Suburbs of Zion

Roberta P. Feins

He who drinks wine to the accompaniment of music
is culpable unless he is thinking of the destruction of the Temple,
and forcing his heart to be sad. Rabbi Hai Gaon 11th century

i. Sabbath ‘63

Moses (maybe God), our white-bearded Rabbi
leans out the pulpit's prow, Captain
of Progress in difficult waters. Candle-flame
heads of bronze women dance,

jeweled eternal light sways on a leash,
above Cantor’s Purify our hearts
truth truth truth, accompanied
by a choir’s Episcopal trill.

Ark doors pray in verdigris letters
punctuated with grapes, peacocks. Slid open,
lights go on inside (like our home Frigidaire).
Torah in mustard velvet, crowned silver

tinkling bells, cradled doll. This week’s
portion, The Golden Calf: vain worship
false gilded. Rabbi lines the undressed
scroll with a slender silver pointer.

If I were bereaved, I could now rise
from dark honey pew and chant Kaddish.
Rabbi blesses us all, his arms extend to our bowed heads.
We kiss left and right, Good Shabbos.
Suburbs of Zion, continued

Phil lifts me up, swings me around. We laugh through bronze-handled doors, past Moses with his seagulls into the Social Hall, where we bless grape juice, cookies:

Baroque adorns and annoys.
Jello halo make like a nun;
Pray pre-McMuffin.

I sneak daisy cookies to wear on my fingers, nibble thin, thinner. Fragrant Mother, Dad in his suit talk and talk, till I’ve tugged and tugged at their resisting arms.

You cannot, he said, leaning forward, poking at Dad’s disagreement get them to work. We hire them, God knows, but they’re lazy and they steal. Don’t last 6 weeks.

Line of poplars guard dark parking. Mother lingers over good-bye; Buick curves the deep, mysterious Parkway. Dad sings We are coming home; I wake.

ii. Dissolution

Rabbi’s retired to Santa Fe with his young wife; nobody can lead prayers with the same expansive.
The new rabbi is so obese, Mom says, I can’t bear to watch him pray. Congregation split,
Suburbs of Zion, continued

north to richer suburbs, West to be nearer
grandchildren, cancer. Phil (rest in peace)
phoned around some Fridays to assure a minyan.
This Sabbath, the dead attend

t via bronze plaques nailed to the wall.
Widows wobble towards me, blue-ribbed claws
outstretched, smell of piss, perfume.
Minks crouch on their hunched shoulders.

The new Temple President extols Volunteerism.
*Everyone must participate, so no-one carries all the load.*
They squirm like school-children: staff’s gone,
library sold to a rare book collector, building

to an AME Church. How
will velvet, bronze, silver, tile learn
to praise Jesus? Now I may rise for Kaddish
below the scythe of Eternal Light. Bitter inclusion.

Punch and cookies still, but few greet Mom
remember her silver-shot gown,
prominent husband. The rabbi turns away
from her drag-footed approach.

*Silent ram’s horn, dark the candles
of mourning bronze women.
On parking lot poplars, we hang our lyres
Our tongues have forgotten their cunning.*
Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal Winter 2010 Volume 7 Number 2
ISSN 1209-9392
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\(^1\) Women in Judaism First Annual Writing Competition, First Place winner in Poetry.