

A large portrait of Alia Mamdouh, a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a brown turtleneck and a red shawl, sitting outdoors. The background is slightly blurred, showing some architectural elements.

Alia Mamdouh

A black and white portrait of Bassam Frangieh, a man with short dark hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark sweater over a collared shirt.

**Bassam
Frangieh**

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

Number 24, September 2006

A portrait of Ibrahim Shalabi, a man with a mustache, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

Ibrahim Shalabi

**The Artist, the Writer & the Academic:
Three Arab Landmarks in the West**

كلمات

Kalimat

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

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SNOWFLAKES

Antony Loewenstein's My Israel Question

Antony Loewenstein is a much needed voice for humanity. We thank him for giving us the privilege of publishing the speech he delivered for the launch of his book *My Israel Question* at Gleebooks, Sydney on 08/08/06. Here is most of the speech:

In 2002 Robert Fisk, esteemed Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* newspaper, wrote that talking about the Israel/Palestine conflict guaranteed sleepless nights:

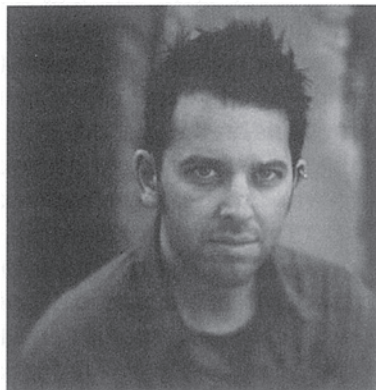
‘Reporters who criticise Israel are to blame for inciting anti-Semites to burn synagogues. Thus it is not Israel’s brutality and occupation that provokes the sick and cruel people who attack Jewish institutions, synagogues and cemeteries. We journalists are to blame...If we want a quiet life, we will just have to toe the line, stop criticising Israel and America. Or just stop writing altogether.’

Had he written that today, he could have added that Israel, through its recent bombardment of Lebanon and Gaza, is sowing the seeds of future anti-Semitism and terrorism against its civilians. Cause and effect. To suggest otherwise defies logic. Just like the Iraq war and its associated outrages have caused unprecedented levels of anti-American sentiment around the world, Israel is not immune from such eventualities.

When I spent time with Fisk in Beirut last March, one day before the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, he remembered Palestinian intellectual Edward Said had told him once that, ‘the last taboo in America is the American-Israeli relationship. You can discuss blacks, gays, lesbianism, anything you want in America, but not that.’

The situation is little better in Australia. We deserve to know why a tiny nation on the other side of the world, that has maintained an illegal occupation over the Palestinians for nearly 40 years, is given complete and total bi-partisan support by our two main political parties. I believe the answers to this question are rooted in geo-

Antony Loewenstein. Photo by Bryan Siebel



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political realities, Zionist lobby pressure and self-interest. And a healthy dose of old-fashioned Islamophobia.

My Israel Question aims to reflect on the defining conflict of our time through fresh, young eyes. As a Jew, I believe in a secular Israel and Palestine. I don't believe in the concept of a Jewish state, but neither do I support an Islamic or Christian state. In Israel and the occupied territories, to not be Jewish ensures discrimination through legal, political and social means.

As a human being first and a Jew second, I can't fully support an alleged democracy that occupies another's land, builds roads specifically for Jewish settlers, erects roadblocks that prevents pregnant Palestinian women giving birth in local hospitals, allows settlers to destroy Palestinian olive groves without sanction and imposes apartheid-like restrictions on movement between towns and villages. I've seen much of this with my own eyes.

We're often told that this conflict is too complex to understand, intractable and filled with age-old rivalries. This is not true.

The biggest single issue (there are others, of course) preventing a comprehensive and just settlement of the Israel-Palestine dispute is the Western public's ignorance of the facts on the ground. What is being funded in our name? I hope my book is part of the renaissance of public involvement in foreign affairs. The peace movement intends to win, and it's only a matter of time before we do.

This may sound overly optimistic – and my book is pretty pessimistic on the prospects of peace – but I do truly believe that global public opinion, as usual, is far savvier than our political leaders. Images streaming out of Lebanon in the last weeks - mass civilian casualties and the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure – have caused a sea-change in global opinions towards Israel. Support for Hizbollah in the Arab world has soared. Likewise for Hamas. Israel, once again, has mistaken military strength for moral legitimacy.

In the Western world, we regularly under-estimate the importance of resisting imperial occupation. The Arab and Muslim world has spent one century being raped and pillaged for our pleasure. And now they're fighting back. We should not be surprised.

Since I started writing extensively on this subject in the last three years, I've been amazed by the level of viciousness thrown in my direction. In the last days, I received the following email:

'You might be getting the love and attention from the media now, Antony, but in 5 years time when the world declares war on Jews, and not just Israel as it is now...you'll see where everyone's loyalties (or shall I say prejudices) lie...you'll be going to the concentration camps just like the rest of us...except when you're gassed to death, you won't be going to heaven, you'll be going straight to hell. So enjoy the limelight now. From a fellow Jew.'

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Maybe he's one of the diligent ones filling in his Census form tonight.

Generally, however, I've been overwhelmed by the hundreds and hundreds of messages I've received from Jews and non-Jews in Australia and overseas who feel their voices are not being heard on this most important subject. They believe the current path in the Middle East is disastrous and they want to discuss the role militant Zionism has played in it. They also want to know why Arab, Palestinian and moderate Jewish voices are so rarely heard in our mainstream media. Powerlessness is being translated into activism, public discussion and greater self-awareness. The mainstream media ignores this at its peril.

One of the most moving emails I've received comes from a NSW politician:

'Like Michael Danby [the Federal Labor MP for Melbourne Ports who last year called for publication of my book to be stopped despite the fact that he hasn't read it and has since ensured healthy sales], I have not yet read your book and like Michael I am from a Melbourne Jewish family. But that is where the similarity probably ends.

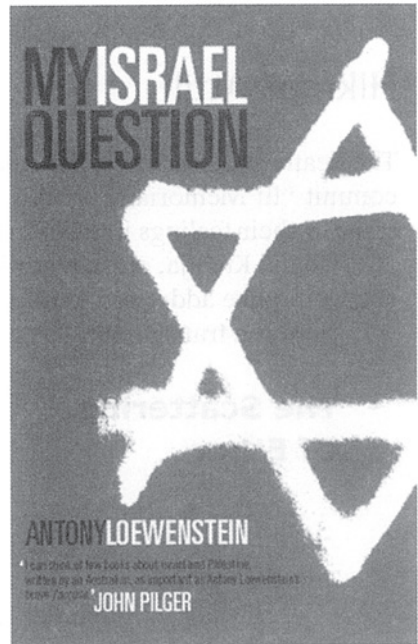
'I have consumed your writing in the media and the Lateline transcript: congratulations on your courage, insight and clarity. And congratulations on opening up a debate within the Australian Jewish community that is 20 years overdue.

'Even if all the wrong voices predominate (as in the Australian Jewish News) or you cop a load of abuse and slander (Gerard Henderson et al), you can be assured that there are thousands of people cheering for you.

'You can almost hear the collective sigh of relief from people like myself who have wrestled for a lifetime with the issue within family and community. And from people who are not Jewish and are deeply offended by the accusation of anti-Semitism for the crime of caring for what happens to the Palestinians.

'In the end you are performing a service to the state of Israel, to its citizens and to Jews everywhere. For too long the Diaspora has provided a moral insulation to Israel, shielding it from the international approbation that any other nation would receive if it acted towards its neighbours and indigenous people as Israel has. No nation can operate in a moral vacuum without the ethical compass of international opinion, and not expect to hit the rocks.'

I don't claim to have all the answers. In fact, I pose more questions than I know



how to answer. Jews have a long and noble history of dissent and no subject, especially the Zionist state, should be beyond criticism. The Israel lobby would simply prefer obedience from its loyal subjects. They've been terribly disappointed with my misbehaviour.

I see this book as the beginning of a conversation with individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds. It's more than time for the progressive side of politics to stop simply talking to each other. Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, religious, atheist and concerned citizen's everywhere.

Hikmat Attili

The death of our adviser, the Palestinian poet Hikmat Attili is a great loss to us and we commit "In Memoriam" of this issue to him, where a group of his friends compiled some of their feelings in a book dedicated to him.

Ghalia Khouja, our adviser in UAE, selected one of her unpublished poems which she would like addressed to his soul and the souls of like-minded people.

Here is a translation:

The Scattering Of Ether

1

Two dots in time,
or... in the sky...
That's the soul of my whiteness,
melting extinction...

2

calmness becomes too narrow
for poetry,
these rituals...
narrow the "I"...
why Oh God,
do you manifest hell
out of my wandering,

and I float mist upon myself,
and forget...
why should intuition
becomes the "I"?

3

At the summit of
the supernatural,
softness crawls...
time may flow to some constant...
and these premonitions,
to the unforeseen! Or,
my ashes may lay aside speech...
so it dances with meanings
transparent and thick
My calmness is suns,
my heart is hell...
There,

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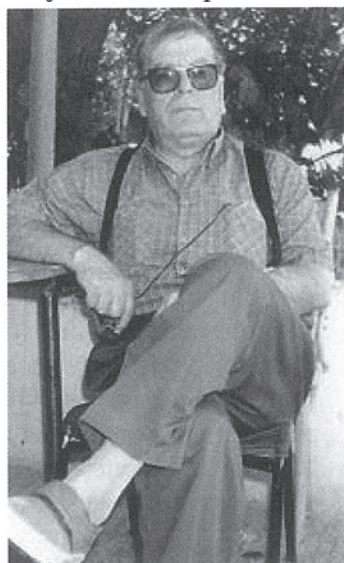
beyond song,
I bleed
over whoever

manages my vision,
for which I am
the only wings...

This year has also witnessed the death of other icons of Arab culture.

Mohammad al-Maghout

The Syrian poet, writer and thinker Mohammad al-Maghout died in April aged 72. He is considered one of the greatest Arab poets of modernity. I had the pleasure of meeting him at his home in Damascus a few years ago. I found a wreck, but this became known to all those who knew him or visited him in his final years. He confined himself to a couch. On a table next to him, was his most important companion, a bottle of wine or a mixture of some alcoholic cocktail he consumed continuously. And he was a chain smoker. A heap of newspapers and books was also on the table. He received me well and we discussed literary and political issues. He touched on his ailments. When I expressed an interest in having him as the subject of our Landmark article for the next issue of *Kalimat*, he declined in a dismissive manner, reflecting a man resigned to nothingness, or so it seemed to me. I left, feeling the pain of the premature loss of a substantial part of this fountain of creativity.



Our adviser, the renowned Lebanese journalist Jihad Elzein, paid tribute to him in an article he published in *an-Nahar* (06/04/06), Beirut. Here is our translation of it.

Who Would be the New Satirist of the Coming Half Century?

I once read in an American literary magazine that any poetry lacking in satire demands a reconsideration of the talent of the poet himself! This judgement, coming from an American critic, is dangerous and bound to be a source of concern to all poets in all realms of poetry: the novel, economics, politics, sociology, history and

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even mathematics! This means all written creative activities, including poetry as a literary genre.

The absence of Mohammad al-Maghout is responsible for opening the wound of this observation more than any other identity in the contemporary Arab cultural landscape. Mohammad al-Maghout was a satirist *par excellence*. He is the “satirist” when the word is equivalent to “poet”, or when there is no difference at all between the two words. The nearest example, with differences in style and experience, for a poet whose vision of life, death, people and themes is exploded by his satire, is the French Jacques Prevert.

Like any great, profound satirist, al-Maghout was mocking himself in the same way he mocked parties, countries, authorities, ideas, love and the beloved. The poetic success of this artist who wrote poetry without knowing it, as he said in one interview, led to providing the prose poem with much needed support to its very foundations. Except for him and a select few, and over two generations, the Arabic prose poem has remained struggling take roots, and still has not. There are still great doubts in the heads of poets, even great ones such as Adonis and Mahmoud Darwish. Adonis adopted it, but continued to use measure. Darwish has not written it. These doubts are about its modernizing capacity, not as a writing form, but as a special literary genre.

Call his writings whatever you wish, they a rare example of Arabic prose that takes the reader to the summit of poetic ecstasy. For a long time, I have only admitted to myself that I only accept al-Maghout, who I did not personally know, as the sole poet of prose poetry. My attitude has changed a little since, but among the many poems I have committed to my memory ranging from pre-Islamic times to this day, I have always recited to myself parts of al-Maghout’s poem addressed to Badr Shaker as-Sayyab:

Oh partner in dispossession and loitering!
My sorrow is as tall as the poplar
because I am not stretched by your side,
but I might be your guest any moment...
embellished by my white shroud like a Moroccan woman.
Don't leave a lamp at your grave.
I will find it... as would an alcoholic find his bottle
and a baby his breast...
No one at home
No one on the road
No one in this world...
Cling to your death you fool!
Defend it with stones, teeth and claws.

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This grand satirist is the one who mocked a few generations of idealists, all types of idealists, particularly those with whom he associated and lived among, from nationalists to leftists of all schools. He started as one of them and turned against them.

Al-Maghout contributed to the creation of the texts used by Durade Lahham, one of the two greatest Arab comedians known. In this sense, he contributed to the making of Lahham himself. In addition, his sarcastic journalistic articles remain unique in their standard in the region that comprises Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. This makes him a witness to an epoch... However, let us be aware: he departs this life, but this epoch itself is approaching death too.

Who would be the grand satirist of the coming half century?

Abdusalam al-Ojaili

Within a few days of the departure of al-Maghout, Abdusalam al-Ojaili died aged 88. Al-Ojaili was a physician, parliamentarian, minister, writer, novelist and poet, with over forty published books. Al-Ojaili was another Syrian icon whose name was strongly associated with his hometown “ar-Raqqa”, north of Syria, where he had his medical practice providing excellent care to his people. He always considered himself an amateur of literature, not a strange thing for this humble man!

In contrast to al-Maghout, Ojaili was traditional, conservative and paid a lot of attention to his manners. An article by Suad Jarouss (*Asharq al-Ousat* 12/04/06) compares the two contrasting Syrian icons. Here is our translation of excerpts of that article.

Al-Maghout and al-Ojaili Brought Together by Death after They Were Kept Apart by Temperament

They differed in everything, never in agreement at any one time, so it must be fate that made their burial on the same day. We would not have dared comparing these two contrasting giants, but the absence of one seems to have triggered the absence of the other, as if by the association of the negative and the positive.

Both Mohammad al-Maghout and Abdusalam al-Ojaili were nurtured by the

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love of their muddy towns; as-Salamia and ar-Raqqa respectively. Ojaili remained attached to his town, refusing to leave after some incidents convinced him of the need for him to stay to provide his medical services to the people of ar-Raqqa. This is despite his interests in travel and politics.

Al-Maghout, however, left his town only to serve a prison sentence for political reasons. His association with as-Salamia was that of profound estrangement. His early childhood memories of as-Salamia are those of murky sky, clouds and sand: 'When I was seven, my mother released me for the first time outside our home yard to herd the sheep, on what is left of the grass growing randomly among the posts. At sunset, the sheep returned without the shepherd.' Even renovating his old home in as-Salamia was undertaken by his relatives, and he only returned to his hometown in a coffin after an absence of fifteen years.

Both writers spoke of the mud in their hometowns. Al-Ojaili spoke whilst wading in this mud to his knees, struggling through his articles, funny stories and connections to allow his town to get rid of the mud, disease and ignorance. Al-Maghout waded to his waist and the mud smudged his words to become a key to the conscious of the deprived.

Al-Ojaili was accused of aristocracy and living in an ivory tower. He was marginalised by the leftist elite who did not want to recognise the traces of mud on his elegant attires and accused him of being a colonialist. The worn clothes in al-Maghout's words, however, appeared more genuine. He remained in the eyes of those leftists the mouthpiece of the downtrodden, never mind that he confined himself terrified behind the window of his little apartment in a street in Damascus. Before the two funeral processions start in each of the two towns, Syria was struck by rainy days, staring with muddy rain that covered the whole country with a mantilla of dirt. Death was one and the mud was the same.

Al-Ojaili lived a harsh life despite belonging to a clan with influence. The route to money was not easy for him as a lot of people would have thought. During his early years of study, he had to work in a mill. During the seasons of grazing, he spent his summer holidays in tents. When he wrote about Bedouin life, he was actually recounting his own experience and that of the region where he remained immersed in till his last day.

Al-Maghout was a farmer and a student of an agricultural school, but he discovered that the only parasites he was interested in fighting were those of the human kind. He joined a political party and used to frequent its headquarters to enjoy the warmth of a stove there, but he was soon imprisoned. After that he spent his life on the streets of Damascus and Beirut, from cafés to taverns, extracting his poetic images from the environment around him, sometimes recounting his poor upbringing in as-Salamia, resulting in writings of dispossession and hunger. Al-Maghout wrote with extreme honesty about his weak frightened self. Others saw their own

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suppressed and terrified selves in his writings.

Al-Ojaili never drank or smoked. He led an organised life with strict eating and behavioural habits. Every evening he would walk for two hours on the banks of the Euphrates. In the last few months, old age struck him suddenly and finished him.

Al-Maghout was slowly dying by his drinking and smoking habits. He prematurely aged. His friends never abandoned him, but when he died he was alone with a cigarette still lit between his fingers.

Al-Ojaily was a fine intellectual who mastered several languages and used to read about a hundred books a year and subscribe to several journals, medical and literary. He augmented his knowledge with travel to many places around the world spending three to six months a year outside Syria. He was disliked for that and accused of being the spoiled writer. In fact, whatever he earned from his clinic he spent on his travel and his hunger for knowledge. He never accepted any rewards or joined any political organisation. He remained independent, but he was counted as a rightist when the left was rising to power and leftist when the right was. He was neither.

Al-Maghout said that he opted for “images”, not for thoughts because he lacked education: ‘I only hold an agricultural school certificate. I am not educated and I don’t speak any foreign language. I consider that God relieved me of this burden. Poetry came to me by chance when Adonis discovered it and introduced some of my writings to the magazine “Shi’r”. The editors were startled at my spontaneity and simplicity. If I were educated, I would have probably written complicated expressions such as those of Adonis.’

Al-Maghout described himself as a “wild wolf”. He carried with him his instinct and rural qualities to the heart of Beirut where he, unintentionally, exploded his prose-poetic bombshell. He was a rebel without displaying any signs of expensive civilised elitism. The younger generations loved him. In contrast, al-Ojaili carried with him the city from Damascus and other world capitals to his Bedouin town. He did become an icon of his own town akin to the Euphrates. His followers were also numerous, but they were not covered by the press as did the followers of al-Maghout. Times were in favour of the rebellious, the angry and those who wanted to destroy sacred taboos.

Two literary figures separated by vast distances, each with his own qualities and wide audience. A reader of al-Maghout does not favour al-Ojaili because he is too classical. A reader of al-Ojaili does not favour al-Maghout because he is too absurd. Each continued to deny the existence of the other, until the opposite was proven true on the day of the two funerals.

Abdulmuin al-Mallouhi

Syria also lost Abdulmuin al-Mallouhi who was in his nineties. I received the news when I was preparing an article in support of, and commenting on what al-Mallouhi had published in “as-Sununu”, the literary magazine of The Migrants’ Friend Association in Syria, Issue No.7, February 2006. His article was titled: “In Defence of the West”. I was hoping that my article would be a present of gratitude to him, particularly that I never met him and that I missed meeting him on the few occasions I visited Damascus in recent years, and for this he expressed his disappointment.

Al-Malouhi was a teacher of several generations of students. He was a writer and scholar and his recent article indicated his enlightenment and objectivity and that despite his age he was more progressive than a lot of younger generations.

From his article, I choose the following points he makes:

- The West is not less spiritual than the East
- We still enjoy the technological achievements of the West and import from it our defence, food and medical needs
- The West enjoys freedom of speech, high quality learning, health, wealth and care
- Care and welfare in the West has become a social and a state issue rather than mere individual initiative

In other words, al-Malouhi is trying to dispel the myth of eastern supremacy when it comes to family and social relationships, despite that he does not rule out a number of problems inflicting western societies.

In my article,¹ I congratulate al-Mallouhi for his courage and objectivity and tell him that more people like him, particularly of his generation, are needed to come out with such ideas in the Arab world to assist in self criticism in order to improve standards and advance forward on the route of reform.

Thank you our great teacher. Your wisdom and love remain with us until we follow you.

Kamal Sabti

Kamal Sabti was an Iraqi poet who, for the past seven years, lived in exile in Holland until his recent death. He was born in southern Iraq in 1955. He left Iraq when he was doing his compulsory military service to spend the rest of his life wandering from exile to exile. He published several poetry collections.

¹ Published in *an-Nahr*, Beirut, 18/05/2006.

FRIENDS OF HIKMAT

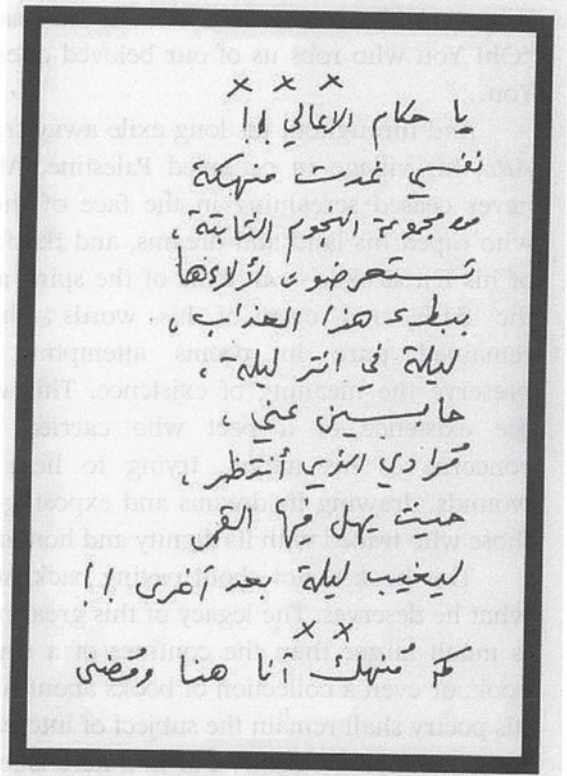
Adapted & translated by **Raghd Nahhas**

Hikmat Attili: A Loss Beyond Poetry

*Oh Lords of the sublime above!
My spirit is weary
of that fixed group of stars
whose brilliance you parade
whilst I slowly agonize,
night after night,
denying me
my awaited desire,
whilst the moon appears
only to disappear
night after night!*

*I am so worn out here
and wasted*

These words, pictured here in Arabic in his handwriting, were the last written by the poet Hikmat Attili.



Hikmat Attili died on 23/02/06 in Los Angeles. He was a fine poet and an outstanding human being. An adviser to Kalimat, our dealings with him were characterized by his professionalism and care which clearly revealed to us his integrity as he followed up his tasks to the full and always added value by sharing his enlightened views of the world and his keenness on seeking the betterment of human values.

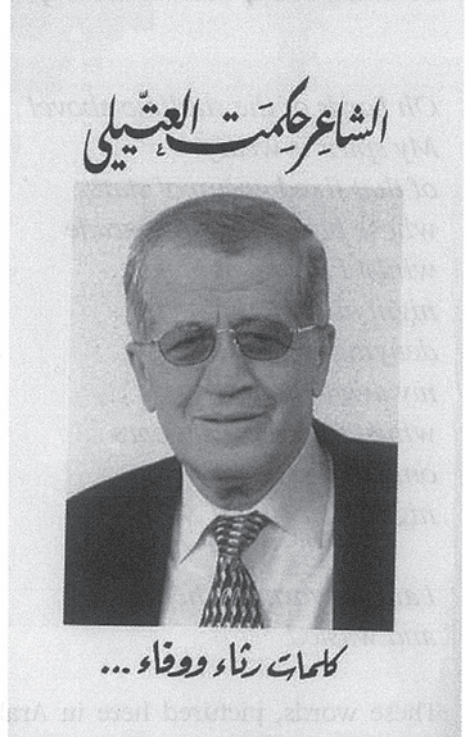
Attili was the subject of our Landmark article in Kalimat 11 (September 2002), written by Issa Batarseh and translated by Noel Abdulahad. Works by Attili appeared in Kalimat 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16 and 19.

