

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Our call for submissions for Issue 5 requested works that address the theme of "Bread and Roses," drawing from early twentieth-century women's rights and labor activist Helen Todd's declaration that roses—or "music, education, nature, and books"—are just as vital to life and liberation as is bread, or staples of living: "home, shelter, and security."¹ The table *and* the imagination: the one inconceivable without the other. Over the course of *Barricade's* history, we have strived to include a variety of works in translation in our issues, from prose to theory to manifestos to songs. However, due to the influx of poetry submissions we received during this most recent call, we are excited to present our first-ever volume dedicated nearly exclusively to poetry.

We feel this feature is warrant-

¹Helen M. Todd, "Getting Out the Vote: An Account Of a Week's Automobile Campaign by Women Suffragists," *American Illustrated Magazine*, vol. 72 (May-October 1911): 619.

ed, as it invokes Audre Lorde's well-known 1977 essay: poetry, indeed, is not a luxury. Here Lorde specifically addresses women, and the present volume appropriately closes with a feature on contemporary women poets from the Balkans that interrogates the condition of existing as a woman alongside themes of migration and displacement. Poetry is not a luxury because in the words of these women—and all the poets in this issue—resonates a legacy of resistances that transcends the divides constructed by nation, class, and language. Some of the poems to follow deal with explicitly political themes, but those that handle the personal, the home, and the everyday, are no less evocative in opposing fascism, hierarchical structures, and authoritarian political order.

The Albanian poet Migjeni's "Highlander's Song," penned between 1933 and 1935, seems to express a more pessimistic view than Lorde with regard to poetry's role

in opposing oppressive structures: while its opening image of "strik[ing] the mountain in the heart" is a powerful one, Migjeni tempers it with a note of futility ("O if I could . . ."). But although the poet here laments his powerlessness in the face of an unmovable structure, translator Ami Xherro remarks that "a lack of optimism is always political," particularly in the face of a status quo that presents itself as unchanging and inalterable. Despite his frustrations with the limitations of poetic language, Migjeni finds in it the best (or perhaps the only) way to express resistance in his present moment—a present in which other modes of expression are tightly restricted.

Jaime Gil de Biedma, whose "El arquitrabe," from the collection *Compañeros de viaje* (Fellow Travelers; 1959), is included in this volume as "The Architrave," also negotiates hope for change (in all its futility) against behemoth hegemonic structures, represent-

ed by the physical construction of the architrave in all its nuances and iterations. An opponent of the fascistic Franco dictatorship, Gil de Biedma nevertheless felt distance from the Spanish Left due to his wealthy family background; this was compounded by the Spanish Communist Party's banning him for being an openly gay man. "Fellow travelers," the Trotskyist phrase referring to writers and intellectuals sympathetic to the movement without being card-carrying members of the Communist Party, takes on a new dimension of meaning in Gil de Biedma's work. His fellow travelers, beyond those opposed to fascism in all its forms, are the neglected and rejected, those who fall into the margins but manage to walk together. But such a message successfully avoids the trap of Pollyannaisms; like Migjeni's pessimism, Gil de Biedma's sharp humor tempers any potentially romanticized depictions of the role of poetry in resistance. Leo Grossman's transla-

tion of "The Architrave" reveals Gil de Biedma's deft wit and subversion of colloquial language to dismantle the structures that would subjugate Spanish society and his own companions.

Leeladhar Jagoori (b. 1940) perhaps most directly examines our thematic dichotomy of bread and roses, even as he challenges it. This passage in "Baldev Khatik" is especially telling:

"lentils" and "rice" are words
 "bread" and "spinach" are words
 no, no—words aren't such
 important things
 words are just flecks of salt on
 bread
 words cause your mouth to
 water
 now where can you find words
 that can be sworn statements
 that can provide testimony?

Yet the next poem, "Inter-India Mail," testifies to the importance of words through the strength of their

silence, i.e. the censorship enacted by the Indian government. And as the title of the selection of poetry included here indicates, Jagoori undoubtedly positions his words “against the state.” Jagoori grew up during a time when the exuberant promise of a new India emerging from two hundred years of colonial rule was giving way to a harsh reality check. His poems bring into sharp focus the disenchantment of a newly independent nation in the face of the political and spiritual corruption of the ruling elite. Deeply rooted in the struggles and aspirations of the marginalized, he offers a piercing commentary on the systemic rot that turns the oppressed into an oppressor of their own class and caste allies. Now that the specter of fascism is once again haunting India under its far-right leadership—in ways that are more insidious than ever before—Jagoori’s poems offer a timely warning. Matt Reek’s translation of Jagoori’s poems in this volume

effectively brings out the tragic irony of a nation whose ostensibly democratic leadership imitates the exploitative practices of its erstwhile colonizers.

There was never any question about whether “Heirs of Poetry and Rain,” a letter by Kurdish poet and activist Farzad Kamangar (1975-2010), belonged in an issue of mostly poetry. The letter, addressed to his young students, was penned by Kamangar shortly after receiving his sentencing of execution, but it is far from a note of defeat or dejection. Tyler Fisher and Haidar Khezri’s translation captures how Kamangar’s deep love for his community and his students is reflected in the care he pays to language, to rhythm and image. We are moved from the prison cell, to the playground, to construction sites and back again; Kamangar’s words display an attention to the power of language that is unequivocally poetic. But even if the writing weren’t particularly beautiful, the power of his message

would have been impossible to ignore: it is a goodbye full of hope and mourning from an activist facing execution because his work—advocacy “for greater cultural and political self-determination for his [Kurdish] community, and [for] environmentalist causes, women’s rights, and educational reforms,” as Fisher and Khezri describe it—was too great a threat to the Iranian regime. Kamangar’s words and the circumstances under which they were inscribed pay testament to poetry’s role in fostering resistance under even the most dire of conditions.

İlhan Sami Çomak (b. 1973), who is currently serving a sentence of life imprisonment in Turkey, offers poems that similarly construct worlds in the face of futility. Çomak is imprisoned on the accusation of being a member of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and of setting a forest fire, both to which he “confessed” only after being tortured. Recently, Çomak has described himself as “spending my life in poet-

ry,” fashioning a reality through his writing that defies the confinement of prison. His poems, here translated by Duru Dumankaya and Deren Ertas, deploy lush natural imagery while insistently reminding the reader that it is only in the words of the text—in the poet’s notebook, or his memory—that these scenes are real to him: dramatizing both the world-creating force of his writing, as well as its inability to, in his own words, “open the door to real life for me.”

The question of what it means to live in poetry is one posed throughout the volume, and carries us from Çomak’s work to that of Selma Asotić, a bilingual poet from Sarajevo. Asotić’s original essay, “Where the River Takes Me Is None of My Concern,” asks the reader to consider a variety of specific ways of living—living in exile, living a queer life, living between languages. Points of fracture, discontinuity, silence, volatility, isolation, immersion: the essay manages to hold together all of

these themes, at once, of a piece. A central task of the essay is to recognize that experiencing a “complete” self, living a “whole” life, in a geographically contiguous and/or historically continuous environment, is simply, given the circumstances, not a tenable proposal, but rather an impossibility. The recognition that Asotić brings through her essay comes to life in the poetic dialogue found in the contributions of Ivana Maksić, Maša Seničić, Marija Draganić, Dijala Hasanbegović, and Marija Dejanović. These five contemporary poets from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia together and in different ways address the private and post-war conditions of ex-Yugoslavia in the form of an elliptical call and response with each poem echoing, amplifying, and adding nuance to the one before. Taking the place of a traditional interview, we close with these poems, as a nod to the conversations going on in and among each contribution in this volume.