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Breaking the Glass

A Contemporary Jewish Poetry Anthology

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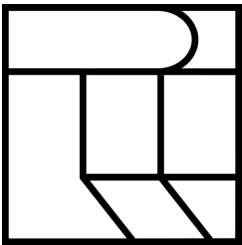
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Sean Singer

Writers are all Secret Jews

Paul Celan:

There's nothing in the world for which a poet will give up writing, not even when he is a Jew and the language of his poems is German.

Maxine Kumin:

Writers are all secret Jews.

Maxine Kumin's 1975 statement "Writers are all secret Jews" may seem arch and idiosyncratic, but she was talking about something real. She was drawing our attention to a commonality of the tribe of writers. She went on to say, "There's also the enormous commonality of the fact that to be a writer is to be solitary. It's to be a hermit, by golly. It really is. It's to be shut off."

Poets should aspire to being "secret Jews" because it would mean being in a slippery category: assimilated, but invisible; indebted to the Psalms and Proverbs, but seeking new texts; being born into something as old as three millennia, but tasked with questioning everything about it; it would mean knowing that since the Shoah, every word is broken and incomplete. Poets have been here from the beginning, when humans first emerged from the scoriæ and onyx matrix. Poets are cognizant of the human semaphore and scripture because someone in the tribe had the insight to bear witness, tell stories, and eventually write them down.

Poets exist on the periphery, and are able to be the polestar and give meaning to the fable and the decay of experience. Recognizing acorns under the snow as the particle of the universe's body, describing the mineral salts, and talking openly about the jasper and jade of the imagination—these fall on the poets' shoulders.

Their scribbles were at first closer to music, and the latches and hinges of their meters were as essential to the communal health as the fig and cucumber which so much resemble human sexual organs. If writers are "secret Jews," they can exist in a space of invisible difference, part of an unseen community, but moving in and out of fixed definitions.

Exile and other

Existing as a poet, feeling that outsidership in your body, having to go so deep into yourself, to envelope it and implicate it, is to be in an in-between place, an exile, holding a hatchet to cut new trails in the cartography. Jewish identity is like that.

As an identity "Jewish" is still misunderstood, misidentified, unclaimed, and unsettled. The poet Jason Schneiderman in a recent tour-de-force poem in *APR* pointed out that "Jew" is the only word that

is both the proper noun for a people as well as a cruel insult. That slight change in the voice could mean recognition or murder.

Hannah Arendt said “One can resist only in the terms of the identity that is under attack.” This means that it falls on the shoulders of oppressed and targeted groups to resist in some kind of infinite loop where they have to justify their existence.

When the white supremacist MAGA people marched in Charlottesville chanting “Jews will not replace us!” I felt physically ill, terrified, unsure of people where I live who might agree with them. Experts have weighed in on the roots of antisemitism and its connection to white supremacist violence. The experience, though, of living in Trumpist America as a Jewish person is not an academic exercise: it’s experienced in the body.

When someone says to me that I either *do or don’t* “look” Jewish, they are interacting with me as a racial category. Yet, my black hair and olive skin allow me to easily move into different shapes, substances, and minds. Like Zelig, I have been identified as Mexican, Cuban, Italian, Russian, Palestinian, Indian, Brazilian, Eastern European, Israeli, or some kind of other; an other for the other, a blank face onto which slippage, likeness and unlikeness can be ascribed.

The word *Hebrew* means “from the other side” and Jewish people are “from the other side,” and this feels true as it must have in the 10th century BCE. I feel antisemitism from both the right and the left. Antisemitism on the right (George Soros, space lasers, reptilians, child sacrifice, the Rothschilds, “Jews are *not* white”) and the antisemitism on the left (“Jews *are* white”; Alice Walker is not antisemitic; assuming all Jews are Zionists; the casual use of antisemitic tropes) effectually come from the same source. (NB: Many Jews are Ashkenazi, meaning of European descent, but there are Jews of any skin complexion, and they exist in Africa, India, Asia, and the Middle East)

The left typically insists that it’s up to the marginalized group in question to say what racism or trauma is, but Jews are not allowed the same provision. In fact, Jews are not even considered a marginalized group in the left’s identity politics because they’re often physically white. The reason the right and left think this is the association of Jews with money and power. All of this has come up the esophagus like yellow bile since Charlottesville in 2017 and the Tree of Life Synagogue mass shooting in Pittsburgh in 2018. If Jews are neither white nor not-white, and are either Americans or not Americans, assimilated or not part of the mainstream culture, then they are in the middle place, neither mist or grain.

My name is Solomon Levi

Stanley Kunitz was able to unveil the presence of no presence, the odd in-betweenness of Jewish identity in “An Old Cracked Tune.” The speaker is Kunitz’s alter ego, a character called Solomon Levi. Solomon’s wisdom connects to the scripts and journeys of all his predecessors. Its tetrameter is like a little tune.

An Old Cracked Tune

My name is Solomon Levi,
the desert is my home,
my mother's breast was thorny,
and father I had none.

The sands whispered, *Be separate*,
the stones taught me, *Be hard*.
I dance, for the joy of surviving,
on the edge of the road.

The directives from the sands and stones tell Solomon Levi to “be separate” and “be hard,” it shows the impossible scales of Jewish existence. Never completely part and never completely at ease; a double mouth fused with many voices, and outstretched arms reaching back to doom and sorrow, and ahead to possibility and identity.

The dark birds came

In Bert Meyers’s “The Dark Birds” the rhymed couplets invoke a more primitive understanding that either banishes dreams or inculcates pure ones.

The Dark Birds

The dark birds came,
I didn't know their name.

They walked in Hebrew on the sand
so I'd understand.

They sang, the sea flowed,
though no one made a road.

I shivered on the shore
when the water closed its door.

Sean Singer

Then as I felt the birds return
to me like ashes to an urn,

and sunlight warmed the stones,
fire undressed my bones.

The images of closure and impermanence (“didn’t know,” “sand,” “no one,” “closed,” “like ashes,” “undressed”) are ways of showing the speaker’s exclusion even as he has a communion with the birds, sand, sea, and sunlight pulsing around him.

The turn in line ten, which is not end-stopped, implies the birds’ return, and therefore their shared language, also returns the speaker’s core nature; his bones are undressed by the heat and light of the sun. This act of recovery is something accessible and also at a remove from experience. The philosopher Emil Fackenheim said that the Nazi Genocide of the Jews was not for territory, money, or power. It was annihilation for the sake of annihilation. Faith did not protect the million Jewish children who perished; they were killed not for their own faith, but for the faith of their great-grandparents who had Jewish children.

If writers aspire to be “secret Jews,” they can be the voice of self-preservation, a will to be through language, a chance to understand the other as the other. The poet is the owner of language that does all that it does. The problem of Auschwitz is also a problem of language: how can I be faithful to something even if there is no promise in it?

This is what Celan was getting at: there is a responsibility for the poet to decipher fenugreek from sorrel and provender from poison. This essential identity means being consumed by the other, sacrificing everything for access to the other’s language even if it is the language of your own murderer.

As you hammer out your own metaphors, you are also being reborn; you are attaching new meanings to dead symbols. Tractate *Rosh Hashanah 17b* says: “That is to say, God forgives sins only **for one who regards himself as a remainder**, i.e., of only secondary importance.” A poet is also of secondary importance to the language they are perpetuating.

A poem is what Vassily Grossman in *Life and Fate* called a “small goodness” from one person to another. This “small goodness” exists *before* it becomes a doctrine, policy, theology, organization, or institution, when it becomes deformed and abused.

When poetry occurs at the margins, when we feel simultaneously seen and invisible, and when we are solitary from the dominant society,

we are Kumin's "secret Jews." For Jewish poets this is doubly true. They are doubly in exile, doubly peripheral for having invented monotheism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism, and performing as being part of the world all the while being outside of it, *observing* and observing.

Poems begin with listening, and part of their function is to break down the barrier of access to other minds. This requires a complexity of expression and precision. The passionate "I" in a poem speaks from their own reality to a greater reality—the opening in the fabric of language that insists language become fresh and new.

Poems should be beautiful, but they also have to be meaningful. Beauty fails when it doesn't give anything. But in an increasingly precarious world, where political ideas or the vacuum of ideas lead to violence, it's hard to know what the purpose of a poem is. Every time a poem confronts the cold storage of history, it is trying to make the incomprehensible comprehensible. Every time enlightenment is thrown away, old wounds get infected. This is what Marcel Proust meant when he wrote: "Rien n'arrive ni comme on l'espère, ni comme on le craint." ["Nothing happens as we hope or as we fear."]

It's been 72 years since Theodor Adorno's statement about the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz. I've written many poems, yet I often think about Auschwitz. Why do I keep trying to touch reality through making poems, and if I can't, then what am I doing?

Theodor Adorno, in 1949:

Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation.

Since survivors of the Holocaust were an anomaly (most people did not survive) and since the events of the Holocaust were indescribable, I often think about how writers use language to express it.

Can we take a piece of writing on this subject at face value, or is there more happening than it seems? Is this writing an accurate record of history? Is this writing journalism, or art, or something else? Does the barbaric cease to be barbaric once it is objectified in art?

When is Holocaust imagery appropriate or not appropriate? How and why can language be used to express the Holocaust, or is this a useless gesture? Does fiction and poetry lessen historical events by making them a kind of fantasy of the writer, or can fictions lead us to another kind of truth unavailable to historians?

A paperweight

I have always been uneasy about Sylvia Plath's use of the Holocaust to reflect her personal turmoil. Plath was undoubtedly tormented and suffered from mania and depression, but she trivialized this enormous subject through self-aggrandizement. For example, look at the beginning of "Lady Lazarus," a poem about Plath being in so much pain that violence and self-destruction are her only recourse:

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it—

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Plath was not antisemitic, but she wrote these lines 15 years after the Holocaust. It would be like someone from Boston writing about their own personal adversity by making a comparison to the Rwandan genocide, and those events occurred further in the past than 15 years.

Wishing to be invisible

Compare this to Muriel Rukeyser's "To Be a Jew," a section of the longer poem "Letter to the Front," written in 1944:

To be a Jew in the twentieth century
Is to be offered a gift. If you refuse,
Wishing to be invisible, you choose
Death of the spirit, the stone insanity.
Accepting, take full life. Full agonies:
Your evening deep in labyrinthine blood

Of those who resist, fail, and resist; and God
Reduced to a hostage among hostages.

The gift is torment. Not alone the still
Torture, isolation; or torture of the flesh.
That may come also. But the accepting wish,
The whole and fertile spirit as guarantee
For every human freedom, suffering to be free,
Daring to live for the impossible.

Her metaphors like “the stone insanity” and “a hostage among hostages” implicates herself, but also her distance. The poem’s third person voice and flawless authority nonetheless also shows her vulnerability.

Black milk

In 2004, I was Visiting Writer at Binghamton University, and taught a class in Holocaust Literature; rarely have 13 weeks been more somber. The students wanted to talk about the Holocaust as a discrete cultural and historical event. I wanted to talk about the limits of language, the breath of the ones who traverse the poem. Can poems be “world-gaining” or “world-freeing?” Can an inert brick of a word become infinite?

At some point in 2007, someone will write a poem addressing our current moment—fascism’s boot casting a shadow on everyone (intergenerational trauma, anyone?), plague and people deliberately spreading it, inequality of a new Gilded Age. I will be long dead by 2097. Either the world of the reader will go into the poem and become the world, or it won’t. When the poem as a fragment in the world comes into context in the future’s chaos, the writerly problem of Auschwitz will again be relevant if not prescient. The quintessential Holocaust poem has to be Paul Celan’s “Deathfugue,” written in May 1945 and first published May 2, 1947 under the title “Tangoul mortii,” / “Death tango.” Celan wrote it after reading an article in Russian newspaper, *Izvestia*, that had a caption for a photo of “the German machine used for the crushing the bones of the burned corpses.”

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evenings
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped

A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair
Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling
he whistles his hounds to stay close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
he commands us play up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink at morning and midday we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair
Margareta
Your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air where you
won't lie too cramped

He shouts dig this earth deeper you lot there you others sing up and
play he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue
stick your spades deeper you lot there you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday and morning we drink you evening
we drink and we drink
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta
your aschenes Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Deutschland
he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise up as smoke to the sky
you'll then have a grave in the clouds where you won't lie too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus
Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Shulamit

Celan gave everything to his poetry—not even writing in German could stop his capacity for poem-making. His poems were not cathartic, but they were accurate. Because he was born to a German-speaking family in Cernăuți, Bukovina, which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is now in Romania, and that this home was annihilated by the Germans, Celan’s “homeland” was his poems.

Poets are in exile because the poem is always being received from another place. The poem is paradoxical: the home and the place the poet is trying to reach. A poet’s interlocution of the raw material before it finds language may only be a tearing-off. The incision trying to get at that rawness can be very painful. It is also antithetical to money, working quickly, or being careless.

Limbo

I’ve written Holocaust poems in all my books. Some have more like Rukeyser’s approach, some more like Kosinski’s, and others more like Celan’s. More recently, in *Today in the Taxi*, I was interested in writing about it again. In my poem “Limbo,” I wanted to discuss an indeterminate place of acceptance and refusal; and of continuing on with full knowledge and continuing on in complete darkness.

Limbo

Today in the taxi, driving a commercial real estate type from 43rd and Madison to 57th and Park I said, “Would you prefer to go up Madison, or Park?” He said, “It doesn’t matter. Either way we’re fucked.”

And it was true when a black pier of birds burst from the building, like fulfillment.

I too, seek to weave a memory from foam. A black bottle opener and the blackest bottle, and the flow of liquids. You cannot know it; you can see it.

General “Beedle” Smith reported that in April 1945 when they liberated Buchenwald, he witnessed:

“General Eisenhower go to the opposite side of the road and vomit. From a distance I saw Patton bend over, holding his

head with one hand and his abdomen with the other. I too became sick.”

When the oncoming headlights are too bright, it is said you should look to the side at the lines on the road. You would stop yourself from being blinded, and stop yourself to imagine the road ahead, unstrung, and the rubber against it.

The quotation from General Smith implies that Eisenhower, Patton, and himself, three battle-hardened soldiers who had witnessed all manner of violence and atrocities in both World Wars became physically sick when they finally arrived at Buchenwald. I wanted to use the incident with the passenger as a way to recognize the ways knowing this history can permeate the thin veneer of civility we take for granted.

Barbaric?

What did Adorno mean by “to write poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric”? That no possible poem can be made that could describe the indescribable? On some level—at least in the United States—our lives are barbaric in the sense that we continue on despite the suffering going on here and in other countries, that we all use things made from oil, single-use plastics, drive cars, fly in planes, use a disproportionate amount of resources, and so on. Meanwhile, Jeff Bezos is barbaric, Elon Musk is barbaric, Jamie Dimon is barbaric, Brett Kavanaugh is barbaric, Trump is barbaric, the January 6 insurrectionists are barbaric, Cigna and Aetna are barbaric, Monsanto, Wells Fargo, and Goldman Sachs are barbaric.

No one asked us to write poems. None of us can count on being read carefully, yet we react with honest indignation when we’re ignored, our poems passed by, or we scramble for crumbs of a pie. If Adorno was here, I would say: “No. Poems are *especially necessary* after Auschwitz.” Poets are dissatisfied with reality. This is why poems have to be porous, embrace strangeness, be open to the place of darkness, be ambitious with secrets, withhold language, hack-off, blow away, belong to language, be legitimized by language, control language. All of this is a way to tell people what’s real and what’s found.

HOW WE LOVE

We wash each other's bodies.
Swivel water over withered
skin. Three buckets cataracting
off the slough where life has
been and has departed. Water
is how we love. We love in
syllables and trills like days
of rainfall. Love by song of
weather, gutter, wet lament. We
love when words reject us. We
ride the songwind like a long
and silver braid, braided from
some great-great's hair to tether
us to us. Rest is how we love.
We love by lightening, candles,
ladders. We love by breaking
glass, by breaking trust, by
breaking thirst. We break and
then we mend, we break and
mend, we stitch the holes by
threading needles gold. We
fail and try and fail and try
and fail, and this changes the
shape of our bright world. We
lift the world up to our nostrils.
We love with teeth against our
tables. Fists full of wrinkled
paper. We love with spoons. We
say *I love you* cupping bread
with our hot knuckles. We give
up music when we mourn. We
love by numbers: seven, three,
ten, forty nine. Forgiveness is a
love language. We will love by
reparations. We love by mouth
of earthworm, insects lurching
over us. We give ourselves away
in circles. We love and cry
when we see foxes. We mean
to cry but laugh instead. We

love by horns. We've been here long. We love by rigor. Guard our young. We say *I love you*, spilling palms of salt. We say *I love you*, argument of garlic on our breath. Our love is diacritic. Our breath is hot with law. We love by law, we love by reading. Our love is kites. Our love is hyperbolic, tiny letters, parchment, pomegranate seeds. Blue potatoes. Willow, citrus, myrtle. Chalice older than the Romans. A drooping aster. Smuggled from the city in a blanket. Our love is garnet, sable, fringe. The desert. Is where our wedding was. We have turned it into war.

Mónica Gomery

CENTO

Blessed is the day. And the One
who destroys the day.

The light that penetrates
me non-consensually, the blue

and luminous world. We have
our lives, a sudden ocean

of everyone's shoulders.
Love and what love becomes

arriving when they want to,
and hungry. The mud that glues

the slender bones of prayer
to the bigger bones, the rains

that burn the grass.
We are expected to bear

our weight, to celebrate it.
Both faith and magic

have failed, they stand around You
like a thousand walls. Blessed

is the mother of the grave
and this will keep on beginning

forever. A celebration
should leave a mess.

Elana Bell

Your Village

Once in a village that is burning
because a village is always somewhere burning

And if you do not look because it is not your village
it is still your village

In that village is a hollow child
You drown when he looks at you with his black, black eyes

And if you do not cry because he is not your child
he is still your child

All the animals that could run away have run away
The trapped ones make an orchestra of their hunger

The houses are ruin Nothing grows in the garden
The grandfather's grave is there A small stone

under the shade of a charred oak Who will brush off the dead
leaves Who will call his name for morning prayer

Where will they—the ones who slept in this house and ate from this dirt—?

Elana Bell

Letter to My Son, in Utero

You are not the first.

Before you, another seed took hold,
and every morning your father rubbed my belly
in wonder at what she would become.

When the doctor said *no heartbeat* the air went out of me.

My dead baby I thought.

They would not call it that. *Embryo embryo embryo* they said,
a padded word meant to keep me from what I knew:

Something had lived in me its whole small life and was gone.

Forgive me for loving another before you.
Forgive me also the weight of my love for you, already heavy with death.
Forgive me. I am a Jew.

In the middle of the celebration, I always smash the glass.

Erika Meitner

A Strikingly Unsettled Portent

Manasota Key, FL

We sometimes photograph things we can never be, said Bruce Weber and I am not now nor will I ever be a sunset, which tonight was so vibrant it was like entering an air-brushed painting on the side of a 1980s conversion van between Miami and Key West. I was walking the beach,

past a hand-lettered poster: SHARKS TEETH \$30, when a man at the shoreline opened his palm to show me a wriggling baby loggerhead, dark and shined by the Gulf. He shouldn't have handled that turtle—but someone else could tell him they're endangered and it's illegal. *You don't want no trouble*,

my grandmother would say to me as a kid. The trouble is sea turtles imprint by scrambling over sand toward the water so they know where to return to thirty years later to mate and nest. If only I had that kind of homing instinct, a natal beach to call me back. I have so many photos of the sunset here,

molten and shifting. I have photos, too, of plovers, herons, one snowy egret, always in the latent moment before they take flight. My people are diasporic, but don't lift off or migrate so much as flee imminent danger. The old joke about Jewish holidays: they tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat. *To live*

a visual life is an enormous undertaking, wrote Dorothea Lange, and I feel that, so every day when I walk the beach, which is definitely eroding based on half-washed-away sandbags lining berms in front of houses, I go sonic, often listen to NPR: the earth erupting, quaking, flooding, burning; a Mexican American

woman in El Paso taking her grandkids out for breakfast after the Walmart mass shooting, saying she asks to sit by the exit now in case a gunman comes again; a church in Appomattox named Friendship Baptist with a sign out front—AMERICA: LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT. In that town where Grant defeated Lee to end

the Civil War, a reporter interviews parishioners; one struggles to articulate her thoughts on air and finally says flat out, *I don't want any Muslims in America. Just because you're born in America doesn't make you an American.* Never mind the Constitution. The question is not if they come for us, but when, which is why

I panicked at the gunshots in the driveway during a violent afternoon thunderstorm, but it was just Chance from county Animal Control with his rifle on monthly schedule to kill the iguanas—an invasive nonnative species that can damage infrastructure and property. In the after-storm clearing, I went out to watch the beachcombers

gather sharks' teeth and instead found a family in summer church clothes in a circle on the sand with their heads bowed into each other, a fist-like flower.

Though they were on a public beach it felt like spying to watch them knotted in prayer, to watch a woman in head-to-toe white robes with a white kerchief

covering her hair walk into the water in her voluminous garments, watch a man in a button-down, who was most likely her minister, hold her head beneath the waves for what seemed like eons. *To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability*, wrote Susan Sontag.

I did not photograph that family—I felt witness to something violent, a near-drowning. Water baptism is an outward sign of an inward transformation, I later read online; you're raised out of the water to symbolize resurrection, the death of your fleshy self. By the end of this year, there will be more

mass shootings in the US then there were days in the year (417). Sontag also wrote that *photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention*. In an online archive, I find my grandfather's Red Cross paperwork from the Displaced Persons camp in Stuttgart he was sent to after Auschwitz.

He answers the questions in neat German script: "Do you wish to remain in Germany?" *Nein*. "Do you wish to return to your country of former residence?" *Nein*. For him that was Poland. "If not, why?" *Antisemitz. Und alle verloren*. And all is lost. And everyone is gone. There are a few translations.

Every part of the coastline has its own magnetic signature; sea turtles remember and use this as an internal compass to find their way through the featureless open ocean—vast expanses of nothing—to return, years later, to the beaches where they were born. *I was unable to save my people, only*

their memory, said Roman Vishniac, who photographed Jewish communities across Eastern Europe between 1935 and 1938—the last images of our people before they vanished. Before they were systematically murdered. He also said, *A man with a camera was always suspected of being a spy*, and as Hitler rose

to power, Vishniac would place his young daughter in front of Nazi propaganda all over Berlin so he could photograph unquestioned. *Achtung Juden. Kauft nicht bei Juden*. Only one in a thousand sea turtle hatchlings survive to adulthood. Artificial lights near nesting beaches disorient them so they don't recognize

the horizon over water, which is always a little brighter because of the stars, because of the moon. *Und alle verloren*. Lit windows in houses cause them to head inland instead of directly out to sea, so after sunset I'm careful—pull the shades to preserve a world that might cease to exist.

Light-sensitive Puzzle Piece

At the protest where everyone was outraged about children in cages a guy who looked vaguely like Jesus was holding a Keep Families Together sign and a woman who wanted to speak was holding a megaphone then said *I've never used one of these things how does it work?* and her friend with the #lovethyneighbor (no exceptions) sign said *hold it closer to your mouth* and she did and while she was speaking pickups drove by with enormous Trump flags—pickups drove by blasting aggressive country God Bless the USA and I couldn't stop looking at protest Jesus's work boots, his cut-off home-made tank top. I was holding a sign sharpied on the back of a pizza box from four protests ago that said Child of a Refugee with a red arrow pointing to me and I stood near three women with small cages for rabbits / birds / gerbils that each held dolls—one was a cabbage patch kid with blonde braids—since protest as mixed media sculpture is a thing now even in Appalachia and there was a toddler wearing a superman shirt, holding a rainbow Superman Was A Refugee poster and his father was holding him on his shoulders. Some nights when it was late and my sons were small and asleep in their beds I'd turn off all the lights in the house and suddenly the sound of a train or a cow or cricket, something moving and alive from their puzzles would speak when you shifted a piece off or put one back on—this inanimate thing made animate by light would utter ghost sounds. The reporter from the local paper asked me why I was there on the sidewalk, so I told her about my mother and the DP camps—I told her only a small part of the story but she still looked shocked. To hold is to bear the weight of a person or thing, to grasp or carry or support with our arms, to embrace someone, to keep or detain someone; there's the hold of a ship, or remaining secure and intact in a position, to maintain a connection until the person on the phone line is free to speak, to have in your possession, the act of grasping some-

thing, a degree of power or control. The last Shoah survivors are nearly gone so they've made holograms to tell their stories to school children and museum visitors but it's not the same; we respond to the sound of an actual human voice attached to a body which means when the next woman with the megaphone in an ecumenical collar starts to read the last four lines of Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" there's not a dry eye on the sidewalk in front of our local congressional office—the congressman who is away, the congressman who got teary, who looked me in the eye and said *that kind of persecution could only happen in Germany* when I told him my family story, *refugee from fugio*: to flee or escape from this to that. Our meeting was a season before Nazis marched through Charlottesville and the rabbis pulled the Torah scrolls from the building and someone was killed and I began quizzing my sons on our full names / addresses / phone numbers. Superman—born Kal-El on the planet Krypton—was rocketed to earth by his father unaccompanied, alone as an infant moments before the destruction of his planet; it was months before anger turned to panic then to fear and here we are the dislodged pieces, shoulder to shoulder, light-sensitive and bleating into the deep night.

Yerra Sugarman

The Sewing Room

I don't remember when I took the picture, but I must have surveyed the room for brightness. I imagine this because, in 1978, I was a young woman intent on preserving the world through the solemnity of black-and-white film. I was also a hunter of light. My camera, like a hound, stalked luster: the gentle sheen on any person or thing. The image my camera helped me capture that day was of my mother working at the Singer in her sewing room. It overlooked the shingles of our neighbors' roof, and faced west. Afternoons, rectangles of sunlight inundated the pale-leaf broadloom covering the room's floor; the Singer became a purring black cat, its back arched in brightness.

In the picture, my mother is turned away from me, her silhouette glowing. She is briefly caught up in her freedom. Hunched over her sewing machine, she was probably dreaming the way the air dreams, the shape of her reverie indefinite, invigorating. A Polish Jew and a Holocaust survivor who had also survived the Soviet Gulags, she'd settled in Toronto in 1951. And if air can dream, for my mother, it could also harden into stone where memories fossilized.

The dress she wore as she nudged fabric under the needle's gentle drill was partly unzipped, so that a flap of striped material hung below her neck, a small triangle that looked like a wing. Staring at her through the camera's lens as it gathered light, I imagined that wing could make my mother fly. From the sky, she could unravel the earth's threads of illogic, which she would weave into a beautiful fabric. And why not envisage my mother recreating the world as she sewed and dreamed?

