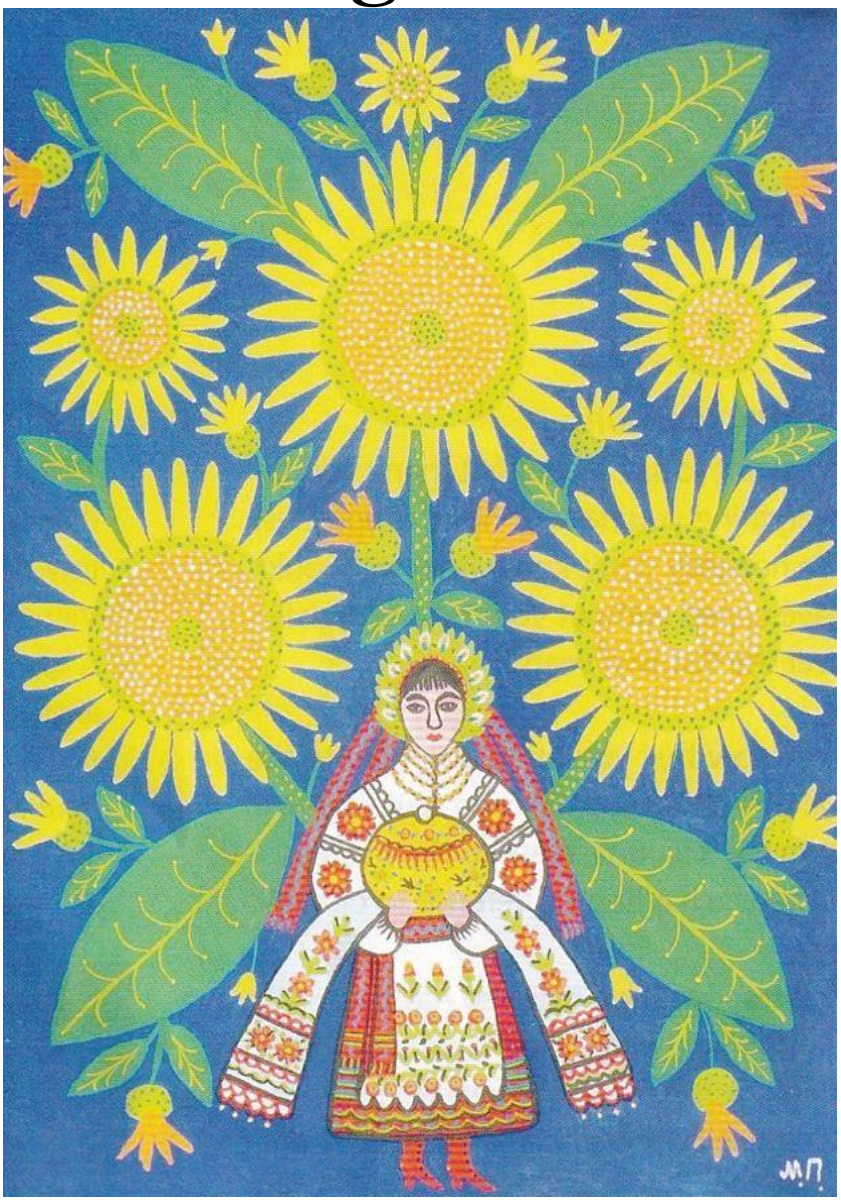
Exiled Ink

magazine



Issue 5 2022

Ukrainian – Iranian – Afghan Voices
Tahrir Square - Book Reviews

Contents

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Cover image: May I Give this Ukrainian Bread to All People in This Big Wide World by Maria Pryimachenko (1909-1997).

Twenty-five of this Ukrainian artist's works have been destroyed by Russian attacks on the Historical and Local History Museum in Ivankiv which housed them, setting it ablaze. Local residents managed to save the rest. The small Ukrainian museum was just another casualty in Russia's war on Ukraine.

Ukraine

How Could a Poet Write about Anything Else?

Some Poems by Yuliya Musakovska

I started writing about war in 2014 when Russia illegally annexed Crimea and occupied parts of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine. Back then, in the spring of 2014, I wrote a poem called “Men are carrying war inside them.” Since then, war has been among the central topics of my writing, even if I wasn't physically present in the war zone. My friends, friends of friends, my countrymen, and women were forced to leave their homes, went to fight the aggressor, were affected, and suffered. The pain was excruciating. And now, when Russia’s unjust and brutal war has filled the entire existence of Ukrainians, how could a poet write about anything else?

METAPHORS

such awkward, terrible poems
soaked with rage,
controvertible

no beauty in them,
no aesthetics;
metaphors withered and scattered
deprived of blooming

metaphors buried
on playgrounds
under hastily made
crosses

frozen
in unnatural poses
across the thresholds,
strewn with dust

cooking food over an open fire
in an attempt to survive

metaphors dying of dehydration
under the rubble

shot in a car
under a makeshift
white flag

lying on the footpath
with motley backpacks on their backs

next to their
executed cats and dogs

forgive me, but such poems
are all we have for you today,
ladies and gentlemen,

dear estimable spectators
in the theatre of war

31.03.2022

Translated from Ukrainian by Anatoly Kudryavitsky

A HOME TO FREEDOM

The man that became my home
wants to become my freedom
but he's failing

He thinks that I'm
overplaying,
overexaggerating,
overwriting the words of familiar songs,
ravaging the principles of calligraphy,
distorting the words of prayers,
acting recklessly,
making a mountain out of a molehill,
crushing a fly upon a wheel,

and all that

How will our home have room for
so many great things,
so many phenomena and creatures,
so many implausible characters,
natural disasters and global issues

Our home is not a bottomless pit,
it cannot hold it all
it will explode and disappear off the face of the earth

There is only one solution:
it will learn to grow,

gradually growing and growing
until it fills everything around us

until it becomes freedom itself

THE SPARTAN BOY

The war that you've been carrying
in your shirt pocket
gnawed a hole in you as if it were a fox.
Your heart keeps falling out.
I am sewing the hole shut,
firmly holding the edges together
with my numb, unbending fingers.
I hope it stays closed a little longer.

When the city falls asleep,
the black caterpillars of scars wake up.
And only death’s head moths will emerge.
The city pours steam out of its nostrils
and sets its hills like horns.
You have a vision of your mates’ faces
at the bottom of the lake —
a dark fairy tale from his childhood that came to life.
Although you were polite, respected elders, and were easily content.
Actually, there is no such thing as justice.
The scratched steel mug you never part with,
your superficial sleep, and fierce hate of fireworks.
What a lucky one, he could have lost so much more,
he's almost whole, they say.
You have chosen me because of my skilful, sensitive fingers.
I’m comfortable holding a needle with them.

A fox's muzzle is peering out of your pocket,
licking its lips, recalling what my bird of peace tasted like.

2019

JESUS OF WAR

Oh my Lord adorned by roses,
clothed in spiderwebs and dew
I will bring to you past chasms and stumps
ten bullets between my ribs

How did they appear, fruit of what land
who raised them and nourished them so fully
They soar off, drunk with impunity
with their ice-cold stingers

Oh my Lord, so ardent and disheartened
wearing thorns above your high forehead
How does it feel to walk wearing a crown
barefoot through the ravaged land

The wind will cast a ball into your face —
these are smells of something human, burning
Oh my Lord shine and bloom abundantly
while inertia is driving us forth

While numbers multiply in the matrix
while it's still early morning, sleep, my Lord
Let us hold on but what's left to hold on to?
Rose petals, raindrops and thorns

2019

Translated from Ukrainian by Olena Jennings and the author

WORDS

Who said that words have no value now?
Our words that are being written in the air
with the incandescent iron of breath,
that strike like clotted blood on pale lips,
are cutting into the soil under our feet,
settling on our clothes and shoes
like dust from ruined homes.

Our words
are stretching to those dear to us – to everyone who is scattered
around the country's map with bullet holes in it.
Words – like the strong connecting wires attached to the heart,
along the tight ropes of lasting together.
How much we can love as one.
How much we can hate.
The words we put into a backpack just before leaving.
The words we grab
to maintain who-knows-what kind of balance,
when the ground is kicked out from under our feet, like an unsteady stool.
The words we press to a gaping wound,
the torn tender belly of the teenage girl, safety.

Our words, hard and swollen with rage,
black from grief,
like the concrete covering of an ancient bomb shelter.
There is nothing more durable,
nothing less fleeting.

21.03.2022

Translated from Ukrainian by Ella Yevtushenko and Olena Jennings

Yuliya Musakovska was born in 1982 in Lviv, Ukraine. She is an award-winning poet, translator, and member of PEN Ukraine. She is the author of five poetry collections in Ukrainian, most recently *The God of Freedom* [Бог свободи] (2021) and a bi-lingual collection *Iron [Żelazo / Залізо]* in Polish and Ukrainian (2022). She has received numerous literary awards in Ukraine, among them the prestigious Smoloskyp Poetry Award for young authors and the DICTUM prize. Her individual poems have been translated into 25 languages and published internationally, with recent works appearing in *AGNI*, *The Springhouse Journal*, *One Art*, *The Red Letters*, *The Apofenie Magazine*, *Life and Legends*, etc. Yuliya is a translator of Tomas Tranströmer to Ukrainian and of contemporary Ukrainian authors to English.

Fighting Words: Poets for Ukraine

Mark A. Silberstein

The war in Ukraine has brought together a unified international stance that is saying no to conflict, no to imperialism and no to Putin! This was never more apparent than when poets took a stand in London on 27 March 2022 at the JW3 centre, to raise funds for Ukraine in a Poem-a-Thon. Sponsored poets read in relay for up to five minutes from 11am to 5pm joining online and in person.

Words have always been the most powerful weapon of speaking truth to power. The well-known anti-war poet Wilfred Owen was certainly no exception with his poem ironically entitled "*Dulce et decorum est"*, the title taken from the Roman poet Horace, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*" the English translation, "it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country." Owen's poem states: "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest to children ardent for some desperate glory, the old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori*."

And from Wilfred Owen speaking out against the First World War, to Allan Ginsberg's poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra" where he wills the end of

the Vietnam War, or as the Vietnamese rightly call it, the American War. Ginsberg states: “I lift my voice aloud, make Mantra of American language now, I here declare the end of the War!” Or the landay, Pashtun folk poems, that powerfully criticised the American invasion of Afghanistan with words like: “May God destroy the White House and kill the man who sent U.S. cruise missiles to burn my homeland. Bush don’t be so proud of your armoured car. My remoti [remote] bomb will blow it to bits from afar.”

Sitting in the auditorium of the JW3, looking up at the blue and yellow Ukrainian colours projected onto the stage, my mind flitted to the historical past sufferings endured by the people of this country. Such as the Babi Yar massacre that was perpetrated in Ukraine in the 20th century that saw up to 100,000 Jews from Kyiv killed by the Nazis.

Although war brings with it great uncertainty, there always remains with it the certainties of destruction, the death of innocence and the opposition to it. These parallels of war remind us that conflict is not new, and we once again are at the edge of a precipice looking down at hell. These parallels of war were a recurring theme throughout the event. When poet Sonia Jarema, born in Luton to Ukrainian parents, took the stage she referred to another Ukrainian tragedy: the Great Famine or Holodomor which was engineered by Stalin in the 1930s to exterminate the Ukrainians. The estimated death toll was 3.9 million.

