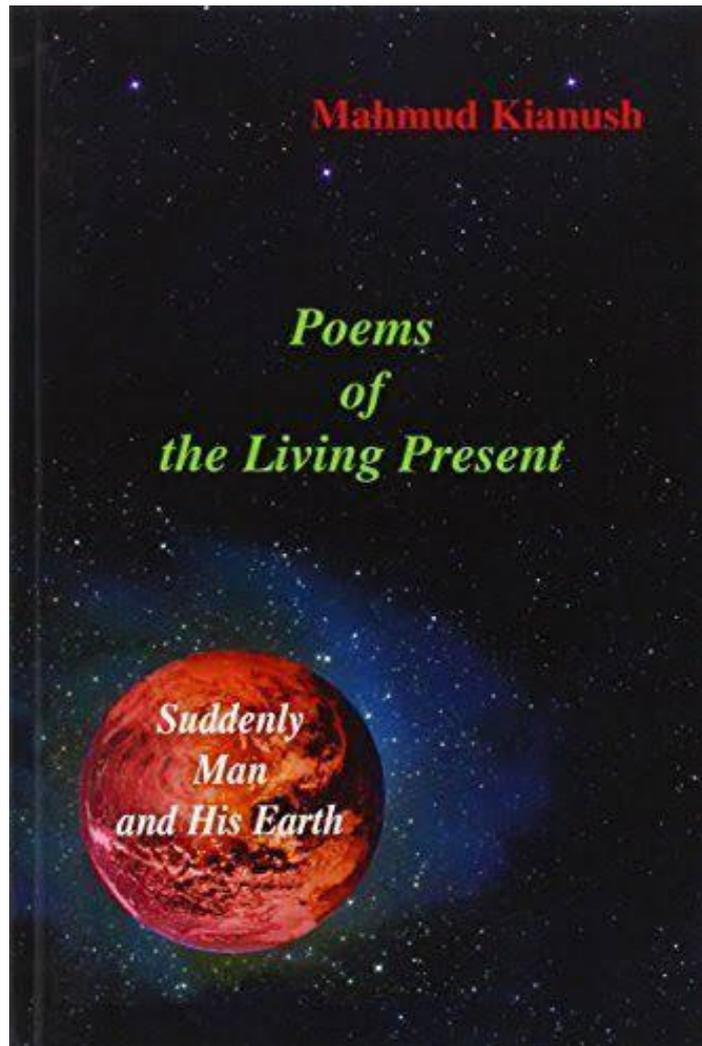


Poems of the Living Present



Mahmud Kianush

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Part One:
Not All Words Are Birds

Not All Words Are Birds

*For Joanne Arnott, the poet, who wrote
"I do hope that you feel inspired, as I do, by
The pleasure of a poetry exchange across the miles".*

I

I wrote a poem
With crimson ink
On a piece of paper
In turquoise blue
And went to the window
And opened it wide
To welcome the morning sun
Of a serene spring sky.

Suddenly,
 before my eyes,
There appeared
 a flock of birds,
With their plumage
 of rainbow colours,
Circling,
 circling,
 in a rhythmic motion,
As if performing a ritual
Of a mystical cosmic dance,
And by reflecting the rays of light,
They created something like a micro-image
Of a supernova;
And, after
 some long moments
 of self-manifestation,
They flew away,
 and out of my sight.

I returned to my desk,
To read once more
My new finished poem,

But,
to my wonderment,
The crimson words had disappeared,
And the blue paper
Had turned to white.

II

It was the sunset
Of a mid-autumn day,
And the blue sky of the horizon
Had begun to fade into a burning crimson,
Setting the windowpanes on flame.

On my desk
A piece of blank paper
in turquoise blue
Was looking expectantly at me,
And on its right side
My black pen,
Filled with crimson ink,
Was left in boredom of silence,
But the poem I had in my mind
Suddenly burned out
And was lost in oblivion.

The flaming radiance of the setting sun
In the receptive,
gleeful eyes
of the window,
Mysteriously urged me to walk over
And watch the magic
of light
and air
and motion,
But what I saw,
I think,
was a visual message
From the God Unknown,
The Almighty Poet,
Whose one and only poem

Illumination

A very young,
 but not so beautiful poem,
Her green eyes shining
 with tears of sorrow,
Was looking,
 through her closed window
At the sky,
 of a late summer afternoon,
Now adorned with a perfect rainbow.

