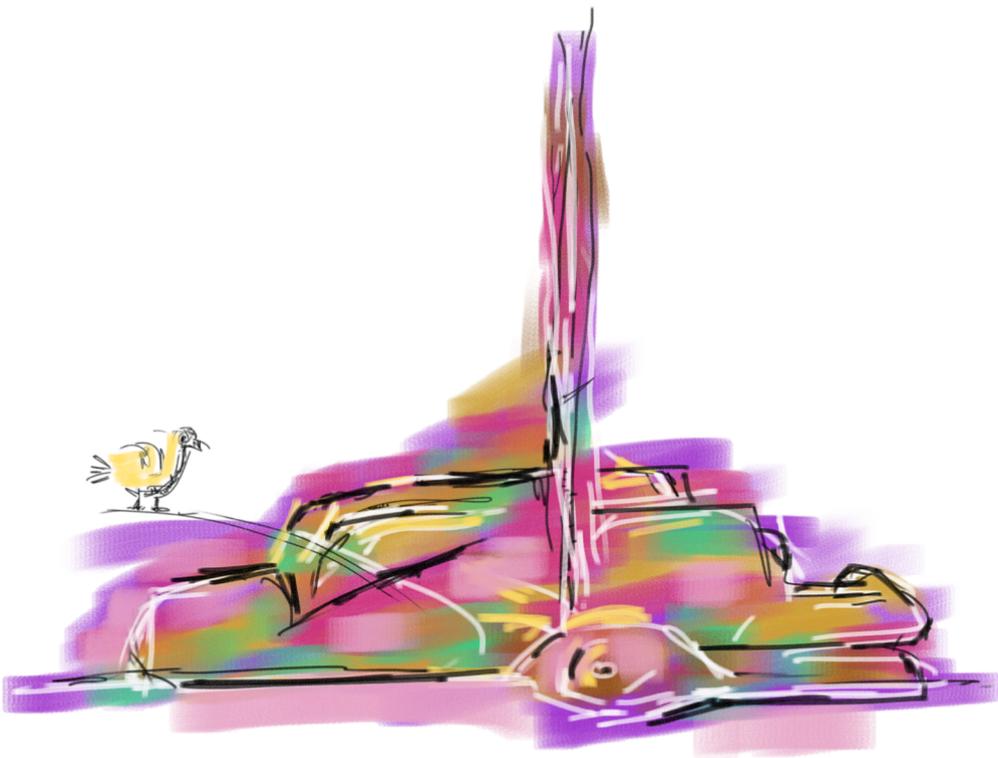


Wadih Saadeh

Text of Absence





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Translated by
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“They are Last Words Here I leave them behind.”

Do I say farewell to writing?

I say farewell.

The dialogue of writing is the dialogue of silence. The time of writing is the time of absence. The place of writing is non-place.

There is no life in words Life may be there, outside them.

There, there may be others, and me too. In the in the other side of speech, outside the text.

Writing is the absence of life. We may come across life by walking,

We may come across it by sitting, under a tree or on a sidewalk.

Perhaps it will come inadvertently, by a kiss or by a bullet, but not by writing.

I sprinkle on this dress I'm wearing a poison for words and run madly searching for life. Poisoning words is the right way.

The death of words is the first word of life, its first babbling.

O, you coming forth from my mouth, you are killing me!

Not with the dagger of betrayal alone, but with the sword of erasure is this killing. By shooting from the luminous rooftop into the depth of the mysterious delusional impossible. With the kindling of fire in the heart and limbs, and distributing joints in a scatter.

Walking on cloud, and falling as drizzle.

Entering into the chamber of death, in view of the fact that life plays along the corridors.

In the long hunting trip I was nothing but a flusher of the spirits of words. Texts are startled doves flying up before authors.

A mirage draws out a way with no houses on its sides, and nothing at the end of its winding. It let's out snare-ropes for wayfarers.

