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Carolyn Kizer

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Eve Triem: A Retrospective · Carolyn Kizer

What follows is a condensation of the introduction to a gathering of the poems of Eve Triem, a poet in her vigorous seventies, who presently lives in Seattle, where she is revered. I have written of her in hopes that, at last, she may become known to a wider audience.

TO READ the poems of Eve Triem is to discover her rare combination of naive delight in flowers, colors, art and gardens, along with her acute social perceptions, and her indignant response to injustice. Eternally young herself, she has an immediate appeal to the young, who reject the notion that you can't be concerned equally with slums and humming-birds, as they reject the ancient shibboleths of the mind-body split or the body-spirit split.

From her first publication, the voice was clear, formed, Eve's own. In reading these poems of thirty-five, forty years ago, there is the same stab of pleasure one feels in reading early Pound, Graves, Kunitz, the best of Bogan:

Your love is a parade of doves
tamed to courtyard corn
and marble bowls of water;
and they tread softly their own shadows . . .

If you left me now,
startled by the noise of my heart . . .

I would crush all summer
like bergamot in my hands
and go through the wrecked fields
crying:
"Have you seen a parade of doves
brighter than scattered corn,
and shining like water when they fly?"

or this:

No longer a town blighting roses at noon; denying
To trees their dryads, to Apollo his tripods . . .

Though we think bricks, and sheets on a line
And mill chimneys, are fixed forever to form,
The shape of things changes: there was meadow-flax,

Going in fable from thread to cloth, furious
For life each time; and every change was death—
But Death is a gate, and nothing is lost . . .

This Greek voice, this Sapphic voice has always been Eve's. In her sixties, she learned Greek. That fact alone proclaims Eve's uniqueness, the self-discipline that flows from her love of language and learning. In 1967 she gave us *Heliadora*, translations from the Greek. I value them as I value Mary Barnard's Sappho, or the poems of the rare H.D.:

Death's freshest loot
's a honey-bee—
poets sing of me
and Fate.

I sang, too,
collecting honey
though my sunny
days were few.

Hell's greedy prince
likes sweet things most—
my wingless ghost
laments.

The Muses moan:
Thy honey-store
is tearful-dearer
than our own . . .

Here are not only exquisite poems, but a lesson in how to translate: the skilled use of compression, elision, compounds. All of Eve's abundant natural talent would not be enough to achieve these effects. It takes a world of craft, cunning and diligence as well.

Although Eve admires, and has been allied with poets who write in open forms, like Denise Levertov, and uses them herself, she is equally at home with forms. Her sonnets have an amazing ease and contemporaneity; and in her hands the neglected tetrameter line comes back into its own. For example, in “Flood”:

Through all windows and where a door was
the river comes in. Whoever is
overtaken by the smell of marsh grass
and heron cries, I like it, I like it!
To help the river over chair and table,
give it the best bed, and see in fireflies
the lamps I paid for, is easy as milk. . . .

In “A Boy Downriver,” she reveals another music in the 4-beat line:

. . . The fun of being fish, clothes wet
to the bone! Away from the shiny bait
of honors in school (I, I am river)
he lunges at berries, he breathes light,

dazed into torment and joy throwing
sticks at frogs, crushing the pungent snow-
yarrow and shouting dirty words—
a fertility rite his nerves know.

Twilight. Hungry, young, afraid,
he returns to a world he senses is mad—
not really afraid but wishing for supper
and the silent warm meadow of bed . . .

These last two quotes are from *The Process* (Poems 1960-75). And then, and then . . . we arrive at the group of poems Eve wrote to and about her husband, Paul, ninety-four years old, blind and helpless, but still, to Eve, every inch a man, lover, powerful adversary and friend. She waits at his bedside and holds his hand, and speaks to him as he dies. She buries him, she mourns him, she remembers him. The poetry rises to

sublime heights. The intensity! Partly because their love still burns fiercely. Partly because Triem was a considerable man by anyone's standards. (See Denise Levertov's introduction to these poems, *Dark to Glow*, 1979.) Even now, in the midst of the squalor of hospitals and dying, Eve recalls and relives their passion:

. . . He doesn't know me
thinned by travelling
his time and mine.
Or remember our coupling
that shook the thrones
of stellar power.

The vocabulary calls up the aging hero, still a hero, part Don Quixote, part Odysseus, part Norman Thomas. . . .

All of his banners
shot down
the last silk threads
carried off
by the ragpickers

He tells the nurse
sponging his weariness
so much left to do. . . .

or this:

Pillowed, a noble painted by Velasquez . . .
I smooth
clammy arms, hear the rattle in throat,
wipe the death-dew from the brow of my lover. . . .

And Triem is gone. But Eve herself goes on, to constellations beyond tears, summons all the powers accumulated in her long life as a poet, looks—clear-eyed and steady—into the night and writes “For Paul”:

I make no moan or outcry, just don't sleep.
The rain staining, etching the windowpane,
takes care of tears. Awake without hope
he will drink the morning with me, intone
a comment to my rhyme. What a lot of breath
went into the loving and now it's dying
we have to think of. The ghost on his path—
I refuse to believe what it is saying,

recalling the heron-river, books read aloud,
the nights we talked, sending the moon away.
The weedy places we rolled in and hid,
each to the other changing dark to glow.
You cannot lose me, said his ringing Yes
between the death-sweat and my forlorn kiss.

There will be more poems from her. Even as I say this, I know that in the midst of that eternal Seattle rain Eve is bravely writing. I can see her pure white hair, her gamine look, her lipstick, screaming red, and her gap-tooth smile. May the Goddess bless her! and all you who read this, who will go out and find her poems for yourselves.