

Bejan MATUR
Poetry

CEREMONIAL ROBES

In the cold decayed
heart of these lands
I saw eyes.
Everyone was there with their voice
and their body's pose.
We know someone best while making love,
when we corrode our hearts together.
Growing heavy, our body
wakes us in the night.
Houses with courtyards are like graves.
Childhood is a sleep, long-lasting.
And a yearning to touch,
a yearning drags us towards death.
I tested myself in every body,
I abandoned myself in every city.
I took the skies of countries to my heart
and when I saw the emptiness of my heart,
I said, it's time to go.

Inside the mouldering robes of ceremony
roots sway on the hanger.
Even if we drop fire in the sea
it will burn for ever,
it burns, a gift of desolation to the dark.
Perhaps history is a mistake says the poet
mankind's a mistake says god.
Much later,
in a future corrupt as the heart of these lands,
mankind's a mistake says god,
I'm here to correct it
but too late.

The wave of red lifeless water,
the road followed at night,
the poor earth strewn with travellers,
the white swaying shrouds,
ceremonial robes.
The only thing needed for a race
is the horse's mane.
This is the truth,
now we are here
rotted away in a rut.

God must not see the letters of my script.
Mankind's a mistake, he keeps saying.
And to correct his mistake
he gives sorrow,
only sorrow.

Berlin, February 1997

WINDS HOWL THROUGH THE MANSIONS

When we were born
It was our mother
Who had caskets made for us
And filled them with silver mirrors
Dark blue stones
And fabrics smuggled from Aleppo
Later
She would put us in those caskets
And whisper in our ears
Of roads
And winds
And mansions.
To stop us being lonely in the dark
She would add our childhood too
To comfort us
With that childhood.
But when we were left
In the long river whose waters streamed
With blood that poured from ritual razor-slashes on our backs
Our mother never wanted such an outrage
And that is why
We kept telling the waters
While she was sleeping
We moved far away.

What's left from that flight
Everything, everyone is here.
I am here
My brothers and sisters are here with their loss
My mother with her dresses
My brother with his fear of war
My father's here, but not awake
Around me the world has shrunk
All like a dream
That hurts the longer it lasts

I

Our mother
Stroking her black velvet dress
And veiling her gaze with her hair
Would remember our father:

She said he was on a white mountain
A white mountain getting smaller every spring

II

When our brother
Older than all of us
And afraid of the distant war
Never came home
We too feared the war.
But it wasn't war that kept him away.
On his way back
He fell asleep with his horse
On the snowy mountain facing our father's

As our mother's face grew thinner
And our mother's shoulders shrank
We wondered which mountain to look at

III

On the long veranda of our house
As her velvet dress grew longer
Her silver hairband heavier
Her silver belt looser
Our mother looked more and more
Like the mountains she watched.
In spring her shell was wearing out
But we couldn't reach her.
She was dying
Pining away
She never appeared again on the veranda

IV

Lost every winter
Returning in spring
Our mother became a tree

A tattooed oak
Her moaning in our ears

V

Every night
In her black velvet dress
Our mother wandered among the mountains
She was a rootless oak
Silent, now and then weeping

Before we parted
We would gather in our mother's shadow
And whisper among ourselves
Please God forgive us
Spare our house
Don't touch our veranda
Only there can we laugh
Only there can we be really silent
Only there can we say what we like
And even if we don't touch her

We can see our mother from afar

VI

When the cold spell began
Horsemen came to take us away
Horsemen old and strange
Who made us afraid
Snow veiled their eyes.
Without a word
Not looking at our little hands
They came to carry us off to the mansions
Mansions howling with winds

EARTH'S DREAM

In its loneliness the night sky
thought,
Why these stars?
Why this voice humming in my heart of darkness?
When the voices recede
what's left
but oppression gnawing at my soul?

If the Pole Star moves one second from its place,
does the fisherman lose his way?
Does the shepherd forget his whistle?
Perhaps nothing,
nothing, can alter the truth of me.
I am earth's dream.
A sleeper ending his sleep
will see when he wakes,
real darkness beyond.

TO BE IN THE WORLD IS PAIN.

All the red stones on earth are smeared
with blood of the god.
And that's why red stones
teach our childhood.
When we are children, the god
walks beside us.
He touches our ear-rings
and necklace.
He enters and hides in our shiny shoes
and the folds of our childish ribbon.

I must buy a flame-red dress and bed,
a red ring
and lamp.
There must come a time
when the mother's time begins and ends.
The blood that knows how to wait,
also knows how to be a stone.
To be in the world is pain –
this I have learned.

Red darkness
blue darkness
and the beginning,
the meaning of these must be
that they never abandon us,
our mother and our god.

EVERY WOMAN KNOWS HER OWN TREE

When I came to you
I was going to open my wings
over that deserted city
built of black stones,
and find a tree and perch on its branches
and shout with pain.

Every woman knows her own tree.

That night I flew.
I passed over the city that darkness feared to enter.
Having no shadow the soul
was lonely.

I howled like a dog.

BLACK RAIN

Cover me up.
Let me change my shell,
like day, like birds of the morning.
While a black rain falls.

A NIGHT SPENT IN THE TEMPLE OF A PATIENT GOD

I

You chose your exile among rainswept mountains.

Where you lingered last night
was the home of the patient god
the home where a human is equipped with compassion.
No need for temples, I said.
This is simply a place.
The human soul must surely be a temple.
And rain the river of homelessness
reminds us of god and childhood.

II

You chose your exile among rainswept mountains.

