

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

**Hikmat Attili:
Lover of the Sea**

Number 11 (English), September 2002

العدد الحادي عشر (إنكليزي)، أيلول/سبتمبر 2002

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Kalimat is a fully independent, non-profit periodical aiming at celebrating creativity and enhancing access among English and Arabic-speaking people worldwide.

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Kalimat 11

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Words are the gate to cultural heritage, and writing is the key to its permanence

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SNOWFLAKES

Syria and Lebanon Revisited

My recent five-week stay in both Syria and Lebanon rewarded me with meeting, for the first time, many of the writers who contribute to *Kalimat*. It was quite a thrilling experience to rediscover, through those writers, the countries of my origin (father Syrian, mother Lebanese). In my opinion, those writers represent an important link between my memory of promising bygone days when there was a vague notion of Arab resurgence in the late nineteen fifties and early sixties, and the hope for a happy future free of the ills that presently inflict Middle Eastern societies. I view them as a type of such link, because even if politics eventually succeed in achieving stability, a more demanding task is required to normalise relationships and establish common ground for cooperation, so as to maintain mutual respect on all levels and in all aspects. Doubtless to say that intellectuals, writers and thinkers have a role to play in this regard, but I do not believe that they have been given a chance yet.

I initially spent two days in Damascus before leaving for Lebanon. During that time I was delighted to meet with Dr. George Jabbour, an eminent Syrian and political writer and thinker. We exchanged views on *Kalimat* and its increasing role in providing access among cultures.

I spent the next ten days on the mountains of Lebanon where my two sisters, brother, their families and I had a family reunion. Our relatives paid us visits. It was nice to see many of the little children, whom I left long ago, have grown up and are now accompanied by their own children.

My sister organised for some writers to come up and meet me. I travelled to Beirut to meet with those who could not come on that day. On a personal level, the highlight of my visit was my call on the American University of Beirut where between 1970 and 1976 I was a student and researcher.

Entering the university campus, that is considered one of the most beautiful in the world, I felt the intimacy and familiarity of the fragrance of its trees which was just the same as when I left twenty-six years ago. I roamed the place intoxicated by a strange

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day-dream and found most of the buildings were the same as before, but the furniture in the lecture halls and some laboratories was replaced by a touch of modern style. In every hall, however, I spotted a few old chairs or seats from the period when I was a student. This delighted me and I could not resist sitting for a few minutes on one chair reviving my feelings for this place where I spent the most beautiful days of my life.

I was craving to see a face I knew, someone who might have stayed on, but alas- it was a different world.

I spent the rest of the time in Syria where, in addition to Damascus, my birthplace, I managed to visit Latakia and Homs. Latakia is the main coastal town in Syria where I lived with my wife and two daughters for six years due to my profession in marine research. A city surrounded by some of the most enchanting countryside in Syria where we tremendously enjoyed our stay and forged many friendships. It was an excitement for me to visit my old friends and the Marine Research Institute I helped establish and run.

Equally exciting was my encounter with Dr. Mohammad Abdulrahman Younes who is known to readers of the Arabic issues of *Kalimat* by his refined articles related to "One Thousand and One Nights". He and his family received me for lunch in their home in a village near the town of Jable, not far from Latakia. He showed me his book collection, and presented me with several books he authored.

In Homs, I spent an unforgettable night by invitation of the Migrants' Friends Association to a dinner in one of the open-air restaurants where several writers and poets were present. Ms. Nohad Chabbouh, the president of the association showed me enormous courtesy and hospitality.

Youssef Abdulahad and his wife received me in their home in Damascus on several occasions. A writer himself, Abdulahad is known for his massive collection of literary archive material used by all scholars. He can be described as an institution in his own right. I enjoyed the company of Mrs. Widad Taweel-Abdunnour and her husband Dr. Ibrahim Abdunnour who received me in their home on a few occasions. They showed great interest in and support for *Kalimat*. I also met others such as Samih al-Basset, Issa Fatouh and Hani al-Khayyer, but many more were spending the summer holidays away from the heat and crowd of the city, and I missed out on meeting with them.

I was privileged to meet two prominent thinkers and writers who have achieved a pan Arab/international status. Abdulrahman Munif, the author of the famous novel "Cities of Salt" and other distinguished novels, received me at his home in Damascus with his wife and son along his side, a refined lovely family. Munif showed a great interest in *Kalimat*, and gave me a lot of advice and suggestions.

Sadiq J. al-Azm has been a person I wanted to meet since my university days. The opportunity came in Damascus where my intended half-hour appointment with him stretched to a few hours. We got along very well. He presented me with some books and graced *Kalimat* with an article for the present issue.

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Mrs. Zaynab Hakim-Shehade, a highly respected eminent lady, known in Damascus for her literary and charitable work, was kind enough to invite me with some other friends to a lunch at a restaurant where we fell to exchanging views on *Kalimat* and various other topics.

A friend of mine who is the minister for tourism in the present Syrian Cabinet is Professor Saadalla Agha al-Kallaa. He received me in his office, and was as elegant, modest and intelligent as ever. I'd remark without reservation he is one of the finest of men that Syria has ever had. Beside his scientific and technical background, he is both an amateur and an authority on Arabic music. He is well known to the Syrian public by a series of television programmes about Arabic music, alongside other series concerning information technology. To my family and myself, he and his family remain friends of long standing despite our brief acquaintance before we departed Syria.

I was delighted and privileged to be invited to the home of the late Dr. Basheer al-Azma (once a minister and later a prime minister of Syria). His widow, Mrs. Rima Kurd Ali al-Azma, their sons Hosni and Bashar, and their wives were present. Their family gathering as they received me for a delicious Damascene lunch, meant a lot to me, particularly a friendship was forged between the late Basheer al-Azma and myself when I was in Syria. Though he was old enough to be my father, but our minds had many a thought in common, or at least, we had many things to discuss.

Media contacts, including television and radio interviews characterised my visit and helped spread the word about *Kalimat*, its writers and contributors.

A group of friends from my school days in Damascus met with me for a dinner in the heart of the city. Each one of us updated the others on his family and work progress. Some of them hadn't met one another for a long time despite living in the same city. I was glad to be an instrument of this reunion, in spite of the fact that this group remained together all through the twelve years we spent at school.

Several of my relatives and friends invited me for dinner. There was hardly any night that I spent in Damascus without discovering a new restaurant; thanks in particular to Nihad and Akram Shehade, their son Anas and daughter Alia. The restaurants in Old Damascus were attractive Arabic homes that had their yards and fountains erected inwardly, with citrus trees and jasmine planted in various corners around the yard. I was born in a similar house in the same area, and it is still standing there, and so is my school and our local cultural club. Unfortunately, many of these majestic houses were lost to developments in a rush to accommodate the demands of a city that grew from a few hundred thousand inhabitants in the nineteen fifties to over three million now.

Instead of spending my time in an "Arabic" house as I would have preferred, I had to be content with an apartment. No sooner my grandfather died, than his house, where I was born, was sold, because two of my aunts who lived there could no longer keep up with its maintenance. They moved to a new-built apartment, where my youngest aunt who outlived her sister still lives. *Ammeh* (Aunti) Aida continues to open her home to

every family member, stopping short of becoming the matriarch of the family. She spent a lifetime teaching at schools in Damascus, but never married. Since my childhood, her relationship with me, as her eldest nephew, has always been almost like the older sister to her small brother. She inundated me, as she did long before, with her love, affection, kindness, care and generosity.

Kalimat and the Ethics of Creativity

We would like to present some of the points we raised in a speech titled “*Kalimat...and the Ethics of Creativity*”, delivered by the Editor in response to an invitation by the Arab Heritage League in Sydney to one of the League’s literary evenings on 24/02/2002. The last Arabic issue of *Kalimat* presented this speech, and the feedback we keep receiving from writers and readers prompts us to share these ideas in the present English issue. We often spoke of these ideas, but the interest they are generating, particularly in relation to our views on translation, are worth revisiting.

I would like today to commit the sin, often committed by the Arabs, and sing the praises of our grandfathers. But I would like to do it following the method of one of the naughty boys, and controversial creative modernists of Arabic poetry, Nizar Qabbani, the son of Damascus and its pulsating heart even after his heart had stopped.

After his visit to the Alhambra in Andalusia, Nizar wrote his famous poem “Granada” in which he, the Arab, is led by a Spanish tourist guide through the premises of the grand palace. The chance meeting with this particular lady is sweet. In her black eyes, Nizar sees echoes of the past, and when she tells him that she was born in Granada, seven sleeping centuries revive in her eyes where Nizar sees the glory of the Omayyad victories and wanders how strange is this history that draws him back to one of his dark-coloured descendents who has a Damascene face, the neck of Suad and the eyelids of Balquees. This brings to him memories of his home, how his mother prepares his bed, the jasmine vine and the fountain with its golden songs. When the guide asks him about the location of Damascus, he advises that she can see it in her dark flowing hair, Arab feature and in her lips harbouring the glow of the sun of his homeland. She can also see it in the sweetness of Generalife Gardens and their water, jasmine, basil and citron. He follows her like a child, leaving history behind him like a pile of ashes. He can now hear the pulse of Arabic ornament crying out from every design on the walls and ceiling. His guide then tells him proudly that this is Alhambra, the pride of her forebears, and requests him to read her glory on its walls. He feels the depth of his heart bleeding and wishes his heiress knew that these men were *his* forebears. When he finally embraces her in farewell, he feels he is embracing a man called Tariq bin Ziad, the Arab conqueror of Andalusia.

The Arabs did not only spread their empire, excelled in medicine, physics and

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chemistry, but also continued to appreciate the wisdom and beauty of life through their poetry, philosophy, architecture and landscape design. Al-Andalus was, above all, a period of intellectual glory associated with the coexistence of several streams of thought, races and religions including Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

The shock Nizar had in hearing his guide's thoughts about her forebears is matched by his shock in seeing all this glory transfixed to ornament on the walls testifying to the presence of a culture full of potential pulse, but has become paralysed, and can only move through the achievements of other cultures, or pulsate within the features of a hybrid descendent.

It is possible that this is part of the cycle of history and that nations rise and fall, but the Arab positive contribution to civilisation is undeniable. It can now only pose a serious challenge to present day Arabs: how can they transform their admiration of their past accomplishments into a present day lesson for intellectual resurrection? Can we give and simultaneously renew what is available for us? We can rephrase the question such: can nations contradict Ibn Khaldoun's Introduction and not become arrogantly complacent when reaching the peak of their greatness?

History says no, because it derives from long experience. But the mind says yes, because this feat, in my opinion, depends on balancing all issues. Should we follow a *modus operandi*, consistently subjected to examination, review and re-thinking, we can change things upside down. There is a beginning for everything. I personally believe that nations, or at least some nations, will reach a stage where they can give and preserve themselves. This depends on adopting intellectual democracy in addition to political democracy.

The indications are that democratic thinking needs re-examination. I believe in the universality of life, and that an understanding of this universality can refine democracy. Details and differences among people and nations cannot be denied and should be supported without permitting them to become a means of eliminating "the other" or "the different". We need to maintain that the styles of individuals, races, religions, societies, political entities, scientific institutions, literary organisations, moral and material, are operational means of fortifying the basis of our new universal society in one global village.

Globalisation is inevitable, but it must be the outcome of this universality, not the foster child of any despotic power, or a race claiming supremacy over other races. It is an experiment like any other: the outcome depends on the method of control and application.

Kalimat took off with our saying: 'Words are the gate to cultural heritage, and writing is the key to its permanence.' We all know that writing developed from a hieroglyphic symbol on a piece of rock to become an electron bouncing at the speed of light all over the world. The tablets in Ugarit differ from electronic screens in many technical and aesthetic aspects, but each type served its perspective purpose and achieved

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universality in providing access among people, not only geographically, but throughout history, for as we speak someone would be working on some ancient text to understand about a civilisation that existed thousands of years ago.

The printed word still enjoys its particular aesthetic and technical effect despite the spread of electronic screens that could one day eliminate the need for paper, and this will be one result of globalisation. Until then, the book and the computer screen will continue to coexist differing so much to achieve the same result in this respect. We can even say that the computer is currently servicing the book.

Adopting the appropriate operational method at the appropriate time, and directing it to the appropriate receiver is what makes it a useful method. It is useless to send a facsimile to someone who does not own a receiving machine. It will equally be useless if someone sends us an article by surface mail to be published in an issue of *Kalimat* that is going to be printed in a few days time, if we both have electronic mail.

Where is *Kalimat* in all of this?

No doubt that the democratic environment we enjoy here in Australia is one of the most important factors contributing to the presence of a magazine such as *Kalimat*. We say this despite that *Kalimat* does not specifically deal with politics, nevertheless the liberal trend *Kalimat* adopts requires such an environment. The universality principle we believe in means that we cannot ultimately isolate issues; a liberal literary magazine cannot be free of some politics, even indirectly.

Kalimat has two main aims: celebrating and enjoying intellectual creativity on the one hand, and maintaining access between creativity in English and creativity in Arabic on the other. We consider these two processes two operational methods of one universality, namely the betterment of mankind.

This universality includes the embodiment of contemporary creative works of known, developing and unknown writers, in an effort to maintain access at all levels. But we adopt a policy of maintaining quality by carefully selecting and evaluating submitted works before accepting them for publication.

One of the most important aspects of publishing as part of promoting access is translation. The most difficult text to translate is a badly written text in its original language, and not complex poetry as some people might like to believe. We believe that it is possible to translate anything. It is not necessary for the translation to take the same style as the original text. And you do not have to be a poet to translate poetry. In other words, it is not essential to translate poetry in poetry format, particularly that this could be impossible in many cases, except where the translator accepts to recreate the original text ("transcreate" as one Australian poet puts it). This is acceptable to some writers, but almost most Arab writers do not accept that their work be tampered with to such a degree. It is also possible to append the translation with some details and explanations shedding light on what the writer means in his or her original work, but this is academic

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territory that *Kalimat* has no intention to tread. How do we then maintain both the original meaning and the style of the original text?

The big challenge lies in the power of our ability to distinguish between “literal” and accurate translations. *Kalimat* believes in accurate translations and rejects literal translations, because we believe that good translation cannot be literal in the first place. We also know by experience that accurate translation might appear literal to some, but this is the result of the high quality of that translation. This adds to the complexity of the whole issue, but we concede that working on the original text, no matter how good the translation is, is a complex operation where the translator must avoid mutilating, developing or improving the original text.

Kalimat's method is to select words from the target language that convey the original meaning and at the same time be familiar to the recipient. These words need not be the dictionary's equivalent of the original words. They are sometimes phrases that explain one word, or one word that can replace a phrase. Each language and culture has its own idioms and methods of expression. Good translation not only requires proficiency in both the original and target languages, but also in both cultures and the “codes” they use for communication. Surely, we are unable to translate a poem in the same way we translate a legal document and stamp it with ‘a true copy of the original’.

We believe that accurate translation, of poetry in particular, might expose the defects of the original work because the translation cannot hide behind poetic technicalities such as the use of certain unnecessary words for the sake of rhyming for example, and similar. These technicalities cannot be similarly repeated in the target language where different metres and measures are used. This is why those using the “transcreation” method of translation might need to use added terminology to end up with a “beautiful” text in the target language at the expense of the original meaning. This new text is often appealing to the reader, but equally deviating from the original. If a translator is able to fully preserve meaning and style, then we do not care what you call his or her method of translation. Every method might end up in either “good” or “bad” translation. This simple description might be more telling than any other when it comes to translating creative work. Needless to say that we believe that good translation has got to be accurate.

Kalimat was able, within a few months of its launch, to attract a distinguished group of advisers and writers. It is rewarding to see their *Curricula Vitae* and business cards carry an indication of this role. Every name you see on Page 2 of each issue of *Kalimat* is a name of a person who has played an important role in that issue, editorial or financial.

The amount of original material suitable for publication we receive is sufficient to produce more than one issue each time. The material awaiting its turn for translation is enough for years to come.

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In addition to our literary role, *Kalimat* has achieved an important moral status within the Australian establishment for its contribution to promoting cultural access. Enlightened Australians view *Kalimat* as an eminent representation of Arabs in Australia. For example, we received several communications denouncing racist attitude against Arabs. One writer said that he felt ashamed that Australians voted again for a government that had shown a racist attitude in dealing with the detention of asylum seekers. A distinguished academic confirmed to us the importance of *Kalimat*, particularly after the events of the 11th of September 2001, in being an effective means of bridging the gap between nations through better mutual knowledge.

Kalimat has maintained its full independence from any organisation, society, government department or sponsor. This is a basic condition of guaranteeing publication based on the quality of the submitted material, not the party that sends it.

We attempt to produce an elegant publication worthy of the high quality of its contents. We consider this to be part of the whole exercise in creativity. Sometimes we include artwork such as paintings and photography, but our ambition is that the whole magazine appears as an attractive work of art. Our thanks are due to all those writers and artists who entrusted us with their work.

Feeling beauty, appreciating creativity, discovering creative people, encouraging beginners to publish, astute observation, commendation, critique, review, advice, consultation, documentation, professionalism, being proud of one's achievement, production and distribution are our operational methods with which we would like to adorn the conscience of humanity. Perhaps one day *Kalimat* could become like Nizar's poem, a mirror for universal thought combining the spiritual and the material in our rebirth. Perhaps then the song of our forbears becomes a tune worthy of the future.

Raghid Nahhas

Sacred Mission

I was delighted to read the interview with me, conducted by Dr. M. A. Younes, published in *Kalimat 10*. Indeed, I am honoured to receive a copy of your elegant magazine.

I read with interest and great admiration all the material you published, and I believe that you ought to be congratulated on your work in editing, producing and publishing this periodical with such a sacred mission of spreading ideas and enforcing cultural access among English and Arabic-speaking people.

*Professor Shareef Shi Xi Tong,
Beijing Foreign Studies University, China.*

Wide Strides

My real and honest feeling in admiring *Kalimat* is growing greater and greater. The wide strides, this magazine is taking towards success in a short period, are astounding and amazing. I really admire your tireless efforts in making this magazine grow so fast. Its richness with so many literary content makes it unique. I enjoy reading all its material at least once, and the poetry, in particular, at least twice. I would like to commend you and your editing staff for a superb job well done.

*Professor Hanna Canawati,
Keck medical School, University of Southern California, USA.*

A Great Standard

Many thanks for sending me a copy of *Kalimat 9*, containing three of my poems. I was particularly pleased to them as you have them presented. Yet another fine edition of your journal. You are really keeping up a great standard.

Especially when one considers the events of September 11 of last year, the issue of building good relations between Australian Arabs and the rest of the community is a significant goal, and your magazine makes a contribution of value to that cause.

*John L. Sheppard, Ph.D.
Former Associate Professor of Psychology, Sydney University*

A Service to Inter-Cultural Communication

Thank you for *Kalimat* which I receive regularly. It introduces to the reader new poets and writers, each expressing a rich personal creativity that benefits us all.

Your *Kalimat* offers a great service to the inter-cultural communication among the nations and ultimately to the attainment of a world peace for which we all aspire.

Your burden is heavy, but we wish you all success.

*Dr. Fuad Rifka,
Lebanese American University*

EVA SALLIS

Where has the Spectrum of Feeling Gone?

Australians seem so heartless, now, shadowed by the fallen towers and the whisper from Government that we are under threat. In Australia we have a majority population who feel active antipathy to Muslim and Middle Eastern people. We also have, outside the majority, a small handful of people who feel sympathy for Muslim culture and Middle Eastern people, particularly for those unfortunate individuals who have been unlucky enough to come to Australia as asylum seekers asking for our help.

But do we feel only these shades of grey? Where has the spectrum of feeling gone?

What are Antipathy and Sympathy? To me these represent the narrowest and meanest spectrum of feeling that we could eke out. Dark grey and bland white, a war painting. I feel appreciation, anger, fury, joy, pride, delight, love, hatred, and I change my mind daily about Australian culture; and I have to say I have lost a sense of a great gulf between Australian culture and Middle Eastern culture. You would never say 'I am sympathetic to Australian culture', as this would not capture the range of feelings you might feel. Sympathy and Antipathy have an awful rigidity, a holding at arms length of engagement, love, friendship and shared experience, shared grief. Sympathy is an outsider's emotion, and a complacent one, because we all know that it is better than Antipathy, and that in a prevailing climate of blanket, homogenising Antipathy, perhaps sympathy is as good as it gets.

Antipathy says that these Others are so other that they have non-human feelings towards their children. Sympathy says those are terrible lies, and of course Middle Eastern mothers and fathers feel the same way as we do for their children. There is something appalling in both these statements; the one that it could be said at all, and the other that it must be said in return.

Of course our human experiences are shared – that is a given. It is a betrayal that it would have to be stated at all. Are we so far gone that all we can do is assert our shared humanity in these sympathetic words? In asserting it, we are fingering the fissure in our hearts that should not be there.

If we share everything with another culture, all the big ones: grief, joy, hope, despair, desire, dismay at our teenagers' behaviour, pleasures of a good meal, how can we live with permitting just sympathy and antipathy?

إيفا ساليس

Eva Sallis is an Australian writer and academic with the University of Adelaide. She is an active advocate of human rights for asylum seekers in Australia.

Universalising from Particulars

Is it possible to construct universalising notions of human rights from a particular tradition? My answer is an emphatic and historically-based yes. For though the notion of human rights and its accompaniments, such as civil liberties, citizen's rights, freedom of conscience and expression, etc., are of modern European origin and provenance – conventionally attributed to and traced back to the enlightenment – they have indisputably come to acquire by now a universal significance that has turned them into a common human good and into today's compelling and pervasive normative paradigm on all matters pertaining to rights, citizenship, human dignity, democracy, civil society, government accountability and so on. This development calls for several important observations:

a) The modest localised European origins of the modern notion of human rights does not detract from its later paradigmatic universality anymore than the humble rise of Islam in two insignificant desert towns on the edge of the Roman Empire detracted from its consequent universality and sweep. Similar things may be said about the relationship of Christianity's equally modest and localised origins in a neglected and despised district of the same Roman Empire to its subsequent paradigmatic universality, hegemony and comprehensiveness.

b) The common good represented in the notion of human rights did not come about *gratis*, but had to be painfully, slowly and very imperfectly conquered over several centuries and at a very heavy price in terms of wars, revolutions and much sacrifice, and human suffering. This is one reason why it deserves to be defended, elaborated and expanded along with other human goods that we know of and have come to take for granted.

c) Even in those parts of the world, Muslim and otherwise, where human rights and the values attendant on them are most flagrantly violated and/or ignored, some public and official lip service has to be paid to them, or at least to some version of them, by offending governments and political regimes and forces in search of self-justification and legitimacy both nationally and internationally. This simply testifies to the legitimacy, strength and efficacy that the human rights paradigm has universally acquired by now even in the eyes of its enemies. In fact, experience has shown that the moment these enemies fall prey to the persecution of their own enemies, the first thing they appeal to in self-defence are the recognised universal principles of human rights with plenty of emphasis on their universality and inclusiveness.

d) Today the serious struggles over human rights are waged within societies, cultures

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and politics, both East and West, and not just across civilizations, cultures and states. In other words, the main battles over human rights continue to be fought not so much between Islam and the West, Europe and the Middle East, the Orient and the Occident, but rather inside France, inside Germany, inside China, inside India, inside the United States of America, inside the Arab countries and so on.

All the above considerations are put forward in opposition to the currently fashionable, convenient and politically expedient particularist, and even postmodernist positions on the question of human rights, their “universalisability”, validity, and applicability to all human beings. Stated crudely, but starkly and robustly, the particularist position holds that such norms and ideals as human rights and their attendant practices are the West’s deepest values from which the contemporary Muslim world, for example, is excluded on account of its own deepest cherished values which are antithetical to the core to the modern European conception of human rights.

This position also calls for a number of observations and explanations:

1) This static, a historical and exclusive juxtaposition of a particularist set of reified Western values against another particularist reified set of supposedly incompatible Muslim (or other) values amounts to, (a) a reaffirmation of the nihilistic mentality which reduces the contemporary world to the simplistic terms of the West versus the rest, and (b) a legitimization of the cynical apologetics, pretexts and excuses that violators of human rights all over the world delightfully reach for and successfully employ to justify continuing to do what they are so good at doing anyway.

Thus, it was quite a sight at the 1993 Vienna International Human Rights Convention to see the spokesmen and representatives of some of the most repressive regimes around the globe suddenly and most cynically adopting what looked like a relativist, postmodernist, avanguardist and multiculturalist sensibility and outlook on life, politics, culture, human rights, women’s rights, and the sanctity of cultural differences, to justify the peculiar versions of human and other kinds of rights violations practiced back home, all in the name of a conveniently discovered authenticity, nativism, particularism, cultural diversity, the sacredness of tradition and inherited customs and the death of the universalist grand narratives!

Similarly, when Amnesty International and other human rights organizations condemned president Saddam Hussein’s regime for the practice of cutting off the ears of petty thieves and removing the noses of minor transgressors, Mr. Tariq Aziz replied by openly attacking the Iraqi regime’s critics for such sins as Euro-centrism, a biased Western point of reference, lack of understanding of Iraqi society, disrespect for the particularities and peculiarities of Arab culture, Muslim values, shari’ah law and so on. Obviously, particularism, nativism and cultural relativism have become the last refuge of these offenders, pretty much the way patriotism used to be the last refuge of certain kinds of rascals. Similarly, particularism and cultural specificity are invoked, here, not to further human rights and improve their application and implementation everywhere,

but in order to subvert the very idea and principle of such a thing as an inalienable set of rights belonging to human beings *qua* human beings.

2) Given this static juxtaposition of exclusive values, one would have to think that the West's supposed deepest values were always what they are taken to be today and that the most authentic values of the Muslim world will forever remain what they are currently perceived to have been and will continue to be. In other words, given this historical amnesia and the reigning monopolistic discourses and fundamentalist attitudes about the deepest values of this or that part of the world, of this or that culture on the surface of the globe, one would have to think that the West had never known the bloody practices of intolerance, persecution and the violent repression of freedoms and rights and that the Muslim non-West, for instance, had known nothing but the fanaticism, dogmatism and suppression of freedoms and rights characteristic of mullahs and tyrants.

