

POETRY IN THE WAKE

In the wake of the recent US elections, our editorial collective sent out a call for poems that could reflect our moment. Poetry, we felt, would be an apt genre to convey the deep and complex emotions many were experiencing. What follows is a selection of the submissions we received. These poems are raw and turbulent by necessity; most were written in the first week after the election results. They express some of the depth and range of feminist responses.

DEBORAH ROSENFELT

I Need a Poem

I need a poem.
I cannot find one appropriate to the occasion.
Poets mourn the loss of love, of youth, of vision, of health, of life.
They do not, as a rule, mourn the loss of elections.
True, Yeats's rough beast slouches toward Bethlehem,
And if ever there were a rough beast. . . .
But Yeats too wanted a return
To the old order, especially for women.
Brecht, watching the rise of the Nazi regime, wondered
What to tell his son, but the best he could come up with was,
Keep studying your French, your mathematics, your history.
Not bad advice, but not much help
Under the circumstances.

Once, a man died
Whom I had loved a lot.
I read elegies end on end: Milton, Shelley, Tennyson, Hopkins,
Even John Crowe Ransome,
And it helped, it really did, to read
This fashioning of grief into a formal shape
Both manageable and lovely.
Now, I have scoured Rukeyser, Rich, Lorde, Forché, my go-to gals
But even they have no words
For this loss of country
To the venal and malign.

Still — perhaps the best I can expect — they do very well with hope,
and with rage.

ROSAMOND S. KING

This Was Always Going to Be a Poem about Work

This was always going to be a poem about work.
This is not the poem about the shards from the glass ceiling slicing my
face as
They rain down, pricking blood from my fingers as I wash my hair.

This was always going to be a poem about blood.
It's a difference of degree, from racism to white supremacy, from
capitalist to economic isolationist, from willing to drop cluster bombs
to willing to drop nuclear bombs.

It is no longer a question with degrees
Saving you from debt or deportation
From danger or fear

We all say we are on the same side
While we think about people "over there" —
We say we're all standing together
We feel that we're all alone —
This poem was always going to be

This poem knows your silence will not protect you
It sees you
Not knowing what to say

This is not the poem we wanted
The blank page in front of you is the ear of your grandchildren
Waiting

This was always going to be
About work.

This poem
Cannot finish
Itself

ASHWINI TAMBE

November 9

Last night, silence plunged down
And pressed the air out of everything I thought was sealed.
Even the Beltway¹— the drudging rumble — was quiet.
There should have been ambulances
Wailing up and down the streets,
But when I listened,
Nothing.

Except at around midnight,
After Pennsylvania came in,
When someone got on his motorbike,
Startled his engine,
And rode through blocks with sleeping children.
A victory lap.

1. The “Beltway” refers to Interstate 495, a highway that encircles the city of Washington, DC.

One Week Later

If it makes you feel better to think
That they were not *really* racist,
Then I wish your faint heart comfort
— but please, comfort of other kinds.

Your fond script that this is the revenge of the poor
Is actually a betrayal
When the only poor you notice live with pinched faces near shuttered
 factories
And not among you,
Their dark eyes downcast.

So, those who wear white hats,
Who scrawl white shapes on public walls,
Who spit white words on subways,
Surely they are not all poor, or *just* poor?

Another kind of poverty, you know, is when you feel stripped
Of the illusion
—As I am —
That we live among friends.

YVETTE CHRISTIANSË

Eve

Not that one, that her,
the she so despised,
blamed one, fruit craving
fruitful one, but this: time
the waiting time, anticipant
hours that pace, that check
and check for shadows emissarial,
their length and impatience,
their drag and invitation
to look back, to summon
a staggering syntax— what if . . .
if only . . . next time . . . how come.
There was a street I knew
and grew into like an apricot tree.
It stood in storms.
I have its leaves somewhere,
their green whispering
that spoke to the air—
Of daylight opening the sky—
to birds that saw the world
curve away into forever—
Of summering winds—
to ants, streaming and crushable—
Of weightlessness that bears most—
to bricks that rose into the walls
of our bedrooms, our kitchens—
Of departures, wilding and avid.
I hear them, the green and whispering
proceedings, verging, anticipant,

the same, all incantations the same —

This has begun...

And I will remember,

remember, this day of November.

AMANDA SOLOMON AMORAO

To My Student Who Is an Immigrant

TO MY STUDENT WHO IS AN IMMIGRANT, I see you. You come by my office hours and talk to me of homesickness, missing meals cooked by mother, of the struggle to find your way on this campus, in this state, in this country. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you, but I see your struggle. I see your profound wish to succeed, to make your family proud, to silently persevere and not complain when it all seems overwhelming. I want you to know you will survive. You will make this place your own.

To my students who are undocumented, I see you. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you. I am afraid of what it could mean. I am afraid you feel alone, targeted, criminalized, dehumanized. I want you to have hope. I want you to find your space to belong, to dream. I want to help make that space for you.

To my queer students, I see you. You come to my office and speak in clear, measured tones, about the violence of binaries, about the impossibilities of simply being "out" or "in" with your Christian grandmother at the holiday table. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you, but I know gender is fluid, and sexuality exists on a spectrum and that love is love is love is love.

To my students who honestly believe but may not say out loud that borders should be closed, that this is all politically correct bullshit, that this course is a waste of time, I see you. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you, especially because we probably have not talked after class or in my office or even just in passing. Why not? I genuinely want to understand. I genuinely want to listen. I want us to exchange questions. I want us to exchange stories. I want us to hear each other.

To my student who emailed me to let me know that she never knew a woman who looked like her could be a professor, I see you. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you and for young women like you who may have always felt like their voices were too small to fill a 200-person room. I want to tell you that your voice is bigger than you know, that there is strength inside you to claim your equal place, to demand respect, to make your way.

To my students who are the children of immigrants, who talk to me about that burden they feel on their backs, that deep desire to make your parents' sacrifices worth it—to master the English language, to get your degree, to become that doctor/lawyer/engineer you're "supposed" to be. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you. Will you be told to go back to where you came from simply because you look like your immigrant mother? Will you be able to know how to respond? I want you to have the strength to meet those who would draw borders around you. I want you to be able to insist on your truth, insist on the dignity of your immigrant family.

To each and every one of my students, I see you. I do not know what last night's results will mean for you, but I have only ever wanted to encourage you to ask questions, hard questions, necessary questions, even questions that seem unanswerable. What questions will you ask of yourself about this election cycle? About this course on borders and migration? About critical thinking and argumentation? About your first year in college? About the person you are and the person you are trying to become?

CARMEN GIMÉNEZ SMITH

Ethos

Now that I know the line is grabbing pussies,
I'm going to start a figurative system around the idea
of grabbing pussies. And it'll contain some of the rages
I've accrued in the last few weeks. I'll also include
blood because that's a big part of my work. I'm
going to troll the streets for this insistent root
needing to be excised. I have a machete and a hothead,
and you can drive. It's about time. It's also about how
close I am to setting my girl into the world, more about
how ready she is to launch into it. I want to clear
the dross of misogyny, so she won't suffer under its yoke.
We'll paint our faces, take off our earrings, do the inescapable.