

## VII

In these last days of total disintegration I look around and recognise not the faces, but their expressions – unhinged.

It is 2018 and half my friends are losing their minds.

To sit inside yourself crouching always, braced, to encounter yourself only in crisis, to be always under your own emergency is comprehensible but will make you cruel.

Emotion, or potential emotion, or emotion's potential is viewed as if from a watchtower like an enemy approaching. Speculative only. Unfelt it stalks the perimeter. To speculate on a future feeling, or a feeling future, is to speculate on a future at all. You know you are not doing the enemy's work if the divorce from hope feels and is understood not as a wrench, but rather as relief, that is: space. Necessary.

We will learn not only *to* feel, but *how*.

A smile comes doesn't it? I am funnier than ever now. I have never felt better in my life. Really. Look at my muscles. My smile has seduced millions. Here can the fine function of laughter be finessed. Here can my cry know to no longer fear itself – unrecognisable and startling though it is to me, to the world it is new but not unique. There is room for it in the air. And it goes.

The Permanent Yes

Mira Mattar

LYDGALLERY



Written and published by for Cara Tolmie's exhibition *Cannon* at Lydgalleriet  
28th September – 21st October 2018

## Notes

The line 'Lovers never really love that way, the way they say' is a variation on 'If lovers ever really love that way, the way they say' from the song 'Blasé' on Archie Shepp's 1969 album of the same name.

The phrase 'charming bird' is a reference to the song 'Charmant Oiseaux' from Felicien David's opera *La Perle du Brasil* (1851) – the only song Zabelle Panosian recorded in any language other than Armenian.

'Something is coming' refers to Jeanne Lee and Ran Blake's 1963 interpretation of the song 'Something's Coming' from *West Side Story* (1957).

The following lines and phrases have been taken from translations of Zabelle Panosian's 'Groung' ('Crane') (1917): 'Crane bird, with a message from home? Has it lost its way across the heavens?' 'Crane bird where are you coming from? I am the servant of your voice.'

The words 'lest we perish' form part of the cover art of the compilation album *To What Strange Place: The Music of the Ottoman–American Diaspora 1916–1929*.

Both 'an object in someone else's nightmare' and 'in these last days of total disintegration' are lyrics from the song 'In These Last Days' by Jeanne Lee, Andrew Cyrille and Jimmy Lyons, 1979.

**I**  
The balsam tree grows under the eye of the sun.

It is 2018.

I lost my home. I lost my lover. I lost my friend, my sister. I did not bear a child.

It is 1948.

A genocide began (continued, continues). My family fled, leaving the dog. We will return soon, they thought.

Time is no balm. Fresh memory of smell (olive, salt), touch (my spine, my lips), sound (her voice, her step) – ever distant. The distance from having had. You put your hand out and nothing. A limb exposed and embarrassed. Reach.

Is there a pain that isn't of loss? Is there a loss that isn't painful? Is it only time? That bitch. Is it only owning? To have held, possessed. Fool.

My father is the same age as the struggle. How he opens oranges slowly, their pith the hard skin of his heels. I will never return until Palestine is ours again! he points into the air. Like many I am always an alien here and doubly there like many. This grass, that sand. Burger King, Burger King. Your house smells funny.

Lovers never really love that way, the way they say. Constance, heart-beat, gets predictable – blood and guts, squeaks and chores. I dared you to look at me. I dared you and you flinched. Betrayer. Since you will not look, I will make you hear. Since you will not touch, I will make you feel.

For her I was were a beacon surely. Proof against the world. But light, regardless of its brightness and necessity, is not also water and shelter and mind and heart. The world remained the world – unbearable.

There. I have exposed my flesh.

There. I have made it sound.

These are my sorrows, ordinary as yours. Young, boring. I don't recognise them.

**II**  
Mine is not the song of a charming bird.

Can you bear it?

