

Almira Hess - And As Far As What I Wanted & Other Poems



*Amira Hess. Ills.: Joseph
Sassoon Semah*

And As Far As What I Wanted

And as far as I wanted to further explain to you
what every sign says.

After all, surely you understand the way of colors,
the gilded light, the chlorophyll light,
the light of pain and the light of need and vigilant light
and the light of an arc in the sky
splitting through again to seed with drops of sun suddenly burning
the essence of yearning.

The light of the eyes of the dogs
shine loyalty in the dark to their masters.
The growing shadow of darkness placed late
in fading time.

How the radiant blackness disseminates its night
And how the arrows' whiteness smothers its light
How everything is lucid from so much pain.

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Yonina Borvick*

From And The Moon Drips Madness

There was a time
when I'd have said:
I won't defile myself
with this contemptible Orient,
I'll relegate my ancestral
home to oblivion,
my mother's owlsh visage
weeping over the ruins,
my father's face like a cherub-
the Lord - graced him not.

And I also said:
The West, for instance,
Has no cares to its spirit,
well-done within, singed to the shrouds.
East and West I'll set out in a strong beat
for there is no ark
to bestir myself, if daughter
departs more spirit
to make eagles soar.

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay*

Then Slake Him From

Then slake him from
A wineskin flowing and a wineskin of milk and a wineskin of loveliness
Kiss and weep, for the time of loving has come.
Woman-dust-earth seeped into the lust in his touch
Keen after him
Kiss his footprints
Do not bind his freedom.
Place him as a cock
Rising early, at sun's fire,
As a madman, his body screaming desire.

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Marsha Weinstein*

We're Children Of Atlantis

Remnants alighting from the
sea
immigrant
busts.

And there are brigades of cavalry
stumbling as they gallop.

The golden horse pulls down the priestly vestment
his face resplendent.

Month of May moon

I didn't see moons

months I didn't count days

I just saw blood and took my pulse.

The Lebanon cries out to the cedars of Goshen.

Judah cry not Judah

rotting further in the dust

your eyes veiled

in terror. Dread heaven

sent deloused

municipal decree - cry not Judah.

Don't weep chosen

over the babble in paradise no-land

the poetry of mint stirs

onion poetry of the rock and roll

savagery encircled by "uncles", dances

from the jungle calling TAM TAM TAM

Restore me Oh Lord to my sister's bosom

Set me upon the *gopher* wood

Oh Lord bring me back to the ark of Jeshurun
directly.

Turn my visage on a festive day to a vow of radiant
light good souls holding on to the world's foundation.

Inasmuch as the day breaks
I had been hoping night would fall
to continue sleeping as deeply as possible,
to gird up greater forgetting power to be forgotten
before you, inasmuch as the day breaks to get up
I wasn't oblivious already
because I wanted to go on to utter ruin
more and more,
but didn't have the strength
to ask myself
for e little more sleep without getting up in bed.

Wandering from world to world
Surely even my father would
speak at some point and say -
"All in all dwarf you
has face covered up in specs
wear minimal hat
go on
wear had to the max."

Between tone and slumber
now seems like a passage
from letter to letter
from a high octave *do*
to *sol* on another octave's scale,
coming down many thresholds
face to face within my very being which, after all,
only asked to be born and simply.

Hebrew's a nice language for revolvers one generation to the next
looking for a source out of their slumber
as they tarry upon the hook of retention.
Let it not found favor in my eyes
the realm of my garments overthrown
in the womb of holy scribes from Barazan,

I'm having a hard time finding a way out in origins
sometimes discovering my face by surprise
settling for tricks by the side of the road
crossing over another layer.

Yesterday I dreamt how the Nile rolled over its banks
and I saw the Delta inscribed upon the waters.
As I was still looking for other estuaries I suddenly
beheld interpretations on my palms
and between furrow and furrow
a white line of snow stood out
and the Delta was trampled by the running.
Afterwards the Nile made the warm blue
and if a cycle of time had been shifted
and Mount Ararat was dislodged from its place
barren wastelands stood out covered with lavender
their peaks slightly green.

An armored car behind me
an ancient carriage before me
veering to the right, and the color of mud the color of mine.

I still stumble to catch up with the steps taken before me
the niche has been breached
and sparkling water bathes my face.
And we were kind of an assembly of people
From the first generation unto the great-grandchildren.
My father was absent from this place
since he died while still alive,
and I didn't know if we gave birth,
if only my face was bathed,
if I'm the great-granddaughter,
If I'm a member of the tribe,
if my language is literal
if my lips speak the language of fresh twigs.
(That's how I remembered my anger
at their shutting their intent
to see the Aswan Dam

and the pyramids
from my eyes.)

And I still thought I governed myself that I had come for a little rest
without having to make much effort, except eating and drinking
bundles of lemons growing, pepper trees on the ceiling
I wanted to pick
so mother wouldn't get scared,
but she already took the initiative to go
to the other room, leading to the open field,
causing the sorrow in our hearts to arise anew.
She departs aware that she's going
and I'm aware of her departure.

I'm still disturbed by the form of the lemon that grew on the ceiling
Like a yellow candelabra
and behold, a light is lit in my window.
I didn't reign in the switches
presuming someone always kindles a light in my dreams.
Something turns topsy-turvy,
something runs amok,
the world is posed to change its face,
whether Persian lilac or sprouts of
orchid, whether an abundance of
rolling sandalwood beats
against my window and wakes me to tell
of the Nile's blueness even
more splendid than other blue.

