

2010 - 2024



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
APRIL 2024

DR SALWA GOUDA
presents
Arab Women Poets & Writers

COVER ARTWORK 'BLUE LAGOON' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS. DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2024

Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of:

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

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

[Donate](#)

All articles and photographs are the copyright of www.liveencounters.net and its contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the explicit written permission of www.liveencounters.net. Offenders will be criminally prosecuted to the full extent of the law prevailing in their home country and/or elsewhere.



ARAB WOMEN POETS & WRITERS
APRIL 2024

CONTRIBUTORS

DR SALWA GOUDA - GUEST EDITORIAL
AICHA BASSRY
AMINA ABDALLA HASSAN
ASIA AL-AMMARI
FADWA TUQAN
FATMA QANDIL
FAWZIA ALAWI ALAWI
HABIBA MOHAMADI
HAFSA RIFAI
HEBATALLAH AHMED
KHULOOD A-MUALLA
MAHA ALAUTOOM
NAGAT ALI
NAZIK AL-MALAIKA
NEHAD ZAKI
PARWEEN HABIB
RASHA AHMED
RIM GOMRI
SAHAR ANWAR
SAMIRA AL BOUZIDI

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'* 294 publications (till April 2024). 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-publisher-editor-of-live-encounters-magazines/>
<https://www.amazon.com/stores/Mark-Ulyseas/author>



WHO AM I?*

The night asks who am I?
 I am his secret, deep, black anxiety
 I am its rebellious silence
 I content myself with silence
 And I wrapped my heart with suspicions
 And I remained solemn here
 Gazing, while the ages ask me
 Who am I?

Who am I?, Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007).
 Iraqi poet and women's rights advocate

**translated by Dr. Salwa Gouda*

Nazik al-Malaika is, perhaps, one of the foremost Arab women poets who had cleared the undergrowth of dense cultural barriers and laid bare the soul of the Arab woman. Since then, many have followed in her path sharing their beautiful world pitted with angst and the exaltation of their intense beliefs wrapped in the words of a rich ethos.

A heartfelt salaam to *Dr Salwa Gouda*, Egyptian literary translator, critic, and academic, who has translated the works of Arab women poets and writers from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Algeria, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, UAE and Libya. This is an acknowledgement of their valuable contribution to the lyrical dominion.

The world, especially the Arab world, is fast changing, shuttling between beauty and violence at a frenetic pace leaving many gasping for peace within heart and home. The manic media is like a malevolent force that has unleashed banshees to troll the viewers, to entice them into a world of loathing, vengeance and death.

It is in this world that these poets exist, constantly reminding the reader of the *Word* that can drive away this hate and usher in a mind filled with peace, beauty and silence.

Acceptance is the path to travel with these scribes, who show us a fascinating montage of colliding worlds of mayhem and womanhood, of retributive justice and forgiveness.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas

Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian literary translator, critic, and academic at the English Language and Literature Department at Ain-Shams University. She holds a PhD in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and California State University in San Bernardino. She has published several academic books, including "Lectures in English Poetry, and "Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism" and others. She has also contributed to the translation of "The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers," which includes poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians, and men of letters, under the supervision of UNESCO. Additionally, her poetry translations have been published in various international magazines.

DR SALWA GOUDA THE CHALLENGES FACING ARAB WOMEN POETS AND WRITERS

When I started writing this editorial, several questions arose: What does the world expect from women poets? Do Arab women poets write a different language?

Do they lament their fortunes because they belong to Third World societies? Do they demand more freedom through their poetry? Are there themes that are suitable for men and not suitable for women?

For shaking the dogmatic social structures and answering these illuminating questions, I find that it is suitable to trace the position of women in world history which bears witness to the marginalization of women, particularly within patriarchal societies. Women are denied the freedom to express themselves in such societies; in societies where they are not given the right to self-expression, they often project a weak image of themselves to satisfy the egos of male chauvinists. Women are deemed to have a low social status, regardless of their position, because of the gender ideology propagated in male-dominated societies. Each act of theirs is judged with a microscopic eye to detect even the minutest blunder to prove that they are less competent than men.

The impact of this gender ideology is so strong that a vast majority of women develop a negative self-image and tend to believe that they are inferior to men in every respect, while some of them, because of this injustice, develop a strong hatred for men, assuming that men are responsible for all the injustice against women in the world, which of course does not hold true in all cases.

What women fail to realize is that their own gender has an equal role to play in the disempowerment of their female identity. We should also realize that Arab women poets and writers are part of world tradition, and they suffer the same patriarchal rule with its restraints as the rest of women writers across the world.



Dr Salwa Gouda

Throughout the ages of Arabic poetry, the female poetic voice has remained a synonym for weakness and absence. If we exclude rare female poets such as Al-Khansa' in pre-Islamic times, Laila Al-Akhailiyya in the Umayyad era, Al-Fari'a and Rabi'a Al-Adawiya in the Abbasid era, Walada bint Al-Mustakfi in the Andalusian era, and Aisha Al-Taymuriyah in the modern era, then we hardly find anyone included in the group of female poets except female slaves, from whom we receive stray verses and fragments. It only expresses their contributions to the festivals of fun, and thus the predominant image of their productions has become associated with the emotional model and controlled by methods of seduction and arousal of pleasure and anecdote. Although, Enheduanna, the Sumerian poet, preceded the Greek poet Sappho by 700 years.