Within weeks of his death, his friends and acquaintances led by Issa Batarseh and Nizam al-Mahdawi compiled a book of tributes, in Arabic, titled “The Poet Hikmat Attili— Our Elegy and Words of Loyalty”. These editors start the book by explaining the reasons behind their endeavour:

‘Over forty years ago, our great poet Hikmat Attili screamed in the face of death: “Oh! You who robs us of our beloved ones... You...”’

And throughout his long exile away from *Attil*, his village in occupied Palestine, Attili never ceased screaming in the face of those who raped his land and dreams, and the face of his harsh exile— an exile of the spirit and the flesh, and even of his words which remained pure in poems attempting to preserve the meaning of existence. This was the existence of a poet who carried the concerns of his nation, trying to heal its wounds, drawing its dreams and exposing all those who traded with its dignity and honour.

This book is not about paying back Attili what he deserves. The legacy of this great poet is much larger than the confines of a single book, or even a collection of books about his vast experience. We have no doubt that his poetry shall remain the subject of interest of poets, critics, researchers and readers for generations to come. Our aim here is to present our great poet with a bouquet of roses for his final rest. It comes from colleagues who knew him or dealt with him and they all want to say that they love him and respect him. The words we shared with him during our literary meetings shall remain with us as long as we live, because it was from him we all learned true literature... and from him we learned true loyalty.’ Here are excerpts from what the contributors to the book said, in some cases describing their state of emotion as Attili was facing his final moments. They are



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presented in the same order as they appear in the book.

Where does a poet migrate to in his coma?

Does Hikmat hear me now? Does he read me and expose the feelings hidden behind my words as he used to do?

No poet told us the truth after going into coma.

The body of the poet disappears, but his presence in us continues to enthuse the mysterious we harbour.

The world is white...

White is the origin of all colours.

It is the origin of emptiness and the essence of the soul which masters, above all, sending its hints or misguiding our paths.

A white morning... as white as your bed... and a very ordinary day in which I try to think of nothing.

I try absence... in order to search for you in your coma.

Nizam al-Mahdawi 15/02/2006

You are my bleeding memory.

A wound rubbed in salt.

Aaah!

For a while I have been trying to write about you, but I failed because you subconsciously grew inside me.

I remember when you were sick and I promised you a full-moon night as befits lovers in the city of palms, you said 'swindler', and you were right!

When I saw you confined to bed, legs amputated, cords paralyzed, breaths cut, heart fatigued, sore, weary and lost, I was at odds with the idea of your slow death. I turned my back on it like a child inflicted by an acute anger attack. My voice came out bewildered, chaotic and out of tune like a torn crying lute.

I practised all my childish deeds before you. You were in a coma or sleep, I didn't know. I hit the floor as I should, then cursed the tubes, the syringes, the solutions and all the antibiotics that memorized me and I memorized. I changed what I wanted, added what I wanted and gave myself all the justifications I needed.

...Why did I then grabbed your receding temple and improvised: 'You shall live'?

You opened your right eye, the one you see with, and scrutinized me for a while

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as if you were having pity on me. And you wept, like I had never seen you do before. My eyes had not lied to you— my guts were full of straw. Did I think that I would be able to stop the bellowing of the spirit?

How arrogant of me!

Your breathing tube is sunk in blood and vapour. Have you quenched your thirst? Have you emerged out of me or have I emerged out of you?

Was I me or you?

I or You, I or You...

Ah my pain!

A thousand ah.

*Ban Hassani (A Palestinian physician and writer,
Washington. She is a niece of Attili's)*

Hikmat... you are now asleep and unaware, but you are full of facts.

Inaam al-Jundi

You used to phone me in the morning happy about a new poem you wrote. You used to read to me some of its verses to hear my comments. You often asked me about my latest writings, and when I read to you, you would say: 'Allah Allah! Salwa, your sorrow is akin to the sorrow of the olive trees in my country. When, oh God, are we going to return to Palestine? I would never leave again. I would like to die in Attil, my town. I would be buried in the soil of my folks there. Yes, I would go back to start my life again. Do you believe that every night I dream I am there? I dream that I am busy publishing my ten poetry collections... still handwritten, kept in my drawers and bags.'

Half a century of your life was consumed by bitter waiting and exile. You did not change, always as if you were still living in Attil, in the heart of our beloved Palestine.

Salwa as-Said

From now on, I will not run to answer the phone if it rings at ten every Sunday morning, because I know that it will not be you any more. And I don't think that any of my children will come to me running with the phone to give to me without answering, because they know the identity of the caller: uncle Hikmat! But where would I run away from the sound of its ringing if on a Sunday it rings at ten? Then

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would my heart bear to answer knowing that it would not be you?

The Poet Who Lost His Time

You leave alone in this era,
With heavy steps,
tired soul and destroyed body.
Whenever you almost come closer,
whenever you almost reach
escaping your burden
and find your way to the shore,
you see the route to your home
from afar...
Amongst the ruins of calamities
your homeland weeps in your hands,
and the wounds of your nation
calls you from a distance.

Alone, he passes the realm of God
undeterred by sea,
or tiredness or a dam.
He visited every corner of the world
from extreme to extreme!
He saw his tired eyes reflected
on the mirrors of great cities,
like a flash he passed quickly
from one front to another
His bundle was a nation with
an open wound harbouring
hurricanes and angry poems
opening wounds in the wound
burn and get burned
build and destroy!
He perishes many times a day
and many times a day he regenerates.
He never settles
He never goes silent

He has never built himself a house
or a place of rest
The wind dies if it stops blowing!
And if the water in the river stops flowing,
the river becomes its tomb.

Is it possible, Hikmat, that you
chose the wrong time that
brought you to us?
The path has betrayed the steps
that could have led you to Attil
and you wasted your life
in a long exile where you
did not find your homeland?
The journey has passed my friend
and the earth is unaware
and your sorrow fell on deaf ears.
You lost your dream,
what is the use of poetry
and the deployment of vows
if your eyes cannot,
through your home window,
day and night witness
the transpiration of native basil
filling you with passion,
filling your abode with tenderness.
Oh my friend!
My partner in this bitter wandering
where exile has shrouded us,
but you betrayed me my friend,
without you knowing,
you changed your shroud before I did.

Issa Batarseh Los Angeles 27/02/2006

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To remain hostage to the two giants – life and death – for a period exceeding half a year, is a proof of the miracle of your perfection, and your eternal presence in the hearts and minds of those who love and know you, and those who appreciate your creative poetry which signifies your unlimited love to your precious homeland, your embodiment of the true meaning of freedom and your sacred understanding of the humanity of mankind...

You identified yourself with the splendour of the word exploding with nobility. You have written the words and they have written you. You were their loyal friend and their master, seeking guidance from your rich enlightened thoughts, despite the suffering they caused you and the agony you put them through. Purity for both you and the words resulted.

13/02/2006

At last one of the two giants claimed victory and proudly led you to its realm as its rare treasure, and to monopolize you and your heritage.

Your heritage – the word pulsating with life – has taken roots in the depth of life. No death can, despite its victory, raise its banner over your body or conceal the beauty of your gifts.

You are one of the rare pure few who maintained their veins of pride fresh and bright, uncontaminated by falsity.

Your memory shall remain in our hearts and spirits for ever.

Noel Abdulahad

Hikmat Attili was a shooting star in his patriotism, a light in his ideas and a leading example of human values.

Nakhla Badr

Rest in peace. Oh wandering noble Palestinian!
Light shall continue to shine on us from your words
even after death
Oil shall remain in your raised lamp
Oil shall remain in the lamp.¹

Francis Bassili

The evening of 11/02/06 was not an ordinary evening when my friend, the poet Issa Batarseh, and I visited our friend Himat Attili in hospital. Attili was clinging to life

¹One of Attili's poems carries the title "Oil of the Lamp". See Kalimat 7, Page 11.

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with the feeblest of threads...

When Attili's wife tried to alert him to our presence, there were no signs of greetings on his face. It was clear that the connection lines between heaven and earth were in a state of disarray.

Silence was the master of the moment. However, when Issa interrupted this silence by reciting "The Oil of the Lamp", a poem by Attili, I could swear that Attili's features started saying something.

Nabil Azzam

I cherish those moments when we used to meet in a restaurant every now and then to discuss various issues and share our interest in the affairs of life over a cup of Arabian coffee.

Hanna Kanawati

Hikmat Attili was honourable, pure-hearted and generous.

Farhan Sahawna

Never had I sensed in him any bitterness or hatred towards others, Hikmat Attili was a generous man who gave life more than he took from it. He devoted his poetry and literature to the good of the Palestinians, Arabs and humanity.

Saheb Zahab

Attili's attitude and his poetry are not a reflection of reality, but a creativity of reality.

Hikmat's poems carry the true essence of poetry. They carry a penetration of contemporary humans to their own consciousness.

George Saad

He once visited me in my home, carrying his printed poetry collection which appeared yellowish page after page. I asked him how come many years have passed since that collection without another one being issued. He sadly looked at me and said: 'I have no desire to do so, and I have no incentive.'

I shall never forget his look filled with signs of sadness and despair as if he was wandering what should he write, how and to whom.

He was a keen reader and an elegant listener. This is why his writings are rich in wisdom and dewed with song, radiating words of light— no darkness, no matter how strong it is, is going to subdue his brilliance!

Salah Kanakri

My readings of you on the pages of books, magazines and newspapers reveal a poet who believes in God, peace and justice for Palestine and the fraternity of humans.

Your poetry was new in its language, imagery and the resonance of its meanings. It was also a guidance to your many admirers.

Issa Boullata

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Hikmat attili, we all remember you in our “Wednesday Meetings” and in “The Arabic Cultural Forum”... We shall forever miss you, and as one poet once said: ‘It is when the night is dark that the moon is missed.’

George Harmoush

For me you are always present, and so for others!

Hassib al-Jawhari

Hikmat’s sea has disappeared, but the wisdom of the sea² remains in his tale and insight... Oh passionate man of the sea, we leave you to your oceans and the waves you propagated for us where the sea of your poetry swells for ever...

Nidal Hamad

May the peace of God be upon you with every breeze blowing on Attil, spreading your scent...

Saoud al-Assadi

Palestine is yours, Oh great son of Attil!

Abdulkarim Abdurrahim

Kalimat

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²The sea features in many of Attili’s poems. For example, see Kalimat 9, Page 95.

RAGHID NAHHAS

Ibrahim Shalabi

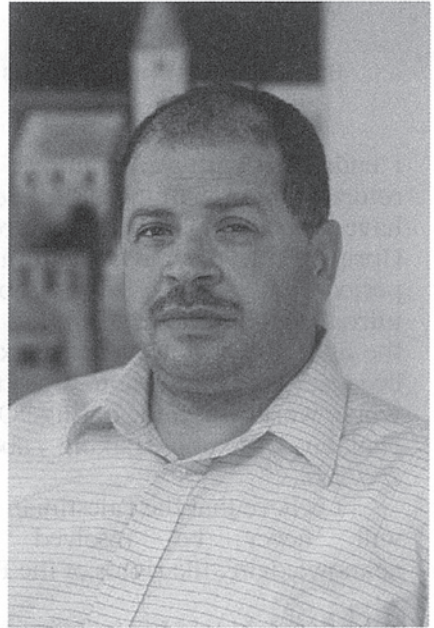
A Dancing River Poem

Son, I see strong brave lines and fertile imagination. Take care of yourself, because one day you might become an artist.

These were the words of the Arts teacher to his student Ibrahim Shalabi when he looked at his drawing of a Palestinian peasant in her traditional embroidered dress, walking with a water pot on her head among palm trees next to the Egyptian pyramids. Shalabi was in his fifth primary grade. When he conveyed the news to his mother that day, she was very delighted. His father was out of town due to work that kept him away for extended periods among a few Arab capitals.

The family was modest with limited resources, but Shalabi was a spoiled first child. After his birth in 1956, it took another 11 years before a sister was born. From his early days, Shalabi used to spend a lot of time in open places, contemplating nature and following with enthusiasm the shape and activities of animals and plants around him. He often opted for drawing what he saw.

As a Palestinian, Shalabi considers that the biggest dilemma of all is to be born without a homeland. As he went on with life, he felt that he was faced with two contrasting attitudes: some recognised him with respect and pride, but others discriminated against him. When he completed a series of paintings “Children of Stone”, some accused him of instigating violence, but he says: ‘I only recorded what we daily watched on the news. I only added some human expressions that cannot be expressed by a camera or any other technology. When the first *Intifada* (uprising) erupted back in 1987, I was working as a university lecturer in Kuwait. I closely



followed the news of the uprising. I was full of admiration of the courage of the Palestinian youths. I started cutting pictures and pieces of poetry from the local daily newspapers I read. I collected a considerable number that I considered a nucleus for a “revolutionary museum”. Then I started expressing my feelings by including these pieces in my paintings, using various techniques such as burning, changing colour, gluing bandages and barbwire. I also added verses of poetry using free calligraphy. These were from poems by Darwish, Qabbani and Sabbah. One poem by Sabbah says:

Resist Oh beautiful hands!
 Resist Oh hands dampened by
 the water of childhood
 Never listen to the lies of the tribe
 We have never liberated
 an inch of Palestine
 But... these prophetic hands
 liberated us.

I ended up with 33 paintings. When I returned to Amman in 1989, I decided to have an exhibition titled “Features of the Uprising”. It coincided with a critical period when the Oslo Accord was introduced, but to this day it has not seen the light. It was a provocative exhibition, because the impression was that the whole world was anticipating “Oslo” and Shalabi was still talking about the *Intifada*.

I believe that the Palestinian problem will never be resolved without acknowledging the rights of the Palestinian people.?’



When Shalabi told his father of his wish to study arts, his father was furious and told his son that he would forever be poor, spending his time on the streets begging for money. The father wanted his son to be a doctor or an engineer. Differences grew. Other family members and friends got involved in a futile attempt to convince the father to allow his son to choose the area of study he liked most. Finally the father told his son that he wouldn’t be spending any money on educating him if he chose arts.

Shalabi applied for a scholarship. The selection process involved sitting for a drawing contest which Shalabi passed. When his name appeared in the papers as number one on the list of successful applicants, he tore the page and handed it to his mother asking her to show it to his father and to request him to give his son his

blessings. 'My mother wept and gave me some of her jewellery so that I could sell them and use the proceeds for some of my expenses. I left Amman for Cairo to join the Faculty of Fine Arts at Zamalek.'

When Shalabi showed the Dean of the Faculty a photo album of his works, the Dean marvelled at the high standard of Shalabi's work. Shalabi mentioned that he needed a degree to find employment. 'The Dean lit a cigarette and told me that he would like to do me a favour by advising me to study something related to the arts such as architecture or interior design. And indeed he helped me apply to the Faculty of Applied Arts.'

Shalabi lives in Hamilton, Ontario, in Canada. An artist and a family man, he is kept busy with lectures, seminars, exhibitions, consulting for a local television station broadcasting through Abu Dhabi satellite television, and himself presenting two television programmes. In one programme, Shalabi completes a painting from start to finish. In the other, he interviews artists and writers to shed a light on their work.



Shalabi with his two daughters

Due to extreme weather conditions in Canada, Shalabi spends the winter achieving a lot of his work, whilst he takes advantage of the summer to exhibit his works in the many open air art markets and exhibitions in parks and on the banks of lakes, attracting thousands of visitors and art lovers.

His views on careers such as teaching are that these careers are indeed noble, but they kill the artist. Whilst '...in the space of my paintings I can say and do whatever I like without conditions or restrictions, save problems associated with red tape in some Arab countries. Some interesting memories from my work experience as an architect are when once I supervised a hotel project. I had to daily climb thirteen floors using emergency steps, and to inspect every room of every floor to make sure that subcontractors were adhering to their contracts. I was young and this was my daily exercise. I used to have a modest lunch and at the end of the day use public transport to return home.'

When I asked Shalabi about his art work, his reply was full of passion and pride.

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'I started an amateur, training myself by consulting books and reading about the history and techniques of different artists and the arts. I started copying the work of various artists, particularly the French Paul Cezanne. I used to group his paintings which I copied in collections on the walls of my parents' home. When relatives visited, they bought these reproductions at token prices. I fell in love with painting horses and the Bedouin life. I was introduced to the works of the renowned Iraqi artist the late Faek Hussein. I started copying his works. Later I started spending time at horse stables, including the Sporting Club in Alexandria and the Royal Stables in Amman. I watched the movements of horses and studied their muscles and anatomy. This was an exciting period of research which included consulting veterinary books and a comprehensive study of the horse's skeleton. I became specialised in pure Arab pedigrees because of their reputation and distinctive beauty. I drew tens of horse pieces, becoming renowned as an artist of the horse. In 1980, whilst a university student, I accomplished my fifth solo exhibition at the Holiday Inn in Amman, under the patronage of His Majesty the late Hussein bin Talal, King of Jordan and his wife Princess Alia who was known to adore horses. The princes bought seven paintings within moments of the start of the reception party.'

Shalabi believes that Arab art is more advanced than western art in its richness and purpose. He believes that 'whilst the western techniques might be more advanced in using non-traditional materials and tools, western works often look like photography or abstract spaces emphasising the genius of using these unfamiliar materials. I call it absurdity! In contrast, despite



the limited means of the artists in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Iraq, they produce works with substance. I prefer European art to that of the Americas. We cannot ignore the works of Rembrandt, Eugene Delacroix and Diego Velasquez. I paint for Canadians to enjoy, but I feel more related to the Canadian-Arab who stands in front of my work to smell the scent of Baghdad, Damascus or Palestine. He might carry my painting to his family to talk about his homeland to his children, or to hang it behind his desk in his office.'

Shalabi tells us that most of the Canadian art focuses on nature in North America. He has no doubt that this is heaven on earth in a multicultural country. Canada might be the largest country in area, but it is relatively poor in its contribution to art due to its small population. Shalabi adds that Canadian society is distinguished by its love of

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the arts in any form and from whichever origin. However, for financial reasons, only 13% of art lovers buy genuine pieces, the rest buy reproductions. ‘...I work between the Canadian and the Arabic streams. I participate in all Arabic celebrations and upon their invitations, I exhibit my works during events such as the national day of a certain country, charity functions, Arabic Heritage Festival or when an Arab singer performs in Canada. My paintings and drawings are placed at the entrance area to these functions, allowing participants to have a look and buy what they desire. One rewarding incident was when three Lebanese brothers participated in such a function. One came from Alberta, the other from British Columbia and the third from Germany. The one from Alberta had his Canadian wife with him. She bought some pieces that had natural themes. The one from British Columbia bought paintings about Old Jerusalem. The one from Germany bought a painting about Arab horses to take as a souvenir to his family. In this way I feel that I live to serve my people and nation anywhere I happen to be.’

During an exhibition in the city of Aleppo in Syria in 1993, the Syrian artist Sharif Moharram described Shalabi as ‘...a dancing river poem’ indicating that he will forever enjoy the dance of life.

All photographs used for this article are taken and provided by Samir Kasem who deserves our utmost thanks.



Cottage Pathway
oil on canvas



Glances
oil on canvas



Half-Moon Night
acrylic on canvas

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Life Dance
Oil on canvas



Iris Sunrise
Oil on canvas

KHALID AL-HILLI

Translated by **Raghid Nahhas**

Alia Mamdouh

Yes to Elegant Betrayal, No to Naïve Loyalty

- *I discover myself more in silence than I do in talking*
- *Every dwelling I lived in was temporary and accidental, even my marital home*
- *The west did more justice to my novel "Naphthalene" than my own folks*

Alia Mamdouh is an Iraqi novelist who lives in Paris and fully dedicates her time to writing and creativity. Her distinguished works have attracted readers and critics, Arabs and non-Arabs. Some of her work has been translated into English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, and Dutch. Her latest novel *al-Mahboobat* (The Beloved Ones) won her the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz Prize.

In a grand celebration at the American University of Cairo, The judges commended the novel highly. Dr. Samia Mihriz described it as ‘...a song of friendship and giving for life, articulating the language of the exiled in order to resist all kinds of ill-gotten gains. It is a talisman against forgetfulness, and an agonizing attempt to challenge annihilation through narration.’

Dr. Huda Wassfi mentioned that the text in the novel ‘attempts to destroy the institutional boundaries between the philosophical and the literary in order to achieve freedom of manipulation... A tale forms itself as a separate entity within the text, but it unifies with its literary body.’ Ibrahim Fathi added that ‘this novel is a mixture of textual fragments, different tales of distinct women whose voices eventually combine in a musical harmony.’

Dr. Abdulmonim Tlaima said, ‘*al-Mahboobat* succeeds in using creative, dynamic and renewable qualities of a place, rather than adopting constant, frozen descriptions. It articulates an ever-changing time, with a writing skill utilizing intuition psychologically and philosophically.’

Alia Mamdouh responded with a speech that evoked the feelings of the audience by its combination of sadness and joy, with moments of tears as well. She mentioned

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her first meeting with Naguib Mahfouz, the only Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize. She considered Mahfouz a threshold for a strong discovery of the soul. She mentioned that the Prize was also for Iraqi women writers who were lonely and had been undermined by a despotic system, only to be followed by occupation, sectarianism and extremism. She explained the experience of living in exile as a tool for discovering the self and the original homeland. Mamdouh also said that the American administration had entered Iraq to cleanse it of Iraqis.

Of her novel she said, ‘...the essence of hell is that no paradise should exist; my city! My most vicious obsession has been to bring about the power of life in the attitudes and fates of the characters. For example, the power of Suhaila, who attempts to re-unite her friends from all around the world, particularly Iraqis. It is a novel about those who have not lost their way to Iraq despite that they live away from it. It is a song of joyful friendships, which are less perilous than love. The events of the novel revolve around an exiled Iraqi woman who falls into a coma as a result of an illness. At the hospital, her friends of different nationalities gather around her.’

Alia Mamdouh has five other novels to her credit, two short story collections and a book of essays about creativity in Arabic and international literature. In addition, she has published a huge number of articles in leading Arab publications.

Mamdouh is a graduate of psychology. She worked as a journalist in Baghdad, Beirut and Rabat.

Which of your works is closest to you?

My dear Khalid, I don't like the use of comparative terms. I do, however, get attached to my novel, meaning that I am indebted to all the characters that dwelled in my mind, particularly the dead. Writing, in one of its concerns, is celebrating those who passed away. It is not precise to say that we live alone. I live alone physically and operationally, but I am always overwhelmed and surrounded by the others; by the characters of my books, who passed by but never departed me. I do suffer from the symptoms of the "others" in me; their fragility, weakness, depression and failures more than their successes. I am very attached to my novel *al-Gholama* (The Young Girl). It is a harsh and very hurtful novel. I don't dare repeat some of the things that have been written



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about it. I waited thirty years before I could approach the edge of that bloody year when in 1963 the Ba'th Party took over power. In my novel I attempted to document the history of the downtrodden, the losers and the marginalized from both sexes, as part of my personal history. My husband, who at the time was not my husband yet, was a member of that party. He himself helped release tens of women and young men who were detained at the Olympic Club. I use him as one of the narrators of the tale of Sabiha, the central character in the novel. I don't say this because the defeated achieves better than the victorious, but because the first is still bleeding. I love this novel because I am very much like Sabiha who was not concerned with patriotism in its hypocritical superficial meaning. I even don't like the term "homeland". I always use "country" instead.

Where are you between the story and the novel?

I find myself more in silence than in talk, and more in erasure than in writing. I lean on the novel where I can build many dwellings with wide windows and clean glass, with keys in the hands of their owners. This is particularly so because my first home was demolished in *al-Azamia al-Jowania* (in Iraq) for a new development. We are always told that advancement will come, but on its way it kills the spirit of the places it passes by. These cannot be replaced except in dreams and in writing. Every home I lived in was temporary and accidental, even my marital home did not last more than a few years. I always feel that we cannot build a solid home on the ruins of the first home that disappeared and to which we never returned. I feel that all attempts of writing are mere attempts to touch the borders of what has disappeared and to which we never had a chance to return. The virtual home seems to be able to succeed. This is the home we build in our tales where we cheat extinction, abandonment and desolation, in one way or another, so that we try and return there to cleanse the place we now occupy.

How do you view the many articles that have been written about you? What do you consider fair or unfair?

Not all what any writer writes is important or good. I have little trust in most of what I have written. We need to persevere and be humble in order to learn the art of erasure, omitting and deletion more than what we do. There are no sacred writings. If I now repeat my first novel, I would burn most of it. Nevertheless, I consider that these lame pages are the ashes of the writer when she was burning alone. Some of my works were neglected and avoided like you avoid a person with a contagious disease.

