

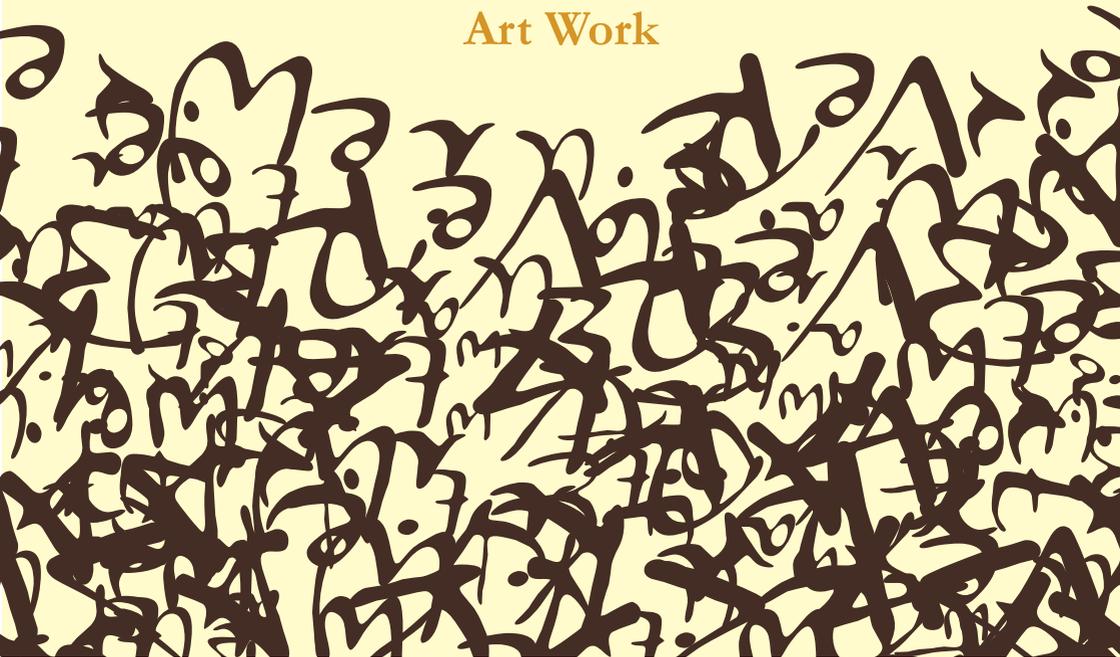
AUKuwait

Review

Arts & Literary Journal

Issue 3
Spring 2009

Poetry
Short Stories
Creative Fiction
Art Work



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY *of* KUWAIT

AUKuwait Review: Arts & Literary Journal
2008 - 2009 Spring

AUKuwait Review: Arts & Literary Journal 2008 - 2009

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The American University of Kuwait's Arts and Literary Journal, *AUKuwait Review*, is published annually and features fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, graphic art, photography, drawings, and illustrations. The *AUKuwait Review* is dedicated to showcasing the talents of emerging and established writers and artists. The *AUKuwait Review* is primarily edited and managed by AUK students. Submissions are accepted from May through December. Send literary submissions to Dr. Craig Loomis (cloomis@auk.edu.kw), English Language & Literature Program, College of Arts and Sciences. Send arts submissions to Professor Maryam Hosseinnia (mhosseinnia@auk.edu.kw), Graphic Design Program, College of Arts and Sciences, American University of Kuwait, Box 3323, Safat 13034 Kuwait. ISSN number 1997-0056

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

I'm pleased to present the *AUKuwait Review: Arts and Literary Journal*, Spring 2008-2009 issue. This third edition includes poetry, short stories, plays, descriptive prose, as well as photographs, paintings, and computer-generated images. Also included are selections from two English Literature classes, namely "Creative Writing" and "Women & Literature."

These works have been submitted by different members of the AUK community, from students, staff, and faculty to the largely student-run Literary and Graphic Design boards. These boards spent weekday mornings poring over dozens of manuscripts and a multitude of artwork, eventually agreeing on the selections that you have in this volume.

I am also pleased to note that with this edition, we celebrate the growth of the *Review*, where there are three times as many text selections and four times as many images as the last edition. We have come a long way from the first slim volume to this thicker edition.

The students and faculty who reviewed submissions, along with their supervisors, Professor Craig Loomis and Professor Maryam Hosseinnia, have all been key in the Journal's development, showing guidance, enthusiasm, dedication, an eye for quality, interest, and potential.

On behalf of the Literary and Graphic Design Boards, I invite you to leaf through this volume to explore the literature and the artwork of the AUK community, discovering their varied styles, interests, and remarkable creative capabilities.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Nur Soliman,

Editor-in-Chief

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Soccer Boo

By Amal Bebbhani

“That’s it. I’m going to form my own soccer team,” I announced to the goofballs sitting at the table. None of them replied, just kept on reading or eating. “Guys, I’m serious.”

Julie was the first to speak. She looked over from her book, took a good look at me and said, “Uh huh,” and went back to reading. Sarah just kept talking to Jason, while Matt kept playing with his soccer ball.

“I don’t think any of you heard me – I said I’m going to form a team. Seriously. A professional soccer team.”

“And you forming a team would interest us because?” Julie replied as she flipped a page.

“Because you guys are going to join me.” I grinned as they all stopped what they were doing and stared at me.

“You’re not serious, are you?” Sarah gasped.

“You really think we’re going to go with your crazy plan?” Jason laughed.

Julie stopped reading and put the book on her lap. Matt just kept playing, hopping the ball from one leg to another.

“Well why not? I like to play, you guys like to play, and we’re really good. Not to mention it would be great playing on a real soccer field.”

“Um, Piper, I think you forgot one tiny detail,” Sarah mentioned to me.

“Which is?”

“Well, it’s not like others would be open about the idea.”

“Why wouldn’t they be?”

“I think it’s because we’re basically – oh, you know – invisible to other beings?”

I looked around us, realizing that we were sitting with other people who have not yet realized that our little group was in the middle of them. Of course, they don’t mind when we walk past through them, since they can’t see us at all. Hmm. That might be a problem if we’re going to play soccer with human beings since other ghosts don’t like to play with us.

Life and Death

By Amal Ahmed

Buds blossom under their mother Spring
Caterpillars cocoon to butterfly wings
Like a new born baby, who cradles and crawls
Wrapped up in Mothers' love, who knows it all.

Flowers bloom beneath the Summer sun
Butterflies new have a song sung
The toddler balances to take a run
Shielded by his parents' love unplugged

Autumn comes leaving a curse
Flowers have diseased and butterflies burned
The teenager goes through his toughest of times
Deaf to most of his parents' chimes

Then all disappears- the sorrow, the pain
Leaving no hope for peace to reign

Winter contaminates what's beyond and near
Creating a reality, we all fear
The man's sufferings choke him
The butterflies' wings lie still
Colors fade from petals as if spilled

Everything takes one last breath,
This is the story of Life and Death.

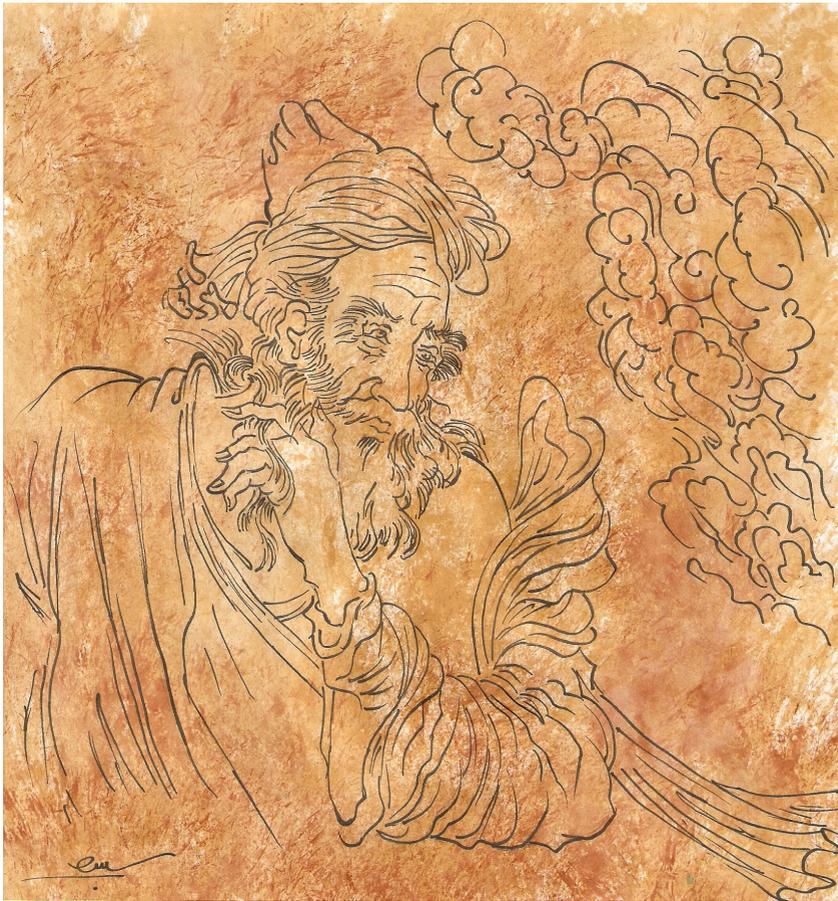


Per Astra Ad Alia Reptilium

By Nur Soliman

Turtle swims up-stream
Slow-footed, in light it leaps—
Rising, light-hearted, in spring!





Name: *Sepideh Bebbehani*
Title: Experience of Negargari

The Balcony Scene from *Romeo & Juliet*- Segregated!

By Christopher Gottschalk

Dramatis Personae:

Drama Professor (early to mid 30's)

Romeo (a male student actor, late teens or early 20's)

Juliet (a female student actor, late teens or early 20's)

A bare stage is presented with a table set up Stage Left to represent a balcony. At Center Stage a 3-meter wooden pole set with one end on the floor and the other end resting on the "balcony." The lights are dimmed in a pre-show fashion. The Drama Professor takes the stage and addresses the audience.

Professor-Thank you for joining us today and showing your support for the Drama Club. To conclude this afternoon's scenes, we present for you the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. Due to the necessity to adhere to the laws of segregation in higher education, we've had to make a few minor adjustments, but nothing too serious and I'm sure it won't impact your enjoyment of the performance. So, without further ado, the Drama Club presents "The Balcony Scene from *Romeo & Juliet*- Segregated!"

The Professor encourages a round of applause from the audience as he takes his seat in the front row of the audience. Lights come up as Romeo enters from backstage and moves Down Stage Right to place himself less than a meter from one end of the wooden pole. He is wearing a dishdasha and has what appears to be a sleeping aid night mask on his head, just above his eyes. He looks out to the audience, smiles warmly, and waits patiently while making a very strong effort to stare straight forward. Juliet emerges from backstage and climbs on top of the balcony. She is wearing a traditional abaya with hijab and also has a night mask on her forehead. Once settled on the balcony, Juliet picks up the 3-meter pole and nudges Romeo then quickly resets

the pole, covers her eyes with her night mask, and presses her hands against her ears. Romeo, having felt the pole as his cue, silently mouths counting to "5" (giving Juliet time to put on her mask and cover her ears) and then begins his lines never breaking his forward gaze.

Romeo- But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east and Juliet is the sun!
It is my lady, O it is my love!
O that she knew she were!
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand.

(Romeo pauses and then speaks to Professor in a stage whisper) Um, sir? Is she touching her cheek? I can't see her.

Professor- (trying not to sound irritated) Just say your line.

Romeo- But, sir, the next line won't make sense if she's not touching her cheek.

Professor- Don't worry about it! Keep going.

Romeo- Oh. Sorry, sir. (Romeo collects himself, resumes his character and continues...)

O that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek.

(Romeo picks up the pole and gently taps Juliet on the shoulder. Juliet silently mouths counting to "5" while Romeo quickly puts his night mask over his eyes and claps his hands over his ears. Juliet finishes counting, lowers her hands from ears, raises her night mask, and very theatrically says.)

Juliet- Aye me.

(Juliet picks up the pole, taps Romeo on the shoulder, and repeats the process of covering her eyes and ears while Romeo silently mouths counting to "5." Once done, he lifts his night mask and begins his next set of lines.)

Romeo- She speaks! *(Breaking character, Romeo addresses the Professor)* Um,

sir... did she speak? I couldn't hear.

Professor- Yes!

Romeo- Oh, good. Sorry, sir, this is kind of hard.

Professor- That's ok. Just keep going.

Romeo- She speaks!
O speak again bright angel, for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
(Romeo gestures wildly behind him in the general direction of the balcony)
As is the winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-puffing clouds
And sails upon the... and sails upon... *(again breaking character)*

Uh, sir, are you sure we can say that? You know, that next line?

Professor- Just say the line!

Romeo- And sails upon the BOSOM of the air.

(Romeo smiles as if he got away with doing something "naughty," makes a crude gesture of miming having large breasts, and then repeats the process with the pole, the mask, and ears while Juliet counts to "5.")

Juliet- *(loudly grumbling to herself)* about frickin' time...

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name.
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

(The two actors repeat the "pole" process. With each successive cue change both actors get increasingly agitated.)

Romeo- Shall I hear more, *(he shakes his head in embarrassed disbelief)*
Or shall I speak at this?

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Juliet- 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy:
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? O be some other name.
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called.
O Romeo, doff thy name, and for thy name,
Which is no part of thee, take all myself.

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Romeo- I take thee at thy word!
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptis'd:
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Juliet- What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Romeo- By a name,
I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself
Because it is an enemy to thee.

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Juliet- My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words
Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Romeo- Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike.

(Repeat "pole" process.)

Juliet- How cam'st thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.
If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

(Juliet in her agitation hits Romeo with the pole a bit too roughly, causing him to gasp in pain. He whips off his mask and looks at Juliet...)

Romeo- You'll murder me if you're not careful with that stick!

Juliet- *(Screaming in shock)* Don't look at me!

Romeo- Oh! Sorry! *(Romeo abruptly turns down stage to look away, while Juliet puts on her night mask and covers her ears.)*

Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye!

(Romeo picks up the pole and roughly hits Juliet with it in retribution. Juliet screams in pain and rips the mask from her eyes.)

Juliet- Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face... YOU JERK!

(Juliet grabs at the pole which is still held by Romeo on his end of the stage.)

The two actors engage in a game of "tug of war" trying to wrestle control of the pole from one another while calling each other names. Professor leaps up on stage and takes the pole from the warring actors who begin yelling at the same time,

Juliet- This is so stupid!
He isn't doing the stick right!
I can't act with him, I told you
I didn't want to work with him...

Romeo- She hit me! Sir, she isn't
Supposed to hit me! Tell her she's
not supposed to hit me! This is hard
enough without her smacking me...

Professor- ENOUGH! Both of you, go backstage immediately! (*Romeo and Juliet stomp offstage in defiance. Calling after them,*) AND MAKE SURE YOU SEGREGATE BACK THERE! (*The Professor takes a moment to collect himself and then addresses the audience,*) Well, ladies and gentlemen, obviously we still have a few kinks to work out with segregated theatre. Thank you for bearing with us and supporting the Drama Club. If anybody has any suggestions for how we might improve on things for the next show, I'll be upstairs crying in my office.

END

The Puppet Show

By Meshal al-Harbi

Can you see through my dead eyes?
The tears that swell up inside me?
Can't you see that I'm dead?
Someone's pulling the strings to make you all happy,
You're all smiling while my smile was drawn,
I think I have dry tears,
I'm alone in this world with no one like me,
Can't you see my smile is fake? Can't you feel my pain, can't you see my pain?
Everyone's so blinded by the entertainment,
I'm just a puppet, what more can they see,
Emotions and feelings by a wooden toy,
There is no such thing, I'm no Pinocchio,
Show's over, now leave happy, put me atop my shelf,
Leave me smiling and crying while you all laugh your heads off.



Origami

By Nur Soliman

The sound of the paper curving, the softness of the dyed fibers, and the way the edges almost melted away into the rich whiteness beneath under the warm sunshine pleased the artist. The fluttering of those soft creamy cherry blossoms outside the window made the subtlest movements and breathed life into the paper that lay over his work surface.

The shadows of the leaves and petals fluttered like bird's wings over the crimson red, the deep lavender, the pale rose, the soft white or pale pigeon-wing grey, the light green, the cobalt blue and daffodil yellow. Most were fresh, smooth sheets, while others were half lifted, a single flap hovering in the air; others still were unfinished work, with intricate foldings softening into anonymity as he had left them half done.

His slender fingers brushed over the soft surface and quietly folded the square into a triangle, his gentle touch firmly pressing the edges. Open it out, and another triangle, with just as much care and tranquility as the first. Open it out again, and fold a third, and fourth time in straight lines.

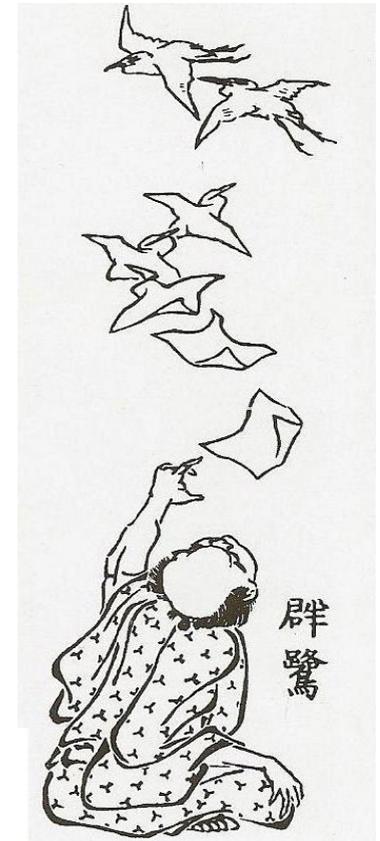
Indeed, even from the very beginning, the life of the figure trembled under the warmth of his fingers, for it trembled in his knowledge of how it was to be, trembling in his mind as he pictured it. In his folding, in his valley-folds, mountain-folds, and pulling open certain flaps, the spirit of that which he was suggesting whispered its name excitedly, and took form and definition in every turn of paper.

He was not creating anything real, anything life-like; indeed, he would never dream of doing so, and knew he would only shame himself if he tried. Instead, he tried to get at the very nuances or subtlest suggestions of a being, trying to encapsulate it in a paper translation of its beautiful essence.

He smiled, a humorous lift of his lips, barely perceptible except in the wrinkles about his mouth and the faintest sparkle in his eyes as his fingers strained to turn inward a slender triangular flap and press it gently down, without pulling or letting his fingers tug the white paper in the wrong direction.

Now the slender, tapering neck, and now the elegant tail, he whispered to himself, and there, revealed by themselves, are the long, upward spread wings. There was an added childish excitement as he inside-reverse-folded that proud neck, and with the grace of his touch made it upright, gently bending its beak inwards, downwards, as was befitting its calm modesty, the paper quietly bending under the command of his touch. There it was, now, the tail, lifting above the waters.

He paused to look at the finished work, and after turning it over, smoothed down the spread of its long wing. Now he really smiled, his dark eyes shining with the happiness of a child as, in the cool fluttering of the sunshine and the wind that lifted the leaves and blossoms, he imagined that it would alight from the warm palm of his hand to soar. He saw it clearly, a suggestion of wings, of flight, the spirit of lightness, for that's what it was. He felt in his heart the warmed wings of that suggestion, that bird, tremble with an eager pulse of flight.



Ancient Japanese woodblock showing a magician who, according to legend, folded a flapping bird so realistic that it took flight." Beech, Rick. *Practical Origami*. London: Anness Publishing Ltd., 2004.



