exiled ink

e-mag

Issue 1 2018

Editorial

Many of you will remember Exiled Ink print magazine which can still be viewed on our website – the first magazine dedicated to the work of refugee and immigrant writers. Now we are resuscitating Exiled Ink magazine but this time in electronic form. Exiled Writers Ink welcomes you with pleasure to our first issue of Exiled Ink e-mag.

In this first edition of the Exiled Ink e-mag, there are poems reacting to Brexit and to Grenfell, to the rumblings in a country of refuge that can suddenly feel unsafe, disturbed. Poets respond to the mean-time, to what captures our attention in this moment in history. Poets also respond to the dream-time, and there are poems here, too, that slip beyond the moment into the mythos.

We are delighted to include the winning poems from our recent free competition, kindly funded by the Bart Wolffe Legacy Fund to assist struggling refugee and migrant writers. Bart was a talented poet and writer from Zimbabwe who served on the Exiled Writers Ink board.

The magazine includes two interviews with writers who have ended up in the UK after fleeing violence and upheaval. Against the darkness of history, both speak about optimism – optimism that might be nostalgic or irrational, but that keeps us searching for ways to connect across space and time – mouth to ear, heart to heart, word by word.

Catherine Temma Davidson

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Out of Europe

June 2016

Maria Jastrzębska

This poem was written out of the utter despair I felt at the referendum result, along with all its racism and xenophobia - the title's date is when it was announced - and my attempt to climb out of that. Also - deliberately - it's an un-English tree... I wanted to write an angry poem but wrote something more in sorrow than than anger, though I did and still do feel plenty angry!

I've heard that cypresses point
folded hands towards the sky
in prayer so thought I'd ask this tree
which stands close to the edge
of the water and is naturally tall
though still young judging by the tuft
of untidy new growth at its peak
which being thinner sways a little
in the wind while the rest of the tree
is upright entirely motionless
under the slow lights of a plane say
and even though I don't believe
in anything I could explain I thought why
not ask the tree to pray for me for us

* * * A Friendly Fishmonger in the Harbour

Anna Blasiak

A friendly fishmonger in the harbour

suddenly spews TV-hatred

as acrid and thick as toilet bleach.

His fish spoils faster.

I go vegan.

People are lighter

in the streets, ready for flight.

There is no looking each other in the eye.

Dense fear mutes

the tongues of other languages.

And then there is the "oh, we like your lot, it's the others…"

I can still see the coast of France

when the air is clear,

A Flag Maker and An Anthem Writer

Edin Suljic

Tell me, tell me again, how was it…

When your grandma' asked you to put a thread through the eye of a needle -

just as mine did…

Were you laughing?

Oh, granny…

The first time I met your father, he sized me up, despite his glazed eyes, and said - There will be nearly a hundred inches to stitch for your suit.

And here are we, I am watching you struggle to put a thread into your fancy sewing machine as you shout

- I see, said a blind man!

You who've spent an entire man's life building a safe place to be -

an armor, out of something as fragile as fabric.

And life as such, goes on...

We give each other what we can or what we must.

Your fingers getting sewn into a new suit and my pencil keeps breaking under the weight of heavens.

And we go on in building this Country anew -

You're stitching its tattered flag and I am spelling its anthem.

Roll of the Dice

Anna Blasiak

2004

It was with perfect clarity that she remembered the first time when she actually thought she could stay here (though she never let herself or anybody else use the expression "forever". That was definitely too acrid for her taste). She was sitting in a taxi on her way home after a long night of clubbing. It must have been around 4 am. It was early spring, a quiet, beautiful night flooded with lights. She was in love without knowing it yet. The idea of staying here was so striking, the thought so new, that she went absolutely speechless in her head. She really and truly did not expect it to happen. She did not see it coming and suddenly it was there. An absolutely clear thought, perfectly defined to the smallest details. She felt badly hit by it and eternally peaceful at the same time. It was like meeting a speeding truck in the middle of an empty road. Suddenly it is there. Lethal. Peace-making. Suddenly everything was possible and everything so easy. Before she could even raise the question about the future, the answer popped up in her head. Of course she did not have to go along with this idea, she could still decide to go back to her old country. And that was the beauty of the situation. She was given an answer without asking for it and yet she felt that her free will was not questioned, she could do whatever she wanted and not feel guilty, whatever she decided to do. And she knew. She knew she would not go back.

2008

She was permanently stretched, at least between her two points on earth. It felt a bit like treachery. It was a new feeling. And there was nothing she could do about it, even if she wanted to. There was no turning back, it had already happened and could not un-happen. She was stuck in the in-between, in this tragic realm of duplicity that sometimes equalled nothingness, a vacuum, and sometimes – a horrifying, stifling, noisy crowdedness. The only imaginable cure was amnesia, and that you cannot easily get over the counter in your local corner shop.

Her feet got itchy again. She started thinking of moving, packing, starting afresh somewhere again, somewhere new, unknown, far away. But that – thus far – remained just an idea, and only half-hatched. Not even a dream yet.

2016

She thought about it all the time now. It wasn't a dream though. It wasn't her itchy feet. For the first time in her life she was thinking of moving not because of the excitement of leaving and starting anew, but because she felt forced. Fear, discomfort, a sudden explosion of ugliness around her, conflicted emotions, fear… She came to accept the fact that she would always remain a stranger here. She could live with people always mispronouncing her name, turning it into something unrecognizable even to her. That was fine. But suddenly, one fine June day, this new country, which she thought was becoming more and more hers as time went by, turned its Janus's face and became stranger than ever. Fearing to speak her native tongue when out and about? People not looking each other in the eye? Civil servants voluntarily suggesting she should change her name to something sounding more local? Or that she should work on her accent so that she could pretend to be from here? Passive-aggressive hostility suddenly so apparent in all those "kind", well-mannered elderly ladies you sit next to on the bus?

What exactly happened the night this Dr Jekyll of the nation turned into a Mr Hyde?

But going back to her old country was not an option, never an option, and especially not now. She was from nowhere. She was from everywhere. All she needed to do was roll the dice…

Across Seas and Generations

David Clark

When I was born, long ago,
my grandfather wrote a lullaby for me,
across the water, across the sea,
imploring the wind to gently blow,
blow the lullaby towards me, a babe in arms,
in the arms of the daughter,
who had fled Nazi horrors,
seeking refuge on British shores.
Now I am growing old, reaching 70,
and the crashing winds of Brexit blow,
blow harshly across the realm.
I no longer feel welcome, here by these shores,
British born and British I am, but no longer feel at home.
Will I be welcomed back, back there, where my mother was born?

London 2017

In the Shadow of Grenfell

Grenfell Tower

Shamim Azad

A fire has its own smell,
a distinctive story.
Silver birch or aspen wood,
Lovely lavender or food.

