Poems: ‘Do not live a day in a homeland’s memory’ and ‘O fire be peaceful’

Emad Jabbar

Emad Jabbar was born in 1968 in Maysan, Southern Iraq. He has published two books of poetry in Arabic – There Were Songs There (1996) and Tears On the Eyelids of Distant Windows (1998) – and won a number of awards, including the Iraq Prize for Creativity, presented by the Ministry of Culture and Information in 2000. In March 2000 Emad travelled to the United Arab Emirates to receive a prize from the Al-Sada House for Journalism. He has not yet returned to Iraq. While he was living in Jordan as a political refugee with the UNHCR in 2001 his long poem ‘O You Prayer Rug of Al-Aqsa’ won the (American) Holy Land Institute for Relief and Development's Cultural Contest on the theme of ‘The Suffering of the Palestinian Refugees’. In 2002, he won the Al-Sharjah Award for Arabic Creativity, presented by the Ministry of Information and Culture of the UAE, for the poetry collection A Feather from Sorrow. The material prize of the Al-Sharjah Award is the upcoming publication of A Feather of Sorrow (in Arabic) by the UAE government. Also in 2002, A Feather of Sorrow was translated into English by the Iraqi scholar Yaqoub Abouna. Emad has not yet sought publication of this work in translation. He migrated to New Zealand in 2002, and is currently living in Wellington where he is studying Religion at Victoria University, writing new pieces in both English and Arabic, and working with the International Writers’ group (established 2002).

In a live performance recorded for the accompanying DVD, he reads two poems in Arabic which reflect his personal experience of exile.

We are most grateful to Tarik Bary for providing the English subtitles.

See DVD
Do not live a day in a homeland's memory

Each time you pack up
  your things to travel
All the little stars flutter
  in you
All the bridge's lamps return
  you
All the house's eyes
The stubborn date palms
  return you
Their nascent clusters have landed
And the last squadrons are
  startled in your heart
And they shout: don't leave
You are a poet
You are he
Who gathers people's tears
In the dawn of registers
You are a witness
Live here between the
  twin rivers and persist
Live here and strew the
  years of sufferance
In the embers of the braziers
You weep every time a bullet
  hurts Baghdad
Every time the river's water
  returns a drowned babe
The voice of death's colour
  in its eyes wounds you

Leaves from the bushes' top
  falling
On the migrant's crown
And the green boughs almost
Grasping the garments
And the bitter orange
Throwing fragrance and questions
  in the way
Why do you pack the bags