

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY *of* KUWAIT

AUKuwait
Review
Arts & Literary Journal



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The AUKuwait Review: Arts & Literary Journal
Spring 2010 Edition

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The American University of Kuwait's Art and Literary Journal, The 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 Program, College of Arts and Sciences. Send arts submissions to Dr. Maryam Hosseinnia (mhosseinnia@auk.edu.kw), Graphic Design Program, College of Arts and Sciences. American University of Kuwait, Box 3323, Safat 13034 Kuwait. ISSN 1997-0056

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

I'm pleased to present the latest edition of The AUKuwait Review: Arts and Literary Journal, Spring 2010 issue. This fourth edition includes poetry, short stories, descriptive prose, travel accounts, as well as photographs, paintings, and computer-generated images, and presents a diverse array of writers and artists from amongst our students, staff, and faculty.

You will find some of the contributions relevant and resonant, some of them refreshingly different. We offer you a range of topics, from views of modern-day Afghanistan, Palestine, or China to an account of medieval Iraq, from discussions on painting and poetry to commentary on illness and family, even accounts of campus life.

We have had a board of students and faculty who reviewed submissions and designed this publication, along with supervisors Professors Craig Loomis and Maryam Hosseinnia. This group has demonstrated energy and dedication to the long process of producing this edition.

On behalf of the Literary and Graphic Design Boards, I invite you to peruse the latest volume of The AUKuwait Review, to explore the many voices of the AUK community. This being my final year as a student at AUK, I am confident that The AUKuwait Review will continue to share and showcase the creative talents of its writers for years to come.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Nur Soliman,

Editor-in-Chief

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**Short Fiction
Poetry**

A Border of Persian Sofas

By Ghaidaa H Mohammad

“In my opinion, however, Jan is mistaken in thinking that the border is a line that crosses a man’s life at a specific point, that it marks a break in time...No. I am certain...that the border is constantly with us, irrespective of time and our stage of life, that it is omnipresent, even though circumstances might make it more or less visible.”

--Milan Kundera

During Siesta hours...

the news from the shiraz radio

permeate the open windows,
and rustle the leaves of the Baghdadi palms--

lulling them to sleep.

The singular kanar tree shades the ivory entrance
of Grandma’s hosh that circumvents
her white brick house.

In Grandma’s kitchen
the cats are overfed; the two gardens
--hosh palm trees and potatoes beyond its border--
are over-watered by a hose extended from the sink.

Two Girls

sympathize with the defunct stapler,
overused by their physician aunt,

Then when they asked her she said: Oh gosh, of course I like the boys in our class they're our friends.
The guys didn't talk to me at recess.

November 12, 2008

Dear Diary,

Today I saw my cousin in school and I got so excited to see her I screamed out her nickname: ZUZU!! Her classmates laughed when I did that and she looked really embarrassed.

I don't think she'll want me to call her anymore.

November 24, 2008

Dear Diary,

Today I went to school. And nothing happened.
It's a good day.

A Letter to My Mother

By Yousef Nayef

Mother...

They surrounded me,

In darkness they sat me down...

They asked confusing questions.

And then,

Mother...

They beat the hell out of me...

And I am

like a bird

Anonymous

Where is my perfume?

Where is my passion?

“These things are not important.”

Where is my home?

Where are the days of pleasure?

“They are now ruins due to the strong winds.”

Mother...

Tell my son

That I am alright...

and play hide and seek
in the room where velvety golden-brown sofas
are reserved for guests;

they race from the kitchen
and fling their diminutive bodies
on grandma's expensive sofas:
their laughs interweave
like intricate mosaics.

As the Older Girl Laughs,

she remembers
that her mom's sofas
are itchy orange-wool-:
not as nice for this game she plays,

but she still liked the nylon butterfly curtain
hanging in her own blue toilet,
and the scent of fresh laundry
waving in her home's back garden.

A whisper to Grandma: enough!

The constant feeding of the cats;
the constant worry about desiccating the palms,
or the fear of creating a dead wall of both.

The Defunct Turtle I am now

is wearing a perfumed turtle skull;

my hair's adorned with palm leaves
and my youth's trapped inside me.

Note:

Hosh: a yard that surrounds houses in Kuwait. This yard's walls are all low and concrete. Most hoshes are as big as a track field, both in their circumference and width.

Kanar: a huge tree that survives for generations. Its fruits are called canar: they are sweet, white, berry-shaped, but have a hard pulp, like an apple's pulp.

Memories of a Middle-School Girl

By Amal Behbehani

September 23, 2008

Dear Diary,

Today in school, we read our essays about what we did in the summer. As I read mine about the fun times I had in London, the other kids just mocked it. Why? Because all the fun I had was trying the crepes and the different ice cream flavors and the glazed peanuts and the food they had. They said I basically did nothing since I just ate there. After that I stayed silent and didn't finish reading my essay.

Nobody asked me to continue.

They were just jealous that I got to go to London.

October 5, 2008

Dear Diary,

Today I faked that I was puking to get out of running in soccer practice. I was so slow the girls were already on their fifth lap while I was on my second lap. At first, they tried to wait for me and encourage me to go on, but as they saw I couldn't run like them they just did their thing while I went and "puked".

October 14, 2008

Dear Diary,

Today I was late to class and I was so afraid of being late to class that I cried when the teacher asked me why I was late. I didn't know how to explain to her that I stayed up late because we had a family meeting and I was so scared from all the looks the students gave me for being so late that I just told her: funeral and cried.

My mom had to explain to her what I meant. I don't think she got how I thought the two issues were related.

October 30, 2008

Dear Diary,

Today in class, a girl asked me if I liked any of the boys in the class. We were sitting in a circle so they could hear me, and I thought I knew the obvious answer so I screamed out as the bell rang: Of course not! I hate all boys!

And hug my daughter hard...

And remember that we were born to dream.

And to forget barbaric wars.

See you soon...

Where the Dove Has Danced (for Azmi) 1989

By Pauline L. Arthur

I asked a friend,
who must remain nameless,
from where he came,
from which land or place.
His face got strange and pained
and his answer seemed quite insane
to one who had never been there.
“I come from nowhere,” he said, “Nowhere at all.
The houses and the walls of my country
have been ploughed under
like the olive branch and the orange tree
upon which the dove had lately danced.”

He took out faded, dumb pictures
cracked and withered as the faces of old women
sternly watching us from their safe refuge in the past
where they had lain half forgotten in tired, dusty albums
embellished with coy forget-me-nots.
The camera, speaking in foreverness,
had captured shadows, speechless and empty of destiny.
They were our interlocutors in a dialogue of silence
more eloquent than a conqueror's
borrowed rhetoric of power,
a dialogue of violence so often heard
by our muzzled shadows of rage.

Marked lambs for a poisoned feast,
we stutter, bleat to protest butchery.
Numbed and mute in slaughtered blood,
Checkered shrouds are flecked twice
in a calligraphy of bone shards
and fragmented history.

Suddenly the click of guns alerts us
and triggers a remembered tune.
Flute-like girls, too shy to speak,
rise up to encircle

the captured notes of a *dabkhee*.
Beneath lost trees their slender feet
tap out a dirge in orange petals.

So now our names of power and strength
appear as inscribed ghosts
written on sugared and hypocritical hearts,
sold in distant exile lands
where the children of our ancestors,
sucking on a temporary sweetness,
forget or are forgotten
where poets can only second guess
and write second-handed of
our loss and pain
but cry out with us our names:
WE ARE PALESTINIANS!
WE COME FROM PALESTINE!

A Eulogy for the Most Worthy¹

By Fatima Ibraheem

By the several graveyards that were a record of the past, I stopped. It was a melancholic mass murder of martyrs performed by the hands of merciless monstrous men perhaps a thousand years ago, not less. O, descendent of Adam – God’s elite, peace be upon you! O, descendent of Noah - God’s legacy, peace be upon you! O descendent of Abraham – God’s devoted believer, peace be upon you! O, descendant of Moses - God’s speaker, peace be upon you! O, descendant of Jesus – God’s spirit, peace be upon you! O, descendent of Mohammed – God’s beloved, peace be upon you! O descendent of Ali – God’s Crown Prince of the Faithful, peace be upon you! God cursed the people who slaughtered you! An everlasting shame shall be upon this condemned act...Where art thou? Where art thou?

O! It was during the sun-up of 10th of Muharram in the Islamic calendar - 680 CE, did all of this take place. An army composed of thousands against approximately seventy-two indescribably brave men. O! This battle brought the beliefs of mystic devotion and spirituality, religious tenets and principles, more than any other battle in the entire history! O Karbala! The soil that sought splendid blood, spirited knights, and ceaseless wails. The ground that held the meaning of fighting for the righteousness-banner, human freedom, and virtue, against dictators and autocracy, sword and violence. Even today, it will never be forgotten. It will be revived and remembered. We will for you, lament, forever and ever...the most worthy, the sacred. Around the golden dome, the doves revolve and hover. Beside the red flag, the air laments. Above the golden dome, the blue heaven cries. Under the golden dome, I stop...

