



Sukoon

Art . Poetry . Prose

Volume 2 | Issue 2 | Summer 2014

*From the outside in,
and from the inside-in.*

Sukoon is:

an Arab-themed, English language, online literary magazine; the first of its kind in the Arab region, where established and emerging artists, poets and writers of short stories and personal essays, publish their original work in English. Writers need not be Arab, nor of Arab origin, but all writing and art must reflect the diversity and richness of the cultures of the Arab world.

Sukoon is an Arabic word meaning "stillness." By stillness we don't mean silence, but rather the opposite of silence. What we mean by Sukoon is the stillness discovered within, when the artist continues to follow the inner calling to express and create.

A calling that compels the artist to continue on the creative path for the sole reason that he/she does not know how not to.



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Sukoon would like to thank Dubai-based calligrapher and artist, **Majid Alyousef**, for Sukoon's unique logo design.
www.majidalyousef.com

Editor's note:

All Quiet On The Eastern Front is the title of the art piece on the cover of the current issue. It is a close up of the piece by Kuwaiti/Syrian mixed-media interdisciplinary artist Shurooq Amin, from her series *Popcornographic*.

During the times in which we live, the irony of the title is hard to escape. The irony of it being far from quiet on the Eastern front, and yet, and yet, it is sinisterly so. Disturbingly quiet in some parts, as we simply watch horror after horror unfold around us in the region. Are we simply watching? Some of us are. Some of us, our governments, are simply digging into our large buckets of popcorn, hardly blinking, hardly moved, as ethnic wars, displacement, occupation, divisions, rape, beheadings, propaganda, incessant settlement building, exile, murder, live burials, fundamentalism, reach new heights, surpassing even our worst nightmares. This is today. This is probably tomorrow as well. They say before it gets better, it must get worse. Worse than this? I cannot imagine it can possibly get worse than this.

Can you?

With a heavy heart I sifted through the submissions to the fourth issue of *Sukoon*. I looked for stories and poems and art full of hope and truth and love and gratitude and protest. And thankfully, I found all of the above. Above all I found protest.

Isn't that ultimately what art is about? A thunderous protest to every single kind of atrocity? A quiet celebration of the space between? No matter how fleeting and temporary that space may be.

I am proud of this issue, of the voices that have come together from cities and countries all over, to express pain, heartbreak, memory, and longing; and to question and reject the status quo—the social and political—in all its absurd and incongruous limitations. Voices from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Kuwait, Tunisia, Egypt, Argentina, Spain, Ireland, Egypt, Iraq, Scotland, USA and China!

It is an honor to also include two interviews (instead of the usual single interview) in this summer issue. An interview with wonderful poet, writer and painter Hedy Habra, as well as some of her previously unpublished poetry. And another interview with Dubai-based Lebanese poet Zeina Hashem Beck, who publishes her first book of poetry *To Live in Autumn* (September 2014), which won the 2013 Backwaters Prize by the Backwaters Press. Her poems, included in this issue, are from her debut collection.

And as I humbly offer this fourth issue into cyberspace, I pray that the next six months—the due date for the following issue—bring us an improved reality, a much more forgiving one.

REWA ZEINATI



The Dates of Wrath by SHUROOQ AMIN

From the 2013 series Popcornographic. (Title based on John Steinbeck's book *The Grapes Of Wrath*, banned & burned in some American cities in 1939, 1980 & 1982, and in Ireland in 1953) – Acrylic painting, photography and collage on canvas mounted on wood. 150 x 170 cm. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

Holocaust Babydoll

Brown satiny skirt with tucks, tiny stitched booties.
Red hood, crossed eyes, mouth in round shock.
I can't imagine what she has seen.
Today when I woke she was screaming.
What happened to their memories?
A girl in Gaza had been stitching her sister.

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

AFTER BREAKFAST

what can you do but sit and survey the tracks where the ambulance
had stopped yards away from the body and see the flies gather
where the driver was struck by the bullets? the smoke in the air
lingers days old stale sorrow the kind that settles into your throat
can't be coughed out even when singing the old songs that erupt
from the chest the roughest way out the notes as hard as pebbles.

your hangout the café where fuul simmers fresh parsley and scallions
in pots on blue flames throws a shadow on a map of blood
drawn on the sidewalk where **X** his feet are shot and **X** he is hit
in the back and **X** the ambulance arrives and **X** the driver
cannot navigate the storm of fire and fear and **X** the street fills
with mourners a matter of course the words fly rocks and melodies

each body is its own island and the waters gather round splashing
against the shores pushing a million heartbeats against the silence
exhaling a thousand zaghrat pumping into the lungs everything
they have. Children are lost everywhere and their bodies form
land masses a new diagram that must be inset into our geographies
so we know where we stand.

sip tepid water slow now wait again for the beans to cool
the metal of the spoon stains your mouth leaves sulfur
on your tongue. You cannot eat here
anymore and you cannot leave.

ELMAZ ABINADER

ARSENAL

We don't need thunder, might, or the conversion of galaxies to withstand –
if anything we are armed with fists, conscience, rocks, history, and backs like hemp

Warfare drives us into an insistent fog, cold and frequent, a churning in the belly–
drives us to link, chain a curtain, thatch a roof; braid vines into electrical cords

Our skirts are shredded into tourniquets; clog arteries resolute on lava, tidal wave–
Rocks crack like pumpkin seeds between our teeth, even in empty mouths.

It's nothing for women who cradle little ones between curtains of incursion–
we have birthed more than one dead son, brother, hostage, girl, flower, stone.

Forts have been built of silk and cement, each hand laying brick upon brick.
The years pass, the beds sag aloneness; graves are hollowed right below
the breastbone

We are our own weapons: waiting hardens the calves, teaches us how to move—
phrases are formed and we mouth ancient stories but nothing

as remarkable as this preservation of life when death lurks. The sergeant asking
questions through the crack in the door our bodies are pressed upon

These days are not remembered, no names are evoked; our shadows slide
down the wall unnoticed

We are seismic in our keening, this song, a story, told in whispers, starving
ourselves of breath.

ELMAZ ABINADER



**In Her Dream I Spoke Arabic:
In a college composition class a few years ago, many worlds came together.
By Jesse Millner**

A student from Palestine writes “theological” instead of “theoretical.” I help her understand the difference. She has no thesis. She arrived in America three years ago having learned to write essays that reference poems and the Koran. She loves her family, misses growing tomatoes outside of the village she grew up in. Her main point is the compassion with which she writes about the world, how the very first creature she wrote about was a rabbit, which she drew a picture of in the top right corner of the page in her notebook. Rabbit, she says, in Arabic, contains the first letter of that alphabet. So it’s logical to associate learning alphabets with drawing rabbits. She comes to see me in my office with her work and I tell her how good it is, how her voice is strong and beautiful, how she paints the world with strokes of kindness, how she’s almost making me believe in God again.

Is that the main point of teaching, of writing? To learn about others, to hear their voices, to see the wonder with which they still view our world? A student from Lebanon writes about living in an apartment building where, after the 1988 civil war, they had to use black garbage bags to replace whole sections of the outer walls of the building. During one attack after air raid sirens went off, her grandmother had to be left under a table in their apartment because she couldn’t walk and she was too heavy to carry to the shelter.

Sitting next to the woman from Lebanon is a former American soldier who had served in Iraq. His first essay is about beauty, and he says beauty for him is being allowed to leave his running shoes on the floor in the middle of his apartment, and to throw his clothes on his bed when he gets home. He writes, “For me, chaos is beauty.”

For me, my students are beauty. My writing classes are filled with a chorus of young voices straining against the walls of the five-paragraph essay. They are amazed that they are allowed to write in first person. They are astounded that they can write about issues that are important to them: My Palestinian student’s fifteen-year-old cousin was beaten by Israeli soldiers because he ran from them. His leg was broken. One soldier picked a fresh lemon from her grandfather’s orchard, cut it in half, and then rubbed the bitter fruit into her cousin’s eyes.

On her way to school each day, she had to pass three IDF checkpoints. She writes that the soldiers were young and afraid, that they asked her about her major in college, what she liked to do in her free time. She feels sorry for them.

She wishes, as the young men do themselves, that they could go home.

Her name is Enas. My spellchecker underlines her name in bold red, and I think of the blood spilled in Palestine. Enas writes about the smell of her grandmother's bread. Enas writes about the beautiful red cheeks of her ripe tomatoes. Enas writes about teaching second grade when she was in college because an Israeli curfew prevented the regular teachers from traveling.

Yesterday after class Enas showed me pictures of her friends and family in Palestine. They lived on a mountain covered with olive trees. Some of the photographs show children playing in snow. Enas tells me she has forty-five cousins. I'm drawn to a particular photograph that shows Enas with her family just before she moved to America. Enas, her aunt, and her mom are all wearing white hijabs. She flips the album and on the next page Enas is wearing a sombrero in Disneyland. I tell her I'm delighted by the juxtaposition. She types "juxtaposition" into her hand-held translating device and I watch the word I know flow into Arabic.

I ask my class to write down their dreams. I tell them not to have coffee or tea when they woke up. I said it was ok to go to the bathroom. Enas writes about a dream where I came to class drinking a beer. Since I'm a recovering alcoholic and haven't had a drink in twenty-eight years, I was a little bit taken aback. Then she talks about how, in her dream, outside the classroom door she could see images of Palestine: a rope swing that her grandfather had hung from an olive tree branch for her when she was little, a car carrying a bride to her new husband's home. She could also smell burning wood from an oven where her grandmother baked fresh bread. At the end of the piece she listened to me speaking Arabic. And when she read aloud my words in that other tongue, when I listened to myself speak through her, I heard myself in a different way.

It didn't matter that I only said, "Enas, pay attention instead of looking out that door." The words were magic and they still linger like foreign ghosts on my tongue.



The Fisherman of Moons

Translated from French by Patrick Williamson

1.

He walked
On the moon
The planets vying him with ice
The stars, the whole universe, it's all mine
Tomorrow deep down in the earth
He shouted out to vanished forests

I will reign over all the deserts

2.

I will meet
The oceans
And tell them of volcanic lava
It doesn't matter if the fossils
Despise my old skeleton
Among the tyrannical phosphates

The water will remember the passage of gold

3.

It doesn't matter
If the days
Laugh at my helpless petals
The days will tell the coral
Of their purple shivers
The needles like sighs

Patch up the white-haired dream

4.

I drag Mars
Out
Of your sleep among the ferns
Will I tell you how
The winds bore away so many friends
Lime tree remedies for the ephemeral

In such a brief night the calvaries

5.

Under the footsteps
of dust
Insolent the boots razed
Your poppies
What didn't I say in the palm of your hand
Be in the swift light a river

Or a dove for the outraged skies

6.

How many
Olive trees
Do my powdery bones need
To steal
The heather from your rocks
The sparks from fires

Foam vengeful of so many seas

7.

In the stuffed
Town
He declared the end of the countryside
Here the cemeteries have storeys
The skyscrapers muddled up
Swallows with free-floating clouds

Along the walls the grasses are wild

TAHAR BEKRI



Chefchaouen, Morocco
By HARRY WILSON

This Road Never Ends *Syrian Refugees Sept 2013*

Sun has no mercy.
It does what it does
the way war does.

People do not matter.
The old man carrying
all he never achieved

or that young woman
carrying her flayed soul,
do not matter.

They walk and carry
what they must.
Sun crosses over.

The road is behind
them and in front.
It is always so.

At some point they
or their hearts
will stop and we

who watch will turn,
let the sun fall
from their sky, step

back into our known
places and close
our doors.

FRANK DULLAGHAN

Living with Small Disappointments

No matter what they say, if you're expecting a full glass
and you find that it's half-full, there is some emptiness.

This is how most of us experience life: as a series of
small disappointments – settling for a lesser promotion,

the smaller car. We continually negotiate these
compromises with ourselves, we tell ourselves that

we're fine, that compared to where we could have
ended up, we've actually achieved quite a lot.

Right now someone is being systematically sliced open
in body and/or in mind, so someone else can know

their lives, unseat their soul. For some, suffering is
a mountain. Right now someone is hollowed out with hunger,

physical and/or emotional, and someone else is approaching
them to steal all that they have left. And there is war,

that moronic and continual condition of our species –
as if this is the only way we can limit ourselves.

In the refugee camp a twelve-year-old girl is trying to be
mother to her younger siblings, her mother in pieces in Syria.

We should feel lucky to be spared. But we do not feel
lucky. It just makes it harder to live with our silly

disappointments, our little hills of suffering. The songbird
isn't blessed in its cage when we carve our thanksgiving dinner.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Taxi-Bus

Al-Quds, Nablus, Tulkarem! The Drivers call:
Which servees we shall take together? We want
Ramallah, the height of God. We have friends there.

Kaddish? How much? *'Ashreen* shekel. Twenty total,
as you like. That is all. *Yalla*, let's go. Climb through
the door of yellow taxi-bus: an old Mercedes, leather

seats split, windows belching a gust of tobacco smoke.
I am the one woman. My husband and I in the back row.
Eight men turn to examine us. Whole trip will be one o'clock—

ah, one hour, yes. Eyes fasten to my hands, folded
on this skirted lap, and we are patient as Driver hurries
through Wadi an-Nar, desert Valley of Fire.

First checkpoint, easy passage. Palestinian flag
painted on metal trash bins. Two soldiers with
machine guns nod, and we are through. Next checkpoint,

not so easy. Even inside the Territories, IDF has many.
My eyes finger the purse, identities safe within.
Husband's words—only if we have to—enter

my ear, and we turn our glance outside. But this?
What? A barrier before the point, because today
is different. Today, huge stones block this road. Piles

of rock front like bold words. Driver's hands yell
in irritation: *Shoof!* Look, we must find another way, another
road. Ah, yes, nothing is certain here, but this. *Yalla*, let's go.

TARA BALLARD


C

a Phoenician throw-stick
held high in his right hand
the Egyptian basket
lying far beyond his reach
what was, what is
the Chinese peasant
trying to do
in his story?

CHANGMING YUAN

8

first, a curved 1 from Indians
then, it was twisted until it became an S
ready to seduce, re-presenting itself like a 5
before the Arabs connected
her two closed circles
piling them one above the other
as if to round up
all sudden Chinese fortunes

CHANGMING YUAN

6

a forgotten European flirtation with a glyph
the Ghubar Arabs borrowed from Indians
all of whom dislike its squigglish tradition

a cherished number emulating the uppercase G
not really related to home, family, responsibility
but easy and smooth, what else on the road?

CHANGMING YUAN

N

No, nobody knows this
But you are really no more
Or no less than the old
Egyptian metonymy of
A stream, river, lake, sea or
Even an entire ocean, where
There is always water , where
There are always fish
Rather than a synecdochic Z
Pushed straight upright
On the bank of the Euphrates

CHANGMING YUAN



Ait Ben Haddou, Morocco
by HARRY WILSON

CLIMB UP AND OVER

Our garden bordered an alley, which crossed into a hayfield and stretched to the hillside
Our yard had lilacs that surrounded a pond filled with sweat peas and crested by vines
Our porch led to a street that lined the road running from our house all the way to West Virginia
and we walked from one house to Neff woods from another to the waterfall across a bridge

The coalmining corner of Pennsylvania with all its faults let cows chew from this neighbor
to the next and children crossed yards that were not theirs to get to school and sit on the steps
of someone's porch without asking and we didn't know that this was belonging

This was Pennsylvania and not Abu Dis where a wall was erected right down main street
keeping the kids away from the school they've been going to their whole lives— so what
do they do? they wonder, like the farmers of Azzoun whose vegetable fields, olive trees

are out of reach, who stare at the twenty five feet of stone and wire, guarding them
from their own food as a security measure that forces a four-kilometer walk to get in a gate
that gives them twenty minutes to slip over to the other side for bushels of barley

to take home, if it's still there or if you live in Ana'ta district in East Jerusalem, it's probably
not—some things had to move to make room for the wall and without your home
everyone is more secure. The landscape is sliced and lands are carved and contained.

