كلمات

Kalimat

Number 3 (English), September 2000

Happy Australia

SAMIH AL-BASSET AND
THE SYRIAN-AUSTRALIAN COLOURS AND LINES

An Australian-Arabic Literary Quarterly
ISSN 1443-2749

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

Number 3 (English), September 2000

Published
by

سيروس

SyrAus Incorporated
The Australian-Syrian Cultural Council
Registered No. Y3060544

Kalimat 3

Material published in *Kalimat* does not necessarily represent the views of the editor, advisers, publisher or sponsors.

CORRESPONDENCE
P.O. Box 242, Cherrybrook, NSW 2126, Australia.
Phone/Facsimile: 61 2 9484 3648
Electronic Mail: raghid@ozemail.com.au

Printed in Australia by Prima Quality Printing, Granville, NSW.
Bound by Perfectly Bound, Gladsville, NSW, Australia.

Kalimat 3

Photography

Poetry

Short Stories

Books

Arts

from the Editor

Judith Wright & Alec Hope

I do not know how I will mourn Judith Wright and Alec Hope. In its quiet way, a labour of mourning started years ago; but in recent weeks the news of their leaving us has bit deeply into me. We have their poems, a permanent possession, but without those two elders Australia is a sadder place.

Kevin Hart
Australian Author, Vol. 32, No. 2, August 2000.

Naim Khoury

This year, Arab-Australians also lost a leading poet who lived in Sydney. Naim Khoury was a masterly poet of both traditional and modern techniques of Arabic poetry, but above all he was a poet of depth and power of expression whichever method he adopted. The following is a translation of part of one of his poems.

Should you inscribe the night on my face without a moon,
every grain of your sound becomes many moons.
In every one of our suns there is a spellbound world
girdled by wind and sky.
Stretch your wings in the gusts of our elation,
for our blood is full of rain for those fires.
And do not say history is long gone;
We ourselves rotate history!

Naim Khoury from his poem *To a Brunet*,
published in *al-Sharq*, 29/03/2000, Sydney.

Constantin Zrayk

The Arab World is mourning Constantin Zrayk who died on 12/08/2000 in Beirut, Lebanon aged 91.

A writer, academic and leading Arab thinker born in Damascus, Zrayk was acclaimed for his book *National Consciousness*. The book was influential in the thirties and forties of the twentieth century in guiding Arab nationalistic thinking. Zrayk represented a stream of thought that Arab unity will result from realising the educational, cultural and political will of the nation simultaneously. Nations and national unity, in his opinion, are not accomplished historical phenomena, but projects of construction and hard work.

Despite his direct and indirect influences on the emergence of some Arab nationalist movements and his early involvement in their politics, his main contribution to the Arabs is in the cultural and academic areas.

Let's not talk politics

In a recent interview with Adonis, the Syrian-Lebanese poet and thinker of international renown, the interviewer asked him about the reasons that led him to leave the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, despite his admiration and respect for the founder Antun Saadé. Adonis left the Party a long time ago, but he was not the only one to join, leave and later become very distinguished. Many leading figures, particularly thinkers, were attracted to that party for what they aspired to, and thought possible with the presence of a leader of integrity who was himself one of the greatest minds in the region.

Adonis explained that he left the Party '...when it started to change into an institution just like the others, carrying all their illnesses, and when the leadership started giving more importance to the institution than to the idea behind it. This was when power became more important than the party...It is very strange that this party, founded on intellectual and cultural grounds, was not able to publish a single magazine of literary importance over fifty years. However, some individuals who joined the party were able to publish, in their personal capacity, some of the most important Arab journals in the twentieth century.'

When we formed SyrAus Incorporated in September 1999, we wanted our achievements to be more important than the organisation. In particular, we felt that a magazine such as *Kalimat* was a good reason for having an organisation. We were, and still are interested in creative and dynamic products. We believe that this is what Adonis is talking about. Adonis, and many others, left one party or another because their creativity was beyond the rigid structure of their organisations. Those organisations failed to understand that they were supposed to be there for their people, and that they needed to be flexible enough to utilise the talents of certain people who were potentially the driving force for change.

To widen a spectrum for access

Kalimat is attempting to maintain a dynamic forum representing a wide spectrum of writings from known and unknown writers. This contributes to the cultural access we are trying to achieve. We use *cultural* in all its dimensions, not simply the ethnic one. We are concerned about the social, economic and generation cultures as examples.

We have often stressed the importance of translations in providing access between English and Arabic-speaking individuals. In the editorial of the first Arabic issue of *Kalimat* last June, we outlined our philosophy on translation. We like to preserve the quality and particularity of the original work. This is why we believe that it is important to find appropriate expressions in the target language, and not necessarily literal meanings. Dictionaries are reference books. Appropriate choice of word and expression is the responsibility of the translator, not *al-Mawrid* or *Oxford*. The translation we are after is not literal, but accurate. Accurate translation requires a clear understanding of the language, history and culture of both the original and the target languages. We do not accept recreating or 'transcreating' of the original work. We aim to translate the work as it is, beautiful or ugly. The translator has to be creative in the choice of appropriate expressions to suit the target language, but be understood by the receiving culture. In some cases, where no equivalent exists in the target language, these expressions might be entirely different from those used by the original, nevertheless they should convey the same meaning. In English, for example, one might say *you are my cup of tea* to indicate a liking for someone. This cannot be translated into Arabic by selecting equivalent Arabic words, because they would not reveal the actual original meaning or purpose for which this phrase was coined. These problems are easily overcome

in scientific and some prose translations, because it is possible to incorporate additional 'explanatory' or qualifying terms. This, however, is largely not possible in literary translations, particularly poetry, if one wants to convey the form and the spirit of the original work rather than present solely an academic analysis of it.

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Good translation, in our opinion, is a mirror. It is not a magic mirror. It is a mirror in which you can see the original as it is. Whatever we see in this mirror does not make us hide or break it. We strive, however, to make our mirror of the finest glass. We try to polish it constantly to reflect the true meaning and spirit of the original. This requires research and a lot of hard work. This is the only creativity to practise in translation, and we would like to practise it abundantly. Our main aim is to be faithful to the author's work.

Perhaps, the main organisational aspect of *Kalimat* is to make it a finely polished mirror that is able to present a wide scope of writing and thought. Translation from the Arabic is a major tool of the English issues of *Kalimat.* We use it to promote Arabic-speaking writers within the English-speaking world. The Arabic issues will serve a similar function of promoting English-speaking writers within the Arabic-speaking world.

We are privileged to have in the present issue a variety of Australian writers who continue to support our work, and to have secured the consent of a number of distinguished names in contemporary Arab writing to translate and publish some of their work. In some cases we have been entrusted with translating whole books.

We are equally pleased to be able to present works of some emerging writers who are knocking on the door of the literary world with the hand of beauty, quality and determination.

The present issue also contains works of art and photography. This is an area that we would like to pay more attention to, including art in architecture.

Enjoy it!

Raghid Nahhas

to the Editor

Kalimat continues to receive letters of support and congratulations. We thank all for their encouragement. Here are excerpts from some letters, writings or poems received from Syria.

Your valuable cultural message

It gives me great pleasure, along with my colleagues in the Syrian plastic arts movement, after receiving your important cultural message taking the shape of Kalimat, to congratulate you on this important cultural achievement that will elate writings and creative plastic art to the horizons they deserve in our two dear countries, Syria and Australia. We are confident of your encouragement to the Syrian artists, who in recent years, rose and obtained many gold medals, and participated in many Arabic and international exhibitions. May God help you carry this message, and bless your steps.

Ayman al-Daqre,
President of the Fine Arts Association of Syria

A creative masterpiece

There are no limits to my happiness with Kalimat. It exceeded all my expectations. The translation of my article is excellent. The whole magazine is a creative masterpiece.

George Jabbour
Professor of International Relations and ex-Adviser to the Syrian President

Kalimat

For ever will live, he who drank from *Ishtar*,
from the veins of eternity, or the veins of life.
It all started on the Syrian coast:
mud from the Euphrates baked in fire
to reveal drawings and a frame,
pictures of the female…culture.
My glass is empty; fill it for me to the brim.
For I would like to sing my enchantment '*Kalimat*'
Kalimat: Alphabetical, Samarian, Babylonian
that had flown from the tops of the Lebanon
and settled on black Africa.
Languages are Kalimat.
Now Kalimat comes from a migrant?
Today I cried from inside my soul
and asked the post master,
'Have the pigeons carried for me a copy of Kalimat?'

Youssef Elhajj,
educator & poet

To enter with Kalimat

Salutation from my home town Mharda that dozes on the shoulders of the River Orontes. You entered into her heart, not with one word but with Kalimat. And what Kalimat! I read it all, and was delighted at its valuable contents. It is a pleasure to the eyes and a delight to the heart. I congratulate you with all my heart, and support you with all the Kalimat that I have. Words are my only treasure in this life, and I would like to share them with you.

Mufeed Nabzo,
writer & poet

A new vision for a new creation

Kalimat is a new vision for a new creation – not only on the Arab migrant map, but also extends over the map of the greater World. This is a victory following victory. First the English Kalimat, now the Arabic one. Twins.

Kalimat delves into culture, or the innocence of nature. It touches colours governed by the redness of blood and the yellow of depravation...or the pinkness of birth and the rainbow of happiness. It touches deprived towns and villages, burnt souls and aspirations, laws governed by fatalism or the ability to progress. It is a renewal dealing with cultural blend, and the means of transmitting ideas among people.

We congratulate you and salute your articles, translations, style and presentation. We salute your struggle with every thorn in your way.

Nihad Shabbouh,
President Migrants' Friend Association

L. E. SCOTT

Issues and Ideas

Some Thoughts on Contemporary Maori Writing

New Zealand, unlike Australia, has never claimed that it was *terra nullius* when white settlers arrived. It has never had an official whites-only immigration policy and it has a treaty with the indigenous people. New Zealand, unlike Australia, has attempted to camouflage its racism.

Given that both countries have practised varying degrees of racism/genocide against their indigenous people and given that both Maori and Aborigine have survived the white hands of racism/genocide, one cannot but wonder what kind of literature has been produced from such wretched histories. It is not possible within the space of this article to develop a comprehensive thesis on the indigenous literature of both countries, but such a thesis might explore the following:

- how to define indigenous literature, given its oral traditions
- how indigenous people have been portrayed in the literature of white writers
- the daily language of racism used towards indigenous people
- the exclusion from school curricula and mainstream media of indigenous culture and the significance of indigenous culture, despite that, to the national heritage
- the continuing insistence that indigenous culture and social mores derive from the invading Euro-centric culture.

It is not surprising that when we examine the written word of Maori from the early 1970s, we see a literature that in many cases was trying to prove or establish the 'human-ness' of the oppressed. The core of that writing deals with the pain of an oppressed people and the mechanisms they have had to develop to survive their oppression. The language is not confrontational, it is a plea to be accepted as human. Much of the Maori writing of that period can be described as lyrical and rarely, if ever, a declaration of war against racism.

In comparing this to the radical, confrontationist African-American writing of the 1960s, it should be remembered that that writing was not being published by white publishing houses, but by small kitchen-table presses (the desktop publishers of the time). And the books were not distributed through the normal white-controlled outlets, but on street corners, in bars and at poetry readings.

Given that Maori writing of the period was published primarily by white publishing houses and white literary magazines and in the first instance was exposed to a white audience, the conditions that might have encouraged radical writing to be produced did not exist. It may be noted that here, as elsewhere, when indigenous writers did challenge racism via creative writing, white critics historically dismissed it as 'protest literature' not worthy of serious consideration.

In 1964, Hone Tuwhare's collection of poems *No Ordinary Sun* was seen as a breakthrough for Maori writing into 'mainstream' literature. The poems were lyrical, not confrontational. Nearly a decade later, Witi Ihimaera published his first book, *Pounamu, Pounamu.* Ihimaera is viewed by both Pakeha New Zealanders and Maori as one of the most successful contemporary Maori writers writing in English; he is also one of the most prolific.

Patricia Grace has also carved out a reputation in New Zealand as a highly successful Maori author. Like Ihimaera, her early work is placed in a human and cultural context that constrained her from telling the dominant white culture to 'go to hell'. While these writers and their contemporaries showed a conciliatory face to their oppressors in their earlier work, this does not mean that they were not relevant or important to the development of an unfettered Maori voice. Indeed, the fruits of that development can be seen in later works of these writers which do issue a direct challenge to Pakeha New Zealanders on their attitudes to, and perceptions of, Maori.

This development is not simply a matter of chronology, however. In 1990, Alan Duff's book *Once Were Warriors* was published. It was viewed by Pakeha New Zealanders as a major breakthrough for Maori writers. As a result of the popular success of the novel, the main character, Jake Heke, has become synonymous with Maori violence against Maori. It is significant that this violence was directed not at the oppressors but at 'the racial self'. On this point, one should refer to the African-American writer James Baldwin, who described how racism and oppression can make their victims believe the oppressor's judgements of them. So, *Once Were Warriors* is not a book that attacks the oppressor. It describes the condition, not the cause – something it shares with the blues.

One could argue that if the characters of this book had viewed the

controlling society as an invading force, begun to organize ongoing protest about a court system that is inherently racist and pointed the finger at the oppressor rather than the victim, the book would not have had the success it did. As it was, Pakeha New Zealanders were not threatened by it because they were not the targets.

In contrast, also in the early 1990s, poets like Apirana Taylor were writing pieces such as *Thunder God* and *Sad Joker on a Marae*. These were angry poems and that anger was about what had been done to them and their people. They made the declaration: NO MORE.

It might be said that Maori writing in the late twentieth century has been sometimes a literature that indicted Pakeha and demanded sovereignty and sometimes a literature that spoke of Maori spirituality derived from the land. Maori writing today is continuing to move towards more direct confrontation with the colonial power. Writers like Apirana Taylor and Robert Sullivan are not arguing their right to be treated as equal human beings, they are demanding it. Peter Simpson, writing in the *Evening Post* of 14 February 1997, said of Taylor's work: 'Its raw, powerful and angry poems' present 'a Maori voice utterly different from the lyricism and gentle ironies of Hone Tuwhare'.

With the new generation of writers is coming a rebirth of the Maori language and that rebirth stands alongside a movement towards self-determination and a reclaiming of the land and all that is Maori. Writers and the Maori population generally have clearly come to know the impact of that wretched proclamation: 'If I take your language and I give you mine, then you are what I want you to be'. The young warriors who are now coming to the forefront of Maori literature are demanding unconditionally to be heard. And they understand the words of James Baldwin in his essay prophesying the riots that would sweep across the United States of America in the 1960s: *No more water, the fire next time.*

L. E. Scott is an African-American writer/poet/editor who made New Zealand his home.

CAMILIA NAIM

Issues and Ideas

Before Leaving

She stood confused, looking right and left. She was aware that something was behind her action, but was unable to determine what it was. Confusion obliterated features of her thoughts. After all, dispersion was her companion since fate had chosen to use one of its cruel tools to leave its mark on her.

His eyes were gazing at her perplexed face. A face roaming the unperceived, beyond what eyes could see or gazes could touch.

So you leave, and leave behind the remains and sadness of years thrown in those several places that embraced your escape. Who would collect the fragments of the memories scattered in cafés, alleys and parks?

Would you be able to take off the garment of fear, the companion of estrangement and the release of the self from oneself? Are you able to put off the fire of your perplexity and the flame of your migration that burned for ages inside the wardrobes of your felicity and tore your soul apart?

Let us forget the agonies and the melancholic tales of this exile. Let me lift the burden and torture of all these years off my back. Turn your face away from me, I might then be able to erase its details from my memory, and lift some bitter fingerprints off the pages of my days.

My love, you are as warm as a hearth in winter days, don't be as cold as ice on a naked body. Do not burn the fineness of this farewell with whiplashes of blame, weakening my wounds with the boiling water of reproach. I might be a foolish man, but I see you in every cloud and on every street corner. When the night falls, I see myself stealing your ghost lest no eye could see me. In my fancy, I kiss your lips and bury your head in my chest, or engage it in an unceasing love. Oh my migrating scent! I wish you could know.

Don't bother yourself any more with embracing my ghost, or toying with dreams. What do you want me to know?

I know that within the frost of my isolation, my self freezes intact-unbreakable. Inside me there are ashes within ashes. And thank you, you a skeleton of a man. In vain I beg of you a sunrise, and all your balconies are in

sunset. I cried for you unceasingly. I wished for my crying to hit the barrier of your weakness and penetrate the wall of your cowardice, but I returned alone wrapped in my disappointments. I remained written on the lines of the days, a question without answer.

Something in your eyes has hardened. Nothing is left in you except those dull and empty eyes telling love stories like a rat shivering in fear.

I have had enough with your nonsense, hypocrisy and fate blaming that have aggrieved you and turned you into a stone, a corpse worn out by doubts. I no longer know where I am heading. I have become nothing. In essence, I have become a choked throat whining painfully. I tried to bring you closer to me, to steady your teetering, to light the right torch and extract from my veins ink with which I wrote so you may see, but I returned alone wrapped in my disappointments.

He looked at her silently, and then lowered his head.

He spoke, begging with all the weakness that remained in him. In nights of honesty, the souls shed their darkness. A cloud of light emerges from their depths. One day, a pond of light will flow cleansing all the impurities that cling to my pores. Wait here. Give me a little chance. Do not go.

I no loner find a shadow to protect me from the burn of my fate. The earthly space around me has become too small even for one foot to set. Let me search in the secrets of the unknown for a greenness that can revive the leaves that dried before their time. Let me go. The woods of our remains have accumulated in the wasteland. I must go. You stay, and gather the crumbs of words and chivalry to crown with them your surrender to yourself and your desires.

He stretched his hand towards her to pick something to return him to his runaway humanity, to an illusion that embraced the corpse of his manhood, but he could only pick emptiness and the blackness of the night, and remains of her scent that she entrusted to the pockets of the breeze when she left.

Camilia Naim is a Sydney housewife whose hobby is to write. She published some of her writings in the Arabic press in Australia. This article was originally published in an-Nahar, Sydney, and is translated from the Arabic by **Dana al-Baqaeen**.

GERALD SPECK

Issues and Ideas

The Downstairs Room

The window slammed shut as Gerry tried to shut out the neighbour's barking dogs, alone again in the safe world of the past. Old architecture books from the 70's, a collection of matchbox toys and tin plate buses, die-cast motor bikes and brass aeroplanes. Past memories were gently rekindled by these possessions, they formed a static diary of recollection of times and people, places and houses that were unchanged by time. A stream of remembered cars drive down a familiar street, old neighbours and friends waved hello, and Gerry smiled, felt loved and remembered.

The neighbour's dogs now quiet, birds and crickets sang outside the downstairs room. The old sheepskin rug warm and friendly on the rocking chair as Gerry peacefully lay back and gazed around his world. The red leather chair proudly given to him by his father, the wicker table his mother had bargained for in an op-shop in Hamilton. A green hued point of fishing boats in a Mediterranean port, from uni friend Chris, and a similar one from his grandmother Rosie, then a third from his mother, a wooden row boat on a sandy Australian shore, formed a trinity, a oneness.

Rembrandt's *Golden Helmet* and *Nightwatch* observe him from a corner, yellow and gold highlights, against dark shadowy backgrounds picturing past glories. The wooden drafting desk, drawing board and tee-square, are an altar to the past. This vehicle of promise, this architectural passport has given way to a plastic swipe-card in a call centre, but still recollects the midnight oil burnt in the pursuit of escape from a room that now shields and protects, nurtures the past and helps keep away the fear of the new millennium.

Above the roof a flock of woolly clouds meanders towards the coast, the neighbour's dogs bark again to guard their house and in the street green clad schoolgirls giggle their way to the local highs school. A pair of rosellas squeaks its way to the far neighbour's casuarinas and rock in the branches. And on my screen door a snail slides the morning away, heading down to the moist garden soil below.

My back neighbour's towering Kentia palm flickers in pretend breeze while a builder's truck exhausts its way up the hill to the nest of new pole framed houses. The everyday is rolling past again, a chorus of nature and man noise rising, last night's owl hides under feathered blinkers as a high beam of sun slowly rises and illuminates myriad droplets on dewy grass.

The Asonia clock chimes and Gerry in his downstairs room gives thanks for his 49 years of people and places, gently recollected in a world wide web of memory.

Loving Memory of Dad

Now just a scarecrow of balsa wood and tissue paper, what happened to his deep chest, his thick motor mechanic's forearms and fingers, the nails black, greasy and worn down? The nails now pale, splintered and clean, his breathing short and wheezy, legs skinny and bowed like an old wicker basket. Years of love of work have exorcised the energy, the vigour and the spark.

Now facing ritual finger pricking for blood sugar, spills for heart, pills for circulation, needles for insulin, stainless steel rods for blocked arteries, procedures for bladder, laser for cataracts, wooden stick for balance. Where goes the strong young body that fought on faraway battlefields?

The soul now worships God, the blinking teary eyes worship the long departed love of his life, that long jet black hair, gone to heaven in a wooden box with fake brass plastic handles.

Where the zest for life, cancered away in a misty cloak of valium?

The wave of life rises, speaks, breaks, splashes, leaving sparkling flashes of memories of years of love and hard work, white mechanic's overalls, smell of engine oil, rainbows of colour of kerosene on a service station driveway.

Your son Gerry
5th March 2000

Gerald Speck holds a B.Sc. in Architecture. He believes that the journey of life is his purpose, not any destination. He journeyed through varied workplaces and experiences; draftsman, gardener, taxi driver, crane driver and others.

ADEL BESHARA

Study

Syria
in the Thought of
Gibran Khalil Gibran

INTRODUCTION

In attempting a critical appraisal of Khalil Gibran's political thought one must be careful to distinguish between facts and fiction. As Professor Khalil Hawi had once remarked: '...Gibran is one of those figures in the history of literature who, for one reason or another, invite more comments on their life than on their achievements. Legends often grow up around such people, and fact and fiction become interwoven in their lives.'[1] Indeed, so many 'sacred images' have been constructed around Gibran over the years that, in the words of another writer, 'it was impossible for his readers to know him seeking the pleasures of this life.'[2] Most of us know Gibran either as a poet, painter, artist, a great man of letters, or any one combination of them. But there is another equally interesting side to Gibran that is often and unjustly overlooked. Gibran was a social reformer who carried the national banner undauntedly, and was not afraid to speak out in defense of radical reforms often at his own personal risks. Throughout his life, he showed a particular concern in his country, through various charitable organizations and societies he either founded or

[1] Hawi, K. 1972. Khalil Gibran: His Background, Character and Works. The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, Beirut, p67.

