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Witness, Signature, and the Handmade in Rahat Kurd's *Cosmophilia*

Poetry is a technology of witness in Rahat Kurd's *Cosmophilia*. To understand poetry's witness, it is valuable to look for the poet's mark as writer. Through the artist's mark in *Cosmophilia*, handicraft and writing become linked activities in which the work of the hand recalls and recreates artistic tradition. The ghazal tradition in particular, which Kurd uses in this collection, conventionally includes the poet's name in a signature verse. The signature within the poem evokes the idea of a poet's unique voice. The signature also recalls the unique work of the hand, particularly in relation to *Cosmophilia*'s poems about calligraphy and embroidery. To examine such work with reference to technique, technology, and the technical is to emphasize poetic writing as a craft with, especially in witnessing, a significant relationship between the writing hand and the written words. What does it mean for an artist to sign art in the context of witness? Witness poetry takes this signing as a central problematic. The mechanism of the speaker, for example, complicates a poet's signature, and this complication is particularly interesting in relation to a witness, typically understood to be an individual who speaks from authentic, personal experience. Kurd's collection invites consideration of the nature of witnessing through poetry by examining the poet's mark. This mark differs from the more easily recognizable signature. The poet's mark is essential to witnessing as that aspect of the poem (a different aspect in every poem) that demonstrates the relationships among poem, poet, reader, and tradition.

In *Cosmophilia*, the evocation of ritual and convention comes alongside the witnessing of political events and atrocity shaping Kurd's family's history. Kurd writes about the traditions she inherits through her familial

connections to Kashmir and Pakistan and through her Muslim identity across *Cosmophilia*'s three sections. The first section's epigraphs—one from Elaine Scarry on beauty and one from memoirist Sudha Koul stating that "[i]n Kashmir the real thing is what we are after" (n. pag.)—demonstrate its interest in tracing inherited culture and history, particularly through ornament. The second section, beginning with epigraphs explaining the stoning of the Jamarat, examines the speaker's divorce through reference to this Islamic pilgrimage. The final section's epigraph from Lal Ded—in part, "And then I wrestled with the darkness inside me, / knocked it down, clawed it, ripped it to shreds" (55)—introduces the speaker's wrestling with both gaps of inheritance and the breakdown of marriage. Kurd's poems witness political conflict and violence—as, for example, in the first section's engagement with the partition of India in "Wagah Border" and "Wagah Border II"—alongside the beauty of cultural creations like Persian script and Kashmiri embroidery. *Cosmophilia* means "love of ornament" (a definition appearing on the book's back cover), and Kurd's collection suggests such loving looking is implicated in witnessing.

Cosmophilia's theory of poetic witness as a way of looking through cultural tradition connects witness and ornament, as evident in Kurd's treatment of calligraphy in "Nastaliq Confesses at Twilight." The collection's two ghazals raise the subject of the artist's mark through their conventional inclusion of the poet's name as an inclusion in tradition. A multilingual code in the first ghazal and the encoded name in the second write the speaker into continuing tradition while contributing to the collection's interest in lost or hidden names. Moreover, the title poem creates a distinction between signing and marking through its examination of handwork. In the poem entitled "Cosmophilia," the speaker is not connected to the poet but to an unnamed ancestor who creates the poet through her intention to pass on her embroidery to this future descendent. Through the idea of inheritance, this poem examines the embroidered and poetic marks of the artist.

Witness, Ornament, and Tradition

Poet and human rights advocate Carolyn Forché defines poetry of witness as "evidence of what occurred" ("Poetry of Witness" 139). There is no simple way that poetry performs evidence of a poet's life; nevertheless, Forché defines poetry of witness as the poet's authentic relationship to what is witnessed in the poetry. As Forché writes, "[i]n the poetry of witness, the poem makes present to us the experience of the other, the poem *is* the

experience, rather than a symbolic representation" ("Reading" n. pag., emphasis original). Claiming poetry as the delivery of authentic experience is thorny not least because a poem is a mediating device.[1] A poem cannot present a speaker that speaks exactly or simply as the individual writing the poem. In other forms, witnesses might speak more recognizably as themselves and emphasize the facts they tell over the way they tell them. For this reason, it is useful to understand poetry as a technology of witness in which the ornament of the poem is not excess that can be divided from the truth it expresses about the world, but the technique of poetic witness itself.

