Poems

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Alejandra Pizarnik

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Abstract
GOD’S CHANDELIER, SIGNOS, SIGNS, GOETHE’S DESK, FIESTA, FIESTA, SARGASSO SEA, NOMBRARTE,
SPEAKING YOUR NAME, STRAW ON MY DESK, TU VOZ, YOUR VOICE
In the following extracts each set of three poems consists of a poem by Susan Bassnett, a poem by Alejandra Pizarnik and an English translation of that poem by Susan Bassnett

GOD’S CHANDELIER

The chandelier of heaven once came loose. I did not know, until I saw its chain swinging in vicious freedom and looked up to where the vaulted sky clanged open, shut belling in each wind’s sway. Nothing to do with me, of course. Let someone else repair it, some strong saint armed with his pliers and a trusty nail. God can keep chaos out and fix his own dome’s breaking heart. I’ll even give him lessons if he likes on how to keep his house in order. If, in turn he’ll tell me when the fractured crystal sphere is set to fall and wipe me out of time.
SIGNOS

Todo hace el amor con el silencio

Mi habían prometido un silencio como un fuego, una casa de silencio.

De pronto el templo es un circo y

La luz un tambor

El infierno musical (1971)

SIGNOS

Everything makes love with silence.

They promised me a silence like fire, a house of silence.

Suddenly the temple is a circus the light a drum

Translation by Susan Bassnett
GOETHE'S DESK

I once saw Goethe's desk, in Goethe's house, a lovely piece, warm wood on which to write, while on a floor below a dozen servants tiptoed their way to make his tea and keep his carriage at the ready. Outside the casement gardeners trimmed his plants. The world of Weimar begged for his company and he tried hard to learn all that there was to know and write it down.

If I'd had Goethe's desk I might have spent a lifetime writing Faust. Instead I do a dozen servants' jobs and write my lines stealing the time from home. My desk's the kitchen table. No clavichord nearby. The washer's thrum would drown it anyhow. I learn the hard way. Washing the muddy footprints off the floor I rinse the hopes of grandeur out of me.
FIESTA

He desplegado mi orfandad sobre la mesa, como una mapa.
Dibujé el itinerario hacia mi lugar al viento.
Los que llegan no me encuentran.
Los que espero no existen.

Y he bebido licores furiosos para trasmutar los rostros en un angel, en vasos vacíos.

Los trabajos y las noches (1965)

Translation by Susan Bassnett
SARGASSO SEA

They say that if you sail for days on end
and follow currents in the ocean's skin
you reach a place where water drowns in plants,
a jungle of entwined pads of leaf,
seaweed snakes that slow the waves to slime.
Once in that place, who knows what tendrilled things
could curl around a helpless wooden boat.
Perhaps the hulks of ships still rock
the skeletal remains of men who tried
to cut a pathway through the hungry vines
to get back to the sea. When I was trapped
in the Sargasso Sea of our own bed,
I clawed my way back from the curling fronds
and raised a ragged sail. Now, out of sight of land
the boat is moving well, the wind behind.
But, just in case, I keep the oars on board
because that wind is fickle. If I drift back
I'll row against the tide and save myself
using the oar to break your clutching hands.
NOMBRARTE

No el poema de tu ausencia,
sólo un dibujo, una grieta en un muro,
algo en el viento, un sabor amargo.

Los trabajos y las noches (1965)

SPEAKING YOUR NAME

Not a poem on your absence
just a sketch, a crack in a wall,
something in the wind
a taste of bitterness

Translation by Susan Bassnett
STRAW ON MY DESK

Straw on my desk, flutters below the eaves
tell me a bird has built her careful nest
inside my good brick walls. The fledglings cheep;
I dare not type in case the keys disturb
her new-hatched family brood. There is no room
for me at my own table, mothering
wings hold back my writing hand. I must share
my spaces, cannot have ground of my own.
She chose her place with care, took straw and twig,
dry grass to line the nest, the warmth of brick,
defense against the world. The last outpost
my desk, has fallen not to savage cries,
but to the force that binds us mothers both,
nourishing of our young. But she can fly,
between the feeds she soars. The straw she leaves
a trophy of her triumph, while I stay
earthbound and silent, home-made prisoner.

Susan Bassnett
TU VOZ

Emboscado en mi escritura
cantas en mi poema.
Rehén de tu dulce voz
petrificada en mi memoria.
Pájaro asido a su fuga.
Aire tatuado por un ausente.
Reloj que late conmigo
para que nunca despierte.

El infierno musical (1971)

YOUR VOICE

Hidden in my writing
you sing in my poem
Your sweet voice a hostage
turned in my memory to stone.
A bird snatched in its flight
Air stained by absence
A watch that ticks with me
to keep away despair

Translation by Susan Bassnett