

The Deronda Review

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Black Swans, by Helen Bar-Lev. Pen and ink, 8x6 in

A POEM NEEDS A BEAUTY OF ITS OWN

The Beauty of the World
We see with our eyes
Is too great to be written,

A Poem needs a Beauty of its own.

— Shalom Freedman

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Across the sodden square I now could see
 That portions of the tower had been cracked,
 That brickwork from an edge had broken free,
 Where centuries of weather had attacked;
 Exposing, as the sun began to set,
 The lurking outline of a minaret.

— Jack Lovejoy

STRANGE BINDING

June 2009, Birmingham, UK

Around the restaurant walls,
 was a Spanish ceramic frieze
 of red flowers on a black stand
 with a Doric scroll capital.

They looked like
 old paintings of
 red flames on a stone altar,
 Abraham and Isaac's.
 Flowers' red flame,
 altar's scrolled top,
 Abraham's ultimate
 ambiguous sacrifice,
 in the end not made,
 or was it?
 Auto da fe,
 a Spanish binding
 and burning of Jacob.

— Michael E. Stone

THE SAME SANDS

In memory of Major Benji Hillman, killed in action
 on July 20, 2006, in the Second Lebanon War

A quarter of century before you
 I walked over the same
 Endless unexciting
 English seaside sands

When building simple sandcastles
 Surrounded by shallow gullies
 Making soft patties
 Finding a very occasional shell

Sitting under umbrellas
 Ready to take them down
 If the gentle drizzle stopped
 To let pale sun rays through

Eating packed lunch
 Of cucumber sandwiches
 Well fried fish balls
 Seemingly filled entire life-times

When I was your age
 And newly-wed like you
 I came to commit my life
 To this difficult land

But while you have already given up
 Your un-lived life for this country
 I carry on my inappropriate struggle
 To find out what I can possibly give

— Rifkah Goldberg

PIROUETTE

There is a square
 in the warren of ways
 a place within
 our spirit's self
 where we pirouette
 with arms outstretched
 and only sometimes
 bloody our knuckles
 on the walls around.
 That place
 is hard to find,
 for mostly we do not see
 it, just a land.

— Michael E. Stone

DESERT LANDSCAPE

The stones long for the mountain
 From which they were once hewn
 For thousands of years the dawn light has caressed
 them

The wind, the sand, the water smooth their bodies
 To leach out the sorrow of parting

The stones are still gazing at the mountain
 At evening they call to him,
 And from the other side
 He hears, he answers
 His answer scatters in the desert spaces
 And they round themselves toward him in their
 longing, incurable,
 They call: let go, let go, let go.

— Ester Vitkon

From the Hebrew: Esther Cameron

Or is this greater glory, recondite,
A co-creating part for us to play?
"Let there be light," He said, and there was light.
(Up to us, the sparks to reunite.)

— Eric Chevlen

T'CHELET *

Rabbi Meir said, "T'chelet is likened to a rainbow."
In the Zohar it is written, "The beauty of David's eyes
were as the t'chelet"

Until we found the Murex snail that gives us t'chelet
we were mistaken to think
that our lives had become a metaphor.

Sealed in our beloved tractates of learning
forgotten was the feel of a transparent snail
in the palm of our hands.

Lost to us was the bitter-sweet fragrance of the Yoreh -
the first rainfall -
and the embroidery of gnarled olive trees on the hillock,
the harvest, the vintage, the olive picking
time of almond blossoms, for the Benediction of the
Trees
and the ripening fig.

When we discovered the Murex snail
we had not yet recalled the luminous skies over
Jerusalem.

On that day we opened the diaphanous heart
which awaited the touch of light,
and turned to gold, to chartreuse, was painted blue-green
was stained royal purple,

then we revealed the window to our translucent hearts
and saw there all the colors of the rainbow,

for like the eyes of David, they were stitched in all God's
hues

and no more pleasing sight was seen
in all the wonders of Creation.

— Shira Twersky-Cassel

t'chelet — 1) color of the sky or the sea. 2) A blueish-purple dye
extracted from the Murex snail and used to dye the fringes on the
small tallit garment worn by Orthodox men. During the
long exile from Eretz Yisrael this skill was lost and is now being
revived.

V. Uncharted

"THE THIRST THAT FROM THE SOUL DOTHS
RISE"

Thirst unquenched,
Yearning for part of being,
for fullness.

not slaked by learning
of the minds and souls
of Jews two eons dead.

Yet their struggle's prism
refracts God's white light
into a rainbow,

that light's so bright,
it sears the soul,
blinding and giving sight.

His face you cannot see,
only his light scattered
through life's prism.

Peace comes for a moment,
fleeting fawn-timid,
beyond, within.
Then it's gone.
Adam's curse!

Still I am not whole,
not yet.

— Michael Stone

MEANING

The soul mistakes the body for itself
and so despairs. Watchful, the body stirs,
quick to divert its restless other half
with leisure's griefs and work's indifferent cures.
Sleepless, it never truly eats its fill;
famished, it cannot slake its vacant lust;
tumid and sore, it lies awake until
daybreak can grant the crowing cock's request.
These pastimes help time pass, and then they don't:
the milk goes rancid in a brand-new carton;
one night the weary lover simply won't;
old songs that used to comfort now dishearten.
The soul begins to contemplate the soul,
a part that's not and never will be whole.

— Matthew Smith