

TSIYIM, A HIDING

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Aaron LoPatin, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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ABSTRACT

Tsiyim is a collection of poems and poetic sequences that investigate faith, doubt, and the natural world. The poems draw on the stories of martyrs, saints, prophets, and pilgrims, entering a mimetic chain that sets language and poetry as the placeholder for a contemporary faith to take place.

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tsiyim
a hiding

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[in which I question all I knew]

If you know it is hiding, it ceases to be a hiding.

Reb Pinhas

*You know, there are places so beautiful
we could almost be there, as if we were.
No; I don't believe. But it is true.*

William Bronk

Madaba

On the floor there was a map — & then, of course, there were the many orchestrations — of good, of evil — you know this — you know the way maps shine in light — the way, like needles, they thread — the faces they make — the what else, the haunting of it — you said to be perfect I must give it all away — so I give, I give, I give — the mapmaker will not acknowledge my hands.

I.

I read often of their bleeding

I.

Perfumed palms: gilded, kingly.
The smell of orchids filled the room.

Cries, emphatically: *consumattum est*.
Leaks, lauds, the smell of orchids, blooming:

and I thought I saw the little flowers grow from out their palms.

II.

To grow from out their palms—

Rabbi Yohanan, to Akiva: “Grass will grow between your cheeks and still the Messiah will not have come.”

The answer? Throw away the key.

The monks in ancient anchorage, withdrawn, withholding;
the monks held up by chains; the monks walking on wire;
standing on towers; on the backs of lions, tamed.

The pilgrims stop at Archelais, changing horses.
They come from distant cities. They look at empty tombs.

III.

I know the ache.

The skimming stroke of sandpaper on eyelid.
On ankle, on abdomen, on tapered rim of lip.

If life is only papercuts then why advance it?

The kings aren't kings here in the windmill.

The harness, hermitage, the palmer's walking staff:
they find me changed, unhinged, unrobed.

IV.

The ways we've gone at times unhinged,
at times attached like nose to face.

The fragrance for the name of what we did.

The essence of the antifreeze we drank,
and pushed up, once again, the flowers —

stems still inching up my spine.

V.

Was it sacred or profane?

To touch the bones. To whip oneself
with pleated rope. With whiplashed camel's tail.

To hunger, to starve.

John the Baptist lived off locust, wild honey.
The fact of eating plague. Of eating death. Of eating eating.

What we ate: wild garlic, reed hearts, bush tucker, asphodel.
How it left us: brackish, holy, thirsting.

VI.

We follow the sounds of metal:
the coin that rolls & glitters on the ground,

the spurs that dig into the ribs;
shrapnel on the battlefield, resounding;

the *are we animal?* No, more than that, we're mouthing.

I believe in what you show to me: antlers on the mantle.

VII.

The cave, the cell, the cloister, pillar, roof of thatch and clay.

We like to hear the rain fall upwards here.

The hemispheres turned hexagons and rambling; the joiner's constant rambling.

One more sound that draws us in: the stump between the sawhorse.

IX.

In 130 AD Hadrian rebuilt the ruined city, renamed Aelia.

How like a widow she is!

And all the Jewish shrines destroyed; Bar Kokhba killed in prophet's armed revolt.

The peregrine cry: *If I forget you O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!*

In 618 Jerusalem fell.

In 636 it fell again.

Immovable monks savaged in their stationaries: 7 dead at the monastery of St. George, at the church of St. Sophia: 369, on the Mount of Olives: 1,207, at Golgotha: 80, on the steps of Anastasis: 83

Yohanan to Akiva: "Grass will grow between your cheeks..."

X.

James (of Nisibus), Eusebius (of Teleda), Reb Simeon, Reb Jose, Anthony (of the Desert).

Let us now praise!

The king with carved saints, who had visions.

The king of furnace fame, destroyer of walls.

The king whose bones lay buried in their crypt.

The perfumed palms of kingly bleeding saints.