Name: *William Andersen*

Title: The Blue Mosque at Dusk, Istanbul, Turkey

Come Take Me Away

By Fatma al-Sumaiti

Come take me away
To a place where darkness fades away
A kingdom where I can be your queen
A land where fear, loss, and pain can't find no space to survive
A reverie where man need not strive
Take me where no tears are known
To a place where only skies can cry
A dream where only cocoons can break
Releasing beauty into the world
Releasing light into the dark
Come take me away
Let's fly far away
Come take me away



Emptiness: On the Surface of the Moon

By Fatima I Haji

It was as empty as my brain, when I took my initial step on its surface. The divine, monumental, spherical surface secreted dust of emptiness that massaged my soul. It was painted in shades of grey...colours you wouldn't possibly find on an artist's pallet... brightness was obviously neglected. The structure of the rock smothered the ambience with sickness and disease. There wasn't the slightest feeling of temptation. How could this rock, a rock full of boredom, ignite our coal-like sky at night in earth so iridescently?? I simply can't figure it out...my mind went numb.

The smooth covering wriggled my body temperature as I heaved myself to move. I waited patiently to visualize something thrilling and energetic, but nothing reacted to my patience. The sulky-looking sphere contrasted the broad sky with its colours, and the sky – a jet black garment examined my patience and replied – a shooting star passed by.

The moon, the stars, the sky...what kind of correlation was there? My heart and brain interviewed each other for the sake of sensible interpretations. My kinetic sense relaxed for a second and then jolted my knees forward, towards the smell, the smell that plunged up my nostrils and delivered a message...of emptiness. Clinching my fingers was the dust; it harvested itself on my skin. Everything was congruent and incongruent...like fake twins.

Everything was obese, sedentary to inch itself in different directions. The appearance of the planet was a film from the forties. A sheet of horror acted as a barrier, protecting me from the envious planet...I became mentally blind...and then I got that pain of...emptiness...not the pain you get when you slice your finger, but the one that absorbs all your concentration to breathe, so that you would want to sob and scream at the same time, because you're the only human on that surface that is suffering.

Middle East

By Mubarak al-Mutairi

North are the realms of cold savages
South are the bottomless seas
East the high mountains of heaven
West the endless stretching of sand dunes
And we the center of the universe
A compass

From Sunrise to Sunset
The Sun beats down on the sands
The lands of my people

From Nightfall through darkness
The Moon
A witness to God
Where faith expands and contracts
Expands and contracts
Expands and stays

Arabia
A place inhibited by
Men with long eyelashes
That beat to the desert drums
Women with elegant Lips
Etched like those of ancient goddess

Mesopotamia
Its men built like rocks
Rigid and strong
Its women with emerald colored eyes
That only they possess

The Holy lands
Its people a mix of their own
White as snow

Dark as clay
Hair the color of hay
Hair the color of coal
Eyes the hue of sky
Eyes the hue of night

North the realms of cold savages
South the bottomless seas
East mountains of heaven
West stretching of sand dunes
And we the center of the universe
A compass

These lands are unique and diverse
As the many beats and rhythms
Of a drum

Yet even as this diversity is a blessing to us
It is also a curse

From Persians
To Romans
We faced Crusaders
And suffered Mongols
From Ottoman cannons
To European lies
To the present aggressions

We survived

Under thumbs of
Rulers and Tyrants
Kings and Emperors
From Sultans to Popes

We survived

Because we stayed true to what it means to be us

We open our arms wide to strangers
We cheer our victories and mourn their fallen
We are the people of a tongue that give love
30 names

And with that love we have conquered all
From Spain to China
We are known

Because we dance to the rhythms of our lands
Lands that are always in flux
Of their own accord
Where we have no control, as it moves us to its earthen beat
And we dance to this tune for we know
That we'll survive

From Persians
To Romans
We faced Crusaders
And suffered Mongols
From Ottoman cannons
To European lies
To the present aggressions

We survived

Under thumbs of
Rulers and Tyrants
Kings and Emperors
From Sultans to Popes

We survived

Yet the beats of our earth has been replaced
By a mechanical tune

We no longer honor ourselves
Or our customs
We have closed all doors

We have closed our minds
We view ourselves as right
Never willing to compromise
Having lost all shreds of humility, piety, spirituality
And most of all forgiveness
We have lost all that made us great

Instead we view life as
Black and White
Never realizing that life is a collection
Of colors

Colors that painted our existence
Colors that brush life into our cities
Into our mosques, churches, Synagogues
Colors that brush the fabrics of our cloth
It is the spice of our life

A life held dear and viewed as a true sign of God
And yet we destroy the most sacred thing
Through pointless wars
Fought over land, riches, power
Never realizing that countless lives that we kill with a word
Never knowing to God we'd return
Never knowing that this land belongs to us all

Because we are blinded
By greed, hate, lust, power

We have turned into a people so contradictory
A battle between the
Passion of the young and the patience of the old
Where we spend our time
Burning and blasting
Yearning and calming

Our collective existence is in peril
For the majority have forgotten our ancient dances to the

Earthen Drums

And yet it lives throughout us
For there are still those who
Dance and resist
Dance and persist
Dance and insist

Against
The mechanical tune that has enslaved our collective psyche





Name: *Hiba al-Homaizi*
Title: Bucket in Hiding

Never Kill a Spider

Nur el-Huda Abdelhalim

She watched the spider crawl up the wall, across the picture of her mother, without noticing what she was seeing. As soon as the image of the spider consciously registered in her mind, it stopped moving, right on her mother's teeth.

Never kill a spider.

Not even if it was hurting Mother? She smiled. He only ever stressed two points, only ever got worked up over two things: killing spiders, and hurting sweet, fragile Mother. They should never be done. Mother hated spiders, and he knew that. It was what killed her. Ever since Mother died, she has been alone. He stopped speaking to her. She only ever heard from him when he had a note delivered to her on her birthday via a servant with the same four words written on it in liquid gold: Never kill a spider.

Okay, Daddy, I get it. But she'd never say that out loud. She'd never say anything out loud. She doesn't speak.

He used to try to get her to talk. The last and most extreme measure he took was to hurt animals. He knew she loved wild animals. At first, he'd bought a rifle, to test her reaction. She did not react. Then, year after year, he had filled the house with animals, sometimes whole, sometimes not. He employed a taxidermist and built a workplace for him. She stayed silent. And the forest, her haven, died. Now, she had no voice, no mother, no home, and no friends. She just had him. And the dreaded spiders.

There were almost as many servants in the house as there were spiders. The servants, too, came in different shapes, sizes and colours. But the servants were insignificant. They were killed quite often.

The spider finally moved, down her mother's face. It rested on her chest. She lifted her arm and placed it in the niche between her collarbones. Slowly, she moved her fingertips down. One bump. Two bumps. Before she reached the third breastbone, she felt the outline of the spider tattooed shortly after birth into her own chest. The spider looked deformed now. When it was created, there were

no bones to make parts of its gold and black body stick out. Absentmindedly, she scraped wax off the burning candle by her bedside and covered the spider trapped under her skin, knowing its two-dimensional contours well, for she had traced the same outline for hours every day, days every year, until she had it committed to memory.

The wax slid down her chest and was in her belly-button before she could react. Not that she would want to. Hot wax burned more when in her navel. Angrily, she knocked the candle to the floor. It was a bad candle. A good candle's wax would have sided with the spider and not gravity. It was all about the spider. Everything was about—

“Once again, you have ruined the marble floor. Once again, you have lost control.”

No. I *am* control, she thought, gripping her wrist. *You* have lost control. You have lost me. To illustrate her point in the most puerile way possible, she turned away, back to the spider still resting on the visual memory of her mother.

“Ah, you see the spider. Good. I knew you were like me. I knew you would come to your senses and let yourself be mystified by the dazzling beauty of...”

She tuned him out. Not again. For such an all-knowing man, he was ignorant. A scarlet woman's boy would be able to see that the only thing she was mystified by was the dazzling beauty of her mother's smile. Yet here was the king himself, making a sudden appearance after years of making himself scarce, only to tell her a story she had memorized since she was merely a hopeful stirring in her mother's body.

“Stop it, girl, and behave at once!”

A mental arm yanked her out of her thoughts. Her mouth filled with a familiar saltiness, and she saw in the king's sad eyes that she was hurt, and was being pitied for it. A moment's hesitation, and then he approached her. She did not flinch when he pushed his fingers to the corner of her mouth and then slowly dragged them across her cheek, smearing the blood.

He dabbed his fingers on a bone-white napkin the servant accompanying him

hurriedly offered, and then ran his bloody fingers across his teeth.

She watched with near-apathy. She was not fazed by his dragged-out performance. She knew what he was doing. It would probably seem erotic to any mere citizen, but to the residents of the castle, the act was everything but.

The servant could not help but gasp, ruining the performance and concurrently sealing his fate. She could not help but give a dry laugh. One down, too many more to go.

Her kohl-rimmed eyes returned to her father. His eyes were shut, but she could see the pupils racing beneath the golden lids. She only noticed that everyone in the room was standing erect when he opened his eyes, smiled, and the tension in the air collapsed, bending their spines and dropping their shoulders.

“So, you are not a traitor. Yet you still attempted to kill the spider.” He was thinking out loud.

She sought out the spider and found it listening across the room. She abruptly knew that she had indeed attempted to kill it. She also knew that her attempt had left a pink line on its underside, though it was impossible for her to be able to tell such a thing from this distance. But she never had needed to see to know.

He had seemingly finished thinking, for he had dismissed the doomed servant with a casual flick of his elegant fingers and was preparing to sit by her on the bed.

As he sat, she stood, and walked two steps away from him. He was so calm, talking to himself as if he was the only one in the room, that she felt uneasy. Slowly, she walked across the room to the mirror. She eagerly raised her eyes and saw...

...nothing. Her soul jumped out of her body and then dived back in as she realized that the mirror was covered. Of course; she had covered the mirror herself a fortnight ago. The sheet really didn't look like the mirror itself upon closer inspection. She had been surprisingly calm in the face of her worst nightmare. She let a sardonic smile touch upon her lips, but before it left its mark, it was gone, for once again she had been pulled out of her thoughts.

All was quiet. The silence was like a physical presence in the room. The hairs on her arms rose as the level of her hearing heightened. But she couldn't hear anything except the panicked thoughts in her head: *itswrongitswrongitswrong*—

What's wrong? She turned

--itswrongitswrongitsWRONG

and wished she hadn't.

Spiders. That explained why silence was the only sound that filled the room. When spiders screamed, they screamed Silence. When they were killing one person in the presence of another, they emitted Silence, and sent it through the pores of the unwanted person, making him retain said Silence so completely that the person is dead to the crime being committed against his blood brother.

Or so the king said. But she never had believed him. Until now.

Still, she was confused. As far as she could see, her father was perfectly fine. And although she knew she looked and acted like a corpse, she was not mortally dead, and not nearly dying fast enough.

Their eyes locked, and she instinctively knew that his expression mirrored hers. Confusion. Now fear. *What's good for you is bad for me. What's good for both of us is bad for...whom?*

"Mama?"

She started upon hearing her voice. He laughed. She could not tell if it was out of joy at hearing her speak or joy at being alive.

"That's ludicrous. She's died once already. She can't die again." He continued laughing. She should've guessed.

Like a baby excited about uttering its first word, she called again: Mama? No, she did not say that out loud. She tried harder:

"Mama." A pause. "Mama! Mama!" She ran towards the window, convinced she would see her mother whispering to the lily tree. She was out of breath and no

closer to the window. She was suddenly aware of a sharp pain in her arms, and a burning on her face. She tried to raise her arms to her face to somehow assuage the pain but they would not move. Her arms were completely frozen. She looked down at them but they were not clear, the edges undefined, like a smudged charcoal painting of herself. She wanted to step forward, to sit and get her breath back, but she could not feel her legs.

She called out for help, over and over again, in the only way she knew: she wailed. A sudden hard slap across her cheek shut her mouth in an instant. Stunned, she gazed at her father. Two slaps in one day. He has set a record. As quickly as the noise was silenced, it erupted again from deep within her raw-boned frame, this time in the form of laughter.

She watched as the confusion darkened the orange tint in her father's amber eyes and laughed harder at the predictability of his levelheaded reaction to her hysterical one. What a normal, boring man.

Presently he tangled his fingers in her hair and pushed her down to the ground, her face inches from the basin of diluted acid kept in an enamel bowl, purely for her own amusement.

She saw the spider lying in the pool of acid. She saw the horrified expression extolled on its face. She saw the pink scar running along its underside. She saw the sunlight-coloured hairs rimming its black body. She saw and understood.

A sudden hopelessness gripped her insides and knotted them around her heart. Still gazing at the spider, she wondered how it would feel if she drank the bowl of acid, drank the spider she had loathed mere moments before, and protected it from the horrors of death she was sure to endure. Reflecting upon her existence, she realized that the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel had been diminished at the same time the glint of life had been stolen from her mother's eyes, millions of years ago, when she had realized her whole being was to revolve around the spiders that gave them their wealth and shaped up their kingdom, and had stopped breathing from the sheer horror at having to lead such a miserable existence.

She wondered, and then she acted. Swiftly, she pushed her face in the bowl and felt her father let go of her hair. As she brought it up to her face and swallowed the clear liquid quickly, she imagined the disgust on her father's face as he looked

down and saw the masses of dark hair in his pale hand. Her father...

She sank into death. A painful ripping in her chest announced the departure of her soul. The nothingness that ensued confirmed that she was indeed dead, for though she had felt vacant, empty, and lifeless for most of her life, she had not felt real death, real emptiness - the kind of emptiness that is only present in the absence of spirit - before.

She heard her father lift up her body. She heard his gaze travel across her face. She heard his tears fall into the blood-filled gashes and bubbles the acid left on her formerly smooth skin.

He stood confidently, and a wind rushed through her bones. She knew, as he crossed the room, that he was carrying her face-down, like he used to when she was a little girl and requested he do so in order for her to give her attention to the ground while her father gave his attention to the sky, so that the earth and heavens got an equal amount of acknowledgement.

He laid her on the left side of the bed, then crossed over to the other side and lay beside her. He gently blew out the incandescent flame of the candle by her bedside, then carefully arranged his fingertips on her face, starting from behind her ear and ending on her lacerated jaw. He looked at the picture behind her and saw a spider. It seemed to nod, and he sighed. He did not know what was real and what was fiction.

But he closed his own eyes anyway, confident that he had the ability to murder himself.

Murder, after all, did seem to be his Spider-given talent.

Paintbrush

By Bedour Hamadah

I hate myself more
Every time I see you
It hurts because we
Look exactly the same.

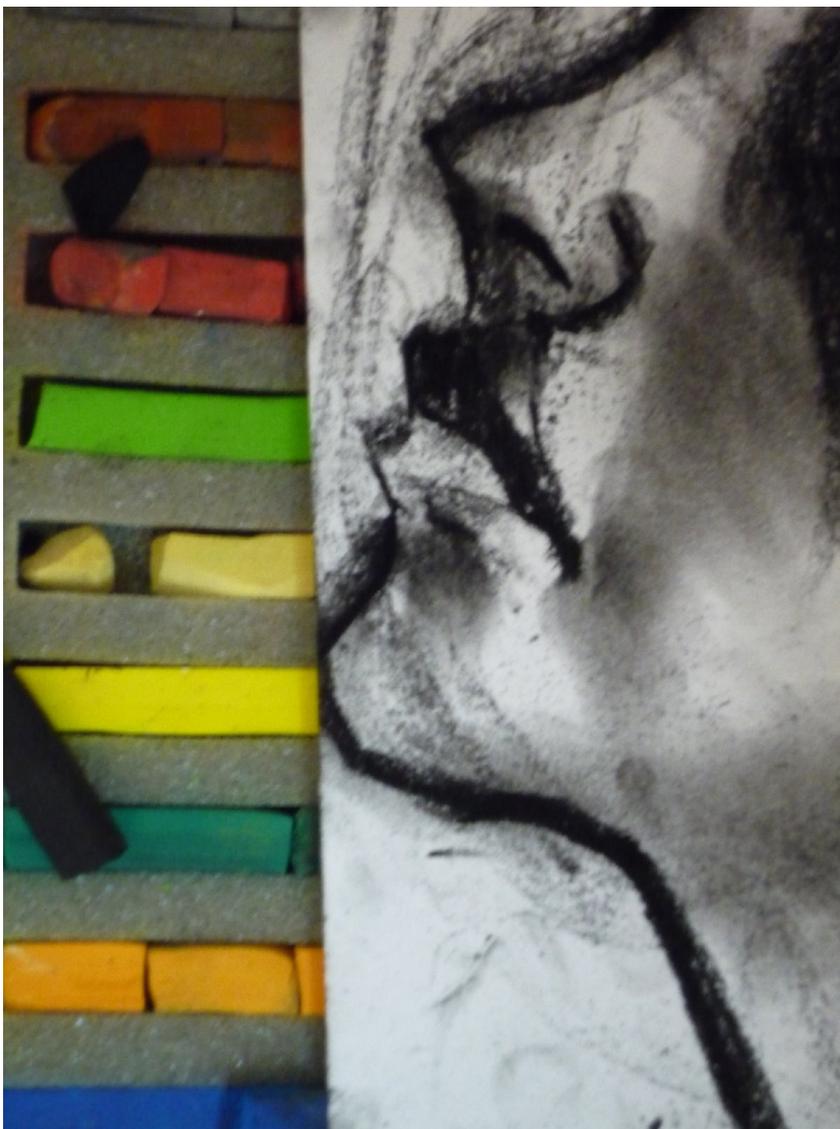
I am not you so stop -
Stop trying to live
Your dreams through me
The dreams you never achieved.

I am an individual
Not a copy of you
I have my hopes too you know
And they don't match your own

The picture on the wall
Took forever to draw
An image of perfection
The way I truly saw it.

All you had to do was
Look at it and frown in question
And yes, you broke it
And shattered it to nothing.

One day I shall take my paintbrush
To paint a mirror on that wall
Where you will frown at your reflection
And shatter your own image.



Name: *Sepideh Behbehani*
Title: Breathe the Art

Faith, Brad Pitt and other Disorders

By Anurag Galhotra

Dan: Give me his twelve-pack.

Jen: What?

Dan: Brad Pitt...You see this, this right here? This is a gut, otherwise known as a one-pack. Give me twelve of them.

Jen: [laughs] You want twelve guts?

Dan: [smiles] Stop it. You said that anything is possible if you *believe* right? I want a twelve-pack...like his.

Jen: [sits back and cocks her head] Firstly...no such thing as a twelve-pack--

Dan: [interrupts] Remember that movie he was in? You know...the historically inaccurate one. He was a Spartan, or a Greek or an American or something... [leans back and clicks fingers twice]...

Jen: 'Fight Club'?

Dan: [gives Jen a blank look] Yes Jen. He was a Spartan, wore a tiny skirt and ran around the streets of New York in 'Fight Club'. [sighs and then slams both hands on the table] 'Troy'. That was it. 'Troy'. You saw that with me you moron. Remember the scene where he comes out of the tent and his robe's falling off?... Conveniently. [shakes head and rolls eyes]

Jen: [smiles broadly] Oh *yeah*. *That* robe...scene.

Dan: Yeah. Well. Go ahead and *believe* that you can give me his twelve-pack right now so that I can prove that he is in fact, anatomically not human. [pause] Go ahead. Have *faith* and *believe* that you can do it. I'll just wait right here. [sits back, smiles and stares at his belly]

[long pause]

Jen: Do you have faith?

Dan: [smacks his forehead on the table and sighs] We talk about Brad Pitt and my gut, and you bring *that* up. What's wrong with you?

Jen: Well you're making fun of the fact that I believe anything is possible if one has faith. I think the question is relevant. So?

Dan: [shifts uncomfortably in his seat] Awright look...I believe when I'm happier, ok? [smiles]

Jen: [leans forward] That is *not* funny.

Dan: What? [sips his coffee] Awright. I believe in aliens, but I haven't exactly gone camping with one recently. So, I suppose I *could* believe.

Jen: I'm not asking you *to* believe. I'm asking you *if* you believe in...fate, and things like that. I've known you for what, ten years now? For the most part, you're pretty much an idiot and that's probably why we get along! But I'm serious... [looks down and lowers voice] Like, where do you think your Mum is now Dan?