This retrospection was the cause of the tears that flowed from my eye. Therefore, I clutched a handful of sand grains to receive an answer. The past record revealed, recounted and recalled every hero’s risk that was retaken on this battleground. The foes dared to burn their tents and torture the children; but the glory of the heroes, they dare never to hide. Where art our saviors that once mowed down the bloodthirsty? Where would our fate lead to, after all of them, without? Where art the justice-establishers and rightly scholars? Where are the revolutionaries and equality revivals? Where art the saints we are ought to approach? The sand screamed to respond...

I strolled in the barren sand sea to search for any signs. Nothing. My memory was the only mention for a sign. So I restored the images...wailing women beside the dead bodies, waiting under a wave of divinity and providence, wandering around desperately without a word. One of them fell on her knees, stretched out her arms and pleaded, “Where are the sons of the sacred; the great after the glorious and the lumi-

nescent after the luminous? Where are the rules of Religion, the symbols of Science, and the light of Law? Where are the publishers of the righteousness banner? Where are the eliminators and abolishers of injustice and aggression...?”

My attention got distracted; it was disturbed by the baby on the far left of the battlefield. His last cries were still heard as he suffered from the spear that stuck out of his arteries. Parallel to his position was the pot of water that lay partially shattered beside the Plucky. The Plucky...he who promised the little girl in the tent to bring her water from the Euphrates...but it was sieged by the dishonorable foes. The young girl looked around longingly at the lousy leopards that dared to attack her uncle, and innocently questioned, “Where is my protector, where did he go? What have you done to him? Why did he leave without returning back?”

Soothing her was the well bred stallion that stood on the bloody sand sea. His neck bent down with grief. His eyes shimmered with sadness. His energy sucked by hopelessness. It was her turn to comfort him...caress his collar carefully, did she. After the third rub, did the blue heaven bawl tears of blood, expressing its sorrow. The monsters started to hang the holy heads high on spears. Blinded those eyes, did the undying halo. It was intolerable, the women were chained up and assembled together to march under the scorching sun, from Karbala’a to Sham, and then into the Palace of the Damnest of all God’s creations. Ever...

“This is enough! Enough!” I cried.

My mother who was beside me fiddling with piles of cotton bandannas and cubes of ice steered her face towards me and looked worried and fearful, “What’s wrong dear, did you have a bad dream?” My body language vividly answered; there was no need for any verbal reply. “It’s ok dear. It’s only the effect of your fever...”

I sighed, “No, this is real mum...where is the demander for their unjustly spilt blood...the blood of the killed in Iraq’s battle of Karbala’a? Where?”

I Mourn

By Fatma al-Sumaiti

I

mourn

My tree, a friend,

Her laugh, Loss,

Faith, Trust, Life,

Love, The rain, A smile,

Delicacy, Potency, Empathy,

Harmony, Audacity, Tranquility,

Security, Responsibility, Maturity,

Amnesty, Creativity, Mentality,

Altruism, Authenticity, Vehemence,

Revelation, Courage, Wishing well,

Health, Infinity.

I mourn, I mourn, and yet I mourn endlessly.

Oh mourning, I set you free.

I sigh,

I smile.

Clear Conscience

By Walah al-Sabah

Perfect serenity

A still and peaceful nirvana

Such is the condition of a clear conscience.

Who would I show it to? W S Merwin, “An Elegy”
By Nur Soliman

To read it out would be like unfolding a tiny flowerbud open.

Still, to write it is like sending a “sorry I missed you” note;

A stuttering glimmer, a note travelling the universe,

To one of the greatest gentlemen I’ve ever known.

Liberation of Thoughts

By Anwaar al-Asousi

The spherical moon shone dazzlingly in the night sky. A mixture of black and shades of blue painted the sky sketching numerous stars along with it. The reflection of the moonlight shimmered on the surface of the river, dancing by the wave of the gentle night breeze. A nearby cherry blossom tree was embraced by the moonlight and was swallowed by the darkness of the night at the same time. Few scattered petals twirled around the tree and some surrendered to the gravity's force and fell on the ground. With a gentle wave from the night breeze, the petals were sent soaring higher in the sky. Aside from the cherry blossom's soft melody, it was the perfect night for a walk.

The faint sound of footsteps nearing the scenery was heard. A man in his late twenties named Dane emerged and stood near the cherry blossom tree. The playful breeze teased him by gently swaying his hair and his clothes. A gentle smile crept on his lips as he closed his eyes. He inhaled the fresh air which filled his nostrils then exhaled it. His eyes fluttered open and stared directly at the shimmering river in front of him.

Many thoughts were jammed within his mind. Work, life issues, friends, family, his love life and everything else he thought about. However, all of this was in need for some kind of liberation. He needed to set free those thoughts so that he could be at ease once again.

Switching jobs as well as recently getting married didn't make things easier for him at all. Day by day he worked hard to prove himself worthy for his job as an accountant and worthy as a husband. It would not be long until he dropped dead from exhaustion. This was just the beginning of his new life and he was a little bit tired. Therefore, he needed a short escape from reality.

It was as though the breeze was aware of his current state, which was why it teased him once again. This time he let out a chuckle and said, "If you were a person, I would've embraced you." Just then, the breeze enveloped his whole body as a response to his words. Dane released both hands while raising his head to the sky. He felt complete freedom surrounding him. His thoughts weren't completely liberated, but he decided to call it a day. His hands dropped to their original position; his head was slowly lowered and swiftly he turned around after saying goodbye.

Carry on in Silence

By Mohammed Daoud

For the man in the overcoat eating lunch alone, gaze fixed on the wall;
For the wonderful, laughing artist who now drives a cab in the winter;
For the sleepy accountant who doesn't come home 'til late at night;
For the journalist muted by a truth drowned in forms and bureaucracy;
For the child on a bench, toying silently with a lonely piece of string;
For the retired teacher, now aching in the back, heart as big as the world;
For the grey-haired man, growing old, who used to like the sunset;
For the shepherd under a palm tree with tired eyes ablaze.

Spectrum

By Maryam Temershin

It's hard to write when you think too hard,
the ink comes out scratchy and dark.
To get through a passage alone is hard,
and the poem sits lead-heavy and dark.

Then a deep thing, locked light under folds
floats lightly over it, as a pheasant in the field.
The lines are gently tugged off the page folds;
they're recited brightly in an invisible field.

eyes warm

By Ghaida H Mohammad

Mother's eyes are splendid slides
into my playful memories.
Like pale stars in dim skies,
they give their warmth with ease.

Her daughter, I was perplexed and awed,
at the world she was able to see:
following her like romantic perfume—
she wasn't aware of me.

She was still young when I was younger.
She comes from her pictures exalted,
married under a Lebanon moon.
I think it sweet, Ma, to be melted.

But behind our opaque house walls
my face stands as a shadow:
I looked over her every step
since her milk was still in my marrow.

From fifty to twenty-five,
I grew with her, like her.
Her self is not my own, but
somewhere, she's me.

You don't speak of the pictures, Ma,
but as you get wiser,
you loosen your chestnut eyes,
and their musky warmth gets *wider*.

Three Men

By Fahad al-Refai

Three men: a Jew, Christian and Muslim

As often happens in life, disaster strikes.

One is left alone in this world

One is now an orphan, with two baby siblings

One in a Widower – his wife dies giving birth to his daughter

10 years pass

The first fell in love and got married – his wife is 6 months pregnant

The second got a job, he raised his siblings well. Both are in college that he's paying for. They both think of him as their hero

The last raised his daughter; she is the light of his life. And to her he is not just her father, but her best friend and protector.

But disaster strikes again

September 11th

The towers fell.

The first's wife was visiting her father who worked in the tower. He was so excited about being a grandfather.

The second's siblings were in the plane that crashed, they were visiting him from college to celebrate his birthday.

The third brought his daughter to work today, she got lost when the planes crashed. He was never able to find her.

They all died – leaving the 3 men alone again.

The three men were broken

The Jew went to the Temple

The Christian went to Church

The Muslim went to the Mosque

None of them could believe god existed. For if he was real they wouldn't have let
them die.

Yet they all of them were afraid that god wasn't real. Because if he wasn't real then there
is no heaven or hell – no after life. If so then those that they loved are truly gone.

So all three prayed, begging him to be real, while they all knew he could not.

They walked through life, shadows of their former selves.

A few weeks later,

When the rubble was cleared.

A Jew, Christian and Muslim wandered ground zero

And the three men met,

They sat down, each lost in his own thoughts.

One of them, later none of them were sure which, began to talk.

He began to talk about the one he lost.

Soon the other two began to join him.

They told each other all they remembered, all they knew about the ones they lost.

When one talked of happy times, the other two laughed.

When one talked of hard times, the other two listened in understanding.

When one talked of how he missed them, the other two shed tears of grief.

They talked.

They talked till the sun set.

They talked till the night grew old.

They talked till a new day dawned.

And when they ran out of things to talk about, they all waited in silence, once again
each lost in his thoughts.

Without a word,

The Jew,

The Christian,

And the Muslim

All rose and left.

The three will never meet again

But because a Jew met a Christian and a Muslim

Because a Christian met a Muslim and a Jew

Because a Muslim met a Jew and a Christian

For an unexplained reason

Because they met

They began to believe in God again.

