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Editorial

Baghdad the Capital of Culture

The year 2013 will mark the return of Baghdad to, OFFICIALLY, function as a center of culture and cultural development through its selection as a capital of Arab culture. Many cultural activities were held in different parts of the city last year and they will continue to gain momentum this year too. Universities, union, organizations, music halls, theaters, galleries and cultural centers were active this year. No doubt this cultural liveliness is very necessary to bring life to a city that was forced to cease playing its cultural role because of a stupid dictatorship and an incompetent democracy. But activities are not enough without a vision. When cultural builders realize that Baghdad is not simply an historical place, but a pivot, a starting point and certainly a mission, then one can safely say that the city has certainly regained its soul and role. Ceremonial activities do not mean anything if they are not based on a clear-cut vision that starts first with the preparation of the material base prerequisite for any true cultural achievement. But who is capable of doing this? Who are the cultural builders? Who are the ones responsible for creating the vision? And the simple answer is, unequivocally, all the Iraqi people and certainly not the government alone or the Ministry of Culture alone or the Iraqi Writers’ Union alone. All the people will certainly be able to formulate a new vision when the level of awareness is increased, political stability is achieved, and the economy of the country provides abundance for everyone. To reach this, all cultural institutions-families, schools, universities, mosques, and cultural cafes and clubs- must play their parts properly and with consciousness. It is a long, complex process in which the government must function as the facilitator, mediator and executor. We all must seize this moment and positively respond to it.

Editor
Sadek R. Mohamed
Articles
Introduction: Reading and Text

It has become common today, in the critical activity, to say that the analysis of texts is based on the act of reading performed by the reader, which is parallel to the writing of the text itself. Speaking of the effectiveness and centrality of reading ranged from paying attention to the text producer, i.e. a poet, as a human being or a self. The text itself, as a body, is realized and independent of its writer, then comes reading that gives the text a place at which several horizons converge: the writer's horizon, the horizon of the text, and the horizon of reading, whose amalgamation and interaction create the new form of the text. Thus, they reject focusing on the reading of the text, due to its producer, thereby turning its utterances into documents that follow and track the reference, and embody its dominance and its outside entity without attending to the body [of the text], its vocabularies, internal systems, and qualitative characteristics. As for the approaches of reading and acceptability, all parts of the text reflect its relationship to its genre, on the one hand, and the internal features it realizes, which are revealed by reading on the other hand.

Reading the text, then, was no longer ruled by the existence of the body by itself, but bypassed it to the reader's interpretive activity permitted by this body without being hampered, oppressed, or suppressed through being automatically linked to its owner, life, psyche, and ideology. The activity of reading and interpretation became an integral part of the authorship, which does not necessarily match with it nor impose a unified approach.
for the explanation, understanding, and interpretation. Thus, the freedom of texts was attained by not subjugating them to a final meaning (or purpose), and the freedom of the reader was guaranteed through multiple and multifarious readings, provided that they are based on the textual inputs, and what they raise at the level of the reception. Therefore, many terms entered into the field of the analysis of poetic texts, some of which are used nowadays in our language such as (text), (reading), (interpretation), (internal rhythm), and others which are out of our question. Each of those terms has its own adjacent concept, invented in our Arabic critical discourse. The text, then, is the new name of the literary work, be it poetry or prose, and the signification corresponds to the meaning which is singled out for the units of sentences and phrases, whereas the unit of signification lies in the text in its capacity as a specific entity of locution that has a holistic existence.

As for reading and interpretation, they replaced the explanation and exegesis, and reading became "that which turns the text into a meaning and makes it an articulate saying ". The text is not a structure independent of its recipient, and can be described only within the process of its reception. But we have to confess first the novelty of these terms, because 'text' as a term and a concept was not known by name and signification in our old criticism, and the best thing given by the linguistic dictionary for this lexicon is to highlight and reveal the object, its purpose, limit, or end. Terminologically speaking, 'text' is "what has become more explicit than what is apparent of the meaning in speaking, and steering speech for that meaning". We note in those two definitions the connection of the text with the meaning and showing its relatedness. It is not an independent structure, but belongs to a purpose whose meaning is intended to convey. It is also said about its definition in more specific way that "what could only have one meaning and was not subjected to interpretation". This is a confirmation of its association, for them, first with the meaning and with intentionality later on.

However, when we oppose what is said about the unlikelihood of the text for interpretation, we find that the reader's task does not lie in demonstrating the meaning, which the text originally contrives to demonstrate, but in rephrasing and rewording it through interpretation. The reader's task is no longer limited to "the reception" of the text only, but also it is extended to "meet it". This is beyond the theory of the text itself, i.e. the ideas that define poeticism by detecting the system of the text and its internal relationship, which is explicated by utterances without the intervention of the reader. It could be said that the traditional theory of text looks into its impact on the recipient, while the theories of reading assume researching into the impact of the reader himself on the text. While we are assaulted by texts with their verbal and semantic repertoire, we – readers - have our own corresponding repertoire. The following diagram can illustrate this:

**Author**

**Text Theory × the Text the Recipient**

**Reading and Acceptability Theories × the Text the Reader**

where they converge on traversing the writer's presence and being sufficient with his textual presence (via his text), and differ in increasing the effectiveness of the reader who meets the text in the reading theories. Highlighting the text was resulted in the demolition of the traditional naturalization of literary genres (poetry / prose), and the shared name
became a catalyst for the approaching of poetry from prose, the issue of which the Arab writers were aware. Al-Tawheed quoted Ibn Hindu the writer as saying: "If it was looked at poetry and prose in terms of comprehending their circumstances and conditions, and getting acquainted with their introductions and conclusions, as if poetry had something of prose on the one hand, and prose had something of poetry on the other, and had not been for such an epithet, they neither agreed nor disagreed". So, the schism between prose and poetry is not complete as it is perceived by the traditional criticism, and the presence of each of them in the other whether explicitly or implicitly is an evidence for their affinity in the origin and direction, and the book "The Prose of Poetry and Untying the Knotted" is nothing but an attempt to restore the prestige of the literary genres according to their established traditions which we see that their change is so inevitable that introduces the advantages of some of which in the other. As such, the distinction between genres falls, and the functions exchange completely as their members do.

**Qualitative New Merits**

The prose poem entered into the literary genres in its capacity as a poetic text despite the ambiguity involved in its name and concept. Many researchers referred that the text is considered a rendezvous of the horizons of reading and can be listed under the textual classifications, because it has qualitative characteristics and internal merits that can be shown by the textual analysis and subjugating it to reading:

1. It is a poem to be read addressing, through the paper body, the reader's eyes and not his ears. It addresses his written, and not oral, knowledge. This presumes many advantages of which are: investing the surface of the paper for communication without pressing on the oral means by meter, rhyme, and oral linguistic formulas or forms. So, it makes use of the whiteness [of paper], for example, to connect the sense with time, and punctuation marks to communicate emotion. Such cannot be invested by another text while being under the control of meter, rhyme, and the stereotyped poetic language.

2. It [prose poem] benefits from its textuality and evasion from naturalization to make use of the narrative characteristics, in particular, settings, the language of narration, naming, dialogue, and event, although it has its own time, i.e. the poetic time that does not necessarily correspond with the outside time. Susan Bernard notices the prevalence of narration in poetry since surrealism. It is a narration falling "outside the time" using the technical means to narrate and the sequence of events that are realistically narrated, despite the prose poem neither complies with those means nor provides us with a general or apparent logic. That does not mean it lacks the internal logic, because "every poem no matter how free it is from the rational thought, it has its internal logic which gives it its organic build and presence".

3. We mean by rhythm the component that bestows the prose poem with its special poetic merits. Such an internal rhythm that compensates for the outside absent music. We usually feel and recognize this rhythm without a limited description
because it is variable according to the input of the text, centred on the idea, image, and utterance, but it contributes to the growth and generating of the significance through all, and not part of, the components of the text. Rhythm is more comprehensive than meter, the outside music achieved in the poetic line, and rhyme. It is a vertical line that runs through, and organizes, the text. The meter is just one of its elements, along with language or meaning, rhyme, and the parts of the poetic line. It, therefore, includes the meter and goes beyond to intervene the linear form of the poem, as is clear below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Internal Rhythm</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Linear Shape of the Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
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</tbody>
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Thus, the internal rhythm became a positive factor embodying the entirety of the text because it contains all the elements and we can track and monitor it in the white paper and the unseen connotations to which they refer utterances, and in the parallelism of their ideas, their concordances, and their changing relationships.

4. It generates suggestions not meanings, and this confirms that it is a suggestive poem because it makes the phonetic part poetically not independent; being sufficient with the connotations resulted from the indicative elements. This contributes to the freedom and multiplicity of reading. The prose poem does not give specific, fixed meanings, but creates suggestions usually generated by a verbal stimulus (a word, a phrase or an image) and then on which are based narrative elaborations that lead to the creation of the impact of rhymed poetry in the recipient, and leave him free to generate other secondary sensations. The position of the recipient changes as long as the position of utterer was changing all the time.

5. It is a holistic poem no part of which may dispense with the other parts, besides it cannot be recognized with verbalization alone. Therefore, it is more valid for reading than others. In it, the poet's ego, the ego of the text (or the poetic ego), and the ego of the outside world (or objects) are fused together. At another level do fall the connotations of the text and the reader's interpretative explanations. All of that make their organic correlation a distinct phenomenon beginning with the title and ending by the last marks. It is perhaps the misunderstanding of the prose poem that drives others to delete it from the textual taxonomies and makes them not see its inner and qualitative merits and characteristics. It is a poem that does not advertise itself but gives the reader the freedom of discovering its own internal logic, its time, its rhythm, its overtones, and its organic holism.

In the following part of the study, we try to probe those features and characteristics in Unsi Al-Haj's text in which we will see that the linguistic level allows the identification of denotation of the past and the present as poetic, not syntactic, times. In
addition, we will see the position of the utterer who affects the position of the recipient (when the narrator gets older, and refers to the passage of time on the girl's dream using the story narrative language). Narration, as understood by Unsi Al-Haj in his introduction to the collection of poems "Will not", is like the description in the prose poem - loses its time end.

In the first half of the text, we will see that the external narrator describes neutrally and without interference, but after the whiteness that separated the two sections of the text, it [the narrator] entered into the narration directly. It is a written poem understood only by knowing the implications of the whiteness and its deliberate lining, and that creates its own rhythm as well, as we see it embodied in the symmetry (and growing) of the girl's dream. We might say that the language of Unsi Al-Haj is illusive here, where as much it seems to us ascetic in logic and coherence, frivolous, worried as it is found disciplined to perform its connotations and to imply them in a sequence. He maintains the synchrony of actions according to the level of narration in the text, and he relies on repetition to create the signification or sometimes its multiplicity.

Al-Haj's poem is illuminative according to Susan Bernard's classifications of the patterns of the prose poem, because it "wipes out the limits of space and time". It is contrary to the "formal poem" that commits itself to them. In addition, it deliberately ignores its reference with which it entered into an incarnate contextualization with it, and what I mean here is that the story of the girl and butterfly, which are mutually identified, is originally a Chinese legend.
Adeeb Kamal Ad-deen

From Mesopotamia to Australia: The poet is the poet

By: Shakir Hassan Radhi

Writing about Adeeb Kamal Ad-deen’s poetry is not an easy task, especially that I have not seen him from more than fifteen years. However, reading his recent poems reminds me of the fact that I am dealing with a poet who has been progressing towards the realization of the function of poetry, taking into account his deep Mesopotamian background that enriches his language, imagery, diction and discourse. Though Adeeb is inspired by a long tradition of poetry that enriched his career, he remains unique in his use of the poetic and philosophic heritage that inspired his poems, a material that animates his life and ours. Because the material that we draw upon to make poems is also the stuff of wills, death certificates, constitutions and declarations of eternal love between real human beings, “breaking and re-writing of the rules that govern non-poetic language are more than indulgence or entertainment” as Richard Bradford puts it (2010:41).

As such, poetry offers a means of expression in which uniqueness seems attainable. It does so by providing a catalyst between two independent networks of conventions, the intrinsically poetic and those that poetry shares with non-poetic language. (Ibid).

