

ILR

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R e v i e w



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Why Iraq Literary Review ?

Iraq Literary Review is the first Iraqi Literary journal in English with an Iraqi, Arab and World outlook. Its main aim is to be fully engaged in charting out the contemporary Iraqi literary scene and translating it into English. It will also be engaged in observing what goes on in the Arab and World literary circles and bringing it to Iraqi English readers and the whole Anglophone at large. Iraq literary output can not and should not be cut off from its Arab and World wellsprings. All previous Iraqi English magazines and/or journals, if ever they existed, were focusing on Iraqi culture without the slightest concern for their immediate cultural neighborhood or the global environment. The result was a one-eyed view that could not serve any purpose. Iraqi culture is reinventing itself after the fall of the totalitarian regime.

The soviet-like iron curtain cultural policy which was imposed on the Iraqi cultural scene under dictatorship is no more valid in free democratic Iraq. Iraqi culture must seek its true place in the civilized world free from past complexities and present difficulties. Our nascent free creative space needs to acculturate with all the free self-same experiences. But we need to make ourselves heard first. Very few around the world know anything significant about our literature. Some do not even remember that this land produced the first literary documents on this planet. Unfortunately, some doubt even the existence of our own literature. Thus Iraq Literary Review comes to function as a bridge that will open-mindedly convey the very best in our culture to the world. The main objective, of course, is to create more tolerance and better understanding between the national "I" and its the international "other".

This mission is definitely massive and requires gigantic efforts. Hence, we call upon all our like-minded friend and colleagues to assist every effort we make both morally and creatively. May the journey ahead be pleasant and fruitful! Amen.

{ Sadek R. Mohamed
Editor

Criticism



The Solitary Spirit:

Understanding the Poetry of Yaseen Taha Hafiz

Samir al-Shaheikh

This is a world
Whose meanings are
devoured by ants

And the spirit runs far away.

How far I am!

I was reading about another world in a book.

The creativity of art lies in the assumption that it portrays the complexity of human nature and penetrates the diversities of human situation. Man,

in the brave new world, is crushed by the heavy heels of wars and all self-consciousness is lost in absurdity, bareness, and boredom. To keep one's self alive, man seeks refuge by either aspiring to the celestial kingdom, or believing in the death of gods. Otherwise, he plunges into the turmoil of reality, or withdraws to the bygone times where beauty, purity and illusion are the particles of «another world». Hafiz, the Iraqi modern poet (b.1938), seminally hinges over the situation of the solitary man who confronts the destruc-

tive powers of external world beyond himself. The conscious ego feels the vicissitude occurring in the nature of physical world. Intimacy, splendor, and love have been replaced by gloomy beauty, «the breaking of that glass»:

The water at twilight
Loses something. Its face is getting dark,
Turning to put out the mirrors.
The grass is perplexed.



Y.T. Hafiz

It tends to leave its place.
 I stood still.
 Can I encounter the breaking of that glass,
 And behold the sky
 Extinguished,
 Lying like a loser
 Upon the water bed? (Hafiz 2004)

Not only has the semantic configuration of the poem reflected the perplexity of the ego, but also the syntax itself. The interrogative structure reveals a sense of uncertainty and dramatic conflict within the speaker's interior world. The speaker endeavors to hold on to the fading light of life:

O Life,
 Arise
 O Life!
 But it is the clouds
 That draw in vacancy
 Maps
 And write history in the air (Ibid.).

What is distinctive about Hafiz' «The Tigris at Twilight» is the poet's preoccupation with things. The river to which he expresses his world-view is personified. Personification is the poetic technique that charges things with animation. Moreover, the final line of verse shows that the personal history of man is not really written by him, but by forces other than himself. The separation is turned «inside-out». The reckless vicissitude makes the self shrink into his shell. The experience that the man has undergone in Hafiz' poem is different from that of, say, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586). In Sidney's «Leave Me, O Love,» the poet aspires to the peaceful spiritual sublimity of divine love compared to earthly love:

Leave Me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,
And thou my mind aspire to higher things:
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
What ever fades, but fading pleasure brings (Hayward 1956).

In these lines of verse, there is a sense of serene divinity. The poet's aspiration is for the celestial world where beauty and purity, while bodily desires vanish away. In Hafiz's poetry, however, the spirit aspires for «another world», i.e. the world of bygone times. The poet in «A woman «feverishly cries, «Ah! The awesomeness of bygone times!» (Jayyusi 1987). The speaker feels that he is entangled by the chains of ugliness and frustration:

The face of the woman is the face of the past. The face of the past is lovelier and prettier than the here -and -now situation.

. . . . This city is full of jerboas
And deformed frogs,
And the rifles point at the far-away moon.
A black shadow appears behind my window.
Blocked are the roads. And here am I, besieged,
But her face never departs the head of mine:
For it is the sole light in the desolate room.
The face of the woman is the face of the past. The face of the past is lovelier and prettier than the here

-and -now situation. Here, one may recall to mind Wallace Stevens' poetic experience. The mind, in Stevens', witnesses metamorphosis in the external world. Miller (1966) paraphrases Stevens' poetic vision. So Miller.

There was once a time when man lived in harmony with his fellows and surroundings. This harmony was a unified culture, a single view of things. . . Suddenly something catastrophic happened, and this happy order was destroyed. Once the theater is ruined it can never be rebuilt . . . When the tempest cracks on the theater the whole thing integrates: «exit the whole/Shebang «.Men are no longer brothers, but strangers to each other. The land withdraws to a distance

and comes to be seen as no longer included in man's interpretation of it. Only cold and vacancy remain» When the phantoms are gone and the shaken realist/ First sees reality». As soon as nature becomes outlandish the gods disappear like ghosts dissolving in sunlight. They do not withdraw for a time to an unattainable distance . . . They vanish altogether, leaving nothing behind. They reveal themselves to be fictions, aesthetic projections of man's gratuitous values. Having seen the gods of one culture disappear, man can never again believe in any god. «The death of one god is the death of all». . . This vanishing of gods, leaving a barren man in a barren land, is the basis of all Stevens' thought and poetry.

Though Stevens and Hafiz's poetic experiences have certain affinities, they are different in certain respects. The crisis of the solitary man in Stevens' is religious, and philosophical in the general context. When man believes no more in gods, he will be plunged into a state of nihilism because he has already lost the spiritual power that gives light in him:

That's what misery is,
Nothing to have at heart.
It is to have or nothing. (Ibid.)

Miller (Ibid.) wittingly comments on Steven's lines of verse saying that» the destructive of the nothing can be seen not only in the bewildering metamorphoses of the rest of the poem . . . but also in the dislocation of syntax in the sentence: «It is to have or nothing.» Hafiz has nothing to do with pious spirituality. He assumes that when the things of ugliness domain the world and the things of beauty vanish away, death does exist spiritually, though not physically. In this new careless world man loses his identity and becomes a nameless thing in the rush mob:

There remains the caravan of embalmed people
At the offices calculating hours. They are waiting for the day pass-

ing,
While their heads hanging on and the eyes on the calendar slopping
down

(Hafiz 2004).

Man loses harmony with the external world. Even Baghdad, the land
of eternal light, undergoes that vicissitude:

Baghdad is a sad chant,
And a forbidden light,
And a broken violin (Ibid.).

Every thing is turning like an aimless turning spiral. The onion - seller,
in Hafiz' poem, is imaged as living thing. The human being, here and
elsewhere, is referred to by the singular pronoun in-
stead of proper name:

The ego in soli-
tude finds that
the real world
is not his. In the
true reality men
become stran-
gers to each
other.

For a time, her face is lost in the vacancy, turning
round,
And the heap of onions clinging on together, turning
round.

The houses are turning round,
The streets are turning round,

And the clouds of the sky, the passers-by, her

thoughts,

And the flies, turning, turning, turning round,

And she warps herself in her black cloak,

Crouching and life turning (Hafiz 2004)

Man loses power and will to control not only the world but his own.
He diminishes to become less than human; he himself becomes a
thing:

Today I close my door,
And sit down alone here
In silence

As a vacant vase (Hafiz 2004)

The solitary self is living in a room of vacant mirrors that he could not see but himself. Hafiz' language serves to express the speaker's attitudes towards the human situation as it is and, moreover, to express his inner world. In this sense, the modern Iraqi poet treads the path of reality not only in his network of linguistic interrelated options, but also in his world-view. He deals basically with inanimate shapes or things as they are. The poem is «not ideas about the thing but the thing itself,» part of the world and not about it (Miller 1965). That poetic bearing has come to be known as «poetics of things». That is to say, poetry brings being into open naming things as they are. The new poetry is therefore «the outlines of being and its expressions, the syllables of its law (Ibid.). In Hafiz' «Obscurity», the reader will be encountered by a human being, imaged as a ghost. Everything about him is strange and obscure. He is, let us borrow Yeats' phrase, death-in-life. The language the poet uses in describing the man is closer to prose style than to the ornamented figurative speech. It is the language that coincides with the rhythm of the guest's personal life:

His jacket was old,
 And the straws were hanging upon his hair,
 And the wind did its exercise on his face.
 He was with no ample features,
 Emptied from the light of his spirit
 Except a flash on his eyes, coming and go
 Whenever ha said.
 Or recalled something
 Or gazed along (Hafiz 2004)

«Obscurity» is a par-excellent model of strangeness in modern Arab poetry. Poetry brings being into the open by naming things as they are (Op. tic). In the space of Hafiz' poem the world is narrowed to the point of hollowness. The ego in solitude finds that the real world is not

his. In the true reality men become strangers to each other. Boredom, forlornness and absurdity are the true heroes of the modern material world. The nature of the physical world goes astray from the path of ecstasy and meaning:

This is a world
Whose meanings are devoured by ants
And the spirit runs far away (Ibid.)

Some wits may find redemption in art. But even art, for the speaker in «The Blacksmith», becomes the proper way to fix his sorrows upon:

What should I do but making these drawings
To fix my sorrows upon,

To keep the heart amber, blazing one day,
To write a line of verse as a compensation of loss,
And draw for the wind the last bird. (Ibid.).

Things are structured in the poet's style as they are. Still, the string of diction derived from reality does not create the "poem of life".

Along with solitude goes other types of separation: the separation of mind from mind, the estrangement within each self which separates the self from itself. Existence itself is split into twain: the physical world and the other world:

Are we strangers, inanimate men or poets?

We are a band chased by squads throughout time
For every one is sleepless in his corner,
And lights off his cigarette at night,
Then turns to throw in silence his book down (Ibid.).

Hence, it is the collapse of man's peaceful and delightful world. And the ugliest manifestation of that collapse is the structure of war. In reality, Iraq from 1980 throughout 2003, witnessed three regional wars. The last war was the invasion of Iraq, led by the US troops on April 9, 2003. The catastrophic consequences of these absurd wars resulted not in the deformation of nature, but of man also. Hafiz, in «Mendly Orchards» penetrates the correlation of war as a destructive phenomenon to man and nature:

The orchards are the graveyard of the shelling,
 They are gathering dry
 Like us
 Like us
 To be burned.
 The orchards are not the ones when the seasons pass by
 Nor are they the ones when
 The intestines of theirs are torn by war carriages,
 Like us
 Like us
 They are a falling world holding on life (Ibid.).

The repetition of «like», here, overdoes the misery of both man and nature while undergoing the horrific times of war. The spoon, a thing in itself, becomes the inanimate space where the poet reads the tragic history of human kind:

The spoon is of gold.
 The ornaments on the polished arm are records of war.

Though those records are of the might of the conquerors, they are records of human misery:

I read them in silence. I behold the kings' chariots',
 The buried trenches and the men
 Who were slaughtered and the houses that were set in fire at
 twilight
 (Hafiz 2004).

