The Anna Fragments [1]

March 7, 2016 Featured Poetry [2]
Illness [3]

Hybrid Poetry by Elisabeth Weiss

Winner of the 2015 Talking Writing Prize for Hybrid Poetry



What's madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance?
— Theodore Roethke

I drive over the Queensboro Bridge and follow my GPS
until it lands in a spot I recognize:

KINOT 1
Reconstructing Anna

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a towering white-sepulchered building.
I pull to the curb and look up.
I remember her at the window, waving goodbye.
Anna in her flowered housedress.
Anna in her blue cardigan.
Anna's clear stockings rolled down.
Anna and her long, white hair wound up in a bun.
Anna larger than life,
her profile like a proud Indian warrior.
Anna not giving in.

None of us really knew her. How could we?
We didn't visit often. We couldn't. My
father hated driving on the Long Island Expressway on weekends because of the heavy traffic. After working as an attorney for the state all week, downtown
at Broadway and Chambers, he was often irritable and stressed when requests were made for his free time. My mother, trapped by her own phobia of driving over bridges,
couldn't or wouldn't drive off of Staten Island. She was particularly
afraid of the bridge's outer edge.
"If you love me," my mother often said when I was older and at the
wheel, "you will stay in the inner
lane." And so I did.

There were many
conversations we avoided
back then. In place of truth

Anna bows her head and studies her nails, blackened, dried and cracked. How beautiful and strong they were once. Since moving to New York and leaving her family behind, the pushcarts and crowds in the streets wore Anna down. She began to panic in large buildings. Visiting the Flatiron, then the tallest building in New York City, she had to run out onto the street just to catch her breath. In the Bronx butcher shop all the housewives pushed around her, screaming in Yiddish, "a *shmalta* chicken, a *shmalta* chicken," and she was horrified. "How incomprehensible," she thought, " and how uncivilized." After all, she was American born.

The New York Anna desired was full of glamor: Fifth Avenue's satin gowns, pearls and furs and pin-curl hair, ostrich plumes, Prohibition's speakeasies with the smoky, shadowy gaslight and tin ceilings reflecting the coppery warmth of an evening out without responsibilities. Anna, trained as a stenographer, first worked for Breittholz Brothers Furriers and then became the wife of the blue-eyed brother who was a travelling salesman. Paul joked and charmed the customers south of the Grand Concourse, all the way to the Everglades. He was on the road for many weeks while Anna was left alone. City life became a ritual of shared spaces: the elevators, the Oriental-carpeted lobbies, and the velvet chairs in long, dark hallways when it all began to close in on her and fold her into the box of an apartment they rented until she couldn't get out of bed.



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From Mosby's Medical Dictionary:

postpartum depression
Etymology: L, post + partus + deprimere, to press down

an abnormal psychiatric condition that occurs after childbirth, typically from 3 days to 6 weeks after birth. It is characterized by symptoms that range from mild "postpartum blues" to an intense suicidal depressive psychosis. Severe postpartum depression occurs approximately once in every 2,000 to 3,000 pregnancies. The cause is not proved; neurochemical and psychologic influences have been implicated. Approximately one-third of patients are found to have had some degree of psychiatric abnormality predating the pregnancy. The disorder recurs in subsequent pregnancies in 25% of cases. Some women at risk for postpartum depression may be identified during the prenatal period: those who have made no preparations for the expected baby, expressed unrealistic plans for postpartum work or travel, or denied the reality of the responsibilities of parenthood. Depending on the severity of the disorder, psychoactive medication or psychiatric hospitalization may be necessary.

My mother must have felt powerless when she badgered my father for rides to Creedmoor. Only occasionally, he relented. What follows is Anna's story, a woman imprisoned and suppressed by her circumstances. It begins on October 1, 1927, one-and-a-half years after my mother was born. There was nothing in the records to suggest that my grandmother might have suffered from postpartum depression. There was no

KINOT 2
Intake Creedmoor Division, Brooklyn State Hospital 10/01/27

Holding her cordovan lizard pocketbook against her chest with an air of defiance and defensiveness, Anna proceeds to answer the questions in a small, pea-green painted office. She sits erect, haughty, on a high-back chair, her chestnut hair pulled into a swooping bun with a tortoiseshell clip. She is serious, determined, exasperated, waiting to get to the bottom of all this.

The transcriber sits to her right with a memo pad and takes shorthand, transcribing every word.