Kurd's collection offers its centrality of ornament to discussions of poetic witness. Forché's position aligns with the concept of witnessing that trauma theorists have explored in relation to poetry and other arts. Cathy Caruth, in her enduringly influential text *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), reads art as a vehicle for the delivery of writers' unconscious trauma to witnesses, a project she continues in *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013). Shifting away from the assumption of the critic's power to find what Forché calls "the mark or trace of extremity" that the poet is too traumatized to know ("Reading" n. pag.), I look for the poet's mark as writer. This mark's role is overshadowed in a discourse influenced by Forché and Caruth that focuses on witness poetry as experience, not ornament.

I consider Kurd's *Cosmophilia* through the lens of witness poetry because its poems engage the partition of India in relation to Kurd's family history, including her great-grandparents' death in the Jammu massacre in 1947. When asked in an interview about her collection's inclusion of these historical events, Kurd responds:

> The creative or technical challenge becomes, can you pull the reader into the experience, and still leave room for them to decide what it meant? Can they gain even the flicker of a sense of how huge and devastating something like partition, or the Jammu massacre must have been? And I also wanted the poems . . . to show that I didn't necessarily know if I could succeed, that wrestling with the questions and being afraid of failure was part of the process. ("Kashmiri" n. pag.)

For Kurd, the collection's purpose is to meet the technical challenge of bringing readers closer to an event without disrupting their ability to consider it from their own positions. Meeting this challenge means navigating the actual distances involved between event, poet, speaker, and readers. Kurd writes the poems "to show" the process of writing, including writing's potential failure to represent witness adequately; by indicating her wish to include her unknowing, her wrestling, and her fear, Kurd presents witness

poetry as poetry that creates a sense of historical events through recording the process of poetic witness itself. What the poems provide is not access to the experience of the events but access to the process of poetic witness.

Kurd's method of witnessing her inherited history is precisely through ornament, as the speaker of "Modern (Abdul Rehman)" declares: "Samarkand, Iznik, and Esfahan, / I declare myself heir / to your discipline of looking" (71). Speaking to "[m]aster craftsmen" of these cities, the speaker wonders, to the "harmony" of colours, "can a mere human hand / outstretched to another / ever compare?" (71). However, the ornaments

> rebuke, from across four centuries,
> that I'm missing the point;
> that you hold in your beholder
> the anticipation of how,
> in what precise lyrical sphere,
> to be properly humanly held. (71-72)

Whether of hand held out to hand or hand working in cultural tradition, ornament demands faith that art holds and beholds this future human life—even beyond "the war games and quagmire / for which India and Pakistan / abandoned the onyx and carnelian / of their real names" (74). The ornament that might be held, metonymically standing in for its original context, shows the distance from the present day to this time, but also, held in hand and beheld in witness, facilitates connection across war's quagmire.

Cosmophilia invokes handicraft and writing as cognate technologies in its reflections on ornament in poetry, calligraphy, and embroidery. More than poetry does, these other arts, given their visual natures, invite looking and, more specifically, looking for evidence of the craft's relation to the hand that made it. In "Nastaliq Confesses at Twilight," Kurd—inspired by an article reporting that, since popular electronic platforms find the Urdu script, nastaliq, too complicated to offer, it is consistently replaced with the Arabic script, naskh (Eteraz n. pag.)—imagines Nastaliq as a woman on her deathbed. After recalling the script's relationship to "tyrants" (Kurd 16) and twentieth-century atrocities (17), Nastaliq then posits her ability, "over all the centuries before," to unite "those who wanted most / to know each other's voices" (17). In the final two stanzas, Nastaliq says to the speaker,

> "I was not made
> for people to sit alone at night
> ruining their eyes
> in search of lost expression.

You know I lived in the breath,
in the quick movement
of human hands. What else
can satisfy the human heart?" (18)

Cosmophilia's theory of witness through cultural creation is evident here. The script does not present "lost expression," so those who wish to witness should not waste their time "ruining their eyes" looking for it. Rather, witnessing is in the work of the hands as the work unites individuals in a living, "breathing" tradition. As Nastaliq says, "It mattered only / that I gave them a way / to be together" (17). *Cosmophilia*'s poems give the poet not an experience of the witnessed past, but a way to be together with those who came before and will come after.

