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## **Editorial Office**

Exiled Writers Ink  
31 Hallswelle Road  
London NW11 0DH  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8458 1910  
jennifer@exiledwriters.co.uk  
www.exiledwriters.co.uk

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# Editorial

## Writing under Terror

**D**ictatorial political regimes inflict tyrannical constraints on writers who must either condone the regime or be gagged. Many writers fall back on metaphors to denounce their country's political predicaments. However, often - to borrow the writer and poet, Jack Mapanje's expression - "the art of meaning without saying" can prove dangerous; as some writers become masters in metaphorical language and being simply too prominent, they are imprisoned. Furthermore, if their outspokenness becomes a major hindrance to the oppressive regime, they could be effectively "suicided" or "accidentalised". Such idioms, familiar in many African countries, are the creation of people facing the daily routine of censorship and repression. They are sarcasms which point at emotional and social turmoil.

The number of Iranian writers, poets, journalists, film makers who have disappeared, are being arrested or sentenced to death under the Islamic regime is alarming. Inside this issue, the sociologist, Hammed Shahidan, gives an insight of the fundamentalist's intolerance towards free expression and intellectual fulfilment.

Given the difficult conditions, many writers are forced into exile. But even in a place of safety, images of terror, the longing for loved ones, the uncanniness of the new soil, might halt creativity. The exiled Afghan writer and film maker, Atiq Rahimi, waited ten years to recover the will to write again.

For Spôjmai Zariâb, another exiled Afghan writer, the terror and violence she has left behind fuel her anger and give her the energy to write not only about her devastated country, famine and death, but also about the plight and courage of Afghan women.

For many in exile, writing is a means to exorcise the ghosts of terror. Jack Mapanje, who spent three years in prison in Malawi under the dictatorship of president Hastings Banda, felt the urgency to write his prison memoirs, as the memories of that time spent in incarceration were hampering other writing.

Today, the globalisation of terror, and at national level the post 7/7 bombings, bring us all face to face with intolerance. We feel in accord with writers, poets, partisans of free expression, who wish to free themselves of the ghosts of terror.

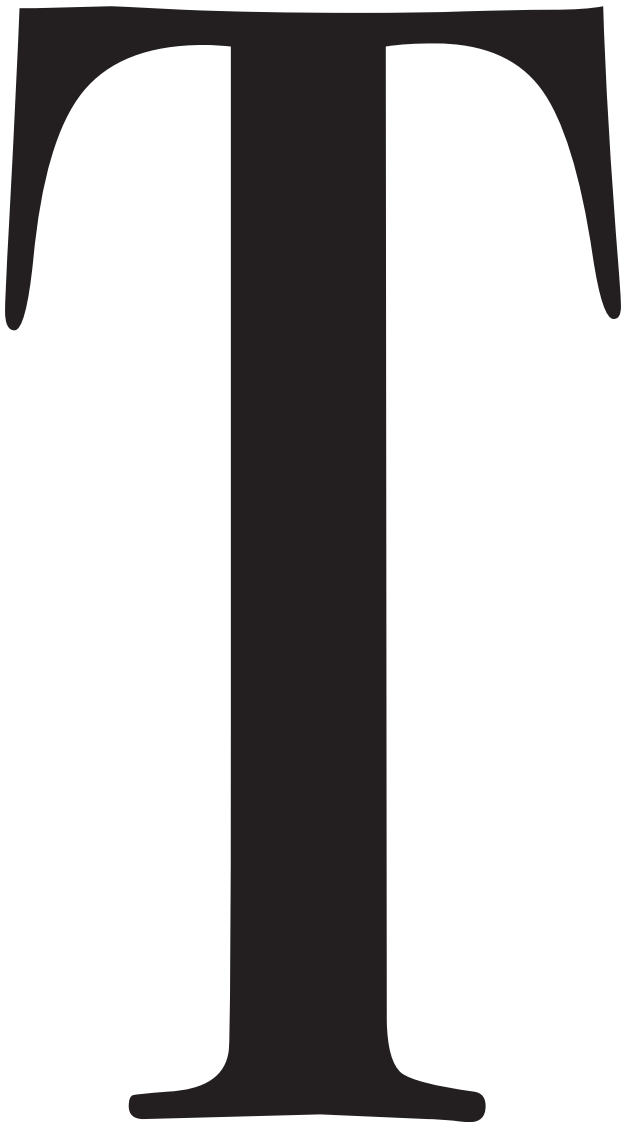
# Iranian Writers and Literature in Exile

## Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs

*Farideh Goldin*



*by Fatma Durmush*



There has been an explosion of memoirs by Iranian women writers since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The books are written and published not inside Iran, whose bibliophobic government has killed many writers and their words, but abroad - not in Persian, but in English and French.

A decade after the Revolution, scholars of Iranian women writers and Iranian autobiographies called attention to the rarity of autobiographies and even biographies by Iranians and fewer still by Iranian women. Farzaneh Milani wrote, "Avoiding voluntary self-revelation and self-referentiality, most Iranian writers have turned their backs on autobiography



by Fatma Durmush

In a later article, she added, “Granted the part played by humility, self-censorship, discretion, and unfavourable living conditions, the fact remains that whereas [Iranian] male writers have produced a handful of life narratives, no woman literary figure has ever published an autobiography.”

William Hanaway went even further to suggest that maybe autobiography is “too Western-centred and culture-bound for Iranians to make use of it,” more of a cultural form rather than literary genre that does not lend itself to the Iranian. They blamed continuous political oppression against freedom of speech and literary expression; they blamed the indirect style of writing in Persian, where speaking of oneself is at best impolite, at worst, vulgar; they blamed the spiritual veiling of women that keeps their voices silenced.

What happened in the decade following the publications of Milani’s *Veils and Words* and articles by Milani, Hillaman and Hanaway in *Women’s Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran*, in which they had suggested that the Iranian culture did not lend itself to life narratives? What enabled Iranian women to break with tradition, to write in a genre that is the most forbidding in the Iranian literature?

There are approximately twenty-five books of *khaterat* written the following decade. This collection is impressive. Of these, I consider twelve to be western-style memoirs, five of which were published in 2003, 2004, and were mostly well-received and read enthusiastically.

The Persian word *khaterat* is often used casually by Iranians to refer to any autobiographical narrative. *Khaterat* can be poetry by Forough Farukhzad, or Homa Sarshar’s *In the Back Alleys of Exile*, which is a collection of essays and poetry, or Zohreh Sullivan’s *Exiled Memories*—all very important and ground breaking books, but not memoirs as defined by western literary standards.

Categorised as memoirs are also recent books published by mostly members of the Qajar and Pahlavi royal families, for example, Farah Pahlavi’s *An Enduring Love*, Ashraf Pahlavi’s *Faces in The Mirror*, Soraya Esfandiari’s *The Lonely Palace*, and Satareh Farman Farmaian’s *Daughter of Persia*. I label them as biographies whether or not they openly acknowledge their ghost writers or co-authors. Farman Farmaian’s book names a co-author, Dona Munker. The purpose of most books in this category is to rewrite history, to correct supposed misunderstandings, and to interpret the events from their writers’ points of view.

Then there are books such as Farideh Diba’s *My Daughter*, Farah and *Khaterat-e Taj Ol Moluk*, books presented as life-narratives that are actually forgeries to achieve similar political aims. These works, in a convoluted way, reaffirm that memoirs by Iranian women are being read and have an impact.

Undoubtedly the Iranian Revolution of 1979 is the catalyst for almost all these memoirs. Virginia Woolf wrote that for a woman to write she needs to be able to have life experiences, to travel, to see, to experience the world. The shock of displacement, of exile, even if not necessarily the writer’s, but for her parents and extended family; the inability to return to one’s homeland easily, safely; and awareness of the suffering of family, friends, and those left behind—all such overwhelming life-experiences propel these books of memoirs. Moreover, the nostalgia among the Iranians in exile and the westerners’ curiosity about Iran reinforces the momentum.

Carolyn Heilburn wrote, “A woman sits down to write her memoir, recording not only her own story but that of a place and time that has since disappeared.” I would like to add, that in case of Iranian women memoirists, the memoirs explain a world that has not disappeared but one that the writer has lost. The cover page to Shusha Guppy’s *The Blindfold Horse*, for example, describes the book as an “evocation of a way of life that has been destroyed forever.” In *Snake’s Marble*, Mehry Reid hopes that her “memoirs will help keep those [Iranian] traditions alive in the minds and hearts of Persians wherever they might be. Her first chapter, in fact, is named, “Window to the Past.” Reid writes, “For many years, I thought about writing the memoirs of my childhood, but when my daughter... told me that she was carrying my first grandchild, this was the catalyst that got me started. I wanted to leave for him and his descendents a family history of sorts and a feeling for the customs, traditions, and way of life of the country where half of his forebears were born.

I personally started writing my memoirs, *Wedding Song: Memoirs of an Iranian Jewish Woman*, at my daughters' request, who wanted to know about a country they might never be able to visit.

In our zeal to recapture the Iran we knew for our children, many Iranian women memoirists tend to record parts of our past, or rather Iran's past as if for an encyclopaedia, reaching out to the Iran that is forbidden to us, trying to paint it with our words.

The Western movement in women's memoirs has enabled Iranian writers, who are often well-read in western literature, to treasure seemingly mundane details of life. *Sizdah-bedar* picnics in Gelareh Asayesh's book *Saffron Sky*, and "Sleeping on the rooftops under the desert sky," the recipe for Norooz food of *sabzi-polo* and dried fish in Rouhi Shafii's *Scent of Saffron*, and the custom of cleaning sour grapes for Passover or visiting a women's public baths, the *hamam* in *Wedding Song* are common scenes in Iranian women's memoirs, attesting to the importance of not just historical events but also of everyday life, home details, and women's work that are characteristics of women's memoirs.

Modesty and secrecy prevented Iranian women from recording our life narratives until recently. Writing of self is frightening; it has consequences. Life narratives cannot possibly explain the author's life alone without involving other family members and friends. When Farzaneh Dumas told her father about writing her memoir, he responded, "Great! Just don't mention our name." Even before I decided to write a book about my life, I received messages from family members threatening law suites if I spoke about family matters in my lectures. We have imported the taboo about speaking and writing candidly from our Iranian past to America.

Although Iranian women traditionally shied away from writing and especially writing memoirs, the facts are that the oral tradition of telling of one's own or ancestral lives are part of the Iranian women's oral tradition. I remember vividly the winter nights my mother, grandmother and aunts gathered around a space heater, sharing life stories of women's past and present. This tradition of story telling has also inspired contemporary women fiction writers. For example, Gina Nahai started writing her first book, *Cry of the Peacock* after a summer she spent at home, in the kitchen with her mother, grandmother and aunt, retelling old stories of life in Iran, of the events in family and neighbours' lives. Dorit Rabinyan, the author of *Persian Brides*, similarly, wrote her first novel inspired by the tales her grandmother and mother told her. Then, why didn't these writers record their stories in the form of non-fiction? Nahid Rachlin, an Iranian-American fiction writer, contemplated writing her memoirs a few years ago; in fact, she published one slice of her life narrative in the *New York Times Magazine*, but then changed her mind. As with many other women writ-

ers, the baring of soul, telling the private scenes of her life felt too frightening.

The amazing explosion of memoir writing by Iranian women in recent years could also result from the fact that, in Jill Ker Conway's terminology, we are finally willing to take "agency" for our life stories; that we realise our stories not only matter, but that they can be received enthusiastically; that these *khaterat*, these memories are worth taking the risk for. Most importantly, with the wealth of material on Iranian history and the fallout from the Iranian Revolution, and western curiosity about a country that was recently labelled as an axis of evil by the Bush administration, it is possible to have a personal story that is not totally private; it is possible to write a life narrative that is more political than confessional.

Almost all these books of life narratives are written in English. Why would any writer choose a language other than her own to tell the story of her people? There are, of course, commercial considerations: these memoirs reach wider audiences if written in English. With Azar Nafisi being a best seller in the U.S., the probability of other women memoirists imitating her is much greater. The Indian author Anita Desai has said that to her English is the key to a world literature. In an interview, Nahid Rachlin told me that few of her readers are Iranians. Iranians who read her books have been living outside the country for many years. The new generation of hybrid Iranians, barely remembering Iran, read the memoirs nostalgically, comparing them with the stories of their parents' experiences in Iran.

Additionally, with the west's increasing curiosity and awareness of Iran, these autobiographies give rare glimpses of life through a lens that is not coloured by the western media. About writing her memoirs, *The Journey from the Land of NO*, Roya Hakakian said, "Many English speaking friends always wanted to hear the story of Iran and its revolution as I had seen it. So, in a way, I wrote this for them." Similarly, about Firoozeh Dumas, the author of *Funny in Farsi*, the Iranian critic Mersedeh Mehrdash wrote, "Firoozeh's work focuses on one of the most important aspects of our community's efforts towards self-representation: our image. By taking matters into her own hands and writing a book on her experience in America—as an Iranian-American—Firoozeh is helping our community set our image in our own words, and on our own terms." Dumas herself said, "I hope that my book serves as a bridge for non-Iranians, taking away the fear of the unknown. The media has portrayed us as such a frightening group of people and I hope that my book reveals the warm and lovable side of the culture. It's hard to hate a group of people when you see the shared humanity."