Applying these concepts to Adeeb’s experience, we will discover that he had succeeded in employing simple but symbolic language to convey his deep experience that relies on
old Babylonian (Note: he was born in Babel), culture that seeped into the holy books and constituted sacred beliefs in human history. Yet, the reader of Something Wrong, finds that, my ex-student, and I have the honor to say that, embodied Jacobson’s theory of the poetic function which “projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination”, (Quoted in Bradford, p.43), by closing the gap between language and reality. The poet selects words not according to a sense of duty to an extrinsic frame of reference. Rather, Adeeb becomes possessed of the anti-logic that reveals itself in almost all his poems where the relationship between images and ideas supersede any responsibility to notions of order or reason that prevail outside the poem:

There is something wrong in the bed,
In the bird that flew over the bed,
In the poem that was written
To describe the pleasures of the bed
And in the surprise waiting from the bed at the end.

There is something wrong in everything around and within us and our world. This is the vision of a poet who experienced wars throughout history, and not only the eight-year Iraq-Iran war or the US-led invasion of Iraq. He takes us back to the human condition and the sense of alienation and fear in “Noah came and went”, reflecting the sense of belonging and exile, and existential dilemma that shaped the lives of our Sumerian ancestors, represented by Gilgamesh’s search for immortality, the sense of loss and Death. These are universal themes that Adeeb Kamal Ad-deen deals with in his poetry.

Like any other universal poet, Adeeb delves deeply into the human condition, a leitmotif that repeats itself in almost every line that he writes. Even his fascination with “letters” has changed into an obsession or into a renewing desire that needs to be saturated but in vain. This is the reason why the theme of the letters reappears time and again:

And the letter frequently burns with death and love –
Put your fingers to your lips
As a sign of silence. “Will of the Letter”.

Here lies the holiness of the Sufi experience that may reveal something that others could not recognize. The poet, in his everlasting travels and alienations, recognizes, like mystics and prophets, the fact that Man is doomed:

The ship is in the middle of the sea.
The ship is moving with our bodies:
I and you. “Where to?”

The “I” and “You” remind us of Eliot’s “Let’s go you and I” in his Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. The “you” here may be a universal “you”. All of us share the same experience in different environments, in Babel or the “country of kangaroo” (Australia) where the poet lives now, The same “Something Wrong” or “Drops of Love” or “Magician” could be met in one way or another.
The Western or English speaking reader may find some of Adeeb’s images and expressions strange to them. It is true because Adeeb stems from and derives his feelings, images and words from another part of this world, where life has been subjected to the will of the tyrant or the dictator, the god who decides everything. People may think that poets of the East may exaggerate when they tell us about the powers of the police officer that enable him to confiscate your words, poems, novels, and even your dreams.

In “My New Poem”, Adeeb reveals the hidden “policeman” that lies inside each one of the people of his native hand.

- What do you hold in your hand?

“A new poem” said I.

- What do you say in it?

However, the poem declines to disclose its secret, the eternal secret of poets.

In “Depths”, Adeeb stresses the mystical trend that characterizes his poetry, relying on the same structure of repetition that constitutes the refrain:

River ➔ heart ➔ poem –
Letter ➔ dot ➔ Sufi ➔ God who is

“Looking to my slaughtered bird with weeping eyes”

Furthermore, “In Little Dust”, the poet sums up the human condition in the image of dust; nothing will remain but only a little dust or a handful of dust that Eliot used to show the terror of the tragic end, “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”

It is the absurdity, that the Bible and all other holy books, myths, and plays that overwhelms the human condition:

Little of the beautiful women’s beauty will remain
Little of the nudity at sea and in bed, ..

Even the cries of football and bullfighting fans will disappear. Memories, photos, love letters, cries of the orchestra, poems, refugees’ tears, rusty boats, “yes, everything will turn to dust”

Thou art from dust and to dust thou shall return. This is the epitome of the human fate that terrifies the poet as it did with poets throughout history.

Nevertheless, Adeeb shifts the attention and feedings from the state of optimism to “cheerful optimism” through the use of oxymoron(s) in “Interesting, Strange, and Amazing”: 

- What is the color of the sea, poet?
- Ships and women
- What is the color of freedom?
- Bread and salt.
- Bread and salt?
- Yes,
- Interesting.

Finally, the poet discloses the secret of poetry writing, unlocks the trade’s secret:
- I enter in the letter
  - Wearing the secret of the letter
  - Weeping, thinking, napping
  - Dreaming, hallucinating, dancing, and dying.

All mystic poets follow the same approach of melting in the world of words, magical beauty, drinking the wine of nature and identifying themselves with the universe and its creator, the “sun that speaks inside my heart”.

This is the essence of poetry and faith. As such, Adeeb conveys an eternal message, that is, the poet, like the fish, cannot live out of his “water”, the source of life. That is very strange and amazing.

Adeeb Kamal Ad-deen introduces us, Iraqis and Australians, to a world that combines existentialism with mysticism; to “a delicious death”, a strange juxtaposition that many readers find out of date or obsolete due to the ICT revolution that made us forget the rituals of reading of and listening to poetry. It is this sense of belonging to a global family that a poet like Adeeb seeks to reach in order to redress our declining planet, plighted with wars, disasters, tsunamis, nuclear horrors, material consumerism and alienation!

Poetry remains, however, the only form of writing or expression that enables us to experience and enjoy living and loving. This is the reason why we write and read poetry, interact with unusual or extraordinary experiences that poets, like Kamal Ad-deen, introduce us to.

As he says in another poem that the tree of letters will remain despite all tragedies, charged with light and joy.

References:

- Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen, Something Wrong, Salamt Press, Adelaide – Australia 2012
Shaker Hassan Radhi was born in Baghdad in 1955. He holds a B.A in translation (1979) and M.A in English literature (1987-Baghdad University). The title of his thesis was The City and the Individual in Louis MacNeice’s Poetry. He had worked as instructor of English poetry and literature at the College of Arts, Al-Mustansyria University-Baghdad and the College of Languages-University of Baghdad for almost 13 years. Mr. Radhi was promoted to the title of assistant professor in English poetry after writing and publishing three original papers on William Butler Yeats, Philip Larkin and Robert Graves. Besides, he taught translation and simultaneous interpreting for post-graduate diploma students and supervised three theses.

As a writer and researcher, Shaker Hassan published scores of papers and articles on modern Iraqi and English writers and poets in periodicals and literary magazines in Iraq and United Arab Emirates. He has been working as translation instructor at private institutes, legal translator and conference interpreter since the year 2000. He has translated many books, articles and poetry collections into both Arabic and English. He is married and a father of two children.

Something Wrong: Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen, Salamt Press, Adelaide – Australia 2012
In the minds of many Iraqis, especially the intellectuals, Russia is not a completely stranger country. We all assume that we know Russia and its people and that Russia and the Russians know us well. Weren’t they our own friends and allies for many years, if one may use our own old political lexicon? Wasn’t Russia our own economic partner for decades? Yes, but did we really know the Russian people? Do Russians know anything about us, Iraqis? Wasn’t this friendship, originally, initiated by politicians and it remained as such? How can we, the Russian and Iraqi peoples, come closer to make that...
friendship stronger as we all need each other? These were the questions that were rattling in my mind when I recently arrived in Russia in a private visit. My first impression was that the political/diplomatic initiation of that friendship was correct, but it was also deficient. It lacked the human aspect or what we, writers, call in our own jargon the socio-cultural aspect. No surprise! Politicians are all expedient. They speak of interests and naturally their actions do not, necessarily, require the human bond we normally find in friendships. Do we need this friendship anymore and why? How can we, together, promote a well-founded friendship between the two peoples not between politicians only? However, let me remind readers before I proceed further that the present article is not an investigation into the geopolitical significance of the Iraqi-Russian relationship. Unfortunately, I am neither a politician nor a strategic analyst. It is a purely cultural article that aims at examining what was ignored or marginalized in a very old friendship. Now one may say “Hey! But the political is at the heart of the cultural”. If you agree with this kind of thinking then I do not deny the political aspects of my present ‘cultural’ investigation.

Arriving at Moscow

Every time I arrive in Moscow I realize how very little I know about Russia, how very little all Iraqis, who were there before me, know about Russia. We were all speaking stereotypically or perhaps even fictionally about it. This is not due to some Eastern centrism that reproduces the “other” fictionally. God forbids! It is due to the mystery that engulfs this vast country and its complex nature. We are talking here about the largest country in the world that is home to as many as 160 different ethnic groups and indigenous peoples. “Russia”, says Winston Churchill, “is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” One needs to be a historian, an anthropologist, a psychologist, a linguist, and perhaps even a theologian just to grasp the tip of the Russian iceberg. And Moscow, a city reinventing itself in the post-Communist era, intensifies this feeling. One of the world’s great cities, it covers an area of about 386 square miles (878, 7 square kilometers) with a population of about ten millions. It is also Russia’s major center for political, spiritual, industrial, economic and cultural activities. One senses the complex nature of this city and its people immediately after setting foot in Sheremetievo, the city’s international airport. A glance at the population will unveil a mixture of many ethnicities and cultural groups: Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Tajik, Uzbek, Georgian, Armenian, Belarusian and many others. You are definitely going to laugh at the description given to this city by one visitor in 1880 when he described it as “just a lane between two farms with a flax field on one side and a post office on the other.” Of course, Russian is the dominant language, but some speak their national languages too. It is very difficult to find people speaking English in Moscow. Strangely enough, even the airport forms are all written in Russian. So if one does not know Russian, s/he will find himself/herself in hot water indeed. The people are fatigued of overwork and their salaries are very slim and Moscow is one of the most expensive cities in the world. Hence, one can easily feel the pressure on the people. Very few have the time even to answer a single question from a stranger. Thanks to Capitalism they are just running, running, running. But this time I was not planning to stay in Moscow. Volgograd was the destination I was heading for. But before I talk about my visit to Volgograd, let me tell you that I have noticed that very
few Muscovites know anything significant about Iraq. Some confuse Iraq with Iran; some only remember Saddam and the war when you mention Iraq and some are simply apathetic as they have other more important things to think about. No wonder! Very few Baghdadis also know anything significant about Russia. Some confuse it with the Soviet Union; some remember Putin or Zhirinovsky when you mention Russia and some only know that the Russian drink vodka and that their winter is very cold. But at least there are people in Baghdad and certainly in many other Iraqi cities who know such Great Russian figures like Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy, Anna Akhmatova, Pytor Tchaikovsky and even Alla Pokachova. In Moscow you can very rarely find anyone who knows anything significant thing about our culture.

Volgograd/Stalingrad: The Hero City

In Volgograd, after I spent some time with family and friends, I started my search for answers to my questions. The city, by all standards, is smaller than Moscow. Situated on the west bank of the Volga River, it benefits from its unique geographical situation in a crossroads of land and waterways linking Europe and Asia. In 1925, its name was changed to Stalingrad after the Soviet leader of that period, Stalin, who headed the Communist Party after the death of Lenin. Since then, the city was promoted as an industrial center and the first Soviet tractor-building plant was established. This was followed later by a thermoelectric station, a large shipyard, and metallurgical and woodworking plants. In 1942, during WWII, Stalingrad became the center of the famous
battle of Stalingrad, the costliest battle in human history, as well as the central turning point in the war against Nazi Germany. The city was completely destroyed during the battle, but reconstruction work started soon after the Germans were defeated. The defenders of the city showed spectacular courage during that battle. That is why, in 1945, the city was awarded the title “Hero City” and King George VI of the United Kingdom awarded its citizens a jeweled sword in appreciation of their courage. In 1961, the name Stalingrad (Stalin city) was changed to Volgograd (Volga city) when Nikita Khrushchev started his program of deStanilization. Presently, Volgograd is one of Russia’s vibrant industrial, cultural, educational and touristic centers.

