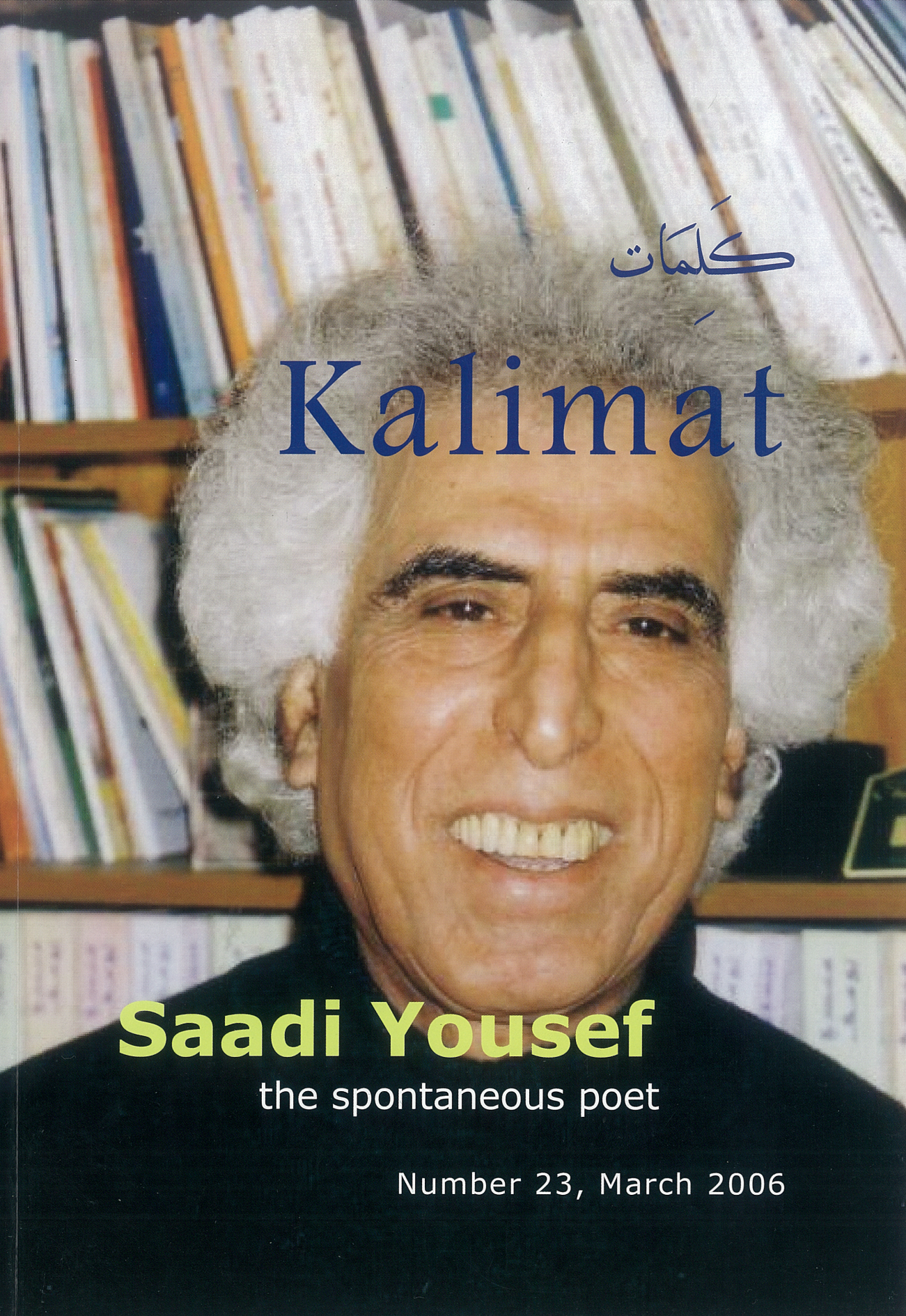

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

Saadi Yousef

the spontaneous poet

Number 23, March 2006

كلمات

Kalimat

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

Starting in 2005, two issues will be published in English (March & September) per year.

Deadlines: 60 days before the first day of the month of issue

Kalimat publishes original unpublished work in English. It also publishes translations into English of work that has already been published. It does not accept translations of unpublished work.

Full submissions should be made directly by email to: raghid@ozemail.com.au or saved on a disk and posted: P.O. Box 242, Cherrybrook, NSW 2126, Australia.

Writers contributing to *Kalimat* will receive free copies of the issues in which their writings appear. Their work might also be translated into Arabic, and the translations published in projects undertaken by *Kalimat*, or in Arabic media in the Middle East. No other compensation is made.

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الكلمة باب الإرث الحضاري، والكتابة مفتاح ديمومته

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

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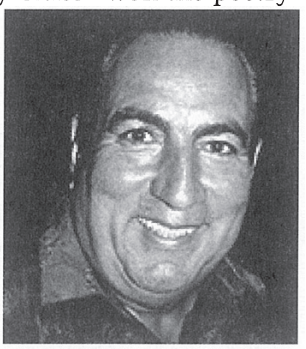

It is our pleasure to report that Khalid al-Hilli's poem "Cloudy Cities" won the poetry contest organised during the "Northern Notes" Writers' Festival which ran from Saturday 19 to Sunday 27 November, 2005. It included literary activities throughout the towns of Darebin and Whittlesea in Victoria, Australia. The program offered a range of workshops, readings and performances.

Al-Hilli's poem was selected from among works by seventeen poets, and it was the only poem originally written in a language other than English. Al-Hilli first read his poem in Arabic, then the Dutch poet Jeltje read the English translation. The poem was translated from Arabic by Raghid Nahhas and published in Kalimat 3, September 2000 as follows.

Cloudy Cities

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

empty othertimes.
On the forehead of what is to come carrying...
off the shelf of my years
come other cities:
cities that trifle with me
whenever I ask about their inhabitants
or the banks of their rivers.
Walking cities...
anchoring in my forehead
if I imagine myself
as one of their inhabitants.

...

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

drugged, they exile me.

...

The roads of the cities
unified their trip when they announced
another truce...
and slept under the bridge of time.
From them escaped paths...
and buildings...
and houses
from which migrated
men
and women
and birds.

So I prepared myself…and hovered
then retreated a little.
They chatted to me…
my foot left me
and I hung alone in space
and on my lover's face…
I had left my blood
and the yearning of the prophets.

Arrafid Celebrates issue 100

Arrafid is a leading Arabic literary periodical. Arrafid celebrated its 100th issue in December 2005. Ghalia Khouja, our adviser in the Gulf, describes *Arrafid* as '…a magazine aiming at having an insight into original texts crystallized in modernity, to form a mirror that reflects the Arabic cultural scene with all its contemporary daily intellectual transformations: poetry, novels, arts, theatre and other enlightenments…'

Arrafid is published monthly by the Department of Culture and Information in Sharja, United Arab Emirates. www.arrafid.ae

The First Migrant... and One of the Latest

Every now and then we read about early migrants from the Middle East, and recently we came across an article by Ghinwa Ghazi[1] about Antonious Albashaalani, considered the first Lebanese migrant to America. The article focuses on that such people are forgotten and that more should be done about celebrating their memory and achievements.

Albashaalani left Saleema, his native town in Lebanon, for Boston in the United States in 1854 when other Lebanese did not even know USA existed. After a few years of his arrival he fell sick and died. We knew about Albashaalani from previous readings, but this is the first time we read the last letter he wrote to his family. Here is a translation of his letter to give some insight about his experience.

> To be hand-delivered to Hanna, or Saadalla, or Ibrahim Yousef Albashaalani, may God prolong their lives.
>
> I have no money to bequeath you, all I earned I spent on medical treatment and on learning. My books, valued at two thousand piasters,[2] are all in English. I asked that they be given to some American friends of mine.
>
> My respected brothers Hanna, Saadalla and Ibrahim, I greet you with all my heart hoping that you are in good health and the best of success. If you ask about my health, let me tell you that I am at my worst, protected only by the mercy of God.
>
> I like to inform you that in April 1855 I was struck by a severe flue, and doctors here refused to let any blood out of my veins as this is not an acceptable practice here. I later had another attack accompanied by harsh coughing. I used the medicines prescribed by doctors here at a cost that reached 800 piasters. Despite all this, I never stayed in bed or ceased my studies.
>
> In June 1856 the flue struck again. I became certain that I no longer belonged to this world. This is why I have written these lines for you, entrusted with a friend who will hand you my letter after I am dead.

[1] Re-published in el-Telegraph (Arabic Newspaper, Sydney) on 03/02/06.
[2] He is using Lebanese currency

Death is the end of every creature, this is why I now lie with the hope of resurrection and meeting with you again in a fashion most pure and pious, seated to the right of God whose seat is the throne of glory in the world of immortality.

I write to let you know that what happened to me was not the result of negligence or lack of care. No, I was treated in the best way possible. Nor should you think, Oh brothers, that I am dying sad. The truth is that I am happy to part with this mortal world. Yes, I no longer have any desire to remain in this life. I am fulfilled. I have spent many a happy day with my friends here, and I am now happy to meet my creator and god.

I would like to finish by sending my final yearnings to you all. This is the last time I am able to say peace be upon you. Don't mourn me, but be happy for me and put your minds at rest.

Oh Ibrahim, my soul-mate, kiss our mother for me. Take care of brother Dawood, and I ask God to smoothen your paths and allow you to succeed in your work, and be with you all time. Please brothers send my greetings to all relatives and friends as I say good-bye to this mortal world. May God protect you from evil and prolong your lives.

I am writing this letter whilst I am able to, but I leave out the date because I don't know when I will take my last breath.

Your brother, Antonious bin Yousef bin Dhaher Albashaalani, from Saleema, Mount Lebanon.

On the same day we came across the above, we read in the Sydney Morning Herald (03/02/06) about the plight of a refugee to Australia who had been the longest serving detainee at Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney. Mr. Naqib Ahmed Noori, a former diplomat, spent six years and four months in detention whilst his wife and three children had already been in Sydney. We learn that the reason for the extended detention was an investigation into alleged involvement of Mr. Noori in war crimes committed in Afghanistan. However, after a number of appeals, it turns out that this was a case of a mistaken identity. The cost to the Federal Government exceeds one million dollars. The cost to Mr. Noori is probably immeasurable. He said of the detention centre: 'Everybody there is suffering because they are not certain what their situation is.' We wonder what sort of a letter Mr. Noori would have written to his relatives in Afghanistan before he left the centre.

2006
SHOALHAVEN LITERARY AWARD
POETRY

Co-ordinated by
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DO YOU HAVE A POEM of 50 LINES OR LESS ?

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

A Defence of Poetry

There's a topic for you: a Defence of Poetry, and why? Horace wrote an Art of Poetry, to be sure, and many other poets had their piece to say in prose about their art. It was that elegant, learned courtier, Sir Philip Sydney, who wrote in the 1580s *An Apology of Poetry*, which also got known as *A Defence of Poesy*. Perhaps it was his Calvinist education that made him a bit anxious: Calvinism and aesthetics were not exactly good friends.

For Sydney, poems were an imitation of life, and their moral role was 'to teach and delight'. That's a pretty virtuous position, and I generally hold by it, but I keep being held in check by Auden's modest conclusion that 'poetry makes nothing happen. It survives/ A way of happening, a mouth.' The notion of it's being a mouth is really clever, even teasing the mind.

I am a poet. For a young while, I wanted to be an industrial chemist, but finished up in this penny-pinched art. Being so, I practice a verbal craft of modest enchantment which is at the same time much diminished and archaically privileged. Hardly anyone reads poetry, after secondary school and its vicissitudes (exercises, exams, a broken heart, and so on), yet to be a poet still sounds like something serious and lofty: part-sybil and part-philosopher, if you like.

The modern writer of poetry wears glamour like a cloak. It does not matter if this poet was, by day, a sex-idol like Ted Hughes, a drunk like Dylan Thomas, an artful dogger like Brecht, a self-destroyer like Plath, or an evasive like Pessoa. Forr each of them Time 'worships language and forgives/ Everyone by whom it lives.' Our fame is the shadow cast by our neglect. Cagey old Marianne Moore wrote, 'I too dislike it', but she was only throwing a shred sop to Cerberus to keep him quiet.

Poetry has the misfortune to be written in language. Hang on, why do I say misfortune? Well, I do so because the same medium is commonly employed in gossip, in story-telling, in parliamentary debate, even in text messages. So we don't notice the fabric of it. Our danger is that habits developed in reading transparent prose, like that of the sports page, are at odds with how we read modern poetry. And this can

disconcert us. We happy concentrating few, we band of brothers...

Let's begin by addressing the curious distinction of poetic language, its fierce wedding to sound, rhythms, form, and metaphoric interplay. A single word can change everything, as in Yeats' 'slouches towards Bethlehem to be born'. That 'slouches' is worth whole pages.

The organization of lyric poem, concentrated like Vegemite, means that every item, every syllable, is at work in the construction business. Modulation is meaningful. When gloomy Housman writes:

> The tree of man was never quiet:
> Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The slide from *'twas* to *'tis* proves intrinsic to the meaning. That narrowed vowel signals a passage of time, but it also enacts the shift from a generalized Roman-Briton to the isolated modern speaker.

Then there is that innocently quiet metaphore, "the tree of man". How long would it take to explicate all the meaning of that. Poetry demands that we be attentive: that we as readers pause, reflect and associate.

Moreover, language gains force of spring when it is screwed up tight inside a small stanza. You might call it a "verse" but as stanza it is also Italian word for a room. The little room works like a gym st some sports club, giving concentration a good work-out. In one such room we can encounter the creation of woman:

> The he remembered through mysterious sleep
> The surgeon fingers probing at the bone,
> The voice so far away, so rich and deep:
> 'It is no good for him to live alone.'

Yet this remarkable stanza (yes, that was God 'probing the bone') is no more than one room in the poetic house called "Imperial Adam". Moreover, if the creator was a surgeon, the incarnation was already implicit in Genesis. All is concentration.

However the poets behave, they can be so silly as Rimbaud or d'Annunzio, poetry matters, because it distils its native language for the attention of a true leader, one who resembles Sir Walter Ralegh's 'judicious sharp spectator': one who really cares, for language and for truth. Oh dear, yes, unlike footloose music, poetry has to care about truth, even if Shakespeare and Auden were ironically right in allowing that 'the

truest poetry is the most feigning'.

What I'd rather say is that the truest poetry is often the most figurative. In it, metaphore shoves syllogism off the stage. Colour and action carry the day, ever so often. And their little dramas drag us back into carefulness, into maturity of response. We have to be the kind of people who, as Hardy said, 'notice such things'.

Even if we never read it, we all know that there is something special about poetry and its use of the language. It is easily detectable on the page, because its right hand margin isn't justified: this may be a reason for the reader to skip over it and get on to some clear, sensible prose.

When I talk about poetry, of course, I mean the modern, lyric medium, not the ancient, easier genre which told all the stories of the aural tribe. Modern poetry tends to be dense, relatively difficult, and sometimes – paradoxically – 'pure'. You could say it is to every day speech as cognac is to a bunch of grapes. It has been worked over, refined, intensified.

Perhaps it is even the haunting speech that modern print culture, let alone indolent e-mail, took away from us. We can have meetings and 'presentations' instead: worst of all, those with dot points.

An American writer has said that 'poems come out of wonder, not out of knowing.' Perhaps this why they can hold us up, even annoy us, tempt us to skip over them. Dot points are so much easier.

All of the cultural past, all the language's accumulated vitamins, lie behind a mere poem, urging it on and filling its veins with past meanings. Poems are overdetermined like dreams, but perhaps like a dream with an active conscience. When read hard enough, they offer a little hurdle of answer in the pathless wilderness. A poem stops our fluid attention for a wee while. It says to readers, beautifully at best, 'slow down, mate, what's the hurry?'

As I have written elsewhere, 'the words we cannot say, we try to say./ We cannot say what we would truly say.' But we shape and orchestrate words to try and get the genuine saying done. It is an art that 'make nothing happen', except to the heart and the spirit. Once you have absorbed Slessor's line about 'Time that is moved by little fidget wheels', or Baudlaire's amorous poem "Les Bijoux", nothing will ever be quite the same.

Yet poetry is language charged with such orchestration that it should be read thrice, at least. The Viennese, Karl Kaus, said about german that 'My language is the universal whore, whom I have to make into a virgin.' Now, that's a poetic metaphor for you! A wicked one. But his point is that a poem tries to take German (or English,

or Italian, or Urdu or whatever) and turn the soiled chain of words into an inexhaustible pool.

In this age of instant gratification and small machines, poetry is language with the original rhythms put back in, and it should be read aloud, even if only in the muffled theatre of the head.

But poetry remains, as Sidney claimed, a kind of deep, organized mimesis, an imitation of life. That was why I wrote a poem about my own art and called it "The Thing Itself":

The important thing is to build new sentences,
to give them a smart shape,
to get acquainted with grammar like a new friend.

One rubs down syntax
into a coarse familiarity,
such foreplay as closes down all thought.

Were it not
that the undertaking is too mannered
(as Gnostic as a shower of rabbits)

I would like to go right back,
devising a sentence
unlike any such creature in creation;

like nothing on the planet;
as structure full of brackets and cornices,
twigs, pediments, dadoes and haloes and bells,

full of nuts, butter and flowers,
sinewy, nerved,
capable of blotches or of waving hair.

That would be a sentence to really show the beggers,
like a cute
new thing

or like a tree
recently invented
by some utterly brilliant committee;

it would glitter, articulate,
strum and diversify.
It would be the thing itself.

Only in poetry would I dare to get away with a phrase like 'as Gnostic as a shower of rabbits', but then it is a feature of my poems – or so I have been told – to mingle the colloquial with the metaphysical, cheek by jowl. And also to recover faded phrases like 'cheek by jowl'. For a committed poet, everything in the language is his or her province.

Professor **Chris Wallace-Crabbe** is with The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. The above lecture was his keynote address to ***In Other Words***, a festival of poetry in translation, organized by Lella Cariddi and Janna Hilbrink, held in Melbourne, Australia in August 2005, and supported by Multicultural Arts Victoria.

JON BEINART

Four Drawings

Family Coat of Arms
Felt-tip pen on paper, Approx A6, 2002.

Deep Sea Fish Dreams

Pencil on paper,
Approx A4, 2003.

I'm two-faced daddies doing the chicken

Felt-tip pen on paper, Approx A6, 2002.

Ninja
Felt-tip pen on paper, Approx A5, 2002

Jon Beinart is a 24 years old self-taught artist who partially makes his living by selling his prints, designing album covers and fliers for bands, and undertaking various commission jobs. He says: 'Drawing for me is a subconscious process. I only realise what I am drawing half way through a piece, or at the end. This gives me insight into my subconscious, which I believe is important for self-discovery and emotional development.' '...I draw because I love it. I love creating little worlds and watching them grow to maturity.'

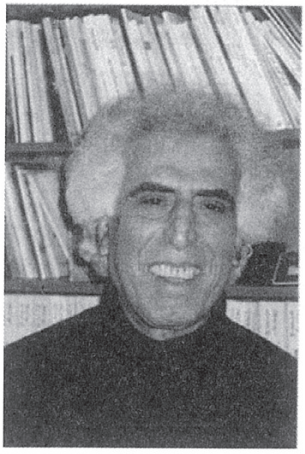
www.beinart.com.au

KHALID AL-HILLI

Translated by ***Raghid Nahhas***

Saadi Yousef

The Spontaneous Poet



The novel is the greatest of the writing arts, but it is not more revealing than poetry

If there are revolutionary novel writers, David Malouf is one of them

The Iraqi poet Saadi Yousef has been living in a quiet county area near London since 1999, dedicated to his writings, translations and creative activities, after moving for years among different Arab and European cities, carrying with him his national and humanistic concerns, full of unceasing hope for a better future, liberty and opulence for his nation, people and all humanity.

The P.E.N. magazine, issued in London, has recently selected Yousef to be on its advisory board, but his creativity surpassed his local environment at an early stage in his career allowing him to become renowned all over the Arab World and internationally.

His first exile was between 1957 and 1959 where he stayed in Syria and Kuwait. The second exile was between 1964 and 1971 and when he returned to Iraq after that, he was hoping he would stay in his homeland forever. Subjected to suffering and many pressures, he left in 1978 never to return.

Yousef was born in *Abul Khassib*, a town in *Albassra* municipality in southern Iraq, in 1934. After graduating from university, he worked in teaching and cultural

journalism. He experienced the reality of danger and imprisonment in his homeland, and that of wars and civil wars in his exile.

Yousef published his first book *al-Qursan* (The pirate) when he was only eighteen in 1952. The book took the form of a long neo-classical Arabic poem. After this, however, he opted for modern metred poetry. His activities diversified soon afterwards to include literary essays, translations, short stories and novels. He published 35 collections of his poetry and ten poetry collections he translated from English into Arabic. His other works include a collection of short stories, a novel, a play and eight books of essays, articles, memoires and critical reviews. The awards he received include the Sultan Ouais Cultural Award, the most prestigious in the Arab World.

Saadi Yousef waited for me at the nearest railway station to his home. We had both arrived half an hour before the agreed time. When I met him, I felt we had never parted company. He greeted me with his usual kindness and courtesy. He reminded me of our first meeting in 1971 and how on the second day of his return from exile I received him in a humble unit where I lived. I was a cultural editor for the *Manar* newspaper in Baghdad, writing every now and then about the need to release imprisoned literary figures and allowing exiles to return home with guarantees for their safety and freedom. I had before then started to read Yousef's work with a lot of admiration. Meeting a poet of his calibre was to me a source of ultimate pride.

On the bus carrying us to his place, he started explaining to me about the charm of the area he lives in: lakes, canals, a harbour on a river and landscapes shrouded with calmness that encourages contemplation and writing.

As we entered his attractive humble abode he pointed to an olive tree he had recently planted and how he had been caring for it on a daily basis. I could not help thinking that this symbol of peace had a lot to do with Yousef's particular attention to this tree.

Yousef introduced me to the details of his apartment passionately. Lovely paintings decorated the walls, some were from an intimate friend of his, of Austrian origins.

Our conversation diversified. We had had many common aspirations and concerns pregnant with events and sadness, and many mutual friends spread around the world with contrasting paths and circumstances. In what follows, however, I hope to reveal more of Yousef's character through his answers to some of my questions.

You have had an enormous amount of published material. How do you plan and manage your day?