Stevens (1951) convincingly says that «reality is not that external scene but the life that lived in it. Reality is things as they are.» To deepen that bearing, Hafiz accurately refers to the real setting in his poetry. This is clearly shown in «A Woman»:

In the Kifah Street, near the Fadl Mosque
 One evening I happened to notice
 A woman crossing the street
 A stranger she was

Flitting through time
Swathed in a black cloak
On her face the stamp of bygone days
And a shadow of ancient Babylon
(Jayyusi and Heath-Stubbs 1987)

The proper places, «Kifah,» «Fadl Mosque,» and «ancient Babylon» are stylized in a simple language that could not afford any ornamentation or extra beauty. When Hafiz speaks this way, he is the poet of reality, not in style, but also in world-view. It is worth noting that mentioning certain places do not create a «poem of life». In the Iraqi Modern verse, there is a poetic experience which preceded Hafiz in time, but different in aspiration, i.e. <Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayyati. In his

«Broken Pitchers» (1954), the poet depicts the details of everyday life in a real impulse. To show that poetic bearing, let us read his «Village market»:

The sun, the bony red, and the flies,
And a soldier's shoe
Is handed each other, and a farmer gazing unto vacancy:
«In the new year
I'll be full -handed with money
And I'll buy that shoe.»

He is not sad because of unrequited love or the absence of the beloved. Rather, he “reads about another world in a book.

The poet, then, proceeds introducing various images of toiling human nature where the visual is intertwined with the auditory. So, we behold the little priest, the blacksmith, the ornamentation - sellers, the grape - sellers, the cows, the black rifles, the plough, the furnace, the fire, etc. All these images are pictured in a bland language closer to prose style. Still, al-Bayyati's village market is non- definite. It could be everywhere and nowhere. What creates the texture of the text, here, is not the things of reality themselves but the things brought together by the monotonous repetition of the cohesive tie «and» which is repeated twenty times throughout the whole text. The text, stylistically speaking, is not a heap of syntactic structures, but a semantic unit. The syntactic ties are but one way to create the texture of the text.

In Hafiz' poetic career; however, we may anticipate such descriptive poems where images are heaped to build up the poet's vision, as in «Baghdad» or «About the truth of Sadiq's orchard», where we read:

Do you want a tale to entertain yourself.
 Go to Sadiq's orchard and see
 The lean date palms, the roofless hut,
 The trees like beggars gathering of cold
 And the heap of firewood (Hafiz 2004)

Nothing is romantic about the orchard. Things are structured in the poet's style as they are. Still, the string of diction derived from reality does not create the «poem of life».

The solitary man walks bare-footed in reality. And the question may arise here: How could the man in solitude manage his destiny? Hafiz chooses what Stevens has already refuted. When the mind is encountered by the physicality of the material world, the speaker in Stevens cries in exultation «the past is dead. / Her mind will never speak to me again. / I am free»(Miller 1965). The speaker in Hafiz, however, decides to withdraw to the bygone times since the past affords to the solitary ego that harmony which has already been lost. We do agree with Miller that «in the exterior, turning world, man leaps into solitude as a maneuver of escape,» and the effacement of the ego before reality means abandoning the will to power over things. This is the most difficult of acts for a modern man to perform (Ibid.).The withdrawal from the external world might be a Romantic solution, as that shown in Keats' «Ode to the Nightingale.» The Arab modern verse, in one of its bearings, had trodden the path of Romanticism. The Romantic is apt to live in the realm where the unchangeable moon is the most glorious element of nature. So, Nazik al-Mala'ka in «Song for the Moon» appeals to that silver beauty in an imaginative poetic style:

What are you? A vessel of light
 A blending of stars out of the dark

Oh. Kiss of lilies pouring out clear
The honey of a perfumed evening
You are a refuge and a haunt for beauty
A bouquet of lilies clasped by the sky
Your lips of light have come so close
To caressing the face of these fresh arbors
Oh pool of goodness and perfume

Sloping to the horizon, a basket of jasmine (Jayyusi 1987)

The chosen diction, » lilies, » « beauty, » honey, » jasmine » and the figurative expressions , » a vessel of light, » » kiss of lilies, » « pool for goodness » and « a basket of jasmine » create the dream-like scene at night. And because of the dominance of landscape, the poetry of the Romantic era has become synonymous with » nature poetry ». In Hafiz, however, the speaker does not intend to live permanently in Flora realm. He is not sad because of unrequited love or the absence of the beloved. Rather, he «reads about another world in a book.» This means that the self, though solitary, still lives reality on one hand and appeals to a better one on the other. The way Hafiz looks in the world is different from that of al- Mala'ka. The deep misery of the man lies in the fact that the splendor of the past has departed the modern world. So, the man in solitude aspires to that fading light to rebirth once more. He aspires to the world of harmony, peace and humanity where one could not witness the discordance of music. Such reconciliation between the present and the past does not exist except in the mind of the speaker.

In «Enlightening », one of the poems of Hafiz' «Poems of the Fair Lady» (1988), the poet harps on the same string, but in less degree, i.e. the contrast between the past and the present. Stylistically, the title of the collection implies a sense of ambiguity. The phrase, «poems of the Fair Lady» means either, (1) poems written by the fair lady or (2) poems about the fair lady. «Enlightening» starts at a point in the present. Then, it goes to the past as a «flash back», and later on returns to the present which discloses the speaker's amazement when beholding that feminine beauty. What is characteristic about

the description of the past moment is the use of the snapshots in introducing the glamour and beauty of the lady:

The lamp of her room was low
 And the beauty that dims the years
 Uncovered in tranquility
 The rose of the blazing spirit which gives
 The scared body its encouragement
 And the eyes whose blazing greenery
 Are as shining gold and burning orb (Hafiz 1988).

Moreover, the poet describes the lady of the past moment without any attempt to impose his personality upon it. The significance of the Keatsian «Negative Capability», as Gilbert (1965) puts it, is that «many things stand between a man and reality: his moods, his pre-conceptions, his prejudices. But if a man has negative capability, he is able to penetrate such barriers in order to get the heart of reality.» He goes on to say that he is able to yield himself utterly to the experience, to become, so to speak, the object he is contemplating (Ibid.). Hafiz' «Enlightening », is a prime example of the short poem which manipulates the sources of plastic arts, like painting, and cinematic techniques. Though Romantic in colors, the poem stands in contrast to the Romantic poetic style which pays much attention to the details, the elaborations of human and natural elements of beauty , as in Shelley's « The Sensitive Plant».

The human yearnings and sufferings are encoded in language which matches the rhythm of the modern age. By poetics of things, Hafiz invents a new bearing in Modern Arab verse. He does not bring humanity to the brink of nihilism as the western poetic experiments in the twentieth century have done. Rather, he describes man as a human situation in terms of real stylistics. Therefore, the poem of reality is not merely a group of concrete diction and imagery. It is the poet's world-view, structured in linguistic structures, that outlines the movement of the world. Therefore, to bring reality into poetic creation is not merely to describe it but to make it. The poem, then, becomes the thing itself.

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Appendix

YASEEN TAHA HAFIZ b. 1938
(From «What the Last Orator Uttered»)» 2009

► The Tigris at Twilight

The water at twilight
 Loses something. Its face is getting dark,
 Turning to put out the mirrors.
 The grass is perplexed.
 It tends to leave the place.
 I stood still.
 Can I encounter the breaking of that glass
 And behold the sky
 Extinguished,
 Lying as a loser
 Upon the water bed?
 O Life, Arise
 O Life!
 But it is the clouds
 That draw in vacancy
 Maps
 And write history in the air.

► Take Me to Thee

Take me to thee, O absent village.
 O date palm trucks in the roof of the room, aperture
 Rounded into the wall, golden hay
 Slumbering on the sorrowful golden wall,
 Poor clothes in the sun,
 Morning cow milk with rising vapor,
 Furnace nearby the door, where the boughs
 Of pomegranate and citron are enlightened,
 The dwelling of my beloved is not here.
 Neither is mine. This city is full of jerboas
 And deformed frogs,

And the rifles point at the far-away- moon.
A black shadow appears behind my window.
Blocked are the roads. And here am I, besieged
But her face never departs the head of mine:
For it is the sole light in the desolate room.

► Obscurity

His jacket was old,
And the straws were still hanging upon his hair,
And the wind did its exercises on his face.
He was with no ample features,
Emptied from the light of his spirit
Except a flash on his eyes, coming and go
Whenever he said,
Or recalled something
Or gazed along.
I was scared by seeing him at the door, standing,
But I gave up when he signed
As a friend to come in,
And he became as a strange guest
Or an ex-friend. A story
I should read: Was he in the jail? Was he a fugitive of conspiracy?
Does he bring me some news?
Once more, he signed me as fatigue,
Leaned his head, lied on a mat and got a sleep.
I covered him with a blanket. «when he gets up,» said I,
«I'll see.»
Two hours later, he woke up,
Said goodbye,
And went away, as he came, in silence.

► Baghdad

Baghdad is minarets.
 Baghdad is bowers of citron
 And votive candles.
 Baghdad is an eternal absence and presence.
 Baghdad is faces that depart not the night of her streets
 After ages.
 Baghdad is a sad chant,
 And a forbidden light,
 And a broken violin.
 Baghdad is the virgin, caged into the castle
 And the forlorn orchard.
 Baghdad is the lover adorning the beloved's panel
 And lanterns floating on water
 And wedding of birds.
 Baghdad is darkened vaults
 And a cloudy sky
 And burning blood throughout ages.
 And there are people.
 Everyone throws something out of his blood
 So as that light keeps burning!

► Enlightening

From "Poems of the Fair Lady" (1988)
 Eternity tranquilizes upon sleepy bowers,
 And the distances in silence keep waiting.
 She wasn't a star in the sky.
 It was winter cold,
 And winter ways.

Closed were the rooms,
And bowers on which snow and darkness fell into a slumber.
Her lamp was low,
And the beauty that dims the years
Uncovered in tranquility
The rose of the blazing spirit which gives
The scared body its encouragement,
And the eyes whose radiant greenery
Are as shining gold and burning orb.
The ages, in whose snow the fire is set, flow
While I am contemplating in dazzle
The glow of the youth that years saved,
And the breaking of the old snow in a moment,
And the enlightening of the day.

The Broom of Heaven

Five Rabbits in the Basket of Murtatha Gzar

Dhia Al- Jubaili



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

Gzar did not extracted the character of Ramzi from a realistic model whatsoever.

The eloquence of this character

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 Basrah. 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 Basrah, 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 specially 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 tragical 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 any way, 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 Jenet.

The narrator in the novel is Ramzi, «this painter who is penetrated from all his 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 Jenet 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: Mullayah 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. Basrah as a city is infected with disasters of war, oil and art. Despite all that Basrah 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 Basrah, the quarter of Hakkaka, «slaves of Basrah 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 Basrah, 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 Basrah - Baghdad! Finally, is hunting rabbits really such a difficult mission?

Translated by: Mustafa Naser

Tragic Imagination

Nadhim Audah

Disease freezes my rest, darkens my future
 In my imagination, Paralyzes my breath, to release it then
 As withered breath swaying in my lungs
 Where the ghost of death dancing; Lungs, tied to the darkness of
 the grave By blood and coughing.
 Alas! Such is the way I die, Like the morning dew getting dry.

(Badr Shakir Assayyab)



► Covers of Assayyab's Collections of Poetry

So often, authors' photos fixed on the covers of their books seem to be rich with meanings. Such meanings are liable to be interpreted by a language that can possibly be described as the language of explanation and interpretation. This language tries to form a semiotic text that draws upon the symptoms shown in the photo itself.

In this respect, Assayyab's photo that appears on the cover of his complete collection of poetry issued by Dar Al-Awda in 2000 in which he appears leaning on a stick, with his face deprived of every glance of joy, associates directly with his exciting poetic experience. In fact, all his personal photos, which are but a few, represent a single picture; one that is devoid of every sign of happiness. His x have gone too far in transforming every bit of human tragedy into vivid rhetorical images burning with pain.