[2] Karam, M. Karam. *Sha'ir yatwi Ajnihatah*: *Gibran Hayyan*, (Arabic, unknown publisher), p454.

joined. Of significance to us is the question to which country did Gibran show his greatest loyalty? Once again we must stress that in searching for facts in Gibran's life we should treat with suspicion any statement or comment made about him. This is particularly true in the endeavor to establish where his national loyalty lay. Therefore, our answer will depend almost entirely on Gibran's writings, in particular his letters to Mary Haskell.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Kahlil Gibran was born in Bsharri, North Lebanon, on December 6, 1883. At the age of eleven he emigrated to the United States with his mother and siblings escaping, in the process, his cruel and drunkard father. Three years later, he returned to Beirut so that he could receive a good education in Arabic. During that time, he displayed a talent for drawing and in 1908 was sent to Paris to study art among the masters of the time. From there, Gibran sailed back to the United States to begin a new and chequered career. At the time, national emancipation from the Ottoman yoke was the occupying issue in Syria (including Lebanon). In Syrian centres of immigration, especially in Boston where Gibran had settled, the mood was equally corresponding. In addition to the religious and charitable organisations, the Syrian community in the US began a series of clubs which aimed to integrate the immigrants in their new found life and train them into responsible citizens.[3] One of the earliest was organized in 1891 and was called the Syrian Scientific and Ethical Society (1891). Another was the Syrian American Club. Indeed, many of the clubs that were formed usually included the name *Syrian* in their title and, however imperfectly, attempted to unite all the Syrians in a single purpose: integration into American life.[4]

THE GOLDEN CIRCLES

The first literary society attempted in the United States was established by Kahlil Gibran in 1911. He called it *Al-Halaqat al-Thahabiyah* (The Golden Circles). In his inaugural speech for the society, Gibran expressed his disappointment with the 1909 Ottoman Statute, claiming that the Turks had not abandoned their goal to retain 'absolute rule over the Arabs and the Arabic speaking peoples.' Hawi here remarkes: 'We observe the distinction he [i.e.,

[3] Ewing, Douglas L. 1970. Emigration from Greater Syria to the United States, MA Thesis, American University of Beirut, p90.

[4] Ibid, p91.

Gibran] makes between the Arabs as a race and the Arabic speaking peoples, which enables him to speak of Syria as a nation, dissociating it from the world of Arab nationalism.'[5] Gibran's loyalty to Syria (i.e., 'Geographical or Greater Syria') is further highlighted in a political statement he drafted in the same year. It contained nine basic ideas:

1- The safeguarding of Syria's national and territorial integrity.
2- The security of Syria' s political and civil unity.
3- Awarding regional representation to worthy patriots.
4- Patrolling Syria' s natural resources.
5- The adoption of Arabic as the national language.
6- The application of Arabic in all schools.
7- The introduction of compulsory and equal education.
8- Freedom of Religion.
9- Freedom of speech and thought.

By 1912 Gibran was thoroughly committed to his national ideals and his passion for Syria is captured in a private letter to Mary Haskell: 'Poor Syria. Her children are nothing but poets. And though we sang as angels in her ear, she would not hear. Poor Syria!'[6] A sick friend in a Brooklyn hospital, sensing Gibran's infatuation for Syria, took his hand and tenderly said: 'Gibran, go to Syria - go to your Old Mother - she loves you much - go to Syria, Gibran.'[7] Unfortunately, Gibran's ideas went unheeded. His affirmative actions and vocal revolutionary tone were to prove the main undoing of *al- Halaqat al-Thahabiya* and a source of great discomfort in his private life.[8] Another, according to Professor Hawi, was 'explicitly expressed in the form of introducing members, which was to be held in an atmosphere of secrecy and symbolical mystery meant to convey the grave responsibility of the undertaking and the grave consequences of betraying the society.'[9] As far as Gibran was concerned, *al- Halaqat's* disintegration was the net result of Syrian naivety and their blind subordination to an inferior people: 'Seven times have I cursed the cruel Fate which made Syria a Turkish province! The influence of the Sultans follows the poor Syrians over the seven seas to the New World. The

---

[5] Hawi, K., *Ibid*, pl55.

[6] Hilu, Virginia (Ed.) 1972. Beloved Prophet: the Love Letters of Khalil Gibran and Mary Haskell, KNOPS, N.Y. Letter to Mary Haskell dated Wednesday, May 3, 1911.

[7] *Ibid.* Letter to Mary Haskell dated Friday, May 12, 1911.

[8] See Jan Daya 1988. *Aqidat Gibran* (Gibran's Doctrine), Dar saroukia, London.

[9] Hawi, K., *Ibid*, pl57.

dark shadows of those human vultures are seen even here in New York.'[10] Again in a private letter to Mary of Saturday, May 19, 1 911, Gibran asserted: 'Here I am trying to preach Self Reliance to the Syrians who rely on the new Regime in Turkey. I want these poor people to understand that a beautiful lie is as bad as an ugly one. The throne of the mighty Sultan is built on wet sand. Why kneel before a tarnished idol when there is an immeasurable space to gaze at?' The *al-Halaqat*'s disintegration convinced Gibran that his compatriots were 'more interested in making a living than in developing an idealistic literary theory.[11] He spoke of them as 'Those who have been dead since their birth, but not buried.'

THE SYRIAN ARAB CONGRESS OF 1913

Not to be deterred, Gibran relocated to New York and set up his own studio. He also issued *al-Funun* (The Arts) with Nasib Aridah. But the vision of a united Syria remained a thorn in his side: 'The real truth is this . . . that I am a little chaotic inside. I have a notebook filled with things that came to me those days when I was doing the drawings . . . They are waiting to be worked on. My Mad-man is on my brain - I want to have him published - [But] the Syrian question, as you know, is always with me...'[12] By now the centre of agitation for Syrian nationalism had shifted to Paris where 'the young founders of *al-Fatat* had entertained the thought of bringing the Arab (sic) question to a head by a public ventilation of it in some neutral and free atmosphere.'[13] The result was a Syrian Arab Congress held in 1913 and attended by various political organizations from all over the Syrian Diaspora.[14] In his capacity as a distinguished and outspoken leader, Gibran was asked to represent the Syrian community in North America. But he flatly turned down the offer because 'after talking things over with a committee of Syrians I found that we do not agree on any point...I was to speak their minds - not mine!'[15] Gibran's position vis-a-vis his moderate compatriots indicated two separate patterns of thinking.

---

[10] Hilu, *Ibid.* Letter to Mary dated Tuesday, May 2, 1911.

[11] Ewing, D. *Ibid.*

[12] See the Introduction to Khalil Gibran: Dramas of Life, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1973.

[13] Antonuis, G. 1938. The Arab Awakening, Librarie du Liban, Beirut, p114.

[14] See Beshara, A. 1994. Syrian Nationalism: An Inquiry Into The Political Philosophy of Antun Saadeh, (Chapter One), Bissan, Beirut.

[15] Letter to Mary Haskell dated Tuesday, June 10, 1913. From Hilm, *Ibid.*

Suffice to say that Gibran disliked their political loyalty to foreigners in that the Druze adhered to England, the Orthodox to Russia, and the Maronite to France, and regarded as 'foolishness itself' their dependence on local governments. Instead, he felt that under the existing circumstances, there was only one thing for the individual Syrian to do, and that was to rely on himself.[16] The Paris Conference was widely applauded and there was talk of hosting a second conference in New York. But Gibran would have none of that. By now his mind was firmly set on revolution. 'Khalil,' wrote Mary, 'wants Revolution. Arab military strength is enough for revolution. It need not be planned. Revolution even failing will be met with Home Rule, succeeding, will free Syria and Arabia.'[17] It was his distrust of Turkey's dreadful record that aroused in him this liking for revolution as a way out of the diplomatic stalemate. Gibran plotted his revolution with a certain Damascene Eresi. His heart was filled with excitement and his mind with honesty. Gibran was so serious about the revolution that when Guiseppe Garibaldi (1879-1950)[18] turned up in New York, he took the extraordinary step of enticing him to carry it out.[19] The revolution to which Gibran aspired never eventuated. The most important reason for this was the lack of community support for the idea. In the words of Mary: 'He [i.e.,Gibran] seems entirely alone among the Syrians who have influence. The Oriental poison of Safety, of patience, paralyzes their eye. They cannot see themselves fighting, starting a revolution.'[20] Gibran, it seemed, wrote a great deal in the matter but was met with 'storms of abuse'.[21]

THE SYRIAN MOUNT LEBANON COMMITTEE

The outbreak of the First World War had a profound impact on Gibran. The deprivation and famine which swept Syria, particularly Mount Lebanon, left in their wake 'indescribable' scenes.[22] Since the United States was not technically

[16] Hawi, K. *Ibid*, p155

[17] *Ibid*, p28.

[18] Garbaldi is the grandson of the popular Italian patriot and general, served as general of a brigade in the Greek army during the Balkan Wars (1913) and was with the Italian army in 1915.

[19] See Hilu, *Ibid*, pl29.

[20] *Ibid*. See also Daya, J. *op.cit*, pp36-39.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] From a report written by an American resident of standing. Excerpts from this report can be found in G. Antonuis, *Ibid*, pp201-210.

at war with Turkey, American residents were allowed un-molested in Syria and it was through them that vivid descriptions of the devastation reached America. One report in 1917 stated: 'It is conservatively estimated that no less than 120,000 persons have died of actual starvation during the last two years in the Lebanon alone.' These reports touched the hearts and minds of all American Syrians. A Syrian Relief Committee formed to address the crisis had its work cut out by a myopic organization called the Society of Lebanese Renaissance which agitated for the allocation of the entire relief funds to Mount Lebanon. Bewildered by such childish acts in time of widespread suffering, Gibran jumped to the rescue aided by Amin Rihani and Mikhail Naimy. His efforts were rewarded in 1916 with the amalgamation of the two groups into The Syrian Mount Lebanon Relief Committee. Gibran would serve as secretary on this Committee. In the beginning, the Syrian Mount Lebanon Relief Committee behaved in a truly responsible way. It collected a vast amount of money and donated it to the worst hit areas through American missions in Syria. But as the war dragged on, the organization began to reproduce many of the same political and personal tendencies that had already begun to surface in the community. The mood in the Committee was described by Gibran him-self in a private letter to Amin Rihani, then Assistant Chairman of the same committee: 'As for the Syrians, they are even stranger than they used to be. The bosses are getting bossier and the gossips more gossipy. All these things make me hate life...and if it had not been for the cries of the starving which fill my heart, I would not have stayed in this office for one second.' Consequently, the Syrian Mount Lebanon Relief Committee became an arena for a variety of personal disputes. Nonetheless, the fact the Gibran had played an active part in this committee, participating and promoting its interests, shows 'that he was not a sentimental egoist who satisfies his conscience by expressing humanitarian sentiments without trying to put them into practice.'[23] It also shows a side to his life far different to the one we are accustomed to.

THE SYRIAN MOUNT LEBANON LIBERATION COMMITTEE

Another new tendency was manifested in Gibran toward the end of the war. In the Spring of 1917, a public notice appeared in the New York-based *al- Fatat* calling for the creation of a 'Syrian liberation Committee' (*lijnat tahrir Surya*) for the purpose of bringing the Syrian national cause to the forefront of international politics. The idea belonged to Amin Rihani but it soon won the approval of other leading figures in the community, including Gibran. While

[23] Hawi, K. *Ibid*, pl06.

serving as secretary on this committee, Gibran produced an elaborate statement of his political ideas. But it was his pride in the committee that stole the show, so to speak. Gibran wrote: 'It is a great responsibility but I must shoulder it. Great tragedies enlarge the heart. I have never been given the chance to serve my people in a work of this sort.' But like its predecessor, the Syrian Liberation Committee fell victim to the political differences and personal disputes that had ripped the community apart. The Committee did not achieve anything tangible aside from lobbying certain international figures and skinning the outside surface of the political world. Gibran was disappointed but his enthusiasm remained intact.

GIBRAN'S LAST STAND

Like most in his community, Gibran was jubilant and excited at the news of Turkey's defeat. The war was won, and for the first time in modern history, the Syrian national movement stood abreast of its destiny. Syria was at last rid of the alien yoke that had lain it for four stifling centuries. Gibran's exhilaration was manifested in a delightful sketch called 'Free Syria' that appeared on the front page of al-Sa'ih's special *victory* edition. Moreover, in a draft of a play, still kept among his papers, Gibran expressed great hope for national independence and progress. This play, according to Hawi, 'defines Gibran's belief in Syrian nationalism with great clarity, distinguishing it from both Lebanese and Arab nationalism, and showing us that nationalism lived in his mind, even at this late stage, side with side with internationalism.'[24] But his jubilation soon turned into disappointment. As the main terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration began to surface and post-war diplomacy took its natural course, it became clear to everyone, including Gibran, that Turkey's defeat was more a sweet victory to the Allies than a triumph for Syrian nationhood. The relief from the long strain and anxiety of the war was to prove ephemeral. In the face of this hapless development Gibran grew increasingly idealistic and began to address a new public. Although he never completely gave up writing in Arabic, his major works after 1918 were almost all in English. Was this a Gibranic revolt against the West or a mere re-orientation in his thought? Some writers think it is the former: 'He declared his revolt against the West by means of the spirit of the East, just as before he had declared his revolt against the backwardness of the East, drawing his inspiration from what is pure in the spirit of the Western

[24] Hawi, K. Ibid, p219.

renaissance.'[25] Whether or not a revolt had occurred in Gibran is not important for our purpose. What matters is that although Gibran was absorbed in a busy literary life for most of his later years, he never lost sight of Syria. His love for it remained rock solid but his enthusiasm for action slowly tapered off. As Professor Hawi has succinctly put it: 'It might be fairer in thinking of Gibran's last years to observe the general pattern of his behaviour rather than the exceptions. We prefer to think of him as one who was gradually advancing towards the realisation of his idea of perfection.'[26]

CONCLUSION

An objective appraisal of Gibran's political and literary vocation must necessarily begin with the realization that Gibran was an active nationalist and not a mere literati. He was a man who felt deeply about the situation of his country, its problems and tribulations. Gibran did not write for the sake of writing: he wrote because he had a mission in life to fulfill. Part of that mission was dedicated to the emancipation of his country and its reunification in a single state. Gibran has been claimed both by the Lebanonists and the Arabists, but the naked truth is that he was neither: Gibran was a gifted writer, a man who belonged to the early pioneers of Syrian nationalism, like Butrus Bustani, whose vision cut through the artificial barriers of sectarian and foreign interests as they sought national clarity.

In fact, like the early pioneers, Gibran had a clear perspective of where Syria stood in the present and where it might end up in the future. 'In the mouth of the Syrian nation,' he wrote in acknowledgement of its present decay, 'are many rotten, black and dirty teeth that fester and stink. The doctors have attempted cures with gold filings instead of extraction. And the disease remains.'[27] Despite this bleak picture, Gibran remained confident that Syria would one day re-emerge to claim its rightful place in the concert of nayions: 'Oh Syria...Your plight is like that of Egypt, Persia and Greece, for each one of them has a lean flock and dry pasture. Oh Syria, that which you call degradation is an indispensable sleep from which you will draw strength.'[28]

Yet, despite this clear tendency in Gibran's thought and writings, the first objective study of his national thought did not appear until 1963. This was a Ph.D. dissertation by the well-known Lebanese poet, Khalil Hawi. It seems that Hawi was drawn into the subject by Antun Saadeh, who was probably the first

[25] Faris, F. 1936. *Risalat al-Minbar ila al-Shark al-Arabi*, (unknown publisher) Alexandria, p94.

[26] Hawi, K. *Ibid*, p118.

[27] Ferris, A. R. 1962. a Second Treasure of Khalil Gibran. Castle Books, New Jersey.

[28] *Ibid*, p.77.

political thinker to remark about Gibran's Syrianism.[29] For almost twenty-five years after that, the subject of Gibran's nationalism took a backseat to his other writings and creative work. In 1988, John Daye reintroduced the subject with a blockbuster study of Gibran's political thought entitled *Aqidat Gibran* (Gibran's Doctrine).

Gibran will always be to us the writer of *The Prophet* and *The Broken Wings*. But if we read between the lines of even his most 'non-political' literature, we are deemed to find a nationalist sentiment in each and every one of them.

Adel Beshara is the Editor of *The Middle East Quarterly*, Melbourne, Australia.

[29] See Saadeh, Antun 1982. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1. (1932-1936). SSNP Publication, Beirut.

ZENOBIA, THE SYRIAN QUEEN, BY THE SYRIAN ARTIST NABIL SAMMAN

NEHMAT ABDO

Study

Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani

a Lasting Influence

Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838/39-1897) was an Islamic reformist and became a catalyst for Islamic reform. He was a political activist who never settled in one country and kept travelling throughout the Muslim world to spread his ideas about Islamic reform and revival, Islamic unity, national solidarity and in exploring ways for the Muslim world to be free of despotism and colonialism. Many of al-Afghani's ideas, particularly as questions on how to combat colonialism and despotism in order for Arab and Muslim societies to develop, remain relevant to the present day as Arab and Muslim societies still suffer from political despotism, and the impact of colonialism in its many forms. This issue remains the main subject matter of the discourse of both fundamentalist and modernist thinkers in Arab and Muslim countries.

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries many areas of the Muslim world felt the impact of military, economic and cultural infiltration of the West. Trends of modernisation and westernisation as well as the introduction of new administrative and political systems continuously challenged the traditional Islamic way of life. Certain events made the impact of western influences apparent. For instance, the early attempts of Muhammad Ali of Egypt to modernise and strengthen his military defence followed by the Ottoman sultan Abdelmejid's series of reforms known as *tanzimat* (1839-61), Medhat Pasha's first constitution for the Empire, then the increased economic reliance of Ismail, the *Khedive* of Egypt, on the West made the impact of the western challenges to traditional society, culture, religion and politics of the Muslim world very obvious. With the *tanzimat,* Islamic institutions were challenged by the establishment of more secular ones to organise the legal, commercial and

penal affairs of the community. The change introduced could not appeal to Muslim traditionalists who saw that this process leads to the separation of religion from the institutions and functions of the state.

By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, western powers such as Britain, France and Holland had penetrated the Muslim world and increasingly imposed their domination on areas from North Africa to South East Asia. Questions and concerns were raised among Muslims about the reasons behind western superiority and dominance. What had gone wrong in Islam? Was the success of the West due to the superiority of Christendom, the backwardness of Islam, or the faithfulness of the community? How could Muslims realise God's will in a state governed by non-Muslim law? In what way should Muslims respond to this challenge to their identity and faith?[1] These were questions that preoccupied Jamal al- Din al-Afghani who strived to find answers to.

Al-Afghani's country of origin was controversial until 1963, when scholarly studies, based on irrefutable primary sources like al-Afghani's own letters and papers, showed that he was born in Iran and had a Shiite education, contrary to his claim that he was a Sunni from Afghanistan.[2] Al-Afghani can be excused for having had to hide his origin, when we know how dangerous it was in his lifetime to be a Shiite. The political and confessional animosity between the Ottoman Sultan and the Shah of Iran was intense.[3] Al-Afghani, who wandered throughout the Muslim world and lived a part of his life in specifically Sunni countries, was heavily involved in its religious and political affairs. The doubt that he was a Shiite had always been used against him every time he secured a ruler's favouritism. For example, when he was in Istanbul in 1870, as an appointee to the reformist official Ottoman Council of Education, he was asked to give a public lecture on the occasion of the opening of *Dar al-Funun*. His lecture caused a furor amongst traditionalists because he had as his source of inspiration the medieval Muslim philosopher *ibn Sina*, whose views on the relationship between religion and philosophy were not accepted by orthodox Sunnis and were considered extremely heretical whilst accepted by the Shiites.[4] Albert Hourani considers that 'Al-Afghani's views of Islam were those of a philosopher rather than those of an orthodox theologian. In other words, he accepted the final identification of philosophy with prophecy, that

---

[1] Esposito, John L. 1987 *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, p125.

[2] Nikki, R. K. In: Rahnema, Ali (Ed.) 1994. *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*. New Jersey University Press, p11.

[3] Imara, Mohammad. 1984. *Jamal ud-Din al-Afghani: Munqiz al-Shark wa Faylasuf al-Islam*, Dar al-Wahda, Beirut, Lebanon, p29.

[4] Fazlul, Rahman 1982. *Islam and Modernity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p50

what the prophet received through inspiration was the same as what the philosopher could attain by the use of reason.'[5] The extent of piety, according to that view was interrogated. The nature of the lecture may have provided al-Afghani's opponents with a strong ground to support their claim that he was a Shiite, and therefore, jeopardised his relationship with the Ottomans, and led to his expulsion from Turkey.