Dan: [lights a cigarette and coughs] Ahmm...about five and a half feet underground. They hit cement or something so they couldn't go the other six inches. [looks up and blows out a few smoke circles] *Cementary* huh? [laughs to himself] Damnit, where's my twelve-pack Jen?

Jen: [lights a cigarette] This is all because of her death isn't it? People die, Dan. I'm sorry that it happened. I *really* am. But people die of cancer every day--

Dan: [leans forward, looks straight at Jen and says sarcastically] Oh...oh really? Is that what happened to her? 'Coz I was thinking maybe she choked on her eyeballs Jen. *Jeez!*

[long pause]

Dan: Where was fate and all that stuff when I was crying my eyes out and asking for Mum to get better? I was a'believin'. I was a'faithin'. [puts out cigarette and

shakes head]

Jen: Sweetie, life doesn't *have* to be fair. [lights a cigarette] Miracles do happen you know. The other day...about the tsunami in Malaysia or wherever it was. *You* read the news to me. How the little boy washed ashore on a little plank of wood three days after the tsunami, and he was fine even though he hadn't eaten or anything. What do you think happened there? And in so many other places? Hm?

Dan: [flicks his cigarette and says under his breath] Probably wasn't a kid anyway. Just some bulimic midget who knew how to fish. [looks down and stirs his coffee]

Jen: He *was* there you know. He was giving you the strength to be able to pray and ask for life.

Dan: [bursts out laughing] Do you say this stuff to other guys? Because that's probably why you're single you know. Seriously sweetie. That and you're a vegetarian. [deepens voice and says sarcastically] Yeah...here you go. Here's your strength, Dan. You're strong. You're strong enough to get down and beg boy. Now beg I tell you. *Beg!*

Jen: Tsk!

Dan: You know what. When I...stop living and stuff, do me a favor awright. Get me a nice place, not like Mum's. [snaps finger, leans forward and points a finger at Jen] I know. Pick a really green and flowery place. You know, like in the movies. It'll be raining and everyone'll be wearing black shades and holding up black umbrellas...looking like they're in the CIA. You can wear a large black hat and stand behind a tree in the distance so everyone'll think you're my secret lover. Make sure it's six feet exactly. Oh, and put me next to George Lucas. I got a thing or two to say to him about Episode II.

[long pause]

Jen: [stares at Dan] George Lucas is not *dead* yet.

Dan: [frowns] Really? Shame. [lights up a cigarette] Anyway, promise me you'll

do all that and I'll think about believing, awright? Believe me.

Jen: [smiles] You're an idiot and I can't believe you're not single.

Dan: [sits back and gives Jen a cocky look] Hey, like you said. I'm an a'hole, and you gals keep coming around to guys like me!

Jen: [shakes her head and smiles] I *cannot* understand the idiots who go out with you. And they're *hot!* That Natalie girl...how the hell does someone like you manage *her*? Seriously.

Dan: Better believe it...I think it's Natalia though. I think.

[long pause, both drink coffee]

Dan: You know...we just make up s#!t like faith and all that. Just soothes us, that's all. [mimics child's voice]...Mum's only smoked *one* cigarette. Dad smokes like Vietnam. He stinks and Mum smells like lilies.[stops mimicking child's voice]...That's what I believed. I just wanted to know that *he'd* live forever. Instead... [sarcastically mimics nurse] 'Oh sorry Sir. Your wife just decided to die. I'm going on break but the doctor will tell you more about her lung cancer. Sorry then...I hope she gets better. Buh bye.'

Jen: So don't you want to be soothed right now?

Dan: My PlayStation and that Natalie do that just fine. You wanna jump in the mix and help the soothing? Great!...Yeah, they soothe me just fine. And isn't that just selfish anyway? I should have faith and believe just so *I* can hurt less? If anything, shouldn't others feel less pain if I pray for *them*, and *they* be praying for me?

Jen: [frustrated] Yes. They should. But there're no set rules about what's supposed to happen. I know *I* feel at peace and stronger inside, and I think it's because I believe that the powers that be will always be by my side. [sips coffee]

Dan: Yeah, I feel at peace and stronger inside after I work out...trying to get that 12-pack! [sips coffee] And Hell no, there're apparently no set rules. You know

how long...[holds back laughter]...You know how long I've been praying for Pitt to stay with Aniston and his 12-pack? For *years*. And what now? She's Brad-less and that freak's probably only got an 8-pack. [bursts out laughing]

Jen: [laughs out loud] 8-pack! Hm! You know, you might be right. We haven't had any proof of his 12-pack recently have we? Can't believe he's with Angelina.

Dan: Oh yeah. That matchstick with mammary glands! What'd she say? Hold on, hold on. She said something about children all over the world wanting a family and...and how she thinks that they can be helped if women in America truly *believed* in the mother inside them or something. Yeah Angie, you go ahead and have faith in true motherly instincts and parenthood. We'll talk after you're done remembering your 17 children's names.

Jen: [laughs softly and shakes head]. What does any of that have to do with--

Dan: [leans in and interrupts] It shows that people just need *something* to believe in. A devotion to any deity, or any whim whatsoever so that they know where they stand as human beings. And what they're standing on.

Jen: Nothing wrong in feeling safe and seeking a sense of who you are, if that's what you're saying. [pauses and frowns...looks at Dan mockingly] I can't really understand things when *you* start talking philosophically! You even used the word 'whim'. Dan the Man, the One-Gutted Philosopher. [bursts out laughing]

Dan: [smiles] Moron! Hey, I believe in karma. There you go. You happy? *I do* believe in something.

Jen: [spills coffee and laughs] You believe in karma? Sweetie you do understand that if *you* believe in karma, you're in for a rough, rough time right? [snickers]

Dan: Rough? You don't think karma's kicking my a\$\$ already? You don't know the half of it Jen. Awright...tell me this isn't karma at work. Last night I spent 3 hours getting to the last level of this game right? There's a tiny spark, the PlayStation smokes and dies. [leans back] That's it. Freakin' tiny little spark...Smokes a little and dies...kinda like Mum actually.

Jen: [flicks cigarette and opens eyes wide] Oh that is just sick Dan. That is sick.

How the *hell* do I get along with you. Honestly, what the hell will you say to Him when you get there? [shakes her head and knocks on wood]

[long pause]

Dan: I don't know. Probably something like [clears throat] 'Aw damnit! You *are* real...Thanks for doing that thing for my Mum by the way. That was swell. And ah, not to be too bloody demanding or anything, but where's my twelve-pack?'

[Jen and Dan stare at each other and burst out laughing]

"We are born believing. A man bears beliefs as a tree bears apples." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882, American Poet, Essayist)



Name: *William Andersen*

Title: Workers' Bed for the Night

Emotions

By Essa al-Boloshy

I want to be cold, to hear the chilling wind blow and whistle in my ear,
to free my mind of worry, to not care...if I am lonely, whether I desire
be held so tight... or not.

I want to change for a while, I wish to be outside, away from buildings, people,
things, to be dressed warmly, but

yet feeling cold, my cheeks and nose painted a reddish pink, but my hand held
tight in yours.



Breaking Point

By Yousef Nayef

One

It was a coincidence that our names rhymed, for he was Kareem and I Haleem.

Just two weeks ago I turned sixty-three, but he was still fifty-five. We never expected that our ages were to approach one another, or that our fate will be here, I mean in the old age hospital.

(Our children couldn't stand us)

But here we find food and drink without any suffering, and so we are dominated by emptiness. Therefore, there is no escaping from talking and especially about memories. Every Thursday, we go to isolated places in the suburbs. We sit under the shadow of the swaying branches of trees, and so the sunshine hits us times and misses us others. We challenge each other to see who can recall more memories, and the winner is whomever's stories were the highest in quantity and influence. No pride, but I used to win every time. Once I turned sixty, Kareem defeated me. Honestly, I used to be, and still am, happy that he defeats me, for no reason but that he is my friend and that he survived lung cancer after many operations and endless medicine.

Two

I woke him up with a tired voice:

"Kareem...Kareem."

"What, man?! It's still too early!"

"Come on, we are going."

"Who?"

"All of us, of course. I'll get your medicine."

"Alright."

"Don't forget the money..."

"How much may we need?"

"Umm...just five..."

"Isn't that too little?"

"Honestly, no. I think it's enough."

"As you like."

We slowly began to organize our stuff in bags. Silence and the fact that I was out of subjects prevented me from talking to him. Due to the strength of this silence, I began to glance at him trying to make him say something. All I benefited from was the fact that his face had changed. He seemed angry. I didn't know why, so I tried to recall what happened yester-night. I tried and tried, and then I decided to talk with him.

"Kareem?"

"Yes?"

"I want to sit down a little."

"Do. Nobody is preventing you."

I sat down.

"Why don't you have a break too?"

He glared at me, put his favorite shirt aside, and sat down beside me.

"Go on...Say what you want."

(I coughed) "Kareem, I will be honest with you, since we are used to being honest with each other. I don't mean to annoy you or anything, but I say, with deep concern, that..."

"Make it brief, will you."

"Alright, sorry. Umm...Are you alright?"

"Why do you question?"

"I realized that you are kind of gloomy."

(He smiled) "Who, me?! Not at all, my friend! Maybe the wrinkles on my face increased and so I just appear angry."

"So you are alright?"

"Thanks to God."

"Excellent. Now my heart is reassured."

He went to complete organizing his bag.

"Would you like some tea, Kareem?"

"No, no. I would like to drink it when we get there."

He was smiling whilst putting a pair of trousers in his bag, and then suddenly he looked at me scornfully, and resumed organizing his bag almost cheerfully.

Three

"We're there!"

It was seven in the afternoon.

We carefully got off the bus. I was about to forget the tent which I am responsible for putting up, but Kareem reminded me. The others started cooking the food, whilst Kareem and I put up the tent. By the time we finished, we smelled the food's odor.

"It's ready!"

We began to eat and share some jokes, waiting eagerly to listen to this week's stories.

At eight-thirty, we entered the tent...

We sat in a semi-circle. Our friend Ahmed started with a humorous story, but everyone knew that the real challenge was between me and Kareem.

When they finished laughing, Kareem told us a short story. Everyone was affected, and so I became a bit jealous. It wasn't only for that reason, but I was jealous because the story was about our childhood, and he mentioned it as if he was displeased, even though it was one of the most beautiful memories to me. He knew what he was doing.

I advised myself not to annoy him or anything. I mentioned another beautiful and interesting story of our childhood. I was not shocked to see that everyone complimented me except him.

His face reddened.

After a while, he told us another story with clear mockery, avoiding looking at me, and it was also about our childhood. Our friends were not affected since they began to realize that Kareem was not in his natural mood.

I was almost forced to tell another one, but no relevance to Kareem. They complimented me even more, and that only made the matter worse.

Kareem excused himself and spilled his glass of water without noticing, and went out quickly.

Ahmed said: "It seems that you have won at last, Haleem."

I did not smile.

Four

We were on our way to the old age hospital.

...

(DOOB!)

Everyone panicked.

We expected the worst since the street was uneven.

What happened was that one of the wheels of the bus went into a large hole.

Hakeem began to calm us down.

And after a while, the bus halted suddenly.

All of us got off, and so the darkness covered us.

We began to walk around the bus.

Luckily, we had two torches.

And we found the third one later.

We divided ourselves up into three groups.

I chose to accompany Kareem.

We set off searching for a taxi.

We didn't find one for some time.

After almost one hour of walking, we found one.

We stopped it, Kareem told me: "I will pay."

I said: "Wait a minute...Hello."

"Hey."

"How much is it from here to the old age hospital?"

"About six."

"Isn't it too much?"

"It's our prices, and not my fault."

"Alright. Thanks very much." I moved back to let him go.

"Wait!" Kareem said: "I will pay five."

"But he..."

"Don't worry."

The driver: "Of course not!"

Kareem: "What do you mean?"

"Either you pay six or nothing."

"Then I'll go walking. Let's go, Haleem."

"Will you just listen, Kareem? I do have enough money...besides you can't walk in this cold weather, you're still ill."

"My medicine and illness is none of your business! You're not my father!"

"Kareem!?"

The driver: "Are you going to pay, or what?"

Kareem: "No, just go away."

I said: "Why did you do that?"

"I'm going."

"How?! You can't! I'm responsible for you!"

"Are you deaf, or do you just act dumb?! I already said that you are not my father! Good-bye!"

He threw away the torch.

His light was turned off.

Misleading Intuition

By Reem Shuhaibar

My absolute everything,
You have given sense and meaning to my life.
The concept of love may not be tangible,
But you have defined it for me in a way that no longer requires tangibility.
Love may be a simple illusion misunderstood by many but, surely, I am not delusional.
Allowing me to be myself with mere acceptance from you is just one of the many loyalties you've bestowed upon me;
And reciprocating to you what you have blessed upon me is an accomplishment I strive to pursue,
And, so help me God, I would've made sure of it.
But, once again, you have failed me,
Digging me deeper into your dark dead hole.
I would call you a "tragedy" but that implicates you had some kind of value.
So nothing.
I will say nothing more,
I have nothing left,
And you are nothing,
My absolute nothing.



Name: *Fawaz al-Yagout*

Title: Escalier

The Scribe

By Hooda S Qaddumi

My master's hand was steady as he wrote the words:

**"Thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who Teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not"**

He softly murmured under his breath. A gentle early morning breeze whiffed from the window as he sat cross-legged on the carpet, his head buried in a tablet propped on his lap. "You see, my dear Abu Bakr, the Aleph is the basic unit from which all the other 28 letters emanate..."

My master, Abu Ali Muhammad ibn Ali, known as Ibn Muqlah, the vizier of the Abbasid Caliph, had already survived two Caliphs of an empire that was rapidly disintegrating while a rival new power, the Hamadanids, was emerging in Mosul. It was a miracle that he was still alive, given the intrigue of the Abbasid court, but his talents and skills as a star calligrapher were too prized by the rulers. His golden ink *alephs*, diamond-shaped *mims* and silver *sins* were legendary and sought after in the royal court. He was of the elite, the intelligentsia, the revered corps, *ahl-al-Qalam*, people of the Pen, as opposed to the *ahl-al-Sayf*, people of the sword. Without his beautiful script, administration's state affairs could not be managed, important state letters would not be drafted and above all, beautiful illuminated Korans would not be copied.

Ibn Muqlah sat there guarding his manuscript. I, his young, scrawny-bearded apprentice, felt anxious. My master was famous for inventing a new method of script writing, called the "Khatt al- Mansub," a proportioned script with a new rounded font to replace the traditional formal, angular Kufic. The curved script, based on ancient Pythagoras's theory of the harmony of the spheres, brought every letter into relation with the tall vertical *alif*. "The alphabet, my dear Abu Bakr, creates music; music for the eyes" Ibn Muqlah proudly explained, "this is the music that our Greek forefathers and the great Pythagoras wrote about, the harmony of the cosmos, the music of the spheres...". Legend was that Ibn Muqlah's was a prophet of handwriting; that it was poured upon his hand, as it was revealed to bees to create hexagonal honey cells.. When he recently wrote the text of a peace convention between the Muslim and the Byzantine states, the

people of the Byzantine court were so taken by the elegant graphic work, that they exhibited the text, as a fine art work for audiences who enjoyed its beautiful composition.

I listened attentively. "This is a new era", the revered scribe continued, "a new era of freedom and these Alephs must be perfect as an eyebrow, the *jims* like moles on a rounded moon-faced *houris*...letters must breathe, must live, they must dance."

We worked till late afternoon, stopping only when a servant would bring a tray of food followed by dates and sweetmeats. My master then resumed his work, and I was to bring out lamps and candles of various shapes and sizes, for the day was beginning to ebb and the light of the afternoon was rapidly losing its intensity.

My job was to help my master construct his beautiful creations. Each morning, I prepared my master's instruments: carefully sharpening his reed pens, mixing his pigments, cutting his nibs to a thin and narrow point. Then, I would prepare his paper to make it worthy of receiving his exquisite calligraphy. It never ceased to amaze me as I watched as my master's hand moved swiftly across the page, penning lines that seemed to dance across the page like birds in an infinite space. Soaring *mims*, rounding *kafs*, arching alephs: elongating, compressing, extending, and embracing in a cosmic dance. Upstrokes bold in soot-black ink, down-strokes in vermillion red, the end result resembling a rambling bush that exploded into a garden of blossoming roses.

My master took off his turban as the nearby mosque's call to evening prayer heralded the end of the day. But a loud banging on the door shook the serenity of the *kitab-khana*. I hurried to the door. A gang of masked men had already broken its lock and forced their way into the tiny room. Without uttering a word, one of the men approached Ibn Muqlah, while two others headed for his materials. They broke his bronze inkwell, tore up his precious parchments, threw his pens, pen cases, and nibs out of the window. Then, I watched in horror as a sharp, gleaming dagger emerged from the pocket of one of the thugs. My screams went unheeded as I helplessly watched the dagger strike my master's right hand. A pool of blood blended with the spilt crimson ink I had just finished preparing.

Another One About Us

By Anurag Galhotra

Hungry babies know the taste of sand,
Old men try to remember they once understood,
Women try not to be burnt by men,
Boys try to pretend their parents are still alive.

Happy families can't even smile,
Fathers die to save their beautiful daughters' lives,
Mothers die to save their sons' lives,
Grandparents want life to be grandparents again.

Dead legs wait till they can walk again,
Lips still want to move to say 'I love you' again,
Hands want to touch and be felt again,
Hearts wait to be used so that they can give again.

Quiet women rape themselves again,
Men stand there and watch infidelity some more,
Two-minute-olds learnt to cry today,
Their mothers would cry but they don't live anymore.

Begging artists fret about living,
Painters look in the dirty gutters for life's ink,
Sculptors search lovers to sculpt again,
Singers scream for lungs so that we can smile again.

He prays for them and He prays for us,
I, You, We, could pray for Him and could pray for Them.

*But we're too busy complaining about our Gucci's getting scratched. We're too pissed off
'coz we don't have a spot for our Jags. We can't pass 'coz our Professor's really bad. We
can't live 'coz he said she said.*

You're too pissed off about me judging all of us in here.

And I'll admit.

I'm too vain about getting something like this in here.
We've fallen and honestly, the Hell with things like us.



In Wonderland

By Gholam Reza Vatandoust

It was a cold and dreary summer morning in London. I walked down Oxford Street to the underground station, mounted the escalator down the 139 steps, in time to hop on the tube heading for Richmond. My destination was Kew Gardens, the PRO depository of the British archives. I had spent the past month shuffling through grey and hapless writings of distant past in godless lands, in hopes of finding something special, which could make my story palatable and exciting for my readers. Lo and behold, among these papers I found a small document, less tarnished than the rest and coded WONDERLAND. It was a summary report of a double agent, working with the British in the service of her Majesty the Queen, mysteriously referred to as "the Private Diary of Wonderland." Was there another Wonderland? I could not wait to find out, and the story carried me on:

Wonderland is experiencing grim days since the early years of the revolution. Its former president brought with him hope for better days ahead. Citizens of Wonderland had come to believe in a better future. He had ended the serial killing of intellectuals and had exposed a second list of nearly two hundred academics, writers and journalists marked for elimination. He also reduced abuses and nepotism and presented, much to the chagrin of intelligent agents and ultra-conservative men of God, a new face of Wonderland, one that preached tolerance and dialogue.

He even went so far as to establish a Center for Civilizational Dialogue and throughout the land he funded civic centers to initiate dialogue among all age groups. All this was done under the watchful and disapproving eyes of the old guards, the true guardians of revolutionary Wonderland. The office for human guidance, an omnipresent Soviet KGB style watchdog created in the 1980's, particularly in schools, universities, and governmental centers, was reigned in and the killings of intellectuals were suspended. For a while people came to believe that things will actually improve in Wonderland. There was the free press. Everyone came to regard that a Prague Spring was at hand. How-

ever, hopes were short lived and even before the former president's term ended, this untimely season of hope came to a jolting halt.

