

Raghid Nahhas

Literature has been an essential part of the life of Raghid Nahhas since his school days in Damascus, in the nineteen-sixties. He was active in preparing, editing and publishing school bulletins. Al-Mohsinyya Highschool, where Nahhas spent all his school years, had a reputable magazine, *Adwa' al-Mohsinyya*, where Nahhas published his first literary material.

His maternal grandfather, Sheikh Ahmad Aref Elzein, was a reformist in South Lebanon, and the founder and editor of *al-Irfan*, a leading literary publication, since 1909, that played a pioneering role in Arab culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Nahhas used to visit his grandfather's offices and meet a lot of writers, politicians, poets and thinkers. His grandmother used to recite hundreds of verses from traditional Arab poetry. All of this must have contributed to his eagerness to delve into the sea of creative writing.

Despite his scientific orientation, Nahhas wrote literary material without publishing. He was too busy with his scientific pursuit at the American University of Beirut, but benefited a lot from the University's resources which enriched his scientific, literary and intellectual capabilities.

After obtaining a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Marine Sciences from the American University of Beirut, he received a grant from the Syrian Arab Republic to undertake a PhD in England. There, he met another Syrian at the same university who was preparing a PhD in English literature. This friendship rekindled Nahhas' literary spirit, and in 1978 a short story of his was accepted in *al-Adaab*, one of the most prestigious literary magazines in the Arab world. This had a positive effect on Nahhas who was determined to continue his literary activities, but his preoccupation with scientific research and professional life prevented him.

He worked in research and teaching at the American University and at Hull University, and in Syria at The Supreme Council of Sciences, The Marine Research Centre and other research organizations. He was adviser to a number of ministries and organizations. He was very active with the United Nations' Environment Programme.

Nahhas migrated to Australia in 1988 where he worked as a consultant for the Environment Protection Authority in Victoria, then co-established and headed its Marine

Research Group. In 1990, he moved to Sydney to head the Estuaries and Beaches Section of the Scientific Services Branch of Sydney Water, progressing to senior management at Australian Water Technologies. Years later, he left, focusing on his own business in consulting, translations and journalism. He joined the public service again where he worked for the Australian Federal Government in the area of community services until his retirement in 2014.

Nahas headed and participated in several associations and councils, in the literary, social and scientific fields. He is a member of the Australian Society of Authors, the New South Wales Writers' Centre, PEN and the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. He organized and participated in a large number of local, regional and international conferences and forums. He is often invited to chair or be a keynote speaker in various events.

Nahas published, in both English and Arabic, more than 500 works in science, simplifying science, culture, politics, critique, short stories, essays and translations, including ten literary books and forty technical manuscripts.

A notable literary achievement was his publication and editing of *Kalimat* from 2000 to 2006 (please see the **MAGAZINE** section of this website).

Nahas obtained an 'Australia Day Medal' in 2003 for publishing and editing *Kalimat* and for his efforts in providing access among cultures. The Arabic Heritage League in Australia awarded him the 2005 'Gibran International Award'. In the same year, The Arab Council Australia awarded him an Honorary Life Membership.

Nahas has been interviewed by various media in Australia and overseas, including radio and television. Some notable examples are mentioned below.

Rafif Sidaoui published an interview with Nahhas (in Arabic) titled *Raghid Nahhas: Kalimat Celebrates Beauty*, in *Al-Shorouk*, No. 9272, 07/10/2004, UAE.

Sophie Masson, the renowned Australian writer and former member of The Australia Council for the Arts and former Chair of the Australian Society of Authors, published an interview with Nahhas in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (17-18/01/2004) titled *When a Good Read Talks in Two Tongues*. This is a leading Australian newspaper distributed to over seven hundred thousand individuals.

In a referendum by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, published 12/03/2005, Sophie Masson, nominated Raghid Nahhas as one of the top 100 Australian intellectuals.

Another notable gesture by another Australian is a poem by Professor Manfred Jurgensen presented to Raghid Nahhas, titled *Prayer of an Infidel*, addressing contemporary issues in the Middle East and calling on human unity. It was published in *Eltelegraph*, 28/11/2003, Sydney. Similar gestures were made by the poets Youssef Haj in Syria and Yahia Samawi in Adelaide, Australia.

The prominent Arab novelist and thinker Ghada Samman wrote about Nahhas and *Kalimat* on many occasions praising its quality and contents. And so did Ghalia Khouja, a poet and literary critic. Other similar support came from literary figures such as Khalid al-Hilli in Melbourne, Chadia Gedeon-Hajjar, Tony Kazzi and Akram Burgess Elmugawesh in Sydney, Wadih Filastine in Egypt, Ghassan Alameddine and Jumana Abu Roos Mufrej in Lebanon, Nihad Cabbouh in Syria and Noel Abdulahad in USA.

The Syrian journalist Hani Elkhayer included a section about Raghid Nahhas in his book *Syrian Personalities of the Twentieth Century*.

An article about Nahhas was published in the *Prominent Personalities* Section of *Syria Times*, an English publication in Syria, No. 6691, 13/11/2005.

More recently, Professor Manfred Jurgensen dedicated a whole poem from his book *The River* (Boolarong Press, Salisbury 2016) for Raghid Nahhas. And Greg Bogaerts dedicated his whole collection of short stories (*Beyond Sunflowers and Starry Nights*, Shanti Arts Publishing, USA 2018) to Raghid 'In gratitude for all of his support and encouragement over the years'.

His other interests include photography, gardening, bushwalking and swimming. He enjoys handy work and manages all repairs and maintenance around the house.

He considers caring for his grandchildren, as needed, one of the most important tasks he does.