

## My Life in a Coffee Cup

What I poured in  
    I drank—and what I drank  
I became. My tongue led me  
  
to taste the entrance to things—  
    my lips, split apart, in pursuit—  
my eyes strayed to other eyes  
  
when the cup overturned—  
    my nose drank in  
the escaping mist—my ears  
  
on their own foraged  
    save for instants of sip  
and pour. First, letters fell  
  
into the cup—then, words  
    canalized the mud  
as I stirred in the milk  
  
drinking it up, whole  
    phrases tumbled in:  
it took many strokes  
  
to hook and pull them out  
    clean onto the page—  
white like the roughest sea—  
  
as the words spilled out  
    the cup emptied until  
night's ink scavenged  
  
the dark and refilled the cup  
    when I poured  
and once more  
  
drank down the world.

## If I Told You

If I told you I am Roma, if I told you I am named  
after my great-grandmother Sabina and that  
Sabina is a Romani name, if I told you  
there is no DNA marker for Roma but I believe

my people are Jewish Roma. If I told you  
I feel Roma in my blood when I watch flamenco  
and I have a common Roma blood type,  
if I know how to speak every Romance language

but Romanian and my Romanian-American grandmother  
who knew no Yiddish knew how to say  
*Cum vă place?* How do you like it? in Romanian.  
If I told you that proves nothing and everything.

If I told you I am related to a Hollywood gangster  
on my Romanian side and you probably believe  
Roma are gangster thieves. If I told you I am a thief  
and I am stealing my Roma identity, if I have never begged

for a coin never sat outside a subway or train station  
though once, stranded in Boston, asked strangers  
for a bed, ended up on a bench in the police station.  
If I told you I slept in a tent or under the canopy

of stars, if the rhythms of my clapping are Roma  
and my people are from Iași in Moldavia  
in eastern Romania, if I told you  
Roma played at Jewish weddings and Jews

played at Roma weddings, yet during  
the Iași pogrom of June, 1941, Romani were caught  
laughing as they helped the Nazis. If this is when  
I have my doubts about being Roma.

If I told you the Romani part of me believes  
only in song and the Jewish part insists

on writing it down. If I told you  
some Romani have light eyes and hair like mine.

If I told you that part of me never feels at home  
and that part is a Romani Jew. That being  
an outcast once, why not be an outcast twice.

## Kafka's Hands

Not the ones with which he wrote  
and held lemon water and lifted up a spoon  
to fletcherize his food  
nor the ones with which he held Felice

at two hands remove

nor the degenerate hand of Leni  
who tries to seduce K  
but the one with severed thumb  
pinky sheared off to the root  
and a ring finger worthless to

hold a ring—to illustrate

the accidents that might befall  
a worker using a rectangular wood-  
planing machine as opposed to  
a circular plane. *Who has a magic*

*hand that he can place into a machine*

*without it being torn and tossed aside by a  
thousand knives?* These the hands—  
manikin worker hands—deftly drawn

that drew me.

## How Many Secrets?

I don't know her name, the Chandigarh girl,  
who was raped by her uncle, and I don't know  
that just because I, too, was once a ten-year-old girl

in braids that I have any right to speak of her—  
but who will speak for her—she who had no right to her body,  
or to know that what bumped up inside her

was not a kidney stone. If it is true we all begin  
as female before testosterone washes through  
the womb to make some of us male,

isn't she close to being the mother of us all?  
At six months pregnant, denied an abortion  
by the Indian court, denied to her parents, that is,

who have not told the girl she was pregnant,  
who now has had the baby  
cut from her as she lay in numbed

sleep—the baby girl unseen  
by her or by her parents.  
Why did she finally tell them about her uncle—

her stomach pains a month earlier?  
What did she make of the heaviness of her breasts?  
Now I see her stitched-up belly healing.

How she'll have to go on when her whole life  
things have been done to her—for her.  
Now I can see her married off

at fifteen, the stomach pains returning.  
When the anesthesia of not-knowing  
wears off, let her mouth unstitch itself

even if it means knowing she has survived  
one cycle of suffering only to be borne  
into another.