

## Taharah

I'm wondering about you, *chevra kadisha*,  
  
the "holy society," who will prepare my body,  
  
once I'm no longer in it, for the earth.  
  
Will you know me already, or see me for the first time  
  
as you wash and shroud me, as my father was washed  
  
and dressed in simple white *tachrichim*, for those  
about to stand before God. Perhaps by then I'll know  
  
if I believe in God. I like the democratic  
  
nature of the shroud, an equalizing garment. You  
may see a body that surprises you. You may not have seen  
  
a man's body like this one before you, which I hope is very old,  
  
wrinkled, and (since I'm wishing) fit, muscled  
as much as an old man can be. You'll see scars.  
  
Ragged dog bit forearm, elbow my father picked gravel  
  
from over the sink, then flushed with foaming iodine,  
and the long double horizons on my chest, which trunked my body  
  
like a tree. If I am unexpected, let me not seem  
  
grotesque to you, as I have to many people, perhaps  
even my own parents, and others whose highest  
  
kindness was to say nothing. Please let me return to dust  
  
in peace, as the others did, and recite those beautiful psalms,  
remembering, as you go about your holy ritual,  
  
how frightening it is to be naked before another,  
  
at the mercy of a stranger's eyes, without even any breath.

## Credit

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## About this Poem

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“This was the first thing I'd written in quite some time, so I was really relieved to know I could still write a poem. It was inspired by an essay on cemeteries written by a student of mine.”

—*Miller Oberman*

## Author

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# Miller Oberman



Photo credit: Louisa Solomon

## Miller Oberman

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Miller Oberman is a trans, Anti-Zionist Jewish poet and is the author of *Impossible Things* (Duke University Press, 2024) and *The Unstill Ones* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

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