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One Hundred Hungers by Lauren Camp

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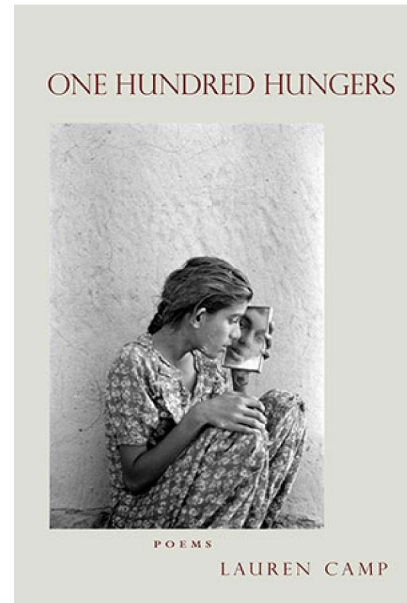
Author: Lauren Camp (/author/lauren-camp)

North Adams, Massachusetts. Tupelo Press. 2016. 91 pages.

One Hundred Hungers is a book of exile, faith, and acceptance. Of flavor, desire, and violation. Poet Lauren Camp confides in us what feels like a timeless narrative, and her creative explication of an American immigrant story feels entirely new. In addition to exposing the experience of the cultural and religious Other, Camp also unveils several issues that are specifically female. As the daughter of a Jewish Iraqi immigrant, Camp invites her reader to experience the oddity of diaspora within diaspora through evocative imagery and diction; a variety of portraits of differing people, places, and experiences; and direct interrogation of political (and personal) drama.

Without falling into any clichés or the chronological reenacting of events in her family history, she unveils her Jewish-Iraqi heritage through a linguistic dance—as if her language were long scarves of bright-colored silks twisting around the arms and hips of an intoxicating woman. Camp does this in five parts, each pulling a thread from a different angle of the experience of fleeing one’s homeland and settling anew. Before the five sections begin, Camp offers us the poem “Without Spectacle or Fading,” which serves as an entry point for the rest of the book. It is as if the poet stepped in to teach her readers how to approach the poems that follow. From the first line, the poem invokes a mythological, ancient, and even omniscient tone as it says, “What time said first: / the sky is holy.”

This book carries the soul of someone with deep empathy who understands what it means to be an outsider. The journey the reader travels with the careful guidance of Lauren Camp is full of rich language and imagery, and a soft hum seems to always be in the background. Perhaps the sound of the oud or the gentle singing of a grandmother mixing ginger and tamarind in the kitchen. One can even envision the glossy red pomegranates or taste the rice, raisins, and okra that make humble appearances. *One Hundred Hungers* truly inspires readers to hunger for all the things that Camp details about the cultures within the text, leaving only anticipation, now, for her next book.



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