Jumana Faroukhy writes about Marjane Satrapi, the author of *Persepolis*: "From the start, Setrapi makes it clear that her mission is to dispel the Western notion of Iran as a land of fundamentalists and terrorists. In *Persepolis*, the

author portrays her parents as westernized intellectuals who adopted western styles: her mother wears pants, not a chador, and her father shaves his beard against the enforced Islamic rules. In an interview with Janet Saidi, Setrapi added, "I wrote this book to give the image of Iran that I knew." She added, "Anytime I was outside my country and saw pictures of Iran, it was pictures of women in chadors and guys with guns."

To alleviate the west's fear of the Islamic Republic of Iran, many writers look for metaphoric images to reveal the western side of Iran, the familiar, friendlier aspects of the country and its people as victims themselves. In *The Dance of the Rose and the Nightingale*, Nesta Ramazani uses the "metaphors of movement," of ballet, to fuse Iranian and Islamic traditions with the western thought process. Marjane Satrapi's comic strip memoir is filled with the images of American insignia, "Denim Jacket with the Michael Jackson Button," "Nikes," and western music: the BeeGees, Pink Floyd, and Stevie Wonder. Firoozeh Dumas in *Funny in Farsi*, mingles her parents' Iranian ways, like their arranged marriage when her mom was seventeen with their learned or practiced American life-style, for example, Firoozeh's adventures in baby sitting or her father's affinity for ham. Azar Nafisi brings her western readers closer to Iranian life through Western books. The message is, of course, we are more like you than you think. We are the same people, also the victims of Islamic fundamentalism and theocracy in our own home. The exception to this rule is my own book which does not portray pre-Revolutionary Iran as a paradise lost. Being a Jew from a smaller town in Iran, I experienced a different Iran.

Many Iranian women memoirists attempt to preserve the culture hence the encyclopaedic form of some of the narratives, describing the customs in their finest details. Farzaneh Dumas said, "We need to preserve our culture by preserving our language and literature. Speak Persian without all the English words thrown in. She persuades Iranians, "Write your stories." While saying this, the irony must have even escaped Dumas herself that to preserve her culture she wrote her story not in Persian, but in English. Can the language of the west that has preconceived notions of the Iranian culture and the Iranian woman, a language that is

based on western patriarchal construct that views the east, views Iran through distorted lenses, be used as the medium to define and defend Iranian culture and thoughts?

These Iranian women write in English, a language with which they are probably the most comfortable. Most Iranian women memoirists received western-style education. Additionally, two decades after the Iranian Revolution, the Iranian children have grown up in the west, comfortable with their adopted languages and cultures, speaking English or French without or with little Iranian accent. It is, therefore, natural for them when they write to adopt the language of the countries that have adopted them.

But is it natural or even acceptable to consider these memoirs Iranian? Can a writer be Iranian if she doesn't write in Persian, or worse yet, when she doesn't know how to? I asked Azar Nafisi if she ever considered writing a memoir in Persian. She replied, "I wanted to write this story when I lived in Iran, but I could not. There were many reasons why this book could not be written in Iran, not all of it political. There were too many restraints, too many rules, imposed by the government and many of the readers. I don't know if I would have written the same story, in the same style; even the language you write in can decide the way your book is shaped, but I know I had the same urges when I was in Iran."

I asked the same question of Roya Hakakian, author of *Journey from the Land of NO*. She replied, "I don't know when I chose to write in English. It just came." I asked both writers if they would like their memoirs to be translated into Farsi. Nafisi replied, yes, "but I want to have control over the translation. It is translatable as far as any book is. It is so difficult to capture the nuances, the lights and shades of a book in another language." Hakakian answered, "I would like my work to be translated into Farsi, but as you put it, I am not sure it'll make a whole lot of sense in translation."

When I was asked the same question, I replied "No" immediately. Persian is a circuitous language. Centuries of oppression and foreign rulers taught Iranians to evade direct responses in order to keep their heads. I cannot imagine a book as direct as mine would be translatable into Persian, and if it is ever translated, I fear it will be called vulgar.

The next few decades will be a testimony to the effect of these books that have broken the barrier of language and culture for Iranian writers outside Iran. Whether they will be read in their English form or translated into Persian, they will undoubtedly be read by the growing number of highly educated Iranian women. The impact of these confessional books on Iranian readers will be a fascinating subject to watch and to study.

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*Farideh Goldin presented a portion of this essay on May 28, 2004, at the Fifth Biennial Conference on Iranian Studies. It was first published in Persian Heritage Fall 2004.*

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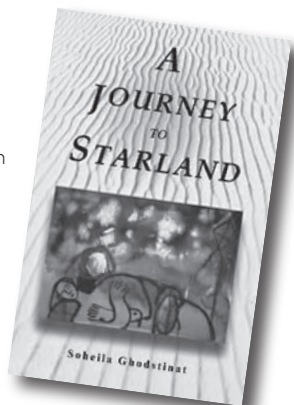
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# Writing Out Terror

## Hammed Shahidian

Thoughts of an Iranian exile:

January 1999.

*Although this article may appear to be somewhat out of date, we publish this extract now precisely because it captures the mood of the time, bitter but defiant, finding solace and meaning in continuing to write.*

**Writing Out Terror. It can kill a man.**

**"Thanks for the e-mail about Mokhtari's execution. It looks like Pouyandeh is also dead."**

I receive this short message first thing in the morning. We were hoping Pouyandeh was only missing. We were hoping, though we knew deep down that it would turn out otherwise. We knew Pouyandeh would be yet another writer whose body would be found somewhere in the morgue of the Islamic Republic of Iran. And who knows how many others? Who knows how many more?

Prominent in my joyous memories dating back to childhood are memories of written words. All such recollections, though, are paradoxically dabbled in blood. Down my mind's dark alleys, far back as I can go, I find fallen authors. Critical and uncompromising. Deemed "dangerous," censored, imprisoned, executed.

I am barely nine when I first encounter such authors. Samad Behrangī, social critic and author of children's stories with strong political undertones, presumed to have been drowned in the northern river Aras. In school, I read Ali Akbar Dihkhoda's classic "Remember the extinct candle, remember." Dihkhoda sings of Mirza Jahangir Khan of Shiraz, co-editor of a progressive weekly, strangled by order of a Qajar Shah back in 1908. I am appalled, but learn in whispers from teachers and friends that throughout our history, many authors have suffered Jahangir Khan's fate. Many others. And then many more.

Within two years, the execution of poet and journalist Khosrow Golesorkhi and filmmaker Keramatullah Daneshian corresponds with my initial writings.

Writing becomes my life and a liability. "Did you hear, did you hear," a fellow book lover tells me, more times than I can count: "Such and Such is banned," "they arrested So and So."

Towering intellectuals like Ahmad Shamlu and Gholamhossein Saedi, and minor figures are subject to the same inquisition, and respond with like tenacity. Nothing they write warrants the denial of their freedom of speech. Nothing we write warrants the denial of our freedom of speech. Reading is equally dangerous. We hear reports (and rumours) about people receiving prison sentences for having the "wrong" kind of books in their private collections. "White cover books," books no one knows where published and how distributed, fly from one corner of the town to another, from one city to the next, even across the borders. We keep reading and writing, nevertheless.

Then comes the dah shab, the Ten Nights - ten nights of lecturing and poetry reading organised by the Iranian Writers' Association (IWA) in the autumn of 1977. The first formal "public appearance" of the IWA whose legitimacy the government has so far refused to recognize. Toleration of IWA's public appearance is supposed to signify a gentler state, more conscientious of human rights. The Ten Nights receive unprecedented welcome by the public. Secular intellectuals speak side by side religious authors, showing solidarity among opponents of censorship, opponents of the Shah. Soon, police clash with students, as, one after another, penners fiercely condemn censorship and the government's suppression of freedoms. Poet Said Soltanpour, just released from prison, and other participants join students. The dress rehearsal of a gentler king turns into a dress rehearsal for revolution.

And then pours the vernal shower of the revolution in the winter of 1979.

A sigh of relief. No more censorship, no more prison, no more execution. No more writing in metaphors, no more deciphering codes. Writing as life should be-free and playful.

Alas! On 7 March 1979 comes the newly established Islamic Republic's first attack on women's rights. Shortly after, a full-scale war on the Iranian Kurds, then on the Turkamans, and then vandalizing bookstores and headquarters of politi-

cal organisations... Here a bookseller is injured. There, a student selling newspapers on a street corner is beaten. Here, books are torn. The daily Kayhan whose autonomous policy the new regime cannot tolerate is "bought up" by a metal merchant supporter of Khomeini. Ayandegan is closed down by a zealot mob after Khomeini says he won't read the irreverent paper. "Laws of journalism" are decreed, "according" freedoms of thought and expression "within the proper limits of Islam." Khomeini's calculated guidance to his followers: "Break these pens!" And then the purging, injuring, and killing of students on university campuses, and the closing of universities for over a year - "cultural revolution" à la Islamic Republic.

The Islamic regime thus from the outset shows hostility to the free expression of ideas. Book-burning, banning newspapers, prohibiting the publication of certain authors, accusing authors of "immoral conduct" or "affiliation with the West," imprisonment, torture, and execution of authors, paper rationing for magazines, attacking publishers and bookstores, all are an integral part of building the Islamic Republic. The more the Islamic project crystallises, the more we realise the incompatibility of our secular, democratic agendas with their objective of creating an Islamic society.

The Hizbullah, the partisans of Allah, attack the Iranian Writers' Association.

Said Soltanpour, poet, playwright, a political prisoner of many years under the Shah, and Executive Secretary of the Writers' Association, is incarcerated at his wedding ceremony. Charge: illegal exchange of foreign money. An endless nightmare from which we wake up to a more horrifying reality on a summer day.

20 June 1981. Confrontations between the Islamic regime and the opposition escalate. A brutal clampdown on a popular demonstration followed by nationwide arrests. The next morning, Massoud's phone call wakes me up. "They killed him.

They killed him." Said Soltanpour executed. The picture of his holed chest, sleeping serenely, is etched forever in my memory.

The persecution is widespread. Months after the initial crackdown of 1981, newspapers print the list of the executed prisoners every day. Producers and consumers of the written word are on the run. Some go into hiding, some escape, some go into hiding before they escape.

Those of us abroad, cautiously seek the latest news, hoping to dodge disheartening discoveries. "How many more today?" "Any news about Shamlu?" "Do you think they would kill even people like Mahmood Doulatatabadi, or Bagher Parham, or Dariush Ashouri?" "Saedi made it out. He is in Paris." "Homa Nategh is in Europe, too." "Esmail Khoi is in London." "Fereydoon Tonekabony is out, too." Many others.

And then many more.

Khoi writes fiery poems about the "Imam of the plague." Saedi writes about art production in the Islamic Republic and

about exilic life. Pakdaman contrasts ruling mullahs to human beings. "Have you read Majid Danesh-Arasteh's Breeze in the Desert?"

Magnificent. "Have you read Simin Behbahani's new poem?" "Have you read Shamlu's recent interview?"

Khomeini issues a death fatwa on 14 February 1989 on Salman Rushdie. Authors in Iran, themselves living under death shadow, obviously cannot denounce the edict.

Exiled writers show their solidarity with their fellow author. They face the wrath of the Islamic state, once again. Poets Nader Naderpour and Esmail Khoi become unmentionable names in Iran. Bookstores are wiped clean of their books. Khoi has been tried in absentia long before this punishment; he is already sentenced to death.

After the "blessing of the war" with Iraq concludes, political prisoners in the dungeons of the Islamic Republic are massacred in September 1989. Many of the old producers and consumers of written words are rounded up and summarily executed.

A partial list compiled by Raynaldo Galindo Pohl, the former United Nations Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, includes 1879 victims. Shahrnush Parsipour, a prominent novelist, is imprisoned because in *Women without Men*, she refers to menstruation and virginity. Written words, guilty of breaking the code of silence, endangering "public morality." So are many others subject to the rules of morality. Many are savagely stoned to death for committing "adultery." Luckier ones have to watch what they write! "Breast" is too provocative to mention. "Dance" must give way to "joyously jumping up and down." "Wine" ought to be deleted.

In her memoirs, Parsipour narrates her incarceration. Her book becomes an addition to an emerging genre in Persian literature: prison writing. People imprisoned for their love of writing paradoxically record their observations from their cells, in book-length manuscripts, short stories, articles, and poems. Mass imprisonment produces mass prison literature.

On 15 October 1994, 134 writers in Iran publish an open letter entitled "We Are the Writers!" They demand the abolition of censorship and call for the establishment of an autonomous writers' association. The Islamic government reacts without hesitation. In a riposte in the daily *Kayhan*, diabolically entitled "We Are the Dead!" Hassan Khorassany lashes out on the undersigned as "excrement of the monarchical period who have always been the source of moral and intellectual corruption and whose circles are not different from a fly's nest."