And I still knew: Why must I, the skinny one, stay hung up on these ropes, neither live nor dead, skinny so the rope doesn't kill me, hung just out of reach of the hand of life. I'm the one who doesn't relish a bite to eat – why must I remain prey of what does not find it pleasant to be the master of the feast.

Hanging on a rope. Hanging on a paper, waiting for a life to come forth from the fissures of words.

I don't know a life that has come forth to its writers from there. I know writers who have died over letters, writers who have died over diacritics, writers who have died over their margins. What am I waiting for from words? I want blankness. A delusional search for a delusional life – writing.

Being able to conjure absence with a text is not true. Neither the living nor the dead.

What I believed during the long journey of this delusion is not true.

Absence is non-being and death is non-being. It is not possible to conjure either of them. We become absence; we become death in the journey of this delusion.

Writing – a synonym for death.

I used to think that I would build an existence from imagination. That imagining would transform imagination into body, and words would build a house, which I would be in, not out in front facing it.

I went a long way in the imagination of language, until I was broken in its delusion. I went along in language searching for my native place, until I discovered that I was searching for a delusion. Because language was my native place, I had only dwelt in absence.

I was nothing but a flusher of spirits of words.

Those which emerged from my mouth, along with my spirit, then absented themselves afar. I recall now the last scant drop of them on the furthest horizon. I recall some of their eyes that emerged suddenly; they turned to look at me blamefully, and quickly disappeared. I recall feathers scattering all about with gunshots, and feathers hastening to flee, and a fine line drawn in space by this flight, then erased in a moment.

I was nothing but a failed flusher of spirits of words.
There is no place for words, for they are a state of absence,
a state of impossibility. They come as a shadow would come,
and they go as a shadow would go, with no face or stature, or
place.

Shadows, shadows, and no vestigial trace.

Many words, but it's impossible to say anything.

A shadow, passing sometimes, always passing, but with no
owner, no seat, no utterer, and no talk with the ones passing
through.

Talking is the betrayal of place.

And place is the betrayal of speech too.

So let me pass on; there's no speech or place for me.

I was shadow; I was treacherous speech

So let me pass on.

Desires turn back on the ones who have them. So let me walk
with no desire above this slender bridge because any arrow
will make me fall. Any arrow, and perhaps the blowing of a
breeze. The ones hunting desires are their game animals,
dropping one after another, as if crossing were only for the
undesiring.

So I walk on, but slowly, with no desire. Let me walk on,
empty, perhaps I'll arrive unharmed. The portage increases
my weight, and this bridge will plummet quickly.

Those who wish to cross over must divest themselves, not just of their clothes alone, but of themselves as well!

Therefore, there is no crossing over.

I was only trying to cross over with words: sending sound to cross instead of me over this bridge. But the sound wouldn't cross over, and its echo would turn back to kill me!

I was always practically dead. I was a group of dead: the victim of every sound and every echo. A dead man when I send forth speech, and a dead man when I receive its echo. And because I spoke a lot, I died a lot. And now I want silence; I want to live.

I put a mirror in front of me and look – I'm dead!

What do I not see, besides my eyes and my hands and my face and my spirit?

The breezes are there, and the collision of space with them. Hair near fog. Madness near water. Singing under the cloud. The sea above the heart. The watersource next to dust. Time with Rock. Blood with Sign. Light dangling in the Snake's tent.

My voice there tries by itself to cross the bridge, warily, terrified, going parallel between its two edges, divested of every weight, even its echo ... trying, perhaps it can cross.

My voice is there, and I'm here.

Even were it to cross, it would be there, and I here,
separated, cut-off, cut apart, with no speech between us, no
kinship, no look.

It was perhaps my voice, one day. But it is there by itself, on
that bridge; I'm alone here, in the snake's tent.

There is no crossing, even with words. As if the first step were
the last. It's as if standing still were the whole distance, the
whole way!

There were once two companions: Sound and Snake. They
played on the hills, they pelted one another with almost
invisible drops of dew.