Dylan and Hopkins

By Maryam Temershin

It is in the silent wellspring
of light filling the
hollow of the leaf

Tender green. In the
coursing threads of gold
through stems, and
in the lily-coloured waves of
swept secret petal.

Glory, eloquence is trumpeted
clarion-clear,
without a single inked
or spoken word.

And the poetry of Dylan and Hopkins
are silently, forever,
recited first-naturally
with heart's wings wide, happily
in the driven green.

Change

By Fatma al-Sumaiti

Who I am is far away from who I was

Uncertainty is what I face when I come to question now and then

Am I the variable or are those faces I see in constant change

How shall I proceed?

Shall I fight alterations and become what I've forgotten once again?

Shall I inhale this alien and let it be the forever me?

I choose to be not who I am today

For change will always seep into me

The dirt I'll release...

The pain'll be deceased...

The right is when this essence of mine is at ease...

I shall not be a remorseful soul in lament of what was yesterday

I accept that change will come... I accept it's only for the best...

As for the rest... for the people whose souls I've wounded

For that I shall regret forgetting the right from the left

I serve you my tears on a platter of pardon

I am at the deepest of sorrow for being the reason of your distress

I shall embrace this change... I shall wish you nothing less

I shall make it a divine epiphany of what life's all about...

I am not who I was yesterday...

I am not who I am this very day...

I am the child of righteous change...

I am the soul of just resolution...

Wonderland and the Magic of the Ballot Box

By Gholam Reza Vatandoust

In its thirty years of topsy-turvy existence, Wonderland has held more elections than any other country on the face of this earth. This is a sign of grandeur, civil society and democracy for Wonderland, where the Supreme Guardian, the self proclaimed savior of the world, would sublimely guide his flock towards heavenly bliss. Wonderland proclaims to be a free and democratic state with open and fair elections in which God's representative, the guardian and trusted Holy Padre, would ensure that no rights were undermined. This view was generally endorsed until the elections of the 12th of June 2009. The outcome exposed another side of Wonderland, one different from what was previously assumed. The situation was brought to light by the miracle of the Ballot Box.

On June 12th there was magic in the air, the magic of the ballot box. Wonderland's Supreme Leader had already provided an injunction some nine months earlier, asking the incumbent President to prepare for four more years of service to humankind. But the elections proved contrary to the wishes of his Eminence. Out of 475 candidates for the presidency, only four were approved by the College of Cardinals or the "Guardians." The most popular of the four presidential candidates, heading the Green movement, acquired some 20 million votes. But the miracle of the ballot box changed all that. Out of the box emerged the incumbent President, an ultra-conservative principalist, dedicated to serve the wishes of the Supreme Padre. As succinctly explained by a cartoon in the *International Herald Tribune* of June 24th under the title of 'Theocracy explained', it shows his Eminence telling two voters: 'You vote, God decides.' As appropriately predicted, God decided that for the sake of nuclear peace and fraternal love, the incumbent President should rise out of the Ballot Box.

Only a few hours after the polls closed late in the evening of June 12th, results of a grand victory was forecast by the official media of Wonderland. At 2 a.m. on the morning of June 13th, less than four hours after the polls closed, preliminary results were announced with the incumbent President leading the way. The votes were released in blocks of two million, without any indication as to where in Wonderland these votes were cast. In every instance, the champion of liberty and world peace was declared riding high on the road to victory. Later that same notorious day of June 13th the votes were switched to blocks of five million. However, the percentage announced for each of the four candidates remained unchanged until all the 39 million votes were counted. The miracle was stupefying. Throughout the country, the electorate had voted in exactly the same proportion for each of the four candidates. In the final call, the ordained one had acquired over 24 million votes, some 62.5% of the

electorate. Further miracles indicated that in several provinces, the total votes outstripped the eligible voters. Surprisingly, the incumbent president was supported in regions in which he was least popular, such as provinces occupied by religious and ethnic minorities who had suffered most under his prudent leadership. The other candidates even acquired fewer votes in their respective hometowns where they have their political and social base of support. This is the true magic of the Ballot Box.

Despite the shock and awe, His Eminence, the Holy Padre, validated the results by extending his congratulations to the incumbent, even before the Council of Guardians had an opportunity to investigate the wide reaching protests. The public however felt otherwise. Millions of disenfranchised voters came out into the streets demanding back their votes. The Circus was about to begin. The battered streets of Wonderland were now a big performing theatre. It was a primetime show to watch. Every day, thousands took to the streets to reclaim their votes. Their demands were simply “give back my vote.” The authorities took the threat seriously and ordered a crackdown. This has continued for months on end.

The reformers appropriately duped as “godless” liberals and western spies, diabolically known as the Greens, had now landed in the famous Evin prison, known as the country’s Open University. They were kept there against their will and for their own safety, in order to protect them against the mercenary thugs, notoriously known as the Janissaries of Wonderland. These soldiers of fortune were most eager to rape and conquer for the Holy Padre. After all, whether you kill or get killed for his Eminence is a blessing. You conquer both the heaven and the earth, and you are blessed either way.

One recently raped victim described his ordeal in detail: “They take you to a miracle room where the walls speak to you. You view your entire life fleeting past you. You must experience heaven and hell. They talk about salvation while they kick you in the rear end. As you fall, they hit you again and again, demanding repentance. The louder you plead the more they demand. While you lie on the hard concrete bleeding from the nose, begging for mercy, they rip your pants and complete their act. They then pour icy water over you to freshen your soul. The cell is designed to break you to save you. You have no choice; all you can do is submit while you plead for clemency.”

The Greens who were out to redeem their “stolen” votes were now branded as traitors of Wonderland. They had defied the Holy Padre by their overwhelming presence in the elections as they cast their votes for the Greens. By not having voted for the ordained candidate they had disrespected his Eminence. In fact they had served the enemy. Further objection to the miracle of the Ballot Box had landed them in Evin University, where, God willing, they will remain there for their own protection and as

long as their re-education necessitates. Despite themselves, this was needed for their redemption.

What makes Wonderland so special is its visionary leadership that is seldom seen elsewhere on earth. Perhaps one puff on the magic opiate flute is sufficient to hallucinate into the ever wonderland of self deception and grandeur. Opium can do wonders, particularly of high quality. They call it the Napoleonic brand, produced in the neighboring Afghanistan and abundantly available to the ordained and the select few. Only five puffs are enough. It will elevate you to heaven itself. Soon you fly above the clouds and your mind is crystal clear. Opium strengthens and broadens the vision and provides self illusion beyond limits. While hallucinating you are no less than God himself. In fact you transcend God, and commandeer the sheep to servitude and obedience. You become Thou, the Almighty, the Supreme Padre, all in one.

The magic of Wonderland is its ability to erase its past, particularly those popular among the wretched of the earth. The magic of Wonderland is its dictates, which goes beyond the Ten Commandments. 'Thou shalt not question the elections,' 'Thou shalt lie in order to protect the *nezam* (system),' 'Thou shalt punish those who march in the streets demanding their votes.' Appointed by God himself, He is the Master. Therefore, history is rewritten, and clichés are made to stand tall on their heads. Wonderland is a living proof that all 'animals are not after all created equal, nor are they entitled to life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness,' unless ordained by the Supreme Padre. He alone has the audacity and the key to blissful happiness. No one else can acquire such a privileged position without his explicit consent. He is the righteous, entitled to nuclear peace and nuclear bliss.

The Wonderland show has continued into the New Year. The curtain is unlikely to fall in the foreseeable future. Who shall win remains a mystery. There is a power struggle between God's representative and his rebellious flock. The people continue to demonstrate their will in order to fight what they consider to be a 'stolen election.' But how God sees the whole scenario remains a mystery. Ultimately 'God decides.'
Inshallah

Spot On

Nur Soliman

“Oh, so you’ve *read* my essay on post-modern fiction in dying cultures?”
She laughs into the collar of her tweed coat while showing me the book.
“Well, I have to say it’s really hit the nail on the head, I mean, you *know*
what all those other writers are like; ha! I just *don’t* know what things are
coming to. And it’s been receiving quite a review, I mean, you didn’t hear
it from me, but it’s been quite the hit. People have said it’s the best thing
written on the subject in years!”

The café’s side-lamps

cast blush-coloured light

on pale air that heaves.

while her black coffee is thick and dark, reflecting no light off her eyes.

Shone into the blue

of the evening bright

between the leaves

while she readjusts thick glasses, blinking blankly, not looking anywhere.

“And it’s in the beginning, too. Criticism’s just heading in the right direction, um,
don’t you think? Well um, I mean there isn’t ever one absolute answer to questions
of literature, but we all know who’s right in the very end, just between the two
of us, hm? The conference we’re going to? I’m keynote speaker! Isn’t that great?
Not the most interesting topic – I mean, it’s been done *before*, oh! so many times,
But nobody’s complaining, and besides, it always creates good discussion, right?”

I pay for our tea and coffee, poems radiant unwritten on the check.

Before a painting by Ayvazovsky
By Kevork Awakimian

The irritated waves
Of the sea,
Colliding
In forming frenzy
Rear up
And gather themselves
With a fearful glow;
While in that vast
And boundless space
The raging hurricane Howls.

