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Conjuring the Moon

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CONJURING THE MOON

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by

Ariella Berkowitz

2023

I dedicate this book to—

The wise women in my life who continue to enrich my perception of womanhood.

The feminists who continue to enrich the dialogue on womanhood, and the world, through art.

The women who have suffered in silence.

My thesis director and mentor, Professor Sasha Pimentel, who has held my hand through every step of this journey, giving me the courage to free my voice and the audacity to speak my truth.

CONJURING THE MOON

by

ARIELLA BERKOWITZ, BA

THESIS

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Preface

The award-winning writer and feminist campaigner Caroline Criado-Pérez once said, “The result of this deeply male-dominated culture is that the male experience, the male perspective, has come to be seen as universal, while the female experience—that of half the global population, after all—is seen as, well, niche” (12). This sentiment speaks to the burden carried by so many women of past and present fighting to be seen and heard in a society that continually trivializes and invalidates their lived experiences. This sentiment is also echoed by countless feminist theorists, writers, and artists, including for example, in the notable essay titled “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision” by Adrienne Rich, who reveals that she “had been taught that poetry should be ‘universal,’ which meant of course, non-female” (24).

Like so many other creative outlets, poetry in its earliest stages was predominantly regarded as a male undertaking, written for predominantly male audiences. Rich contends that “No male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language. But to a lesser or greater extent, every woman writer has written for men even when...she was supposed to be addressing women.” (20) She accuses some of history’s most acclaimed female writers—like Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, and Marianne Moore—of doing just that (19). Writing to an audience of men. That’s something I was admittedly guilty of in my earliest drafts of *Conjuring the Moon*. And I question the subconscious motivation behind it, just as Simone de Beauvoir questions in *The Second Sex*: “Where does this submission in woman come from?” (7).

As I moved through the process of writing and revising this book, my priorities started to shift. An objective that was initially driven by frustration with the patriarchy and its encroachment on my autonomy had evolved into a desire to openly share uncensored glimpses of

my reality. In focusing on the physical and emotional reality of my own experiences, I stopped addressing men and started addressing myself. In doing so, I finally started addressing women. But this was a challenging feat, requiring me to unpack major personal, and often uncomfortable, themes within my own life. According to Rich's essay, there's a pressing task at hand for poets like us; that is to imbue our work with honest, unfiltered, unrestrained female representation (20). With this thesis, I am trying to honor that task, to honestly and unabashedly represent myself, and in doing so, represent a microcosm of society at large. Hidden in this book's nooks and crannies are the complex layers of my ongoing journey to self-discovery, which continues daily.

But as Rich states, "until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves" (18). Simone de Beauvoir seeks to break down such assumptions sewn into the fabric of society, embedded in our own conditioning. These assumptions are at the center of de Beauvoir's theory exposing society's divisive categorization of men and women. These are the same assumptions that *Conjuring the Moon* explores and converses with. Through social, philosophical, psychological and historical frameworks, de Beauvoir dissects the patriarchal tradition of defining men as subject and women as object, of treating men as the "essential One" and women as the "inessential Other" (7). The following quote is at the crux of de Beauvoir's theory: "She [woman] is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (6). De Beauvoir suggests that woman's relegation to a state of alterity is the driving force behind her inherited condition as inessential. De Beauvoir goes on to describe alterity as a "fundamental category of human thought," explaining that "No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself" (6).

Because we live in a world primarily built by men with “all history...made by males” (10), women are by default classified as the other. “Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being” (5). From early childhood years, girls learn to define themselves in relation to men, to perceive themselves as “the inessential Other” to man’s primary One. Woman’s perception of self as Other perpetuates society’s treatment of her as Other. “It is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One, but in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view” (7). Thus is the condition of woman: submitting herself to a foreign point of view, an imposed definition of reality which stands in contradiction to her actual lived experiences.

De Beauvoir references Hegel in stating that “the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object” (6). Since before I had the words to vocalize it, I’ve struggled to reconcile my own sense of self as essential subject, with my social role of inessential object. This struggle has been compounded by the cultural and religious influences in my life as a half Moroccan, half Eastern-European Jewish woman with a childhood shaped by the patriarchal structures of Jewish orthodoxy. Of these many patriarchal structures, none irritates me more than Judaism’s domineering male god, in whose image I was supposedly made, but whose tendencies solely align with a male agenda. As captured in the poem, “Cognitive Dissonance,” I’ve been long grappling with this patriarchal Jewish God shoved down my throat since I was a baby, the supposed “*creator of reality—whom I could not relate to in the slightest*,” but in whose image I’ve been pressured to see myself. In searching for a spirituality outside of this patriarchal god, both in my life and in this book, I’ve developed a deep interest in the metaphor of feminine divinity. *Conjuring the Moon* encapsulates

my search for the feminine divine within myself, my religion, and my environment; but as empowering as this search may be, it remains inextricably connected to my social and historical role as inessential Other. Narrated primarily from a first-person point-of-view, a consistent, evolving I, inspired by myself, the poems in this book present a woman longing for feminine divinity in a world that reduces her status to inessential Other.

Family & Religion

One of the ways in which *Conjuring the Moon's* speaker explores her imposed role as inessential Other is through her relationship with her twin brother. "Cascade of Parallel Universes" takes the form of a cascade poem, whose formulaic structure is indicative of the relationship it describes, a pouring of one's life into the other—the cascade of two almost identical universes set apart, only, by gender. After identifying all that the twins have shared, such as parents, puberty, and a love of Halloween, the speaker ultimately reveals that they've been subject to "*two sets of rules under one roof.*" An earlier line of deliberate repetition hints at the speaker's internalization of her role as inessential Other: "*baggage / filled by each other, and others.*" This idea is punctuated by a line in the subsequent poem "The Great Unscrolling" where the speaker explicitly mentions feeling for the first time that she "*was the other,*" after being denied a religious rite of passage given to her brother. In being robbed of an opportunity granted to her twin brother, the speaker feels resentment, not towards him exactly, but towards her religion and the men who created it in service of their own dominance. She claims to feel "*indignant... at the forefathers who didn't care what I had to say, didn't even want to hear my voice.*" As de Beauvoir notes, "Lawmakers, priests, philosophers, writers, and scholars have gone to great lengths to prove that women's subordinate condition was willed in heaven and

profitable on earth. Religions forged by men reflect this will for domination: they found ammunition in the legends of Eve and Pandora. They have put philosophy and theology in their service” (11).

The condition of subordination to which de Beauvoir refers is both rationalized and reinforced through the construct of religion. In the world of my book’s speaker, Orthodox Judaism functions as a fundamental mode through which the subordination of women is both normalized and preserved. Judaism, like many other monotheistic religions, was established on a foundation of male subjectivity and female objectivity. Upon this uneven foundation were built the structures that define Judaism, which the speaker expands on in “The Great Unscrolling – P.2”. Here, the speaker reflects on the convoluted explanations she was fed her whole life, through “*angled dissections of letter, number, line, verse,*” to legitimize woman’s role as inessential Other. This poem reflects the extreme “*reaching*” and mental gymnastics that have taken place throughout history to ascertain and codify a religious narrative that supports male dominance. The frustration in the speaker’s tone is evident as she feels clearly unaccounted for in “*treatise written by men / for men,*” interpreted from an ancient language she, literally and figuratively, has always struggled to understand. Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, the first woman ordained as a Rabbi within the Jewish Renewal movement, claims that “Feminism...has confirmed our recent perceptions that Jewish women have, indeed, been an oppressed class within our culture. We have denied the material, legal, and spiritual privileges granted to the group of people we have been required to serve, that is, men” (6).

