

Ahmed Mattar

They imprisoned him
before they charged him
They tortured him
before they interrogated him
They stubbed out cigarettes in his eyes
and held up some pictures in front of him
Say whose faces are these
He said: I do not see
They cut off his lips
and demanded that he name
those 'they' had recruited
He said nothing
and when they failed to make him talk
they hanged him.
A month later they cleared him
They realised the young man
was not the one they really wanted
but his brother.
They set out to get the other
but they found him
dead from grief
and did not arrest him.

Nizar Qabbani

My lord, no doubt you are able
to cut down necks
and cut down wages
But why are you against
love and lovers
ink and papers
You have everything needed
the whips and prisoners and gallows
the lightning and thunder and bellows
You have balances and accounts
You have credits and discounts
As for me, my calling is to plant lilies
and to set loose the dove
And you, my lord, your nature is
to set loose bullets at the dove.

Ahmed Mattar, an Iraqi poet, lives in London.
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