3) The particularists and nativists find themselves in the awkward and paradoxical position of having to produce their own versions of Islamic, and/or African and/or Chinese, and/or Hindu, etc., human rights precisely because the original notion has acquired the dual status of a common human good and of the compelling normative paradigm for judging these issues, in spite of its manifest European origin. This is why I would insist that all these particularist and nativist human rights schemes are really tactical and not strategic, reactive and not enactive, rhetorical and not real, momentarily expedient but not serious. Let me add that the Muslim nativist position finds itself, here, in a doubly awkward and paradoxical situation, because careful examination will show, I think, that the particularistic logics, discourses, arguments and apologetics it employs are themselves a recent import from Europe, i.e., a recent Islamist appropriation of Europe's own critiques of modernity in general and of the West's postmodern musings in particular. Add to that the fact that this particularism goes against the grain of Islam's own abiding inner impulse towards universalist claims, absolutist principles and hegemonic aspirations. In other words, the Muslim particularists have to implicitly forget that Islam, like its sister religions: Judaism and Christianity, has always taken a dim view of "particularism", especially in matters of principle.

The more sophisticated Muslim particularists borrow openly the conceptual apparatuses of European structuralists, post-structuralists and postmodernists to formulate and defend their position. For example, they argue: a) that Islam is a self-contained universe of discourse which created its own peculiar and original space, time, history, scientific paradigms, cultural epistemes, civilisational problematique and so on. b) That Islam's universe of discourse is incommensurable with any other, à la Thomas Kuhn and Foucault, especially with the equally self-enclosed Western universe of discourse and its creations and contents. Hence, no comparative judgements on incommensurable totalities are valid and no objective knowledge or independent evaluations are either possible or obtainable about such solipsistic totalities. c) That

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Islam needs a clean “epistemological break” with the West’s universe of discourse to fulfil its “authenticity” and unfold according to its own unique spirit, norms, values, laws, rights and sense of density. d) That Islam also declares the death of man as a universal category, in favour of the primacy of Muslim Man vs. Western Man vs. Oriental Man, etc.; the death of the subject as the maker of a shared human history, in favour of an objectified reified Islam making its own private historicity process; the death of the idea of progress as a major component of that history, in favour of decline and/or eternal return; the death of the idea of objective knowledge transcending the confines of incommensurable epistemes and incomparable discourses, in favour of the relativity and particularity of all held and emotionally cherished truths.

Michel Foucault affirms somewhere that every society has its own “regime of truth” and its own particular mechanisms and procedures for determining what is true and what is false. I can assure all concerned that in the Arab world, for example, every Ministry of Information has its own “regime of truth” and its own particular mechanisms and procedures for determining what constitutes truth and what constitutes falsehood. According to each one of these truth-regimes some things are simply not permitted to be true while others are simply not permitted to be false. Obviously, the Ministers of “Truth and Information” administering these regimes are all Foucauldians without knowing it.

صَادِقُ جَلَالِ الْعَظْمِ

Professor Sadiq J. al-Azm is a renowned academic, thinker, philosopher and writer. His acclaimed book “Critique of Religious Thought” (in Arabic, Dar at-Tali’a, Beirut- several editions) has been the centre of controversy for the past thirty-three years.

ISSA BATARSEH

Translated by Noel Abdulahad

Hikmat Attili: Lover of the Sea

By the end of 1990, we were dining at a friend's in Lakewood City of the Los Angeles district, on the occasion of the visit made to USA by two of my life-friends Fakhri Kawar¹ and Nazih Abu Nidal (Ghattas Sweiss).²

We were surprised to what our host retailed to us unexpectedly: that he was in the company of Hikmat Attili, the day before, to attend the convention of the Arab-Palestinian Fund.

The morsel gripped by my hand stopped all of a sudden halfway to my mouth. I inadvertently stared at the face of my friend Fakhri, who seemed to stare simultaneously at my face, as though his expressive look was asking me whether I heard what he heard.

Fakhri took the initiative and asked our host whether he actually meant Hikmat Attili the poet. Our host was surprised to hear the word 'poet', but I intervened and asked him whether he had Attili's phone number. Fakhri did not give him a chance to answer and asked him about his future plans to meet Attili. Our host informed us that he was scheduled to meet him at the next session of the Convention. And when I asked him about the relationship of Attili to the Fund, he replied: 'Hikmat is the president of the Fund.'

Fakhri requested our host to ask Hikmat Attili, when meeting him, to find out whether he was the poet bearing the same name, and to inform us as soon as possible.

Two days later, our friend phoned us from Lakewood. He told us that Attili was amazed at hearing the word 'poet', particularly that he never announced himself as such since he moved from San Diego to Los Angeles six months before. Attili was also inquisitive about the source of our friend's information and when he heard our names he mentioned to our friend that he had never heard of us. This was true! It was *us* who knew pretty well about Attili.

The New Horizon

Since the publication of the first issue of the magazine *Al-Ufuk al-Jadid*,³ it formed what conceded to be a cultural institute for writers, poets, intellectuals and men of letters, not only in the then West Bank and Jordan, but also in most of the neighbouring countries particularly Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt.

¹ A columnist writer, short story writer and an ex-member of the Jordanian Parliament.

² A writer and critic.

³ The first issue of *al-Ufuk al-Jadid* (The new Horizon) appeared in September 1961 in Jerusalem.

The Arab readers received *al-Ufuk al-Jadid* warmly and yearningly that they quaffed the richness of its various themes written not only by the pioneers of the first generation, but also by the new young generation of poets, short-story writers, critics and other intellectuals.

Attili was, perhaps, one of its most brilliant names. He contributed to almost every issue, with poetry flowing with ease and naturalness that attracted the attention of many readers in the Arab World. His fame expanded further, and to a wider scale, when he started publishing his new poems in other well-known magazines such as *al-Adib* and *al-Adab* (both were published in Beirut).

On the shores of Attili's poetry we halted, reposed, caught our breath, paused and brooded at the flow of his poetic waves, the bursting out of his gales, the sailing of his boats and the soaring of his seagulls.

Perhaps it was his poems that intrigued me to follow the track of poetry. I dare say it prompted me to take, at last, the decisive factor in my life, by choosing to write poetry rather than short-story.

The Sea Lover

Two days later, we decided to invite Hikmat Attili, along with some other intellectuals, writers and journalists of the region to dinner, on the occasion of bidding farewell to our two dear friends Kawar and Sweiss. It was our hope that, at some stage, the poet would read some of his poems during this gathering.

My memory has retained many stanzas of Attili's poetry for over thirty years:

Your timeless eyes and the seas are alike:

An endless voyage
Plunged by a traveler
From dawn to dawn

Wherever I go

I carry you with me O sea:

A song ingrained in my memory
A prayer imbued in my heart
An inculcated worshiper's supplication

Tell the sea gull:

We shall wash it
with jolliness' dew
and shall ask God
to keep it calling on us
day and night

At one sunny day
my mother bore me
since then, I fell
madly in love with the sun
and when I watched how my father
planted tender olive trees
my love for olives imbued in my veins

The sea has its tiny things, and so do I:
my fury and serenity
my rage and silence
my waves and estrangement
my life and death
and yet I am fed up with my home
as is the water with its sea

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With the understanding that some critics nicknamed the poet Mahmoud Darwish as “Lover of the Earth,” then Hikmat Attili is in his own right “Lover of the Sea.” Any reader of his poems would indisputably hear in their lines the roaring of the seas and the clattering of wings of sea gulls on the surface of the waves.

In some of his poems one distinctly hears how the waves of the sea gain momentum, becoming louder and louder. In some other poems, this momentum is weakened, becoming softer mimicking the sounds of the clattering of the wings of his seagulls. All of that depends on the theme of a particular poem, but in every case we find a loyal lover of the sea and the seagulls.

The poet Iliya Abu Madi, in his famous poem *The Enigma*, drew near to the sea when he sang:

One day I asked the sea:
Is it true that I come from you?
Is it true what some say about you and me?
Or is what they claim, perhaps, a lie?
The sea waves laughed at me and said:
That's what we do not really know!

Hikmat Attili, on the other hand declined the role of a mere witness, flirting shyly with the sea from a distance. Rather, he stepped forward, touched the salty water of the sea, dipped his eyelashes in it, listened carefully to its breath- with ears beyond his ears, watched its mysterious depths- with eyes beyond his eyes, to be able to sense its passion, torment and deadly mystery. These were the moods within which Attili created his poems, burdened with sheer beauty and arresting scenery:

I saw your gloomy eyes
dewed like wild mint
proliferating terrible distress
flowing down with divine passion
and I screamed with your cries!

The Handshake

I shook his hands as if I had known him for years. He shook mine, but he had no idea who I was. His low-pitched voice, his composure and mannerism were placid and serene, yet I could easily catch the restlessness that reposed in his eyes, due perhaps to his alienation, to the intermittent voyages and several partings he was forced into over long past years.

Staring at his face, I could almost see the many fleeting images I had been contemplating in his poems, emerging from his verses to flutter like butterflies around him with their complaints, sorrows, rebellion, hesitation, conceded credibility and passion.

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Fakhri came to know pretty well about the poet, for he was falling in love to death with his poetry to the same measure as I did. Nevertheless I felt a special attachment to Hikmat Attili, and I was certain that we were going to have an unbreakable bond.

Hikmat read for us his poem describing a lover searching for his sweetheart in a civilized and in as big a city as Los Angeles; a boring, tiresome and oppressive city in which one can only hear the sound and fury of people, traffic, the thunder of steel bars and beams and the never-interrupted rotation of the monotonous movement that swallowed the placid and quiet voice of the poet and made him return without his lover.

In that very night I returned to my home, charged with a flickering hope that Hikmat was going to be, without any shade of doubt, one of my most intimate friends.

In the Beginning

Attili was born on the 8th of August 1938 in a small town by the name of *Atil* in the district of Toulkarem City of Palestine. Obsessed by his town, the poet has always considered it as 'the unanimous centre of the World.'

Attili completed his elementary studies in Atil and his secondary school in Toulkarem. His early blooming buds of his poetic genius and his sympathy and love to the Arabic language were encouraged by his teachers who perceived in him this touch of genius and by the motivation, instigation and encouragement of his grandfather (his mother's father).

He then enrolled for his higher studies at the Teachers' Institute where his teacher of Arabic, F. A. al-Ghoul, entrusted him with editing the supplement of *al-Qalam* magazine. This magazine opened the door for him to a wider world of culture and literature and qualified him, at the same time, to be chosen as a teacher. He was appointed to teach in the city of Maan, south of Jordan. In that desert city, Attili suffered from loneliness and experienced the bitterness of estrangement. He did not bear being away from his associations and loved ones. His life, however, was made easier by the companionship of a group of his teacher colleagues. The poems he wrote in that period clearly depict this situation.

Attili then left for Saudi Arabia where he was appointed a teacher of Arabic Language at Aramco (American-Arab Petroleum Company). Very soon later he was appointed an editor to *Qafilatu Azzayt* issued by Aramco. He spent fifteen years almost alienated from the literary movement of the Arab World, except for short periods during his holidays spent in his homeland.

During all these long years of alienation, Attili published many of his new poems in famous Arabic journals, that were mainly issued in Beirut, but unfortunately he never had the opportunity of seeing his poems in those journals as they were all banned in Saudi Arabia.

After that long stay in Saudi Arabia, Attili migrated to San Diego in USA, accompanied by his wife Amal al-Karmiyyah, and their two sons Jad and Adel and their daughter Sura- all born in Saudi Arabia.

He stayed in San Diego for fifteen years where he obtained an M.A. in General

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Administration, before he decided to move to the outskirts of Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles he was acquainted with many intellectuals and men of letters. Through their cooperation, he established the "Literary Club".

When Poetry Sweats

Three years in the Jordanian desert. Fifteen years in Saudi Arabia. Fifteen years in America, a country that asks you to abandon your dreams. Add to this the bitter defeat of the Arabs in 1967, that burst out its impact on a whole generation of poets, tore away their fingers, spilled their inkwells, filled their notebooks and blank paper with the blackness of its gun powder, and led them to believe that 'the dignity of the defeated is in keeping his silence.' All these factors combined, made of Attili a myth's hero climbing down his white horse, when the smoke of defeat and the fume of expatriation filled his eyes.

The years of expatriation, vagabonding, broken links of effective and active access compelled both poetry and prose to sweat heavily. When the flames of creativity are extinguished, the specks of a creator dissolve quickly and scatter to earth, particularly after abundant years of giving. Things become equal, and the Earth stops its rotation, the Sun takes a new orbit rising from every direction except the East.

If we search the archives of modern literature for the name of Hikmat Attili we would hardly trace it, yet if we search in the hearts of those who fell in love with his poetry and in particular the hearts of that generation who drank to satiation from the blooming of bygone years that preceded the disgraceful Arab defeat of 1967, they will for sure be making a short stop at a literary edifice and catch their breath as a preliminary step before embracing all the elements of greatness, the majestic substance and the distinguished peculiarities of that name, the name of Hikmat Attili.

It is worthy to mention that through all his years of wandering, Attili remained a symbol of the humane of the Palestinian being, who vagabonded in the wide world and forcibly put into exile, yet always preserving the key of his salvation, Palestine- his only homeland. This key that he keeps in his heart is a master key that opens all the doors of the world but not his own door.

Attili was abducted from his own self and dodged to migration's corridor. Were it not for these ceaseless migrations, the train of the great poet would have not been delayed, neither his poetic genius would have been fenced up, even for a single moment. On the contrary, it would have been flowering for ever and Attili's fame would have spread like wild fire.

The Tent of Friendship

Our friendship was strengthened by the passing of time. It wove a tent around us and spread a shade over us, succeeding in protecting us from the scorching sun of our nostalgic yearnings, not eliminating them but at least softening their effect. The whole

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thing started to appear like a new acceptable poem allowing us to return to life and life to return to us. For the first time, in this exile, we started to lose our feeling of futility and carelessness that loomed and overwhelmed our souls for many years.

Soon the poet Salwa as-Said joined our small circle, followed by the Palestinian short story writer and journalist Nizam al-Mahdawi who publishes a weekly newspaper called *al-Watan*. Our group thus became an important platform for launching our "Literary Club."

Other intellectuals and writers joined as well. These included the Syrian-Lebanese critic Inaam al-Jundi, the renowned economist of Iraqi origins Dr. Sahib Zahab who loved poetry, the Syrian writer Dr. Wafa Sultan and the Egyptian musician and journalist Salah Kanakri.

The club turned out to be our spiritual home, where we would meet once a month to read and listen to our creative writings, debate issues and discuss various themes. There we found our lost identities and our lost selves. The club helped shape a new upturn to each member and prompted us to continue our life struggle with the determination to achieve our noble values and goals.

The Resurrection

With this new activity infiltrating our lives, the poetic power of Attili re-emerged. We used to part for a few days only for him to phone me to recite a new poem of his, such as *The kingdom of Straw* in which he says:

In the Kingdom of Straw
they chewed kat⁴
as though chewing a healing medicine.
They yearn for a pre-Islamic age,
and pray for twenty kings, princes and idols
alienating their true God.
Those who are in authority there
embrace paganism
They brand all traits of life
as they would tattoo their sheep.

A few day later I listen to excerpts from his poem titled *The Hawks Do not Cry*:

The loneliness in Oslo brings
no warm feelings to the chilly bones
The wax statues wear solemn intoxicated smiles
Shy, as they stealthily leave
their bedrooms before dawn,

⁴ A type of a narcotic herb planted in Yemen.

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leaving behind no traces of their memories...
save some heaviness that lingers
up their chests:
so sharp is the bitterness of the zachum tree
and raw Egyptian fig-marigold.

His voice reaches me resonating with joy. He reads to me *The Attic of Saada*:

Saada's attic lies under a great vigil,
it warms up the sunlight in the morning,
for her to wash up the light warms up,
Saada stacked up her night gowns
at the two windows of her attic,
infatuated and amazed
the door shyly averted its glances
while the balcony and the flowers' vase
laughed sneering at the door,
a white lily blushed in the corner.

Hikmat reads his poem *The Lily of the Valley* in a meeting held at the Literary Club:

Woe to a moment where shadows recess
and platforms transform into guillotines
the angels become Tatar soldiers

Woe to a moment where fire burns
the fledgling birds shattering their dreams
turning their long-awaited daylight into darkness
and the land of their migration into graveyards
their nests into pieces, fragments of life and dust

Woe to a voyage...
where ships never return
Woe to a sad epoch
equaled by no epoch
Woe to miracles that are
aborted before they are conceived
Woe to the hallucinations of the renegades
One thing is certain:
love, and only love, deserves to dominate

In the next meeting we listened to him reading to us his poem *Mirrors*:

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Mirrors
Mirrors
All mirrors become misty
they break, and turn into splinters.

Images in Attili's poetry flow down like an unhindered cascade. The words he employs are peculiar, forceful and graceful like a bouquet of flowers, meticulously arranged.

Reading his transparent love poems one often stops to catch a breath lest one loses even one word. But when one reads his violent and rebellious poems, one hears quite clearly the neighing of horses and the clatter of weapons of all sorts.

In his poem *The Coppersmiths' Bazaar*, the poet holds your hand, and leads you into the bazaar, where one hears the rattling of copper mixed with the furious calls of the salesmen, with the footsteps of the visitors and with memories of the poets.

People from all races
crowd at the coppersmiths' bazaar
it's mumbo jumbo where
the profligates meet with the upright
they parallel and disperse
to the wide expanse

The reader of the poem finds himself bound to a symphony where the poet goes on by saying:

The sound of hammering of the scattered ornaments
reverberates all over the bazaar's nooks
and resounds with the neighing of piebald horses.
The hemming of the workers and the flurry of the sophists
transform the bazaar into an eternal symphony
of a multi mellifluous rhyming
of pungent scents and variegated fragrance
of workers' panting
of humorists' laughter
of coppersmiths' jollity
of faithful pilgrims
of tourists and
visiting lovers of all races.

Then the poet suddenly comes across his damsel. He takes a breath and the reader joins him in taking his breath too, when he beholds her and listens to her through the hoarseness of his voice and his breathlessness:

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Coming into the bazaar from a wayside
she showed up, all of a sudden
towering like a palm tree
catching the eyes of a desert wanderer
arriving at the dunes around his lover's tent.
His heart rejoiced. So did mine.

Reminded by Abla's love story, dunes, palm trees and shade; the poetic image takes shape:

My soul was overjoyed
for seeing her as a good omen
radiant like rainbow colours
gleaming in a majestic halo
like a flirting moon
revolving around its morning star
suffusing its aromatic fragrance
in a garden of budding roses.

The poem achieves its apex of beauty when Attili reaches the door of the Bazaar's sheikh and bursts out saying:

Here I come back to you,
O sheikh of the coppersmiths,
Shaking off my soul...
a handful of my pathetic pathos
sweeping away from my infant heart
– aged by anguish and sorrow –
part of its enthrallment.

The reader can only stop for a moment at 'the aged-infant image', pondering on and reflecting its splendid magic. The poet goes on saying:

I hope, O sheikh
that you smear my wounds
despite their frenzied excitement
knowing my past battles fought in vain
my spoils of war, lost
and turned out to dust

The poet awakens to note the drastic changes that swept all things, including Abla, her tribe and the camels' caravan:

Abla, stupefied in a trance

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the caravan's clan left away
the camels' drivers slipped into slumber
my blood spilled off many an age ago
calling for its own death
neither the glittering swords
nor the polished shields
are of any use by now!

The accomplished fact then terminates, with its good and bad aspects, with its bitter and sweet realities, where the poet witnesses that great flock of working people, whose sweat blends with his loaf of bread on the borders of this symphony that extends its shades, all of a sudden, and grow as big as life itself. The bazaar becomes their refuge:

Let torrents of rain wash me up
wash all quarters of the city
that would make of the coppersmiths' bazaar
a safe refuge, a peaceful haven
for all hearts deprived of joy and vision
and overburdened with livelihood hardship.
I beg you O sheikh!
That you appeal to all coppersmiths
to slow down their heavy rhythmic hammering
so as not to drown the sighs let out
by pilgrims and lovers of all races
who come over to
the coppersmiths bazaar.

In his poem, *The Road to Aleppo*, he says:

Aleppo draws nearby
Aleppo draws away:
whenever the she-camel is spent
and the clouds hid the summit of Ebal
and Abu Attayeb is a sheathed sword
the Bathan⁵ is an echo of strained singing
that rises and faints
it supplicates and prays
but no one listens
How near Aleppo is
How far Aleppo is.

⁵ A valley located east of the city of Nablus, Palestine.

A Question of Total Birth

A poem for Attili is born at once as one. It dwells in his mind for a short period, before the delivery date. During that period of labour, he becomes overwhelmed with concerns and reclines to serenity and silence until the poem is delivered with a single breath.

Oftentimes, Attili reads to us a poem written on a tissue paper that has been retained in his pocket for a few days. It is kept until the time comes to arrange its contents as he says: a door here, a window there, a painting on a wall, a chair behind a table...and finally it lands on the screen of his computer. He prints it on paper and keeps it in a drawer in his office.

I know every bit of Attili's office. In addition to his computer, papers, notebook, pens, pencils and many long hours of his life, that are the most beautiful, valuable and truest in his life as he says, we find ten volumes of poetry ready for publication.

Oftentimes we speak about the time when these volumes would break their chains and fly like a flock of seagulls aiming to reach the shore where many yearning readers have been kept in waiting.

عيسى بطارسة

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***ʿAtābā* and *Mījanā* in Lebanese *Zajal* Poetry: A Study of Genre, Metre and Music**

In a previous study in *Oral Tradition*¹ of the metrics of Lebanese oral poetry (*zajal*),² I argued that the poets of *zajal* render their lines in two distinct musical styles, one characterized by a free rhythm, the other by a regularly rhythmized underlay. In other words, the various genres of Lebanese oral poetry divide along the two traditional styles of Arabic music: *nathr al naḡhamāt* and *naẓm al naḡhamat*. The former (literally, “musical prose”) refers to a “vocal or instrumental performance without regularly recurring rhythmic patterns.”³ The latter, or “ordering of tones,” defines a musical style based on a traditional melody and characterized by regular beats.⁴ In general, formal long poems in long metres, used in verbal duels and concerned with various degrees of *iṣābat al-māʿnā* (clinching the argument) are closely associated with the *nathr* style. Informal, lighter and shorter poems and metres, such as jokes, popular songs, counting rhymes (*ʿaddiyyāt*), and verbal tricks abound in the *naẓm* style.

The main metre in the *naẓm* style is the *qarrādi* metre, which has a strict rhythmic pattern imposed by a musical metre, producing a neutral realization of the following trochaic pattern of long syllables and stresses $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—} \text{—} \text{—} \text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$ with a wide variety of internal and external rhyme schemes and strophic divisions. On the other hand, the *nathr* genres employ metres that are constantly changed and modified by the singer poet to suit his/her singing style, message and venue of delivery. The preponderant use of malismas and coloraturas is a formal characteristic of these genres. To put it differently, in the *naẓm* style the music writes the poetry, while the poetry writes the music in the *nathr* metres.

The study that follows takes into full consideration these aforementioned distinctions and highlights the importance of song and music in determining poetic metre and rhythm.

¹ Foley 1989, vol.4: 189-212.

² The term “*zajal*” designates vernacular poetry (*al-shiʿr al-ʿāmmi*, *al-shiʿr al-shaʿbi* or *al-Lubnānī*).

³ Al-Fāruqī 1981: 233.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 239.

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The etymology of the word *ᶜatābā* derives from the Arabic root *ᶜatab*: “to blame”, or “to censure”, or “to reprove”, and is related to the verbal nouns *ᶜtāb* and *muᶜātāba* signifying two persons reproving each other, and the verbal noun *taᶜattub* or ‘conversing together, as persons confiding in their reciprocal love... and reminding one another...their anger, or friendly anger.’⁵ The genre is, therefore, conducive to verbal duelling and is very popular with aficionados of *zajal*. In its modern manifestations, however, the main themes of *ᶜatābā* are: unrequited love, musings on life and death, as well as love for nation and nature.

A lot of guesswork is associated with the derivation of the term “*mijanā*”. Is it related to “*yā mājanā* (how he/she has smitten us with love or adversity), or to the term “*yā mājina*” (you who are loose and lascivious), or is it derived from the Syriac root, *Najam* which means “melody” or “song”?⁶ While there is no proof to support any of these conjectures, a cursory look at *mijanā* verses in numerous publications shows that the main theme is that of love, and the tunes and slow rhythms of the *mijanā* refrain seem most suitable to the sad complaints of the lover/singer.

Writing in 1932, Jean Lecerf observed that *ᶜatābā* was a modern genre of great popularity among the poets of the time, and that *mijanā* ‘ne parait pas constituer autre chose qu’une variété de *ᶜatābā*.’⁷ While the popularity of both genres is still much in evidence throughout the villages of Lebanon, they are recognised by critics as belonging to two distinct Khalilian metres, *rajaz* in the case of *mijanā* and a form of *wāfir* in the case of *ᶜatābā*. Part of the difficulty of distinguishing these two genres from each other lies, I believe, in the similarity of their improvisatory *nathr* style and in the fact that a *mijanā* refrain introduces and concludes every *ᶜatābā* verse. When a poet is asked to sing a *bayt* of *ᶜatābā* (a *bayt* or verse is composed of four hemistichs), he starts with the popular *mijanā* hemistich which consists of singing “*yā mijanā*” three times followed by another hemistich with the same rhyme. The second hemistich then becomes a refrain which the chorus repeats twice at the end of every *ᶜatābā* verse. The poet moves smoothly from *mijanā* to *ᶜatābā* by interposing an “*owf*” syllable (lit. a sign of tedium, exasperation or ennui) between the *mijanā* hemistichs and the ensuing *ᶜatābā* verse. This syllable allows a sort of coloratura, or a virtuoso display of the voice. A similar display takes place at the end of the *ᶜatābā* verse, as though to cue in the chorus for their rendering and repetition of the second *mijanā* hemistich.

⁵ Lane 1980: 1943-4.

⁶ Yaᶜqub 1987: 53-4.

⁷ Lecerf 1932, vol.2: 179-258.

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If the poet wishes, however, to sing the *mijanā* verse himself, he often does so without recourse to the "owf". This is an important feature which helps the listener identify the two genres and understand how they relate to and how they differ from each other.

The refrain-like *mijanā* plays an important role in giving the improvising poet time to compose his next *bayt* of *atābā*. The verse of *mijanā* is often called *kasrit mijanā* because it implies this time factor. In Lebanese dialect, *kasara lahu* is pronounced *kasarlu* and means "he prepared the way for him", that is to give enough time for improvisation. The term *mijanā* itself is associated with length. In *fushā* (formal Arabic), *ṭariq mumajjan* means a long, smooth and levelled road.

