
Passing Over

Norman Finkelstein

This is the bread of affliction

though we have divided our trouble
from the center of our being
and hidden it away.

It will return sooner or later
for whatever beset our parents
is not easily put aside.

Already our children
stirring around the table
long to seek it out.

Let us distract them with stories
sweets and unlikely dishes
promises and strange songs.

Let us whisper of the darkness
to which we were enslaved
and which may come again.

Be assured that we are here
neither in Egypt nor Israel
—be assured of our exile

in the wilderness of recitation
in the Egypt of questions
and in the Israel of seeking the truth.

Those at the door
are welcome in our wandering
sustained by fragments—

let them come and eat.



Norman Finkelstein is the author of Restless Messengers, a volume of poetry, and two books of literary criticism, The Ritual of New Creation: Jewish Tradition and Contemporary Literature (SUNY Press, 1992) and The Utopian Moment in Contemporary American Poetry (Bucknell University Press, 1988; 2nd ed. 1993). He is a professor and chair of the English Department at Xavier University.