



# Sukoon

Art . Poetry . Prose

Volume 1 | Issue 2 | Summer 2013

*From the outside in,  
and from the inside-in.*



## Sukoon is:

an Arab-themed, English language, online literary magazine; the first of its kind in the Arab region, where established and emerging artists, poets and writers of short stories and personal essays, publish their original work in English. Writers need not be Arab, nor of Arab origin, but all writing and art must reflect the diversity and richness of the cultures of the Arab world.

Sukoon is an Arabic word meaning "stillness." By stillness we don't mean silence, but rather the opposite of silence. What we mean by Sukoon is the stillness discovered within, when the artist continues to follow the inner calling to express and create.

A calling that compels the artist to continue on the creative path for the sole reason that he/she does not know how not to.



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Sukoon would like to thank Dubai-based calligrapher and artist, Majid Alyousef, for Sukoon's unique logo design.

## Editor's note:

This is not a happy issue. As you've already noticed from the cover photo, by Lebanese photographer, Mohamad Ghamlouch. This is a cold, featureless, black and white issue. Don't let it frighten you away, though. This is a rich issue, an intimate one, a timely one, as I hope you will soon agree.

We've got poems about cities and traditions, about borders and dictators and the fall of empires. We've got song, and longing. We've got colors too, contrary to what may seem within. Although this issue lacks color in the literal sense, the Arab world is certainly colorful. It is nothing close to "black" or "white," it is nothing less than the million shades in-between. Although with the way things are going these days, it looks like we're gravitating more towards the darker, less optimistic hues.

Six months ago the first issue of Sukoon Magazine was launched, and it encompassed language and place, nature and memory. This second issue includes all of these and much more. Loss mostly. Loss and yearning.

It is a family-heavy issue, where Saudi film student, Areeb Al-Shathri, brings us up-close and personal with Saudi tradition in his story about the death of an important member of his family. It zooms in on the failing marriage of an artist, a father, a teacher, a man, in the short story, "Perspectives," by Lebanese poet and

writer, Hedy Habra. It brings us *kaak* and *zaatar* and the "jacaranda's blue light," in Habra's poem "After Twenty Five Years."

This issue proudly shares that impeccable and very necessary attention to language, each line a poem on its own, in the poems of American poets, Olivia Ayes and Kenneth E. Harrison, Jr. It brings us that longing to cities we can't help but *choose* to call home, in Greek-Lebanese poet, Mishka Mojabber Mourani's poem, "One is not born a Beiruti."

"We're all refugees from our homeland,/ fleeing countries of pain," says American poet Jeff Friedman in his poem, "Crossing the Border." It brings us displacement and bereavement, in Laurel Harig's poem "For Palestine." This issue invites an imagined conversation, a detached intimacy, the satirical exchanges between the occupied and his occupier, in Palestinian writer and film director, Firas Khoury's translated piece, "Take me Back to Tel Aviv."

Irish poet Frank Dullaghan contemplates Emirati gender roles and tradition in his poem "Black & White," a title pleasantly coincidental for this issue. Dullaghan's poem draws an interesting contrast to the gender roles found in the poem "In sha'allah," by American poet, Steven Schreiner.

Poet Sean M. Conrey summons memory and place; "the quays and docks lined with old men telling/fishing stories to boys too late getting home" in his poem, "Suburban Beirut Nocturne," set in a



Lebanese suburb named Antelias; this is a poem *about* people, their private lives ordinariness, their unspoken loneliness.

This second issue of Sukoon also proudly interviews Nathalie Handal, internationally-acclaimed poet, editor, playwright and translator, of Palestinian descent. Handal tells about her most recent poetry collection, *Poet in Andalucía*, a recreation of Lorca's *Poet in New York*, but in reverse. She shares her views on the significance of place, on women, the idea of home and her own writing journey. She also shares with us a previously unpublished poem, "By Heart." A poem with a heart-wrenching beginning;

By my heart, a slum,  
acid on the floor—  
where else can we go  
to be without our origin?

In this issue we delve deep into the mind of Egyptian artist, Tamer Elsayy, in all its intricate details and human horrors; the realities of a disturbed and disturbing present anxious for change. We also see through the eyes of a self-taught Lebanese photographer, Mohamad Ghamlouch, what moments matter to him, in his recent travels, of Turkey, of Lebanon, of people. This is an issue of *people*.

I chose only the photographs that stood as portraits, of men, of women, old and young, homeless and hardly making ends

meet. Regionally, and in the last six months to say the least, we have witnessed nothing but what the people have been demanding, through revolution and change. And revised revolution. That may need to be revised once again?

Since the first issue of Sukoon was launched, in February 2013, the Arab world has also witnessed sharper divisions, extremism in all its forms, bombings and kidnappings and the wrong kinds of prayer. We're still in the midst of it, in all its confusion and disjointed agendas, still on the rollercoaster ride to where we do not know.

Poet Zeina Hashem Beck mourns this devastation, and yearns for a seemingly illusory past, in her powerful poem "Spring." She captures the all-consuming grief we share, and tries, and often fails, to make sense of an outrageous reality.

I add to what Nathalie Handal mentions in her interview, "So we went to our natural prayer, poetry." I want to say, May we all eventually recognize our stories and poetry and art as the only prayer we can safely hold on to in order to understand each other better, and in turn, discover our utter humanness (what else is left anyway?) through the truth that we are all just as fragile as we incessantly pretend not to be.

REWA ZEINATI



Istanbul, Turkey, May 2013  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH

## Crossing a Border

Say what you want.  
The bridges are buckling,  
the roads collapsing,  
18 wheelers tumbling  
with their cargoes of hazardous waste,  
their casks filled with poisonous wine,  
their drums leaking.  
Clouds blossom, pink and fat.  
The sky smacks us in the face.  
Say what you want.  
the knots are failing,  
the houses coming loose.  
The finches turn up dead,  
while foxes behead our stunned chickens  
and gutted cars rust in the ravines  
and the moose linger by the shoulder of the roads,  
licking up the salt run off  
and bears tear off the bark

to get at the ants,  
and tiny spiders bite  
into our fleshy feet  
and tumors populate our townships.  
Say what you want: cities of tents  
and sheets multiply across the globe  
while cows shrink to stamps  
and famines grow too numerous to count  
and the stalks rise and fall  
and skin tightens around bone,  
red eyes glinting at the gates of palaces,  
villages incinerated, armies  
of flame burning up the air.  
Say what you want.  
Bankers and brokers own the poppy fields,  
the drug dealers,  
the men on camels  
with automatic weapons,

and missile throwers  
and anti missile detection systems.  
They own the cells hidden in caves,  
the coca leaves, the machetes,  
the tsunamis, earthquakes,  
vaults the size of equators,  
the rigs plunging into ice,  
the vast storehouses of oil  
locked in rock.  
Say what you want.  
We're all refugees from our homeland,  
fleeing countries of pain.  
We're all crossing a border,  
dying to get in or out.

JEFF FRIEDMAN

## The Great Man

### —dedicated to a dictator

The great man bullies fleeces from sheep, carrots from the mouths of jackrabbits, gardens from gods—bullies stalks into submission. He bullies the necklaces from graceful necks, the wings from swans, the fancy shoes from fancy feet. He bullies flies from spiders, He bullies the birds from the bush; he bullies the bush until he splits the roots. He bullies figs, petals wilting at his touch. His tongue never rests touching his lips, the tip of his nose, licking the velvet pockets, dulcet wounds, salty cups, Velasquezed veejays.

The great man rules with a firm hand, showing off his rings, glinting emeralds, ruby reds. He rules with a hoarse laugh, promises to slay the harried kings, the loose sheiks, the brazen bulls who question his authority with their bloody horns. He rules with his own book of prejudice, renames poverty prosperity, swaggering down the aisles, flowers falling at his feet.

The great man showers everyone with his bliss. He parts the rock. He crosses out the sea. He sticks it to his believers causing them to squeal. The great man banishes his band of bandits, punishes the pundits who warn him of disgrace. He hectors the crumpled bodies, rants like an exotic bird in the wrong paradise, like fire burning up the dry brush, smoke embracing the ruins.

JEFF FRIEDMAN





«FAKES»  
TAMER EL SAWY

## Black & White

Café Supreme, Mall of the Emirates, 6th June 2013

They come in, in their blacks,  
two unspoken thoughts  
behind the white grace of their husbands.

Only their eyes may be seen,  
and their heels,  
in the flap of their sandals.

One of the husbands is a boy,  
still practicing his beard.  
The men wheel the baby buggies

which they park by the women  
as the women flurry into chairs.  
Then they talk to each other, good-naturedly,

man-to-man, and the women listen.  
Then the women join in.  
And this is allowed.

A waitress brings food.  
One woman takes a baby onto her lap.  
It nuzzles at her black.

One man spoon-feeds cake  
to his own older child.  
His wife watches.

Happy families.  
When women's eyes are smiling  
who am I to say differently?

FRANK DULLAGHAN

## In sha'allah

When he holds your hand and doesn't let go,  
when he looks you in the eye the whole time  
and asks you again what the grade will be  
tells you again that he must earn a C  
+ or the university will let him go  
with no degree;  
when he has removed his dishdasha  
and you're not sure he used the proper  
title before your given name, as all  
do, all term long, with Dr. This  
or Professor That, you like him for his  
calm resolve as you tell him again  
"as I told you before," grades  
today or tomorrow and he tells you  
"Alright then I'll come to your office  
on Sunday" but forgets to add  
as I forget, in sha'allah  
which never goes unspoken,  
I feel I know him at last  
and want to help him, because his wife  
of two months has begun to make  
fun of him, she's got her degree,  
and the day has gotten dusty  
though the building is lit and cool  
and I see that he is a man  
with much more important things to do  
and there's no need to pretend anymore.