Conjuring the Moon’s speaker identifies with this sense of religious oppression, feeling first-hand the effects of certain privileges she was denied by her own community on account of her gender. While “Jewish men did not...invent...the patriarchy, they perpetuated the exclusion of

women from the priesthood, the rabbinate, and from religious discipleship and secular leadership within the Jewish community” (Gottlieb 3). Judaism is one of many social structures that has notoriously forbade women from participating in its most sacred rituals. For the speaker, this type of religious weaponization against women reflects a multitude of factors expressed by Gottlieb, from “negative stereotyping” to the “denial of education” to “economic dependency and sexual harassment—all have served to curtail our life choices” (6). This curtailing of life choices and privileges rings especially true for the speaker in poems that deal with the theme of religion. In “The Great Unscrolling – P.3: A Palindrome,” the speaker still carries the pain of *“feeling left out the / Not having read when / He did.”* Placed in the third section of the book, this poem fits within the third section’s overarching theme of searching for self, for identity, for meaning, while recognizing the loss of an old self, of innocence and blind faith in humanity. Using the symmetrical form of a palindrome, this poem reframes the speaker’s grief through a lens of resistance—there is a sense of hope for a better future in the repeated word *“hopeful.”* The speaker also realizes she can’t blame herself for this exclusion as it was *“inherited”* before she was born through no fault of her own. Here, the speaker seeks to claim agency in her pain, spurred to take action in the form of resistance captured through images like the *“torch of rebellion”* and *“Lioness of God”* which is the Hebrew translation of the name Ariella. The speaker is empowered by the idea of rebelling against a society that forces her into the box of complacent inessential Other. She is prepared to fight to be seen and heard. She feels in her heart that this rebellion is right while still recognizing the emotional difficulty of committing to it, implied in the line *“still going, easy yet not.”*

Consequences

Chief among de Beauvoir's points on the female condition is the following; "Even when her rights are recognized abstractly, long-standing habit keeps them from being concretely manifested in customs" (9). The speaker of *Conjuring the Moon* may live in a modern world, but her surroundings remain entrenched in patriarchal structure. They line the bedrock of her society, form the customs of her culture. These structures infiltrate her life in ways that are both subtle and overt, through myriad micro- and macroaggressions. Tethered to the role of inessential Other, she cannot escape her label of object to man's subject, as much as she tries to resist it. The speaker's internalization of this co-dependent inessential role takes a naturally devastating toll on both her spirit and body. It is a common phenomenon for psychological obstacles to surface in the body as physical symptoms. A major thematic thread in this book takes form in the physical manifestations of the speaker's emotional trauma—much of which is rooted in stringent cultural norms, in oppressive constructs both internal and external.

In "Memory of Trauma," the speaker uses a combination of abstract metaphor and concrete biological description to articulate the effects that her experiences have had on her body. She likens her shoulders to "*a locked vault*," and "*cement drying to an iron frame*," with knots that resemble "*boulders*," while fusing the imagery with corporeal terms like "*swollen nerves*" and "*protective tissue*." She physically carries the trauma of her childhood and adulthood in the form of tension, stiffness, and unrelenting knots. A lifetime of inescapable pressures, guidelines, and rejections have deformed her shoulders, while simultaneously lining them with an armor preparing her for battles to come. The poem "The Weight I Carry" achieves similar effects with the speaker's back as the central focus. This piece plays with the themes of weight

and lightness, as the speaker uses images of “*cinder*” and “*concrete*” coupled with words like “*eggshells*” and “*feathering*.” This sequence creates a dichotomy that demonstrates the daily tug-of-war the speaker faces by merely existing as a woman in society.

In “Curly Reins: A Sestina,” the ending line mentions the speaker’s hair loss due to alopecia, yet another somatic symptom resulting from her internal anguish. This poem shows the speaker’s body rejecting the artificial changes she has inflicted on it, using her curly hair as a primary example. Outside of the physical, there’s a whole slew of psychological and social repercussions the speaker faces from internalizing her role as inessential Other. We see the mounting pressure the speaker feels, from the age of six years old, to conform to society’s rigid standards of beauty, as well as her absorption of insecurities from her surroundings. The speaker’s all-consuming desire for both self and social acceptance is evident.

The defining characteristic of the sestina is its complex pattern of repetition. Comprising six stanzas of six lines each, and a seventh stanza of three lines, “the same six end-words are used throughout. But there is a fixed distance for these repetitions” (Strand and Boland 22). They are constructed in specific patterns “across a selected number of key words, so that in the end the sestina becomes a game of meaning, played with sounds and sense” (22). Other distinctive markers of the sestina include its capacity to adapt to conversational language and its creation of a circular narrative (24). My sestina utilizes these poetic devices to capture the ongoing cycles of shame linked to the speaker's curls, an insecurity that alienates her from her friends, persisting through the different stages of her life. The non-metered conversational language makes for a narrative tone that reads almost like scattered journal entries combining into a larger story. The intentional repetition of words like 'hair' and 'straight' punctuate the pressure our speaker feels to hide, restrain, and condense an integral part of her nature, to scorch

“each tendril of hair / into surrender, into pledging allegiance to the society that prefers it straight.” There is a clear conflict between the speaker’s external appearance, her nature, and her learned perception of beauty. Any sense of self as beautiful has been completely invalidated.

Nature

In “Curly Reins: A Sestina,” the speaker is first submerged in the rain she hopes will straighten hair, and later in shower streams that de-straighten her hair. Water appears as a recurring motif throughout this book, building on the prominent theme of nature and its varied representations across numerous contexts. For one, nature has long held associations with the feminine throughout history, philosophy, literature, and mythology. The natural world has long been regarded as feminine (Adams 8). Columbia University English professor, James Eli Adams, conducts an in-depth analysis on the feminine archetype of nature as presented in the works of Alfred Tennyson and the theories of Charles Darwin, both of whom so clearly had fraught relationships with nature and women, alike. “To question the nature of ‘Nature’” Adams writes, “is inescapably to question the nature of woman...More precisely, it is to ask what has become of those conventionally feminine attributes that have so long distinguished ‘Mother Nature’” (8). Simone de Beauvoir confirms this idea in describing the patriarchal view of woman as “the temptation of Nature, untamed against all reason” (213). Here, de Beauvoir introduces what lies on the flip side of this nature coin, the concept of reason, firmly rooted in historical associations with masculinity. Modern conceptions date back to the Enlightenment tradition, which narrowly defined reason as the universal moral code by which all civilized people live (Seidler 16). Throughout most of history, reason has been seen as a quality exclusively natural to men,

“Women could share in this world, but only if they were ready to subordinate their individual needs to serving the needs of men” (16).

Where the actions of men have been attributed reason, those of women have been attributed to nature, defined in opposition to reason (15). Ever since reason formed the basis of legitimacy in our culture, emotion and intuition have been deemed illegitimate grounds for knowledge and understanding, for they conflict with man’s reason. Back in the day, any experiences that contradicted reason were discredited for defying the one and only publicly accepted reality. “Ever since the Enlightenment, men have sought to silence the voices of others in the name of reason” (14). Much of our current society continues to be dominated by this intangible voice of reason—the same reason that justified the atrocities at Hiroshima and Auschwitz (16), the same reason that institutionalized mass witch-hunts and condoned marriage between middle-aged men and little girls. “It is the rationality and planning with which these acts were performed that is part of what makes them most disturbing” (16).

This loaded concept of reason, invented and defined by men, is explored through my poem “Blood Moon,” which turns reason into a character who imprisons his adversaries, emotion and intuition, and “*dangles a key for the price of allegiance.*” This poem comments on the oppressive system of reason inherited by our culture, a corrupt moral code that “*set precedents for spectral evidence / scold’s bridles, atonement walks.*” Among the questions asked of reason are: “*What are you hiding / behind / all those numbers and equations?*” “*What are you / so scared of?*” In my process of questioning reason, I found myself channeling the voice of Mara Pastor, specifically in her poem titled “Last Names on the Body.” In it, Pastor goes through a list of female body parts and functions related to pregnancy that share the commonality of

being named after men. She reclaims these parts, renaming them in relation to her actual experience of them. She then asks:

“May I give a mountain my last name
because I gaze at it? May I
name my lover’s mole
with my last name because I discover it?” (Pastor).

