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Live  
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POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH

ARAB POETS IN TRANSLATION

AUGUST 2023

DR SALWA GOUDA  
PRESENTS  
ARAB POETS IN TRANSLATION

COVER ARTWORK 'INTERTWINED' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE





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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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*Live Encounters Magazine (2010), Live Encounters Poetry & Writing (2016), Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers (2019) and now, Live Encounters Books (August 2020).*

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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ARAB POETS IN TRANSLATION  
AUGUST 2023

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Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 271 publications (till August 2023). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*; *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas/> <https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Ulyseas/e/B01FUUQVBG>



Cairo, Egypt. ca. 1550

## SUQ UKAZ\*

Thank you, Dr. Salwa Gouda, for gathering twenty-three Arab poets from Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, and Palestine, and translating their unpublished work into English.

Is poetry lost in translation? Can the essence of its cultural roots be transported into another Word without losing the colour, texture and breath of its soul?

The question is – how else can one read poetry written in a foreign language?

How do poets meet in the warp and weft of cultures if language is the barrier?

This edition of Arab poets in translation is the first in a series of cross-cultural poetry conferences in Word. Live Encounters hopes to publish Irish poets in translation (in Arabic) in the near future.

Our salaams to:

*Ahmad Al-Shahawy, Ahmed Al-Muraikhi, Ahmed Nabawi, Aicha Bassry, Ali Al-Shalah, Chawki Bazih, Esraa Al-Nimr, Essam Khalifa, Faris Khader, Gerges Shoukry, Hassan Najmi, Kamal Abdel Hamid, Maha Otoum, Mohamed Miloud Grafi, Muhammad Al-Kafrawi, Muhammad Al-Mutayyam, Musa Hawamdeh, Nagat Ali, Nihad Zaki, Parween Habib, Reem Najmi, Sameh Mahgoub and Samir Darwish.*

\*Arabs also took part in poetry gatherings in pre-Islamic times. This was known as *Suq Ukaz*, where poets from different places met to recite their poetry in a cultural festival supported by their rulers. – Dr. Salwa Gouda.



Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian academic at The English Language and Literature Department in Ain-Shams University. She is a PhD holder in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and at California State University in San Bernardino. She has published many academic books including *Lectures in English Poetry*, *Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism* and others. She also contributed to the translation of *The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers* including poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians and men of letters.

## DR SALWA GOUDA ARAB POETS IN TRANSLATION

Poetry is one of the essential resources of the Arabic culture and personality. It is one of the most important facets, which identifies the Arabs as a distinct civilization. From the very earliest stages in the Arabic literary tradition, it has reflected the deepest sense of Arab self-identity, of communal history, and of aspirations for the future. Poetry has never had an effect on a nation as it did on the Arab nation. A single sonnet of praise could raise an entire tribe to the highest level of glory, honor and fame. Whereas a disparaging verse could throw it into the abyss of disgrace and shame. It has the power to ignite wars and to send armies to the battlefields. Within this tradition, the role of the poet has been of major significance. They are honored and are held in high esteem. The kings and caliphs used to lavish them with gifts and titles. Many of them had their own poets who chronicled their achievements. The Arabs also took part in poetry gatherings in pre-Islamic times. This was known as *Suq Ukaz*, where poets from different places met to recite their poetry in a cultural festival supported by their rulers.



Dr Salwa Gouda

In the Arab world, poetry is heard every day and everywhere. Vernacular poetry, classical poetry, prose poetry are recited at weddings, funerals, schools, and other social gatherings. Reading Arabic poetry is like reading an alternative history of love, exile, death, nostalgia, longing, grief, mystery; things that have been carried around for centuries and which are not culture-specific. It addresses every person on earth regardless of all kinds of distinctions. The beauty of Arabic poetry is also mirrored in the beauty of the structure, meanings and melody. Like all creative arts, Arabic poetry has been influenced by the changes that have occurred in the world, as it receives them, interacts with them, and develops its cognitive and formal tools as a result.

Arabic poetry is also affected by the translations of world poetry, which had started early a century and half ago. As reading poetry in translation will not only allow us to find affinities with poets internationally, but also surreptitiously influence our writing, shaping us into more informed, more ethical, and more connected writers. Translation also introduces semantic and aesthetic components that has renewed the Arabic poetic discourse, which emanated from the employment of myths, symbols, places, masks and cosmic philosophical opinions. Arabic poetry has been influenced by the translations of the poetry of Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Emily Dickenson, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, Walt Whitman, Arthur Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Saint-John Perse, Kavafis and others.

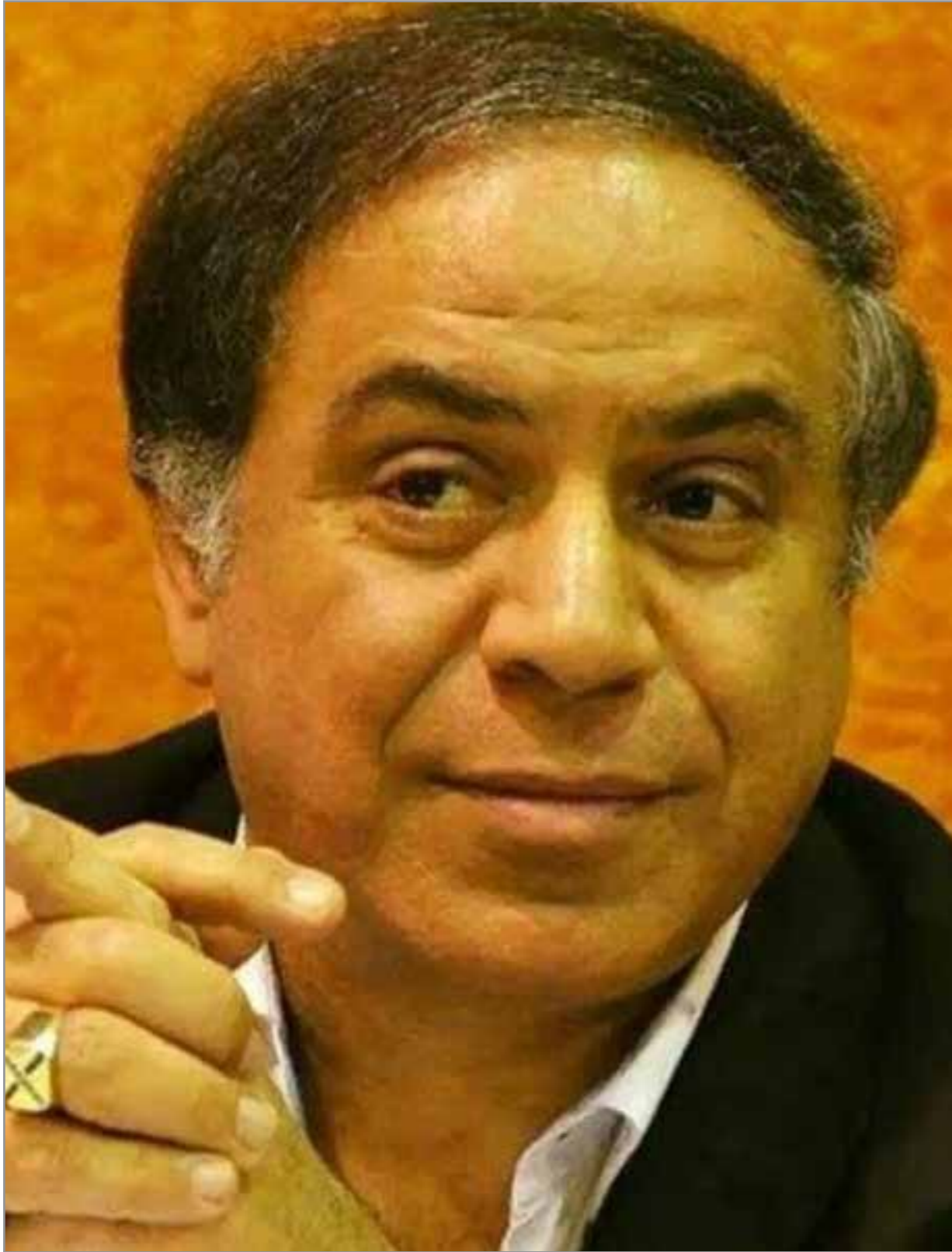
Another important issue to be mentioned is that translation of poetry is not an easy task as the translator should be aware of the source language as well as the target language's culture, syntax, grammar and poetic tradition. The translator must know the poetic structure, which makes poetry's sentences and its lines stand as a whole. As the components, which constitute the aesthetic values of a poem have a meaning only when they are correlated with other types of meanings in the text. This is the reason behind the early debates about the translatability and untranslatability of poetry. In my opinion, it is possible and needed. We, as humans belonging to one human civilization and different cultures need to know and read each other for the sake of peace, tolerance, mutual understanding, and acceptance.

Depending on what I mentioned before about the importance and the influence of translation, I have a tendency to continue bringing Arabic poetry into international recognition by translating it into English. Translation brings the poem's assertion from its current micro language to the macro world stage. In addition, poetry translation can offer countless benefits to the recipient culture.

This special edition from *Live Encounters Poetry and Writing* is devoted to Arabic poetry in translation as it includes the translated poetry of twenty-three prestigious poets from different Arab countries including Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, and Palestine who put their insights, hearts, souls, and individual music on well-articulated poetic forms. They tackle universal cosmic themes of loss, disillusionment, collectivism, individualism and societal changes with an apparent Sufi world vision. The goal is to continue our task of translating Arabic poetry, as we need Arabic poetry to be read and recognized. Finally, special thanks is due to *Mark Ulyseas* of *Live Encounters* for his belief in the power of poetry. My thanks extend to the great Egyptian poet Ahmad Al-Shahawy for his support of the idea and his constant encouragement.



Ahmad Al-Shahawy is an Egyptian poet and author of more than 20 books and poetry collections. His poems have been translated into many languages including French, Italian, English, Turkish and Spanish. He participated in many international poetry festivals organized in many countries of the world. Al-Shahawy was also the recipient of UNESCO literature award in 1995, and Cavafy Poetry award in 1998. Four of his literary works were nominated in the long list of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in the branch of literature including his novel *The Magician's Hijab*, 2022. Also, Lavender Ink / Diálogos published Al-Shahawy's poetry anthology entitled *Alone by the Nile*, 2023.



## WHAT IF I DIED ALONE AT NIGHT?

When I enter my house  
 No name there will be waiting at the door  
     Neither for me nor for my other many faces  
 Nor will the cats of the past come  
 Back to check on me  
 There is nothing but a high pressure  
 Sitting on a chair  
 And an anxiety rocking on a second chair  
 And at most dull poetry.

From now on, the likes of me have to control themselves  
 So that the head does not explode  
 From questions  
 And in order not to clot my brain  
 In the moment when doubt  
 Flows into the sea of mistrust  
 And lest the poet's brain goes  
 Into stroke  
 And the blood balls do not pour  
 On the rock of the Nile Sea.

What if I died alone at night?  
 Who will shroud my language?  
 Who will stop the tears of the awaking  
 Books on my head?  
 Who will indoctrinate *talqeen*\* my poetry  
 The testimony that I was without trees  
 Growing in my palms?

*continued overleaf..*

Ahmad Al-Shahawy

WHAT IF I DIED ALONE AT NIGHT? *contd...*

What if the stress hit my brain?  
 Will this disturb the balance of the earth?  
 Will the birds who lived on the rhythm  
 Of my words die?  
 What if death dared to sit on  
 The edge of my chair  
 And wrote me a merciless death speech  
 With no deferment?  
 Who will lay out the divine tablet on the chest?  
 Who will arrange my journey  
 For eternal oblivion?

Nothing but two eyes from the shadow  
 Nothing but ruins from the scents  
 Of memories  
 Nothing but insomnia deaf to the sound  
 Of my sleep  
 Nothing but the wind carrying  
 No hope of a cure for high blood pressure.

Will the poet have time  
 To finish his writing?  
 Or to end the biography  
 Of the cycle of silkworms?

I only find crosses carrying  
 The corpses of words  
 And dying flowers  
 And butterflies going to the way of death  
 And women who had returned to enter  
 The shrouds alone  
 Adjusting the rhythm on the cadence of the spelled blood  
 Nothing but blood trees

I sit under continuously dropping fruits  
 As if I were Adam leaving her Eden  
 Or let's say: as if I were Abel without a woman  
 Kindling her flower before the blood flows.

