

Khalid al-Hilli

Translated by Raghid Nahhas



Your Name Is
My Memory

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Foreward

My association with Khalid al-Hilli developed when he was an adviser to *Kalimat*, a magazine of creative writing I used to publish and edit. In addition to his literary contributions to the magazine, he attracted several Arab writers from around the world to contribute their writings, poetry and art. He was also in charge of “Literary Fair”, a section in the Arabic edition of the magazine, concerned with book reviews. He promoted the magazine in several ways, including organising literary gatherings. His deeds were a reflection of his dedication and love of literature and the arts.

Khalid al-Hilli was born in *Hilla* (so he is *al-Hilli*), a town in the county of *Babil* (Babylon) in Iraq, in 1945. His first publications were outside his country in 1962 when he published poetry and prose articles in prominent literary journals in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Later his works appeared in many Arab and Iraqi journals.

He left Iraq for the last time in 1979, and stayed in the United Arab Emirates where he worked as a journalist till 1982. He then moved to Morocco working as an editor for a local newspaper and a correspondent for a Qatari newspaper.

He migrated to Australia in 1989, and worked for some time as a correspondent for a Saudi newspaper. He lives in Melbourne, and still writes for some Arabic newspapers.

His first book of ideas and poetry was published

in 1963. The present translated collection was originally published in Arabic under the title *Cloudy Cities* just before he left Morocco in 1988. From his introduction to *Cloudy Cities*, we know that the poems were all originally written in Iraq between 1962 and 1977.

Al-Hilli believes that poetry is written on some occasions and lived on others. This is why when he is not writing poetry, he is living it.

Khalid and I are very appreciative of Eileen Marshal who kindly commented on the manuscript.

We are grateful to Dr. Mohamed Abumeis, an artist of Libyan origins, for allowing us to use one of his paintings for the cover of this collection.

The photos used throughout the text are of paintings by Dr. Foad al Tai, an Iraqi artist living in Sweden. For this, we thank him whole-heartedly.

We appreciate the guidance and patience of Clarissa and Herbert Stein, of Papyrus Publishing, throughout the preparation for and publishing of this work.

Raghid Nahhas

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Notes from the Book of Women

A writer travels, one day,
in the blood of women.
His papers burn.
Melancholic songs quiver
 in his hands,
 cry in water,
to become his favourite ink.
Monotonous he walks.
Monotonous he lives.

How can he, then, write a story he does not know
when it falls in his hands and disappears?
How does he see in her hands the papers of the past,
and what brings him near her?
How does the face in his hands disappear?
How does she leave?

He does not ask now— he is not expecting an answer.
Who shall answer or ask?

 No question ...

 No answer ...

He returns now in his sad pain, killed
on a lost old book of poetry.
He returns now ... from where?
Does he then ask where he comes from?
No, he does not ask!

 But he has now returned,
in his face part of him, or of what he has left behind
... something from the books of women.



I dream that I open all the closed doors,
steal all the stolen dreams
and distribute them among the poor.
I dream that I close all the open doors
and give back every martyr his soul.
I dream that I'll open all the harbours of my land
and I go on ...
 in my dream go on ...
to become a dream.

3

To kill myself ... is better than to kill somebody else.
Let me thus begin ...
And let somebody else begin.

Cloudy Cities

Cities of paper I play with,
scratch days off their foreheads.
Cities, in their darkness, I read
letters unbeknown to
every language I wear ...
They wear me.
Crowded cities sometimes,
empty other times.

On the forehead of what is to come,
carried off the shelf of my years,
come other cities:
cities that trifle with me
whenever I ask about their inhabitants
or the banks of their rivers.
Walking cities anchor in my forehead,
should I imagine myself one of their inhabitants.

The clock's handles carry me
in the body of the night and hide me,
leave me ...
 intoxicated by their pulse.

When I am numb, they exile me.

The roads of the cities join their trip
when they announce another truce ...
 and sleep under the bridge of time.

The Garden of Sadness,

Called Happiness by Chance

The voice that splits my head
comes to me in the night
whispers and rain.

I gather myself,
slumber in my hand,
relax my worries and sleep.

My watch departs my wrist;
I search ...
I am in my hand, and
the hand is my blood.
Where are my papers that know
my sorrow,
my passion and
my boredom?

The watch is lost,
the hand is rain and
the night is over.
My hours are rain,
my body has not departed the hand ...
The voice that splits my head departs me,
I become a hand in the rain
embraced by the sun at dawn,
dispersed in the oceans of tedium
in the morning.

