

So That They Shall Not Say This Is Jezebel



ALIKI BARNSTONE

SO THAT THEY SHALL NOT SAY,
THIS IS JEZEBEL

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LOCOFO CHAPS

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Plume: “On August 6;”

Rattle, Poets Respond: “Late January Thaw, Refugees, Fragments”

Spark & Echo: “So That They Shall Not Say, This Is Jezebel;”

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SO THAT THEY SHALL NOT SAY, THIS IS JEZEBEL

1

The one who tells the story has power to erase
a story, a nation, a faith, “so that they shall not say,
 This is Jezebel,”
Phoenician princess who became Queen of Israel.
So that a woman shall not speak, a woman shall not
have power to tell the story.

2

Emily Dickinson wrote “The Bible is an antique Volume
Written by faded men.” Skilled at the artful smear
such men make a Queen faithful to her own
a harlot, a fleshpot, a despot.

3

He looms behind her as she speaks,
taunts her for daring to lead.

4

The King of Greed rants she is pushy,
brags he grabs pussy, rapes a child, lies
every 196 seconds, fact-checkers reckon.

5

The teachings say she was a dominating wife,
with “force of intellect and will,” and none
of the “nobler feminine qualities” of selflessness.

6

Faded men with faded skin, evolved from migrating
 North,
away from sunlight and warmth, away from the Mother
 God
brown-skinned Isis, whose name they disgrace, make a
 terror curse—
Isis, friend of slaves and artisans,
icon of the icon of Mother and Child.

7

After her son was murdered, knowing she, too, would
 be killed,

Queen Jezebel dressed, arranged her hair, and lined her
eyes with kohl,
prepared herself for the grave where she would never be
lain.

Her last question: “Does he have peace, who slays his
Lord?”

8

His answer: “Throw her down!” Pushed out the high
window,
adorned in a gold embroidered and tasseled hyacinth
gown,
her blood splashed on her palace wall and on her
assassins’ horses.

“He trode her under foot” till he was king
and he left his Queen’s corpse to be eaten by dogs,
except the skull, feet, and palms.

9

“And her carcass shall be as dung on the field...
so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel,” write
the faded men
who deem their story the Word of the Lord.

10 THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME

- 1 When I go to bed, I live in a house on a lake. When I dream I climb the oak and return to a treehouse on a river.
- 2 Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* so when I learned to read, I'd recognize myself in a book.
- 3 I wear blue when I travel to ward off the evil eye. Sometimes it's just my underwear.
- 4 I have conversations with my dead friends.
- 5 Most days I wish I were a painter. Some days I paint.
- 6 The first time I heard Billy Holiday's voice, I was lying on a floor in Providence and the darkness was a velvet glove stroking my face.
- 7 When I was a kid we swung on vines that always broke eventually.
- 8 I'm in love with John and Yoko.
- 9 When I was in elementary school, I read all the biographies in the school library.
- 10 Sometimes I know things I don't want to know and it's too much.

GALACTIC

- 1 Today the word galactic makes me think of milk. I spot the Greek root, *gala*, also the root of lactation, the Milky Way, like me, nourished matrilineally, O, Source beyond time.
- 2 Our Source who art in heaven,
God is not my Father,
yet not my Mother.
- 3 God waves from the black sunflower seed shells on the ground
when cardinals and sparrows rise sated to the oak branches and
sky.
- 4 *Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap.*
- 5 Blue sky! Color of the joyful spirit!
Yet it's said our seeing blue is new,
no word for the color in Homer's Greek.
- 6 What euphoric depths must be the wine dark sea
that wasn't blue until we were nostalgic for it.
- 7 When I close my eyes and become galactic, I count
my heartbeats on my tongue.
When I speak I cannot feel my heart beating, yet hope
my words breathe like the word
that was, is, and will be God.
- 8 Most of the time, my daughter doesn't want my help, so I pray to
the Galactic One to keep her safe. I wonder if I should pray
instead to the whales plumbing the wine dark oceans, singing in
complex variations of tempo, crescendo, and emphasis, a
composition constantly shifting, reshaped, improvised.
- 9 When my daughter's home for spring break, lunatic laughter comes
from her room, where she and her friends venture into the world
wide web from her cloud bed, their smart phones and laptops lit
up among the sheets and duvet, their young limbs and bright faces.
- 10 Lunatic refers to the moon. I pray to a celestial body
who is not my mother.

- 11 A hard frost is predicted. I pick a hundred daffodils in my yard, array the masses in vases, snap a selfie haloed by yellows, and text it to my mother.
- 12 Days my human loves are away, my best company is myself and the simple presence of the dogs and cats, stretched on pillows, laying their paws on me. With God's creatures breathing beside me, I make up new stories about the Milky Way and her daughters and her daughter's daughters, milk-drops shining.
- 13 My mother sends me a text, says I look like a daffodil.