Strictly speaking, therefore, it is incorrect to consider *mijanā* as a variety of *atābā*, as Lecerf does. Numerous printed works include verbal duels in both *atābā* and *mijanā*.⁸ One poet might start with a *bayt* of *atābā*, and the other would answer with a *mijanā* verse and so on until the end of the duel. If there is no chorus, which happens occasionally, the poets often make the transition between the two genres with the "owf".

In terms of structure the two genres exhibit some similarities in their rhyme schemes. The typical *atābā* verse contains three homonyms, one at the end of each of the first three hemistichs, and a compulsory "ba" rhyme, preceded by the long vowel "alif" or sometimes a short vowel (a), or an open *alif* or less frequently "ya" at the end of the fourth hemistich.

Consider the following *bayt*.⁹

Khidini b^catfik-iw ḥilmik wi ^cadlik
(Treat me with [your] love, [your] patience and [your] justice)
ta ḥatta-n-ghibit irja^clik wa ^cudlik
(So that if I went away, I would return and come back to you)
Ḥalafillik biji- w albi wa^cdlik
(I swore to you I would come and my heart made you a promise)
Wa^cid zaghlūl¹⁰ mish maw^cid-i-ghrāb
(The promise of a song bird, not the promise of a crow)

⁸ See, for example, Yaqūb 1987: 29-62.

⁹ This "bayt" is attributed to Joseph al-Hāshim, nicknamed Zaghlūl ad-Dāmūr, one of Lebanon's greatest *zajal* poets.

¹⁰ "Zaghlūl" means "song bird". The reference here is to the poet's pen name.

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In this *bayt*, the play on words is affected by the use of the conjunction "wa" with ^c*adl* (justice) and ^c*ud* (to return, from the verb ^c*āda*, imperfect, *ya^cūdu*) in the first two hemistichs, and with *wa^cada* (to promise) in the third hemistich. The fourth hemistich ends with "*āb*," as in the majority of ^c*atābā* verses. Likewise, most *mijanā* verses employ three homonyms but the fourth hemistich must close with a word ending with the rhyme syllable *nā*, as in the following example:¹¹

'ālū-b tihwa-s-simir iltillun balā
 (They asked, "Do you love brunettes?" I said, "yes.")
 Wish shi'ir minhun mabyiji illa-l-balā
 (Nothing comes out of blondes except disaster)
 [iw] shū nafi^c kill lil-^cimr wid-dinyi balā
 (What's the use of [this] life and [this] world without)
 shi'r-iw-simir khallu-l-ḥaki baynā tinā
 (Brunettes and blondes; let's keep these words between us.)

Here the homonyms *balā* ("yes," in *fushḥā*), *balā* (disaster) and *balā* (without) constitute the rhyme in the first three hemistichs. The rhyme *nā* in the fourth returns to the end rhyme in the principle *mijanā* hemistich (*yā mijanā yā mijanā yā mijanā*), which presages the main verses or strophes that follow. Neither Whaybeh¹² nor Nakhleh¹³ mentions the use of homonyms in *mijanā*, which does not seem to agree with the available data. Both writers use examples from written works in which the first three hemistichs of the *mijanā* verse have a common rhyme but are not part of homonyms, and in which the fourth hemistich ends with a *nā* rhyme. Such a rhyme scheme does exist, though it is less frequent in improvised *mijanās* and verbal duels. On the other hand, rhyme in ^c*atābā* is always based on homonyms.

The use of homonyms seems to predate the earliest recorded Lebanese *zajals*. These are as old as Arabic poetry itself and most probably in direct development from an old genre of *fushḥā* poetry known as the *muthallathāt* (the threesomes, or the three homonyms), about which no written record is known. Perhaps the most famous collection of such poems is the *Muthallathāt of Qutrub* published and edited by Edvardus Vilmar in 1856. This is a critical edition in Latin which discusses among other things the metre and form of the *muthallathāt*. In 1914 the same collection, along

¹¹ This "*bayt*" of *mijanā* is by Zagh'lūl ad-Dāmūr in one well-known verbal duel.

¹² See Munir Whaybeh 1952: 78.

¹³ See Amin Nakhleh 1945: 39-45.

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with a poetic commentary employing the same homonymous rhymes, was edited and published by Père Louis Cheikho in *al-Bulghah fi shudhur al-lugha*. The metre used in these *muthallathāt* is a short *rajaz* consisting of two rather than three feet and exhibiting the well-known syllabic licenses, though it often takes the following two forms:

_ _ ◡_ / ◡_ _ and _ _ ◡_ / _ _ _

The metre employed by Vilmar has the following syllabic configuration:

_ _ ◡_ / _ _ ◡_ / _ _ _ or _ _ ◡_ / _ _ ◡_ / ◡_ _ _

The first radical in the first homonym in both the *muthallathāt* of Quṭrub and those of Vilmar is vowelled with a *fathā* (“a”). The second and the third are vowelled with a *kasra* (“i”) and *ḍamma* (“u”) respectively. Every one of Quṭrub's fourth hemistich ends with the rhyme letter “ba”, preceded by a consonant with a short vowel while those of Vilmar always end with a consonant “ra” after a long *alif*.

While *Ḍatābā* and *mijanā* do not follow this method closely, the formal similarities that exist between them and the *muthallathāt* clearly suggest a continuum in the development of the genre, an adaptation in the vernacular of a rhyme scheme which is predicated upon word play and verbal virtuosity. At times, *zajal* poets compose two hemistichs selecting two difficult homonyms and then challenge other poets to supply the third to finish the *bayt*. The challenge is usually taken seriously since failure to meet it would cast serious doubt on a poet's reputation. The difficulty can be insurmountable, the result being that numerous *Ḍatābā* verses remain incomplete. It is common to hear poets boast about their success in the game of *tatlit* (*tathlith*).

As indicated above, the *Ḍatābā* verse is followed by a choral rendition of a *mijanā* hemistich. This rendition, in contrast to the poet's *nathr* rendition of the verses, invariably makes use of the *mijanā* proto-tune, perhaps with a slight variation in rhythm. It is metered, always falling into four beat measures or divisions. Two such versions of the refrain, each repeated eighteen times, were chosen from an *Ḍatābā* and *mijanā* exchange between Zaghālūl ad-Damūr and Zayn Sh^cayb (Shu^cayb).¹⁴ As it turned out, change in poetic content had no significant effect on the choral renditions of the two lines. As in the case of the *mu^cannā* proto-tune,¹⁵ the results obtained show

¹⁴ Zayn Sh^cayb has been and is at present a member of Zaghālūl's “*jawqa*” or *zajal* group, known for his excellent improvisational skills, especially in verbal duels.

¹⁵ The reference is to a major *nathr* genre in Lebanese *zajal* poetry, popular in verbal duels. The last “*bayt*” of every *mu^cannā* rendition is picked up by the chorus and cast in *naẓm* style with

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Maḥ - lā sa - mā - - - rik - - - yā - - - - - sa -

ba - - - ya - b(i) lā - - - di - - - nā

Poetry: mahlā samārik yā ṣabāya-b-lādinā
 (How beautiful is your dark color, O young women of our country
 [Lebanon])

Poetic scansion: maḥ lā sa mā rik yā ṣa bā ya-b lā di nā
 - - ∪ - - - ∪ - - - ∪ -

Musical duration in terms of syllables:

Musical accent: ∪ - ∪ - - - - - - - - - - - -
 ∪ ≥ ∪ ≥ ∪ - - - ≥ - - - ≥ - - - ≥ - - -

(Here again the sign "U" indicates weaker accents in each case because of syllable position in the middle of the measure except for "sa" which coincides with the fourth beat.)

The strong accents produce the following stress pattern in the poetic line:

_ ' ∪ ' _ ' ∪ ' _ ' ∪ ' _

On the other hand, the typical *Catābā* verse scans as follows:

∪ - - - / ∪ - - - / ∪ - - -

resembling a form of the *wāfir fuṣḥā* metre called *al-ma^Cṣub*. The fourth hemistich in the *bayt* is always one syllable shorter than the rest though the last syllable is always extra long. The following *bayt*,¹⁶ for example, scans

∪ - - - / ∪ - - - / ∪ - - - 0 in the first hemistich.

¹⁶ This "*bayt*" is by Zagh'lūl ad-Damūr in a famous verbal duel in 1972.

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- 1) ya 'albī ghitt-[i]-bid-dam^cāt-[i] wir-sūm
 ∪ _ _ _ ∪ _ _ _ ∪ _ _ ∘
 My heart, immerse yourself in tears and draw
- 2) [l]- ḥabī-bil alib aḥla-khūṭ-[i] wir-sūm
 ∪ _ _ ∪ _ _ _ _ ∪ _ _ ∘
 for my heart's beloved the most beautiful lines and pictures
- 3) [w] Idhā baddū k[a]fālit ḥub-[i] wir-sūm
 ∪ _ _ _ ∪ _ _ ∪ _ _ ∘
 And if she [the beloved] wants a love pledge [bail] and fees [tax money]
- 4) Ta 'idfa^c niṣ-ṣi^c umri^c a liḥsā
 ∪ _ _ _ ∪ _ _ _ ∪ _ _ ∘
 I shall pay half of my life as an advance

In the second hemistich, the apparent syllabic difference in the first two feet is caused by the poet's preference of *alib* to *alb[i]* (or ∪ _ to _ ∪), both words being permissible dialectal readings. Read as: [l] -ḥabib-bil albi aḥla-khūṭ ṭi wir-sūm, we obtain:

∪ _ _ _ / ∪ _ _ _ / ∪ _ _ ∘. Likewise, the third hemistich yields the same syllabic pattern, and the fourth, which is one syllable shorter, gives: ∪ _ _ _ / ∪ _ _ _ / ∪ _ _ ∘ if syllables 8 and 9 are transposed in accordance with the legitimate reading *al-ḥiṣāb* (_ ∪ _ ∘) instead of the equally legitimate *aliḥsāb* (∪ _ _ ∘). I mention all this to emphasize that inadequate knowledge of the dialect may confuse the pattern of syllables and feet in *atābā* and may lead to faulty scansion. Over and above dialectal considerations, the first three *atābā* hemistichs may, at times, contain ten, nine or even eight syllables rather than, the most common, eleven. The loss of the first short syllable of the foot is quite frequent, (∪ _ _ _ becomes _ _ _). A sort of *kharm* (deletion of first short syllable from the foot) takes place, to employ a term from books on traditional *fīṣḥa* where the phenomenon is limited to the beginning of lines. In the second and third feet of an *atābā* hemistich, short syllables may also drop altogether, but in such cases extra-long syllables are always involved and a brief *waqfa* (pause) is

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used to compensate for syllabic quantity. At times, the foot $\mathbf{u} _ _ _$ reverts to $\mathbf{u} _ _ \mathbf{u}$, causing a change in the succeeding foot as in the following: $\mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ \mathbf{u} / _ _ _$. In other words, the last foot changes from $(\mathbf{u} _ _)$ to $(_ _ _)$. The ${}^c\text{atābā}$ *bayt* that follows illustrates the loss of the first short syllable and the changes that may occur in the last two feet:

Mihri yawm i ḥash-ir-rikāb bi^clāh

$_ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ \mathbf{u} / _ _ _ \circ$

I mount my steed in the thick of the battle

Wi kam mihrah-sh-tahit laykūn ba^clāh

$\mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ _ \text{p} _ _ _ \circ$

And how many a mare had wished that he would be her *Ba^cl¹⁷*

Bitar^crif^c an Ilā-hil^c arish bi^clāh [bi^culāh]

$\mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ \mathbf{u} / _ _ _ \circ$

You're quite knowledgeable about God in his Heaven

ka'annak min malāyik-tis-samā

$\mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ _$

As though you were one of Heaven's angels

In addition to the change from $\mathbf{u} _ _ _$ to $_ _ _$ in the first foot of the first hemistich, there are two occurrences of $\mathbf{u} _ _ \mathbf{u}$ instead of $\mathbf{u} _ _ _$ and two changes in the basic and more common $\mathbf{u} _ _ _$ where in one case (hemistich #2) the short syllable of the foot is lost after a long syllable (*kūn*) and a short *waqfa*, and, where in the other case (hemistichs #1 and #3), a transposition of a long syllable for the short one takes place. These seem to be the only variations on the most frequent $(\mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ _ / \mathbf{u} _ _ _)$ which can occur in a *bayt* of ${}^c\text{atābā}$.

Framed by the *mijanā* refrain, the ${}^c\text{atābā}$ verse is rendered in a typical *nathr* style, where stresses, as musical accent shows, do not follow a regular pattern in the first three hemistichs. An interesting development, however, takes place towards the end of the *bayt*, and specifically in the fourth hemistich of the scores of ${}^c\text{atābā}$

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examples studied. The last few musical notes in the fourth hemistich in each case revert to a pattern of accent that coincides with that of the ensuing *mijanā* refrain, to affect, as it were, a smooth transition from *atābā* to *mijanā*. The *atābā bayt* below was sung by Dr. ^cAjamii¹⁷ and was then followed by the typical *mijanā* refrain. The first hemistich of the *bayt* was set to two different melodic lines (lines one and two below), the second to a third musical line. In the last hemistich and its repetition the singer anticipates the *mijanā* proto-tune (lines four and five below).

^cAtābā

Ta rak tā ^can hi - mūm mil 'al bi tim lī - - -
 I let her relate [dictate] the troubles of the heart
 Ta ra ka tā - ^can hi - mūm mil 'alb tim lī
 I let her relate [dictate] the troubles of the heart
 Ta add il ^cum ur hā bis ^car ri dāyb - - -
 Then I would spend my life locking up [protecting] the saliva
 Dāl ligh mi zī nī ^cal ^ca tim bi' sha ^ca nā
 Keep on winking even in the dark, I will see you
 Dāl ligh mi zī- nī- cal- ca- tim bi i-sha ^cci a- nā

The musical transcription of the pertinent *atābā* hemistichs yields the following poetic scansion and the following stresses derived from musical accent:

¹⁷ The reference to Dr. Mansūr Ajami, a *zajal* poet himself, who has recorded examples of the various *zajal* genres for this study.

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Taraktā ^can himūm - mil alib timlī

U _ ' _ _ ' _ U _ ' _ _ ' _ _ _ ' _
(_ U)

Taraktā ^can himūm - mil alib timlī

U _ _ ' _ _ U _ ' _ _ U _ _ ' _ _

Ta 'aḏḏ- il ^cumur ḥābis ^carriḏāb

U _ ' _ _ ' _ _ ' _ _ ' _ U _ ' _ o
(_ U)

Comparing the stress pattern in the last ^catābā hemistich with the *mijanā* proto-tune, we discover the following coincidence:

^catābā U _ ' _ _ ' _ _ ' _ _ ' _ U _ ' _ o
(_ U)

mijanā _ _ ' _ U _ ' _ _ ' _ U _ ' _ _ ' _ U _ ' _ .

Given this result, we can conclude with certainty that a verse of ^catābā commences with a free pattern of stress then ends with a pattern resembling that of *rajaz* rather than that of the *wāfir*, which, in its most prevalent form,

U _ UU _ / U _ UU _ / U _ _ shows either this pattern of stress,

U _ ' U U ' / U _ ' U U ' / U _ ' _ ' or

U _ ' UU ' / U _ ' UU ' / U _ ' _ ' .

The ^catābā metre, however, bears a close resemblance to the *ma^cṣūb* variety of *wāfir*

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(\cup _ _ _ / \cup _ _ _ / \cup _ _) with, as we have seen above, possible minor modifications (usually transpositions of a short syllable with a long one or vice versa) for dialectal reasons. The music confirms this since short poetic syllables are consistently sung to notes with shorter durations, preserving, as it were, the foot-pattern of the *ma^cṣūb wāfir* metre in al-Khalil's system. The *atābā* poet's preoccupation with syllabic quantity is further illustrated in the pronunciation, during delivery, of extra-long syllables and in the frequent use of *waqfas*. Cognizant of the syllabic composition of the various feet in the metre, the poet sometimes shortens an extra-long syllable to a long one, affecting as he does, the morphology of certain words:

ya shakh Tawfi' [i] māli⁻ ^cizz [i] ba^cdāk¹⁸

\cup _ _ _ / \cup _ _ _ / \cup _ _ o

After you, Sheikh Tawfiq, there is no glory left for me

In this hemistich *yā* is shortened to *ya* and *shaykh* is pronounced *shakh* in order to obtain from the combination of the two words a short and long syllable (\cup _), which are the first two syllables in the first *atābā* foot. Similarly, knowledge of metre, and consciousness of syllabic quantity, allows the poet to render the second hemistich of the *bayt* in one of two acceptable dialectal readings. Either

Ghibit 'iw ṭāl [i] ^canni yawm[i] bu^cdāk

\cup _ p _ _ / \cup _ _ _ / \cup _ _ o

You went away and the days of separation were very long for me

or

Ghib-tiw ṭāl [i] ^canni yawm [i] bu^cdāk

_ _ _ / \cup _ _ _ / \cup _ _ o

In the first instance there is a short *waqfa* after *Ghibit*, followed by the inclusion of the glottal stop "ʾ" for the sole purpose of producing a long syllable composed of the glottal stop and the ensuing silent consonant-conjunction "w", and therefore for the purpose of producing a second long syllable in the foot (\cup _ _ _). The second

¹⁸ "Shaykh", the proper vernacular word, would have jarred the rhythm of the whole "bayt".

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reading achieves all this by forging a liaison between "Ghibt " and the conjunction, at the expense, of course, of causing a *kharm* which does not seem to affect the quantity of the foot. This is because "ṭāl" is pronounced longer here to compensate for the loss of the first syllable.

In his brief discussion of *ʿatābā*, Jabbour *ʿAbd an-Nūr*¹⁹ claims that the *ʿatābā* hemistich is reduced to the *fushā wāfir* metre,

$\cup _ \cup \cup _ / \cup _ \cup \cup _ / \cup _ _ _$ and he adds that the foot, $\cup _ \cup \cup _$ transforms into $_ \cup _ _ _$ as it is the case, in his words, 'dans la prosodie classique.'²⁰ The example he gives in support of this transformation is the following:²¹

[N] kḥtīṭi rabbina byughfur kḥaṭākī

$\cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _$

If you sin, God will forgive your sin

[N] ramāki-d-dahr[i] bi-s-hāmū kḥaṭākī

$\cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _$

If time tossed its arrows at you, they would miss you

[W] 'a shaṭṭ-il-baḥr-[i] law sir^cit kḥaṭākī

$\cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _$

And if your footsteps speed up along the seashore

Nabat fī raml-i-t-il-mālīḥ ^cishāb

$\cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ _ \cup _ _ \circ$

Grass will grow out of the salty sand

The assertion that $\cup _ _ _$, the basic foot of *wāfir*, may change into $_ \cup _ _ _$, the basic foot of *ramal*, goes against the rules of Arabic metrics. The books on *ʿarūd* never mention such a transformation. In addition, the *bayt* of *ʿatābā* that he offers as example

¹⁹ See *ʿAbd an-Nūr* 1966: 103-4.

²⁰ *Ibid*: 104.

²¹ *Ibid*: 104.

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does not support his assertion. The only possible explanation is that ^CAbd an-Nūr scanned the *bayt* by reading the unvowelled consonants at the beginning of the first three hemistichs as "in", "in" and "wa" respectively, giving each hemistich an extra-long syllable,

$$\begin{array}{cccc} - & \text{u} & - & - \\ - & \text{u} & - & - \\ - & \text{u} & - & - \end{array} / \begin{array}{cccc} - & \text{u} & - & - \\ - & \text{u} & - & - \\ - & \text{u} & - & - \end{array} / \begin{array}{cccc} - & \text{u} & - & - \\ - & \text{u} & - & - \\ - & \text{u} & - & - \end{array}$$

The resulting pattern then becomes that of the *fuṣḥā ramal* metre. The problem here is that ^CAbd an-Nūr is imposing a *fuṣḥā* reading, "in *khiṭiti*", "in *ramāki*" and "wa ^C*a shat!*" in order to satisfy the demand that no line in *fuṣḥā* may begin with an unvowelled consonant. The situation is not the same in the Lebanese or other Arabic dialects. Phonetically speaking, the first syllable is "^Ca", which is where the scansion of the hemistichs should begin. Deleting, therefore, the first forced long syllable, we obtain:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} \text{u} & - & - & - \\ \text{u} & - & - & - \\ \text{u} & - & - & - \end{array} / \begin{array}{cccc} \text{u} & - & - & - \\ \text{u} & - & - & - \\ \text{u} & - & - & - \end{array} / \begin{array}{cccc} \text{u} & - & - & - \\ \text{u} & - & - & - \\ \text{u} & - & - & - \end{array}$$

which with reference to the fourth hemistich,

Nabat fī ramli-t-il-māliḥ ^Cishāb

$$\text{u} \quad - \quad - \quad - / \text{u} \quad - \quad - \quad - / \text{u} \quad - \quad \text{u}$$

yields the form of *wāfir* that characterizes ^C*atābā*. Even if the poet were to read the hemistichs as ^CAbd an-Nūr would have them read (and this is not unusual in particular metres and particular situations), the metre would still be that of the *wāfir* as long as the stress pattern of the *wāfir* is used as the point of reference.

It is clear from the above that any study of genre in Lebanese *zajal* poetry has to take into account the relationship between poetic and musical metres. The critics' confusion stems from the facile assumption that the application of classical metrical scansion can determine the formal characteristics of both written and sung poetry. Yet once it is acknowledged that when a poetic verse is declaimed or sung, music becomes the key to its metrical composition, the confusion over genre relationships, as in the case of *atābā* and *mijanā* above, will no longer exist.

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S O P H I E M A S S O N

The Matrix Effect

In 1999 a film was released which rapidly became a huge hit, and whose strange world was immediately recognised by a large number of people. It was the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix*. Many people not attune to the *zeitgeist* saw it merely as a great action movie, a dark science-fiction conspiracy theory story with strong elements of myth. But it is much more than that. Based on Platonic and Biblical ideas and motifs, on the darkest, most persistent human fears and dreams, it bypassed Enlightenment ideas and orthodoxies of left and right almost completely, and went straight into post Enlightenment perceptions. It fed into what had once been a minority feeling--the feeling that the world we live in is in fact a vicious fiction, an invisible tyranny controlled by a faceless, inhuman system. In the world of *The Matrix*, that is literally true- the Matrix is a computer programme, a 'reality' constructed by sentient machines to keep the human race in a state of complacent slavery. It is difficult to tell real from false in the Matrix, because the machine masters have agents everywhere, who look just like human beings but are not. There is, however, an underground movement opposing the Matrix to liberate humanity, a movement waiting for its Messiah, who comes in the form of computer programmer Thomas Anderson, who becomes Neo the hacker by night, is inducted into the *samidzat* world by fellow rebels Trinity and Morpheus, begins to assume the mantle of anarchist saviour, is betrayed, killed, and resurrected, with his story to continue in two sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*.

What is interesting about *The Matrix* is that it is not just a paranoid computer geek's fantasy. All kinds of people identify with the perceptions reflected on the screen; what was once a minority feeling is fast gaining momentum amongst a large proportion of people. A work of art can only really succeed and haunt people if it accurately taps into some sense that people have of their real lives and times. *The Matrix*, along with much fantasy and science fiction, is part of the undercurrents of our times which are coming to the surface. Its image of the Establishment as being an inhuman, evil, controlling system is not at all new, of course; omnipotent, totally evil, mesmerising Dark Lords have been in control of people's worlds in reality (as in tyrannies such as those of Ivan the Terrible, Vlad the Impaler, the Jacobin Reign of Terror, Stalin, Pol Pot, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung etc) as well as in people's minds, such as the image of the Devil, since time immemorial, across many cultures. Indeed, that traditional base is part of the reason for the success of the film: it is a movie that can cross barriers of culture, for its fears of what is happening to us is common to all cultures. The Dark Lord is as much a part of

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non-Western cultures as in the West.

But the filmmakers have also correctly reflected back to their technological society the malaise that many people feel all over the Western world. Real life, biological life, complex, ambivalent, strange, multifaceted, is being slowly strangled by a technological, bureaucratic, inhuman Matrix. People do not *feel* a part of the Matrix- they do not feel they have a stake in it or created it, but rather that they are helpless slaves to it. They no longer feel they have a handle on the forces governing political, social, cultural change and transformation, unless it be with the catch-all explanation of the Matrix. What is more, people feel butterfly-pinned by the omnipotent, faceless Matrix and its lumbering, cold, mechanical language, reducing human life to slogans and pretty, lying words, all the better to swallow humanity. The painful feeling of being held in thrall by the Matrix is expressed in many ways, through trivial disregard for authority in any shape or form, even if it is, say a referee at a soccer game, right through to very serious cynicism and fury, even murderous fury, as in the case of terrorism. And it crosses barriers of social, economic, religious or racial backgrounds, as well as political ones: both on the left and right, people believe in the Matrix, and the increasingly beleaguered centre finds it hard to persuade people that it is not so. Whatever people identify as the Matrix- whether it be globalisation, hegemony, capitalism, leftwing liberalism, Chardonnay lefties, decadent bureaucracy, Microsoft, the American empire, the Coca-Cola conspiracy, the Great Satan, the modernist project, the *trahison des clerics*, of the elites, of the moral majority, of the military-industrial complex - people want to rebel against it but must, ironically, understand its ways and emerge from within it to do so. They are in fact compromised by the Matrix itself, but see themselves outside it nevertheless. They do not necessarily see beyond rebellion- the opposite of the Matrix is, in fact, the anarchist impulse, destruction, not building. Allied with the existential fury that is the dark side of the human heart, it can be a very dangerous thing. For this kind of rebellion is not about answers, necessarily, but about catharsis, even violent catharsis. It's not about despair, but prideful ecstasy- the ecstasy of violent rebellion itself. It's not about proving any reality to the Matrix, though any number of conspiracy theories is woven around it to make it seem so. For this is all about perceptions- about a kaleidoscope of feelings, both coherent and incoherent, central amongst which is the unshakeably strong belief that rebellion against the Matrix is what it means to be human.

What I'd like to call the Matrix Effect, in all its forms, is the source of the malaise in much of the Western world and beyond it as well; and rebellion to it is immense, but fragmented, fractured, quarrelsome and divided. From all the corners of the old political world, the rebels against the Matrix are gathering force; only their fragmentation and quarrelsomeness make them, for the moment, not completely formidable.