Pastor’s powerful and gripping line of questioning, her subtly sarcastic, biting tone was what I wanted to emulate in my poem. “Blood Moon” protests not just reason, but an imposed definition of reality perpetually used to discredit and silence women. It calls into question the hypocrisy of a system that invalidates and claims ownership of woman’s lived experiences, seeking to cement her role as inessential Other. Polarizing feminist writer Andrea Dworkin asserts that “Women are especially given to giving up what we know and feel to be right and true for the sake of others or for the sake of something more important than ourselves... Defined everywhere as evil when we act in our own self-interest, we strive to be good by renouncing self-interest altogether” (128). This quote speaks to many of the experiences haunting my book’s speaker. It speaks to the horrifyingly unfair positions that reason so often puts women in, reflecting a familiar pitting of male expectation against female experience.

Outside of water, a number of references are made to other natural elements and symbols like fire, air, earth, and of course, the moon, which is a poetic device in its own right. From Percy Bysshe Shelly to Emily Dickinson to Sylvia Path, the moon has served as a muse for poets since the inception of poetry (Tearle). My adoption of the moon as a feminine archetype aligns with an argument made by Dianne F. Sadoff in her journal *Mythopoeia, the Moon, and Contemporary Women's Poetry*: “When a woman writer encounters these mythologies, she must reinvent, revise, and transform them to fit her own female body, her female identity, her unique experience” (98). That idea of reinvention largely fueled my fascination with and incorporation

of the moon motif in this thesis. Besides a handful of mentions of the moon, there are multiples occasions in this book where I deliberately use the word “eclipse.” An eclipse for me is an especially powerful image, symbolizing both darkness and light, beauty and pain. The moon blocking the sun during a solar eclipse represents an act of natural resistance, as it steps into the spotlight, creating a new lens through which to view the sun—one that isn't as blinding. This lens acknowledges, punctuates, and pays respect to the darkness of women's history, to the weight still carried within us from what our gender has endured since the beginning of time. In the phenomenon of a lunar eclipse, also known as a blood moon, the earth's shadow obscures the moon whose natural response is to glow with ominous tinges of red. This act can signify the moon's rebellion against its being casted in the earth's dark shadow—the moon's red color is symbolic of the anger, trauma, and bloodshed that have marred woman's standing on earth.

Throughout my writing process under the Miami moon-light, Dorianne Laux's “Facts About the Moon” kept coming to mind. I was transfixed by her book's title poem, revealing the extent of our shared reverence for the moon as poetic symbol. Reading like a stream of consciousness, Laux serenades the moon:

“how if you go back
far enough you can imagine the breathtaking
hugeness of the moon, prehistoric
solar eclipses when the moon covered the sun
so completely there was no corona,
only a darkness we had no word for” (39).

I was in awe of the striking specificity Laux brings to her descriptions. In one fell swoop, this poem moves from praising the moon's power to calling it a mother to describing the mother of a rapist-murderer.

“I harbor a secret pity for the moon, rolling
around alone in space without
her milky planet, her only love, a mother

who's lost a child, a bad child,
a greedy child or maybe a grown boy
who's murdered and raped" (Laux 40).

Laux's tactical use of enjambment creates deeper meaning within each line, keeping us on our toes. The poem's lines feel organic yet unexpected and steeped in symbolism. What I loved the most about this poem was its bold subversion of the traditional trope of lunar femininity. Just like Pastor reclaims body parts, Laux reclaims the moon as feminist rebel, rather than patriarchal constituent.

De Beauvoir asserts that "nature does not define woman: it is she who defines herself by reclaiming nature for herself in her affectivity" (49). This quote captures the essence of my goal in embracing the theme of nature in my poems. For I want to reclaim the metaphor of woman as nature in a way that is liberating and inspiring, rather than confining and belittling. This was the inspiration behind my choice to generously spread out my word spacing in poems like "Unlubed," "Seduce Me," "Dress Codes" and "The Great Unscrolling — P.4." The earlier versions of these poems were single-spaced, condensed into much more conventional poetic formats. But in the revision stage, with invaluable guidance from Professor Pimentel, I'd come to the realization that these poems in particular needed to breathe. They needed to take up space, literally and figuratively, just like their speaker. Professor Pimentel reminded me that my words should be used as power and resistance against the white space of silence. So, I let my speaker's words take up the whole page in protest of the structures that try to silence her, in an act of embracing nature—of entering her full self. Perhaps female autonomy can be as simple as a woman following her own nature, her own impulses in an environment that tries to suppress and restrain both. And perhaps in claiming this sense of autonomy, women can find some sense of divinity.

Divine Feminine

In a groundbreaking book titled *She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Vision of a Renewal Judaism*, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb details her personal search for feminine divinity within herself her environment and her religion of Judaism. Identifying as a feminist rabbi (which sounds like an oxymoron), Gottlieb seeks to navigate challenges surrounding the controversial intersection of feminism and Judaism. The complexities she explores coincide with many of those confronted by my speaker in *Conjuring the Moon*. Much like my speaker, Gottlieb is entrenched in deep familial, cultural, and historical ties to her inherited religion of Judaism, but she struggles to accept its aggressively gender-coded liturgies. Gottlieb's mindset strongly aligns with that of my speaker, whose life experiences have unequivocally demonstrated that assuming the role of inessential Other is a necessary precondition for participation in religious spaces. “Women as ‘the other’ have been subjected to centuries of depersonalization, defined not on our own terms but by a given culture’s designated roles and by judgements about what are or are not appropriate ‘feminine’ characteristics” (26). In a similar vein as my speaker, Gottlieb rejects the rigid notion of a singular, all-powerful patriarchal God modeled after man—a figure for whom women are expected to unquestionably obey and define themselves in relation to. Rather than forsake Judaism, Gottlieb doubles down in her faith, but does so through a critical lens that involves reconstruction and rearticulation. She clings onto a rabbinical theory of feminine divinity known as “Shekinah,” which she nurtures and refines through her own reformulations and feminist interpretations.

“The idea of Shekinah in Jewish tradition testifies to the basic human impulse to express the experience of the numinous through symbols that include the ‘feminine’...The word Shekinah first appears in the Mishnah and Talmud (ca. 200 C.E.), where it is used interchangeably with

YHVH and Elohim as names of God” (20). While merely alluded to in traditional rabbinical texts, the concept of Shekinah is fleshed out more thoroughly in Kabbalistic texts, however because these were too written by men, they naturally evoke certain “male projections of women as overly emotional, earthbound, and sexually dangerous beings” (22). The concept of feminine divinity as captured through Judaic sources remains intrinsically tied to woman’s role as inessential Other. The bias of such a perspective renders these sources unreliable to Gottlieb, standing in contradiction to the sense of divinity she has always felt instinctively (20). Gottlieb concludes that “Without women’s voices interpreting and composing Shekinah texts for themselves, however, we can never fully grasp women’s experience of the divine” (20). Her rabbinical theory seeks to use Judaism’s expression of the feminine divine as a mere starting point, a textual base through which she can formulate a larger belief system that amends, expands upon, and amplifies female representation. Gottlieb does not out-right reject Judaism’s conception of feminine divinity, but instead wants to reclaim and reconstruct it. She notes that “many descriptions of the Shekinah in Jewish sources hark back to images that once belonged to the ancient goddesses of the Near East. Waxing and waning moon, evening and morning star, mirror, well of waters, primordial sea, rose amid the thorns, lily of the valley, Mother Wisdom, the oral tradition of Torah, Womb of Emanations, gateway and door, house and sacred shrine...all belong to the poetic constellation of the Shekinah” (22).

Gottlieb goes on to theorize that “the many images associated with the Shekinah can become a source for women’s encounter with the divine today as well as a bridge to our past. Women yearn for this possibility. When women speak of God She, we can finally picture ourselves created in God’s image.” (22). These sentiments align with the themes and images expressed in my poem “Shekinah,” in which the speaker asserts her belief in a female god, in

place of the traditional patriarchal god she was raised to fear. Here, the speaker notes the ways in which Shekinah appears to her—mainly through nature and instinct. Our speaker senses the presence of Shekinah in the moon and the sun, in animals and plants, in earth, fire, sky, clouds—but most importantly she feels Shekinah in her gut. Just like Gottlieb borrows from Old Testament language associated with the Jewish patriarchal God, so too does the speaker in this poem with lines like: “*light / dividing darkness*,” “*firmament / between / waters*” and “*guides / the clouds*.” What Gottlieb and I share, besides our feminist beliefs, is our desire to reach out for something greater than ourselves. One of the ways she sets out to do that is through the poetry of prayer and ceremonial ritual. Rather than reciting prayers created by the misogynistic men of antiquity, she recites prayers of her own creation. Her protest of patriarchal structure takes shape through the prayers she writes on behalf of women and directs to Shekinah. My protest of patriarchal structure takes shape through poetry written on behalf of myself, my reality, my truth, directed to my own interpretation of Shekinah, which I am still in the process of finding.

