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Gervitz, Gloria. *Migrations: Poem, 1976-2020*. New York: New York Review Books, 2021.

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Forty-four years in the making, Gloria Gervitz's epic poem *Migrations (Migraciones)* is an erogenous flowing of women's sexuality and exploration of Jewish heritage that is as deeply rooted in the author's national Mexican culture as it is in her Eastern European Jewish ethnic roots. The subject of numerous revisions throughout Gervitz's lifetime, *Migrations* is Gervitz's own *Leaves of Grass*, a Mexican Jewish epic of erotic and patriotic fervor that is supplely translated from the original Spanish by Boston-area scholar and UM-Boston Spanish lecturer Mark Schafer in a new revised edition for New York Review Books' NYRB Poets series. Already having earned a reputation as one of the nation's best publishers of classic fiction, New York Review Books can now be considered one of the first-rate publishers of classic poetry in the country, and Gervitz's text is no exception.

Based around a central image of a woman masturbating in a bathtub while contemplating her girlhood in such Mexican cities as Oaxaca and Ciudad de Mexico and the lives of her mother and grandmothers, Gervitz's poem eschews the masculinist, almost laundry-list sense of "epic" seen in Whitman and approaches a zone of feminine eros whose eternal return has much in common with the *ecrtirue feminine* of Marguerite Duras' novels. Gervitz's use of the Whitmanesque technique of cataloging the everyday is not one of tokenism or fluff, but rather builds on the central image motif to convey a sense of networked being-there among "ointments and soaps made of oats and goat milk / face powder made of wheat toothpaste that tastes of chewing gum / and those rinses for untangling hair on drawn-out days" (9) that disassociates the material from the mundane and elevates it into a tangible tangle of sensual pleasures. This sense of the everyday consumer object as an erotic fetish is most visible in the sequence set in a Oaxacan marketplace that turns into a contemplation of the narrator's indigenous nanny as a figure on par with her mother and grandmother as a person of importance in her life (162-173).

This passage, breathtaking in its appearance after roughly 50 pages of only a handful of lines of verse per page, bursts through the book like an orgasm, rich and full of traditionally Mexican imagery like stalls selling "orange juice and grapefruit juice / and rice milk and hibiscus

tea and tamarind water / and strawberry atole and hot chocolate champurrado” and a “church [with] bells calling the faithful to mass” (163, 165). The juxtaposition of the material with the sensual calls to mind the works of 3D printing artists Neri Oxman, herself a Jewish woman, as the artists’ work oscillates poetically and visually in ways that are clitoral and earthy. Though Gervitz doesn’t have the explicit ecological critique of Oxman’s work, the same themes of flux that Oxman relates to the disposable and the postmodern are present in Gervitz’s contemplation of the border-crossing and the non-chronological.

Likewise, Greta Gerwig’s performance as Babette in Noah Baumbach’s recent adaptation of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (2022) touches on the same sense of consumer object-as-sex object that resonates across *Migrations*; though Gerwig’s character is not explicitly Jewish, she plays the role as that of a Jewish intellectual woman adrift in the Midwest in the Reagan Eighties. Babette’s use of Dylar, an experimental psychiatric medicine used to treat anxiety, is based around her fear of dying. Similarly, Gervitz’s fears of anxiety over death run throughout *Migrations*, including the use of multiple quotes from the Kaddish in both the original Hebrew and translated into English. In an interview with Schafer, published as an afterword to the book, Gervitz comments on how her visit to Poland in February 2020 inspired “a very strange feeling” when in proximity to the Warsaw Ghetto and the sites of the genocide of the European Jews, one which she addresses in her poem “On Going to Poland” by saying she intended her visit to be a “return to say Kaddish for all those who stayed here, / return to say Kaddish for myself” (289-290). One senses that Gervitz’s constant revisions of *Migrations*, her only published work, are a lifelong Kaddish, and that Schafer was attracted to her poem and Gerwig and Baumbach were inspired to adapt DeLillo’s novel for that same sense of narrative-as-Kaddish.

Gervitz’s text is a classic of contemporary poetry, deserving of its place alongside works by such writers as Apollinaire, Michaux, and Whitman himself as part of the NYRB Poets canon. The book is strongly recommended for those who teach and study Mexican literature, Jewish literature, women’s literature, and poetry, and would make for a superb textbook in an introduction to epic poetry or introduction to Jewish women’s writing class. Schafer’s translation, complete with handy glossary, is a worthy addition to the NYRB library, and the afterword interview is essential for those who want to look beneath the hood of the text to see how it runs.