The Poet's Signature

As she enters into this inheritance of cultural creation through participating in living tradition, Kurd's relationship to the poems she writes is evidenced within the poems themselves. Notably, the ghazal form conventionally gives expression to the relationship between poet and poem through, Paul E. Losensky explains, a "signature verse" in which "poets mention their own names" (244). The form thus seems to create a direct connection between speaker and poet. However, this signature is more complexly about a poet's presence and absence. The signature verse, Franklin D. Lewis writes, "developed perhaps as a seal of authorship for ghazals sold to musicians as lyric texts, to be performed in the poet's absence" (571). Indeed, Losensky finds, in his study of Arabic and Persian ghazals, that the "sentiments expressed by the poem's persona or lyric 'I' cannot be identified in any immediate way with the experiences or emotions of the historical poet who wrote the work" (239); Losensky's perspective both "discourages the naive reading of the poem as autobiography" and "encourages the study of the collective, generic 'deep structures' of situation and diction that inform the tradition as a whole" (239). Kurd's ghazals offer their signatures in relation to these deep structures of tradition.

The first of *Cosmophilia*'s two ghazals, "Ghazal: In the Persian," is about lost languages, lands, and relations. In her article "Learning Persian," Kurd explains that her interest in Persian develops from losing other languages that shaped her childhood: "Since I can't recapture the multilingual environment I grew up in, I have decided to make one up, based on the Persian literature Urdu poets would have studied before partition" (n. pag.). According to

S. R. Faruqi and F. W. Pritchett, the ghazal "is at the heart of that tradition" of Urdu lyric poetry and is "a natural vehicle for every kind of longing and passionate desire" (111). Because its signature verse dramatizes the relationship between poet and poem, the lived experience and the art, the Urdu ghazal has a special capacity for producing poetic witness, if that witnessing depends, as I argue it does, on showing the process of writing oneself into tradition, like the tradition of the ghazal form which itself might long for tradition.

The signature verse for "Ghazal: In the Persian" contains the poet's proper name twice:

> As a serene heart? Rahat's *that* comfortable in the Persian.
> As paradox? Being Rahat's *kheili mushkel* in the Persian. (11, emphasis original)

The mirrored italics function as a kind of rhyme between the lines, thus drawing these words into comparison. In the first line, the italicization is for emphasis; in the second, it signals the use of another language. Yet, because of the first line's set-up, the second's italicized words also seem emphatic. The emphasis on "*kheili mushkel*" becomes important as these words encode layers of meaning regarding the relationship between the poet and the poem.

The name "Rahat" means "peace" or "rest" ("Rahat" n. pag.); the question of the "serene heart" invokes this meaning so that the proper name has a double function. Rahat is rahat: the speaker is so comfortable in the Persian, she is what her own name says she is. The suggestion is that, writing in Persian, she is completely herself. However, as its question about paradox suggests, the second line contradicts the first. These two lines are emphatically paired and contrasted with each other through the repetitions of the initial questions, the final phrases, and the proper name. In Persian, "*Kheili mushkel*"[2] means "very difficult," so the paradox comes from the contrast between Rahat's serene comfort in the Persian and the difficulty Rahat has being in the Persian. But this line also could be read, "Being serene is very difficult in the Persian." By invoking the difficulty of being serene (which is, more than simply a feeling, a part of Rahat's identity as the meaning of her name), Kurd uses the ghazal form to express the complications of identity built out of a history of loss and forgetting.

