

POEMS

*By Najwan Darwish**

THE WINDOW YOU DREW ON THE WALL

Architect, the window you drew on the wall
has become a vast prison,
and the nightmare, however we paint it,
will never be a dream,
and these pretenders,
however many titles you bestow on them,
will never be the real thing,
and you, architect, you watch the farce from above,
the one you sketched out
with protractor and compass.

Look at the crows,
how they pass through the ceiling of that room
where a band of fools is held captive.
The crows are leaving freedom's banquet—
that feast that was wasted,
lost,
lied about,
that freedom
that debases freedom
in its own home.

The crows—even the crows—are leaving
and looking for a different banquet.

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* Najwan Darwish is a Palestinian poet born in 1978 in Jerusalem. These five poems were translated from their original Arabic by Kareem James Abu-Zeid.

النَّافِذَةُ الَّتِي رَسَمَتْهَا فِي الْحَائِطِ

النَّافِذَةُ الَّتِي رَسَمَتْهَا فِي الْحَائِطِ أَيُّهَا الْمَعْمَارُ
أَصَبَحْتُ مُعْتَقِلًا
وَالْكَابُوسُ مَهْمَا صَبَغْنَاهُ لَنْ يُصْبِحَ حُلْمًا
وَهُوَ لَاءِ الْأَشْبَاهِ
مَهْمَا أَعْدَقْتَ عَلَيْهِمُ الصِّفَاتِ
لَيْسَ بِمُسْتَطَاعِهِمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يَكُونُوا أَشْبَاهًا...

وَأَنْتَ أَيُّهَا الْمَعْمَارُ تُرَاقِبُ الْمَهْزَلَةَ مِنْ عُلٍّ،
تِلْكَ الَّتِي رَسَمَهَا قَوْسُكَ وَفَزَجَارُكَ،
انْظُرْ إِلَى الْغُرْبَانِ
تَخْتَرِقُ سَقْفَ الْحُجْرَةِ الَّتِي تَعْتَقِلُ فِيهَا جَوْقَةً مِنَ الْمُعَقَّلِينَ...

الْغُرْبَانُ تَفِرُّ مِنْ وَلِيمَةِ الْحُرِّيَةِ الْمَهْدُورَةِ
الْمُضَيَّعَةِ، الْمَكْذُوبِ عَلَيْهَا
الْحُرِّيَةِ الَّتِي تُذِلُّ الْحُرِّيَةَ فِي عُقْرِ دَارِهَا.

الْغُرْبَانُ تَنْأَى بِنَفْسِهَا،
وَتَبْحَثُ عَنْ وَلِيمَةٍ أُخْرَى.

The following poem, which evokes Delacroix's painting "Liberty Leading the People," was previously published in the book *Nothing More to Lose* (NYRB Poets 2014).

LIBERTY

Liberty Leading the People has two bare breasts,
her right hand holds the French flag,
her left a rifle with a bayonet.

But notice too how barefoot *Liberty*
tramples the people beneath her.

* * *

الْحُرِّيَّة

"الْحُرِّيَّة تقود الشَّعب" حاسِرة النِّهدين
وبِيدها اليُمْنى تَرْفَع عَلَمَ فرنسا (في اليُسرى بندقيةٌ على رأسها حُرْبَة).

لاحظوا أنَّ "الْحُرِّيَّة" أيضاً كانت تدوسُ أنقاضَ الشَّعب بِقَدَمِها العارية.

LISTENING TO REINETTE L'ORANAISE IN DAR ABDEL LATIF[†]

I must have been twenty-seven
when I stayed at Dar Abdel Latif,
which was crouching in the middle of the mountain
between the sea and the Martyrs' Memorial.

Two small villas beside the palace,
one of which I had to myself...

What grief was blowing like a breeze,
and what Andalusian motifs were ingrained
by the heavy hand of the Ottoman era?
What cries froze in time like statues?
I saw them haunting the rooms of the palace
when I walked through it at night
after all the administrators had gone.

"During colonial times, Dar Abdel Latif was a prison
where freedom fighters were tortured."
"They're still being tortured," I replied.