Grenfell Tower
did not smell of that, however.
It smelt of pee soaked nappies,
mothers' milk and burnt breasts
plastic brushes tangled with fallen hair,
deformed leather furniture
a whirling clay-cloud and dark air.

Grenfell Tower's heat,
sharp blades with thousands of eyes
an enormous body
a barbecued human head.

Breathless carbon thick
from scorched certificates
of English as second language,
undistributed wedding invitations,
burnt chip wheel-chair.
In the sky layers
of poisoned black soft fat
sat still, there.

Only few hours ago

they had body and bones

a music of their own.

The Voices of Grenfell Tower

Alemu Tebeje

Translated from Amharic into English by Chris Beckett

Alemu lost close friends in the fire.

Hashim calling calling
Hashim's wife calling
Hashim's three children calling calling calling
look! the fire consumed a building
now it is consuming me
with all the burning voices of the dead
old people young people
        Marco calling calling
boys and girls everyone I used to see
        Zainab calling calling
and say hello to at the bus stop
        Bernard calling calling
or the train station on Latimer Road
        Nura calling calling
voices wailing into their twisted mobiles
        Haniya and Izra calling calling
about the stairs and the smoke
even if they have no eyes to see the building
or live in it now without their bodies
        Antony calling calling
even if their kind words and smiles in the street
        Mariem calling calling
have all gone up in smoke I was their neighbour once
        Jeremiah calling calling
we shared this ground
now I bear witness to their disappearance

oh! burning souls have burning voices
let me be their guarantee of truth!
Ligaya calling
Mahadi calling
we lived next door…what will you do for us?
the voices ask whenever I go out
or come back home they want to know
why it burnt down in minutes like a matchbox
and where will I find justice and a home
for Nur's family of voices
Khadijam's family of voices
for Malak's voice and Jessica's and Tuccu's
for Biruk's and his mother's voice and Ali's voice and little Isaac
calling calling
calling calling calling calling calling

Requiem for Grenfell

Julio Etchart

The eerie structure haunts the clouds,
its charred skeleton arrests the rush-hour traffic
and confuses the migratory birds who seek a nest amid the debris

Exhausted neighbours resume their daily pilgrimage
past a gallery of faded photographs
whose innocent faces contemplate another day in limbo,
their drained hearts trying to tune into
the latest episode of this never ending saga.

Corporate manslaughter
decree the masonic suits
giving another turn to this absurd tragicomic libretto…
But *corporate* has no faces
and bestows a convenient anonymity to the real culprits;
and *MANslaughter* falls so short of including
the women, children and those of mixed gender preferences
who, along with cats, dogs and parrots
disappeared on that terrible night…

My strong empathy has a history for I, too, was not accounted for,

during many weeks in my younger years, forcibly hidden behind a dirty hood
in a concealed basement in a distant corner of the world.

My comrades missed me in the barricades
which we erected against a cruel dictatorship,
my loved ones moved heaven and earth
in the hope that I would be still alive…
They finally found me, and freed me
and sent me into exile to these cold islands
where decades later I had to witness the sad irony
of seeing so many who also came here
to escape a terrible past or an uncertain future
finding themselves betrayed by indifference and inequality…

Ashes to ashes is written in ancient folios…
The names of the Grenfallen
are also recorded in the Book of Life,
a memory that no one can erase;
and they will be remembered and honoured
with the respect and the dignity
that they could not find on this side
of destiny

Your Nightmare is My Reality

Mahmood Jamal

The number 18 bus at 9.30 at night

The women all darkly clad

Look straight ahead with sullen faces

Merrily cocooned in difference;

And the men looking tired

With a stern and dignified indifference

To persistent poverty.

There is something not quite right with this

But that is what it is!

These are the pay as you go

Not ones to have contracts

Carbohydrates, as Irish Madge would say

Not Protein.

I get off in that gloom

Of a winter evening wondering

what my thoughts mean

There is a foreboding, a fear

That the Westway creates in me

I look back, and see the tower

In the distance and wonder when

It will ignite and lift the gloom

Like being part of one country

And feeling you are in another?

Friday 10 March 2017

Summer in the Shadow of Grenfell

Juwon Ogungbe

When I arrived at Latimer Road tube station, I could hear the station announcer intoning "Please refrain from taking photos of Grenfell Tower, out of respect to the residents and to avoid distracting motorists." I left the station, with no clear idea of how to reach the actual street called Latimer Road. My last visit to the area was probably sixteen years ago. On this occasion, I was on my way to the Playground Theatre, to run a music workshop for local children affected by the fire at Grenfell Tower and the unfortunate sequence of ensuing events. Bramley Road, which runs outside the station, was adorned with shrines in various spots, bearing flowers, cards, drawings and notes from well-wishers. The ambience reminded me of the aftermath of the demise of Diana, Princess of Wales, but on a smaller scale. Eventually I found the theatre, on Latimer Road. My workshop was part of a programme set up by Jake Walker (a composer affiliated to Artists for Grenfell) and Grief Encounter – the nation's leading bereavement counselling service for children.

In the theatre space, there were six children, still involved in a session run by the counsellors. The kids were very young, ranging in age between two and six years old. I suggested they should have a short break before I started my workshop. Because of the average age of the children present, I encouraged them to sing several familiar nursery rhymes and songs before we touched on any creative work. This helped to warm them up and to get them engaging with me about their ideas and preferences. The main aim of the workshop was to get the group to write a song. The children chose a theme about a monster skulking around underground. We agreed that the monster would lurk in the tube station, which led to some word association brainstorming, to work out what this monster looked like. Pretty soon after that, we had completed the song writing process. We practised singing our song a few times before documenting it on my digital recorder. The children huddled around me excitedly, listening to the playback recording. I promised to send MP3s to Jake Walker and Liz Dempsey of Grief Encounter, which could be forwarded to the children's families. "Does this mean we'll have the song forever?" "Yes", I replied. The kids were very keen to do some monster inspired movement improvisation work, accompanied by my piano playing. After doing this and some percussion work, we ended the encounter in high spirits.

On my way back to the tube station, I saw the fire damaged tower block. It was blackened and gutted, looking desolate and ghoulish in the sky. The counsellors and I stopped to reflect for a moment about the children

and the neighbourhood. Apart from feeling "there but for the grace of God, go I", one can only send healing thoughts and wishes to those affected.

Exiled Writers Ink Poetry Competition Winners

The competition is kindly funded by the Bart Wolffe Legacy Fund to assist struggling refugee and migrant writers. Bart was a talented poet and writer from Zimbabwe who was an Exiled Writers Ink committee member for many years.