Further, "*mushkil*" means "abstruse" in Urdu, which has the sense "hidden" as well as "difficult to understand." This meaning—"Being Rahat is very hidden in the Persian"—would suggest that the Rahat of this poem loses herself in the difficulty of learning this language.[3] At the same time, the closeness between the Persian and Urdu words also includes a suggestion that Urdu is hidden in the line. In "Learning Persian," Kurd writes, "Urdu and

Arabic are the keys I inherited in childhood; Farsi is the treasure they are helping me unlock. Their common words are indelible proof of connection" (n. pag.). The poem participates in the process of unlocking one language (Farsi, another name for Persian) with other languages. At the same time, the poem questions to what extent poems can unlock the poet's identity (shaped by all these languages) for readers: yet another reading of the line suggests that the poet is very hidden in this poem called "In the Persian." That is, even with the direct inclusion of the proper name, readers do not have access to the poet. Indeed, readers could exclaim along with the speaker in the ghazal's first line, "What secrets—and from me!—you kept in the Persian!": what secrets this poem, "In the Persian," keeps—and from its readers!

In my reading, this coded signature verse is the "improvised device" Kurd's poem mentions earlier:

> The warmongers jeer: "Even the Taliban write poetry!"
> But my improvised device pulls Sunni closer to Shia in the Persian—
>
> Listen: Shujaat Husain Khan weaves Mevlana in the sitar strings of Hind;
> Kayhan Kalhor bows his kamancheh's deep approval, in the Persian. (11)

The second *she'r* (two-line unit) names musicians, musical instruments, and a poet (Mevlana, also known as Rumi); together, the two *she'rs*, positioned just prior to the signature verse, consider the role of art in countering cultural and political division. The dash signals a connection between the verses, which is unusual for the ghazal form whose *she'rs* are usually independent in mood and topic (Faruqi and Pritchett 113). Warmongers increase division by suggesting the Taliban has destroyed art's integrity by writing poetry. Yet, the speaker argues, her "improvised device" works against division by bringing groups with religious, cultural, and political differences closer together, an action the dash performs between typically autonomous *she'rs*. Since the device does this work "in the Persian," the improvised device might be the poem's only Persian words, the ones that suggest Rahat finds it difficult to write in the Persian, or to be serene about it, but that also suggest the poet or another language she speaks may be hidden in the poem. By including herself in the multilingual diversity of her familial past, Kurd writes a poem that unites across difference at the deep level of the poem's structure, form, and convention. Through the tradition of inserting the poet's name into the poem's concluding verse, this poem creates a multilingual code evoking the connected traditions in Kurd's inherited past.

Kurd's collection has an interest in hidden names, as in the final section (set in 2048) of "Wagah Border," a poem witnessing the aftermath of

partition, when the speaker claims, "We undid Wagah border step by step, / smuggling the names / of all who died not reaching it" (23). "Wagah Border II" (set in 1998) ends with the affirmation of poetry's role in smuggling names within violent legacies when "the customs official / at Amritsar" reacts to the speaker's inability to share one of her poems with him "as if I have broken a promise" (24). He later sends a reminder of this promise that the poems themselves seem to have made simply by existing: "Don't forget to send me your poems" (24). Poetry promised itself as part of border crossing, and, if remembered, can circulate the names of those who could not cross.

A similar consideration ends "Ghazal: On Eid": "Broken threads, friendless cities, whole scarred mountain ranges—Rahat's lost legions. / Why ask for their names? She embraces their ghosts when her arms hang slack on Eid" (12). The speaker embraces these ghosts while "her arms hang slack"—that is, without moving to embrace: just to participate in that day is to embrace the lost.[4] The speaker need not ask for names because what has been lost in history is hidden in the structure of life, particularly in the calendar structure of holidays. This sense that Eid's date structures life beyond the day itself arises in the third *she'r*: "Each year you complain: Hijra, lunatic, mocks solar clockwise in widdershins skips / But your delight shines all twelve months when your birthday falls smack on Eid" (12). Referring to the Islamic calendar, the speaker evokes the structure of the whole year as understood through the special falling of holy days. Eid is a day that hides the lost names; to celebrate this day is to embrace the ghosts of what has been lost, and its effect can last the whole year.

