

This poem is a poem about people:
What they think and what they want
And what they think they want
Besides this there's not much in this world
We ought to care about. And it's a poem about human deeds,
Because the deeds are more important
Than the things that aren't done. And every man wants
His deeds to be remembered long after the things
Left undone are forgotten.
And it's also a poem about a grand and spacious land
And when the darkness descends, wrapped in sunset
Like pity, a man might
Mistake it for a desert and so it's obviously also a poem
About a desert and about human beings crossing hot sand which moves
In their blood and it's a poem about people everywhere: How
They feel when the blue night sings the song of caravans
And how they taste sand in the charred fuselage which falls and sings
Like a burning love note: Instead of prose, this is a poem
About houses torn down and others put up in their place
But different from those which came before: Poets will sing
Of houses as long as there are poets in the world, but maybe
Not as long as there are houses. And finally, these are poems
About war and were written in the heat of battle and at a writing desk
and without hope.

EVENING

The space in the window opened before him
to say that all was darkness,
the pearls of scattered light
in the intended garden of night
rushing about or fixed in their places.

What, at any rate, have we managed
in the growing exile fading
in the distance continually growing
out of the place from which we've burst
to celebrate the diminishing light
by right or unjustly-
just now it's all the same.

Looking out through the glasses
reading through glass that estranges
reveals nothing new,
sharpens what's near it,
blurs what's far off:

There in the distance in fact is Cyprus
across the open sea.
Here the wind and the evening
and a darkness thickening and passing
delaying every step
from a place we've never been in
to a place we'll never be.

MORNING

Don't touch, it said on the sign
though we touched and so the Margosa
tree is right, the bougainvillea
wants to be touched, precisely,
like you with provisional fingers
shooting its red out before us
as though already unclothed
on the stone wall across from us:
your common lover
into a transitional season.

What is it that we've started
and what does what we've finished mean?
And how long is the quiet
Of morning there in the window
With its cargo of masts and cypresses.

Blue is the day before us
blue despite our blindness
how long will it last
and will the break be hard.

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NATHAN ZACH was born in 1930 in Berlin and moved to Haifa while still a child. He completed his PhD in the U.K. and returned to Haifa. As a writer, a critic, a translator and a poet, Zach has had a immense impact on the way Hebrew poetry has evolved.

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