The pilgrims sleep like cattle in the streets.

We gather sand and call it sacrament;

gather twigs and call it holy cross.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

(on the death of alexander)

The ways we bend
avoiding light

Of bows—
their bending—
bowing down (the apple
thrown at Cleitus)

Or who directs or who
demands (if any
one at all)

And I the fool—
and me the fool—
and I the me
the fool encounters—

Kings!—not Lear,
not Christ —the fail
-ured kings
who kept their crowns—avoiding light, avoiding ground.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (a backscatter of dust, an atlantis of sand)

In the dream (another dream)

there were three (always three)

new laid plants (neo-phytes)

patched (and dappled)

in the light:

I am looking for perfection. I know nothing of
perfection.

gold. The Aztec valued feathers over

I don't know what to make of this:

Tanis, Kish, Iram, Ubar.

I wait and watch the dusted path
unfold.

II.

And I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruin, a lair of jackals.

Jeremiah 9:11

[in which the jackals show their faces]

I did not need many words.

I did not enjoy the shade.

I wasn't unlike rocks.

I knew my end, my fragrance.

May I introduce you to my friend, the Jackal?

(He aches me.)

If not the Jackal in the daylight.

If not the horse's ample calf.

If not thieves, the shattered window pane breaks in uponward.

If not the mapping of their bounty.

If not when waters overflow.

The horse's even-tempered sigh —

The Jackal's scramble up the stud—

& down, & down, & higher.

If the Jackal when the footprints.

If the ladder why the Jackal.

If the drinking why not dripping down its downy beard.

If the thieves in broken windows.

If the Jackal if the Jackal.

If why how the horse do horsey things by rivers, lakes, etc.

If do that and that the this then how the horses do their horsing.

I was going into town to warn the people
of the danger, how the voices were attacking,
how the visions were relentless, how the smell
the sound the buzzing from the bugs—

[in which i give the jackals names]

I, shivering, fearing full:

fruit flies fend about my navel:

*Did not days,
hard & mourning,
weep disaster?*

*Did not I, morning hard, storm through
your soul? Afflict your bones?
Terror, fever, brother skin?*

I are dead horse.

They am whiplash.

They are willow, whimple, windlass.

I'd be pleased enough with poetry.

Pleased enough without the Jackals crying in my mouths.

They are wilderness, discovered. I am tabernacle, taken down.

Terrified of mouths & Jackal: holy, brazen, and condemned.

[in which the jackals prophecy against me]

In which we raise a banner on a hilltop.

In which the leaping goats are seized and slaughtered.

In which in terror, look aghast:

castles turned to desert.

[in which the jackals judge the nations]

In which the bodies shrivel from the fig tree.

In which we calf&kidney them together.

In which the Jackals crown their Jackal heads.

In which the wicked fools are wicked fools.

[in which the jackals joy, redeem]

In which the crocus bursts in bloom.

In which the lonely leap like deer.

In which the nettles rise in smoke.

In which the owls eat their young.

[in which the jackals whisper secrets]

in which the labors aren't imagined.

[in which i try to overcome]

I lengthen, I sicken, I stretch, I weaken the pass.

Three times I wake in the night.

The Jackals laugh, they laugh,
laughing).

(continue

And am I fool for their enjoyment?
them alone?

Do I cease for

I walked from one place to the next,
a village to a village, towns & cities,
great ones, counting time through
cry of cock-crow — well? 1. The day
begins, the swell of grasses heating
2. The day continues and continues
and continues once again 3. The day
the breath the bodies cease, etc, etc,
I was angry I was cold; the rain, the
snow, the lonely looks of those who
hadn't heard the news, the troubled
cry the anguished cry the pleased
moan slash doleful cry of animals
in rapture.

I walk until my feet aren't feet, my toes untoed and crossing.

I don't have anything to give but this, my flesh, the space between me.

[in which the jackals overwhelm]

The Jackals make their faces
frightened).