Brush in hand,
The old magician,
Cries out, "Stop!"
To the wild elements,
Silent and docile
At the master's voice,
Those angry seas,
At the height of their furry,
Freeze upon the canvas,
Immobile in their motion:
Behold them before us!

Hell Hath No Fury

By Walah al-Sabah

I am a sea of rage..

Screaming with every wave.

Disappointed at humanity.

Which is beyond getting saved.

I am a face.

Standing among the crowd.

But no one seems to hear me.

When I scream out loud.

I am your fellow human.

I have the key for us to survive.

Yet you never appreciate our kind.

And you bury us alive.

I am your fellow sister.

And brothers, you have been warned.

Because hell hath no fury.

When women like me are scorned.

*This is not dedicated to womankind because not all women care for the interests of their fellow women or humans. Rather, this poem is dedicated to strong, righteous, moral women who have to fight everyday to survive just because they are women. It is to them that I dedicate this tribute.

My Trash

By Kurt-Frederick Mähler

Blood Bank Street, Herat, Afghanistan

Thanksgiving, November 2007

Concluding that it was ridiculous to pay someone to take out the garbage, I fired the young man who had sought employment for this job.

The next evening as I walked to the street dumpster, garbage pails in hand, a small flock of boys rushed to meet me.

“Let me take that from you!” one said.

Another barked at him, “That’s my trash! You stay away from him!”

Another said, “This foreigner has plenty of garbage for all of us. Calm down.”

Before I could lift the lip of the pail to the mouth of the dumpster, the boys had already begun to rummage. As I poured the trash, another boy went into the dumpster along with it, retrieving objects.

This is the world of the scavengers of Herat. They are villagers who have come to scour the waste of the city dwellers for things redeemable for cash: aluminum and tin cans, plastic water bottles, copper wire, iron scraps, glass jars -- anything else worthy of the flea market.

A block up the road is the central sorting post for our neighborhood. There is a space of pavement underneath the billboards where the scavengers consolidate their trash into categories before going off to the salvage merchants who buy a sack of old plastic shoes for 10 cents (to recycle into new plastic shoes) or an armload of copper wire for a dollar.

Above the hagglers, larger-than-life banners of clean-shaven men and happy children celebrate new cell phones, new shampoo and new dishwashing liquid. Beneath their smiling faces lie the empty bottles of the latter two products. Men and boys search the off-scouring of a thousand kitchens one last time, like clam diggers hoping to stumble across a pearl. Due to decomposition, the overall hue of the rubbish is a black one; but there is a certain potato chip consumed here that comes in a bright red and yellow package. Hundreds of these tattered packages are scattered throughout the dark debris, giving the impression of flames licking the feet of the scavengers. It is an Afghan *Gehenna* (Arabic *jehanam*).

The boys have taken on the hue of the garbage. They wear a layer of the filth on their faces as if they had just emerged from a coal mine. The smallest ones are the darkest. This is because older brother lifts little brother into the dumpster. The four-year-old wades through the rubbish inside, while the ten-year-old receives the objects of value kid brother hands to him.

The Italians did not intend to create this trash-sorting industry when they donated several hundred silver dumpsters to the city of Herat, along with a bright green garbage truck. The Italians intended to make the trash disappear. Instead, the vicinity of each dumpster has become a blackened sorting station, with regional sorting depots like the one described above.

Who are these people? They are boys like Samad, who appears to be eight. (He does not know his age.) His family has come from a village where drought and war and poor wages make for a most stern living situation. Samad is illiterate. He does not go to school. While the city boys fly kites on the weekends, Samad is finding stale bread to sell as chicken feed, so his family can eat as the chickens do.

Samad is more fortunate than most. Instead of carrying his collection in a sack, his family has provided him with a cart. He can sort the trash as he goes along.

I help him go through the family trash.

“Here are some dead batteries,” I say. “Do you need these?”

“Yes,” he replies.

“What about these cans?” I ask.

“Yes.”

I inform him, “Listen, son, my boy saves our cans in a bag. When the bag is full I place it right here, in this corner of the dumpster. When you come by, look there, and you will find it.”

The boy is too dazed to say anything. It is cold. He is hungry. He will eat once he has sold my trash.

Then there is the old man with a goat. Also from a village where life is more like a hostile planet than Mother Earth, he has come to the equally alien environment of asphalt and electricity. Youth on motorcycles mock his progress, taunting him with a rebel yell as he makes the circuit of dumpsters.

But the ignominy is a price worth paying if he can find slop for his animal.

“Sir,” I tell him, “every day I have a bucket full of food waste; everything from carrot peelings to the food we could not eat because we were full. I place it in this dumpster in the same place. Make note of it; you will find food here.”

“Thank you,” the old man says.

It is a holiday morning. It is time to take out the garbage. I want a clean home for the holiday and the trash bucket is giving off a bad odor that will spoil the occasion.

As I open the door, six dumpster boys are walking by. I watch them pass. I see their shadows halt abruptly. They are filling my doorway now.

“Please!” they shout excitedly, “allow us to empty your trash pails!”

For a moment, I talk to them in my mind:

This is my trash, boys. My trash. What are you doing looking so hungrily at my trash? This is personal to me. It belongs to me. Granted, I am placing it in the municipal dumpster, but give me a minute to emotionally disconnect with my used tissue paper and Pepsi cans before your grubby hands lay hold of them.

Their smiles disarm me. I smile too. I hand them my pails. A seventh, older boy arrives and takes charge of the sorting process.

I hand the smallest boy the largest pail. It is almost as tall as he is. Delighted, he immediately thrusts both arms deep into the rubbish. Then he cries out in pain.

A shard of glass has pierced his finger.

I had forgotten that at the bottom of this pail were the remains of an outdoor light I had fixed above my storeroom. It was a security light, whose burning bulb guarded my possessions at night. But autumn rains and cold winds had shattered the hot glass.

And now the boy in front of me is bleeding because of my security light.

I Am Just Curious About The Unjust World We Live In: Response to The Bookseller of Kabul by Åsne Seierstad

By Fatima Ibraheem

There is a thirty-three year old **blonde**.
She is, of throwing typical clichéd stereotypes, **fond**.

She thinks that publishing a book gives her the **authority**,
to describe her experiences in a tone full of **acidity**.

After she successfully completes her absolute Western **agenda**,
she lies on her couch with a coke by her side, takes a cruel triumphant breath and
reads the reviews of her book that make her **engender**.

Just like an intruder, she spends three months in Afghanistan with a **family**,
to claim that she knows all about Islam's **harmony**.

She thinks that part of her fieldwork is to go over some Afghani **lab-rat**,
and journalize in a naïve, superficial way, which is nothing more than **narrative-flat**.

"...[D]ons a burka, the garment prescribed by Islamic fundamentalist, and describes
what it's like to go about fluttering, billowing, half-suffocated, and half-blind," says *Los
Angeles Times* Book Reviewer, Michael **Harris**.

He adds, "[T]his is a story of individuals struggling for **happiness**..."
Bull's eye! 'Your file has been successfully uploaded,' stereotype **headmistress**!
Anne Saab from *Greenhouse News-Record* confidently claims "[H]er objectivity makes
her story impossible to dismiss."

I did not know that 'objectivity' is defined by inserting judgmental words while "objec-
tively" **reporting**.

There is only one truth; it's either I'm on the right track or she has a shameful hole in
her education and **learning**.

Are you satisfied? Of course you're **not**!
There is a lot to say, to say a **lot**.

"Seierstad offers a sharply focused view...in light of the vividness and immediacy of
her account," says Christina Maranci from *Shepherd Express*.
I wonder, is over-simplifying cultural and religious beliefs, considered a "focused view"

and an “immediate account”?? Oops! I forgot! In her world, it’s a definite “**yes!**”

Her purpose is to feed into the already-manufactured Western **stereotype**, that is, for her, an Islamic Genotype and an Afghani **Phenotype**.

“He [Sultan Khan - her Afghani protagonist] was a believer, but a moderate Muslim. He prayed to Allah every morning but usually ignored the following four calls to prayer...He reluctantly respected the fast during Ramadan and did not eat between sunup and sundown, at least not when anyone was looking,” narrates Seierstad on page **12**.

In feedback, and as a pious Muslim, I am more than ready to analyze, debate and critically **delve**.

I intend to delve into her previous contradictory statement.

Based on what does she evaluate Sultan as a ‘moderate’ Muslim while he “usually ignored the following four calls to prayer” and “reluctantly respected the fast during Ramadan”?? Its contradiction is blindly **radiant!**

It is imperative to put in mind that I’m doing this for the sake of bringing the truth to everyone’s **attention**, as this will result in a good sense of required **correction**.

Certain traits of a journalist, she obviously seems to **lack**.

This weakness has befallen her into the trap of viewing the world in dichotomies; either white or **black**.

In fact, she has fallen into a much dangerous, deeper **hole**, since her judgment was solely based on what she physically viewed, and she neglected the most essential part; intellect, mentality, ideological circumstances, and even **soul**.

A knowledgeable proprietor of a well-known book should know the proverb “never judge a book by its **cover**,” in order for her to critically and analytically avoid distinguishing between ‘The One’ and ‘The **Other**.’

Also, a highly educated individual should never superficially report and disregard questioning the **atypical**.

