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from The Jerusalem Poems

Stanley Cooperman

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From *The Jerusalem Poems*

STANLEY COOPERMAN

Kiryat Hayovel

Terraces: angles in the earth,
geometry
older than the mud
that walls hold back, now
crowned
with Institutes, apartments,
streets planned and unplanned,
Community Centres,
children
with irresistible schoolbooks
held in their claws.
Samson? an amateur, dumb
and fumbling. Still . . .
his hair blows back from myth
and puts down roots,
and each root
becomes a face,
each face a shovel:
 here men break stones
 with their tongues.

(the donkey in the vineyard
is confused, and kicks
at loosened dirt;
a scarecrow in *kaffia* curses
the animal turns
his plow between the random olive
that stumps his ground . . .
buried in rubble, the trees
 protrude
like hands
warding off a blow)

A Story

(for Saul Tchernikhovsky)

The white donkey from Beersheba
with a golden rug upon his back,
waits for a rider to appear:
the gentle rider, of whom it is said
"his hands fall upon us like the dew."

The white donkey from Beersheba,
weary of ruins, fierce with waiting,
rings a hoof on Jaffa Road:
with a sabbath candle under his tail,
and a hand grenade fastened to his jaw.

The white donkey from Beersheba
peels the stones
of earth and heaven,
and eats them like oranges.

Mitla Pass: The Sinai

I remember the landscape as a place
where machines flake
but never rot,
and the occasional shin-bone,
unfired shell shoe
chamber-pot
town newspaper
(the print flowing in that liquid script
no wind can cure)
rest heavily on sand,
set
in some thick and perfect lens.

I remember the landscape as a place
where all laughter
is accidental, and a question
could break your foot;
I remember birds
attacking each other on a wall,
dust-devils
near a few stray palms
arranged
like paraplegics
against the sky

this is no country for boasting.

Parable

The ancient honored despised
beast
thinks again
of what it means to wait:
argues with himself, with God,
with empty space,
brays his thirst among hotels,
counts his dead
buried with a boast of fruit
uneaten
in the city square:
his golden rug is ravelled
at the seams.

The ancient honored despised
beast
knows that history returns
like a blind eye,
and holy scrolls
are also winding sheets;
chilled even to death
his blood moves heavy as bronze,
but the hills stand stupidly
as always, none
dance,

and the nations prepare
for his throat
to be torn by the wind.

Commentary

The urge to prophecy:
burning footsteps
at the edge of the sea.
Perhaps these thin travelers
will feed on each other's flesh; perhaps
the acid
of their holy vision
will raise feathers
from the stumps of rocks;
perhaps
among fields of sunflowers
they will thicken
into square and terrible
shapes . . .

their hope
is a stone dagger
pressed against my skin.