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In the Beginning... and Later

The fever called "living"! - Edgar Allan Poe

An ancient lightning... a small courtyard... a green spot in a child's memory... summers, hot summers... a ghetto that knows rain and mud... and looks forward to mysterious days and horizons.

When I was a child, I used to watch remote stars from poor rooftops - where families would sleep during summer's unmerciful nights - and I drew whole virtual worlds there, or kept watching through glass and streaming away inside tiny bubbles when the sky poured... Maybe I've been in love with life since the beginning?

But "history" doesn't care about individuals, or societies, or peoples, as I recognized later. And beginnings are no more than innocent, neutral initial scenes.

Gradually, life revealed a grim face, with a rough tribal color and military mien. A regime, a dictatorship, a person, which grew like a poisonous parasitical plant, and started to target life in all its shapes and in its final shelters.

When the Iraqi-Iranian war started, I was 18 years old. What a paradox! The year that is supposed to be the year of a person's deep bloom towards life was the year I came to know what war is, loss, coffins, screams, orphans, widows, and fear. So, *April*, eventually, *can be the cruelest month...*

We were expecting that it would all take a few weeks or a few months, but years dragged years behind them like military vehicles dragging their ugly muddy ammunition in the mud, and the war continued for a full eight years. We grew up meanwhile, but something had already died, or faded, inside us. Like the many dear ones we lost and the many dreams that we had to bid farewell even before recognizing them. Iraqi society became a deconstructed one: hatred spread, fears, secret reports, the news of prisons, executions, and torture which can chill a man to the bone.

Should I say more about the second gulf war and the later embargo? I don't think so. But I might say that the red color of the war days turned to a black dusty one in the embargo: huge, vast mourning and deep silence.

And just in the middle of the embargo decade, when I had almost reached the middle of my thirties, something happened inside me, something curious, a moment of enlightenment, a shift, although a tragic one. I suddenly felt that we had already lost a large portion of our lives and souls, and what was left, with all the scars that it already had, was going to be lost, too.

Yes, "history" can be so cruel that whole generations might not only live under dictatorship and terror, but die, too, under that same dictatorship and terror.

I believe that it was in those days that the deepest cry in my life was born. A cry that escalated from an unknown place, to become a hurricane

sweeping away the "simple furniture" of my previous existence. And I had nothing, at that time, but the pen and the paper; in other words, the *Word...*

Actually, I had always felt a serious need to write, since my adolescence maybe, and I had always written poems and tried forms here and there, with a small ring of friends, because the idea of publishing or being a poet was not serious to me. Maybe because I didn't recognize my "deepest identity" yet? Maybe because I didn't dig deeper inside my soul, or maybe, eventually, because I was aware, subconsciously, that what I was going to write could not be published in those days of dictatorship. Unless, of course, I was ready for more political persecution, of which I had already had enough.

So... I wrote about everything, almost: ancient childhood, the *missed life*, time, meaning, the world, and existence.

However, I wrote about Hope, too. But what kind of hope?

It was that kind which can only grow in ignorance and forgetting, like unnoticed weeds among tiles, when silent years flow again after big wars and fires. It is that hope which only the basic fabric of life can preserve.

Yet, however cruel the things a poet, or a writer, passes through, the result will be failed literature if he doesn't have enough spiritual power to surpass his painful experience and reconstruct it in his literary aesthetic consciousness. Something of that was what Archibald MacLeish said about Emily Dickinson's poetry, which was great poetry in spite of its melancholic atmosphere, because she didn't write in a merely *broken* tone.

Indeed, I didn't pay serious attention to literary form until later. Only then could I recognize some elements in my writing, like the inclination to write short or very short pieces, and to charge the word, the sentence, or the whole poem with the maximum possible *energy—the potential options of interpretation*.

Some critics and readers said that my studying architecture influenced my inclination to avoid unnecessary elaboration; some said that my partiality to philosophy made my writing include both the daily and the eternal, the transitory and the essential, the very local and the universal, but in an *allusive*, implicit language.

My first poetry collection (*The Circle of Sundial*, 1998) was a metrical one. So was the second. But the third was a mixture of metrical and prose poems. My last, *Dayplaces*, was all prose poem, though a rhythmic prose.

If the one basic merit of any important literature is "modernity," as I believe, then it is essential to define what is meant by this over-controversial term. I might mean by being modern the ability to be in contact with the deep heartbeat of the present moment. This demands continuous innovation and experimenting with form, not only to avoid the boredom and monotony which the reader might suffer, but because formal innovation is the necessary container of the most contemporary visions of an incredibly complicated and increasingly fast-moving world.

One of the totally new features in some of my poems, as far as I know, is the suggested footnote title: when there is or there is not a title, and there is a footnote followed by a question mark. I think I have the inclination, too, to

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invite the reader to participate in formulating the meaning, right away, based on the title, a reader who should have some speculation abilities, especially since we live in a world where, I believe, there is no definite final meaning or truth.

In fact, I detest *pedantic* ambiguity, when there is no real depth, or even what some might call the “intellectual” poem, which I can barely understand. I think poetry, and writing in general, are much more than games or arrangements of words, although they are, technically, no more than this – another paradox of our *permanent labyrinth*.

The reader might notice that I revisited, in my latest collection, *Dayplaces*, some ancient texts and myths, like *Dante's Inferno*, *Ithaca*, and *The Arabian Nights*. Here I do not deal with the ancient text or myth as a ready-made thing but instead seem to try to make it *dissolve* in what might appear transitory and “usual.” So it is no surprise when Noah’s flood becomes a drop of rain or sweat on someone’s forehead, or Odysseus’ trip becomes a few-minutes transport in a vehicle, or even *Dante's Inferno* becomes the slow rhythm of a life which persistently rejects its children and their dreams.

After all, a lot has happened since those days of my *writing earthquake*, and now, as I, and a whole generation, approach the threshold of our fifties, I might only say that the bleeding has continued, in so many different ways, and so has the struggle to formulate and re-formulate the word.