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FULLMOON  
Thoughts in the Time of Facebook  
LAUNCH SPEECH  
by the author  
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I would like to pay my sincere respect and admiration to our original Australians and to the Palestinians, another aboriginal people whose land is stolen, for their resilience despite the never-ending blows they keep receiving.

One of the pieces in the book emerged from my continuous pain during the past few years for what is afflicting Syria and the world, with particular reference to what is happening to Jerusalem.

In the piece titled LAND, I describe the depth of this pain:

The slave merchants sold my arteries  
to the highest bidder who  
rechannelled my blood  
to irrigate his land.

.....

I pause in awe

.....

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all. Among you friends and supporters that have been of a great help over the years ... Among you, friends who came all the way from Melbourne for this occasion. This is very humbling.

I thank all media outlets who advertised for this launch. Special thanks to those of them who are present here today.

I would like to pay special tribute to Liat Kirby, Raghda Nahas-Elzein and Louise Wakeling for their input and support. The outcome is, of course, my sole responsibility.

I sincerely thank Ghassan Alameddine for accepting to be part of this launch and for his musical work on my words.

It is very nice of writer Aman Alsayed, who is a recent arrival in Australia, from Syria, to accept to be part of this by reciting to us some of her poetry.

I thank Gleebooks for the opportunity to launch this book in this esteemed venue.

For Najat, my wife of 42 years I say:

Glorious is the morning  
When it begins with you.  
Glorious is the day when it concludes  
with the splendour of your smile.  
Glorious is the evening  
when the night is made endless by you.  
Glorious is your love  
that lights up my sky.

Dear Friends,

Many women leafed through  
the pages of my book,  
but you are the one who read it.  
I saw them glancing ...  
touching the writing,  
but I wondered why  
the words spoke only to you.

A little bird told me  
you feel the soul of things.

.....

Appreciation is key in establishing the fullness of an event between the giver and the receiver. The receiver, by expressing appreciation is also giving back. Some cycle becomes complete.

The moon reflects the light from the sun. With her beauty shining during dark nights, she makes us appreciate light more aesthetically. She is a receiver who becomes a giver in her own right.

This collection reflects my integrative approach to life. It is about the wholeness of things. It is not simply about the crescent or half-moon which I love very much. It is about the full moon, which I love most.

And I love your ways:

appearing to me

a crescent sometimes,

a half-moon other times.

Though you are always on my mind,

and you nestle in my soul,

I will await your fullness.

For I want you whole!

My collection is a cry to seize rare opportunities at the appropriate time. It is an invitation to make love work and relationships sustainable. The opportunities are often in front of our eyes, or in relationships we already have but we don't seem to appreciate.

My claim is that the work is not only very hard, but is made harder by the need for two to make it work. Those who know me are aware of my love of Tango. The outcomes, however, can be attainable and very rewarding. I have enjoyed such rewards. This is why I value them.

My collection is homage to the genuine partner who understands the value of these rare opportunities and the need not to squander them. My claim is that a relationship between two individuals is key to more compound relationships, including among nations.

A love affair between two people is not merely confined within the limits of two human bodies and their sexual encounter. This is what might occupy most people, making them ignore the sensuality of the event, enriched by two minds with a

tremendous inheritance of experiences and ability to project beyond the skin. And beyond biological reproduction. I would like to think of ‘intellectual reproduction’.

Take the piece titled ‘The Crossing’:

You are a Damask rose—  
layers of scent, strands of light,  
staining your colour.  
And I am a traveller  
in search of my love.  
I arrive at your body.  
I follow roads short and long,  
lanes narrow and wide.  
I climb hills and slide into valleys.  
I stop to marvel at the splendour of it all.  
When you open the door  
I see my Fullmoon shining.

I am here talking about a woman, but I can easily replace the title by ‘Damascus’ and the whole piece will be about my city of birth.

I am dedicated to love. A woman who shares with me her body and soul for a moment, remains part of me for ever. A city from which water and bread I drank and ate, also remains part of me for ever. A friend who stands by me for a day, guarantees my love for ever. This is not obsession or blind loyalty. My protagonist is also a scientist. His dreams are visions to sustain reality. He invokes his mind for love and enjoys the resulting throbs of the heart. He is neither loyal nor forgiving. He neither believes in luck nor in miracles. He no longer associates with a number of people for various reasons, but he never stopped loving them.

I am hostage to  
my persisting heart.  
It beats east,  
it beats west,  
it beats south,  
it beats north,  
but always settles  
between your breasts!

One of the Arabic language contemporary leading poets is the Australian-Lebanese poet Wadiah Saadeh. Wadiah considers 'place' not to be a geographical space, rather an internal space that we take with us wherever we go.