In The Writers’ Union

My first visit was to the Writers’ Union of the city. The building of the union is located in the center of the city, but I did not go there directly. I contacted the general secretary of the union, the poetess Mrs. Tatyana Briksyna, and took an appointment first. Two days later, I was in her office in the union. Mrs. Briksyna is a charmingly courteous lady. She dazzled me with her hospitable reception. I informed her that I am an editor of a literary journal and that I am on an assignment to write an article about Iraqi-Russian socio-cultural relations. She welcomed the idea and was more than enthusiastic to provide me with any help I needed. My starting point with her was like this: “Iraq and Russia maintained a long diplomatic relationship, don’t you find it sad that we, in Iraq, know Zhirinovsky more than any contemporary literary figure in Russia?” She answered diplomatically by saying: “You probably know Mr. Zhirinovsky because of his relationship with Saddam Hussein, but it is, indeed, sad that you do not know anything about our contemporary literary scene.” I asked her about her knowledge of Iraqi Literature and was shocked to know that she did not know much about it. Even those writers and poets whom the authorities translated in Russian and many other languages were not known to her. But she is not to blame. We all know how our cultural attaches were selected in the past and perhaps even in the present. Then, to further continue our discussion, she arranged for another meeting in which she invited Piotr Taraschenko, a writer and a member of the union who speaks English, because she does not speak English and my Russian is very weak too. In fact, my wife was acting as a translator between both of us throughout that interview. I thanked her for the interesting time and promised to come again for the next meeting. Few days later, we met again. Of course, Mr. Taraschenko’s presence helped in translation and provided another point of view as he is a prose writer and Mrs. Briksyna is a poet. This time I spoke about the need for a better understanding of our cultures, a point on which they both agreed. Then they both talked about two thematic stages in the development of modern Russian literature during the Soviet Union to satisfy my desire to know about what happened in Russian literature after Gorky. The first stage they marked as the ‘stereotypical’ stage where Russian Literature produced idealized images of a heroic people without any concern for the real problems of the common man. And this tendency was dominant up to WWII. The second stage started after WWII when some innovative writers started to tackle the mundane problems of the common man. This interest in the real problems of ordinary people
completely changed the Russian literary scene as more and more writers started to join
the group that first initiated it. I asked them about foreign influences on Russian
literature; they mentioned many but singled out the avant-garde Japanese novelist Kobo
Abe as one of the major influences. Of course, they read him in translation. There was a
strong translation movement during the Soviet Union. But when I asked them about their
knowledge of Iraqi literature again, Briksyna mentioned the Arabian Nights, but nothing
more. And when I wondered about the reason, she spoke about the “difficulty of
understanding Arabic Literature in general as the mentality is different”. The Arabs have
a very “spiritual perspective” to life as she put it. I told her: “Excuse me but don’t you
think that this is another stereotypical image. You read the Arabian Nights as you told
me, what is so spiritual about that work? On the contrary I personally see it as an erotic
book”. She agreed and apologized for her sweeping judgment and again emphasized the
linguistic barrier as the major obstacle to Iraqi and Arabic literature. We all agreed that
there are many things that we do not know about each other and that more translations of
Iraqi and Russian contemporary literary works should be made available to readers in our
two countries. Therefore, when I told her about the anthology of contemporary Iraqi
poets I was preparing in English with my friend the renowned Iraqi poet Soheil Najm, she
asked me to nominate some poets and their poems to translate into Russian through
English and publish in the union’s quarterly journal. An idea I welcomed very much and
promised to consider in the future. Then she organized some interesting visits for me to
the Youth Theatre and the Experimental Theatre to further increase my acquaintance with
the Russian present cultural scene.
I visited the Youth Theatre first. The creative director and manager of the Youth Theatre, Albert Avchodeev, invited me to attend his production of Athol Fugard’s *A Place with the Pigs*. Athol Fugard (b 1932) is a skillful white South African playwright writing full length plays in a small cast. His *A Place with the Pigs* demands a thoughtful audience as it verges, at some level, on poetic symbolism. Avchodeev’s creative adventure lies in his production of this drama for a young audience. The play advocates pacifism and is radically anti-war. It is based on the true story of Pavel Navrotsky, a WWII Soviet soldier, who deserted the Soviet army and hid himself out in his pigsty for 41 years. The only contact he had with the outside world, during that period, was his loyal wife, Praskovya. His sole relief was a midnight walk disguised as a woman. The play begins ten years after the end of WWII when Pavel has decided to come out of his hiding place and announce that he is still alive. His village is celebrating the tenth anniversary of the end of WWII and has presented his wife with a posthumous medal in his honor. He cannot go through with his plan and decides to remain in his pigsty. Although Fugard says that the play is a metaphor for his own personal struggle with alcoholism, it can be read as a statement of liberty, alienation, self-imposed exile and courage and on a more individual level as a human struggle with inner demons. With the passage of time, Pavel struggles to overcome his fear and face up what he has done, while his loyal wife attempts to stand by him as best as she can; but, she, too, is a captive of what he has done and is obliged to lie to her neighbors. The leading roles were played by two devoted
artists Valery Krasnov, as Pavel and Nataliya Streltsova as his wife, Praskovya. After almost two hours of artistic enjoyment, Avchodeev invited me to meet his cast over a cup of coffee. He asked me first: “do you know any story, in Iraq, similar to Pavel’s?” I answered in the affirmative. I mentioned the story of that Iraqi deserter who hid himself out in a pit inside his house during the Iraq-Iran war for more than 25 years. No one knew about his whereabouts except his mother. His only contact with the outside world was a radio set by which he was listening to the BBC to know what was going on in the world. Then I thanked the actors for their wonderful performance and their arduous efforts to bring some warmth to the dull lives of modern man. My happiness at meeting actors is not less than Hamlet’s especially when I get to know them personally well “for they’re a favored race” as Cervantes describes them. This time I knew more about the huge human cost these people pay in their attempts to enlighten us: low payments and less appreciation that lead to a loss of a proper family life. This is a familiar story in Iraq, Russia and many other countries that do not have a Hollywood or a Bollywood. But must we have a Hollywood so that we take care of our artists? Of course no. Then why do these national assets languish and are poorly appreciated? I humbly ask. Nataliya is struggling alone to support her son after the death of her husband and Valery is living alone after his separation with his wife. Doesn’t this remind one of the late Kareem Chitheer? Yes. He was struggling alone to find a proper accommodation in Baghdad after his return from Canada. Alas, he died unnoticed. In spite of the similarities between the situation of the artists in Russia and Iraq, I noticed that our Russian friends did not know anything about the Iraqi Dramatic movement. In fact, Avchodeev was even questioning the very existence of this movement in Iraq. He wondered “how can there be such a movement if all female actresses are obliged to wear the ‘burqaa’, the Moslem female head wear?” He was still surprised even after I told him that we had a vibrant modern dramatic movement that dated back to the middle of the 19th century. I think I could not dispel his misconceptions even after I spoke to him about the achievements of Salah Al-Qasab, Jawad Al-Asadi, Awni Karoomi and Kareem Chitheer. I assured him that not all women wear the burqaa in Iraq, but I cannot tell whether I convinced him or not. Still this shows how much we need to know about each other. There are many gaps in our socio-cultural relationship that need to be bridged and many misconceptions and stereotypes that need to be dispelled. But there are many more things that we can learn from each other too.

Albert Avchodeev is a devoted artist and a cordial person. In spite of his tall artistic stature, one needs no special recipe to befriend him. He works up until midnight in the theatre with his cast designing, rehearsing and performing. When I asked him about his selection of A Place with Pigs for his young audience, he told me that his aim was to teach the young generations the horrible consequences of all wars, that life is more valuable than any war. He touched a raw nerve here and I felt our need for people like him to do the same in Iraq. Indeed, Volgograd must be proud of people like him. He agreed with me that much is needed to be done to dispel all preconceived ideas about each other. In fact, he expressed their readiness to receive any Iraqi acting group to perform in a festival they hold in the city annually. I thanked him for that and expressed my personal desire to receive them in Baghdad in the future.

My visit to the theatre could not have been complete without seeing the Experimental Theatre. Unfortunately, the manager of that theatre was a very arrogant person who
thought that he knew everything. He was very cold and irresponsible and pretended to be very busy and asked me to visit him again after two weeks. When I saw that he was trying to speak to me as my ‘superior’, I declined even his invitation to see one of his plays. And that chance was lost. It is tactless persons like him who distort the image and cause things to stagnate.

Enkidu Does Not Recognize Gilgamesh

My visit to Volgograd lasted more than sixty days, in which I moved around a lot, seen a lot and talked to many people a lot. Throughout that period, I was always coming out with the same conclusion: much socio-cultural work is needed to solidify our friendship. This noble human duty cannot be left to business people or politicians to perform alone no matter how well-intentioned they might be. No people can live alone in this new millennium. We all need each other. But we also need to know each other well. We need to base our friendship on very strong foundations. And this entails including what was excluded in our relationship in the past, i.e. the social and cultural elements. A true friendship cannot be made by mutual business ventures or mutual political decisions alone. A true friendship begins from the people and ends with the people. This is what our Russian friends agree with me on in all my discussions with them. There are many things that we do not know about each. There are many things that are misconceived or preconceived about each other. Many social and cultural windows must be opened between the two peoples not officials only. And I hope that this article would be a step in the right direction that would encourage more people from both countries to take more initiatives for this purpose.
First in Everything: On the Babylonian Literary Documents

An Interview with the Iraqi Historian and Encyclopedist, Dr. Ali al-Nashmi

Interviewed by S. R. Mohamed

It goes without saying that any discussion of Babylon would be meaningless without the views of some Iraqi historian. Indeed, the first that came to mind was my friend and colleague Dr. Ali al-Nashmi. I knew from the beginning that it would be very difficult to find him in one particular place as he is a very busy man working more than eighteen hours every day reading, writing, lecturing and presenting programs for various Iraqi, Arab and international satellite TV's. Anyhow, with some luck and too much diligence, I was able to find him at the University of al-Mustansiriya where he works as a professor of history and was able to convince him to have this interview with me.

Dr. Ali al-Nashmi was born in Baghdad in 1956. He got his doctoral degree in history at the University of Baghdad in 1995. He lectured in various Iraqi, Arab and international universities. He worked as an assistant director of the Center for Historical Studies, which is one of the bodies affiliated to the Arab Historians Union. He issued the first independent daily newspaper, the Dawn of Baghdad, after the fall of dictatorship in 2003. He also issued the first Iraqi newspaper for children with an international perspective. He wrote extensively for Iraqi, Arab and world newspapers, magazines and journal and published thousands of articles, essays and papers. He also presented tens of cultural programs in many Iraqi, Arab and world satellite television stations. He published more than one hundred books in various disciplines such as mythology, anthropology, psychology, literature, art, history, physics, chemistry and religion. Dr. al-Nashmi, in addition, published five different encyclopedias:

1. The Encyclopedia of History before the Twentieth Century (four volumes).
2. The Encyclopedia of Dreams in History, Tradition and Science (four volumes).
3. The Encyclopedia of the Greatness of Allah (eight volumes).
4. The Encyclopedia of the Days of the Twentieth Century (360 volumes).
5. The Encyclopedia of Ancient Religions (four volumes).

SRM: Dr. Nashmi it is, indeed, a great pleasure to meet you today to talk about Babylon.

AN: Thank you, the pleasure is mine.

SRM: In many of your books you speak extensively about Babylon and its unique place in human history. Why? Is it because you are from Iraq and Babylon is an Iraqi city?

AN: I talk extensively about Babylon in many of my books not because I'm an Iraqi jingoist, but because every human being on this planet is indebted to it. It was the first capital of the world and the land of all beginnings. No doubt I'm proud of my country and of Babylon, but this is not a personal whim. It is because historical facts and eminent historians, like professor Kremer, say that Babylon is the dawn of all human civilizations. Kremer published a book entitled Everything Began in Sumerian Land. Kremer asserts that the pillars of human civilization were established in Iraq.

SRM: But what are the things that first began in Babylon?

AN: First, writing and this means the beginning of civilization which took place about 4000 BC. The first school was found in Babylon. Archeologists found a book written by the headmaster of that first school in which he describes the daily routine of the life of the students in the school. When we read that book, we notice that the students' daily routine at the school does not differ from the daily routine of preset day schools. Archeologists also found tablets written by students as exam answer sheets. They were marked by teachers and with results on them. This means that teaching in these schools is based on scientific and practical bases. Furthermore, the first electrical battery was made in Babylon. It was discovered in 1956 when the government of Iraq wanted to build a Luna park in Baghdad. They unearthed a jar with plates and acid liquid made from grape
vinegar. In the Iraqi National Museum, scientists brought twenty of these jars and they were able to light a fluorescent tube. This experiment, by the way, was written in detail in the German Archeological Journal. The first beauty parlor for women was accidentally discovered in Babylon in a region called Supar near Yusufia. In my books, I insisted that this must be a public beauty parlor because other parlors were found in the palace but this one was found in a normal neighborhood. This, definitely, gives a glimpse of the type of life the Babylonian society was living six thousand years ago. The first medical book was also discovered in Babylon. This is not like any other medical book. In many civilizations, we find people say that they have medical books in their civilizations, but when you examine them, you'll see that they are entirely made of magical recipes and nothing more. The book I'm referring to is a typical scientific book because we found in it descriptions of symptoms of diseases, their causes, and their treatment and how to prepare drugs and use them. The first law system ever known by humanity was written in Babylon. It was the Urnamu Sumerian law. It was written 3000 BC. This even preceded Hamurabi's code of law by at least 400 years. Of course, many articles in Hamurabi's code of law are still used by all humanity even today.