Within this context, the classical critics did not highlight women's poetry except what promotes social virtue, sincerity, and where there is no vulgarity. In their view - the uttering of poetry is something that is aroused by the intensity of her passion and the feeling of sadness and enormity in her. Otherwise, they would not have prioritized Al-Khansa over the most powerful poets, because of her elegies about her brother Sakhr, or Laila Al-Akhailiyya for her elegies about Tawbah bin Al-Himyar. Other than that, the critics did not like the poetry of the councils of fun, as it seemed soft, seductive, and lacking in emotion.

The woman poet's mission extended from merely composing poetry, to fit within an artistic school that had its own components, characteristics, and artistic taste. However, criticism and discourse parallel to her poetry continued to view her only as a model of the crying poet who was only good at shedding tears. This attitude reminds me, in one way or another, with the role played by female characters, including queens, in Shakespeare's History Plays, as there was no vital action or rational ideas provoked by them, only lamenting words and tears.

There was a degrading vision that saw women's literature as weak, of little value and not comparable to men's literature, which made women afraid to engage in literary activity, and they were condemned to remain outside its arena or battle within society. This view continued to guide the overall activity of literature, as if it had become a kind of authority of cultural norms, established by the institution of literature and accepted by the dominant taste, and it did not budge successively except with the call, since the beginning of the twentieth century, to liberate women and grant them the rights that were stolen from them.

From the middle of the twentieth century, the collective voice of the literary woman began to emerge, in successive waves, to remove from her the traits of negativity, submissiveness, and hesitation, and to break the barrier of fear of speaking her ego and its hidden things. From there, an intense need emerged for her to express, at first under pseudonyms, her personal suffering, her private concerns, the aesthetics of her femininity, the details of her body, and her painful personal archive, and she found in all its genres of literature, poetry and narrative, what responded to this urgent need.

In this context, there was a discussion about what was termed "women's literature" within the field of literature, in response to some cultural studies, and the study of gender or sexuality. Such expressions carried a gender division of the concept of literature and its function, and raised a debate that has not subsided to this day, between supporters and denouncers. Just as awareness of "feminism" has been awakened among many female poets, story tellers, and novelists, and those working in cinema and documentary art in recent years.

With the spread of prose poetry, women poets turned their experiences to a new poetic stage, perhaps its most important feature: the rooting of the feminine dimension of the poem with its linguistic characteristics and its rhetorical and artistic components, including the tendency towards subjectivity and interest in the body with its various details and revelations. This has allowed scholars to sense the emergence of a feminine poetic discourse, betting on its patterns and self-being to achieve different aesthetics, to the extent that it refuses to be subservient to the authority of masculine discourse, or to imitate it and subjugate it, but rather challenges it and rebels against it.

Thus, it seems that women's language is regaining its legal rights through the localization of its specific language and stage as a system of signs into the space of poetic writing, in a way that brings women back to writing forcefully, and allows them to reside in the world, as they see it and defend it. It was like a soft revolution to extract recognition of their existence, recognition of their presence, and their rights to determine their creative and human destiny, and they paid a heavy price for this, and for the establishment of the policies of their vital field.

Women poets excel in poetry about motherhood, romance, homeland, family, and humanity, delving into emotions and values. On the other hand, men shine in poems of enthusiasm, chivalry, flirtation, values, homeland, and humanity.

The difference between their poetry lies not in creativity; both female and male poets are equally creative. However, women's romantic poetry is vivid, while men's is more direct. Women tend to have limited experiences with enthusiasm, whereas men navigate battles, challenges, anger, and intensity, which enhances the masculinity of their poetry and gives it wider recognition. When we consider men's freedom and control over areas like administration, governance, and media, they use these resources to reinforce their roles with a determined and explicit presence.

The field of cultural authority was crowded with prohibitions and taboos of all kinds, and the woman's voice was struggling between life and death, until it proved its right to exist, and created forms of residence in it with merit. Nowadays, the voice of women writers imposes itself on the literary scene with boldness, strength, and efficiency. Surprisingly, it was the man who supported her and opened the doors of poetry arenas, magazines, and festivals to participate in, with her poetry and publish it as well, as more than 90% of publishers are men. This, in fact, explains the increasing number of women poets and writers in the field of creative writing.



The world's first known author is widely considered to be Enheduanna, a woman who lived in the 23rd century BCE in ancient Mesopotamia (approximately 2285 – 2250 BCE). Enheduanna is a remarkable figure: an ancient "triple threat", she was a princess and a priestess as well as a writer and poet.

Aicha Bassry is a Moroccan 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). Her books have been translated into English, French, Spanish, Italian and Turkish. She, also, participated in many Arab and international cultural events (book fairs, festivals and conferences.)



DISCORD

Autumn that inhabits me
Is the autumn that looks like you
The wounds, themselves, divide us
The same pain brings us together
My poem is the wound and the balm
Your poem is the nightmare and the dream
You are the one who dwells in the memory of the wind
I am the one who lives in the remains of a gone sun
So, how does all this discord come together
Every night in the bed of love?

Aicha Bassry

LIFE CAN SOLVE ITS MISTAKES

The dagger that stabbed me
One day
Was damaged by rust.

Thus,
Life spared me the vice of revenge.



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/>

Amina Abdalla Hassan (1972) is an Egyptian writer and poet who has published six collections of poetry. She is also a prominent writer in *The New Culture* magazine published in Egypt.



USUALLY

I am only read by strangers and travelers
As if we were one tribe
One of us sniffs the other
Smell and the scent turn and bring us closer
As a family with history of intimacy
Even if they are just eye contact
That visual memory creates
Relationships in my life.

