

# **Study Guide:**

## **Jehanne Dubrow's *The Arranged Marriage***

### **General Questions about Form**

1. Unlike many contemporary poetry collections, *The Arranged Marriage* is not divided into separate sections. How does the lack of breaks or sections affect the reader's experience?
2. *The Arranged Marriage* is comprised entirely of prose poems laid out in narrow columns. Why did the Jehanne Dubrow choose to work only in prose poems? What is lost when a poet doesn't work in lineated verse? What is gained?
3. Although *The Arranged Marriage* contains only prose poems, Jehanne Dubrow uses many devices employed in formal poetry, including internal rhyme, meter, and the repetition of words or phrases known as "anaphora." What are some poems where you see these techniques being used? What other musical devices does the poet seem to favor?

### **Questions about Storytelling**

1. *The Arranged Marriage* contains several, distinct narrative threads which are braided together. How would you summarize each of these narratives? What is the experience of moving backward and forward in time, shifting through different landscapes?
2. *The Arranged Marriage* is based on stories that come from the childhood and early adulthood of the poet's mother. What are some of the challenges of telling a story that is not your own? Are there ethical questions the poet must consider?
3. Many of the poems in *The Arranged Marriage*—including "A Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals," "Malamute," "Scheherazade," "Story," and "Strawberry Thief"—use the word "story." What are so many of the poems concerned with the art of storytelling itself? What is at stake for the speaker?
4. An ekphrastic poem is a poem that describes a visual work of work, such as a painting, a sculpture, a photograph, or even a film. "Hostage," "Eros and Psyche," "Lost Photograph of Trotsky, from the Family Album," and "The Leap" are among the examples of ekphrasis in *The Arranged Marriage*. What are some others in the book? What purposes do all of these ekphrastic poems serve?

### **Questions about Motifs & Imagery**

1. Knives appear in more than a dozen poems in *The Arranged Marriage*, including “The Handbag,” “Portrait of My Mother’s Father, with Peppercorns and Vinegar,” “Story,” “Willful Abandonment,” and “Schiller.” How are knives used at different moments in the book? How do different characters view knives?
2. Birds are an equally important motif in the collection. A variety of birds appear in poems such as “Rules for Passover in the Tropics,” “Mother-in-Law,” “Portrait of My Mother’s First Husband, with Fabergé Objects,” “Chronic Pain,” and “What I Saw in the Water; or, What the Water Gave Me.” What do these birds symbolize?
3. Body parts—particularly hands and faces—play a significant part in many of the book’s poems too. Why are images of the body so essential to *The Arranged Marriage*?

### **Questions about Voice & Point of View**

1. In a number of poems, including “A Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals,” “Bruise in the Shape of a Hand,” and “Schiller,” the poet represents moments of violence. How would you characterize the voice of the speaker? Is it emotional or detached? Why?
2. Almost all of the poems in *The Arranged Marriage* appear to be written in the third-person. What is the effect of using third-person point of view rather than first-person (i.e. “she” rather than “I”)? And how does “my mother,” a phrase that appears throughout the collection, allow the poet to create a bridge between the two kinds of viewpoints?
3. During the years she was writing *The Arranged Marriage*, Jehanne Dubrow interviewed her mother extensively. Why would a poet choose to incorporate research into her drafting processes? Which poems speak in a voice that seems the result of interviewing?