ON AUGUST 6

- 1 On the altar: 7 white roses in a tall narrow vase, the glass abstracting the candle flame, a delicate fire fountain leaping among thorns and stems, fallen petals curled, wrinkled, scarred on a silk table cloth, six coins for crossing the River of Three Crossings.
- 2 After sunrise yoga,
I take my peace—
shanti, shanti, shanti—
to the car.
- 3 The radio tells me today is the 70th anniversary of the first dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. A table set for morning tea, sunflowers high in the blue window, lavender scenting August heat, a mother holds her toddler's soft foot in her hand, slipping on a sandal. At 8:15 a.m. all simple, daily beauty is aflame. No justification.
- 4 Nothing, nothing,
nothing I can

say. Yet I speak

anyway, anyway
any way I can.
- 5 I turn left on the green arrow. A truck turns right on red, not looking, almost hitting me. I veer away from injury or death in a split second, repairing the unpredictable rent in time—this time I was lucky.
- 6 The empty birdfeeders sway in the breeze.
I'm negligent. Must go into the heat
and fill them.
- 7 The gong that rings at 8:15 a.m.
when the city falls almost silent
in memory

sounds like the singing bowl
marking the end

of mediation.

- 8 “The bells tolled and white doves were released into skies as clear as they were on August 6, 1945.”
- 9 So it is reported.

BOB DYLAN, JOAN BAEZ, AND A MYSTICAL CHILD

- 1 The first Bob Dylan record I listened to over and over, *Nashville Skyline*, was my parents' in 1969. I was a mystical child.
- 2 Fall of '75: to score tickets to Rolling Thunder Revue, my friend and I camped before dawn on a Providence sidewalk, dry leaves blowing from gutters into our hair. The war was over. Later I recalled Rolling Thunder carpet-bombed Vietnam.
- 3 Cobalt glass candlesticks.
Cobalt Mexican wine glasses brimming
with purple-microdot-spiked wine.

We're tangled up in blue sheets—candlelight
releases flocks of tiny doves skimming
the wine dark sea rippling and swirling

moonless
starry, starry night.
- 4 *Your eyes are like two jewels in the sky.*
—sapphire, peridot, amber, tiger eye,
depending on the lover.
- 5 I wasn't gonna serve someone or anyone,
no man, no devil, no lord.
- 6 Now I carry a rosewood rosary in my purse, purchased in the
Ironbound District of Newark from a Portuguese woman with
eyes like blue topaz.
- 7 I loved Joan Baez just as much. My lover played jazz guitar naked,
then put Billie Holiday on the turntable and played my whole
length stretched out on a mattress on the floor. I broke it off
when he almost said my poetry was lousy, not quite. Was it for
vanity's sake or to keep a thief from breaking me and stealing my
art? There would be no diamonds for me, no laying up treasures
moth and rust corrupt, but I lay up a few days in Providence, a
few memories in rust belt heaven, where my heart is.
- 8 Civilization lessons wait in the ark.
Unroll them to hear God's thunder,

our faces become blank with light,
having spoken with the Most High
face-to-face.

- 9 Bob Dylan sang in whiteface, his eyes lined with kohl. Joan Baez sang, her spine straight as the flowering rod, her short hair a halo in spotlights, her voice rising with the psalmist, where “the birds of heaven dwell.”
- 10 Nights I was like Isis, a mystical child and no mystical wife, I woke to the chill beneath the blankets, Providence wind-tunes droning from the cracks in the windowsills. I shifted away from him, from loyalty, and could not stay another night.
- 11 I stood at the soap-scummed sink,
brushed on the midnight eyeliner
he drunkenly swore
made me like a whore.
“Let’s go down to the Silvertop Diner,” I said.
“One more cup of coffee for the road.”