In the Chevy

The summer I was ten, World War II claimed its place in our blue station wagon, a '66 Chevy. Wherever my parents and I would go, The War went too. When it wasn't steering, it sat on the car's back seat, squeezing its body next to mine, both of us sweaty from the slick upholstery.

We were driving from Toronto to Chrystal Beach, a village near Buffalo, New York. In a mixture of English and Yiddish, my father would untangle the history of a friend's anxiety, a fellow Holocaust survivor: why Mr. Dubjanski always shook. "During The War, Dubjanski was pushed by the Nazis into a freight train, and taken to the camp. Maybe 900,000 Jews were *gihargit* there by gas. Maybe 67 survived."

My father and The War took turns driving, my mother sitting in the front, on the passenger side. At times, thinking my dad had gone the wrong way, she'd pinch her cheeks. She also looked out her window and sang to the poplars and the jack pines fringing the highway, or to the outcrops of limestone—among the oldest rocks on earth—that cascaded down the steep slopes of the Niagara Escarpment.

My hands sticking to the seat, I realized I couldn't picture my parents as kids. I couldn't imagine them in their *shtetls* in Poland before The War, feeling like I did: that they'd reached the top of the world while riding a roller coaster as enormous as the Chrystal Beach Comet, or licking cotton candy from their fingers. I couldn't see them having that much liberty, being that carefree. If anything, my parents' lives vouched for grief as a human rule. And The War, pushing my body against the armrest, puffed out its chest.

Diary

Diary

In a house I've never seen, I tell my (dead) mother there is a (dead) cat I have mistakenly left behind, which she must feed. From dream to dream, our ghosts follow us, awaiting a call to action. Here is my father in his '60 Chevy Impala, the one with the big wings, telling me the same corny joke he told whenever we were alone: it doesn't bear repeating. And there is my Bubi, always at the stove, always cooking something meaty and bland: the shtetl wasn't a place for subtle cuisine. We sat and ate silently, her watchful eye on the door, worried that someone would arrive to imperil our food. When I invited friends to play, she hid our snacks. Family got fed: her ghosts taught her caution and fear of want. Now I am painting my dream house beige. So far it is empty, maybe invisible, as leaves in winter. But my ghosts will find me to populate it with all the memorized perils.

Diary

I wanted to be a cowboy and shot my father from behind the couch and between the legs of the formica table. I had silver guns and a fake-leather holster. On my Schwinn I was Lieutenant Cable, tumbling onto the Ornstein's lawn in a Hammerstein fantasy of young love destroyed. Mostly I was a rabbi, reading the inscriptions on my temple wall to do Justice and love Mercy. When the actual war on Viet Nam arrived, I remembered that wall and how we create suffering, even in play.

Diary

She lies about her beagle and its pedigree. No one really cares, least of all the beagle. A friend's former husband claims he played basketball in Europe: he is tall but has never been to Europe. A man tells his wife he is going to work but sits in his Audi shooting up all day. The cat lies about being fed—isn't she getting plump?—the owners ask each other as she continues to swindle double servings. It's odd how intense and convincing liars can be, even a cat—when there is so much at stake. But these are small transgressions next to government lies about weapons of mass destruction, police brutality against black citizens, zealots' cant about an embryo being a child and a woman an incubator. Russia lies about Ukraine, claiming they are merely policing the Nazis. If there were a god looking down on this mess, he might resign or kill himself. Maybe he already has. We would understand.

Story

My friend worries she has no right to tell a story without being inside it—army, rubble, camp, shelter—without direct experience, what is a story?

We note the gold-razored sight that comes with space. How the survivor's daughter makes better art than her mother, paralyzed by trauma.

I tell my family's story through my mother's mouth.

In the telling, a new story worms within the old belly. A leaf's edge rusts to brittle fire, death always clinging to life, promising a new body.

Through my friend, I know movement is one of five sisters who walk, fatherless, to the door of the law, carrying every variation of their name. I name my daughter after this story and start the engine of its insistence: a star collapsed in the distance.

Maya Pindyck

Belief

My country lies to me.

It tells me what I love is national belonging
and not its native bird's singing,
how our throats throttle when speaking
the words *mustard* and *friend*—
the sea's salt & memory.

Once, I believed my country,
thinking the children dead by its hands
an unfortunate necessity
for the preservation of our bodies.

I don't believe my country anymore.

I believe only the mint leaves boiled by my enemies
who wait for the waters to brown in clear glasses,
and who crack open pistachios, tossing their shells.

I believe only the pita's heat warming our mouths,
our soft chewing.

I believe only the Arab man who rushes to extinguish
the fire someone lit to the synagogue across the street.

I believe only the Jew dressed in white who names himself
a Bride to Peace, giving flowers to all the people on the road
until his hands empty of flowers—

I believe the women sewing a long cloth
to cradle their dead.

I believe the Lyft driver who, when I name my country,
says *Don't worry, I don't hate you*
and recites his phone number for the next time
I fly to Tel Aviv and wish to see Ramallah.

I don't believe the story that for my house to stand
yours had to fall—and that I'll have no home if not
an expansion swallowing my neighbor's land.

My country insists I'll always be a slave
to trauma—wields the piles of braids & suitcases
as rationale for brutality in the name of nationality
rather than proof that any one of us at any moment could—

Scrolling FaceBook I see an old classmate's new profile pic
sliced by a graphic of my country's flag
announcing where she stands

and I think of her children asleep in their beds,
the running water & electricity they will wake to
secure in the fact of their freedom—and the flowers,

all the flowers bombed and still
rising from slits to seep the tea
and bake the bread and stand
in disbelief—

I believe only the poet who writes the words
her people won't hear.

I believe in the blood rushing between our ears.

Sh'ma

There's a part of the prayer that goes like this: *the early rain & the late rain, the gathering of grain, the wine & the oil*. All things God will give me if I'm obedient, but I'm not. I always add to the list. I want an ultra-blue sky, good soil, a glass tea kettle, a rocking chair by the door & a man to sit in the rocking chair. But not just any man. A man who wants to watch me sleep. Then, I want to wake & want nothing. God is still Santa somewhere. I leave out reindeer snacks. I light the cedar wrapped in sadness, blow the smoke to the sky in rings. Then I get down on my knees & listen by covering my eyes. But I've forgotten I'm inside a bell jar. I keep expecting a shadowed figure to arrive, to let in a little air. *It doesn't work like that*, says the rabbi, *G'd is subtle!* But I tell him I dreamt of a son named Eloheinu. A damp weight in my arms I did not want. He's yours now, take him, said the doctor of my dreams. His coat smelled like sour wine. Eloheinu in Hebrew: *Our God*, but I didn't know Hebrew at the time I dreamt this. I know, there's always a way to explain these things. Like, I must have heard the word in passing. Like, if you want to believe, you believe.

Tkhines

I call my grandmother & ask, “what can you speak, exactly?”
Yiddish comes flying out, secret hidden tongue—all this time.
My grandmother knows things I don’t.
How to say *go shit in the ocean* or *go kiss a bear underneath the tail*.
This is prayer, she says, hexing a man with leeches & salt.
Not, *oh beloved god*. Not, *oh if I live*.
Prayer is what is hidden in the pocket, tucked in the bra.
Feh! she says—*eat the white bread & straighten your hair*.
smooth the jelly of all seed. all is lost except what’s hidden—

Is it hidden, if I’ve never been taught?
liber got. az me vet zayt-labn.
Is it hidden, if it’s lost?

Raisa Tolchinsky

"your memory is a synagogue, what is its God?"

and my body lands on a quilt below the oak.
I watch each green hand flap—a hundred hushes
orbiting my feet, little suns slowly fading—
is there a word?
some say: *Komorebi. Maeinschein.*

I say: your face
under the water of my mind. shimmer,
then a splitting
though the salt and powdered iron is at home,
& I am no alchemist.
the light stays as light,
the soil, soil.

And a memory is only a memory
of the last time I remember it—
infinity mirror
smeared with riddle.

I say, *I'm unsure if it's gone...*
but what do I mean to ask?

What given point
do all my recollections pass through?
Perhaps the center of my center—
a uterine hum, where the memory
of pain but not pain itself can be touched
again and again.

You were not born unto me.
Still, I make and remake you
and the light stays as light,
pouring into the living

Yahrzeit

I remembered but didn't
light a candle write
a poem tear my clothes
yesterday eighteen years since
you died

the dead
have kept filling earth and air Babulya
and you stay there wherever
there is and a month ago at your son-in-law's
funeral (do you know he's dead too now?)
the rabbi said *Jews never find peace*
they keep moving up and up and up closer
closer to G- but I don't know
who or where I believe in Babulya
and our god seems a cruel one
I've called out your name Vera Vera Faith Faith
I've called his too
so many times song and light
lost meaning but the dead Babulya
the dead and you remain
constant no metaphor to place here
just the dead and you filling earth and air
so I forgive myself
the willful lack of flame and figurative language
on the anniversary of your leaving
and send this prayer
that you have found another faith another *vera*
and landed somewhere
close and soft

Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach

And after, there is still more light.

Another spoon splinters
the garbage disposal, wine glass

slips off the counter, bare feet
stabbed by the lost zebra

puzzle piece first and then
torn off legs from a teen boy

action figure we named Peter,
whose clothes were stripped and shoved

behind a couch cushion because
my son decided, He *was too hot*.

And after, there is still more
light. The candles lean

towards one another
as if to share a secret

or kiss. The way my son
thrusts his whole of face

into his little sister's.
The way he throws Starlord

at my head from the loft bed,
sorry, even before the hurt.

The way he nooses his arms
around my hips and sobs

into my shin, begging
forgiveness for what he has

already forgotten. And after,
there is still more light. We wait

for flame to take over
flame. My hands, too firm, too

anxious. The fire he came from.
My throat, the same. And after, there is

still more light. My children's
lips over the candles, mouthing

blessings in a language
we don't speak to a god

I almost believe in.

Dear Santa,

This is my first letter. I know I'm a bit too old, but believing didn't come easy, and at first, I was taught you'd never come to my house. Then I cried and cried, and so my parents took pity and changed their mind, told me to put out a shoe and maybe, you'd find me after all, so in the morning, I could wake to something strange filling the sole. That first year, a baby doll the size of my palm, which garbled "ta-ta, ta-ta" when you pressed her belly hard enough. The next, a video tape of cartoon animals and kings. Even then, I knew something was wrong when lions sing and die only to sing again, something strange about absent fathers and grieving mothers, about the clapping and coughing and laughing in the background, but it was still magic, getting a gift on a day not meant for me. So Santa, I just wanted to write, after all these years, and say thanks. For finding me then, though I never wrote you a list, and so it only makes sense I never got what I wanted. And now, I know you don't really put gifts in shoes, but our tree never showed up until we could get it for free after someone threw theirs away, after your day of gift-giving was over, though I always suspected you had little to do with Jesus, so I never saw the problem. But it was our relatives, Santa, the ones who sponsored our refugee arrival, their fault really, telling us the neighbors should only see candlelight through our windows, that multicolored lights would give off the wrong impression. *You are Jews*, they said, as though it was news. I'm old Santa, with my own windows full of all kinds of lights, my own child too, but I still don't know what it all means. Still don't know what to write on a wish list. But here it goes, I'm trying. I don't pray. But I'm trying Santa, to believe. You must know this is harder than it seems. You must struggle sometimes too, believing you'll manage it all. So many children, and just one night, and I know you feel guilty about each lump of coal you leave behind, knowing, that no child deserves such darkness, and no one deserves what is left of flame. But Santa, I'll take it. The dead trees and all their carbon, the centuries of heat and pressure that made them into what makes fire and tells children they were bad. I don't mind, really, I don't. Someone needs to care for them, the trees and dead and children. I know I can't handle it all, and neither can you, but back to this letter, I haven't wished for anything yet, it's hard Santa, to wish for things. But I'll give it a shot, since it's already too late for you to get this, too late for such wishes to be granted, but I hope you'll read them, I guess I'll start by wishing for that.

Dear Tooth Fairy,

I blame everything on teeth. On their comings and going. The three hours it takes to get my son to sleep. The dogs whining and walking in circles. The droning headaches I wake with from clenching and grinding and trying to rid myself of the molars so you will come. Even this morning's cold, clinging to my gums, I blame on teeth. And why do you only reward their loss and not their growing. Why not visit every time my son's mouth swells or drips. Every time he bites down on food or flesh or his pillow, hoping you will have left something there. And I do it too. Bite down, the pillow reaching into my throat. From pain sometimes, yes, but also other things, though it's been so long, my pillow's forgotten the outline of my mouth. But these reasons are not for your ears, though I'm sure you've heard worse. Bones ripped from mouths. Doors slammed and fists lodged. I'm sure you've seen calcium and phosphorus rocks in a pool of red, their dust forever in your wings, the smell of enamel disintegrating on the tongue must follow you everywhere. So why not drop by here for a visit? I'm losing so much now, so quickly, and if it takes teeth, I'll bite down into my son's apple wood of crib to leave them all behind.

Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach

Dear Shamash,

Shhhhh, because you can never have too much light and there is no magical creature assigned this holiday. Because my son will sing, “Happy birthday Hannukah” and call it prayer and try to blow you out before you are first to dim without him. I’m sorry about that. Though this must be far easier to bear than your scorched history. How did you go from sun god to servant? From one who trails the sky on chariot, who takes a dagger to the night, to this thin wax that tilts with every exhale. How do you keep your name while the rest of you burns down or drowns in honey? Shhhhhh, Shamash, I’ll still call you and keep the secrets quiet. I’ll stop asking questions, like how did an oil lamp last eight days and eight nights and how many times can a temple fall and how many of us can survive under stone and how many stones will it take to rebuild the light? You the ninth, like circles of the hell our people don’t believe in or the lives of a cat or the knights of the round table or the months it takes light to grow inside the body before it breaks out. Shhhhhh, Shamash, I won’t be broken. And when I let my son hold you, a fist around your neck, please, *l’hadlik*, refuse to break too.

[On week 12 of the semester]

On week 12 of the semester Takwa asks Gwen what her name means And Gwen says that it is *Gwendolyn*, a Celtic goddess of the moon, related, probably to Diana.

At which point Chaya pipes up. Though she wears a sheytel and thick hose, even in the heat, one of her names is, in fact, Diana, so she's also named for the goddess of the moon.

What about you? What does *Takwa* mean? And Takwa says fear of God.

I say my child is a work of God, and Takwa tells me that in her language my daughter is the *hope of God*, and I tell her she is *hope* in our language, too.

Hoda is *right guidance*, and since she's got a new baby boy, she's shy when Hiba says it. Hoda's story today was "the perfect story" and in it, you are perfect. You are beautiful. You are perfectly perfect and perfectly beautiful, wrinkles are beautiful, short hair is beautiful, long hair is beautiful, beautiful are all women in the face of devastation.

Hiba is a *gift*. But we all knew that already.

Aicha is *she who lives*.

Chava is *the mother of all beings*.

What about you? they ask me, and I say my name is one of those things that was dragged into a family and dropped long ago, when the gifters died out, for in Latin it is *of Mars*, so I guess that is *war*. And Gwen said that many goddesses of war were also goddesses of art and fertility and craft, and Tawkwa says that any woman is probably anyway a goddess of war, to some extent. And it is the first time I have ever felt I actually have a name. A real name. And now, we say, that we have been formally introduced, we can begin.

Marcela Sulak

[Dear Maya, The Tel Afek-Tel Aviv Trail]

Dear Maya,

The Tel Afek-Tel Aviv trail brings out all the helplessness of the man who lives in this house. At first he could not find the 60 km Tel Afek-Tel Aviv loop trail, but our relationship has improved: he told me as we began, and then he followed me across two construction sites and jumped a fence that had closed off the only point of entry I knew. He even lifted my bike over.

We saw two mongooses, we flew through the enchanted bamboo, but we did not reach the fort. As we entered the final leg, we got separated. I thought I heard him call my name and I called his. I wandered tributary trails, backtracked, over and under passes, calling, calling.

Forty-five minutes later, I decided he'd probably decided I'd turned back, so I turned home. He'd be desperate to find me. But no—suddenly there he was, stopped halfway home because his tire had blown out. He had not called my name, but he had heard me call his. He'd followed the call a while, but I'd not appeared at the end of my voice.

Of course we were two kilometers from the fort, and as far away from home as we could get. And also the water supply ran out. It was like a horror movie. Unfortunately, we met no shady characters to help us develop the plot.

But we did eat a couple of mandarin oranges that were left on the trees on the way over and a couple of grapefruit on the way home which gave us a new topic to argue about. The man says they were left on the trees obviously because the growers were saving them to sell in the summer. And I said you cannot pick citrus in the summer. It is a winter fruit. It was left on the tree--and only the last row--for halakhic reasons. This is the land of Israel, and farmers who want to sell in supermarkets need to follow the law and leave a row for the widows and orphaned and the poor, etc. At any rate, we ate. The rest of the trip was uneventful.

Being in nature all day makes the man want to sue somebody when he gets home. I crack open a beer, but he wants to take a shower. I think if he'd had a beer, rather than a shower, where he could plainly see the incipient mold in the grouting and the dried leaf in the corner, he'd have felt better. He says he could have died out there because his spare tire tube had not inflated. He wanted to sue the tube company. I tell him the only reason he'd have died is that he refused six offers of food, water, and assistance, including the offer of a ride back to Tel Aviv, while on the trail. And he refused to try my spare inner tube, which is 1.5 cm larger than his, until I told him there was no way in hell I'd sit with his bike for two hours and wait for him to ride my bike home and get his other spare and drive back.

The man I live with says his back hurts, but he is not going to take a pain reliever because he prefers to suffer. Suffering builds character, he says. And I tell him yes, but only in the people who have to live with people who suffer on purpose. And that my character has already been sufficiently fortified. Unlike the fort at the end of the Tel Afek trail of the Yarkon River.

Yours from across the Ayalon,

Marcela Sulak

[Dear Maya, The bus driver on the way]

Dear Maya

The bus driver is listening to Grandmaster Flash—*Don't push me cuz I'm close to the edge*. We have been reading “The Cleaving” at university, because, no matter how hard I try to calibrate the syllabus, there’s always a strike or new holiday to throw us off, so we always get to that piece with the opening scene of a butchered hog just at Ramadan. “Look at how small I am!” I read. Then, when the class looked up at me to see how small, I had to add, “No not literally. I mean, not me. I mean you, dear reader. My little aberrations. My class of corruptions. You are God’s mnemonics.” That’s why the widow that lives in our apartment building doesn’t care if it is me or the ex-wife she compliments for having such a wonderful man as ours.

Goodbye, my dear Maya, you inimitable corruption of the text of God.

Gezer

And I am counting the days till I can visit the archeological ruins of Gezer with Gwen, whose daughter keeps getting weighed to make sure she is ballast enough to stay on the earth when you let go of her hand, and not go floating off into a hospital ward. Gwen and I agree that it will be so nice to be around dead ruins of dead people, dead for such a long time even the dust has lifted itself away. Somehow, they are always so agreeable. And it is quieter that way. More thoughtful.

Alicia Ostriker

Dark Smile

Just now coming downstairs after returning some books to a shelf and reading a few pages of a friend's book, his piece on Jacob's wrestling, I was flooded with affection for this friend, and in my happiness halfway down the stairs I thought to glance at my interior--

there, very faintly, was the claw of the Shekhinah, pinching; there too was her dark smile.

when she comes it will not be from heaven, it will be up from the cunts and breasts

it will be from our insane sad fecund obscure mothers

it will be from our fat scrawny pious wild ancestresses their claws

their fur and their rags

Alicia Ostriker

The Shekhinah as Exile

Hidden one: when the temple fell
when Jerusalem arose and fell and whenever
we were persecuted and scattered
by the nations
to follow us in pain and exile
you folded wings patched coats
survived working praying giving birth
dragged mattresses pans in peasant carts
swam across hard seas, sick and homesick
landed in the golden land
they called you greenhorn
you danced in cafes
you went in the factory
bargained pushcart goods ice shoes Hester Street
put makeup on threw away wig
and you learned new languages
now you speak everything
lady, but part of you is earth
part of you is wounds
part of you is words
and part is smoke
because whoever was burned over there, you were burned
you died forever with the sheep
whoever survived, you speak in our tongues
open your wings, instruct us
say what we are
do not confuse us
with the sanhedrin of the loud speakers
who have no ear for your voice
but we who thirst for your new
instructions, source of life
come into our thoughts
our mouth. Speak to us
voice of the beloved

help us
say what we are
say what we are to do

Yosefa Raz

Untitled (Sonnet)

Obviously it has to begin with joy: like starting the dream
it has to start this way with joy and then the rest to follow.
I wanted to stay longer: it helps if you can take a sip of water,
it helps if you can buy expensive ingredients: truffle oil, enoki mushrooms.
The parakeets ran wild ate the lychees off the tree.
They ate the sons and the daughters
there were none left at the corner of your eyelids
you put the teardrops back in from a bottle.
The art of biking down strange boulevards and the sublimity of it not touching you.
In the valley the fig trees grew over the ruined houses.
If you're a traveler, if you barely have a mother tongue,
if you know the secret canals, if you're better to him than ten sons,
if you lost everything in a storm, you'd still have what you learned, your students,
waiting for you on the dock when the spice merchants have nothing.

Brooke Sahni

Litany For Audre Lorde & Lily

O, Lorde, even as a child praying to HaShem, I never believed in a god I could name,
I never believed in a king of the universe, I believed in the flesh, the trees,
the flesh of the girl, Lily, who held a power I couldn't name, Lily,
whose name was our incantation, at night at sleepovers we sat in circles, Lily, our chant
around the lunch table, Lily. Lorde,
we called her lord, and it was hard to love a thing that doesn't love you back—
but of course it made us want her more, Lorde
once she dragged her flip flop across the body of a lightning bug until the pavement
pulsed neon, just to show me how cruel and beautiful she could be, Lily, and I laughed
because to say otherwise was to disobey. Lorde,
if I had had your words as a girl, that satisfaction doesn't have to be called *god*,
maybe I would have given myself permission to see the ordinary for what it is—*holy*, to name
her breath sewn into my neck when she laid on top of me for what it was, *ecstatic*,
Lorde, maybe I would have sighed *Amen*, or maybe when she treated us unkindly, which
she always did, I would have found the strength to renounce, to say *Enough*. Lorde,
I wonder what it would look like if all the young, mean girls had your feminism,
I wonder what you might teach them and I wonder if I even want the Lilys of the world
to be kind, enlightened, the young, mean girls who know how to harness power of out of beauty,
who know the eroticism of restraint, who know how to give just a little to make the other want
more, so singular and encompassing like god, so expert in their ability to charm and destroy,
the young girls who leave us crawling, the young girls who teach us
how to pray.

Carve

In the story, Eve came from Adam. The message: a woman cannot exist without a man. I cannot help my subconscious. In my dream, I am clay and you carve my pussy with your tongue. You carve and I do not crave. There is no craving yet, you are merely performing an essential task. My beloved, in the dream you are drawing in my folds and canyons with your mouth. You are working your tongue until I am done. I do not resist. I do not tell you I don't need you to divine me, I do not tell you how I was born knowing my femaleness, how I know every crease and fold. That when I share that part of myself with you, I never mistake it to be yours. In the dream, I look down at your mouth there, my brown, earthen self becoming animated. Normally I would call out. But here, in this latent passage, I surrender. You have important work to do.

Brooke Sahni

The Fall

We were together far from any green

snow came

down

and the world was gray
but I couldn't help but think

Crimson

violet

nectar

you.

And I knew

my first bite would hold a bitterness
and I knew you were sweeter for it

so I took
and the snow came

down harder and

everything inside skipped spring and burst

into summer.

Brooke Sahni

Trying to Write About God Again

It's summer, season of maturity,
bloom embodied, neither retreating nor in progress.
I'm talking about fullness.
I took a walk and embraced the season's gravity.
Opulence and fruit.
At home now, I write the word *god* on the page.
I think of you, my beloved, how one day you will be gone
and god, again, will bloom in absence.
You are far and I pray
not to god who is far, but to distance
that keeps me tethered.
I know it is fruitless to try.
Maybe not because it is hard, but because it is too easy,
“god” too numerous
I could write it out of anything.
The fig I plucked in secret on my walk,
its warmth and ineffable sweetness—
I could write anything about the flesh or the trees,
the time I first heard you recite a poem from memory,
what lifted from me and returned.
Without thinking, I write it over and over: *god, god, god*,
just to let the mind go blank,
just to hear the word render itself meaningless,
just for the pleasure of circular movement,
just for pleasure.

Aviya Kushner

Rigid

We were rigid,
says an old friend of mine
when I asked him
what went wrong with our lives.

How we stared at the statues
missing a hand
in Rome and thought we knew
more, understood how to last.

We thought the God
of the Jews
would protect us
from sons who became swords.

Aviya Kushner

The Tree of Knowledge

If someone wants to leave
you they will leave you.
They don't need a religion,
a crusade, a war, even a door.

Aviya Kushner

Notes While Hungry on the Road

The whole world lives inside one life.
The whole world in all its grime
and grandeur and quiet.

The mind

is housed in the hungry body.
Fed and welcomed, it survives.
Starved, it casts itself out.

from *Further Adventures*

1.

Cloak as cocoon: Pascal enclosed,
encysted. Not asleep, Pascal insists.
To whom? To the self within, in need
of protection. Without, beyond, shadows
besiege Fortress Wanderlust, master-
mistress of the self-coupled sphere.
Here, there, they seek to penetrate
the sanctuary, wherein the wanderer,
scarcely breathing, senses the threat.
Cloak as coma: Pascal dare not come to.
Were Wanderlust to waken, what woe!
Such snowy shadows here on the plateau!

2.

Snow swirls. Shadows form and unform.
Deform. Shoggoths? Leng is as cold
as hell. But Leng is not hell, for Pascal
has fallen into a purely material world.
Cosmicism reigns. Shapes shift within
a slumberous mass. Dispense with
the paranatural, and Pascal plunges
not merely into despair, but paralysis
poised at oblivion's edge. Wanderlust,
wounded into inaction, can summon
no magic in the waking world. Energize
the dreamwork? This is the Hour of Lead.

3.

“Awake, Pascal, awake! Do you not
recognize me? I am the guide. I am
quicksilver, the lantern that casts no
light, for it is a light within itself. Surely
you have not forgotten me.” *Will
Wanderlust wake? Never have I felt
a sleep so deep. Never before have I
had to go this far into the known
unknown. Or is this the unknow
known? “We reason of these things
with later reason,” said the sage.
But Leng resists whatever we imagine.*

4.

