

Speak, Hands

Excerpts

Author's Note

For a long time, I could find no language for the seemingly ineffable journey on which my own hands were leading me. Through experimentation, I eventually discovered that, using four distinct voices in prose and prose poetry, I could convey the essence of my extraordinary experience.

Below are excerpts from each of these voices...

The Narrator as She Directly Addresses Her Hands:

p. 5

Help me, Hands, to tell this story. Isn't the work you perform in my life, and the work of other hands in other lives, the gesture dance of the unsayable? Dance through my memory. I will not restrain you. Time is meaningless to you, yet in your repertoire are the sweep and pattern of a life. Dance for me. I will translate as I can.

p. 13-14

Was it tossing the shuttle back and forth between you ... was it my mother's hands at her own work ripping, redoing ...was it the rhythmic, inward hours at the loom that prepared you to reweave a life? All and none of these.

You would never have learned this spiritual craft without the primer of childhood sorrow.

How shall I say what you have conveyed to me
wordlessly if I do not lend you words?

Her Hands Speaking about the Narrator:

p. 14

*We are her hands ...I, Her Left, and I, The Right.
Though mute, there have been times when we were
her only voice.*

p. 28

*Have we waited months for this opening – or only an
instant? Moments after she takes up her meditation,
I, Her Left Hand, rise on my own like a seedling
unbending its head toward the sun, fingers slowly
unfurling.*

*I, The Sister-Right – more cautious – wait, motionless,
upon her knee.*

*If we are to serve as an inward mirror to her, what
needs to appear in it first is her lingering ambiva-
lence. We have no cause to hurry her. Have we not
held on to what we know of her since we were small?*

The Narrator Addressing the Reader:

p. 42-43

My detachment from my hands lends them a sense of otherness. They evoke in me myths and fairy tales in which the protagonist is helplessly lost in a forest, or baffled by a riddle, or spellbound in another body. Enter the magical “other” – nymph, perhaps, or fairy godmother – who represents the subject’s wiser self.

As my hands move in meditation, a verbal translation nearly always occurs to me effortlessly. I believe that my gestures and the interpretations that they

prompt are complementary elements of an organic whole, and that both are directed by an aspect of consciousness to which I've never had access before. It does not attend to the passage of time, but to the evolution of personal themes. Though it is clearly wiser, calmer than prosaic consciousness, it is far from omniscient. If it seems at times like a spirit guide, it is of the human spirit – a wiser, reflective capacity that exists – sometimes within, but more often just beyond our accustomed reach.

p. 69

I can't hold back tears any longer, as I say to Katherine, 'I feel I'm at their mercy – that I'm consciously allowing myself to be at their mercy. I don't know if I trust them, or why I'm subjecting myself to this. I guess I'm driven by a feeling that something wants to be restored. And only my hands – I mean the layers of my unconscious that direct them – have the key to its restoration. For better or worse, I'm making this mysterious leap of faith every day.

The Voice of Narrative Memory ("Hidden Chronicler")

p. 79-80

Alive in everyone is the voice of narrative memory – call it the Hidden Chronicler of one's life. I am hers. Because I observe her as she moves through time, I have been called upon by her hands to help them recount her early memories. But I am aware of my limitations when asked to go back so far. For I have not existed as long as she, and I came into being slowly. I would not attempt to recapture these memories without the collaboration of her hands.

Day after day, her friend Jean-Paul sits in the red leather chair that was her father's, in order to witness her meditation. But how different are my powers of observation. I monitor her thoughts, her feelings and the translation of gesture into words. I relive the forgotten moments her hands call up from her body – her body that is also mine. I am present with Jean-Paul and her in this garret, yet unbound to this place and time.

I use everything I can to assemble the stories of her life: long held knowledge and recovered memory, inference based on years of therapy, information offered up to me from her trances, the gestures of her hands.