She had been walking about in the room,
Wandering in the wilderness
Of her lost, lonely soul,
When suddenly,
 some illumination occurred,
Either
In the awakening light of the window
Or
In her own tearful eyes,
And stopped her from wandering.

She blinked and watched,
She watched and blinked,
A faint smile of amusement appeared
On her very young
But not so beautiful face.

A Poem of the Living Present

I,
In the body of an old man,
Tired of memories and dreams,
Was sitting on a bench
Nearest to the entrance of the park,
In a late summer
 Saturday afternoon
Watching the people
 passing by,
With a glance of understanding,
With a peaceful smile of resignation.

Of those who were just arriving
 many,
And of those who were departing,
 a few,
Smiled back at him
With reverence and affection,
With sympathy and well-wishing,
Or as an act of politeness;
And,
 of course,
There were also those
Who had their reasons
For not seeing him at all.

I could readily accept
All these different attitudes
As natural to all the people
Who don't claim to be poets,
But he,
Who passed by me,
And his eyes caught mine,
But did not see me at all
Happened to be acclaimed
 as a poet,
As a seer of souls,
As a seeker of truth,

As a mirror to life,
As a singer of beauty and love,
As a giver of meaning to absurdity,
As the bard of God's loneliness in Man.

The old man
Tired of memories and dreams,
Gently shook his head
and thought:

“He is a betrayal to himself
And he does not know!
In every step he takes,
He passes by some real,
pure,
living poems

But he does not see them,
He does not recognize them,
Because his head and heart
Are always heavily burdened
With the affliction of name,
And his sight entirely lost
To his foolish fantasy of Future,
Leaving him blind
To the poetry of the living Present!”

“Please don’t say it,
I know!”

Now, the old woman,
having lived
All her past life,
In the span of a few minutes,
Took the red rose and her handbag,
And lifted herself off the bench,
Still unconscious of her pain,
But with a sweet taste in her mouth,
And started to walk home.

Soon she came upon a teenage girl,
So happy,
so sure of herself,
That she seemed to have received
Her first unique single red rose.

The old woman stopped her,
Said hello to her,
Smiled at her with sympathy,
And gave her the rose.

O, My Ancestors!

I did not like their tales and legends,
Not because they were so very old,
Or so boring
 and badly told,
But because my parents
 submissively believed
They were sacred and true,
And the canon of their faith,
Forbidding them to live
 their lives
As their own follies
In their own time.

I loved my father
Because he was my father,
And he thought he loved me,
Without ever asking himself why.

He thought he loved me,
But yet I felt
 he had a deeper love
For those ancestors' tales and legends,
Which he always recited
In the highest state of reverence,
And in an awe-stricken voice,
As if they were being revealed to him
Just then
 and for the very first time,
Straight from the Almighty in Heaven;
And it was in times like that
That I could not help hating him.

I loved my mother
Because she was a natural mother,
Dangerously suffering from
The malady of
 an irrational love

My Neighbour

I

If I were asked by a Holy Voice
From the Temple of Poetic Truth:
“Of all the mystics
 of all times
 of the world,
Who would be the one you may choose
As a fellow traveller
On the journey of your life?”

I would answer,
Without the least hesitation:
“Not and never
The famous Persian Sufi mystic
Abū-Saʿīd Abul-Khayr,
Who was so tenacious
 in his bigotry
That he believed
His Merciful,
 Compassionate God
Shall only save the souls of the Muslims!”

“But there have always been”,
I would expound,
“Many,
 many men of revelations,
Some of whom have already been
My equally great,
 equally loved,
 fellow travellers
Since the journey itself
Took the lead of my life.”

“There is no distance
Between them and Heaven,

As one of them,
The Unreligious Saint,
Reiner Maria Rilke,
Has given it expression
In an intimate, personal hymn,
Calling the God Unknown
His *Neighbour God*,
Telling Him: *Between us*
There is but a narrow wall
And letting Him know that
If sometimes in the night
He rouses Him
 with loud knocking,
It is only because
 he feels that He is alone,
And assuring Him that
 the narrow wall
Would merely take
A call from your lips or from mine
To break it down,
And that without a sound.

Now I see I am both,
The Silent Neighbour
And the Wandering Speaker.”