Such as polygamy, traditions, and the veil – or anything that seems to a Western culture, ‘**radical**.’

For centuries, respected educators have agreed upon the fact that journalism's efficiency/accuracy is highly dependable on questioning rather than **superficiality**, to produce a narrative piece that is genuine and not based on the stereotypical **artificiality**. I am curiously stunned by how easy a highly-ranked author can simply **be**, a flawed student who comes to be a prey of this unjust world...and a shameful **detainee**.

Man Drinking Tea in Tashkent

By Nur Soliman

Looking past Chorsu Bazaar, the only bright blue dome in my sight isn't even ours; it's Soviet. Or is it ours? I don't really know about these things. It doesn't matter. It really doesn't, no matter what everyone says. I like to lift my eyes past where they sell melon and *non* to see those old Asian oaks. I used to sit under them, by the small lake, reading those few-paged paperbacks in between my classes, reading the leaflets and pamphlets, brightly printed, that they sold by the bridge. I used to be a brilliant student, Ulugh Beg would have been proud. I studied astronomy in Samarqand, close enough to Tashkent, here. I studied those stars of al-Biruni and al-Farqhani, studied it so well. Good enough to be in the first form of my class, they said to me back then. Russian? I asked back in '89 when they peered over my papers. "I don't speak Russian anymore, I don't read Cyrillic, either. Don't you know they never print in Cyrillic anymore? Or Uzbek, for that matter, but that's beside the point. It's Uzbek I speak now: what else do you think fills my textbooks, my smudged ink notes? What else do you think fills up hours of conversation at the *chaikhana* (tea-house) with the boys?" The gnaw of rejection humbles me; they never told us we'd need to speak Russian. Things are different now, of course: the Lenin District is Mirobod, where the relatives are, but I sometimes forget. I speak Uzbek as I please to my Mrs. Halit, to Abdulhamid at the store. The pink slip is like a sentence. Arabic is required for the job? Well, the only Arabic I speak is in my prayers; and the Holy Book every evening. "I only speak Uzbek; I read the good Arabic, but no-one said I had to

“speak like an Arab.” They never told us Arabic was good on a resume. Being an accountant is alright; Mariana Sevastyanova doesn't grumble about my Russian or my Arabic. The pay keeps the house, I tell Mrs. Halit; it pays for the new washing machine we bought from Almaty. Of course, Almaty's cleaner, they say, Almaty's got all the latest jobs, but I don't think about it. I know what the children in Almaty speak. I know that Kazakh mothers sigh when they try and read Lewis Carroll to their children. But still I sit here eating *plov* and drinking hot sweet tea in soft misery. The wind from over Ferghana and Tehran blows cold and dry, and I sit and ponder whether bread was cheaper before '92, or whether I ought to go to the mosque more often. Those Farsi films are playing in the cinema across the street, but I only sit and lift the collar of my coat, and look past the Asian oaks where I used to sit. How lovely those evenings before wandering past Kukeldash Madrasa and past poplar-lined Soviet streets. By those Asian oaks, looking past Chorsu Bazaar, amulet-blue, where I didn't know the price of bread or felt nervous when I couldn't get Uzbek books at Jacov's store anymore, I know *I* never had to think of translation, never had to think of anything to do with anything, those days, But only thought of the stars.

Sketching

By Ghaida H Mohammad

Nude
figures on his
page

Scribbles on the February 2002 issue

of *Physics Today*

confident that the books

he checked out from the Suzallo Library

will make him intelligent

Intelligent books Intelligent writer.

The library is wise behind him

In black coat (he's pathetic)

sitting on the stone benches

The Next
Brilliant I

The Next Einstein
Manifesto.

Rainier cranes over

his doodles

The fountain of the UW

piazza

deluges his abstract

The nude fairies giggle

at this

A Brief Detour through the Hindu Kush

By Kurt-Frederick Mähler

This is an account of a journey from Termez, Uzbekistan, to Kabul, Afghanistan, 14 to 16 April 2002. I made this journey with two friends, Jonathan and Nicole. I had been manager of a training course for medical technicians at the Public Health Institute in Kabul during the days of the Taliban and fled just before the war started. I returned to see the changes. - KFM

After Jonathan, Nicole and I had made our way through a series of checkpoints and barbed-wire barriers, we walked across the “Friendship Bridge” connecting Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. We pulled a few pieces of rolling luggage. An Uzbek freight train was returning to Termez on the bridge as we walked, having just delivered a load of merchandise to Hayeratan. A little more than halfway across the bridge, Farsi graffiti began to cover the girders and concrete.

We said *Dosvedanya* to the last Uzbek guard, walked a few feet and said *Salaam Alekum* to the Afghan guard. He and other soldiers helped us carry our luggage the rest of the way to the border station.

A thin green carpet covered the desert plain north of Mazar-e-Sharif because of the abundance of rain that year. As we got closer to Mazar, red flowers known as *Gul-e-Lola* brightened the landscape.

“The flowers never bloomed while the Taliban were here,” our taxi driver said. “Now that the Taliban have gone, the flowers and the rain have come.”

In the morning, we plunged into a fray of overeager drivers for hire wanting to take us to Kabul. Each made a boast as to why he was the qualified candidate, while others would rebuke the boaster. Just about the time it looked the most confusing, we experienced a breakthrough and landed the perfect driver.

We toured smoothly through the provinces of ancient Balkh and Semangan, turning south into Baghlan. What amazed us over and over were the verdant hills and fields, splashed liberally with the lavender and scarlet of wildflowers. Even the mountains wore a faint green garment. Fattened sheep and goats feasted on the hillsides. We had never seen this Afghanistan before. For during our days under the Taliban, all was dry, barren and bare-bones.

There was one stretch of land that still seemed under the former curse, however.

South of the tight gorge of Tangi Tashkorghon, we came upon meadows that seemed to have been cut down with a crooked scythe. And indeed they had: the scythe of a plague of black grasshoppers. In some places, the grasshoppers were so thick that their carcasses splattered the asphalt with dark spots and a faint magenta slime.

The men and boys of this region gathered to combat the plague with brooms, branches and plastic sheets. Farmers relentlessly beat the ground to stir up the bugs and drive them into trenches, whereupon men buried them alive.

Periodically we passed uniformed soldiers marching. Here and there we saw the new tri-color of the nation, along with countless posters of Masood, the final man to fall in the epic tragedy of his generation.

And the closer we came to the Salang Pass - that mile-long tunnel separating north from south - the more we saw the hulks of Soviet tanks. There were scores of them. By the time we reached Kabul, we had seen at least seventy. Some were frozen in mid-attack, pointing at the oncoming traveler. Others, with gun barrels lowered and turned aside, seemed ashamed to have succumbed to the line of vehicles passing by.

Bad news awaited us at the foot of the Hindu Kush: the Salang Pass was blocked. Although it was the north side's turn to use the tunnel, there were still two days' worth of vehicles backed up on the south side. Therefore, the south-side tunnel chief would not give the "turn" back to the north side.

A jam of more than 100 vehicles and ten times as many people huddled at the base of the rocky ascent to the mouth of the tunnel. (The tunnel mouth was more than an hour and a half farther up into the snowy Hindu Kush, but no place nearer than the jam was suitable for waiting.) Trucks, busses, vans, jeeps and cars crowded one another so tightly that one had to slip sideways through them to reach the groups of men gathered here and there. Women and children remained in their vehicles. Some of the travelers had been waiting two days.

Set at an aloof distance beyond the jam was a canvas tent, the seat of the north-side tunnel authority. We made our way to the tunnel chief's tent. It was 10:30 a.m. He was asleep. After awakening him, we talked and also engaged in radio chats with the south side tunnel chief. It became clear that nothing would change that day.

We stayed overnight in a whitewashed, mud-brick "hotel room" in a flood-flattened hamlet known as "Stone Board." We enjoyed good interaction with the family running the place. They enjoyed our tale of the Good Samaritan, adapted for Afghan culture as the tale of the Good Hazara. (Hazaras are the hard-working Shi'ite

Turkic people firmly shoved to the bottom of the ethnic pecking order. In the eyes of Afghans, their unforgivable sin is that their forefather was Ghengis Khan, who wiped out whole cities here.)

The next day, as instructed, we showed up at the tent at 7:00 a.m. The tunnel chief was sleeping. His assistant, who was awake, radioed the south side. They were sleeping. But the south-side chief's assistant found enough coherence to talk. After a minute or two of groggy chatter, the two sides reached a stalemate in deciding whose turn in the tunnel it was that day. Although vehicles from the south side had been pouring through all night, there were still hundreds of vehicles backed up, the south-side chief said. Passengers coming through talked of being stranded all night in the tunnel. Water from melting snow had poured into the tunnel, filling up to more than four feet deep, increasing the amount of mud and debris that had already reduced the two-lane tunnel to one lane.

The north side tunnel chief awoke. He negotiated with the south side.

"The pass will open for you in two hours!" he said with assurance in his voice.

We waited for five hours in the wind and rain. An occasional shower of wind-driven pebbles from the cliff above pelted our van. Inside, Jonathan read Dostoevsky. Nicole did cross-stitching. I read a history of North Africa.