Conclusion

In reclaiming the metaphor of feminine divinity, Gottlieb attempts to work towards building an equitable and inclusive reconfiguration of Judaism, guided by the tenets of gender equality. She practices her own version of Judaism that aims to speak to our realities, unearth our histories, amplify our voices, and represent our interests, as women. For so long, “Our fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands, and a host of male authorities have controlled the scope of our activities. Our names have been unrecorded, glossed over, or suppressed. Our contributions have been devalued or forgotten” (4). Gottlieb’s vision of renewal is an act of resistance against the erasure that looms over so much of women’s history. Her reconstruction of religion through the

theory of feminine divinity exemplifies Adrienne Rich's principal argument in the essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." Rich implores women writers to resist erasure through "Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (18). For Rich, that endeavor is "more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (18). This thesis ultimately strives to look back with fresh eyes at my lived experiences, entering them from a new critical direction through the medium of poetry. Its arguments reflect a poignant statement made by Rabbi Gottlieb: "Male authorities can no longer negate women's perceptions and writings with the words 'but Judaism says' or 'according to the sages,' because women were not part of such formulations. We cannot be expected to abide by norms we did not help to create" (6). *Conjuring The Moon* wrestles with the question of why we as women still submit to norms created by men who can't possibly understand our reality. Why should we support ideologies that claim to represent us while actively working against us? Why should we conform to a system that positions us as inessential Other? The speaker of this book aspires to liberate herself from such burdens.

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I

Patriarchy has no gender. ¹

bell hooks

Curly Reins – A Sestina

“Snack Time” declares Morah Ruby with a warm smile.
We sprint to the cubbies, I find my rainbow sprinkled vanilla frosting
Dunkaroos, Andy gets her pizza flavored Pringles and we’re poring
over my new Disney Princess Adventure book. I look down at the
multicolored constellation of long, flowing silky straight
manes. I look up at Andy’s sandy-gold ruler-straight hair.

I reach behind my head and grab a fist full of my own hair,
an unruly mess of frizz and knots, my heart drops, I force a smile
to offset incoming tears, I ask Andy if her hair is naturally this straight,
she says no. It happened years ago. I scoop a big heap of frosting
and offer it up on a cookie, she accepts, and I watch her eat the
whole thing in one bite, she tells me about a night it was pouring

she’d walked miles without an umbrella, it started pouring
harder, and the rain saturated every strand of hair,
and something in the minerals activated a miracle because the
next day her waist-length waves were a little straighter, she gushes, smiling
from pig-tail to pig-tail. That’s why she kept on doing it, come wind or frost,
hail or thunder, she’d let the heavens smite her locks until they scared straight.

It’s 2,001 and I’m 6 years old. Every night I pray to God for straight
hair. For hours, weeks, months I stand outside every time it pours,
for years I cling to Andy’s story, forsaking all umbrellas, willing the earth to frost
my bushy curls with her divine elixir, but hope evaporates every time my hair
dries into a frizzy halo. I buy my first flat-iron at 9, but nothing makes me smile
like a fresh blow-out at Abdul’s Salon, where I transform into the

poised effervescent goddess that I see myself as on the
inside, for a few glorious days, until a hot shower melts away the straight-
jacket holding my beauty in place, unforgiving streams smack the smile
off my face, wash the confidence from my body, I watch it all pour
down the drain. At 12 I drag my Mom to a Flushing salon for Thermal
Reconditioning treatments to reverse-engineer my curls by frosting

them over with a chemical cocktail, washing it out, frosting
again, rinsing, repeating for hours before unleashing in quick succession, the
dual forces of blow-dryer and flatiron scorching each tendril of hair
into surrender, into pledging allegiance to the society that prefers it straight.
I’m 15 waking up every day before the sun to incinerate my poor
crinkly roots until the mismatched straight bits grow out. I forget what smiling

feels like for three years straight until I scrounge up enough to frost

my tips which adopt a burnt orange hue in the pouring
rain. But all smiles fade once I get to college and alopecia eats up half of my hair.

Pains

She catches me after dinner
from the edge of her mirror
lurking by the cracked door,
both of us surprised to catch her
in the act
analyzing her stomach, sucking
in breaths, hands prying,
poking, pinching loose
folds of skin in spite of
strenuous ab workouts and a South Beach Diet
the flesh stretches thin
etched in faded white lines
remnants of ruptured collagen and
broken tissue refusing to be
erased. Needing to hide,
the familiarity of it.

A Cold Night in January

Two streaks
form a crimson X
marking the exact
spot my mom was sliced open
on that cold January night
28 years ago
under a harsh fluorescent light
after ten and a half grueling months
growing
two zygotes
and two placentas
inflating, rearranging,
displacing
a petite frame on
mandatory bed rest
and the constant verge of
toppling over.
That night my brother and I
were extracted
three minutes apart
blood-stained organs on a cold table
next to buzzing machines,
screaming our heads off at a bespectacled
Brooklyn surgeon and his prenatal team.
My mom keeps a picture of them in an album
cradling two pastel bundles,
right next to a picture of the last time
she ever wore a bikini.

Sunny Moon

My whole childhood
I idolized
that photo of my mom on honeymoon
in the Bahamas posing next to a
big burly palm tree
like a solstice
dancer undulating
in black thong-
bikini mesh sarong set
sunbeams bouncing
off her iron-taut
abdomen
honey glazed
almond skin
citadel of curves
sun-quenched
sand-speckled
strong-willed thighs
Jackie-O sunglasses on
star-spangled eyes
as my sunburnt
father laughs
mustache flailing
shoulders veiled in
microfiber terry
moonbeam aviators
transfixed, while a
cyan ocean glistens
in the distance.

Memory of Trauma

Memories fade, but trauma remembers. It is stored in your body, your senses, your synapses and cells. ²

Dianne Lake

I grew an inch of steel
over the muscle
in my shoulder blades,

now a locked vault
holding the memory

of a childhood
stunted

in the vice grip

of a clenched fist,

a checked list,

a frivolous quip.

My shoulders are cement
drying to an iron frame

as connective tissue writhes
in protest snarls

into knots

like

the wired headphones in my
brother's backpack, my shoulders

shoulder a lifetime of

policies and procedures
detailing community values
codes of conduct,
dress codes, moral codes,

penal codes

termination protocols

have hardened my bones

into admantium,

raw and primal
volcanic

detonation of chains

into pulverized fragments

binding to my

armor

of swollen nerves
callused numb

from the pressure

of boulders I knead out
every evening with a tennis ball

I could barely feel.

Sponsored by Disney

I spent my younger years

Romanticizing

My future

Slippers of ruby and glass,
Pumpkins morphing
Into carriages
Flying umbrellas
Whisking me over the rainbow.

I pictured
My future self
A traveling ballerina
With long blonde hair,
Sparkling eyes,
The ability to talk to animals.

I was prepared to
Kiss an amphibian or two,
Maybe even a beast,
Although I wasn't thrilled about it.

But sometimes you
Gotta do what you gotta do
 for a wax-
Sealed invitation to
The King's ball.

Where I finally meet his charming son
Who just so happens to be my fated
Soul-mate, entranced at first glimpse,
Having waited his whole existence
To meet
Me.

Days I would dream,
Nights fantasize
Grand proclamations of everlasting love
Through ballad and orchestra.

A courting of my hand

Through passionate letters
And heart-shaped lockets,
Roses and diamonds in
Musical boxes, makeovers,
Shopping sprees, sailing through
The breeze, long walks on the beach.

