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Writing Sample

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Seven Attempts to Portray Mr. President

1

He is alone in the hall,
red cup in hand,
feather hat on head.

Through the window one can see scattered corpses,
knocked down trees
and a handful of rabid dogs
wandering around.

2

He leans against
empty space,
his eyelashes stuck to the glass,
his toothless mouth chewing unintelligible words
about our vanishing glory.

And in the distance the royal guards
sit around a table,
barking at each other.

3

Swollen
like a rotten apple,
from his apertures stream
black snakes and false secrets.

4

As he dozes,
he builds, out of his fantasies,
a wailing country
and awkward speeches

5
Full of pride,
he stands on the edge of the world
holding the bell of the final alarm
to ride back to the beginning of creation
as if he were trading two fires:
that of God and that of the battle

No citizens
profit by his wisdom
as he mixes flaming colors.
The citizens have no president
shaping their reactions
to his lengthy tales
about killing a ghoul
and his raging seas.

Biting his fingernails
with his bleeding gums,
he mourns over his falling image.

No Paradise outside the Window

He is busy with his scattered papers.
The muzzle of the old pistol
is looking at him in provocation.
Poetry is the noblest thing in language,
and the whiteness of the papers is death.
They may knock his door.
The distance between him and the pistol
is penetrated by time.
Did I leave it loaded?
The barrel may be rusted.
The poem is a butterfly's wing,
adjuncts burden it
and a lack of verbs deconstructs it.
The pistol is a lying monster.
If they come…shall I leave the paper?
Or will I ambush them from behind the window,
then open the door
and hold the poem up to their faces?
My fingers become pens,
their ink pours
onto the white
The words are sparrows
flying over paper to perch on the handle of the pistol.
The pistol is still
raving, motivated.
Death is a hair's breadth or less.
What will the wind say to the window?
They may come down...
Or...go away...
Or...
The shame is when Hamlet eats his hands,
and the image here is unfinished,
o no fingers left to gather on the handle of the pistol,
no desire to dance with hesitation,
so agitation spreads across the paper,
and bullets are teased by
crowds and rust.
When they come or land
Shall I sit…
or ready my soul?
The letters are glass injuring splinters.
I wish sensed already
that the enemies are not a fantasy—
The distance is narrowing
when the poem seems to drink its ink
from the water in his hands.
My paradise is here, not outside the window.
A sweet sleepiness flows over things,
their voices insist they are present while they are absent.
How do I know that the trigger has two deadlocks,
that time between us is just an invention to the last step?
I ask heroism to be late,
until the live coal of the poem is extinguished.
Then I will return to mock Hamlet’s long sword.
Why does this night put on two horns?
Why does the image of death reflect on
the world, the labyrinth?
The pistol is a gypsy with teeth of fire
waiting for celebration music.
What obsessions are flourishing
under the cloak of the impossible?
Why do words disappoint their pleasure's terms?
Why do words alone
carry the gamble?
Why are our intersections
dependent on mad roads?
The sky is a night dropped
onto my world.
I wish they already knew
that I am not a bystander,
and if they come,
and their pistols laugh,
that they would pass my blood as if it were dust.

*A Sparrow Rubbed by a Flute*

It comes to me
That I may see what is unseen
   In the pleasure of speech,
   In the night step
And in the crawling of roses on myrtle.

It comes to me
That I may cross the sea of experience
   To the sea of language,
Since the world is transforming the obsession
   Into a song and the secret into a color.
This is my soul, approaching
   The stranger’s fantasies,
Going far in abstracting the place
   Going ahead in taming the time,
   Passing with no hope of rescue
From the kings of drowning.

It comes to me
That I prefer the coming up against the leaving
   When it is a mistake
To exaggerate in gleaming
   And accept to walk
On stagnant water.
I may not do well in the art of living
And I may stumble by light,
Because love is dust that moves
And I have nothing but the invisible guarding me.

To expel my whims
I structured myself
On the extension of a flower
And stretched out my arm
To plant my happiness
On the pores of meaning,
Hey, meaning
What if the victorious sat
Inside an open pocket?
I am qualified to advise you
You who lives
In the navel of the ink
To single out a ray for death,
And I may advise oblivion
Not to escape
Unless the wind peels it
Or the waiting snips its
Shadow.
Visions emerge
From me
And never come back,
Colors emerge too,
Drinking their fog
And rise.
From me...
Surfaces perk on wide beds.

These are my blue voices
And my gardens, wet with intimacy.
These are my rains
And my horse
Is kneeling down
Over the noise,
This is my time,
Time of azure skies
And the speed orbits.
As if
I wanted what he didn't want,
I wanted my wing and my shadow,
I wanted the map of the lost soul
I wanted my breaking,
I wanted to sing
The eyes of the stars embracing me,
I wanted the propagation of wishes
And the tongues setting free
I wanted…
Tomorrow, in a morning like this.