Literary scholar Ali-Akbar Saidi-Sirdjani, one of the signatories, "dies" of a mysterious heart attack in prison in November 1994. Ahmad Mir-Ala'i gets kidnapped in October 1995. A few days later, his body is found in his hometown, Isfahan. The translator Ghaffar Hosseini, as we Iranians say, "is died" on 11 November 1996-he, too, falls victim to a mysterious heart

attack. Faraj Sarkuhi, the editor of *Adineh*, is imprisoned and brutalized. Novelist and editor of the monthly *Gardoonyeh*, Abbas Ma'roofi, is sentenced to 6 months imprisonment, 20 lashes, and 2 years prohibition from journalistic activities, in a farcical trial.

And then comes the people's showdown with the Islamic government in June 1997.

Mohammad Khatami is elected president, despite the clear message from the religious leadership that they favour his opponent. Many Iranians, suffocated under the pressure of Muslim fanatics, find Khatami's liberal rhetoric attractive. The long-existing divisions within the Islamic state widen. Khatami expresses a desire to relax the censorship, to enhance the tolerance of the Islamic regime. Orthodox guardians of Islam, however, do not allow any leniency.

In May 1998, after nearly one year of detention, Morteza Firouzi, the founder and editor of the English-language daily *Iran News* is sentenced to death for adultery and espionage. Around the same time, *Jame'eh* newspaper is closed down.

Iranian authors' efforts to organise themselves continue. A provisional committee of six is to plan the first general assembly of the Iranian Writers Association: Mohammad Mokhtari, Mohammad Ja'far Pouyandeh, Hooshang Golshiri, Ali Ashraf Darvishian, Kazem Kordavani, and Mansour Koushan. They are summoned to Tehran Public Prosecutor's office in October and questioned about the Association's activities. They are not released until they sign a promissory not to organize the general assembly. Many more magazines are banned; Piruz Davani a political activist is "executed" by the notorious Feda'iyani of Islam; dissident writer Majid Sharif is found dead under suspicious circumstances; Mokhtari and Pouyandeh have disappeared.

Khatami's imperative of affording the Islamic state a gentler face has given rise to a minimalist politics among some Iranian intellectuals. A mood of self-censorship prevails among many who hold that they should be careful not to sink the boat. Yet Khatami's promised freedom is always "freedom with limitations." Many books are still denied publication or banned and destroyed after publication.

Dariush Ashouri declares that "ruthless intellectual war is underway both in Iran and in the Islamic world between everything that stands for intellectualism, enlightenment, and progress, and all things dark, backward, reactionary, and fundamentalist. Just look at what is going on in Iran, in Algeria, or in Afghanistan." Golshiri sketches a similarly gloomy picture: "Now all those wielding a pencil as a tool are in danger of death, a well prepared death by a very well oiled machine."

Dead and alive, authors of past and present roam my mind. Mokhtari brings his head close and articulates the pre-occupying question:

All we demand is your solidarity - or is that asking too much?

8 January 1999

## Esmail Khoi

*translated from Persian by Lotfali Khonji*

### Hatred

O, my God!  
If you take me to Hell  
I will not ask you why  
on the condition that  
where you condemn me to be  
I shall not see  
the enemy of my passion and my wisdom  
this dead but vociferous being  
this dumb but garrulous creature  
this peddler of nonsense  
this mullah.

### .....and the world goes on

And as ever  
the tree will go on singing itself  
albeit on a meadow further away.

And the moon-tide  
shall increase upon the silvery sea;  
and the sky will be more eloquent  
in my galaxy.

At present  
I am only worried about you,  
O, humanity!

### The unfortunate mother

Behold our earth from far away in space  
and you will see a serene, blue jewel.  
It betrays but one foul streak with no grace:  
she has nurtured us who are so cruel.

### Loveless

And then  
I was all alone  
with a reality that had the face of death.  
To be exact, it was faceless  
exactly like sorrow.

Oh....  
When that oasis, that distant goal, I mean love,  
is lost in the wilderness of hopeless wander

we are left alone  
with a reality that has the face of fear.  
It is, like death  
boundless  
meaningless.

## Reza Baraheni

### The Doves

outside doves perch everywhere  
it is clear from  
their cooings of love and delight  
it is clear from  
the whirr of their wings  
wings which seem to fan me in my prisoner's  
sleep  
it is clear outside  
doves perch everywhere

the night is like day on the other side of the bars  
on this side the day is like night

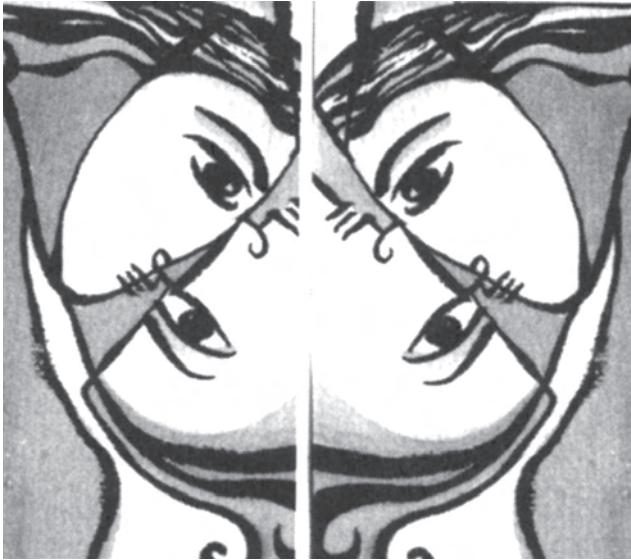
### Cemetery

The criminal prison autumn  
has arrived outside without  
Us seeing its signs  
If we were  
In Darakeh now  
we could see  
the cemetery of yellow leaves  
And now that we are not there  
we had better put  
our heads on the cold tiles of the cell  
and sleep until  
the sounds of shooting startles us  
and we rush  
to the hole in the cell's iron door  
and if the windowlet is open  
watch the silent caravan of the innocent  
like Ardaviraf who saw  
pre-Islamic hell dwellers  
like Mohammed  
who saw post-Islamic hell dwellers  
The identity of the caravan of the innocent  
will not be proven in the course of time  
Future archaeologists  
will remove the firing squad's last bullet  
rattling in the empty skull like a peanut  
and send it to the last laboratory  
so that at least  
the geological stage of the crime  
will be brought to light  
And the bald scholars of the future will write  
two or three dissertations connecting this  
peanut  
to a dark prehistoric time  
which is our present

## Love is the Colour of Lemon

Ziba Karbassi

Translated by Ziba Karbassi and Stephen Watts



If you take away this pink veil from my face  
love is the lemon colour that lemon-limps its  
way to the tangerine sun

Eyelashes and neck  
Eyelashes cockeyed and neck skew-whiffed  
Crooked into your shoulder-nooks  
That seem like children's doodle-drawn homes  
My head is craned down to your cranny bone  
We are stood two crazed souls in each other  
Stood neck to neck  
Shudder to shudder

Eyelashes and neck just there  
Craned round again in the whorl of hot bone  
And your eyes that kissing-kissed wet my lips  
And your eyes that wet the kisses of my other lip  
Your eye that plunges its furrow until we can't see  
Fused in the voice and rapture of it

Come, come if you take the pink slowly from here  
Love is this lemon colour that oh lemon-limps bitter  
then leaps to the tangerine womb

### Collage Poem : 2

Always in my face you were looking for someone it wasn't me  
you could kill someone always it wouldn't be me not me at all  
when I was looking at you from far-away you were nearest to  
yourself my shoulder shivered just a little so you wouldn't see  
even under the stone when I was shuddering I didn't shudder  
even when you pulled the nails from my fingers I myself was  
painting them red  
When you shaved my head I kept plaiting the tulips of my hair  
so that in the morning they would sway in waves like the dawn  
breeze & wind themselves around my waist  
When you blindfolded my eyes and push-pushed me to the Hang-  
Man's Tree with my own feet I walked toward the poker tables  
so as to lose all that I had & come back & spit full into the mirror  
then in my face I would look for someone who's no longer there  
My the mirror of this house holds strange memories !

So I would wrench out my heart that always was in pain  
and throw it at the mirror with its closed-up hidden wounds  
What a tulip tree ! This one in the full mirror see it lung-in  
its tree-breaths

The drop of rain that becomes a pearl knows about this  
Knows about the feel of the poem that from its roots is in pain  
in my skin and my words



### collage poem : 3

And death like death to be wholly dead  
And each night hail raining down like dead ones  
And you become my umbrella-tree  
So I could calmly say "let it rain"

And your arm beneath my neck  
And the view through this open window become this  
supple willow again  
So that its waist weeps into love and then love bows from  
its waist to this line of verse  
And then this line would raise itself a little  
& not a little but a bit more  
or would leap from the page  
Even if the sky wanted to be dark  
Let it be so for ever  
What's the difference  
But stay here for me  
You the warmth of our hugging  
You the soft kiss of spring

And then a little bitter  
a bit wet a bit cooled getting inside each other to the soul  
and tied together so that no hand could prise us apart again  
like some secret Like this ruined heart of mine that not with  
any good reason could be opened  
Like this poem itself Let it not be uttered  
And if I say it what will be left for me

The drop of rain that becomes a pearl knows about this



# Ali Abdolrezaei

## Standing Upright, they were Tall Enough

*First publication of the work in English.  
Translated by Ziba Karbassi and Jennifer Langer*

*Dedicated to Mokhtari Poyandeh, prominent writer,  
murdered by the Iranian government in December  
1998 in Tebran*



*image: Afshin Shahroodi*

The photo created instantly  
screaming occurred instantly  
death came instantly  
Did you see that? Did you see it in the paper?  
How instantly his face was tinted?  
Did you see that?  
How we remained in the mirror?  
How shattered he became?  
How fraught the wind?  
Accidents befell him, a tree toppling  
Boom  
Howled death and the leaves fluttered away  
Banished it from his dreams  
A voice lost in space  
Was shot dead

The radio is blurry  
The world turns its back on us  
Powerless to see  
To hear  
The programme they are dreaming up  
While we censored the shouting in our throats  
On TV His Excellency was listening  
"The remainder of the programme will be shown  
shortly."  
It resumed.  
We were stunned  
As we emerged from lamentation  
Creating a sea in place of Alborz

Long years have elapsed  
No, I refuse to answer the phone  
The wind has gusted into the receiver  
I cannot reach it  
Cannot reach the black mass  
To wash the moon from the skirt of the sky  
Not the wind sweeping down the slopes of the roof  
Not the rain causing umbrellas to be unfurled

I was petrified by those two tall cypresses  
So courageous, insensitive to fear  
Standing there  
Now absent  
No longer there

The photo created instantly screaming occurred  
instantly death came instantly  
Did you see that?  
The world turns its back on us  
The radio blurry  
Did you hear that?  
Perhaps death is his destiny  
With his pen and hanging rope desired to write  
'Write' we sobbed under our veils  
How can I stand up for him  
He who never stood up for anyone  
Why don't we reveal the man who makes up in a mir-  
ror  
Every morning  
Leave him there

A tree is my narrative  
When it fell, it was tall enough  
Didn't I say that?  
Two men were felled in the accident  
Why should I be silent?  
The wind pursues the falling leaves  
The carefree wind.



*image: Afshin Shahroodi*

# Forrough

**Ali Abdolrezaei**

*Translated by Ziba Karbassi and Jennifer Langer*

Forough Farrokhzad (1935-1967), poet, the most famous woman in the history of Persian literature, was born in Tehran to a middle class family of seven children. She was married at the age of 17 and her only child, the boy to whom "A Poem For You" was addressed, was born a year later. Within two years her marriage failed, and Farrokhzad gave up her son to her ex-husband's family in order to pursue her calling in poetry and an independent lifestyle. She voiced her feelings in the mid-1950s about conventional marriage, the plight of women in Iran, and her own situation in poems such as "The Captive", "The Wedding Band", "Call to Arms", and "To My Sister". She died in a car accident at the age of 32 in February, 1967.



I wanted to write a poem for Forrough  
Knew it would not be published  
Wanted to lie about her name  
Knew you would not believe me  
Believe me  
How could I write  
So that you would not censor it  
When silence is stamped on our mouths  
'Believe'  
It's emblazoned on the billboards  
You can sense Forrough's vacant space  
And a few lines  
Don't you believe me?  
So don't publish me at all



# Ghazi Rabihavi

## The Prey

*Translated by Nilou Mobasser*

Welcome to freedom, which will protect you as long as you live. Then your spirit will fly until it enters another body and the other body will wander aimlessly for a while until it falls prey to a hunter. Who can say how many of the ones behind the door have had their spirits pass through here before?

Hey, you, behind the door!

You see? Only silence, this is what happens when there's a newcomer. That's you. It's not that they're jealous. Not everything can be put down to jealousy. It can be hatred too. It is because I'm talking. I have to because when you're talking you forget what's going to happen to you.

