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New Ends, Fresh Beginnings

If one has to chart out the last nine years in the history of Iraq (2003-2011), one can easily see that this period was always marked by the dawn of new ends and the prospect of new beginnings. There was first the end the long night of dictatorship and the totalitarian regime and the beginning of the new age of freedom in 2003 which triggered the cycle of all other ends and beginnings: Occupation, governing council, the writing of the new constitution and the referendum, the interim government and the three elections and three new governments. A massive historical process is in the making then, which future historians might say was probably responsible even for the so called Arab Spring in the entire Middle East. The resurrection of new, truly democratic Iraq seems to be the aspiration of the overall majority of the population of Iraq. No question, though, the travails will drag on for quite some time, after all this is the Middle East not Scandinavia, yet no one can doubt the ultimate result. But how was this reflected on the new literary scene? Of course, in times of social and cultural upheavals, one cannot speak about intellectual and cultural developments with precision as the necessary dialectical prerequisite-the material base- is still in the making. After all cultural practices feed on the sap of economics and we may find ourselves obliged to agree with Trotsky that “furnaces have to be hotter, wheels have to move faster, looms have to turn more quickly, schools have to work better” before we speak of a new cultural or literary scene. Nonetheless, we may be able to provide some concise description of some general aspects of what happened in the last nine years. *Firstly, there was a movement that marginalized the center and centralized the margin.* Many mainstream writers, who were residing writers and generally counted as supporters of the old regime, found themselves in exile and many dissident writes, who were in exile, returned to Iraq and now are counted as residing writers and

supporters of the new regime in Iraq. Yet, public media knew only the former and know very little about the latter. The focus continues to be centered on the old names and no serious attempt is made to highlight the new ones. Criticism must be fair with all as a full account of the history of Iraqi literature is a necessary step before we move on to any new era. *Secondly, we may be able to speak of the stagnation of the middle man.* Writers who remained in the middle, in other words, those who were neither supported nor opposed the old regime, continued to maintain their old place in the new era. They seem to be incapable of exploiting the new potentialities of the age of free speech. *Thirdly, we can safely speak of the dilemma of the ideological writer.* In the age of the death of all ideologies, the ideological writers embarrassed themselves by their attempts to impose their preconceived ideas about the world. And when the world did not conform or the people did not agree, they indulged in an individual monologue resenting the world and its people. Otherwise how can one explain the attempt of one poet who dubbed himself as “the last Communist”? The new age is larger than all ideologies. It is more comprehensive and all inclusive. *Fourthly, there was the rise of the historical novel.* History was a taboo under dictatorship. Writers were forced to adapt the official version of history and any attempt to write any version that contradicts it was harshly punished. In this regard, we find ourselves obliged to raise our hats in admiration of the new novels of Ali Badr and a few other novelists. *Fifthly, the failure of criticism.* Unfortunately, criticism was in the past and continued to be in the present very much a coterie activity. Critics only write elegant compliments about the writings of their friends regardless of their merits. Creative, objective criticism is scarcely existent. What we need is a criticism that explores and unveils the hiding places of our literary creations. We certainly do not need the panegyrics of hypocrites.

These are only some general aspects of what we were able to observe in the literary scene of the past nine years. Let me confess that the full image requires more than what we have cited here. But 2012 undoubtedly marks the dawn of a fresh beginning. Let us cease this chance to redirect our creative writing towards new higher literary goals!

Editor,

Sadek R. Mohamed

Criticism

Structuring the Artistic Sentence in the Theatre of Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh

By Yaseen Al-Naseer
Translated by Khalida Hamid



Here are two tasks controlling the context of this article; to have the sentence under the domination of the politically and socially pressing powers (which was the characteristic of the past years) so they change the discourse of culture, and to connect the sentence with its birth place. With Muheyil Deen these tasks turn to a cognitive problematic since he writes in a simplified standard Arabic understood by all. This means that adopting the standard Arabic gets him away from the locality of language and its complications. Besides, the clarity of his mental views was the main reason behind the prevention of many of his theatrical shows in Iraq, as well as the threat to be trialed. The other problematic is that his texts are related to the issues of simple people dwelling in the suburbs, villages and towns. Most of them deal with struggle, revolution, nationalism, liberty, right and justice.

So, it is a critical adventure to pause before the product of a great artist and intellect by shedding some light on the ‘sentence’ in his product. He is an artist who had given the Arab theatre, within 50 years and so, more than fifty works including many-act plays and one-act plays, long and short novels, long and short stories and novellas. Such a writer is able to talk with a high artistic language on the nature of the Iraqi society, its structure, ideas, and its past and current events by following the changes in its life. He is the son of this people who has been affected by it like any other citizen belonging to a progressive culture.

Accordingly, his artistic sentence must carry all that since the central problem that characterized his product does not stop at the verge just to look at what happens or to comment on it or to criticize this or that phenomenon. Rather, it seeks to detect the situations that arouse questions by adopting a method that combines a strict academic and artistic structure, such as the plays: “The Question”, “The Secret”, and a modern experimental structure having the elasticity of breaking stereotypes, such as the plays: “A

Tale of Two Friends”, “The Stone Box”, “Whose the Flowers?”, “Shouting of the Dump Silence”, “The Thorns” and “Talk Oh You Stone!” with a structure that combines both structures, such as the plays: “Kawa Deldar”, “The Punishment”, “Cats” and “The King’s Dream”. Will his artistic sentence do all these tasks?

When having a look at the artistic character in his plays one can find that they are ideas filled with live bodies; they are not an ordinary man that he uses haphazardly. Rather, they are the man who is a problematic, an idea; the man who asks questions to face what will happen. We find this man so close to the author or among his acquaintance who is fed by heritage, as in his play “The Question”, sometimes by the problems of the bloody reality as in “The Secret” or sometimes by the popular tale as in “Talk Oh You Stone”. Hence, we find that this character carries names and sometimes comes nameless. It is the moving creature among contradicting disciplines that we can recognize in factories, jobs, party organization, state departments, demonstrations, cafes, palaces, prisons, and migration cities. It suffers with us the dilemmas of suppression, estrangement and hunger. So, this character became the author’s companion and his true friend. They talk to each other.

Structure of the Artistic Sentence

The artistic sentence of Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh is saturated with literary doctrine. It does not have the artistic spontaneity only, but there is an internal condition that controls the context of the artistic sentence. This context is the national doctrine that it directs its discourse towards its validity and legitimacy. The substance of this doctrine sentence is the non-literary text underling the theatrical text. Because of the depth and domination of the mythological text the sentence carries within itself a narrative structure. That’s why one finds a sort of similarity between his narrative and theatrical works but they differ in signification. The sentence of the novel is mostly charged with investigation, interpretation and telling while that of the theatre is temporary, discursive, rich and deep with questioning in order to stimulate the struggle. This is not a deficiency. Rather, the nature of the dialogue in play imposes a certain context to suit the situation while the novel works on delaying the situation. The difference between the two is that the characters in the novel conceal behind clear and complete names while the characters in the play are most of the time vague and unknown concealing behind attributes, symbols or individual names.

As for the mental structure of his plays, one finds that he did not depend on a certain ideology in spite of his clear inclination to Marxism. This means that a great intellect is not led by his ideologies but he enriches from them and then he departs them towards wider areas. In a society like ours, with all its events, ideology becomes good only as a

general framework for a controversial vision. But the problems that a writer deals with may deviate this framework towards the remote roots that makes theatrical art part of a developed cosmological artistic game. No doubt that anyone views the play on stage finds a primitive artistic theme decorated with dreams and reality and embodied by the language of motion, body and tongue to tell a tale on the static and physic level of the game. As for level of significance, there is a cosmological game played by humans to express their attitudes, needs and ideas. This game was very ancient and still repeated by peoples as seasonal rites in a way to keep its form and content. It is done annually within a mass festival but it turns them into a message expressing a certain attitude and a need just like music, dance, singing, sadness, joy, anger and war. The game is mortal and cannot be stable with a certain shape or language, nor a text or code. It is an open search game to originality, experimentation and creativity.

In theatre of Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh we always find ourselves in an old rite circle but its framework and content is continuously changing in order to express the present. It seems to me that Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh had some of the primitiveness of theatrical game; a sort of the old shape unconsciousness moving within his texts and moving them. It is the artistic play on the shape, theme and Man. The whole experience of this play depends on two central characters. Most of the event structure in his plays is built on two characters despite the many characters in the text. This makes us quite sure that he is open to experimentation from a narrow angel then he splits the two characters into other ones in a way that you may find his play with four, five, six or ten characters but the main characters are two. Muheyil Deen did not graduate from The College of Fine Arts and did not study theatrical arts in a private study. He published his first play in 1959. All he knows about the game of theatre is that it embodies popular drama with a language so close to the public and with an ideology for people. So he represents every side with on character and then splits it into many others standing behind this or that. This sort of composing grew and developed as a way of managing dialogue among many main and secondary voices in the Iraqi culture under the auspices of national sense and progressive culture as the first step towards democracy. All the novels of the Iraqi novelist Gh'ib T'uma Farman, for example, depends the polyphony and he briefed them in five only surrounded by dozens of peoples. This variety was imposed by the national culture in emphasizing the open criticism and questioning to the roots of problems and their social ramifications.

The other aspect that our author has built his artistic architect upon is that all his plays were done in narrow places: rooms, prisons, houses, jails, corners, allies, carts, cave and palace. The significance of the narrow places stresses oneness, solitude, watch and waiting. They are places charged with the power of the solo voice. Since he writes in standard Arabic the features of the popular place and big city were disappeared and became mere shades in these narrow places. Yet, you feel that his artistic sentence carries

the collective sense of the big places. The absolute affiliation to these places stresses this sense; because he, who builds the houses of his plays in the suburbs, in the above mentioned areas in particular, sticks too much to historicity, traditions, classic mode of dialogue, future vision of things and clearness in saying. Standard Arabic is part of this historical structure that we have since that its events cannot be floating without any depth. Had his places in the city they would have carried the economic, political and cultural actions, properties and language of the city with a multi-faced standard Arabic charged with everyday talk.

It is true that Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh does not see another place but the stage; the narrow place, but he built on that stage the houses of his texts. The decoration of that stage has the popular features of isolated areas and suburbs charged with individual energies. This makes us connect between his use of the simplified standard Arabic with the deliberate absence of big places, because the standard Arabic generalizes the event and prevent it from being specialized. With this marriage between the standard Arabic and narrow places the grand national issues turn to a dialogue of ideas that is said in tea session, a journey on a road, a moving cart or a narrow sail, between two crossed men on a wall or a conclusion of an existential question. You can also find it in the nature of the countryside and small towns.

This is not confined to Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh only but it includes the generality of our cultural product. In our novel, poetry and theater there is no place for the modern city, nor an identity or a context of a city like Baghdad. But there is such a place for the context and relation of the local neighborhood, factory, prison, alley and café. In other words, the relations produced by narrow places. But Muheyil Deen Zen Ge Neh is deliberately concealing the identity and features of the big places by being satisfied with using the standard Arabic as a big eraser to delete the differences among places.

The Broom of Heaven Five Rabbits in the Basket of Murtatha Gzar

Dhia Al- Jubaili
Translated by: Mustafa Naser



It is said that this novel resembles the act of rabbit hunting! But why rabbits specifically? Is this kind of hunting to be considered difficult to this extent, contrasted with hunting other kinds of preys, such as eagles, or even snakes? There is no doubt that writing a novel isn't an interesting endeavor as some of us may think, it is in fact a kind of skillful workmanship, or as sometimes it is called, practicing cursed rituals that only brave hearted persons can dare to talk about.

