

An extract from ‘O Bejewelled Realm’ by Forough Farrokhzad

Victory!

Got myself registered,

I decorated my ID card with my name and face,

And now my existence has taken on nothing but a number.

So long live number 678, from Precinct 5, a resident of Tehran.

All is well, time to relax.

The merciful embrace of my motherland,

Suckling onto a pacifier filled with proud history,

Calmed by lullabies of civilization and culture

And the clatter and grind of the law.

Ah yes, all is well...

Out of sheer bliss, I go to the window

and eagerly take in 678 long breaths full of air

smelling of shit, garbage and piss.

Underneath 678 debt receipts and on 678 job applications,

I wrote: *Forough Farrokhzad*.

In the land of poetry, flowers and nightingales,

It is a gift to live.

When the reality of your existence is accepted after many years,

A land where from behind the curtains,

My first glance spies 678 poets,

All tricksters in the strange disguise of beggars,

Rummaging for words and rhymes about the dustbin;

A land where suddenly, from the dark mire,

At the sound of my first official step,

678 mysterious nightingales,

Who have, simply for fun,

Transformed themselves into old black crows,

Take themselves into flight towards the edge of the day;

A land where my first true breath is permeated with the scent of 678 rose branches,

A product of the vast industrial machines of Plasco.

It truly is a blessing to exist.

ای سرزمین جواهری

پیروز شدم

خود را به ثبت رساندم

خود را با نامی، در شناسنامه‌ای مزین کردم

و هستی‌ام با عددی تعریف شد

پس زنده باد ۶۷۸، صادره از بخش ۵، ساکن تهران

دیگر خیالم از همه سو راحت است

آغوش مهربان مام وطن

پستانک سوابق پرافتخار تاریخی

لالایی تمدن و فرهنگ

و جق جق جققه قانون

آه

دیگر خیالم از همه سو راحت است

از فرط شادمانی

رفتم کنار پنجره، با اشتیاق

ششصد و هفتاد و هشت بار هوایی را که از غبار پهن

و بوی خاکروبه و ادرار منقبض شده بود

درون سینه فرو دادم

و روی ششصد و هفتاد و هشت قبض بدهکاری

و زیر ششصد و هفتاد و هشت تقاضای کار نوشتم: 'فروغ فرخزاد'

در سرزمین شعر و گل و بلبل

موهبتی‌ست زیستن؛

آن هم وقتی‌ست که

واقعیت موجود بودن تو،

پس از سال‌ها سال پذیرفته می‌شود

جایی که من، با اولین نگاه رسمی‌ام، از لای پرده

ششصد و هفتاد و هشت شاعر را می‌بینم

یادگاری‌ست از همه آن حقایق
که در کارخانه‌های بلند نظم و انضباط
و در نهاد شرافت‌های زنجیردار
و از صدای اولین قدم رسمی‌ام
در آشیانه‌ی بلبل مرموز
و از میان زنجیرهای ششصد و هفتاد و هشتم
شکل می‌گیرد

کلاغ پیر سیاه
در آورد از نفس خود
در قالب ششصد و هفتاد و هشتم
باریکه‌ای از نغمه‌های مرموز بلبل
که از میان زناجل تهی‌دستان شعر
می‌بارد

و از صدای اولین نفس زنده‌ام
با تنبلی به سوی حاشیه پر می‌زنند
هوایم
آغشته می‌شود به بوی
ششصد و هفتاد و هشت شاخه گل سرخ
محصول کارخانه‌های عظیم پلاسکو

موهبتی‌ست زیستن

Commentary

Translating Forough Farrokhzad's poetry is quite challenging. While there are many linguistic and stylistic challenges, I think the biggest difficulty lies in understanding the cultural and historical background behind her work. Her imagery is deeply connected to Iranian identity, politics, and social critique—layers that can easily be missed if you don't interpret her poems carefully. For example, in the part I translated, there's the phrase “آغوش مهربان مام وطن” (line 7), which literally means “the kind accept of the motherland.” In Persian, *motherland* carries warm, caring feelings. I chose to translate it as “merciful” instead of “kind” to better match the protective and forgiving tone that Persian speakers would feel. In another part, “قچقچق جقجقه قانون,” Farrokhzad combines onomatopoeic sounds with the word “law” (قانون) to show how mechanical and dehumanizing authority can seem. I went with “the clatter and grind of the law” to keep both the sound and the critique of stiff legal systems alive in the translation. Lastly, “محصول کارخانه‌های عظیم پلاسکو” refers to the Plasco industrial complex, which symbolizes modernization and mass production. But beyond a factory, Plasco is a metaphor for the bureaucratic system of the state—conformity, standardization, and control. My translation — “a product of the vast industrial machine of Plasco”— emphasizes her critique of how societal and institutional forces shape individuals, especially women. Farrokhzad uses this layered language to critique not only patriarchy but larger systems of power and bureaucracy. Her poetry still feels very relevant today, and she certainly deserves wider recognition as an important voice in world literature. This is why I decided to translate one of her pieces, being a long time fan of her brilliant work.