Through teaching, preaching, writing and travelling, al-Afghani's political and religious reformist messages were heard in Egypt, Afghanistan, Turkey, Persia, Russia, France and England.[6] His attempts to initiate reform were 'mainly prompted by external stimuli, by confrontation with a technologically superior and politically dominant western presence.'[7]

To al-Afghani, the question of what went wrong with Islam did not seem to be relevant. Rather he asked what went wrong with Muslims. His message, along with other Islamic reformists at that time, was how to bring back the faithful to the 'right path' and to let them properly understand Islam: 'Islam in its essence was as valid as ever, only the Muslims' understanding of it was wrong: thus Muslim backwardness was not caused by Islam but rather the Muslim's ignorance of its truth.'[8] Al-Afghani called for *ijtihad* which was necessary for reconstructing Muslim thought to rid itself of much of the 'opprobrium' attached to it later.[9]

Hisham Sharabi believes that the linking of political decline to moral and religious decline gave the movement of Islamic reform the character of political renaissance as well as religious rebirth.[10] Not unlike what happened in Christianity with the ascendancy of Protestantism, al-Afghani saw that Islam also needed a Luther and he perhaps saw himself playing that role.[11] For Al-Afghani, going back to the roots of Islam does not mean stagnation. On the contrary, Islam is progressive, dynamic and creative. It is not a simple imitation of the past, but the religion of action and reason.[12] Islam is a comprehensive way of life encompassing politics and worship. The true Muslim should be involved in politics wherever he goes. This is part of his

---

[5] Hourani, Albert 1983. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Cambridge university press, p123.
[6] Esposito, John L., op. cit., p126.
[7] Ayubi, Nazih, *Political Islam*, London, p58.
[8] Sharabi, Hisham 1970. *Arab Intellectuals and the West*: the formative Years 1875-1914, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, p27.
[9] Enayat, Hamid 1982. *Islamic Political Thought*, University of Texas Press, Austin, p47.
[10] Sharabi, Hisham, op. cit., p26.
[11] Hourani, Albert, op. cit., p123.
[12] Esposito, John L., op.cit., p46.

religious duty. '...Unlike other religions, Islam is not only concerned with the afterlife. It is much more than that. It is concerned with the interests of its believers in this mundane world here below, and with allowing them to realise success in this life as well as peace in the next life. It seeks the good fortunes of the two worlds'[13]

Al-Afghani believed that 'Islamic principles...are concerned with the unique goal that the holder of power ought to be the most submissive of men to the rules regulating that power which he gains neither by heritage, nor inheritance, nor by virtue of his race, tribe, material strength, or wealth. On the contrary, he acquires it only if he submits to the stipulation of the sacred law'[14] To al-Afghani, only when those who rule Islam return to the rules of the Law and model their conduct upon that practiced by early generations of Muslims, they become strong and powerful.[15] Apparently, al-Afghani did not have a good opinion of Muslim rulers of his time. He believed that they were not worthy of their positions, because they cared only about their own 'caprices and pleasures.'[16] This is why they fell victims to British deception. Despotism was dangerous he believed, and if there was a bad ruler, the nation leaders should get rid of him.[17]

Al-Afghani's main advocacy, throughout his career as a political and religious activist was an appeal for an Islamic unity. He saw that only through such a unity the Muslim world could drive out the European danger manifested mainly by British and French colonialism. He reminded Muslims of their past where they managed to establish a great empire in which a great Islamic civilisation flourished. According to him, the European Powers were not stronger than Muslim states, nor were they superior as it was believed, but because Muslims were disunited, 'ignorant and lacking in public virtues'.[18] He used the example of the Mahdi of Sudan to support his idea that Muslims could expel the British if they woke up. He also explained that the advancement of the European Powers and their expansion in the Muslim world were mainly because of science. He told Muslims, 'all wealth and riches are the result of science' and that there were 'no riches in the world without

[13] Donohue, J. J. and John L. Esposito (Eds.) 1982. *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford, p46.
[14] ibid, p21.
[15] ibid, p. 23.
[16] Hourani, Albert, op. cit., p116.
[17] ibid.
[18] ibid, p114.

it'.[19] He emphasised that only by a return to Islam, Muslim strength and civilisation would be restored. This was his response to the common belief in Europe that religion in general, and Islam in particular, 'sapped the will and restricted reason, and progress was only possible by abandoning it, or at least by making a sharp separation between religion and secular life'.[20]

While al-Afghani was in Paris, he entered into a controversy with Renan who, in a lecture given at the Sorbonne in 1883, said that Islam and science and therefore modern civilisation, were incompatible with one another.[21] Renan's lecture stirred the Muslim circles in Paris. In his reply to Renan's statement, al-Afghani reasserted that Islam was compatible with science, and the example could be taken from the past where there had been Muslim scientists, some of whom were Arabs.[22] However, given that Islam was several hundred years younger than Christianity, he argued that it might progress equally in time.[23]

In his call for Islamic reform, al-Afghani did not ask Muslims to neglect or reject the West. On the contrary, he believed that Muslim revitalisation from being a subjugated community to an active and influential one could be realised by active engagement and confrontation. He asserted that Muslims could claim and reappropriate the sources of western strength such as reason, science and technology as they had been part of their Islamic heritage. A good example of that was past contributions of Islamic civilisation to philosophy, medicine, science and mathematics. Thus, al-Afghani urged Muslims to look to their own glorious Islamic past as a source of inspiration, identity and unity.[24] He further argued that, in addition to science, Muslims should be taught philosophical sciences to attain wisdom and better understand their religion.

Al-Afghani maintained that the strength and survival of the *umma* was dependent on reassertion of Islamic identity and solidarity. In one of the articles he published in *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa*, he said: 'Believers in Islam are preoccupied neither with their ethnic origins nor with the people of which they are a part. They are loyal to their faith. They have given up a narrow bond in favour of a universal bond: the bond of faith.'[25] He saw that Muslims had common values and were facing common danger; therefore, they should

[19] ibid, p120.
[20] ibid.
[21] ibid.
[22] Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol.II, p418.
[23] Rahnema, Ali (Ed.), op. cit., p21.
[24] Esposito, John L., op. cit., p47.
[25] Landen, Robert G. 1970. *The Emergence of the Modern East: Selected Readings*, pp105-10.

forget about their differences of doctrine and traditions of enmity to be able to attack the common danger. The differences of sect should not stand as a political barrier. He called Muslims to profit from the experience of Germany, which lost its national unity through giving too much importance to differences of religion. He believed that even the deepest of doctrinal division, that between Sunnis and Shiites, could be bridged.[26] It seems that his call for reconciliation between the two main Muslim sects, the Sunni and the Shiite was a persistent message that al-Afghani kept spreading especially in the last period of his life. To him, it did not matter what the identity of the ruler was or whether there was one ruler or more controlling different parts of the Muslim world, as long as the unity of the *umma* was preserved, and cooperation on the service of Islam existed.[27]

Al-Afghani called for Muslim unity and solidarity among Muslims without distinguishing and discriminating between the different religious elements of the nation. In his opinion, unity is a force that held society together. However, it should be subject to the principles of moderation and justice. It should also be the organising principle of human societies in order for it not to turn into fanaticism.[28] Unity, he believed, may have different bases, 'it may spring from a common religious belief or else from a natural relationship such as language...Language is an essential element in creating a stable community. Human groups with no common language can possess no firm unity, and a group that has no language of its own in which to express its knowledge and skills can easily lose them.'[29] Arabic, which is the language of the Koran, could play a unifying role. Therefore, he believed, Ottoman Turks should be Arabised rather than imposing their language on Muslims who are under their rule. Arab nationalists, who came long after al-Afghani died, adopted his call for the supremacy of the Arabic language.[30]

Al-Afghani's devotion to Islamic revivalism, Islamic unity, and fighting colonialism inspired Islamic reformist and national independence movements in other Muslim areas such as North Africa and contributed to the ideological basis of Islamic activism today. The reform movement, which gave rise to the *salafiyya* and later the Muslim Brotherhood, began with him.

Al-Afghani's influence was perhaps far-reaching in the Muslim world, because of his moderate stand between al-*salafiyya* and westernisation.

---

[26] Hourani, op. cit., p115.
[27] ibid, p116.
[28] ibid.
[29] ibid, pp117-18.
[30] Imara, Mohammad, op. cit., p178.

Nevertheless, he faced opposition from traditionalists and conservative *ulama*, who did not have the ability to express their ideology in a systematic fashion. They believed there was nothing new to be said and kept reiterating in traditional terms the old tested truths. Also, they believed that any questioning of the application of faith would inevitably shatter the social stability of the Muslims. The new way of thought advocated by the reformers may have endangered their interests as a class, as well as the values and approach of Islamic orthodoxy.

Although he did not write much, al-Afghani wrote political articles for *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* (the Indissoluble Link) and *al-Manar* magazines and encouraged his disciples to write in literature, religion and psychology. This led to the development of the art of writing in Egypt and other parts of the Near East. In his Refutation of the Materialists, *al-Radd 'ala al-Dahriyyin,* al-Afghani attacked the materialists from 'Democritus to Darwin with their equivalents in Islam, who gave an explanation of the world not involving the existence of a transcendent God.'[31] He attacked in this context, Babism and the doctrines of the Indian thinker Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who then had started to preach for a new Islam where the "laws of nature, as deduced by reason, were the norm by which Islam should be interpreted and human acts judged implying that there was nothing which transcended the world of nature, and that man was the judge of all things.[32]

Al-Afghani realised the important role of organisation for any reformist movement. Therefore, he joined the *Freemason movement*, which had then a good reputation among Arab nationalists. It called for the principles adopted by the French Revolution: liberty, fraternity and equality. It was at the time still struggling against conservative, religious and ecclesiastical authorities and was trying to separate secular authorities from the religious ones. But when he discovered the link between the Freemason leadership and Colonial Powers, he withdrew, with other members, from the organisation to establish an Oriental National lodge. In that new lodge in Egypt, he formed the first National Party in the Orient, *the Liberal Political Party.* It aimed at establishing political democracy, and liberation from despotism and foreign colonialism.[33] That party was the birthplace of the leaders of future national movements, some of them were to become prominent political figures in Egypt such as *Ahmad Urabi, Mahmoud Sami el-Baroudi, Abdul Salam and Ibrahim al-Mouailehy,*

[31] Hourani, op. cit., p125.
[32] ibid.
[33] Imara, Mohammad, op. cit., p54.

Muhammad Abdo, Adib Ishac and *Abdullah al-Nadim.*[34]

Whilst in Egypt, al-Afghani had an influence on the youth of Cairo and Alexandria, through his lessons and preaching in al-Azhar, in his home, or through his articles published in local newspapers. Among his disciples was Muhammad Abdo, an important figure who played a significant role in Egypt as a reformist of al-Azhar, the most prominent religious institution in the Muslim World, and then became the chief Mufti of Egypt. Although Abdo renounced al-Afghani's political activism, he carried on one aspect of his work when he tried to elaborate modern and pragmatic interpretations of Islam.[35] Sa'd Zaghloul, the famous personality in the struggle for Egyptian independence, and many other young men who played an important role in Egyptian politics in that period, were also pupils of al-Afghani. He lectured them on various subjects, opened their minds on Muslim philosophy, literature, science and politics. He helped them to broaden their knowledge and outlook. He encouraged the establishment of journals and newspapers such as the review *Misr*, the daily *al-Tijara* and *Mir'at al-Sharq*. He contributed by writing to these journals himself.

Al-Afghani's political activities in Egypt led the French and British Consuls to stir the *Khedive Tawfiq* against him. They made him responsible for the increasing democratic movements and the new reform plan presented by *Sherif Pasha* to Tawfiq, who refused it, sacked the Ministry, and sent al-Afghani to be exiled in India in 1879.[36] He was requested to remain there until the Urabi revolt was over, and the British succeeded in occupying Egypt in 1882.

In Iran, al-Afghani had a bad experience with the shah *Nasir al-Din*, who at first treated him well, but later became intolerant of his political activities and his plan of legal reforms and had him forcibly removed from a sanctuary near Tehran where he had retired. Al-Afghani was put into chains and sent to the Turko-Persian borders in 1891. Embittered by the action of the shah, he kept his political activities against him and managed to persuade the first *mujtahid* of Samarra to oppose the Shah's decision in 1890 to grant the tobacco rights of Persia to a British firm, and to issue a *fatwa* prohibiting the use of tobacco to all believers until the government cancelled the contract of concession.[37]

---

[34] Ibid, pp. 57-60.

[35] Keddie, Nikki. *Jamal al-Din al-Al-Afghani*, in the Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World, Vol. I, p26.

[36] Imara, Mohammad, op. cit., pp62-63.

[37] Encyclopaedia of Islam, op. cit., p 418.

In Paris, al-Al-Afghani established a joint publication, *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* with Muhammad Abdo, who was its editor. The journal was the tool of a secret Muslim society of the same name. It did not last long and produced only eighteen issues. It was sent free of charge to the members of the society and other interested people. However, the British barred it in Egypt and India, and heavy fines were imposed on those who were caught in possession of it. Although the journal did not reach enough readers and was ultimately abolished, it had a considerable influence. It attacked British and French actions in Muslim countries. It emphasised the doctrinal grounds, on which Islam should lean, in order to recover its strength.[38]

To sum up, al-Afghani influenced many Muslim countries because of his moderate views. These views were neither pure traditionalist, nor pure westernised. His ideas attracted and influenced the different trends of Islam and nationalism in his lifetime.

Nehmat Haddara Abdo was born and educated in Tripoli, Lebanon. She worked as a primary school teacher in Lebanon before she migrated to Australia in 1981. She is currently an officer of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. She has a Master of Arts Degree from the University of Sydney, in Arab and Islamic studies. Her major thesis was on the development of sectarian politics in Lebanon.

[38] Ibid.

Landmark

Samih al-Basset: Syrian-Australian Colours and Lines

Aesthetics thinking gestated over ten thousand years ago in the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts until it flourished on the hills of Athens in sculpture, philosophy, theatre and other forms. But humans remained lost and orphaned, dragged by the winds of war and sadness...

We struggle today for ethics in the arts, and ethics in the sciences. We must strive for a culture of aesthetics that encompasses compassion, a promised land that bears fruits.

Samih al-Basset,
from the preface to his book 'So...I Loved You Australia'

Love Letter from Australia was the title Samih al-Basset chose for an exhibition of his paintings in Damascus, Syria in 1997. The paintings were inspired by a six-month stay in Australia between 1995 and 1996. His Excellency James Dollimore, the Australian ambassador in Damascus who attended the exhibition, commented that al-Basset wanted to convey his yearning for Australia and her people to his people in Syria.

Faces and Colours from Australia was another exhibition in 1998. Her Excellency Dr. Janet Gardiner the Australian ambassador in Damascus that year, mentioned how al-Basset's life-pulsating paintings succeeded in translating his spiritual and emotional perception of Australian colours and

light. She also commented on how extraordinary it was to see someone from Syria obtaining his inspiration from Australia, given that Syria was historically a land of influence on the cultures of East and West.

So...I Loved You Australia

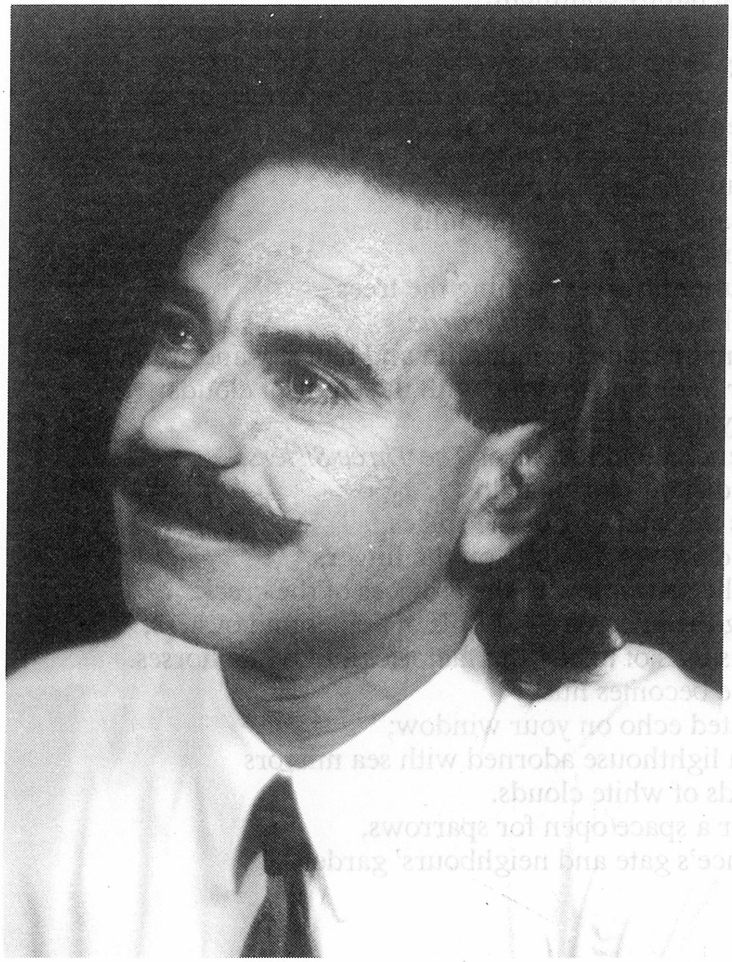
The answer is love. Al-Basset fell in love with Australia. So much so, that during the 1998 exhibition he launched his book *So...I Loved You Australia.* The colours and images of his paintings were not sufficient to express his abundant emotions. He opted for the use of the *kalima*, the word.

Al-Basset believes that, 'Cultural heritage and human gift are a tree of many branches. Its roots are planted deep in human history. It branches in our imagination throwing its shadows and abundance all over humanity...' He further emphasises his holistic approach to life by describing a continuum of human activity: 'In the beginning was the drawings of animals on the walls of caves, then the drawings of sweet fruits. The beginning of words was in the form of drawings. Thus we can visualise the space of aesthetics in life to be a mixture of music, poetry, song and the products of letters.'

In his book, al-Basset often refers to Australia as the white continent. He feels that there is a conspiracy of nature- either the sky is low, or Australia is high in that part of the World as he says. This closeness to the clouds has left in him this feeling since he first sensed his plane touch the grounds of Sydney airport early one white morning.

Luckily, his paintings are abundant with much more than the whiteness. They express the beauty of the green, the red and the earthly colours that characterise the Australian landscape, and the blue of the surrounding sky and ocean. Together, these colours provide a strong combination in any of his paintings, yet there is a transparency in any one of them akin to what you feel when confronted with the whiteness of the clouds. One of his paintings is on the back cover of the present issue. It is called *The Three Sisters*, inspired by a natural formation in Katoomba in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, Australia.

Perhaps this is the happiness al-Basset felt when confronting and celebrating this land. In his book *So...I Loved You Australia*, he often speaks of a happy Australia. Here is a translation of his prose poem *Happy Australia*, from the same book.



Samih al-Basset
(Photo by Studio Waseem)

Happy Australia

The morning sun rises over Australia,
the white happy continent,
covers the vast cities taking them out of their councils,
throwing them in the crowd of seasons and harvest.
Serenity spreads her wings writing in a pattern of rays,
hearts open like lilies with a thousand windows
and factories and schools and books,
light draws its eternal passion
for the sand, the clouds, the hills
and your blue eyes.
The mountain wakes rushing the trees –
and the beach of *Old Melbourne*
to sing in amazement: half sand and half sky and water.
Summer has come to draw with the elixir of clouds
on the eyelids of the desert,
for the enchanted forests of *The Three Sisters*,
and the distant marine fields.
Today is the wedding of the spikes,
and the dance of the flute on the fingers,
so that the songs flow in the crevices of the creek...
bringing the good news of hills of apples and oysters,
for thousands of farms and factories and white horses.
My voice becomes husky
of repeated echo on your window;
the high lighthouse adorned with sea mirrors
and herds of white clouds.
I sing for a space open for sparrows,
for a fence's gate and neighbours' gardens.

Painters add white to other colours when they want to make them bright – and happy. It seems to me that when al-Basset interacted with the Australian landscape he was always happy, and adding white to the colours that moved his sensations. He painted his words with the same whiteness that brightens, but never eliminates the original identity of a particular colour. His paintings and writings about Australia, indicate to me that Australia was placed in his soul and mind at a level a dervish reaches when floating above the clouds after a whirling dance of ecstatic elation.

Nowadays, when I speak with him over the phone, his voice comes to me from behind ten thousand miles with an amazing whiteness that carries with it the innocence of children and the sadness of passionate artists. There is anxiety in his voice, and a beauty. He could be speaking the language of his paintings and writings.

I, the Migrant

Al-Basset also writes in his book about Australia in winter, an encounter on a Belmore terrace in Sydney, Belmore Park, the road to Melbourne and the shadows of Melbourne. He also writes about migration and migrants. It seems that despite his short stay in Australia, he was able to feel some of the problems encountered by some Arab migrants, particularly their nostalgia about their homeland. Here are translations of lines from his poem *I, the Migrant.*

I left a branch behind a stone
and the singing sparrow at home,
a handful of soil for my heart
and a drop of the creek's water.
My soul used to blossom, a flower of light
for the corolla village
and the spicate city.

I am the migrant emerging
from the waist of the sad East.
My ribs are the sigh of flute and folk songs.

My shadow is cast of vine leaves
behind the walls of vineyards sleeping
in the bosoms of castles.

Australia my Lady

Towards the end of the book he speaks to a female:

> *Thus is my love for you: in the evening, you stand beneath the greenness of the mellow tree of life with your hair wet with the rain of the sky and the rebellious passions of my happiness that yearn for an impossible meeting.*

Black and Blue, and other Colours

Al-Basset was born in 1959 in the village of Malah, one of many black and blue stone villages scattered in the Province of Suweida in the south of Syria. His mother told him that 1959 was a year of good harvest. Peasants erected tents and slept in the fields so that they did not waste a minute of the day to keep up with gathering their wheat. Unfortunately, in the same year, a renowned village chief, Yussuf al-Basset died. Fifteen neighbouring villages participated in his funeral because of his influence on the lives of people in that area and the advice and the solutions he used to provide them with. This was an area that the Ottomans could not fully control during their four-hundred-year rule of Syria. It was an area rough in landscape and tough in people. Self-sufficiency prevailed, helped during those days by some good returns from the fields for those who were willing to work. There was snow, rain, vineyards and the wheat fields.

And there was Samih al-Basset. At school, his teachers considered him very lazy, due to his unceasing absentmindedness and absenteeism. He finished year nine with difficulty, and left school for three years. When he moved to Damascus, he started frequenting the Russian and British Cultural Centres. Then he realised that he should reassess his situation. He joined an evening school in the old Qanawat district of Damascus, and managed to finish the General Syrian High-School Certificate.

The Shooting Star

The man from the tough *Druze* village in the south, now joined Damascus University to study philosophy. There, he was very active in organising trips in an attempt to lure Sohayla, a Jordanian student he met. He wrote poems for her, published in a book under the title *The Shooting Stars.* She later became his wife and life companion.

Another book of his poetry is *Before the Dawn Breaks*, published by The Arab Writers' Union. 'The book speaks of love from the whispers of the pine trees to the dew on roses.'

During his last year at university, he collected a number of old Sufi poems his father used to recite, and showed the collection to his teacher the renowned Arab thinker Tayyeb Tizini – now one of his friends. Tizini advised him that the collection merited a higher degree, and that he would consider him for a Master of Philosophy.

Consultations with father, uncles, friends and journeys to Lebanon and Jordan resulted in a richer collection of Sufi poems that would not only secure the higher degree, but also guarantee the birth of *Sufi Songs of the People of Tawhid – the Vein of Gold.* The book is published by Dar al-Yanabih, Damascus, 1996. The material presented in the book has a special quality and flavour because it belongs to a particular geographical area of Syria, namely *Suweida.* All these poems are in formal Arabic composed in the traditional rhyming style of poetry.

The term *Tawhid* refers to the oneness of God, in that he is a unity, not composed or made of parts. This term is of significance to Islam and to a number of associated sects, movements and philosophies such as Sufism.

The book starts with a few commentaries by different people, followed by

al-Basset's introduction. These introductions speak of *Bani Marouf* as a people of *Tawhid*. The inhabitants of *Suweida* belong to this branch of a tribe that originated in the Yemen and migrated north thousands of years ago. This people, like the other peoples of the Middle East, was affected by the politics of the area over the past one thousand years, but proved to be one of the most resilient due to internal solidarity and highly developed sense of honour and dignity. In more recent times, the 1925 Great Syrian Revolt led by the *Druze* under Sultan Pasha al-Atrash stand witness to the metal this people is made of.

