

Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway examines Indrani Sengupta's "lustration," which appeared in *Oroboro* (Volume 4, 2020). To preserve formatting, we have included the poem, and a closer look at its sonic qualities, as a separate document.

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### How It's Put Together

Approaching the first prose section's halfway point, Sengupta's "lustration," or the act of "[purifying] by a propitiatory offering or other ceremonial method"<sup>1</sup> gives us benediction in the name of architectural restoration ("to bless an old house new."), religious references serving as blueprints among a diction trinity of

floral

biological

arboreal

Sentences one through four speak of an injury, narrative's reversal displaying effect *then* cause. Repetition and elongation are the storytellers (1-3), the anatomical ores drained (4): "finger rewilded. which is to say dogbit. which is to say split and serosanguinous. nerved of all its heavy metals."

Sentence five, our offertory ("flinging coins"), is larger than the combined word count of those that preceded it. *Psalming* is an activity I wish I'd thought of, and, there should be a name for the poetic technique where consecutive words begin with the same letter pronounced differently (*psalming plant*). What was *rewilded* now is "blessed with new reactivity," regeneration attained. Sengupta's serrated abstraction ("shivful of joy") complements the altar's combative *struck*. "Will" "or not" statements address expansion and diminishment, *nail* both house-apt and finger-relevant. *Woodstain* breaks into *wood's stain*, our speaker *commingled* with the construction materials. Eschewing typical placement, the colon's breathing space separates lustrated and lustre ("hands exalted, dining floor"). If you're hearing this as a line of haiku, thank the seven-syllable count—section one, a gathering of renovation instructions ("how to make an old house new.").

Section two contains the altarlike *norco wall*, an image more at home counting doctors' signatures than ceiling holes, *pain* being the check that "earns the pill." Sparseness (a way of achieving prose purity?) draws our attention to the medication. Interestingly, three of the earlier words associated with harm (*dogbit*, *split*, *shivful*) rely on the short "i" sound, the same as our *pill* antidote.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/lustration>

Section three's arrival is literally cause for ceremony ("you break the first glass and meet it underfoot,"), the previous *joy* becoming *joyous*, metal re-nerved to the speaker. Sengupta's list consists of food (*bread, apple*), hurt (*knife, parer, nosebleed, wire*), and nature (*garden, poppy*, also a girl's name). Raising my favorite locution specter, *blessed be* and *blessed the* have me thinking about the nuances of blessed (verb), blessed (adjective), and blest (verb, past participle). Blest is as monosyllabic as the day is flesh glass. Blessed (v) follows suit. The two-syllable blessed (adj) is a melodic captivator, especially when alliterated with *be*. How you in your silent or verbal readthrough pronounce "finger blessed" and "blessed the house"—that interchangeability attests to the poem's level of craft, a lower-dictioned word as interesting as *serosanguinous*. The *you* who "[circled] the halls, flinging coins" turns into an *I* taking what they will, outdoors and food sanctum, before committing intellectual vandalism, *desk* and the trio of *study* a scholarly shift. As with the prior colon, Sengupta adheres to divider space. The closing words convey plantless (or childless), impenetrable, and profane states. The poem's sentence rituals, a constancy of lowercase.

### Prompt

Write a sectioned prose poem about the building of a shrine or iconographic parade float in a city whose soil cannot sustain plant growth. What are the preparations? Lustration outcomes? Include at least three pairs of same-starting letter, differently pronounced words; use of *begonia, aster*, and *iris*; and a sentence ritual pertaining to length.

Happy Poeming,

Jon