Poems by first prize winner, Leonardo Boix

An Introduction to Oneself

And when you fall flat on land
away from what you call home

And when there is only a room,
a simple bed, a longing for

And when it feels a ship adrift
a raft to somewhere, but no—

You stand still, looking outside
upside down, still here, still here

And when there isn't light, you
levitate, your unprepared face

And night comes quick, flickering
lights, a ceremony of two now

You stand still, a tree removed,
sending roots up. *Where is your bark?*

And when day finally arrives
between ancient stones, you rise.

Harbinger

" I can sing my own true story/of journeys through this world"—from the Anglo-Saxon poem The Seafarer

You carry a message in your body
to be delivered far away to people
you won't recognise as yours.

You travelled all this way to be
a simple messenger, your tongue
tied in multiple knots: wrong signs.

You look like her, same dark-green eyes
same faults, similar hand- lines
your future unravels: on her terms.

This message of yours, as body
turns to bodies, you a blip
history repeats itself. You've opened.

They think you could be instead
you are maybe this
read your story now, do it for the sake of

God has deserted you unholy body—
a map upside down geography trans/
lated into a thing (bodily) /a keyhole/

Then a door| of a door | closed behind
you: as you sail with your *equipage/*
dressed as someone else: doppelgänger.

Pretend to be someone else for as long as
they allow winter's tail'll come soon then
your old skin'll burn at bonfire's night.

Impersonate an *argie* ready to fall back
to reclaim what's already *there* islands
cut off/adrift/from home/now to/ *where?*

Tierra Extrajera

His country, a garden where birds arrive all at once, their brief calls,
unknown language, look for signs, gaps between their claws, green mantles,
these long tails can tell stories of exodus leaving always at midnight.

A perfect world for hiding against those in search of colour, music rites
embalmers writing more laws at dusk, you will need to identify yourself,
low light can take away your dwellings, straw, twigs, hair, *los nidos.*

A universe ever expanding, I follow dimming blue light of supernovas
from uncovered window panes. Land of sirens, umbrellas, sizzling predators
under buses, elephants, condors, you cutting wings with sharp secateurs.

Wild animals converge on caged globes hanging high from an old sycamore
tilting slightly to the right, left. *"Come here to eat from a hand that gives life,
take what's not yours, this bold grey sun glued, submerged, untranslatable".*

My birds know me by heart, they wait in spite of my lateness.
Will they ever try to land on marked beaches where I couldn't go?
Inside a privet tree, skyscrapers filled with messages to decipher. Your turn

now, it is time to return to a land where all patterns fuse, coral feathers
travel by unsolicited boats, unchecked. *"Leave as you'd leave a door ajar, follow
a south-north transoceanic line, write a testament, put it on paper, do it now".*

Poems by second prize winner, Elena Croitoru

Family Portrait

Grandfather sits on a rickety chair
and sees himself from afar,
running towards old age.
There are lines on his forehead,
two from his childhood, then year by year,
they map the growth of his heart.
There's barely a trace of his ancestors

although they lie down to sleep in his soul.
Their bones are heavy today.

He weighs what will be left of him,
knowing the creaky pine bed
will be a pedestal for his weakest self.
How many children make a future?
How many coins for a patch of land?
How much light does the whey need from the sun?
How come that church is so far?
Too far for God to touch
the communists who come and take.

But maybe close enough to see
desire, like a fish
churning the waters in his soul.
He tries to chase it away,
just as his ancestors have tried before.
This immortal fish is as blue as them.
It seems to swim through time
but feeds all the while.

Communists

The morning air smelled of trodden roses.
Grandfather was sitting on the porch.
This silence wasn't like any other he had known.
The new geometric village seemed stillborn
and when he looked up, the hills

were burning alive in red uniforms.

He kept replaying in his head
the scratching of the fountain pen
which gave the land away,
the creak of the beam
from which his neighbour hung the night before,
the rattling of the tractor
which does not stop anymore.

He knew what would happen next.
But whose shape would they use
to mould the villagers?
As he walked across this strange land of equals,
he noticed the hidden God who whispered.

Grandfather

An entire world has grown out of you
and it breathes above your sleeping bones.
Mechanical fingers comb the soil
tumbling roots, snails and all,
to bring back the living green
while monarch butterflies craft a technicolour dream.

If you folded your soul, it still wouldn't fit
in this new brick house
which does not hear accordion sounds.

Only when using that deeper sight
do I notice the eyes of foxes turning into light.
Cattle and mongrels are drawn in ink
and crickets give rhythm to their sleep.
Time is no longer a maze and I see
your heart beating again, in all these things.

Poems by third prize winner, Lester F. Gomez Medina

When Shipwrecked

If the idea appears,
it's captured in verses by dream catchers,
with the verses, they weave, weave a poem,
and the poem speaks and the poem infers
what it may want to say in images.

The image contains everything thought,
the thought in hours, the lived thing now,
that is crossed by that past which sometimes does not sleep
when one goes to bed, when one looks at the ceiling,
which is like another bed, only that upside down,
from where it´s supposed there is someone who observes
and says nothing.

But nothing is just the way that we all express something
as the poet who sheds letters, puts them here,
moves them there to build something that they will read

just for seeing how a verse sounds united to the others,
verses that may reach a reader who seeks to feel poetry.

I want to tell you poets, with sincerity,
Thank you for your verses and your reflections
that give me reasons which make me think
about what you have written,
about what you have told me with honesty.

I would like to tell you not to despair,
just like you when I read I infer
that life goes, and it goes tumbling,
tumbling like the sea
that drags a bottle in its waters
that within it carries a poem
that will comfort when it is shipwrecked.

The Unaccountable Kind

Almost everyone will say,
What a beautiful sunrise,
the sun is rising.
But somewhere,
in the ground of the earth
it dyes another colour.

It's the red of the aurora
that mixes with the blood,
there are bodies everywhere,

they have died in an attack.

Ramón looks for his brother.
He finds him there, lying,
dry lips, eyes open,
he seems to be alive.

Ramón is just a boy,
and still feels the warmth of that dawn
that sometimes burns inside.
But he can handle it all!

Ramón today turns eighty;
And he still asks:
Why does humankind still burn in hostility?

Pronouns Working as Subjects

I, like any other,
like you, or thou;
in other words, personal pronouns,
as in a sentence.

He; for example, "He washed his hands",
or, "He, a prefect of Rome in Judaea,
weary of instigating leaders
who asked for the condemnation of a sensible man,
washed his hands..."

We, feminine or masculine pronoun,
first person plural; used as a subject,
regardless of gender, which can easily be neutralized.
Hypothetical example: "We live in democracy."

You, for the plural; and the other pronouns, they,
without excluding she, also used as subjects.
For example: "She thinks of her family.",
or, "She, in a café, looks through the newspaper;
and while she is reading, also thinks what it will be;
thinks of the people who voted to stay
and in those who decided to leave
and in that agreement of *Article fifty*;
thinks of her dreams, and of war,
thinks of her land, of peace;
and once again, of her family, of course,
and all of those who will leave or stay."

