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Bushra Al-Bustani
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The Wine Table Spins

By Bushra Al-Bustani

Translated from the Arabic by Wafaa A. Abdulaali

Abstract

Bushra Al-Bustanic (b.1949) was born in Mosul, Iraq. She is one of the most famous poets of the Arab world. She is also an academic and a critic. She has published fifteen collections of poems and numerous critical essays on Arabic literature, besides a collection of short stories, called Night Calls. She chaired several literary journals in Iraq and throughout the Arab world. Her epic poem, Andalusian Songs for the Wounds of Iraq was translated into English by Wafaa A. Abdulaali and Sanna Dhahir and published by the Edwin Mellen Press (2008). Most of her poems talk about the love of Iraq, its glorious history of Mesopotamia, as well as themes of war, the oppression of woman, and the domineering, patriarchal society. This is a translation of the Arabic by Wafaa A. Abdulaali titled “The Wine table Spins” offered in both Arabic and English.

Keywords: Al-Bustani, Bushra; Iraqi poetry; modern, Arabic poetry; translation; women’s poetry; Wafaa Abdulaali; Sufi poetry.

Introduction

Bushra Al-Bustanic (b.1949) was born in Mosul, Iraq. She is one of the most famous poets of the Arab world. She is also an academic and a critic. She has published fifteen collections of poems and numerous critical essays on Arabic literature, besides a collection of short stories, called Night Calls. She chaired several literary journals in Iraq and throughout the Arab world. Her epic poem, Andalusian Songs for the Wounds of Iraq was translated into English by Wafaa A. Abdulaali and Sanna Dhahir and published by the Edwin Mellen Press (2008). Most of her poems talk about the love of Iraq, its glorious history of Mesopotamia, as well as themes of war, the oppression of woman, and the domineering, patriarchal society. This is a translation of the Arabic by Wafaa A. Abdulaali titled “The Wine table Spins” offered in both Arabic and English.

“The Wine table Spins” is a poem about a woman who goes through the Sufi experience of intoxication with the dizziness that takes her into a world full of miseries, where the woman is marginalized, but thoughtful and mindful of the plans woven by Imperialists and Colonists to usurp her home, personal home, and the birthplace. Everything around her shares her feelings: nature, her own home, the trees, the mountains, the sea, Tigress and Euphrates, etc. The contradictory feelings overwhelm the poem, such as when she says:

1

Department of English, University of Mosul, Iraq
Love blesses my palm and
sprouts in it a camphor flower.
I am sick of the pink honey
when it shreds in darkness.

However, the wine table transforms into other things to embody the subjects of the poem: the mystical longing, war, love, patience and death. However, like all her poems, optimism weaves as the griefs loom and surrender her. The poem is a strong rejection of all wars where woman is the first victim. The woman-speaker is truly Iraqi, in body and soul. She is also the earth, the poem, the Iraq map, and the Arabic language:

My heart’s stone leaps from a caravan and turns into a guide.
Earth is a night’s bet on a lantern.
The soil is my eyes’ kohl and my perfume.
Land is engulfed in grief and wailing hymns.
The earth is my two arms I raise to the thunder,
a fever of the green rain,
a feast of this earth,
and promised bait.

The poem ends with an optimistic note:

The hunter lies in wait for me and grabs it.
I write in wine on the glasses: I love you.
The Wine Table Spins

By Bushra Al-Bustani

Translated from the Arabic by Wafaa A. Abdulaali

1

*1*

- The wine table spins.
Pearls erase lines written on the branches by rubies.
I do not exclude the anguish of the fish that linger in the cave of green glow.
The green fish was murdered in the eye of the needle.
Lilacs said:
The eye of the needle is larger than a sea,
whose anchor is swallowed by zeal;
the fever
takes the sea towards an arm of scum that is keen on tearful parting.
Necklace snaps and I fall.

*2*

- The wine table spins.
Pearls erase lines written on the branches by rubies.
I do not exclude the anguish of the fish that linger in the cave of green glow.
The green fish was murdered in the eye of the needle.
Lilacs said:
The eye of the needle is larger than a sea,
whose anchor is swallowed by zeal;
the fever
takes the sea towards an arm of scum that is keen on tearful parting.
Necklace snaps and I fall.