(angry, sad, and

The Jackals throw their stones at faces
frightened).

(angry, sad, and

The Jackals by the asters, cast their shadows, cast their stones at faces
frightened).

(angry, sad, and

The Jackals by the asters, by the thorn-grove, by the by.

The Jackals sing their songs on branches
watching).

(watching, always

The white rat (day), the black rat (night),
sunday).

(the raven on a

The welled up eyes
mouth

mouth).

(the mouth the mouth the

the mouth the mouth the

The healthy goat eats only grass
sneezeweed).

(the wounded goat eats

[in which the jackals storm away]

When the waters rise, inevitably,
& swallow up the mountain:

When the mountains were, before, just mountains,
then, & without hesitation, stood

on their four feet & walked away across the plain:

I'll shake my fist if that's preferred:
I'll quote the scripture:

*go now / rich men / weep & howl / miseries
shall be upon you / gold & silver all moth-
eaten & your flesh it / heaped together / as last days
behold!*

[in which the jackals give their sentence]

*And though with your own hand you
Jackal, Jackal, Jackal?*

*In adversary, boasted all day long? In laughing-Jackal-
stock your soul is sunk?*

(The goats are captured, tied, & shorn
& hurried up the mountain)

You shall be mouths of liars, dry / You shall be dry & thirsting.

*And ever-parched & ever-
parched: you shadow, help, & silence
Jackal: cling & clutch for water.*

Moan like sin & mountain.

*Moan & roll in dust, disalcèd,
wax before the fire.*

[in which i give the jackals me]

Or how can one thing equal nine
how this be this or that or what the ways

the count them ways
in which we spoke of cast-

les passages through randomness
that were and weren't both the choosing

what if anything is cast
the brightness here is shuddering

what goes on and on like ants
colonial and vesting

terrible news for Jackals who once
congregated this and there

terrible just terrible to be those dogs who
thrown a bone just wince and whine astounded.

Will one plow there with oxen?

And what, I wonder, did the Rabbi
say about mistake.

The way it galls and shackles
and architectures on your soul:

The abandoned abacus strains.

Rain water fills a bucket to the brim.

Horses worry that we never live again.

We mistake the taste of hemlock for the truth.

III.

As the hesychast in heat

I saw you in the trees.

I felt the shaking of the leaves
that came as both a quiver
and a whiplash to the eaves
that overhang on thoughts,
on moments, solipses'd and
faithless to the ever-thinning
sheaves—

of wood? of skin?—that
undertow the passage that exhales
but never breathes, that bereaves
but never grieves.

You are nothing more than riddle.

I don't know how to carry on
in anything that fails to show
itself—or show its need—you

ask we pray but never cease
you ask we pray but never cease
you ask we pray but never cease
you ask we pray but never cease—

Every sentence, life

There is a song for this I'm sure.

There are words in other languages, forgotten —
remember Babel? That ghastly tower, that silent
streak of light. That herd of language, thundering,
colliding in the mud-bricked walls —

you glued our mouths with loam, turned
our tongues to trappist cells, assassin's
lips went dumb, & birds flew overhead

like animals that scratch & squawk with pride —
but they are animals, of course, & aren't
we all? & so, since then, I keep my life
in quietude. In hum-hushed tongue, molecular.

◆

The flies are back again —
The flies, the voices, but also the flies —

I let them take from me their fill.
I let them brisk, I let them flutter.

If all in life is this or that, then what am I?

I hide from nothing.
I am answered & all-known to you.

You took me up the mountain but no intervention came —
slit my earthen throat & heaped the remnants on the pile.

◆

There is a reason for doing it this way —
& not, like the others, puffed with pride
& sprouting. I remember to save
each other. I jump in front of cars
& am trampled.

For what? For you, of course.