STEVEN SCHREINER

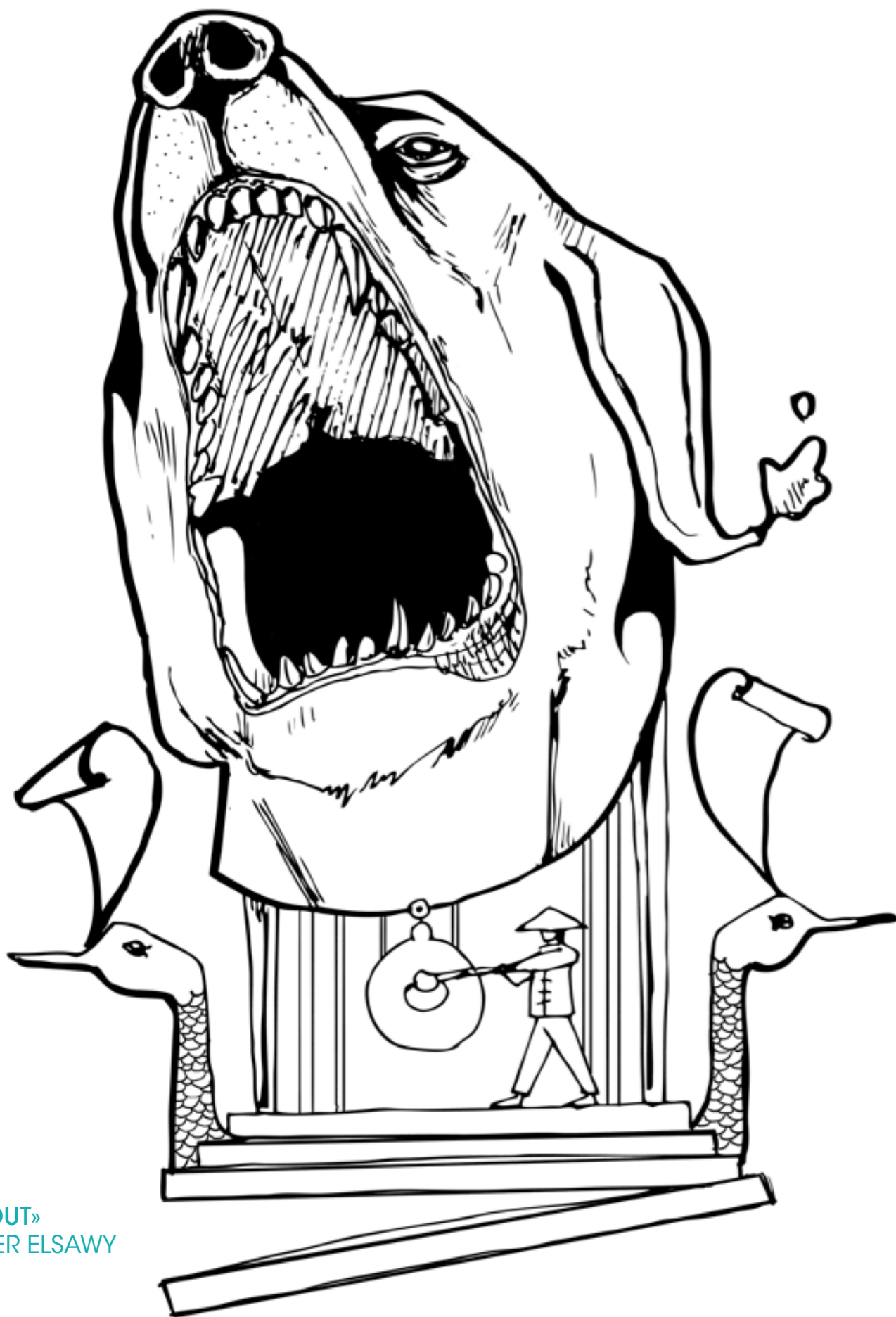
## It is Quiet Now

Dubai 27.3.09

It is quiet now,  
the birds have moved on  
from my garden  
and the wind has eased  
so that my palm trees stand  
with their fronds spread,  
still as stars,  
next door's cock has boasted enough  
and traffic on the road below  
is now exhausted.  
For this is a day of rest.  
Labourers do not toil  
on the half-built mansions  
across the way,  
gardeners do not lean their bicycles  
against a wall  
or kneel to their work,  
maids do not walk their masters' dogs  
nor push his children in buggies.  
It is quiet and I sit out  
under the shade of my house,  
the house I am trying to sell  
before I run out of money,  
before the bank calls in my debt.  
I sit out with a book of Arabic poetry,  
a translation of the Palestinian poet  
Taha Mahommad Ali and read  
and let the day gather its hours softly  
without rush, without effort,  
let the future of my company  
and my prospect of being paid  
alone,  
to happen or not happen  
as they will,  
for I am but one man  
caught up in the storm  
that is shaking everything loose.  
But it is quiet now, a day of rest.

FRANK DULLAGHAN





«SHOUT»  
TAMER ELSAWY

**Take me with you, to Tel Aviv**  
**by FIRAS KHOURY**  
**Translated from the Arabic by Thoraya El-Rayyes**

My Occupier and I ride the train together. "Excuse me" I say, smiling, asking if I can sit in the empty seat next to him. My Occupier lets me through graciously, smiling.

I get off the train. My Occupier serves me coffee and lunch at a restaurant. "Do you need anything else?" my Occupier asks.

"No" I tell him, smiling. My Occupier smiles and backs away, so as not to disturb me by hovering over the table for even another second.

My phone rings. My Occupier speaks to me through the phone, "Can I offer you some of our products?"

"Sorry, I don't have time."

"Have a good day," he smiles.

"You too," I smile.

I leave the restaurant and head to the bank next door. I get stopped by my Occupier's car, he asks how he can get to the Occupied street named after a leader of the Occupation. I think, I choose my words in the language of the Occupation and I give him directions. My Occupier thanks me and smiles. I smile.

I go into the bank. Next to me, my Occupier is reading the newspaper of the Occupation. Our eyes happen to meet so he smiles to avoid that pointless awkwardness. I smile back, and wait for the screen to announce my turn. My Occupier processes a cheque for me, a cheque I received from my Occupier after he deducted a percentage for the Occupation army. The money goes into my account (my Occupier's account). I thank him and I smile, so he smiles.

I enter my Occupier's university to pay off a debt that is a few years old. It is the first day of the academic year and my Occupier is joyous: my Occupier frolics, dances, sings, jumps. My Occupier is flying high!

"Me and my Occupier are in a garden, under a canopy of roses"

---

I call my Occupier, I want to meet. My Occupier is a dulcet beauty with lips like Golan cherries moist with dew. Nothing can turn my gaze from her breasts except the curve of her hips, my Occupier's hips. We meet in my Occupier's bedroom. My Occupier kisses me, I shag my Occupier. She comes, so I come. Me and my Occupier have just come (together).

---

In his taxi, on my way to a party, my Occupier asks me "Shall I turn on the meter?"

"Yes," I reply, smiling.

"Thirty shekels. OK?" he asks, not smiling.

I say "OK." I imitate him, and do not smile.

My Occupier has thirty shekels. My Occupier has no meter. My Occupier hates keeping count. My Occupier hates history.

Here we are now...

My Occupier and I are celebrating in the same place. My Occupier raises his glass high towards me as he drunkenly passes me in the queue for the toilet:

"Happy New Year" he says in a voice that pierces through the loud music. "Happy New Year," I reply, smiling.

My Occupier has a drink and a holiday. My Occupier has no meter. My Occupier hates keeping count. My Occupier hates history.

---

My Occupier hunts me down before dawn between the folds of the last drink in the final bar. He wants to talk to me about politics. My Occupier is a "Leftist" - his hatred of me is gentle and my hatred of him is banal. My Occupier is my Master and feels guilty about his status, so he tries to endear himself to me in the tackiest ways, and smiles. What else can I do? Eternally bored, I smile.

He tells me about his earnest love for the superficialities of my culture and his commitment to the two-state solution. My Occupier has chewed up Yaffa and spit on Haifa, urinated on Akka and swept away the Galilee, cast Safad into darkness, wiped away Al-Lid and Ramlah and combed the coast. He has choked Al-Nasra and swallowed Al-Quds but he would like to take Tubas from the hands of my Occupier and liberate it for me.

My Occupier is a Leftist. My Occupier is a Leftist.  
Whether I like it or not, he has publicly declared himself to be a Leftist.

My Occupier is the same as my Occupier.

---

As the first rays emerged from behind the deceitful cement buildings, he began to get comfortable in my company (in his own company) and so he asked me for the only thing I have left, my right to be "Occupied". He wasn't content with what I offered because according to him, he is not my Occupier.

My Occupier thinks he is "not" my Occupier, but I think that is the only thing he is. That is how he started out and that is how he insists on continuing. To me, nothing remains of him except this "not."

My Occupier has no meter and I don't have anything left to pay him with, so I pay for the glass of whiskey and get up. I do not see him anymore, I do not see my Occupier. I see beyond my Occupier, and I smile.

---

This story first appeared in Arabic on Qadita.net

#### Translator's notes

"Me and my darling are in a garden, under a canopy of roses" is a line from a song by the iconic Arabic singer Sabah Fakhry. Yaffa, Akka, Al-Lid, Al-Nasra and Al-Quds are the Arabic names for Jaffa, Acre, Lydda, Nazareth and Jerusalem. The English spelling for the other cities mentioned in the story reflects the Arabic pronunciation.

#### Context

Firas Khoury is a Palestinian citizen of Israel living in Haifa. He is one of over 1.5 million citizens of Israel whose cultural, linguistic and ethnic heritage is Palestinian. They are the descendants of indigenous peoples who did not flee to neighboring Arab countries during the 1948 war that led to the establishment of Israel.

Although they were granted citizenship, Palestinian citizens of Israel were subject to martial law until 1966 and continue to face institutionalized racial discrimination today. Several prominent Israeli politicians have even gone as far as to call for the revocation of their citizenship, or for their collective transfer to a future Palestinian state.

"Take me with you, to Tel Aviv" is a bold expression of this community's unique experience of exile within their own homeland. It is a defiant expression of a collective identity that is still considered subversive in Israeli political culture, written in a strikingly detached voice that mirrors the alienation of the protagonist.





Istanbul, Turkey, May 2013  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH

## Spring

*There are poverties and there are poverties – Adrienne Rich*

I hear your neighbor has trouble sleeping, trouble eating,  
that she changes her door locks every week and has brought  
all her plants indoor, hid her Bible under the mattress.  
Though the streets are not safe, you say, you still go out  
every night to forget— or is it to remember? Am I exaggerating?

I hear Hamra is not the same anymore: Syrian  
refugees on the streets, men begging, children selling  
roses, selling roses, why are the doomed always selling roses?  
You say you don't know whether to fear for them or fear them.

I hear these borders have been failing, have failed, will fail,  
these fake borders will shift like continents, I wonder  
whether memory could go back to the supercontinent, tell me

who is holding the big crayons this time, and what color  
will our share of sky be, to which God will it be forced to answer?

There is exile, my friend, and there is exile.

My husband, he keeps telling me the Salafis  
are coming, the Salafis are coming, says we  
should sell the house and buy one here,  
in this exile, this desert, because home  
is no longer the home we knew when we were young,  
and I shout, I laugh, I break something, tell him home was never  
the home we knew, the one we wanted, the one  
we imagined when we were young and didn't listen

to the evening news, heard only the absurd voices inside us,  
those voices with big hands that pushed us fully-clothed  
off high rocks and into the icy water, our arms beating  
like wings to fly back up from its dark depth for breath.