Before I knew that
this dazzled world was expanding,
my step had been growing at the window and
in my chest I had all the doors of distance—
a street to the Universe, stretching to a world
surpassed by my imagination,
in years before I was born,
when I walked in blood
never seen by man before,
never born by death yet.
I was alone walking happily
like perfume ... as free as water.
I did not know the meaning of a life
dissolving in the tea of cafés.
I did not believe an incident not
told one day by my lips.
I was walking over my days
as quick as time, as slow as joy.
I built histories from my white papers
when dreams were growing in my chest.
I embraced, for me, another joy.
My feet stepped on sand,
in the sand I drew a face,
the face became
a voice and a body.
We united.
What a history this moment was.

Distances disappeared in my voice.
Distances shrank to a dot
that became my voice
and we started.

I was alone the first exultation.
I was the sea and the trees ...
and the ever spreading fragrance!

I land from the end of my voice
to start another voice,
to whisper something—
who would hear my voice?
Who would tell my trees and my seas
about my death?
Should I die alone?
Now I know that I am going to die.

My body watches my shadow
and I watch the shadow of the shadow.
are we going to die
a body inside its shadow?

Then even silence would escape our place.

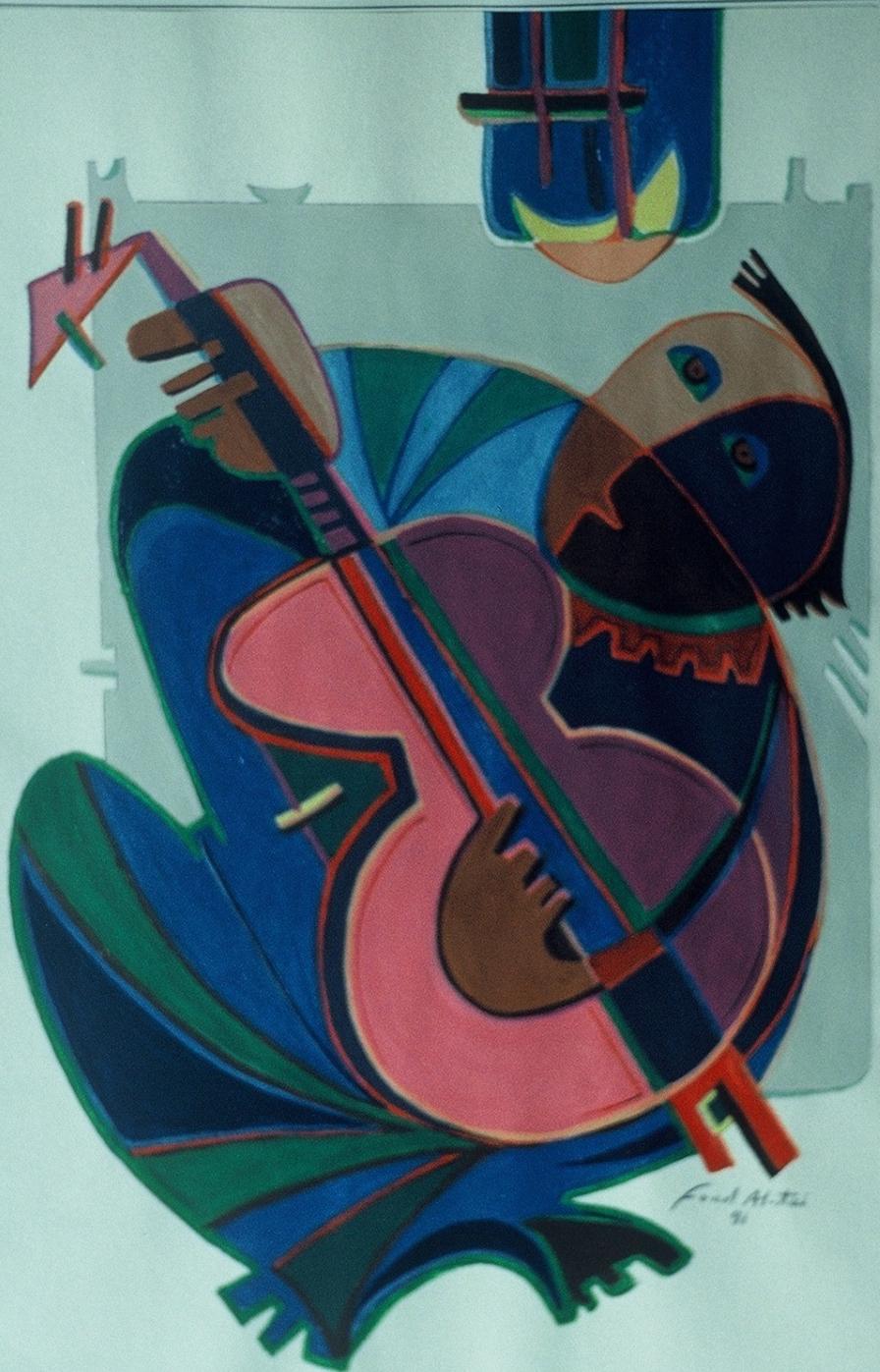


Ferdinand Altmann
92

A Deferred Matter

The road does not expect from me
a silence like tonight's.
My throat does not expect
I cry like rain,
like the wound
across my hand.