1

Department of English, University of Mosul, Iraq
تتشكل نحلًا،
نملًا،
غيمًا،
وقوافل ماء في واح تحرسه الأجراس.

هل قلت: أحبكِ؟
كيمي يهضُن نخل الأرض،
ويشتعل الكون.
جيِّات الصحراء تغدو
جيِّات الأرض تطير بأجنحة من نار
تدنو الأغصان، وتشرب وحدي
اليهود خلف أصابعها
ويفجّ نمي ..

*2*
-The longing table spins.
The roof of words abandons the walls.
Gazelles writhe in pain
in the cemeteries.
I read my palm lines so
latitude can extend and
grow wings.
Countries escape
searching other maps
that form bee-combs,
ant colonies,
clouds,
and caravans of water,
of oases watched over by bells.

Did you say: I love you?
so the palm trees would grow
and the universe would glow.
The desert’s fairies
scamper.
The earth’s fairies fly with wings of fire;
branches come closer to drink up
my longing;
I pant running after their fingers.
My blood dries up.

*3*
- مادَّة الحرب تدور ..
جبل فوق صدر الفتاة
صخرة فوق صدر الفتاة
قمَّر مريك
ويقين يشِك بأبراجه
وصلاة ..
-The war table spins.
A mountain weighs down the desert’s breasts,
a rock burdens the young woman’s bosom,
a perplexed moon;
a faith doubts its towers;
a prayer interrupted by distraction.
Sand mat, a fading coral,
a passing night.
Between your scheming hands and the leaving soul,
a lethal knife.

O promises!
Take me to the deceit of
a nocturnal diaspora;
take me to saddle the heart of sins;
to map steps for a tomorrow
that does not come,
and to a narcissus and waterwheels stabbed by dews
and by the calling that wounds.
Take me…
Statues invade the mount meadows
and awake the evening cold.
Take me…
and sow women’s tears
like necklaces on homes,
and like a hat of blood.
Take me;
missiles are infatuated with nights
spreading the spray of demolition
above the daunted casement;
scared eyeball tempts its secrets
and collects its lovers’ fingers in an apple’s shelters.
The apple has passed by a celestial cave,
like a moon of wilderness,
and colonnades of blood…

*4*
- The love table spins.
I write down in the very first Books parables
never related by a sea at the desert’s ends,
and erase things never erased by waves in storm;
I open my bosom for the arms of a slave-like star.
I hunt a dumb night myth;
Like a grain I fall in dales.

*5*
- The longing table spins.
The palm trees arise;
tear clusters writhe in pain on the palm fronds.
I twirl around with the squirming trees.
I kneel down at the roots of the first Books and
proclaim the joy of the heart, smitten by flowers of love.
I do what Eve did not do.
I tighten the pomegranate branch around my neck.
I strangle myself.
The wine table spins.
In your eyes, coral bulbs shine.
My heart check glows.
The fountains wine yawns on the branches.
By breeze, I’ve warmed your heart.
My palm pants between your hands.
Was it your palm glistening?
Or is it a pomegranate seed that steals the moon’s warmth which falters,
and in your eyes slumbers?

-The musk table spins.
The forest moons slept on my arms.
The cooing dream grants your cup the reed’s wine
that hankers, playing on my heart’s chambers.
Take me before the white thread merges with musk so the night witnesses my salvation...!
The patience table spins.
Love slept on the chests of forgotten pastures.
Earth’s weeds are awakened by pomegranate’s whisper.
Volcano collects the night traps to take shelter in the youths’ cave.
The youths got lost and
the cave went astray;
the doors were closed.
The seat is filled;
in the pillars of the seat,
a barren mountain breathes.
A mountain heaps up pollens, shaping them into a woman of fire.
The problem with the seat is that fires will hunt down the heart’s wounds; a heart that holds
out behind a precipice pending to fall.
The problem with the seat is, if the precipice is hunted by the whale, it will crumble on
desolate planes.
The seat will then spin around in a gazelle’s broken horn.