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My novel *al-Naphtalene* (Naphthalene) was mentioned in a book about the Arabic novel where a full page was allocated, with reasonable praise. When the author issued his second edition of the book many years later, he removed that page. This novel was sent to all Arab critics, but no one responded. Eventually a Jordanian writer, Fadia Faqir, nominated the novel for translation into English. This was followed by translations into seven other languages. The English version was well received in USA where it reached the top of the selling chart in Seattle for a period of one month.

A novel translated into seven languages is great. What is your impression about that?

One has to be careful not to be carried away with this. A German publisher, who for twenty years has been publishing translations for many Arab writers, once contacted me to say that they would not be sending me any sales' list that year because all the books distributed were returned to them and that this applied to translated works by other writers as well. So, just because a translation happens it does not mean that the writer is going to reach the readers in a popular way. We still need to do a lot of work and promotion. Even translations of the Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz do not sell as you expect.

Nevertheless, it gives me pleasure and pride that my works are being taught in several universities in USA and France. I would love to reach a wider western readership, but I am not going to die in sadness if it does not happen in my lifetime. Notwithstanding the importance of translation, I mainly write to strengthen my spirit, not to be translated.

What are the most important requirements of translation and do you feel that what has been translated for you was compatible with the original text?

I prefer elegant and just betrayals to naïve loyalty. In all translations, there are betrayals as strong as indiscrete love affairs. We have to accept that every language has its own particularity. I liken translation to a flowing river carrying all what is coming from the motherland and from the lands of others. In the end it will end up in the glass of the reader- a new drink containing the sweetness of this and the freshness of that.

You are a good reader. What do you concentrate on from the non-Arabic literature?

I have glaucoma, a disease that attacks the eyes without any reason, and it is like being bitten by a snake. I am patiently awaiting blindness, this is why I use my

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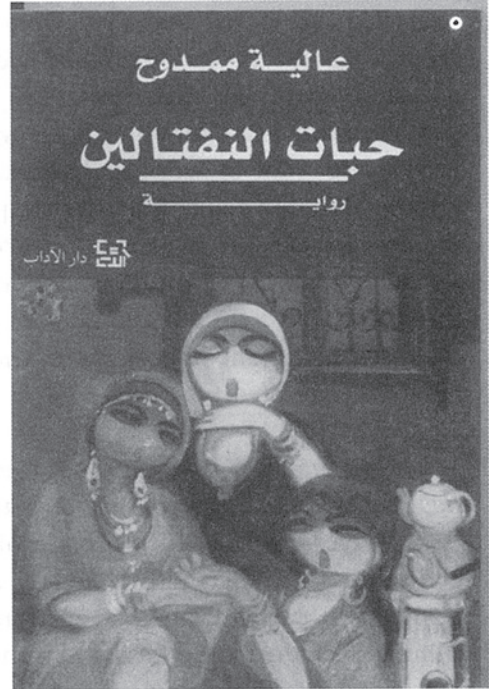
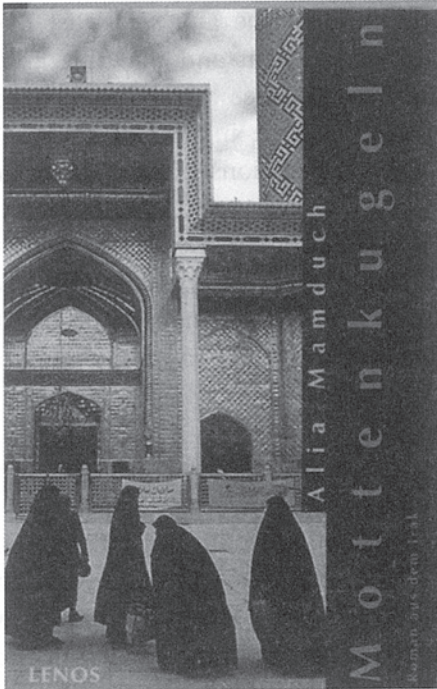
eyesight sparingly, so I am very selective. I read American literature and am fascinated by the works of a young Spanish poet.

What about Australian literature?

I only know David Malouf through some of his novels, and I follow some of the Arab writers in Australia such as the poet Wadih Saadeh.

What type of work are you preoccupied with writing now?

I am working on some humorous texts, in addition to the final stages of a new novel which I don't want to talk about now.



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

SUHEIR ABU OKSA DAUD

Excerpts Translated by Solomon Sara

Bassam Khalil Frangieh **a Critic and Translator of Arabic Poetry into English**

My father used to work in the orange groves in Jaffa. He died as a refugee refusing to eat a single orange as long as he lived.

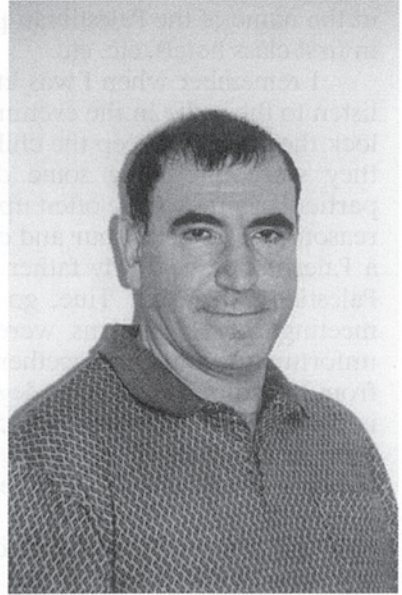
Due to the reputation of the Lebanese Frangieh Family, people think of me as a Lebanese though I am a Palestinian who once lived with his family on bread and tea.

Dealing with a Lady Arab writer is easier than dealing with a male Arab writer. Some Arab publishing houses slash the profits of the author.

Bassam Frangieh

From displacement and refugee camps to the top American universities! He is the first to translate Nizar Qabbani into English, and creatively translate Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati, Hani al-Rahib, Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, Hanna Minah, Halim Barakat, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Qasim Haddad. Students at Yale University demonstrated when he decided to leave the university after 12 years, so he changed his mind and was awarded the prize of the best teacher at Yale for the year 2001. He is the most renowned teacher of Arabic literature in America. He picked up popularity after September 11. He has authored articles and books that have gained Arab and Western respect. His most important works of translation are "Love, Death and Exile" and "Arabic Love Poems". In 2003 he compiled "The Joy of Discovery", a book published by the Arabic Foundation for Studies and Publication. It contains letters from Qabbani, Bayati and al-Rahib to him in which they discuss the translation and publication process of their works, indirectly revealing important hidden sides of themselves in life and literature.

Bassam Frangieh obtained a Bachelor Degree in Arabic Literature from Damascus University and Masters and Doctorate degrees from Georgetown University, where he



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taught for many years. He is now at Yale University. He is an adviser to Kalimat.

The following are excerpts from an interview, conducted by Dr. Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud, published in Arabic in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, May 29 and May 30, 2006.

You are of a Jaffa family that migrated from Palestine, your motherland.

Yes, my family is a Jaffan family. My father used to work in the orange groves. Whenever he saw an orange in the market place after 1948 he used to sigh. To him, orange was a symbol of his lost country, his lost work, his lost house and his lost identity. He took an oath that he would not eat an orange until he returned to Palestine. My father died without eating another orange. Few years back, I saw, by chance, oranges imported from Jaffa in an American market. I stopped contemplating them. I picked up one. It had a special scent, a shape that was different from an ordinary orange. Oh how I wished my father could see it! I did not buy it, I did not eat it. That orange opened a wound in me.

Afterwards, when I returned home, there were plenty of electronic messages inviting me to attend a lecture at the university where persons from the Palestinian Authority and Americans, would be present for a discussion of the "Road Map" and its implications. I wanted to cry! What road map? What maps are they talking about? This is no doubt a lucrative trade in the name of the Palestinian people. Everything is in the name of the Palestinian people: flying on planes, taking limousines, and staying in first class hotels, etc. etc.

I remember when I was little, my father and his friends used to get together and listen to the radio in the evening and discuss the Palestinian issue. They would always lock the door and keep the children and women away from their meetings as though they were discussing some dangerous topic. That made my mother suspicious, particularly they were often uptight and agitated. Once she asked my father about the reasons for his behaviour and continued: "Tell me, I want to know. Is there going to be a Palestine or not?" My father was silent and angry, then he answered: "There is no Palestine." She said, "Fine, go ahead and meet. Meet as much as you want." The meetings of Palestinians were mostly a vent for the heart. The simple and the unfortunate would get together to discuss their miserable conditions and take comfort from the similarity of their degrading lives and helplessness. What a difference there is between the meetings of those simple people and the meetings of their leaders in Oslo, or the meeting about the road maps. Those meetings were not only for nothing, but they aimed at deceiving the Palestinians.

How did you live your childhood?

I don't know what to tell you. There is nothing in my childhood that is nice to hear. My childhood does not differ from the childhood of any other Palestinian child who was a refugee in the camps, whilst the well-off from Palestine did not go to the camps. They went to other places. They lived in comfort and sent their children to American universities in Cairo and Beirut and even to America and Europe to study in prestigious universities. Those children formed the highly educated Palestinian

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bourgeois class. All those did not live in the camps nor do they know the truth about the pain of the Palestinian people.

The involvement of some of them in the affairs of Palestine was a purely romantic venture and it gave them an opportunity to exercise and practice a dominant authority and nothing else. The children of Gaza, by their defiance, have exposed the nakedness of the upper Palestinian class. Every thing before those children became lame. Nothing could rise up to the level of the Palestinian children. All the academic theories came out tottering, boring, without any value and they failed. The lectures failed.

How did you leave Palestine?

I was not born then. I don't know how things happened. What I understand is that my father did not want to leave, but my mother heard that houses in another neighborhood had fell on top of their residents and bombs were falling on houses. People fled. Confusion, rumors were spreading among the people. Agents were scaring the population that greater things were yet to happen. False promises came from the Arab leaders. Leave for fifteen days and take the keys of your houses with you and we shall liberate it for you. You know the rest of the story.

Just like sheep, they told me, a truck was jammed with people and after a few hours they were dumped in a camp in Jordan. Within hours they were transformed into refugees. The great indignity began and grew by the hour and by the day. They became refugees like thousands of people. People used to share tents and I heard much from my mother saying that some of the people she knew were our neighbors in the tent. Of course, there was no work in the camps except to swallow more indignity. It was not an easy task for any man among his family.

My family stayed in the camp for at least two years. They went to another camp in Lebanon. My father was looking for work. He was not lucky. They left for Damascus. He found a job, but on a day to day basis, depending on the circumstances. One day he worked another he did not. Many years passed in this state. Then he found a job at the city of Qunaitarah on the Golan Heights. The family moved to Qunaitarah. There was not a single library in Qunaitarah, no breathing space. My father was able to rent a humble dwelling. His salary was a pittance, and with difficulty we managed our affairs.

When did you leave Qunaitarah?

Qunaitarah fell to the Israelis in 1967, with frightening speed. It became a city of ghosts within days. The military and the intelligence units withdrew. The governmental bureaucracies withdrew and left the people behind. The people of the city were the last to leave. Take care of yourselves was the government's advice. We did not leave until the sixth day. There was no one in charge left there. The governmental and the military presence came apart. The city was empty. We left for Damascus on the 10th of June, and the war that had begun on June 5th had ended. When I was heard saying to a friend of mine that the departure from Qunaitarah was

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a mistake, and that we should have stayed, on the very next day, a group of intelligence personnel showed up and took me for questioning.

Those who left Qunaitarah were labeled as immigrants, but those who left Palestine in 1948 were called refugees. My mother, to the day of her death, used to say: 'We were refugees and we became immigrants, they destroyed our houses. May God destroy theirs.' We ended up living in public schools, since the schools were closed. They gave every family a classroom in the school or put several families in the same classroom depending on the circumstances. They distributed bedding and blankets among us. We used to gather the school desks into the center of the room and use the rest of the room for living. In the evening we spread the mattresses on the floor and slept, and in the morning we lifted the mattresses on top of the desks and transformed the rest of the room into a sitting and guest room. We took care of ourselves and served tea when the "immigrants" from other rooms came to visit us. We used to hear the radio say: 'The will of the Arab people has won, and Israel has failed in its war. The aim of Israel was to bring down the progressive Arab regimes but it was rewarded with failure.' At the end of the summer, we left the schools, because the schools were to open their doors to the students soon.

You mentioned to me your visit to your home town Jaffa during a sad day... What does Jaffa mean to you and what does Palestine mean?

I was taking part in a conference on linguistics in Jordan. I took advantage of my presence in the region and crossed the bridge into Palestine. Jaffa is my folk's town, I don't know it. After the bridge, I did not know what to do. I began to examine the landscape. This, therefore, is the motherland Palestine! I felt a chill and a shiver. This is the land to which I belong!

Everything in it looked sacred. I even saw the sands as sacred. I rented a car to Jaffa and stayed there several hours in one of the districts, the *Ajami*, the birthplace of my parents, may God have mercy on them. I heard a great deal about the *Ajami* from my father. I wished I could let my parents know that I saw the land they dreamed of returning to during their lives. I walked the streets as a stranger. The district was a wasteland. I thought of the key that my mother kept till she died. I asked an old lady, whom I saw standing in front of her house if she knew my father, she said yes. She said she knew where our house was, and she pointed to it. The house had been abandoned, was in bad repair, its windows were smashed, its walls were falling down, there was no furniture in it and no one there, the door was locked. I did not enter. I was not able to talk with the old lady anymore. She had difficulty talking and walking. Why did they leave the land? She said it with a halting voice filled with sorrow, bitterness and blame. She was blaming me. She continued: 'They should not have left.' I felt her words pierce my innards like a dagger, or as if I was hit over the head with a heavy blow. I almost fell to the ground. I felt a betrayal. I felt that I had betrayed my country, and that my folks had betrayed their country. How can people truly leave their country? Whatever the circumstances, my parents should have stayed on the land and died there. The people should have stayed. Staying is establishment on the

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ground, true resistance and the only true path to liberate the country. Becoming a refugee is an unforgivable mistake. Being a refugee means indignity and staying means heroism. But you know the story of the betrayal that befell the Palestinians.

What is your opinion of the topic of the right of return and Oslo?

Oslo demolished the Palestinian struggle, and frustrated the wishes of the Palestinian people. It is altogether a miserable and fruitless operation. It destroyed everything. There will be no return. I am very pessimistic. The matter needs another fifty years for resolution.

What does belonging to a place mean to you and where do you feel you belong after about thirty years in America?

I feel I am wrenched. Like a branch being tossed away from the tree, tossed away from the roots and the trunk. After thirty years of exile, things lose their essence, everything loses its meaning, the place remains a mirage, the earth remains fragile. I have entered tunnels from which I don't know how to exit. I desired the motherland to the dregs. Arab security services made of my exile a permanent country. It caused a fissure in the heart. We are neither with these nor those, so when we travel to the Arab homeland they suspect us at the airports, but they welcome whoever is blonde with blue or green eyes. They welcome every kind of travel documents that are foreign, except ours. We the exiled Arabs find the treatment bad.

Our Arab looks do not lead to respect, nor do our foreign passports meet with the same respect as the passports of the foreigners. It is as though we came for a purpose we did not declare, or we are suspected by them as being spies of American intelligence. What is laughable is that these countries are on good terms with America at all levels, including some which harbour American bases.

This Arab himself when he returns to America with his American passport, and because he is not blonde nor are his eyes blue, and because his name is Arabic, and he was born in an Arab land, becomes an object of suspicion and uncertainty by the American airport authorities. He becomes subject to interrogation and he is treated with a less respectful treatment than a native American, despite he carries an American identity card.

My American students, who travel to Arab countries for studies or otherwise, tell me of the degree of respect they encounter, and the advantages the country extends to them. They also talk of the hypocrisy of those people they met because they treat them by one scale and treat their own citizens by another. They also talk of the customs' officer at the border, and the bribes and corruption, and absence of justice. I feel a sense of great embarrassment when I hear stories like these and others from American students.

What is your opinion of the Hamas movement?

I look at it with joy. Hamas could be the beginning of salvation. It may be the only path to cleanse the successive corrupt Palestinian authorities, the merchants of

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cement and thieves of revolutions. I begin to feel optimism. I respect some of the Muslim movements greatly. All other banners have fallen. All the Arab governments that exist now are an insult to the Arabs and their populations. They consist of a hurdle in the progress of advancement and democracy. The Arabs have, at the moment, no leadership to feel proud of except for Hamas and Hezbollah, without whom the Arabs would only be left with disgrace and shame.

Why did you originally tend towards the study of Arabic Literature and why did you turn to translation?

I graduated from Damascus University in Arabic Literature. I adore Damascus and Syrian literature. I was ahead of the pack among the Arabs in exile who studied and published on creativity in Syrian literature. I wrote about this literature and translated brilliant Syrian authors such as Haydar Haydar, Hani al-Rahib, Hanna Mina and others. I wrote about the recently deceased Muhammad al-Maghout and I studied his works. I did the same for Sulayman al-ʿisa and others. I shall continue my contributions in this field. These Syrian authors are a unique breed and when they depart, history will not repeat their likes.

When I came to America, I said to myself that I must introduce the Americans to Arabic literature, so I translated a novel and some poetry. I did not realize at the time that this would open for me doors that were difficult to close. I did not realize then that people were thirsty for the field of translation. Soon letters and contacts poured in asking me to translate more, and due to personal pressures I entered into a field I did not want to enter. For reasons I don't understand, my name became connected with translation and people started introducing me as a translator. The truth of the matter is the opposite.

I teach at a university, write criticism and analyses in both Arabic and English and I have some books like *Al-Ightirab fi al-Riwayah al-Filastiniyyah*, "Alienation in Palestinian Novel" and "The Anthology of Arabic Literature, Culture, and Thought from Pre-Islamic Times to the Present" which is used in many American universities. Lately, the author Ghada Samman wrote a comprehensive review of this book in *al-Hawadith*. May be the Arabic saying is true: *Whoever provides much of something becomes known for it*. It may be said of me. I have increased the number of translations more than other topics. That is why I have become known as a translator. I truly don't feel that this label is very precise on its application to me.

What are the prerequisites that must be present in an individual to become a good translator?

First, that a person must know the two languages. Second, that he possesses a measure of poetic sense and a degree of critical sense. Third, that he bears the burden of long hours and days, all of which at his own expense. All the translations I undertook were free and I gained not a penny. Stupid you might say? I don't blame you.

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It is said that you are the professor who presented Palestine through poetry. What is the secret of this success and the flocking to your classes?

I was presenting Palestine through poetry, because I could not present it in actuality. Palestine has become songs that the people romantically chant, so I cried romantically with the mourners. May be my love of the topic is behind the success. I don't think I am a genius. The rarity of those who study the topic with love and yearning made me look good.

Who are those who care about Arabic Poetry in America?

Very few. Some teachers and students but their numbers are small.

You were among those who signed a petition against America entering and invading Iraq, along with many other names such as Sahar Khalifa, As'ad Abu khalil and Samah Idris... How do you see the place of political work within literature?

Objections flowing from the heart are poured on the page. However, if a noble Arab leader were to stand up and object to the war that would be stronger and more useful. If one Arab country were to close the American military bases that were used to wage war on Iraq that would have been more effective. If a single Arab country were to say 'No', that would have been more significant. Petitions were being written against the war while the Arab countries were hurrying to provide supplies and security to the American forces and helping them in striking Iraq.

Can you give me an idea about the American publishing houses in comparison with Arab publishing houses?

There are for sure many giant publishing houses and they are greatly esteemed. For translated books of poetry and prose it is better to seek notable or university publishing houses. It is not easy to find a publisher for Arabic literature in America. Therefore, it is important to try to publish it in houses that specialize in the world of Arabic literature or the literature of the third world. We have in the Arab world respected publishing houses, for example, Dar al-Tali'ah, also Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-'Arabiyyah and others.

Why do you choose what you choose, and do you choose the poems first or the poet?

I choose the poet first then I choose the poems from his poetry. This is not the correct way, but I got used to doing it that way.

Why is the female writer almost absent from your work?

Dealing with a female writer is better than dealing with a male writer. I have the greatest love, appreciation and respect for female Arab writers, and I confess my deficiency towards them. I will write about and delve into their works in the near future.

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Do you consider the aesthetics of literature sufficient to draw you to this tedious work or are you attentive to the political work in literature?

Aesthetics/beauty is more important than politics in literature, but the Arabic literature is all politicized, and I agree with this politicization, especially in this stage of history. All creative people must contribute. We have many problems, and Arab writers must discuss them in their literature.

It is said that a critic is a failed poet.

This saying is not correct. They are words the critic repeats either out of humility or mostly out of conceit. A critic is creative, and the creativity of a critic is a necessary condition for the creativity of the poet or the story teller. Poets learn a great deal from critics and are afraid of them. Were it not for good criticism, the level of poetry would not improve. Poetry without criticism is without value at all. Just imagine a cook who cooks and there is no critic who complements or criticize him. The critic is the one who tells him that your food preparation needs salt or is slightly burned. Consequently, there is no value to that cooking without someone to eat it. That the eater be artistic in his taste is not only necessary, but also a duty to add to the food's flavour.

What is the project of translation you wish to accomplish?

For a project on translation there must first be a project of support for this translation. If appropriate support becomes available, there are many possibilities crying for accomplishment. But rest assured, there will be neither support nor a project.

I read lately about a bad translation of Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah "Introduction" into English... Have you thought of translating this long and important text?

If the support project were made available, then the translation of the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun is an important necessity among other necessities, it is a must.

Dr. **Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud** is a Palestinian writer and scholar from Mi'ilia village in Western Galilee and holds a PhD in political science from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Currently she is a Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Politics Department, Pomona College, Claremont, California where she teaches Middle East Politics and the Israeli-Arab Conflict. She was a visiting scholar at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University in 2005.

Solomon Sara, S.J. is with the Department of Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057. saras@georgetown.edu

LEONORA HOWLETT

The Eightieth Anniversary of The Australian Watercolour Institute

The Australian Watercolour Institute (AWI) will celebrate its 80th anniversary with the publication of a comprehensive book in December 2006.

Watercolour painting has been an important and continuous part of the depiction of Australia, historically and aesthetically, since the first European exploration and recording of this country, and from this beginning a strong tradition has evolved.

The visitor to a public art gallery searching for watercolours will find them displayed in a more dimly lit section of the gallery, away from the bright main halls which will exhibit impressive, high impact oil paintings and sculpture. Usually painted on paper, the watercolours will be shown in the subdued lighting which is required for the conservation of these more fragile works. The lighting focuses on the individual paintings, often quite small in scale, encouraging close scrutiny and the contemplation of a subtle medium which traditionally builds an image using delicious layers of transparent pigment. There the visitor will also be most likely to find past or present members of the Australian Watercolour Institute displayed in these collections, from the original members whose work developed from the 19th century academic tradition to the artists whose work encompasses the major developments of the 20th century.

The Australian Watercolour Institute had its origins in 1923 when a group of six watercolourists met to form an Australian society devoted to showing the special qualities of watercolour painting, a medium which they felt had come to be regarded as less prestigious than oil painting and was often therefore exhibited in a less favourable manner. Subsequently a group of 11 members and 32 non-members held their first exhibition in a gallery in the now demolished Anthony Hordern's building, in 1924. Since then the Institute has flourished and grown, by invitation, to a membership of 80, from all states of this country, and represents painters whose

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pictorial vision and expression range from the most profound realism to the extremes of abstract expressionism, and using all gradations of pigment from pale transparency to heavy impasto.

An observer will notice that landscape painting in watercolour has always been one of the favourite subjects for European artists, its special qualities of quick drying paint and the easy portability of paper, make outdoor painting expeditions easy to manage. Many such expeditions were undertaken over the years by Institute members often with unexpected and hilarious results.

How the most serious of such endeavours can easily be sabotaged by real life is humorously described by Mr. Newton Hedstrom who has been a member since 1969 and was born in 1914 before the Institute was established.

