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Poems for Gaza

Gaza Poetry

Poems of the NAKBA: the Holocaust of the Children of Palestine



This page is dedicated to the women and children of Gaza, who have been denied equal rights, freedom and justice by the governments of Israel, the United States and Great Britain; all three hypocritically preach sermons on equal rights, freedom and justice to the rest of the world. My prayers are with the women and children of Gaza, and will be until they become free. — Michael R. Burch, Holocaust poetry editor and publisher, *The HyperTexts*



Epitaph for a Child of Gaza

by [Michael R. Burch](#)

I lived as best I could, and then I died.
Be careful where you step: the grave is wide.



**The oppressed can but pursue suitable tracks
Learning to heed the lessons of awesome war
But will the mighty listen to reason's voice
That justice will accomplish the peace of Rome?
Or will conscience's dictates be inexorably ignored
As war's clouds hover over culture's great cradle?
And yet we do not harbor the odium of hatred
But pray that peace can still be humanity's finest hour . . .**

—Khaled Nusseibeh



Distant light

by Walid Khazindar, a poet born in Gaza City

Harsh and cold
autumn holds to it our naked trees:
If only you would free, at least, the sparrows
from the tips of your fingers
and release a smile, a small smile
from the imprisoned cry I see.
Sing! Can we sing
as if we were light, hand in hand
sheltered in shade, under a strong sun?
Will you remain, this way
stoking the fire, more beautiful than necessary, and quiet?
Darkness intensifies
and the distant light is our only consolation —
that one, which from the beginning
has, little by little, been flickering
and is now about to go out.
Come to me. Closer and closer.
I don't want to know my hand from yours.
And let's beware of sleep, lest the snow smother us.

Translated by Khaled Mattawa from the author's collections *Ghuruf Ta'isha* (Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1992) and *Satwat al-Masa* (Dar Bissan, Beirut, 1996). Reprinted from *Banipal* No 6. © Translation copyright *Banipal* and translator. All rights reserved.



My nightmare ...

I had a dream of Jesus!
Mama, his eyes were so kind!
But behind him I saw a billion Christians
hissing "you're nothing" and blind.
—The Child Poets of Gaza

For a Child of Gaza, with Butterflies
by [Michael R. Burch](#)

Where does the butterfly go
when lightning rails and thunder howls
and hailstones scream and winter scowls
and storms compound the frost with snow?
Where does the butterfly go?

Where does the rose hide its bloom
when night descends oblique and chill
and stars such vacuum fail to fill?
Where does she then her bloom bestow,
and where does the butterfly go?

And where shall the spirit flee
when life is harsh, too harsh to face,
and hope is lost without a trace?
Oh, when the light of life runs low,
where does the butterfly go?

I have a dream ...

I have a dream ...
that one day Jews and Christians
will see me as I am:
a small child, lonely and afraid,
staring down the barrels of their big bazookas,
knowing I did nothing
to deserve this.

—The Child Poets of Gaza



Ahmad Al-Za'tar

by Mahmoud Darwish

translated by Tania Nasir

For two hands, of stone and of thyme
I dedicate this song. For Ahmad, forgotten between two butterflies
The clouds are gone and have left me homeless, and
The mountains have flung their mantles and concealed me
From the oozing old wound to the contours of the land I descend, and
The year marked the separation of the sea from the cities of ash, and
I was alone
Again alone
O alone? And Ahmad
Between two bullets was the exile of the sea
A camp grows and gives birth to fighters and to thyme
And an arm becomes strong in forgetfulness
Memory comes from trains that have left and
Platforms that are empty of welcome and of jasmine
In cars, in the landscape of the sea, in the intimate nights of prison cells
In quick liaisons and in the search for truth was
The discovery of self
In every thing, Ahmad found his opposite
For twenty years he was asking
For twenty years he was wandering
For twenty years, and for moments only, his mother gave him birth
In a vessel of banana leaves
And departed
He seeks an identity and is struck by the volcano
The clouds are gone and have left me homeless, and
The mountains have flung their mantles and concealed me
I am Ahmad the Arab, he said
I am the bullets, the oranges and the memory



The Deluge and the Tree

by Fadwa Tuqan

When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge
of dark evil
onto the good green land
'they' gloated. The western skies
reverberated with joyous accounts:
"The Tree has fallen !
The great trunk is smashed! The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!"

