

Mixtapes

POETRY
in VOICE
les VOIX de
la POÉSIE

SPELL CASTING THROUGH RITUAL



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RAOUL'S LINER NOTES

In our modern times, it's fascinating to see where we still hold rituals in our lives, even in small quiet ways such as preparing morning coffee, unbraiding the hair of the one you love, or reading to our children. Sometimes they are performed without even realizing they are rituals—perhaps because they are essential to who we are as human beings. A repeated ritual is like a single beat that forms a rhythm in the long song of yourself. In a chaotic and unpredictable world, this can be both grounding and awakening.

Religious and spiritual rituals work to strengthen the bonds we have with our ancestors, each other, and of course, the divine. Bringing these rituals into a contemporary world can be tricky, even humorous. When the speaker in Molly Cross-Blanchard's "First Time Smudge" realizes too late that she has Jimmy Eats World on her stereo, or when Kaveh Akbar recalls praying with his brother and his brother's foot accidentally "brooongs" a coiled doorstop, and they erupt into laughter. Somehow even these "sloppy postures of praise" still fold into a kind of holiness.

Rituals do what a lot of poetry does: they help one form a relationship with mystery. As much as we are drawn to facts and reason, we also seem to need to reach beyond them, sometimes even as a matter of life and death. Feel the urgency in Cassandra Myers's poem "Lake Baptiste Ungenders Me" as the speaker "re-brown[s]" at the water's touch, or how the speaker in Anna Belle Kaufman's "Cold Solace" eats a frozen piece of honeycake made by her dead

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mom and tastes the important message that her mother left her.

Of course, much of this does happen with other kinds of poems, not just ones that are about ritual, as many of these are. The poem itself can be used as a ritual object, something to cast a spell, to open a channel to the unknown. I included a couple of “incantation poems” that explicitly do this. One of them, Erin Robinsong’s “Late Prayer”, for instance, asks that we “feel the very large intimacy / And may it assist us” I hope as you read these poems you feel ‘this intimacy even for a moment--a beat--in your day.



THE POEMS

**MY GRANDMOTHER
WASHES HER FEET IN THE
SINK OF THE BATHROOM
AT SEARS**

by Mohja Kahf

**LAKE BAPTISTE
UNGENDERS ME**

by Cassandra Myers

**EQUINOX RITUAL WITH
RAVENS & PINES**

by Brenda Hillman

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOON

by Raymond Antrobus

LOVE POEM

by Bob Hicok

**ANOTHER SET OF
INSTRUCTIONS**

by Alexis Pauline Gumbs

LATE PRAYER

by Erin Robinsong

COLD SOLACE

by Anna Belle Kaufman

FIRST TIME SMUDGE

by Molly Cross-Blanchard

HOW PRAYER WORKS

by Kaveh Akbar

A poetry mixtape edited by Raoul Fernandes.

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