How did this situation come about? How have people come to feel so disenfranchised, so arrogantly sure, too, that they know the truth, that their political and cultural masters

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are the Matrix, in an age that was supposed to deliver a sense of democracy at the reach of all? It is my contention that the Matrix Effect is the inevitable result of the ending of a two-hundred-year cycle that began with the Luciferian blaze of the French Enlightenment philosophers. Slowly coming out of that two-hundred-year cycle, we find ourselves in a strange new-old world. The fall of the Berlin Wall did not mean the end of history nor even its recommencement after a 50-year hiatus, but a continuation which precious few had charted or even thought about. The twin mirrors of Fascism/Nazism and Communism have shattered; most other dualistic terms, such as Left and Right, conservative/progressive have no meaning, to anyone who lives in the real world and thinks at all beyond familiar and shop-worn orthodoxies. Religion and tradition, once thought dead and buried by the mainstream intelligentsia, have resurged with a vigour which shows clearly that they never really went away, but stayed as a strong undercurrent just waiting for the dykes of ideology to be swept away. Because during all that time when politicians and commentators thought they had everything sewn up into some kind of civilised consensus about how to avoid a repeat of the things that had convulsed the world in the 20th century, those undercurrents were gathering strength. And what was more, the world was getting closer together- in hatred sometimes, in sympathy other times, in indifference as well. The world was knocking on the world's doors.

In fact one could say that the Enlightenment cycle had already reached its last agonies by the time the two-headed beast of Fascism and Communism tore the continent of Europe apart. The Second World War, with its clearly defined dualities, and then the standoff between East and West during the Cold War delayed the inevitable reckoning. Before the French Revolution, in particular the extremist coup d'état of 1792, unleashed its murderous Year Zero fury on the ancient institutions and customs of France as well as its population (more than half a million people died in France as a direct consequence of the Revolution, this in a country of 18 million!), there had been a consensus in most of Western Europe that order, custom, and memory were the most important things in a nation's culture. Rebellions and heresies were constantly breaking out, but they were suppressed, with the general feeling being that they were not a good thing. Evolutionary change, slow incremental reform, was the pre-modern way, and still is, in countries still governed by customary law, such as Britain. The Revolution, splitting the soul of France in two, gave as its legacy to Europe several powerful things: the idea that rebels, not the status quo, was good; the idea that tradition and custom was, if not bad, at least backward; the idea that ideology counted more than human beings; the idea that Man is not created both good and bad, as was the traditional sense of it, but that natural man is only good, and that it is only civilisation that has corrupted him, therefore it is civilisation that is rotten. The atheistic Revolution, a Luciferian rebellion if ever there was one, ushered in modernity, in itself not a bad thing at all, but it was a Faustian bargain indeed. The revolutionary bug was caught by many cultures beyond the French;

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it inspired nationalist as well as internationalist movements, and even religio-revolutionary ones such as *Al-Qaeda*, which, rather than defending the rich and complex patterns of tradition, is more about imposing artificial Year Zero concepts. Osama bin Laden and his kind are an inescapable part of modernity, modern revolutionaries, not 'medieval' throwbacks as all too many thoughtless commentators in the West have assumed. The Middle Ages, in both Islamic and Christian cultures, was more about that preservation of order and custom and memory; though they were enemies, people like Saladin and Richard the Lionheart were more truly equals, and understood each other better, than their counterparts do now.

The American Revolution, being both a religiously derived movement, and a parish-pump revolt against 'taxation without representation' had different effects. In effect, the two, French and American, could be said almost to be opposite modern revolutionary traditions, though they share the same messianic sense of mission. And they have influenced cultures all over the world.

What would happen once the Cold War, the last battleground of the two-hundred-year old enemies and rivals of left and right, ended? What would happen when those who were no longer firebrand radicals but the Establishment itself, became, in fact, allies against that inevitable reckoning? What would happen once 'the people', that totem held high and bloodily by the bloodiest tyrants and most venal villains the world has ever seen, as well as championed by real democrats, actually come onto the stage, in their own right? Few thought to ask, to question the idea that 'the people' could be led as always, would follow blindly in the train of materialistic progress to social or cultural 'progress'. It's been so long that left and right have dominated that few thought, in truth, that the cycle would ever end. And so people have been caught helplessly mesmerised by the new political movements mushrooming across Europe, across the world in fact, at the common Matrix Effect malaise which is sweeping not only 'developed' countries but those in the process of development (for that too, is a part of 'globalisation'!), and unable to get a grip on what could be happening, and why.

Only a few commentators or political analysts, more than ten years after the fall of the Wall, are holding an untarnished mirror up to human nature, and allowing its true condition to be clearly reflected back: a common sense of a loss of meaning, of depth, of a Shakespearean understanding of humanity. A loss which leads to unease, sorrow, and in some, to fury. As one might expect, artists understand it much better, particularly in the less prominent, less establishment-sanctioned, humbler, more-in-tune genres like science fiction and fantasy (for a truly extraordinary, chilling glimpse into what post-Matrix Anarchy UK might truly be like, read Gwyneth Jones' fiercely puckish novel, *Bold as Love*, and its sequel, *Castles Made of Sand*).

But in the running-behind-the-times mainstream press there is a lot of huffing and puffing about the rise of the 'hard' Right, the 'extreme' right, the resurgent spectre of fascism, jackbooted and shrill. Some of this is the panic-stricken, angry jeremiad of a

threatened *ancien regime*; the only jackboots one can hear marching are those on the feet of those seeking to defend their privileges tooth and nail, and their cosy game of orthodoxy. Most of it though is lazy and complacent and half-baked, half-educated talk, a wilful blindness to see the truth of what is happening, because to think is hard work. *Everyone* knows what 'fascist' means- it's code for an authoritarian busy-body brutality, right? Let's forget about the fact that fascism, the mirror image of communism, was, like it, militaristic, imperialistic, millenarian, group-oriented, and sought to completely remake the individual as part of a hive mentality. Let's ignore the fact these new movements are anything but fascist, then, but individualistic to the point of almost-lunacy. So much easier to make the old skeletons dance! This laziness of thought leads to some fairly amusing sights- to self-styled 'leftwingers' busily defending the status quo, and consensus 'rightwingers' agreeing with them. Then there is the kind of non-analysis which insists that the new movements are anathema, unless of course they happen to be led by a woman/person from a minority race or culture/with a different sexual orientation/ex-Marxist/university lecturer/take your pick. Then a movement is not 'rightwing' it is merely 'populist', geared against the 'elitists'. Anything to keep up the good old dualisms: whether 'populism' versus 'elitism' means anything stable at all either in this new climate is of course seen as a mere loose cannon of a question.

We are seeing indeed the return of all sorts of things, in modern guise. This is an age of transition. And like all transitional ages, it is an age of pain and unease and paranoia, as well as real danger. In these circumstances, of course, people everywhere might pine for the certainties of the Cold War. But it is also an age of opportunity and potential, if we can avoid the twin spectres of alienation and anarchy. The 'certainties' of the Cold War depended on the murder of millions of people in Eastern Europe and Asia, and the oppression of millions more. The new world disorder is frightening too, which in a sense is why people want to believe in the existence of the Matrix: easier, better to imagine the world is led by a conspiracy than to come to grips with the idea that no-one, in this newly fragile, globalised world we live in, can *really* control events, no matter how powerful they seem to be. Inward change, inward understanding, loyalty without hatred: that should be the real project of this age of transition. But will it happen that way? Or will we all fall victim to the Matrix Effect? All bets are off, for the future can no longer be clearly seen, if it ever was.

صوفي ماسون

Sophie Masson's new book, *Hand of Glory* (Hodder Headline Australia, July 2001), which is a mystery/adventure novel, also changes the history of both France and Australia: the events of 1792 did not happen, and France colonised Western Australia!

EILEEN MARSHALL

**The song, dance, laughter,
tears, of creation.**

I was first aware that I was different, early in my life. I would be ecstatic over trifles and the world would glow and I would expand to meet all the wonders. At other times all would darken, everything would hurt and I would shrivel inwards. Of course, much of the time I was like other children, eager and busy with living, but often with a sensitivity that frequently brought me close to shattering.

Over the years I became slightly crazed, my surface covered with tiny fault lines, like fine bone china.

Crazed, but not in pieces.

Perhaps my worst sin is a passionate intensity. As the poet said, the worst are full of it. Someone once told me that I intensified him to death- cruel, but accurate. I still have this tendency, but over the years I have found my solution in humour. It is seldom that I don't see the absurdity of myself, and, yes, others. Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) observed that 'the secret source of humour is not joy, but sorrow.' One laughs instead of crying.

I believe Mr. Clemens, I believe Pagliacci and I definitely believe Patch Adams.

Another sin is that of ebullience. I don't just enjoy music, I want to sing, hum, dance or even cry to it I don't merely like a poem, I fall in love with it: I don't simply admire a painting, I adore it. A few years ago, I lurched around the galleries of Amsterdam in a drunken haze not from the lesser intoxication of alcohol but from an ecstasy of inebriation generated by the likes of Van Gogh, Rembrandt and Jan Vermeer.

When the pall of melancholy falls on me, my darkness can become like a pestilence to be kept away from others, in case it infects them.

I recommenced writing some years ago, diffidently, I tried for some time not to write, I endeavoured to find another way of expressing some of the ideas and passions that were driving me. I remembered too, my youth, when I 'wrote'.

In my teens and early 20's, I was quite a prolific writer who wrote from the compulsive belief that I had something vital to tell the world. I wrote poetry about infatuation with death, the agony of unrequited love and the alienation of being life's outcast. Never a niggard, often all three featured in the same poem! I wrote somewhat better prose although the themes were always bleak in the extreme.

One work was a novella about a clergyman, who like Peer Gynt 'was meant to be a shining button on the world's waistcoat', but he was flawed, or in button terms, his 'loop

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was missing'. Titled *The Same Corruption*, it was pure Ibsen in darkness, if not in skill. The ending 'He looked to the sky but the sun had already set' was in sentiment, if not in exact words, the ending of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. I hadn't read the play before I wrote this line I think the Norwegian shared a similarly morbid frame of mind when he wrote his darkest drama. According to Kay Redfield Jamison, Ibsen was a manic-depressive.

Ever the extremist I had to be the best, or no one. When I realised I would never reach the standard of my heroes, Emily Bronte, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy etc., I stopped writing 'literature' completely and had a funeral pyre of all but a few snippets which I copied into an exercise book. I kept the book as a curiosity and an affectionate reminder of the melodramatic girl I had been.

As I reread two of these fragments a few years back, I realised I had described what could only have been an experience of the two ends of the mood spectrum. These extremes of mood became commonplace in my life. No prizes for guessing which expresses melancholy and which expresses elation, nor the words which presage the change from one to another.

'The walls throbbed with ecstasy and grew huge until the room became a universe of light and life and joy. She extended her being past the four walls into the core of eternity. The heavy garment of flesh that had so encumbered her, fell away and she soared to singing heights, unimpeded. The entire universe hummed with silent harmony. The white heat of her transfiguration grew more intense until it swelled out to encompass all things. She could see into the heart of beauty and became the light the life and the joy of the world... She roamed the house, glad they had all gone and left her to relish her transformation. When she looked in the mirror, she saw a beauty that was beyond physicality, a beauty that was supernatural in its perfection and radiance'...

...Her descent from the High hill was agony, she felt every step along the cruel path, uneven with sharp jagged stones, the path that took her down to the plain...

...Beside her on the table was an assortment of books. She picked them up one after the other and glanced at their covers without interest. A week of doleful days and forlorn nights had left her soggy with an exhaustion that no sleep could assuage underneath the tiredness was an awful tremulousness that would not let her mind be still. Her body felt both numb and painful, it ached as if she had been punched and beaten. She sank down into the unreality of the moment: the moment that had detached itself from the continuity of moments that stretched endlessly before and behind her. She was sealed in with all the diffused and distressing sensations thrown up by her mind the room was impersonal, as if it were no longer hers. It had a stale damp clamminess from the heat of the gas fire. She felt suffocated as the gas fire gorged on the air and she was left to breathe in her own horror and smell her own fear.

It became imperative for me join my two writing selves. I had changed so much, my

adult writing self scarcely ever would allow such excesses as the above. Besides, there were many gaps where I have only a faint recall of my life. St. John of the Cross wrote 'I live without inhabiting myself.' I had experienced something like that.

Some little time ago I wondered about the lacunae, and about this insistent desire to recommence writing that I could not stifle as much as I tried.

May be some of you may think I should have tried harder. I would sometimes agree.

In the space between my younger and older selves, I had managed to get reasonably on top of the deep melancholy and mild mania that had beset me on and off for so long. In the midst of my self-pilgrimage, I read William Stryon's account of his own descent into deepest melancholy, *Darkness Visible*.

Writers, particularly poets, are unusually prone to mood disorders, it seems. I became interested in this aspect, for a partisan reason writing had become my own way through Dante's "dark wood" and I was curious to see how others had travelled.

Gerald Manley Hopkins has long been the poet laureate of depressives with his *Terrible Sonnets* but there are many other poets and prose writers who seem to have experienced a dysfunction of mood.

I decided rather grandly that I was in a plum position to write about writers with mood disorders. All I needed was a medical specialist on the subject, a literary expert and some reasonably well-read person, preferably a writer, with a mood disorder. I located the first two and believed I myself could supply the last of the trio.

Then I found Kay Redfield Jamison and her luminous and scholarly *Touched with fire*. I gave up my project, with a sigh of gratitude. The definitive text had been written.

It would be fatuous to suggest that all creative people experience mood imbalance, it's just that the creative process and the experience of manic depression may have a similar source. The creative burst one gets during hypomania, the speed of thought, divergent thinking, the boldness, the energy etc, is part of the creative process. Recently, for the first time since my late teens, I wrote in a glorious burst of mild mania, fairly reasonable poetry.

Surprisingly enough, depression itself can also have a positive effect. Suffering makes you more open, tends to increase understanding, enables you to see things afresh. One can become 'More sensitive, more creative, more effective after the depression has lifted.'

And it's far more normal, given the nature of the human condition, to be depressed with the state of the world and its people than to be enraptured - yet we all get bursts of ecstasy in our lives. Without them, who could stand the murk of the real world? As T S Eliot observed, in a line that became a twentieth century poetic cliché 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality.'

It is more than likely that it is the 'flux and tensions between the mood states' rather than any one-mood state, that gives rise to creativity. When highly creative individuals (with or without mood disorders) have been studied, it has been found that their

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thinking is 'very fluid and divergent'.

It is often quite obvious from their works, which writers suffer from mood disorders. I myself find that any text I write during a depression often needs the dulling film of melancholy wiped off to reveal the colour and texture buried underneath. Alternatively, if I write in a flight of mild mania, the hyperbole, the dancing all over the place, the larrikin cheekiness, have to be subdued to be acceptable to most people. For instance, I was once told that my heroine sounded shallow, when she just reflected my hypomania. Her mind darted all over the place - from a serious discussion on the world's poverty, to colourful trinkets on a stall. I hadn't realised her behaviour could be interpreted this way - it's quite common for me to be thus.

Since the condition, now renamed bipolar - I dislike the expression, one sounds like an android not a creature of flesh and blood - affects about 1 to 2 in 100 of the general population, there must be many people for whom my revelation has at least some passing interest. Particularly since it has been suggested that the incidence of this mood disorder amongst writers is inordinately high, perhaps as high as 20 in 100, and that incidence is for acknowledged writers.

Of course one can have the disorder, without the ability. One young man I know, when applying for a grant, had decided to put as support to his submission, 'manic depressive'. Showing unusual restraint, instead, he just used one word - 'genius'.

Mental (or emotional illness) is still not the most acceptable of illnesses, unless you are a performer, an artist, a writer of stature, or a stock market Croesus with gold worry beads. Recently it seemed set to become a fad among wanna-be creatives, you had to be at least unipolar and preferably bipolar to be considered a legitimate genius, and it looked as if everyone, with intellectual or artistic aspirations, was jumping on the bandwagon.

With the predilections for writers, artists and celebrities of all sorts to come out and proclaim their eccentricities, I hesitated to use my real name, although in the end, I did. I was concerned you might think I was boasting, taking unfair advantage by using a label that has some kind of perverse Kudos, riding on the backs of *famous* writing bipolars, so as to speak.

We are not always easy to pick. For every flamboyant bipolar there are others, maybe just a little off-centre, maybe a little ill-mannered or even positively rude, but otherwise appearing to be 'normal'. Don't be deceived. We are quite often singing - laughing - dancing - crying under a full or even a crescent moon, the song - laughter - dance - tears of life and death, of heaven and hell, that the uncomprehending call lun-a-tic, that some of us know as the experience of creation.

Acknowledgements

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LAILA MAQDISI

Translated by Raghid Nahhas

Twelve Love Letters

I

My loneliness stretches itself on the wings of vagrant hope. I take the paths of secret bewilderment. The heart of Ishtar, the first lady and goddess of this eternal earth, beats and plants roses in the twilight.

A soft narcissus tears its sleeves at the temples of worship. It prays...for the bloom of the perpetual secret of the dying fields, for the bent yellow ears of wheat and for the marble human form in the universe.

The seeds of love scatter. The sperms of happiness bloom on the lips of grass and trees. The fingers of oblivion erase masses of dark clouds, still pour over their dusty ashes upon the hearts of people.

I went out of the last passage...

Riwa', the beauty of your face struck me out of the soft convolutions of the narcissus, and out of your hands I planted happiness in the prime of my life, and dozed among the towers of dreams...

Waiting for you.

II

The night dragged out. A bird restrained his singing and waited, as I did, to gulp, from the flutes of happiness. A sole basil flower embraced my sorrow...

Another night dragged out, it wrapped my bosom with its darkness.

Joy is imbued in the laughter of children,

in the memory of trees and with

the birthday of a child, welcomed by the cooing of the earth

Another night dragged out...my heart is bare, enveloped by loneliness,

I seek companionship in the swinging of the worn-out clouds scattered on the dawn's eyelashes.

Another night dragged out...sadness withdrew its eyelashes away from the dreams of my drowsiness.

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I flipped into slumber with some happiness, on a pillow promising the fantasy of your arrival...

III

A singing bird hummed its secret melodies for your eyes. I freed my eyelids from the chains of the heavy sleep to share its singing and sing for the unwithered flower in you that exalts the darkness of my soul. The world choked, darkness corrodes the night, and people spread their arms to the ropes of struggle under the domes of evil, despite life is but a fleeting moment.

I ask you... why has happiness vanished away when you departed?

IV

Your visage proudly drifts on the waves affectionately and in silence. The intensity of my craving froths up its sparkling on the poplar leaves, and makes the rustle of the willow weep over my grievance. The travelling hoopoe forgot to pass my melodies to you with the wandering star. The distant clouds diverge in the expanse of timelessness where the yearnings of my heart drizzle on the shore of my secluded life...

V

Dreams sway back and forth in the ribs of ancient pine. The state of my sorrowfulness drifts on pale halls, following the ritual of your migration. When the curtains of your window flutter in its dance, your transparent face vitalises its colour and the tears glisten on a pillow of purified dreams wrested by pain.

VI

My eyes catch you taking the colour of the sea. I paint up my yearning with the form of a rock scorched by the sun. You wear the look of the shiver of dawn and the drowsiness of the evening. I feel the creeping of your fingers on my wounds; warmth penetrates into the pillows of my throbbing bosom, white and black thoughts filter through the holes of time.

I imagine your face like the face of a dancer in a Greek temple

Kalimat 11

I almost touch it, but soon it dissipates in the haze of confusion.

VII

In the garden where ashes crept into our steps, the clattering of your steps is heard.

The confused pelican flew away to the cerulean lakes that extend like blossoms of yearning under horizons pulsating with my concealed craving for you...I hide you among the vines of affection, the weeping clouds absorb your affectionate kisses...

You are the promise of a vine deserted by sleep,
the grapes of fertility of the vineyards' wine.

VIII

I pass our paths. I touch your steps that flounder on road-sides designed by your pride. The fleeing sun closes its eyelids, for my tears dance among the roaring of the loss of my strayed looks. Sadness melts me down. I follow your face fluttering its smiles above the clouds: the letters of your name froth up on the shadows of your absence.

IX

I remove the rust of time out of the nails of pain. The glow of tenderness glitters with your hands. Your heart throbs along the paths of oblivion, exiled in the meadows of the obscure city of Toulouse, where some of my defeated tears that escaped the darkness of the night, spray its windows.

X

I stand close to your window exhaling the scent of the dry roses and ask them of your whereabouts. Stillness dominates the place, the live-coal of silence burns off, the smoke of estrangement dims my vision and your little dog rolls itself in your seat and looks at me with sadness...

Where would Riwa' be?

I never thought life would in your absence wither, and that I would scatter like tiny seeds among the expanse of the green fields...

Kalimat 11

XI

Shells of silence break up. Your voice over the phone reaches me arrayed with the song of absence. I glance an invisible sobbing surfing on your smiling face; the boredom of your isolation chokes your longing. The soil of your homeland is enraged. I hold your face- imbued with white flakes, a shattered heart inflamed by the fury of loss.

I wash the urn of tears with a flood of kisses; another flame spreads out of the ember.

XII

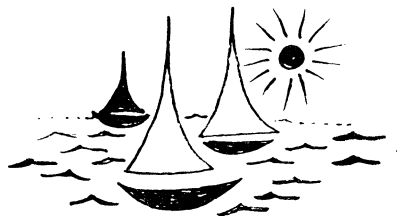
Drown in the tears of my love before they dry up, for the herb of salt grew and dried up on shores burnt by the glow of passion.

I see you in my mind's eye despite my raged memory...

The lovely door of your room is shut up. The rain after the storm stilled down.

They say: 'You are great when you are not done away...'

You are still a symbol for the beginning.



ليلي مقدسي

Laila Maqdisi is a writer and poet from Aleppo, Syria. The above twelve pieces of prose are from the second Part, titled "Twenty-Five Love Letters", of her book "Some Longing for Riwa". The first and major part of the book is a collection of poetry in which the writer expresses her burning longing to her daughter Riwa' who left her for France to prepare her doctorate. *Badush Shawk li Riwa'* (in Arabic), Darul Maqdissia, Aleppo 1998.

L . E . S C O T T

IN PASSING

for Gwendolyn Brooks, 1917 – 2000

Gwen
in passing
I saw you in South Africa's Soweto
with the children of Nelson Mandela
the refrain of the poem –
apartheid, apartheid, apartheid is over
the work has just begun
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen
in passing
I saw you in Zimbabwe's Harare
at Afrika Unity Square with the children of Robert Mugabe
the refrain of the poem –
land reform, land reform, long overdue
political oppression, drunk on power, raped by corruption
Mr. President, this is unclean water
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen
in passing
I saw you in Kenya's Nairobi
at the Maasai Tuesday market
with the children of Kenyatta
the refrain of the poem –
Daniel Toroitich arap Moi
so many years, so many years, way too long
do not bathe Kenya again in such unclean water
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

I N M E M O R I A M

Kalimat 11

Gwen
in passing
I saw you in the green killing fields of Rwanda
with the children of the dead, Hutu and Tutsi alike
the refrain of the poem –
Mr. President, Mr. President
do not feed tribalism with the blood of brother and sister
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen
in passing
I saw you in the coup-infested land of Nigeria
where tribalism, witchcraft, religion, corruption
are dancing with mouths full of human blood
the refrain of the poem –
in the words of Marvin Gaye
Brother, brother, brother
There's far too many of you dying
Tell me what's going on
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen
in passing
I saw you standing between the armies
of Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe
in Kabila's Democratic Republic of Congo
the sins of the fathers –
at the feet of the people
were the photographs of Mobutu Sese Seko and Laurent Kabila
diamonds cannot save the greedy for ever
the refrain of the poem –
where, beloved Afrika, are the children of Patrice Lumumba
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen
in passing

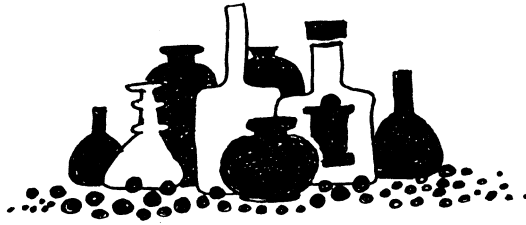
I N M E M O R I A M

Kalimat 11

Gwen
in passing
I saw you on a full moon night in Blackest Afrika
you were standing tall
at the last village
all the ancestors had gathered
you were going home
the refrain of the poem –
Afrika, Afrika, Afrika
you are more than fifty strong
Black leaders, Black leaders,
stay on the course of righteousness

لويس إي. سكوت

Lewis E. Scott is an African-American writer, poet and editor who made New Zealand his home. He is *Kalimat's* adviser for New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.



I N M E M O R I A M

L . E . S C O T T

He Tipua The Life and Times of Sir Apirana Ngata

By
Ranginui Walker
Viking Press

Sometimes life gives birth to a person who will come to shape the future of his/her people. Then, those who come after must try to work out what it was about that person that was so different from others who were also born in that time but were not chosen by history or fate to be a light of change. Often such people do not live a long life, but if they do, our judgement of what they do to change the course of history for their fellow human beings is not always kind – being great does not make them free of human frailties. But once death has come to such a person, it makes them less troublesome for us to embrace.

Such was the man, Sir Apirana Ngata. What was the historical sperm that gave birth to him? He was born in 1874, 34 years after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed – a document that established a partnership between the indigenous people of New Zealand (the Maori) and the British Crown. The Maori did not cede sovereignty with this treaty – that was a convenient assumption taken by their partner in later years. And by the time of Ngata's birth, the colonising power was conducting its business with less and less regard for the terms of the Treaty. Every aspect of Maori society and indeed the population itself was in decline, many believed heading towards extinction, and the marae, the tribal gathering places and the heartbeat of Maoridom, were rotting away under the syphilitic racism that touched every facet of Maori life. This was the world of late 19th Century New Zealand for Maori.

Apirana Ngata was born into a position of leadership and authority in his tribe, Ngati Porou, and from a very young age he assumed the responsibilities of that position. He worked all his life for the betterment not just of his tribe but of all Maori. He believed that Maori should educate themselves in the European way, but also that Maori society – its culture, traditions, language and marae – must be preserved and that one of the keys to resourcing and sustaining that was land reform. He himself was a shining example: he was highly educated in the European sense (he was the first Maori to graduate from a New Zealand university, with a law degree) and served as a Member of Parliament for many years, rising to the position of Cabinet Minister. At the same time,

he worked tirelessly to promote and preserve Maori activity of all kinds, whether cultural, social, sporting, political or economic. He had enormous mana (honour/stature) in the Maori world, and was highly respected in the pakeha (European) world – as long as he followed their rules. It is one of the paradoxes of colonisation that the colonisers have the ability to exempt individuals from their assumptions about a race's inferiority and backwardness without questioning the validity of those racist assumptions.

