

Writing the Words

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WRITING THE WORDS

by Brenda Marie Osbey

*It was not Death, for I stood up,  
And all the Dead, lie down—*

—Emily Dickinson, No. 510

i stand here  
solitary  
nearly weightless  
in a room of white walls  
and lean, dead men  
these are only shadows  
of endless histories  
randomly attached to me  
for the sake of simply saying  
this is  
or has never been  
no one listens to words anymore  
and how are we to hand down the tale?

sally's body  
was the very signature of pain  
mohab never loved her  
once her stomach turned up rock  
he said it was the smell of beer he hated  
everyone knew it was a toddy she had  
before turning in at nine  
but mohab could never love her  
after her belly turned to stone  
and her hair fell out  
the only thing left to value of hers  
was the fine handiwork she could do with a needle  
other folks used to do no more  
than stitch

who will put the history down?  
 even the devil's children  
 once listened to words.

sometimes  
 i am this lone woman  
 standing in a field  
 where only weeds  
 survive  
 realizing that i also  
 will never be a flower  
 but at least i know  
 that i am soil  
 could a sally every see me  
 as soil?  
 i plant words  
 and bring up myself  
 even if no one sees me  
 i can be the history of migrations  
 coming up through city pavements  
 reminding them of where home  
 really is  
 even if i am only  
 the dirt washed off turnips  
 by old crusty-faced women  
 surviving in settings  
 where even wild parsley  
 can not grow.

who will set it in time?  
 what happened  
 to reading by candlelight  
 after the lights are shut off?

mohab is praying  
 sally  
 sally  
 mohab is praying  
 where have you gone?  
 where have you gone?  
 the night is time  
 the sky gives witness to history  
 over in the rice field

with embroidery thread  
and gilt-tipped needle  
i can see sally  
stitching her bald head  
to the back of her womb  
mohab is praying  
sally  
mohab is praying  
and i am witness  
and when i can no longer testify  
i will stitch open my eyes  
i will stitch them to my fingers  
and together  
they will witness the history  
and hand down the tale

sally