If only that I knew, like gar, to swim.
I'd catch myself within your net —
I'd light a charcoal stove & lay—

◆

Do you remember the birds
you sent for guidance? The little ones
with broken wings? They lived, the nestlings,
in my arms,

I fed them milk, they bloomed right there,
like orchids, in my hands. I read to them
at night your words —

at times I thought I was transcending —
at times I thought they kissed my hands & took
me for their own.

They grew & left & I felt smallness.

I know you love me, know you love, but why
then must you end me?

Why must I ask? Why must I forget
& never ask? Why, in forgetting, must I ask
again for more?

I love you, but you gave me
love — feel you, but you gave me hands —
& then must I, to see, gouge out my sullen eyes?

◆

What profane pride for me to ask — what blind
insanity — I forget the meal I ate just now, the thistle,
and the locust — It is better than anticipated — I feast

on rotten herbs for you, am broken with delight — broken
with imaginaries, delight in your abundance:

you're ceaseless & invisible & yet I think
I hide.

I put your book between my teeth
so I can taste its words. They cling to me: the tower,
mountain, birds you took like Job —

at night, I boil bones & salt for broth —

salt, the taste, is not just you, but all of us—
your reminders that we suffer,
here: I lick them clean.

I tend toward smallness

My life had been collecting stones
& washing them in waters

I've never been to this place
or to that one

My wish had been to be
unnerved before & after: mountains
march in progress, forward, take
my palms as proof

I make a list of passerines

(it's horrible containment):

the raven, rook, and treepie,

magpie, jackdaw, chough,

& jay.

I count the mealworms in my toes:

(smell my breath: salvation).

IV.

Fauxbourdon

The hilltop swollen with a flag.
The smell of bread, the smell of bread.

The burred & bayoneted wind.
The hedge that faltered by the fen.

The pigs that fattened in their pens.
The flowers strewn up in their stead.

The unkempt hair, the unwashed hand.
The cankered waking the misled.

The wakerobin that dampens, droops,
while we, unstooped, begin again.

Wren (Invocation)

Then came: ruin.

I wonder where you are.

Then came: ruin.

I walk along the scars.

I turn to scarecrow, crying out.

I worry about the dangers.

Wren, almost shouldered, almost wind:

I was not made of stones.

Wren came: ruin.

Wren reckons, widens: *clench*.

pose questions, run astray.

. . . and?

We walk along the scars.

Then wren wry and dry. I

Wren flies, thicket out

Wren Song #1

Smoke abandons mist in backwards glance;
The under-knowing eye looks upward, past

the fluttered bugs, the un-towned crown of sky,
that figure-eight in its presumptive glance;

I carry like a rock or stack of rocks;
An all-too-knowing fog of past-attempts;

The river laps my body, topples stones
on toppled-stones: a fictive mass.

And if the past is that rock on the shore,
and all the little birdies come and go

into that rock, into those rocks below,
to wrest away what troubles they have known,

then where do I seek out that one success
that is and isn't water on my toes?

My toes, my bones, a rock in their own sense;
A rock that shipwrecks all the rocks in tow.

O tree of knowledge, tree of life, of pain;
Of rocks and river-rocks stacked on the shore;

Of tyrant-time and tyrant-undertow;
Build up a covenant within my bones.

My knuckle's fast approach at your attempts
to feed me song and feed me underfed

articulations of your twig and stem:
is this the pain that they all underwent?

Wren (Convocation)

We are not *exactly* fused.

Honestly, wren frightens.

I walk; wren stutters.

I write *wren stutters*.

It was almost almost right.

I try to, often, get things close.

I sing about the crevices.

Wren rots; I welter.

I sing about the sighs.

We pass sounds back like this between us.

I, to wren, says: *breath of kings?*

The gesture folds, unfolds.

The crowned-bird watches, watches.

The poet sits as always in their chair.

We count us up an inventory:

Dust, weeping, and there, the gnashing of teeth.