The beauty of making mistakes
and the peace of pain.
Everything led you to emptiness.
And you, you looked at the pale flowers of patience and wept.
You slept in his arms as though nothing existed.
There shall be a journey made to the mountain and exile chosen.
And a human wanted from god.

We must listen again to that music.
That place was not meant for loving.

CREATION

Listen and look, mountains rise into being.
Underground rivers shrink
to sluggish inner blood.
A lapis-blue vein
atoms of dust.
Perhaps only a wind knows earth.

The wind touches trees and humans and dies away.

From HOW ABRAHAM ABANDONED ME

'Every night is sacred,' said one
every night sacred
there will be many more nights of longing.
And we, what do we hear?
In the courtyard where we sat yesterday
the rose that was black
opened its soul today,
a revelation.
And the waters a revelation.
The fragrant divine breath
of birds flying past the rose
and their voice
is your breath still in the making.
When you look at the rose
every sin here is cleansed.
Your desire was weighed in heaven.
When I speak of an angel
the city is utterly black,
I spoke of an angel
'and perhaps,' I said,
'the black nature of the city
exalts the angel
and opens its wings to words.'

Undoubtedly we'll talk of time,
of the burden the child carried across the stream,
of a sister,
of a curse,
of an absent mother,
of the dead.

We'll talk of a mother who didn't give birth
of denial.

So much happened
Trembling replaced trouble.

Enlightenment came
and you remembered the mother.

And the dead?

How many dead this night and morning?

Impossible to count the deaths of the past
for every moment they are with us.

Their souls breathe within us
the waters gleam and darken with their eyes.

.

In a garden
of forgotten innocence
circling
round
and round
O human creature
when the circle is completed
what remains

is Self.

And night.

SEA OF FATE

Part 1

Sea of fate
Of nothingness
Of death...

For this sea
will carry us.

And the angel
will surely come.

Being human is being in confrontation.
The limit
The death

* * *

Visible from the sky
Seen only by God.
Destined by the big eye
Divine death,
Swept away from existence to none.

On this journey
together with God,
in this state of non existent
we're together with God.

* * *

This encounter
An encounter of continents.
God's will.
God wishes the same death to all.
Will summon fate
And those divided on land
Be merged in the waters.

* * *

Today has nothing to say.
No word
No silence
Even decadence can not tell.
An eye from above
Observing us,
Smoothing the wings

of the angel of death

* * *

The angel has come to the shore...
To hold the earth.

This is a great illusion
Heading towards its destination
Traced to the composition of fate.

what was whispered to us
Was our existence
Ones we believed.

* * *

All the waters of earth
embrace us
like a mother's womb.
For to us a womb
was never given.

We run to the waters
like one who runs
to the womb that was spared.
Sea of Being
Are you Being itself?

* * *

Now what begins
is the zone of breath
of blue
and of wings.
In the sea depths
the song sung to the peonies
surely remains unfinished.

* * *

For pity,
removed from the land
lives in the breath of the wave,
pity.
As it approaches
becoming thinner
This is the land.

* * *

For we
are created from atoms
divided
set free.
Removed from memory
from perfection
we fell into this desert.
Climbing over the mountains
we came to the border
It seems the border
was human!

The border was human
between the angel
and death.

* * *

Between the angel and death
Stands truth.
If truth has a hand
Will it reach out to us?

God in his care
weaves fate.

Part III

Everyone from a mountain top
everyone from the country of stone
has a story for sure.

Now we're here
we were told to stay.
But why does the wind
cut our face?
Why does our way of looking bring us pain?
The starlight on the skin
of each of us,
is from the spheres, they say.
We flow
and flow
down
deep down
to the lowest depths.
And as we fall
the sea opens
it opens to Being.

* * *

Man's border
is a tiny line,
from being
to a sea of nothing.
It whispers to us
as it begins,
'Watch out!
This is not the beginning
but the end!
Come off those wings
you flew with!
Those wings
will carry you to death.
Those wings
will bring you to God's land,
to the blue
God's country is blue.'

* * *

I'm making a lament for you, O Lord.
A lament
dragged along with me
in my saddlebag.
From now my eyes
are the eyes of the homeless.

O my Lord
Tell me
where I belong!

* * *

Cruel God
who has gathered the sole compassion left,
tell me
is this Holy Ascension
an ascent in reverse,
I come down
from the mountains
to the constellation of stars
I come down to the heart of darkness.
If this is a holy ascension
I come down from the mountains
to the host of stars
to the galaxies.
In this ascension in reverse
caves hasten
to show the hidden stars.

It is God who reveals
the hidden stars
to us homeless ones
in the depths of the sea.

* * *

O hidden stars
O galaxies
Song of the peonies,
that begins and ends
with us.
I'm the one dying
everywhere!

'Swim to the shore,'
says the captain,
'It's not
an order!
Listen
It's a promise.
One thing only
was given you.
For what's on the shore is the world
not what was shown to you.

'Go,' says the captain.
'Your future is there
not here'...

Part IV

We're drowning here
While we can't take our eyes off the blue
we drown
in a slowly darkening sea.
This falling is into God!
This fall into Being.
The reality of the keel
will be destroyed,
we will come face to face
with the patient wisdom
of the coral
where it waits
in the depths of the sea.
The infinity we beheld
as we crossed the mountains
formed by the brotherhood of the wind
was absolute as stone.
Now the angel comes
and takes me
transporting me
from one paradise to another.
For we were in paradise
where breath grows less,
in a paradise of unheard voices
of the unseen look,
the paradise of the heart.

Translated from the Turkish by Canan Marasigli and Jan Hadfield
First published by Poetry Translation Centre in 2017