Poems

Susan Bassnett

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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

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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

Translation by Susan Bassnett

El infierno musical (1971)
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

I unfurled my homelessness
across the table, like a map.
I traced my journey as far
as my place in the wind.
The ones who get there never meet me.
The ones I wait for don’t exist.

And I drank wild spirits
to change faces into
angels, into empty cups.

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
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.
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