

SCTIW Review

Journal of the Society for Contemporary Thought and the Islamicate World

ISSN: 2374-9288

April 26, 2016

Samih Al-Qasim, *All Faces but Mine: The Poetry of Samih Al-Qasim*, trans. ‘Abdulwahid Lu’lu’a, Syracuse University Press, 2015, 288 pp., \$24.95 US (pbk), ISBN 978-0-8156-1052-6.

The poetry of Palestinian poet Samih Al-Qasim, entitled *All Faces but Mine* and translated from the Arabic by ‘Abdulwahid Lu’lu’a, is an excellent addition to the repertoire of Palestinian poetry in English. In addition to publishing fifty-six works of poetry, Al-Qasim also published prose works, translations, and an autobiography. The book gathers selected poems from fourteen collections of poetry that Al-Qasim published between 1991 and 2014. This is a valuable contribution to the dissemination of the poetry of this iconic Palestinian voice.

Samih Al-Qasim (1939-2014), together with Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), had launched in the 1960s and 1970s what came to be known as “Poetry of Resistance.” This poetry emerged after the Nakba (Catastrophe), when the state of Israel was founded in 1948. Then, about 700,000 Palestinians were dispossessed of their homeland, their properties, and their livelihoods. Consequently, many Palestinians became refugees, and the name of Palestine was erased from the maps. However about 163,000 Palestinians, including Al-Qasim and Darwish, remained in what became Israel where they lived under military rule, usually referred to as the Emergency Laws, until 1966. These Palestinians came to be called Arab Israelis. Al-Qasim and Darwish, two poets of resistance, among others, began composing poems and songs of resistance in Arabic, to challenge the settler-colonialist state, and to reclaim their Palestinian identity and Arabic literary heritage. Lu’lu’a’s translation into English of Al-Qasim’s poetry offers twelve selections of poems from the various time periods of Al-Qasim’s output, with titles and year of publication for each section. The overarching theme of *All Faces but Mine* is the voicing of Palestinian identity and the call for liberation and justice for the Palestinian cause. In addition to the dominant ironic tone, the tenor of the poems strikes me as being that of the secular humanist whereby the angry speaker lays down the facts for his “brother, enemy” (“I Regret” 181-219).

Invoking historical, literary, mythological, and Biblical parallels, the poems universalize the Palestinian heritage. *All Faces but Mine* encompasses a diversity of styles, subjects and conversations from intimate conversation with Darwish to the allegorical poem addressed to Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), to the Israeli enemy in the aftermath of the 2008 Israeli attack on Gaza.

Browsing through the poems, one is able to discern the development of Al-Qasim’s voice as he is shaped by the concrete historical experience of the Palestinian people, from the Oslo Accords of the 1990s through the 2008-2009 bombardment of Gaza and the last

poems he wrote before his death in 2014. That the poet is the representative of his people is evident. For example, the longest selections from the *Collected Works, Volume 3* (1991), with which the book opens, is reminiscent of Al-Qasim's early poems of resistance. They are mostly short poems accessible to average Arab audiences—Arab culture is mostly oral where poetry is recited rather than read, especially in Palestine/Israel where Israeli censorship controls publications by Palestinians. The poems in this section describe the daily violence experienced by ordinary Palestinians: children, women, martyrs, and poets. The admixture is striking: bombings, arms, fires, blood, and death comingle with song, wrath, and resistance at the unjust enemy, the silent globe. The image of children hurling stones at the fully equipped soldiers is a flashback to the first Intifada (the Arabic for “shaking off”) of 1987. “Asking No Permission,” a quiet and careful poem, is exemplary of the poet's steadfast song to freedom and adoration of his “captive body sweetheart,” i.e., the homeland.