Had the Tree really fallen?
Never! Not with our red streams flowing forever,
not while the wine of our thorn limbs
fed the thirsty roots,
Arab roots alive
tunneling deep, deep, into the land!

When the Tree rises up, the branches
shall flourish green and fresh in the sun
the laughter of the Tree shall leaf
beneath the sun
and birds shall return
Undoubtedly, the birds shall return.
The birds shall return.



Look at me

by [Nahida Izzat](#)

Look at me
I would love to write poetry about love,
Paint rainbows and butterflies,
Smell the scent of pink rose buds,
And dance;
Dance with the melody of jubilant bluebirds

I would love to close my eyes and see children smiling
No guns pointing at their heads
Tell them stories of lily-like fairies in far-away lands
Not of bullets shrieking . . . of missiles exploding
But
How can I?

There is a dagger in my heart
I am hurting
Hurting
I bleed,
I cringe
I cry

HUMANITY, WHERE ARE YOU?
I am being slaughtered
Under your watchful eyes
I am cold . . . cold . . . cold
I cringe
I cry

Humanity, where are you?
Why do you turn your face away?
Why do you keep looking the other way?
I am here
Languishing
In Gaza's alleyways
Humanity, where are you?
Look at me
See me

I am here
Sighing
In Gaza's alleyways
I cringe
I cry

Humanity,
Enough turning the other way !
Turning a deaf ear
Turning a blind eye
While I,
and *oh ! my poor children*
Die



Armed with a prayer
by [Iqbal Tamimi](#)

Once upon a crime,
the night
hijacked the face of my homeland.
The next day,
the spring was pronounced dead.
My blood
lost its way rivuleting through sand.
I was not courageous enough
to declare
the theft of my skin;
It was stretched by loathsome hands
to create a new face for an old drum.
There . . .
sat my anxiety
on the banks of pain,
washing my punctured voice,
asking me
how would I . . .
fish for my poem's crumbs in a mine field?
What could I say?
For . . .
I had lost the dawn in the market,
my mouth was stuffed
with the sweat of my exile,
nothing of me remained
but
my few half-living fingers
exhuming the guts of lines,
a nose . . .
striving hard to find its way home,
and a pair of eyes,

that looked but could not see
any
of the absent loved ones,
who used to be there for me.
My pulse was swinging,
documenting my name,
alongside others hanging
on the verge of plight.
My loaf was naked.
I was armed only with a prayer.
A child beneath the rubble
Screamed, calling my name
Mama . . . Please . . .
tell them not to execute my kite.



Suffer the Little Children

by [Nakba](#)

I saw the carnage . . . saw girls' dreaming heads
blown to red atoms, and their dreams with them . . .

saw babies liquefied in burning beds
as, horrified, I heard their murderers' phlegm . . .

I saw my mother stitch my shroud's black hem,
for in that moment I was one of them . . .

I saw our Father's eyes grow hard and bleak
to see frail roses severed at the stem . . .

How could I fail to speak?



I Pray Tonight
by [Michael R. Burch](#)

*for the children of Gaza
and their mothers*

I pray tonight
the starry Light
might
surround you.

I pray
by day
that, come what may,
no demon confound you.

I pray ere tomorrow
an end to your sorrow.
May angels' white chorales
sing, and astound you.



Mother's Smile

by [Michael R. Burch](#)

*for the mothers of Gaza
and their children*

There never was a fonder smile
than mother's smile, no softer touch
than mother's touch. So sleep awhile
and know she loves you more than "much."

