

Herstories

Poems by
Kathy Silvey Hall

“Women of History are remembered as **Whores, Slaves, Virgins, or Goddesses**—these are herstories”

Art by
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*Poems appeared in pervious issues of Literary Alchemy Press’ Poetry and Fiction Zine

This book is dedicated to **Margaret McNair**, beloved sister, who, when told by a weeping young woman, “I had an abortion,” answered with great tenderness and grace, “Only one?”



“The Storyteller For Pegah Motaleb, who hates poetry”

She told me a story once,
Whispered, in the way of wives,
He never touched me, she said,
I don't think he touched any of them.
They must have entered the gardens of perpetual bliss
As intact as the day they were born,
Unbroken vessels,
Fitting rewards for believing men,
And there may have been seventy-two,
All beheaded.

He would marry a lovely girl, she said,
And the next day he would kill her,
He claimed their screams for mercy were loud when he took them,
Louder still than their cries when he slaughtered them.
Headless brides could not deny his accounts,
Nor tell tales of an impotent potentate.

She knew that first night in their room,
There was no desire in his eyes,
Though my breasts, she said, were like gentle fawns,
And the kisses of my mouth were as honey,

He had no use for my body, she said,
It was too solid, too real,
So I offered, instead, a story.
He saw the brilliance of my plots,
But did not think me capable of planning,
My feminine ignorance another useful narrative.

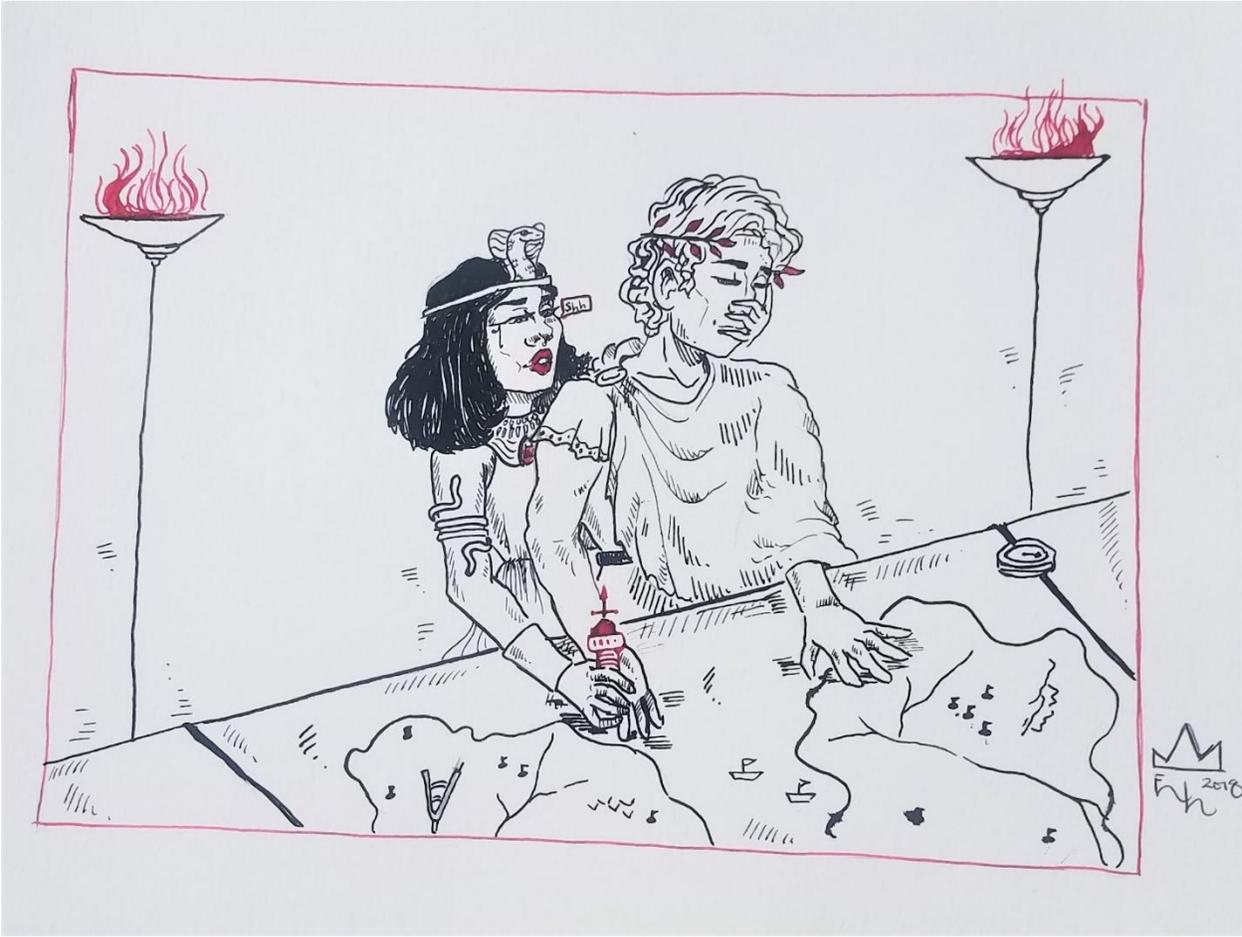
That he lay with his wives before he killed them,
That my stories so enchanted him he forgot to take me,
That he let me live because he wanted to hear
More convenient fictions,
All were convenient fictions.