Exile

Home in Exile

Nada Menzalji

Translated from Arabic by Valentina Viene

Home in exile

Alone

To savour the void,

Bite after bite,

Until the hours that never stop stretching

Become thin

Like a thread

And I am there to witness

the moment it will be cut.

Then I spitefully laugh

And the eyes of the walls open wide,

Astonished by what they see

The walls that don't dare

Screaming at me:

"Woman, you've become mad!"

Alone to grill desires,

I am inebriated by their burning smell.

To rearrange my aches and pains

In the space I have all to myself

I count my illnesses one by one,

Carefully checking and flipping the symptoms.

I pull them to pieces then assemble them again,

I change the quantities.

I heat them until they boil,

I add a sprinkle of sorrow,

A bunch of mint of nostalgia.

The headache I will beat with the tahini* of chronic fatigue

And the waist pangs go well with heartbeat disorders.

Dazzled, I check my new collection

As nasty as I can be:

Complete incurability.

Then I go further with my loneliness

And I imagine that I am asleep

And the film immediately starts

Today I won't buy the popcorns,

Ten fingers crunched up by remorse.

Alone

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Alone

Alone

But they all scream:

"Woman, you've gone mad!"

Tahini: Sesame sauce*

So where do you come from?

Isabel del Rio

"And so?"

"Yes?"

"And so where do you come from?'

"I come from London."

"But I mean…"

"Yes?"

"Before… London."

"You mean…?"

"Yes, where do you **really** come from?"

"You mean…?"

"Yes, before London."

"Well, as I explained earlier, I come from London. But you could also say that I have a connection with… with another, very different place."

"Really? Which place is that?"

"It's a place that you've probably never heard of."

"Oh, I know my geography."

"I'm quite sure you don't know the place I originally come from."

"Try me!"

"The place where I come from is…where shall I start? It's bright, it's warm."

"In the South?"

"Not necessarily."

"Then where is it?"

"In a way it's here and it's there."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a place where people would never, ever ask you about where you came from."

"And why would that be? We all want know everyone's origins."

"Do we?

"Well, I certainly do!"

"Is there a real need to ask that question?"

"Of course!"

"And is there a real need to answer it?"

"Definitely!"

"Well, in that other place, the place you know nothing about, what is important is not where you come from but where you are going."

"What?"

"Yes, where you are going is what's important. Do you know, yourself, where you are going?"

"Well, I… I mean, more or less… I know roughly where I'm going. It's sort of this way and that way… "

"Do you or don't you know where you're going?"

"Well… I… I certainly know where I come from!"

"It sure seems that you do."

"And what about the place where **you** come from?"

"How very insistent you are…"

"Well?"

"As I said, it's a place that you've never heard of. And if I may add something: nor is it a place that you'll ever hear about…"

The News has Just Arrived

Amir Darwish

The news has just arrived.

The red wine bottle I once had is still in its place

Unmoved,

Untouched

Half empty.

Nearby is a broken window

An open door and in the corner, a crying woman

Each time a tear falls the wine inside shudders then settles

The dust of falling buildings

Has covered the half empty bottle.

And I am there

I can no longer lift the bottle

Or look to see how thick the wine is

Or what I can see through it

Nonetheless, the news is that my wine bottle still stands upright.

London Now

Esther Lipton

Welcome to lonely London, to unsmiling skies
Sad summers and unending winter whine.
Welcome to commuter crowds and hostile looks
To costly rooms, torn lino, cracked windows
To shared loos, damp walls, absent landlords
Welcome to our multi-lingual, multi-cultural Babel
To centres, immigration, job, detention, housing, medical
Centres, where distrust and documents abound
And red tape entangles, strangles,
Welcome to waiting rooms of patient patients
To classrooms, walls papered with torn pictures,
Where children learn to forget their mother tongue.
Welcome stranger.

Words for the Silenced

Reflections on EWI's Second Agit Lit event

Catherine Temma Davidson

On February 5, I hosted an event at the Poetry Café in Covent Garden on behalf of Exiled Writers Ink, London's longstanding umbrella organisation for refugee and immigrant poets and writers. It was our second "Agit Lit" event—where we combine an evening of poetry and performance with some kind of action on behalf of other writers elsewhere who do not have the power to speak for themselves.

On Monday, we shared the evening with Howell Productions, a young theatre company who have written a play about the imprisoned British Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Longlisted for the Amnesty Freedom of Expression Award and praised as "political theatre at its best", the hour-long production tells the story of a woman visiting her family in Iran, who was torn from her one year old daughter and thrown in prison, accused of being an international spy.

I had heard of Nazanin already, signed petitions and sent letters on her behalf. One of my friends in West London worked with her at the Thomson Reuters Foundation, a charity that promotes media freedom and the rule of law around the world. This story of a mother separated from her baby, of a husband stuck behind in England with no access to the murky world of Iranian justice, of the series of arbitrary accusations, detentions, near-releases, and heartbreaking set-backs, became part of the national discourse late last year when the bumbling foreign secretary mistakenly described Ratcliffe as a trainer of journalists—a blatant falsehood that reinforced the narratives of suspicion that shackle her. The backlash on her behalf sent him to Iran, finally, and hopes were raised again that she might be released over Christmas. As of today, she remains in prison.

The play takes us up to the present moment, and as I watched the young actors portray the husband and wife at the heart of the story, and a variety of judges, journalists, politicians and guards, I was aware that Richard Ratcliffe

was in the audience, and I could not help but imagine what it was like to see his life re-lived for a live audience, in the middle of story with no resolution.

Before the evening, I had been anxious. On a cold Monday night in London, there is no way to know how many people might show up. An hour before the start, people began to filter into the café, and by the time we let them downstairs into the performance space, we were so full a few people had to sit in the hallway.

After the play, Kathy Voss from Amnesty International gave a short speech about their campaigning work on behalf of Nazanin and of others unjustly imprisoned in Iran and elsewhere. She invited us to fill out letters she had brought and postcards that might join the pile of 20,000 they have not yet been allowed to deliver to her.

Then Richard Ratcliffe spoke. He told us that Nazanin and others imprisoned with her knew about the event that evening. Some were writers, and had written poems which would be shared later in the evening. They were pleased to know their words had made it all the way to listeners in London. I could not help but imagine those words—fragile, ephemeral and yet somehow alive, powerful—linking the women in their impenetrable prison to us, who were thinking about them with all our hearts.

After a break, Nasrin Parvaz read from her prison memoir, published in Italian, currently being backed by Unbound for the English translation. She was 20 years old at the time of the Iranian revolution, and fought for women's rights during the early years of the regime. Arrested, imprisoned and tortured, she was detained for 8 years, escaping to England in 1993. Nasrin's voice was gentle and steady, calm and soft, but underneath, you could sense her strength and determination. She read her fifth chapter, a story of interrogation and resistance. Her poet's eye captured the images, the emotions, the physical moment, so that we were carried along with her.