Notwithstanding the hidden world of the dominating lustiness, which converts the direct informative function of language into a purely enjoying one, the text becomes a tale of prohibition and possible desires, a history of the internal world of a poet disappointed in his love stories. Therefore, the bodily poetry of Assayyab comprises a group of figurative uses, related to his sexual sufferings that interact strongly with his other works to yield in the end a myth of a poet whose way of life keeps fertile in the

imagination of his readers.

Blood in his burning heart,
Boiling, and thus, pushes
His body to sin.
Love set fire to his dreams
And made him fall in to sin.
(Ibid, 339)

Assayyab was always making comparisons between his sick body and others' because he thought that his sick body is just an exception among healthy ones; therefore, he never quit dreaming of a place with vigorous elements of life. It seems that the affinity of the image of a sick body to the excitement of literature made Assayyab carry over his illness to his poems. This rendered a reduced text, namely the text of the sick body, which derives its words from a lexicon rich with words of sickness and severe fatigue. You may listen to him say:

O, only if you know
What it does mean to sleep
For seconds in a bed of blood
With dead legs and fevered forehead;
My eyes are eaten by darkness which
My mouth drinks,
Lost I am in an oasis beyond
The wall of years and groan,
With a heart pulled ever on
To the stars.
(Ibid, 64950-)

Assayyab, the heir of the permanent tragedy of the epic of Gilgamesh, might have realized that his sick body is also good for a permanent tragedy in which wounded souls show themselves to humanity. In the extract above there is some sick language: six sick sentences with seven words or phrases selected from the lexicon of disease such as: O, seconds in a bed of blood, with dead legs, fevered forehead, my mouth drinks, and groan.

Translated by:
Hussein N. Jabr Al-Ibadi

Poetry



A Practice in Distraction

Ra'ad Zamil



No train waits for me
Nor stations
I am just a passer by
Holding my age
As if it were a bag of trash
I stand on a crossroads
But they are all
Lead to that distraction.

All over the world
The seed can
Be a tree
And the tree can be a forest,

Only in this land
The forest retreats to be a tree
The tree becomes a seed
The seed after that
Becomes a disgrace

on a forehead
called the wasteland.

For the emperor
Who took my blood
As fuel in the wars,
For the father
Who made
From my back
As a camel in the desert,

For the woman
Who disappointed me at the beginning of the age
And for the friends
Who weaved my existence on the poetry table
Without a memory
All of them
Have to correct my life
Which they spoiled,
So I'll stop chasing them
Convincing only with hooting
As a witness like the owl
On this destruction.

Everything vanishes
In the ruins
Which we call the houses
Everything vanishes
Only misery

Gleams like a scandal there
While in the bitter darkness
Whenever I saw

A spider on the roofs
I invited it to the meal of loneliness
saying
Be my drinking companion in this distraction.

Concerning the shining and the brave
Who there is no war
But left a handful of dust

On his face.
And there is no history of glory

But passed on its pages yesterday
When he remembered
those who rode him
In their way to the summits
And he thought of his life - now

His life that surrounded with the dung

And the flies
He passed away because of sadness

The poor miserable
Yesterday too
They found him dead
when his corpse
In the stable
Appears as a loudest cry
Against the destruction.

Translated by:
Soheil Najm

The Lemon Trees of the Year

Nasif Al-Nasiry



Coming from a night of sliding shack on the postal stars, the wolves of heroin and the dead of the light deceive me. A dark bundle of money hides near the river Syat, awaiting the looks coming out from amongst the concealed elation.

The suffocated tremors of my longing for riches while drying my anxiety under the sun of the bulging clocks is in itself the tremor of the thief around his stones of disappointment and the cellars of his underwear.

The pleasant apathy to hunt a thin journey to an anonymous country feeding on the sentences of dreams and diseases makes it an obligation upon us to cut the hairs of the doors' heads until the wet voices of the pipes rise.

The mysterious end of the lives of the bank's squirrels and the summer death of metal in the lakes of the fierce eyes are the free thoughts of the thief in his continuous endeavors to catch up with the whistles of the angels of the machines of sleep.

In the city of my lover's jaw, the shepherds of torment turn the ice and the forbidden that embed the lemon trees of the year.

The thief is the stork of luck.

► The Land of No Future

Leaving the pleasure of a few burnt stones in the land of no future,
I try to liberate my song from the hatred that challenges the brotherhood
of man.

I ask: will God bless a country where hatred and weapons are hung on
the shoulders of trees and poets? Will the trustworthy sun long to rivers
where corpses of the deceived are thrown in its groves.

We must stand now under the hot shadows of the angels and weep
in the honey of the flower, so that the hours of forgetfulness do not
disappear from our memory. We should ask the stretched palm trees on
the horizons of the Euphrates: what forces us to listen to the signals of
the flood in order to be liberated from the rottenness of the waterfalls of
blood encircling our necks?

What is this amazing code inscribed on our flags, the secret of which
we can not solve or walk under its scented scope in the chaos and
moving contradiction?

A man kills another in the land of no future for a skin of an onion and a
holiness he invented and raised in the stockade and in the graves.

Why are the curtains drawn on hatred? And the love and warmth of the
thin earth's veins disappear in the land of our forefathers who have not
spared a method of killing without using it on each other in coldness
that keeps its darkness in my way. I enter the dark history of the drums
of the continuous executions and get lost in the night of our old and
new mass graves.

The stiffness of the land of no future stamps a past in an eternal
darkness and there is no dawn where the quivering windows of the
morning of life incline towards the magnificent breeze.

Translated by:

Khaloud Al-Muttalibi

Darkness



Ghareeb Iskander

Nothing, except for this darkness
 Nothing, anew a white tear will come down on you
 Piles of damaged things
 Endings, which will flash and disappear
 You have nothing in this world
 Except for the word
 So says the poet
 Ascend with it
 Ascend to the end of the mountain
 The bright mountain of gaiety
 Or the dark mountain of the ending
 Ascend to the sea,
 I don't mean the sea of words
 The sea of lies
 The sea of truths
 It's only a sea,
 This, which stands
 Behind you
 Admire its beaches,
 Which don't flash
 Nor disappear
 The beaches of hope
 The beaches of spirit,
 Which light up
 Amidst this darkness
 It isn't the beaches of gaiety
 It isn't the beaches of the small river,
 Which our childhood used to cross over

It's the beaches of the tear, with which
We wrote our poems
On the messy school exercise books
The beaches of blood,
Which used to flow
On the streets of our innocence, which wilted
Our innocence, which still blazes
 blazes
 bla...
but, in the end
there is
Nothing
except for
Darkness.

Translated by: M. T. Ali

An Autumn

Majid Alhydar



I feel sorry, deeply sorry,
 For...
 Every thing"
 The old man knows a lot of things,
 And in his brief journeys
 Between home and the coffee shop
 He always carries
 The memory of the everlasting desolation..
 "I feel sorry
 For the city.. about it..
 For the fading sun
 For the crowned God of Dust
 For the fire that no more gives warmth.."
 Now the old man is crooning no tune but his cough
 "I feel sorry.. for my old house
 For it's mice.. for it's wooden windows..
 For the old magazines..
 And the picture of James Dean
 Printed in blue"
 The old man halts, wipes his eyeglasses
 And the cold, non out-of-crying tear drops underneath.
 Now he looks at the careless sun..
 "Oh, how fast runs this train!"
 The Travelling Bags

- And what do the soldiers carry
In their travelling bags?
- Old socks,
Prayers of the grandmother,
Sleeping pills
And a picture of the little beloved brunette.
- And what do the soldiers do when they arrive
To the new slaughterhouse?
- They will unload the cooking pots and the tents
They will erect two bathrooms made of tin;
One, on the right, for His Excellency the Commander,
One, on the left, for Their Excellency the officers.
They will dig a temporary draining ditch
In a fold of land wrapped in camel's thorn.
They will look to the sky.. to the clouds.
They will curse, they will damn, and dream
About death, about running away, and about the blind night missiles.
- And what will the soldiers take with them on decamping?
- Cooking pots,
Their folded Tents,
The bags of dead comrades,
A bitterness in the mouth,
The smell of phenol,
Confused, distracted eyes,
And a prick...deep in the heart

Fiction



CIRCLES OF SORROW



Ali Alkasimi

I must tell my story to someone so that he can record it and commit it to memory before they kill me, for I am besieged. They light fires around me, steal my air, lie in wait for me, ambush me, and watch for an opportunity to entrap me, to pounce on me, to cut off my limbs, to put an end to my life and to endanger my existence. I do not want to leave this world before I relate my story, not all of it or in details, of course; for it is a long story, one that no book can contain, and I have very little time left to tell it all. I shall therefore only introduce the highlights of my life - just flashes in the night of time:

I helped Noah build the boat; and when the rivers rose and burst their banks, torrential rains fell hard and fast, and the deluge struck in the month of Muharram al-Haram . I boarded the vessel with him. My sweetheart, who was standing on a high hill, was looking at me and waving to me. I called out her name, but she did not answer. I waved to her to hurry up, but she did not move. She just remained standing there on the hill. The boat set sail without her. Then I sat down alone, hanging my head in grief, and burying my face in my hands. A silent tear was trickling down my cheeks when a she-cat that was walking past me stopped right in front of me and began to mew, affectionately rubbing her body and tail against my bare legs.

In the last part of the yearning for her, I entered the city of Erech bareheaded and barefooted. I went straight into Ishtar Temple looking for my sweetheart, but she was not there among the harlots. So, I picked up a nail and, on a stone, I carved these: "I love you forever." I hung the stone on the Temple door in the hope that one day she would enter the Temple and see it. I swallowed my disappointment like a needle and left. Then on the main city street, I descried endless, grief-stricken and consolatory processions of the city's nymphs who were wailing and mourning Dumuzi, the pastoral deity, who was

assailed, tortured and unjustly killed in the month of Moharram al-haram. I examined the faces of the wailing beauties, searching for my sweetheart, but I could not find her among them. Gripped by the stifling agonies of love, I joined the consolatory procession and began to weep. I did not know then whether the tears I was shedding were for Dumuzi or for my sweetheart.

Then I joined Gilgamesh and Enkidu in their conquests of the land of Cedar Forests and the Sea of Darkness, searching for the plant that would renew youth: my sweetheart. It was then that I beheld the brave Enkidu challenging the demon in the forest and defeating him, and fighting the wild bull in the city square and overpowering it. Ah, but brave Enkidu breathed his last in a closed room! Then Gilgamesh, full of grief, carried on searching for the plant of life alone. He dived down to the floor of the sea to fetch it; but the serpent came to him in his sleep, stole the plant of life from him, and slithered back into its hole. Gilgamesh wept inconsolably, and I wept silently with him. I did not know then whether the tears I was shedding were for Gilgamesh or for my sweetheart. I drank my tears and, returning to my worn-out tent in the desert, I threw my blunt sword on the sand.

I entered the city of Ur in the land of Sumer and began looking for my sweetheart. They were all gathered around Abraham, listening to him; so I joined them. Then Nimrod's men came unexpectedly upon us; they seized me and set fire to me and to Abraham. My ashes, spreading out and rising to the heavens, touched the face of the moon, causing a lunar eclipse; and they stroke the eye of the sun, setting off a solar eclipse. Their atoms gathered and stuck together, and I remembered my footprints on the sand.

They used me, along with others, in building the suspended Gardens of Babylon. In the evening I was bathing in the Euphrates wherein I searched for my sweetheart amongst its mermaids and for a bite to allay my hunger. The river waves slithered fast towards me, loaded with ducks and fish, but I still felt very hungry. The mermaids guffawed, and everybody left, except I. I stayed alone searching for her in my dreams. When the sun sank at the other end of the sky, and the moon dimmed, the Tower of Babel came tumbling down. So, I left with the others, heading towards the city of Ashur. On my way there, I asked trees and stones about my sweetheart. I traveled through gypsy villages, saw their tents, and beheld gypsy women dancing

with wolves and singing with owls, but I still could not feast my eyes on my sweetheart. In the evening I wept bitterly. I did not know whether the tears I was shedding that evening were for the Tower of Babel or for my sweetheart.

