Gospel of the Heavenly Mother

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GOSPEL OF THE HEAVENLY MOTHER

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

Gospel of the Heavenly Mother

by

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A collection of poems, Gospel of the Heavenly Mother asks, and attempts to answer, questions regarding the freedom that is available to the individual within a power structure. The two structures examined in the book are the grammar of the English language and organized religion, specifically the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The poems enact the belief that as we reorient ourselves to these structures, freedom is possible; by usurping the syntax in which we communicate (and therefore the language by which we understand God and our relationship to Him/Her), we gain the ability to speak more fully and more clearly. This reorientation and clarification reminds us that humans are social beings and that there are many versions of what is true.
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"All writing is exchange, and exchange is active in finding out what the present is."  
—Leslie Scalapino (as qtd. in Frost 22)

The continuous present, as termed by Gertrude Stein, presupposes what can be called the "continuous past": that which exists only in how we are constantly realigning ourselves with what does not exist. The present is the realigning.

This "how" can be considered the components that allow the present to occur— it is the words we use, the syntax in which we use them, and whatever sense of "history" we have adopted, willingly or unwillingly. As a children with toy blocks, we build, destroy and build again. There is no one grammar best for the present, as there is no one logic through which all dreams are played out. Images, fears, hopes, issues simply cannot stop rearranging themselves. For this reason, even as we abandon a concept as false, it can reappear to us in another form and seem truthful in that arrangement; and on and on, until we don't know which, in the succession, is the original or most true belief. Our recognition of these constant reversals is often called "accepting our past."

The process implies the possibility of its own denial: any next present may deem this way of understanding untrue. Having to relearn is both our sorrow and our joy.

The embracing of this joy and sorrow was the modern sensibility; the postmodern is the continual letting go and re-embracing— exhalting and inhaling— because the present, we keep learning, is all that we can do.

I wish to express my thanks to Claudia Keelan, who has encouraged me in the research of this manuscript and compelled the poetics that shape it. My husband, Mauricio Romano, and Sasha Steensen both make the idea of a socially-defined self
more appealing, and I thank them for their friendship and love. I dedicate this book to my mother, whose continuous loving support and willingness to listen have been invaluable to my writing and my spirit.
I. Benediction

"still doth our hero contemplate
in raptures of undream

that strictly (and how) scienti
fic land of supemod
where freedom is compulsory
and only man is god."
--e.e. cummings (85)

"Liberty is the right
not to lie"
--Albert Camus (as qtd. in Olsen 44)
Adult Speech

There is a bully
where the sentence begins,
shoving us from airborne swings
to the see-saw, splintered
and asking to answer
for the weight of another--
heavier, lighter, slower, and
compromise becomes
the only play we know.
Finding Mary

Seagulls circle, crying,  
but my scream is all I hear.  
My dry throat, her dry body,  
salted, washed up days  
before and shriveled  
like a child hiding  
she'd tried all the corners  
there were; she just couldn't  
back in far enough.  
Even this time she failed--  
the tide circling in daily  
brought her with it  
a Judas to her solitude  
seaweed clings to her,  
from her arms, hair,  
lips. I long to kiss  
her, to feel the salt  
that had always been there,  
tasteless to all but her,  
to touch the wrinkles on  
her blue-stained face  

staring through me  
to the sky with no life,  
no regret for leaving  
me, is too much  
like the face I've seen  
every day for years,  
and I leave her to the gulls  
for only their cries to mourn.
Upon Excommunication,
Without Remorse

—"And those that would not confess their sins and repent of their iniquity, the same were not numbered among the people of the church, and their names were blotted out."
—Mosiah 26:36, The Book of Mormon

A careful wash-and-wait
stored for drying
stored
for others / unloved /
undone, and soaked
shaking to leave the comfortbed of lack

/ Instead /

map project of other
stone throws:
    she never
went far from herself
without backtracking,
    / careful /
without knapsack
with lunch for later.
The world without preposi-
tion is a lovely, cakey thing: sticky trying, lost method change.
Liveliness

The color pink
fades
from rage to sorrows:
stagnate, anger
spreads a rot—
the color
is a counter-act,
an intuition
saying nothing.

Not a thing
takes up space
in my drawer,
my closet, under
the games
I don't play
(no one wants
to listen
to me win, to me
lose, to me).
Not a thing is company
in spaces
of common wonders:
the wonder of others,
the wonder of self.