I do plan and organize myself well. The early morning is my preferred time for writing, particularly writing poetry. I like to receive the world in the morning. When I am in any city, I like to go out before the shops and cafés open. In the evening I read, listen to music, go to the theatre or movies or fulfil other obligations. My life is devoted to poetry and creativity. If an idea comes to me in the evening, I often note it on a piece of paper and work over it the next morning.

You have one novel, *Muthalath ad-Da'ira* (The Circle's Triangle). What was your experience with it?

There is a common belief that the first novel is often an autobiography. The events of my novel take place in five cities which belong to five different countries. These cities are: Basra, Beirut, Nicosia, Paris and Aden. I lived in those cities and was able to read their lands. I, therefore, feel that I have the right to write about them. I needed to fabricate events. This is not easy, particularly that I feel the novel is the greatest of the writing arts. It is more serious than poetry, but not necessarily more revealing. The structure of the novel requires great effort and extensive research. I tried to respect this difficulty. My novel included five chapters, each with ten parts and each part with only five pages. I planned it carefully and followed the plan rigorously. It took me only three months to complete.

It has been ten years since you published your novel. During this period many events unfolded. Are you planning a new project?

I do think about many projects. I have a plan for an enormous poetic work. I will show you the outline which I put a year ago. *(He rises and fetches an orderly folder to show me the plan.)* I am calling this project "The Odessa". It is a poetic novel. The work will comprise ten books, each in fifty pages of five parts. Each part comprises ten pages and each page thirty verses. This makes the total verses of the whole work 150 thousand verses.

Don't you think that this sort of programming affects poetic flow?

It is an enormous work, but my approach is that of constructing an artistic building

composed of many units. The thirty verses within one unit will address a particular subject, leaving other units to freely accommodate other ideas and subjects.

I was hoping to commence earlier, but the rumbling of the invasion of Iraq paralysed me for some time. When this war started, I was attending a movie festival in Amsterdam by invitation of The International Justice Organization. Upon hearing the news, I was unable to walk for one day. The effects haunted me for some time, but I am now better. I hope to start soon.

Do you see that writing poetry requires some spontaneity?

I am a spontaneous poet. The real poet is born to be one. This condition provides the poet with an instinctive ability to freely receive and filter through his many experiences, reflections or ideas and express them using his creative tools.

The regime of Saddam Hussain opted for obscuring your name and the names of other important poets. It is believed that this has negatively affected the modern Iraqi poetic movement. What do you feel?

I used to meet with young Iraqi citizens in Jordan, some of them high school students, but none had heard of me or others such as Muzaffer Nawab or Fadhel Azzawi. They only new of the regime's trumpets. They might had heard of my name as a myth only. Yes, the absence of certain names hindered the progress of the Iraqi poetic movement and disturbed its natural development. You might find some Lebanese and foreign influences on Iraqi poetry, but the natural development as initially marked by Badr Shaker Assayab has been mutilated. It does, however, have the power of resurrection.

Do you think that poetry has been in recession due to the increasing influence of the novel?

I believe that there is a general recession in all forms of Arabic art due to decades of censorship, tyranny and subjugation. These are the foundations of the backwardness of any nation. Now we are witnessing the possibility of a complete breakdown. Our nation was protected by a genuine strong cultural consciousness. Now it is a different story. We don't read enough, we have the lowest rate of book distribution and we are culturally retarded. We cannot express ourselves because our "Big Brother" is unparalleled.

You have been to many poetry festivals. Which one do you consider most important?

One of the latest festivals I attended was a bi-annual international poetry festival near Montpellies in France. It is an important festival attended by poets from all over the world and lasts for two weeks. Another international one is in Mediene in Colombia where the whole city becomes devoted to poetry read in the streets, universities, parks, stations and cafés. Everywhere you get great crowds. That could not happen, in my country Iraq, unless someone like al-Jawahiri was present. Poetry is always effective. Poetry readings are often attended by tens of thousands of people in open theatres or sport stadiums. Most of those who attend are young people.

It is interesting that something like this could happen in a troubled nation such as Colombia.

It is possible that Colombia's troubles inspire poetry.

You visited Australia and held a successful evening for the Arab community there. Did you have a chance to be acquainted with Australia's cultural life?

I was able to meet with some Australian poets during some of their poetry reading sessions, but I think that my readings of Australian poetry is not enough. I know David Malouf well. He is basically a poet before becoming a novelist. I met him on several days in Jordan and received him in my home there twice. I read most of his works and translated two of his novels.

What was the basis of your choice of the two novels you translated?

I was particularly attracted to his novel "Imaginary Life" because it tells us about Ophaed, the Roman poet who was exiled by the emperor outside the Roman borders to where present-day Romania is. They spoke Latin there in addition to there local dialect. Ophid, the great poet and the author of "Metamorphosis" had to devise new terminology for everything around him. I found similarities between the state of Ophid and my personal state in exile.

I also translated his play "A Child's Play" and I gave the Arabic version the title "The Terrorist". It is a play about Italy where the author spends half of his time. I translated it because I consider it a fine example of the art of narration. It also sympathizes with movements of change in society. It is almost a story about the Red

Brigades, but you feel a lot of support for David Malouf who arrived there and took the side of those who wanted to change things.

You contributed a lot by your translations from English to Arabic. Do you have a particular agenda and how do you select what to translate?

You can consider my poetry translations as a small encyclopaedia of international poetry, printed in three large volumes over some years. It is somehow a programmed matter because I wanted to open some windows on the world. A more deliberate act could be my translations of African novels. This feat has been neglected despite the similarities between African and Arab societies particularly after independence.

Can you specify the most important problems associated with translations and what makes a translation a good one?

The most important aspect of translation is to have a command of your own mother tongue. It is important to know the translated language well, but knowledge of the target language is vital for expressing the text in the spirit of that language, otherwise it will appear weak and unreadable. The responsibility of the translator is associated with faithfulness to the original text and its impact. For example, "An Imaginary Life" is a holy book in Australian literary culture. When I translated it into Arabic I had to keep in mind both the content and the style, expressing all of this in an Arabic compatible with the grandeur of the original. On the other hand, when I translated Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass", I had to add vigour to Whitman's language which was very simple and lacking in surprise. This was necessary to cater for Arabic readership.

Many a critic mentioned that you have given a lot of your poetic spirit to your translations. How do you view this and is this a betrayal of the original text?

I only translate what I select and love. I don't translate by commission. When a relationship between a certain text and me develops, I translate. It is a slow-developing relationship that ferments for a considerable time. When I translate, I am in love with the text and I give it part of myself, but complete faithfulness to the original should be maintained and this is what you find if you compare my translations to the original. The real test of good translations is that when you are reading them you feel the language flowing as smoothly as the original.

You are proficient in English and many of your works have been translated into English. What is your opinion of those translations?

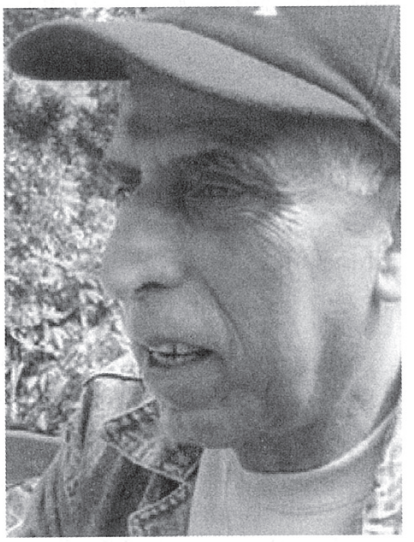
They are good translations, the last of which in USA, published by Graywolf Press, Minnesota, in a large volume. The translation won the PEN prize for translations.

What are your latest translation projects?

(He laughs)
I am now translating for myself. I am translating my novel "The Circle's Triangle" into English.

I am also preparing for translating a third novel by David Malouf, "Conversation in Curlew Creek". It is a strange story of a convict condemned to death and a dialogue between him and the officer that was sent to execute him. They both discover that they were of Irish origins and an interesting conversation about Ireland reveals a richness of history. The convict requests to take a bath to become pure before meeting his creator. He is allowed to go and bathe in a nearby inlet, but disappears suddenly. Malouf's myth in this story is that Australia has an internal sea where all rebels live in their own city.

Selected Poems



The following are samples of Yousef's poetry, translated by Raghid Nahhas.

Longing is my Enemy!

You and I have been together for thirty years.
We meet like two thieves unaware of
all the details of this journey we embark on;
train carriages reduce in number as
they pass one station after another
and the light grows dimmer, but
your timbre seat occupying all trains

stays put, carrying the furrows of many years,
preserving chalk drawings and cameras
their names no one remembers anymore, and faces
and the trees that now sleep beneath the soil...
I glanced at you for a fleeting moment then
I ran panting towards the seats in the back carriages,
running away from you...

I said: it's a long way;
and took bread and a piece of cheese out of my hessian bag...
Then I saw you
sharing my bread and cheese!
How on earth did you end up with me?
How did you swoop down on me as a hawk would?
Listen: I have not crossed tens of thousands of miles
and roamed tens of cities
and frequented thousands of branches
so that you rob me... of my treasure
and confine me to a corner!
Leave this seat now, and disembark!
My train will take me faster after this station;
Disembark
and let me go to where
no train shall ever stop again...

Difficult Variations

Peace be upon the hills of Iraq
and its two coasts, and the cliff, and the slope
Peace be upon the palms...
The English village is easily dragging its clouds now
as the evening approaches
It is warming up, like a cat, in its sleep and
preventing nightmares from reaching trees sunk by lakes

Kalimat 23

The evening arrives slowly
and orderly (it shall count its seconds once)
Are you going to close your eyes?
The lofty walnut tree rises off the window
at the end of this passageway...
The evening arrives slowly
and crawls to lull your eyelids:
Can you see the impossible palm leaf?
Peace be upon the hills of Iraq
and its two coasts, and the cliff, and the slope...
Did I know that my face, after you, is the roads?
I left closed doors and a house for the wind behind
Your green waters did not attract me.
You left me behind in the desert's castle.
What should I hope you do this evening?
You abandoned me in the morning and entered the barracks.
You said: 'War is more beautiful.'
You shall not see my feet after today.
I am the street and the tavern singer,
I am the blind poet.
From the sullen autumn I bring music for every colour
and freshness of the roses from the sight of sunset.
And I ask about you
Ask about you
My question is akin to the stung asking
what happened to his blood.
Peace... I don't want you to reply...
Save your greetings for the dripping water!
And peace be upon the hills of Iraq...
Upon the feast's sacrifice and upon
Baghdad during the feast;
its cafés serving bitter tea,
and its hotels hosting faraway inhabitants.
The prayer is called for
The soup plates have some bone stock
and stock from a lizard's meat...

The mosques have been trespassed
their doors opened for soldiers, infantry and marines
and for flying angels...
.....
.....
.....
Peace be upon...

The Voice of the Sea

Oh muted voice of the sea
a whispering, a hissing,
turquoise weeds and
songs of a blind sailor.
You are my last moan of fever,
my gate to peace
a palm-leave mat woven by
a child's hand in the night
Oh feathers and turtles
The start of a journey at a woman's earrings
A light flickering in evergreen trees, east of China
Oh my tired voice!
Oh muted voice of the sea!
Has creation missed us, so we wait for creation?
.....
.....
.....
Oh calm voice of the sea
A voice I hear creeps through the hut's reeds
baskets full of leaping fish and weeds...
and I hear it loud and clear,
like a swelter dangling from a roof of grapes
I say:
How come we can hear you now?
Have you got sick of the shape of the shell?

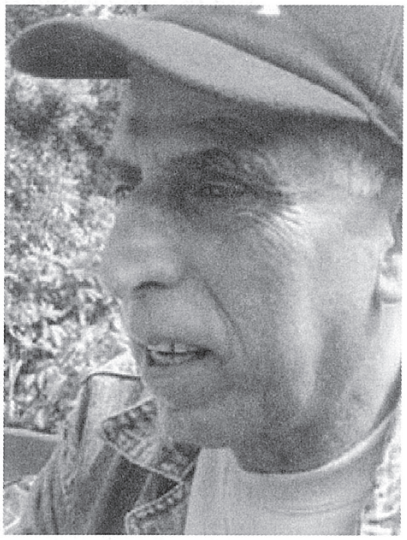
The sea is an ocean...
But the voice from the shell has returned to the shell!
We shall now search for another land
for a louder voice
Oh calm voice of the sea...
.....
.....
.....
Oh present voice of the sea
Oh roaring voice of the sea
You rise from the bottom of the abyss
to the crown of the horizon
Oh roaring voice of the sea
let the shirts fly with the wind
joined fists and banners fly with the wind
let the braids of our beloved and those who loved
fly with the wind
fly with the roaring voice
higher than this world
higher even than the source of sight
Oh roaring voice of the sea!

Hamlet's Balcony

1

'Denmark is a jail...'
Dying in the sight of your father is
your only elevation to life
The night's citadel has shut
Is this the shell of doomsday?
Shades have covered the steps...
Horatio shall say:
Easy, Oh prince!

The night is deeper than our fears,
and more dangerous than yesterday's battles…
You know what was not known to
the ancients and the wise sailors
you hardened your self
and sought refuge in it
but darkness is forever…
Embarrassed, Marcellus shall say:
Easy, Oh prince!
Was it not you who said: 'Denmark is a jail'?
What do you expect from continuing to ascend?
Who, I wonder, shall you meet?
Your father?
We have already seen him,
and he was armed…
It is midnight
and this marine citadel has collided with its shore
and Hamlet
is ascending the ladder…



2

Rosencrantz was standing here:
It wasn't a balcony (familiar to people, or as in the books):
The sea is an abyss
And it was a balcony overlooking the abyss
But Rosencrantz could see it as if he was looking at the isthmus
(point zero between life and the corner's hypostasis)
Rosencrantz was watching what the sea was spitting out
broken spears and ships,
sailors and captains arriving here
and leaving by dawn or during the nights of wild storms.
Oh Rosencrantz!
you make a theatre out of any inquisitive matter
(and let it be as simple as you wish it to seem)
but today, you are under scrutiny my friend:

Hamlet's ship has set anchor
Now...
And the play hasn't started yet
.....
.....
.....
The play hasn't started yet
Reveal the secret Rosencrantz:
Would it then be finished?

3

I am now at the watchtower:
The wind enters the sea
and the see enters the wind
The horizon becomes salt
Even the ships seem disturbed in the grim harbour
The morning I am hoping for is not in Denmark...
The evening shall come
and as the night falls, the awl's hooting shall be
wilder than the trench of the citadel
and tonight: the royal party...
.....
.....
.....
let me celebrate:
thou shall be or thou shall not
then madness shall come.

Khalid al-Hilli is a writer, journalist and poet of Iraqi origins. He is an adviser to *Kalimat* who lives in Melbourne, Australia.

EILEEN MARSHALL

The Doors of my Perception

I have always had trouble reconciling my tendency to be rational and my equally strong habit of experiencing things in a decidedly non-rational way. I am no closer to doing so. You see I don't know which is the 'real' experience, the one that comes through my logic and senses or the one that 'happens' intuitively, like a form of extra sensory perception.

The earliest experience I can remember of this kind was in first year high school. I was so overwhelmed by the enigma of -X multiplied by -Y equalling +Z, that my hand shot up when the teacher asked if anyone had a question. She didn't mean the sort of question I asked, I couldn't believe what she was telling me could possibly be true. How could two minuses make a plus? If you multiply two things that are less than nothing how could you get something? She thought me stupid and I was quite discouraged even though I was quite good at Algebra. Then some years later when I was in a half sleep, suddenly two minus signs seem to hover in the air in front of my eyes and regrouped to become a plus. Sounds quite crazy but I *knew* at last that minus times minus makes plus.

The next experience I remember, that, for want of a better word I'll call mystical. Our house was a small weatherboard on a large block that Dad farmed with all the skill and dedication of the grower of fruit and grapes in the Barossa, he once was. We had two goats - one called Snow White, chooks and bantams, a garden full of vegetables, a cubbyhouse to make believe in, beside a large gum tree to climb. A world in itself, a small paradise of fecundity and freedom. I could and did run wild with bare feet through the backyard and into the vacant lot next door.

We lived in an outer suburb of Sydney; the atmosphere was not blurred with the haze of vehicles. You could see the heavens; you could see the stars - an experience that most people in our pollution-racked cities seldom have now. They may have it when they go to the country on holiday and forget about television and, like the

ancients, watch the night sky. We all did this more often once, I think it stretched our cramped psyches. Looking up at the vastness of unbounded space somehow perversely makes me feel less ephemeral.

It was an extremely hot summer that year. We'd often lie on the lawn under the night sky to enjoy the cool air that gathers above green things, even after the hottest day. The air was vibrating with the sound of cicadas and crickets, the occasional bleat from our goats, the tissue paper rustling of leaves in the slight breeze. The sickly sweet perfume from a gardenia near the back door triggered a delirium in my sense of smell. The perfume of gardenias and magnolias always creates an expectation that something alluring is about to happen. That night, it did.

I lay on my back on the grass staring up at the navy blue expanse and the intense silver flicks of light and the occasional shining flash when a comet fell. I forget what led up to the experience, all I know is, that night I felt a great happiness that seemed to open my heart and expand my mind. For a brief instant I was in the sky and the stars; I was moving through the deep blue, I felt I was dancing. I suppose people would call it an out of body experience, but that's not what I'd call it, I felt very much in my body, but I was up there.

The next significant experience happened when I was a second year student. I had gone from a quasi atheism in high school to a passionately devout Anglo-Catholicism. I was even contemplating taking the veil! I was totally in thrall, I found it hard to do anything but pray to God and meditate. Everything else, reading, studying and even eating – became a tiresome chore. I began to have optical illusions, one that I haven't had since - the ground slanted downwards and I thought I would slide into a great chasm. Another illusion was to recur in my life. My face, when I looked in the mirror, had a preternatural beauty – not an earthly beauty of flesh and bones but an angelic one. My face glowed back at me. I must have presented as a rabid narcissist, I suppose I was one: I nearly wore the surface off a mirror.

Of course this didn't last. I fell into a deep melancholy that I wrote about in crude adolescent poems. I spoke of the voices of the rain crying with me, sick with weeping; then even that much connection with the world ceased. I was totally alone in sepulchral gloom with death's hand in my hand.

Mine is a soul sick unto death, but a soul too sick to die..... I walk where there is no God ... Amongst leering painted spectres where only the mad have trod.

Pretty morbid stuff of a religion and death infatuated adolescent, who was found to be anaemic and generally undernourished, but there was a kernel of reality in it all - the abandonment that some of us feel who don't have a strong belief in God and

desperately want one to make the pointless universe bearable. Alone with their terror some turn to ersatz gods, others to the soporifics of food, alcohol, sex, drugs or knowledge.

I left university, recovered my physical health, God had vanished; all I had now was from my senses and reason. I returned to university the next year, an atheist fortified by a smug materialism but not contented by it - I have always naturally been drawn to the numinous, the possibility that there is more beneath the surface of things attracts me, almost unbearably. But for an operational position in the world, atheism was hard to beat. Religious ecstasy had been, in my case, religious mania.

During this time another enigma obsessed me. I felt that my Self was eternal. I still do. This did not marry with atheism but it refused to go away. Some words I wrote in an exercise book, with a few other gleanings of those days, still have meaning for me *When I die I will not be alone because I will take myself with me.* When my husband almost died a few years ago, I completed my riddle: *Where will you be then my love, where will you be?* This conviction of the permanence of the self does not include anyone else; it is a rather hollow thought, that I will be moving around in a universe alone, trying perhaps to dodge black holes?

There have been a number of other experiences of note. One that challenged the certainty of my belief in atheism happened on the occasion of my mother's death. The last time I saw her alive she was sitting up in a hospital bed, her sweet cheeky little face brimming over with life and interest; she was entertaining the staff with her insouciant patter. I saw her a few days later - she was a tiny limp wax doll lying in a coffin. As I stared down at the travesty of the person I loved, I had the overwhelming conviction that she had simply kicked away her worn- out body and danced off somewhere. I couldn't justify my conviction, intellectually it seemed silly wish fulfilment, but it was powerful and I have it to this day.

Where she'd gone I didn't know, so it didn't comfort me in the least. Either way, she was and is no longer available to me.

I had changed in a few hours from an adamant atheist to an embarrassed agnostic. I've always hated fence sitters but that's where I am, still sitting on the fence between a belief and disbelief.

In my youth I had imbibed the wisdom current at the time that only humans had a soul and that only humans anticipated death or suffered psychologically from this knowledge. I was conventionally kind to fellow creatures and had become a semi vegetarian when I was given a parcel of meat. It was from the carcass of a billygoat I had seen charging around the paddock of a hobby farm. The goat tasted like the raw

animal when I put it in my mouth and forced me to think of it being killed for me to eat. I developed a generalised aversion for animal flesh.

When we moved to a small property in the country I had another gleam of insight about other living beings, that changed my attitude even further.

I had experienced great elevation of mood when we moved there as I daily watched creatures going about their lives. A vast panorama was laid out for me to enjoy: an echidna with its silly spines poking out of its body and its even sillier pointed burrowing snout had me transfixed as I watched it nosing its way into the dirt. A plump lizard on a hollow log with the upper part of its body erect like some haughty orator, the kookaburra who sat each morning on a post chortling its scorn at me, the newly-made nature lover.

Oh yes nature was so beautiful and nature was to be enjoyed - at a distance. Nature did not include me.

Then as the weeks passed, a drought set in. Two horses on an adjacent property were literally starving; the paddock was devoid of grass; their owners had abandoned them like unwanted household appliances. It took weeks for the RSPCA to catch up with the backlog of cruelty cases in the worst drought the region had had for many years. Daily I'd crawl under the barbed wire fence and spread out all the cabbage leaves, the old fruit, the vegetables, bread, hay, whatever we could find. For a couple of hours each day the poor creatures could ease their hunger and their anguish. I believe the anguish at being discarded by their owner was as terrible for them as the hunger - they knew they were doomed.

I'd look out from our verandah and see their ghostly grey-white faces looking towards us, their eyes sick with despair and a kind of desperate hope. Their faces smote my heart - no animal or even human face has so affected me. For me, they were symbols of all the suffering and despair that creatures, animal and human, have ever had to endure.

They seemed to bend their heads with shame at what they had become. I felt the pain of their abandonment; I shared their shame.