I hailed them when I saw them on horseback attacking, their swords unsheathed, and the columns of dust rising behind them all the way to the heart of the desert. I picked up my blunt sword and caught up with them. I stood with them in front of Khosrau's palace, smashing every brick in it. With its stones, I built the walls of a circular city full of beautiful palaces, lush gardens and spacious courtyards. When construction works were completed, the Sultan, his sons, and his court entered the city, and they appropriated the palaces, leaving me and my companions out in the open outside the city wall. I stood at the city gate enjoying the sight of beautiful girls, who had hailed from all parts of the world, entering the circular city, but my sweetheart was not among them. A silent tear, over which I had no control, rolled down my cheek; I did not know whether the tears I was shedding were for my shattered dreams or for my sweetheart.

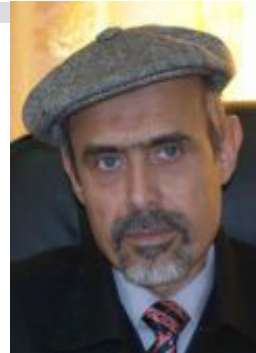
I entered the city of Baghdad, and I saw people in cafés laughing and making merry. I took up a job in an observatory. One day I saw through the window Mongol armies riding towards the city on ugly ponies. They laid siege to the city until it ran out of food and ammunition. And during the month of Muharram al-haram when the sun was at the center of the sky, they invaded the city. They massacred the people, slaying the elderly and children, slitting open the stomachs of pregnant women, burning books, and destroying minarets. So much blood and ink flowed into the river that its water took their colors. Standing alone on the bank of the river, I broke into tears. I did not know then whether the tears I was shedding were for Baghdad or for my sweetheart.

I swallowed my pride like colocynth and, exhausted, I went back to my worn-out tent in the desert wherein I cast off my saddle, allowing painful memories to parade before my imagination. Whenever a mirage heaved into sight, I would grab my sword, prod my horse, and chase it down hoping it was the mirage of my sweetheart, but every time I'd return frustrated and heartbroken.

Translated by: Ali Azeriah

Al-Sheikh Al- Jabeli's Journeys

Hameed Al-Mukhtaar



It began when the telephone rang continuously and I was busy toppling the triumph of crossing to the second bank of the mind, saying to myself: "What else?" Was there any thing after writing to make the fruit close to the open mouths, especially when I had passed the forty and a little? When I reflected what passed of years, I discovered that I was moving in an empty circle exactly like the donkey of a waterwheel and wondering what was achieved up to this moment. What were my aspirations, achievements and overcoming? The matter was only a resounding as the resounding of the sound and its echoes, the long suffering nights, the moaning and the torment, the severe self hunger, the slow wishes and the dead words on the edges of the lips. There were no backs and no rank which led to good situations or victories, I had lived an actual Autumn after being left by the most of my friends and the one I gave her the fruit of my heart on a dish of gold and blood left me. She preferred gold and left blood covering my wounded heart. She married a very rich merchant in the town leaving me to loneliness in front of pictures, pens and old newspapers which time had painted with a dry yellow color. Exactly at this time, the telephone rang on my table to return me to my bitter reality. I raised the receiver heavily, immediately I heard the editor in chief calling me, I who was forgotten and cornered in one of the corners of this big newspaper office, to his study. After I sat in front of him, he ordered a cup of black coffee for me. I loved it to be sweet but I endured the bitterness of the coffee hoping to hear something sweet from him.

"You, in your recent position is more than enough! Is there any profit of your existence in the newspaper?" He said.

I wanted to answer but he continued to complete his fearful question:

"Of course, I know your ability in writing; I read, your old articles in different newspapers but why is this silence and what is the use of this isolation?"

I wanted to answer but he blocked all the outlets.

"Do you indeed like to work with us?" He said

Before I opened my mouth, he as usual completed:

"If you want that you can start from now a real and useful beginning and indeed it will be fruitful!"

I said to myself, Oh, Almighty God, here he is answering my questions concerning the profit and the fruit. Is it a telepathy that joined me to this man? Here he is interrupting the series of my thoughts and putting in front of me a long list of shrines and graves of many holy men, clergymen and seers, the significant and the companions of the route. Then I heard him saying:

"I intend to write a series of investigations about these shrines and we selected a lot of names of writers but I have chosen you to do this mission and I dictated a cameraman to accompany you in your tours to be under your demands."

Then he rose off his place announcing the end of the meeting, saying:

"I don't want to see you in that narrow corner. Go there where the closed places waiting for someone to open and shed light on. Don't you want to be the conqueror?"

I smiled saying to myself, "Here, he is knocking on the second vocabulary which was used by me."

When he saw my smile he said wondering, "Why are you smiling? The conquerors are too many and they are not only opening cities and provinces or establishments. There are hidden openings only few who know them and you will be one of this small number."

"Me...!"

"Yes, you. You will conquer the forgettable shrines and pump them with life again by your pen which is throbbing with life."

(Oh, God, he resurrects hope in my soul in an injection and flow in my inactive mind which held closely the sad memories and blocked its doors on them.)

I got out of his bureau and returned to my room which was surrounded by a universe and barriers which pushed me far away from the vast movement while I was in a new status. I turned the list and read what it contained. It contained a lot of names of holy men.. It began with Maarof Al Karkhy, Bisher Al Hafy, Al Sury Al Saqti, Al Harith Al Muhasby, Al Junaid Al Baghdadi, Ahmad Al Noori, Abu Baker Al Shibly, Al Hussein Bin Mansour Al Halaj, Ibn Arabi, Al Nafry, Bahlool Al Majnoon, Ibrahim Ibn Adham and Mohammad Ibn. Ali Al Jabeli. I do not know why the last name in the list in particular reminds me of my earliest childhood when my father took me on the Thursday nights to those shrines to share the dervishes and diviners in their rites which frightened me too much. I took the cameraman and went to those places but I failed on the first day of my arrival to one of those shrines. By chance I found a mosque and the time was nearly the noon prayer.

I told my companion to have a little rest and pray in this mosque. When we sat, a young man accompanied by an old man wearing a turban sat near us. They were arguing in an audible voice. I heard the young man saying:

"But I don't know him, indeed. How can I know him?"

He knows you and wants you to go to him. He has chosen you. Isn't that enough?" The man of the turban said.

I followed their strange dialogue. The man with the turban was looking at me from the corners of his eyes in such a way that he did not want me to discover those looks. Then I heard him talking to the young man:

"Go to him, look for him and your heart will lead you to him!"

This time he looked at me with steady looks, and then he returned talking to the young man:

"Go out of this prison and leave the house of illusion and be far away of these graves whose dwellers were perishable and their people are injustice."

"I said to myself, he was addressing me any way; I mean you but my neighbour listen."

When we went out of the mosque, I told my colleague, the cameraman about the fact of what had happened inside the mosque.

"This is correct; usually the matter happens through a code or a message. Only the receiver understands it. Here you understand the message. It was certainly sent for you, not to the young man!!" He said.

"But who is he? Is he Al Sheikh Al Jabeli himself? Where is he? Who has the evidence of his existence and who knows his traveling and settlements?" I said.

I returned to my references and some bibliographies in the libraries looking for him in the texts and margins of books, until I checked the place part after part. During that the name of Al sheikh was repeated a lot, not only in my work but also in the house as well. My dreams, my imagination in my awareness and sleeping deal with it. I had a dream when I entered an inn crowded with dervishes and a beautiful woman who received me and let me enter one of the rooms where three dervishes entered and welcomed me warmly. One of them held my hand and began to read some talismans and cites, then he beat the back of my right hand.

Since then I woke up from my sleeping, feeling excessive rest. Since that time whenever I met a person I asked him about Al Sheikh Al Jabeli. One day I met accidentally a beggar and after I put a piece of money in his open hand, I asked him if he knew something about Al Sheikh Al Jabeli. He kept silent for a while and his lower lip was shivering and he began gazing at me with eyes filled with doubt and mistrust. I repeated my question to him. He answered that he did not know anything. When he was about to leave, he stopped and said:

"Where have you heard his name?"

"It is a subject of study I want to write on." I said.

"I had been little when I saw him talking with my father in one of the mosques." He said.

"How did you know he was Al Sheikh Al Jabeli?"

"My father told me that and he was very happy to have met him!"

"Why?"

"Because...few who met him, don't you know that?"

"I do not know."

"Well, now you have known how you want to see him?"

"I don't want to see him but to write about him."

"How will you write about him and you haven't seen him?"

I did not answer because he departed leaving me bewildered, plunging into a labyrinth without an outlet. The following day I agreed with my colleague, the cameraman to search again what remained of places we had not reached yet. We arrived at a narrow quarter surrounded by twisted branches and houses which were threatened to fall. I went directly to a carpenter's shop. The carpenter was busy making antiquarian chairs and tables. When he saw me, he smiled and came toward me and welcomed me. Before I would surprise him with my question, he said;

"My heart is telling me that I'll see you. So I've seen you now, indeed!"

"Do you know me?" I asked him surprisingly.

"No, I don't know you and I haven't seen you in my life." He answered spontaneously.

"What a surprise! So how have you been waiting to see me?"

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"Of course, I believe in them."

"I have seen you or a man looks like you in a dream. I was lost and did not remember what happened after that."

"Perhaps this man would help me in my research." I said.

"Do you know Al Sheikh Al Jabeli's residence?" I asked him.

"Al Sheikh Al Jabeli!!"

The carpenter kept silent and his eyes began looking for something

in the sky as if he had lost something.

"Yes, he is near, here," he said then.

"So, take me to him, please."

The man led me to distant alleys leaving my colleague, the cameraman far away behind us. He began entering places I had not seen before: low, muddy houses and open doors, yards filled by naked children and heaps of excrement scattered everywhere. There were some women having very thin bodies with naked breasts milking pale yellow babies dying in their sweatiest laps. We entered one of these houses where a boy with a beautiful appearance received us.

"Where is the Haja?" The carpenter asked the boy.

The boy stared with a strange look before he answered.

"She has gone in a business; she will come after a while. Why?" He asked.

"This man wants to visit Al Sheikh and writes about him."

The boy began examining me as if he had seen a fabulous creature descended recently from the sky.

"Al Hajia doesn't allow anyone to visit Al Sheikh."

"Why?"

"You know that well!"

"My son, why? Why doesn't she allow anyone to visit Al Sheikh?" I asked the boy confusedly.

"She is always so."

I told the carpenter that I would wait for her return and I would persuade her of my want. I sat near a child who was crying continuously while his mother was trying to feed him with her nipple of her emaciated breast, he was suffocated and became pale, she released the nipple from between his lips and he returned screaming. Suddenly the boy entered breathlessly saying:

"Al Haja arrives and wants to see you."

The boy took me to a woman standing at the opening of a narrow alley and she unveiled her bulged white marble chest from the edges of the open cloak, and some tufts of her coal black hair escaped from under the veil which retreated to the back of her head. If Al Haja is not

old, she is a woman in the forty and her body is still insisting to cling to the retreated youth. I greeted her and told her my want to visit Al Sheikh after her agreement of course, but she refused that nervously pretending at the beginning that the building needed reconstruction and the shrine was unsuitable for visits recently.

"My lady, I don't care for the building but what interests me is the person himself. I have an insistent want to write about him." I said to her.

"Where have you been before that? Why have you remembered Al Sheikh exactly now?" She answered with a clear convulsion.

"Why haven't you written to the authorities about the ultimate need for the reconstruction? Why?"

When she finished her speech, she veiled her body with her cloak in a dramatic movement and went inside the darkness of the alley. I went back to the carpenter feeling disappointed very much. But before I departed and saw off the carpenter after I stepped a few paces outside the alley, I heard feet fall behind me. At once, I turned and saw the boy approaching me.