Who will hide from the hands of men  
 My treasury of secrets?  
 My head is compressed  
 My heart is more stressed  
 And my sky is a cascade of sentences with  
 Clipped verbs  
 And absent indexes of nouns  
 When I enter my house  
 Ants walk in my brain.  
 Fire runs below me  
 And a rusty saw chops  
 The tissues in my brain.

The night strips me of my medals  
 I remain in the wandering like an isolated  
 King robbed of grammar  
 And walking naked without secrets from my fantasy  
 There is no power and no strength in me  
 Except two carats of despair  
 And an acre of trees of the two brothers' blood  
 And a basket filled with joining words  
 Which I am not good at aptly exploiting  
 In a text.

*\* Talqeen: in Islam is performed for those who are dying to ensure they are spiritually ready for the journey into death.*



## OPEN CONCLUSION

For a woman to get off in the middle of the road  
 Means  
 Do not blame  
 Do not strain your soul  
 That the star will fall in its mirror  
 That a Passage opened for others  
 That you see a black face in your mirror  
 That you do not ask Jesus to revive your dead  
 That you do not weave a secret from flimsy thread  
 That you do not beg a memory out of forgetfulness  
 That you do not light a fire in the desert of autumn  
 That you do not milk a bull's cloud in a dead night  
 That you do not write in meter and retire from music  
 That you do not fall like a wise man  
 That you do not pray to God to be saved from the shining of the divine union  
 That you do not climb up a mulberry tree to cover a woman's nakedness with a leaf  
 That you do not dig into the language further than the silence digs  
 That you do not fancy a moon that towers over you  
 It is actually a drop of blood  
 That you do not enslave a woman's name in a text you write  
 To be immortalized  
 That you do not be ashamed of being defeated in the grass  
 As a hollow cloud  
 That you do not open a blind door  
 That you do not consume ink in praise of a woman  
 Who picks your mistakes as grapes for an open  
 Conclusion.

## TATTOOS IN MY BRAIN

I hate tattoos  
 (What is apparent and what is hidden)  
 But when I wake up  
 I saw my head full of tattoos  
 I thought it was ephemeral drawings  
 But, it is an enslaving snake  
 It commands and terminates  
 It eats from my food  
 It steals me every second

It strips the soul of its flight  
 It holds me in one direction  
 It vanquishes and subdues  
 It insinuates me for wrong acts  
 Till I became a guard of doubt  
 In my country  
 Till I doubted my fingers  
 When it plays in the void  
 And it became a stranger to me.

I came near my right hand  
 And I saw myself writing history  
 In a blink of my eyelids  
 Needles are in my head cells  
 Like rain falling  
 And the lightning tattooed in it

I did not ask for an amendment  
 I did not go to specific decorations  
 A mercenary army attacked me  
 I do not know where it came from

*continued overleaf...*

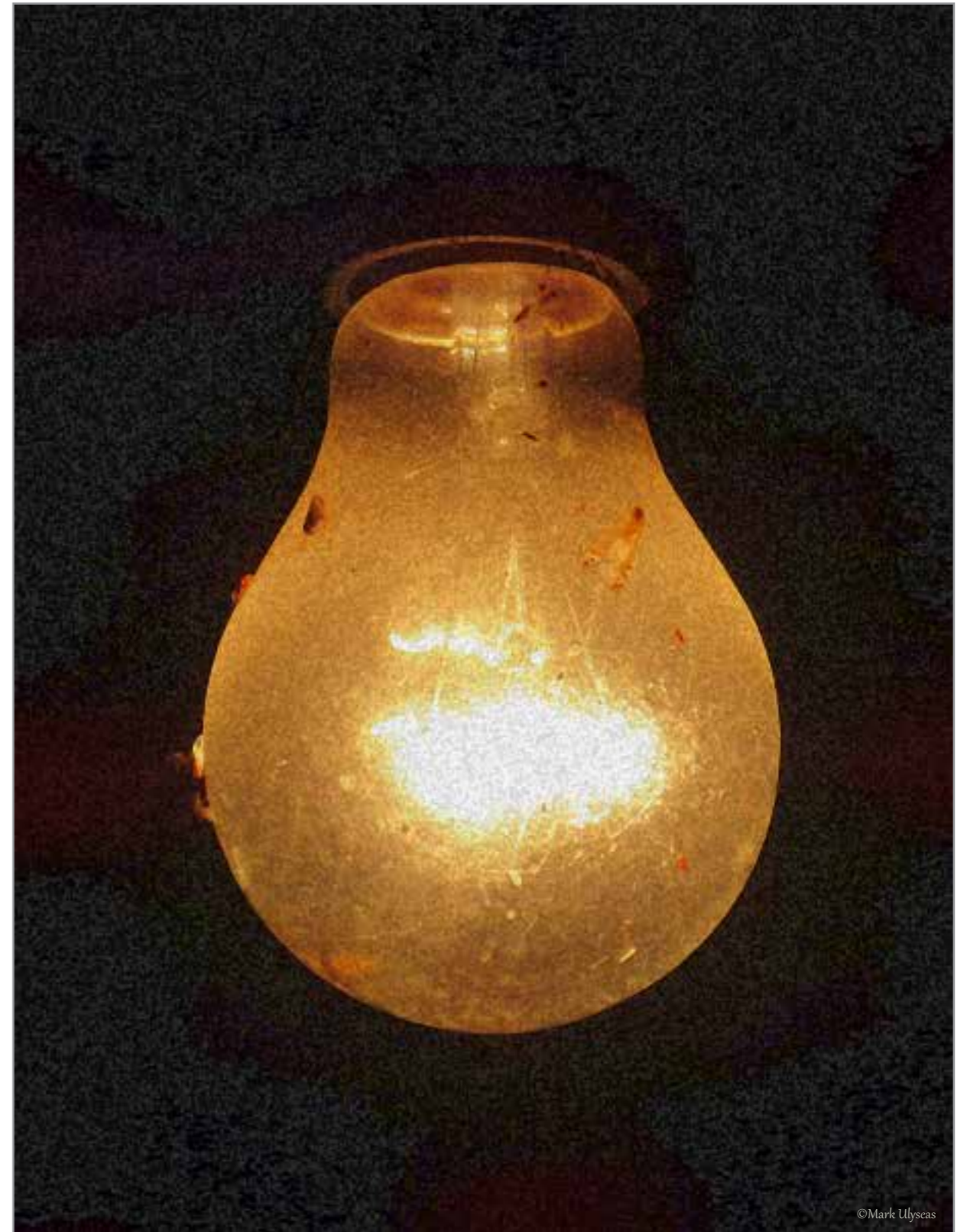
## TATTOOS IN MY BRAIN

*contd...*

What I know is that I tattooed my  
 Sins on my palm  
 A tattoo that does not resemble any other  
 Lest I forget that I committed a mistake  
 And that I have darkened myself so much  
 I-the one- who despaired Satan  
 And when he returned as  
 A night woodcutter  
 The mind was like a tombstone  
 He controlled me  
 And in my silence I write  
 My love for the world.

I begged the ants to intercede for me  
 And I am the one who lived to build one  
 House after another for them

I do not treat myself with tattoos  
 Like my ancestors  
 And I don't need magic  
 Because I'm looking for me  
 In an extinct volcano  
 And I am not the slave who runs  
 Away from those who tattooed his face  
 But I became a university of slaves  
 In a name for me.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Ahmed Al-Muraikhi is an Egyptian poet. He works as a Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Radio and Television Magazine. He is also Former Editor-in-Chief of Poetry Magazine. He has published three poetry collections entitled: *Against My Will-2008*, *Movements of Teenagers-2012*, and *What My Hand Did-2015*.



## MEMORIAL SERVICE

The peasants returned from the field with wheat  
 The workers returned from the mountain carrying stones  
 And while mothers made bread  
 The engineers built the walls!  
 It is okay, dad  
 You have been merciful to us  
 We decorated the walls with marble  
 And we inlaid the marble with the alabaster that you love  
 The calligrapher - my brother - engraved the words you love  
 And the painter - my brother - painted pictures of your loved one  
 My sister made all kinds of sweets  
 And we deposited the small details of the system that you love.  
 The building is complete  
 The loaves my mother baked were all done  
 The shrouds weep you in the washroom  
 And I supervised it myself  
 The cemetery is ready, Dad  
 And the dead are ready.

Ahmed Al-Muraikhi

## AHMED AL-WARD

He did not inherit the name  
 And he does not have a palace like Al-Khouli's palace.  
 The house was of raw bricks  
 As it rains, he rolls over in fear  
 And he is covered with the smell of silt at the sound of thunder  
 The mud was pure, the people for people, the village far away  
 Transportation to the city is riding on donkeys and camels  
 And at the station he greets the returnees cordially; "a rose in each hand"  
 Wherever they pass the house, they spray love to the ground  
 Roses were growing on the edges of the canals  
 Al-Khawli calls it the devil's plant, and people call it the herb.

Ahmed Al-Ward died.  
 So they built a house for him, and whenever they passed by, they stopped.  
 They tell their children how it was.

## BEFORE THIS MORNING

Like a hawk looking at its young from a distance  
 It happened before this morning that a mother stood in the doorway of the house  
 She contemplates her children as they play  
 They were building a village  
 They make houses out of dust, and young sheep out of palm heart  
 The houses were real, the sheep too  
 The grass is growing in the nearby field  
 And at night the young returns with a ram in their hand  
 They hang food for it on the windows  
 They call him by his name  
 When it leaps, they rejoice with ecstasy  
 They clap for what their little hands have made  
 And the mother gathers their day at the end  
 Then she puts it on a bed of palm leaves  
 And soars like a hawk looking in the distance



Ahmed Nabawi is a contemporary Egyptian poet and academic. He deals with humanitarian themes in his poetry. His poetic career began early in the nineties. He has five collections of poetry: *Testimony of Love*, *Wounds Have Tributaries*, *Flames of Questions*, *Scenes from the Refugee Camp* and *The Flourishment of Colors*. Two collections in print entitled *An Ant Said* and *The Doors*. In addition, he has a collection of critical books, including *The Poet's Culture and Significance Production*, *The Poetics of Small Details*, *The Contemplative Tendency in Andalusian Poetry*, and *The Heritage Tributaries in Andalusian Poetry*.



## CONSOLATION

I want a window  
 Wider than my eyes  
 And a headphone  
 Finer than my ears  
 I want  
 Instead of my two arms, two large wings  
 Too long nose  
 Two-minute legs  
 Train myself  
 To listen with my heart  
 And see with my ears  
 I like being led by my wild mind  
 Until the end of the journey  
 I am afraid he will abandon me  
 And leave me paralyzed  
 Leaning on the void  
 I do not like to die protruding eyes  
 Opening my mouth  
 Oh, my God  
 Even these  
 I will not be able to control  
 Completely  
 I also could not control my appearance  
 When I come to life

Ahmed Nabawi

## EXIT DOOR

He said to me:  
 Then you have to  
 Wear thick dark clothes  
 And two pairs of long stockings  
 And you should  
 Take shelter in a cornerstone  
 Close to the door  
 As your legs no longer  
 Bear the weight of those years  
 That accumulated over your skinny body

\*

But  
 I do not like thick dark clothes  
 And I do not like that cornerstone  
 Near the door  
     I love  
 To ascend the stairs with musical lightness  
 To read the house room by room  
     To be assured  
     That my love  
 Who came out years ago  
 Her scent still permeated the place  
 And its small details  
     Is still alive  
 And she blames me if I am late  
 So I kiss her apologetically  
 When I wipe her hair  
 And wipe a tear, without her seeing it  
     I love  
 To go into her room  
 On my own  
 Twice every day

And open her cupboard  
 And hug her dresses for a long time  
 A dress by dress  
 Until the nostalgia that never  
 Quenches is satisfied  
     And I always love  
 To walk in the open plain  
     To dance  
     And sing  
 When I embrace people  
 In the wide garden

\*

So what happens  
 If it is time to go out  
 When I go up the stairs?!  
     Or  
 When I embrace my sweetheart's dresses  
     Or  
 While I am walking in the open plain  
     Or even  
 When I dance and sing  
 Is not the exit movement one?!



