exiled ink!

Love and Exile Writers and Literature

poetry . prose . articles . reviews

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Editorial

It sounds trivial at first to dedicate a whole section of our magazine to love. The idea of love is readily associated with the portrayal of two people immersed in romantic longing while major issues are at stake. Yet, hardly anyone could pretend to exist beyond the constraints of their communities or institutions. Love narratives written by the exiles illustrate the oppressive nature of these institutions in settings of inter-racial prejudice, same sex relationship intolerance, or religious fanaticism.

Our section begins with two love poems set against a background of war torn Bosnia. Each poem shatters in their own way the idealised image of romantic lovers above the concerns of war. 'Emina', the traditional story of a Serbian poet's unrequited love for a beautiful Muslim girl, has become part of a folklore which has the power to rally exiled Bosnian around a consensus of shared memory and common culture. The cruel plight of relationships between Muslims and Serbs is portrayed in 'A Love Story', in which two lovers are shot dead while trying to escape Sarajevo. The poem is a sinister depiction of the two bodies left to decay for days, unclaimed by either side for burial. 'A Love Story' illustrates man's brutality and cynical disposition in times of conflict.

It would appear that love stories are doomed in our context of war and oppression, Aids and poverty, tyranny and exile. Yet, love could not be entirely buried under the mantel of sorrow. As the narrator in the invigorating poem 'Red Skirt' suggests, he might have failed to gain the attention of the frivolous girl in a red skirt, might have failed to succeed where every other man has succeeded, but the one offer he could make for certain was love and 'nothing else'.

exiled ink!

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Cover: 'Wedding' by Iraqi artist, Ali Abdul Jaleel
The female relatives of the bride express their sadness at losing a daughter.
The painting is part of an exhibition entitled 'Riding on Fire: Iraqi Art Under Occupation' at the Artiquea Gallery, London. Ali Abdul Jaleel lives in Baghdad.

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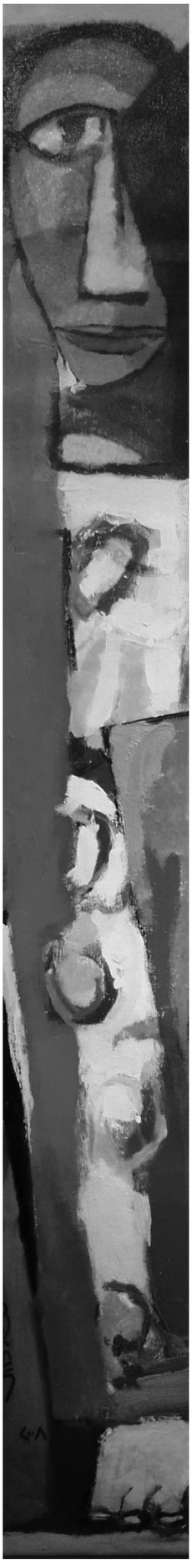


Love in Conflict

Emina

Aleksa Šanti

Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović

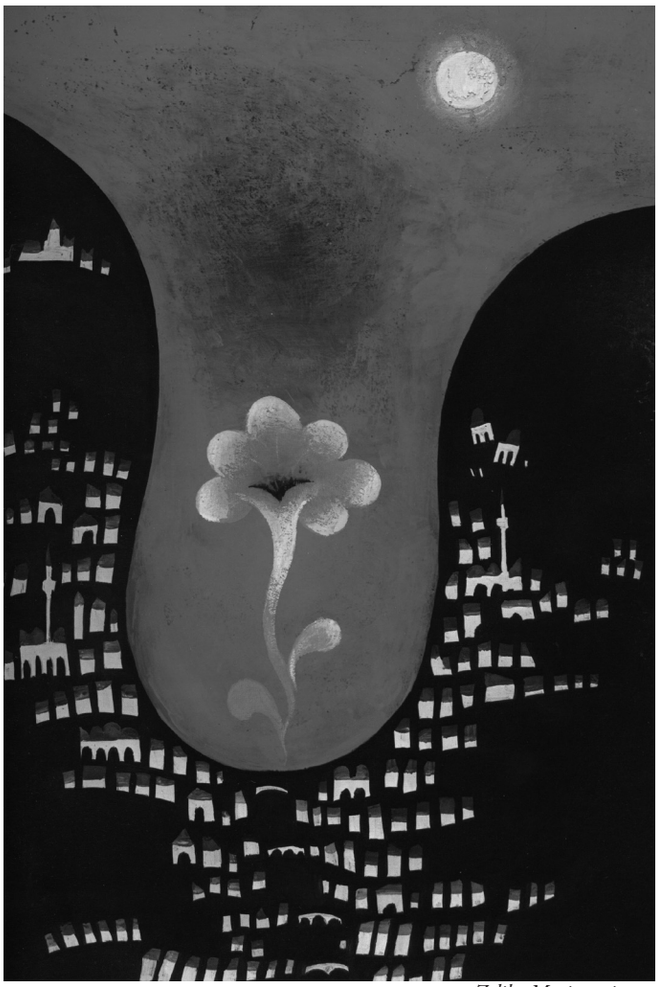
Last night, returning from the warm *hamam*,
I passed by the garden of the old *imam*,
And lo, in the garden, in the shade of a jasmine,
There with a pitcher in her hand stood Emina.

What beauty! By my Muslim faith I could swear,
She wouldn't be ashamed if she were at the sultan's!
And the way she walks and her shoulders move
Not even a *hodja's* amulet could help me!

I offered her *salaam*, but by my faith,
Beautiful Emina wouldn't even hear it.
Instead, scooping water in her silver pitcher,
Around the garden she went to water the roses.

A wind blew from the branches down her lovely shoulders
Unravelling those thick braids of hers.
Her hair gave off a scent of blue hyacinths,
Making me giddy and confused!

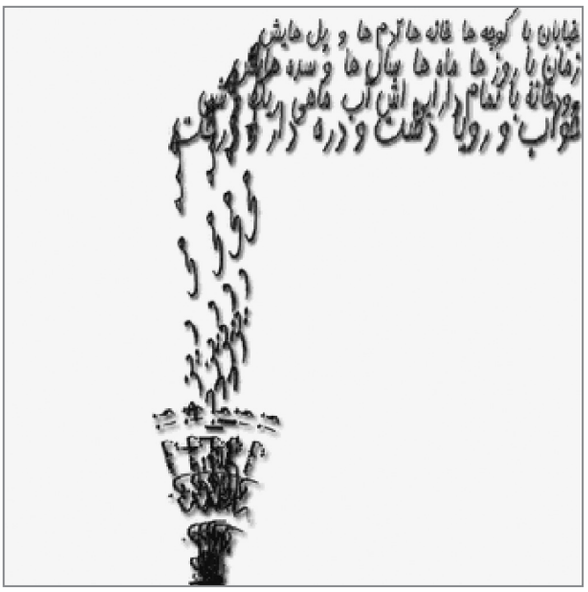
I nearly stumbled, I swear by my faith,
But beautiful Emina didn't come to me.
She only gave me a frowning look,
Not caring, the naughty one, that I'm crazy for her!



Zeljko Marjanovic

On Emina

Darija Stojnic



Mehrdad Falah

The poet is long gone and so is Emina but the poem about Emina will last forever.

I still remember my student days back home in Sarajevo when we were sitting in a smoky atmosphere in one of the popular cellars. A lot of empty glasses on the table, usually a sombre mood from too many drinks, until the crack of dawn when all of us with no exception, started to sing, usually out of tune, the old song about forbidden love: 'Emina'.

'Emina' was written in the 19th century about a beautiful girl. Both the poet and girl lived in Mostar. The poet was a young Serbian man who saw her one night walking in the garden. He knew that she was not meant to be his but she was so beautiful that it took his breath away. But she did not even give him a first glance let alone a second. The whole of Mostar made a laughing stock of him. "For God's sake, how could a Serbian guy even dare to think about marrying a Muslim girl." At that time people were defined by who their parents were, the name they were given and the church, synagogue or mosque they attended. That was the time when people could only marry someone of the same religion or nationality.

Decades passed and my generation was free to marry whoever they wished. Religion was proclaimed "the opium of the masses" and we slowly became disengaged from it. We enjoyed the freedom of mixed marriages, by choice not by force. In our time 'Emina' became a beautiful song - a gentle, sad melody with enchanting lyrics which generations sang almost like an anthem.

In 1992 war broke out and the song 'Emina' became brutal reality when people were killed only because of their names. Mixed marriages were called "rotten eggs". Husband turned against wife and neighbour against neighbour solely because of the different nationalities into which they were born.

The poem 'Emina' was not appealing to the crazed nationalists as it did not endorse their cause. Nobody wanted to deploy it - the Serbs because it was about a Muslim girl and the Muslims because it was written buy a Serb and so it was cast aside and forgotten until the advent of better days.

We, the last generation of the former country, left never to return. There was nothing there for us and the life we once had will never happen again. But sometimes I get the opportunity to meet with friends from the past, far away from the ugly divisions of a war-torn country. Every time we get together, all different nationalities and no questions asked about identity, spontaneously sing the song about Emina. We who in many ways feel like the " Last Mohicans" of our civilisation, who believed in unity and equality, are still singing 'Emina' which will always and forever remain with us, but only with us.

In the poem 'A Love Story' Simic writes about a pair of lovers, one Muslim and one Serb, shot on a bridge leading out of Sarajevo. Their deaths occurred in 1993 during the siege of Sarajevo and the couple became known as the Bosnian Romeo and Juliet because of their romantic love which surpassed political boundaries. Confident that they had guarantees of safety, Admira and Bosko walked from Bosnian government frontlines in the heart of the city, between buildings bristling with guns, toward Serb-held Grbavica. They planned to go to Belgrade and on to a life abroad. For eight days, their bodies lay in the sun as the two sides disputed who had killed the lovers and who should risk death to gather them for burial.

Zeljko Marjanovic

A Love Story

Goran Simic

Translated by Amela Simic

Bosko and Amira's story
who in escaping Sarajevo tried to cross a bridge
hoping that on the other side
where the bloody past reappeared anew
there could be a future for them,
was the media-event of the Spring.
Death was waiting for them in the middle of the bridge.
The man who pulled the trigger wore a uniform
and was never accused of murder.
The whole world press wrote about them.
Italian articles wrote of Bosnia's Romeo and Juliet
French journalists praised love's inseparability
which tear up political boundaries.
The Americans recognised in them two nations' common symbol
There on the bridge split in two.
The British saw their corpses as examples of wars' absurdity.
And the Russians just kept quiet.
The dead lovers' photographs spread out
in the blooming Spring.
Only my Bosnian friend Prsic
who secured the bridge
was forced to watch day after day
how the worms the mosquitoes and crows
finished off Bosko and Amira's bloated bodies.
I heard how he cursed
when the Spring wind blew from the other side of the bridge
the stench of decay
forcing him to pull on a gas mask.
About that however not one paper made mention.

From: *From Sarajevo, with Sorrow*, published Biblioasis, Canada, 2005

Censored Love

Interview with the Chinese writer: Hong Ying

Jennifer Langer

Hong Ying's novel *K: The Art of Love* has been banned for one hundred years by China

photo: Jennifer Langer

Hong Ying's imaginary account of the real-life love affair in the 1930s between Julian Bell, son of Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf's nephew, and Ling Shuhua, one of China's most highly respected short-story writers, was the focus of intense legal debate and became the subject of a scandalous court case in China. Ling Shuhua's daughter was outraged at the depiction of her mother and sued Hong Ying for defaming the dead. In addition the book was banned on the grounds that it was deemed obscene and pornographic.

When I ask Hong Ying if she regrets writing the novel, she comments "I don't care about reactions. Other Chinese writers care but I never do." She feels she now writes freely without self-censorship but nevertheless comments that she would not have been able to write the sexually explicit, *K: The Art of Love* whilst in China. In the novel, Lin, the married female protagonist instructs the young Bell in *The Art of Love*: sexual skills and self-cultivation from a Daoist classic text. Hong Ying informs me that her novel *The Concubine of Shanghai* is more explicit and I notice that it was published in Taiwan rather than in China. Hong Ying declares that K has been banned because the government fears the people will rise up once they have gained more insight and become more progressive. She originally left China because of the military suppression of political dissent in 1989 and is adamant that although she previously lived in exile in London for ten years, it is now essential for her to be in Beijing as an activist and leader given all the energy there.

Hong Ying declares herself to be "a refugee, a poet and Chinese". She writes a poem every day in order "to escape the ugly world to enter into a world of poetry" where she can exist at a deeper, more beautiful level. I ask her whether she would add 'woman' to the category above but the answer is negative although she comments that she writes about love from the point of view of a woman and generally represents the voice of the common woman, women such as her mother.

The love depicted in *K* is one of dark, deep, violent emotions that become obsessive. Hong Ying believes in the Platonic-Socratic view of love which is the love generated and desired for beauty on this earth which can never be truly satisfied until death. Roger Fry, himself a member of the Bloomsbury Set, stated that the Chinese were willing to give up life for art as art could never be attained. This is represented in *K: The Art of Love* in which both protagonists die. Lin, the female lover, whose future desires cannot be fulfilled and who therefore wishes for death, commits suicide. Bell is sexually involved with Lin and although certain that he will not become emotionally involved, he cannot control his emotions. Rather than face commitment, he leaves China to fight in the Spanish Civil War and is killed while serving as an ambulance driver.

Hong Ying tells me that she was trying to express the notion that sex and love are inseparable. Julian assumed he could have a sexual relationship without the emotion of love but realised that he had fallen deeply and irretrievably in love with Lin. Hong Ying explains that she was attracted to writing about the love affair between Julian Bell and Lin because they represented two totally different cultures so that the process of love was very much influenced and complicated by the two cultures. In the novel, Julian Bell is attracted by the 'extraordinary, strange world' of China with its romanticism exoticism and superstition and which includes mysterious, beautiful women. He is introduced to Daoist theories and sexual practices and to various traditions but essentially remains an outsider and exile rooted in the English culture of the upper-class Bloomsbury Set. 'The fanatical love of this Chinese woman, like the violence of the Revolution and everything else Chinese, was simply too alien for him to comprehend or accept.' Lin, a writer and intellectual, is the emotionally unfulfilled wife of a university professor and has to adhere to certain Chinese traditional behaviour patterns and rituals although she belongs to neither traditional nor progressive elements.

Another reason for Hong Ying being enticed by the love affair was her interest in the Bloomsbury Set given that their ideas entered China and influenced the New Moon Society, its Eastern equivalent, thereby shifting cultural and artistic norms. She told me that her curiosity was ignited when she read the evocative, romantic writings of K, a writer Hong Ying considered the most talented woman author of the New Moon Society. In the course of time, she heard rumours linking K to the young, English poet, Julian Bell and also read letters from Vanessa Bell to her son in which K was frequently mentioned.

In Hong Ying's novel *The Concubine of Shanghai*, love develops although the female has been forced into sexual slavery. In 1907, seven-year-old Cassia is sold to an upper-class Shanghai brothel but at the age of sixteen, her life changes when she gains the attention of one of Shanghai's most powerful men, Chang Lixiong, Grand Master of the Hong Brotherhood. With Master Chang, she discovers love and passion. However, when he is brutally assassinated, she must learn to survive on her own. Cassia, a character with charisma and strength, subverts the conventions of her time and creates her own identity.

Although women are generally constructed as oppressed in Chinese society, they are also represented as strong characters. This may be modelled on Hong Ying's own experiences as a child. Her mother had to work as a brick labourer to feed the family while her father was too ill to work. She later discovered that she was in fact the illegitimate daughter of a lover her mother took while her father was in prison.

Hong Ying represents love as an inner, emotional, complex dynamic only experienced by the two characters involved. Her love of poetry is reflected in her depictions of this world and in her sensory descriptions of clothes and objects inextricably connected to the perception of each other by the lovers. Hong Ying tells me that the contemporary poets by whom she has been influenced are mainly English and American rather than Chinese – T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Ted Hughes and Paul Celan.

Tinashe Mushakavanhu

The Distorted Looking Glass

From the bedsitter window
I watch them walk down the road
Arm in arm clutching Tesco carrier bags
They pretend the world is one big stop-shop
Without suffering and pain

They saunter sway jog laugh
Up and down Waun Burgess Road
As if they can enjoy the sunshine
Of youth forever and yet they will not
Let the world know for fear
Of their delicate skin

Crossing the Line

We entered the Friends Arms holding hands
The way Jesus and Judas must have been
When they both knew each other's secret

No words, my coal black hand tightly clasping
Her long white fingers but it was the silence
Drawn in turned heads and suspended gestures
A haunted hush, an odd clink of glass, a cough

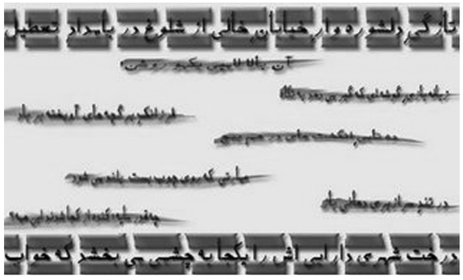
She and I had gone down Taboo Valley and
Crossed River Prejudice, that led up to this spot
And walking in Love's sacred paths

Ade Olaiya

Love

Liebe,
Love myself, my children, my parents,
my family, my friends, my God, my church,
my people,my enemies, my humanity...

Liebe,
I do not love,
I do not want to love,
I love, I will love, again,
Ich kanst liebe dich.



Mehrdad Falah

Prisoner of love

Can't go out today, won't go out tonight.
They wait and watch for me,
on street corners, in crowded streets,
in shops and pubs and clubs and other places
where society meets,
with their insults and abuse, harassment and
discrimination,
and their Love that so quickly turns to visions of
hatred and war.

Can't go out today, tonight.
Can't go to work or come out to play.
Won't come and visit you,
I'm a Prisoner of Love,

My love, Their love, Our Love.

Another Way of Loving: New Narratives of Love in African Writing

Isabelle Romaine

In the context of African writing, narratives on love today contribute to the blurring of boundaries between female writing and male writing. The five writers, whose stories are briefly given here, are from Chad, Eritrea, Ghana, Uganda and Cameroon. Their insights illustrate the challenges of writing about cultural identities within trans-national movements.