When Eid falls on the speaker's birthday, it seems to shine personally on her. This poem is about the speaker's personal relationship to Eid, and while her name appears in the poem's signature verse, it is also hidden in the *she'r* referencing her divorce: "Cold thicks our plot: a marriage dismantled, as Ramadan mantles seven summers *karim*. / Speak the blessing: so hollows our fiction! Does a heart or the facade now crack on Eid?" (12). In these lines, two words appear with the following spacing in which I find the name "Rahat" (as I demonstrate by striking through the superfluous letters):

Ra~~madan~~
heart

In my reading, the speaker's broken heart combines with the Muslim holiday to produce her name. Does the "crack[ed]" heart become in some ways whole when united with this tradition? It seems likely, since the word "heart" appears again in the following poem, "Nastaliq Confesses at Twilight,"

where, as I noted earlier, it is the act of contributing to tradition that satisfies the human heart. *Cosmophilia*'s ghazals are about the poet's relationship to poetry as well as to the Muslim tradition as part of the histories the collection witnesses. Faruqi and Pritchett argue that the ghazal "is a non-realistic genre" that typically addresses topics like "war, revolution, or other social or political problems" if "they are transmuted into metaphor" (123). Ghazals are thus characterized by an "obliqueness" (125) in which "real events are pushed far into the background" (125). Working in a tradition of subjects encoded by metaphor, Kurd follows Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Ted Genoways notes that Faiz's "The Dawn of Freedom" conflates the common ghazal figure of the beloved with the beloved country to explore partition through the "conventional theme" (112) of "the anguish of separation" (111). Kurd's interest in exploring her divorce alongside legacies of partition in *Cosmophilia* is as much a personal mark as it is an engagement with this poetic tradition in which Kurd positions herself.[5] Her backgrounded, hidden name serves as a metaphor for lost names while also suggesting that the poet participates in and creates new relationships with the cultural traditions attending the historical events the poem witnesses.

Handwork

"Ghazal: On Eid" connects the work of the poem with the work of embroidery by naming the lost as "Broken threads" that may be reattached through the cultural traditions in which the ghazal participates. Lewis explains that the Arabic root of "ghazal" "encompasses the gazelle, the act of spinning/weaving" (570).[6] Fittingly, the collection's two ghazals follow "Cosmophilia," the title poem, which I suggest gives a theory of witness through handicraft. The publisher's website includes this description of Kurd's book:

> What earthly use is the love of ornament? Slowing down to look closely at an inherited shawl made by hand, the title poem in Rahat Kurd's *Cosmophilia* traces an object of luxury to the traditionally male art of Kashmiri shawl embroidery. The poet works with images from Kashmir, her maternal family's place of origin . . . ("Cosmophilia" n. pag.)

In this collection, the art made by hand includes poetry, and the love of ornament has use for witnessing as it pertains to making one's mark in tradition, an artist's mark, the mark of the working hand.

In "Cosmophilia," the poet imagines her ancestor, an embroiderer, in turn imagining her own future existence. When the speaker imagines passing on an embroidered shawl to a descendent fifty years hence, the poem expresses

a mutual creation in which the descendent inherits the object marked by the ancestral embroiderer's initials but also the ability to embroider herself. The poet, who can be sensed behind the poem, imagining the ancestor's imagining of her, inherits the skill of embroidery (which possibly materializes as poetry), but she also embroiders herself into being as she imagines an ancestor creating and marking her in the inherited object. In being marked by her ancestor, she also inherits herself.

"Cosmophilia" is about the distance between the ancestor and the descendent, and among speaker, poet, and readers. The speaker says, "I will sew my initials / into the fresh length of wool / she will inherit" (4). The poem subsequently details this handwork and the distanced initials: these initials are metonymically connected to the hand, which is itself a synecdoche of the embroiderer whose initials we never actually get. In one sense, the poem collapses this distance by imagining the original embroiderer as the speaker; it makes this voice accessible. Yet, accordingly, the "her" that refers to the poet does not speak. As the speaker tells us, "We will never meet. / I will not live / to know her name" (4). Kurd signs this poem in absence, making a space for another voice by imaginatively relinquishing her own voice and signature as they might be connected to a speaker. The absence intensifies when no new name fills the space, but instead only the insinuation of the speaker's initials. The poet's presence as the third-person construction of an imagined voice means that readers cannot conflate the poet and speaker to find the poem's decisive meaning only or primarily in the poet's biographical connection to the witnessed events, thus emphasizing the significant mediation of the poem as a technique for creating witness. This poem is about what can and cannot be known from and achieved by a poem, embroidered shawl, or other "useless ornament" (7).