Writing a novel may be merely a process of telling lies, or it is a trick that the novelist uses to falsify life, even when he may be more sincere to life than those who are still driven by rotten ideas, those ideas that are easily dissipated by storms of the new world order while being tangled with decaying ropes.

This means that writing a novel is certainly a difficult endeavor, it is a painful maneuver that costs the novelist great losses on various levels, but it at the same time grants him lots of profits in recreating beauty and ugliness likewise within the frames of one world, that's the world of the novel. Thus, a novel may in fact resemble rabbit hunting if we agree that this kind of hunting will be really a difficult job! On this basis, there must be a skilled hunter who is excellent in chasing preys, who can distinguish between trivial targets and fat rabbits, or beautiful deers, and from blood of such valuable preys, he can extract the perfume that enchants the goddesses of beauty!

There are many measurements by which we can distinguish between "fat rabbits" that have been dropped in the basket of Murtatha Gzar, in his novel *The Broom of Heaven*.

Depending on number of rabbits which he captures (rabbits here are a theme, or technique, or just a character... etc.), we can put under our search lights five aspects characterizing this novel.

First, the Negro grandson.

We know that the following characters: Widad, Midyan, Hayawi and Mullayah are grandsons of the Zunj Revolution (revolution of Negroes). They are slaves who have rebelled and tried to get emancipated from cruelty of the Abbasids after a severe revolution that shock the thrones of the caliphate, "the distant relatives of Widad lay in hospitals and clinics in many African republics healing from enuresis, aids and harsh injuries of rape by using giant equipments," (p. 55).

For a long time, the Iraqi novel kept ignoring this crucial element, unless in rare cases, though its roots were growing deeply within our life and history, especially history of Basra. If we read the American novel, for example, or the British novel, we shall observe the huge benefit that writers acquired from exploring this element and its effects in a basic sector of their societies. Those writers have extracted many significant characters that enriched their way of writings with special novelistic scent, such a scent that we can smell through the techniques adopted by Murtatha Gzar. Bringing this family to life isn't arbitrary or something mentioned in the margin, it is rather quickly deserve to be mentioned in the original text. This textual presence isn't an extension of previous slavery acts or verbal depiction of slaves and retarded persons. Median, in the novel, is a translator, and Widad a painter, it is something extraordinary to exist in reality unless in extraordinary cases, but the Iraqi novel has absorbed this contradiction at last in the Broom of Heaven, "Abid... have you ever seen a slave who paints!" p. 54".

Murtatha Gzar has injected this kind of "strange" blood in flesh of the novel using distinguished skill and investing great amount of magic and sense of humor. The roles of the characters became something more than Haywah dances performed by those who are affected by African or Swahili art in the quarters of Ziran, Old Basra, Zubair, Abulkasib and Fao!

Mullayah, the black mother might be most insisting factor in the mind of the novelist because of her refusal to the question of color, this was especially clear in page 42 of the novel: "I want you to bring me the films of the postcards which you have stolen." "But we haven't stolen them, they were our pictures." "Yes, your pictures indeed, but they are without development." "My mother loves us like that, with our white faces and black hair." "Your mother should have waited the pictures to be developed, so that white color might be reflected on blackness." Although Murtatha Gzar didn't accomplish the woman's desire of getting kids with white faces, she was an important character in the novel, she gave birth to Widad the painter and Midyan the translator.

Second, the scent of graveyards.

For the second time, the scent of graveyards spreads all over the world of Murtatha Gzar. We have smelt this scent in funereal form after the earthquake of the 9th. April 2003. We can observe here that the writer didn't use unknown victims or ordinary persons, what is meant here is that victims were buried in one graveyard created by the political authority. The obsessed interest of the writer in graveyards led him to use twelve painters who painted portraits of the previous president, revealing the fact that they were not ordinary persons. If the matter were contrary to that, they wouldn't have been all executed and buried in the same graveyard.

The question is: what could have been said in the novel if Gzar concentrated upon questioning those painters? What might he do if he made the death of a group of painters his distinctive theme? Would he write another novel? Supposing that is true, how would he manage to get rid of the domination of Bamouk, the novelist who was excellent in his novel "My name is Red" in detecting the secrets of dialogue and expression of painting and art, especially that those painters were gathered in one workshop, and they were concerned with, or ordered to, paint the portraits of the president!

There is no doubt that faces in the twelve painter's graveyard are considered a valuable hunting, a work that is driven away from tragic and romantic television scenes, despite the existence of a girl who carries her grandfather's bones: "as if she wants to suckle him, she was showing off her long awaited motherhood, p. 19 and the other woman who threw herself on the skeleton of her son "her weeping almost resembled in some of its syllables the sound of laughter," p. 19.

Murtatha Gzar leaves this theme flourishing in the imagination of the reader without his interference, not paying attention to the questions of developing that theme. He produces his theme from something different having a special flavor that enhances aesthetics of the work, the opposite may be true also, it may spoil it! It seems that the writer was convinced with this closed theme without thinking about resorting to the trick of putting solid lives between its layers, or retrieving each character separately, or even revealing their names, so that he may direct attention to other characters that aren't less important, characters that suffer from the worries of life. Generally speaking, the author was wondering with unstable steps in strange atmospheres, and whenever he penetrates tunnels, darkness increases without being able to observe an end or a faint spark of light.

The lost episode in the novel is a group of painters who were executed, a Danish team discovered their corpses in South Rumaila, but this episode seems to have a destructive effect in the novel, it almost causes an act of explosion within its characters, so thinks the novelist at least. He wanted not to open the file of those painters; so that their stories would not overwhelm the events of his novel, no place was left even for Widad and his

family members to express themselves. This is an innovated technique anyway, because the novelist always sacrifices many of his thoughts, but he at the same time certainly needs great intelligence in case he deliberately uses such a theme, he also needs the spirit of courage sufficient for getting rid of his innovated creatures on paper, and it is obvious that he has managed to do so!

Third, the Iraqi Jean Jennet.

The narrator in the novel is Ramzi, "this painter who is penetrated from his entire digital hole," so declares he himself. The scent of his lust to slaves spreads all over the first pages, "a bunch of slaves stole a horse from an Inkisharian soldier," He doesn't hesitate to inform us about the scene of his capturing one of them, that's Widad in page 8, so it becomes clear to us that abnormality of Ramzi in a way exceeds all expectations of the reader. He seems to be more than just a man who likes black kids; we can add that he is an intellectual figure and a painter, in addition to being the narrator. Ramzi doesn't try to hide his lust related to his partner Widad since he met him for the first time in one of the restaurants in Ash'shar, where he used to work: "that slave has conquered me," p. 72.

Matters develop rapidly in the novel to the extent that Ramzi is identified with his vague and exciting images, he describes the alley inhabited by negroes, where his beloved Widad lives in a style that corresponds to his desire to have that kid: "there.... where houses of poor people bend in a homosexual fashion, how shameful!" p. 14. That's how he confirms the deepness of his feelings concerning that race which he has himself chosen instinctively, his passion to Widad isn't sexual at all, because he declares many times his love of a black girl, not thinking about the possibility of sleeping with Midyan for example, though having the same blood that moves in his adult brother's veins.

Gzar did not extract the character of Ramzi from a realistic model whatsoever. The eloquence of this character, its highly erotic feelings resemble to a certain extent the obscenity of Jean Jennet in his diaries and other works. Ramzi didn't choose a black boy from the street, he felt that it was necessary for his beloved to have suitable education, that is Widad who can paint, write and speak English, in addition to some words from Persian and Mendai languages!

The writer presented to the reader a character that is different from any model that practices the same kind of action in other works, that gave Ramzi a psychological and affectionate rather than sexual dimension related to sodomy. We are able to distinguish that feature from the dialogue of the narrator, those phrases that clarify his feelings and experiences about severe homosexual love: "my whole body was trembling, my love to Widad reached the depths of my heart," p. 75.

It is a kind of strange relationship; it carries something extraordinary in the field of writing about homosexuality. In an excellent endeavor, the writer has driven his novel away from claims saying that, "it is no use to talk about these things at all."

Fourth, the craft of humor.

Away from realism in the novels that we usually read, the writer weaves his jokes with excellent craftsmanship, revealing through his sense of humor certain questions about life, death, war and coincidence. He deliberately uses tools of the craftsman to create the scenes in which those things mingle together, we cannot say about those scenes that they are facetious, nor can we classify them as tragical. From another point of view we see that death makes fun of Hayawi during the war days with Iran, when he killed by a grenade five Iranian frogmen by mistake.

There is also the soldiers who try to "cheat" time by learning to play chess using their huge boots. Widad who is only six years old, who almost put the batteries in the ass of his brother, Midyan the infant, "thinking that this new small creature is only a black dummy!", and other characters: Mullahyah and Hameed Tabanah who intended to buy a donkey. All these humorous situations and many others produce a kind of vivid contradictions that refresh the reader's mind and make the work less boring, and more interesting.

The novelist has made use of this aspect that enabled the reader to appreciate the scheme of this great amount of humor in a more aesthetic way, although this has reached an extent that made the technique of the novel more difficult to the ordinary reader. The novelist made this amount of jokes in order so that we might continue reading, this characteristic existed in the (Broom of Heaven) in a different fashion, or maybe quite different than what we hear in reality, because the scene is connected strongly with the indications that humor try to reach. Humor is not constructed of mere jokes upon the tongue of a comical storey teller, it is rather a thing that seems to be woven from the texture of imagination. As soon as we discover that amount of reality mixed with magic, we'll believe that there must be something refreshing, but it is also quite catastrophic and fantastical, like when women satisfy their lust with mines!

Fifth, ambushes of place.

Places in the novel are characterized with a special scent, a spirit that fills oneself with ecstasy. Basra as a city is infected with disasters of war, oil and art. Despite all that Basra has the ability to hatch the most strange tales, it is a city overwhelmed with events and narrative, thus the novelist is supplied with great amount of scenes and places relaxing on the pen of Murtatha Gzar. The novelist has provided the necessary narrative benches, realistic inspirations and schemes that depend on ignoring the obstacles of temporary details. It seems that the Murtatha Gzar was trying to search for a new

transparent spirit that would dominate on the reader so that staying within its boundaries might be more than an arbitrary passing by. Voyage of the reader in the novel becomes an experience of smelling the odors of places and search for lost recollections and foot prints of a voyager who has passed from there one day.

The shrine of Sheikh Shofan is in Old Basra, the quarter of Hakkaka, "slaves of Basra have long considered it their own shrine, they used to visit it, perform the ritual which is called the Meedan, and make their vows to God there," This means that the novelist depended on the historical model of this place, he didn't ignore its being a place usually visited by this class of people. We also read in the novel about the alley of slaves, which enhanced the novel's importance, in addition to its historical privilege, and there are other places that added a source of interest to the narrative. We know or imagine how beautiful the watch of Surain was as a symbolic statue resembling posts that no longer exist unless in the memory of old people.

Place in the mind of Murtatha Gzar is not something imagined in as much as it is retrieved from the depth of the wasteland, he constructs its shapes with intensive care, or reorganize it, so that it doesn't lose its spiritual dimension of being a theme that attracts the reader. He decorates it with pearls from his own memory, just like an architect may do with his newly discovered worlds. Discovering the new worlds makes the novelist feel enchanted while walking in the alleys of Basra, it gives him a chance to retrieve the most beautiful places and moments before formalizing them artistically.