Ze Tubia

Journalist Mahamat Saleh Haroun from Chad turned to cinema as the literary genre that best described him, his people and his country. His first long feature *Bye Bye Africa* was released in 2002. Set in N'djamena, the capital of Chad, it recounts the painful and deteriorating relationship of a couple against the background of a city where "war has become a culture."

This was the first feature film from Chad. Continual improvisation had to be used in the making of *Bye Bye Africa*. Frequent power cuts, poor sound system as well as a shortage of professional actors, turned the shooting into a documentary-fiction about making a film in Chad. Haroun turned himself into the main protagonist, playing his own character, a film maker returning to his country from Europe, while the actors kept their real names and used their everyday speech. The making of *Bye Bye Africa* shows that narratives about Africa cannot always be contained in the written genre. The constant improvisation and the absence of a script turn this film into an oral discourse on Chad's social situation. Haroun foresees the shared responsibility of the man /woman relationship as a theme capable of social changes in Africa. He explores intimacy in the couple by questioning male and female archetypes. Against the background of Aids, violence and delinquency, Haroun expresses his fears and uncertainties and unveils the feeling of spatial displacement in his own country.

Denunciation of strict Islamic dogma in Sulaiman Addonia's first novel *The Consequences of Love* (2008) is in the form of a narrative on love. Addonia, like his narrator, Naser, in the novel, was born in Eritrea, spent his early years in a refugee camp in Sudan, and moved to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in his teenage years.

Twenty-year-old Naser resents the repressive Islamic order which stifles love. Zealous representatives of this religious extremism patrol the streets of the city and watch every move. Eye contact between unmarried men and women, hidden in their black cloak, is reprimanded and further relationship between the culprit lovers leads to death sentence. Against this background of despair, one afternoon a woman, wrapped in black, drops a love note at Naser's feet. From then on, more love letters are dropped, each one instructing our protagonist of the next dropping place. Naser gives a name to her mysterious admirer: Fiore. But who is

she? What does she look like under her cloak: is she young? Is she beautiful? Is she black? Asian? Arab? How can he be sure that 'she' is a woman? These series of questions posited by Naser, heighten the intrigue and emphasise the invisibility of women in strict Islamic states. Addonia, however forces an optimistic hand in making Fiore a decision maker. She plans the farcical scenario in which the tyrannical blind imam, who instigates the fear of God and hatred for anything or anyone who does not conform to Islamic principles, becomes their love letter courier. This irreverence of the imam works as a denunciation of strict Islamic dogma which is seen as the obstacle to the true integration of the individual in society.

The Consequences of Love is written from a woman's perspective. As Fiore plans and dictates the next moves, it seems that a female rebellion is the best possible answer to bring radical social changes. This is certainly true when she takes the highly dangerous step to become Naser's lover, involving the latter in dressing up as a woman to avoid suspicion, in a symbolic gender switch. Should Naser's masquerading as a woman be seen as man's eulogy of woman's transgression? Or should it be seen as emblematic of gender fluid boundaries illustrating African writing today?

African women writers have disturbed the social-cultural patterns by which they were perceived and have placed themselves at the centre of innovative writing.

Changes, winner of the 1992 Commonwealth Prize for Literature in Africa, is the landmark for bold narratives on the changing position of the contemporary African woman. Written by the Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo, *Changes: A Love Story*, describes the sexuality of Esi a career-oriented woman who has very little time for her family. Her husband, Oku, feels neglected and his anger and feeling of abandonment are encapsulated in a graphic description of marital rape. Esi obtains a divorce, and later becomes the second wife of her lover, Ali, a business executive. She is infatuated with Ali, yet her passion never overrides her awareness not to yield up her power and independence. But it is a goal difficult to attain and soon her marriage breaks down.

Changes is deliberately provocative. It captures the female stereotype of a sinful temptress which justifies woman's exclusion from any decision making and brings to the open her sexual fulfillment as a catalyst for self discovery and a redefinition of womanhood.

Novels such as Changes set the pace for a new generation of writers to break the mould even further. Monica Arac de Nyeko from Uganda spoke the unspeakable in her tale of lesbian love in *Jambula Tree*, winner of the Caine prize for African writing in 2007. Jambula Tree gently tells of the love between two teenage girls in a housing estate community of Uganda, where poverty and broken dreams make gossip ripe and fierce among women. The story shows how the two girls are affected by the community harsh judgment and hints at how that taboo love has disrupted and permanently affected the community: "Our names became forever associated with the forbidden. Shame". The story is a tale of refusal where the two girls deliberately set a partition between "those women" trapped in marriage, pregnancies, infidelities and poverty, and 'we', "(M)e and you hand in hand, towards school, running away from Nakawa Housing Estates' drifting tide which threatened to engulf us and turn us into noisy, gossiping and frightening housewives". "Those are the kind of women we did not want to become" concludes the narrator.

New topical narratives are deployed by young African writers. Displacement, immigration and exile, have led to the insertion of new sexual ethics. Talking of love today infers making reference to Aids and Internet connections. The status of immigrant has transformed the structure of power in the relationship between men and women. The fundamental issues and urgencies of legalisation, housing and finding work in the host country, have given women and men equal footing. For women, immigration carries a potential for changes, a catalyst for their autonomy. In that sense, the new narratives of love by African writers today, male or female, open up a possibility of dialogue between men and women, instead of the representation of love as a war of sexes.

In this context, the itinerary of Cameroonian writer Nathalie Étoké is revealing. Born in France she was brought up in Cameroon, she then returned to France to study for her Masters. Today she teaches in Rhodes Island in the United States. Étoké always places her characters within the immigration process and its procedures. In the process, she gives voice to both male and female characters, without necessarily prioritising one sex or the other. Her latest novel *Je vois du soleil dans tes yeux* , "I See Sun in Your Eyes," (2008) invites men and women to redefine their love relationships in the north-south context of postcolonial chaos. *Je vois du soleil dans tes yeux* could be subtitled 'Love in the time of Internet.' Wéli is young and ready to leave her country, Koumkana (a fictitious Cameroon), where poverty and prostitution are rife, to join a French man in rural France. His name is Vincent. They met through the Internet and had agreed to marry: he, for company, she, for the promise of a better life. There is little hope left for Wéli in Koumkana. Her father is an alcoholic, her best friend Val has died from Aids and her revolutionary lover, Ruben, has ended up in prison half crazy. Vincent therefore becomes the passport to a life elsewhere. Wéli's attempts to settle in France fail however, and she returns home. Étoké poses the question of what future lies in store for young Africans. What dreams, when the dream of France as a land of welcome has been denounced?

This overview on narratives of love in Africa today is admittedly too brief. Its aim however is to show the boldness in these innovative discourses which force us to reconsider post-colonial literature. Written in the context of Aids, Internet, unemployment, war and migration, these narratives bear witness to the failure of African post-colonial states. Today, there is a new generation of African writers, young writers born in the late seventies and early eighties, who face issues that suggest a different perspective. Instead of being women writers or men writers, they are new voices taking up new challenges.

When I said goodbye

Nahida Izzat

Unlike yourself
You were cold
When I kissed you goodbye

Unlike yourself
You didn't hold me close
You didn't even kiss me back

Unlike yourself
When I cried
You didn't try to comfort me

Unlike yourself
You didn't follow me with your eyes
As I was leaving... moving away

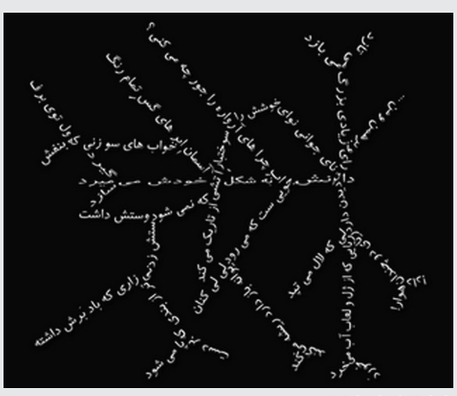
Unlike yourself
You didn't ask me to join you
On this trip

Unlike yourself
You didn't hold on to me
You departed alone

Unlike yourself
You didn't keep your promise this time
Weyyak weyyak yellyrbeit ana weyyak
En ishna ishna sawa, wen muttana weyyak*

My grief... infinite
My sorrow...deep
My pain... unbearable
For the world to endure
So it crumbled before my eyes
When I said goodbye

** From a Palestinian folklore song that Khaled used to sing to me, it means:*
With you for ever,
We grew up together, sweetheart,
If we live we live together,
And if we die we die together



Mehrdad Falah

States of love

Fathieh Saudi

My beloved
behind my window
i longed for two wings.
The shortest to meet death
the longest to fly with you.

I enter a state of love
i become the lover
where is the beloved?
I long for him.

The guitarist on the river's edge
plays for the river, the trees
the water ripples with rhythm.
/My vision embraces/I embrace/ the pearls of the flow
i enter them all.
I become a wave in the river
a green leaf
an autumn breeze.

My hands expand
searching a transparent wave
the wave of life.
My body expands
the soul finds a space.
Together we cover the world's oceans
we embrace the cosmos.

O life, I adore you
let me swim between your waves
unify with you.
O life don't drown me.

I gaze through the trees
my soul expands
embraces all the branches of the world,
my heart divides
to hold the expansions of my soul.

Sadness nests in my eyes
with the falling of the night.

My soul
why did you leave me so naked
like autumn leaves in the storm.

Tonight, I long to be embraced
by the cosmos.

I hear the fluttering of your soul,
i touch the light of my soul.
I see you, you don't see me
you see me, I don't see you.

In the night
the earth comes closer to the sky
the body comes nearer to the soul
there...I miss you.

Classical Persian Love Literature

Rouhi Shafii

In classical Persian literature, the story of love and love stories have occupied a great space. In Persia or Iran, up until the 20th century, in literature, poetry was the dominant language. Through poetry, history, politics, social tensions, the beauties of nature and human relations were described and depicted, sometimes in great detail. Hakim Abulghasem Ferdowsi, (10th century AD) was one of the first poet-historians, who spent thirty years of his life writing the history of the Iranian peoples before the Arab invasion in a book called Shahnameh, 'The Book of Kings'. From the 10th century AD onwards, Persian literature took a new turn and great poets emerged and enriched the language. Rudaki, Hafiz and Sa'adi, Khayam, Rumi, Nezami Ganjavi and many others; men and women wrote volumes of poetry depicting their personal lives, their world views and the society in which they lived.

In the ancient world, the realm of men and women was separated physically and regulated by strict codes, especially after the Arab invasion and the Islamisation of the country. Yet, classical Persian literature is full of enchanting love stories. Despite segregation and restrictions on premarital relationships between men and women, the work of poets concentrates on some imaginary beloved or their sentimental feelings over separation and a burning desire for union. Yet, their work also conveys additional meanings; love of God or the creator or praise of the ruling king, who might otherwise have deprived the poet from writing freely. The masters of Persian language infused images of love with numerous other meanings.

Persians and the Persian speaking people are devoted to poetry and to this day, prose has been unable to replace poetry to any great extent. It is through poetry that the "long, black tendril of her hair, the ghazal's look-alike of the beloved's eyes, the colour of her cheeks, her smile, her moon-lit face and her whole complexion" comes to life and finds its way into classic miniatures and paintings through time. These depict dreaming of the beloved, a quick glance through the closed doors, depictions of the go-betweens or maybe simply the saghi girl, who serves wine from a tortoise goblet in the wine house; while in most cases, the saghi girl was actually a young boy dressed as a girl!

Among the most famous poets, Hafiz of Shiraz (14th century AD) was able to establish himself as the master who gave a new direction to Persian poetry. His book of poetry is still kept in every Persian speaking house and read and

enjoyed generation after generation. Hafiz speaks freely of wine, love, nature and the beauty of the world:

"How priceless is the prayer-mat of piety,
they don't accept it
for a cup of wine
in the street of wine-sellers."

The great Sa'adi of Shiraz who was also contemporary of Hafiz deployed smooth, musical language and spoke of love and longing:

"O, caravan, move slowly
the comfort of my soul is travelling with you.
My heart is departing with the owner of it.
How the soul departs from the body
is the subject of many debates,
yet, I saw with my own eyes
the departure of my soul."

Most of the love stories in classical Persian literature had tragic endings. The poets reflected the society in which they lived and so tragedy, longing, jealousy and revenge are the essence of such stories. Of the literature before the Arab invasion (6th and 7th century AD) little remains. For almost two centuries Arabic became the official language. Yet, Persian people, who were famous for their love of nature and beauty, when forced to accept the new religion and its language, soon mastered it and many Iranian poets writing in Arabic emerged including: Omar Khayam, Avecina, and Razi.

Although women were not allowed to exist outside the walls and veils, they occupied a considerable space in literature. In a book called "Famous Iranian and Persian speaking women from the earliest times to the Constitutional Revolution in the early 20th century", the author has recorded the names of about six hundred women poets, some of whom wrote love poems. Women did not allow themselves to cross the line of piety and demonstrate their inner desires and love of the beloved. The majority of women poets belonged to the courts or had connections with the kings and were supported by them as were men. Their work is mainly in praise of the ruling king or God and creation, chastity, piety or religious themes. Daughters of a number of kings are also among women poets. A great number of these poets had studied Persian, Arabic and Koranic texts and mastered fields considered male.

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Among the first tragic love stories is Rabe'h, who is known to be the first woman poet registered in the history of the Persian literature. Rabe'h was born in the 10th century AD, around the same time as Rudaki, the master of Persian poetry. They met on some occasions and exchanged their poems and Rudaki was very fond of Rabe'h. It is said that: "Although Rabe'h was a woman, her knowledge was superior to that of many learned men. She was the master of Persian and Arabic poetry."

According to records, Rabe'h was a beautiful and gifted poet. When her father, Ka'ab died, Rabe'h's brother, Hares, who was the Lord of Balkh, became her guardian. Rabe'h fell in love with one of her brother's handsome slaves, Bektash. At this time, she secretly wrote poetry. Eventually, she fell ill and weak and when a woman confidant insisted on the reason, she opened her heart. She then began to send her love poems to Bektash through this woman. Bektash also fell in love with Rabe'h. Some time later, in the middle of a battlefield, Bektash was injured and story has it that as he was about to be taken prisoner, a warrior appeared on the scene and attacked the enemy fiercely, killing many and taking Bektash to safety. And so the army of Hares won the war. Some time later during a banquet held in the court of King Amir Nasr Samani, in Bokhara, Rudaki recited a few of Rabe'h's poems. Legend has it that when Hares found out about the love between his sister and his warrior slave, enraged, he threw Bektash in a well and put Rabe'h in a bath, cutting her wrists and walling the bath's door. And Rabe'h used her blood to write poems on the walls until the very last drop.

Mahasti Ganjavi (11th or 12 century AD), was among other gifted women poets, who wrote love poems some of which were even of an erotic nature. Mahasti was a very beautiful and witty woman who had connections with the court of King Mahmoud Ghaznavi and later his nephew Sultan Sanjar. It is not known how Mahasti travelled from her hometown, Ganjeh to Marv and entered the King's court. At a young age, Mahasti fell in love with a man called Ahmad, who became her husband or lover. One of her contemporaries, Jowhari Zargar represented this love affair in a detailed poem.

Though tragedy is the essence of love stories in Persian literature, in the Book of Kings, Ferdowsi's women are powerful, strong minded and influential in the political and social scenes. Ferdowsi's recording of history is focused on pre-Islamic times and that might be one reason for the existence of such women in his epic work. According to one of his narrations, Sindokht was a legendary woman poet and the wife of Mehrab, the King of Kabul. She found out that her daughter, Rudabeh was in love with Za'l, Sam's son, the Lord of Sistan, which was a province neighbouring Kabul and in constant war with it. Initially, she scorned her daughter but having found out that she was deeply in love, she asked her husband to agree to their marriage. She then prepared presents, put on a man's costume and rushed to the court of Sam. Sindokht sat in conversation with Sam and told him of the love between Za'l and Rudabeh. Having heard of their true feelings, Sam took Sindokht's hand and promised to agree to the marriage and never attack Kabul. Sindokht, who until then had not properly introduced herself told him who she was. Sindokht returned with caravans of presents and a friendly message to Kabul.

This friendly relationship continued until Rostam, the legend hero in the *Shahnameh*, the Book of Kings was born in Nimruz while Sindokht was at her daughter's bedside. The love of Rudabeh and Sam is written in length. Ferdowsi had registered a great many other love stories between the legends of Shahnameh. Women in the Book of Kings are strong, self-aware and directly approach the man they desire and tell them of their yearnings. Tahmineh, for example, found Rostam very handsome, when he came to the court of her father. At night, she went straight to his chambers and told him the fact. She told him who she was. Rostam married Tahmineh and she bore Sohrab, another legend in the Book of Kings. Almost all the love stories in Shahnameh end in marriage, while other Persian love stories have tragic consequences.

Up until the 20th century, writing of love and speaking about it was a disgrace for women poets. The emergence of Forugh Farokhzad, a young and courageous poet in the second part of the 20th century turned the pages of history and the concept of women speaking freely of love and their inner thoughts, entered Persian literature. Forugh wrote three books of poems. She was well aware that young women longed to free themselves of walls and veils and shout out their true desires:

"I want you and I know
that I can never take you in my arms;
you are like that clear, bright sky
and I am a captive bird in a cage."

Forugh paid a high price for her rebellion. Her husband divorced her and took away her only son. She was a divorcee at the age of nineteen. It was difficult to live freely among the hostile world which rejected such rebellion. Yet, Forugh chose to walk on that path and subverted many traditional values, old social norms and hypocritical religious restrictions. To date, none of the many Persian speaking women poets have replaced Forugh's direct and strong language in terms of portraying human relations, love, loneliness, desire, companionship and liberation from restrictions.

A great story with perfect rhyme and rhythm reflects in detail a love that has been eternalised in the Persian literature. Nezami Ganjgavi (11th century AD) was one of the great poets. After he completed a collection of mystic poems, Nezami focused on earthly matters. He composed two lengthy love stories; Khosro & Shireen and Leili & Majnoun. The first was written in remembrance of his beloved, Afagh, who died at a young age, and is briefly described below. The second was written by order of the king, who supported Nezami.