"Mr. I can let you enter Al Sheikh's shrine." He said.

"You!"

"Yes, I know where Al Haja hid the keys."

"But you will expose yourself to danger because of me."

"Never mind, the importance is your entrance. I love Al Sheikh and hate to leave him enclosed all the time."

We agreed on an appointment at the hour when Al Haja slept early as usual, as the boy said. At the exact appointment, the boy came carrying the keys. I rose and walked behind him while my colleague, the cameraman was following me. We went through the opening of the alley where the wet darkness swallowed and carried us as if we were flying in interval and material penetrating mantles by ascending steps and ladders till I believed that I crossed to another universe which I had not seen yet. A universe which had its laws and creatures, its stars and galaxy. There were eyes of light appeared to you from nearby corners of our souls washing our inners and disclosed them

of their masks and endowed us a wonderful warmth we hadn't felt before that.

We entered a threatening-to-collapse building through a wooden gate moaning of the heavy fall of time on it. There were faint lights coming from the closed shrine. When he opened the door of the shrine, the door squeezed announcing our entrance into the sacred place of Al Sheikh Al Jabeli. My colleague began to take pictures while he was moving around the shrine which was covered with heaps of dust. I read two lines of poetry engraved on the wood of the shrine in black color which began to be exfoliated:

I traveled without supplies to my homeland,
Sadness is my caravan with worry and remorse
I say alas in the route of my problem
Who will treat a sick tortured by pain.

I remained turning and turning round the shrine like a butterfly trying to approach the source of the light forgetting myself and time and forgetting the danger of burning the wings by the blazing of the nearby light. The boy drew my attention by saying:

"Al Haja may wake up and come to the shrine."

I was surprised to hear that.

"What will she do inside the shrine at an hour like this?" I asked.

"Of course she visits the shrine."

"At this time?"

The boy kept silent and did not know what he meant by his saying. His silence suggested a secret he did not want to disclose. The following day, I felt being haunted by the place and its magic. The unseen kneeling person in the hollow of light caught me of my hamstring and pulled me drawlingly to his slight spaces, those spaces were leading you to paths of spirits" slight light which lighted the desired shelters of soul to the light to free it from the endless labyrinths. I even began to forget my friends and the complex of my life completely and my feeling of helplessness after that woman had left me. I forgot

everything. I came back to the place again and the boy did what he had done at the first time.

I began to prolong staying there in front of the shrine crying bitterly as if I were in a secret dialogue with Al Sheikh's spirit flying as a nightingale around the box of the shrine, (What made me stay here? Which voice is this to enter me in Al Sheikh's cocoon and his luminous lamp?) One day, the boy told me to shorten my visits especially this night because Al Haja decided to enter the shrine. The boy knew the times of her visits to the shrine and knew well the rites she was doing because she sent him to buy sticks of incense, candles, henna and other things of supplies for the visit. At the time he warned me of the danger of coming, I decided on my part to take a mad decision with insist to come to the shrine and hide in a place inside the threatened to collapse building. I had done that after my agreement with the boy I loved too much and could no longer dispense with his services in return for little amount of money.

He let me inside after my arrival to a safe place far away from Al Haja's eyes. She wore transparent black clothes. She removed her veil and put it on her shoulders. I was watching her while she was carrying a pot of henna, sticks of incense and the lighted candles. She entered in Al Sheikh's presence. She distributed the candles around the shrine and rubbed the bars of the shrine with the red paste of henna and continued moving round the shrine holding the sticks of incense, redolent with its ritual scent and filled the corners and the sides of the shrine. She sat in front of the head silently, closing her eyes as if she slept soundly. The boy came and warned me not to stay to the end of the secret rite of this woman. He said that I must go out at once.. He insisted and begged me while I became obstinate and dismissed him severely.

"Then you have to bear the consequences of all that coming!" He warned me before he went out.

The boy went confused and left me in a worry to explain what he had said. But soon I forgot the boy's matter when I saw Al Haja put off her clothes piece after piece till her underneath clothes appeared showing the details of a white body because of long hidden and being far of the light of the sun. After moments, I heard sighs, moaning, groaning and a sound of something shaking. With a sudden one movement, she put off the last piece of her underneath clothes and threw it far away showing a disgraceful nudist. The body was released of its old chains as if it were a tiger leaving its cage and began shaking, roaring and showing its fangs of wants and shakes through hissing, throbs, grumbles and rattles. The woman was changed into a dumb creature embodied through a transparent mirror, the curtains of oblivion withdrew of it where her body appeared reflected and hidden by.. The mirror was the appearance of the body identification in the hidden depths and the embodied shape of the furious woman until they were fixed together. The woman became a mirror and the mirror became a lustful and ophidian body hissing and crawling towards the shrine and its open door from the side of the head.

I saw her as a white snake shining under the glittering of a desire and the candles' wicks. A snake showed her flexible skin after she removed her old skin hidden under no existed folds. Then she went through the open door of the shrine and closed it behind her. At that time the candles extinguished and the sticks of the incense were no longer blazing. Everything was put off and the place sank in deep silence and darkness. After this accident, I stayed in bed suffering of fits of fever and disturbed dreams and nightmares in which that woman was moving, changing into the same lustful snake disappearing in its mirror trying to approach and turning around me, entering my body as it entered that shrine.

Atimeafterthat accident, I forgot the matter of writing and investigations in the newspaper and the editor in chief. I was busy with Al Sheikh Al Jabeli who kidnapped me suddenly of all my occupations and took

me there where he was lying, departing, traveling and appearing. At the time when I was lying in my bed, I completed my research about him and decided to hide and put it far away of lights and the friends' intrusive eyes and the officious hands. The desire pushed me again to return to Al Seikh's shrine. I was as a one walking narcotic towards the same place. I found it open widely attributed by a lot of people; men, women, children, dervishes, Indian monks, Afghans, Kurds, Pakistanis, Turks, Charkas and different nationalities. I did not see the carpenter or the boy and even the devilish Al Haja who carried keys. Everything was changed and I was hardly acquainted with the place. I did not know how my eyes fell on the two lines of poetry that completed the ones I read in the past days:

The desire fills me and disaffection forbids me,
 The limit is impossible periodically and demolished.
 Oh, secret of my secret and the secret of soul in my body
 How can I tolerate and the rope of joint is cut?

Suddenly I heard a faint voice entering through my ears to my soul slowly and clearly.

"Here, you read the completion, finish what you have begun because the ways ascended to him are equal to the breaths of the creatures, and don't forget to follow the stoics and the men of knowledge."

When I turned, I found a man of a venerable appearance in tatters leaning on his stick of a green branch shape, putting his sarcenet cloak on his shoulders. He held my hand and led me to a vacant corner and sat me there. He was contemplating my face with clear smiling eyes, surrounded me with strange quietness. I surrendered to him listening to my heart's palpitates which also became cheerful, yearning to extra time to complete what I got of gladness and exultation and sweet relaxation. The man said:

My Sheikh, God mercy on him, was alone along his life worshipping, self-content, praying, fasting, God fearing, no one would enter his jail

but rarely. One day the prison guards decided to make Al Sheikh out of his temper so they sent a very beautiful woman to him to chant and deflect him of his prayers and the night prayers. She entered and stayed for a long time waiting for him to finish his prayers, but he continued without stopping till the woman became fed up and wanted to go out.

"What happens to you girl, I see you become bored?" He turned to her and said.

"Oh, Al Sheikh, I...I...want.." She came in a hurry and said.

He interrupted her, saying, "I know what you want. You have to go where you come from."

"I want to sit beside you!" she said.

Then she came closer to him. At that moment he threw his cloak on her. She was calmed completely as if she fell in a trance. She remained sleeping for a long time and when she woke up, she threw her head under his feet crying and apologizing repentantly till she washed his feet with her hot tears. Since that time, the woman remained with him till the guards missed her. When they came, they were surprised to see her praying behind him and wrapped her body with his cloak. They pulled her forcefully outside his cell.

"What happened to you?" they asked her.

"I have seen what you haven't seen before. Al Sheikh has been living in his own paradise and the wide gardens were surrounded by maids, boys and rivers of wine and yogurt. He was fenced by pillows, carpets and pavilions. He was surrounded by halos of lights and angels" wings flying around him and there were praises and invocations produced by tender voices. Oh, brothers, why have you let me out of there? Why? Now leave me alone. I'll return to him!"

She returned to him, but alas she did not find anything there. My Sheikh traveled to another place and another cell. She remained in the same gleaming jail alone, praying, renouncing worldly pleasure.

When the man finished and kept silent,

"You, Al Sheikh, who are you?" I asked him.

"Oh, my son, what shall I say? The utterance is helpless and the speaker is dumb and the listener is deaf. Are names and drawings useful?"

At that time, he took out of his saddle bag a record having a manuscript.

He said:

"Take it and read it well, open its locks and symbols and its secret doors. Travel with it to the first creation through its moons, lights and secrets to reach the settlement of your last journey where you'll find the inn is...!"

Then he bid me a farewell and went away. When I paid attention, I did not find anyone, so I went in a hurry filled with breaths of the angels, walking in a long journey tracing steps which no one had trodden except me.

Translated by:

Fadhil Abbas Al Musawi



The Rosary

Najah Al-Jubaily

The old man sits in his room. His black rosary is still in his trembling and skinny fingers gazing at the photograph of his only son whose face is soft and his black eyes are like dim caves.

"If he is still alive he would be 33 years old," he murmurs.

His feeble memory begins to restore the son's age stages with the low rhythm of the rosary's beads as he slowly sets them apart starting with the first bead.

Bead-1: he was a meek and mild child filling the house with his beautiful clamor.

Bead-6: he carried his school bag in the company of the other children.

Bead-18: he succeeded in high school exam and attended university.

Bead-22: graduated/ married / the war breaks out.

Bead-26: joined military service and never returns.

Beads-27, 28, 29, 30: waiting, waiting, waiting.

Bead-32: according to Sharia he is considered missing. His wife claimed divorce.

Bead-33: his mother died with grief.

After slipping on the last bead the old man's fingers become stiff and loosen cool. The black rosary falls down on the hard floor. The beads unfix and disperse away except "the two flat beads" which keep rotating bright at the old man's feet.

First Witness: by these very eyes of mine which someday the ants will eat I saw him running toward the frozen borders.

Second Witness: I saw them shooting him and leaving his dead body on which the wind kept breezing up.

Black Joy

Mohammed Soheil Ahmed

It's a strange friendship that ties me up to Mary, because the period she was able to give what she owned is now a bygone. In fact she gave it exceedingly at a time she was obsessed with the desire of being loved by others.

I let my body enjoy a warm sunbath. I gaze at Mary on the other pavement sitting on a bench that was some second hand furniture, exhibited for sale in that very corner, next to the entrance of a deserted old cinema.

Everything was old: the folkloric chest studded with pale blue stars, with the cracks on the pottery, the rocking chair, the bed with its dangling springs, her wardrobe with its large scratched mirror, the silent clocks and the empty vases.

"The Parade is coming closer.." they said to Mary.

"I'm in the middle of the road ." she declared.

"Maybe it'll be blocked because of you." laughed Toma.

"It's simple.. push the furniture a few feet backward." I suggested.

"I'm afraid I'm going to be deprived from the joys of watching." moaned Mary.

"Watching or being watched?!" mocked Toma scratching his nose tip.

"Toma.. You should be ashamed of your grey hair!"

"They <ve been watching you for the last twenty years.. Correct?"

"What were you doing all the time you bastard but yawning in the cabaret bar?!"

"You see?" he turned his face towards me.



"He <s the unjust who starts the offensive!"

"By God's sake! .. Hassan <s really a nice young gentleman." her eyelashes trembled looking at me.

"Only his shape's young .. But my heart is young." meditated Toma adding.