Sufism and Sufi poetry, however, are the topics that dominate these commentaries. The characteristics of the poetry of the people of *Tawhid*, compared to older Sufi poetry are explained. The former concerned itself with the physical world, whilst older Sufi poetry concerned itself with the imaginary and the metaphysical. The senses dominate modern Sufi poetry, as poets express their relationship to the physical world around them.

Al-Basset finishes his introduction by the words of the late Kamal Junblat, a leader of the Lebanese *Druze*, prominent politician, philosopher, writer and poet.

You and I are one my brother
You are the reality of this Universe
You are the human
You are the face of God

The book lists poetry for fourteen poets and other poetry for unidentified poets. The poetry is dominated by love and passion, combined with praise to God. There are sections dedicated to elegies and eulogies.

Another, contrasting collection of al-Basset's, is his book about popular songs in the *Jabal al-Arab*. *Jabal al-Arab* is a name that indicates the same geographical area of *Suweida*. These are colloquial folk songs that use spoken Arabic, not the formal written Arabic. Therefore, they represent the particular dialect of that region.

The *Madafa*, or the 'guest house' had an important effect on al-Basset and his folk and Sufi collections. It was, and probably still is an important part of the social life of the village in that part of the world. Dignitaries and others would open part of their residence as a *Madafa*. This is used for receiving visitors who would drink coffee and chat. In a village, one of these would take

a major role in becoming the 'social club' of the village. These are places where songs are sung, poetry and stories are recited and told and the affairs of the village discussed. The host receives you with a smile. There are no membership fees, and you do not pay for your coffee. There were, however, many reasons for the young absent-minded al-Basset to be attracted to such gatherings, and perhaps to listen attentively. The consequences were to be known many years later.

Young al-Basset's attention in his village was probably preoccupied also by the details of nature around him, particularly change that later influenced his paintings and writings. He describes (or paints) the spring in the villages of the Suweida: 'In the spring, fields widen and become coloured by their wild flowers, connecting the villages. Houses become boats engaged in an ecstatic dance in waves of anemones, daisies and wild lilies where birds build their nests among the green leaves.'

Raghid Nahhas

ABDO WAZEN

Doors of Sleep

Abdo Wazen is a modern, daring literary writer of Arabic. Since 1982, he has published five books. One of these books, *Garden of the Senses*, was confiscated in The Lebanon because it contained explicit sexual references.

We translate the following from his book *Doors of Sleep*, published by Dar al-Jadid, Beirut 1996.

Listening

He does not sit on his chair except to listen; he does not stand in front of the window except to farewell the cloud of his delusions; he does not look in the mirror except to see his past face.

This is the mysterious man: he does not close his eyes except to awaken the trees sleeping in them. He does not become silent except to hear of a flower or a dove.

Sleep

The cloud that crossed his head at the slope of the night was as opaque as an angel. It did not even awaken him from the sudden sleep that attacked him as he sat on a chair. He had, before his doze stole him, been looking at the sky whose blueness exuded like an old perfume.

When the cloud crossed his head it did not create a shadow or a

watering place. It moistened his closed eyes, and left on his face some of its whiteness.

The cloud visited him only to fend the rust of waiting off his face, known only to the forest trees.

Coincidence

Who told the flower to awake from the sleep of the tree,
and the sparrow to rise from the trance of the sky?
Who asked the dove about the darkness of its past?

The flower has only been a bygone wound.
The sparrow has only been a morning arrow.
The dove has only been the first plant on earth.

Absence

This is the door that no one has opened.

The visitors who knocked at it and knocked
have not returned from the garden of their absence.

The traces of passers-by who walked by it
disappeared in air.

But many knocks are still being heard.

This is the door that no one has closed
behind it rises a strange sun
behind it shine the treasures of the night.

CHAWKI BAZIH

Poem

Chawki Bazih was born in Tyre, Southern Lebanon in 1951. He holds a Master of Arts Degree in Arabic Language and Literature. He is a teacher and journalist who has been very active in poetry festivals, and national and international poetry seminars.

Bazih started publishing poetry in the early seventies in Lebanese and other Arabic periodicals. His work has been translated to German, English, French, Bulgarian and Romanian, and has been the subject of several theses, research work and books. He has published nine books of poetry since 1978.

The poem we translate and present here is about an old café on the coast of Beirut, from his collection *Faradees al-Wahsha* (Heavens of Desolation), Dar al-Adaab, Beirut, 1999.

Dbaybo Café

Roosting like a huge bird on the sea
aiming at nothing
indifferent to the wind sailing
against the ships.
Its legs no longer aid
descent to the bottom,
or hands to light a fire
against the rise of days crumbled by salt.
It listens attentively to steps with dusty feet,
isolated within the city crowds,
roaming its corners.
What sun bared its roan walls
from their first colours,
to become a forsaken hall

searching for past visitors,
or an icon pregnant with the water of heartache?
Nothing will release in its limbs
the soul that was closed
by the delicate eyelid of years.
Where is the mutter of lovers
in the corner made by breaths
into a statue of two strangers,
and the fatuous bowing of the face
overtopped by the spear of St. George
pierced in the dragon?
There is nothing but the nails of silence
that slit open the entrails of rotten space.
To which sky does the café now stretch its arms?
In which abyss does it fall?
It is a resting place crucified over the sea,
and the coastal tilt of dreams.
It is the solid sculpture of despair
driven by the waves out of its empty chair
towards the slope.
It is the wrong hand of clocks
and the promise that has not matured.
You are the café whose glass, mixed with poison,
I have been drinking for twenty years...
like a cave surrendering
to the demons that claim me.
Ah, that café, like me, holds
the hand of tired questions.
We both no longer see in the mirror
except features wrinkled, without a sound,
by the hands of time.
And neither of us knows any longer
whether one is carried by the rock, or one is carrying it.
Like you, I am carried on the ageing wings of ink,
and I do not know when I will fall
off the back of the skies that support me.

JAWDAT FAKHRUDDINE

Country Fantasies

Jawdat Fakhruddine was born in Sultanyya, South Lebanon in 1953. He lectures in Arabic Literature at the Lebanese University, Beirut.

His first collection of poetry appeared in 1979. Since then he has published another four collections, the last of which was in 1996, reprinted in 1998.

The following is a selection from his 1980 collection titled *Country Fantasies*, published by Dar al-Adaab, Beirut, Lebanon.

The Autumn Sun

It scorches in malice
...and disappears behind the clouds.
Then it returns like a man of toil
to pour an imaginary fury.
Who but the trees understand
this solar sickness?
They remove their green garments,
and weep naked.

The Fig Tree

It causes cracks in the floor of the house,
which tell of a collapse to come.
It stretches toward a space never approaching
and remains, over the years,

sleepless, yearning for an imaginary sky,
roots penetrating the ground, intersecting the deep.
And in the summer (when the sun practises a fervent nakedness),
it gives fervent fruits.
What a difficult fig this is; its juice glows with frenzy.
In our village, people admit that the fig is the sweetest fruit,
and that if the fig trees wither in an orchard
they do not leave, but weep.
What if all the fig trees leave?

Delusions of the Moon

What is this vagabond thinking about?
How does she illuminate the creatures with her fantasies,
so they release theirs?
She seems to them dreamy and amiable,
she arouses delusions in them,
hides her delusions from them,.
then she plays like a child among the branches,
seducing innocent trees.
What does she hide behind innocence?
What does her self tell her?
As she explores behind the clouds
does she conceal something, and return?
She bows sometimes, and we think that this is tenderness;
What is she thinking about?
What seduces her in the sequence of seasons?
And how does the wind touch her?
How do the raindrops disperse her?
.....
.....
It is the surge of tears flooding the face of the moon.

The Passion of Shade

Shade has symptoms known to the clouds,
play their game in distributing light,
and inspire the shade arousing its passion,
playing its game of dozing,
trotting towards bare places, covering them,
or away from others, uncovering them,
stays confounded.
Our villages laugh at it, know its touch.
It passes broken sometimes,
returns as if remembering something,
listening to the guffaws of the hurrying clouds.
Realizes its failure.
Shrinks of shyness.
Hovers a little.
To repeat its foolish passion
among the threads of the sun and the guffaws of the clouds.

The Familiar Rock

I think of it as the peaceful stop
providing the passer-by with some security,
and its eyelids never twitch.
This is why it became familiar to me.
I now consider that a rock dwelling on the side of the road
has only the calm of sullenness and assent.
Whenever I come to it, I say: *this is my rock,*
and I have not known that a rock dwelt inside me:
without it the way is lost.

A work by the Syrian artist Nabil Samman

HANADA ELHOSARY

Poem

Hanada Elhosary is a poet from Damascus, Syria. She holds a B.A. in English literature, has recently won a poetry prize in Syria. She has published in a number of journals, and has three books of poetry so far. Her latest book is titled *The Humming of the Narcissus*, published by the Arab Union of Writers, 2000. This collection of poems is aptly described by the prominent Syrian writer, Chawki Baghdadi, with the title he chose for his introduction to the collection, *Femininity as Poetry.*

Kalimat translates and presents the following poem from this collection. This poem combines the sensitivity of the female with her vocal protest against a never-ending male dominance.

The 'carrier of wood' is a reference to the wife of *Abu Lahab*, condemned in the Koranic Sura CXI. *Abu Lahab* (the father of flame), an uncle of the Prophet Mohammed, was the nickname of an ill-tempered enemy of Islam. His wife used to carry bundles of thorns and strew them about in dark nights on the paths that the Prophet was expected to take, in order to cause bodily harm.

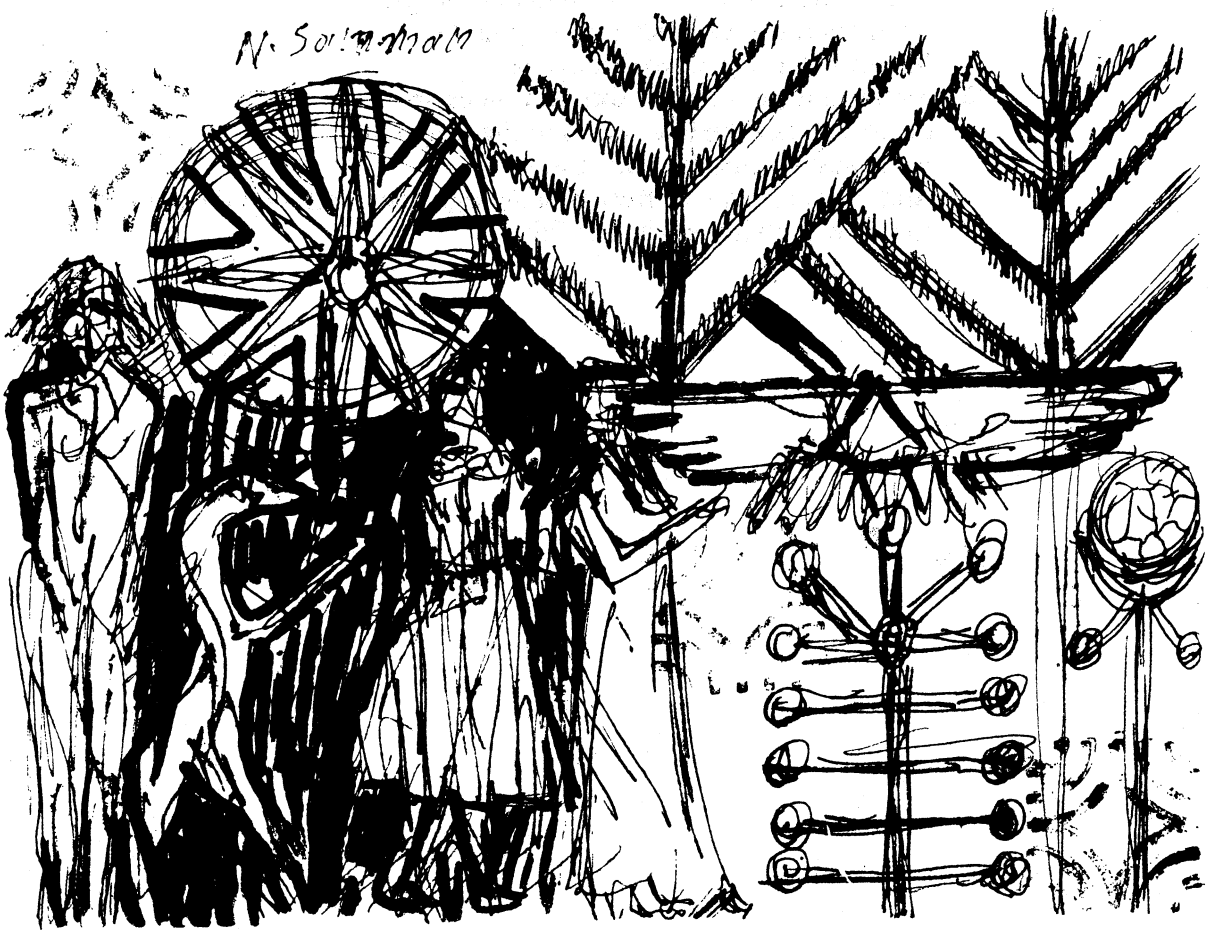
The Essence of the Female

When would the gossip stop about the female of life?
When would the siege of songs be lifted?
Who would be fair to her whenever she rattles with song?
Would I remain an object? I wonder!
And from birth,
walk trailing my chains
as though the *Carrier of Wood* is reincarnated in me.
But who was the one called the *Father of Flame*?

Kalimat 3

It is as if I was born canned in a seige of frozen perceptions.
And I know that I was delivered to the universe coerced:
like a cactus, denied of thorns and shade,
I touch my soul like a mint in the wilderness,
moving by the power of thunder,
as the master of lightening desires,
on a cold night!
I am girdled by command and inhibition,
I get bored, annoyed
I protest,
scratch the face of the sky,
and scream.
My voice hits silence
that suppresses the tears of the moan's echo.
I return forsaken,
carrying the disappointment of my pursuit under my arm,
like someone who returned empty-handed.
They spread about us all sorts of descriptions:
they made us into westerners,
they mutilated the female condition in us,
they hooked trivia onto our rails,
their bells exaggerated their drone.
And we, with genuine yearning,
seek beautiful dialogue covered with the sun:
free, pure white,
and we only seek a clear path,
blessing our picture and features.
Oh! How they pretend to forget the glowing truth:
that we are together in this struggle of life,
caring for the seasons' harvests in one basket!
Darkness lights, in our gloomy paths,
a lamp of tender love,
abundant in its glow, green.
When will delusion leave us
and others understand
that we are tributaries of a great river,
the Universe in its midst we rise
feminine and creative,

innovate, build and suffer,
and that we are not forms of pleasure?
Behold you! Who with us suffer oppression,
when will the patriarchal age see
that we are the heirs of *Ishtar*, the mistress of all creatures,
the Goddess-Mother, embracer of justice?
But we are neither stubborn nor arrogant
in forging this splendid existence,
and we do not remind the living of our gifts,
or of what we have bestowed upon them.
When will the patriarchal age see?
No matter how gloomy our difficult times are,
or how dark salvation seems in the Kingdom,
we remain a candle in the night!
And continue to seek beautiful dialogue covered with the sun,
to mend with it the trivia of life.



A work by the Syrian artist Nabil Samman

MOHAMMED ALI SHAMSUDDINE

Abodes of the Dice

Mohammed Ali Shamsuddine has been writing poetry and prose for over thirty years. He has published nine books of poetry and three books of prose.

The following are translations of poems from his collection *Abodes of Dice*, published by al-Intishar al-Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 1999.

The Blood of the Virgin

They worshiped
that eagle emerging from two mountains
as they worshiped
the first thread of water
they carved their manhood in the rock
they portrayed the first strike of the hoe
splitting the transparent flesh
they found their picture in the sperm
consecrating the origin of things
O blood of the virgin
come and carry me
O blood of the virgin.

The Agonies of Death

When we are drunk
you ask me: where is the wine?
- it is not in the glass
- it is not in the head

- it is not in the mouth
- it is not in the blood
- it is not on the vine
  or in the crushing trough
- it is not in the cask
  or in the glass of the cupbearer

Well...
you ask me where the wine is;
I say that the wine exists in no wine
but in those repenting.
We are the ones who celebrate it
during the agonies of death.

Do Re Me

Dore[1] us O days *dore*,
We are the straw flying off the garment of the days.
Dore us O days *dore*,
We are the pollen and the feathers of the hedge sparrows.
Dore us O days *dore*,
We are the crust of the pumice earth.
Dore us O days *dore*,
We are the pottery fragments of a star.
Dore us O days *dore*,
We are the crutches of the defeated soldiers.
Dore us O days *dore*,
We are the broken cables under the rain.
Dore us O days *dore*,
We are the seven pillars of fear.
Dore us O days *dore*,
Do
Re
Re
Re...

[1] In Arabic when the letters of the two musical notes Do & Re are combined in one word they read *dori*, or turn. The expression of the days turning, or the days turning with us, etc. signifies the passage of time, changing conditions and sometimes the lost past.

HASSAN AL-ABDULLAH

The Shepherd of Clouds

Hassan al-Abdullah was born in Khiam in the south of The Lebanon. He holds a B.A. in Arabic Literature from the Lebanese University.

His family used to narrate popular literature. In that atmosphere, he spent his childhood years and began writing poetry when he was only ten. A major area that attracts him is children literature, with fifty books so far.

His interest in modern Arabic poetry was aroused through the poetry magazine 'Shi'ir' when he was in his secondary school.

The following poems are from his collection *Ra'i el-Dhabab* (The Shepherd of Clouds), published by Riad Najib Elrayyes, Beirut, Lebanon, 1999.

The North of Things

did we have to
go forward towards the east
to trample across defiles
that imply great difficulties
and pitfalls?

or should we have taken
that route heading westward
when we rose at dawn
and went too far walking southwards?

And why have we neglected
in our silly plan

the north of things?

Fools
and repeating the mistakes of fools

of people
who passed before
through this
desolate
valley...

The Indolent

shut up
shut up
he screamed in the face of the singing bird in the cage
when it awoke him one morning
he sent the curtain of his window towards the sun
and threw a table in the face of the day
and returned to sleep
the indolent man...!

Fool

fool
absolutely
who goes to a woman
with a heart-hole
in his hand
wanting to fill it with love!

Absence

two seats under a vine
and calm and shade
and two persons who do not sit
nor do they stand

and a door
and they do not enter
and they do not exit

and a day and night
and they do not enter upon morning
and they do not enter into evening

the new wall stands erect
the scratches that disfigured the face of the place have vanished
the dog still limps
despite the passage of months
since
the air-
raid!

October

serious thinking has started
about alternative shirts

the clocks recover
their lost hands
this is a time when
our passions swing
between yellow and brown

Kalimat 3

trees become visible
more than before

and the non-trees as well!

well
let this sun enter
and sit on the cat

let a portion of this wind pass
and turn back the rest...

Two old days loomed at the horizon of the month
one is a day drenched in water
and one in ink

now
that the summer sweat cleared off bodies
a friend
of mine
is in the grave...

Freedom

we have not picked figs off the fig trees
we have not rubbed a spike between two hands
today is the most difficult in October
the pastureland is still very far away
Marjhioun[1]
and to reach it we have
to hit ten tanks
by then my second brother would have died
and the world be filled with freedom!

[1] A town in Southern Lebanon affected, like many others, by the Israeli-Arab conflict.

YAHYA AS-SAMAWI

This is my Tent...Where is Home?

I present to you this paper plate filled with some of the ashes of my letters, hoping that one day I present you with a palm shoot that has not yet been executed by hanging, there, in my home. A home fenced by gallows.

The above is a translation of the words of Yahya as-Samawi, handwritten in Arabic on the copy of his Arabic poetry collection: *This is my tent... Where is home?* that he presented to Kalimat. As-Samawi published this collection of poetry in Australia in 1997. It is a medium-size book of 258 pages, adorned with drawings by Lamia al-Assali.

Yahya as-Samawi is a poet from Iraq who made Australia his home. He lives in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. He has so far published nine poetry collections in Arabic. His poetry has also been published in various media in Australia and around the World.

This is my tent... Where is home? comprises thirty-five poems written in modern and classical styles. In both cases, there is abundant musicality in this very powerful work that stands as a testimony to a masterly and gifted poet. As-Samawi delivers streams of passion that come out wearing a clad of a powerful mind. His language is of the highest quality, yet easy to follow and ride into a world of wisdom manifested by experience.

Kalimat translates and presents the following poem from the above collection:

my love subdued me

My love subdued me,
and my wound stretches
from the plaits of the palms
to the loaves of the people.
My love subdued me!
When the Moguls besieged me one night,
I crossed the fence of the slaughtered nation,
my apprehension was my supply,
my fear was my copious water from paradise!
I roamed the fires of the east
and the gardens of the west,
to find no morning or friend,
but the remains of the house ashes,
of the mud of the two Euphrates on my garment!
My love subdued me.
I searched inside the days' memory for my childhood...
I searched for my city inside all the waste of wars of subjugation...
and for a stray horse.
I searched for my beloved amongst the captives of time...
for my city.
I searched for my roots,
and for a charming sweet Euphrates,
and suddenly on the road
I saw a palm tree on the pavement.
I shook it,
tears dropped on my eyelashes.
And when I shook the stump of the Earth - my God,
Iraq dropped in my heart!

KHALID AL-HILLI

Cloudy Cities

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

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

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

His first book of ideas and poetry was published in 1963. He published his collection of poetry *Cloudy Cities* just before he left Morocco in 1988.

From his introduction to Cloudy City, we know that the poems were all originally written in Iraq between 1962 and 1977. Al-Hilli states that he believes that poetry is written on some occasions and lived on others. This is why when he is not writing, he is living it.

Kalimat would like to live the poetry of Khalid al-Hilli and share it with our readers by presenting the following translations.

Notes About a Case

A citizen whose profession is to write
travelled one day in the blood of women.
His papers burned. Melancholic songs

quivered in his hands...cried in water...
to become his favourite ink.
Monotonous as he walks.
Monotonous as he lives.

...

How could you, then, write a story you did not know
when it fell in your hands and disappeared?
How did you see in her hands the paper of the past,
and how you were near her...
How did the face in your hands disappear?
How did she leave?

...