All of the rain-kissing,
Feet-sweeping,
Fireplace-nuzzling,
Slurping the same noodle
Kind of love

We share

Before waltzing away to his

leviathan

Castle
Of crystal chandeliers,
Where I meet my fairy godmother,
My friends the sentient rug and singing candelabra,

We host our royal wedding
And ride off into the sunset
On a unicorn

Only ever having to worry about
Poison apples, magic mirrors,
Stepmothers and

Witches.

Pestilent Nuisance

Over fried eggs and home fries
my friends and I trade stories
at the brunch table of catcallers devolving into
women-grabbers, ass-flappers, spirit-nappers, strangers on
our streets
swinging from vine-to-vine feral eyes bolted, tongues hanging out,
as they grunt and growl, hoot and howl, track scents and pound chests in
crescendoing thumps, circling their prey before the chase
the lunge and pounce, push and dig, maul and gloat, the peacock,
the improved orgy flash-dance simulation of convulsing pelvises

humping

phantom figures

that they pretend are us.

We compare notes on farcical one-liners hurled through
the rolled down windows of engine-revving cars popping U-turns
rolling up to
curbs the impressions of wheels braking asphalt crunching

bargoers glomming onto waists without asking,
wormy fingers crawling slime trails down the hips of
unknown faces, go ahead and hoist us of the way

instead of simply

asking.

Mimosas in hand, we laugh ourselves sore in the
warm light of a red leather booth's embrace, sanctum of
comfort, in our zone of comfort food we concoct
preposterous responses to the human-embodiments of mosquitos
that swarm our daily routines,

sharing brands of repellent, alternative routes,
defense strategies and protection in the form of
pepper spray disguised as lipstick,
travel-sized hairspray-lighter-torches,
sharp manicured claws
to swat the pests away
as we pray

for their salvation.

Uneasy is the Head

My neck is a
a kneck
of fiber-optic cables
burning out from use straining
to support
shaky vocal cords
glands sore from the constant whiplash
of looking behind my back
vertebra
trembling
like a suspension bridge
on the brink of
collapse every time I do the
cross-armed sit-ups
hands cradling head
as eyes lock eyes
in the four mirrored
walls of a carpeted room
I lock eyes
with the sharp lines
of our teacher's sculpted four-pack.
"Elbows down" she shouts into a mic,
perky voice blaring from all sides
abs staring at

me.

Life Lessons from My Adolescence

At the age of 13 I was betrayed by a long rip of toilet-paper
carefully arranged in two ovals protruding a training bra
when a rogue corner popped out and my first crush pulled it
like a magician's never-ending ribbon.

At 14 I'd awoken
to the frightening reality that a makeup routine
I'd spent years perfecting was working
against me when an older girl informed
my best friend it was abhorrent. (Was she wrong though?)

I'd just turned 15 when I started researching, studying,
memorizing the numbers and measurements of calories
in anything and everything digestible by the human body
from a pint of miso soup to an ounce of cucumber to a cup
of raw spinach to a cup of steamed spinach to a gram of cantaloupe
to a teaspoon of honey to a squirt of ketchup to a stick of gum.

When I was 16, I started spilling my drinks into bathroom sinks
and delivering award-winning performances of a drunk person
after seeing an actually-drunk person pass out at a party
and classmates rip her clothes like hyenas, clawing at her
limp adolescent body while taking pictures.

When I was 17, I learned to wear tampons and thongs with leggings
when a popular girl spotted the Kotex pad protruding through the Hanes briefs under
my nylon leggings, and then asked if I was wearing a diaper as her cabal of shiny-haired
boot-wedged gum-popping Balenciaga-toting cronies laughed until
we all cried.

At 18 I learned how treat the sharp sting
that comes from shoving a cucumber
up my vagina for protection
upon the request of my first
friend with benefits
to spare him the drama of ripping my hymen,
rule out any
risk of my blood
tainting his triumphant sword.

II

*We are taught to respect fear more than
ourselves. We've been taught that silence would
save us, but it won't.* ³

Audre Lorde

Cascade of Parallel Universes

Brother of mine I salute
the way we've always
known
how much we've shared.

Strollers, birthdays, parents, family
feasts, fasts, chicken pox, puberty, baggage
filled by each other, and others.
Brother of mine I salute

our solidarity in shabbat fish, skinha, matzo ball soup,
twinsip love of schnauzers, Halloween, Taylor Swift.
The tangled threads of our coexistence,
the way we've always

bounced off one another
like trampolines, interconnected
springs flouting gravity
known

to be errant and willful.
Two Martians from the same womb,
two sets of rules under one roof, oh
how much we've shared.

The Great Unscrolling

At twelve years old it was posed and packaged to me as a gift—a burden spared, extra year of homework avoided.

No toiling over torah portions. No stressing over weekly rabbinical lessons. No having to sing in front of everyone I've ever known in my entire life.

Despite the fact that my twin brother was required to do all these things, the pressure was off of me.

Reformed classmates remarked how lucky I was—the only girl in my grade getting the big frilly party without all the work.

I had no problem with any of it. Happily accepted without a second thought, though unaware it wasn't my choice exactly.

But a historic decree imposed by the holy Patriarchs of Jewish Orthodoxy. The men who decided reading from the Torah was a privilege exclusively reserved for boys.

We hail from a long line of girls keeping their distance from the podium, relegated to a separate section in the back of the synagogue behind a partition. We upheld the standard of religiosity set by my mom's side of the family, even if mostly in appearance.

A Torah-less party at twelve was the Bat Mitzvah they expected and the only one they would attend. It wasn't a question.

Make no mistake, my Bat Mitzvah was nothing short of sensational, still ranking in the top five best nights of my entire life. Thanks to mom's meticulous planning and dad's reluctant footing of the bill, we had a DJ with lively dancers galvanizing audiences in the Electric Slide, Cotton-Eyed Joe, the Hora, My Humps by the Black Eyed Peas.

A lavish buffet served kosher Japanese-Italian fusion. The dessert bar was epic with my face on the cake, a fountain rippling tides of melted chocolate. Everybody raved about the food. I wouldn't change a second of it.

It was one year later, after watching my brother get up on that Bimah to absolutely murder his haftorah, serenaded by cantor in a three-hour ceremony of songs and praise and crowds throwing candy to celebrate his entrance to manhood, when the first thorn sprouted from a soul of roses. The first time in my short life when it hit me in a visceral way, that I was the other. And from that day forward I was indignant.

Not at my parents, but at the forefathers who didn't care what I had to say, didn't even want to hear my voice.

The thorns have grown sharper, just as I have, pricking those who try to pluck a rose.

Villanelle for A Ghost

Sometimes I still feel her ghost
like liquid nitrogen dripping down my spine—
That's what keeps me up the most.

Roaming the earth in search of a compliant host,
scratching windows and slashing powerlines—
sometimes I still feel her ghost.

Stray dogs howl from their designated posts
as black-eyed disciples materialize
pale, mouthless, varicosed—that's what keeps me up the most.

We had our house formally diagnosed
by a witch doctor who burned sage and pine, told us it would all be fine—
but still. Sometimes, I feel her. The ghost

who protests our sleep, wants us to be as morose
as she eclipses space and time—her darkness feeds on mine
which is what haunts me the most.

Glitches in the matrix exposed
by the Feminine Divine
I lay awake in bed most
nights haunted by her wistful
ghost.

Unlubed

Women are brought up to submit to intercourse—and here the strategy is shrewd—by being kept ignorant of it. The rules are taught, but the act is hidden. Girls are taught “love,” not “fuck.”⁴

Andrea Dworkin

I

detach.

gress.

quiesce.

words dissolve

bodies

shadows

in a spectral mirage of

micro

micro

the micro-

of my inner-most core

re-

ac-

to

detach.
regress.

fade to

trapped

aggressions

fissure rug-burn

a one-way

mist.

acquiesce.

tears

robot

rewiring my life

I

short-circuit

repress

sit on bags

of ice

detach

acquiesce
to crippling

obligation

the humiliation of
multiple E.R. trips

suppositories

to

extinguish the

flames

supplements for a

balanced

pH

artificial

hormones

reverse-

engineer

ing

my DNA

not

to rely

on

condoms

colonic therapy

was

My

reward

for
being

self-

less.