Since the election of the new president just over three years ago, the ultra-conservatives have had everything under control. In big bold letters, at one university, posters proudly announce another "cultural revolution," which meant another round of purges, arbitrary arrests and executions. Universities are the playground for action. Since most academics are civil servants, and universities are run by government appointees, their treatments of independent academics were harsh and non-compromising.

Today, Wonderland is blessed with a deep moral crisis. The essential problem of most citizens, both government and private, is a lack of commitment to honesty, integrity and respect for humanity. Several academics have been threatened with dismissal for refusing to sign petitions condemning the Big Satan or for refusing to support the nuclear project. With the new president's high profile "ethics code," a citizen of Wonderland wearing a tie also breaks the rules. A tie is a symbol of western decadence and care should be taken not to infest Wonderland.

The founder of Wonderland praised the wretched of the earth and the shanty dwellers, the forsaken, the benign and the forgotten, what he repeatedly called the "mustazafin." However, he had very little respect for the western educated for they had all the characteristics of the "other." The western educated were certainly a dishonor to the Revolution. After all, they were the "westoxicated." Those who traveled too often, particularly to the U.S. were "maznun," (suspect), sending too many e-mails, that was sufficient cause to become mashkuk (under suspicion). Those academics that were critical were often warned by the notorious censors to watch their language as well as their steps for they could well cross the "red line," that made them guilty (mugasir) by implication. And

of course those who so much as mentioned the Zionist state would undeniably become mahkum (condemned for eternity, perhaps with a one way ticket to prison if not to hell).

Wonderland is the land of the unexpected, the land of paradoxes, of conflicting values, and of extremes, where uncertainties remain a norm.

In such uncertain terms expediency serves as the religion of Wonderland. It serves the citizenry to uphold the code of silence and to look the other way whenever necessary.

Among natives, there is an expression that goes: "death is okay, but for the neighbor." In Wonderland today, while it is fashionable to be anti-American and to outwardly support the wretched and the poor, it is equally okay to be all that is outwardly condemned, so long as you keep it a secret, and when it becomes public, the best response is total and absolute denial. This is why in a televised interview during the previous election a former president claimed that he was a poor simple man with no wealth of his own. He even claimed that the old house in which he lived was part of his inheritance, and that the enemies of Wonderland had collaborated to ruin his good name. In another instance, the son of a prominent cleric traveled to the Big Satan with his pregnant wife in order to have the child born a citizen. The son of a former commander of Wonderland guards fled to the Big Satan seeking asylum but is reported to be traveling back and forth regularly between Wonderland and "Satanland." So in this particular case, as the moral of the story goes, "America (the big bad Satan) is good for you but bad for your neighbor."

Contradictions abound in Wonderland. While the country is packed with religious zealots and mystic saints, it is simultaneously the largest per capita consumer of alcoholic beverages in the Middle East. In fact the use of alcohol, opium and drugs has increased significantly since pre-revolutionary days. Just months ago, a daily paper reported that in the Vatican city of Wonderland, home brewed liquor sent more than ten to the

cemetery while another two dozen ended up in the hospital.

Among the ministers nominated by the new President shortly after his election, and introduced as downtrodden and down to earth individuals with modest means dedicated to religion and the hidden Messiah, one nominee turned out to be a resident of the United States (had the green card), another had a home he came to possess after the revolution valued over four million dollars, one candidate was exposed as having a fabricated online doctoral degree, etc. So it is that while Mr. President claims that there is an apartheid regarding nuclear energy and we shall not give in to western imperialism, missiles are paraded in the main streets with signs of "Death to ..." In the meantime, the man in charge declares that all avenues are open for further negotiation. After all tagiyah (dissimulation) is an acceptable way of life in Wonderland, so are nepotism, influence pedaling and hypocrisy. Thus it is that many researchers are directly connected to the government, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Intelligence. Yet they are all eager to join American universities or American research institutes should the occasion permit. Anything goes to boost your position, even at the cost of the other. As the moral goes, "death is okay, but for your neighbor."

Academics that refuse to tow the line are constantly pestered by university authorities and the secret police. Dissidents are often called in to answer questions behind closed doors. In Wonderland, support for Human Rights, nuclear non-proliferation, freedom of the press and more recently the two state solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict are all a liability, if not a crime. Some individuals are now called in regularly and asked to confess as to their past and future sins.

There is little doubt that the political dynamics within Wonderland has changed dramatically in the past year. It is not only the neo-conservatives alone that run the show, they do so with the collaboration of Wonder guards, volunteer corps and regularly paid operatives. The atmosphere of love they sought

to create has turned into one of paranoia and fear. A new pattern of persecution has emerged. Arbitrary arrests and detention of civil activists, journalists, women's rights movement, academics, teachers, students and even unionists are frequent. It is all done to safeguard Wonderland.

The general policy of the hardliners is to alienate, ostracize and frighten the moderates. It is the easy way to silence and isolate. By incarcerating scholars on a visit to Wonderland, they are doing the inevitable - actually making any dialogue impossible to sustain. What they least want is a solution to the problem. It is to their benefit to keep the citizenry isolated from the world. An isolated citizenry would be easier to govern. In such circumstances elections too would lose its meaning, and dictates from above would be sufficient and easier to maintain. Already the talk centers on the dire need of obedient supporters, not "unfaithful" critics who would serve the "enemy" by acting as a liaison for a western influence. This they consider as nothing less than preparing the groundwork for a velvet revolution in Wonderland. Only ideological and faithful supporters of the system are needed. As one conservative cleric recently stated that the "Republic" is nonsense since Wonderland is governed by the Almighty himself. Thus those at the helm can do what is best for the masses, like the shepherd leading the sheep.

The rally behind popular individuals incarcerated is remarkable and has many people within the government exasperated. However, no one considers the faith of numerous Wonderland citizenries who are called in, harassed, threatened, and even eliminated. Accidental deaths occur far too frequently. Over two years ago a noted nuclear physicist died under mysterious circumstances. Even before an autopsy was conducted the cause of death was announced as gas poisoning and within hours after his death all his papers and belongings were confiscated. Most often citizens are held incommunicado for months and years without access to legal counsel. They are charged with "threatening national security." No one shall ever

know what happens to them, should they disappear. Wonderland is indeed a human circus. It claims to be the most democratic state ever created by man, yet all it needs is a swing of the magic wand to bring in the unexpected, including unpredictable election results. Women are said to be equal to men, yet they need permission of male guardians to leave home. In Wonderland, all humans are created equal, yet some are certainly more equal. In Wonderland your social status is determined by the length of your beard and your expressed faith, not necessarily in God but your benefactor. Nothing else matters. So it turns out that one high ranking minister was found to hold a high school diploma, while posing as a graduate of "Oxford University of London," for the past ten years. With only a high school diploma he was even teaching at the most prestigious university of the land. Wonderland has rejoiced at the downfall of the former Soviet Union, and more recently at the financial crisis of the West. It now boasts of a third and final alternative to the world crisis, the universal model of Wonderland. After all it is God's own gift to mankind, and God moves in many mysterious ways. Wonderland is no exception. Halleluiah!

As I scratched my head wondering about this new discovery, I flipped over the document to see if I could find who the author was. After all, a document without a source is meaningless in our profession. On the back was the author's confession with his fingerprint:

This humble author would like to confess for past and future generations that Wonderland is entirely a figment of his twisted imagination and there is not a speck of truth to the story.



Socially Conscious

By Alia M Aref

In a room filled with loved ones
I am surrounded by strangers
In honor of this social event
Everyone has their social mask on
I too have a mask
It's awkward but necessary
I am out of place at social gatherings
Where I belong but then again I don't
The familiar faces I have gotten to know well have disappeared
Their warm smiles and affectionate looks were gone
All there but hidden under dull expressions of interest
The false smiles and empty words cause me to pity their shallow existence
I hate myself for being here, witnessing their downfall
I wish I had never come, why am I here?
People here are fakes
They tempt me to join in their evil games of deception
Do I dare succumb to their wickedness?
To paste a fake smile on my face
A smile I don't feel
To hide my true feelings
To turn into one of them and live the lifestyle I loathe
I will not be made a mockery!
Although I do have a mask on
Hiding my true feelings of contempt towards all around
Why did I allow myself to be put in position?
I don't belong here and I know that to be true
For if I did belong would I have time to be writing to you?

The Divine Comedy of Motherhood

By Ahlam Alaki

From religious icons to popular culture - through modern media and even history, motherhood has been greatly romanticized and enrobed with this aura of sublimity, tenderness, and extreme satisfaction, evoking images of awe and veneration. But are these images true to reality?

I think that the concept of motherhood is one which has been misrepresented throughout time. All of these icons with satisfied female faces looking at babies with angelic halos are actually far- far away from planet earth. You look at the faces of these mothers, and you see nothing but serenity, satisfaction and extreme health: beautiful porcelain-like complexions, shiny hair, healthy bodies and relaxed mood: a total Zen experience, the ultimate Nirvana. No signs of post-partum depression, no hint of varicose veins under garments, no worries about stretch marks or cellulite or weight gain, and most important, no *signs of fatigue*. Where are the black circles under the eyes? Where are the wrinkles and the chapped lips? How about near-death experience of exhaustion during those dreadful graveyard shifts when babies refuse to succumb to sleep just out of spite? And of course mothers follow: no sleep, and a lot of spite.

What did mothers do during the Stone Age? We never heard about their ordeal. Is this fair? We read about cavemen hunting and facing great dangers with ferocious animals and harsh circumstances. As if their women were having fun in manicure parlors! If men had to hunt, women had to clean up the mess after the hunting and cook that dreadful beast of an animal after skinning it, cleaning it, and probably even dismembering it: horror of horrors!

But believe me, this is not the hardest bit. The kids' part is even more challenging. But nobody ever speaks about it. Nobody ever warns the new generations of young women of the hardship of motherhood. It is so cruel and so unfair; a whole chapter has been deliberately deleted from the history of *womankind*. It is the most commonly practiced form of censorship, a universal conspiracy wickedly and intentionally targeting women just to let the humankind continue. What did mothers do in an age where pacifiers did not exist, *Gripe Water* was unheard of, and the famous *Baby Einstein* DVDs were not there to distract fussy babies from destroying their mom's nerves.





Adolphe William Bouguereau. "Rest." 1879.
(Rest, mothers! Yeah).

They say: 'Behind every great man there is a great woman.' But we seldom hear about the ordeal of mothers when we read about famous figures (whether men or women). Was Napoleon a colicky baby? Did Freud give his mother the freaks talking about penis envy? Did his schoolmaster ever summon his mom to give her a warning? Was he following young girls in his school repeating his menacing theory? How about Shakespeare? Did he sleep the night when he was ten month old, or did his mother go through the 'nuits blanches' as the dear French call these sleepless nights? How about Van Gogh? Did he ever tear off the ears of his sisters' dolls and unleashed upheaval in the house, which his mother had to cease? Did Beethoven ever throw a tantrum in a shopping trip, screaming and kicking the floor? What did Simone de Beauvoir's mom feel like when her daughter declared: 'One is not born a woman, but becomes one'? How about Michelangelo's mother? Did she play the buffoon during his mealtime so he would just eat? Did Archimedes give his mother a hard time potty training? Or did Plato's mother argue with him using logic and reason while offering food: 'you could always spit it if you do not like it.'

They talk about the destructive impact of Chinese water torture, the terror of the Spanish Inquisition, the horror of vampire tales from the heart of Romania, the iron maidens of the medieval era, but believe me; all of these are less horrendous than a fussy baby constantly roaring in the house.

What happened to sunny babies in ads? Where are these rosy cheeks and smiley eyes? Where are those lovely chubby creatures in highchairs giggling and munching cookies? Well, that is pure fiction, and to believe it will be a fundamental defect in your intelligence. Real mothers receive an upgraded (or a downgraded?) version that has nothing of these features. Real babies come to this world with red faces, saggy skin covering dangerously fragile bones, and repulsive white flakes on limbs. Their wrinkled features look more creepy than pleasant. No smiles, no cookies. And as for you, no *Great Expectations*, only *Hard Times!* All of these immaculate bibs in ads are phony; all those smiley babies are impostors. Well, they do exist but just for seconds. Real babies vomit, dribble, etc. (and this is the worst part) on the crisp, freshly ironed clothes. I used to always wonder why mothers would leave their babies and small children to rot: unkempt hair, spotty clothes, smelly bibs, now I know. The damage is an ongoing process.



Gaetano Chierici (1838 – 1920). "Mother's Pride."
(*God bless your soul Chierici: motherhood= pride+ anarchism*)

What happened to all of these peaceful mothers knitting tiny baby clothes? And why would anyone bother knitting when high street shops would sell clothes for peanuts, minus all the mess of knitting? 'For the joy of it,' I overhear someone whispering in indignation, but what joy is there if you have other tiny creatures in the house jumping around you while you're knitting, asking you ceaselessly and relentlessly to explain why there is a new fish in the ocean? Who on earth would be knitting or doing any sort of creative activity in such harsh, even brutal, circumstances: a baby crying, a toddler emptying the tiny flakes of fish food on the Persian carpet, and a child throwing a tantrum because he wants to go to school in his swimming suit. What would make an otherwise reasonable mother negotiate for a Batman suit instead of a swimsuit as school attire?

Gracious God, let us be realistic. Motherhood is so not like being in heaven. It is not really like being in hell, on the other hand, but maybe like being in purgatory (apologies to Dante), a limbo state of oxymoronic fear and hope. It is not bad, but it is not just the beautiful moments of contemplating babies' angelic faces when they are sleeping. It is also a lifelong saga of sacrifice and concern. When they are babies, it is a relationship of a great dialogic frustration: you feed, they vomit; you clean, they ruin; you cook, they spit (or more politely, decline your food with a grimace). When they grow up, you have another agenda to worry about. On the long run, there are years of great anguish, but moment of intense joy. It is true that sometimes mothers tend to forget all the torture inflicted upon them in moments of content, but this does not make these long periods of distress less *bona fide*. I always ask myself: who was the fool who romanticized the idea of motherhood? And I now realize why people always refer to the cradle with the coffin: one human develops, another human decays - a fixed formula.

But despite of all this, mothers love their children! I think it is a potent spell on mothers who strangely endorse self-denial policies. The relationship is paradoxical and even tragic. Mothers suffer all this to end up seeing their kids flee away to become fully independent. After years of servitude comes the time of complete void - the empty nest. And again, mothers start to enjoy their life and their well-deserved emancipation. They tell me that mothers would then, strangely, miss the fuss of babies, the tantrums of toddlers and the chaotic life of motherhood. But I do not believe them, at least now.

I will spend my time now secretly collecting brochures of luxurious spas, Mediterranean cruises, and best hotels in the world, just to save some activities for

these much-longed-for free years. I just wish that my kids won't find the secret place of this future bonanza, or the glossy brochures of my future plans will be converted into paper boats and origami swans.

Gift

By Nur el-Huda Abdelhalim

gift-wrapped in a package, too tight
too messy, too much
Too haphazardly dropped in your lap and
i'm sorry but You can make me pretty
tie a ribbon, tie a knot
tie me good and closed and
The shadows, they consume
feather-shaped in the pillows
crawling over the colours on my arms
slip into my lungs and laugh and laugh and
Sing sweet imaginary
pretty crazy pretty baby
it makes so much sense, sometimes
the moon, it kills it, it fights for me
You know i can't fight for myself so
just wait, just wait, and hold me till the morning
trap me in my package and i
i'll count each heartbeat till my release.





Name: Anurag Galhotra

Title: My Angel

Gardenia

By Nour M el-Shamsy

The red sedan stopped in front of the black gate. Slowly the lights dimmed and the sound of the engine started to die. He stepped out of the car and took a deep breath. He reached into his side pocket and took out the key. He inserted the key into the lock and after fumbling with the lock for a few minutes, the gate finally gave way and opened. The key is rusty he thought to himself, *I need to get a new one, or better yet, I should change the lock.* Funny, he smiled to himself; she never bothered to change the lock when he was gone. He started walking on the driveway to the house. Around him he could see the garden was well trimmed and as he took a deep breath he could smell the sweet scent of gardenia. The smell reminded him of Gardenia, the hotel where they spent a week. From the back it had an admirable view of the Nile. The hotel got its name from the massive garden that surrounded it from the front and sides of the building. The only thing that was planted in the garden was gardenia, and from above, the white flowers were all you could see for miles ahead. It was an incredible sight! She always said that the hotel looked like it was built on clouds and that the beautiful scent of gardenia was like the scent of heaven. After their visit, she always insisted on planting gardenia in their garden, "We'll have our own cloud to live in," she had told him. He smiled to himself, *she was always a romantic,* he thought, and out loud he said, "Those were some happy memories," and as if knowing she could hear him, he looked up at the bedroom window and saw her sitting on her rocking chair watching him. He held her gaze and her green eyes glittered as the sun hit them, but she didn't turn away. He could tell she was holding back from running down and meeting him at the door. He turned away and looked at the door and could almost hear it slam when he pulled it after him eight years ago. He shook his head trying to erase the memory, and unlocking the door, stepped inside.

He took off his coat and hung it behind the door. He quickly looked around the room and could easily see that nothing had changed. The place was spotless and as he looked at the kitchen he could see an apple pie cooling off on the window table. She couldn't have known he was coming, he thought, for they hadn't spoken in years, and yet it's as if she had always expected him, even baking his favorite pie. He reminded himself of the task he came here for, "I mustn't keep her waiting," he said as he rushed upstairs.

She didn't turn when he walked in and closed the door, and he didn't expect her to. He leaned on the door for support and looked at her. She didn't move, and avoided his gaze by continuing to look from the window. From where she was sitting he could only make out her profile and as the sun shone on her face her auburn hair glistened. He thought of telling her how beautiful she looked but decided against it; there were other things he had to say before he could comment on her beauty. He was lost for words, but knew that the silence between them can't prevail any longer.

"The smell of gardenia almost took me back to Cairo. Do you remember Cairo? I can remember it as if it was yesterday and not twenty-five years ago. Wow can you imagine that twenty-five years ago we were living in the clouds, smelling heaven? I remember when I saw you walking among the gardenias and I thought to myself if I can stand close enough to you I will be able to smell the sweet aroma vibrating from you, in fact in your white dress you looked like a gardenia yourself. I could feel everyone watching you as you swayed your hips and your dress caressed the flowers. When you turned and smiled I couldn't believe that from that day on I would wake up every morning to that smile for the rest of my life, I couldn't believe I had you." He heard her sigh, or was it the wind making that noise. He couldn't tell for her sighs are usually soft, almost inaudible. No it was her; and although she still didn't turn he could feel she was holding back her tears.

"Just as our honeymoon witnessed our urgent passionate nights, as it ended we experienced a more mature, gentle passion that kept us going for years. It was a pleasure returning home everyday to find you waiting for me. As time passed, I took everything you did for granted; my clean clothes, my favorite food, my morning coffee, and even my late dinners. You used to always wait for my return late at night to warm my dinner, and not once did you complain. Back then I saw this behavior as maternal and it annoyed me to not quite understand why you bothered so much. Why did you give so much? Why did you care so much? Why were you always there to clean up my messes? Oh and God knows I have messed up a great deal. Don't you remember when I almost got our house sold and you gave away your entire inheritance just to get it back. I don't know if I ever thanked you enough."

He lit a cigarette and started pacing the room. When he first arrived he didn't know what to say and how to begin, but now he felt he can't stop. He took several

long puffs from his cigarette before continuing.

"I loved you back then but I was never considerate enough of your feelings, it was liberating to know that I had you to fall back on, to run to when life failed me. I never gave it much thought other than you were always there." He put out his cigarette in the ashtray by the bed. He noticed his hands were trembling and he held them together to stop their tremor. He steadied his voice and added, "And you were there when I walked out of that house eight years ago.." He paused for a deep breath, "Adam, the gardener, told me that every morning you will clean the house, cook my dinner, bake my pie, sit on that rocking chair and wait for my return. Every day for eight years you sat there waiting for me and when it was evident that I won't be coming you would give Adam the food and the pie for his children. I made you suffer all those years, I broke your heart and hurt your feelings and for what?" He was shouting now. "For love? A deceiving emotion love is, when it left me running after the illusion when I had the real thing waiting for me at home for eight *damn* years!"