I am but a perpetual wound!
I fall in forests, in a sleeping darkness.
I sing over the wounds of dreams
something I have not sung before ...
I don't know the tune of this song,
or the tune of this enchanting voice,
or the tune of my voice.
I don't know that I am a voice
dazzled by my wounds—
I defer my scream.



Paul Gauguin
11

Nightmare

When I look in the mirror,
water flows,
chatter sprays another
handful of death
and memory's yearning.
A door opens my lanterns to darkness.
The door is morning.
If I leave my face behind,
the wind will call me
and death will call my face.
As I depart my eyes,
heaven comes to me
an exile on my feet
digging a sound
and a song in my blood
carrying death.



The Many Faces of the Same Matter

A Face

For those who
suddenly
appeared in my way one morning,
splitting my life into two seasons:
autumn, then summer ...
For those who awaited salvation from me,
then got disappointed and fired bullets at me,
I come: death is my sea ...
and my heart is my boat.

They sprang
in my hand,
rested in my blood.
I descended from the forests of my death
crossing all distances, dying on my way.
They moved my voice,
desecrated history's desire,
trod on my foot,
stepped on my head
and died on my death.
They left behind a thousand garments ...
near my home.
They narrowed all distances,
making them a finger
interlocking two hearts.

In their coming, they became a moment
for all things
and I became their focal point.
They put their crown on my head
and when they regretted it,
they took off my head and went.
I did not know where to!
They left in my hand a white paper,
with a thousand gypsy voices,
a thousand stone gates
in my voice

in

my voice

in my voice ...

voice that is searching for me ...

will remain searching for its voice
floating in its death.

A Second Face

They quickly passed through my blood,
undermined a step of a whole generation
then they returned, planting the impossible
to become a thousand generations.
They told the truth during the night ...
and lived their lies at dawn ...
They struggled to see themselves in the morning—
their mirror committed suicide
when their falsity dropped their voice on it!

A Third Face

They taught me that things had two faces,
but they did not say that humans had two lives.
Then they died.

Because the first wisdom was inscribed
on my chest,
I said nothing.

I wasted two lives and gave away
my veins for a time on the roads.
I yearned to know who had died ...
knowing nothing ...

about death in life

or life in death
and when ...

or how ...

or where ...

Why did he die?

