

## Knack

(For Sylvia Plath / Hughes)

I will never clear my debt to you. In every syllable  
I choose, each sound repetition that isn't quite,  
An occasional missed iamb, I hear your influence.  
In Yiddish even I can't escape your knack with language.

I build a *verter-bukh* – a set of fevers, bees, mirrored lives,  
The thing that sleeps in the elm tree. It's only mania,  
Two in the morning electric-waking, throwing German  
Roots letter by letter to the page. In your verbs I see you

Surviving these struggles – you elude the poems, never  
Quite the narrator. They take the continuous, present  
Tense. The miracle: you manage thesaurus note scales,  
The rhyme just off, the rhythm, exact in its counting

Undermines the form. You tug myth from a yew tree, London  
Snowed under, death masks, every dybbuk from the past hovers  
To serve you. I steal your tools, your scaffolding, an enamel  
Façade, several arches, a pair of doric columns. An eye mote

May needle the sky white too – I go out dancing, women  
Of the city anoint me for the solstice offering.  
I am the Jewish other woman, the Jewish poet  
Who loved you – in a city of Jews, you may well be one.

You slid into Anglo-Saxon, German, Yiftach's daughter  
Paying for his battle wins, possessed by love elided,  
Family ghosts, selves dissolving. I see you in Devonshire,  
Writing Yiddish folk tragedy on the moors in mirror

Letters, owls, mists, any pen to be had – you don't waste  
A bat, a heel, a line of breath. I use each palette oval,  
Each pause and muted sound and dash finds its place and structure  
In my catalog – there is no relief in blinking. I

Split open your mythology to see how it lives. Now  
I put pieces back together in all their different forms,  
Playing with fields and distances, Cerberus and blue black  
Waves of bulls. I serve you a Yiddish midrash on tragedy.