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Birgül Oğuz – Turkey

Hah (2012)

Aha

Publishing House **Metis**

Biography

Birgül Oğuz (b. 1981) received her BA in Comparative Literature and MA in Cultural Studies from İstanbul Bilgi University. She is the author of two short fiction books, *Fasulyenin Bildiği* (2007) and *Hah* (2012). Her short stories, essays, articles and translations have been published in Turkish literary magazines and newspapers. In the winter of 2013, she was invited to be a writer-in-residence by quartier21 in MuseumsQuartier, Vienna. Currently, she is studying a PhD in English Literature at Boğaziçi University, and she lectures on text analysis and the European novel at Moda Sahnesi and Nazım Hikmet Academy in İstanbul.

Synopsis

The eight and a half stories in *Hah*, a collection that reads like a novel, contemplate the psychology of mourning and melancholia, and the politics of mourning in particular. *Hah*, in search of a new literary agency to transform traumatic loss into meaningful narrative, seeks to answer these questions: how can one mourn when mourning is impossible? How can one write about mourning when it is impossible to find the means to narrate it? And how can one not write when writing is the only way to mourn?

In *Hah*, the intervention of time into mourning manifests itself as the intervention of mourning into language. *Hah* searches, finds, tries, uses and disposes of many types of literary devices in order to articulate the Loss (that is, 'loss' with a capital 'L') which defies articulation. It is a text that signifies the literariness of every discourse, politics included.

Highly intertextual, *Hah* draws upon a plethora of texts, from the Old Testament to 20th century European poetry, from 16th century ghazals to contemporary Turkish verse, from cornerstones of Turkish literature such as Leyla Erbil, Oğuz Atay, and Bilge Karasu, to the likes of James Joyce and William Shakespeare, from workers' anthems to folk songs. It is a work that – while a product of a specific time and place – resonates with anyone who has ever experienced loss. Therein lies its particular universality.

Hah

Birgöl Oğuz

Tuz Ruhun / "De" (ss.29-30)

Ağırlığımı çay kaşığıyla ölçtüğüm günlerdi.

Dur duraksız yağın tebeşir tozu gözkapaklarımda birikip ağırlaşırdı. Eve dönerken hiç konuşmazdım. Günün ışığı eğrilip soldukça, beni dünyayla bir arada tutan dikiş tıkkır tıkkır çözüldü. Bir yanım uyur, öbür yanım susardı.

Akşam kapıya dayandığında, tak tak, gözkapaklarımdaki tozu silkeleyip kim o? derdim. O zaman kapıdan baba girerdi. Dünyanın uğultusu girerdi. Kapkara ve kocaman türbinlerin uğultusu, asitli sıvıların fokurtusu, eğ ve çekicinin sesi, yanmış yağ ve polyesterin kokusu girerdi. Ayaklarını sürüyerek girerdi. Tanıyarak büyüdüm. Sofraya tuzkarabibeklemek götürürdüm.

İcraatın İçinden programı başladığında, ha-ha, buğday taneleri uçuşurdu ekranda, sofradan patates yemeği geçerdi ve pilav ve turşu ve traktörler, (örtmene bok denmez kızım), dap dap dapdağınaktı her yan, ekmek kırıntıları, tuz, iplikler, boş makaralar, (ha Zebra ha Cebra, üzülme kızım), tabaklar boşalınca masadaki kırıntıları tek tek toplardık tek parmağımızın ucunda, göz göze gelemezdik çünkü doymanın utancı girerdi aramıza, (ama bir daha kendini duvara çiviletme, gerekirse devrime inkılâp de, tamam mı kızım?), sağcı kestanelerin göbekleriye çoktan çatlamıştı işçi kanı içmekten ama güneşin zaptı yakındı, (dünyanın tuzu sensin, unutma), ama akın yoktu, benim gibi kıcı puntolu aksaklar vardı,