How are you feeling today, Mrs. Breittholz?

Well, I feel a little bit more shaky than I did when I came here.

Tell me why you came.

Why I came here. They told me they were sending me to Central Islip for a rest. There was no way out of it. If I resisted, I would be taken by force.

Who told you that?

The nurses.

Where?

In Bellevue Hospital.

Anna shifts her weight and crosses her nyloned legs. After the birth of her second daughter, her calves seem to have grown excessive and weighed down the flesh in her Spectator pumps. The birth progressed rapidly so the baby was born in the apartment, before Anna could shake Paul awake in the early morning hours of February 17th, 1926. Most women gave birth in hospitals without their husbands, often given a combination of morphine and scopolamine, which acted as a painkiller. The drugs took away a mother's memory of the event as a whole, while also taking away her self-control. Because of the loss of control, women were often tied to beds for not only their own safety but for the safety of the hospital staff. They made sure to use soft materials like lamb's wool that would not leave marks on the arms and legs of these women so their husbands wouldn't question hospital

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research on it at the time. There was no name for it, and there was certainly no cure.

Only one visit to Creedmoor stands out in my mind. Anna was allowed outside. We sat on a park bench together. I was wearing sunglasses that were plastic and dirty. I spit on the lens, and Anna told me to never do that, to only use soap and water and wipe them clean with a soft cloth or else they would scratch. Why have I held onto this piece of logical advice? It was the only time I remember her acknowledging me.

The more I read about state mental health hospitals in the early 1900s, the more I learned that they began with good intentions. There's this from the *Kingston Lounge* blog about Brooklyn:

"Queens's Creedmoor State Hospital (now Creedmoor Psychiatric Center) had its humble beginnings as the farm colony for Brooklyn State Hospital…. A prevailing theme in the treatments of the period was that fresh air, a rustic environment, and overcrowding, inadequate sanitary facilities, and physical and sexual abuse of residents by members of the school's staff," according to the *Wikpedia* entry on

From "The Unfinished Promise of Willowbrook: Twenty-Five Years of Unnecessary Despair for New Yorkers Living with Mental Illnesses":

In 1965, U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy visited the now-infamous Willowbrook School on Staten Island, unannounced. Afterward, he declared the "wards were less comfortable and cheerful than the cage in which we put animals in the zoo."

practices.

Anna knew she was happy to be alone and alert during childbirth. She wasn't afraid. The baby came more easily than her first daughter. She reached down between her legs and guided the shoulders out, first the left and then the right. The baby was bloody and slick with white. But nothing hurt. Anna placed her baby daughter, with chord uncut, on her chest and covered her with a cloth warmed from the oven like a challah on a Friday night. She sighed. The night was ceremonial, quiet.



KINOT 3
People Have Tongues and Can Speak and Say Whatever They Like

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Willowbrook.

My grandmother was finally discharged from Creedmoor, though she was resistant to any attempts to place her in the community and said she would never leave the ward. Her release precipitated my mother's initial breakdown, which coincidentally had many eerie similarities to her own mother's psychotic delusions.

How is madness inherited? What are the fine lines that connect us? A few years back, my sister requested records from Creedmoor, but there was a problem. They would only be released to the next of kin. Since my mother was in an eighteen-year bipolar phase at the time, her sister Meriam signed the papers. The documents came to us. Concealed within was the voice of my grandmother, essentially silenced since 1926. We have come to know her only through these few transcribed interviews and doctor's reports. We have her Oriental rugs. We have her Limoges. But with her records, her words return her to us and give her a voice finally, which is loud though fragmentary.

* * * *

With Anna gone, Paul sent the girls to boarding school, then camp, then boarding school. It went on like this for years. My mother, too young to attend classes, drew pictures instead. She played with the big boys, who would tease her. Told she could be in the school play, she

I

Well, I have an apartment on the first floor
and those boys have been throwing cherry pits
into my windows again.
It certainly doesn't make sense to clean the house and
it isn't very pleasant to stay in the kitchen and
have things thrown in at you.

That morning I got up with an awfully funny feeling
that someone was choking me, and I said, "Oh, stop, stop!"
And then all my nails turned black.
Remember the nice nails I had, Dr. Smalley?

My mother's fingernails
were thick and healthy and
always long. She asked the manicurist to leave nail
polish at the little half moons above her cuticles.
When she held my hand, I
would bring her hand to my
mouth and bite her nails.
"Stop it," she would exclaim.
Later, I would do it again.