Do not ask now: you are not expecting an answer.
Who shall answer or ask?
No question...
No answer...
You return now in your sad pain, killed
on a lost old book of poetry.
You return now...from where? Do you then ask
where you come from? No, you do not ask!
But you have now returned,
in your face part of you, or of what you have left behind
...something from the books of women.
And here is the evening
returning vague near your eyes
and you in your dazzled ambiguity,
a voice of miserable singing
.....
.....
And you returned, no longer a writer.
And you returned, no longer monotonous.

The Carriages of Trees

1

The trees are dense.
How do I hide myself among the trees?
How do I cover...
my chest with rocks?
How do I talk to my heart...?
My heart lets me down.
My heart derides me inside the carriages of fire -
how do I slumber...
when my ribs grow and extend to the street,
to the wind?
Oh desolation of my voice
scream
scream
the trees are dense
and the dead live in my head like trees
and I am lying...
Lying...
Lying...
Lying...in the carriages of fire.

2

At night, I dream that I open the doors of the World,
tear them out...cast them in an abandoned sea
swimming in another universe.
I dream that I open all the closed doors,
steal all the stolen dreams
and distribute them among the poor.
I dream that I close all the open doors
and give back every martyr his soul.
I dream that I'll open all the harbours of my land

and I go on...
in my dream go on
to become a dream.

3

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

Cloudy Cities

Cities of paper I play with,
scratch days off their foreheads.
Cities I read in their darkness
letters unbeknown to every language
I wear...
They wear me.
Crowded cities sometimes,
empty othertimes.
On the forehead of what is to come carrying...
off the shelf of my years
come other cities:
cities that trifle with me
whenever I ask about their inhabitants
or the banks of their rivers.
Walking cities...
anchoring in my forehead
if I imagine myself
as one of their inhabitants.

...

Kalimat 3

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

drugged, they exile me.

...

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

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

GHASSAN ALAMEDDINE

A Thread of Whiteness

Ghassan Alameddine is a poet and musician who migrated from The Lebanon, his country of origin, to Australia in 1977 when he was twelve years old. Since then he seems to have settled only in the uncertainty of time and place.

A Thread of Whiteness is his first poetry collection in Arabic, published by Almassar 1999, in Beirut, Lebanon.

The following translations are of poems selected from the book.

I stretch my hand
like a dead man
for a thousand years
longing for a look.

Lost

Like a lost sailor
I open the skull of time
and generations crowd in with death
and slanders
and skeletons.

The First

I used to need a lot of silence
before I dug my first grave,
and seemed unknown
like a killed stranger.

Who

I will fire it
in the direction of he who
because of his intense presence
~~disappears.~~

of the one who disappears

I am not

I am not a stranger
to the degree that
passers-by would
plunder my umbrellas.

Thus

passers-by
my umbrellas

As if I

Faces pass by me
as if I have seen them
in times that followed my death.

And as if he

The night has emptied itself except for a drunken
drawing on the pavements, the map of his delirium
as if the spider that had shared his silence
disappeared.

RAGHID NAHHAS

Three Photographs

Spring, early sixties. Every spring during the week-end, the people of the city seek the orchards near Damascus in an area known as al-Ghouta, to spend a day enjoying the flowers, the scent and the butterflies. They take selected spots and start preparing the meat for BBQs. Men, women, children, the old and the young engage in playing, running, walking, dancing, singing, praying- all against a background white spring bloom, smoke from fires and music from radios. A host of activities of nature and humans renewing all senses and perceptions.

And many incidents and moments are captured in feelings. I used to enjoy watching these activities and wonder to what extent the butterflies were disturbed by us. I wanted to take a photograph of a butterfly.

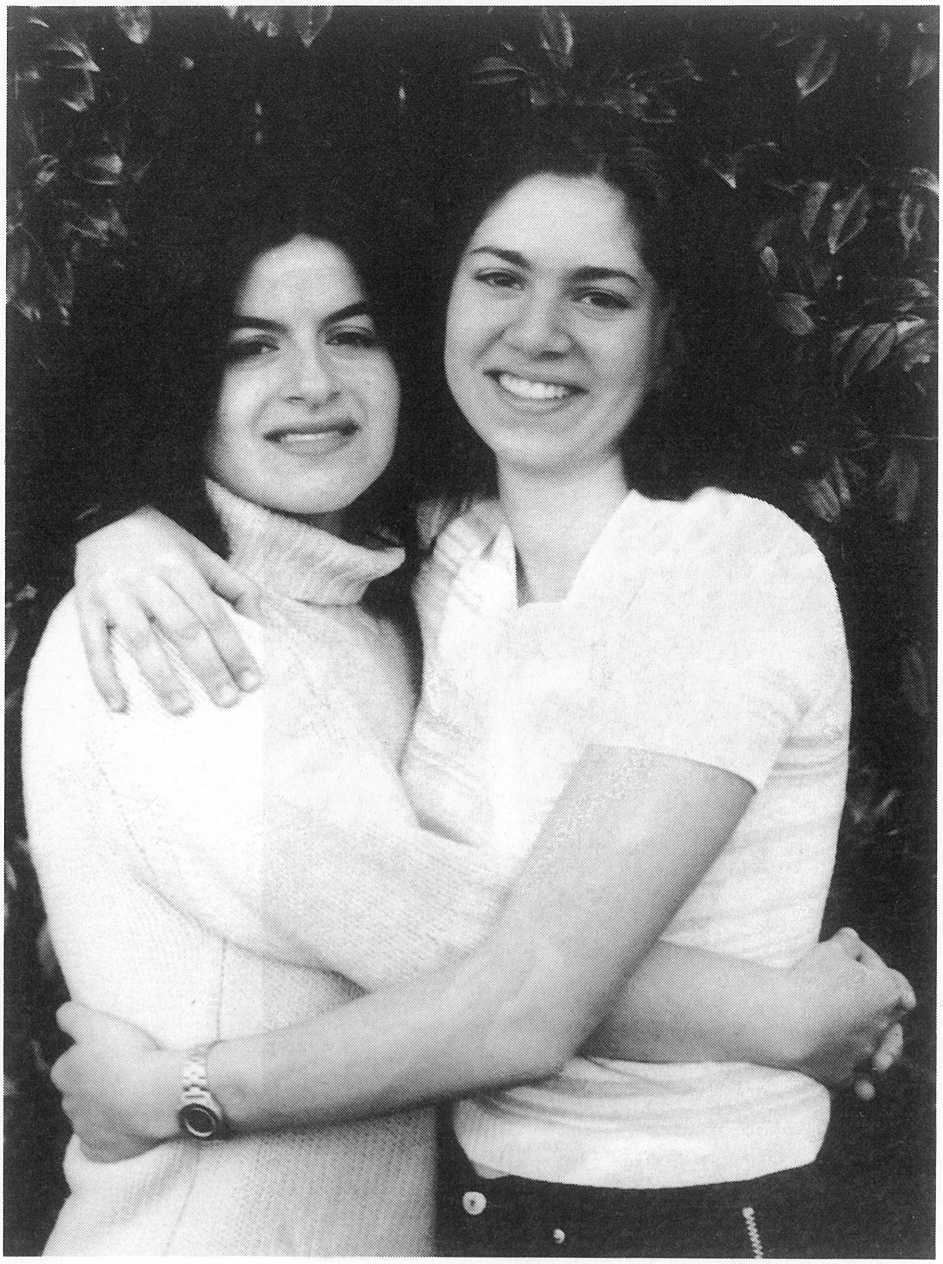
But I had no camera, and I was only twelve years old.

My uncle Hani did. He had one where you press a lever on the side of its case, a cover opens, bellows extend and the lens springs out to look at you. It used a wide film of twelve frames- a remarkable instrument. But he was only interested in shooting photos of family members while we stood motionless and had to pose looking straight into the lens.

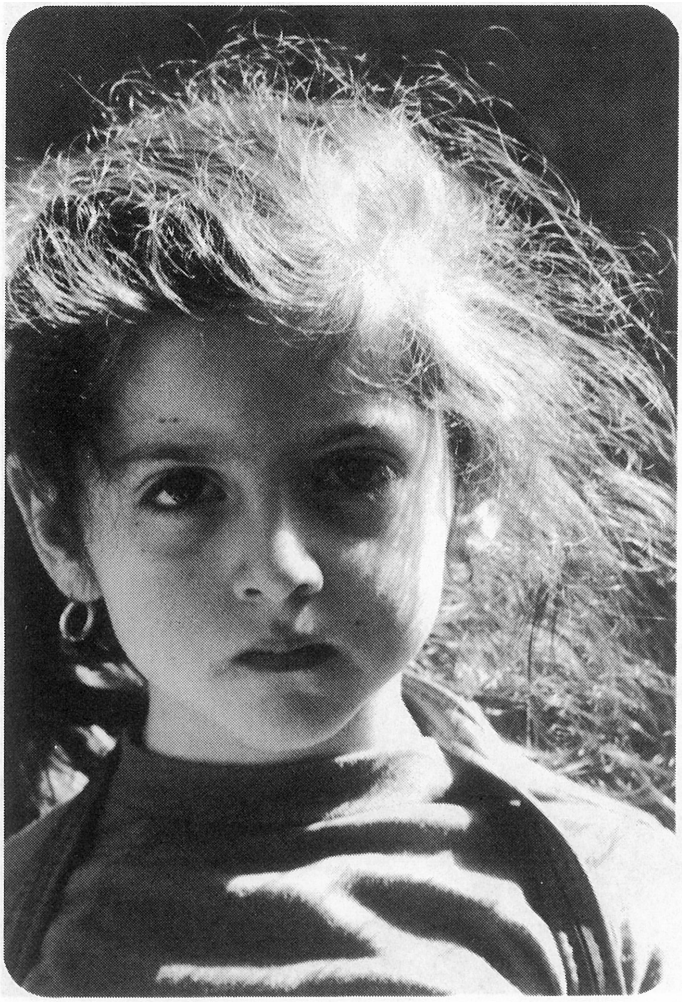
I asked him with curiosity and embarrassment whether I could take a photograph with his camera. He was delighted and showed me what to do. When I took the camera and embarked on taking a photo of the head of a cow that was tied to a tree in the field, everybody attempted to deter me from wasting a photograph. But my uncle used to spoil me, and he said, '*Ma'lishi*' (that's OK). He then observed how, after we ran out of film, I continued to use the camera to aim at 'non-conventional' subject matter.

At the end of the day, my uncle gave me his camera and said that I would be able to make better use of it than he did. It was the best gift of my life. Since then I have been a keen amateur photographer of a wide range of subjects. I have a particular interest in the human face, and the following photographs are examples. I dedicate them to my late uncle Hani who died in his forties, and was at least able to see some of the photographs I took and developed myself.

The Cousins 1987, by Raghid Nahhas



The Cousins 2000, by Raghid Nahhas



The Gypsy Spirit, by Raghid Nahhas

LIAT KIRBY

Five Poems

transmigration

the moon is unbreathing
and the night hangs black.
you are my centre point
and the pull effortless;

my hands are icy,
my muscles burn softly
in their slow heat;
I am out of my skin

and floating into you.
my separateness glitters
like a cluster of stars,
heating in you my love.

Dispossession

the window opens onto blackness.
the stars hang thick from the sky.
the night is gemmed with silver
and my eyes are wide.

eyelashes flutter the skin like
petals. settle with grand solemnity.

Kalimat 3

I am contained within the windowframe.
my soul is pale and my heart is slow.
stripped bare, my skin glints
silver veins, streaks of sadness.
my mind is silenced and my
soul drifts unattached.

something is lost, the glint in my eyes
swallowed by the stars.

waking at midnight

the night is black velvet
heavy it strokes me -
it strokes my sadness
it strokes my skin

my skin is an offering
white to black
velvet to velvet
pore to nap

the night undoes me
and settles over me like a lover -
I am softened and formless

the dark has taken my shape
and gently fashioned me

the night-raven spreads
his wings and sings.

wintering

The currawongs have returned
and my heart curls in on itself,
wintering in hollows newly formed

yet as old as the desert stone
shifting in a breeze of pain.
The hollow in the stone

stares from my eyes
and the currawongs call;
soft, intermittent cries

that crack the dark of early morn,
glimmer like wet beads
cut and bled on grass blades.

The calls lilt and loop,
connecting - disconnecting,

quiver in the light of a new day
which fashions itself with disregard.

The Grove of Black Bamboo

In the grove of black bamboo
water moves slowly,
bearing small leaves and silence,
surface circles appear, widen to disperse,
and it is as if man's sorrows are swallowed.
I sit in the forest of the sages
and know that I am not wise.

When the seven sages wandered in the forest,
contemplated, discussed,
had they become so calm that they were as a leaf
floating on water where ripples are unknown?

Did a sage feel wildness?
Did a sage curve himself to the cusp of the wind
and in so doing alter form?
Did a sage allow perfect nothingness in the act of love?
Does love join sorrow beneath the water's skin,
to pin-prick the surface under a new moon?

Liat Kirby is a Melbourne poet, freelance reviewer and Director of Lynk Manuscript Assessment Service. Her poetry has been published in many journals, and translated into Chinese and Arabic. Her first book of poetry is to be published early 2001.

ANNA KERDIJK NICHOLSON

Three Poems

Survivors

As you got out
past Sofala in spring

the gardens
are sad with blossom

trees. Like the
settlers, and

without their water,
they will stand

until the bush rubs
out their foliage

to make crosses
of apple-wood.

Cambewarra Mountain

after Li Po

I walk up Cambewarra
Mountain and look down

over the plains of
the Wadi Wadi and
the Wondandian: I look
down on the lands

through my telescope--
armies are driving across
the plains as I watch.
I can see spotted-
brick encampments
and roads for transport.

Wind blows through gardens
of bones flowering white
and gullies are red
with the buds of invasion.
The river cries itself
dry into the sea.

Ghazals of the Drover's Wife

i

The smell of bread, done, escapes round my waist
Calling you in through the open door
Potatoes, strawberries and beans all these entries
a journal in the lines and cracks of my hands
To boil water, pull it, cart it and pour in pot
a click and hiss as the handle gets the hook and slops
The river points her toe, testing my skin
my reflection and I meet at the centre of a ripple
Bubble of breath, a back, a hand in the night
turn over to blow out the moon

Kalimat 3

ii

Long weeks of droving leave me full of children
the rasp of claws eating dirt beneath the floor
Greens torn to make yolks dark and sweet
a streak of blood and a cord in the bowl
Grey males suck air, thump and box
cleared land, the bull rears red and grunts
Hooked black pot timely smoked patch
Iron-bark burnt from its setting for meals
When the whipbirds ask for grateful dusk
does our unsaddled spoon and pot clamour answer?

iii

Mouse-rustling sacks of flour, sugar, tea
I have woven the snap of the trap into my hair
Too much of it, the smell of waxy blossom --
now oily rinds, soaking in their juice for jam
Theirs is done, I unrig my hair and plunge --
our chook-pecked feet by the soap and bucket
In town last month I inhaled the smell of new cloth
standing by a window for the tears of a piano.
Calling you in through the open door
the smell of bread, done, escapes round my waist.

Anna Kerdijk Nicholson is a lawyer, poet and stepmother of three who lives in Mascot with her Dutch husband. She has been Writer in Residence at The Bundanon Trust where she completed a book-length cycle of 36 cantos. She is co-editor of *5 Bells*, the quarterly magazine of The Poets' Union.

A Poetics

After reading any number of cultural/literary theorists, most recently Lidia Curti, Diana Bryden and Fiona Morrison, I have discovered I am marginalised because I am a woman, a woman from the bush, a woman writer and a woman traveler. According to some Australian critical theorists writing about multiculturalism and cultural displacement, writers as marginal as myself are exiles, the condition exacerbated by mediating with places other than Australia. By not writing about the neighbourhood street, the assertion is the writer is rejecting or avoiding Australia. Aah! Marginalised again, as an expat of some sort! Then I add to the list above the fact that, although I am the daughter of a country grocer, I grew up on the side of an Australian hill several miles from a town or a village. My head lightens. I begin to lose my balance.

Do all these margins add up to making the edge my centre? Should I look for a bridge? Perhaps the need for a bridge is the reason why I love literary expression and write poetry, short stories and have had a go at novels. And needing the bridge may suggest a need to move back and forth between poles of experience, the traveling from hill to city, from city to island reassuring me I am a human being with a few choices to make. I am the descendant of settlers, but am I a settler or a nomad?

In poetry, I write about where I am, whether that is a town in Indonesia or Malaysia, or a Sydney street. The poem below, however, is drawn from memories of places in Indonesia. It begins with the cliché, the bucolic beauty of the villages set among the wet rice fields of Java. The middle deals with the effects of globalisation as I witnessed it on an island called Batam, once unpopulated and now – just as the poem describes it. The end is its genesis, the sitting in Sydney trying to make sense of the political volatility.

I like a sinuous language that makes poetry of the rhythm of speech and walking. Content means a lot to me, as well as form,style and poetic nuance.

Carolyn van Langenberg

CAROLYN VAN LANGENBERG

Poem

Democracy

Indonesia, 1999

1 : farm

The woman is curvatured without her teeth.
She's classic, tough foot on a stone road,
breathing
under a bag of rice.

2 : village

Drifting on the edge of memory,
hooked, too, under the curved stick
carried by a bow legged man,
the line of white ducks waddles
through *sawah* to the copse,

that Java delicate for all its vitality,
a painting on silk of jungle mists
wreathing greensome, palms kissing
soft energies dissolving abundance,
the shapes ghostly, and cloud,
curling slowly, hesitates.

3 : town

At Salatiga, where a rough road bends
sharp under trees, a group of waterless
and powerless houses trace the red bank
of a pool deepening calm, soft swishing
below rocky bubbling where three streams meet.
And women and girls and little boys slide
into the water where they wash their bodies
and babies, the household sarongs, old shirts,
a few kitcheny things, each others hair
and, once, a bright motorbike, truly new.

Love, laughter, church bells, the imam calling
prayer — the static crackling, wincing loud —
these sounds, generations old, rise crisply
and drowsily pass through the slow spirit.

4 : island

On Batam, a malarial island
not forty minutes by ferry from
glittering stainless steel Singapore,
men shovel red mud out of ditches
scored through towns built where rainforests grew.
Dig. That's all they do for a living.

On Batam, an insular tax-free zone
and brothel serving the soft bummed clerks
of Singapore, streams of young women
flow into barracks, eddy in factories — and they
scarf their heads to make them invisible
to the grinning bosses' half-joked leers.

On Batam, an industrial park
mouldering on lawns grown for a clean look,
AIDS sick eyes fix on small parts and pain,
and the unclaimed baby rolls on a bank,

grasps after red, wants bright brightness,
falls for a ball tumbling on mud.

Batam: An island of transmigrated
young people needing work, needing, too,
those unnamed things stirring smiles from toes to lips
sweetening a heart yearning for mothers
and aunts, fathers and village spite. And the old
rhythm murmuring, whispering ...

There is more: Golf links and seafood, tourists
swimming under palm trees in pale pools
on shores of brown, battery acid sea,
and homesickened Europeans,
families of engineers who, wanting bread,
imported a baker's oven

beyond the edges of civilisation

and not forty minutes by ferry
from glittering, stainless steel Singapore.

5 : city

Svelte men in shirts like fancy dress
loose over tailored trousers,
women rolled in pleated *batik*
bulging through lace *baju*, smooth hair
coiled on slim necks, elegance
celebrated when the body
unfurls on a deeply shaded
pendopo with a sweet cold drink
and the heady scent of wetness,
spiced fruit and coconut excess.

But inside walled houses — perfection
air-conditioned, serenity detached
from the outside where the sun cooks garbage —

green timbered Chippendale chairs creak
under his, under her shrewdly
deft manoeuvring, dispossessing
the pliant heart its rhythmic beat —
it's enough to toss a coin
at the toothless hag hissing her hate.
A beggar sleeps on marble steps.

And a hot eyed man stares at blondes —
maybe women — stride, big feet flat in sandals,
naked legs dressed in shorts, big tits loose
inside men's crumpled and unbuttoned shirts.
He spits, sputum misogyny.
He shouts, 'They fuck like horses!'
And his listless brothers smoke and smile,
wait for the boss's fat wife, watch all day
for sweet-faced girls, eyes drifting towards youths —
bored, until the spirit explodes.

6: cyb-erth

The tee vee screen doesn't show or
feel that reality. You see,
you see, you cannot touch
a weeping crowd, an angered mass,
or the Chinese man thrust down the street,
thrown down a gauntlet of mad hands
to vengeful disregard of his humanity.
The camera zooms on stones hurled
at bruised skin, at brittle bones, and
hovers with its certainty, aloof.

And the bent farmer smiles a crooked smile,
only smiles at an interviewer eager
with the desperate question why is it
that villagers throw rocks, steal ducks, your onions?
And stones grind under a rising roar,
the long-wanted *tsunami* churning,

rough justice sliding, gliding across
the whetted gem of civil society.

The gods speak from clouded mountains.

I sign petitions, write poems,
tap earnest letters on webbed sites.
And CNN beams around the world
police and army boots smash heads
to protect the Bourse. And proud men
buff manicured fingernails, pick polished teeth,
stand beside impassive women corseted
in costumes said to be traditional,
their unbreathed words satisfied
no stone will strike, not them, dead still.

A Poetic and Democracy were also published on the Poetryetc thread,
Managed by the poet John Kinsella, Cambridge University, UK.

PAUL KNOBEL

Three Poems

Journey

for Kerry Leves

The road goes always on.
There's no telling where it will end

or how
or when.

Mysterious as Birdwood Gulley
and difficult as Glenbrook Gorge,

the only certainty lies between the sheet:

the perfect penetration of love,
his hand-

and its passing.

Austinmeer

for Ron Lambert

That wavy line of the mountain:
the shore bound breakers of the escarpment.

Il-la-war-ra...

A snake
or a dinosaur?

Behind it stretches to Perth.

A Garden in Winter

The garden is beautiful in winter too.

The bareness of the fig's branches.
The greenness of the jasmine.
The first bulbs.

Pared back to essences.
Basics.

Paul Knobel is an Australian poet living in Sydney. He published many poems and authered a book of poetry. He is currently working on an encyclopaedia of poetry and another on arts.

CHARLES D'ANASTASI

Three Poems

still life: winter days

the emigration of light in season -
brings me - those quiet things from an inside world

clusters of spent leaves under the bare tree -
strip me - the way they want you to remember their colours

branches, their thin arms stretched to the sky -
feed me - I'll join in their supplication

the house, still standing after all these years -
haunts me - a jigsaw piece with a defiant heartbeat

a winter wind taking up the cudgel -
strikes me - it's cry 'what other music will fit?'