II

For the Sufi mystics,
Such as Abū-Saʿīd Abul-Khayr,
The word ‘neighbour’ meant
 a devout Muslim
Living next door to another Muslim
 like himself!
And for the Anointed Son of Man,
Who is known to have said:
Love thy neighbour as thyself!
The ‘neighbour’ meant someone like himself
Whose existence
 has so far been denied
 by history.

There Is A Bird

There is,
 and no doubt
Has always been,
A mysterious bird
 whose strange song
Has been heard,
 at least once or twice,
By everyone
 in their lifetime.
But the bird itself
Has never been seen
 by anyone.

I for one have heard
 many,
 many times
The indescribable song
Of this
 ever-elusive,
 ever-evasive bird.

But each time only when I come
Quite close to repeating the notes
Of its melody in my heart,
And visualising for it
A shapely figure,

And a plumage
With a pattern of colours,
Gracefully becoming
To his divinely song,
Alas!
 Just at that moment
The joy of fulfilment
Turns into a cosmic explosion
With the formidable glare of which
All my memory burns away,

And a moment later,
I am left empty,
 exhausted,
 and dismayed.

Without My Smiles and Tears

O you,
 who know yourself,
And undoubtedly know
That the knowledge of yourself
Is,
 of ultimate necessity,
Identical with the very existence
Of your selfhood;

O you,
 who must also know
What is your will and why,
And the consequences
It would create
All through all time,
To the end of eternity;

Hearken and behold!
I am standing here,
On the threshold
Of your conscience,
 your consciousness,
Calling you by a name
In meaning
 the same
 for the whole world,
But in word
 as different
As are the languages of nations!

Hearken and behold!
You are called by the helpless,
You are called by the hopeless,
Always when their sufferings
 break
 their endurance,
And they want to know why,

Before they join the Unanswered
In the realm of deaf, dumb,
and blind silence!

perhaps, it was,
In one of these situations
That one of them,
The one who,
perhaps,
thought
Of himself as the heart and voice of Mankind,
When nailed on the cross,
and in agony
Called you ,
saying:
Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?

Hearken and behold!
I am standing here,
On the threshold
of your conscience
and consciousness,
In an era when the damned
Are leading the way for the meek
Towards the annihilation of life,
And am calling you helplessly,
hopelessly
saying:

*Do you not suffer
from the sufferings of Mankind?*

If your answer is Yes,
Then you are helpless
and hopeless like us,
Then you are us;
And if your answer is No,
Then you are not my God,
And, therefore,
Without my Smiles and Tears
All and everything is Absurd!

The Wonders of the Mystery

He is deadly tired;
Tired,
 beyond the will to existence;
And feels he is ready
 to be left alone,
And forgotten.

He asks himself,
 without emotion:
*What did you get
From your time of being here?*

He does not need
 to think for an answer;
With a faint resigned smile,
He says to himself:

*The Mystery has remained
 unyielding,
 intact,
But the very Coming
 in itself
Was the Sublime
 and the Bliss.
I enjoyed,
 ecstatically
 enjoyed
Wandering
 and Watching
The beauty
 of the wonders
 of the Mystery.*

into a fatal curse,
Fallen upon the beauty of life.

I am the Third One,
As is the rainbow,
Hanging between
 the rays of light
And the drops
 of pure water,
But now,
In the early morning of this World,
In the confusion of its New Order,
I feel I am seeing
Through the eternal eyes
Of my Third-One-ness

In the blinding rays of Darkness
The pouring raindrops of Blood!
I feel I am seeing the Other Two,
In spite of their disharmony,
Are both on the road
 to Armageddon,
To complete the ruination
 of all my dreams,
And to defeat
 all my meaningful endeavours.

I am the Third One,
The giver of Purpose to my Animal Self,
And Meaning to my Human Self;
I am the Eternal.

Part Two:
Suddenly Man and his Earth

Suddenly Man and his Earth

I

At the uncertain border of night and day,
When comes the call of light,
Now so near,
 now so far away;
When colour sways between hope and fear,
Letting it seem
As if wolves are giving birth to lambs
And ewes to wolf cubs,
Again I was dreaming,
On the edge of wakefulness,
A dream of apocalyptic horrors:

Clouds rained fire,
And fire,
Turning into torrents of blood,
Before my fear-frozen eyes,
Swept across the face of the earth.