And those boys throwing cherry pits into my windows,
do you think the mother put the children up to it to annoy me
Well, the way she answered, one would think so.
I am certain about it, Dr. Smalley.
Those boys played with wooden guns and shot rubber band
It's the newest craze. The mother's voice called: *Come on, Sta*

II

The windows were open and people looked in
and the housekeeping, I couldn't keep up with it.
So, I folded my best clothes and linens into a trunk
and let the rest go.
I fell asleep with two stones in my hand.
The superintendent entered. What did he expect
to see?
I went down to the police station to complain
about the boys and the cherry pits
and the guns and the mother
hollering, *Come on, Stanley!*
And I wound up in Central Islip for a rest.
Come on, Stanley!



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One day, three furrier brothers
left Poland. They left behind
their mother, another brother,
and two sisters. They arrived
in a city so poor they had to
share one suit. So, one
brother worked in the day and
wore the suit, and another
brother worked in the night
and wore the suit. The third
brother stayed home.

There is another story. A letter
arrived, marked only with Paul's
name, the word "furrier," and
"New York City." When he read
it, he cried. He said, "They
killed everyone in my town."

There is another story. Paul
returned to Poland just once
and saw his mother again. An
enormous rock he remembered
from childhood became a small
one. How do we tell the story of
what we cannot see? Of what
we cannot know? Do we say,
"I ran to my mother, and I
sobbed, and she held me to her

KINOT 4
Ideas of Electricity

When the pinpricks began I knew it was
happening again.
My blood was being sucked out and something
foreign was being sucked in.
There are markings on my stockings to prove it,
look!
There are enemies here I cannot name.

My husband is not my husband.
An imposter is in his body.
He sneaks out at night,
confiscating the goods of other women.
His eyes follow me through cornfields where dust
storms
make the whole world dark for days.
Here in the hospital they shoot dope into me and
call me a dirty Jew.
The nurses have the audacity to wear my clothing,
cut up and resewn.
During the night they cut up and resew my body
too
with their long scissors and needles.
All the parts don't fit together again
which is why I am so tired and cannot move.

For these things I weep
for I am in distress
my innards burn
my heart is turned within me
And my heart is faint
He dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help
They mock me in song all day long
What can I say for you?
With what can I compare you, daughter?
To what can I liken you, that I might comfort you?
I am in torment within
My heart is poured out on the ground

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Watching my parents sitting in the grass on a windy day eating an avocado. Happiness like that. *High moments. They go round and round in me.*

On parole, Anna packed the girls for camp, but it proved too fatiguing. She was left alone with them and locked the eldest out. She cooed to her infant that she was her only real baby and held her tight. Anna's own mother and sister once claimed responsibility for her, but she was always returned to Creedmoor within months.

* * * *

If you saw the nervous flick of my mother's heavy eyelids, if you saw her look away as you were speaking, you'd know how easily she could disappear, a wispy vapor. What happened in her beginning years inhabited the thick air around her. It made others nervous. Her intensity. Her shiver. Made her care for the neighbor's kids as her own, made her never raise her voice, made her a shelter to the lost, the vagrant, the disabled, the palsied, the lonely.

My mother's ashes inside a tin inside a square cardboard box inside my file drawer, waiting. My father wanted her to be

From auschwitz.dk:

But the Chiger family miraculously managed to escape the liquidation of the ghetto by hiding in stench and darkness in the sewage-filled

KINOT 5
Lakewood and Other Pleasure Resorts

To the same hotel to which we have referred there is a reading room where no one is permitted to utter a word. To a man seeking refuge from the "strife of tongues," such a place is heaven on earth. No hotel gossip-monger can reach him there. Not even his wife can talk to him.

— ad for the Lakewood Resort, circa 1900

Steamship moguls and steel barons built
Georgian mansions
in the Gilded Age, in the pine belt of New Jersey
seven miles from the Atlantic.
I swim their pools with abandon and volley on
their courts
grace their lush gardens in my promenade
take tea in luxury in my mink and pearls
all the while my thoughts are a tilt a whirl, a
carnival ride, an exhibit at a dime museum. The
barker will call you in.
Who, after all, is more worthy of this quality and
charm
than I, a Jew, who has been sent for respite in the
country
far from the clamor of the raised El and the glare of humanity?
Ordered by doctors to rest,

with him. I met the shrouded body in the driveway outside the chapel. I opened the plain pine box. The tin jammed, then twisted open. A little wind blew up, and bits of my mother flew into the blueness of Fairview, New Jersey.