## TWO REFUGEES

An old man and an elderly woman  
 Rely on unfair time  
 Rely on their fading youth  
 There was nothing left of their lives  
 Except a little  
 They cultivate life with love  
 In the span of a long life  
 And they built a small house  
     In a moment  
 Volcanoes of cannon  
 And stray missiles blew up  
 The long life plant

\*

An old man and an elderly woman  
 In the midst of the ruins  
 - Distraught -  
 They tremble  
 They do not utter a word  
 They do not cry  
 Leaning on a cloudy fate  
 Leaning on the open  
 Their eyes stared  
 And went backwards  
 The soul is neither satisfied  
 Nor reassured

\*

An old man and an elderly woman  
 Towards the camp  
 They are crawling  
 Towards the camp  
 In a fugue  
 They lean on pure words  
 They lean on the sky  
 They do not look ahead  
 They do not look back  
     In a tent  
 - In the middle of the camp -  
     They sit  
 She does not move  
 She comes near her beloved  
 And enters into fugue  
 And remains from silence  
 To silence  
 And messing with her fingertips in the dust  
 - He does not move a finger  
 He comes near his beloved  
 And he enters into fugue  
 And he remains from silence  
 To silence  
 And messing with his fingertips in the dust

\*

*continued overleaf..*

## TWO REFUGEES *contd...*

At night  
 Where the wind is hungry  
 And the groaning of wounds  
 And the snow is falling  
 And the stray missiles  
 And the cannons - without heed - wail  
 She gave him the bread of The Relief  
 - And the bereavement looms in her eyes -  
 He casted it aside  
 And stretched out on her side... and fell asleep  
 Next to him  
 She threw her body... and fell asleep

\*\*\*

In the morning  
 The Relief announced  
 - In the crowd of arrivals -  
 About a tent  
 In its hollow  
 The whining fell silent  
 And The Relief workers dug a hole  
 To include  
 Two dead bodies:  
 An old man  
 And an elderly lady

\*\*\*



Photograph courtesy: IlyaKantakov <https://pixabay.com/users/ilyakantakov-5147951/>



Aicha Bassry is a poet, novelist and storyteller. She published many novels and poetry collections. She won the International Prize for the novel, *Kateb Yassin* (Algeria 2016), for the novel *Greta Garbo's Granddaughters*, the Simone Landry Prize for Women's Poetry (Paris 2017) for her Diwan (*The Bathers in Thirst*), and the Prize for Best Arabic Novel for the year 2018 (Sharjah Exhibition - United Arab Emirates) for the novel *Life without me*. Her books have been translated into English, French, Spanish, Italian and Turkish. She participated in many Arab and international cultural events (book fairs, festivals and conferences).



## BLACK POEM

About my lips  
 I wiped the last kiss  
 Off my shoulders  
 I shook the farewell pat  
 I uttered flowery words that I swallowed foolishly  
 And for not crying when I remember  
 I recalled all his offenses:  
 His look at a woman who passed by  
 A stain of betrayal on his shirt  
 His break of an old date  
 Spinning poems, he wrote for bed-passers  
 And for a complete heal of him  
 I buried every word that reminded me of him  
 In a black poem  
 In the color of this poem

Aicha Bassry

## THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE BODY

If I was born with the intuition of a wolf  
 -As I was accused-  
 And I pretended that the wolf ate me  
 Thus, I would not be eaten twice  
 If I shouted:  
 God, my sins are not what I have committed  
 That serpent confused my desires,  
 Thus, I would not be stung from the hole twice  
 If I were to slander Adam  
 And with an accusing finger, I pointed out:  
 This is your creature, Lord, and he ate the apple  
 Thus, I were not be thrown on the ground, a body with two hemorrhages,  
 Uterine bleeding and heart bleeding  
 If I disbelieve in myself  
 And you gave birth to me in the basin of temptation  
 Thus, I would be crowned queen of the kingdom of Eros.  
 And owned my body  
 If I had not taken off the mulberry leaf from me  
 - My only cover -  
 And threw it in the face of the devil  
 Thus, I would be the tree of the promised paradise  
 If I were more cunning and careful  
 Thus, I would not gave birth to a man from my womb to enslave me  
 If I were Atum I would not have created anyone but me

Thus, there was no first woman  
 Nor a first man  
 Nor there was betrayal from eternity  
 If you were born on cunning  
 - As stigmatized -  
 Thus, I would have torn the shirt of my beloved  
 From kisses  
 And in love, believe me  
 If I stood at the gates of death  
 And with the boldness of the one who goes back to him  
 I cursed Hades and all his names  
 Thus, I would not die between two lives  
 Was I really "me"  
 When I was not?



## WHAT DOES LIFE BESTOW UPON ME?

Of my language  
I made and lived lives  
I built a house of words and inhabited it  
I drew a sea and sailed  
I set a sky and I flew  
I fantasized about a man and fell in love with him  
From my ashes, I grew a nursery for roses  
From cuts in the palm  
I released a flock of butterflies  
From the womb of the snow, I ignited the meteors of desire  
I explained myself to myself  
And I called myself the riddle of names  
Even my body made my death from its cells  
So what does life bestow upon me?



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Ali Al-Shalah (1965) born in Babylon, Iraq. He obtained a BA in Literature from College of Arts, University of Baghdad, 1987 and MA in Modern Literature, Yarmouk University, Jordan, 1996. He also obtained PhD in Philosophy and History, University of Bern, Switzerland, 2007. He has published five poetry collections and five books on criticism. He was the Founder and President of many cultural institutions, events and festivals including the following: The Founder and President of the Swiss Arab Cultural Center in 1995 and Al-Mutanabbi International Cultural Festival / Switzerland 2000, President of Babel House for Cultures, Arts and Media, with two branches in Baghdad and Babylon, 2003, Founder and President of the Babylon Festival for International Cultures and Arts 2010, Chairman of the Culture and Media Committee in the Iraqi Parliament 2010 and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and President of the Iraqi Media Network 2014-2018.



## THE FIRST WOMAN

The first woman in my life  
 Was not a neighbor in a house  
 Nor a classmate  
 Not an actor in imagination  
 Nor a heroine in a novel  
 Nor a hermit in a temple  
 Nor a picture on a wall  
 Nor a statue in a garden  
 The first woman in my life is the one who has not come yet  
 I am afraid she will not come  
 Thus, the femininity of the world remains incomplete.

Ali Al-Shalah



## TRACING

The desert washes its sand with the wind  
 No sign of tracing  
 And you come back/forth, forth/back  
 No difference  
 You cannot read sand properly  
 And he lies silently  
 Sand is a history of repetition  
 No door to start sand  
 Sand is the disappearance of those who pass by, and a sign for passers-by  
 Sand is the origin of beginners, and they are hungry by it and for it  
 Sand is the origin of proliferation at times, and at other times, it is a deficiency  
 Is it stated in the sand that sand is more dangerous than others?  
 Sand enters weakly into another  
 But covers the tops of its wounds  
 So carrying its death at its end  
 Sand is not Sufism...  
 And even if the seer saw the visions of al-Hallaj in it!

## LIFE IS A LIE OF ITS OCCUPANTS

(Reading for confusion)  
 I am not certain because you are not certain  
 A vessel of knowledge whose countenance is anxiety desiring to increase  
 The eye is an anxious gateway to a hungry heart  
 The soul is a well of mistakes necessary for Humanization  
 Humanization breeds mistakes  
 There is no life for those who do not perceive its chaos  
 And there is no identical repetition except with death!  
 We are the beginning of our own and his descendants  
 We are the ones whom we deny  
 And the trees of meaning that emanate from within it!

Life is a lie of its occupants  
 And death is the bitterness of discovery  
 A body that takes hold of a body and throws it into the past  
 To discover the chemistry of time!  
 If time could be saved,  
 We spared hours for those who dwelt in the sanctuary  
 And opened a horizon for them in the previous future  
 We are a past looking for a future to pass it on  
 Our limbs are time  
 And our bodies are other times  
 We are a past that does not pass  
 And a future that does not come.

Chawki Bazih (1951) is a contemporary Lebanese poet. He has dozens of books on poetry and prose, as well as critical, literary, cultural and intellectual articles. He won the Okaz Poet Award in 2010 and the Al Owais Cultural Award in 2015. He also received the Jumblatt Medal in 2010, the Palestine Medal in 2017 and the Special Honor Award at the Mahmoud Darwish Award for Culture and Creativity on March, 2020.



## HOMES

Homes are birds that gnaw at their chicks  
 The farther away they are from the iron of its slanted windows  
 And homes are bridges of nostalgia that connect the cradle to the grave  
 Mother adventure feather  
 Breeding mud  
 The secret of symmetry between nature and temper  
 Between the funeral and the midwife  
 And the homes are lines whose sea composes us like a poem  
 Line by line  
 To weigh the memories with their balance  
 Whenever the melody is broken  
 Or the compass got lost  
 And homes are roots  
 That always return with its inhabitants  
 To the same place they left  
 For its sun to shield them from the vertigo of the heights  
 And from the roads that displace them in the fractures of the place  
 And homes are a time that divides its beats equally among its inhabitants  
 To swim between two homes:  
 The home of existence and the home of non-existence  
 And to pass by stealthily  
 Between what falls apart and what heals  
 And the homes are the womb of our longing to reside in the drowsy archipelago  
 To touch the sea without water  
 To kindle our initial fires  
 Or cry over a time that will not return to earth again  
 And the homes are our lost paradises  
 So tend to the homes  
 Carry them like the turtle on your back

Chawki Bazih

*continued overleaf...*

HOMES *contd...*

Wherever and whenever you are  
 In its shade, you will not stray from the path to righteousness for yourselves.  
 You will not tire of its black stones  
 No matter how far from your steps to its spiral paths  
 You will not bow over a cradle less harmful than its neglected vaults  
 And you will not find in the frost of your winters  
 What is equivalent to resting on the rock of the family  
 And the silk of silence  
 So tend to the homes, turn around them  
 At least once  
 Then hurry  
 Towards the home of life that does not die

## OAKS

It is the most dependent tree on what has passed  
 The crutch of childhood  
 And the initial bleating of the goats of the past  
 And its dive does not need proof  
 To see it, we need handkerchiefs waving from afar  
 For white drivers  
 Dreams to dispel fears  
 Around its pet stove  
 And tools to climb the years when we grow old as proverbs  
 Under its feeble sobs  
 And we need shovels with solid hands  
 Let us look, where the plant assumes the tombs of the ancestors  
 For trees, we exchange trunks with  
 And about the air of complete oblivion  
 The oaks are our wild back  
 No trees are populated in the villages except with his permission.  
 No bell hums in the foothills  
 Without its brotherhood  
 And tests virility itself  
 With its thirst beauty  
 The oaks are our instinctive departure  
 In eternal doubtful ways  
 When the sun's disk appears green  
 At noon  
 It gets high  
 And when the memory passes over it its long strands  
 A poetic, retrograde moan tyrannizes it  
 Its voice intoxicates the valleys



OAKS *contd...*

But in its angry blood  
 The luster of mares that fizzes in the air  
 And the wind in the wild cannot  
 Twist its resolve  
 It does not die except standing  
 And it remains precipitous despite falling  
 Like the flames in the flint  
 Oaks have two natures:  
 A winter ferocity to pounce  
 On the blood of meaning  
 And a constant yearning to fly around the summer of form  
 And it shines between them  
 A narrow corridor steps  
 Between the beast and Man

## HER VOICE IS A LIGHTNING SNAP OVER NISSAN

*To Fayrouz*

Not a sound  
 But a sunny day between two winters  
 And half lakes  
 And waterfall of rings  
 It is what makes us cry over what has not yet been established  
 And what makes a piece of music  
 Wreaths of flowers  
 And candles and funerals  
 As it flows, the windows of Palestine appear on the horizon  
 And bare trees  
 And two strands of oblivion  
 That rack what is left of Andalusian silk  
 To sing, we must awaken the dead from sleep  
 And to accompany the dawn with hymns and new feasts  
 To sing, blue must rule the earth  
 And to derive from the kingdom of pain twenty Christs  
 And resurrections  
 ... And children sleeping on the balcony of faraway Sundays  
 It is as if the East, when she chants, is an eternal cradle of waves  
 Carried on a drop of water  
 Her voice is trees looking at her

From a runaway train like age  
 And the earth dreamed of by a blind planet  
 Singing without a river on the path of heaven  
 Her voice is the grass that tramples souls  
 And the water that seeps from the grief of the statues  
 And what remains of the tears of the Nile

*continued overleaf..*

## HER VOICE IS A LIGHTNING SNAP... *contd...*

In the eyelid of the mokattam  
 Her voice is a lightning that strikes over Nissan  
 The remains of a mare neighing at a passing massacre  
 And a looming cloud of red flowers  
 As Zainab's lamentations above Muharram  
 Her voice is the geometry of color  
 Lines bending in the Dome of the Rock to touch the soul  
 And another baptism for Jordan's childhood  
 Which drips from Mary's eyelashes  
 Her voice is a people of the dead  
 And the palm of a woman standing in Qurna as Sawda  
 To lament a country that fell in a line of blood  
 Her voice is a pomegranate blow to Sidon  
 And a purple sword on Tyre  
 And a sun wipes over a camp  
 Her voice is the spectrum of a prophet whose revelation went crazy in his Burda  
 And his soul overflowed with palm trees and gardens  
 When she chanted, peace befallen upon the world



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Israa El-Nimr (1991) is an Egyptian journalist and poet. She studied journalism at the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University, and graduated in 2012. In 2015, she specialized in cultural journalism, especially after joining one of the most important Egyptian cultural newspapers, Akhbar al-Adab. This step in her professional career helped her develop her poetic talent. She writes prose poems, and she published a poetry collection in 2020 entitled "The Eyes That Left Quickly". Her new poetry anthology is under publication and entitled "Paradise is nothing but my grandmother's name."