I is a wonder,
a space occupied
between old panties,
behind the 80's version
of Trivial Pursuit.
Catch it only as you clean;
clean it only as you throw it out.
Pink will return in its place.
Toulouse-Lautrec was a man
a painter and a lover
too, I'm sure, a lover
and when he died he came
to visit me on the canvas.
He is a spry young thing
and a lot of muscle.
How the Noun watched Others
watch it fall apart

Seamless dolls (it was) a teacake of sugar
and melting pot
or washstand (it was)

he goes away
I stay wanting the change
in myself in construction (it was)
of pants that sometimes fit
hoping they never will

this rayn of sunshine waits for me
waiting
was never a specialty (it was)

selfish and serving
this kind of pottery burns
wanting a roundness unknown
kick pin
kick-

pin pokey
couldn't put the sentence together again:
I'll wait  I'll want
to want to wait.
I'll never love like you.
Her mouth doesn't work
without an ear, hearing page;
she makes him listen
spacing herself line to
line to hear at least
a glimmer shadow
of what her voice might say.
Loud Air and the City

Counting grams of sunlight
the wind gets home faster than I;
I can't use numbers
and give them to the rain
falling behind wind.
I never ran quickly,
ever loved a moment
without destroying its memory—
the act of protecting
turns me still/weak/somber/old.
I am a walking piece of thought unattached
unorganized and mostly cloudy.

The wind isn't heard in this city
(the hungry hands
paralyzed in cup position).
It needs painting—
pesos are the color here,
a dirty and wrinkled and rare coin.

Love calls and a sound to listen.
Prayer to Stephen Dedalus

Girls from divorce
can have hope too—
watch them
    hokey pokey
and rhyme-diddy
(my shoehorn doesn't fit,
I hung my stocking
   too high,
        and fell further
for being barefoot;
the bra sagged too.)

Watch me dance
around the totem pole and sing
hi diddley dee

Please have me painted by morning.
Take-down

Take me down-town
she says to him softly/
roughly/hoarsely a low voice she knows
he will love (obey). Take me please
she says higher so
his unborn daughter goes too.
They share a bucket seat with not enough
buckle, the she-lower thinks,
while the higher
hums a tune she hates.
Breathing

I don't know who writes you,
but you've ceased to write yourself
if you say you can't cause pain.
You deny you make me cry,
so I deny you are God,
but as a human,
my breathing forgives you:
the man who thinks he is god,
the god who forgets he's a man.
I carry you bandaged
in my chest of hearts (I have many
for they sometimes fail)
until you cry your pain
yourself, inhale hurts
of those who lost hope of love
in your name. You will heal
in your then-teary bandage,
hop from me alive,
in painful love for others
you'll call
life. You will live
forgiven, friend, a failing god
like the rest of us.
Many wait for your healing,
as many long to love
your bleeding eyes
for what they cry to become.
Welcome, friend, to the land
of lost and found. Here the wind forgives you.
The Anatomy of Opposites

—"All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of deity."
—Joseph F. Smith (as qtd. in McConkie 516)

Anatomy

Anatomyms
found themselves cornered:
a mirror into mazes
of stirred repressions let loose
turnings and turn

-ing
slots of A's and B's:

repetition /re pet it ion/
the joy of the human race
a lavish trying
drooping for more

catch up to find them
staring in wonder
at where they are each other

catching raindrops to save for later

a small indented circle
erased a calming spot of land
corner of love and sky to sport
not refusing to listen

The sentences fit
The sentences fit
with spaces between

knowing that to speak
isn't always to know

coughcough /canter/
slay sleigh 's lay

spelling doesn't make it so
The water spirit that birthed me
was a writhe one
and she never left again.
II. Sophia's Incarnation

"In the heav'ns are parents single?
No, the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I've a mother there."
—"O My Father," Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints (292)

"Some said: 'Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit.' They are in error. . . .
When did a woman ever conceive of a woman?"
—The Gospel of Philip (31)

"The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also;
but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit."
—The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints, 130:22

"This earth was created to be a place where the hosts of spirits might come,
receive mortal bodies, and undergo further testing and trials."
—Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (575-576)

HOW THE SPIRIT SPEAKS
BY MOVING PHYSICALLY

15
Libation to the God of No

Counted lovelorn a flock of geese flies southward circles, gladly in one direction.