He describes an outdoor painting expedition to Oxford falls with fellow member John Eldershaw [president of AWI 1945-1948 and member 1923-1972] in the mid 1940's:

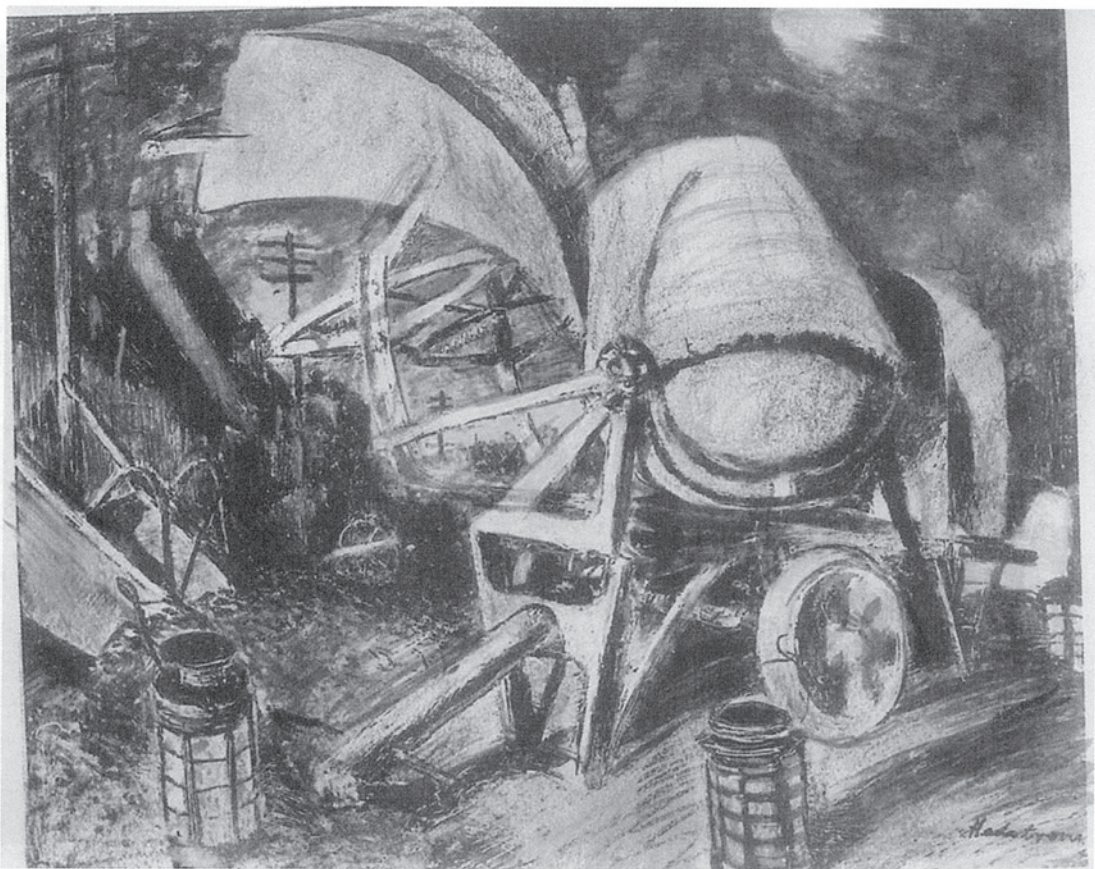
‘Two members were painting outdoor landscape, sitting on canvas stools, come rest period, stood up to look at each other’s work, placing paint loaded palettes on stools. After some discussion one AWI member sat on his stool – forgetting his paint loaded palette - much to the amusement of the other AWI member - who said “bend over and I’ll scrape it off” which he did, placing the paint on his own palette’ accompanied by language as colourful as the palette itself.

The Institute, which is only two years younger than the famous Archibald Prize, has survived the passing whims of fashion and is one of the oldest continuously functioning art societies in Australia. It has exhibited internationally in Korea, New Zealand, the American Watercolour Society in New York, Spain, Canada , Hong Kong. The book launching which will take place on December 3rd this year at the Mosman Regional gallery will record the history of watercolour painting in Britain and Australia, the history of the Australian Watercolour Institute, illustrate the work of some of the founding members and the work of the current members .

The following quote is from Brian Kennedy, former director of the Australian National Gallery. His foreword to the 75th anniversary publication of the Australian Watercolour Institute in 1998 expresses his perception of the significance of watercolour painting: ‘The art of watercolour painting remains one of the most vital areas of artistic production in Australia.’

This new publication can only support his definitive statement.

The following are samples from the work of some members of the AWI.



Newton Hedstrom

Concrete Mixer
14 X 17 cm
1948

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Newton Hedstrom

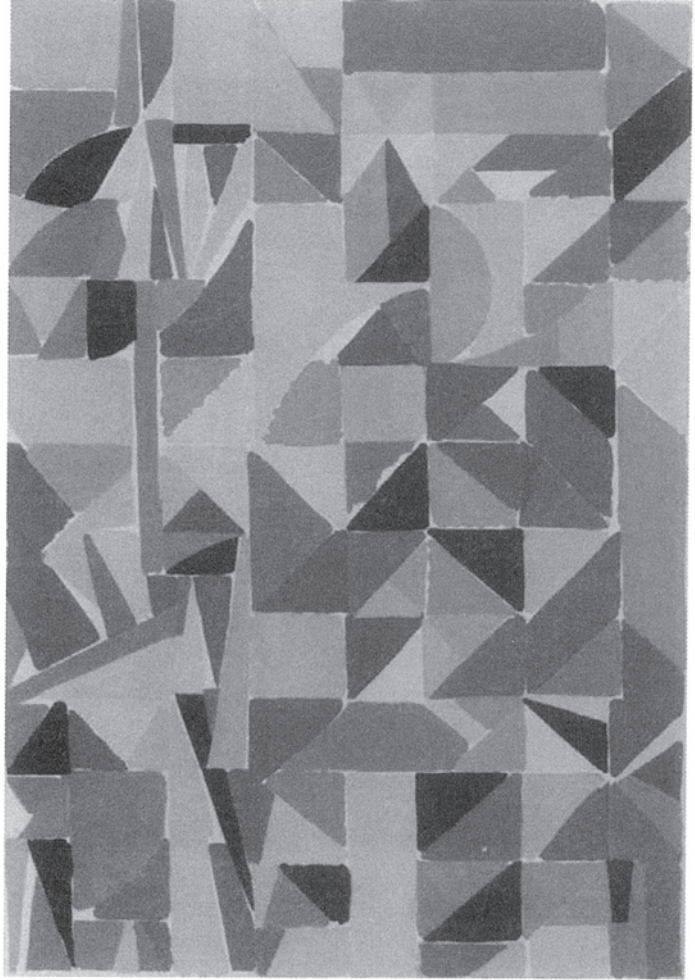
Currawongs

56 X 76 cm

Undated

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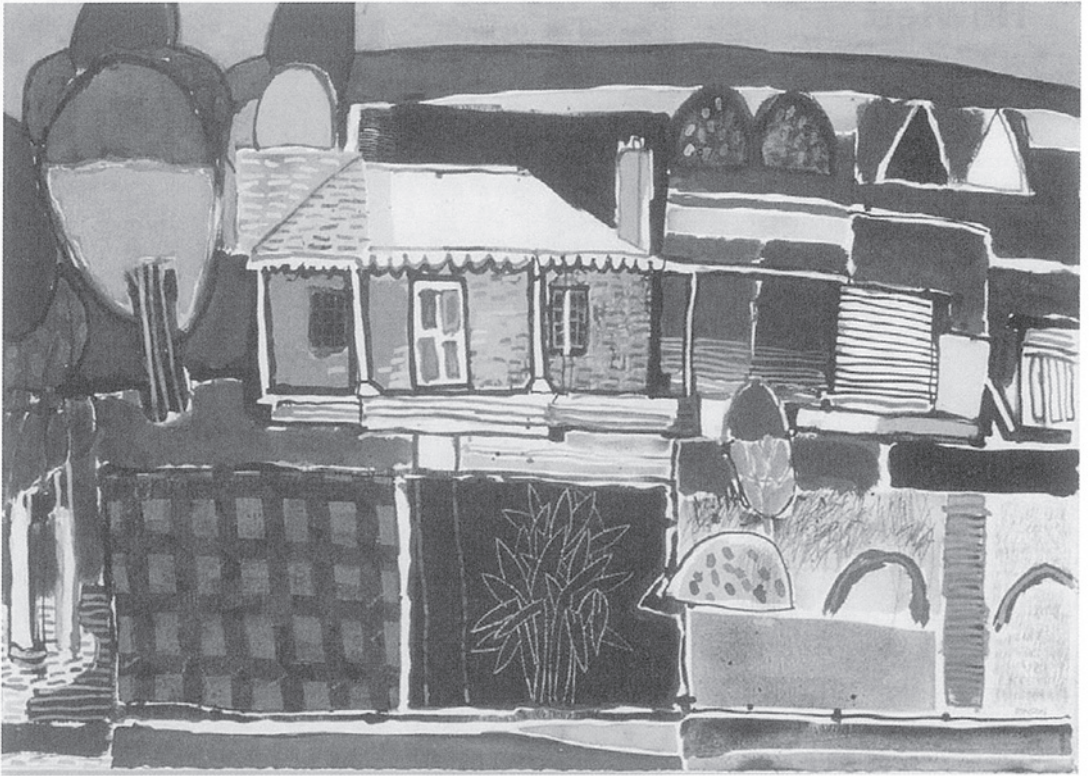
**Leonora
Howlett**



Geometric Composition

60 X 45 cm
1985

A R T S



Peter Pinson

Hill End

75 X 105
2000

Colleen Werner



Love Trinkets of a Modern Bower Bird

22 X 21 cm
2004

Leonora Howlett is a Sydney artist and a member of the Australian Watercolour Institute. An article about the life of Howlett was published in Kalimat 11.

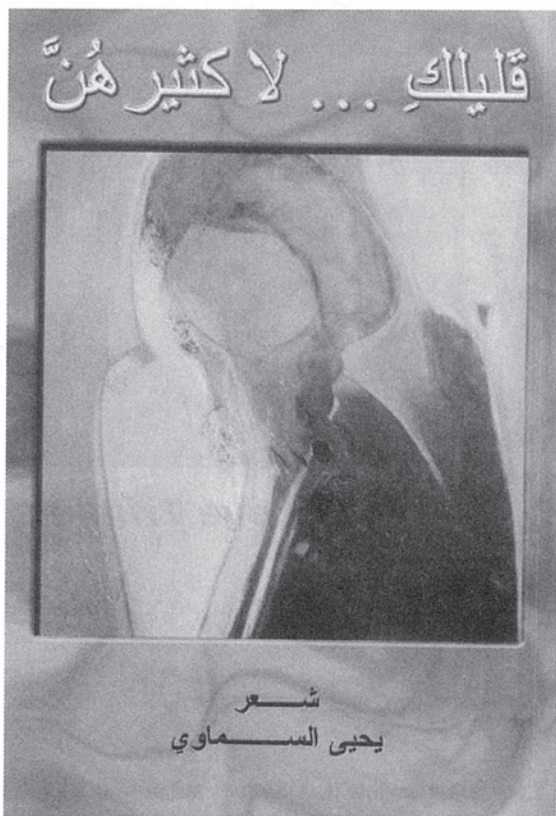
YAHIA ASSAMAWI

Translated by **Raghid Nahhas**

Identity

There is a likeness between
you and Iraq...
You both dwell in my heart
like a burning fire
You both rebelled
against the pupils of my eyes
and here I lie between you
a martyred poem
and a corpse thrown by passion
into the graveyard of papers

There is a bond between
you and the Euphrates...
You both stream out of my eyes
when passion brims
and the dove of my soul
complains of the midday heat
in the wilderness...
You both turned me into a slain wish
and a wounded laughter
extending from the side of lines
to the inkwell's lips...
You are both minarets
besieged by the invaders...
and here I am between you
a hymn awaiting prayer
in those slumbering cities



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There is a kinship
between you and the palms...
you both sleep in the memory of the pasture
and wake under the wailing terrace
You were both bereaved by the tyrants and invaders
by swishing and cooing
and here I am between you
a morning without a sun
and a night with dead stars and extinguished lamp

Don't be surprised if
the palm of my years withered
before my birth even began
Don't be surprised...
The roots in Baghdad suckle the mud of terror...
and the branches are in Adelaide
Between the two of you,
I am a Sinbad's sail
gliding between death and life!

Yahia as-Samawi is a poet from Iraq who made Australia his home. He lives in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. He has several poetry collections in Arabic to his credit. His poetry has also been published in various media in Australia and around the world. He is considered a leading Arab poet, and won several prizes for his achievements. The above selection is from his recent Arabic collection *Qaliluki la Katheerahun* (A Little Bit of You... not Much of Them), self published, Adelaide, Australia 2006 (ISBN 0-9751200-3-4).

ABDYAGHOOTH

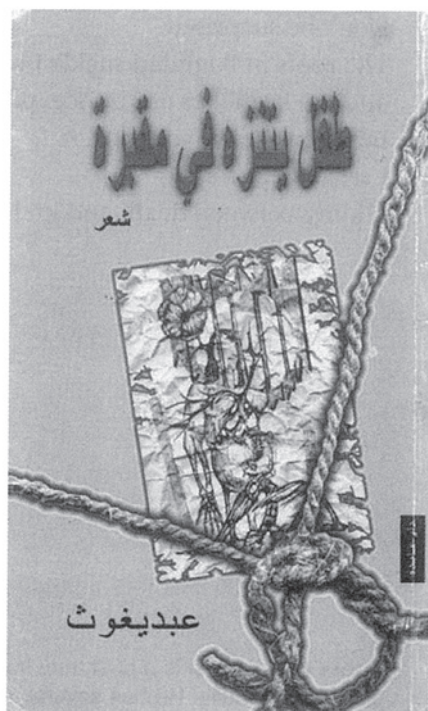
Translated by *Raghid Nahhas*

A Rose in the Hand of an Infant

Oh Allah! This Earth is frightening...
It looks like a boiler brimming with vomit
We leap in it like monkeys
over your voracious flames
our heads shake
like in a saint's dance
Oh Allah! I only want
a little home
the size of a rose
in the hand of an infant
nothing more
nothing more
nothing more!

Sleep

At night
when I place my head over my head
like he who places a rock upon a rock,
a lame fountain of memories flows
like children's scribbles,
so I turn my face over my face,
only to see a corpse floating
all through my life!



Panic

Once upon a childhood
I dreamt of two women
descending from the sky
with arms like those
in Greek mythology—
it was as if they washed my heart
and flew away...
My mother came out
to the yard to see
a naked child
dazzled by looking at
two awesome stars!

The Tongue of Death

Our ancient house overlooked
a cemetery's courtyard prostrated
at the feet of a deaf mountain...
How can I rejoice now
as I speak to you in
the tongue of death
and the expanse of my childhood
is graveyards and mountains?

A False Grip

I feel the night like
a blind man
as I float in my bed like
a drowned man
in a pool of blackness
and sorrow
I listen
to the rhythm of my years
falling in the dark
stone
after stone

like mountain rocks
released
into
a well

I pass my frail hand over the table
hoping to grip a year
before

It
rolls
down!

The Unfamiliar Women

Ailing childhood,
and an ailing mother

distanced her breast's passion
once upon a patched-cloth winter
and left me in the hands
of the unfamiliar women,
the strangers who
weaned me on a bitter plant
my mother was as far away as
a cheerless star
so I sucked tobacco and
the lips of others,
gasping until my spittle overflowed!

My Mother's Stove

Oh distant warmth when
on my mother's left knee,
once upon a muddy winter,
she left my eyes wander
about the butterflies...
next to my brother
whose warmth was
the warmth of a stove,
so I slept under the wings of Allah
like a lover who fell into
the soul of his beloved
who had been in eternal sleep!

14

My father bathes me
at the steps of our house.
Water falls

like the awakening of the intoxicated
and I glow
as if I were running in the alley
with patches of garments
as he scrubbed my head
my armpit
my pubes,
until I drew a watery smile
and watched the household
glancing at me
with naked laughter

This was
when I was
fourteen!

A Mysterious Train

Thirty years have passed
each year an empty carriage...
A mysterious sadness
descends on me
when I remember
I have never really existed!

Stony Fountain

My song is stony because
my voice, sometimes, falls
like mountain stones
swept by the storm
and sometimes
resonates as calmly as

a fountain on which
I poured my face
in a fleeting childhood of water!

A Tear

A tear awaits me
at the end of the night
by my bedside
It reproaches me if I stay long
in lands that are not mine
and when it wraps me in
its night cover
my soul roams past memories
and disappointment that
one day I won't become a stone

Glory be upon those who
were born adults—
without tears!

Indolence

I watch the mingling steps of
passers-by
and the meekness of children
and lovers
This all reminds me of things
which no longer belong to me
and that thus I was born;
indolently indifferent to the world
more than my indolence
at this table!

Corners

At some corner in this world
a child weeps from middle-age
folding his arms around his head
as if being whipped.
He knows...
that at another corner
in this world,
his soul is hiding
like a poem
hastily slipped
under a rock
there... there...
where the World is a child
whose eyes almost pop out
with laughter!

Innocence

Pure foolish life
with all its prostrations
during the morning prayer
and the harvest seasons...
With its night burdens,
it comes out like incense and tales
from the holes of mud...
the child's eyes close on it
as he sleeps on his mother's knee
and a stove burns with innocence
not touched even by a pure hand

Suddenly, like
misguided rebelling molars,

the tooth of life's wisdom
dreadfully protrudes and
grows into two devil's horns
which I now furiously shake to
exorcise the ghost of his steps
chasing my distant
coloured butterflies!

A Bird in the Prime of Youth

The routes of hope are
droplets of love falling off
the wing of a bird
to flower
blood on the soil,
and when he sets foot
on a high rock
he sees the world
an expanse of pain...
A long tear falls off
the furrow of his wound.
He wishes it would wash away
his marks on the ground!

The Shape of Death

Allah descends from high above
and asks about me
among the mountains
I run away...

because he resembles
the ghost of death.
Among the small scattered bushes,
I harbour an idea and turn...
as if bitten by a snake
and when I wake up intoxicated,
my hair over my shoulders
like a messiah in love,
I find traces of a god
who passed here and asked about me.
I become dancing clouds in my space
and try to come to grips with
an idea that torments me:
is death a god in the shape of
a shepherd?

Premature Anxiety

Oh premature anxiety
which resembles a child
inflicted with cancer!
I want to sleep
like the rock of the valley
neither swept by rain
nor by The Resurrection!

The Steps to the Grave

No...
You had not been asleep
as they started your burial.

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You woke up
over an extended childhood.
As they loosened the threads
of your shroud with
biblical scissors,
you shed an abundant tear
and when the sound of
the steps of those

who had escorted you
reached your grave,
like a sound you
witnessed in childhood,
your whole body
glowed with too much pain
for your grave to bear!

Abdyagooth is an Omani poet who currently lives in Perth, Western Australia. The above selection is from his first collection *Tiff Yatanazah fi Maqbara* (A Child Strolling in a Cemetery), Dar Abida Publisher, Cairo 2003. He is currently working on another collection.

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SHAWKI MOSLEMANI

Translated by Raghid Nahhas

The party

A skull
laughing
in the desert

In an Opposite Direction

I desire a mountain
I fall in a valley

I stretch my arms open
a torrent receives me

I ask it to drown me
a hand holds me

I curse it
it sticks to me
tenaciously

A Hole in the Heart

The seas are black
but I plow the waves
with a radiant heart.

The Eagle

All the space is his to see, but
his eyes target one point!

If

Would space end if
the eagle folds its wings?

A Lesson

He said the ants taught him...
and laughed until
a nest grew out of his head

Naught

A bend
at crossroads—
fatherless
motherless,
called:
Naught



Shawki Moslemani is an Australian-Lebanese poet and writer who lives in Sydney. The above selection is from his recent Arabic collection *Who Unmasked the Rose*, Dar al-Mustaqbal for Printing & Publishing, Sydney.

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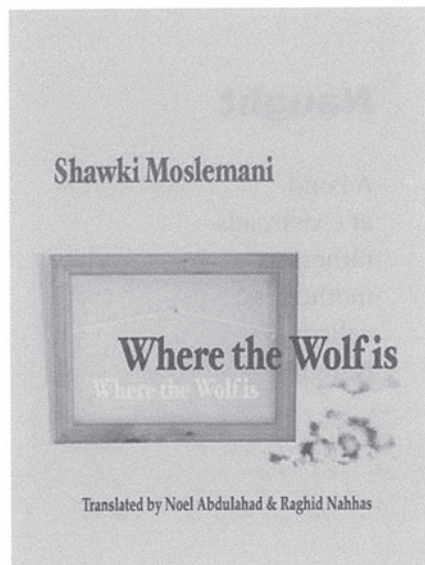
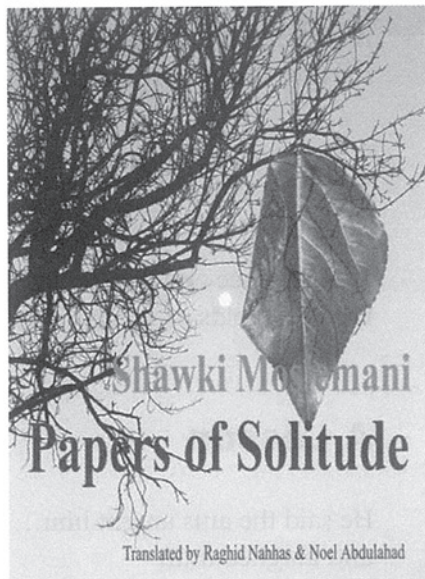
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J I H A D E L Z E I N

The Poem of Istanbul

Translated by **Raghd Nahhas**

II. Statements of Gratitude to the Impressionists

The Dance Hall¹

Oil has its entertainers...
Do I hear the oil's clamour or
is it the clamour of the party?

Sunken eyes
become addicted to
the Waltz in their longing

The architect shall collect his brush
from the madness of
his extinct temples

drawing the science of
his lewd innocence
in the wilderness

and from sound
he shall erect a statue
Have you heard

¹ Based on several paintings by Lautrec, Manet, Degas & Renoir.

the sound's possibilities
so that you see the sound?

One in his mirrors...
Gloomy are the people who
appear in his wakeful sorrows

A funeral's joy entraps us
with the longing of
its rainy fingers

He dances among his shrouds
which dance on the
velvet of the slaughter

Paris

They painted other cities...
but only her glory they painted
They gathered her water
and her expanse
but claimed to belong to

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other cities and that
they were only her arms
They coloured the wakefulness of
wakefulness...
They said they saw her:
a woman or a wilderness

It is another city...

a wave had left
only to bring her back
It is another city...
in celebrating excesses
and in the cycle of
the desired passionate one

III. Women

Beirut

To R...
You yawn...
May your morning be jasmine and
water on palm leaves...
on the breeze and the sleeping wounds
where the universe is a shade

Peace exudes you now to
the beach's sparrows
you spread on the bed of the first taste
the gardens of the old sorrow dampen
intimate wounds open

You yawn...
May your morning be jasmine
What is in the heart does not depart
It is my first coffee of the morning...
and my last shiver
waning on the silence...

You both lull time with
the city's slumber
before the sun erupts
at the confrontation line
Now, before the daily funeral
you rest in the palm of the city

Beirut
12/06/87

Women

The First Case:

I am bewildered at women's whispers
and their muted voices on balconies
I am bewildered how women
walk in the streets
I am even bewildered by

their hair, their faces and features
...and their cycle of fear
when their bodies quiver on
the shore of desire
I am puzzled by the
fremitus of fragility of the lips
and by the quiver of
the pupil of their eyes
I hear the sparrows' pulse
when women land
snowflakes touch my soul and
my moments become
as elegant as velvet
I am bewildered by
the kingdom of women...
mercilessly they arouse
the childish in passion and words
...I am bewildered how
women are women!
and I wonder, upon seeing a woman,
what a tyranny that befalls
the downy heart
what a joyful tyranny!

The Second Case

I will still be bewildered
until my neighing rages
The horses rolled inside the crowd...
strewn from the fragments of
hard metal
softened by passion and lust,
tamed by the electricity of possession
and waves of glass smoked by
poetry and calamities.

The sails of shade extended their fire...
A river sprung from another river
A sea sprung from another sea
Multiple darkness sprung
from darkness
and when the women of oddity
became a wound
urbane ecstasy raged in the wilderness
The tribe women started conquering
the tribes
My woman is in town
spreading a meadow
letting the metallic metal gather
what has been scattered
She is distributing her green joy
among the gloomy homes...
The patios leaf with intimacy

**The Greenness
of Invincibility**

*She said as the breeze of al-Khinshara
scorched her tender sunglasses on a
day in winter 1966:*

Have you seen
the blueness of my fingers?