I asked myself: Where did she get the strength to write the story, to read it? Yet for how many writers is the act of creation a form of strength, of salvation?

Our second reader was Ziba Karbassi, who left north-western Iran as a teenager, and who lives in London while being perhaps the most outstanding

Persian poet of her generation. Ziba was the Chair of Exiled Writers Ink from 2012–2014; I had not met her before, but from the moment she started to read, I knew I was in the presence of a world-bestriding voice. She read with great power, her words physically pouring forth like notes played by an instrument carved from some gnarled and verdant tree. Stephan Watts, who has translated many of her poems, read us the English version, images and rhythms as shocking and startling, full of fury and sorrow, as her voice.

I looked at Ziba, her beautiful face, her wild hat and white rose, her platform slippers, and elegant fingers, and wondered, how was it that the angry, passionate voice of an ancient tree goddess existed inside that human body?

The final reader of the evening was Simone Theiss. Simone runs a blog, Ciluna27, advocating on behalf of imprisoned writers and others around the world. Earlier this year, she published poems Richard Ratcliffe had gathered from women imprisoned with Nazanin. Simone read some of these, and a poem from Nazanin herself, a beautiful poem reflecting on her daughter, who has turned three while she was in prison, how their "stories remain unfinished." She also read a love poem from Golrokh Iraee to her husband, Arash Sadeghi. Both are writers, both currently in prison, "under the same sky of the same city," together only as they "watch the trace of migrating birds".

How do people become brave, I wondered. Is it something you find in yourself, surprising, like an unexpected talent you did not know you had? Is it something you cannot help, the way some are born with blue eyes and some with brown? Is it something you can cultivate? Does it grow, through contact, a social contagion?

My first thought at the end of the evening was relief—that we had filled the space, created the silence, listened and gathered the words, fulfilled our promise to take action.

The next morning, I woke too early and lay in bed, thinking of the women, their real physical selves, and the link we made to them with our real, physical selves, through the smallest, most fragile of instruments—a spoken word.

The word—sometimes I doubt it, even deny it. Yet sometimes I believe what Shelley told me in his poem; it remains, stronger than tanks, stronger than strongmen, stronger than the tallest Ozymandias whose feet crumble into dust while the word leaps, nimbly, ephemerally, light as a butterfly, out over the bars and into the air.

Interviews

Interview with Hama Tuma:
Ethiopian poet, satirist and campaigner

Hama Tuma launched his published poetry collection at an Anglo-Ethiopian Society event at Keats House, Hampstead on 18th October 2017 with questions from Alemu Tebeje and readings by Makonnen Wodajeneh and Chris Beckett.

Just a Nobody

The dead man was no one,
just a man in tattered clothes,
no shoes,
just a coin in his pocket,
no id cards, no bus ticket.
He was a nobody,
dirty and skinny,
a no-one, a nobody
who clenched his hand before he died.
But when they prised his fingers
open, this nobody,
they found a whole country.

Alemu Tebeje: Let me start by asking you, Hama, about your name. I know it is a pen name, so what does it mean and why did you need a pen name?

Hama Tuma: In a northern dialect of our country it is an innocuous greeting - "everything is fine" - but in Oromigna (one of the main Ethiopian languages, with Amharic) it means 'hitting very hard', I did not know this when I chose it, I just meant to say "everything is fine" but I think it is not bad to try hitting very hard. I wanted a pseudonym so I could say things that

were not allowed, but when my first book was published my companion put my photo on the cover, so the pseudonym was no use, but I kept it anyway.

AT: Tell us about your education and why and when you left Ethiopia.

HT: I went to the Tefari Mekonnen Secondary School in Addis Ababa, run by Canadian Jesuits and then studied law at Addis Ababa University. There I became involved in student protests against the government of Haile Selassie and after four years because of it, I was expelled from the university. Eventually, I had to go into exile in Sudan with six other friends and we then went to Algeria, then back to the Sudan to cross over and fight in our guerrilla areas in Ethiopia. By the nineties I finally came to live in Paris, which I knew, because I had come to Europe before when it was a centre of student activism during the late 60s/early 70s.

AT: What made you start writing?

HT: When I was a student, I never imagined myself as a writer. There were many distinguished poets like Gemoraw, but a lot of their poems and writings were forbidden, so we used to copy them by hand. At that time, I wasn't interested in writing myself. I read a lot of books because our teachers encouraged us to read, mostly classics like Shakespeare. But I used to write comic parodies of the student political meetings I attended. The turning point was when I entered a BBC short story competition in the 1980s and won a £75 prize, so I said "I can write" and I had a lot of stories in me. So, I wrote *The Socialist Witchdoctor and Other Stories* and with the help of Ngugi Wa Thiongo who was my friend, my first book was published by Heinemann in the African Writers Series in 1993.

AT: You write in Amharic and English, can you tell us why you write in both languages and is there any difference in your writing process?

HT: Well, when I was at secondary school, we studied everything in English, not Amharic. We studied Amharic as a language, but other subjects like history, maths and geography were all taught in English. I think my poetry in Amharic is better than my poetry in English – angrier – but it is not a problem for me to write in English and publishing in Amharic is very restricted and difficult anyways at least for me. If I write a new book making fun of the current regime, then I can't have it published in Addis Ababa. I understand the argument put forward by many African writers that if you don't write in your own language you are still a victim of colonialism, but I do not really feel part of that movement, and writing in English for me means I can reach a much bigger audience and tell them what was and is going on in my country. Even when we wrote about the terrible Red Terror

campaign of the Derg government in the 1970s, we wrote in English because we wanted people outside Ethiopia to know about it.

AT: Your short stories mostly deal with crimes, is that because you had a legal education?

HT: No, I think it is because I come from a country which is full of crimes.

AT: Your poems are simple but passionate, even angry. Do you think it is the job of the poet to tell the absolute truth and challenge the government and even society? Can I say that you are the torchbearer for the great protest poets of the Haile Selassie era?

HT: No, but I agree my poems are angry sometimes, pessimistic I suppose but also optimistic sometimes because otherwise you cannot achieve anything. Maybe bitterness is important too, and natural, because millions of us Ethiopians have been badly treated, always subjected to some process of domination and misery, which seems to be the reality of Africa not just Ethiopia by the way.

AT: Yes, some of your poems like *When we Return* are a little bit optimistic, so what makes you hopeful for your country?

HT: Well Gramsci used to say he had optimism of the heart and pessimism of the mind, maybe I am like that. And yes, optimism of the heart is essential, especially in somewhere like Africa when you look at South Sudan, Congo and other places as well as our country. Maybe you could call it wishful thinking but you need to be optimistic in order to go forward at all in your life.