More parallels of war with Isabel del Rio, a British-Spanish writer and linguist who is the co-founder of Friends of Alice Publishing, in her powerful poem ‘Our little pale blue dot’. She referenced the crass quote from the tyrant Stalin, “As one of them once cynically claimed exactly a century ago, the many ensuing deaths are but a mere statistic.” Del Rio’s comparisons of conflict were summed up succinctly with the lines

‘The word ***war*** tragically defining every period of history: invading wars, colonial wars, world wars; even the cold war wasn’t bloodless. Wars are measured by death toll, suffering, devastation; but they can only be explained by the bloodthirsty greed of invaders, by the brutal schemes of tyranny, by sheer evil.’

Other poems at the event took on a more direct approach confronting warmongering in present day Ukraine. Like Dr Jennifer Langer, poet and editor of five exiled anthologies and founding director of Exiled Writers Ink, whose evocative poem ‘To Hades We Descended’ was newly written at the beginning of the Russian invasion of 2022 in the women’s voice:

‘He sits at his table long as his fables/ planning a banquet of death/ too sharp are his claws/ too aglow are his eyes/Putin of the great war cry/ dragging his carcass of history./ Our men have gone to war.’

The poet Julian Bishop stayed in the 21st century and its warfare, addressing the use of hypersonic weapons by the Russians in Ukraine, ‘Hurled down at five times the speed of sound […].’ The poet Tim Edwards reminded us of Putin’s toxic masculinity and misogyny when he mentioned that the despot quoted a Russian rhyming phrase when referring to Ukraine:

‘My beauty, whether you like it or not, you must tolerate whatever I choose to do to you, while you are asleep.’

Poets for Ukraine are using their fighting words to do what they can to create awareness of a tragic and unprovoked attack on Ukraine as the war machine keeps moving forward and led by a tyrant, like all the rest throughout history, who only cares about gain without any regard to lives lost.

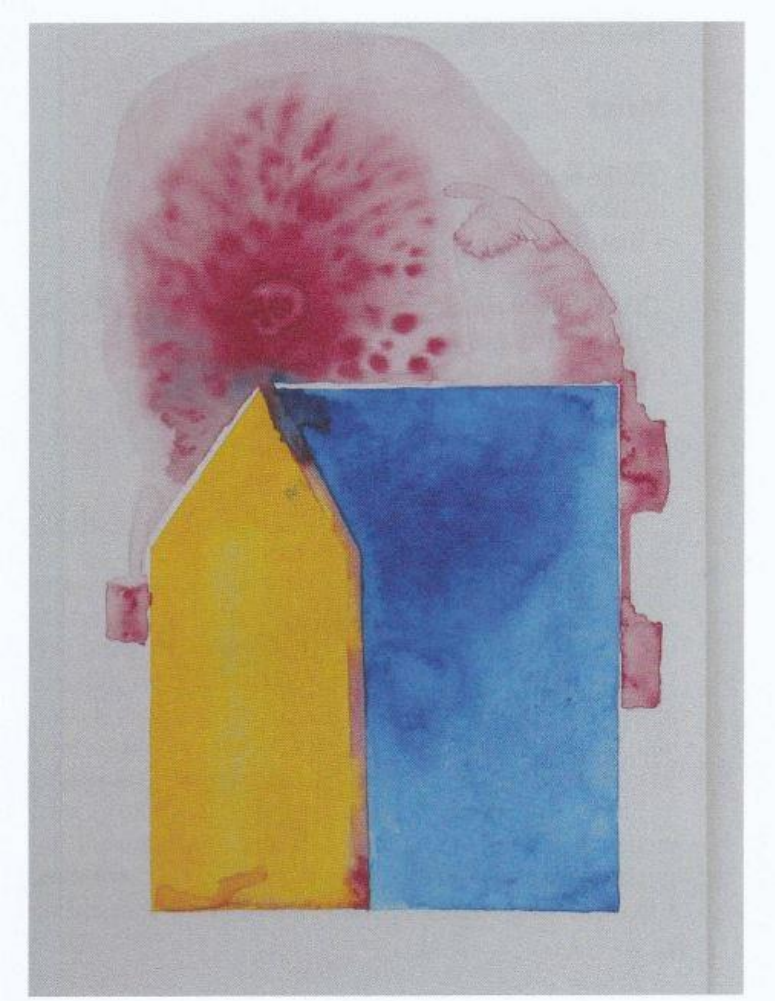
Note: The poet and Exiled Writers Ink member Viv Fogel, invited the involvement of EWI in the Poets for Ukraine initiative. The event would not have happened had it not been for the hard work and commitment of a group of sixteen poets including Jacqueline Safra, Aviva Dautch and Caroline Maldonado. The EWI poets who read their work were Isabel del Rio, Sonia Jarema, Ziba Karbassi, Jennifer Langer, Viv Fogel and Yvonne Green.

Mark A. Silberstein is the editor of on-line magazine Synchronicity
https://www.synchronicitygroup.net/

Ukraine in the Work of International Poets

Edited by Anna Maria Mickiewicz, Adam Siemieńczyk and Tomasz Mickiewicz, London: Literary Waves Publishing (2022).

Reviewed by David Clark



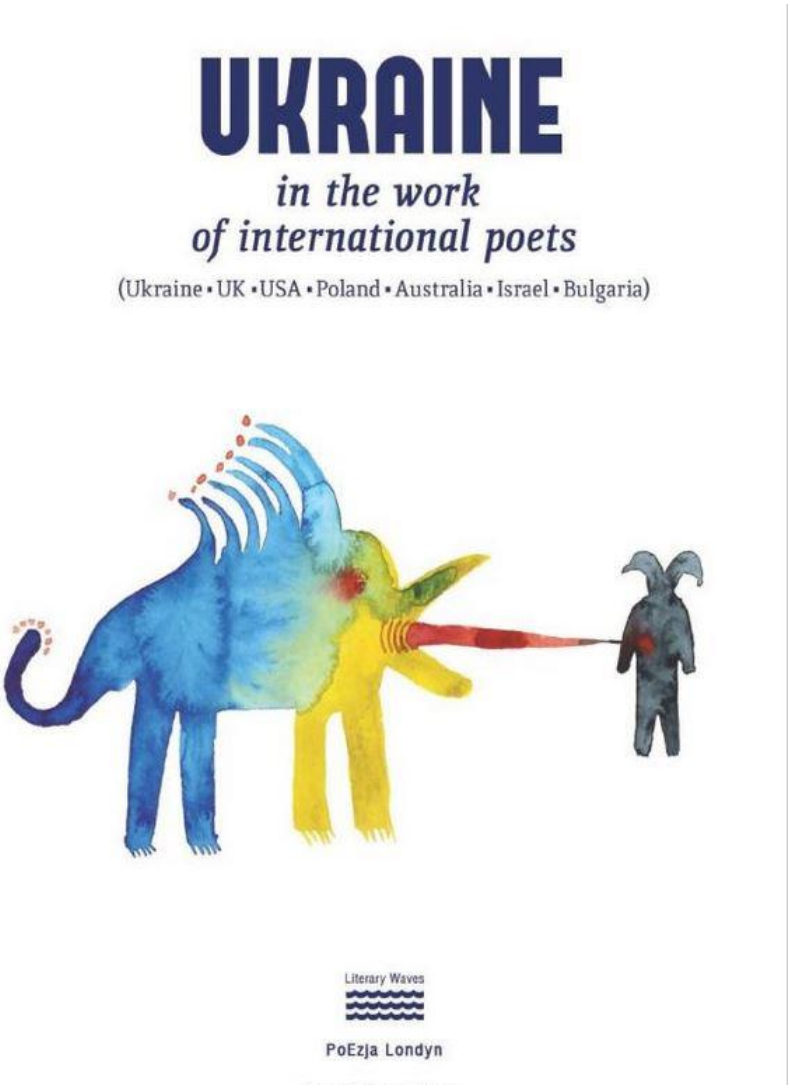
Danylo Movchan (Ukraine)

There has been an international outcry and an enormous sense of solidarity with the Ukrainian people as a result of the brutal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Humanitarian aid is being provided from all quarters, including grassroots level; but there has also been a cultural response. Poetry events, musical recitals, photo and art exhibitions sprung

up all over the place, bringing to the fore the cultural achievements of Ukrainian writers, artists and composers.

This book goes further in bringing us right up front with Ukrainian responses to what has been happening in their country since 2014. It documents the spirit of outrage and resistance that is to be found in the heart and soul of the Ukrainian people. This is a war that is being fought not only in the battlefield, but also on the cultural front.

I have watched countless live stream broadcasts and interviews of Ukrainian poets, artists, journalists, academics and experts, explaining what the current situation is like. Music students performing chamber music in the basement bunkers in which Kyiv residents were huddled together for weeks at a time. It is clear that these are acts of defiance under the most appalling and life-threatening of circumstances.



This book is a testimony to the resistance and resilience of Ukrainian artists and poets in the face of such unrelenting attacks on the very soul and soil of Ukraine. Fourteen Ukrainian-born contemporary poets are showcased here, mostly born in the 1980s. A further twelve Polish poets are featured, twenty poets from the UK, three from America and one Bulgarian poet. It is truly an international effort.

Yet, for me, it is the first section of the book, presenting the Ukrainian poets, that holds centre stage. The poems are powerful and haunting, while at the same time demonstrating a rich variety of topics and moods.
The book opens with a poem by Borys Humeniuk, writing about the initial stages of the war, from 2014 to 2022, with the proxy annexation of the Eastern front. Humeniuk describes war in the trenches. He takes the perspective of a 19-year-old raw recruit, starting with the phrase, 'When you clean your gun everyday'. There is no punctuation mark in the poem, which takes you through different scenes and images, from cleaning the gun, digging and living in the trenches, to the smell of trenches and war. What keeps the poem together and powerfully conveys its message, is the repeated refrain after each scene, 'and you become one whole'. The soldier, the gun, the soil in the trenches, the soil of the motherland, the war, become 'one whole'.

This is a completely different kind of trench warfare from that described by Wilfred Owen, in his poem *Exposure*, written in very graphic terms in 1918, about British soldiers dying abroad, in cold and icy winds, amidst utter confusion and no sense of purpose. In Ukraine, soldiers are fighting on their own soil, with a love of their motherland; in the trenches they feel 'warm and cosy in it' as in a 'mother's womb', loving that soil more than ever.

By contrast, Anton Polunin's poem, *Heaven on their Minds,* shifts the focus to the plight of urban areas under direct attack from Russian artillery and aerial bombardment. Polunin starts his poem with a very powerful statement about writing poetry in wartime, 'war is war and poetry is war'. There is no room for any bystanders under current conditions. While the poet, the poem, and the war, become 'one whole', to paraphrase Humeniuk, Polunin brings both a personal touch and a soft, tender, quality to his poem. The threat of being maimed or killed by an exploding bomb is ever present, but there are certain precautions one can take, such as 'covering the windowpane with scotch tape to protect us from glass shreds going for our guts and throats'. But before the windowpane is sealed in this manner, Martha, his daughter, leaves an imprint of her kiss on the window, a friendly and loving message sent out

to the world. Martha's kiss is left there as a gesture of love and friendship, of hope for the future.