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay*

From The Information Eater

The time of the singing birds will become the depths of poverty

1.

And beyond the unknown
I will yet know we don't know everything
and the thing of totality

that's the black holes
that I burn after you
cloaked face ablaze

and reason for this suffering

2.

I banished the forsaken from myself
and tonight amongst horses neighing like jackals -
how come

3.

if it was possible to give
to the soul via the body
for me to burn unto you without this suffering
spirits in flight perishing to block
the totality of the holes
until we know not

4.

the cycles the cycles their surface like hornets
the cycles why symbiotic
to tell me not to leave the house
not to run about to and fro and to tell me
not knowing whither without where to go no place-

5.

I'm afraid of the library
and what's between its shelves to search in the letters
little birds pain the wings within me

6.

seems to me I'll have a saint's face
and find it had been used sometimes
and there were times I was a memorial flame
and flowers on someone's balcony
needing neither dung nor water
my face from which only a sunflower will emerge
without wasteland -

7.

and under this sun
normally will be bred if it can
without the grief of parental doctrine hit home lying in wait
from my two eyes and my mother's voice as it sings so like an infant pecking
away
and just think my breasts playthings sucked out from sucking
and what milk's left me to give the kids
within a space closed
quite hollowed out to nourish
where both our voices stop
in do re mi-

8.

and all this from that windowsill
I saw the dove brooding over time
and her rounded eyes embroiled lashes
the pulleys entangled within
pyres of melancholy
and longing for the openings out -

9.

and my mother asks: have you got flowers
in the garden
people want to see flower
and when there's a garden in the wastelands of sustenance
in the wilds of that jungle of yours
echoing
I want to see your hair
like a field
in that man's room
so I know you're my daughter -

10.

I am Amira
going in my own captivity
and I have a papa buried on the Mount of Olives

the silence of the hush within me we have in common
and the hair brushing on my neck
if I was his secret
if his silence reigns bound me
without release -

11.

And there is a revolution on my face
as if I had been suddenly formed
and from a shorn lamb I had come to the raiments of favor and grace
and clemency and great reverence before the grief of my existence
in the stratosphere
bottleneck of my soul.

12.

There are waters there are mighty waters
at salt's threshold.

13.

There are tremendous waters
my face is an ocean.

14.

And beneath your beauty if anything happens to me
I will see this night
and we shall gaze
ourselves above like a torch
and the eyes will shed tears in a blaze of fire.

For that's how we are the wind -

And I took upon myself the yoke of your love
to reckon ourselves within the midst of the cry

Until I'd not be able to have left that night
the depths of my shriek's range
that day my mother gave birth to me
instructing my soul that it be thus with me
flying between the dreams

and kindred contentions
given birth into nature's lap
for I was born attorn
and the sudden brilliance of the cord seemed real to me -

15.

And how can one migrate to the inner
depths as over the surface of flesh and blood?
Go in and go out and scandal bangs me -

16.

I'll know and summon you
gather spirit to bind me to the altar
and place your eyes upon me to brand me and hunger for me
to ride
and make it if you want I'll spread
and if not I'll want it open
to come
time diving into buoyancy

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay*

-

Border Poets: Translating by Dialogues - Amira Hess

the black hand's palm
the black woman's voice
the old black woman's face,
afraid of a man

don't touch me — if you do
ragged weary Yemenis will gather inside me
in screaming want, trying to move their home's walls,
their dwelling caves, and fly here by magic carpet
I fight off Yemen, the desert south
and the rod of wrath - stay away
because — why me?

and I'm a room of my own body
gasping for breath inside my own turf,
let no strange man come touch me
to taste my skin. A wandering Jew
comes up to my oasis – cool water purifies –
as if immersed in white, I am shined
he polishes away my charcoal and Yemenis

I flee to the caves
and weep the seven days
and ten nights, then put on eye make-up
downing tears and pain
leaving only a void to be orphaned from me too
then I catch ringing laughter
from petals of flowers
and shake myself all
over to get my second wind

– *Translated from Hebrew by Helene Knox and Smadar Lavie*

Amira Hess was born in Baghdad, Iraq to an ancient rabbinical family. She was brought to Israel in 1951, at first living with her family in an immigrant transit camp, and later moving to Jerusalem, where she lives today. Hess worked as secretary in the Foreign Office and in the Government Press Office. Her first book, published in 1984, was awarded the Luria Prize. She received the Prime Minister's Prize in 2005 and the Amichai Prize for Poetry in 2015.
Source: <https://www.ithl.org.il/>

Books Published in Hebrew

POETRY

And the Moon is Dripping Madness, Am Oved, 1984 [Ve-Yareah Notef Shigaon]
Two Horses by the Light Line, Am Oved, 1987 [Shnei Susim al Kav Ha-Or]
The Information Eater, Bitan, 1993 [Bolea Ha-Informatzia]
Yovel, Carmel, 1998
Boulimia of the Soul, Helicon, 2007 [Ha-Bulimia Shel Ha-Neshama]
Tears Without Eyes to be Shed, Am Oved, 2014 [Kmo Bchi She-Ein Lo Einayim Lehibachot]