ELEVEN ON WOMEN, THE VOTE, AND PROSPECTIVES

- 1 I organize my tasks with lists while my fears and desires vie for attention. I can't tell which is which, the arguing is so noisy.
- 2 At its deepest points the ocean is three Mt. Everests upside down where no sunlight can ever reach, nor whales, nor human divers. Sunlight, whales, human divers—my list is, I suppose, in reverse order, by what convention I do not know.
- 3 There's t-shirt of the galaxies with an arrow pointing to a minuscule dot: *You are here!*
- 4 On Facebook a man calls me imbecilic, stupid, illogical, sexist, vulgar, loudmouthed, and proclaims I vote with my vagina. That is his list.
- 5 The depths of the ocean, the expanse of the universe, the world wide web.
- 6 Is azure the color of the sky today?
Or is sky the pigment shining on my mother's palette?
While I write about her in the next room,
my mother paints a portrait of her mother,
born before women could vote.
Is azure merely a pretty word that cannot contain
the lightless depths of the ocean, only the surface
on which it reflects the sky?
- 7 My mother and I go to the polls together and joyfully vote for a woman president.
- 8 Susan B. Anthony was arrested in 1872 in Rochester, New York, her crime to use her mind to vote, the indictment read, "being then and there a person of the female sex." Such are the laws made by penises.
- 9 When a woman runs for office, she does not cover her head with ashes and dung as Queen Ester did and pray, "Put eloquence in my mouth before the lion and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us."
No, a woman who runs for office *closes the valves*

of her attention to rumors and hisses, organizes
eloquent voices, and takes up the task.

- 10 Emily Dickinson read the news in several papers delivered
morning, afternoon, and evening, and withdrew to her writing
table:

*—accept the pillage
for progress' sake—*

- 11 Eleven is the mirror number. Task eleven: Read yesterday; mirror
today.

TODAY IS BEAUTIFUL TO STAY INSIDE

- 1 Today is beautiful to stay inside, the chill wind swaying the evergreen boughs and beside our house shadow, the sun aslant on the December yard.
- 2 The media uses the “new normal” to describe the cataclysmic, fear of ordinary things, sitting in a café or school and remembering those who were shot.
- 3 Grateful for window glass the blue sky makes invisible.
- 4 My orange cat rests in the center of the quilt, keeping me company or guarding my attention doesn’t stray too far from him.
- 5 Sometimes I don’t want to think about the Earth. *A Holiday Heat Wave* says the headlines. *Flint Mayor Declares a State of Emergency over Lead in Water*
- 6 Our neighbors’ cat jumps over the chainlink fence. His name is Sport.
- 7 A chickadee is pecking at the vines covering the arbor. I hope it’s eating dried grapes we didn’t harvest in August.
- 8 Sometimes it’s beautiful to stay home.
- 9 When I began writing the windowpanes were full of light. Now they are graying with sundown and I remember the people who were shot, their faces on the screens, and the numbers this time and the numbers last time and the numbers the time before the last time. *The last time, the last time*, I whisper, the phrase losing meaning.
- 10 I stood in Emily Dickinson’s bedroom, her corner of the Homestead, one wide window facing mountains she called “my Strong Madonnas,” the other window looked toward Amherst’s downtown, the “dark parade,” Civil War maimed and dead, circus elephants ambling from the station, the steam locomotive she liked “to see lap the miles,” the procession of Sundays—

loved ones crossing Main Street to the stone church.

- 11 Blue sky signals joy, probably something in the brain's synapses. Sadness is like gravity that weighs us down, ages our skin, yet holds us here, pulling oxygen close, gifting the Earth breath.

LATE JANUARY THAW, REFUGEES, FRAGMENTS

The Christmas cactus opens like white gulls
diving toward the sea, their red beaks leading.

The late January thaw gives my muscles peace
and I put off deadlines.

If I could join
my breath with others
across oceans, if we
could share the air,
atmosphere be
love's common lungs.

The student recently released from solitary in Iran says his cell was six by seven, and he's over six feet tall. There was no bed but he took comfort to know others in the building, also in solitary, were journalists, professors, artists, thinkers, poets.

Five geese walk in unison over ice.
Others drift in the oval where ice has melted.
Near the lakes' far shady bank still others rest,
heads tucked into their bodies.

My feet are cold when his radio words enter me.
My toes curl beneath my chair.
My socks and sweater are navy blue and soft.
My black cat in the seat beside me purrs,
mewing a bit, and bumping the top of her head
against my elbow.

A fragment.
A boat sinking
off the coast
of Samos.

All at once the whole flock rises,
their wide wings flickering
shadows on ice.

Gusting wind.

Rusty oak leaves wobble wildly
but do not fall.

Oppressed on Lesbos, Sappho wrote her daughter,
*I have no embroidered headband
for you, Kleis...*

Fragments of clothing, plastic, or wood
on the water's surface.
24 dead. 9 of them children.
Yesterday
alone.

The tea kettle wails to my soul,
Aflame, aflame.
A video shows ambulances racing from the quay.

A fragment
of understanding.
Words in Arabic,
Greek, English.
Fake life preservers
piled on the beach.

Tamman Azzam (musical name) photoshopped
Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* over a bombed out
Syrian building.

Ancient walls
or new.
Fabric of craters.
The Kiss
on ghosts
of living-
quarters.