At noon the tunnel chief announced that the tunnel would be closed for four days: floods and debris had made it impassable.

We decided to take the 18-hour, two-day detour that would take us through four provinces: Baghlan, Bamiyan, Parwan and Kabul. We joined an exodus of scores of other vehicles doing the same thing. A number of the vans in our convoy were families from the village of Nahrin, destroyed in a series of earthquakes and aftershocks that continued for several days. These families were moving to live with relatives in Kabul.

Eventually about ten vans, including ours, teamed up for a drive which snaked through gorges, rice paddies, wheat fields, mine fields, floods, rivers, and bridges that seemed to have been designed by the makers of the Indiana Jones movies. We passed through a region that resembled the Painted Desert of Arizona and another that resembled a valley in the Swiss Alps. We passed by castle ruins and dusty villages.

We crossed to the south side at a place called Shibar Pass. It was a steep descent of switchbacks that rain had turned into a slippery quagmire. There were no guardrails

to put our hope in. The derelict Soviet tank at the peak of Shibar looked on our entourage in helpless concern.

Every river and irrigation ditch we passed was filled with water, some overflowing. For fear that our convoy would be caught in a flash flood, we pushed forward as far as we could go, to a town called the Mouth of Bamiyan.

Here, many of the trucks, cars and buses we had seen at the Salang also piled up. By 8:30 p.m., the town was swollen to about 900 travelers with no room at the inn. Many of us ate in our vehicles as the teahouse staff served rice and tea car-to-car.

The drivers decided among themselves to rest during the prime time for highway bandits and depart early the next morning to evade the feared floods.

As if on cue, everyone settled down in their seats to sleep. It was as if all 900 of us were in one big cot. The driver of the van next to us tucked me in with his extra blanket. Our own driver covered Jonathan and Nicole with his sleeping bag.

At 2:45 a.m. a driver gave a great yell to wake everyone up. Within seconds engines roared. There was a mad scramble for bathroom spots behind buildings and woodpiles, a mad dash to get back on board, and within twenty minutes, the Mouth of Bamiyan was a ghost town.

A driving rain sent the river over its banks and onto the road. Vehicles began breaking down, their drivers calling out to other passing drivers for whatever tool or spare part they needed. Men occasionally leaped out of their vehicles to help pull a car out of the mud. For a long time, our van was behind a diesel bus belching clouds of black smoke. As the morning wore on, vehicles of similar speed began lining up. By dawn we were with our group of ten vans again.

For lunch we had kabob and Pepsi in a town where everyone appeared to be hiding some big secret. Armed men leered at us from doorways and the corners of buildings. A black-bearded mujahedin commander frowned upon us from a balcony. We never learned what the secret was, but its presence was obvious enough that the drivers had their passengers eat in the vehicles; then we made a quick getaway.

By the afternoon we emerged from the eastern end of Parwan valley near Ghorband. Eroded cliffs fell away from a plain on which patches of sand and gravel competed. From a distance we saw what appeared to be a family reunion; there were clusters of vehicles and people. But the picnic was in a panic. The river had swollen and swallowed a few cars. Groups of men waded around in the river with cables and

ropes shouting in argument with one another. A top-heavy, over-decorated cargo truck leaned in mid-stream, exhausted and embedded in the river bottom. A Toyota Corolla looked as if it were in mid-dive with muddy water up to the windshield. Its driver had calculated that if he drove fast enough, the force of his vehicle would push the turbid waters back just long enough for him to cross. He didn't.

But our driver believed he could do the same thing. He convinced us that it was possible because of the superior clearance of his vehicle and because of his superior driving skills. "But what if we get stuck nonetheless?" we asked one another. "We can escape, but what about our luggage?"

To hedge the bet, our driver teamed up with two other van drivers to make a high-speed cue. Their view was the same as the ill-fated Corolla driver: if enough speed and weight is plunged into the river at the same time, then water will clear the engine just long enough for the vehicle to make it.

As our Kamikaze caravan gained speed to cross, we prayed. As it plowed through the river, we perspired. As it came out the other side, we praised God and the driver. He looked at us with a grin through the rear view mirror.

The final leg of our journey to Kabul took us across the broad plain of the Shamoli Valley north of the city. On this plain Ahmad Shah Masood ambushed the Russians in the 1980s and Pashtuns in the 1990s. On this plain the Taliban and their Punjabi and Al-Qaeda allies completely devastated the land. They bulldozed homes, uprooted vineyards, cut down fruit trees and took the women. On this plain, United States bombers turned Taliban tanks into blackened tinfoil. What had once been a line of trenches was now a neat row of craters.

Refugees were streaming back to their homes in a convoy running the opposite direction of ours. Others were already living in tent cities. Still others - looking bewildered - were picking through the bricks and broken branches of their homes and vineyards in an attempt to figure out where to start rebuilding.

After cresting a hill, we came upon the vista of the new Kabul. This was a city we had not seen before. The markets were full. The streets were full. Men sported every style from turbans to neckties, from beards to mustaches. A few women wore scarves and sunglasses rather than burqas. Many men wore pants rather than traditional clothing. A motorcade of black Benzes and clean-shaven motorcycle cops whisked dignitaries past us. Posters glamorized Afghan entertainers. A pair of Taliban military buildings looked as if two giant thumbs had flattened them, while all around, other buildings stood intact. Construction workers labored on a five-story, marble-covered commerce

center. Norwegians, Malaysians, and Germans patrolled the streets. Girls and boys carried their schoolbooks. Cell phones beeped here and there. There had been no such thing before. A blue-and-white airliner from Ariana Afghan Airlines glistened in the sky. They had virtually disappeared from the sky before.

Seeing these things helped us forget about being sore from the journey. Our thoughts turned to our Afghan friends.

The first place I went was the store of Ghulam Maideen in Shar-e-Nao. I had a bouquet of Shamoli Valley flowers for him and his sons. His store was bursting with new merchandise, looking even better than stores we used to see in prosperous Peshawar. Foreigner after foreigner busied himself at the cashier's counter.

I saw two of Maideen's sons - plus two more who had returned from exile -- but I did not see Maideen himself.

We greeted one another with great joy and the traditional barrage of salutations and hugs.

"How is your father?" I asked.

"Oh, you haven't heard?"

"No."

"He died 50 days ago."

I left the store for our accommodations in Kabul, seeing the city through tears.

The next day one of his sons took me to Maideen's grave. On the dust beside his marble sarcophagus I poured out the fragrant oil I had intended to give him. I chanted a dirge. I read Psalm 23 in Farsi.

His sons told me that Maideen carried around with him a certain card I had given him a few weeks before our evacuation, a card on which I had written verses from the words of the prophets. His sons told me that he cherished this card, and after he died, the sons framed it for display in their home.

I shall miss Ghulam Maideen.

Note:

It so happened that on the day he died, his picture appeared on the front page of USA Today.¹ The old, bearded man is grinning from ear to ear along with his middle-age son as part of an article that had been written about how Afghans felt relief over the fall of the Taliban. The journalist did not know Maideen died on the day his article was published. He identifies Ghulam Maideen as “Ajee [Haji] Maiden Nasrati.” Haji is a title of honor given to one who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca. “Nasrati” is Ghulam Maideen’s family name.

¹*Squitieri, Tom. “Kabul Dreams of Turning Back the Clock; Craves Normalcy of the 70s.” USA Today. Page A01. 16 January 2002.*

Driving to the Saudi borders at night

By Mohammed Daoud

Ink can sufficiently describe it, but it's too dark
for the leafed brush on fields of sand, the color of night.
Behind a sky big enough to forgive us, holy, holy, holy
arabesques spinning with the most invisible light.

I fly

By Amal Behbehani

I fly so high
That the clouds can't cover my sunshine
I fly so high
That the rain can't stop my smile
I fly so high
That the thunder can't strike my stride
I fly so high
That the smoke can't haze my sight
I fly so high
That the dust can't cloud my senses
I fly so high
That the present can't blur my past
I fly so high
That you can't see the tears in my eye

Walls that can never speak

By Alia Mustafa Aref

The sun illuminates your alley ways
Gathering every twist in its heat
My clothes flutter behind me in your warmth
As I wander your busy streets
Children running, Children screaming
Children laughing, I start humming
Gliding through the souq
Past fruits and spices
Sweet honey nectar of our labor
The ruffling of silks and cotton
The flow of garments coming and going
Men, women and children alike
Going to and fro some buying
Some passing by,
Just then the sound of the athan rings in my hear
The glorious praise of Allah fills the souq
Muathen's voice is heavy and passionate
As he calls out for the afternoon prayer
Shifting their focus towards the great masjid
The souq closes gradually
I move to go along to the great masjid
When I find myself staring at the sun
Suddenly I find myself at Alhambra

The palace is empty
Where did they all go?
I run through the palace grounds
Every room is deserted
I call out for my family
My children, my husband
I run from room to room
My bare feet patting through the palace hallways
Echoing in my ear
Frantic, tears running down my face,
I dig my fingers into the palace walls
I bleed, my fingers digging deeper
Screaming, trapped inside a maze of wonder
Damned to wander the halls of my palace alone
Forced to relive the old days
The glory days, the golden age
My pride, my country, my identity
Gone forever, vanished
Lost in these walls that can never speak.

