

## Two Poems by Larissa Shmailo

### IN PARAN

I grew up wild and reckless in the land of desert nomads,  
In the arid lands that lie near the promised land and Egypt,  
That land of milk and honey they were saving for my brother  
And the land of Pharaoh's bondage where my mother's kin  
were born.

I lived my youth near Canaan and the slaving lands of Egypt;  
I lived my life an outcast in the desert of Paran.

I grew up wild and stubborn: my hand against my father  
At war with all my kinfolk, my kin at war with me.  
I grew up wild and skittish, like a scared colt in a sandstorm;  
I laughed at mules and camels that never could break free.

But I learned to run in sandstorms, and how to eat my water,  
And how to find oases, and how to take the heat.  
I learned to talk to demons, to tempters and to genies.  
I learned to talk to devils, to outcasts just like me.

I learned to love and pity my younger brother Isaac  
When they took him to the slaughter, not even asking why.  
God bade me make the manna for Isaac and his children.  
My demons said they'd be here, twelve tribes of them someday.  
In this land of desert nomads, near the promised land and Egypt  
Near the land of milk and honey in the desert of Paran.

Previously published in *In Paran* (BlazeVOX Books, 2009)

## LOVE'S COMELY BEHIND

Say, is not all love illicit and blind?  
True, it hides, undone, in the mind.

*Who knows Allah's thoughts truly loves  
the Self that is Allah's own wisdom to know,  
and you are Allah's, my milk, sheep, and doves,  
unsure yet certain, a dervish in the snow.*

Did you, today, attend upon love?  
No, intent instead, you will not find.

*Who knows Allah's thoughts truly loves  
the Self that is Allah's own wisdom to know,  
and you are Allah's, my milk, sheep, and doves,  
unsure yet certain, a dervish in the snow.*

Greedy, you eat and fruit is gone.  
Pulp devoured, you hold the rind.

*Who knows Allah's thoughts truly loves  
the Self that is Allah's own wisdom to know,  
and you are Allah's, my milk, sheep, and doves,  
unsure yet certain, a dervish in the snow.*

You have lost your love? O, sing, fool:  
Now gaze upon love's comely behind.

*Who knows Allah's thoughts truly loves  
the Self that is Allah's own wisdom to know,  
and you are Allah's, my milk, sheep, and doves,  
unsure yet certain, a dervish in the snow.*

I love love's desert and its snow.  
I, Ishmael, dervish, a lover signed.

**Bio:**

**Larissa Shmailo** is editor-in-chief of the anthology *Twenty-first Century Russian Poetry* (Big Bridge Press), poetry editor for *MadHat Annual*, and founder of The Feminist Poets in Low-Cut Blouses. She translated [\*Victory Over the Sun\*](#) for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's celebrated reconstruction of the first Futurist opera; the libretto is now available from Červená Barva Press; Larissa also has been a translator on the Russian Bible for the American Bible Society. Larissa's poetry collections are *#specialcharacters* (Unlikely Books), *In Paran* (BlazeVOX [books]), *A Cure for Suicide* (Červená Barva Press), and *Fib Sequence* (Argotist Books). Her poetry CDs are *The No-Net World* and *Exorcism* (SongCrew); tracks are available from Spotify, iTunes, Muze and all digital distributors. Larissa has work forthcoming in *Fulcrum*, *Plume*, the *St. Petersburg Review*, the *Battersea Review*, and the Random House anthology of metrical verse, *Measure for Measure*. Her novel, *Patient Women*, is forthcoming from BlazeVOX [books]. She blogs at <http://larissashmailo.blogspot.com/>