A Fourth Face

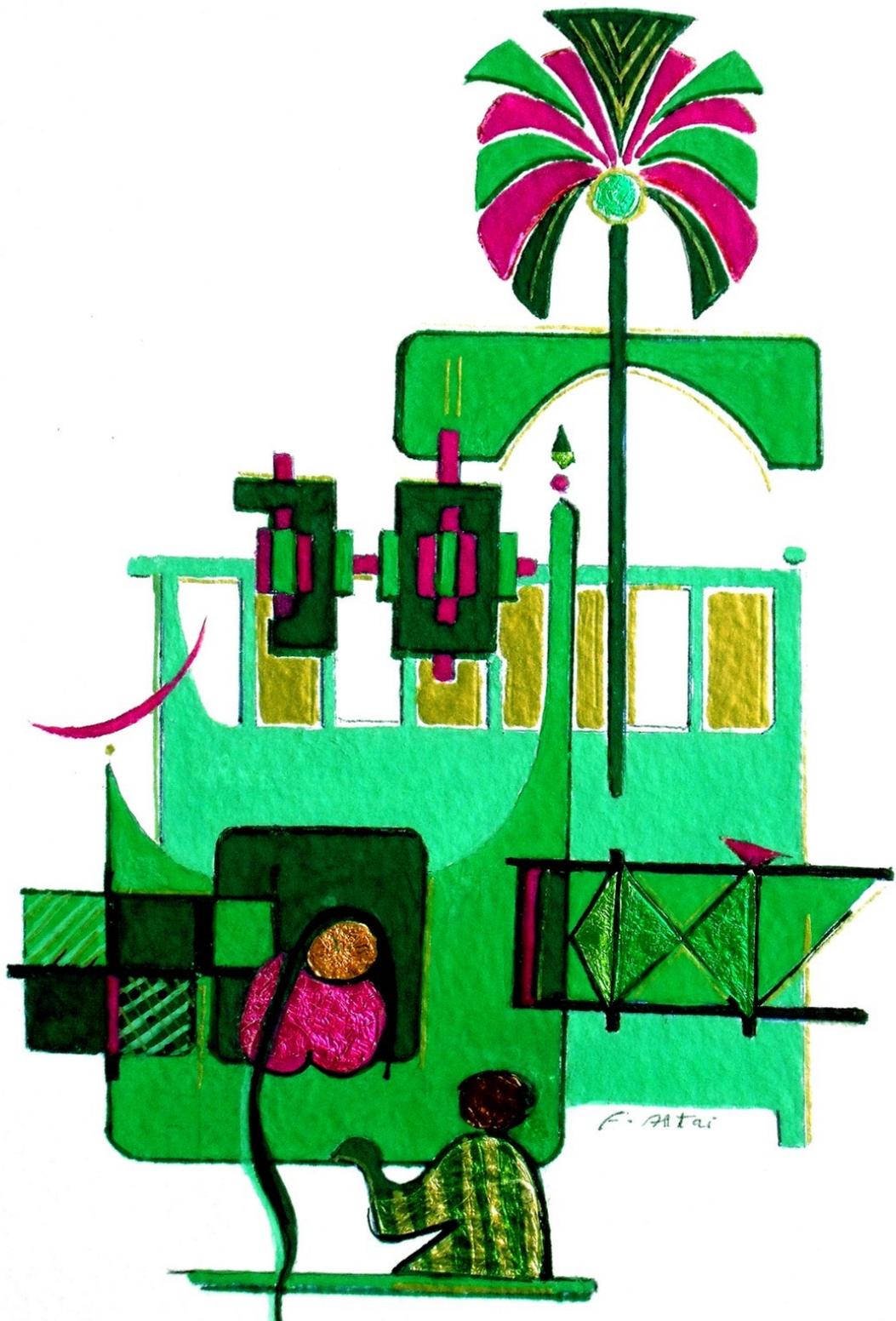
When they died waiting ...

I was alone with her

contemplating her nakedness
and courting her yearning.

When they died waiting ...

I alone died on her.



F. Atar

The Flight of Laughter

Echoes embalm my papers
and sleep near the night.
They betray my voice,
wear my face and
disappear in the smoke of my exile.
I see them walk in daytime gardens.
They pick a rose out of my eyes,
a nod out of my blood and
a waiting out of my mouth.
They see me lie in my estrangement.
They watch me and walk away,
wearing my garments
wrapped in the season of torment
at night.
They laugh and fly away!



Fond Altai
92

When the forests were lush, I lived.
I felt I was the rain and
covered myself with trees.

4

You try to escape the consciousness of escape.
You resemble me!
Who, I ask, created a mirror for us?
Is it the mercury floating on the sea,
the sand troubled by it, or
the face that burdens us?

You try to escape the consciousness of escape—
you resemble me!
Is it a mirror that reveals our secret?

The Riddle

1

Should I return to myself,
for a moment,
towards the end of the night,
my despair returns to me!
Then I return, lost, distraught and wasted
in seas where so many sails have lost their way.
Thus I search for myself,
beyond the abyss of darkness and wretchedness.

2

Asleep, you dream of roses, perfumes and jasmine.
How do I wish a cloud may, for once, carry me
to you after my sustained sufferings.
If only once! Only once! Once!
But I do apologise.
I see myself alone;
a vagabond child behind the wall of night.
You are asleep, and I apologise.
What do I hope for from my torment,
and what do I hope for to wait?

3

Shall we meet in an imaginary street?
Shall we sail behind the sun,
behind the impossible?
I alone ask, oh my distant passion!
I ask ...
Would my question bear any fruit?

Vestibules

1

These doors cannot shut out the wind ...
My heart is rain,
my paths are trees,
the scarfs are dust,
there is fire beyond this dark tunnel.
The windows, planted by the sun
alongside the doors,
appear to me a haze of drizzle and waiting.
I become an orbit,
hung between the hand of death
and an instant!

Oh vastness!
Take me towards my face.
Submerge me in the details
forgotten inside the pit of my years.
My lip has become a ship,
my blood has become oceans,
my first dream is about a gypsy,
my mouth is mad,
my head turns with the clock,
buried by the fire of questions.
As much as I am ignorant of
how long my blood kept
flying with abandoned miracles,
and how I manipulated my closed life,
I am ignorant of my self tonight.

2

My face ascends when my homeland sinks in it
and the ships disappear.
Among the whispers of the wind to the wind,
I see the roads giving two sides of the game:
paths for life and paths for death.