I don't care if you say I'm being anthropomorphic, an unforgivable sin once if you studied behavioural psychology. That's obviously what the doctor who treated me for a severe rash that suddenly arose on my upper body, thought. He asked me if I had been undergoing any stress. I told him about the horses. To him it was a huge joke and he suggested I give them scones and jam and cream. I almost hit him; instead I scowled and told him his humour was in bad taste. We didn't part friends.

Recently I was reading a section from *The book of nothing,* about the Indian

discovery of the counting system and the zero, just as a background to something I was writing. As I read the chapter on the Indian discovery of the zero I became ecstatic, a line of a sixth-century Hindu poem *'the stars shone forth ... Like zero dots ... scattered in the sky'* kept on repeating and repeating in my head.

One night when I was lying in bed in the dark I again started walking through the sky; the stars were like tiny stepping stones. It was as though I was the Indian who saw the tiny silver dots in the midnight blue sky, and created a system. The zero dot, the bindu, the zero signifying the infinitesimal amount, the nothing, from which everything could flow. I couldn't understand it intellectually any more than I had understood minus multiplication, but this time I felt its truth at some deep level that gave me an immense joy. It jolted the memory of my twelve-year-old self lying on the lawn under the stars, fully into my consciousness.

I now believe some things are beyond logic, or at least beyond my logic.

The Greeks with their dedication to logic could not have countenanced a zero, a symbol of nothing - non-being as something, was an anathema to their system of thought. The Hindus and the Buddhists actively sought a state of non-being to achieve Nirvana: - oneness with the universe.

That's what I had felt, for an instant.

My very early experience of religious ecstasy and despair was very much like the Medieval Christian saints' experience of Heaven and Hell. My excitation about the zero was triggered by the Hindu poem – I was experiencing the universe through Hindu eyes. Is all of this second hand colouration from what I have currently in my mind. Do different cultures have different experiences of the same aspect? Do I have at times a window to another world, or am I just seeing through a glass with the distorting flaw of a socio-cultural frame of reference?

Once when I was in an aeroplane I was reading about the Zoroastrian vision of God as light. An intense ray from the dawning sun shone through the glass and fragmented into brilliance. At the time I was in a reasonably ordinary state of mind but I momentarily could visualise God as light almost to the point of belief, then the impression fell away into normal sensory experience.

I am no nearer certainty about the meaning of existence and of these non-rational occurrences. That my experiences may be based upon some chemical reaction in my brain somehow or another reduces their authority. The experience of Aldous Huxley after he took Mescalin was akin to the experience of the mystic, and probably psychotic, poet/artist Blake. Were their doors of perception cleansed, so that they could see everything as infinite or did the mind-altering drug, or in Blake's case

naturally occurring chemicals, merely create illusion?

Perhaps I will never know what my own experiences mean. I would like to.

The following works are quoted in the text:

1. *The doors of perception* by Aldous Huxley.
2. *The book of nothing* by John D Barrow.

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

L. E. SCOTT

FROM SLAVE SONGS TO HIP HOP

Thirty years ago when hip hop music busted out of the Black American ghettos of the United States of America, there were many who believed that this form of Black American music would not last. This new music was alight and it was burning across the United States from coast to coast. White America's reaction to this new Black music was that it was violent and destructive in form and manner. Young Black rappers saw it very differently. For them it was a fire with which to fight racism and the daily brutality, both physical and psychological, that Black Americans have to endure every living moment in the U.S.A.

The development of Black music in America reflects the history of African American society. Like any aspect of society, music is both cause and effect; it is both a product and producer of the society of which it is a part.

Negro Rituals

The society that created "negro spirituals" was made up of slaves, most of whom felt that they had but one hope – God. During slavery, Black folks embraced the white man's concept of God and they believed that one day he would walk beside them and lead them out of the hell they were living in. Although the white man used God and religion to control and manipulate slaves, the image of God nevertheless became the power that gave Black people the strength to endure the hardship of slavery. Even today, Black Americans are probably the most God-fearing people in America (and that includes the new generation of "born again" Christians).

So, from people who were waiting for Judgement Day came their expression of faith and hope, in the form of spirituals or gospel music. In their spirituals the slaves

personalised God and the devil; but more importantly their music was a way of expressing the suffering they had to endure:

Nobody knows the trouble I see,
Nobody knows like Jesus,
Nobody knows the trouble I see,
O yes, Lord.

The spiritual "Great Day" echoes the slaves' thoughts on the coming emancipation:

Great Day
Great Day and the righteous marchin'
Great Day
One of these days and it won't be long
You'll look for me and I'll be gone ...

The "Great Day" that was anticipated after the Civil War did eventuate in part. The chains were removed but blackness of skin became the new shackles. Though the Judgement Day the slaves sang about still seems many Black lifetimes away, the life-saving powers of this music had a far reaching effect on Black people in slavery. Conditions in which spirituals were created have changed, but the music is still very much a part of Black life and on any given day, the sweet, powerful voice of the late Mahalia Jackson can still bring an 'Amen' from deep within the soul.

The Blues

Up until recently, the blues has been almost a natural part of Black folks' lives. It is music that expresses a mood, defines a situation; it depicts life. The world of blues is a world of trouble. Writing about the blues is rather like walking through an old southern segregated graveyard, long overgrown with grass, searching for epitaphs of those long since passed.

For many years, the blues lived only in the minds, mouths and fingers of those who performed it. It was seldom written down until a trumpet player named W. G. Handy collected some of the most popular tunes and published them under the titles that became world famous: St Louis Blues, Memphis, Beale Street Blues, and Yellow Dog Blues.

There have been many great blues performers. In the early days the most

influential were Leadbelly, Ma Rainey, Robert Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Bessie Smith. The tradition was carried on by such singers as Muddy Waters, Memphis Slim, John Lee Hooker, Joe Turner and BB King. It has been said that had Mahalia Jackson chosen blues instead of gospel, she would have no doubt been one of the greatest blues singers to come along.

The culture and conditions from which the blues came have dramatically changed since the twenties and thirties when rural blues reached its greatest height. In those days the blues singer was, in effect, a community spokesman.

The date of the origin of blues is uncertain, but research by Paul Oliver and Duke Ellington shows that somewhere between 1890 and 1895 blues were being sung in Mississippi. From 1865 to the 1900's, "Jim Crow" segregation was legislated and institutionalised until it pervaded every inch of the United States of America. Lynchings became a part of Black America's daily reality, reaching a peak in the last two decades of the 19th century, when over 160 Black men, women and children were lynched yearly. It was against this background of suppression and the American Dream that blues originated:

Did you ever wake up with the blues
and you didn't have no place to go
and you couldn't do nothin' but
walk from door to door?

The early phase of the blues mirrored Black society, but it did not change as Black society began the slow walk from the back yard to the front yard, with an eye on the front door.

The emphasis in early blues was not on changing life's circumstances, but trying to live with them. Blues depicts what life is, rather than what it could or should be. Up until the end of World War One, blues reflected much of the general feeling of Black people and how they viewed themselves in American society – a world of trouble.

But then Black soldiers began returning from Europe at the end of World War One; a powerful new feeling took shape in America as the Black man demanded his right to be treated as a first class citizen. With this new step, blues – as a reflection of the Black society out of which it grew – began to fade out of everyday Black life.

As a music form, blues will never be totally lost, because many of its elements became a part of the music that followed it. And it was also reinterpreted by Black singers such as BB King and Bobby Bland, who sing of the hardships between man and woman:

Have you ever been mistreated,
Then you know what I'm talking about,
I worked five long years for one woman,
Then she had the nerve to put me out.

Ragtime

Blues was the basis of the new kinds of Black music that surfaced after World War One. Ragtime is a bawdy music that originated in Missouri and jazz is a music of protest that seems to have originated in New Orleans. A not-so-well-known ragtime musician and composer was Scott Joplin.

Though jazz had been on the scene before the 1900's, it was only when attitudes of Black society changed that it became a part of everyday life. It started out in most cases as "fast music" and the people who played it lived fast and died young. It was music that told of Black life in America differently from "negro spirituals" and blues, though both those forms are embedded in it. Jazz is not a prayer for freedom, nor a cry of despair. Rather, it is a statement of protest about the conditions of Black life.

In its rawest form, jazz tells the wretched of the earth that Judgement Day is at hand. As Frantz Fanon said, 'I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with a desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found I was an object in the midst of other objects. And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me. It is not out of my bad nigger's misery, my bad nigger's teeth, my bad nigger's hunger that I will shape a torch with which to burn down the world, but it is the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history.'

In his autobiography, "Music is my Mistress", Duke Ellington explains the development of jazz and its roots in this way: 'The name jazz was given to a new kind of music that was being played around the turn of the century. Much of its development, in fact, came through the playing of small Black bands in the street parades, especially at Mardi Gras time: the instruments commonly in use being the cornet (or trumpet), trombone, clarinet, bass and drums. These bands were accompanied by what was known as the second line; a group of supporters who danced attendance on them before, behind and on the sidewalks alongside. It was an animated music with a strong African beat pulse beneath what sounded like a caricature of a military band. Many fine musicians came out of New Orleans, some of

the most famous being "King" Joe Oliver and his protégés Louis Armstrong, Jimmie Noone, Sidney Bechet and Jelly Roll Morton.'

One of the greatest forces behind the development of jazz was Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong. He was the first great jazz innovator. Through his efforts, jazz became a lady. Later, Duke Ellington, who was to become a major composer and innovator of orchestral jazz, not only made jazz a sophisticated lady, but he also took her into the church. When white musicians learned to imitate the sound, she became a respectable lady who quit her job in the "whorehouse" and is now being played in the White House.

The jazz musicians who followed Louis Armstrong's generation were not only to confront America with their music of protest, but with their lifestyle as well. Among them were Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Steve McCall, Cannonball Adderley and countless others.

Rhythm 'n' Blues

White people got very excited about the new music that came to be in the 1950's and they chose to call it rock 'n' roll. But for Black folks, it was the beginning of soul. Although Elvis Presley came to be considered "King" of rock 'n' roll among white followers, he could never be forgiven by Black folk for stealing his music and songs from Black singers such as "Big Boy" Grudup, and Big Mama Thornton without any kind of acknowledgement.

Soul music is an outgrowth of rhythm 'n' blues, which is itself a mixture of "negro spirituals" and blues. Up until the 1950's, spirituals had been kept separate from other music forms since Black people respected their traditions and religious overtones. In time however, rhythm 'n' blues singers such as Little Richard, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry and Ray Charles began to mix the two forms. In 1954 the spiritual "My Jesus is All the World to Me" became Ray Charles' "I Got a Woman". The following year, Clara Ward's old spiritual "This Little Light of Mine" was changed by Ray Charles to refer to his lady.

At first soul music did not really have any social or political value for Black people. It was light music for dancing and partying. But in the 1960's, soul music came into its own and expressed the social consciousness message of the Black protest movement. James Brown stopped recording bouncy soul music and began to spread the word – "I'm Black and I'm Proud!" Curtis Mayfield's "We're a Winner" and "Keep

on Pushing" were considered by many white radio stations to be too political and for a few years his music was banned.

By the time the fires of the 1960's had burned out, soul had reached a new high– "Soul to Soul", or as Stevie Wonder said, "Spiritual Soul".

Hip Hop

As stated in the opening of this essay, when hip hop broke out of the Black ghettos thirty years ago, few believed it had a long life span. And as previously noted, African American music has never been unrelated to the Black American experience in the United States of America.

The Black American civil rights struggle of the 1960's changed the landscape of the United States with a certain level of "progress". Middle-class Black America could now escape the ghettos and live in different parts of American cities. What was left in the ghettos were Blacks who had no means of escaping. In some cases, Blacks "left" in the ghettos felt betrayed by both white America and middle-class Black America.

It was out of that disillusion that the so-called "Black under-class" that was left in America's ghettos gave birth to hip hop. These young Black men and women felt they had nothing and that nobody cared about them. What they did have and what they created was music; a new kind of Black music that spoke of despair, the daily police brutality, lack of jobs, lack of education, lack of a better tomorrow, lack of respect. This music was hot and "in your face, motherfucker". These young Black artists knew that for them the American Dream was a cesspool. What their music was about was an uncompromising confrontation with the corrupted white American nightmare.

In his review of the 30 years of hip hop in *Ebony* magazine, Kevin Chappell writes: 'Last year (2004), hip hop came full circle, as the music once cast aside as mere noise, earned the country's highest honour with hip hop duo *Outkast* garnering a Grammy for album of the year, the first hip hop album to win the award. Hip Hop advocates say the music creates self-pride, self-help and self-improvement among Blacks, a message that is largely absent from other American institutions. Many hip hop enthusiasts assert that the music accurately portrays life in inner-city America, serving as a voice for a community without access to mainstream media. Critics, however, say much of the music and culture glorifies misogyny (hatred of women).'

Whichever side you take in regard to what hip hop is or isn't, what cannot be

denied is that as with all the forms of African American music, it has had a profound effect on the world. This is particularly true in regard to the youth of the world, but beyond that, hip hop has become part of human life, from the "'hood" to the corporate world to the streets of Cuba.

The Changing Massage of Hip Hop

When hip hop music exploded out of the Black ghettos, its core was mainly political. It was preaching revolution – "by any means necessary" as Malcolm X said.

So what happened to the message in hip hop? Very simply, corporate America polluted the message with money! When hip hop artists signed contracts with big recording companies, they lost control of their music. Another cotton field to be picked!

But it is returning home. In the last few years a growing number of young hip hop artists have been signing up to small record companies. They know they will not make a huge sum of money – but they also know what they are about and it cannot be defined by Wall Street.

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.

PAUL MADILL

An Anniversary

I had house-guests on the day, eleven years ago, that my little Subaru broke down on me – colleagues who had come a fair distance to speak at a seminar. I was nervous because our little hospital had never hosted such an event. We were about halfway there when the engine cut out, and I had to drift to an embarrassed and emphatically final halt at the roadside. It wasn't the sort of place where you could just leave a car, so I stayed with it. I didn't have breakdown cover, and wasn't at all sure that I could afford to get it fixed. They were loath to leave me in the heavy rain, but my decisive and sensible flatmate, who was facilitating the seminar, flagged a taxi, and took the others with her. I stood in front of the bonnet, peering at the engine with what I hoped was an air of intelligent enquiry.

Within seconds, four unshaven but impeccably dressed youths emerged from the comfort of a café, chatting away in the impenetrable argot of their generation. In the time it took them to offer to help they were drenched through. I hesitated, but given that they couldn't get any wetter now and that they knew where the nearest garage was, I accepted gratefully. They grinned at me and started to push the car, waving me aside and telling me to follow. Off they went and I raised my game to a trot in order to keep up.

About one mile (and no more than 8 minutes) later, we got to a garage. At this point their enthusiasm got the better of them and they ran the car into the upright of the workshop entrance. Apologies ensued, but it would be easily fixed, and we all had a nervous little laugh. Handshakes all round and off they went, fists in pockets, shoulders hunched uselessly against the rivers of water now sluicing down their necks. No money changed hands. The garage owner brewed coffee, and listened to my sorry tale. His eyes lit up when I told him where I worked. His wife had been very ill and had been treated in the intensive care unit there. He dropped all his other jobs and set to work on mine. He refused to charge me for labour, and unconvincingly denied undercharging me for parts. Within the hour I was mobile again, and I got to the hospital before things were fully under way.

The seminar was a great success. The old car ran for months without breaking down. I am now happily married to my former flatmate. But as for the young lads who had helped me, and the garage owner, I doubt things have gone so well.

You see all this happened in 1994 in Gaza City in Palestine. The youths and the garage owner, all Muslim, were helping to facilitate a seminar at a Christian-run hospital in that ancient, benighted city. The easy charity which they bestowed on me was quite unremarkable in that place at that time, where foreigners were feted, invited into people's houses and 'force-fed' tomatoes, olives, cucumber, bread, yoghurt, chicken and fruits by the basket-load.

Hope was an unquenchable part of the local psyche. When I sat in Palestinian houses a decade ago, people laughed and joked, and asked incessant, curious questions about life in the West. They were also conspicuously well-informed about, for example, the devolution debate in the United Kingdom. They told guarded, earthy jokes about their leaders, interspersed with heart-wrenching stories of occupation, and matter-of-fact accounts of the loss of beautiful children. But they knew who they were and what was important.

The fasting Muslim festival of Ramadan, viewed with incredulity by self-indulgent capitalist nations is actually a time of jubilant celebration there, where penniless children are wrapped in love and in beautiful homemade clothes. The streets come alive each night after the fast-breaking meal, Shops doors are thrown open, funfairs appear as if from nowhere, and street vendors do a roaring trade in hot snacks. Old people look on indulgently as their children and grandchildren frolic in the streets. Nowhere in the world are the old and the very young loved and respected more.

In the face of the vicious nihilism of Qa'ida and their ilk, and despite the wilful ignorance and over-reaction of the West, I will always remember that it was in a Muslim and Arab country that I spent two of the happiest years of my life. It's not that I forget the innocent youth, shot six times by an Israeli sniper, who I accompanied in an ambulance to a hospital in Jerusalem (it took me 20 minutes to talk us through the checkpoint). Nor the frequent raids on the hospital by Israeli soldiers, or the senseless torture and murder of a colleague by Islamist zealots.

It's just that such negatives are overwhelmed by the positive humanity I encountered. I felt safer (from crime, at least) than at any other time of my life, and rarely felt awkward or unwelcome. When I now read in our press stories of child neglect, or obscene salaries for the big end of town, or elderly relatives being exploited, I remember the sense of community, generosity of spirit and indomitable

courage of the Palestinians I lived and worked with in Gaza. How many foreigners of different ethnicity, culture and religion could report such a positive, life-affirming experience from a stay in New York, London or for that matter, Sydney?

Gaza will remain with me forever. Not only did it introduce me to my wonderful wife, but it has been an inspiration which has changed my life and my view of the world. And though the memories make it hard to take the news that I now watch with reluctant obsession, I still have hope. And I got it from the cheeky, indomitable, exasperating, fun-loving street urchins of Gaza City.

Paul Madill is a Scot-Australian who has worked in a diverse range of occupations in Scotland, Germany, England, Palestine and New South Wales. Last year, he took up writing for the first time since his pastiche of "Under Milk Wood" made the school magazine in 1977, and he has had a number of short stories published. You can find other examples of his work at www.skivemagazine.com and at www.antisf.com

CECILE YAZBEK SCHOLTZ

My Lebanese Past

In 2001, at lunch overlooking the heads in Sydney harbour, from Mosman, with my friend Emmy, her mother-in-law suddenly looked across at me and said, 'I knew Yazbeks when I was at school in Kroonstad, in South Africa. Susan Yazbek served me in the shop selling sweets: Tickey liquorice – that was for rich people. One penny bought a handful of gobstoppers, a farthing for a bag of sugar balls.'

Life in Kroonstad at that time: my friend Emmy's mother-in-law fills me in somewhat, but not really. She was from the other side of the tracks, an Anglo woman, white enough among that mixture of colours and circumstances. Where was my grandmother's house and shop? All demolished now. Was it a socially acceptable area? Or did they live, like the Lithuanian Jews who fled Russian pogroms and went to South Africa at about the same time, on the fringes of towns, other side railway tracks among people of questionable origins – people who spoke broken English, ate strange smelling food and wore unmistakably European hats and coats? My father once told me that there were Jews called Smulovitz who lived nearby. Before my next question he launched himself into song, a mournful Yiddish tune 'Ai yai yai yai, Smoooolovitz.'

There is something sad about their own reactions to hardship. It seems that while they helped one another up to a point, many were left to cope on their own. I wonder why, in an extended family situation, my father and his sisters, when their father died, ended up in the Nazareth House orphanage.

I viewed that pristine Sydney environment, sparkling sea, yachts bobbing and ferries tripping across the water and tried to imagine the dry Orange Free State in the 1920's; my father and his sisters just out after years in the orphanage.

Most of my varied sources in the family cannot agree on too many of the facts: memory blurred by desire and denial? A hard question to ask yet I want to come straight out with it. What was life like? You left Lebanon for the greater opportunities in the New World, but instead, found yourselves displaced, regarded as racially inferior, forced to live on the wrong side of the tracks.

They tell me in various ways, some even angrily: 'You have the answer already. We suffered, we struggled, we made it. We produced lawyers, doctors, teachers. Why go back there now?' Because displacement, racial prejudice and struggle are as much part of people's experience today as then. As educated and successful people, we locate that in others but it is part of our lives in our undisclosed histories. For myself, I still listen carefully to the way in which a stranger will ask me where I come from. Whether they allude in a friendly way to my accent, or is the question loaded with an assertion of my difference or otherness? Now it is my privilege to speak about these things. Among my South African friends whose parents survived the holocaust in Europe, there is a silence that may not be broken by free inquiry. Only what is publicly known can be discussed. Personal reactions and feelings are mostly taboo. A migrant myself, in vastly different circumstances, there are fragments of their experience that feel familiar. There is an allure for me, exploring that time of first generation Lebanese people, short and dark, huddled together behind language and food, beside a culture that marginalized them. Their children, my parents reached out until by the time we children were born as the third generation, our cultural dissipation or assimilation, depending on which side of the gulf one stood, was almost complete. The food and vestiges of the language remained, but because of our looks the question continues to arise: 'Where are you from?' From this position and now living in Australia, when I meet first generation Lebanese migrants, I feel a moat of silence surrounding my grandparents' early days. They only spoke to me as their grandchild. I will never know what possessed them in those hours of separating from family; the ship weighing anchor; the months-long trip south along the east coast of Africa passing Port Said, Mombasa and then finally Beira.

In questioning my mother and her sister and in the earlier conversations with my grandmother, it was the gaps in the stories that were most audible to me: what they were trying to conceal or what were merely stifled fragments of memory. As we talked, a look, a glance sideways, a lowering of the eyes and I knew the narrator was in a detour from the story. I tried to access that and occasionally they delivered, but sometimes when called into the present, they professed no knowledge of what their inner eye had made contact with.

Among the old photographs, a sepia tint taken in 1915, a sleek and glossy nine-month old infant bright-eyed on a blanket: my father, Joseph. As a young child, he was silent, did not speak a word until he was four years old. He had medical check-ups but no cause could be found. Unlike my mother's younger brother who'd had to have the membrane under his tongue snipped to free it for speech, my father

appeared to be mute. His hearing was fine and he understood what was said to him.

