

Salvation and Damnation

The path of divine ascent is a ladder we must all climb,
The dissent is hellish,
But take a look—
Look into the soul of the damned one,
Go!
Take a mirror,
What does damnation look like?
See what it looks like to finally be one of the lost ones,
A creature the world has fallen in love with,
A damned one—

Look carefully now,
See the fire in their eyes.
Your body shakes,
What is it?
Why do you shake?

Was the flame in their eyes robbed from the great Inferno?

Do you fear the gnashing of teeth?
Do you fear your soul being placed into the great incinerator?

Is hell ice cold like the most freezing day on earth or is it boiling hot like a furnace
that turns what is you to ash?

Why do you care? You deny the existence of Hell,
or the Devil,
or the Daesh army—vile and odious
—or ISIL—

Or the legion of cancerous demons that live and breed amongst humanity—

All pollutants of the soul, all armaments stockpiled to damn and destroy the soul,
but all spiritual pollution within us begs, mercifully asks to be cleansed,

Even in the bowels of Hades, a soul cries out—

Yet another laments,
Yet another yells out,
Knowing the distance that has been created from them to their God.
When every knee bends in genuflection,
How the demon's blood boils to see such a tender submission of love to the power
that transcends all creation—

God is the only exorcism of evil.

Pride is fallen,
Ego and self and higher self is Babel falling,
Worship and love of self is Gomorrah burning,
Narcissism is self-immolation's first spark rising upon the naked skin,

Longing for God is the first sight of the stairs that show the path to the divine
ascent,

A man has fallen from his boat.

He is surrounded in a salty wilderness by an endless sea of water with no dry land,
The man cries out for help,
He roars for God to help him,
He hears a barely audible whisper,
I will help you,
But you have to help yourself—
He swims to where his upturned boat is,
A strong wind blows, dragging the man to dry land,

He falls to his knees—surely he was lost,
But the thirst for God and providence remains within us all,
Because God knows exactly what lies within us.

Burning, shot, hung, Sirte, Libya

Mourning,
Holding my head down to the ground,
Dressed in orange fatigues,
Looking like I belong in Guantanamo,
I speak in my mother tongue, Arabic,
Why are you really doing this?

He says it's because I am a Christian.
*My father studied the Quran and knew it so perfectly the Imam Khatib allowed him to
teach the Quran to children,
When I return to my country I will also be allowed teach Quran to the children.*

He calls me an infidel.
I tell him I believe in the same God as he,
He calls me a crusader.
I was born long after the crusades,
He calls me a crusader again.
I laugh, *I am not European—*

He sharpens his knife,
This is for Abu Ghraib,

But I am not an American soldier—

His men open the cage they put by the sea,
This is for the invasion of Iraq,

But I opposed the invasion—

He throws oil all over my body,
You're an infidel,
Infidel! Before you killed Gaddafi I was able to work and feed my family.

He calls me a pagan—
I pray to God,
I will burn to death,
I will die a martyr in Christ.

He pours oil all over my body,
The Americans blew up my family,
Now the world must never know peace.

I roar,
I scream—
Unbearable.

The rest of my men were shot in the back of the head,

But I burn and I burn and I burn.

Hyenas of Ar Raqqah

I am in the outskirts,
Waiting for the hyenas to eat me alive,
Awaiting punishment,
In a tyranny of rules and torture—
In the Al-Khansaa Brigade*.

I am a woman.
I write, exposing the inhumanity,
I will not accept this torture.

The carnivores are waiting for me,
I am tied to a tree,
Raw meat, dripping blood, attached to my body—
They will catch on to me with their teeth.

The spotted hyenas circle me,
Their eyes fully open,
Their erupting incisors even visible tonight.

I know how the hyenas work,
They vampiric creatures,
They will rip my neck apart,
They will suck the blood from me,
But Al-Doumairy wrote—
Hyenas only attack the brave.

The life force entering and waiting to exit me in the deserts of Ar Raqqah,
We women are the bravest this land has ever had.
But we wait here to be crushed,

Waiting for the world to see this cursed cancer and stain on humanity.

I think of family,
I think of Allah,
I think of that cursed black flag, a shadow over my home,
I think of cruelty.
I think of love, defeating cruelty.

I think of what I did,
I think of how every building in Ar Raqqa will be destroyed,
I think of how the ground underneath will be exploited for tunnels,
I think of how mass graves will be dug with landmines in between,
I think of how civilians will become shields—

The hyenas are raising their paws,
They are now ready to rip me to pieces.

*The Al-Khansaa Brigade is an all-female religious police force part of ISIL, and is colloquially known as “Biters”.

Burning Books

Looking through life through the seemingly neverending road
Of bars,
Of control,
Of being watched.

Of every word uttered, recorded,
Of being overheard, when you think that your life is private—

Freedom.
All I do is dream of such a life,
A life that does not exist,
A life that can never exist.

When I close my eyes I see Gulags.
Barbed wired fences, snow, endless forests,
I see tracks to what one imagines is freedom,
Unattainable freedom,
A freedom that does not exist,

I close my eyes anyway.

I puff away at a cigarette,
And I dream of the books I wrote and burnt to ashes,
I dream of how I murdered creativity to save my life—
I miss them, the books I wrote,
Which sounds asinine to someone able to live without attacks looming.

But how can I even ask, *was burning my own books even worth the price?*
When the price of not burning what I wrote could be so high?

Freedom is an ideology that you dream with a glass of champagne,
Freedom is a fantasy land where plans idealistically come true,
But all dreams abort when reality—
With its grim, ugly, sardonic-looking face—
Kicks in the door,
Comes in unannounced,
Takes a seat beside you,

Reality, for sure, will tell you what to do.

Exegesis

I wrote these poems to complement my research on the Syrian War, in addition to writing a novel on this topic. I felt a need to write about the devastating horror in Syria, and these poems reflect my inner reaction to the human rights abuses and apocalyptic scenes of charred buses and shelled-out buildings in Syria.

Such observations and reflections ultimately led to, in one poem, my contemplation of the hereafter, the divine ascent to paradise, or the descent to hell.

When I think about what I have learnt about the nature of this war, life in the Caliphate under ISIL, Daesh, I am convinced that parts of this world are indeed Hell, and this is reflected in the imagery used in my poems.

My writing background is based in horror fiction, and I approached the writing about the horrors of this war in an upfront manner, directly addressing the melancholic subject of the continuing Syrian conflict—which will still burn, and see the continued gathering of grave losses.

Biography

Michael Mulvihill, of Dublin, Ireland, has written prose for Black Petals, such as "Drop" and "Lupine Savagery" published in Issue 77, among others. Mulvihill has also published a poem, "The Bombing", in The Kingdom News about a domestic tragedy in Ireland. He has two poetry books published by Exposure Publishing, Searching for Love Central and The Genesis and Anatomy of Love. His first novel, Siberian Hellhole, has been translated and is due for publication in Georgia.