Sylvie Robinson

A Wolf Howls: Memories of a Poet\*

a wolf howls a mouth buzzes with flies

pink swollen foot and neck all twisted-like

hands grasping the air of Baghdad’s godless night

this body rigid with longing rigid with death

your body uncoiling from the pattern of living

reaching back to lost futures stumbling behind itself

loss never final enough not to be enacted again

lost as I am lost lost as you

the stomach lost in the Tigris

your bowels in the mouth of the dog

the memories that were not yours and then were

the copulating dead or so it seemed so it was described

so I saw memories not mine and now are

a wolf I never heard howl the wolf

that woke me this morning the wolf

vacantly witnessing what I chose not

*And from the gap in my memory where the sun blinded me,*

*you were killed. And in the fissure in your mind where the bullet*

*was born, a dog whimpered and scratched at his fleas. My son,*

*I turned my back from you and night’s oil seeped in so suddenly,*

*spilled into my eyes, blinding me again with its cloying odor.*

*Good, I think, your beauty was unbearable, even to me.*

this poem is not for me to hear not for me to read

Al Nawab’s exiled voice stretched thin on the tape

of a lost cassette lost as me lost as he

all the poems you will not read the poets who will die

without having written a word poetry that must crouch

in the dark suffocate before being heard

fugitive poems poems that grind like sleeping teeth

smell unwashed poems of dying of undying

the languages we will spend our lives pretending

to comprehend the words we will empty

from mouth to mouth the words that collect

like soil under our tongues until we are at last

made to spit them on the ground or choke

or maybe have them kicked from our jaws

I am not the poet I am a poet

but if I’m to be honest

these days are too hot to write poetry

soon they will be too cold

I am weary with meaning motherhood

has eaten at me I regret it entirely

but I am not a mother or maybe

I was it doesn’t seem to matter

loss precedes the hood of it no matter what

*My son. You stepped so lightly through this world of sorrows.*

*Your gait was nearly*

*obscene.*

\*Based on the painting *A Wolf Howls: Memories of a Poet* by Dia Azzawi, which is in turn based on an unpublished poem by Iraqi poet Muthaffar Abd al-Majid al-Nawab.