

Hearing the Voices of Jewish Women: Week 4

Source Sheet by Danielle Kranjec

What texts do we include in our learning?
How do we help ourselves see and be seen in our tradition?
What does it mean to include modern texts, and texts beyond the traditional canon of religious texts?

Eight Days in April by Marilyn Hacker

1.

I broke a glass, got bloodstains on the sheet:
hereafter, must I only write you chaste
connubial poems? Now that I have traced
a way from there to here across the sweet-
est morning, rose-blushed blonde, will measured feet
advance processionally, where before
they scuff-heeled flights of stairs, kicked at a door,
or danced in wing-tips to a dirty beat?
Or do I tell the world that I have got
rich quick, got lucky (got laid), got just what
the doctor ordered, more than I deserved?
This is the second morning I woke curved
around your dreaming. In one night, I've seen
moonset and sunrise in your lion's mane.

2.

Moons set and suns rise in your lion's mane
through LP kisses or spread on my thighs.

Winter subsided while I fantasized
what April dawns frame in the windowpane.
Sweetheart, I'm still not getting enough sleep,
but I'm not tired, and outside it's spring
in which we sprang the afternoon shopping
after I'd been inside you, O so deep
I thought we would be tangled at the roots.
I think we are. (I've never made such noise.
I've never come so hard, or come so far
in such a short time.) You're an exemplar
piss-elegance is not reserved for boys.
Tonight we'll go out in our gangster suits.

3.

Last night we went out in our gangster suits,
but just across the street to Santerello's,
waited past nine for wine. We shone; the fellows
noticed. "You have a splendid linen coat,"
Dimitri told you as he sat us down.
(This used to be my local; now it's chic.)
A restaurant table's like a bed: we speak
the way we do calmed after love, alone
in the dark. There's a lot to get to know.
We felt bad; we felt better. Soon I was
laid back enough to drink around the bend.
You got me home, to bed, like an old friend.
I like you, Rachel, when you're scared, because
you tough it out while you're feeling it through.

4.

You tough it out while while you're feeling it through:
sometimes the bed's rocked over tidal waves
that aren't our pleasures. Everyone behaves
a little strangely when they're in a new
neighborhood, language, continent, time zone.

We got here fast; your jet lag's worse than mine.
I only had Paris to leave behind.
You left your whole young history. My own
reminds me to remind you, waking shaken
with tears, dream-racked, is standard for the course.
We need accommodation that allows
each one some storage space for her dead horse.
If the title weren't already taken,
I'd call this poem "Directions to My House."

5.

I'd call this poem "Directions to My House,"
except today I'm writing it in yours,
in your paisley PJ's. The skylight pours
pale sunlight on white blankets. While I douse
my brain with coffee, you sleep on. Dream well
this time. We'll have three sets of keys apiece:
uptown, downtown, Paris on a sublease.
Teach me to drive. (Could I teach you to spell?)
I think the world's our house. I think I built
and furnished mine with space for you to move
through it, with me, alone in rooms, in love
with our work. I moved into one mansion
the morning when I touched, I saw, I felt
your face blazing above me like a sun.

6.

Your face blazing above me like a sun-
deity, framed in red-gold flames, gynandre
in the travail of pleasure, urgent, tender
terrible—my epithalamion
circles that luminous intaglio
—and you under me as I take you there,
and you opening me in your mouth where
the waves inevitably overflow

restraint. No, no, that isn't the whole thing
(also you drive like cop shows, and you sing
gravel and gold, are street-smart, book-smart,
laugh from your gut) but it is (a soothing
poultice applied to my afflicted part)
the central nervous system and the heart.

7.

The central nervous system and the heart,
and whatever it is in me wakes me
at 5 am regardless, and what takes me
(when you do) ineluctably apart
and puts me back together; the too-smart,
too-clumsy kid gluttoned on chocolate cakes (me
at ten); the left-brain righteousness that makes me
make of our doubled dailiness an art
are in your capable square hands. O sweet,
possessives make me antsy: we are free
to choose each other perpetually.

Though I don't think my French short-back-and-sides
means I'll be the most orthodox of brides,
I broke a glass, got bloodstains on the sheet.