“Home from Gordium”

For Susan Johnson

He is home,
But he does not say, “My wife, I have missed you.”
He does not say, “The nights were long on the battlefields.”
He does not say, “Hello.”
He walks in speaking of the Great man.
Again.

“My wife, did you hear what he did at Gordium?”
She is sewing. She does not look up.
“No, what did he do? Did he win a great battle?”
“No,” he says, “There was a knot at Gordium.”
“A knot?” Deftly, she ties a knot in the thread.
“Yes,” he says, “A knot that no man could untie. Many had tried.”
She raises one perfect eyebrow. “Many had tried to untie a knot?”
“Yes, that is what I said. But do you know what the Great man did?”
She picks up her scissors. “I cannot imagine.”
“He took up his sword and cut it in two! He is a genius! Who would have thought of that?”
“Who indeed?” she says and cuts through the knot, as she has done many times.



“Pax Romana”

For Corinna Evett

“Well, actually,” he said,
“It is difficult to lead.
I mean, I don’t know if I can really
communicate to you
The pressures I am under.”

“They must be immense,” she said,
But that was not what
She thought, “Your father may have
been a praetor,
But mine was a dynasty.

“You dare speak to me of leadership,
But I do not think you know
The pressures you are under.
The senators await your return to kill you.”

“To be a leader of men requires discipline,” he said,
But she was no longer listening.
She was thinking,
“I might take up with your nephew
When you are gone.

Or,” she thought,
“It might be Antony.”
And then she thought of the young man’s shoulders,
And thought it might very well be Antony.

“Do you see?” he asked, since he was still alive,
A question which meant his
Explanation was ended.

“Quite clearly,” she said, and smiled sweetly.
“You always make everything so very clear.”

“Geoffrey, Husband of Bath”

In Memory of Marilyn McCord Adams

Maid, wife, widow,
What else could she be?
Made to bear children and sorrows,

My lofty lady descends
from my pen
To tell men
What women want.

But first she tells a tale of deflowering, despoiling.
She is compelled to begin,
“Once there was a rape,”
Because always, there is a rape.

Well she knows a knight who so used a maiden
Would lose title, rights, life,
Yet she begins with abduction,
And I cannot will her to do otherwise.

It is a salve to my conscience,
The penance I pay for Cecily,
My whip, my scourge, my self-flagellation.

That which makes her my sovereign,
And gives her, maid that she was,
Wife I made her against her will,
Crone she is now and is in the tale,
The right to tell all: This is what women want:
To rule,
To rule themselves,
And, failing that, to rule men.

I write her, wealthy, promiscuous, older than her latest lover.
How piteously a-night she makes them work!

I try to despise her for not knowing her place,
But I did not know mine.
My pen fails me,
And, once again, she is beloved.



Photo by Katyana Hall

Kathy Silvey Hall is a Pushcart-nominated poet, author, humorist, and editor whose work has appeared in the LA Fiction Anthology by Red Hen Press, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Chiron Review, and Literary Alchemy. She teaches composition and literature at Santiago Canyon College.

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