The female poets cover the 'home front' from a variety of perspectives. Halyna Kruk, is a writer and an academic teaching Ukrainian literature at Lviv National University. She has published several poetry and children's books as well as received many international literary awards and scholarships. Her poem, untitled, contrasts the feeble and ineffectual anti-war protest in Russia with the harsh realities of everyday life in a city under siege, 'the war can't be stopped, like bright blood from a torn artery'. She uses irony and gentle humour. In Ukrainian cities, men, 'whose life didn't prepare them for street battles, but the war teaches rapidly, in field conditions'. At first the army took men with combat experience, 'then, even those whose combat experience was Dune and Fallout (alluding to popular computer games) and a short master class in explosive cocktails from a friendly bartender'.

Meanwhile, in basements and underground bunkers, 'children are sleeping, are crying, children are born into this world unfit for life'. Yet the entire population is galvanised by the war effort; 'in the courtyard by the playground, the anti-tank hedgehogs and deadly "drinks" are being poured - now a family business for the whole kin, who learned at last, the joy of togetherness and of coordinated collective labor'. Everyone is pulling together; but even so, there are other anxieties too, as adults try to keep in contact with the elderly and the housebound, who are not responding to increasingly desperate phone calls. This is what war is like, under constant siege.

Yuliya Musakova, is the author of five poetry books and recipient of many literary prizes. In her poem, *Emergency Bag, s*he is constantly being asked whether she has packed her emergency bag, but what will she put in it? A child's T-shirt from the Caucasus or Siberia which would 'clash in Lviv', where they might be heading, and give out the wrong message. But the 'roots buried in the ground won't let go of me, pull me down'. It is hard to leave, even in an emergency. She decides on a few faded photos that won't take up too much space and would remind them of past times, also medicines, photocopies of documents and a battered radio.

Kateryna Mikhalitsyna is a poet, children's author and translator. Mikhalitsyna imagines a dialogue between a mother and her son. The poem is called *(son/wording day)*. The poem is deliberately written in colloquial language, partly to reflect the kind of language that a child

might use. And yet, at the same time the language is by no means that of normal childhood, but is forced upon the protagonists by the invasion. The child is struggling to come to terms with this new reality, and asks ‘the war is disaster, right?’ He does not even wait for an answer, he knows it is so. But why? He tries to provide an answer himself, as he sees it: ‘it has come in for something, like for, naughtiness.’ That is the best he can come up with. But then he elaborates further, ‘maybe we wanted to summit the sky, but somehow we should not, like the Babylonian did, you know, their tower was caused to fall, you know, I heard in school.’ And the mother does not know quite what to say. How do you explain the incomprehensible? She keeps back her tears, she is silent and lost for words. Then he comes up with yet another thought: wars can also be paid-for? And he draws a map of Ukraine, with Crimea and Donetsk on the misty window- ‘inviolate, aren’t they? They are untouchED and ours, mom, this is so, yes?’ His mother corrects him, untouchAble, she suggests. But she wonders,’ where you’ve taken, kid, this so unchildish wording?’

I have singled out but five out of the fourteen Ukrainian poems in the book, but sufficient to provide the reader with a flavour of the power and heartfelt emotions of souls under barbaric attack. It also conveys their ability to fight back and resist, with all their might, not just with weapons, but also, very clearly and powerfully, with words.

David Clark's poems have been published in Contemporary Writers of Poland (edited by Blaszak and Mickiewicz, 2015,2020), Voices Israel Poetry Anthology (2019, 2021), The Litterateur (2021), Mediterranean Poetry (2022), Southlight (Spring 2022).

Iran: Woman, Life, Liberty

© Nasrin Parvaz

Women – Life – Liberty

by Rouhi Shafii

It all started on a day in mid-September when reports came of the death of a young Kurdish girl in the custody of the "morality" police in Tehran. Mahsa Amini, who was known by her favourite name, Jina, travelled to Tehran from her small hometown, Saghez in the Kurdish region of Iran, accompanied by her parents and brother.

Mahsa was excited to see the big Capital for the first time and took the underground with her brother to go sightseeing. At the exit, they were faced with a group from the "Morality" police, who roam the streets of big cities to hunt the women and girls, who have "improper hejab" and harass, intimidate and ultimately take them to the designated detention centres for questioning, fines or in some cases imprisonment.

To the astonishment, horror and objections of both brother and sister, Mahsa was put in a van and taken to a detention centre. Her brother

followed the van and waited at the door for his sister. A short while later an ambulance arrived to take Mahsa to hospital as she was unconscious. She had horrific injuries to her body, including her head. Two days later, Mahsa passed away.

The death of Mahsa Amini sparked an unprecedented anger and uproar among the women of Iran, especially the younger generation, who have experienced harassment and humiliation by the morality police for not wearing “proper hejab”. Women and young girls poured on the streets tearing off their head scarves, setting them on fire, chanting slogans in which they said they are fed up with this life style. A life style they have not chosen and they do not want. Demonstrations led by young women, mainly teenage girls, spread throughout the country like a spark of fire, waiting to set ablaze everything on its way.

The name of that young Kurdish girl, from an unknown small town is now known to the whole world. Mahsa Amini Hashtag has been accessed over 500 million times. The whole world now knows that women of Iran are not the women the Islamic regime wanted and portrayed to the world. The women of Iran rejected the compulsory hejab right from the beginning in their mass protest of 8 March 1978.

Demonstrations which began with the death of Mahsa Amini have now lasted 5 weeks in which, universities and high schools along with other sections of the society have joined and an unknown number of people have been killed and thousands detained. Among the dead, is the 17 years old Nika Sjakarami who was snatched during demonstrations in Tehran and her mutilated body was found 10 days later. Many more young girls and boys under 18 have been murdered in police custody or shot dead during demonstrations.

In response to the events in Iran, the whole world stood with the Iranian people, especially the Iranian women. Iranians in exile, who have fled the country in fear of their lives, have joined forces to inform the world of the situation in Iran. Iranian refugees in Britain, members of Exiled Writers Ink who have contributed to the development of the organisation, are in the forefront of struggles to free Iran of the Islamic Regime. The names

of Mahsa Amini and Nika Shakarami and many others will always be a reminder that freedom comes at a heavy price. But it will come. Soon. Very Soon.

Rouhi Shafii is a writer and committee member of Exiled Writers Ink and also a board member of the Jaleh Esfahani Cultural Foundation

Poets, and especially exiled Iranian women poets, have been moved to write spontaneous poetry in response to the tragedy and freedom struggle.

The Death Foretold

Sana Nassari

Every step that I took
Brought me closer to the city I fled from
The sound of knives rose from my bones
I wanted to cover myself, my body
But the sand
Only mirrored my feet in itself and kept retreating
I remembered
The Arab woman called me
In Ahmad Abad bazaar
She was a palm reader
And had read my palm
From the distance
“Your future is a book of a thousand leaves”, she said
“Where one sentence is repeated time and again”
“But I can’t read
The letters
The alphabet”, she said
And disappeared into the crowd
Rushing towards vegetables, yoghurts and dates.
“Beware!”
Her voice came from a distance
“Know and beware!
That these people can’t bear
The sad beauty of young women

Grow old
Or remain unseen", she said.
Yet, neither was possible.

Sana Nassari is an award-winning Iranian writer, poet, and literary translator. She has published one novel and translations of four novels plus a chapbook of her short stories, These Two Roses (Exiled Writers Ink, 2021). Her poetry collection, O Delilah, was banned by the censor in Iran. It recently won Journalists Poetry Award second prize for an unpublished collection.

Masha's Wisp of Hair

Marie Papier

Where is my daughter
Where is my child?
begged Masha's mother

but Masha lay dead in hospital.
Morality Police had poured
their anger on the woman
who dared show a wisp of hair
outside a mandatory scarf she wore
with grace

And what if she wore trousers
underneath, trousers to fit her hips?
Was the State to dictate the size
of her trousers, the colour of her thighs,
was the State eye allowed under her skirt
to damn a daughter of God shrouded in black
before her time?

Her brother was waiting outside
Her mother was longing to hug her
Women in the street were shrieking with rage
The crowd was cursing the State

while Masha was meeting her God

His arms wide open
to free the spirit
her country had smothered.

Marie Papier is a French-speaking novelist turned English poet after her self-chosen exile.

Hands in Tehran

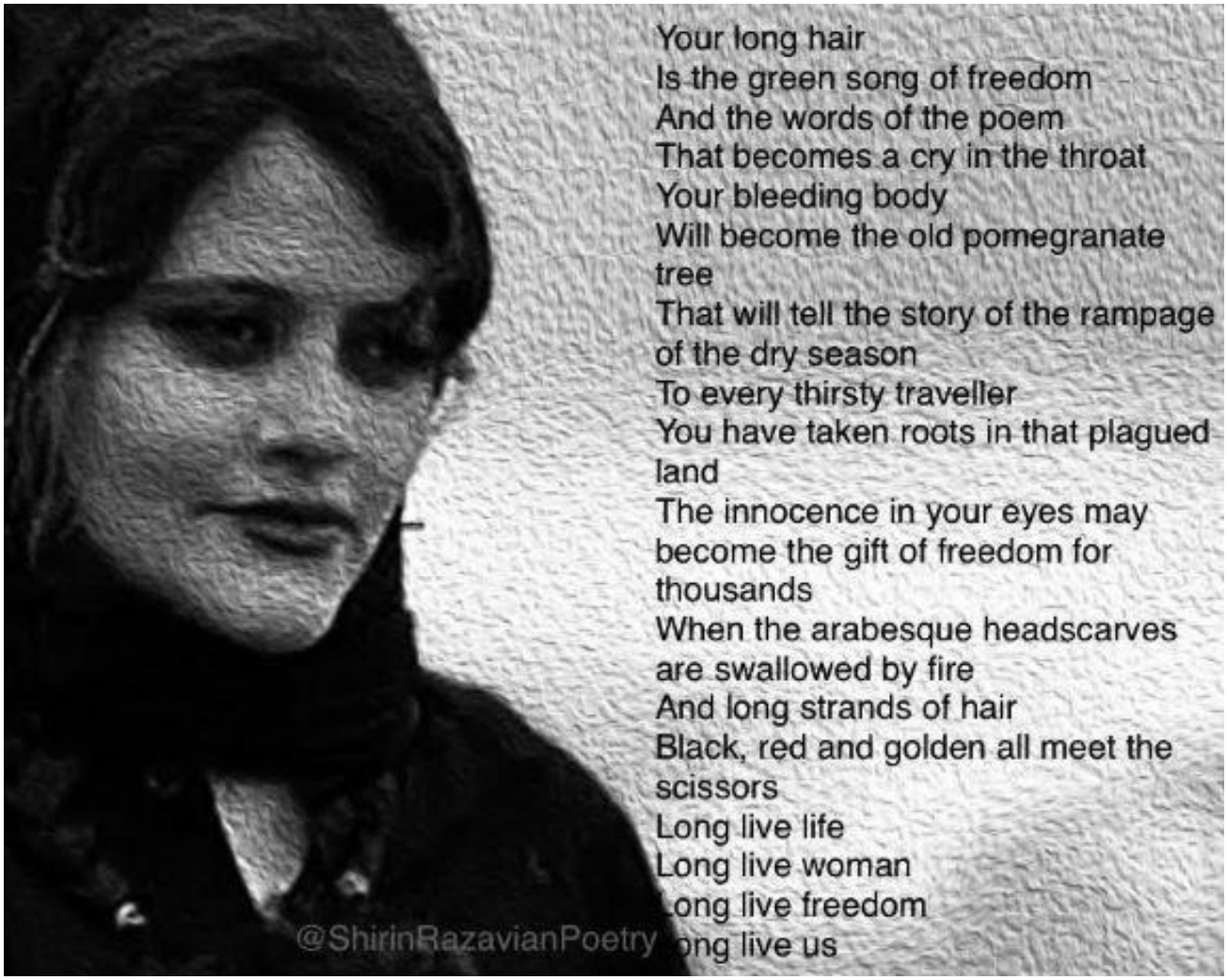
Esther Kamkar

Hands in Tehran
My dark stained small hands
that peeled fresh walnuts
and saved the white flesh
for marble pyramids
have since whitened
in their longing
for a cherry tree
to climb.
I look back at the roads
cluttered with broken pyramids
dried nails of dahlia petals
and crushed earrings of cherries.
Afraid of becoming robed
in black like a crow
with the fingers and face of a woman,
How can I go home?