So more than "much," much more than "all."
Though tender words, these do not speak
of love at all, nor how we fall
and mother's there, nor how we reach
from nightmares in the ticking night
and she is there to hold us tight.

There never was a stronger back
than father's back, that held our weight
and lifted us, when we were small,
and bore us till we reached the gate,
then held our hands that first bright mile
till we could run, and did, and flew.
But, oh, a mother's tender smile
will leap and follow after you!



Labor Pains

by Fadwa Tuqan

The wind blows the pollen in the night
through ruins of fields and homes.
Earth shivers with love,
with the pain of giving birth,
but the conqueror wants us to believe
stories of submission and surrender.

O Arab Aurora!
Tell the usurper of our land
that childbirth is a force unknown to him,
the pain of a mother's body,
that the scarred land
inaugurates life
at the moment of dawn
when the rose of blood
blooms on the wound.



Hadeel's Song

by Hanan Ashrawi

Some words are hard to pronounce—
He-li-cop-ter is most vexing
 (A-pa-che or Co-bra is impossible)
But how it can stand still in the sky
I cannot understand—
 What holds it up
 What bears its weight
(Not clouds, I know)
It sends a flashing light—so smooth—
 It makes a deafening sound
 The house shakes
 (There are holes in the wall by my bed)
Flash-boom-light-sound—
And I have a hard time sleeping
(I felt ashamed when I wet my bed, but no one scolded me).

Plane—a word much easier to say—
 It flies, *tayyara*,
My mother told me
A word must have a meaning
A name must have a meaning
Like mine,
 (*Hadeel*, the cooing of the dove)
Tanks, though, make a different sound
 They shudder when they shoot
Dabbabeh is a heavy word
 As heavy as its meaning.

Hadeel—the dove—she coos
 Tayyara—she flies
 Dabbabeh—she crawls
My Mother—she cries
 And cries and cries
My Brother—Rami—he lies
 DEAD
 And lies and lies, his eyes
 Closed.
Hit by a bullet in the head
 (bullet is a female lead—*rasasa*—she kills,
 my pencil is a male lead—*rasas*—he writes)
What's the difference between a shell and a bullet?
(What's five-hundred-milli-meter-
 Or eight-hundred-milli-meter-shell?)
Numbers are more vexing than words—
 I count to ten, then ten-and-one, ten-and-two

But what happens after ten-and-ten,
How should I know?
Rami, my brother, was one
Of hundreds killed—
They say thousands are hurt,
But which is more
A hundred or a thousand (*miyyeh* or *alf*)
I cannot tell—
So big—so large—so huge—
Too many, too much.

Palestine—*Falasteen*—I'm used to,
It's not so hard to say,
It means we're here—to stay—
Even though the place is hard
On kids and mothers too
For soldiers shoot
And airplanes shell
And tanks boom
And tear gas makes you cry
(Though I don't think it's tear gas that makes my mother cry)
I'd better go and hug her
Sit in her lap a while
Touch her face (my fingers wet)
Look in her eyes
Until I see myself again
A girl within her mother's sight.

If words have meaning, Mama,
What is Is-ra-el?
What does a word mean
if it is mixed
with another—
If all soldiers, tanks, planes and guns are
Is-ra-el-i
What are they doing here
In a place I know
In a word I know—(Palestine)
In a life that I no longer know?



Excerpts from Under Siege

by [Mahmoud Darwish](#)

translated by Marjolijn De Jager

Here on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time
Close to the gardens of broken shadows,
We do what prisoners do,
And what the jobless do:
We cultivate hope.

A country preparing for dawn. We grow less intelligent
For we closely watch the hour of victory:
No night in our night lit up by the shelling
Our enemies are watchful and light the light for us
In the darkness of cellars.

Here there is no "I".
Here Adam remembers the dust of his clay.