"I'm sorry" he was crying now, "I'm sorry for your suffering, I'm sorry for the broken hopes, and the many times I failed you. I love you, I've never stopped loving you, not once." He looked at her and saw that she was still looking out of the window. Were those tears that were shining on her cheek?

"I will make it up to you; whether I live for a minute or for a century I will spend every moment for the rest of my life making it up to you. I will show you the proper love you deserve, for you have loved me unconditionally. Please no more tears", he said as he wiped his tears. "Come on let us not waste another minute in suffering." He walked over to her and noticed that the sun was setting. "Look at the sun it is setting, let it set on our sorrows my love. Come on." He held her hand which was cold under his warm one, and as he patted her cheek noticed that her eyes continued to look outside the window. He dropped her hand which immediately fell on her lap. Alarmed he moved his hands in front of her eyes that continued to look lifelessly outside the window. He sank onto the floor at her feet and hid his face in his hands. The bitter waters of life rushed high about him; their sterile taste was on his lips. Had she seen him come? Had she heard him? The mute lips refused to answer. He looked outside the window to watch the sunset, only to find that he was late for that too.

The Broken Hero

By Meshal al-Harbi

In a uniform I stand,
following the drumming of deaths band,
can you hear the echoes of the night,
screaming, bleeding people with fright,

My uniform's dripping with the color of red,
I guess you didn't listen to the words i last said,
"I love you" were my final words,
before I left you to defeat the Kurds.

I stand in my uniform with guilt and shame,
killing and slaughtering with all the blame,
the sky pours down a river of blood,
tearing down everything, leaving the city in flood,

I stand in my uniform figuring out what's right,
looking for the path towards the light,
the blackness of the air is the disease i take in,
the days of justice are gone, as I end a sin.

I stand in my uniform crying
dying,
trying,
lying...

I stand in my uniform a sin.

I am an Arch

Nur Soliman

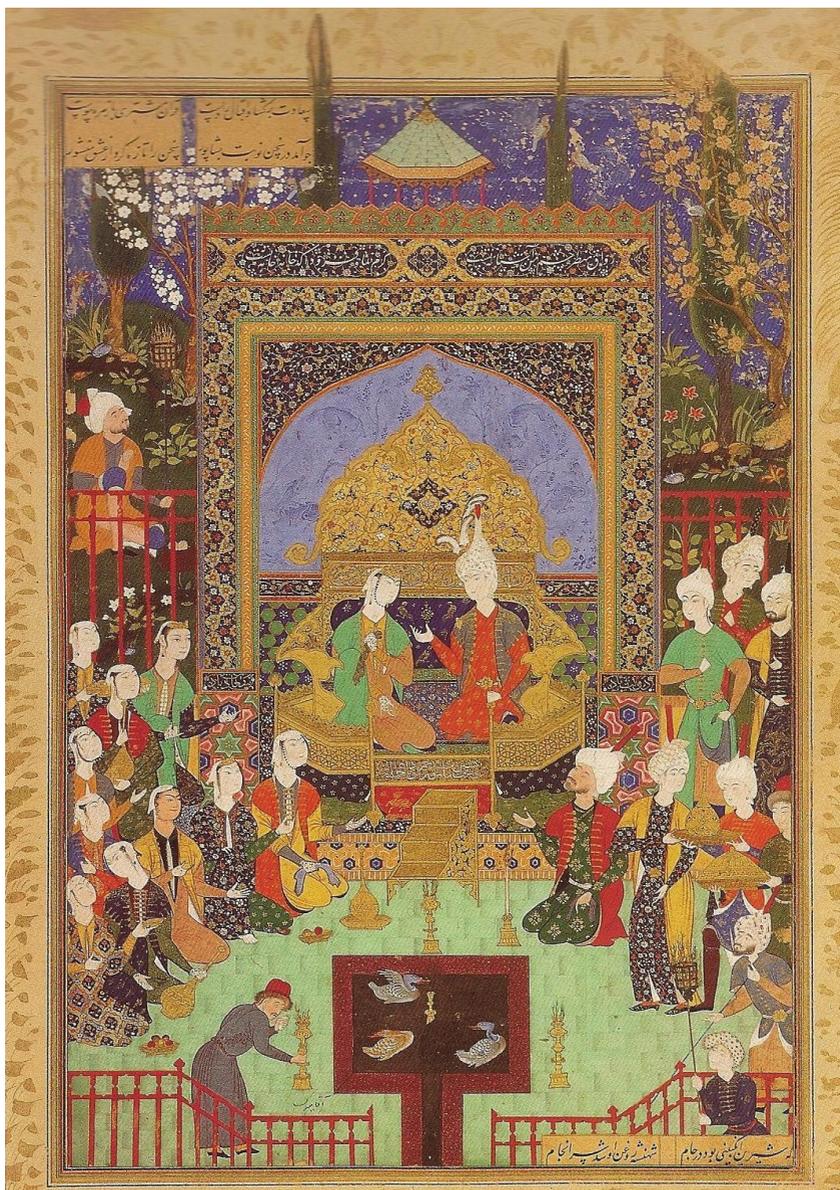
Beneath my curved and crenellated brow, find a thoughtful, delicate-faced youth converse with his father in earnest murmurs that you, curious viewer, cannot hear; find tilted head of pretty Shirin and the upright Khusrau, bright and exquisite as I arch over them all. Before my stucco and stone façade, find rows of delightfully dressed lords and ladies, courtiers and ladies-in-waiting all no doubt as talkative as they are colorful, bless the miniaturist. He's lined them in thin black ink and then painted their sleeves and vests and everything as lovingly as if he were stitching them together. They sit and talk over stretches of green wash sprinkled with floral patterns as sweet as their meek expressions.

The miniaturist must think that rich verdigris and the powder of crushed Hindustan beetles are not for me, for he lavishes the precious enamel-hard colours onto coats and dresses, robes and sashes, but not on me! It's not like you are given tons of the stuff by the Sultan's *kitab-dar* to fritter away on us arches and doorways, at least not before you're done with Khusrau or Rustam, Timur or Anurshiwān, then perhaps one will graciously line my crenellations with ruby-red, or my frame with green like twisted emerald.

Mind you, I don't turn out half bad when the illuminator's done with me, the calloused side of his palm tickling my frame as he patiently paints flowers shining happily like jewels held in place by the bursting pale-green tracery of vines, and then paints the in-between space with black and blue, sometimes even using that lapis lazuli behind the white lines of poetry and to tint the flying phoenixes and lions on the pale blue on my sides. I look even better when the gilder's sprinkled his lovely gold over my plaster-covered voussoirs and crown, tinting those delicate flowers with golden breath. Then my mud brick columns aren't so humble, and stand as proud as anything, looking worth enough to stand in the *Registan* over in Samarqand that I've heard about. No robe or sash is like my façade when that devoted, patient illuminator has covered me with stars more flower-like than the real stars in the cobalt blue sky.

Speaking of monuments though, look again at my silent façade and those that pass beneath me, lean on my columns, or those who rest on the blind arcade blocked in. How lovely are these princes and princesses, how charming the lord and dainty the lady, how shyly smiles the maiden with her head coyly bent, and





“Khusrau and Shirin, in a garden at night, listening to Shirin’s maids recite poetry.” Shah Tahmasp, Nizami’s *Khamsa*. Tabriz, 1539 – 1543. London, The British Library. Image from Sims, Eleanor and Boris I. Marshak. *Peerless Images: Persian Paintings and Its Sources*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

how vibrantly sits up the young courtier. The turn of their heads, the lift of their eyebrows, the curve of their lips, and the gestures of their arms speak for them where words will not do, where the direction of their eyes and the loudness of their colour compensates for the shimmering silence. They sit and rise like flowers, their lithe, curving bodies like stems of blossoms, the arch of their back and the curve of their arm brilliantly fluid, thanks to the dear miniaturist. But they seem so frail while I stand mute, hard and stone-like, diamond-like before that fleeting smile and spent breath! I, standing stone, will not crumble before these men and women, but will stand mutely, resolutely. Time cannot wear down my edges or let my crown collapse, nor will it let the bricks tumble down in miserable silence for princes on horses to wander about my ruins, composing elegant, melancholy poetry. I am a painted arch, and my pages protect me. I am the perfect arch, the arch that blossoms like a tree on its façade but stands as straight and perfectly rendered as a real building. I do not have to fear the day that rain and wind will wear away my finely incised grooves, or the day that little boys chip away the glazed turquoise tile like real arches do, but can remain intact and as serene as my reader while he gazes upon my beauty.

Unless, in a careless moment, someone drops the book I am going to be put in and let it sink in a fountain, or snatch it and burn it in a fit of fury, unless something so horrible like that happens, may Allah forbid it, rest assured that I will remain standing for hurried young lovers and thoughtful men, the ceremonious couple and the courteous company, letting them pass through or rest beneath. I haven’t met as many people as other arches have, of course, since I was painted for an interior garden, and not an open square in Shiraz or Tabriz, and only hear the whispers of women with the scent of their perfume, or the low conversation of serious men. But let these people move, miniaturist, and let them get up and wander off, and find that I stand without their sweet pleasantries or the scent of their coffee and their wine. I am an arch, and my miniaturist has painted me like stone so that I may live for eternity and stand sentry before those butterflies of paper maidens and men.

The book I’m going to be put into, the one that everyone in the kitab-khana has been working on for some years now, is sure to be lovelier when my page is sewn into a quire, next to those lines of Nizami’s poetry. I wonder what it’s like to be in a book. It makes you a little self-conscious, and kind of hope that the miniaturist has drawn those lines in perfectly straight. Of course, I know he has because my artist is older than those nervous apprentices of his, and no longer

has to think and rack his brains when he runs his pen down that page, for he knows his craft well. After all, you probably won't recognize me fully.

You see me, perhaps as the silent, lumbering architectural element, this huge gateway under which people pass. You see me, maybe, as another projection of the textile-intricate building, maybe like a half-window. To be sure, I am all those things, but what you don't know is that I'm the one who conceals your young sons and daughters when they rush to secret meetings with their blushing lover, and I'm the one who is in on the secret when that unfaithful merchant from the neighboring *bazaar* hides that extra bag of silver coins at the foot of my column and returns, smelling of bad coffee, the next day to collect it. It's behind me that breathless thieves lean on before they finally run off to their humble little shanties, and underneath that many of you vehemently pour out comments and words to a friend, that even a decent arch ought not hear, about people who even I, silent and mute, saw you chatting happily to.

All that aside, even, I remind you of life beyond the terrace, of life beyond the sunshine of clinking cups of wine and women's laughter. See how my haughty height and breadth turn a real cold and august, forbidding shoulder to the kneeling and stooping man with the torch in his hand, who you'll see only after you'll have already seen the lovely lord and ladies, their faces delicate and round without wanting, the hems of their robes and cloaks stitched with gold over silken red, ultramarine, green. But how selfish is my painted patron, how selfish are my audience, where we turn a blind eye (granted I cannot see) to the tanned torch-bearer, flushed from the heat of the light, and weary from holding it up. Kind and considerate miniaturist, you have included my torchbearer in his dull blue and orange, and his low turban so that we remember, haven't you? Be kind and gracious enough, viewer, to look at the top left-hand corner and past my broad glittering surface, and see what I negatively frame, that which is beyond a lovely Shirin and Khusrau, but still close, higher up, far from the laughing crowd. See him who my back completely ignores, neatly cushioned in the smooth dark green vegetation as inconspicuous as he.

Though I reflect the dazzling beauty of my garden, don't let's forget those I leave beyond my frame, and frame by not framing, the solitary, wistful torch-bearer who stands vigil in the dark grass beyond me. I remind you of the extremes in our world, and the unfairness of the socialite glamour and the not-so-glamorous world beyond my gateway. While I am a mirror of the garden, I'm

a wall for my lone torch-bearer who blinks up at the gilded flame. Don't forget, viewer, the torch-bearer and the stable-boy, the nursing maid and the servant, the violently shunned beggar and the dark-skinned woman who lifts the jug of wine. My miniaturist sometimes places these beyond my reach and beyond my gaze but I know they are there. You can see, viewer, that these worlds are not so different, yours and mine, and that there is painful irony behind the refulgent terrace.

Now the elegant calligrapher has completed that last stroke of the *ta* in the cartouche of poetry, and is off to the *chaikhana* for a cup of strong, sweet tea before he burnishes my page, and I am more confident that I will look more presentable to you. My miniaturist's fingers, those sensitive, hardened fingers no longer tremble with impatience, but are slow, as though he's instilling that slowness of time and the spirit of eternity in us all, arch and man alike, for his heart is still and patient and meditative as the ink flows from the reed and brush.

His practiced eye roves across the page with the sweep of my arc, and the illuminator is unwearied as he lightly paints the buttons on someone's shirt, then the intertwined stars on my façade. He secures my fate as the eternal symbol of architecture, immobile and unwavering before the mortals, while they, too, are not as transient as I like to fancy, but are also suspended like pearls in a delicately embroidered robe. As we are infused with colour, we are also infused with the timelessness that preserves us, so that those maidens and men will never tire of whispering foolish things and laughing shyly, and I will never tire of those gusts of perfume or the scent of coffee or the strumming of some distant *santur* as they rise up to me, for we're placed, my fleeting audiences and I, in a garden where the music doesn't cease, the guests never feel tired, and I stand guard over them all, more silent and more splendid than they. In the timelessness of our joy, might I humbly remind you, as only an arch can, that beyond the sunshine of my frame, there lives a people beyond the archway, who are just as real, just as eternal, if not more so, though perhaps not as splendid. But they are just as lovingly painted, and remind me that I'm an arch that can divide.



Name: *William Andersen*

Title: Calcium Carbonate Travertines, Pamukkale, Turkey

Papa

By Amal Ahmed

My eyes are dry, with which I'd cry
My voice is numb, with which I'd joke
My smile is gone, with which I'd laugh
My light disappeared with which I'd look through the dark.

A cherished love bond had started to evolve
Into the mould of a beautiful relationship
Around which my life revolved

We had blended into a color of vigor
Zeal for excellence was our strife
They all said I was your true grandchild

The warmth of your hand on my head, I can still feel
You would always be there for me, we had a deal

The castle of my relationships is trembling
Its pillars are weakening, my heart's exploding
The walls are cracking,
And the castle is weeping.
One of my pillars just took a mighty fall,
This one can never be replaced at all

The soft kiss of an inevitable truth
Has caressed my pillar into silent sleep
And it silently waits for me there beneath

My late grandfather ignited the sparks of writing and expressing thoughts. He encouraged me to spill my mind and heart out through words. He was a script writer and a producer.

This poem is dedicated to him, was read at his funeral and brought a tear to many eyes. My family and I will always miss him. I believe he is amongst us, just for the very reason that I am still continuing what he started in me, the passion for the written word.

A SINGLE VIEWER'S ENCOUNTER WITH A SINGLE WORK

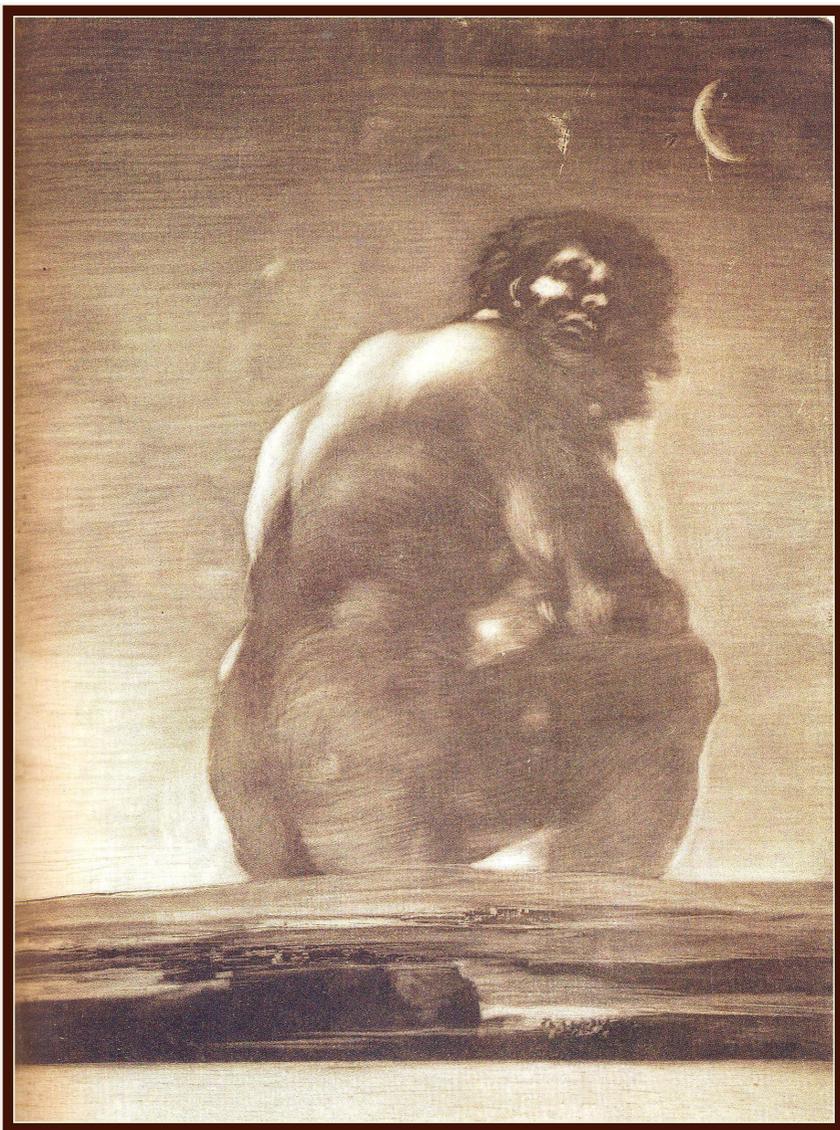
By Anurag Galhotra

Commentary on tinted sketch by Francisco Goya, "The Giant"

I don't look at the giant as dangerous. His face, which is what I always notice first, is blanketed with a despondent expression. He's not looking at me, because I feel like my head is the only thing sticking out of the ground. He's not looking at me because he's looking at something or someone even bigger than he is.

Even though Goya uses the darkest shades of copper tones on the face, the stark contrasts highlight just enough to see a down-turned mouth. The area around the eyes is almost pitch-black but Goya masterfully manages to dab a hint of light in the giant's right eye, almost reflecting the tinge of hope I see in the poor figure. He seems like he's so close to me, almost within arm's range. That's what makes this image so frustratingly painful for me.

The background does not allow for depth even with the crescent moon in the sky. The beast's hunched posture helps in making the area seem even more confined. I've personally felt the claustrophobic feeling of failure, and looked up for something or anyone to help me get up. 'We can make our imagination play around this dreadful apparition...' (Gombrich 488). I think it's ironic and almost cruel to allow our imaginations so much space to play in, especially around the pitiable giant.



Francisco Goya, The Giant, c. 1818, aquatint, 28.5 cm x 21 cm

There is light shedding onto the beast from the top left of the image. It lands on his upper back, but pierces his face. Yet, the moon's light should be gently resting on and in front of the giant. Is he really out in nature, or could he be dreaming about a certain freedom like the one I do? I find myself looking for a hint of light wherever I can and I can't help but sympathize with the look of yearning in the giant's eyes; in fact his entirety.

Goya 'sculpted this gargantuan colossus...out of darkness' (Works of Art Drawings and Paintings). Like me, many people feel their world is too small for them, their surroundings too calm and peaceful compared to themselves. The giant is wound into such a tight ball, that the only two places light makes it through in the image are just under his thigh and a little between his arms and his body. I can feel how his troubles are weighing his lower half into darkness, while his eyes still look for that meaning.