When We Return

When we return
one day, tomorrow,
when the exile ends
and loneliness and despair vanish forever.

When we return
let us hear the music
of love and hope renewed, not hate.

When we return
let us not visit

the mass graves and cemeteries
but the museums
the nurseries of happy kids.

If and when we return
        let it be to
the future we'd dreamt of,
died and sacrificed for,
not to the past
so much abhorred,
nor the present loved by no-one.

When we return
        let it be
to the tomorrow we died for.

AT: Do you feel bad or guilty about living in exile? Many intellectuals have gone back to Ethiopia and either had to shut up or been jailed. Do you sometimes feel you should have taken your chances and returned?

HT: No, I do not think like that. You have a country, but other countries are also your country. A lot of people stayed – stayed and died. We went into exile in order to fight, organise and go back which we did. Those who came out, part of them is always there. It's too bad if exile becomes a perpetual thing, but you should be active for human rights and democracy wherever you live. For me, being in exile is not a very big deal. I have never felt disconnected from Ethiopia – never.

'Just a Nobody', a selection of English and Amharic poems by Hama Tuma, with translations by Chris Beckett and Alemu Tebeje, is published by Tamrat Books, price £4.00. Copies are available by request to: chris.beckett123@btinternet.com

Nostalgia for the Light

An interview with Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes by Catherine Temma Davidson

On June 14, Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes came to London to launch *Desentrañando Memorias/Unravelling Memories* at the Chilean embassy. This bilingual collection of poetry from Latin American writers in the UK is the

first imprint of Victorina Press. Rivera-Fuentes, who serves as the book's editor and publisher, designed the anthology to "celebrate languages, memory in diversity and to show that as immigrants we contribute much to society."

It is a theme that fits well with the impulse behind Exiled Ink's e-magazine, and Rivera-Fuentes' work speaks well to our present moment in the UK. She is both deeply rooted and multiply branched, as a publisher, academic, poet, teacher, lesbian, Chilean, immigrant and story-teller. She is also a writer with a deep interest in memory, the way the past leaks into the present, and what we lose when we erase the truth about our origins.

I first met Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes when she read at an Exiled Writers Ink evening I hosted at the Betsey Trotwood in Farringdon entitled "Beyond These Walls." I conducted this interview via email.

This book is the first in your imprint, Victorina Press, named after your mother. What motivated you to become a publisher?

My mother did not have the opportunity to be educated beyond primary school because she had to help the family to put bread on the table from a very early age. But she was thirsty for knowledge and she would help us (six children) to do our homework and she even wrote better copies of the drafts we had, editing and proofreading what she understood to be wrong. She did this even when two of my younger brothers were at university. I inherited her love for books and for telling stories and poetry. When I was thinking of retiring from my job at the Open University due to illness, I knew I could not stand life without anything else to do, so I thought this was the perfect chance to do another MA (I already have an MA in Sociology and Women's Studies and a PhD in Women's studies) this time in Publishing. But the idea of a publishing house had been in my mind for a while. I could see that there were wonderful writers out there who could not show their art because they did not have a literary agent or because their writing is different. Big conglomerates are only interested in publishing the global successful story, there is no room for heterogeneity; everything is homogenisation and money.

You use a lovely expression to describe your own roots: "the spider's web which makes us co-evolve as we read and write"; can you give readers who do not know you very well a brief description of some of the threads that have led you from the Chile of your birth to where you are now in the UK?

Usually, a spider's web is seen as a trap but I see it as threads that go from the present to the past and to the future not quite trapping me but maintaining my roots tightly woven in the imaginary of writing.

My first degree in Chile was a PGCE and I used to work at a Chilean-British Institute in Concepcion, the second largest city in Chile. This institute was part of the British Council and the Directors, who were changed every 4 or 5 years. In 1982 the council sent me to do a course on Methodology at one of the Bell Colleges in Saffron Walden. I fell in love with a woman in that course and my life changed (one thread).

I was an active writer and published a poetry book (La Liberación de la Eva Desgarrada) which was written after I was arrested and tortured by the military. We were in dictatorship at the time. The British council, through Vicaria de la Solidaridad, got me out of prison (another thread). This was, of course, extra official as the institution could not get involved in politics. I continued working at the institute and participating actively in protesting against the regime and writing. I founded the first Lesbian group in Concepción and I was the only member who was out. It was dangerous to be vocal, a woman and a Lesbian in dictatorship (another thread). In 1990 the British Council sent me to Lancaster to do a course for Inspectors, Advisor and Teacher Trainers. I was the Director of Studies at the institute by then (I fell in love with another woman, another thread). In 1992, I came to study the MA and then the PhD I mentioned before. Memories of torture followed me although Chile was in 'democracy' now. I co-founded a literary group of women in Lancaster and together we published Women Words. Then I moved to Wales and in 2002 I was awarded the first prize for a short story called The China Doll by the Embassy of Chile in London. I continued to write and participate in writing groups. At present, I belong to the Hispano-American Women on Memory, a group co-founded with Maria Eugenia Bravo. I also belong to SLAP, another literary group for Spanish and Latina-American poets and writers. So, most of my threads have the element of writing.

Your introduction to *Unravelling Memories* offers this quote from Chilean film director Patricio Guzman as its theme: 'those who have memory are able to live in this fragile time, those who cannot, do not live anywhere.' Why is memory such an important theme for this book?

I see two kinds of memory: individual and collective. Memory is the basis on which the self of a person is held: without memory, there is no history or *herstory*. This memory is dynamic and is accessed in the present experience; it is activated through the wishes of the future. Memory rescues

what it is to be part of the diaspora; it allows us to identify ourselves with the suffering of others. For this to happen, memory cannot be linear; on the contrary, it must travel through times and appear in different places and it has to have its own time. Memories can be physical and I talk about this in an article I co-wrote with my partner Lynda Birke, a biologist. (Talking with/in Pain: Reflections on Bodies under Torture. Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 653-668, 2001).

The writers in your collection – from Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Venezuela – understand what it means to live in "fragile" times, rooted in human and physical geography subject to seismic upheaval. What perspective can the anthology offer to the Britain of this moment?

The book offers an array of memories rooted in suffering, both as witnesses and survivors of enforced 'disappearances' and as people who have been persecuted and tortured. Many were violently expelled from our countries live lava into exile, others came to change our lives voluntarily but we are all firmly rooted in our memories. We know what it is to live in countries in turmoil and survive but what we offer to Britain in these times of upheaval is HOPE.

I come from America, where "new" always means "good"; the UK, on the contrary, has seemed a place reluctant to embrace change, a phlegmatic country. Like many immigrants, I am re-thinking my view about the UK; has Brexit changed *your* view of this country? In what ways?