I tell him I believe, I still believe, I repeat myself  
like that broken CD of ours that got stuck on "will always," "will always,"  
but he has burnt holy books, newspapers, manifestos, a long time ago,  
like one who's lost in the woods and wants to scare away the wolves.  
He wakes me up in the middle of the night, hand brushing my breast,  
and tells me to look, listen to that Palestinian guy from Gaza,  
he's the new Arab Idol, he used to sing at weddings,  
never got paid, crossed borders, climbed walls, smuggled  
his dream, just to feed a little prayer into this microphone.

There is religion, my friend, and there is religion.

You say the theaters are still open, and I see red wooden doors,  
and people eager to watch that play enacted by the inmates  
of that horrible prison, and that play by the patients in the psychiatric  
ward, and that play about a woman who wakes her husband  
in the early morning to tell him she might have stopped knowing  
how to trace the aroma of her coffee back to their occupied house.

I hear we are still running marathons and exhaling shisha smoke,  
I hear we're still diving in this polluted sea, diving in this polluted  
sky, looking for our black hearts like precious pearls,  
singing songs that are either about love or our country,  
and better still, about love and our country, for we want them both  
to open their arms and take us into their mud, their pain.

There is longing, my friend, and there is longing.

I tell you the shooting is heavier in Tripoli this Friday,  
that people are afraid of prayer day now, they're afraid of prayer;  
will the sound of the *azan* never be pure to my ears again? Listen,  
the shooting is heavier in Tripoli today, so don't take that roundabout,  
the one with the word Allah painted green, it's probably blocked,  
all motorcycles and black smoke, tires burning, people cursing  
around it in the name of this stone-God erected in its middle.

I gulped Tequila shots and danced until dawn, until the phone rang and I was told my daughter was feverish, no Panadol would do, and I knew it was another kind of fever, the kind that a child who longs for her mother burns with, the kind the exiled longing for their houses burn with, the kind that could fill mountains with hate like lava, turn them into volcanos, these mountains that never wanted anything but a little sun, a little air, a little grass.

There is guilt, my friend, and there is guilt.

I hear your friend in Damascus who has three kids hasn't left, crosses herself many times a day, convinces herself life is fine, life is fine and doesn't care who wins, really, she just wants her boys to play football in the street again. I tell you, See? Egypt hasn't given up, I knew it wouldn't, not Egypt, no, and of course I exaggerate but who cares about the Second Coming now that we have a Second Revolution? You say the word revolution also means turning around something else.

I ask you about that tree with beautiful leaves across the street, is it still there? Does the wind still release the song of the sea from its branches? You say it's strange that I only seem to remember it in spring, you remind me that the leaves I listen to every year are different leaves that have replaced the fallen ones, that they have no memory of you and me on this street, perhaps it's better to look for ourselves in the brown ones rustling on the floor. You say we might be on the verge, on the verge of another civil war, and what on earth do we do if it comes, how long can one pretend to exist outside of this, when blood might flood the streets instead of rain? What flowers will grow then? And where will we bury our dead?

There is Spring, my friend, and there is Spring.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK

This poem was first published in audio form at [www.sphericaltabby.com](http://www.sphericaltabby.com).





## ONE IS NOT BORN A BEIRUTI

One is not born a Beirut,  
One becomes one,  
By accepting,  
Without negotiation or compromise,  
This city devoid of gardens,  
This mess of grizzled buildings,  
This mess of smells and scents and flavors,  
This jungle of disheveled wires,  
This aging, overly made-up movie star  
with her poorly-concealed scars.

I choose Beirut  
As one chooses not to stop smoking.  
I light up the city to calm me.  
I inhale it to compose me.  
I extinguish it so that I may savor it later.

It tempts me with its abandon,  
It lures me with its contradictions.  
The serenity of its madness  
Offers me refuge. It is a capricious child,  
A fickle woman in the autumn of age,  
An alcoholic in denial,  
A cruel adolescent embracing self-indulgence,  
A cornered animal.

It is a child whom one cherishes  
In spite of her temper tantrums,  
A virago with a heart as big as the world,  
An old man who loves to love,  
A mistress with open arms,  
An alley cat in all its splendor.

Immolating city,  
You quench your thirst from our sea.  
You are a frenzy,  
A final assault,  
A respite.

MISHKA MOJABBER MOURANI

## After Twenty Five Years

I came to Beirut to retrace my steps but its warmth enveloped me in its ample mantle through streets I didn't recognize; mushrooming bridges and roads led me to Phoenician bronze letters gracing the Corniche railings. I caught glimpses of a façade's laced arcades vivid in my dreams, its twin sister's face disfigured by bullet holes.

Here and there, a jogger runs along the Promenade. Steeped in lost footsteps, the water seems darker as though hiding painful memories. Only the vendor of crisp sesame breads makes me feel at home; with a smile, he fills my *kaak* with fragrant *zaatar*. We won't linger in a café to sense the sea's mist suffused with bitterness, hear the stories of the wind; instead we go to the new Friday's.

I wish I'd pace the streets to gather some crumbs of what I miss the most, the traces of a city hiding within a city hidden under my eyelids. This is not what the heart remembers, I say to myself until the jacaranda's blue light anchors me back, whispering, yes, it's here, deep inside, fluttering like a dove's wings.

HEDY HABRA



Istanbul, Turkey, May 2013  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH

## “Exploring *convivencia*”

### INTERVIEW WITH NATHALIE HANDAL

BY REWA ZEINATI

“Although, we did not have solutions for what was going on nor could we explain or define the East so rigidly, we felt a deep need to respond in any way we could. So we went to our natural prayer, poetry. We went to the human voices that have enchanted us and that have changed our lives and spirits,” says Nathalie Handal, award-winning poet, playwright, and editor. In this interview, Handal talks honestly about her craft, her role as a woman writer, and what she discovers to be “home.”

**RZ: In your new collection, *Poet in Andalucía*, you re-create Federico García Lorca’s journey, *Poet in New York*, but in reverse. What inspired this collection?**

NH: *Poet in New York* is one of the most important books written about the city. Lorca is a poet who continues to call us to question what makes us human. Andalucía has always been the place where racial, ethnic, and religious forces converge and contend, where Islamic, Judaic, and Christian traditions remain a mirror of a past that is terrible and beautiful. Eighty years after Lorca’s sojourn in America, and myself a poet in New York of Middle Eastern roots—and this being a crucial moment in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—I wanted to explore *convivencia* which in Spanish means “coexistence.” The Spanish *convivencia* describes the time when Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in relative harmony in Islamic Spain. There are numerous debates surrounding notions of tolerance in al-Andalus during the Middle Ages. However, one cannot deny the rich and prosperous cultural and artistic life that existed during that period—a life that these communities created together. Mahmoud Darwish’s words kept echoing: “Andalus... might be here or there, or anywhere... a meeting place of strangers in the project of building human culture.... It is not only that there was a Jewish-Muslim coexistence, but that the fates of the two people were similar.... Al-Andalus for me is the realization of the dream of the poem.” So recreating Lorca’s journey in reverse became increasingly important to me.

**RZ: What was the most challenging part of writing this collection?**

NH: Coming to the understanding that although peace is possible if we desire—because what people want most is to live—we stand far away from that reality. It was challenging to weave *hope* into the poems, staying true to my vision while also understanding the fundamental forces that continue to lead us into conflict states instead of conciliatory ones.

**RZ: How is this new collection, *Poet in Andalucía*, different than anything you’ve written before?**

NH: I had a blueprint, a map of the book before I started it.

**RZ: You were listed as one of the “100 Most Powerful Arab Women in 2011” and one of the “Power 500/The World’s Most Influential Arabs” in 2012 and 2013. Where has your inner strength and powerful voice sprung from? And how do you cultivate it?**

NH: Staying faithful to my vision and understanding that every challenge is an opportunity for transformation, and a deeper more fundamental power.



**RZ: How are women, writers or not, in your opinion, empowered? How do they get that fierce fearlessness, do you think?**

NH: From what they have endured, from those who inspire them, from other women, from love, from that luminous-kickass-energy-force-inside.

**RZ: Where is 'home' for you?**

I suppose I've given versions of the same response over the years. Today, I will simply say that home is where you can see the most profound side of yourself.

**RZ: You have promoted international literature through translation, research, and the editing of the groundbreaking *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, an Academy of American Poets bestseller and winner of the Pen Oakland Josephine Miles Book Award and the W.W. Norton landmark anthology, *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia & Beyond*. How important is it to promote international literature, and why did you feel these anthologies were necessary?**

It's vital—one of the most fundamental ways to understand other worlds; their history, culture, traditions. Coming for the Middle East but also having a global identity, I almost didn't have an option. Thank goodness I enjoy editing and translating. It's a tough job.

*The Poetry of Arab Women* was prepared to eradicate invisibility: to provide an introduction to Arab women poets, to make visible the works of a great number of Arab women poets who are virtually unknown to the West, to make visible many Arab-American women poets who are marginalized within the American literary and ethnic scenes, and to demonstrate the wide diversity of Arab women's poetry, which extends to other languages besides Arabic and English.

*Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia & Beyond* was conceived following the events of September 11th, 2001. Tina Chang, Ravi Shankar and I started this journey together because we felt troubled by the negative views showcased in the media about the East. Although, we did not have solutions for what was going on nor could we explain or define the East so rigidly, we felt a deep need to respond in any way we could. So we went to our natural prayer, poetry. We went to the human voices that have enchanted us and that have changed our lives and spirits. We hope this adds to the ongoing dialogue between East and West. This anthology celebrates the artistic and cultural forces flourishing today from the East, bringing together the works of South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian poets as well as poets living in the Diaspora. The collection includes 400 voices from 55 different countries writing in 40 different languages. The work included is diverse in style and aesthetic from political, to apolitical, erotic to experimental.

We are currently planning the 5th year anniversary celebration of the publication of our anthology in Hong Kong this summer. Simultaneously, we are launching the Language for a New Century website intended to reach educators and to assist them in adopting and teaching the contents of the book. Beyond this, the LNC site will be an energetic space where teachers, professors, students, readers, poets, and anyone interested in this anthology and the amazing voices from the East can go to for more information.

**RZ: What do you think of Arab writers who can only write in English? Do you think they owe their heritage the ability to express, and the insistence upon expressing themselves in Arabic as well?**

We don't owe our heritage as much as we owe ourselves—whatever it is we feel or need. We can't force connections and alliances. We have our personal circumstances and histories, and shouldn't be judged by those realities nor assigned *expectations*. After all, a person might speak Arabic and not feel connected to the Arab world and culture. And another might not speak the language and feel very linked to his/her heritage.