However, Goya's Giant isn't looking at me. I can't help him. The genius of the image is that it makes me want to be there with him. The aggressive, yet waning plea for hope looks like it is almost gone. Is that Giant sitting at the edge of a cliff?

Suffocating

By Reem Shuhaibar

Wanting to surpass this dreadful feeling I keep locked up inside,
I find myself drowning in this half empty cup trying to hide.
But no matter what I do, or which path I attempt to take,
My insides tear up more and more as results turn out to be nothing but fake.
Losing my grip that distinguishes dreams from hopes, and hopes from reality,
I slowly see myself floating above this world that begins to lack gravity.
Battling with bitter loneliness as it starts to become my worst foe,
I find myself accompanied by nothing more than my shadow.
So, in time, I begin to deteriorate in a shameful morbid way,
As my half empty cup has now completely washed away.



Name: *Amina al-Ansari*

Title: Untitled

The Censor

By Craig Loomis

Wanted: Seeking someone who is not too young, nor too old. Successful candidate must know the ways of the world. Looking for somebody who possesses good moral sense, someone who knows decency when sees it. The successful candidate must know how to use a magic marker, preferably black.

Once Fatemah got the job, her supervisor, Mr. Nassir, pushed back his chair, stood up, and said, “Congratulations, you’ve got the job.” He went on to say how she would have to get up early in the morning, and be ready to go to work tomorrow, because, “work like this cannot wait. Don’t you agree?” And she did. “Oh, by the way,” he continued, “don’t worry about bringing any markers, we have plenty, but, again, come early, around 4 am, because that’s when the foreign newspapers are flown in; and another thing, there will be days when there won’t be much to do, to mark, and when that happens we might ask you to do something else, something more, but never mind, let’s wait and see because usually there’s always something: a wine bottle here, too much cleavage there.” Fatemah nodded. But Mr. Nassir wasn’t done. “This is a daily issue, this censoring business—every day. So, be at the airport at 4 am, terminal one, room D33. The newspapers are delivered in big silver trucks fresh off flights from Cyprus and Paris, even Washington DC. No doodling, no smiley faces. This is serious stuff.” Finally, all done, he held out his hand to have her shake it, and she did, although she’d never shaken many men’s hands.

Fatemah ended with, “Thank you for this opportunity.”

He replied, “Not at all, it’s nothing.”

The next morning—her two children and husband plus maid still asleep—Fatemah with driver makes her way to the airport. Only after much asking and

wrong directions and re-asking, does she finally find room D33 where stacks of newspapers await her. Picking up the first newspaper, it doesn’t take her long to find what she is looking for. On page 13, something called the Culture section, there is an announcement for a photo exhibition in Berlin, some ministry of arts and sciences, and to prove it there is somebody’s wonderfully large photo of Michelangelo’s *David*. On the table, to her left, is a row of ten black markers and she grabs the closest, blackest one, uncaps it and begins work. Quickly, smoothly, expertly, as if she has been doing this for years, she gives David the long black shorts he deserves. “Yes, that’s better.” Moving on now, page 15, and there is a fashion show: Milan, Spring Collection; six photos of long skinny-legged models, staring straight into the camera, as if even the hint of a smile is all wrong. Glaring into the lens, these girls. But never mind, it is their too short dresses and see-through blouses that need fixing. And so, without a second thought, she gives one of them fishnet black stockings, another a new, longer, better, blacker dress, and still another a simple X will do, and so on. It is then that the door opens and in walks a man pushing a cart full of fresh newspapers. “Right off the flight from Dubai.” He parks the cart next to the others. Only now does he say, “Good morning.” But when Fatemah turns to reply, he is already at the door, his back to her, clicking the door closed. By now she has memorized the page numbers, the section, Culture, her black marker working faster. By newspaper thirty, forty, David’s shorts have become less fancy, ragged at the edges. Now here’s something from one of the French papers: too much cleavage showing on some blonde starlet, famous, making millions of dollars. Fatemah runs a black streak across her chest, X-ing out a hint of thigh, just in case.

By seven o’clock her fingers ache and the floor is littered with empty black markers. The same man who brought her a cart of newspapers is back, asking, “Are we finished? Should be finished. Seven o’clock, should be finished by now.” But instead of waiting for an answer, he picks up one of the newspapers and thumbs through it, stopping here and there to inspect her work. In the end he drops the paper back on the pile, and says, “Not bad.” Vodka bottles that need

blackening, a model's meaty thighs that require polka-dots. And so it goes.

But then one day, in the morning heat of May, Fatemah goes to work and the driver, like always, says he'll be back at seven. By now, three months into censoring, everybody knows her, waves her through security, "*As-salaam alaykum*". And except for that one time two weeks ago, when she missed a "dangerously provocative advertisement for Southern California swimsuits", she's done her duty. In fact the life of a censor is—how did she put it—"fun and easy and not at all what I expected." Meanwhile, back to that May morning. As she is thumbing through a London newspaper, she stops at page three. She stops and stares. She stops and stares and sits back in the chair, placing both hands in her lap. Even when he clicks open the door and wheels in his cart of newspapers, she refuses to look up, but staring down at page three, while he, like always, says, "Seven o'clock. Should be done by now. We've got to take everything to the trucks, you know. Time's up." Then, not waiting for an answer, he leaves, shutting the door behind him.

Looking down at a photograph of a blood splattered body, a child, maybe a girl, like her daughter, maybe a little boy—it is hard to tell, but blood everywhere, one leg missing, a black hole where a shoulder be. Still on page three: photographs of starving children, all ribs and brown, slick skulls, flies walking across their faces, stopping to drink from their eyes and lips. Done staring now, having made up her mind, Fatemah picks up her black marker and makes the photos as black and nothing as she can. Blacking out, getting rid of all the death and dying. Paper after paper, page three.

Next morning, extra early for Mr. Nassir, he comes to Fatemah and tells her in his best supervisor voice that, "No. This"—holding up yesterday's London paper with black squares for photos—"is not to be censored. This is different."

Fatemah nods but it isn't the nod of understanding, because the next day, the next newspaper, there is more of the same: the Congo, a line of headless villag-

ers on a dusty road; India, a ruined marketplace littered with blood and shoes and shattered machinery; Iraq, . . . always Iraq--mothers weeping over young dead children. What else can she do but X it out—X all of it out.

Still in May, Mr. Nassir has no choice. He tells her, "You leave me no choice." Fatemah is fired, her black markers taken away from her. But before she is escorted out of room D33, the man who wheels in the carts of newspapers waves to her like he is on holiday, saying, "Good bye." As Mr. Nassir takes Fatemah's censor's badge, he says, "News is different. People need to know what's going on. People need to see the mayhem that surrounds them." Finally, sticking out his hand to have her shake it good-bye, he finishes with, "People need to appreciate what they have, you see. The news puts everything in perspective."

Eyeless in Gaza (After Milton's *Paradise Lost*) (from ENGL 319, "Women & Literature")

By Hooda S Qaddumi

We are the blind men,
Bound with fetters of brass,
Grinding at the mill in the prison,
Grinding the fruits of rage,
Reaping the grapes of wrath,
Sowing the seeds of hate,
Delivering sleeping cherubs in white coffins,
Waiting for deliverance, waiting for a Great Deliverer
To lead us away from our blindness.



My Shisha (from ENGL 319, "Women & Literature")

By Patty A Marotte

I slowly opened my eyes as the sun light was penetrating through the bedroom curtains. I looked beside me. My youngest child Fatima was still sleeping, making sounds as she sucked her pacifier. I turned the other direction to the small crib on the right side of my bed. It was empty! As soon as the thought registered in my mind, I heard my only son, Abdullah, screaming and playing with his older sisters in the *sala* outside my room.

Brrr! This November is colder than last year. I got out of my bed, put my on fuzzy slippers, and headed towards the bathroom. As I made my way across the room, my children burst in the room screaming. They scrambled on top of the king size bed, laughing and panting heavily. Before I could ask them what was happening, their father rushed in with a hunched back and a funny face and grunting, reminding me of one of the monster characters from a cartoon show my children watch. I rolled my eyes and continued to head for the bathroom, not willing to wake up fully and participate in their morning antics. My husband attempted to growl at me and gestured a sign of playful attack. I waved at him to go away and go in the bathroom. After my obvious rejection he focused playing with the children again.

As I sat on the toilet I heard my second born daughter, Aisha, shriek, "*Bes baba, bes baba!* (Stop father, stop father)"

Aisha is our sensitive quiet child. In any situation that becomes too loud or hectic even if in play, she freaks out.

I washed myself with the spray. A new habit I acquired after becoming Muslim. As a matter a fact, I thought to myself, I haven't used toilet paper in 12 years! That's funny. Amusing myself with how my life changed, I routinely washed my hands and then splashed my face with cold water. Rubbing my face with the towel, Khalid popped his head in the bathroom with our son hanging off his hip. Every time he tried to speak, Abdullah playfully hit his face.

He asked in Arabic, "Are we going to the desert to camp?"

I replied in English, "How is the weather? It's not too cold to take the kids out?"

He replied, "*Al joh helooooooo!* (The weather is nice)."

"OK, I will start to pack the kids' stuff and get them ready." I reached for the *jaras (bell)* to call the maids. The irony I think to myself.

In half Arabic and English I told the maids to prepare the baby's bag and to pack it with clothes, milk, and diapers.

In unison they replied, "*Zain, mama* (Ok madam)."

I hate speaking Arabic to the maids. It always makes me feel I am having an out of body experience. It is interesting how my speech process has developed (or under- developed) over the years because I rarely ever complete a sentence in either full English or Arabic. It is always a mixture of the two languages. Yes, a decade in Kuwait has not made me fluent in *Arabi* (Arabic) and I'm losing English vocabulary.

I went downstairs to the kitchen, making a mental list in my head of the more important things I should take to the desert camp since it was obvious I delegated the children's things to the maids. As I was scanning the kitchen, my husband's voice startled me from the top of the stairs.

"Umm Abdullah. Don't forget to pack my shisha (smoking water pipe)."

"*Inshallah*," I said, an automated response I have learned over the years to end conversations quickly.

Thinking aloud, "Yes my shisha I must not forget to bring mine." While I was packing the two *shishas*, Abu' Abdullah walked in the kitchen.

"Why are you packing yours? You know my dad's family will be there!"

Replying defensively, "So what are you saying?! That what I do in front of God, my husband, and half the restaurants in Kuwait, I cannot do in front of your family?"

"*Keefich!* (As you like)." This was my husband's word when he wanted to end

conversations quickly with me to avoid confrontations.

As we arrived, I let the maids unpack the things from the car, except my shiny gold bag that held my precious object of freedom. I held it tightly to my chest in a rebellious and protective way that only I recognized. I silently chuckled to myself.

Amati Badriya, the oldest Aunt from the father's side, was already sitting in the corner on the *jelsa ardhiya* (traditional Arabic floor sitting) wrapped in her shawl. I immediately went to kiss the top of her head and commenced with the traditional Kuwaiti greetings. My older girls fell into line behind me to greet her properly. She nodded her head in approval as she inspected my children from head to toe, quietly making religious supplications for Allah to give my children a long and healthy life.

My husband's mother, Mama Latifa, sat in the back of the tent organizing the food for the maids to prepare. I took my place next to her and started to put the meat on the metal sticks for the *showi (grill)*.

After some time, Khalood, the youngest sister of my husband and my closest friend, came inside the tent, shouting, "What is that?! The camping tents are very far!"

I started to laugh because it also seemed to be the longest drive with all four children talking, crying, or screaming in the car. I could barely hear myself think as I was driving!

Kissing her mother on the top of her head, "Hello mother, how are you?"

Turning to me, Khalood bent down and kissed my cheeks, "How are you, Lisa? The kids? Work?" She was fluent in English and working on her Master's degree in Banking and Finance. She was the prettiest out of all my husband's sisters. Khalood took after her Saudi great grandmother and possessed real *khaleeji* (Gulf area) beauty. She had huge wide black eyes and thick eyelashes that put Maybel-line to shame. Her nose was the typical Bedouin feature, long and straight. Her figure still looked good after having three children because of her height. *Mashallah* (God's praise) I said to myself as the thought passed through my mind. A hard lesson to learn after paying someone compliments in public only to hear a week later some disaster had happened to them and it was my fault because I did

not say mashallah.

"*Hamdallah* (Thanks to God). Things are well. So busy as usual with work and the family."

"Same here," replying with an exasperated look as she placed her youngest baby on the floor next to me and Mama Latifa.

After lunch, we were sitting around the *doowa* (traditional charcoal heater like our American fireplace) in the center of the tent. One of the girl cousins removed the ceramic kettle to pour *chai fehem* in our little tea glasses. I was shivering. The cold in Kuwait, especially the desert, seems to get inside the body, and your bones will hurt if you don't dress properly.

The *adhan* for prayer started and the elder women of the family left to wash and go to pray, except Aunt Badriya who was asleep in the corner. We being the younger generation with slightly different priorities, all looked at each other reading each other's minds.

"Do we sit outside?" (After all didn't Khaled say the weather is nice?)

"*Enta mejnoona?* (Are you crazy)?" the two relatives asked in harmony. Khalood shot a warning glance at the entrance of the tent. Now understanding their alertful behavior, I decided not to pursue the idea. After taking my 'apparatus' from the shiny bag and putting it together, I put *fehem* (charcoal) from the *doowa* (charcoal pan) and put it on the shisha head that holds the fruit tobacco. I sat next to my sister-in-law and began to smoke my shisha.

"What's new, Lisa? How is studying going?" Khalood wanting to change the subject.

"Ok. They segregated the students. Males have to be in another class altogether."

"What?! It's an American university," she said in a surprised voice.

"Yeah I know. It makes no sense to me. When the students graduate they have to enter the workforce in the real world and it's not segregated!"

The cousin who had just graduated from an all-girls Secretary training school expressed her experience of starting work and being around men not related to her in the workplace.

"*Shinoo selfa* (What is going on)?" said the eldest Aunt, just waking up from her nap. She was always irritated when we spoke in English. Khalood began to explain to her that my university begun segregation under the new decree of the Ministry of Higher Education.

In an authoritative tone, Amati Badriya huffed in Arabic, "Better!" continuing, "In my opinion it is better that boys and girls have no mixing. University is for learning not socializing like they do in America!" Over the years, I had gotten used to the clever comments that any of my husband's relatives would say.

"I think your Aunt forgets I understand Arabic now."

Laughing, Khalood corrected me. "I don't think she cares." We both started laughing aloud. Realizing that she was late for prayer the aunty asked her daughter to help her stand so she could go to make *wudhoo* (religious purification to pray). As she limped out, she shot a look of disapproval of our activity.

"You girls are just shameful!" she mumbled as she left the tent. Refraining out of respect, we did not start to laugh or talk again until she was out of range to hear us.

Abu Abdullah walked in, staring at us, not even daring to ask why we were cackling. He sat on his plastic chair and began to put the *fehem* on his shisha.

"What are you girls talking about?" he asked us.

We said nothing and he picked up his shisha and walked outside the tent to join the other men sitting at the table playing cards. The girl cousin chiding in a funny voice, "What's that about?" She pointed to the entrance of the tent and made a funny face. Yes thinking to myself, outside that threshold was the forbidden area for us to sit and smoke openly in public.



I smiled clandestinely deciding to enjoy the rest of the day; looking at my husband's sister and cousin wryly, I took another puff from *my shisha*. I had .already enough victories for the day so let me enjoy the moment



Name: *Shaza Abdelazim*
Title: Etiquette

Honor Killed

By *Walah al-Sabah*

The girl fell in love.
As innocent as she can.
She'd stop herself only if she knew.
Her life would extend a short span.

The father came and hit her.
When he knew she walked with a guy.
He was her school mate.
Her brothers were the spies.

The girl begged and cried.
As blood poured down her nose.
Her teeth were all broken.
After the hard, merciless blows.

The father then takes the pistol.
And shoots her in the head.
He stands on her body.
And sighs as she lays dead.

Such is the fate of many.
Whose destiny is cruelly fulfilled.
The many girls and women.
Who have been honor killed.

* To the victims of Honor Killings, This is for you. Rest In Peace.



She's Banned From Entering the Kitchen

By *Hawraa' K Ashour*

She's banned from entering the kitchen. But that isn't new. She tries anyway but it's not her thing. Her father looks on with pity or humor – she can't tell – in his eyes, he still gives the sentence though, and it is enough.

She's looking at them work through an almost yellow glass door. Like little ants in a colony, although they make, not gather. Her body gives a signal, and she places pale hands on glass, with strength behind them, ready to push. They notice, and disapproving heads dance left and right on delicate shoulders. They say no, their fingers joining the dance. She doesn't give up. But they already knew that.

She's standing on the beige tiles of the kitchen floor, her eyes wandering the whole length of the kitchen. The excitement makes her dizzy. The many possibilities and any tools to use make her smile. She wonders if Santa's elves feel the same when they're in their toy workshop. It's the TV's sound in the background, an old cooking show that she was watching, finally coming to an end. But she doesn't care; she had her notes already, childish and vague in working. And then she is approaching the refrigerator, retrieving a bag of flour and picking up an egg. Her scribbles read, "sugar and salt," but she isn't sure it sounds right. She blames the green crayon, but still uses both. She giggles, hands in the mixture and their movement is fast enough to make the flour take flight and shape clouds. She imagines making a tasty castle, painted gold and shining from afar, and her giggles resume. Now it reads, "leave covered, 5 m." She rushes out to check if her mother is still sleeping and is unaware of what is being done.

She's there again, though she shouldn't be. She could almost taste what the thin slices of bread called *chapatti* would taste like. Though the round ball of dough in her hands looks nothing like normal *chapatti*, she is sure it can be cut into thin slices later. The oil is hot enough, bubbles rising all around. She brings a small baby chair, stands on it to be closer to the pot of oil. It's her moment of glory, and she drops it in like one might drop a stone in water, expecting ripples in the surface.

She's banned again, and she puffs her cheeks. It's the same scene and she wants

to join in. It's still painful to use her right arm, and the itch that comes as a result of burned skin rubbing against layers of bandage drives her mad. But she is still there. She places her hands on the yellow glass of the door, and pushes hard. The faces on the other side are laughing; the door doesn't open. Her mother waves a set of keys. They clink together, almost like glasses in a toast, and her mother has a smirk playing on her lips. She sticks her tongue out and shouts with a hoarse voice, weakened by hours of screaming and crying, "I'm not giving up!"

On the Portrait of a Gentleman

By Nur Soliman

The sparkling eyes, a cheerful grey,
Those eternally rosy cheeks,
Soft scented hands that remain in yours,
As he gently, slowly speaks.

The pressed blue shirt immaculate,
The pearly white hair brushed neat.
He liked sunny Saturdays, out in the car,
And loved the old jasmine-filled Cairo street.

He loved the dust-grey towers of the capital, and
The pigeons' murmur by the road, palm-lined,
He smiles at the *falafel* man who remembers him,
Looks up at the "D. Attorney" sign he once worked behind.