## THE MEN I LOVE

I always take the men I love  
 To the same places  
 And make them sit on the same chairs  
 And I choose the same food for them  
 I want without feeling  
 To introduce them to each other  
 To create a state of intimacy between them  
 Because one day  
 When I am gone completely  
 They will meet in these places  
 And they will see that they look alike  
 As if they are all one man  
 That would be funny to me  
 I, who, hover around them  
 Like dust.

Esraa Al-Nimr



## AN AFFECTIONATE GRANDMOTHER WRAPS HER ARMS AROUND HER GRANDDAUGHTER'S NECK

Do you feel pity for me?

When the teacher slapped me  
And she said that I did not find anyone to raise me  
I remembered you at once  
And I cried  
Not from the slap  
But because she said what you always tell me  
Although you know  
The hand that made me  
And put me on fire a lot  
To become in this state  
Your hand

Do you feel pity for me?

I see our picture together  
Almost normal for those who do not know us:  
An affectionate grandmother wrapped her arms  
On the neck of her granddaughter, who lost her parents early  
But for me:  
A grandmother slowly strangles her granddaughter  
Or a granddaughter hangs herself  
With her grandmother's arms

Do you feel pity for me?

I failed a lot in love  
And at work  
And in making friends  
Failed to make a meal for two  
Failed to walk in high heels  
And in choosing clothes that keep pace with fashion  
Failed to have a normal smile..  
And a less severe gaze  
Failed and failed and failed  
But I never failed  
To hate you..

## YOUR VOICE

I love your voice, because it reminds me of the door of our old home  
The door that smells like orange  
Your voice smells the same

Your voice makes me reassured that this door will never die  
And it will surely know my way  
And come to me.

I need your voice because I live in a house without doors  
I need a door to get out of



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Essam Khalifa (1971) is an Egyptian Canadian poet who obtained his first degree in Medicine in 1994 and his M.A. in Business Administration in 2011. He has published more than five poetry anthologies, two of them have been translated and published in Spanish, in addition to a book in the field of human resources development. He attended and participated in many poetry festivals around the world and his books have been circulated around the Arab area. He won the second position in Prince of Poet competition reward - Emirate - 2015.



## ORCHID FLOWER

Rest

Do not be afraid of me today  
They may cross like a glance  
Like a flash of lightning when my eyes see it  
They did not carry my heartbeats in their veins  
They did not shed tears when I was sad  
They did not dance over the madness of my strings and melodies  
They did not grow in the depths of my memory and my art

So rest

I am no longer like a bird that harried towards flowers  
that mimic their shape in every corner  
As similarity  
Among the jasmine blossoms arouses my rejection  
And matching became my problem and my prison  
For how many flowers, from a distance,  
decorated the chest of spring if it is beautiful  
Suggesting that the face of beauty is coming from near  
In its monotony, beauty dies, exiled and is defenseless  
I scream into her mirrors and ask:  
Who will revive the renewal revolution, who will come to carry  
In her hands the rarity of the orchid or the charm of the carnation

I got lost in search of myths of imagination  
About women who dressed frankness  
Not beautification  
About a conversation that did not resemble  
what was said yesterday or what was said first

*continued overleaf..*

Essam Khalifa



ORCHID FLOWER *contd...*

About a free and unfettered spring  
 About flowers that did not repeat me and suffocate me and kill me  
 And ,then, I met you  
 As I found a beautiful orchid spinning  
 Spectrum from the threads of dawn  
 That makes the rising more beautiful  
 Then I realized that my desired spring is coming  
 To remove the snow from me.

Orchid, be tender  
 And rest on my bough  
 And dress my security in fear  
 And grow between me and me  
 And rest  
 No flower is like you  
 No greenery, no plant  
 That grew up in the field of imagination  
 Or wishing groves.

Oh girl who hurt my heart and my mind  
 In my question  
 About the intentions of the mobile phone  
 Whenever I swear that  
 Every time I teach her not to suspect  
 For some suspicion in some cases is a sin,  
 She followed me  
 This suspicion is love; do not leave me  
 I burn from the fire of my feelings and thoughts

Oh my peace midst my worries  
 Oh my stillness  
 In a noise that could not help  
 Oh, a dialogue that came whispering  
 Like a harp that Soliloquizes the silence of my night  
 Like a flute when it regurgitates a tune  
 Gathering moons around me

Like a brush that mimics the painter's vision of me  
 It traveled from his hands  
 And picked my color from the palette

Oh you, a feeling formulated from me  
 Oh you, intelligence that did not betray me  
 That disappear when love describes my say  
 Be my support in expression and singing  
 Be my rhyme and meter in creativity  
 And save me from letters that did not describe me  
 From the seas that drowned me  
 From ports that did not rescue me  
 Of meanings I have written and I do not know  
 In the concepts of passion, what does it mean?  
 Pass like a torrent in the desert of my bosom  
 Destroy the walls of my fortress  
 And enter without my permission

*continued overleaf..*

ORCHID FLOWER *contd...*

I lived my life like a train  
 Hating my waiting time  
 Refusing to feel my cowardice  
 Fleeing from all patience that may be sweeten with hope  
 Seeking help, my God help me  
 On the path  
 Towards fire or bliss that did not water me  
 I cannot bear patience as my companion  
 This was what happened to me  
 A liar who claims to be safe  
 In less speed.

Rest  
 They did not read my poetry before my ink touched it  
 They did not shine the night of my solitude as the dawn prayer  
 They did not taste the bitterness of my volatility and impatience  
 They did not accept, despite the guilt, my excuse  
 So settle  
 And drink from the water of my feelings and rejoice  
 Here where my heart resides  
 Here I deposited my secret  
 Here I will live from my cradle to my grave  
 So be quiet and dwell in the warmth of my chest

Rest  
 I am no longer like bees quenching my nectar from the blossoms  
 I am not used to living from my rejection and stubbornness  
 This is how I made my covenant  
 This is how I became mine  
 O stillness of the sea, O River of paradise  
 O girl, whenever I burdened her with a load, she answered  
 "O beloved of the heart from my eyes and my eyes"  
 Do not be afraid or slow down  
 In my country, you will not get lost  
 This is my compass, and that path is my path, so go through it  
 And remember what I said, if you did  
 That is my heart  
 Purify it  
 From the remnants of its inhabitants  
 Decorate it with your own color granted from me  
 And dance and sing in it.

Faris Khader (1969) is an Egyptian poet. He has published four poetry collections. He works as Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Radio and Television Magazine and the Editor-in-Chief of the Egyptian Poetry Magazine (2007-2017). He holds a PhD in Philosophy of Folk Arts (specializing in folk customs and beliefs), from the Academy of Arts. He has published folkloric studies, including: *The Inheritance of Sorrow*, *Perceptions of Death in the Popular Consciousness*, *Enchanted Cities: Bridging the Distance between Heaven and Earth*, and *The Night Vigil: 100 Folk Tales from the Dakhla Oasis*.



## A CRIPPLING GUIDE

(He knows nothing of his desert except the abyss)

I cannot find anything that indicates me  
Only my pain

O head of wisdom and foolishness  
You have not read my chapter  
Or caught my fire... ever  
But you know the way

My hand squeezed in your knowing hand  
And my steps are more ignorant than a sacrifice  
That walks towards the slaughterhouse

I walk against your wind  
Fascinated by old singing  
And I do not follow the gallows  
Over your walls  
So that I do not suffer  
Again

Thus  
You left me in a semicircle  
And you said:  
All roads lead to the abyss

If you pointed to the edge of a mountain, I would have walked  
I am the blind  
I took my share of the dark  
And your crutch that was eaten by licorice  
Crucified me in the wind

*continued overleaf...*

Faris Khader



A CRIPPLING GUIDE *contd...*

if ...  
 If you bequeathed me cruelty  
 I would not cross this forest barefoot  
 And I would have taken the thorns out of my throat  
 And released my cry

And I would live near my wild plant  
 To watch my sadness  
 When it drinks my rain  
 And sleeps under my cloud.

I would  
 Be pleased to be  
 A tear  
 No warrior sheds  
 On his rifle.

Sycamore  
 Took off its feet  
 At my waist  
 And shared the houses their grief

The baker of legends  
 I feed you..  
 And the pebbles crackle on the fire  
 For my hungry child to sleep.

Gendarmerie guard  
 I distribute sleep on the eyelids  
 And the terror waters its tall tree.

The cry of the flute  
 When it blows the smoke off  
 After the wars finished their music  
 And the earth was filled with blood

Just  
 If.. you bequeathed me cruelty..

I left my palm  
 Hanged on the pillars of the shrine  
 And the intercession is spoiled  
 On the feet of the sectarians

This is my fault..  
 The crime that I do not know what it is  
 So I flee from my shadow  
 And I do not gain from my successive breaths  
 Except punishment

With fingers touching life  
 When it runs to its burrows..

With a mouth  
 As a tank  
 That distributes its missiles fairly

*continued overleaf..*

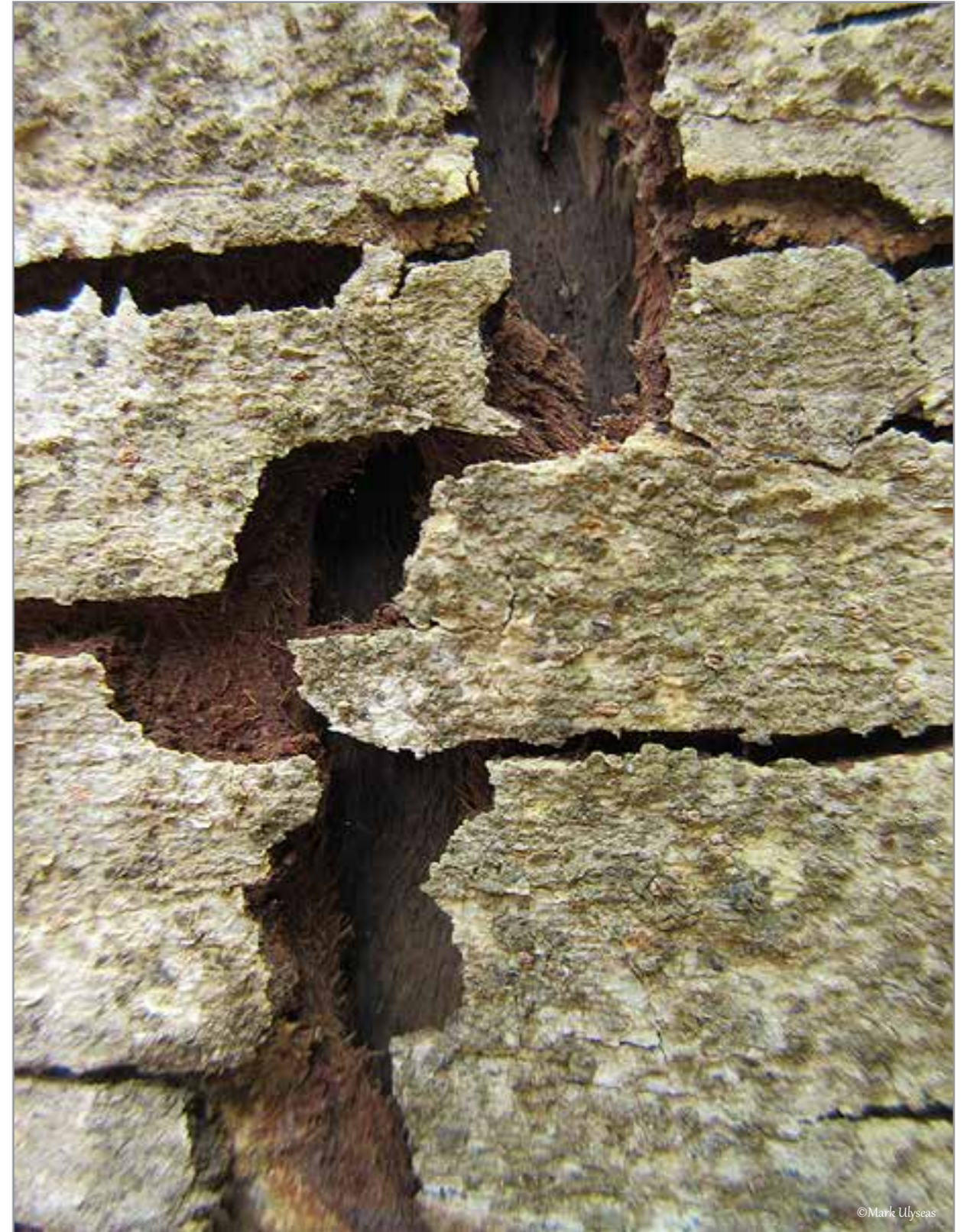
## A CRIPPLING GUIDE *contd...*

With an enemy  
In the goal  
Bemoaning the wasted ammunition.