The next photograph in which he appears is the pre-orphanage picture. It looks as though it was taken at their father's funeral. Middle sister, Victoria, looks like a gypsy, one that homeowners in earlier children's story books would have chased down winding lanes to protect their property. The lump in my throat dissolves. The shoes those five children wore, their skinny legs with rumpled socks. My father always told us, when we travelled in the countryside in South Africa to 'look at those children. They must be starving, they have such skinny legs.'

This Yazbek Family photograph was taken in 1935, in Kroonstad, South Africa.
Back: Elaine, Victor, Susie; Front: Victoria, Mother Florie (Faridie), Joseph, my father.

The day I opened the envelope from my 90 year-old Aunt Elaine, the eldest girl, it was as though the secret history of my successful and privileged family was suddenly exposed. I am haunted by the photograph of those five children. They stare from poverty into my heart, in my Australian sitting-room. I send 'God bless you's' retrospectively to them. I stroke the glass on the picture frame thanking them for their endurance and tenacity in the face of all that life showed them. It is indelibly part of my own and my children's past, contributing to making us the people we are.

My father Joseph Anthony Yazbek, BA LLB, mortar board, gown, academic hood with graduate ribbon, a studio portrait taken in 1937.

After hoping for a scholarship to study medicine, he won a place in Law at the University College of the Orange Free state in Bloemfontein, South Africa in 1932. There he was helped by the Lebanese community and worked at menial jobs like stringing tennis racquets in the days when animal gut was used. The gallery of photographs in our downstairs playroom when we were children bore testimony to my father's vivacity and determination during his five year university course. He was in the drama society, debating, playing hockey, tennis, rowing, boxing, a black and white minstrel strumming his banjo ukelele at every opportunity.

His BA major was geology. 'By jove, she was a beauty and I just wanted to look at her all the time,' he enthused fifty years later over his geology lecturer. But after graduation life threw up a challenge. Florie, his mother, was in congestive cardiac failure and needed to live at sea-level. He would have stayed in Bloemfontein under the patronage of Toefie Khalil, the lawyer to whom he'd been articled, but decided to care for his mother first.

A Lebanese community in East London beckoned. The Allams, Michaels and Sanans were all established there by the 1930's. While Durban or Port Elizabeth were bigger cities, with possibly more opportunity, the social environment was mostly English-speaking and the attitude at that time was not friendly. So my father, his mother and his youngest sister Susie went to live in East London.

In 1937 Hitler's emissaries toured smaller towns in South Africa lecturing the population on the dangers of Syrians in their midst, dark Arab people who would dilute the Aryan purity of the Afrikaner unless they were stopped. In Graaff Reinet where the Sakers and Shamleys lived, Joey Saker tells of hearing such a public speaker in the town square and going home to warn his family about 'those bladdy mad Nazis.'

In East London my father went around to the various law firms looking for a position as a professional assistant but he was hounded out of office after office, abused as a Dago or Arab by the most illustrious lawyers in town.

Deeply hurt, he borrowed five pounds from his brother Victor and hired a shabby room in a decrepit building on a corner of the main street, Oxford Street, to set up practice. He had an African assistant, Darlington, working for him.

At about this time my mother, Bertha Haddad worked briefly as a shop assistant at Ackermans then she went to do a secretarial course at the Tech. Before long, my father employed her and she entered Darlington's domain to be heckled and picked on for her typing errors. In fact he even took copies of her typing in to 'show the boss her mistakes.' (They eventually married in 1942).

My father was in contact with other Lebanese professionals, a lawyer in Butterworth, Transkei, Simon Mahoud, for example was as committed to anti-racism. They met and decided that the only way to fight prejudice against the Lebanese community was to facilitate the education of the next generation. Get people away from 'informal commercial ventures', such as illicit diamond buying, receiving stolen property, dealing in unlicensed liquor and cigarettes and gangsterism. Ghettoes of Lebanese in the Transvaal, a northern province, were destroying the good name of the community. As well, the government was threatening to re-classify Lebanese as Asians, thereby disbarring them from owning fixed property or trading in white areas and they would no longer be allowed to vote. So they formed the Lebanonian Association with a commitment to fostering a desire for university education among youth. Those who could, would lend money, others would speak publicly about it and encourage parents who might not have been educated, to assist their children as much as possible. In short they became mentors and sponsors to other Lebanese children as if they were their own. As well, they agitated against the ethnic labeling of people accused of or found guilty of crime. Their reasoning was that the society was composed of so many different groups, they did not want one set up against another. They won that battle and the press respected the resolution.

When the war broke out in 1939, Anglo citizens of Natal and the Eastern Cape rushed to enlist. My mother's brothers, Haddads, also went off voluntarily to be stationed in Egypt. Albert, the eldest and a doctor was a Captain in the medical corps. Mickey, the middle brother, also took rank and was a navigator in the desert. In later life, Mickey could travel anywhere in the world without having to ask anyone for directions, whether it was Taipei, Tokyo or Athens where he and his wife Moine (Saker) played bridge in the 1960 Olympic Games.

Joffe Saker, later to marry my mother's elder sister Phyllis, also fought up north. Other Lebanese, Africans, 'coloureds', Jews joined the war effort. An Afrikaner faction, among them, John Vorster, the prime minister who succeeded Hendrik Verwoerd as prime minister in the sixties, sided with Hitler and they were interned in camps with Germans and Italians who were regarded as enemy aliens.

My father felt left out. He wanted to be one of the men, a local person and no longer a foreigner. So he joined the queue for the 'medical'. He failed and was rejected because of poor eyesight. Disappointed he went to Port Elizabeth where he thought he might pass, as no one knew him there. He was rejected again. Disheartened, he went back to East London wondering where he belonged in the world. His pronounced Semitic features, large nose and olive skin, as well as his devout Catholicism weren't helping. In later years we joked about our looks and my father said of his nose, 'it is a desert nose and will always give trouble in town.'

Back in East London, he put his head down and worked at his practice. He lived at home with his mother and younger sister. The latter, my aunt Susie told of my father coming home from the office and weeping at some of the cases he had to deal with. 'He had such a soft heart, he wanted to help everybody.'

Soldiers going away to war, make wills. As more and more men were leaving East London and districts, lawyers too, they went to my father to draw up their wills as he was not going anywhere. By the time the war was over and the men were coming back, they came to see him, as he had their documents. His practice ballooned. His affable nature and expertise combined to make him the busiest professional for miles. He moved premises, expanding until he eventually bought a whole three storey building in the centre of town to house his business.

As it was, no Lebanese were to be allowed into the country after 1948, as the nationalist apartheid government decreed that we 'were not white enough.'

In the 1960's a ship docked in Durban harbour after sailing down the east coast of Africa. A Lebanese man who disembarked was sent back aboard and not allowed to remain overnight on land as 'he was too dark-skinned'.

Regrettably, my family's attitudes set us apart from some Lebanese people who seemed to have forgotten our struggles and supported the government in its racist policies.

Eventually, when the change came to South Africa in the 1990's it became, in Bishop Tutu's words, 'a rainbow nation' welcoming all peoples from everywhere.

1937 Yazbek Tea

This Photograph was taken in East London in 1937. Left to Right: Florie Yazbek, Susie Yazbek, Ha'nie Abdo, Joseph Yazbek, Phyllis and Bertha Haddad. My mother's mother, Isabel Haddad was probably on Bertha's right. Florie asked Isabel whether Joseph could marry Phyllis but he 'preferred Bertha as she was less feisty.'

Cecile Yazbek Scholtz has written a memoir of growing up Lebanese in the old South Africa. She has a grown-up son and daughter and has lived in Australia for twenty years. At present she is learning to read and write Arabic to augment her meager conversation skills.

GEMMA CREEGAN

The Impact of September 11 on The Arts

'No clock now needs
Tell we have only what we remember:
Minutes uproaring with our heads.'

This line from a Ted Hughes poem titled "September" could have been written in the immediate aftermath of September 11 except for the fact Hughes died in 1998. It's a classic example of the ways in which September 11 has imbued literature and the arts with a new meaning. Mark Lawson's informative article "After the Fall" in the Guardian explores what he calls this new September 12 mentality in reference to films, and theatre at the Edinburgh fringe festival. Lawson's article formed the basis of my research so I'll be referring to it frequently.

The Guardian quoted Damien Hirst, the controversial British artist; verbatim that September 11 was a 'visually stunning work of art'. He later apologised for his remark. His provocative comment brings to mind the imagery we were flooded with in its immediate aftermath again on the first anniversary. The before and after pictures of a golden New York skyline. The first plane and an inferno. The second plane. The towers crumbling to the ground. It's an image ingrained on the public conscious, like a scene from a horror film.

Philip Hodson, a prominent psychologist, who's written numerous articles on September 11, remarks: 'With past conflicts we've been so used to the idea of a credible plot – beginning, middle and end – that this has shaken our foundations.'

His allusion to the lack of a 'credible plot' causes one to think of the event in filmic or narrative terms. In a typical scenario (think *Die Hard, Collateral Damage)*, when an act of terrorism is committed, the CIA or an individual (Bruce Willis) will bring the evidence together and track the perpetrators down ultimately with success. In this case there is a solution, the terrorists are killed or arrested, and nothing is left hanging in the air. September 11 has opened a floodgate of questions to which there are no clear-cut answers.

The film, "11-09-01", was one of the initial filmic reactions and screened at the Venice film festival in 2002. After the overwhelming amount of TV programmes

commemorating September 11 in the wake of the first anniversary, one television director, Alex Brigand, had an original idea. His idea was to have '11 filmmakers from 11 countries, 11 short films each lasting 11 minutes, nine seconds and one frame.' (Guardian website: *A Very Different Take*). Although Brigand is a television director, he felt that television was too 'reductive' and film allowed for a more varied response to the televised images we've been flooded with.

"11-09-01" was yet to be released in Britain or the U.S at the time of writing as it failed to find a distributor in both countries probably due to some of its more controversial material. The US entertainment magazine, *Variety*, labelled some of the short films as 'stridently anti-American'. One film that probably provoked this comment was the Egyptian director, Youseff Chahine who shows the U.S government in a more sinister guise. In his 11 minutes and nine seconds of screen time, one of his characters, a fundamentalist assassin, comments upon 'the millions of victims of US foreign policy.' (Guardian) America is shown through his lens critically, as a destroyer of civilised nations not a peace- loving nation.

The reputed British film director, Ken Loach also has a rather provocative film. He goes back in time to another chapter of American history, September 11, 1973 when there was a bloody coup of the Chilean president Salvador Allende supported by the Nixon administration. The protagonist, Pablo, a Chilean in exile in London grieves along with the present families of victims of September 11. His words to them are: 'On September 11, we will remember you. We hope you will remember us.' (Guardian) Echoing the words of a Palestinian journalist, who said: 'U.S we feel your pain, isn't it time you felt ours?' Loach reminds the viewer through the juxtaposition of historical events that there is always a different perspective. There is no such concept as good and evil and America is not the only victim of terror. Pablo gives a voice to the silent victims of what Loach labels American 'terrorism'.

The American effort by Sean Penn is less gritty but poignant nonetheless. Its protagonist is an old New York widower. We follow his morning routine, after telling his dead wife that the apartment is too dark, he awakes from a nap to see it's flooded by sunlight. The towers obstructing the light from their apartment have crumbled to the ground. Each filmmaker has a unique angle, which does not attempt to recreate events or manipulate the viewer but to tell it, as it is whether through the eyes of a New York widower or a Chilean exile. Idrissa Ouedraogo, an African filmmaker dares to have humour in his short film. It's about a young boy who has no money and is certain he's seen Osama Bin Laden in the marketplace. He and his friends dream of what they could do with the $25 million reward and cry 'Osama, come back we need

you!' as he flees from the airport.

"11-09-01" is about freedom of artistic expression, it uses different voices from diverse cultural worlds and it's a voice that's continuing to emerge in the September 12 world. Many television documentaries about September 11 painted a one-sided story. Films like those made by Ouedraogo and Chahine are essential in showing us that there are other views and other voices out there not just the prevalent Western ones. As Lawson suggests good art should 'expose and provoke' and new voices are an essential part of the artistic process and they don't have to be terrorist voices. British film director, Ken Loach, was attracted by the subversive elements of the film and says: '...[The] Meaning of what happened on that day became hijacked in the way that the planes were hijacked...the meaning of those events became fitted into the agenda.'

He draws a comparison between the terrorist hijacking and the way meaning has been hijacked by the U.S government and the mass media. It calls to mind an Egyptian novelist's comment (whose name escapes me now) on an SBS documentary that the U.S. has hijacked language to manipulate the public so that language itself becomes a form of terror. One only has to switch on a commercial news station to see that the Western media paints everything black and white, the language of good and evil to manipulate the public. Sean Penn, who directed a short film in "11-09-01" and speaks openly about September 11: 'We have a president who indulges in terms like good and evil and that's in the tradition of too many Hollywood movies.' Proving that the line between politics and film has blurred and it's becoming more difficult to tell which informs which and who the real villains are.

The huge box office blockbuster *Pearl Harbour* was released in the same year that America would also suffer its surprise attack on home ground. The multi million-dollar box office success of the blockbuster *Titanic*, proved film directors can't go wrong with a true historical disaster story. At the release of *Pearl Harbour,* there were criticisms about its bias and glossing over history in America's favour. Lawson draws upon this coincidence in his article and I was reminded of the soon to be released second part of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy eerily called *Two Towers.* Film directors have had a Nostradamus type role in predicting the worst possible scenarios, think *Independence Day* and *The Day After Tomorrow* and reaping the rewards financially.

After September 11 Washington politicians turned to filmmakers as a vital source of information for possible future terrorist attacks against the U.S. We'll probably never know the details of the sixteen possible scenarios submitted to the government. The concept of terrorists blowing up the Whitehouse once seemed far- fetched but in

our September 12 world anything is possible.

Lawson looks at how even a seemingly innocent family film about a mouse lovingly adopted by a Manhattan family, *Stuart Little 2*, can be viewed through a more sinister lens. He suggests how a scene in which Stuart guides his toy plane through the skyline of Manhattan triggered a recollection of September 11 through the fatal dives of the plane and Stuart's fear.

The Manhattan skyline, so visible in U.S sitcoms and films, could not be salvaged and in many recent film releases the twin towers do not rise on the horizon. Quite a lot of 'architectural cosmetics' had to be done to ensure this during post-production to fit in with September 12 guidelines. A number of films were due to be released filmed on location in New York such as *Spider-man* and *Serendipity*. Cameron Crowe chose to leave the twin towers in his skyline scenes in the New York filmed *Vanilla Sky*, which came out at the end of 2001. The scene in which a confused Tom Cruise runs through a deserted Manhattan is eerily reminiscent of panic stricken New Yorkers fleeing the city and the silence of the aftermath.

The teaser trailer for *Spider-man* had to be discarded as it showed a helicopter sequence between the twin towers. The release of Arnold Shwarzenegger's action offering, *Collateral Damage*, which cost $85 million, begins with a terrorist explosion in a skyscraper, this was delayed for five months. As was another film, *Big Trouble*, starring Rene Russo and Tim Allen, which included a bomb on a plane scene.

The film *Panic Room* starring Jodie Foster focuses on a vault like room in an upper class New York apartment in which a mother and daughter flee to for safety when intruders storm their house. However it turns out to be a kind of death trap not unlike the inferno of the world trade centre. Another film contained a September 11 moment, M. Shyamalan's *The Signs* when a daughter flicks on the TV to find all channels are showing the news about an alien invasion. In many of the films released in September 12 there's been an overriding but unrealistic sense of optimism, which has also seeped through to other areas such as music and literature.

Lawson says: 'for the last year, America has been at a funeral and music is the art people most use to express and treat their grief.' Bruce Springsteen's recent album *The Rising* was among the first musical responses to September 11. He wrote a lot of the songs using the voices of workers whose lives were tragically crossed by the hijackers. Although the songs are sad, there is an overwhelming sense of hope. He also opened the telethon *America: A Tribute to Heroes*, which was broadcast around the world to 200 countries including Afghanistan.

In one song from his album, *The Rising*, called *Empty Sky*, the protagonist looks

upwards at the empty space where the towers once stood and says: 'I want a kiss from your lips/ I want an eye for an eye.' Naturally, many of the songs deal with loss. The album's best song *You're Missing* ends: 'God's drifting in heaven, devil's in the mailbox/ Got dust on my shoes, nothing but teardrops.' Another song opens from the perspective of a suicide bomber. Springsteen adopts different voices not unlike "11-09-01". He got his material from the news and phone calls with widows of victims. One critic responded without enthusiasm: 'They're really marketing it as a September 11 album, I think we want art that can deal with it, but its still an uncomfortable thing, and its still pretty fresh.'

Neil Young's latest song takes the words 'Let's Roll' from ill- fated flight 93 passenger, Todd Beamer. The commercialism aspect of September 11 is still very raw and sensitive. Yet it hasn't stopped the publication of over six hundred and seventy books on the topic. Novelist, Iain Banks, has written about the aftermath of that day in his recent work *Dead Air*. It deals with the social aftermath in London such as fear of being on the Underground; in high rise buildings and paranoia about foreigners. Lawson states that in around thirty or forty years time, fiction will have the same right to write about September11 as it does for the first and second world wars.

At the time of writing about the event, art must confine itself to sensitive displays of emotion, sentimentality and above all patriotism. Lawson isn't optimistic about the short-term artistic projects that have groped somewhat half-heartedly with the subject. He says at the end of his article that 'The best works of creative imagination surprise, explain and provoke. It will be many days before it's possible to do any of those about that day.'

It will take some time for the arts as a whole to be able to voice opinions freely and controversially again in regards to September 11. In the wake of the event one hundred and fifty songs were banned for being 'lyrically questionable' including John Lennon's *Imagine*. Lyrics like those by Toby Keith 'We'll put a boot in your ass/It's the American way' held sway. His album, *Unleashed*, sold 338,000 copies in its first week of release.

Gemma Creegan, currently based in Melbourne, is originally from the U.K. Her travels to various countries have influenced her writing and she particularly enjoys discovering other cultures and watching foreign films.

Gemma wrote this article as a university assignment in 2002 so the references are to films that were released that year.

ALI ALIZADEH

Two Poems

The Clash

Civilisations, it's often shouted,
clash. Particularly mine

and yours. At *Thermopylae*
the Persians crashed

into and squashed the Spartan
infantry. At Salamis

the Athenians sank the Persian
fleet. Romans were crushed

by Parthian horsed-archers
but they later skillfully

smashed Cleopatra and took
Egypt. Then Christianity

and the destruction
of Jerusalem's temples. Yet

my religion untouched by your
god's self-sacrifice

Zoroastrian, polytheist, Jewish
and Islam: your Romanised tribes

unified in the exigent cause
of the Cross. My side took Spain.

Yours defeated the Saracens
at Poitiers. Then the Crusades. Then

the Ottomans. Scimitars clashed
chainmail, cannons fired

on muskets. Then the tanks,
the air-raids and suicide bombers.

But do I forget to tell
you about the Muslim scholars

studying Aristotle? The English
poets translating the ghazals

and rubaiyats of Persians? Or my
watching sneakily the pirated

videos of *Friday the 13th*
and *Mad Max*? Or your eating

kebabs and saving to buy
an Afghan rug? Perhaps. But my

forgetting to include
the images of exchange

in the midst of the clatter
of the chronology of hostility

proves a little more than dubious
compared to the fallacy

of classification. How did I
become Eastern and you

my Other? Vice versa? How
am I grouped? According to what

mischievous logic? Am I
shrunken to an ethnic type? But I

don't wear turban, ride camel
have never spoken Arabic or bothered

with the Koran. Your pride in
the Acropolis, Colosseum

and Westminster Abbey, frankly
nonexistent. To what cultures

do we belong? To repeat:
Mine, not of sensuality

and hashish-induced lassitude, but
a love of Rimbaud

and Belgian beer. Yours, not of greed
and rationalist modernity

but baklavas and the Book
of Thoth. Why determine us

by the trite significance
of hair-colour and nose-shape? What

does it take to overcome the logic
of the Third Reich? But enough

questions. What use when The Answer
is being shouted and proliferates

above the murmur of my individual's
doubt.

Iran

I cringe (or is it shiver?)
every time I hear the word

motherland. I'd like to think
my blatant internationalism

foments the reaction. But is it
the latent fear forever held

by you, my *pays natal*, the terror
of *un retour*? I'd like to

remember the scent of your
jasmine, the ooze of

your pomegranate's juice. But
the torture in your prisons

the sadism in your leaders' eyes
pervade the reminiscence. I'm

drawn to the romance
of your poets, memorialised

so lyrically in the sepulchral shrines
of Shiraz. The tales of turbaned

bards drinking the forbidden,
singing the heady praises of Love

fill me with the desire
to love you, but the ubiquity

of sub-machineguns,
the vigilance of the Guards

repel. And I've been repulsed
across the globe. I've been

made thoroughly homeless. Blame
Islam? The historical disaster

of a revolution without vision?
Anti-colonialism without

the aim of ending the slavery
of the soul to the superiority

of belief? Or, as always, 'them':
the Americans, greased up

for devouring your oil? Blame?
No, I'm not at all interested

in constructivism. I'll accuse,
as they say in my surrogate *patrie,*

'until the cows come home'. Why
the pretentious reliance on

Italicised French words and Anglo
slang? My mother-tongue

also terrifies. Once the language of
no doubt sublime poets and *ghazals;*

the discourse of submission
and hatred during my childhood.

Remember your theologians
interpreting reality? I don't want to.

I don't know if my psyche
can handle many more nightmares.

Let it suffice that I can recall
the purges, the bruises, the glow

of the incinerations. I'll have
you know that I now fathom what

you had in mind for me: a plot
among the other 'martyrs'

in the *Heaven of Zahra*
mausoleum in Tehran. Now

I hear you're armed
to the teeth to continue your

infernal war against
timeless nemeses. Your wealthy

still holiday in Europe and plan
cosmetic surgeries. Your clerics

Kalimat 23

still issue death warrants
against 'apostates' and 'infidels'. I'm

almost dead in the quicksand
of the deserts of foreignness and

exile. Do I even begin to dare
contemplate a return

to the makeshift terrains
of memory? To the localities

that cultivated my senses
of placement, to the orchards

that I wandered as a bored
child? The people are mostly dead.

The remaining form a diaspora
of regret and disillusionment. I'm

as I said, not a positivist. Only
a fickle and shuddering ghost

rejuvenated and alarmed
by the mention of the word

motherland.