Amina Abdalla Hassan

THE ENIGMATIC WOMAN

Approaching or photographing is prohibited
You write about her with caution
She is the closest
To the emotions of the Eastern man
The enigmatic woman
A creature not accessible to those close
Easier than the complexities of eloquence
And the construction of poets
And the dreams of young musicians
This woman
Becomes a god of love that
Everyone denies

AS A MAN

You do not know how to love a woman who loves details
She goes with you to the supermarket
She picks up things she does not often buy and does not like
But you might miss them
The woman who loves details is very self-critical
If the jar of hazelnut coffee runs out
If she failed to make the unknown smoked salt for us
She does not like alcohol during intimacy
The woman who loved you with such attention to detail
Does not expect your famous word "grateful" - that's the worst thing to say -
Because she is more appreciative than you for her ability to do seemingly trivial
Things
She is thankful for the sigh over a pot of green soup mixed with a kiss that thaws
Her frozen heart
Grateful for the sound of your mother bridging the gap between you both
As a mysterious man
You cut the vein without ceremony or praise
And that goes against the rules of sacrifice.

Asia Al-Ammari is a prominent Saudi poet and academic from Saudi Arabia. She has published more than four poetry collections, which are subject to critical study.



AT ONE A.M. ORDERS

Bring a cup
I will pour us
A sweet meeting.

Bring your hand
We will light
A candle
For an apparent joy.

Bring your mouth
We will move a song
In the air.

Bring your pillow
I will hide it under
A dream coming true.

Bring your heart
It will stop its light beat
And will leap to my windows.

Bring your perfume
It will blend with mine
Now.

Asia Al-Ammari

ABOUT TWO DANCERS WHO DID NOT TURN TOWARDS US

We sat silent
Not knowing what to say
About our steps
That we do not know.

There are two dancers
Approaching
And receding
Like waves
In front of us, we who
Are afraid of drowning.

Do they feel two
Belonging to the seats
Not the music ?!

Will they be sad if they knew
That there are those who watched them for a long time
And left
Before they turned
Towards them?



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/photos/danse-studio-classique-tutu-5381508/>

Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003) is a prominent Palestinian poet known for her representations of resistance to occupation in contemporary Arab poetry. She has sometimes been referred to as the "Poet of Palestine." Tuqan eventually published eight poetry collections, which were translated into many languages.



HAMZA

Hamza was one from my town, like the others
Who eats his bread nicely
With the hand of toil like my simple, good people

He told me when we met one day
As I stumble in the maze of defeat:
Be patient, do not weaken, my cousin
This land that the fire of crime reaps
Which, today, shrinks in sadness and silence
With its broken heart, will remain
Alive and never die.

This land is a woman
In the grooves and in the wombs -
The secret to fertility is one
The power of the secret that grows palm trees
And ears
Also, grows the fighting people.

Days passed when I did not meet
With my cousin
But I knew
That the belly of the earth was heaving in pain
With labor and a new birth.

continued overleaf..

Fadwa Tuqan

Hamza — sixty-five — weighs
 Heavy like a rock on his own back
 When the town governor gave his order:
 (Blow up the house and tighten up
 His son in the torture chamber!)
 The governor of the town ordered
 Then he rose
 He ,later. explained:
 It was necessary for law and order
 That is, for love and peace!

The soldiers surrounded the perimeter of the house -
 The serpent's coil came full circle
 The bang at the door was but an order —
 'evacuate, damn it!'
 And generous as they were with time, they could say:
 'In an hour, yes!'

Hamza opened the windows
 Under the eyes of the soldiers, to the sun and say, "Allahu Akbar."
 Then he called:
 (Oh Palestine, rest assured
 I, the house, and my children are the offerings of your salvation
 For you, we live and die)
 Then a shake penetrates the veins of the town
 When the echo repeated Hamza's scream
 Then, humility and silence enveloped the house.

An hour later, the house collapsed
 Burying dreams and memories of a lifetime
 Of labor, tears, and some happy moments.

Yesterday I saw my cousin on the road
 He steps on the path with determination and certainty
 Hamza still had his brow raised with pride
 It is enough for me to stay in its embrace
 It is enough for me to die on its land
 And buried in it
 And under its dust, I melt and annihilate
 And I will resurrect as grass and as a flower on its land
 Infested by the palm of a child grown by my country
 It is enough for me to remain in its embrace
 As dust
 And grass
 And its flower
 Is the freedom of a people.

Fatima Qandil (1958) is an Egyptian poet, writer, and academic. She has published many poetry collections, and one of her most prominent works is the novel *Empty Cages*, which won the Naguib Mahfouz Prize for Literature in 2022.



SPIKY VOIDS THAT MOVE SUDDENLY

Keys that open doors
 Are the keys that close doors
 And the keys hanged in chains
 Only has the drama of resonance
 But the key that dies in my pocket
 Reminds me that it's time
 To be a sensible woman
 That lives in a house
 Without keys... without doors...

A shooting star is hiding
 Before we see its features
 Before we knew that
 It is the same shooting star.

Everything I saw in my heart after that
 Is a sunken feet
 Then the blood prevented traces.

Fatima Qandil

How I loved a man like a black star
Who stripped me of all the men I loved
And he leaves me only
The joy of orphanhood.

Darkness eats the full moon
Then it rises trembling
The scythe of defeat.

Why do you imagine the family scene
As water falls on the sides of the tractor?