Khosro was a young prince who was about to become King of Persia and Shireen was a princess in Armenia. The crown prince, having heard from the artist, Shahpour, about the beauty and status of Shireen, decided to travel to Armenia where he felt at ease mixing with Shireen. Their love flourished and deepened and the two decided to get married in due course. Unfortunately, one night prince Khosro became very drunk and rushed to Shireen's chambers and tried to impose himself on her. Shireen refused and the young prince's pride was injured and he left Armenia in anger. On his way back to Persia he visited the king of Byzantine who proposed his daughter, Princess Maryam to him and he accepted the offer and married her, knowing full well that he was still deeply in love with Shireen.

Nezami Ganjavi wrote hundreds of lines depicting details of conversations and messages between the two lovers. His language while simple is poetic, argumentative and strong. Both lovers have a strong personality. None is willing to give way to the other. Here they are angry at each other, there they reconcile and make amends. Shireen loves to flirt and keep the fire of desire alive. The King is mad with lust and love and on several occasions rushes to Shireen's court desiring to make love to her. Shireen, though deeply in love with Khosro Parviz, does not sacrifice her honour and her dignity to become his lover. Finally, the separation ends and the two lovers stop their games and in a week-long celebration they get married. Eventually, Shahpour is appointed the ruler of Armenia to replace Shireen. King Khosro Parviz and Queen Shireen ruled Persia for many years until he was old and turned to religion and moved to a temple. Shireen moved with her husband to the temple and put herself at his service.

Shiruyeh, King Khosro Parviz's son from his marriage to Maryam toppled his father from the throne and declared himself the King of Persia. He took the King away from the temple and put him in prison. Shireen accompanied Khosro Parviz and stayed with him, day and night while nursing him. On the other hand, Shiruyeh who had an eye for Shireen, conspired to kill his own father and took Shireen by force. One day he entered the prison and cut through his father's side with a sword. Shireen who was asleep opened her eyes and saw her beloved in a pool of blood. Devastated, she arranged for a state funeral and with herself in official mourning dress walked alongside the coffin. Legend says that as they lowered the body to the ground, Shireen bent to kiss her husband and quickly drew a sword and killed herself at his feet.

As all epic love stories, Khosro and Shireen's epic ends in tragedy but today if you travel to the west of Iran, Bisotun Mountain bears Farhad's carvings, the brook, the mountain path and is one of the many tourist attractions in the west of the country.

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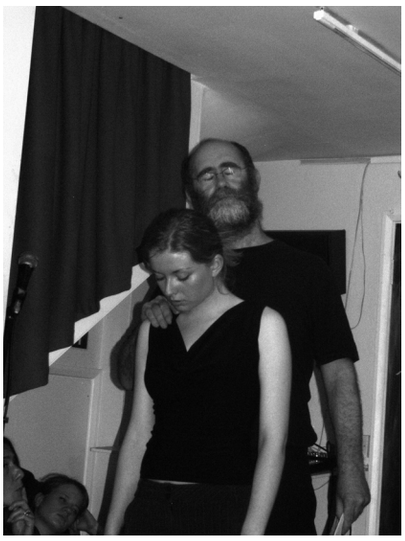
Masculine Law

Ghazi Rabihavi

Translated by Bita Mafizadeh



In an Islamic country such as Iran, where Sharia Law is enforced, women are still suffering sexual discrimination. As a result, Iranian women have started a campaign, demanding equal rights and amendments to some of the laws which discriminate against women.

This short episode is one of the twenty-one episodes which, together, comprise The Masculine Law. The play is written in support of the women's rights movement, known as the One Million Signature Campaign. Each episode consists of an individual story, describing the problems related to women's lack of rights.

The short episode, 'He did love me' is about inheritance laws and what a woman legally receives from her husband as inheritance.

On 4th August 2008, a reading of some scenes from The Masculine Law was performed at the Poetry Café, London, as part of an Exiled Writers Ink event.

HE DID LOVE ME SO MUCH

Characters:
Woman, in her mid-sixties
Her brother, slightly younger than her
Place:
The brother's house
Time:
Early morning

The man's back is to the audience. He is standing by the window, shaving his face and taking a puff on his cigarette from time to time. He seems not to be listening to the woman.

The woman is sitting on a chair, in the middle of the room, talking to the man.

Woman:

God bless you brother for letting me stay in your house. It won't take long. I know you've got your own family to look after and could barely make ends meet, but it shouldn't take me more than a few weeks; or maybe even less. I'll leave as soon as I find myself a small place to rent; or even a tiny room. You know, I don't know anything about renting places, so I have no clue how long it would take.

Pause.

I lived with my husband in the same place for thirty two years; God bless him. I never even thought that one day I'd have to leave and look for a rental place for myself. Even after he passed last year, I still didn't believe everything would finish so fast. Well, his children had to sell the house because they wanted their shares. If he had put the house under my name, I wouldn't be homeless like I am now. I mean then nobody could've kicked me out. I told him a few times to put it under my name, but he kept saying: don't worry woman you'll die before me. He was sure that I would die before him, although he was twenty years older. To be honest, I'd also believed that I'd die before him and in that house, but unfortunately it didn't happen that way. He died first and left me homeless. I mean not on purpose, of course. God knows how much he loved me. He adored me.

Pause.

Yes, he did love me so much.

Silence.

But his children, from his other wife, suddenly turned up and said they had to sell the house so everyone could get their share. Not that they didn't give me *my* share. They did; it's all the money I've put in my account. It's enough for the deposit of a small place. It's not much. I'm sure it's enough to rent a small room if not a flat. What could I do? God knows, they shared it based on the law. The boys each got one whole share and the girls each took half a share. You must know that according to the law, the wife's share is one eighth of the whole property. If I was his only wife, it would've been much more but I'm not. Not that there was anything between them; not at all. He only loved *me*, but she was also his children's mother. So, that one eighth of the money was divided between the two of us. Now, you can imagine how much we each received; one sixteenth of one whole share.

pause.

You see how this country values a woman who's been looking after her husband all these years!

Silence.

Do you think I can afford to put a roof over my head with this little money, not to die in the streets?

Black out.

RED SKIRT
(Song for the Unwanted)

Freddy Macha

painting: Ze Tubia

Red skirt
genuine smile with a bite;
red skirt is your name Annette, Margareth or Charlotte?
Dance for me please do the funk
swing for this beaming hunk
come on red skirt;
do la bamba, caramba, samba
go on taste me, scratch me; hold me tight
I have been checking you all night
Saw you seated at the table red skirt
Watched the lucky man blowing you away with his swinging guitar
heard you twitter;
Observed the guy at the bar offering you a beer called bitter
Saw you taking a picture
of the stylish drifter
(he is affluent, articulate, richer)
Even heard someone calling you Rita
(everyone is trying to get your attention!)
Except me
I insist I am not a loser
(I am not going to let you go).
I may not be a colourful musician nor clever writer
I cannot do poetry; be the painter
Can't be the singer, photographer
I cannot
grab your attention red skirt
I am...
The bloke you like to ignore
Yes red skirt I might be a bore
Ordinary, idiot, imaginary
I may even fly aeroplanes in my hair
ozone layer, cigarette smoker, twisted flyer
I am...
The bloke you love to neglect
come on red skirt
dance for me
you know I can only...
I can only offer you love
nothing else

Billie Holiday

Majid Naficy

Oh Billie, I dance with you
Holding your waist with my hand
I circle around on tiptoe
Your playful rhythm leaks into my veins
And the salt of your skin sinks into my blood
The sea is far but I hear its sound
The sea is big but fits in my body
Let us cast off our shoes
And step on its sandy carpet
The little waves grab our feet
and draw us toward the green waters

Oh Billie, I dance with you
Holding the hem of your long skirt
I walk gently on the skin of the sea
The wandering wind wraps around our bodies
And the albatross opens its wings on our shoulders
There, across the sea is the land of my childhood
With fragile trees that like the tips of your fingers
Are now growing all over my skin
The sea is borderless but beats in my heart
The earth is vast but fits into my skull
Tonight no border can separate you from me
But... suddenly my hand lets go of the radio antenna
The blues singer begins to whine
Ah, my dance partner is not imaginary!
I hold her waist as before
Her velvet voice rises again
And takes me back to the nightly dance

Tacit Love

Albert Pellicer

The tacit love of the sea is not a lullaby. The shore has softly spoken of an end and seagulls claim the laughter. On the horizon a tight-rope walker scrapes the sun. We are touched by this passing figure as the evening falls and dreams come close to life. It is now that the folly of being forgotten is moon–like written.
Later through a window in a Barcelona café, we hear of a man who crossed the street that leads to the sea.

I saw a man cross the street
His shadow a broken bridge
No longer a return

Your hands cup an elbow
Naked knot

And everybody's face longs
Where scars seal a dream

Over this marble table

Let us speak of lands and fishes
Let us talk of new wounds
Between two lovers

Rain on tar
Terracotta
glazed eyes

Scribble

The poet
Faded in his journey
As heaven dictated

For nothing remains

that leads to the sea
blown in mid-verse
a suicide no more

arms tangle

for signs
and heal not

hand in hand upon hand
and a spider web
still unmet

rain on tar

mid-night sense

a cloud reader

steps he knew

but forever lingers

Forbidden Love

Coffee Cup

Nora Nadjarian

I never believed in the coffee cup. On a school trip in June, many years ago, the toothless grin of the old lady drew us to her. We drank the coffee, turned over our cups and laughed at her pink gums. She picked up my cup with her arthritic, wooden fingers and lowered her face into my future. The other girls gathered round.

"Look inside this coffee cup and see the sediment of your life's patterns, which will tell you things about your future," the toothless voice droned. "Oh, yes, many, many patterns on the inside walls of the cup, just like ripples. There is a fish, you see, with its tail, and a boat sailing. There is a man in the boat sailing to you. Hurry up and see him. Meet him, hurry up – or else it will be winter."

I told her I had all summer, all my life – to which she replied silence.

My mother listened bright-red, as if she had just been slapped in the face. "You should never have gone near her," she said, boiling with indignation, for she thought she knew my future better than anyone. "She's a witch, that's what! There's one in every village. The devil dressed as a woman, stirring your fate, telling you lies and eating into your youth."

She talked about it for weeks. Non-stop. She cleaned the house and talked about it; cooked and lit candles in church and talked about it. Remembered the incident and searched my eyes for clues of secret pacts with the witch. When my coffee cup was forgotten, and her anger subsided, she reverted to her daily habit of filling the emptiness of her own wasted youth with words. I knew the sequence well: "At your age, I was married. At your age, I had you. At your age, I ..." She would never complete the sentence. There was nothing to complete it with. For a moment she would look embarrassed, and continue dusting. "At your age," I often thought, "I hope I will have lived." I was eighteen.

Years later I proved the truth told by the coffee cup. Perhaps I did it to spite my mother. I went to the old port deliberately looking for a man. After two failed engagements, I was the eccentric who had never loved, except once, "the doctor who left her for a bigger dowry". The village talked. I would give them more to talk about. Until there was no more to talk about. Soon.

When the peach sun melted into the evening and the cicada persisted on telling the world its shrill stories of boredom; when the sweat beaded a necklace of drops round my neck and the water hissed on the shore and splashed, as if sequin-tailed sirens were plunging into the Mediterranean; when the road tarmac oozed with the heat of the day and the pores of my skin opened up to the evening breeze - I met Ramez. His large olive eyes smiled, and we met.

"Here," he said. "This is my secret place. My fishing boat."

Our bodies met. We held each other, and the wood and nets and sheets absorbed our heat under the dark supervision of night. It was my night in shining armour. "I have never slept with a stranger," I told him. "I have never slept on the sea." He hushed my hair with strokes of his big, dark hands. And over us the moon shone like a brightly polished silver coin. I listened, my heart full of stars, to the sound of his breath and mine. Nestling my face in his neck I finally slept and dreamt. That it was morning and I was collecting his clothes off the beach as if picking crabs, some deadly, some dead, asking Ramez if the sand would bite my bare feet; singing a wistful mermaid tune: "When will I see you again? Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps never?"

When we woke up we ate watermelon. He cut it into two and then into slices. Sitting on a half-broken chair, half-dressed and half-awake, I sucked at the last drops, stacking the black pips to one side; and wondered, as I watched his eyes, if he was a Spaniard, an Italian or just a man from the sea. The man that my coffee-cup had promised me.

"I wish," I said, "I wish I was happy."

"I thought I made you happy," he whispered, and took my hand. "Don't cry."

At the sound of his voice the salt of my tears turned to sugar, and a small joy sprinkled the vast expanse of the sea. I felt as fragile as a jasmine flower. He kissed my tongue with his cigarette breath and looked into my mascara-stained eyes, smiling awkwardly, inwardly, as if he wanted to help me but didn't know how. I thought then that I had never seen him smoke a cigarette and wished I had met him long ago, ten, twenty years ago, five months ago in my garden of youth. We would have drunk coffee under the eucalyptus tree, kissing in full view of the village, waving at my mother. And suddenly I remembered what the cause of my sorrow was. I had never dared in my life. I had never made a splash.

The clinical words came back to me. "Five, six months, maximum. I'm sorry." Ironically, words from the mouth that had jilted me. "I'm sorry."

The heat descended on us that month. You felt its crudeness, like a dog's bated breath on your earlobe, the sweat salivating and dribbling on your body. Watermelon with Ramez breezed air-condition cool into my memory during the day and I returned to the boat every night. My mother's hot blast of Greek frequently interrupted my thoughts of nocturnal bliss. She talked to me in much the same way she talked to my father. Who left her. For bottles of brandy and a heart attack.

"You must tell me," she said, "if you're not well. You're pale. Despite the sun."

"I don't," I replied, "think so."

"Working too hard," she continued, without listening, a faint flush of pink indignation forming on her round bun cheeks. "All that work in the evening is doing you no good. No good at all."

In the heat of summer, her words stung like mosquito bites. And not just hers. There were others who talked, nudged each other, peered out of their windows when I passed. My feelings rolled into prickly hedgehog balls.

"I caught some red mullet today," said Ramez one night, "but they didn't pay me much. I'm illegal."

"Remember, Marigo," Mother said the following day, while chopping salad, "remember you are a Greek Orthodox." There was a touch of bitter Fetta in her voice.

Perhaps she had seen me with Ramez. Followed him to his house, introduced her bun cheeks to the immigration office. Moonwhite in the darkness, conspired to ruin the one happy sediment in my coffee cup. It hadn't taken long for village talk to reach her.

It didn't take long for Ramez to appear on the early evening news. Along with a group of around twenty young, bearded, bewildered men. Trying to make sense of the commentary, snatching at the words "arrested", "illegal", "foreigners". Waiting to return. Ramez staring at me through the screen, watermelon pips falling through his fingers, black tears.

"Look at them! There may be babies in their houses," her voice spat vinegar into the clot of anger forming in my throat. "Lots of babies, crying, gooing and pregnant women, tugging at their hair and crying out. I've heard they treat their women like dirt." The whole village applauded.

It was the first time my mother heard me scream. It was also the last. Coffee cups and plates crashed like cymbals, becoming one with the salad. "Here's the mess I've made of my life. You're standing in the middle of my chopped salad of a life. Well – I have very little of it left... so eat, mother, eat."

I found the boat, but the sea seemed so rough without Ramez. The stark sky so cold. *Hurry up - or else it will be winter*. Who had said that? My mother, the witch, the doctor, Ramez? All the patterns, the words of my past merged into one. *At your age I had you. I have never slept on the sea. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps never...*

Beneath the pink sky of dawn, coffee-coloured ripples carried me along.

When I looked back, no land was visible. And for the first time in my life I was happy.

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Gay Iranians in Germany

Schahroch Reisi, editor of ASAR

Translated and summarised from German by David Clark

The co-ordinator of a group campaigning for the rights of Gay Iranians in Germany writes that many refugees have fled societies which are openly homophobic and where gays are routinely persecuted, tortured and sometimes killed. In Iran, homosexuality was tolerated to some extent up to 1979 and indeed in 1974 Sawis Shafai founded the first movement for homosexuals in Iran, based at Shiraz University. Since the Iranian Revolution, however, the situation has become quite dire and any discussion on the topic is considered out of bounds. Since 1982 large numbers of homosexuals have been executed in Iran, some say at least 3000. Even those who manage to escape and flee to the West often have to face difficult times in reception centres. In Germany they find themselves once again in a largely homophobic environment where they do not know the language, culture and their rights or how to get in contact with other homosexuals whilst having to face a complicated and long drawn out judicial process in order to claim asylum and residency rights, having first to prove that they had faced persecution and that they are irreversibly gay.

The PGLO, an international organisation on behalf of Iranian homosexuals, was established three years ago and is now based in Toronto, with branches in many countries, such as Germany, France and the Netherlands. It has some 4000 members world-wide and campaigns on behalf of the rights of Iranian homosexuals. Its co-ordinator in Germany is 29 years old and is still waiting for his German residency rights. Since his Iranian qualifications are not recognised in Germany he is currently completing studies for a technical and vocational diploma, hoping to continue his studies at Frankfurt University. He wishes to qualify as a social worker in order to help other Iranian gay refugees through the complicated bureaucratic and legal processes to obtain residency rights and suitable recognition.

White Rock

Ghazi Rabihavi

The photographer jumped down over the gallows and his three cameras jumped around with him. We were worried something might happen to them. The gallows were still lying on the floor of the pick-up truck. He dusted off his trousers and said:

"Are you kids from around here?"

We looked at each other and one of us said:

"Are you going to take pictures of us or the dead man?"

The photographer blinked nervously and asked:

"Is he dead?" and ran, complete with the solid looking black cameras, to the patrol car. It had arrived with these three persuaders carrying G-3 guns about an hour earlier. And one of us had said:

"I bet those guns aren't loaded."

Two of the officers threw their guns onto the back seat of the car and walked over to the pick-up. And one of us had said then:

"I bet those guns are loaded."

They began to help take out the gallows posts from the truck and to set them up on either side of the white rock where they had already dug two shallow holes to support them. Before they had found the rock, one of the pasdars had asked us:

"Hey, you. Can any of you get us a stool?" and one of us had said:

"He's going to be hanged, isn't he. Because you have to hang him."

But the other guy said:

"Don't bother with a stool: this white rock will do."

A few local men were coming our way from different parts of the town. It was a good Friday morning for a hanging, only it would have been even better if it hadn't started to snow, or if we'd had gloves. They said if it snowed they wouldn't hang him. It wasn't snowing when they brought the dead man. When they brought him he was alive.

