

Daniel Y. Harris

**The Melissa Oracle**

for Melissa Chapman

*Here Merlin ceased, that for the solemn feat  
Melissa might prepare with fitting spell,  
To show bold Bradamant, in aspect meet,  
The heirs who her illustrious race should swell.  
Hence many sprites she chose; but from what seat  
Evoked, I know not, or if called from hell;  
And gathered in one place (so bade the dame),  
In various garb and guise the shadows came.*

—Ludovico Aristo  
*Orlando Furioso*, Canto III, Section XX

I.

A nimbus tilting toward aura and bleeding *geist*,  
prescient in the marginalia of direct access, melds  
in the other face—that chasm of strength, inchoate,

to furnish the undenized with a home—converges  
at the apex of opposites with a plan for the minute  
gate. “Open it!” Melissa struts out in white face and

narrow over-lapping strips of brightly colored cloth.  
To her right, Columbine, ragged and patched. To her  
left, Harlequin, back from Dante’s hell as Alichino,

perfumed to flip over backwards. “We have come  
to replace circles with triangular patches,” they  
boast in phony a cappella. “Where is Sybil?” asks

II.

Columbine, as if betrayed by a common sense of mayhem. "That's a different mythology," says Melissa, and launches to the skeined corner for

a sip of Ouzo from Mount Athos. Not a divine shield over the city, Tule Fog and the stench of an alley brewery littered with scarlet and bur

oak. Enter the measured exile of the mediocre, the rabblement of moldy figs in desperate need of discard, and the scene muddles as if toxins,

pasty in their attraction to weak immunity, held a community meeting to discuss their spreading nature. Not that possession. This one, after the

### III.

great purge and the day of new bodies. It's the rough side of a rift, the oblique with ray-tints curving in themselves and dispatched in code.

The anagram is a rebus which is now a pun, baroque and elitist, which the uninitiated may, in a week or two, blame for their anaphylactic

shock. It comes down to intervals between the margins and the center of our willingness to reach up to the gilded scaffolding of new

peptides creating new people with a mix of amino acids and hyperlinks. It's about the 0.24% with holy inertia—how in endtime,

IV.

that silly paroxysm with its attendant acid  
reflux, each of us will reach the unblemished,  
when stasis becomes divine parastasis, when

pleroma and emanation describe the same  
unfallen precursor, when the tetragrammaton  
is a heart palpitation gleaned from the latest

list-serve. Nothing about ethos and a place  
to score mission. Not in this fractured enclave  
with its familial resentments glossed by the lit

aporia of false mystagogues. The short “then”  
of *beshert* has been replaced with the long “now”  
of *gevult* and the spatial deflates like a helium

V.

balloon over midtown. Enter the plumed  
and coiffed, the troubadours, puppeteers,  
acrobats and larded clowns sporting tulips

and dandelions. Enter the bearded immortals  
hauling Holy Writ on shopping carts, and listen  
to words spawn from a seraphic mouth. “Doom

is eager, or rather, we are doom-eager,” says  
the youngest of them, the one whose moniker  
is JHAK, for Provençal Rabbi, Jacob Ha-Kohen.

JHAK enters the conference room. Is that where  
they are? It’s a far cry from The Globe or Carnegie  
Hall. “Frankly, I’m directionally challenged,” says

VI.

the Infrequent Voice feigning omniscience. "I  
spent a generation living as an ancient Canaanite  
on Mondays, a Phoenician on Tuesdays, a Hittite

and Philistine on Wednesdays and Thursdays,  
respectively, becoming a bloated Babylonian  
on Fridays, to emerge, triumphantly, with scepter,

as King of the United Monarchy of David on Saturdays  
and Sundays. The telegraphy fades in the telling, as  
does the metempsychosis. Worse, incongruity sets

itself against a plethora of antitheticals, seeking  
a respite for the estranged spirit. Characters come  
and go and we wince at the Eliotic flippancy,

VII.

darker than pitch black, but don't abate, it being  
our intention to people these triads with galloping  
personae, suspending our disbelief above corpses

of dead ideas. "I can't support this," pipes in Melissa,  
"our troop of stock and pantomime has no place for  
the lukewarm middle cast in white noise, lids heavy

with snicky snacks." It's eleven minutes to rapture,  
fourteen minutes to the apocalypse, ushered in by a  
meth-head eschaton, seventeen minutes to a nation

of priests chanting the yahwic yelp of the Asherah,  
but too late for the cradling messiah of flux. Melissa  
broods and grows crimson with fury. "Crap," she says,

VIII.

