

Five Poems

By Soraya Qahwaji¹

Operation Eternal Darkness

Dear commander of carnage,
My family has lived in the same village
For at least five centuries
I know where all my ancestors are buried
I know where I will be buried

Pity the soldiers you beguiled
Breaking under your command
Men who truly defend their land
Do not commit suicide

Pity the uprooted memory
No amount of blood can repair
Pity the worship of brutality
Pity your boys' fear and despair

Up in your fighters, inside your tankers
Pity the failure to belong
Pity your stories, the Lord of armies
Planting the cedars of Lebanon

Pity the baby messiahs shot
In Qana, Gaza and Sderot
Pity the golden calf fodder
The monotony of murder

Turn back while you still can
Lest more die by their own hand
Lest darkness eternal

¹ Soraya Qahwaji is a poet of whom nothing is known. Now let's look at her poems.

Return to sender

Apology for a Poem

Call my poem propaganda, sir
But please don't put me on your list
You've killed all the journalists
Poets are the last shelter

Forgive the clichéd, overused tears
That might prick your connoisseur ears
Forgive my stale verse and my pain
It's only my people that are slain

Forgive me also, commander-lord
For forcing you to kill and expel
Don't hang me yet with the rope
You have pinned to your lapel

Have it your way, take my country
May it profit you more than it did me
I've picked the old walking stick
You thought you had thrown in the sea

Take my land, since you love it so
May you dwell in it in good health
May your children never know
How you put my parents to death

Savor your victory, the deed is done
But let me weep over Lebanon
While all the *kdoyschim*² surround me and wail
"Woe unto us, Hitler has won!"

² Yiddish word used to refer to Holocaust victims.

ما هكذا تستعاد الهوية

No Way to Reclaim Identity

After Mahmoud Darwish's "To a Killer"

if silencing the victim undid the crime
I would have kept silent
if my displacement gave you a home
I would have left you the keys
if my uprooting made up for yours
I wouldn't have waited your prompting
to take to the road
if looking away kept you safe
I would have effaced my face
if forgetting my homeland
gave you a place to belong
I wouldn't teach my children
the names from whence they come
I have picked up your pilgrim's staff
carried for you the burden of exile
my children have learned from your forefathers
the wretched prayer of return
yet you are more frightened
than on the day of your arrival
if the wisdom of the rifle
could bring back your grandmother
I would bear my breast
the one you think nurses snakes
I would become as evil as it takes
for you to be found not guilty

Melos Under Siege

After Thucydides' Melian dialogue and the subsequent history of humanity

the gods have not abandoned us, little ones
the gods are calling us home
when the Athens of this world grow and sprawl
the Melos of this world collapse and fall

the gods do reward virtue, little ones
they will save us from the Athenians
their democracy, and their historians
but not with chariots and javelins

they are already vanquished
who think that we would
do the same to them if we could
they have already perished
who keep no mercy for the meek
lest someone calls them weak

I don't know why Athens must prevail
why the pain or how long
I don't know whose debts we're paying
but the gods have not abandoned us
my little ones
the gods are taking us
all along

The Lamb and the Blade

God will provide the lamb
God always provides
though sometimes he provides hunger
sometimes, a sniper on your roof
playing God with your mother
carrying the groceries home
one bullet for the bursting watermelon
one bullet for your mother's head

God will provide the lamb
God always provides
though sometimes he provides a hammer
and an anvil
sometimes it's your sister they rape before you
to teach you how to behave
If you want to be kept from the blade
go and look for another god