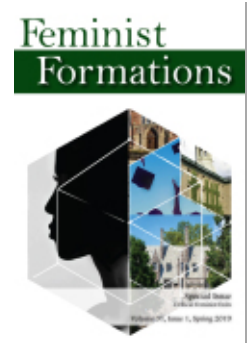




PROJECT MUSE®

Our Survival Is Our Blessing, and: Adjunct Blues, and: Write Me a Paper, and: A Primer for Online Teaching, or How to Kill Your Soul, and: Death and Papers to Grade, and: Somewhere in Texas Is a Jail for Babies, and: Mothers Rising, and: 99 Other Jobs for ICE Agents, and: Rhymes with Trump



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➔ *For additional information about this article*

[This content is not available for reading by the publisher during the COVID-19 pandemic.]

Poesia

Melissa Tennyson

Our Survival Is Our Blessing

For those of us who have
longed for something
that didn't have a name

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us who have known
the sudden lash of cruelty
in the place we thought was safe

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us who have known too well
the sharp edges of aloneness
amidst the lavishness of springtime

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us whose sleep
has been shattered by the ghosts
of cruelty and loss

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us who have tried to ignore
that steady ache for something else—
a new story: as simple as sunlight and rest

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us whose cry at midnight
slips unnoticed toward moonlight
and stars, those other worlds we dream of

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us who have shouldered
a terrible burden, made invisible to the world
by some cruel spell

our survival is our blessing.

For those of us who draw
the furious gawk of strangers
when we reach for the one we love

our survival is our blessing.

May courage weave its strong web
over our wounds

may joy surprise us as we shake off sleep
in the morning light

may we find each other, and the path to
the home we never knew

may we paint our lives in the colors
of laughter

may we know that

our survival is our blessing.

Adjunct Blues

I taught when my daughter was a baby, still nursing.
As I raced off for class, I tried not to think of
how small she looked in the arms of another,
reaching for me with a sob.
When I got home,
my breasts hardened with milk,
I nursed her, desperate to soothe the burning.

Higher ed, what else do you want from me?

I graded papers
the day after my father died.
Too exhausted to move, I
wrote comments and posted feedback.
Online schools don't care about death, and
I had to pay the bills.

Higher ed, what else do you want from me?

I taught a class on my wedding day.
True story.
Showed up to class in vest and tie.
I gave my sweetheart flowers, kissed her on the steps of the courthouse,
then caught the bus for campus.

Higher ed, what else do you want from me?

Write Me a Paper

Write me a paper about
how your writing teacher lost her
healthcare because her class got cancelled.

Write me a paper about
how your writing teacher has to
use food stamps to feed her daughter.

Write me a paper about
how your writing teacher doesn't know
if she has a job next term.

Write me a paper about
how your writing teacher has to
choose between gas for the car or food for the table.

Write me a paper about
how your writing teacher cried on
the day she got the card: "congratulations on your ten years of service."

Write me a paper about
two or three pages,
double-spaced, Times New Roman,
one-inch margins, no extra spaces.
Give it a title, staple it.
Of course you need a thesis statement.

Write me a paper, and then burn it.
I already know the story.

Death and Papers to Grade

We ate cold tacos
under the fluorescent lights of the hospital
the day my father died.
His heart stopped beating with all of us there in the room.
We cried and hugged his body.
The warmth didn't leave all at once—there was a spot on his back,
scarred tissue where the heat pooled, as if
he were only napping.

I stayed after the others left,
knowing there was something to learn from him in that place,
even after the warmth was gone.
The nurse brought water,
and I sat with the body he had left behind,
remembering the silly songs he used to sing—
there were donkeys and morning birds,
the tickle bug he made with his hand.
He made us laugh so much.
Now he was teaching me how to die.

In the morning, too exhausted to move,
I reach for my laptop.
Papers to grade, posts to make, bills to pay.
No more time to grieve.

Somewhere in Texas Is a Jail for Babies

Everyone was polite at the office today.
We said hello, and good morning, and good afternoon.
Yet somewhere in Texas is a jail for babies.

Their mothers carried them on their backs through cities and deserts:

*Come little one, we will go to a new place—it is safe there, and there is food
enough for us.
We will not be afraid there.*

Somewhere underneath the big sky, across the roaring river, the floodlights
descend. An ICE agent takes the small one away, wailing as mama fades from
view. Mama still can feel the warm spot on her back where her baby had
slept. She weeps into the wind:

*Little one, mama will come find you. We will go to a new place—it is safe
there, and there
is food enough for us. We will not be afraid there.*

Tomorrow in the office, everyone will be polite.
We will say hello, and good morning, and good afternoon.
Yet somewhere in Texas is a jail for babies.

Mothers Rising

Mothers stand fierce, facing off ICE Agents. Infants nod off at their breasts, milk-full and sleepy.

How can you live with yourself?

Don't you have children?

How can you sleep at night, kidnapping other people's children?

The ICE Agents stare into nothing, grip their weapons.

Their faces, inscrutable.

They are guarding the doors.

They are guarding the country.

They are making America great again.

They say nothing.

They are untouchable.

They are immovable.

But after work,
some of them wipe away their tears,
take off the badge, and walk away.

99 Other Jobs for ICE Agents

There's lawns that need mowing,
mail that needs delivering,
firewood to be chopped
for the winter ahead.

Why don't you
wash the dishes
walk the dog
stir the soup
wipe the stove
peel the potatoes
chop the onions
do the laundry
feed some people
help some people
heal some people
hold the baby
pass the tissue
clean the mess
get the bandaids
fix what's broke
say you're sorry.
Anything will do.

Just please
stop stealing babies
from their mothers.

Rhymes with Trump

Lump
Stump
Bump
Rump
Dump

***Melissa Tennyson** is a queer feminist poet and adjunct ESOL instructor based in Portland, Oregon. She has an MA in English and a PhD in American Studies, both from Washington State University. She has taught at colleges and universities in Washington, Ohio, Oklahoma, Michigan, Bangladesh, and online. She has taught courses in composition, research writing, literature, American studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, history, and public speaking. Her poetry has appeared in ZNet Creative, Voices in Wartime website, Poets against the War website, In Our Words: A Journal about Women, Meghbarta: Online Forum for Activism, Landscapes, and Re-Visions: Women, Art, Activism. She has also published a book on the poetry, politics and praxis of Audre Lorde and Julia de Burgos.*