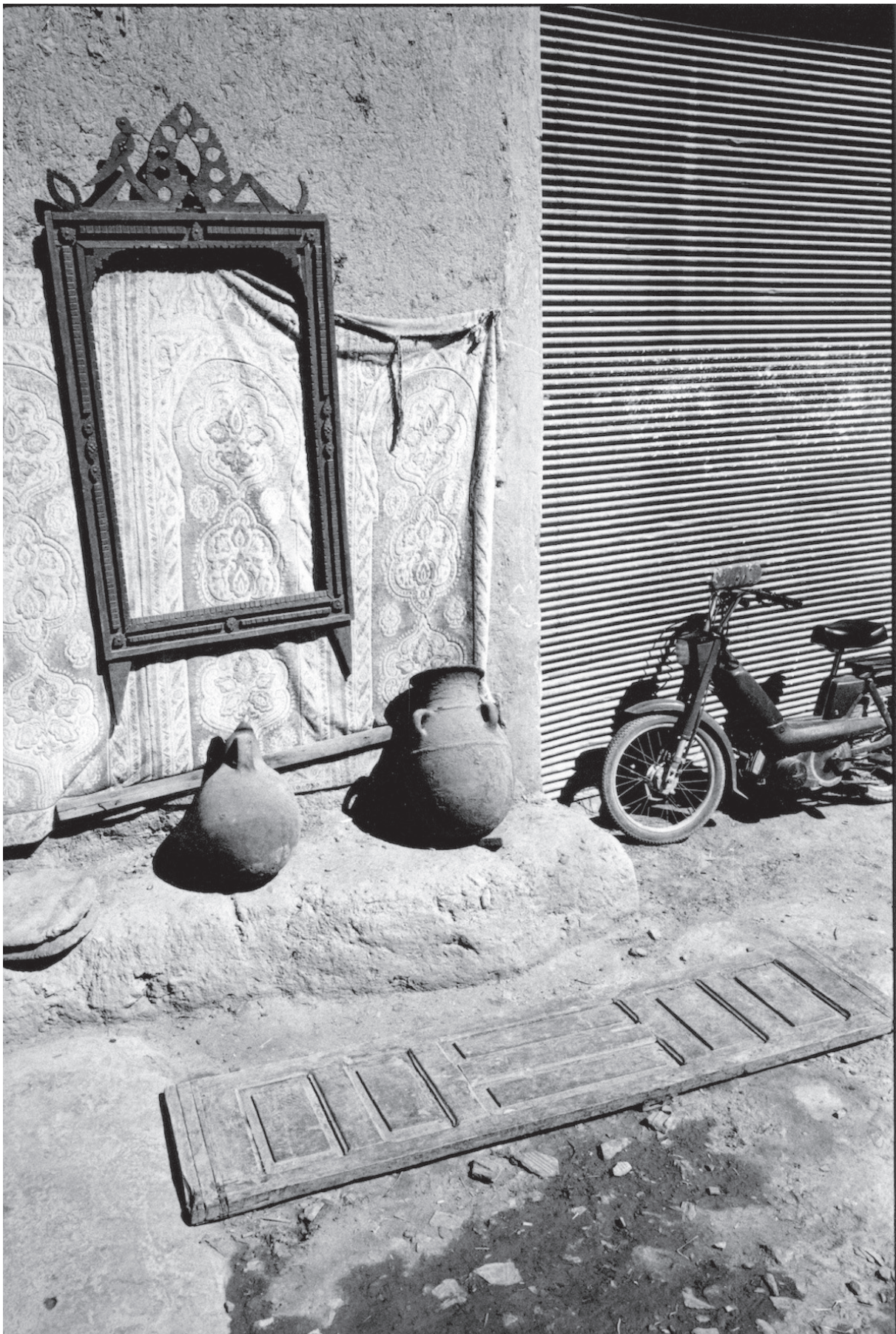
I have studied maps—the blue waters and the green mountains, yellow countries
and red ones all meant something to the cartographers and I followed them,
a puzzle of colors explained in the legend in the corner that said this was the earth:

Lakes, mountains, cliffs, buttes, highways, hiking trails, one way streets, capitols, borders
mileage counters, oceans, river snaking through states and countries, ranges peaking
across the Urals, frozen tundra, pampas, veldt, thickly populated cities, railroad tracks

I run my finger along each symbol, each road designation, each color, each touchstone

How do you mark a barrier? Make it part of a landscape? What is the symbol of restraint?
What is the color of confinement, disruption, loss and separation? Of sorrow? How do you
hold that pen, diagram the atlas, sketch the captivity? Do not draw the wall
of the Great March to liberation, just mark a slow death to the earth that inhabits
it and the people who make it home.

ELMAZ ABINADER



Still Life, Rissani, Morocco
by HARRY WILSON

Publications, paintings and the multi-language of art.

A CONVERSATION WITH HEDY HABRA

BY REWA ZEINATI

RZ: Your collection of poetry *Tea in Heliopolis* was an Award-Winning Finalist for the 2014 International Book Award in Poetry. Your book *Flying Carpets* won the 2013 Arab American Book Award Honorable Mention in Fiction and was an Award-Winning Finalist for the 2014 Eric Hoffer Book Award in Short Fiction. You won an Excellence in Teaching Award at Western Michigan University in 2014. And your individual poems and short stories have been published widely and often. What drives you on?

HH: I feel honored and grateful for these publications and awards. I have been studying, writing and also teaching Spanish language and literature for a very long time. I believe that these continued activities stem from an insatiable curiosity and a passion for learning combined with an urge to share and communicate my enthusiasm and love for languages and literature. With each project, I learn a bit more about the world, about others, but mostly about myself. Literature is the best way to transcend one's reality with its unavoidable ups and downs. Immersing oneself in the virtual space created by fiction or poetry allows for a much richer and more intense life.

RZ: How has being multi-lingual and multi-cultural shaped your craft, if at all? And while growing up, who affected your writing the most, and how?

HH: I was born and raised in Heliopolis, a residential suburb of Cairo, Egypt, and was schooled in French, Arabic, and English. I was mainly influenced by French literature and read extensively. I have always loved Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Aragon and Paul Celan as well as most of the classics. I studied Pharmacy in Beirut's French St. Joseph University, and lived there till the onset of the civil war.

After spending several years in Europe, I came to the United States where I pursued graduate studies in English and Spanish. Some of my favorite poets are T.S. Eliot, Theodore Roethke, Charles Simic, Tony Hoagland and Mark Doty, but my list would be endless. My favorite author is usually the one I am reading and enjoying at a specific moment. Each great author provides a unique experience. Some of my favorite Middle Eastern writers are Adonis for poetry, and Amin Malouf and Tahar Ben Jalloun for fiction.

When I first discovered Latin American literature, I knew that it was the sort of writing I would like to emulate. My favorite writers are Mario Vargas Llosa, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez and Juan Rulfo, for fiction, and Octavio Paz, César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda, for poetry, to name only a few. But I admire lots of Spanish and international authors, so it is hard to tell which writers have left an imprint on my work. I am also a great admirer of the fiction of Italo Calvino, Alessandro Barrico and Dino Buzzati, and I try to read them in the original Italian.

RZ: What makes a good poem?

HH: For me, it is a desire to reread the poem over and over again. I am very sensitive to a poem's music and to the way the language flows. I love poems with striking images that create unusual and unexpected connections but that still won't reveal it all, letting the reader make the leap and use his (or her) imagination.

RZ: What makes good fiction?

HH: I guess that my preference goes to novels that are well crafted and require the reader's participation like Mario

Vargas Llosa's fiction. I have read each of his novels several times, always with renewed delight and interest. I love stories that have a surreal or fantastic dimension, that's why I regularly reread Buzzati, Calvino, Cortázar and Borges. Good fiction is a text that you want to keep returning to, always discovering something new in its pages.

RZ: Some writers dedicate a couple of hours in the morning to write. Some after a jog. Some wait for the evening hours to settle down. What is your process?

HH: I don't have a specific routine or ritual. Sometimes working in the yard, gardening or walking helps me enter a meditative state that is propitious to writing. It does seem to me that I am constantly writing, with occasional interruptions. And because I also like to write criticism, paint and cook, it is necessary to juggle with time.

I have always kept a journal, and at times, I like to leaf through the pages and highlight some passages that strike me for different reasons and seem to lead me into writing. I always record thoughts, impressions, epiphanies, and have tons of drafts and material that serve as inspiration. Many of my poems are inspired by visual art.

I find myself writing in different languages in my journal. Oftentimes, I work on the same poem in three different languages because some lines would come automatically in a different language associated with new images that I then try to translate, and by doing so I find unexpected ways to express the same thought. This process enriches each version in a reciprocal movement like osmosis.

RZ: What are you working on right now?

HH: I have just finished revising my second book of poetry and sent it to my publisher. Most of the poems in this collection are inspired by paintings. I have a passion for visual art and I am also an artist. I have painted a watercolor to illustrate the cover of the forthcoming book, as I did for *Tea in Heliopolis*. I am also working on a collection of poetry that focuses on my personal connection with the Middle East. Some of the poems are responses to what is going on in the area in an attempt to convey the sense of helplessness that we feel when we see it all from afar.

RZ: How important are literary journals, if at all?

HH: Print and online literary journals are very important. I subscribe to several journals, such as *Poet Lore*, *Cutthroat*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and read them with great interest. They are a bridge that allows readers to discover a multiplicity of voices and genres, and enables to keep up-to-date with the evolving tendencies of contemporary literature.

RZ: Do you have any advice for emerging writers, or other writers of many native tongues?

HH: I would say that persistence and discipline are indispensable. I think we learn writing by reading. So the more we read, analyze and try to emulate the authors we admire, the better our own writing will become and we will eventually find our own voice. This works for painting as well. Visual artists first learn to copy the classics before developing a distinctive style. Regarding multilingual writers, I would recommend that they maintain their languages alive by reading constantly in the original. Writers should consider this ability as an advantage instead of a hindrance. In addition, every language brings along a wealth of original metaphors, which cross-pollinate and enrich one another.



The Communion

Mother tried to pin the large white moiré ribbon around my left arm. She smelled of onions and bleach, too busy working in other people's homes.

She'd stay up late, hanging laundry by the moonlight, while some gathered around arak and mezzes. She found the right spot to stick the needle. "Now my brassard will be all stained with blood."

"Your father's a good man," she said sucking her finger, "Bad tempered, but who could blame him, it runs in his family." I was invited to a real party with kids from school, unlike the street boys of my neighborhood who played with a ball of rags.

Long necks bent, Calla lilies sprouted from the altar, from every corner of the church. On the garnet velour rest, I knelt like a consecrated knight. It was extremely hot despite the humming fans, I thought of ice-cold water, soft drinks, the party.

I had never seen anything like it, not even in pastry shops: Women with fine clothes smiling behind a mountain of glazed cream puffs and a three-layered cake. I felt a knot in my throat, forgot my thirst and left.

HEDY HABRA

The Burma Pearl

In my chest there is a dot that is a hole where I could hear my heartbeat as I stepped into the Burma store while you picked a pearl pendant just for me. That morning dew was barely brushing the petals of the budding spring. I handed you my gold medal carved with the crowned Virgin and child, my grandmother's gift at my baptism.

I still have the oval-shaped pearl in my jewelry box; it has escaped looting, known so many homes in different latitudes and languages. It has never touched my skin since but remains filled with words said and unsaid, steeped within the music of a light that once ran over my cheeks.

HEDY HABRA



He Loves Me He Love Me Not by SHUROOQ AMIN

From It's A Man's World series. He Loves Me He Loves Me Not. 120 x 150 cm. Acrylic painting, photography, and collage on canvas and wood. 2011. Private Collection.



The Softness of Women

For Zeina, Middle East, Aug 2013

I am slouched over a latte in Gloria Jean's
at Ibn Battuta Mall, heat-heavy from the Dubai summer,
when my dead brother joins me.

You're looking old. He wears that half-smile
he always managed. Ah, now, I say,
he looking younger than either of my sons.

I was in love, he reminds me, that year.
A Chinese girl. His quick-step eyes dance
with the memory of it. But what are you doing

so far from Dundalk? Oh, I'm just making ends
meet, just making ends meet, I tell him.
He leans forward, intense as he always was,

his dark fringe falling. And are you happy, Brother?
Sure, I say, as happy as a man can be in these times.
Love, he says then, is a mighty thing.

I thought to tell you this here, where old darkneses
gather and inherited pain has forsaken all softness.
It was the same at home, I say, hard men

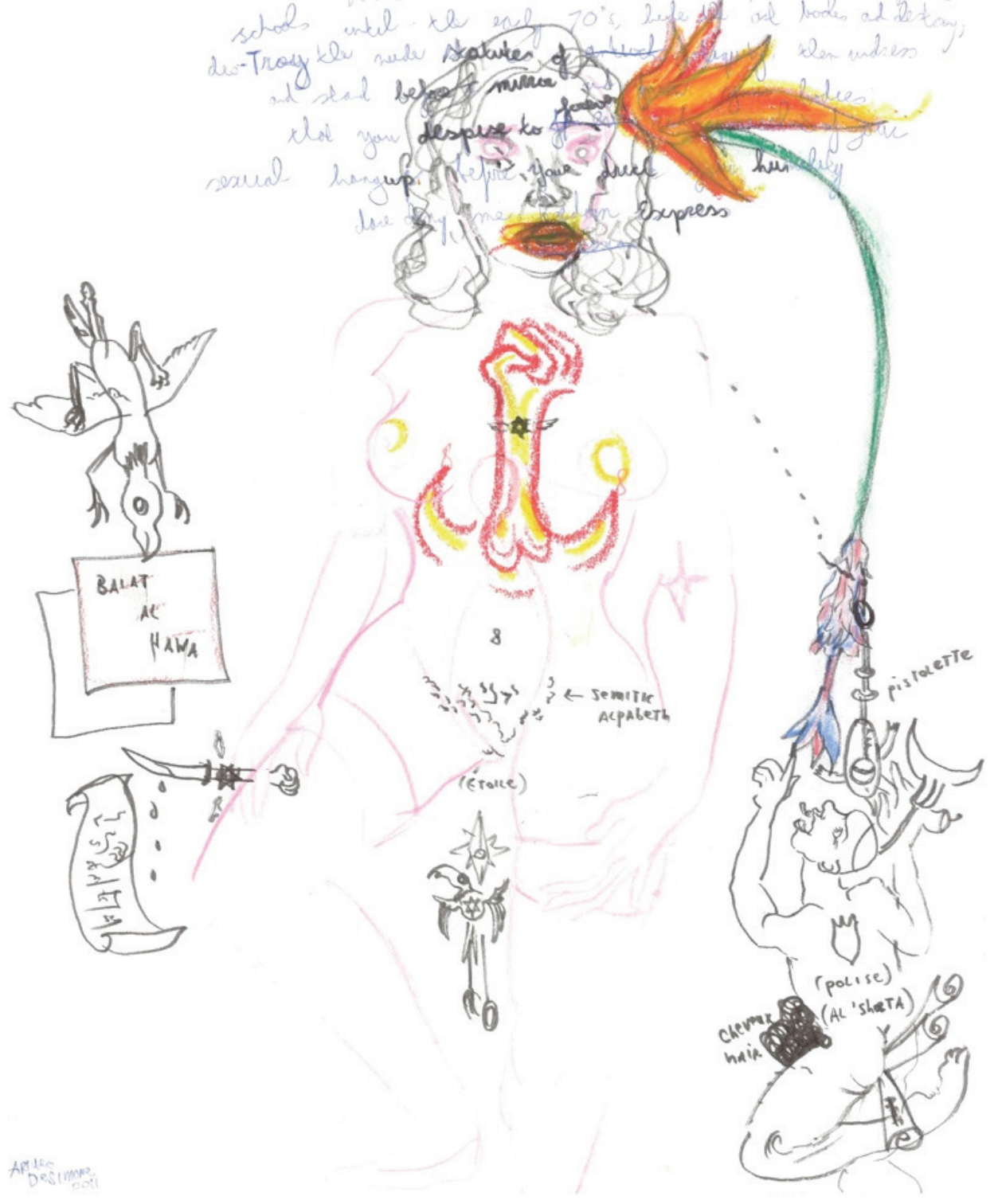
breaking everything that mattered
as if that were an answer. The cold that has gathered
in his eyes judders me. I see women sweeping

rubble from the streets, burying sons.
When I look up his chair is empty,
shoppers busy with bags, barging in.

