

TRIBES

Ronny Someck
Trans. Karen Alkalay-Gut

When I dressed up as a cowboy I smelled gunpowder in the tribe
of the trigger,
And when I taught a hungry child to steal bread I kneaded dough
in the tribe of justice.
When I crumbled a crumb from that bread for a sidewalk bird I
belonged to the tribe of nature,
and when the bird sang in the cage I felt myself a part of the tribe
of crime.
When I stammered I belonged to the tribe of the slowly silent,
and when I bounced basketballs I joined the tribe that scored with
one hand.

When I was invisible in the tribe of the blind,
I met Jorge Luis Borges in "The Garden of Forking Paths,"
and when I read there, on page 9, that "the tiger wants to be
a tiger," I sought shelter in the next page.
The tribe of nomads introduced me to Cain,
and the tribe of the irrational to Albert Einstein.
Because of a broken nose Muhammad Ali is a distant cousin,
because of black eyelashes I've earned a branch on the tree of
crows.
Because of Baghdad I belong to the tribe born in the city of
a thousand and one nights,
And because of one night in October '73 sometimes
I hang onto the tribe of the hyphen between the word *shell*
and the word *shock*.

After eighteen years the saxophones of the Lord
raised up pails of joy from the bottoms of their throats
and then, in one moment, I had
A daughter.

THE POEMS OF RIMA

Ronny Someck
Trans. Karen Alkalay-Gut

Listen Ronny, if the men knew how to whistle
Like in my mother's stories,
You'd be calling me "Rima Orchestra."
Trust me, I'd just warmed up from their breath on my nape,
And after their heads turned toward me
I provided income for many orthopedists
Who'd have to loosen up the spasms in their necks.
At night I sleep on a slant, alone,
And my sardine brain is infused with skull oil.
Yes, I too don't know exactly what I'm saying,
But where are the men who know how to stab the knife of words
And then say that if I were Jewish I'd already have been deflowered?
My dyed blond is the fantasy of Sammy the stylist.
I swear I didn't make up his name. That's the way he was born.
We went to school together at St. Joseph's
In Nazareth, and during the breaks
He'd sneak in to give me a faux ponytail.
His father says that with hands like his he could be an engineer
Or at least a window blind contractor and share the truck with his
cousin
But Sami is hooked on his scissors, and from our hair he's already
built
Three floors in the middle of our village.
"What curls you have," he tells me,
"Like the girls on the shiny pages of the tabloids."
Just for that I'd marry him, but
My father says that all the girls in the village hear the same thing,
And I didn't do five units in English and five units in math
To burn them up on someone who barely has an IQ of shampoo.
I wrote my first poems in the antique café in Haifa.
I sat in the chair they told me once belonged to Mahmoud Darwish.
Without words I hid tears that pressed against my eyes.
Poets are the world champions in weeping. That's a dumb sentence,
I know,
But my high school teacher said it so many times

I can't get it out of my mind.
The best poem in the world
Natasha, the wife of Ahmed the dentist, showed me.
He brought her from his studies at the university of Moscow.
"The seagull," she translated, "is the bikini of God."
Some Russian wrote it. His name is Andrew Wossinsky.
I hope I didn't mix up his name,
But that's how I want to do it too:
First to fly,
Then be the first poet who knows how to swim in clouds,
And then like that Russian, after one line
To fall in love with silence.