3

Should my face return to the mirror,
the forest of fear shall cry
and the door of darkness shall return to the finger.
They have drawn eyes on the face
and life in the heart.
On the wall, they had left a notion of hope that
slept in my eyes for a while then died.
I returned to the mirror paralysed—
my face is its demise
and my longing is its face.
When my voice felt this loneliness,
it left this life and flew away!

4

A word dropped by the night in my way,
rolled me towards rivers of tar.
When I was there, I sadly washed myself
with the sand of their banks
and I shrouded myself with a week-long of days
that became my memory.
I regained my way only to
return today begging for my present life.

5

I am mere numbers in a room of riddles:
symbols of multiplications and divisions—
doubling, reducing, subtracting, summing.
As I add up the years of life in my mind,
I become the paper
buried under millions of papers.
My iris dies under my eyelids.



Fond Altai
92

Down and Up

I climb down the ladder of sorrows
wearing the faces of my happiness.
I see a poet dying on every step
sucking, like a child, a doll ...
The houses are sad with children and dolls.
I descend from the terraces of old grief ...
where I once wept.
Is this the land I seek?
Is this happiness?
I ask many people,
no one answers!
The One and Only
witnesses all.
The ladder becomes a straw
and the winds become lashes of ember
licking my wounds,
a cigarette sealing my eye.
O' you who ascends to the unknown
let me, through my hand, release
the yearning of my arm.
O' you who give the unseen whatever
you desire!
O' you the thief of poetry,
you give away what you have never had.
Let me hear a scream
hanging in the wind,
strewn between day and night.
Let me now scream,
for this persisting thirst
wants to say something.
I ascend, my only garment is a shroud.

I lose you.
I lose the ladder of sadness and time.
I climb up on a thread without roots.
I descend to the roots.
I become a soil for resurrection.

I am unknown,
abandoned,
searching for my name,
for the names of all the unknown,
for your face and mine.
Can I confirm my half-life
by some unknown,
half-mysteriously departing without a mask,
or weeping near a mask?
O' half-loss I ask you!
I am ignorant of what you are.
I am ignorant of how you depart.

O' half-sail!
O' half-
Sail!

Words at Crossroads

After midnight, when
the streets become empty,
wafts of tender breeze,
bearing from you a secret drowned in fantasy,
come from memories' lane,
to tell a thousand mysterious things about you,
as I lie on the fire of my doubt!
I may remain broken-hearted, crying. Maybe!
Whilst the night is a black shadow,
playing across the road.

When I was little, white-hearted
and we were two lovers,
the world was innocent tales.
We used to disappear in a corner
when words spilled over our lips, and
I saw lust in your gaze,
silent screams in two eyes.
When we were lovers!
When we were!
You might be jaded with the talk of the past,
but once again I am tormented.
I feel I am behind a wall
after I have lost your eyes
and my great expectations.
The past between us deludes me
with its tales of suffering.
Again I see you a child with pale dreams

who left her boy
behind the fence of the night crying,
searching for you among the leaves in darkness,
deeply immersed in sadness, recalling your image
and no one but you.
When do we set sail for return?
When do we anchor without
a shadow of estrangement?

After Four

In whom do I confide?
I only have your face,
the old stories,
the wind and
the memories.
I await daylight.
Here I am, a ghost restlessly dispersed by the wind.
Here I am, voiceless, dreamless, light-headed,
nothing near me.
I had engraved your face on my heart
just before it died.
But your face lives!
Here I am, no heart, no history,
not even a bouquet of hope.
Here I am!
Where did I come from?
Where am I going to?
No where!

What would remain after four?
What would remain?
Oh! You are a forest blossoming in the unknown.
A sun and the horizon!
I am surrounded by the wounds of silence,
death, papers and my lost soul.
What would remain past four,
but the moaning of a stranger?
What would remain after my death?
I wish you hear my tale,
drink the tears of my voice.

My voice seeps with sadness.
It will be killed by its tone!
Ah! Only if I could see you before I die.



From my Early Scribbles

We passed by roads closed to us,
witnessed despair and deprivation and
spent harsh nights that exhausted us.
Despite so many things,
despite our lost love and
the passage of so many years
that separated us,
our memories faded into small tales.
Despite what I carry of your past,
small exciting tales in my heart,
despite the big secrets,
and before I close my eyes
and go through closed roads again,
I wish I could see the dreams in your eyes:
my dreams and the dreams of life.



A Knight with a Twisted Neck

Your weeping is silent, tearless.
Your step, that has just passed by,
is heading towards a road of thorns,
paved with fire.
In its wilderness, your step asks
when the sails of darkness fray
and this maze unravels.
Your feelings remain tired with
the insult of indifference.
Should they remain tearlessly crying
all through the night?
Should they dream of green shadows, of candles,
and remain confused with lost hopes
when the silence of the night persists?
When would your home receive, with tears,
the candles of a hesitant happiness?