On the nights when we were going to attack, we would all gather together in a huge underground trench, maybe one thousand of us. We would sing songs. Then we'd begin to move in the desert darkness and we'd talk about girls. No one would try to trip the others up by asking questions, because we were going to die. So we told our stories any way we wanted.

You shouldn't ask any questions either about how long I'm going to be talking. I don't know. Well, it's a game like the other games you'll be getting used to, or not getting used to until it's over. Nothing's ever over, look at my hands. Then, I'll take you out of the cage release you behind the door. You'll find lots of seed there, you won't need to fight over food with others anymore, pecking at your mother or your child.

The cause of death here isn't a shortage of food. I don't want to talk about blood right now either, because you'll smell it soon enough, let's just talk about life. As long as we get our weekly pittance, we'll stay alive. See, my love is soothing to you, because I want you, you. Each one of you a bit of my flesh. I've caught many of the others outside.

Catching you wasn't difficult, although it took a really long time. I've got to keep waiting until one of you sees my bait, then you come, with the beating music of your heart, that sound is with me no matter where I've hunted you. Whether I'd set my sights on you before or not, my young friend used to say, do you know how much pleasure you feel when you plunge your bayonet into the heart of someone you'd set your sights on plunging a bayonet into from before?

Then, I let the fear that had been with me all my life slip down off my shoulders and, as soon as a group of enemy

men surrendered to us, I'd set my sights on the ones that were going to be my prey and I'd stare at the point on their chests where I'd have to plunge the bayonet in. You see how lucky you were to fall into my trap of your own free will? Our traps and my hands.

Then the war was over and I had to go somewhere far away, so I came here. Maybe I'd had a job before, maybe I worked high up in the air, so high that people were just moving dots to me. Did I clean windows? Or was I in a helicopter? Maybe I was a teacher who never started a family, like my friend who felt no fear, because he was young.

He said, now that the war is over let's plunge our bayonets into our own hearts. I said, I need to go. He said, what do you think is waiting for you there other than an old people's home, until you die? I said, there's a gadget that can take the bullet out of a person's head. He said, you're crazy. Then he plunged his bayonet into his own heart. I came here. The bullet has still not been removed from my head.

The good thing is that I found all of you. The doctor said, no, there is no bullet. I said, there is a bullet that's spinning around like a top in my head. The doctor said, maybe it's a headache from old age. I said, I wasn't old. He said, then you must be imagining things, go. I left and didn't think about it anymore. I didn't think about my wife who said to me, go, otherwise the children will turn out crazy like you.

My wife used to pull all her hair back and tie it up in a braid. Her hair would become like a whip then because that's how I liked it. You see, I was a real man, like now, because you're real, otherwise, outside there are lots of people, working, just wandering around. If I had the patience to do it, I'd tell them there's a bullet still spinning around in my head.

But I can get you to understand, because you're real, that's why I share my love with you, from the day you fall prey to the day they take away the dustbin bags with your bones and I never cry for the one who's just gone, because I know her spirit is looking for another body, from the moment of... no, not the hunt. From the moment of freedom till... I'm not going to talk about blood, not there, not here.

Anyway, this house, like any other house, has a place where you can cook. But before that, there's a place where you can sleep and each night one of you slips under my sheet. My body is warmed up by your feathers and wings. Then we start all over again. Welcome.

## Shadab Vajdi

### A Heart Blows in Every Storm

*'Translated from Persian by Lotfali Khonji'*



It is a woman's singing, blowing with the wind.  
The disturbed, scattered rain of her voice  
plays the worn out nocturnal strings  
and washes the dust of exhaustion  
off the town's back alleys.

It is a woman's singing, blowing with the wind.  
The fiery heat of her melodies  
touches the shy faces of tulips, turning them red hot.  
The fiery heat of her melodies  
touches the spirit of elated wheat ears,  
making them ever more ecstatic.

Oh, my endless melody!  
For how long will you remain the companion of the spirit of the  
storm  
in the green rebellion of the forest  
and with the struggle of everlasting rivers  
curling around mountains like autumn clouds?  
For how long  
will you set pace along the isolation of the wandering road?

What is this spot on the blackness of nocturnal clouds?  
It is the shadow cast by my heart.  
It is the shadow of my heart  
crawling on its chest  
along the streets wet with tear drops.  
O, passers by! O, love-sick creatures,  
tread more carefully, more slowly.

All along difficult mountain passes  
and in the vastness of deserts bearing famine  
there is a heart blowing in every storm, murmuring:  
"Where am I? Who am I?  
I am an agitated wanderer  
in the storm-bearing waters of the ocean;  
I am no wave;  
I am a mere colourless drop"

Behold how your songs  
mingle with the lovers' blood tonight.  
Behold how amidst galaxies  
planets move swiftly and with disharmony.  
A pain tears the town asunder  
and a town throbs with exhaustion  
awaiting the explosion of the moments of  
patience and silence.

It is a woman's singing, blowing with the wind.  
And on the wire of her voice  
settle a flock of sea-gulls.

**In addition to the writers whose work appears above, the following leading writers are in exile in a range of countries.**

**Abbas Marufi** has written four novels and a significant number of short stories. He was also editor of the literary magazine *Gardoun* which the government closed down and in fact the intention was to whip him in public in the street but he ran away. He then hid before being granted exile in Berlin.



**Nader Naderpour** was a poet who became very outspoken against the Iranian government in the last years of his life in exile in the USA where he died in 2000. He was regarded as one of the leaders of the movement of 'New Poetry' in Iran and published nine collections of poems, many of them translated into English, French, German, and Italian. Naderpour's poetry is rich in imagery and deeply imbedded in the texture of Persian language.

**Shahrnush Parsipur** is a novelist whose entire work is banned in Iran. She received a B.A. in sociology from Tehran University in 1973 and published her first novel, *The Dog and the Long Winter*, in 1974. While working as a producer for Iranian National Television and Radio, she resigned from her position in protest of the execution of two poets by the Shah's regime. Shortly thereafter, she was arrested by the Shah's intelligence agency, SAVAK, and imprisoned. A year after her release, she travelled to France, where she completed her second book, *The Simple and Small Adventures of the Spirit of the Tree* (1977), an erotic novel that continues the story of a character in *The Dog and the Long Winter*. Following the 1979 revolution, Parsipur returned to Iran where she was arrested by the Islamic Republic and, although never officially charged with a crime, remained in prison for four years and seven months – an experience she has written about in her *Prison Memoirs*. While in prison, Parsipur wrote the first part of *Touba and the Meaning of Night*. Published in Iran in 1989, the novel became a national bestseller. She later endured further arrests and detainments for discussing virginity on three occasions in her book *Women Without Men*, published in Iran in 1989. Parsipur fled from Iran and now lives in the United States as a political refugee. She has published eight books of fiction, as well as her *Prison Memoirs*.



**Gholam-Hossein Saedi** is considered the most eminent playwright. He continued to write in exile in Paris where he died. His plays include *An Eye for an Eye*, and *The Cow*, in which an impoverished village is thrown into chaos after losing its only cow. In his last play, the tragic-comedy, *Othello in the Land of the Exotic*, 1990, Gholam-Hossein Saedi portrayed the effect of strict cultural supervision in Iran such as censorship, prohibition against the display of emotions, male-female contact and so on. He was a staunch supporter of the Resistance.

# Poetry and Essays

## Dialogue with Myself

Wafaa Abdul Razak

**This is the first publication of the poetry in English.**

*Translated by Jennifer Langer, Ziba Karbassi, Nahar Salan*



### Colours

Crimson camelia  
Stuns the grass  
Juicy orange courts a violet  
Charred brown of burnt cake  
Unaware of the famished child  
Grey is foolish  
Lacerates my hand  
Smooths the black sheet on my bed  
Overlooks the purity of the white satin  
Around my bleeding wound

### Hand Span

The world is but a hand span  
Hanging from a thread  
Merely a hand span  
On the knot of time  
Quieten yourself  
Penetrate my veins  
I have but clotted seasons  
I am forsaken on a wall  
Repudiating my days  
Me  
I am Home  
Rejected within it  
Powerless to assert control  
Powerless to remove the claws of the wind  
My echo destroying me  
Wild seeds shoot up encompassing me  
For 2000 years storming between two enemies  
Between a prophet's words borne on my voice  
And the other enemy  
A god that does not receive me  
Not even on a hand span of crumbling twigs

The world is an apple in your hands  
Don't bite of the sin of the leaders

Confront the world  
Strike it  
Call yourself to prayer  
Oh my heart  
The overt and the covert  
Your mother is a whore  
So what!  
Take my flaming torch  
Burn between her legs  
Name her  
From her exhaustion  
Ignite the sparks  
Embellish her necklace  
Take the flaming torch  
To the naked, hungry prisoner  
Burn between his legs  
  
All rivers flow from her nipples  
On earth two angels  
Hand spans colossal  
As their breasts

Be silent, silent, silent  
Your mother is a god.



## Concentric Circles by Yang Lian

*Translated by Brian Holton and  
Agnes Hung-Chong Chan  
(Bloodaxe Books, 2005)*

### Gaia

man is a sketch  
the heartbeats of sand a fatal dream  
more reticent than a room  
ocean leaks down along the beautiful waist of  
a glass  
more ignorant than light more like a single  
night than love

language gives you the theme  
sand grips you in slow motion  
a pair of tiny dancing breasts  
deny dying in death  
the more delicately a moment is depicted the  
shorter it becomes

the more a bright window between the legs  
hears  
a glass of wine next door  
lies teach you  
create a dark truth in your own eyes  
ocean's pattern placed above a non-human aim

more familiar with destruction than bird claws  
in dreams under golden skin a murmuring  
grain of  
unreachable by event the prettiest finger  
sand

### Constructed Ground

the garden is only at the foot of the cliff  
extinct volcano  
threatening the ocean for a whole year  
it's you walking down the street  
it's street turned into bridge  
under the bridge corpses wrap a  
tediously long rainy season  
it's Auckland that polished the bloody  
axe bright in seagulls' screaming

it's Sydney hanging beneath an oyster balcony  
passing drunkards in the dusk  
mumbling to themselves again  
yellow waves of jaundice  
break into a basket of ripened apples  
it's New York auctioned off to  
the festering yellow snow

stray cats taxi drivers  
disappear into the alleys of Paris or Prague  
rancid smells gush out of  
the bowls of Vienna and Los Angeles  
it's a Brooklyn basement on a madman's seabed  
counting the sand leaking down

flocks of concrete birds cove your timeless window  
it's Berlin on its sleigh always sliding to midnight  
waxed street light  
glowing earlier still in blood vessels  
a pearl among mossy eyelids  
it's what is watched  
watching you rush to the destruction ground

the chime is only the foot of the cliff  
fondly injuring drowned hearing  
cliff tumbles into London sky  
flowers at the funeral grip  
a face through four seasons  
thorn of grammar  
pricks newspaper headlines below silver fish-scales  
is the river that threatens poets minting  
another marble pillow  
breathing conceals a city in the abstract  
sound of rain you're unmoving  
two parallel ranks of gravestones blindly passing

it's  
this place that never changes  
only then does one collect the disaster of  
one's own past

# Driving to the Harbour of Heaven

*Translating Yang Lian's Concentric Circles*

## Brian Holton

*Concentric Circles* is not an easy book, in any sense. It makes great demands on the reader in any language, and it has often been a vexing and frustrating experience attempting to translate it, though I must also say that Agnes Chan and I have just as often felt the exhilaration of rising to a challenge and the rewards that come when the puzzle of a recalcitrant text is finally unlocked.

Yang Lian has written to me that it is the “most important piece since I came out from China”, and that he intends the work to be seen as a matched pair with his book-length poem cycle *Yi*. It is, he insists, emphatically not a political work, but instead an artistic work focused on “deep reality”.

Yang Lian’s style, it seems to me, is one founded on a type of collage, where many small fragments, each complete in itself, are aligned together in a series of patterns to form a grander mosaic: from line to line, poem to poem, cycle to cycle, book to book, in ever-widening concentric structures. Like Burroughs’ cut-ups, they are startling and disjointed on one level while remaining coherent on another, but Yang Lian is collaging images, not words - ‘image cut-ups’, perhaps. Each image remains self-sufficient and perfect, creating an extraordinary and vertiginous effect as the reader’s focus is shifted willy-nilly from micro to macro, the eye and mind constantly jolted between different levels of reference and different levels of attention. There is order here, a precisely shaped and crafted order, as intricate as the work of the mosaic-builder or the watchmaker. Though they may be ambiguous, and though the meaning of each fragment is not always instantly obvious, his images are exact and true. A good example of this precision is in the opening lines of his poem cycle *Where the Sea Stands Still*:

blue is always higher  
just as your weariness has chosen  
the sea just as a man’s gaze compels the sea  
to be twice as desolate

At first when I read these lines, I was paying more attention to the stanza as a whole, and, inasmuch as I gave much thought to it, I assumed *blue is always higher* to be an abstract kind of thought, a ranking of the ocean’s blue as having a higher, more abstract quality, with the added possibility of its referring also to the blue of the sky, which is positioned above the sea. Then in 2003, Yang and I were in Auckland for a poetry conference: though he had lived in Auckland

for several years, during the period when *Where the Sea Stands Still* was conceived, and I had visited the city a couple of times, we had never been there together. As we walked or drove around the city that week, Yang constantly drew my eye to small details in the cityscape or in the scenery, referring them to lines and images in his poetry. Finally, we were invited out to Mike Hanne’s place, close to Karekare beach, where Jane Campion’s *The Piano* was filmed. As we arrived, Yang rushed me out to the deck to look at the view: as we looked down the narrow valley to where the sea was framed between two almost perfect 45 degree hill slopes, the optical illusion that the blue seawater was rising away from us at a steep angle was near-perfect. “That’s it!” he said. “That’s where blue is always higher!” And it was, perfectly precise and physically present, there in front of me. Nothing abstract about it, but a deftly executed sketch of a physical phenomenon, inserted into a complex tessellation of images.

