

Shibboleth

We live in the linings of suitcases

“*Beurre*”

He is instructing us,

Our tongues swimming in one another’s mouths

We attempt.

“No, not *bear*...

Beurre”

He rolls his eyes back to their albumen

Grabs our mouths in his hands until we surrender the sound of crackling fires

Your tongue is in my mouth,

We cross the checkpoint, unscathed,

Intoxicate the nightshade*

See it opening itself unto the moon’s conducting hands

We find a knife,

Cut and release the word, the sweet snap of God’s green**

They cannot tell us apart

* During the Lebanese Civil War, one way to differentiate between who was Palestinian and who was Lebanese was by having people pronounce the Arabic word for tomato.

** During Trujillo’s rule of the Dominican Republic, his henchman would determine Haitian from Dominican by asking them to pronounce the word for parsley. The order was to shoot the Haitian.

The Civil War, My Mother's Body

My mother arrived at my father's village,
Carnelian shoes, open toed
Trespassing through wet, littered alleyways,
The crunch of cola glass and sewer water slip beneath her heels
Shia piety clicks its tongue at her skirt length
Children, constellations of laughing stars, dart through streets

Days before, they had met in downtown Beirut
And ate sandwiches slathered in mustard's sting
That morning a busload of Palestinians were shot and killed
"It's not going away, Mohammed, it's growing"
Ashamed of his hands, my father hides them in a bomb shelter where a family cowers in the corner

She pauses to study posters strewn on the wall
Beards and eyes,
Men remembered with the calligraphy of roses
She wonders what her son may have looked like
In the distance she hears the echoes of drunken revelry, carnival moans*
She clutches her stomach, tulips bloom across her face

Demarcations begin, a single word sorts kindred from killed**
Eyelashes harden in the sun

* Baalbeck, Lebanon was once populated by temples dedicated to the worship of Pre Islamic idols, including the lascivious and sensual Bacchus, god of wine.

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Jesus and Iblis Go on a Road Trip or
Finding Myself Back To You

That afternoon, they harvested the bread of the sea
The car scented with saline, gorgeously fetid mussels,
Iblis' silver scale eyes scan the road, contemplating their last conversation
Jesus was mostly quiet, in flip flops, toes shriveled from the tides.

What do you do when you are bewildered by the madness of the other?

the sacrifice, the rage-rebel
somehow, the heart crawls across the floor, arms outstretched,
reaching for a second helping of wine soaked bread
the heat of truth exchanged,
a tail on fire,
scorched last words

We the Boom Crash Girls

for Sylvia Plath

We the boom-crash girls
Quick the shards
Clean the scene
Clean up after you
Pickle jar splat
And the bladed machine

We quietly bend down at the waist
Cyrillic letters
Head stays down to track the waste
Don the gloves,
Make love, curb your taste,
Don't take up space
Ordinaire Flower
Ho-hum daisy in a nightclub of juicy iris

Speaking of purple, did you happen to see Saturn's rings around your mother's
Neck the other day?
Bust lip, thick, curdling hips,
"Open, Open" you say

Mothers, Monsters

“My mother bore me in the southern wild” - William Blake

for Samantha

I once met a child who remembered his brother's dreams

But could never recount his own.

Is this how it is

[keepers of the dream]

Mother's living?

Stately myth of bone and joint

Regal, layered, ruffled

A sandalwood prophet

She was an iris

born of a centerpiece Gold

I've come to know her through your tender/stern ways

Glacial sized storytelling

Aromatic renderings of legume, animal,

Mothers surely have their monsters

For her Kin, there could be no Joy Slaughter

She would not have it.

Comforted by God's petticoats,
She stayed by that silken side
Looked out at these cities of disappointments,
Until she saw your head crest on the horizon.

It was then that she remembered her fondness for this world,
Operatic sunsets,
Her hands which are your hands,
Beautiful, black swans in search of soft landings