

From the Hospital (extracts)

Translated by Andrew Firestone and Beni Gothajner (2014)

The fault is ours. We were given bricks and mortar to build a palace.

The sun gave golden beams, and the dawn brought willow green in bucketfuls
to adorn the walls. ó In sleep, dreams hover above us like coloured hangings.

And if we long for songs, our motherø words will make a melody.

The fault is ours. We were given a palace to build. All that was needed:

like magnificent gates, hearts open wide to receive guests, both healthy and ill.

Above a garland of live birds; *around us* are carved mountains, rivers, woods ó
and at every gate a child, laughing open-mouthed, like a silver lock.

We had a palace to build. But someone babbled on: there's time, still time.

We strayed, leaving wire fences to collapse. Like stolen bricks

our days lie scattered now by every fence. And the brilliant palace

has become a ruin. We waded in muck. At midnight great black wings threaten.

* * *

"You knead so much anguish into our poor sourdough

and then complain so we flee the banquet:

we leave the table still set with plates, to wander city squares

talking to ourselves, saying prayers for the dying streets.

"Who stuffed our tents with horror? ó

You grab the evening by the throat and hang it from the ceiling.

What was our household's sin? You made a gallows there,
and hammered misfortune into every rafter.

"And now no one can endure the twilight of his room. He

leaves behind his bread and salt and wife and baby in arms

and wanders off wherever his nose leads ó so who's to blame but he

who holds a whip in hand and drives and drags us, like cattle on a leash?"

* * *

Barely had a speaker uttered his last word ó when another spoke:

"Old householders, through prayer and study we amassed some wealth,

bought an estate: with field crops, fruitful as joy and moist as blood.

And if late-night sorrows ripen, we pluck a scythe from the moon and mow...

As decent householders, our days pass in steely harness, like oxen at the plough.

Then too, some days run pell-mell after the sad days, like calves after cows;

Those days we shepherd, to pass unharmed over rock and pitfalls...

And there are days, crooked as camels; the hump is high but they kneel down

and we load on our childhood joys, ready for trade in raisins and almonds.

Every single hour is deep and sandy, street after street void as desert waste

and hot; but we go on, we are householders ónce you suddenly sent down

a fire from heaven upon our rooftops ó now look at our estates: just ashes and rubbish."

* * *

Unrelenting tears dripped and dripped, bored through
the ancient stone foundations, and the old world collapsed,
and people scramble through debris, no eye, no nose, limping
they drag their feet through muddy black phlegm, green bile?

Tears spilled so long they soaked through body and soul:
dreadful days hang like white masks full of holes,
pieces of flesh like poison bits, flake off and spread
and people want to get out of there, but the way is blocked?

Tears have dripped so long: a mist obscures every exit,
They gag, though every head strains proudly to free itself?
The sick walk stumbling, as if over cobblestones, they want
to run away ó but fall crying to the floor and scream.

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