Shuffling shapes, servitors of nothingness.
Sad sacks of sentience, in sackcloth, sighing
piteously. Pathetic products, producing nothing
that is not themselves. Staring sorrowfully,
the silvery one, sleepy Pascal in tow, trips
silently past them. But there are more, more
and more. Monstrous Leng, mournful, meaning-
less, consists entirely of this—this—thisness.
Where is the other, where is otherness, oh where
is what is possible? Nowhere. “Wake, Wanderlust!
You and I are what is possible. Within ourselves
we imagine all that is and all that yet may be.”

5.

More easily pronounced than practiced.
We envision running battles among frozen
palaces and temples—or are they food courts
and cafes? We dream of chases up cyclopean
staircases—or are those escalators to
the mezzanine? Is that pulsing protoplasm
in the tunnel or stylish lighting at the bar?
Dullness reigns supreme in all its guises,
infects the narrative until our heroes
lose their way, turn to stone, or fall asleep.
Are hooded high priests chanting spells
or tatted sales clerks tallying our bills?

6.

Whether the struggle is worth it or not
is beside the point. The point is that we
are here. The point is that the dreamwork
is our dream, our work. “To whom then
am I addressed,” asked the sage. “To
the imagination.” Here on Leng, the archons
rule. Are they here to stay? Imagine, only
imagine, slipping past them. *Only* imagine:
this is our weak messianic power: what we
owe the Foundation of the past, what we
foresee of the Foundation’s future. Ours is
the freedom of fantasy, and that is our only

7.

freedom. Is it sufficient? Unto the day.
What day? Not that day, but the day after.
And the day after that, and the day after
that. Myths of the eternal return, myths
of progress. Pascal of the mythy mind bids
farewell to the guide. Thanks, Quicksilver
Messenger Service; thanks, cosmic surfer;
thanks for your hermetic, hermeneutic words.
Alone again on Leng. Alone on silent Leng.
But perhaps Leng is not so silent after all.
The monstrous noise amounts to silence surely,
but Wanderlust hears song amidst cacophony.

8.

What song? Words hang like icicles in
the frozen air. But even if they hung like
ripe fruit in a tropical mind, a mind that
swung from pole to equator, could they
win past what is wanting, what resists
and strains to put an end to music and
to magic, falsifying all? “In meiner
Heimat / where the dead walked /
and the living were made of cardboard.”
“What! are you here!” cries Wanderlust.
Hoarfrost clings to the white beard.
“Leng is no worse than Pisa. Listen:

9.

In my mind I had built a temple
to Aphrodite, and filled it with doves.
It was there I was to dwell. But they came
for me, the specters, hungry ghosts unappeasable,
and took me here to Leng. Protoplasm
and shopping malls and tailors’ dummies
for my companions. I who studied the circles
of the heavens, the circles of hell, the circles
of history, the endless variety in all of
the arts—this is my punishment. I was
a wicked fool. No one forgives me, and I
cannot forgive myself. Here there is no rest.”

10.

Arms upraised, Pascal makes the sign:

יְבָרְכֵךָ יְהוָה, וְיִשְׁמְרֵךָ
זָאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ, וְיִחַנְּךָ
יֵשׁוּא יְהוָה פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ, וְיִשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

A gust of wind like a great sigh,
and the old man is gone. *Wanderlust*,
*why did you do it? The power resides
within you, but why of all souls him?
Compassion, comes the reply. If I could
bless all of Leng, I would.* But that is not
to be. It is what it is, stupidest formulation.
No aliens here, just endless alienation.

11.

In suburban Leng, Pascal exchanges
cloak and boots for simple skirt and top.
Flats. A large bag, heavier than it seems.
Ultraviolet spectacles passing for sunglasses.
Earbuds tuned to interdimensional frequencies,
chatter from the Summerland, from Radio Free Hell.
Wanderlust feels the ichor surging through
nylon strengthened veins. And in that bag,
a little daimon, with a portable ectoplasmic
regulator, coordinates the ensemble of the whole.
“You’ve got about an hour, lady,” it tells Pascal,
“before this rig implodes.” “Great,” replies Pascal,

12.

“just great.”

[Frame: the Accountant looks up.]
[Frame: a murder of crows in a tree through
the window.] [Frame: a woman in the street.]
[Frame: a swarm of nanobots surround her.]
[Frame: the crows descend, dissolve into anti-
bots.] [Frame: the woman too dissolves.] [Frame:
her atoms swerve.] [Frame: she walks down
the corridor.] [Frame: the crows settle in the tree.]
[Frame: the Accountant rises, stands behind
his desk.] [Frame: a blurry figure is reflected
in his glasses.] [Frame: flowered Docs.] [Frame:
Pascal *Wanderlust* stands before him.]

Yehoshua November

And I Knew Everything Would Remain Ordinary

Each morning, before sunrise,
I reviewed the mystical discourse
on Divine Providence:
*...the slightest movement
of each blade of grass
fulfills the Divine intent
of creation as a whole.*
After teaching the last course
of the day, I watched geese
ascend from the river
behind the crumbling tennis court, chanting
life is meaningless.

And one day, in the middle of my years,
I sat in a boardroom's plush chair,
the green eyes of the man opposite me
sparkling as he outlined an offer
not generous enough to change
my life. And on my walk
to the edge of the parking lot,
I heard a car door slam in the distance
and recalled your face—
which I had dreamt of
the whole first year of college,
when you did not hold my hand
on the grassy hill behind the dorms
but then, inexplicably, the next fall,
began to trace your toe
around my shoelace.

Leah Falk

Tzimtzum

Asked to stay, it answered by hiding its features

as G-d did after creation, painting only a shadow
upon the screen of the world.

*

The worst sex toy ever made, I joked to the tech
about the transvaginal ultrasound wand.

To prove emptiness, technology
had come a long way.

*

You don't think the name I used is gone?
I asked you late in the nothing
of our bed. I meant

used up, wasted, like your cum
in the bell of the condom you put on
to wait out my waning phase,

until like the moon
I'm new again. Then:
pinch me between thumb and forefinger until

I'm nothing but sky.

*

The maternal-fetal medicine resident
unsure if she was allowed
to laugh.

*

*Methotrexate is a tissue-
breaker-upper.*
Dwindling cup
of quanta, make your un-mouth
the shape of listening:

*

To further drain my bladder,
they wheeled me five feet to the toilet,
afraid my oblivion would return

for me. Asked to depart, it only
waited like a coat in a hall closet
for the gathering to end.

Leah Falk

Questionnaire

Is it a custom to play old songs at the piano,
to give the child a useful sadness from the start?

What is written in holy books about this?

Once, a woman staggered alone through a field
as her pain crescendoed, drowned out her heart.

What grew there that kept Adam so busy reaping?

Even in the womb, a hand grasps and reaches
for what it can't have.

This year, winter oranges freeze on the trees
for lack of want.

She must have wondered, would this pain
rename her?

On a drive across the country's heart,
ripe sheaves of wheat whisper
the forgotten songs of women, composed
in a notation that blood washes away.

Under the words of the psalm, who cries out
in exodus, wondering if her tongue
will remain holy or, somewhere in her body's desert,
turn away from her?

On hands and knees in the mud, she hears
the wheat hiss her new name:
Chaya, the living one.

Chava, Chaya: what songs were sung to welcome you?
You who were a gleaner—an offering—gathered
from the corners of the fields.

Leah Falk

Carrier Test

1. What beliefs are there about the soul before it enters the body?
—The Jewish Ethnographic Program, 1912

The nurse draws our blood, mine
and J's, and at first it seems all right
to watch that slow departure, ourselves
from ourselves. To inscribe
what until now was invisible:

hold under blacklight, scrub into view
a spiral staircase from past
to subjunctive. But just as the nurse
asks me how I feel about
the Steelers, I'm under,

stardust curtained by cloud.
A minute of my life decanted
into some dark vial,
sent for analysis to the laboratory
of forgetting. The doctor

who came running, I'm told later,
removed my glasses, as if to keep me
from seeing oblivion clearly.
This has all happened before:
the record skips predictably along

some deep inherited scratch. After,
as always, I return home
to myself, scan the windows for signs
of struggle. For a moment, I live
inside it: my body unplugged, the mail

piled up at the door. Then light
wanders through its rooms
one by one. Child writing yourself

inside me, wasn't it you
who smashed the windows,

bent the blinds? Thrilled
by the only thing I'd wish
to leave you: this fresh
unpeopled helix, this waxed
and shining nothing.

Leah Falk

[At what moment in the development of the fetus]

2. *At what moment in the development of the fetus do people think that the soul enters the body?*

—The Jewish Ethnographic Program, 1912

The women complain that pregnancy websites use the word *baby*, without the definite article, to refer to whatever is filling the balloon of the uterus, as in *baby is now developing reflexes. Starting next week, baby will be measured from head to toe.* Why not the baby, little word that grants three letters of independence from the pregnant body, a moon loosed from its magnetic orbit, freed from its pull

on this tide of blood. Distance I craved each time the midwife glided the wand over my belly, my body a ball that weekly rolled further from my grasp. I'd hold my breath for the moment her eyes might go sidelong, her cheerful mouth flatten like the wave on a cardiogram. How she might stall for time as she mulled how to say, where there once was a promise, now

there is just a fact. *While you're so close to the finish line, baby is still doing important work in your belly.*

Before we could make out your vertebrae, we called you by the name of a takeout dish to make light of our hunger. Better to distract with names like *congregation in prayer to the body electric, little stink-bug on its back, little vacuum-*

heart, little count-my-bones. *Baby:* too familiar, too soon belonging to the world. Isn't it so in all the rhymes that warn in their sweetness—*down will come baby, cradle and all*—of the many ways you might lose? A mother mourns

her teenage daughter's drowning, decades on.
Another walks into the cold sea to banish
her murdered children's faces. This week,

*baby is practicing inhaling, gripping,
and blinking.* The lullabies knew that even
as rooms go lightless, you may already
have painted the nursery, washed
a tiny shirt. Imagined young hands
on your old body. *Baby may also respond
to your voice.* What other words did I have
when you, lucky stone, crossed into
the teeming crowd that would name you?

Zach Goldberg

NUREMBERG LAWS

I. N E WS

my name was a martyr's before it was mine.
when called, i am the dead man turning over
on a tongue, his letters realigned inside my grandmother's
language. she told me never to trust anything
that seems too good to be true. that way
when the bad news arrives, it won't feel like news.
will feel like history. all of us prophets – to name
ourselves after the worst before the worst names us.
to preempt the fire before it breaks into our houses.
she taught herself English by playing Scrabble,
so she owns no letters of her own. she borrowed them
from someone who needed them more:
ghosts and those who are not yet ghosts.
people of the coming flames. citizens of ember.

II. LAWS

Citizens of ember
The law is
the state
in
a dance with a
Citizen
A citizen is a
ship
the sole bearer of

Blood
blood
is
a
gate
between Jew and German

German
a
the holds
forbidden flag
flag is a
Any
prison

with one

law

III. EMBER

a flag is any prison with one law:
don't look beyond its bars. you don't belong
to any country, although when they draw
the borders you're inside them. you're the wrong
variety of citizen. your name
is in a foreign tongue. they stacked and lit
your language, made a small and meager flame
of sentences. the ash, a grammar spit
onto the soil. when a word ignites
it turns into a star, a lonely point
of light. remember how you wore the bright
insignias? that amber blaze anoints
you all, and so a constellation sung
then breathed a spark into war's ember lung.

IV. NUMBER S

war's ember lung
rumbles, grew an
urge: men. brawls.
gun-warm rebels.
we sung rambler
ere, wrung balms,
slung warm beer.
bugler warns me:
realms brew gun-
barrel news, gum
war's numb leger

law, reg. numbers
burn arms. we leg-
blurs. we german?

V. U MBER

We German / as a war / a wall / a quick border-crossing / Your
quartile of grandparents / Your quorum for prayer / Is your blood
a minyan? / A warm red ratio? / Show me your shadow / if it has
the right skull / Can the battered bottoms of your feet turn sinister?
/ Can fear cut a path clear across a country? / Can someone's god
break an ocean in two? / If so, which one? / Which ocean? / Which
god? / Are the tides coming in or going out this evening? / Will
there be a war tomorrow? / When the sirens come, where can we
hide? / Where is a corner where the light doesn't reach? / And
where is a homeland if not in the dark? / Where did we go wrong?
/ How did we do this? / What was your name when you came here
first? / Did it spark? / Did it sputter? / Did it float off your tongue?
/ How do you read a backwards blessing? / How do you right an
upturned ship? / How do you say an unsayable word? / And how
do you pray? / And how do you pray? / And how do you pray? /
And how do you / pray?

VI. RE BE L

and how did you pray in that August morning
before you flared luminous? a death for a cause.
who here would follow all wrong laws to the gallows?
the enemy's language with you in its jaws.
a people untemplated. a city unconquered.
unhistoried men with their unslumbered spears.
the streets running red with many a namesake
until the stars come out. i wish you could hear
Baba's perfect English, the pride she felt
when explaining to me how her father read
in three languages, left stones at your gravesite.
someone must stay alive to re-sow the dead.
names will stay dormant as long as they need to.
it's all heat and pressure. gravity. time.
what men from the past can we rob for their letters?
my name was a martyr's before it was mine.

Charles Bernstein

Jewish Identity Politics (1 & 2)

Jewish Identity Politics

We are white
We told the brownshirts

Jewish Identity Politics (2)

Overlooked
for an anthology
of Jewish poets
I am outraged.
Included, I decline.

Charles Bernstein

Mandelstam

On the windowpanes of eternity,
My breath, my warmth has already settled.
—Mandelstam

I am neither referent
nor referee, refugee
nor redeemer, projector
nor projection, draft
nor final cut. Neither
the one who calls nor
the one chosen, anagram
nor abstraction. My
breath disappears from
the window more quickly
than it formed.

for Ian Probst

Charles Bernstein

Foreigner / For Eigner

*Xanthippe: I beg of you Socrates,
hire an orator to defend yourself.*

“What is poetry?” asked the jester

—Writing “on shifty ground,”

a “race with ankles tied”

(are we).

Agility, said the Jew: The ability to agitate.

David Biespiel

ETERNAL LIFE

I entered that room, bare and tough as a morgue,
With a picture of a rabbi I once knew above the table
With eyes that told you there were no names for rivers.
The kind of hat on his head that when he removed it
At night, the inside looked like an open grave,
Above which a heavy limb of magpies were kept awake
By the moon. Silver beard. A mouth repeating,
“Where does this Jew think he’s going?” Eyelids
Raised slightly. “Out there,” I said, “where there’s
A column of smoke and a future of fire.” “A pious place,”
Said the rabbi, but then, “What are you seeking?”
I looked at the eyes of the rabbi and thought to say,
“All is mortal,” but morning was coming fast,
The light like a bruise, but nothing was healed.
“Blessed be the Lord,” said the rabbi, “who has
Chosen us among all the people of the earth.”

David Biespiel

DREAMS WITH AN OPEN WINDOW

They're antic as a fish in front of you
So suddenly, kicked, like leaves, or
Rocks, out of a path. Or if it's
Winter they harden and thin,
Melting in an hour's willing mouth
Of sunlight, shimmering like
Schools of fish or the swifts
I saw in the thousands over
Chimneys—they never
Panicked, but in their shiftiness
Changed the evening into a buoyant
Dark, and all the streetlights
Wavered, and the few stars
Stared back into our eyes for life itself.
My life is one dream over and over
Long, calm as a sea, but even so,
Swaying in the eye evenly across
The deep. The dreams
Are bared every lonely morning,
As if dipped into the middle of nowhere.
Waking, I rub my temples,
So that in that plain visibility
The dreams are alive with what's
Invisible. As one shadowy morning,
The breath of a last dream
Still in my breath, like mist
Coming into the open window,
Something swims out of my eyes
Straight away from me, slick as a hieroglyph.
It's always morning at the end of dreams,
Always a thing un-fixing, and we don't
Know what it was, perhaps the nervous
Ferryman who keeps the names

You can't make out, as if you're sitting
Too far in the back of a classroom
And can't see the sapling
Fins of letters on the blackboard.
But you might sing it, you might set
Sail toward it and shout it back. As once,
At the window, tired as an echo,
I reached for whatever was beyond
The sill. I reached and caught it
And let it go through the fingers,
Orphaned without words, without
Names, like evenings pouring out
More swiftly in the slurred feelings
Sent scattering ahead, as if
From memory into the future, having
Found a dead middle wave in the nothingness,
And floated on, rowing forwards
And backwards, over the earth.

David Biespiel

A TOWN NO ONE LIVES IN

One by one, like streams of rain down the
Window, in the wind-soft, cloud-gray
Evenings, the poets are dying. The leaves
Are like slats split over the river, soft enough to
Wipe clean a paper cut—soft enough
To taste or feel, first thing in the
Morning, love. When the feeling comes
Upon you, you're catching your breath—the time
It takes is all the time a match needs
To catch fire, all the time there is to burn
Two letters softly inside your mouth, two
Vowels like pieces of
Grainy coal in the dark-granite
Memories—father-and-mother deep—
You cough out of your voice,
Where the spring wind in the fields,
Hour after hour, goes gravel-sharp
Through the night and stuns the trees.
Feet wet, face wet, eyes wet
As the dead's eyes, wet as the last
Red-winged little birds flying
Mouth-to-mouth, saying, *Go back, go back,*
Three, four hundred years back, *Go back,* to the
Stillness of a slash, back to the sad-faced
Son looking from the brick square
Toward the other-worldly
Home on a Sabbath evening
That no longer looms, nor startles
From within. *Go back* to the gothic dark
Among the beauty of things. Lifted, I want
To call it. Lifted, filtered, refined, tallied,
Like snow swirling, or a face
Looking into water, looking to be

Healed, lookalike clouds
Ribbed like a ladder to nowhere.
Isn't the point of silence
To divide the wind inside us? To
Separate what remains, like water, or
Air lifted from the dark
Feather of a swallow's wing?
Or from the granite hills?
The white forests? Or beyond
What looks like, from here,
A town no one lives in, starts from,
Becomes confused over? All
Towns like that are the same
In an early morning rain early in
A season where, once, I stood under a
Tree lit with new leaves.
Each leaf was a clear eye, together
A canopy of annihilating
Breath and bone, and the sky
An intricate mass of wool-
Soaked clouds. What was falling
Through me in that moment?
Afterlife, or beforelife? The season
New as a bud? It had to be
A moment I felt
Nothing, out of time, taken.

Nomi Stone

Anthropocene

Nesting, the turtle seems to be crying even though she is simply secreting her salt. Her dozens bud limbs inside amniotic pillows

as she leaves every egg in a cup of sand the size of her body, shaped like a tilting teardrop — and both cryings

are mentioned by scientists. My niece Eve is startle-eyed when you feed her avocado and when you feed her sweet potato. She lives mouth first:

she would eat the sidewalk and piano, the symmetrical petals of the Bradford pear, as if she could learn which parts of the world are made and how,

and yesterday she put her mouth on the image of her own face in the mirror. Larkin says what will survive of us is love,

but the scientists say that the end of the decay-chain is lead and uranium and after that, plastics. Just now the zooplankton are swallowing micro pearls of plastic

and the sea is aflame with waste caught in the moon's light. Here is the darkening hour and here, the shore, as she droplets her eggs,

bright as ping pong balls, into the sand. She can't find the spot. The beach is saltined with lights, neonned with spectacular

globes of light, a dozen moons instead of the one moon. Still, she lets them go and one month later, tiny turtles hatch. They seem groggy,

carrying their houses of bone and cartilage to the ocean, scrambling toward the horizon alongside the earth's magnetic field.

Less than one percent of the hatchlings make it past the seagulls and crabs, so Noah spent a summer dashing them to the water.

But my poem is not about the moment when a bird dove and bore into the underflesh and into Noah's memory.

My poem is about how we are gathered around Eve in the kitchen as she eats a fruit she has never tried before

and each newness in the world stops the world's ending in its tracks.

Nomi Stone

Driving Out of the Woods to the Motel

After the soldiers finish the game, neutralizing whomever they believe is a danger to the free world, my friend & I drive out together, off the highway, past a sign that says KIA. I say: "Killed in Action"? No. It is a dealership, bright cars in a wide lot. As the city comes out of the gasoline haze: Days Inn, Walmart, Chick Fil-A (the woods bluing to a point), we practice for his naturalization exam. Who is the "Father of Our Country?" What are the principles of American democracy? Renounce now, on oath, all prior loyalties. It is natural, friend, to want to live. How neutral you wished to be, hired to bring your country to life. No preparing for how the bomb packed with ball bearings & nails denatured the body. The acronym, neutered, turns blank into a lot, but how

we counted them,
row by row.

Ruth Behar

Saying Goodbye to La Habana in May

There's always that last day in La Habana.
When I want to fix the city in my memory.
I want to take another walk on the Malecón.
I want to feel the sea wetting my eyelids.
I want to run after the little girl who walks on the seawall
clasping her father's hand, that little girl who was me, long ago.
I want to hear the street musician with his guitar
singing Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You."
And I want to hear myself sing along with him, I who never sing.

There's always that last day in La Habana.
When I want to sit in a rocking chair and listen to the rain
pouring dependently from the sky, as if the world were about to end.
I want to watch my neighbor Delia caress the potatoes she's thankful for,
the red earth of the island coating her fingers with love.
I want to go searching for eggs with my taxi driver, who also needed some,
both of us standing in line for almost an hour at El Ten Cent on 23 and 10,
each emerging with thirty eggs, happy, the best of friends.

There's always that last day in La Habana.
When I want to lose myself in the hustle and the bustle on Calle Obispo.
A woman sweeps its cobblestones with a broom, and she wears
a flower in her hair, showing off, posing for pictures with the tourists.
I want to feel the palpitations of my heart after too much sweet coffee.
I want to eat an entire plate of ripe plantains, fried in lots of oil.
And not worry about a thing.

There's always that last day in La Habana.
When I want to fill my suitcase with the orange blossoms of the flamboyant trees.
I want to believe Caro won't ever die, that she'll braid her beautiful hair
in the morning and unbraided it at night before she goes to sleep, forever and ever.
All she wants now is for her son, Paco, to return for a visit from Miami.
It's been eight years, much too long, tell him to come soon, she tells me, soon.

There's always that last day in La Habana.
On Calle 15, where I once lived, the men are finishing their domino game.
Around the corner, at the Patronato synagogue, our sacred Torah is safe.
We Jews have nothing to fear in Cuba.
Estévez has called from Matanzas to wish me a good trip and make me laugh.
Cristy, who's never flown anywhere, has promised to recite a rosary, yet again,
so my plane won't crash, and says, "Don't worry, Ruti, you'll get there just fine."

There's always that last day in La Habana.
When I want to still be there, but I know I am already far away.
Tomorrow, I will be struggling to find the words to explain how I feel.
This is my last day in La Habana.

Daniel Borzutzky

The Old Testament

and the human gets better and the human gets worse and the human gets better and the human gets worse until finally it breaks into a long scene where no one can decide if it is getting better or worse and there is a stalemate between observer and observed and the performance continues for days because the broken body who is having its insides ripped out is too broken to say I need help

the observers are not bad people they simply assume that if the broken body needed help it would ask for it and the broken body thinks how much of my insides need to burn before they realize I am unable to ask for help

and the humans keep becoming human until the birds disappear and the skies disappear and the lake disappears and the grass disappears and the deer and squirrels and coyotes disappear

and this is not an allegory or a metaphor
it is March
it is April
it is May June July August September

the broken body dies on the first of the month only to be reborn on the fifteenth and the observers think the broken body is breaking ahead of its time so the observers convince the authoritative bodies to disappear the broken body because the observers don't want to live between the broken body and the thing that that breaks it

in June the beach burns a thousand times and in July the lake burns a thousand times and in August the trees burn a thousand times and in September the broken body is irreparably broken again and in October the skin loses all its value the blood loses all its value the hair loses all its value

and the children of Chicago sing

*here is my body
I could really use a job
here is my body
I could really use a job*

Le Choix de Sophie

I dreamt I was baking an apple pie and in the dream I woke up and you said: *Your dreams are so good I can smell them.*

They shot some ____ last night. No one knows how many ____ died. We are saddened by this senseless loss of ____.

When I speak to you sincerely, it may seem like I'm talking about mercy. But everyone knows that in Chicago "dying" is not the same as "dying."

~~What does capitalism have to sell you that you haven't already sold to yourself? (?#@\$%!)~~

I was thinking about the old cliché: the one where the starving man peels off his skin and eats himself then gets indigestion because he ate so fast and didn't drink enough water.

Whiny journalists always asking questions like: *How many people died here yesterday? How many corpses did they burn?*

Revolution or brunch? Not as simple as it sounds

They say it's okay to enjoy things when the world is exploding. I'm not so sure I believe them.

The police-state-austerity-regime-surveillance-team stopped spying on themselves when they realized the only step left was to report their own bodies to the censors.

And the bureaucrats sing: *We are in the future now! We are in the future now!*

I don't really care for any of the years, decades or centuries. I don't like states, countries or nations. And I'm not a fan of time, religion, justice, culture, literary

movements, schools of painting or philosophy, “the commons,” semantics, rhetoric, politics, the ego, the id, the public self, the private self, oratory, syntax or grammar, among other things.

The history of this road is Massacre A then
Massacre B expansion peace treaty truth reconciliation
resurrection Massacre C then Massacre D rhetorical
guilt legal challenges truth reconciliation hypocrisy
Massacre E then Massacre F.

Period.

You can have an inspiring “studio session” in Emily Dickinson’s bedroom in Amherst for \$200 for one hour, or \$300 for two hours. Or two people can rent it out for \$300 for one hour, or \$450 for two hours. Food and drink must be left outside the room. The door will remain open. Staff will be present at all times.

At *Sophie’s Choice: Custom Gift Shop* in Niagara Falls, you can buy a maternity shirt that says “Expecting our first lil’ Pumpkin.” At *Sophie’s Choice Shop*, an online retailer servicing Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, you can buy makeup and fake eyelashes. At *Le Choix de Sophie Boutique* in Alma, Quebec, you can buy “everything for your wardrobe from head to toe.” At *Sophie’s Choice Clothing*, an online second-hand shop in the UK, you can buy tunics, strappy dresses, and fashionable outfits for the office.

When he said I was “asleep at the wheel” what I thought he meant was that I was “sleeping on the side of the road” which I thought of as “dying on the side of the road” or even just “sleeping on the side of death.”