I too am a prisoner, abandoned
in the name of a guest.
What is the guest of the state
if not a prisoner?
And what is the guest of the people
if not a prisoner of their love?
I ask myself: How did you replace the gods with peoples?
How can you stand up to carnage
yet collapse before song?
And how is it that the Oranian singer still guides you
to wherever you hide in the land?
How is it she's still knocking at your door with her voice,
as if you were still a resident
in Dar Abdel Latif?

* * *

[†] Reinette L'Oranaise, also known as Sultana Daoud, was a well-known blind and Jewish Algerian singer who lived in Oran and worked hard to preserve the Andalusian musical heritage in Algeria. Dar Abdel Latif is a famous compound in Algiers.

سَمَاع رينات الوهرانية في دار عبد اللطيف

لَعَلِّي كُنْتُ فِي السَّابِعَةِ وَالْعِشْرِينَ
حِينَ أَقَمْتُ فِي "دار عبد اللطيف"
الرَّابِضَةِ فِي مُنْتَصَفِ الْجَبَلِ
بَيْنَ الْبَحْرِ وَ"صَرْحِ الشَّهِيد"...

دَارَتَانِ صَغِيرَتَانِ بِجَانِبِ الْقَصْرِ
شَغَلْتُ وَاحِدَةً مِنْهُمَا.

أَيُّ شَجَنِ كَانَ يَضْرِبُ مِثْلَ النَّسِيمِ
وَأَيُّ زَخَارِفِ أُنْدَلُسِيَّةٍ عَرَفْتُهَا الْيَدُ الثَّقِيلَةُ لِلْعَهْدِ الْعُثْمَانِيِّ
وَأَيُّ صَرَخَاتٍ تَجَمَّدَتْ فِي الزَّمَنِ مِثْلَ التَّمَائِيلِ
أَرَاهَا مَشْبُوحَةً فِي حُجَرَاتِ الْقَصْرِ
حِينَ أَدْرَعُهُ لِيَلًا بَعْدَ أَنْ يُغَادِرَ الْإِدَارِيُّونَ مَكَاتِبَهُمْ.

فِي الزَّمَنِ الْاِسْتِعْمَارِيِّ كَانَتْ دَارُ عَبْدِ الْلطَّيفِ سِجْنًا عَذِّبَ فِيهَا الْمُجَاهِدُونَ.
قُلْتُ: وَمَا زَالُوا يُعَذِّبُونَ.

أَمَّا أَنَا فَسَجِينٌ مَتْرُوكٌ بِاسْمِ ضَيْفٍ.
أَيَكُونُ ضَيْفُ الدَّوْلَةِ إِلَّا سَجِينًا؟
أَيَكُونُ ضَيْفُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا أَسِيرَ مَحَبَّتِهِمْ؟
وَأَقُولُ لِنَفْسِي: كَيْفَ أَحَلَّلْتُ شُعُوبًا مَكَانَ الْإِلَهِةِ
وَكَيْفَ تَصَمَّدُ أَمَامَ مَذْبَحَةٍ وَتَنْهَارُ أَمَامَ أَغْنِيَةٍ
وَكَيْفَ تَسْتَهْدِي عَلَيْكَ الْمُغْنِيَةَ الْوَهْرَانِيَّةَ
أَيْنَمَا اخْتَبَأَتْ فِي الْأَرْضِ
تَضْرِبُ عَلَيْكَ الْبَابَ بِعُرْبِ صَوْتِهَا
كَأَنَّكَ مَا زِلْتَ مُقِيمًا
فِي دَارِ عَبْدِ الْلطَّيفِ.

TWO MEN CONDEMNED TO DEATH, AND YOU ARE OUR THIRD

“We’ve been condemned to death
in Acre’s prison,
but we’ve come
to have a cup of coffee with you.
Our sentence will be carried out
in just a few hours
so hurry up now....”

One of those two joked around with me:
“If the coffee’s good
we won’t force you
to compose an elegy for us.”