Dr. Ranginui Walker, a Maori scholar and university professor, has done what so many people have been waiting for: he has written "He Tipua: The Life and Times of Sir Apirana Ngata". There has been much debate about why it has taken so long to produce a biography of someone who had such an impact on the life of his country. In fact, a number of pakeha writers have over the years expressed an interest in such a project, but Sir Apirana himself before his death in 1950 and subsequently his family have been reluctant to participate. Sir Apirana Ngata believed that one would have to be a Maori in order to fully understand and therefore write about Maori people and their world.

It has fallen to Dr. Walker to take up the task, with the consent and co-operation of the Ngata family. And so this book came to birth. Without doubt Dr. Walker has captured some of the essence of this great leader, but he himself says that there is much more to be written, a task he has firmly passed on to other historians.

Sir Apirana Ngata was, quite simply, a remarkable man – it is not for nothing that Dr. Walker has titled his biography "He Tipua" (the superhuman one). He was a man born for greatness and he proved his ability to wear that mantle far beyond any expectation. Dr. Walker's biography shows us not just the man but also the conditions and the times that shaped his views and beliefs. In today's climate, where disparities still exist between the social and economic indicators for Maori and Pakeha and many of the younger Maori generation feel marginalised, some of the compromises and accords that Sir Apirana Ngata struck in his struggle to uplift his people are now questioned. For example, during the World Wars he actively encouraged Maori to enlist, believing that New Zealand's Maori sons had to cross the waters to those battlefields to fulfil their responsibilities under the Treaty – and also to prove that they too were worthy. History and hindsight may have taught us a different lesson about such a position, but that should only increase our ability to judge with understanding the actions of those who stood up and faced the winds of power that did not want to change their course.

لويس إي. سكوت

Lewis E. Scott is an African-American writer, poet and editor who made New Zealand his home. He is *Kalimat's* adviser for New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

FIONA M. CARROLL

As sweet as you

Sweet, this fruit,
though not as sweet as you
when you are sweet,
when you are sweet
your fingernails are
perfect
and leave no mark,
save for the mark that scores you
gathering me in its groove
in leaving leaves no trace
save for the trace of irises,
hidden eyes lingering,
watering
in sight of home.



فيونا م. كارول

Fiona M. Carroll is a writer and poet from Adelaide, South Australia.

EILEEN MARSHALL

Soorab Rumi Sings of Love

Anahita¹

You are honeycomb, I would bite into
your brittle sweetness. I would let your
sticky gold pour over my lips and down
my breast, thumping with longing for you.
Anahita - Anahita - Anahita - Anahita
source of life, source of love. I devour
the beauty of your face, I swoon at
the beauty of your voice. I lie at your feet
arched delicately as they tread lightly on my soul.
Do not tread lightly. With your strong feet
kill the body that is half dead. Finish me,
destroy me or I will forever be as I am,
one of the living dead.

I cannot live with your spell

You came into my sight last night
and the butterfly wings of your glance
created a gale in my heart.
Faery maiden I cannot live with your spell.
You came into my dreams last night
your tears poured into my soul
they flowed and flowed 'til I drowned.
Faery damsel I cannot live with your spell.
Last night I watched you dance
your footsteps drummed in my head
and shattered my psyche's tough shell.
 Without you, I will be dead
 With you, I will be mad
Faery daemon I cannot live with your spell.

¹ Anahita was an ancient Persian goddess 'A beautiful maiden, powerful and strong.' She was regarded as the source of life.

It is my soul that burns

Your mouth filled with fragrant words
and you speak of love's food to me!
Do not speak of the body's feast
it is my soul that *starves*.

I watch you dance, the veil of night swathing
your breasts and your goddess thighs.
Do not flaunt all these delights
it is my soul that *yearns*.

Your soft palms and your dimpled hands
slither and stroke my eager skin.
Do not tease me with your touch
it is my soul that *craves*.

Your mouth, your form, your hands, will not
put out the flame that rages through me.
Nor will any of these give me ease
it is my soul that *burns*.

You give me no peace, no joy

You are the moon who drags the tides
to towering heights within my heart.
You are the sun who warms then sears
my being, until I have shrivelled away.
You are the gale that sweeps and scours
my will, my strength, all my resolve
the quake that splits my mind apart
till with desire I am insane.

You give me no peace, no joy -
to my dilemma there is no end.
If I let you near, my heart will
implode, from longing. If I push
you away, it will shatter, from sorrow.
Mine is a love that will me, destroy.

I yearn to be the white heat

The pain of bliss unrelenting,
tears your fragile loveliness
sweeps through your being
like Asha's² purging wind.
By Mazda Ahura's³ flame
your soul is lit, till your eyes
are globes of light and
your whole body's rapture
flares out from them.
How I yearn to be
the white heat that is
transfiguring you.

آیلین مارشال

Eileen Marshall is a writer and poet from Newcastle, Australia.



² Asha is Truth in the Zoroastrian religion.

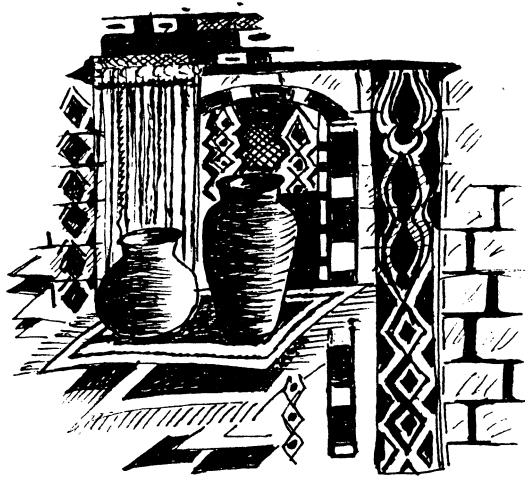
³ Ahura Mazda is the Zoroastrian god of light

ELAINE BARKER

Three Poems

Tango

Watch that young couple
branch out across the floor.
Yellow-shadowed,
they circle one another,
momentarily pause,
press together
as bodies, thighs, entwine.
See how he holds her,
his hand blooms
upon her back,
flutters, then gathers in
tendrils of her hair.
When they turn again
their eyes connect,
faces lift, open, flower.



Hands

Hunger gives tongue to limbs,
so that the naked child
huddled here,
though silent,
whispers, whines, calls,
groans, cries, yells, screams,
with his bare hands
which while empty,
hang almost as if
weighed down with stones.

Behind Glass

(at the Holocaust Museum, Washington, DC)

They are stacked at random,
wrenched into right angles.
Weighed down in their thousands,
scissors flicker undisturbed.

They are snipping into silence,
they are cutting up space.
These metal struts of memory
keep pointing to the future
from the edgy light here

instead of trimming woollen cloth,
tailoring beards or hair or nails.
But that pair there, I see them poised
to play a game with folded paper,
to form a frieze of matching children,
stretched out, laughing, holding hands.

إيلين باركر

Elaine Barker is a fourth-generation South Australian. She writes poetry and short stories, and for the last ten years has been running courses in creative writing. Her work has been published around Australia and has been broadcast on the BBC and in Australia.

Federation Picnic

They stretched their legs
on the tended grass
hitched up their mock bustles
and long floral frocks
with parasols aloft
cheered and squinted
into the western sun
 while riverboats
 churning the muddy waters
 with paddlewheels and diesels
 and even sails
 simulated 'the great old days'

From their wheelchairs on the bank
they held beribboned walking sticks
and waved with both arms and legs
like so many crayfish
stranded on the river's edge

The arch of the Hindmarsh Bridge¹
cast a shadow on the day
as dusky as indelible ink

¹ Built on sacred Ngarrindjeri land

The Wish

A veined leaf of pink marble lies
in its tray of lead-sided silver fish
Ruby mouths gape, beautiful as sculpture
'How much this one?' a Vietnamese
asks, and then, 'How much this?'
Each one is weighed on the scales, She's
acting out a play with eloquent hands
Fingernails gleam like fish scales
Shining eyes like goldfish in a tank
A flick of hair, eels drifting in a lake

Lost in the past, she forgets herself
here at the fish-stall in the Market
Who are we to spoil her pleasure? The queue
behind fidgets, is bored, and moves away



ري سڪتون

Rae Sexton is a writer, editor and poet who lives in South Australia. She won the Henry Lawson Poetry Prize for 1989, has published widely and has three collections of poetry.

JOHN STUART

A Taste of Tunisia

[i] a moving mosaic

Late morning,
crisp air and a light sky.
In Tunis, a whitewashed metropolis,
splashed with blues and greens.
Oriental and European,
the great Mosque, a thriving Medina,
bustling souks selling jewellery,
handmade textiles and metalwork.
The Bardo Museum,
exquisite treasures of mosaic art.
Pattern and order.

Reaching the city centre,
more chaotic, contrasts.
The traffic proceeds impatiently,
palms nestle along the boulevards,
elegant females strolling along,
some veiled, mystic, others more mod,
families in traditional dress,
the occasional Bedouin.

Casual, cosmopolitan.
Young men, self consciously aware,
in groups and pairs, touching,
others in work garb
going about their business,
as are police officers,
observing all this, very officially,
a paternal presence, settling civilisation.
Continuing onwards,
along the causeway through the waters,

Kalimat 11

to Carthage, Citadel of the Ancient World,
reduced to rubble by the Romans,
now a wealthy, upmarket suburb,
lush and leafy vegetation,
luxury villas, embassies and consulates
overlooking the Mediterranean,
a refuge for the establishment.

At the Roman baths of Antonie,
a scattered mosaic
of crumbling ruins, pathways, arches
and graceful columns, most fallen,
but some standing still,
postcard monuments of creative will.

And on the hillside above,
the grandiose presidential palace,
firmly embedded
in this glorious graveyard of Empires,
Phoenician, Roman, Byzantium, Islamic,
and Carthaginian ...
but Carthage is still here,
rising from the remnants,
ashes to ashes, dust to dust,
cycles are cycling, boom and bust,
in history's mysteries, shifting simplicities.

Cultures past are always merging,
altogether and converging,
for they are all one and the same,
all those labels are only names,
this mosaic is what we are,
on this our planet, this our star,
one and the same, its quite bizarre,
then and now ...
seeing smelling touching tasting,
living dying growing wasting,
and in the silence,
hearing the sound of the clearest call,
sensing the self of the being all.



[ii] the inside outside

Nearby, on rolling hills,
surrounded by cypress trees,
the blue and white village
of Sidi Bau Said...
a glittering sea, greenish turquoise,
light clouds floating in an open sky.

Walking down cobbled streets,
entering Dar El Annari,
a private dwelling and museum
customs and traditions all displayed,
set pieces and models neatly made,
clearly labelled for the passing trade.
A tourist trap, resistance...

Continuing into the inner courtyard,
split levels...
in the centre, a well,
with all the trimmings, as expected.
Paved throughout with geometric tiles,
greens, whites, browns...
Controlled chaos,
ornately decorated,
wine casks, a bird cage,
some palms and cactus, vines,
earthen pots overflowing with
bougainvillea,
garden furnishings, so much...

Turning to face one wall, looking upwards,
complex layers and levels, whites, blues,
balconies and balustrades,
arches, windows and shutters,
delicate wrought-iron lacework,
gates and grates, metal arches arrowing in,
doorways, small patches of stained glass,
all against whitewashed walls rising
to squat columns and open archways,
edged with greenery in a boundless sky.

A rush, almost overcoming ...
Returning, facing an archway, opening
a collage of colours and forms,
lamps, curtains, darkness and light,
cushions, couches, richly embroidered
textures.

Further inside,
a brass bell on a raised platform,
a fireplace and mantelpiece,
with fine porcelain pieces ...

Rushing, overwhelming,
the inside outside, defined in space,
heaviness lightness, intricate lace,
the shadows outlining cracks and grooves,
logic progressing the mind that moves.

In body's heat ...
the mouth moistens, the taste is me,
beauty is blessed, I am free.

جون ستیوارت

John Stuart is a published author of secondary school texts, numerous articles on English literature, and more recently, various poetry and prose.

GHADA SAMMAN

Two Poems

Translated by Issa J. Boullata

A Lover with a Star in Her Pocket

In my pocket, there is a star
Which I grope for
When the city falls over my head
And the faces of my beloved ones
Are broken up into fragments
Inside the smashed mirrors.
It is a warm, shining star
That I keep like an amulet
In the pocket of my coat
Torn by the stabs of hostile times.
It is a star that gives me mysterious strength
When the world renounces me
And laughs aloud, showing its grey teeth
Darkened by the soot of burnt cities,
And blowing in my face
The atomic dust of its nuclear cigarettes,
And noisily and savagely trampling my village
With a highway,
And with the whip of wars
Lashing me and the caravan of lovers,
And stabbing space till it bleeds its ozone,
Drunk as this world is in carnivals of epidemics,
Famines, and sorrows, and in the death of beautiful things
Fleeing like birds... and love.

In my pocket, there is a star
Which I grope for in secret
When I am about to be annihilated.
And I stand up against the wild world,
Like a fish swimming in the torrential stream
Or an owl sleeping on the pillow of earthquakes.

Kalimat 11

In the cemetery of city tunnels,
I rush like an electronic mouse
With the caravans of metallic rats
With gloomy, livid faces
Crowding the entrails of sad evening trains,
Hardly believing that my body, now preserved in moth balls,
Furs, musty fog, and the rust of melancholy streets,
Was one day plunging into the transparent blue sky
Of my Damascene village, swimming in greenery and light,
Happy like God's happy squirrels in the fields of the pool
And under its vast sun.
Is this the same body
That runs in the smut of the hidden weeping
Of the underground Metro?
Is it the same one which the old Damascene women
Protected with charms, and over which my grandmother
Recited her incantations and her blessed invocations,
And which she dyed with henna and adorned with a blue bead,
And whose hair she braided with jasmine?

If it were not for that star in my pocket,
I would have gone astray
And would not recognize my own face
Among the million livid faces in the cities of the Diaspora,
And I would not have distinguished between myself
And that blue corpse of an unknown stranger
In the city morgue.

I no longer remember where I got that star.
Perhaps I carried it from my village as a child
And it was a pebble, then became an amulet
Charged with my father's blessings on me.
Or perhaps I picked it up from my teacher's lap
In the school playground.
Almost everything has failed me since that time.
I have seen thousands of stars extinguished like candles
But my mysterious star continues to shine with a special brightness.

In vain does the school of being in a foreign land

Kalimat 11

Teach me that money is poetry,
And that the cheque-book is the poetic register of the Arabs,
And that the look of George Washington on the dollar bill
Is more beautiful than the look of the Mona Lisa.

I grope for that star in secret
As I ride in the underground train
Surrounded by faces and faces
That are photocopies of misery.
It is a star that I hold fast to, lest it get lost,
As I rush in the darkness of cities that are not mine,
As I ascend the stairs of the Metro
Passing by drunkards and beggars,
As I cough my cigarette smoke
In the face of the snow,
As I receive on my cheek the buffeting blows
Of the winds of being away from the homeland.

I grope for that star
Then I calm down and I know
I will continue to exist— if I don't lose it—
And I will continue to write, to run over my papers
With ink until the bottom of their whiteness.
Sometimes, I contemplate my friend
Who has settled down happily in his exile from the homeland
In whose eyes move the metallic escalators
On which are heaped the corpses of other exiles
With hands petrified as they clasp
Their visa, their residence permit, and their work permit.
In his voice wail the songs of jazz
And in his hand shine the sharp edges
Of broken bottles of drink.
In the rustle of his cold leather coat, I hear
The collapse of the Alps and the Pyrenees
As he tells me about the high taxes and the strikes,
About AIDS and the pampered dogs.
And I break up like a coloured Phoenician jug.
Then I grope for the star in my pocket
And I wake up and disappear
In the curve of the film that has not been shown yet.

Kalimat 11

Don't ask me, my friend, until when I will continue to run
With my stubbornly resisting wound,
And what I will do to continue to exist
After my repeated daily death.
Rather ask that star which continues to shine
Like a healthy baby in the lap
Of her unforgotten village.

A Lover of Separation

Love obsessed me
And enticed me to believe
I was a vast forest under the moonlight.
That night, I did not notice
That I was no more than a tree
Burnt by the thunderbolt,
And I did not hear the woodcutters' axes
Falling upon my trunk.
O my friend,
We exchanged roles:
One time you are the hammer
And one time I am the nail,
And in secret the wall laughs.

Like any woman who is crazy about words
And who loves love and hates the lover,
I don't want to be denuded of your love
Lest I lose my memory,
And I can't wear your love
Lest I lose myself.
I want rather to be annihilated in your love
As my body is annihilated in sleep.
And I want to rise from your love
Next day morning like someone
Rising from a dream
As if nothing had happened.
But how? And who can affirm

Kalimat 11

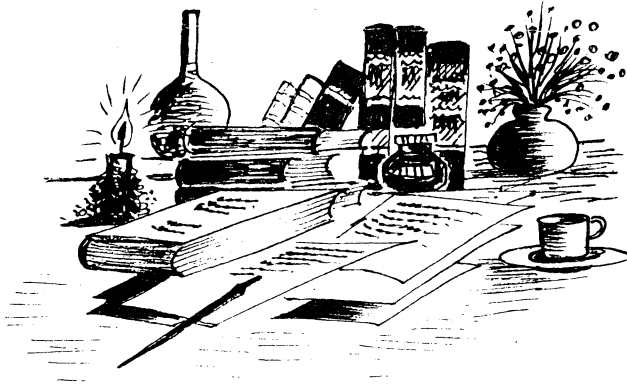
That what we see in our dreams
Is not really happening to us?
And why, whenever you give me
A rose in my dream,
I find it on my pillow at dawn next day?

عيسى بُلّاطة

غادة السمان

Ghada Samman is a prominent Syrian writer, currently living in Paris, France. The above poems are from her collection *'Ashiqa fi Mihbara (A Lover in an Inkstand)*. Ghada Samman Publications, Beirut, Lebanon, 1999.

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T R A N S L A T E D P O E T R Y

T A R I K E L Y A Z I G I

Two Poems

Translated by Raghid Nahhas

**One Tear for Patience,
One for Despair and
One for an Extinguished Smile**

I am as sorrowful as a sad night for a bygone day,
as a barren land thirsty for rain.
My sorrow is for love beautified by patience,
for magnificent things that did not flower
at the break of dawn or nightfall.
I am as sorrowful as despair falling short of hope!

He said he was coming...
time tended the wind
of boredom and promises forgotten
with childhood doubts.
He said he would come...
when patience wavered at the doors of adulthood.
He would come to end my dreams...
One tear for patience... and one for despair...
when sleep declines to succumb to slumber.

It is too hard to light the borders of eternity,
to be surprised with our voices under sunset's light
to discover that we are but an echo... or a body.
It is too hard that you say this is a map for the embrace
and that is a child turning it away,
summing up its whole in one part...
From which land have you emerged?
From which climate?
And from which memory had this glow burgeoned
until it turned into a beautiful face that seeped into the mind of the child?
You...

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You are an enduring caravan
a rock recalling the fountain
a wave kissed by the banks
that stirred both the foam and the dew.
I search all alone for the rituals of warmth,
not tempted to wait for the dream, save a sound from your space,
a song of a shadow, and a rhyme of time.
I return alone, imagining the same tracks...
the same songs... and the same wishes...
What patience begot such an endurance?
My dream slackens a little...
my self departs to you
a boy running skillfully...
competing with eternity.
My light grows a little fainter...
so as to ignite the flickering despair of the harbour,
but none is in sight.

The Missing Joy

The stillness of the night drowns my silence
and I stay outside the walls lit by twilight
gathering the spreading fear of my sad passions...
I wait, only this fearful night beside me
and a gate... almost present
planting anxious courage in my heart
and some almond trees steadily leaning towards me
as though to reveal to me their deep sadness.

I wait for the emergence of revelation
from the thickness of fog at dawn,
perhaps it will bring forth what was missing
even if it be a smiling torture.
I have been like a dead man for ten years, suffering
all sorts of pain, heartbreak, sadness and long-waiting.
The cold has damaged my hunger...
The fire of hard times
has eroded the core of the glow.

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Thirsty...

my wounded distraction becomes a scream
losing its consciousness to destiny's vanity.

Mystified...

my voice writes down poems for the moon
on the arch-rival sand.

I call, with all my staggering desire,
a missing joy,
that once was the dream of my childhood passion,
our unclothed murmur and the colour of our tears.
When mourning was over,
our fluttering ambition, our timid divulgence
became an amazing joy... akin to the rain?

After all that long waiting, a fiery wind suddenly blew
beckoning harmoniously, confirming its promise,
blasting our craziness and creating a fate
parallel to our existence...

We who planted seasons of joy in the barren earth,
waited...
until, from the inspiration of our pain,
the morning's processions were born.

طارق اليازجي

Tarik Elyazigi is a poet who lives in Homs, Syria. The above poems were published in *Kalimat 2*, June 2000.

DEB JOHNSTON

Gingerbread to Sydney

And I say to her, ‘You’re not there yet,’ and I love the way it feels. No-one ever said that to me. I wish someone did. She’s so eager to go, and I hate, yes I do, I hate the idea that she *can* go. Lah-de-dah Sydney. I was good enough to go to Sydney when I was sixteen. But I never went. No, I stayed in Binalong and married a farmer, a good man. I was a housemaid, and I was all right. No shame in being a housemaid. She’s no better than me, when I was sixteen.

I’m invisible, sometimes, past young and saucy; not expecting another baby and being fussed over; not even old and getting respect. Just past forty, and not worth a second glance. I *was* pretty once. Jesus! I remember the Agricultural Balls, and all the local lads! Us girls had them lined up for miles, waiting to dance. And they were decent boys too, some of them. Plenty to choose from, and all hard workers. Had to be, back then, else them and their families would’ve gone under. Nothing to be ashamed of, hard work. I was ‘Miss Binalong Show Girl’ when I was sixteen. Not any more though, two axe-handles across me bum, and a double chin. I can feel it wobble when I get angry. I know I look silly, and that makes me even crosser, and it wobbles faster.

I can hear her asking; she’s worried I’ll say she can’t go. I don’t answer; there is no answer. She’s too good to stay in Binalong is she? I know she’s watching. I drag out the sewing machine, and pick out Julia’s skirt to sew, rather than *her* dress. The one for her to wear to interviews. In Sydney. She leaves. I put the machine away.

God, I’m so proud of her, the way her eyes flash, fire and ice; and her chin, it’s her father’s all right, with that little dimple. There’s tears in me, buckets of them, I don’t let them out. I learned that, years ago. I’ll do gingerbread, it’s her favourite, and then she’ll know her answer. She’ll go far in Sydney.

Julia comes charging into the house, just as I settle back to my sewing. ‘Why must you run everywhere?’ I ask. I don’t like the answer and rush outside with the others to see for myself. Oh my God! The Haynes boy! She’s sitting on a horse, cocky as all hell, with that Haynes garbage.

He’s not good enough for our Susan, who’s going to Sydney to get a decent job, and maybe a lawyer or doctor husband.

The way she’s fluttering her lashes at him. It’s as if she’s on heat. And his hands all over her.

‘There’s no Sydney trip for you, miss!’ But she knows she’s won. Damn that gingerbread.

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'Mum made the gingerbread!' from Julia. Damn Julia, and damn and *damn* the gingerbread!

We've lost. We can't keep her here, and she won't stay. Still I can't keep the anger in my heart, from my voice, in one last outburst. 'Lady Muck', I call her. I don't love how it feels anymore.

We go back inside, her father's sitting there, still, silent, grey as the sky. He knows he's lost too. He saw her, on that horse, defiant and triumphant. We've all lost, except Susan.

I've still got my man, but the love of one man, even a good man, doesn't always make up for what you missed out on. Not when you were sixteen anyway.

دب جونستون

Deb Johnston is a writer and poet and mother of 7 from Bendigo, Australia. She studies professional writing and editing. This is her first published story.



S T O R I E S

FIONA M. CARROLL

Steps

Two minutes past twelve and morning has slipped into afternoon. Outside there is the sudden explosive call of a bird. Not knowing what kind of bird it is, I think of it, *as the castanet bird*. Bigger than a myna bird and smaller than a magpie, brown, with a speckled breast, it comes here in the spring. I have watched it perching itself on my washing-line or on the branch of a tree, its neck arched back to release a strange rhythmic song, a song that reminds me of wood or shells knocking together. An early spring this year, the warmest start to August in decades. Bottlebrushes, bougainvillea and other trees and bushes are coming into flower, red and purple, orange and a pink-tinged white.

On the wall above the kitchen-sink the clock ticks on. I get to my feet, pick up my purse, cigarettes, lighter, pen, notepad and *When The Pelican Laughed*, put them in my canvas Country Road bag, take my jacket off the banister at the bottom of the stairs, my keys off the hook, and go out through the front door locking it behind me.

Part way up the street I see Theresa's son, one of my neighbours, sitting on the gate outside their house, smoking a cigarette. *Hello Leroy* I say and notice his left eye, swollen and purple, his skin cut and stitched beneath it. *What happened to you?*

I got beaten up by a bunch of coons in Victoria Square he says, looking away from me, into the memory, before continuing *one of them asked me for a light and I just kept walking — then the next thing — one of his mates threw this bottle at me — and it hit me — I turned around and said — what the fuck did you do that for — and just as I'm turning around — well — this bloke's a fucken giant — biggest fucken Abo I've ever seen — and he says — well you wouldn't give us a light — and it's Thursday ye know — Pension Day — and they're all sitting there with their bottles of port — and I'm thinking — I just want to get the fuck out of here — and the next thing is — this third bloke's swung a punch at me — and he knows how to swing a punch — and I'm in me work clothes — you know — and boots — so I'm not exactly flexible — but I think — well fuck this — so I just swing one back at him — and he's gone — down — but then the other one goes for me — and I'm dodging — and I've hit 'im — and he's down and then the big bloke — he sees that I can fight - pulls a pair of scissors on me and starts lashing at me — I feel it cut me face — and I've looked up and seen half a dozen of the fucken bastards getting up from under a tree heading towards me — so I just said See Ya — gave them a wave — and then I ran man — I fucking ran — Mum took me to the hospital — I had to have stitches. After a pause, becoming aware of me again, he turns*

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his head and adds *so much for reconciliation* and takes a deep drag on his cigarette.

