

Bandelette de Torah

for Carl Rakosi

In honour of the Eternal One, it has been made, this band
and cloak, by the young and dignified girl, Simhah,
daughter of the cantor, Joseph Hay, son of the wise and
noble Isaac.

—1761, Musée du Judaïsme, Paris

The hunger is for the word between us,
between outside and in, between Europe
and America, between the Jew and his other,
the word and the non-word.

In the museum case, belief has been sealed
behind glass. The gold Yod, fist-shaped
with extended finger, marks where the letter
is made free, davar twining aleph into thing.

The hunger was once for textured cloth, brocade
of thread, gold-webbed damask, tessellate fringe,
for sewn-in weight of lead or brass, the chanter
lifting all heaviness from the page, singing out

lost richness. He followed the gold yod of divining,
alchemic word intoning the throne's measure in
discarded lexicons of cubits and myriads. The cloth
lay over Europe's open scroll between Athens and Jerusalem,

between library and dream. What if Athens were to be entered only via the syllogism or Jerusalem's sky were written over in fiery labyrinth, in severe figures, unerring texts? The hunger was for the lost world

that lay between Jerusalem and Athens. Later, terrors came to be its portion, flames beyond remonstrance, synagogue and worshiper in ash. Celan in the Seine with its syllabary. The words were as burls in woven cloth.

They lay across the lettered scroll, ink on paper enveloped in darkness, desperate to be inmixed with matter. The words were between us, poised to rise into constellated night as task unto the city,

to enter this place unshielded between the One and nothingness, if only to exist as from an echo between hope and horror, between sacred sound and profane air. Between Athens and Jerusalem and America.

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