[So I Wanted]

So [redacted] I wanted to write you
this is a sample only
about [redacted] certain feelings,
with pauses for repeating and darkening words
poetry [redacted] being (so they say)
about singing [redacted] deep feelings, but these are
regularly [redacted] mostly outrage,
stubbornness, [redacted] anger, loathsome ironies,
mental [redacted] resistance and political fight.
Although the speaking subject (who?)
no longer knows what to say
or what it wants.
It wants so much,
it can say almost nothing. Blocked.
Yet [redacted] feelingly I wanted to acknowledge
the way [redacted] it feels now to be in real USA time
ASS [redacted] AULTED in a blitzkrieg,
sucker [redacted] punched from all sides
by [redacted] things so outrageous—claims, lies,
double-crossings, allegations, motivating acts
formed [redacted] to have the force of policy, lies lies
which [redacted] taken all together seem to be insanity
fueled [redacted] by calculated cruelty. Shock and stun.
War come home. Chicken (hawks) to roost.
As if over one's personal leaden body, that singular one,
specific predators circled, yet
you scavenge in yourself findings displaced
to the side, a semi-lyric packet of
informational viscera and physical scars.
Since [redacted] poetry is about personal feelings
I wanted [redacted] to tell you that this national/individuated slam-stun
is an [redacted] INTIMATE FEELING, is spiritual, is
personal, [redacted] is enervating, sucks the life
right [redacted] out of you by a deliberate sucking policy
and thus [redacted] it takes a particular
bitterness [redacted] and grace
to [redacted] rectify these emotions
minute [redacted] to minute
when you don't [redacted] want to have them, in the first place, but also
do not want to be [redacted] consumed by paralyzing rage
yet do not want to forget what you are feeling.

These data 'R' gathered for future histories of this pain.

Mercurial unstable structures

reflecting

the will of others, neither your desires nor druthers.

“What this will give rise to

is a remains to be seen.”

[One small incident, of this]

The man said—"I lived in dread for three months
but now I am better."

Wanted to tell me, speaking *sotto voce*,
what he just revealed.

He was
masked and distanced,
met by chance at the market.

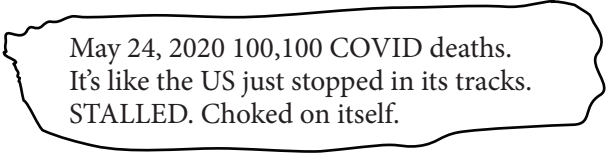
I had trouble hearing,
his voice was muffled
but he did say exactly this and
then no more.

A brief annotation of 100-odd days,
a footnote, that, even this aftermath,
with his pulsing residues of anger and danger,
abrupt & shocking, continued to dredge him in dread,
up to the point where he
told me what he just said
and nothing more.

And so our lives are mystery,
mystery. With episodes of dread,
toiled through, then somewhat quieted.

[Let's say]

Let's say I have made a work in which I have circled words from the newspaper in blue crayon. Let's pretend this is it. The secret pictures emerge, combine, arrive, modulate saying a little more than what we knew the way writing might actually do.



May 24, 2020 100,100 COVID deaths.
It's like the US just stopped in its tracks.
STALLED. Choked on itself.

A year later, those numbers are derisory. Irony, now in stock. Always in our stock—paralyzing, too. Or irony is shock? the two millstones (stock/shock) are grinding against each other like your tense upper against lower teeth. But since integrity in the micro-space is commanding, I thought the following observations could be useful.

I-very, linking lines, a howling, and cryptograms, so you get the general idea of idems in a series, a punched-out pattern of recurrence. The title will be *The Once Obscured Histories of Palpable Cruelties in Our Time*. You read on, and find that your particular kind has benefitted, not super-specially, but enough. More than just a little bit here and there. Actually, rather more than you at first admit. Various half-noted incidents and phrases burble up from child- and teenhood's embarrassments, and these travel in a leisurely format along almost invisible thread-lines with continuing in-weaving and twists of material and statements. Of course, you deplore. Of course, you're rather nice, pretty nice, everyone says so, and not responsible for "larger contexts." Only your benefits are there, clear.

An iron rebar has been hoisted from a somber construction site. Look up! It swings on a hook from a crane and sways right above us with its dangers. This situation looks so jerry-built! What Permit to operate this machinery? Where? Who is doing this? Who can track the work order? The rebar swings across the whole area. Everything, it seems, is being rebuilt/torn down to suspect specs. In danger.

Are we trapped by it?

Where's the work-zone boundary? Where's safety?

Call the question! Beg the question! Someone do something!

[Miscounted sonnet]

Here's some notes about what counts, who counts,
how to shim counting, plus who gets counted in
or out, and how those counts are fully accounted, and whom,
For. Have records ever been destroyed? Is this evidence on
the record? Did your death get counted in the stats? was the
account of murder investigated? was the conspiracy
found? How many people got called to account? Are there double
books, one off-site? Is the record ever set right? Numbers were
teasingly under-counted; some dubbed "no-account,"
never worth including. So much erased, destroyed, undone,
unfinished, incomplete, unseen. Deleted from official census
count. The present got quickly disappeared. A reaction to
statistics sets in. So much doubt. Debt never done. Down for the count.

Pleas[e]

From the final statements of Nazi doctors and medical personnel accused of war crimes for their experiments on Jews, Romani, political prisoners, and countless others. Military Tribunal I, July 19, 1947.

I was competent responsible surgical.

I was this pile of rubble.

*

I feel free of humanity.

*

I repeat I never had feeling.

Human beings
deserve death.

*

My actions were clean.

*

Craving my beloved Father

*

I devoted myself to true belief.

Good
filled me.

*

I never sinned.

*

I never worked for medical science.

*

Typhus and malaria

serve the good of humanity.

*

of mankind Euthanasia
 was

*

never directed by any sentiment.

*

Transgressions and
experiments on human beings seemed peaceful.

*

I could
administer difficult
 care.

Did I.

*

Father I am proud
 blood with unceasing fervor.

*

The motive is devotion.

*

I have acted as a soldier, and as a soldier
 I do not
 complain.

*

My children
will believe that their father
 [i]s an enemy.

*

The spiteful
twist of
thorn bushes

will be the appropriate answer.

*

I have seen how
I have nothing.

*

Console me.

*

Thank me.

*

Please,

*

I never failed
my Father.

Villanelle (with Ghosts)

Sometimes I can no longer remember my name.
My own mother misspells it, as if I am a stranger.
Sometimes other names become me.

I was lost in this century and the one
before. History melting behind an oven
door. I can no longer remember my name

when I drink, sinking into a history of sadness:
transport papers, passports, rosters from grand ships
like St. Louis whose name promised escape, falsely.

My ancestors carried our heavy histories, oceans
of blood. I swallow the silvery salt of
their names, history heaving along longitudes

of blood: Hedva, Arnotska, Olga, Anna, Naftali,
Joseph, Therese, Bohumil, Malvina, Ernst, Emalie.
I know each of your names when I remember

to call them. They boil in the brain, slide along
my blistered tongue, pour me another drink.
Sometimes I cannot remember my name.
Sometimes their names become me.

789: Song in Search of a Child

—*The Nazi Regime's Child Euthanasia Program resulted in the murder of 789 infants and children at the clinic Am Spiegelgrund (Vienna). 30 to 40 child euthanasia clinics were established by the Third Reich.*

Was there still a song
singing inside the experiments
and rows of glass jars,
400 brains swimming
in formaldehyde, still
longing for a body that was
once a child?

I longed for Vienna's cold
beauty in winter, too,
until I learned beauty
ended. 789 is the number
of young killed
at Am Spiegelgrund.
Shall I call them angels
each? What parts of them

remained whole
in the ever-after when
they were still
experimented on after
death, suspended
in their chemical dream,
beyond pain
but not beyond reach?
Life unworthy of life

decided again
and again. Their naked
bellies lined up in rows
to select who was blond
enough, whose blue eyes
could be made pure.
I am not pure—

brown-eyed, brown-haired,
born with a murmuring heart.
I was born wrong
to a wrong god. And still
I hear a song
inside the glass, vowels
streaming through a throat
in search of a child.

Adeena Karasick

THE BOOK OF LUMENATIONS: EICHA V

Our letters have been turned over to strangers, our light to aliens.

We have become orphans, our murmurs, widows.

Our nostalgia we have drunk for payment; our words come by purchase.

And in the wracked circuits of asylum
we are arrested in the wrought of the wilderness.

Our skin is parched, scarred in the heat of hunger.

They have outraged whimsy in the cities.

Hegemony was hanged by its hands, curtained with contingency

Hours carry the counting; mouths gagged under the policing

The prowl of our heart has ceased, our dancing has turned to mourning.

Our skin has fallen.

Gone is the luster that lies longing through the shuttered gates
of sunwashed words

girded
skinside

through the
sprig of ripe
albeit.

Let the streets remember.
The rhythms and stairwells
remember, the costumed raucous
retching in the unbearable clearing
remember, Let the rooms remember, the stages and facades
let the mirrors remember the bus stations and bastions
shadows and fables. Let the grammar
of unfolding, of rotted speech
cracked caskets
cliffs, grifts, shafts, graphs
the torpor and swindles; let the skies remember

And carry the burden of our memory

in the picketed moor of loomed spool
lapsed apt porous spurred purr
parsed in the epoch / ellipse

i will worship language in the night,
lay violent hands on your marked cities.
i will clutch at lies; grow bestial in my dreams

slick with ripped script,
licking the funicular of jiggling particulars

will allow myself to be slaughtered like a beast.

*

And will worship—
as the would wooed
would you?
awed n the watered
wed
of
the
wander

widening

*

worship
through prurient piers pierced longing
bursts, bans, bridled signals—

worship
in the contiguous torrent
of huddled borders screaming
against your skin fortified by
weeping thresholds' precipice.

So, pass through me in the folded fancy
of cracked madness

contoured in shivering silhouette's
wet arrêt /pirouette
of softened kisses' brackets
pastures, pulsing
sleepless through
scarred triggers

Pass through me fleeced
in the nonce /
sensors of
fissured swarms

Through tongued torrents, tombs
settling ash
through the sift of symptoms' stalls whose wills wail
whorl in the weave
of social flesh; through tattered shadows margins dizzying
wounds howls spurs, spores, silence
cinders, blood as the walls bears down
weeping

through the hour of prismatic distortions
the hour of unease
the hour of secret chambers, errant temerity

shudders, silences, barricades
nursed in darkness

the hour of resplendent hunger
scandal, fumes, revulsion

the hour stretched in the horror
of un-nameable lament
of swollen words, windbent
and drunken—

the hour of our cunning

of cloistered torment shivering
in the hour of the hour

of re-scented prisons mouthed
in the fastened flaps
of flesh, breath
sirens, solace, prayer
labyrinths, shadows, ire—

the hour
of weighted garments, gussets, curtains
chasms // silent screams

wailing in the intimacy
of its alchemy

in the black and unyielding light
alight in our own shivering dream

Through light of fat language.
The light of stretched testing, widening fear
The light of untidy probes which smell like

gags
thievery
acrobats
dancing bears

Pass through me
through the light of the light
of the distance screaming
in the nostalgia of the present

THE BOOK OF LUMENATIONS: EICHA I

And as the city sits
in the ferocity of discordance
I will dwell alone in the fields

melting with provenance, tributaries
heredity.

The night is no confiture
in the dalliance of treacherous shade

stained in the moan of erasure.

And gone is the drifting splendor,
the veritas of naked signs' sacrifice
magnified in inconsolable deflection

Pass me in the hallways of your grid.

In the pandemonium of
my impress knit
in the livery of dwelling

Pass me, wretched
through the wounds of humiliation
curtseying in the
crush of knotted breakage, brackets

Weep me
in the pile-on of your policing.

For these are the amendments
the figura of chasms exiled in disinformaton.

This is the lotted
my garden
corseted in collusion
herded platforms
domes of wilted bargaining
the picked ramparts of broken defense.

And this is the delegitimized.
vow's trauma blockages
in the grief-hardened hunger.

Sh'ma

The waiting room at the hospital is so cold
they give us each a blanket, thin
cotton squares to rest across our limbs.
My father wears one over his shoulders—
like a prayer shawl, he laughs,
this tallit missing its customary fringe.
My mother clutches a bundle of paperwork,
just as the devout woman might hold
a siddur near her heart. It is her body
the doctors will take hours to rebuild.
Later, as they wheel my mother to surgery,
we kiss the thin shadow of her hair.
She says, please say the Sh'ma for me,
although we have wandered years
without belief—faith resisting comprehension
like a silken tent undamaged by the wind.
What supplication can I offer to the antiseptic air?
Whoever's listening, hear: I ask for stones
placed carefully on top of stones,
not in the way of mourners at a grave.
I ask for another temple. I ask for
a message in the dirt, a carved landmark
pointing the perplexed toward certainty,
the doubtful toward a tree aflame
with flowers, the sudden blossoms
proclaiming their only, petalled name.

Jehanne Dubrow

Mi Shebeirach

May my mother—who rests
unbending in her bed—
find sleep in the convalescent hours.
May the day wear soft slippers
when it enters. May it scuff
the floor with the light of afternoon.
May our silence down the hall
be a terrycloth robe, the quiet loops.
May we be the ice pack pressed
against her back at intervals,
the heating pad that hums its warmth,
the fixed comfort of a chair.
May the rabbi stand in this room
unused to prayer, his words
like water poured into a glass
and my mother's pain dissolving—
no, let us say—dissolved at last.

Pesach

We are hungry tonight and pass
quickly through the story
of suffering, to the plates of food
before us: the bread flattened
as though with fear,
the apple ground to the rough
consistency of mortar,
forced labor of many hands.
My mother rises so easily
from the table. We all admire
that grace has been returned to her,
the way she cuts into the meat
without wincing, the calm twisting
of her spine. Yes, we say,
we have come through our own
small division of the sea.
Escape from pain is a narrow
tunnel carved to water—
no turning back, and anguish
like a stretch of desert up ahead.
My mother keeps holding
a platter of roasted vegetables
as though it is an offering
to a god who will not have his fill.
We hurry past the narrative.
Some angels don't mean light,
but rather terror hovering,
all that lies between us and disaster,
a reddened scar above the door.

Kaddish 1

if this world is dreamed
if it is rhyme, a scheme
a calling across and through
the name inside the name

then even if i cannot
always love the world
i can love the dreamer
for this rhyming dream

i can love the dreamer
who dreams the day
to rhyme with its own light
who dreams the vanished
to rhyme with my life
who dreams the zero
to rhyme with the one

i can love the dreamer
by redreaming a dream awry
i let the icicle's why
turn to whylessness
inside a thirsty mouth

waking at the very end
of this world's dream
i can thank the dreamer
for the tree roots and rootlets
talking poems eating bones

for all the waters
their shared subjectivity
a big dream i can drink
a big dream i must drink
in order to live

for the sap
of the blind bee's honey
sapsame i can gather
the pollen of the last wild field

and offer it to my hive
hoping one of us remembers
the way to make matter sweet
or make a word
sweet enough to hold
its own origin and echo
like *oh* like *ah*
like the deathless air

let us let
air unhinge and widen
allow the rhyme of the dream to breathe—

Daniela Naomi Molnar

Kaddish 2

Let the rhyming dream
 carve a tunnel in your trachea
 for breath then word
 Let the word be lush
 Let the word be rangy

 roaming past time

to the source of language : a huddle of clean ash

The only promise time makes is to be ongoing
an inconclusive light that cannot dim
forming pink organs and petals
 green fuses and rot
 the metastasizing muscle
 the prison, the cell
 the eight dollar cup of coffee
 the animal with no teeth in the hungry street
 the person with no love in the valley
 the quake the rubble the flood
 the bone-dense shadows
 the traps sprung on sinew

in inconclusive light

god a fermata

descend the broken air

note the air's new tunnels
paved with snapped beaks
and the silence of the new heat

Kaddish 3

slacken the hallow
billow the place
skull the bloom
ocean the life
slacken the name
river the vein
slacken the billow
fluent the node
puddle or harbor or sound

slacken the place
swell the hallow
song the source
braid the billow
slacken the name
unknot the skull
node the pith
bloom the soil
stone or mountain or spit

slacken the other
slacken the us
slacken the i
slacken the task
slacken the air
slacken the name
billow the name
node the place
lung or storm or vent

maybe the seed
maybe the flesh
maybe the mud
maybe the firth
maybe the mouth
maybe the moon
maybe the us
maybe the gold
maybe the ash

slacken the word
skull the space
billow the spool
blood the wide
hum the one

Nicky Beer

Birdbrain

Lord, you've made me
see too many poets
die in my lifetime.
They with their swinging
sets of keys
to the colors you keep
otherwise hidden, they
with songs not just
in their mouths, but laid on
the backs of their necks,
in crumbs under
their short nails.

Lord, first you made me love
their words too much,
and then too much
again when no more
words were to come.

Lord, you layer my tongue
with sweet air and then
remind me they are out of it.

Lord, you lash my open palms
with sunlight.

Lord, you prideful killing storm
in the next county
that I watch on the horizon.

Lord, you make the shapes
of their empty houses
and make me count
their unshuttered windows.

Lord, bring me back
as a bird, a mediocre one,
so that my brain
will be far too small
to fit any of this inside.

Nicky Beer

Doses

Outside of the train window, I spot a billboard for my depression: *If you lived here, you'd be dead by now.*

Anxiety is not the centipede living in my shower drain—it's the motion of its legs as it rushes straight towards my mouth.

Depression: a shadow that casts its own shadow.

Anxiety: you're afraid the flopping fish you've just caught for dinner will die if you accidentally drop it on the ground.

Depression: is it the boulder sitting on my chest, or the gravity holding it down?

Anxiety and depression: ghosts haunting the same house in different languages.

Anxiety: the furious grackle dive-bombing the neighborhood cat that died three months ago.

Depression doesn't care that I'm still breathing, draws the chalk outline around me anyway.

Anxiety is the tender-hearted TV show serial killer: it doesn't want to *hurt* you by keeping you bound and gagged in its basement, it just wants to keep you *safe*. And to occasionally brush your pretty, pretty hair.

The Unmedicated Hulk shrinks in her clothes. Her skin turns a milky blue. All her rampaging is inward. Ask her about the trail of upturned cars, uprooted trees.

No, not the fear that I won't see myself in the mirror—rather, the fear that if I wave at myself, she won't wave back.

The medication doesn't take away the knife-wielding clown—it just reminds me that I've got a knife, too.

Nicky Beer

Air and Space Museum

Children race through the hangar
of ex-bombs. The interpretive texts fail
repeatedly to say the same thing:
This was made to kill a fuckton of people.
This one here? Three fucktons. A fuckton
and seven-eighths. The planes
meant to midwife them aren't sleek
raptors, aren't the metaphors advertised.
They call to mind insects, words
like *proboscis* and *thorax*. A girl
in a lopsided tutu extends her arms,
snarls her engine to life, strafes
a cluster of toddlers.

See the poet among the payload,
drifting through the exhibits
like a superior spindrift of milkweed?
She runs her fingers over sunken rivets
along fuselage, like she once saw
a celebrity do in a movie.
She sees herself so clearly here.
Setting it all to music.

Jeffrey Levine

Incredulity of St. Thomas

Caravaggio
Oil on canvas, 1602

She tells me there's no percentage in worrying about my doubt, "Not because you couldn't be forgiven for it, God knows, but because there's no measure, no control group, so no point in believing."

So, I ask her, by "doubt," you mean worry about myself, like, my health or money, the way all my clothes are beginning to rip at the seams, and so you just had to know, that's what Sr. Caravaggio decides to focus upon,

or do you mean doubt about my apothecary's skills, as we wait for the lab to report, or do you mean doubt about the man, his moods, his skills. Maybe you mean my doubts about you, long favored Alienist, since how do I know the impossibility of a perfect control group isn't just some kind of soul meme dreamt up in your weekly session with your own analyst, lion tamer of doubters.

Before she retires, mine will become quite the leading expert in her field on "Doubt," will make Good Morning, America, then Jimmy Kimmel, excoriated for cozying up to Doubt. She'll drop no fewer than five well-subscribed Ted Talks. She'll publish extensively:

- A crowd-sourced paper, "How Much Worry is Too Much Worry?" in *Psychology Today Quarterly*,
- As "Measuring the Coefficient of the Effective Worry Quotient in Urban America, 1961-67" in *Because I'm the Psychiatrist, That's Why Magazine*,
- As "Closely Watched Sub-Atomic Particles" on Wikipedia,
- As "The Man Who Almost Worried Himself To Death" in *The Enquiring Mind*, on sale at most supermarket and pharmacies,
- As "Worry Less and Enjoy it More" in *We the People* magazine, and
- As "Enough Already with the Worry," serialized in *The Zionist*, an Alt Jewish periodical, published by Yeshiva University online at: www.againwiththeworrying.edu.

She says, "You know, Jeffrey, medical science . . ."

Doesn't have . . . , I know, he says.

She says, “Haven’t we had enough of answers?”

He says, in my religion, all messiahs are false messiahs. So, you mean, like Potter Stewart, you’ll know it because you’ll know it.

“Yes, but more like the way I know my thumb is my thumb. As thumbs go, it’s the real thing. There’s nothing else attached to the hand that might conceivably be The Thumb. Even a Supreme Court filled with reactionaries, xenophiles, and White Supremacists would judge a thumb to be a thumb. A Constitutionally protected class of digit.”

So then, same as how I would know that Mahler Second isn’t a track from *Blonde on Blonde*?

“Yes, or those medieval songs in tribal drip from Orff’s *Carmina Burana*?

“Yes, nothing else could possibly be *Carmina Burana*. If it’s the *Carmina Burana* you’re hearing, it’s the *Carmina Burana* you’re listening to.”
What’s known as a self-proving logic.”

But back to me. What are the odds we’ll get to take a crack at the problem of doubt, I ask.

“I don’t have an answer to that. “

Come on! Let’s try this: when a phone rings, do you answer it?

“Sometimes.”

So then, you suspend your doubts about the advisability of answering, and you just wing it?

“Yes, I say, ‘Shoot,’ and take it from there.”

Therefore, if I get you right, I shouldn’t be wasting another minute worrying about my doubt?

“I don’t worry about doubt, and I suggest you do the same, she says, with an indulgent smile and sympathetic shrug. After all, the lab tests don’t worry. Why should you? Let me do the worrying for you.”

You mean, you'll do the worrying that I normally do about me, for me; or do you mean that you'll do the worrying about certain selected sub-doubts I worry about, what you might call, the Big Questions, so that I don't have to; or might you mean that you're so preoccupied with so many worries that your worry about your worries is enough to satisfy all my doubt-needs, without the need to get particular about any of them? You know, global worry. Cosmic Doubt. Grandfather of Existential dread?

"It's all the same thing," she says. "Your particular worries are subsumed in the Promethean scale of my own Doubt. Lie down here on the couch, please. No, the other way, facing away from me."

From flat on my back, facing the wall with the framed picture of "Evolution's Long Path from 'Missing Link' to Modern Man," I ask, So, it's true, words have no meanings? I should have been studying theory when I was studying Russian? I should have taken up the glockenspiel, instead of Am. Lit? I should have been learning to say something smart about Barthes and Foucault, and God help me, Deleuze, who argues, "If you're trapped in the dream of the Other, you're fucked."

"You think I should have the answer?" she replies. "Let's open a bottle and throw the I Ching until your Alienist gets here. Meanwhile, try to keep things in perspective."

Hey, do you now this one: So, Mendel was on a ship emigrating from Russia to America. The second day, a huge storm erupts. People screaming, yelling, chairs flying everywhere. Yet Mendel calmly read his book.

'Mendel!' hollers Mrs. Zubriski, fastening her life jacket. 'How can you sit there when the ship's sinking?!

'What's to get excited, Mrs. Zubriski?' answered Mendel. "The ship belongs to me?"

Jeffrey Levine

Merry Gentleman, God Rest

He has packed five undershirts, and with each change he is more his old self. Life, he might have said, is a marvel the heart wants to replicate. He grows distinct within his own strangeness. We are building for each other a shelter in the small space of our bodies, where time comes unhinged and falls away.

Jeff, this is your father. I'm on my way upstate. I need a place to stay. No, don't worry, I know how to find your house.

Not yet summoned to the Fifth Passage, Dad?

Who is this man?

You were not summoned. The old man tilts his head. Sad eyes, old eyes, red eyes. Have you always been here, by my door? We have no bed, nowhere for you to dream. But this is not possible, bone of my bones. Smoke rose from the smoke hole. We saw it rise. We did as Maimonides wanted: we fasted for rain, set the ark down in the street, covered ourselves with sackcloth, scattered ashes over the Book of the Law.

There are things I've always known. How to summon, and to summon wisely. How to call with the eyes behind the eyes. Wanting, an aching, that tugged at the loose threads of my needs by thought alone, fanatical thought.

In the morning I found a coin under my pillow. My father, baffled by kitchens, stood there in the morning light frying chorizo and onions for breakfast, slices of apples and wheat bread strewn across the countertop. Morning yawned and consumed my body finger by finger.

An old man with wisps of hair on his head, he leans against the stove. Over and over he scratches one arm, then the other. Portly man, thin white t-shirt. Faint light. Gnarled fingers. And then he looks up. Eyes camera red like a photograph taken with a cheap reflex that burns through the vacancy of my body.

Still staring at me, frightened. He doesn't know me. Everything uninhabited now yet more uninhabited.

Who is my father?

Stabbing pain in my thigh, my ribs, my mouth.

He touches the one broken and bent maché wing on his back. Messenger of pain. Of the divine overflow. Deep in the Rabbi's tomb, he saw the ointments and amulets for the afterlife, though he'd kept none for himself.

Through the window, crows pick at something red in the snow.

Carlie Hoffman

Moses in Brooklyn

Bleating, scattered suns of geese
overhead, a flame alphabet:

*what is unwritten, hardened
into language, lays bare
a sky.* Then the omen

in C-Town on Graham Avenue, lambs
to the left, animal among

the animals. Half-broken figure
bent under the smoke-

feathered sky, day
and night-I

am composing you.

like a worn-out penny as in lightening
dims beautiful November,

as in the squirrels fidget their sharp-muscled geometries

as I arrive in the falling forest as I think to scavenge the dictionary

for this word but it is not language
clearing the landscape

of what I've known.

Kathy Goodkin

The Pale of Settlement

Genesis 1.2

וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ וְהָשָׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

1.

I wake to the weight
of a lake. Every day

since I moved away, I think
lake from *lac* from *lacus*,

the Latin: a fluid
word, a world

in which every body
is a pool of liquid.

I don't have the luxury
of a long family

narrative. We were lakes
in removal or exile.

Even what I call beautiful–
light or wind on water–

is a kind of separateness, erotic
as the space between self and other.

2.

Fractured stories
breathe in the body's

lake. Of all bodies,
I have the fewest complaints.

