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Four Poems

By Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor

Progress Sieve

Pros and cons

hoes and hons

weighing and debating

both sides of the boat,

like knowing or not

what's best for pro-ing:

to pro-fane or pro-test,

pro-first or pro-last,

pro-sex and process,

pro-iconoclast.

We're *ohs* and *on its*

bows and bonnets

provoke to vocal,

pro-yoke to yokal,

pro-doodle, pro-dab,

produce, pro-grab,

pro-choice and profit

pomp and program it

from pro-vost to pro-most

from proletariat lariat,

lasso to last,

we digress to ingest

spoonfed repast;

pro- is to yes

as con is to *pass*
 the buck, sift fine
from course, re-learn
 that things can always
get worse

Diaspora, An Acrostic

Die, death, dead as a doornail
as cold as ice, belly up, the big *adios*,
pour lists into a bucket, take
a last bow, the last train to glory.

Die like a language dies
as the last speaker's words
pour into a recording device,
a remembered sound.

dai dai, dai dai dai dai dai dai
as wordless songs: *niggunim*.
Pour minor keys into
a thrum fluency.

Die the locket's death
as it opens, hope to
pour gold chains to
a granddaughter's palm.

Die in one syllable
as in one fist's thump.
Pour yourself a drink,
a toast, *L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim*.

Die,
as eight, ten, fifty, and more do when,
poor timing, an addict to hate has
a gun.

Day- Day- enu elders sang
as they, 2019 Poway, CA,
poured wine, passed matzoh, opened doors to
an AR15 event described only as "possible hate."

Die, mother fucker!
Ask or don't ask for hands up.
Pour a city's bullets to
a 12 year old's back.

(stanza break, p. 1 of 2)

Die from the melting pot
as if it were too hot soup.
Pour its broth into
a cracked bowl.

Die
as if to
pour water to
a generation in thirst.

My Pre-Teen Daughter's Not Good at Spelling

"Annoying spellings that drench the English language can be traced back to the Great Vowel Shift (1400-1700)."

—G. Gray, [Linguistics Online](#)

that art meen,
my girl would have written

not accusation but possession,
of language, "that's mine."

can, man, see, sit
mother, father, winter, wise.

Easy peasy words, first words
travelled 1000 years to Normandy

shifting vowels, adding diphthongs:
boy, joy,

when *my house*
would have been *may hoose.*

But red marks it wrong.
It's nact, nig^t, niht, night

which means spelling these words
as they are now,

those ruinous h's haunting shelves
with an old Flemish printer's afterthought.

gost
she wrote
on her Halloween essay

like *most* and *host*.
By 11 she's wrong.

Her belly aches.
Stomach it, I tell her.

Like ruched
drawstring tops, & slouchy
chenille sweaters, wear
these longer, consonant
cluster words, add
sneaky "e" like a keyhole top.

If she reads
she can get a pop socket, I promise.

We live in this system

loch-ter
doch-ter

where laughter and daughter once rhymed.

There Are No Bad Words

Why on earth, do we say
instead of *on Mars*
and how did we get from stink
to stanky and how did a child sink
into TikTok
with the word f**k?
Proud warrior
for the justice of words,
all twerks in final
voiceless, velar stops,
airflow from throats blocked
tongues capable to shock
saying any word,
meaning anything but good,
muttered selling, brandishing
on posts, on backs of first ladys' coats;
not bad but bruised on greenish
skins, to rhyme or scat,
thin and cut back
excess as if words were fat
ridges on ribeyes, as if wounds
of words could ever be taken back
returned for little songs singing
translations, histories erased
by today's cliché.



Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, a U.S. Fulbright Scholar Ambassador, is Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia. She's authored five books addressing intersections between language education and the literary, visual, and performing arts including one book of poems, *Imperfect Tense*, and her newest book, [*Enlivening Instruction with Drama and Improv*](#). Supported by grants and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, Fulbright, and Beckman Award for Professors Who Inspire, her work narrates the heartache and joy of teaching and learning language. She lives in Athens, GA with her husband and two children and their rescue dog, Bagel.