You who stand in the doorway, come in,
Drink Arabic coffee with us
And you will sense that you are men like us
You who stand in the doorways of houses
Come out of our morningtimes,
We shall feel reassured to be
Men like you!

When the planes disappear, the white, white doves
Fly off and wash the cheeks of heaven
With unbound wings taking radiance back again, taking possession
Of the ether and of play. Higher, higher still, the white, white doves
Fly off. Ah, if only the sky
Were real [a man passing between two bombs said to me].

Cypresses behind the soldiers, minarets protecting
The sky from collapse. Behind the hedge of steel
Soldiers piss—under the watchful eye of a tank—
And the autumnal day ends its golden wandering in
A street as wide as a church after Sunday mass . . .

[To a killer] If you had contemplated the victim's face
And thought it through, you would have remembered your mother in the
Gas chamber, you would have been freed from the reason for the rifle
And you would have changed your mind: this is not the way
to find one's identity again.

The siege is a waiting period
Waiting on the tilted ladder in the middle of the storm.

Alone, we are alone as far down as the sediment
Were it not for the visits of the rainbows.

We have brothers behind this expanse.
Excellent brothers. They love us. They watch us and weep.
Then, in secret, they tell each other:
"Ah! if this siege had been declared . . ." They do not finish their sentence:
"Don't abandon us, don't leave us."

Our losses: between two and eight martyrs each day.
And ten wounded.
And twenty homes.
And fifty olive trees . . .
Added to this the structural flaw that
Will arrive at the poem, the play, and the unfinished canvas.

Oh watchmen! Are you not weary
Of lying in wait for the light in our salt
And of the incandescence of the rose in our wound
Are you not weary, oh watchmen?

A little of this absolute and blue infinity
Would be enough
To lighten the burden of these times
And to cleanse the mire of this place.

In the state of siege, time becomes space
Transfixed in its eternity
In the state of siege, space becomes time
That has missed its yesterday and its tomorrow.

The martyr encircles me every time I live a new day
And questions me: Where were you? Take every word
You have given me back to the dictionaries
And relieve the sleepers from the echo's buzz.

The martyr enlightens me: beyond the expanse
I did not look
For the virgins of immortality for I love life
On earth, amid fig trees and pines,
But I cannot reach it, and then, too, I took aim at it
With my last possession: the blood in the body of azure.

The siege will last in order to convince us we must choose an enslavement that does no harm, in
fullest liberty!

Resisting means assuring oneself of the heart's health,

The health of the testicles and of your tenacious disease:
The disease of hope.

Greetings to the one who shares with me an attention to
The drunkenness of light, the light of the butterfly, in the
Blackness of this tunnel!

Greetings to the one who shares my glass with me
In the denseness of a night outflanking the two spaces:
Greetings to my apparition.

My friends are always preparing a farewell feast for me,
A soothing grave in the shade of oak trees
A marble epitaph of time
And always I anticipate them at the funeral:
Who then has died . . . who?



*We should not justify suicide bombers.
We are against the suicide bombings,
but we must understand what drives these young people to such actions.
They want to liberate themselves from such a dark life.
It is not ideological, it is despair . . .
We have to understand—not justify—what gives rise to this tragedy.
It's not because they're looking for beautiful virgins in heaven, as Orientalists portray it.
Palestinian people are in love with life.
If we give them hope—a political solution—they'll stop killing themselves.
—Mahmoud Darwish*



Faith Beaten Like Gold

by [Michael R. Burch](#)

*for the children of Gaza who were born, aged
and now face death without ever having drawn
a free breath, as a free people*

When she was a child
in a dark forest of fear,
imagination cast its strange light
into secret places,
scattering traces
of illumination so bright,
years later, they might suddenly reappear,
their light undefiled.

When she was young,
the shafted light of her dreams
shone on her uplifted face
as she prayed;
though she strayed
into a night fallen like mildewed lace
shrouding the forest of screams,
her faith led her home.