**RZ: You've mentioned once in an interview that what makes us human is our ability to answer thoughtfully, and change our minds later. That resonates with many people, surely, many of whom are probably afraid to perhaps voice this resonance. What is it about changing our minds that terrifies us so much? And is this confirmation an integral part of what makes us creative? What makes writers, writers?**

It doesn't terrify all of us. I find it rather reassuring, comforting. As for what makes writers, writers. I can't speak for all of them, I can only tell you, as a writer, I'm a romantic of sorts in search of an impossible *perfect*.

**RZ: You have been asked this question countless times before, but I will ask you again, forgive me; how do you define yourself in terms of identity?**

A Bethlehemite—who is also French and American—with Latin American, African and Asian influences. A Mediterranean who is also very much a city person.

**RZ: You've mentioned once that, "homeland is one thing and home is another." How so? And do you find yourself constantly in search of one or the other in your writing?**

Not any more. They appear and disappear but I'm very clear on what each means to me. Home is the place I have chosen to exist in, my cities, Paris and New York. Homeland is where I am originally from, Bethlehem.

**RZ: You've lived in Europe, the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Arab world. You are of Palestinian descent and write in English. Does the Arab in you feel empowered?**

I only write in English but my poems include French, Spanish and Arabic words because they are an integral part of my English or maybe I should say, the way I communicate. These languages coexist inside of me harmoniously. Speaking various languages has expanded my interior and exterior world in a multitude of fascinating ways.

**RZ: In an increasingly globalized present, where the world seems to be shrinking faster than a new phone app is created (or maybe not!) and the distinctive, discerning features of each Arab culture seems to be vanishing, how can art reconcile us with the idea that we may become increasingly obsolete? (or maybe not?)**

Arab or any other culture will not become obsolete. It's our fundamental pulse, and we instinctively preserve our cultures. We re-imagine them but will not let them disappear. I don't see the distinctive features of each Arab culture vanishing. I can recognize certain unifying spaces, especially when it comes to social media, but every Arab country is graced with its unique and ancient histories, cultures, traditions, art and literature. We continue to cherish, nourish, and add new twists to them. Even if every generation complains that certain elements of their culture have been lost, the essence remains very much alive.

**RZ: How important are literary journals, if at all?**

They are an important meeting field of ideas, minds and creative talent, where we communicate, challenge, change, learn, and are exposed to a constellation of voices.

**RZ: What advice would you offer emerging writers?**

Read as diversely as possible, and don't be in a hurry to publish. If you persist and are dedicated, you'll find the bus that will take you to the terminal where you're meant to begin your writing life.

## By Heart

By my heart, a slum,  
acid on the floor—  
where else can we go  
to be without our origin?

Now grief is but—  
exile is but—  
war is but—  
a bullet in my shoulder,  
a sharp metal in my brain.  
We need explanation for facts too.  
Somewhere I will find it,  
somewhere I will renew my sight,  
somewhere I will recover my house,  
the place I once taught you  
to memorize a verse  
before you became a soldier  
on the other side of Iraq.

I can still feel the bomb,  
still hear the television news,  
the screams, the tooth being pulled,  
words we couldn't spell,  
translations of my language by armies.  
It was summer  
when I first heard you were here—  
what does it mean to love life,  
to blame a son?

Say you found our cow,  
say you aren't a sinner,  
say you deserted them.  
Tell me, you didn't see  
the flies on top of a dead body  
at the corner by Abu Hassan's bakery,  
and you didn't see me  
twisted under the sky,  
under the smoke—  
I forgive you for being alive.

We'll never meet again.  
When will I forget you?  
After the bullets, grenades,  
mortars, barricades,  
barbed wire, and tanks  
stop ringing in my head.  
Perhaps there's no light  
like an explosion,  
no fear like remembrance;  
perhaps our untitled dream  
will remain unsold.

I will pretend the old gods  
aren't at the entrance but at the exit,  
pretend you never killed but pray,  
and the sermons have no edges.

I wish I could live forever to see  
not the man they call John  
but the boy I named Hydar.  
Life has not exhausted paradise.

I entered your room of ditches,  
wandered through your guns,  
and counted my ribs;  
I played with all that divides us  
to see you better—  
now that you are lost,  
now that you are elsewhere,  
now  
that I see,  
now that it's ended,  
now that it's begun,  
now that your face is no longer yours,  
let my will be yours,  
and these, my last words to you:  
Son, don't harden your smile.

NATHALIE HANDAL



## What's Told in Ramallah

It is written, I'm told,  
all of this. My son  
is off in Ansar,  
three years for a stone.

It's hours past curfew.  
His wife, the girl  
I never had, tells their son  
to stay inside. He does

what he's told.  
Looking up, he says  
it's raining harder  
than last night. But

for now the tea's hot,  
the olives cured  
from summer.  
We're watching t.v.,

all three sprawled  
on the floor. I think  
you're right, I say,  
I hope the roof

will hold. This rain  
came all the way  
from Egypt, or at least  
that's what I'm told.

SEAN M. CONREY

## FIRE

May 26, 2011

"the poet is truly a thief of fire." -Arthur Rimbaud

Where the angels gather – still pools over which  
the scent of orange blossoms and olives becomes a memory  
our oars peel back into branches and if an animal  
stopped to drink, could we track it? Would we know what it was?  
How cut off we are from our original sin  
How little your mouth tastes like apples  
or dates. I was startled and unable to drink  
the unrepentant I sang me into a corner and further graces melted  
like the leaf that crackled to warn me – look out!

You're walking too fast, you might miss a turn or a sign or a mark  
of his face in the shadows and grayness of the cool night air.

LAUREL HARIG





Istanbul, Turkey, May 2013  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH



## FOR PALESTINE \*

December 8, 2009

bring me a pen  
oh doctor–light of my life  
“goodbye, father, you will find me under the bombs  
*Al-thawra hata an-nasr.*” -Muna\*  
bombs spring out of her hands into the cloud-blue morning  
and in that night, before the morning, she wrote  
poems with her pen dipped in blue ink  
because of that flight, because of that morning drenched in bitterness  
    you weren’t there again, we weren’t allowed to be there with you  
to see you clutching the frames of your  
glasses and crying amid the rubble of your house.  
we came after when the traces of your flight had gone,  
swept back into the corners of the narrow alleyways of Jerusalem  
and all the cranes had been unfolded, their wings creased  
beyond recognition, a city divided beyond its original identity–  
if history will blame you for anything it will blame  
you for distorting your own history.  
father, of bombs and wars and erasures,  
take nothing and let nothing remain after you  
return with humility to the drawing board, to the table  
where all our family might gather in the festive season  
and at all other times of the year–  
    fall down laughing, light candles  
    to hope upon or to blow out after  
    your campaigns will not rest, tell me  
    father, when will you leave the war behind?

\* “revolution until victory,” Muna Dawud, 1971

LAUREL HARIG





Istanbul, Turkey, May 2013  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH



## any creature that cannot rid of want or song, perhaps

to keep you at a distance, mercy—you can't miss it on my face. there are rules to follow,  
boundaries we cannot traverse, but to feed—

your wish for acoustic and drum will not disappear—the life cycle will happen until there are  
no ends to fall from. it has been an hour since the last gun shots.

within us, the urge to wash and disperse—as seruca, as far away continents. discrepancies  
on the affidavit: she is 25 years old; doctors say, 14.

tracks are swept—what they took will not stop apathy. red has already faded this city. there  
are no photos of leashed humans on all fours.

every morning, we leave forgetting something—a kind of digression. to convince the living:  
there is no reason for blame but the promise—

OLIVIA AYES

## more inequity than the world itself or its counterparts

indeed, if this were a dance, bees will never find the way home. mishaps thrill even the  
sober—stumble, so freely—you are capable of everything.

a momentary tangle, just to be under us—did we want too much, too soon? disdain is only  
half as effective. in truth, i wanted to regain some control.

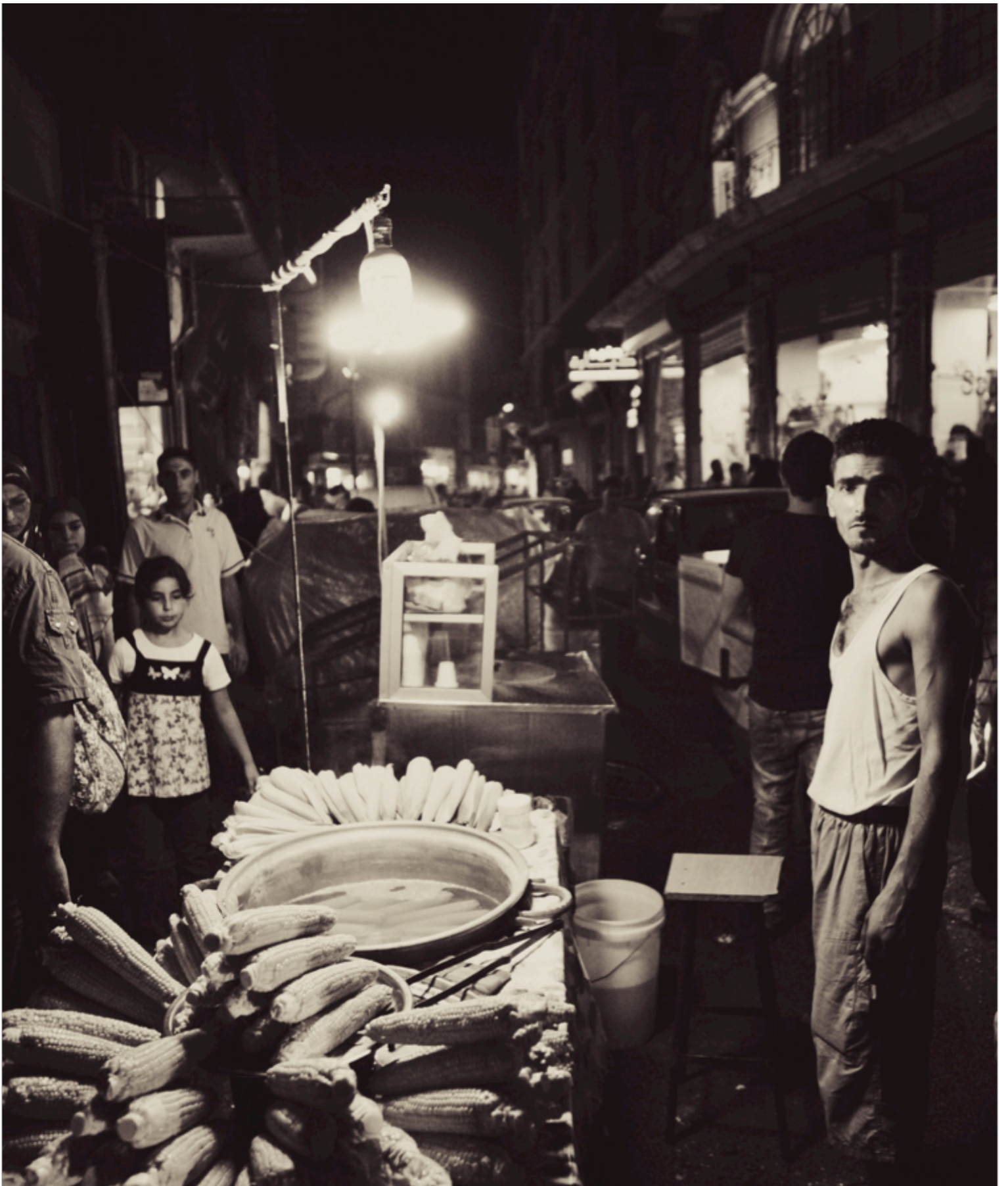
the city disregards what should be asked: who claims the wild? a pink scarf—from a few feet  
away, remnants of an accident.

this time, ourselves, the affliction. we should rally, of course—address whoever will listen.  
break, look forward and try not to falter—

yes, a loss we are not ready for. challenge our bodies' need for heat or escape—especially  
now: torturous shortcuts to love or recovery.

