

A Personality Not Made to Adapt to this Reality*

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I was standing in the kitchen cooking when the ketchup bottle fell and shattered. The sound of the blast, the shards, and the red smears on the kitchen floor sent me running, trembling, my heart beating weirdly, to my writing implements in the next room. The result was the following poem, which I'm quoting from memory. Its beginning has been forgotten, as has its ending. The poem was written at the beginning of the nineteen eighties: "...and suddenly a bottle fell and shattered and a red liquid covered the floor and my hands, and suddenly I was afraid. The Tigris River like the Nile flowing red. Please no wonders and signs, please no signs. And what of rivers, only a bottle was shattered. Do not rage, and here I stand, two feet side by side cleaning among the shards, lightly wounded, very lightly. And suddenly I began to say a word I was afraid of, started to skip and say: frogs, lice, hail, bring lots of hail to wash, to make clear rivers, transparent lakes, people hovering, pulling out of golden rivers a smell that I remember and the lights of one evening that I don't want to escape from me in a flowing river ... "

When this poem was written I was already in the process of "and it was like a fire shut up in my bones ...". Today, being a more aware person than I used to be, I tend to interpret "and it was like a fire shut up in my bones" as relating to various kinds of mental, physical, and mystical states that joined together to fuel the creative process.

I was in the United States when my husband phoned me and told me about the death of Dalia Rabikovitch. After a long pause during which the words stuck in my throat, I answered him in tears, "You won't understand the tears, we're poets,

like one family. I don't know if anyone is capable of understanding" (he understood).

When I returned to Israel and read the article in the "Seven Days" supplement (of the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*) that my husband had saved for me, I felt that nearly every word that Dalia Rabikovitch had said could have come from my own mouth. The situation of displacement, of not belonging, of fragility, of feeling that you can be shattered at any given moment. Like the bottle in the poem. The very fact of it breaking then expressed my "glassy state," the fear of breaking, cracking, or being injured by even the slightest occurrence. When body and mind are always in a crystal clear state, a person sees everything through what is transparent and from within it. The transparent is a container filled with sights that accumulate inside it with every fraction of a second. Sometimes the sights emerge in sublimation, such as a poem or other creative work, and sometimes the reflections crack from the sights and what they contain. You could say that the glass man sees everything at once; sometimes there are so many sights that you see all of the nothing. And the nothingness of nothing. That glass man is also the glass floor of himself.

Once in high school we were given a topic on which to write a composition. When I finished reading mine, my teacher, Mr. Moshe Hillman of blessed memory commented: "This girl does not belong to our century. At age fifty she will run in the fields and read poetry." At the time, I did not know that, indeed, people along the way would relate to me as a poet. The truth is I never knew myself. I never knew who I was. And it's not clear to me what it means to be called a poet. I am somewhat quarrelsome and contentious with myself and against myself and outside of myself. I'm simply outside.

As a child, I wrote poems and once, at twilight, a fragile time full of longing and yearning for something that is impossible to catch, I wrote a story that I called "Tree of Loneliness."

I also submitted to my high school teacher various lectures that I was asked to give on certain issues. Those lectures became a completely different subject, which came out of the depths of the heart of the "glass man." Comments such as "Yes, you wrote interesting things, but they are not related to the subject," came from the teacher, who looked at me as though I were a strange creature.

To conclude, regarding my first creative work and its meaning then and now, I can say that it stemmed from the need of my personality or my exceptional essence— a personality that isn't made to adapt to this reality. And from this difficulty stems what is sometimes not even clear to my knowledge. I am a person who does not know, trying to be precise about the accuracy or inaccuracy of understanding, within the complexity that sometimes seems horrifyingly very simple.

The sense of detachment and lack of belonging painfully accompany me to this day. This certainly must arise from the existential process of the state. The fact that I was born in Baghdad also adds wondering and wandering. And I do not know exactly what or who I would like to be. And so I didn't publish many of my poems, despite the fact that I have a great deal of material. And all of that stemmed from the fear (perhaps unjustified, I think) that my poems would be related to as merely concerned with gender. The struggle is for self acceptance. Apparently, a person will always look for his identity, through the acceptance or negation of the Other, and especially through the negation of himself. At the end of the day, perhaps I will come to the conclusion that a man is born with his essence

and will never change the origin and identity he is born with. And even if he changes his religion or hair color, he was, indeed, born into the reality with which he is entwined. He may expand himself or reduce himself, become assimilated in terms of his customs, but his roots are planted at the moment of birth.

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