Esther Kamkar is an Iranian-American poet. She has published three books of poetry: of such things, Hum of Bees, and Hummingbird Conditions. She lives in Northern California.

Your Long Hair

Shirin Razavian



Shirin Razavian has published six Farsi and English poetry collections in the UK. Her poetry has been published in a range of literary magazines and anthologies. Shirin is a judge for the Jaleh Esfahani Cultural Foundation Poetry Prize.

Pomegranate Tree

Mahnaz Badihian

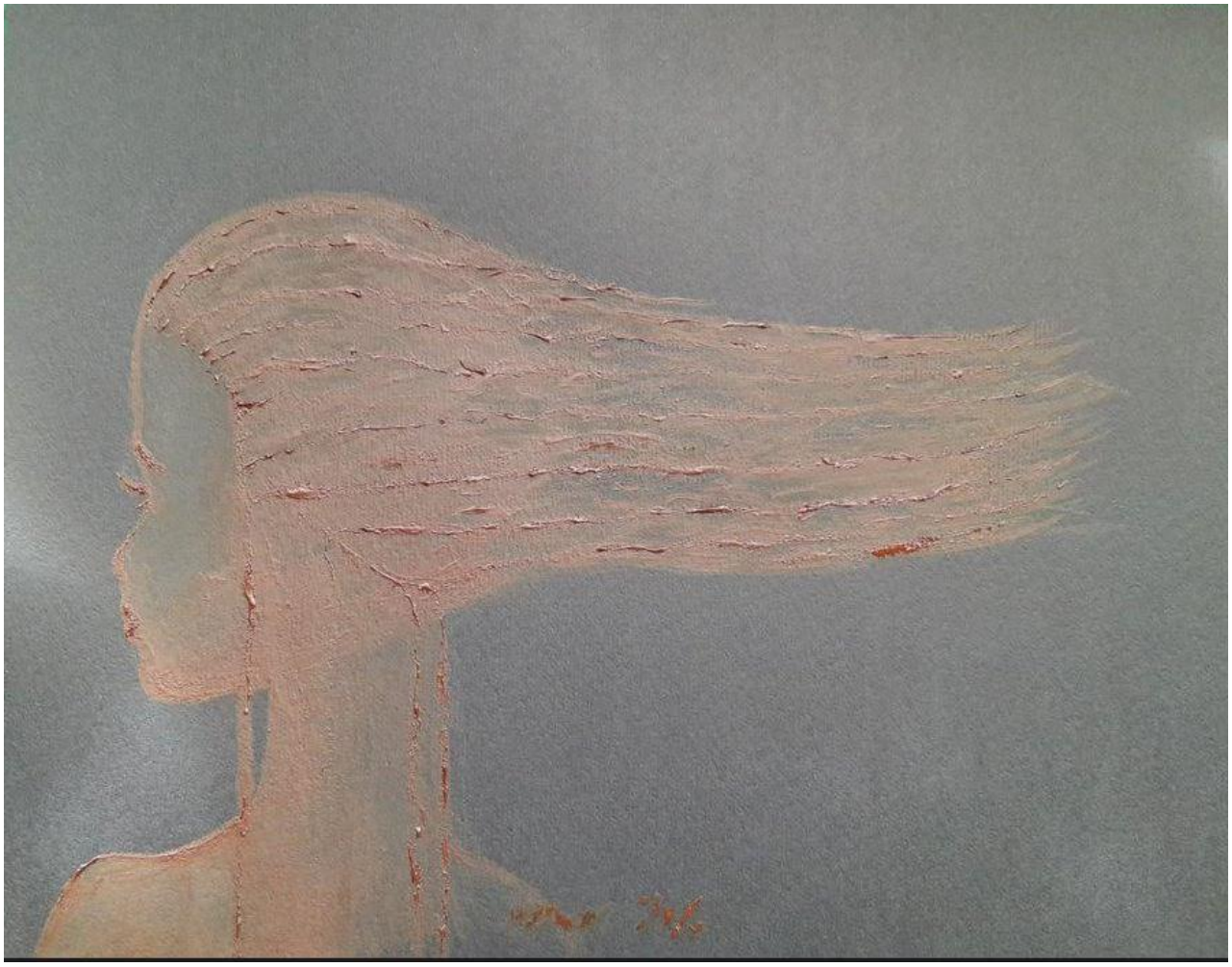
Nothing will happen
if my pomegranate tree
forgets me
if no one remembers me

There are women
who will carry all my pains
on their shoulders
who will walk with my legs
who will fall in love
with my heart
and enjoy the stars
with my eyes
who will write my poems
about love and wars

There are women
who will go to bed
with their lover
with my body
they'll kiss with my lips
they'll talk with my voice
and they'll water

pomegranate trees
with my hands across this world
I am all women

Mahnaz Badihian is a published poet, translator and artist and member of the Revolutionary Poets Brigade in San Francisco.



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What is that noise?

After Macbeth

Barbara Saunders

It is the cry of women
It isn't hard to fly the nest
The hardest part to stay at rest
Trees wise in ways we don't possess
We did not think uprooting permanent
So sure he was that trees don't march
The elm, oak, ash, birch, larch stay put
So sure they were to execute threats
They say they make for the trees' protection
They can arrest an entire forest
No need to worry about an election

Tangling branches through detention doors
They've been caught on camera
What if the trees grow back more?

Swirling your skirts in a cedar tree
be my Fibonacci
1, 1, 2, 2, 3
Come, we'll have some fun
dance with me
you're not alone

We do not want to see our daughters
in stained glass, your soft looks
trapped in rock
We pull weeds stubbornly
plant seeds
pick life

So sure he was that trees don't march
So sure they were to execute threats
They say they make for the trees' protection

Barbara Saunders' work about social rights is published in various anthologies and magazines.

That Sunny Afternoon in Cyprus

Nasrin Parvaz

The face of a man born
in a different part of the world
brings you to mind
I need to call your name
have you walk towards me
you were holding my hand
we were talking
I jolted violently
the sound of a gunshot
your hand slipped from mine
you bent
double

flattened
on the pavement
your red shirt turned black.

Note: Nasrin's poem is about one of the Iranian regime's assassinations.

Nasrin Parvaz became a civil rights activist when the Islamic regime took power in 1979. She was arrested in 1982, tortured and spent eight years in prison. Her books include 'One Woman's Struggle in Iran, A Prison Memoir', and 'The Secret Letters from X to A', (Victorina Press 2018).

© Jorge Etcheverry

Witch Hunt

Jorge Etcheverry Arcaya

In solidarity with Iranian women

Sometimes
she didn't attend mass on Sundays
No big deal
but someone remembered
she had a black cat
and someone else said
crows perched on her roof
And when she bent over at the well
a man saw a mark
just below her left shoulder

Someone else was almost sure
that hers was the silhouette he saw in the fields
the night of the storm
And someone told us
the market vendor
she fought with last year
dried up and died

We think the jury
won't have trouble deciding

Jorge Etcheverry Arcaya is a poet and writer of Chilean origin living in Ottawa. He has published numerous books of poems and fiction and authored critical essays about literature.

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Jinabendan

Nazand Begikhani

You came like a dream
A beauty shining over hatred
As a spirit
You have become the light
Pouring down
Over the dark alleys of our time
Flying into the beyond
You uplift our lonely souls
Binding us to a thin thread of hope

Nazand Begikhani is a writer, poet and was Vincent Wright Chair 2019/2020 Visiting Professor, Sciences Po, Paris. She has published eight poetry collections in Kurdish, French and English.

Moon and Wolf

Rethabile Masilo

—for #Mahsa and #Nika

Here is a troubled park, here a paradise
Killed by the people meant to protect it—
A park beaten up and trampled underfoot.
I sit on a bench and follow the old street.
Juglans trees bow their heads each time
Girls make turbaned men beat a retreat.

Today I started thinking about their world
With its too much hair slashed, and said to
My self, the world is headed straight to hell.
A sky reflects these girl–warriors, alive
With pigtails held in one hand and sickles
In the other, baby girl and mother both.

What if we raised our arms and ululated?
Soon the sun will rise to make death move
Off these broken streets, make all of us leave
The shadows of this four–decade distance
Until the dog that howls from the rooftop
Shuts wails of wolves on a blood moon.

Rethabile Masilo is a Paris-based poet from Lesotho. He has published four collections and is hard at work on a book of selected poems.

Afghan Voices: One Year On

On Thin Crust

Karim Haidari

On a thin crust of fear we tiptoed
Along a shallow escape route
Leaving no traces behind
Except a thousand memories
With empty hands we departed
Seas of the unknown before us

The short-lived bliss of survival
Pondering where to draw the line
Between gratitude and loss

Imagine a day of uncertainty
The swear, the sweat, the scream
That is the length of someone's life.

Waves of change washed away
A sandcastle we called life
Like ghosts we wander

Behind see-through satin

Enough to possess the air

Inadequate to prove presence

October 2022

Karim Haidari is a writer with Afghan soul and British nature. He writes poetry, short stories, plays and novels. He won the best playwright award at the International theatre festival in Tajikistan in 2009 for his play 'A Sick Family'.

Rhino's Cry

Surab Sirat

Once again, dawn peeps in through the window and you pull your head out of your collar

You slither out of bed and stand, as if you try to get out of a bog.

Once again, your last night's nightmare were war, fleeing and taking a bullet

In the train station, you sigh, which comes from beyond your body and soul.

You look at the sandwich and say 'that straw is tastier than this!'

You can't swallow the bite, the lump in your throat and take it out of your mouth.

Under the fraternal sincerity shade of a sister-like tree

You smoke the "fatherless" pleasant plant, in memory of your motherland.

You are not able to get used to the city of fake looks and fake smiles

In a corner of your own isolation, you cry like a rhino.

If you didn't betray yourself then why does your body smelled of petrol?

You remain naked after that, you were ashamed of your clothes.

Once again, wound, once again, regrets, once again the neck-slap of foreignness

For the thousandth time you cover the corpses of your hopes in the death blanket.

In between the borders and bothers you constantly throw yourself in the water and fire

You look at yourself in the mirror and say: what was all that you had to put up because of me?

Suhrab Sirat is a poet, writer and journalist. Three collections of his poems were published in Afghanistan. His poetry collection in English is The Eighth Crossing (Exiled Writers Ink, 2021).

Poems by the Plaza Girls collective

These poems are by the Plaza Girls collective: Adele Qias, Arian Ashory, Ely Qias, Karima Qias, Mahmonir Shirzad, who escaped from Afghanistan and worked with poet Homan Yousofi to create poetry. Their work appeared in Issue 2 of the Plaza Girls Magazine and in the collection Chink of Light.