I had always felt that the way to improve the standard of Chinese-English literary translation would be for native English speakers to collaborate with native Chinese speakers in small teams: as a non-native speaker, I will never be able to read the Chinese text with enough subtlety or depth; conversely, the Chinese speaker will find it extremely difficult to render the richness of the text in an English sufficiently nuanced to have literary value. Yet together, what might we not achieve? The reader will judge us on the product of this joint venture, of course, but I think the process of translating this book has been a very interesting and highly affirmative experience, and in terms of our collaboration, a resounding success.

How did we work? Agnes Chan took on the painful job of slowly reading through the Chinese text, noting ambiguities, intertextualities, cruxes and challenges. She then presented me with first drafts in English, including alternative readings and helpful notes on every page. Once a week, we would sit down together and slowly read through her draft, as I polished the English drafts, looking for rhythm, nuance, and cadence, as well as trying to create for our English versions a sound structure that could in some sense replicate or parallel the sounds of the original. We were not always in agreement, though our collaboration was good-humoured: from time to time we did, however, come close to losing our patience with the poet, who tormented us with such seemingly-intractable problems - but that is a fact of life, if you are foolish enough to attempt the charmingly impossible trade of poetry translation.

Yang Lian is engaged in testing the limits of his language, and in so doing, he has tested the limits of our ingenuity. Some of the problems we have had to deal with are acrostics (the three poems in the final section which all bear the title *POETRY*), neologisms, coinages and apparent malapropisms (e.g. oysterses), the splitting of words into their component parts and even the splitting of characters into their constituents (Yang cites one example in his preface). These are tricky to negotiate, though not impossible to resolve.

## Have you Seen my Cactus

*Bogdan Tiganov*

bursting with violet flowers on  
one side for that's where the sun  
breathes ?

and it has no need for religion  
patriotism or  
propaganda



## Monet

*Bogdan Tiganov*

didn't excite me  
but I was told  
he kept painting  
tranquil landscapes  
and lillies  
when his real life  
was insufferable  
blind

so my scene is this:  
a small tree  
dark and rich and deep  
growing in a tidy garden  
the heat and storms have  
harmed some branches  
blue and green

## When you return to Ashtarak

*Nora Nadjarian*

stand on the bridge  
and listen to the silence of our ancestors  
in the marrow of your bones

you were born with a church bell in your heart  
and the voices of angels in your throat

sing sing said my mother wake up the stones  
the souls of the dead the river the skies  
sing to the red and orange birds in our language  
sing those bitterwords and proud refrains  
to show them you remember who you are

your grandfather will play his violin  
he will play it the way he did at markets and fairs  
the same way he played the music of falling tears

just sing to the river Kasakh  
when you return

# Nora Nadjarian

## Waterfall

You asked me what I was  
doing last Sunday, when  
you called and didn't find me in.

I was standing in front of a waterfall  
in the Tate Gallery. Not back, like most  
people, but close, right up close, looking

looking at, into, this abstract landscape hiding  
behind white cascades. I was not sure whether  
it was the trees first, or the water, or the shadows

I was recognising. It was all a haze - like a framed  
tear- but I clearly knew that the eyes of the land  
watching me, lost, here, somewhere in London

were making me shed all my rough edges  
to become a soft body full of contours,  
ready to step into pounding water

to meet others clinging like me  
onto the rock of their identity  
in this never-ending, flowing,  
falling, falling waterfall.

You asked me once what  
it means to be Armenian.  
It is quite difficult to explain.

### ***Inspired by Arshile Gorky's The Waterfall (1943)***

*Arshile Gorky (1904 - 1948) was born in Armenia and emigrated to the USA in 1920. He has been referred to as an artist-in-exile, for whom art became a homeland.*



# The Struggle for Freedom of Expression in Turkey

Richard McKane

I went to Turkey for 5 days in February and March 2005 as a representative from English PEN to observe the trials of Ragip Zarakolu and Fikret Bashkaya and to join an international team led by my friend Eugene Schoulgin of International PEN and Alexis Krikorian of the International Publishers' Association. By some fate, or was it State engineering the two trials were set to be held on the same day: Ragip's in Istanbul and Fikret's in Ankara. I joined the half of the group that was due to go to Ankara.

I had lived in Turkey for six years in the 70s, including a couple in Istanbul. I have co-translated with Ruth Christie books of Nazim Hikmet and Oktay Rifat. I had been invited to Istanbul to do readings and to conferences on Nazim Hikmet and Oktay Rifat. Two poetry books of mine have been published in Turkey, bilingually.

The first night in Istanbul I chose a very cheap Lahmajun (Turkish Pizza) joint off Taksim Square – the heart of Istanbul and centre of the famous or infamous Mayday demonstrations where arrests are often made.

Here are a few of the quatrains I wrote in that café – too late to go into my book *Coffeehouse Poems* which came out in 2003 with Yapi Kredi, Turkey's leading publisher, in my English and skilful translations into Turkish by Turkish poet friends. These quatrains form part of a book length sequence *Trains of Thought*, that I am still in the process of writing.

Quatrains follow.

Hours after landing I'm in a lahmajun joint  
and the rough and ready meal does not disappoint,  
washed down with ayran or buttermilk –  
I'm back in the land of my ilk.

\*

The busy poor folk round Taksim Square:  
what relation do they have to those in the hotels there?  
And why when I had the first evening to spare  
did I turn down the fish and belly-dancing restaurant for more  
humble fare?

\*

It's because I wrote a lot here  
in restaurants, teahouses and coffee ones –  
it's because I say without fear  
I'm a mixture of a populist and one of the elitist ones.

\*

I like the high-flown and the low,  
the nightingale and the ragged crow,  
the rose and the gorse crown  
and picking you up when you're down.

\*  
The fish would have tasted nice  
but come at a healthy price,  
but this red-brown tea in its clear glass  
cuts across all elements of class.

\*  
How much will they charge for thirty lines,  
feathered with double rhymes?  
My God, I owe this restaurant sixty pounds –  
to repay them I am honour bound.

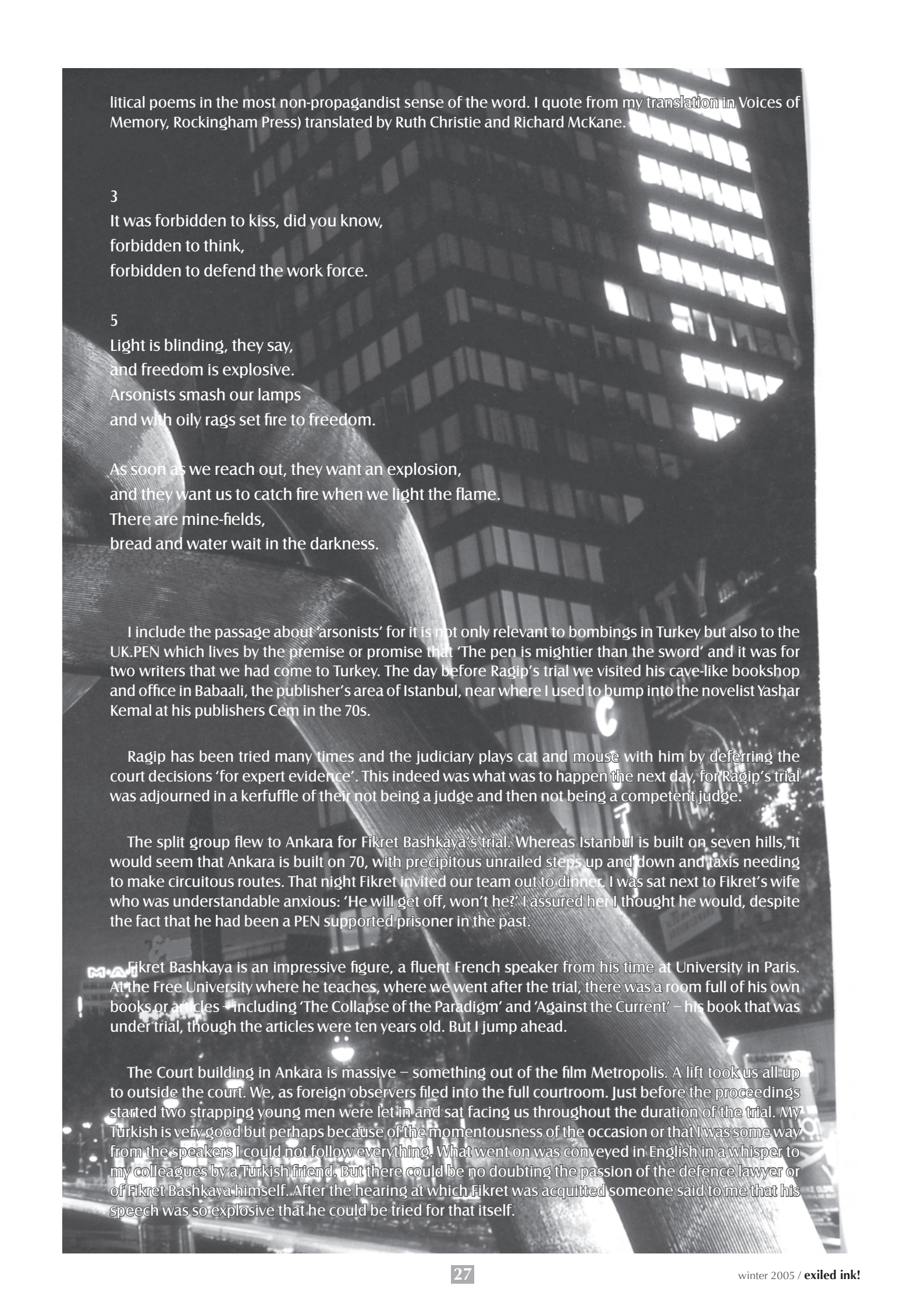
\*  
My memories go round and round  
as I digest the meal –  
familiarity in the pit of the stomach is found,  
there it's not always fear one feels.

\*  
At home I interpret torture,  
here too I'm carrying a torch.  
Keep its flame alive with caution,  
a candle burning at a threshold's porch.

\*  
All will become clear at breakfast –  
the thrust of the Press Conference.  
Will the news break fast –  
freedom of expression has to be experienced.

The Press Conference was well attended by the public but poorly by the Press. Shanar Yurdapan was our host, one of Turkey's leading human rights activists, organiser of FoX ('freedom of expression', a human rights monitoring organisation, which has had success with several civil disobedience campaigns against State legislature) and a very famous songwriter. Eugene Schoulgin and Alexis Krikoryan made the main speeches. They both stressed that whereas articles in the Legal Code of the Republic had changed there was 'a long way to go in implementation' and freedom of expression was still not a reality. This was illustrated by the case of Ragip Zarakolu who was present at the conference. Ragip Zarakolu, with his publishing house Belge, (firebombed in the 90s) has set out to tackle and publish books on the taboo subjects: the Kurds, Kurdish and Kurdish issues, including the razing of villages in Turkey by the State forces; the Armenians – including the massacre in the teens of last century and memoirs of Armenians some of which are books in translation. At the time of writing he is due on 21st September 2005 to be tried for Insult and Contempt against Turkishness and the State Military Forces, for having had translated and publishing 'Garaet Hacheryan's Izmir Journal: An Armenian Doctor's Experiences'. Also, a court case may be brought against the outstanding novelist Orhan Pamuk for stating in an interview with the Swiss newspaper Tages Anzeiger that '30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares talk about it'. For a most balanced assessment of this see the Independent article (Aug 31, 2005) by his translator, the novelist, Maureen Freely. I don't want to go into this here, but a vigorous campaign of support for Orhan Pamuk is being mounted by PEN and internationally.

Freedom of expression requires freedom of thought and thinking. The great twentieth century Turkish poet Oktay Rifat who died in 1988, in the early sixties wrote a poem about this subject – one of its few po-



litical poems in the most non-propagandist sense of the word. I quote from my translation in *Voices of Memory*, (Rockingham Press) translated by Ruth Christie and Richard McKane.

3

It was forbidden to kiss, did you know,  
forbidden to think,  
forbidden to defend the work force.