What was I at that moment?
Or where was I?
I do not know!
I was both my conscious self
And someone utterly independent of it.

In front of my eyes,
From the middle of the sea,
Suddenly rose
 a mount,
A huge fountain of swirling fire,
And jetted high up,
Up to a height
 beyond my sight;
And then
It poured down,
 down,

There it was,
A tower of horror,
A huge demon,
 darker than the night of despair,

Oh, God!
At the very first glance
He turned me
Into a statue of stone,
Silent,
 still,

 cold stone:
A statue without heart,
Or with a heart
But empty of the song of a feeling;
A statue without head,
Or with a head
But empty of the faintest ray of thought.

His eyes were bowls of blood;
With his stares,
Green flames of poison
Darted out from those bowls of fire;
With his fists,
Those big maces of steel,
He violently,
 recklessly beat
On his broad,
 bulging chest:

Perhaps,
With his pains
 of agonizing wounds
 of speechlessness
Suppressed for unending eons in his heart,
Now he was reduced
To two fists of fury
Pounding on the drum of madness.

Suddenly,
 his eyes,

Those two bowls of blood,
Now in raging flames,
Burst out of their sockets,
And shattered,
scattered on the ground;

Now the pressure of his revolting pains
Broke the cry of rebellion in his throat;

And his chest,
His rock,
His anvil of endurance,
Lost all its solidness,
All its enduring power,
Under the hammering fury of his fists;

It split open
 like a soft black wooden box
By a single blow of a sword,
But with the exploding sound
 of announcing

The birth of a star;

His apparent bestiality
Seemed to have been
 a blind curse
Thrown upon him
By some unknown force
Which was now so unexpectedly broken
By the power of his beatified revolt
Against his fate.

Now the heavy corpse of the black demon
Lay there,
 in the dust,
Free from himself,
And saved from the torments
of his tongueless pains.

II

A few moments passed,
With everything in absolute stillness,
In a silence
 filled with bitter premonition,
And then appeared
 through the gap
In the broken chest of the demon
A swirling mass of black,
 but shining smoke;
And the colour of the swirling mass of smoke
Gently turned from black
Into a bright,
 transparent white,
With the sparkling glitter
 of jewels
 of all colours.

Through the smoke,
The beautiful veil of magic,
Emerged a figure,
 image perfect in artistry,
From the gallery of astonishment;
The most sublime verse

At the top of the opening page
In the *Divan* of miracles;
A figure destined to mirror
The secrets of harmony
 in the physical beauty;
His face a pictorial verse
Showing the clear meaning of Soul.

He came,
 full of passion and joy,
All singing and dancing;
He came,
And I,
 at my first glimpse of him,

Became so astonished
That said:
 Praised be Nature
For her works of amazement!
And saluted the glory of Creation.

What am I saying?
I am talking of him
 as a single entity,
But, no, he was not!
Only at the moment of his appearance
He was *he* and he was alone,
He was *He-Alone*,
And the next moment,
Having taken the first few steps
Away from the empty carcass
 of the black demon,

He began to multiply,
To become the *He-of-Infinite-Number*.

His duplicates,
Each coming out
From the inside of the other,
Were the perfect mirror images of him,
And soon they grew to a great population,
And like him
They were all singing and dancing,
Full of joy,
 merriment,
 and laugh:

Now,
 with every step he took forward,
The sounds of motion rose higher,
Giving more intensity to emotions
In a world that was,
And kept being,
created by him.

In search of the unnamed,
In every land
 and *nowherelands*;

At the height of their pleasure,
The seizing, narcotic pleasure
Of gluttony and drunkardness,
They, sometimes,
Went deep into trance:

Their solid brains
Free from the torments of thoughts,
Their idle,
 unskilled hands
Alien to the throbbing rhythm
 of arts and crafts.

Oh!
It seemed that suddenly
The history had changed its course:
Laughs mingled with tears,
Songs with lamentations,
And discord began to rise
Amongst the multitudes of He's,
And their way of life
 thoroughly changed.

The slaves,
The dwellers of the earthly hell,
Laboured from dawn to dusk,
Sweating,
 panting,
 in agony
Close to, or past,
The point of collapsing
 of exhaustion
Under the cracking cruel whips
Of the soulless, callous guards,
Their backs,
 and arms,

and legs,
Covered with bleeding wounds;
Their stomachs empty,
Their bony faces twisted and pale,
And their eyes burning red

By the fire of anger
And the tears of pain.