5.30pm
allows me - a silent house,
a black coffee, unopened letters, some
ignored message on the answering machine,
a voice on the radio :
'what's going on in Britain will have a ripple effect ...'
'traffic is banked up on the South Eastern Highway ...'
'the Australian dollar has lost 6/10ths of a cent;
it is now worth ...'

The Unpainted Picture

Does a painting come
with it's own body language
unfold it's own story
turn into a meditation or damnation
defiant with colours?
My mind and eyes planned for such a banquet
ready if need be, to child-splash their way
to some marginal figure
the intimacy of skies;
recalling the jade dealer's words
that time he passed his hands slowly
over the stone's veins :
'It's like the way the blood flows'

Instead, even years later
what remains with me the most
is a different picture
unpainted, not hung on any wall -
the guide's story of Matisse
accidentally knocking down
one of his sculptures - his dread,
his wife stepping in that circle of anguish
taking him for a walk to calm his nerves,
who knows what her words were
what lifted in their silence -
a picture aroused unknowingly,
her ocean in every way -
who was the painter then?

because even at Innsbruck

a four hundred year hotel
with it's fairytale formations
and sloping skylights
in our bedroom
could not disrupt
our tools of the day -
the rattle of our ball and chain,
words like constant windmills

we went out
with a minimal heart
well versed in sobbing the numbers
crossed the bridge, joined the crowd,
walked up and down the main road
excused ourselves from each other's dream
waited for coffee and strudel,
waited ...at a corner café

Charles D'Anastasi was born in Malta. He has been writing for a number of years, with poems published in various journals and anthologies including *Verso*, *Turnstyle*, *Pendulum*, *Poetry* and *Monash*. He lives in Melbourne, Australia.

MARISA CANO

Poem

The Sleeping

How tranquil he looks,
silence slumped upon him
like a heavy blanket.
Oblivion softens
the deep lines and furrows
of his long-lived face,
and the blessing
of a benevolent dream
adds an ethereal touch
to the contours of his features.
He lies on his right side,
head resting
on a numb left hand.
In this way he barely snores,

Kalimat 3

the air whooshing easily

through lazy nostrils.

Like a child,

he looks younger and handsome

in his sleep.

I write 'Do not disturb'

with my finger dipped in dew

and hang it from the clouds.

Marisa Cano is a journalist, translator and community writer who lives in Sydney. She facilitates creative writing workshops for non-English speakers, and organises cultural and literary events.

MARY FLASKAS

Two Poems

Leaving home

Remembering Fitzroy
1986
the allure of Bohemia
and independence
inner-city style
the romance of an attic bedroom
for thirty dollars
house interviews with strangers
and cigarettes
the tell-tale
tattered edges of tally-ho papers
thick veined
beetroot stained
chopping board
crumbs and cats piss
steaming
on the stairs.
Home.
Remembering Lalor
Orwell's 1984 on the television
dread rounding in the belly
- I've been telling you for months –
Fathers' staked silence
in the garden.
Mother's search for pots and blankets
amidst outbursts of denial.
Home.
The small, dark loungeroom
and concrete yard

baking in the summer
the lidded eyes of neighbours
too close
roofs slanting in
a daily avalanche of domestics
rent, bills
part-time sales work
and uni
protests in the square
Brunswick street raining
doner kebabs and cappuccinos
the karma sutra and seduction
on a fold-out sofa
guitars and parties and the heating of hash oil
the crushing of Sudafeds
get-rich-quick schemes
giant pot plants in garbage bins
dying...
smoking the rest
chip sandwiches and sheets
of salami
taking home
kilos of apples on the tram
1997.
Remembering home.

Lighting Ridge

She speaks to me
from way out west
where the dust curdles
in the heat
and the scorched earth
stretches...

and she speaks to me
of angels
pinioned
with lofty ideals

of a naïve god
chasing the brilliance of sun
with waxy wings

and Jesus flying
because walking
is far too mundane
an exercise

and she asks if I'm intereste
in jumping
whether I trust that she will catch me
in the net of her laughter.

She promises nothing
but the burnt-out day
and the anticipation
of reprieve,
the coolness of evening.

Mary Flaskas is a poet and Tenants Advisory Officer
with Redfern Legal Centre, Sydney, Australia.

MARGARET METZ

Two Poems

Outside it's cold

and wept,
owl-blind in early sun
for what I had begun.
- Gwen Harwood

And now we're almost at the station
the woman with the bunch of lilies and roses,
pink and delicate on her lap,
has arranged them prettily against her
grey snakeskin suit, her blonde hair;
and the insect that was inching
across the crisp shoulderline
of the grey business suit in front of me
is wriggling inside the man's pink shirt collar.

And I am remembering you
and your charming teeth with sadness,
my soft gentle giant,
as I inch to the door of the bus,
worm my way down the escalator,
am enclosed in the human heat
of the crowded carriage
and enter the stiffened collar
of another drab working day.

Sacrifice

She can come back out now,
that dark corkscrew-eyed monster
that sits on top of the wardrobe.
She can come back out
into the bedroom
now that my lover has gone.
He was losing weight and terrified
that all that sex would kill him;
so – he'd hide that evil portrait
I bought to write a murder;
he'd turn away that female face
pink horse neck and penis nose;
he'd spurn that fleshy kisser
painted by the woman in goal.

He'd do it quietly,
with a sense of propriety,
an air so cool and self-assured.
He'd turn it as part of the ritual
of making love with my alter ego –
the woman as sweet as roses –
on the bed, against the wall,
or on the floor.
But now that he is gone
I'm writing his murder
and my portrait steps down to the floor.
Now that he's gone
I'm digesting a monster
and hanging my life on the wall.

Margaret Metz holds a Master of Arts degree. She is active in poetry groups.

RAE SEXTON

Two Poems

The Milkman

He's a doctor now.
He still remembers his uncle's round
the awesome sight of the night sky
all the planets and stars
and their movements across the seasons
At 2 am they'd lean against a wall
drinking in the night sky
and their thermos of tea

The catch-cry was
'We must support the dairy industry' –
plenty of butter and cream for these
children of the Depression
and a billy of milk at the door

Now they buy 'long-life'
in cardboard or plastic
The van does not come to the street
Nor the iceman or breadman
Occasionally the newspaper plops
in the middle of the path

In Memoriam

nobody comes to weep and mourn
at the nuclear graveyard

where the old bombs are laid to rest
where missiles, de-gutted in the nuclear arsenal
are rendered obsolete

does anyone come to tend them secretly
at night? with watering-can and potting fork?

are they hoarded inside a forbidden place
guarded by a concrete wall
awaiting a life-giving injection at some future date?

does anyone come to strew fresh flowers?
have their souls gone to Heaven yet?

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

FIONA M. CARROLL

Two Poems

Migration

He will be older now
than she remembers him
dancing under harvest and crested moons
his arm on her shoulder
his head thrown back
she felt him laugh before she heard him
his face open, streaming with light.

They eat at separate tables now
too far to wave
across ridges of time
memories churn a tide of questions
and recede
as he settles in, curved to the last bend in the road,
on his way home birds are singing her awake

She will be older now
than he remembers her
departing with criss-crossed fingers
her new coat lighter
her hat off to love
he felt her defection before her hand went up
life-lines describing the loss.

Dragonfly

Late afternoon lapses into silence
beryl-green and secretive
no-one knows I am here
except, perhaps, that dragonfly,
detained mid-flight
over opaque waters
darting back and forth
and back again
tugged on by memories
hesitant in the tender air
a universe of colour
on its wings.

GREG BOGAERTS

Short Story

The Sun Fish

Tom and Mary Shortland stood in the day coming upon the new year and the new century. Tom with the rope in his hand holding onto the small wooden skiff as the high tide of saltwater jarred the vessel side on to the wharf. And almost took Tom Shortland into the harbour water; Tom righting himself at the last second when the cry of his wife went out to him and he took hold of it still ringing like metal in the air. Because Mary Shortland was all he had left and Tom Shortland was all she had left.

The two of them standing in the pearl flush of the morning of 1900 and not another soul to be seen walking the wood of the wharves or out on the oily skin of harbour water fishing the depths.

'I think yer should look me over Tommy. Just in case,' said Mary.

And Tom Shortland didn't argue or question. Tied the rope to a pole of wood and went to his wife. Who unbuttoned her blouse. Tom looking carefully over her breasts and then her skirts hoisted and Tom going through her thatch of pubic hair looking for the black fleas but finding none. Feeling the shock of blood in himself when he saw her. Then the wilt, the melting in a fire of shame when he remembered his son, Tim.

When he remembered the raised lesions on the small body and the fire running through the boy. The brow burning and the flesh and bone and blood pain-twisted in the wet sheets. And the arch of the spine; the small span of bone and cartilage shot upwards as the fever of the plague reached its zenith. And broke the boy beyond reclaiming.

And as Mary straightened her skirts and stepped onto the bottom of the shallow boat, Tom remembered, still heard her cry as they both saw the pale whisper of the boy's essence leave the casement of flesh that had been Tim Shortland. The cry of Mary Shortland like a migratory bird that had taken flight with the soul of their son. So there was part of Mary missing for Tom

Shortland. Something that hadn't returned to the woman who turned her opaque eyes up to Tom as he unleashed the skiff and pushed it out into the water. Where the bony hull stitched a seam of phosphorescence upon the water; a fiery umbilical cord shattered by the movement of the oars.

'Do yer think we'll be safe out 'ere Tommy?' asked Mary, and Tom could hear the tremor in the voice. A fear that found him and made his hands slip on the wood of the oars. Tom losing control for a second and the craft side-on again. A short fierce struggle and the oars grasped tightly in the hands that chopped a couple of tons of coal a day each time Tom Shortland went into the belly of the earth.

'Yes lass we should be alright. Th' doctors 'ave said it can't travel across water. It's only a short while we'll be fishin' but it's a little time away from th' town. It might claim us when we come back this evening. Yer just don't know,' said Tom and rowed hard against the rising tide coming in through the heads of the harbour.

Tom Shortland all skin and bone and iron muscle from the hard work he performed every day except Sunday. Tom going down into the estuarine mine that ran out under the water of the harbour and the open ocean. A dangerous job when the water broke in and drowned men at their bords, or when the fire stink erupted and burned men to shells in the darkness.

And Tom thought about the stories the men passed about. The leg-pulling stories they told to others who hadn't worked in coal and under water. Telling open-mouthed listeners how the miners could hear the hulls of sailing ships scrape against the bottom of the harbour just above the heads of the miners. All bullshit but never disbelieved by a listener.

Barely disbelieved by Tom Shortland since he began to dream the story; the ships grinding above his head in the mine in the dream. The ships coming back to load Newcastle coal; coming back empty except for a couple of hundred tons of ballast picked up from the four corners of the globe. The rock and rubble of the San Francisco earthquake, rock and rubble from the Americas and European ports. And one or two of the ships carrying plague rats amongst the ballast. The rats escaping in Tom Shortland's dream and with their teeth stitched into the gullet of his son. Until Tom woke screaming in bed with the sound of the ships still grinding above his head, the sound of the rats scuttling across the wood of the wharves.

The port of Newcastle closed when the bubonic plague broke out. Orders from the authorities and the harbour master that all foreign ships entering the harbour would from there on discharge ballast out to sea. Too little too late for

Mary and Tom with Tim drowned in the earth of Sandgate Cemetery.

Tom Shortland bent his back and pulled the skiff across the water; Tom shifting water the way he shifted coal. Without thought. Until the skiff floundered upon the bank of ballast that had built up higher and higher as the ships discharged the waste at sea.

'We're stuck Tommy. We'll sink!' said Mary.

'Nay nay we won't Mary. Don't panic. Just come up here and sit beside me,' said Tom.

Mary sat next to her husband and the weight of the two lifted the boat from the submerged ballast. So the craft floated free and Tom heard the grind of wood on stone and tried not to think of the dream that came to him every night.

Tom Shortland gained the open water of the ocean. Left behind the breakwater and the land still dark in the new day coming. Left behind the smell of burning where some houses in the town had been dowsed with pitch and kerosene and set alight to burn the rats and the fleas that might still be the bearers of bubonic plague.

The man and the woman in the boat in the dark and the small pulse of light on the horizon and the flutter of wind as small as the breath of Mary Shortland as she sat beside her husband and watched him find the lines from beneath the wooden seat. And stop, wait for the movement of the boat. Wait for wind or tide or both to take the craft over the water so Tom and Mary could slowly drift and search out the fish with hooks and lines and the bait of green smelly steak.

The boat becalmed and the two figures in dark relief upon the silver coat of the water; as if they'd been cast in hot steel and poured in moulds and set and tempered in the coolness of the ocean beneath the wood. Tom and Mary unable to move it seemed and the heat of the day coming, the heat of the town fires upon them in great lathering waves.

Tom not prepared to fish until the boat moved; not prepared to waste time in the wrong spot.

'Do yer think we're wastin' our time Tommy bein' out 'ere? Do yer think we should go back?' Asked Mary.

'Nay lass I think we 'ave t' stay. Th' wind might come and take us yet. I'd rather be out 'ere than back 'ome in bed,' said Tom Shortland. And his wife looked at him and saw, for the first time, how the pain and grief of Tim's death had taken some of the flesh from his bones. Saw for the first time, through her own pain and grief, the eyes of her husband; the spark gone and

the round hearts made of a substance as black and as dead as the coal her Tommy cut and hauled out of the mine.

The wind broke away and the nose of the skiff shifted on the water and they began to drift south. With the lines lowered leaving behind the swirls of oil and fat from the meat. The craft riding the swelling scrolls of water that ran in great lines beyond them into the annihilation of The Great Southern Ocean. Tom and Mary with the lines as taught as wire in the water and the occasional short shake on the meat in fathoms below, but nothing big to take the lines and make them sing in the air luminous as the sun rose around them. And the man and the woman burned upon the water.

Late morning and only a few fish to show between them; not enough to make a meal and Tom Shortland setting free the three small whiting that were swimming in the porcelain bowl on the bottom of the boat. Tom packing away the lines and taking his place upon the wood and rowing north back towards the harbour. With Mary silent, as if the fish they hoped to catch were jewels of thought and feeling that would flare between the man and the woman. Bright beads of light in their hands they would pass to each other and wonder at the beauty of the silver. But the light, the soft colour in the scale still lost in the sea.

Tom and Mary almost to the harbour and close into the shore and in shallow water when Mary saw the flap of the fin, heard the loud smack of the fish turning over in the water. Like the earth turning in the sea of night and the day coming upon the land without warning.

'Over there Tommy! Over there I can see it!' said Mary and stood up in the boat. That did not rock but held its place in the water.

Tom Shortland pulled hard on one oar and turned the skiff towards the sandbank barely covered with water. Looked over his shoulder and saw the sphere of the fish flounder in the water. The yellow and brown and tawny hide sparkling shots of light across the water; the shell fish and barnacles like a hundred small eyes winking and watching the man and woman coming towards them. The skiff upon the sun fish; a fish that belonged to tropical waters and rarely seen so far south. Tom and Mary frozen in the boat as they looked upon what they saw as a monster.

'Leave it be Tommy! It's 'orrible. I've not seen nothin' like that b'fore!' said Mary and lost her balance in the boat and sat down hard on the wood.

'I'don't think it'll do us 'arm,' said Tom. 'It'd make a good catch and feed us and some others for quite a while.'

'No don't do it! Leave it! Yer don't know what it might do t' yer!' pleaded Mary.

But Tom Shortland went over the side of the skiff. Carried the hatchet he kept in the boat if he should land a sizeable shark. Tom in the water that closed around him like warm uterine fluid; warm soft hands on his flesh as he dived down under the huge girth of the sun fish and found its mouth in the spears of sunlight coming into the water. Tom Shortland chopping into the hide just below the mouth. Making a gash and swimming back to the skiff and dropping the hatchet into the boat. Swimming back to the trail of blood and following it like a life line down to the wound in the big fish and taking his knife from his belt and slicing open the heart and guts of the fish. Tom Shortland blinded by the cloud of blood that shrouded around his body in the water.

Tom shooting to the surface and the taste of the blood in his mouth.

'Quick Mary throw me that rope we keep at the back,' said Tom. Mary finding the line with the big hook on the end Tom kept for the jewfish when they were running. Mary rowing the few yards and handing the rope to Tom.

Who planted the steel hook in the hide of the fish next to the dorsal fin. Tom diving down under the fish and encircling its thickness with the rope. Securing the other end through the eye of the hook and handing the rest of the rope to Mary. Who lashed the end to the skiff.

Tom hauling himself from the water with the blood and salt water dripping from him. Mary holding out her hand and her husband taking it. Steadying himself and their hands a planet of bone and knuckle covered in blood and water.

'Thanks lass. I'll be right now. We've got t' get this monster back,' said Tom Shortland, and seated himself and took up the oars and began to row. The fish close to a skiff of coal in weight but buoyed by the water.

Tom pulling hard on the oars and the fish barely moving; an hour of toil and Mary taking the oars from Tom and bending her back. Until the heads were made and Tom took his turn rowing and rounded the craft and the fish into the harbour. Mercifully found a rip of water running fast and close into the shore of sand and wharves and sailing ships tied up to load and unload. The craft and the sun fish bumping and shocking over the harbour bottom and some sailors coming up to rails and looking over the sides of their boats. Watching the strange procession in the water and the man and woman dead beat and dropped down on the wood of the small boat.

'Over 'ere matey!' came the call from a man standing on a small wharf close in to the centre of town. Just across the railway crossing to the stores and

shops of the city.

Tom Shortland rowed the last yards and Mary tossed a rope to the man who tied the craft securely into the side of the wharf.

'I'll haul up yer beast there and help yer sell th' flesh if yer pay me a pound,' said the man.

'Agreed,' said Tom who was buggered and not about to argue even if a pound was a weeks wages and a bit more to him.

The man winched the sun fish out of the water; turned the handle that worked the pulleys and pulled the bright hide into the air. Blood came from the wounds. People came from the town when the word spread a monster had been caught out of the harbour.

Only a few people out on the first day of the new century; most still indoors and afraid of the plague that might be still amongst them. Not prepared to risk rubbing shoulders with their fellow men and women.

But news of the catch went from door to door and curiosity got the better of the fear of infection and people came from behind the wood of their doors. Came down from the hills and ridges above the town, came from the small mining villages on trams and in carts and on horse back. Until a crowd massed on the small wharf. Where the blood of the fish ran in a straight gutter grooved in the wharf. And pooled around the feet of the watchers.

Tom taking his knife and hatchet and slicing open the hide; cutting a long opening from head to tail in the fish. Carefully cutting away the flesh from the flaps of the hide.

'Come on,' said the man who'd winched the fish out of the water, 'a penny a slab of fish and I'll cook it f' yers and all and there's some wine I've just had brought in.'

Tom Shortland cutting the steaks of fish flesh and Mary and the man cooking the pieces on a plate of iron with the fire in a drum on the wharf. And all the people in the crowd coming forward and paying their penny if they had a penny and the man and Mary still giving of the fish and the glasses of wine if a man or a woman didn't have the penny.

The crowd on the wharf swelling and Tom still cutting the fish, gutting it hollow little by little. As the men and women of Newcastle tasted the salt water still in the fish. And drank the wine that continued to come across the rail line from one of the town's pubs; wooden barrels of wine that bumped and thumped in the dirt of the main street. Wine that disappeared quickly and found the wellsprings of love and affection in the hearts of the people on the wharf. Who continued their sacred meal of wine and fish. The miraculous fish

bringing a rebirth of Newcastle as the word of the catch spread wider and more people came to look and eat and drink.

The hide of the sun fish swung in the wind of evening. The crowd gone and only Tom and Mary Shortland left. Tom cutting the hide down from the winch rope. Taking the hatchet from the boat and cutting some wood from the wharf. Placing it inside the empty skin of the fish. Lighting the wood and the fire drying, curing the hide.

The smoke wrapped around the man and the woman. Who waited until the fire burned itself out and turned their backs and walked away together with the smoke and fire in their skin and hair and the taste of fish and wine still on their tongues.

Greg Bogaerts is a writer who lives in Newcastle, Australia. He has had many short stories published in journals, magazines and anthologies in Australia and America. Many of his stories have been read on radio.

PAM HARVEY

Short Story

Until Death

It wasn't anything to do with him, he insisted. He hadn't been there, hadn't been anywhere near her for a long time. It wasn't his fault.

'I realize that,' said Miriam. But he knew, from the way she glanced away from him to look over the drying summer lawn, that she was feeling guilty as well.

Miriam had, if anything, known Gael for the longest time. They'd met in high school. He'd first seen Gael when she was working at Myers selling stockings, hats and handbags. There was only a few months difference, and hadn't seemed significant at any other time, but now it was crucial. Miriam had known her longer, she had been Gael's best friend. It wasn't his fault, he said again.

'Would you just shut up?' said Miriam. 'Just shut up.'

They'd come home from Gael's funeral, and were changing out of their good clothes. The suit, he remembered, had been bought for Gael's father's funeral. He hung it at the back of the wardrobe, trying not to think how Gael's lipstick had smeared the lapel as she turned her face away from old man Wagner's burial. It seemed so long ago. It was long ago, he thought. Absolutely years. He hadn't seen Gael for ages; possibly months, many months.

Miriam was hanging her dress on a clothes hanger covered with apricot ribbon. It hung in vast folds, and for a moment she held it against her, covering her tight, rounded abdomen, as if hiding it. From him? From herself? She smoothed the skirt several times, pushing it firmly over the curve her stomach made, before forcing other clothes apart on the rail to make the space that one needed. He felt like speaking again, one more time denying any connection between himself and Gael's death, but Miriam was not facing him and had her hands busy in a drawer, searching for a pair of comfortable shorts. It was pointless saying anything, he thought. No use in worrying over what had gone on in poor Gael's head (a nasty sort of joke, he realized) and what could have been done to stop it.

'I'm going out into the garden,' Miriam said, still not looking at him, walking towards the door.

'Don't you want a cup of tea? I'll make iced tea if you like.'

'No,' she said. 'Thanks.'

He sat down on the bed and listened to her opening the back door, pushing roughly at the fly screen. It shouldn't matter about Gael, he thought. Not to us. Not to what's going on with us. We haven't seen her for months. Things had been over between the three of us for months. The months felt like protection; large, fat periods of time wedging away any responsibility for Gael's death.

The tiny house Miriam and he lived in had been bought after the divorce. Of course, he had let Gael have the other house, their original home. Others thought it magnanimous of him - such a large house, in such a good area - but he couldn't wait to be rid of it, signing the papers over as soon as her solicitor requested it. Miriam and he bought their pretty house with its unkempt garden, and lined it with new furniture, discarding anything they had of times before, and were happy. They were happy, they worked hard at being happy. And now the baby was coming. They were happier, he thought, than ever.