Epilogue

After reading this novel, we may remember seeing Murtatha Gzar in many places, when we sit in a bus, along with other passengers who feel weary and try to amuse themselves by their beads, mobile games and listening to the radio, waiting for the last passenger to arrive. We can hear the annoying voice of the driver shrieking: "one person left, we shall leave!", or sitting in one of the cafes of Ash'shar, or maybe standing in front of one of the President's portraits which was replaced by portraits of Imams, whenever we look out of the window and behold the vague shrines that spread all over the road of Basra - Baghdad! Finally, is hunting rabbits really such a difficult mission?

Ishtar's Songs ... Ishtar's Agonies

Ramadhan M. Sadkhan



1. Introduction:

Ishtar's Songs: Iraqi Poetry since the 1970's is an anthology published recently in English by Darul-Ma'mun for Translating and Publishing. This anthology, which falls in 304 pages, is translated and edited by Dr. Sadek R. Mohammed and Soheil Najm. It covers a very vast span of time extending for about four decades with their ups and downs as we see later in the course of this review. Poets included here totaled 61, arranged alphabetically, with one, two or three poems each depending on the length of the poems. It is a praise-worthy endeavour that acquaints the non-Arabic speaking communities with the status quo of the Iraqi modern and contemporary poetry in terms of its themes, structures, dominant images, etc. In what follows is just a modest expository reading to highlight the dim pictures drawn bitterly by those poets who suffered, and are still suffering, whether at home or in exile. But before of that, an introduction about the touchy status of affairs experienced by Iraq during the decades from 1970 upwards seems a must. This is so because poetry is the product of the era with which it interacts whether positively or negatively.

The year 1970 witnessed the real rule of Baath Party when it retook power in 1968 – the decade that was overflowed with plots, liquidations, rebels, attacks and counter-attacks between the proponents and opponents of the then ruling party. In the 1980's, the Iraq-Iran war erupted, lasted for eight years, and created a generation of poets whose

dominant concern was to eulogize the regime and polish its ugly face. Next to that, another category of poets opted for silence to save their bacon, but due to the repeated harassments at the hands of that regime most, if not all, of them were coerced to flee their country preferring to live abroad. So, the two dichotomies of poetry came to surface: poetry at home that drummed for the hollow victories supposedly gained by the regime and poetry in exile that censured all the brutalities committed against humanity in the name of blurred ideas of liberating lands from the enemies. Hence, two classifications of poets were in vogue: poets at home and poets in exile, though I am personally not interested in such "spatial" categorization because many poets opposed the regime while they were inside the country and their fate at that time was either death, marginalization or expulsion from their jobs.

From 1990 up to 2003, many tragic events occurred that affected poetry one way or another: the invasion of Kuwait in 1990; Desert Storm in January 1991 that claimed the lives of about 100,000 soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians; Intifadha (uprising) in March 1991 that was followed by many atrocities the least of which were relocating of Marsh Arabs, draining of marshes, and imposing of no-fly zones; from April 2003 till now the dethroning of the old regime that ensued in the states of disorder and lawlessness that made many people, including poets, live in mess. Such calamities, touched upon earlier in passing, reshaped the scene of the Iraqi poetry to render it from being lyrical to be teamed with images of blood, isolation, killing, death... So, to make a good selection among poets with different orientations and ideologies is not an easy undertaking; it requires a meticulous examination and exhaustive reading of most products of that era throughout 43 years.

It is worth to note that the Iraqi poetry since the 1920's witnessed a state of agitation or a kind of revolt against the traditional parameters, and this was culminated in the 1940's and upwards in the first fruits of the pioneering poets that broke the bonds of rhyme and rhythm, take for instance: As-Sayyab's (*Was it Love?*), Nazek Al-Mala'ika's (*Cholera*), Al-Bayati's (*Angels and Evils*), Bulend Al-Haidari's (*The Songs of the Dead City*) to mention but a few. The poets chosen in this anthology are a continuation of those great poets whose works are still resounding.

2. The Anthology Revisited:

In his able introduction, Dr. Sadek R. Mohammed, a co-translator, gave panoramic views concerning the general atmosphere in which the Iraqi modern poetry developed. He said that the Iraqi poetry translated into English was less than expected, rendering that to the barrier of language and the strategies adopted in translating poetry. The former lies in the fact that Arabic is the least language which is translated from, i.e. opposite to English which is the most language which is translated into. The latter is represented in the non-systematic process of translating Iraqi literary products including poetry. Most

translations done till now were carried out, according to Dr. Sadek, only for powerful figures in the Iraqi literary establishment, or depending on personal basis, or the degree of the literary men's acquaintance with this or that translator. He also brought to the fore the kinds of poetry, and hence the kinds of poets, translated in this anthology; the dire conditions under which poets wrote their poems; life in Baghdad; the difficult situation of translators especially after 2003; the generations of poets; the themes; and the non-inclusion of some poets in that period apologizing to them with a promise to be included in the future anthologies. Dr. Sadek concludes saying "the best test of poetry is translation and ... the best test of translation is poetry".

To begin with is the main title of the anthology, i.e. *Ishtar's songs*, which connotes, due to the word '*Ishtar*', to fertility, love, sexuality, friendship, quietness ... etc. But the contents of the poems selected run diametrically opposite to those affectionate meanings; instead, the poems address sterility, hatred, enmity, chaos ... and so on. Here lies the keenness of the translators (and editors) in suggesting such a title to imply that even Ishtar turns her back on the joys and pleasures of the world to give heart-breaking "songs" that are full of miseries, killings, blood, and wars. This upside down fact is clearly visualized through the particulars dealt with by those poets. So, it is not unusual in that era to envisage that the clothes are shabby, memories lame, seagulls wailing, ships broken, the sun colourless, even dreams are mysterious and tarnished with the blood of poverty, birds cry, the clouds defeated, the hope injured, the light poisoned, to the extent that even the river becomes as a black knife, while the Tigris and Euphrates are nothing but two gaping wounds, the statues were perplexed ... watching nothingness. Such macabre images are repeatedly echoing here and there in the poems:

Travelers ... leave their luggage in stations
The ladies are without eyes this time
Beautiful cars are not a dream any more
Everything is leaving or staggering ... (p. 39)

This departure, however, does not lighten the burdens of alienation because everything abroad is with no taste, no colour, and no smell. Such is "the air of exile" too, and those who left their homeland were depicted as if they "took refuge from death / By death" (p. 254). Due to such nostalgic feelings, we see the country present almost in every poem, together with the images of death, blood, isolation, despair, etc. that are deep-rooted in their subconsciousness: "There is always blood ... / and if not ... / There is a smell that leads to it! (p. 149). The Blood Rivers of Iraqis being shed now and then are bitterly derided in the following lines that come in the form of "fatwas" which are analogous to Quranic verses:

Whoever, among you, sees an Iraqi, should slaughter him with his hand, but if he
Can't, then with a mortar canon, and if he can't,
Then with a car bomb and this is the least of faith (p. 211).

So, death hovers close to us even in laughing, "Didn't I tell you [Becket] that I laugh
till death" (p. 29). Despite how unbearable that situation is, a resounding call comes aloud
appealing to patience: "AND WE ENDURE" that is reiterated many times in the poem
'*Fatwas for Rent*'. However, "blood" in its positive connotation comes only one time in
this anthology:

Come forward female
Soul of the forest ...
Your wet body
With its smells and tenderness
Is awakening in my blood (p. 244)

Otherwise, it is related to death, destruction, loathsomeness, and annihilation
especially in the rein of the "The Man of Blood" who gets his relief in the scene of blood
because:

His breakfast is blood
His dinner is blood
His supper is blood
His drink is a wail of a widow
And wars are his joys
His hobbies are palaces
And mass graves (p. 132).

In brief, the contents of poems, because of the arid era in which they are written,
reflect some states of agnosticism, despair, defragmentation, postponed dreams,
alienation, ongoing departure, fear, forgetfulness, indiscriminate killing, a paper country,
dim and khaki colours, wars, lost love immersed in agony, injured desires, eternal
wailing, tears, surrender, ..., all of which constitute the dominant themes of poems grown
up in sickly atmospheres.

But out of such prevailing despair appear poems, though few in number, that express
love and looking forward to passionate, romantic life: "The brown tea is thick / It is
connecting between the lips" (p. 284). Or the hearts that are throbbing with love and
poetry, " Half of my heart is love / And the other is poetry" (p. 185).

In addition, there are poems whose poets turn to be philosophers spreading their wisdom to their peers, "All seaweeds hate the colour green / But they all love the sea ..." (p. 37); " ... a sun marries the absence to avoid the present" (p. 85); "The sea is born of a cloud / As the war is born / Of pride!" (p. 167) to the most prudent and pedantic question, "Who could pluck out the distance from the road" (p. 267). The anthology, however, encompasses some lengthy poems, poems of medium length, and flashes (poems of two, three, or may be four lines with shocking ends): "A vast country / And a small heart / How difficult nostalgia is!" (p. 116).

All these dim environments depicted in sorrow-pleading poems do not prevent from aspiring to a bright future and "peeling the night from its fear" (p. 93), because hope is still existent:

Fertility is certainly coming
This is our last chance
Our brooklets are filling their breasts with honey (p. 215).

However, as soon as "... Iraq is alive and will never die" (p. 215), beauty will evade and obliterate ugliness from the souls, and "Iraq is for the Iraqis" (p. 290) as Jafar Abu Attemmen stressed. Every Iraqi, then, may have desires and wishes like the sparrow that twittered:

I wanted my wing and my shadow
I wanted the map of the lost soul
I wanted my broken life
I wanted to sing the eyes of the stars embracing me
I wanted to propagate wishes and set free language
I wanted ... tomorrow in a morning like this (p. 274).

3. The Anthology Translated

"Poetry is what gets lost in translation", says Robert Frost believing that the loss in translating poetry is beyond redeemable owing to the fact that this genre is governed by some devices peculiar to it the most salient of which are rhyme, rhythm, meter let alone the unusual usage of language. Other challenges may be added like: the time at which the poem is written – i.e. the older the poem, the more demanding the translation, and whether or not the languages in question [SL and TL] are of the same family. This justifies the difficulty, but not the impossibility, of translating poetry. So, we read many poetic masterpieces translated from other languages into Arabic, say Brecht, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Rimbaud, Lorca, Omar Al-Khayyam, Goran, ... etc. the same way

they read in English Al-Motanabbi, Omer bin Kulthoom, Imru'al-Qais, As-Sayyab, Nazek Al-Malaika, ... etc.

Accounting for the difficulties touched upon earlier, the task shouldered by the translators of the anthology at hand is not easy-going but shrouded with so many stumbling blocks of which are: the stubborn poetic language that needs a professional to decipher it in a way that makes it run smoothly in the English language. In addition to the barrier of language, some hindrances and pitfalls the translators are to overcome. Of these hindrances are: the existence of some culture-specific terms like سید, بمبر, شناسیل, انکیدو; some references to the holy scriptures like the Quran as in [الذي يرجع نسبه إلى رسول الله محمد (ص) من رأى منكم عراقياً] or to the Quranic-like verses as in ارم ذات العماد, خلق من ماء دافق; or other famous works literary or otherwise from eastern or western cultures; or zero-equivalence terms like جبة, فتوى, مؤذن; or names of places and figures like المعقل, اور; poems that are not originally written in, but translated into, Arabic, the case wherein the translated text (English) is double-distanced from the source text (Kurdish); and the highly-stylized way those poems are written with.