The women are still soft, I whisper to myself
as if it were a benediction, but perhaps a prayer,
women still have their softness

FRANK DULLAGHAN

Put on bird the crotch models who posed nude for the
 schools until the early 70's, but all the bodies and history;
 de-Troy the nude statues of a bird... when address
 and stand before...
 that you despise to...
 sexual hangup. before you...
 do by me... express



Manifesto of a paragraph and a girl's nakedness
By ARTURO DESIMONE

inspired by Egyptian internet activist and women's right advocate, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy

IN THE AFTERNOON MAIL

By Patty Somlo

My mother says I am a bad son and she should disown me. She has written these words in a letter I have just set down on the counter of my shop. The paper is a pale blue color and so thin I can see through it, if I hold the sheet up to the light. My mother wastes her time writing these words, filling up nearly the entire first sheet with them. I tell myself the next time she writes I won't bother to read the letter. But then when the letter arrives, I can't help myself. I open it and read the words I'm expecting and say next time I won't do this again.

In my mother's eyes, I am a bad son because I refuse to return to my country. I was expected to go back the minute my studies were completed and I had my degree in hand. At first, I told my mother I needed to go on, study a few more years and get an advanced degree. By the time my graduate program was completed, the economy back in Egypt had collapsed, even further than the terrible situation that existed when I left.

"There are no jobs," I wrote my mother. I would have preferred to call but my mother refuses to own a phone.

What I didn't tell my mother at the time was that I would probably never go back home. She couldn't possibly understand, so I didn't even try. I had fallen in love, you see, and the woman was an American. New York born and bred, as she liked to say.

Even worse than falling in love with an American woman who worked every day and on warm days wore a tank top and shorts, I'd gone ahead and married her. We didn't bother with a wedding. No. One Tuesday morning, we drove down to City Hall and stood before a short woman with dyed bright red hair and a harsh Russian accent who, twenty minutes later, pronounced us husband and wife.

My mother would not have understood any of this. In fact, if I'd written even one of the details of my life in a letter, I'm certain this would have broken my mother's heart. She had sent me, her only son Ali, to America because she believed America was the means to a good life. And while we were poor and struggling, my mother nevertheless has continued to define good life as living in the place and in the same way she has always known. If I wrote to her about what my life has become, this would have had my mother tearing her hair out by the fistful.

As if marrying an American wasn't bad enough, we had a child together, a son. By the time David was born, I had opened the store. My wife, Catherine, didn't approve. Here I was a trained engineer and I had decided to purchase a corner convenience store.

Maybe Catherine was right, that I didn't want to stay home. That's one of the accusations she threw at me near the end of our marriage, claiming I'd given up my job at the engineering firm downtown to own a store in a not-so-great neighborhood, at the corner of Seventeenth Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, because I wanted to be alone. Or at least I wanted to stay away from her and David.

So now you see there's an even worse part of my life I couldn't possibly let on to my mother. My American wife and I are divorced. As if this wouldn't have my mother screaming and pounding my chest with her fists, I do not even have custody of my son. His mother does. I see him rarely, since I'm working nearly all the time at the store. In fact, so much time passes between his visits to my apartment that I barely recognize him when he comes.

I couldn't let my mother know that the boy has begged my ex-wife not to have to visit me. And what could I do? Yes, I have agreed. I send money, of course, but I've quit buying him presents. Since I never see my son anymore, I don't even know what he likes.

In her last three letters, my mother has changed her tune somewhat. She now claims she wants to visit me here in America. I tell her I am too busy, that I leave the house before the sun comes up and don't come back until after midnight. My mother says she doesn't care. If she can only see my face and hold my hand for a moment or two, that will be enough.

Of course, she kept the real reason for wanting to visit me hidden until this most recent correspondence. This time she told me the truth. She is dying. The cancer my mother never revealed to me before has spread, she says. According to her doctor, my mother has only six more months to live.

She does not want to die without seeing her only son again. And so I am faced with a dilemma. You see, as hard as I tried to make the store a success, it is, after all, located in a tough, poor neighborhood. I bought the store at a very low price, thinking I was smart enough to make something of the place. What I didn't realize was that all the previous owners had once believed the same thing.

The store is up for sale but so far I haven't received a single offer. I am losing more and more money every day. Each evening, I calculate what I've sold, hoping to have made enough to cover my expenses running the place.

What I can't bear to tell my mother is that America has worn me down. I have made mistakes, yes. Not understanding the freedom I was given here has certainly exacted a price. My mother cannot understand this, having her life go along on its preplanned path. She would not believe all the choices and opportunities available to a person in America and how easily one can take the wrong steps.

I came up with the idea at the end of a day in which I wrestled with the problem of my mother and her dying wish. This was the best plan I could manage, no matter how many times I went over and over my limited options in my mind. It was obvious that I couldn't leave the country, as long as my store was up for sale. Given that there had been only a handful of calls, I knew a buyer was not about to arrive. I couldn't bring my mother here. Even if I had the courage to reveal how my life in America had turned out, which I didn't, what would happen if my mother's health suddenly took a bad turn during her visit and I needed to take her to the hospital? I had no medical insurance, even to cover myself, let alone my mother. One hospital visit would ruin me, dropping me into a hole from which I would never get out.

To carry out my plan, I dressed in the only suit I owned, which I hadn't put on since my marriage. The waistband of the pants was a bit snug. So after pulling the zipper up as far as it would go and holding my breath in the process, I left the top button undone. The jacket too was tight. Best left open, I realized.

Luckily, I had purchased the two white dress shirts I owned a little large. There was enough material to pull out a bit of cotton to cover my gut. That allowed me to leave the jacket unbuttoned. Studying my reflection in the full-length mirror on the back of the bathroom door, I thought I didn't look half bad.

I almost couldn't remember how to fasten the tie. As I tossed one end over the other, I remembered that Catherine had done this for me the day we got married. That's when I realized how long it had been since I'd let myself think about that time. I scolded myself now to forget all that, but as I worked on getting the knot straight and close to my throat, my vision blurred. Tears had flooded my eyes.

Then of all the crazy things, I started letting the memories come of my mother when I was just a boy. How beautiful she was, I thought, recalling her brushing that shiny black hair which spilled down her back. I could see her now serving my father dinner first and me next, my sisters getting whatever little was left.

It took me several minutes and a few false starts to remember how to set the self-timer on my old digital camera. As soon as I got it set right, balancing the body on top of a short narrow bookcase, I hurried across the living room and sat down on the couch. Since my mother was dying, it didn't seem right to smile. I tried to arrange my face to look

neither happy nor sad, as I waited for the camera to go off.

I printed the series of photographs I'd taken and sat down to write. Starting out, I thanked my mother for everything she had done, beginning with bringing me into this world. I couldn't have asked for a better mother, I told her, writing all the kind words my mind told me any mother would have liked to hear from her only son.

When I finished the letter, I carefully folded the thin writing paper around the photographs. As I slid the letter into the envelope, a dark thought entered my mind. I would never again see my mother alive.

For some reason, I kept my suit and tie on for the walk to the post office. As I made my way up Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, I noticed one of my regular customers on the street.

"Mr. Ali," said old Mrs. Jackson. She was sliding her walker forward, then ever so slowly catching up with her feet. "You all dressed up today."

"Oh, yes," I told her, not wanting to have to explain the reason for my unusual dress

"You look like you goin' to a funeral," Mrs. Jackson said next.

"Oh, no, no," I said. "Just some business I need to attend to. That's all."

The letter from my sister came in the afternoon mail, moments before I planned to leave my apartment and return to the shop.

"Our dear mother has gone," my sister wrote. "We are burying her today."

I put the letter down on the coffee table before leaving the apartment. As soon as I got to the store, I hung the sign I had just made on the front door.

CLOSED UNTIL TOMORROW 7:00 A.M.

The sky was as blue as I'd ever seen it here in Oregon, this being a place more often rainy and dark. I walked up MLK Boulevard, still wearing my suit and tie, though I'd slid my feet into a pair of comfortable white Nikes. Though I had spent nearly all my waking hours since coming to America either working or studying, I knew that from now on I was going to place myself more often outdoors.

I walked all the way to the bridge, something I'd never done before. Then I climbed up to it. The sidewalk on the bridge, I was surprised to find, was very wide.

Sunlight sparkled on the river. Two long white boats filled with rowers sailed by. Trees alongside the river's opposite bank were covered in pale pink blossoms. The air smelled sweet and I realized that spring had arrived.

I stared at the tall buildings downtown on the river's other side. The city where I'd lived going on, was it twenty-five years now? I had hardly seen it before. The river was beautiful, as were the boats, the sunlight and people peddling across the bridge on bikes.

I turned around and headed back toward my apartment. My life in America, I understood, was just now getting ready to start.



Envoy to the Ignorant

He explains what life is
like in Syria, in conflict,
while I nod, sip
espresso, avoid
his eyes.
His hands circle,
smooth the black
foil wrap of a chocolate
left against the cup.
I say, it must be awful,
and I can't imagine,
and for the life of me
I can't. He listens slowly,
picking words like petals
as the foil curls
tighter from the sides.
He is an architect,
stirring black holes
in coffee shops
until he stops
to ask why
I call it conflict,
not war.

NEIL FLATMAN

On the Palestinian Poet

(after listening to Farah Chamma)

I don't have a well formed picture,
the image that lets you in, though
I have a first line of sorts;
Our blood is sharp,
and a knife (though I can't tell
if the handle's made of bone),
which cuts

her heart in two
with each unanswered pulse.
But now I've moved
to pulses and the heart,
heart and home, cliché
to cliché, this pen,
these words.

NEIL FLATMAN

Abu al-Haul

Great Sphinx,
sentinel
of shifting desert sands,
you watch over Giza
with Pharaoh's wisdom
and lion's stealth.

Monolith,
are you the rough beast
who slouches towards
Bethlehem to be born?

*From "The Second Coming" by W. B. Yeats.

FERN G. Z. CARR



The Kiss by SHUROOQ AMIN

From It's a Man's World series. The Kiss. Acrylic painting and photography on canvas and wood. 130 x 120 cm. 2011. Menasart Fair, Beirut. Private Collection.

into the leftover blue

With the incantation of a yellow morning the sun slips into an ethnic war. Where is the solvent that becomes a misrepresented scion? Unravel me into the leftover blue glass that becomes a promiscuous skyline. Here, see that? You are the feverish penmanship of cave walls. We are the hasty philosophies of Bedouin concrete. By setting a drink upon a table made of sex or placing a hand upon the inner thighs of tulips the narrative continues via pierced singers with red mohawks.

ANNA KING

A Second Life

They came running
when they heard the crash
in the ravine
and found our car
resting on its roof
like a defeated beast,
its doors swung wide
its wheels still spinning.
I screamed your name
and when I saw you
sitting in the dust
nursing your cut leg
I shouted with the villagers
Allahu Akhbar.

At the clinic
they closed the wound
with thread for sewing saddles
and nothing to dull the pain.
You squeezed my hand
as I looked on contritely.
God has granted you,
the medic said, hayat thaan,
a second life.

Four decades later
as you lay
in our bedroom
amid a clutter of tubes,
too drugged to speak,
I re-arranged the covers
and found the scar now faint
and thought of just how grand
our second life had been.

ART HEIFETZ



In the Closet: The Coffee Jug by SHUROOQ AMIN

From It's A Man's World series. 110 x 130 cm. Acrylic painting, photography, and collage on canvas and wood. 2011. Private Collection.



Diwaniya High by SHUROOQ AMIN

From It's a Man's World. 110 cm x 170 cm. Acrylic painting and photography on canvas and wood. 2012. Private Collection.

Dunes of Liwa By Janet Testerman

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Friends had told me that the *Rub' Al Khali* desert in Liwa, Abu Dhabi, was worth seeing, so I finally decided to visit one early, dusty morning, along with my niece, Sarah, who lives in Dubai.

The tedium of the three-hour drive through horizontal white sand was mediated by small talk; the weather, cultural assessments of Dubai and dietary preferences. Suddenly, we passed by a car ablaze. Deep black smoke oozed, writhing around the jaded flames. Rubberneckers gazed, passing slowly, something happening on the road. Surely the driver was dead. Men in brown dishdashas, red headgear, detoured traffic around the inferno. No police had yet arrived. The view from inside our car, silent chaos. Thus began our, at first hesitant and reluctant, disclosures of past catastrophic relationships, our own conflagrations. The insipid landscape disappeared as we travelled to the interior.

Sarah's parents' panic peaked on her 27th birthday; she was still embarrassingly unmarried, a spinster. Against her wishes, they hastily arranged a marriage for her to a young Gujarati from Kenya. He arrived in London, cocky and hungry for an EU passport. Three weeks after the nuptials, living under the rule of an oppressive master, she not-so-politely asked him to leave. His agreement to divorce depended on his receiving 10,000 pounds from Sarah's family. When they balked, he evaporated. Her voice wavered as she recounted the incident; the shock, the wounds waning, but still tunneling somewhere under her skin.

Our directions to the dune desert were murky; our faith lay in intermittent signs for the Liwa Hotel. Triumphant, we entered the abandoned lobby, skeptical of the prospect of seeing magnificent dunes since the surroundings (mirroring our lunch) were still nondescript. A falcon perched by the door and nonchalantly pulled on an elastic sinew of his raw chicken snack. The desultory wait staff vanished. I considered returning without seeing The World's Largest Dune, Tal Moreeb, even though it was only 30 kilometers away. The surroundings were so ordinary, why bother?

We continued through the desolate flatness for another four kilometers when the first few shapely dunes emerged. Smooth and flowing, one bending gracefully into the next, shy in their hesitant encircling of nothing. These were minor precursors of the grandeur that followed. As we moved further into the Rub' Al Khali, the lovely dunes stretched with an intentional harmony, working together to create a surreal aesthetic. Black dromedaries appeared magically with babies in tow, howled, and cantered into the expanse leading my gaze to a new dreamlike canvas, again harmonious and uncanny in its detail.

Climbing the dunes felt like fighting them. They would let you casually traverse them then suddenly trick you and pull your feet hard. My thighs were burning as I ascended, wind whipping around my ears, sand tugging then reluctantly relenting. I finally reached a summit of the windward side of a large, elegant barchan, a crescent-shaped dune, and stared at its flawless ridge. It was as if a row of single sand particles aligned between the slip face on the lee side and the larger, windward mound on which I stood. A steady stream of particles blew over the ridge, but frequent troupes of grains assembled and swirled like apparitions; jinn ascending the mound, imparting messages. I touched the perfect crest, but in less than one minute my mark was erased. I looked over my shoulder, my footprints had vanished.

Sarah lay secluded in the trough between dunes, arms spread, eyes shut. Her wild black curls were frosted with dust. The sand had amassed around her, enclosing her in a cocoon-in-progress. Jinn whirled about her, her spirits emerging.





Of Wives and Men by SHUROOQ AMIN

From the 2013 series Popcornographic. (Title based on John Steinbeck's book *Of Mice and Men*, banned in Ireland in 1953, and USA in 1974 - 1990's). Acrylic painting, photography and collage on canvas mounted on wood. 120 cm x 200 cm. 2013. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

Call to Prayer

From the wrong side of the fence
I saw them, looking smaller at this distance.
The orange sand skirting rocks
looked artificial, insolent.
Heat, dust and disappointment
accumulated in my eyes,
clouding the culmination of a third decade.

My horse was temperamental,
going his own way at every turn,
unfazed by the teeth-setting cracks
of hooves on old asphalt as we left
the stables, the clash and squeeze
of thickly dusted sweaty flanks
on all sides, like the city's rush hour traffic.

