Classic Poetry Series

Elizabeth Daryush

- 10 poems -

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Elizabeth Daryush (8 December 1887 - 7 April 1977)

Elizabeth Daryush was an English poet.

Life and Career

Daughter of British poet laureate Robert Bridges, Elizabeth Daryush had a privileged upbringing in Victorian and Edwardian England. Although she followed her father's lead not only in choosing poetry as her life's work but also in the traditional style of poetry she chose to write, the themes of her work are often critical of the upper classes and the social injustice their privilege levied upon others. This characteristic was not present in her early work, including her first two books of poems, published under the name Elizabeth Bridges, which appeared while she was still in her twenties. According to John Finlay, writing in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Daryush's "early poetry is preoccupied with rather conventional subject matter and owes a great deal to the Edwardians."

After she married Ali Akbar Daryush in her mid- thirties and lived in Persia for four years, Elizabeth Daryush's poetry took a subtle though marked departure from her early work. Finlay observed that "The Last Man (1936) suggests a new awareness on her part of the anguish and pain caused by the profound changes that transformed English social life during the 1930s." Yvor Winters, writing in American Review, noted that "she seems to be increasingly conscious. . .of social injustice, of the mass of human suffering." It was also with The Laughing Man that Daryush began to refine the stylistic experiments her father had undertaken with syllabic meter.

Style

In comparing the poetry of Elizabeth Daryush to that of her contemporaries, John Matthias once offered this analogy: "Elizabeth Daryush appears rather like someone who has suddenly stepped out of the wrong century to find herself at the wrong party wearing the wrong clothes. There she stands in her brocades speaking her o'ers and 'twixts and 'tweens in her very proper accent. . . . But the effect of her presence is curious. Suddenly everyone's language sounds indecorous, full of improprieties and vulgarities." Jan Schreiber of the Southern Review agreed that Daryush's "diction is often that of ladies' magazines of the nineteenth century." However, Schreiber found that the poet's "best writing is independent of this characteristic. It comes from a kind of moral vision attainable by the poet only in response to a fairly clear-cut situation. . . . When the theme is undisguised and of straightforward human concern, the words come right and confound criticism."

Robert Bridges had argued that the form of traditional English poetry, with its emphasis on regular accented meter, had served its purpose, and that something new was needed. He attempted to write poems in which the meter of individual lines was bound not by regular accented syllables but merely the number of syllables in each line, thus leaving the emphasis up to the reader. Daryush took her father's experiment a step farther by making it less experimental; whereas Bridges' syllable count was a visual one, including unpronounced clusters of letters, Daryush's was strictly aural, counting only those syllables that were actually sounded when the poem was read aloud. It is for her successful experiments with syllabic meter that Daryush is best known to contemporary readers.

Beyond its social content, Daryush's work is also recognized for a consistent and well-defined personal vision. As Finlay noted, "For her. . .poetry always dealt with the `stubborn fact' of life as it is, and the only consolations it offered were those of understanding and a kind of half- Christian, half-stoical acceptance of the inevitable." However, he also argued that Daryush's best poems transcend such fatalism, "dealing with the moral resources found in one's own being. . .and a recognition of the beauties in the immediate, ordinary world around us."

In his introduction to Daryush's Collected Poems, Donald Davie wrote, "When an unprejudiced literary history of our century comes to be written, our failure to recognize Elizabeth Daryush will be one of the most telling and lamentable charges that can be laid at our door." In contrast, Richard Ellmann stated in Poetry: "Living in an age when the poet's first duty has been to find an appropriate language, [Daryush] has avoided the problem by using a language that is dead.

Her accomplishments have been chiefly technical, and these in themselves are not enough." Finlay has an explanation for such diverse reactions to Daryush's work. While granting that the "defects of her poetry are a diction often unnecessarily archaic and a frequently melodramatic use of personified abstractions," he went on to note that "these defects will irritate only those readers so committed to the Pound-Eliot revolution in poetic style that they refuse to see virtue in any other poetry than that modern and imagistic." He concluded: "For readers who wish to explore the full range of English poetry, such defects should not blind them to the obvious excellence of the poetry of Elizabeth Daryush, its thematic sturdiness and the subtle kind of music she was able to achieve in syllabic meter."

Works:

Sonnets from Hafez and other Verses (1921) as Elizabeth Bridges
Verses (1930) (OUP)
Verses, Fourth Book (1934)
Poems (1935) (Macmillan)
The Last Man and Other Verses (1936)
Selected Poems (1948) edited by Yvor Winters
Verses: Seventh Book (1971) Carcanet Press
Selected Poems (1972) Carcanet Press
Collected Poems (1976) Carcanet Press

After Bank Holiday

Now deserted are the roads
Where awhile the lovers went;
Vacant are the field-abodes
Where a vivid hour they spent:
Solemn dark
Broods again in lane and park.