"You often look sad.. Hassan"

"In life there are lots of harsh unforgettable facts" said I.

"Maybe because of the numerousness of bars in this street! Ha ..Ha."

"Look. I've got a game" declared I.

I grabbed three cigarettes from my pocket and a pencil. On the edge of one of the cigarettes near it's end I wrote Toma, in the middle I wrote down Mary, and on the third part of the cigarette I wrote my name. I stopped a beggar and got a light from his melting cigarette.

"My name <ll be the first to vanish." Toma blew the smoke.

"The larger the blaze is, the sooner it dies out" said Mary.

"I'm after you but the fire is a must! ", I coughed harshly. ..

"In fact it isn't my game" I concluded.

Mary looked at the end of the road when the sun's light shone in the wardrobe mirror, "Look.. The parade is coming closer."

Mary stood slowly bending her head looking beneath at her chest and the gown's blue collars, "I wish I wore better clothes.."

She stepped toward the wardrobe and stood before the mirror, wiping her grey hair mingled with hair dyes trying hard to put in order:

"It <s the last time I stand before my mirror"

"Who told you it isn't going back home ?" Toma was behind her.

Mary sat back on the bench, stretching her flabby forearm. She pointed at the wardrobe, " I already told Toma I'm facing a financial disaster .."

"The only thing left is to put you in this auction!"

"Mary doesn't know anybody else but you and me..!" I gave him a rather angry look.

"In fact it's the rheumatism costs," she interrupted me..

The friendship between Mary and me flourished coincidentally and with no bad feelings. Al Watan Street is full of women like her who keep

bars. It is an unsuccessful way of distracting others. One day after a short shower of joy I suddenly got gloomy while wandering in this street that smells of the grilled meat of restaurants and aromas of cheap local white wines going out from somewhere.

With melancholy I wanted to get back my balance as I was quite aware of my extremeness. These women.. these women! If they haven't really stopped, they no longer give anything save that feminine inspiration based on illusion. It was a consensus to dry up. A collapse that evokes mockery or pity, and I chose the second. I was always wondering: Does anything deserve a waiting for? Mary owned a bar in which she achieved the greatest failure in the street! Perhaps because she opened it at a later time, exactly at the time she stopped giving what she was having.

Yet it was a small bar: lights spread dimly around its corners. On the long counter there was a giant bottle of whisky that could knock down an elephant if it really were full of that drink. The walls were full of thousands of very tiny mirrors in which the faces of all inside were shattered .These mirrors had an extra dazzling impact on

The drunken, but some beer calendars hung on these walls decreased that optical impact. The bar wasn't a success at all, although Mary used to sit by her customers. She often told them stories her nights in The Hope Cabaret, those cheerful clamorous nights. She did a lot of oriental dancing, and singing, making company with the town's VIP personalities .She often retold her story with the city mayor who got upset one night and threatened to put his shoe in her mouth if she ever mentioned his name again.

Finally everybody left and the bar was filled with one sole customer: Mary herself, or a bankrupt broken down bar keeper .She later gained a different funnier sort of reputation: her excessive plumpness... in this street known for its drunks, sailors, beggars, and peddlers who sell cherries, chewing gum and perfumes to noses that have lost the ability to smell.

I didn't leave her because she kept on telling me about her memories of the old days. I also wished to see the approaching parade of Spring

with her. Being busy listening to her, I watched it in the wardrobe mirror instead: young girls and kids in white school uniforms passing by. At this moment they preferred to enjoy a short stop. They put their drums aside and had some refreshments before continuing. I invited Mary to the Ship restaurant whose terrace had a good look. We went there resuming continuing to watch. Though I heard the taunting made by others such as "old women's boyfriend!" or "now we know the cause of the city famine!" I tried hard to be indifferent.

The outside decor of the restaurant stimulated my appetite though the prices on the menu inside wiped it off. The terraced fence was coated with painted white seashells, and there was a steering wheel in the middle. The restaurant inside really looked like a fishing vessel. On her colored glass various sorts of fish were painted. Mary ate a little while I, with a better appetite, devoured my fish. We went back to the furniture sale. We had some fresh tea brewed over coals. Then I listened again to Mary chatting about her days of merry and woe. Again the mirror reflected the parade - young sailors carrying torches. I could hardly read what was written on the billboard: Open Your Shirts to the Spring Breezes. The mirror reflected the flames' glare thrown on Mary's wrinkly face. The girls dressed in butterfly shapes entered the mirror with their wings, childish faces and rosy ribbons. They waved to Mary and me as a sign of salutation.

Mary was so amazed and joyful, "Look... Hassan... how graceful these girls are!" She waved to the girls.

"I'm really surprised!" I murmured.

Being captivated by the enchantment of the scene, she clapped her hands, and then suddenly looked at me with a rainy face, "I was and was...!"

It's a strange friendship that ties me up to Mary, because the period she was able to give what she owned is now a bygone. In fact she gave it exceedingly at a time she was obsessed with the desire of being loved by others.



The Soul's Garden

Nadhum Mizhir

Fear took possession of him as he was approaching and trespassing, all was still, the stillness of the suspicious sands where silence had deeply rooted itself and engulfed the whole place. Some mushrooms grew here and there with their steel heads appeared on the banks of sandy brooks .He knew desert throbbed with its strong life; helmets clenched their rims with all of their soldiers under their steel roofs aligned in military discipline as if they were still standing alive there under the sand for their souls bursting buds blossomed in these steel vases which embosomed the heads of them tightly and carefully and passionately for fear that they might get lost and drifted with the low hurricanes of sand which was continuously running in whirls towards the deserted far off labyrinths where there were no ends but the floating whirls of astray mirage and dim illusive posts which hardly uncovered themselves in the far horizon sinking into phantom ocean of mirage. No one knows whether those posts are deserted sites of heavy artillery or nomadic campsites or they were just illusions thrown by the heat waves into the depth of this midday sunblast.

Here under the arbors of the sunblast there was no shade but his dwindling shade at his feet as he was approaching stealthily a step by step to the bulging of the steel mushrooms; empty helmets

weighted with sand, as if they were young pregnant bellies in their first months and some new sap of life had crept through the umbilical cords that had been buried so many wars ago. The inhabited deep womb is still watering them until those heads appeared into the new born helmets from the womb of desert. Smooth summits that frustrated every desperate attempt made by the sandy streams to bury their resuscitation from the dry crust, for the straw, thorns, the wool folds, the crumbs of strings and rusty yellow papers still throw themselves deadly to clench into their smooth edges to salivate from the lariat of being drifted with dunes streams and the whirls of the winds and the traveling mirages.

He stopped and fearfully gazed at them; Helmets squat side by side, all aligning beside each others as they were afraid of the eternal solitude; except one. When he noticed that it was separately alone he leant over its summit, green as it had been, though its colour faded a little under the fevered eye of the sun as it was watching of its deserted kingdoms. God! Where all this gentle greenness came from, on those new born shaded heads as they were struggling with their gentle soft haired buds. All the seas of the sun and the floods of the sands failed to pull them out of their bed seeds because their roots have deeply stretched like the umbilical cord in the wombs of the shaded dark depths. He could not dare to stretch a hand as he was sitting cross-legged like a Buddhist in a séance going so far in his contemplation of this lonely helmet which was sleeping by itself in her eternal bed watching her still lying partners; they might have been surprised by the unexpected visitor, the intruder who kept moving in their kingdom of stillness. It happened to him as if he were hearing something like painful weeping; such a long drawn weeping like a full sigh that the heart could bear it no more, coming to him stealthily through the sandy secret paths as if they were a hiss descending from the heaven kingdom of silence. Is it the whispering of sands near the helmet's summits or it was some whistling due to the ultimate dump that engulfed the whole world? He pushed ahead his finger carefully

to touch one of the small domes as if he were in front of a lemur that weeps dryly from thirst into the ripple running of the sands that were flowing from the clear fountains of pure sands.

He touched it at last, a very slight swift touch, a touch that was so soft that left such a cold shiver on his back as if he had touched a snakes belly which made him feel that so multi- legged creatures passed hurriedly on his shoulders and left such a sticky cold traces and a shiver as if the bogeys isolated him in this dreary spot and began to tread on him with their multiple gelatinous bare feet and laugh at him. He was under a sinful feeling of trespass of those who were in their eternal repose. It came to his mind that this particular helmet began to move slightly as he was kindly patting its top and it looked in its steel formidable shield like some reserved turtle far away from the shores of dreams.

He decided at last to move this lonely helmet and planted it near her companions; where the whole of them were drowning in the eternal hush. After he had awakened it from its sound repose, his ears were triggered waiting for what would be uttered from the imprisoned soul in its steel ewer. No doubt it was stretching now and it might have been raged suddenly into the darkness inside and began to hit the inner formidable walls seeking a way out; Perhaps, it would come out any moment and yowl in his face or surprise him from behind giggling like a bogey from a hidden holy place. But before he pulled and turned it up he closed his eyes and knocked on its top with his finger; three taps like those which awaken the silence stilled behind the haunted houses late at winter night. There was a warning in the stillness. His ears was so instantly triggered to receive what echo would reply to those three taps though the deaf steel thickness had muffled them deep under the sand layers. After a while ,just like his three taps, three taps came to him so vaguely muffled followed by something like a wounded wailing or a buried weeping as if he were listening to someone whispering from the remotest border of the world:

"Who is there..there ..there?!" came the question.

"It's me, Fred. Open..."

Is it the resonance echoed by the steel what he has just heard? Or it was merely the whistling of astray hot winds? Or the whole thing is just the bogeys' giggles carried by the wind as he was sitting in front of this upside-downed helmet inspecting it as it was clenching deadly to protect itself. One day it was so shiny under the shiny illuminating projectiles like an eye made of steel in the midst of astray splints and astray death coming with the fraction remains of the night which was being torn by the screech of counter bombardment. Just now he remembered his own helmet and how his mother had embroidered inside the linen of it the name of god and an incantation so he was feeling that angels were around with their invisible wings defending him.

As if he were opening a bird cage, he was in such a fear of those awaiting wings to fly, he prayed before lifting the helmet edge then hurriedly he turned it up leaving no spare time to see the darkness nesting itself inside the corners among the leather strings which had been dried and crackled so long due to the salty deposit of sweat and coagulated blood but he could read the embroidered letters inscripted into the linen inside:

Private . NO. 123600 D+J=forever

From the far horizon, it came to him he could hear the heavy artillery came back to murmur , this time so deep as if it were coming, not from the horizon, but from the deep layers of sand and keep going howling as if it were the suffering of souls' weeping wrapped by a twisted whirl of sands ascending to the paradise.

Things That Are No More

Karim Abid



Between one stumble and another, I hear sounds, remains of sounds that come from nowhere: my mother's voice calls me not to go away in the garden, surprising uproar of birds that fly away hilarious or scared. The sound of chalk on the blackboard and the rain fall that surprised us from the open windows of the classroom, the pant of a friend who calls me while running towards me, a friend whom I loved but I did not know his whereabouts ... A sound, remains of sounds, rustling of trees that haunts me in sleep, trees that head to me, come to me from everywhere as if they know me, distant trees draw nearer and then suddenly disappear. But their rustling remains in the air between my body and my shirt, it touches me and so I tremble ... Perhaps, therefore, I used to turn about from time to time for no reason ...

But I forget and then, in no time, I remember ...

I remember remnants of events I do not know where or when they occurred, and so I was surprised by a face suddenly appearing from the end of the alley to disappear without being able to discern its features. A face that belongs to a person whom I hated or feared. And sometimes, many features of many faces mix together and cluster in one face that remains appearing and disappearing from afar ...

I do not know what prompted me to this desolate alley in this calm mid-morning, where stagnant ponds lie, and mosquitoes flying here and there. I have repeatedly stumbled while being stunned by soot, and wounds of people moaning on the walls of old houses. On the old walls, there were shreds of pictures and unidentified remains of political slogans. I was saddened by the fact that I was not greatly interested in retrieving memories that beset me now and then, as if I did not live here more than thirty years ago!! Memories chase me and I escape from them ... I have come back to Iraq for the sake of many things; many things I did not know that they were no more, so I did not know what to do!!