SRM: What else began in Babylon?

AN: The first utopia ever known in human history was envisioned in Babylon. In Ashur Banipal's library, an epic written in cuneiform was found. It was called the "Epic of Inmerkar and the Land of Iratha". It is a verse epic that talks about an ideal society that enjoys absolute peace, absolute luxury and economic sufficiency. The society portrayed in that epic has eliminated all problems, crises, agonies and authoritarianism. In a word, it
is a society that sits in the lap of the gods. Let me read this extract for you which was originally translated from cuneiform text:

*Once upon a time, where there were no snakes or lions or rabid dogs or wolves; a time when all fears had lost their meanings; a time when man was not ravished and the land lived in absolute peace. The people were united in everything. They had the same prayer and they used the same language. That was the land of Iratha.*

Obviously, the extract speaks about an ideal society...

SRM: Sorry for interrupting you, but I find this extract poetically charged. Do snakes, lions and wolves symbolize anything or one must conceive them literally?

AN: No, they symbolize man's fears of man. The ancient man got used to them as he lived in the wilderness and there were no more fearsome animals he encountered more than the snake, the lion and the wolf.

SRM: By the way, why did Alexander the Great take Babylon to be the capital of his empire?

AN: Because Babylon was the capital of the whole world. It was an extremely well-built city with paved streets and even traffic police. It was surrounded by palm-trees. Indeed, it was a city suitable to be the capital of the whole world. And above all, it was the capital of the Persian Empire during the reign of Darius.

SRM: Some people say that the Babylonian contributions to human knowledge were marked by the dominance of the mythological thinking unlike the contributions that came from other civilizations which were scientific. How do you respond to this?

AN: This accusation came primarily from European writers. Their intention, of course, was to highlight the superiority of the "White Man's" contribution. They want us to believe that philosophy and science are European products. In this view, the "Orient" is solely the source of mythologies and religions. But this is a naïve, racist, colonial view. The first myth that was invented by the early Iraqi man was an attempt to answer instinctive questions such as how things happen? And why do they happen? And what is the nature of the mover of all things? Hence, he was able to find his way to the gods. He also attempted to find out some logical depth for their existence that goes well with the then dominant thinking of man. But because the early man did not possess any scientific tools, he resorted to metaphysical interpretations. The rain, for instance, was a miraculous thing that could not be explained by any laws of physics as they did not exist. The early Iraqi man made it a god. The same is also true of the sun and the other stars. All other civilizations rose later such as the Greek civilization which came after the Sumerian civilization by 4000 years. So it relied on 4000 years of real, natural, experimental research. Therefore, when it wrote its mythologies, they were more objective and carried more scientific weight. The credit in this goes to the civilizations that rose before the Greek civilization. So Pythagoras relied in his theory on an Iraqi theory called the theory of Ishnuna. There is a tablet unearthed in Baghdad where all the details of this theory are recorded 700 years before Pythagoras. In fact, all the achievements of the Greek
civilization relied on the achievements of the Babylonian civilization in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, engineering and pharmacology. We have concrete proofs that ascertain their indebtedness to the Babylonian civilization in all these fields. Furthermore, there is a huge number of supernatural/metaphysical elements in Greek mythologies. Zeus was the god of gods who had seven sons. And there existed hundreds of deities that specialized in one aspect of life or the other. So which is more metaphysical the Greek or the Iraqi? The ones that were written 4000 years later or 4000 years before?

SRM: Yes, but what about the strict logical thinking of the Greek philosophers that verges on science in the case of Aristotle, for instance?

AN: This question answers itself by itself because human progress came from accumulation and influence. The Greek philosophy is the natural outcome of all the philosophical, scientific activities that preceded it. Beginnings cannot be judged by the value judgments of results. Let me cite the epic of Gilgamesh as an example, which can also be a response to your previous question about the dominance of mythological thinking in the Babylonian civilization. The philosophical dialogues in Gilgamesh go far beyond many aspects in the Greek philosophy in spite of the fact that this epic represents the ancient man that preceded the Greeks by at least 3000 years. Has the Greek philosophy reached the same depth as Gilgamesh particularly in its discussion of death and immortality? I very much doubt it.

SRM: What about astronomy? What were the contributions of the Babylonian civilization in this regard?

AN: The answer to this question is very simple. In the American and German Universities, there exist specialized studies called the Babylonian Astronomy. The Babylonians were the first to identify the signs of Zodiac. Humanity was able to identify 88 signs of Zodiac up to this moment, but 48 of them were determined by the
Babylonians 4000 years ago. Indeed, the observation of the stars was an official duty linked to the king directly. Let me translate this Babylonian tablet for you:

{My dear king, the result of the daily observation of the heavenly bodies in our observatory had recorded an unusual movement of a new star in the northern eastern corner yesterday. This movement confirms that there is a change in the type of stars in that region.}

This text provides us with an idea about the Babylonian observatories and the extent of interest and creativity of the Babylonians in Astronomy. There are hundreds of books that discuss in detail the "Babylonian Astronomy" in various languages.

SRM: What about the Babylonian theatre?

AN: Very few people know that the theatre started in Iraq 3000 years before the rise of the Greek theatre. Presently, people conceive the theatre as a building where plays are performed. They do not realize that the theatre is any work performed in front of people to enact an event, a story or a legend. The sedimentary plains of Iraq are different from the rugged mountains of Greece. It is easy in Iraq to throng in the form of a circle to watch something enacted for the purpose of mere spectacle or edification or making a speech. Whereas in Greece, topography necessitates the existence of a platform for a speaker to make his speech or a band of actors to perform their play. In Iraq, since 4000 BC, people used to perform open-air religious stories in the form of acts of drama in front of people. These performances lasted for days. Every day one act of the religious story or legend was performed. These religious celebrations were taking place every year on the first day of April and they lasted for twelve days. Every day one act of the Babylonian story of creation is performed. The performances describe Inana's descent to the underworld and Tamuzi's exist from it. According to the ancient Iraqi religious conviction, Tamuz comes to life every year on the first day of April. Hence, comfort, growth and greenery come to the land because he is the god of all these things. If he does not come, life ceases to exist in the land. Therefore, the ancient Iraqis used to perform the scene of his exist from the underworld and the descent of Inana to replace him. Only the gods die and enjoy rebirth every year provided that they redeem each other. Ordinary
human beings don't come to life when they die. This scene was performed in one day of the twelve days. A beautiful Iraqi girl plays the role of Inana and her descent to the underworld. The role describes how she passes through the various layers one after the other. At every layer, she takes off one piece of her clothes until she reaches the underworld completely naked. This is the first drama scene ever known in human history. In the fourth day, for instance, they used to perform the journey of god Murdoch to the underworld. The performances lasted for one full day. The priests and nuns take part in these performances too. On the twelfth, they perform the holy matrimony. The king himself comes to take part in the performances. He takes his boat to the middle of the Euphrates in front of the people who watch on both sides of the river and one of the most beautiful nuns goes to him where he makes love to her in the boat. If the nun becomes pregnant, her son will be the king because he has the blessings of the gods. This last day is called the "Aketo Day" which means the day of the feasts because in this day food is given to people. The food itself is considered holy because it is cooked in a holy place in Babylon called the "House of Aketo". This place still exists even day. It is located about 500 meters north of the old city and is built of mud.

SRM: Is there anything else you think you need to add?

AN: The Babylonian civilization made great contributions to human civilization. Unfortunately, very few people know this fact very well. It is time that we made known all these contributions to all humanity. This is the duty of all Iraqis.

SRM: Professor Ali al-Nashmi thank you very much indeed,

AN: Thank you.
In my opinion, the Iraqi narrative today has matured enough to monitor the situation in Iraq with its interlacing details; it is able to catch the most interactions between competing identities in Iraq, looking for a presence in place and time. This assumption, I cite, is based on reading a number of novels, and to prove that I'll review here two of them, as examples, they are namely "The American Granddaughter" by Anaam Kachachi and "Onsam Camille" by Asaad al-Lami.

The authors here have managed to monitor the situation in Iraq and its contradictions in an objective manner much better than the political analysts whom we see on television.

**The American Granddaughter**
The active characters in this novel are ten covering the substance of the novel and the main heroes are:
First...Zina Iraqi originally American citizenship to work as a translator in the ranks of the U.S. military in Iraq.
Second, the novelist / shadow ..a character planted by the writer in the land of the events as if to confess the fact of reliance on a true story took place for this soldier.
Third..Rehma .. Zina's grandmother of her mother, the central figure and almost the true heroine of the novel and who has only lived in the house of the family and who sticks to her first root, refusing to leave Iraq and rejecting at the same time the occupation and despises it despite all the oppression and injustice afflicted her family from the authoritarian regime before.
Fourth "Tawoos" .. Shiite woman from the poor city -Athawra, who lived within the confines of this Christian family for many years, and offers many services, helped by her cleverness and mastery of more than a career in addition to that she breastfed Zina after the illness of Zina's mother.
Fifth-Muhaimin ..Son's of Tawoos, who was a communist and then captured in Iran, to turn to an Islamic extremist when he comes back and belongs to the Mahdi Army, a brother of Zina in breastfeeding. He helps his mother in the delivery of services to Rehma the grandmother.

Sixth Haider ..Muhaimin's brother who worked in the intelligence service of the former regime.

Seventh.. The father ..previously a well-known TV. broadcaster who was arrested by the security men for no other reason than he remarked to his friend about the news material, and subjected to the process of torture ended with his teeth broke, precipitating in making his decision to leave Iraq, where his default judgment of execution was issued.

Eighth  Batul .. the Mother who did not dry her tears on leaving her home, despite all that has happened to her husband.

Nineth Calvin .. U.S. Zina's boyfriend, who is no longer, satisfied her after her experience in Iraq and meet Muhaimin.

Tenth ..Yazen, her brother who is addicted to drugs.

The writer was able to gather the two contradictions to convince the reader with a relationship difficult to be achieved in reality, when she made Zina the Christian girl who spent all her youth, in America, and who represents the modern and civilized of the parties of the relationship to fall in love with Muhaimin, a bearded young man from the poor city and a member of the effective of the Mahdi Army, who represents the extremist religious despite she knows she is his breastfeeding sister, and this kind of relationship is a taboo in Islam. .. It is a complicated equation..Zina is an American soldier and wanted dead or alive by Mahdi Army, which announced its armed resistance against the occupation forces, and Muhaimin is wanted by these forces as a terrorist Shiite, thus as if the writer intending to maintain the social fabric of Iraq that has shaken because of the severity of sectarian extremism.

The writer succeeded, I guess, in highlighting the role of Rehma, the grandmother, the only one of the family who remained in Iraq and who sticks to the last day of her life to traditions and customs she brought up on, who does not bear the idea that her granddaughter a soldier with the occupation forces, and remained determined to do that until the day she died and buried in her mother land, the image of the suit of her late husband, the retired Colonel, the assistant commander of the recruitment of Mosul is the last thing her eyes pictured.