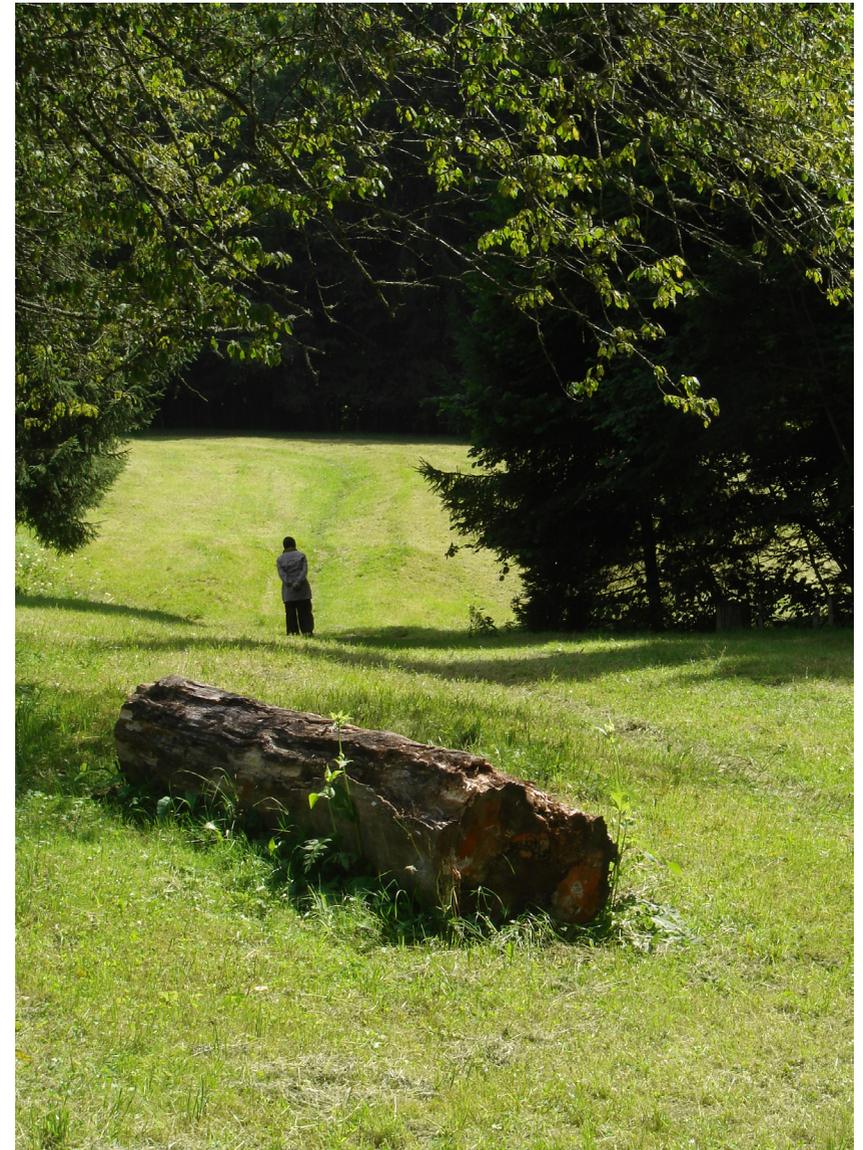
The silent embrace of those grandchildren, growing
The gently whispered "love you, too" in our ear,
Sitting in his rocking chair, tilted, tired head,
Our hands in his while he muses, his eyes still clear.

The memory of his mother, tall, bright-eyed angel,
And each dark-haired brother with a monochrome smile,
The spirit of college days, the smooth sands of Sharq,
Abdulhalim Hafez spins quietly as he thinks back awhile.

Eloquent in speech and elegant in thought,
His gentle words as neat as his cuffs, starched white,
He loved sleek ink pens, good coffee, conversation,

More so an old friend, poem recited, a warm, starry night.

Oh! no more orange segments or cups of tea with mint,
No more laughs, shy pleasantries on the 'phone,
No more hospitals or hours sorting his bottles and pills,
Since, bathed in the sacred light of dawn, he is no longer alone.



Name: *Fawaz al-Yagout*
Title: Tranquility of Nature

Moment of Utopia

By Fatima I Haji

I stared at the majestic blue tone of the sky that was pregnant with cotton-candy like creations, and then I stared at the endless stairs that carpeted the ground leading to eternity, while the sun vibrated its rays to welcome its guests. My internal organs smirked to the flying angel that passed by...I succumbed. The river of pure contaminated-free honey was riding the shimmers with it, alongside, were the scampering toddlers that metaphorically caught my eyes. The intoxicating aroma blind-sided me each time I whiffed the smell of sterilized joy. Birds I've never seen before hovered above me soaring around the monumental bright-green shelters, in which I laid below to avoid the over-whelming strength of the golden rays that arrived from the magnificent fireball. High above the sky-smothering mountains, I watched those tossing particles of pride, as they gracefully landed on the smooth surface of the mowed grass, being welcomed as if they were royalty by their fellow companions.

As I lay there, surrounded by the sauna of flaming breezes, I voluntarily lifted my eyelids to observe a sight of crystal-blue lake calling out to me with its junior waves dancing above the surface. The badge of pride I was wearing permitted me to enter the place of passions of what I decided now to call "utopia." To snap back to reality was a wish I never wanted to come true. Being in a place I have always portrayed I would stand upon plunged me to my senses of where I wanted to be whenever I had such a moment...whenever I put a piece of chocolate in my mouth...

Then at last, I dipped the chocolate bar into my mouth after suffering a strict diet. My dream came true...



Name: *Fawaz al-Yagout*

Title: Cimmerian Pond

Nothing's Left

By Isha Sadiq Haidar

Nothing's left to hide,
Nothing's left to care,
Nothing's left to abide,
Nothing's left to bear...

Nothing's left to feel,
Nothing's left to fear,
Nothing's left to smell,
Nothing's left to hear...

Nothing's left to hold,
Nothing's left to caress,
Nothing's left to say,
Nothing's left to mess...

Nothing's left to love,
Nothing's left to deft,
All that's left is me,
To think of what is left.



Sweet Reciprocity

By Anurag Galhotra

I hope you never weep your nights alone,
dream somebody else's nightmares alone.
I could slip into your mind, make you smile, make you soar.
But I won't be him.

You know you can make my days laugh alone,
make my suns drown in colours just I see.
And you love being her.

I hope you never catch your breaths alone,
watch somebody else's encores alone.
I could fall into yourself, make you sigh, make you seen.
But I won't be him.

You know you can make my worth seem alone,
make me wrap unblemished gifts just I want.
And you love being her.

I could thrust my hatred into you.
Just my misfortune,
You can feel how much I still love you.





Name: *Hiba al-Homaizi*
Title: Just One Second

Loot-able Memory

By Fatima I Haji

To every life there exists an introduction and an ending. A portion of the people on the face of this universe will perhaps plunge into a level where they would desperately reach for their daughter's palms to make their destination to their place. Traveling through the years of our lifetime, we might possibly return to be an expired-dated baby. Each and every cell in our body is programmed to increase until a certain range, when everything relaxes, including your heart.

I woke up early in the morning. It was apparent that I've changed 360 degrees since I turned three-quarters of a century. Who am I, and how, I wonder, will my life end? The sun came up and sat by a window that was foggy with a breath of a life gone by. I was a sight that morning: two shirts, heavy pants, a scarf wrapped twice around my wrinkled neck and tucked into a thick sweater knitted by my granddaughter twenty birthdays ago. The thermostat in my room was set as high as it went, and a smaller space heater sat directly behind me. It clicked, groaned and spewed hot air, like a fairy-tale dragon, and still, my body shivered with a cold that never went away since I turned 75. I hoped I was as energetic as that heater.

I've been tossed into numerous challenges of life, but there wasn't a challenge more heart-breaking than this one, where my own daughter was unknown to me. I fumbled while I walked, I whimpered while I talked, I garbled while I wrote... why? I saw photos of family trips, graduations and celebrations. I saw grand children and cheerful faces. I saw photos of my hair growing whiter, my face paler, and lines in my face deeper. A lifetime that seemed so typical, yet uncommon, our lives can't be possibly measured by our latter years. I forget where I placed my keys, but who has not done that? It was not until the more obvious events occurred that I began to suspect the worst. An iron in the freezer, clothes in the dishwasher, books in the oven. The day my daughter found me in the car three blocks away, weeping over the steering wheel because I was unable to find my way back home was the first day my daughter was really worried. A knot twisted in my intestines, but I dared not think the worst.

Yesterday was the longest day in my life. I looked through magazines I could not read, played games I did not think about, waited, waited, and waited until

finally, the doctor called me into his office and sat me down after a series of blood tests. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but you seem to be in the early stages of Alzheimer's..." My mind was vacuumed, and all I can think about is the bulb that glowed above my head. The words were echoed in my brain causing it to go numb. The surrounding universe rotated into circles, and as the tears started to trickle smoothly, the word came back to me again: Alzheimer's. It is a barren disease, as empty and lifeless as a desert. It is a thief of hearts, souls and memories... Is my life just an illusion?

A Steady Beating Sound

By Dana Shamlawi

A steady, beating sound
Consistent, slow, quiet
Where have all the toy soldiers gone?

I left them standing here against the wall

The confidence of a sunflower
Swaying gently in the breeze
Rocking back and forth
Moving to silent music

There's always next time
Once the blood has been shed
There is nothing left but healing
Or bleeding to death

An empty blue cup
Resting upon an otherwise unoccupied space
Seemingly staring at me
With invisible eyes

Judgments rain upon the sea
Disappearing deep inside
Scattered among the hidden ashes
Never to be seen or heard from again

Go now, before it's too late
Those toy soldiers have the habit
Of coming at the most unexpected times
And they cannot find you here with me

Go now, and be without me
The steady beating sound growing
Inconsistent, fast, loud

Losing all control

An ugly little girl

Looking at me with disgust through the window

I smile, because I find it ironic

It's the same look I used to give you when you weren't looking.



Best Friends Forever

Isha Sadiq Haidar

Laughing hard,

Goofing around,

Watching movies,

With those little frowns...

Slumber parties,

Pillow fights,

Hanging out,

Oh! Those lovely nights...

Hand in hand,

We went along,

To each other,

We did belong...

Cute little secrets,

Sweet little fights,

I still remember

Our pathetic chocolate diets...

Then one day,

We grew old,

Different roads

We did hold...

The next day,

We grew apart,

Hugging our memories

In our hearts...

I can't stop
This flood of tears,
Because in our lives
We faced all fears

We grew apart,
With rain of tears,
But we'll still remember
Those beautiful years...

"I miss you all a lot!"



Name: *William Andersen*

Title: Felt Hats at Cocoon, Istanbul, Turkey

An Escape

By Amal Ahmed

One way out- an Escape
From a torturous world full of fear
Packed with an avalanche of terror
A place a child wouldn't dare come near

One way out- an Escape
From a horrific playground- our World
Every mind designed to envy another
Planning wars, destroying each other
Numb to bloodshed, broken limbs and such
Obviously, they don't care much

One way out- an Escape
From hell that's living on Earth
Killings, murder, suicide, rape
Words that once made us shudder
Now commonplace like draught and famine
If you have lost someone, you can imagine

One way out- God's Grace
To blow winds of peace
To shed some light on this gloom
To make each bird sing
To make the flowers dance
To make the waters ripple, and
To make the pebbles prance
To remind us that there is Hope
If we climb onto our Creator's rope

The only One who will relieve our pain
And breathe back life once again.



An Ode to Shakespeare (and Professor Gottschalk)

By Hooda S Qaddumi

He tells the tales of mighty kings who fall,
Of star crossed lovers' doom, of princely plots,
Of wizened men, of whispers to a wall,
Of witches brewing evil spells in pots.
Of wooing men, of fresh-faced dancing dames,
And tales so sad, to make them cry and weep.
Of courtly love, and lutes, and trysts, and games,
Of scary dreams and specters in haunted sleep.

Of wisdom poured from lips of clowns and fools,
Of goblins, ghosts, and ghoulish thoughts and deeds.
And words of profound love from mouths of mules,
And knights in tights on shining silver steeds
Here, in a corner, far from England's shore
An English class learns Shakespearian Lore



Glenn Miller 2008

By Nur Soliman

Gold syncopation
In afternoon brightly gleams –
Old record plays on.





Name: *Shaza Abdelazim*

Title: Plastic

Madness

By Alia Aref

Soil suffocating me
Darkness is overwhelming
Numb to the bone
Can't get up
Can't move
Earth has buried me
In its womb I suffocate
In my own skin a prisoner
Life was not worth this
I never wanted to be born
Never wanted to be mummified
Buried dead but still
Alive under my dead skin
I breath I think I am
My body is crushed
My mind races
Blink my eyes all I see is Darkness
It's hard to believe
I am damned to spend a lifetime like this
It's Madness.



Gallant Knight

By Walah al-Sabah

A fresh breeze and sunshine bright
'Tis the day to receive the gallant knight
A lady dressed in yellow like a daisy bloom
Little did she know today might be doomed

Awaiting her warrior on the tip of the hill
From morning's warmth till midnight's chill
He wrote her the letter saying he'll arrive
She didn't wonder if he's still dead or alive

The next day came and she still was there
Tears down her cheeks and at the sky she stares
Hoping against hope her knight will come
To desperation she will not succumb

But she has grown tired from the cold and tears
Reality she'll accept and affirm her fears
She stood up hesitantly to return
Until she heard a familiar voice and turned

There he was standing with his usual smile
Weary and tired from walking miles
She ran as fast as she could towards her gallant knight
At the end of the tunnel, there was the light



Blinded by Love

By Bedour Hamadah

He slapped her once, twice, and thrice,
Leaving hand prints across her cheeks,
Called her names that she didn't deserve,
As she stood with her head in the ground.
Her heart would swell up with anguish,
As the words stabbed at her endlessly,
Breathing was no longer easy,
As she struggled with each forced breath.
She longed to walk away from it,
Walk away from the pain of it all,
But for some strange reason she couldn't,
Until one day she figured out why.
She loved him, heart and soul,
She loved him with all she had.
Even though he was slowly breaking her,
She unconditionally loved this man.





Name: *William Andersen*

Title: The Ruins at Hierapolis, Pamukkale, Turkey

Crutches and No Feet

Walah al-Sabah

He lost his leg in a mine blast.
He wept and screamed a lot.
He told himself he'd give up.
And that his life is one bad lot.

He is but a mere twelve years old.
And he already couldn't play with friends.
He watches the game with anger.
And feels relaxed when the game ends.

His crutch is the new pal.
And the bees and butterflies down by the lake.
He smiles a little as he looks at nature.
But the memories make him ache.

A small boy comes to him.
With two crutches and no feet.
He approaches our friend.
And says, "You mind if i take a seat?"

The two boys sit together.
And laugh and joke and play.
They might not run to be happy.
But for happiness, they found another way.

Life might close many doors at one's face.
But, other doors will be broken free.
Happiness and peace of mind are not places.
But attitude is the key.

And, the two boys sit together.
And laugh and joke and play.
They might not run to be happy.
But for happiness, they found another way.



No, No, I Am Not Perfect

By Dana Shamlawi

No, no, I am not perfect
Talking aloud to an empty room
My laugh seems too much, even to me
These sunglasses serve as my protection

On the verge of something new
Or so is said at every new crossroads
I wish someone could have let me know
That all the roads lead back to here

Whispered words uttered late at night
Just loud enough for only us to hear
A lone star shining bright in my night sky
Turns out to be nothing but a broken satellite

I like this game, I know all the rules
You make the most adorable cat
Your eyes piercing, your ears erect
And I, well, I can get used to the taste of cheese

No, no, I am not perfect
I will misunderstand and over-analyze
Watching the sun rise as it does every day
Becomes an earth shattering sign from above

But, isn't that what they say though?
Fool me, fool you, shame on everyone
To err is to be human
To err again is pure stupidity?

So I will wear this smile as though it is mine
As though it has not been tainted by you
And I will only wear dark colors
To disguise myself from you when you're on the hunt

But you, I know, will wear clothes so bright
In an attempt to distract me from what you really are
I took a trip the other day, don't you know?
These sunglasses serve as my protection.





Name: *William Andersen*

Title: *Lovers Dreaming, Deira Gold Souq, Dubai, UAE*

The Eyes of a Soldier

By Meshal al-Harbi

Soldiers never have pleasant memories
Death, war, destruction,
We soldiers have a reason to fight,
Prepare!
Is it fear that instills us at this moment...
Or hope?
At the ready!
Tighten your grip –
Feel the leather in your hand,
Stand still!
Defending your country is worth dying for,
Take it like a man and fight
Suicide kills your own country
And your country will cry with embarrassment
The enemy is arriving,
March!
The continuous motion of footsteps
The grey polluted air surrounding the deserted wasteland,
Open your eyes... don't be afraid,
When the rain drops...
Your sadness flows along
When the lightning claps,
Fight with all your might
When a sword pierces your heart,
Smile.
Soldiers! The rain and thunder be our hearts.
Soldiers! Fight for the ones you love
Soldiers! Work in unity with our protector!

We soldiers will always live in war,
And smiles will always lift us when we die.



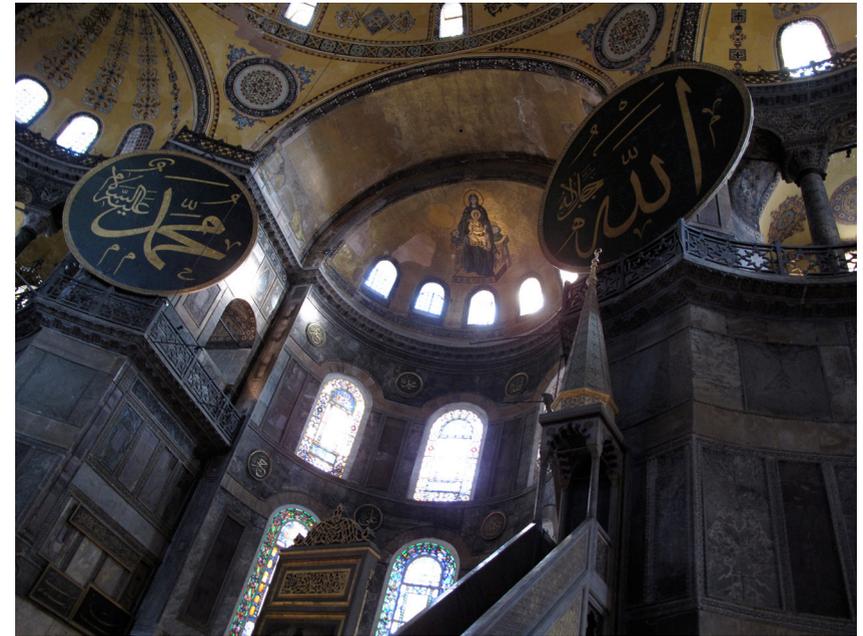
Name: *Hiba al-Homaizi*
Title: Edifice

Poetry on an Expression by M Scott Peck

By Nur Soliman

The sweet spirit of expressions is born, noble
In the gentle mingling of an autumnal mirth and sorrow;
And the mud-loving dragon's wings flutter
In the promise of spring with tell of a brighter 'morrow.

When the air lifts his slender feet,
Hermes is swiftly borne above touching land;
Skips gaily on the star and sun-lit streets of skies
Does young Mercury's man, blithe over grass, sea, and sand.



Name: *William Andersen*

Title: Interior of Aya Sofya, Istanbul, Turkey

Experiences of a Trojan Woman

By Nur el-Huda Abdelhalim

[For the play, Trojan Women, Prof. Christopher Gottschalk had us do a little exercise right before the show opened. In this exercise, we all had to breathe a certain way to warm ourselves up, and we had to think of the character we are playing and what she is doing while Prof. Chris speaks. The italicized parts are the things he said to us, to get our imaginations going, and the rest is how a certain character felt after the war, and then was attacked during the festivities. This character had already known the Trojan Horse was a very bad idea, but no one listened. In this sense, though this never actually happened, it is still not a fictional piece.]

I'm freezing, lying on the hard floor in the middle of winter. I'm so glad, for once, I decided to wear layers. I'm dreading this exercise; Trojan Women are hurt, disappointed, depressed creatures, and I don't want to be one of them. Also, we have to close our eyes, and it's so cold. I feel everyone else lying near me and it makes me uncomfortable. Still, I close my eyes and breathe deeply. Apparently, warmth comes with breathing right. Then, he speaks, and the game begins:

You're happy. You just got everything you dreamed of.

The iciness lifts from my bones, but not completely. I still shiver, unsure if the warmth I'm feeling is real or just a desperate attempt by my imagination to get me to focus. I'm happy. I'm happy. Everyone is laughing, eating, drinking. So social without me, but I like it that way. My hands are cold. No they're not. They're warm because I'm happy. Because I'm breathing right. I know what's coming, though. I know it won't last. I feel like I'm cheating, because I know, and the iciness is creeping up my wrists, slowly. I tighten my fingers into a fist, but I can barely feel them. His voice brings relief, as he twists the story around by saying:

You hear a sound, a strange one. It's getting louder. And...suddenly, it's pitch-dark.