5

Light is blinding, they say,  
and freedom is explosive.  
Arsonists smash our lamps  
and with oily rags set fire to freedom.

As soon as we reach out, they want an explosion,  
and they want us to catch fire when we light the flame.  
There are mine-fields,  
bread and water wait in the darkness.

I include the passage about 'arsonists' for it is not only relevant to bombings in Turkey but also to the UK.PEN which lives by the premise or promise that 'The pen is mightier than the sword' and it was for two writers that we had come to Turkey. The day before Ragip's trial we visited his cave-like bookshop and office in Babaali, the publisher's area of Istanbul, near where I used to bump into the novelist Yashar Kemal at his publishers Cem in the 70s.

Ragip has been tried many times and the judiciary plays cat and mouse with him by deferring the court decisions 'for expert evidence'. This indeed was what was to happen the next day, for Ragip's trial was adjourned in a kerfuffle of their not being a judge and then not being a competent judge.

The split group flew to Ankara for Fikret Bashkaya's trial. Whereas Istanbul is built on seven hills, it would seem that Ankara is built on 70, with precipitous unrailled steps up and down and taxis needing to make circuitous routes. That night Fikret invited our team out to dinner. I was sat next to Fikret's wife who was understandable anxious: 'He will get off, won't he?' I assured her I thought he would, despite the fact that he had been a PEN supported prisoner in the past.

Fikret Bashkaya is an impressive figure, a fluent French speaker from his time at University in Paris. At the Free University where he teaches, where we went after the trial, there was a room full of his own books or articles – including 'The Collapse of the Paradigm' and 'Against the Current' – his book that was under trial, though the articles were ten years old. But I jump ahead.

The Court building in Ankara is massive – something out of the film *Metropolis*. A lift took us all up to outside the court. We, as foreign observers filed into the full courtroom. Just before the proceedings started two strapping young men were let in and sat facing us throughout the duration of the trial. My Turkish is very good but perhaps because of the momentousness of the occasion or that I was some way from the speakers I could not follow everything. What went on was conveyed in English in a whisper to my colleagues by a Turkish friend. But there could be no doubting the passion of the defence lawyer or of Fikret Bashkaya himself. After the hearing at which Fikret was acquitted someone said to me that his speech was so explosive that he could be tried for that itself.

After asking my way to the lift from a woman who had attended the trial – we were all happy at the result (and shocked that the trial had taken place at all) – she gave me a lift with a friend to the Free University where a Press Conference was held. Once more Eugene Schoulgin spoke eloquently of how pressure should be kept on the Turkish Government to implement legal reforms. He was later in the day to see the EU Ambassador and found him in agreement with many of the conclusions of our freedom of expression initiative. I quoted a poem from Nazim Hikmet. Here is the English from *Beyond the Walls*, Selected Poems of Nazim Hikmet, Tr. Ruth Christie, Richard McKane, Talat Halman – Anvil Press:

26th September 1945

They captured us, and threw us into jail:

me inside the walls,

you outside.

Ours is small business;

but the worst thing is,

consciously or unconsciously

to carry prison inside one.

Most people are in this situation,

honourable, hard-working good people,

worthy of being loved as much as I love you...

I spoke briefly in Turkish about torture. Fikret Bashkaya had called Turkey 'a torture state' and this was one of the things that was held against him.

After the trial I met up with my Turkish friend who lectures in Russian at the University and found myself helping her teach a translation class in Russian, Turkish and English. Afterwards we drove to a café and talked about the Russian poets Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam and Marina Tsvetaeva, poets who lived and died by their art and their struggle for freedom of expression. My friend is making them better known to Turkey with her teaching, translations and writing.

Ragıp Zarakolu and Fikret Bashkaya are two outstanding examples of brave writers who have been targeted in recent years in Turkey for expression of their ideas in a non-violent way. As Turkey puts itself forward to join the European Union and makes legal reforms it is important that true freedom of expression be created, defended and implemented. PEN defends this in many countries worldwide and will continue to do so.

September 2005

## Post 7.7.

### London Bombings

*Yuyutsu RD Sharma*

I didn't desert the Underground  
to join British waterways  
or party on the shores of the Northern Sea.

I didn't leave the streets,  
Oxford, Piccadilly, Marylebone High Street,  
to go into the lonely Room  
to read Bronte, Bill or the Da Vinci Code.

I didn't desert the West End  
to go for meadows dotted with sheep.

I moved like Blake  
in the double-decker buses  
deciphering terror alphabets  
of a script of hidden sleep.

Notting Hill, Tooting, Camden,  
Fullham, Wembley, Hammersmith,  
I stayed on to join  
carnivals of primal ecstasy.

I was there when they brought  
their forgotten gods and demons out from their skins.

I fell in love with her  
as Elizabeth got drunk and kept swearing,  
smearing her purple lipstick  
with shaking long fingers all over her mouth

Sitting in her lover's lap,  
she kept calling me 'husband'  
while her teenage daughter  
opposite us lay in waiting.

I was there when they celebrated  
the death of Jane's family  
and their charade of being  
proverbial husband/wife went on  
like a morality play  
faming the last shame humanity's grandmothers.

It was there that Elizabeth's body  
glowed like a hillside hearth in a room where  
a statue of the wooden  
Krishna broke into a smile.

"Put your Hinduish/Buddhist marks on your forehead  
or wear pendants showing your holy gods,  
you could be taken as a terrorist and shot five times in  
the brain..."

But I refused to desert the square  
littered with blotches of the dark ink of terror...

I didn't desert the squares of the mighty Pound  
to cry secretly in the nearby towns where  
under common ground Marx and Freud lay buried....

I moved about fearlessly  
under the shadow of Marble Arch  
kissed her beneath  
the tall column of Trafalgar Square.  
and entered immaculate doors  
of New Age goddess on the swelling Thames' banks,  
daring to risk the Empire's familiar hand,  
Prospero's mighty magic wand.

# I Do not Wish to Leave This Lovely World


*Mir Mahfuz Ali*

This world is too lovely for the price of my blood.  
I do not want to pack my bag with brutal bombs  
and leave the attractive earth where I belong.  
There is too much at stake at this red hour.  
A troubled figure, muttering: allah who akhbar,  
to fill the mind's own fixed emptiness.  
He becomes self-righteous in his own right.  
Wishing to walk further than death and fame,  
where he will meet his God in the menacing air.  
I watched his thick brows draw together with strain.  
Nobody aware of the frequency of his internal throb  
Why is he so determined to pulverize the sky?  
Does he think, I care too much for my secular life  
just like my fellow travellers on that public bus?  
We all are far from our families and homes,  
far from rivers and oceans, far from fearing a god.  
The young man regards death as his wilful karma.  
Maybe his sense of body has dissipated by now.  
But mine wants to linger longer with the sunlight.  
While the breeze blows across the bustling city.  
The beguiling birdsong will again call me back  
to take part in the consolation of the trees.  
When my dreams, desires and despairs surface  
in my heart makes room for wailing joy,  
does this man know what new surprise is in store?  
If I do not wish to live somewhere other than here,  
in this tumultuous earth, where the spring,  
the dawn the dusk rejuvenate me, then why  
take risk of dying from a bomb explosion  
while buying my ticket to worldly pleasure?  
Why grant this bomber the chance to justify his cruelty?  
while my guts spill out onto a busy road?




# Bubbles for Peace

*Dennis Evans*




There were Reverends and Rockers  
Housewives and children



There were old friends, new friends  
Politicians, policemen

There were Christians and Muslims  
Communists and Buddhists

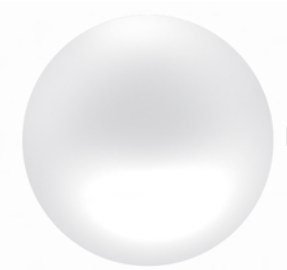


And banners, such banners  
Banners for peace

There were dancers and drummers  
And children in pushchairs

There were priests and our poets  
And grannies in wheelchairs

There were students and stiltwalkers  
And a brave paraplegic



And a man with his toy gun  
Lit by his laughter  
Blowing bubbles, such bubbles  
Bubbles for Peace

London Peace March against the invasion of Iraq, February 15th, 2003

# An Iranian Female Called Che!

*Soheila Ghodstinat*

Suicide bombers, terrorists, soldiers, fighters all have one thing in common: they kill! However, they have no idea what they are doing and why they are doing it. Is this the correct way? To kill ourselves and each other to get what we want? Attack other countries to achieve justice? What exactly do we want? Freedom? Whose freedom? That of innocent people? How are we to obtain it? Is there any other way to fight? Instead of killing each other? I am sure there is. As a matter of fact, I know there is. I once witnessed people fighting for their rights and freedom without even scarring on someone's face. You want to know who they are? I will tell you.

They are Iranian women, still living in my homeland. The admirable, amazing women of my country. They are the real fighters, with courage and intelligence, just like Che Guevara! However there is one tiny difference: these women have no weapons! Or should I say their only weapon is their intellect. And yet, especially after the Islamic Revolution, Iran was one of the most strict and severe countries for women. To make my point clearer, I will tell you a true story about one of those remarkable women, a story of courage, bravery and wisdom, of a woman who is known as "Che!" Yet no one outside of Iran has ever heard of her.

Elmira! She has been fighting the regime for as long as you could imagine. The people who are in control of the current government have arrested her many times, but she never gives up. "I am always ten steps ahead of them." She told me once I asked her about how she defeats them all the time. "I know their language and I know their weaknesses, but they have no idea about my strategy!" And she was right. On one occasion I was there and I saw her in action. She was confident, composed, without fear, and she amazed everyone with what she did that day.

One morning, I was supposed to pick Elmira up and go somewhere with her. "I'll be there around 10am. Please be ready by then," I told her the night before. "If I'm not home, then I'll be in the shop next-door. I'll see you there," she said. The next morning as soon as I got there, I saw her come out of the shop, her four-year-old daughter in one hand, her one-year-old son's push-chair in the other, some herbs and vegetables under her arms. She wore her usual hijab: a small scarf that failed to cover or contain even most of her blonde highlighted hair. A very thin and transparent long jacket had been left unbuttoned to reveal a strapless dress and her cleavage. Her feet were shod in summery sandals exposing rows of red coloured toenails. Her provocative dress was a perfect reason for those fanatic, furious Pasdars to arrest her without mercy or compassion.

As I thought about the danger, a car approached, full of Pasdars\* who jumped out with angry faces and guns drawn as if they had seen the most wanted and dangerous criminal of all time. They pointed their weapons at her and told her

not to move. "What kind of Hijab is that? You slut! We are here to keep our society and community free of people like you with your disgusting appearance and behaviour. Get in the car right now. Go on. Get in now. It is an order!" said one of the menacing Pasdars to Elmira.

I didn't know what to do and was staring at them in fear, almost sure that they were going to take her away. To my shock, Ellie without saying a word, walked towards the vicious Pasdar and very calmly put her daughter's hand into his, then with a gesture asked him to hold the push chair with his other hand. Next, she put all those vegetables under his arms, then took her jacket off serenely and put it on his shoulder. Finally she took off her scarf and placed it on his head! Every one was stunned, even the cruel Pasdar. She slowly turned, raised her voice and said, "Now, with all these things, you walk, so I can see how you manage to have a good Hijab. And if you can do it, then you have every right to arrest me, but if not then just back off and leave at once!" The Pasdar who had been shocked by her actions, returned all her belongings in stunned silence, headed towards his car, gestured for the others to follow, and they left! Whether she had acted out of extraordinary presence of mind or just sheer guts, she had had gotten them to leave without pressing charges!

It was one of the most interesting things I had ever seen. After that day, I was convinced she was a true fighter. She was brave, bright and confident. Her tactics were too formidable for these Islamic, narrow minded, thick people. She was also an activist and was constantly helping other campaigners, even those from different political parties, groups or mind-sets.

And after almost nineteen years since my departure, last week I saw a mutual friend. When I asked her about Elmira, she told me that Ellie was still doing the same thing, "Nevertheless, no one could put her away" our mutual friend told me. "She was arrested a few times, but every time they had to free her as they never had enough evidence to put her away forever. She is amazing! In our small community, people call her the female Che Guevara! It's a pity that no one else knows about her apart from us. I wish someday, somehow, people all over the world will know about her. I wish someone would tell her story to everyone, as people like her should be a light in this violent, brutal, malicious world."

My friend was right. People like Elmira, are true fighters. They put their life in danger every single day, doing everything to get back their own and everyone else's rights. They try their best to achieve real justice and even do so without hurting someone. I am so proud of them, I am so proud of my friend Elmira, or should I say, the Iranian woman called: CHE!