I look at his bruised face, rock my weight from one foot to the other and say *I'm sorry to hear that — I have to get going or I'll be late for my tutorial*. He says *no worries* and shrugs and I walk on.

I wanted to ask *why wouldn't you give them a light?* I wanted to say *you could be a coon to me you know — how do you feel about me thinking of you as a coon — referring to you as a coon?* His mother is black, a South African of *mixed blood*. The first time I met her, a couple of weeks after she moved in, she came to borrow some sugar and a pen saying one of the neighbours had already made three complaints about her.

The first was verbal. The second and third were in writing to the Housing Trust Manager who has an obligation to follow them up. Complaints about hip-hop music and cars pulling up at all hours of the day and night, Leroy's friends picking him up and dropping him off, engines revving, music blaring, doors slamming. I think they think I'm Aboriginal said *Theresa* that I don't know how to care for my children.

I wanted to say *where do you get that equation from — Aboriginal Australians took care of their children for forty thousand years at least* but this is not a safe environment in which to alienate the neighbours. There is always the threat of complaints, complaints about children being children and flowers being flowers in the wrong place, and allegations, true or false, about social security fraud, dope plants and, recently, bamboo.

We have a shared area of land nestled between the town-houses on Capper Street and the flats on Rundle street, covering a slope. We call it *the common*. When I first came to live here the common was flanked with bamboo. In the wind it sounded like the rustle of silk dresses. One morning recently I woke to the grinding noise of chainsaws. I discovered workers from Parks and Gardens in green overalls and ear-muffs, attacking various trees. At the top of the common one of them was hacking into the stems of the bamboo with a machete. I walked up the incline shouting through the noise *excuse me — excuse me*. No response. I touched his shoulder. He stopped what he was doing, looking up at me as I asked him *what on earth do you think you're doing?* Getting to his feet, lifting up his ear-muff with one hand, he said *sorry* as though asking me a question, his voice lifting on the y.

Why are you cutting down the bamboo?

Housing Trust he said. *They want it done — I'm just carryin out instructions — there's been complaints about rats inere — and the boys from Prince Alfred College coming over smokin inere — anyway — yer not allowed ter ave it — it's a noxious weed bamboo is* and with that he turned his back on me and continued his hacking. I looked around me for someone *in charge*, walked over to another man, no overalls, white shirt, mobile

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telephone. *The bamboo* I shouted, *why are they cutting down the bamboo?*

It's taking over he said *and there's a problem with rats - since the work's been going on turning the old brewery into apartments — the rats have been disturbed — there's been reports of them running along the balconies outside the flats.*

Disturbed rats. In seven years I have not seen one wretched little rat in this neighbourhood, a few half-chewed mice, but not a single rat. Every third person around here has a cat. And now the building of Luxury Inner-city Apartments has dislodged an invisible plague and instigated the murder of the bamboo. I said *but the bamboo is beautiful — and it provides a screen — without it anyone passing will be able to see straight into our sitting-rooms. We're going to replace it with sacred bamboo* he said, *if that's any consolation.* It is not. I liked my profane bamboo.

In the centre of the common stands a very old peppertree, its arms outstretched in every direction. The base of its trunk measures wider than I stand tall. In the summer you can sit in its shade, with the myna birds and the magpies and sometimes vividly coloured parrots, and watch the cats crouching under bushes, shaking their teeth at birds in the sky. The Housing Trust does not approve the existence of peppertrees, *their roots get into everything*, so they pull up the young ones. There was talk that the old one has white ant, but so far it has stayed.

The walls of the houses are thin. Cardboard thin. My next-door neighbour Sandra says *you can hear someone fart two doors up in these places.* For as long as I have known her she has been on The Priority Transfer List for a single-story unit, because of her bad back and difficulty with the stairs. Each time the Housing Trust offers her one she goes to *have a look at it* and comes back saying she is staying put, she will crawl up and down stairs on her hands and knees if she has to, *these houses are the best the Housing Trust has — stairs or no stairs.* It is true that the only time someone leaves without being evicted is when they die or come into an inheritance.

When I first met Sandra she invited me in to see the inside of her house, a house so clean it is as though no-one even breathes in it. *You could eat off the floor* as my mother would have said. I stared in dismay at the orange formica in her kitchen. I have inherited the lime-green version. I now know that the interior decoration alternates up the street, from orange to lime-green and a very bluish blue, a legacy from the nineteen-seventies. *These houses were built in Don Dunstan's era you know* said Sandra. *Don Dunstan built these.* Citrus colours have become fashionable again, in the new millenium.

A fifteen-minute walk from Capper Street to the university, through the parklands and then along North Terrace. In Rundle Park the smooth grey trunks of some of the eucalyptus trees remind me of elephants. Pausing underneath one of them there is the

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still strange fragrance of lemon in the air. When I first came to Australia, to Adelaide, I thought that most of the trees were dead or dying, that their bark had dropped off. There were, unfathomably, Christmas trees at the beach instead of in the snow.

On the terrace I pass Ayers House and Henry's Brasserie. There is a statue depicting two women, ancient Greeks I think. Once I entered the restaurant grounds, to stand close to them, touch them with my hands. I had to tilt back my head to look into their faces above me. One of them was garlanded with ivy, grown up the length of her tunic, across her breasts, around her shoulders and into her hair. Both figures had lost a hand, landscapes annexed from one another. Iron stumps extended from their wrists. *What are they doing here — who are they meant to be?*

I cross to the university at Frome Road, moving through the square which sets the Napier building back from the street. Despite the milling of bodies I move without touching anyone, down the steps and over to the departmental building. Doors sliding open and shut.

In the tutorial group one of the students says that the description of a soup, made at the Moore River Native Settlement for aboriginals, in *When The Pelican Laughed* reminds him of a scene in Angela's Ashes in which Frank McCourt's mother is offered a pig's head by a butcher in exchange for some food vouchers she has been given by St. Vincent de Paul's charity. Frank carries it home holding it against his chest because his mother says she has a pain in her back and the head is too heavy for her. It is wrapped in newspaper which tears and falls off because the pig's head is damp. People on the street can see its snout poking out. Someone calls out to them asking if that is what they ate when they lived in America. Someone else says the way to eat a pig's head is to grab it by the ears and chew its face off.

In Alice Nannup's story she could not eat the sheep's head soup, sometimes garnished with bott-fly. She missed her mother's cooking and wild plums, wild mandarines, ngarlgu, wagarlu, galabu, mardarra and wild turkey. A discussion ensues about food, and the withholding of food, as both a literal and symbolic instrument of Imperialist oppression.

After the tutorial I make my way to my favourite place on the campus, by the waterfall, outside the conservatorium, smoke a cigarette and let my mind drift. Today the notes of a piano being played beneath a high open window accompany the tumble of water over the edge of a flat mossy shelf into a small sheltered pond. Two ducks rest in amongst the reeds, their beaks tucked into their wings. The sun is a warm, tender light.

I remember walks with my grandfather, the feel of my hand small inside his as we trekked around Ingleton Falls, across summer afternoons, in another hemisphere. At the

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top of the climb, water cascaded in sheets over a rock that seemed as big as a mountain. There was a cave inside the rock, big enough to stand up in if you were sure-footed enough to reach it. From inside I could stretch out my arms so that liquid silver splashed my fingertips before joining the river on its way to the sea. Afterwards there was sausage and chips and grandma's-home-made-cherry-pie.

I look at my watch. Three o'clock. Just time to walk home, get in the car, drive up to the school and pick up Seb before the bell goes. I get to my feet, forcing myself up the steps and then the path leading away from this small sanctuary to North Terrace, crossing at the Pulteney Street Lights. Heading towards the parklands, leaving the State Library, the Museum and the Art Gallery to recede behind me, I have the sense of leaving a filmset, a ghost town.

Walking around this city for the first time I worked out, incorrectly, that the day must have been some particular kind of public holiday, a religious festival perhaps. There were no black people on the streets and hardly any white people. Although the shops and department stores were open, there was none of the rush and bustle of the city I was used to. No horns blaring and shoulders knocking and pushing other shoulders and jumping to get out of the way of cars as I crossed wet oily roads.

In the space that separates me from other people I do not know where I am.

He is a block away from me when I first see him, crossing East Terrace, opposite the wrought-iron entrance to the Botanic Gardens. As we move towards one another he sways slightly from side to side, rhythmically, without staggering. I see him look at me. His eyes travel up my lime-green pants, over my oversized cardigan and up to my face, where they stop. In the moment when his eyes search out mine I know he is going to approach me. I look away from him, down at the pavement, re-directing my steps slightly to my right, away from his. He straightens his shoulders, turning his own steps to his left, so that we are both still moving towards one another.

I see his feet, his right shoe split from one of its eyelets to the sole, and the hems of his trousers unravelling above his ankles. He is wearing a check shirt underneath a V-necked jumper. Two holes in the jumper have ladders running from them. There is an open sore on his cheek. The whites of his eyes are webbed with red, their corners seeping thick yellow. Some of his teeth are missing. His hair is like wool, a grey that looks almost white against the brown of his skin. When he opens his mouth to speak the smell of alcohol travels with his breath. At first I cannot understand what he is saying, it sounds like *where you come from girl — where you goin?*

Time slides.

England. I come from England. Land of hope and glory, hills and dales, dark satanic

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mills.

I am leaving, we are leaving, me, Jessie, and the baby wriggling and resting, curling and uncurling, seven months old inside me.

Jill will be here soon. Jill will be here soon in her white Ford Escort to drive us to the airport. The house has been handed over to an estate agent, the cats are given away, the good-byes all but finished, the suitcases sat on and re-fastened for the third time.

Here she is, smelling of January cold. It is snowing, a thick crunchy snow that stays white underfoot and along the tops of hedgerows and roofs. Two o'clock in the afternoon and no sunlight visible, the sky mottled with the colours of seagulls' wings.

Driving south. Ice forms on the inside of the windscreen, the wipers move like second hands clearing away snowflakes. In the back of the car Jessie is asleep, held by three straps buckled across her, her cheek squashed against the corner of her seat, her mouth open.

We are going on an aeroplane to see daddy.

Nightmares. I have nightmares. The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith. Walkabout. Skippy the Bush Kangaroo. Pictures in school history books of savages with huge nostrils and spears. Desert. Terra Nullius. Lost in acres of nothing but heat, pierced through with light.

Do they have cows in Australia — and yoghurt — and nappies — do they have disposable nappies?

The university I tell him, and gesture with my left arm, behind me, across the terrace. *I've just come from the university. Ah — university* he says *what you doin at the university? Studying English* I tell him, and then feel foolish and offer *literature* and then feel embarrassed and try *stories — I study stories.*

For a while, a few seconds maybe, he says nothing. His eyes are fixed on my face. I ask him *would you like a cigarette — a smoke — would you like a smoke? Oh yeah* he says *I'll ave a smoke mate.* I open my bag, take out my packet of Escort Blue and take out two cigarettes, offering them to him. He puts one in his mouth and one behind his ear. I take my lighter and light the cigarette in his mouth. He inhales on it without holding it before taking it out of his mouth with his right hand and continuing to look at me. What does he want? I take out another cigarette and light it. As I put the packet and my lighter back in my bag I notice a woman at a bus-stop, staring at me, at us. I catch her eyes with my own and she looks away.

I like a smoke - and a drink he says *I like a drink. I like a drink too* I say and then immediately want to swallow the words back again in case he thinks I am suggesting we go for a drink. He speaks again. *I lost my wife to the drink - long time ago now — I'm seventy-four now.* I wonder if he lost his wife to her drinking or she left him to his. *I lost my husband to a woman with a hat shop* I tell him. He nods. For a few moments we stand smoking, seeming to count one another's losses.

I have to go I tell him *I have to get to the school to pick up my kids. Ah — kids.* He nods

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again. There is another silence before he asks *you got a dollar mate?* Reaching into my bag, I take out my purse. The deep gloss of its worn leather reminds me of the old man's eyes and in turn of someone who loved me once, a long time ago, a long time away.

My mother is saying *if you're pregnant you're having an abortion*. My brother is saying *when I get my hands on that black bastard I'll break every bone in his body*.

A confusion of shame and sadness makes me fumble with the zip on the small inner-purse. There is a two-dollar coin in there. I save two-dollar coins in a little moneybox with a lock and key that Jessie gave to me one Christmas, for emergencies. I take out the coin, holding it out to him.

He lifts his head, looks at me again, brings his right hand up to mine, takes the coin and tucks it into his trouser pocket. I am lowering my arm when I feel a weight close around my fingers. He has taken hold of my hand. I watch him rubbing the skin over my knuckles with the ball of his thumb.

Thoughts form like slides projected onto a screen inside my mind. I look up at him. Feelings with no names to call them by form in tears which begin to trickle down my cheeks. He wipes them away with the fingertips of his free hand. I take one more step towards him, my free arm goes up around his shoulders. *I'm sorry — about my people — us white fellas - I'm sorry*. He holds me to him, his arm pressed against my back, my nose pressed into his jumper, leaking.

Here we stand for a long moment before stepping back from one another. *You beautiful* he says *you go get your kids*. I nod my head. We both start walking away from one another at the same time, him heading west, me heading east. I look back once, caught in the impulse to call out *do you want to come with me — come and have dinner — come and tell us your stories*. He is looking straight ahead, still swaying slightly, making his way.

By the time I get to the school the second bell has gone. Seb is standing by the gates, frowning. When he gets inside the car he looks at me and says *you're late* and then *what's the matter mum?* I say *I can't really explain — nothing really — I'm alright. Well I'm not* he says *I'm starving — what's for dinner mum — can we go to the bakery and get a sausage roll?*

فيونا كارول

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GRAHAM SHEIL

The Streets of Toledo

Ahead of Miriam, a man lay sprawled across the narrow street.

Miriam started toward him. Then she stopped. She looked beyond the man. She looked behind. There was no local person. No other tourist. The street was a narrow canyon between four-story walls with shuttered windows and recessed doorways. No sunlight touched the uneven cobblestones. No movement of air relieved the hot gloom.

The man's legs twitched, his breath came in gasps. Miriam hurried forward. She was already stooping to the prostrate man – when suddenly there was another man. He was heavy-shouldered and shorter than she. He began speaking.

Though he seemed to be speaking English, Miriam caught only one word: '...money.'

'That man's hurt. That man...'

Whatever else she might have said, went unsaid. She instinctively stepped back. The heavy-shouldered man stepped into the space between Miriam and the now violently twitching man.

She forced herself to say: 'You're asking for money?'

But she saw the palm outthrust toward her was not cupped to receive; the palm was toward her, warning her away.

'He only wants your money.'

The man's voice surprised her with its depth.

'That man's hurt,' she protested. 'He's unconscious. He could be having a fit.'

The prostrate man's jerking twitches had turned into truncated kicks. He seemed taller than the other man. Certainly leaner. And Miriam felt sure he was young, though a cloth cap lay skewed across his half-turned face.

'He could be choking.'

The other man stood immobile, his palm toward her, warning her away.

Miriam said: 'I'm a nurse.'

This was not wholly true. She had trained as a nurse; and had spent just two years nursing. Then she had married. *I'm a nurse* was like the wedding band she still wore: neither wholly true.

She took a sudden sideways step. But the man also stepped sideways, blocking her way. Now they were closer, his thrusting palm quite close to her breast.

'Not your help he wants – your money.'

The man's voice as deep as a bull's bellow.

Miriam's gaze moved from the thrusting palm to the heavy shoulders. *He even looks like a bull.*

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Then she was running. She had made no decision to run; such decision as she *had* made had been toward the young man who was in such need of her help. Now she found herself running from him. Stumbling, as she ran, over the uneven cobblestones.

Where the narrow street turned, she looked back. The heavy-shouldered man was moving off toward one of the recessed doorways. Yet he still held one hand outthrust. Except the palm that had been so intent on warning her away, now gestured her back.

Wherever else Miriam's legs were going to take her, it was not back. Where Miriam did, eventually, go was to a footpath café. She sat, gasping deep painful breaths, beneath an umbrella advertising beer.

Had the man on the ground tried to trap her? - He seemed so vulnerable. So very much in need of her help. She'd never forgive herself if a moment of panic became the cause of a young life being choked off in an epileptic fit.

A waiter came. She ordered mineral water and a coffee.

She remembered the thrusting palm so close to her breast, and she shuddered. She had always thought Spanish men to be as lithe and as elegant as those matadors on posters advertising the bull ring. But the deep voice that had bellowed her away, had come from no matador: it had come from the bull.

A bull, she thought. *A real bull. Emissary of uncertainty.*

It had been to resurrect certainty at the centre of her life, that Miriam had come to Toledo.

Since schooldays, certainty had seemed the one prescribed essential of her life.

While other girls her age had been sent to outer-suburban Terrigal's High and Tech. Schools, Miriam had attended Grammar. Certainty seemed inherent in the cross and mitre emblem on her school blazer, in the school's straight macadamed paths bordered with rose gardens enclosing patchworks of lawn. Certainty was there in the imperious diction of her English Mistress, in stained glass chapel windows, in her own voice joining with other voices to choir *Give me my bow of burning fire/ Give me chariots of desire.*

The *New Jerusalem* so confidently prophesised in the hymn had seemed to Miriam to be her own future, stretching straight and rose-bordered before her.

She had, for a time, strayed from the prescribed path. That was when she became engaged to a pro runner who worked part-time in a bar. She returned to her prescribed future by breaking off her engagement, and marrying Gerard. Gerard was a dentist.

Unlike other couples she knew, they did not build their home on an outer-suburban housing estate. They moved into an established home in an older suburb with oak-lined streets.

Because of the mortgage, they put off having children. That did not stop Miriam planning and planning the direction her daughter's life would take. Because it would be a daughter, and just one. She planned what hospital, what kindergarten, what prep

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school, what college, what university, the course, the profession, the stamp of husband to steer her daughter toward.

Miriam never did bear Gerard that much-planned daughter; because without any planning whatever, Gerard's dental nurse – did.

Year's later, Miriam's sister read to her lines of a limerick which Miriam would certainly never repeat; but once she had heard, could never forget: *By some form of depravity / He had filled the wrong cavity / Now she's nursing her filling at home.*

If *Give me my bow of burning fire* had pointed the prescribed road for her life, *He had filled the wrong cavity* became the deep skid marks at precisely the point where her life had left that road.

Miriam's sister, Gillian, had started toward certainty (Grammar, then a degree in accountancy) before she propelled herself off in a different direction. She worked sometimes for an accountant, more often at a supermarket, while she studied art part-time at a Tech. It was she who married the pro runner. In quick succession she popped out four as simply as shelling peas (a cliché Gilliam reversed to *As simple, Darling, as peeing shells*). As for careful and precise planning of four separate futures, Gilliam's plan was to *Push 'em all in, Darling, at the deep end.*

Ronald never did win any of the really big races. Not the Stawell Gift, nor the Wangaratta nor Burnie Gifts. Past thirty and on a generous handicap, he took out the Dandenong Gift. And, it transpired, a betting coup. Winnings that paid for the pottery studio Gillian had built behind their home on a bush block beyond the suburbs

That Gillian had married Miriam's one-time fiancé, was never mentioned by either sister, nor by Ronald. Yet each felt it was this that drew them so closely together. At weekends, Miriam drove beyond the suburbs to where a slope of flinty ground between a pub and a footy ground became, each Saturday, a market. Here, trestle tables were set up, open-sided tents erected, rugs laid on the ground, to display cardigans, jumpers, vests knitted in greasy wool, backpacks from Nepal, furniture made from bush timber, clothes made from hemp, used tools and books and car parts, where stalls sold chunky soups and course-grained cakes (Gilliam: *Great poo-food*), where someone was always reading palms or cards, playing a harp or reciting poetry, and the smell of wood-smoke and coffee and incense never quite masked the too-sweet waft of marijuana.

Here Gillian displayed for sale what she produced in her pottery. Miriam would stand with Ronald back of the trestles laden with pottery, while Gillian, up front, performed. In red skirt, puff sleeves, scooped bodice displaying cleavage, Gillian flirted with browsers, held up her brightly coloured pottery, told whole epics that related to her designs and glazes.

Once Miriam congratulated Gillian on the sale of a dozen pieces bought by a woman who arrived by Mercedes. 'Bitch!' Gillian retorted. 'She only bought them because she *had* to buy presents!' And once, after seven freezing hours and only one sale, Miriam and Ronald attempted to console Gillian, to find Gillian needed no consoling. 'But she

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loved that piece. She bought it for *herself*?

Miriam loved this unpredictability in Gillian – even her ebullient vulgarity.

Since the break-up of her marriage, Miriam had taken to attending church. Among the congregation, she made friends, she enjoyed social functions; she did not rediscover certainty.

She wondered if it was just this church or the particular slant upon religion that prevailed here that had removed certainty from the centre of religion.

One Saturday, Miriam surprised Gillian by saying she was going to Europe. To a theological conference. Gillian frowned and made despairing shakes of her head – until Miriam told her precisely where. Then Gillian said she'd come too.

So all three had gone to Madrid. Arriving some days before the conference, Gillian dragged Ronald off on day-long and two-day excursions to pottery works and ceramic studios. At night, Gillian swept Miriam along too, to café performances of flamenco dance and Gypsy guitars.

Miriam sat through discourse and lecture given by theologians whose own certainty seemed as circumspect as promises by politicians, as horse-racing tips given by bookmakers. Lectures were given in different languages, concurrent lectures being held in different halls. Miriam listened to translations through headphones, often sure – very sure – she must have missed something due to translation. Or wondering if she should have attended a different discourse in another hall.

On day four of conference, she arranged to meet Gillian and Ronald at noon. Together they went to a gallery.

Gillian was swept along on her own self-generated cascade of enthusiasm for painting after painting. Miriam and Ronald wandered in her wake. Since running days, Ronald had progressed from rep, to marketing manager, for a wholesale sports shoe company. He carried himself, he moved, with lithe athletic grace he had never possessed when he had actually been an athlete. Miriam liked being with Ronald. She especially liked being with him in public, aware that others saw him as she did, the quintessence of one kind of manliness.

Wandering two rooms and more behind Gillian, they were addressed by a man of middle years. Miriam supposed he was speaking Spanish, a language she spoke not at all. Ronald, however, had taken upon himself to learn sufficient to order meals, interpret timetables and street directions. Whatever the man was asking, Ronald must have understood. He spoke, he mimed directions. The man shook Ronald's hand. With grave courtesy, he took Miriam's hand. When he saw the ring, he said something that caused Ronald to smile and to turn away.

After the man had gone, Miriam asked: 'What did he say?'

'No, no.'

'Go-on – tell. Tell me.'

'All right.... He congratulated you on your husband.'

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‘My - ?’ And then, realising: ‘You nearly were.’

Laughing and a little shocked that finally it had been said. Relieved when Ronald too began laughing.

‘Why not?’ he said. ‘For this afternoon.’

Ronald held out his arm and she slipped hers through. All afternoon they wandered like that. They gazed in wonder at paintings, and stooped together to read the names beneath. Not until the bell rang for closing, did they catch up with Gillian. They both told her *she* was the sister-in-law.

‘Then you’ll have to sleep with him,’ Gillian said. ‘You’ll be sorry.’

Nonsense, of course. Play acting, of course. But as Miriam passed Ronald back to Gillian, the glow that had intoxicated her all afternoon stayed with her. It seemed to Miriam this brief afternoon had been the honeymoon with Ronald she had never had, that they were newly-weds together in a romantic city.

Next afternoon, Gillian returned from another of her excursions to breathlessly relate how her bag had been stolen. A youth had, it seemed, run between cars and footpath and had snatched the strap from her shoulder. Ronald caught hold of the other side of the strap, and a tug-of-war followed. Ronald’s greater size and strength enabled him to drag the youth up over the gutter and onto the footpath – when the strap broke.

Miriam asked: ‘Why didn’t you grab him?’

‘He probably carried a knife.’

‘Oh, come-on! – Did you actually see a knife?’

Ronald acknowledged he had not. Then he added: ‘They hide them in their boot-tops, strapped to a leg – anywhere!’

Spaniards-carrying-knives seemed to Miriam the cliché of opera and melodrama. A lame excuse, given Ronald’s size and strength. Ronald’s failure – even more, his excuse for failure – seemed to Miriam acts of unmanliness. His bearing, his physique, his athletic grace of movement, suddenly seemed to Miriam to be a kind of fraud. Sending another of Miriam’s certainties the way of all others.

It was this, more than all the rest, that caused her to miss the last day of conference. Without telling Gillian or Ronald, she took the train to Toledo.

On the train she read her guide book. This told of a city so certain of its precepts *until the Civil War, no newspaper or street lighting had been allowed in the city.*

Arriving, she found a city built upon the very concept of certainty: a walled city with great battlements protecting the city’s heart, its cathedral. Geographically, architecturally, conceptually, the cathedral dominated the city. Its side rooms were filled with religious relics, with treasures of the church, tapestries, sculptors, paintings. Expressions of certainty were everywhere. Wherever Miriam looked, she saw hands cupped in adoration or clasped in prayer. In painting, mural, bas-relief, there were the cupped and clasped hands, the eyes lifted toward heaven, or bowed in reverence; eyes, often, serenely gazing at God enthroned in Heaven, while the body was pieced with

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arrows or butchered with swords and axes. Certainty was in the stern gaze of the cardinal presiding over the burning of heretics, and in his downward gaze, now a saint, enthroned in Heaven.

Toledo was the city of certainty.

Beneath the umbrella advertising beer, Miriam finished the mineral water and took up the coffee.

The café was back of the cathedral and opposite what passed as a park: three knarled trees, a row of shrubs, concrete bench seats. There was no grass. Heat and glare flared up from the patterned pave.

Miriam put down her coffee, put on sunglasses. She took out her guide book and unfolded to open out on the table the book's map of the city.

She had taken up her coffee again, when she saw the young man. She thought he was the same young man who had lain across the street; then she realized this young man was shorter, plumper, than the other. He was sitting on one of the concrete seats and he had a backpack which, clearly, was not his. He was extracting notes from a wallet, stuffing the wad of notes into his pants beneath the belt. He threw the wallet over his shoulder into the row of shrubs. He took out books, flipped pages, threw the lot into the shrubbery. He found perfume, sprayed the back of his hand, sniffed. He put the bottle on the seat beside him. When he pulled from the pack a pair of jeans, he stood and tried length and width against himself, turning and preening as if he stood before a mirror.