They were disgusted with the world,
Tired of themselves,
and sickened of life;

By the agony
of hellish experiences
Grown wretchedly old
In the years of their youth;
And their only hope
For an eternal rest
Was paving the way for their death
By the help of despair.

Compelled to live in such a situation,
They had,
and were,
expected
To make and store in abundance
All and every kind
of necessities and luxuries
Of life,
and comfort,
and pleasure
For the masses of spoiled,
And greedy,
and feckless
freeloaders.

The hordes of hedonistic freeloaders
In the secure privacy of their mansions
Were,

as usual,
Wildly busy with their boisterous orgies
In such an obscene
and repulsive manner that...

Oh!
That one cannot bear to witness!
I would rather be blind!
And were deeply intoxicated
With such blind pleasures that...
Oh!
That one cannot bear to name!
I would rather be deaf and mute!

With such demonic intents,
And such habits of cruelty,
And such hideous deeds of theirs,
One would have expected the Sun
To stop shining
indiscriminately,
With his divine glory and grace,
And to be eternally disgusted
Of giving life
and soul
and love
To a handful of dust
And a bucketful of water.

IV

Utterly lost in bitter bewilderment
By the extent of their fiendish brutality,
You would have said:
Heavens!
Are these corrupted, accursed villains
The same pure angels
Who once had pure light
as their thoughts;
Who had pure love
as their faith;
Those wonders of creation
Who awakened

*The latent,
unmanifested soul of stone;
And turned the body of stone
into flower gardens
By the pure miracle
of a glance of their eyes,
And the pure grace
of their divine voice?*

Behold and see what they are
And their guards and guardians now:
The eternal disgrace
To the sanctuary of creations,
And the spits of contempt and curse
On the face of life!

Being in their evilness
Beyond the meaning
and limits
of evil,
They made it extremely hard for Satan
To rule over his own domain,
And extremely embarrassing for God
To pass judgement
Upon Satan's evil work.

Sometimes...
No, not sometimes,
But always...
Always their reactions
to the slightest disobedience
Was death punishment,
Even in cases when
A father among the toilers,
Exhausted beyond endurance,
Would have fainted and collapsed
Under the burning licks
of a guard's whip,

And now his toiling son,

Hearing,
 in an inner explosion,
The call of love,
And saying to himself:
Let-them-do-to-me-what-they-do-to-all,
Would have been thrown
 towards him
To protect him
 against a heartless guard,
The tame tool of tyranny,
Who attacked with ferocity of a lion,
But with foreboding laughter of a hyena;
A psychopath of a guard
Who could not wait to thrust
The shining, sharp head of his spear
Straight into the old man's heart,
A tormented heart,
 empty of all hopes,
 full of heavy sorrows.

And now
Time was ripe for the special guards
To appear so suddenly as if by voodoo,
And,
 like a rout of hungry wolves,
To surround the young insolent rebel,

Crushing his bones
Under their hammering heavy boots,
Ripping,
 shredding,
 mincing his flesh
With their spears,
 scimitars,
 and machetes,
Savouring the pride of death incarnate.
They seemed
In their over-zealous show
 of combat
As if they were engaged
Not in killing one single helpless young man,

The *lower half* of every village,
Every town,
 every city,
 on fire:
Fires with towering,
 rebellious flames,
But the dwellers of the *higher halves*,
With their hearts and minds
In pursuit of their world-cindering lusts,
Were so intoxicated
 by the world-devouring pleasures,
And so delighted
 with their world-engulfing
 shows of power,
Feeling so safe and secure
Inside the strong walls of executioners,

Behind the sure shields of executives,
That the great catastrophe,
With all its world known signs,
Was already there,
And they were ignorant
 and unaware of it.

V

The flaming *lower half*
 of every village,
Of every town
 and every city
Had opened hundreds of outlets to Hell,
To the molten hells
Of the turbulent core of the Earth;
Making it easy for the surging fire
To devour the living soul of the world.

Dragons,
Troops after troops,
Began their blood-curdling,
 tempestuous onslaughts
Against the *upper halves*,
Dragons,

The guards,
The defenders and worshippers
of the *Devil of Sefl*.

Oh, come,
and behold
The ideals of the corrupt,
of the wrong,
Against the truth of Man,
Against the soul of Righteousness!