The night is a deprived desert bitten by shadows.
Out of beautiful braids
they bring a fairy,
a black legend,
embracing your voice,
streaming in the shade,
asking about a frame without a picture
that has lost the colour in
the magic islands of oblivion.
It oozes a moan of a thirsty lover,
crying over the sound of a sparrow.
Alone he revels,
where the paths' shadows flow solo,

just like me, parallel to
a premonition burning in their chest.

You are alone ...
A thing with nothing else!
Unknown shall you stay thus,
except for a vision and
a whisper flirting with
the pause of the mind.

Attack and Retreat of another Kind

I come to you from my future
grasping a handful of my timidity and
perpetual longing.
I advance to you walking backward,
carrying your past in my face
and the burdens of the poor in my heart.
They arrive here before me ...
They compose the songs of the tribe
for your eyes.
They sow pearls in your head,
a crown and a braid.
They plant your face in the mirror,
a land and a sky.
For you, they paint a rainbow
from the fountain of joy.
They turn around your dreamy eyes
to borrow their face:
falsehood, verity and waiting.
You don't know whether you are the princess
of these captive rituals and ceremonies, or
you descend from the unseen,
a heaven carrying two halves:
dryness and greenness!
They are dazzled,
you become dazzled!
The clock turns twice ...
The wind fairy arrives.
The curtain disappears from the stage.
Dreams circle in your eyes.
They circle.

Their lips are sealed.
The land silences the tongues' whips.
You say nothing.
You sing not.
You don't hover over the blaze of the wind.
They settle in the wind.
They steal the crown and run away.
You stray, divorce the island and go mad!
You marry the hypocrisy of time.

I come towards you,
a Quran in my chest.
Questions grow in my eyes.
I come towards you.
You are swiftly jogging backward,
and I come to you running backward.
Each of us is growing
in the void of this farce.

Dispositions

A Beginning

I once asked you that we start the end,
write things with clear memory in our sky
and start the tale.
I asked you once that I be your sad voice,
or even a single pulse in it.
I wanted to be a hair lock on your forehead.
I wanted to be a smile in your eyes,
or a fleeting glance.
I wanted to be.
But, Oh joy of my day!
I was only one moment or two.

I scribble my name in your blood,
so it may live in you,
or half of you,
or some of you,
or die!

A Cloud

You are distant, like the sun.
You are a sun masked from my eyes
by a lonely cloud.

You are lonely.
I am lonely.
What extinguishes the glare of the world

carried in the hand of danger?
What lives in the drops of the rain?
What dies inside me today to make me
a child again?
Something as strange as the unknown comes.
It is you!
Why you?
Why, alone, I drink consciousness
as if it were volcanoes of an end?

Headache

They speak to me about the past.
Dazzled, I ask:
'Why don't the feet of time wash
the face of my path?'
'Why don't they enter my heart beating tenderly?'
When I finish,
the whole world becomes a question!

I come sailing from the darkness of the unknown.
I pass the face of my old histories,
carrying the shrouds of defeat for my misery—
Desolate is my path and the fences are on fire.
The youthful laughter in my face is
merely an aging sign.
They teach me how to wait—
I cry!

Insomnia

04:40

I carry a saw cutting into the soul.
I carry voices in my voice.

04:42

I am with the living,
I am with the dead.

04:45

I have nothing but my birth.

05:00

It is five o'clock,
opening a new day for the dawn.
I wish I get out of me,
to run towards the sky,
run away from my legs,
run away from my sleep,
and stay afloat in the air.
Five passes, leaving me on a wall of ice.

The Café

I am tea, possibly
cheap tea in the cafés.
I am sad in the cafés,
a losing game wilting
in the silence of my lips.
I am a history of death
and thirst in the water.

I am alone in love,
alone in death,
alone in the tea,
alone in the head.
But, I am not lonely!
The cafés know me.
The cafés love me.
A ghost ignorant of its misery—
I begin my self when
the world ends itself.

Temporary Departure

My blood boils with questions and pours rivers.
Your epochs engage in a battle
and surrender to the fire.
I ask my sad face what it would say.
I draw my image at the bottom of a wall and
become an open tavern
for the seasons of giddiness.
I carry the horror of the wind in my palm and
depart flying in your sky—
a tired butterfly, a sparrow.
Oh, the heaven of vision I have been waiting for!
when would the fire burn?
The words of this poem are moons
granting children their bridge of splendour,
burning all secrets.
I bless the space for my journey.
I hear your voice screaming at me ...
Come!
The wind departs and shreds my palm in the sky.
I fall on your land, a deformed tale—
I carry my face in the darkness of the squares.
This is the deepest question of them all!

