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Translating the Unspoken Language

When Beethoven began suffering from deafness, he found a way to feel the sound of his music as he composed it. Actually, he more than felt it—the genius of a man jammed a wooden rod between his teeth and rested the opposite end on his piano soundboard. This is known as bone conduction—the passing of vibrations through the mandible into the cochlea. He circumvented his damaged middle ear by routing sound directly into the inner eardrum.

When we write, we do just like Beethoven! We're deaf to emotion: that special, difficult language. We can only describe the echoes of the original voice and draw shadows. The most skilled, expressive writers can touch this circle of feelings like tangents, but seldom go inside!

What I can say, however, is that writing is the logical consequence of feeling lonely, because loneliness pushes individuals to listen to their fears, dreams, loves, hatreds, indifferences, desires, and show infinite sympathy to themselves or creatures that bear life burdens like them.

Many times when we dream, we leap out of bed full of passion to capture the dream we had hours before. But when we look down at what we've written, we sigh with dissatisfaction and despair:

“No, it wasn't like that!”

It's never the same!

That's why the writer is always happiest when the reader says, smiling, “You wrote just what I FEEL.”

During my precious pregnancy period, I was inspired to write a novel divided into the different stages of a baby's fetal development, which would allow me to write unique kinds of stories. For instance, in the fourth week, the fetus is the size of a poppy seed, but on the thirty-third, it grows to the size of a pineapple. I would write a story somehow associated with each of these subsequent stages. But after losing my child, I couldn't write a single line!

I hope I have the strength to write it one day!

“Brothers, I lost something big, incredibly big—I can't even say it.”(Salah Jahin, Egyptian Poet)

How do writers do it?

It's not just about going through a range of foreign experiences. It's about the special talent to learn by receiving new knowledge and sensations, like a baby constantly passing through new milestones.

I often wonder: How could Arthur Rimbaud turn from poet to slaves and weapons dealer? And secretly, I ask: what EXTRAORDINARY poetry might he have written in those awful years?

In my short story (Saxon's Promise) I tried to get at the feeling of bottled-up anger through smell:

“I completely forgot my favorite scent in adolescence, coconut, which was later replaced by another smell that was similar to me: The smell of the electric kettle every time its plastic almost melts when the water boils, and then turns off by itself!”

In my first novel *Al-Fishawi*, I challenged myself with narrating polyphonically through the living and the dead, animals, and inanimate objects! I wouldn't call it anthropomorphization, because I wanted to tell the story through their distinct perspectives. Rather, it was a type of incarnation: the pigeon narrates from the dovecote, watching from above: the road narrates through the shapes, colors, and conditions of the shoes walking on it; and a panda graffiti, with dark halos around its eyes, with a smudge of white paint in one of them, bears witness to the loss of eyesight that many young Egyptians experienced during and after the 2011 revolution.

In my third novel *Yalda* (Night) I innovated further: the dying protagonist, Hafiz, recalls his whole life story over thirty chapters in a narration that is both historical and contemporary. I faced the most difficulty writing his eight imaginary dialogues in eight separate chapters, where Hafiz meets eight mystic poets, the last being himself. He loses his sensations and perceptions gradually, so in each chapter I was forced to communicate through different language—sometimes only using visuals, or through hearing, smell, other times complete silence, by dancing in an invisible world, or finally in the last teardrop that falls from Hafiz's eye.

As a writer, I believe fiction should balance emotion and thought. The emotional aspect is the most powerful, because it grabs the reader's attention and elicits a reaction, and moreover translates an unspoken, unexpressed feeling and awakens our inner consciousness.