

The order of things – By Rob Baum

Between times I always forget
the long hard story,
its impossible consequences
cinematic and obtuse:
clouds of insects,
babies in baskets,
reeds parted like theatre curtains.

Despite imprecations never to forget
pain blood death
poured out in palatable drops,
the hot foreign desert
cut conveniently to dry squares,
and a band of dusty travelers
bound by the desire for civilization,

I remember instead
tables dressed in white
sacrificial plates already composed of leftovers,
inedible shanks of unknown animals.

I see *karpas* sprouting from salt water,
unnecessary eggs

(painted, perhaps, for some other holiday),
the full cup, an open door
and a sea of other exiles
gazing at the cloth
in hopes of food.

Is it another year now, or only the next course?
Israel is falling to the infidels (our own).
The neighbouring nations poise, ready
to beat us back into Egypt.
Next year there may be no Jerusalem.

It's the only night we eat a meal of garnishes
and complain of satiety before the soup.
The only night *goyische* women read my history aloud--
and admit they don't understand.
The only night we stand again at Sinai,
naked, and numbered.

I have opened the book
in the most ancient port of this world,
on the chill ice of the Arctic,
at the gentle seacoast of Santa Barbara

beneath the changeable skies of Melbourne.
I have dribbled rose petals between Moroccan melodies,
spooned coconut with Jamaican haroset,
slid *zhug* onto Yemenite *matzoh*.

I need no orange on the plate
to remind me of my own
difference.

In each place of heart
the oft-told story remains elusive
at its frightening core,
a mystery of salvation
barely repeated
in time:

the war on children,
the help of angels,
the miracle of righteousness,
the strangeness of order
in a landscape barren of kindness,
when the skies blacken with death
and even decent people turn away.

© Rob Baum