“this is shape shifting and reification. Have we no use for uplifted hands and wrapped leather straps? And the chronically betrayed, have they no say in the outcome?

Margins? Peripheries? Borders? Zones? Apps of the pod people? Nonsense! I prefer the nondual, shred nostalgia clichés and read *The Tanakh* upside down.” The moldy

figs shift their blue squints to a sulfur-green sulk. Now, bent on the cusp of the void, appeased by the thickening plot of origin-craving, without force of edict or bylaw,

no decision is made, nor opinion voiced. Nothing happens. The oily, neon hum of light bulbs play God to a fat fly. Such is the reprieve on a day of light rain. Is it reprieve,

IX.

or a revolt against the digression of *dramatis personae* dropping in without appointment? “I pick the latter,” bestows the Infrequent Voice, unphazed by the lack

of a latter. Then, in unison, the Greek chorus of this *mise-en-scène* sings “the reprieve is the latter!” Hyenas dart across the office carpet. Raccoons and opossums

nibble on trail mix. Pest Wildlife Control is closed, but the janitorial service has a vacuum cleaner and two, 32-oz. spray bottles of Windex powerized glass cleaner

with AMMONIA-D RTU. When the hoopla stills to a wince worn by a passerby, we come to a conquered verity: we’re the possessed holding the last chance.

X.

Notice the period, grammatical prank of completion,  
and the new realism—the conceptual has been replaced  
with the digital instant of viral media: bandwidth blood-

lines, 4G DNA, a parthenogenic shared drive with trigger  
happy error messages, fiber optic pineal eyes, forensic  
webinars, remote access pituitary glands, fetishized

social media with an amygdala GPS and wireless limbic  
systems. Let's perform the ancestral autopsy. Please, no  
interruptions, even if they be entropic agons of worry.

We are hybrids of antiquity, amalgams of disparate  
nuances, resolute in our talents to swerve away from  
extinction, be that by polis or lack of diffidence, thus

XI.

prone to pulsing bright like a semaphore in winter fog,  
or desert reliquaries replete with canopic jars. The secrets  
of scrolls, really, are not bulwark covenant, though the

thongs would revile this claim, and blame their adherents  
for an insufferable syncretism. Spin us, inflate us, deflate us,  
burn us, bury us, force us to be our opposite with hyphenated

or truncated names, and we're still here, a fractured people  
of ventriloquists, voicing the grand, undead monism with  
a sigh. We take a corporeal shape and look inward at a

zoharic Daniel fresh with new double-chiasm theories,  
as if the four beasts were Ezekiel's postlude to a third  
temple. Call Daniel and Ezekiel our nervous ticks of fatal

## XII.

urgency, and let us say that Melissa is the first human, macranthropos and Adam Kadmon, at once biblical *tzelem*, renaissance golem and hybot of the messianic internet.

Theosophically, we are adding a variable to the classical tetragrammaton. For the faint hearted, queasy and easily prone to gossip during the High Holidays, we offer this

caveat: poetry is still the Stevensian supreme fiction, abstract and inconceivable as an inventing source. Now, add MLSS to the Mesha Stele, suspend disbelief and

invoke the sad loss of vowels. Why the slapdash? May this not work with any chanted consonants reinscribed on the Moabite Stone? The Melissians say “yes,” but are

### XIII.

quick to point out that only secret societies with quick senses of a comedic cabal have outwitted the redactors. “Do we now contain every variation,” worries the