Even so, the parents tie a bright ribbon around their little daughter's head
before they board the unsafe boat.

Today the sun makes gray ice and clouds
luminous silver, though some would call it white.

Today an African violet bloomed and looks out
from a corner of windowpane at birdfeeders swinging in a breeze,

geese huddled on the ice.

Tonight another freeze.
The hours of sun become
glowing fragments
in wintertime.

A crowded raft.
Another raft behind it.
Rescuers with red cross vests wade out.
A bottle of water.
A snack.
Some dry shoes and clothes offered
from bins lining the beach
where once were chaise lounges
and generous umbrellas.

Samos, Rhodos, Kos, Leros, Lesvos.

In the State Historical Society of Missouri hangs the painting, *Order Number 11*. The guides explains the self-emancipated slaves, who are fleeing toward us, out of the picture plane, are refugees.

A boy and a man.
A man who hides his face
in his hands.
A wide-eyed boy
in rags.

The candles burning on my dining room table are for memory,
Oh, transporting scents.

No. The little flames
focus attention
inside where
there are no
borders.

House sparrows fight over birdseed.
They came from Europe.
They kill off the native bluebirds.

Somewhere in Syria, Yazidi women are slaves.

The enterprising refugees
gather discarded pool toys,
life preservers, so-called,
fashion them into purses
and messenger bags.

The sewing machines—
gifts from the people of Lesbos
where Sappho wrote poems
not intended to be fragments:

*The bright
ribbon reminds me of those days
when our enemies were in exile.*

On the high hill above the beach and ruined rafts and wooden boats
and full graveyards, people from all over the world gather
life jackets and water wings and form an enormous peace sign.

A sign made
of wrecked
life preservers.
Preserve life.
A sign to be
seen by people
from the air,
breathing air.

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Eileen Tabios – *To Be An Empire Is To Burn*

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Francesco Levato – *A Continuum of Force*

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John Goodman – *Twenty Moments that Changed the World*

Donna Kuhn – *Don't Say His Name*

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Gabriel Gudding – *Bed From Government*

mIEKAL aND – *Manifesto of the Moment*

Garin Cycholl – *Country Musics 20/20*

Mary Kasimor – *The Prometheus Collage*

lars palm – *case*

Reijo Valta – *Truth and Truthmp*

Andrew Peterson – *The Big Game is Every Night*

Romeo Alcala Cruz – *Archaeoteryx*

John Lowther – *18 of 555*

Jorge Sánchez – *Now Sing*

Alex Gildzen — *Disco Naps & Odd Nods*

Barbara Janes Reyes – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry, vol. 2*

Luisa A. Igloria – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry, vol. 3*

Tom Bamford – *The Gag Reel*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Humpty Drumpfty and Other Poems*

Allen Bramhall – *Bleak Like Me*

Kristian Carlsson – *The United World of War*

Roy Bentley – *Men, Death, Lies*

Travis Macdonald – *How to Zing the Government*

Kristian Carlsson – *Dhaka Poems*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted*

Martha Deed – *We Should Have Seen This Coming*

Matt Hill – *Yet Another Blunted Ascent*

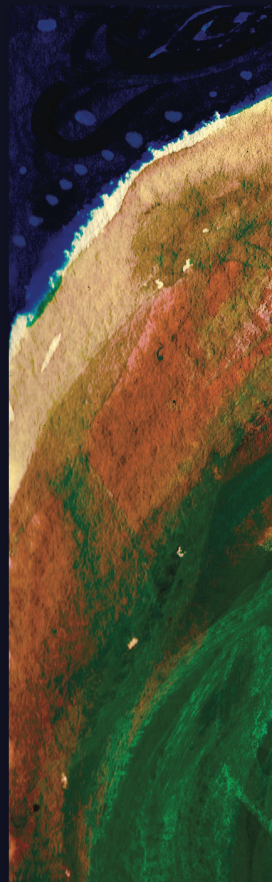
Patricia Roth Schwartz – *Know Better*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Petty Poetry for SCROTUS' Girls, with poems for Elizabeth Warren and Michelle Obama*
Freke Rähä – *Explanation model for 'Virus'*
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Aileen Casinnetto – *Tweet*
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Carol Dorf – *Some Years Ask*
Marthe Reed – *Data Primer*
Carol Dorf – *Some Years Ask*
Amy Bassin and Mark Blickley – *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes From the Underground*
Nate Logan – *Post-Reel*
Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump and the Pocket Oracle*

Luisa A. Igloria – *Check & Balance*

Aliki Barnstone – *So That They Shall Not Say, This Is Jezebel*

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