Miriam didn't wait – she *couldn't* wait – to see more. She slipped money beneath the saucer, put down her unfinished coffee, and left. She was determined, this time, not to run. She might as well, though; for some inner compulsion drove her to a racing pace, stumbling on the uneven pave through the narrow canyoned streets. On and on she went, turning randomly where streets crossed, along dark airless streets. Soon she was lost. Quite lost. Knowing only she was going downhill and away from the cathedral. These streets seemed darker than before and darker than before her thoughts. – Had the young man who had lain across the street the same intention as the one with the backpack? – Was that why they at first seemed the same? – Should she have trusted the heavy-shouldered man – or her own instincts? – Had she been unfair to Ronald? – An urban Spaniard – or Australian – who set out to rob might very well carry a weapon. Unless it was right there before your eyes – how could you know? – How could you ever know from one second to the next?

She realized why the streets seemed darker than before. Without slackening her headlong rush, she took off her sunglasses.

Instantly she was plunged into blinding light.

As abruptly as the blaze of light, the revelation: *You never could tell.*

Miriam stood quite still while her eyes grew used to the light. Then she saw her headlong rush had brought her out from the narrow streets, and she was facing a wide

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road bordering the bank of a river.

And as her eyes grew used to the light, her thoughts grew used to her revelation. *The only certainty, she thought, is uncertainty.*

That this was something she must always have known did not stop it being a revelation. So much of her life, it suddenly seemed to her, had been spent not-knowing what she had always known.

Miriam looked for street signs, before realizing they would be useless: her guidebook with its map must still be on the table beneath the umbrella advertising beer.

She had no way of knowing where she had reached, except it was far from the cathedral with its paintings, its murals, bas-reliefs, its statues celebrating certainty.

Without putting back on her sunglasses, she crossed the road. She looked down at the broad brown river.

Far upstream the river appeared as a smooth predictable glide. That section ended in the turbulence and rush of broken water which passed, after a distance, into what appeared as a heavy sluggish stretch. Approaching below where she stood, the river picked up pace at its centre; though at both sides were eddies of confusing current where the flow turned back on itself. Downstream was a bridge. She could not see beyond the bridge and presumed the river took a sharp turn, though which way it went was impossible to tell.

To Miriam, it seemed very necessary that she should cross over to the other side.

That was where her legs took her. Without map or guidebook, she had no way of knowing what lay ahead. And as she crossed at the bridge, it seemed to her she had been confusing time with distance. There was no map or guidebook to what lay ahead. There never had been.

Reaching the far side, she saw there was a foot track that went downstream, following the flow.

I will follow, she thought. I will follow and I will see.

غراهام شيل

Graham Shell is a writer from the State of Victoria, Australia. Some of his stories have been translated into Chinese and Arabic.

ABDULKHALIK HAMWI

Translated by Raghid Nahhas & Noel Abdulahad

Book Signing

Fresh air touches the surface of my lungs despite the pollution in the environment. It refreshes my thoughts about finishing my poetry collection.

This air is in harmony with your revelation: ‘Come on and write. Divulge what is not revealed, as I discover from your scented words their hidden treasures. You call your words “poems”, and I call them “tales”. True tales are those that happen between two persons only, who share a terminology of words that flow without affectation, or censorship, or the comments of a snob publisher who tries to conform to an editorial committee in the concerned department.’

You told me you were inspired for the choice of these words, by the aroma of the few meetings we had. Meetings impregnated with tales where melodies are blended with the shy blink of an eye rendering thereby the most beautiful of human songs, as they turn to be part of freedom: the tune of letters immersing its words in four lips and two tongues intending to produce a hoarse speech and a husky whispering in tune with a unique touch of spittle and a watering mouth.

I told you: ‘Don’t rush as the others do. It is not the quantity that matters. What is the use of having a hundred-page of poems of hundreds of verses and words, for just filling as much space as possible, and simply call it a collection of poetry? In reality, it represents no more than a cancerous product tinted by the colours of the rainbow, but no sooner the bubbles of soap take form than they explode and vanish.’

One day I told you: ‘The most beautiful poems are the ones that are revealed only once without writing them down, for they sink deep inwardly, replenishing the cells of thirst itself, and when dryness persists in requesting to drink again its fill, another poem is revealed on the spot to irrigate the cracks caused by the passage of time between the first poem and the last. Then a third poem emerges to wash the shores of thirst. Real poems cannot remain buried in book-covers nor hide behind paper or signatures.’

You accomplish your poetry collection and claim its wholesomeness and its embodiment of the pulse of life. One evening you told me: ‘I will present you with a copy and shall write a dedication that appeals to me firstly, knowing how much my words get you at ease. My dedication will be unique, and never will it be written anymore.’

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You launched your collection in a party inviting to it all of your friends except me. Something deep inside me prevented me from attending it. Those parties are full of pretensions and consumed jokes.

Later we met in a more genuine gathering, the time we restored calmness into our spirits. You picked up one of your collections titled "The First Crawling" out of your pregnant leather briefcase. You took a pen out of the pocket of your black coat that added more to your charming sobriety. On the inside first page of the collection, you wrote two words: *TO YOU*, that are still imbuing that paper with splendour.

You extended a hand that held your gift to me, I chose to place it on my bookshelf next to others who really wrote genuine poetry: Neruda, Ritsos, Eloire, Nazim and as-Sayyab.

You committed a mistake when you hung in your mind the dedication of these two words: *TO YOU*. You proved to be of double standards when you scribbled the same dedication to many other women whose feminine feelings were scribbled too, though they were hypnotised by your flattering words no matter how hollow you were.

I called you once a true shade perhaps to protect myself from the crowded heat emitted from the mouths of pretenders, but this fresh cool space lost itself to this pretentious crowd of the majority of those who carry leather briefcases full of papers, pens, political speeches, poems, stories, studies and critical articles and are always ready to fill gaps on any occasion to satisfy their whims and conquests.

Impure air, that once brought us together, dusts the scope of my vision so that my eyes are now addicted to the haze despite the availability of goodness in many aspects of life.

Leave me alone. Let me sleep away from your complexities that you are always ready to defend with your arguments and amazing craftiness.

I seek fresh air, a crucible to keep in it all my purity ridden of all contamination that would come out the moment your metal melts.

I was sorry for attaining a great measure of defying courage that motivated me to discard your collection to a street book hawker. Amazed, he said to me: 'Take all these other copies, of same title, discarded by other people like you, or if you feel better then cast them away to their twins for I am bored to have them dusted every other day.'

How much I wished I could help that hawker. But I am not only bored but also totally exhausted.

عبد الخالق الحموي

Abdulkhaliq Hamwi is a writer and poet from Homs, Syria. The original Arabic of *al-Ehda'* (Book Signing) was published in *Kalimat 8*.

SUHAYL ELSHAAR

Two Stories

Translated by Raghid Nahhas

Terror

You have just returned to your small room, deserted for over twenty years, to see everything there as it was: the wooden wardrobe your kind grandmother left you, the books, the magazines and a second-hand table you bought when you were a student.

The other man, however, with an even pebble in his fingers, rubbed your earlobe until it bled: 'Don't do it again, understand?'

You shook your head and lowered it with a broken, defeated heart: 'Yes sir, I understand.'

You may remember those men who once upon a grievous dark night, broke into your solitude, books and sad papers, then fired at your grandmother's wardrobe and the shelves of your little bookcase. You may remember some of what they said: 'You traitor...you are conspiring against the authorities!'

You only had some old books, some papers as ancient as the years, and a wardrobe for your worn-out clothes and some basic items. Nevertheless, you explained to them with a lot of patience and politeness about all the contents of your room, and allowed their hands to search deeply for everything. But they did not believe you! They tied your hands with chains, and wrapped your eyes with black cloth that smelled like the moving corpses you see every morning.

Later you learned that your books were all burnt, along with your papers and ideas. They placed your exhausted body in a cell, possibly one hundred steps below ground, as narrow as a grave, and as dark as December nights.

After three hours you confessed that you read a lot, wrote about sparrows and stars, about love, land, bread and trees... They promised not to harm you. You believed them, and said what you wanted to say and what you did not want to as well. As a reward for your confession, they pulled out your tongue and put off one of your two resigned eyes, and left you to bleed alone in the hope you die...

But your heart went on pulsating...beating...pulsating and beating...beating... When they brought you back tonight, after twenty years, you noticed that your street did not change. The pale moon still rose over it, covered with fog and despair.

Your lover might still be awake, or she might have married someone else and left you alone, to your defeats and loneliness.

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Something is leaking out of your skinny fingers. You feel the urge to quickly reach your deserted room, to write something about what is gone, or maybe about what is yet to come.

You go up the dirty steps, filled with plastic bags and empty tins. You climb slowly this time, as if the mountains, the planets, the ocean waters, the cells and dungeons of the whole world gathered on your back.

You open the antiquated wooden door, and attempt to turn on the light with difficulty, but the bulb is burnt out.

You bring a candle...you light it up as you moan in bitterness.

Something is dripping out of your fingers. Still dripping. You extend your hand, attempting to hold an old pen, and a small worn-out notebook. You try to write something... anything... a sentence, a word, at least one word...

You try again...

And again...

But in this sad moment, you suddenly remember, that they had already pulled out your nails half an hour or less before they released you!

Feast

Because it's the first day of the feast, and I am very sad and depressed, I would like to pick some roses from the neighbours' garden, and then go to see you for sure.

If I am unable to pick enough roses to make a bunch, one rose would be enough for me. I will enter the garden, and ask the owner, seated on his balcony: 'Merry feast. I am going to pick one red rose. Only one rose.'

He may smile at my face whip-lashed by centuries' sorrow, shake his head and say: 'All roses are yours, pick and worry not!'

Longing to see your eyes, I am going to pay you a visit tonight. Furthermore, I am lonely and sad. Sad beyond measure.

I think I know where you live, and that your home consists of four rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom.

By the way, we tenants, have a common bathroom. A bathroom is no doubt essential for every household. It could be the most important part of the house. Beautiful houses and palaces are useless without comfortable bathrooms, private or common, no matter. The important thing is that they are available.

You do not expect my visit on this particular day. You might have already forgotten me, or assumed that I was a traitor. Or perhaps I do not deserve your great love, because I did not call on you the next day after we first met.

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You are right. It has been a year since our first meeting. It was also on the first day of the feast. And you were beautiful! More beautiful than beauty itself. More charming than charm itself. Kinder than kindness.

Frankly, you were a remarkable lass, and you deserve that I love you very very much... Indeed I had promised to see you the next day. I thought much about you. I dreamt of your fascinating eyes all that night, and when I fell asleep I saw you in my dream.

You have the right to blame me for not seeing you the next day. Ah, I shall not reveal to you why I did not show up, leaving this matter as a surprise for some other time. I'd like to pick a red rose on this particular night and come to see you. A real MAN I'll be on this one occasion, and enter your beautiful home.

If I happen to come across your father, your mother or one of your brothers, I will not conceal the reason for my coming: 'Merry feast! This rose is for your daughter.'

Bewilderment and perplexity might show on your faces. A clear great shyness might wrap your charming face. You might welcome me, yet there would likely be other possibilities. Your father might, for example, contact the police, or he might slap my face and send me off.

Just now I precisely remember that I cannot pick roses for you, not even one red rose. It is autumn time, and none of our neighbours has private or public gardens. None of them even has a single bunch of flowers on their kitchen table or on their balcony. I am lonely and sad. I cannot even buy you roses, because roses are very expensive, particularly red roses, the very red roses...

سهيل الشعار

Suhayl Elshaar is a writer from Damascus, Syria. He is a member of the Arab Union of Writers. The original Arabic of *Terror* was published in *Kalimat 6*, and of *Feast* in *Kalimat 2*.

KHALID ZIADÉ

Friday, Sunday – Chapters from a Biography of a City on the Mediterranean

Translated by Raghid Nahhas

The Bygone Days

The first day of *Ramadan* sets the atmosphere for this month of fasting. We leave for school in the morning, feeling as though we are moving from our present time into a past time. We feel stronger and happier than usual.

There are several reasons for our happiness: the joy of waiting for this month, the clatter it creates in our houses, the shortening of our school day and the image of the whole city. There are also other details: the beating of the drum during the night, the firing of the cannon, the sweets of *Ramadan* and the new clothes we buy in anticipation for the *Eid*, the feast marking the end of fasting.

Ramadan commences once the crescent is seen by the naked eye and its beginning is announced by the firing of the cannon at *al-Qalaa*, the fort. For a few nights before that, we stay outside in the early hours of each evening waiting to catch the first glimpse of the newborn crescent. Sometimes this

wouldn't happen until midnight, and such a delay in announcing the month would cause a great flurry in preparing for *Sahour*, the last meal before the first day of the month breaks, when an abiding Moslem ceases to eat or drink until sunset. Preparing the meal under these circumstances turns into an affair involving the whole family, including children. Often, however, no sighting occurred and the announcement was delayed till the next day and we would go near *al-Qalaa* in the afternoon, confident that the cannon would fire with the call for prayer. We would witness the loading of the cannon and its



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ignition, followed by the blast that echoed everywhere.

In my early youth, *Ramadan* coincided with the cold winter season, which made getting out of bed for the *Sahour* a miserable task. I was not dedicated to fasting during my early school days, but participating in the *Sahour* was vital, as this was a main ritual of the month and an announcement of one's intention to fast.

During the first day of *Ramadan*, the route I took to go to school seemed deserted and quiet and there was an air of tardiness in the movement of the few passers-by. Eating was restricted to the hours between sunset and dawn. The main meal (*Iftar*) now became the meal that broke the daily fast at sunset. This meant there was no urgency to shop in the morning as the shops opened later. Moussa Café was without customers during the day, its activity was resumed after *Iftar*. The *fil* restaurant was closed in the morning, but became busy in the afternoon preparing its popular meal of cooked beans, often used as a starter for the *Iftar*.

Even our arrival at school was later than usual. *Ramadan* was the subject of our school conversation. Almost every young student was fasting, at least for the early hours of the day. We all became quiet; there were no violent games and no running about in the schoolyard. The school vendor disappeared, for who would dare buy anything even if one was not fasting? Classes were shorter now and they passed quickly. The school day now ended at twelve thirty rather than four thirty in the afternoon. We enjoyed *Ramadan* for this reduction in our school time.

My early *Ramadans* coincided with winter, rendering the days shorter and the fasting easier, in contrast to fasting during long summer days. Spending half of our day at school helped in reducing the sting of our hunger. We spent the remainder of the day hanging about in the *souk*, which became full of activity in the afternoon. We kept asking about the time and waited for the blast announcing the breaking of the fast.

Ramadan was not for us a mere practice of faith. It was a concrete symbol affecting every aspect of our lives. It was a whole combination of feelings, sensations, scenes, rituals, sounds, names and idioms.

During the afternoon we browsed in the market place, looking at the shops that sold sweets, clothes and shoes. We looked closely at their ware for a long time, preparing ourselves for the choices we were going to make in celebrating the *Eid*. But we also wanted to pass time. Our favourite section was the perfume market. Perfumers had a strong connection to the piety associated with *Ramadan*. What they sold had a true association with this month of fasting. We were attracted to their displays of apple fruits implanted with dried carnation, spreading a scent that appeased our hunger.

We were not the only ones attracted to the *souk* during *Ramadan*. The old *souk* attracted all folks, including those residing in modern suburbs. *Ramadan* seemed to revive their nostalgia for their past. Most of the mosques were located in the old town and in order to fulfill one's faith, one had to come to the old town to practise traditional rituals and celebrate the spirituality of the month.

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Ramadan imposed its strict rules on the city and forced it to abandon its normal routine. We felt this through changes in our school programmes, as well as in our sleep patterns. We were awakened by the drum of the *Mussafer* alerting us to the time of the *Sahour*, one or two hours before dawn. Then we returned to sleep after the dawn prayer. This delayed the city's wake-up time. Activity in the market place was sluggish in the early morning, but gained momentum in the afternoon, when its clatter escalated and then subsided again in the short period preceding the blast announcing the *Iftar* at the sunset prayer. The whole city was then wrapped in silence. The streets were deserted. Then came the blast of the cannon and the voice of the Muezzin calling for prayer.

An hour after the *Iftar*, the streets regained their busy life as the evening of *Ramadan* started. We were allowed to spend time out and popular cafés became full of patrons. Families went on their evening visits and the youth compensated for their morning laziness with evening activity.

Ramadan was our premier practice of faith. Fasting required praying in the mosque and attending religious classes. Our faith underwent examination and training. At age six or seven, we fasted for half a day only. We learned about religion through our questions concerning what was permitted, what was prohibited and about the rules of prayer and fasting.

During the last days of *Ramadan*, our studies slackened off and gave way to increased market activity. Everyone became busy with the approach of the *Eid*. We held our breath with increasing enthusiasm as people exchanged visits to bid the holy month farewell.

We woke up earlier than usual on the first day of the *Eid*, enthusiastic about putting on our new clothes. Then we set about enjoying in full the three days of the feast. Men started the *Eid* by praying at the mosque, then they accompanied their families to visit relations. The youth enjoyed the relative freedom they were given and went on a spree of continuous festivity in the market squares, where many games, stalls, peddlers and shops were available.

There was an *Eid* of a different sort in the square of the modern city, where the young men came from every quarter and filled the square with their joy and noise. In those days, the cinema was introduced as the newest addition to the festivity of the *Eid*. We discovered its world in halls crammed with the young people of the *Eid*.

We often felt depressed about how quickly the time went during those joyful periods. The last evening of the *Eid* was a sad affair to us. *Ramadan* was gone, and so was the *Eid*. We extended the *Eid* by absenting ourselves from school for a further day, for which we were forgiven, but this did not bring back the bygone days.

Moslems and Christians

The *hara*, our quarter, was our world. We boys only left it on certain occasions. It was also our playing field, and we played on the nearby hill or alongside the cemetery. And it was also our symbolic world. We lived at one end of the city, but kept in touch with its ancient heart. This is why my knowledge of other parts of the city remained limited. For most of the time in my early youth, my feeling of belonging to the *hara* took precedence over any other sense of belonging, to the extent that I considered boys from other parts of the city to be strangers. Luckily, I eventually started to realise that we all shared the same city. The *hara* started to come out of its isolation gradually, as did other city localities. Nevertheless, my connection to the *hara* did not fade completely. It was part of my nature, and I always kept part of it in my soul.

It was an isolated place, yet it was connected to all other parts of the city without interruption. There were no gates to be locked during the night, though some of the old city streets carried the names of gates that had existed in the past.

Our old *hara* was moulded by traditions two or three centuries old. A Christian family dwelt in one old house; I remember some girls who used to tailor clothes with their middle-aged mother. Yvonne, one of the girls, was full-bodied. I do not recall the names or features of the other girls.

Having a few Christian families residing in our midst did not seem strange and it was part of the image I had in my mind of the *hara*. Other things aroused my curiosity, such as

the family of the Turk and his elegant daughters, or the Moroccan sheikh who kept his women under full quarantine. Despite its image as a uniform society, the *hara* was full of human diversity. The *hara* brought together many people from different places and gave them a sense of constancy. There were people in that secluded world who were unable to change. Things were carefully designed, as if every person occupied a particular, unshifting space.



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School was considered the first change that took us out of the narrow world of the *hara*, despite the fact that my first school was located on our side of the city forming a continuation of the world to which I belonged. I could easily reach it by following an almost straight line along the *souk* of the old town without crossing a street or passing a road. The *souk* was long and no cars could drive through. The distance my brother and I covered comprised only one quarter of the length of the *souk*. If I continued to walk, I would reach the other end of the city past the river, but I never undertook such a feat on my own.

The people in the *souk* that I passed four times every day were also inhabitants of the city. Their children were my classmates. Our teachers were of the same blood as our family and we could follow them to discover their nearby dwellings. Our parents knew them, but their methodical strictness seemed to be from a different era or world. Their features captured remnants of the Ottoman past, but most of them were trained in colonial schools from where they learned about discipline and obligations. A severe punishment was imposed on whoever deviated or neglected his duties.

The French teacher of the highest class at my school was not one of our own, he was not of our *hara* or our city. He was a Christian. He wore a grey or a navy blue coat. His students wore dark coats. Our uniform in primary classes was a black apron, like all the younger pupils in the city.

After 1960, younger teachers started to arrive at our school as a result of a new employment initiative to select primary and secondary school teachers. They were teachers in their thirties and not as enthusiastic to impose punishment as their older peers. There were three Christians among the new recruits and one in particular drew our attention because he wore a coloured shirt and no dark coat. He was closer to the students in age and behaviour than the other teachers. Another teacher always wore a black coat and a white shirt with a strange collar, the like of which we had not seen before. We later learned that he was a religious Christian. He was a very kind man, but we managed to startle him during one of his classes when the call of the muezzin from the nearby *Tahham* mosque came loud and clear and the whole class stood as one, raising their forefingers in a prayer gesture and mimicking the muezzin's call by uttering in a low voice, 'there is no god but Allah and Mohammad is His apostle'. This was our way of showing him that we were different! The few Christian teachers in our school had to accept this situation when the midday or afternoon call for prayer fell within one of their classes. Such behaviour would not have been tolerated by either a teacher of our own religion or one from our *hara*.

In my fourth primary year, I moved to a school located in the middle of the modern city, not far from the apartment where we now resided. Our old *hara* had its roots in Ottoman history. Our new *hara* was a product of the Mandate, with some aspects only completed in the nineteen fifties. It received residents from nearby villages, rendering the majority of its population of the Christian faith up until the early nineteen sixties.

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My initial feeling was that we now resided in a Christian district that was an extension of the Christian Quarter of the old town, but the reality was different. This was one of several multicultural districts that flourished during that time. Christians, Moslems, villagers and city folks lived side by side. Even further than that, our neighbour was a Christian of Palestinian origin and the only grocer in the street was a Greek who lived in the building opposite ours. There was also a French family and many Syrian families.

The passage of time opened the way for a limited socialising, mainly by women. My mother considered that our real neighbours were those we left back in the old *hara*. We believed that we lived in a temporary environment. I avoided friendships with the boys of this *hara*, but I used to watch the girls and talk over the balcony to the daughters of the Greek grocer.

The aspects of the new *hara* in the nineteen sixties would gradually be erased, but in the meantime I was carefully exploring and meticulously observing our new world. The street was for me an anthropological place. I watched the Christians from the villages and examined their habits. I discovered their Sunday routine, when men stayed at home wearing their new clothes or joined in barbeques at lunch. I discovered their festivals: Christmas, New Year's Day and Easter, as though they had never existed before. I watched their funerals and their happy occasions. The Christian funerals filled me with awe for their overwhelming blackness and the sight of priests marching ahead of the procession. Men, women and boys marched carrying wreaths. The participation of women in general society was a novelty to us, particularly unveiled women talking to men outside their homes without embarrassment. The lady in the ground floor apartment near the Greek's shop used to drink her morning and afternoon coffee in her front yard along with her daughters whose complexions were stark white. She spoke to neighbours passing by and invited them for coffee. I wondered at the significance of this strange ritual that took that lady outside the walls of her home. There seemed to be no secrets, and an increased affinity between neighbours who lived like brothers and sisters. We did not take part in such rapport, which was in a way more akin to the village environment.

It was a period of mixing together and happiness. My new school was friendlier than the old one. It was quite multicultural, with its Christian and Moslem teachers and students, but I stayed in it for only two years. When I obtained my primary school certificate, I moved to the only public high school in the city. It was of a very high standard, matching the best private and missionary schools of the time and had highly qualified teachers, new buildings and spacious playing grounds.

During my first year there, a Christian and I shared the same desk. As a matter of fact, one quarter of the pupils in my class were Christians. They joined us from private and missionary schools, so their competence in French was greater than ours. All in all, our generation was lucky to have such a mixture of cultures and forms of education. There was a Catholic from *Zahlé*, a Druze from *Shoof*, a Chiite, Maronites from the

neighbouring countryside and Orthodox Christians from the heart of the town. Our Islamic scripture teacher, delegated from Egypt, was surprised at the number of students who left the class during his first session at our school. Non-Moslems were not required to attend such classes.

High school, for me, represented a social place, with no room for my anthropological explorations. Differences among students were minor. There was some effort on the part of those outsiders to the city to conceal their original identity, regional affiliations and particular accents. There was a common language among us, comprising terms and utterances familiar to everyone. Religious festivals were school holidays, allowing pupils to practise their faith and rituals in their family environment, not at school where there were no religious traditions.

Friendships were mixed, particularly in groups that adopted trendy fashions and western music. Moslems from the old town were more conservative, but these groups of mixed friendships were not based on religion, rather they were related to participation in the common emerging city model and following the most innovative fashion. Christians and Moslems who rigidly adhered to their original affiliations were exposed to our ridicule and criticism.

In our second year of high school we made an area called *Harat al-Nassara* or the Christian Quarter our street of leisure. We were a mixed bunch of Christian and Moslem, country and town people, but these classifications never bothered us or engaged our attention. *Harat al-Nassara* was a natural extension of one of the city's most original and ancient quarters. Its aspect might have changed in some outlying localities where missionaries established schools and monasteries, but its eastern part melted into an environment that had not been subjected to change. There, churches stood with their towers amongst a variety of architectural styles. But Christian dwellings were not restricted to the quarter that carried their name. For example, they inhabited *al-Hajjareen*, *al-Noori*, *al-Tarbiha* and *Suwaykat al-Khayl*. Their shops stood next door to the shops of people from other religions. Their dignitaries were acknowledged as part of the city community, not just the Christian one. For centuries, belonging to a city had been an important part of one's identity, regardless of one's religion.

We did not need to read history in order to choose our friends. Our friendships were a reflection of our times and the places from which we came.

خالد زيادة

Dr. Khalid Ziadé is a Lebanese academic and author. These chapters are a continuation of our translation of his book *Friday, Sunday* into English. For more information, or for previous chapters, please see previous English issues of *Kalimat*.

RAGHID NAHHAS

Translated by Salwa Boulos & Hans Boulos

Leonora Howlett: a Forgotten Star in the Sky of a Random Universe

At a certain time in Sydney's artistic history, a distinguished galaxy appeared in its sky. It was made up of several stars, among which was one group that shone with an unusual radiance and a unique brightness. One day, one of its stars disengaged and soared unrestricted, away into the vastness of space.