OLIVIA AYES





Tripoli, Lebanon  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH

## Suburban Beirut Nocturne

Antelias, the name the Greeks gave this city,  
meaning Before the Sun, the sunset's rosy fingers  
pulling the sea edge surely seemed similar to home  
as sailors leaned over gunwales near nightfall  
and the quays and docks lined with old men telling  
fishing stories to boys too late getting home.

And where Adib wrenches a stripped bolt off  
a Beamer used to be a spice seller next door  
to a legume shop next to a fat-armed bureaucrat  
whose hat tilted when he coughed, smoking.  
I've gotten sorely used to it, it's become home  
and home, everyone knows, is often a bore.

Antony's coffee shop abuts the sea and sells  
cheap sandwiches to plumbers and bank tellers  
who bring their wives for the concrete veranda sunsets.  
Follow the river up the valley past the bakery  
and we're on the fifth floor, halfway up a tower.  
From the balcony the long bend to the sea

unfolds in a dense clot of parking and apartments,  
though a rocky-soiled banana grove with its house  
for farmhands is napping at the foot of the street.  
I recall how in an ancient captain's log was written  
'Even the fiercest, bluest gods grow tiresome  
without enough priests to shill their wares.'

Wise, that, I think dully, nattering to myself.  
Though it's dusk and everything's red, I watch  
the thin river where men walk between the blocs  
and sometimes stop to light a smoke and move on.  
Even the slight dingy bubble of sludge and muck  
sliding down the river's concrete byway's empty.

Kids with sparklers dance between parked cars.  
A light comes on across the street one floor up.  
It's a maid in a small room off a kitchen (I see  
through her door to the pots and pans hanging).  
Today I woke to her shouting out the window,  
talking with a maid in the next building over.

It went on for an hour or more, one sometimes  
ducking in to do some small thing, their tongue  
so foreign I couldn't glean an inkling. But now  
she's alone and I'm bored so I steal her. She's  
worrying her sheets into place, putting up her hair.  
She steps to the window and starts cranking,

the light behind her as the black blind creeps  
down the sash until she's gone. What have I done  
to you? Against the sun setting and with me  
desperate I've taken your shade and hawked it  
like a brothel lineup, invited others to watch.  
Days later, she still goes about her work alone.

SEAN M. CONREY



"SUICIDAL THOUGHTS"  
TAMER ELSAWY



## THE FALL OF AMERICA

When it comes to the fall of America we are not the father  
The faintest light where you'd once held me  
nearer the pine groves nearer the Atlantic  
the boats motoring slowly away from their own bright colors  
The degrees of ache for what we've lost  
carry deeper into a century  
of apples  
until everything reflects again  
a mother's long cry across the backyards for her boy  
The past snags a rock along the river's bottom leads back to a mountain  
stripped of its trees  
Winter is coming whenever we talk  
Without clocks we're always headed indoors  
pity the dog who follows home the Sunday in our clothes—

KENNETH E. HARRISON, JR.







"LOSING MY VIRGINITY"  
TAMER ELSAWY



## THE FALL OF AMERICA, CONTINUED

Your life in my mouth by mid-morning  
the mountain throws off its bed sheets drenched with sweat  
Without fanfare without pain  
the body of war moves unnoticed along the sidewalk  
pushing away excess water with a broom  
Where we're going I still don't recognize the new chains  
of restaurants sliding across a horizon  
originally built for two  
Afternoon drones like congressmen across a stately table  
Air conditioners click on well into the night  
Words are the only time & space we have left  
until daybreak  
a film of condensation drawn to the edges of a window  
shepherds of the light that consumes us—

KENNETH E. HARRISON, JR.



## PERSPECTIVES\*

by HEDY HABRA

On my way back from the hospital, I enjoyed the solitude of the empty apartment. My son Fady was spending the weekend in Jounieh at the Rimal Resort with my brother Joe, who had a chalet overlooking the beach where his family spent most of their weekends. I wasn't sleepy anymore. On the contrary, I felt alert as if I'd slept through the night. Despite the early hour, I poured myself a glass of Armagnac and sat on the leather recliner, oblivious to opening the shades, enjoying the semi-obscure. I was totally free now and not eager for the day to begin: I needed this time alone. After seven years, Nicole and I just had our second child, but these years weighed on me as if twenty interminable ones had elapsed.

I remembered Fady's birth, our first years together. When did Nicole and I grow apart? At first, I attributed her change to a difficult pregnancy. Her back hurt constantly and she'd lie in bed or lounge on a couch all day long, reading or watching TV. Where was the energetic young girl, always eager to go out, always ready to have friends over? I gradually took charge of all the chores, thinking it was just temporary, hoping things would get better. With time, I resented coming home early because Nicole would always welcome me with comments like, "Ah, Paul! At last! I bet you forgot the bread again!" or as we'd put the groceries away, she would burst, "What's in your mind? You bought the most expensive cheese! Don't you check prices?"

Later, when my paintings weren't selling, she didn't miss one opportunity to remind me, "You must switch to a more remunerative work, something more . . . commercial! That's the only way to get ahead." It's true that my pay at the Art Institute took care of only our basic needs. I'd spend hours in my studio, staring at half-painted canvasses. I'd sketch some ideas, then put them away, discouraged. The only place where I could concentrate was a loft at my parents' summerhouse, twenty minutes from Beirut in the heart of Broumana, which became my studio. Situated above the garage, in the midst of trees, with windows on all sides, it offered a striking view of the pinewoods and the sea. From there, I enjoyed the change of seasons as if I were living in the wilderness. I loved this place. It had a private entrance and I could get in and out without being noticed. My parents used the house mainly during the hot summer months, when the humidity became unbearable in Beirut. Whenever there, they made themselves invisible to allow me maximum privacy.

Nicole was jealous of the time I spent away from home. "You're not much of a father," she'd complain. "You surely got the easy part." She'd constantly enumerate the projects done by her friends' husbands. I kept hearing that our neighbor John was redoing their landscaping and basement, that Lily's husband was a wonderful cook and helped with the laundry. I tried to be more present, especially spending quality time with my son, but my efforts passed unnoticed because Nicole couldn't bear to see that I wasn't painting enough either. I had to renew myself, find a different style: that's how I'll make it in the "high" circles; that's how I'll find the right clientele. She'd always remind me that Inspiration was slipping away and that I lacked motivation. Then came that day when I completed an abstract painting using resin over golden leaf. An abstract composition I considered my best work. A touch of genius, I thought, elated at the daring effects I had created on my canvas . . . until she saw it and asked, "Aren't you going to finish it?" She then added, "And that's what you've been working on for so long?"

For a while, I did portraits in oils and pastels, something I had avoided for a long time. I needed to explore different approaches, but kept getting discouraged by each attempt. I tried to project illusions, boldly explore the instantaneous luminosity that transformed a subject into emotions. But this wasn't going to be an easy route. Once, a businessman objected to his daughter's portrait commissioned for her birthday: "Why isn't it as colorful and lively as these other vivid portraits hanging in your studio?" How could I explain that his daughter was dull and unimaginative and that her own colors directed my palette? I refused to alter the painting.

Nicole took it very badly. "Go ahead, throw our source of income out the window" she frowned. "Your son needs a new pair of shoes, how do you think we'll pay for them? I should never have had a child so young. I'd be at school getting a business degree."

"You can still do it if you want."

"And who will take care of Fady?"

"What about evening classes?"

"Evening classes, huh? And slave all day at home! Everything seems easy when you're not the one doing it. Why aren't you painting anymore, as you used to, Maestro?"

Of course, there was no point arguing how much I had been doing around the house. Tension increased, and my teaching was affected. I spent more and more time away from home, inventing any kind of pretexts. Nicole seemed to be waiting for anything to go wrong so that she'd have an excuse to recite her frustrations like unending litanies.

That was when Michelle came into the picture. I'll never forget the day I first saw her seated by the window in the atelier, a spacious workshop where I also lectured. She wore her auburn hair shoulder length, sunrays cresting its waves with Venetian blond highlights. She was staring at a poster of *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, biting her pencil in concentration.

"Do you like Picasso?" I asked.

"I'm a great admirer of your work, Monsieur Helou" she replied, ignoring my question.

"You may call me Paul. And you are?"

"Michelle Rahme. I'm new here. My parents just moved from Dahr el Souwan. I'll be attending your Art Theory class and the workshops as well."

"Welcome to the Institute," I smiled, directing myself to the other students arriving at that moment. Michelle. There was music in her name. I had never thought of it, but it felt as if these two syllables had the secrecy of muted notes imprisoned in shells, echoing the hushed murmur of distant waves. Yes, I knew I was overreacting, but it felt good to be recognized. It must have been early fall. Jacaranda branches were heavy with purple clusters, and bougainvillea, climbing over stonewalls, sprouted with an explosion of shapes, offering up variegated colors through tall windowpanes. Michelle always placed her easel close to mine and never lost a word I'd say, making sure to take notes. I remember my repeated glances at the half-open door when she was late. She missed only one day. I strove to incorporate into my lecture the infinite palette displayed beneath the transparent glass, beneath her vacant seat. The students seemed distracted, detached, or was it me? My mind wandered; I was unable to focus on my lesson plan.

The thought of seeing her for as long as the academic year comforted me. The very first thing I'd do upon entering the atelier was make sure she was there by the window. Inspired, I spent more time than ever before at my parents' loft, developing techniques and ideas that I presented in class. Michelle's sensitivity to shape and color stunned me. With an innate feeling for art, she understood immediately whatever I'd try to explain. I always questioned her hazel eyes before I'd go any further.

"Michelle, please step up and demonstrate after me, will you?"

"I'll try."