The writer made Batul, the mother, refuses to retold the oath of allegiance to America during the granted of U.S. citizenship, she only screaming with herself (forgive me my father) and her tears did not dry on her cheeks as long as they are far from home, despite all that happened to her husband. That puts the readers, in front of a perfect model of the Iraqi mother imposed by immigration, and stil...
Palestine and the songs of resistance in Vietnam, and I find that the American occupation of Iraq is not different from it.«
It seems that the novel «The American Granddaughter» is a kind of attempt to accommodate the motives of that group of Iraqis who worked with the occupation, which seemed taboo to talk about it.
Kachachi is trying to ask a question of identity and belonging. For technical reasons she tried not to take a direct stand of the granddaughter who returned in soldiers clothes nor of her breastfeed brother Muhaimin, the activist in the Shiite Mahdi Army, but she reveals her views through a variety of dialogues, attitudes and anecdotes.
Kachachi is trying to monitor the ambiguity in Iraqi character today. The more awareness of what seems sure and clear with the previous generation it seems ambiguous with the new generation. Zina, or the American granddaughter, seems torn between affiliation and loyalty to the occupier «the savior» and belonging to her country of origin.
In Iraq, the granddaughter meets her grandmother, but the meeting, which was a sort of a sweet dream turns amidst the contradictions to be a cause of pain and suffering to the grandmother and the granddaughter. The conflict of situations between the two leads to collide, the grandmother of another generation, and her deceased husband was a colonel in the former Iraqi army and fought in Palestine, who remains fixed on her position against the occupation of a definite identity. The granddaughter does not understand the hatred of the Iraqis that seems larger than their hatred for Americans. So strange contradiction happens and makes Muhaimin the fighter in the Mahdi Army and an American enemy the closest person to her heart that makes her see life and situation by another view.
But within a broader context the events depict the ambiguity of belonging and fragmentation of the Iraqi identity and the rupture of the sons of one homeland between affiliations and ideas very contradicted.
The novel ends with the death of the grandmother, and her departure symbolizes the absence of firm confident identity, and the death of the memories that are not owned by the granddaughter, the outcome of her return from Iraq, "grieve as a heavy and a refinery honey, viscous and transparent, useful during the nights of insomnia inciting to write poetry, but it is not fitting to strengthen the motivation and morale." The novelist, Anaam Kachachi, bases her narrative in a realistic style and preoccupied too much with the aspect of political - social debate in Iraqi history in recent decades depicting the dilemma of the heroine and her splitting mind between the adoption of the identity of the motherland - the roots or the identity of the present nation – shelter. We find there are two images competing to stay in the minds of Kachachi's heroes, the image of past and the image of present, raising many difficult questions one of them is the motherland just a past, a bag of bones or is it the conscience and feelings of identity and therefore cannot be abandoned? Is the shelter -country the future, the new life, the denial of the past and the possession of a new identity as a result or is it just an illusion?
The important question here, as I think, is what will the position be when these two identities strike against each other and who will prevail? It seems that there are multiple interpretations for the answers to these questions based on the generation to which the character belongs and its location in the conflict of identities. What should be noted that the plot of the novel is coherent, and the experience of the author in writing press releases have appeared clearly in the suspense of the events and the detection of the contradictions.
of social and historical experienced by the Iraqi individual in recent decades not to mention that there is an ideological and clear idea of condemning occupation and all who stand beside it no matter how justified, because the writer sees any justification flimsy or a kind of treason.

All technical requirements required by the novel contemporary meet here, in terms of narrative and movement of the characters within the time and space, sober language, element of suspense, spontaneous dialogues and correct extensions horizontally and vertically of the events which made the line graph of the novel not in meanders and sharply break to make lose a lot of stability.

I am confident that the author relied on the story of one of the girls of Iraqi origin Americans who worked as a translator for the service in the U.S. Army in Iraq after the fall of the regime of oppression to make it a draft article for her novel, and this was confirmed by some of the fine details contained in the body of the novel and which cannot pass in the mind of the writer if she did not live them herself or transfer to her very carefully, as well as what reported to us in the novel itself that one of its characters is a novelist investigating the life of this soldier and pursuing her like her shadow making the character at conflict with the novelist, accusing her of snooping around on her privacy.

Some reviewers see that Kachachi dealt with the American characters affected by the American Cinema. She stereotyped the Hollywood heroes and heroines as we see with Calvin, for instance, the boyfriend who has nothing but drinking beer and watching TV. I can add also the same thing of stereotyping happens with Zina's mother whose character seems flat.

**Onsam Camille**

Onsam and his twin brother Bassam from a poor family. His father abused the family and the boy of eight years, hiding under the bed, sees his father suffocates his mother (Muteaa-obedient). He forced to leave school and work in the market, driven by the wife of his father. Because of the continued ill-treatment at home and the attempt of rape by the repairer of stoves in the market, the boy became homeless until a rural woman (Radia-traumatic) found him and gave him good treatment to be his second mother. After growing up, he had called to serve in the army, captured in the Iraq war on Kuwait and taken to America as a refugee. Being got a psychological shock he agreed to be adopted by an American Orthodox Jewish woman (Rachel) who is an archaeologist specialized in the remains of Babylon and believes in the reincarnation. She assumes that there is a similarity between her son, who was killed in Afghanistan, and Onsam. Rachel's father, who was born in Iraq in a district called the "Torah" in the city of Amara, advised her to return to Babylon to search for the evidence herald the coming of the Savior. Onsam shocked when he knows that the lady who provided accommodation to him is Jewish and he doubts in her purpose, but his view changes when he knows that her community recognizes religious and intellectual tolerance, moreover she loves his country and humanity in general to become his third mother. Yet, he committed with her what is forbidden from his point of view, the taboo of sex. So they unified in one fate, she in her yearning to get out of her isolation and the return of her son in another image and he to find a safe refuge taking him out of labyrinth.
Although the novel "Onsam Camille" by Asaad al-Lami deals with a subject similar to the novel "The American Granddaughter" that is the complex of the migrant or expelled from his country returns to it to be a part of the invading force, to commit a sin to participate in the destruction of his country with the foreign occupier, almost this novel to be less direct, realistic, and more technically dense than the first. This novel has adopted the style of rotation in the multiple narrative voices and in the overlap of using time. The characters here are all revolve around the hero, who the novel was named in his name. It can be said that the writer Asaad al-Lami through his language, charged with aesthetic details evident in depicting the fates of some Iraqi social strata sincerely, have managed to attract the reader to receive his text through the joy of reading. The writer gives an aesthetic image faithful to the contradictions of the reality experienced by the characters. The conviction for treason comes here more covered up and it does not come directly. We see that in the strength and the intensity of justifications which the writer tries to put in our way, or perhaps he is trying to "delusion" us that this is what fate has done to his hero.

In America Onsam remembers his mother, who born him and his twin brother with love, also his second mother, raised him. He remembers with hatred his father and his stepmother. As there was a desire for revenge, he plans to return to Iraq after recovering. So when he finds an opportunity he contracts with the U.S. forces occupied Iraq after 2003. His thoughts mixed between his position as a U.S. soldier and his Iraqi origins. His black and white memories confuse him. The novelist sets parallel lines for Onsam and Rachel. He is back for searching his near past to take his revenge from those who crashed his childhood, while she wants to achieve the dream of her father to return to Iraq, which represents her roots, to search in the ancient past for an evidence of salvation. But the two characters get only the illusion. Onsam gets shot in the shoulder while he hesitates in killing a native of resisting the occupation.

Surely, the trouble of the heroes is the belonging and the identity. In spite of Onsam's satisfaction with life in the United States he insists on returning to his native country his mind afflicted with confusion and mental schizophrenia. In a time he wants to find his black past to take revenge and in another time he longs to see his white past to celebrate it. On the other hand we find cracked family loyalties between his mother who was killed in front of him and the loss of his twin brother. Also we need to notice another type of confusion in the name of the main character. His first mother (Muteaa) who born him gives him the name Onsam, his second mother (Radia), gives him the name (Ghareeb-Stranger). Thirdly Rachel used to call him a in the name of her died son David.

On the other hand, although Rachel born in America she remains nostalgic for the homeland of her father and feeling of belonging to it. The dilemma of the characters is complicated here when others consider them traitors and invaders and not sons of this land. In the midst of that the author presents his basic questions: What is the concept of treason? What is the concept of belonging? Is it justified by the past? Is it justified by the immense suffering? What also deny home to deserve to be a strange land? What strange land gives to deserve to be alternative homeland? P 147

Onsam injured by a non-lethal shot from his citizen yet what puts an end to him is the trouble of mental association, and the split between the victim and the executioner inside him which afflicted him with deadly insomnia as it starts with bouts of panic and phobia and hallucination end deficit of complete sleep and death.
*Born in Baghdad, Inaam Kachachi now lives in France. She writes for several Arabic newspapers and has previously published two non-fiction books in addition to her debut novel Sawaqi al-Quloob (Streams of Hearts, 2005).
*Asaad al-Lami born in Baghdad and he is still there. He works in the daily press. He published two collections of short stories.
Two poems

By Hasab al-Sheikh Ja’far
Translated from the Arabic by Ghareeb Iskander

1. The Face of the Death

He passed like water beating in the vase
He passed like water beating on the pole
In his eyes the blueness of papyrus
In his hand a bitter tear
In his hand the luster of the milk
And in his hand a rich cloud
Wrapping me,
carrying me into a wave of an astonishingly blue purity.
He passed like the rhythm of the wind above the door
He passed, with admonition on his forehead
I saw him smiling and sad
When he fell,
His eyes fell over the mud
His hands filled with grass
And his eyeballs with longing.
(You are alone like a fruit
Surprised by the winter,
Singing like a lark
Across the deserts of tears and polar twilight)
2. A Leaf from the House of the Dead

The lost foam of the seas,
And the dead leaves, and the dust
Are the last thing remaining in the defeated actor’s pouch.
I see him alone
Dreaming in his café
Wrapped in his old worn jacket,
Nervously holding the glass, and raving absently, feverishly.
The Brides of the forests fled from their den, so who will swarm around
In the house of the dead except the owl
Odette in the swan lake
Captive of the wind forever,
Who knocks on her door?
O handful of foam,
O body – devouring flame
The brides of the forests fled: it is winter
In its snowy nights, it covers earth and sky,
So that the failed actor dreams in his café,
So that his hands burn behind
The moon melting in the water,
On his bed, dead seagulls float and owls wake up
Swarming around crying
Let the failed actor shout as he likes
In the desolate wilderness.
Odette in the swan lake
Captive of the wind forever
Let the failed actor shout or drown in tears
Carriages departed at night, and left him laying on their platform
Nothing put the wind
swirls, careless, wrapping around the posts of light.

Hasab al- Sheikh Ja’far (born in Missan, Iraq 1942) is an Iraqi poet living in Baghdad. He did a MA in literature in Gorky Institute, Moscow (1965). Ja’far has published many collections of poems, including The God’s Palm Tree; The Wooden Bird; The Sumerian Lady’s Visit and Through wall in the Mirror, which established him as a leading poet in the modern Arabic poetry. He also translated many Russian poets into Arabic, including Alexander Bloke, Pushkin and Akhmatova. He won Soviet Peace Award in 1983 and Alowais Prize for Poetry in 2003.

Translator’s note about the first poem

I chose this poem partly to introduce a leading, influential, but little known Iraqi poet. I also chose it because it describes the serious issue death, but using a lyrical poem. In general, translating poetry faces many obstacles in terms of differences between languages, cultures, themes, and the musical structure of the poetry itself. The more the differences between source and the target languages, the more these obstacles will be a problem for the translator.

In the case of translation between Arabic and English, to me, there are three main issues. The first relates to the differences between their linguistic structures. For example, the Arabic sentence is mainly a verbal sentence, while the English sentence is a nominal one. The second issue is related to the inherent limitation of a particular lexicon. For example, the English words for *love*, the most widely used word in poetry, are limited compared with the variants of the same word in Arabic. The last issue is about the differences in the metrical structure of their poetry. Musically, Arabic poetry uses what are called “cumulative structures”, while the music of English poetry based on “stress” on specific letters.

This poem uses some traditional Arabic words which refer to the traditional tools (e.g. *mardi*, pole), objects (e.g. *jarah*, vase) and plants (e.g. *bardi*, papyrus). These words, which have been used since the early Iraqi civilizations, are rooted in the culture of southern Iraq where the poet comes from. Therefore, my main problems were how to convey these words with their cultural meanings, and to find a relevant approach. My approach consisted of mixing literal and interpretive approaches. The former helps to keep the spirit of the original poem, and the latter makes the translated poem more accessible to the target reader.
Poems Originally Written in English

By Sa’ad Najm al-Khafaji

The poem

Like houses, poems are of many a kind
Each has its own special key
When the door is wide open, the mind
Operates and eyes begin to see

Big and small, each has its own heaven
Number of rooms also differs
And has a door that leads the visitors in
With walls decorated by pictures

A house can be new or like an old castle
With the flavor of distant past
And stories that amuse and might puzzle
And voices will forever last

The pictures and figures that are often hung
Show the owner’s taste and mood
His frame of mind and nature of his tongue
Which sweet it might be or rude

Houses vary in type and also in their design
Some are spacey and nicely built
Some, where the sun does not seem to shine
Others are airy and suitably lit

On their faces, we see mark of death or pain
The horrors of war or prints of time
Marks of rain and sometimes signs of old love
A different tone; a different rhyme

The mountain

Praised be the lord who made such a piece of art
Which puzzles the mind and raptures every heart

The richest living symbol in this wide universe
So hard it is to see the like in painting or in verse

Silent most of the time like a white-haired sage
Yet at times erupting with the youth fire of rage

Shielded with steep rocks and clad in green trees
Eyes that survey and a head filled with memories

From beneath his heavy rocks springs fresh water
He has the heart of a mother and the head of a father

Like the mood, his colors changes as a rainbow
Turning white, black, green, red and even yellow

His ancient caves used to fascinate and enchant me
They seem to be the history of mankind on epitome

He witnesses, unshaken, the rise and fall of nations
His head is always up, engrossed in contemplations

He is a marvel, a riddle, a legend, God’s masterpiece
A mysterious emblem of fertility, power and peace

**Garara**

Slept peacefully for ages in the arms of the Tigris
Dear village, is it possible to talk of you?
An emblem of love and of long lost happiness
How shall I begin and how can I be true?