All such difficulties were overcome skillfully and patiently by the translators via resorting to some manipulations like supplying footnotes though some unusual expressions remained unannotated; transliteration; the use of archaism especially in the poem "*Fatwas for Rent*" where the translator deals with the poem, due to its dominant theme, as if it were "holly" text, "Seest thou not the sky blood red in Iraq" (p. 212) or "And he hath power over all slaughters" (p. 213); paraphrasing and rephrasing; and giving free translation especially to those lines and passages that are borrowed from other literary works or figures. Such skillful manoeuvres on the part of the translators attest to their high profile in the slippery world of translation as a process and as a product. The first, i.e. Dr. Sadek R. Mohammed has long been an academic, literary man, internationally-acknowledged translator, and specialized in the English literature. The second, i.e. Soheil Najm, is himself a poet, internationally-acknowledged translator, and works for literature since long. Meritorious qualifications as such make accessible the process of translation and alleviate the translational burdens. So, Dr. Sadek's dictum may be slightly re-worded, "the best test of translator is poetry".

4. A Concluding Word

This anthology, undoubtedly, constitutes a valuable addition to our Iraqi literary perspective in the field of translated poetry. But there are three things left I would like to voice here. First, many poems appear with no date or at least the year of writing, because this will deepen the understanding of such poems both on the part of the critics and readers, whereas others have the full date: day, month, and year, and some even with the place of writing. Second, some poets, in their blurbs, appear with no date of birth like

Amal Al-Jubouri, Baqir Sahib, Hadi Al-Husseiny, and few others. Third, one can add, there are no indices at the end of this anthology for the titles of poems, names of the poets and figures that appear in those poems, because this will make it convenient for anyone who wants to quickly browse the anthology or refer to any poem. It is worth to note that this anthology is republished in 2011 by Plain View Press, a very well-known literary publishing house.

Fatima Al Muhsin: On the Representations of Iraqi Culture in the Renaissance

Alexander Habash, Lebanon



"Representations of Renaissance in Modern Iraqi Culture", the new book written by the Iraqi critic and researcher Fatima Al Muhsin (published recently by Al Jamal House), is more than an ordinary work which is easily to be discarded after reading. It's one of the books I personally prefer to consider them of immense cultural significance that were published within the last few years and managed to add valuable information to the Arabic Library. Such books are aware quite well of how to question us, not just about the issues of Arabic renaissance project, but about Arabic culture in general.

The importance of this book lies indeed in the way by which the critic guides us through boundaries of a third cultural era within this huge project. We used to be convinced till now that our culture has essentially been represented by two main projects, namely; the enlightenment movement in Egypt, and its counterpart in Al Sham countries (especially Lebanon), but in this book we are confronted with another dimension regarding the cultural eras of Arabic renaissance, such a dimension that we ignore most of its details, (there are certainly more dimensions that still need to be explored).

Cultural critics used not to acknowledge the extraordinary role played by Iraqi poetry with all its effects imposed on Arabic poetry in general. Poetical discourse was of such great importance in Iraq that when we talk about culture here, we can hardly mention anything other than poetry and its unquestionable role. Many details concerning culture in Iraq would be lost, and that's why we notice such a phenomenon of paralysis in the

cultural context that is constructed through sociology, politics and the other disciplines that have established the history of Iraqi elite.

We can definitely say now that the emergence of Iraqi elite in its distinguished shape was the primary and direct cause of forming the Arabic renaissance that we talk about.

This dialogue concentrates on the newly published book by Fatima Al Muhsin, who resides now in Beirut since many years:

Q. It seems that the first question I may think about isn't strange at all: What was the main incentive of writing your new work, I mean in this timing exactly? However hard we try to think, our present cultural situation drives us to believe in the necessity of a certain connection between these two issues.

-- This question reminds me of two things related to the incentives that encouraged me to work on this subject: The first thing is concerning the scientific side of my project, while the second is about what we may call the attractiveness of the idea, its emotional dimensions, or the feeling of enchantment with a certain subject.

The idea of this book started to evolve in my mind since the eighties during the preparation phase to write my PHD. dissertation that was on "Modernization in Iraqi Poetry up to Saadi Yousif". Nevertheless I wrote at that time a collection of critical essays on the early stages of modernization in Iraqi poetry. Those essays were published in literary journals, most of them expressed the questions that were concerning me and supposed to find their answers in my new book on the concept of renaissance.

My project developed significantly after exploring more material extracted from the archives of Iraqi culture, while I was living abroad. It seemed as if I were in a marathon with time in the various places of emigration. The coverage level of my project extended from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. That period is considered to be one of the cultural eras that require to be revised so that we can understand the different aspects of Iraqi culture. I discovered, while I was organizing my accumulated achieve and preparing to start my project a decade ago, that I wasn't in fact the only Iraqi critic who was trying to study this same period seriously.

Starting to dismantle the causes of all that, I concluded some ideas concerning what was worrying all Iraqis. We were, at that chaotic time, observing our country conducting stupidly all its unjustified wars and marching towards an expected catastrophe. Baghdad was bombed heavily in the beginning of the nineties, after Saddam had invaded Kuwait. My feelings of fear and agony towards my destroyed country reached its unbearable climax. The scene of Iraqi culture while it was being deconstructed, fragmented and loosing the stable grounds it usually stood on, was one of my incentives to return to that

history. It isn't an emotional incentive, nor is it an act of lamentation over the waste land, it is an attempt to capture the memory of our lost times...

Anyway, the choice of any subject depends on the intellectual background of the writer himself, in addition to his concerns, whatever are the incentives. I was trying to keep a certain distance away from the emotional effects so that I might be able to read the cultural history of Iraq. My concern was primarily based on the way of approaching all these matters objectively and scientifically.

Q. There are many things in the book that induce me ask a question about the renaissance era in Iraq. We usually define poetry just as "another intellectual movement". What are exactly the outcomes of that renaissance era, its noticeable representations in Iraqi culture?

-- Maybe all the precursors of innovation during the modernization phase have been obviously represented by culture of the forties and fifties. In that time, we can notice shapes of the multicultural project, with some degree of difference, that project which crystallized and began to evolve. Iraqis succeeded then to bring forth many effective changes in Arab culture. Among the most important aspects of change: the wave of free poetry or the verse meter poem, in which the Iraqi poets were the unchallenged pioneers. Iraqis also became pioneers in the field of architecture and plastic arts.

While in the field of scientific research, the famous Iraqi historian Jawad Ali appeared with his magnificent work on "The History of Arabs before Islam", professor Ali Al Wardi with his outstanding sociological studies, and also Abdul Aziz Al Doorri, Ahmad Saleh Al Ali in their distinguished historical researches, Taha Bakir's readings and translations of the heritage of Mediterranean civilization, and many other researches in the Arabic culture.

We should not forget of course the achievements of Mohammed Mehdi Al Jawahiri in the forties and fifties, who intended in his project to revive the glamour of Abbasid classical poem, and became himself one of the most influential classical Arab poets.

Despite the weakness of traditions in the field of the novel and short story in Iraq, the wave of free poetry was accompanied by some distinguished experiments in the story, which were represented by Ghaib To'ma Frman, Fuad Al Tekarly, Abdul Malik Noori and others.

This phase was, from the cultural perspective, one of the most rigid periods, despite the political chaos in Iraq, whether in the monarchy era or after the revolution of 1958. This tradition continued and was represented in the culture of the sixties with all its revolutions and uprisings that shock the bases of culture and intellectuals.

The shades of catastrophe began to appear in the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, that period has been crowned with emigration wave of a most influential group of Arab intellectuals after the coup d'etat of 1968, those individuals who spread all over many countries in the world.

Q. This leads me to a question that I find principal. Did emigration play any role in your choices of research? As we know, you have left Iraq since a long time, and lived in different countries.

-- My travels in various countries after leaving Iraq have been greatly beneficial for me, not on the epistemological level only, but in the way by which I began to see things, including Iraq and its culture. I don't deny that I until the present day carry the burden of the limited horizon in traditions of our local and closed culture. The experience of travel has given me an ability to get rid of many convictions that I was imagining as unquestionable doctrines, including the romantic way of loving our country and being prejudiced in criticizing whatever is related to it.

Maybe the attempt to establish a contrast between Iraq and every place I visited was one of the reasons that encouraged me to be acquainted with Iraq more, especially with its cultural heritage.

Q. I think that we can in no way forget the great role played by the poeticism of the renaissance era in Iraq, is that right?

-- I believe that I have talked too much about this, and I've tried to explain this subject intensively in this book. Maybe the effect of Iraqi poets on culture, including the poets of the renaissance, has participated in hiding another kind of culture, or making it rather weaker from the perspective of national memory at least. We until now in Iraq, and even in emigration countries, do not celebrate poets other than Al Rusafi, Al Jawahiri, Al sayab, Nazek Al Malayka, Abdul Wahab Al Bayati and Saadi Yousif. I have been trapped too in this dilemma when I was almost finishing my study abroad.

More recently we came to remember our pioneering intellectuals in other fields. The most upsetting thing in this issue is that Arabs don't know Iraqi culture except through its poets; even the new generations in Iraq are accustomed to follow the traces of poets, and ignore anything else about other writers. Maybe plastic art is the only field in Iraq which has preserved the ability of working within its own boundaries, away from the chaos and glamour of poetry.

Q. How do you explain then the project of Al Rusafi with his important book "the Mohammedan Character"? What I mean is that he was a poet after all?

-- I think that the pioneering discourse of renaissance era in Iraq, despite all the differences in it, has been synchronized with great courage of Muslim writers precisely. That project was represented by attempts to cross the boundaries of forbidden and restricted areas, especially in the religious thought. We witness here the great courage and enthusiasm of Iraqi intellectuals to challenge the single minded religious thinkers, though religious culture in Iraq at that time was weak indeed, as I explained in my book.

The tendency of skepticism of Al Rusafi has driven him to write his book about the Mohammedan character, though his epistemological tools didn't enable him to exceed Islamic culture that he depended on in his historical reading of the character of prophet Mohammed. It is more likely that he has read the writings of the orientalist on this subject, but he also depended on the biographical books about the prophet, that is to say that he performed a dialogue with Islamic culture from the inside so as to remove all the superstitions and miraculous events connected to the biography of the prophet and the idea of Revelation. Al Rusafi made use of the mysticism heritage to emphasize the principle of "unity of existence" that many writers in the western renaissance have adopted and also some Islamic reformists, in order to defend themselves or to make balance between faith and reason.

We don't exaggerate when we say that Al Rusafi's book is as important as Freud's "Moses and Monotheism" in its attempt to trace the historical effects of the religious text, taking into consideration the difference between the cultural sources of the two writers. The so called "skepticism tendency" in the poetry of Al Rusafi, Al Zahawi, Ali Al Sharki and other poets and writers of the Iraqi renaissance era, cannot be found in the Egyptian enlightenment poets for example. We all know that Al Zahawi was not to be welcomed when he visited Egypt and published the first poem that was considered blasphemy. Salama Musa himself refused to publish Al Zahawi's collection of poems "Tendencies of Mephistopheles" and considered it as an assault on sacred religious thought, while it was just asking the simple questions about the concepts of punishment, repayment, and freedom of the human being to choose his own beliefs.

The same question was ignored by Islamic reformists, so that the same idea of Reformation remained incapable to interpret the holy text or trying to approach it through its different periods, or reading religion from the historical viewpoint. That was what the Iraqi poets tried to do, though in a way derived from the religious lesson. So we can see that Al Rusafi has abandoned poetry tried to study the Mohammedan character, because, as I think, he sensed the inability of the reformists to go beyond the restricted horizon towards the field of intellectual modernization. Maybe this inability was one of the reasons of recurring crises in different Arabic renaissance periods, because it has led to negligence of the most crucial questions regarding freedom and reason, so as to keep concentrating on secondary and trivial issues.