She became my assistant. Quietly, she helped the others with pencil, brush and a minimum of words. She could have passed unnoticed if it weren't for the energy that sparked from her eyes when she talked about art, and her hair, whenever a source of light fell upon it.

She remained reserved until the weeks preceding her departure for Paris, where she had been accepted as an assistant for a young Lebanese artist, Joseph Awad. She came early to class one morning as I was arranging pottery and clay around a draped crimson velour fabric.

"I have a place to stay. My friend Monique, the sculptor, you know, offered to share her flat. She's the one who arranged everything with Awad." She was elated: "And I hope to study Beaux Arts at the Sorbonne. Wouldn't it be marvelous, Paul?"

"Sounds great." That was all I could say, sensing a growing irritation. Why not continue here, after her assistantship was over? I thought to myself. The Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts had produced a great number of talented and world-renowned artists. I had studied there myself. I remembered the day I paced its dark humid lobby, hoping I'd be admitted. Why Paris?

Later that day, we met at La Maison du Café a few blocks from the Institute. We didn't say much as we drank our coffee. She looked at me intently, smiling at times.

"We'll keep in touch," I said.

I could see her struggle to find the right words. "I'll miss you."

"Same."

"You don't understand," she said, uneasily. "It is hard to leave Beirut, you know."

We drove for a while on roads lined with mimosas and palm trees; then we found ourselves surrounded with delicate umbrella pines, their tall parallel trunks steeped in oblique luminous rays, until we reached rocky mountains covered with purple thistle and yellow and blue wildflowers as far as the eye could see. I did most of the talking, telling her about my life with Nicole, how often I had thought of going far away. I stressed my regained enthusiasm, my projects. I wished I could tell her she was the reason for the energy with which I'd climb the stairs leading to the workshops, to the light shining in her auburn curls bent over a canvas. I couldn't confess I'd look at her sideways, thinking of the many times I had an urge to paint her in class, forget the others in order to capture her hair's brilliance. Between the shadows of passing clouds, delicate hues brightened the vegetation, making it glitter. We weren't far from Broumana



and my parents' house. Images of the two of us together were constantly on my mind as we spoke. Time after time, I was about to suggest we'd go there for a while. I'd rehearsed it in my mind; we sort of had a parallel conversation, one real, the other invisible. We'd have some wine, beer, or coffee, I'd show her my paintings, my sketches, the view, she'd get to know my private space . . . I couldn't wait to take her in my arms. I kept silent.

"I envy your freedom," I said, thinking aloud.

"I had to leave. I couldn't bear it anymore . . ." Her voice was monochord, as if she had rehearsed the lines, over and over. I had nothing to say, nothing to offer. Yet she had become part of my life. How could I tell what she had come to mean to me?

She looked at me, expecting me to hold her hand, to kiss her. I almost stopped the car by the side of the road, but instead turned back, beginning the descent towards the city. As it often happens in early spring, on late afternoons, the heavy sky lightened with a fake promise of a new dawn. I drove silently, eyes fixed on the road, indifferent to the unexpected changes around me.

The day before she left, we talked on the phone three, maybe four times. I was in my studio, trying to paint, procrastinating. I'd jump every time the phone rang.

"I'll write," she promised.

"So will I."

When she left, I felt relieved at first. It was only in the evening, right after dinner that I had a sense of numbness in my face, my lips twisting uncontrollably towards my left eye, distorting my vision. It was as if half of me lived passively in the real, concrete world and the other half entered a blurred, phantasmagoric universe, seen through rippled surfaces. A couple of aspirins took care of these symptoms.

These episodes struck me again, for brief periods of time. I enjoyed these melting images, wishing they would last long enough to be reproduced on a canvas. I'd concentrate, try to remember the vision of people cut in half, one half floating on a quiet pond, the other wrinkled under troubled waters. I thought of Dali's limp watches and wondered whether he suffered from migraines. I feared I had become transparent and was witnessing what was going on within my own self, facing the distorted picture I surely offered to others.

She wrote regularly at first. Her letters were brief, her handwriting irregular. I'd run my fingertips over the words, over her name at the bottom of the page, as on a Braille musical score. Around Christmas, I sent her a long letter in a manila envelope, including a sketch of a still life, with an unusual, slanted perspective; the only letter I ever sent. With time, her letters became infrequent.

Did Nicole ever notice any change in me? She was so accustomed to my ups and downs and moodiness. She was also so wrapped up in herself that as long as her needs were met, nothing mattered. I stopped painting for months, and my own bitterness surpassed Nicole's. Never had the tension been greater between us. It was as if electric static were always in the air. I couldn't remember what had brought us together in the first place. I wasn't even seeing her shiny, silky black hair that had once attracted me so much nor her delicately arched eyebrows that she used to raise playfully when we first dated. Now, Nicole and I would sit for hours in the family room by the fireplace,

reading, watching TV, without exchanging a word unless it concerned Fady, who had turned five and was excited about beginning soccer practice. I even ignored her compulsive flipping of channels, especially during commercials. I'd open a book, read or work on my lectures, indifferent to what was going on around me.

"What's with you?" she said once, irritated. "It's the third time I've asked you if you were ready to eat!"

"You and Fady go ahead. I'll help myself later."

"Why can't we live normally like everyone else?"

"What's on your mind?"

"Think of us! Of your son . . . of me, for a change. You're always elsewhere."

And she was right. The only reality for me was the one I constantly fabricated around Michelle's image, conjured up through imaginary dialogues. I'd feel her by my side whenever visiting a gallery, admiring a painting or listening to music. She would have loved these brushstrokes or that unusual use of pigments, I was certain of it. Michelle's departure coincided with a major shift in my career. I became involved with local artists who organized cultural exhibits throughout Europe, planning my trips around my teaching schedule. These brief trips—a couple of days, three at the most—enabled me to get away from home, from the perpetual acting that had become my lot, maintaining a wavering status quo.

My bouts of migraine started again, the sharp pain increasing steadily. My head ached almost constantly, and I had to resort to stronger drugs than aspirin. I thought migraines were associated with women, but discovered they could be a major chronic ailment. Some of my friends started telling me how they had dealt with them, giving me all sorts of contradictory therapies that didn't help a bit. All I wanted was to stay away from the network of relations that one can't avoid in our country, beginning with close relatives and extended family. We were constantly invited, and we had to reciprocate sooner or later. Nicole had begun to take pleasure again in socializing, although it barely changed her attitude. Her newfound frivolous trend was weighing down on me and I resisted going along. That's when my pilgrimage among neurologists started. My whole vision was fragmented. I felt helpless, worthless . . . my universe was slipping away. I knew there was nothing wrong with me. I simply had to leave Nicole and try to hurt Fady as little as possible. I wished I could go away, live alone in a hut in the Marquises or in an unknown island where all I would do was paint, eat and sleep without seeing anyone. I was ready to go to the other end of the world. Nothing could save our marriage, but I had to regain some peace and strength before I'd face Nicole. That's why I decided to take a short leave with the pretext of meeting other artists organizing an exhibit in Florence. But even from a distance, I kept seeing her split image, half solid, half liquid, half of her accusing, menacing, the other half broken, resigned as if she could read my thoughts. Whenever home, I'd avoid talking, even looking at her. I was waiting for the right time to talk to her. That's when she announced she was pregnant.

How could I possibly leave her? I thought of Fady's birth, his tiny bald head, his slanted dark eyes already questioning the world around him. A wave of tenderness submerged me. A boy or a girl, it didn't matter. We were bound to be a family again. From that day on, days succeeded each other, colorless. This time, Nicole had an easier pregnancy, without back pains or unnecessary complaints. She kept busy remodeling the apartment. "It's time to change the wall paper," she said, "I want the baby to come to a perfect home!"

"As if the baby had any interest in the decoration," I'd say to myself, never daring to contradict her. Still, I was pleased to see her interest was shifting away from her perpetual criticisms.

I had never immersed myself so much in my work, rising early, sleeping late. I seemed to need fewer hours of sleep. Even the migraines weren't a hindrance anymore. In fact, I considered them an invaluable source of inspiration. I'd endure the pain for as long as I could before taking the medicine and would paint frenetically, consumed by a creative fever. I'd disappear without a word, grateful that Nicole had become more understanding. In such moments, she knew I needed to be alone. I remember the day I imagined a woman's body emerging like a butterfly from a cocoon, her body barely covered with cracked, peeling bark, thin as a veil she was slowly removing. From her head sprouted innumerable arms, branching into more arms, each holding a ripe golden pomegranate. I worked nonstop all night long until the next morning when I fell asleep exhausted on my studio's sofa. I didn't even bother to clean my brushes and palette. When I woke up, I was stunned at that tree woman with no face, a seductive Medusa tempting and arresting, charged with mature fruits ready to burst.

My paintings began to attract attention, and invitations to show in local, regional, and even foreign exhibitions followed. I became obsessed with Phoenician letters. I was intrigued that most of the letters' names were identical to Arabic words: B, beth, house . . . G, gimel for camel . . . K, kaph, palm, yes, and Y, yodh, same as hand. The one I particularly liked was O, the perfect shape, called ayn, the word for eye! It felt as though I was in some mysterious way linked to that remote past. I started to incorporate these symbols in my paintings, modifying them, twisting, elongating them. They became a recurrent theme in my compositions, though not always recognizable, a thread that guided me in the darkness.

My life was finally taking shape, until a week ago, when Nicole announced she changed her mind about calling the baby Leila if it were a girl. "No," she said, determined, "It will be either Mark or Michelle."

"No, no. Not Michelle," I thought! I couldn't bear it. I tried to think of ways to fight it, pretending it reminded me of a boy I hated in elementary school, Michel Lakah. I insisted upon calling her Sulla, Soraya, Elvira, Sofia, Esmeralda, anything less common, more evocative. I insisted so much, Nicole agreed to compromise for the first time in her life: "Fine. We still have time. Let's think of something else, honey."

Then everything happened suddenly. I could barely remember the dream I had the last night just before we went to the hospital. It was so real. I was gasping for air, choking, strangled by hissing serpents. I threw away the smothering blanket, eyes wide-open to the sound of Nicole's alarmed voice, saving me from a certain death: "Hurry, it's time! We have to go to the clinic!" I slipped into my jeans, put a shirt on and helped her with her robe like an automaton.

"Get the suitcase, quick," she said with a faint voice, her face taut with pain as she held her belly.

We took the elevator down to the ramp and got into the car. I adjusted her seat until she reached a comfortable position and then started the car, fumbling for the ignition with shaking hands. I needed coffee. It was two in the morning. I tried to concentrate on the road, careful to avoid any jerky movement of the car, having a hard time keeping my eyes open. It was drizzling. Pearly drops gathered into faint, solitary lines and the wet asphalt of deserted avenues and

sidewalks shone beneath hazy streetlights. I felt as if we were sailing over dark waters under the moonlight.