When in cold nights we gathered round the fire
listening to the anecdotes of grandmother
folktales that amuse and will forever inspire
forgetting the roar of the rainy weather

How often we drove our team to the distant school
Passing, boys and girls, the green orchards
Till we wearily reached the young ambitious tool
On the river, the old buildings still stands

Sweet was the time when I went with grandfather
Sitting in the small cottage in the field
Watching, in sun and rain, how farmer by farmer
Bringing earth’s gifts to my save shield

Lived for centuries in those lovely homes of clay
The warmest nest of both man and bird
A place where the soul wished to vanish or stay
A celestial joy that both equally shared

Memorable still are the innocent joys of the holy Eid
When we flew, colorful, with the sunrise
To make our sways, the white children’s flying steed
And the palms cherished kids’ surprise

Deep in heart I still hear the charm of those nights
Of natural light and innocent, simple tune
When the dark river was filled with thousand lights
Or singing to whales not to devour the moon

A village lived and died away from the glare of life
Was indifferent to trade and merchandise
Her children still in the heat of merciless strife
Recalling the dream of that lost paradise

**Ammadia**

Is it a town or a cloud that is hanging over there
Or is it the nest of some legendary bird
Hatching its eggs or chicks with love and care
The strangest scene I’ve seen or heard

Like a king or a queen with embroidered gown
The colorful mountain is topped with houses
A non human king enthroned with a live crown

When reverently you enter that land of dreams
Your heart beats and the eyes remain open
Like a resting place, that hanging town seems
To the tired souls in their way to heaven

The moment when it touches the floor of the town
The shivering foot seems to tread the sky
There where people are like angels; never frown
With pride show the place to the passer by

The old walls and faces tell the history of the place
A marvelous book of many tales and pictures
In which the present and the distant past embrace
In a dramatic scene that puzzles and raptures

The drops of melting snow at the dawn of spring
Water the green trees and fresh flowers below
Youth thus drinks gladly from the pierian spring
The cold sobering water of wisdom and of law

I hope that I have the hands of the skilful artists
Who made the now remains of those statues
Of the mighty guardians of the ancient gate
To inscribe these humble words on stone

They would be my feeling print on stone
Neither years nor wind can wipe out
And though art gives eternity to mortal things
This town gives life to those words

A Wish

How nice it is sometimes to be a mindless creature!
When the soul escapes the eyes of the sleeping preacher

At night, or when thoughts intoxicate the tardy brain
Mystical fits or celestial vision spark as drops of rain

Like breeze, they rise refreshing the memory of the soul
Shadows of that distant world they inhabited ere the Fall

The sweet memories of the blissful hour of innocent joy
Grouping for ages in their deep dungeon, blind and coy

When the guardian falls asleep or when it is hypnotized
And the spell – bound body looks motionless ... paralyzed

They sneak and their departure is vague... inexplicable
As the wind they rise and fall invisible... uncontrollable

Out of zeal, some birds aspire to reach the blue dome
But when their race done, they breathlessly strike home

The brain is bliss that at sometimes turns into a curse
While leading out its way, the glorious moments curbs
Fiction
Many years had passed now since Mr. Abbas used to perform his job as a train driver on the railroad line between Baghdad and Basra. He has been doing that all his life, obeying all the routine instructions conventionally, without any objection whatsoever.

But he, at this severely hot July night, has been informed to join his work instantly, as there was a certain cargo that should be transported tomorrow evening by all means to Basra.

Mr. Abbas never failed to arrive at the station from which the train would depart. That was a very hot day indeed, but heat seemed to become slightly lower then. Over the horizon, he could still feel few light breezes blowing; they might even have evoked a desire inside him to take a nap.

He indeed sensed such an inexorable desire to take a nap, but orders certainly wouldn’t allow him to fulfill it. When he arrived there at midnight, he found everything prepared in the station for that trip. The wagons were closed with huge locks. It wasn’t his responsibility to ask about the content of the cargo. All what he was supposed to do would be driving the train to its specified destination with its usual speed.

Despite all those routine procedures, Mr. Abbas noticed some obscure movements in the station, there were persons climbing on the roofless wagons. He saw them wearing peasantry clothes, but that wasn’t something to worry about, nor was his mind ready to take it into consideration.
He waited to be given orders from the station headquarters, so that he could start moving. It was about half past four in the morning, when the train engines started to roar. The noise invaded all other wagons, so that Mr. Abbas was no longer able to hear his assistant’s voice who stood just beside him. The train moved slowly and heavily, as if it were moaning from its rusty wounds, or from the weight of some unordinary heavy cargo inside its iron womb, a cargo that Mr. Abbas absolutely knew nothing about.

But when the train stopped at last in Almahaweel station, a young man, about thirty years of age, surprised him, he was yelling:

"Hey. Old man! You know that your cargo isn’t just rusty pieces of iron? There are human souls on your train; they are the best guys whom you can ever imagine!"

It seemed that the way in which the young man stepped into the train has annoyed the old man; it wasn’t ordinary at all to hear such words. There was something disrespectful about his behavior. Any train driver should have his reverend status and immunity; no one has the right to interfere with the way of performing his job. This young man has certainly exceeded what is expected and broke the boundaries of his position as a train driver, and those dictated by human morality.

Mr. Abbas was about to say something when the young man shouted again:

"Old fellow, what you are carrying isn’t any kind of cargo. You are delivering prisoners."

Being aware more than ever of that desperate and exasperated call, Mr. Abbas finally yelled at his assistant, "You better go and check what is going on."

After hearing those shouts, the assistant wanted indeed to know what was going on inside those wagons. It is his human responsibility to do that, not just due to any kind of legal obligation. He has to ignore all the instructions, and listen only to the sense of kindness that resides deeply in his heart like a lighted candle.

He went over to the wagons and was able at once to hear persons calling desperately for help; their shouts penetrated the thick iron walls. Few strong hands prevented him from approaching further, and even when he introduced himself as the driver assistant in this train, they kept pushing him aside.

At last the driver assistant retreated to the driving cabin and cried: "Hurry, old man, the rumor seems to be true, there are human beings imprisoned inside those wagons, there isn’t any kind of cargo!"

Mr. Abbas realized at once that he was about to deliver masses of corpses, his train inevitably would be loaded with ugly ghosts of death. Knowing quite well the structure of those damned wagons, he realized that those miserable prisoners would finally be sitting on burning embers in this July afternoon. What is worse than that, the wagons were coated with tar so as to protect them from rust!

The sun was hanging in the centre of the sky arch, gleaming, and suffocating the air, preventing anybody from breathing easily. The assistant thought hardly about a certain way to save that strange human cargo, but the keys of the wagons were not in his possession. It was forbidden to open them except by the chief of the station to which the train was going, and the train speed was undoubtedly limited.

Mr. Abbas noticed that he had only one choice, and that’s to make the train move with its utmost speed, so it might arrive several hours before the supposed time. Then he would not have to think about any consequences, including the possibility that the train
would collide with other trains. What was about to happen now on his train might be worst than anything.

He knows very well the nature of those wagons. Nobody can manage to breathe since they were tightly locked, with no windows or any ventilation. He was really anxious to find a way to prevent those human beings from suffocation. Then he suddenly rushed as if he were mad, encouraged by his assistant. It might be the only way to save what is left of them in the iron wagons. He certainly can sense very well the danger of carrying human souls and then delivering them as corpses. He has now to forget anything about his legal obligations, he must only think about what is going on in those wagons. It is true that his job is just to drive, but it is a hard job to deliver corpses, he cannot possibly accept that.

Even if that would mean his death, he certainly felt responsible of those human beings whom he was carrying in his train. All what was going on in his mind called him to choose the utmost speed as the only solution to save what was left of the prisoners.

The train was rushing with mad speed towards Samawa city. When he finally saw some of the city sights, he felt delighted to observe many hands waving from a far distance. That meant some persons had information about what happened. Maybe they knew more than he had expected. The train stopped, and the crowds immediately rushed towards the wagons.

Nobody managed to open the gates, the guards who were wearing peasantry clothes to disguise their real mission had no keys. Despite everything some of them were sensible; they also tried to find a way to unlock the gates regardless of the severe orders that prevent doing so.

What is more important now is to save that mass of human beings inside the iron wagons. More crowds came from here and there; some persons were carrying iron bars, buckets filled with water, hot bread, and yogurt. Finally the crowd managed to force open the gates, they saw then persons lying on the floor who could hardly catch their breaths. Some of the women hurried to supply water, men and children served whatever they had. Chaos spread all over the place. There were voices shouting:

"Don’t let them drink cold water. We need some salt and warm water."

Feet began running towards the houses. Men came back with salt and water, each man was nursing a group of the prisoners, feeding them and giving them water to drink.

Mr. Abbas and his assistant were astonished at what was happening, the guards turned now to rescue team trying to save those exhausted souls whom were about to die before their eyes, unable even to stand up. None of them thought about the possibility that they might run away. It is difficult here for the dead to run away. The guards were sure, however, that none of the prisoners was missing, and that the total number was complete. Anyway the delivery process would be done sooner or later, now they can give some help on condition that their eyes stay alert.

What surprised the guards more was that one of the prisoners became unable to breath, nobody managed to help him or save his life. He finally passed away like an extinguished candle at a wedding night. The crowded place turned then from chaos to worry, there might be other victims to follow.

It was very hot and dry atmosphere indeed; even healthy persons couldn’t possibly withstand it. What about those who were weak enough to resist death, and wish to stay alive in this suffocating dusty air!
The three doctors who were among the prisoners were suffering just like everyone, they tried to save their own lives too, so as not to lose it forever and increase the number of widows and orphans. They fought to stay alive, actually they would love life regardless of its ugliness, they were ready to sacrifice whatever is expensive, all other wishes and delights no longer existed.

Doctor Rafid, more merciful and sensible than his other colleagues, was ready to sacrifice his own life to save other lives. He waited thoughtfully a little while, looking forward to whatever scarce chance, and then rushed to save as more lives as possible. He tried his best to help men untie the ropes that joined the prisoners to each other. It was a surprise to find that the ropes were easy to be loosened. That certainly means that some of the guards who tied had them in the first place felt pity and respected their thoughts and dreams.

The prisoners were stretched on the tarred wagon. Doctor Rafid advised them not to take off their clothes so that their sweating rate wouldn’t increase and then cause disturbance in blood pressure as a result of loosing much salt. He also suggested that they should breathe fresh air from a hole beneath the wagon gate. They did that with equal motion, nobody needed more time to breathe than the other, nobody wished to stay alive even if the other might die.

In the beginning they were all singing and talking about different affairs, despite the hot dark air that was pressing its shades over their chests. They were forced to whisper, their voices turned to cross words, or to unconnected letters, then their vivid activities would shrink gradually. The asphalt began to melt under their feet and would stick on them; its embers sank deeply in those feet. They couldn’t know where to put their feet; they all wished that they could fly in the air.

As if their feet were longing to withstand pain a little more, the feet were sharing the tragedy of pain, one would rise and the other would sink. Each of them tried to act ordinarily in dividing pain between his feet, each of them was quite aware that there were other feet wanting to crash his own. Despite this invented strange way, their feet were painted with melted tar, nerveless they had a sense of time and space.

All the prisoners have been transformed here to a single united community. Some of them were officers; the others were judges, doctors, engineers, workers, farmers. All of them are members of an elite community, distinguished with awareness and discretion. They all had developed an excellence in listening as well as talking, with a sense of responsibility of their whole society which loves them and needs them desperately.

Isn’t it the responsibility of the lover to sacrifice? They encountered here a very difficult exam that depends on their excellence in the art of withstanding pain, preventing total damage of the soul, and inventing certain means of survival in the face of death, so they kept standing.

The wagons were moaning, they were about to explode with that strange cargo. The iron blades lamented over an expected massacre. Unable to bear this massive pain and moaning, the iron blades tried vainly to protect those men who were hiding behind their thoughts. The iron blades played hide and seek with them, wishing to shake hands with them. Pain has melted the iron blades, and the echoes of moaning made them aware of that increasing catastrophe.
But there were other echoes, when they heard that chaos they sensed a reviving glamour of life. The rescue calls increased outside: "Try to hide somewhere; we are trying to save you."