The state of affairs
As it was,
and had been for generations,
Justified the tyranny of their justice
According to which
The world was a balance of two scales,
One for the servants,
one for the served,
And between the two
There was the powerful arm of law
That to preserve the balance,
Watched over the tongue of order:

So the corrupt and the wrong
Expected to live,
As if ordained by Heaven,
In lust and luxury
With peace and security
Till the end of time;

And to remain,
at all times,
Protected and assured
By the ferocious faith of their guards
In the blind servility of the sword;

And though they themselves

Never let the tip of a finger

Have a close and humble touch
With anything that may bear

The dirty name of work,
Can enjoy a wild orgy
Of everything they could imagine
By usurping the fruits of life and labour
Of the generation after generation
of the dwellers of hell,

The devotees of Love,
The oppressed of the Earth,
For whom living was
a continuous torture,
And death an eternal sweet relief;

Thus the corrupt and the wrong
Expected to live
In the paradise side
Of every village, every town,
And every city of the world,
Free of defying opponents,
Divinely esteemed
and feared;
The supreme proprietors of the Earth.

VI

Oh, come,
and behold
The absurd,
ugly,
abhorrent fate
Of the ruthless,
imbecilic,
unfeeling oppressors!

Suddenly,
With the unrelenting assault
of the dragons of fire,
In their vast multitudes,

And one moment later
They were devoured by the next wave;

And thus the regiments of the fire dragons,
In myriads and myriads,
Began to cleanse the earth,
By the heat of the sun-nourished fire,
From the ugly,
 unchaste,
 uncultured Paradise
Of the corrupt and wrong;
From their filthy thoughts,
 and words,
 and deeds;

They cleansed the Earth,
The unique pearl of astonishment
Across all the galaxies of the universe;
The keeper of lives of all colours
Inside the womb of the soil and stone;
The great workshop of Creation,
The Earth.

VII

A few moments
Or thousands and thousands of years
The face of the earth
Was an ocean of fire all over;

A jungle of
 insurgent,
 soaring,
 red flames;
There was no sign of any animal,
 any plant,
Living or dead;
Nor a piece of a rotten rafter
Remained from a ruined cottage;
Or a broken sun-dried brick
 of a collapsed wall
In a poverty-stricken

A poisonous,
 heavy smoke
Began to invade the air
And soon filled the whole space,
From the silent dark earth
To beyond the fountain of glory,
With a frightening
 the Sun,
 still and silent darkness.

VIII

At that time
I was empty of my 'self,
Inside the absolute silence
 of the absolute darkness,
A tiny point
 in the centre of a consciousness
Expanded from all sides
To where?
To beyond the infinity!
The bright point of my awareness
 of the world without,
Of the realm of *otherness*;

A point,
 notwithstanding its tininess,
 its insignificance,
It could clearly see,
In the infinite space of its infinite journey,
The panoramic perspective of history,
The history of Man and his Earth.

It was not I,
But the tiny point of my awareness
That could so clearly see
The image of existence,
And inside it,
 perhaps,
The reflection of nothingness
In the dawn of *I-lessness*.

The ocean of molten fire grew cold,
Grew solid,
And turned into dark granite;

That living planet,
That world which was full of passion,
full of songs,

That gallery of amazement
By the miracle of beauty;
That great scene of the meeting with God
In His mysteries of creation,

Turned into *Nought* again,
alas!
Into the Noughtland of *Oblivion*;

The cold,
dark whisper of stone
Into the ear of the dumb air;
The reasonless,
tumultuous argument
of the wind

With the stillness of the sleeping stone
Within its bedchamber
With all its doors and windows
Closed and locked
to the world without:

Love died,
and poetry died,
And the creation was left
Empty of the songs of meaning.

And at that time,
I,
A tiny point at the centre
of the sphere
of consciousness,

Asleep in body,
 but wakeful in mind,
Was going slowly away
From the scene of the nightmare,
And the Earth,
 left down there,
Wretched and forsaken,
From one side to the other,
Nothing but one vast grave,

Covered with a black,
 unhewn tombstone,
In a dark and dreary space.