Ali Alizadeh is interested in, among other things, epic poetry, history and translation. He holds a PhD from Deakin University, Melbourne, where he has taught literary studies and writing. He is currently teaching writing in Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Wuhan, China. He is also Reviews Editor for Cordite Poetry Review www.cordite.org.au. He was born in Iran and migrated to Australia in the early 1990's.

CAROLYN VAN LANGENBERG

Two Poems

remembering, Margaret

To the late Margaret Harris

On the first anniversary of your death
lettering my brain is a lyrical line
about the silver branch
its strongarm stretch
elbowing blue
wonder mirrored in grey
leaves bunched like a crazed skirt, red bracts
shy sign of wild energy,

calligraphy etched on blue
fast darkening grey, the sky within
the same as the sky above —
such as the day I heard you accept, gently,
quiet where the cat sat among books on the wide,
white coverlet,
the penned line your life was finishing,
the chimed pause between shared words.

This is spiritual exegesis,
testament to my disregard
minus Nietzsche. Did he ever chance
to stand where the soft edge of the earth's
driest continent crumbles into deep

antarctic storms? How can Nature,
like the Southern Ocean, be malicious?
His word for hungry, surely.

You believed words explain the upbeat tempo
— *human, all too human*, Margaret —
confided your imperative to understand
sickness empties meaning, isolates essence,
nature the agony in your bones defying
exposition. Anger demanded
life must be explained, redeemed, somehow,
by the particular strength of your mind.

When I was twenty, the synapse slammed shut.
Doctors named my illness, stretching
my future into the body's network where I
found my love for the simplicity of filaments,
youth having faith
framed by the bedside screen. My heart beat
perfect wordless poetry
like a submarine plant wedged between rocks,

the visceral rhythm mesmeric,
intoxicating the belief
that life not circumscribed by religion
is spiritual. You know how it goes
— the formal constraint of the intellect
is not the high point of human intelligence,
the ecstatic pitch, revelations, nothing less than
biochemical riverruns down myelin tissue.

Afterwording

For Heather Stewart

I

The dark grey sky and the dark grey earth
Enclose first light. The slink cat stalks
The slippered woman I am at the gate.
I bend, fingers stretched to grip
The plastic wrapped tube of daily news
Tossed against the picket fence separating
Public traffic from the quiet life adorning
The house and garden. Deciduous plants

Scribble bare lines above an absence of lawn.
Unrolling news about bulldozed streets in Gaza,
Party-girls arrested in Bali
And the prime ministerial dirge,
I roll up then walk straight down
The well-known path. Frost bites gold light
Striking the topmost branches of languid gum trees.
And the night's ghosts melt under ground.

The distant train toots arrival and farewell.
Pines hum upwards, birds swoop and call and
Perch above the cat catching its tail.
The wind is cold, there's snow at Lithgow.
And in my heart, a scar, small as a rice grain
Pinched between wall and ligament and
The poem soaked with grief, your breath
Damp on the skin of my neck.

You sit at first serene, afloat above my eye,
The pleating curtain open wide, the
Theatre of your heart waiting to hear
Religious hope and reparation thrum
From head to toe, as inevitable as the bright
Alternation of light when the priest hangs his head,
Weighed heavily like stone, his universal darkening
How afraid you were, resigned to death.

Did trumpets greet you where the long wings
Of angels listen to shallowing light?
Reason offers no explanation, dearest die
In the why now why, the lone figure gliding silent.
Death performs the embellished stage, shunting drapes
Across an absence of colour when simple love
Affettuoso and joyous *vibrato* lost
Music, you

II

You said, when you were a child, Sydney gardens all
Sported big hydrangeas at the front gate,
Blue contrast to the liver-red, brick fence.
That's why for my mountain garden (with house)
You gave me a lace-capped hydrangea.

I planted your gift where moisture soaked
In a dip. But, like a discarded puppet,
Leaves and branches drooped. One sad flower
Answered in the language of the resilient heart,
Music riffing above its puce, misshapen head.

Determined to preserve with manure and mulch
The memory of you, I took cuttings. Two
'Blue-birds', lace-caps side by side, survived
The long autumn followed by winter frost
And an uncharacteristic ice-storm.

Notwithstanding the early summer heat,
The younger, dark-leafed shrub has grown
Large with mauve and amethyst flowers,
Graceful by the one I speak to as if it were you
Struggling, flowers emphatically pink and purple.

The *pieris japonnica* you gave me failed,
The skeleton brittle, drought drying the sap.
Butterflies hover above geraniums, banksia wrens flit
At the swinging black tail of the dinner-suited cat,
And kookaburras laugh warm red late of an afternoon.

The seat is in the right place under the chestnut tree
Facing the haphazard bank of pentstemon
And an indifferent mountain devil.
Buddha's hands disappear into sand daisies
Under the aromatic *prostanthera.*

I squash leaf curled over thin grub,
Green life staining my gloved fingers,
Forget myself avoiding the task of writing
The effaced self, salvaging the moment of being,
Your tininess tall.

Dr. **Carolyn van Langenberg** lives with her husband and son in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, Australia. Many angles on love, history and Australian negotiation with colonialism flip through *the fish lips trilogy* by Carolyn, published by Indra Publishing. *fish lips, the teetotaller's wake* and *blue moon* are set in the hinterland of Byron Bay in Australia and Penang in Malaysia, from 1941 until the 21st century.

JUDITH FARRAG

Three Poems

Untitled

Fuchsia–bellied cloud
trails feathers on duck egg blue –
sunset palette.

The one you lost,
that got away, is best –
a poem is a fish.

Gold, brown leaves crunch
under lengthening shadows –
autumn afternoon.

Cairo Street

From our verandah
I saw vendors sell from donkey carts.
We let down a basket
to collect fresh cucumbers, capsicums and beans.
Across the road the fruit cart
stayed open late at night
selling grapes, bananas and pears.

At lunch time people carried trays
on heads, from the bakery round the corner
heaped with warm, flat bread.

By the mosque I saw date palms
silhouetted against twilight sky
as the adhan called people to pray
from a loudspeaker –
before it was just a human voice.

One night the radio played Qur'an
as we ate falafel
in a sugar cane juice shop.
Men and women walked
in the dark, dusty street without fear.
'Shai, Um Ibrahim! Tea mother of Abraham!'
shouted loudly disturbed my sleep.
Before dawn the call to prayer boomed out
and pious men went out to pray.

A View from the Bridge

Grey water swirls beneath the bridge,
its currents divide this city
lap cement and concrete
instead of rocks or reeds.

Wordsworth once viewed this city
and described its great heart.
But I have no sonnet form,
no noble vision,
only twentieth century words,
like bricks to build a poem,

quartz-chipped into type.

This mighty river's dirty,
the air I breathe polluted;
the traffic's noise assaults my ears
yet still I wing back to this river
this source.

Judith Farrag was born in Southampton, UK, immigrated to South Australia in 1966, and has worked as a teacher in SA and Nigeria. Her poetry embraces both sacred & secular themes, and a strong vein of socio-political comment runs through her work.

CHRISTOPHER BARNES

Four Poems

The How-Lost? Man

A stroke – the pip in blood
a fanged foredawn's a shining godlet.

In thought-flow sleep, atrocious scraps,
rigor mortis is sourbellied eagles
all arteries
are transitory, cut short.

The Hard Taskmaster

Another Mata Hari unriddles.
Behind my back
she is fandango, love-in-idleness,
and pillow.

I break my way, don't swivel
skeeter through turnpikes
mangled into bash-hammering rain,
eyes trickling, fingers ice in pockets.

I shoulder-shrug away
the reflection
of the chocolate-flowing hair.

The Arrival Of The Guest House Proprietress' Sequential Amoretto

1

A car passed wideopen gateposts, over gravel, a sound like steam gushing from a water drop. Swoop of firs, a parking square, calls of seven different birds, answered by its mate. With a clunk Mr Bellini took crisp air, light-headed. Newness of senses tingles, slow movement. He looked at bright sun light, greenery, the entrance to the big house.

2

She floated up stairs, pollen, silent soft slippers, past cracked veins, oil paintings. Wood furred dust, more animal than her sable-brushed fox, the wonky lion, top-hatted tamer, apple-red cheeks. At top level she slowed, shy of her ability to float. Rattling a key to room five between artless fingers she trod edges, worn rugs, an ordinary mortal.

3

Was it the corner seat that creaked air where its second arm would be? Weight of sun ageing tapestried cloth? Or was it that chair, a cushioned half-moon back, shifting its springs to take each mood of its braid? Unsettled today. The landing smelled as it always smelled, fried breakfasts, morning damp, when musky lovers rose to close the bathroom door; unfamiliar bodies gently submerging, slick of swirling soap.

The Be-Loud Stork

A plain word :- night. I crossed the rivers
of washday overfloods
in terraced lanes
blank as North Shields sky, with the percussion
of nervous marbles,
lynxy optics sparkling, petrol
glittery on numb pavements
in the dips of hunchbacked streets.

Roll back to where the radiogram drifts along.
It's 'Baby Love'
a skim across grit, Motorcity glamour
and my sister flings dough
onto brown-lung sticky-back plastic.

I could never have guessed
that in a trembling of fit-for-nothing hours
Penny would slap the midwife, nor that she
would spend the next two years blubbering,

loud...through Captain Scarlet,
Bill and Ben
and even The Magic Roundabout.

Christopher Barnes lives in Newcastle, England. His collection "Lovebites" was published by Chanticleer Press, 6/1 Jamaica Mews, Edinburgh, in 2005. He is active in poetry readings, including a yearly participation in *Proudwords* lesbain and gay writing festival. He has a BBC website www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/gay/2004/05section28.shtml

LOTFI HADAD

Translated by Mouna Schaheen

The Flood

Dedicated to Arif Dalila

Salome searches
For the head of the Baptist
Yazeed[1] dwells on al-Husien[2]
And we wash our hands off innocent blood.
The flood has begun
And the seven headed monster
And the seven seals
Collapse in front of
The carnation, the harp,
The wild geese,
The willow,
The sad winter nights,
And, nostalgia for home.

[1]Yazeed, an early Caliph of Islam who is responsible for the death of al-Husien, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. He is reviled by many Muslims for this event, as well as for being a corrupt ruler, particularly amongst the Shiite branch of Islam.
[2]Al-Husien, the grandson of the Prophet (see 1 above), who along with most of his family was killed by Yazeed's army at Karbala.

The flood has begun
You are its bloody horizon...
Do not rebuke the pain of words
Dear Sir
We are defeated and orphaned
Do not leave us alone
Oh bronze flower

Tammouz[3] is dying
Babel is blooming
And he who comes never arrives
The sea is apologetic
Must depart
And we are orphaned and defeated
Deliver us oh Tammouz

'His eyes are pearly'[4]
The homeland is dark
His mouth was a stream
And the earth was dry
'A hunchback bird' in a cage
Cleansing itself like a tree of blood
The Oleander flowers open
In his sides
And the milky moon
Sets above the wall
And the larks cry: 'No'
The lights poke a hole
And we are here...
'Sects and gods eat with each other,
And eat each other up'[5]

[3]Tammouz, Mesopotamian God of fertility.
[4] From T. S. Elliot
[5] From the Syrian poet Adonis

Mamnoun[6] dies
Aurora gathers her tears
As dewdrops
The morning rhymes: Come
The branch entwines to the spring
The clouds lean
On the lake
The trees shudder,
Tremble
Lightning disseminates
The weary moment disappears
And dawn radiates sand
On a cage without light
He quivers
He glitters
He flows
He gets baptized

The rejected stone
Becomes the corner head
And the lonely man
Shakes off the rotten temple
And the seized land
Dances victoriously...
Maranatha[7]
Maranatha

[6]Mamnoun, one of the old gods.
[7]Maranatha, this word has been used in anathematizing persons for great crimes; as much as to say, 'May the Lord come quickly to take vengeance of thy crimes.'

The bronze Arab
Shouts in the desert
Everything is false
Except His face, the truth
And the dreamy Naserite
Stares into angry eyes
'You will be with me today
In heaven'
The mountain man
Descends from the light's summit
Sees the atheists dancing
Around the false gods
He holds your hands
And beats them till victory...

Today is Friday
The time is late
The water is navy blue
And the sky is without clouds
A man plays with his daughter
Behind a far away fence
Two young ladies run
A man fishes small fish
A woman in a small boat
Sails over the calm water
Reading a book she holds in her hand
Some bird descends
Above the velvety lake
It quenches its thirst and flies.
Flowers wilt
And others radiate.
The magnificence of time comes out reborn
By the hands of God
I drink slowly
Cold tea
I walk on
The outstretched green
I remember Nazim Hikmat[8]
'Life is beautiful my friend'
And Anatole Franz
'Life is beautiful'
.....
.....
But your name penetrates the painting
Like the face of Mona Lisa
Like an eastern icon
Everything is changed
The water is turbulent
The fish eat the fisherman
The boat sinks
The air chokes
The blue abides
The scene shrinks
To the size of a cage
And I hear the virgin crying
Another man...

We are all exiled
The darkness of prison
Is the last eastern rhyme
We will continue our exile worthless
You maintain your truthfulness
You refuse to compromise.
I see you crouching
In your dampened darkness
Notching your memory stone

[8] Nazim Hikmat, a twentieth century revolutionary Turkish poet.

Kalimat 23

Absent in a dungeon
Aging in your wander
You do not pass through
the homeland twice
You drink your cup to fullness

'When vision expands,
Expression is confined'
I will be silent now
Silent...
To see like you.

Lotfi Hadad is a Syrian novelist, poet, and intellectual. He writes in his native language, Arabic. His main interest is the religious and political conflicts in the Middle East, and Human Rights violations. He has 6 novels, 3 poetry books, 3 intellectual books (Islam through Christian Eyes, Mandela of Syria, and Jesus of History), and 2 Anthologies (An Anthology of Contemporary Arabic Writers in the Diaspora - 3 Volumes, and an Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Writers. He lives in Indiana with his wife and two daughters. Website: www.lotfihadad.com.

The above poem was written in Arabic on 26/08/2004 and published in a collection titled "*Al'nuki Ayyatuhal Tma'im al-Muqaddassa*", Aldar Alarabieh Publishers, Beirut, Lebanon.

Mouna Schaheen, an Arab-American of Lebanese origin, was born on January 25, 1948 in Detroit, Michigan. She has lived most of her life between Lebanon and the United States. She worked in the Lebanese theatre for three years then returned to the US to study Dramatic Arts/Journalism at both The University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University. After graduation, she worked for several years as a journalist in Jordan, Cyprus and Lebanon. In 1984 she returned to the US, lived in McLean, Virginia where she taught beginning and Intermediate Arabic, and did several English/Arabic, Arabic/English translations. She moved to Tucson, Arizona in 2002 with her son and mother, and is currently teaching Arabic at a Tucson Language Institute and interpreting English to both Arabic and French speaking children in the Tucson School District through The US Refugee Program.

JIHAD ELZEIN

The Poem of Istanbul
Translated by ***Raghid Nahhas***

Statements of Gratitude to the Impressionists

The Church at Auvers

(Van Gogh, 1890)

When the crowds march towards
the sun's slumber over The Seine,
The city dwellers travel in love…
strangers mix

I am given a choice, amid the two dances,
of how a gentleman who has
quenched his thirst could
migrate within his intimate exile
So, I return to the painting – the two paintings

The wall's name is the church dancing
with a pagan temple
before calamity struck
both wearing some of
the threads of sunset advancing ahead
towards the feast of estrangement

Then they beckon to lovers on both banks
We alone scoop the two wisdoms
and watch Van Gogh deludes us twice.

Vincent's Bedroom at Arles

(Van Gogh 1988)

Who speaks tenderly
to the features in your face,
when tonight's sparrows pray
on the dome of Notre Dame,
disposed in this intimate space
disposed in this mist
Your hands are perturbed
By affection, alienation and defeat
Or is it that your features are
melting in the confusion
between estrangement
and waiting?

The spirit of Van Gogh
brings us together…
not changing the mood
to release us from
the dominance of our dreaming,
we are for it, even as strangers
we are its unconcerned evenings,
the wine of its wishes and its blood

Open your dream for us,
we shall nourish it at will
from our fantasies, until the end of time

The Cafe Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night

(Van Gogh 1988)

Wakefulness stretches you
to the night's forest
as if pushed by
an ibex to travel
with ibices by night
Wherever his hands
talk to you…
a cry appealing for the dew
is heard

A craving of a
mulberry bush…
The juice of your desire
in the shade

Van Gogh is no longer
a name… He becomes a colour
The yellow is no longer
a colour… It becomes a name

Sir, have you
painted with our eyes?
Or have you delved
into this invasive question:
Is it you or us
painted on this canvas
of certainty and probability?

I shall collect your water beyond the moaning of cultures
I shall claim that bridges, birds and churches are
water from water where fires burn and where there is liaison

I shall sit firmly on the throne of your acceptance…
until distance is reduced to a lap
and passion erupts like war

Decide now as appropriate…
Decide now, on our behalf, as appropriate…
On a formula for departure

My mare shall not attract the attention of the foreign horses
I come to you from the sand announcing my Voice:
Its turban and its prayer
The recitation of its names, the domes of its cities and its lines
I come to you announcing my voice and go announcing others
When do I quench myself with tales coming, from Allah, oil and water and fire?
I now dream of your sun…
abundant with the yellow of the fields…
You paint for wheat, filling our hearts with harvest
Spread and gather
over the gold of this slaughter

Jihad Elzein, a leading Lebanese journalist. This is a continuation of our translation of his first poetry collection *Qassidat Istanbul.*

"An Arab Woman... and Free"

This is Ghada Samman's new book in Arabic

Published by the author as No.16 in her series "The Incomplete Works", Beirut 2006.

The book is a collection of writings focusing on female rights.

RACHAEL QUIGLEY

Babe

When he sees the Valentine's decorations in Westfield, Enoch feels emptied out. *Stomach pit. Chest cavity.* He imagines his sternum cleaved.

There must be a hundred hearts strung from a dozen wires and fastened by kilt pins to the ceiling-sky. They look like an outsize baby's mobile and he would like to steal a string for Miriam. Each single heart would nearly cover her tiny belly. Flat perspex cut-outs in pink and rose and red and also in a horrible fluorescent pink that he is trying not to notice in the cardiac sea.

The kilt pins remind him of nappy pins.

And hearts are for baby cards, too. Elsewhere, he knows he will see Valentine's teddies – another happy baby symbol. Cherubs, as well. He feels sour at the thought. Still Enoch would like to steal a string of those hearts. He can see the stress-curled end of one wire where someone else has picked its bottom-most heart.

It is six a.m. and the shopping centre is empty, open only for the early morning grocery hounds who shop at Coles. But Coles is at the other end of the centre. Anyone shopping there has probably parked in the other car park, not trekked through these subterranean acres as Enoch has. In his uniform, he could probably carry in a ladder and climb it to pluck down a strand without rousing the interest of a single somnolent security guard. But the ceiling is too high – two storeys at least. Enoch's ladder just breasts the guttering of his parents' single storey house when he cleans it for them. The theft can't be done. He focuses his frustration on this rather than on the pointlessness of having those hearts even if they could be taken.

Enoch has come early to the shops because he can't sleep. He's opening the bookshop this morning and doesn't start till eight, but the strange cauterised feeling that seeps through him is less noticeable here in the vast brightness of the shopping centre. His disorientation and hollowness feel less like his own and more like something forced upon him by this space.

If the shops were open, Enoch would lose himself in the throb of a music store. Rifle through CDs for an hour. Blow most of his pay. Instead he window-shops for cheap flights overseas and expensive sheets. Hair products, herbal remedies, communication

packages. From somewhere on the same level, he can hear the Dorothy the Dinosaur ride laughing with a tinkle like a Christmas ball breaking. He avoids walking past the pet shop where he can hear the puppies keening inside their glass cubes behind the roller shutters.

'Church's.'

Enoch hears the way he answers the phone and almost laughs. It sounds less like he is saying the bookshop's name and more like he is cursing religion: 'Churches!'

He holds up one finger to the customer who is trying to ask a question while he is still on the phone. Turns slightly away from her. With the phone wedged between his shoulder and ear, he types at the computer.

'No, it's out of print. You could try one of the bigger chain stores, they might have a copy still in stock somewhere... Well, I don't know where. Try calling Dymocks in the city or...' But they'd hung up. Some people wanted definite answers, they weren't prepared to listen to anything else.

Enoch rubs his earlobe angrily between his thumb and forefinger. He knows it is just as bad getting a customer like that any time of day, but he still wants to give it more weight because it is the first call of the morning – a crappy way to start the day. He turns back to the woman at the counter and almost groans when he sees she is pregnant.

There are sections. Clearly. Labelled. Sections. Pregnancy, baby care, all of that are grouped together under Women's Health. You can't miss it, yet everyone seems to. Why come into a bookshop if reading a simple sign is such challenge to your literacy?

She smiles. Enoch doesn't budge. It will take more to disarm him. But she isn't after 'What to Expect When You're Expecting', she wants a novel. One that might be out of print – her eyebrows come together in apology and she tilts her head indicating his phone call.

Again he bangs at the computer, then pushes out from behind the counter to check the shelves. They have a copy – in its right place on the shelf. Enoch does not comment on Church's bewildering system of shelving novels in alphabetical order by author surname. He pulls the book from the display and makes the sale.

As the woman leaves, he asks, 'Got a name?'

'Ellen,' she holds out a hand to shake.

'God. No. Sorry. I meant for the baby.'

'Oh,' she laughs. 'No, we're kind of hoping we'll know when we see him.'

Enoch nods. He isn't sure what he'd wanted her to say – or what he'd wanted to say to her – but it isn't quite enough.

Kalimat 23

When Christina had asked him to name their baby, it had seemed like a trick. She was in labour and Enoch didn't know whether he was naming a boy or a girl. He hadn't seen either ultrasound – because, he said, he wanted a surprise. But Christina knew better, Christina knew he was keeping his distance. Now she was asking him to name the baby to force some kind of bond on him, he thought. Or so she could reject the name he chose, because he was unworthy to give it.

The room had been emptied of nurses and doctors, just he and Christina and the bundle held still against her chest when he had decided.

'Miriam.'

Miriam. Christina mouthed the word as if she were savouring its unfamiliar taste. She nodded. 'Beautiful.'

He'd since seen new babies – other people's babies – tasting life in this same way: mouthing and tonguing at air.