The Following Happens at a Bullring

By Monica Matta

The following happens at a bullring, but with no bulls, just a girl standing in the middle of the bullring. The place is like a prison with spikes around the top of the fence. The girl has strong feelings of guilt and she has a feeling that everyone in the stadium is watching her and is ready to judge every move she makes. Soon the spikes start turning into faces of her lover. Each spike has a memory of him or a special moment she spent with him.

After a bit, she realizes that the stadium is empty except for figures representing her own feelings of fear of commitment, of not being able to be what she wanted to be, of not being able to do what she wanted to do. Fear of getting trapped with her “lover” forever. At the same time, some of these spikes have feelings of guilt. She’d feel guilty if she walked out on her love, the one love who has sacrificed his life for her during the past few years, who has been faithful, patient, and ever so tolerant. She loves him so much she can’t live without him; yet, at times, she wishes he never existed.

The girl quickly finds herself turning into a young lady and even quicker comes the time when she has to choose what she wants to do with the rest of her life. With her spectators, guilt and fear, watching her, she knows it deep inside that she has to choose her “lover.”

Her heart is torn under the pressure. She spots him waiting for her with his warm smile and welcoming arms at an exit to the left. At the same time she sees symbols of her life and ambitions at another exit to the right.

She hates herself more and more every time she tries to think about or even compare her options. She doesn’t move, standing there in the middle, shattered on the inside, pretending that everything is normal and that she is very happy.

Under all the pressure, she carries what’s left of her towards her lover, knowing that this will be the last she hears of her dreams. She slowly moves into the prison of her lover’s paradise-like arms.

Confused Eyes

By Yousef Nayef

Have you seen a child

Who knows his way to heaven?

There he is walking in the narrow holy streets

With unshakable pride

Following his friends

For they know the way to heaven too

Even though some of them think that missiles
are a sign for celebration

And today is a celebration

To all boys and girls

Woe to those who miss this celebration

There they are walking

Traces of sweat behind them

Stones in their hands

Their target is clear under the shining Sun

They never look back

Or think of escaping one day

If only they wouldn't grow up

And stay friends

And stay together ... One hand

Do they walk under the Sun, father?

Does the earth burn their feet, father?

Don't they sleep, father?

To where are they gazing, father?

... Ask them

For they say

That fear shook when it saw them

And that the earth evened for them to walk
upon it

... Ask them, for they know themselves more
than I do

Have you ever seen a child
Who knows his way to heaven? ... There he is ...
ask him.

A Face that Has a Name

By Walah al-Sabah

The pressure is mounting.
Everyone looks the same.
Tanned skin and blond hair.
All faces with no names.

Skinny legs and matchstick arms.
They think it's oh-so-cool.
Most of them have no identities.
Unless defined by jewels.

There's no sense of uniqueness.
They look down on you if you're not the same.
But at least you have an identity.
You're a face that has a name.

* He who trims himself to suit everyone will soon whittle himself away. - Raymond
Hull

Crimson Creek

By Fakheema Badri

I hear my inner self cry out, but I muffle the screams
Letting them fade into just another whisper in the distance
Slowly drifting into the eerie empty silence of the night
As my heart bleeds, flowing into a vast crimson creek

I struggle in a vain attempt to stay afloat
As the heaviness of my heart threatens to pull me down
Threatens to drown me in its depth
But then waves of numbness crash into me

Yet I feel the pain strike with each collision
And I go under...
Drowning in the river of past evil deeds
Falling into a never-ending bottomless pit,

Blind, deaf, silent and unfeeling
Oblivious to everything
Into the hollow sinister depths, I fall...
Into the dark crimson creek, I bleed...

Sans sense
Sans breath
Sans life...

Something I Saw as I Looked out the Window at the American University of Kuwait.

By Kurt-Frederick Mähler

The man in the white *dishdasha* rolled his bulk forward on the bench. He leaned an elbow on his knee, letting the ash trickle from his Winston. Between and during each drag he looked at his phone's info display. Aviator sunglasses hid his eyes.

Half a meter away stood a woman in maroon uniform with white trim. Her black hair showed a strand of gray colored with henna. She had travelled 4,248 kilometers to reach this spot. She had left her teenage daughter in Dhaka with an aunt.

From the corner of her hazel eyes she caught sight of the cigarette, which was near its end. In silence she moved toward the dying thread of smoke coming from the man's fingertip. The man did not lift his gaze from the phone display. He must have felt the approaching heat of the cigarette, though, for he flicked the butt away. The woman in maroon swept it into her long-handled pan with one silent move of her long-handled broom. Then she moved on.

Half a meter to the right were three men in white. Their eyes were covered with aviator sunglasses. They spoke to one another in the staccato mutter of local dialect. A thin thread of smoke rose from a fingertip of each of the men. From the corner of her hazel eyes, the woman in maroon noticed. She silently moved close to the dying stubs.

Flick.

She swept it up.

Flick.

She swept it up.

Flick.

She swept it up.

Half a meter to the right, she tipped the long-handled pan into the waste bin, an aluminum cylinder with two holes on either side for rubbish. For a hat this silver sentry wore a cap of pale sand, sand as pristine as a dune of the *Rub Al-Khali*.

Next week, the woman in maroon travels 4,248 kilometers to visit home. It has been three years since she has seen her daughter. She has grown tall, the aunt tells her.

After she leaves, the smoking men will flick ashes at her maroon replacement. She will have travelled 4,248 kilometers to move their butts one half meter.

Note:

A *dishdasha* is a robe-like, full-length garment worn by men of the Arabian peninsula.

The Rub' al-Khali – “Empty Quarter” in English – is one of the largest deserts in the world. It is about 250,000 square miles (402,336 square kilometers) of sand dunes and uninhabited wasteland in Saudi Arabia.

Superstition

By Mariam al-Enezi

I am of the superstitious folk
Where all light becomes shadow's snare
And stars laugh at other's despair.
Where villainish protagonists of nightmares
Slither where every shadow lies
And death strikes poison before the blind blink their eyes.
Where translucent visions are rule to come,
We travel in packs of perfumed protection
Knowing not but our chosen detention
As we sit down to drink blessed tea leaves
A stumbled step swears oaths of misfortunes
Yet cookies are star-questioned fortunes
As we chant devils out of beads
Oh such lives live we
Of superstition's rooted tree.

The Fibers of a Plant Stem

By Maryam Temershin

It has its own secret light the way they run together
is kind of like streams of light bound brightly,
running together upwards, as a bird in flight,
kind of like a poem in lime, chartreuse, and spring.

Dedication to Mother Nature

By Walah al-Sabah

How can I ever feel alone?
When the sun shines in the morn.
And the birds sing to wake me up.
And I feel like a newborn.

How can I close my eyes?
While colorful fishes swim in the stream.
And children laugh and play.
As I lay on the grass and dream.

How can I turn away from life?
While the breeze flirts with my hair.
And the ocean soaks my feet.
While the butterflies surround the air.

How can we ever give up?
When handicapped children laugh and smile?
And the journey of life
Suddenly seems worthwhile?

As long as the birds keep chirping.
To remind us of life's tunes.
Then we should keep shining.
Like the beautiful midnight moon.

*Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you. - Frank Lloyd Wright

The Five Stages

By Nada el-Badry

They say that there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. I think I'm too young to understand all of that in detail, though. All I really know is that I went through each one of them. Shrinks actually know what they're talking about every now and then, you know? Mine didn't, though. He was no help whatsoever, in my opinion. But I'm getting ahead of myself here.

I'm sixteen years old and I have terminal cancer. I've known for a few months. They suspect that I'm going to die any day now, because that's the limit the white coats gave me. That's what I call the doctors, see. White coats. That's all they really are to me. I've seen so many doctors that they're all blurring into one, huge white coat. It's easier to think of them as non-human. Because I can never imagine a human telling another that they're dying.

I know what you're thinking: how can she act so casually and cold about this? Isn't she upset about this? Isn't she scared? Isn't she sad that her life could end at any moment? And let me tell you: I was. God was I ever! But see, I've reached the last stage already. It took a while but I've finally just accepted it. I've accepted that I'm going to die. It took quite a while for that acceptance to come, though.

It was a nice day out, when I found out about my illness. I had symptoms and everything; frequent nausea, dizziness, the whole enchilada. I fainted during cheerleading practice and my parents were worried so they took me to the hospital even though I insisted that I was just dehydrated. I couldn't be sick; I was perfect! See, I was one of *those* girls. I was beautiful, smart, and funny, you name it; I was it. And I knew it, and I guess that made me a little conceited, but so what? When you're like me, you're *allowed* to be conceited. Or so I thought. I'm only sixteen, for God's sake. I'm allowed to be petty.

Anyway, back to the point. My dad drove us to the hospital and I went through the awful tests. Then one of the white coats came in, looking somber. He had that "I have bad news" look written all over his face. I hate that look. I was going to hate it even more in the weeks to come.

He told me I had leukemia, and it was, apparently, at the terminal stage. He also said some sort of complicated medical terms, but I was too shocked to listen. My ears were buzzing and my head was screaming NO! No, I couldn't have cancer. No, I couldn't because I was young and beautiful and had an amazing life and...I didn't have cancer! I'm not really sure when I started actually speaking and not just thinking, but

the next thing I knew my mother was holding me and rocking me, and she was crying, and I kept shouting “no” over and over again because I couldn’t believe it.