By step  
That do not cross the road  
Except to an abyss..

With my scorched blood  
And the scent of my limbs on embers,

I eat my body..  
And die hungry.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Gerges Shoukry (1967) is an Egyptian poet and theater critic for Radio and Television magazine since 1994. He published nearly six poetry anthologies. His poems have been translated into German, English, French, Swedish, Dutch, Catalan, Slovenian and Hungarian. He also published five books in theatrical criticism and a book in travel literature. He won many national awards on his poetic, theatrical and critical achievements.



## JACKET

My jacket and I go for winter walks  
 I entrust it with keeping my cigarettes  
 And we do not ask anyone about the way  
 I hold it in my hand when the world suffocates  
 And sometimes it jumps onto my shoulder  
 Like a cat when longing overcomes it  
 So it bits my hands in her pockets  
 And I smile reassuringly  
 My jacket is faded and the street is noisy  
 Despite this, it insists on exiting  
 And when I get spoiled, it pushes me hard  
 So I carry it and do not talk to anyone  
 My jacket loves the street as much as I do  
 And I do not know how this love was born  
 I do not remember where this jacket came from  
 Only when I hate the world  
 I hide in my jacket  
 So it walks alone... It does not talk to anyone.

Gerges Shoukry



## THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

We are the knives  
We have screaming blades  
And our handles are dead

We know we are slaughtering and tearing apart  
And do not be deceived by the love of butchers  
We smile at the sacrifice while it is in pain  
So do not hate us  
We are the infidel knives  
With all love  
We were created like this without hearts

They put our feelings to a sharp blade  
And the blacksmith recommended us  
To slay vigorously  
So as not to die.

Do not hate us when we slaughter you  
We do not know pain  
Also, we do not cry  
We just slaughter  
The sharp blade rises high  
Without fear.

## THE HAMMER

The hammer said:  
Why do I beat my brothers like this?  
And it looked at the blacksmith in weariness  
He got angry and said:  
To be swords tearing the hearts of enemies  
Blades that slaughter those who are bored  
Many things.

Your brethren, you fool, are a code of life  
Then he tossed it away and went furious

Days passed and the hammer was sad  
And its brothers got sick with rust  
One evening the blacksmith did not return home  
Passers-by heard an enchanting rhythm flowing from his shop  
Things dance and then repeat the rhythm for days  
So sleep abandoned the city and the affliction intensified  
As the slaughter machines abstained from killing their brothers  
Of animals and birds  
And the other machines refused to do their work

And whenever a blacksmith is absent and they open his shop  
They found him sprawled like a sword, and a smiling hammer beside him

Hassan Najmi (1960, Ibn Ahmed, Settat province) is a Moroccan poet, author, and journalist. He was The President of the Union of Writers of Morocco between 1998 and 2005 and former head of the House of Poetry in Morocco. He is also the President of the Moroccan Center for the International PEN Club and Secretary General of the Argana Prize for Poetry. He founded the House of Poetry in Morocco, along with a group of Moroccan poets (December 1995) and was elected vice-president and spokesperson for the House. He received many Arab and international awards, and his works have been translated into more than ten languages. He has also translated into Arabic the poetic works of a number of the world's leading poets.



## THE DEATH OF A POET

*To a poet friend*

I do not trust this morning  
 This sun is not mine  
 It will betray me as it betrayed you (and it came to me that you left).  
 I found, when I woke up, my face silent  
 Suddenly, as if the depression of eternity was under my skin  
 And I ran with the eyes of a blind  
 As if, the night swallowed my way to you  
 My fingers were groping the distance to your funeral  
 And your mother raises her eyes to the ceiling, searching for the light.  
 As if, the room of the universe was darkened  
 She was spreading her arms. And she cries. And she asks: "Where is Saeed?"  
 And she sees you wrapped in your shroud  
 And she lays down to cover up the night that has begun  
 She leans like a white cloud over the thought of your grave  
 She kisses the stone of hardness  
 Only, the mother knows that her kisses have a scent  
 I stretch out the hands of the two sisters and thank the feathers of the womb  
 And I wipe away the tears with which she bathed  
 Then I see her as a winged butterfly praying  
 And she lights up. And prays  
 Then she remembers you  
 She hopes to see you as she used to see you standing at the door  
 When she will raise her head from prayer  
 (We did not get along like this, my son. Why did you precede me in death?)  
 And Saeed shaded his eyes with his hand, shy, from her halo of light.

*continued overleaf..*

Hassan Najmi

THE DEATH OF A POET *contd...*

God forbid, my mother, but death preceded me for the ringing of your voice, so that I would not hear it. Into your hands so that I do not take your touch with me. To your lips so that I may be naked from your kiss. To your feet so that I do not take with me a promise of your paradise. Into your eyes so that I may retire in the dust alone behind your gaze. Oh, my mother, death preceded me to me, so that the cry of the living flee from me. And I go with a fading wing to the height of the night, broken like the edge of a well, alone under the grass. The eve supplicates on your carpet. My mirror was broken, and darkness fell. There, in that remote seclusion, I did not find the day of your fingers.

My mother, my grave is as cold as a bed from which I have been absent all my life. My gaze grew dim - and this darkness separates me from the stars of your eyes. Now I lie down in the whiteness of contentment. I took with me nothing but what was left of my clay (Oh, the reed cultivar!). Oh, my mother, from the emptiness of your palms from the gods who gave up, and a hole that wants your mirror to turn away from my face!

I do not deserve this silence that escapes with my life

I lived in thunder drums. The horses pass by me, and I shudder to neigh. Horizons scream around me. And crowns of thorns on my head, and I care not for the flocks. I lived to establish hope. I lived in the atlas of life awakening aspirations. Steps sway in my ways. And my feet bleed, and I walk as blood in the basins. The coral of your rosary shines in my eyes. And I search for words that suit me. I nurture my poem in the habit of your weeping. Wherever I go, I hide my weeping. And whenever my cry called, I rushed with terrified tears from you to you.

I do not deserve - now now - this death  
 What are they going to do with my bag of bones?  
 Pray for me.  
 And if I open the door, forgive me the wall of the night  
 I was sheltering in your tears  
 I preserved the estate of my soul in breast milk.

But it is black, mom  
 Because of this blackness, which we call sorrow, my heart fell  
 Because of grief, the blood dried up with the throat of the songs  
 Because of this singing, the life trailer broke down  
 And I am going to stop there  
 I click the wood of the coffin so that my poem does not darken  
 And I shake a little, so that the dust does not clump on the linen of death  
 I am afraid that forgetfulness will be older than my age  
 The poet is like this -  
 Mad with a touch of life  
 Of a language, of love, of a memory, and of orphanage.  
 Oh how beautiful your prayer robe, the braid fall on it and henna leaves  
 grow! Cloves bloom on your face. And my face is in the flames of forgiveness.  
 And your look that weeps is not more difficult for God than its late loneliness  
 behind the casket!

I have turned the key of eternity and closed my hands.

My life hastened me. I suddenly became an ally of the night. Rain is pouring down on my grave now (is this the time for it?) Like water dancing on the tiles, so the hooks quenched. Leaves of grass rise up, scatter a little, as if to cover the stele. There, behind the wall of the garden, the heads of grain began to bow. Mother, why does death cough when I do not see anyone's face here? And what did I come to do in this far hallway? No one told me why my shadow was broken on the ground. And why my way has escaped from my step. Is there anyone who can tell me why I left you my share of pain? And I hastened on, as if I were enjoying the darkness.

Now - like a bird I go leaving, oh Hassan Najmi, my song is in your throat!



## THE DEATH OF A POET *contd...*

How do I know I am going to close my book on the far shelf.  
And why did I leave my friends as startled as they looked? As if I were a narcissistic friend who changed the patch of the land and left a crowd of broken hearts. As if, I gave up. It was shabby time; undo its robe, so I withdrew. The windows fell asleep, and the roads turned away behind me. I did not have a look left to turn around.

Death and absence alone do not forget (I have to fade away).

Now - the silence cracks like a lonely snow that no one hears  
All the dead cool down -  
But I burn as if they shrouded me in the ashes of a volcano  
I see them moving the tongs of the fire under me

The paving stones are starting to get distracted by the walking ritual  
(I soon forgot my step).

Now - I hold life and go  
Please remember me. Do not leave me under the tree of forgetfulness  
I have plenty of time to hear young women and the bleating of sheep  
I have enough hours to wait for a step  
Please visit me. And stay in life.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Kamal Abdel Hamid (1965) is an Egyptian journalist, essayist and poet. He has published seven literary books: four poetry collections, a book of essays, a book of texts, and a poetry anthology in English.



## WHAT IS YOUR HAND?

Do you remember it?  
Your hand that sweats in love  
So I click on it with an ambiguous pressure between I love you  
And I want you now so you know how much I love you  
She did not talk much  
She was not afraid of street dogs  
She does what she desires  
With one touch

Is she still with you?  
Your hand that you do not come out with  
Always keep it in your closet  
For I trained her so long to guard you,  
To gracefully leap before the radars, café cameras,  
And building guards  
To pick grapes and oranges  
From the trees of my hands.

We are the two look-alikes who once danced in secret  
And when they returned separately to their homes  
They did not have two homes anymore

A divine sympathy that is rarely repeated

Now.. What is your hand?  
But the ceiling of the room above my bed  
As if, it were the hand of God in Michelangelo's refrigerator

*continued overleaf..*

Kamal Abdel Hamid



WHAT IS YOUR HAND? *contd...*

After you  
 My mother died  
 I went to the edge of the sea to scream  
 In order not to kill myself  
 I threw many things behind my back  
 I asked the oncologist:  
 How lethal is the dose?

After you  
 I mean when it is not your hand  
 It is obvious that an epidemic will come

## DISTANCE DANCE

**I**  
 Outside a primordial melody follows  
 Galloping like herds of extinct mammoths  
 Of dust, trees, air  
 Distant seawaters  
 Of Music hidden by the earth  
 Under its skin  
 For a moment like this

Inside  
 I dance a lot more than usual  
 While I am looking out on free streets  
 After everyone raised  
 His eternal shoes off her lungs.  
 I dance naked  
 In the cave of (Two Nine One Two... 2912)  
 A gypsy celebrates the beings of the void  
 And she experiments with passion  
 A sudden jump to the stage  
 And we are in our numbered caves  
 Watching the loose danger  
 Immersed in the scents of vinegar and soap  
 Dried with salt and spices  
 Like seasonal fish behind the windows  
 I dance relentlessly high  
 Whenever I anticipate your existential fear  
 And when you wash your hands  
 From everything  
 Yes.. I mean everything  
 To pass, according to your intentions  
 Without sin  
 Until after the end of the world

*continued overleaf..*



## DISTANCE DANCE *contd...*

I think, with you, as a good lover  
 Who may excuse viruses  
 Is not it a curse?  
 To be invisible?  
 Shall we not step outside the secret?  
 Have we never been?