When I was a child my mother read to me stories such as *Ivanhoe* and *King Arthur* with his knights and castles and where the 'good' were always the English. So, I had this idealised vision of a country where England (not so much the UK) was some place to go to. As I became older I read Howard Pyle's *Robin Hood* and Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and much later *Bleak House* and my ideas started to change: so, there was social injustice here as well; there was poverty and immigrants who had been slaves; not everything was nice. However, when I arrived in the UK to live permanently here, I was still in awe of a country which held some traditions dear to me but also a place where I was allowed to be myself, a Lesbian and an immigrant woman, a single mother and I was not frowned upon if I spoke in Spanish. But lately I have been appalled by the hatred towards 'the other', I can see the huge gap between the poor and the wealthy and I also fear the fact that basic Human Rights will be unprotected when Brexit finally is here. I am Chilean and British now but I feel more Latin-American and European. Most of all I fear, as I said, the hatred instilled by fanatics, UKIP in particular.

The past and our relationship to it play an important role both in your own writing and in many of the poems in the anthology. The past is hotly contested territory, particularly now. A malevolent nostalgia seems to have played a role in both the Brexit and Trump campaigns. Can you talk a bit about the problem of nostalgia?

What you are describing in your question is a nostalgia which is bleak and negative. The nostalgia I feel is positive; it spurs me to go and do what I am capable of doing; it is a dynamic nostalgia and as in Guzman's film, it is a nostalgia for the light.

Our present historical moment seems to be motivated in some ways by a resistance to accept the multiple narratives of the other, those who have been marginalised in the past and who have in recent years found their voices. What can we do, as writers now – to respond to that resistance?

I think the resistance to multiple narratives of the other is simply a resistance to 'the other' in singular. It is a resistance to accept that diversity and difference are empowering and when narratives empower the 'wrong' people, it is dangerous; it is a threat to capitalist modes of writing with its emphasis on the individual and the individualistic. This is why I like participating in activities, writing included, which are inclusive and collective. In Chile, I was part of a literary group and we published three books together, in the UK I have participated, and continue to do so, in four literary groups. Creating with others gives me more pleasure than writing on my own, although I do that also. Social movements and revolutions could not be successful unless people act together, speak and write together.

You write that for immigrants who carry the past like a shell on their backs, the way to "continue to breathe without breaking is to keep memory alive." Do you ever personally feel that shell can also be a burden?

Yes, sometimes, especially when what I carry has to do with memories of torture. But generally speaking I am an optimistic person so I carry them regardless because 'nice' and 'bad' memories make me, in part, who I am.

As someone who often writes about my mother and my grandmother I was struck by what you said at our reading about how important both of yours were to your work. Would you talk a bit more about that?

Both my grandmother and my mother told me stories about themselves but often mixed with stories they invented. My grandmother would tell me stories about men with red eyes, black thick ponchos and black powerful horses from which she always managed to escape. So, although this fear of

men as devils in disguise never stopped her from being the heroine who could outmanoeuvre them in very funny ways. My mother loved stories of the French Revolution and she would tell me the beheading of women for daring to intrude in men's matters. Contrary to the resistance my granny showed in her stories, my mother's tales were fearful and accepting of her role as a woman who was physically abused by my father for many years. When we grew up and that stopped she took pleasure in asking me to sing a song about Che Guevara which we all knew my father did not like. That was her resistance, and by writing about it, mine too. So, both have been very influential in my way of writing.

In your own poem 'Wonder-makers we are' – 'we' includes a widening circle of women who are connected across time and space through creative resistance. It seems a very hopeful poem – one that uses imagination to make connection. What makes you hopeful?

Sorority, fraternity, resistance in togetherness, collective writing. All of that and more is hopeful. By launching Victorina Press with an emphasis on emergent and divergent writers I think I am recreating those principles and it makes me hopeful that writing will continue to be one of the most powerful tools — not weapons, I hate that word —to achieve a better world.

If you would like to know more about Consuelo Fuentes-Rivera's work with the Hispanoamerican Women Writers on Memory – Wonder-Makers, Navigators of the Thames, you can find a link here:

http://cosmopolitascotland.org/memory-exile-human-rights-bilingualism-and-poetry-interview-with-consuelo-rivera-co-author-of-wonder-makers-navigators-of-the-thames/

Book Reviews

From Aleppo without Love, an Autobiography

A true story of anguish and despair by a boy from Aleppo

Amir Darwish, Published by Amir Darwish, 2017, ISBN 1527209377

Reviewed by David Clark

This is not a book for the faint hearted. It is a shrill cry of pain, despair and anger, at what was inflicted on the author, as a boy, growing up in Aleppo, in a society that is unforgiving. It details incidences of domestic violence, intense physical and sexual abuse.

The story starts when the boy is about five years old, witnessing his father's rage and violent treatment towards wife and children. The father is an autocratic patriarch, ruling the family with an iron fist, enforcing a strict code of honour, as befits a respected religious leader, a Sheikh, in a long line of such spiritual leaders. The father soon dies, but the catalogue of abuse and violent behaviour is repeated and re-enacted by various of Amir's siblings, each in their own way, thereby perpetuating the abject misery of young Amir. The book ends when Amir is still a teenager; two more volumes of autobiography are envisaged for a later date.

The fact that the book ends when Amir is still a teenager, flirting with girls, is a key to understanding the style and tone of the book. It is written as if penned by a teenager, though the author is now much older. The writing is well paced, often with short sentences, conveying both urgency and intensity of pain. The style is colloquial, ridden with clichés, sometimes elliptical in the rush to get the words out. Thus, indefinite and definite articles are sometimes missed out.

I liked the occasional use of Arabic terms; these terms provide an essential element to the story, lending authenticity to the tale and setting the scene. Placing dates and occasional references to time of day give a sense of concrete reality; it is not just a story but it actually happened, as the author insists.

Despite all these stylistic touches, there is no getting away from the pain and the anguish. So why write the book in the first place? The answer lies on page 80 of the book, when his sister Rana defends the book by stating: "Amir is in pain, he wants to be free of oppression and to find love. Writing does it for him". That is all the justification anybody needs to write.

Finally, this book sheds light on the effects of brutalisation. Many observers are shocked by the atrocities perpetrated on civilians in societies ravaged by civil war and conflict. Amir's father delights in inflicting pain on himself, in a show of religious zeal and self-discipline. Whilst this gains him respect and recognition from fellow believers, it also generates insensitivity to the pain of those around him, especially the pain and harm he inflicts on members of his own family. Self-flagellation and self-harm, when approved by society, leads seamlessly towards brutality and insensitivity towards others.

The Moon at the End of My Street

by Isabel del Rio

Review by Esther B Lipton

There are numerous poets who have been inspired to write about the moon. Isabel del Rio has given us an entire book of her moon poems which she describes as factual and fictional performance poetry. The relationship of us earthlings and the moon is a lasting and fascinating interest from time immemorial. The moon has universal appeal and significance.