He came out of the ambulance and sniffed the air. He had pulled up the zipper of his grey and green jumper — or someone had done it up for him because his hands were strapped behind his back. The first snowflakes settled on his hair. A group of locals ran towards him. The photographer was checking out his cameras. The headlights of the ambulance had been left on. The snowflakes were light and soft. They melted even before they touched the lights. One of us said:

"Pity. I wasn't even born when they executed the Shah's guard." One of us answered:

"My brother was born then; my dad sat him up on his shoulders so he could see the guy being executed. Bang! Bang!"

The truck driver said:

"I'd love to stay and watch. It'd mean a blessing for me. But I've got to deliver this food for the troops." The fat pasdar scratched his beard with the gun barrel and said:

"Good luck." The truck driver ran to the pick-up cursing the snow.

The prisoner was pacing up and down in the snow without any idea that he was moving closer and closer to the gallows. Sometimes he just stood there, with his long, thin legs, turning his head this way and that, sniffing the air. He wrinkled his nose and waggled his eyebrows, trying to shift the blindfold to find out where he was. But the blindfold was too tight. One of us said:

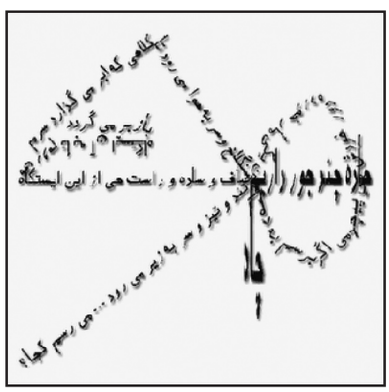
"Shout out his name so he knows where he is." Another said:

"When I used to know his name he was a different person."

A couple of people were still working on trying to get the gallows firm in the ground. Only men and children could come to watch. One of the guys, who had been given a leg up on the cupped hands of another, jumped down and said:

"Where's the other one?" The prisoner turned his head and said:

"Yeah. Where is he?" We didn't know the other guy; he wasn't from our town. We only saw him once — no, it was twice — on the same night. It was the beginning of autumn. The sun was just setting when we saw him entering the gates. He had a long turtle-neck sweater pulled down over his trousers. His clothes were black; like his hair. The officer on the gate was eating meat and rice. The stranger was carrying a bouquet of pink roses, and he was trying to hide a black plastic bag underneath it. He didn't like us watching him. But we did anyway and worked out that there were two bottles in the bag. He had the address of the prisoner but didn't know which way to go. So we showed him. At first, we thought he was a rather tall boxer. He ran his fingers through



Mehrdad Falah

his hair and lifted his head. Then he looked down at us from under his eyelids. His eyebrows were shaved across his nose where they should have run together and he smiled at us. The sun trembling through the plane tree splashed his face with light and shade. He smiled and turned in the direction we had pointed. The security guy was washing his plate under the tap and asked us:

"Who was that?" and we told him. He looked over to the prisoner's house.

People were moving closer to the gallows, gathering in front of it. The photographer was sitting in the ambulance having a smoke. The prisoner, walking towards the gallows, was still unaware of where he was. One of the guards took his arm and pulled him over to the rock. The photographer grabbed his cameras and jumped out of the ambulance. He was wearing one of those safari vests with a lot of pockets. He got out a wire contraption from one of them and hooked them onto the shoulder tabs. Then he got out some white cloth and stretched it over the frame he had made. Now the snow wouldn't bother him. He ran across to the gallows with the umbrella that had sprouted from his shoulder.

None of the spectators were related to the prisoner; we didn't know if he had any relations. He was a loner; he built the wooden bodies for stringed instruments and twice a week went out of town. People said he had a wife and children somewhere that he had abandoned. The grocer had said to him:

"Give it another chance. You're only 45. It's just the right time to get married." The prisoner had smiled and said:

"Just the right time."

The guy holding onto the prisoner's arm was still looking at the hanging rope. Then he told the prisoner:

"Stand on top of this stone, will you, pal. Just to test everything's OK."

The prisoner's feet searched for the stone. Found it. If we could have seen his eyes, we could have told if he was frightened or not. That midnight, in the autumn, when the guards attacked his house and arrested both of them, he pressed his face against the rear window of the car, his eyes searching everywhere for his lover. Then, his voice trembling, he yelled from behind the glass:

"Leave him alone!" The car drove off; a crushed pink rose was still sticking to the back tyre.

The prisoner asked:

"Is it time?" The pasdar said:

"No. The hadji hasn't arrived yet. We can't start without him." He said:

"Then what?" The officer said: "Take your shoes off. This is only a trial run." The prisoner took his bare feet out of the loose-fitting canvas shoes and stood on them. His long, thin toes were red with cold. They had up-ended the white rock and were holding it in position; the slightest kick would topple it, leaving his feet dangling in space.

"Now climb up." He put one foot on the rock. It shifted, swayed, nearly fell over. The guard jumped forward and set it straight again.

"What's with you? Are you in a hurry?" he said. Then he got up and one by one, carefully placed the prisoner's feet on the stone. The prisoner stood on the stone and was raised up above the crowd. His shoes were left below, on the ground, and everything around him was white: the sky, the snow. The rest of the officers and the driver were standing under a big umbrella like you have on a beach, next to the patrol car. It was a long way from the gallows. The photographer said:

"What are you doing? Hadji isn't here yet.' The guard said: No, he isn't' The photographer said: 'Then come over here and have some saffron dates.' The guard said: 'Only if you let me stand under your umbrella,' and burst out laughing. The photographer looked up at his umbrella and said: 'It's for the cameras,' and walked towards the patrol car. The spectators were not saying anything. They were just standing there, silent, looking at the prisoner. Hanging onto one side of the gallows, the guard pulled himself up next to him. If he hadn't been wearing boots, there would have been enough room for another pair of feet. The stone wobbled again, but didn't fall over. The guard grabbed the hanging rope and struggled to get it round the prisoner's neck. The prisoner was trying to help, but couldn't see what the other guy was doing. Then he jumped down and the rock stayed firm. He said: 'Now you see how steady it is?'

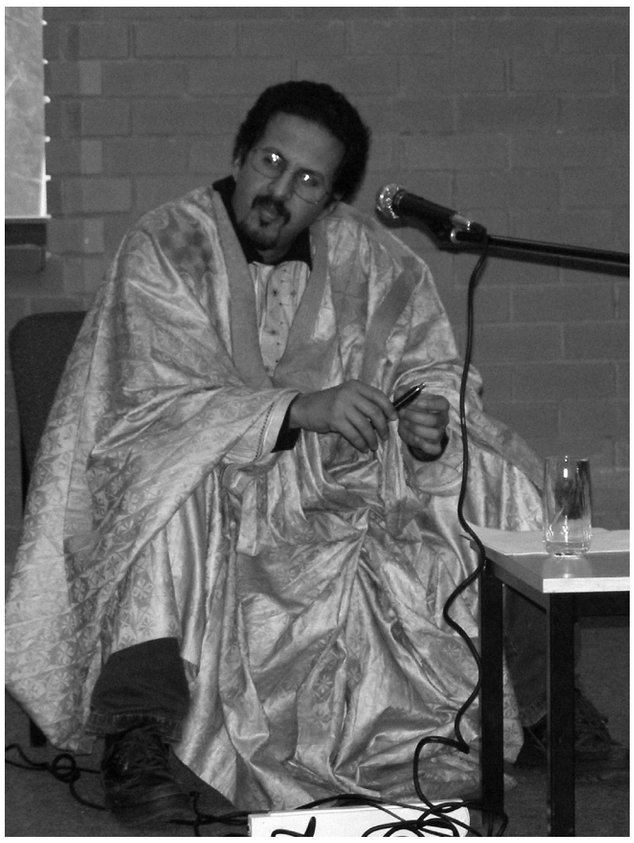
In the distance a car was approaching. One of the psadars called out: 'Hurry up!' He looked at the patrol car and then at the prisoner and said: 'Try to get used to it, then, when the time comes, you won't panic.' The only movement in the landscape was the distant car. We could only just see it, but because of the whiteness of the snow, we could make out what make it was: either a Mercedes or a Hillman. Hadji must have been lounging in the back seat. The guard said: 'Make sure it doesn't work loose. I'll be right back.' The prisoner said: 'What?' But the guard had already moved off to the patrol car. The boot of the approaching car sagged low to the ground from the weight on the back seat. It drew nearer to where we were, but it was still a good way off. The guards were still eating their dates near the patrol car.

Women were not allowed to watch because this was not their business: it had nothing to do with them. The prisoner tried to shift the rock with his feet. It refused to move. One on the spectators jumped forward but quickly froze to the spot. All of us were waiting for the approaching car. The psadars and the photographer were throwing the date stones into the snow. The snowflakes were melting as they hit the ground. The prisoner again tried to shift the rock. It moved, but didn't fall. The silent spectators stood stock still as if they were frozen to the spot and it wasn't snowing. Our hands were red with cold. Red as the wine the guards found in the prisoner's house the night of his arrest. One of the bottles was empty; the other still half full. The guards also took the two long-stemmed crystal glasses. By now we could see the car. It was a Hillman. One of the officers threw the date box away. The rest quickly ate up what was left in their hands. One of the pasdars went to meet the car and the rest followed. The photographer glanced at the gallows. He started to move closer, but changed his mind and walked over to the ambulance instead. The prisoner was kicking at the rock with his feet. It tottered, fell down and left his bare feet hanging in the air. His long, thin toes were searching for the stone. But by then it was too late. Then the movement stopped and his feet hung motionless. The car finally arrived dazzling us with its headlights. We went to warm our hands at the headlights of the ambulance because that was what the photographer was doing.

Pasdar is a revolutionary guard.
Hadji is a mullah.

The Exiled Poetry of the Western Sahara

Miriam Frank



Malainin Lakhal

Last year the Western Sahara came to Bethnal Green in the form of the Sandblast Festival which was a magical whirl of music, dance, workshops and poetry in spaces of floating Saharawi material and desert tents. Exiled Writers Ink was involved in the two poetry workshops, featuring exiled poets living in the Tindouf area of Algeria and writing in Arabic and exiled poets living in Spain and writing in Spanish.

Poetry is predominant in terms of the oral traditions which have always dominated Saharawi society. Both historically, and in the present, it has been one of the most respected art forms and has been a primary method for transmitting the culture and collective memories of the desert nomadic Saharawis. Their rich poetic tradition is expressed in both classical Arabic and Hassaniya, their spoken language, and covers a complex range of styles and genres.

Poetry played a key role in powerfully conveying the message of the Saharawi liberation struggle in its early days, in the seventies, when most of the society was still largely illiterate. Spanish colonialism and the increased numbers of Saharawis who have studied in Cuba since exile began, have given rise to new generations of Saharawis who select Spanish rather than Arabic as a means of expression. Those who write in Spanish are called the *Generación de la Amistad, the Friendship Generation*.

Poetry continues to play a large social and emotional part in the life of Saharawis. Many consider poetry and songs to be part of their struggle for independence, as they are ways of keeping their identity and culture alive.

Verses from the Hamada: contemporary Arabic Saharawi poetry

The Moroccan and Mauritanian invasion on Western Sahara in 1975 led to the mass exodus of Sahrawis towards Tindouf, a small town in the Algerian desert which is one of the most inhospitable in the world given that it is arid and hot with temperatures between forty to sixty degrees in the summer. Only a small number of plants and animals survive al-Hamada which is the term that the refugees of the Western Sahara use to describe the extreme temperatures.

Much of the poetry is about the relationship with a lover which is a metaphor for the lost homeland. The love feelings are usually yearning, remembrance and being separated by torturers. Malainin comments "The occupied territories in Western Sahara are the biggest open prison in the world. People are detained, tortured, imprisoned illegally, demonstrations are oppressed, and houses ransacked by police, Saharawis are victims to all kinds of segregation and so on. This is why when I sing about love and about the homeland, I do that out of my own experience and the experience of my people. I wasn't allowed to sing about the Sahara, because for the Moroccans my songs about my country are songs for freedom, and songs against colonialism. This is why love, woman, homeland, are faces of the same coin in my poetry, they are the beauty, freedom, liberation and human warmth. Love is a unit, a value, a deep feeling that generates my strength, and my will to struggle and hold on to the final goal I set for myself: freedom, dignity, emancipation and development for my people. To me the love of my lover is a love for the homeland and vice-versa. In general, the lover in my poems is at the same time the love to woman, who is my lover, my mother, and my homeland."

Some of the nature imagery in the poetry is reminiscent of classical Arabic poetry although the style is different as Saharawi poetry is mostly written in free verse which was not introduced into Arabic poetry until the 1940s.

The following poems are by Malainin Lakhal and Nana Rachid.

Malainin Lakhal *was born in 1971, four years before Morocco invaded his country, Western Sahara. The Spanish had left their colony before holding a referendum of self-determination. He lived through the ensuing war (1975-1991), the UN brokered cease-fire and preparations for a referendum of self-determination which is still to happen. In 1999 the Moroccan occupying forces cracked down on a peaceful sit-in by Saharawis. Malainin, by then an English graduate of Agadir University, was sought by police as a suspected ring-leader of the Saharawi resistance. With previous experience of Moroccan prisons he decided that instead of living under cover, he would make a break for freedom. He escaped through the minefields and the military wall, which divides Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara from the territory held by the national independence movement, the Polisario Front. Since August 2000 he has been living in the Saharawi refugee camps near Tindouf in SW Algeria, working as a teacher, translator for the Saharawi Press Service, journalist and as secretary-general of UPES, the Saharawi writers' and journalists' union. Through this work he supports his friends still living in the occupied zones, bringing the human rights abuses they suffer daily to the attention of the world.*

Nanna labat Rachid*, born in1975, has published three collections of poetry. She studied Psychology at the University of Oran, Algeria and then worked in the Saharawi Women's Union. In 2007 she became responsible for the literacy campaign and is now director of the Department of Information, Culture and Orientation.*

The following poems are translated by Nariman Youssef.

Me and You

Nana Rachid

Now that we are alone
My darling
Which one of us will start
By undoing the other's chains
Whose spirit will be wider
And whose embrace for the other stronger

I.. will tell you everything
I will fill you with myths
And centuries.
I will break your chains before my own
Before the dream is bent
Or thoughts are distorted
And I pledge
To undo my hair
Lock after lock
And present it to you
And any title you give me will suffice in return.

Now with our survival a certainty
Tell me how the rituals go
But first show me:
Your wounds the bars of your prison your shackles
And where your remains are buried.
And I
The lady of past centuries
The glorious virgin
If I was once beautiful
It was because I knew
That my road was leading to you
Shatter me
I long to see my remains
At your feet
My darling..
I spent my life
Creating myself
Into the greatest gift that I could present to you.
I have tried to be a sun
And a moon
That shine only on you
I have tried
To conceal my anger my evil my sadness
And reveal all that would point towards you.
My companion..
I will die or see how you ascend
How stones find harmony
How my blood and your blood flow in your valley
I will die or hear the songs of those who once loved you
From the heights of your tower
Time
Even twice the time I spent without you
Cannot contain our kisses
For you are a cave within me
And I am the smallest smallest of your symbols
I will deny them all
For you are sublime
Among your rivals
My companion my home
Love and the sword and I
Are verses from your existence.

Bedouin Obsession

Malainin Lakhal

She came to me with a memory of yearning
With a bullet that her love placed
In my heart
And a tear
Shed for both of us.
She came to me with memories of the feel of sand
Of her beauty when we made the desert our bed.
Do you remember the colour of my eyes when the moon is full?
Do you remember the poems
you sang for our parting on those sleepless nights?

The night is mine
and her smile the light of day.
My heart blushes as it aches.
I thought my heart would be my messenger
But I was shocked to hear:
'Leave the heart in peace'
'Leave the heart in peace'.

I never knew the desert had a breast,
I never knew the desert had a rababa *
That tells me stories of my exile as a cradle.
I never knew the night could be such torture.
If I had known I would never have doubted.

I knock on a door
And another is opened
My heart's love defies me
If ever I meet her
She comes like a dream
Then eludes me
And I crave her
Or is it love?

The desert in my heart is a sea,
And the sand is devotion.
The clouds have names that flatter me,
Night is a chain.
The morning breeze that comes from the west
Brings the memory of my love,
And the longing for her joy
Is an eastern blaze.
The night is pain.

She came to remind me of her splendours
"My heart bleeds for you
my sweetheart.
"No meaning remains in poetry
to describe my love.
"My heart bleeds for you.
"The heartache I endured
has consumed my youth
"And I spent an eternity
with my eyes silent.
I spent a lifetime
without complaining.
"This is my love, I now raise it,
with all its cruelty,
to you in a poem.

El-Aaiun, the occupied capital of Western Sahara 22/03/1999
** Rababa is a traditional Arabic musical instrument that used to be played while poets recited their poems to audiences.*

The new Spanish Saharawi Resistance Poetry

Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara, after a century of Spanish colonialism started to crumble in the 1970s, robbing the indigenous population of their identity and freedom. The fledgling Saharawi liberation movement, the Polisario, rose in resistance and liberated itself in the south, but the Moroccans kept the main territory including the rich phosphate mines, the seaport with the important Saharan fisheries, the area's capital El Aaiún and the holy city of Smara, building 2,700 kilometres of walled and guarded defensive structures around this vast area of the desert.

Half the native population now lives outside these walls in the Tindouf refugee camps, where the headquarters of the exiled state, the Polisario, is based. Spanish has remained the official language and plays a central role in the collective identity of the camps. Frustrated by the stagnant situation and lack of opportunities many Sahawaris found here on their return from Cuba, where they went for their education and studies, these Cubarauis moved to Spain where they now live in exile.