None of them knew the source of those voices, but they were certain at least that somebody had known something about them, when they were first imprisoned in the wagons, or when the train stopped in Mahaweel station. Hope flourished again in their souls, life became an immortal anthem. But July afternoon sun denied that hope, and this massive anthem fainted gradually like a melting candle dropping burning tears.

However, they retrieved some of that hope when they saw that the train was gaining speed, rushing, wanting like a wild animal so though trying to escape from the capture of its railroad and fly up to a level that nobody can touch it. It kept rushing, and trying to escape with them. This escape process, as it was discerned by each of them, meant that the driver was keen to save them, to help them defeat their death.

Few light breezes escaped from beneath the gate, with suffocating dust. Many of them abandoned their roles in taking breath. Others responded to that faintly. They hesitated between taking the suffocating dust, and the radiating embers of iron blades. Nobody was able to console himself better than the other. The three imprisoned doctors couldn’t fathom their ranges of resistance compared with that of the others, But Dr. Rafid refused to hesitate any longer, he said to them:

"My brothers, please try to absorb your sweat drops, just drink them, don’t let sweat drops fell on your bodies. Put on your shirts, suck your friend's sweat, this is the only way to survive. My brothers, please... I am a doctor; my life is entangled with yours... We all want to live, we shouldn’t give up."

His disconnected quivering phrases helped him sometimes to resist suffocation. He kept insisting, beseeching, oscillating on the margins of death, while the train of death continued madly its process of penetrating unknown sterile earth, while the shiny sky was like a moaning widow.

Mr. Abbas increased speed to its utmost range. Few eagles, frightened by the harsh roar of the train engines, moved away hesitatingly, they had smelled something from a very far distance. Wild distances were approaching, getting closer became survival.

Survival chances increased more and more, there were aspects of stronger hope. Time passed reluctantly, with many allusive images, tangling together like a lost ship in the midst of unlimited sea and darkness. The train speed began to be lower, as if it were tired of those long distances. It had to take a little rest now. The train was like an ugly huge creature which got bored of moving, it no longer wished to move anywhere on that July afternoon, in that sterile place. The train was an animal longing wildly for a drop of water... water... water. But there was not a single drop of water in its vessels, neither was there any vessel.

From distant places, voices penetrated their ears, the ears widened to catch the threads of those voices that became closer. Indiscernible words and cries had gradually been recognizable: "Hurry... bring water, bread, milk, dates, any kind of food, come on."

A word followed by another, words were carried from one wagon to the other. Then the shouts were heard: "We all are alive, brothers... alive... alive." Unknown bodies enclosed in the wagons. Some of the bodies collapsed after being burned by hot iron blades, others insisted to stay alive on the embers.
At last the train stopped. Men began at once to unlock the gates, iron pieces were summoned from everywhere. Nobody has been asked about what he was doing. All of them wanted to participate in breaking the iron prison gates, so as to make them smell the breath of freedom.

Mr. Abbas breathed easily; he has arrived several hours before his time. He felt sure, or maybe unsure, that he was taking them another destiny. But he has managed anyway to rescue their lives. They responded to life, as they were excellent in withstanding unbearable kinds of pain.

The prisoners drank warm water during that July afternoon, water or milk mixed with salt, and then they relaxed on the dry soil. They didn’t feel the harsh burning soil because their bodies have been got accustomed to that. They were moved to other shady places beneath the station building walls.

At last they reached Samawa city, they kissed its soil and smelled its air and have been welcomed by its kind people. They accepted food from the hands of its generous people.

The guards also have been given food to eat just like them. They somehow felt ashamed about that mission they were performing. But suddenly the place became crowded with rusty weapons, dry faces, and official police cars. Soldiers spread all over the place. They shouted at those guards, but the guards have disappeared.

Mr. Abbas looked at the faces silently, he felt unpleased. He saw dry faces and hands transforming to iron chains. The soldiers forced the prisoners to move to other small old vehicles. Faces of the crowd seemed to protest angrily and silently in Samawa station, they kept staring interestingly without moving at all. Some of them felt that the prisoners were safe, the others felt worried. While the noisy engines started to roar and the vehicles moved, heavy clouds of dust spread in the direction of Samawa desert.
"What's upsetting you, my dear?"

"It's this harsh cold and loneliness."

She stirs fidgety in her place, and then says impatiently: "Why is this grave so frosty? My body quivers strongly, I am almost freezing."

"It's not a grave. We are actually kept inside a huge morgue."

"Did you say that it's a morgue?"

"Yes."

"Why don’t they cover us with blankets?"

"They might have thought we are dead. The dead don’t have senses, you know, or at least that’s what those stupid persons are supposing."

"But I still have senses and do remember everything. I can feel those pains in my body, and I am aware of this severe coldness and ugly loneliness. I can remember my past memories. For example, I remember my aunt Enaam who used to prepare delicious pizza for us, and my father who used to take me to my grandmother Safiyah's house every Friday. And I remember my teacher Ezdihar who told us about Bekhal waterfalls in the north. But why are we kept here? When had we arrived to this damned lonely place?"
"It seems that we are not alone down here. The morgue is full with many martyrs’ corpses."

"Do you mean that we are martyrs?"

"Yes. And we shall certainly go to Paradise. We would find many other martyrs there."

"Is Paradise a magnificent place?"

"Of course. It is more magnificent than Baghdad Tourist Island, or Habbaniya Lake. Have you ever visited those places?"

"No, I've never seen them."

"I was five years old when Dad took us to Habbaniya Lake. I wore my beautiful bikini and sunk repeatedly in the water. Water was so cool and refreshing. My friend Luma and I played happily and were throwing colored balls in the water and swimming towards them. We laughed heartily while we were splashing each other with cold water."

"You haven’t answered my question yet. When did we first arrive here?"

"I arrived on Sunday. Next day, I heard on T.V that the officials were calling particular days on which many innocent people passed away 'bloody days’ that means all days of the week have been turned to bloody ones. How could I ever have forgotten to ask you about your name! My name is Nuha."

"I am Suha. Nuha and Suha, our names seem almost similar. Why don’t we write a composition about this subject? I suppose that its title should be 'Suha and Nuha inside a morgue'. But why do we write a composition? Why don’t we write a story, maybe a short story for children? It might begin with such words… 'Once upon a time, Suha asked her friend this question: Why is this grave so cold, Nuha?’""

After a short interval of silence, Suha exclaimed while she was touching her forehead: "How strange! My white satin ribbon is gone, and my fair braids disappeared too."

"Ah! How could I have forgotten? Where are my colored flowers that I've prepared on Friday? They were with me this morning. I had met Miss Hamdiya, the fine arts teacher, near the school gate, and wanted to give her a bunch of flowers, but she said 'Not now, dear Nuha. You can bring them during the lesson'. But, I honestly tell you, Suha, that the bell never rang since the second lesson. Why have they not rung the bell till now? I want to show these colored flowers to my classmates Susan, Atyaf, and Afrah. Our teacher would have then told the class students to applaud highly."
"Don’t talk loudly, Nuha," said Suha, "the martyrs are still asleep. They are extremely exhausted."

Next moment, a man on the right side recovers consciousness, followed by another one on the left. At last there were five martyrs who have been resurrected from their unbroken sleep: three men and two women, at last the total number of the awakened martyrs became seven, including Suha and Nuha.

"Didn’t I tell you not to talk aloud?" Suha whispered to her friend, "they are all awake now."

"How did we first get to this place?" said the three men who got up from sleep simultaneously.

"Who brought us to this formidable frig?" said the two women with an adorable feminist voice.

"I was going to the beauty salon to have my hair cut," said the first woman, "my husband always likes it to be cut short. Who, for God's sake, brought me here?"

"And I was on my way to work," said the other woman, "I am a teacher in a kindergarten. The last thing I remember that I was teaching the kids and trying to make them memorize our national anthem 'My Country'... Two girls, Fatima and Ihsaan, had managed to memorize it quite fast. Other kids needed more time to grasp it well. Why have you brought me here, you bloody bastards? How can I ever watch my favorite programs on T.V anymore? Do we have a T.V set here so that I can watch Heya satellite channel?"

"And why should they display T.V programs here?" asked the first lady sarcastically. "Isn't it better for you to learn something about the catastrophe of our country? 'You give eyes to a blind man and he demands brows!' You should thank God for being able to see with your bare eyes despite being dead."

"I wish I could go back to my kindergarten," announced the other woman, "the kids haven’t memorized the anthem well yet."

"And I wish I could go home," said the first woman, "my husband would be amazed to see my new hairstyle. I would certainly be more beautiful than Cleopatra herself! He told me that he was thinking of taking me and the children to Al Zawra Park on Friday. Thurayah and Amjad could play there, and we could smell some fresh air, tell jokes and laugh merrily."

"Do you really think that we are dead? I don’t want to die right now. I desire to travel and observe many wonderful cities such as Alexandria or Lathkia. I dream of
seeing the Mediterranean Sea and hearing screams of seagulls and roar of the waves. I wish I could hear the joyful calls and laughs of my kids as they play and run with their kites along the Mediterranean shore. I had always dreamt of a world without bitterness or sorrows. I desire now to hear the songs of nature, and enjoy life with all its splendid delights. I want to attend wedding celebrations, musical parties, and listen to glamorous songs...

"Why haven’t the poetry festival begun till now?" said the first man, "yesterday I wrote a new poem. I want to read it aloud. Since five days I’ve been writing it. I want to express my grateful feelings concerning life, beauty, and innocent childhood."

"Oh! That was really a deep slumber!" murmured the second man faintly while he was rubbing his eyes. "I really don’t know whether I was taking a nab in a café or in my house. Before few moments, I heard the last customer leaving the café. He kept cursing his bad luck for not having a single dinar in his pocket. He was reading Al Sabah newspaper carefully, he almost read it from the first page to the last, and between a page and another he was announcing unintelligible phrases. Why didn’t the boy who works here come today? Has he found a job in another café? Due to his sudden absence I was forced to serve the customers myself. Their number wasn’t too much anyway. My café's customers are mainly journalists and writers; they used to gossip loudly and often insulted each other."

"What a painful and miserable life it is indeed!" said the third man while an unintelligible smile was roaming on his face, "I had wondered in so many cities of the world: Aden, Beirut, Damascus, Moscow, Berlin, Madrid, and other faraway places. Bad luck had accompanied me everywhere. I experienced so many tragic events here and there. My life was not more than a painful agonizing wound that kept bleeding extinguished dreams and hopes. Yesterday I dreamt of men competing with each other over a golden throne. Hands were pulling the throne from side to side. Some of those greedy persons were pulling the wooden arms of the throne and others trying to extract its back or gnawing their teeth on the wood, and I was screaming like a madman."

"Why haven’t the audience arrived yet?" said the first man.

"Why haven’t the boy come yet?" said the second man.

"When does this bleeding of dreams stop?" said the third man.

"When would I see my new hairstyle that I had made in the beauty salon?" said the first woman.

"When would the kids memorize 'My country' anthem?" said the second woman.

"Why are they so late to bring us blankets?" said Suha.
"Why haven’t the school bell rung yet?” said Nuha.

"I don’t want to leave this world," said the third man, "despite rudeness and cruelty of our country. I had experienced frosty exile and embers of homelessness, but I still don’t want to forget my memories in Alameerat Street, Alhamra Street, or Monmartar square. Neither do I want to stay anymore in this frig, because I got bored of the heavy frost of Sweden and Moscow, please let me out."

He stirs fidgety in his place.

"Where are you going?” said the first man, "We are dead now and have no right to leave the morgue at all."

"Why can't we leave it?"

"There are rules in the morgue. Haven't you read this signboard? (You are welcomed in this morgue. It is forbidden for you to leave it unless with an official approval."

"We die with a decision and live with a decision. Are we waiting for a decision to get back to life? I want to move to an unknown place, to know the reality of myself. I want to stick to my own world like a tattoo on the skin. I want to explore deep meanings, and understand the catastrophes, contradictions and painful cracks that are inside my soul."

"You are philosophizing things again. How can you ever get out of here, you, the philosopher of the twenty first century?"

"I don’t know, but I surely won't stay forever in this frosty spot that paralyzes my mind and senses. I won't let my memory perish. Should I keep searching for lost cities? I shall recover somewhere, my childish seesaws and the hooks I were using to catch small fish with."