My wandering inspiration was beyond
this wire contraption, futile in its existence,
except in keeping out we who had arrived
too late at the appointed time,
talked and taken tea
with the guide and stable boys
instead of setting off at once.

The guide insisted on photos
and in the last few I am almost smiling,
having given up all hopes
of getting there or persuading my horse
of my benign intentions.
Those were still the pyramids.
Technically I was still 29.

As we turned three horses for home,
two froze as Cairo shimmered on the
horizon
with a call to prayer that started in the west
and rolled and shivered like a vapour
across the city, lilac in the fading sun
and exhausted gasps of modernity.
And we might have missed it

had we been where we intended
and not where we were intended to be.

GILLIAN CRAIG

Leaving Damascus in the Arab Spring

My blond, blue-eyed son
escorts us by cab to the airport.
We will go, he
will stay.

His fluent Arabic causes
the usual head snap of surprise.
Soon he is yelling at the driver,
convinced of cheating.
They argue
with great passion.
I am in the back seat sobbing,
convinced any ill will

will puncture
the imaginary safety bubble
I've constructed around him, a fantasy

I will not surrender.
The taxi driver regards me long
and unblinking in the rear view mirror,
eyes soft and sad
as a Byzantine Madonna.

He pulls off to a side drive
near the terminal, with hand
on his heart, speaks. My son
translates: Here is good.
You can have privacy
to say your goodbye.

MICHELE BOMBARDIER

Ebtesam, My Mother's Portrait

Your eyes search for the star sewn
into the farthest corner of God's

blanket – its lacework woven with cancer
and sliding skin. Your spine is bent

under Baba's weight, the man who stole you
from the east. I look like you; teeth sitting

crooked, sharp, between lips plastered
down at the edges, but I crave your smile

with whimpers so brash I call them
laughter. You, with your hair wrapped

in scarves and pins to hide something
that marks beauty. You with your gorilla

paws for feet, cross-legged on the couch
like a lady-in-waiting. In waiting.

Is it a grave for your captor
that you seek? A bed of peace lined

with rocks and weeds, a plate over
his face to catch the drowning dirt –

this failing man who stole you from the east?
His heart, a beating drum by the hands

of a puppeteer who plays music so wild
my dancing hips can't hold its pace.

Baba can't hold it still. Your face wears
questions like body armor – unasked, undressed.

You're a woman routing your children
with cherub hands, your soul on fire

with the pages of a book creased
and spine bent. Like your back beneath
your lover's weight, the prince

who stole you from the flaming east.

LANA I. GHANNAM

Two Tongues

Yesterday I didn't understand
a word, its Arabic sounds crackled
in my ears like foil in a microwave.

Its letters were wet
with rounded lips

and accented with Mama's native breath.
My face felt rubbed raw by ancestors
reclaiming their skin, my identity shook

when I felt my name
could be replaced.

Cultured seeds had been caught
on foreign wind, spread over new land
and waters. American air soaked

my cautious lungs,
like breathing forgotten sounds

was illegal in this place. Mama translated
palpable Palestinian tongue
into English. My split mouth knew

the taste
of each vernacular spice,

she paused to ask if I finally understood—
but I had burned both tongues
and could no longer taste either word.

LANA I. GHANNAM



Hedonism by SHUROOQ AMIN

From It's A Man's World series. 120 x 170 cm. Acrylic painting, photography, and collage on canvas and wood. 2011. Private Collection.

Until Dawn

Pacifico:
 pools of candle light
 on each table—
 we dived.
 I called it "Candle Cup,"
 imagined it written
 in a curved romantic font,
 hid it in my purple bag,
 made my way
 among the smoke.
 "A souvenir," I told Rana;
 such superfluous stealing.
 On Va S'aimer was playing
 in the background.

1975:
 a war-parody pub,
 war-inspired décor.
 Ziad Rahbani songs,
 bullet marks, caps, Guevara
 beards and dabkeh.
 Dancing among the barricades.
 We couldn't hear
 what we were screaming
 as we passed the drinks.

Hole in the Wall:
 bachelorette party,
 us dressed in crazy

'80s style, looking almost
like prostitutes.
Male stripper so
not sexy,
phallic cake.
Music burst out
into the cold
every time the bar door opened,
as if it wanted to dance
on the pavement too.

* * *

Pavement:
the other children were still trying
to sell chewing gum, but he
had stopped.
I gave him money,
he tossed it on the sidewalk,
wiped his cheeks,
said "Here, take it all,"
reached into his pockets,
threw the day's earnings
on the street like bread
for birds. I tried

to convince him to hold on
to the notes, but he knew
there was nothing to hold on to.
Knew it more than I did.
I asked how old he was:
five.

In the car my friend
banged the word
"God! God! God!"
against the steering wheel,
until it broke
into infinite little pieces
that flickered on the seats.
The power went out,
the generators hummed.
Allahu Akbar
from a nearby mosque.
The night already withdrawing
into the candle cup on my lap.
The day bleeding into the sky.
Dawn.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK

Cities of longing, memory, love and war

A CONVERSATION WITH ZEINA HASHEM BECK

BY REWA ZEINATI

RZ: Your first poetry collection, *To Live in Autumn*, won the 2013 Backwaters Prize and will be published in August 2014 by the Backwaters Press, in Omaha, Nebraska. It was selected as a winning manuscript by notable poet Lola Haskins. You've been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and your individual poems have been published widely and frequently in many distinguished journals across the US. You are on the editorial board of *All Roads Will Lead You Home*, a new online literary journal by VAC poetry. A mother of two, founder of PUNCH, a monthly open-mic poetry evening, and runner of poetry workshops for adults and children (in Dubai, UAE.) What drives you on?

ZH: With both poetry and motherhood, one doesn't know what the driving force is exactly. You just go with it, almost instinctively. The love, the passion, the intuition, and the obsession are there. But one doesn't know why/how they are there to start with.

This isn't to say, of course, that all is intuitive (and immediate) in poetry and motherhood. You also learn these things, because they are things you do, not just feel. So, you get up every day, you feed, bathe, and dress your children, and you talk to them, and you play with them, and you love them and hug them, and they drive you crazy, and you are exhausted, and you need a break, and you hope you don't lose it by the end of the day. In poetry too, it's about the day-to-day work on something you love: I try to read every day, and think about writing every day, and I revise, and sometimes I obsess, and the poems can drive me crazy as well.

I have to point out though, since I've started this simile, that motherhood and poetry aren't similar in all aspects, and that they don't always co-exist. Motherhood is something you do with your kids, whereas poetry is something you do alone. Sometimes I abandon my kids for my poems, and sometimes I abandon my poems for my kids. But now I'm digressing. Have I somehow answered the question? I guess I love them (my kids and poetry), and try to be there for them every day.

RZ: Your book *To Live in Autumn* is set in, and is about, Beirut. You being a Tripoli-native and childhood resident of Tripoli (Lebanon), why Beirut?

ZH: When I left Beirut in 2006 after having lived there for six years, the poems just kept coming, out of nostalgia, I think. It was like I was summoning the city back to me in writing. After some time, I realized Beirut was a recurrent theme in my poetry, and I took the decision to write the book with the working title Re-membering Beirut. The process took years, during which I also wrote about other things/places (Tripoli among them), but those poems didn't go into the book. I want to note that some poems in *To Live in Autumn* are a mixture of Beirut and Tripoli. "Nocturne," for example, is one of them. "The Old Building" is heavily based on the building I lived in as a child in Tripoli, and the last poem of the book, "Spring," brings Tripoli into the picture as well.

But why did Beirut keep coming to me in the first place? Probably because I spent my university years there, and those were formative and exciting years for me. Beirut is an inspiring city, and it was new and unfamiliar to me, the eighteen-year-old from Tripoli. It gave me poetry readings, theater, literature (that's what I was studying), dance, streets, new friends, chaos, and of course, political unrest. So naturally, when I left the city that I had grown to love so much, I felt that longing for it, which I think triggered the writing. The poems in the book eventually moved beyond mere longing and nostalgia of course.

RZ: What do you think makes a good poem?

ZH: I don't think there's an objective list of criteria for a good poem. I'll tell you what would make me love a poem though: its ability to make the familiar unfamiliar (and vice-versa), its ability to move me (immediately!), and this urge I get of wanting to read it over and over again.

RZ: Do you think poetry and fiction are at all related?

ZH: Aren't all art forms somehow related? Good fiction and good poetry should both have the ability to amaze the reader. I don't read much fiction, but when I do, I've noticed that the books I like are the ones with good details, surprising images, and condensed language, all of which are also necessary in poetry. On the other hand, poetry too, is fictional, in its reinvention of the world around us.

RZ: Can good writing be taught?

ZH: I think you are either born a writer (among other things), or you aren't. If you do have that innate ability (and better yet, an irresistible urge) to write, then you can definitely learn to write better. The best way to do that is by reading, reading, and reading good writing. And if you're lucky enough to get feedback from fellow writers you trust, then that helps as well.

RZ: You've recently begun exploring writing in your native tongue, Arabic. How is that different from writing in English, apart from the obvious, of course.

ZH: I've only just started to flirt with Arabic. I haven't been writing in Arabic long enough for me to be able to formulate similarities and differences. For now, the creative process feels the same to me in both languages.

RZ: What is your writing process? Are you a morning writer? An after-midnight poet?

ZH: When I became a mother, I also became a write-whenever-you-can poet. So, when my kids are at school, I do most of my reading and writing in the morning. When they're on vacation, I do that when they're not killing each other. But nothing is that systematic of course, and a lot of poems come at unexpected times, as long as I've warmed up for them. The writing process you mention is, for me, about this warming up. It involves reading, getting some quiet time, and observing. If I do this every day, the poems will eventually come.

RZ: What are you working on right now?

ZH: Toward my second collection, I hope.

RZ: The concept of literary journals for Arab writers writing in English is a foreign one. How did you first learn about it, considering that you have resided in the Arab region all your life.

ZH: When I was a graduate assistant at AUB, a professor of mine gave me the CLMP directory to help him look for potential journals for his poetry. He showed me what to look for in a journal, and explained things like what simultaneous submissions and SASE mean. I ended up ordering my own copy of the directory, going online, and checking out the journals in there that appealed to me, the kind of poetry they publish, and their guidelines. Back then, many didn't have online submission managers yet (I'm happy that one can now submit to almost any journal online). That same professor also directed me to pw.org, which was also a helpful resource.

RZ: How important are literary journals, if at all?

ZH: Literary journals are vital. They give contemporary writers the chance to showcase their work, and they are where all the good new writing is! I learn a lot about fellow poets from literary magazines, and when I like a poet's work, I usually end up ordering his/her book.

RZ: What advice would you give promising writers?

ZH: Read Bukowski's poem, "so you wanna be a writer," which starts this way:

"if it doesn't come bursting out of you
in spite of everything,
don't do it."

Read that poem, then: read (read, read), write, revise, submit, learn to accept rejection, and repeat all previous steps, as long as it's "bursting out of you."



Ali

He wasn't a beggar,
just someone who asked
for a smoke and talked to himself.
His right hand traced sentences
into broken circles
near his tilted head,
his eyes had seen
beyond language, couldn't find
their way back. His cigarette,

always hanging at a certain
angle between his lips,
almost parallel to his nose,
was his only anchor to the real world.

The people at West House
would sometimes give him a free haircut.
No one knew where he slept.
I think we believed he didn't,
that he just ceased to exist
beyond the corner.

We never saw him seated,
just a familiar pedestrian
who roamed the same
side of the street every day,
as if the distance
between Abu Naji and Universal were
the whole Mediterranean sea.
He walked and walked yet stayed
in place. Or maybe he didn't.

One day he pointed to a car,
said it was a Russian tank, named
the year it was manufactured.
Sometimes he gave random lectures
about communism.
We said hello or we didn't,
he replied or he didn't.

There were rumors
he was a professor gone mad,
that his whole family was killed
before him during the war,
but no one really knew anything
for sure about him, except that he was
as much a part of Bliss Street
as the students, the sidewalk, the fast food,
that he was one of the possible
definitions of the city.

Souad

1. Water

My neighbor watched TV with her granddaughter
in the afternoons, wore stockings
that rolled down at the knees like a question
that keeps repeating itself.

She arranged her pots
like small silver elephants
on the cracked wooden shelves that still
carried the impossible weight.

Her husband faced the days
with a watering can.
His twig-like silhouette
rustled through the leaves
on the narrow kitchen balcony.

They rarely went to their quiet
house in the mountains.
She cooked, fed a two-year-old girl.
He disappeared, molded
a model of the garden he hoped
to have in heaven,
here on the first floor,
among the car honks.

2. Bread

I had forgotten to buy bread.
Walking under the rain, the hard rain,
there were other things to remember.
I decided to ask my neighbors
for a loaf or two, rehearsed my lines,
"I'm sorry . . ."

But she smiled, shook her head,
pulled me into the corridor,
thanked me for coming,
seated me on the burgundy sofa,
said she was doing okay
when little Farah was around,
but sometimes missed him
and held on tight until
the painful moment passed.

She said her name was Souad,
how nice it was of me,
a young student
from the university across the street,
I must have seen the death
notice on the wall, right?

Yes, yes, I apologized
for my pink shirt,
remembered out loud
that he used to water the plants.
She said she knew nothing
about plants, that they were dying,
that she hoped the rain would save
something.

3. Rain

Gunshots—
in the distance, then closer.
Perhaps another
assassination.
2005—a year
heavy, silent
with bombings.
I leapt

found my fists
banging at her door,
"Souad! Souad!"
heard footsteps,
glass breaking, keys.

"Firecrackers," she said.
"Probably a wedding."
I couldn't be sure
from my side of the building,
so she led me to her balcony,
her firm fingers on my arm as if
to root me back
in the muddy ground of real time.
She told me she knocked over
an old 7UP bottle
she used for olive oil.
We stood in our darkness,
watched the sky wounded
with colors
exploding, then falling
with a sound of rain,
a dark pond of olive oil
on the kitchen floor.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK



MAGHDA or ODA A LA BELLA DESNUDA DANDO LUZ REVOLUCIONARIA

By ARTURO DESIMONE

inspired by Egyptian internet activist and women's right advocate, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy

Falling

You waved, jumped into
the water, you said two towers
in New York had
fallen. You smiled the way I did
when I heard of my grandfather's
death; we were too young.
A woman covered her legs
with almond oil, someone coughed,
the sun filtered
through the September clouds.

Our friend said Americans never die
like us. Why should we suffer
alone? He splashed seawater
on my face, dared me
to race him to the shore.
My eyes burnt. I'd heard
seawater resembled
amniotic fluid.

My mom kept yelling,
"Imagine yourself, your son,
having to jump
like that. Is violence ever—"
But he was too far,
his head half-immersed,
his arms beating
at the surface,
winning the race and I
floating on my back,
your palms in my hair,
my eyes shut, my arms full
of sea and sky,
open.

We were too young.
But somehow when the towers fell,
we felt the day shift,
felt the earth grow old—
a land of barbed wire
instead of rivers.
They're still falling now
in cities, in villages, in occupied lands,
people are still leaping
into the emptiness,
some dreaming of blood,
some dreaming of wings.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK



In the shower she opens the letter of her virginity-test results
 By ARTURO DESIMONE
 inspired by Egyptian internet activist and women's right advocate, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy

Hymen Secrets: Girl with a Box

Seed-rich box carry my secret pulp scraped
 virginity pressed
 like a new flower
 between old pages
 cloudy blue behind me moon glowing
 shaft cut scandal-stained cretaceous white
 carry my hymen's secret oh scabrous secret
 of one more protean woman
 r e - v i r g i n i z e d.