I still cannot bear to throw the tin of her away. What if there is one ash, one remnant, one speck of DNA? Some days, I want to lick the remainder of her, finish the whole of her, she who created my body, who cradled my body, who bled for me, she who sang and rocked and spoon fed the emptiness within her with all of us.

What is it like to grow up without a mother? A tree without leaves. A withering.

Away, I become like you
An empty boat, floating, adrift

—Tu Fu

* * * *

Paul gave up guardianship. He annulled the marriage and married Tanya. My mother never accepted the replacement. I have no idea how often she visited Anna. She graduated, became a bookkeeper for the furriers, then worked in Greenwich Village. She met my father on a blind date in an Italian restaurant up a few stairs. She had coffee. He ate a full meal.

She later told him he was half handsome. She was never good at settling.

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sewers of Lvov for 14 months amid
rats, filth, and the constant
pounding of rushing water. When
heavy rain fell, the water nearly
reached the ceiling of the sewer
and Krystyna and Pawelek's
parents had to hold their children
above the waterline so they could
breathe. They had to pick off each
day's lice and cope with dysentery.

in this quiet paradise
where formerly only Christians were
granted
permission,
I handle the teacups with dignity
and grace;
fine china, the delicate weaves of
Turkey carpet,
full-bodied wines.
I have a second sense, a third eye.
I feel the next world war brewing
inside.
Is it not the plight of an outsider
to smell danger and go toward it
as much as one knew, back in
Europe, the ghetto
boundaries
could be circumvented through the
sewers?

Paul moved to Florida, found
another wife. “Rose, if I forget
you,” he told this one, “may
my right hand wither.” Years later,
Paul found wandering the
streets, unsure of where home
was, taken to a nursing home,
asked, “If this is my home,
where is my key?”

*I’ll take care of Daddy, and you
take Mother.*

There was no dispute.

When New York State released
Anna to community care in
1975, she was placed in the
Vanderbilt Nursing Home in
Staten Island at my mother’s
request. Anna, dying of breast
cancer, refused surgery. She
said she'd lived long enough.

My Mother’s Laughter

Her deep guttural laugh, head
thrown back, delight.
Openmouthed. Then the lilting,
at first ladylike. A tremor begins,
held a moment too long, a sound
emits, low howl. She catches
herself, regains control.

My mother began to slip.

KINOT 6
Parole

*In view of the fact that her husband is in
comfortable circumstances
and can hire a maid to look after the patient,
it is thought by the staff
that she could be on parole.*

People move so slowly around me
Are they underwater?
Maybe I didn’t eat enough
of the right foods
or didn’t have enough to eat
or didn’t like the changes
I didn’t have a thought
Always gossiping you know how
neighbors are
And the children, two rosebuds
Handed off to me
What was I to do with them?
People entered the house and
spoiled things
And used all kinds of language
I was waiting for someone to say,
Uh, she’s dusting

because there were spores. The
shades remained down all day.
People were looking in. The
plumbing began to leak.
Nothing was ever repaired.
Showers were short. There was
a bat on the curtain. The ceiling
was Scotch-taped. The kitchen
faucet exploded. Counters
cracked. She followed people
home from supermarkets. From
the back, they looked exactly
like someone she had loved.

Afterward, my father found
her wandering in Concord,
a neighborhood below our hill,
with a box of old clothing.
“Where are you going, Lydia?”
he asked. A Lincoln in the
drive. The door open. Keys
fallen on linoleum. The dark
hooves of my runaway heart.

In St Vincent’s Psychiatric Center,

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Nervous. Suspicious. Trying
on guests' glasses and shoes.
There was soap on everything.
She scrubbed and scrubbed.
Nothing came clean. She
followed groups of cars over
bridges. License plates meant
something. She visited
childhood friends, knocked on
their doors, and asked to see
their basements. No one was
allowed to sit on the floor

you
You know like when you're
sweeping, a little dust
will rise
When the cherries started to come
out
When school let out, when the sun
fell into the
cracks
When the children played outside
again
When the windows were open
It all started again
I packed the children's tiny
pinafores and rompers
How could I have not?
When I said anything to him she
said,
*Stanley, come on now, don't mind
her*

my mother swore all the novels
in the day room were rewritten.
*Because there's one thing left
to do, and I won't do it,
Elisabeth.*

All this time, Anna was behind
her, breathing her breath.
Holding her. Anna the icon,
perfectly polished, placed on a
metal pedestal. Mother. The
harsh coldness of the word.