After that, other visitors came, as dawn was breaking.
I recognized their faces from the old posters of the Intifada,
except now they looked normal, relaxed.
One of them said to his friend,
“In the morning we’d like to go to the sea,”
and another asked me, “Is this Mount Carmel?”
while a third asked if I had any movies.

“The two of us
have been condemned to death,
and you are our third.
Don’t delay the funeral, like you usually do.
We’re lying in the morgue
at Abu Kabir
where we first met you,
we’re sleeping in the nameless "graves of numbers,"
but they said you know our names.
We’re tired of this endless insomnia,
of the promises of the song:
His eyes were closed
as his hands reached out in longing.
We’re the ones whose graves were swept away,
and here we are, free
and without graves.

Don’t think too long on it.
We,
you...
Just hurry up now.”

* * *

محكومان بالإعدام وأنت ثالثنا

نحنُ مَحْكومانُ بالإعدام
 مِنْ سِجْنِ عَكا
 جئنا نَشْرِبُ فُنْجانَ قَهْوَةٍ عِنْدَكَ
 سَيُنْقِذُ الْحُكْمَ بَعْدَ سَاعَاتٍ
 هَيَّا أَسْرِعْ...
 أَحْذُهُمَا مَرْحَ مَعِي:
 فَلْتَكُنِ الْقَهْوَةُ جَيِّدَةً وَسَنْعُفِيكَ مِنْ قَصِيدَةٍ رَثَاءٍ.

ثُمَّ طَرَقَ زُورًا آخرونَ وَالْفَجْرُ يُشْفِقُ
 وَعَرَفْتُ وَجوهَهُمْ.. الشَّاخِصَةَ فِي مُلْصَقَاتِ الْإِنْتِفاضةِ الْقَدِيمَةِ
 لَكِنَّهُمْ يَبْدُونَ الْآنَ طَبِيعِيَّينَ وَمَرَحِينِ.
 يَقُولُ أَحْذُهُمْ لِصَاحِبِهِ:
 فِي الصَّبَاحِ نُرِيدُ أَنْ نَذْهَبَ إِلَى الْبَحْرِ.
 آخِرُ يَقُولُ لِي:
 هَلْ نَحْنُ الْآنَ فِي الْكَرْمِلِ؟
 وَثَالِثٌ يَسْأَلُنِي:
 هَلْ عِنْدَكَ فِيدِيو؟

نحنُ مَحْكومانُ بالإعدام
 وَأَنْتَ ثَالِثُنَا
 لَا تَوَجِّرِ الْجَنَازَةَ كَعَادَتِكَ،
 نَحْنُ مُمَدَّدُونَ فِي مَشْرِحَةٍ "أَبُو كُبَيْر"
 حَيْثُ النَّقْيَا بِكَ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ،
 نَحْنُ نَائِمُونَ فِي "مَقَابِرِ الْأَرْقَامِ"،
 أَخْبَرُونَا أَنَّ أَسْمَاءَنَا عِنْدَكَ
 تَعْبُنَا مِنَ الْأَرْقِ الطَّوِيلِ، وَمِنْ وَعْدِ الْأُغْنِيَةِ:
 "سَبَلْ عَيُونُو"
 وَمَدَّ إِيدُو يَحْتَنُونُ،
 نَحْنُ مَنْ جُرِفَتْ قُبُورُهُمْ
 وَهَا قَدْ عُدْنَا
 أَحْرَارًا بِلَا قُبُورٍ.

لَا تُفَكِّرْ كَثِيرًا
 نَحْنُ
 أَنْتَ
 هَيَّا أَسْرِعْ.

[UNTITLED]

He said to me:
I live my life like someone serving a sentence,
so when will God release me?

I smiled and said to myself:
I've never known a prisoner
who loves his prison
more than you.

* * *

قال لي:
إنني أعيش حياتي مثل مَنْ يَقْضِي عُقُوبَةً
فمَنْ يُمْسِكُ اللَّهُ عَنِّي؟

فابتسمتُ وقلتُ في نفسي:
لَمْ أَعْرِفْ سَجِيناً يُحِبُّ سِجْنَهُ أَكْثَرَ مِنْكَ.