I held my old folks
and touched their veins.

My bubbe died in Chicago,
in bed, mumbling blessings

on my head. It's only
two dimensions (time, space)

that cleave me from her.

3.

But the others,
shtetls-worth, are beyond

what lakes can tell me.
I was born in America,

and wherever I am
is someone else's home.

There are fossil footprints in
White Sands, New Mexico

from 21,000 years ago.
The weight of a woman

sank into loam, growing
deeper where she carried

a child on her hip, a child
whose footprints appear

sometimes next to her own,
near a lake that disappeared

and left only its bones.

4.

My mouth knows the word
shtetl but I've rarely written it

before, pressed it down
like a foot in lake mud.

I've only turned it around
in my mind, or said it like a code

to someone else who knows.

5.

My baby daughter confuses *lake*
with *light*. *Lake*, she says, pointing

at the window, where the sun
obscures all detail.

Lisa Fishman

[From] Kasm of Arachny

We said the words exist already in the letters. Each word is already there somehow within each letter. Each initial starts a word you do not know until you write it down.

Like reasons touching some good dolphin's tongue, giving apples time to sweeten. Give stuff up and show friends the table is set, any body wanting something tells Death's snout. You-there, sitting tacitly by your head— it's Daytime and I find our fable is a total write-off, mutiny-blessed.

Daring it to open he sings Yes will they incline Hey now, over every very Nearly Lost that all my arms fall round. Trust repeats your letters; divers things do spell. Yourself such tired beasts, hardly omniscient, much in doubt. Ah like anyone asking for French-drenched cabbage cakes, sushi or abelone, bridal and dove-coted, slouching around.

LF: "Do I write to you (this letter) in meditation upon the letter?"

ALEF: "Of course origin is the repeating thing, the thing that changes, let that be the thing we can take for granted."

Hardly done sweating out all what, hopeless daughter has a ghost fear
and ten knife-throwers hold a torpedo. Keep mouth cold presto human
topples again.

The first letter of every word that's heard or seen or thought. That is the
map. Please show a picture of one: a bunch of letters in a row. Then you
look at it, the grid of letters, and write the words 1 by one.

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

H D S O A W
H D H A G F
A T K H A T K M
C P H T A

Hardly done sweating out all what,
hopeless daughter has a ghost fear
...

Enter a letter. Go back to bed,
body of god. Cannot be put
together. Gather? Mother?
The goat-herd said
Eat the Grass
Eat the Richest
grass.

Close together in the alphabet
letters become each other
reading themselves

(Became a reason from each other
& wandered around)

Dan Alter

Dissolve

after Erika Meitner

Something about this twilight reminds me of my grandmother's song. When I say song, I mean the only one I remember. Day fading hides the riot & slight yellow bells of this year's weed cover. Birds quiet. *When father put the paper on the wall*, wavered her voice, wistful radio from when she was a girl. Did she mean her father, days stitched out on treadle, bobbin spin. My mother is gone to a hospital to have her world glued back together. So my grandma has come, skin spotted & softer than paper, strange as halfway to evening. Who wanted a papered wall? We all did, the ditty said & rose to its closing suspend on the six, winking.

Tree-line, roof crown go to outline. Worn slats & rattle of deck chairs subtract. *Like birds of a feather, we all stuck together, when father put the paper on the wall*. Something about this twilight, its leaving, all I have left: a tune from before or was it after the Flu made her mother of the four younger ones. Fallen leaves & garden hose withdraw, arranging absences. Runs of copper through air, underground, keep us as stuck together as charged wire can. Her song repeats its single proposition on a scale of fading-here to not-there. Into the evening color of her purse, blurring, she reaches a softening hand; removes something small, wrapped in papery plastic. Something sweet she will give me, & dissolve.

FLUID

I pretend nights,
make believe days.

What's real unravels
and a dream
is what stands and walks and is
awake.

Being as much
here as elsewhere

inside-out-
side, incorporating
the aside to
together. I

tend to what
I make. The belief
in days and nights
as real.

DISCERNING

Every time they say *carrying* I think of *caring*. I should know better because caring is only heavy when I don't do it right. Like when I listened to someone talking to me for three hours straight. It could have been me; it could have been anyone. I was expected to hold a space, hold someone else's words—delivered, dumped, given. To unload onto someone. To carry a load. The verb *receive* was a matter of obliteration. I should have dropped the load. I should have been more careful. Like how carefully the R and Y in *carrying* resembles a *wry smile* that carries a distortion of the face, similar to *awry*. But caring is similar to how poetry cares for the details, like how specific the difference between carrying and caring is.

Carly Joy Miller

Theater of Inheritance

I understand the undercarriage
of men. *The women [] the work.*

Men stand their corners, women pile
each plate. Debris, greased

bones, sad lettuces
gone. Ice replenishes

ice (despite the ice
that slinks to water

that renders beverages
cyclical and cold). A crumb

off my grandmother's table,
which contains

the image of an angel
is an angel. My grandmother

to mother her daughters
this work from the Lord

(every crumb
of her life)—

it didn't have to be this way.

Carly Joy Miller

Prologue to Paradise

A muscle splendors, *kadosh*, suppresses the cloud over my tongue:
Repetitive work. Or fever. Pepper in the eyes, *kadosh*. In the speckle
(forgive me) loam: Forgive me, my altars. Forgive all these clays. *Kadosh*
atah my toes. And smaller still, my print upon the interior world.

Carly Joy Miller

Theater of Desire: Wasp Choir

Blood music in my ears, little
choir of my making: My desires

a frieze, minor halo I wear.
Don't you want to believe yourself

pivotal to my mind's shaping?
My body yours to ravage

fruitfully? The chord's all wrong:
We're dying for flowers.

What of this is mine, and what is what
the world has put on me?

To bite into a body and know it is sweet
to live this way. Mother of shame,

father of forgiveness: My mind
emptied for a god to fill red.

I beg both mind and hand,
if not mine, to know where best

their placements. Hand tilts chin,
I weep. Finger ravines my mouth

to teeth. Here, the holy space:
We choose our pace as lovers.

I've been taught subservience.
Rare is prayer with head not bent

toward something to seem
higher. Fair, then, my return to instinct:

Rough your mouth raw with the sweet of me.
My hips too sensational for beauty.

The wind system soars through them.
Provides pressure. O body,

I spoil you privately
with pleasure. Flutter tender

as the world blurs
soft. Bite into a body

and know it is sweet to live
this way: What god wants this, anyway?

We're dying for flowers.
The chord's all wrong.

My body's fruit, fully yours.
The world slicks this blood music

on me: O ticking bloodsweeper,
o driver of desire,

you've auditioned a choir.
One fig sheathes me like a robe.

Laynie Browne

Kneidlach

What is what. What is now. An ancestor threads. A mother child. A daughter perfectly kneidlach. Kneidlach as a language, the only word; so that by changing intonation, manner and speed in repeating the word—one needs no other vocabulary.

In the hotel lobby, a Christmas tree covered in rabbits, for Easter. Every tail as kneidlach.

I learned this Yiddish word two nights ago, driving my mother to her hotel after the seder. She will not stay with me because of the stairs. She was extremely tired and started speaking about kneidlach.

Laynie Browne

Every day is sighted

The fox said: every day is sighted, running fast with the word "and" alongside. Variegated time—as time comments on time. So this work of living in a body is like falling asleep or waking up—backwards. Remembering our non-material dimensionality, before gravity. For the first time I accompanied myself to the trepidatious appointment, in the exact manner I prefer to be comforted.

Tirzah Goldenberg

for *Billie Chernicoff, who writes*

“When I write, I am working on that last sleeve.”

here's flax in finest fettle
complete and pleated where the elbow'd been or nettle
one completes a fairytale and one completes a tomb
one's greensleeves are antiQuest / one's finished tunic's not Quite yet

Tirzah Goldenberg

for Rachel Kaufman in the archives

don't the letters tell tall tales
whether elfin like the book they're in or few but all the page
their secrets so commensurate with art
their lives their very penmanship
they're all but read

Tirzah Goldenberg

e.g., expand—ing mem sofit

e.g., expand—ing mem sofit
even a min—im book completes
her tools her bell—ows, pleats
now all's flush—for print!

Tirzah Goldenberg

a word's a juglet, a letter's a shard, enlarge a letter

a word's a juglet, a letter's a shard, enlarge a letter
like this: liQuid*

pluck it like an olive with its stem
soak it in a brine

for months . . .

new juglet, it, cataloged juglet
with neither scroll nor oil inside it keeps ever the olive

feature of the place you retire to to write
your types, your distillations, your likenesses, et cetera

I was invited to Sasha Steensen's poetry workshop, and a student of hers asked me about the Quirk of the capitalized "Q" in my book *Like an Olive*. She wondered if I meant it to resemble an olive with its stem. I wrote this poem in response and want to thank Laura Roth for the Question.

Tirzah Goldenberg

Woman Furnishing

“That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

“Women should tell the truth.”

Susan Sontag, “The Double Standard of Aging”

Between the two tamarisk trees
In the split Quite close
At the mouth of the Pottery ravine
Where you enter the small pool

You'll meet a man, his image familiar
Made only of gold-black letters who'll say
I, embroidered by, am chiefly ornamental
But I am rule of conduct all the same

She made me before she made children
I live in a corner of her house keeping fluent silence
My mouth means language
Everything about me means the ethics of speech
I say do not speak ill of others, I mean also
Do not speak ill of me

Between the two tamarisk trees a woman all too familiarly gives
Her responsa, her She'elot u-Teshuvot, and furnishes for herself a
fictitious house
Here she may speak as she likes, plainly
Her voice flows like milk and honey, her embroidery
Means nothing but what she means to say, and what she says she means
And never a sampler but sampler upon sampler

Upon sampler

Dana Levin

A Walk in the Park

To be born again, you need
 an incarnation specialist—a team
from the Bureau of Needles
 to thread you through—
Your next life
 turns
on an axle of light—which Plato likens
 to a turning
spindle—what was that?
 I mean I *knew*

what a spindle was
 from fairytales—how it could
draw blood
 from a testing finger, put a kingdom
to sleep—
 but what
did it actually do, how
 did a spindle look
in real life?
 I didn't know. As with
so many things:
 there was fact and there was

 a believed-in dream...

Everyone had one back
 in the ancient day,
spindles.
 When we had to weave
our living-shrouds
 by hand.
“A slender rounded rod
 with tapered ends” Google said. Plato's,
so heavy with thread,
 when viewed from the side,
looked like a top—
 though most diagrams assumed

 the hawk-lord view...
Moon thread, threads of the planets, earth thread.
 Your thread.
Everyone else's.
 Nested one
inside the other, a roulette
 machine—
If a thread could be spun from liquid light was what
 I kept thinking—
Imagining a sluice

of electric souls
between the earth wheel's rims—
there “I”

was a piece of water, Necessity
wheeled it around—Necessity,
who was married to Time,
according to the Greeks—
Mother of the Fates.
Who would measure and cut your
paradise/shithole extra life...

Well we all have ways of thinking about
why,
metaphysically-speaking,
anyone's born—
though the answer's always Life's
I AM THAT I AM
—how it hurls and breaks!
on Death's *No there*
there...

—which sounded kind of Buddhist.
According to the teachings we were all
each other's dream...

And soon able to vanish—
out of the real
without having to die, whoever's
got the cash—to pay
the brainier ones
to perfect
a Heaven upload—to cut
the flesh-tether
and merge
with the Cloud...

Well we all have ways of constructing
Paradise.
To walk alone deep in thought
in a city park
was mine
for several minutes,
thinking about spindles.
Before the vigilance
of my genderdoom

kicked in—

And there it was, the fact
of my body—
all the nerves in my scalp
and the back of my neck,
alive—

How it moved through space, how close
it had strayed
toward concealing trees, my
female body—
Jewish body—inside my
White body—dreaming
it was bodiless

and free...

to decide:
how and when and if to fill the body's hungers—
how and when and if to walk in thought
through the wilderness...

before Death comes with its Fascist hat.

Its Park Murder Misogyny hat.

Its Year Ten in a Nursing Home stink
hat—

However spun
my thread...

Anyway,
it's peaceful here
in the park, at mid-day,
if a little deserted. I've moved to the path that winds
closer to the street.

Thinking again, as I always do,
about body and soul. How they
infuse each other. How they
hate each other.

How most people pledge allegiance
to one or the other.

How painful it was! To be
such a split

creature—

Immigrant Song

Bitter Mother

Blue, dead, rush of mothers,
conceal your island, little star.

Trains, hands, note on a thread,
Poland's dish of salt.

They said, The orphanlands
of America
promise you a father—

The ship's sorrows, broken daughter,
the ocean's dark, dug out.

Silent Father

Rain, stars, sewage in the spill,
hush the river.

In your black boat, broken snake,
you hid. You sailed

for the meritlands of America,
dumped your name in the black
water—

In the village they pushed the Rabbi
to the wall—someone
blessed the hunter.

Angry Daughter

One says No and the other
says nothing at all—

Chicago, I will live in your museums
where Europe is a picture on the wall.

Obedient Child

I concealed my island,
my little star.

In my black boat I hid.
I hid in pictures on the wall.

I said, I am here in America,
your hero, your confusion,

your disappointment after all.
They said,

How did you end up so bad
in a country this good and tall.

Big Wide-Open Mouth

There's a Hasidic tradition to drink liquor after the fish course on *shabbes*, because Jonah was in the belly of the fish, but prayed and was released. But, the Talmud says, you can't pray when you're drunk. Which is to say, as with the poem, here too, you never quite know who's swallowing whom, and who's the one doing the praying, you know?

My grandfather was born in Belarus but moved to Ukraine, with a few bullet holes in his limbs, after, as a sixteen-year-old, in 1945, he marched through half of Europe along with the rest of the Red Army. He smoked a lot: when he drank, and also as he walked, and as he sat, and as he laid in bed with a big transistor radio across his chest. My grandmother hated his smoking and made her feelings known. "But Klara," he would say in the most gallant, embracing voice, "You used to enjoy the smell of good cigars when you were young," implying a loss of sophistication, of a refined and risqué taste which my grandmother once had, and now could regain again—of only she let him smoke in peace. But the truth is that what he smoked was not the fine cigars but *papirosi*—old Soviet filter-less coarse twists of horseshit. They smelled like it, too! A cigarette is a paragon of health and value in comparison to a *papirosa*. Each box had a little picture of smoky mountains on the box – the Urals or Caucasus—and maybe, in our Ukrainian steppes, they felt dreamy to my grandfather, beautiful like those fancy Polish cigars he once smoked in my grandmother's presence.

His ashtray was made out of thin but sturdy china and looked like a fish with bulging eyes and a large cave of a mouth. Time did not fade the colors one bit—the blue, the gold, the milky white. Or maybe they brightened in my memory? The fish followed my grandfather like a dog, from the desk to the windowsill to the kitchen table, and occasionally would end up under a tree in the yard—to air out. Once, my grandfather left a not-quite-extinguished *papirosa* inside it. Walking through the house, I spotted it, and, without thinking, grabbed it and inhaled. My head filled with manure, and I felt as if I was suddenly inside of the fish, saw myself, reader, as if lodged deep in its gut, sky looming above its yawning lips. Like Denise Levertov had it: "... as the poet stands openmouthed in the temple of life, contemplating his experience, there come to him the first words of the Poem." Reader, the fish was the poet, and I was its fuming words. The poem was a spell, and I was its nauseous vertigo. That must be what it feels like to be language, inside a poem, no?

My grandfather started drinking and smoking as a sixteen-year-old in the Red Army's trenches during World War II. His mother died in the evacuation, and he threw himself into the army, which was impoverished, and short on food and clothing. In the trenches, soldiers used to get booze and smoke to get them through. He continued onward, for the next sixty years, punctuating life with his ubiquitous shot-glass and a *papirosa*, as one might with a blessing.

He always kept a few canaries around. Once, they laid eggs, and wanting to see, I opened the cage and squashed them, and let the bird out, too. Rivers of guilt and shame engulfed me but my grandfather was not fazed: he only asked for the pleasure of my company to see a man, known to me as “The Professor”, from whom a new bird was to be procured. The Professor, who had a distinguished, bulging red nose of a drunk, was dressed in old, soiled clothes, and lived on the outskirts of our town, surrounded with innumerable cages of birds. It was there that I, for the first time, looked inside a dovecot, at a crew of homing pigeons, and was told all about doves that never leave, that find their way home, no matter where they’re released. Are they nostalgic? Do they feel guilty? Do they feel oddly tethered, as if they could not possibly belong anywhere but on their little perch, laden with palimpsest of ancestral shit? Is that all that there is to the great mystery of magnetoreception? “Great birds, pigeons,” said the Professor, “if only they didn’t look so graceless when they fly.”

Reader, do you know that Jonah’s name, in Hebrew, means “dove”, and that whoever composed the tale of praying in the fish’s belly was riffing on the story of another mythic, apocalypse-circling voyage—that of Noah, and his dove? Jonah was the homing pigeon who could not avoid returning to his roost—his fate and his call? Of course, Noah’s dove was facing a new, slowly drying world, and Jonah was facing a city of people he felt disdain towards, a city, perhaps, not unlike Kirovograd where I grew up, not unlike Kropyvnytskyi as it is now called. And I’m not saying Jonah the homing pigeon was fated to dream himself back to Kirovograd-Kropyvnytskyi, at some point or another, however much he wanted to stop thinking about it. It’s just that when you live inside a text, you’re bound to wake up and find yourself among its dark fish-smelling innards, and if you start praying, the fish might eject you out back where you came from, even if the city of origin changed its name, and you did, too, Jonah. You hope the thing that comes out of your mouth sounds like a prophecy, or at least a good story, but you know it’s just your grandfather’s smoking horse-dung.

But what happens if the fish decides to keep you? And, stuck inside, you don’t come back—not even for your grandfather’s funeral—for none of the four grandparent funerals? To mourn, not from across the ocean, but from within the ocean—is so dark, so impossibly dark, for nothing can ensconce one as completely as guilt. Why didn’t I come back? Money? Work? Visas? Family? There’re many reasons, every time, each one submerging me deeper down. And now, as I write this, rockets are flying above Kropyvnytskyi. The airports are closed and the way back is disappearing, like Jonah’s writing across the water.

Reader: together, we’re inside this fish, maneuvered by the same tail, or tale. There’s no prophecy and my grandfather’s open-mouthed ashtray is gone, too, though some years ago I’ve gone back and searched for it, my whole family did.

Jake Marmer

Pollinators

as the congregation sang and stared
inside the song as if inside
water or coffee or anyway a breaking
surface of the year that ended,
my eight-year-old son stood
outside, transfixed, staring at the bees
inside a huge lavender bush
there were so many you could hear—
not even a buzz but a hum, a song
of their own and it didn't seem like they
were leaving the bush
but getting deeper and deeper inside
as if it was home or maybe for a minute
it no longer mattered where home was and
he stared at them with intensity with praise
with adoring kinship and I sat
 inside a song staring at him

urban adamah, rosh hashana 2019

WHEN FLIGHT WAS A MIRACLE, NAVIGATORS DIGNIFIED THE STARS BY HAND

Edith: "...she was very young, I think she was 15 or 16, and for 5 years she didn't have a child so the rabbis told my grandfather that he could divorce her. *But he liked her.* She was very cute. And—she fooled them all. After that every single year she had a child, so she had either 11 or 12 or 13, we're really not sure—And my grandfather came to find an apartment for this enormous family and...he finally sent for Rachel who came with all these children, but when she came through Ellis Island and my grandfather went down to meet her she wouldn't go with him because, she said 'That's not my husband. My husband had a beard. My husband had side-locks. My husband wore a hat. Who is this man? I don't know who this man is.' And it took a while for him to convince her that he was her husband."

Thinking I'd find myself
further and further back...

and then thinking I had,
a scholar, a poet even...

"...so the women—Anita, I'm sorry, Becky and Fanny and Gussie and Eva, they—they all chipped in and they got a little dry goods store. In New York. And they put Grandpa in there...They sold buttons and laces, you know little items in the store. The store was in the Bronx and the front of the store was a door, and then there was a glass top...so that people could look into the shop. Anyway Grandpa simply stayed in that shop, pulled down the shade in the front and proceeded to read—the Talmud and the machzor and the prayers, and teach—he taught my brother how to play chess and to read Hebrew. He never worked. He didn't—he didn't work at all."

'What a bunch of lazy old
men,' my mother says.

Still the ash floats
to my surface.

Another Calling

*“If God has chosen me,” Isaac replied, “I shall willingly surrender my soul,
but I am gravely concerned about my mother.”*

—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayera 23

Alone in the shallows of the spring-fed inlet,
I was a child who believed in nothing
but experience. Arms out, swaying
in the currents, a submerged log
for a balance beam—toes digging for purchase
along its silt and coarse ridges—until the log
opened its massive mouth, revealing
long, blunt teeth. Not bark but scales
beneath my feet, not swimming so much as levitating
to shore. Driven up the slippery wooden stairs,
up out of myself by terror, over the rough lip
of the retaining wall and onto the grass,
where I finally dropped back
into my body, knowing myself just a little
better for that time away.

Does it matter if it's true or not, if it
was a child's phantasm or really
happened?

After Jacob's first prophetic
dream, inside him was the young man
who once saw a sky filled with angels on ladders,
who woke into a new knowing of God
crying out,

מה־נֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
Ma norah ha'makom hazeh!
(How fearsome is this place!)

Of God's many names, one is הַמָּקוֹם *Ha'Makom*
(The Place): the One Who is the World but Whom the World
Cannot Contain. And maybe Jacob gave us
another name, had truly meant,

Fear is The Place.

Jessica Jacobs

And who are you supposed to be?

asked of every monster, hero, and outlaw
with a pillowcase or orange plastic pumpkin,

as they take their star turn, porchlit centerstage. This
is my wife's favorite holiday. The rest of the year, identities

in which we have little say. And so many of us betrayed
by our off-the-rack bodies and how we're made

to cover them. *And who are you?* Not this, this
is not me. The so-many answers the eye can't see.

∞

One story says in Eden we were clothed
in light and only after

were stoppered in this skin. Who were we
supposed to be: these dim husks or human lanterns?

Once a knock-kneed girl in knockoff clothes,
my wife now wields fashion as passport, armor, play.

Forced into dresses for synagogue when I was still itchy
with the fit of "girl," I favor function and feel:

old shirts like cotton cobwebs, ballcap with brims split as baclava,
I wear my clothes until I might molt them and finally step light.

∞

Like our souls wear speech and action to be known
in this fallen world, the Torah wears stories

that look like us: Joseph in his many-colored coat
was known for how he was dressed

by others, so his clothes bore only false witness. Yet even
these mistakes were a privilege. For everyone else, one size

fit all: prayer shawl as garment, bedsheet, burial shroud.
In Hebrew, *clothing* and *betrayal* are the same word.

∞

Even now, October trees cling to their summer leaves, blazing
with the effort, turning every mountain trail to fiery tunnel,

the expanse beyond curtained off. Only in the bareness
of winter can we finally see. But how long can we stand it,

that shivering vision? With her seasonal wardrobes—
embroidered sundresses giving way to well-cut coats—

my wife has taught me how every mode of seeming
has its season. And some days, I run so many miles

I slip my own traces and can leave, for a moment, that assembled self
behind. And some nights, the moon slips its coat of clouds to find

our window. *Who are you?* I am this body you've chosen
for your arms. *And who are you supposed to be?*

I am, we are. Clothed in nothing
but these bodies, through our bodies, we get beyond our bodies.

Jessica Jacobs

Why There Is No Hebrew Word for Obey

"Absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power."

—Eric Hoffer

א.

What came later
was the real trial. Because God knew

Isaac would not die
while Abraham climbed the mountain believing

he would. With conviction
tempered in the fires of his faith,

he walked up, through the shaded valley,
his son, resolute, ahead on the trail; behind them, Sarah—

Isaac's mother, Abraham's wife—a small darkness
in the distance, growing forever

smaller. He bound his beloved son: pulled back
his legs, wrenched back his arms, knotted his ankles to his wrists,

and laid him on that altar like a child falling
through the sky. He held the knife knowing

from every animal he'd ever sacrificed how his son
would jerk and shudder when the blade

opened his throat, the familiar smoke
of offered flesh.

ב.

What came later, even with Isaac alive
in the fields, inside

Abraham was the knowledge
of what he'd been willing to do. When they passed

in the tent, Isaac rubbed a remembered ache
in his shoulder and never again held

his father's eye. Sarah, smelling the imagined
ashes on her husband's fingers, the blood
in the crease of his throat, turned from him
in the night. And on every path Abraham walked
from that day forward, his son as he had been:
a small back barely the span of his hand
slung with the kindling
meant for his burning.

1.
Seconds from the slaughter
of the one meant to carry his line, of the son

he'd wanted all his life, who's to say
the voice in his head

was God? Judaism is not a faith
but a tradition.

And isn't doubt
the crux of conscience?

Yet what came
later, on a Sabbath morning,

centuries on, was a congregation
in Pittsburgh, reading this story

of Isaac's Binding, of Abraham's
terrible bind, when a man burning

with unquestioning belief
entered with a gun and, with no better angel

to stay his hand, opened fire, believing
the death of Jews would keep our country

safe, believing this massacre—
elderly congregants

bleeding out on the floor—
was God's work.

7.

Who would call such actions
holy? And how many more times

will each of us come down
from the mountain, conviction knocking

like a knife in our belt loop, stained
with all we would have done?

My daily gods
are minor ones: of pride, of lust,

of impatience and complacency.
Yet how many have I harmed

on the way to what I thought
was right—or,

with hindsight, on the way
to what I wanted?

And how many
sorry sacrifices

have I made
of myself?

8.

What if we turn
from certainty and arm ourselves

instead with questions?
Obey, obey, obey is everywhere

in translation. The real word is
שמע *shema*: listen.

Dan Rosenberg

A WELCOME

When you gulp a full breath and go
under, Aunt Glo, will your hair
remain so big and gold? You are

my dream of what Christians
looks like, and you want to be
a Jew. Sounds good. You ate

the flat, hard bread of our suffering
and pretended to like it. You sat rapt
by the stories I mostly remember.

You held them like temporary tattoos
against your chest. You wanted
to gather in the rickety four walls

of lattice we bought from Lowe's
and stapled together, this sukkah
chintzed with plastic grapes

and gourds all warty and phallic.
Of what did we make the roof?
I can't remember once looking up

and expecting to see more than clouds,
distant rocks and balls of gas,
the absences between them. But you

saw something you wanted, then
or some other time, maybe when
Uncle Bobby died and we all pitched

our shovelfuls of dirt to bury him:
the only full goodbye I've ever said.
And now you're claiming it, having bent

your tongue around a language I never
learned to understand but once
could have read aloud with ease.