Didn't I say I knew? Goosebumps run up my body. If only it weren't so god-damned cold in here. My eyes are wide open, but it really is so dark: so dark, and so silent. It's all wrong. It shouldn't be quiet. Why aren't people screaming? Where's my mother? I'm scared to reach out in fear I'd touch the wrong person. Or even worse...find no one reaching back. Should I make them scream in my

head? Maybe then I won't feel so alone. At least I'd know they were still alive.

The lights come on and everyone is running around. Everything has fallen apart.

How could it have? How can a world shatter so silently? I was so ready to pounce, to save everyone. I'm so confused. Running outside, stepping on broken glass that I don't feel because the world's too full of strangers and it's scary. I always hated the night. The stars trick everyone, promising to illuminate a life they can't touch because they're light-years away. So pretty – easy to be pretty when you're detached. How can the stars save us now? I willed them to fall around me and experience this moment from up-close. Not so pretty now. Not so safe. There's a breeze somewhere. I feel it sting my eyes. Or maybe it's not a breeze, I don't know. Who cares?

They're coming after you. They chase you.

Men. I can smell them. They can't see me. Does it matter if I run? I have to. I have to find my family. I run in the opposite direction. There are people around, but they don't care. They pick at pieces of rubble and cry softly into broken glass. Like crying will help. I want to cry. But they won't get me. I won't let them, they can't, I won't. No one will get me. I knew this was coming. Didn't I know? How can an entire family just disappear?

You see a tunnel. You go in.

I go in, and it's dirty. I hate it, rubbing its dust on me. The walls are rough. It's dark here, but I see the grey of the wall. Its roughness is comforting.

The tunnel gets narrower.

My back is scraping against the wall now. What madness am I heading towards? I want to slow down but I can't. I forget why I can't, I just know I have to keep going. I'm going to ruin my dress. It's cold again. I put my frozen hand to my neck and feel a quick pulse. How can this heart beat so strongly when it knows there is no hope?

The tunnel is smaller now. You have to crouch.

My knees hurt. My hands are too cold for this. I hear them behind me now. So that's why I'm running. From what? To what? It's so dark in here. I'm scared. I'm scared. Am I crying? I don't want to keep going. I'm tired. I don't want my mother. I don't want anyone. Is the tunnel going to keep shrinking? I can't breathe in this darkness. I can't breathe here.

And it's dark again. Let go.

Finally. I lose myself in the blackness. Breathe in...out...in. Warmth. I know I'm alone here. No one to worry about. No need for screams. Just me, here, doing nothing. Breathing. Warmth in my veins.

Slowly, it gets lighter. You see yourself. Pull away.

Pull away from me...to whom? There's no one here. I'm worried I'll never find myself again. But I'm grateful. I don't want to be me. I don't want to be this dirty, lonely, scared girl. Not me. I'm not me.

You see yourself. What's one word you want to tell that woman? One word.

What could I possibly say? She's crouching there, staring at me. How could it be so cold when I'm not even there anymore? Why won't *she* tell me something? One word. Hope? No, hope is useless. Love? From where? Me? I don't exist to her. Strength. She needs the strength to keep going. I wish I was with her. She doesn't deserve to go through this alone. I press against the glass and whisper "strength" to her. I send her the energy from my soul and feel cold air seep in to replace it. Strength. Strength. I can feel her getting stronger. I'm slipping out of my body and into hers, back and forth. It's cold everywhere I am. Was it wintertime when the Trojans died?

Open your eyes.

It's bright, suddenly. I'm not breathing right. I know where I am at least. I know who I'm with. I turn around and greedily snatch comfort from whoever is willing to offer it. Suddenly, I'm glad we all did this together. I'm glad these bodies were crowded around me. Pressed up against each other, we whimper. I am not me. It doesn't matter anymore because I am not me. But it hurts. And the tears I cry can ease my pain, but not hers – not my Trojan woman. It's my fault for leaving her with only a word for protection.

The Wretched of the Earth and Tzipi Livni (from ENGL 319, "Women & Literature")

By Hooda S Qaddumi

The blond bombshell on TV

Rambles on consistently:

What you see, you know, is not real.

There is no humanitarian crisis, she says persistently.

As coloured phosphorous bombs, rockets, and shrapnel

Continue to pound and pulverize

Dispatching efficient Death in mass production:

In nooks and crannies of hospitals, in holes of homes,

Relentless Death seeking the dead in their own funeral procession.

Rest assured, says the blond bombshell liar:

For the wretched of the earth, there can be no cease-fire.





Name: *William Andersen*

Title: Dubai Creek at Night, Bur Dubai, UAE

Hold My Hand and Fall Asleep, Dear

By Anurag Galhotra

You haven't rolled on hills,
Hills of warm grass yet.
You haven't felt the mists,
Mists of fine clouds yet.

You haven't swum in oceans,
Oceans full of light honey yet.
You haven't floated on lakes,
Lakes of scented petals yet.

The clear moon hasn't glided down to you,
And shed its soft light on you.
The stars haven't fallen yet,
Wrapped you in their safety yet.

The fireflies haven't drifted around you,
And lit up the paths for you.
The dreams haven't reached you yet,
Lifted that weight off you yet.

Come,
Hold my hand and fall asleep, Dear,
This man will die a thousand lives
To make it all come true, Dear.

I'll wake from my dream now,
And wish that you were real, Dear.

In the Land where Oranges once grew (from ENGL 319, "Women & Literature")

By Hooda S Qaddumi

Spluttering on my cappuccino, I awake
To carnage across my Plasma Screen

Nimble turning the pages of my morning paper, I cringe
For fear of confronting yet another horrendous scene

I know those places, those streets, those houses
That desperate land of forefathers
A land where Orange groves once grew
And hoopoe birds on a warm spring day once flew.



Once Upon a Time

By Bedour Hamadah

Bright red poppies
A blanket to cover the hills
Dancing with the wind
Swaying to and fro.

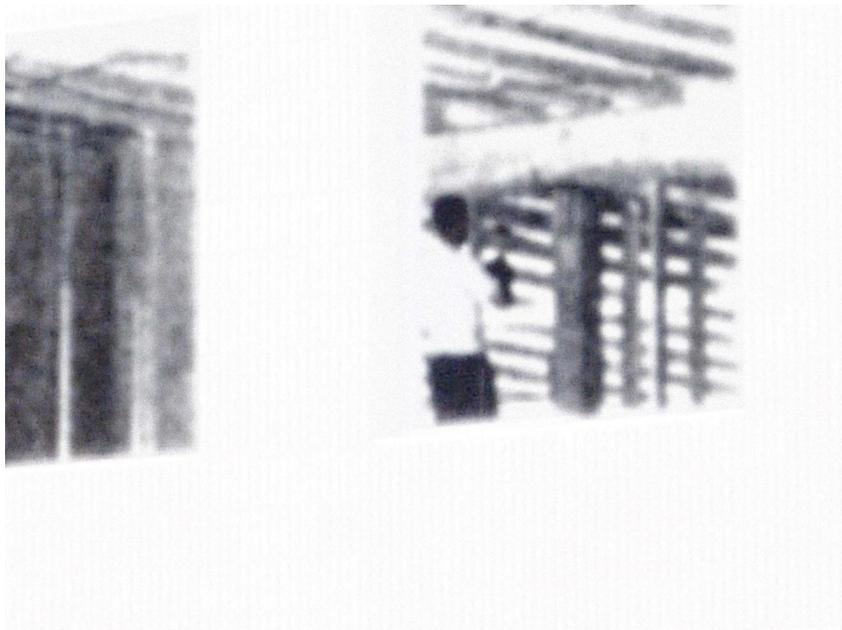
Happy red poppies
Ever so proud
Singing their hymn
With all their heart.

Grey clouds gather
Over a field of red poppies
The clouds swell with tears
As they fall down the heavens.

Poor red poppies
Struggling against the winds
Poor red poppies
No one seems to care....

Once upon a time
There was a field of red poppies
Which covered all the hills
Once upon a time.





Name: *Hiba al-Homaizi*
Title: Solus

Inscapes

By Nur Soliman

Graceful swerves the green
Stem rising, as birds in flight –
Fiercer gleam within.



Silver Wolf

By Alaa M Abd al-Jawad

Every night she stands alone at the top of the hill,
Broken and hurt... wishing she was strong enough to kill.
Waiting for the moonlight to cover her, waiting for the journey to begin;
While she remembers all the humiliation, the hair started to grow all over her
face,
And all the sadness and sorrow turned into anger,
The sounds of laughter are heard over and over in her head;
Her nails sharpen to become claws instead,
The feeling of anger becomes wrath,
After this moment she will change her path.
She continued changing in the light of darkest night,
A silver wolf...a ravenous jungle beast searching for a prey
She's no longer a normal girl she's a monster who wants to get through this day.
She wasted no time taking her first bite,
And the fresh blood was so bright in the moonlight,
The sounds of laughter are now gone,
And all she can hear is this beautiful tone,
The sound of cracking bones was so sweet to her ears,
She didn't feel this strong in years,
Tonight there's no more crying... no more salty tears
At least...not her tears!



Pang

By Leen Taha

Wilting shoot peeks above yellow grains,
barely above horizon, but
evident enough.
Evident enough,
amongst plain lands, dry winds and ever blazing fires.

Surge of sensation flourishes
shriveled stem,
Sustained spirit, gush of momentum, flood of life.
A flood of life.
Purge of loyal loneliness, single-hands vanish.
Solidarity!
Upward stance,
soldier-like endurance amid fearsome foe.
Sustained spirit, gush of momentum, flood of life.
A flood of life.

Arid grounds quenched,
Scorching light diminishes,
Burning upheavals evened,

Sustained spirit, gush of momentum, flood of life.
A flood of life.

Only to bring back confusing sentiments
back to the beginning.

Once upon a time floating amidst...
Amidst?

Out of sight
evaporate
out of sight.

Shrinking

One with the grains,

Deepening into horizon.

Floating?

Floating is balanced
ascending with clouds...

Flying without wings-
gliding.

Back again wilting, lifeless...

Falling head-first

incessantly hanging...

hanging.

Drenched in promised grains,

sinking

rising

hanging



Name: *Hiba al-Homaizi*

Title: Hours of Darkness

Kuwait – State of Trance

By Abdulaziz A al-Buloushi

Here I come, all alone, to find some peace
Away from love, away from life, away from wars
Here I fly; my head is high above the trees
Touch the sky, smell the clouds, sway the stars
Oh dreamers' sky, kill my cry; hold me tight
Your majesty, promise me you'll never let go
Pull the ties; I'm mesmerized by the sight
Tonight you'll get me right, and heal my soul
Here I come, all alone, to steal the time
Away from noise, away from toys, away from people
Here I rule, around I fool; the world is mine
Freed at last, in the past was clogged by a needle
If this is how I'm suppose to live, then reality is dull
I'd rather be in a state of trance, and have it all.



Sonnet to Kuwait

By Fatma al-Fadli

The heartsick eagle laments my city
While asking and searching for past delight
It remembers the wall that once was bright
The sad eagle cried loudly with pity
Alas! All what I have is just my tears
The sands and the shore forever in my mind
with boys and girls standing against the wind
Oh! My old city... your sound in my ears.
It became so dark with no hope nor emotion.
With the past oh my city! You will survive.
In my heart oh my city you will ever be.
The sad eagle flew toward the ocean.
My city without borders it'll revive
to live eternally happy. You, and me.





Name: *Ranya al-Mastali*

Title: The Beginning

An Open Letter to My Country

By Alia Mustafa Aref

Dear Kuwait, you are the land of my birth,
My pride, my glory, my heart, my homeland, mine,
Your desert sands and blue sea, gave us worth
Treasures buried beneath hot sands over time,
On your seas, my ancestors sailed their boats,
From your warm waters, came a great legacy.
Pearls from your deep sea made us prosperous,
You have sacrificed much for my family.
You've endured and survived bitter long years,
Without hearing praise and joy in my voice.
So I gently say to you, dry your tears
After a long struggle, it's time, rejoice
To your arms is my return, open your doors,
Waving my colors with pride, truly yours.





Name: *William Andersen*

Title: Graffiti Art, Salmiya, Kuwait

Sonnet to Sharq, Kuwait City

By Nur Soliman

I stand from threshold, windowed bank in Sharq,
See pigeons grey come overhead from trees:
They beat great wings above me, pale then dark,
Then skimming over your dull, thick warm breeze.
Past lime acacia, mapping neat by greyed
Worn tarmac, tall Court issues rulings ten.
Beneath your shadows arabesque, I stayed.
Stop still to think of where to go on then.
Tea, tailor's, walking silent, I push through
Those heedless, careworn crowds, grey-faced. I look:
At saris, suits: past tan house, Sidra, 2.
Small flowers, papers tossed, on kerb and nook.
O Sharq! You're shy, not Cairo. Glory, past
Can't match: I stay, though night may come at last.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Abdulaziz A al-Buloushi is a sophomore at AUK. He is currently majoring in English Language & Literature.

Ahlam Alaki is an Assistant Professor of English Language & Literature at AUK.

Amal Behbehani writes: "I'm a second year university student at AUK. I'm planning to major in English & Literature. My hobbies include reading books and watching Anime. My goal in life is to become a novelist."

Amina al-Ansari is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Anurag Galhotra is a junior at the American University of Kuwait. He is majoring in Business Management. His work has been published in past issues of the *AUKuwait Review*, and the 1998 Summer Camp newsletter at the Safir Hotel in Kuwait. His interests include anything related to audio. This includes arts like sound design, audio mixing and music composition. The only aural art he dislikes is inconsequential ranting. He has a keen interest in anime, which has encouraged him to experiment with digital art and violent images! This is his second attempt at working with the following applications: Lightwave, Apophysis and ultimately Adobe Photoshop CS4. He wishes every deserving person at AUK a wonderful 2009!

Alaa M Abd Jawad writes: "I'm a freshman student at AUK and my major is Graphic Design. Writing poems is one of my hobbies."

Alia Mustafa Aref is majoring in English Language & Literature and is thinking of minoring in Psychology. This is the second time she has published her creative writing and she plans on many more to come.

Bedour Hamadah is an AUK Alumni, Class of 2009. She majored in English Language & Literature and minored in Graphic Design. She has previously published work in the first edition of *AUKuwait Review*.

Christopher Gottschalk is a professional actor and educator specializing in classical theater. Most recently, Mr. Gottschalk performed the title role in *Hamlet*

with the Gorilla Repertory Theatre Company in New York and is hard at work finishing his first novel. Mr. Gottschalk currently holds an appointment as Assistant Professor of Humanities (Theatre & Drama) at the American University of Kuwait.

Craig Loomis is an Associate Professor of English Language & Literature, and is Division Head for the Humanities Department. He frequently writes short stories and has published in *Bazaar*.

Dana Shamlawi is a senior double majoring in International Relations and English. She began writing at an early age, and continues to dabble in fiction and poetry, with hopes of one day becoming a published author.

Essa al-Boloshi is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Fatma al-Fadli writes: "I am a junior, majoring in English Literature. My minor is in Arabic literature, so I'm a literature kind of girl. I consider myself as a universal citizen in which any place in this universe is my own country."

Fatima I Haji writes: "I am a sophomore at AUK, majoring in English Literature, and double-minoring in Arabic Literature as well as Natural Sciences. I am glad to have heard of the *AUKuwait Review* since one of my hobbies is (creative) writing. I will try to apply the utmost effort in order to develop that hobby as I go along. 'You don't have to win the race; however, you should never think of giving up whatsoever!'"

Fatma al-Sumaiti is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Fawaz al-Yagout writes, "I was born in 1990 and raised in Kuwait. Currently, I am an undergraduate at the American University of Kuwait (AUK), seeking a Graphic Design major. Travelling is one of my favorite experiences. I have been in many locations in the world; yet I've always travelled to Switzerland every year since I was born. Not only is it a wonderful place to chill and spend a vacation, but it is also my mother's country of origin. Photography is one of my essential hobbies. Moreover, my interests extend to designing anything in general, especially, architecture, interior design, and graphics design."

Gholam Reza Vatandoust is currently a Visiting Associate Professor in the International Studies Program. He served as the Giovanni Costigan Professor at the University of Washington before coming to AUK. He is the recipient of the Getty Institute Fellowship and is the author and editor of more than 12 volumes and more than 50 academic articles. He has won several book awards and one of his publications underwent its 5th edition in 2008.

I am **Hawraa Ashour**, a recently transferred student to AUK. I am majoring in English Language & Literature and this is my first published work.

Hiba al-Homaizi writes, "I'm an upper Junior majoring in Public Relations and minoring in Human Resources."

Hooda Shawa Qaddumi is a graduating senior majoring in English Literature. This is her second degree as she studied Economics and Political Science many years ago and realized that her passion was in Literature. A writer of children's stories in Arabic, she has published two books, *Anbar* (2005) and *The Birds' Journey to Mount Qaf* (2006). She is currently working on her third book.

Isha Sadiq Haidar writes: "I am a freshman at AUK, planning to do a major in Finance; someday, I hope to become a successful financial analyst. I enjoy writing poetry and fiction. My poetry reflects my mood and thoughts. After I produce my feelings through this medium, I feel extremely relaxed. Humorously, poetry for me is almost like another best friend."

Leen Taha is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Meshal al-Harbi writes: "Second semester, I guess. Major is Business Management (what else can I say). Yes, I have published some poems before. I enjoy football, running, making people happy, and smiles. I like seeing the world and its creations and I love everything about space."

Mubarak al-Mutairi is a freshman at AUK. He has no clue what he is majoring in, as he is a wandering soul. He is thinking of majoring in English Literature and Graphic Design. He posts much of his artwork on DeviantArt, and he likes to waste time on photography, reading, writing, and taking care of animals.

Nour el-Shamsy is a senior at AUK, majoring in English Language & Literature

Nur el-Huda Abdelhalim is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Nur Soliman is now a junior, continuing to study English Language & Literature, thinking of minoring in Gulf Studies and concentrating on Art History. She loves to read, draw, and write. Nur writes and illustrates for *The Voice of AUK* and used to write for *Kuwait Review*. She also loves to learn about art and Jazz as well as spending time with her family.

Patty A. Marotte is a senior majoring in Social and Behavioral Sciences with a focus on Anthropology. Married with children, she is an American convert to Islam, and studies at AUK while working at a kindergarten.

Ranya al-Mastaki writes, "This is my third year at AUK. I am majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in English Literature. I love drawing, painting and designing."

Reem Shuhaibar is a junior at the American University of Kuwait and is majoring in Communication & Media. This is her first publication; however, she enjoys creative writing on a regular basis as she finds it to be an effective method of escapism.

Sepideh Behbehani writes, "I am a sophomore, double majoring in Communication Studies and Graphic Design."

Shaza Abdelazim writes, "I am a junior AUK student, majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Advertising. I love Graphic Design as well as photography; I like to take random photos from different angles and positions. I also like doing abstract paintings. In my spare time I prefer listening to music while painting, or watching a good movie!"

Walah al-Sabah is a junior in AUK. She is majoring in International Studies and has three minors. She collects quotes and writes some of her own. Her poetic profile is displayed on poems-and-quotes.com. and she has a current balance of 31 poems along with several of her quotes. One day she intends to publish her writings that deal with many issues of human life.

William Andersen is a multi-disciplinary artist who recently moved to Kuwait. His artwork has been exhibited in the *Wisconsin Triennial* at the Madison Mu-

seum of Contemporary Art and in various exhibitions in China, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and throughout the USA. William is currently an Assistant Professor of Studio Arts at the American University of Kuwait. More of his work can be seen at: <http://williamandersen.spaces.live.com/>.

Yousef Nayef is a student at the American University of Kuwait. He is majoring in English Language & Literature.