Two syllables. Gutteral. Anna
died in the summer of '76. Paul
came to the funeral. He wanted
to see her. *Verboten* in
Judaism. I was there when they
opened the casket. Her long
gray hair spilled out. "This is
not my Anna," he told us. I
went off to college, leaving my
mother shaky, bereft.

After school, after grad school,
after a stable decade, after
we all left home, after she found
a dog wandering the streets
with a rope wound tightly around
his neck, after she stopped
smoking and then started, and
after we married and had
children of our own, she took
flight once more.

Her anger was a storm directed
at my father. She walked out

KINOT 7
The Living Museum

*Located in the grounds of Creedmoor
Psychiatric Center, the Living
Museum became a space where each
participant could create art and
develop a sense of ownership and foster
their inherent creative talents
in any sphere.*

Look how the art studio
in the former dining hall
bursts at the seams with joy:
soup cauldrons
filled with mannequin legs
strait jackets hanging from rafters
like flags from countries you'll
never visit.

The world can't offer sympathy
because most encounter
such disorders on subway
platforms
and in movie theaters.

A Sunday phone conversation:
"Good thing you called
because your mother's on
the floor and can't get up."
"Did you think of calling an
ambulance?" I asked.
"Nah, she's fine. I got her
a bowl of cereal and a comb."

To the ER and out. Refusal.
X-rays. Signing out against
medical advice. Crawling on
all fours from the taxi back into
the house.

When we were admitted, we
slept head to toe, until I shifted
the wires that measured
her vitals. In the early morning
hours, I sprawled onto a
makeshift bed between chairs.

In rehab, we got her back.

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of everything. She ranted and
pushed. She threw gold teeth.
She would not sign documents,
taxes. She kicked him out,
piling furniture against her door.

And so the years went. Search
and rescue. Dumbo Drop. Drive
and scoop. Boston to New York.

Those people, my kind, were put
away.

When Freud came to us in 1919
with his Five Lectures, at Clark,
suddenly there was meaning
everywhere:
in the slip of the tongue,
the dream, the shock.
Modern treatments followed:
lobotomies, chemical straitjackets.

They weren't for me.
I was too old already,
for the idealism of Andre Breton,
Jean Dubuffet or Oppenheim.
Art Brut thrived when I could not,
gentle daughters.
What good can art do except
remind you
of all you cannot be?

From Bolek Greczynski,
founder of the Living
Museum:

In here, *nous sommes*
tous les indésireables—
we are all undesirables—
but that is not our
problem but yours, the
spectator from outside.

I am trapped,
bruised, kept, shakier each year.
I am being erased.
The lunatic in me
doesn't care.
I sign myself in.
I'll never touch you again
or come near.
Brittle words of little use make an
awkward flight
from my mouth and go to pieces,
two stones of my heart.

Ravenous, her loving us.

Released and returned. My
father was in charge of evening
pills. She tried to put them in
his mouth. They pushed.
Fought. She made her way to
my house. In her suitcase: one
bra, one pair of pajamas.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

Dementia had set. We walked.
We had her hair done, her nails.
She followed me around the
house. She forgot what room
she lived in. She circled the
date. She forgot how to read.
She could no longer put
together parts of things. We
sang to her, her common refrain,
”Whatever will be, will be.”

From Wikipedia:

Female hysteria was a once-
common medical diagnosis, made
exclusively in women, which is
today no longer recognized by
medical authorities as a medical
disorder. Its diagnosis and
treatment were routine for many
hundreds of years in Western
Europe. Hysteria of both genders
was widely discussed in the
medical literature of the nineteenth
century. Women considered to
have it exhibited a wide array of
symptoms, including faintness,
nervousness, sexual desire,
insomnia, fluid retention, heaviness
in the abdomen, muscle spasm,
shortness of breath, irritability, loss
of appetite for food or sex, and a
"tendency to cause trouble." In
extreme cases, the woman
might be forced to enter an insane
asylum or to undergo surgical
hysterectomy.

KINOT 8
Diagnosis

The delusional formation, impatient.
Overproductive with ideas of
reference
and persecution, egotistical,
expansive,
poor judgment, impaired insight.
She insisted she was humiliated
and insulted
for being among the other patients.
Sullen, suspicious. At first obedient,
but later,
noisy and resistive.
She became hysterical and
peevish.
Very opinionated. Not violent.

