

Mohammad

Mahmoud Darwish

Darwish's Requiem for Mohammad Al-Dura, the 12-year-old boy shot by Israeli soldiers as he was stranded with his father at Netzarim Junction in Gaza, was published in September 2000. The shooting was caught on camera and broadcast widely in the days after it happened.

Nestled in his father's arms, a bird
 afraid of the hell above him, Mohammad prays:
 Father, protect me from flying.
 My wing is weak against the wind,
 and the light is black.

Mohammad wants to go home,
 without a bicycle, without a new shirt.
 He wants his school desk and his book
 of grammar. Take me home, father, so I can finish
 my homework and complete my years slowly,
 slowly on the seashore and under the palms.
 Nothing further.
 Nothing beyond.

Mohammad faces an army, without a stone, without
 the shrapnel of stars. He did not see the wall
 where he could write: 'My freedom will
 not die.' He has, as yet, no freedom,
 no horizon for a single Picasso dove.
 He is still being born. He is still
 being born into the curse of his name.
 How often should a boy be born without a childhood or a country?
 And where will he dream, when the dream comes to him,
 and the earth is a wound and an altar?

Mohammad sees his death approach
 and remembers a moment from TV
 when a tiger stalking a nursing fawn
 shied away upon smelling the milk,
 as if milk tames a beast of prey.
 And so I am going to be saved, says the boy,
 and he weeps. My life is there, hidden

in my mother's closet. I will be saved . . .
I can see it.

Mohammad,
hunters are gunning down angels, and the only witness
is a camera's eye
watching a boy become one
with his shadow.
His face like the sunrise, clear.
His heart like an apple, clear.
His ten fingers like candles, clear.
And the dew on his trousers, clear.
His hunter could have thought:
I'll leave him
until he can spell 'Palestine',
I'll pawn him tomorrow,
kill him when he rebels.

Mohammad,
small Christ, where you sleep and dream
is itself an icon
made of olive branches and brass
and a people who are rising up.
Mohammad,
blood superfluous to prophets and prophecies,
so to the right side of heaven ascend,
O Mohammad.

Translated by Tania Tamari Nasir