Every Time

My chest tightens,
lungs constrict,
heart valves pump out
steam like a runaway train—
body temperature climbs until
sweat pours out of every pore,
and hot tears burn like coals
behind my eyes. Deep breaths
leave me breathless. I forget
how to breathe altogether.

The lie claws at my chest
like a rabid wolf

every time his smug face
pops up on a picture.
Every time someone
utters his name.

Every time there's a
lull in the conversation.

Every time I am
touched by surprise.

Every time
my parents
look me in the eye.

Consent Kings

A term that has entered the ether.

Consent King.

Is it just me or...?
Does it hit your ear kind of funny?

Consent
King.

As opposed to...?

Gropey Jester?
Transgressive Serf?
Predatory Pauper?
Knavish Interloper?
Henchman of Unwanted Contact?

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

Loyal subjects, we beseech thee!
Place a crown upon the noble
head of any lord who refrains
from trespassing upon a woman's
ladyhood, unbidden. Construct a gilded
throne in his majesty's honor,
inscribe his name on bronze plaques,
marble slabs, parchment pages, position
the royal scepter within his valiant grasp.
An ermine cape shall grace his mighty
shoulders in opulent embrace.
Sound the trumpets, sharpen the lances,
ready the steeds, prepare a royal banquet
of delicacies to commemorate his majesty's
altruism and bravery.

But in all seriousness,
congratulations are in order

to our gallant King
Harry Styles whose
coronation made headlines
the one time he asked to
touch a woman's hair.

Dress Codes

Lining up outside

the Vice
Principal's office

like

hunted

prisoners

waiting to be

sentenced

for

crimes of

low necklines
thin shirt straps,
leggings if you had

a big ass

like

me

democracy

unraveling

in

inches,
centimeters

guilty
on the
base

of

temptation,

cleavage

checks

skirt-

measuring
tests

breast

recon

of

adult

eyes

scrutinizing

the

microstructures

of
teenage

bodies
under

atomic

microscope.

The Great Unscrolling – P.2

A persistent wandering
through obstacle courses
pondering the meaning of this
and lesson of that

reaching for reason
through delineation,
cautionary tales
angled dissections

of letter, number,
line, verse, chapter,
treatise written by men
for men,

encrypted in
convoluted long-
winded speeches
of which

I understood
so little

having been
in remedial Hebrew
since the 3rd Grade.

The Weight I Carry

My
back
is
a bag of
battle
ropes coiled
around
stacks of
cinder
buckling
under
the
crushing
weight
of
glass ceilings and
molds
cracked eggshells
plastic glances
a feathering of
glossy facades
matted lies
brazen
lines
crossed
skipped
clubs full
of words
swallowed
sentences
echoed
voices
directed to others.

concrete

masking

dropped

Reactions from Straight Men When I Tell Them About My Thesis:

- *So you're one of those me-tooers, huh?*
- *But women have equal rights now.*
- *How does your boyfriend feel about that?*
- *You should consider juxtaposing it with a male perspective.*
- *You can't blame all the world's problems on men.*
- *It's just a generational thing.*
- *You gonna stop shaving your pits now?*
- *I don't know anyone who still sees women that way.*
- *But it's not a problem in this country.*
- *Men are victims too.*
- *That's a broad brush to paint with.*
- *I don't understand.*
- *Explain how women still experience sexism...*

III

*I'd like to be my old self again but
I'm still trying to find it.* ⁵

Taylor Swift

A Blood Moon

I've been burned
by the age-old friction
between

emotion
and
reason,

classed as implacably linear

experience
vs.
expectation

a right and a wrong,

two paths
excavated
by prehistoric creatures
preserved by
millions of years in upkeep,
expansion, renovation,
cosmetic upgrades

like a modern cover on an

old book,

the original structure remains

emotion and intuition

dance

in a cage
built by reason
who dangles a key
for the price of allegiance,

passage through the grounds
of knowledge,
legitimacy granted upon
surrender to the snaked

roads of
reason
foundation of
civilization
indisputable
source of truth
steering the wheel of society
through a monochrome lens
setting precedents for
spectral evidence
scold's bridles, atonement walks,
naked bodies
pelted
by
rotting
fruit.

I ask you this, Reason.

What shall we do when our reality defies you?

Can't you smell our blood?
Hear our screams?
See what's right in front of you?

Feel
anything?

How can you understand what you've never felt?

Haven't you heard
of nuance?

Of color
and dimension?

How does his spectral evidence

eclipse

her blood-stained dress?

What are you hiding

behind

all those numbers and equations?

What are you

so scared of?

A Stepford Wife Lives in My Brain

It's in those moments of mundanity
when she emerges
shaking a dainty finger
supple breasts compressed by a structured crew-neck
lips pursed, pleated skirt, Mary Janes,
silky waves trailing down a 23-inch waist
beneath a striking cherubic face engraved by shiny
robotic eyes, and that classic tight-lipped Nicole Kidman smile.

She is you
but the Hollywood version,
former Valedictorian of Wife School
who earned a Bachelors' degree in Motherhood
with a concentration in Housekeeping,

popping by whenever she suspects you
of stepping out of line
with invariable reminders to
hide yourself,
save yourself,
always behave yourself,

get to a gym,
lay off the bread goddamn it,

penis doesn't like bellies
and he is your master,

but don't interact
until the day

one claims you forever
you are be both the gate
and it's keeper.

Pool Views

Men are objects to me. ⁶

Megan Thee Stallion

Firm and dense, big
but not too big

with ridges and valleys
like a rind encasing
the lush mesocarp
of an avocado cut
in two.

I stand, a sentinel
studying cryptic
movements, the seamless
twist like an elastic

clenching and releasing
ease of resilience
bowing and stretching
as

shadows shift across
denim creases,
chevron pockets
of orange stitching
gape at me
like vacant eyes.

I watch a
bending down slowly
cross-table shot, shoulders
tightening like piano strings
T-shirt rising

to reveal a slick band
of caramel skin.

A maneuvering
of cue
with quiet
confidence

and I

envision myself
as the cue
between those
big girthy
hands.

I
am

the table
he bends over

so steadily.

The Clitoris: Golden Thread in an Enchanted Forest

Myelin sheath—
Velvet mantle on a glacier
Myelin sheath—
infinity stone, cushioned wreath
of electric currents nature's
song of artistry, embrace her
Myelin sheath—

Silky White Shirt

You are ransacking
your closet
in the morning
searching for a nude
bra to go with that new white t-shirt
you saved up for and waited months to receive,
but the bra is not there, and any other
colored-bra will show so
you dig through the four hampers of dirty clothes
your boyfriend organized by color
and you still can't find it.
You say 'fuck it' and slip on that buttery-soft cash-vandal,
sans bra, and feel your skin gently tickled,
lifted into a delicious swaddle, fibrous
tissue nestling in the hush of a marshmallow hammock
lulled into the whipped cream pillow
threads of stardust, manna of the sky, ethereal
material tightens your edges, smoothes out
the bumps, fills in
the gaps
with luxurious layers of ruched silk
worthy of the lunar goddess.

You inspect yourself in the mirror at every angle, measuring how close someone has to be to
make out the ever-egregious shadow of your nipple.
What if you just kept your arms crossed?
You play out every scenario. The super. The neighbors. The stoop gallery. The guys at the
bodega. The ladies in line at the grocery store. The flirty bankteller. The Hasidic pharmacist.
Cars slowing down, strangers veering uncomfortably close. All those unsolicited eyes and side-
eyes incising a big serified A into your chest cavity.

You take off the shirt.
You lock up your breasts in a padded wire cage
tighten the clasps so they stay in their place.
You start your day an hour late,
conceding.

Heritage

What you have heard is true
About the wandering
Jew
Blood stains
The paddles of her
Escape canoe
A lifetime of biting disfigures her
Tongue
She stifles the screams
Of six million and one, she
Wails
In her dreams
Over all that was done
Feels their plasma coursing
Through her veins, their
Ulcers
Swelling in her
Stomach, crooked nose
Stamped on her face as she
Contemplates those many
Moments
Back in Poland
When her lineage was almost
Erased.