He lay down on the bed and tried not to think of Gael. Bitch, he thought. This was the only way you could get to us, wasn't it? Not content to let us be happy. He tried not to think of her, and couldn't not think of her. Her face, which he hadn't thought of in such a long time - now that it wasn't close to him every night, staring at him (he knew) while he was asleep, with that look that begged (don't leave, don't) - was clearer in his mind than Miriam's despite Miriam having been in the room only ten minutes ago. If Gael had been reproachful, angry, contemptuous: anything on her face except that dumb look of apology as he told her the morning he'd left that he wouldn't be back, that Miriam was pregnant, that they were happy. He was sorry, he had said (and he was, really sorry) but the way things worked out were often strange and rarely planned, who could have known five years ago that this would happen? He said many things that morning, lots of words, talked far more than he wanted, but she kept looking at him with that soft, sorry face and he talked so he wouldn't notice that she was not going to say anything to him, not a sound.

He rang her quite often after he left, not only for the sake of settling the business dealings they had to go through, but to ask, genuinely, about her, to see if she was O.K., eating well, work going well, tapestry coming along. She spoke to him in a tiny voice, but didn't ever whinge, or ask him to explain further, or command that he give her more (not that he could, she had everything that had been theirs together). After a while, he couldn't say precisely when, he stopped ringing her and felt great relief at not hearing her

breathe quietly into the phone as he talked.

She did contact him once. It was a while after he'd stopped ringing her, and she was the last person he expected to be on the phone. 'Hello, Gordy?' She said, and he was instantly angry at her hesitation for who else could it be? She had rung him.

'Hello, Gael. How have you been?'

'I'm fine, Gordy. Just fine.'

He could hear her breathing, small shallow almost silent breaths. He wished she hadn't called him Gordy, only she ever called him that and he hadn't wanted to think that there was any intimacy left.

As far as he could tell she was ringing with a question in mind, but they only spoke of linear things, weather and distant friends and the new shopping centre in town. I gave her lots of openings, he told Miriam later, I even asked her if she wanted anything. She kept saying that she was fine.

Miriam had listened to his re-telling of the phone conversation with both hands around her cup of tea, and her eyes looking into its depths. What do you think she wanted, he asked her, but was glad when she didn't look up, didn't answer, and he was able to shrug and go outside where the mower was idling.

He didn't tell Miriam everything. 'I'm sorry about the baby,' Gael had said. What? What? he'd mumbled back, not grasping her words, was she going to get spiteful after all this time? 'I mean, I'm happy about your baby. Miriam's baby. I'm happy for you.' He thanked her, feeling ridiculous, and the conversation ended. 'Bye, Gordy.'

He'd forgotten until that moment that Gael had never become pregnant. Oh, that sounded silly, he thought, but it was true. It seemed an irrelevant thing to remember, they'd stopped expecting anything to happen so long ago and they had never really thought about going further into it. He didn't care, why would he care? Children? Never had anything to do with them, he often told their friends, as if it was a boast; but really kids perplexed him. I just can't see, he would say, the attraction. Aren't they costly? Don't they rob you of your freedom? Aren't there too many people in this world anyhow? Miriam's pregnancy had occurred as an interesting twist to his already committed relationship to her. It had nothing to do with Gael. It wasn't vengeance. He had been surprised at the excitement he felt about the growing foetus, their baby. Children were not the reason he had left Gael, it wasn't even in his verbose speech on the morning he left her. He had completely forgotten it had ever been a consideration.

Miriam came back into the house as he was preparing tea. She sat heavily on a kitchen chair and watched him peel and dice. He looked up at her now and then, but she had her head on her hand, her elbow on the table, and was

watching the knife he held. He continued chopping, then, with mock ferocity, went to flick it at her. She gave a feeble scream, her hand fell away from her face, and her chair tilted wildly as she moved away from him. The momentary horror on her face made him feel sick.

'God, Mirry,' he said, the knife on the chopping board, his hands knocking vegetables to the floor. 'I'd never hurt you!'

She was crying, so he went to her and folded himself over her as she sat on the edge of the chair weeping without bothering to cover her face. She sobbed for what seemed long, lonely minutes, and when she spoke he realized she had forgotten the knife. 'I was her best friend, Gordon. Her best friend! It's like I didn't care about her. Worse: it's like I hated her. Poor Gael, she didn't ever hurt anyone, could never think a rotten thought. Gordon, what have we done?'

He listened to her, she wanted to talk, and he stroked her shoulder as she went on and on, talking of friendships and things he didn't want to hear. It wasn't my fault, he kept thinking, knowing the unfairness of the thought, and not blaming Miriam (certainly not) but they were best friends, and women's friendships - weren't they governed by their own rules? Weren't they run on layers deep within that no man could ever understand? Couldn't a friendship between Gael and Miriam have stopped this happening?

Gael had not wanted her death to worry anyone. This was the irony. She had left two notes, one on her back door, one on her front door. Please do not come in, they read. Please call the police and do not come in. Gael Harrison. She had used her maiden name, he thought, so as not to incriminate him.

A courier had read the note. He had the wrong address anyhow, it was found out later, but he was there to read the note and call the police on his mobile. They entered the quiet, clean house and found her in the bath. It appeared, they said to Gordon after it was over and they had to get some details for, you know, their files, that she had shot herself twice. The first time (sorry, sir, for relating this) she hadn't completed the job, but was able to try again. It was the second shot that had killed her. She was neat, said a young constable. There were three towels wrapped around her head to stop any - well, it was the neatest job he had seen. A neat clean house.

Ah, Gael, he thought, continuing to stroke the shoulder of his new wife. Somehow the lack of fuss is most disturbing of all.

A hot north breeze rattled the fly screen door, and a piece of carrot rolled off his chopping board and onto the floor, spinning around until it stopped resting gently against his foot.

Pam Harvey is a writer who lives in Victoria.

EDWARD RIELLY

Short Story

The Mark

They popped him outside *The Lalor Arms.* His blood dribbled from the steps to the base of five totem poles, corner Shorts Lane & Little Malop. There he was stopped, twitching still as the last slug smashed him into the pavement. His departure was permanent. Rain washed away his blood.

Of course nothing was heard. The band was blasting away thousand-decibel riffs. No witnesses. It was raining outside: the wee hours and all that. Only a yell of surprise from Brooke, the dumb redhead waitress, when a stray bullet punched a neat round hole in the plateglass door opposite.

The mark died slowly, drowning in his own bile. He didn't make a production of it. Just lay there to die. When the boys did arrive ten minutes later, most of the blood had been washed away, except for that stuff frothing around his lips. He seemed to be smiling.

He was clinging to one of the totem poles. *Life*, the government-grant sculptor had named it on a little bronze plaque, with a quotation even he would have to admit was rather rueful: *vita brevis ars longa.* Behind, the other four poles loomed ghostlike all splattered in red: *krasniji cërti.*

I stayed well back in window-shadows. I had seen it all: two thugs slouched back in the black *Lexus*, Toro Blanco chatting up the nervous mark, two men exchanging brown parcels, smiles, shaking hands. A match flared: I could see Gimpy's smile as he lit a cigarillo. Gimpy doesn't smoke.

Then the passenger window slides down, an ever so quiet revving as the saloon slips into rain: not a whisper as the mark stumbles and slumps. The mark hadn't realised he'd been set up. He tried to yell, but he's drowning. Gimpy, and someone else, slide out of the shadows.

I did not call for the Ambos, nor for Macpherson's men. The mark was going to die: he had no chance. I stepped into my room's quiet and waited for minutes to tick away, for the circus to begin. It took ten minutes. Then a rush of sirens, yells, muffled screams.

Kalimat 3

That single malt whiskey from Van Diemen's Land has an umbrous taste lingering on the back palate, induces thoughtfulness, a mellow disposition. I poured myself a double and sat over the keyboard watching words spool onto sheets of electronic paper. Some lucky bloke had found a fat brown paper bag.

What happened to him should have been fiction. Someone from Melbourne had wanted him charged for withholding information. Yet the fool couldn't keep his trap shut and had rushed into a junior's office and shown him the cache. Macpherson kept the narcs away, but the citizen had his frontpage feature.

We're all famous for fifteen minutes and getting your smiling mug into the papers is fine if you're a politician or beauty queen opening bazaars, but not if you've picked up fifty grand in someone else's lunchbag. Now he's worms' lunch with lead trimmings. His widow is rich and fled.

From my window, I look over rubbish bins and strewn empties. I can see all the way from City Hall to Breakwater and Anglesea. The rubbish stinks in summer. What happened on the steps opposite stank. The mark stank as he died. The paper bag he found at Breakwater stank.

My breath stank, my fingers sweated on the page as I read the headline next morning DRUG SLAYING: worth four centimetres on page five. Police are making inquires. The victim's identity unknown to Victoria Police. Bullet smashes into nearby hotel. A photo of a frightened waitress: she has dark hair.

Macpherson should have known better: all the locals have been squashed flat. The Ouyen brigades have seen to that, buying up acreages in Meredith and Forrest, cultivating for the cut flower market. Macpherson should have spotted the bloke as Happy Olsen, the Sydney turf identity. The locals are not happy.

But no, Macpherson had to play all mysterious. So the phone was ringing before I sat down, the chief jumping down my throat – where were you when I needed you? Didn't matter that I was working on his pet project. Get on it! Yessir! Expense account blowout coming up: Monday!

A reporter in a small town like Geelong is known to all and every. I had my start writing up agricultural shows, fallen trees and traffic accidents, Mrs. Lupino's triplets' first day at St. Margaret's. I learnt at parish fêtes to not dance too closely to charity queens, smile, scribble.

It's an incestuous town: if you weren't born here, or didn't play in the Reserves at least – forget it. We all meet at the Social Club, score off each other before the game gets too serious or they chuck it. At times we reckon the match committee's backing the Bombers.

Everyone gossips. Usually I only have to drop into Silvio's to hear who's returning from Calabria from an extended vacation, or visit Lacey's Framing to

get the gist on Paddy Dillon's visit to Derry, or which kid from the local high school spent Saturday night in the police D&D cells.

Then the phone rings: Hi Tom, how are you? Say, did you hear the latest ministerial on the toxic waste furnace at Gravel Pits? The Party Room will go berko! Or better still, a hushed whisper: There's a pileup on the Lara Lake turnoff – two ambulances, helicopter. Spotter fees. Vultures.

Today, nothing. My pot of stout at The Lalor Arms was watered down: tepid coffee at Silvio's – Silvio away signora chirps. Macpherson doesn't call. Friday morning and the town has iced lips. Lunchtime, and the rain begins to ease off a little. November and it's near twentyfive in the shade.

By about two I've had enough and sign out on the weak excuse there's a longstanding appointment down in Fairhaven. I get that out of the way and email in a lame story about sharks schooling along the coast: sign out for the weekend. Monday and the Chief can wait.

Clouds have rolled back leaving behind a sticky residue of sweat and angst on the asphalt and other people's lives. Geelong is not supposed to be the kind of town where lucky strangers get popped. I drive further south, past Lorne and Apollo Bay, tuck into the Marengo Beach carpark.

My kind of place. I can't be bothered here. It's well out of range for the mobile phone, and I have an hour or two of quiet for myself. There are only the waves and cold currents, gulls flying straight in from the Tasman Sea. Can I glimpse King Island?

I don't have to think about anything, not work, not Maria, not Gimpy, not even the mark with slugs thudding into his belly and the bloody trails between the steps of *The Lalor Arms* and the five totem poles. I use my 7 x 50s to watch a Chinese tanker.

It's painted a dirty green on the hull with a grey superstructure, a red flag dropping at the stern. Chinese ships have inscrutable names, unlike the Japanese which all have simple to understand names like *Sakura Maru* – 'Cherry-Blossom Ship'. This has new characters and no Pinyin. It slides towards Adelaide.

Gimpy and the boys hang out at Marengo when the heat is on. He has a hacienda on the hill a half-click to my right. I know it, Macpherson knows it as well. This weekend, if Gimpy's going to be anywhere other than at Ouyen or overseas, he's at home.

When I'm coming out from my slow swim, two girls dash past me giggling and squalling as they realise how cold the sea really is. Marengo may have a tourist-brochure name and look *très tropique* when the sun's shining, but the sea is as icy as a melting Antarctic floe.

Kalimat 3

They're real lookers. I look. One is the silly bird from *The Lalor Arms*, the painted redhead, Brooke, who served me watered beer this morning. The other is the frightened one in the photo, dark hair, grey eyes. They're too busy to notice me. I keep moving towards the dunes.

The dark-haired girl is lithe, olive-tanned and quieter. She'd stripped off completely but for a green ribbon. She dove straight into the Antarctic waves, emerges further out and beckons the other to join her, turns and swims straight towards an orange marker buoy. The redhead flounders after her friend. Yelping.

I can see Gimpy. He's standing at the top of some wooden steps and he's looking through binoculars at another tanker. I follow his trajectory. Then I see two speedboats cutting inshore well away to the West. He swings beachwards, checks out the playing children. I stay well back, invisible.

He's joined briefly by the two girls. They retire into the house arms links, laughter tinkling. The children have disappeared towards the golf course and the beach is empty now. I go for another swim, this time out the marker buoy. A girl's green ribbon is looped onto a lug.

In a valley behind Marengo Beach there's a B&B I use as a sometimes retreat. There's a cancellation. Sam and Ada are grateful. I get a reduction for writing them up. They give me the studio & spa apartment, one honeymooners prefer. When was it: first time? Too soon ago.

I want Gimpy. I want him dead. Quick with a hit of overpure horse, or slow and screaming with a gutful of pain: it doesn't matter, so long as he dies knowing that he's dying and that nothing is going to save him as he slides down into eternal cold.

One pop of nice lolly and Maria was blown away, her heart ripping itself into shreds. The doctors had assured me she had died instantly. That means nothing. She had lived in Limbo for all those years beforehand. No one in town would have Gimpy's discard, no one except me.

Gimpy and Maria used to live charmed lives. They had a house on Cheltenham Close, overlooking Queen's Park. He was the most successful legal on the circuit, took silk and for crims up in Melbourne. Respected, not liked. Yet Maria kept the palace and practice in trim, did him proud.

They had a Fred Williams and a Balson hanging in the Lounge, two Picasso prints and even a small Chagal. The twins were angels and went to the local Parish school. She raised fifty grand in all for the rebuilding fund. He donated his services to St. Vinny's and orphanage.

I liked them. My glass was filled with Moët when I stepped across the threshold. New Year Eve. Maria seemed so unspoiled by it all. That was ten

years ago. Later, she learned to tolerate his unexpected absences and the succession of incompetent *receptionistes*. He sent flowers far too often.

He was photographed in unfamiliar places. She confided in me. The boys starred at St. Joseph's. He drank too much when he realised there would be no more children. He lost his youth, lost important cases, started hitting her when they went up to read Law. She confided in me.

The firm's accountant let slip Gimpy had bought Tyler, the latest blonde, a Beemer to keep her happy. She was seen visiting the smooth obstetrician. Maria got out her pinking shears and cut trousers and arms of his silk Italian suits at the knees and elbows. Everyone in town sniggered.

Then she was alone in her castle on the hill, with swimming pool, sauna and ducted heating. She could look down on Queen's Park but none of her friends came calling. Gimpy prospered with his svelte, soon-pregnant partner. A girlfriend gave Maria something nice – to take the pain away.

Maria told me she would never marry again, no matter how hard I tried, no matter how happy I had made her. Nothing's permanent – she would say over and over. Or she'd say – Your ghosts are buried at Long Tan. That hurt. Hurt herself, she now knew how to hurt.

Gimpy had taught her well, hurt her bad. She hurts especially when I would flush away her happy pills. Smiled when I held out a steady arm, cry with me when we had too much and collapsed into helplessness. She could always get what she wanted and her girlfriends gave.

I must blame Gimpy. He got Nico Bellini off the St. Kilda charge. The Bellinis run routes between Cape Otway and the Werribee dropoff. A small technicality: he was paid to do it. The stinks fumed. Gimpy hated the stinks: they were as bent as himself, but wore the suits.

When Signor Bellini's crew takes the stuff out of the Forrest factory, it hits the Mall and Highton like lightning. Everyone's happy. The truckies, the housewives, the little schoolgirls, their miserable single mums, the pimple-faced boys from Valley Technical are happy, even local stinks. Chill out: fly high for $25!

There's a risk in flying too high, especially if you've built the aeroplane out of your spare parts, gossamer wings and dreams. Spars snap, wings fold, flybaby plummets. It is possible to make a soft landing now and then. Bellini sold too many angels their wings made of tissue paper.

Her sons found Maria by the pool on a Sunday afternoon. They had come home from Newman with washing and girlfriends. Maria had promised to introduce me to the girls over roast and champers. They had smelt the crisping *schweinfleisch* before we opened the frontdoor. I almost collided with Macpherson.

Kalimat 3

Young Mick and Iain really did not want their father at the funeral: but Gimpy came anyhow, mouthing his regrets, looked sideways at his angry sons. The bottle blonde wasn't there. She'd sued for divorce, but was going to luck out in the settlement: a paper pauper cannot pay maintenance.

After the funeral I took to whiskey, my one true wife, and had been threequarters under the table when the happy mark bought it and Gimpy had shown his face on the corner of Spring and Winter, Bellini at his side. That night, Gimpy was not in a smiling mood.

When Gimpy smiled, everything about him was crooked, like his soul, his buck teeth. When he was at school, two classes behind me, all the girls from Sacred Heart though he was cute. Probably was. He used to smile during interschool debates, even when cutting down the opposition. Smile Gimpy.

It is very easy to kill someone and leave a smile on her face. Macpherson had walked me through the forensics, showed me a nasal pump in which saturated horse solution had been substituted for regular medicine. Very portable, so very potent: one puff and straight off to dreamland baby!

At supper, I let Sam and Ada get off their faces on two of Wynn's Grange Hermitage. Their B&B was off the main route, and custom is slowing. I helped with the dishes, pushed drunk Sam and Ada into bed, then waited. Easy as eating apples. I loaded the sniffer.

Sam called out for me to lock up and switch on the answering service. Told me where keys to the video cabinet and scotch were kept: *mi casa su casa*: grunts and giggles then snoring. I switched on the television and pretended to watch for an hour, rehearsed my moves.

It took about twenty minutes to walk through the back lanes down to the waterline, then circled up to Gimpy's spread. Some lights were still on: good. Salvatore, one of Bellini's grunts, silver-haired & bull-like, was supposedly guarding the rear. He snored. I helped him snore deeper. For insurance, I took his gat.

Silded in through the sliding door: there were squeals and braying guffaws coming from the Loungeroom. Gimpy was having the redhead, playing Heff and Bunny. The dark girl, heavy lidded, suntan oil still glistening by the open fire, sat on the couch and yawned. The house stank of sweated oil.

Easy as apple pie. Gimpy had to take a break at some time. I wanted to wait until he went off to the bathroom, come up behind him before he'd switch on a light: as I had been trained: a big squirt up the nostrils and he'd fall into blackness.

I wanted it. The only time I'd ever killed was in Vietnam, but then I had my face in the dirt and couldn't see five yards in front of myself. This would be

different. This would be very personal, up close and dirty. I saw myself in a mirror trembling.

Then I saw two other men come through a side door. Old Bellini stood in the centre. The redhead lay slumped against a coffeetable, cradling her head, nose bleeding. The other girl was pinned down on the couch by a black suit. Old Bellini had started to shout: out of control.

I had wanted Gimpy dead: quick, clean, efficient: a guiltless kill. But Bellini liked it dirty. I counted two puffs from his silencer before I remembered my insurance policy. Gimpy was thrashing around on the floor begging for mercy. Bellini granted mercy. Then he swung round, aimed at the redhead.

Steady, stay in the shadows: use a two-hand grip: ease at the knees. First I took Bellini, then the suit: puff, puff. I didn't let the girls see me, pulled back outside, rolled unconscious Salvatore into the pool, waited for the girls to leave: melted into shadows: lit a match.

Macpherson's boys made of the smouldering mess what they could. I had got back to the B&B without incident, towing both gat and nasal spray where only I could find them. I've bought the house overlooking Queen's Park, seen to the boys' careers, told Brooke not to water my beer.

I thought it was all over. It's well after Christmas, silly season. I've been promoted and have my own office, a veneered partition - the screen me from the rest. I don't have a secretary. The dark-haired girl has called on me. She sits agitated: says simply, Bellini's brothers – they know.

Edward Reilly was born in Adelaide in 1944. He teaches Literature at Geelong High School. His M.A. thesis was on the Irish poet Thomas Kinsella, and he is now awaiting the examiners' reports on a submitted Ph.D. thesis (Creative Writing/Poetics). Reilly is a committee member of Geelong Writers, and is active as an educational consultant.

Your subscription and contribution to

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

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

is a support to literature and cultural diversity

It is a celebration of the beauty we see in the diversity and creativity of words

It assists in the promotion of Australian writers in the Arabic-speaking world, and Arab writers in the English-speaking world

الكَلِمَةُ بابُ الإرثِ الحَضَاريّ، والكِتابَة مفتاحُ دَيمُومَته

KHALED ZIADÉ

Book

Friday, Sunday

Chapters from a Biography of a City on the Mediterranean

Dr. Khaled Ziadé is a graduate of philosophy from the Lebanese University, and obtained his Ph.D. from The Sorbonne in France. He was the president of the Cultural Council of North Lebanon from 1984 to 1986, the Director of the School of Arts and Social Sciences at the Third Branch of the Lebanese University, 1985-1987, and Fellow of the Advanced Studies Institute in Berlin, Germany, 1998-1999. He is currently a lecturer at the Social Sciences Institute, the Lebanese University. He is a member of the UNESCO National Lebanese Committee, and Vice-President of the Lebanese Association of Sociology.

Dr. Ziadé has participated in many seminars and conferences in the Middle East and Europe, published several studies and articles, and so far published eight books.

The following chapters are from his book *Friday, Sunday- Chapters from a Biography of a City on the Mediterranean.* This book was published by *Dar al-Nahar*, Beirut, Lebanon in 1994, and was reprinted in 1996. It was also published in 1996 by *Thakirat al-Mutawasset*, in French, Italian, German and Spanish.

Kalimat is proud to be the first to translate and publish this work in English, starting from the present issue and in subsequent issues.

The book has been described as presenting a new type of writing about a city (Tripoli, Lebanon) that witnessed varying stages of modernism and associated social contrasts.