The discourse of Iraqi modernization

Q. Your book is full of many personalities: Al Zahawi, Al Rusafi, father Instans Mary Al Karmali, and many others who have played a great role in the different representations of this renaissance. Why did you choose those persons? What do they mean for you?

-- Every cultural paradigm I chose represents a certain side of the Iraqi modernization discourse. Mahmoud Shukri Al Alusi is, for example, the most distinguished educated person in the religious culture in Baghdad during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. He represents what may be called the moment of transformation in Iraqi culture, that's to say the movement from the religious lesson to the school and printed book.

Father Instas Mary Al Karmali was really the godfather of renaissance in Iraq, that kind of renaissance that was looking forward to the west but maintaining its own roots with Arabic heritage. Hibat Aldeen Al Shahrstani represents the paradigm of cultural effect in the religious environments, he has joined between science and the religious lesson, his love of science was incomparable except with the chaotic world of Al Zahawi. Rufael Butti was the paradigm from whose coat came out the culture of the forties and fifties; he was the most rich intellectual and "exile".

Mahmoud Ahmed Al Sayid was the new breed of renaissance culture; he tried to defy what we call the poeticism of renaissance discourse in Iraq, so he was the first person in the domain of the novel and the most distinguished arguer about the concept of culture and the intellectual's role and effectiveness.

Those paradigms have been of much concern for me so as to allocate a single chapter to each of them in my book. We cannot of course degrade the importance of other pioneers, I may return to some of them to discuss what has not been dealt with in the book.

Q. If we may make a certain contrast, your new book is about the renaissance era in Iraq. Is there such a hidden contrast, if I may ask, between all that and the present Iraqi culture? I mean, how do you read the facets of Iraqi culture now?

-- Iraqi culture now is living a phase of the aftershock of horror as a result of what has happened, and still happening in Iraq. Culture is, whether from the inside or outside, in a state of defending its existence and identity as a culture of life. This does not mean only the written literature, but the style of living as a whole, including architecture, and the way of observing the scientific future in universities and educational institutes,

The first thing that I noticed when I returned to Baghdad after the occupation exactly is those groups of children roaming in the streets, those who have no families or shelter and

education. Many of them may join the militias and become projects and targets of the suicide culture on the two banks of political Islam.

What might be the future that we can talk about within any culture in which the number of illiterate and astray Iraqis increases every day? Today there are at least two million widows in Iraq, each of them carry few children without shelter, and the government is busy with dividing the spoils between the leaders of Shia't, Sunnat, Kurds and Bathists...

Iraqi culture, in any way, is losing institutions; it is even abandoning the place that assembles it. It is now a fragmented kind of culture on all levels. Despite all the outcomes of culture in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and other Arabic countries, we can see obvious landmarks of cultural gatherings, even of individuals and specific assemblies that indicate certain intellectual directions and refer to poetic and novelistic waves in many Arabic countries like Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, and Syria, and even the Arab Peninsula. But you cannot manage to collect the deconstructed fragments of Iraqi culture in one system.

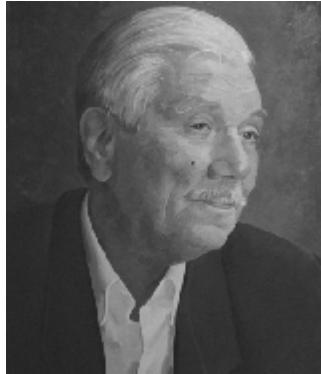
We, emigrates, for example, do not know anything about the new generation of Iraqi writers, and ignore many things about each others in various countries. Can you imagine how I discovered the name of Muhsin Mahdi, and knew that he is a professor of Islamic philosophy in Harvard university? That marvelous Iraqi intellectual with his distinguished books! It was before a decade only, through a footnote in one of Al Arawi books.

The Iraqi intellectual now, even the one who writes abroad, is a marginal person from the perspective of Arabic culture tradition. This state must not be looked at through its tragic dimension, it is something taken for granted in Iraq today within a political and sociological project that is now in progress. This project does not have any of the qualifications required in the state of construction, that's because most of its staff of scientists and specialists are running away from its sunken ship.

Poetry

The Dragon

By Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (Iraq)
Translated by Salih J. Altoma (PhD)



Under nihilism's mask,
a dictator
exceeded all bounds
in murdering,
in crushing man's humanity,
while claiming he dreads killing a bird
his smiling picture is everywhere,
in cafes,
brothels,
nightclubs,
and markets.

In the beginning was Satan
the dictator became his twisted shadow
he cancelled the solar calendar,
banned Neruda, Márquez, Amado,
abolished the constitution.

Renamed after himself
all the squares,
all the rivers,
all the prisons of the humiliated homeland,
burnt to death the last fortune-teller
for not kneeling to the worshipped idol,
claiming death to be a gift, a votive offering,
his watchdogs ravaged the earth
stole people's provisions,
raped the Muses of poetry,
wives of men who died by torture,
girls and widows of a war his watchdogs lost
fleeing like rabbits in a clover's field,
leaving behind the corpses of victims:
workers/ peasants,
writers/ artists,
carpenters and blacksmiths,
youths in their 20s,
driven to death
hunger and incineration,
by invaders alien and native
under autumn's sky

Disgraced, the dictator buried his face in the mud
But persisted in his scheme
only to see his scheme backfire [only to see the magic turning against the magician]
his pillars of deception crumbling,

his picture underfoot
trampled by history's worn shoes.

Overthrown,
facing death in exile,
a new monster arose,
a new dictator
in the deceived homeland
the sandglasses resumed counting,
the breaths of the dictator omnipresent everywhere
in cafes
brothels,
nightclubs
and markets.

From the Caribbean Sea to China's wall

This dictator reincarnates
and turns into a dragon

When will St. George pierce the dragon with his spear and lop off its tail?

Other Poems by Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati

1. The Master and His Disciple

In Baghdad in the District of Bab al-Shaykh
my master Shaykh al-Kilani,
opened the door to his anonymous
visitor and said: I know whom you seek
but my offspring was banished
to the seven cities of love: he vanished
into the Milky Way.

Whenever he visited his relatives
in Baghdad, he visited me
to relate what he endured in his exile
or to ask me what I thought of his verses
at times he wept in distress,
like a man who lost something
he took refuge in the Mosque's sanctuary
reciting verses from the Quran.
at times he beseeched a woman who had departed or passed away
searching for her in the poetry of al-Shibli and the Tawasin of al-Hallaj

2

On the last day

he kissed the window of my tomb

and whispered:

farewell my Shaykh

and was gone.

What is Baghdad now

but a graveyard of his loved ones

and a love poem that has vanished.

January 4, 1997

Notes:

Abd al-Qadir al-Kilani (al-Jilani) (1078-1166) is the founder of al-Qadiriyyah, perhaps the oldest mystic (Sufi) order in the Muslim world. His tomb is located in Baghdad in the district of Bab al-Shaykh where Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati was born and raised. The title of the poem in Arabic is "al-Qutb wa al-Murid), literally "the pole and the novice." In Islamic mysticism, al-Jilani is generally called "al-Qutb" or "the supreme pole", the highest rank in the mystical hierarchy.

Al-Hallaj, a leading mystic, who was executed or crucified in Baghdad in 922, is one of al-Bayati's central historical figures, which he invokes in dealing with contemporary sociopolitical issues. *Tawasin* is the title of one of al-Hallaj's books which al-Bayati addressed earlier in his poem "Reading al-Hallaj's Book of Tawasin" The poem has appeared in several English translations one of which was reprinted in Jacques Berque's *Arab Rebirth: Pain and Ecstasy* (London: al-Saqi, 1983). al-Shibli (861-945) is another noted mystic who was al-Hallaj's associate for some time, though he, it is said, testified against al-Hallaj and accused him before he was executed.

2. To Whom Does the Homeland Belong?

O' my lady

To whom does the homeland belong?

the mercenary killer or the jailer?

or does it belong to

the rain man?

Nazik, Sayyab, and Jawahiri? *

or to the man who steals

bread, the medicine, our homeland?

(* Reference to three leading Iraqi poets: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964), Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1900-1997) and Nazik al-Mala'ikah (.1923-2007).

3. The Sea Is Far Away: I Hear It Sigh

The sea is far away, but I hear it sigh
I see ships and seagulls carried far away by the waves
sailors and drunkards trapped by Aphrodite's charms
in the darkness they lose their sanity
and I, between al-Ma`arri and al-Du'ali, *
search for a manuscript
not knowing its author
or who let it vanish: Sayf al-Dawlah
or Kafur? *
in this age when no soul cares for anyone else
when no one dares to rebel.

Latakia, Syria /August 4, 1997

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(*) al-Du'ali (d.689) one of the early Arab grammarians, al-Ma`arri (d.1057/58) the great medieval Arab poet with whom al-Bayati identifies himself, Sayf al-Dawlah (d.967) who personifies the Arab chivalrous ideal and Kafur (d.968) of Egypt, who assumes the role of a dictator in al-Bayati's earlier writings.

4. The Nightmare

In darkness a ghost chases
the author of "the little man"(*)
Here and there in bookstores
on Baghdad streets
the phantom sniffs the shelves
but returns in defeat to the coffeehouse
not having found even those he chased yesterday
they have fled into exile like flocks of birds
no more preys to hunt
graveyards and prisons swell with the rest
this is the carnival of death
reaching its pinnacle.
Ishtar is now a blind wolf
who all fear
she has possessed the city's soul
taken captive by the invaders
and under their embargo
a tattered old woman
weeps in secret, sleeps hungry to dream:
she cries out,
victim of a nightmare,
there is nothing
nothing but the wind which trifles with piles of refuse
or the footsteps of a ghost which chases in darkness
the author of " the little man."

Amman/ April 13, 1997

(*) The title of a short story by one of the most talented Iraqi writers, Abd al-Malik Nuri (1927-1992?).

Background Notes:

One of the most outspoken, innovative, prolific and influential poets, al-Bayati pursued his role for fifty years as a revolutionary or mystical -oriented poet in search of a highly idealized human condition. His numerous volumes of poems (more than twenty) have helped to vitalize and enrich contemporary Arabic poetry in terms of its structural elements and themes, the universal vision it has acquired, and the wealth of archetypal material, secular or religious, it has incorporated whether from Arab, Islamic, Christian, ancient Near Eastern or other sources. He was noted for his strident tone in attacking colonialism, tyranny, rulers and kings in general, injustice, corruption and other social ills, which have plagued Iraq and the Arab world at large.

Al-Bayati's legacy is not limited to his poetry or the few other works he published or co-translated, but it also includes countless interviews, many of considerable length, which he gave over the years in different parts of the Arab world and beyond. Perhaps no other poet of his generation has used the interview format as extensively as he had for the purpose of clarifying or promoting his beliefs, his poetic practices, and for commenting on the social and political reality in the Arab world.

Perhaps it is relevant to note that much of his latest poetry can be characterized as "interiorist" to borrow a term used by Ernesto Cardenal, the Nicaraguan poet, whom al-Bayati admired for his double commitment to revolutionary struggle and liberation theology. According to Cardenal "interiorist poetry" is "made only with abstract or symbolic words" in contrast to "exteriorist poetry" which is "created with the images of the external world, the world which we see and feel, made with the elements of real life...." The latter type applies specifically to al-Bayati's earlier phases.

al-Bayati's poetry has been the subject of countless studies and dissertations in Arabic and other languages which began to appear as early as 1955. Many of his poems have been translated into Spanish, French, English and other European and non-European languages. The largely favorable reception he has received underlines not only his stature in modern Arabic literature but also the positive contribution he may have made toward introducing Arabic literature to a wider audience beyond its borders.