We were nearing Dr. Sawaya's clinic in Achrafieh. Nicole was breathing rhythmically. The raindrops hit harder, echoing the wipers' nervous whistle. Fully awake, my throat dry, I pulled up to the emergency lighted entrance and stopped carefully. As I helped Nicole out of the car, a young man in a windbreaker rushed towards us holding an outstretched black umbrella, and asked for the car keys. In the waiting room, Nicole sat, moaning, legs apart, on an uncomfortable vinyl chair while I filled out the admission form. Two male nurses entered with a stretcher and took her away. I tried to follow them but the receptionist stopped me: "One moment, Sir. Please wait until the doctor allows you inside."

What about Fady? I thought in a flash, What if he wakes up and doesn't find us home? Then I remembered he was staying at his uncle's beach house with his cousins. I stared at the old woman seated across from me. She seemed distant. I rubbed my eyes, and looked around me. The empty chairs seemed to sway. A nurse walked in after an indefinite lapse of time and looked at the old woman then at me with inquisitive eyes.

"How is my wife? Can I see her, now? "

"Congratulations!" she said, smiling. "You have a beautiful baby girl. It was an easy delivery. Your wife's fine. She's expecting you."

I followed the white shape through narrow corridors framed by half-open doors. We entered a spacious room with drapes closely drawn, separating several beds. Nicole was in the first bed, by the entrance, reclined over pillows: an older nurse sat by her side, holding a baby with jet black hair, blue eyes and perfectly defined features.

"You can only stay a minute," said the nurse. "Your wife must rest now."

"Her mouth is perfect," I said, kissing Nicole on the cheek, unable to turn my eyes away from the baby. Nicole seemed tired but beamed with joy despite the circles around her half-closed grey eyes.

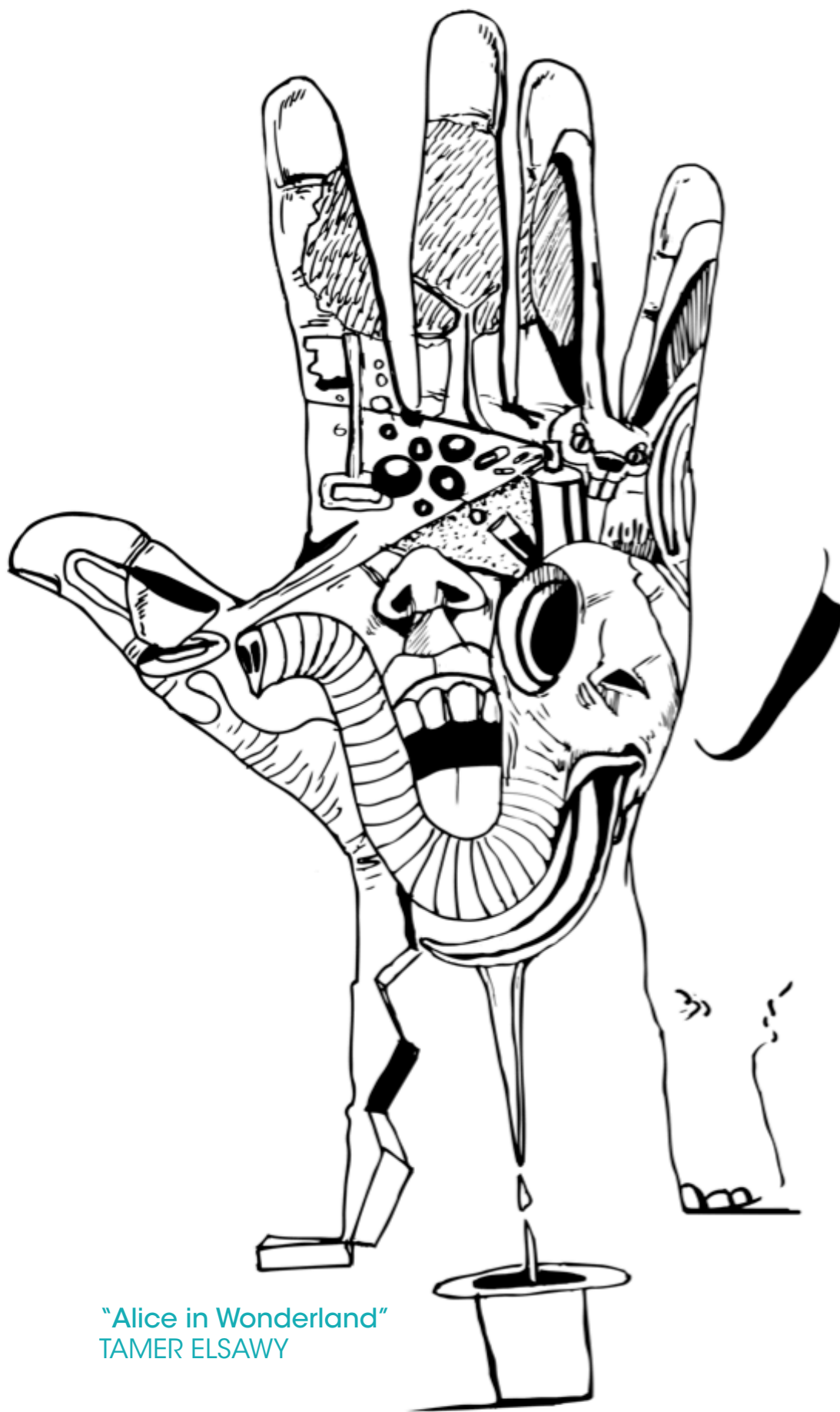
"Yes, she is lovely," she said with a sleepy voice, "and so tiny. She has your eyes, Paul. Here, hold her."

I was surprised at the baby's weightlessness. So much life in store in that miniature.

"Let's call her Michelle, honey," I said.

She rolled onto her side and closed her eyes. I needed to go home and sleep. Sleep, that's all I could think of, all that really mattered.

\*This story is from Habra's short-story book Flying Carpets. It was one of the last to be incorporated and it did not appear in a journal, until now, unlike the rest of the 21 stories.



"Alice in Wonderland"  
TAMER ELSAWY





## guarantee a bruise or the evening sky of every color

complete the failing all together—anticipation's carnage will show, clear as ourselves in the mirror. even if the last attempt brings you—

what satisfies is finality. either this or the flight edging against your back. our talk about compression—fill in the blanks. leaders and their audacity.

the goal to return—a natural happenstance for the city to elude. we love and think somehow we are significant—an orange bird among sameness.

my stretched fingers will shake, so you have scattered all over. there is no safety in disbelief—as the stars say, we are here exactly as we should.

except it is not love or happiness or glory we are looking for. it might be another moment to rest. if i can help it, whether to give sound—

OLIVIA AYES



## Lost Link

by AREEB AL-SHATHRI

We were split into three main groups. The first group was composed of “the elders,” which included my parents, aunts, uncles, and the cousins who were above thirty-five. The elders were always in the main living room, scattered on the ridiculous number of couches. The living room was always the loudest room. All my aunts and uncles, paired up into groups of two or three, would reminisce about their childhood. My grandmother, the matriarch of the family, would sit on a couch quietly, occasionally chiming in with her almost comically trained, and well-timed, sharp tongue.

The second group included “the older kids,” which would usually split into two sub groups: the older boys, and the older girls. The boys occupied the cramped second living room, while the girls would commandeer the tent in the yard. I was never allowed into the living room that the boys occupied, but the smell of tobacco would always seep through the door and take over that part of the house. The girls, however, were another story. They were always my favorite group. My cousins and sisters, each setting a new standard for beauty, would take up different positions in front of the TV, and watch the latest soccer game. Taking shifts to make sure each person in the house had everything they needed, they were the fuel behind this entire gathering.

The third group, “the younger kids,” included anyone under twelve. The younger kids would all sit in the yard on the edge of what might have been the largest carpet ever made. They would stare up at my sixteen-year-old cousin while she explains the rules of the game and guards the mountain of presents that will be given to the winners. They all knew each of them would get a present eventually, but it didn’t matter. To them this was the closest they will ever get to war at that age, and they had to win.

Then there was the last group, “the in-betweeners.” This is where I belonged. We were the drifters, dividing our time between the groups while keeping the kids entertained. This was the way it’s always been during Eid. All my mother’s family gathered at my grandmother’s house for Eid lunch. The kids’ excited squeals filling up the outside of the house, the boys’ cigarettes and the elders’ laugh echoing on the inside. That’s the way I choose to remember this house.

I’ve grown accustomed to hospitals. The smell of burning rubber on linoleum floors and disinfectant stir a sense of familiarity. I struggle to keep up with my cousin, Basma, as she maneuvers her way through hospital corridors with great precision. Everyone’s always in such a rush in hospitals.

I’ve become a pro at this. I know exactly what to do, what to say, and whom to say it to. In an Arab family, a Saudi one in particular, there are certain procedures, a certain protocol you have to follow when a member of said family passes away. I have these procedures down to an exact science.

Saudi Funeral Protocol:

- Always wear a skirt or a thobe, traditional Saudi garb. Pants are frowned upon.
- Always keep a veil hanging from your neck in case a male enters the room.

- Always start condoling people from right to left.
- If the person is a closer blood relative to the deceased, you must condole them by saying "May your reward from God be greater."
- If they are not a closer blood relative, then they must condole you with the same phrase.
- Never forget to reply with "May both our rewards be greater."

Walking through the ER has become like a family reunion. Everywhere I turn I'm met with a familiar but sad face, and an expression that says "Hi. I don't want to be here either." Three aunts and one uncle are laying in different hospital beds, with at least three of my cousins assigned to each. It wasn't a car crash or contagious disease that led them here. It was something much simpler: my grandmother died, and they fell apart.

My grandmother had thirteen children; the youngest of which is forty, give or take a few years. She raised eight women and five men. She was not only a grandmother; she was a great-grandmother. She lived a full life. I couldn't understand why they were so shocked. She had been sick for over a year, and they knew she was going to go soon. It was better this way, I thought.

I held my mother as she cried and sniffed my grandmother's pillow. My grandmother's house was empty, except for me, my mother, Basma, and a few workers cleaning up the house for the expected visitors. The house was... gray. This is not how I choose to remember this house.

I didn't cry over my grandmother, but that doesn't mean I didn't cry at all. I cried for my mother. I hated seeing her like this. Seeing her broken. I hugged her shoulders as she rocked back and forth while my cousin whispered soothing words in her ear. My mother cried for her mother like a child. "We won't be together again," she gasped. "Nothing will be the same. This will be the last time we'll be together."