I say, Ziad, I am your mother
And you will not be
I say, Ziad: My uterus is in fragments
How can I settle you?

Every day
In metro expressway
A dilapidated house flashes
With an external wooden ladder
And an iron door
Always open
every day
Until it became my home.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Fawzia Alawi Alawi is a Tunisian poet, novelist and essayist who has published nine poetry and short story collections, in addition to a novel entitled "Faces for One Woman" (2020). She also won several national and Arabic awards.



Fawzia Alawi Alawi

WOMEN

Women who are tired of hanging laundry
 And peeling garlic in dark kitchens
 Women who cut their fingers when
 Darning the finches and
 The arrogant vultures' socks
 Women who are tired
 From tasting the salt meals
 And the bitter tea
 Women who complain of varicose veins and the sweat of sorrow
 And from the emptiness of the dictionary of love
 Women who plant fragrant crops in pots that do not grow Green
 And those who plant olive trees
 In minefields
 The recorded in the notebooks of despair
 Because they are chickens that do not lay eggs
 It happened that one day they made funny wishes
 The tall white lady said
 I would like, oh, I would like to smoke a cigarette in the Port café
 Without the carp spying on me
 Or sailors throw green apples
 And the stinky nets at me
 The fat woman said, "I would like, I would like, if, if."
 I swam in that pool alone
 Coverless except for the clouds
 Without being harassed by fish
 Or the crab craves my body foam
 The secretive lady said, "I wish I could sing at the top of my voice."
 Until the birds gather on the corners of the shops
 Without the sellers being upset by the possible dissonance in my voice
 A man follows war news on Channel 3
 Shouted angrily at his friend
 Who is this poetess that dares our women against us?

Habiba Mohamadi is a well-known Algerian poet, writer, and academic who writes modern poetry and opens her text to experimentation between the flash poem, the painting, the fragment, and the epigram. She has many poetry collections and has a long history of writing for the Egyptian, Algerian, and Arab press. She has several collections of poetry and intellectual works. The most famous of them are: "The Kingdom and Exile," "Fractures of the Face," "The Overflow of Exile," "Time in the Open," "Anklets," and other works, and some of her works have been translated into foreign languages such as English, French, and Spanish. And her latest intellectual publications: A book about the relationship between poetry and philosophy in philosophical thought, with "Nietzsche" as an example, entitled *The Lust for Wisdom, the Madness of Poetry*, issued by the Egyptian General Book Authority. She was honored in Algeria, and in several Arab and foreign countries, including, but not limited to, an honor from the Supreme Council of the Arabic Language in Algeria for her excellence in writing in the Arabic language and her efforts to preserve it. Her last honor was from the General Syndicate of the Egyptian Writers Union in 2023, and she was awarded the Union Shield as the first Arab writer to receive the Egyptian Writers Union Shield.

SELECTIONS

1

With a poem
I shake off the dust of the soul!

2

I Come out of the skin of the idea
I gouge out Apollo's eye
Just like Dionysus did
For the mind!
Time is madness or wisdom
The great leap of the soul
This is my time
This is my wisdom
Perhaps my language emulates it!

3

You are the only one who grows with me, poem
And after forty
We die together
With a shell of awareness!

4

My mind is my nakedness
Adam, I was not his crooked rib
Since my lungs turned pale, I have not breathed fresh air
That's because I left my kiss
Suspended
There
In Paradise!



Habiba Mohamadi

5

Do not cross my soul barefoot
It's glass!

6

The fashion of diet, women
Are craving at, made me laugh!
I, as a little philosopher
I make a lifetime
Until I become a beautiful structure
Underground!

7

Black milk
That is the taste of my mother's absence
In my mouth!

8

My mother was a kind frond
Then she went with the wind to the mountain
And when I knead the kasra bread
Like her every Friday
My sadness becomes a mountain
Then the wind comes
Without my mother!

9

I did not cry when my mother died
But in the morning
They found me killed on the guillotine of a poem!

10

What are the characteristics of my longing?
Transparent as truth
Lofty as a polite text
For a poet in pain
Salty like a sea abandoned by its visitors
Or fragile as a child
Who sees his mother for the last time?!

11

My soul is planted in the nursery
Of love
If she dies, that is my grave!

12

A Message to "Zorba"
No, Zorba, I'm free!
Because the rope hanging around my neck
And pulls me down,
I distributed its threads
On the birds
To raise me to heaven!

Hafsa Al-Rifai is an Egyptian poet and urban planning engineer. She won the shield of the "Zarqa Al-Yamama" Poetry Festival in 2015. She published a literary collection entitled "Possibilities of a Mirage" in 2012 and the poetry collection "Before Habit Tamed My Vocal Cords" in 2023. In addition, she participated in several collective books, such as "Writers of Youth" and "Half-Closed Windows". Moreover, she has published periodical articles and translations. She is also qualified for the short list of the "Ibn Khasib" Prize for Arabic Poetry in 2022.



MARGIN

"Perhaps I wanted to be more
Than a space for pencil scribbles
And naive words
And ugly fractures
What distinguishes the blank page from me?
To test the elegance of ink
And the correct numbers
And the trustworthiness of a point at the end of the line"
A margin says painfully,
Before it is erased again.

Hafsa Al-Rifai

CHAMELEON

The womb of the world devours me
It does not want any more embryos
After today
It tells me in its own way:
To grow bigger
And I tell it
- With the fetal curl around my confusion-
Every night
Everything it needs to know
It slaps me on the cheek
And I cannot return the slap
And I do not turn the other cheek to it!
I'm not that capable
Not that serene anyway
We do not belong to each other
But I'm just pretending to blend in with its colors
Until I borrow a chameleon's skin
And stop chewing the bad poems.