Now she is old
and the light that was flame
is a slow-dying ember ...
What she felt then
she would explain;
she would if she could only remember
that forest of shame,
faith beaten like gold.



The Folly of Wisdom

by [Michael R. Burch](#)

for the lying, hypocritical governments of Israel, Great Britain and the United States, which preach sermons on "equal rights," "freedom" and "democracy" to the rest of the world, but deny human rights and dignity to the children of Gaza, and the realization of their dreams

She is wise in the way that children are wise,
looking at me with such knowing, grave eyes
I must bend down to her to understand.
But she only smiles, and takes my hand.

We are walking somewhere that her feet know to go,
so I smile, and I follow ...

And the years are dark creatures concealed in bright leaves
that flutter above us, and what she believes—
I can almost remember—goes something like this:
the prince is a horned toad, awaiting her kiss.

She wiggles and giggles, and all will be well
if only we find him! The woodpecker's knell
as he hammers the coffin of some dying tree
that once was a fortress to someone like me
rings wildly above us. Some things that we know
we are meant to forget. Life is a bloodletting, maple-syrup-slow.



Poems by [Michael R. Burch](#) translated into Arabic by the Palestinian poet [Iqbal Tamimi](#)

مقتطفات من أشعار مايكل آر برتش محرر مجلة الهايبر تيكستس للشعر ترجمتها للعربية الشاعرة الفلسطينية إقبال التميمي

Autumn Conundrum

لغز الخريف

ليس الأمر أن كل ورقة يجب أن تقع في نهاية المطاف

إنه مجرد أننا لن نستطيع أبداً التقاطها جميعاً

It's not that every leaf must finally fall,
it's just that we can never catch them all.

Piercing the Shell

اختراق القشرة

لو خلعنا جميع واقيات الحرب

ربما سنكتشف سبب وجود القلب

If we strip away all the accouterments of war,
perhaps we'll discover what the heart is for.

Epitaph for a Palestine child

مرثية لطفل فلسطيني

عشت قدر استطاعتي، وبعدها متّ

إحذر أين تخطّو: فالقبر واسع

I lived as best I could, and then I died.
Be careful where you step: the grave is wide.



[What I learned from Elie Wiesel and other Jewish Holocaust Survivors](#) is the personal account of how Mike Burch learned more from some of the Jewish Holocaust survivors he worked with, than they seemingly wanted him to know.



Hidden dimensions

by [Nahida Izzat](#)

My first son Hassan
Was born on April the 9th

You might think
So what ... why are you saying it
With such a gloomy tune
What is wrong with the 9th of April?

You have to be a Palestinian
To understand
For on the 9th of April 1948
The massacre of Deir Yassin

Took place
Where every man women and child
Of that peaceful farming village
Was killed in cold blood
No one survived
Except those
Who pretended to be dead

As we celebrate the birth of a newborn
With joy
We mourn and grieve
Lost loved ones

In our midst
Nothing becomes insular
Nothing is disjointed
No single colours

The fabric of our lives
Makes the most amazing tapestry

If you hold it backwards
Looking at the wrong side
You'll see a mirror image
Of shades of a blurred picture
With loops . . . knots and fraying thread
If you turn it over
It looks much neater
But still you can't actually see
The full picture
Only colours and shadows

But hey . . . take a little time
And walk backwards
Further back
Look at the tapestry
From a distance

You will be amazed
At its outstanding beauty
All these murky shades
That didn't make sense to you
Even disturbed you
When you were near

From afar
These dark shadows
Are precisely what makes this piece

So unique
So spectacular

These unfathomable hues
Are what give our life portrait
Its depth
And hidden dimensions

Since that day of 1948
Many . . . many babies were born
On April the 9th

Our joys are always stained
With hints of sorrow

Our sadness is always coloured
With hues of hope

Without which
The tapestry of our lives
Will never be complete
Won't be as rich
Or as beautiful

Don't waste much time
Staring at the wrong side with fury
Turn it over . . . walk further back . . . and feel the glory

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