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MAHMOUD DARWISH
TRANSLATED BY FADY JOUDAH

*The “Red Indian’s” Penultimate
Speech to the White Man*

Did I say, The Dead? There is no Death
here, there is only a change of worlds.
—Duwamish Chief, Seattle

I.

Then, we are who we are in the Mississippi. We have what is left to us of
yesterday.

But the sky’s color has changed, and the sea to the east
has changed, master of white ones! horse master, so what do you want
from those who are going to the trees of the night?

Our souls are high, our pastures sacred, and the stars
are illuminated speech...if you stared into them you would read our
story entire:
we were born here between water and fire...and we will become reborn
in the clouds

at the edge of the lapis coast after resurrection...soon.

So do not kill the grass anymore, the grass has a soul in us that defends
the soul in the earth.

Horse master! train your horse to apologize
to nature’s soul for what you have done to our trees:
Ah! my tree my sister
they have tortured you as they have tortured me
do not ask forgiveness
for the logger of your mother and mine...

2.

...The white master will not understand the ancient words
here, in spirits emancipated between trees and sky...
because Columbus the free has the right to find India in any sea,
and the right to name our ghosts as pepper or Indian,
and he is able to break the compass of the sea then mend it
along with the errors of the northerly wind, but does not believe
that humans are equal like air and water outside the map's kingdom!
And that they are born as people are born in Barcelona, though they
worship
nature's god in everything...and do not worship gold...
Columbus the free searches for a language he did not find here,
and for gold in our kind ancestors' skulls, he did
as he pleased with the dead and the living in us. Then
why does he still see this annihilation from his grave to its end?
Nothing remains of us but an ornament of ruin, and light feathers
on the garments of the lakes. You have burst seventy million hearts...
enough,
enough for you to return from our death as monarch of the new time...
Isn't it time we met, stranger, as two strangers of one time,
and of one land, the way strangers meet by a chasm?
We have what is ours...and we have what is yours of sky.
And you have what is yours...and what is ours of air and water.
We have what we have of pebbles...and you have what you have of iron.
Come, let's split the light in the force of shadow, take what you want
of the night, and leave two stars for us to bury our dead in their orbit,
take what you want of the sea, and leave two waves for us to fish in,
take the gold of the earth and the sun, and leave the land of our names
and go back, stranger, to your kin...and look for India.

3.

...Our names are trees of the deity's speech, and birds that soar higher
 than the rifle. Do not sever the trees of the name, you comers
 from the sea in war, and do not exhale your horses aflame in the plains,
 you have your god and we have ours, you have your faith and we have
 ours,

so do not bury god in books that promised you a land in our land
 as you claim, and do not make your god a chamberlain in the royal
 court!

Take the roses of our dreams to see what we see of joy!
 And sleep in the shadow of our willows to fly like pigeons
 as our kind ancestors flew and returned in peace.

You will lack, white ones, the memory of departure from the
 Mediterranean

you will lack eternity's solitude in a forest that doesn't overlook the
 chasm

you will lack the wisdom of fractures, the setback of war
 you will lack a rock that doesn't obey the rapid flow of time's river
 you will lack an hour of meditation in anything that might ripen in you
 a necessary sky for the soil, you will lack an hour of hesitation between
 one path

and another, you will lack Euripides one day, the Canaanite and the
 Babylonian poems
 and Solomon's songs of Shulamit, and you will lack the lily of longing
 you will lack, white ones, a memory that tames the horses of madness
 and a heart that scratches the rock to burnish itself on the violins'
 calling...

you will lack the confusion of the gun: if our murder is imperative
 then do not murder the animals that have befriended us, and do not
 murder our yesterday

you will lack a truce with our ghosts in the barren winter nights
 and you will lack a dim sun, a gibbous moon, for the crime to appear

less festive on the movie screen, so take your time
to kill god...

4.

...We know what this ambiguous rhetoric conceals for us.
A sky descending on our salt pacifies the soul. A willow
walking afoot the wind, a beast founding a kingdom in
the vacuoles of wounded space...and a sea salting our wooden doors.
The earth wasn't any heavier before creation, but we knew something
like this existed before time...the wind will narrate to us
our beginning and end. Yet today we hemorrhage our present
and bury our days in the ashes of legend. Athena is not ours,
we know your days from the smoke of the place, Athena is not yours,
we know what the master-metal prepared for our sake
and for the sake of gods that did not defend the salt in our bread.
And we know that fact is stronger than truth, that time
has changed when the weapons changed. So who will raise our voices
to a brittle rain in the clouds? Who will wash the light after us
and who will dwell in our temple after us? Who will preserve our rituals
from the metallic roar? "We promise you civilization," the stranger said,
and said: I am the master of time, I have come to inherit your earth,
pass before me, to count you corpse by corpse over the face of the lake.
"I promise you civilization," he said, to revive the gospels, he said, so pass,
for god to remain mine alone, dead Indians are better
to the lord in his heights than living Indians, the lord is white
and white is this day: you have a world and we have a world...
The stranger says strange words, and digs a well in the earth
to bury the sky in it. The stranger says strange words
and hunts our children and the butterflies.
What have you promised our garden, stranger?
Some tin roses prettier than our roses? Do what you please, but do
you know the deer will not chew the grass if our blood touches it?

