

# Terman's torah garden

Literature



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Institute Termans The Torah Garden Torah and garden are two words rarely used together within the same sentence. However to the poet Phillip Terman, the two words show case creative tension. Torah is the first five books of the bible which form the foundation Judaism. The books are to large extent commandments which Terman juxtaposes with unregulated existence, nature and wildness. Terman presses two things together which normally would not go together and is able to arrive at something rarely achieved in poetry; peace coupled with joy, sense of homeland and contentment.

Unlike many other Jewish poets, Terman places Jewishness at the centre of his work in the book. Throughout the book, Terman makes reference to Jewish traditions, customs and way of life. From the poem " The Torah Garden", Terman makes reference to a tradition performed among the Jews on the turn of every New Year " I sound the shofar for the New Year and in this suspended time, my life is focused in my mouth, lips on the ram's horn I purchased in Jerusalem,"(p. 20). Terman like so many other Jewish writers longs to be back in Jerusalem, to the cradle of the Jewish people. His longing is further demonstrated in the poem " Among the Unspoken Names" stating that " we would be like them, we would turn into the book completely, we would walk around the garden seven time, out of some obscure longing,"(p. 23). Though a third generation Jew, Terman is able to experience Judaism without really living it and by writing about Judaism he is able to feel the power of it.

Apart from the sadness that comes from being away from his homeland, Terman is faced with other challenges and calamities. The second section of the book titled " to A Scientist Dying Young" talks about his late brother.

From the books, the reader gathers that Bruce, Terman brother, was a

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talented scientist killed one day as he went for morning run by an oncoming vehicle. A poem like "To The Woman Who Killed My Brother" is heart wrenching and brave as he tries to make sense of it all and move past the pain.

However, Terman has found a way of escaping the torment that life deal people. The only place that one can find peace, content and a feel of home is in the mind. In the mind, a verbal garden complete with plum blackberries, fresh corn and ripe red tomatoes can exist. In the poem "the torah garden", the speaker awakens the city through the sound of the shofar, to rise up and create a kingdom in their mind and open themselves to the possibilities that life holds for them. Like the New Year, the speaker is calling people to a renewal which arises from the dream, darkness and night soil. Despite the pain, longing or suffering that people may endure, they should open up themselves within their mind, create a paradise and enjoy the peace that comes with it. He calls the audience to "open your eyes up to the only moment there is, this stillness, their garden hanging like the last blast of its bellowing breath"(p. 20).

Good sumacs by Jeff Grieneisens compares to the torah garden in that the themes focus on elements of nature, religion,, family and personal growth. Through imagism, the writer aims to express his opinion of the circumstances of his life. Like Terman, Grieneisens longs for his hometown in Pennsylvania. He has moved to Florida because of his career. Florida is nothing like his home city saying "here the dirt is sand.... lakes teem with anhinga that do not sing"(p. 56) from the poem "The Distance Is Debilitating". Being away from Pennsylvania has even made it hard for him to write and he would rather be back home where he is able to stare at the <https://assignbuster.com/terms-torah-garden/>

stars that his great grandparents looked at. In the poem “ Momento Mori” , the speaker would like to find a man that would write down what he really feels that though he is happy to be alive, it should not be in Florida. However, as the book ends, the reader is taken through a journey where he or she finds themselves. Through the journey with the book, the reader gets to understand that no one knows what tomorrow looks like through such poems as “ Back to Dust”. Like Terman, Grieneisens observes that all we have is now and hence we should be able to enjoy it and eventually one will find the answers they are looking for.

#### Works cited

Terman, Philip. The Torah Garden. Pittsburgh, PA: Autumn House Press, 2011. Print.