The Apocalypse of the girl's entering womanhood (by way of rebellion)

Sabah el Eshta

By ARTURO DESIMONE

inspired by Egyptian internet activist and women's right advocate, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy

The Hand of an Honest Man

I bruise more easily now, you know.... But let me tell you, the other day under the shower I was scared by the sight of a swelling on my left foot: a swollen bag of blood with a tip like a nipple on an oversized breast. Where did all that blood come from, and how did my skin extend so much? Breast sizes were always a concern since childhood: I was told that all that was needed, according to the French, was to have enough to fill the hand of an honest man. How big was the hand of an honest man? I wondered throughout my adolescence. My father had died, and my older brother wasn't quite a man yet to become a parameter of such aesthetics. Was Adam honest, and how generous were Eve's breasts? These questions troubled me when I first saw her androgynous rendering by Cranach the Elder: then I became perplexed at Rubens' depiction of women. Maybe the Dutch were bigger men, after all they descended from the Vikings—and Renoir kept me in that same dilemma. Were these artists only concerned with perverts and lechers, and would an average pear-sized breast represent a reasonable attribute for honesty? And what about a man with smaller hands? My quest lasted for a long time until I gave up, since there was no definite criterion to validate it. Later on, I was convinced that my husband was an honest man: he seemed to have his hands full.

But this digression resulted from my discovery of that large clot on my left foot. After the initial scare that brought the burning subject to life, the swelling receded and my foot healed as though by miracle. The proof having vanished in thin air, even the doctor who checked my blood to make sure I wouldn't be prone to bleeding couldn't see that sight on my leg where only yellow and purple hues remained for a long time as an elusive sign of a hematoma. I lost that surreal nipple growing on my leg: I had no iPhone at the time to capture it live but it reminded me of the story my nanny used to tell me in Heliopolis about a man in the desert whose leg swelled and swelled to the point that he couldn't walk. One day he cut it open with a knife and the most beautiful girl emerged. He raised her in an oasis and fed her goat milk and dates until one day he died, and she was left all alone. Every time she'd hear a caravan approach, she'd climb up to the very top of the tallest palm tree, except for the day when a silk merchant's caravan arrived without her noticing. He was struck by her beauty, ravishing like the moon on its fourteenth day. He took her back to the city as his wife and they were happy forever after.

HEDY HABRA



A Tale of Two Muslims by SHURROOQ AMIN

From the 2013 series Popcornographic. (Title based on Charles Dickens' book A Tale of Two Cities, banned in Ireland and USA in 1955) – Acrylic painting and photography collage with Giclee print on canvas mounted on wood. 100 x 150 cm. 2012. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai

Becoming Rana By Reem Rashash-Shaaban

Do I fear death? No, what I fear is having my jaws wrapped tight with a handkerchief and looking like a bunny rabbit. What I fear even more are people placing old quarters on my eyes to hold down my eyelids. But what I fear most is having my face uncovered by my granddaughter who might look like me and worry about her fate.

I was the youngest child, the only daughter. To my three older brothers I was a boxing bag to practice their verbal and physical punches, the family idiot who could do nothing right, who did not know how to speak, react or behave. I was the badly dressed child who insisted on wearing her favorite blue shorts, summer or winter. I was the child that could not sit still in a restaurant, the one who would walk about making the most personal comments out loud, the one who embarrassed the family. Or should I say half the family. Our father did not live with us. He and our mother had long since separated. His absence was an invasion of my inner peace, a continuous physical attack. Our mother's presence was a different type of attack. On the surface, our mother was what every Lebanese mother was supposed to be, a blueprint of exact proportions and design. No line or measurement was wrong. She was the finished product of an architect's dream. Tall, well proportioned, with piercing blue eyes, she had a sweet voice that tasted like taffy but could easily turn into a sour jawbreaker, but never in public. Mindful of society's whims, observant of society's traditions,

our mother wore the right clothes, said the right things, and behaved in the right way. To them she was perfect. Some pitied her, however, having married beneath her station a man who had not appreciated her finer qualities and had left her for a younger woman.

Our three-bedroom house was well kept, displayed the right furniture, and was in the right neighborhood, a relatively new area considered chic by most, with a lovely view of the Mediterranean. Everything had its place. The ashtrays on the imported glass coffee table were perfectly aligned with the French magazines and at right angles from the 'bonbonniere'. Our mother realigned them daily, muttering about the inefficiency of the hired help. "No proverb was ever said in vain," she would say, "why servants are the destroyers of thriving households." She then proceeded to re-dust everything, from the furniture to the crystal ware that she had inherited from her family. Every item was in its place. Everything except me.

Oh, I had my physical space, but it was the other space I needed. I needed to feel that I belonged as much as the Persian rug in the living room. I seemed to be part of the peripheral sphere, an unwanted yet necessary brooch for a black evening dress. I gave color, but sometimes I gave too much and ruined the effect. I occupied the space left for the in-laws; I was not one of the family. Was it because I looked so much like my grandmother?

"Rana; sit up straight. Put your napkin in your lap. Don't use your fingers. Did you say Bismillah before you started eating?" My mother's words kept falling on me like bombs and as I look back they reminded me of the faceless enemy, the civil war. In those days we did not know who the enemy was or where the next attack would come from. The attack could come from within, from without, from the right, from the left. Today it came from all sides. Confusion mixed with anger and I could stand it no longer.

"I'm gonna eat with my hands," I firmly stated and picked up the fries with my thumb and forefinger, stuffing them into my mouth, feeling them crush beneath my braces.

"What are ya gonna do about it?" I taunted. I made the mistake of looking her way and the sharp darts her eyes threw in return made me blink. But I was past thinking.

"I'm sick and tired of you telling me what to do. Don't you ever get bored? Don't you have anything better to do?"

"Quiet!," she whispered, "the neighbors will hear." I wanted to say that I wished she cared about me half as much as she cared about the neighbors, but something inside stopped me.

"I don't care about the neighbors; I don't care about the world. I wish I were dead!" My last words were a scream.

"You're just like your grandmother; you'll end up crazy like her."

"Ooh!" Suddenly I didn't know what to say. All I knew was that at that moment I hated my mother. I looked at her eyes and I knew that she meant what she said. I pushed the chair away from the table, kicked it and ran into my room.

That was when it started.

I slammed the door, hearing it echo, walked slowly to my bed and sat cross-legged facing the balcony. My room could be considered small by most standards, but it was practical I suppose. On one corner lay my twin-sized bed; on the other, my desk and bookshelves. The wallpaper was a print that had been chosen by my mother. Nothing in there reflected me except the mess. I reveled in it as much as my mother hated it. Did I love it because she hated it? I don't know. I looked out at the sea but my gaze was interrupted by the intermittent light of the lighthouse that hit the left wall. When we'd first moved it used to bother me; its deliberate frequency reminding me of the daily quarrels I had with my mother. Then I got used to it. It got to a point that I could not sleep if I did not sense, or see, the constant light. Suddenly I felt something I had never felt before. My fingers began to shake; every finger was doing the twist on its

own. I started to panic, the fear making my stomach roll like clothes in a washing machine. Oh no! Mother was right! I was like my grandmother. I would end up becoming a staggering, shaking, Parkinson-affected old blond woman that all people would stare at with pity. I would spend holidays dining alone in my favorite Turkish restaurant overlooking the Corniche.

In the coming months, I noticed that my fingers shook only when I got angry or anxious. Whenever my brothers made comments like "Your face is like an ingarli plate, big and round," I would run into my room and hide, their laughter jarring my already shaking body. It didn't know what an ingarli plate was, but I imagined it to be a huge, round, ugly thing that took up a lot of space. But was I ugly? I often looked at myself in the mirror. It was true. I did look like my grandmother. I had her green eyes, her blond hair, her dimples. My father had often said that I was beautiful, so why did my mother hate me? It was as if I had not come from her womb, as if I were a stain on the freshly polished wood of her dining room table.

Every night I was comforted by the soundless cries of the guiding light of the concrete striped lighthouse that reminded me of how little things bothered the essence of routine in my life. The regularity of the light hitting the wall and the glass window was an enticing ice cream cone, soft and sweet. The tall strong, immovable lighthouse had been towering over the tip of Ras Beirut for as long as I could remember, a second moon in the dark stormy nights of my life.

"Your grandmother, Rana, was considered one of the most beautiful women in Beirut," my father would say. I prayed to God that he was right and I would at least retain my beauty, if not my mind. I remember how beautiful my grandmother was, even the day she died. I remember walking up to the hospital bed dressed in my favorite blue shorts and red sneakers. Until then I had never seen a dead person. My eyes started to itch and I wanted to run out of the room as fast as my sneakered feet would take me. "She's not shaking anymore," I thought. I looked at her again; she was at peace, asleep. I felt a hand on my shoulder, nudging me to move. It was my aunt, her daughter. She laid silver coins on my grandmother's eyes. "To keep them from opening," she explained. Then she picked up a scarf and tied my grandmother's head from chin to forehead. When I looked at her in puzzled surprise, she said, "It's to keep her jaw from falling." I suddenly recalled the time my brothers, cousins, and I had had the mumps and they had tied our heads. We had all looked like rabbits; we would point to each other and laugh. My fingers started to shake.

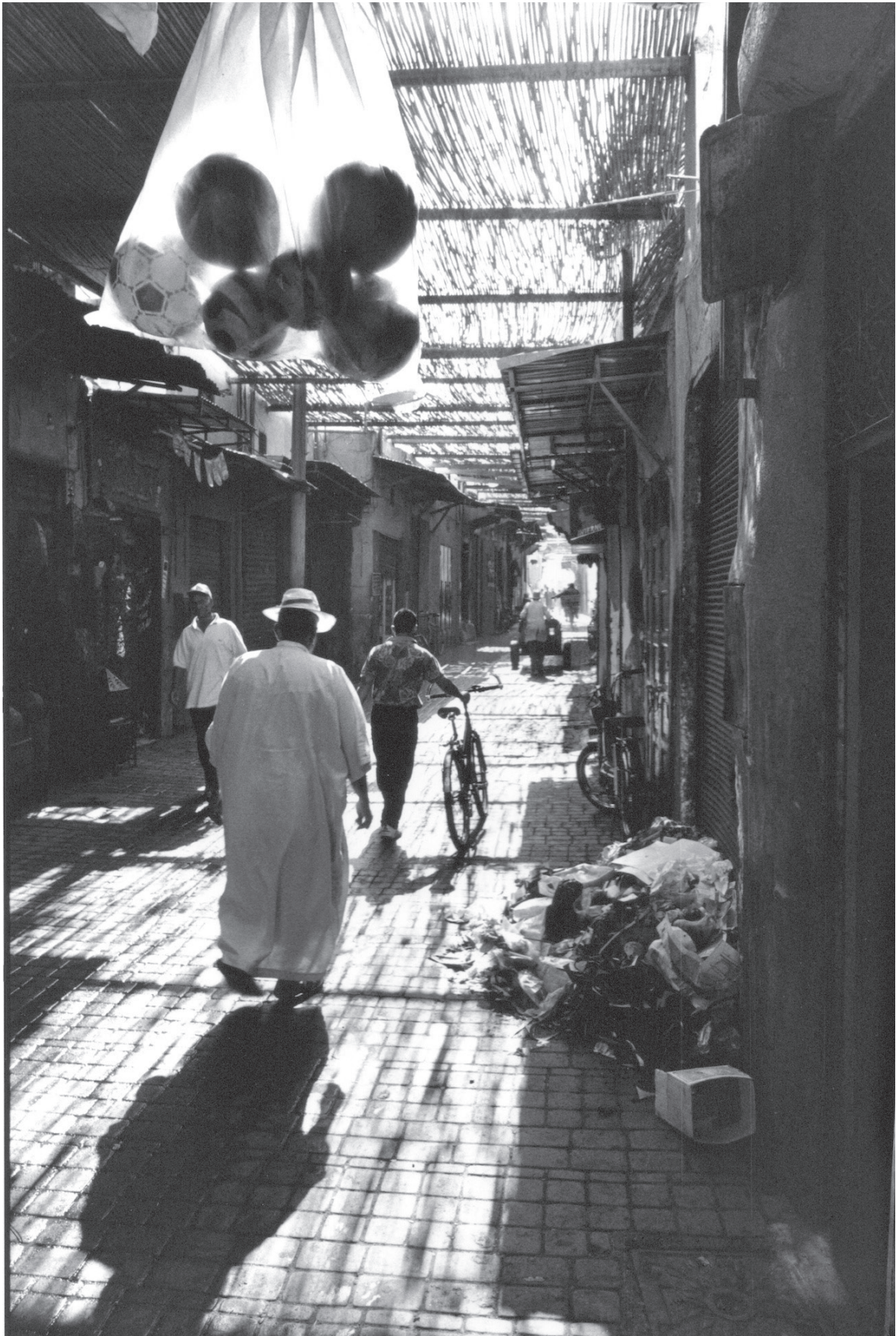
I stood at the entrance of my grandmother's house. The droning sound of the sheikh's voice ran swiftly along the corridor, carving deep cuts into my half-healed wounds. I peeked into the room, my heart beating like a steady rain of shells on a violent night. The mourners were listening, heads bowed, each reliving past pains, some swaying inwardly to the rhythm, others pouring rivers of tears to be mopped up or daintily absorbed by white tissues. I walked in quickly, an awkward seal in high heels and took the first seat next to the door. My fingers started shaking and I sat on them. My eyes looked around the room, taking in the sights, inhaling the smells of the food cooking for lunch. Those close to the family would be asked to stay and eat the food in honor of the departed spirit.

As I fingered my prayer beads, mouthing a silent prayer, I heard a shuffling sound coming from the elevator. An old woman stood in the doorway, her eyes scanning the living room. She nodded her head when she spotted my aunts and father. She shuffled across the marble floor, her feet following behind her bent body. She did not have to bend down to kiss them and offer her condolences. I had never seen her before. Was she a relative? A friend? She turned her head to look up at the ceiling, her white veil shaking, her voice barely a whisper as she shouted, "May you all be blessed with the rest of her life. She was a saint, a saint!" Her roaring caused fifty pairs of eyes to stare at her over cups of sugarless coffee. As if she had said all she was capable of, the old woman fell into the nearest chair, readjusting her veil and looking around. Her eyes stopped at mine.

"*Ya binti, ya habibty*, my daughter, my love. You must be her granddaughter Rana; why you are a photocopy!" she

exclaimed. "Come and give me a kiss." I wobbled toward her thinking, "Who are you?" And as if she heard my silent question, she said, "you don't know me, but your grandmother was a good friend of mine. Sit down," she coaxed, "Your grandmother was a fine woman; may God forgive her and grant her a home in Heaven. Why there was never a better woman. We were classmates, and when my husband died, she helped me." She bent to retrieve a crumpled handkerchief from the sleeve of her dress and proceeded to wipe her nose. "She's been helping me all these years. Why even with her sickness she would come and visit me every month and give me an envelope. Nothing I could ever do would repay what she has done for me. She was a fine woman and I'm sure you're going to be just like her." My fingers shook and the old woman noticed, but she just smiled and, with elderly hands, held mine.





Marrakesh, Morocco
by HARRY WILSON

Dar'sana Pd Mallamo

Discriminate between what gives you peace and what disturbs you. Whatever is better, follow that.