She sits by the window, shrugs her
shoulders,
spreads out her hands.
She speaks freely with a somewhat
affected and
airy manner.
Tidy and clean. She dresses well.
Delusions of persecution, of people
molesting her, injuring her,
breaking into her house, gossiping
about her
and passing remarks.
Auditory hallucinations, poor
reasoning, childish
egotism.

Diagnosis: She has an obvious,
undisclosed
desire to be free of her husband.

When she left, I wailed. I broke
open the source of my origin.
My connective tissues fractured,
my voice was a voice neither
sisters nor fathers could
understand. I held, then let go
of her hand.

For Anna

All those footsteps on the seashore.
The fishermen hauling their blue net in before
dawn. You in the room upstairs, not sleeping. Who
owns anything?
Anna, I am watching such a cold sea.
I cannot tell you.

Last year I thought I put you away but you kept
reappearing,
falling out of my cupboards instead of sugar,
folding yourself into my linens until I thought for
sure
I would weep myself mad.

Now I let you stay.
I feel your black breath
move across the table.
It is everywhere
in this house we share.
I make coffee enough for two
so used to nights like this:
listless, watching you unwind your hair. Why did
you die all these years
and never tell me?

Fall 1976

When I was small, there was a
valley below. To the east was
the ocean. The far edge was
Sandy Hook, where my father
went deep-sea fishing, which
had something to do with the

KINOT 9
Release

What happened to Anna was
beyond her control.
Postpartum psychosis sometimes

From E. Fuller Torrey:

Deinstitutionalization is the name
given to the policy of moving
severely mentally ill people out of
large state institutions and then

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long boots hung in the
washroom. And he was a giant,
and she was a giant, and they
inhabited the Earth long ago,
when animals crawled on
primordial bellies and ate
berries from their hands, and
pheasants flew from the deep
thicket of oak behind the
redwood house.

We are born without scars,
perfectly molded heaps plucked
from a coral bed of grief. We
are missing teeth and feel like
straw dolls in strong arms. We
are born and born again
through the years, and wind
whips through the walls as if
they were paper. Goodbye, water
sprites, you ragged and unruly,
you o husk of voice. Shush! Like
the angel who from womb to
womb teaches a baby the entire
Torah before it's born, then
touches between the upper lip
and the nose so that all that was
learned is forgotten. Only the
slightest indentation that we
were here at all.

develops out
of postpartum depression or hits
women who've
had previous psychiatric problems.
Sometimes,
as in Anna's case, it shows up out
of the blue.
Psychiatrists aren't sure what
causes such a
sudden and powerful break with
reality but they
know that changing hormones and
the stress of
childbirth are involved.

Records for Anna between 1931 to
1966 do not exist.

On December 16, 1966, Anna's
status was changed
from "involuntary commitment" to
"voluntary."

In 1973, she was released,
unwillingly, to the
Vanderbilt Nursing Home on Staten
Island.
The records state: *Obese,*
hypertensive, a mass
in left breast; she refuses all
treatment.

Anna lived another two years.

Her husband stopped visiting her
after Family
Picnic Day, 1931.

There were no other records of
parole.



closing part or all of those
institutions; it has been a major
contributing factor to the mental
illness crisis….

Deinstitutionalization began in 1955
with the widespread introduction of
chlorpromazine, commonly known
as Thorazine, the first effective
antipsychotic medication, and
received a major impetus 10 years
later with the enactment of federal
Medicaid and Medicare.

Deinstitutionalization has two parts:
the moving of the severely mentally
ill out of the state institutions, and
the closing of part or all of those
institutions… The magnitude of
deinstitutionalization of the severely
mentally ill qualifies it as one of the
largest social experiments in
American history.

Deinstitutionalization was largely a
failure. Drugs were used as a
panacea. Funding often didn't
reach the community level, and a
percentage of the mentally ill
became homeless or imprisioned.