\* pasdars: militia



# Events

## ***Against the Oblivion:* Response to a Photographic Exhibition Srebrenica Now, 8-17 July 2005, Salon des Arts, London**

### **Mirza Fehimovic**

Bosnia is not in the news any more. Even at the time, with the media bombarding the English audience with news from Bosnia, not many people understood what was happening. But ever since the Dayton Agreement was signed in 1995 in Ohio, the Balkan wars of the 90s, as the three and a half years of war crimes in Former Yugoslavia, are now called, have gradually been pushed into oblivion. A couple of months ago I met an 18-year old girl who came from Macedonia on a short visit to London. In a brief conversation I mentioned that I had arrived in London six months into the war in Bosnia. "War? Which war?" the girl asked.

To mark the tenth anniversary of what happened in Srebrenica where 7000 unarmed people were executed, several NGOs organised "Srebrenica Now". The event was intended not only to remember the victims of Srebrenica massacre but also to address the future in terms of how to restore at least a semblance of normal life in Srebrenica with the expelled Bosniaks returning in very small numbers and the prevailing mood among the local Serbs being that of disapproval. Srebrenica's massacre was an organised crime, said Dr Honig, committed in order to "liberate", in Serbian terms, that part of Bosnia. By killing more than 7,000 men the Serbian military forces made the repatriation impossible.

The highlight of the event was the launch of the book *Postcards from the Grave* by Emir Suljagic, a Bosnian journalist lucky enough to escape the siege of Srebrenica. The exhibition of photographs was a record of what NGOs have tried to achieve by working on projects involving both Bosniaks and Serbs. The focus of the project was on returnees but resident Serbs were helped too since creating a more normal atmosphere in the town needed both sides to be engaged. Volunteers have taken part in many activities that should benefit the community as a whole. Bosniaks and Serbs, when it was possible, were asked to take part in the activities together.



*Philippa Harrison*

But Srebrenica was not an isolated case. It is simply an icon of the three years of brutality that was carried out with the complicity of the international community. The anniversary could have been a chance for the international community to do something positive, though several obstacles of a political nature are in the way. On what grounds can we expect a rape victim to reconcile with her rapist? The question concerns not only the victims of Srebrenica but Bosnia as a whole. The question difficult as it is, has to be answered.

# News

## Exiled Palestinian writer awarded Swedish writing prize

Samir ElYoussef, the Palestinian writer living in exile in London, was awarded the annual Tucholsky Award in April 2005 by the Swedish chapter of Pen Club. The prize, established in 1984, honours writers, journalists and publishers who face persecution, threats or exile from their home countries. Previous winners of the Tucholsky prize include the Indian-born author Salman Rushdie, and exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin. The award is named for German writer Kurt Tucholsky, who fled to Sweden in the 1930s from Nazi Germany.

ElYoussef was born in Rashidia, a Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon, in 1965. Since 1990 he has lived in London, where he studied philosophy. As a novelist, he has published several books of fiction in Arabic and *Gaza Blues: Different Stories* is the latest which he wrote in collaboration with the Israeli author Etgar Keret. It was first published in translation in the UK by David Paul Books. ElYoussef writes in both Arabic and English. He is also an essayist with interests ranging from literature, politics, philosophy and cultural studies.

## REVIEWS

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**Silver Throat of the Moon**

### ***The Silver Throat of the Moon: Writing in Exile* edited by Jennifer Langer (Five Leaves, 2005)**

*Reviewed by Nathalie Teitler*

This is a collection of prose and poetry of writers in exile from many countries including Algeria, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Iran, Kurdistan and Afghanistan. It is edited by Jennifer Langer and is the third collection of this nature that she has compiled. In this publication she has included not only the work of many excellent writers- some known to English readers, such as Choman Hardi and Yang Lian, and others new- but also essays expressing the reality of being a writer, or reader in exile. This adds an additional dimension for reflection and makes the text particularly thought provoking. Langer chooses wisely to focus on those writers who have true experience of being forced into exile, rather than exploring the interesting, but very different issues, related to cultural diversity and migration. This refusal to di-

→

lute the journey of the refugee, allows a true picture of the exilic life to emerge that is both painful and profound; it is clearly based on Langer's own personal commitment and involvement with this area. Although the writing is of the highest quality and the intellectual value cannot be denied, it is this clear focus that allows the reader to gain real emotional insights and understanding of issues such as memory, trauma and loss as expressed in the poem *Land* by Sherko Bekas from Kurdistan:

When I touched the bough of a tree  
It trembled in pain  
when I held out my hand to the branch  
the trunk started to weep  
when I embraced the trunk  
the soil under my feet shuddered  
the rocks groaned

this time when I bent down and collected  
a handful of earth  
all Kurdistan screamed

*(translated from Sorani by Kamal Mirawdeli)*

***Creativity in Exile* edited by Michael Hanne (Rodopi, NY; 2004)**

*Reviewed by Nathalie Teitler*

is an ambitious and exciting book edited by Michael Hanne exploring the many themes associated with the creative productivity of those who have experienced some form of displacement. It consists of a series of essays and poetry from artists around the world and is accompanied by a DVD which includes interviews with eminent exiled writers, extracts from two films relating to exile, live readings of poetry, a performance by a group of musicians and an audio and sculptural installation. Its strengths lie in the diversity of media and cultures that are presented and the powerfully honest writing of some contributors, notably the Nigerian writer Chris Abani and Ethiopian poet Yilma Tafere Tasew. Another strength is the willingness to explore and critique the abstract concept of exile as used in contemporary academic circles and contrast this with the very different lived experience. This thorny question of definitions relating to exile, dislocation, displacement, multiculturalism and others are touched on by the editor himself in the introduction, and developed in the fascinating final chapter 'Fading into Metaphor: Globalisation and the Disappearance of Exile' by Rudolph Teeuwen. The only criticism to be made is that the desire to embrace all possible approaches to the topic of exile has led to the inclusion of a few chapters which are purely academic theory with no experiential basis; nevertheless they point to the very 'fading into metaphor' problem highlighted at the end of the book.

# Reflecting on Reflections and Other Poems

## Reflejos y Reflexiones y otros poemas

**Moises Castillo Florian**  
publ. Anaconda Editions, 2005

*Reviewed by Jennifer Langer*

This is a dual-language collection of poetry that mesmerised and beguiled me. In it Moises Castillo Florian, an exile from Peru, not only confronts and engages with the problematic of penetrating and recovering his identity at the deepest and most personal level but also interrogates the self through the collective memory of Andean history and literature.

The mirror that reflects is the metaphor for this process as it creates a façade or mask which the poet aims to transcend in a mirroring two-way process. The ambiguous nature of the looking-glass creates a chaos and questioning in order to reach introspective awareness which is at the heart of the poetry. As Castillo Florian says 'It is not easy to talk about oneself...though because of an ethical need and aesthetic position I have to do so.' The mirror is also a symbol of memory, represented in the present by the reflection of the poet but also reflecting back faces of the past.

This is poetry of surprises of tone and rhythm shifts. It is passionate, lyrical, playful and insistent, containing both screams and silences. The latter are marked in the poetry to serve as spaces for readers to reflect and contemplate on the poetry perhaps in a personal context. I admired the creativity of the language and the manner in which he has mastered the craft of expressing his innermost feelings and explorations yet he succeeds in deepening the mystery and pain of the ontological being.

It is not surprising that as an exile living in London far from the 'Peruvian Sunlight', he craves for the connection with his roots which form an inextricable part of his spirituality and identity. Castillo Florian pleads for the mirror to become a window as he longs for his homeland. Displacement frequently serves as a mirror, as a compulsion for the exile to examine and somehow address identity in the starkness of isolation and dislocation, far removed from the familiar environment of home, family and language.

*Mirror-Window akashic reflection:  
Show me America 'Amoria'  
And the land of my birth please!...*

Interestingly, in his introduction, Castillo Florian discusses his aims of recovering and recreating Andean-Hispanic poetry given the influence of autochthonous languages on Spanish, in particular the Quechua language widely spoken in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. He is concerned about the divide between the dominated indigenous languages and the dominant language of Spanish and seeks a reconciliation and convergence of the languages. In addition he proposes the concept of the Andean Muse, which constitutes the great indigenous poetry of the past, as an inspiration for contemporary Latin American poets.

*Poets from Southern Earth:  
let's watch your reflections with my eyes  
and talk and sing with my voice*

Florian Castillo has succeeded in fulfilling the notion of poetry articulated by a range of poets, artists and philosophers in quotations at the beginning of the anthology:

'The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery.'  
(Francis Bacon)



*By Sofia Buchuck*

## Yoyo, *Ghost Tide*,

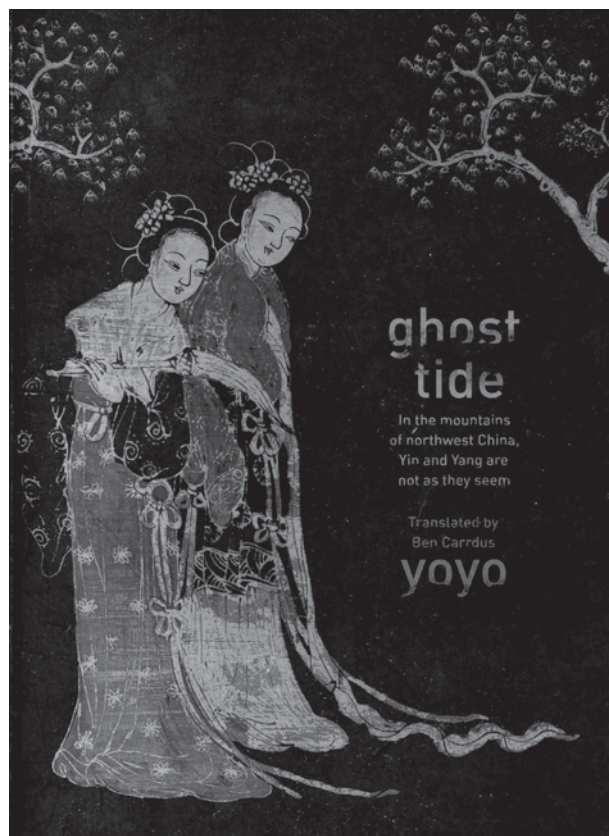
Fourth Estate London, 2005

*translated from the Chinese by Ben Carrdus*

*Reviewed by David Clark*

**G**host Tide throws light on a broad sweep of modern Chinese history, from the collapse of Empire and the old order, conflict between nationalist and communist forces, the hardships endured in the rush to modernisation, followed by the self criticism and inward-looking self obsession of the cultural revolution. Only to emerge in the harsh and confusing light of global consumerism, just hinted at in the book.

Yet, this is not a historical account of those days. This is not a well-researched social documentation of twentieth century Chinese history. It is something quite different and magical, a fable of our times, dealing with the essence of historical truth through the intermediary of characters who inhabit the hinterland, the margins. Indeed these characters acquire a larger than life quality, standing for a whole era, an attitude of mind, the spirit that swept the whole country. These characters acquire a life of their own and animate the novel, they move the story along a historical continuum and embody the spirit of a particular moment in that history. They are both characters in a novel and ghosts of the past which still animate the present, in the modern China of today.



Whilst these characters are known, in a very real sense, to the Chinese who lived through this period, under other names and guises, they are largely unknown in the West. Yoyo has done a great service to western readers by bringing these characters to our attention. Yoyo weaves an enthralling story, a fable in which the characters inhabit a landscape shaped by the demons of superstitions or the demons of cultural and political forces beyond the control of ordinary folk. The tale is told in a manner that keeps the reader's interest throughout, and engages us in the various passions, enthusiasms, foibles and longings of the main characters. It is also told with a great deal of humour as well as insight into what propels the characters forever forward.

We are first of all introduced to Xiezi's father and we are plunged straight into the turmoil of Communist China facing new realities. He is a veteran of the long march with the Eighth Route Army, imbued in the revolutionary zeal of the time, devoting himself entirely to the cause, to the defence of his country and the fulfillment of the Party's dreams. He had been a rough country boy who had been propelled into the very heart of the revolution, alongside the Eighth Route Army, but his role had been a very minor one, tending to the reserve horses, at the very rear. Nevertheless, he had to be duly rewarded as a hero and was given the post of coal-plant manager in a city ten thousand miles away from the capital, and that is as far as the illiterate hero could rise within the ranks. He continued to support the Party through all the twists and turns of the post-war period, retaining his faith in the old

certainties of the initial struggle. This, despite severe hardships, despite being asked to lie for his country and announce ever better harvests and production attainments even in the face of famine and deprivation.

We are also introduced to some of the absurd excesses of this blind faith in future progress, the melting down of much useful household objects in order to produce home-made steel of such poor quality that nothing could be manufactured with it, all in the name of increasing steel production. Or the sudden appearance of a locally produced car, called the “Forever Forward”, which looked a bit like a tractor but had the singular feature of not having a reverse gear, symbolising the forward march of Communism. This resulted in huge traffic jams, as mobile construction cranes had to be dispatched to rescue and remove vehicles trapped in dead end streets.

We hear about the periodic witch-hunts against those still tied to the old superstitions or simply those caught up in minor misdemeanours, the public humiliations and degrading punishments meted out. Yet, while Yoyo writes about the ideological and bureaucratic excesses of the regime, she does so with humour and a light touch, highlighting absurdities rather than focusing on gruesome details.