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/photos/chameleon-abstract-chameleon-reptile-378557/>

Hebatallah Ahmed is an Egyptian writer and doctoral mental health researcher. She has published two collections of short stories, Al-Nawala and The Vanilla Revolution. She won the 2024 Sawiris Literary Award for Short Stories, Senior Writers Branch, for The Vanilla Revolution. In addition, She won the Egyptian Story Club Award 2023 and the Central Prize of the Palaces of Culture for her collection, Al-Nawala.



QASIM

Oh December, good morning to the birds that inhabit my bold jasmine, to the warm cups that fill the kitchen, to the stormy weather outside the window that tempts me to make a cinnamon-and-sugar stuffed cake. I, incredibly, love the smell of cinnamon mixed with vanilla. The smell of vanilla stimulates my appetite, and cinnamon gives me energy of unlimited gentleness. Its sting, combined with the intensity of its scent, resembles an overflowing femininity that incites one's resolve to challenge, just as the dense rose tree beneath the window does; as it flaunts its roses in the face of rain, radiating brilliance after rain that continued throughout the night.

The December air this morning dances breathlessly with the dresses of passers-by, and its shy sun shrinks the shadow of a woman buying groceries, bread, and oranges for her children. With the second drizzle of rain this morning, I begin to knead the cakes well and massage the dough with a large piece of butter, and with every massage the scent of nostalgia wafts from my hands and the kitchen. The "Qasim" gale, which has struck Alexandria since yesterday afternoon, has been severe this year.

I once asked my grandmother why you called that violent gale "Qasim, and she said: One day the fishermen went out in a large group, and the sheikh of the fishermen was suffering from a cold that had become difficult for lemons, so his eldest son Qasim went away to lead the fishing procession, and there the sea swallowed him, and his father went mad and went out in anger to the sea and struck it with his stick, and the sky mobilized for retaliation, , to avenge the adornment of the youth. The sky continued to rain heavily of sadness and love for five full days. The wind rose, uprooting the doors behind which loved ones hid along the coast.

continued overleaf..

Hebatallah Ahmed

So, the people called it Qasim gale. The cat jumped in fright into the kitchen, and I lost my balance as I thought about Qasim, whom nature had revolted against being swallowed by the sea. Was he so handsome that the land would spare him as wide as the sea? Were his eyes like the eyes of Omar Sharif, and the sound of his laugh like Rushdi Abaza's laugh...or was he filled with confidence like Amal Dunqul's poems?

Or does he plant ears of corn, goodness, and love in the earth? Or was the sea the most courageous of Qasim's lovers, so it embraced him inside its heart, throwing everyone away? Hmm... the cake fills the kitchen with a pleasant smell. The light that penetrates through my fingers as I bake it makes me able to collect the day's remains in an empty glass jar on the spice rack; bringing back to my soul some of the sweetness cut from it. It seems to me that I have loved the smell of bread since forever.

The story of my passion for cinnamon sticks coincides with the story of Qasim and the sea. Why didn't I think about the necessity of opening a bakery? And set up a wide sofa in the middle of it, on which the grandmothers of the neighborhood sit, and the children gather around them, listening to the tales of the gals and the stories of the beautiful girls who stumble over the cups while baking cakes with the names of those they love.

And of course, I will create a cake named Qasim with lots of cinnamon, ginger, and honey.

FIXED TIME

At half past four o'clock, the station is full of groups of people, ranging from those arriving to travelling, laughing, and frowning, and various colors of dresses, coats and scarves, and the squawking of conductors and vendors. Her arrival silences the noise, with her slender stature and her flexible body despite the passing of the years. She kept the same white dress and high heels, and her carefully styled hair, which has grown taller over the past year, and the mixed fragrance of jasmine and fruits, and her strong attractive steps... I heard a faint groan emanating from Muhammad Atwan, followed by a long sigh. He pulled a chair in front of Madani's booth,

"You are welcome, I swear it is a long time ago! You are welcome, Madam. Jilan."
"Mercy...how are you and how are the trains?" Muhammad Atwan, smiling:
"Okay, fine, Madam, excuse me."

Atwan left, bowing his head to the right, and left, squinting, and saying: "Indeed... longings are the goods of strangers." On February 5th every year, Jilan comes looking the same for fifteen years. Nothing had changed except the dimming of the sparkle from her eyes, the smile shrinking into a curved arc that matched the color of the red lipstick, and a trembling appeared that comforted her fingers as they fumbled together. "

Fifteen years, Kamel, and I have never lost hope that you will come on the five o'clock train as you promised me. I know, my dear, that you will not break the promise even if you are late... you will come. I break the neck of time with my daily attempt to outrun the sun, ignoring the silence of the years hanging on the holder next to the door. I make sure I am well dressed in the windowpane and the dirty elevator wall, which clearly reflects my image. You know that I do not like mirrors... The walls of the house are filled with pictures of those who have passed away, my father, whose fate did not give a chance to meet you, and my repulsive wretch brother, and Khalaf the one whose back has been bent by time?

continued overleaf...

Do you remember Khalaf, the young man who was carrying your letters to me?! The young man grew up and now has three children, the youngest of whom is a girl named Jilan - after my name - I became the manager of the bank where I work, and they started calling me Mrs. Jilan instead of Miss Jilan. They are fools who do not know how much I love calling me Miss, to remind me that I am devoted to you ...