And I say to her now in 1989:

There are no seas,
mysterious temptations
or suspicions between us
It is only the passion of women

going as far as a rebel would
behind a veil

They quench their desert...
with a stream through the darkness
in his vision
the greenness of invincibility
lather their skin
his heartache is in their lather

The Weddings of Bewilderment

1

Slumber on the frailty of women
Their body is tinted
Playful
Magnificent
with their soaring breasts
and pleasant plumage
Shake the sorrow off
that fremitus down
so no routine stays with
that fremitus down

The salted body becomes
infatuated with manhood
The dubious body flexes—
amazing plums celebrate in darkness
and agonize in words until
the cask fills to the brim with wine:
the clamorous roc pleads ecstasy!

2

Suppose your winds dwindle or
misfortunes oppose you
would a lover then beckon to passion
or even respond?
Men are sullen,
bent by difficult times

But women...
are concerned with roses,
perfumed water
...and fecundity
Their fragile cooing has
the serenity of the returning doves

They come together...
like boats agitated by an alien sea
Their safe harbour is the hearts of men
casting their shade on a meadow of
cool dew

3

I granted you my domination
Take, if you wish, my last breath

Hush if You are Sad

Hush if you are sad,
your tender imagination rages
and take a win...
Your journey is a wide split
and a lasting temptation

Contemporary Indonesian writers, Ayu Utami & Laksmi Pamuntjak

For those readers who have engrossed themselves in the many novels by Orhan Pamuk, Ayu Utami and Laksmi Pamuntjak make an interesting addition to reading/writing that may be loosely described as coming from an Islamic *weltenschaung*.

Ayu Utami and Laksmi Pamuntjak are two Indonesian writers whose international reputations are beyond dispute. Yet here in Australia we hear as little of them as we do our own writers.

Utami is highly praised for innovative prose and Pamuntjak for her poetry. Both address themes that revolve around issues related to the freedom to be sexually expressive and both extend their cultural references satisfactorily from East to West. Both work with a knowledge of the ancient religions of Asia Minor, the Graeco-Roman tradition that informs much of Western philosophy and the Arts, admirably juxtaposed with the rich cultural references of Indonesia, Agama Jawa and Sumatra.

*Saman*¹ is the first novel by Ayu Utami. Published by KPG in 1998 in Indonesia, *Saman* was awarded the Best Novel from Dewan Kesenian Jakarta. In 2000 Utami was a Prince Claus Award laureate for opening new horizons for modern literature in Indonesia. Her novel, which has sold more than 100,000 copies and been reprinted 34 times, has won acclaim for its innovative prose style and thematic choices.

Saman has been translated into both English and German. Utami's English translator is Dr. Pam Allen from the University of Tasmania. This year, 2006, Ayu Utami has been a guest at the 9th Time of the Writer international writers' festival in Durban South Africa.

Contemporary political and economic realities in *Saman* are written across and into a lyrical quest to find a place for religion – the spiritual life – beside a young woman's exploration of her sexuality. The structure of the novel is postmodern,

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avoiding the linear development of character by interlacing several decades, liberating the writer to allude to the unsettled history of Indonesia without sinking into a morass of detail. The time-frame moves between 1962, pre-dating the coup that saw the overthrow of President Sukarno and the installation of General Suharto as President, to 1996 when, Laila, a thirty year old woman, is waiting for Sihar, a man of dubious character and her lover. She is in New York.

The man Saman is, unlike Sihar, honorable. He is a fascinating survivor of the will imposed on rational human beings by military politicians. *Saman's* humanism mixes with his religious attitudes and his keen sense of social responsibility.

Through monologues, letters and emails, the dreams of the novel, dreams that figure the imagery and myths of Java and Sumatra, Laila's sexual awakening is discussed with her old school friends Yasmin, Cok and Shakamutra. The women, variously successful adults, lead lives unlike each other.

As with European writing from de Sade to Kathy Acker, Ms Utami uses the sexual body as the site for an intimate analysis of the moral society. Within the well-structured frame of *Saman*, political freedom parallels passionate advocacy of libidinous freedom.

Saman is a refreshing novel of lightness and clarity, intensity and darkness.

Ellipsis is a collection of poetry and prose by Laksmi Pamuntjak, an Indonesian writer and food critic who lives in Singapore. In 2005, *Ellipsis* was selected to be one of Book of the Year for the Herald (Scotland). Some of the poems were introduced for the first time at the Singapore Writers Festival, August 2005.

Ellipsis flows, as if without elision, the metaphor of omission lingering actively as an act of free will. There is nothing passive about the voice or the persona who focuses on song, scraps of urban legend, myths, immediate visual experiences and the sounds echoing through landscape. Subjects swing from love, food and sex, travel to faraway places, a mother's prayers, mythology and music, Sylvia Plath's poetry and the persona's intimate ferocity as mother and lover.

Ellipsis is a refreshing and sensual collection about human relationships from the point of view of a strongly inscribed feminine sensibility with abstract politics and religion not far from the physical experience. As a poet she is adept at finding the extraordinary in the ordinary, whether in the sly innuendo alive in *Two Women Sitting at a Window Table in a Café*, the lusty sweatiness of the love poems, the earnest passion of *by the recovery room* or the wise contemplation of (women's) lives

¹ English translation published by Equinox in 2004.

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not quite lived in the prose poem *Lives*.

In *Ellipsis*, truth rolls, Pamuntjak's poetic ear musically sensitive to the lines that delve into the rational, the intuitive and the spiritual, underscored on every page by the sensual.

These two women are alert, their engagement with the world is both intellectual and sensual. The ease with which both write about the spiritual and the social realities facing contemporary women is admirable.

Ayu Utami:

1] Saman, KPG, 1998.

2] Larung, KPG, 2001.

3] Parasit Lajang: Seks, Sketsa, Cerita (The Single Parasit:Sex, Sketches, Stories) Gagasmedia, 2003.

Laksmi Pamuntjak

1] Ellipsis, Pena Klasik, 2005

Carolyn van Langenberg is the author of *the fish lips trilogy* — *fish lips*, *the teetotaller's wake* and *blue moon* (Indra Publishing).

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JOHN SHEPPARD

Two Poems

Johannes Vermeer's Portrait

An enigmatic face, soft complexion, lips
half opened, turban flowing, head turned,
as if suddenly attending. Freshness
bringing your eyes back again and again.

Distinctive, blue band above eyes
that track you as you move, peer into you
in wistful innocence, mind on something else.

Our family called it 'Girl in the Yellow Turban':
it was a Vermeer -- 'Head of a Young Girl.'
Today people call it 'Girl with a pearl earring.'

Did it mirror her? Image of what she once was?
She saw she had a connection with it.
Her favourite picture. There was something there.
Could not define it, but was certain.

Portrait of Toni Messiter

Her brush sweeps in a long arc
smooth as samurai sword in motion
slicing the emblazoned red
a layered bedrock-background.

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The canvas bristles with colour
figure and ground equally textured
playing off one another.

Her thematic paintings form
a haiku or senryu moment.
Every two weeks a picture
emerges like fruit
on a Japanese palm.

Heaving inner life
silent battling
like a sumo wrestler
free spirit
drive for independence
all project as a shadow play
upon a screen.

Each working day
regular as a ninja exercising
she carves human shapes in paint
brings out their character
with zen-like control and precision.

Often she tilts a geisha's head
disdain or defiance
etched on the profile
a rebel perched
apart from the group
a butterfly
first opening its wings.

Dr. John Sheppard is a Sydney poet who has published in journals and anthologies. He is on the Editorial Panel of the Poets Union journal *Five Bells*.

JOSHUA TAAFFE

Poem

Palestine Knows

Palestine knows
a calligraphy of pain
etched in scar tissue
and the care lined faces
of old women
sun worn
and shrouded
with the loss of sons

picking olives
under gun fire
patiently stripping branches
a symbol of peace
circumscribed
by bulldozers and flying lead

old women
with the smallest gestures
urging me
finish your tea

Joshua Taaffe has been at various times a traveller, a teacher, a DJ and a poet. In 2003 he visited several places, including South Korea, Egypt, Czech Republic, Israel, Mexico and Occupied Palestine. These travels have inspired his life and poetry. He is now embarking on a career in law and is still striving to write...

Storm

The rain is heavy tonight
But the wind is soft
They play together
Gentle
Thunder croons a song to the city
Wind blows stronger
Shut the doors
Havoc
Too much for my mortality
Left alone
Watching my own shadow
Music
A sax cries in the quiet

Krystal Hansen has written short films, poems, and songs and is currently working on completing her first manuscript. Her main influences are Anais Nin, Leonard Cohen and Pablo Neruda. Her writing is strongly inspired by the dynamics of relationships, touch and intimacy.

CONGRATULATIONS

TO

SOPHIE MASSON

ON

HER RECENT
FANTASY NOVEL,

PUBLISHED BY

RANDOM HOUSE
AUSTRALIA

A new adventure in the Chronicles of El Jisal

The TYRANT'S NEPHEW

Sophie
Masson

A violent dictatorship
A terrified heir
A fight for courage!

Y O U N G T A L E N T

Illusive Memories

I killed her.

I killed her with skill and perfection.

I killed her with love.

No court on earth can condemn me. The prosecutor-general cannot say to me, 'You, Amjad Khayyal, killed Hind.' Nor can he accuse me of anything. No one can prove my crime. Even I cannot do it.

I killed her with the blessing of everybody and with their help.

Here they all are around me now to honor me, pretending to eulogize her. They all express their sympathies to me. The Master of Ceremonies asks the audience to stand up for one minute of silence to mourn her. I stand up with them and I am the killer.

She knew I would kill her one day. She did not run away, she did not object, she let me do it. I imagined her surrender to me was part of her romantic pleasure of believing that, as a woman, she was created for sweet suffering and dying for love and the bliss of sacrifice.

As she was dying, it seemed to me she was mocking me, perhaps taking her revenge on me. My killing her was her punishment for me. *Color slowly faded from her face. The pain spasms vanished and were replaced by an indifferent relaxation. Suddenly, with a semi-victorious smile, she said her last words, 'I entrust Zenobia to you. It is she you should take care of now.'* The word 'she' tormented me. *Did Hind mean I had not taken care of her and should perhaps now take care of our daughter? Were her last words a gentle but sharp blame addressed to me? Why did she insist in her last moments to call our daughter Zenobia, the name she had chosen when I had preferred Zein, because it was the first part of the name of Zein al-'Abideen, the name of the boy I had wished she would give birth to? Her body trembled and she appeared to be choking, as though I was strangling her. My hands were not around her neck;*

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but as she struggled for breath, she stared at me with protruding eyes as one would stare at one's killer, beseeching and accusing.

Did this really happen or did I imagine it? Why did she ask me to take care of Zein only and said nothing about our twin boys to whom she had given birth a few hours earlier? I will never forget the scene recurring endlessly in my head like a nightmare that tortures me and is tortured by me. *She is choking before me and my fingers run over my fists, perhaps to persuade myself that I am not the one who is strangling her. I hide my hands in my pockets, but her choking continues until she is finally still. I almost tear my pockets and yet, at that very moment, I see my hands around her neck relaxing at her chest with blood staining my long nails. I am terrified and I call her name, 'Hind.' In a flash like a thunderbolt, I become aware that she is no longer here. She is here and not here. Her looks are extinguished like a lamp that was shining at me then they were turned away to the opposite side, inwards.*

Zein runs to her mother's bed as though she feels something extraordinary and fearful is taking place. She tries unsuccessfully to climb to the bed and asks me again, 'Why do we give her water drop by drop through a tube?' She does not know that Hind will never drink after today.

The doctor takes away the white bed net from Zein's hand and says to me in French as though rebuking me, 'Take this child out of the room.'

I try to carry her but can't find my hands. It is as though they are still there, strangling her mother. I turn into a stone statue. The doctor examines Hind, listens to her pulse, and touches her skin here and there. A minute or an age later, he covers her face with the sheet and says again, perhaps in a tone resembling pity, 'I told you, take this child out of the room.' Zein understands and I don't. She runs out of the room and I follow her to the corridor of the hospital. Her slight body moves swiftly like a spot of light, fragile and agile at once, like her mother's.

Leaning against the corridor wall, I collapse next to my brother 'Abd al-Fattah. My knees fail me, my back slides against the wall, and I squat on the floor. He says, joking and not knowing what is happening, 'Congratulations on the twin boys. Come let us look at them in the glass room.' But as he notices me collapsing, he adds, 'Don't be afraid and don't worry for her. Women have seven souls!'

'She died,' I say voicelessly as I weep. 'She had one soul, like us, and she died. Take away the two boys, I don't want to see them.'

Zein stares at me with her wide black eyes. I am terrified, for I imagine Hind's look peeking out of them at me. My brother 'Abd al-Fattah weeps. I can't find my voice to answer him. There is nothing but a frightful void within me. The scene recurs

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from its beginning. It recurs and recurs.

The one minute of silence ends. The Master of Ceremonies at the commemorative celebration in the auditorium of the Syrian University [in Damascus] announces the first speaker. Sympathetic looks turn to Dr. Amjad Khayyal with encouraging warmth. *Why am I so lonely since her death? I was part of the herd and was happy with that. Why do I hear Hind's voice coming from deep down within me, mocking the commemorative celebration, when I have never really listened to her voice when it was alive and talking to me? Why do I weep only for her and not for the twins? It's as if I consider her death part of an obscure punishment for me. Why did she not counsel me to take care of the twins, but only of Zein alone? Did she know that they would die and accompany her? Or was she confident that everyone would take care of them because they were boys? Did she purposely let me kill her so that she would realize her presence in my life, even in her absence?*

Dr. Amjad Khayyal tries to listen to the speaker describing the effect on him of the tragedy of Hind's death and that of her twin boys who died hours after their mother. He enumerates the qualities of the deceased, attributing to her qualities she never had and forgetting her real qualities. Amjad hears her laughing, and he turns to his right but does not see her and continues to hear her laugh like someone watching a theatrical comedy, the comedy of the commemorative celebration. The speaker continues his speech and turns to praising the family of the deceased. *I hear Hind's sarcastic voice in my ear commenting on the speaker, 'And why should he not praise my family? This will give him the opportunity of winning thousands of electoral votes. I, the deceased, belong to a large and rich family from Ladhaqiyya, and satisfying them gives him the opportunity to win thousands of electoral votes.'* She bursts out laughing and I hear her. *How right she is! For the first time, I notice that, in celebrations to honor a deceased, everyone is preoccupied with himself and his interests, including this speaker—and I am no better than he is. I was preoccupied with myself and building my future; I forgot Hind, and I forgot Zein, whose arrival instead of Zein al-'Abideen I have not forgiven. So she grew up as her mother's child and I knew nothing about her. Since my killing of her mother, I have continually tried to get acquainted with her.*

Amjad continues to be absent and present. He hears the speaker's voice lamenting Hind in a neutral tone. Then Amjad gets warmed up when the speaker profusely praises Amjad's qualities and his family's. *Hind cackles again and her sarcastic voice is louder than the other voices as it whispers in my head, 'And you, the son of Damascus. Your forefathers came from Hejaz with the Arab conquest,*

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hundreds of years ago. The speaker is prolix in explaining this, as you see. Your very large tribe can secure for him a lot of strong support. It's all pure lies.'

Another speaker comes to the podium. He speaks about Hind, the writer. *This impostor has not read a single word of hers, yet he praises her excessively as though she were May Ziadeh. Poor Hind used to publish under a pseudonym, and I used to be her first admirer. After our marriage, I forbade her to publish---sometimes by my kind words and distraction, and sometimes by my open refusal. I forced her to become an oral woman of letters, whom no one knew but those who sat with her and were touched by her goodness and the magic of her speech. How ashamed of her soul I am!* Amjad covers his face with his hands, and his fez falls down on the floor. It is picked up for him by his wife's friend, the writer Widad, sitting next to him; and her husband, the poet Zaki, pats his arm encouragingly.

I should have been satisfied with having Zein after Hind's life was threatened on giving her birth. I should have spared her fragile body the task of giving birth to a boy. But, I didn't. I had to have one son or more. I wanted to have Zein al-'Abideen in full, and not in part as Zein. She became pregnant and I thought to myself, 'A little suffering on giving birth can be tolerated. But I must have a male successor to the throne.' They all said with their voices and I acquiesced in silence, *'A son is better than a son-in-law but a daughter is a zero.'*

She overwhelmed me with her wealth, some of which I accepted haughtily and some of which I spurned to satisfy my male-chauvinism. She overwhelmed me with her love too, but I didn't understand it and I disappointed her. I disappointed her mind and her talent, preoccupied as I was with the fruit of her womb.

The speaker left the podium and another ascended it. He was a young poet, a relative of Amjad whom Hind used to encourage. He elegizes Hind in a poem that calls for the audience's tears. He expresses his regret that Hind died after the French had evacuated Syria [in 1946] but she did not live long enough to enjoy the evacuation. Widad next to Amjad and dozens of other women cry as the poet expresses in emotional verse his pity on Zein as a child of five after her mother's death. Even men's eyes well up with tears whenever the poet enumerates the sorrows of Zein's tragic childhood. *During all the five years of her tender age, I never tried to get acquainted with my daughter; but after the death of her mother, Zein began to transform me, to subdue me, to educate me. She awakened in my depths a feminine aspect I used to conceal. When Hind's look peeps out of her eyes, I see things anew in its light. There are moments when I feel I love that child and hate her, I love her and fear her. She embraces me with great love then treats me with a sudden,*

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temperamental hostility which I interpret as I like, imagining that she looks at me as though I were her former killer or her future killer.

Amjad Khayyal wakes up from his thoughts at the sound of silence. He sees his friend, poet Zaki, husband of writer Widad, ascending the podium. He listens to him as he eulogizes Hind in extraordinary words, exactly as the young poet had done. He trembles and drops his head in shame. *Damn the poets! How can anyone love them, when they insist on reopening the wound stitch by stitch? These two cursed poets point their finger at the wound of my agony, my crime, and my regret.*

The first autumn storm still batters the windows. Amjad shivers in terror. *Hind was a storm imprisoned in a body. She is now released and here is her soul pouring down in rain.* The poet leaves the podium and another speaker ascends it. Those present wipe off their tears. The storm becomes increasingly furious. A falling branch of a tree breaks the glass of the hall windows with violence, like a corpse's arm hitting the cover of a coffin from inside where it is buried alive. The audience jump with fright. Amjad's heart wails as no sky has ever wailed. *I cannot blame my brother. I knew exactly what 'Abd al-Fattah would do if labor pains came over Hind while I was away in Beirut. I knew he would refuse to call a male doctor to her or take her to the hospital; he would be content with the neighborhood midwife after consulting with Shaykh Taha. I abandoned her and went away. I am the one responsible and, deep down, I am perhaps not much better than he is. My Paris studies for the doctorate in law are merely a veneer. My diplomas are merely a veneer. My social graces are merely a veneer. My Parisian silk tie and my European suit are merely a veneer. Yes, I am an Eastern male-chauvinist. I hated Dr. Mreiden when Hind took Zein to him. I was jealous of him. Any contact of hers with any member of the male gender hurt me. She is my own property, and my tolerance does not allow for any contact by her with the other gender apart from me, even with our daughter's doctor and even when my time does not allow me to accompany her to the doctor. I was very happy when Dr. Margaret Maher returned from France after her graduation and, under the pretext of encouraging women, I asked Hind to take Zein to her. Yes, perhaps deep down I am like my brother 'Abd al-Fattah and like my friend Mu'tazz, who is married to two veiled women living together with him. I wished I could veil Hind and put her up in a tent surrounded by a desert so that she might not be seen by any man but me and only when my time permitted!*

I admit that all I told her before our marriage about solidarity with women and about their liberation was humbug. I heard my voice as I was lying to her in the club where we first met and my need for further lying increased, as though to cover up my

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exaggeration. I declared that I supported the liberation of Arab women because they were like French women whose lives I had closely gotten acquainted with in Paris during my studies there. Hind and her female friends were happy with me, and Thurayya among them was pleased when I expressed my sure belief that the Arab woman had a greater right to freedom than the German or French woman, and was of greater understanding. I was lying in order to please Hind and in the hope of possessing her, although she was difficult to possess even after I had married her. After our marriage, she began to keep her moral distance from me, the better she knew me, and I imagined she had come to hate loving me and could not help it, or rather she loved and hated me at the same time. As for Zein, she sometimes did not seem to me to be a child but rather a divine punishment, with her crafty face from which I did not know whether she loved or hated me, and with that ambiguous look in her eyes since Hind's death; it was as though her mother's soul had moved into her, or that is what I imagined perhaps because I had a heavy conscience.

No. All this is the fabrication of my imagination. I did not kill anyone. My wife rather died while giving birth for the second time, as do thousands of women in childbed fever every year. This is a familiar happening and the twin boys died because of Hind's difficult delivery. This is God's will, and that's all there is to it.

The commemorative celebration came to an end. There were quick goodbyes in the auditorium and outside on the sidewalk under the rain, as well as shaking of hands and encouraging words from Amjad's friends, and expressions that seemed to him to be like gum chewed from one mouth to another. He remained standing with his brother and Dr. Ma'moon, son of his late brother Sufyan, and with his closest friends, foremost among whom was Mu'tazz, the journalist whose first presumably 'barren' wife became pregnant and bore him a son while his second new wife bore him none. They all offered to stay with Amjad. 'Abd al-Fattah held his arm but Amjad snatched himself away rudely and said he needed to take a walk alone but would later join him at home. *I will walk for a long time until Zein sleeps. I don't dare go back and face her eyes. She continually asks me where her mother went and whether we quarreled, and I tell her that her mother went to heaven but she does not believe me and I fall silent. I can't sing to her of my marital happiness. We used to quarrel.*

Hind was choking in this house, crowded with members of my extended family whom she called my 'tribe.' She had bought a large house and offered it to me as a gift, but I refused to move to it and made her rent it to others; I made Hind live with me in this large house with my mother, my divorced sister and her children, my other widowed sister and her children, my brother 'Abd al-Fattah and his family, my niece

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Fayha' and her brother Ma'moon before he went to France to study and return to live independently in a home of their own, and with every member of our extended family who had met with difficult times and came searching for a refuge in this house like my grandfather's brother, a ninety-year old man who found it to his liking to die on the very morning of our wedding day.

In this large house, Hind was choking and I did not care. She had come from her father's big palace and plantations to live in a room in a large house inhabited by a 'tribe.' She had come to live with me and love me to death, and I had done nothing to help her. I was even somewhat proud: 'Look how much she loves me. She owns millions and accepts to live with me in a little room in one house with three other families. How important I am, how handsome, how loved and adored by women!' How I hate myself now!

When Amjad Khayyal left the auditorium of the university and said goodbye to everyone in order to go for a walk alone, the rain had let up a little and had become a refreshing fine drizzle. The wind had calmed down and the scent of a sigh was diffused by the trees welcoming the first rain of the autumn. He had a feeling that his brother 'Abd al-Fattah was waiting for him around the corner. Although 'Abd al-Fattah was the only one to run the workshop with four looms, he came to attend the commemorative celebration, for he had compassion on his younger brother. But Amjad felt he needed to be alone by himself. He changed his route and walked toward the river. The minarets of the Sulaymaniyya mosque looked like giant arms stretched out toward heaven in a living stone elegance pulsating secretly with an imploration like his. He contemplated the river being transformed from a river into a mirror of light, the sunset having seemingly paused for a while. With his eyes he contained the curves of the domes gilded with twilight and the clouds' honey flowing sweetly on them, on Mount Qasyoon, and on the streets full of life, people, and buildings. He felt some comfort and was pleased to see the street vendors return to spread out their goods on the sides of the roads as soon as the storm had passed and the rain had stopped. What he saw filled him with consolation; his wounds were relieved by the courage of the simple men who continued to struggle despite difficulties and by the tenacity of the street vendors and the power of life in them in the face of rain. The sight of River Barada flowing like an open vein and Mount Qasyoon overlooking the city like a guardian angel refreshed him. He turned right and walked along the river. *No. I did not kill her. As men, we can't stand by the women merely because they are pregnant. They become pregnant and we continue to run, to fight our wars, to go on hunting. Why should I blame myself? On the night she underwent the pains of labor,*

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I was in Beirut for the necessities of my work; I was there as well to participate in a patriotic task I was asked to do. I was anxious about Hind and knew she was about to deliver, but I could do nothing about that.

