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### Words Left Behind

I decided to write a series of poems based on the lives and work of some of the female authors we read in class, namely Bernarda Manuel, Glikl of Hameln, and Clarice Lispector. It has been a while since I wrote poetry, so I also hoped to reconnect with language in a way I have not for a few months. I was drawn to these three authors in particular because of the variety of the purposes of their writing. While Bernarda Manuel wrote her testimony with the specific purpose of defending herself from the Inquisition, Glikl wrote her own memoirs as a way to cope with her husband's death and leave an account for her family to read over the generations. Clarice Lispector wrote novels and short stories, a completely different genre. All three women also had different relationships to Judaism: Bernarda Manuel was from a converso family and had to face the Inquisition for her religious beliefs, Glikl was a pious woman despite facing discrimination, and Clarice Lispector did not reference Judaism much in her work, but still dealt with Jewish themes through analogy.

I structured my poem about Bernarda Manuel as a question and answer, in which instead of being questioned by the Inquisition, Manuel questions herself and the reader. In the "question" portion (the first two stanzas), I drew primarily on the chapter on Manuel that we read for class, finishing with the sentence "¿Qué culpa tengo yo?", or "How am I to blame?", quoted in the Vollendorf chapter. I decided to write the "answer" portion of the poem in Spanish to engage with the linguistic side of Manuel's life, and also as a way to bring some of my knowledge from my second major into the project.

I chose to write my poem inspired by Glikl as a list of things that might be passed on as a legacy. While rereading the parts of Glikl's journals that we read earlier this quarter, I was struck by how important leaving money for descendants was, as well as providing financial security for family members, whether children or elderly parents. Considering the fact that Glikl's journals were intended to be an ethical will for her descendants, I thought it would be interesting to consider the kinds of things that, according to Glikl's journal, can serve as a legacy.

In my third poem, I incorporated details from Lispector's biography as well as elements from the short story we read in class, "Forgiving God." Although the narrator of the story is not necessarily Lispector herself, I wanted to engage with the last sentence of the story, "As long as I invent God, He doesn't exist," to link the narrator's invention of God with the creative process of being a writer. Being of Brazilian descent myself but never having lived in Brazil, I was able to relate to Lispector's experiences of displacement and the complexities of identity, which I also wanted to address.

## I. Bernarda Manuel

The inquisitor has risen again.  
What words to contain a mother tongue?  
How to forgive the heretic her lifeblood?  
How to disparage the sacrifices of the prisoner?

The truth is that he kept a knife on his pillow.  
I could not leave the house for fear.  
And this child I hold to my breast is all I could hope  
To know of God. ¿Qué culpa tengo yo?

La culpa no te pertenece, Bernarda.  
No es tuya. Las locuras del género,  
De la religión, no fueron el final.  
La historia respira en tus palabras.

## II. Glikl: Things You Pass On To Your Children

A sizable dowry. A firm faith in God.  
An honest living, sparing no effort.  
An edict of expulsion. A father barely held back.  
One piece of bread to last the entire day.

Entire crates of gold lost, but no matter—  
It is not money that is important,  
But to accept it all (wealth, loss,  
Plague, marriage) with love.

And finally, a book.  
A legacy of family history,  
A monument of fortitude,  
And memory, blessed memory.

### III. Clarice Lispector

You of flight, you of city,  
You of sprawling and contraction,  
Assaulted by senses, inescapable, you —

They say your name was not your name,  
Your home not your home.  
Refugee and refuge, your mother,  
Paralyzed, dissolved into herself.

What are the things that make a home?  
What government papers must be signed and notarized  
Before you can call the ground below your feet your own?  
And yet you are obliged to be grateful, you must understand  
You might have died twice over if your parents had held on.

You who thought yourself mother of God, your worst death  
Was thrown in front of you, Something to be tripped over.  
And yet, in the horror, a warning: to contain all things,  
You must first learn to cherish the container.

If God is everywhere, how can he be contained?  
Perhaps in your invention.

## Annotated Bibliography

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Clarice Lispector". Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 Dec. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Clarice-Lispector>. Accessed 19 March 2021.

- I consulted the Encyclopedia Britannica biography of Clarice Lispector to be able to include biographical details in my poem.

Vollendorf, Lisa. "Bernarda Manuel: Defending Femininity to the Holy Office." *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2007, pp. 32–54.

- I drew on Vollendorf's account of Manuel's written testimony to imagine a response to her question, "¿Qué culpa tengo yo?"

Lispector, Clarice. "Forgiving God." *The Complete Stories*. Edited by Benjamin Moser. Translated by Katrina Dodson, New Directions, 2015, pp. 379–383.

- I referred to this short story for some of the metaphorical content of my poem on Lispector.

Glikl of Hameln. *Glikl: Memoirs 1691-1719*. Edited by Chava Turniansky. Translated by Sara Friedman, Brandeis University Press, 2019.

- Many of the things listed in my poem on Glikl come directly from the parts of her memoirs that we read for class or are paraphrased from them.