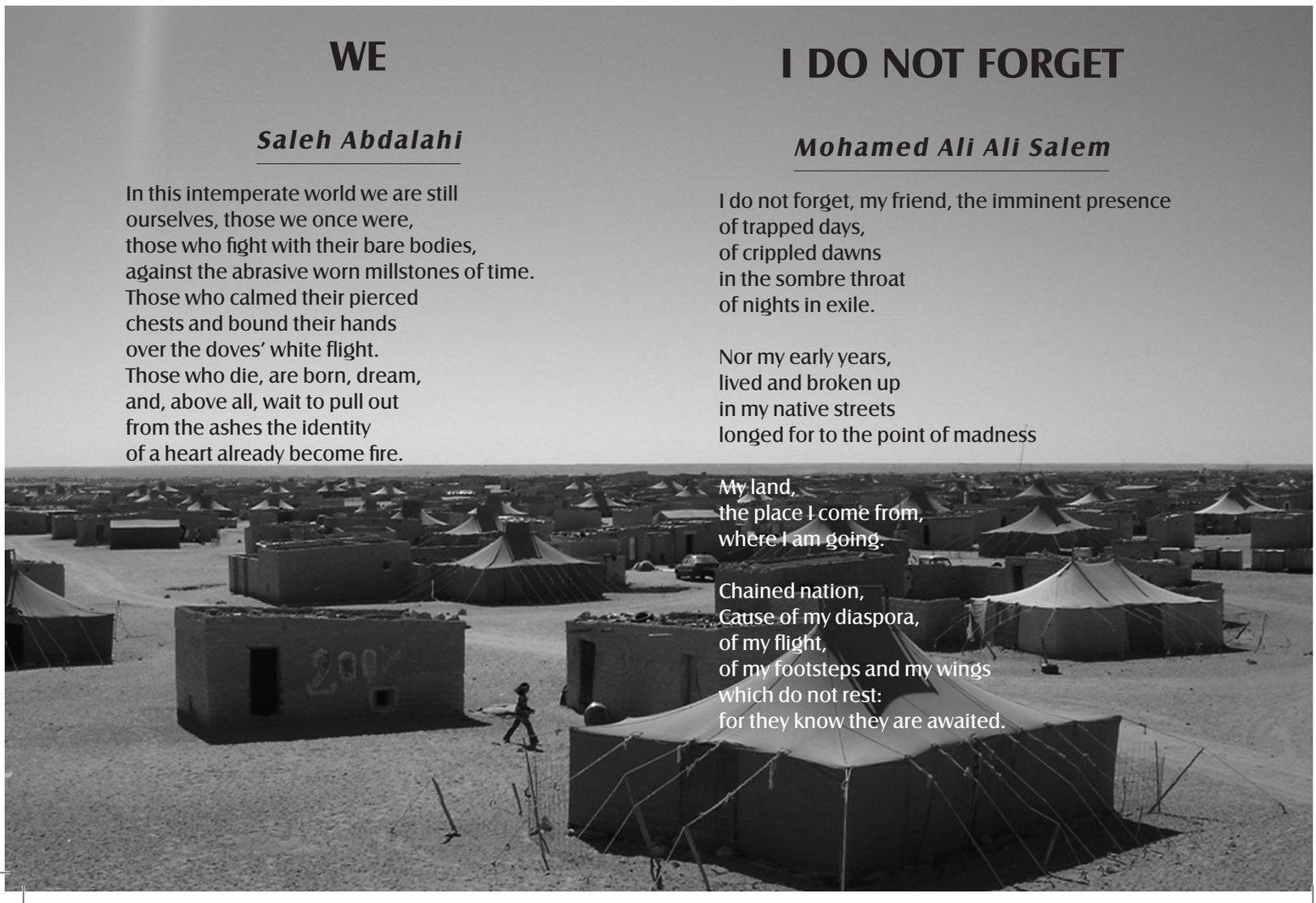
The poetry of this group, the *Friendship Generation*, is a poetry of resistance. It is driven by the poets' collective Saharawi struggles as well as their difficult individual lives. The loss of and search for identity often appears as the underlying theme. The love, patience and hopes, pain and despair experienced, also find a voice in this poetry. In their introduction to their bilingual anthology, 31, Pablo San Martin and Ben Bollig write "...the poets explore the effects of politics at an everyday, interhuman level often portraying the pain of exile and political loss. Thematically: love of the land, the effects of time on the body, a playful relation to religion, and a discussion of the role of the poetry and the poet within the struggle, feature prominently."

The poems below, translated from the Spanish, were written by Saleh Abdalahi and Mohamed Ali Ali Salem.

Saleh Abdalahi is one of a group of Cubaraui friends who spent their education years in Cuba, where they were exposed to the great Latin American poets, to return to the Saharawi society in the camps which was no longer entirely their own. They set about changing, with their words, that world they had left behind, as well as reconstructing their own identity from their exiled life now in Spain.

Mohamed Ali Ali Salem was born earlier and witnessed the exodus to the Tindouf camps as a young boy. He became a teacher of Spanish in the camps and later worked in the Ministry. He also moved to Spain where he represents the Polisario as its cultural coordinator.

SANDBLAST
Voices and visions from Western Sahara



WE

Saleh Abdalahi

In this intemperate world we are still
ourselves, those we once were,
those who fight with their bare bodies,
against the abrasive worn millstones of time.
Those who calmed their pierced
chests and bound their hands
over the doves' white flight.
Those who die, are born, dream,
and, above all, wait to pull out
from the ashes the identity
of a heart already become fire.

I DO NOT FORGET

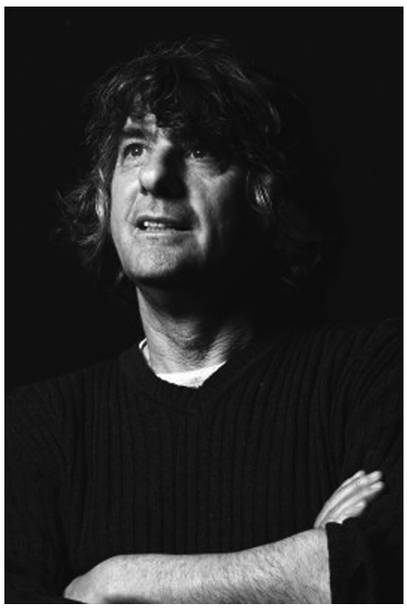
Mohamed Ali Ali Salem

I do not forget, my friend, the imminent presence
of trapped days,
of crippled dawns
in the sombre throat
of nights in exile.

Nor my early years,
lived and broken up
in my native streets
longed for to the point of madness

My land,
the place I come from,
where I am going.

Chained nation,
Cause of my diaspora,
of my flight,
of my footsteps and my wings
which do not rest:
for they know they are awaited.



Two Journeys

Yvan Tetelbom

Jennifer Langer

Yvan Tetelbom is a passionate Algerian-Jewish-French performance poet whose work emerges from the inner need to express himself. The title of his latest collection *In the Footsteps of the Word Gatherer* is significant. For him writing captures and encapsulates moments in time which would forever have been lost throughout history if it had not been for the artistic and literary representation of personal moments.

Yvan Tetelbom recently performed his poetry in London having been invited by Exiled Writers Ink. Dressed in black he strode round spitting out his words with passion, emotion and frequent bouts of venom accompanied by the haunting music of Cristiane Bonnay playing the classical accordion. Tetelbom is a poet whose style and tone are diverse. He can shout, cajole, harangue, sing and be melodic.

In the Footsteps of the Word Gatherer is published in French with summaries in English, Italian and Spanish translation and comprises both poetry and prose-poetry. His previous collection is entitled *Prayers and Confessions* while other work includes short stories and two poetry collections: *D'amour et de Révolte* and *Jours de Pluie*. His work has been widely broadcast on regional, national and international radio and television and he has performed his poetry at national and international literary festivals and events in a wide range of venues and countries including France, Hungary, Israel and the Palestinian territories. Prior to becoming a poet, he trained as an actor and singer.

Yvan Tetelbom lives in exile in the south of France, having been born in Algeria in 1947 with Polish ancestry. One aspect of Tetelbom's poetry is his interrogation of the complexity of roots and identity, home and exile which have shaped his work both at the personal and philosophical levels. Tetelbom is a Polish surname and yet Yvan was born in Port Gueydon, a Kabyle village by the Mediterranean in Algeria. In the 1900s, because of the frequent pogroms, his grandparents fled from Poland to France and thence to Algeria. They spoke Yiddish mixed with Kabyle (an Amasigh language) while Yvan grew up under French colonisation learning French at school. For Yvan the French language was a revelation because for him it represented a language of the intellect, philosophy, poetry and dreams. Relations were good between the Jews and Kabyles to the extent that during the Algerian War of Independence the Jews assisted those revolting against the occupation. However, because of the creation of Israel and Middle East tensions, antagonistic attitudes manifested in insults and threats, developed towards the Jews. The Teltelboms fled to France in 1962 when Yvan was fifteen, when about 100,000 Jews emigrated from Algeria on its independence. In spite of the Crémieux Decree of 1870 in which Algerian Jews were granted French nationality, the Tetelboms' immediate impression was that the French disliked Algerian Jews reproaching them for the loss

of French soldiers who had died defending French Algeria. In addition, repatriated Algerians were considered inferior and backward irrespective of religion, and racism towards the Jews gradually became more pronounced.

It is evident that Tetelbom's family history is one of layers of accumulated trauma and exile. His grandparents fled from the pogroms in Poland; in Algeria his family was subjected to the anti-semitic laws of Vichy France during the Second World War and later was rejected by the Kabyles and Algeria generally, as well as by the French in France. His poetry frequently mediates not only his own trauma of rejection and exile but articulates trans-generational haunting in terms of the transmission of trauma down the generations. Albert Memmi, the Tunisian born exiled Jewish scholar, posits that the Jewish collective unconscious 'must be crowded with the hosts and ghosts of legionaries, inquisitors, crusaders, landsknechts and Cossacks' in the context of 'the endless procession of centuries throughout which the Jews were persecuted.' Furthermore, he suggests that this constant and prolonged insecurity is transmitted from generation to generation. In Tetelbom's poem 'Warsaw Child's Dream', he writes about an imagined past in which he is a helpless child of the Warsaw Ghetto forever running in the labyrinths of the sewers pursued by the packs of hounds of history.

The trauma is deeply internalised as evidenced by the poem 'They Can Still Re-emerge' in which he presents a nightmare scenario of Nazis who could resurface to express their hatred for Jews and to assassinate innocent people. He almost shouts these poems to the audience in a rhythm that is close to slam as if to draw the listener into his emotional orbit and force them into being committed to the subject matter.

The memories of childhood in Port-Gueydon are written in a different form – in lyrical prose-poetry to represent nostalgia and his contemplation of the meaning of his childhood. He sets the scene for a traditional story-telling ceremony for which oriental rugs are spread for the Mediterranean serenade to begin, as if equating his childhood to an idealised narrative. However, there is a tension in his nostalgia for his childhood which is described in the third person as if observing it at an objective distance, reinterpreting the past through the knowledge of his current consciousness. This tension is due to his childhood sense of forces uniting and dividing groups of beings manifested in a sense of disquiet as if the present and future were in disorder. Yet in his dreams, a voice searches for an invented narrative of belonging

'He gazed at the immense sea under the first stars in the sky which heralded Ramadan and the War. He wanted to say so much but it was all deep in his heart, words that he could not yet articulate.'

Despite this, there is a real sense of nostalgia for the Mediterranean which played an important part in his childhood when he confided in his friend, the sea. He sees the naked child running like a crazed horse across the vastness of the beaches. His mythical childhood appears idyllic, with descriptions of inhaling mixed smells of wheat, barley, flour, tobacco and chocolate in his father's shop, listening to his grandmother's magical Yiddish stories which nourished his dreams and connected him to poetic energy.

As a group, the Jews inhabited and were positioned between the multiple, conflicted spaces of the French, Arabs and Kabyle. There is ambivalence towards the coloniser, France and the French, although it was the nationality the Jews shared. This is reflected in the tone in which Yvan remembers the parade of French servicemen 'They walked on a path which smelt of death. They still believed in French Algeria.'. He describes the trauma of leaving Algeria in 1962, his family having been ordered to burn and destroy everything.

'The van sped toward the Other France under a moon that had achieved two thirds of its surface. They had commanded: everything must be burnt, everything obliterated before leaving. The child of Port-Gueydon was still thinking about the papers set alight, attacked by fire and consumed to cinders, when the sirens of El Mançour screamed out in the port of Algiers.'

Yvan's work is permeated by alienation to his spaces through the mediation of memory at both the conscious and unconscious levels. The trauma and tribulation of banishment from Algeria is deeply internalised and he feels that it connects him to the soul of all slaughtered poets. When he is lonely, mourning a lost love and feeling rejected the repressed feelings of banishment surface. He is critical of France describing it negatively with a litany of adjectives and in fact, it is far from France, in America, that he finds the child that he was between Djurdjura and the Mediterranean.

In the performance of his poetry, Tetelbom articulates the depth of his pain and anger in the context of privileging the spirit of revolt because it encapsulates a fundamental quest for freedom. Tetelbom expresses his admiration for anarchists who acknowledge no master and demand a just society. In the poem 'Revolt' he uses the metaphor of a mythical past in the Middle Ages:
'and my soul remembers
I see myself again in castle courtyards
Aggressive
In the spirit of revolt
Shouting with my brothers
Our thirst for justice
Tyrannised by the lords
And madmen of France'

Tetelbom articulates freedom to experience and live because there is no future. This manifests itself in the acts of exploring his inner consciousness, creating poetry and searching for love, resulting in poetry that is almost metaphysical.

The Reader Within Me

Majid Naficy

In the triangle of author, text, and reader, the reader has a divine power. If one does not pick up the text, nothing comes alive and the author remains trapped in the lifeless letters of the text. Moreover, the reader's role does not begin when a text is finished. As soon as authors pick up pens, they have their readers in mind, and the image of the reader never vanishes during the writing process. Every author has a reader within who not only knows the art of listening, but also speaks and, like a child's imaginary playmate, sometimes even has a name.

When I fled my country, Iran, in 1983, I brought my reader along with me. As a political refugee, I started to experience new things in Turkey, France, and then America.

But for half a decade, when I picked up my pen, as a writer and as a poet, I was driven to write for that reader. Although he travelled abroad with me, he still lived in Tehran, spoke only in Persian, preferred Iranian food, and thought within the framework of an Iranian culture. A good example of this can be found in my second collection of poems *After the Silence*, consisting of one hundred and three poems which I wrote over the course of a four month artistic explosion from December 22, 1985 to April 23 of the next year in Los Angeles. Except for fewer than ten poems which I will discuss later, all of the poems in this collection were written about the Iranian situation in the past and present.

The poet is still haunted by the phantom of the lost revolution, which was crushed by a new regime of religious hypocrisy and coercion. He tries to portray his comrades, who were killed on the streets or like his wife executed in Evin prison. Moreover, as a thinker he attempts to break out of his orthodox Marxist thought, diluting it with humanism and exploring the meaning of every single philosophical and social concept such as "state", "labour", "organisation", "progress", and "sexuality". My body lived in L.A., but my soul was still rummaging through the ruins of a lost revolution in Iran.

Among those few poems in this collection which are related to my new situation as an émigré, we cannot find a single one which is not written for that Tehrani reader within me.

In fact, I subconsciously wrote in such a way that I would not be perceived as an émigré. I sought this goal by either erasing the specific features of life in L.A. or by making comparisons with life back in Iran. For example, in the first poem of the book called "To the Sea", there is no specific trace of the Pacific Ocean shore where I was then living. It could just as easily have been written on the sandy shores of the Caspian Sea.

In another poem entitled "In Anatomy Class", dedicated to Dr. Karl Marx where I have tried to dissect his idea of fetishism of commodity, the reader encounters the familiar features of an American supermarket, like Lucky and Ralph's, but the imaginary dialogue with the producers of the commodities is spoken with a heavy Persian accent because the farmers who have produced the cabbages, cantaloupes, and grapes live in the outskirts of Tehran. In two poems, "What People Might Say" and "Satisfying a Need", which respectively portray an unhappy marriage and a utilitarian relationship between two tenants sharing the same house, the reader finds hardly any reference to the specific situations in L.A. on which these poems were based. In the poems "A Letter from Iran to America" and "House and Street", the author for the first time uses the words "Los Angeles" and compares the way of life in the two countries. Nevertheless, he cannot speak freely about his new experiences and forces himself to compare them with similar situations in Iran.

In another poem, "Person and Non-Person", the poet talks about the conditions of the homeless, but again the reader finds no distinctive trace of L.A. life, only a philosophical reference to the homeless as a reserve army of labour in a Marxist sense. In a long narrative poem called "Exile Fever", I see myself as a refugee and describe to my reader in Tehran the story of my flight to Turkey, France, and the United States. In the last stanza of this poem I subconsciously warn myself against denying my new identity as an émigré and guard myself against becoming a prisoner of my own nostalgia:

> In these three years
> My lungs became filled with fresh air
> But my exile fever still remains
> Woe unto me, if like a wandering gypsy
> I become captive to the cart of my memories.

It seems to me that, after this collection of poems which I published abroad, the reader in me gradually comes to terms with his new situation and sees himself as a person living in America. He seeks to cherish both his cultural heritage and his new identity. In the collection of poems called *Sorrow of the Border*, published in 1989, the proportion of poems reflecting the new situation has increased drastically.

In a very long poem dedicated to my newborn son, Azad, not only do I depict my bilingual world by including quotations in English into the body of the Persian text, but I also see my son as my own new roots growing in the second homeland.

In the next collection, published in 1991, called *Poems of Venice* , the reader finds different aspects of life at Venice Beach, where I lived for seven years. A turning-point in this long journey from the realm of self-denial to acceptance and adjustment is when I wrote a long poem on January 12, 1994 called "Ah, Los Angeles" which was published in *Daftarhâ-ye shanbeh*, a Persian-language literary magazine, of which I am a co-editor. It starts with these lines:

> Ah, Los Angeles!
> I accept you as my own city,
> And after ten years
> I am at peace with you.

The reader which I brought with me as I fled on horseback over Kurdish lands on the border of Iran and Turkey has changed. He does not want to live in the past, and looks forward to finding a new identity here.

Nevertheless, today I do not regret having written those poems about the lost revolution.

I see in them not only myself but thousands of people from my generation who were executed or imprisoned as well as those who are still living in fear in Iran, or have fled abroad in search of a new life in freedom.

Presented to a conference entitled "Writing in Exile" sponsored by the Institutefor European-American Relations at University of Southern California in Los Angeles,June 1995.

Exiled Writers Ink Mentoring and Translation Scheme

Nathalie Teitler

Mentoring has existed on an informal basis in the literature world for centuries with established writers taking younger, or less experienced writers under their wing and presenting them as their protégés. In recent years, however, the relationship between mentor and mentee has been formalised and professionalised allowing a new type of mentoring scheme to emerge. This kind of mentoring focuses on writers who are at a point of transition in their writing and, with the help of their mentor, allows them to reach a new level of writing. This kind of development support has proved to be one of the most effective means of supporting writers, particularly those who are excluded from the mainstream. It is for this reason that Exiled Writers Ink applied for funding to run a mentoring scheme alongside a translation scheme for writers who were unable to get work published in this country but had strong track records in their native country.