The Eeyore

Those four long years at that stuffy school made me the writer I am today. But they also broke me. Shattered every cell of my innocent, carefree, extroverted little body. Turned a confident happy goofball of a kid into the human embodiment of Eeyore. Perpetually slumped and exhausted, head bowed under a rain cloud halo, puffy patches of skin framing eyes on the constant precipice of tears extending release until I could reach the closest bathroom. An anhedonic outsider, exiled from the land of broken toys. I missed the version of who I was in middle school. I grieved for the sunny girl who brightened the room with her big metal smile. Ever-inquisitive and optimistic. Fearless. Trusting. Guard down. The unabashed Tigger, bouncing around with a proud flat chest and Shirley Temple curls. Buoyant, outgoing, self-assured. The life of the Bat Mitzvah. Assuming the best of humankind.

Sometimes I still miss her.

Ode to Female Friendships

Mentor, coach, therapist
partner, pseudo-mom, cheerleader,
referee, defense attorney, bodyguard,
parachute, net, gas pedal,
compass, pillow, nutrient,
tribe.

You are my comfort land.

Ice water in a barren desert,
campfire in a wintry forest,
sunlight in a graveyard.

My oxygen, sustenance,
shelter, sanity, strength,
you are my bone and muscle,
the prefrontal cortex of my brain,
breath of my lungs,
blood of my vessels,
vessels of my heart,
soles of my feet,
root of my soul.

Thanking you for teaching me
the meaning
of requited love.

The Great Unscrolling – P.3: A Palindrome

Not yet easygoing
Still hopeful but hurt
Feeling left out the
Not having read when
He did
More now
Forth carrying
A rebellion of torch,
The Inheriting, before I was born
Moroccan, Jewish Orthodox, A
—Lioness of God—
A Jewish Orthodox Moroccan
Born was I before inheriting the
Torch of rebellion, a
Carrying forth
Now, more
Did she
When read, having not
The out, left feeling
Hurt but hopeful, still
Going, easy yet not.

IV

*Enliven within my body of woman
union with Earth, union with sky
I am daughter of stars.⁷*

Tamara Rendell

The Impenetrable Chuppah

A chiffon canopy
Drapes across

Four
Posted
Barriers

To

A sacred plot
Of land.

In which stands

The hallowed
Fortress

Forged in
Roots
Ancestral

Protected

By a luscious garden
Inverted

Layers

Of

Hydrangea blossoms

Interlacing

Eucalyptus ribbons

Curly willow

Baby's breath

Petals raining

Pollen

Promises

Repelling trespassers.

The stronghold of our first
Holy temple

Under God's firm Gaze
We pass

The mic,

Recite
Medieval
Blessings

As all our friends and family,
Family's friends and friends' family

Watch

Us

Sip wine from garnet
-rimmed goblets

Before

The tattoo-sleeved non-binary Rabbi

We chose—

Over curmudgeonly Uncle Henry, now seething in his seat

—Declares us officially betrothed.

I lift the gossamer tulle tail
Of my gown,
You bend down

To remove the slippers of glass
On my feet

Replacing them with
Disruptor Twos, you wrap

The glass

Shoes

Set them down before us

We each raise a foot
And together,

Stomp the partition

To splintered slivers

S h a t t e r i n g

Echoes sing our rites to the rotunda

Warding off all Dybukks

I watch my uncle's face drain,
Mouth drop, eyes bulge

And all our friends cheer Mazal Tov.

Seduce Me

with your words
whisper in my ear

slide

your
fingers

through the gaps of

mine

I want
your

time

it's

not a race

nurture

the flames

of

a leaderless dance
we move as

one

entity

two atria
connected

anticipation

I want to be

charmed with music

like a snake

spill your soul

into me

for
I
am rapt

by

a supernova

jolt.

What Remains

I bought a silky new dress,
the color of raspberry jam.
It hugs my chest
and fans out at the bottom,
the sheer fabric gathering
in long shadowy lines.
I sip on a bitter double espresso
to keep me awake and curb the hunger,
which wouldn't go well with this dress.
I'm wearing those dangly
teardrop earrings
you said framed my face.
I put on the perfume that smells
like cinnamon and sandalwood
because you love the way it tastes.
I carry myself tall and proud at five foot one
but you don't see what I see.
You don't notice that my dress is new,
only the one-zip opening on its back.
Your eyes evade mine,
trailing quickly down from
my sparkly ears, to my neck,
right down to my palpitating chest.
Your words pretend to play innocent
but I know better than to fall
into the black abyss
that is your bedroom
where all that I bring will remain.

Shekinah

*Just as Shekinah has been in exile, so Jewish women
have been in exile.* ⁸

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb

I see

Her,

right there
in
the moon,

the snowdrops

drinking

rain

a

single blade of grass

thread of spider silk

abdomen of firefly

black kiss

on the red wings

of lady

bug

seeds of pomegranate,

skin of pineapple

pirouette
of
flame.

She who sparks
the sun
 and guides
 the clouds
the higher Mother
 Priestess
 darkness
light
dividing pink
 firmament
between waters,
no,
she is
not from
 his rib,
not
 a passive shadow
not
 hashem's wife
but the deity

in
whose
image

I was
made

not his

bolded name

on every page

but

Hers

whispered

through

the leaflets

of

Mysticism

living in
the
subtext

of
my gut.

Cognitive Dissonance

I've been working through my inner child's
residual fear of God.
and I'm talking about the O.G.
steel-fisted, chest-beating
sea-splitting, plague-smiting
bush-burning, commandment carving,
booming voice of Charlton Heston
First Testament, Holy Torah God, known to us as
Hashem. Literal translation: The Name.
Drilled into my brain were his many—
Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Elohim, Adonai, Yahweh,
that last one so holy you're not allowed to say it.
Then there's the long list of demands and conditions,
with accompanying tomes of commentary
from Rabbis asking and answering their own questions.
Though they were never the ones I had.
Hashem is not a He nor a She,
teachers would remind me
before only ever calling him a he,
boasting of his indominable greatness,
omniscient voice of morality, deliverer of justice whose
reflection mirrored the best of humanity,
creator of reality—whom I could not relate to in the slightest
and spent half my life feuding with
disgruntled teachers, rabbis, uncles over. I know it now and knew it then.
Whoever my god is,
it can't be him.

So I say to the child within, if eating bacon
cheeseburgers is equally as blasphemous
as talking shit about people who do shitty things which is
heretically on par with playing music on Saturdays,
you've been doing all those for a decade
so you might as well enjoy the ride to Gehenom.

I'm Back, More Bad, Than Ever

Being good is like staring

At a frozen clock, it's like,
Waiting to see the dentist.

Noone claps for you. Noone rewards you.
Noone says: Congratulations Miss Good,
Here's your cake and champagne!

I think I'll hang onto my Chutzpah.

Add more glitter to my picket signs.

Peel the filtered film from my tongue.

Ignore the rules.

Enjoy sex.

Scream obscenities.

Dance naked in a forest,

Bathe in the moonlight.

Call me
Lady of the night.

Miss Wayward.

Madame Uncivilized.

Call me

Mad

Hysterical

Satanic

Witch

Born of Lilith

Not Eve

Was I

Morally reprehensible in the eyes
Of some

Police
In certain countries,
Who'd prefer me dead.

Watch my fucks

Left to give

Burn to ash

With the sermons
I roll up and smoke
Into clouds of obsidian.

Condemn

Me.

Go ahead

And try

To erase

My scarlet lipstick
Prose.

Try to forget

The
Echoes

Of my cackle.

The Great Unscrolling – P. 4

I

Will

Read

My
Amended
Scrolls

Replacing

His name

With Hers

My
Speech

Will

Unearth
Lives

Buried

Free

Secrets

Caged

Guests

Will

		Applaud
My Brother		
	The	Loudest
My Mother's		
	Mascara	
Will	Run	
As fast As	My	Father
When		He sees
The	Tarot	
	The	Treyf
	Incense	
		Smoke
	Dense	
		Cornucopia of
Loud		
	Lipstick Lace	Sparkle

Sitars
Come out

We toast

With
Moon water

Friends

Lift

Me

Up

On

A

Chair

Rejoicing

The

In

Renaissance

My becoming

Woman.