Success at my work was one of her deep concerns. I am one of the few university-educated members of an old respectable family who, generation after generation, had been master brocade weavers and silk merchants. The trade and weaving craft of our family stagnated in the First World War period and later on, because we did not woo the Ottoman governor and the officers of the French Mandate. We continued to oppose them as much as we could and to share in the funding of nationalist movements against any authoritarian despot. We earned our living by righteousness and the fear of God. My tasks in the National Bloc against the French increased and were on top of my work as a lawyer. I could not leave my work or neglect it because my wife was pregnant and about to give birth! When I finished my work in Beirut, I did not go with my friends to evening entertainment at the nightclubs of Zaytouneh but I returned to Damascus that night in order to be next to Zein and her mother, for I was overcome by a foreboding feeling about Hind. I said to myself, 'You'll be there at night, and that's the important thing.' I don't know why I always imagined that people gave birth, suffered, and died at night only. Hind began her difficult delivery at two o'clock in the afternoon and I had entrusted her to my brother's care and had earnestly entreated him to take her to the hospital at the first signs of labor pains. I said to him that her difficult delivery of Zein made me fear her next one and I mentioned to him the doctor's caution. He mocked me and scoffed at my fears and said that women gave birth like cats and died only of old age, the proof being the many widows around us. But before I left, he promised to do my wishes. When I returned from Beirut and reached Damascus at night, and walked in the semi-dark Jasmine Alley through which no car could drive to our house's door because of the narrowness of the alley, I felt at ease; for this was my kingdom, my forest that I knew and loved. I knew the owners of the closed shops one by one. I knew the mosque and its minaret from which I had often chanted the call to dawn prayer before going to France. No. No evil could possibly befall Hind in this friendly and familiar place, and among my own people.

Yet on that sad night, less than five years after Zeina's birth, death was the master. This is what my mother's anxious face told me, and that frightened me. My sister Buran hastened to say, 'Hardly had you closed the door and left, when the owl ominously cawed. Hind began her labor soon after that.' My mother added briefly and in her eternal calm, 'When Hind lost much blood and the three midwives 'Abd al-

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Fattah had called were unable to help her deliver, I myself went and fetched the doctor. He immediately moved her to the hospital because of her bad condition, and 'Abd al-Fattah helped him carry her.'

I asked ruefully, 'But why didn't 'Abd al-Fattah move her to the hospital at the very moment she first felt the labor pains as I had asked him?'

Without any attempted evasion, my mother said, 'You know your brother does not want a male doctor to examine our women. He had brought her the best of the neighborhood's midwives but refused to call the male doctor so that she might not have to take off her clothes for him and the other male doctors at the hospital. He went to the mosque and consulted with Shaykh Taha, and the shaykh gave his legal opinion in this regard and said nothing would befall her but what had been decreed for her by destiny.'

The above is an excerpt from Chapter One of Ghada Samman's novel, *Damascus Mosaics*.

Ghada Samman is a leading Arab writer. She is from Damascus, Syria and lives in Paris.

Professor **Issa J. Boullata** is at McGill University, Canada. He is a renowned scholar, writer, translator, critic and academic.

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J A B R A I B R A H I M J A B R A

Translated by *Ghassan Nasr*

Excerpts from

The Journals of Sarab Affan

What a beautiful morning I had today! It was excruciatingly hot when I took a taxi to Janeen, where Nael was waiting for me as usual at the corner of the turn leading into his neighborhood. When I got out of the car, I felt as though the sun were pouncing on me, until I reached the other side of the street congested with people and wheels, where he sat watching me from his blue car. I felt like a sailor steering her ship through the rocky waters to safe shores--skillfully, cautiously. I felt a fire inside me when I sat next to him in the car, despite the cold air blowing from the air conditioner. His hand felt cold to the touch, and so did his cheek when I brushed it with a light kiss. 'Your lips are so warm!' he said, 'When a stone touches you it is touched with joy.'⁵

'You mean, when a stone touches me it is touched with fire... I have enough to burn a whole city,' I said.

'This is where poetry begins, where the fires begin to scorch...,' he said as we drove off.

We both left work early this morning without feeling a bit guilty. Even one day apart, let alone two, was enough to make us drop all our responsibilities. So many things would pile up--so many ideas, so many words, so many feelings--all bound to give rise to more ideas, words, and feelings. All the commercial offices could go to hell, and with them all the legal offices, government ministries, brokers, middlemen... Nael parked the car in a shaded area of the parking lot around noon, and we got out into the heat and cut through it toward the entrance of the Holiday Inn. 'Who set the sun's coals on fire today?' he asked.

'You and I. Who else?'

We walked towards the bar. The coolness of the dimly lit place made us forget the heat of the sun's coals. We went to our favorite table in the upper corner where three or four people we didn't know were sitting at a distance from each other, each clearly in his own lonely seclusion, drinking beer. I wasn't much of a drinker and

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usually ordered soda with a lot of ice, and Nael usually asked for the same. As soon as we sat down, I said, 'I brought you my poem.'

'At last, at last! And you're going to read it to me. But why do you have your hair up?'

'Because it's hot outside.'

'You're reading your poem with your hair up? I don't think so! You will let it loose over your shoulders, then let the words flow with all the grace of God! Quickly, to the ladies' room.'

'In that case, we'll have to drink wine, not soda.'

'The finest wine.'

'Only one glass, all right?'

I went to the ladies' room and let my hair down the way Nael liked it. I combed it and was back in a few minutes. He stared at me as I approached him, devouring me with his eyes. I sat down without saying a word. His eyes were still fixed on me. He was speechless, his mouth gaping. 'As if you are seeing me for the first time!' I said.

He said slowly, puffing on his cigarette, 'Every time I see you is like the first time.'

I laughed, remembering Talal's poem. 'Be quiet, stop exaggerating! Have you ordered the wine?'

'It's coming in a few minutes. Where's the poem?'

'What about the rituals, the pouring of red wine over the red sands?'

The waiter brought us the wine in two large glasses, each with a thin, delicate stem that seemed to hold the cup above it with arrogance and elegance, seductive even to the touch. I felt its lure flowing through my fingers to my arms and chest. The first sip I took, as I watched Nael sipping from his glass, heightened the pleasure flowing through my body, making me feel like a mythical character out of a Greek play. Randa al-Jouzy, you will never know this kind of delight, frightful to mind and body! I dare you to come in and spoil these moments with your needless logic and reason. I don't feel like I'm on earth in moments like these. Look at me and listen to my words, and his, and keep quiet forever!

I took the poem out of my bag and moved as close to him as I could, my hair hanging like a veil that separated us from everyone else. I took a big sip of wine and began reading, whispering or speaking loudly, I do not know, stopping every now and then to rescue myself with more wine.

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*I never sat on thrones or lived in palaces
I only had my head, and body,
and the promise of the day to come
bringing with it my dreams and treasures,
bringing a volcano of passion, which--if it erupts--
would bury all the love of the world in a pit
deep as anyone can imagine.*

*I came to you a wild horse bearing nature's tattoos,
on a path traced by the fingers of a Babylonian fortune-teller.*

*I found you crucified at the horizon of your visions,
your eyes two horseshoes nailed above your lips
like an amulet, ready to drive off evil!*

*What age have we entered together?
What sea?*

*My dreams are wandering ships,
gathering the foam of a love that floats in your shadows.
My love for you is an unfinished legend
lost on your isolated shores for a thousand years,
a legend that even your imaginary lines could not conclude,
while it waited.*

*The whistle was blown, in a moment
when the doors of captivity were still closed,
and only the faint flickers of light
could trickle in.*

*The escape began!
Time lost its contours, its boundaries,
and I sprang forth, a wild horse,
plowing the distances with her mad, giant leaps,
toward a rocky abyss where death is sweet,
if it means reaching you.*

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*She neighs through a land of hot embers,
stumbling and tripping in the dark,
and rises again crying and soaring above the plains,
surpassing the clouds with dreams that
bleed dew drops over the gardens of your awaited paradise!*

*In my heart the throbbing of the world
becomes an eternal waterfall of your love,
and the mad child in me exults
in warm sensations that mingle in the folds of your exile...*

*Love and the light of dawn mingled,
announcing their defiance,
and together they erased all traces
of a darkness that nested under the wings of your soul.*

*Defiance and struggle are the language of the distance between us.
My untamed love is always ahead of me.
Your open fields writhe like serpents,
wrapping around my feet in ever-growing circles,
and you are like a pendulum inside my head,
endlessly reflecting your image.*

*The fences around you multiply
and press together with the countdown,
only to recede into the distance,
becoming a prison camp and a finish line:
Two splendid choices for a painting
rimmed with the wreath of finality,
for a wild, tattooed horse...*

‘Wonderful, wonderful,’ he whispered, putting out his cigarette and taking a big sip from the wine glass he’d completely forgotten about while I read. He took the pages from me and began reading again in a soft voice. My hair hung loosely like drapes in a breeze, separating us from the rest of the world. I listened to him and wondered, ‘Are those really my words? On his lips they take on meanings I hadn’t

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thought of before.'

'If this poem is really about me,' he said, finally, 'then no man has been loved like me before, and you are the greatest lover to have ever put some of her madness to words!'

We drank to those words and finished the rest of our wine.

We walked toward the dining hall for lunch. Could I but have welcomed the promise of more pleasure, even though I had exhausted it to the fullest and knew my parents would shower me with endless questions and reprimands for being late and not coming back home for lunch? As we crossed the bar and hallway leading to the restaurant, I felt like I was not only a tattooed horse neighing her way through the valleys and rocky abysses, but with him I was all the world's valleys, rocky abysses, cities. So keep quiet Randa! This is an experience you'll never understand. And don't ask me where we sat and what we ate because, I swear to you, I don't remember. Nor do I remember how Nael and I crossed through the sun's burning coals to his car, by then no longer in the shade, and how we got inside and kissed in its infernal heat, and how finally around four o'clock he drove me back home where everyone was awaiting Sarab's return from another grueling day at work. My only way of avoiding my family's scrutiny was by running to the bathroom, quickly taking off my clothes, and standing naked under the shower, which despite its warmth refreshed and made me alert again. Then I went straight to bed and sank into a dark, deep slumber.

The above is a conversation between the two characters Sarab Affan and Nael Imran. It is a section from Chapter Three from Jabra's 'The Journals of Sarab Affan'.

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra is one of the most distinguished Arab scholars and writers.

Ghassan Nasr is a freelance literary translator, writer, and book editor. He resides and works in New York City with his wife Myriem.

Tunnels

The garden looks good again. Spring has arrived on time, as usual. Camellias and rhododendrons splash colour. A pre-dawn thunderstorm has freshened everything up. It is the first Spring since Mum died. The boys, all various shades of blond, get out of the car, hulking and scowling, knocking into each other with their schoolbags and instrument cases while Dad shuts the gates. Andrew's face is red, his skin sensitive to rashes. He still towers over Conor despite their slight age difference, and it is impossible for Dad to imagine Conor shaving when he reaches Andrew's age. Conor frowns. His blazer collar is turned up. Danny's shirt, filthy, flaps outside his pants. He needs a haircut but has doggedly resisted this move. He is ten, and swaggers like a teenager. Danny is also exceptionally strong for his age, and capable of smouldering resentment. Jonathan's movements are quick and nervous. The youngest at seven, he is talkative, quick to laugh and cry, and loves school.

Dad, thinking in lists of tasks ahead, hustles past Andrew and Conor as yet another argument simmers between them. He tries to ignore it as he unlocks the back door. Danny behaves like his father, ignoring them too. The key sticks a bit. It has been this way since the handyman Mum employed because he had lost his job had supposedly fixed the door which has always been a problem. Dad avoids these kinds of chores.

The boys change out of their school clothes so Dad can do the washing immediately, the way their mother used to. Jonathan wants to play with his new *Dragon Ball GT* warrior. He was in the middle of a game he had been making up that morning when his father had yelled that they were running late for school. Dad listens to a message. Jane, Mum's close friend before she was killed, inviting them all for lunch on Sunday. He looks uncomfortable.

The house is chilled so they switch a heater on. Conor asks if he can go on the computer. Dad says he can, hoping that won't trigger trouble, but they each find something to occupy them. Girls send emails silly with sexual innuendo for Andrew who is an athlete at school, never missing training, and yet who still enjoys endless attempts to foil the evil *Sauron* who sends his *orcs* to kill innocent people. This is also

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Conor's and Danny's favourite game. Dad makes jokes, imitating *Sauron's* deep voice, jokes he thinks are funny, and he sometimes blames *Sauron* when Jonathan has a nightmare. Now he rummages through their schoolbags, breathing sweat and stale food odours. Sometimes a teacher's message lies crumpled and ageing in their dark reaches, stained like a pirate's map of buried treasure.

When Conor sets the table for five, his lips moving silently, Andrew asks him if he has finished his overdue assignment.

'Nope. Mind your own business,' he says, placing knives on the left and forks on the right. The knives are all upside down.

'Fuck you, Conor,' Andrew mutters. 'You're an idiot.'

They eat in hungry silence, knees pressed against the chunky table legs. A wren pecks at the big window opposite the old dining table they have eaten at for ever, the sky dimmed pink and grey. Danny, after receiving a look from Andrew who is four years older than him, asks about Jane's telephone message, which they all heard, and the others are quite still, waiting for their father's answer. He explains, frowning, eyes on his plate.

'Are we going?' Danny asks.

'We'll see. Eat more vegetables, Danny. You too, Jonathan.'

Andrew says, 'You should go, Dad,' in a kind voice.

While Dad washes up everyone is busy except Jonathan who walks down to the old caravan to watch a TV programme Dad has taped for him. Andrew practices on his violin while Conor and Danny sit at the table half-heartedly doing homework among the crumbs. When Andrew finishes playing his last piece, *Chorus from Judas Maccabaeus*, his mother's favourite, the house is quiet but for the creaking of the dining chairs as his younger brothers squirm over problems and night settles around them.

The boys ask Dad, who reads a book in his usual armchair looking like a man frozen, if they can watch TV in the house. They have checked the programme so they know *World Sport* is on soon. He says that's OK, and they invite him to watch with them. Apart from reading books, sport is about the only thing that interests him. Conor, who hates sport, joins them after fierce looks from Andrew and Danny. He claims the single chair, with his cat on his lap, while the others all crowd together on the stained couch, leaving room for Dad. There is some silent jostling over who sits next to Dad.

During a segment bemoaning the tragedy of a netballer's knee reconstruction, with the cat pricking his thighs, Conor looks at a photograph of his mother when she

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was pregnant with Andrew, that Andrew placed prominently on the sideboard next to his father's precarious stack of blues CDs. There is something not quite right about her smile, not real. Conor has thoughts about the car crash that killed his mother, and about the family, that he whispers from his bed to Jonathan when their light is off. Danny and Andrew sleep in bunks in the other bedroom because Conor can't share with either of them. Their father still sleeps on his side of the queen-sized bed, and often leaves the other side untouched when he makes the bed every morning before putting the telephone back on the hook.

That night in bed Conor spoke across the room to Jonathan.

'I'm going to live on another planet when I grow up.'

'Andrew said you already do.'

'By then you'll be able to. Technology.'

'Yeah. A kid in Grade Three said he's been into space.'

'I'll be an army commander. It'll all be done by computers.'

'Can I come?'

'It'll cost a lot to travel there.'

'I've got money. In the bank account Mum left me. I can save more.'

'OK. You can be one of my soldiers. She left me one, too. I've got way more than a hundred dollars.'

The next day is the weekend. Danny wakes early. He likes to be the first up but Dad has beaten him again. When Danny speaks to him Dad makes regular agreeing noises so Danny wonders if he is listening. He helps himself to cereal, pouring on spoonfuls of sugar while Dad slumps over his mug of tea.

When they have all had breakfast and Dad is standing at the refrigerator, holding the door open, staring inside as if he might glean some arcane knowledge he needs, the boys, with the exception of Conor who goes to the caravan, walk to the cliffs where they have dug an extensive trench system they call 'the tunnels'. These look a bit like a smaller version of the trenches in The First World War. Andrew has supervised their construction and done much of the heavy work, although they have all helped, even Conor. Dad thinks, vaguely, that they are dangerous like the real trenches of that dreadful war. By bizarre chance their spades had exposed the skeleton of one of several pet cats their father had buried before Danny and Jonathan were born. The boys have covered parts of their trenches with unwanted timber, fencing, and broken gates, even the excavated clay, creating a cubbyhouse effect. They have tarpaulins, candles in bottles, and privacy. Many hours are spent in these trenches, together in their own little world.

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Over fruit juice and biscuits for morning tea with three candles lit despite the morning sunlight slanting in, they discuss their father.

‘Do you reckon he’ll get married again?’ Andrew asks Danny.

Jonathan says, ‘Who to?’ eagerly.

‘I wasn’t talking to you.’

‘Who, me?’ Danny says.

‘If he met someone. You know.’

‘Nah.’

‘Why not?’

Danny starts to giggle. Andrew smiles although he tries not to.

‘I hope he does,’ Jonathan says.

‘Yeah,’ Danny says, his voice suddenly loud. ‘Just so’s you can get spoiled, you baby. Your T-shirt’s on the wrong way. Hey, that’s mine. Used to be.’

Danny puts their empty plastic bag over his head and pulls a cross-eyed face. Jonathan blushes and scowls, his eyes brimming.

‘That’s dangerous,’ he accuses. ‘I’m telling Dad.’

‘Shut up, Jonathan,’ Andrew says. ‘Take it off. God, you’re idiots!’

Danny removes the bag, leaving crumbs in his woolly hair. He thinks his brothers talk just like their father sometimes.

That afternoon they talk their father into walking to the river after he has vacuumed the floor and found four odd socks. They go the long way, via the cliffs, three of the boys racing ahead to lie in wait and ambush him. Conor trails behind, pretending to stalk them. They want Dad to inspect their latest additions to the trenches and he tries to sound impressed but is thinking he must return Jane’s call.

At ‘the fish and chip shop’ a place of fallen willows their mother had named when they played there before Andrew was old enough for school, the river’s current is swift with snowmelt and the recent rain. The boys want to swim naked like they have done so many times in the past. Although the sun is out the breeze is cool. Andrew picks up a pebble. His throw easily reaches the far bank. Then they are all throwing. Dad hopes Conor can throw further than Danny. Their splashes are close, and they dispute superiority. They eventually tire of pitching pebbles, then firing the bows and arrows Andrew has taken hours crafting in their shed. Ducks and ibis seem to flap away in irritation.

‘It’s too cold,’ Dad protests. ‘And the water’s too fast. It’s dangerous. You’re prepared to jump in this, and yet I have to hound you to take a bath.’

‘Aw, go on, Dad,’ Andrew says. ‘We’ve gone in when it’s been this high

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before. Mum used to let us. Remember that time she swam topless and even you came in? We'll be careful. And you *don't* have to tell me when to have a bath anymore.'

The others support Andrew but their father stands firm, listing colds, the absence of towels, and the promise of warmer weather ahead when he says he will swim too. He also feigns an interest in a bow and arrows, demanding a go. His shots are weak, and they all grin at each other. They watch a large tree limb, its leaves looking fresh, borne by the current. It is quickly gone, but Dad, with his poor eyesight and the bright sunlight glinting off the leaves, can't tell exactly when it disappears.

They walk home along the road, a little apart from each other, talking idly. It is shorter, and more boring this way. When the bridge, which looks sound but is dangerously rotten below water level, was closed due to local government cutbacks, their road became a dead-end, limiting and exposing them. Their isolated road is now attractive to youths who do burnouts in the night. Ahead, they see tyre scars. The black symmetrical stripes end abruptly with a short right-angled stop just before a smaller bridge that crosses a gully. As they near the skid marks they bunch closer, and each falls silent. On the small bridge they suddenly swear and duck their heads like a synchronized unit when a nesting magpie swoops them from behind. They all face the magpie, walking backwards, equidistant, taking up the width of the road, the boys quickly fitting arrows to their bows, as it flies away. Then they see the magpie bank and begin to head their way again. It hasn't done with them yet.

Ian C. Smith's fiction has appeared in many journals including *Australian Book Review*, *Island*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, & *Westerly*. His next book is a poetry collection, *Memory Like Hunger*, to be published by Ginninderra in 2006.

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T O M S H A P C O T T

A Monstrous Infection

Hal, they all said, you'll find nothing. Go by all means, but if you expect revelations take along your smelling salts as well as your camera. Pack in a bottle of scotch, too, it might assist with the required nostalgia.

His brothers all joked and it was the same joke.

North Devon was the place the family name came from. And now, with his son at Bristol, not that far away, he was set on making the pilgrimage.

Chas, who did a business trip to Exeter two years before, drawled out a West County accent rolling with mirth and potato vowels. 'Zjuurrrre, and oi felt the blood tingle!'

Hal, of course, smiled.

When his son got that scholarship to Bristol University, Hal urged him to do an explore around North Devon, and send photographs. It was two years before Lloyd bothered, then his sister Cassie came over and carried Dad's message with an imperative command of her own and a brand-new camera. This was a search for Roots.

They sent back photos of a flat, drab landscape: 'These are the family lands,' was scrawled on the back of one.

Chas gave him a farewell dinner at the Club and was unremitting in his jocularly and his cynicism. 'We all came from somewhere,' he said, 'but don't expect skeletons or gratuities. If it is a Manor, as you say, don't anticipate they'll let a colonial like you inside the front door. Or the back door, for that matter.'

'Remind them about the Olympic Games,' one of the others said, 'and take some of those little kangaroo coat-pins.'

'Don't let them talk you into investing in the local piggery or the family property. If it's not owned by some absentee landlord in London it will be mortgaged up to the hilt, and you'll probably find there's been an outbreak of Mad Cow disease or Foot and Mouth in the district.'

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But it was Chas who came up with the winning surprise, only the next week. He had discovered on the internet that the ancient family Manor was now a B & B. Hal could book in there over the web before he left.

‘Of course,’ Chas added, ‘that means if they are reduced to B & B, the place is probably suffering from European Union backlash. Don’t mention the Common Market. In fact, stick to Australia and primary production. No, on second thoughts, Talk about cricketers and tennis players.’

Hal arrived at Heathrow in the early hours of the morning but his son, Lloyd, waved and it took Hal a second to recognize him.

A long grey drive in the hire car through endless housing sprawl. Over-ripe roses drooped in front yards. Autumn brown and urban grey became a sort of blur but Hal told himself it was the sleepless flight that was doing it. His son was at first eager but grew subdued. Relationship problems, he muttered.

Lloyd agreed to the expedition to North Devon, but there would be a price and Hal suddenly realized the tone of voice: his own, as a young adult, and that long resentful impatience at his own father, in the years before the old man could be safely consigned as a grandparent.

Pulling himself together out of the drowsy languor of the endless drive towards Bristol, Hal looked carefully at his son, driving. His world was tomorrow and the weight of the Ph.D. hanging over him, as well as this Ursula or whatever her name was. Lloyd talked bitterly about the Brits and their stand-offishness and gave instances of their incompetence and their petty mindedness, but at the same time Hal noted a growing independence and decisiveness, even in the way he handled the car, or when they stopped for fuel, how Lloyd took command.

He mentioned the B & B at the old Manor. ‘You go ahead,’ his son said. ‘One night? Two nights? What will you do there, once you’ve cased the place out? Count the cattle? Take rubbings of the marble headstones in the old church?’

He realized that Lloyd did not include himself in the board and lodging arrangement. When pushed, he explained he had a meeting, a date, other priorities. He would drive over and pick Hal up whenever it was necessary. He implied that his father would be ruminative. He would want to be alone. Alone with, well, with all that.

No, the earlier visit had been fun in its way, Lloyd and Cassie had poked around the graves in the churchyard and had stopped outside the old Manor and had joked about going in, but really, what was the point? It looked remodelled. ‘There was still a sense of mud and cowshit, if you know what I mean’, Lloyd added.

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The local innkeeper had told Lloyd and Cassie all there was to know. He did say there was not anyone with their surname on the local electoral rolls, but nearby there was a scrawny little woodland named after them, Truscott Woods. He and Cassie had counted it a half day well spent.

Hal was not to be put off. 'Let's case out the joint,' he said. 'I just want to see it. I will go back later in the week, that's when I booked the B & B.' His son gave him a look and extracted the promise of a slap-up meal at Lynton, on the way back towards Bristol. For the first time that day, Hal felt a twinge of excitement. He tried to keep it to himself. You don't give away everything.

They drove through Exmoor: high, flat country. He thought of a time before cars: this must have been lonely and isolated. As desolate as Woomera, if you thought about it.

