

Nature – with a blink of her eye

Shara Atashi

Between my cluttered desk and my dream there's just a short walk. The Kingdom of Catsharks and Sea Urchins is down the hill. A magic formula of multi-coloured seaweeds, shells and salt pulls me away from the desk to the shore. The seabirds are preparing a banquet over there. With all the hubbub they must be arguing over the decoration of the horizon. 'The Goddess of Victory' is always in view, always watching. Facing the sea, she holds her ring of laurel leaves ready to throw it around the neck of the next champion swimmer that arrives at her feet. My neighbour is one such champion swimmer and a destroyer of nuclear arms. She must be a mermaid. I've heard she hides the eggs of catsharks in her purse for eight months. The other day she swam seven miles to the village of Borth, where the drowned forest will soon reappear. The sea is becoming transgressive. One distant day she rose in a terrible temper and swallowed the forest and all its inhabitants. It was self-defence.

Aberystwyth is not a place from a dream. Though, maybe it is. Like a Persian fairy tale that begins with 'Once there was, and once there wasn't...' we know very little about dreams, even less than what we know about our solar system. But Nature, the owner of countless solar systems, navigates our dreams with her telescopic eye.

I first discovered the wild side of Wales in a deserted valley in Snowdonia. Each day of that year I climbed a green hill which offered a panoramic view

on life and death: skeletons of farmhouses and haunted chapels, birds of prey flying their rounds, and songbirds in tune with the wind's orchestra whistling through branches and leaves. I saw a sheep give birth, and I saw one die. I drew the eeriness of dark lonely nights into my soul. The floating mist took me, as Pablo Neruda writes in 'The Heights of Machu Picchu', 'from air to air, as through an empty net'. Wild goats high up on chestnut trees were not an optical deception. Nature reminded me that I, too, was a mountain goat when I was a child in Tehran. Always ahead of others when we went to climb Mount Damavand on weekends. Nature is a mirror. When you smile at her, she smiles back with a blinking of her eye.

It isn't that wild here in mid-Wales. Aberystwyth lives with Nature. Even the university campus, with all its buildings, is scattered on the hillside with pasture and sheep in between. Nature is a rebel. In her mirror she reflects the rebellious people of this town. Such rebels are different from revolutionaries who have a cause. Nature's cause is life itself. Her cause finds the rebels, on land and in the sea.

Our love of Nature is unrequited. Her moon is a cold mute mass, careless of our praise and curse. Her solar systems are mysteries where people navigate in search of a god or of answers they cannot find within themselves. Nature, too, might find that her love for us is unrequited. Again and again, she communicates joy, but many don't hear it. Maybe that's why she navigates our dreams for her reflection. When she finds it, her mirror becomes a window through which we can fly beyond our shadows. That's when her smile sets us free.

Shara Atashi

Shara Atashi is an author and translator based in Aberystwyth, Wales. She is the daughter of the Iranian poet Manuchehr Atashi. Her mother is a visual artist. In 1979, at the age of twelve, she travelled to Frankfurt, West Germany with her mother in the hope that the new cleric regime in Iran wouldn't last long. That journey became a life-long exile and Shara, who was an antifascist from an early age, enjoyed an anti-authoritarian schooling and later a liberal education at the Goethe University, where she read law under a number of influential leftist scholars involved in the work of Germany's Federal Constitutional Court.

Shara worked for lawyers representing prominent clients, including sympathisers of the Baader-Meinhof Group, and later witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall. After working for the European Patent Office in the Hague she relocated to London and settled down as a translator.

Her works have subsequently been published in several journals. In 2021 Shara was awarded a place at Literature Wales's campaign against racism and is now dedicating her entire time to writing and literary translation. Her most recent work, 'Large Glass', published by *WritersMosaic* earlier this year, is an extract from her upcoming memoir *Tomb at Bushehr*.

A recording of this talk can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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