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Two Poems

Nasser Rabah
Wiam El-Tamami

Two poems by Nasser Rabah. Translated from the Arabic by Wiam El-Tamami.

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Sing

When you wake up from
the war, sing. Let your voice

ring long and free, from day's
break till its end. Like an eagle

tasting, for the first time,
the fallen crumbs of the sun.

Let it climb to the top
of the minaret, chasing
the angels. Sing

with the wisdom of
old women, with the salty
ramblings of the mad.

Musical as the wailing
of mothers at a funeral, tuneless
as the gibberish

of the tanks. Just sing.
Sing, so you'll know how much
you've cried. How much absence

you'd tucked away in the pockets
of your silence. How many mirrors
you had broken to avoid

watching your soul dancing
on the shards. Sing so you will
know how many senses

you've lost. How many
prayers slipped between your
fingertips. Sing —

because they're calling your name
now, and you are also out looking
for you. Sing so we can keep painting

our houses with song, our city
with children's supplications. Sing,
for the war has left you

with nothing
but singing.

Heart Reader*

In absence, in
presence, You appear —
reading even the grass
in the wilderness of my silence,
and the name of the birds whose beaks
bloom open the pain in my heart. You hear me
in the drowsy stillness, behold my shadow
and my sun, bear witness as I rise and as I
break. You watch over the children, noisy
in their dreaming, over an eternal blue
raincloud hurtling behind hope.
How could it be *no,*
when my heart thrums with *yes*
for You? How can I not be bursting
with gratitude — my voice
awash in tears as I overflow
with love for You? You,
who have created me
from nothing

* With thanks to Ammiel Alcalay for his input on this translation.

Biographies

Nasser Rabah is a Palestinian poet and novelist who lives in Gaza. He has published six poetry collections and two novels, and his work has been translated into several languages. *Gaza: The Poem Said Its Piece*, his debut collection in English translation, was published by City Lights in April 2025 and was on the *The New York Times* Best Poetry Books of the Year list. His work has also been featured in publications such as *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Words Without Borders*, *Literary Hub*, *ArabLit*, *The Markaz Review*, *Poetry International*, *Harper's* and *Poetry* Magazine**.** He was a 2024 Jean-Jacques Rousseau fellow at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Germany.

Wiam El-Tamami is an Egyptian writer, literary translator, and editor whose work has been featured in publications such as *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, *Ploughshares*, *Freeman's*, *AGNI*, *Literary Hub*, *ArabLit*, and *The Common***,** as well as various anthologies, including *Palestine is Everywhere* (2025). She won the 2011 Harvill Secker Translation Prize and was a finalist for the 2023 Disquiet International Prize and the 2024 First Pages Prize. Her work also received a Pushcart Prize nomination in 2024 and was a runner-up for the 2025 Jules Chametzy Prize. She is an editor at large at *The Avery Review*. https://wiameltamami.com/

Competing Interests

The author and translator have no competing interests to declare.