Infrequent Voice. “Have we evolved into variation itself, shifting foci with each trope?” The reproducing triads are without frontispiece. It would be futile to start again,

now that we’ve come this far, late and all, fragile in this overreaching preamble to our lack of epic closure. At times, say on Tuesday in the afternoon, aren’t facile

antitheticals annoying? Can the rebus be redressed as linear call-to-action? Is the straight-and-narrow always chronically unhip, saturated by formal monotones clad

XIV.

in tweed and loafers? There's a way out, down a flight of stairs to a storage room filled with scraps, bottles, steel-flits, tax forms, excretes and nitrogen waste, slag,

sludge, strategic plans and human resources manuals, modest post-consumer waste, e-waste, insulation debris, electrical wiring, rebar, wood, concrete, bricks, lead

and asbestos. The Melissians provide us with disposable coverall splash contamination suits to protect against blood and blood-borne pathogens. The exit is well lit.

Is this respite from the heights inevitable? There is no one asking, albeit, perhaps the Infrequent Voice, now engrossed with our spectral people. This is the latest

XV.

news—our miracle of survival is a nervous disorder.  
Frankly, no. We've reached neither a respite, a reprieve,  
a crescendo, a way out, a way in, a closure, a resolve,

a dénouement neither naming nor unnamng our tribe's  
vandalized preoccupation with each other. Yes, yes,  
the great chameleons and millennial polyglots we

know, cleaving to the romanticism of priority. Guilty  
as charged. When aesthetic immanence become trite  
and ponderous, negate it: farewell to the pulpit with

its oratory charm and charisma. Farwell to departure  
with its rose garden lattice, apocrypha and canards.  
Today is the high art of the continuum, meandering

XVI.

about like the moving targets of a population study.  
The Emersonian prayer is a disease, but nostalgia,  
with its quaint orientalism, in part raw psychotropic,

at war with the human sciences, produces unbearable  
tears. Can we bear a hybrid cosmogony of the Galilee  
and the Black Forest, to say nothing of the soggy pathos

of personal angels? How they oblige us beyond terminus  
and are held responsible for our remission from malaise.  
Welcome to bliss with its conical terrain. Here is honey,

milk, petite madeleine with chamomile tea, nuts, dates,  
almonds, a splash of lemon zest lit by lemon-light and  
sugared pomegranates above a thin veneer of marzipan.

XVII.

We have reached the hinge of the mirrored door, a.k.a., *La Porte de l'Enfer* in a mock *Hôtel Biron*, adjusted to 36 degrees of the line of sight. With a quorum present,

the minutes are approved. *The Three Shades*, renamed *Mem*, *Lamed* and *Samekb*, make a motion to add a final *Samekb*, augmenting the original 98 centimeters by 515,

or 613 centimeters. This readjustment has chronic repercussions: the original size of 6 meters high, 4 meters wide and 1 meter deep, by dint of gematria and nuclear

fission, is cryptically resized to 6 meters high, 1 meter wide and 3 meters deep. The blacklight of antimatter is released through the mirror. The sexy prime triple

XVIII.

of 613 dispatches its 613 parts in *sefirot* and *mitzvot*,  
all contained in the one supernal body with its lacuna  
of ancient Hebrew. Call this digression an infiltration

of the normative: after all, we're at the threshold and  
about to burrow into underlives clad in vintage dress.  
The Infrequent Voice calls upon The Lord of Talent

to speak: "nothing but the loggia of décor—my  
laxity as tenor before the aria—my triad's trap  
scented like the perfume of a triangle—leafmold,

dyspepsia—bulldozers like giant clams are the root  
causes of my political imbroglios—this is my paisley  
ascot, and my royal-purple smoking jacket—may

XIX.

I disturb you for a Romeo y Julieta from Belicosos,  
and a Chocolats Halba from Wallisellen and truffles,  
an aluminum necktie, a velvet thong, diamond cufflinks,

a Louis Vuitton handbag for my wife and one, limited  
edition Yaacov Agam to mount next to my vitrine of  
Alsatian figurines?" The narrative moratorium of said

triads is proclaimed to no fanfare: in fact to no one, or  
to no one who would ultimately make a difference. Who  
proclaimed? The Melissians are out of the office. Next

time, we'll install a surveillance camera and catch the  
proclaimer in the act. Was it the Lord of Talent, or the  
Infrequent Voice, Columbine, Harlequin, the ultra-hip

XX.