Christina's name and an old share-house address are written backwards on the bench-seat of the breakfast nook. Enoch is surprised to notice again the intense blue stain on the shiny white paint. It came from a Postpak an old flatmate had dropped off for her. After ripping it open, she left the package on the seat that they never used and months later the cat had peed on it, imprinting Christina's details on the bench. She had scrubbed away the smell with detergent, but nothing would take out the ink. Now Enoch wonders half-heartedly about sanding it back and repainting.

Christina had gotten the kitten from a litter of his sister's. Harbinger, Enoch called it, because he suspected the kitten of being a surrogate for the baby he wasn't ready for. Harbinger. Then Bringer and finally Ring-ring.

And Christina had babied it, letting the cat sleep wherever it wanted so that when Enoch pulled his work shirts from the clean laundry basket, they were threaded with cat hair. Once when Enoch was making love to Christina, the cat had taken a swipe at his swinging ball sack. Still, she'd convinced him to drive it to the emergency vet at three a.m. when it fell from the tower of milk crates they were using for storage. Bringer's nose had started dripping and his breathing came in a deathly wheeze. Christina thought he might have broken a rib, punctured a lung. Winded, the vet said. And how much had that diagnosis cost them?

Christina fell pregnant at about the same time they had Bringer desexed. She swore she had been taking her pill, maybe missed one day, but that shouldn't have made a difference. When Enoch had checked the packet, there were five tiny yellow buttons all in a row still inside their plastic domes.

He sees the hearts again at the smaller Westfield, near his parents'. The ceiling here is lower and the hearts hang like a beaded fly-curtain that people push through rather than walk around. It is ratty with broken wires from being grabbed at. Even the kilt pins are bent from people tugging the strands. It's deflating to see the weary and tacky look of the display. Enoch doesn't even wonder about filching a chain.

He buys flowers for his mother which are just as inelegant and damaged as the Valentine's hearts. They are overpriced too because it is so close to the 14th. She will draw attention to these things, but they are all that is on offer and her nose will be out of joint if he doesn't bring any. Enoch always brought flowers when he came with Christina.

'How's Ring-ring?' asks his sister over lunch.

Enoch shrugs. 'Haven't spoken to Christina.'

'But he was your cat, too.' Leah can't understand his indifference. It turns out that Callie – Leah's cat, Bringer's mother – has been run over. Leah wants Enoch to ask for custody of Bringer for her. He shrugs, noncommittally, which they both know is a 'no'.

'It wouldn't hurt to ask,' says his mother.

Enoch ignores her.

'Enoch, ask for your sister's cat back.'

'It's not her cat, mum, it's Christina's. And I'm not asking her to give it away.'

His father watches impassively. His mother stands up, giving him her back. Enoch hisses out air. Depressurising.

Hearing his mother begrudge Christina a cat, Enoch feels something like a series of knots tightening or bubbles popping in his middle. She had liked Christina until the pregnancy, when she could no longer ignore their living together. Seeking clarity or reassurance, Enoch had told his mother about the pills. But she had not perceived it as Enoch had – a single loosened flagstone on which he tested and retested his footing: 'Five days, Christina! Five. Days. How can you say it was an accident?' Or more gently: 'Please. Can you just tell me why?' And Christina might ignore him or yell back, but more often she would cry and he would hold her, crying too. Then they clung hard to each other until the rest of the world seemed to ebb away and all that was solid and certain nestled there, between them.

But his mother didn't see any of that. Instead she saw a past repaved; Christina and Enoch's history as an avenue of manipulation and deceit. She no longer greeted Christina when they visited her house, but kissed Enoch, welcomed Enoch, then pressed herself back against the wall for Christina to enter, making certain she could pass without touching.

Still Christina had tried to make conversation, persevering with steely-bright monologues after it became clear that her questions would hang unanswered. Two. Three visits like that and she had folded. No more visits to his parents. At the time Enoch had imagined himself neutral in all this, sitting beside his father, not interfering. Now he wonders if it was out of cowardice or cruelty that he didn't intervene.

He is reminded how shabbily he treated Christina at the end, leaving a note for her on the ironing board: 'I can't live here anymore, we need to talk about this place'. Then he didn't go back to the flat, stayed out drinking with friends and went home with the girl from the card shop two nights in a row, so that Christina finally understood that he never meant to talk to her and he didn't intend to be the one to leave.

She had taken very little with her, apart from the Bringer.

Enoch was glad the Bringer was gone but thought less of Christina for taking it. For continuing to want it after all that had happened. He thought of the cat as both Bringer and Banshee. He would shove it from tables hoping it would not land on its feet and boot it from his path, with sudden fury if it wrong-footed him. Enoch hoped he would break one of those fragile ribs, so unlike a dog's barrel chest.

The cat was a year old. Still playful and kittenish, but sleek and lean like a cat. A killer. It would sink its teeth deep into his Achilles or take a pair of balled up socks in its jaws, battering them repeatedly with its hind legs. It was belled against bird-hunting, but sometimes it brought home real quarry, painstakingly killed, and laid it on the doormat in offering. To him, Enoch thought, not Christina – which made him hate it more.

He came upon it once in his bedroom, nosing down into the sheepskin underlay, exposed where the sheet had rucked up. Enoch was alone in the house with it and the place was quiet but for the noise of its claws catching and pulling in the sheepskin, its purring and the wet sounds of its mouth eating its imagined prey. Transfixed, Enoch stepped closer. He saw how desperately the cat nuzzled into the underlay. It was not savouring the animal taste of the sheep, but suckling as if the blanket were its mother. Discomfited, Enoch left the room.

'Don't push,' the midwife told Christina over and over until she was almost yelling. 'Don't push, the cord's caught round the neck!'

And Christina bellowed back, 'I'm not pushing! I can't help it! She's COM-ING!'

That was how Enoch found out his baby was a girl.

She slipped out soundless and strangled. Cyanotic, someone said then, or afterwards. Enoch wasn't sure.

'Baby blue,' he whispered, meaning her colour. Then again and again, 'Baby-blue, Baby-blue, Baby-blue, Baby-blue.' A nickname chanted to encourage her. A nickname chanted in mourning.

They sucked the meconium from her stomach and lungs with a tube; a blackish-green sludge. And consciously or unconsciously, they made a wall around her with their bodies, preventing Enoch and Christina from watching as they tried to revive her. Miriam.

No-one had asked for her name before they slipped the plastic identity bracelet on her wrist and it read: 'Shaw' and on the next line; 'Baby of Christina' and finally her date- and time-of-birth. So that it looked as if no-one had taken the time over her to think of a name. And as if she belonged only to Christina.

'Baby of Enoch', he said to her. But it was too late.

Christina was still straining and heaving. Crushing his hand. Enoch watched her birthing the placenta at the end of that murderous leash. He felt like a ship hammered in rough seas, hit again and again by the waves. He couldn't concentrate on what was happening, what was being said to him. He didn't know if he was angry or sad, couldn't even think who the feelings were for – Christina or himself or Miriam.

Christina would not take the tablets they gave her to dry up her milk and it leaked from her nipples when she heard other babies crying in the nursery. It was thin and yellow. Just colostrum, she said, but Enoch knew that was the best bit, the stuff with all the antibodies in it. Baby superfood.

He watched it dribble from her nipples as she changed to go home. He thought it might be savoury rather than sweet. Salty milk tears shed for Miriam.

Enoch has thought about junking all the things Christina left – fabric and carvings from Bali, the paintings she did while they were together, a wardrobe, her microwave. He wonders if she was being kind, leaving the things he might want or need – or if she was just too exhausted to carry it all away with her. Perhaps she wanted to slough away everything to do with him. Or she could have left them as a rebuke.

They are all these things to Enoch. Smells of her that he folds against him some days and other times, colours that sicken him just to catch them from the corner of his eye. Her dent in the mattress that he will not turn over.

Christina has left a shoe box, lidless on the table of the breakfast nook. In it he has seen Miriam's hospital identity bracelet and a rolled copy of her birth certificate. He can tell from its stiffness that it is the decorative certificate with the birds on it; the one that is meant to be framed rather than used to open bank accounts and enrol in school. There

are cards of congratulation and condolence addressed to Christina, which he never read. Other things, too.

People make the mistake that because he wasn't ready, he will be relieved now Miriam is gone. Or that 'goodbye' is less painful for never having had 'hello'. Even his mother said, 'Oh, Enoch, it *is* for the best. You weren't even trying for a baby.' As if he were a child, sullen over some small loss.

Sensitive even to the ordinary unkindnesses and disrespect of everyday interactions, Enoch wishes there were still traditions for wearing mourning black. A code written in clothing. *I have loved. I have lost. Give me space. And time.* But did men ever do that or was it only women?

In the box Enoch glances the black lock of hair in its tiny pink ribbon and it knocks the wind from him. He thinks of Christina tying a ponytail and cutting it from Miriam's small head. Like a souvenir stolen from her tomb.

He thinks: *Her womb was a tomb.* But Enoch doesn't blame Christina, now. She would have traded, he knows. Her life for Miriam's.

If only there had been a nest ready in his heart for her, she might have fought harder, Enoch's Miriam.

The girl from the card shop has been coming to see him in the bookshop on her lunch break. She writes him little cards and signs them Sophie, with a heart over the 'i', even though she is twenty one and only three years younger than him.

Enoch tells her about Miriam. He tells her as a warning that he is an ancient and broken thing, not someone she should love. Not someone who will love her. But he sees straight away that it was a mistake to tell. She looks on him with such pity and such hope, that Enoch knows she will persist longer now than she would have otherwise. She thinks she understands. She thinks she can repair him.

'You miss Christina, don't you?' asks his sister. Enoch nods. He is working on Leah's car. He can talk to her like this. Without making eye-contact, pretending his thoughts are deep in the engine and shallow in the conversation.

'You didn't like her, did you?'

Leah doesn't say no. She pauses. 'She always seemed a bit feeble.'

'She wasn't.'

'Fair enough.'

Enoch holds up a handful of perished rubber for Leah to see – a hose ragged with holes. 'Here's your leak.'

'Why'd she leave?'

Enoch turns the engine on and watches where he removed the hose. 'Oh, hang on, that's not a water hose, that's another problem altogether. Something to do with the exhaust it looks like. See the black smoke shooting out? Water's still pouring out down there somewhere.' He manipulates hoses with a screwdriver to get a look at their bellies.

'Why'd she leave?'

'It was me. I dumped her. Pretty much.'

'Wish you hadn't?'

Enoch thinks. It seems more than the way he did things, but the fact that he did them at all. 'Yeah, I think I do. I do wish I hadn't.'

Leah nods. 'Can't undo it?'

'Nope. Don't reckon I can.'

'Gonna try?'

This has been in his mind lately, but Enoch feels somehow that it's not the answer. There is so much more to untangle that is nothing to do with Christina; complex riddles of his own.

'I talked to her,' he says. 'I think she's doing better than me. Without me. She knows what she wants more than I do.'

Leah grins and so does Enoch. They are both thinking what their mother would say about forcing parenthood on a man and trying to manipulate him into marriage. Enoch is really not sure if that's how it happened. He can barely find the sore spot in him, where it once mattered so much.

He packs up Christina's stuff in boxes, wraps her paintings in newspaper – knowing it is not the best thing for them – and puts everything in the front room. The nursery that never was. Never filled by a baby, and never filled with baby things either. Just a cot in a beige room like every other. A rental property they could never mould into their own.

Enoch can imagine how the hearts would have looked, twisting above the cot to cast a shivering pond of pink light on the wall. He imagines the perspex pieces knocking together not with a clatter, but tinkling like glass. He pictures his baby in the cot, but Enoch cannot imagine Miriam as anything but still.

He thinks of burning the box, but knows immediately he won't. Too many regrets beaching jagged in his lungs for what he has already thrown away. He fingers the lock of Miriam's hair, soft and slippery as a doll's. And smells the serrated clip from her umbilicus. Nothing.

The hospital bracelet he must force himself to look at, spreading it flat with two fingers in a 'v'. The paper inside looks pink where the black writing has leached across it from being moist. It is not typed as he remembers, but handwritten in a neat, looping

style. Enoch has to look twice to be sure of what it says, because it is not what he read from the first.

And there it is: 'Babe of Christina'.

Not baby, but babe. Something gentle. Written by a human hand.

It is not enough. Not nearly enough, but it is something.

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TOM SHAPCOTT

Lilie and Irises

d'Lys had to explain, always, about the name, but that was okay. It was a charm, she said. It was a very old family name. She ignored the titters, she always had, and if that was the worst thing in life she had to face (as her mother said - frequently) she would be getting off light. d'Lys Somerton and don't you forget it. And never Delys.

Zoe understood, but Zoe always spelled her name with a dierises - or an umlaut, as Zoe affected - and the two of them sailed through primary school, and then secondary, with a united sense of specialness. That was when the Band of Fairies began.

It was a joke, of course, but it protected them like a magic circle and then the fashion for Faerie was in and they became authorities. Long after, when faerie had become Celtic and Geiea had become an email homebase and whole covens of wicca gathered with cats and spells and scabies in the rising-damp tenements of the inner suburbs, there still remained, at least for d'Lys, some last fingerprints of that girlhood fantasy, with its cobwebby charm and its unconscious belief in the tides and seasons and all the earth-based rhythms as well as the aereal magics of wings and of gossamer.

Her last dance with that delicious world that, like a crysalis, held all her grub-like childhood, was when she was twenty and she, for seven months, took part in a series of fairy-parties for small children that became the rage in Launceston long after the mainland had moved on to Bananas In Pyjama Parties or MacDonalds Discount Birthday Specials. d'Lys drew out her gossamer gown and her sliverfros star, her pin-on wings and her tiara of sparkles and for an hour or two, on Saturday afternoons, she could sing and dance to the children and feel, curiously but authentically, transported, even though she laughed. Her laughter tinkled with such light enjoyment that some of the mums wiped their eyes and remembered times when christmasses still had a santa claus, things like that.

Zoe had faded away, she had become a Nanny somewhere to a rich family in Double Bay and she turned all her attentions to her little charge, Billy, who was three years old and had a devil of a smile. Zoe read Billy Peter Pan and Wendy until the

parents, realizing the implications, objected and thrust Patricia Wrightson at the girl, it was more up to date and, besides, the mother had adored it. Zoe completed the forbidden story for Billy on their excursions to the park or one of the quieter cafes, and knew she had a convert.

There had been the one time, just before d'Lys moved down to Tasmania, when Zoe and Billy met up with her and they made it a witch's party, with Billy an Honorary Wizard who was allowed to choose his own mudcake for once. Somehow, a three year old boy, especially one as solemnly self-assured as Billy, who even had his own favourite Natsuke ivory toad, seemed to d'Lys something altogether more fascinating - more desirable - than her own collection of dolls and little people (with the exception of Jens the Troll; his grumpiness always defied indifference). After that teaparty even her CDs of Gaelic whistles and windy surf on Erse headlands somehow became diminished. Billy was a revelation. d'Lys had not considered little boys.

In Launceston she had to consider many little girls. Her Fairy Parties (part of a Franchise) were, for three and a half months, a word-of-mouth success and it looked for a while as if she would be able to give up her weekday job as a temp. in the local environmental exchange store.

And then Bill.

There is not much you can do with a name like Bill. Even Billy has a baby goat-like charm, like all young things. But Bill - William - insists on its own lack of resonance. Bill is a here and now word. Bill is not assertive, like Frank or Greg or even the more oboe-like David, but it knows where it stands, and it stands alone and will not budge. It will not be bought off, and it certainly will not put on airs. For every William there are a hundred Bills, and their only subterfuge is that they know what their Birth Certificate declares about them, and their Death Certificate will too; but in the meanwhile and for now until some elderly aunt or grandparent says otherwise, Bill it will be.

Bill was floored by d'Lys. He could not believe her name and he remained incredulous, repeating it over and over, each time shaking his head. But if you are born d'Lys you will have learned the seductiveness of patience. Even the most fragile of d'Lyses is a born educator. It might be a name of frills and petals, but it has its feet in good boggy soil, dirt under the fingernails and beneath the apparent feyness there is a determination that endures. Anyone named d'Lys has grown up in no soft garden bed, but in the semi wild environment of fens and sedges. Zoe knew this quality in d'Lys; it was what made her special.

What chance did Bill have? It was not a matter of spells and incantations; it was

sheer determination.

28.2.1918
Dearest Turnip

Writing this in the Red Shield Hut, which is really the remains of a pigsty at the back of the estaminet but the floor is not mud. That's a blessing. The smell of damp rising in steam through the serge uniforms of the men is not so much an eau de Cologne as an deu de xxxxxx (censored). Sometimes I think of mustard baths, but French mustard lacks the bracing punch of English mustard so I'll have to be content I fear with what I've got, which is a bloody great urge to get back to you in one piece. How unbelievable that we should have met, and like that. I'm still running over and over that night in my mind, it is what keeps me alive in this muddy desolation. They say Gerry is preparing for more fireworks. If I get out of this I want to get as far away from all this madness, away from warfare, away from crowded billets, away from the smell of wet overcoats and blankets and bodies, back to Australia and that little farmlet I talked to you about, where we can live by ourselves, for ourselves, and bring our own children (this is my dream) into a world that has not gone mad. We can make our own world. At least, back there. Do you believe me? I've got to believe that.

Your own
Rawl

13.3.1918
Wonderful Raoul

You letter got through to me, and so speedily I almost felt your breath upon the stamp! Two months ago I could not have believed anything possible, and now! I dream, like you, of that little farm in your distant country. I have been reading incessently, maps and books and newspapers in Australia House, and it sounds incredibly rich, incredibly strange and remarkably familiar. I tell my friends I will grow pineapples and bananas and acres of cotton on our farm under the Glasshouse Mountains, where we will never need to have glasshouses or overcoats but will wear shadehats and swim all year round in the Pacific Ocean. The names themselves are magical. The photographs I have now seen are lumpy and down-to-earth and I think I like that. I come from a long farming stock, you know that. I am not afraid to push my hands into the soil and get my fingernails broken. I will tell you two secret things. These are from my reading. I want the back of our cottage to open into a shade-house, a fernery with plants such as I have seen last week in Kew Gardens. There I will serve you, when you come in from the fields, cool cordials and sweet tea and we will talk

over the plans we have and the plantings and the harvesting to come. And then, I want an enclosed place where I shall breed fowls - Australorps and Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds (you see, I already have the names) and perhaps some geese, but not a turkey, I cannot abide those big nasty things, they are not loyal like geese. So. We both have our dream. And you must come back. I am willing that for you. I am willing that upon you, and I have the force of many old magics on my side. I come from a line of women who have woven their spells and their charms, and their potions are life-giving herbs, not those ridiculous recipes Shakespeare invented. I will demonstrate some of my old grannie's real herbal cures and salves, perhaps they will even be useful when we go to Australia? We've both got so much invested in our future together, now. I am rounding out with all sorts of expectations, but for now that remains secret.

I'll tell you more about it, later.

Passionately and adoringly

your

Lilian

PS Though my father always called me 'little spud' I am honoured, Sir, to be elevated to 'Turnip', which has more flavour. Once tasted, you never forget the taste of turnip.

But I will never anglicise your name. Shame. Is this lack of confidence? Or is it a -rude little bit of the Australian lingo? Hmmmm. We must talk this over. Another reason why I insist you return, and (God willing!!!) without delay!!

d'Lys moved out of her cold little flat on the hilly slopes of Launceston and settled in a small one room hut down in the hilly ridges around the Tamar River. It was owned by absentee Swedish landlords who had come for one season, bought, built, ploughed a wide pasture which had the effect of breaking and redistributing thousands of soil-bound daffodil bulbs from a nineteenth century farmhouse garden (long since rotted) so that within a month of her arrival the slope became filled with buttery trumpets that waved in the chill southern wind but seemed the very appropriate salute to her arrival. The wooden room had a large stone fireplace and there was plenty of timber around. There was a sink, a rainwater tank, and a small supply of candles when she moved in. One hundred yards away, sheltered by black wattles and bracken there was an outhouse. She learned to manipulate the candle at night, cupping it in her rosy fingers, but the darkness and the stars put her in her place properly, though she sang folksongs in her tenuous soprano. She made soups with local herbs. She knitted wonderful, loosely relaxed shawls and a throw-over for her bed in the corner.

Across the lane (a dirt path, really, with tracks of pademelons and the occasional echidna through the goat-cropped verge) the farmlet of her neighbour showed the signs of several years of composting, grading, planting and systematic ergonomics. Cattle horns were filled with organic nutrients and planted at the correct angle and in the right moon phases to ensure beneficial regeneration of the soil. A system of preparation of nutrients, ploughed back into the soil and designed, not for human consumption, but for longer term fertility, had been practiced for some years now, and the first berry crops, luscious and almost disturbingly prolific, were about to be harvested in this early spring season. There were apples, too, and zucchini, tomatoes, all the quick growing vegetables, at last coming into their own. This was a two room cottage and d'Lys was the closest neighbour. Bill owned this one.

21.11.1918

Dear Lily, my Turnip

It is through your protection and no doubt your prayers that I have survived and now it is over. At least, the fighting part is over. Everyone is bored here and they say it will be months before we are to be moved. As a junior officer I have been charged with devising events to keep all the men controllable. There have been nasty rumours of defections in some of the other batalions, and who could blame 'em, except to look out at the miles of mud and slush and a few broken trees around here and unless you could walk to Paris or find a train that is still running, what could you do or where could you go? So I have the men lining up for boxing matches, and soccer (Rugby League hasn't a hope in these conditions!) and they've called volunteers for a concert party and the Salvos are running a chess competition and of course we drill, drill drill (they say there's to be a competition cup). But at least I can write this note and know it will get to you quickly, and that when it arrives you will know no Jerry bomb is about to hit me so we will be together.

And I have used the news to exert some pressure. I think I will get at least some special leave. The Padre is on my side. I will put aside the thought of having to return here, to this place, to this muck, and concentrate on the will to have the leave pass issued. I will learn some of your tricks and magic spells to make it happen. There; I'm only half grinning. The other half of me is still a little amazed, and almost too scared to believe it all yet. To believe any of it.

When it happens it will happen fast, so Be Prepared. What do your parents think? Or have you told them?

Your husband (or husband to be)

Rollo

2.12.1919

Lovely Raoul of the Earthen Brown Eyes

See! I would have it so and it was so. But I do despair for you in your long boring nights and short boring days over there. It is incredible that all the energy and organiation that men put to having their wars is succeeded by some sort of clerical tangle that prevents everyone getting home. Or even getting back to England; I know your home (OUR home) is across the world and I do take account of that and will understand if they cannot find enough ships to convey all the soldiers back overnight. Well, I will pretend to understand.