In reading his poem "The Dragon", it is important to note that it represents a drastic shift in his association with Iraq's former regime. For it belongs to the latest phase of his life in which his poetry exhibited a highly critical tone of Saddam Husain as reflected in this particular poem and other examples such as, "The Master and the Disciple", "To Whom the Homeland Belongs", "Nightmare"

“The Sea Is Far-Off: I Hear it Sigh.” All were published after 1995 the year in which the Iraqi government revoked his passport or citizenship in retaliation against his visit to Saudi Arabia.

There is no doubt that “The Dragon” revolves primarily around Saddam Husain’s figure, but al-Bayati has in mind also dictators wherever they rule in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Indeed, it is possible to maintain that al-Bayati’s abhorrence of dictatorship represents a recurrent theme in his writings throughout his career. This is largely due not only to his ideological orientation which rejects dictatorship as a political system but also to the personal relations he nurtured or his sympathetic identification with many poets and writers who are noted for their struggle against repressive regimes. That’s perhaps one of the reasons why he chose three Latin American writers known for their opposition to dictatorship: Gabriel García Márquez (1928-), Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), and Jorge Amado (1912-2011).

Furthermore, in writing his poem, al-Bayati seems to have been inspired or influenced in part by a poem which the Nicaraguan priest/poet Ernesto Cardenal wrote against Somoza*. According to al-Bayati, it was during his visit to Nicaragua in 1982 that Cardenal read to him personally a poem which attracted his attention. Apart from citing a different version in Arabic, al-Bayati underscored the significance of the poem as a mirror of “the dictator who seeks to place himself everywhere.” **

The poem’s reference to St. George, as a mythical or religious savior, is consistent with al-Bayati’s mystical orientation and his extensive use of symbols, figures, myths and other material from different sources.

***_Cardenal’s poem is translated into English as follows:**

Somoza Unveils the Statue of Somoza in Somoza Stadium

By Ernesto Cardenal

It's not that I think the people erected this statue

Because I know better than you that I ordered it myself

Nor do I pretend to pass into posterity with it

Because I know the people will topple it over someday.

Not that I wanted to erect to myself in life

the monument you never would erect to me in death

I erected this statue because I knew you would hate it.

See Poets of Nicaragua: A Bilingual Anthology, 1918-1979.

Edited by Steven F. White. Greensboro [N.C.]: Unicorn Press, 1982.

**** Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Muhyi al-Din Subhi. *al- Bahth `an yanabi` al-shi`r wa al-ru'ya.* Beirut: Dar al Tali`ah, 1990, p.30. al-Bayati's Arabic version runs as follows:**

Somoza

Somoza got out of his palace and rode in the car

The car proceeded on Somoza Street

And stopped at Somoza Stadium

To unveil the statue of Somoza

Selected Readings:

al-Bayati, Abd al-Wahhab. *Love, Death, and Exile.* Trans. by Bassam K. Frangieh. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990.

Musawi, Muhsin Jassim. *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition.* London; New York: Routledge, 2006.

Rizk, Khalil. "The Poetry of Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati: Thematic and Stylistic Study" Ph. D. Diss. Indiana University, 1981

For more information on al-Bayati's works in English translation, see Altoma's *Iraq's Modern Arabic Literature: A Guide to English Translations since 1950*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010. Pp.63, 73-78.

Translated by Dr. Salih J. Altoma

I am Middle Eastern Studies

Shahad Atiya*



I am the Arab with no Arab American identity
You cannot look at me and expect I will support every Arab on every election ballot
You cannot look at me and judge me as uninterested in politics
You cannot look at me and think I only care about the happenings of the Arab world
You cannot look at me and think I only read the news when an Arab is on the front page
You cannot tell me my identity is rooted in the unity of all Arab countries
I do not know anything about the struggles of not living under a defined regime like a Sudanese would
I do not know anything about what pride an Algerian feels for gaining her liberation
I do not know how it must be for an Iraqi to live in constant fear for her life simply for being born into her society
I do not know what it feels like to be trapped on her own land like a Palestinian would
You cannot tell me the only thing binding us together is religion because we follow different ones
You cannot tell me for centuries, the only factor binding us together is food, I don't even call Kabob Kufita, your Shawarma is my Gus, and I don't even know what an Arabic salad is
You cannot call me a self-hating Arab, [either]
I am the study of Near Eastern Studies
I am the cradle of civilization
I am the land between the two rivers
I am the process of rewriting my ancestors' history
I am entire generations wiped out
For being born in the wrong place
For being born at the wrong time

I am the never-ending struggle to reclaim my identify
I am the socialist, the dictator, the president, the prime minister, the citizen, the priest,
the imam, the rabbi, the caliph the never ending recycled political cycle of restoration
of our pride
I am the one that burned libraries full of books
I am the one that wrote poetry about love
Converted it to songs
So my people can dance to it at weddings
I am
The image for war
The struggle for oil and control
The love for peace and unity
The search for my identity

*Shahad Atiya

Shahad Atiya is a 23-year-old Iraqi immigrant living in the United States for the past 10 years. She moved from Baghdad, Iraq at the age of 12. She studied Political Science at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

Wine-Beam

By the Classical Kurdish Poet Mahwi

Translated by Himdad Abdul-Qahhar Muhamm (PhD)



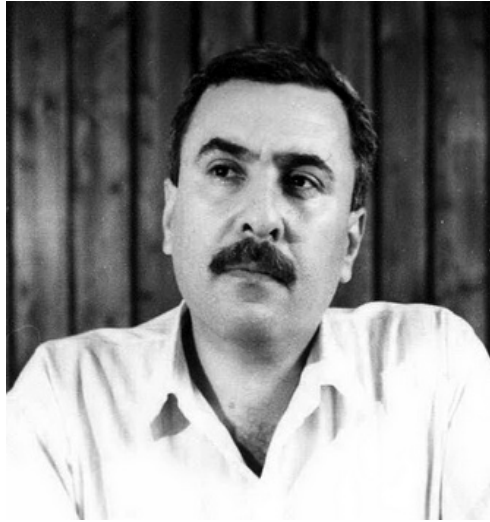
Unable to disclose the gloom of piety with wine-beam, what should I do!
Should I not manage such a night with such a candle, what should I do!
Love-brand fills the safe of my heart,
Should I not exchange my treasure for the sickness of my heart, what should I do!
My sweetheart's tress from mullah's hand banned
Should I not like Sheik* select a Christian Doctrine, what should I do!
The city of affection is pensive, inactive for a time
Should I not with a lunatic a revolution, what should I do!
To cry no dampness in my eyes, next is outdoor prostration
Drought is the year, should I not say the dropsy prayer, what should I do!
Unable to gather with one, people are all my enemy because of you
Should I not bequeath to you, not bequeath to the entire world, what should I do!
Left behind lovers, worthless I stayed, may death be soon
Should I not seek pardon for the rest of life, what should I do!
Congregation Day Layla promised to meet you "Mahwi"
Should I not sigh, woe and lament till then, what should I do!

* A very famous Muslim who converted to Christianity to be able to marry his lover.

The Jackal of the Group

Salman Dawood Mohammad

Translated by Khaloud Al-Muttalibi



I adjust the breath of roses
On a watch on a dynamite wrist
And relieve the breathlessness with a bicycle
I realized just now, the people boasting about a non-existent fluttering, are my
companions
What flew off the feathers of their eloquence was caught by the cleaning baskets
Glory has no connection with such an affair
Nor is there a cure for Malik Al-Hazeen at the clinic of a clown
Like this I refute the darkness of the bulldozers with burning palm trees
I descend from Mongolian messengers
And from Gods looting in the blood bank
While in the grave of dignity, the remnants of Gilgamesh is settling
From his trait I suckled my breeding and went
Wasting hectares of flowers on the hat of Miss Bell
Forgetting the cigarette's embers on the imagination of the "Abyat¹"

As soon as my eyes met the chimneys of Uruk
I saw with all my blindness
Who rewards the orphans with tanks of tears
Then counts the spoils in a Columbus mosque
As such and as a result

I withdrew the silk of disappointment on the defects of hope
Startling the chickens of the banquets with guest flu
So the radio made a living from my misfortune
The screens on my bulkiness and
The newspapers on the trough of words,
But I have no touch, like nothing
Sincere in detaining the memories like a photo album

And I am mostly, the worst ant in the explanation of the date syrup
I am not a bag seller to
unfortunate women who buy victims
And this modesty is nothing but for the sake of witticism only
I was not as fit as I should be, to be an angel
I have no experience of repairing the kingdom as I should
I just want to drown, that is my hobby
But the urinal of the commandos shared a shore with my Tigris
Increasing the distress of the homeland in the blood of the martyr

Here I am crouching like a puppy for sale
I have not got a (waw²) in the constitution of the group
Nor phoenixes flapping in the Ghazl market³
Oh law of the techno fart, pardon me
Oh law of the technocrat, helloooooo
The mobiles of the guardians without cooing
And (Iraqana⁴) in the seduction of the pigeons
Without network coverage

- 1. Abayat: A plural of Abaya; a loose black robe worn traditionally by some Arab women.**
- 2. Waw, the letter waw in the Arabic alphabet.**
- 3. Ghazl market: the home of a weekly pet bazaar in Baghdad with various small animals.**
- 4. The name of a mobile communications company in Iraq.**

Statues

Karim Al-Najar

Translated by Khaloud Al –Muttalibi



The carriage, drawn by an old horse
Took away the statue¹ of the man who committed suicide
But in the square, the crowd staged a sit -in
Erecting their tents in solidarity with the statue
Sold by the carriage owner
To the smeltery man
In return for the horse's fodder

What am I going to do with these dolls?
Like a wave, I am surrounded by wires
It makes me float on an old board

What am I going to do with the statues?
They hang their insignias
Like a one way road sign

What am I going to do with the flower?
That mummifies its leaves with wax
And melts when touched by my fiery fingers

.....

.....

Is it for the dolls, the statues and the flower

I mend the tears and prevent my stomach from shouting

1. The statue of Abudmuhsen Al-Saddon, the first Iraqi prime minister who committed suicide because he was accused of treason in 1929.

The Heaven of Joyous Creatures

Ali Abdulameer

Translated by Khaloud Al-Muttalibi



Between marble and copper

The soldiers scatter in the square

So that the horsemanship sparkles noisily

While a nation destroys the structure of its freedom

And roams in its ruins

They were amidst the future capsule

Looking at the horizons of the Stone Age

Their ancestors are a few suburbs

Of cities absorbed in a great weeping

Who seduced them with a ray of thought?

And persuaded them to hold the lamp

To light through the souls

They split into dreams

So their torment flies with light wings
They departed to the texture of the song
And were astonished, before tender grass which
grew on their graves

Covered by the moss of silence
They inhabited the fields in the dark
The texture of absence turned them into
a gown of solicitude,
It is the truth of the enigma
And the need for hope
They were passing seconds
Helpless to give the world back to itself
Those who are perfectly pure
And refrain from hatred
They carried us, bored kids
To the houses of knowledge
So they could disappear with us in a thick fog
and we emerge with transparent souls
Those who bartered us
With underground adventures and discovered that
We pursue the death that picked their flower
Those who deserve to be in control

Of our conscience
Controlled an amount of soil
With the figure of seven feet,
And the intimate anthem
From the direction of our souls
As it is being destroyed

Mohammed Al-Nassar

Translated by the poet himself.
Edited by Allan Shute.



Restoration

Water can be a devil too
in this region
when labyrinth
becomes
the weapon of the Nazi god
to restore his millstone.
As for this jungle,
Caesar makes jokes
about its teary salt.