*

The Song of the Wanderer of Basra

Between waking and sleep
I set out a heart for her as if a door
and I knocked,
She shouted: "who is it?"
People were asleep
And my woman woke up from fear
Bare feet in the sea
Covering the sands with her heart
She wrapped herself in the instant and in water.
"Hey.
Who are you?"
Hoarsely I called.
My memory failed
At the Breiha (1) road,
She said:
"Too vague, oh, remote man!"

Here is the door, closed again.
Should I knock?
In a bell tumult below al-Ashar (2) river
My soul splintered
And in front of the Indian market (3)
It will be resurrected.
Our beloved will desert us today
Take her boat across the river…
What do you want?
No heart is here to throb for you,
No stones to echo your night
And the river is strange,
It hurries at night to the shelter
And al-Korah (4) is weaving waves
From the war's sorrows
For the remains of a child lying in the river bed.

What do you want?
Neither the beloved
Nor the sea care,
Nor a ghost of the guards at Bab-Zubair (5).
I drown in al-Kandaq (6)
And smell love as if an ash,
I drink the voices of our pleasure
When they are date palms
Dancing when the jinn surprises them.
What do you want?
A school of sharks snapped up my heart.

The door didn’t open.
The Shanasheel of Basrah are let down with tears.
I shouted, the longing was barking in my bosom,
Waiting for the handle.
I look up and darkness sets in,
Windows of the city disappear in the clouds.
My steps detour to the date palms,
Illusion plants them in my way.
And I call: oh if the rivers doze
On a wish dropping with light…

Who is that wanderer?
A monster is lying in my deep,
Oh, stay closed my doors…
But …I sang for her innocence and yelled:
Oh, my beloved,
By what right do you deny me this night?
My glow is fading while I am knocking your door.
In what sense do I sail
As the wind is enraging me
When the beloved deserted her residence?

Oh, my beloved.
I’m still shouting and shouting
my heart overburdened with my dream
Knocking at your door
Between waking and sleep.

*1,2,3 and 5 are districts in Basrah. 4 and 6 are small creeks in Basrah, too.

*  

Alienation

Alienation at home, in the living room
and in front of the TV,
alienation in the street,
where there is noise and the glaring sun,
alienation in the market, where there is the clamour of
the sellers and the rush of the buyers,
alienation in the cafe, where the upset

customers gossip about the last news,
alienation from my ego
as it unifies one moment and splits in another.

*  

The End of the Story

It was the same story
but the storyteller said,
or so we thought,
that when the king’s claws grew long,
he molted his skin and
at that moment black snakes came out,
finding their way to the earth’s East and West
till night and day mixed
and the world returned to primeval times.

Yet the storyteller didn't tell
the whole tale.
When tomorrow arrived, his audience
remained sleepy but awake
waiting and waiting
not knowing that the story teller
had been eaten by the snakes
and the crazy king
was shedding his skin daily.

*  

Bareness

Strangers gathered in the barren square
chewing an endless tale
and withered longing.
I said let me go with them,
but remained alone.

Letters were tossed in the corner
charred by the live coals of the past,
a string of teardrops drizzling from them
and a lost kiss to my beloved.

Figures multiplied
in the mirrors of illusion
some of them touched me gently
others stung me.

From the extremes of my yearning,
it seemed to me that I gathered up my isolation
beneath an eyelash
and went to sleep.

*  

The Word and the Bullet
The relationship between the word and the bullet is complicated and tense, or rather, one of rivalry. Both of them compete for sovereignty over man's life. Unlike the other creatures, man has the privilege of the word. And the word gave him a greater chance to survive. Extinction was the fate of many creatures whose lives were based on annihilating others!

So, since at the beginning there was the word, the word built civilizations. And since the existence of the word, the speaker has been there and so has the listener; this means the Other (interlocutor) has been there too. The word is valueless without that listener (the receiver).

The word is associated with thinking, building, just as the bullet-- and its mate, the sword-- are associated with dogmatization, destruction and annihilation.

One must say that sometimes the word can be more destructive than the bullet. It may become seditious and ignite disputes. A malicious word is like a malicious tree, we read in the holy Quran. That is why the wicked word is associated with madness and psychiatric disorders, whereas the good word is associated with reason and wisdom.

On the other hand, the bullet is associated with revolutions and liberation from colonial occupation, and in that it contributes towards rebuilding an identity about to be lost.

Revolutionary men like Gandhi proved that the power of the word in liberating the country is much greater than the power of the bullet and violence. That is why we can say that even in resisting the bullet the word could be stronger for its ability to be elusive and convenient.

We assume that in many cases violent resistance will only delay liberation further.

Let the word be the first as long as there is a listener on the other side. Concerning the negotiations with ourselves, it is certainly criminal to let the bullet decide instead of the word, again and again.

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