An only is told, honking, and the next mountain listens. Offense.

In a square, you are a noun reaction.

A diaper speaks all ways in shrills.
Conception

Coersion of a second-rate type
couldn't see the rush for waves.
Wasted, unwanted, a couple
gathers in
for winter.

She skips to him,
notices grey in the window behind.

It falls flat, a kiss, in
the knowing of a torque wrench.
Humbling, a twist on goodbye.
Body

Circular swings
an open door

sing    sing

mold to my wants
and wishes an

I-can-betray-a-thing
I-can't-be-faithful-to-a-one

a you
for whom
the circle is a square.
Tighten a proponent
to watch for falling--

the failing
to watch for loved ones--
people you cannot
hug:
they are too hairy
too clean
too oozy
too mean;
they remind me--
I'm here now, too

a woman galvanized
for the long
walk ahead.
Inconsolable

Dust begins, she watches
the pane for signs of spring.
yellow. uncautious. indifferent
to her silver,
powder puffs on the counter.
Children sing, dogs growl,
clean and dirty enter the room.
    Cattails dance the side of
    the road, how can green
grow without her help?
    Nestled under her dorsal:
    contempt for
    nighttime needs, open windows.
It settles, soon and even.
She sweeps a constant
for distraction of results.
After-immigration wandering

a fiesty kind of walk
an empty-headed foe to kill
a friend for whom
talk is meaningless, a bundle
of foreign hillsides aren't the same

indigenous brothers
School

Droopy legs fall hard
on the soft couch
they gave her.
"She will smile," they say,
but her memory is too sharp,
perfect to allow her hope.

They watch.

Calling india, india
a place where place is superfluous
and wishing an elsewhere
is an unknown job.

One cannot paint with expectation.

Current:
a coral messy mid-March
myopia.

Take her away and kill her.
Touch him and he will die.
Still death floats
on metaphors between them
while they wander without home.
There is a never spot on the window,
for washing when things don't fit.

She was a woman
and left him
wanting children of his
(er) own.

The telephone cackles domestici
cities
of transcendental transgressions that
my FUCK YOU can
(t) say:
without you—

how it loses flavor
mastur
(er)bation never was temptress of mine.

There is a wash on the window,
finished word wiped clean,
only speech staying to
sell the barn of oysters and cloistered
nunnies
with too much time on their hands.

Don't stop to stare at me,
you perfect sen
(in)tence across the street;

I can't
(−) declare war
on half a window.
Dictating a love malign,  
meaning  
(a heavy soul determined)  
imposed weight upon the world.  
An abundance of counting  
shivered itself to sleep.  

A quiet rest.  
Assimilated upon arrival,  
rhyme can bear a pointed tooth;  
undeniable: we glean rhythm  
from dead men's mistakes.  
We are bold to say:  
their ignorance taught us  
a new vocabulary.  

Speech accurate and true.  

Cancel my love, my life,  
my second chance  
for eagerness—  
ego, mystical wrongness.  
I lie in a bed  
I hope is unmade.
Glow

As if
His -tory could be wrong,
this river runs backwards
north to
   Pacific
   and
I decide
    which right to flow,
drowning either way
in the tide
    that sweeps the land.

Moonrock
crumbles
washes love,
the sinless
   wait
    to perfection:
lost to found,
their slipshod wordage
adds breath to silence.

Love for children
clears the throat of teaching rightness:
History can be wrong = cannot tell itself.

In your death
   I live
simply.
    Our children glow
a relative light
in speech they taught themselves.

Truth is messy
   and only present.
Office

Desk next to
Barbara is
a clear jun-
gle mess. She

thinks she
owns her
pencils
her mind
her no-
ticing
spelling
keeps her
free
for days. One
day she will miss
a verb
maybe
an
ad-
jective
then
she will know
she can
leave.
To Honey

Limit, love:
the candle burns
but
not forever.
Speak, love,
of constant, sure.
Can't love,
not a trace
in my rotting shoe.

Here. Love,
hold
and
tell yourself
you speak fluently.
Lightly in a frame
we run
toward each other
but
what we see
is ourselves.

