

# Galilee Goes Free: A Review or The Tetragrammaton Only Knows Why A Poem in Adeena Karasick's Aerotomania: The Book of Lumenations is Dedicated to Me

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## Galilee Goes Free: A Review or

### The Tetragrammaton Only Knows Why A Poem in Adeena Karasick's *Aerotomania: The Book of Luminations* is Dedicated to Me

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According to the Babylonian Talmud (Eruvin 53b), the Hebrew-speakers of ancient Judea were so precise in their speech that they would never describe a cloak they were trying to sell as merely green, but would tell you instead that it was the colour of newly-sprouted beet greens trailing along the ground. Galileans, on the other hand, were less punctilious:

What do you mean when you say that Galileans are not careful in speaking? It is taught: There was a Galilean who used to go about [the marketplace] asking, "Who has *amar*? Who has *amar*?" They said to him, "Stupid Galilean, do you mean *khamor* [donkey] to ride or *khamar* [wine] to drink? *Amar* [wool] to wear or *imar* [a lamb] to slaughter?" And don't forget the woman who wanted to say to her friend, "*To-i de-okhlikh khalovo*, Come, I'll give you some milk," only to have it come out as "*Tokhlikh lovyu*, May you be eaten by a lioness?"

Where the ancient Galileans seem to have had no choice but to sound like themselves, Adeena Karasick has elaborated, over fourteen volumes of poetry, a sort of deliberate neo-Galileanism that sometimes bridges, sometimes leaps, and on occasion just fills the Talmudic chasm between utterance and meaning in a way guaranteed to drive any artificial intelligence program out of its simulated mind. As she says in "Talmudy Blues II,"

...sometimes the letters rule over her and sometimes she rules over the letters  
cleaving to the light of infinite possibility (p. 31),

Is Karasick cleaving to the light as she rules over the letters? Or do the letters ruling her do the cleaving? Have her consonants been endowed with the *naissances latentes* of Rimbaud's "*Voyelles*"? Or, less goyishly, is Karasick turning Galilean imprecision into an aesthetic approach rooted in the modalities of elementary-level reading instruction—reading silently and reading aloud, the absorption and subsequent re-citation of a written text—as enacted in the traditional East-European Hebrew school known as *kheyder*?

The basic level of instruction had three phases:

1. *Alef-beys*, literally, alphabet, in which students learn to recognize the consonants that make up the Hebrew alphabet, along with the sundry diacritical marks that take the place of alphabetic vowels. There are eleven of the latter, representing five vowel sounds.

2. *Halb-traf leyenen*, reading half syllables. Each diacritic is run, as it were, through all twenty-two of the consonants. So, for example, syllables formed with the vowel *komets* would be learned by reciting, “*Komets alef, o; komets beys, bo; komets giml, go,*” and *komets-sof* so on to the end of the alphabet, when the student would go on to the next vowel: “*Pasekh alef, a; pasekh beys, ba; pasekh giml, ga.*”
3. *Gants-traf leyenen*, reading whole syllables, i.e., combining the individual letters or syllabograms into words.

Karasick’s traffic is with the last two, the *kheyder* basics supplemented by the graphemically-focused mysticism of *Sefer Yetsira* and Abraham Abulafia as refracted through a contemporary sensibility and range of reference: “The letter is matter which moves matter...these words are closer than they appear” (p.31).

We see *halb-traf* in full flight in, say, the coda to “Eicha,” the long poem with which *Lumenations* opens:

In the eros of aching ethos  
 The caesura screams—  
 Through cirque’elatory sequiturs, resistances  
 and continues  
 Here, her in mired err whose scar is clear  
 Hear her/here/whose heir wears err’s  
 shared prayer / where care is rare (p. 27)

All you have to do is imagine a phrase like “hear her/here/” in unvocalized Hebrew: הר הר הר and then read it as “hair hare hoar,” to realize that Karasick’s poetry, like the airplane she anatomizes in *Aerotomania*, constitutes a hybridized syncretic space between cultures and idioms where that interlingual complexity doesn’t close down but builds dialogue (p. 83), a dialogue rooted in, but quickly soaring beyond, quotidian phonemic reality. There is an upward thrust to the book, from the dust and cracked earth of “Eicha,” the recasting of the biblical Lamentations with which *The Book of Lumenations* begins (*eicha*, means *how*, as in, “How sits the city solitary”), through the rising rabbinic commentary of “Talmudy Blues II,” a romp through ways of thought—words, that is—that now stand in place of the *things* destroyed—Jerusalem and the Temple (known in Hebrew as the Holy House). An excursus on the idea of house follows, then “Checking In II,” i.e., checking into the *Aerotomania* flight by stowing readers’ cultural baggage for the duration of their stay on the plane. Having shaken off our dust (Isa. 52:2), we emerge from the fog of our associations. Our *lumen* is come (Isa. 60:1); we rise through the ether to embrace The Shining.

As the dedicatee of “Talmudy Blues II,” it behooves me to say something about the poem. A continuation of “Here Today Gone Gemara” from Karasick’s 2018 collection *Checking In*,

“Talmudy Blues II” consists in large part of elaborations of dialogue (and dialect) culled from our on-going conversations about the ways in which the Talmud is reflected and refracted in Yiddish. *Carpe Verbum*, reads the epigraph to “Here Today,” pluck that word like it’s a Sabbath chicken, clear away the excrescences and bite into the thing itself, ever mindful that the Hebrew *davar* means both word and thing, utterance and entity; my honeyed words solidified into raw material, ore for Adeena’s gold, one *davar* turned into another. But as it says in the Talmud (Megillah 15), “Whoever credits a *davar* to the person who said it brings redemption to the world.”

Amen. Thou hast conquered, O neo-Galilean.