.....
.....Answering the terrible boredom
of this desert,
the poet burns a puzzling book
in the name of the prince.

Conflict

This hand,
sweeping over the stormy river,
carelessly kicks up grains of sand
that fall upon
My words,

dispersing
their happy agility.
Life can not deny
the despair
of this stranger.

.....
.....
.....

A clown
standing on the coast
alone,
fumbles to find the connection
between his heart
and the drum he is carrying.

Analogy

Dawn shares the cocks with thieves.
The stranger starts to bark
when some threatening clouds
unsettle his mind.
Houses crumble alongside the river.
The puzzle is to spell
the name of the invader correctly.

He tries to calm down
the pack of terrified words.
This heart which outrun the trap
keeps sighing:
I thought something else was hissing
under the autumn leaves
on this breezy day.
The restless sun
puts the touch on my fingers.
Does she want me to write
some exciting stories for her?

For me to escape the strict mind,
partiality seems to be
the unavoidable price.

Death's Lock
occupies the heart
of the black sky.

Kings' Tatters

**Poems by : Jean Demmu
Translated by: Soheil Najm**



***Kings' Tatters**

I will listen,
I'll wait,
I will reconcile
with what is oozing from the copper of oblivion.
But it is not forgetting;
it is whiteness, which
surrounds the tropical of our dry minds.
Is it a new concern of Plato?
No, it is anguish,
Anguish of not arrival,
where to?
It is strange to awaken the alive people
in the tatters of horror,
tatters of geography,
or let them be the tatters of kings.

***My Generation**

Dead toward crossing
I contribute to develop the week,
detain myself in the port of bed,
welcoming the advent of the sand and its moan
at the root of my forehead
many clouds stumble.
In Speak, I will not prevent you
So much grass speak the language of Negro.
Locks.

***Falling Down**

Sleep concentrated in secret.
In the most distant regions, I fling a vague need
but I was on good terms with the demands of spring.
I learned to be myself
leaving reality to take care of what has spoiled.
The distance shortens, and the truth erodes.
Beauty is an arid chamber,
deserted.
I hasten the coming of dawn. My falling down
enjoys the essence of the soul.
I did not know to be absent long.

In this Mud there is a Desire

Sadek R. Mohamed

Translated by the poet himself



The storm has come to an end.

There is a wish,
there is an overwhelming desire
to surprise time,
there is a thrilling moment...

We need some water
for words to wash themselves
and reiterate their prayers.

We need some time
for orange trees
to swing as they like.

We need some silence
for virgins to answer
the call of music.

Let seagulls
emerge from the breast of the earth
for waves to doff their tatters
and make a new elixir for life.

Give the teardrop time
for sparrows to have faith in the sun.

Take your talismans,
 priests,
 amulets,
 thick beards
 and psalms

for the memory of the tin
to acquire the softness of the water.

The storm has come to an end.
The earth lifts an arm
up to the sky.

In this mud there is a desire.

Fiction

**Master Socrates,
One more Valium pill, a single one is not enough today**

By Khudayer Al-Zaidi
Translated by Hussein N. Jabr Al-Ibadi



Pouring some wisdom in his cup, he stared at the exploded bubbles on top of it. He contemplated the poisoned cup long before sipping it, thinking of Athena after him. Now, either the cup of poison or the apple of life? The mundane wisdom which had flourished at his hand recommended the first choice. He had to follow its shade, not to quit and get dismissed from the dismissing town. To be away from his first home was the hardest decision to take; harder than sipping the cup of poison. To die with the sound of wisdom tattling in his mind was easier than to die in a luxurious warm bed.

The executioner came near to him offering the glass of poison on a silver tray, and said,

-Socrates, I'm sure you won't curse me; you're a sage man, able to stand the judgment.

-Well-done, come on, what ought I to do?

-Nothing, only a few steps after you have belched out poison, and you'll feel heavy legs. You should, then, lie onto the yard of the court and let the poison do the rest for you.

Socrates took the cup and, quietly, had it all but at once. His students could not help but burse with crying, and thus, to anger their master.

What are you doing? I asked my wife not to come to this place so that I wouldn't see such a weak thing. I want to die silently and submissively. Do withhold yourselves...

All kept silent at once. Then he laid down as the poison man had told him. The executioner began to chain his feet asking him:

-Do you feel anything?

-No

Then the executioner began to explain to those present there the way poison works in one's body: a few minutes later the poisoned person puts his hand on his stomach, whirling and bending, and then his bluish veins shrink out at his neck. Some sweat will appear on his face. In a few minutes, feeling fainted, he lent onto the wall. Seven minutes later, the first push of poison reaches the small intestines and so he feels as if to nauseate. Now, hands are heavy, eyes still in their holes ..Death is approaching the heart as the coolness has caught hold of the feet and belly.

When Socrates has begun to feel that coolness at his belly, he waved to Cretan, his faithful pupil, to come near to him and said faintly:

Cretan, We owe Escolab the price of a cock; pay him back without words.

Yes, sir; anything else?

Socrates Kept silent. His eyes have been closed. Cretan blankets them with the cover of wisdom, stretches his hands along his body and bids him farewell.

Today might this single tablet be not enough, for it is as rose-coloured as the first cup of Socrates, coming out with the first morning news through the radio. It is not enough because the teachers in the school were, before the first lesson, winking behind his back at one another ; he is like Ptolemaeus or Plato in his black overcoat and the European hat on. His black beard is different from those decorating their faces; his eyeglasses do not resemble the headmaster's plastic-frame ones. Mute laughter prevails among the school teachers whenever he comes near; they look at him from time to time to check his reactions.

-Therefore, one valium tablet is not enough for such a dark grey day... the town refuses to sip the cup of poison. The teachers have substituted dry scorn and mute laughter for weeping.

With such odd clothes you cannot make your colleagues not to nickname you. You have breached their dressing norms, familiar style of life and affected sobriety. This sobriety will vanish at home where each would wash dishes, clean the floor, and teach children, asking wife humbly for a hug or to sleep with him whereby his round back would drive away all wraps of affected sobriety. Never mind, Socrates. You are the truth standing out against the board of the Wisdom-of-the-Week*. To hell with them; you be radiant and do count the days of your town/ Athena Baghdad/ and start to hunt stars out from the earth, and get to the pith of wisdom. Little pupils in their first year cannot pronounce your new and incidental name that rushed among people like the air, which they write on the board as Socrates; they call you Sodrat.

It is the Wisdom inscribed on the board this week that has irritated all others in the school including the old, edentate janitor. No poison or cup, nor wisdom will benefit those barrel-like persons full with certainties and illusion of belongingness and the identity of the traditional job. Hadn't been for shame, they would have walked on four. Be yourself, wise man.

This morning, he went into the third -level class to solve a hard mystery in Mathematics. He put two digits upon two others for subtraction, following skeptical methods: Two, when subtracted by one, in extraordinary conditions, will not often give the familiar output. Subtraction is mere defection, referring us to dryness and ultimately extinction at the threshold and neutrality of

-
- It is a board on the school wall on which a wisdom is written every week.

ciphers, or rather, their death at the point of separation between what is above and below.... A cipher is not neutral or exceptionally marginal; it is at the centre of the arena of wrestling digits. Facts are not identical. Thus, he wrote the product on the board and turned to the pupils, who were confused by this queer logic, *hasn't the product had the*

same form for the following days? Hasn't it taken another form in the absolutely new facts? The first stage in the philosophy of mathematics is to be skeptical about the new products obtained, far from stating proofs or testing the resultant products.

No one writes the supposed product the way he does; all methods of teaching stand short of presenting the notion of relativity of the proved products.

He faced the wall to hit his head against as he usually did in every lesson, then picked up a pink valium tablet and swiftly threw it into his mouth. Some minutes passed as he was standing in front of the window of the class. Thence, the results of his pupils have turned out nothing but nulls in his diaries. He's no more concerned with relativity of products.

Now, the investigating committee has granted him two choices: either to be moved out of the city, or to accept an administrative job so that the pupils' minds won't be confused any more.

He, then, asked the head of the committee:

-Is there a third choice?

-What?

- A cup replete with poison; it is the most appropriate choice to me.

For the last time he faces the wall of the school master's room to hit his head against as strongly as he can.

The Anonymous

Hadiya Hussein*

Translated by Haitham al-Zubbaidi, PhD.



I find no exit from what is befalling me. It's over. . Nobody passes by me. . Left between a palm tree trunk and a heap of garbage, I will definitely be rotten. . . Nothing scares me at the moment but the dogs and cats. . . The air which touches my corpse will spread my smell, and wherever this smell goes, it will reveal my whereabouts so that hungry dogs and cats will soon show up.

I'm no longer asking why they did this to me, everything is allowed when the law stops to reign and ugliness prevails. . . but I wonder why they threw me at this deserted place and did not bury me after their crime? Were they in a hurry? Who are those veiled people? Where did they come from? Why they insisted on drilling, kicking and distorting my body after shooting me? Did they think that I may tell of their looks and features even after death?

- "The curses of Allah may befall you," said one of them while rummaging my purse, taking my money out.

The second searched my pockets, gazed at the very little money at his colleagues hand saying:

-“Is it possible?”

Whereas the third one said:

- “Okay, other times may be luckier.”

This means that they will hunt a new victim. . How many victims fell or will fall in their hands? I smell they scent of my body. It overwhelms me, though I could not breathe. . . I remember my wife’s pale face as she sprinkles water at the threshold of our house, repeating:

- “May you return safe.”

I also remembered our widow neighbor who was also sprinkling water after her single son whenever he gets out, till the day when he got out and never returned, and despite her continuous visits to police offices and the organizations concerned with the missed people, she got no clue to find him. She moved around the hospices, holy shrines, she went to the soothsayers and oracles, from each she used to get a dose of patience, till her patience went away and she passed away in grief.

This is the first time in which I did not reply to her good-bye. I moved frowning, broken-hearted, for an unknown reason. As I moved to the main street, the semi-empty street, they closed the way before me. They were three. Threatening me with their arms, I got in their car, they muzzled me with a sticker and inserted me in the back seat.

I do not know for how long the car moved before it stopped in this isolated place. The terror that overwhelmed me changed the time pendulum began to ruthlessly bite me. Time has lost its stability and it being. Before they departed, one of them wanted to remove the sticker from my mouth, but the second one objected:

- “Never. He may be still alive.”

The third one glimpsed my bullet-holed corpse, and he wanted to be completely sure, so he shot me twice at my heart which is already opened by a bullet.

I hear dogs barking not far from me, I feel thirsty, what a wonder! A corpse hears and feels thirsty. But I’m completely still. The wind is striking me but I feel no pricks of pain, as if my body and its pain have left me. After the pass of a time of whose hours I have no idea, and after the barking of the dogs disappeared, I heard a car coming. . . Perhaps they came again, they may have forgotten something and came for it, they may have imagined that I am still alive, someone of them may have forgotten something which may reveal his identity, and when he remembered he came to erase the evidence.

The car is approaching, approaching more and more, coming very near to me. . . two men in a military uniform come down, they are looking at my corpse, they move my head with the stains of congealed blood on it. . . one of them writes some notes in a little notebook while the second is talking in a mobile phone:

- Yes, Sir. We found a corpse of a man. . No, there are not papers to prove his ID. .
 . Bullets in the chest and the head, with some holes of a sharp tool in different
 places of his body. . . yes, anonymous.

