

Three Poems

Sharron Hass

Translated from Hebrew by Tsipi Keller

Happy Holiday

Happy holiday! Happy holiday and welcome. Really, we hardly fussed at all.
All kudos that you made it so fast on the open roads.

Over the frothy eggs we were struck by the thought that the philosopher,
the architect, and the poet lean on an old and shackled form that only
gradually relents and cracks under their weight; and they, with great effort,
open a new door to the wind, and yet, the hinges are crooked and the foot
cautious in the doorway.

So good of you to come. This morning it seemed that we would be able
to see faraway, up to the open path, to the empty chair in the rising blue.
Honestly, the tapping of feet and the clatter of silverware
will hush in me the great loss. When you leave the house
will be filled with the glory of exhaustion to mean:
Did I have the strength to withstand the severity of visions,
or is this fatigue the oblation to the festive music.

Either or, in the glow of hosting it seemed that the walls grew taller,
crystal trembled in the windows and through it we noticed how
at the edge of contentment a shadow was slinking away
dancing amid orange peels and light.

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Ever since I bore a son I became a mortal—
so writes a poet whose name, sadly, I cannot recall,
a bird of ashes buried a green seed and I held onto
the tree that sprouted in the dream, perhaps oak perhaps olive,
a dear essence to climb toward the unexpected,
but since my heart awoke in the dark
I cannot be happy without the fear, to be left with memories
in a place of no oxygen, no motion,
and the child who widens in me a footstep under leaves unsullied
by prophecies, uncovers in me a white road clear of lovely moss and ferns,
wheels travel in the light and love rouses frenzy and industry
in those who would like to stretch out with the cats to warm
their cold blood beside heaters burning in the heat.

Ever since I bore a son the human race was revealed to me as more
heroic than Achilles playing near the black ships while his friends
are slaughtered in battle, his rage entirely subsumed
in the radius of the sun, the slowness by which drop after drop
the body of the parent is poured into the gaping mouth, wrecking
the framework of the story upon which the melody was based,
never again will Eros stand at the door to demand,
Raise the roof in my honor, builders!¹

Starry-eyed like worker bees before the queen, we circle around
the happy heart laid out in the crib,
gradually turning into straw and stubble to cushion a soft frame
for the one without whom we would not have climbed back
above ground. Who else do we give milk to and are robbed of fire?
To the infant, the offender, the redeemer. God flattens us
to the inanimate in us and then lets go,
to allow the flow of blood to rush through the passageways.

¹ Alludes to Sappho's fragment 88.

Glazed Fire

And farther from here? It seems that they never captured
the pain of our love. The dream remained, a ladder
to climb up and down, a nimble poet
climbed it ninety meters beyond every bookshelf
I've managed to read, beyond the sails of black bees,
the song and halos of those who are resolute and in whose eyes
the Eros burns, opening before them chariots of celestial travels.
What are celestial travels? To lie down with a beast, with the bull and the lion,
and to yield to the wholesome shape of flowers weathering the decay
of sheaths—where do red dahlias travel? And wide-eyed sunflowers?—
and yet, to cleave to the body, to the visions rising like breath
from the tunnels of hunger that cast fear into the hearts of traitors.
Who are the traitors? Those who never lay down with a cow,
and wheat in the field never bowed to them, and the stars' awful chill
did not silver the black-pink flesh of deceit and seduction.

And farther from here? I heard the girls emerge from the larvae of wasps,
from the black thunder of birth that spins
in a centrifuge of stillness. One girl stepped forth from a row
and, against the backdrop of choirs and gods condemned to smoke and bones,
said: "When I lay with him I lay with a lion. A big lion, gaunt and wounded.
The beast of the surviving king whose watery eyes tear and flies rub their forelegs
around his head. I lay with the one I had granted—in jest—the trust, the hole in the heart.
And all that was poor wretched and wormy in us—truly—was the reeking splendor
of the wound. We managed to witness how silence switched
faces between us, between the large rifts in the networks of nerves,
we rose, twin to twin, with a yellow eye and a dripping fang
that stains the frosty lace of memories into rot.
Who else would be in the world to once again breathe into me,
to whom would I give, from whom would I take the hollow
when everyone, so it seems, dissipates in the clouds of furs and feathers."