Publishing Information

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- **Theodore Roethke**: Lines from "In a Dark Time," [4] *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Doubleday, 1966).
- **Kinot 1 box:** Excerpt from "History of the Jews in New York City," [5] *Wikipedia*, February 2016.
- **Kinot 2:** *How are you feeling today, Mrs. Breittholz?* and other italicized lines are from the Creedmoor State Hospital patient records for Anna (author's personal collection).
- **Kinot 2 left and right columns:** Quote that begins "Queens's Creedmoor State had its humble beginnings" is from "Creedmoor State Hospital, Building 25" [6] by Richard Nickel, *The Kingston Lounge,* March 31, 2008.
- **Kinot 2 first box:** Definition is from *Mosby's Medical Dictionary*, eighth edition (Elsevier, 2008).
- **Kinot 2 second box**: Excerpt from "Twilight Sleep," [7] *Supported Birth* (supportedbirth.com) website.
- **Kinot 2 third box:** Based on reference to "Dementia Praecox" in *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- **Kinot 2 fourth box:** Excerpt from "The Unfinished Promise of Willowbrook: Twenty-Five Years of Unnecessary Despair for New Yorkers Living with Mental Illnesses ," a policy paper by the Mental Health Association in New York State, 2002.
- **Kinot 2 and 3 columns:** Quote about Rivera's expose is from "Willowbrook State School," [8] *Wikipedia*, February 2016.
- **Kinot 3 box:** Text by the author.
- **Kinot 4 Biblical passages:** Excerpted and adapted from "Lamentations 1-2," [9] *The Complete Jewish Bible* on the *Chabad.org* website.
- **Kinot 5 Lakewood Resort ad:** The author recorded this ad text while doing research for "The Anna Fragments," but hasn't been able to track down the original reference.
- **Kinot 5 left column:** *High moments. They go round and round in me.* Lines are by Carl Sandburg from "High Moments" in *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg* (Harcourt, 1970).
- **Kinot 5 right column:** Lines by Tu Fu are from "Written on the Wall at Chang's Hermitage," translated by David Hinton, in *The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry*, edited by Eliot Weinberger (New Directions, 2003).
- **Kinot 5 box:** Excerpt from "A Miracle in the Sewers" [10] about the Chiger family in the Lvov ghetto on the *Holocaust* (auschwitz.dk) website.
- **Kinot 6 opening:** From the Creedmoor State Hospital patient records for Anna (author's personal collection).
- **Kinot 6 box:** Text by the author.
- **Kinot 7 opening and box:** Excerpts from *White Sale, Revolution Denied: From the Living Museum at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center* by Bolek Greczynski, October 29-December 1, 1990, Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, State University of New York/College at Old Westbury (The Gallery, 1990).
- **Kinot 8:** The italicized "Diagnosis" line is from the Creedmoor State Hospital patient records for Anna (author's personal collection).
- **Kinot 8 first box:** Excerpt from "Female Hysteria," [11] *Wikipedia,* February 2016.
- **Kinot 8 second box:** "For Anna," unpublished poem by the author, 1976.
- **Kinot 9 box:** Excerpt from *Out of the Shadows: Confronting America's Mental Illness Crisis* by E. Fuller Torrey (John Wiley & Sons, 1997), reprinted on the PBS "Frontline" website under "Deinstitutionalization: A Psychiatric 'Titanic.'" [12] Italicized commentary by the author.

Art Information

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Elisabeth Weiss teaches writing at Salem State University in Salem, Massachusetts. She's taught poetry in preschools, prisons, and nursing homes, as well as to the intellectually disabled.

Her poems have appeared in many journals including *London's Poetry Review, Porch, Crazyhorse, Ibbetson Street Review, Birmingham Poetry Review, Muddy River Poetry Review,* and *Paterson Literary Review*. Her chapbook, *The Caretaker's Lament,* was published by Finishing Line Press. For more information, visit Elisabeth Weiss's website. [14]

On the hybrid nature of her piece, Weiss says:

> 'The Anna Fragments' began as a nine-part poem. It deals with how my grandmother's life was shaped by her times. I added the preface as sidebar commentary and then added further definitions and explanations to enlarge and expand her story. The text resembles a page of the Talmud, which is how learned rabbis argued texts across centuries. Last summer at the Millay Colony in Austerlitz, New York, I completed the narrative by extending it to women in the following two generations. The combination of research, poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction mirrors Anna's schizophrenic world, but I also hope it gives voice, in many different ways, to a woman who was silenced.

Source URL: https://talkingwriting.com/anna-fragments

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[4] http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172120
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_New_York_City
[6] http://kingstonlounge.blogspot.com/2008/03/creedmoor-state-hospital-building-25.html
[7] http://www.supportedbirth.com/articles/twilight-sleep-childbirth-history
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[14] http://www.elisabethaweiss.com/

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');