Another Return

Death is defined by an instant
when silence is born from
the murder of sound at the door.
Things are growing when
I approach the corners of astonishment.
For a moment,
I forget the slackness of time in my face.
For another,
I leave the surface for the depth of the bottom.

She left her papers and went.
In my bewilderment,
no lip can understand my silence.
My talk is a language.
My seas are a shore.
We both,
we both
are a body falling
on the sand
crying.

At the doors of new plans
we launch another paradise
and disappear.
We die in the vagueness of a dream.
Then we become another dream,
scattering in the wind.



Fond Alai
92

Equation

W

Do you remember me,
or have I become a slain statue
in a wax museum of your years?
Slaughtered years in your hand watch me
and the papers fly.
Now I ask you, answer me:
'Do you remember me?'
Do you remember me?

S

I have no notions about you.
You are clouds in my face.
You are sleepiness in my heart.
But you are defeated at the walls,
written on the walls,
forgotten behind the walls.

SH

Erase memory from my blood,
scratch everything!

How would the evening come?
How would the next night arrive?
How could you come when
a cloudy evening fills the sky?

In the nakedness of the evening
I was alone walking,
without bread or water.
My dagger was a smile
and the nights were air.
Keep silent, smile,
fall in love and run
to the limits of space.

I

My name is anonymous like yours,
but I am looking for two names.
I am searching for the abyss of moments.
Your face is searching for my face ...
I am searching for two!
Two unknown in the twilight of exile.

From Discarded Papers

To a lady that may not read these poems

Love

Spontaneously, I come to you
in the morning like a sun,
and in the evening like a moon
dancing in your eyes and weeping.
There is another evening in your eyes.
In your face, there are days
painted by none other than me.
In your face, there are numbers
whose first formation I know.
Your face turns with me, then I turn.

Is your face ignorant of something in me,
or is it ignorant of the colours of my days?
Is it I who is ignorant of your face?

Insomnia

Don't I have a jar where
I pour my blood?
Don't I have notebooks where
I scribble on their margins?
Why then do I become as
transparent as water and
weep like water, and wake up:
my voice is a wound
and my wounds are salt.
The night is an island.

Times, overwhelmingly remote,
mirror themselves in my face.
A human asks, 'Who is this?'
Voices rise asking: 'Who is this?'
Dazzled, I remain silent.
Joy suffocates in my chest;
I am one of them now.
I sing about times and epochs
I have never witnessed.
Wakefulness blends in us,
we wake up and sing for
a new beginning.

Oh woman! You reside in my body.
I join you in my dreams.
You open shrouds in my body and
sing in my delusions!

Would love come?

Alienation

My spirit descends
in my body.
I cry.
I quarrel with myself.
Trees, on which I had scribbled
the first letter of my name,
quarrel with me.
And ...
I remember something:
your name is my memory.

Tremor

I have nothing but my face,
dazzled and alienated by the wind.
I walk alone trembling
with a wounded voice,
enjoying the cold.
I look for your face whilst
the roads are exiled in darkness.
The voice screams—
my language is as cold as
papers forgotten in my pocket.
The pocket shall swell with paper and grow.
You will remain asleep on the chest of
another wretched soul.
Asleep ... and
The dawn shall come.
I shrink inside me
and leave towards forlorn secrets.
I cry like children.
I cry sad, wearing my doubts.
This night climbs in my head,
sleeps in my heart,
carries tales of death to my face,
delivers me to the wind
and grows in my voice.
I extend my search—
I search for your eyes,
and you ...
tremble on the chest of
another wretched soul.

Sour Grapes

Cigarette butts are all what surrounds me.
The evenings snatched half of me—
I am the adventurous child!
The grapes I know deny me,
the grapes that drew a face in my ribs,
the grapes growing in the desert of my face
left me and became questions!
I, alone, kneel beside them—
abandoned over abandoned remains.

There is a ghost as high as a wall
at the door of my conscience,
remembering two eyes and a fence.
Oh my heart! Pass through the forest and migrate.
Leave your face alone on the bridge
standing still, like all our questions.

In the night, our past passes
like forests of ash.
Our flesh disrobes of all desires.
Our bodies know the curse of waiting.
They had their first round in bed and know
that subsequent rounds would actually be a battle!



F. Altai

Premonitions

Contemplations

I stick on the door
the map of our planet as it revolves.
Where are you revolving now ...
and where do I revolve?
I look for you everywhere,
but desolate places are what I see.
I search for you on all the roads of this earth,
I see nothing.
I shred all this planet's maps,
then I see my face revolving in the mirror.

