

Leaving Home (November 2002)

The speaker of Elizabeth Daryush's "Children of wealth in your warm nursery" enters our "home[s]" (13) to warn us. S/he tells us we are prisoners, that our current home is a prison, and that our guardians cannot be trusted. S/he wants us to leave, to "go out" (9), but getting us to leave is a difficult task: s/he must provoke us to consider uncomfortable truths and to leave comfortable settings. The speaker must first gain our attention, then earn our trust, before we could consider no longer being "[c]hildren of wealth" (1).

The speaker explicitly addresses "[c]hildren of wealth in [. . .] warm nurser[ies]" (1), but implicitly addresses all those who live privileged lives amongst privileged surroundings (ostensibly including most Western readers of poetry). "Children of wealth" brings to mind "children of God": s/he implies that we *belong* to a god, a false one, and that, whatever our age, we are de facto children. The speaker defines us with two objectives in mind: first, as s/he issues a warning, s/he wants us to imagine ourselves as children so that we are—like the children deliberately "[s]et in the cushioned window-seat" (2)—more likely to listen, "watch" (2), and attend; second, "[c]hildren of wealth" suggests that we are captives, but does not suggest that affluence has irrevocably tainted, ruined, or spoiled us (as may have been the case if s/he had addressed us as "wealthy children"). Wealth claims but does not define "its" children: the speaker readies us for exodus.

The speaker wants us to "go out" and experience the outside world. Neonates, however, require preparation, and the speaker prepares us to accept two terrible truths: the world out there is "cruel" (6), and so too the negligence we have suffered at the hands of our custodians. We are, however, braced to hear these truths. The speaker shapes her/his warning so that it contracts (and intensifies) as s/he proceeds. We know that s/he has given us time in the initial octave to prepare ourselves for the expostulation in the quatrain and the prophecy in the concluding couplet. Whoever s/he is, we sense her/him tending to us.

In the octave we are told that we have little "knowledge" (8) of what "winter means" (6)—that is, about the outside world. The speaker forewarns that this world is as cruel as we might imagine it to be. But the second stanza's expostulation, which encourages us to "[w]aste [our] [. . .] too round limbs" (10) and "tan [our] [. . .] skin

too white” (10), implies that life outside of the “double-pane” (4) is harsh, but not necessarily devastating. Devastation—burning, not tanning—the speaker tells us, awaits those of us who linger “too” (10) long hereafter in comfortable settings.

The speaker’s provocation in the concluding couplet to imagine “your [own] home” (13) burning, is daring and risky, but more so is her/his insinuation that our guardians may be responsible for the fire. “Your” parents, “your” ancestors, the speaker implies, may be negligent, or worse—*malevolent*—in creating a prison (a “citadel” [7]) and a fire-trap out of “your home[s]” and heritage. S/he risks alienating us; “parents” have a strong hold over their “children.” But perhaps our speaker’s risk-taking helps convince us of her sincerity and trustworthiness.

Indeed, we might conclude that our earnest speaker, so apparently aware of the worlds on either side of the “double pane[s],” was once a “[c]hild [. . .] of wealth” her/himself. S/he escaped dominion, we might conclude, and returns only to warn us. But if s/he isn’t, we might one day grieve if “[t]oday” (12) for fear of fire, we leave our cozy cushions for the cold “night” (12) of “winter” (6).

Work Cited

Daryush, Elizabeth. “Children of wealth in your warm nursery.” *Anthology of Twentieth-Century and Irish Poetry*. Ed. Keith Tuma. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 117. Print.