Introduction

There is a city on the eastern Mediterranean that used to receive, sometimes silently and at other times with violent noise, the effects of the attractions among the different parts of the Mediterranean.

We were young then, when the inhabitants of the city seemed as if they were moving fast away from the old quarters to the west side, where buildings crept among the citrus orchards that surrounded the city.

I have always been preoccupied with the implications of such a move that did not lack mutilation and destruction of the Old City and its architecture. I had assumed that the mutilation only touched old buildings and past heritage, until I discovered, a few years ago, that these destructive processes did not spare some more recent buildings that were considered symbols of modernism. When the last three colonial landmarks were destroyed, I realised that dealing with this matter was not going to be fulfilled by a mere historical or sociological analysis, but it was important to address aspects of architecture and heritage. I, therefore, revisited my own experience in my own environment where I was brought up, among people who shared their living with me. I excavated among the remains of my memory in order to follow up my special relationship with those landmarks and places that formed my world of childhood and youth.

I have not attempted to write an autobiography, document realities or resurrect norms long gone. I have, however, attempted to write the biography of places during times of their splendour and demise, as I lived them. I have attempted to write sections of a biography of changing times. What stimulated my desire to write these sections, or let us say scenes, was that intimate relationship that existed between places and times.

Olden times that disappeared after their places had been run down by age.

The passage of time leaves deep fingerprints on places in that civic medium where the pull between the traditional old and the *other* new resides side by side. This is a matter that does not lack symbolic violence before it changes into an open conflict. The time during which things coexisted in apparent peace no longer exists. This was a happy era between the fifties and sixties. A happiness made by the world of our early childhood, our first acquaintance with school. It used to flow fast, changing places that were tossed from the eastern side of the city towards the west.

The matter does not relate to facts narrated by a historian, connecting them by a causal relationship. It does not relate to nostalgia about youth, customs or rituals of those times absorbed by age. It is, therefore, of concern that one might slip into the style of a historian or a writer of antiquities. A greater concern is that the writing might change into autobiography. But this is not an autobiography as much as it is a series of landmarks in the memory of a generation, and sections from the biography of a city.

It is the biography of varied places, characterised by consecutive times, as if times become shadows that cannot be erased, particularly during fetes and on Fridays and Sundays.

Let us say that it is a story of a city in a specific period of time, with one side on the eastern Mediterranean, whilst some of it dwells inside an enclosed old history, a few hundred years, upheld by a civilisation of sandstone, minarets and narrow lanes that stood up for all types of events exchanged by the shores of the Mediterranean early in the century.

It is the biography of civilisation: buildings, streets, districts, men and ideas. It is the story of pictures hanging by twine across the streets, or pasted on walls.

In the narrow space of memories that proves difficult for analysis to comprehend, exists a possibility for literary approaches that could be akin to anthropology, and could gather the fragments of places that are a mere reflection of the shrapnel of memory.

A Biography of A Civilisation

For a long time, I have been searching within myself for the secret of the overwhelming joy that befell me when my parents were upgrading some of our home furniture. There was no real need for that, but the matter was more related to a change in the style of living. There was some desire to change some pieces for others: the grand copper bed for beds of a cheap metal and lesser heights off the floor. The tough hand-painted wooden tables for others made of Formica based on metallic legs. The three-mirrored wardrobe was removed in favour of another simpler one devoid of mirrors. This was accompanied by getting rid of some kitchen utensils; copper ones were replaced by aluminium, hand-made bamboo chairs by mass-fabricated leather chairs. To a degree, this was a situation similar to moving from the Copper Age to the Age of Formica

and Aluminium. It was the age of change from coal to electricity. The coal-heated iron and the coal winter-stove gave way to the electric iron and heater.

There was a degree of pride and ostentation in possessing these things and instruments, for they were things that others did not possess yet. Whatever was considered a must to go was sold quickly. I quite remember the broker who was in charge of moving those copper beds, huge wardrobes and other items to the weekly scrap market that contained a collection of items sufficient to refurbish quite a number of homes.

This period, covering about three decades, seems to me a period of joy. There was a belief that things were moving to the better. I remember, when I was in my first years at school in the early sixties, that I felt no passion when those items of furniture left home. On the contrary, I was happier to see the new furniture coming. The situation now also required a new arrangement for the geography of the walls: coloured landscape pictures and photographs replaced family photos. The large frame with its ornament of hand crafted silk flowers was removed. Its place remained empty. All of that was only in preparation for moving houses to a newly established street: a wider, quieter and more serious street. This was a move from a single level, free standing house to an upper floor apartment overlooking the sea that I could view from its windows.

From the balcony of our new home I could watch, as a boy, the buildings of the new huge Government House, the building of the boulevard amidst the fields and the cutting of orange trees from large orchard areas in preparation for building the Fair. Before the new buildings were able to obscure my view completely, I was able to count the ships that arrived daily to transport oil from the company whose constructions were not part of the same view.

I must mention that we did not stay in that apartment more than a few years. We later moved to a larger home, located further away from the old town. This entailed getting rid of more old domestic items, replacing them with newer ones. The new home was approximately located in the middle of the new town, at a time when terms such as 'modern' and 'new' repeated themselves within the talks of the town.

Modernity was an affair practiced daily, in one way or another, before the biography of modernity was written or read. During almost the same period, extensive removal of the veil and the fez occurred. This was the end of the fifties and the start of the sixties. The whole city, or most of its households moved from the inner streets that witnessed the birth of parents and grandparents, to new houses in districts with recently built streets.

It is possible for research, after the passage of all those years, to trace back the origins of this civic fever. It happened after 1958, and immediately following the 'revolt' that lasted four or five months, during which I was confined to home. The events at the time constituted a beginning for consciousness. They took place two or three years after the flood of the river that passed through the middle of the old Mameluke city. I assume that there was no relationship between the flood of 1955 and the revolt of 1958. Amidst the Arabism zeal, however, the city opted for ridding itself from a tradition that seemed too distant and too ancient. It was decided to demolish the houses that surrounded the river in order to widen its path, and build a corniche along its sides. Houses, public baths and streets six to eight centuries old were removed. The bulldozers that tore the middle of the town had become active. It was said that one such bulldozer malfunctioned because it hit the grave of a *wali* (saint). Planning spared the riverside mosque. Aside from that, the demolishing operations did not attract any objection. During that period, building flourished on the hill overlooking the city, to where some citizens from the flood stricken district moved. Inhabitants of the inner city also moved to the hill. Buildings were particularly creeping towards the harbour along three routes, so that today the city buildings almost connect to the buildings on the harbour.

Writing a biography of a city involves profound dialectics, that would initially seem chaotic and destructive, and so it is in some of its aspects, as if modernisation can only be accomplished by taking revenge against the past. Truly, constructional modernisation can take its path ignoring the old, such as having the old city beside the modern one without conflict or waste of history, be it not for the fact that men themselves want to rid themselves of their selves. They, therefore, take revenge against their past, and they opt for hiding it, destroying it or eliminating it with contempt.

The age of modernisation in the city began over a century ago, towards the end of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* Period, during the rule of Medhat Pasha the *Wali* (Governor) of Syria in 1879. Medhat Pasha was saturated with modernising and constitutional ideas. During his brief governance, he paid many visits to the towns under his jurisdiction, providing advice to dignitaries to build new edifices in their cities. A public park and a mosque still stand in our city as a mark of his advice. The *Saraya* (Government House), in the *Tal* district, dates back to the late Ottoman period. Opposite this building is the clock tower that was built in 1898, commemorating a quarter of a century of the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid. Constructional modernisation was initially, however, not

solely Ottoman; Europeans participated in it as well. Missionaries built several schools, mostly choosing areas at or outside the boundaries of the old city, or in the Christian quarter and its surrounds. There were French schools such as *Les Freres*, and others for the Italians. This is in addition to the American and Russian schools in the City or its Harbour.

Al-Tal, where the park, the Government House and the Clock Tower were built, was a district attracting Ottoman modernisation, where a number of local notables were encouraged to build mansions in an area that was considered too desolate by most city inhabitants.

After 1908, and for a few years only, the Unionists spread a wave of modern ideas appropriate to their revolutionary principles. The Ottoman provincial governor built a straight road among the orchards, connecting the old city with the harbour. This road is still known by his name. Ironically, the street that was established along this straight line, is today the most modern of the city streets, with westernised shops spread along its sides whilst itself carrying the name of an Ottoman administrator. The provincial governor intended, had he had time, to extend the straight road to penetrate the city up to the castle that lies on the hill overlooking the city. He also built, among other things, establishments such as a home for the aged.

The actual period of modernisation, however, is the period of the mandate. The centre of power moved outside the old city. A centre for the city was built outside it: a European style public park near the Ottoman park, schools, police station, shops, hotels, night clubs, etc. They all took *al-Tal* and its surrounds as their place. *Al-Tal* became the core of the modern city that extended towards the west and the northwest.

The modern city could have expanded on a large span of orchards without touching the old city, particularly that some modernists came from another space. Constructional modernisation is, however, a message addressed to the people of the city. They get embroiled in it, and they respond to it. It is inevitable that the new buildings must touch the old ones, because constructional modernism takes the forms of extension, spreading and expansion as if emanating from the old city. This is because it aims at liberating the old from its shackles. It is thus not possible for us to imagine a buffer zone between the two cities. On the contrary, there is an overlap, particularly when the new drives away the old. In the beginning, some old buildings are partially demolished, but it is the building of roads that is the predicament of the old city, particularly when it loses the ability to resist. Building roads is the product of the mentality of the straight line, the short

distance between two points and the child of the age of the car (the automobile in those days). It is the process that eats up complete streets and leaves an ugly deformity in what remains of them. The first road that was built during the mandate was over the shoulder of the city, penetrating it beside its great mosque from the southwest.

The modern city during the Mandate expanded and grew in three directions, except that of the old city. But this growth of the colonial city, if we can use this term, cannot be compared with what happened after the Mandate.

The Mandate almost left behind it a complete nucleus for modern civic life. As mentioned before, its formation started towards the end of the Ottoman regulative period. Indeed, new streets containing buildings, residential buildings, government establishments, private schools, shops, hotels and cafés were built. The new scene did not lack industrial factories that were established in other districts of the city. The locals participated in this feat effectively. They were the substance of modernisation, including country folks, Christians and Moslems, who were more enthusiastic about entering a new type of modern living. A notable migration took place from neighbouring and remote villages to the city that now had communities that added variety to the scene, and participated in the city's commercial and social activities.

The demographic structure of the city changed. Before World War One, the majority of the population of twenty thousand was Moslems. Orthodox Christians constituted one quarter of the population. During the Mandate, the city hosted citizens of the ex-Ottoman state such as Maronites, Armenians, Greeks and immigrants from Crete, in addition to some Italians and French. During World War Two, Moroccan, English, Senegalese and Australian soldiers resided in it for some time.

This is a picture captured by the memory of the contemporaries, and gives us an idea about a demographic change and expansion. It is a picture transmitted to the independence period after 1943. If we remove the décor of WWII off this picture, the resulting structure appears to be of permanent and continuous characteristics, as if, from the point of view of the social structure and activity, the independence period is a continuation of the Mandate.

It would only be three to four years after independence and WWII, when matters developed unceasingly, not here only, but all over the East. The first Israeli-Arab war erupted, resulting in the arrival of a wave of Palestinians who were compelled to leave their homes, and this affected the mood of the city significantly. At that time, the seemingly stable city was shaken, and a process resembling an operation to remove the traces of colonialism began.

It is not possible to comprehend matters the way we mention without casting an historical tint on the sequence of events, and rearranging these matters rationally, particularly because they seem reactionary in their time. Difficult circumstances and critical moments are what rearrange things, changing viewpoints and influencing public opinion, and gradually affecting the demographic structure of the city. Communities of Jews, Armenians, Greeks and others who had lived there for some time, now thought about migrating, either to near or faraway countries. Some of the Maronites who settled in the city for some time also thought of leaving it, for various reasons, including heading towards the capital city, the centre of activity, administration and work.

Indeed, the scene that became the city's character in the first half of the twentieth century was part of a series of changes that overwhelmed the Eastern Mediterranean right after WWI. In all the coastal cities from Greece to Turkey, to Syria and Palestine, groups of various ethnicities were on the move. There was some relatively wide spread civic exchange involving opposite shores of the Mediterranean.

It was ten years before we witnessed a wave of local violence. However, the ten years between 1948 and 1958 were full of events, but we are concerned here with their civic aspect. Population exchange among the cities receded. The Italians and Greeks kept away from the shores of Egypt and the eastern shores, some of the Armenians headed towards Europe and the United States of America, the Jewish minorities dwindled in the cities almost to nothing, and an intransigence in religious and national feelings took hold as a belated reaction to an abhorred colonialism.

During critical times, and in fits repeated approximately once every ten years: 1948-1958 and 1967-1975, there is chaotic destruction or demolition that takes the form of removing colonialism, its symbols, its likeness and its traces. It extends to institutions that resemble the colonial example or are its remnants. Periods of calm and local peace witness, as well, demolition and systematic local removal of constructions related to the colonial period. Over the past thirty years, organised demolition of the greater part of buildings of the missionary and the Mandate periods has taken place. The school that had occupied a large area of land at the border of the old city inside the Christian Quarter was sold to a number of local financiers after its administration and pupils moved outside the city. The buyers demolished the old edifice that educated generation after generation of students over a century, leaving the

place that was once a school an empty square. Through its naked space, you could see the old city that had been horribly mutilated over the years.

A few years ago an Italian school was sold. The building was demolished completely, and the colonial trees were uprooted. Before that, *Les Freres* at the harbour was demolished.

The French girls school that was established at the end of the nineteenth century beside the old city was like a doorstep to the new city. It was surrounded by a great wall, so that nothing could be seen from outside except the tiled roofs of the buildings inside. Watching girls was only possible during departure time when the great iron gate was opened. In the area that was occupied by the school, five or six buildings were constructed forming what looked like a popular commercial and residential quarter: a mixture of offices, shops and apartments. But there are other older examples. The American Hospital and the American Library disappeared. Some western financial institutions and commercial agencies departed. By this we mean establishments belonging to a previous era, and missions built and kept by active missionaries as we mentioned before. The prime of these institutions was, however, during the colonial era. When that era subsided, some of these institutions fell into decline. Some others, however, were able to preserve their continuity and adapt to the new circumstances, particularly that the style of life associated with the French attracted many inhabitants of the city. In contrast, there was a tendency to remove aspects of western life, particularly those at odds with local customs, and those that failed to colour local life with their style and character. Those aspects fell and receded.

What is noteworthy is the reproduction of the same western type, or a similar one, by the city folks themselves. In the period following 1948, a wave of cinemas spread in the city: large and neat theatres of the Italian or American type, taking striking western names. After 1958, the phenomenon of street cafés spread, again according to western specifications with foreign names. After 1967, came the turn of boutique shops that sold clothes and ready made goods, at a time when the traditional crafts of the old city were declining. After 1975, construction of residential buildings and clusters lead to the creation of quarters and streets similar to the type known in the south of Italy or the southern cities of the United States of America.

Some demolition is followed by construction, and the spread of building phenomena akin to the growth of fungi. Demolition, however, did not stop at edifices of the time of the Mandate and the missionaries only. It also affected historical buildings and edifices such as the demolition of the late Ottoman

constructions such as the Government House, the police station, some schools and other buildings. In addition, there was the demolition of constructions built by the city inhabitants only a few decades before, such as the Electricity Company and the elegant hotel surrounded by a rose garden. Here and there, residential apartments took hold, and lanes for work and dwelling were formed.

It is deeply dialectic, commutative and to a large extent confusing. There is demolition followed by expansion in the spread of construction. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, modern construction had a striking identity revealing French and Italian models, and others. Construction used to integrate all the meanings associated with particular life styles. Dwellers of the old city revealed themselves by their clothes, professions and methods of recreation. Dwellers of the modern city revealed themselves by contrasting comparative features. Modern construction used to storm into old construction. Today, however, a demographic mutation connected the old and the modern: the old is no longer old, and the new has not ascended to the level of modernism.

In all of that, there does not seem to be a certain identity for either the removal of certain landmarks, or the construction of other alternatives. It seems that we have to search for the meaning of all of that in a different way. There are reasons for demolishing older buildings, and those no longer comfortable in order to construct buildings and establishments that are more commercially viable. In place of a school with all its large fields, areas, and even spacious classrooms, it is possible to build several commercial and residential buildings. This explanation is, however, a partial one. It is difficult to imagine, after those great buildings lost their functions, any other functions for them within the fabric of the city aside from what they ended up being. This is why it seems that their only fate was demolition. Those who are lovers of the ancient and the old can feel sad to see this excessive destruction. It is possible to suggest that this building or that can be changed into a museum! But these are impractical ideas from varying viewpoints.

There is a demographic storm without any identity, bestowing its type to the city construction. It is neither old nor modern. In this dialectic of building, demolition and rebuilding, there is some tearing to parts of the identity, and some deterioration of both heritage and modernism alike. These are buildings with no eminence or prestige, lacking in taste and shape, aiming at guaranteeing elementary living conditions.

Kalimat 3

Some of those who left the old city four or five decades ago, and sold their copper bed, wooden box, the wardrobe with mirrors now establish societies for the preservation of that ancient relic and that mosque. Some others return to the old souk to search for the coal iron and the copper bowl. It is the search for the fragments of the spread identity, and a deceptive yearning to the self in its search for a token originality. But those who show their remorse for demolishing those solid edifices, and for the decline of those buildings that are over five centuries old, do not do, or can do anything to preserve what remains.

All cities are heading to represent types without identity. The construction movement of today, and as it has been going on for some time, indicates a loss of identity. We are neither in the East nor in the West, passing a period difficult to name and identify. Cities consistently grow in a form expressing the emerging generations.

كلمات

Kalimat

Kalimat is an Australian-Arabic literary quarterly, published by SyrAus Incorporated: a non-profit cultural association.

Two issues are published in English (March & September), and two in Arabic (June & December).

Deadlines: 45 days before the first day of the month of issue.

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

Writers contributing to Kalimat will receive a free one year subscription. Their work might also be translated into Arabic or English, and the translations published in Kalimat or other projects by SyrAus or in the Middle East. No other payment is made.

Contributors can send material as a printed hardcopy, saved on a floppy computer disk or via electronic mail. Please save files as *Rich Text Format.*

Single issue for individuals: $10.00 in Australia
$20 overseas (posted)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

(All in Australian currency)

For individuals

Within Australia: $40 per annum (four issues) posted
Overseas: $80 per annum (four issues) posted
(Half above rates for either the English or Arabic two issues)

Organisations: double above prices in each case

All overseas payments must be made by bank draft in Australian currency

Please make your cheque payable to *SyrAus Incorporated.*

All correspondence to:
P.O. Box 242, Cherrybrook, NSW 2126, Australia.

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

كَلِمَات مجلة أسترالية عربية أدبية فصلية، تصدر عن سيروس إنكوربورايتد، المجلس الثقافي الأسترالي السوري، وهو مؤسسة ثقافية لا تبغي الربح. يصدر عددان باللغة الإنجليزية (مارس/آذار وسبتمبر/أيلول)، وعددان بالعربية (يونيو/حزيران وديسمبر/كانون الأول). آخر موعد بالتقدم بالمواد لكل عدد هو ستون يوماً قبل أول أيام الشهر الذي يصدر فيه العدد. مثلاً لعدد ديسمبر/كانون الأول، يجب أن تصلنا المواد في أول أكتوبر/تشرين الأول. لكننا ننصح المساهمين بإرسال موادهم قبل ذلك، نظراً لكثرة المواد الواردة. من الضروري جداً إرسال تفاصيل الاتصال كاملة بما في ذلك أرقام الهواتف. كما نطلب نسخة عن السيرة الذاتية للمؤلف/المؤلفة، أو بضعة أسطر تلخص منجزاته/منجزاتها (المستجدات فقط لمن سبق له إرسالها).

تنشر كَلِمَات النثر والشعر والدراسات والقصة والفنون باللغة العربية أو الإنجليزية وفق طريقتين أساسين:

أولاً ـ **المواد الأصيلة** التي لم يسبق نشرها مطلقاً بأية لغة.

ثانياً ـ **المواد المترجمة**، أو التي يتقدم بها المؤلف لتقوم كَلِمَات بترجمتها. وهذه يجب أن تكون منشورة سابقاً بلغتها الأصلية. وتقدم كَلِمَات خدمة الترجمة مجّاناً للذين تقبل أعمالهم. (الأعمال التي تأتي مترجمة سلفاً قد يتوفر لها حظٌ أكبر بالنشر نظراً لضغط العمل لدينا.) يجب تزويدنا بالمرجع الذي تم النشر فيه، بما في ذلك اسم الناشر، والسنة، ورقم المجلد، والعدد في حال الدوريّات. جميع المواد المقدمة للنشر تخضع لتقييم قبل قبولها، كما أن الدراسات الأكاديمية ترسل إلى مُحكمين مختصين.

يحصل المتقدمون بأعمالهم الأصيلة إلى كلمات على الأفضلية في إمكانية ترجمة أعمالهم لاحقاً ونشرها في كلمات أو مشاريع أخرى يتبناها المجلس. ونحن نعتبر هذا مكافأة عينية على جهودهم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتلقى من نشر في كلمات اشتراك سنة واحدة مجّاناً. لا نقدم في الوقت الحاضر أية تعويضات أخرى.

الأسعار والاشتراك للأفراد (القيم أدناه بالدولار الأسترالي)

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

الاشتراك السنوي (٤ أعداد) 40$ ضمن أستراليا، أو 80$ بالبريد الجوي. (نصف القيمة للاشتراك بإحدى اللغتين فقط.)

للمنظمات والمؤسسات والمصالح التجارية ضعف القيم أعلاه في كل حالة

ترسل الدفعات من خارج أستراليا بحوالة مصرفية بالعملة الأسترالية (يحرر الشك باسم SyrAus Incorporated)

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

هاتف/فاكس 61 (2) 9484 3648 بريد إلكتروني raghid@ozemail.com.au

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

العدد الثالث (إنجليزي) أيلول/سبتمبر ٢٠٠٠

مجلة أسترالية عربية أدبية فصلية

تصدر عن سيروس المجلس الثقافي الأسترالي السوري

في هذا العدد

الكَلِمَةُ بابُ الإرثِ الحَضاريّ، والكِتابَة مفتاحُ دَيمُومَته

The Three Sisters

A painting by the Syrian artist **Samih al-Basset**, inspired by his visit to the Blue Mountains area in New South Wales, Australia.

Oil and gold on canvas