Fake Shadows
Karima Qias

Let's get away from this double-difficult weather
Get rid of the fake shadows
Let's stand on the lips of the dew in the middle of the night
And slowly land on leaves at midnight

A Voice

A voice crosses my imagination
A breeze is passing through my mind screen
I can hear it drifting in the shadow of the paper wall

The Sun

The weight of the sun on the curtains
Falls
Life, again
Waking hope

Based in Brussels, Karima Qias was born in Iran of Afghan and Tajik origin. During her migration to Europe, which took her to Greece and then Belgium, Karima discovered the power and benefits of writing as a weapon of political combat but also as a means of poetic expression. She has written about her experiences as a refugee in Moria camp and Athens.

My Kabul

These daily cracks and breaking sounds
this blackening of your skies
The reddening of your soul
takes the hope of your green away

A Secret

in salt there must be a secret
  that is both in our tears
    and also in the sea

No Soul

Sometimes you live in form alone
      you have no soul
          you only
           breathe

Chains

Adele Qias

Destroy the chains
Drown them in the sea
Make the depths speak again

Kabul Art Lords wall art is now painted over

To The West

By Zulmat

This is an extract from the novel in progress by Zulmat whose whereabouts are unknown. The author has changed his name to protect his identity.

I was cleaning the kitchen when I heard the door knock, so I stopped cleaning and waited to see who it was.
“Would you like to drink tea?” I asked Walid as he entered the hall.
“Yes. If there is any, it will be superb.” He replied and walked toward the living room.
“Did you hear the news?” I asked. He stopped and turned to me, and I went on. “A lot of people have gone to the United States and Europe via Kabul Airport, without passports or visas.”
“They are all rumours,” he said casually and stepped into the living room.
“Wait!” I called. Wiping my hands with a piece of cloth, I walked out of the kitchen. “Why are you escaping from me?” I asked, trying to be agreeable. “Do you hate to be with me?”
He stopped and turned to me with a curious look.
“It’s true,” I said, entering the living room. “I heard the news on TV.”
I turned down the TV volume to talk to him calmly. Faryal and Frebaa stopped watching TV and turned to us, and Samir, waiting for an opportunity, took the remote control and changed the channel to watch a cartoon.
“These are all lies,” said Walid. “People exaggerate everything.”
“You don’t know. A lot of people have gone.”
“Some people might have gone on the first day, but now the situation has changed.”

I expected my words to have a positive effect and motivate him, but that didn't happen. Samir turned the TV volume up, so I turned to him.
"Turn the volume down!" I ordered him with tense nerves, and turning to Walid, I went on. "The situation hasn't changed for us. We have your documents, so we can go."
"Maybe you are right. You have sent the e-mails, haven't you? We have to wait for their answer. After they answer your e-mail…"
"The foreigners have time till the end of August. If we don't act soon, we may not be able to migrate."
"What can we do? We aren't able to do anything."
"If we go to Kabul…"
"What, what, what did you say?" asked Walid, looking me straight in the eyes. "I didn't catch you."
Upset by the way he was staring at me, I repeated my words. "I said if we go to Kabul…"
"Going to Kabul is useless."
"Anyways, it is better than sitting on our hands here and doing nothing. We have to go to Kabul at any cost."
"No one goes to Kabul. It's final," Walid said in a fixed tone.
"You neither do nothing, nor do you let me do anything."
"Because I know it is useless."
"On what basis have you come to this conclusion?"
"I don't have to give you a reason."
"No. You do have to give the reason because it is not just a matter of your life."
"That's enough. Close the subject."
"No. It's not enough," I said my voice trembling. "We have to talk about it."
"The matter is closed."
"Nothing is closed. This is not an issue to skip that easily. It is related to the lives of all of us, and I won't let you ruin everything with a wrong decision."
Samir stopped watching TV and turned to us. The signs of fear appeared on Faryal and Frebaa's faces.
"What did you say? A wrong decision? You want to take everyone to Kabul in such a critical situation, and you talk about a wrong decision?"
"Yes, because I know you are wrong."
"What rubbish."
"Anyway, we have to go to Kabul."
"I won't allow it."
"I'm not asking for your permission." I clenched my fists, got closer to him, and looked into his eyes incensed with anger. "Whether you want to come with us or not, is up to you. I will take my children and go."

My children looked at me with astonishment and fear. I found myself physically small compared to him, but the energy created in me at that very moment gave me the feeling that I was able to face anyone opposing me. I was no longer that patient, agreeable woman.
“Do your ears hear what you are saying?”
“Yes, better than you,” I replied, my voice louder.
“Safia, don’t try my patience,” he said, raising his voice, “otherwise…”
“Otherwise, what?” I asked, not taking my eyes off his. “Will you hit me again? Will you? Will you? Hit me! Hit me! For God’s sake, hit meeee!” I shouted with my eyes full of tears. “Why don’t you hit meeee?”
“Do you want me to hit you?” he asked, his eyes widened and the blood vessels of his neck became thicker than usual. “Then take this.”
He raised his hand, and at the same time, Samir shouted with fear, and Faryal and Frebaa yelled all the while crying.
“Don’t hit her, dear father! Don’t hit her!”
Walid stayed his hand, turned, and looked at their frightened faces and tearful eyes.
“If you don’t let us go to Kabul,” I warned, looking at him with teary eyes, “I swear by God I will burn myself.”
Trembling with rage, I was ready for anything, even death. Life had become unbearable for me. I had endured years of misery and frustration, yet there was nothing on the horizon of my life except despair, discouragement, and a dark future.
“Are you out of your mind?” he asked and looked at me with raised eyebrows.
“Yes. I am out of my mind.” I shouted like a crazy person. “I’m tired of this life. I’m tired of this poverty. My life has been nothing but misery. I won’t let my children’s lives be ruined like mine.”
I, who had always been gentle and tolerant, I, who thought a woman should respect her husband and try to keep the atmosphere of her home warm and pleasant, suddenly changed to an aggressive and militant creature. I had never thought I would become such a wild and unyielding creature and one day raise my voice like that and be so determined and ready for anything.
“Did you say you wouldn’t let your children’s lives be ruined like yours? That means I ruined your life.” Walid pointed out with an questioning look at me.
“Yes, you have,” I said, no longer caring about anything.
Walid fixed his eyes on me, annoyed and upset, and then looked at the frightened and crying faces of Frebaa, Faryal, and Samir and went to the bedroom.
Until then, I had acted as per his decisions because I did not want to argue with him. I tried to avoid bitter times at home. But this time, I was not

ready to miss the opportunity. The atmosphere of home seemed to be annoying. The joy and happiness created in us at the thought of immigration had given way to sadness and despair. I was upset that I had hurt his feelings, but I was not ready to take a step back. Even when I said I would burn myself, I was firm in my decision. Maybe Walid felt how determined I was, or maybe not, but whatever it was, I was tired of such a poor life until death.

Walid didn't get come of the bedroom after that, nor had I asked him to come and have dinner with us. I didn't care for him anymore. I sat with my children on the floor while they had their dinner. They ate their meals at a slow pace and in gloomy silence. I didn't feel hungry, so I didn't touch the meal. My gaze was immersed in the patterns on the old carpet. I was tired and heartbroken. Therefore, we had reached a point and I did not know where it would end.

However, I felt sleepy; I stayed in the living room until late at night. I did not want to go to the bedroom until Walid was asleep. I hated to see him. I turned to the bedroom many times. The light was off. The room deepened in total silence. He may have been asleep then. He could give pain to everyone and sleep on his own. It was very likely for him.

When I entered the bedroom, contrary to my expectations, I found him awake. He was sitting on the floor with his back leaned against the wall and his legs extended forward, staring at the front wall in silence. Depressed and upset, I entered the room. I didn't turn on the light nor did I tell him anything, for I did not want to back down from my position by starting to talk to him, and I knew that Walid would remain firm in his position.

I took my pillow from the corner of the bedroom and threw it on the floor. The sound of the pillow hitting the ground seemed louder than usual. It was unpleasant to hear such a sound at that time of night. I did not care. Without flattening anything on the carpet, I lay on the other side of the room with my back to him.

Some time passed in total annoying silence. My eyes had just shut when I heard Walid's voice and jerked awake.

"I have always tried to provide good living conditions for you and my children."

I remained motionless with my back to him, giving not a jot about what he said.

© Orna Kazimi

“Are you asleep?”
I did not want to talk to him, so I took a deep breath to let him know I was awake.
“Do you think I don’t care about you and my children?” he continued. “I like to see all of you happy and comfortable.”
I kept quiet. My eyes were used to the dark, and I could see the objects in the room in the dim light coming from the neighbouring house. A mosquito was fluttering with a buzzing sound in the room.
“When I see you and my children having a hard time, I suffer,” he said.
I said nothing. Silence engulfed the room again.
“Why are you silent?” he asked moments later. “Why don’t you say anything?”
“I have nothing to say,” I replied, my back still to him.
“You said I ruined your life. It hurt me because I have tried my best to provide comforts for you and my children.”

I felt a severe itching in my ankle. I stretched my hand and started to scratch my ankle.
“Other men try to do whatever is in their ability for their family,” I said, as I was scratching my ankle, “but you sit on your hands and just look at others.”
“What can I do? I can’t do anything.”
Our tones were soft and sad.
I sat on the carpet and turned to him. “All those people can do something, but you can’t? Why?” I asked.
“Because they have at least something to sell, but we don’t.”
“When we have nothing, we should seize the opportunity. Our whole life has passed in misery. We mustn’t let our children suffer the same pains.”
He folded his legs under him and turned to me.
“What else do you expect from life?” he asked. “It is life.”
“No, it is not life,” I said with a fixed tone. “We have never lived. We have always tried to survive. We have always longed for the comfort others enjoyed in their lives. Is it life? Trying to stay alive? Are you sure? Is it? To suppress all your desires and aspirations. To dream and dream and dream while you know your dreams will never come true. To give up all joy and happiness. Do you call it life?”
“I tried to the best of my ability. What else could I do?”
“Well. What was the result of your efforts?” I asked, waiting for his response.
“What else did you expect from me?”
“A simple life. A life without stress.” I replied with a sigh. “What dreams we envisaged for our children! But because of financial problems, we haven’t been able to do anything for them. We even couldn’t supply them with the basic requirements of life. Before this, we had hope, but after this, we can’t expect anything except a dark future. I don’t want a lot. I just want my children to have the basic educational facilities that people in other countries have and a simple life without problems. Is it a lot I want?”
“Wait for a while. Everything will be alright. The Taliban are good people. They aren’t like the thieves who worked for the previous government and …”
“You can’t catch me. Remember the previous Taliban government. We weren’t even allowed to leave our homes. All the time, from morning to night, we were living like prisoners in our homes. We weren’t allowed to go to the bazaar but had to be escorted by a man. Girls weren’t allowed to go to school, and the schools for male students were the worst. We shouldn’t let our children remain illiterate. They shouldn’t suffer living in such a strict environment. They should have their choices. Before this, with all the financial problems, our life was tolerable because we had

hope. No one knows what may happen in the future. The future might be the worst of all the periods we have ever experienced."