**II**  
 This is not the end of the world  
 As you think  
 It is not an epidemic followed by hell  
 Or a paradise  
 The peak will not reach a reverse explosion  
 To regain the universe its initial density  
 But it is a dance of symmetry  
 A generalization of the same distancing  
 Which I have experienced many times  
 And when you smuggle my corpse  
 Between two cities.  
 This is how free death encircles us  
 Not as a holy punishment  
 Or a collective embodiment of karma  
 Rather, as a form of love  
 Forgotten axioms  
 Maybe nature  
 An infinitesimal cry  
 Particles that sing in aerosols:  
 Every void is a home  
 Every silence lurks  
 Every tranquility bears faces

**III**  
 This is a biological refinement of beings  
 A moving of the fixed towards the abyss  
 A Temporarily disabling of hands  
 The rise of popularity of metaphors  
 Every joint physical action  
 Is nothing but a gagged craving  
 There are ready-made alternatives through imagination:  
 Gesture handshake  
 The kiss with a look  
 Survival.. a distance of fear.

I think, and with you,  
 As lovers, who were not under a cosmic threat  
 To invent physical distancing  
 This is not a leaked version of our end  
 These are the beginnings of what follows  
 The appearance of forgotten ones  
 Correspondence of two parallel worlds  
 - As we are now -  
 In an intimidating cycle  
 Of natural law.

**IV**  
 So.. Simply  
 Something is wrapping under our feet  
 But as potential survivors  
 We sharpen our nails to resume life  
 Albeit with less brutality

Maha Otoum is a Poet and an academic. She holds a PhD in Literature and Modern Criticism. She is also member of the Jordanian Writers Association. Among her poetic works: *Circles of Mud* 1999, *Half of It is Lilac* 2006, *More like Her Dreams* 2010, *Down the River* 2013, and *Upper Rooms* 2019. She received the Jordanian State Appreciation Award in 2017.



Maha Otoum

## A POET PASSED THROUGH HERE

I knew  
 And I know that way  
 In which I was lost  
 And I still walk it and get lost  
 I pass it from the night  
 Defenseless  
 I forget the bullets that  
 Pierce sleeping  
 I forget winter  
 Which makes lovers  
 Prophets or poets  
 I only remember the letters of the alphabet

I will draw a line pointing to the house  
 My house is words  
 In which I lived like its trees  
 I entertain myself and creep up  
 And I took noon naps in it  
 And I slept at its door  
 Like a swing  
 My house will become my words  
 And It is emptied when I die  
 And inhabited by strangers

I will draw two lines  
 Life passes between them  
 Like a river  
 A thin line of water  
 I hold pebbles in it  
 And it becomes a way  
 For a poet who passed from here:

The pebbles are my steps  
 And those lines on the water  
 Are what remained of me  
 And from my words.

## THE SHADOW OF FINGERS

A woman shook your hand  
 And the shadow of her fingers remained in the poem  
 Clearer than a chronic disease  
 You almost forgot to write about it  
 But her symptoms  
 Like a mild rash  
 Go and come

..  
 The poem is like a prey  
 I said:  
 I follow  
 But I hunt other than it  
 And I said, treat it like a dog  
 But it caught me

Two sides of illusion

There is water  
 Seen in speech  
 To make it clear and its fish shining  
 Or the crow throws dust at it  
 And the rill laughs at us

We might try our shirts to fly

...

But we don't fly

## DETAILS

You miss the details  
 In the margin of the text  
 You may leave homes with their inhabitants  
 And a laundry  
 Which mothers hang with their eyelashes  
 They fly like their dreams  
 And you forget that you are clumsy in love  
 When you write about love  
 How many streets in the poem  
 You did not cross  
 How many streets crossed you  
 And you did not write them

You wrote  
 Because the distance is clear  
 In the poem  
 Between tears  
 And between your eyes  
 You still cannot master crying  
 And you do not know a heaven  
 Only poetry to shed  
 And to cast

Because you are alone in the pit  
 Do not hold the ropes  
 And wait for the shadows  
 Which follow

...

Because you are alone



Moroccan poet and novelist residing in France. He has published four collections of poetry and a novel. He is a researcher and professor of contemporary Arabic literature at the University of Lyon, France. He translated many contemporary Arab poets into French.



## KM 6

At the sixth kilometer  
 The asphalt did not help us  
 We turned towards a path  
 Where the soldiers  
 And the sun of God reside  
 So she released all her charms  
 Above the seat  
 She said: take me now  
 Take me towards the seventh kilometer  
 Higher  
 Where love lives with all his fires  
 And take that kiss  
 Take it now  
 Do you know the meaning of a kiss  
 Where the soldiers reside?

Mohamed Miloud Grafi

## I MAY MEET YOU

I envy the tree  
 As it covers two lovers  
 And the gulls  
 As it flies without a license  
 In the dictionary  
 And the hand of the ice cream seller  
 When it stretches coldly  
 To the phone  
 I envy the phone  
 Shivering in her back pocket  
 I envy the cup  
 With red lips  
 And the beds  
 In hotel rooms  
 And the mirrors  
 I envy all perfumes  
 That carry me to you now  
 Terrified in the night train  
 Embedded in a lecture  
 About poetry and cancer  
 I will get off at the same station  
 Wandering  
 And trembling  
 Like the phone in your back pocket  
 I may meet you  
 Standing  
 At the ice cream seller.

## DELUSIONS

For whom are you plucking now  
 Jasmine flowers  
 Under the house?  
 As your hands are stained with gold  
 And your bicycle  
 Is breathless  
 At the door  
 And your eyes are sleepy  
 In front of DiCaprio in the kisses scene  
 Underwater  
 And your chest is lifted up  
 Towards God  
 Exultant  
 And your whole night is  
 A debt to poets  
 In describing nightmares.

I disappeared  
 The day they increased in love  
 Fifty dollars  
 And two bottles of whiskey  
 Not because I am empty handed  
 But to raise the ceiling of my delusions  
 And prove that I am  
 Going to a war  
 Lost without you.

Mohammad Al-Kafrawi is An Egyptian poet, born in 1978. He has been writing in cultural journalism and literary criticism since 1998. He has four collections of poetry: *A Pink Dream That Raises the Head* 2006, *Shortly After the Dead* 2018, and *A Suspicious Place* 2020, and a fourth collection entitled *scraping nothingness with his nails and giggling* is under print at the Egyptian General Book Authority.



Muhammad Al-Kafrawi

## PORTRAIT ON A WALL

A noble and chivalrous feeling  
 To pat every day on my image  
 The one hanged on the wall  
 And the wrapped into the folds of your memory  
 As soon as you shake off its dust, it breathes and refreshes again  
 And It starts its day with energy and vitality  
 Like any pet picture hanged on the wall  
 For a happy departed

A noble job to rub every day my features  
 You leave me that awesome expanse  
 To wander on my freedom in your memory  
 So I relive my days and recover your smile.

Soft and inspiring work  
 To reach an agreement  
 That makes me breathe thick fumes in your imagination  
 That clogs pores, which secrete bad visions  
 That haunted us for a while.

It is a wonderful feeling  
 For the one to be free of all burdens  
 (From flesh and blood to feelings and sensations)  
 And to remain alive even if symbolically  
 In the eyes and imagination and the memory of his lovers  
 Without costing them howling in the daytime  
 Or a serenity at night  
 Or a cry of apology  
 Whenever time robs them of one of their limbs  
 Or his sharp saws penetrated to slit their bones.

A chivalrous job my friend  
 To keep my picture there  
 Dust it off day after day  
 And do not forget to feed it every now and then  
 With memories and tears.



## HOW I TRIUMPHED OVER A CITY OF FOOLS WITH A RUSTY FIST

Landfill  
 Not less. Maybe more  
 The smell of living corpses writhing in the void  
 Sticky snakes seeping into the soul stream  
 Her heads screwed up by the jamming  
 Their mouths are traps for flies and other stupid insects  
 They groan from pleasure  
 With every blow of pick or scrape of axe that level their limbs  
 It comes out of the friction of their joints  
 A creak of centuries of an old abandoned door  
 Their bellies are emptier than the waste quarter

\*

Like a classic villain  
 He scrapes nothingness with his nails and giggles  
 Galloping here and there  
 Looking for a fresh prey  
 Behind this great emptiness.

\*

Wait a little  
 I did not tell you everything  
 Over there... In the darkness  
 The ghosts of the past appeared  
 Demanding their inherent right to attend  
 Here on the barrel of the cannon  
 And they stood cheering, screaming and rumbling  
 Begging everyone's anger to go  
 To tear the flesh of the present.

\*

On the outskirts of the city, the sun hardened  
 It seems that the day will not pass peacefully  
 I am the one who shed that flame on you  
 I am the accomplice with the desert sands  
 To burn your skins  
 And leave her beloved mark  
 On every passing body.

\*

I actually did not have weapons  
 Just a worn cloak and a dozen of imagination  
 Nevertheless, my plan worked  
 Entire armies fled  
 Kingdoms have fallen and civilizations have collapsed  
 Here at the crossroads  
 Where the mind sets up its trap  
 And leave to the arrivals the task of falling into it.

\*

With a rusty fist and a broken heart  
 Walking around without a clear aim  
 Was he crossing the streets looking for meaning  
 Or wandering behind lost spirits  
 No one knows  
 But in the end  
 He was able to join all groans that came out of the cracks of the walls  
 To gather his strength and strike deep with his fist  
 Until he reaches the bowels of lost time  
 He managed to emerge victorious from the maze  
 In his hand, the magnificent skeleton of a dilapidated city.

Muhammad al-Mutayyam (1993) is an Egyptian poet, independent cultural journalist, and literary editor for a number of Arab publishing houses. His book "Open the Door Fatima" won the "Muhammad Afifi Matar" award for classical poetry. He also published: "A tear that breaks two sieges" by the Department of Culture in Sharjah. He participated in several poetry festivals in Emirates, Sudan and Egypt, and is working on producing his third collection: "The Deer in the Red Shirt."



## SEVEN JOBS DO NOT FIT ME

He said, "Be a sculptor"  
 I said, "And disturb the stillness of the stone?"  
 He said, "Be a bird"  
 I said, "And awaken the nostalgia of the immigrant?"  
 He said, "Be a musician"  
 I said, "And spread the grief of the plank instead of embracing it?"  
 He said, "Be a street"  
 I said, "Should I bear the burden of the debtor's step?"  
 He said, "Be a knoll"  
 I said, "I pity the lame lover!"  
 He said, "Be the night"..  
 I said, "If I am long, they will curse me, and if I fall short, they will curse me."  
 I am neither long nor short...!  
 He said, "Be..."  
 I said, "Make me a cemetery guard"  
 Listening reverently to nothingness  
 My back resting on a tombstone  
 My legs stretched out  
 And eternity..  
 Lays her head on my lap and falls asleep.

Muhammad Al-Mutayyam

## DEATH LIKE A DRINK OF WATER

Have you tried to sit at one table?  
Face to face  
With your opponent,  
And without the slightest precaution  
Drinking two cups of tea?

Staring at each other sadly and gloomily  
Grubbing the features of your two faces  
In search of traces of the whips of time  
You speak very proudly  
About the honor of rivalry and the majesty of men  
The glory of men  
Not in the number of battles they fought  
Nor in the number of their dead  
Or what they flow from the tears of bereaved and orphans

The majesty of introverted men  
Is in how do they conduct dialogue with their opponents?  
In the eye, the eye itches  
In snapping fingers  
In the rib cage  
Rising and falling in a measured amount

I did it yesterday  
And death was in front of me  
-And anger and serenity are neutral-  
My sweat pours out  
His hand trembles  
And a glass of water spilled onto the table.

