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Lois Barr’s chapbook, *BioPoesis*, mobilizes the reader to a journey where the feminine subject is the nucleus and where her Jewishness marks her every step. Even though Barr refers to her poems as “adopted children,” meaning that they don’t have a common root, the chapbook’s thirteen poems convey the deep and meaningful passage of women through history: from Genesis to the modern world. The inherent Jewishness of the first biblical woman is reflected in the first four poems, where the creation of the world does not involve a big bang, but “a series of soft pops like champagne” and where the delicacy of the fig taunts both Eve and Adam and caution is presumptuously left aside.

The author does not remember how she happened upon the word “biopoesis” (the first poem and title of her chapbook), but says she loved the sound of it, as well as its meaning: of the Greek roots—bio for life and poesis for creation. Barr naturally loves the sound of words as a professor of Spanish at Lake Forest College and author of numerous poems and stories. (This chapbook won *Poetica Magazine*’s 2013 contest and she has been a Puschcart Prize nominee.) Her academic research focuses on Spanish and Latin American literature, with a special focus on Latin American Jewish Literature. In an interview in “The Whole Megillah” she states: “As a language teacher, I’ve always been in love with the sound of words, and so sometimes things I hear just stick with me and seem to need to be in a poem.” This enthusiasm is candidly depicted in her work.

Barr enters the modern world with “Eliahu Ha Nevi” and prophesized stories of journeys, multiple destinations, and compassionate memories. The author’s academic research inspired her
to write two of the poems in the chapbook. In “The Odessa News,” she found inspiration from her research on Isa Kremer and the poetry of Ilya Kaminsky. In the poem, Odessa is a city bursting with life, but also filled with despair. Her family’s history starts to unravel here and continues in later poems, depicting memories that shaped the author’s life. Interestingly, a paper from a conference Barr attended in 2008 inspired the subsequent poem, “Two-Week Visas.” The presenter’s talk motivated her to think about how one would feel when forced to renew a visa every two weeks. This piece of Jewish history took place in Portugal during the regime of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, who kept refugees in limbo (Portugal remained neutral during World War II). It was the Portuguese consul to France, Aristides Sousa Mendes, who expedited visas to Jews in need of an escape route—and he continued to do so even when his government asked him to stop. Barr’s poem methodically weaves the two worlds in which these limbo-stricken refugees live. Both Yiddish and Portuguese words are used, as well as imagined routines of those waiting endlessly.

From this point on, the poems become more intimate and personal. Barr tells about her grandmother’s journey from Bialystok to America. Barr’s family history is brilliantly reflected in “In Her Shoes,” but it is her Bubby who keeps calling for her attention, almost whispering in her ear: Bubby’s shoes, her dishes, her coking, her smells, can effortlessly represent the untold stories of countless women who migrated and started anew in an unknown land. However, there is a distinct Jewish narrative in the way Barr remembers, retells, and transmits her memories: the preparations for the Sabbath; keeping the milk, meat and pareve dishes separately; the Manischewitz wine on the table; the challah waiting to cool down. In a distinctive and revered way, the author celebrates the hardships as well as the delights of everyday life and of women’s crucial work to maintain traditions from generation to generation.

Is this Bubby the same woman who ate all the figs just like Eve did in “Leave Some Figs”? Is she the woman who wears her polyester Sears dress in “Bar Mitzvah Wear Circa
1960”? In Barr’s *Biopoesis* individual women become universal and the poems multiple their voices to reach the readers—both intellectually and emotionally. In the last poem of her chapbook, “Number Your Days,” the author playfully enumerates ways to live life in an instant, to live life to its fullest, to “exprime diem,” to count the days and to make them count. Barr instinctively suggests what the readers should do with her poems: “listen to their stories/with both ears and/both hands/open.” That is, willingly let her in the everyday reverie, let her tell her stories, let her summon women’s stories—Jewish women’s stories—and weave one collective story from Genesis to the present day.