JHAK, Ezekiel, Daniel or Melissa herself? We're sorry, the answer is Chaim Mania, the one whose voice has yet to surface, may not, has already—awkwardly uncanny

of the outcome and its attendant gloss and blue pencil. The cross-hatched third-degree—the alias's or avatar's, or impersonator's stand-in tone littered with double

entendres and trompe l'oeil—hyperreal crazy irrationalism, for better or worse, is a by-product of 21<sup>st</sup> century post-digitalism. He is, of course, part dilettante and animus,

and part *Vitruvian Man*, standing at ease against the holographic wall, which is an infernal machine, a final form of identity, and we're unlucky not to be on hand

XXI.

to shake. Where have we gone? The unhappy claim  
to the land of incoherence having trashed the idioms  
of the canon, caught between some neutral proverbial

wisdom and an edgy ellipsis. With that said, is Aristo  
anywhere to be found? After all, didn't he begin as a  
preemptive strike on intent and ethos? Is he mere agit-

propagandist, or Chaim Mania's alias, absent the *ottava*  
*rima*. If only our coy Chaim had littered the canon with  
couplets soaked in dactyls, but he didn't. Chaim Mania

is a Renaissance Man of nothing. Neither a maggid nor  
a magus, the rabblement accuses us, (the writing coterie)  
of a fatal deception—another false messiah linked to Writ

XXII.

the way plaster is linked to mould. Anxiety melts into postponement, which melts into distraction, its milieu a potpourri of memorabilia and recondite ends lit by

a strange hegemony. It's impossible to blink it away, to change the channel, or post a retort. Best to break the triadic mesmerism, what lulls and stirs, romances

and flames to come to a reappraisal of the enterprise. It may just lie in changing stanzaic length. Why four stanzas of three lines per section? Chaim Mania was

emphatic at the outset and planted his magnetic pole. Though we know nothing of him and less about her and the others, we are doomed to be failed romantic

XXIII.

questers, born with a passion to expand the epic,  
epic now meant as epic tweet. Same harbingers of  
doom, different medium. No idolons. A gut feeling

that a decade's sustained mediocrity far exceeds the  
current state of the art—this is the microcosm. Later  
that day, a jolt forward to confluence with its bold

trajectory—the “we” is now the “I” of a crowned  
skull, hurled in the air, catching up to its face, neck  
and torso. There's no turning back. The deed has been

done. The oracle implodes in pledge blanks, spent  
by the zealous support of no one. Not a moment too  
soon. Support is lost. The fabric, unwound. Here lies

XXIV.

the requiem with its litanies and postpartum. How did it die? Why didn't we stop it, or at least market a public restoration project, prior to the fatal blow?

A lattice of reasons: say the windowpanes, the irregular climate system, the hollow walls between offices, provincial bandwidth, raw novelty and the

pilfering of shits and giggles in the back hallway where black, bound newspaper tomes of "the great age" lie next to Elmer's Glue. Perhaps the Herring

Hall Marvin safe flanked by tubes of simple washable tempera and a Presto heat dish, are to blame? The culprit is entropy with its glazes of declension.

XXV.

Declension has its wit and vacuum to add to ends,  
which veer toward a true lack of coda. The coda  
is no coda at all and the dramatis personae peopling

the vestibule and foyer, are sadly mere aliases and  
agents of the continuum. We surrender to the fleeting.  
Skinned to bare bone and lower, reduced to flakes

spinning in slants below the midtown streetlights,  
one pale verity leaves its glow: the heart is a fitting  
spell. Once, of course, we demanded prooftexts

with their nuanced Latin. Once we were chivalric.  
Now, we spin our stint groomed by the gray mood  
of a pineal eye blazing from a hot, conic head.