

The Orientalist

I am a dead Orientalist – I am the wisp of a ghost
of an Orientalist.

I'm fat-lipped limping through the sun-bleached streets
of a foreign land,
trying to remember what I was –
the Orientalist,
searching for dead kings and cavalries
at the bottom of the Bosphorus.

I am glugged chimney-chutes and streets thick with the smoke
of a lukewarm winter;
Tel Aviv or Cairo,
without poetry or rhythm, dreaming of a home under Occidental rains
clutching at this image of a desert washed in gold,
clutching at this image of antiquity –

I fell out of Istanbul and tumbled to the streets of Old Tbilisi
with a split lip;
this world is old
and all her sins are written in her sighing,
and I used to be – have this thought, this blinkered memory –
I was once,
in another life –
before truth and experience brought me to my knees –

I was an Orientalist.

Meat

Ruddy tongue, the fickle thing,
hacks the words apart and tacks them back together;
this is a language of flesh.

Pieces slopped askew
with a length of twine.

(it's all of it made out of meat)

Like poetry.

Like the half-jarred rhythm rolling out with
places to go
things to be.

(meat noises, made out of meat)

All of it was words and none of it was language.

(it's just air and words and air and meat)

Not quite animal – are you listening? – this isn't like
bodies tumbling

fingers trembling;

like romance or like nature

sentiment or reason

body or soul – none of it like brushstrokes,

black and white,

the artistic whine of a tortured soul

laid to bare

– none of it

like *that*.

(it's meat!)

Verbs that cut the teeth.

Syllables that howl and

arteries bursting – at the turns.

Like veins and hair and cartilage.

(it thinks with its meat, for a start)

A phlegm in the throat of the heavens.

Like if the pearl excreted oysters, or

silk gave birth to the writhing, bloated body
of the silk worm.

Like the ugly duckling laying its own egg and
hatching out again.

(He was with the Word and the Word was with He)

But all of it was language and then none of it was words.

(and They both were made of meat)

Starting over – still listening?

It's a prime cut

of a word;

and a run-on sentence

of the flesh,

cut right from the carcass.

Like follicles being twisted into synonyms.

Like...

(...*meat?*)

...among other things.

For the Temple Once was Holy

Ahuvati, min hashemayim, crowned queen of the reed bed
from whom all things are born and cut:
your face like frosted glass appears one winter night
and vanishes beneath the light of morning.

I have no voice to give to you
but speaking through the dawn in frantic reverie
and clutching to the threads of moonlight
as they're drawn into the West.

I fled into a land of fleece and worship.
I fled into the earth where earth was sanctified
and man made sacred, *min ha'adamah*,
and saw upon the palace steps
the mystics twirling;
I have seen your words embroidered
in their velvet, gold, and silk
and have spun your name in jewels
around my forehead;

but the night unfurls and finds me speaking, hushed and frantic,
and your name has vanished from my lips.

At the place where the earth arches up to touch the sky,
I found a temple there
and stood, as the world in bated breath
and silence
awaited your command;
surrounded by the sacred and
forgotten.

There is a mystic here inside me:
there is something of the sacred in my breast.
Her face like frosted glass appeared to me one winter night
and vanished with the coming of the dawn.
And like a flame, I was extinguished,
and arose as a vapor in the air
arching toward some phantom draft
to find her.

Pigeons

heaven bless the iron dome
sparks and thunder in the blistered night –
tails braiding up, heads careening down
the whole collects itself
and disappears in pieces
across the desert, somewhere;

heaven bless the terror and the chaos of a not-quite-righteous man;
heaven bless the promise
of a coming age
and the myth
of a two-fold history;

heaven bless the other –
giving unto mercy what the night would give
to fear

Send to Me Some Plague of Frogs

I wandered in the desert seeking visions
and found instead the wavering absurdities
of friction;

my mirage is a plague of frogs
my mouth is full of sand

that Moses did all that he did is no great wonder
for Moses was a man of means –
that poets should graft a line or two in metered rhythm
from their half-false visions, altered memories and dreams
is likewise
no great myth –
the cadence comes from mindful things

but I wandered in the desert seeking treasure
found a glint of something here, a wavering something elsewhere,
a pain, a past, a long-dead line –

and lo, behold,
that the dunes of the desert, somewhere in the creases of the earth,
should echo back

when I whistle toward them