

Boat of Letters, 2025 is Eve Grubin's fourth published poetry collection. A New York-born Jewish poet, Grubin now resides in London as a lecturer at NYU London. She attained her BA, MFA, MA, and soon her PhD on the 'poetics of reticence.' Grubin draws heavily on Jewish texts, traditions, and the study of poetic reticence. With her religious learning and personal experiences—marriage, motherhood, and loss of her mother— it helped shape this collection. This book is divided into three sections which move the reader through scriptural based poems and leading into grief.

The first section of Grubin's poems is titled "Book of Love," which turn to Jewish texts, not to be an underlying or distant aspect, but rather as means of a framework. She relates the book of Jonah to her son, quoting Zecharya and realigning Korach's rebellion like in the poem "Marriage." It's interesting to see how the author blends together religion into life. In "Marriage," Moses's "stammering" and "single blue thread" becomes a metaphor for relationship conviction; tension arises from this between doubt and certainty, which is heightened by a Jewish backdrop. It's effective the way she uses this as an invitation to the reader to consider marriage, faith, and contradiction intertwined rather than being something that's separate.

A central craft element that Grubin uses effectively is her use of reticence—holding the meaning of "remaining silent." In "Rather the Flower than the Bee" and "The Poetics of Reticence," silence becomes intimate and loving:

There is no vessel; there are no oars.
Silence is praise: words cannot touch glory.

*She moves him with emptiness
between fingers. (16)*

This quote is from "The Poetics of Reticence." Both of the poems mentioned work because they have the emotional charge which comes from what is unspoken. However, at times there is a risk of flattening the tension by making the poems *too* quiet.

Contradiction becomes a recurring theme as it emerges again in "The Great Oven Debate"—a reflection of 'contradictory truths.' Grubin uses this to show how "combined truths" disrupt what is meant to be certain. A verse reads, "I don't want to hold tight to one truth. / I want to hold all of the truths in our arms at once" (33). It is intellectually rich, which may raise flags as some readers may be unfamiliar with the references. This risks a distance between poem and reader.

Another theme that Grubin uses to draw in the reader is of unfinishedness. There is an unfinished nature of life and love within a specific section. Concepts such as *lashon hara* and *zecher l'churban* become a metaphor for spiritual discipline. Grubin does this in a manner through:

Who needs finality when unfinished creates a longing

for what has not yet happened. (36)

The second section, "Grief Dialogue," is the most affecting and grounded. The poems don't take on the textual use but rather put forth immediacy through emotions like anger and numbness. "The Laws" provides a formal structure to grief, while "Mother to Daughter" reimagines it by using the voice of the author's mother. This complicates the separation and death in an effective manner. Lines such as "'it was not an alternate world I entered / It was reality" (45) are effective because the emotion goes to the reader. The shift in perspectives creates the transformation grief forces:

The wind I entered was the reality of your wind.
Not the cold against your ear,
not the dry leaves blowing their sentences

around your shoes,
but a sweeping into. (45)

The way she uses her diction and sound to keep the poem soft makes the poem feel like something the reader can connect to.

The final section, “Keep Not Knowing,” continues the wrestling of certainty and uncertainty. This is the section that ties together themes of language, belief, saying goodbye, and even parenthood. Each poem represents the themes in a lyrical manner. The author creates a bridge to those past poems, an effective callback to have the reader gain a sense of spiritual return.

Boat of Letters has a strong sense of grief from different lenses while still being able to keep religion intact within her writings. There’s relation and constriction in her lines which pulls the reader closer to the situation. Through her precise diction and structure, Grubin allows emotions to emerge organically. In the end, her work is a reflection of loss, but also of the endurance of faith and how one's belief and religion can exist together with pain.