Furlough. Well, we'll see about that. When I have you back here with me do you think it will be all that easy to escape again? I have spells to cast. I have Horoscopes to read. Really, dear heart, I do wish I could call up a Magic Carpet and transport us both - transport us ALL - to your little farm among the Silky Oaks and the Casuarinas and the Bunya Pines and the Tessellated Grey Gums by the banks of the meandering Bli Bli Creek. How exotic it all sounds. Will my magicks work over there? Or will I leave all that behind with my girlhood and my rag dolls and my pouter pigeons and my secret places under the hedgerow? But you will not accuse me of not being precise. I have done my homework. I have done my RESEARCH. Will I ever catch up to you, I wonder? I love to hear you name the names, every single one. What are the names of the different varieties of grasses on your property? What year do the Bunya nuts come into fruit? Will you take me to meet that old native woman on Stradbroke Island? She will know all the stories, all the real stories.

I agree with you. We will make everything ourselves. We will eat the produce from our own garden, we will be independent from everyone. We will be ourselves.

Do you understand that word: ourselves? Of course you understand it.

Come to me quickly.

Lilian

d'Lys watched the other woman. She found plenty of opportunities to wade through the grassy paddock over to Bill's cottage, for matches, for rat poison, for some of his abundant lemongrass. She always brought small tokens, of thanks or of neighbourliness: a bottle of pickled nasturtium seeds she had made; the pair of mittens (just the right size), and armfulls of the daffodils ('They won't last but aren't they glorious!'). Sometimes she brought small offering for Maggie, that was her name. They smiled at each other and sat apart.

And oh dear, Maggie did have her moods. Bill would go out into the orchard and work hard. 'A weed is only something that adjusts to an imbalance' Bill would say,

and he pointed out to d'Lys how one returned nitrogen to the soil, how another had vigorous roots that aerated the undersoil, or how others transferred nutrients into more portable proportions, ideal for composting. She would squat on her haunches, her long legs drawn up neatly into a lithe frame beneath her Indian cotton. He would explain his systematic preparaton procedures so that, in the end, the plantings would be strong and yield excellently. She began preserving and bottling, and discovered in the hills around a generous community of neighbours, the Vacola Set she called them. They were all seeking - and achieving - their own self-sufficiency. Bill knew them all cheerfully and he sometimes introduced d'Lys, in his casual way. He spelled her name out carefully, and nobody blinked an eye.

Maggie had a rich voice, a cross between Joni Mitchell and Joan Baez (people still remembered Baez in that valley). She was a feature of the community and was in great demand at their barbeques and small festivals - midsummer, midwinter, the solstice.

She had been living with Bill for three years. People thought of them as permanent, a couple. Maggie was the only person in the valley who makes cracks about the newcomer's name. 'd'Lys?' she said, 'sounds like "disease" to me.' Mary from across the valley was the first one to reprove Maggie openly.

21.4.1921
Dear Mama

Two years last week since I first saw Boonoborn. Perhaps I can admit, now, how my heart took a leap when I realized all the work that had to be done. And little Rollo splitting his gum that very first week! I did not know a small child could carry so much blood. Like a bottle, it just streamed out. But there, we overcame all that and Raoul set to with a will, we all did. Though I still remember how amazed he was when he came up to the house after that first visit to the bottom paddock and said that there were gumtrees twenty foot high in the field he had ploughed in 1915 just before he enlisted. Twenty feet in under five years. Well, I said, you can see how things can grow in this soil if you let them.

I told you how someone (Raoul's sister) gave me a lovely long rose branch, covered with blooms, and I simply plonked it in the back garden when they were finished - mainly to keep off the sparrows from my lettuce seedlings. The rose simply put down roots and flourished. It is nearly three feet high this year and this year I am going to let the flowers set, it is sturdy enough.

Rollo looks like you more and more, including the impatience with others. But baby Elspeth is not at all a Scottish heir, she is my little fairychild but do you know,

like me, she has already an affinity with small animals. I think I will get her a kitten, I have always longed for one again, even though Raoul is right when he says that will be the end of the birdbath and the dozens of little silvereyes and finches. I am sure we can train it, Elspeth and I, and I will insist on a bell.

So you see, we are thriving and growing and I believe the first real harvest of vegetables will be ready for the market shortly. Raoul has been so scrupulous in following the best agricultural principles. He says that cotton is the coming thing, and this climate is ideal. Imagine us competing with America and India! And here I thought we got away from all that, competition and bartering and scrambling for money and position and power. Well, at least we are as far out of it as anyone could reasonably hope for. It has been blistery hot these past weeks, a harsh wind from the inland that scorches everything, including the tomato bushes horribly. Raoul says it is most unseasonal, but we are going to the seaside for a week, and I look forward to that. You could not believe how soft and generous the sand is. The only pebble beach I have seen was a small inlet at Caloundra and that was part of a rocky headland really, with shellgrit, not pebbles, and the most wonderful pools and marine life hidden in rocky crevices. I look at Raoul and I say: this is home. And I mean it.

If only you could come over.

Yr daughter and all of us here

Lily.

Zoe paid a visit. The daffodils were over and only brown cords and stalks spread out and around the little one roomed shack. Zoe was terrified of spiders and the trek to the outhouse at night was only to be endured if the two of them went together and if d'Lys carefully sprayed around the thunderbox first. But Zoe was a sport, too, and was already practicing how she would narrate her epic visit to the wilds of Tasmania to all her Sydney friends. When a bandicoot intruded on the second night and sent them both screaming into each other's arms, Zoe embllished that, too, into her story. d'Lys almost regretted having written, earlier, to her friend with the episode of the Tasmanian Devil. It was true, all of it. And it was as fierce as all the stories - Bill had kept a small joey, a young wallaby that had lost its mother in a roadside motor incident; one night the little animal was savagely attacked and killed by the Devil. The noise was heard over at d'Lys's shack and Bill had warned her the next day to be careful at night, especially if she had to go to the jakes. For a week d'Lys had not ventured out after dark.

It was only when the whole valley had quietened down after the Tasmanian Devil had apparently made its getaway that d'Lys had noticed Maggie was no longer

in Bill's cottage. Nobody mentioned it. Bill was as busy with his composting and his pruning and his planting as ever.

It was the night she realized this that d'Lys had got rigged up in her gossamer fairy costume and had danced in the moonlight, out on the narrow paving of old bricks and stones that the Swedish owners had made into a sort of preliminary car-park. d'Lys thought of them and their midsummer rituals and she made a dance in homage to them. She did not think of Bill or of Maggie.

The next week Zoe turned up and, seeing Bill in one cottage and d'Lys in another, she of course put two and two together. The answer is always three, but the third was certainly not Zoe.

'Bill' she said. 'Well, Bill is not at all like my little Billy - remember Billy, the baby I nannied back then? His father made a killing on the futures market and they live in the south of France now. They asked me over, actually. Billy was a spoiled brat, really, but the father was a bit of a stud I believe.'

'You should take up the offer' d'Lys said, and Zoe looked at her. 'I mean it. I can just see you, I can picture you slipping into that world like a glove.'

'Really?'

'You know I'm right. I know things.'

'I wish I did. I wish I could make up my mind.' Zoe tried not to sound jealous.

'More often than not, your mind is made up for you.'

'You don't believe that.'

Neither of them did, but that did not prevent d'Lys from going out the day after her friend had left and buying a blue iris in a plastic pot which she took across to Bill's cottage and placed on his stoop. As she strolled back across his paddock she was singing in her sweet and almost plaintive voice something that sounded like an old folksong or an invocation to the daytime moon above or some sort of fanciful spell.

13.11.1925

Dear Mater

This is the saddest letter I have ever had to pen. Your daughter Lilian died last night. It was a burst appendix. We are ten miles from the nearest medical help and she was quite cheerful almost until the end though the pain reached a point where she gasped out to me, 'So this is the limit?', and as you know I did medicine myself at university though I never completed the degree because of my commitment to the land. I am not up to narrating the details, but it was mercifully short, magically enough. The baby did not survive either. She was seven months pregnant. They have both been taken from me.

I am not sure if I will stay on at the farm, though both of the children are rooted here and cannot conceive of living anyplace else. In a funny way I, too, feel Lily here still and am not ready to abandon her either. You will forgive this sentiment.

She said a curious thing, in those last hours. 'We are only passing through' or words to that effect. 'But it is what is passing through us that matters.' She believed, I know, that she was something like the reincarnation of her own grandmother, the one she always said had the second sight. Your own mother. But she said that you were from elsewhere, it usually skipped a generation. I played along with her thoughts, all these years. I did not know any of my own grandparents, so it was different. Or at least, I think it was.

I will write again. I know you loved her, but sometimes I think only I knew her. Or perhaps I should put it: she knew me. To be beloved, sometimes, is a great burden. I have the children. I see her in neither of them, though Rollo is uncannily like me sometimes. I must live for them now.

I am somewhat aghast to think that as from now I am no longer your son-in-law, only a fellow mourner.

Sincerely

Raoul d'Lys Somerton

d'Lys had lost weight. She had moved over to Bill's place and though she had left one glass fairy leadlight to catch the sun over her now abandoned deal table in the little shack, she had gladly taken across all her other paraphenalia and a line up of herbs in plastic containers now took over the space above his kitchen sink and reminded her, every morning, of how growing things change and transform their futures out of wishes and air, or out of energy and light. She loved to see her herbs grow, and she loved even more to see how Bill had brought all his years of dedication and industry to bear on his small orchard, which was now for the first time coming into fruit. The apple trees were laden, and the berry crops had yielded so much they had bottled what they could, made conserves and jams, and then taken the surplus to the country market last Sunday.

But the morning sickness had persisted. d'Lys was too ill to be frightened, but decisiveness had abandoned her. Bill did not know what to do. He was used to women like one of the neighbours who had milked the goat, hoed the house-garden and chopped the firewood right up to the moment she dropped her little boy and then was home again managing her husband and the ripening tomato crop before anyone had time to think of excuses. Bill looked at d'Lys out of the corner of his eye and knew the months ahead were going to change all his preconceptions.

Like a fairy godmother, d'Lys's own mum turned up out of the blue and began arranging things, putting things together, and organising Bill. d'Lys sank into her mother's solicitations and knew everything would be all right. Her beauty had grown almost translucent.

There are earth spirits and water spirits and air spirits. Bill had constructed a largish pool near the house for those herbs that liked dampness. It took the run-off from the taps and the tank and d'Lys had planted the blue iris there, after she had moved in. She was waiting for its flowering season again, in the spring. As her own time came close it began to swell and bud and she imagined the blue petals forming and straining under their green cowl. There were two buds that had formed.

d'Lys's mother left quietly. As a parting gift, Bill and d'Lys gave her the new spring of iris with its bud and its flower. The birth had been difficult and there had been a great loss of blood. But the hospital in Launceston was well equipped and the doctor took over from the midwife they had engaged and it all turned out well in the end. Alone, with the baby back in the little cottage, d'Lys sometimes dreamed of reticulated water, and electricity, and a commodious washing-machine, but when Bill walked in the door carrying the morning's crop of harvested vegetables and fruits, she didn't have the heart to press the point. After flowering, she divided the Iris corms and planted them around the pond, singing her dance-songs and her incantations.

Everything was in the future.

Professor **Thomas Shapcott** has recently retired as Professor of Creative Writing at The University of Adelaide, Australia. He is now writing full time.

LISA SLATOR

'And so our story begins'

When I got home from work Anna was lying in bed. It was just after 4pm and she was tucked up under the covers, all curled up like a terrified child. The door to her bedroom was wide open and I could see the top of her head poking out from under the covers. At first I thought she might be with someone. I don't know why I thought that, she never brings anyone home and she was supposed to be at work.

Vicki, who owns and runs the Exchange with her partner John, is sitting with me in her break, having a smoke. 'It's so out of character,' she says. 'She never misses work does she? She must be in a bad way.'

I stood at the door and whispered her name, 'Anna, Anna are you OK?' She didn't answer. I thought she must have been asleep, so I went to shut the door, I wanted to make a milkshake and I didn't want to wake her. Then, just before the door closed, I heard a dry, croaky voice, worn out from crying say, 'Brett'. It was such a sad voice that I just wanted to shut the door and pretend I didn't hear it. Drown it out with the noise of the blender. I said, 'You sick Anna? I'm just about to make a milkshake would you like one?' She rolled over, pulled the covers off her face, shifted to make room for me and patted the bed. I reluctantly sat down, half sitting half standing. I've sat on her bed so many times. We've lay together under the doona, sipping tea and chatting. When I'm sick or depressed she snuggles up in bed with me, entertaining me with stories from her healthy, happy world. I felt so weak. I just wanted her to lie in bed, alone, amongst her sadness and let me get on with making my milkshake. All I could think about was how good a chocolate milkshake would be.

Vicki is on the other side of the bar restocking the fridges. She has a cigarette burning in an ashtray. I pick it up, take a drag and pass it to her. She takes a long, slow drag as if she is feeding every cell in her body. For the first time I notice that Vicki is beautiful or was once beautiful. Beauty haunts her face and gestures.

'What did she tell you?' she asks.

Anna has this friend at work, Stacey. It's one of those work friendships. Anna talks about her a lot, really seems to like her and they often go for a drink after work,

but they've never met one another's friends. It's remained one of those friendships.

'That's often a good idea,' Vicki says. 'All my husbands have been men I've worked with and all my ex-husbands have been men I've worked with.'

For a moment I wonder if everything is all right with her and John, but I never ask Vicki personal questions. She tells me stuff, but I never ask.

I sat down on the bed and Anna started to tell me about Stacey and, an ex-boyfriend of Stacey's, Ben. Anna has told me stories about Stacey and Ben before. For some reason it always makes me a little bit angry, this time is no different, but Anna is sick so I listen.

'What do you mean makes you angry? What makes you angry?' Vicki asks from the other end of the bar.

I tell Vicki that I don't know why it makes me angry. She stops wiping the glasses as if she is waiting for the right answer. There are only a few other customers in the bar. It is often this quiet mid-week, before 6pm, and I can usually be assured of Vicki's attention. I use to do all the talking and she would listen. Lately she has started to ask questions, offer her opinions and make connections with previous conversations.

'Does it make you angry?' she asks.

I take a gulp of my beer, swallow hard and answer her, yeah, it does.

She let's this lie slip by, like a stray, hungry dog stealing a bone.

I asked Anna if she was sick. She said no, not really, and then she repeated a story that she had already told me. She tells me how Stacey came to meet Ben. I tried to tell her that she's already told me this, but she seemed to need to tell me again, as if her wellbeing was tied up in it. She told me, once again, that Stacey, at some indeterminate time and age, was a waitress in Byron Bay.

One day she couldn't wait to get off work because she had a god almighty hangover and couldn't cope any longer.

'Why didn't she take a sickie?' Vicki asks.

Because she always has a hangover and if she took any more days off work she would be fired. The unemployment rate up there is really high. Luckily, according to Stacey, she was a great waitress and one of the few people around who wasn't a huge dope smoker.

'At least she could concentrate long enough to take orders', Vicki adds. 'Hey, John, remember that women, what was her name, Cara, Sara, something like that, who worked here a few years ago. The only day she was ever straight was interview day and guess who employed her.'

John is in the kitchen, just behind the bar, preparing their dinner.

'Laura, her name was Laura,' John yells back from the kitchen. 'That kid had a difficult life and no one would give her a break.' He's standing at the door, that joins the kitchen to the bar, gesticulating with a knife.

'Put down ya weapon big fella,' Vicki jokes.

John stares at the knife as if it has strangely materialised in his hand, then wanders back into the kitchen.

'Yeah, and which sucker decides to cut her some slack. She'd forget the customer orders before she got to the taps,' Vicki whispers conspiratorially.

Anyway, I say. So, at five to three, her knock off time, Stacey has her apron off, and is out the door. Her intention was to go straight home, put her swimmers on and dive into the ocean to replenish herself. But listening all day to quick to whinge out-of-towners and locals, who think that they should be given preferential treatment, she...

'Gagging for a drink no doubt,' Vicki interrupts.

Right, I say, and push a $10 note across the bar. So, instead she heads for the pub, The Railway Hotel, which is quite literally a pub at the train station. I ask Vicki if she has been there. She says she and John prefer to go south for their holidays, but I know that isn't true, they never go on holidays. Then I tell her that it is a pub at the railway station. She's impressed.

Stacey doesn't expect to be at the pub for very long because she only has enough money for a beer or two. In all of Stacey's stories she is broke. However, I tell Vicki, she always has a good supply of cigarettes.

'A woman after my own heart,' Vicki says, as she places the beer in front of me. I tell Vicki that I don't think she would like Stacey. Other than smoking they don't have anything in common.

So there is Stacey, once again sitting up at the bar of the Railway Hotel, lighting another cigarette and ordering another beer. She clocks a passenger, who has just alighted from the train, running his hands searchingly over each pocket. He turns toward the train, which is leaving the platform, and looks longing in the direction that his cigarettes are travelling, as if his lover is leaving on the train. Dipping his hands into his pockets, he looks as if he is fumbling with just enough change for a beer, but not enough for a packet of smokes. All the passengers, but him, have cleared the station. Stacey has this guy in her sight and she is wondering if he'll notice her.

'God, I know what that feels like,' Vicki says sadly.

I don't want to believe her. Anyone worth anything would notice Vicki. I feel

compelled to touch her, but resist.

As he drifts toward the bar to order a drink, Stacey makes her move. She catches his eye by dancing a packet of cigarettes across the bar. Corny hey, I say to Vicki. She ignores me.

Stacey told Anna, repeatedly, that she has rarely devoted much time to pondering the beginning of her and Ben's relationship. This was the beginning. A friend of his was supposed to pick him from the pub, but he wasn't there when their money ran out, so they went back to Stacey's place. Ben spent the night with her, then met her again at the Railway after work, went home with her again, met her after work the next day, and this quickly developed into a pattern that two low income earners couldn't maintain, so he ended up moving in with Stacey. She says that it felt like they had always known one another, as if they had never been strangers. Can you believe she thinks this? Everyone, no matter who they are, were once strangers, and remain that, in some way or the other.

'I've always known John,' Vicki responds dreamily. 'When we first met, I thought, there you are old friend.'

Stacey says that Ben was the great love of her life. Yet, they just let the relationship wither away. I tell Vicki that a long-term relationship can't begin casually, you've both got to be prepared for one another, that's why it didn't survive.

She says, almost pleadingly, 'They begin how they begin Brett, go with it love.'

Someone interrupts to order a beer. If I were an angry man I would have hit him.

'What do you mean it just withered away? What happened?' Vicki asks.

I say, I don't know what happened, I only know that Stacey still circles around this old love like a carrion bird and she's got Anna feeding off it. Now Anna can't get out of bed.

'But what else did Anna tell you?' Vicki insists.

That's it, I tell her. Anna got to the same point she always gets to and then rolled over, tucked herself under the covers again and asked me to turn out the light and shut the door.

'So, you left?'

Yes, I tell Vicki, Anna didn't ask me to stay. She wanted me to leave.

'Hmmm,' Vicki responds, 'mmmm'.

I'm left pondering what all her mming is about as she hurries into the kitchen to speak to John. What might be beginning to make sense to her remains oblique to me. In a few minutes she returns with a warm, fragrant ice-cream tub, that smells of lamb, carrots and rosemary. She shoves the container at me, saying, 'We need more to

go on Brett. This isn't enough. You need to go home, make sure she eats and tells you more.'

I don't want to go back there. My home is lost in a fog of sadness. I tell Vicki that I do know more. Despite wilfully not listening to Anna recounting Stacey's stale love life, I had caught snippets – incense, smoking, shoplifting – of the Stacey and Ben saga. I had enough to fashion a tale together, enough to allow me to stay. Placing the tub of casserole between Vicki and me, I begin again.

They had so little money that Ben shoplifted their little luxuries, like incense, and for some reason, something to do with karma I think, he couldn't steal beautiful scents like sandalwood. Their house smelt or stunk of patchouli oil.

Vicki begins to recheck the fridges, I speak louder to get above the hum. I tell Vicki that I thought Stacey actually liked the smell of patchouli oil because it reminded her of the hippies from her childhood, whom her father disallowed her associating with. Burning patchouli oil gave her a sense of allowing them to finally have a place in her home.

'I thought you'd never met Stacey,' Vicki says.

I ignore her bored interjection and continue. They burnt way too much incense because they hated the smell of cigarette smoke in the house.

'Why didn't they smoke outside then?' Vicki questions.

They smoked way too much to do that; it wouldn't have been worth paying the rent. Vicki receives this with derision. My story is flagging, I fear being sent home. Vicki prefers to clean dirty ashtrays than to listen to my storytelling.

'What did Ben do for a job?'

A lie would at least give me a few more minutes with her.

He was a semi-professional surfer. He was very dedicated but never made the professional circuit. Stacey loved that he loved to surf. She would lie in bed in the morning, after he'd gone down to the beach, and attempt to dream herself onto the board with him. As if by sleeping beside a man of the ocean, with the imprint of the sea on his body, the rise and swell might possess her as well.

'I think Anna's in love with this bloke. In love with the idea of this bloke,' Vicki asserts. 'She must be, otherwise she wouldn't tell the story like that – the rise and swell – mm.'

She mms and mms for a good minute or two before she asks, 'What else has she told you about this Ben bloke?'

They smoked rollies because they smoked so much they couldn't afford to buy tailor-mades. It was Stacey's idea. Ben insisted that they smoke Dr Pat, he thought the

little tins would come in handy. At first the tins offered homes to paper clips, pins, buttons and an assortment of dried herbs, but eventually they had too many and they were just left lying around the house, offering nothing but confusion. They often reached for a Dr Pat tin only to find them empty of what they wanted.

Vicki hurries to the other end of the bar to serve a customer. To regain her attention I buy another beer.

Every third or fourth cigarette he rolled for himself, he'd also roll one for Stacey. He was always able to anticipate when she wanted one. She never refused it; he'd always been right with his timing. He was a shameless chain smoker, despite being a semi-professional surfer. Ben loved Stacey more for not disapproving of him smoking in bed. She loved him more because he smoked in bed. They used to lie back on the too many multi-shaped, multi-coloured pillows, naked, stretched out like starfish, blowing smoke rings.

Vicki calls John to relieve her behind the bar; joining me on this side.