Be quiet: something is coming. Crane bird, with a message from home? Has it lost its way across the heavens? Soon I will know how to listen. I always knew how to look. Recently I learned how to smell – not only to be aroused or assailed but to seek out, to follow, to encourage. Waiting, I wait. Inside the waiting I hear everything: caw, breath, blood, plane, slam, flap, scratch, screw, song, creak, chirp, siren, helicopter, children, spit, gate, peck, chorus, traffic, mower, lust, pollen, smoke. Come crane bird, lest we perish in this waiting.

Mine is not the touch of a healing hand.

Can you bear it?

Touch and taste I was a baby for, without language: relief. Now there is language, but only one word: no. No: do not cup my cheek. Do not kiss my forehead. I am nobody's baby. I despise these nicknames. Sing my name or say it not at all. I want it in your mouth. Sing my name or sing nothing at all. I loved it in your mouth. Do not cut out my tongue. Do not touch me. Air do not touch me, light do not.

**III**  
I have scuttled in syllables here to tell you: under the eye of the sun grows the balsam tree Cancamon. I have slid along the wall in the stretched arch of each vocable to etch from my little lung a taut call for you. Is it touching or being touched, feeling or being felt, that hurts, that heals? I have pressed with my paw and my face down a loop for you to ask: is each repetition a writing in, a recording; or is it an exorcism, a screech, an exit?

**IV**  
Five-year-old Zabelle Panosian emigrates from Bardizag (present day Bahçecik, Turkey) to the USA in April 1896. Between 1894 and 1914 about 100,000 Armenians arrive in the USA following the Hamidian Massacres. The Ottomans' systematic extermination of 1.5 million Armenian people – the Armenian Genocide – is commonly thought to have begun on 24 April 1915.

At 21, she records five songs in Columbia's studios in the Woolworth Building on Broadway, New York City. She is given four more takes than the customary three allocated to immigrant musicians on Columbia's E (for 'ethnic') series. *Crane where are you coming from*, she sings, *I am the servant of your voice*. She holds an unbearable note, tone, bears it; holds the unholdable, what cannot be touched.

Hers is an open mourning, it searches. Hers is a searching openness, it mourns.

Did each incantation deepen her, their, the, sorrow, or soothe it through articulation? What becomes of yearning if time is only the accumulation of distance from the object? With the collection of the years, the collection of the dead, does yearning grow or does it degrade only into yearning for itself, for having felt? Slide. Fragment.

**V**  
What is it barely to be able to stand a sense? What is it to barely be able to stand – a sense?

Balance. A foot, no, toe, crouch. Balance. An ankle, hover, scurry to the centre. Flesh exposed. Vicious is the light upon it. Arm, shin, chest, back, belly offered to what, to whom. Its exposure in silence and then barely open blue lips release a hiddenness, what cannot be contained or borne cannot be containable or bearable. The horror of exposure from inside the throat's alien mouth. The exposed flesh is stroked – soothing or taunting? Flesh crawl or seduction? Pat pat. There. There. Reset. Limb or part tucked back. Crane bird adjusts its wings. Pelvis tilts, vertebrae rearrange, jostling the spinal fluid and the ears' liquids. Now a melody, a whistle.

I have exposed another with my eye, and I cannot stand it. I have been exposed by the eye of another, and I cannot stand it.

I like to let this reptilian sound be forced upon your ears. I was hunted. Now I hunt. That is why you do not know my sound, my movement – mouse, dinosaur, corpse, woman. I am learning to walk again. I am learning to breathe this air. Laborious, filthy but I need it. I don't know if I am human, but I know I am alive. I want to use all of my voices.

**VI**  
In 1969 Jeanne Lee records the African American spiritual 'There Is A Balm In Gilead' for Archie Shepp's album, *Blasé* in Studios Davout, Paris. In that total voice she sings, *There is a balm in Gilead / to make the wounded whole*.

Does a wound declare an extraction or an opening? Does a balm seal and complete or does it, in entering through the body's largest organ, remind us how to let holding be absorbed?

That total voice.

(It would be like trying to describe the permanent yes of a heart that knows it will never again be hunted, in a world that it will never again need to refuse; the permanent yes of a heart that knows it will never again be an object in someone else's nightmare.)