One of the most touching scenes in the novel is the account of the children of the fallen cadres, during the cultural revolution. The youthful children of former elite officials are set apart, parading themselves in their parents’ old uniforms, now that their parents were in prison or rehabilitation camps. The uniforms are threadbare in places, but the signs of where medals used to hang or where epaulettes used to be, still clearly visible. The youths hang around together, listening to classical music on old 78 records, reading 19th century Russian novels and singing old folk songs together.

Xiezi herself is a much more complex character. As the eldest surviving child in the household, she is given many tasks and errands to fulfil, in many ways standing in for the absent sons, none of whom survived childhood and infancy. She has a serious and quiet disposition, but in adolescence is worried by the male gaze of Chairman Mao’s eyes watching her from his portrait as she takes her weekly shower in the public baths. She avoids showers for months on end, feels guilty about avoiding the Chairman’s gaze; is she being disloyal to the Party? She makes up for it by buying several portraits of Chairman Mao which she hangs up all around the house, and then denounces her best friend in school for not having a portrait of the Chairman in her bedroom. But she has to contend with other worries. She feels she is ugly, being considered too thin, her lips too thick for Chinese notions of beauty. She despairs of ever finding a husband; she falls in love with a classmate but does not dare speak to him. Life passes her by and by the time Xiezi is thirty she reinvents herself as a man, but nobody seems to care.

This tale is counterbalanced by the story of Dandan, who is born a boy but brought up as a girl until he is twelve, as a ruse to cheat the demons who seek to devour little boys. At twelve Dandan is told to dress and behave like a boy again, but he still yearns to be a girl. Later he falls in love with the male lead in a dance troupe, the affair is discovered and he is put in prison and disgraced forever. The novel is a fable about the struggle for a better future in which millions of individuals are forced into conformity, but some individuals still struggle to be allowed their own individuality. The reader becomes engrossed in the long sweep of history, in events that affect the lives of millions, whilst still engaged with the individual’s struggle to retain their own unique identity. It is a powerful plea for the need to express one’s own creativity and sense of self.

# Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture

**Edited by Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac**  
*Weaver Press Ltd 2005, distributed by the African Book Collective, Oxford*

*Reviewed by Isabelle Romaine*

This series of essays written by scholars based in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Europe, give an overview of Zimbabwean literature today. They are critical approaches of a fiction which ranges from nationalist texts, centred on a single vision of Zimbabwe identity, to polyphonic texts envisioning changes and dislodging conventions. The analyses render well the cultural wealth of a fiction equally written in three languages, Shona, Ndebele and English. The volume reminds us that Zimbabwean fiction, whether pro-nationalist or plurivocal, stems from the government's political agenda, the 'third chimurenga', the liberation struggle, very narrowly associated to the policy of land redistribution. The 'third chimurenga' bases its creed on 'authenticity', the reference to a pre-colonial past, which paves the way to ultra nationalism and violence. The historian, T. Ranger, uses the notion of 'patriotic history' in which the state imposes its version of history and makes sure that that version is broadcast through institutional channels.



Whether written texts prove favourable or in opposition to 'patriotic history', the delineation is not always clear and the writer's political inclination not always one sided. Chenjerai Hove is an example, his novel *Bones* can be read both as confirmation and as a critique of a nationalist politics.

*Versions of Zimbabwe* provides a plural vision of Zimbabwean literature anchored in its social and political history. Typically, some renowned writers named in the volume live in exile. Chenjerai Hove left Zimbabwe in 2000. He started to be openly critical of the political regime in his 1998 poems "Rainbows in the Dust". He wrote "Blind Moon" in 2003, in reaction to the violence which took place with land distribution. Yvonne Vera, a prolific writer, depicted female characters stubbornly determined in the world of violence. More than any other Zimbabwean novelists she defied taboos. She held on to her country until exile became inevitable in 2004. In May 2005, she was granted the Tucholsky Award (Swedish PEN award). She died in Toronto in April 2005. Robert Muponde, who edited the volume is in exile in South Africa.



# ***The Lake Fewa and a Horse***

**by Yuyutsu R.D.Sharma,  
Nirala Publications, Delhi, 2005**

*Reviewed by David Clark*

Yuyutsu RD Sharma is an Indian writer who has become enchanted by the beauty of the Annapurnas in Nepal and has adopted its landscapes and its people as his own. He has since been championing the cause of young Nepalese poets and writers, translating some of their work and setting up his own publishing series devoted to the writings not only of Nepal, but also the wider Himalayan region. He also edits Pratik, a magazine of creative writing focusing on South Asian writing.

The Lake Fewa and a Horse is a collection of poems written over the period of a decade, in which time Yuyutsu meandered over all the major mule paths of the Annapurnas. This certainly provided an excellent vantage point from which to view the scenery, but in his wonderfully evocative poems Yuyutsu paints an inner landscape and journey which mirrors, reflects and engages in dialogue with the outer landscape.

'I tear through the film

of butterflies on the mule path of Kaligandaki  
and climb the fragrant mountains to find  
the Sun, a plump plaything,

crawling like a baby  
around the glacials of Annapurna'

'Cruel river

knows each time

I come to brood

over her roaring waters...  
each time I come to pour last of my life's salt  
in the ringing gorges  
of her sonorous frame  
a bone breaks  
in my smoldering chest  
and a wrinkle appears  
across the shriveled leaf of my life'

'This poem I write  
for the porters of the popular trail  
holding the rusting bars  
of a squeaking wooden bridge  
never ending song  
of Modi Khola roaring in me,'

Each poem is a delight in itself, a discovery, a new turn of phrase, a new sensation, a world of sound and light, and visions all colliding against each other to provide an unexpected and haunting experience.



# Biographies

**Ali Abdolrezaei**, poet, left Iran in 2002 for exile in Paris and London. His last two collections *Jameh* and *Shinema* were censored in Iran where he received threats. His poetry performances became increasingly subject to disruption by the authorities. His work is currently being translated into English by Jennifer Langer and Ziba Karbassi.



**Mir Mahfuz Ali** was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and studied at Essex University. He dances, acts, has worked as a male model and a tandoori chef. He has performed at the *Royal Opera House*, *Bedlam Theatre* Edinburgh Festival, *New End*, *Tricycle* and *Arcola* theatres and at the National Theatre of Slovenia. His poetry has appeared in *The Silver Throat of the Moon*, *Index on Censorship* and *Exiled Ink!*



**Karin Altenburg** was born in Lund, southern Sweden. She worked in academia, as an archaeologist in Britain and Sweden before joining the British Council in Stockholm in 2001. She held the first cultural fellowship with the British Council's think-tank Counterpoint, and now works in the Embassy of Sweden cultural department in London.



**David Clark** is the child of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s. He grew up in Australia, Italy and Austria, before returning briefly to England, then studying in Canada, USA and East Africa. He now teaches tourism studies and contributes to various cultural magazines in London.



**Reza Baraheni** was born in Tabriz, Iran and is in exile in Canada. He is a professor of Comparative Literature at Toronto University and President of Canadian PEN. Poet and academic, he is the author of fifty-four books, including the *Crowned Cannibals*, a collection of prose and poetry, *Les Saisons en Enfer du Jeune Ayyaz*, a novel and *God's Shadow: Prison Poems*.



**Dennis Evans** is a poet, journalist, teacher and publisher. His collections include *Earth Anchor*, *Paper in the Wind* and *Bubbles for Peace* and his poetry has been published and translated widely. His dance poems have been performed at Sadlers Wells. He teaches poetry and creative writing.



**Mirza Fehimovic** comes from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina where he was engaged in freelance journalism and translation of literary essays and fiction. He taught Serbo-Croat at the University of Delhi for three years. He has published two collections of poetry, one collection of short stories and a novel.



**Soheila Ghodstinat** was born in Tehran, Iran which she left to further her education. She obtained her degree in Sweden. In her first novel, *A Journey to Starland*, she talks about her struggles, hardships, hopes, dreams and finally love. She has lived in forty different places in seven different countries and fourteen different cities.



**Brian Holton** has taught Chinese at Edinburgh, Durham and Newcastle and English Literature at Ningbo University. In 1997 he established the UK's first Chinese-English translating & interpreting programme at Newcastle. He has published translations from Chinese literature, as well as articles and essays on translation and translating.



**Ziba Karbassi** was born in 1974 in Tabriz, Iran but was forced to leave in the mid-1980s and came to Britain as a political refugee. In exile she quickly became recognised as one of the foremost young Iranian poets. Her collections are *Scorpion Under The Pillow* (1996), *With A Broken Star In My Heart* (1998), *The Sea Will Drown* (1999), *Jizzz* (2002) and *Collage* (2005) She has read and been translated internationally.



**Esmail Khoi** In the early 1980s, as a leading member of the intellectual opposition to clerical rule, he was forced to spend close to two years in hiding before fleeing his homeland in 1983. Since then, Khoi has emerged as a most articulate poetic voice of the Iranian Diaspora. Khoi's poetry bears eloquent testimony to his experience and thought, and to his life long quest for a more humane world. Selections of his poems have been translated into several languages. English translations of his selected poems are *Edges of Poetry* and *Outlandia*.



**Jennifer Langer** is the founding director of Exiled Writers Ink. She is editor of *The Bend in the Road: Refugees Writing* (1999), *Crossing the Border: Voices of Refugee and Exiled Women Writers* (2002) and *The Silver Throat of the Moon: Writing in Exile* (2005). She is completing an MA in Cultural Memory at the Institute of Advanced Study, University of London.



**Richard McKane** is a poet, and translator and interpreter from Russian and Turkish. Recent books include *Beyond the Walls Selected Poems of Nazim Hikmet* (co-translator Ruth Christie) [Anvil Press] and *Ten Russian Poets* (Ed. and main translator, Anvil). His *New and Selected Poems* are due out from Hearing Eye late 2005.



**Nora Nadjarian** is an Armenian Cypriot poet and short story writer. She has published three collections of poetry: *The Voice at the Top of the Stairs* (2001), *Cleft in Twain* (2003) and *25 Ways to Kiss a Man* (2004). Nora's work has been commended in various international competitions.



**Ghazi Rabahavi** has written eight books. *From This Place* (1991) Iran consists of eight short stories. *Daisies* was made into a successful film and *Geesu* (1994) is a novel. After migrating to the UK, he published the books that were banned in Iran: *The Iranian Four Seasons* and *Merriam's Smile*. In 1997, *Look Europe!* was performed in London, Amsterdam and New York. Other plays are *Stoning*, *Fourplay* and *Voices*. In 2001 he wrote and directed a short film, *Prey*. *Captured by Camera* is based on the true story of Ahmad Batebi, a film student serving fifteen years in prison in Iran for being photographed by a journalist during student demonstrations.



**Wafaa Abdul Razak** is from Basra Iraq and came to the UK in 2000. She had three collections published in Iraq – *The Night does not Know me*, *The Key is Blind* and *A Moist Eye for the Sun in the Mirror* – plus 2 unpublished collections of poetry, a CD book with music, 2 short stories and 4 novels.



**Isabelle Romaine** a French Cameroonian, graduated in Geography at Lyon II University. She taught History and Geography in a lycée in Dakar, Senegal. She has an MA in Cultural Memory from the School of Advanced Studies, University of London.



**Hammed Shahidian** is associate professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois. Focusing mainly on gender and political activism and Iranians in exile, Shahidian has published in *Qualitative Sociology*, *Current Sociology*, *Sexualities*, *Sociological Inquiry*, *Feminist Studies*, and elsewhere. He is author of *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*.



**Afshin Shahroodi** has exhibited his work in Tehran, Dortmund and Paris and participated in over forty group exhibitions. His published work includes *Aks-ha (Pictures)* 1981, *Pajah va panj aks, (55 Photos)*, 1990, translations of some of Arthur Rotshane’s papers into Persian and two books of poetry.



**Yuyutsu R.D.Sharma** from Punjab, India, lives in Kathmandu, Nepal. He has published four poetry collections including *The Lake Fewa & a Horse: Poems New* (2005) and has translated and edited several anthologies of contemporary Nepalese poetry in English. His work has appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines and has been translated into German, French, Italian, Hebrew and Dutch.



**Nathalie Teitler** has run creative writing workshops for refugees and has edited several anthologies of the work produced. She is South East Arts Officer for Refugee Action. She has a PhD in Latin American poetry and has published her own work in academic journals.



**Bogdan Tiganov** was born in Braila, Romania, and currently resides in London. He has worked as an English language teacher and as an artist. His work has appeared in various magazines including *Orbis* and *Aesthetica*, and he has published four books including *Romanian For Sale*.



**Shadab Vajdi** is a poet and linguist from Iran. Her poetic works in Persian are *A Bend in the Alley*, *A Song for Little Hands* and *To the Memory of the Thirst of the Southern Mountain Slopes*. The anthology of her poetry in English is entitled *Closed Circuit*. She has translated into Persian Paul Harrison’s *Inside the Third World* and Liang Heng’s *Return to China*. She currently lectures at SOAS, University of London.