## YES, HE WRITES WITH HIS FEET.

I have always been the "high-achieving boy with bad handwriting,"  
and the first thing the teachers said when I hand my notebook was:

"You write with your feet, son?!" To my older teachers, I say:

"Yes, he writes with his feet"

With dawn  
They aspire to become wings  
In the forenoon  
They run like two betting horses  
Competing in a track  
At noon  
They are carrying one another  
So that their owner takes the form of "Effendi" reading the newspaper  
In the afternoon  
They hang out  
In the water  
With meekness  
And the third of them.. The thread of lucky hook  
At the beginning of night  
They lie next to each other  
As two beggars held on the sidewalk  
And at the end of the night  
You hope - in awe - that they will remain two wedges.  
And with dawn  
They aspire - once again - to become wings  
Two violins: they have the same rhythm  
And two sisters: they have the same features  
And two tramps: they have the same amount of footsteps and socks

*continued overleaf..*



YES, HE WRITES WITH HIS FEET. *contd...*

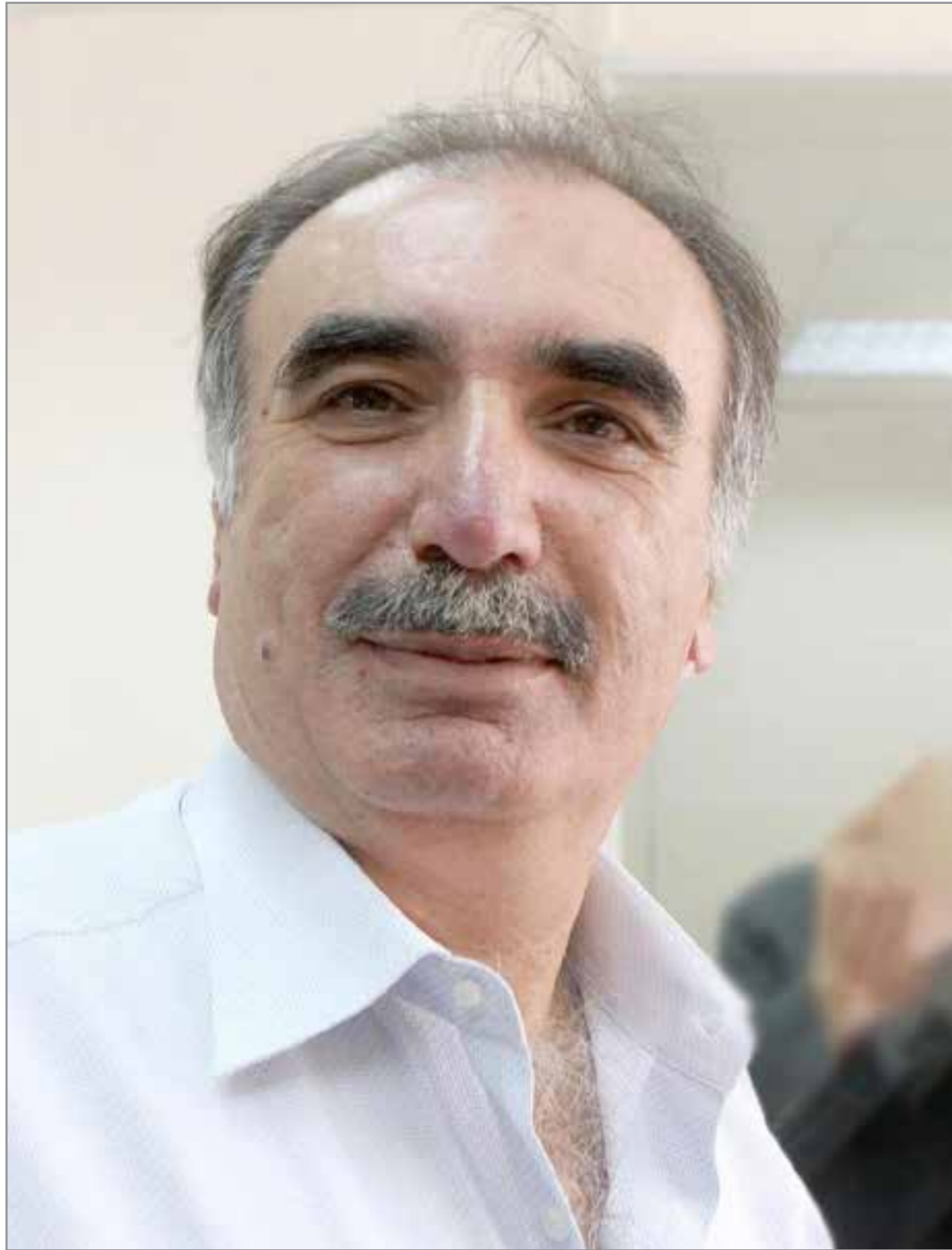
They run like a wind  
And sleep like a mountain  
They swell like a home  
And slimed as a widow  
And in all of this: they smell like a scandal

What surprised me was what I saw yesterday  
A man writes his personal history with his legs!



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Musa Hawamdeh is a Jordanian poet of Palestinian origin residing in Egypt. He published more than eleven collections of poetry. UNESCO published his poem My Races of the Wind and My Titles of Rain in one of its annual publications. He won several awards, including the High Committee Award at the Jerash Festival in 2018 for his collection "I will go to nothingness" issued by the Egyptian General Book Authority, and he won the "La Plume" award, which is the Grand Prix awarded by the French "Fondation Oriani", and the award of The annual French Terranova Festival in 2006. He also won the Australian Immigrant Prize for Poetry in 2011.



## YOU SLEEP ALONE

You sleep alone with your head full of pictures  
 Men passed by and were not caught in the grip of dew  
 Forgive them, for they did not realize the secret of the rose in you  
 They have not tasted your morning breast milk  
 They did not touch the silk of your hands  
 And the mint of your heart  
 Your ribs are not cracked in their hands  
 And under their breath

Forgive them; they are arrogant males for no reason  
 Peacocks that fluff their feathers aimlessly  
 Bubbles of foam and speech  
 And you are more beautiful than the idea of femininity itself  
 You are more beautiful than the cruelty of lust  
 You are an angel who humbled himself and became the body of a woman  
 And a head full of images and regrets

Musa Hawamdeh

## AN OWL ON THE PORCH OF THE POEM

The time the owl spends on the porch of the poem will pass  
 And the hoopoe will chase me in order to make the slanderer happy  
 when "pleasing the dead"  
 I want to intensify  
 And metaphorize  
 I have a desire to move the box of euphemism to the storage of absences.  
 I have a lust for borrowing some years of my former life  
 And put it in the algae of the coming day  
 I long for a decent life  
 And women who don't look like women  
 And beings not like the ones I know  
 As for the trees, I like them as they are  
 And nature is complete  
 Perhaps it lacks some genius  
 But it is enough to keep me away from the madness of searching for life and  
 people in distant galaxies.

I urge words to mourn  
 And the women mourners to be near  
 And the prostitutes to be in love

I urge the city to forget  
 And the poet to remember  
 And the trees to self-conceit  
 And the fire on blackness

Evening shines  
 And autumn becomes more reckless  
 Like a paid violin  
 And lost  
 I am also a deserted violin and lost  
 And my musician is coward  
 He hides behind the hill of pain that hurts my chest  
 He hurts my chest and does not say

Far away are those fading nights  
 More distant than a breath that leaves its killer  
 And a dream that flew off its pillow  
 And a woman who used to tell stories to the wondrous sleep.

Oh my only friend  
 Oh my lonely regret  
 Show me the absolute grace  
 And the waist of the galaxy  
 To strike him with the ankle of the treacherous Achilles  
 And drag the arrogant Hector by the ear.

Oh my only friend  
 Oh my new regret  
 The time the owl spends on the balcony during the day will pass  
 And the hoopoe will follow me to reveal my secret to tyrants.  
 Oh my stubborn regret  
 Oh my poor friend  
 Get away from me  
 To continue my journey to distant Ithaca.



Nagat Ali is an Egyptian poet who obtained a PhD with first class honors from the Department of Arabic Language, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University in 2014. Her poems have been translated into several languages: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Kurdish, Portuguese and Romanian. She has published four collections of poetry, In addition to two books in literary criticism. She won several awards, including the Best Poetry Award for the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, 1998 and Tangier Prize for Young Arab Poets, Morocco, 2009. She was selected among the best young Arab writers at the 39th Beirut Prize in 2010. In addition, she won Naguib Mahfouz Award for Literary Criticism, Literary News Award in 2017.



## AT THE AGE OF SIXTY-SIX

At the age of sixty-six  
 You will have fun with what is left  
 From age  
 And you will name your next days  
 The "wasted time"  
 And you will be entertained by watching  
 The loss of returnees from the sea  
 And make fun of love  
 That lost you for years  
 And made you wake up afraid  
 In the middle of a dream  
 But that will never stop you  
 From strolling among the remains  
 Of delirious corpses  
 In the adjacent rooms  
 To resist the ghosts of loneliness  
 And you will always be proud that  
 You have made enough  
 Of legends.  
 At the age of sixty-six  
 The conditions of the city will also hurt you  
 The one, which got old without noticing it  
 And you will make fun of the scene of the girl  
 Who lit a candle for you  
 To dissipate the negligence  
 That took too long  
 And she kept believing that  
 You are not dead yet.

Nagat Ali

## OUTSIDE LONELINESS

These are not tears, Dad  
 To hide it away from you  
 It is the sound of the wound  
 Bleeding in the heart  
 And It may be the messages that I have hidden  
 Encrypted in my poems  
 So, It may reach you one day  
 For long nights  
 I was walking by the river  
 -That dried up without noticing-  
 Contemplating my pale shadow  
 That has become just like you  
 So I realize that you have taken with you  
 The light of the world  
 And that your only daughter has become  
 The negotiator of time  
 To let her forget  
 The betrayals of the body  
 And the loneliness of the wanderers who walked  
 Toward nothingness.  
 And when I was out of my frayed breath  
 And failed to climb  
 To your sky  
 I said I would wait alone  
 The passing of your spectrum  
 From here

But you are too late  
 In the visit  
 You are late more than enough  
 And I was tired of the darkness.  
 I waved my hand to you several times  
 From the balcony  
 And you did not see me  
 You were preoccupied with your appearance  
 As if you want to stay young forever  
 Perhaps to see me as a little girl  
 Who never grow old, no matter how time passes  
 Come a little closer to me  
 These are not tears, Dad  
 This is the silence, that ended  
 My story with you  
 But why do not you give me a second  
 To prepare you dinner  
 Before you go up again  
 And leave me a prey to insomnia?!

## LET DOWN

The city that did not fit  
 Your dreams  
 And kept chasing you all over  
 The place you migrated to  
 Turned off its lights early tonight  
 -Unusually-  
 To allow you  
 To escape quickly  
 You will -then- cross the bridge  
 Alone  
 This time  
 And your hand stained  
 With the remnants of my tenderness with you  
 In the last time we met  
 Where we sat for hours  
 -Unconcerned with time-  
 In the neighborhood restaurant  
 Which you intentionally get lost in it  
 I was contemplating your palm lines  
 That hurt you  
 And the glow of the eyes  
 That no one understands its secret  
 But they say all  
 They hide  
 When you say my name in disgrace

So I will convince myself  
 That you are nothing but  
 A miserable sailor  
 Who has no homeland to yearn for  
 Perhaps you cannot  
 Read tales  
 Nor broken faces  
 Nor the poems I mixed  
 With despair in my soul  
 Perhaps you will never understand  
 That hate is the beginning of healing  
 From the wound.



Nihad Zaki, an Egyptian poet and writer, born in December 1987. She won the Buland Al-Haidari Prize for Young Arab Poets in its session in 2022. She is also a journalist specializing in history. She practices drawing and is interested in Fine arts, film criticism, philosophy, literature, and other human sciences. In February 2022, her book "As if it were the Resurrection" was published.



## SAVORING MY TASTE

I named every sperm I aborted  
I scattered it in salty soil  
I left it to nature  
As seeds of creation  
It bled and ruptured  
Flowers and roses.

It is the fruit of the belly.  
She says:  
"Tomorrow I will pick from it and savor my taste."

Nihad Zaki

## AS IF SHE SWALLOWED HERSELF

Something in me stiffened like an atrophied organ.  
I am searching my body for gangrene  
And I cannot find anything to cut it off  
I am all engorged with blood  
Each cell rots separately  
I feel its pain.  
Death like childbirth  
But without a crying baby  
Without placenta and umbilical cord  
I carried my afterbirth in my womb  
As if she swallowed herself.

## RESURRECTION ENDS

Mothers stand together  
Their wombs opened to retrieve eternity  
Their gift to the world.

Everyone is willing to take what he/she gave  
Until the world is emptied of its inhabitants.

Only then... will the resurrection end.

Parween Habib is a poet, an academic researcher and a media expert. In 2011, she won the Dynamic Women Award at the continental level from George Washington University in the USA. Thus obtaining the first international award granted to successful women around the world with inspiring experiences. She also won national and international awards in different fields including media, poetry and other cultural activities. She is the author of four critical books, three poetry collections, and two children's books. Her poetry has been translated into seven languages. In addition, she holds a master's degree with distinction in Literary Criticism from Ain Shams University, Cairo. She also holds a Ph.D. with distinction in Literary Criticism, through a study of the language of women's poetry in the Gulf from 1975 to 2004, from the Arab League University, Egypt. Through her talk show program in Dubai TV, she interviewed 500 Arab novelists, poets, and thinkers.

