

Shawki Moslemani

Papers of Solitude

Translated by Raghid Nahhas & Noel Abdulahad

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by

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&
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كلمات

Kalimat

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The Arabic title is أوراق العزلة (*awraq al-uzlah*), *awraqul ozlah*.

Raghid Nahhas & Noel Abdulsahad

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*You shall leave for
a cloudless land...
The land you have left is
but a summer cloud.*

Smoke

you haven't yet said a word
you made no step
there is no cloud to cover you
no gazelle to follow you

all the names you know
shimmer and disappear
you stay all alone in the night
watching names that fall
to their cosmic dust.

all your life is a cigarette
tinier than a needle
smoked by a passer-by

Cities

I shall replenish my eyes with cities
that rise amidst their fires
and neigh

I shall shake hands with
those I defeated and
those who defeated me
and those who will laugh

From every tavern
I shall pick a clatter
a laughter
a rose
a little glass
and, in the night, I shall embrace
someone other than you
and shiver
at the discoveries of the traveller
in the real cities

Dust

When I open my eyes
more than ten men encircle me
they all look like me
but they are slimmer
What is your name? ...Shawki
What is your name? ...Shawki

in this revolving room
I sit in the middle
besieged by many eyes
and solemn faces

I am not a thief
you are not bandits
I own my solitude,
and your siege is
this vacuum in my hand.

All along the way I
hastily carry my memories
I do not look back

I do not cry
only
my heart slows down

your faces are dead
sheets of lead
years of dust.

Dead Ones

On the chair of waiting
I do not part with my chair
and on the opposite side is
my head
my face
my nose
my long legs

An hour
and I have gone

also
on the chair of waiting
on the opposite side
heads
eyes
circles

dead ones
two closed eyes
a chair
and wind slamming doors.

Madman

The stranger fondles the hair of solitude
thinking that God is nearby
and he tells tales

passers-by think him mad
so he becomes silent.

When They Awoke

What could a man do
having run and not arrived?
Having carried his heart
upon the palms of his hands
placed it on a table
for the first hungry man
for the first thief
the bohemian
the passer-by...
He dispensed of
the pomegranate of his head
giving lovers 1995¹ pips
spread his body for them to recline on
swayed with them towards the sea
took them up to the top of the mountain
and when they awoke
they dropped the stones of their hands
on his head

¹ This poem was written in 1995.

Circles

A man
should he sleep
soon is awakened by
circles echoing
in his head
he has children
waiting to get out.

A man
worthy of water
would be drunk by the sky
until he becomes desert

A man
becomes
a
m
a
n
strewn by the wind.

Screaming

I'd rather
you screamed
but despite
your agony
you are kind.

Graveyard

Silence grazes the weed of myth
an owl on a rock
stares at the passers-by

who ever passes by
resembles us.

Night

All your life is nothing but
a line upon the water
All your eyes are
only smoke
Night is silent
as though the dead are
its habit.

Locust

He stares with locust eyes
almost gulping
the last islands.
Locust creeping towards
the last two oases
his blood splashed on the walls
and his ashes scattered
over the sky.

Robot

He said: ‘I am going.’
Off he went
one dash in all directions
his soul fell on the road
his memory fell
his lower jaw
his tongue
his feet
his hands
his heart
his guts...
then he disappeared.

Most

The drunkard is
most balanced
most stable
most transparent
in a drunk world.

He Does not Turn His Face

Behind the cigarette's smoke
you watch your life:
a seat off which birds peck no bread
and a passer-by
does not turn his face.

The Lakes of Sand

How can he gather his limbs?
a hand
is on the island of dreams
a leg
is in the lakes of sand

How can he
gather his eyes?
How can he
place his heart where it belongs?

Desire is
the anguish of fire
and his desire
is smoke.

Someone Who Looks Like You

You
with the
chestnut face
there is a stone in
your grimace
have you dropped
a smile-looking thing
from your small face?
Your nose is almost falling
you stare as if listening hard
I have tunes
for cases in staring at walls
When you look at me
I see a wolf
knotted eyebrows and
displaced ears
Are you mad?

Surely,
you must have lost something
that looks like the moon
growing every night
like a child
like shepherds
like nomads.

Stone

Oh!
How in your eyes
all became stone!

Absent

...and he counts waning names
of places
and friends
who happily rode the wave crests
until they were strewn by the wind.

Optimist

He advances two steps
attempts
to drill a hole
in life's wall

He raises his head
and smiles.

Strangers

They walked down to town
from faraway mountains
barefooted silent in a funeral.
The wind scattered their feet
and their fields vanished
behind rainy eyes.

Whips

Laughter disappeared behind
heart-nestled evenings
on treetops,
on the roof.

The water of life in merciful skies is
for other people.

On the asphalt, tearful butterflies
yearn for a life
that will never come,
a murmur
that will never be.

Harvest

The standing carriage is
your life
yet you
hardly push your years.
Your fields
your thrashers
are wind.

Another Herb

Opium is the herb of the other isthmus

Drop by drop they drink their delusions
Intoxicated by wakefulness,
and lightning in their hands
turns into ashes.

Voices

Voices swimming in space
wrecked ships
bones
on the banks
we bury them alone
silently.

A Fang

It does not scarify the stillness...

A fang
in
the vein.