Sound and Snake were companions pelting each other with
dew. And a drop struck Sound, and the Void took him back.
He lived there alone, with his tears coming down, cutting
across remote distances, to the Snake's mouth.

Sound has one companion: Snake. They play together and kill
together!

O word arising, malicious, from my mouth

O word arising to play with the Snake and kill me.

I have dew. On the grass in my back yard.

So pelt each other with dew at night, so the Void won't see
you and call out to you. And play whisperingly.

And kill whisperingly. Perhaps the neighbors want to sleep.

We were sleeping under the wool of wild chicory; sleeping silently.

Instead of sounds we would release time's timidity, so it would walk among the biers and Memory. Perhaps we will fly, drink alcohol from the throats of dead sparrows.

Now, the snake's tent. The dried-up branch before it, from the leftovers of a pulverized forest, opens and closes the door. Now, left of the ruins, right of the cinders is the gallows which kept the shirt!

The branch is a little higher than my height. Therefore I shan't bump into it. I'll enter without bowing my head.

Now is the time of bones. The time of blankness in the body.

The time of the one withdrawing gently from the flesh. He who is thrown down, and withdraws into a corner, a lone witness to the fact that he was, that he was not. The time of the dust of non-being. The time of non-being with no dust.

The one withdrawing lightly from the hand of time, from the specter of place, from the shadow of the angel. The one who was a grain-spike with weird-eyed kernels. The one withdrawing white and pure from the field, to beyond the limits of vision, to the edge of non-being.

The bones had no speech. There was something primordial, gooey, confused and impoverished, that they wish to proclaim. They search for a language for it, in which perhaps it would come to life.

In that remote place, on a small bed, the confusion of bones began. There began their silence, and their search for a language. In that place where language had not yet been born, where there was a tree, whose leaves drop one after another in silence.

There was no place for words ... In the beginning there was no speech; there was silence. And when words burst forth, the way of death began.

Now I bear these confused white bones, and I cast them down in their first silence.

I put them in the non-existence of language, in the little bed. Everything that I learned from words, that I raised from the well of ancestors, that flashed out, and that was concealed, and that was sent out in directions, I return it to its silence. I extend the gestures of my hands to the sounds that have come to be far off. And I return them to the larynx. I spread out a shirt for them under the wool of the chickory, and sleep near them.

In this narrow place where sleepers and the dead play cards, and take turns.

A delusional search for place, is writing. A delusional search for time, for life, for freedom. A delusional search.

Writing does not inhabit life. Its habitation is in another place. On the edge. In the delusional.

Writing's habitation is behind the door. It knocks, but the door does not open to it. Perhaps because no one is inside. Perhaps because inside is empty. Perhaps because there is no inside.

Where are life and place and time? If they are outside, why, when we are outside, do we not see them? If they are inside, why doesn't the door open?

I the writer confess: I searched in writing at length for life, and didn't find it. I found no life, nor time, nor place, nor freedom. Freedom? A priori there is no freedom. How can there be freedom as long as there is no life? We invent them both, they said. True, and here we are inventing them, but out of delusional materials also not conducive to life.

Why do I write, then? Since I knew, since I discovered this delusion, this lie, why do I write?

I must, most likely, put myself back together. I break myself apart bit by bit, throwing away the cursed part of it, and putting it together anew. If only the self were an instrument. If only I could just see its pieces.

Wandering lost in the gale, as I search for an instrument!

Wandering lost and dispossessed. The wind dispossessed me, and I want my possessions back!

I want the finery which my mother gave me; I want the birds which my father brought me; I want the feather of spirit, the teeny spot of space before the house, the milk of the stone which used to gush from my glances.

If all of these are among the things snatched from me, didn't
I at least have myself in the past?

I want it now, then.

And if it isn't mine, I want a flower, for its bier.