As the publisher's website suggests, though embroidery is "traditionally male art," Kurd may seek a matrilineal inheritance through "her maternal family's place of origin." The epigraph to "Cosmophilia" explains, "It was hereditary for an embroiderer's son to be an embroiderer's son." Since there is a daughter rather than a son in this poem (the one who inherits is referred to as "she"), it is possible that the fore-father also becomes a fore-mother. There is no pronoun to signal the embroiderer's gender, and Douglas Barbour interprets the speaker as a man: "Kurd has fascinating histories to explore, not least in the title poem, which tenderly takes up & renders into words the history of an old embroidered scarf, made in the traditional Kashmir way by a man, but given unto the women of the family

down through the years" (n. pag.). Yet, given Kurd's interest in lineages of art through women, I read the speaker as a woman, whether or not such an ancestor really existed. Kurd's interest in finding such an inheritance is evident in the other poems I discuss, with the speaker losing Urdu "every time I left my beloved women" ("In the Persian" 11) and "crav[ing] a female muezzin to praise" ("On Eid" 12). Indeed, Kurd's interest in tracing matrilineal connections is evident throughout her collection, notably in "Return (Fahmida Begam)," which considers the grandmother's "daughters and their daughters" (27); matrilineal inheritance (28); "centuries of women's voices" (30); a daughter writing the family history (31); and the speaker reflecting on "merciless act[s]" committed in Jammu when her grandmother was "carrying the girl / who, twenty-two years later, / would become my mother" (34). Moreover, this poem's concluding sections consider women in relation to their "true work" (37), which many are made to think must be only "silence" (38). Nevertheless, after cataloguing the kinds of poems Fahmida Begam recites to her, the speaker declares, "We had arrived, she and I, / at the hour of the true work" (38).

The pervasive insistence on women's work as creation shared across generations of women in Kurd's collection reinforces my reading of "Cosmophilia." Kurd's epigraph from Lal Ded—"I gulped down the wine of my own voice" (55)—for her final section (about speaking English and finding voice after divorce) likewise puts her into an inheritance of women's artistic voices. Moreover, her "Seven Stones for Jamarat" series ends with a poem wishing for historical accounts of women throwing their stones at the pillars. The poem concludes with a comparison of this ritual gesture with poetry: "I seize the ancient gesture, weighted / with my fierce gleanings. I never write a verse now but I hurl it" (52). In an interview, Kurd speaks about her search for a literary lineage through reading work by Muslim women: "Reading what other Muslim women have written about their lives is the best, most direct way to find the necessary courage to write about yours. Trace your lineage and you will find your voice" ("Kashmiri" n. pag.). "Cosmophilia" details its own coming into being as this voice is not her own but one coming before her that allows her to write the poem as an inheritance.

"Cosmophilia" raises the question, whose poem is it? The speaker signs her embroidered item with her stitched initials, but no one signs this poem except in the sense that we, outside of the poem, know that Kurd wrote it because it is in her collection. Inside of the poem, we know there is a poet behind the speaker because the speaker knows about the inheritor's life

in a future world presumably unimaginably unlike her own (for example, the speaker imagines a first-grade classroom's cloakroom and the jeers of contemporary children [5]). Ultimately, "Cosmophilia" is marked by the invoked tradition more than it is by an individual; the poem works to construct the setting of inheritance. The embroiderer's initials were a mark beyond a proper name referring to a person; made within a tradition of inheritance, her mark also refers to a relationship into the future, where the next mark will be written.

"Cosmophilia" expresses art as a technology of inheritance insofar as the stitched initials create the next marker; artistic creation forges relationships across time and with new artists. Signing is in pursuit of future signing, and the anticipation of that future in some sense creates it, insofar as a tradition is created or upheld for future people to work within. Jonathan Culler, explaining Jacques Derrida's well-known comments on signatures, writes that the signature "seems to imply a moment of presence to consciousness which is the origin of subsequent obligations or other effects. But if we ask what enables a signature to function in this way, we find that effects of signature depend on iterability" (126); "a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form" (126). The work of the signature, as I am expanding it beyond the individual, seems to be precisely what "Cosmophilia" explores: the ancestor's conscious intent to stitch her mark as inheritance, an inheritance that would require the poet to take over the mark by making herself (making art herself and making herself as an artist). In writing this poem, Kurd makes the ancestor's signature repeat in a new context; the ancestor signs this poem as its speaker, even though Kurd signs it as its author. Since Kurd imagines the speaker's intent, she posits a motivation for the initials that allows her to be part of a tradition she, as one participant in it, creates.