Wren Song #2

14 waterfowl seen between the day;
a blanket, or a balm, it fails to say;

14 raindrops pinnacling their way
down backs of brants, down coots, down mutes, down cranes;

The birdie pants as water clutches shore;
The earth that fails to molt fails to restore;

The cupboard is the shadow of the drawer
that holds the bones of birds found on the shore.

This shore, this deep, that deepens as I go;
That culls and cataracts as though I know

the difference in a breakage, in a beam
of light, or lichen, rippled into stream;

And breakage, steadfast, breaks into a whole,
breaks into fragment, breaks again to bone,

and broken, breakage, breaks again to broken
words and images un-sown.

And now the birdie, clench-caught in the jaw;
The angled teeth that widen and withdraw;

This maw, new-found and final, lays its claim
to sound, and soundless soundings from the maimed

and martyred ambler, gravel-gone, but
song-struck by the visions carried on;

Who sees three moths ablaze in candle-flame;
And writes: *the wildness framed / the wildness tamed.*

Wren (Revocation)

And though I went in silence I stood out amongst the whole.

Wren says: *disappear*.

I try, I say, I try, I say, I try.

And yet, wren tells me, here.

I do my best explaining wren to friends.

They don't always understand.

Wren is out today, I say, into the air.

Wren is (almost almost) gone.

I, wren-clasped, grasp at straws:

Wren. . .risen?

No. . .

. . .ridden?

Wren says . . .

Then says . . .

I say . . .

Wren says . . .

Wren, riven, exits: gone.

Wren Song #3

I take salvation in its bite-sized forms;
I wonder if the sandman comes at night;

I pack the stones in piles by the shore;
I tend the garden of earthly delight.

And if it were that I could comprehend
the ways through cloud and music wren ascends?

I count the birds that falter as they fly;
is I awry with wren or wren with I?

Is I awry with wren or wren with I?
Is I a rock as much as wren is sky?

Is this the final breakage into cry
that leaves the I and wren solidified?

Now wren in mist; in terror; wren in doubt;
in chariot; in mantle; wren in cloud;

in recrudescant language, lingered on;
in mud-formed, muffled, birdie-brokered song.

If wren is wren or if wren, unwrenned, still
maintains its name or if its bloodied bill

lies plume-plucked, no more cormorant than crow,
nor wren, nor birdie, tomb-tucked, overthrown;

Or if wren is ascension, if wren's flight,
if birdie faithful-wakes into the night,

then I and wren and birdie (all the same)
run wrack on ruin, ruddered, undecayed.

Wren (Invocation)

Then a fallen, then a thunder.

Wren flies that way, scared.

I was lostness: could not find wren, could not seize wren.

I ate, drank, slept in bits.

I passages'd around.

I let wren say, as weeping: . . .*etc.*

Then wren prods the ground.

Wren, dressed in kings, stone-set, set-stone —

Wren: *In these stages of collapse, I. . .*

If the numbers counted up were counted down again. . .

Wren says: *batten hatches*.

Wren lets me say, as weeping: . . .*etc.*

I go wood-wose, wandering around.

I count the syllables: 14.

I count the letters: 47.

Wren to deep water: *now?*

I play a song for wren, wren likes it.

Wren asks me: *play again*.

Wren lets wren weep, says: . . . *etc*.

I and wren go, hand-by-hand, away.

[this page intentionally left blank]

[in which I question all I knew]

We walked alone, the growing of the grass
between our cheeks, and still, it magnified
your presence in the future and the past.

As if you weren't the tread beneath our tracks;
as if you weren't the paver of our paths;
we walked alone. The growing of the grass

was stalling; still we loved—we begged—to pass
the time ignoring you (our maker and our mast);
your presence in the future and the past;

your presence in the mule and in the ass,
and in the horse, the stable, in the past-
ures growing on; the growing of the grass

that told us of your presence, and your last
reminders—unrelenting chance—
that presuppose a future and a past.

And all the birds that followed us, and all
the questions had but never asked,
were present. In the future, and the past,
we walked. Alone: the growing of the grass.