

MS 57947

by Emma Morris

Between the covers, what else  
besides words slide along  
the surface what other  
bindings strain, barely  
able to contain them.

*Marginalia* and *provenance*

are words used to evade  
whose ghosts touched it,  
whose hands, whose eyes.

How many were lovers.

How many were weapons.

Which of them cast spells.

This vibration of hiding

translates as *archive*

or *preservation*, how many

years buried in genizot,

how many then

in consecrated ground.

Every seventh year.

Does the sacred lose its burn

when an object becomes a subject.

Does direct access to the divine

stashed away in some lonely corner,

diminish with each rip and tear,

the dust that settles and unsettles

every time you lift the lid.

Does the feel of the paper,

the smell of the ink, the skin cells

the bones of a saint, the relics,

the ghosts, the golems,

the "letters of introduction required

to view this manuscript,"

the dealers paid, the donors wooed,

the hands it passed through.

*One's vanity forbids.* Don't speak the names

of those who bequeathed

or of those from whom

they were stolen.

Bury them in acid free paper.

Embalm them in their own fragile, hard-won magic.

Don't let the dead

picking men of letters rest their eyes on

the nameless Arcanum.

The oracle works best

when there is skin on the table.