The context of this work is the descendant's existence in a world lacking the handmade: "From the ubiquity / of the machine-made / she will fatigue" (6). The speaker envisions her descendent "prepar[ing] for the work" (10), believes "She will make it work" (5), and explains, "We must search quickly, quickly / for the tools that best fit our hands" (9). In her interview with *Muslim Link*, Kurd discusses the handmade:

> The admiration of the earth's natural beauty is common around the world, but in Kashmir there is a whole culture around expressing that beauty through skilled craft. I don't just mean that it's part of the economy. There is a deeper social and spiritual value attached to the practice, the discipline, in making something by hand that is beautiful to look at and which is meant to last, as there is in the repetition of patterns. Many of the poems in my book draw upon

> traditions and ideas in Islamic art and reflect on the conditions in which art gets made. ("Kashmiri" n. pag.)

These comments come in relation to Kurd explaining that her collection's title "speaks with particular acuteness of the very fine Kashmiri handicraft traditions I've grown up surrounded by" (n. pag.). "Cosmophilia" aligns the skill of writing with that of embroidery, and evokes both art forms as handicraft through its attention to hands. The speaker explains she and the poet have "the same" experience with their hands as they begin work:

> she will press
> the same stiffness
> I press from my finger joints
> wrapping both hands
> around ritually prepared
> cups of hot liquid. (10)

This ritual time for beginning work recalls "Ghazal: On Eid," where the ritual time of Ramadan may heal the speaker's broken heart by tying her into tradition. When the speaker in "Cosmophilia" posits "a collaboration" in traditional handicraft, she imagines "our fingers will touch" (4). It matters that this touching is imagined such that "my deft hand" (4) becomes linked to "rigorous thought" (4), "lines of my thought" (6), and "reverie" (7). The work of the hand is linked with the work of the mind, so that the inheritor will "discern / with pleasure" (4) and "become fluent" in the tradition (5). The collaboration unites the work of the hand with the work of imagination, and "the skill" "with which we made each other up" (10) is of both kinds of work. It's not just that they made each other, but that they made each other up: the poet imagines the speaker imagining her. As the speaker says, "I will have become her creation / as much as she is now mine" (10).

Thus, the speaker and poet create "a collaboration / that insists and insists, / . . . / on being looked at" (4). This is the ornamentation central to poetic witness. The speaker says,

> I will remind her
> how to pick up the thread
> when the end of mourning comes;
>
> how to mark the rhythms that mark us
> as we cross our given spans of time. (9)

The thread recalls the previous section's "[t]hose who tied thread / at Chrar-e-Sharif" (7) as a mark of vows. The thread that the ancestor will remind the poet to pick up is the thread of tradition beyond the thread of embroidery.

The speaker explains, "Even at our vanishing point, the marks we make / must stun with delight, the force of life itself. / Death must be satisfied with just our bones" (9). Names have to do with the "vanishing point" and "our given spans of time," but marking has to do with what "we make," marks in the world that also "mark us." We are ornamented by tradition. Only the bones are subject to death; the bones may have been ours, but they are not the portion of us that is marked. The body must be aligned with the name and the hand that worked, but the mark that is "the force of life itself" is made through the product of the hand's work, the handicraft, the artistic creation. When Kurd's name appears in the ghazals, the name itself only alerts readers to the mark that is aligned with the ungiven initials mentioned in "Cosmophilia."

