

Throat Erasures: A Series of Textile Poems

My project at Can Serrat centered around the creation of textile poems, presented hung from clothespins in the garden. These pieces were an exercise on how to construct poetry out of physical materials, and how this act of construction-- laborious, painstaking, tactile -- is a poem in itself. Drawing inspiration from asemic writing (such as the work of Argentine artist [Mirtha Dermisache](#)) and expressing meaning through exploding the semiotic form of words, the poems therefore exist as physical testaments to process, less so as products in themselves. In this way, I meditated on a moment of personal sadness that struck me right when arriving to Can Serrat-- the passing of my grandmother-- and to try, in my own small way, to find a ritual to do the work of grieving.

My grandmother, Rhea, passed after years of struggling with throat cancer. I found myself unable to sit shiva with family or take part in any of the mourning rituals of Jewish tradition that are personally grounding around this time. Instead, I turned to the creation of my own ritual to process grief. This involved copying down long passages of text about the throat, the larynx, and laryngeal cancer, often for hours each day. I then blocked out sections of the text to create erasure poems. Then, I used textile paint to paint these erasures onto scraps of fabric (generously sourced from fellow residents at Can Serrat), which I dyed with avocado pits to various shades of (raw/throaty) pink. The painting of the erasures was experimental-- on some, I painted half of a sheet of fabric with the entire source text, leaving gaps, like lost teeth, of those words that formed a poem, and then on the other half the poem. On others, I painted the source text all in one color, and then the selected erasure poem in another color, to make the words stand out.

The resulting poems, as pasted below, while written in an intuitive sense, all seem to hold themes true to my grandmother's life-- the loss of her larynx (colloquial called the 'voice box') in middle age, her inability to speak, the constraints of womanhood and of her role as a wife (then a divorcee) and mother. This made sense to me, as erasure poems, unlike other forms of source text-based poetry, render time as essential to the body of the poem. The words are never reorganized into a new poem-- they hold their place and order from the original text, and are drawn to the forefront, while others are 'erased' or blocked out. I see connections in this form to the way that memory functions, the way that certain incidents in time are held, erased, delineated, in reflecting upon a life. Aspects of my grandmother's life surfaced, almost accidentally, in these texts-- obviously incomplete, and obviously biased through the lens of my understanding-- in the act of my own reflective mourning. The final product also held physical and formal resonances to the *midrash*-- the ancient rabbinical texts used to interpret the bible (or more broadly any text), which I also found apt, given the connection to seeking a mourning ritual tied to Judaism, the religion practiced by my grandmother. In one of the erasures "mouth/serve

only/as birds/serve to guard the air”, I also experimented with deconstructing letters themselves using the concept of molecular typography (the book *Understanding Molecular Typography* by H.F. Henderson served as a guide here). These experiments in erasure served to reflect my grandmother’s voicelessness and the deconstruction and decay of language in the process of her death and the mourning that followed.



1. tend to the throat/ the vibrations raw/ emerge, resonating/ shapers of sound/
the tongue, teeth, hard, and soft, palates, and the lips.
2. animal/ hissing/ rushing air/ croaking/ rushing air/ the mouth a/ resonating chamber.
3. mouth/ serve/ as birds/ serve only to guard the air
4. patient/good/body/small/warty/singer
5. the box/opening/into/the/ancient word/forms pairs/they are also called/false
cords/unpaired/adam connects/bone/a ring/a large/spoon shaped/closing off/has its origin/
there