Utopians of Tahrir Square

An interview with translators Dr. Anba Jawi and Catherine Davidson

by Danielle Maisano

One of the last events hosted by Exiled Writers Ink before the first coronavirus lockdown, held at The Poetry Café in Covent Garden, featured the poems of and inspired by the groups of young people that had taken over Tahrir Square in Baghdad in October of 2019. They were in the midst of risking their lives to occupy the square against vicious and deadly attacks by militias and government security forces. That night in London, translations of the poems were read out to a captive audience by a group of drama students from Regent's University, helping to raise awareness of events getting little coverage in Western media. The event was the result of a collaboration between British-Iraqi poet and scientist

Anba Jawi and British-American poet Catherine Davidson. The two began work on the project after Jawi began collecting poems from the protesters, inspired by their actions and feeling the need to do something to help their cause. Originally, a live broadcast from Iraq to London had been planned, but during a technical rehearsal the technician helping was killed by gunshots and so the plan had to be abandoned, but the event was streamed live from London across the world.

In January of 2021, a collection of poetry by the protesters comprised of some of the same poetry read out that night in the Poetry Café was published as an anthology collected by poet Sama Hussein in Baghdad. Davidson and Jawi quickly began work translating the rest of the poems into English and the book, *Utopians of Tahrir Square*, was published in English in 2022. The poems are haunting, full of emotion and imagery that convey the limits reached by a youthful people who understand that their fight to live in a peaceful and equitable country has reached a now or never moment. Their words are sad and powerful. This is a generation born in the wake of the U.S. led invasion, daring to dream of a future differing from the one they have known for most of their lives; A life of death and war that has enveloped the country for over twenty years. But what makes the collection so much more powerful is that it is not with defeat that they meet this moment. It is in the joyful defiance of knowing that they have given everything to a fight for a better tomorrow. Many gave their very lives. As the poem "Commandment of the Happy Dead Man' by Ali Ibrahim Al-Yasiri states:

> Do not wear black for me, black is fake.
> Even the sad songs
> Should have a bit of joy.
>
> When my body leaves you,
> Lear a kiss a kiss that marks the soul…
> And please, take down my pictures from the walls;
>
> I want to die free.

Exiled Writers Ink was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Jawi and Davidson about their work and their hopes for this movement and its future.

Tell me about your experiences and work to translate the poems? What was difficult? What was surprising?

Catherine: I had worked with Anba before, as part of our Exiled Writers Ink mentoring and translation scheme and also during the poetry workshops. When she started sharing the poems with me, even in her initial translations, what surprised me was how immediate and urgent they felt, like hearing a voice on the other side of a wall, shouting out for help. You had to follow until you saw who was there, what was happening. As we worked together, we got to know each poet – their humour, their point of view, even their life stories. It was the first time I had ever done translation work, and it could only be done in partnership with Anba. She is so passionate about the Arabic language and was so emotionally committed to the poets and their work. What surprised me most was how much joy our collaboration gave us both. Even though the subject matter of the poems was often grim and heart-breaking, we got real satisfaction and pleasure hunting connotations and resonances in order to find just the right word so Anba could say: ah, that is it, that is what the poem was trying to say. It felt like taking someone by the hand and pulling them to safety.

Anba: Iraqi poetry is full of metaphors and imagery. But the imagery is so abstract. And the challenge is to understand what the poet is trying to say. And so, I had to contact the individuals poets and ask them 'What did you mean by this, what did you mean by that?' Poetry in Iraq has changed dramatically, because it has had to adjust to the changes happening; the socio-economic changes that happened, and mainly, the political ones. For example, there was a young poet who wrote what would translate literally as 'the black material, or 'the owners of the black material.' And I didn't understand what he was trying to say, so I talked to him and then I understood. He couldn't say, 'the mullahs' because he was afraid of what they might do to him. So, he referred to the black material. There are many references like that, so abstract, about the corrupted religious leaders. The poets would search discreetly, and I wouldn't understand it.

Anba, why was it important for you to have an English translation of these poems?

Anba: For me there are two reasons. One, I wanted these young people, for their experience and voices to reach English speaking people so they could share with them their experience, which was extraordinary. After forty years of oppression, it's the first time young people challenged the government. That courage won my admiration and respect and I thought they deserved to know that English speaking people are aware and know how these people challenged the government.

The second reason is because their poetry was a documentation. Because we know that there are two sides that write history; the people in power, they write history, which is distorted from their point of view. And then there are the normal people who know their history is completely different from what those in power write. So, I wanted documentation of the true, true history. I want researchers to read the book, because as I said, it's a document. For anyone who wants to study the uprising. And there are many academics who follow what's happening in Iraq, they should read the book, really, to understand the reality of what's happened.

Catherine, you wrote a very powerful piece on Medium about the original performance of the poems that took place in Covent Garden at the poetry Café in London. Can you talk about your experience as an American, telling these stories?

Catherine: This is an interesting and important question. I am ashamed to say when I started hearing the stories from Anba about the protests in Tahrir Square, it felt distant to me – something happening far away. As I learned more about the devastation felt by a generation whose promise and potential were cut off by massive political corruption and economic inequality, I recognised not only a situation mirrored by our growing inequality here but also, sadly, my connection through history to what was happening at that moment. After all, it was the country of my first citizenship, America, that had gone into Iraq and heedlessly and violently intervened in its polity, arrogantly assuming it knew best and leaving behind a terrible legacy that was also a failed promise. How can you "bring democracy" to another country you know so little about? Americans knew nothing about Iraq and still know nothing, and yet to the young Iraqis, the belief in human rights, in equal opportunity, in a just and fair society that works for all, was not a slogan or an idea. Their passion and commitment were so poignant and so moving – ideas I believe we should all be working for around the world. In fact, it is what we say we stand for and yet seem so willing to ignore.

What do you want the world to know about the Utopians of Tahrir Square and what do you hope for the future of this movement?

Catherine: The young people who risked their lives protesting in Tahrir Square in Baghdad share a vision with others of their generation around the world – a vision of a free, fair and democratic society that works for the benefit of all its citizens, and not just for the handful at the top who suck up and keep all the good things for themselves. It feels to me that we

are at a tipping point as a species. Will we go forward into a Mad Max future where a handful of corrupt and violent authoritarians dictate the fate of our planet, or will we make a shift to a political and economic system that works to empower everyone – so we can draw on all the talents, creativity and vision we will need from each and every human to make sure we learn how to live in balance with our planet and its creatures, so that we can give up our exploitation and extraction and learn some other way of being here together? When I saw the free libraries and donated health care and shared meals and generous creativity and vibrant, pulsing, multi-coloured love for each other that was manifested in the protests, I too, felt like a Utopian. I, too, believed that another world was possible. These waves keep rising up and getting crushed. Many of the poets we translated have had to leave their country to save their lives. I have to believe one day the waves will be so strong they cannot be smothered. I have to believe it – for the sake of the young of the world, and for the sake of my own, still hopeful self.

Anba: I think the world needs to understand that the whole globe has become too small, with all this new technology, it has become like a small village. And these young people in Iraq, in Colombia and Chile and Iran and Lebanon – in 2019 there was an uprising in many parts of the world – it's related. For example, what happens in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Chile will affect Britain one way or another. We are interlinked. We are a small entity, we are not large. For example, in Iran, if any changes happen in Iran tomorrow, it will immediately affect Iraq, and not only Iraq, but it will affect the whole world as well.

Anba, are you still optimistic about the movement after it has been seemingly defeated by the Iraqi government?

Anba: I am still optimistic about the movement. I wasn't optimistic about the uprising before because I thought, who would be able to challenge this monster? I did not expect it to be possible, not in the very near future. But the uprising of 2019 did happen and now possibly, a new generation will learn from it so that there will be a better uprising that might create major changes. I am optimistic because an uprising happened in 2019. It planted a seed of hope.

Danielle Maisano is a U.S. born novelist currently residing in London. Her debut novel, The Ardent Witness (Victorina Press), was a finalist for the 2019 International Book Awards fiction category.

Book Reviews

Forty Names by Parwana Fayyaz

Published by Carcanet, 2021

Reviewed by Catherine Davidson

Parwana Fayyaz poetry book, *Forty Names*, published by Carcanet, has been critically acclaimed and chosen as a Poetry Book Society selection; the title poem won the 2019 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. The book has been beautifully designed with a deep black cover and the "0" of 40 shaped like an eye containing the yellow iris word "names". This evokes perfectly a book of poems that act as witnesses to women in Afghanistan who live their vivid stories behind an imposed black out.

Fayyaz was born in 1990 in Kabul, where she completed high school after having moved to Pakistan with her family. She earned her BA and MA from Stanford University, and a PhD in Persian Studies from Cambridge University, where she currently works.

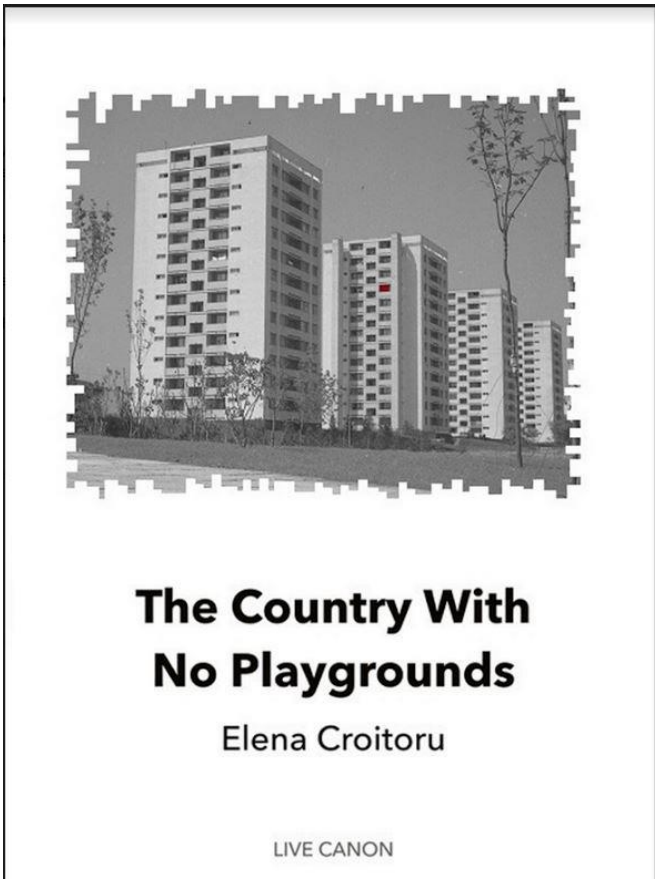
Her book is divided into four parts, and is as gripping as a novel. The first section, *Roqeera,* carries her mother's name and contains poems that weave the story of childhood exile in Pakistan, during the first Taliban regime. Her mother's skills as a seamstress become an extended metaphor for women's creative resilience, the way scraps of fabric from Kabal are sewn together to fashion a skirt "emanating rivers of color -/flowing towards the ground" that "danced around my legs/stirred by the wind" – images of movement, life, fluidity and "bright dreams".

The second section, *Patience Flower to Morning Dew*, is named for two of women in the ancestral line, whose stories form a patchwork of fable-like tales of women stolen, betrayed, murdered, married off, and yet, who manage to pass on their spark, like the emerald and ruby rings worn by her grandmothers. The poems suggest that in Afghanistan, "women exist in corners and no one sees". When "history pays visits to women" it fails them, even judges them, but these poems act as a form of recovery.

