

**Soheil NAJM**  
**Poems**

**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

6

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.

7

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

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### **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,  
adjectives 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,  
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.

3

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.

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### **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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