

PHILIP METRES
from A Concordance of Leaves

On the occasion of my sister's wedding in Toura, Palestine

*as if I could not sing
except when you sing*
—Pablo Neruda

on drying racks tobacco leaves swim
wind turns the pages of the book

we can only read in the rough translation
of my soon-to-be brother-in-law

& this is the brother of my soon-to-be
brother-in-law, inhaling through the straw

of his cigarette: holds it between ring
& middle fingers, palm up: the unseen

& inaccessible sea caresses our strange faces—
blind & we wait for our lines to be read

ورق

& this is the cemetery, where the father
of his father's father's father's father's

father's father's father's father's father's
buried, bodies marked by broken stone incisors

among neighbors we sip sage tea, *maramia*—
named after the mother of God—for sage slaked her

PHILIP METRES

desert tongue & now a cousin comes, footfalls
white explosions of dust, from the mouth

of that abandoned quarry, its Jurassic cranes
& rusted conveyers hauling nothing now

ورق

& our family will ask so many questions we will
be called The Question Factory

& you my future brother will write your answers
with my slowly disappearing hand

The Question Factory asks: what is a dunum?
Answer: *slowly disappearing land*

The Question Factory asks: what is that line
on your skull? Answer: *a failed poem*

*by one who tries to write over everything
already written over*

ورق

The Question Factory: why do you smile?
because I still have my teeth

where are the doll's missing eyes?
in the back of my mind I believe

PHILIP METRES

in what?
I believe I hear a song

why do you laugh?
because I still have my tongue

there is a song, & yet
I hear no singing

ورق

consider the olive: it gnarls as it grows
into itself / a veritable thicket / it throws

up obstacles to the light to reach
the light / a crooked path in the air

while beneath our sight it wrestles the rock
wrests water from whatever trickles

beneath / it doesn't worry it looks like hell
refuses to straighten for anyone

each spring offers itself sweet to be eaten
first brambles / then olives

ورق

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because there is a word for love in this tongue
that entwines two people as one

& there is a word for love in this tongue
that nests in the chambers of the heart

& a word for love in this tongue that wanders
the earth, for love in this tongue in which you lose

yourself in this tongue & a word that carries
sorrow within its vowels & a word for love

that exudes from your pores & a word
for love that shares its root with falling

—*after Ahdaf Soueif*

ورق

something larger than a wave hovers
& buoys us in its wake, large as the sun as it breaks

into hills as if coaxed by the singers
to hold another's shoulder or hand off our hands

to another & sway our branches
& stamp the dear earth so hard

it feels we are lifting
from its trembling chest though the wedding

PHILIP METRES

photos will be ruined when the pitiless
enters the darkroom unbidden

ورق

having been warned to tell the truth
and nothing but the truth or else

I shall be subjected to penal action
I, the undersigned, do hereby swear

the sun-cured page of each tobacco leaf waits
to be crushed & burned into lungs

each olive tree's thousand eyes
ripen into sight

& the pomegranates of Toura are planets
neither mouth nor fence can fit around

ورق

behold my beloved beyond the wall
within my sight beyond

my touch
he standeth behind the wall

*he looketh forth, shewing himself
through the lattice*

PHILIP METRES

beyond the wall her family held
a feast for her

I stay here & wait at the gate
until my bride arrives

—for Rani Ghassan Qabaha

ورق

you my sister you my brother
outside the walls / in the wind

if Aristophanes was right
& we walk the world

in search of, a split-
infinitive of *to love*, if two

outside the walls / in the wind
should find in each other more

than mirror, then we should sing
outside the walls / in the wind

you my sister you my brother
that tree & stone may answer

outside the walls / in the wind
& let our *echo ring*