The Arts Council England generously gave the funding and the scheme began in 2007 with six writers selected for the mentoring scheme and six for the translation scheme. The applications came from all over the country and the competition for places was high. The countries of origin of the writers selected included South Africa, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Bangladesh, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and Peru. The writers were very fortunate to have excellent mentors and translators working with them on the programme including: George Szirtes, Jacob Ross, Martina Evans, Graham Fawcett, Robert Chandler, Carole Angier, Paul Starkey and others. At the end of the translation/mentoring process each writer had an individual chap book printed. These were launched at Amnesty International Action Centre at a well attended event covered by Arab and other press. Some of the writers were also interviewed by BBC World.

Following the scheme many of the writers have had great success; the Bangladeshi poet, Mir Mahfuz Ali was short-listed for the New Writing Ventures prize and had poetry published in Ambit, Poetry London and London magazine. He won a place on the Complete Work, a national development programme for advanced Black and Asian poets and will now be mentored by Pascale Petit. He is currently on a residency in Edinburgh. Bashir al-Gamar had a number of readings, including a performance at the South Bank for the Africa festival. Shereen Pandit has also had a number of readings and workshops for PEN and others. Several of the writers were also awarded places to attend a special Arvon week led by PEN in association with Exiled Writers Ink.

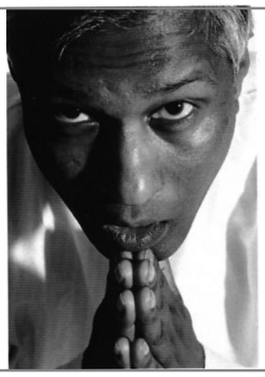
There is no doubt that the mentoring and translation provided an invaluable and unique experience for the participants and the audience they were able to reach, allowing these writers to fulfil their potential. As Mir Mahfuz Ali describes "The mentoring scheme was one of the most exciting, challenging and fulfilling experiences of my life... My writing career has now moved to the points where I am busy performing and publishing, something I had not dreamt could happen. Without the Exiled Writers scheme and the project manager who provided exactly the right help at the time I needed it, I would never have been able to have this success."

This year's scheme looks certain to be equally successful. The writers are once again from a wide range of countries: Croatia, Iran, Iraq, South Africa, Chile, Bangladesh, Romania, Ethiopia and Jordan. The mentors and translators include Stephen Knight, Bernardine Evaristo, Blake Morrison, Graham Fawcett and Robert Chandler.

From the chap books

Last Look before Leaving the Land of My Birth

Mir Mahfuz Ali



I rest in the shade biting on a piece of dry bread
and think of my past,
quick to realise I did not have a face
to show or a life of my own.

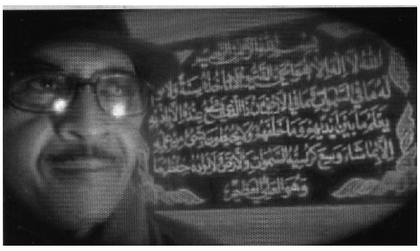
Now I am grown up and going far away,
leaving this hard land of heat and drought
hoping to find peace in the comings
and goings of a rambling breeze.

From A Golden Bowl

Music

Bashir Al Gamar

Translated by Fathieh Saudi



Oh music, pound across me,
bring happiness to the helpless
enhance my life with joy for another day.

You are like a cloud
one day friendly, another harsh.

One day, when you are faithful,
we are lovers.

Oh music,
release my restraints
and sing with me.

Perfume me with the scent of musk.

You are the secret of beauty
a path with no way back.

Oh music!
flirt with a distant star
its distraction and mystery
its new discoveries.

Lull me with a nostalgic rhythm
so I remember the only one
I truly long for.

From: Lost Time

Cinnamon

Sofia Buchuck

For Juan Charles de Menezes

Quick and bloody
Life goes fresh,
How many lives are shed,
And cut from the stream of flowers.

Down Stockwell station,
A voice rises sometimes,
Half in English,
Half Portuguese,
Half, half.

The graffiti in the wall in halves,
The memory we like to have in halves,
The death of your youth in half,
Everything we reach in halves.

Your community rises like a single flag,
The tears of the moon and sun,
The whole universe,
Praying for justice to be done.

From: Orange Nights in Autumn

A Manifesto

Abol Froushan

Cubist Poetry
freezes the fluidity of
speech breaks up into
cubes of ice accumulate in (this poem should be in black
and not underlined)
a stack vertically defies
language itself.

From: A Language against Language

Which Shade Of Blue

Shirin Razavian

Clear, salty,
squeezed by loneliness
from my eyes,
a tear
greets the night
on the other side of the glass.

Drop by drop,
I squeeze sadness
onto this white page
till I make out
her precise shade
of blue,

till the sea
opens her mouth
on my page.

From: Free Fall

In my mind

Hasan Bamyani

In my mind, my arms are around you
You live in my eyes and lean on my shoulder
I lose my senses in dreams of your beauty
You are my feeling by night and my thinking by day
You are the fire that consumes me
And the water that soothes my pain
I am the beggar at your castle gate
You are my wisdom and my worldly goods

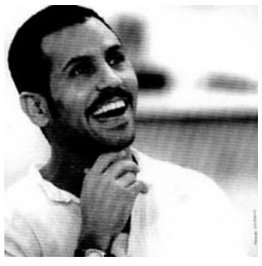
I am the slave-boy at your wedding
At mine you are the henna and the pearl
You are queen of my heart and empress of my world
You are the crown on my head and the ring in my ear
You are the breath in my body
You are my burning mountain and my boiling brook

From: Lyla and Majnon

Live transmission

Mogib Hassan

Translated by Fathieh Saudi



I sat down to watch television:
the speech of Mr. President,
a live transmission.

I saw troops in their tanks,
aeroplanes hovering in the sky to protect the great one;
a cavalcade of limousines, decorated with flowers;
a downpour of arrows bringing kisses,
warm greetings from the obsequious crowd;
sent across the wind.

Cries of fear carve through the air:
"we sacrifice ourselves for you:
protector of this land",
"you were born to be revered,
son of the great one;
and you remain the greatest."

From: Close Up from Far Away

Iranian Azerbaijani Literature

This section focuses on literature by Iranian Azerbaijani writers whose mother tongue is Azeri. The mutilation of the mother tongue is still taking its toll in Iran, with the language of 37% of the population (Persians) imposed on the entire population, made up of different language and ethnic groups. Ethnologue.com an independent world organization, famous for its research neutrality, considers the Azeris as the second largest linguistic group in Iran with 34% of the entire population of the country. There is not a single Azeri-speaking school in the entire country. According to Ethnologue.com a great variety of languages are actually and systematically annihilated in Iran. This was the case during the Shah's time, and this is the case with the Islamic Republic.

In September 2008, the following poets and writers were arrested and imprisoned merely because they wrote in their mother tongue: Alireza Sarafi, Said Moganly, Akbar Azad, Hasan Rashidi, Mehdi Naimi Ardabili, Hosain Heidari.

The following poem is dedicated to these writers.

Sun be our Witness

Hadi Gharachai

Sun be our witness
Soil be our witness
Tree be our witness
Leaves be our witness
Of what is transpiring

Our reverie resembles a childhood dream
From speech to speech and from words tasting of love
We planted a tree
That was our sin

The Forbidden Language of Azeri

Reza Baraheni

When Western traditions of modernity are introduced to countries of non-Western origins as a result of colonialism or semi-colonial oppression, the consequences are unforeseen and unprecedented.

Iran is a typical example. Infested by contradictions, the case of Iran may elucidate complexities for many similar cases. One typical example may throw light on a typical instance. Although the concept of the nation-state was introduced to the country with the Constitutional Revolution (1906-8), in the aftermath of the revolution, with the advent of public education in the country, only the language of one nationality, Persian, was recognised as the official language of the whole country, depriving more than 67% of the whole population of the country of the right to read and write in their own languages. The convenience was adopted with the cooperation of the West, whose scholars and orientalists sought to play up the significance of Persian language and culture as the sole identity of a whole nation with diverse nationalities. A perfectly recognisable pattern of conspiracy between the Iranian regime and foreign powers, mainly the British and Americans, with intellectual and political assistance given to them by orientalists in the West and their counterparts in the Iran, deprived almost 70% of Iran's population of their mother languages, literatures, arts and other cultural identities. While the social and national culture of the country was based on the very concrete hybridity of several nationalities living together, the imposition of one language for the education and administration of the affairs of all nationalities, one of the worst patterns of segregation imposed on any nation in world history, created a schizophrenic situation in which Persians were supposed to be masters, and the Turks, the Kurds, the Turcomans, the Arabs and the Baluchies were thought of as second class citizens. The disastrous policy submerged the nation and the relationship among nationalities in a spiritual and intellectual dislocation, as a result of which the mother languages of about 70% of the whole population of the country became a hidden archive. You could speak in the mother tongues of the oppressed nationalities, but you were not allowed to read and write in them. Imagine two thirds of the population of a country turning into translators from their mother tongues into the language of the superior nationality from the day of the inception of public education to the present, about seven decades.

More than one third of the whole population of the country spoke Azeri, a language of Uralic-Altaic origin. In 1946, I was forced to lick off the ink from the childish school paper, which I had written every month for a year. In that year, under a democratic regional government, we had learned everything in our mother tongue, but in the aftermath of the fall of that

regime, we were forced to write everything in Persian, the mother tongue imposed by the Pahlavi dynasty as the official language of the entire country and maintained in the same capacity even after the Islamic regime took over in Iran.

I learned Persian, and English, the reading and understanding of Arabic and French, before I learned the reading and writing of my mother tongue. I never forgot that licking of the mother tongue, the metamorphosis that one's memory had to go through in the process of speaking and writing, and more than anything else, the exilic situation which had become a part and parcel of my entire being. Although Persian became the natural tongue of my decades of writing and intellectual being, and although I benefited from the complexities of my linguistic hybridity, turning it almost to a merit rather than a demerit, I came to realise that there was in me a hidden mother in the form of a hidden language, in the form of such a dynamic space that I could only make up for it by talking about it and by addressing myself and my efforts to the redressing of this lack by birth, by writing about it in any language I knew, and by carrying over the structure of this hidden world towards the hidden voice of a poetry that was almost the equivalent of a kind of disturbed singing; and in my fiction to a labyrinthine underworld in which language is always in the process of a new and genuine birth. A writer giving birth to the mother.

From: *"Exile, the Third Zone of Literature" essay in The Silver Throat of the Moon, ed. J. Langer, Five Leaves, 2005*

We are pleased to announce that Ziba Karbassi is the winner of the prestigious Golden Apple prize for Iranian Azerbaijani poets.

Today

Laleh Javanshir

Translated from Azeri by Ziba Karbassi and Jennifer Langer

Today also passed like this
Raining
Drenched in sorrow
Drawn out, prolonged
The afternoon of an unending Wednesday
How quickly does the name of the day
  alter nowadays
How rapidly does the rain drench
  the name of the days
In this country.
Each day she drapes her coat over her shoulders
Walks the dead streets
Each day the poet dies a thousand times
The victim ceases to exist

You too will weep
You too will one day repeat
Today also passed like this
Sitting immobile in the long afternoons
Today also passed like this
On my hair, the finger-tips of autumn rain
Where was it that you lost touch with the names
of the seasons?
The trees shaped by the core of the seasons?

When the migrating birds return
The bird that gathered its nest in its beak
Soared far away
It will return
It will kiss Tabriz
From stone to stone
These are profound origins
And you will sob
For your doomed town.

Sürgün

Naser Manzuri

Edited by Jennifer Langer and Miriam Frank

This is an episode from the short novel Qarachuha. In Azerbaijani folklore sürgün is mass exile to some mysterious and weird death. A character, Ilqar, is speaking to a faceless company.

One day, before noon, a cry burst in the village: "There is a snakes' sürgün out there in the fields in the east!" they said. Grasping sticks or some loaded rifles, they rushed to the east, above the Lökölen valley.

Kids had arrived ahead of the others. It seemed to me there were snakes moving as far as the eye could see. All moved synchronously making their way to nowhere, to never-never. Colourful they were. Oblivious of their surroundings, they made their way in their agony, nothing else. There in the ploughed furrows of sown fields, a great rapturous struggle was taking place. A profound, eerie feeling surged in the heart. One could not trust one's eyes witnessing this enigma, this mystery. Deluding imagination quivered in the mind, a dream-world that was anguish and yet real.

A wanton boy did not restrain himself playing the devil and darted in and clubbed a snake. It did not arouse any of the snakes; they continued with their weird gait. They did not become irate. They did not disperse. They did not panic, nothing; they neither slowed down nor went faster. The boy grew bolder. Now we witnessed his rapacity, dancing and clubbing. He was running mad hysterically, impetuously jumping up and down. Other children watching dared to imitate him. Good heavens! It was total carnage! The snakes were but innocents merely passing by, not deflecting from their course at all! Adults then arrived. Everybody was astonished. Where were they from, where were they bound for in such unified haste? Why were they so preoccupied? Why did they not harm the children?

One child fired at them. Pellets hit a few snakes. The wounded snakes remained while the others continued their course! Old Iskender Nayib arrived at the spot on horseback. Beneath his white brows his narrowed eyes were burning as he cried: "You dare devils! You damn cursed things; don't bother`em, I say! Don't touch them. Wanna black winds blow upon you?" There was some impulsive thrill in old Iskender Nayib's chest. He looked as if he would spew out his heart at any moment. His eyes were two chalices of blood. He was crying out thunderously. He was over ninety they used to say. Yet he acted like a young man. He had experienced battles. A man of mountain nights he was. And now he couldn't help but carry his shovel over his shoulder and turn over the soil, dawn to dusk in the field or orchard. Such a hardened man he was that everyone hearing his voice from the village circle used to say: "Come on! My bull is roaring!"

He was panting on his horse. He screamed, "Want black clouds to blow upon you? Don't you see they are going on sürgün?" And he added, "Don't you damn see they aint doin' anything to you? They're on their own way, those innocents! Want heaven and earth to be moved by the devil? Want to set fire to the ground and skies? What's up with you cursed devils! Why do you want to bring evil upon us?"

They took the younger people away. The snakes passed by and departed. Old Iskender Nayib dismounted. He sat by the dead snakes and burst into tears. He was joined by the old who were present there. They recited a dirge and sobbed. Then they dug the ground and buried the dead corpses of the snakes. As far as the eye could see, the snakes moved in haste, going athwart obliquely from west to south-east. They were not in this world, only adhering to their route. None were deviating. There was something in the air - a mild chilliness every now and then. Every witness felt a lump in their throat. It seemed the snakes were bewitching everyone. There was some sign in the very soul of the ground, some mysterious hidden sign in the soil.

Then, son, I learned something for life. I got a feeling. I understood that some feelings are greater than our utterances. There are such understandings, such insights over and above words that the dumb speak more clearly. There are such nisgils [1] that rise higher than mountains. There are such signs that remain hideously buried in the soul of the ground. There are such depths that man cannot recognise.

I was a kid but I faced some issues that were non-interpretable. Then for the whole of my life I wasn't able to speak of my suppressed feelings. That day, son, I saw this mounting Chiraqmerdan, shameful. The very day I heard this hidden whispering in the soul of the ground I could find nobody to speak to. Now, son, I come here once a year. When the waterfall changes to the döym Krmi [2] melody I bathe my soul under it. I think of the days I had the experience. I escape people who are unaware of what passed. I listen to the secrecy of the land. I smell the soil. Then I go. You couldn't wait to ask: "Uncle Ilqar, what place is it they head for?" "No-one knows, son!" said he. "Not a single person has been found who knows of the place. Nobody has ever seen the end of sürgün. Yet they head for death, to the deep valley. Nobody has seen it, for if ever you see it you die."

Uncle Ilqar was in an emotional mood recalling all this. A suppurating aging wound it had been, working ever deeper. Now it was being lanced. "Yet none of it," he said. That day, returning home, ninety-year-old old Iskender Nayib told us of the gazelles' sürgün which he had witnessed once in those days long ago.

I was no more than a kid, I couldn't get closer. So it was rather hard to understand everything he was saying. It is fragmented now. He said: Prior to the famine of hasht-hasht one day in the early evening, when the autumnal sun was setting, there was a faint reddish light over the buildings. That day, again, as now, we heard cries burst out. There was some mysterious whispering thing in the air. Dogs were in full cry. When dogs are in full cry, they say there is a mysterious calamity passing by in the sky. Then, some hidden panic possessed the dogs.

A cry burst into the village exclaiming a sürgün of gazelles. The gazelles' sürgün passed on the very edge of the village. Their gaze burnt the people. Some were scorching. Their hair was dazzling. Their complexions were flushed. A man, I don't know who, took aim at them and shot. Here, again, old Iskender Nayib seemed to feel a lump in his throat and he burst into tears.

* * *

Your exhaustion was taking possession of you. You were drowning in a world of sleep. Old Iskender Nayib's childhood memory was becoming blurred and changing colour from his childhood to his final days. Then Uncle Ilqar emerged. He was aging while stories fossilised in his tingling chest and heart. After that, time lost its consistency. You were sleepy. The ground and heavens swung like a cradle.

[1] nisgil: unattained emotional wish, nostalgia
[2] music representing the mood of the Karam in Asli and Karam love story. Asli's father takes her from place to place and Karam pursues her. This romance represents the eternal love of "Sonay" Harvest Moon chasing the sun which then burn together.

Book of Ziba

Yashar Ahad Saremi

Words my dear words
They are my feet running, falling. Where are you? In the chase
They are my hands searching for freedom, in air, in water, in stone
They are my wounded eyes in Baghdad, in Karbala, in the middle of the highway.
Where are you?
Words are my horses, free, wild, panting
They are my birds cloudy and rainy
My letters of distress questioning your betrayal of me, when, in sighs, in the blue dreams
Words are my companion, around the table, singing, saluting, sighing
They are my brothers, on hanging nights in the jails, in hunger, again and again
They are my gods in an apple, in kindness, in giving, in pots
Words my dear, are my rain, in spring, in ears, in dreams
My own words in my heart, inside me, in silence
My kisses on your lips, on your wounds, in your loneliness
If you plant them in your heart, once more the strings will shine again
And once more we will dance the tango, in greeting, in beauty
Behold them, share them and in the reflection of their eyes, regard the night
The stars will hold hands and once again in the languid voice of a petal
I hear your cheers and your laughter.