“You may not know, Kamel, that the fifth train no longer existed at the end of January 2011. I was also surprised, my beloved, that the time of our sacred train was changed. Although the young revolutionaries demanded change, I did not hear that one of their demands was to change our time. I heard them calling for freedom, justice, equality, living in dignity, and refusing inheritance of power. They demanded things and things that did not include changing the time of the trains. I came here on our time in 2011.

I was surprised that day that the trains from the governorates to Alexandria and Cairo stopped, and the station was completely crowded. However, I was crowded to get under the street lamppost, where our meeting place was, you might manage your way and come to me.

When the wait was long, I chanted with them: “The people want the trains to return.” “Haha don’t laugh at me. Yes, I participated in the cheering, just as I shared a loaf of bread last year with a young man who came from his village to look for work here in Alexandria. He was waiting for a relative of his: He told me, ‘Eat this expensive loaf of bread kneaded with my mother’s tears.’” I didn’t tell him that I found it saltier and softer than all the loaves I had tasted before.

“The year before, I found you on the opposite sidewalk... I don’t really know how I forgot the place of our meeting - I grimaced a little - You told me, Kamel, that our place is under the street lamppost of our love. It is the one with a scratch on it bearing a heart with my name and yours. I called you Kamel, Kamel, I am here.” I ran over you until the heel of my shoe got stuck in the pavement tiles that have been repaired for two years. I left it and ran barefoot, and you did not hear.

I pushed the passengers before you disappeared into their dust, and I ran... Five o’clock strikes, and I ran... The station’s internal call rose, and the horn of the departing trains rose, drowning out my voice, and I ran... “Where did you go, Kamel? And how did you not hear my voice even though you heard my silence?”

Pardon me, Kamel! I know that you would not have ignored my call. Tell you a secret?! Your beloved’s vision has become weak... I have been using eyeglasses for ten years, but I do not wear them when I come to our expected date so that they do not obscure my eyes and I can see you clearly among all arrivals.

Kamel... Oh Kamel... I’m here.” Jilan’s voice rose as she stood up and ran towards sidewalk 6, and Muhammad Atwan and Madani ran after her to prevent her from falling onto the tracks.

Khulood Al-Mualla is an Emirati poet and writer. She has published six collections of poetry, and her works have been translated into several languages, including Spanish, Turkish, Russian, French, Hindi, Italian, and English. She won the Buland Al-Haidari Prize for Young Poets for the year 2008 at the Asilah Festival in Morocco. Furthermore, she participated as a member of the jury for the 2011 Buland Al-Haidari Prize. In 2016, she was honored along with three world poets in the Initiative of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum for Peace Poets. She has also been chosen as a consultant at the International Poetry Festival in Costa Rica in 2020.



ANCIENT CITIES

I enter the world from its ancient cities
 And I do not turn around
 In ancient cities, poems sit on the roads
 And between stories
 They jump over the ribs
 And open their arms to the lost
 In ancient cities strife flies
 And nerdy songs flow out
 The coasts hide in them
 The clouds descend subtly
 And poetry reproduces
 In ancient cities as well
 Passion flies
 Houses dance
 Doors and windows open
 The heart of the world expands for people like me

Khulood Al-Mualla

SNOWBALL

The snowball I form with my love makes me feel warm
The snowball that I throw into my heart teaches me to melt
The snowball that bears my name is rebelling
What a feisty whiteness.

ABSOLUTELY FREE

I practice my passion for displaying the sky
thus
Absolutely free
I look out my narrow window
So, I see the whole universe
His biggest secrets are revealed
thus
Absolutely free
I color my small details with the color of snow
I reconcile myself with the moment that brings me pleasure in things
From my narrow window I look out
I enjoy stretching
And my sky is wet with life
I practice my passion of reaping the fruits of my existence
Naked from my old injuries
Naked from the excessive silence around me
Absolutely free
So that I am not complete.

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



WHAT LOVE DOES

Do you know what love does with perfume?
It makes it recover the garden.

And do you know what love does to roses?
They drip their colors into butterflies
There is no difference between a butterfly and a rose
in love
There is no difference between
The metaphor of the butterflies and the roses of truth.

And do you know what love does to poetry?
It catches a sea with its fish
For a fairy in the caves of speech
Who sees in the dark
And raves:
If the waves are honest
We survive
And if the sea drowns
You are the drowned.

Maha Alautoom

WOMEN

Women who drag out their darkness
To raise a dawn that illuminates speech.

Women who were bereaved of their chicks
To release a flock of doves.

Women of Palestine
And the women who return with their lovers' light shrouds
From Egypt to the borders of the Levant

On them - only -
Peace.



Graphic of a Palestinian woman in mourning.

Najat Ali is an Egyptian poet who obtained a Ph.D. 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.



MUSIC THAT CREEPS IN LIKE LIGHT

I will collect my losses from
 Lost loved ones
 I will write about swarms of despair
 That come to me
 From every direction and end
 Then I will tell you about my loneliness
 Which took a long time
 Then I will point my hand to the cracked
 Wall
 Which I engraved
 Part of my broken face
 And stories of the painful past
 I will just be happy now
 Because I am listening to this
 Music
 Which shone like the sun
 In my soul
 And it seemed like an audible light
 That permeates my body
 So, life was revived in it again
 And spread peace
 In the whole universe.

Najat Ali

HOW COULD YOU DISAPPEAR HELEN!

