

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Three Poems

1. JORDAN VALLEY

I shouted at a bird
As he flew westward over Jordan Valley
'Are your papers all in order?
Do you have the right to fly
across this border?'

But he flew on unheeding
To where my loved ones cry
And pray in silent pleading
As the weary years trudge by
And all our fields and vineyards lie
Beneath the hands of strangers.
And I am bound with paper chains
Of documents that won't be signed
And boundaries by fear defined,
And treaties of men's selfish claims,
The rule of dogs within their mangers.

That bird in his unhindered flight
Was totally within his rights
What irony, I wondered then
That birds possess more rights than men.

Michael Dooley

2. MARTYR

precision lazer guided xenophobia
dismantling the rubble of dreams
awakening the silence of screams
disseminating random death
with pinpoint accuracy
extinguishing a child's breath
to make a world safe for hypocrisy

half a century
of compressed frustration set to detonate
at the precise location to achieve
the greatest damage to the road
the beauty of the girl before she died
it seems there was one thing we never tried
there was still love

I must believe
although at times I barely want to
it is written in my contract
not the fine print
but the main clause
I cannot ignore it
even when the anger gnaws
away at sensibility
and I dimly understand
the rusted barbed wire of futility
that confined you
that defined you
that degraded you
that persuaded you
to throw a bomb
or become a bomb

I feel your pain
but I must tell you once again
as I have always told you
pain alone cannot condone
your right to kill
but still I long to hold you
till your tears explode,
hot, scalding fragments on my cheek

Three Poems by Michael Dooley.

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and speak the words
I have no right to speak:

When you give way to hate
You step into the snare they set for you
A trapped falcon
Proving itself worthy of the hunter's blows
By flailing wings and scrabbling claws
Suddenly black clad outlaws
Masking your own nobility.
Tarnishing the glory of your cause
By passion's importunity

One day amongst the piles of debris
you may look into the eyes
made dreamy by the clearing smoke
of the ones who sought to crush you
whose hands you sought to thrust
violently away
and say
perhaps somewhere within us
we are more alike
than we ever dared to realise
perhaps the blood that long ago
stained the cobblestones of our great city
can still cleanse us from this present hell
perhaps together we can find our way
And there is no hatred
that can undo the redemption
of that day.

Michael Dooley

3. TO A PALESTINIAN POET FRIEND

It is not hard for me to speak of peace
For I have never known a war
I've never seen my brother die before
My very eyes.
I've never heard the cries
Of wounded children, tried to calm their fears
Or dry a mother's bitter tears
For sons who will return no more.

It is not hard for me to speak of love,
But you, my brother, you have seen the worst:
Your homes seized by an iron fisted glove
Your numb ears ringing from the burst
Of rocket shells.
Yes, you have tasted of the deepest wells
Of war's insanity
Yet somehow have retained the cool
Untainted waters of your rich humanity,
And kept your faith
A hidden polished jewel.

I wish my eyes concealed two reservoirs
Of tears, that I might weep them all for Palestine.
But I know you would take my hand in yours
And tell me not to cry,
But look up where the stars of God still shine
And dream of love and opened prison doors
And talk of olive groves and flowering vines
And breathe the mountain air of hope divine:
that peace shall one day wash
the world's embattled shores.
Oh my brother, you are braver far than I.

Michael Dooley