- Papaji, Sri H.W.L Poonja -

1

Geneva

Fabian rode the bus from his home in Pottsville PA to Providence RI, three hundred and twenty two miles. The bus stopped forty-six times; the trip took thirty-seven hours. He drank a full gallon of black coffee he'd brewed the day before and poured into a pump-jug hidden in his backpack. He made fourteen trips to the abominable toilet at the back of the bus. Except for a three-hour nap, he spent his time working through the first two books of James Elroy's underworld trilogy while looping Neon Indian's "Polish Girl" over and over until it became trance music, an enhancement to Ellroy like sex in a hearse. His Pentecostal father, disappointed and distrustful that he had chosen Brown over Calvin or Hope, drove him to the bus station and advised him to be careful with the coloreds, even at Brown, sure there's some good ones and a few who genuinely love the Lord. Maybe when you're finished with college you'll reconsider the Army. These days the Army is loaded with Christians, you'd be right at home, they're doing the Lord's work in the godless Middle East. Don't be out late; half the wicked things in this world happen at two a.m. Beware the evil eye. Discern the antichrist. The woman in the seat next, a window seat, was black, beautiful and from Baltimore by way of Botswana, or so she said, and sporadically, when she wasn't staring soundlessly and in perfect stillness out that window, began brief soliloquies with the phrase "I remember ...". These inevitably became confessions, as if he were a priest or, better yet, a priest she would never see again. At one point she told him she had willingly lost her virginity to a nineteen-year old cousin when she was twelve, allowing that twelve was at the outer limits of consent but that's how she chose to remember it. This was a week after the heat riots in Houston. At another, that she'd had a boyfriend every single day of her hilariously dysfunctional and now-defunct marriage because one man was never enough, 'specially if he got no money; at still another, that she used meth and even though meth is considered a white man's drug she likes it very much but knows it will kill her. Confronting the baleful twilight of a soon-to-be heat-dead universe without the comforting illusion of a loving god she has nonetheless switched to prednisone which is even whiter and perfectly respectable and makes her feel like an angel but will eventually leach her bone like meth and destroy her liver and kidneys, though maybe not as fast. I won't lose my teeth, she said, and I won't look like I got hit by a truck. I'm not exactly a candidate for Celebrity Rehab. Her name was Geneva and she didn't know who had named her or who her parents were, she'd bounced among foster homes until she was eighteen and then she bounced to the street where she'd taken her lumps, believe me! She was straight out of Ellroy, and little fissures raced through his heart each time she revealed a side of life so bad it was scarcely believable, color of pain, stench of fear, relentless anger, death everywhere. When she spoke she always touched his arm. He switched off Neon Indian, shut the book and twisted in his seat to regard her full on, this stranger he was not supposed to meet. He focused on the center of her eyes when she spoke, peering deep inside to see fire and destruction, evil and light, where erotic capital had soon enough become survival sex and only god knew what else. In her presence he felt his leaving home in the muscles of his bottom and thighs, interludes of fear, giddy joy, anticipation, premonition, dread, dark confusion - then, finally, deliverance and Amen, the entire limbic cycle compressed into hours instead of months, amplified by caffeine and bus motion, by the strange being sitting next to him, by the memory of the abrupt bewildering almost ex-nihilo call from Providence. Smelled briefly from somewhere in

the back an aroma like pot-roast his mother made on Sundays; later, a voice, also from the rear, that sounded like his father, but half-drunk, unlike his father who was drunk only on the Lord. He comprehended that his brothers and sisters, all younger, were now permanently deprived of a secular advocate and would have to fend for themselves, resist the programming or dive right in, he's gone to make his small way in the big world, fantastically lucky because first he'd been turned down cold by Brown as expected, a single-page form letter signed by the copy machine and mailed to nobodies; then, inexplicably, another letter admitting him provisionally but only if there were room and the gods did not continue to ignore him; turned down cold again two weeks later with another single-page form letter sent first to the wrong address; then informed by phone forty-eight hours prior that a place had unexpectedly opened, come immediately if you can tear yourself away from Pottsville, there is a scholarship because even though your high school grades suck your SAT is stellar and you maxed the math. Someone high at Brown had reached down down down and pulled him up up up as if his or her hand were the very hand of God, pulled him in one clean lift above religion, Republicans, patriotism, coal mines, KwikStops, little gray houses, four-hundred pound women, listing Pontiacs, television, girls who couldn't read, bullies and dolts and drunken veteran's parades. On cream-colored tile by a urinal flush-handle in a Wilkes-Barre men's room at a Gas 'n Go where the bus had stopped to offload three passengers a urinator had scrawled "This may be your day." The final stop was still three miles from the campus. Geneva took his face in both hands and said with breath that smelled like Trident, I ain't no white man's dog, then wished him luck and blessed him, a soft wet kiss on his lips. She said Fabian was a lucky name unless you happened to be a Pope. Never forget me, she said, I will live in your mind even when I'm dead, that's god for you. Exhausted but too embarrassed to call Brown for a pick-up from the bus station he lugged two suitcases and a duffle bag nearly the entire way until a family from Massachusetts with a van and another Brown freshman gave him a lift.

2

Cooper

Fabian met his advisor Monday afternoon at two p.m. in Archibald Hall. He knocked a door upon which the words A Cooper were printed modestly in gold leaf and when he heard a noise inside walked through. He closed the door carefully and turned around to see a very old man leaned way back in a swivel chair looking him up and down through half-lidded eyes.

Judas Priest, the old man said after a long moment. When did you drag in?

Last night, sir.

You the Pottsville boy?

Yessir

Bus?

Yessir

God almighty. He shook his head. Fabian is it? - nice name unless you're the Pope.

So I've heard, sir.

Pottsville P-A. Wooo-E! You musta blowed the ROOF off that test! A Cooper dropped his chair forward and rummaged through papers on his desk until he found a green file.

As I thought, he said. Maxed the math. Well well well. Play ball?

Center field.

And?

.263.

Cooper plopped the file on the desk, turned around, leaned again back in his seat. You want the good news or the bad news?

I'll take them both, sir.

Which one first?

The good news I guess.

By the way, I AM the Brown Department of Journalism.

Yes sir

Brown doesn't have a Department of Journalism.

OK

Make sense?

Not quite, sir.

In reality I am the Brown University reality consultant - the Consultant on Reality, as it were. Journalists deal in reality. You follow?

Yes sir.

People come to me to make sure it makes sense.

What makes sense, sir?

Whatever. Two point five billion dollar endowment people tend to pull all sorts of things out their ass. It's a self-reinforcing system with no actual referent to the real world. This is why they need a reality consultant. Follow?

Kind of, sir.

To Brown's credit, they understand this - unlike Harvard with an endowment ten times bigger.

Yes sir -

So the problem's ten times worse.

Yes sir.

The claptrap that comes out of that place...

Very interesting, sir.

You a Pollack, son?

Yes I am.

Rhetorical question.

Oh, I -

Your name's Jarosinsky for god's sake

Of course, sir.

The most beautiful women in this world are Pollack.

Yes sir

Did you know that?

No sir

Chiseled features. Statuesque. I saw Zsa Zsa Gabor once with her clothes off. Of course she's Hungarian, but what the hell -

Yes sir

I'll tell you about it sometime.

I'll look forward to that.

You don't know Zsa Zsa Gabor from Lyndon Baines Johnson.

I'm sorry, sir.

Is your mother beautiful?

A bit overweight, I'm afraid -

Of course she is. She's a Pollack.

Actually, she's Hungarian.

The old man slapped his knees and hooted at the ceiling. Well played, young man! Well played!

Thank you, sir.

Anyway, here's the good news: You've done the hard part.

Which part was that?

They jump you through hoops?

They sure did!

A goddamn dog circus?

A dog circus it was, sir!

Sixteen letters, twelve phone calls and they still can't make up their goddamn mind.

Exactly, sir

And if your daddy had two hundred fifty million dollars like Mitt Romney?

No dog circus?

One goddamn letter, one goddamn phone call, they meet you en masse at the airport - but you're just a Pollack from Pottsville -

True, sir

Smarter than Mitt Romney's sons put all together -

Thank you, sir

Want the bad news?

I'll take it, sir.

No underwater basket weaving for you, I'm afraid.

Sir - ?

He pulls a volume from a bookshelf above his desk, ostentatiously closes his eyes and flips pages. He chooses a passage at random, then opens his eyes and reads aloud: But this emphasis would be lavished in vain, if it served, in your opinion, only to abstract a general type from phenomena whose particularity in our work would remain the essential thing for you, and whose original arrangement could be broken up only artificially.

He tosses the book back on the shelf. Is this comprehensible?

Not to me, sir.

We're off to a good start.

Thank you, sir.

He holds up his hands: I'm not saying no wine, women, song -

No sir -

Without wine and women not to mention song old Brown is just not Brown. You may as well be back in Pottsville -
Understood, sir.

I'm just saying a Pollack from Pottsville has got to make this goddamn place PAY! What's the major?

Don't have one yet.

We'll work on that.

OK

Will you listen to me?

Yes sir.

Will you trust me?

Fabian hesitated and the old man laughed again.

Son, he said, here's the bad news. Here's the reality from the Brown University Consultant on Reality: You have to come out of here knowing something very few people know. And - he jabbed his finger for emphasis - people have got to pay GOOD money for this something. You follow?

Trying, sir.

Otherwise go back to Pottsville.

Yes sir

That junior college on the hill -

Oh Lord -

One shot.

Yes sir

Hard work!

Absolutely!

Now, you don't want to be a goddamn dentist or something - ?

No sir

Lawyer, MBA - ?

Heaven forbid, sir.

This is the golden door, boy. For you it opens ONE time.

Sir, I swear on a stack of bibles I will study my Pollack ass off!

A Cooper slammed both hands on the desk. That's the goddamn spirit!

Thank you sir!

You've made me a happy man, son!

I'm very glad, sir!

Your people religious?

Highly, sir.

Strychnine? Rattlesnakes?

Not quite, sir.

Rapture?

Any day.

We can set that little fable aside for now can't we - ?

Yes sir

We can establish veracity in the present tense here at old Brown - ?

Of course!

Allow Saint Philomena be who she actually was, etcetera - ?

I'm not sure I -

Define "apotropaic"

Fabian thinks a moment. I think you've got me there, sir.

Who was E. Howard Hunt?

I know I've heard that na -

What's tardive dyskinesia?

... I

He pointed to photographs on the wall opposite. Do you recognize these people?

That's Earnest Hemingway. Speaking with Fidel Castro.

Who's this? He pointed a shaky finger to a sitting man with dirty boots and an open shirt, laughing like he didn't have a care in the world.

Don't know, sir

A Cooper pulled another book off the shelf, Che by Jon Lee Anderson. I knew all three, he said, handing him the book. Fidel was sane, the others were artists. Sense the dichotomy? So of course Fidel's still alive, Hem and Che long gone. Goddamn it, I'll be dead soon, too. Wife passed five years and I miss her every day. Get as much from me as you can, I won't last forever. First assignment: read the goddamn book. He reached out, tapped the cover. Second edition.

If I may ask, sir, why him?

Because you're from Pottsville. Got a dictionary?

I'll get one, sir.

A Cooper pulled forty dollars out of his wallet. Brown Bookstore, he said. Get a good one. Make sure you get the Cooper discount.

His joy was whole and perfect when Fabian chose Arabic. He said Beirut women were the most beautiful women on earth. They met for lunch every week for three years. Look deeper, he said, always deeper. The summer before senior term Fabian went to Damascus with a professor of Mideast languages for a conference on Islamic verse during the sway of Suleyman the Magnificent. Cooper died on an August morning sitting at that same desk in Archibald beneath the photographs of Fidel, Hem and Che Guevara. He left Fabian his cat and two boxes of books with explicit reading instructions penned in precarious handwriting. He also left him thirty-five thousand dollars. Fabian considered giving half to his family but knew most of it would go to the church. He bought a red almost-new Ducati, clothes, shoes and boots, a MacBook Air and the best electric shaver money could buy. When he graduated in May he joined the army as an Arabic linguist. He called his father, who shouted for joy. He sent his mother A Cooper's cat. He stood mournfully at A Cooper's grave wishing mightily he'd heard the story of naked Zsa Zsa Gabor. Then, after three month of basic training, he blasted his red Ducati across the continent to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California for a year of Pashto.

And, suddenly, Afghanistan.

3

Aamir

عامر

One hot two a.m. at the end of summer he is inserted with a Ranger squad four miles outside an eight-hut hamlet midway between Qila Abdulla and the Afghan border. They tramp silently to a rocky overlook and wait for drones - and, if the night is a bad night, the Taliban or, worse, Pakistani commandos. A tap on the head means flip down your IR goggles and all-at-once he sees a Ranger's arm extended skyward where three simultaneous exhaust trails from high orbit lance into the hamlet from different angles

We didn't come here. You came to New York.

New York, he spits, that sewer. We did you a favor. Now look what you have done. Will you destroy the world for a filthy place?

We are anxious to learn the whereabouts of any captured American or Allied service member.

Of course you are.

If you will provide names and locations we -

If you will provide my feet.

Your feet are gone.

So are those men. This law is plainly written. You speak well the language of The Word yet you are ignorant of it. Where is your excuse?

*

I suppose it is time to move on with my life, he said. Isn't that the Anglo-Saxon way?

Fabian has brought him another pack of Marlboros. Aamir holds his cigarette up to Fabian's face.

At least with these I can talk, which is a relief for me also. It is up to you to judge the value of what I say.

Everything you say is valuable, Aamir. I am sorry about your feet. Actually, you should be dead.

Are the rest dead?

Yes.

All?

No.

Who is alive?

A child.

By God! He will grow to fight you!

She is already in California.

Aamir falls back into his bed-chair and flicks the cigarette away.

*

About the waterboarding, he said - let's get it over with. Maybe I will remember something to tell you.

Shall we do it here, on this bed?

If not, you will have to carry me. Plus the bed moves up and down. Very convenient.

If you cooperate we will send you back to Thadiq.

Is this before or after you make the devil-feet?

Whichever you prefer.

I don't want your devil feet. I would rather crawl. I was crawling when you caught me. That is good enough.

You don't want to go home?

Of course not.

You want to stay here?

Oh no!

Where, then?

California! In Los Angeles you will find blond women with blue eyes and massive breasts. Bring one to me. Then maybe I will tell you everything!

*

I had a teacher, a wise man. He told me to work as hard as I could, then let it go, like a balloon to the sky. If it is the will of god, the rains will come and my orchard will grow.

An American said this?

Yes.

Well, by god, that is good advice!

Here's the rest of it: He did not believe in god.

Aamir took a long drag on his cigarette and looked above himself. He sighed and took another long drag.

This is my world, said Fabian.

So it is. But I, too, have been to many places - Europe, Africa, once to Brazil and Venezuela - yes, the life of sweet fruits. A friend graduated from the University of Wyoming School of Social Work and lived with the hills-billies in Hardeman County, Tennessee. Yes, I have seen many things and heard of more but the Word of God is always within me. When I read a newspaper or book, or watch something on the television, or meet someone new, The Word is there. It is my focus and reality. How can you live? How can you think? How can you create these vast machines without consulting the true Creator first? If there is no center it will all crumble to nothing, yes, even your machines.

*

I am finished with the feet. All flesh is consumed. My feet just got there first. Insha'Allah

He is watching another episode of Walker, Texas Ranger. Fabian pulls up a chair and tosses him a pack of Marlboros. Shall I now roll over and bark? He taps one out and Fabian lights it. He motions to the screen where the Texas Ranger endures a savage beating.

Walker is hurting for certain-ing, he says. Those cruel Anglo-Saxons! I see them on South Park.

Hurtin' for certain. That's how it's said.

Hurt-ing for certain-ing?

Drop the first "g" - Hurtin' for certain.

By God, even your language is corrupt. Who can understand this? Where is this written? There are no rules!

It is the people's rule. It is the people's language.

What people?

The people who watch Walker, Texas Ranger.

What kind of people are these?

Simple people.

Less simple people do not watch Walker, Texas Ranger?

As a general rule, no.

Do they say "hurting for certain-ing?"

They do not.

And why is that?

Their language is less precise - a language of deception.

And the show?

The plots are predictable and the outcomes sure.

Less simple people cannot agree with this? Do they not find this comforting?

Is life like that, Aamir? Here you are eight weeks later with no feet in an American hospital talking to a man in the intelligence service you think wants to waterboard you.

If you waterboard me I will be hurting for certain-ing, just like your countryman, the patriot Chuck Norris.

Fabian motions to the television. Maybe they should waterboard Chuck Norris.

Aamir slaps his knees and throws back his head. If God should allow this, he wheezes through gusts of mirth, I should like immediately to die! For how can life get any better? Only if they showed this on Cops.

*

One cannot live without God. Did your father not teach you this?

He tried.

You did not listen?

I did not agree.

Then it was the false god

That is certainly possible.

Not all gods are the false god. This is the error in your thinking.

This, too, is a possibility.

For obedience the True God gives us many wives. Therein lies great joy.

In my country it's called something else.

Does your father wish for many wives?

Fabian laughed. After my mother, I doubt it.

