



GHAZAL OF PAIN + 4

BY

RIZWAN AKHTAR

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...*

In Rizwan Akhtar's 'The Man Who Talked to Trees,' the text is almost as elusive as his theme; "as a child the question chased me like / an apparition disguised behind language." Still the imagery is soul-stirring. In 'Ghazal of Pain' the poet's words are sharper, even searing, each verse ends in "pain." Here's the first, "do not take away the memory kept with pain / there is a chance of total erasure, another pain!" Bear in mind Akhtar has translated his work from Urdu to English. I have always been envious of mother tongues, certain I'm missing out on something. 'Nusrat Fatah Ali Praises Muhammad pbuh' is beautifully homage to the singer "the Pavarotti of East frees himself from chains of notes / setting the audience to a Sufi swirl, a séance by Rumi." His

final two entries feel more whimsical the last one actually in the form of a villanelle. He's a good read. (Spacing is poet's own.)

The Man Who Talked to Trees

silence plucked out something from night
like a tennis ball thud a measured wind
played a belated volley on a jaded turf
a century ago father told me there was
an old man who had the habit of telling
stories to trees and shrubs (ran a rosary)
but why should he converse with trees
as a child the question chased me like
an apparition disguised behind language;
Dad's lips emitted wrinkled plosives
masticated details, we cuddled vacant
when the old oak made noises, faked
the man talking to us what if he had left
behind an army of dwarfs flecking trunks,
poetically bearable I added more things—
warm quilts, only the yellow bulb flickered,
an excuse of prowess pretending to sleep.

Ghazal of Pain

do not take away the memory kept with pain
there is a chance of total erasure, another pain!

declared "insane" after Laila's separation Qais
wanders disheveled-What brought him this pain?

remember! the day walked barefoot on the roof,
came the storm; how we mingled rain with pain!

close as breath you invoked a dormant ghazal
Imagine! you have the talent of morphing pain!

after taking strain of writing this ghazal in English
the palate revolts in Urdu, and it doubles the pain

the night we stole a moment to reiterate couplets
lunging touching heaving bodies enjoyed this pain

the beloved roams streets riddled with Mutiny
soldiers, rebels, lovers, & this poet lives his pain.

Nusrat Fatah Ali Praises Muhammad pbuh

*Oh! Muhammad wearing the black robe, no one like you
words lift a sacred angst; in-between he pauses-
the Pavarotti of East frees himself from chains of notes
setting the audience to a Sufi swirl, a séance by Rumi
in Theatre de la Ville, his party coaxes the burnout;
drenched in Persian wine dervishes stagger,
in the autumnal hush of Fontevraud Abbey
the Singing Buddha baptize the parched, his voice
lingers over dust-filled alleys of Lahore-
where shrines stage vertigos of Dionysian lovers
How beautiful God has made Muhammad stand by have-nots-
puffy cheeks he continues like a Promethean on
Olympian heights -had there been no Muhammad
there wouldn't have been any World, supplication pours
angels in heaven inebriate, on earth Nusrat intoxicates.*

We Loved October

October brought a page loitering on
an ochre turf rabbits' excrements lasted
the smell changed from dewy to mild
putrid, a nude acacia stood over us
gulping the last dregs of tea, I dozed.

A tired wind settled on barks shaking
a brown presence poked at faces
a tinged evening while the sun
still not subdued created shadows
with a delayed smile, I groped.

What is the reason we stopped talking?
instead of words relied on heartbeat
now unable to hold hands watching
the gardener reciprocating to early
moods of a winter for us, we loved.

The Way to Love

(a Villanelle)

hope of finding you in front of me is a bliss
so many dreams and now this meeting
having you was also kind of a miss,

loved you every day, a form of distress
searching the right word for greeting
the art of waiting; an amiss,

further down your body, I caress
our creepy heaving
not a good sign; a complete mess!

panted over your wandering tress
eyes broke their vows, peering
a day come we were meant to press

before I lost two moments, my abyss
more time I needed, before weeping
over the loss, heart convinced is a bliss,

whatever is given I will have to confess
it is evident that you are grieving
how I confused more or less
left to fix this which never was a bliss.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I think for me language is a triggering point. It sets the process subsequently derailed by an uncontrollable ceremony of imagination giving birth to form. So, I stick to the rule: form dictates content. I am enamored with Robert Frost, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. To that end, I could not get over Heaney's line 'the music of what happens'. I come from a place that has been ruled by British colonialism therefore I am also conscious of representing my local structures of aesthetics. Arabic and Persian poetics is my formative influence.*

AUTHOR BIO: Rizwan Akhtar is a writer from Lahore, Pakistan. His debut collection of Poems Lahore, I Am Coming (2017) is published by Punjab University Press. He has published poems in well-established poetry magazines in the UK, the US, India, Canada, and New Zealand. He was a part of the workshop on poetry with Derek Walcott at the University of Essex in 2010.