Departure

We are the bleeding of the mountains
who sketched silver dreams
on the shores of
the city that sheltered us,
then we slept.
We did not know
that the ship we beckoned
carried us away.

Group

I have not known your name yet
your name was Shawki
your name became Jimmy
but surely, you are not Jimmy
you are a group
Jimmy alone
sleeps
and you all dream.

Bill on the Other Side of the Road

Bill
you shred words
like you shred lettuce
I wish you would plunge into
the seventh earth
with all your questions
and your chatter.
Sometimes
I want you to resemble my shadow
and say anything
no matter how trivial it is.

I think of you now
shall I call for you from
the other side of the street
or shall I utterly forget you?
My head is jammed with emptiness
and the cold creeps into my bones.

Fetch the Bottle

Sam
my tortoise friend
you are late by twenty trains
and two aeroplanes
my head is a wood mill and engines
give me the bottle
hurry up.

Abdullah

How could you aimlessly wander
how come you did not turn your head
you did not raise a hand
you did not break a branch?

How did you surrender
your eyes to the wind?

Our rendezvous was
on the coral beach!

Hope

Travel in your cigarette's smoke
like a drunkard...
Among the ruins
there will be a flower
for your broken heart
Travel in the mist of your eyes
like a wandering man
there will be shores
for your veins you charged
with song about the earth.

Cawnin

1

Cawnin² stands at 800 metres high
that someone has a glimpse...
yet other villages
rise
higher
still!

2

All alone
with the night
and the storm
your hand is out-flown
of air

² Cawnin is the poet's village in south Lebanon.

Sleep O flower
your blood spills over doorsteps
the starving are eying the wheat
the naked are in the cold
the sky is space

I say sleep
like the dead.

The Departed

I draw her in tears
lost by the road
barefooted
followed by pebbles.

Beirut

In a faraway country
the sun-heated breeze blows
the memories simmer in my head
and from a cloud
two drops
fall...

What Do You Want?

Carried on the rhythm of running, or
heaped in space
when fever sets you ablaze, or when
you are formed by a place

the distance between
one hand and the other,
a curve of a circle
between one eye and the other
one mouth and the other

what do you want from
the wheat-coloured face,
from the coal-coloured head,
from your corroded language
and from your life?
Do you want to strip off your skin?
To powder the air with dust?

In the eye of death,
you are alive.
In the eye of water,
you are lifeless.
What do you want?

Corner

I am not who I am to collect the clouds
in my hand and scatter them
over doleful lands
or make the dawn
out of my blood,
from the roar of the sea
longing for its deliverance
I am not who I am to be
thrown by passion
over the carpet of space
to have opened for the river
the outlet of its life.

I have quenched the birds' thirst,
I have herded the deer
I have made the wind smell the
fragrance of flowers
I have opened the city for the
barefooted

Yet, I am cornered.

They Said

Grass dried on
the souls of your children...
they said
and the birds died inside
the cages of their eyes.

A child's hand
is a brush
painting a bird
in space.

Naked

They were naked
on bare mountains
they made oak trees of their hands
and rocks out of their backs
filled the roads with fury
raised their flags
made their blood a beacon for seagulls
and whenever they advanced
they would drink rainwater
and knead wildflowers

A Window to the Sea

The river submerses me
I am the earth's passionate fruit
the wind inscribes its melodies
upon my face
my sight roams this vastness
the earth turns to my hand
that merrily holds the seasons
by wind and rain and flowers and fields.
With my hand, I raise the stars,
release them in the heavens
that I may celebrate the distance

Once
I was the forest,
beginning in the branches
a master in the plant kingdom
carrying the tops of the trees upward
and sleeping like a bird
guarded by the breeze.

Once

I was the caves, the rocks and
the valleys...
preceded by my caution
in the animal kingdom
with my fire, which I lit with a stone
to change my voice


And once

I was the fields in the
plains of the world
blossoming with my comely fingers
and upright back
lashed by whips that
I fed bread to fatten
and I become slimmer
and avenge myself.

Now

I have completed my life's cycle
cracked by steel wheels
filled by oil
clotted by carbon
overwhelmed by mud so that
lead lies in my blood
and stones pull me

I completed my life's cycle
to open a window to the sea
and race the wind.



Shawki Moslemani's poetry explores the human condition, in the style he has made his own: using his words as 'flashes' of expression, short in length, long in effect. He is a poet of impulse akin to a sudden throwing of a pebble, causing ripples in the receiving waters. When the ripples dissipate, they regenerate themselves as echoes in our innermost appreciation of the meanings they reveal. When the echoes dissipate, they carry us with them into an outermost world of Sufism and mysticism. But Moslemani's twilight zone is where the material and the spiritual become one.

There is a great affinity in Moslemani for "Cawnin", his birthplace village in Lebanon, where every rock on every hill is a poem singing the tales of the good earth and the good people Moslemani identifies with. However, though the natural images in Moslemani may well spring from the landscape of his village, his poetry is that of a man with a deep sense of universality. It is a universality which is always present, despite the pain apparent in his attempt to reconcile his village inheritance of spontaneity and simplicity with the sophisticated state of mind into which he has managed to elevate himself philosophically and intellectually.

The Publisher

Noel Abdulahad is a writer, critic and translator who lives in USA. He is renowned for his translation of Gibran's *The Prophet*, considered the best. He is an adviser to *Kalimat*.

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