HONK!

I saw the gentlest souls of my generation ravaged
by excess, engorged Armani-suits staggering through the cobbled streets
of Meatpacking at dawn in search of a last-ditch pocket,
 demon-minded tricksters yearning for fiscal loophole networks in
 the land
of the skeptical home of the traumatized metropolis of
 dreamers schemers drifters grifters real estate moguls media
magnates billionaires
 riding the F train side by side the homeless
of graffiti artists performance artists crypto artists scam artists starving
 artists encompassing every shape color religion gender kink,
of insatiable gastronomes trekking through four boroughs for the perfect
 bagel bao-bun brick oven pizza birria biryani the best
steaming stack of charred pastrami that money could buy piled high on rye
 smothered in Russian dressing topped with sauerkraut and melted swiss,
of chopped cheese and 99 cent Arizona cans every brand of rolling papers electronic
cigarette craft beer kombucha whipped cream canisters all available
 any time of day or night at your trusty bodega.
City of coiffed Starbucks suburbanites cross-examining flustered baristas about
 bean sourcing and roasting techniques and flavor profiles,
of militant frat-brothers in middle-aged bodies spewing pomposity and privilege
 from corner offices and VIP sections flaunting Rolexes chauffeurs aged bottles of single-
malt scotch who feel up assistants and hit on barely-legal teenagers at college bars.
Capital of emotional repression sexual aggression public declarations of objectification
 of existential dread,
nucleus of the lost the lonely and the rushed
 where everyone rides the escalator while simultaneously walking up it,
of coffee dosed with cynicism and devoured by the pot,
of jobless nepo-babies lounging around the wrap-around balconies of penthouses
 paid for by their hedge fund fathers numbing ennui with expensive toys with escorts with
puppets with robots with endless games using people for pieces and sex for cards
 of black sheep guerilla-theater kids turned reiki-masters professional huggers career cuddlers
rat czars
 whose broad stripes and bright stars are laughable to our savvy cosmopolitan
New York City rats with contractible bones and saw-teeth roaming
unbothered through the garbage-ridden streets in
the city that never sleeps, concrete jungle where dreams are
 interrupted by legions of rats building tunnels in your walls,
of gym rats incessantly catching glimpses of clenched glutes
 in the reflections of fast-food windows department store screens security
 screens tablet screens phone screens sunglasses puddles,
of club rats hard of hearing and feeling boasting laser-vision offering nocturnality

in the form of pink cocaine from a nasal-spray bottle
who scour hidden corners scavenge under tables lurk in staircases for a frail
doe lost incoherent enough to pin down for a quick fuck when nobody's looking
in a dirty bathroom empty parking lot park bench fire escape, a quiet
alley behind a dumpster...

Land of drunk prep-school foragers frolicking through the manicured medians of
York Avenue
raving obscenities at the nannies trailing behind to clean up their shit,
of death monuments and Svengali memorials with added nuance qualifiers
etched in sedimentary signage.

Epicenter
of grid-locked roads and standstill sidewalk traffic of endless honking and wailing
sirens halting conversations lunches conferences panels speeches lectures dates
matinees philharmonics ballets parades weddings funerals moments of
silence concentration the botched application of liquid eyeliner
and orgasms and shavasanas and sleep,
sanctuary for insomniacs
who write their best material under a full moon,
of tourists taking pictures of the homeless man drinking
his coffee, or the business exec drinking his coffee,
or the Empire state building not drinking its coffee,
or the building he mistakes for the Empire state building
or any one of two billion obese pigeons taking bread from the hands of a
one eyed Rastafarian,
of empires built upon empires built upon empires built on
camp and debauchery and naivety and marijuana and the backs of health clinics
and single mothers and women in school girl costumes lined up
outside massage parlors like human signs,
the cat cafes dog academies plant nurseries juice cleanse pushers pharmaceutical
marketing companies cohabitating an island of tyrannical
strip clubs and sex clubs and comedy clubs and golf clubs and secret societies
and escape rooms rage rooms grime glazed peep-show booths
undercover lounges in cellars and taco shops and train stations,
where the wonder wheel has a profile on Instagram, where every park and business and baby
and pet and office building in Manhattan has an Instagram profile and LinkedIn page, I know
this because I make them for a living. Yes. I live in a world run by charging bulls and Wall
Street wolves hungry influencers with oblong sunglasses influencing the easily influenced
disproportionate ratio of men to women emboldening finance bro culture breeding endless
fuck boy factions who date like it's a buffet commanding woman to date like it's a famine and
barter for performative chivalry and partial companionship from the same men who coerce
them into sex insisting on using coconut oil as a lube and calling it date night in the restaurant
capital of yeast infections and diet culture and high fashion models housed by corporate
monoliths stocking fridges with water and celery and Ozempic and cabinets with laxatives and
stimulants in buildings with leaky pipes and clogged toilets and voluntary starvation,
of navy-seal-training fitness classes laser electrocution of body hair cyanoacrylate
gluing of plastic lashes to raw flesh eyelids,

of panic-attack-breathlessness and breath work curse words monosyllabic non-answers
workplace tantrums first dates at MLM recruitment meetings and detached men losing
women to other women,
mecca of cosplay and LARP and rebellion and denial and windowless closets converted into
bedrooms of friendly vampires misunderstood satanists covens of witches nudist colonies
fae protesting the charismatic ghosts who sign
their pay checks and take a percentage and then charge extra for barely passable health
insurance with infinite out-of-pocket deductibles,
of subway acrobats subway quartets subway flashers voyeurs vandals
passengers who fall asleep on the shoulders of other passengers and passengers
who light up cigars in subway cars manspreading who whip out their dicks and
masturbate in front of kids, who lure you into conversations to convert you to their church
and call you a greedy piece of shit for not donating,
of the Harvard-educated investment banker
chastising anyone who deigns to disagree who slips words
like “stagflation” and “remuneration”
into daily conversations but can’t compute the word “no,”
of the hopeless romantic raised on Meg Ryan
movies and Nicholas Sparks books waiting to
bump into her soulmate at a Barnes and Noble,
of the hopeless-romantic-turned-misandrist
sweeping up the shards of her shattered identity
scrubbing away the burnt sugar stains encrusting her brain,
wincing in pain as a diamond grows
where her heart used to be.

Appendix

1. bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*.
2. Dianne Lake, *Member of the Family*.
3. Audre Lorde, Interview with Claudia Tate in *Black Women Writers At Work*.
4. Andrea Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women*.
5. Taylor Swift, “All Too Well.”
6. Megan Thee Stallion, when asked “Do you ever feel like an object?” during an interview on Houston’s 97.9 The Box.
7. Tamara Rendell, *Realm of the Witch Queen*.
8. Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, *She Who Dwells Within*.

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Vita

Ariella Esther Berkowitz hails from Brooklyn, New York, where she has lived for most of her life. After graduating from a reformed Jewish High School in 2013, Ariella attended Binghamton University in Upstate New York, where she pursued her major in Creative Writing and minor in Theatre, ultimately graduating with a Bachelor's degree in 2018. During her undergraduate years, Ariella's poems were published in various publications including Binghamton University's "Ellipsis Literary Magazine", local arts magazine "Carousel", and poetry anthology *New York's Best Emerging Poets* by Z Publishing House.

Upon graduation, Ariella began her career as an intern at MTG Creative Group, a boutique advertising firm in NYC. Concurrently, she earned her certification from the NYU School of Professional Studies in copy editing, proofreading and factchecking. Over the span of five years with MTG Creative Group, Ariella progressively rose through the ranks to assume the roles of Senior Copywriter and Copy Chief, ultimately reaching the pinnacle of her career as the company's Creative Director. Her professional growth paralleled her academic pursuits, with Ariella dedicating the last three years to refining her craft in the Creative Writing MFA program at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Focused primarily on poetry and screenwriting, this remote program drove her academic advancement while allowing her to nurture a writing career in New York City.

Ariella has recently relocated to Miami where she continues to work remotely both as student and Creative Director. She identifies as a Jewitch, combining the rituals and traditions of Reconstructionist Judaism with the earth-centered magic of Wiccan culture.

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