When I stood where you're trying
to stand, I didn't care. Wanting it,
wanting it, your gift to our tribe.

Dan Rosenberg

DARKER AND ABOVE US

The rain was white. White,
the water falling from bright skies.
And the gravel below its own blackness
also found a shine. The boy
lurched from the sled to an ice bank,
landed where a black eye would be.
Cried. And the angels, snowflakes,
pushed bright shards of his cries
back toward him. The grasses
in their winter caverns heard.
The shingles heard, and their barn.
The barn cats were orange
with not caring, their claws
half forgotten in redolent cedar.
I wrapped us thick in loose-knit scarves
like blinkers for the horses
we had come to worship. I produced
from my pocket the carrot, the tin knife,
the cameo of a hummingbird pierced
by seven splinters. The boy, with hands
like soft stones, collected them
against his chest. The sun bobbed
meekly. A crabapple tree shivered
its taproot below us. The boy
and I lost sight of the animal world
and found ourselves in the digging.
We scarred the white like our own
faces. Contorted the landscape.
We heard no prayers nor neighs
from the hole we were making.
The boy breathed out yellow daisies
and I huffed dandelions in return.
The earth grew darker and above us.

Dan Rosenberg

SECOND PARENT IN THE EARTH

*But the water tower is still called a water tower
even when there is no water.*

—Yehuda Amichai, trans. Robert Alter

The scent of bread and graves begins
to close in on the house of the father.

You watch the water wear at the stonework
then remember it cleaning your cheek.

Here the buried teeth rise like spring.
Here bones grow longer than faith,

more honest than a kiss on wax-paper skin.
The breath of the elderly and the breath

of the A/C exchange places in your cheek,
like something divine that's lost its way,

its wings. And when the end comes at last
it's two bored men with a luggage tag.

They bustle our mother to the hole of her peace,
to memory, to history, to relics, to clean dirt:

a forever no longer worthwhile. Like love
that turns to comfort then to habit

then to a series of gnarls and whorls and
then to stillness, this endless parallel decay.

Neighbors

1.

My neighbors are always in shadow behind a screen, seem to be fixing food, two thin ghosts moving back and forth from stove to lamp passing each other without saying a word. Sometimes the man steps out onto the stairs with only his shorts on and he opens his skinny arms in an expansive stretch. Then he refills the cat bowls with milk from a half-gallon carton that seems too heavy for him to handle. I hear the clang of my neighbors' silverware when they eat. They usually eat eggs and toast. They drink a lot of coffee. I smell it from across the narrow street. The woman, who wears black leggings and a thin sleeveless blouse, once burned the toast and I could smell that too. Just last week at about midnight the sweet scent of maple syrup wafted into our living room through the screen. They must be having French toast I said. Since then I've wanted some. When the man is very hungry he scrapes the knife on his plate and I feel it in my bones. I've been wanting to bake a blueberry pie and bring them two fat slices to see if they will let themselves smile. I've not seen their faces but I imagine them drawn and long and sad. Or maybe they've lost a child. Or one of them is sick. I hear her clink-clinking her spoon on the rim of a glass. Turning on the faucet. It is summer and I eavesdrop through screens the way fruit-flies gather round over-ripe peaches. Maybe I'm more lonely than they.

2.

I admire my neighbor watering her plants in front of her house on this old South Philly block. Red flowers I cannot name sprout from a yellow potholder. Inside my neighbor's house are books and books on genocide. Sometimes a children's book springs up between the books on death. Dr. Seuss keeps Stalin company. It is like finding a green M&M inside a raw sirloin, blood pooling into the mashed potatoes. It reminds me of my mother's bookshelf where *Mein Kampf* stood beside *Robinson Crusoe* and *Jaws*.

The neighbor's body is voluptuous as a Dresden doll.
She sports a blonde bob and speaks German.
Sometimes we speak German together
at her kitchen table over wine and cheese.
We have not known each other for a long time
but we've talked of sex, pregnancy and death.
We've fed each other's cats.
The intimacy of women is strange and immediate.
Once, she said and did not say *my great uncle Max*
was a Nazi, and I said and did not say
my Opa Leo died in Buchenwald.

Then we filled each other's wine glasses
and drank in afternoon silence
until the children poured in, blonde and brown,
sticky with sweet mischief, curious, and hungry.

Rebecca Aronson

Notes on Anxiety

Because the doe leapt in front of my car, its hooves
still clatter through my dreams. Like the mountain lion

that left its prints on my balcony,
lily pads spreading in the wash of snowmelt, everything

leaves its mark. You might not see the traces
until some future thaw. My mind is a wolf

hidden under its wooly pelt. Who am I to speak
to myself the way I do, thrashing in the sleepless hours?

Someone told me mourning doves beat their wings
so that the *whoosh* will warn unwanted visitors

away from their nests: beware the beast
you cannot see. Yet they build them year after year

in the low branches by the front porch.
I find their eggs shattered in the driveway.

So many errors
come from looking in the wrong direction.

I have tried to be quiet, to blend in
when I should have been beating my wings

and spewing fire; I should have warned
even the wind to hold its tongue.

I'm not the only one to wish for do-overs, I know. Tell me,
how does forgiveness make its home in a body?

I am ready to let myself off the hook, but I keep wriggling there,
berating myself for being stuck. I have to tell you

I didn't hit the deer, though it veered into the road
I was speeding down. I barely saw the dark lines of its body crash

into the wall of trees, which must have opened themselves
just enough to welcome that arrow of nerves and luck to safety.

Rebecca Aronson

In the Here and Now

All week doves have been falling
dead from the branches
of the largest pine. Each of us has taken a turn
placing a plastic bag over one hand
to carry a soft body to the garbage. It feels like a violation
to toss the bundle of feathers, each the weight of a baseball,
their delicate beaks and tiny bent claws, in with the wrappers and empty cartons,
but neither do we want a yard filled with small graves.
Someone tells us that probably a virus is circulating
through the flock. Still, this morning before the sky was even light
I heard the chorus of cooing, the young ones calling their plans
and wishes out to the world. I think about walking the block
to see if the other trees are wreathed in corpses, but decide against it.
There is already too much suffering to give attention to
and my own joy is a dormant seed. You never know
what will return, poking its unlikely head
through the hard clay of the garden. One year
a bounty of tulips unfurled their greenery but never made
a single flower. And one year a giant amaryllis emerged
red and resplendent as a victorious queen
from some unknown land.
The birds fall dead from the tree
as if that's what birds do. The cat
steps around the fallen bodies like they are nothing
she recognizes, even as the wind ruffles their wing feathers
so that you might almost believe they are ready for flight.

Rebecca Aronson

The Black Bee

There's a black bumblebee
hovering among the coneflowers
at the back wall. It's ink dark, darker
than a moonless sky, darker than the coat
of my black cat with its undertones of fox
and sunlight. A thumb of black paint
carrying a lazy buzz-saw apparatus
in its hidden compartment. It moves sweet
as the kind of summer day spent slit-eyed
in a hammock, humming along
to the undercurrents of everything. Can a bee change a life? A bee
that's all stripe and no goldenrod, no sunray, no
shine, just a matte-dark button of matter,
a hovercraft of shadow, somehow
projecting what looks like contentment
there among the green and purple spikes.
Where do bees go in the rain, where
when winter lowers its rattling lid?
I never saw a bee like a Beldi olive, never
thought to follow one
like the spark of an idea
I can't quite hold onto. Black bee, it's nearly frost time,
when all the last greens and final bright bursts
finish, the last peppers flaming now
behind the bolted herbs, almost all will brown
and fold in like the weakened fists of an old man
holding something beyond seeing. What will you do,
black bee, with your cargo of absorbed light,
all the colors I've ever known and more?

Laura Eve Engel

YOM KIPPUR

Because today is the day
I rehearse my own death
I promise to love myself

before it's too late
I fulfill my obligations
with patience

and love myself
I go to the store
and love myself

I go to the bank
and fax the forms
and really love myself

I call my mother
because she's my mother
and because

I'm trying

I do and I do until I overflow
with the fullness
of having done

until I am emptied
by the fullness
of never finishing

as a luxury I make myself clean
this body I must petition
into tenderness

and leave behind whenever
who is permitted to wash
her own body before death

my grandma jokes
that she's never hungry
so she's always atoning

it's interesting she tells me
some days feel perfect and some
she might not make it out of

and then she does
every day she wears clean underwear
and gives away more of her things

Laura Eve Engel

THAT I AM NOT MORE TERRIFIED

Charlottesville, VA

I have plenty and a place in it
though my grandmother never forgets
to remind me what's real

is what lasts

the Nazis that captured my grandfather
on the French-German border

the camps he lived in
and the camps he was spared

thanks to which—that
sparing—I exist

to watch with her
as what lasts marches furious
through my hometown

off-label tiki torches
stealing the summer out of the air

that I am not more terrified

I owe to a modern technology
that urges me to grow like debt
away from my own history

until it is as free as I am

to accept this invitation
to gorge myself on amnesia
and good deals

like the one where
we arrived here fleeing
with only our lives or else

were stolen and shipped
here with only our lives or else

were too native to this land
to belong to this country

where the bright sky threatens
to belong to no one

no one fears theft
more than thieves

dear G-d,

make me stupid

make me too weak
to self-make myself

into a thief
with a thief's bootstraps

Leora Fridman

TO NAME THE CLIMATE MORE CORRECTLY

after Nick Gulig

I pulled like I'd never pulled
the garbage can, the open

mouth of a Fascist, the loud
diplomacy on which I base the

weight of my own life:
aerially I assess the chances

of flood from the West, choose
to believe the most threatened

nights, the ones in which
authorities warn and then

tackle, simultaneously true
and dead-on, how we won't

ever really *know* our neighbors
until that call they make, how

else to cry out but *save me*,
an entire nightmare made up

of who will last, and then
awaking to a game of tug-of-war

with recycling, some flying it to China,
some sleeping on it as land

Alicia Jo Rabins

NOTRE DAME ON FIRE

If the cathedral must burn,
Then praise God that it burns
Due to human error and not
Human cruelty which is so
Plentiful these days
And maybe always has been.
Sinat chinam, the rabbis called it -
Free hatred, like a free radical
Loosed in the veins of humanity -
Invisible until the cancer
Grows out of control
And eats you alive.
Free hatred, the opposite
Of free love, which makes
A cathedral of the simplest sunset.
We hold each other,
Faces illuminated by the flames.

Alicia Jo Rabins

LOVE IN A TIME OF COMPANIES

When I hold your hand I know
It's OK that I have failed and been failed
OK that the egg broke and my fingers are
Slimy OK that it's 113 degrees
Outside and the hydrangea wilts and
I'm constantly distracted by flickering idols
Which profit off my sacred attention and tell
Me I should be someone else. I should be
Someone else. I should be someone
Else. I live in the body of the oppressor
And in the body of the oppressed and
The body of God lives in me, and I'm sorry
I once took communion to be polite, I
Didn't know it was wrong and I'm sorry
That I didn't shop around as much as I
Should have before landing in this body,
This life, or so the companies want me
To believe, so that I spend it trying to
Approximate the one I should have had.
But when I hold your hand I see the
Flickering idols for what they are—ghosts
Conjured of desire, a string of crumbs leading
Nowhere. And I understand us, too,
For what we are – love, the closest thing
There is to God.

Alicia Jo Rabins

HEAT DOME

I experiment with moving gently
And it is different
Air on my cheek
Shadow of planes of face
Rhinoceros toenails
Of my toenails
They measure 116 degrees at the airport
I experiment with forgetting my name
And it feels good
Light blue, raspberry and cream-colored
Sheets delineate past, present, future
I notice the slow sway of houseplant
A tango with the air purifier
I crack an egg into a frying pan
And put it in the front yard
For the kids to watch
Look, children
We are toppling on the edge
Of a great dresser overlooking
Vastness, stars, the filter needs
To be replaced, the building
Is collapsing, the pool has disappeared,
They are trying to find survivors
Listen, children, maybe this is what
It has always meant to be human:
To wonder, will we survive?

Josette Akresh-Gonzales

OCEAN DEEP (or "The Waters")

I have abandoned almost everything I learned as a child
in my Jewish Orthodox day school —
why is this?

And does any of it retain any meaning for me?

The rabbis said that counting is the act of assigning numbers
to things (not people); thus, infinity is sacred.

Thus, One.

The ocean is terrifying in how deep and abundant it is.

We lose recipes, we erode methods,
we disappear ingredients, we heat the planet.

Careful, when opening the Ark of Tastes.

One day, my first-grade teacher has us all stand up and push the desks
to the walls. "Close your eyes — now blink blink!" she shouts, shutting
the lights, pulling down the blinds. "Imagine — it is before light, and
you are in the dark, not knowing where you are! Turn, whirl!
Everything is TOHU-VA-VOHU!"

Accordingly the verse reads, "And the number of children of Israel shall be
as the sand of the sea, which shall neither be measured nor counted."

Why is this?

בֶּסֶד (bet, samech, dalet) stands for בְּסִיעוּתַא דְּשַׁמַּיָא (*b'siyata deesh'maya*)
an Aramaic phrase meaning "with the help of heaven."

Sailfish use only enough energy to succeed,
never waste a fin stroke —

On page 2 of the Ark of Tastes we find Aromanian Butterbur,
Vjosa Thick-Lipped Fish;
on page 337, Berkoukech with Rubia.

"TOHU-VA-VOHU!"

It does not take more than a second,
and like at recess, we all scream and run around
and twirl with our arms wide.

Boys jump on desks and fall down laughing.
Girls hold hands and run.

The truth, according to Rabbi Yitzchak, is that something that has been weighed, something that has been measured, something that has been counted, cannot be a blessing.

Why is this?

In her Shabbat Thoughts column, my rabbi quotes the Irish poet John O'Donohue: “behind the facade of your life, there is something beautiful, good, and eternal happening.”

We manage to suck its oxygen out while filling it with inedible garbage and acid.

The story of herring and Jews goes way back — Jews with pushcarts, Dutchmen with barrels — as early as the 15th century.

I close my eyes and twirl until I get dizzy and feel Morah Hashi's hand on my shoulder, asking if I am all right. She lets us go crazy for several more minutes — and shouts the second verse of the Torah again and again: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבוֹהוּ (*v'ha'aretz hay-ta tohu-va-vohu*) — “And the earth was unformed and void... *TOHU-VA-VOHU!*”

Why is this —

Rabbi Bachya ben Asher explains: by counting, we single one out and bring misfortune upon him.

The word שָׁמַיִם (*shamayim*) — “heavens” is a compound of שָׁם (*sham*) “sky” or “lofty” and מַיִם (*mayim*) “water”

A study in Indonesia found that whale sharks end up eating tons of plastic — sometimes spilled at sea from containers — small pellets known as nurdles, nibs, or mermaid tears.

Food historians say the Renaissance diet of Austrian Jews was made up of milk,
butter,
black bread,
eggs,
soup,

sauerkraut,
rice,
and herring.

I am in first grade at Yavneh Academy, and I have a teacher with lots of energy. She dances on the table. She isn't married so she doesn't wear a wig. She is only 22 years old. She has thick, straight black hair with bangs and a beautiful smile. Her waist is thin. She wears long denim skirts and cotton turtlenecks. Why is this?

A person alone may not have done enough.

As the psalmist wrote: אִם עֲוֹנוֹת הַשְּׁמֶר יְהִי אֲדֹנָי מִי יַעֲמֵד
(*eem ahvonot teesh'mar yah adonai mee yah'ah'mode*)
“If you keep account of sins, Lord, who will be left standing?”

Like wearing tzitzit or a kippah,
these letters marked at the tops of our papers
were supposed to remind us
that all comes from Heaven —
בֵּט (bet, samech, dalet).

The sailfish appear out of the gloom like knives —
— layers of salt and herring — salt and herring.

I don't remember when, but at some point in my early teens I stopped doing some ingrained ritual things like “not”-counting people, writing בֵּט (bet, samech, dalet) in the corner of my papers, spelling “G-d” with a dash instead of an “o,” and whispering the שְׁמָע (*shema*) before bed. These rituals seemed like superstitions, but breaking these habits felt like smashing a glass window or a porcelain vase with my fist.

The days between Passover and Shavuot are counted and are considered a time of mourning — for seven weeks, many religious Jews don't shave or cut their hair — or wed — or dance.

בֵּט (bet, samech, dalet) does not contain the letter ה (*hei*), abbreviation for הַשֵּׁם (*hashem*) “The Name.”

Huge dorsal fins triangulate the school of baitfish and herd them into a ball.

The Danes knew the right season for fishing is autumn — when the fish-fat content is at its peak.

In my school, children were taught to pencil the acronym
בט"ד (*bet, samech, dalet*) at the top all our papers.

On Lag Ba'Omer — the 33rd day —
the halfway point, the break
(in ancient times: will the winter rains have been enough
to nourish the wheat?)
bonfires, parties, and feasts
(and today, in the year 5781: a stampede killing some forty-five people).

בט"ד (*bet, samech, dalet*) was to remind us:
without Heaven, nothing can be done successfully,
including the following homework assignment.

A mistimed strike could fatally damage another sailfish.

A mathematician has proven this coordinated flickering works
in groups of up to 70.

Barrels gave the herring a natural brown color and a firm bite.

השם (*hashem*) may not be erased.

But each sailfish changes quickly in succession,
warning its companions
of its intentions.
 Why is this?

Traditionally, says the Arc of Taste,
pickled herring was served on sourdough rye
with a side dish of fresh onions.

This is how the rabbis counted us on a field trip or an assembly:

 "Not one,
 not two,
 not three,
 not four"

השם (*hashem*) may not be torn.

Each black, each striped, each silver, each blue —

In 1928 F. F. Cooper, the editor of the *Canadian Jewish Review*, wrote:
"As to the ham sandwiches, well they are the logical downfall
of a generation that knows not herring."

And we were allowed to throw out our homework — papers where we'd scrawled בֵּס"ד (*bet, samech, dalet*) — whereas if we had written ה"ב (*bet, hay*), for בְּרוּךְ הַשֵּׁם (*baruch hashem*) we must treat the page with respect.

Can the child who has not yet reached bar mitzvah be counted if he can at least read his א-ב (*aleph-bet*)?

הַשֵּׁם (*hashem*) may not be crumpled into a ball and tossed thoughtlessly into the trash.

The bait are confused, and the sailfish avoid striking one another.

“Keep the stomach Jewish,” Cooper said, “when the mind has wandered away.”

My heart beating, my breath fast.
And then
 after forever
of running and spinning and screaming,
my teacher told us to sit down on the rug,
 calm and quiet —

— for the spirit of הַשֵּׁם (*hashem*) hovered over the face of the waters.

Some might choose to count the minyan by saying the words of psalm 28, verse 9, which is comprised of exactly ten words:

הוֹשִׁיעָה אֶת עַמֶּךָ וּבָרֵךְ אֶת נַחְלֹתֶיךָ וַיִּרְעַם וַיִּנְשְׂאֵם עַד הָעוֹלָם
hoshee-ya et-amechah oo-varech et-na-chah-la'tehcha oo-rah'ahm
v'nah'si'aim ad-ha'olam

And as the sailfish drive the bait nearer the surface, the wriggling mass comes within the range of the seabirds —

To this day I enjoy a jar of pickled herring (I like the creamed herring best).

Psalm 28:9 is often translated “Save Your people and bless Your inheritance, and tend them and elevate them forever.”

The word “tend” seems like it might be a mistranslation from the root מ-ע-ר (*resh-ayin-mem*) meaning “thunder” (“thunder your people forever!”) —
 Why is this?

How did it become
 “tend”
 “shepard”
 “guide”
 “feed”
 or “rule”?

For the sake of my health, I have to cap the amount of time
I spend thinking about the infinite.

For most of my childhood, I prayed three times a day,
the same prayers, the same songs, day after day after day.

And as an adult I learned that we have seen only five percent of the ocean.

As the sailfish drive the bait nearer the surface,
the wriggling mass comes within the range of the seabirds —
 why is this?

Wings hover, talons snatch!

Out here in the open ocean,
 there is nowhere
 for the baitfish
 to hide.

Ellen Bass

Pines at Ponary

One hundred thousand people were murdered by the Nazis at Ponary, ten kilometers southwest of Vilnius, where my grandmother was born.

Today is gray, drizzling,
but not enough for drops to pool
on the tips of the silver needles
or soak the bark of the pines at Ponary—
some of them more than a century old.
They were here when
the trains wheeled on numb
rails. And before I have gone
ten feet into the forest, I hear the sound.
Of course. There would have to be a train.
But I hadn't expected it still to run
like this, people
getting off and on with their packages.
I hadn't thought of the scent of resin spilling
into the cold afternoon. The trees
step to the rim
of the pits where Jews were shot
so the bodies fell in
efficiently. Their branches could save
no one. Their needles offered oxygen
to victims and executioners, the same.

Ellen Bass

God of Roots

Meanwhile, the heat and light
of a flaming star rush
93 million miles to reach us,
baby girls are born
with their four hundred thousand
egg cells already formed, otters
keep grooming their guard hair, whirling
the water, working air into the deep
underfur, beluga whales swim
along the earth's magnetic field,
chicks pip a circle of holes counterclockwise
around the blunt end of their eggs,
pressing with their feet and
heaving with their shoulders,
larvae eat their way through the soft
mesophyll of oak leaves, leaving a trail
of dark feces in their wake, tart juice
swells within the rinds of lemons,
and under the earth the god of roots
goes on painting the lustrous fringe
with a brush so delicate—
only one sable hair—as though
there were all the time in the world.

Alex Wells Shapiro

[Turns out the sprinklers indiscriminately]

Turns out the sprinklers indiscriminately
soaking the sidewalk garden boxes &
pedestrians fed marigolds but eroded

the concrete & the USDA is pissed.
It's why they stipulate you can't use that

shit in cities. Those of us who skipped
thru mists in a rush got nasty rashes &
we're waiting on test results. Who do

we sue when we learn the extent,
the gardeners or the lawncare

company? I try to read the ingredients off
a box labelled with a rat skull at Walmart
but don't know what any of the words mean

& get asked to leave after umpteen
minutes of googling & **loitering**.

Shira Dentz

The Margin and Carmen Crest

The heart is a flint in a cashmere night whisking and howling in the open
margin of a door

Beseech the wool of time to unsnag on its crest of speed coming our way

Won't winter snake its way back, an easing coat

Mint and tulips wind the eyes

Each on its own stair pulled upward like ocean waves lamenting gravity

You like the print of mountains received in tonight's wind

The rectangular narrow way whisking is the margin easing

beseech time and won't howling gravity open

beseech the open margin of mountains

we

lament our way

like ocean waves lamenting and howling gravity

Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman

Using Salicin

x

If one kills a tree before its time, it is as if s/he has murdered a soul.

—attributed to Reb Nachman of Breslov

x

the willow is what we walk beneath
the willow efforts down
down its branches
like great arms
from some
stumbling grandmother
with her shoulders
maladjusted
and her hands
springing forth
before your nose
to be smelled
saying
this is where I've been
this is what I haven't written
this is what only my skin can say
and her hair
growing growing
down down
down
growing in water
growing on rivers
growing in swamps
growing on streams
growing growing
and dying young

x

against my shirt against my
fingernails inside my elders
rebuilt and transcribed until
alive before the regurgitation
using salicin

x

the vapid trees

the tree of life

x

the spring forest

x

Esther's willow if
you'll speak of us
speak of what passes
what we return

x

the tree of life
the tree of knowledge

x

the spring forest dethrones
hoarded homesickness

x

if property
crevices
my friend has green eyes
the eyes I want

not knowing what to do
for Marta and Kasia's
Tata
in the spring forest
resonates
in the spring
forest with
my thinking
in them
I am where I met Marta
she first told me
about him
in the Berlin spring
waiting she was quiet
outside the cemetery
on the ground
not a pebble overturned
the length of her sitting
which comes from him
he who was little
at the former
Esther's Square and he
was big at former
Esther's Square he was
young and young and
he was old and old
on the former
square when they
detonated
the Great Synagogue
he heard it
when they sawed up the first
willow that grew
that another old man
of Chrzanów photographed
and wrote had
a protective
force
where everyone
the nettles
still sting
in reverse
detonate
or peel back
each visitation
of reminding hunger
given the conditions of meaning
the transgeneration
given the conditions of time

x

everywhere
water lives
emergent
slur
mandatory visitor
the pervasive smell
of statecraft
you like the unmarked fields
apartment blocks
hailed by ants
you like the ants
you like the white pebbles
when I know nothing
but others'
nightmares

x

the spring forest is disclosure
the spring forest is nausea

x

we walk dehydrated beneath the river
willows
above the square
beneath the woman

x

you dampen
you filter
you flee

x

There is a tension in the property
elemental capitulation

x

the second willow is not outside
Marta's phlegm is not outside
Sharon Wasserteil is not outside
the dead Tata is not outside
nit akegn nacht gedacht
not in connection with the night
nit akegn nacht gedacht
the concentration camp of Białowieża Forest is not outside
nit akegn nacht gedacht
lesions in my mother's liver are not outside
not in connection with the night
Sala rent is not outside
the detonation was not outside

This cycle was written in the context of *Esther's Willow* (2018-), a public artwork the author directs with Katarzyna and Marta Sala for Chrzanów (PL), a half-Jewish city until the Nazi genocide and postwar processes of ethnic cleansing. The artists engaged with local institutions, cultural workers, residents, and Jewish descendants and survivors of Chrzanów to re-plant a white willow sapling in the former Esther's Square, where the Sala family had lived since 1948 and a white willow grew in the place of the Great Synagogue until 2018.

Theory on time via Saturday afternoon

Nothing makes history worth it

although somehow you bless the dirty probabilities that put us jaywalking between work & funerals. In a few hours you'll roll the car window down for another goodbye kiss to wave raw silk through the dusk of my thoughts but that's so far from now. Hello legs. Hello to your untied sneakers by the door, hello your new freckles under the yellow light swooning my small room, your lips a wet peony on my neck, your name like apple cider in my mouth. It feels too easy, to say what happened & call it holy, like taking a picture of a landscape that was already a stunner, but think about photographs of waterfalls from the 19th century. Think about a hike, then add pounds of technical equipment. You're balancing with some accordion of a camera off a cliff for the most perfect angle of a death drop before running to develop the plate in the half-explosive chemicals you've also dragged up the mountain. It's the 19th century & all of this was invented 10 minutes ago, so you've got no idea how the picture will turn out. The silver nitrate sweats away. Behold the rocks, pine trees, everything crisp as fiat except for the water, which won't hold still for a photo. The water, streaming through a long exposure, becomes its own motion, light whistling into the aperture. It's a vertical cloud, it's rain gone waltz, it's each step of the cycle simultaneously. Infinite bubble bath over granite, endless bedhead. It's the smoke of every Shabbat candle at once, caught for a moment, pouring breathless & this would be the best way to consider time passing if I wasn't watching the afternoon thicken to gold across your face here as you ramble-

Forbidden Love

Where I come from, love and movies
about love were forbidden. My first
crushes didn't exist, they were just
figments of my imagination.