This collection of twenty poems, together with ten Haikus, provides the reader with one subject but looked at from many different angles. Moon Haiku 9 asks 'Is it an eye or / an ear, the mouth or the nose/ of the universe?' Because format plays an important role in this collection they are easy to read and, presumably a real joy, to perform. The final poem, whose words are ingeniously contained within the shape of a crescent moon, makes demands of the reader. However, the effort is worthwhile with lines (or I should say curves) such as '… that other moon that lives within us, the imagined one, shrine to thoughts and hopes, even to delusions, and so why do we think there are two / when they are only one, …'

Nevertheless, the range of ideas is wide and intriguing. They offer 'light' and original thought about the moon in all its meanings and appearance. Of the three sonnets offered I particularly liked 'this Moon is but a quaver in the sky' this title being also the first line of the sonnet. Whilst her imagery is both elusive and, in some lines quite beautiful, she also conveys a serious message: 'A warning that 'it'll be our home sooner than expected, /when ravaged Earth falls because we are reckless.'

I should also mention Isabel del Rio's colourful painting of the moon on the front cover of the book. Unconventional and original, its simplicity is beguiling. One glance at the picture is not sufficient to enable one to appreciate the contents. So it is with the moon. Isabel del Rio poems invite us to look more closely at the moon and in all its many aspects.

Biographies

Anna Blasiak writes poetry in Polish and English. She has translated over 40 books from English into Polish and some fiction from Polish into English. She has also translated poetry into Polish and into English. Anna worked in museums and a radio station, ran magazines and wrote on art, film and theatre. She helps run the European Literature Network and is one of the editors of *Babiniec Literacki,* a Polish website publishing poetry written by women.

Leonardo Boix is an Argentinean poet and journalist based in the UK. He is the author of two collections in Spanish, most recently 'Mar de Noche' (Letras del Sur, 2016). His poems have appeared in *The Rialto, Modern Poetry in Translation (MPT), Litro, Magma,The Morning Star, Under the Radar*, and elsewhere, as well as in many anthologies, such as 'Ten: Poets of the New Generation' (Bloodaxe, 2017). Boix is a fellow of The Complete Works scheme.

David Clark grew up in England, Italy, and Austria, studied anthropology in Canada and East Africa and taught tourism and heritage management. His poems have been published in *Contemporary writers of Poland, Flying Between Words*, edited by Danuta Blaszak and Anna Maria Mickiewicz (2015) and in *Second Generation Voices*.

Elena Croitoru was born in Romania but now lives in Kent. She is studying for the MSt in Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge. Her work has appeared in Ekphrasis - A Poetry Journal, Foliate Oak, Amaryllis and other magazines. She has been longlisted for the Aestas Short Story Competition and is also a Pushcart Prize nominee.

Amir Darwish is a British Syrian poet and writer of Kurdish origin who lives in London. Born in Aleppo, he came to Britain as an asylum seeker in 2003. His work has been published in the UK and internationally. Amir has an MA in International Relations of the Middle East from Durham University, UK and is currently, doing an MA in creative and life writing at Goldsmiths University, London.

Isabel del Rio is a poet and writer. She has published fiction and poetry in both English and Spanish, and has worked extensively as a translator and journalist. Her writing has also appeared in anthologies and online magazines.

Catherine Temma Davidson is a poet and novelist who lives in London. Originally from California and from a Greek and Jewish immigrant background, she often writes about themes of cultural inheritance, crossing borders and living with multiple perspectives. She teaches Creative Writing at Regents University, and works as a writing consultant at Amnesty International. She is chair of Exiled Writers Ink.

Julio Etchart is a documentary photographer and visual journalist who grew up in Uruguay and later settled in the UK. He travels the world for the international media. After being awarded a World Press Photo First Prize, Environment category, he was commissioned to produce *The Four Elements* on environmental issues. His publications are *The Forbidden Rainbow* (Serpent's Tail, London 1992) and *Toys* (Pluto, London), and his latest photo-book project is *Imagining Orwell*.

Mahmood Jamal was born in India and his family later moved to Pakistan. He is a poet who has performed at leading poetry venues in London and around the UK. His published works include *Sugar Coated Pill* (Word Power 2006/7) and *Silence Inside A Gun's Mouth* (Kala Press London 1984) in addition to *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, *Urdu Poetry*.

Maria Jastrzębska Born in Poland Maria came to the U.K as a child. Poet, editor, translator, her new collection *The True Story of Cowboy Cowboy Hat and Ingénue* is out in October 2018 (Liquorice Fish Books). See alsohttps://mariajastrzebska.wordpress.com/.

Jennifer Langer is founding director of Exiled Writers Ink and editor of four anthologies of exiled literature (Five Leaves). Her poetry has appeared in various cultural publications. She holds a PhD from SOAS in the literature of exile and is a SOAS Research Associate.

Esther Lipton's poetry and short stories have been published in several national and international anthologies and on the internet. She co-edited Exiled Ink magazine and is a reviewer and translator. She currently runs a Creative Writing group for the University of the Third Age.

Lester GeMedina was born in León, Nicaragua in 1980 and moved to Costa Rica with his family in 1994. Since 2014, GeMedina has lived in London where he completed an MA on Audiovisual Translation at the University of Roehampton. He attends literary writing groups in English, as well as in Spanish, such us the group led by the Argentinian writer Enrique D. Zattara, with whom GeMedina and others young writers have published a book of short stories (2018) *Visitantes: Antología de Relatos* […].

Nada Menzalji is a Syrian poet, author and journalist who left Syria in 1998. Her published poetry collections in Arabic are *Withered Petals for Dinner* and *Thefts of a Nameless Poet* and many articles and poems published in prominent Arab papers. She is member of the Union of Free Syrian Writers.

Juwon Ogungbe is a singer, composer and band leader based in London, of Nigerian heritage. His commissions include music for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Union Dance and the Southbank Centre. Juwon leads two performing groups: The Vocal Ensemble of Africa, and his band. "Life Force Music" with a debut album released in 2012.

Edin Suljic grew up in the multicultural, multinational society of former Yugoslavia where he worked in engineering and theatre. He moved to the UK at the onset of the 1991 Yugoslavian war. His creative output includes writing for and producing collaborative theatrical work, poetry, short stories and essays as well as photography and

short films. His poetry has been published in various magazines and pamphlets including Index On Censorship, The SHOp, Connections, Soul Immigrants and Finding a Voice.

Alemu Tabeje is an Ethiopian exiled journalist, teacher, poet, community activist and website campaigner based in London. His poems have appeared in *Forever Spoken and No Serenity Here*, and other online and print literary magazines including *Modern Poetry In Translation* and *The Missing Slate*. He co-administers a website named after one of the Ethiopian literary giants, Tsegaye Gebre Medhin Lucha (a.k.a. Debteraw).