And high up there,
The spirit of fire,
The essence of life and thought,
 the Sun,
Deeply grieved
 by the loss of her beloved son,
 the Earth,
Was soon afflicted with melancholia,
And fell victim to a fatal illness;

Her face,
The dazzling mirror of pure gold,
Which reflected
The seven-colour light of her happiness,
Now,
 empty of the grace of her smile
Grew red,
And the redness made it look
Like a hot spring of blood;

And then,
The hot spring of blood,
In the course of a few moments,
Or millions of millions of years,
Dwindled to a dismal black dot,
And the black dot

Suddenly disappeared
In the depths of the infinity.

IX

I,
The tiny point
 in the centre of consciousness,
Somewhere
 in the infinite silent darkness,
Was free from the burden of existence,
Left to myself
On the orbit of nothingness
 and absurdity;

Having left behind me
The bitter adventures of man's history
From the first moment,
 the first step,
To the end of everything,
And having broken the chains
Of all thoughts and desires,
I felt I was
Above and beyond
All *whats* and *hows* and *whys*,
And unbound to time
 and space;

In my inner self of dot size,
I felt as if I had no connection
 with the world of sleep,
Nor had I any memory
Of the world of wakefulness;

Oh, no!
What am I saying!
I do not know how it was!
Whatever I say
 is what I felt,

But yet I am sure
That whatever I was
And whatever my feeling said I was,
It was all beyond
 the world of thoughts and words;
Therefore,
 it would be in vain to say
That I was naught;
That I was nothing,
 but was aware of all;
That I was nothing and all,
In my Self,
 but unaware of self,
I was in God!

Suddenly,
In the silent darkness of infinity,
Again broke out
A wild cry and thundered in the space!

Oh, no!
 I said,
Oh, no, God!
Not any more of that again!

Oh, again that cry?
Again the cry of that demon,
The unfortunate,
 huge beast,
Darker than the night of despair,
Left forsaken
 for millions of years,
Suffering the unbearable agony
Of being alone amidst all the others,
Of having the self of consciousness,

But still a tongueless self,
Still a silent consciousness;

Waiting,
Afflicted,
 and waiting,
Confused,
 and waiting,
Humiliated and lost
 and waiting,
Waiting for that great day when...

When what?
Oh, no, God,
No!

The absurd experience
Of this tragic trial of self-revelation,
Even if it were indulgence in whims,
And merely for fun,
The experience of it
Is enough for all times
And for the whole universe!

Oh, woe upon woe!
Should this thunderous cry
Of the black beast be taken
As the commencement
Of a complete repeat of the nightmare
Of Man and his Earth,
Scene after scene to the end?
Oh, no, God
 No, never!

X

This was the situation when,
Suddenly,
The tiny dot in the centre
 of consciousness,
Which was I,
Shocked by the thought of recurrence
Of the great nightmare,

Turned into a wild cry,
And exploded,
And thundered in the space:
It was a cry
 of rebellion and force
That,
 like a hurricane,
 plucked me
From the domain of nightmare
In the mysterious world of sleep,
And carried me away,
With all my spiritual tiredness,
My confusion of mind,
My wretched perplexity,
And let me fall down,
 unhurt,
In a place familiar,
But,
 as always,
Full of aloneness,
 sorrow,
 and disgust,
In the ancient,
 tormenting,
And habitual world of wakefulness.

Suddenly,
The morning sunshine
Poured through the window
 into my eyes
A lapful of diamond shavings
Of the bare and brazen Reality,
The poison of which
 flowed in my veins
And burned my soul;

And still the wild cry
Of that wretched black beast,
And also my own cry
 of fear and despair,
Heavier than the enigma of existence,

The long poem – ‘Suddenly Man and his Earth’ – in Mahmud Kianush’s new collection is one man’s apocalyptic vision of a world destroyed by greed and heartless hedonism. Not only were the fruits of science and learning squandered on creating a world of the servants and the served, with the rule of law keeping everyone in his place, the earth itself was also changed:

“Gone was now the planet Earth
Which once was known as ‘The World’;
It was drowned in hell,
No, in truth,
It turned itself into hell;

The world,
The filthy institution,
The dominion of whims and vanities,
Was gone ...

and with it died poetry and love. And the Creation was left empty of the songs of meaning”.

Mahmud Kianush is an Iranian poet, novelist and literary critic, who has been living in England with his family since 1976. Four of his collections of English poetry have been published by Rockingham Press, which also published his anthology *Modern Persian Poetry*. He is a frequent contributor to the BBC Persian Service on social, cultural and philosophical subjects.

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