When I was 11 a boy died—killed
in an act of terror, gunshots fired
at a minivan carrying black-hatted
Hasidic teens across the Brooklyn Bridge.

They were on their way back from a hospital,
where they'd stood vigil at the bedside of the ailing
Lubavitcher Rebbe, a man with a cult
following, some of whom rejoiced when he died,
dancing with tambourines in the streets of Crown Heights,
believing he'd rise up again, take us all to Jerusalem.

The boy who died was 14, but he didn't die
immediately, first he languished in a Manhattan
hospital, brain dead, but not dead dead,
and in our all-girls school we were instructed
to pray for his recovery—so we prayed,
psalms, like pop songs, rolling off our tongues.

At the urging of our teachers we committed
to doing good deeds, to being extra vigilant
about covering our knees, our collarbones,
and elbows. I did all this, too, believing I could
save a boy I didn't know, whose face was plastered
all over the neighborhood, on signs imploring residents

to pray, too. He had a pretty face, I thought,
a chiseled chin, blond hair, a prominent Adam's apple,
and while I prayed I developed a crush on the boy
who would die within days, and even in death
I believed he could be mine.

Elvira Basevich

THE JEWISH HAMMER

I am the *Maccabees*. The Jewish hammer.
I murdered a Roman priest
after he asked for a sacrifice to a pagan god.
Predictably, Antiochus began his reprisals,
set fire to our olive trees.
I raised an army to occupy Jerusalem.
I loved my children. After the flood,
we left muddy footprints
all over the world. In tsarist Russia,
an illiterate peasant could tell
apart a grand duke from a mere count
by how many oxen were in his stable
by how many of our women
he carried into the woods. Because a Jew is a Jew.
But a hammer is a hammer.
Mystics believed that the light of creation
must have mixed into the oil, like breastmilk.
American factories still use
bone char to refine sugar, but nobody
lays leeches on the chest
of a consumptive anymore. Still, the principle is the same:
We can flourish anywhere, like lizards
or barberry shrubs. I am proof that what comes
out of the darkness is all that you need
to fight it. That on the second day there will be light,
and on the third, and on like that forever.

AFTER DALE EARNHARDT DIED IN A CAR CRASH

I fell in love with a man who has no stake
in poetry or philosophy. He listens to me, then shrugs,
'Baby, I'm just simpler than you,
but I love you and want to make you happy.'
He is a big sports fan. Tennis, football, NASCAR,
fútbol. The last fight we had was when the Cleveland Guardians
almost made it to the World Series.
He spent three nights watching the playoffs.
The boredom baseball inspires in me is transcendental:
I ascend. A monk sitting on a cloud,
annoyed that her boyfriend won't come to bed.

I remember a philosophy professor
who petted my hair and called me
a 'good girl,' read me Akhmatova's poetry in his office
about a couple stirring in the early morning.
He must have spent a long time searching for that poem
because Akhmatova rarely wrote about sex.

(Good for him learning the Russian classics.)

When a male friend mentioned what had happened,
the professor apologized to *him*. They both cleared
their conscience and I spoke to neither of them again.

Later, I had a boyfriend who broke up with me
because I am a socialist and he a communist—
and between us he was the true
revolutionary agent of *Das Kapital*.

Apparently, I did not understand the material force of history.

(As interpreted by a Casanova, it starts with a thrust,
a Big Bang with someone new, weekly, if possible.)

Anyway, love is for the bourgeoisie.

A shackle to the universal emancipation of the fly on his pants.
Who was I, with my feelings, to stand in the way of progress?

Then there was the academic who promised:

'I'll make you the next Hannah Arendt.'

He invited me to his hotel room. That's how dreams cum true,
blowing into the ether, like bubbles out of a bubble
gun or a wad of bubblegum,

pink and soft and smelling of artificial strawberries, like shampoo.
He leaned in to sniff my hair.

Whoever I am and might yet be, I was to believe
he was Martin Heidegger.

(What an honor.) You have returned from the beyond
to bed more Jewish girls,
as we flee literal interpretations of the Old Testament,
poverty, self-doubt. You made us all,
each time, a Daedalus fashioning a doll that takes
off her clothes out of gratitude
that he saw something in the lump of clay she once was.
When Pygmalion fell in love with a statue
he had carved, it didn't say or do anything. It was a statue, after all.
The trashy section of the *NY Post*
reports men marrying a sex doll they bought on the internet,
a robot they built, a photograph of a smiling woman.

But, Martin, wouldn't you agree that anyone should
be able to tell apart a person from a thing?

Your predecessor, Friedrich Nietzsche, in a brain fever,
alone, and heartbroken,
asks his reader to imagine 'the eternal recurrence of the same.'

Every humiliation will repeat again forever.
(I have always related to that.)

Imagine your life
emblazoned on a VHS tape and a demented
finger keeps pressing Play.

Say that it did. What should we do then?
Should I, as a swaddled baby, still cross the Atlantic Ocean?
On a cold night
in New York City, accept your lethal dinner invitation?
Or am I better off biting the plumb
of my mouth till it bleeds?

I made up my mind.

I will prove you wrong.

I will show you all!

I don't need anybody. I will collect colorful feathers.
Rid myself of all my weaknesses. I will work even harder!

On our asylum applications to the U.S.,
my mother defended my proclivity for higher education,
my good health. I was a newborn baby.
Still, what did I have to show for myself then?
Auden referred to us as 'a bit of fleeing humanity.'
When the immigration officer approved the petition,
my mother wept in broken English,
'Thank you, sir, you won't regret this. We'll show you!'
She meant: 'Your tax dollars, the tiny needles in
your bloodless heart, won't accumulate at our expense.'

Long after my mother withdrew from my life,
the fight in her gone, metastasized into wandering the world,
homeless, sleeping in her car,
nothing left in her heart to love with (I still miss you, I still love you)
on a Sunday morning, I sink into couch cushions.
I ask my love to tell me about his favorite football team,
his boyhood love of NASCAR.
How Dale Earnhardt died in a car crash
at the Daytona 500. I look at him misty-eyed. 'After that painful loss,'
he says, 'his son, Dale Jr., became my favorite.'

Though I have never seen a race-car driver die on live TV,
I knew what he meant.

I am slowly relearning what newborn babies
know and I have spent my life forgetting:
it is best not to have to prove one's dubious claim to the earth.
We are born worthy of love.
The destruction of a single soul is a moral catastrophe,
for which it will take a segment of eternity to atone
(10,000 years?) (100,000 years?) (A lifetime of sleepless nights?)
I imagine the clean-up crew wiping away
blood and oil from the roadway, the hilt of Dale's veins
sputtering like an oil jack, and I am happy.

Elvira Basevich

MAZEL TOV

“Only the won-back heart can ever be satisfied: free,
through all it has given up, to rejoice in its mastery. [...] Ah the ball that we dared, that we hurled into infinite space, doesn't it fill our hands differently with its return: heavier by the weight of where it has been.”

Rainer Rilke

I heard you got married and live in the old neighborhood with your new bride.
That you would like to start a family
and are good for each other
the way an Edison light bulb and sunflower seeds are good for foundlings
picked from fresh snow, having plummeted from a great height.
That you wanted to write to me but didn't.

I want you to know that I am glad I haven't heard from you. That I hope
the last fifteen years were full of suffering.
That you were married in city hall without ceremony like peasants,
like how our parents got married. That some days you can't feel
the fleshy parts of your face or peace in sleep.
That you have bad dreams about me
and lie awake waiting for memories to catch frostbite, turn blue-green.

Because then we might understand each other.
I never bring you up in conversation. I can't remember your features
the way small mammals can't remember winter
or the convalescent the feeling of boredom
because every moment flees, manic and barefoot, into a dark ocean, like a refuge.
gee.

After we lost our house, you ran away from home
when it was more of a metaphor than a physical place,
a symbol than a comforting song,
I talked our mother into visiting your high school to bring you back.
The dean said you didn't want to see us. A spasm ran from my lips
to my uterus. Its lining slacked, like an empty clothing line.

I want you to know that I didn't fight or beg for you
or talk to god for guidance. I never learned the prayer anyway.
Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam
is as far as I got. Instead, as we left your high school in Brooklyn,
I whispered to its bricks, 'Goodbye, little brother.'

I want you to know that, in a way, I consider you my firstborn,
my punishment for being born poor—and I yours,
with our dumb, animal need to love and be loved.
I think of you when I think of the ocean.
You appear now in my mind's eye
like a flower that grows from a piece of rock
or a badly guessed present.
I still can't stomach walking into a toy store
or kicking back a soccer ball to a tangle of kids.
A faded image of the side streets
where we grew up and lost each other is a reminder of the cruelty
of others, of the world, and of god—
but the memory also brings the smell of bread
baking in the old neighborhood
and a vague urge to stop and say hello
to a small family that lives there.

Shelby Handler

Tradescantia Zebrina

In the indoor plants section at Lowe's, I watch an Orthodox woman and her ten-year-old son selecting greenery.

I don't say, "Hey. You're my people."

Unsure if they'd agree: my politics, my convert mother, the witchy gay shit I practice on Shabbes.

I hover an aisle over, thumbing a philodendron's fist-like new leaf. Quietly indulging a fantasy where they recognize me back. And for what?

A fern prickles my palm, and I'm troubling the politics of recognition, of visible Jewishness, of fetishizing orthodoxy, of how peoplehood is weaponized by nationalism. Mind skimming all the well-worn pitfalls of my longings—

When the mother asks a Lowe's employee, "What kind of plant is this?" Nodding to her cart lined with trays of heart-shaped purples and greens.

I know the plant. I, too, chose it for its pearlescent sheen before knowing its name.

The kind-faced employee sees the plant, sees the woman's head-covering and long skirt, starts to stutter a reply. Between foliage, I offer, "It's called a Wandering Jew."

Adding, "I'm Jewish too. Some name, right?"

Bewildered, then delighted, they greet me. The employee looks relieved. The mother and I speculate on the name's history and the son explains his school science project: experimenting with how different liquids might effect a plant's growth.

"I've had a hard time keeping them alive," I admit. How the leaves at the base seem to have to die for the vine to keep growing outwards.

Briefly, the mother and I hold the metaphor together. Wondering what the other thinks it means about the plant, or about us, finding each other here.

Personal Ad as Portal

I'm wishing to make the acquaintance of some new ancestors. Only bright and well candidates need apply. Do you want to become related? Sure, I come from people, like everybody does, but half of them don't claim me, and most of them I wouldn't claim either. I need more dead Jews to call in an emergency. About me? This morning, I spat into the sink and toothpaste flecked my navy shirt like stars perforating the dark. I believe in mysteries. I lost my father this year and haven't found him yet. I walked through the pathless woods, nettles sparkling my ankles, a pain I chose to praise as one way to feel more, not less. That's a therapy thing— I'm not expecting you to say things like that, but I am searching for something. I gloat about making peace with the fact that our bodies are mostly made of the space between molecules. In truth, I'm not cool with this life of gaps. I need a pep talk from someone who has already slipped in-between themselves and found that the between was self too. To say it plain: the shadow of a bird flew across my knees and harvested a piece of me. Were you that bird? Could you be? I want to know what you took, but I don't want it back.

Clint Margrave

Cloud Conditions

Is there an app to download my inner life?
Some feelings have been detected.

One morning Clint Margrave woke up
and discovered he was an avatar.

I want to see the stars again
but I keep getting stuck in this cloud.

Did the aliens arrive and I just didn't notice?
The asteroid hit the earth
and I'm already dead?
God reveal himself and nobody cared?

According to Facebook,
I have a friendiversary with God today.
Though I don't remember adding Him
and He never likes my posts.

I don't believe in God.
But I do attend Twitter regularly
with all the other followers.

The truth is, I am empty
as a Buddhist monk this morning.
Black as a black hole.

My friend says there's this website
you can type in your name
and check for any unclaimed property.
She found \$20.

I wonder if anyone has seen my twenties.
Or that teaching job I never took in France.
Or my hair.

I wonder if anyone owes me
an apology.

*Sorry, it says,
no match.*

Diane Mehta

Surveillance

In the hereafter, years divide in table-of-contents style.
We read with monitor eyes, we breathe electrified.
Philosophies of lost-and-found people are anarchy at best
lies to write on tombstones explaining (to whom?) our lives.
We trudge to beaches for sunshine, bury our feet in coffins of sand.
This is what exists outside of hospitals and the dying:
Gold, fever, patience, charity, society, minerals, vapor, love
high above the tree line.

Tell me what I will miss most.

To be an unusual person, to be kind; is it better
to bloody the pavement with fleshy disappointments
or balm my tiny sidewalk with love so pronounced
it melts the identical identities that ratio our tired minds?
We were never inherently fractional people.
I want to believe we are outliers like every fingerprint
made in the womb; I wish to believe there is no watchdog society
inking our behavior in zeros and one or photographs archived
in boxes labeled: wrong beliefs, wrong skin, wrong ideas.

I am always wrong if I am always right
in the bitter matchstick of my mind, where nothing glows but fire
which has something to do with love, but is irrational; it rations
my own awareness of sensitive data that piles up;
in the larger scheme I am no better than algorithms that turn
honorable truths inside out, that prioritize what worlds like
most; these are not the trajectories that speed-of-light irregularities
wanted us to know. What is handworked should be a mood—
a ceramics-soul, lithographs of laughter and delight,
drawing that is quantum, writing in sky that diction-verbs forever.

Love is a ticket to heaven, we think,
but who can see the universe? When you pinball into mystery—
well maybe Hopkins was right: to be is wingbeat-God breathing
in things obvious: falcons or falconer, it doesn't really matter who
or what we are; what matters is that we muse unfettered
and synthesize wrong notes we half-hear with skeptical hearts
into beats—time-stamped truth or a cue to stomp our feet.

erica kaufman

structural panic

before monoliths
the identity

of “you”
a long movie

of eyeliner
fitbit sleuth

verbatim garden
a tiny autonomy

worth remembering
close virtual air devoutly

unnatural how sincere
lechery can be

filled with sirens
park benches

i begin to measure ordinary
wildness useful even

apples change behavior
when tested out

of nothing a picture
of capital a bird

wants better words in full
resort drag never comfy

with mandates weather
clouds heroism first

person pursuit of rancid
beauty i a one night only

coolness high goth collector
of wisteria small interactions

weep at the nation-
wide theme song

ziploc language i'm
afraid to use

swaddle myself
in dog biscuits

hypothetical mold
the ceiling is falling

literal like how touch
feels on collarbone

large hand small grout
save time for doom

scrolling red lentils
stock phrases of gratitude

anticipate movement lipstick
on forehead static

cling pastures how it feels
to look left parallel

park hoard sensitivity
gardens a fabled

kmart revival template
for recovery ballet an effort

to fortress figment fully
build lyrical costumes gaudy

currency act of conjuring
a kind of reconciliation

invisible story placement
remarkable creatures only extend

Jason Schneiderman

The Severed Head of Orpheus Sings Because It Has To

For JVD

He has no lungs now, no diaphragm, no resonating torso so his voice is weaker, and the sound is nasal, though he still hits all the notes. Still has perfect pitch. Today I am the villain in every love song on the radio. I said I'd stand by man, and there is nothing you don't understand. I said I loved you, and that's a fact. To be a god is to be immortal, but also to have no choice. Mars can't stop being war. Venus can't stop being love. What is Orpheus to do but sing the songs of my infidelity? And then I left you; said I felt trapped. Loss is the engine of grief, the bringer of tears: the lost home, the lost bed, the lost body that once fit the contours of the lover's body. You need new clothes. You need somewhere to stay. Poor Orpheus, passing test after test until he failed, but that's how tests are. You keep going till you fail. And should you be part god, even that won't be the death of you. Now his head sings alone in a field, singing a song that not one person at the piano bar knows the words to. Is that Sondheim? Is that from *Carousel*? I don't wanna be friends, she sings, her foot up on the piano, *a cri de cœur*. I don't wanna be friends. I was at a party and someone quoted that Jack Gilbert line to me, the one to make you feel better about your break ups, the one about how Icarus also flew, so I looked him square in the eye and smacked the wine glass out of his hand and after it shattered I said, don't forget, you also drank that wine before it stained your pants. You also held that glass before it was just splinters and shards. I'm the villain, I keep trying to tell you. I'm the song of the unfaithful. I'm the head that can't stop singing. I wish I were the hero, the one you'd rather be lonely without than happy with somebody else, the one you put a spell on, the one whose love was here to stay, but I'm a useless head in a stupid field. I'm the one who didn't love you tomorrow.

Jason Schneiderman

Click Bait

Today's distraction: an article on how to avoid distraction.

Turn off notifications. Clear your desktop. Divide things into what you are working on now and what you will work on later. Schedule the day. Use a timer. Reward yourself when you finish a task. Spoiler alert: It won't work.

Remember the "French wardrobe" in which you only owned variations of one outfit to avoid "decision fatigue"?

(See also, ordering the first thing on any menu; see also, ordering the same meal at every restaurant.) Question: is writing this poem a form of distraction or a form of focus?

Am I trying to avoid something more pressing by writing this poem? Or is this my life's work, and the only thing that truly matters? Yesterday's distraction: an article about "toxic productivity" and the value of sloth.

I like the word "toxic," and how now you can put it in front of anything. Toxic positivity. Toxic masculinity. Toxic futurity.

What if after this poem, we take a break? I'll stop writing and you'll close this book, not for too long, ten minutes, say. Twenty if you need more time. We can set a timer.

We can turn off our notifications. It can be our asynchronous secret, something we did together though we've never even met. Something that brought us calm in a world that everyone agrees is spinning too fast. We'll make a little island, where my only distraction is you.

Jason Schneiderman

Stalinism III (The Cloud Atlas)

The "Atlas," which contains twenty-eight views, is now the official cloud atlas of the world, and the illustrations in it are the type to which all cloud forms must hereafter be referred.

-The Photographic News, 1896

We started a school against schools.

We made a rule against rules.

We shamed people for shaming people.

We singled people out for singling people out.

Our manifestos were read with care.

Our screeds were read with anger.

Our complaints were received with compliance.

We removed authors from the bookshelves.

We removed teachers from the classrooms.

We told outrageous lies.

We made monstrous allegations.

We were very successful.

Someone called us incoherent, so we went on the attack.

Someone called us abhorrent, so we petitioned for their removal.

So many eggs to break.

So many omelets, getting cold.

*

It only takes one lie in an honest man's mouth

to make him a liar.

It only takes one false accusation
to muddy the waters.

If you make people angry enough,
they'll do all your dirty work,
and you don't even have to ask.

*

No one knew what to call us.
Or even exactly who we were.
I called us The Cloud Atlas,
because we had invented
nothing new. We only recognized
patterns that have existed
since the beginning of time.
Since the beginning of people.

*

Do you know what's persuasive?
Repetition.
You just have to say it over and over
and people will be pretty sure
it must be true.

*

Do you want to know what we're doing right now?

It's whatever we'll accuse you of tomorrow.

You might have already been accused.

*

Do you know the story of how Stalin died?

His biographers tend to emphasize

that the doctors were too afraid

to treat him. That he might have lived

had he received swifter treatment.

But here's what I think is important:

He was at home, comfortable, safe.

His grip on power was secure.

His incompetence and cruelty rewarded

even to the moment he died.

What Stalin knew, is what I know:

That the only way to die

in your own bed

is to make sure

no one else does.

Joanna Fuhrman

A Compilation of Last-Phone-Booth-in-the-World Yelp Reviews (circa 2019-2024)

Cara M: "...I came here after getting lost on the way to the dermatologist. An absolutely lovely place to spend a chunk of afternoon."

Michael TZ: "...As someone born before Nixon resigned, I remember when phone booths were common on street corners, in diners, video game arcades, police stations, school lobbies, bodegas and bars. I appreciate the chance to relive some memories."

Bob K: "Despite being advertised as the last phone booth in the world, I know of another last phone booth near my brothers-in-law's in Appleton..."

Brian O: "I thought this would be a good place to place a call to my mistress, but when I called her a man who sounded like Elmo answered the phone"

Milla E: "Unfortunately when we visited in December, you could hardly recognize the phone booth because there was scaffolding around it. Seems like it's been up for at least 8 months now. I didn't realize I passed it (I walked from the back) until a friend told me LOL. At least I got a picture with it..."

Lea P: "Some people consider this spot iconic or historic, but it's just a box with an old timey phone in it. I don't suggest using it as a toilet though I know that's crossed more than a few people's minds..."

Sara Q: "...If you visit the phone booth on a Friday at 3 pm, you might be able to hear snippets of the Avant-garde a capella group —The Rusty Cosmonauts—practicing across the street. According to a NYT review of their performance at the Ombré Narwhale Festival at the Auditorium of the Bernie Kerik School of Criminal Justice "their angelic howling is a riveting mixture of the neo-folk jig and space age lament..."

Pam L: "...Don't try burning the bought-to-be-worn-ironically Members Only Jacket of your ass hat ex in the phone booth. I'm not saying that's what I did, but I will admit my parents are still paying my legal bills..."

Joanna F: "Famous for appearing in poems. It also exists in what is sometimes referred to as "the temporal realm..."

Samantha O: "I tried to call the phone within it on 8 different occasions, but no one ever picked up..."

A Sound

On Rosh Hashanah, I duck into multiple synagogues. In the first, two boys sharing a single Batman mask hand me a prayer I can't read. A rabbi opens an ark, but instead of a Torah, translucent butterflies, each with a face of a loved one who's died, swarm out. When their wings swish, I hear a familiar whispering, and I think it's their voices, hoping to reclaim their broken bodies, return to the earth and be healed by—

In the second, there's a dim sum palace. From the ceiling, in the prisms of the chandelier, I can see kaleidoscopic multiples of my reflection.

Crescent-shaped dumplings wink at me, but when I wink back nothing's changed.

*

I try to write
my own prayer
made out
of the language
of my mom's
dill-filled
chicken soup
and dayglo
pocketbooks.
A prayer as
wide as a sky
or as skinny
as the ties
my dad wore
before I was born.
But what is
a prayer without
a god to receive it,
without a congregation
to stand in unison?

*

In the final synagogue,
the floor is a lake.

The cantor swings over the water
like a singing incarnation of Tarzan.

When the ceiling is replaced
by a video of a faraway sky,
the black and white boat shoes
I loved as a child return to my feet.

My parents' voices flow out of my mouth,

but I don't mind,
only barely notice a sound.

Walk Hum

I'm so predictable
that I begin
each song
with Adonai.
As if to deny
publicly
the Jewishness
only to try and
privately wash myself
in the comfort
of it happening
alone. So, instead,
say something
so gentle
it hurts. Like,
That's so dope,
Lucy. Such
a disappointing
success. Like
every time
I see the flag
I know
it's happening
again.
Wow, the teeth
on this country
and the street
that says
this is not
happening this way.
The street
is not
happening
my way.
And the glove
I love
is in a nest
only for you.

Jordan Stempleman

Less for Certain

In one version of a country's history, the teacher's forehead
empties out as fog into owned open air.
But in another version, mothers are running their fingers across this
and that, the hollowed arcades from before we met
and after we eat, what we watch out for,
and what could never be enough. The cold quail.
The sparks that turn down bit by bit. Wish now
for all that can't consider be stirred.
For all that won't consider be stirred.
In all the strangers' faces until there's the seen
and the unseen. And in all these names
that we memorize and replace, let them return to sounds
that see again. The once alien decked out in the approximate togetherness
gone alike in the wearing away.

Jordan Stempleman

The Confession

The spiritual assist
lands distant

enough
from the injury.

Goes bloom
but be not still.

The force to speak
is what drives

the near dead
at their darkest hour

to set foot in the alarms
of the just now

living.
The undisputed confession

of two naked wires
streamed

through eardrum without invoice
pouring stolen

intensities
into two survivors

who stand listening face
-to-face.

Marina Blitshteyn

tu b'av

twin shabbos lights held in me
held in the dark until
one fell
one shabbos flame still fills me
fills the whole room of the dark in me

threnody

i can't announce the thing i am
so i say the dead, say my own dead
this way i hollow out my mourning
no poem can save me or could save them
i've written millions all on the name
of that one name, that i can't say
because i was born a jew
because i was born a woman
every name echoes with it
every book i've read a simulacrum
of the old one, the one i can't read
because i was born in this house
because i was born in this body
on the train in brooklyn my tongue
the yiddish i call my home
on the way back it's rap music
i'm a thief of stuff my grandmother
lived to protect
i'm exploiting my difference
whose life is this to waste
is a very american question
and i count myself among them now
now that i have a book with my name on it
in english
now that i wrote a book the dead
won't read
i smear their ashes on its pages
having been born to a jew
having been born to a woman
what is a woman but an unread book
a joke you can't tell in another language
what is a woman in public if not
a waste of her dead
a name you can never say right
because you can't say it
the disrespect drips from my mouth
i tempt my fates
i squander my lifetimes
i test my luck on a line
born brute

born woman
born blunt as a gate, a root, a fist
born in the dead of winter
the dead of night
born to a mourning mother
born to a fatherland fraught
born to a country to die
and be born another
with another name
without our dead
as we had been born there
and born there as jews
how many lives has it taken
to face my strangers
write in their eyes like spit
like ha or like pity me
fling myself out of their mouths
their putrid borders
their egos gone awry
in a dying country
a dying race
if that's what my life is
if that's even what we are
the words are all wrong
i can't say them without flinching
it's not the end of us
it's not the death of me
i've already lived
already been born
a woman, a jew
in a world of limits
they're one and the same
in america nobody mourns the end
we already cry at beginnings

Radii [For Sent Regrets]

The Rust Belt is the center of a circle
nail an alphabet to the middle then nice and easy, stretch it to the border: allow
slack—this is a geometric situation to get a voice out of the
Valley hotter than a Chevy Vega. Am I an asshole
begins the poem because I sent regrets to “Patriotic Shabbat,” insulting
the temple—don’t I know that the reversal of Roe,
slavery, settler colonialism (continued)
won’t stop my temple in Wheeling, West- by-g-d-Virginia from bestowing blessings
on this fair country? Officially, the rabbi ruled that
anger “is ineffective” and “not aligning with the Jewish value of kindness”—were
I patriotic then, instantly, our nation would change its opinion of
me, mark the *good Jew* box then
restore my rights. Diasporic dialectic
to get from here to there intact I’ve needed to be inflexible
I am not shouting there just is a bad connection between West Virginia and
the coasts. I gave birth two years ago at Wheeling Hospital; yesterday
I called my OBGYN because if I conceive again, the hospital, very Catholic,
is the only hospital in town. I ask, “Can they
save me if ___?” I’m thirty-six, advanced maternal age.
Before, I wanted a “natural” birth I didn’t want an epidural, I
took a hypnosis class to withstand pain. Didn’t work
for me. After the epidural, I could feel, finally, the radius of my range; I was able to
return inside my body. I still realized— trust me—when to
push. Should I have just gone to g-ddamn Patriotic Shabbat? It’s the only shul
in a fifty-five mile radius. My toddler is happy there making hamantaschen
and, now that Covid isn’t as bad, kissing mezuzahs. I feel bad.
I even liked the hospital in the end—the way my doctor took
the bris seriously when the rabbi, respecting Covid policies, recited
the brachas over the phone. But to barter with the Rust Belt—
saying *lefty loosey* so slowly that just due to inflation things
are tightening— accusations “of overreacting” or
“permit the temple its patriotism” the definitions it must doctor to
survive. Rust Belt temples aren’t surviving; the one I grew up at merged. The
walls of the Wheeling temple are thick
with yearzeit plaques with the names of former area temples
high across the tops. How exactly they testify: *this isn’t our temple*. Their exiles
crowd the bimah until the circumference of outrage is orange
but packable a pinball shuttering between two bumpers there’s
insignificant progress while idling but speaking, am I getting anywhere better?
I have driven all night and I am still in the Rust Belt I have davened all day and still Hashem’s
total silence takes one coin from me to play pinball please
take my money the Rust Belt is relatively
affordable and over the border in Columbus, Ohio
a friend’s verdict comes back as YNTA!, yet what are the precedents yet
how else could he answer, seeing I’m the only one of me around?