There are many lovely flowers. No two are the same. But in America there is only one wife. In frustration the husband watches filth on the computer or divorces his wife and makes lawyers rich. This is not the way of God. How then do you think you provide answers for the people of this world? Pimps and the ho's on television. Drugs in your children and old women. People so fat their faces look like the pig face, millions of them. This is madness. You have got everything backward, everything wrong. You have nothing to teach anybody.

*

At least let me have a good-looking Ukrainian nurse like that shitbag Gaddafi.

Wish I could.

Then tell me a story from your American life, a story of justice. But tell me in my own language so I understand better.

Fabian thinks for a moment. Texas Ranger justice?

Of course, the real thing!

I will tell you a story about my great-grandmother.

A woman?

Yes, the best story of all – but I must tell it in English, the language of justice.

I will hear it. Wait, wait! He fishes around for cigarettes. Let me light another Marlboro. Marlboros are the cigarettes of justice.

My great-grandmother had six children – five boys and one daughter. That daughter was my grandmother, my mother's mother.

OK. What happened?

The five sons all grew up and became coal miners. My grandmother was the only girl and she was the baby.

OK. What happened?

Her name was Hattie. When she was fifteen she ran away and got married.

Fifteen was too young?

Her mother thought so. And, she didn't like the young man.

What did he do, the young man?

He was a farmer's son. He worked on the farm. That is also where they lived. He was a drunk. When Hattie's mother saw her, she always had bruises and black eyes.

This man he would beat her?

Yes

Why?

He did not need a reason.

He was a piece of shit?

Obviously

What year was this?

1936

OK. What happened?

One day Hattie's mother heard that her daughter was hurt. She took a bus to a little town thirty miles away called Moline, near the husband's farm.

OK. What happened?

Hattie's face was swollen and she had three broken fingers. He hit her with a pipe.

This piece of filth!

Great-grandmother found a doctor, then went to see the man's father. He wouldn't do anything.

Because he, too, was a drunk?

You learn quick.

OK. What happened?

Hattie refused to leave because she was pregnant – with my mother, actually. Six weeks later great-grandmother went back to Moline. Alone, at night.

Alone?

Yes.

How did she go there, this woman, thirty miles at night alone?

She borrowed her brother's car, a Studebaker. Today my mother has it. I played in it when I was young.

Nobody saw her?

Apparently not.

OK. What happened?

Right down the road from the farmer's house was a hay barn. You know what I mean?

Yes, food for the horse.

Well, she set it on fire.

By God!

Everybody ran out to see this fire, including my Hattie. When they did, her mother circled back to the farmhouse.

The farmers did not go because they were drunk. This I can tell. OK. What happened?

Great-grandmother had a little revolver.

What kind was it?

Smith & Wesson Hammerless .32. Nicknamed the "Lemon Squeezer" because it looks like a kitchen appliance. My mother has it now, too. It is a family heirloom. Do you know this word?

No

Something passed down generation by generation.

Yes yes, we have knives. In America you have guns?

And cars.

So she took that hair-moon in there? Ok. What happened?

She shot them both.

By God! The Woman did this?

Yes

They were killed?

Indeed

OK. What happened?

She went back home. Dark of night.

And did they find her? Did they catch her?

No. And since Hattie was at the fire and other people saw her there, the police couldn't blame her.

Did people hear the shots?

Certainly.

Why did they not come running?

People shoot skunks all the time, even today. Do you know the word "skunk"?

A stinking animal?

That's right.

Thereby this mother saved her daughter?

She did.

And how did you come to this knowledge? It is in your family of course.

Secret knowledge passed down.

Your mother told you.

That's right.

Do the American police know?

They do not.

To this very day?

Correct

Have you told anyone else?

You are the first.

By God, you do me great honor!

Why shouldn't I?

Because we are adversaries. But you are very interesting. And your great-relative was perhaps an Arab.

*

Your life in America – it is what I heard?

What did you hear?

Baseball and the apple pie?

Not exactly.

No pie or no baseball?

My father worked for a poultry processor. My mother worked at a dry cleaner. The big event was paying off the house.

They're still in it, that house.

What do they do in there?

Watch television. Take pills.

But you left that place - ?

One day I applied to Brown University. It was a class assignment, apply to a college, here's a list. I chose one at random. Someone at Brown actually decided to let me in. It took a while but they did it. If not for that person I'd still be in Pennsylvania pulling chicken guts at the processor. I'd never have learned Arabic. We wouldn't have met.

God helped you. He answered your prayers. Now you have fresh life in a new world!

I don't pray.

We all pray. Even if we don't pray. Here is the proof: You got into Brown University and learned my language.

How many have you killed, Aamir?

By God I have killed no one - or I too would be dead.

How is that?

I will not send a soul to heaven unless I can guide him to the gates of paradise. I promise you.

Why haven't you done this, then?

Don't you know? I am just like you my almost-friend! I speak the language of the enemy. We are both too valuable to die!

*

Fabian's commander, a black bird colonel named Cornelius Monk who graduated West Point and has general written all over him, makes an unannounced visit to the intel shack. He does not seem to notice a poster on the wall hung by a long-gone linguist featuring Richard Nixon shaking hands with an obviously-high Elvis Presley in the White House above the caption "Two Great Americans." You've had that piece of shit three weeks, he says. You got him because you two go way back (he makes quote marks with his fingers) but so far it's been all relationship (he makes quote marks with his fingers). Your terms, right? Knock yourself out. Well here's our status: Current? Zip. Corroborating? Zip. Directionals? Zip. Timeline? Zip. You're all I've got Jarosinski, since Rumsfeld kicked out the queers - but real soon soldier, and I mean real soon, I render Abdul here off to Egypt. They hand out Marlboros, too. Then they shove them up his ass. When did you get to be so stupid? This happen on my watch? I'll tell you this - Monk points a finger at him - he sings in Egypt we got a problem you and me. I'll haul your ass up for dereliction. Or worse.

He sings in Egypt, says Fabian, you'll see Christ Jesus fly over the desert at sunrise. Then we'll really have a problem.

*

He tosses a pack of Marlboros on the bed. Enjoy them, he says. They may be your last.

Aamir slowly unwraps the pack and taps one out. When Fabian leans over with the lighter Aamir catches his eyes and holds them until he inhales first smoke.

I have a confession, he says. For you and for God. I will whisper.

Fabian leans again.

I am afraid. And therefore I am ashamed.

He smokes for a moment. Soon they will give you shit. They will say, Make him talk or we will send him away. He will be tortured and thrown alive from the helicopter over the Red Sea. This is reality.

Take the deal.

Either way I'm a dead man, even in Thadiq, one side or the other. Of course you know this. The only question is how do I die - like a man beloved of God and the Prophet, or like a dog - your dog. I will tell you. I will die like a man. They will

burn me and cut me, then bind me with steel and drop me from great height into the sea. Insha'Allah
He pulls thoughtfully on the Marlboro and again seeks Fabian's eyes but Fabian's eyes are far away. Fabian leans in close and whispers, I knew a man who would do exactly the same.
As do I. Walker, Texas Ranger!

*

Suns in their multitudes seethe and cry upon the boundless plane of the night. Within this very firmament Aamir With No Feet has lately tumbled, somersaulting in clear air through flocks of gulls and Boeing drones and fiery Mohammadan angels shouting praise and courage. Though he unquestionably soiled himself and was abused for that, too, he found his voice and screamed the name of God over and over until the instant he struck the sea.

*

Onward and downward, says the colonel. How do you say "grunt" in Pashto? I hope you kissed him goodbye. We all need pleasant dreams. You will too, Jarosinski. Boots on the ground, troop! Welcome to the real Army. You know what I said to the last interrogator? - So be a bum and a dope addict for a while. Don't sweat the small stuff. Just remember who butters your toast.

4

Fabian Jarosinski

He spends six months in El-Aaiún advising rich old men with coffee eyes and breath of cloves on the thrifty procurement of mail-order brides from Kazakhstan, sometimes three and four at a time, who are happily quarantined for the first three months against the possibility of herpes and HIV. The old men, paprika magnates, not only pay him well but treat him like a son, which is to say they love him. Don't feel guilty, the girls whisper; you are not actually "procuring" because anything is better than Kazakhstan. These old men are harmless, they have let foxes into their henhouse, we will steal their desert jewels and flee to Madrid, come with us! Then another six months in Beirut where he begins a master's program in Arab literature & language at American University. There he sees a countryman with green circles tattooed around his eyes, chain-smoking and talking to himself. On his backpack is a message scrawled on the bars of a childish representation of Old Glory rendered upon a dirty scrap of cardboard: SAY "HI" TO COMMANDER NAGASAKI SPREADING ACTIONS OF PEACE ACROSS THE WHOLE WORLD NOW JOIN HANDS!!!! In Cairo he meets a psychiatrist come from Boston for a conference on addictions who said he almost went crazy working with the obese - diabetes, sleep apnea, hypertension. Crackheads meth-freaks my freakin' ass, they die because they won't stop eating, it's just that simple, I have four degrees from three good schools, I should know. Next week I'm doing a presentation at Johns Hopkins: "Pizza, A New American Religion." Fabian estimates the psychiatrist weighs three-hundred pounds. A full year in North Africa learning Arabic dialects Hassanyya, Touareg, Juba, Nubi, Dhofari, Najdi. Outside a Riyadh mosque one day a woman with her white-blond hair covered along with part of her face so one saw only dark eyes surreptitiously took his hand and slipped him a note. She was a Polish journalist on her way to Western Sahara for a Der Spiegel piece on Mariem Hassan, so back he goes to El-Aaiún where they present themselves as a married couple and sleep together. At some level this is incest, she says, but at least it stays in the family. When something good happens is the universe functioning or malfunctioning, I can't tell - but the gall of deity throwing us upon this senseless earth crawling with charlatans in His name then damning us when we can't figure it out, that's why we're all atheists in Europe. Are you atheist? Will I ever see you again? When she returned to Poland he hired on with a food entrepreneur from Baltimore blessed with ardent Alewite relatives who convinced him that Damascus was ripe for a string a Taco Bells, then threw in all their money. After only one presentation to a preposterous Syrian version of an American chamber of commerce he is beaten half to death by

outraged Islamists who also threatened to bomb any and all Taco Bells he might be so unwise to construct. Fabian later learned that both the man's Alewife and American relations, who had likewise invested and lost everything, beat him yet again - an unforeseen risk of fast food capitalism in the Arab world. Another month with the Polish journalist who came to Jordan for a Paris Match story on Iraqi refugees, who, in some places, now outnumbered Jordanians. She revealed her intention to draw parallels with persecuted Mormons in nineteenth century America who also migrated and engendered resentment and bigotry when they outnumbered Missourians in parts of Missouri.

Do you think your readers will understand this, he asked, a Mormon-Iraqi parallel? It wouldn't even fly in my country.

Sure, she said, the older generation reads books, they don't give a shit what Lindsay Lohan is up to, they've been interested in Mormons for at least a hundred years, do you know any?

I'm Pentecostal, he said, somewhat lapsed.

I'm Roman Catholic, she said, the same. What do you get when you put those together?

A Mormon? he laughed.

She's The Sherriff starring Suzanne Somers is on the hotel television, dubbed into both Hassanyya and Berber. My god, she says, your country is taking over the entire world one television set at a time. Meanwhile the reefs are dying because everybody in America has a constitutional right to air conditioning. You are burning coal to generate electricity to run machines that cool your houses, so the earth gets even hotter and the oceans acidify, does that make sense? Soon you reach a point of no return and then what will you do, jump in the ocean to stay cool? It will eat your skin and you will die like the reefs and fishes, which is what you deserve stupid capitalist pigs. He lunges and catches her ankle and she laughs so hard she pees herself, then blushes upwards over alabaster shoulders and long alabaster neck, which lovely rose, he observes, compliments those black eyes. Watch out, she says, or I will call the mutaween and tell them you want to build Taco Bells in El-Aaiún. Next morning in the bazaar they find Sudanese selling Taco Bell out of a freezer in the back of a spice store. The Polish woman shakes her head as if to say If you can't beat them... and kisses his ear. Will I ever see you again? she asks.

One day, in the middle of the Sahara, Monk calls literally from out the blue to ask if he has overcome his crippling obsession with Stone Age religions because if so there is a place for him at NSA where Monk is a section chief. I made general, he says, and the next year they packed my token black ass off to the Pentagon. NSA made an offer I couldn't refuse. I'm doing the same for you, Jarosinski, don't ask how I got your phone number.

Thanks, says Fabian, but how sick and desperate would I have to be to even consider something like this?

Sick and desperate, well that's interesting. Aamir took that dive for your sins if that's what you're getting at - and yes, by god, even California if he'd given us something to work with, but all he served up was horseshit and you ate every bit. Here's a chance at redemption, think about it, that's all I'm asking.

What about your redemption, Monk, how's that going?

Hard to believe, kid, but I'm working on it, I really am.

Two days later still in the desert another call, this one from Red Cross in Tunisia telling him his parents had died in a car-truck accident the evening before in West Virginia where they'd gone to see his mother's sister, Aunt TerriLois, who weighed nearly a quarter-ton and was in the final stages of congestive heart failure and had actually heard the accident report on her police scanner while working through a colossal bowl of Hostess Zingers. A semi driver hauling feminine products for WalMart had fallen asleep at 9 PM and crossed the divider. TerriLois herself died next evening reaching for her cigarettes, toppling from bed with a thunderous crash and puncturing a lung with a rib shattered by an oxygen bottle on the floor. After he'd settled his two youngest sisters with an uncle in Pottsville for the rest of middle school he rode the bus to DC and lunched with Monk in a jam-packed NSA cafeteria. Then he flew to Warsaw.

The Polish girl was more beautiful than he expected or hoped or, he knew absolutely, would ever in ten lifetimes deserve. She met him at the gate with her family, almost fifty people. Half of them are Catholic, she says, the other half still Communist, I don't know which side's worse. Only god knows.

I thought you were atheist.

No one's an atheist, not even the Communists. They just think they are.

And you?

Some things you have to take on faith, Fabian. Even me. Especially me.





I Like Him I Like Her by SHUROOQ AMIN

From It's A Man's World series. 120 x 240 cm. Acrylic painting, photography, collage and mirror on canvas and wood. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.



An Arabian Tragedy by SHUROOQ AMIN

From the 2013 series Popcornographic. (Title based on Theodore Dreiser's book An American Tragedy, banned in some American cities in 1927 and burned by Nazis in Germany in 1933) - Acrylic painting and photography on canvas mounted on wood, framed. 180 x 130 cm. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

Edge of Your Paper

If my symptoms are just in my head, then why can't you look me in the eye? Why do you gaze past me, like so many do, seeing projections of smoke & deserts, men, with more beard than me, some darker, some lighter, but always ready to blow kisses. I'm here, sitting on the edge of your paper, with stained photographs of sandy shores. I'm telling you about how I can't go on like this anymore. You scribble something down. You talk to me about vacationing in Israel one summer. I've been sick, I say. Exhausted. It's hard to breathe. I'm losing my memory. I'm too young to not remember. Have I told you this before? How I'm here, sitting on the edge of your paper, with stained photographs of sandy shores. I see parachutes coming down when I'm trying to sleep. I smell the leather of military grade boots. I hear the cry of the skin that once was. No, I can't count sheep, only metal underbellies. I can't go on this way anymore. You scribble something down. You talk to me about vacationing in Israel one summer. Have I said this already? I'm losing my memory. I'm too young to not remember. Are you afraid of my beauty? Are you afraid of explosive blossoms, the color of your tears? Am I repeating myself? Are you afraid of my name, the way you can't pronounce it properly? Are you comfortable being able to enunciate my illnesses perfectly? Are you pleased with the school that taught you acronyms dull pain? My mouth is so dry. Doctor, do you think I've been drinking too much ink from the daily news? Have I told you this before? How I fear losing my own humanity? Have I told you that watered down language washes faces away? Have we spoken of how dilution makes it easier to kill?

AMIR RABIYAH



Tile, Asilah, Morocco
by HARRY WILSON

White Christmas

It's Christmas and children are freezing
in Syrian refugee camps in Jordan,
snow in the Middle East for the first time in decades.
It's Christmas and mortar shells light up Aleppo.