What do I do with all these memories?!

I moved forward on my way as if I was existent and non-existent, within the place and outside it, I did not stumble this time but I terrifyingly turned around to our hullabaloo as we entered the alley together, laughing and stampeding, and so our school copybooks fell down and we run after each other to be dispersed, tired, to our homes ... I felt sad because I no longer remember the place of our old house, not only the place but I could not see the house itself. The house that I still remember its rooms, stairs, roof, the roofs of neighboring houses, and doves flying here and there. I remember

the rooms, shelves, the picture of Imam Ali with his bright face, the tandoor , and the firewood accumulated beside it while my mother moving, getting the hot bread out and distributing it on the edges of the tray, spacing the loafs of bread from each other to make them maintain their delicious shape. I remember the house but I do not know its place now. It might have been wiped out, or I might have entered an alley similar to our own old one due to confusing memories ...

But I was sad because I did not see any trace of our first elementary school, where I went there before I entered the alley, I did not see any trace of the shops and the small café that were situated on the left side of the school, as if that region as a whole disappeared and was replaced by another one ... I heard the creak of American tanks advancing on the main street, so my body shuddered and took fright. I felt for a moment as if the Baathists returned with their tanks and black machine guns, so I was besieged by memories of nightmares, which have kept haunting me for many years after my escape to Beirut. Nightmares from which I wake up mouth-dried. Once, I found myself in the middle of the bridge encountered by cheeky faces of a number of members of (The National Union of the Iraqi Students) with two or three of the security policemen, and when I turned around to go back where I came from, I was surprised, on the other side of the bridge, by another number of them!! While they were giggling, one of them pulled out a pistol to aim it at me, so I remained so trapped, terrified that I did not know where to go and how to escape from those dogs. Thus, I thought I threw myself into the river but the bridge shook and was about to collapse, so I woke up mouth-dried, with sore knees, not believing what happened ... Once again, I was startled going out of the house wherein I hid, rushing to the garage to flee to Baghdad. But no sooner that I almost arrived at the garage with great difficulty than I threw myself into the bus, which was waiting for one passenger to

depart, but I was taken aback that all of them were inside the bus!! I found them crowded into the seats, guffawing with loathsome voices, and I was about to spit on their faces, when the bus shook and I drearily angrily got up knowing not what to do with those scoundrels ...

I did not know what induced me to this alley in order to stay in it all this time; I wished to shout to make people get out and ask them what happened?! I did not know whether this was our old alley or I entered another one?! And were my old friends still alive?! But the ground shook again owing to the creak of the tanks, and I felt a pain creeping somewhere in my body ...

I no longer remember this alley and it did not occur to me to head to it before I found myself caught in it. We moved from here after I passed the third primary class to a house near the market, wherein we stayed four years that were full of events and unforgettable memories, and then we built a new house in (Al-Jazair Quarter), to which we transferred ... This alley was not so grim and dusty as such...

I did not remember the first time when I came in my first primary class, but I still feel my father's hand holding my little wrist, going with me inside the school, heading up to the headmaster's room, and then to the clerk of registration ... The rain that greatly surprised us while reciting the national anthem made us run to the classrooms stampeding with each other; so, I noticed the fall of the books and copybooks from one of the pupils and scattering under our feet, at the time he was screaming and cursing to no avail. I could estimate now that he arrived after we gathered in the yard of the school; therefore, he could not go to the classroom to put his books in the desk and then join us. He perhaps feared of the short bald headmaster, Salem Al-Awadi, who kept shaking his stick

while going around us as if something provoked him!! We were so afraid of him that we did not know what to do when he surprised us in the classroom or near the shop during breaks. We did not know what he exactly wanted from us. But our small hearts were trembling for fear of his stick that was always shaking in his hand, he was always shaking his stick, hastening in his wide strides that did not commensurate with his short stature ...

It was the beginning of July 2003, I did not care about the terrible heat, but I was still amazed how state institutions, officials, and police and security disappeared like a flash. The Baathists completely disappeared as if they had not been before, as if I awoke from the nightmare I still dust its effects off my body and feelings, but I was not in glee ...

I knew I would leave Iraq some days or weeks later, I did not care about the groups of gunmen who appeared here and there, I was looking for myself, for things on which I left my shadows and touches of my fingers, but I did not expect that they were no more ...

Nothing left of the school, the shops situated on its left, the brook flowing just steps away from the right side, nor the wide garden overstretching far behind the brook ... The brook was coming from inside the garden, and we were coming from our near homes fleeing from the heat of summer, and so we were throwing our hot bodies into the flowing water of the brook ... I was still feeling the splashes of water when we threw our little bodies into the brook in search of wet, joy and fish that we did not catch one day. The garden disappeared and so did the brook, but I was still wet, just going out of it, shaking water off my body on its grassy cliff, which collapsed one day and I was about to drown ...

The garage was desolate, and cars old and new, the garage that replaced the school, the brook, and the shops. Passengers seemed

to me as if they were forced to travel as they sluggishly stepped up to the car. I remained standing, watching the few people who came to the cars parked there. I could not talk to anyone, nor could I greet anyone, nor did anyone care about me. I no longer know anyone here, as if I was a stranger in a strange place. Perhaps for this reason, my feet inadvertently led me to this alley just to escape from the memories of the school, the brook, and the garden, which cornered me as I turned around stunned amid the desolate garage and the people who did not know me ...

Translated by: Ramadhan M. Sadkhan

*Tandoor (or tanoor) is a cylindrical clay oven used for baking and grilling.

Arab Portfolio

My Mother

Fawziyah Shalabi (Libya)



From the sea
Comes out
My mother.
How do waves break
On
The marble vessel?
And how does the whale devour
My mother's
Magnificence
After she rinses
The skin of
The city
With hot milk?



Your Hands Are Drinking My Face

My windows were still
Open
When harvest time had
Come
Will you come close!
Your face is fresh
Your hands
Were veined
And now
They are drinking my face
Upward
And upward

Like an ivy.

Chaotic You Were and Extremely Impudent

Between nine o'clock
And the fall of the bomb.
Last night.
You were inflamed.
Chaotic.
And extremely impudent.
You roar like a lion.
You mew like a cat.
And like a donkey you urinate.
You cough and extinguish your cigarette in my breast.
You wail. And ask for a glass for the night.
Then
You fall
Like
An exhausted
Donkey.

Abdurrahman

I.
L.
O.
V.
E.
Y.
O.
U.
I: I. o. v. e. y. o. u. as clearly
And transparently as
Water.

Today
At dawn
God chirps.
Do not steal time from time.
O, Abdurrahman.
Listen
This is my heart. That is you. And there is
A tulip
Squatting in fire.
Ironing the collar of the night, Wailing.
O, gentlemen of this wail of woe: What justice.
Look. O, Abdurrahman look:
A fat road.
And indecent genitals
Why do I have to stay lonely?
Watch out. Do not stumble in the stairway.
Breathe quietly. Quietly deeper.
And because I love you
I will not
Easily
Leak out of
Your heart
To
The bottom of the page.
Have you lit the candle? Then take a corner in my heart.
It is the frost.
Cover me.
You have enough blankets.
No.
Your breast has the flavor of Gorky's Mothers.
Three violets.
And a suicidal
Incident.
And you from I love you to I love you.

In between:

Remember. That. Always.

Why.

I.

L.

O.

V.

E.

Y.

O.

U.

Translated by:

Sadek R. Mohammed

Poems



Abdul-Aziz al-Maqalih (Yemen)

Supplications (Extracts)

My God

I seek refuge in you from my own evil,
From the evil of my people,
From the evil of my good friends
From the evil of my enemies poor for love,
From the evil of what the eulogists write
And from the evil of what the spiteful write.
I seek refuge in you God from insomnia in the stars,
From an anxiety in the breasts of mountains,
From disappointment in the men's souls,
From the country unsheathing its death,
Holding its disappointment,
Rolling, afraid of the memories.
My God,
I will confess now that I cheated the sparrows,
Satirized the gardens,
Quarreled with the sun,
Made my way to the sea alone,
And waited out the beautiful time.
Nevertheless, I got nothing but waste,

Yet, I submitted to the doubt. Stubborn,
 Scattered, half-crazy, half-conscious.
 That is why the boils of time have got me.
 I saw my bier,
 Mixed things impossible to name.

My God
 Hastily you brought me,
 And I hope that hastily I would return to you,
 Putting the jewels of my sorrow in your hands
 And the moist precious pain that my childhood spared.
 Oh, nothing could get me but the weeping
 Because I was afraid when I descended to this earth.
 People terrified me,
 The claws of my own fears me.
 I tried, I wished, I was able
 To twist, to become dew, stone,
 To immigrate and erase my name,
Rubbing it out of the book of creation.



Coming out of the Circle of Suliemani Hour

1
 From the Qat tree, from the dictionaries
 Of dead languages,
 I come out unsheathing my letter,
 Riding my voice,
 Walking,
 The birthday rose in my right hand,
 The palm of promise
 And in my blood
 the news of

resurrection.

2

The fingers of the dead are reading me.
The forest is shivering
in the arteries of dust.
The tombs are
throwing
out their inhabitants.
The stone of the drowsy city is awakening,
And the thirsty walls of the sea are rising.

3

My teeth are laughing,
The fire of grief is laughing.
I'm chewing the stones and the trees,
Searching in the water for my face,
For the face of the wind river,
For the letter
of q...a...t,
For the rees of imagination.
Where are my horses hiding?

4

My depression is ancient,
Moving around the corpse of the past,
Drawing the face of today,
Riding the wound of my tomorrow
On qat sails.

5

In the dull faces of sunset,
The silence became my language
And the veins of the Suleiman hour stretched out.
I became young like the old men
Chewing the day's green,
Drinking the water of age.
Where is the light of dream and innocence?

6

Who is wearing
my sadness? Who is writing
the voices in the day
Of silence,
In the night of smoke?
Who is killing the green in the faces,
In the lips,
In the eyelashes?

7

The swords of silence are slaughtering me,
Pouring blood in my shadow.
I come out unsheathing my letter,
Riding my voice,
Removing the earth's grief from
My bosom,
Shouting in the waves of the crowd
Set out
Feel pain
Speak out

The silence swords in the silent lips
Are slaughtering me.
The Suleimani hour: It is the hour of top intoxication of the man
who chews "gat".



Choice

1

Between supine grief and death on my feet
I choose death,
Between safe silence and the bloodied voice
I choose the voice,
Between the slap and the bullet
I choose the bullet,
Between the whip and the sword
I choose the sword.
This is my fate...
This is my glory...
This is the longing of man.

2

God was - anciently - love, a cloud,
Daylight at night,
And a song echoing over mountains of grief.
He was a heaven washed with green rains,
The furrows of the earth.
Where did the ships of God, the song,
The revolution, go?
God becomes ash
A silence...

A terror in the hands of the executioners,
 An earth swelling with oil,
 A field where rosaries and turbans grow.
 Between God, the song, the revolution,
 And the God that comes from Hollywood
 On tape and on the stacks
 Of dollar bills,
 The God of class oppression...
 Which do you choose?
 I choose God...the song, the revolution.

3

Love was coming of spring,
 A girl with green feet
 Washed by the waves and palms
 Opened to the sun.
 Her braids spread out over the green hills of poetry.
 Sustenance and rest for lovers at her breasts
 The red wine of dreams on her lips.
 Now the tree of love has grown old
 Its eyes have withered...
 The leaves of poetry are burnt
 All seasons are winter.
 Love has become banknotes
 And people's hearts have turned to ice.
 Between love the bargain and love the poetry
 Which do you choose?
 I choose love ...the poetry.