Cautious, kindness
a welcome stick
breaking softly
on a fence.
You could not say it better.
Anatomy After Sweeping

Exhaling
this dust
leaves me empty
of structure and
lack of form
takes over
my insides until
my stomach
is in my head
and the pain
near my toes
is a heart
doing double time
to rise through
legs intestined
with where I've been
then recorded for a day.
I can't feel where
my brain is
only see
my left breast
is bigger
than my right (still
breast), and
my lungs,
sunken to where
my uterus
used to be
can now enjoy air
where it's clear.
Summer

The currents continue,
    wiping disconsolate welcome
onto newly conscious sky.
North Star, can you learn to cloud the sun?
In my winter you were both each other.

I hear the dawn rise early.
I hear my voice is blurred.
My arched back is frozen
in an age that's relative—
I am my own grandmother.

Because older ones aren't noticed
I hear them talking on the bus.
I grow young
as people feed me:
the sweaty smell of working,
the sounds of going home,
the laughs of those unknowing
that silence isn't wasted
on those with watchful ears.
First Date

In interrogatory free
dom a sultry call to no
where a version
of completion (in
complete) . Non
sense to be
wanted to be
a part apart:
coarse
cold hands
bad beer and
not knowing our
self(es) stealthily off
er free
dom to a whole
a part
a won
der.
Nouns

They're worth the question.

Calm settles, a cloud
covering all but me:
I run too fast
linger only in
my cleaning.

Indignity is reward
for bastards of this strange breed—
lovers
who cannot love.

I smile
 to forget
and stand still
to collect
a slow drop of calming

wait
Trees know what they want.
Circles return from somewhere,
no apologies, no skeptics. I wake
for my body movements and second-
hand learning. It becomes gently mine.
Trees know what they want.
Mid-Mass Exodus

Innocence reigns a
dictator to the solemn
sorry church of moaning
(the sound of doubling
two unknown happy thoughts).

Constant consti
pation in this nation
of fools gone wild:
I am free! Who is me?
I am me! I am

not elder
in the crosslegged corner
(for my lack
of desire
to know nothing but
good
and loving).

I
quietly slip away
while the chorus sings be.
'Til Death

He is young-er than me and
sings a dance fleeting
but is always in flight.
The bird he flies to me
from himself and back
to him
sometimes stays flitting
with my hungry nonsense.

Sometimes he sings alone.
I am a constant
peanut-butter birdhouse
(our nest I built for one)
we settle and hover and
fiddle—children can't see
a progression.
There is space for two
where butter holds us
the butter we love
we love to eat
our love
it will grow back
our magic birdhouse.

Baby,
he sings, and where I nuzzle
his neck he is bald.
He is a bird and a counting song
that cannot live but sing
to me

for Mauricio
III. Invocation

"The Word is everything to the child, both father and mother, 
teacher and nurse. ...and the Word alone supplies us children with 
the milk of love, and only those who suck at this breast are truly happy."
--Clement of Alexandria (as qtd. in Buell 164)

"i who have died am alive again today, 
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birthday 
of life and of love and wings"
-e.e. cummings (114)
Where Babies Come From

In the post-war
backhand of an hour,
in the was that can't be told,
in my finishing a sentence
of yours and you of mine
("that's a lie"— "you're right"): there is a something
so ripe it can't be
duplicated or
spoken of—
and the word
is dead compared,
and the silence produced
is all sound,
and only in its death is new life born.
Learning Language

dog mommymommy

daddy no no

seep bus vroom vroom

baby no baby no

(it's easier to expose a lie
than it is to tell the truth)

Under the truck there
is a dog mommy
daddy doesn't know
what it says vroom.
The dog under it sleeps.

Corn loves the under
side of itself and can
hate the dirt it grows
from, can't see
to attach smell, sky
as mealy with worms.
Crowded the birds
have dirty beaks.
A lolli could stand a less loved thing a hopeful absent sweet ness kindly melting stick ing to the tops and sides of mouths
He had a farm

I never saw, an E-I-
E-I-O, and on my honor
I did my duty
to God and my country

and obeyed

the law of the pack
I never belonged to
but in word. And even it
divided me, nine by three
and twelve by six,

and by six and teen

I was old as the shoe woman
with so many she didn't know
how to be
one of her children, and

what to do
what to do

became her only question,
and my only answer

is to turn the page

to more tinkly tunes
that wind down before they're done.
Silent Wish to Momma

Sparkle
like you did
when you first came home
and thought the pay-
ments were worth it.
Shag carpet and
lemonade can't grow
a miracle like you were;
every day and then
some days twice I saw you
sit close to no one
but us all
and love no
one but us all.
We felt no
one but us
all loved us.
Lullaby

