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If I Were Another

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MAHMOUD DARWISH

If I Were Another

If I were another on the road, I would not have looked back,
I would have said what one traveler said
to another: stranger! awaken
the guitar more! Delay our tomorrow so our road
may extend and space may widen for us, and we may get rescued
from our story together: you are so much yourself. And I am
so much other than myself right here before you!

If I were another I would have belonged to the road,
so that neither I nor you would return. Awaken the guitar
and we might sense the unknown and the route that tempts
the traveler to test gravity. I am only
my steps, and you are both my compass and my chasm.
If I were another on the road, I would have
hidden my emotions in the suitcase, so my poem
would be of water, diaphanous, white,
abstract, and lightweight . . . stronger than memory,
and weaker than dew drops, and I would have said:
my abyss is this expanse!

If I were another on the road, I would have said
to the guitar: teach me an extra string!
Because the house is farther, and the road to it prettier —
that's what my new song would say. Whenever
the road lengthens the meaning renews, and I become two
on this road: I . . . and another!

To Our Land

To our land,
and it is the one near the word of god,
a ceiling of clouds.
To our land,
and it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns,
the map of absence.
To our land,
and it is the one tiny as a sesame seed,
a heavenly horizon . . . and a hidden chasm.
To our land,
and it is the one poor as a grouse's wings,
holy books . . . and an identity wound.
To our land,
and it is the one surrounded with torn hills,
the ambush of a new past.
To our land, and it is a prize of war,
the freedom to die from longing and burning
and our land, in its bloodied night,
is a jewel that glimmers for the far upon the far
and illuminates what is outside it . . .
As for us, inside,
we suffocate more!

In Her Absence I Created Her Image

In her absence I created her image: out of the earthly
the hidden heavenly commences. I am here weighing
the expanse with the Jahili odes . . . and absence
is the guide, it is the guide. For each rhyme a tent
is pitched. And for each thing blowing in the wind
a rhyme. Absence teaches me its lesson: "If it weren't
for the mirage you wouldn't have been steadfast . . ."
And in the emptiness, I disassembled a letter from one
of the ancient alphabets and I leaned on absence. So who am I
after the visitation? A bird, or a passerby amidst the symbols
and the memory vendors? As if I were an antique piece,
as if I were a ghost sneaking in from Yabous, telling myself:
let's go to the seven hills. Then I placed
my mask on a stone, and walked as the sleepless
walk, led by my dream. And from one moon
to another I leapt. There is enough of unconsciousness
to liberate things from their history. And there
is enough of history to liberate unconsciousness
from its ascension. "Take me to our early
years," my first girlfriend says. "Leave
the windows open for the house sparrow to enter
your dream," I say . . . then I awaken, and no city is in
the city. No "here" except "there." And no there
but here. If it weren't for the mirage
I wouldn't have walked to the seven hills . . .
If it weren't for the mirage!

Translations by Fady Joudah