

Spell

Spelling was beyond me, “unlettered small-knowing soul,” ungoverned, on Sesame Street—Forgetful Jones. Hymns have their rhythm, Dickinson stole from church, problematic anthems, black and white speckles on the “theme” notebooks, blue lines, red margin. I ought to have a scheme, something other than a compulsion to fill in the blanks. This is your skin, prepared for a thousand words, this is your tongue prepared for four scrolls. “Certain bounds hold against chaos.” (Robert Duncan)

Boundary, bondage, I’ll take badinage, liking leaps and bounds without falls, no bandages, two lines around white space makes a sandwich. Let’s collage what we can, form fractured and repaired, blend of is and isn’t. What anchors? Shape. What reflects? He skipped the flat rock four times, mine always sank: this was my idea of the difference between genders; a brother is a terrible thing to confuse. We asked questions, nothing was spelled out. We’d wind colored balls of yarn for our ancient great-aunt’s basket of red, yellow, purple guarded by her wiry little dog, Mr. Dooley, while dwelling upstairs my psychotic uncle mumbled and chomped his teeth. Woolgathering, I find myself humming and think of him. The bee, I’d drop out early, sit and watch others’ effortful tongues and cheeks, eye scrunches, as if the face could help the mind remember what it never knew, deduce from root and elemental codes, (logorrhic, gluttonous, fieriness, gelastic) whoever knew won a giant Hershey bar. A machine taught speed-reading, phrases clanked by in threes, waltz time, the more they pushed, the more I dawdled, held

the words in my mouth, refused to let my eyes get ahead of my body. A hexagram predicts the future, a hex holds you, a painted sign on the barn door keeps cattle safe,

hexachlorophene in toothpaste ads. Spelunking sounded so alarming, scaling those vertical tight chimneys, caverns where air has never been, bats and piles of guano,

people got stuck. Those stupid tourist caves they took us to, colored lights on stalagmites (Witch's Finger, Carlsbad Caverns), drip formations, time as sculptor,

mineral as material, car trips, boredom beyond reason, singing helped but more, we wanted out. "Eye of newt... adder's fork... lizard's leg... like a hell-broth boil

and bubble." It came in a dream, the structure of the hexane ring, when Kekulé saw the ouroboros, double carbon bonds create a form, and along comes a smell.

In "Spellbound," Gregory Peck thinks he's a psychiatrist but learns otherwise, anxious about black lines on white, ski tracks in snow, forgotten murder of his brother,

all that repression undone by Ingrid Bergman, undoing herself along the way. Line gives way to consciousness, Plato's circular creature as first in the universe, one

who consumes its own shit, self-feeding, dawn of being, undifferentiated pre-shape as circle, thought as line of black on white, letters marking the tongue's moves,

lovely chocolaty aftertaste, palate, pharyngeal pillars, taste's papillae, teeth and throat, modulating form and breath out of dark mucosal space, sound's palette, must we speak?