anımsamanın gürültüsü ağırdı ve herkesi evine mıhlamıştı, buğday yağıyordu her yana, sanki kar yağıyordu ama, (anımsamak için unutmak gerek kızım, sen sakın unutma), böyle böyle, sofranın en ortasında birikiyordu üç parmak kadar, iki gözümüzün ikisine de birdi tuz ya da kar, saygıyla susup bekliyorduk ve çok geçmeden geliyordu Lenin, bir tuzluk kadardı boyu, (dünya ne yener ne yenik düşer kızım), hep devrimin seksen ikinci gününde geliyordu, düşe kalka dans ediyordu karın üstünde, neşeyle geçip gidiyordu soframızdan, sevinçten gözlerimiz doluyordu her seferinde, ama kederli bir şey vardı o ayak izlerinde, kederli ve ağır ve susuyorduk, (ve ölüm yalnızca ölüleri ilgilendirir), biz sustukça buğday taneleri havada dört dönüyordu, bir acılık vardı, buğdayda da buğdaya bakmakta da, (bu yüzden yetmişinde bile zeytin dikeceksin ve olduğundan güçlü görüneceksin), başımızı kaldıramıyorduk, başımız ağırdı, çünkü bilmek ağırdı, çünkü bir buğday tanesi bin buğday tanesi demektir, (ve üreteceksin ama unutma: Onlar senden ama senin değil), taneler havada dört dönüp duvara çarpıyordu, sallandı koca duvar, sallandı ve yıkıldı, uzaktı, ağırdı, sırtımız üşüdü, alnımız karıştı, (sen bendensin, cânımın şırası, ama benim değilsin), çay içiyorduk, derken körfezin sularına petrol mavi bir kum yağdı, kum değildi buğdaydı, sulara yağdı, haklıydık, haksız kıldı bizi, haklıydık, haksız kıldı bizi, haklıydık, haksız kıldı bizi.

Ve sofrada bir başıma kaldığımda kaşığın sapını masaya vurup “iyi değil,” dedim, çünkü bir buğday tanesi kavuşup da toprağa yok olmazsa hiç –ama hiç- hiç iyi değildi ve sofradan tuzkarabiberekmek götürdüm.

Aha

Birgül Oğuz

Translated from the Turkish by Amy Spangler

From 'Your Soul of Salt' (pp. 29-30)

It was back in the days when I measured my weight by the teaspoon.

An incessant rain of chalk dust would weigh heavy on my eyelids. I never spoke on the way home. As the light of day bent, fading away, stitch by stitch the thread binding me to the world would come undone. One half of me would fall asleep, the other, silent.

At the knock-knock on the door in the evening, I would shake the dust from my eyelids and ask, “Who’s there?” That’s when father would enter. And with him, the drone of the world. And the drone of giant black turbines, the burble of acidic plaster, the noise of files and hammers, the smell of burnt oil and polyester, all of these would enter. He would enter, dragging his feet. I would grow up, knowing. I would take the saltpepperbread to the table.

When ‘A Nation at Work’ came on, ha-ha, right!, corns of wheat would fly across the screen, a potato dish would traverse the table and rice and pickles and tractors (you shouldn’t call the teacher “shit” sweetheart), it was a massive mess all over, bread crumbs, salt, threads, empty spools (God very well could have spoken to “noses” rather than “Moses” sweetheart, don’t be hard on yourself), when the plates were emptied we would gather the individual crumbs on the tips of our individual

fingers, we could not let our eyes meet because the shame of being full would come between us, (but don't let yourself get nailed to the wall like that again, okay, sweetheart, just keep the word proletariat to yourself), meanwhile the stomachs of right-wing chestnuts had already burst, having gorged themselves on the blood of workers, but the conquest of the sun was near, (you are the salt of the earth, don't forget that), but there was no surge, just the limping likes of me with headline fonts on their butt, the noise of remembering was thick and had glued everyone to their homes, wheat rained down, as if snow falling but (to remember you have to forget, sweetheart, whatever you do, never forget), falling and falling, piling up on the middle of the table, three fingers thick, salt and snow were one and the same to our eyes, we would wait in respectful silence and before long he would come, Lenin, no taller than a salt shaker, (the world neither defeats nor is defeated, sweetheart), he always came on the 82nd day of the revolution, dancing a jumbled dance on the snow, merrily making his way across the table, each time our eyes would swell up with joy, but there was something sad in those footprints, sad and heavy and we would grow silent, (and death only concerns the dead), as we remained silent the grains of salt would somersault through the air, there was a bitterness, to the wheat and to watching the wheat (and that's why, even at 70 you'll plant olive trees, and you'll appear stronger than you are), we couldn't raise our heads, our heads were heavy, because knowing was heavy, because a single corn of wheat meant a thousand corns of wheat, (and you shall produce but don't forget: though it be of you, it is not yours), the corns turned somersaults, crashing into the wall, the giant wall shook, it shook and it fell, it was distant, heavy, our backs grew cold, our foreheads creased, (you are of me, the milk of my soul,

but you are not mine), we were drinking tea, when an oil-blue sand rained down on the waters of the gulf, it wasn't sand but wheat, it rained down on the water, we were right, it made us wrong, we were right, it made us wrong, we were right, it made us wrong.

And when left alone, I slammed the stem of the spoon onto the table and said, "It's no good," – just no no no – no good and I took the saltpepperbread from the table.



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