The geographical targets of my heart beats are not necessarily humans. They could be trees in the east, mountains in the west, fjords in the north, deserts in the south, but all these experiences are part of what I take with me to settle between your breasts, because I seek wholeness in the meaning of life. Love is my way to your flesh and to the rocks of the distant planets.

Wadiah Saadeh considers poetry 'the dream of changing the world'. This book is a fiction based on very real events. It is also a reality, based on imagination. I agree with Wadiah, and I consider his vision to be 'the reality of materialising the world'.

The woman I address is a value, not simply a person. A value symbolic of life, men, children, nature and the whole cosmos. This is why I want her whole, despite the difficulties.

Oh Fullmoon, my darling!  
You come dressed in fourteen layers  
masking your shimmering nakedness.  
On the first night you take off one piece  
to appear a thread of crescent moon.  
Each night following, you take off another.  
My yearning mounts, and mounts—  
torments me;  
I am almost there, I reach for you  
only to realise that you are  
far away, unattainable half-moon.  
The nearer I am, the longer  
the passage of time.  
On the fourteenth night, you reveal  
the full splendour of your light  
and you remain impossible.  
You invite me, while already  
dressing in the first layer of darkness.

There is a major theme that occupies the core of this collection. It is a story told by some of the pieces depicting a love affair full of contradictions, almost like international relationships. It is set simultaneously in different centuries and cities, with events juxtaposed utilising technologies from snail mail to Facebook. Email and Skype have their share as well.

You need to think about this juxtaposition along the reasoning of the American poet/activist Robin Morgan who states that we are not living in a circle, historically speaking, but rather a spiral where events might seem repeating, but actually come at another dimension.

Physics and space geometry are important interests of mine. And here I recall with love Stephen Hawking who joined his beloved cosmos a few days ago where he will be the 'full moon' of the black holes he helped us understand.

My theme is about the beauty of communicating love and the ugliness of destroying it. The dead lover and the living one are both the same. The real lover and the fictitious one are both the same.

The theme develops as a result of a series of intellectual chats on Messenger and by email between two friends. Then after a meeting at a dinner party, the chats get charged by a high voltage of sentiment. He describes to her a dream and she confirms she likes the dream. Then they meet for love.

This theme is the modern version of the original love encounter before the time of Facebook. In those days the love encounter took a year before it happened. In modern time, it took only three days.

In both cases, love was ended by a single blow on 'Valentine's Day'.

Here is an exercise for you: when you read the book, think of assembling the ideas into a play. You are the director. Assemble it the way you like, but you will have a lot of guidelines if you read between the lines. But always remember the SPIRAL!

A lot of the pieces were developed from other or shorter pieces written many years ago. Others were born when I was putting the collection together. In some cases, the work was inspired by correspondence with friends with whom I usually exchange ideas on intellectual levels. Experiences by those friends also inspired some of the pieces.

A recent trip to Switzerland, rekindled in me the beauty of the days I occasionally spent in Lebanon as a child, teenager and a student at one of the world's most beautiful universities. It certainly made me determined to publish this work along with some photographs I took.

When I was a teenager in Damascus, I dabbled with oil painting. I still know the ecstatic feeling of applying the brush on canvas to produce lines and colours. I feel that this collection is an oil painting of mine (at least this is easier for me than knowing whether it is poetry or prose), an oil painting with a lot of personal touches and impersonal certainties. This is why when I sent the work for printing I had a feeling of incompleteness and loss. I suddenly lost my Fullmoon. I felt I was 'dead-in-waiting', a phrase that formed in my mind in a spark. This made me add the Epilog which became the last two pages of the collection after the first proof had been printed.

When I finally was farewelling her, she stood at her apartment's door like a painting. After going down a few steps, I returned, held her face in my palms and kissed her temple, feeling that I was putting the final touches on a painting that was no longer in my possession.

I drove away from her area with a lot of recollections ...

Today I mourn the fall of the moon

I grieve the nights of sweet talk.

I mark the death of passion

on the pages of a notebook

where, together

we once drew the face of love.

Facebook is no doubt an important social medium. Needless to say that, akin to any technology, it can be useful or harmful, depending on how we use it. I am here not talking about or refusing the fun and enjoyment of a lot of things there, but I have been very disturbed by a lot of what I see on Facebook, even by supposedly intellectual people, some of them very dear to me.

However, I am not going to go into that minefield at this stage, except to say that the final piece of the collection is titled 'CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE':

the feelings are frozen

the words have fallen silent

the ink has dried

the pages remain blank

the memories are lost,

all his hobbies suicided—

my friend tells me that tomorrow

he will turn the last page

and close this shop

consigned to a deserted corner

of Facebook's Lane.

*raghid*