"I felt really afraid when I went, for the first time, to the poetry festival. Safety no longer exists; explosions are erupting increasingly despite the huge numbers of the army troops and police men. I told myself however: 'What is the use of keeping a poem imprisoned on paper? Staying home was not less boring and useless. Here, I also get bored; being in this morgue is killing me. Like you, I don’t want to stay here. I hope the audience will listen to my new poem."

"During our last visit," Suha whispered to her friend, "my grandmother threw a handful of chocolate bars into my lap. She told me that she no longer can chew them, because she doesn’t have any teeth now. I first didn’t understand what she was saying, until she took off the set of her false teeth and showed me her toothless gum."
"Each feast day, my mother used to take me to visit my aunts Gayda, Hadeel and Areej. I told my aunts that I wouldn’t want them to give me candies anymore, and that I would want them to give me coins instead. I used then to collect money from my aunts and buy myself a nice doll. I once bought a new doll called Fulla with new garment. I liked, at that time, to buy beautiful dolls with merry faces. I loved feast days, and I was dreaming that all days would be festivals. We would have plenty of time to celebrate, laugh and exchange presents. We could enjoy wearing new clothes, and stuff our pockets with candies and coins. When we were mounting the Ferris wheel, we used to check our pockets for fear that we might lose our money. Our skirts would flutter in the air and reveal our skinny legs, and then we had to stretch our hands in order to cover our knees at once."

"Look!" said the first woman, "They left so many traces of their claws on my chest. My whole body bears signs of torture. I don’t want them to violate my body as they like. I won't be a metamorphosis, or let them deform my beautiful features; neither do I want them to demolish my femininity. I wish I would be able to recover my lost beauty and honor."

"Don’t you think that it is too early for us to die?" said the second woman. "They’ve carried me down here as a paralyzed body, however, my soul refuses to wither, and it resists humbleness and defeat. Despite being dead, I can't forget the past days and nights of Baghdad, they are still sailing endlessly on my tears. I can still remember those meadows, pastures and streets of Baghdad, its willow trees and date palms spreading on the two banks of Tigris: Karkh and Rusafa."

"Me too, my dear, I don’t want my feminism to be violated. I had resisted their attempts to crash my soul. Now I hate to keep crying and reproaching. I thought that their cruelty would end when I heard their gasping voices. But they continued their bitter actions endlessly. Blood stains were on the sides of their ugly mouths as they attacked me. They didn’t spare an inch in my flesh from stabbing with their claws. I wished I could be able to vanish from their sights, or hide even from myself. Now I don’t want to die while my body is stained with their dirty prints. I have a desire to erase their filthy smells and fly high in the sky like an innocent white dove. No, I don’t want to stay anymore in this frosty stinking place."

The first man got up. He opened the zipper of the big plastic sack. The other two men imitated him.

Finally, seven martyrs abandoned their sacks, wiped the blood stains off their bodies. Then they managed to open the gate of the frozen huge box. It was very heavy and slow moving as if it were made of lead. They smiled and ridiculed the signboard which hanged foolishly on the southern side of the frig.
"Out of this heavy frost," said the third man, "life emerges."

"Out of this wasteland," said the second man, "orange shrubs grow and blossom."

"In the midst of this stinking place," said the first man, "we smell the odor of cardamom."

"Out of this ugliness," said the first woman, "beautiful rainbow may shine."

"Out of the wounds of virgins," said the second woman, "the songs of joy are heard loudly."

"Come on, Nuha," said Suha. "We no longer need any blankets. It is spring."

The seven martyrs emerged out of the morgue, while the nurses were still asleep on their beds in a nearby room. Now they can smell at last the scent of the flowers in a green vast courtyard.

"We don’t want to stay in this suffocating darkness," said the third man. "We have to forget anything about that frosty box in which we were kept. Get rid, my beloved fellows, of your dead world. Put on new clothes, and fetch your belongings. We are getting back to life."

"Let me bring my flowers and take them away from this bloody land." said Nuha to her friend. "The bell is ringing, Miss Hamdiya, the fine arts teacher, will finally look at my colored flowers, and all my classmates will applaud highly. Come on, we have wasted a lot of time here. Did you say that it's a grave? No, Suha, I haven’t died yet, neither have you. We were just in a short trip from which we shall return soon. Come on, didn’t our fellow martyrs say that we shall be resurrected?"

"That's right," answered Suha, "here is my satin white ribbon, and here are my fair braids dangling on my chest again."

"Ah! Look, my dear," said the first woman while she was picking up her bag from the ground and exploring her face in a small round mirror, "How beautiful is my face with this hairstyle. Didn’t I say that I would be more beautiful than Cleopatra?"

A question mark sparkled in Suha's mind, "When shall we go to Paradise, Nuha? Didn’t you say that we are martyrs now, and we will go to Paradise?"

"Yes, I did. Of course we will go to Paradise, and we will stay there forever."

"Look, all of you, my dear friends," said the first woman, "there are persons looking at us from nearby buildings. They seem quite happy because we are coming back to life. They opened their windows for the wind while we were absent. They waited for
us too long. Now, the times of loss and sorrows have expired. Look, my friends, there are no more astray dogs in the streets, no howling sounds.

"What a wonderful ecstasy of victory!" said the first man, "Listen carefully. Listen to the sounds of a wonderful new life!"
The World Portfolio
In Praise of the Night

Musa Idris Okpanachi

Al- Lail\(^1\), the maiden name
Of dark-sweet twilight
In the zone of forgetfulness
In the enigma of your space
I sleep and dream in bliss
The blanket of the world
The seven mysteries of time

You are the rainy shade
In the garden of jasmine
The light of the moon and stars
You are the final veil
Of a benign black mirror
In silhouettes of paradise

You are the depth of the sea
The sacred beauty of a mystic world
The secret rapture of bliss
The Mimosa silk hidden

\(^1\) An Arabic word for ‘the night’
In descended Heavens

I am drunk with the joy
Of your secret shroud of peace
In which nothing exists
But angels strolling the scenic
Forest of damask rose

You are the light of the blind
The silent signature
Of God in figs and wild flowers

None of Us Lost a Rib

The mystery of my heart
The mists in my eyes
The self outside myself
The ‘I’ in me
Each time you blink
And close your eyes
My world shuts down
I am sealed
In the blissful beams
Of the fireflies writing
The history of our love
In their wings

Since I fall in love with you
I have lost the sky
I have parted with the earth
Winds have become flutes
I have begun to see with my ears

When I want to write you a poem
The dictionary becomes blank
The Muse says I need a slate of gold
The bird says I need ink of blue sky
The peacock says the letters
Should be cast in drops of rains

Your dark eyes have sent me
On a blissful trip to the alluring
Sky palace mirrors of dream
Since I fall in love with you
I dream of paradise awake
The streams have changed course
The clouds have become messengers
The rains have fallen with flowers

Taste of the World

I have tasted this life
And carried the world
On the tip of my tongue
Like icing sugar
And have savoured
Its bitter-sweetness

As the world rolls before me
I run with the wind
And robe myself
With the cloud

I have run the gauntlet
In the narrow Sitra\(^2\) of life
Navigating the barricades
Of the world thinking obstacles
Would yield to my child prodigy

How long would I have
To fall in love with rock
How far do I have to trek
To touch the rainbow
It is my turn to cry
But the tears would not come

I have tasted tomorrow
A glass window on the world
The foretaste of indelible
Traces of dream

I have tasted the sap

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\(^1\) In Islam, a razor-thin bridge across hell over which people pass to paradise.
Of seminal bile
And have carried
Embers on my palms

My callused and blistered
Soles are scorched
By sand and thorns
Planted by bosom friends

I have received honour
From bitter enemies
I have been insulted by fools
Often I have to shed
Blissful tears of betrayal

I have lost the meaning
Of love to gain passion
I have lost the final
Testament of innocence
To the whirlwind
As I carry my grave
In my hands

I have been abandoned
By kinsmen and flagellated
By strangers and have trekked
A lonely path on a rainy night
I eat only in my dreams
And starve by the day

I want to delete time to soothe
The pain inflicted by people
Drunk on cowries

I want to steel my will
Against the provocation
Of those who think they have
Usurped the acts of God

Let me die in order to love
Let me love to conquer my passion
The Rhythms Stop in Gaza

The streets of Gaza
Is strewn with the rocks
Of offence and stones
Of vengeance

I am a witness and victim
I am the mason to put back
The fallen walls but the walls
Hang on my neck dripping
With the blood of silence

I am the pigeon scanning the horizon
For peace but has become
A quarry for the hunters

They have electrified the sky
They have concealed the skyline
With the smokescreen
Of deadly phosphorus

The rumbles and the rising dusts
From the fallen walls have
Cracked and wounded the earth
And the streets stumble
On the corpse of my brother
Bring the funeral pyre
Cremate my heart and spread
The ashes on the road for my lads
To ride on triumphantly amidst the shout
Of Akbar to the graves

The land is an ice that freezes the heart
The fire that burns the clutches of the amputees
The land of stitches and wounded stones
A gun is perpetually pointed at me
A gun for a stone a stone for a gun
I coo the requiem for those
Left behind by history
A history of wounds
The wounds of history

We shall begin the census from the graveyards
We shall vote with tattered pieces of shrouds
In the democracy of coffins

O Earth, see how they defecate
On our graves trying to renew
The killing of the dead

The earth is full we shall bury
Them in the womb of the sky
And in the tomb on our thighs

We shall hawk their graves
At the lobby of the United Nations

How many martyrs must die
In the arms of the prophets
How much tears of saints
Would cleanse the streets of Gaza

Gaza is a house of candles
The vigil shall not last forever

O Jerusalem the land of Crusade
The temple of the prophets
Where eternal rope is suspended
Between the earth and Heavens

The light is dying
These poems are from my book of collection of poem in press: *From the Margins of Paradise*

The Arab Portfolio
I look down, like a house balcony, upon what I want
I look down upon my friends as they carry the evening’s
Mail: wine and bread,
And some novels and audiocassettes…

I look down upon a seagull, and a soldiers’ truck
Changing the trees of this place.
I look down upon the dog of my emigrating neighbour
From Canada, since a year and a half…

I look down upon the name of “Abu Al-Taib Al-Matanabi”,
Traveling from Tabaria to Egypt
On the horseback of the ode

I look down upon the Persian flower mounting
The iron fence

I look down, like a house balcony, upon what I want

*  
I look down upon trees guarding the night from themselves
And guarding the sleep of those who love to see me dead…

I look down upon the wind searching for the country of the wind
In itself…

I look down upon a woman sunbathing in herself…

I look down upon the procession of old prophets
As they mount barefooted to Jerusalem
And ask: is there a new prophet
For this new time?

*  
I look down, like a house balcony, upon what I want

I look down upon my picture as it flees from itself
To the stony stairway, carrying my mother’s handkerchief
Fluttering in the wind: what would happen if I returned
A child? And I return to you… and you return to me

I look down upon the stump of the olive tree that hid Zakariyah
I look down upon the words that have become extinct in “Lisan-u-al-Arab”

I look down upon the Persians, Romans, Sumerians,
And the new refugees…

I look down upon the necklace of one of Tagore’s poor women
As it is being crushed under wheels of the carriage of the handsome prince

I look down upon a hoopoe tired of the reproof of the king

I look down upon metaphysics:

What will happen… what will happen after the ash?
I look down upon my body scared from afar…

I look down, like a house balcony, upon what I want

*

I look down upon my language after two days. A little absence is enough for Aeschylus to open the door for peace
A little speech
Is enough for Antonio to start war,
A woman’s hand
in my hand is enough
for me to hug my freedom
And enough for the ebb and flow in my body to start anew

*

I look down, like a house balcony, upon what I want

I look down upon my ghost

coming

from

afar …
Ashes

1
A little while ago
The lover told the lost woman:
I’ll make you my rich imagination
And my sparkling distance.
I’ll bestow upon you the quality of music and the language of water.
And for your eyes I’ll offer the tranquility of the night and its jovial stars.
On your pillows I’ll sprinkle dreams with confident wings
Lest you become a mistress of loftiness
And no strong wind dares to shake you
O Queen…

2
Later on
The wolf told his widowed mother:
There is a dog in the wind
Like he means sly levity
Or the desire to howl
And run remotely from the mirrors of pride
And the mysterious wilderness
Like he, as he departs remotely,
There is nowhere for him
Or a language or a space
Solitarily barking O homeland
Where the blind wind
Thrives on broken barking.

3

Later on too
The discharged soldiers said:
We are the ashes of trials.