There are five continents on this planet.
There are seas where
the blueness of your eyes is
nowhere to be seen.
There are countless mountains.
There are women increasing in number now
... and decreasing.
There are billions whose
daily agenda is unknown to me.
I know all of that, but
I have not seen a bit of your face
on the maps of this planet.

Do I see your face in the night's dreams?
Come closer now, for I don't know
what will become of my heartaches tomorrow.
Or how they would be if I were a prophet

on one of the five continents.
Come closer so I reveal my sorrows to you
in my day-dreaming.

Transformations

I will come to you like walking sand
or a phantasm running towards you
bewitched ... or dead ... or paralysed ...
or flying with the wind ...
I alone ask about you in the streets.
I search in the forests.
I dream in the taverns.

Would you come to me a silence
to dwell in my eyes and dreams?

Impressions

Wars hide in our memories
and the imaginary rain becomes trees of tears.
How then could the desperate write his face?
How could the day witness its disturbed elements?
How could you spend your long hours
without me being the night and the day?

Unknown seasons search in space
for islands flying with the wind.
In your madness
you are an illusionary child ...
screaming!

Roaming

I ask about an unknown I know,
about a darkness that steals my dreams,
about a phantom which has travelled over water.
I examine things around me.
Years I have never loved
are in my hands, and
an elated passion.
Lines I have never written
are in my hands, and
a sky.

Do I weep in this hot night or do you weep?
My days were lost years ago.
I am naked in the yard of my thorns.
I rise dead.
I search for my papers.
I return to the window to see
nameless bodies and
my wound floating among things.

I see nothing.

Your Face and the Night

Your face appears whilst
I am in a dreamless slumber.

When I am away from your eyes
and from my body,
I see in my memory
papers falling into water,
walking among people.
I see the days fall or rise like numbers.

When the night is lonely, I shall leave alone.
Have you ever seen the night as a friend?
Have you ever witnessed the night and its sorrows?
Have you ever seen the night
sets a gallows for the heart and cry?
Have you ever seen seas
I love in the morning,
but drown me when the night comes?

When I am away from your eyes and my body,
what drown in my memory are:
days that never pass,
history that was never made,
generations that were never born.



The First Wednesday

A day attacks my memory,
sings in my skull,
dances in my veins.

A day that has left me for years,
returns to me a stranger today.
It gently walks by my side,
to escort my confusion and my dreams.
And I escort it towards sleep when
it quarrels with me and reproaches me.
I reassure it ...
It argues with me and
troubled, it leaves me.
I leave it towards another day.
We are both sleepless memories.
Each is searching for another.

Oh game of these days!
I have nothing but numbers.
The first number is ignorant of its number.
The second number is ignorant of
the rest of numbers!

About the Poet



Khalid al-Hilli is an Arab poet, writer and journalist who was forced to leave Iraq, his country of birth, for political reasons in 1978. He then worked in a few Arab countries before finally migrating to Australia in 1989. He resides in Melbourne and continues to write for the Arab press in Australia and overseas.

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About the Translator



Dr. **Raghid Nahhas** is a science graduate of the American University of Beirut and Hull University in England. He worked in the marine and environmental research and consultation areas for over twenty-five years.

His interest in literature and the arts drove him to publish and edit *Kalimat*, an International Periodical of Creative Writing, from 2000 to 2006.

He has many publications and translations in English and Arabic, in various fields, and he has so far published four translations of poetry collections, the most recent of which was *Arabesque of Love*, published by Papyrus Publishing.

He received several awards including an Australia Day Medal, The Gibran International Award, life honorary membership of The Arab

Council Australia and several achievement awards from The Syrian Supreme Council of Sciences. A two-page biography about Nahhas was included in the book “Syrian Personalities of the Twentieth Century”.

I admire the flow of these poems. I'm told Arabic is a beautiful language when spoken and these poems are extremely lyrical in English, in this translation. There are many good images. "... *the night is a black shadow, playing across the road.*"

I like the surreal element in much of the poetry. Even when he is obscure, there is often a beauty that tantalises me. I want to be able to penetrate the poems further. I like the emotional journeys he goes on, often in the night in his half-awake dreams. "*We are both sleepless memories/Each is searching for another.*"

Eileen Marshall

Khalid al-Hilli seems to me a romantic poet in pain, witnessing the suffering of humanity, and wanting to express his sorrow explicitly in his poems for the receiver to grasp it as it is. His imagery and expressions, however, do not reflect the poet's sadness as much as they reflect the strangeness and harshness of this world.

Dr. Sadiq Altrybe, Al-Qadisiyah University, Iraq

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