We bought our tree at our local grocery again this year,
with bags of oranges, apples, bread, milk, and cheese.
We cram into the Prius around the tree,
the bags of food, snug, warm,

fragrant. Northern Syria gets electricity two
hours a week now, no more fresh water.

My neighbor's seven year-old son tells me
how to wish for snow: flush an ice cube down the toilet
with your pajamas on backwards.

He says he hopes this will be the year
it will be cold enough.

MICHELE BOMBARDIER



Well, Dar Alia, Morocco
by HARRY WILSON



Whatever Happened to the Revolution?

It starts with fire,
as everything always does,
in the heart, in the street.

All is consumed except rage,
which is the instrument of fire,
and despair, which
is its blackened aftermath.

The women pray for rain
But even rain is afraid.
As soon as it falls
it hides in the earth,
smokes away from the fire.

We carry our burns within us.
We are smoke-stained.
War never goes out.
Even our children are charred.

All we ever wanted
was a little warmth before taking
our own small flame from the world.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Natural Born Censors by SHUROOQ AMIN

From the 2013 series Popcornographic. (Title based on Quentin Tarantino's movie Natural Born Killers, banned in Ireland and listed as the 8th most controversial movie in the world) - Acrylic painting, photography and collage on canvas mounted on wood. 150 x 170 cm. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai.

Artists' /Writers' bios:

ELMAZ ABINADER is the author of a memoir, *Children of the Roojme, A Family's Journey from Lebanon*, a collection of poetry,*In the Country of My Dreams* which won the Josephine Miles PEN Award, and several plays, including *Country of Origin* which won 2 Drammies from the Oregon Drama Board. Her new poetry collection, *This House My Bones* comes out in October 2014 from Willow Books/Aquarius Press. She is co-founder of the Voices of our Nations Arts Foundation-(VONA/Voices), and she teaches at Mills College and the Downtown YMCA in Oakland, CA.

SHUROOQ AMIN is a Kuwaiti/Syrian mixed-media interdisciplinary artist and an Anglophone poet whose purpose is to instigate change in society. She has a PhD in Ekphrasis, the connection between art and poetry, and has been published and anthologised internationally. Shurooq has had more than 9 solo exhibitions, more than 40 group exhibitions, her paintings have been sold at auctions (including Christie's), commissioned privately and publicly, awarded prizes locally and internationally, and shown at biennales and art fairs. A retrospective of her work was featured in the biannual art journal *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East*. On March 2012 her show *It's a Man's World* was shut down by Kuwaiti authorities and her work was banned in the country. Since then, Shurooq was awarded the title of Artist of the Year by the Arab Woman Awards, exhibited her 2013 series *Popcornographic* during Art Dubai with Ayyam Gallery, and is showing her 2014 series *We'll Build This City on Art and Love* on September 14th 2014 with Ayyam Gallery, DIFC, Dubai. Shurooq is represented exclusively by Ayyam Gallery.

TARA BALLARD was born and raised in Alaska. For the past two years, Tara and her husband had lived in the West Bank, where they worked at a local Palestinian school. Today, due to visa issues, they have relocated to the Gulf States, but travel often throughout the region – visiting Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and other countries. Her poems have been published by *War, Literature and the Arts*, *the International Poetry Review*, *Cactus Heart*, *Cirque*, *Off the Coast*, and other literary magazines.

MICHELE BOMBARDIER is a poet who lives in the Pacific Northwest whose work has appeared in *The Coe Review* and *The Moon Magazine*. She works as a speech language pathologist with persons with autism, stroke and traumatic brain injury.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK is a Lebanese poet whose first poetry collection, *To Live in Autumn*, won the 2013 Backwaters Prize and is forthcoming in September 2014 by the Backwaters Press. She's been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and her poems have been published in *Ploughshares*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Common*, *Cream City Review*, *Mizna*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Sukoon*, and *Msllexia*, among others. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Dubai, where she regularly performs her poetry, runs poetry workshops, and hosts PUNCH, a Dubai-based poetry and Open Mic collective.

Her website is www.zeinahashembeck.com.

FERN G. Z. CARR is a lawyer, teacher and past president of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. A member of and former Poet-in-Residence for the League of Canadian Poets, she composes and translates poetry in five languages. Carr is a 2013 Pushcart Prize nominee and has been cited as a contributor to the Prakaalpana literary movement in India. She has been published extensively world-wide from Finland to the Seychelles. Some of her poetry was assigned reading for a West Virginia University College of Law course entitled "Lawyers, Poets, and Poetry". Canadian honours include: an online feature in *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper; poetry set to music by a Juno-nominated musician; and her poem, "I Am", chosen by the Parliamentary Poet Laureate as Poem of the Month for Canada. One of Carr's haiku is even included on a DVD sent to Mars on NASA's MAVEN spacecraft. www.ferngzcarr.com

GILLIAN CRAIG currently lives in Singapore with her small family. She has lived all over Asia, including two happy years in Oman, and several months in Cairo. She has previously had poems published in several anthologies and journals, including *New Writing Scotland* and *New Writing Dundee*.

ARTURO DESIMONE's short fiction has appeared in *Big Bridge* and forthcoming in *Unlikely Stories*. His poems have been in *Acentos Review*, *The New Orleans Review* (for his poem About a Lover from Tunisia) at the blog A Tunisian Girl. He was born on the island Aruba (Dutch Caribbean) to parents of origins foreign to the island. At the age of 20 he emigrated to the Netherlands, living there for six years— during that time he participated in the only literary contest for young immigrant and local writers, which is the *El Hizra Literatuu Wedstrijd*. The script for his play *Tattoo Moon* was the first entry in English to win in 2011. He is currently based in Buenos Aires Argentina, his grandfather's hometown.

Artist's statement: At the time I made these drawings (of Aliaa Magda Elmahdy), I had been drawing more nude models, male and female. When I draw a nude I sometimes put in symbols around the body. I prefer to draw women. The story of Aliaah Maghda Elmahdy came up in the news, a young Egyptian who blogged two photographs in which she posed nude, with a very confronting and passionate note. I decided to draw nudes of Aliaah Maghda and to send them to her in an email. She put the drawings on her blog then. In one drawing the nude is an Arab Aphrodite of the revolution. A bird carries the words I learned are Arabic for revolt (*thauwra, horra*) In another drawing, from the nude photo she took of herself in the shower, she holds a failed virginity test, because the army had forced women in the Tahrir square to do these. In another she is again a kind of fertility goddess, there is a small policeman (al-shorta police in Egyptian slang, I learned) investigating the flower in her hair. In yet another there is a line in Spanish from Neruda's poem Ode to the Beautiful Nude, *la luna debajo tu piel*, "the moon underneath your skin" My drawings are closely related to poetry. Sexuality, love and the female body have non-logical forces that can liberate the oppressed. This is one reason why I always took interest in the fertility cults that once existed in the Middle East region, the idolatry known as *Jallilhiya* in Arabic. There cannot be a revolution without pre-logical, sexual and amoral forces being unearthed. Revolutions know an immensely creative process that lets go of rationality, this makes revolution conducive to poetry which comes from a similar but more solitary process. A revolution, like a work of art is a myth brought to animate life, in its essence sparked by love and not mere pragmatism even though revolutions inherently concern the material world. Therefore revolution is a rite of fertility, and a time when the people are revealed as they are, stripped of falsehoods, naked.

FRANK DULLAGHAN holds an MA with Distinction in Writing (University of South Wales). He co-founded the Essex Poetry Festival, edited *Seam Poetry Magazine*. His third poetry collection, *The Same Roads Back*, is due out Oct 2014 from Cinnamon Press. He lives in Dubai and also writes short screen and stage plays.

NEIL FLATMAN lives and works in Dubai, UAE. He has appeared in print and on line at *Literature Works* and *The Poetry Storehouse* where his poems are available for creative remix. If he ever publishes a chapbook it will be entitled *The Icing on the Coffin* and his bio wishes it had more to be modest about.

LANA I. GHANNAM is an MFA Candidate in Poetry at the University of Central Florida where she serves as both a teaching and editorial assistant for *The Florida Review*, UCF's national literary magazine. Her poetry has appeared in *The Holler Box* ("Jumper" Issue 1, Web) and *The Cape Rock* ("Coventry Forest" vol. 41.1, Print). She has received the following awards from University of Central Florida: Outstanding Poet Award, Fall 2012 and Outstanding Outreach Writer in the Community Award, Fall 2012. She is a first-generation Palestinian-American Muslim woman who was raised in a bicultural home with three siblings. She hopes to, one day, ease the tension between both her cultures, Middle Eastern and American.

HEDY HABRA was born in Heliopolis, Egypt and is of Lebanese origin. She is the author of a poetry collection, *Tea in Heliopolis* (Press 53 2013), finalist in the 2014 International Poetry Book Award, a short story collection, *Flying Carpets* (Interlink 2013), winner of the 2013 Arab American Book Award's Honorable Mention in Fiction, and finalist in the 2014 Eric Hoffer Book Award; and a book of literary criticism, *Mundos alternos y artísticos en Vargas Llosa* (Iberoamericana 2012). She has an MA and an MFA in English and an MA and PhD in Spanish literature, all from Western Michigan University where she currently teaches. Her multilingual work has appeared in more than forty journals and thirteen anthologies, including *Connotation Press*, *Nimrod*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Drunken Boat*, *Diode*, *Cutthroat*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Cider Press Review*, *Pirene's Fountain* and *Poet Lore*. Please visit www.hedyhabra.com

ART HEIFETZ teaches ESL to Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Richmond, Virginia. He taught English for four years in Tunisia and Iran. These poems are about Tunisia, where he met his first wife. He has had 125 poems published in 11 countries. See polishedbrasspoems.com

ANNA KING IVEY is currently working on her PhD in poetry at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. Her most recent publications have been featured in *So to Speak*, *The Unroean*, *Antithesis*, *Stone Highway Review*, and *West Trade* literary magazines. She was offered a fellowship by the Summer Literary Seminars to attend a writing program in Lithuania in 2008 and 2013. She has also been published academically in the *Ellen Glasgow Journal of Southern Women Writers*, *Florida English*, as well as in *The Apalachee Review*.

PD MALLAMO's has appeared in *Barcelona Review*, *Granta*, *Lana Turner*, *Sunstone*, *Conte*, *decomp*, and *Cutbank*, among others. He is a MacDowell fellow, has degrees from Brigham Young and the University of Kansas, and writes in the *American Midwest*.

JESSE MILLNER's poems and prose have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Florida Review*, *upstreet*, *Conte*, *River Styx*, *Pearl*, *The Prose Poem Project*, *Tinge*, *The New Poet*, *Cider Press Review*, *Real South*, *The Best American Poetry 2013* and other literary magazines. He has published six poetry chapbooks and two full-length collections, most recently, *Dispatches from the Department of Supernatural Explanation* (Kitsune Books, 2012). Jesse teaches writing courses at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, Florida.

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE is a Palestinian-American poet, novelist, essayist, anthologist, and educator. She is the author or editor of 33 books, including *Transfer*, *A Maze Me*, *Honeybee*, *Different Ways to Pray*, *Yellow Glove*, and *19 Varieties of Gazelle*.

AMIR RABIYAH lives in Oakland, California. His work has been published in *Mizna*, *Left Turn Magazine*, *Collective Brightness: LGBTIQ Poets on Faith, Religion and Spirituality*, *Troubling the Line: Trans and Gender Queer Poetry and Poetics*, *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, and more. Amir is currently the co-editor of the forthcoming anthology, "Writing the Walls Down: A Convergence of LGBT*Q Voices," to be published later this year. www.amirrabiya.com

REEM RASHASH-SHAABAN has an M.A. in Applied Linguistics and is presently an instructor in the English Department at the American University of Beirut. She is Saudi Arabian and married to a Lebanese, and writes poetry and fiction. Her works have been published in *The Potomac*, *Falling Star Magazine*, *The Rusty Nail*, *The Missing Slate*, *In Posse Review*, *Foliage Oak Review*, among others. She is also an avid photographer and her photos have been exhibited at the American University of Beirut and Dar el Mussawir in Beirut.

PATTY SOMLO has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize three times, was a finalist in the Tom Howard Short Story Contest, and has been nominated for the 2013 storySouth's Million Writers Award. She is the author of *From Here to There* and *Other Stories*. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including the *Los Angeles Review*, *the Santa Clara Review*, *the Jackson Hole Review*, *WomenArts Quarterly* and *Guernica*, among others, and in eleven anthologies, including *Solace in So Many Words*, which won the Next Generation Indie Book Award for Anthology.

JANET TESTERMAN has a PhD in Educational Leadership from the University of Miami in Florida. She is currently the Coordinator of the Writing Division of the Department of English Language and Literature, at Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait where she also teaches writing. Her writing interests range from interpreting the ramifications of recent neuroscience research which indicates one's brain responses to stimuli before one is conscious of the stimuli, to her own research examining technological means of advancing literacy. She recently published a book with Cambridge Scholar's Press: *Transforming from Christianity to Islam: Eight Women's Journeys*. Her three grown children, Andrew, Leigh and Conor live in California, Manhattan and Alaska.

CHANGMING YUAN, an 8-time Pushcart nominee, grew up in rural China, holds a PhD in English, and currently teaches in Vancouver, where he co-edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan. Changming's poetry appears in 829 literary publications across 28 countries, including *Asia Literary Review*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *London Magazine* and *Threepenny Review*.

PATRICK WILLIAMSON was born in Madrid in 1960 and lives near Paris, France. His most recent poetry collections *Nel Santuario* (bilingual English-Italian), Samuele Editore, 2013 and *Bacon, Bits, & Buriton*, Corrupt Press, Paris, 2011. He has translated the selected poems of Tunisian poet Tahar Bekri (*Unknown Seasons*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1999) and Quebecois poet Gilles Cyr (*The Graph of Roads*, Guernica Editions, 2008). He is the editor and translator of *The Parley Tree, An Anthology of Poets from French-speaking Africa and the Arab World* (Arc Publications, 2012).

Patrick Williamson translates poems by Tunisian poet **TAHAR BEKRI**. Bekri born in 1951 near Gabès in Tunisia. In 1976 Bekri settled in Paris, where he was in political exile until 1989. Since that date, he has returned to Tunisia regularly, and takes part in many international literary and cultural events. Writing in both French and Arabic, he has published around thirty books of poetry, essays, journals, and special art editions. His poetry has notably been translated into Russian, English, Italian, Spanish and Turkish, and is widely studied in university courses. Considered by the critics to be one of the leading voices of contemporary North African and French-speaking literature, Tahar Bekri is currently Maître de Conférences at Université de Paris X-Nanterre. His work, marked by exile, wandering and travels, evokes the continual reinvention of cultures, where they cross over in time and space. Amidst the tumult of the century, his inner voice is deeply rooted in individual and collective memory, on a quest for new horizons, at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. His work seeks, above all, to be a song for brotherhood, a land without frontiers.

HARRY WILSON taught photography for 34 years before retiring from Bakersfield College. His work has been exhibited in many solo and group exhibits. My first solo museum exhibit was at the de Young Museum in San Francisco during 1969, the most recent was last year at the Bakersfield Museum of Art. He is represented in the collections of the Museum of photographic Arts in San Diego, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the Oakland Museum of California, among others. His work has been published in *The Sun*, *Rolling Stone*, *Zyzyva*, *Cerise Press* among many others. His MFA is from the San Francisco Art Institute. He has travelled to about 50 countries; his inspiration for most of his photographs.

REWA ZEINATI is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Sukoon* magazine, and the author of the creative non-fiction book, *Nietzsche's Camel Must Die: An Invitation to Say 'No'* (xanadu*, 2013), as well as the poetry chapbook, *Bullets & Orchids* (Corrupt Press, 2013). She studied English Literature at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, where she is originally from, and earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, USA (where she is not originally from.) Several of her poems, essays and translations have been published in various literary journals and anthologies based in the USA, UK, levant region and online. She lives and works in Dubai, UAE.