Do you know the buffalo and the plants are our brothers?
Do not dig the earth any deeper! Do not wound the turtle whose back
the earth, our grandmother the earth, sleeps upon, our trees are her hair,
and our adornment her flower. "There is no death in this earth," do not
change
her fragile creation! Do not break the mirrors of her gardens,
or startle her, do not hurt the earth. Our rivers are her waist
and we are her grandchildren, we and you, so do not kill her ...
We will be gone, in a little while, so take our blood and leave her
as she is,
as god's most beautiful writing on the water,
leave her for him ...and for us.
We will hear our ancestors' voices in the wind, and listen
to their pulse in our tree buds. This earth is our grandmother,
all of it is sacred, stone by stone, this land is a hut
for gods that dwell within us, star by star, and illuminate for us
the prayer nights ... We walked barefoot to touch the soul of pebbles,
and we marched naked for the soul, the soul of the air, to wear us as
women
who give back nature's gifts—our history is her history. Time had enough
time for us to be born in her, and return from and to her: we patiently
give back
to the earth her souls. And we preserve the memories of our loved ones
in jars
of oil and salt, we used to hang their names on the birds of the creeks.
We were the first, there was no ceiling between the sky and the blue
of our doors,
there were no horses chewing the grass of our deer in the fields,
no strangers
passing through the nights of our wives, so leave a flute behind for the
wind to cry

over the wounded people of this place...and over you tomorrow,
to cry...over you...tomorrow!

5.

We bid our fires farewell, and we don't return the greeting...

Don't write the decrees of the new god, the iron god, upon us, and
don't ask

the dead for a peace treaty, none of them remain
to promise you peace with the self and others, we had
longevity here, before England's rifles, before French wine
and Influenza, we used to live as we should live, companions of the
gazelle.

We memorized our oral history, we used to promise you innocence and
daisies,
you have your god and we have ours, you have your past and we have
ours, and time

is a river, when we stare into the river time wells up within us...

Will you not memorize a bit of poetry to halt the slaughter?

Were you not born of women? Did you not suckle as we did
the milk of longing for mothers? Did you not wear wings as we did
to join the swallows? We used to announce spring to you
so don't draw your weapons! We can exchange some gifts and some
songs.

My nation was here. My nation died here. Here the chestnut trees
hide my nation's souls. My nation will return as air and light and water,
so take my mother's land by sword, I won't sign my name
to the peace treaty between the murdered and his killer, I won't sign
my name
to the purchase of a single hand's breadth of thorn around the corn fields,
I know that I bid the last sun farewell, and I that wrap myself with my
name

to fall into the river, I know I will come back to my mother's heart for you
to enter, master of white ones, your age... Raise, then, above
my corpse the freedom statutes that do not return the greeting, and
chisel
the iron cross on my rocky shadow, I will ascend in a little while the
summits of song,
the song of group suicides that parade their history to the far,
and I will release the voices of our birds into them: right here
the strangers conquered salt, the sea merged with clouds, and the
strangers conquered
the wheat chaff in us, laid out lines for lightning and electricity,
here the eagle died depressed in suicide, here the strangers conquered
us. And nothing remains for us in the new time.
Here our bodies evaporate, cloud by cloud, into space.
Here our souls glitter, star by star, in the space of song!

6.

A long time will pass for our present to become a past like us.
But first, we will march to our doom, we will defend the trees we wear
and defend the bell of the night, and a moon we desire over our huts.
We will defend the imprudence of our gazelles, the clay of our pots
and our feathers in the wings of the final songs. In a little while
you will erect your world upon our world: from our cemeteries
you will open the road to the artificial moon. This is the age of industry.
This is the age of minerals, and out of coal the champagne of the strong
will dawn...

There are dead and settlements, dead and bulldozers, dead
and hospitals, dead and radar screens that capture the dead
who die more than once in life, screens that capture the dead
who live after death, and the dead who breed the beast of civilization
as death,
and the dead who die to carry the earth after the relics...

Where, master of white ones, do you take my people... and your people?
To what abyss does this robot loaded with planes and plane carriers
take the earth, to what spacious abyss do you ascend?
You have what you desire: the new Rome, the Sparta of technology
and the ideology
of madness,
but as for us, we will escape from an age we haven't yet prepared our
anxieties for.

We will move to the land of birds as a flock of previous humans
and look upon our land through its pebbles, through holes in the clouds,
look upon our land through the speech of stars
and through the air of the lakes, through the fragile corn fuzz and
the tomb's flower, through poplar leaves, through everything
that besieges you, white ones, we will look, as dying dead, as dead
who live, dead who return, who disclose the secrets,
so grant the earth respite until it tells the truth, all the truth,
about you
and about us...
about us
and about you!

7.

There are dead who sleep in rooms you will build
there are dead who visit their past in places you demolish
there are dead who pass over bridges you will construct
there are dead who illuminate the night of butterflies, dead
who come by dawn to drink their tea with you, as peaceful
as your rifles left them, so leave, you guests of the place,
some vacant seats for your hosts...they will recount
to you the terms of peace...with the dead!