How could you suddenly disappear
Helen
Without telling me
Was I not your good opponent
Who wrote a poem about you
one day?!
Your voice is heard here
With me between the walls
How did I receive the news of your passing
Alone
With all this neutrality
It is not appropriate for you
As an opponent that has tormented me for a long time
I am trying to imagine
How they covered your skinny body
And how did the angels bear
The look of your sad eyes
When they lift you up
Rushing to the sky.



Photograph courtesy <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/252890>

Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007) is an Iraqi poet, critic and academic who taught in many schools and universities in Iraq. She published several poetry collections and was best known for her role as a pioneer of the free verse movement, making a sharp departure from the classical rhyme form that had dominated Arabic poetry for centuries.



Nazik al-Malaika

WHO AM I?

The night asks who am I?
 I am his secret, deep, black anxiety
 I am its rebellious silence
 I content myself with silence
 And I wrapped my heart with suspicions
 And I remained solemn here
 Gazing, while the ages ask me
 Who am I?
 And the wind asks who am I?
 I am its confused soul, denied by time
 I am in nowhere like it
 We keep walking and there is no end
 We keep passing and there is no survival
 If we reach the curve
 We thought it was the end of misery
 Then there was void!
 And eternity asks who am I
 I, like it, am a giant embracing ages
 And I return and grant them resurrection
 I create the distant past
 From the temptation of the pleasant hope
 And I will return to bury it again
 To create for myself a new yesterday
 Whose tomorrow is ice
 And the self asks who am I?
 I am like it, confused, staring into the darkness
 Nothing gives me peace
 I keep asking and the answer
 Will remain veiled by mirage
 And I will keep thinking it has come close
 But when I reach it, it has dissolved
 Died and disappeared.

Nehad Zaki, an Egyptian poet, journalist, and writer, born in December 1987. She won the Buland Al-Haidari Prize for Young Arab Poets in its 2022 session. 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.



THE SECRET

In my city
No one is greeted
Eyes do not meet
And hands do not touch.

The trial suddenly shrank.

The spheres lost their control over the City of God
The threads broke up
The circles dissolved.

You are trapped in the present moment
You repeat it over and over again
A cat chasing its tail.

The other no longer has a role in the story
You now know that
He would not end the curse of your blood.

Bats nested in the souls next to spiders
They sucked the heart's blood
Everyone was hit by the infection of walking in the place
Ghosts wandering on an eternal street.

Everyone closes their eyes
Escapes into the bliss of blindness
Afraid of catching feelings.

Here, the secrets die suffocated in the throats
Swords cut tongues before they speak a word.

And under the shadow of the moon
No one whispers secrets in anyone's ear anymore.

Nehad Zaki

Parween Habib is a poet, academic researcher, and 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 on Dubai TV, she interviewed nearly 500 Arab novelists, poets, and thinkers.

TO MY FATHER

What is the benefit of all the medals that you carry?
 And you are disturbed by your daughter's tired dreams
 You fight for the freedom of the people
 And my freedom is prisoned in your hands
 I say - if I hear you
 Take pride in military honor and honesty -
 What a lie!
 I condemn your submission to rulers by the command of God
 You offer a daughter as a sacrifice for their obedience
 How much you hurt her feelings; you became her executioner
 O my father whom the city blessed
 I thought you were a wall that repels gossiping wolves from me
 And pierces the eye of voyeurism
 When it chases my sad soul
 But your silence burned away the similarities between us
 You demand that I do not say, so that you can tell
 But if you bust my window
 Then you closed the door to my letters
 I will burn all my longing for you
 I turn my back on the custom of the tribe
 And I go on... and cry



Parween Habib

TO MY SON

It is true that I am a rogue woman
 Who left her child to the mirage
 To suckle from the breast of this great void
 The night sings to him as a lullaby to sleep
 Then he falls asleep, and sorrow awakens in my dream
 And I hear my heart - I am the woman in love -
 He calls you "Kami"
 I extend my hands to the dream
 To touch your hair, your cheek, your face
 A terrifying scream rises
 He calls for the thief's hand to be cut off!
 It is true that I ran away
 Was I able to hold the child in my hands
 And I leave my freedom with them
 I did not ignore you, but these are the desires of the tribe
 The only thing that extinguished the embers of brutality within them
 Was to see me killed
 I do not blame you if you say one day
 That I loosened the braid in my beloved's arms
 And I betrayed... and I and I...
 I do not blame you
 But despite what has been said or will be said
 Remember that I am your mother!

TO MY HUSBAND

It is not your fault if they handed me over to you as a young girl
 Or have women surrounded me with their jealousy
 And revealed my secret before the family
 And I did not care, I knew that their mornings
 Are servitude and submission
 And in the evening, the night's hem embroiders jealousy
 I have not passed, except through lean years, the madness of childhood
 And I did not know
 That I will be given as a gift on a plate blessed by the tribe
 To a man twice my age
 It is not your fault
 Because I never said I love you
 And I did not sleep awake waiting for you
 And the longing was not intoxicated when my perfume spoke to it
 And how can my snow melt, and I do not know the heat of your fire
 It is not my fault if the soul is a bird
 That rejects life in your dwelling pond
 It spreads its wings to the wind
 I do not care if one day you say something that is not permissible
 And you told them that I am unfaithful.

Rasha Ahmed is an Egyptian poet and cultural editor. She has published several collections of poetry, including "The Boredom of Losses," "It Was Nothing but the Water of My Heart," "With a Pale Light," and "An Empty Seat Weary by the Light."