Leonora Howlett's journey started during the tender years of her childhood, when she knew deep in herself that she was born to be artist. In 1956, at the age of 15, she was awarded a scholarship to study arts at the East Sydney Technical College. While there, she got acquainted with Colin Lanceley and Mike Brown, and the three of them felt empathy towards each other, realising that they were different from the rest of the students. 'We had a strong urge to express ourselves through art,' says Howlett. 'Our mutual friendship provided us with a "freeing" power, a sort of a spiritual kinship that drew us together for the first time. We were more outgoing and rebellious than other people. What drew us together was our unanimous feeling that we were different from the rest of society, each of us for his or her own particular reasons.'

Although surrealism was uncommon at that time, from the beginning Brown chose it as a substance for his studies at college, whereas Howlett and Lanceley chose the abstract art.

Annandale Imitation Realists

This group, including another artist called Ross Crothall, was the initial nucleus that led to the formation of a group called the "Annandale Imitation Realists". Annandale is a suburb in Sydney, but the group's name was a defiance of the ordinary, as no artist ever liked to be known as an 'imitator'. Moreover, realism in art was considered an insult to a period when surrealism and abstract arts were more prevalent. To make matters even worse, Annandale was not a favourite residential area for Sydney's society. There was only one main source of running water in the houses we rented. There were no phone lines; we relied on the public phone in the street. Yet, the group was selective, both in terms of its member composition as well as from a philosophical point of view. In other words, the group chose only what seemed to fit with its ideology.

The well-known art critic and writer, Robert Hughes, described this group as the first

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artistic city urban guerrillas in Australia, thus confirming its radical nature.

Participating in such a group, particularly for Howlett, was important: 'after the radical steps I had taken to isolate myself from the rest of the students.' But she had married Lanceley (who is currently one of Sydney's most notable artists) for a short period of time, and later left the group in 1961 for personal reasons. She declares that she wished if she were still with them until the time when the group became more popular.

Lanceley, Brown and Howlett used to meet in a café in Taylor Square near the college. The café was run by a lady called Magda, who became an important part of this group, particularly when she wanted her café to resemble the Parisian cafés. Maghda began to display the group's paintings there, making the café an attraction to people and a place where visiting was desirable. It was there that the group met Crothall, who soon became part of them.

In this café, the group members exchanged opinions and were occupied by an invented game called "aesthetic chess". This game involved moving cigarette butts in the ashtrays to create images and fancies by the mind. The game became more complicated by the throwing of things on the floor and then picking one of them up to improve the design created, then again by replacing the object in a different place to enhance the design in another way. 'It was a serious game filled with tension and joy. The players' moves were met with enthusiasm and with varying levels of appreciation and approval.'

Howlett states that group work can only succeed if the basic common denominators and views were a common language understandable by all. 'At that time, we were a part of such a group, that we resembled for a short time a tribe, indulged by our own common discoveries and beliefs. The topics we discussed were approved and needed no further addressing. These ideas were the basis of our group, which was a very idealistic one. We utterly believed that art would free the soul and save the world! We also believed in the creative power that's innate in all human beings, which society had greatly restrained it.'

'We further believed that there was a tragic chasm between the artist and the passive audience, leaving to atrophy, the creativity that would illuminate all the human expanse. We adopted that there should be no difference between art and life. There was no preconceived idea or theory in our minds, rather we considered that any time, place or knowledge could be a suitable departure point, or all these factors combined together, or none of them at all.'

'We embraced the direct style of expression than the conscious, constructive one. We trusted in our understanding of time, place and resource, and made our special position in the Pacific area as a centre for our very own world. We admired the art of indigenous people and their use for the materials they had available to create their works. We believed that co-operation among the group members unifies their spiritual power,

making it stronger than if one person worked solely. That was a magical time of discovery and unity. I don't think any of us experienced the beauty of that time at any later time.'

However, the group did not last long, and Howlett thinks that personal ambition overcomes everything else, leading to a disintegration of such groupings. She asks speculatively 'How much a certain idea bears objective thinking and how much is based on personal and emotional needs?' She adds: 'it was a love-hate story, a story of ideals and disappointments, winners and losers, destruction and creativeness. It actually went beyond that; it was the time of dreaming that motivated us to go on.'

An Artist or an Artist's Wife?

Hyde Park in Sydney was one of the places where students used to exhibit their art works. It was there where the group met Bill Lister, who was knowledgeable in Asian and Chinese arts, an area of great interest to the group. Lister was impressed in particular by Lanceley's works and predicted that the latter would have a bright future. But he told Howlett that she had to choose between being an artist or a mere artist's wife. Lister's ideas reflected the truth of that era, where the role of women was largely overlooked. Furthermore, art as a career was unacceptable in the 1950s and parents usually tried to discourage their children from entering a world they considered dreadful and uncertain.

As a woman, Howlett was forced to leave the group due to the great stress imposed on her by the then-current circumstances. It even seemed that her personal talents and tastes, which prevented her from keeping up with Lanceley's onslaughts, were the main factors that led to their separation and her leaving the group. 'I didn't have enough confidence in my ability to withstand these difficult situations. That put me under great pressure. I could only escape from such situations, despite the democratic environment that prevailed over our group. For after I left Lanceley, it became hard for me to keep in touch with the others, taking into consideration that phones were only available on the street. However, I admired Brown for his constant support for what women offered to society.'

As one of the group's members, Brown emphasised in an interview in 1994 on the importance of the role that Howlett had played in the group. He added that he and the others preferred Howlett's humble style of dedicating herself to art more than that of Lanceley's masculine and reforming style. It is known that she has striven to strike a balance between modern and classic art forms, and continued in her endeavour until it was proved later through her works and exhibits, that included Islamic sacred architecture.

However, in an interview by Jane Hampson in 2000/2001, Lanceley talked about the rapid success he and his two male friends had met in the art world as a result of the

group's work. But neither he nor Hampson mentioned anything about the part that Howlett played in the Annandale group, not even mentioning her name. He only said 'having problems with other men's wives' while he was talking about the rumours that arose within the group. Howlett considered this matter very demeaning to her real role and to all those women who refused to be mere objects in men's hands. She further adds that this statement was incorrect in its application to the 21st century and 'even to the 50s of the 20th century as it does not accurately reflect the state of relationships prevailed in Australia at that time, despite the fact that those were not yet the flourishing days of social freedom.' She also said that Lanceley attempted to depict the group as a "Bohemian" one, in the likeness of a French movie where everything was permissible, but that was far from the truth.'

Howlett believes that a great deal of the success one achieves depends on one's ability to socialise rather than on what one is or what one says.

Orbits

Unlike of today's where hundreds of students graduate each year, Howlett was one of only 13 students who graduated in 1960 at the Division of Art, that required 5 years of study. After she left the group, Howlett developed her own style of abstract painting, by using wide planes with rich colours. She also employed a variety of methods from surrealism to geometry.

She travelled extensively abroad. I asked her about the reasons for her travels, she said 'I wanted to see with my own eyes what I always wished to see. As you probably know, during the 1960s not many art publications were available and, therefore, I couldn't form a clear idea about the artistic works without seeing the colours. I needed to be familiar with the reality of these works as much as I wanted to meet real personalities.'

She visited London in 1967, for 4 years, the time she travelled around Europe and the Middle East. In the late 1970s, as an Australian representative for the International Year of Women Conference, she visited Mexico where she lectured about the role of women in art.

'It was very exciting to meet contemporary people of ancient civilisations such as Egypt, Greece, Italy and Mexico.' I asked her which of those countries left a special impression on her, she said 'Greece.' Why? 'Because it is actually not a European country but one that lies halfway between the East and the West. It has many different levels that form its cultural system; whether in music, art or even in the people's lives.'

She continued her colloquy by describing Italy and said that the Italian nation is one of the most creative nations. The Italians love life. She talked with admiration about Turkey and Egypt, and complimented their architectural arts, and hinted to the direct link between an Egyptian art work and its beholder. 'When you look at something

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Egyptian, you know straight away what it means or portrays. It is really amazing that these beautiful works designed some 4000 years ago are easily understood and simply enjoyed today without having to assume a mood of a great mental adjustment, such as is needed for properly enjoying any modern painting.’

Howlett was inspired by Ibn Tolon’s Mosque, that was the stimulus that led her to admire and consider Islamic art. What impressed her in the mosque’s art was not so much the colours used as the shapes that still remain as a landmark of an architectural temple, with the shadows emanating a special spiritual aura. ‘My travels enticed me to a great interest in Islamic art, and I painted a lot of paintings based on an Islamic pattern and design.’

The greatest spiritual feelings that Howlett experienced were when she visited Stonehenge in Britain and the pyramids in Egypt. One would feel there ‘the presence of people and spirits!’ About Egyptian faces, she says that one could see in them remnants of many different races.

Talking about Mexico, she said, ‘When I mentioned that Italians were the most creative, I should have said the Mexicans instead. Everyone in Mexico is an artist. They use flowers a lot. They have a rich culture, encompassing the original American inhabitants as well as the Spanish, with all the influence of the Andalusian era. As an artist, Mexico was the place where I felt most at home, particularly in regards to the colours, their direct meanings and the people’s good use of them in décor.’

India is another romance story that filled the heart of Howlett, the journeywoman. She admitted here, that she could not understand India’s civilisation with its many religions. She focused on Mogul art. She liked the Hindu art but could not comprehend it. She was also greatly impressed by their miniature paintings, as opposed to the large size ones that were a common feature among abstract artists in Australia.

The Art of Receiving Aesthetics and the everlasting Hobby

It became clear to me that Howlett is an artist who sees beauty in everything, and it was hard for her to settle on a particular place that attracted her interest; every place she visited had its own peculiar importance to her. Talking about the distinguishing features of every place, I noticed that she described a universal aesthetical image as to time or to space.

This is how Howlett appeared to me; she herself was like an abstract painting of many bright colours, each of which tells its own story that could only be understood when taken within the context of the whole picture – a woman who struggles for perfection in art and beauty- ‘Abstract paintings can be seen not by trying to interpret them, but rather by “listening” to them as one might listen to a musical quartet. Colours represent the language of feelings, they awaken in us a certain emotional experience depending

on the sum of colours we look at.’ It is not strange to note that Howlett adopts the example of a musical quartet to discuss beauty in general. Every musical instrument has its importance but the aftermath, the musical piece as a whole comes from the combined effort of all the instruments – of all the colours.

‘The Chinese consider that the true artist is the amateur one and not the professional because professionalism obstructs creativity, but the amateur is unconcerned about pleasing society. The situation in Australia today is such that a person can take art as a career and obtain a certain degree of popularity if this person manages to be a part of what is known as the “Boys Club”- a group of arbiters who control the art world. The creative person who doesn’t knock on such doors, however, becomes totally isolated and unknown, that he may only be discovered after passing away, and then only when somebody stumbles upon his paintings stacked up in some obscure corner of his house.’

‘There are other strange things in the world of art. As an example, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, while I presented my works that were based on the Islamic art, no one understood or tried to understand what I was doing, because the Australian knowledge of Islamic art was only restricted to the art of paving and painting on table mats. Nobody read about the fundamentals of mathematics and colours in Islamic art and architecture. What I did was unconventional, but it was not easily understood at that time. I’m saying this because it’s possible that an artist may produce artistic works of an innovative nature that would sometimes be accepted. I remember an interesting thing happening several years following this incident. When one artist, I think he was from a Lebanese background, presented something similar to what I did, the NSW Exhibition Hall displayed it as the first work of its kind to be done in Australia!’

Women and Art

‘I think that women possess unique qualities, but unfortunately some of them began imitating the worst qualities of men under the pretence of gaining equality. Women have had an underdeveloped ego. To be an artist is a problem in itself, how much more so if the artist was a woman! In our society, women are brought up to seek success through men. Can you imagine that in my time at art college, there was only one female lecturer? It’s hard for women to continue in this career as they have to look after the family. But the woman who can persist with a strong egoistic drive is considered a freak.

I interrupted Howlett by saying that she had been confirming to me things I did not want confirmed because it was commonly known that this phenomenon of not tolerating women’s status was mainly suffered in third world societies. But it appeared that this sad reality affected the whole world. I mentioned to her that an Englishman, whom I got to know while I was staying in Britain, had two boys and his wife was expecting a third child. I told him that he no doubt wished to have a baby girl this time,

but he surprised me by saying that he actually wanted a third boy. He reminded me of what happens in most backward areas in my country of origin.

Howlett understands such state of affairs that occurred in the past centuries, where women could not make use of the opportunities available to them such as taking up a permanent career. 'On the other hand, the woman of the 20th century found herself in the same position as men in terms of availability of chances as is the case with the female art student who was as enthusiastic about the subject as the male student, and female graduates outnumbered males. In spite of all this, women ended up sacrificing their professional future for the sake of a conditioned society.'

Howlett further believes that women have the will to sacrifice themselves for a particular cause. When I objected by saying, 'Do you think that men lack this will?' She insisted on her view but she added that it was possible that the latter situation existed but on rare occasions. She hoped the current differences between men and women would not disappear as women have distinctive talents. As an example, one of the aspects of women's tradition and culture is what is termed "women's art", such as handmade embroidery, an art on the verge of extinction due to the increasing demand for the cheap quality produced in mass by new machinery.

She added that many issues changed greatly towards the better, and although the male artist could still find a beautiful, faithful and hardworking wife living under his protection, the female artist could not attain such a situation. She recalled, however, the past twenty successful years of her life, spent with her partner both in life and career, George Martini who executes the designs done by Howlett involving stained-glass projects for churches, cemeteries, institutions and houses.

'I try to use colours according to the European style in order to obtain the same effect as for sparkling ceramic. What attracts me about stained-glass art is the ability to use enormous quantities of intense colours without restraints.' Her last statement could be a summary of her successful business relationship with Martini, in addition to their sharing in life's relationship.

In the course of her other human progress, Howlett talked about Fred and Eleanor Wrobel with great appreciation. She described herself as a lucky woman to have known this couple who run a large collection of artistic works by different artists. She said that they gathered this collection based on their astute perception of the importance of the work rather than on the fame of the artist. The said collection consists of precious works of artists who may have been forgotten or unknown to the Australian society. Howlett's works are an example of this. 'After I met George Martini, and following the establishment of our work, I consider that the second most important event in my life was the regaining of my confidence when the Woolloomooloo Gallery (owned by the Wrobels) accepted my works and promoted them.'

Joanna Mendelson wrote in the *Australian Art Collector Magazine* an article about the Wrobels. It mentioned that Eleanor Wrobel adopted Howlett's case particularly

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about the waiving of her substantial role in the establishment of the Annandale group. Eleanor also thinks that Howlett is one of those many women who were barred by men from entering their “clubs”.

But Howlett did not bend and went on her way determinedly. Some of the jobs assigned to her included the designing of a postage stamp in celebration of the International Year of Women in 1975. She had 9 individual exhibitions in Australia between 1963 and 1996, in addition to her contribution in more than 40 exhibitions between 1959 and 2001. Her name appeared in several articles and publications, and was given some awards and honorary certificates. Moreover, her works have been purchased by public museums and art galleries.

Since 1982, she dedicated her time focusing on commercial designs for the stained glass industry, being the area she and her partner Martini are currently working in. Her works are found in many public places in Sydney such as Rockwood cemetery, St. Frances’ Church in Paddington, St. Andrew’s Church in Balmain and the gardens of the RSPCA in Yagoona.

Are you Still Rebellious?

Howlett, who was born in 1940, thought for a few moments before replying, ‘Yes, I am. But not in the same way I was it back in the 60s and 70s, when all of the society was in a state of disintegration. At that time, everyone seemed to share the same values and morals, but in reality life couldn’t go on in that manner. It was essential for me to do something remarkable, knowing it was no more acceptable to foster the social disintegration, but rather to rebuild anew. I believed that there were things distinct in their own way than other things, and one cannot equate them on the same level.’

The Visit

Monday the 11th of March 2002, 4:30 p.m. I drove from my work towards the Sydney suburb of Leichardt, which is close to the city centre, where Howlett and George Martini live. As expected, the streets were heavily trafficked but I drove in the opposite direction of the general traffic flow at that time of day, when people go back home from their work. Sydney appeared beautiful, as always, and I passed one scenery painting after another: the houses, the bridges, the lanes, the watercourses, the streams and the parks. In the inner suburbs, one could see remnants of Sydney as it has been for more than 100 years ago: identical houses lining the roads and sharing their side-walls with those next to them, each house made up of two storeys, and one or two balconies with an ornate casing in the style of the Victorian or Federation era, known as a “terrace house”, this is usually a small house, suitable for the more densely populated suburbs in and around the city centre.

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In a quiet street is situated Howlett and Martini's house. On the gate is the phrase "Ace Leadlight", the commercial name of the stained glass business they run. In front of the ancient house, stands a huge, lofty tree. The olden iron-gate added in the antiquated impression of the house, an effect rivalled only by the curved stone steps.

Howlett welcomed me with respect and simplicity, her face wore a friendly smile. The halls, walls and corners were mostly full of her modern art works, abstract in nature, contrasting with the atmosphere of the house and its furniture, that took me to a world that existed before I was born. Strangely enough, I found the paintings somehow hung in their right places.

She introduced me to Martini who was engaged in the small workshop that occupied half of their backyard. The other half was filled with plants, surrounding some seats and tables in that small garden. Martini continued his job in the workshop during my conversing with Howlett. He only stopped to bring us some coffee and chocolates. Then, I started picking some of Howlett's pictures and we sat down around a circular table, immersed in a conversation that expanded beyond art in Howlett's life. We discussed the affairs of this world we live in, talked about deprived nations, human cruelty, political corruption, human behaviour and exchanged many views, that appeared in unison to our beliefs. But what drew me most during our talks were her humbleness, politeness and her natural way of expression.

During my visit, Howlett took me to the upper storey of the house, where her art studio is located. She was working on a painting with bright colours, dominated by blues and rose-reds. I was thrilled by the large number of brushes and colour stains that covered most of the table and the painting-holder. Going to the balcony that I glanced during the time I stood in front of the front gate, I stepped onto the wooden decked floor of the balcony, running my hand over the ornamental balustrade embellished with green colour and then cast my glances outside, to behold that tree that endured its loftiness.

Howlett showed me some of her memorial photographs. One of these was a picture of her as a child, seated on a swing. Another showed the house where she grew up in Sydney; it looked like a painting rather than a photograph, with beautiful trees and autumn colours. One of the photos showed her parents in late 1930s attire. She narrated about her parents and about the war in their time. Another photo showed her when she was a teenager with a teacher in front of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and another one where she attended a painting lesson during her studies at college. She also showed me a great deal of photographs of her paintings, that I found myself embarking on a world of history replete with creative works that carry a cry of colours, uttered by Howlett from her humble corner as an expression of her position in the vastness of this random universe.

The original Arabic article of the above translation appeared in *Kalimat 10* as the *Landmark* article, written by Raghid Nahhas after meeting with Howlett. It attracted the interest of several Arab readers who admired Howlett's life experience.

كلمات

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تهدف كَلِمَات إلى الاحتفاء بالإبداع وتعزيز التواصل الثقافي بين الناطقين بالإنكليزية والناطقين بالعربية، وهي مجلة ذات نفع عام، ولا تسعى إلى الربح. يصدر منها عدنان باللغة الإنكليزية كل عام (مارس/أذار وسبتمبر/أيلول)، وعدنان بالعربية (يونيو/حزيران وديسمبر/كانون الأول).

ترحب كَلِمَات بكل المساهمات الخلاقة، وترجو المساهمين إرسال أعمالهم قبل أربعة أشهر على الأقل من موعد صدور العدد الذي يمكن لموادهم أن تنشر فيه، مع إرفاقها بالعناوين ووسائل الاتصال كاملة، بما في ذلك أرقام الهواتف، ونسخة عن السيرة الذاتية للمؤلف/المؤلفة، أو بضعه أسطر تلخص منجزاته/منجزاتها.

تنشر كَلِمَات النثر والشعر والدراسات والقصة والفنون باللغة العربية أو الإنكليزية وفق طريقتين أساسيين: أولاً - المواد الأصلية التي لم يسبق نشرها مطلقاً بأية لغة.

ثانياً - المواد المترجمة، أو التي يتقدم بها المؤلف لتقوم كَلِمَات بترجمتها. وهذه يجب أن تكون منشورة سابقاً بلغتها الأصلية، ولم تسبق ترجمتها. وتقدم كَلِمَات خدمة الترجمة مجاناً للذين تقبل أعمالهم. (الأعمال التي تأتي مترجمة سلفاً قد ينوفر لها حظ أكبر بالنشر نظراً لضغط العمل لدينا.) يجب تزويدنا بالمرجع الذي تم النشر فيه، بما في ذلك اسم الناشر، والسنة، ورقم المجلد، والعدد في حال الدوريات. جميع المواد المقدمة للنشر تخضع لتقييم قبل قبولها.

يحصل المتقدمون بأعمالهم الأصلية إلى كَلِمَات على الأفضلية في إمكانية ترجمة أعمالهم لاحقاً ونشرها في كَلِمَات أو مشاريع أخرى يتبناها الناشر. ونحن نعتبر هذا مكافأة عينية على جهودهم. كما ينلقى من نشر في كَلِمَات اشتراكاً لمدة سنة واحدة مجاناً. وتعتذر كَلِمَات عن تقديم أية تعويضات أخرى في الوقت الحاضر.

المؤازرة (الرعاية المادية)

مفتوحة للمنظمات والأفراد الذين يؤمنون بأهمية الرسالة الحضارية والجمالية للمجلة، مع العلم أنها لا تخول من يقدمها وضع أية شروط كَلِمَات، أو الحصول على أية حقوق أو مزايا، بما في ذلك أفضلية النشر.

الأسعار والاشتراك للأفراد (القيم أدناه بالدولار الأسترالي)

سعر العدد \$10 ضمن أستراليا، أو \$20 بالبريد الجوي إلى أي مكان

الاشتراك السنوي (4 أعداد) \$40 ضمن أستراليا، أو \$80 بالبريد الجوي.

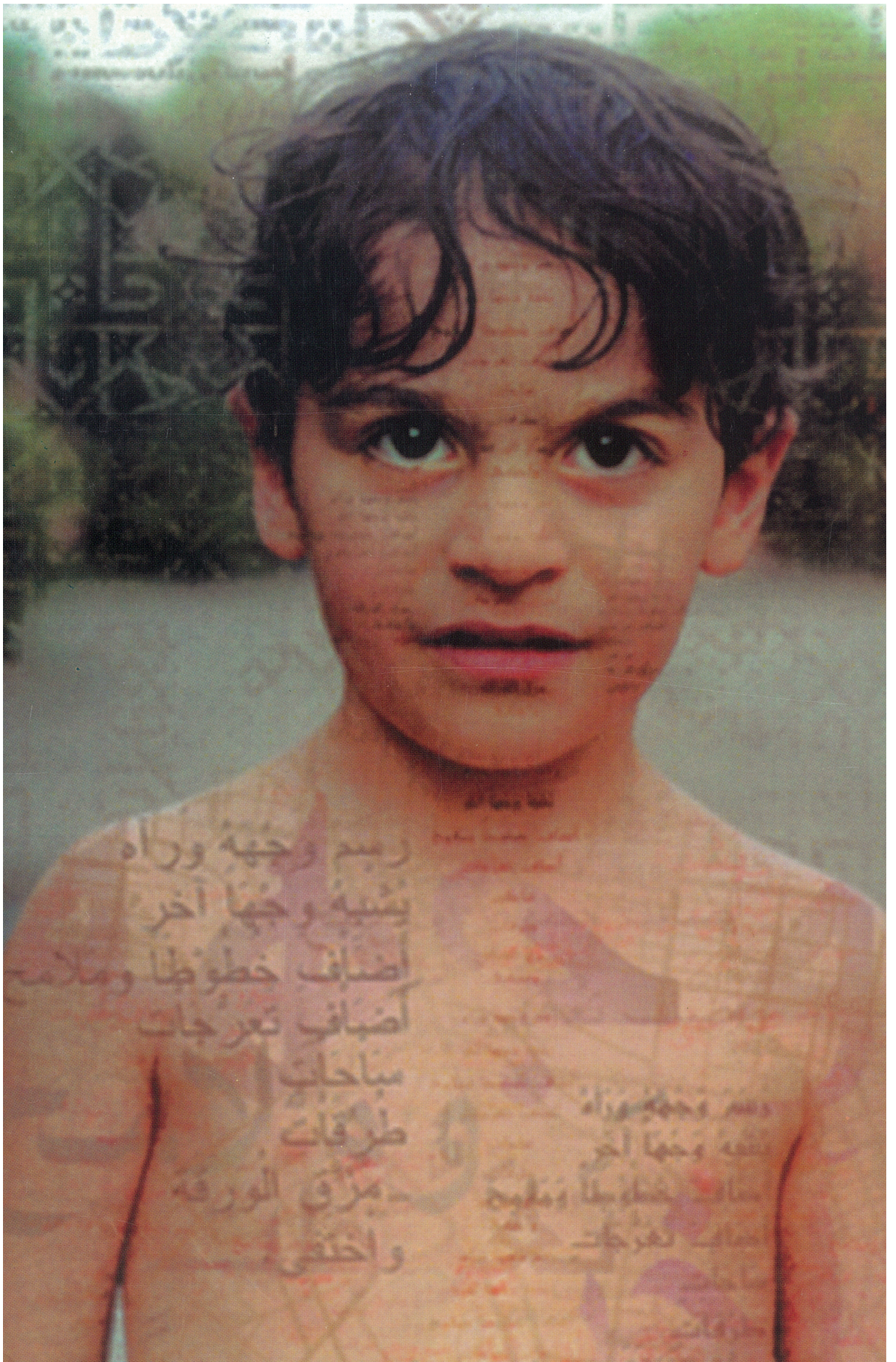
(نصف القيمة للاشتراك بلحدى اللغتين فقط).

للمنظمات والمؤسسات والمصالح التجارية ضعف القيم أعلاه في كل حالة

الإعلانات: نصف صفحة \$100، صفحة كاملة \$200

ترسل كافة الدفعات من خارج أستراليا بحوالة مصرفية بالعملة الأسترالية ويحضر الشك باسم Kalimat ويمكن الدفع مباشرة إلى حساب كلمات رقم 10064964 062401 Commonwealth Bank of Australia

المراسلات والاشتراكات إلى العنوان التالي: P.O. Box 242, Cherrybrook, NSW 2126, Australia.



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