



## *Nero*

**Mahmoud Darwish**

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Translation by Catherine Cobham

What's going on in Nero's mind as he watches Lebanon burn? His eyes wander ecstatically and he walks like someone dancing at a wedding: This madness is my madness, I know best, so let them set light to everything beyond my control. And the children have to learn to behave themselves and stop shouting when I'm playing my tunes!

And what's going on in Nero's mind as he watches Iraq burn? Does it please him that he awakens a memory in the history of the jungle that preserves his name as an enemy of Hamurabbi and Gilgamesh and Abu Nuwas: My law is the mother of all laws, the flower of eternity grows in my fields, and poetry – what does that mean?

And what goes on in Nero's mind as he watches Palestine burn? Does it delight him that his name is recorded in the roll of prophets as a prophet that nobody's ever believed in before? As a prophet of killing who God entrusted with correcting the countless mistakes in the heavenly books: I too am God's mouthpiece!

And what goes on in Nero's mind as he watches the world burn? I am master of the Day of Judgement. Then he orders the camera to stop rolling, because he doesn't want anyone to see that his fingers are on fire at the end of this long American movie!

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**CREDIT:** Darwish, Mahmoud. 2009. "Nero." Pp. 9 in *A River Dies of Thirst: Journals* by Mahmoud Darwish. Translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books. Gratefully reprinted by permission from the publisher of the poem.