I want to get back my possessions: the first alleyway, the
dust of which stuck to my feet, and became mine; the star
of promises when sunset comes, while I'm sleeping under
an almond tree. My possessions: my looks which I emitted
tenderly, and whose return I still await; my hand which
passers-by thought to be a violin; my gasps which mixed with
a light breeze, then changed into a wind that has now turned
back on me and dispossessed me.

What time is it?

I know that the ill hallucinate at sunset in this fashion, that
the holes made by rapacious looks will remain empty, and
that the bullet of madness and the bullet of wisdom both
strike with the same death.

In the past I was not aware of all this. The earth was a round;
I could not see its other side. Now the earth is an oblong, a
vast desert, long caravans of humans and trees and asses, that
the dead are atop.

A faint line in the distance, a hanged string I want to cross.
Whenever frayed ends came out of the cord, I thought them
my children.

Sometimes memory speaks about the earth to me the naked one, so I stretch out my hand to her coat thrown on an old chair, and try to wrap myself in it.

I try to convince myself that I, from these ragged threads, will make a wooly sweater for my children.

Where are the ones abiding in the cold? Let them be gathered now in a queue, and the ones abiding in heat in another queue: it is necessary to sort people with their degrees of heat; it is necessary to create a balance between humankind's chill and its warmth. Balancing between the overcoat and the ragged sweater, else the earth would fall.

Talk for Talk. Only a little talk for lots of futility. Talk belongs to the winds to the glance, to shadow, to the snake. To the combing thread belongs its frayed ends, to the gallows keeping the shirt.

Talk , for those who are not listening.

Give me the bier in the morning. Give me the cloud on the cushion. Look out the window and lop off the head of the lily. Hunt the mad bird. Hunt the traitorous robe in space. Hunt the madman bent down over the spring.

Cut language's throat. Terrify the words. Cut them ragged and chase them away. Throttle style, curse principles and logic .

Take Voice to the garden, take it on an outing, with sentences and throw them in the river.

No, No, let the belly of language yet teem with words. Words whose fathers and mothers think that they will toy with them like infants, washing their face and combing their hair and bringing them toys... Let the fathers and mothers of language dream of progeny – this is their happiness – don't destroy it. For the belly of language is teeming with words that are born dead. Let them know gently. Let delusion gladden their hearts; leave language to its own affairs: to be inseminated with silence and impossibility, with absence and coma, with death and death.

There are words which would have lived, if they had stay in the dark. They come forth to the light and die. They could have stayed alive in their cocoon, in their privacy. No sooner had they entered the public sphere, but they entered death. The Dark alone may be life. The private, unseen, unspoken, undone.

Was I supposed to lock the doors, lower the curtains, and turn out the lights so I could have life and language? At the moment they crossed through the darkness and mixed with the many outside, I lost them both.... but didn't find them inside, really. I thought they were outside, in a bar or under a tree or on a pavement. They were not – neither outside nor inside. Where, then, are life and language?

The clock strikes as I stand beneath it. I hear the chimes running in space and disappearing.

Standing beneath the clock. I don't run with the chime, but hear it and just pay it last respects. Fixed in place and fixed in time. Swift continuous indistinguishable chimes. The first is like the second, like the thousandth, like the millionth. And I, under the first chime, am like me under the every chime. Standing in the space of sounds, steadfast in the wave of reverberations. A bird lands on my head as it lands on a statue, and flies away. A fish touches me and goes on.

There is no place for feelings they can go to. No room to move the emotions. No distance between the walls. There is no place or time for words to move or live. Are time and place also delusions with which we try to build a refuge? But there are not reeds enough to erect this tent. For this reason we sit and play music of death to the air. The wind crosses over, leaving dead at our doors. We cry out from inside, despairingly: Who will inter our dead? Our first ancestors would beat big rock night and day to dig a pit in which to plant their dead. They would provision them with gold and money to pay the fee of the journey to eternity. Our dead is at our doors – who will inter them? Who will inter our dead in this room, the ones stretched out for centuries atop the cement, layer on layer, until this whole building has come to be of the substance of death, and we have come to be the offspring of a mixture of dead.

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