'This is really silly, you know.' Lloyd was shaking his head. 'If you've booked there for the weekend. But don't let my cynicism dissuade you, Dad. You sure you want to go right down there this very minute?'

He looked over to his father's face, and shrugged good-naturedly. They did not even pause.

Let my pores stay open, Hal thought. Not to expect anything, but to expect what offers. There is some part of you, somewhere, that can be still receptive. Allow the hard carapace and all its protective barriers to be let go of, even if only for a day, an hour, even if only for the first few minutes. You could hold onto those, if you are aware enough and responsive enough to intuit things.

His son did not know him. How can sons become aware of the vulnerabilities and the receptivities of their dads? Yes, a day or so alone with this experience. The dream of sharing things, well it was all too eager but it was a dream: Lloyd might come to it some day, but these things cannot be forced. It would have been premature for himself, something like this, any earlier. There is a right time.

'Here's the turnoff, only a few miles now.' Lloyd slowed just a little. 'Pretty grim countryside isn't it? Tell you what; it's these low skies that get me down, Dad. You can't believe how miserable I've been here. I have dreams about Australia. All the time. It's not that I don't understand these people, Dad, but they're so, so shrunken somehow. Like they've never been out in the sun. Mushroom people. Toadstool people. Clammy.'

But Lloyd shut up then.

The village seemed no more than seven or eight houses, crammed together in the tight space between hedgerows. They stopped the car outside the little inn and ducked

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their heads into the smoke-stained interior, hung with fashionable resurrected artefacts of a nineteenth century rural life: scythes, horse collars, reaping hooks, wooden pails.

Apart from these decorations, it was a cottage. The minute Bar, weighted under an overhang of shelves and dangling glasses, had the appearance of a converted larder. Hal led the way in, feeling suddenly gregarious in the face of his son's strained silence. Homesickness was the last thing he had expected. All Lloyd's results had been excellent.

With a smile and a swagger he positioned himself alongside the only other customer, a fawny gent with a tweed cap and the ruddy complexion that belongs to property owners not property workers. He was in the midst of a slow conversation with the publican. No potato vowels and no grass-seed hesitations!

They looked up at Hal and paused. Lloyd stood slightly behind, as if about to make a quick escape. Already he looked embarrassed.

The words foot and mouth seemed to hang in the air, but the two locals paused politely, while Hal ordered a pint of cider and – ‘what'll you have Lloyd?’ – a pale ale.

‘I'm from Australia,’ he introduced himself. ‘Looking up family history. My son tells me in the little church across the way there are memorial plaques with the family name. And crest,’ he added.

‘Which is?’ The local squire (or whatever) turned in Lloyd's direction.

‘Truscott’

‘Best preserved of those gravestones are up the hill, back of the church,’ the squire nodded. ‘But take a look inside. Just by the baptismal font is the best example. It's a memorial tablet.’

‘We had some Americans here last summer, looking up the same things,’ the publican said.

The squire excused himself and went off.

The innkeeper settled in for a long afternoon. He looked at the empty glasses. Hal nodded, then began to explain his tortured genealogical table. He found himself exuberant over the family's more recent episodes in Australia and their good success, rather than the few vague English stories his grandfather used to tell him at bedtime— the wine-taster to the Queen, The Truscott who married into the Nobility, the family feud and the famous missing Will. He also mentioned the initial Truscott “squatters” who followed the Black Death, and he explained the term, which had become sanctified in Australia. He remembered to mention the Sydney Olympic Games and the excellent sand beaches and the surf.

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‘Aw, Dad.’ Lloyd moved to the other side of the room and examined closely a wall map of the district.

Suddenly there were gunshots somewhere outside.

‘O my God,’ the Innkeeper exclaimed. ‘The Army and Ministry Vets were in that truck that went by this morning. Coll Westcott was right.’ And he wiped the bench quickly and made for the front door. Hal and Lloyd followed, impressed by the urgency.

As they all hurried down the narrow road between high hedges, the Innkeeper explained the latest news his friend Coll Westcott had been telling. A herd of prize Limousin cattle - 19 bullocks in all - were being isolated for Foot and Mouth when they had broken into a paddock previously grazed by sheep — over near South Molton. Coll Westcott had told him the Vets had come on like a pen of sheep themselves.

A further burst of gunfire stopped them in their tracks. They hurried ahead.

Turning a curve in the road they came upon a huddle of men, and the truck pulled into a gutter. The men had guns.

Another group of armed men struggled out onto the verge.

‘Bloody cattle stampeded!’ the man in the lead called out. ‘Crashed through the wire fence into that farm!’

‘Christ! That’s the Millman’s, with their pedigree dairy herd! What the shit have you idiots been doing?’ The innkeeper rounded on them. ‘And what the hell are you doing shooting at a herd of cattle out in the open? Who’s the leader among you? You, there! Yes, you. What’s been going on here?’

Explanations about foot and mouth, but shooting into a herd of cattle, out in the open field — what madness was this? Coll Westcott appeared out of the field. He was purple with rage.

‘Are these all city vets?’ he demanded. ‘Are they first year students? You! And you, have you never dealt with cattle?’

The whole gang of them followed him back into the field. Two cattle lay in awkward upheaval half-way across. They were dead. Noise and shouting indicated where the rest of the mob had broken through the far hedge. More shots. As they crowded to inspect, Hal trod into a semi-liquid cowpat. It was streaked across stumpy grass. Panic sign, he thought, remembering childhood.

‘Look at the hedge! Would you believe it?’

But there was nothing to be done. A shaking of heads, and they returned to the bitumen.

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Another two slaughtermen appeared from down the lane. They confirmed that seventeen of the cattle had now been killed. They had broken through three farms in their panic, nothing would hold them. 'Jim here was a grand shot, though. And Jeff was almost as good.'

They seemed satisfied with their efforts.

'Three farms.' Coll Westcott threw his head into his hands. 'Three farms. And seventeen killed you say? You mean there are two more still wandering loose? Why the Hell didn't you herd them into a holding pen, or even one of the big barns like that one here, for instance?'

The status of all the land onto which the animals escaped would now have to be considered, one of the Vets said. He added that it was regrettable that the animals had escaped during the culling operation onto contiguous land.

'Contiguous land!' Coll Westcott exclaimed. 'That's my land, you fools. And that's the old Manor land.'

More people had gathered around. The group of Vets became defensive and drove off to arrange pick-up of the carcasses.

'Townpeople,' someone murmured. 'Strangers,' another farmer spat on the ground.

Hal examined his soiled shoe. Lloyd was still back in the field, examining the carcasses.

Later, Les Winslade, a local farmer, called a meeting in the inn. Hal and Lloyd found themselves included, and were introduced around as 'the Australian witnesses'.

'We saw them taking potshots at the animals,' Les Winslade said, 'but the cattle were going berserk. I have never seen anything like this in my life.'

'I tried to contact the RCPA to stop the shooting,' he added. 'I saw them shoot those first two myself. There are another half-dozen in the Truscott Manor top field. They were lying dotted all over the place, and at least one other was limping. Eventually the MAFF idiots chased them into the next farm. It was obvious what was going to happen. Once you shoot one the rest smell the blood and they go wild. If a farmer did this sort of thing he would be locked up.'

'The surviving cattle ended up among my previously uninfected sheep.' Gordon Willmetts, another farmer, was in tears. 'Now they'll have to slaughter them, because they say they have become dangerous contacts. This is a total disgrace. The cattle were running up and down, totally out of control. I have never felt so sickened in my life.'

Coll Westcott, sitting, took the measure of the meeting. 'They send out people who have no experience of handling cattle, that's the real stupidity of the NAFF. If

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they had let a stockman take charge there would have been none of this. Scandalous.'

Hal sat at the back of the room, on the edge of things. The hedges they had passed through this morning had been changed utterly in his imagination. They could have been barbed wire fences. They could now have been razor wire around the detention centres at Woomera. The cattle and the panic slaughter hung like a smell, still, in the air. The farmers, thinking of their own, were on the defensive. And, worse, the infection, the foot and mouth disease, spoke through all the angry conversation. It was not the sense of each farmer's concern for particular herds or flocks. It was the greater feeling of darkness and what Hal could only think of as dread which stirred itself into the very structure of the air.

Gut feeling. Gut reaction. Anger from the gut, and a willingness to accuse — and fear. Fear was being harvested this very afternoon by clumsy mechanicals and inexperienced lackeys, it seemed. With the guards at Port Hedland or Woomera, Hal thought, they had been trained only in the same instant response to attack, no matter what sensibilities might be trampled. He had read the reports and the TV statements and it had seemed explicable, what his country's politicians had been advocating.

It had been malicious. Everything pointed to something more than expediency. It suggested manipulation and duress. It implied agendas that simple folk like farmers or, in Australia, those who watched TV, were caught unawares in, suddenly in the cross-fire of claim and counter-claim, or the ruthless dictates of power. When things did happen, suddenly, the reaction seemed to bear no relation to the ostensible cause. Undercurrents were everything, taken for granted, the key to the real action.

Guns had been used, here. It was only a matter of degree.

Cattle were the issue. Wasn't that so?

'This is a monstrous infection,' Col Westcott repeated. 'A monstrous infection.'

For just a second further Hal thought of the infection of his own country where the solution seemed to be some sort of quick target and the need for enmity and the slang of 'illegals' — exquisite equivalent of "foot and mouth" as a way to cower even well-wishing locals or constituents.

Suddenly this remote part of England was as vulnerable as his own vague sense of what was possible in his own country.

'They say the disease could have spread into this area in the smoke from that huge cattle pyre lit in Meshaw, just to the south, three weeks back.'

'It's true. The village was completely blacked out by the smoke. People were picking unburned cattle hairs off their walls and gates for days afterwards.'

'I know, I know. My wife had washing on the line and didn't she cry blue murder.'

'It's me asthma. It was so bad I couldn't go outside for three days.'

'We're all risks. We're all in the risk area.'

'They'll be calling restrictions on countryside access. Perhaps they have already.'

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Those NAFF Vets will have made a bolt for it by now, put your life on it.'

Hal caught his son's eye. Lloyd had kept near the little entrance hallway. Hal made some whispered excuses and moved across. They edged slowly towards the door.

As they escaped into the darkness, Hall looked over towards Lloyd, grim faced and driving. Why should we feel so infected? He wished he had not slushed into that cattle pat. He would clean his shoes later. He would discard the socks. We only saw the start of it, the very edges, he said. We didn't witness the real massacre.

'We didn't see the old Manor either,' Lloyd said. 'And I've a fair bet your B & B will be cancelled, courtesy of the Ministry of Agriculture. I'll show you all the photos I took of it. I only sent over two, you know.'

And again, later: 'It's never been an idyllic place, Dad. Early deaths. Suicide. Contagion. Did you see the sidelong glances you were getting — we were getting? They hated us — on principle. That's what I hate about this place — I'm made to feel like some sort of intruder — an Illegal, you know what I mean? I think it's always been like that, in these parts. Nothing changes. But' — and he turned to give a look at his father — 'I read in the paper last week that the bee-keepers are predicting a record honey flow next spring. All the slaughtered cattle means that the wildflowers will be unrestrained. Shakespeare, was it, spoke about honeycomb in the skull?'

Hal smiled, finally, at that. 'Thanks for that image, Lloyd, and let's hope their bee-keepers have their honey flow. I don't think it was Shakespeare, though. One of the twentieth century War poets perhaps? Something worth checking up. Suddenly it sounds very - well - English. Where did you say there was a good seafood restaurant?'

'Dad, you forget. I'm vegetarian.'

'So am I, too, now, I think.'

If Lloyd's little hire-car seemed stuffy and over-heated, Hal did not consider winding down the window. Their own breath steamed up the glass. Lloyd turned to his father again and gave one of his rare smiles.

'But we did make a good scoot, Dad. Imagine being quarantined there for a fortnight? For a lifetime?'

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

ASTRA WARREN

Waiting

For Lisa, the waiting was always bad. In ten years of marriage to a mining man, it had become part of her life. The rhythm of her existence was goodbyes, erratic hours and unexpected arrivals. She often wondered what it would be like to be married to a man with a regular desk job, whose movements were as fixed as the planets. Would her senses be attuned, as now, for the familiar sound of the ute slowing at the driveway and crunch of wheels on gravel? As the waiting time stretched out, even radio or TV were no distraction. Eventually she needed quiet so that her straining ears could pick the outside noises. Each time then, she would be swept with relief, shake herself out of the waiting silence and hurriedly resume her normal busy routine in the kitchen. Kettle on, make everything look normal, so that she could turn with a quick smile and welcoming comment, while his bulky presence drove back the shadows.

Sometimes, she visualised the sea of women who had waited for their men back down the centuries, myriad faces fading into featureless anonymity, like those old group photographs in the local museum, all watching and waiting. War wives, lying in their lonely beds, prey to fearsome imaginings, as seas and continents separated them from their men. Fisher wives, listening to the rain on the roof and the buffets of the wind, and thinking of the men out there on the dark and heaving sea. Perhaps even in caves. She smiled at the image of a cavewoman Lisa crouched over the cooking fire, listening to the wild beasts in the dark beyond.

She thought of herself as the latest but certainly not the last of this continuing chain. Perhaps, she thought wryly, trapped by her own upbringing. Her father had been a pitman in an English mining town. Her childhood home had been warm and cozy, the fire always blazing cheerfully, winter and summer, in the black-leaded range. She loved her father coming home, teeth gleaming in his blackened face, to plant a sooty kiss on her glowing cheek. He always whistled to her childish singing as he swilled the dust off in the tin bath in the scullery.

Good, happy memories.

Later, she came to realize what her mother had endured, a lifetime of listening

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for the clatter of boots on cobbles, dreading the pit siren that signaled an underground accident, and fearing the knock on the door. Once, on a working holiday in Australia, she had identified with a painting called "Bearing the Bad News", a stricken woman, babe in her arms, being told of her husband's death, and had vowed never to undergo the same torment.

But when Russ had come into her life, bluff and even-tempered, she had fallen hard before she realized what his job as a mine engineer entailed. Then it was too late to retreat. He was her rock, and they belonged to each other.

Still, they had been exciting years. Russ was competent and ambitious. He handled his men well and looked for diversity of experience. Coal in England, copper in Zambia, then off to Bolivia. Tin that time. Now it was gold, and she was back in Western Australia. They were both happy to defer starting a family, content with each other and self-sufficient in their relationship.

Socializing was part of the job. The men needed the confidence of knowing each other, for support and mateship in case the unthinkable ever happened. The wives were well aware that in an emergency they would turn to each other for comfort and support. The sound of a vehicle broke into her musing.

'There he is!'

She was on her feet, into the kitchen, kettle filling under the tap, before she realized that the slowing vehicle was not Russ's utility. Something heavier, she estimated, a different sound on the gravel. She put the kettle down very carefully, lit the gas and gripped the edge of the bench. Don't panic. It could be anything. The mind plays its own tricks.

Slam of vehicle door. 4WD, she registered automatically. She counted the strides to the front door. Too long. Whoever it was had hesitated before knocking. She breathed twice deeply, then firmly walked to the door.

'Hello Bill. Couldn't go past without a beer?'

She smiled into his troubled face, trying to make it easier for him.

'I-er-not really, Lisa.' He shifted uncomfortably.

'Come in.'

She stood aside, and he sidled into the hall.

'Kettle's on the boil, I'll turn it down.'

He followed her into the kitchen. She turned the gas jet down with exaggerated care and faced him.

'Tell me', she commanded.

'It's nothing serious, not Russ, I mean. We had a flash flood from a storm up the

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bush. A gully filled and came over the lip of the excavation and down the decline into the workings. Two men still down there – the others got out. And I had to come into town for extra air tanks. And you know Russ, what he's like. Thought the wives would need some company. Need you, I mean. Told me to call and get you.'

She was already moving. Yes, she knew her Russ. Message understood. In a flash he would have worked it out, that's what made him such a good manager, other wives involved with children's tea and bedtimes, Lisa knowing the routine, staying calm and cheerful, because we've already been there, done that.

'Five minutes, Bill. Grab a beer out of the frig.'

She changed into slacks and t-shirt, and packed a bag expertly. Two sweaters, because worry and fear sapped body heat, and shivering was hard to stop. Two new packs of cigarettes - she didn't smoke, but Russ would be under stress, and even non-smokers felt better with something to occupy their nervous and restless fingers. Headscarf - the desert wind was chill at night, and who knew how long they would be there, lollies, tissues, towelettes for clammy palms.

'Ready.'

She grinned reassuringly as Bill swallowed the last of his beer and picked up his hat. Lisa turned on the porch light, a beacon for the later dark, and locked the door with a silent prayer that Russ would be with her next time she unlocked it.

The sunset was behind them on the short, dusty drive out to the minesite, making the red earth redder and tingeing the sand crests with gold. It might have been an enchanted landscape, except for the insistent clanking of the air tanks behind them. They pulled up close to the decline opening, where a knot of people turned to peer at their arrival. Arc lights had been rigged, and Lisa saw the two women standing pinched and silent, worried as well about their children hastily sent out to neighbours. Russ was at her side as she climbed down.

'You were quick.'

'Old ever-ready, that's me!'

The words didn't matter. The exchanged glance said it all: I need you, Lisa. I'm glad you do, and I'll always be here Russ.

A diver had been down the flooded decline and reported that the debris was settling out of the muddy water. He had hammered on the rock and received answering knocks, one, two. So both men were still alive somewhere. The maps were spread out on a truck bonnet.

'We'll explore the closest air pockets first, and work steadily out. Watch your air gauge and keep the guide line free of snags.'

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As the first pair of divers splashed into the water, Lisa persuaded her two friends out of the freshening breeze and into the site hut for hot drinks, keeping the conversation light and occupying them with sandwich making.

Towards midnight, the men came in blinking and stretching. As Lisa made more hot drinks and put out sandwiches, Russ explained, 'The only place left we haven't looked is in the new workings. We had a report they'd gone deeper in before the flood. We've got two divers in there now...'

He was interrupted by a distant shout, then the door was flung open.

'Found them, boss.'

There was a concerted rush for the door, grabbing sandwiches and drinks on the way. The divers stood outside dripping and shaking. Lisa put steaming mugs in their hands. While Russ readied the spare set of breathing apparatus, he gave clear orders to bring out the younger of the two men first. The older man was more experienced and steady enough to handle the extra wait alone. Then the divers splashed back into the water like ungainly black crows. It seemed an eternity as they waited. With an arm around each woman, Lisa could feel their tension. Funny, she thought, how you feel worse the closer rescue gets, the fear that something could go wrong at the last minute. At last, there were dark shapes under the surface, three bobbing heads, and willing arms hauling out the rescued man. His wife clung to him as he was put into the town ambulance. Lisa turned to see Russ in serious discussion with the last two divers, his manner uncharacteristically stiff and formal.

'Sorry, lads, but that's an order. Everybody's done their stint, and there's only enough air left for one. Gear off and don't waste time.'

Lisa's heart contracted as he stripped off his sweater and unbuckled his belt.

'Boss, hey, wait. The department rescue plane's on its way...'

'I'm the most experienced in rescue technique, the strongest diver. And I'm the boss. You got anything else to say, be in my office in the morning.'

The group fell silent. Russ pulled on the wet suit. As he buckled on the tanks, he turned to beam a look at her.

'We'll need plenty of coffee ready.'

The words came across the space between them, but the thought came too- go and do something, anything, to spare yourself the waiting agony.

'Slave driver,' she said. 'Good luck.'

She walked away to the hut, so that she would not see him disappear under the dark water. She opened the door and caught the voices.

'What got into the boss? Why didn't he wait for the emergency crew?'

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‘Cracks opening in the air pocket roof...’

The words were bitten off as they saw her. The world stopped. The shell that was Lisa crossed to the sink with a cheerful remark and started washing dishes, while her inner self cringed by the door whimpering. As soon as she could, she fled back into the covering darkness and let panic overtake her. Russ, her heart cried. Don't leave me. It can't happen to us. When she had calmed a little, she joined the group at the water's edge. She put her arm round the other woman, and they stood silent, wrapped in their sisterhood of waiting against the chill vacuum of foreboding.

Some time later, Lisa felt rather than saw the water heave once, then tremble. Dear God, she thought, the roof's gone. She thrust her clenched fists deep into the pockets of her windcheater, fighting the hysterics that threatened her. Aloud she said, ‘I'll never forgive you if you take him away from me. Please bring him back. Please...’ Then suddenly the waiting group stirred. There were shadows in the water and two exhausted men floated to the surface, clutching the lifeline, and were being dragged out, white-faced and gasping. Lisa clung to her dripping husband. Tears of relief flowed, but she knew she wept also for the years of waiting yet to come, when the suffering would be sharpened by this experience driven deep into her heart. Russ said gently, ‘All right, love. Let me get out of this gear and sort out tomorrow's routine. Then we'll go home and have a quiet cuppa.’ Lisa looked up at him. With tears still on her cheeks, she began to laugh.

‘Oh, Russ!’ she gasped. ‘I've done something terrible. We'll have to stop and get a new kettle. I left the gas on!’

Astra Warren is a writer from Western Australia. She has recently produced her second CD of broadcast stories.

L. E. SCOTT

*Black Family Letters from Boston**Sometimes a person's life is no bigger than their grave***Samoa**

Well, another place in the world your feet have touched. There's something about the way you live your life that makes me wonder sometimes. You have seen so many places in the world but at times there is a same-ness in your words. Maybe it's because I've known you for so long, I can't see what's new and what's old about you. I know there's been change, I'm just not sure *how* you've changed. You've never been an open book and that goes back to your childhood. Somewhere from the womb to where you are now the colours of time shaped you. You have always been a strange bird, flocking with whatever demons shape your wings.

But I'm being remiss. I've not said thank you for taking the time to write to me from Samoa. You painted such a wonderful collage for me. I felt I touched Samoa through your letters. Your friend T was a gift in showing you around her country – the beauty, the good, the bad, and the church with its vampire mouth, eating the money of the very poor as they give more than they have so as not to be shamed by the church when it posts “who gave what?”. The meek shall indeed inherit – but they will have long paid in full. These men of God (and they are mostly men) have made the church a whorehouse. Their tongues should be cut out for the greed and witchcraft they preach.

I don't like feeling this way and I don't like the hardness of such words, but trickery of the poor in God's name is a real low one. It doesn't give much room for forgiveness. We can be hurt all kinds of ways by another human being in the course of a lifetime, but those who eat at the table in the name of Jesus as they swallow the harvest of the poor, they will reap what they sow long before they leave this earth. For they know what they do....

I don't like feeling this way. I don't like the voice in my head it brings back. The bad that touched me in childhood was in the church. I was a child and he was a deacon. I had the gift of the piano in my fingers and that led to staying after Sunday

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school to practise – and don't we know, the devil is looking for flesh that has never bled. Forgiveness for those transgressions doesn't taste well in my mouth. What I swallowed from those deacons was not the blood of Jesus. Times like this, I try and remember the playground. I can remember innocence and beauty there; memories touched by sunflowers and sunlight.

Your friend T has left the church too. Thank you for telling me about her. You have never been one to be free with information about the women in your life. So I take nothing for granted, but feel closer when you crack the door in these rare moments. Her Pacific Island culture, or as you said 'the culture of the People of Colour of the Pacific' has many similarities with African American culture. Our spirituality (as opposed to religion), our respect of the elder, our love of things natural, our earth-ness. And as T points out, we 'People of Colour' have a belief/respect for the supernatural. I had to smile when you told me she turns the mirror in her bedroom towards the wall at night just before she goes to bed, so that whatever demons travel in the dark can't reflect themselves into the world. Please give T my blessing, 'cause we know there are enough demons and ghosts dancing with folks already.

You wrote of all those dreams you had in Samoa. I don't dream so much now. Maybe it has something to do with my age or maybe the hour I go to bed, which is way after midnight. The rooms in my head have just gotten used to being in the dark. When I do dream, it usually resonates of things past. And when I wake up with one of those feelings of things past (usually sad) trying to hold on, I just know I don't need to tell God I ain't one of his perfect creatures.

But you and your dreams. Well, you are a different age from me, you may or may not go to bed after midnight and when your dreams come they are not so far from your past. Your ex-wife is still a living ghost and you are still dancing with your mistakes as if they are strangers. The old folks knew what they were talking about when they said, "Peace of mind is a lovely river to bathe in."