"Forty names" is a poem about a group of young women who take refuge in a cave during a time of conflict. Each one is named, before an act of violence scatters them. In the last lines, it is their mothers and fathers who disappear, suggesting the price that everyone pays when women are silenced.

The last few poems in the book are about poetry making, focusing on Nadia Anjuman, a poet from Herat who died a violent death "at the hands of her husband". Fayyaz recovers the poet and shares her work with Irish poet, Eavan Boland. In 2020, the poet has a dream about Eavan Boland, unpicking an image of "the green gaits of rain" that Boland had asked her explain. The poem claims that these steps lead to "the land through the light/where the country is ruled in-between/God and a woman's mind." That space of light is delineated in these beautiful poems: a place unshackled and ultimately free.

Catherine Temma Davidson is a novelist and poet with roots in Europe and the United States. She teaches Creative Writing at Regent's University, London and is a board member of Exiled Writers Ink.



Reviewed by Phil Williams

Award-winning British-Romanian poet Elena Croitoru's debut pamphlet, *The Country with No Playgrounds*, is an evocative study of childhood in post-communist Romania, where destitution was the norm. She makes the harsher elements accessible, and all the more memorable, through the lens of young innocence.

The opening poem "Playground", quickly sets this tone, with play occurring in "the unfinished body of a building" decorated with graffiti and "bone fragments". The haunting playground image recurs in "Things That Are Green", where "Cranes scratched the sky with metal limbs // and empty swings squeaked in the distance".

Throughout eighteen captivating poems, Croitoru explores childhood wonder alongside everyday struggles underpinned by violence. In "Pencil Case", children escape thoughts of oppression by admiring a glossy pencil case. In "Mechanical Frog", fascination with a toy almost makes it possible to not hear "the gunshots". Croitoru also captures striking vignettes of adult struggles, as in "Tower Block Twelve", where

the sideways stanzas conjure images of industrial skylines.

Croitoru transports you to a fully tangible, grimly urban time and place, with a strong sense of character, from the children to the parents who foster hope despite their hardships. Multiple poems show myths and dreams of flight tempered by reality, as in “How Far, How Far”, which concludes gravely that “there was no getting out, / father, you must have known”. In “Hospital View” the father has “more memories than flesh”, yet is “still trying to be / a father from beyond the edges of his bed”.

This vivid ode to a tough but hope-laced childhood has many standout lines that invite revisiting, and takes you on a journey through a concrete wasteland, before the final poem ends with perhaps the most effective contract of all: a view to the sea. A short but powerful collection, highly recommended.

Phil Williams is an author based in Sussex, known for his bestselling reference guides for learners of English and his speculative fiction, including the Ordshaw contemporary fantasy thrillers. He also freelances as an editor and designer for independent authors and publishers.

Flint by Adriana Diaz Enciso

Contraband, 2022

Reviewed by Shirin Razavian

Skilfully but in an unassuming manner the author takes us by the hand from the first sentence and embarks with us on a surrealistic adventure into a world of shadows and sorrows. She keeps us wondering whether we are in the dream of the writer, or in the bitter memories of someone’s last hours, yearning to read more along the way.

As the story slowly unfolds we encounter Diaz’s inner world and the way she eloquently describes to us with her carefully chosen words opening petal by petal as a blossoming flower. As we read on we wonder to which destination she is leading us?
“Find myself walking with you through death’s crossing, then wake next morning, puzzled, with a task in my hands: the dream that won’t go away.” She exclaims.

FLINT

adriana diaz enciso

The readers then find themselves being the dead stranger that she is trying to comfort. As it transpires the writer starts having recurring dreams about a dead rock star she is not even hugely familiar with. Every morning she wakes astonished and asks herself why? Following on from that point her dreams are overwhelmingly filled by visitations from the departed over and over again.

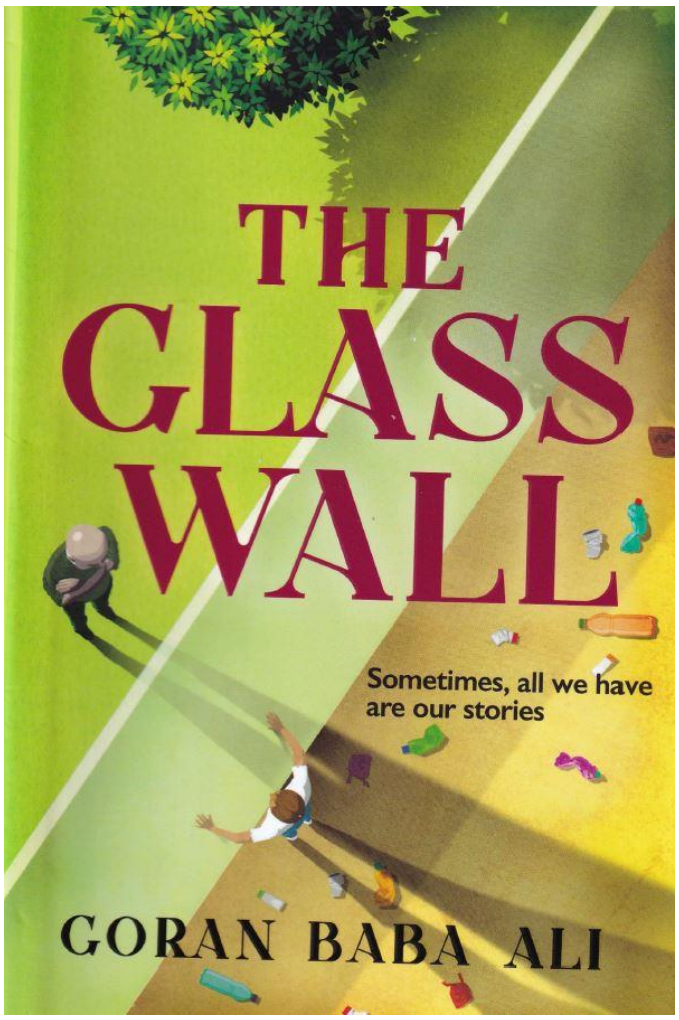
The story dwells on notions of mortality, sympathy and longing all in a smoky foggy atmosphere brimming with surrealist dreams. Having said that, the aimless wandering from scene to scene can become tiring after the half way point so that the reader starts drifting off and away from the story. This is the writer's quest to clear some misconceptions about a character that was misunderstood by her previously as she slowly gets to know him better.

I enjoyed the dark atmospheric veil that drapes over the reader. The best way this can be described is "an elegy in prose" as the writer calls it.

The Glass Wall by Goran Baba Ali

Afsana Press, London, 2021

Reviewed by Rouhi Shafii



Goran Baba Ali is an Iraqi writer from the region of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq. He is a writer of many books and has lived in and travelled to many countries. The novel, *The Glass Wall* is centred on a young man, Arman, who decides to leave his home, carrying the memories he had from his young life. The journey on land, by boat and into the desert is precarious as he is lost in the vastness of the harsh, dry sands and wild stormy winds. Finally, he ends up where he is facing a glass wall which stretches far beyond the horizon.

The story of his tired, thirsty and hungry body on one side of the wall,

and an old stocky guard, whom he saw on the other side and with whom he began to converse slowly but continuously over a period of time, reveals the reason why he left home and ended up behind that wall. In real life, Goran reflects the lives of many people who leave home for various reasons in search of a better future but face a glass wall, where they are not welcome unless they have a "good story". The "story" must be convincing to those who decide to accept them as a refugee or deny them entry.

Goran has skilfully blended the story of that young man with the historical facts which had shaped the present country the protagonist came from. He talks about those imperialists who came and divided the tribes and their lands and created countries (in this case Iraq and the region of Kurdistan) and appointed kings while some of the people still lived the old ways.

The protagonist in *The Glass Wall* is this young man, Arman, whose family came from a village in the Kurdistan region, where his grandma was the matriarch and respected by the people. Grandma was a source of stories which were blended with the region's culture and beliefs. Arman must tell the guard a convincing story in order to get the approval of those who decide his case. He is reluctant to enter the real story which is "his story". Instead, he continues with the narrative about his village, his family and his grandma. In between the narrative, he talks about his love for a girl who left him for a man living in the US and disappeared from his life. As his case for asylum is underway, Arman receives packages of food and other necessities dropped by a helicopter every two weeks. His mind is now clearer as he has enough food and water which he shares with a jackal.

Against the advice of the guard, he continues with the story of his family in the village and the town where his father worked. His asylum case is rejected because the story Arman tells the guard, which he types on his computer to send to the authorities, is not "his story". He must tell his story, whether real or made up. In between deciding to tell his story, Arman walks round the glass wall, watches the people on the other side who are sun bathing and enjoying the sun while he is burning under the scorching sun on this side of the desert and hot sands. He learns to clean his body in the desert sands and wash his few pieces of clothing and the utensils he uses with the sand. He is confused by the way people live on the other side and cannot decide whether to follow that life style once he is granted asylum. After the many failed attempts to get his case

approved, he finally decides to tell “his story” and the reason he had to leave home.

By telling his story, he exposes the way the guerrillas who are living in the mountainous regions fighting the government are recruiting young boys and girls still in the universities and who leave the city life to train as new recruits. He, along with a young girl, songbird (because she had a wonderful voice) travel to the mountains and meet up with other young men and women who were already there. Arman continues with his story and the guard types it all, happy that this time he will be granted asylum status.

The Glass Wall is a novel rich with history of the region, life of the ordinary people in towns and villages, stories which paint the way of life in Iraqi Kurdistan and why some of the young and educated men and women have decided to live a nomadic life and take up arms to fight the government.

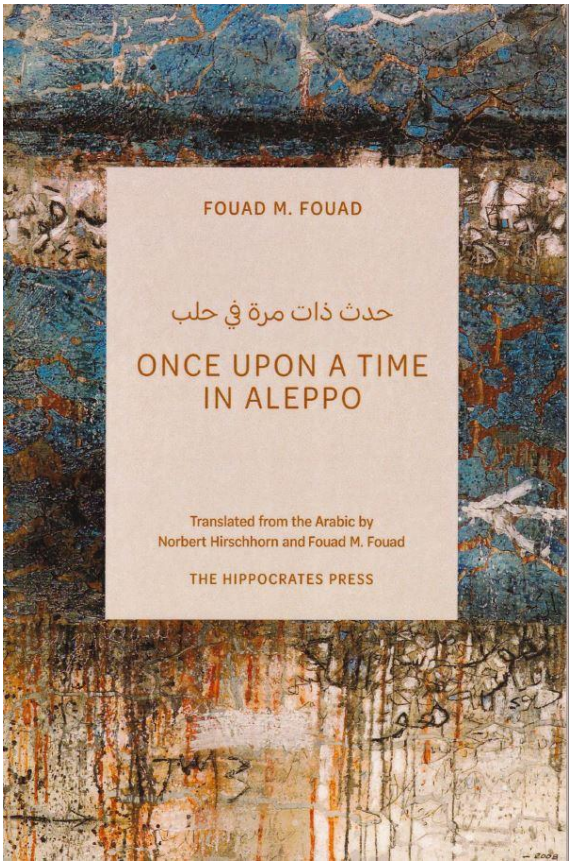
The novel ends with an unexpected narrative which leaves the reader with many questions? What happened to Arman? Why do people leave their homes and travel through precarious routes to reach where they are not wanted? More than that, what was fascinating about the book was the bridge built between the past history and the present situation which attracted my attention. I think it is this smooth route or transition from the past to the present which gives weight to the narrative.

