



Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear

Poems from Gaza

By Mosab Abu Toha

City Lights Books, San Francisco, CA, 2022, 144 pages, US\$15.95

“**W**ritten from his native Gaza, Abu Toha’s accomplished debut contrasts scenes of political violence with natural beauty.”
The New York Times

In *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear: Poems from Gaza*, the young Palestinian poet Mosab Abu Toha deftly harnesses the raw power of words and imagery to expose the cruel and often absurd realities of sustaining life in a city under siege. Abu Toha, who reflects on his family’s prolonged statelessness, is a literary warrior for whom crafting poetry is an act of resistance against the occupying power.

Self-referential and droll, horrible and pretty, a glistening mosaic of shards and shredded steel, Abu Toha’s is a complex book about a complex world born from a contentious war that has lasted three generations.

What makes Mosab Abu Toha’s work resonate so strongly is his gift for the particular, as described on the website of the National Book Critics Circle Award, for which Abu Toha was a finalist in 2022. By avoiding panoramic generalizations, Abu Toha hones in upon evocative images that capture the larger plight of his people: an uncle’s prayer rug, “where dozens of ants slept on wintry / nights, before it was looted and put in a museum,” a girl who “sinks / her small hands into the pockets of her jeans, / moves them / as if she’s counting / some coins” after losing seven fingers to the war.

Abu Toha’s book is rife with death yet painted in every corner with an almost unbearable amount of life, the way one might enter an abandoned house and find the books on the shelves, the bedsheet still folded over, the last cigarette, lipstick and all,

left in the ashtray. Absence, here, is a form of presence. Unseen villains still threaten. Unseen friends still linger. And faraway bombs still shake the unfelt ground, still echo, are still things you may find hidden in your ear.

Born in a refugee camp like his father before him, Abu Toha has devoted his career to the written word and is the founder of an English-language library in Gaza, the first of its kind. His debut poetry collection offers emotionally frank vignettes as well as an extended interview conducted by Ammiel Alcalay. The poetry cracks open a window to the stark realities of life for Gaza’s struggling residents, with Abu Toha serving as a gentle yet insistent messenger who whispers: *look, see our wounds, they are real.* —Shahina Piyarali, reviewer

Abu Toha won a Palestine Book Award



in London in 2022, the 2023 American Book Award sponsored by the Before Columbus Foundation in California, and is among the finalists of the 2023 National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry.

Abu Toha is the founder of the Edward Said Public Library in Gaza that now has two branches.

This introduction is based on reviews by B.A. Van Sise for the *New York Journal of Books*, available at <https://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/things-you-may-find-hidden>, and Shahina Piyarali for the website Shelf Awareness: Enlightenment for Readers, available at <https://www.shelf-awareness.com/sar-issue.html?issue=1119#m19601>.



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