In his introduction to the book, Lu'lu'a mentions Al-Qasim's early development of a specific genre of poetry, described as “flock poems” after the Arabic flight of birds, *Sirbiyya*. This is a fascinating creative invention on Al-Qasim's part whereby the movement in and out of poetic images and ideas in the poem imitates the movement of a flock of birds in flight. *All Faces but Mine* includes three examples of flock poems, and I would like to comment on one of them: “Funeral Oration by the Deceased at His Memorial Celebration” (2000).

A fairly long poem of fifteen pages, “Funeral Oration” is a narrative whose speaker is a dead martyr, but he is also alive, witnessing his own memorial service. One observes at the outset that the absent-present Palestinian motif is at the heart of the narrative. The intermingling of reality, fiction, and illusion is infused with irony as the speaker/martyr witnesses events and converses with characters: real-historical and fictional-literary, to describe the tragic emotionality of the Palestinian context. The opening stanza sets the scene and tone of the poem by thanking the “delegations” from distant lands who came to accompany his coffin, carrying artificial “wreaths/of flowers slow to wither” (115). The concluding stanza returns to the same scene, giving the narrative poem a circular conclusion, as if life returns to business as usual!

The most prominent literary allusion in “Funeral Oration” is to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where the themes of love, homeland, doubt and responsibility are mixed with betrayal, usurpation, revenge and madness. Al-Qasim draws an interesting parallel between the uncle's killing of the legitimate King of Denmark who marries the widow/mother/motherland and Palestine's loss to the Israelis in 1948. The speaker identifies with Hamlet who weaves back and forth within the drama, and with the swallow whose flight in and out of clouds, is “lost on a tree of clouds, lost” (117) as if landing on the horizon of death, after he was imprisoned. This imaginative movement blurs the real/imaginary that not only represents art imitating life, but perhaps life imitating art? Al-Qasim himself was imprisoned by the Israelis several times for his resistant stance; he was tortured, dismissed from jobs, and his work censored. Memories of war trigger the image of the swallow who at the arrival of spring forgets the frost when he lost a wing during the harsh winter. What adds to the tragic feeling in the poem is the mixture of memory and forgetfulness, of life and death, causing confusion with “a thousand chaotic states.” One could take the reference as representing the Arab states who, despite their numbers and the rhetoric of their leaders, offer no supporting wall for the speaker to rest his back. What is evident in the poem is the fear many Palestinians share. It is not only the loss of the homeland when the name of Palestine was erased from world maps that they fear, but the feeling of loss seems to reflect the angst many Palestinians feel about their cause. As the

older generations die out, there is a growing tension that Palestinian history and their heritage will be forgotten. The poet seems to be wrestling with the threat of oblivion that may become the fate of Palestine.

One of the most memorable stanzas in *Funeral Oration* is a self-reflective vision of the speaker/bird who stares into the open sky that mirrors the arduous mountains he must climb/fly over. The homeland seems to have become unreal, a mere reflection in mirrors. This appears to be the ultimate conflation of fiction and reality where the speaker does not recognize his own face. Even the homeland disappears into the world of the unreal: “My homeland is the mirrors./I gaze into them, I gaze for long” (121). And what does he see? Everything but himself! One is reminded of Darwish’s poem, “We Travel like Other People” where he speaks of “the country of words.”

I recommend ‘Abdulwahid Lu’lu’a’s translation of Samih Al-Qasim’s poems compiled in *All Faces but Mine*. This excellent translation opens another avenue to English-speaking audiences to the ways the Palestinian imaginary continues to respond to the ongoing violence the Palestinian people have been experiencing since 1948. The poems in this volume are exemplary of Samih Al-Qasim’s mature voice and creativity. The style is concrete, imaginative, plaintive, and accessible. It would be of interest to the general reader and the specialist, especially students of Middle Eastern Studies, as well as Postcolonial, Global, and Cultural Studies.

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Citation Information

Mir, Salam, Review of *All Faces but Mine: The Poetry of Samih Al-Qasim*, *SCTIW Review*, April 26, 2016. <http://sctiw.org/sctiwreviewarchives/archives/1120>.

ISSN: 2374-9288