A SHADOW RESEMBLING A GALLOWS

I do not have any indulgences
And no stray star in my heart
A completely naked woman
Who covered her loneliness with a shadow that looked like a gallows
Every day she wraps it around her neck
She is waiting for a lonely butterfly
That returns back from the forest
With a wound
That shortens the route to the sea.

Rasha Ahmed

LOVE

Love, this transparent being
 How do we buy or sell it
 How to rent ourselves to it for a day
 For a week, a month, a year
 The trees of silence withered
 The soil is dry
 No moon in the jug
 Love is our fresh, sweet disease
 That does not go to the doctor
 We will always wither and grow in it
 Like a flower
 Like a laugh
 Like a tremor that burns the language
 In the bones of the bed.

I love you
 I regain yesterday, today and tomorrow
 I regain myself
 And wait for another life
 That we can color
 We can ignite through the eye of a needle
 We laugh
 When we fight over a kiss
 That we do not know how to, justly, distribute
 On two lips
 No commandments for grass
 Just
 We rest time on its crooked side
 We smile
 When we take its hand
 Until it crosses the sidewalk.



Photograph of nutmeg by Mark Ulyseas.

Rim Gomri is a Tunisian poet, storyteller, writer, and journalist. She studied journalism and the media. She has published three collections of poetry: *Women Waiting*, in 2013, *On My Body, I Tattooed My Amulet*, in 2016, *What the Dream Did Not Say*, in 2018, and *Another Life for a Past Age*, in 2021. Furthermore, she has a series of short stories and a novel in progress, as well as a fourth poetry collection in print, to be published soon. She writes literary and cultural articles in Tunisian and Arab periodicals.



POSSIBILITIES

The possibilities are many
 It's like witnessing the sunrise from an ancient roof
 You get the ecstasy of creation
 Or survive a traffic accident
 While you are writing a love letter to a distant lover.

Perhaps you get a passing love stroke
 You enter unwillingly the cities of poetry
 You become the pivotal line
 In a forgotten poetry collection on a shelf.

You may drink wine behind a window
 In a city under bombardment
 And you smile
 Death has not noticed your presence yet.

There are many possibilities in life
 As if light seeps into your soul at dawn
 The sun shines on your lips
 You extend your tongue to this existence
 Happy with your victory over the darkness of your heart.

It may happen while you kiss her
 To live the dream
 Mock your naivety
 Go on chasing longing.

Rim Gomri

Life has sad possibilities
A white cloudy morning
Becomes saturated blue
With the salt of distant seas
So, your soul longs for rain.

Poetic possibilities
You write a hot love poem
As brown as your coffee cup
You forget to borrow your lover's face
And the meaning does not complete.

In life, the possibility of death
Destroys what came before it... It destroys what comes after it
The poet is miserable
The lover wails at its doorstep
The dream door closes when it passes
And nothing remains
Except the possibility of crossing the last dream.



Photograph of nutmeg by Mark Ulyseas.

Sohar Anwar is an Egyptian poet and writer who holds a doctorate in business administration. She began writing poetry many years ago, and has had many articles, poems, and short stories published in many newspapers, forums, and websites since 2003. "Without a Trace of Me" is considered her first collection of poetry. In 2023, she published her book "Women in the Business World... Between Finance and Empowerment."



TIME MACHINE

Images of the past collide
Strange worlds are being born
Lead me to my destiny.

The time machine takes me
From now on to other lives
Crashed by air waves
Who are you, alien? I asked?
Your companion: she said.

Now I am free
I fled from me
I am resurrected.

Sahar Anwar

NO ONE LOOKS LIKE HIMSELF

This morning
I am not me
My body is unable to contain me.

A sun like a snake that writhes every night
Sleeps in the embrace of a new sky.

A moon that does not like fullness;
Except after sleeping with star prostitutes.

How often does my sky change
I do not look like me.

THE COFFEE

Oh coffee
Try to remember me
I am the empty woman
The one who uprooted patience from her skin.

Oh coffee
Do you know how long hope died?
Since they left me a sleeping, dying dream
A blind cat meows in my head
And butterflies trapped behind a broken mirror
Waiting for the glow.

Samira Al Bouzidi is a Libyan poet. She has published eight poetry collections, and one of her collections has been translated into Italian.



HEAVINESS

My lightness is heavy
 I feed my beings with transparent bread at the end of the night
 The eggs hatch in my imagination all at once
 That's why the poems flow like mysterious lust.

Hungry and blind
 I monitor the cosmic door
 I put all my secrets in my bag
 And I wait for you
 This is what I have trained to do all my life
 Here I broke the dry loaf
 And drank of the immortal poison
 Here I folded the larger world into my words
 Here God gave me the sad flame!

I have a voice that can be broken
 And forgotten
 Suitable as a chair for stressful days.

Samira Al Bouzidi

CRAZY WOMAN

I open a window to the darkness, and knock on the door of the Night
My neighbor says: This is a crazy woman
And my friends put stones in my feet
And my children pull me by my long dress
But I read the book of commandments
I learned to walk on my own with a damaged foot.

A dog barks in the dark under my balcony
I silenced him with the book "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim."
I know Borges will be upset from behind his
Grave
But that's okay, I read it a hundred times
I will learn to silence my mouth by yawning
Because the light morning that floats in my head is bigger than every lie.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

2010 - 2024



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
APRIL 2024

COVER ARTWORK 'BLUE LAGOON' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE