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POETRY

Fugitives across the River Evros

Hussein Habasch

I wrote this poem in 1996 after fleeing Syria for Istanbul and subsequently seeking refuge in Germany! In Istanbul, I was staying in a hotel where almost all the guests were, like me, fugitives from tyranny, oppression, and dictatorship. At the hotel, I heard harrowing stories about crossing the Turkish–Greek border at the Evros River. Among these stories were accounts of how some people drowned before reaching the land of their dreams and salvation, whilst others would get lost in the forests, never to be heard from again; some would die of hunger and cold; others would come under fire from border guards on both sides; and still others would struggle to reach the other side, Greece, only to be arrested and sent back to Turkey once more! These stories inspired me to write this poem.

Hussein Habasch is a poet from Afrin, Kurdistan, born in 1970. He currently lives in Bonn, Germany. His poems have been translated into more than 30 languages across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, and published in more than 200 international poetry anthologies. His books include: *Drowning in Roses, Fugitives across Evros River, Higher than Desire and more Delicious than the Gazelle's Flank, Delusions to Salim Barakat, A Flying Angel, No pasarán, Copaci Cu Chef, Dos Árboles, Tiempos de Guerra, Fever of Quince, Peace for Afrin, Peace for Kurdistan, The Red Snow, Dead Arguing in the Corridors, Drunken Trees, Boredom of a Tired Statue, Flor del Espinillo, A Rose for the Heart of Life, La harde de cerfs meurt de soif, Jibîrkirin, Los Kurdos Y Dios, Olvido,* and *Stones in Exile*.

He has participated in numerous international poetry festivals throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. His awards include the International Best Poet Prize (China, 2016), the Great Kurdish Poet Hamid Bedirkhan Award (2022), the Aristotle Poetry Award (Greece, 2022), the International "Bosnian Stećak" Award for Poetry (2022), and the Bangladesh Kathak International Literary Prize (2024). He received an honorary prize at the Safi International Poetry Forum in Morocco (2024), was a featured international poet in the "Walking with Whitman" program at Walt Whitman's birthplace in New York (2025), and received honors from the AFRIN Fine Arts Festival and the Indija Pro Poet International Literature Festival in Serbia in 2025.

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Fugitives across the River Evros

by Hussein Habasch, KURDISTAN

The seductive river, the graceful and very violent river
The river that was deluding them with paradise
and the Gardens of Eden under which the flowers of dawn
and salvation flow.
The safety boat disappointed them,
that was taking them to the other side,
to Olympus of freedom
and threw them on the path of perdition in a blink of an eye.
Strangers, drowned...
Their tired bodies clattering the fangs of hungry fish
and the roaring of the water.
Without noticing,
and without lining their eyes with those paradises
and gardens under which the arrival of dawn
and salvation flows.

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In that ordeal, they could not leave any news or trace.
They left only the remains of a bloody day
in the pants of a very violent river
The river of gallows, resurrection and hell
The Evros River!

**** Evros River: A river separating Turkey and Greece,***
It is surreptitiously crossed by fugitives from the East to Europe.