

# Three Poems

by [Steven Sher](#) (November 2019)



*Manos de Protesta*, Oswaldo Guayasamin, 1968

## The Palestinian

*an American college campus, circa 1980*

New to town, he stood each day out in the quad  
recruiting students with grand gestures and with charm,  
engaging faculty who soon embraced him,  
invited him into their classrooms, churches, homes  
to plant the seeds of solidarity.

In the coffeehouse at night, he filled their heads  
with horrors done to those he loved.

When he saw me, we would nod but never stop  
to talk because he knew I was a Jew.

Soon the blame-filled articles began appearing  
in the student paper, the lies about Jews  
circulating on lampposts and in stairwells,  
behind glass notice boards beside official  
bulletins: stereotypic cartoons, blood libels.  
When speakers came to campus,  
they were shouted down, escorted out  
as the crowd became belligerent  
while he just sat with folded arms among the students  
in the back, nodding as the chants grew bolder,  
grinning as the fists thrust higher in the air.



*El Grito*, Oswaldo Guayasamin, 1976

## The Massacre at Har Nof

*November 18, 2014*

One of the terrorists worked next door  
in a grocery store where he observed  
the movements of the Jews:

knew the moment they stood most exposed,  
prayer shawls over their bowed heads,  
trembling and beseeching G-d.

That morning they strode in with guns,  
a meat cleaver and axe; set upon  
the unsuspecting, shooting and hacking

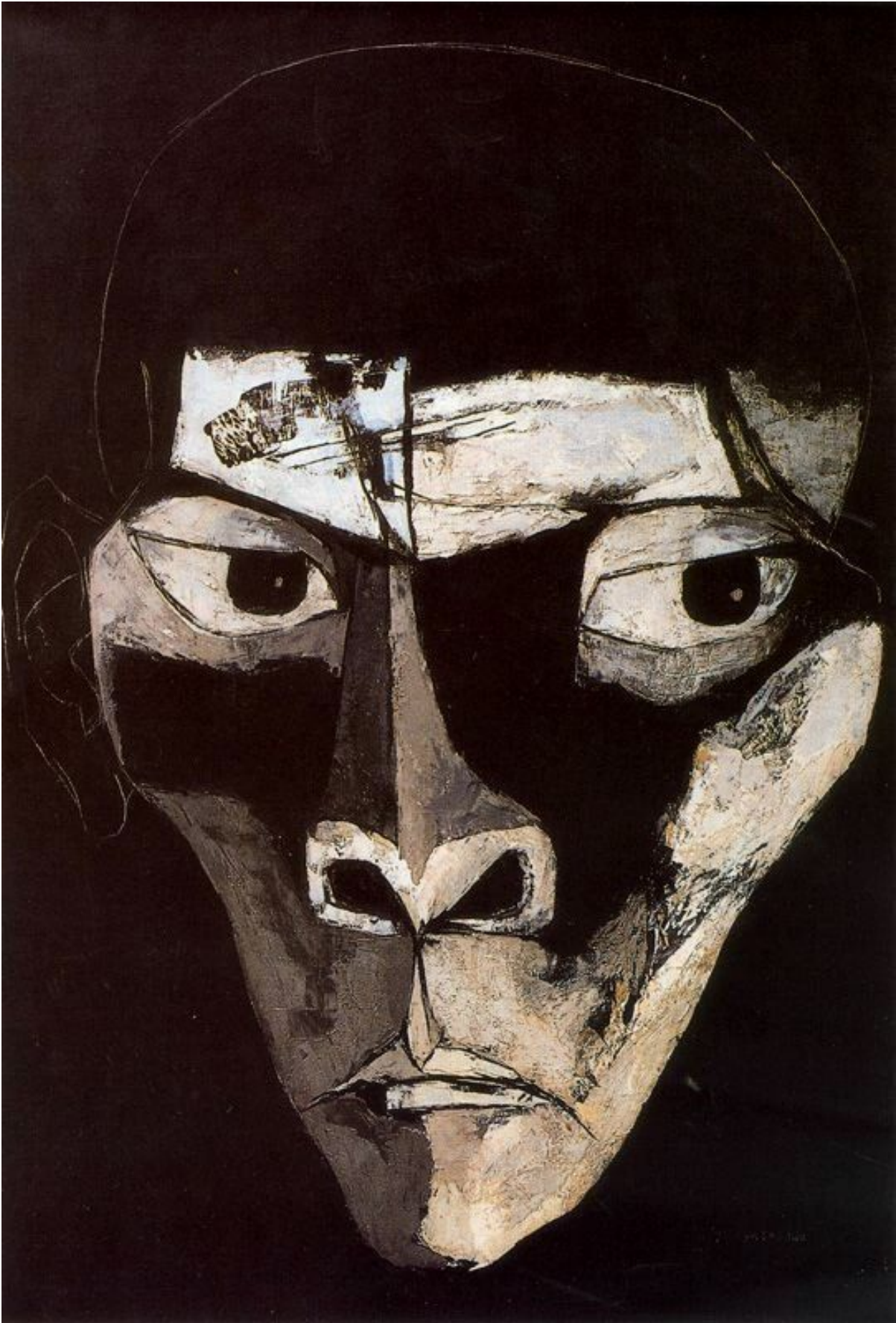
their way through the room, butchering four  
and injuring more: two heads  
and arms cut off, eyes gouged out.

Bodies wrapped in prayer shawls  
and *tefillin* sprawled along the floor

amid the pools of blood.

Blood hardening in horror.





*El Rostro*, Oswaldo Guayasamin, 1969

The Thief

*Nachlaot, Shabbat, 3 a.m.*

Shouts and running through  
the winding alleys shatter sleep.  
On the open deck of the empty flat  
across the way, someone ducks in shadow  
as pursuers close from several roofs,  
triangulate with flashlights and converge.  
Objects crash and loud rough voices  
rouse the night. Slammed to the deck,  
three cops on top, he screams "Enough."  
In cuffs the thief is led downstairs,  
people watching from their terraces  
and windows. He wears a hood  
though it's a warm summer night.  
The cops are joking now. One or two  
remain behind to sweep the grounds,  
their flashlights finding our faces  
in the dark. We listen for returning  
silence to restore the stolen calm.

«[Previous Article](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Next Article](#)»

---

Brooklyn-born Steven Sher has lived in Jerusalem since 2012. His latest (16th) book is *Contestable Truths, Incontestable Lies* (Dos Madres Press, 2019). His work has appeared widely since the 1970s. Recent appearances range from *Veils, Halos & Shackles: International Poetry on the Oppression and Empowerment of Women* to *Mizmor Anthology* to the forthcoming *New Voices: Contemporary Writers Confronting The Holocaust*. Last year he received the Glenna Luschei Distinguished Poet Award, headlining the 35th annual San Luis Obispo Poetry Festival. Visit him on his [website](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)