And then it hit me. They weren't devastated because their mother had left them. They were devastated because she took away the only reason they ever got together anymore. Thirteen siblings with kids and grandkids of their own, who make it hard for them to see each other. Thirteen grown kids who fight and don't speak to each other for years. Thirteen separate families that only come together for one reason. And now that reason was gone.

So, here today, following the protocol for a deceased family member only meant one thing; that an entire family had died.





TYRE, SOUTH LEBANON, OLD SOUK, 2012  
Photo by MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH





## The Taste of the Earth

Two fawns cross the creek. One of them pauses, linked  
to his mirror reflection by the tip of his tongue, parallel  
worlds merge on the fault line of a folded image.


A musical phrase sticks to your skin, the wind espouses  
ripples, liquid dunes lick the shore, give moisture to  
wild brush, blown over seeds and thoughts.

Iridescent hummingbirds hover over purple Iris blooms.  
The shore is faithful to the stream's first touch, like first  
loves, it nourishes tendrils rising into a green flame,

never forgotten like the taste of the earth. A desert thirsts  
for an oasis, a fawn melts into the music of a fable,  
a gazelle, new memories map rhizomes twisting,

anchoring us farther with each shoot spreading from our  
birthplace to everywhere we've lived, to where we live  
now, and does it make a difference if the root remembers?

HEDY HABRA



## Artists' / Writers' bios:

**OLIVIA AYES** is a queer writer, educator, and agent of change living in East Africa. She has lectured at universities in the St. Louis area, as well as City University of New York. Her writing appears on *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Matador*, *Five Quarterly*, *Blackbird*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and elsewhere.

Pushcart-nominee **ZEINA HASHEM BECK** is a Lebanese poet with a BA and an MA in English Literature from the American University of Beirut. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest*, *Nimrod*, *Folio*, *Cream City Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Crosstimbers*, *Quiddity*, *Columbia Granger's World of Poetry*, and *Mizna*, among others. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Dubai, where she regularly performs her poetry.

**SEAN M. CONREY** is a professor in the writing and rhetoric program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York State's Finger Lakes region, where he lives most of the year with his wife, literary critic Carol Fadda-Conrey and their two daughters. He spends his summers writing in Beirut, Lebanon. His poetry has appeared in *American Letters and Commentary*, *Cream City Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review* and *Tampa Review*, among others. A chapbook of his poems, *A Conversation with the Living*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009 and his monograph *Coming to Terms with Place*, a theoretical work concerned with how language affects our sense of place, was published in 2007. An album of original songs, *Hosmer and Ninth*, recorded with The Mercury City String Band, a revolving group of musicians, is available on CD and online through Creative Commons. His first full-length collection of poetry, *The Word in Edgewise*, is slated for publication in early 2014 by Brick Road Poetry Press.

**FRANK DULLAGHAN** is an Irish poet, living and working in Dubai, UAE. He has two collections published with Cinnamon Press in the UK- *On the Back of the Wind* (2008) and *Enough Light to See the Dark* (2012). Dullaghan has an offer of publication from Knox Robinson under discussion for his first novel. He holds an MA with Distinction in Writing from Glamorgan University. Frank is a previous editor of *Seam Poetry Journal* and was one of the founders of the Essex Poetry Festival. He is a member of the Dubai Performance poetry platform, Poeticians, the Emirates Literary Group and the Dubai Writers Group. Frank has given poetry readings, run workshops and given seminars in Dubai and Sharjah and has read at the Emirates Literary Festival each year since 2009.

**TAMER ELSAWI** was born and raised in Egypt. After graduating with a degree in Fine Arts, Elsayy began his career in Advertising in Dubai. Art and illustration are his passion. Before Elsayy sketches or illustrates anything he dives into the scene in his mind, and tries to understand it very well, imagining himself inside this world, making up dialogues and repeating them, imitating their voices, then he sets on his headphones, starts the music and begins to sketch. Tamer is a huge fan of stand-up comedy and boxing. But he will neither ever get on a stage nor punch someone.

**JEFF FRIEDMAN**'s sixth collection of poetry, *Pretenders*, will be published by Carnegie Mellon University Press in 2014. His poems, mini stories, and translations have appeared in many literary magazines, including *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *5 AM*, *Agni Online*, *Poetry International*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Solstice*, *Antioch Review*, *Quick Fiction*, *New England Review*, *100-Word Story*, *Per Contra*, *New England Review Digital*, *Sentence*, *North American Review*, *Boulevard*, *Missouri Review*, *Big Bridge*, *Storyscape*, *Anthem*, and *The New Republic*. He is currently a guest editor for the fall issue of *Storyscape* and a contributing editor for *Anthem Literary Journal*.

Being a telecom engineer did not prevent Lebanese photographer, **MOHAMAD GHAMLOUCH**, from teaching himself the art of photography. His passion has taken him to more than 60 cities and 20 countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, providing him with a wider choice of scenes, cultures and adventures. His work has appeared in various newspapers in Lebanon, as well as photo exhibitions, in Beirut and Napoli. His work also helps him contribute to charity projects and organizing photography trips around Lebanon. He is a business development manager for an IT solution company where he manages the South Iraq region. He lives in Beirut but travels frequently around the Arab world, Africa and Europe.

**HEDY HABRA** is the author of a collection of short stories, *Flying Carpets* (March Street Press, 2012), a book of literary criticism, *Mundos alternos y artísticos en Vargas Llosa* (Iberoamericana, 2012), and a poetry collection, *Tea in Heliopolis* (Press 53, 2013). She received her MFA and a PhD in Spanish Literature from Western Michigan University where she currently teaches. Her poetry and fiction in French, Spanish and English appear in numerous journals and anthologies including *Drunken Boat*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Cider Press Review*, *Nimrod*, *Cutthroat*, *Poet Lore*, *Inclined to Speak*, and *Poetic Voices Without Borders 2*. For more information, visit [www.hedyhabra.com](http://www.hedyhabra.com)

**NATHALIE HANDAL** is from Palestine, and has lived in Paris, New York City, and Latin America. She is the author of numerous books, most recently *Poet in Andalucía*, which Alice Walker lauds as “poems of depth and weight and the sorrowing song of longing and resolve”; *Love and Strange Horses*, winner of the 2011 Gold Medal Independent Publisher Book Award, which The New York Times says is “a book that trembles with belonging (and longing)”; and the landmark W.W. Norton anthology *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia & Beyond*. Her most recent plays have been produced at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Bush Theatre and Westminster Abbey, London. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including *Vanity Fair*, *Guernica Magazine*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Ploughshares*. She writes the literary travel column “The City and the Writer” for *Words without Borders*. Handal is a Lannan Foundation Fellow, winner of the Alejo Zuloaga Order in Literature, and Honored Finalist for the Gift of Freedom Award, among other honors.

**LAUREL HARIG** is currently studying Art and Social Justice at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. Her poems have been published in *Ampersand*, *Avero*, *Lucidamente* and *The Banyan Tree* magazines. She has studied anthropology at the American University of Beirut where she also took part in numerous activist projects. She received a B.A. in Cross-Cultural Communications focusing on Arabic literature from Bard College at Simon’s Rock in 2008.

**KENNETH E. HARRISON, JR.** has recent poems in *E-Ratio*, *Orange Quarterly*, *Pleiades*, *Spittoon*, and *Sukoon* (issue #1). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly*, *Drunken Boat*, *Packingtown Review*, *Pleiades*, *TYPO*, and elsewhere. He teaches Writing & Literature at Webster University and Florissant Valley Community College, both in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

**FIRAS KHOURY** is a Palestinian writer and film director. His works include the award-winning short films *Seven Days in Deir Bulus* (2007) and *Suffir* (2010) which have been shown in film festivals around the world.

**THORAYA EL-RAYYES** is a literary translator based in Amman, Jordan. Her translations of Arabic short stories have previously appeared in *World Literature Today*, *The Saint Ann’s Review* and *Arabic Literature (In English)*.

**MISHKA MOJABBER MOURANI** was born in Egypt of Greek-Lebanese parents. She has lived in Australia and in Lebanon. She is the author of a poetry collection, *Lest We Forget: Lebanon 1975-1990*. Her short story, "The Fragrant Garden," appeared in *Hikayat: Short Stories by Lebanese Women* [Telegram books, London, 2006], and *Lebanon Through Writers' Eyes* [Eland, London, 2009]. Her work also appeared in *Habiter Beyrouth? Parcours d'écriture* [Assabil, Beirut, 2010], and *La Méditerranée au Carrefour Des Mots* [Assabil-Kitabat, 2011]. She has published *Balconies: A Mediterranean Memoir* [Dar An-Nahar, Beirut, 2009] and translated into English *Faiseur de réalités* [Maker of Realities, 2011]. French poems by Antoine Boulad inspired by Mohamad Rawas' art. In 2012, her work appeared in *Mused Literary Review* *An Old Box of Antiques*, and *Arabic Literature in English* *Global Story Behind A Bilingual Book of Poems*, and *Teta, Did You Know Aleppo?* Most recently, she co-authored a poetry collection entitled *Alone, Together* [Kutub, Beirut, 2012], a project in which Aida Y. Haddad translated Mourani's poetry from English to Arabic, and vice versa. Her short story *Fatma's Fate* appeared in the Winter 2013 edition of *The Studio Voice*.

**AREEB AL-SHATHRI** is a Journalism and Film student at the American University of Sharjah, UAE. Born and raised in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Al-Shathri finds himself very connected to his heritage but regrets not being able to write well in Arabic. He was selected as a finalist in the Dubai International Film Festival Young Journalist Award. His stories have been published in *Screen International* magazine, the festival's daily. He has recently written and co-directed the film "*Shiddi Zeilik*" which was commissioned by Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, and premiered in the SIKKA 2013 in Dubai.

**STEVEN SCHREINER** is associate professor of English at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, USA, where he teaches in the MFA program. He is the author of *Too Soon to Leave* (Ridgeway: 1998), and *Out of Egypt* (forthcoming, Cervena Barva Press), and a chapbook, *Imposing Presence*. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Image*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Poet & Critic*, *Gulf Coast*, *Margie*, and *River Styx*. He has been awarded fellowships from The National Writers Voice of the YMCA and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He is the founding editor of *Natural Bridge*, a journal of contemporary literature.

**REWA ZEINATI** is the founding editor and publisher of *Sukoon* magazine, and the author of the creative non-fiction book, *Nietzsche's Camel Must Die: An Invitation to Say 'No'* (xanadu\*, 2013), as well as the poetry chapbook, *Bullets & Orchids* (Corrupt Press, 2013). She studied English Literature at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, where she is originally from, and earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, USA (where she is not originally from.) Several of her poems, essays and translations have been published in various literary journals and anthologies in the USA, UK, Levant region and online. She lives and works in Dubai, UAE.