My problem is,
the pomegranate will ever resist on the branches;
the red won’t glisten at night; and
the dream is a pumpkin;
darkness is a whale.
A couple is in the coffin.
The sea is wounded by the brutal fish.
The sea packs its bags and dies.
*9*

The war table spins.  
I break the death stick.  
I open the window for the gazelles;  
the green fish scampers in the deserts, swallows up the idols,  
changes the map’s colors,  
draws another that escapes the fingertip of a feather,  
that falls unto the bottom of the picture, confusing it and demolishing the murky frames.

*10*

- The patience table spins.  
A rusty oar;  
a sea drunk up by its fish;  
mud-covered beaches;  
invaders’ iron scraps.  
The soldier’s helmet spins around;  
a storm sows sands on a wilderness spread on a wheel held by the Earth’s hand.  
The frond is pregnant with the sun.  
The desert cleaves its fiery dens, swallows up the black rocks.  
Roses bloom in the desert.

*11*

- The death table spins.  
Ad入 from its sheath  
A入 from its coffin  
The green fish swallows up the dreams  
The frond fills up with roses

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The death table spins.
I go into its palms;
I get out of its burka.
The wine table mixes a dream choked by pains with
a sorrows’ feather.
The patience of the parched table soars high.
I leave the whale’s stomach thirsty and enter the trunk of mulberry tree.
The falling apple is received by ravens and turns into a ball;
a river opens its gate and drifts it.
The apple draws a cloud above the waves and sleeps on the wind’s bosom.

-The wine table spins.
The night trees fade away.
The dream takes me out of dream and I resist in its hands.
Basil collects the chunks of voice.
Woe to me!
On my own roads, death lies in wait for me.
From the yard’s doors,
bullets snipe the pomegranate.
A night rises from sorrows’ sleeves and shares me wriggly pains.

The war table spins.
Sleep scatters me over the dawn’s remains.
I break the whoosh of a missile shot by the apache.
I drink the children’s scare and bestow on them my perfume.
The frightened child feels relaxed. 
The perfume scents between my armpits. 
No sooner the child slumbers than my trickling tears startle him; 
they drown the frightened weeds. 
Embarrassed, I melt in his green gaze.

*12*
- The war table spins. 
The night rubble is redolent with the gleam, 
with the panicking narcissus in the spirit’s weeds. 
Night’s labor speaks out. 
Its cloud’s cloak awaits light coming from our palms, 
from a cheek of fire abyss that is full of apples, 
apples that connect my heart with the bottoms of gulfs, 
with bracelets that break its wrists to equal the reverence of the fever.

*14*
- The war table spins. 
The night rubble is redolent with the gleam, 
with the panicking narcissus in the spirit’s weeds. 
Night’s labor speaks out. 
Its cloud’s cloak awaits light coming from our palms, 
from a cheek of fire abyss that is full of apples, 
apples that connect my heart with the bottoms of gulfs, 
with bracelets that break its wrists to equal the reverence of the fever.

*15*
The wine table spins.
My palm grabs the flash of the yard.
With light, my palm brushes the branches.
Love blesses my palm and
sprouts in it a camphor flower.
I am sick of the pink honey
when it shreds in darkness.

I am awakened by the tresses of the mutinous crown that strand
over the hills of dumb language.
Semiotics demolishes me.
I doze off at the wind’s waist
and invent a pristine blue
in the susurru of things.
Rivers run on the desert’s breast.
My heart is a boat.
The opaque attar’s an anchor.
My heart’s stone leaps from a caravan and turns into a guide.
Earth is a night’s bet on a lantern.
The soil is my eyes’ kohl and my perfume.
Land is engulfed in grief and wailing hymns.
The earth is my two arms I raise to the thunder,
a fever of the green rain,
a feast of this earth,
and promised bait.

The patience table spins.
I lie under the wind’s bed.
The earth takes me out of the earth
and I take it out of my grail.
The hunter lies in wait for me and grabs it.
I write in wine on the glasses: I love you.