You wrote vividly about those dreams in Samoa. Childhood dreams, and dreams that had nothing to do with childhood. But the dream of yours that haunts me is the one that feeds off that judgemental streak in you. I'm not sure how or why all of that came into your dream, but let me remind you of some things. The first-born, your brother, was born at a time when America was sicker than it is now. (I'm taking a chance with that statement.) The bitter stench of slavery was waiting for your brother's birth. Between 1919 and when you were born in 1947, your Mama had a bunch of children. None of you paid the price of the first-born. Black men of his

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time paid a terrible price for their salvation. Your brother found his salvation in the womb of women. It didn't always have anything to do with his dick, or to use the vernacular, "it was not a dick thing". People cry out in rage in many ways.

Your brother lived 83 years on this earth and when he left he was not insane. For a Black man of your brother's time to live in America for that long and not be destroyed by it? That is not the life of a broken man. Enigma he may indeed have been to you – but what are you in your time? Who will be allowed to measure your worth when you are rotting back to the place before your mother's womb?

When you go to the graveyard and visit your brother's grave, he is beyond your pity, your mercy or your blame. What your brother did or didn't do in his life will not rest in the dust of your life. On this side of his grave is a mirror not turned backwards.

I feel for you both and as a woman I have allowed – and welcomed – the touch of you both when you needed that from me. I regret not for a moment, nor was the mirror in my bedroom turned to the wall. I undressed and gave what was needed. If either of you didn't want this from me you should have loved enough not to ask, as I loved enough to give when you did ask. As the blues singer says: "My heart and my womb knows you both. It ain't no cross to bear."

In Samoa you had so many dreams about the dead and the living. Such an idyllic place to go for New Year with a suitcase full of ghosts – or hants, as the old folks would call them. They don't need passports, you know. Oh well, some of us just can't walk past a graveyard without going in to see who's there.

By the time you get my letter the New Year will have shed its afterbirth and you will be back home in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In that awful cliché – it goes on.....

My Warm One, Happy New Year, days of sunflowers for you. I love you, but this you know, don't you?

P.S. – Only those who know very little about life would measure a man's grave by the size of his shoes.

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.

This is another one of a new series of "Black Family Letters From Boston". The stories in the series cover a wide range of subjects that may be loosely grouped under the heading "the Black American Experience" and explore the relationships between family members and the way in which their lives are affected by their struggle in and with white America.

CECILE YAZBEK SCHOLTZ

Isabel

My mother's father, Alexander or Skander Haddad, born in Beirut in 1876, teacher of Arabic and French, realised that there was little opportunity for him in the Middle East. The only natural resources in Lebanon seemed to be sun, sand, mountains and Cedars. After the expiry of the French mandate Lebanon became part of Syria. A Lebanese informant tells me, as I write, 'There was a problem for Muslim people as well: they wanted to be boss in that land but they were dark and spoke only Arabic, not the French of the Christians.'

Alexander had heard stories of wealth and a comfortable life from other Lebanese in West and South Africa. George Mukheibir had gone out earlier and begun a hawking business in the eastern cape of South Africa selling suit lengths and household goods to the prosperous sheep farming community. The Lithuanian Jews were doing similar trade with the prosperous ostrich feather farmers around Oudtshoorn.

Alexander left Lebanon in 1895 and began hawking in the Queenstown district. He was successful enough in 1898 to buy a house and shop at number 88 Cathcart Road the main street, and began trading in earnest.

Haddad Brothers imported European fine china, fabrics and laces. Month by month the general store expanded until he was stocking hardware and farm implements for the local farmers. In the twenties, he was even to import a piano from Germany. In a radius of 1000 miles, by the twenties, there could have been 500 Lebanese families. Haddad Brothers was the only source of olives, burghul, goats' cheese and oil.

In 1909 he went back to the Lebanon to fetch his wife. Isabel Ghiz had been promised to Alexander Haddad some time before. He carried a substantial dowry bag of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires and gold nuggets to present to his wife's family.

He sailed up the east coast of Africa and changed ships at Port Said for a smaller boat going to Beirut. On arrival, he went straight to the goldsmith's quarter where he had some of the gems set. The one-carat diamond was set as an engagement ring in

platinum in French style by a Russian gold-worker – or was he an Armenian or even an Uzbek... The two-carat diamond was set into a pendant and given as a wedding gift.

Isabel, my mother's mother, is the only grandparent I really knew. She mothered me in my early years in the best grandmotherly way. She was born in 1894 or 1896 – they argued, so maybe 1895 – to a comfortable family of silkworm farmers living in Beit Merie, Beirut. The ground floor of their three-storey house was devoted to silkworms. They had electricity, a plumbed hand-basin and a maid to fill baths and arrange hair for the women of the house.

Madame Rosa Ghiz had four children: Mary, Isabel, Fareed and Linda. Isabel's engagement portrait was taken in a studio in Beirut with her brother Fareed, a glosssy Levantine gentleman of twelve in three-piece pin-stripe suit and knee-high leather boots.

Isabel wears handmade shoes, silk stockings and a pin-tucked cream French silk dress. Her luxuriant black hair is pinned up, crowning a plump face and showing a diamond stud in each ear. A gold crucifix and large diamond pendant hang around her neck, heavy gold bangles on her left arm, a ring with a dark sapphire on the middle joint of the middle finger of her right hand. On her left, the engagement ring. As was customary for girls, she didn't have schooling beyond the three R's.

In their wedding photograph Isabel's glamorous dress has a train and silk girdle. Alexander looks like a prosperous Lebanese African trader. He wears a tailored knee-length coat, a white bow-tie and holds a white glove. I stare at him, his full face, coiffed hair and moustache, twenty years older than his bride. 'Pure Lebanese?' I ask and I get a variety of answers. 'As pure as Christian Lebanese, uniquely in the world, like to imagine themselves; white Phoenicians, never Arab,' someone says. But he had a Greek Cypriot father who was a wood-carver in church, a fisherman or an icon painter – there is no agreement. I like icon painter. Subsequently, I hear from yet another cousin that he was a monk who left the monastery and fled to Beirut.

In 1910, Isabel was just 15 and pregnant when Alexander announced that they had to go back to South Africa to secure his business affairs. Isabel and her family were shocked and resisted the move. When he promised that they would return after one year, she relented and they set sail. Not one of her family members was at the quay as they refused to be complicit in what they saw as the abduction of their daughter and sister. She set off alone and met up on the ship with other Lebanese migrants. Sailing through the Suez Canal and down the east coast of Africa, stopping at wild and wonderful ports such as Alexandria, Port Said and Djibouti, they had no

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idea of where they were headed or what demands would be made of them. The men had mostly been in Africa for some time and told stories of big homes, large gardens and teams of servants, in order to comfort these young girls. As Christian Lebanese they spoke French and Arabic but none of them spoke English.

This is how I imagine it may have been on the ship: *Isabel nudged Emily (George Mukheibir's wife) who in turn nudged Baheegie (Ray Khalil's wife and first cousin) and the three of them collapsed in a heap of giggles on the deck. Those Ingleesie gentlemen with their blonde hair and red faces were too funny when they lost their game of deck quoits, particularly when they played against the swarthy fortune-seekers. Suddenly Skander appeared next to Isabel and gave her a look she'd learn to mean: be careful. Ray was open in his scolding of Baheegie and George told Emily plainly that they were on their way to a place full of such blond people who were to be respected because they were first to tame that wilderness and were excellent customers in the business.*

The men went to change and puff their cheroots in the smoking lounge while a pall of apprehension settled on the three women. They began to fear, as never before, the truth in the warnings of family and friends: 'You will be alone, alone as you have never been before; you will get lost and be lost to us.'

Their tenuous connections sustained them and by the end of the voyage they felt as though they were close family.

'Never mind', they consoled themselves as Isabel voiced Skander's promise,

'Only six months, make some money, sell the business and go back home.'

On one of our many walks in the garden, Granny answered my question as to who promised her when she was so young, 'Well, as Auntie Mary, my older sister was already married it was my turn. Linda was younger, she stayed home winding silk from the cocoons. Your Grandpa's family spoke with my parents while he was still in Africa. He came back to fetch me. We travelled thousands of horrible miles from home and from civilization. At Port Said we saw Arab children barefoot and begging; we threw money into the sea and they dived in to get it. We were afraid so we never got off the ship until we reached Beira in Mozambique. There, we had to climb into a basket and were lowered into a small boat to be rowed ashore. Then we took the train and somewhere we even had to go in a covered ox wagon. I cried when I got to Queenstown. There were no street lamps, no electricity, no proper plumbing, and I was surrounded by black people. The maid in the house helped me, but I had to show my way of doing the washing to the woman who came for that every Tuesday. At least Baheegie was also in Queenstown. The people around me were so different. When the

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postman came after lunch and I went to the box to collect the mail, some of them would be standing there to watch me as they knew what time I went out. I wore my beautiful Paris gowns. Looking back, I am not surprised they stared at me.' I picture my grandmother, a young exotic beauty, doing something as mundane and human as searching longingly through the letters for an envelope with familiar squiggly writing all over it. Granny was a strong woman but I am sure that her sense of foreignness and displacement must have deprived her of a communal life – so much a part of the Lebanese psyche.

'I was only there a few months and Albert was born,' she continued. 'Mrs Jordaan, the Afrikaner midwife who lived in Joubert Street came to deliver him. An Englishman, Dr Howes was our doctor and she called him if there was a problem. Mostly though, she delivered all of my seven babies on her own. Later when I had too many children, I asked Dr Howes to help me and he did, otherwise I would have had ten children. When I was pregnant with Henry the youngest, I begged him but he said he had helped me three times already so he couldn't do it again. I tried everything. I had hot baths, I jumped off chairs. I sat on steaming pots but he was determined to be born. Look at him now: he is an angel, my darling, a few years old when your Grandpa died.'

'Eventually the lights came to Queenstown. We started with one in the hallway and then put them in one by one. I was almost sorry then because your Grandpa played cards all night and then he came to bed to worry me. He had a terrible temper. If he lost at cards or *Taoulie*, he'd tip the table over and throw everything out, shout, bang his fists.'

In 1911, Nabeeha Haddad, Alexander's sister who was married to Iskander Mukheibir left Lebanon and after having a look at South Africa decided to go and live in New Zealand. They changed their last name to Alexander. When the First World War broke out, Iskander joined the ANZACS as a translator for T.E. Lawrence in the Arabian desert. He concealed his son Norman's real age and took him along as a runner for Lawrence.

Norman died in November 2000 in New Zealand and as one of the few remaining ANZACs had a state funeral in Wellington. So my mother had first cousins whom she'd never met in New Zealand but she and Phyllis used to write to them. I finally met one of their children in Sydney : a woman of about 60, her resemblance to the family was immediately noticeable in a crowded David Jones brasserie. But some of the other New Zealand cousins declined to make contact.

'Historical family is no longer important,' one said. 'I am quite happy playing

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bridge with my English friends.’

In response to my offer to prepare some of my grandmother’s recipes for them, ‘What recipes? We prefer a grill or a lemon sole.’ From this I can only imagine how hard it must have been for those early Lebanese migrants to New Zealand. Their children are all fully assimilated – no Arabic, no recipes, no memories beyond snippets of a lady who took the bus across town, with a tray of Kibbe to visit someone who had been ill.

In 1916 Alexander’s two younger brothers Guy and George arrived with their sister Mary. She later married an Abdinoor and Guy married Mary Tibshraeny. Guy worked in the business and it was expanded to include a large section of imported Lebanese and Greek foods to satisfy the community scattered throughout South Africa.

Tragedy struck when George died in the Great Flu of 1918-1919. In the same year, beautiful Lily, Isabel’s fourth child, affectionately known as Lulu, died of scarlet fever. She was just three years old. Isabel was stricken and it was years before she could even mention her name.

Granny continued in answer to my question of what life was like: ‘ Our house was large and comfortable. Your Grandpa brought beautiful Turkish copper braziers for the cold Queenstown winter, Persian carpets with silk and gold thread and a few French pieces. Our house was grand. The garden was full of all our vegetables, *koosa-zucchini*, *buddenjen*-eggplant, *flayflie* –capsicum,’ and the list went on. ‘To remind us of home, we built a *birrkie*- a pond, under the grapevine in which we chilled watermelon and grapes in those long hot summers. Hidden away at the back, your Grandpa made *arak*- aniseed liqueur. Occasionally he gave the policeman a bottle and was never found out.’

In 1922 the whole family went back to Lebanon for a year. Albert was twelve. Mickey was nine and the two of them went to school in Beit Merie. Phyllis and Bertha were too young and stayed at home. Isabel described the voyage as pleasant enough but daily, sharks trawled, scavenging in the ship’s wake and she constantly counted her children.

Religion was part of their lives, especially when the children were born. There was no Greek Orthodox church in Queenstown so they joined the Catholics. When a friend of Alexander’s suicided and the priest refused to bury him, he ceremoniously uplifted his whole family during mass and they transferred to the Anglican church.

In October 1933, when my mother was thirteen, Alexander fell down dead. ‘Heart’ they echoed once again. A tremendous upheaval followed.

Albert was in medical school at the University of Cape Town. He went home for

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the holidays and tried to be a father to the family but was bossy and controlling and even whacked the girls once or twice. My mother was afraid of him.

In Isabel's words, 'Albert continued his medical studies with the financial help of the Mukheibirs in Barkly East. When Henry's turn came to go to medical school, they helped us again. Mickey left school just before the matric exams to run the shop but he was too young and inexperienced. Slowly we sold everything to survive. My jewellery was last. The Persian carpets, copper braziers, chaise-longues – all went to African people's homes in the 'location', the *Inglesies* didn't like our stuff.'

Granny told one of my cousins that her main loss was of material security. Alexander didn't keep her company or partner her in a modern way. She was sorry when he died, she was afraid of being a woman on her own with a family but she never really loved him.

Her daughters Bertha and Phyllis continued to nag Isabel to improve her English. She cut her teeth on "Little Women" which she read a few times until her daughters were satisfied that she had understood most of it. 'After that,' she said, 'I fell in love with reading.'

When I was growing up and we visited Granny for afternoon tea, we'd find her engrossed in the latest James Hadley Chase or Mills and Boon. Sometimes, a strong burning smell lingered in the air. Granny had incinerated her most recent read: the luscious-sounding adventures of the buxom Angelique by Sergeanne Golon, 'to make sure the girls don't find it.'

'When your Grandpa was dead nearly a year, Mansour Chemaly came to take me for a drive in his new car. He had gold splits in his front teeth. His pitch black moustache was like Clark Gable and he was quite well-off. Adele Sorour, who was not married, came along and we set off on the road to Indwe. I sat in the front of the car and Adele sat on the back seat but she felt left out. Mansour was saying things to me, kept on looking at me and smiling. Adele was poking her head into the front. I had Henry on my lap.'

Isabel's looks were her trump card but Adele was not married so they vied for his favours. Suddenly Adele said, 'What about Albert, Phyllis, Mickey and Bertha? They would have loved to come for a drive as well. Henry is her youngest, Mansour. Isabel here, poor thing, has five children.' The rivalry between the two women erupted and Mansour lost control of the car and they had a crash. No one was hurt but he never took either of them out again and the two women remained best friends.

Granny Isabel continued, 'In 1938 your mum, Auntie Phyllis and I went to live in East London. We had nothing left in Queenstown. We took a flat near the beach in

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Buckingham Court. Then the war came and my boys went to fight in Egypt.' The diamond pendant that Alexander gave Isabel as a wedding gift had gone missing. Isabel had secreted it for a rainy day but must have thrown it out when they moved. It was fated to remain in memory as a tribute to one man's love for a Lebanese girl across the sea in a land he longed for all his life.

Years later my mother Bertha says, 'Of that time, the most outstanding thing I remember is that your grandmother never complained, never talked about money even although we had lost everything.'

Beirut 1907.

Isabel Ghiz aged 13 and her younger brother Farid, aged 12. This is a photograph taken on her engagement to Alexander who was still in South Africa.



Beirut 1909.

Isabel Ghiz marries Alexander(Skander) Haddad.



East London, South Africa. 1940.
The business failed, so in 1937 they left Queenstown and went to live in Buckingham Court Flats in East London.

L.toR: Bertha, Albert (Captain- Medical Corps stationed in Egypt), Isabel, Phyllis.
Front: Henry, aged 15, in De La Salle College uniform.

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.

Slightly Contentious Texts

Slightly Contentious Texts

Doors...
I knock on one
I open it
I only see myself a door
I open it
I enter to find
Nothing but another door
Oh God!
How many doors separate me
from myself?

Schizophrenia

In my country, fear
unites me and divides me:
One man writes,
and another –
behind my window's curtains –
watches me

Doubt

My father said:
Don't tell anyone about your vision
The street is mined with ears
Every ear is connected to another
by a secret cable until
it reaches the Sultan.

Iraq

Iraq is increasingly going away
as its steps widen in exile
Iraq burns whenever
half a window opens
I said: Ah!
And Iraq is trembling!
Whenever a shadow passes
or find myself in a wilderness,
I imagine a muzzle watching me
The Iraq we miss has a history,
half of which is song and kohl,
the other half is tyrants

Al-Hallaj

Al-Hallaj took me to
the highest hill in Baghdad
He showed me all
its minarets and temples
and its churches with bells
He asked me to count
how many warm prayers daily ascend
from the breaths of people
but no one has meaningfully
attempted to ascend in his vision,
to see the deeds of
the tyrants in the land,
the blunders of the jurists
and what the guards did

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Al-Hallaj Again

Who could save me from my calamity?
No one except Him is inside the jubbah¹
No one except me is inside the jubbah
I am the One
And He is the One
How did they unite
How did they separate
in a moment of intoxication
between my doubts in Him
and my piety

Vigils

You look at your god
only through blades and blood
and I see Him
in the words,
in the melodies,
in the blueness of her eyes,
and the sea

Verses

Even some verses² were annulled

and you want your mind to remain
an unchanging boulder
as time goes by

Four Caliphs

Four caliphs³ left history
bewildered
behind them
We remain to this day
drying blood spots on their behalf
I wonder, how could a text be busy
with a woman carrying wood⁴
And neglect who should be
the next caliph

Interpretation

They make me into many lines,
put me in many chapters,
then index me
and print me complete
They distribute me to all bookshops
and abuse me in the newspapers,
though I have not
opened my mouth yet!

¹A Sufi's expression of his deep closeness to Allah

²In reference to Koranic verses

³The four who succeeded the Prophet Mohammad

⁴The Koranic reference to the wife of Abu Lahab who was an enemy of the Prophet

Adnan Assayegh is an Iraqi poet who lives in London. He delivered the above poems at The Third al-Marbid Poetry Festival in Iraq, 15-17 April 2006. Some extremists were not happy to hear these poems and publicly threatened him with cutting his tongue and killing him.

S U S A N B E I N A R T

Wah-Wah

Directed by Richard E. Grant.

Starring Gabriel Byrne, Emily Watson, Julie Walters and Nicholas Hoult.

In the back of the family sedan, Ralph, 10, wakes up to see his mother in the front seat, straddling a man who is a close friend of her husband. Gob-smacked but silent throughout his ordeal, Ralph must bear witness to this climax to his secure family life.

This painful yet somehow funny scene introduces a dark coming-of-age comedy where, in an artful parallel to Ralph's splintering family, his home, Swaziland, is about to be liberated from its British colonial masters.

Told through Ralph's eyes and based on the life of well-known actor and now first-time director Richard E. Grant, *Wah-Wah* unashamedly portrays a colonialist world.

It is the end of the '60s and we see expatriate whites in many roles: playing cricket, drinking in their clubhouse, conferring honours upon each other, cheating on their spouses, talking baby language to each other, fêting royalty from back home. When Princess Margaret visits Swaziland, this white community celebrates with abandon even though she hardly notices them. Although the local doctor is black, most natives we meet are workers, slaving away for their white employers.

Like director Grant and his alter-ego, Ralph, I was born in Africa. As well as lions and exaggerated-necked giraffes, to me Africa means khaki landscapes, cornrows and orange sunsets. It evokes the stark beauty of coal-black African skin. For me, a 'white' African like Grant and Ralph, there is nostalgia too for my privileged life there, something Africa once offered in spades. *Wah-Wah* has enough of all these elements to satisfy those of us who once benefited from such an idyllic existence.

The fact that this film shows Africa through white eyes reflects my own reality, but this can be problematic for a film set on a black continent. We have viewed perhaps too many bleached versions of Africa, including *African Queen* (1951) and *Out of Africa* (1985), both popular films in their day. There is too the current *The White Masai*, which some have criticised for lacking depth by showing only the white

side of a cross-cultural love-affair gone wrong.

However, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1981) and the recent *Tsotsi*, although written and produced by whites, successfully attempt to show a black African viewpoint. As Africa matures into its postcolonial status, there will, I am certain, be more film-makers who will represent that continent through black eyes.

A recent Australian example of this kind of film-making is *Ten Canoes*, prestigiously selected for the *Un Certain Regard* section of the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. Made by Rolf de Heer, it tells a uniquely Aboriginal story reminiscent of some scenes in Nicholas Roeg's groundbreaking *Walkabout* (1971).

But back to *Wah-Wah*, where Ralph grows into a teenager and finds himself in a Swaziland where, not only has his family broken up, but all vestiges of white power are slipping away. These conjoined themes are handled with humour and honesty through the use of stalwart actors such as Julie Walters, playing a kind though comical family friend, and Gabriel Byrne who plays Ralph's crumbling father. This results in a well-drawn and entertaining depiction of the pompous lives of a desperate pack of fading colonialists.

Young Nicholas Hoult gives a sensitive portrayal of Ralph, who desperately needs some sane parental influence in his life. There are both humour and resilience in his experiences as he watches his promiscuous mother come and go and his father fall into alcoholism, just as the colonial way of life with its stiff upper lip and casual promiscuity traditions is crashing.

Fortunately, a new brassy American stepmother, Ruby, brilliantly played by Emily Watson, turns up. She attempts to rescue the now-deteriorating relationship between Ralph and his drunken father who at one stage pursues his son with a loaded gun. An outsider in this snobbish society, Ruby ridicules the colonials and their foppish slang of 'la-di-dah', 'tootle-pip' and 'hoity-toity' as sounding like a load of old 'wah-wah'.

Although short of a 'black' viewpoint, *Wah-Wah* does more than merely celebrate the fumbblings of British expatriates in '60s and '70s Swaziland. A satisfying experience for us all, it goes further than looking at Africa through the narrow prism of one of its white tribes.

Achieving universality, the film both mocks and affirms human nature by giving us a portrait of dissolution and at the same time confirming the decency of the stepmother Ruby who provides heart to Ralph's wounded soul.

Susan Beinart is editing her novel, "Thin Skin", which is about a migrant family living in Sydney.

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 الخلاقة، 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.
ترسل المواد إلكترونياً إلى: raghid@ozemail.com.au أو تحفظ على قرص وترسل بالبريد.

تنشر كَلِمَات النثر والشعر والدراسات والقصة والفنون وفق طريقتين أساسين:
أولاً - المواد الأصلية التي لم يسبق نشرها مطلقاً بأية لغة.

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

الأسعار والاشتراك للأفراد (بالدولار الأسترالي)

سعر العدد \$20 ضمن أستراليا ونيوزيلندا، أو \$40 بالبريد الجوي إلى أي مكان
الاشتراك السنوي (عددان) \$30 ضمن أستراليا ونيوزيلندا، أو \$60 بالبريد الجوي إلى أي مكان.
للمنظمات والمؤسسات والمصالح التجارية ضعف القيم أعلاه في كل حالة

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

ترسل كافة الدفعات من خارج أستراليا بحوالة مصرفية بالعملة الأسترالية ويحذر الشك باسم Kalimat

الموازرة (الرعاية المادية)

مفتوحة للمنظمات والأفراد الذين يؤمنون بأهمية الرسالة الحضارية والجمالية للمجلة، مع العلم أنها لا تحوّل من يقدمها وضع أية شروط على كَلِمَات، أو الحصول على أية حقوق أو مزايا، بما في ذلك أفضلية النشر.
تبدأ الموازرة للأفراد بمبلغ \$400 سنوياً، وللمنظمات والأعمال بمبلغ \$2000 سنوياً. ويحصل مقدم الرعاية على اشتراك مجاني لسنة الرعاية، كما يحق له الإعلان مجاناً مرة واحدة في السنة.

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



Oil on cotton canvas

Jerusalem
by the Palestinian/Canadian artist
Ibrahim Shalabi