Since they'd met, I continue, they had been attempting to interlock the rings, but it never happened. They would bump against one another, but never lock like Russian wedding bands. It ceased to disappoint Stacey, it was only a game that amused her and sent her back to their beginning. Ben never failed to become frustrated by the persistent singularity of the smoke rings. She would try to distract him from these solemn moods, once reading to him from *For Esme with Love and Squalor,* but they began to fight over Seymour's suicide. He saw it as cowardly. She thought it was tragic but understandable. The book was a gift from a past lover. He hated past lovers.

When I pause for a cigarette Vicki offers me one of hers, lighting it off her own. I'm transported to their run down house, just on the edge of the town, so close to the beach you can hear the waves breaking. Their bedroom is huge, with little furniture. In front of the bed is a fraying Turkish rug, covering the worn and stained carpet.

Once when he was in one of his moods, I tell Vicki, Stacey offered to dance for him. She was initially a bit timid. She'd never danced for him before.

Vicki lights another cigarette and motions to John to make her a drink.

Candles replaced the lights; the bottles that held them were heavy with wax. Stacey wrapped herself in a cardinal purple sari and began to dance for him, but she was soon lost in remembering dances that had been performed for her. Twirling the god coloured scarf it cut the air like a too bright, too big butterfly. He felt under siege by the brash colour of the sari. He grew smaller, disappeared under the greying doona, only a smoke trail indicating his whereabouts, if anyone cared to look. Feeling like a voyeur he wanted to turn his face from the spectacle. He had lost her

somewhere and blamed it on the smoke rings. He wanted to weep but there was only a dry sting scratching at his throat.

'Was this the beginning of the end?' Vicki asks.

Yeah, I answer, lighting another cigarette. A few weeks later he told her he needed to find better surf and thought he'd head south for a while. He invited her to go with him, but they both knew. It was easier this way. It still makes her smile to think that he waited a few weeks before telling her he was leaving. He didn't want her to think it was the dance. 'The desert trip will do you good', she told him, then regretted saying, 'do you good', and tried to cover it with talk of the desert flowers this time of year, time alone, silence and the straight roads. He said, 'who said anything about going west', but they both knew he wanted to go home. Within a few days of him telling her he was leaving they became almost strangers. He started to get the timing for her cigarettes all wrong. She started rolling them for herself. At the bus station they kissed one onother on the cheek, hugged uncomfortably, like cousins.

'Funny how that happens. How you can love someone and then it gets turned off like a light,' Vicki whispers.

Crossing the desert he gave up smoking. The bus only stopped every few hundred kilometres and he thought the fierceness of the sun would melt him. He'd always worshipped the sun, now he shrank from it, staying inside the bus at each stop. He breathed the lifeless dry air and watched the desert pass his window. Being so far from the ocean he was gripped by panic. When he coaxed himself off the bus at night his body was stiff and aching. In the public toilets he turned on the taps just to hear the sound of water, in the hope of smelling the ocean. He wrote all this to her when he settled back in Fremantle, asking her to send him some Dr Pat tins. She wrapped the tins in the sari.

'Did she ever see him again?'

No, but she wrote him a letter.

'Just the one?'

Yeah. She wrote a long letter to him. A handsome, young backpacker, she'd met at another pub, volunteered his naked back for her to lean on. As she wrote the boy lit her cigarettes. Vying for her attention he tried to tell her stories about his country, but she wasn't interested. She was content to know that his country was somewhere at the top of the map and that he would be returning soon. When he persisted in recalling stories of his childhood she asked him to leave.

Vicki squeezes my knee, saying, 'It's getting busy, John needs me, and you need to go

home.'

I walk the short distance home and enter our warm, dark house. Anna is sitting up in bed reading a magazine. She turns, smiles and drops her magazine onto the floor. As I slip under the covers I think, strange how nothing ever begins at the beginning.

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ANTHONY O'NEILL

Excerpts from

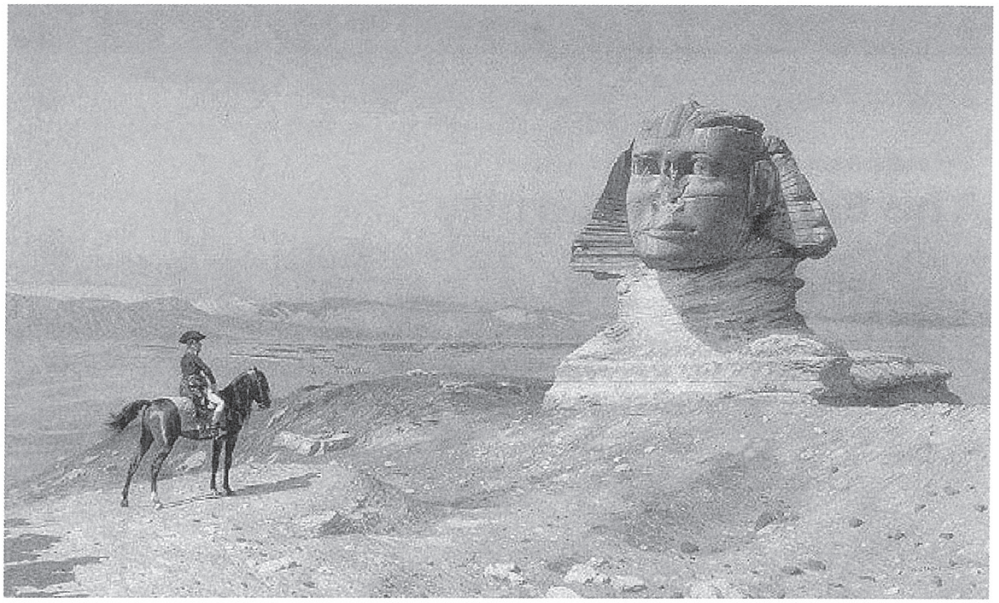
The Empire of Eternity

Re the Iraq War, Robert Fisk for one is fond of drawing parallels with the British occupation of that country early last century. But I'm more inclined to think of the Napoleonic takeover of Egypt in 1798.

Consider this. The precise reasons for the French invasion are complex and murky, but seem most likely to establish a strategic foothold in the Middle East. The official explanation was nevertheless couched in impossibly selfless terms: 'to liberate the noble peasants from oppression'. Napoleon, as the army's commander-in-chief, repeatedly issued half-hearted assurances about his respect for Islam. The Egyptians at the time were ruled by a ruthless militaristic minority – the Mamelukes – who were no match for the immense French forces. The takeover of Cairo, and by extension of all Egypt, was accomplished in weeks. But the natives seemed surprisingly ungrateful to their liberators and there were constant terrorist attacks. The French army was drawn into endless battles around the country as Muslim fighters from neighbouring lands descended on Egypt to resist the occupation ('they are like the Hydra', reported one flustered general, 'as soon as you cut off their heads new ones keeps growing'). In Cairo meanwhile Napoleon fought hard to assert control and maintain morale. But the complexities of the local schisms soon defeated him and the French withdrew after a mere three years, leaving Egypt in a dangerous power vacuum.

In my forthcoming novel The Empire of Eternity (Random House, 2006) I depict the Egyptian Campaign as a pivotal point in Napoleon's quest for immortality. In the following excerpt the future emperor and his arbiter-of-elegance Vivant Denon arrive in Egypt in the hunt for the (fictitious) Chamber of Etrenity – a legendary vault said to contain secrets meant only for the eyes of pharaohs.

Anthony



Painting by Jean-Leon Gerome

Already on his secret hunt through Egypt for the Chamber of Eternity, Denon was not present at the Battle of the Pyramids, but Napoleon thought of him often, and just as frequently lamented his absence. For the battle was an hallucinatory spectacle, an artist's dream – a quasi-mythological tableau, springing to life right before his eyes – and it was the moment he finally believed he had arrived in Egypt.

Certainly Alexandria had been something of a disappointment. No longer the sweeping marble metropolis of historical renown, with its amphitheatres, gymnasia, and wondrous lighthouse, the port city Napoleon found (and quickly conquered, at the expense of a mere three hundred men) was a plague-decimated settlement with crumbling yellow houses, sand drifts, rubbish heaps and clusters of wilted palm trees. The soldiers and sparrows had fled; the upper and middle classes had retreated cravenly into their houses; the peasants were raggedly dressed and the children naked; and everyone – all the classes without exception – seemed alarmingly ungrateful to their liberators.

After surviving a reckless assassination attempt (the misdirected bullet cut a groove in his boot; the sniper was hacked to pieces by his guards), Napoleon joined Denon in confronting Saïd Muhammad al-Koraïm, the notoriously deceitful city governor. Glancing repeatedly through the window, where the awesome fleet

crowded the sunlit harbour, the quivering al-Koraïm pledged undying allegiance to the French Republic, guaranteed the cooperation of his public officials in the overthrow of the detestable Mamelukes and, when Napoleon produced a commemorative tricolour sash, bowed so deeply that he afforded a generous glimpse of the neck that would soon be cleaved by the executioner's sword.

The subsequent interrogation was conducted through an inquisitive little interpreter called Jean-Michel Venture. So when Napoleon arrived at the subject of the Chamber of Eternity he felt inhibited by caution.

'Ask him,' he said to the interpreter, 'if he has any knowledge of a secret chamber.'

'Secret chamber?'

'Just ask him!'

Al-Koraïm listened and blurted a string of obliging words. '*Hunaka katheerun min al-ghuraf assyrriya fi Misr.*'

The interpreter nodded. 'He says there are many secret chambers in Egypt.'

'But any of ... unusual mystique?'

The interpreter relayed and listened. 'He says there are many chambers of unusual mystique.'

Napoleon glanced at Denon. 'Then ask him if there are any here, in this immediate vicinity.'

'He says there are many chambers in all vicinities.'

'Any of particular relevance?'

'Many chambers of particular relevance.'

Napoleon scowled. 'But any that are ... *unique*?'

The interpreter smiled wryly. '*Many*, he says, that are unique.'

Denon cleared his throat. 'Clearly,' he observed with a smirk, 'one cannot expect a reliable answer from one who is so fearful of giving a disagreeable one.'

Without understanding a word, al-Koraïm nodded approvingly.

Later, Napoleon and Denon went together to inspect Pompey's Pillar, the forts, and some of the unimpressive dust-covered ruins, but discovered no evidence of any secret chamber. Alone, Denon investigated the remains of Cleopatra's baths, the cistern, various Saracenic buildings, and every vault, portico and enclosure he could find. When he reported his failure to his commander it was with a face of confusion and barely disguised despair, as though only just becoming aware of the magnitude of the task awaiting him. Napoleon ordered him to head immediately through the fertile Nile delta, overturning every stone along the way; he himself would pursue the army

across the desert to Cairo.

And so Denon missed the gruelling march, the endless thirst, the nipping insects, the dysentery, the hallucinatory mirages, the sharklike packs of pursuing Bedouin... Yes, Napoleon thought, he had missed all that, but he also missed this, the Battle of the Pyramids, and this was a spectacle that sublimated any conceivable suffering.

Napoleon was well accustomed to death. He had seen it in his days among the Corsican rebels, in Toulon, in Paris during the Revolution; he had ordered massacres; he had overcome his own suicidal impulses; and he had, along the way, learned to give little thought to his own safety on the battlefield. But while death itself was now an abstraction, the battle had become an endless source of sensual fascination; and here, on a trampled watermelon patch on the banks of the Nile, with the outcome never in doubt, there was seemingly no end to the surreal beauty.

To the left were the sparkling domes of Cairo; to the right, the Libyan Desert; on the horizon, the Pyramids. His own troops – twenty thousand of them – were massing around him with muskets, carbines and bayonets bristling like porcupine quills. And in front of all this – a sight to make an historian swoon – were eight thousand warriors of the ruthless military oligarchy that had controlled and brutally exploited Egypt for over six hundred years.

These were the magnificent Mamelukes: lawless, fearless, rapacious, self-reliant, bisexual, grilled since infancy in horsemanship and the martial arts – an astonishingly anachronistic caste that centuries earlier had annihilated the plodding Crusader knights with their own numerical and technological superiority.

There they were, resplendent in cashmere turbans, canary-yellow vests, billowing red pantaloons and richly embroidered slippers. Some were mounted on snorting Arabian chargers, others were standing upright in copper stirrups with reins between their teeth, a few were waving sparkling scimitars and silver-chased muskets and trilling like jungle birds. Occasionally one of the bolder chieftains would thunder around the French squares raising clouds of copper dust into the afternoon light ... a blur of horseflesh, egret feathers, striated vests and twirling cords ... wheeling around at full gallop, man, beast and flowing fabric indistinguishable ... a scene so surreal, so thrilling in its madness, that for a long time Napoleon could simply not give the order to open fire. Repeatedly he looked down the ranks of his own soldiers with a crooked grin, exhorting them to delight in the moment's transcendent beauty, to exult in the splendour, the challenge, the *history*... but all he discerned in the sallow young faces staring back was a quivering fear and a quavering resolve, because for all their

inexperience the soldiers recognised that they were made of only flesh and blood, they were insignificant to Providence, and unlike their commander they were only mortal.

The battle was over in a couple of hours. Again and again the Mameluke cavalrymen hurled their horses against the French squares and again and again they were decimated by canister-shot, musket-blasts and roaring flintlocks. Still the more crazed warriors refused to succumb, crawling over their own flapping entrails, emptying pistols, screaming, hacking, biting, scratching like wildcats. Once or twice an enterprising horseman would hurdle the outside ranks and dive into the square before being dislodged and chopped to pieces amid shattered watermelons.

A thousand frenzied Mamelukes drained their lives into the sand; the French lost approximately thirty men.

Under clouds of lingering artillery smoke the victors stripped the enemy corpses of their loot: brilliant jewels, gold pieces in sewn pockets, loaded saddlebags, weapons inlaid with silver. The surviving vestiges of the defeated army retreated to chaotic Cairo and fled with terrified refugees.

At nightfall Napoleon took up temporary residence in the Giza mansion of one of the Mameluke warlords. He slaked his thirst with several glasses of sherbet, ordered the sheikhs of Cairo to be brought before him for questioning, collapsed gratefully onto a voluptuous divan, and plunged into the peerless sleep of victory. During the night a staff officer woke him to report that parts of the city were ablaze. From the balcony Napoleon appraised the distant conflagration: minarets silhouetted before swirling cinders and leaping tongues of flame.

'What shall we do?' asked the jittery officer.

'It's a work of art,' said Napoleon. 'We admire it.'

He turned and found the Pyramids bright with mirroring glow – glimpsing, in that prophetic moment, a future in which so many other majestic cities would burn.

Anthony O'Neill is a writer from Melbourne, Australia.

SOPHIE MASSON

Excerpts from

The Black Wings of Azrael

a novel of the French Revolution

The following is the "Prologue" of a forthcoming novel by Masson.

3pm, 20th May 1858, Paris

The old man was dying. When I climbed the stairs that led to his room, I wasn't sure what I would find, though I had been told he still had his wits about him.

I was ushered into his bedroom. It was a beautiful room, of harmonious proportions, and only a few small, lovely paintings hanging on the walls. That afternoon, it was full of sunlight, and smelling of the spring.

The Baron was sitting up in bed, propped up on his pillows. He had become very thin, very old, the bones showing painfully under his papery skin. Only the famous blue eyes were still youthful.

I greeted him. He responded rather absently. I knew his moods, so I sat by his bedside, and waited. It was then I noticed how his hands trembled, how they gripped convulsively at the edge of the covers. He was frightened. That did surprise me. The Baron had never been known for nervousness, and I'd never thought him to be afraid of the approach of death.

Suddenly, he spoke. 'Master Dumas, do you believe in ghosts?'

It startled me. The Baron had never been one for such things. I stammered, 'Er..I..I'm not sure, Monsieur le Baron. But I think there are things that defy explanation, and..'

He cut me off. 'Go to my desk. Open it.'

This was more what I had expected. When I'd received his summons, I'd thought he must want me to change his will. People often did. On their deathbeds they frequently changed their minds on who should inherit. In the Baron's case, his heir was his great-nephew Maurice—a dissipated and rather unpleasant youth, but the old man's only living relative. Perhaps he wanted to cut Maurice out and leave his fortune to charity instead. People had strange ideas, when they lay dying.

So, obediently, I went over to the desk. I opened it.

'There is a drawer in the right hand corner,' he said. 'Open it.'

I did so.

'You have small hands, Master Dumas. Long fingers.' He gave a wheezing, unamused laugh. 'So this will be no trouble to you. Slide your hand into the drawer—at one side there is a small depression—press it—you will hear a click.'

I did as I was told—and the whole bottom of the drawer slid across, revealing a secret space, in which lay a piece of thick paper.

The Baron said, 'Take it out. Look at it.'

I slid it out, gently. It wasn't a document, as I'd expected, but a small sketched portrait. Just a few lines, on a piece of paper, but so skilfully done that it was almost as if the face that stared up at me was alive. It was an unusual face. Unfashionably long, tangled dark hair framed strongly masculine features, a large nose, a hard mouth, and black eyes—such eyes! They are hard to describe—but it was both as if the man were blind, and as if he could see right into me. The expression in those sketched eyes was like nothing I'd seen before, and yet it held a curious, disturbing familiarity. Unaccountably, I shivered.

I looked up, and got a rude shock. The expression in the Baron's eyes was one of naked fear, and a kind of eagerness. 'You see,' he whispered.

'I'm... I'm sorry, Monsieur le Baron,' I faltered. 'I'm not sure that I...'

'That man is the Devil himself...The Devil himself, Dumas!' He spoke so wildly, so strangely, that I grew frightened in my turn, and quickly crossed myself. 'These last few weeks, oh God, Dumas, I've seen him several times...'

I was silent with astonishment and a strange fear. I could not help looking down at that vivid, terrible sketch. The eyes seemed to burn into me. I faltered, 'Do you mean, Monsieur, that this man is threatening you? The police...'

'Don't be a fool, man,' he snapped. 'What can the police do against a ghost?'

I stared. 'A ghost?'

He gave a short, bitter laugh. 'Go to the desk again, Dumas. In the last drawer on the left, you will find a manuscript. Take it out, and go. Read it. Read it all night, if need be, but right to the finish. And come back tomorrow. Tell me what you think I can do, to... to satisfy that hungry ghost.'

'But, sir!' I protested. 'I am no father confessor...'

He gave the ghost of a smile. 'I've already spoken to my father confessor. It's not absolution I want from you, Dumas, but a practical idea for reparation I can perform in this world, before it's too late.'

'Reparation, Monsieur? But what on earth...'

'Don't argue, Dumas. Haven't you benefited from my patronage?'

'Yes, Monsieur, of course, but...'

'I'm at my wits' end, Dumas,' he broke in, sharply. The skin was drawn tight over his face, making him look like a death's head. 'You cannot begin to understand the torment I am in...' He broke off, then went on, more strongly, 'If you come up with the right idea, I will reward you greatly, Dumas. He paused. 'I was thinking of changing my will, do you see—and leaving half my fortune to you. After all, you've done more for me than that scoundrel of a Maurice ever has. You're a good man, you have a fine family. You could do with some real money.'

I could hardly believe my ears. This was hardly a proper proposition to make to a respectable notary. And yet—I wouldn't be human if I wasn't tempted. Sorely tempted. 'Monsieur,' I said, 'surely a friend, or...'

'You're the closest thing to a friend I have in this world, Dumas,' he said. 'Oh, don't look so surprised—yes, I've had any number of hangers-on, toadies, acquaintances. I've moved in the best circles. I've been praised by all the right people. I'm moderately famous. I'm honoured and wealthy. But I'm alone. Completely alone. I have no loved ones. And no friends. No *real* friends, not any more.' He paused. 'But that is of no consequence. Will you or will you not do this for me, Master Dumas?'

I looked from his gaunt, haunted face to that of the young man in the sketch. I don't know what possessed me then—I still don't understand it—but I ignored all the cautious instincts of a lifetime, and said, slowly, 'Very well. I will do it, Monsieur le Baron.'

He gave a great sigh, and lay back on his pillows. 'Thank you,' he whispered. 'Now, go to the desk and take out the manuscript. But put the drawing back where you found it. He'll leave me in peace tonight. He'll *know*, you see.'

I did as I was told, though a part of me—the sane, respectable part—thought that the old man was definitely mad. I replaced the sketch, and opened the last drawer on the left. In there, as he'd said, was a manuscript. A fat manuscript, bound in water-damaged black leather, with a clasp to hold it tight. I picked it up. 'I have it, Monsieur le Baron,' I said.

He didn't answer. He had closed his eyes, and appeared to be sleeping, though I was sure he couldn't be. I bowed, farewelled him, and went out of the sunny room, clutching the manuscript.

Back at my office, I told my secretary that I was not to be disturbed, and locked my door. I sat down at the desk and opened the clasp. It was rather rusty, and flakes of dull red, like old blood, spread on the first page as I began to read, the hair rising on the back of my neck.

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

تهدف كَلِمَات إلى الاحتفاء بالإبداع وتعزيز التواصل الثقافي بين الناطقين بالإنكليزية والناطقين بالعربية، وهي مجلة ذات نفع عام، ولا تسعى إلى الربح. يصدر منها عددان باللغة الإنكليزية كل عام (مارس وسبتمبر).

ترحب كَلِمَات بكل المساهمات الخلاّقة، وترجو المساهمين إرسال أعمالهم **قبل شهرين** 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 بضعة أسطر تلخص منجزاته/منجزاتها.

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تنشر كَلِمَات النثر والشعر والدراسات والقصة والفنون وفق طريقتين أساسين:

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ثانياً ـ **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 من العربية مجّاناً للذين تقبل أعمالهم. (الأعمال التي تأتي مترجمة سلفاً قد يتوفر لها حظٌ أكبر بالنشر نظراً لضغط العمل لدينا.) يجب تزويدنا بالمرجع الذي تم النشر فيه، بما في ذلك اسم الناشر، والسنة، ورقم المجلد، والعدد في حال الدوريّات. جميع المواد المقدمة للنشر تخضع لتقييم قبل قبولها.

يحصل المتقدمون بأعمالهم الأصيلة إلى كَلِمَات على الأفضلية في إمكانية ترجمة أعمالهم لاحقاً ونشرها في المجلات العربية أو مشاريع أخرى يتبناها الناشر. كما يتلقى من نشر في كَلِمَات نسخة مجانية من العدد الذي تنشر فيه مادته. وتعتذر كَلِمَات عن تقديم أية تعويضات أخرى.

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by the Syrian artist Samih al-Bassit