* * *

Now, my corpse is located in the morgue freezer. . . My wife will surely come and recognize me. When I feel her existence, and see her with the passion of love that was between me and her, I will apologize for not saying “see you” or “goodbye” to her, and for not turning back to her when I got out of home. I know that she does not hear me, but she will feel that by means of the passion of love that was between us too. . . What annoyed me was the large number of those who came to check my body, and look at the wounds of my body:

- No, this not him.
- My son is younger than this.
- My husband is a little bit thinner.
- No.
- Let me look well. Death may have changed his features. . . No. This is not my brother.
- Wait. . . he has a scar in his belly from a previous war. . . Sorry, this is not him.

Between this and that, a suppressed sob and a sigh of despair come out. At the end of the show, I am shocked by the statement of the official of the morgue: “anonymous.”

A long time has passed, making so many days that I could not count them. Finally, my wife came. With what eyes I saw her? I do not know? As I saw the others I see her now, it must be my soul which is seeing. . . It followed her since she first arrived at the hospital till she reached the hall of the morgue freezers, finally I will rest in peace. . . I wish she will not be shocked when she sees what became of me, or she will not scream as others did with other bodies, and that she will not mourn for a long time.

I remember her paleness when she was following me that morning, with a jug of water, her face has never been so pale in other mornings. Did her heart informed her that something is taking me far from her so her blood fled from her face?

Here she comes, her steps are so confused, I could hear her hasty breaths and the shivering of her parts, she carefully approached, with two men in white waistcoats, all stood at a close distance from the morgue door, the worker pulled me with his hand, then he uncovered me, her features shrank, she moved away a little and came again, she looked at the distorted face, the chest, the limbs. . . She is still pretty in spite of the

sadness that covers her. . . She returned to the face whose owner loved her till he felt that life could not be complete without her. I looked at her eyes with extinguished eyes, and a heart which stopped throbbing but it never lost the feeling of love that was there. . . Finally, may be after ages, she spoke:

- No, not him.

Did this concrete hall and its high ceiling and blood-stained floor move around? Or it is my corpse which is moving around? One of them asked her:

- Are you sure?

She shook her head saying in a low voice:

- Yes, I could never miss my handsome husband.

The other man wrote: “anonymous till now.”

They went out, and the worker returned me back to the freezing box. But this time, I could no longer feel any feeling, darkness fell on me and time annihilated . . . completely annihilated.

*** an Iraqi novelist and short-story writer living in Canada.**

World Portfolio

Nighttime in Baghdad

Nikesh Murali*



The shock and awe of warheads
And roses of the desert bloom in many shades of red.
It's nighttime in Baghdad
And explosions spawn a thousand suns.
Shrapnel race away in their chariots drawn by willing horses
And inscribe the poetry of war on soft flesh.
It's nighttime in Baghdad and neighbourhoods are graveyards
Where ghosts are limbless
And wander without purpose into parks that are booby trapped;
Some drive trucks that are wired with improvised cruelty,
Into check posts with messages of hate
Or love
Or both
Or heat and light
And pain.

It's nighttime in Baghdad
And the green zone is a junkyard
Full of metal and bones,
Prayers beads and photographs of children,
Nametags and hope.
The air is red and blue
And full of screaming sirens
And stretchers.
Another night has turned day in Baghdad
And the roses of the desert bloom in many shades of red to greet the radiant sun.

***Nikesh Murali's work (which includes comics, poems and short stories) has appeared in more than 80 publications worldwide. His poems have been translated into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and French. He won the Commonwealth Short Story Prize for the Asian region in 2011. His poetry was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2007. He has completed his Masters in Journalism from Griffith University for which he was awarded the Griffith University Award for Academic Excellence in 2005, and his Masters in Teaching from James Cook University and a Bachelors degree in English Literature and World History from University of Kerala. He is working towards his Doctorate in Creative Writing.**

A Lonely Road to Baghdad

Musa Idris Okpanachi (Nigeria)

On the lonely road to Baghdad
The dead have fallen across
The road littering the highway
Strewn on the snow
And on the mountain paths

Everywhere graves yawn
Every patch a grave
And every step brings them
Closer to ambush

*Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists*

A drop of blood
Has just trickled
From the screen of the television
Staining the tablecloth
It is another CNN
Horror game
A baby has frizzled out of a bullet

*Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists*

I ring my friends
But the telephone
Line to Falluja is dead
Missiles, Cluster Bombs
Fall every second
Only the guttural voices
Of the bushmen and Ivan the Terrible
Answer my calls

With the cutting edge
Of carnage, hailstones
Smoke and shrapnel

I reach out
For a world map
But the legends
Have become bomb holes
Tears dotting the landscape

*Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists*

I complain to the brood
Of rattle snakes, vipers,
Boa constrictors and cobras
Who are tearful
But a serpent tells me
That the bushmen
Are donning the bloody
Intestines as garlands of honour

*Kill them, maim them
Cripple them, they are
All terrorists*

They have invited
The knackers to turn
Their skins into the national flags
And fashion the bones
Into Grammy trophies

*Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists*
The hails and the rain fall
The bullets, missiles, drones
And Stealth bomber pelt
In unlimited pain

Roll the country over
Fold it
Squeeze it
Torture it
Truncate it
Let seismic tremor
Take its tolls

Obliterate the country
Let it be lost in reversed civilization
Twist it
Break it
Invent pain

Kill them, bomb them
They are all terrorists

But this silent rain
This cold wind
This holy fury
This deafening thunder
Are the new fireworks
Of the High-Tech cabal
Monarchs taking new eunuchs

Suddenly the world
Has become silent
The muffled UN
Is now mute and deaf
Chapters of human Rights
Activists have gone to sleep

Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists

These are scenes of
Hollywood film clips

Played out a thousand times
Sit back and watch

It will soon be over
Roll back the world
To the edge of a cliff
Trip it into the abyss
Delete it from imagination
And let us sleep peacefully
In the bloody nightmare

The celluloid is spattered with blood
It is too tragic for tears
Too late for the millennium
Too cold, fire cold, Alaska cold
For the endurance of time

Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists

You have sliced
And silenced breaths
You are the master
Rhythm of pain

Send the refugees
Out into the cold
Let them sleep in the snow
Leave the wounded
To pine in their pain
Drag the corpses and bury
Them in the ruts of your
Furious tanks and the thorns of your mind

Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists

Let them take refuge
In charred fragments of homes
Built of the crucifixes of war

Hurried steps to the theatre
As scalpels slice flesh
I have seen a girl without legs
A boy without a head
A baby with half a skull
A priest with a bloody turban

I witness a silent temple
Without the worshippers
A lone muezzin
Silenced in the middle
Of a call

*Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists*

Dajjal is at the gate
Spraying lakes of fire over the city
Even the ants would die mega deaths
Where gravestones are shadows
And life is a phantom

But mark this spot
Where they stood
To the last man

*Bomb them, Kill them
They are all terrorists*

Tell flowers not to blossom
Their petals might
Be stained in bloody
Mobile Guantanamo

They hound them
Out of every hole
Every hole a trench
They practice target shooting
With babies every baby a terrorist

They bury the men up to the neck
Gallop their tanks on their heads
Every man is a terrorist

Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists

This is a country
Of grave wine
Of global intoxication

Another of the dead
Has fallen across the road
Yet a trickle of blood
Another piece of flesh and hair
Entangled on twisted metal
Of blood and flesh
Fragments of limbs and earth
Another game of Medusa

Kill them, maim them
They are all terrorists

Things have been
Cut to pieces that
It is too difficult
To name the parts
Crucify them on the crooked
Branches of pines and figs
Rape and mangle them to freedom

Kill them in the name

Of the equity of democracy
Sell their blood as oil
Torture them with every letter
Of Human Rights Chatter

Carpet bomb them
Flatten the country
Level it in obedience to the Geneva
Conventions

Lug Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan
And squeeze them into a tiny island
In the Caribbean to sniff out terrorism

They are mannequins
And marionettes
Marked objects
For target practice

Kill them, maim them, rape them
They are all terrorists

The lethal noise of civilization
Torches every household
Stalks the country
Lays snares at the doorsteps
Decrees against sleep
Rules against tears

Banish those who dare
Weep for the dead
Hang the last man in the cemetery
Build the empire of death
Over the city
These swords have clashed
In the season that lasts forever
When babies are used to play
Ninepin

*Kill them, maim them
They are terrorists*

Mark this spot
Where another corpse
Lies across the road
Where they stand
To the last man
Writing the lyrics of war
With a bayonet in the light
Of the burning cities

They shall tell this to their children
Through the flutes fashioned
Out of the bones of the dead

Musa Idris Okpanachi, Ph.D. teaches English Linguistics at the Department of English, University of Maiduguri had been widely published. His poems had appeared in *Vultures in the Air: Voices from Northern Nigeria* (1995), *Kunapipi* (17(2) 1995 Denmark). His collection of poems, *Silence of Time* is archived in Africana Library, University of California, Berkeley. 'Code of Silence' (a poem) was broadcast over the BBC (London) *Arts and Africa* programme, 1995. 'Daybreak', his short story had appeared in *Gombak Review*, 1997, (Malaysia). He had featured in *Five Hundred Nigerian Poets* vol. 1. His poems had appeared in *Amali* (ed.) 2000 and in *Let the Dawn Come* and in *Pregnant Skies* (2003), *Pyramids* (2008). His novel, *From the Margins of Paradise* is in press. Okpanachi is listed in Bernt Lindfors (1990-1997) *Black African Literature in English* (James Curry) and was published in *Presence Africaine* (Paris) 1997. His collection of poems, *The Eaters of the Living* (2007) won Association of Nigerian Authors/Cadbury Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for Nigerian Literature Prize in 2009.

Night vision

Stephanie M. Glazier* (USA)



Once, during the first war of my life
my friend, just here from his home
in Baghdad, we were driving,
I was driving with my friend

my solemn friend
and I was afraid to ask him
but I asked him if Sadaam's
hanging - if it was a good thing.

He told me they cut the tongue out
of anyone who said anything
about the Regime. In the streets.

Stephanie, I have seen
this, he said.
I looked at him: time
and temperature
neon against skin.

what loss, the tongue
savor, lecture, pleasure—

Morning Devotion

I wake up in the home
of my friends and shuffle
into their kitchen and I carry
a pot of their coffee upstairs and away
from the sign that hangs above their sink
a hand-written sign, that reads: *the art of love
is the art of persistence.*

I've slept late and I hear them, these hard-workers
in the yard feeding animals, watering plants, one
working around the other. So many preparations.

Slow, slow. Says the wooden stair.
Shine, shine. Say the bulbous trees.
Another day. Says my swollen heart.

*** Stephanie Glazier is a poet and an arts administrator based in East Lansing, Michigan. She is a MFA candidate at Antioch University LA and assistant director of the RCAH Center for Poetry at Michigan State University. Her interviews with poets Billy Collins and Thomas Lynch have been published in *MittenLit*. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines both online and in print.**

Arab Portfolio

Dhabia Khamees*

Translated by Sadek R. Mohamed



Creation

Because of my dire need for you
I convinced myself
That you never existed
And never will be.

That you are my own creation
Which I capture in absentia
In a dream
And in a shudder

That you are my secret pleasure that does not have
A separate will
From my desires and my whims
And my ability to grant it the right to vanish or become complete.

Friendship

My friends love to see me sad,
sane
or insane.

My friends want me a woman without a man,
a poetess without a country,
a lover without love.

My friends want me clear of everything
clear of the tarnishes of life;
existing there
for them, for them alone.

My friends don't want for me what I may want.

Desire

I want to stay in your hands for long

To sleep between your hands

To breathe your breaths

And count them one by one

In my lung.

Doors

All the time I was inventing you

Why when you found me

You left me!

***Dhabia Khamees is a poet from United Arab Emirates.**