'Tis no matter where are gone
Those warm lives---to halls, maybe,
Festive, or to lodgings lone:
Of the land their tenancy
Now is o'er;
Earth to earth belongs once more.

Gone are they as hourly goes
From the sombre fields of space
Our world, with its little glows—
Passion's ship that has no place,
Leaves no track,
On time's endless ocean black.

Elizabeth Daryush

Anger Lay By Me

Anger lay by me all night long,
His breath was hot upon my brow,
He told me of my burning wrong,
All night he talked and would not go.

He stood by me all through the day,
Struck from my hand the book, the pen;
He said: ‘Hear first what I’ve to say,
And sing, if you’ve the heart to, then.’

And can I cast him from my couch?
And can I lock him from my room?
Ah no, his honest words are such
That he’s my true-lord, and my doom.

Elizabeth Daryush

Children of Wealth in your Warm Nursery

Children of wealth in your warm nursery,
Set in the cushioned window-seat to watch
The volleying snow, guarded invisibly
By the clear double pane through which no touch
Untimely penetrates, you cannot tell
What winter means; its cruel truths to you
Are only sound and sight; your citadel
Is safe from feeling, and from knowledge too.

Go down, go out to elemental wrong,
Waste your too round limbs, tan your skin too white;
The glass of comfort, ignorance, seems strong
To-day, and yet perhaps this very night
You'll wake to horror's wrecking fire-your home
Is wired within for this, in every room.

Elizabeth Daryush

Flanders Fields

Here the scanted daisy glows
Glorious as the carmined rose;
Here the hill-top's verdure mean
Fair is with unfading green;
Here, where sorrow still must tread,
All her graves are garlanded.

And still, O glad passer-by
Of the fields of agony,
Lower laughter's voice, and bare
Thy head in the valley where
Poppies bright and rustling wheat
Are a desert to love's feet.

Elizabeth Daryush

Invalid Dawn

Above the grey down
Gather, wan, the glows;
Relieved by leaden
Gleams a star-gang goes;

In the dark valley
Here and there enters
A spark, laggardly,
For the faint watchers
That were there all night -
Factory,station
And hospital light ...
Tired of lamp,star,sun,

Bound to my strait bed
Uncurtained I see
Heaven itself law-led,
Earth in slavery.

Elizabeth Daryush

Still-life

Through the open French window the warm sun
Lights up the polished breakfast-table, laid
Round a bowl of crimson roses, for one -
A service of Worcester porcelain, arrayed
Near it a melon, peaches, figs, small hot
Rolls in a napkin, fairy rack of toast,
Butter in ice, high silver coffee-pot,
And, heaped on a salver, the morning's post.

She comes over the lawn, the young heiress,
From her early walk in her garden-wood,
Feeling that life's a table set to bless
Her delicate desires with all that's good.

That even the unopened future lies
Like a love-letter, full of sweet surprise.

Elizabeth Daryush

Subalterns

She said to one: ‘How glows
My heart at the hot thought
Of battle’s glorious throes!’
He said: ‘For us who fought
Are icy memories
That must for ever freeze
The sunny hours they bought.’

She said to one: ‘How light
Must your freed heart be now,
After the heavy fight!”
He said: ‘Well I don’t know…..
The war gave one a shake,
Somehow, knocked one awake…..
Now. life’s so deadly slow.’

Elizabeth Daryush

The Railroad

Along the iron rails
Plod still with panting power,
Range still the empty trails
Hour after hour;

Stare still where looms ahead
Each signal-skeleton,
Whose jerking arms forbid
Or bid you on,

Whose grim lamps rule the glooms
With stringent red or green—
Forget your sunny home's
Wild-paths between

Primrose and violet,
Your breeze-lit fields of rye...
Your golden sheaves forget—
Forget, or die.

Elizabeth Daryush

Unknown Warrior

Not that broad path chose he, which whoso wills
May tread, if he by pay the fatal price,
And for such sweet as earthly life extils,
Slaughter his heaven-born soul in sacrifice.

But he, though loving these, cast yet with strong
Hands all aside, and took the obscure way,
Which few may find, or finding, follow long,-
O let not weak regrets hinder me, nay,

Health, wealth, fame, friendship, all that I hold dear,
I'll spend, nor seek return, O what dark crown
Be his, he cares not, who thus gives; how near
May hang yet his lost laurels of renown:

Yea, who dares thus die, haply he may see,
Suddenly, unsought immortality.

Elizabeth Daryush

You Should at Times Go Out

You should at times go out
from where the faithful kneel,
visit the slums of doubt
and feel what the lost feel;

you should at times walk on,
away from your friends' ways,
go where the scorned have gone,
pass beyond blame and praise;

and at times you should quit
(ah yes) your sunny home,
sadly awhile should sit,
even, in wrong's dark room,

or ever, suddenly,
by simple bliss betrayed,
you shall be forced to flee,
unloved, alone, afraid.

Elizabeth Daryush