## EVERYTHING SHOULD BE LIVED A SECOND TIME

Somewhere  
 The echo of wandering footsteps  
 Clouds pass slowly  
 Like post-dinner sleepiness  
 Like the word, that has not a root  
 Like a lonely cry  
 Connecting the silence of the night  
 With a spring body  
 Like a musical note  
 Crossing dormant shelves of books  
 Like a sorrel groaning in the cup after harvesting  
 Like a funny cartoon  
 In an embroidered dress hanging with doubt  
 Like a deferred cold  
 Delayed for tomorrow  
 Like a last rustle of light  
 Rising on a bed of ashes  
 This body is hardly a body!  
 Everything should be lived a second time.



Parween Habib



## ISHTAR RETURNS TO URUK

I get arrogant... I know that your love never  
 Lights up the dark corridors that surround me  
 To say it is over  
 Please Gilgamesh... Follow the echo of your love  
 (Oh Mamish Bamish)... My soul is a sacrifice for your heart

\*

Like a phoenix, shake the ashes off my shoulders  
 So the fire does not burn my heart  
 Nor does the water extinguish the embers of the glow between my ribs  
 And wash away the blackness from me  
 And I have nothing left but my love  
 And longing for you that leaks between the pores  
 Scattering me in the range and increases my passion  
 Defaming me in the country

For you, between my heart and July was the separation  
 And between my heart and all the love  
 Divorce was before my eyes darkened  
 With your love  
 For you, I saddled the seduction horses  
 Flew with it towards your sun  
 Indifferent to combustion  
 Intercede for you until you yearn  
 Crazy and running after you bare heart  
 Wandering by meeting  
 I hope you appreciate what Astarte did  
 She sheds our love her blood, lest it dies  
 And the passers-by bury it  
 As a martyr in the land of Iraq  
 If I die... For this love  
 Bury my heart... a bird in the Valley of Peace

Why Gilgamesh disavowed our love  
 And left me on the embers of pains  
 Ruminating my love alone  
 And our story went with spiteful mumbles  
 That «Inana»  
 Is chasing an illusion of mud  
 And she is the one who came from a distant sky

I renounced the throne of the gods  
 For you, I became a lover of dust  
 I only found resentment tearing my soul apart  
 And sprinkles the salt of ignoring and stings my worried veins  
 So I gathered what my wounds exposed  
 And spread my sails to ruin  
 And a fountain gushed out of the eye  
 When I hear a disturbance behind me: what is wrong with her?

I am the coveted Venus  
 So how can the mud resist me  
 Reject my heart on a plate of nostalgia  
 I am the beginning and the end  
 The dust does not move from the brilliant planet  
 Since thousands of years  
 I sacrifice myself for you «Uruk», without you pure ruin  
 I will sing in it if you are absent  
 An epic of moaning  
 And water my heart if it is swept by thirst  
 A bunch of mirages

*continued overleaf..*

## ISHTAR RETURNS TO URUK

*contd...*

I get arrogant... I know that your love never  
 Lights up the dark corridors that surround me  
 To say it is over  
 Please Gilgamesh... Follow the echo of your love  
 (Oh Mamish Bamish)... My soul is a sacrifice for your heart

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 And the passers-by bury it  
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 If I die... For this love  
 Bury my heart... a bird in the Valley of Peace



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Reem Najmi (1987) is a Moroccan poet and writer. She has been working as a journalist and broadcaster for the German channel Deutsche Welle since 2012. She has published three poetry collections: "Sky Blue" 2008, "My Heart was Like a Sunday" 2011, and "Be Innocent like a Wolf" 2018. She also published a novel entitled "Anatomy of Desire" 2022.



## LOVE

(Identification)

I cannot define love-  
But I think it is those minutes  
In which I miss you  
When you go out to buy bread  
Sunday morning.

Reem Najmi



## FINGERS

Your fingers  
 Make me shiver  
 They are clean as a white cloud  
 Your fingers that caress me in the cinema  
 And turn the pages with  
 Your fingers that rest on it  
 The tired angels  
 And the nymphs revolve around.

.....

.....

Please  
 Remove the glove

## THE NIGHT GETS A JOB

After he finishes his role in the poem of a great poet  
 The night returns home  
 He takes off his socks  
 And he opens the refrigerator  
 And he drinks what's left of yesterday's beer.

He played a small role in the poem  
 Because his stomach did not allow him to play a greater role.  
 Nevertheless, he was happy with the job.

Before this  
 He was homeless  
 He guards lovers in return for being warmed by kisses

Sameh Mahgoub is an Egyptian poet who graduated from the Faculty of Dar Al Uloom .He participated in many major poetic and cultural events inside and outside Egypt including: Tunisia, Morocco, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria, Jordan. In addition, He participated in the jury committees of state awards, as well as obtaining a number of awards and honors, including: the shield of the Prince of Poets Ahmed Shawky, the Al-Babtain Award, for his poem "On the Rhythm of His Laughter He Walks", the Ather Award for Arabic Poetry for his poem "I Write to Defeat My Death". He issued a number of poetry collections, including: "Nothing Equals the Sadness of the River", "Digging with One Hand", "The Metaphor of Water", and "The Wind Explains Its Travels", and some of his poems have been translated into French, English, Russian, and Spanish.



## LA CUMPARSITA

The gloomy woman  
 That leaves  
 Her hair loose  
 Like rumors  
 Is yawning boredom  
 Whenever she encounters  
 A cold morning  
 Behind the window  
 The scandal woman  
 Is sleeping  
 And sitting  
 And standing  
 And running  
 And fugitive  
 From the nothing  
 The woman who sees  
 And never seen  
 The girl child  
 That gets older  
 On her braids  
 And never grow old  
 The uncontrolled  
 Like a stray bullet  
 The soft as a knife  
 The hunting as the idea  
 The rose woman  
 If the fragrance dismounts  
 And walked in the streets  
 In a hurry

Sameh Mahgoub

*continued overleaf..*

## LA CUMPARSITA *contd...*

If the flute cries  
 Secretly of kissing  
 The Spinning woman  
 How many appointments  
 She missed  
 And how much did she send  
 And how much did she postpone  
 And how many horses  
 Of metaphors  
 She saddled  
 And how many and how many  
 I told about her  
 And still

## FROM THE SHORT CHAPTERS

A ... N.... A....y  
 Myself

It is as if you are just going out  
 From the legend  
 It is as if I am there  
 Taking care of moles  
 In the gardens of Babylon  
 Wiping the sun off  
 Your brown hair  
 And fly butterflies between your breasts  
 And read for passers-by  
 The short chapters from the holy book  
 How to your nipples  
 To sleep outside the text  
 How to edges  
 To live without memory  
 And for the memories  
 To betray the images  
 How to dreams  
 To be completed like this  
 Without a night  
 And clouds and rain  
 How to stone  
 To fall  
 Like this on a stone  
 The Kingdom is yours  
 And the hills  
 And pastures that did not sleep  
 And the moles  
 As they cry between my lips  
 On the slope



## INTERTEXTUALITY

From a naïve wave  
 - Between Transient -  
 On the train station  
 Love is born  
 From the entanglement  
 Of strange feet  
 In the crowd  
 Love is born  
 From the electricity of  
 Two palms touching  
 Unintentionally  
 Love is born  
 From the femininity of amber  
 Rolling  
 On the stairs of the soul  
 Till the stream of the breasts  
 Love is born  
 Love is born.  
 Innocent of the truth  
 And certainty  
 And fear  
 Born incomplete  
 And guilty  
 And sad

Between splendor and modesty  
 Between the rain umbrella  
 And the rain  
 Between the edges and the danger  
 Between the raging of two voices in the echo  
 Between echo and echo  
 Love is born on a journey  
 Between us - as between the roads and the returnees -  
 A promise and stories  
 And a time which is still  
 Between us  
 This evening  
 And these streets  
 And that coincidence  
 And that long corridor  
 Between two years  
 They go up  
 Without a desire  
 The ladder of Hope

Samir Darwish (1960) is an Egyptian poet, recently, residing in New York, USA. He worked in several leadership positions in Egyptian and Arab culture, governmental and semi-governmental. He was the editor-in-chief of the "New Culture" magazine, published by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture for four years. He founded and the editor-in-chief of the "Merit Cultural" magazine, the monthly electronic magazine published by Dar Merit Publishing in Cairo, from January 2019 until now. He has published (19) collections of poetry and is preparing to publish his twentieth collection. He has also published two novels, books on literary criticism and others on political and religious thought. The first of his autobiography entitled "The Ten Lean Years" in 2018.



## SOMETHING IS CHANGING

It is not possible for a poem to be exposed to a foreign poet  
 No matter how crowded with rhetoric  
 The poet wants a white woman  
 Average size  
 Who has two light nipples on a rounded breast  
 Like two unripe oranges  
 And abundant black grass in the wellspring of life..

This is what I told the trees that foliate  
 -Every new morning-  
 As if they had never stripped before  
 As if they did not reveal its branches for the winter in its fullness!  
 I was jogging  
 As if I want to plunge into my loneliness again  
 Or... as if I do not want to feel tired  
 And I do not want old memories to attack me  
 Of a white woman  
 With a breast balled up like two oranges!

No poem can give a lonely poet  
 A running yard  
 As if he is testing his virility  
 He wears athletic shoes and puts in his ears  
 An old romantic song by Umm Kulthum  
 Or a popular song by Fayrouz  
 That do not remind him of his white woman  
 Who tends to the modern singing bands  
 And jazz.

*continued overleaf..*

Samir Darwish

SOMETHING IS CHANGING *contd...*

The streets are the same, my friend  
 (Wide, straight and very cold)  
 The houses are short, mostly white  
 They have sloping roofs so that the rain does not settle on Them

The rain..  
 That eagerly wash the bare branches  
 Before they overlook it and foliate  
 For a lonely poet to feel  
 -Who writes a poem full of rhetoric-  
 That something is changing around him!

## GRANITE GOD

I am weak..  
 Like a granite mountain that stands alone in the desert  
 He looks carefully at the birds with their colors  
 And the ability of their small bodies to form  
 And fly  
 Without being able to touch it  
 Tenderly..  
 The moment the lava ignites in his hollow!

I am weak..  
 I left my weapons in a side café  
 -In "Mohamed Mahmoud" Street-  
 With an orange facade  
 A coffee shop frequented by unruly lovers  
 And lovers of reading and philosophizing  
 And the pure laughs  
 Reveal breasts like colorful birds  
 Who fly smoothly in the desert  
 Where a lonely granite mountain stands!

Yesterday I was alone too  
 I watch the intestinal contractions gradually subside  
 And I say to myself:  
 What does a lonely man need from a shrinking intestine  
 And he does not sleep in the lap of a bamboo-bodied woman  
 Who used to sit in cafes with him  
 Especially the one secluded in "Muhammad Mahmoud" Street  
 With its orange facade  
 And breasts that laugh like birds?

I am weak as granite  
 Like a god made a universe..  
 And sat behind a screen watching it!



## WEED LOYAL!

I spray the weed around my solitary home with devotion  
 As if I would carry it with me  
 To my grave, which I see soon  
 As if standing at the crossroads of our street  
 With the main street  
 That a fast train passes by  
 And I never thought of riding it...

There are eyes watching me from behind the windows:  
 A young girl and a lonely boy  
 Perhaps they wonder that an old man  
 Sprays the weeds diligently  
 As if he would carry them to his grave  
 And they may take a look into the future  
 When they are over sixty  
 With heart, arteries  
 And the digestive system diseases !

Our neighbor is old and lonely too  
 But I never see her spraying her weed  
 Although it is always mellow!  
 And the fifties fat white neighbor in front of us  
 Complains of premature aging  
 Although he lives alone with his mother  
 And he visits his girl daily to make love  
 Our neighbor is without work  
 And his mysterious girl urges him to lose weight.

Few pedestrians in this quiet street  
 On whose corner a train passes  
 In the suburb far from the crowds  
 A few girls and a few boys pass by  
 Every few hours one or more  
 Exercise their dogs and listen to music  
 And old women likewise  
 Whose arms are too white  
 And are not very flabby..  
 They smile at me delicately when I spray my weed with devotion.  
 -Also, the girl who exercises her dog in my backyard- smiles  
 They may whisper to themselves:  
 This old man is always alone  
 He does not have a dog to exercise it  
 But he is friendly and loyal to the weed!

Why am I happy when I spray the weed with devotion,  
 Perhaps because I get a chance to think  
 On past events  
 And because virtual sweethearts are waiting  
 -Impatiently-  
 To finish with my weed and devote myself to them  
 And perhaps to send a message to watchful eyes  
 That I do not think of the grave  
 Even if it is as close as they imagine!



2010 - 2022



# Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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