

Standing Before the Ruins of Al-Birweh

Like birds, I tread lightly on the earth's skin
so as not to wake the dead
I shut the door to my emotions to become my other
I don't feel that I am a stone sighing
as it longs for a cloud
Thus I tread as if I am a tourist
and a correspondent for a foreign newspaper
Of this place I choose the wind
I choose absence to describe it
Absence sat, neutral, around me
The crow saw it
Halt, my two companions!
Let us experience this place our own way:
Here, a sky fell on a stone and bled it
so that anemones would bloom in the spring
(Where is my song now?)
Here, the gazelle broke the glass of my window
so that I would follow it
(So where is my song now?)
Here, the magical morning butterflies carried the path to my school
(So where is my song now?)
Here I saddled a horse to fly to my stars
(So where is my song now?)
I say to my two companions:
Stop so that I may weigh the place
and its emptiness with *Jahili* odes
full of horses and departure
For every rhyme we will pitch a tent
For every home to be stormed by the wind,
there is a rhyme
But I am the son of my first tale
My milk is warm in my mother's breast
The bed is swung by two tiny birds
My father is building my tomorrow with his two hands
I didn't grow up and so did not go to exile
The tourist says: Wait for the dove to finish its cooing!
I say: It knows me and I know it, but the letter has not arrived
The journalist interrupts my secret song:

Do you see that dairy factory behind that strong pine tree?
I say: No, I only see the gazelle in the net
He says: What about the modern roads on the rubble of houses?
I say: No, I don't see them
I only see the garden under them
and I see the cobweb
He says: Dry your two tears with a handful of fresh grass
I say: That is my other crying over my past
The tourist says: The visit is over
I haven't found anything to photograph except a ghost
I say: I see absence with all its instruments
I touch it and hear it. It lifts me high
I see the ends of the distant skies
Whenever I die I notice
I am born again and I return
from absence to absence

Translated by Sinan Antoon, from Darwish's posthumous collection, *La Uridu Li-Hadhihi al-Qasidati an Tantahi* (I Don't Want This Poem to End) (Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyis, 2009).

* Al-Birweh is the village in which Darwish was born on March 13, 1941. It was occupied and depopulated in 1948 by Israeli forces. Its inhabitants became refugees, some in Lebanon, some internally displaced and designated present-absentees. In 1949, a Kibbutz was established. A year later a settlement was built on the lands of al-Birweh.