The Glass Wall sums up the story of those who are stranded beyond the borders of Western countries and rejected by them. It is rich with local and regional cultures and the history behind the creation of those countries out of the body of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century.

Once Upon A time in Aleppo by Fouad M. Fouad

Translated from the Arabic by Norbert Hirschhorn and Fouad M. Fouad. The Hippocrates Press, 2020

Reviewed by Esther B. Lipton



This collection of poems, presented in Arabic with English translation, is dedicated to the city of Aleppo and its people.

They reflect the terrible suffering which has fallen on the ordinary citizens of Aleppo following the civil war in Syria. The relationship between poet and translator, also a renowned poet, is as friends, as brothers. They share a common background of persecution, loss of close family and forced exile and both, as distinguished physicians, are witnesses to the horrors and terrible consequences of war. Their close collaboration is evidenced by the inclusion of Hirschhorn's poem 'The Disappeared' which is 'for Fouad M Fouad'.

Fouad's anger at the indifference of the world to the plight of ordinary people caught up in conflicts outside their control is expressed in his poem, 'The Wall Artist of Aleppo': 'I want to shake the world by its shoulders.' The world stands by and 'sees no evil.' His vivid description of being in a war, waking up to a rain of nuts and bolts, going to sleep by candlelight and counting the dead, captures the day to day reality. Fouad, however, does not stand by. He pastes manifestos on remaining walls, scrawls poems and curses. The poem 'The Wolf in the Hospital Corridor'

is powerful. In just a few lines we too, become witnesses to the chilling image of 'Bandages unroll in the waiting room following drops of blood.' We feel the pain of those tortured to death, the terror, the hopelessness of their predicament. We understand the frustration of a doctor being unable to help.

The deep compassion of Fouad expressed in these harrowing poems resonates strongly. 'Writing hurts', he tells us. Reading these poems also hurts. His words create images, feelings for our fellow men and anger at the injustices. The poems are a catalyst for others to learn, to understand the reality and to protest on behalf of all civilians affected by war.

Esther B Lipton writes poetry and short stories and has been published in national and international anthologies. Prize winner: Voices Israel, International Reuben Rose Competition (2020). Reviewer and translator.

Come What May by Ahmed Masoud

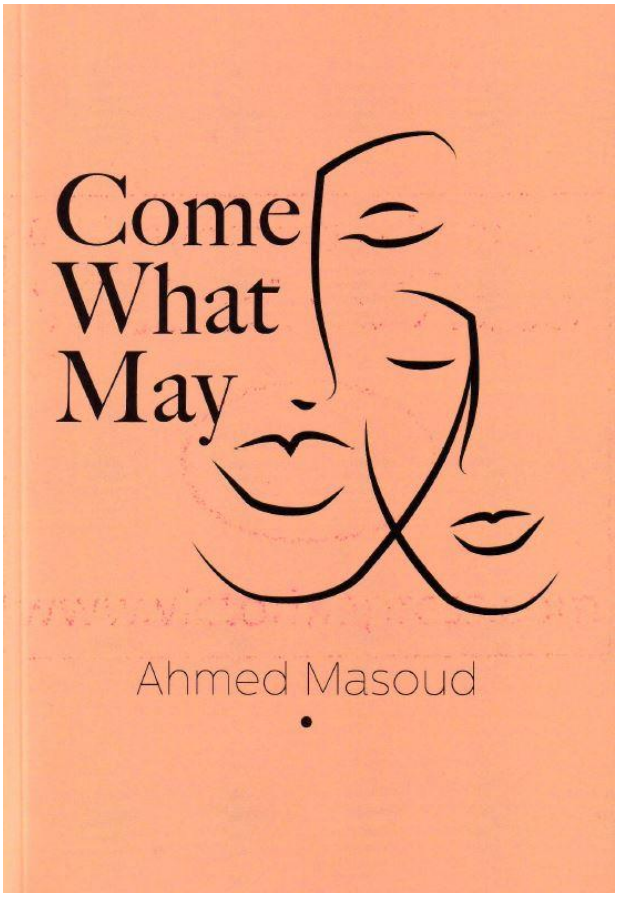
Victorina Press, 2022

Reviewed by Danielle Maisano

"How does one investigate murder in the middle of a war zone? Does it matter if a person is killed by an airstrike or a knife?"

This is the premise of Ahmed Masoud's debut novel *Come What May*, published earlier this year by Victorina Press. It's a fascinating foundation to begin with but made even more so by the setting itself. The book takes place in the Gaza Strip, following the 2014 war in a country still reeling from the devastating and seemingly never-ending aftermath.

The protagonist, Zahra, is a thirty-something Palestinian woman, hoping to uncover the truth of her husband's murder. Eager to dismiss his death as the result of relentless Israeli bombs, the police have dismissed her loss as just another causality of war. That is, until she finds a detective willing to investigate, though he may be risking his own life in the process.



Originally born to refugees in Jabaliya refugee camp, Zahra has left it to begin a more cosmopolitan life in Gaza City. Having studied English there and married into a well-off family, she navigates the difficulties of class and gender stereotypes with intelligent irony, both with humour and equitable anger. Through her voice, the reader is witness to the realities of daily life in Gaza, made even more dangerous, at times, by the fact she has been born a woman.

But it is not just a story of death and destruction. Its themes are timeless; family and betrayal. War and corruption. And in the end, and perhaps most importantly, love. Masoud's novel reminds of something we shouldn't need reminding of. That beyond the headlines there are individual lives going on, people who are constantly navigating the chaos and uncertainty of a life in unremitting struggle.

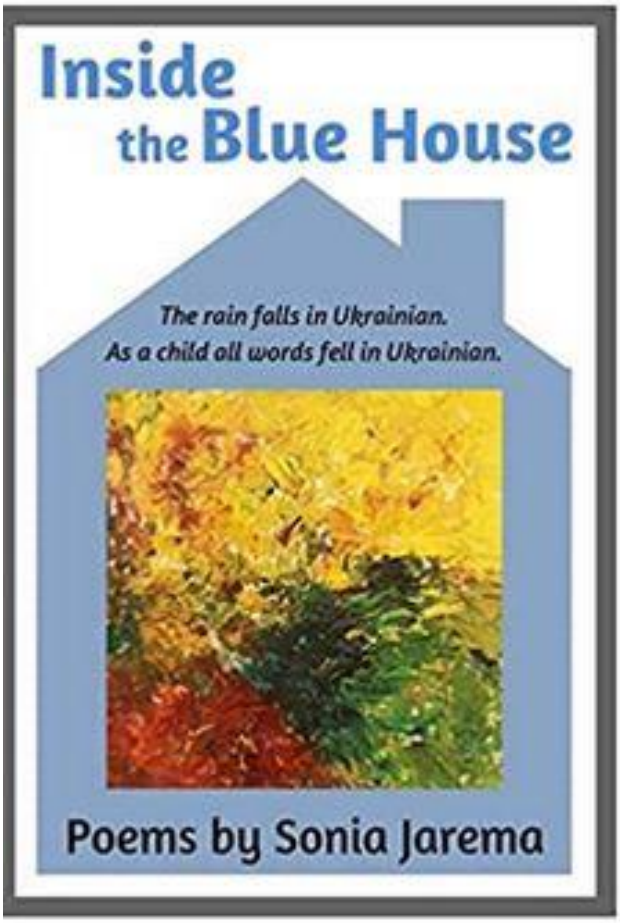
Inside the Blue House by Sonia Jarema

Palewell Press, 2019

Reviewed by Catherine Davidson

Inside the Blue House is a Palewell Press pamphlet of poetry by Ukrainian British poet, Sonia Jarema, that mixes stories of a visit to her parents' homeland as an adult with poems recalling a childhood spent under the shadow of immigration and displacement.

Jarema's poems are clear and sharply observant. She is also very good at building a character or scene, in condensed narratives that contain layers of deep history behind the story. In her short poem, "Pan Osadchiuk" a visit to an old man takes a turn when instead of answering a question about the past, he talks about his three cats, who: "eat dinner at the table with us/wearing napkins round their necks," one image summing up unspoken losses and human resilience in the face of pain.



The poems go back and forth between stories of return and stories of childhood. In the poems set in Ukraine, landscapes, people, events seem to contain hints of hidden history that the speaker can only glimpse between lines. The poems set in childhood have the quality of dark fairy tales, where so much of what happens carries the weight of things unseen

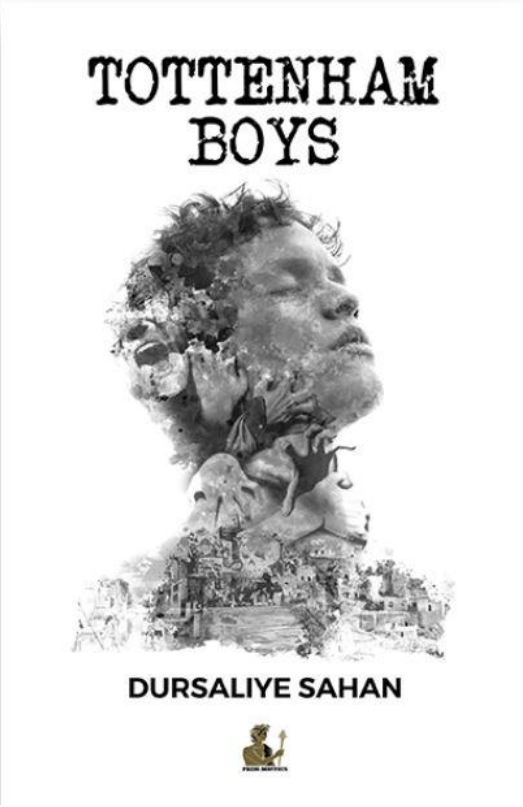
or unspoken. In “Dinner Time”: “Mama feeds us as though we have a field to plough/Eating is slow, so much gets caught in my throat.”

In “What the Silver Birches Know” the speaker foregoes the opportunity to fill her water bottle with holy water on her way to the airport after a visit. What the visitor cannot hold, the “silver birches know” – landscapes have their own way of telling stories, even when language fractures.

While these are timeless poems about family and displacement, this 2019 pamphlet is even more timely and worth reading now as a new generation of Ukrainians find their lives shattered by the senseless violence of autocracy.

Tottenham Boys by Dursaliye Sahan

Dionysus Press, 2021



Tottenham Boys is the first novel by author Dursaliye Şahan who has had dozens of short stories published. It is an important novel as it provides insights into the hidden world of a particular group of young migrants in London.

The reader is quickly absorbed by the narrative as we follow the main protagonist young Keko on his physical, mental and emotional journey which stretches from eastern Turkey to London. Through his story Şahan touches on one of the neglected aspects of the migration issue, namely the socio-political relations behind migration. Keko is one of the dozens of young people who fall into the trap of drug gangs in London and Şahan reveals the chain of relations behind the reality of the gang. The forgotten police files of the juvenile gang members with their mysterious suicides have been closed in haste but cannot be erased from memory. The echoes of the events continued to be poured into stories and circulated from mouth to mouth. The novelist exposes the suicides of the young people from the Turkish community in London as well as the social, political, economic and traditional relations behind them.

Sahan comments 'The geography you were born in, your family, your circumstances, and the sum of the abilities bestowed on your body is destiny. The rest is the struggle of life. In a sense, it is an endless war between good and evil.'