When a poet witnesses through a poem, the witnessing cannot be simply the poet's experience; rather, the witnessing comes through the poet's mark. Peggy Kamuf, translator of Derrida's work, writes in her book *Signature Pieces*, "When you sign, you do not merely write your name, which anyone could do in your place: you affix your name as a particular mark" (ix). Kamuf explains that a signature "is not an author or even simply the proper name of an author. It is the mark of an articulation at the border between life and letters, body and language" (39). It can also be the mark between an individual's experience and a shared tradition or history. Poems navigate that border. Kurd does not give herself or her signature but her mark, which shows the border between the poet and the imagined speaker. This speaker marks the poem by embroidering her shawl. An obsolete meaning of "to mark" is to embroider, and an active meaning is "[t]o put a person's initials or other identifying mark on (clothing, linen, etc.) by means of embroidery or stitching" ("Mark, v" n. pag). At the same time, "to mark" means "[t]o record, indicate, or represent by a mark, symbol, or marker; to record, note, or represent in writing" ("Mark, v" n. pag). Embroidery and writing are linked in the poem's consideration of marking. The reoccurrence of marking in the poem—"the rhythms that mark us" and "the marks we make"—suggests a theory of witness in which handicraft (including writing) gives witness through the mark of the hand. This artistic creation is to "make one's mark": "to make a permanent, important, or obvious impression on a person, field of study, activity, etc.; to attain distinction" ("Mark, n1" n. pag). To mark is also "[t]o commemorate or celebrate (a person, event, etc.)" ("Mark, v" n. pag), and commemoration is an aspect of witness that aligns with "the marks we make" that "must stun with delight, the force of life itself," that elude death through being remembered.

Conclusion

The artist's mark is what a reader can access. A name might be explicitly available in a poem, but it points to the encoded mark, which is the work of the hands with the intention to create a tradition which must be reiterated by the work of new hands. This mark shows and shapes the relationship between poet and reader, poet and poem, and poem and tradition. The mark as the "improvised device" of poetic witness holds the set of relationships inhering in a witness poem. Thus, the inclusion of the poet's proper name, as in the ghazal's signature verse, does not point straight outside of the poem to the actual person and experience; rather, the signature, used as a component of the art, examines and expresses the poet's relationship with the poem. In "Cosmophilia," the poet's name also draws attention to how the poem expresses its relationship to cultural traditions. Since "Cosmophilia" expresses its theory of witness through handicraft, the concept of the signature evokes cultural forms relevant to Kurd's life while also serving to raise questions about the relationship between the embodied witness and the art object. The hand's work is revealed only in the mark it leaves behind. It is in this sense that a witness poem is encoded with the life of the writer.

NOTES

1 For an extended critique of Forché and others, see Thomas Vogler's "Poetic Witness: Writing the Real." I have written about Forché and trauma theory in relation to compassion in *With the Witnesses: Poetry, Compassion, and Claimed Experience* (2017).

2 *A Specimen of Persian Poetry* includes this definition: "Mushkel signifies both *difficult* and *a difficulty*" (Richardson 8). According to translated phrases available at *mylanguages.org*, "kheili" is Persian for "very." Given that Kurd's collection is in English, many readers may be in the position of looking up these two Persian words. Through a Google search, the answers Kurd's readers are likely to find most quickly are a *Yahoo! Answers* definition for "*kheili*" as "very" and the *Hamariweb* definition of "*mushkil*" as "abstruse" (in Urdu). Another *Yahoo! Answers* user gives a variation, "xeyli," which John R. Perry, in his chapter on Persian Morphology in *Morphologies of Asia and Africa*, defines as "very, much, many" (985). My sources are unusual because I could find no Persian dictionary giving definitions in the Roman alphabet that included the words in the forms in which they appear in Kurd's poem. However, a Persian-speaking colleague has confirmed this definition.

3 In "Learning Persian," Kurd explains the complications of her multilingual childhood: "Rippling through these polyglot exchanges were a number of silences, hinting at the sorrows of India's partition and other old mysteries: national and sectarian lines ruling which language to speak, to whom, when; the private resentments of some toward the cross-border fluencies of others" (n. pag.).

4 The shifting pronouns "I," "you," and "she" refer, as "Rahat" does, to the speaker in this poem.

5 Faiz was himself heir to Muhammad Iqbal and Gahlib (Genoways 100). Kurd names all three poets in her collection (11, 14, 15).
6 Pritchett's claim that "ghazal" "means something like 'conversations with women'" (n. pag) is also interesting for Kurd's book, as I will argue that she crafts a matrilineal inheritance.

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