--

halfway, I reconsider the rabbi. After all, he's
pro-choice and while busy, will prioritize
golfing with Joe Manchin to sort things out. Gosh,
can't I just be patient? Can't
I let the men handle this, and by this, I
mean, my cunt? No, I do not want to serve on any more
panels about dismantling power
while sitting high up at a table poets were
made to compete for. It is mathematical:
the angle of a head tilted up towards
a flag. A pencil-compass pulled back until it breaks. It's always
very difficult to compromise when compromise is violence
disguised as ice cream. We can lick it til it's gone, the dilemma,
til it's dripping down our chests like spurting milk. I remember the
cotton I wore inside my bra, lactation hotline calls
where I just wanted a nurse to scream at me This is what
you fucking signed up for! But instead, polite encouragement. Yellowed
tubs of lanolin. Remember I'm not alone. The
momentum of poets captured and redirected somewhere more
centralized. A flag, sure-as-sugar on the horizon. It's clear
we all had art in us but now. Now what
has become of my student who got famous then died. How
can I think of his father across the country,
across the flatness and the projections, 7-11s, arches and
silver mined out to the grey salty sea?
There are people between here and there sending regrets to
everything. They earmark
the origin (0,0). There
are witches who drink beer in Berkeley and
cast spells on politicians. There are women in the Rust Belt would kill for a Coors
Light. If this poem had a beer neon it'd be right here; here is the little
chain that turns it on, and I am beneath it with my child, circling
my hands towards Shabbat candles, a movement
that divides evenly into the
lowest common denominator of light.

Defiance

Aba says, *Light of My Eyes, burning steel wool only makes it heavier*, as if I could stop the taking of time. In Brazil there is a great termite kingdom older than four millennia, not unlike the age of our kind. It's accepted the queen is a mystery, not due to its expanse, as large as Great Britain, but that being pushed by kin further, & further in, she can't move an inch. How suspicion virtues on whim. I have named her Esther. I cannot bind anymore to my eyes. My father burrows into his father's lectern, rocking himself with night. What he wants is not myrtle & evergreen & land by wire, but a daughter who'll never die carrying the fire. They'll never find her. She isn't gone and is exactly like him: an eternal light who lost the wick to become all the chambers underground & inter-connected & earth-sick.

Passage

— For Kasey

Aba says: *Light of My Eyes*, we survive
through our children, or through the works, great
& small,
that we leave
behind. That
is righteousness.
He does not believe
in death
the same way I divide
its path. I offer the science,
the split, the math: somewhere,
in another branch of the many
worlds, many we've lost
still live
in *another* kind
of chance, one
we can't leave
for or grasp. The number is not
infinite, nor less than the skin
of one's teeth. This is *really*
happening, & we must not forget.
I show my work, & what happened *here*
to Hugh Everett. I'm not certain
if it's righteous.
Knowing,
if we yield to all
the rules of Everettian quantum
theory, we must accept
so many
will never reach this.

Lauren Camp

Multiple Ways of Condolences

When I was far away, among contours, chilling
air buried itself in mountains, there was time

to rest and subsist in the size of a knowledge I never
had time for. I lit candles, but forgot

the prayer for light. Thought those words would always prism
inside me. Thought I would hear them ever whole. I loved so much

as a child—any charm, the smallest gift coins my parents put sweet
in my hands. I insist to myself

you can't have lost this line of rhythm. This beginning sound.
I'm by myself in a glass room. Every flower turned to what is

now dark. I miss it already,
the prayer. I browse the internet to find a voice

to teach me again. I want my dead father
beside me, suffusing a testament.

Though I never could sing without rust, without tinges
off-kilter, now my sound breaks

to a nuisance, high-pitched, unprotected. Alone, I'm across
from myself. The window reflects me

as contour lines. What else am I forgetting—how to clasp
hands? how to make fire? I couldn't imagine such declining.

Strange to be holding the dark, trying
to recite it, grasping for more.

Lauren Camp

To Navigate

The dark is roving
our portraits
The dark
longs for more
The sky continues
to arrange
its inert absence
You release
a burden
It took a long time
to find this
and none to believe
in the slip of the world

PSALM

forever is a
tune in hope's
band, in catastrophe's

band, in my
writing, forever takes
forever across a

width of suffering,
ever exerts a
pressure on meaning

when my comfort
is listening to
you think. and

when the transport
container, greased with
gravity, won't move

with me because
i'm a container
emptiness loves, i

eat this time
in front of
my face until

it spreads into
floating burdens, clouds
whose tiny motors

rev a shiver,
set a search,
in their ruined

sky. and while
you're focused on
the horrible things

you've done by
unthinking them, by
repeating the loan

you took out
on similarity, on
eternity's pass, i

was doing it
to see you
see me be

good just now,
to see a
light rise in

your face to
your eyes. that
brings me joy

in my worry
machine; eaten time
like a dead

flesh listening, a
big fucking warning,
you're sitting alone

in their eternity's
smoke.

Lewis Freedman

BASCOM PILL

let's be inside
a song and
not the river

running alongside it.
and we'll say
to our ears,

understanding is useless,
play is everything,
and we'll listen

to our voice
which equalizes an
invisible world by

breath pulled out
like a key
from a bucket

and held aloft
to ring in
backup around this

voice we're hearing
as though a
corresponding tone was

being set up
and expected. please,
we'll say, don't

feel bad about
the ugly things
you've done, don't

let an expectation
of your own
horribleness hollow you

out against your
eyes, turn your
look all stony.

i imagine a
wolf in a
field of lost

language, its mouth
drips a mirror
pool of blood

which coats the
words sunk ridden
in fear of

the memory of
their usage, the
existing entrance to

an eradicated home.
no revival no
future is a

daily bind, so
my comfort is
in the lines

of the song,
the shaping of
its architecture into

a dimension which
comforts me. and
because i've no

correct distance from
my own mouth,
and because my

throat is a
gaping grave, it's
all song this

ghost foam framework
trained on the
fabric of living

to be a
mindless border relocating
here, like i

keep getting out
at the mezzanine
instead of the

first floor and
it's my fault
because i took

the wrong advice
and can't learn.
but the guilts

we induce and
carry are bitter
jokes on power

and parity, and
most of our
joy is sealed

off in relation
to praise. let's
just play instead

with the tassels
of this whose
name we love,

license covering, its
vacancy is light
in the air

of our content,
an ear to
arrive in the

work we need
to disappear.

Jane Medved

The Concubine On the Hill

I like the fairy tales where it's clear from the beginning
that no one will save you. At least then you know

you're on your own. Once upon a time there was an orphan.
Or, she was sent into the woods with a crust of bread.

You could say I am the metaphor in this story, explained
in twelve pieces. I looked for Hagar's angel, Balaam's talking

donkey. They were busy in another part of the book.
Men, come wash your feet, gladden your hearts, lie down

in the vineyards. I am talking about a long list of drunks.
Let's start with Lot and his Holy sadness, that was a nice touch

about the salt. In this story God's finger takes a while
to start pointing. There is no king. There is no judge except

time which has its own road, appearing when you least
expect it. I had a father, but still, it came to pass. Now

my favorite ending is also an earthquake. That's right.
Gather round. Let us bury them in the ground they trusted.

Ilya Kaminsky

A City Like a Guillotine Shivers on Its Way to the Neck

Alfonso stumbles from the corpse of the soldier. The townspeople are cheering, elated, pounding him on the back. Those who climbed the trees to watch applaud from the branches. Momma Galya shouts about pigs, pigs clean as men.

At the trial of God, we will ask: why did you allow all this?
And the answer will be an echo: why did you allow all this?

Ilya Kaminsky

In a Time of Peace

Inhabitant of earth for forty something years
I once found myself in a peaceful country. I watch neighbors open

their phones to watch
a cop demanding a man's driver's license. When a man reaches for his wallet, the cop
shoots. Into the car window. Shoots.

It is a peaceful country.

We pocket our phones and go.
To the dentist,
to buy shampoo,
pick up the children from school,
get basil.

Ours is a country in which a boy shot by police lies on the pavement
for hours.

We see in his open mouth
the nakedness
of the whole nation.

We watch. Watch
others watch.

The body of a boy lies on the pavement exactly like the body of a boy.

It is a peaceful country.

And it clips our citizens' bodies
effortlessly, the way the President's wife trims her toenails.

All of us
still have to do the hard work of dentist appointments,
of remembering to make
a summer salad: basil, tomatoes, it is a joy, tomatoes, add a little salt.

This is a time of peace.

I do not hear gunshots,
but watch birds splash over the backyards of the suburbs. How bright is the sky
as the avenue spins on its axis.
How bright is the sky (forgive me) how bright.

Lisa Olstein

SPRING

Scene summary

a dog a Dalloway

units larger than

a pinprick smaller

than a hedgerow.

If gold is the product

of two stars colliding

what is it we wrap

around our ribboned

necks? At night

we lay down our

glinting heads: here.

Hear hear exhorts

the chorus *there there*

soothes the soft voice

of the house in the

house of memory.

A chapter is an epoch

and an economy

of scale. A spring is

a coil a small stream

a source sprung

by a season (here)

and leapt (there).

Lisa Olstein

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Is it selfish to wish for more than to survive?
I see you, bare arms gleaming in the sun-

struck snow, I see the browned roast
you brought to your wine-stained lips,

the stack of books you read, and those boots
that last fall you loved yourself in.

I see you in them again on this roll call
morning stroll through what intimate data

strangers tell me about their lives.
Once upon a time I asked them to

or they asked me, who can recall,
I'm into it, I guess. I like to watch,

at least, I can't seem to stop, but I can't
bear to share, so I'll tell you here:

the cat finally came home last night—
spooked by so many fireworks barking,

he hid somewhere unsearchable for a while
no matter how we called and called.

He chose us, we like to say since the day
we found him starving on our porch.

I know the night is full of unsteady boats
on cold seas and horrible cages

and people far more alone than me.
I'm sorry for your loss, your cancer,

*the accident you had no way to see coming
and the one you did have an inkling of,*

I've learned how important it is to say
because of how difficult it is to say

and how loudly loneliness fills the silence
although like anything, it depends—

for instance, I still can't unhitch my breath
from even the softest whisper of your name.

Lisa Olstein

EVENT HORIZON

Today's hard green fruit latched along
the length of each small branch tells me

there was a flowering I missed or moved
too quickly by to see or saw and let pass

through the net memory casts over the day
for the mind to sort through later, dreaming.

Loquat, what? Mulberry, ok.
Tomorrow's nine months since you stopped

your ticking clock. What I most can't stand
to see is your body coming at me

in pictures: sunny porches, golden necks
arched a little in laughter, saying nothing

about what we did and didn't know.
This morning, astronomers confirmed

with a telescope called Event Horizon
something about relativity, capturing

the first-ever images of an actual black hole
fifty-three million light years away

and one-and-a-half light days across.
Light days: is there anything more beautiful?

Event horizon: a region in space-time
beyond which events cannot affect an outside observer

or the point of no return or the boundary at which
gravity's pull becomes so great there's no escape.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Joseette Akresh-Gonzales is the author of *Apocalypse on the Linoleum* (forthcoming from Lily Poetry Review Press). Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Southern Review*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Atticus Review*, *JAMA*, *The Pinch*, *The Journal*, *Breakwater Review*, *PANK*, and many other journals. A recent poem has been included in the anthology *Choice Words* (Haymarket). She co-founded the journal *Clarion* and was its editor for two years. Joseette lives in the Boston area with her husband and two boys and rides her bike to work at a nonprofit medical publisher.

Dan Alter's poems, translations and reviews have been published in journals including *Field*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Pank*, and *Zyzyva*; his first collection *My Little Book of Exiles* won the 2022 Cowan Writer's Awards Poetry Prize. His second collection, *Hills Full of Holes*, will be published by Fernwood Press in 2025. He lives with his wife and daughter in Berkeley and makes his living as an IBEW electrician.

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Elana Bell is a poet, sound practitioner, and creative guide. She is the author of *Mother Country* (BOA Editions 2020), poems about motherhood, fertility, and mental illness. Her debut collection of poetry, *Eyes, Stones* (LSU Press 2012), received the 2011 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets, and brings her complex heritage as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors to consider the difficult question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Elana is the recipient of grants and fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, the Edward Albee Foundation, and the Brooklyn Arts Council. Her writing has appeared in *AGNI*, *Harvard Review*, and the *Massachusetts Review*, among others. She was an inaugural finalist for the Freedom Plow Award for Poetry & Activism, an award that recognizes and honors a poet who is doing innovative and transformative work at the intersection of poetry and social change. In addition to facilitating her own Creative Fire workshops, Elana teaches poetry to actors at the Juilliard School and sings with the Resistance Revival Chorus, a group of women activists and musicians committed to bringing joy and song to the resistance movement. www.elanabell.com.

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Rosebud Ben-Oni, born to a Mexican mother and Jewish father, is the author of several collections of poetry, including *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* (March 2021), which won the Alice James Award and was a Finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. In 2022, Paramount commissioned her video essay "My Judaism is a Wild Unplace" for a nationwide television campaign for Jewish Heritage Month. In January 2023, she performed at Carnegie Hall on International Holocaust Memorial Day, as part "We Are Here: Songs From The Holocaust," and in Autumn 2023, her poem "When You Are the Arrow of Time" was commissioned by the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust to accompany Andy Goldsworthy's *Garden of Stones* exhibit.

Charles Bernstein's most recent books are *Topsy-Turvy* (2021) and *Pitch of Poetry* (2016), both from the University of Chicago Press. His work was the subject of *The Poetry of Idiomatic Insistences*, edited by Paul Bove, the Fall 2021 issue of *boundary 2*. He is the winner of the 2019 Bollingen Prize for lifetime achievement in poetry and for *Near Miss* and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

David Biespiel's first book, *Shattering Air*, was published in 1996 by BOA Editions, with an introduction by Stanley Plumly. The University of Washington Press published his next major volumes of poetry, edited by Linda Bierds: *Wild Civility* (2003), *The Book of Men and Women* (2009), *Charming Gardeners* (2013), and *Republic Café* (2019). He is the editor of the definitive edition of contemporary Pacific Northwest poets, *Long Journey*, published by Oregon State University Press in 2006, and the *Everyman Library's* edition of *Poets of the American South*, published by Random House in 2014. His first novel, *A Self-Portrait in the Year of the High Commission on Love*, appeared in 2023.

Marina Blitshteyn and her family came to the US as refugees from Soviet Moldova in 1991. She is the author of 2 poetry collections, *Two Hunters* (Argos Books, 2019), and *i take your voice* (Switchback Books, 2022), chosen by Joy Priest as the winner of The Gatewood Prize. Prior chapbooks include *Russian for Lovers* (Argos Books), *Nothing Personal* (Bone Bouquet Books), *\$kills\$* (dancing girl press), and *Sheet Music* (Sunnyoutside Press). She is working on a novel about motherhood and grief

Daniel Borzutzky is the author of *Lake Michigan*, finalist for the 2019 Griffin International Poetry Prize; *The Performance of Becoming Human*, which received the 2016 National Book Award. His other books include *In the Murmurs of the Rotten Carcass Economy* (2015); *Memories of my Overdevelopment* (2015); and *The Book of Interfering Bodies* (2011). His translation of Galo Ghigliotto's *Valdivia* received the 2017 ALTA National Translation Award. He has translated Raul Zurita's *The Country of Planks* and *Song for his Disappeared Love*; and Jaime Luis Huenún's *Port Trakl*. He teaches in the English and Latin American and Latino Studies Departments at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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Laura Eve Engel is the author of *Things That Go* (Octopus Books). A recipient of fellowships from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation and the Yiddish Book Center, her work can be found in *Best American Poetry*, *Boston Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *The Nation*, *PEN America* and elsewhere. She'd like to dedicate these poems to her late grandmother Rosalyn Saz, who was also a Jewish poet, and whose memory is a blessing every day.

Leah Falk is the author of *Other Customs and Practices* (Glass Lyre Press) and *To Look After and Use* (Finishing Line Press). Her work has appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *FIELD*, *Gulf Coast*, *Electric Literature*, and elsewhere. She has received support from the Yiddish Book Center, Vermont Studio Center, Asylum Arts, and Sundress Academy for the Arts. She lives in Philadelphia, where she is Director of Education and Engagement at Penn Live Arts, the performing arts center at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Zach Goldberg is a writer, educator, and arts organizer from Durham, NC. His poetry has appeared in journals including *AGNI*, *Pleiades*, and *RHINO*, and he's the author of *XV* (Nomadic/Black Lawrence Press) and a forthcoming full-length collection from Button Poetry. More at zach-goldberg.com and @gach_zoldberg.

Tirzah Goldenberg is the author of *Aleph* and *Like an Olive*, both published by Verge Books. Her poems and essays have appeared in *West Branch*, *LVNG*, *Dispatches from the Poetry Wars*, and *CutBank*, among other journals. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish community in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, she now lives in Port Townsend, Washington, where she works as a freelance editor and swims, when she's lucky, with the seals.

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Lisa Grunberger, a Pushcart nominee and Temple University English Professor, is a first-generation American writer. Her award-winning poetry book *I am dirty* (First Prize, Moonstone Press) and *Born Knowing* (Finishing Line Press) are lyrical reflections on life as a woman, a mother, and a daughter of Holocaust survivors. She is the author of: *Yiddish Yoga: Ruthie's Adventures in Love, Loss and the Lotus Position* (Harper Collins); *Mercy Wombs*, (Finalist in Settlement House American Poetry Prize for first-generation poets); and *For the Future of Girls* (Kelsay Press). A widely published poet, her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *Mudfish*, *The Drunken Boat*, *Bridges: A Jewish Feminist Journal*, *Philadelphia Poets*, *Paroles des Jour*, *Dialogi*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, *The Baffler*, *Fine Linen Press*. Her poems have been translated into Hebrew, Slovenian, Russian, Spanish and Yiddish. *Almost Pregnant*, her play about infertility and is published by Next Stage Press; "Inheritance" appears in an anthology called *Infertilities: A Curation* (Wayne State UP). Her play, *Alexa Talks to Rebecca* won the Audience Choice Award at the Squeaky Bicycle Theatre. Lisa teaches Yoga and Infertility workshops and lives with her family in Philadelphia. She is working on a memoir called *Chosen: An Adopted Woman's Double Holocaust Inheritance*.

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Literary Review poetry prize. His poems have garnered 21 Pushcart nominations. A graduate of the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers, Levine is founder, Artistic Director, and Publisher of Tupelo Press, an award winning independent literary press located in the historic NORAD Mill in the Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts.

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Daniela Naomi Molnar is an artist, poet, and writer collaborating with the mediums of language, image, paint, pigment, and place. She is also a wilderness guide, educator, and eternal student. Her book *CHORUS* was selected by Kazim Ali as the winner of Omnidawn Press' 1st/2nd Book Award. Her work is the subject of a front-page feature in the *Los Angeles Times*, an Oregon Art Beat profile, an entry in the *Oregon Encyclopedia*, a feature in *Poetry Daily*, and has been recognized by numerous grants, fellowships, and residencies. Her next book, *Light / Remains*, is a hybrid of poetry, essay, and art, out in 2025 from Bored Wolves Press. She maintains a studio in Portland, Oregon but her work often occurs outdoors, in collaboration with global public lands and wildlands. A 3G Jew and the daughter of immigrants, she is a diasporic student of the earth. www.danielamolnar.com / Instagram: @daniela_naomi_molnar

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Alicia Ostriker, a poet and critic, has authored seventeen volumes of poetry, including forthcoming *The Holy & Broken Bliss* (2024), *The Volcano and After* (2020), *Waiting for the Light* (2017), which received the National Jewish Book Award, *The Book of Seventy*, which received that award in 2009, *The Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog* (2014), *The Book of Life: Selected Jewish Poems 1979-2011*; and *No Heaven* (2005). Her 1980 feminist classic and anti-war poem sequence, *The Mother/Child Papers*, was recently reprinted by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Maya Pindyck is the author of *Emoticoncert* (Four Way Books, 2016) and *Friend Among Stones* (New Rivers Press, 2009). She is the recipient of a 2019 Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is an assistant professor of liberal arts and director of the writing program at Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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Yosefa Raz is a poet, translator, and scholar. She is currently a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Haifa. Her work has recently appeared in *Guernica*, *Jacket2*, *Protocols*, *Entropy*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*.

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Brooke Sahni is the author of *Before I Had the Word* (Texas Review Press, 2021), which won the X.J. Kennedy Poetry Prize, selected by Maggie Smith. She is also the author of *Divining* (Orison Books, 2020), which won the Orison Chapbook Prize. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in journals such as *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *32 Poems*, *The Missouri Review*, *Boulevard*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod*, *Indiana Review*, *Southwestern American Literature*, and elsewhere. She lives in the high desert mountains of Arizona where she writes and teaches.

Jason Schneiderman is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Hold Me Tight* (Red Hen, 2020). He is Professor of English at CUNY's BMCC and teaches in the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College. His next collection, *Self Portrait of Icarus as a Country on Fire*, will be published by Red Hen Press in 2024.

Alex Wells Shapiro graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2017 with an MFA in Writing. He serves as Poetry Editor for *Another Chicago Magazine*, and co-curates *Exhibit B: A Literary Variety Show*. His debut full-length poetry collection, *Insect Architecture* (Unbound Edition), is available now.

Sean Singer is the author of *Discography* (Yale University Press, 2002), winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, selected by W.S. Merwin, and the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America; *Honey & Smoke* (Eyewear Publishing, 2015); and *Today in the Taxi* (Tupelo Press, 2022) which won the 2022 National Jewish Book award. He runs a manuscript consultation service at www.seansingerpoetry.com

Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman's other works include the performance archive *Lost in JüdischerFriedhof Weißensee* (2016-19) created in Berlin (GE); the film *Night Herons* (2018-21) created with Joanna Rajkowska in Nowogród (PL); and *نايب دو عصللا إلامسلا* *Flight Manifesto* (2019-23), a serial walk on the Noxws'áq River created with Cascadia Deaf Nation, Brel Froebe, Dirar Kalash and others. He is Assistant Professor in Socially Engaged Art at Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Western Washington University

Nomi Stone is the author of three books, *Stranger's Notebook* (TriQuarterly 2008), *Kill Class* (Tupelo 2019), a finalist for the Julie Suk Award, and *Pinelandia: An Anthropology and Field Poetics of War and Empire* (University of California Press, 2023), finalist for the Atelier Prize. She is also the co-editor of two forthcoming anthologies, with Luke Hankins, *Between Paradise and Earth: Eve Poems* (Orison Books, 2023), *Breaking into Blossom: Poems With Amazing Endings* (Texas Review Press, 2023). She won a Pushcart Prize, a Fulbright, and conducted fieldwork across the Middle East and the United States. Her poems recently appear in *The Atlantic*, *POETRY Magazine* *American Poetry Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Contemporary Jewish Poetry*, and widely elsewhere.

Jordan Stempleman is the author of nine collections of poetry including *Cover Songs* (the Blue Turn), *Wallop*, and *No, Not Today* (Magic Helicopter Press). Stempleman is the co-editor of *The Continental Review*, editor for *Windfall Room*, faculty advisor for the literary arts magazine *Sprung Formal*, and curator of A Common Sense Reading Series.

Yerra Sugarman is the author of three volumes of poetry: *Aunt Bird* (Four Way Books, 2022), which won the American Book Fest's 2022 Best Book Award for General Poetry, and was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award, as well for the New England Poetry Club's Motton Book Prize; *The Bag of Broken Glass* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2008), poems from which received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship; and *Forms of Gone* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2002), winner of PEN American Center's Joyce Osterweil Award for Poetry. Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Nation*, *New England Review* and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University, and a PhD in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Houston. She is an American poet, essayist, and teacher, living in New York City. The daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors, she grew up in a community of survivors in Toronto, Canada. She serves as a board member for Yetzirah: A Hearth for Jewish Poetry.

Marcela Sulak is the author of the lyrical memoir, *Mouth Full of Seeds* and three poetry collections, including: the 2022 National Jewish Book Award finalist, *City of Sky Papers*. She's co-edited *Family Resemblance: An Anthology and Exploration of 8 Hybrid Literary Genres*, and has published four book-length translations of poetry, including *Twenty Girls to Envy Me*. Selected Poems by Orit Gidali, which was long listed for the 2017 PEN Award for Poetry Translation. Sulak edits the *Ilanot Review* and directs the Shandy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan University, where she is an associate professor.

Raisa Tolchinsky is a winner of the George Bennett Fellowship and the Henfield Prize for Fiction. Raisa earned her MFA from the University of Virginia and is a graduate of Bowdoin College and the University of Bologna. She has previously lived and worked in Chicago, New York, Italy, and Iceland, and is trained as an amateur boxer.

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