

The Intimacy of Distance

Poems by **Elisa Nathalie Heine**, b. 1982

[1] In ganzer Gestalt und vor einem großen Himmel

A gargoyle's gaze, Gothic pining petrified, the city that never looks back, clairvoyant horses in blinders, the pack howling against a catatonic moon, God in vigil coma, frankincense smelling better in ink, the woman who loves the man through crowds, the man who loves the crowds, the crowds who love nothing through anything, the phoniness with which the sun warms, the sincerity with which it sinks, Monet's bridge disappearing up close, faces too, towers traumatized by all those who abused them for a jump, the joy to be hidden, the disaster not to be found, an arm's length always longer than an arm, Warhol's opposites remaining unmet, equivalents just the same, I and they and the vastness of pronouns in between, first and third, singular and plural, the difference they might not make, bubbles and butterflies dying upon touch, babies without, giants too tall to reach the grass at their feet in time, troglodytes and angels, the seeking rope between their windows, a knot, a knife, a predestined falling, letters read through telescopes, the word which has already died by the time you hear it, the *and yet*, the *but still*, the eternal dream of convergence, the ecstasy over a fox turning around nodding before running off.

[2] the centre coils bottomless

discipline and the day
must both bend backwards
must bend the bones and the fractals
must bend croziers and cones
must bend sclerotic eyes, the stiffened hair of memory
must bend tethered colours, even numbers, speech in squares
must bend the sword and the stone, the hard hands who hold them
must bend telegraph wires and the antennae of the snail
must bend the coastline and the flight route of the passerines
the bend itself must be bent
curl all edges
into truth
no poles no perpendiculars at core
the hunchbacked and bow-eyed
blacksmiths who forge the iron
heart helical
shall be the wise ones of
this glowing earth
i know

[3] Heimkehr

Beim Muttertier hab ich gesessen, an der nassen
 Quelle am zerträumten Bett
 seine zeitgeschwollene Lunge
 geatmet, hautvertraut
 die liebesfiebrigen Mutterhände an meine
 Augäpfel drückend.
 Zischen.
 Mutter brannte lichterloh in meiner Iris.
 (Und ich verstand:
 handbeschwert lodert Schwertlilienfeuer am stärksten.)
 Sie wurde Funken und Kohle und jede Stofflichkeit
 dazwischen
 in meinen verwaist-vergessenen Augen, die ganz weich
 werdend ob der plötzlichen Zurückerinnerung
 sich zähflüssig in mein Sehnsystem ergossen,
 hineintropften,
 woraus ich komme und was ohne mich geht,
 irgendwann,
 es auffüllten mit Ursprünglichkeit,
 bis ich wieder ganz voll meiner selbst,
 Mutter,
 war.

*By the mother deer, the humid source, I've sat
 by the bed, a dream wreckage,
 breathed her time-swollen lungs
 as love-fevered mother hands
 pressed in intimate touch
 against my eyeballs.
 Hissing.
 Mother blazed bright in my iris.
 (And I understood:
 iris fire burns the fiercest when weighted under hand.)
 She became spark and coal and each material
 between
 in my forgotten orphan eyes that, softening
 at the sudden remembrance,
 poured viscously into my yearning system,
 dripped into it
 what I come from and what leaves without me,
 sometime,
 replenished it with origin
 until I was again filled with my own,
 mother,
 self.*

[4] Blood Moon Kulning

And so we made moon
 man in our making of the world,
 in our meaning-making,
 so moon may mean man, may mean
 what we know, may be
 what we are.
 Look at us,
 how scared we are,

all of us, always equal
at least in our limitation.
Man pulls moon,
moon pulls water,
but only sea is moving closer.
Tidal imitation bound to fail –
otherness is fixed.
And yet we pull.
And pull.
And pull
still.

And so we made red
blood, made carnal
the celestial body.
We veined and arteried the moon,
basalted skin, simulated
connubial bliss
instead of honestly saying:
We feel nothing for each other but gravity.

And we did not stop at the stars
that we named after gods whose faces we wear,
given when gods made men them—the only
image they too could imagine,
or galaxies we milkified like endless udders
of cosmic cows grazing in the highest pastures,
familiarily beautiful with their big benevolent eyes
and long womanly lashes,
the cows we covet to call with a song
to hear the bells of the herd echo across the human valley
as they approach in our fenceless dream.

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But from its shadow unchanged,
objective-angled,
moon grins back at us,
mouthless and manless, remaining
cratered and cracked.
Because where we think we see systolic skies
we breathe nothing but anaemic air.
Pressing our thumbs against world's wrist
we falsely feel a beat,
having confused its pulse with ours
in our intentional mistakings
made to make meaning and metaphorize moons.

In the end there's as much man in moon as there's sea
in shell and everything
outside of us is just
a resonating chamber
whose fillings we call reality,
reverberating with us into being, us being
mirror-alone
with our own echoes
we believe we believe to be bells
while singing to cows
that never come closer.

[5] State of Matter

I was, now, in winter,
watching horses
steam and radiate from their moved forms,
in stillness,
across the fields
the fields,
crystals killed against brief bodies and breath
lawfully against the law
within them,
pale Icaruses falling
falling,
going
out on equine suns below in each
of their attempts to touch
to touch,
and know
through conversion
of ice in air
to ice on fur
on fur
of these warm engines of equivocation on whom
hypotheticals lie thawed, their flanks
a quiver
steady-wet with conjecture, and all white
but the horses
the horses
and I, in winter,
waiting
for the end
to see
a snow-covered horse
living.