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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ POETRY

Blood Honey

Chana Bloch
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The grief unique to women plays a central role in Bloch's fourth collection *Blood Honey*, here cast in muted shades of irony: "We were sitting on my sofa with his dead wife. / (A good-looking woman, he allowed.)" But the pain of objectification proves to be no match for that of violence; "[The Bullet] passed through her brain at an acute angleÂ…It was then that we knew her, / mantle and magmaÂ…Grief / is a strange anger."

Metaphor, for Bloch, is the device that allows the writer to both protect and exploit the subject-the former in her homage to Paul Celan, "Covenant": "What he was given was too hot to touch. / He took it / in the tongs of metaphor / so it wouldn't burn," and the latter in her Joycean rift "Portrait of the Artist": "Who wants to beÂ…stripped to his cotton socks, / with nothing but a fig leaf of metaphor / to keep him decent?"

The speaker's goal is attenuated listening, yet the voice described is often one of maternal nagging, a "hopeless engine / that won't turn over," a "siren grinding its monomaniacal hardluck story." The speaker persists in listening, albeit with frustration ("I am like a child / left behind by the fast-talking / grownups"), searching for a firmer ground beyond the mirage of "brushed-on smiles" and tightly fastened masks.

Bloch's fascination with smoothed-over illusions is illuminated in "Private Lives": "His face is fully dressedÂ…but his wife's face is stripped / to bone and pain. / Whatever that man is trying to hide / the nakedness of her face uncovers." Moving fluently from the lost world of ancient biblical texts to modern disasters, the speaker presents her predilections, however strange, pithily ("I like to walk in the presence of the dead. / It clears my mind"), and redefines with precision and humor one of humanity's favorite pastimes: "Sex is a brisk new broom."

Minding the balance-and occasional eruptive gap-of metaphysical contradictions (the dead co-existing with the living), Bloch reaffirms the act of witnessing to be an art of patience, and of hope: "Her assessor's eye is shrewd but genial. She has something crucial to tell me / but she's taking her own sweet time."
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