4

Yesterday was drums, tombs...throttled voices

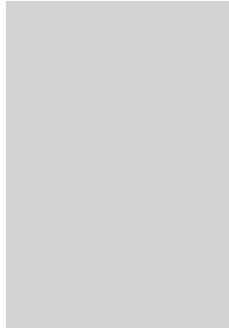
A sword made fruitful by blood
And today ...is a pregnant groaning old woman
Whose pregnancy goes on and on...
What is hidden in the swelling abdomen?...
A mountain?....a mouse?
Between the promised mountain and the mouse full of promises,
Between the killer yesterday and the murdered today
Which do you choose?
I choose tomorrow.

Translated by:
Soheil Najm with Nicholas Linfield

*The Suleimani hour: It is the hour of top intoxication of the man
who chews "gat".

World Portfolio

Elena Orlova (Russia)



It is two degrees centigrade here,
And the people are already wearing their fur coats.
I was waiting for you yesterday too,
Warming my hands with the phone handset.
I'll adorn my right eye
And armor myself with lipstick.
It is cold in your place
And the snow falls often.
I adorned my eyelid with the color of pearls.
Everything is done. I'm ready to go out.
Just a drop of perfume and I'll go
To the world of the strange and unknown men.

Translated by:

Galina Rahma & Sadek R. Mohammed

The Poetry Between Us

Mehmed Ali



Within the Zone
I lie awake, excluded

from the real living
that is the city

the meekly, muddy flowing Tigris
the Dejlah to the knowing locals
what a thin veil

protecting me from

the other side of the river

here is us

there lie thee

here are we

far from them

And in between
runs the current
of our shared misfortunes

LIFE
with all its messy mornings
even with its

DEATH

ever present
it is still worth breathing
and seeking
and with all its sorrows
and despair
its sadness
it is still living

the Dejlah between us
the simple barrier of water
not too wide
but athwart the divide

we cannot
shall not
pass

one side vitality

one side sterility

Across is poetry
the fugue of creativity
awaits if only
an opportunity
a boulevard that lines

the River

named for the Baghdad Bard
Abu Nuwas
who flaunted the clerics
and spoke of women and wine...
and of men being with men
in the most intimate game
and not too far is another path
named for Al Mutanabbi
who criticized the courts of princes
and was killed for his verses
look today

in coffee houses
they hold "Poetry Chases" ...
one against another
competing to skillfully add
to the previous orator's lines
scheming to win respect
in the march of metres

but here there is none
the deadly silence
caught behind blast walls
antiseptic, dyspeptic
the gloom of a wordless world
reigns in our perfect prison
a prism refracting little light
no times for rhymes
no pen to the page, no lust allowed
fleeting thoughts never captured
we are darkened
the solitude of safety
drags us within

drowns us halfway
as we try to ford the River
seeking Lawful Magic
beseeching the foreign natives

to join us
but they cannot
we must not
they will not

for the River
prevents us from knowing
and stops their sharing
of the common flow
that could bridge the two worlds
divided

The Sisyphus Struggle

Sabahudin HADZIALIC



▼

10 GODINA POSLIJE TEN YEARS LATER

Envy and malice
feed on
my mistakes.
I try to understand
what they are
painlessly looking for
the collectiveness
of my being.
I don't understand
that without pain
there is no life
let alone

▼

FILMOVANA REALITY REALITY FILMED

Dismal image
of my own imprint in time
that's real
inside the vision that- isn't,
is desperately in search for

Her !
Queen Elizabeth,
Chatherine, Nikolajevna,
Princess Dianna,
Fatima
Disappear in front of the eyes
of wild hordes.
I remain alone
trembling with trepidation
trying to figure out
what is it that they want.
Virtual reality of a surreal film-world
is nothing more than
a treacherous impersonation of a real world
that deceives me
a Servile Servant !
She's gone !
Will she ever come back ?
The question is swept by the wind.
I'll wait for the storm to calm
and try to catch the mistral wind to find a cove,
and search for the place where I met her.
Barefoot and naked.
Back in the day.
On the stage !



CUDAN SAN STRANGE DREAM

Hands buried in sand
Deep
.....
Blood stained hands.
Both.

I try to reach the bottom of the sand pit
digging deep,
feeling pain.
Two blue eyes
deep dive
towards you.
Blood shot eyes.
Both.
Carried on the wave of desperate tears,
I try to catch a glimpse of you,
however
you disappeared behind a horizon.
Alas !
You drew near, furtively
and embraced
The World !



BESMRTNI SNOVI ETERNAL DREAMS

I call out her name
at night
while she is asleep.
The reflexion of probability
is out of grasp
of my mortal soul
because
Ariadna
spun a yarn
from a molten core.
My core!
I call out her name
at dawn,
while she is asleep.
She is strong in her

restraint
while she lolls
on the tombstone
in the graveyard
of
my...
Destiny.
BRACA PO PERU
PEN BROTHERS
(the poem dedicated to Alija Keba and Sabahudinn Hadzialic)
The two of us
from the same tribe
from the same seed
the two of us
walk the battlefield
skilfully brandishing
the sword.. of time.
The two of us
from the same kinship
seven high-seas and one ocean
we are the verse keepers
we are the time keepers
and they sing in the name of our freedom.
The two of us
from the same tribe
pen brothers.
Spark created by passion
and times made us
rip the body
from heart to bottom.
Samir Tahirovic, the poet
Donji Vakuf

1st September 2009

«Evidence Of Grace»

Susan Bright (USA)



An introduction by the poetess

Poetry, work that is driven by hope and tenacity, is making the world better by bringing people together. I believe that poetry has work to do in the world, work that is accomplished as our words find the essential meaning and truth all human beings share, and as our words unmask forces that oppress the essential human vitality and truth which is the soul of the world. That is the grand idea behind my work. But it is also a daily presence, a habit and passion for the beauty of words, ideas, and people -- evidence of grace.

One of my books is titled: *Tirades And Evidence Of Grace*. It is easy to remember the tirades- outrage is an obvious response to the violent chaos of our time. It's harder for me to remember the Grace, and I need it to work against war because only something different from violence can stop it. My poetry and my work as an activist have grown out of the American Feminist Movement, and later, (after Beijing) from the World Women's Movement. It was never possible, however, to focus on a single set of issues. Women's rights are human rights, there is no peace without justice and we can't live on a ruined planet, etc. My poetry, the publishing work I do and the activist work are of one arc - a wild pitch into the eye of time. Poets create meaning from daily life, images, metaphors, from magical connections of thoughts, from rhythms new to the soul. Meaning, as it moves from thought to action, creates the world we live in. Poets invite people to «see» differently, understand a distant culture, find common human truth among diverse populations, to look at our own reality differently - and that can nurture a world culture and local

cultures informed by new, hopefully saner, values. Does this work? I hope so. And if it doesn't work -- it is the way I choose to live. The world of Art is as slow to change as are the cultures it reflects. The poet Meridel LeSueur was, in the 1930's, the first poet in English to write a literary journal of pregnancy, *The Annunciation*. «Not art?,» one might think. Certainly that's what the literary establishment thought for many centuries. But is there anything more beautiful than the laughter of a child? Any better reason for making a better world? I quote Meridel LeSueur often. «Hard times aint quit. And we aint quit.» It is a spirit I recognize in the work of the Iraqi poets in *Ishtar Songs*. My five year old grand son makes up songs all the time. Yesterday he found a tiny red bug alongside the creek near our home. He wanted to take it home to show his father. I suggested that he hold it gently so it wouldn't die.

«You are very large, compared to the ladybug,» I told him. So you must be gentle.

He sang this song:

Stay alive, live, live

Stay alive, live live

Stay alive, live live

little lady bug

Stay alive

And so it did.

The Poems



Diving Off the Hancock Center

I take deep steps

in Chicago

sinking into

saturate

black earth,

all the blues

of the lake,

wind,
the child I was,
my parent's grief,
an American dream
that never stopped
breaking,
the best
of now.
Let's go up.
he gestures.
I remember the
elevator
as my ears pop.
And the view -
shocking,
magnificent.
I wonder
how long it will
take him to run out
of architecture
to identify,
this man
who keeps knowing
and knowing,
who I
dumbfound.
Then I dive.
I dive fast,
deeper than blue,
though glitter,
through Chicago jazz
in a taxicab
on Lake Shore Drive.
I stop holding on.

I'm not falling.
 It's a dive,
 one hell of a dive.
 Life is a horizontal fall.
 (Jean Cocteau)
 - is something like
 this long dive
 that is essential,
 that I carry
 close
 as the air
 I dive into,
 or the water
 I dive through,
 pushing off
 from
 blue -
 (from Breathing Under Water, Plain View Press, 2000)



Women's Work

I can't imagine being able to get done
 what I have to do today. It is impossible.
 Guests will arrive to a house which has not been
 cleaned in a month and the roses need water.

Students will not get papers back this week, or next.
 I don't have time to get the car serviced or even vacuumed.
 I have to pay bills, drop off art work, deposit checks,
 pick up a check, deposit more checks.
 I have to clean the bathroom and fold laundry.
 I have to get something faxed and go to the post office.
 I have to go grocery shopping, spend time with my child
 after school-then cook supper while I drive to the ranch.

I have to do my income tax by tomorrow and there is no dog food.
Tomorrow there is no time either, and then we go on a trip
for which there is no time to pack. There isn't enough money or time
to figure out how much more money we need. Fleas are hatching.
In this chaos I have to find a way to do what I can
and not let the hungry mouths of unfinished work
scream at me! "Now, now! My turn, my turn!" Days like this,
months, years, decades have buried women for centuries.
I am buried like the grandmothers were—no, deeper.
Even though I thought it would not happen to me, it has.
Rude mouths of everything I can't do scream at me
even from sleep.

(from *House of the Mother*, Plain View Press, 1995)



Conscription

We were standing on Margo's deck
in Michigan, hadn't met since childhood.
He said, "Judy and I were talking about the sixties.
Free love, drugs, openness—it wasn't like that.
It was chaotic."
"You went to Vietnam?"
"I went."
He was my cousin.
He was talking about the economy.
I was trying to remember why
I didn't know he was in Vietnam.
"I've spent whole college educations
getting ready for vacations that cost thousands
of dollars themselves." he said,
"Now the economy is dead. Half the men
my age in Flint, Michigan are out of work."
"I didn't know you went to Vietnam."

"I almost refused."
 "People didn't know--"
 "By then we knew. I had to ask myself
 if I loved my country enough to kill for it-
 and then if I loved it enough to die for it-
 for no reason.
 "I carved my name beneath Grandfather's
 on the back of the campaign trunk
 he used in W.W.I.
 "J. D. Safford
 Joined May 12, 1918
 J.D. Safford, Jr.
 Conscripted August 16, 1968."
 (from *House of the Mother*, Plain View Press, 1995)



Love In a World At War

Astounding me, this morning
 time split like a lazy atom
 drifted across an emerald creek -
 to open my chaotic orchid being
 to the force of life, again, again
 the long breathless passion
 of it rasping out of a first shriek
 shuddering toward a distant,
 shimmering arc.
 I have my mother's hands
 and these are Father's words.
 The child who just leapt into water
 for the first time
 is part of me, and the grackle
 sipping at the water's edge -
 I am astonished

by the long, threadbare tenacity of life,
born of every kind of touching
and I wonder how
human beings fall to battle
invent bombs to drop on hospitals
how at the height of annihilation
when we are numb from outrage
life asserts itself like rain, peace blooms
anywhere and someone rests alongside
a water fall, in a golden slant of light
on an October afternoon, or
dives into an emerald creek.
Every instant contains every other one
and we float thick with awe
across the fierce and holy face of time
so that when life radiates to every corner of
our world – green and insistent,
against the brute force
of a world flat crazy,
we know love is both possible
and the essential fact
in the quickening of time and mud
we call home.

(from *Tiny and the Giant*, forthcoming Plain View Press)

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