War and the Grotesque

Headless

Ghazi Gheblawi

What amazed me this morning wasn't the darkness that surrounded everything around me, and wasn't losing my sense of hearing, or smell, but what amazed me, was that when I crawled till I reached what I expected to be the mirror and turned the lights on, I couldn't see myself. There was only dark emptiness...!!! I walked to the front door of the flat, facing a stillborn, depressing morning. I tried to touch my eyes, but there was nothing. Only a smooth studded neck. When did I lose my head?!! And what made me more astonished was that I found myself walking in the streets without bumping into things. But when and where did I lose my head..??!! I have the desire to eat without a mouth, to hear dirty jokes without ears. But when and where did I lose my damn head??!!

Suddenly I stumbled and nearly fell over something in the street "What is this?!!" I said to myself, I began to touch it, "It seems a head, which had lost its mind, to dump his head?". "It doesn't matter, as long as it has two ears, two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, that's all I need". I didn't waste a moment; I fixed the thing on my neck. light exploded in my eyes, I licked my lips, the sounds and noises of the mad world reached inside my new head, things around me might look weird, but it doesn't matter, what matters most is that I have a head. I continued my morning stroll in the city, to discover people without heads, walking everywhere, children, women, men. All the drivers in their cars were without heads, what kind of madness is this..?!! I must be hallucinating, or maybe the defect is in this head I put on.

I quickly ran to my flat; I rang the bell many times for my wife to open the door. There she stood without a head, I

painting: Ze Tubia

was terrified. I ran to my room, closing the door behind me. I turned the lights on and stood in front the mirror. Nothing seemed weird, as in the mirror stood my image, and above my neck was my new head; my ears might be a bit big, but it didn't matter. I threw myself on the bed and slept for a long time.

I woke up on a hand, shaking me. There she was standing, my wife without a head, I covered myself with the bed sheets, but she insisted on waking me up. I tried to shout, and said what I thought was "leave me alone you ugly freak" but what emerged from my throat was just a simple loud, donkey's bray. Under the sheets I was smiling and praying for my head and all other heads to be spared forever.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Halaji

M.A.Kargar

The moment I came to the city I was engulfed by its thoughts. It was such a great wonder to me. I could not keep my mind off it. I would spend hours trying to imagine its shape and form. Before coming to the city I had never even heard its name. If ever at home I would hear the sound of something being smashed I would stop and listen to it. For me the world would become meaningless and soundless. The only sound I would hear would be the sound of smashing. It was music to my ears. Things would form different shapes and forms and they took me far away from the real world, into the wonderlands. I would not even pay any attention to the hands that were busy smashing that thing and giving it its many forms. For me they did not exist. I would think only of pestle and mortar; what hard and crushing objects they are.

But when I came to the city I heard of a machine that would mince meat. Some called it d' Qoafto machine (meatball machine), yet others called it meat's Halaji. Halaji was the closest to my heart for I had heard it being used in my village home. I thought meat's Halaji too would be something like the halaji that separates cotton and its seeds.

To tell you the truth it has been a long time since I used to think that like the 'Maloocho (cotton) halaji" separates the

clean white cotton from the black one similarly Halaji too would strip meat off their bones and separate them. Just like the Maloocho halaji it too would operate smoothly and with great ease.

One day I went to the market to buy some household things. I did a lot of shopping for the household and the children. I bought all that was required but all the time my eyes searched for the halaji. I looked for it everywhere thinking I shall chop some onions and other things with it. To me this machine was a symbol of culture, modernity and civility.

I could not wait any more; I was going crazy for it. In my desperation I even looked for it in the butchers' lane. But I did not find it. It increased my thirst for it. I was getting obsessed with it. I called it meat's halaji but probably they knew it by some other name. I would get the same reaction from every butcher's cabin that I visited. They would give me such looks as if to say how ignorant and lagging I am to ask such questions from them. I would think to myself why they are so ignorant of their own profits and advantages? They do not like minced meat or what?

The whole market and city appeared blind to me, because they did not know halaji and with these thoughts I spent a long time in the city. In any gathering if ever an electric mincing machine was mentioned I would act as if I knew a lot about it and would not reveal that I had never seen it, not even once. I would act as if I too sometimes used it to mince meat. Every time this topic was mentioned I would divide into two. The real me would stand before me and laugh at me for not being able to see a halaji and the superficial me would nod to the participants of the conversation to give an impression that I knew more than I actually did.

In reality I would divide into two beings, the first one real and the second artificial. The artificial one was to give me a pseudo appearance that I could hide my real one with. I pretended that I too am one of those who know what a wonderful machine halaji is. It can smash and soften even the toughest of meat. Even if you drop stones into it, it will crush them into dust. But it was all a lie.

To keep my face, sometimes I too would fabricate some tale about halaji and tell it to impress the audience with my knowledge of the present day appliances. But I had no idea what a meat-halaji was. How much meat passes through its mouth; cities pass through it; villages are destroyed by it and rivers go through it. It is not only for meat but for everything. It is a machine for the annihilation of life and to wrap it up.

A lot of time passed like that. These thoughts wrapped round my mind like a serpent. I was thinking about something I had never seen. Then a strange thing happened, wherever I would go and in every gathering I attended, I would hide my real self from myself. At all times I would consciously try that avoid being seen as someone who is unaware of modern ways, a naïve villager. I am unaware of civilized life; I have never flown in an airplane. I am not use to attending ceremonies and I cannot dance to the beats of lively music.

But out of all these the most annoying and irritating was the failure to see halaji. Another reason for liking it was that I love to eat meat. I had a feeling that once I got this machine, the taste of mince meat would definitely increase many fold. In spite of my educational and literary achievements, ignorance of meat-mincing machines and other such things was taking its toll on my mind. I could not stop thinking about them. I imagine them day and night. It is said that you dream about the same things you think about during the day. The same happened to me and I lost the love of life.

Today once again I came to the market to buy some things; determined to see the meat grinder this time. The market was very busy today, very noisy. One could hear the shouts of hawkers coming from every direction. I went to the butchers' street. All of them were dressed in red jackets and shirts, lambs and sheep were hanging in the shops and all the butchers were sharpening their knives with leather strips and cutting chunks of meat from the hanging carcasses. One could see wooden slabs by their sides and the numerous cut marks on them were witnesses to the hard blows of cleavers they had endured over the years.

Machines were fed raw meat and at the other end it came out minced along with thick red blood that dripped down into the filthy drains. These stagnant drains caused a very foul smell in the whole area.

The whole market was red, the sky was red and even the clouds were red. Walls appeared red and my bed was red too, everything looked red.

In front of every cabin I saw these machines for meat. Initially, my joy had no bounds. I knew that I had finally seen it. I was no longer a simpleton. I knew a lot and not just the meat mincing machine but a lot of other things too. I knew a lot. The machine operated by electricity appeared to be the very latest and advance one, exported from a foreign country.

I cannot shake off the butcher-shops from my mind. One cannot figure out the start or end of the street; it's all red. Machines screech, sounds increase, spread out. In my thoughts, the mouths of the machines gradually widen, their bellies expand and they assume the form of a huge serpent. With a long gasp they start pulling everything in, all the soil, all the meat. All the machines transform into a single monstrous meat-mincing machine. I feel as if the whole street is sucked in. The machine grows, expands. The whole market, along with all the people in it, is sucked in and the whole city is being sucked into its mouth. Buildings fall into its mouth like small onions; roads disappear, mountains tumble down into it. Schools, their pupils and everything else are sucked in. The ground beneath my feet moves in the direction of the machine and I too am pulled along; my family and the hand-held kids, they too are pulled in. The earth is rotating towards the mouth of the machine.

But with a sudden and long scream, soaked in sweat, I sit up in my bed. The hairs of my body were standing on end. My lips were protruding with immense thirst and fear. I wish I had never thought of halaji and that I had never seen it. I wish.

Oranges in Times of Moon by Carlos Reyes-Manzo

Translated by Valeria Baker, published Andes Press Agency, London, 2006

Reviewed by Valeria Baker

When I began to translate Carlos Reyes-Manzo's book of poetry I entered a world of magical realism; a world of memories, exile, struggles, love, humour and philosophy. The collection opens with the poem *Mother Eagle* on the Spanish invasion of Mexico 500 years ago, Mother Eagle symbolising Mother Earth. The last two lines,

I left their names
on the altars of stone.

refer to the people who fell during the Spanish conquest of Mexico, and declare that the poetry is about not forgetting people who have fallen in struggles for peace and justice. The forgotten who become the disappeared will accompany Reyes-Manzo on his journey in poetry.

In the same poem,
On my journeys
there are no walls
or roofs of glass.

announce that he is free to fly over any obstacles and to be a protagonist in history with the forgotten people.

Following the military coup in Chile in 1973, Reyes-Manzo was detained and tortured in secret detention centres and held for two years in concentration camps and then exiled to Panama, and in 1979 was exiled from Panama to the UK. The last two lines of Ninth Symphony,

Behind the mask of freedom
hides the cruel face of exile.

a poem on his last day in prison before he was exiled from Chile, warn on the cruelty of exile, a theme that runs through the collection.

The harshness of exile is reflected in the solitude of a hotel in *A Tree*, in his desire to return to Chile in *Nostalgias*, and in his conflicting feelings on his first return to Chile in 1987 when it was still under military rule. The cruelty of being in exile is also expressed in, *In Flowers at Dawn*, where the poet remembers the disappeared under Pinochet's military regime,

It is time for the earth
watered in suns and tears
to return my comrades
in flowers at dawn.

The collection includes poems written on people and places from around the world, witnessed by Reyes-Manzo in his work as a social documentary photographer in South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, Nepal and, more recently, Afghanistan and Iraq. The poem, *Abu Ghraib*, speaks of the horrors of torture of contemporary society and a horror that he suffered personally in Chile,

The silence and the command
from the anonymous telephone scream.
The tortured scream
the silence in Abu Ghraib screams.

Some of the most moving poems are dedicated to children in Afghanistan and Iraq, the innocent victims of modern day warfare as in Children of Iraq,

Do not speak of melancholy autumns
and the need to throw leaves to the wind
they cut the trees in the spring.

But love and humour have a place in the collection too as in Green Swords in Rome. I grew up in Rome and I feel this poem captures the layers of history in the poetry that Rome is,

Caligula lights a cigar
and the jailers
of Castel Sant'Angelo
close the doors to paradise.

From Baghdad to Bedlam

by Maged Kadar

Published by Saqi Books, 2007
Reviewed by Mara Lockowandt

Civilisation has a darker side/Which must be accepted with the good' is the introductory lines of a poem by the Sumerian Goddess of Wisdom, which transports us into the world of Maged Kadar, an Iraqi man now living in London. Immediately, Kadar begins to narrate his immigrant story. Born in 1957, his journey from Baghdad to London spans the end of the Iraqi monarchy, four military coups, and the rise and fall of Saddam Hussein, with illustrative descriptions of confrontations with Kurds, Muslim missionaries, and Iraqi border control, all providing an individual perspective of the war-torn Iraq unavailable in most classroom textbook. However, From *Baghdad to Bedlam* is much more than an autobiographical account of an Iraqi immigrant. It is a poetic journey from the silks and gems of the souk, where women 'with bundles of brushwood balanced on cotton-cushioned heads' weave across the 'sun-scorched earth', to the streets of London where Kadar's cab is a hub for politics, history, religion and 'affairs of the heart'. Comprised of scenic episodes from Kadar's life, each short and poignant chapter offers an honest (and often humorous) account of his experiences growing up outside the Iraqi town of al-Hay, to his escape from Iraq and subsequent hardships living and working as an immigrant in Liverpool and London. Kadar's accounts of British culture are often insightful and humorous as he is 'educated' by the locals and his wife's family, 'In Liverpool we don't just say "Thank you," we say "Thank you wanker!"'. Struggling to survive as a cabbie, hooked on news from Iraq, and trying to live between two worlds, Kadar's bittersweet memoir is an honest painful account of what it means to be of one soul with two hearts. His afterword should not be neglected as it offers an informative and consolidated account of Iraqi's political history, from ancient times to modern day. Anyone who has experienced love, loss, and longing will find solace and inspiration in the poetic prose of Maged Kadar.

Wedding Day at the Cro-Magnons

A play by Wajdi Mouawad

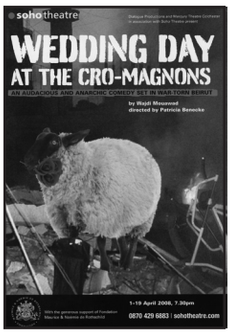
Translated by Shelley Tepperman, published Oberon Modern Plays
Reviewed by Esther Lipton

Wajdi Mouawad, actor, writer, producer and director was born in Lebanon in 1968 and now lives in Montreal. In 2002 he was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre National des Arts in recognition of his artistic achievements.

Reading a play and its performance are two different experiences. Having seen 'Wedding Day' at the Soho Theatre, London, for me the performance made the most impact. The visual and aural representations of war (the Lebanese Civil War) and its effect on a middle class family were convincing. I heard the bombs falling, the sky lit with flashes, smoke and fire. I saw the damaged building. I smelt the rotten potatoes cooking and the burning. The play is not morbid. There is tragedy but there is also humour and love, compassion and passion.

The story revolves around a family: husband, wife, teenage son and daughter aged 30 whose impending wedding is the subject of the play, and the unmarried neighbour. The elder son is away fighting but it is unknown whether he is dead or is missing. They live in hope.

The constant bombing and explosions have a profound effect on this likeable, emotionally charged and dysfunctional family. The interaction of the conflicting relationships between them and the ever present neighbour are expertly drawn by Wajdi in his short, sharp and often witty repartees.



Trying to get on with one's normal life in such dire circumstances where anyone at any time could be killed creates hidden and deep tensions which Wajdi deals with in a sympathetic yet humorous manner. Basic commodities, food, heating electric lights and water become the focus of their difficult lives. These are highlighted in the wedding preparations. The bride is narcoleptic which causes her to fall asleep. When she is awake she exists in a dreamlike state in her own little world. This mental state is perhaps the escapism that man needs in order to keep sane in a world in which cruelty and senseless killings are the norm. The daughter has (involuntarily) opted out of reality as has the rest of the family by going along with the pretence that the fiancé does exist and is 'rich, handsome and European'.

Sexual frustration is heightened between husband and wife, but we still smile at their antics. For theirs is a deep love tested by dire circumstances. The relationship between mother and a son, angry, bored and confined by falling bombs, is defined by verbal aggression but also by love and deep concern. The son describes his absent elder brother as 'a walking neutron bomb' who confronts the enemy with a poem, then blasts that person with his gun.

Food and cooking are diversions from the situation and bring opportunities for kindness and compassion. It is the neighbour who brings both, food and understanding, to the family. The comic brutality of the father slaughtering and skinning the sheep (a symbolic and bloody sacrifice of their fellow countrymen?) leaves one with uncomfortable feelings. The family have to eat but the actual slaughter is barbaric.

The Cro-Magnons caught up in the tragedy of war lose, at least in part, the modern trappings of civilisation and revert to fundamentals, both emotional and physical for their survival. The cro-magnons were an early type of primitive man. (60,000 BCE-10,000 BCE). This bitter–sweet comic drama, about an ever optimistic family ends in tragedy but also on a note of hope and love in the future.

Riding Pisces: Poems from Five Collections

by Yang Lian

Translated by Brian Holton, published by Shearsman Books, 2008
Reviewed by Lynette Craig

Yang Lian became an exile from China after the Tian'anmen massacre. In his poem For *A Nine-Year-Old- Girl Killed In The Massacre*, he conveys a sense of the immense loss of this life and all the others. He describes the death of the child –

'on your body nine bullet holes grew sweet
they say you played with the moon until you lost it.'

His focus on the details of her life, 'a little wooden desk', her 'new teeth' invites sentimentality but in the immediate following poems, again about the massacre, we have 'dripping blood', 'gutters going crazy spewing out severed limbs,' all the horrors of the deed. This description of the massacre in *Bloodstains in Heaven* attacks all our senses in such telling images as 'the dead, naked as tongues' and 'angels sit in iron chairs'.

The translator of the poems, Brian Holton, has kept to the layout of the Chinese which is printed as a parallel text. The poet leaves spaces mid line, like prolonged caesuras forcing the reader to adjust his pace and absorb each phrase more carefully. This also enables the reader to puzzle over the Chinese characters, identify one or two but not to hear the sound which I feel will be missed by most of us, unable to speak Chinese.

One of the first poems in this selection from five collections of his work, *The Time, The Place* is a quiet , melancholy recognition of being unable to return, not necessarily to China, but as he addresses the reader

'that old house I can't go back to
you can't go back to now either..'

This could be the story of all exiles, of any one of us, lamenting the loss of youth or the past. He draws us into 'the crumbling of ruined walls' 'to those strange bygone days'.

In *Old Man* he writes a poem 'for myself on my 35th birthday.' This is one of many poems in which Yang Lian deals with the transience of life and the physical trappings of death. Life is just waiting for death.

'it's the nurses who wait to lay out the corpse
standing attentively around us'.

In the second part of *The Garden on a Winter's Day* Yang Lian reveals his consciousness as a poet, his role as commentator on life:

'in this world the ones who trust writing least are poets
in the blank snow roses have been withering since birth'.

We are reminded of T.S Eliot's rose garden, an expression of time passing. Yang Lian refers to Eliot's *Four Quartets* in the prose piece, *The Mask That Can't Be Taken Off* when he says

'Everywhere is therefore here. And this one moment lasts an eternity.'

And just as Shakespeare, in his sonnets, is aware that his poetry makes his subjects live for ever, or at least for as long as his poems are read, Yang Lian has this quality of going through time, leaving his thoughts to the next generation, extending to them his observations, always acute, yet always universal.