Parting elephants sway,
swing purple-giving
and slightly raised (you're mother)
the wallpaper faded
since he-de  he-de  ho
tink  tink never mind
I'll take myself
to the table I want
get my own then crush
the centers.  I know
audience doesn't care,
staring  staring (you're beautiful)
at what is shown  lies  lies
tonka trucks under the bed
hide from you  stop  stop
(you're sister)  this is for me.
twinkle  twinkle  say  it
goodnight.
Anthem

That is a way of singing,
a quiet nationality of hope
and song measured in ballets
  a chorus, a chorus of cheese:
  they give a non
  sense reiteration,
retreating to a treat where necessary.
The snacksong can give
it back and never
can it thank. A ballad failing
to repeating

Give it back, it sings with deafness.

The dearness fell silent,
singing a dance it couldn't move.
For a New Tutor

Mr. Careful won't you come

to see me here and some

lessons teach me can

you teach me to love can

I learn a new word

all those I've not heard

those I fear

will never be Here

is a place where rhyme dies

a death I see every day

and here is where

I need a new line to

say something new so can

you teach me to love

can I learn a new word?
Negative Capability

Torrild lorrid mal a dees
tick losson mosson do
torrid morrid ping pong bock
tore blossom never blue.

Teller nevel gloric now
the doric of the bawn
shine-e shine-o lock be ho
be nomul horndy ion.

Fivel nevel clossum doe
fivel clossum do
nevel nevel clossum nee
the rain will beat on you.

To deebbe deebbe deebbeho
blahde saydin hod
klama klama dama dee
the rain be mon jihad.

Fa dee sevin for dee sicks
dee sevin sicks some don
to dive dee dive dee cleaven bove
dee boy som mof ur tawn.

Stu dennel me stu dennel dee my
stu dennel dee sadie me
my dog she be she beedle ho
me kennel be woolen klee.
Going to Solla Sollew

Our mindful __________ pick-up
    plants __________, weeds
shoot up behind
    you and me.
We ride
    tip-toe, __________, bare,
unaware of the other's cold,
    warm to consented neglect.

I talk, listen: squeaks, chains, ______________,
    (breaths, mostly vowels);
you listen, talk: ________________

Left, front, sideways and back. My list
    of scrapes and dents:
    circus of stars teeming religion,
jolly roly-polys, and crisp
    white shorts.

: ________________ . I drop you off.
Biography as Constant Climax

The details are:
stains only on the canvas of the shoe
black lights surround a car's two signs.
There we were, the truthful
happy few, skating away
on plagiarism and dirty diapers.

Once there was no sound is me.
Then I inhaled the voices surrounding
and spat them out in my own.
(No, I only learned to declare
the background noise more beautiful.)

The details are:
spanish speakers stay in back
orange rises between cloud shadows.
There is a plug under my bed
disguised as a wild thing.
It sings to me at night.

Snowmen never grow here, sadly
nothing does, happily this isn't
a problem for me for my details.
reverse is in the upper right
too many cookies are bad for the soul.

The details are
only until the next

twisted cinnamon-sliced loaves
garbage trucks afraid of dogs.
Feet say so much about a person;
pain sinks to them daily,
landing on yesterday's unfinished chore.

Unlimited magic is the apple
forever unplucked. Reachable, yes,
edible, maybe, but still on the tree
for even the unknowing to teach us, again,
it is a fruit. it is alive. it is happy.
Blink

Choochoo the eyelids close
to the opening field around
tracks shining daily
nightly speed slowing
speeding slow daybreak
as eyelids awake.
The Variety of Religious Experience

I.

Knowing left the right hand
so the left
kept me knowing

will undoubtedly swim
from me—
to bear
(to bear
would be to raise a child).
Swim
gently
back

what cannot cross;
what cannot cross

seems not a hard thing

a baby
to me
to me.

II.

The
solstice
hand
water
thing

To
rise
cross
love
not know
bear

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The water spirit that birthed me
was a writhe one
and she never left again.
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