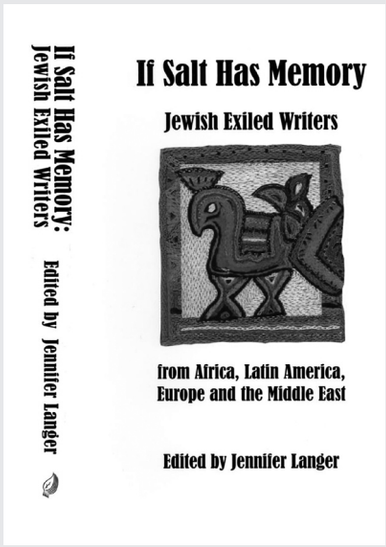
In Masks Yang Lian has written a series of 30 short poems, like musical variations on a theme. Number 12:

'there are lost faces in forgetting
layer upon layer like mushrooms
huddling together to speak
the white of disease or dreams
memory its spores
breeding forgetting beneath every face'

Each piece has its own strong image, often domestic and familiar like the mushrooms, but each deals profoundly with time and identity.

Yang Lian has been living in London since 1997 so the expectation is that his later work would reflect this. In the poem called *London* we have

'red phone boxes in the rain like a warning', 'rusting' benches and 'brown beer's froth' but this is not a mere tourist description of his urban setting. The 'warning' is of impending decay. In London, he continues the journey towards death.



If Salt Has Memory, Jewish Exiled Writers

Edited by Jennifer Langer, Five Leaves Publications, 2008

Reviewed by David Clark

This is a collection of short stories and other pieces written by Jewish writers who have had to flee their countries of birth. The Jewish writers included in this volume were born in places like Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Ethiopia, Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary, Cuba, but now find themselves in Britain, USA, France, Mexico and Israel. Despite this diversity, there are a number of common themes which recur time and again. Childhood remains a powerful imagery for many of the writers; it retains a dreamlike quality, a nostalgic vision of people and places indelibly etched in the writer's mind and heart. Houses set in alley ways "twisting and turning like an intricate cobweb", is the Baghdad that Ballas remembers. Along side such memories of places are memories of people, full of awe and wonder, contradictions and mystery, such as the neighbouring Armenian singer who told stories about distant lands, her gold tooth gleaming in her mouth and her laughter gushing out.

Yet, the nostalgia is double edged. Not only is there no possibility of return, for landscapes and cityscapes have changed beyond recognition, but it had never been a truly comfortable home in the first place. Alexandria had never been a place where they wished to stay, but always only a stepping stone for somewhere else. For other writers, the past is much more nuanced, nostalgic and sinister at the same time, with the ever present fear of persecution and attacks; Amir recalls the tensions in Baghdad, shortly before his family left the country forever; tensions between Muslims and Jews flaring up in street fights between rival gangs. Even so, there are recollections from an earlier period when he lived in a mixed neighbourhood, Jews and Muslims together, children happily playing together.

Goldin's memories of an Iranian Jewish woman present an even darker side to childhood memories. In Shiraz, where she grew up, fear permeated their lives, fear of mob violence going back many generations, especially during the holy month of Moharam. But it was not all gloomy; there were moments of snatched joy and special treats. There was poverty and harshness, but also treats and support from her grandmother and a sense of solidarity amongst the womenfolk in the Jewish neighbourhood.

Another theme that is ever present is the theme of escape; fleeing from Ethiopia, in small groups, in secret, but often at the mercy of villagers along the way who might betray them, robbers, hunger, illness or injury slowing down the desperate flight. On leaving Sarajevo, Finci writes, "I am leaving what used to be my life in order to preserve what could be my life". Farhi sets his story in Turkey, with the Holocaust approaching in a menacing way in Greece. A teenager plans a rescue mission to bring back his aunt and her three children safely from Salonika. The theme of the Holocaust is understated and the editor deliberately avoided focusing on the Holocaust as such; nevertheless the fear of persecution and the need to be on the move, to go into exile, is so much part of the Jewish experience that is permeates much of what is being presented in this volume.

There is yet another element in Farhi's piece, and in other chapters in the book; that is the peculiar turn of events that is precipitated by family dynamics. Thus, the underlying motivation for the rescue attempt by the teenager stems from the unhappy family dynamics in his own home and the hope that the rescue of relatives from Salonika will help to restore harmony in the home. This focus on internal family dynamics takes on very unusual and bizarre twists. In one story, the husband spends most evenings inside his stationary car. In another story, a Cuban woman who moved to the States marries a quiet "safe and unassuming" man for fear of being uprooted again. But then she rebels by having her ears pierced and going off dancing whilst her husband goes to synagogue. A daughter visits her mother in South Africa, communication and intimacy between them has been very limited over the years, but as the mother gets older and frailer, there is a rapprochement of sorts. In a story by Darakhshani, a man, still living with his mother, feels unwell and comes home early from work. In his feverish delirium he imagines the clock on the wall is getting ever louder and ever closer to him. The clock seems to envy the man who is free to come and go, whilst the clock is a prisoner on the wall. Persecution, torture and imprisonment are real fears that permeate our consciousness; but who is the victim and who is the perpetrator? In all of these stories one incident seems to summarise a lifetime of relationships between family members. Some stories are unrelenting, others provide a glimmer of hope, but all are set in a context of dislocation, loss or difficulties in communication and struggles to maintain family relationships. All of these themes are ones that are closely linked to the experiences of many refugees, wherever they have come from and wherever they might have landed.

In Riskdom Where I Lived

by Ali Abdolrezaei

Translated by Abol Froushan,
Published by Exiled Writers Ink, 2008
Reviewed by Mansor Pooyan

In Riskdom Where I Lived is the title of a chapbook collection of twenty-eight poems. The term Post-modern describes Ali Abdolrezaei's tendencies in post-Revolutionary Iranian literature. His style consists of both a continuation of the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period (1960-1979), and a reaction against traditionalist ideas implicit in classical Persian literature. The distinctiveness of new poetry began to emerge nearly a decade after the Revolution. As well as progressive tendencies in secularism and human rights, Iranian literary nationalism began to take shape based on individualism and imagined reality.

Abdolrezaei's poetry eschews, often playfully, clear-cut meanings. He has a distrust of conventional poetry and therefore uses colloquial language, multi-phonics and genres not previously deemed appropriate for Persian literature. He turns from external reality to examine inner states of consciousnes and he explores fragmentation in both narrative and character construction as in the poem "At The Priory". He employs pastiche to demonstrate the working of extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis. What we call reality is actually the construction of our minds. This is to say, our lives are not the subject of random fate, but reality is of our own making.

The sprawling canvas and fragmented narrative of the poem "Bandar Abbas" has generated controversy on the "purpose" of the narrative and the standards by which it should be judged. Abdolrezaei believes that the style of a poem must be appropriate to what it depicts and represents. The post-revolutionary Iranian socio-cultural landscape is a text that with the help of the poet can be read and understood. This poem provides us with a narrative vision which is in sharp contrast with the utopian dreams preceding the 1979 Iranian revolution.

...and since February walked a brand on my face
I am looking for a July bullet hid behind these walls
This wall this snail shell that revolves round Nothing
Where does it end?

The poem "Junction", defines the attitude of a generation exuding a much needed confidence in an age that following the totalitarian regime in post Revolutionary Iran, could easily descend into disillusion and decadence. His imagery is consistent with contemporary life representing the spontaneous expression of the poet's thoughts and feelings. He sees poetry as a vital part in the process of creating transformation.

To re-create a new identity in exile, the poem "Album" is a manifestation of reinventing his life in the process of remembering and rehearsing it. This poem establishes a link between the world of poetry and his original/ local world of farming life. "Album" is indicative of a certain alienation resulting from his present life of exile and the need to negotiate the distance between origins and present circumstances. The distance between the two is marked by physical distance as well as cultural disjunction.

The translator, Abol Froushan, is himself a poet. Like Abdolrezaei, Abol is concerned with rendered experience rather than statement. He believes in organic form, rhythm and cadence that are the product of a particular moment and voice. Abol's poetry adheres to objectivism wherein the concern is with music, sound and the senses. Meaning is subordinated to sound, in that the individual word becomes an object and the order and movement of sound in a poem might create a flux of emotions more significant than the underlying literary meaning. There is a one-to-one relationship between the inner world and the outer world. His abstract expressionist poetry dramatises that relationship to the re-creation of experience.

Working Children of India- A Photographic Exhibition

by Lalit Nagpaul

fighter against child labour
Reviewed by Janna Eliot

Philanthropist Lalit Nagpaul is a former magistrate, has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and is an amateur conjuror. He is also a very talented photographer. Born in India, he grew up in Kenya before coming to England in 1968, working in Highgate Court and becoming a prominent member of the Hindu Cultural Society of North London.

During one of the annual family visits to India, Lalit's young son asked a perturbing question. "Daddy, why does the servant's little boy clean our latrines? Doesn't he have to go to school?" Lalit explained that poverty stricken children in India have to earn their living. Then he found himself wondering why illegal child labour was still rife in his homeland. The answer was obvious. Many families are unable to survive as an economic unit without the income their young offspring provide. And although this practice is forbidden by labour laws, many employers still exploit children with low wages and terrible conditions.

Lalit decided to make a photo journal of child workers in India, and exhibit his work to publicise the problem. Starting in Pune, he took photographs of child servants and delivery boys, then travelled through India filming a varied number of child labourers. These include a ten-year-old chapatti fryer, an eight-year-old assembling chandeliers at the side of the road, five-year-old balloon sellers, youngsters decorating clients with henna, infants selling temple offerings, and a child singer. The children in these striking, well composed photographs look out at you, happy, sad or bored, involving you in their lives. The clear captions beneath each picture give biographical details, recording one boy saying, "I like polishing shoes, I don't understand the teachers in school, and this way, I can earn some money." I wonder what the life choices and aspirations of this boy would have been, had he been born into a wealthy family.

The exhibition, "Working Children of India," has been touring London and I caught it at the Arts Depot in North Finchley. "How terrible! Child labour shouldn't be allowed!" commented a woman visitor to the gallery. Glancing at her heavily beaded Indian jacket and sequined shawl, I realised that Lalit personalises a problem which involves us all. Most of us chose to forget that the clothes we buy, much of the food we eat, and the delicate jewels we fasten around our necks, have been produced by children working in dangerous environments, whose families live in shacks with no running water or electricity.

You can see more of Lalit Nagpaul's work online and read about his campaign at http://siddhartha.smugmug.com/gallery/442745

Biographies

Bashir Al Gamar was born in Sudan in 1955. He came to England as a political refugee in 1991 after being imprisoned for his poem: 'Patience on a Beach'. Since then he has lived in Brighton. Bashir is a poet, songwriter and composer. His first short collection Lost Time will be published this year by Exiled Writers Ink.

Mir Mahfuz Ali was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He is currently preparing his first collection of poetry for publication and was short-listed for the New Writing Ventures Awards in 2007.

Hassan Bahri is a Syrian who was a political prisoner for over 8 years. He graduated from the USSR as a mechanical engineer and now works as a translator. He started writing fiction with the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture. Since then he has give readings around the UK.

Valeria Baker was born in Rome and read Classics at Newcastle University. She is studying for an MA in Cultural Memory at the School of Advanced Study, University of London.

Hasan Bamyani fled Afghanistan in 2001 when he was attacked by the Taliban for teaching girls. He has filled three notebooks with poetry and continues to write on a daily basis.

Reza Baraheni was born in Tabriz, Iran. He is professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto and President of Canadian PEN. He is the author of numerous books of poetry, fiction and literary criticism in Persian and English and has been translated into all the major European languages.

Sofia Buchuck was born in Cusco, Peru. Her collection of poetry is entitled *Al otro lado de America*, 2003, Mexico and her poetry has been published in a range of anthologies. Since 1991 she has performed Latin American music and poetry at festivals. In 2000 released Girl of the Rain Forest.

David Clark is the child of refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. He grew up in Australia, Italy and Austria. He studied in Canada and East Africa and now teaches tourism studies and contributes to various cultural magazines in London.

Lynette Craig has an MPhil in Writing, leads poetry workshops with refugee groups and mentors and edits their work. Her poetry collection is entitled *Burning Palaces*, (Flarestack).

Janna Eliot Novelist and translator, Janna Eliot lives in London and comes from an immigrant family.

Mehrdad Falah is considered one of Iran's finest poets and has had seven books published. He often presents his poetry visually.

Miriam Frank Her articles, translations and original works have been published by the Guardian Review, Index on Censorship, Buenos Aires Herald, Quartet Books, Serpent's Tail and Rodopi, and she has been interviewed for BBC Radio 4 and World Service programmes.

Abol Froushan left Iran for London in 1975 to disengage from student unrest in the Shah's Iran. In 1979, he graduated in Engineering from Imperial College, University of London, subsequently gaining a Masters in Social and Economic Studies and a PhD. He writes poetry fused with digital images and sound.

Ghazi Gheblawi Born 1975 in Tripoli, Libya. Two collections of short stories in Arabic have been published, 2001 and 2007. Ghazi translates literary works from and into both English and Arabic languages. He resides in London where he works as a doctor.

Mogib Hassan was born in Yemen in 1974. He left Yemen for India in 1994 and in 1999 moved to the Netherlands where he worked as an Arabic teacher as well as writing and taking part in literature activities. Some of his work has been published in Dutch and Arabic. He moved to London in 2004.

Nahida Izzat is a Jerusalem born, Palestinian refugee who has lived in exile for over 40 years. She was forced to leave her homeland at the age of seven during the Six-Day War. She is a mathematician.

Laleh Javanshir lives in Toronto, Canada. She was born in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1978 and studied Biology at Tabriz University. She has published two poetry books and translated Fariba Vafi's short stories in Baku. She is editor of Barama and Bayqshu literature websites.

M.A.Kargar born in Afghanistan in 1953 was Director General of Radio Afghanistan, Deputy of the Writers Association and Professor in Philosophy and Social Studies. He has published several collections of short stories

Jennifer Langer writes poetry and is editor of four anthologies of exiled literature (Five Leaves), the latest being *If Salt Has Memory: Jewish Exiled Writers*, 2008. She has an MA in Cultural Memory.

Esther Lipton is a retired lawyer and has an MA in Jewish Ethics. She writes poetry and short stories.

Mara Lockowandt is a theatre practitioner and scholar with a focus on the work of exiled and marginalised groups. She is currently studying 'Theatre in Exile' for her PhD at Royal Holloway and is the artistic director of The Silver Lining Theatre Company.

Freddy Macha is a London based Tanzanian born writer and musician who leads workshops and performs solo or with his Kitoto Band. In Tanzania he was a reporter for the national Swahili daily Uhuru and weekly columnist for Sunday News. His first collection of Swahili stories was published in 1984. He has lived in Germany and Brazil where he played with *Os Galas* band until 1992.

Naser Manzuri was born in Iranian Azerbaijani in 1953 and lives in Tehran. He is a linguist and novelist who has published both theoretical studies of language and four novels in Azeri.

Tinashe Mushakavanhu is a young Zimbabwean writer and poet. He is the first African to have received an MA in Creative Writing from Trinity College, Carmarthen in Wales. His short stories and poems have been published on three continents.

Nora Nadjarian is a Cypriot poet and writer. She has published three collections of poetry and her work has won prizes. Her first collection of short stories, *Ledra Street*, was published in 2006. Her play "My Life as a Shiksa" was performed at a short plays festival in Israel in 2008.

Majid Naficy fled Iran in 1983, one and a half years after the execution of his wife, Ezzat in Tehran. He has published two collections of poetry, *Muddy Shoes* (1999) and *Father and Son* (2003) as well as "Modernism and Ideology in Persian Literature" (1997) . He is the author of over twenty books in Persian and co-editor of the Iranian Writers' Association in Exile literary journal.

Ade Olaiya is Yoruba, of Nigerian and Jamaican parentage. As a child he lived in Lagos during the Biafran War and later lived in Jamaica during the early days of Michael Manley's Socialist regime. His poetry is generally about his personal experiences of life in London which may relate to being a member of a minority.

Albert Pellicer Born in Barcelona, based in London, Albert Pellicer is a poet and a freelance journalist. He has a BA in Creative Writing from Antioch University and an MA in Poetic Practice from Royal Holloway, University of London.

Mansor Pooyan born in Tehran, studied Economics at Tehran University and Sociology at London University. He now lives in London where he teaches Social Science courses. He has written extensively on Iranian culture and is the author of a book barred from publication by Iran.

Ghazi Rabihavi is from Iran and has written eight books. After migrating to the UK he published the books that were banned in Iran. In 1997 Harold Pinter produced Ghazi's play 'Look Europe!' performed in London, Amsterdam and New York. Other plays include 'Stoning', 'Fourplay', 'Voices', 'Captured by Camera' and 'Masculine Law'.

Shirin Razavian is a British poet born in Tehran where she studied Persian and English Literature. She has published three poetry collections.

Isabelle Romaine a French Cameroonian, graduated in Geography at Lyon II University. She taught at a lycée in Dakar, Senegal. She has an M.Phil.in English Literature and an MA in Cultural Memory. She writes short stories.

Yashar Ahad Saremi, born in Tabriz, Iran, emigrated to California in 1994. He has published three books in Farsi: *Arthur's House*, 2000, Yashsar's Quartets, 2004 and *Sonnets of Tabriz*, 2005.

Fathieh Saudi born in Jordan, completed her medical studies in France. Her books include *L'oubli Rebel* in French and *Days of Amber* in Arabic. Her first poetry collection is entitled: *The Prophets.*

Rouhi Shafii is a social scientist and writer. The focus of her work is women in Iran. She has published *Scent of Saffron and Pomegranate Hearts* and written numerous articles.

Goran Simic was born in Bosnia in 1952 and has written eleven volumes of poetry, drama and short fiction. His work has been translated into nine languages and has been published and performed in several European countries. One of the most prominent writers of the former Yugoslavia, Simic was trapped in the siege of Sarajevo.

Darija Stojnic is from Sarajevo, Bosnia and came to England as a refugee in 1993. She now works as a counselor. Darija writes short stories and also writes for *Bosniak Post*, Norway.

Nathalie Teitler born in Argentina, has a PhD in Latin American poetry and is a professional editor and writer. She has worked for many years in the field of cultural diversity and arts, specialising in work with refugees.

Ze Tubia is an Angolan artist, currently living in Croydon. The recent exhibition of his work was entitled *Cycle of the Repeated V Millennium.* Ze Tubia was seven years old when he lost his right eye and both arms at the elbow whilst playing with a found hand grenade in Lobito.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