That was denial, and I think it went on for a week or so. I refused to believe the doctor, and asked to go to another. He told me the same thing. I went to ten different doctors, at least, and they all gave me the same lines: *“I’m so sorry, but I’m afraid you have terminal cancer. It’s incurable. You only have a few more months to live, by our guesses. Once again, I’m so sorry.”*

Terminal cancer. Terminal cancer. Terminal cancer!

I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t want to. I stopped going to doctors after the last one confirmed the same thing. My parents were patient throughout my denial; I love them even more for it. They tried to be strong for me, even my mother, the woman who cries at the drop of a hat. Neither of them could look at me for too long, though. Once, my mother actually looked away to avoid crying. It broke my heart, especially because I was convinced there was nothing to cry for. *I didn’t have cancer!*

I’m not too sure when I finally stopped denying it. All I know was one day I woke up feeling completely angry with the world. Whatever you wanted to call it, I was just angry, completely and utterly enraged. This was my *life*. I’d only gotten to enjoy *sixteen years* of it. And now I was being robbed of it? I felt cheated. That day, I took it all out on my room. I completely destroyed it: I turned over bed covers, ripped clothes out of my closet, swiped at the delicate perfume bottles and other little objects on my dressing table and sent them crashing to the ground. The racket woke up my parents and they immediately rushed to my room, but I shouted at them to get out. I heard my baby sister, Lily, ask, “What’s wrong with Janie, Mommy?” I didn’t wait to hear the response, slamming my door shut. My whole frame was trembling. I’d never felt so angry before, and I wasn’t even sure who I was angry with. I don’t think I was angry with anyone in particular. I was just angry that my perfect life was being shattered before my very eyes, and I raged because otherwise I would have been completely shattered, too. Just like my mirror when I threw a shoe at it because my reflection showed a scared little girl who I didn’t recognize and I hated it.

I don’t scare easily.

Next up, according to those genius shrinks: bargaining. I bargained with everyone. It was ridiculous. They knew it. I knew it. I didn’t care. When we went to the doctor for a check-up, I tried to cajole him into telling me good news. I felt ludicrous, but I couldn’t stop myself. The words just kept coming out. “You have good news for me, right? My illness is curable, right? *Right?* You can fix me. *Right?*” And when he said no,

I took it with a fake smile while another piece of me broke inside. I bargained with my shrink: “*Yes, I’m fine, I really am. I don’t think I need to come to you anymore, do you? How about this, I don’t come to you for a few weeks and if I’m fine on my own then I don’t have to bother you again. If not, I promise to come for my sessions and everything. Okay?*”

I received yet another no, and thus another broken piece.

Bargaining was quickly replaced with depression. I fell into it so swiftly and so entirely that even my shrink was shocked. It affected the whole household. I would be cooped up in my room for hours, gripping those beautiful flaxen locks of hair I had kept during my chemotherapy treatment and crying over them. I was the beautiful girl no more. No, now when I looked in the mirror all I saw was a broken, lost little girl who had been thwarted by an illness. I was completely and utterly helpless at the hands of this awful disease. I was a ghost in the household. I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t sleep. I didn’t have to go to school anymore – what was the point? I was dying anyway, getting an education wasn’t going to help me where I was heading. Whenever I went out (which wasn’t that often at all), I always wore a hat. I was embarrassed about my lack of hair, and felt self-conscious whenever anyone looked at me. I didn’t want to see any of my friends; I didn’t want to see their pitying looks. In their eyes, I was no longer Beautiful Jane. I was now Dying Girl.

Sometimes, I was jealous of my little sister, because she was healthy, because she had all these years ahead of her I didn’t. I feel awful about it *now*, but back then I didn’t care. I didn’t care about much. I was a hollow shell. I felt like God had forsaken me.

I was *dying*.

Then one day, it didn’t matter anymore. As if a light had gone off in my head, I was suddenly fine. Maybe “fine” is a stretch, but it doesn’t matter. I’d found my faith again. I’d been lost for so long, and now I’d been found. The light was faith: my faith in God. God hadn’t forsaken me. This was another one of His tests, wasn’t it? It was a test of faith. And for a while, I had been completely botching it. But now? Now, I wasn’t making a mess of it anymore. Now I could feel the warmth of His presence, because He was with me every step of the way. I felt that He loved me. Chemotherapy wouldn’t heal me, I knew it. I was in the hands of God, and I felt safe again, because there, everything was okay. With my concrete belief, I could conquer anything. Perhaps I would die – actually, it was most probable. But my faith had been restored, and if I died I believed that there was a reason for it. So, I finally accepted it and, at last, I could say:

I’m sixteen years old and I’m dying. And I’m okay with this.

A Clean Slate

By Fatma al-Sumaiti

I run, I fight the wind...

With my hair catching up behind me, and a faded dress to savor my warmth...

I breathe in the cold air, I take it all in like the oxygen I was deprived of by uncontrollable forces...

I feel as if my speed is unchallenged... I run furthermore...

I hug the acceleration with my all and blast it out like the vastest atomic explosion..

This state I'm in feels like charging out of prison walls...

This irrepressible freedom feels like water after a decade of thirst.

I run, run, run...

Just run...

With an unknown destination I scatter my fears, worries, and pain where I'm never going back

Goodbye yesterday... last week... goodbye all eighteen years of mine..

I'm clashing these walls standing in my road...

I'm flashing through time... I finally know where I shall go...

A future where all that I knew ceased to exist...

A clean slate... like reflecting water off a lake that's still..

If this is a dream, God let me dive peacefully into an endless slumber...

I shall never wake up... I'm loving this air... I'm breathing forever

I close my eyes as I fly with unstoppable legs...

Goodnight...

Ode to My Night

By Ghaida H Mohammad

When I am wrapped in black,
yes, in black,
inside these walls,
I don't hear much noise.

This black existence of the night:
could it be white
 on the other side of the earth?

This black boat of the night
hushes me
like a hunger-stricken stranger
wrapped in cold shawls
at night.

*

I wasn't breathing in
the air of the misty sea
until I climbed up the boat.

I placed myself up the mast
as three drops of moonlight;
they hung in the air
as if invisible threads from
heaven held them in place.

*

Now there is my black boat of the night,
my black sea of the night,
my lit stars of the night,
the light of my drops of moonlight,
and my smile.

Invisible Satori

By Nur Soliman

Contemplating the universe from two marble steps,
the clarity of the blue-purple night is so clear there's not even air between us,
a curtain to shadow-green trees reading sic transit gloria while breathing
in eternity, forever. They're not finite as great sculpted legs in sand, transient
like the chiseled cheeks and graven lips of a poet or statesman, nor like
tall buildings with pins of lights for twenty-three rows of windows, squares of
ceiling-lit halogen stars behind which real people work, read, and dream.
The sky behind silver towers holds a rushing whisper that overcomes.

Toi qui marche dans le vent

By Mohammed Daoud

Joining, running together, streams of painted grey asphalt, joining wide and narrow rivers along which sail silvery cars.

The roads go

Onandonandon in weaving ribbons forever

turning

Along the banks tired men stand expectantly, looking for the turn of the road where home's door waits, waiting where the *"reek of ether and lead and gas melts into the silent grassy smell of the earth."*

They stand where the thick, blowing dust and the exhaust mingle with the scent of a spent afternoon that lies in withered jasmine in dark bushes.

Waiting expectantly for a patient delivery
that seems to always be at the coming turn,

"a hundred miles down the road,"

they wait on tip-toes, bending slightly to catch the coming turn,
a slender bar of breath, of light illuminating the underpass.

Title from Gilbert Becaud, excerpts from John Dos Passos' Big Money

My Imaginary Kingdom of Utopia: The Wise-dom of Happy-ness

By Fatima Ibraheem

His quill stopped at the word that forced a tear out of the other man's eye. The tearful man stopped dictating knowledge and gestured to the writer to halt his writing and liberate his ever-devoting fingers from the object that is mightier than a sword. "Let's take a rest, dear Salman," Hussein suggested after taking a deep sigh. Salman nodded convincingly without a word, placed his quill gently on the half-filled papyrus, and headed towards the wooden door. He politely held the door open as a sign of respect for Hussein to exit before himself into the boundless realm...

Within the city, there were several companions of Hussein, of whom only a very few were the truest companions. For them and Salman, Hussein was the only reason that made them content in the life they're living. They couldn't wait for a day's rituals similar to today's, where Hussein would gather them after Friday prayers to utter eloquent words of wisdom and advice. Everyone vied for the front seats on the solid ground, since they're considered the nearest to their blessed figure. Hussein smiled before pronouncing a word, which reflected its brightness to each member of the audience. They smiled in response. "I would like to pose a question to you all. What do you think 'happiness' is to you?" Everyone remained muted for few seconds until three mentioned "Hussein's" name as an answer. Following them, the audience posted different answers that varied from "Love," "Modesty," "Knowledge," "Satisfaction"... He never wished to interrupt anyone, so Hussein waited until everyone was quiet and curious for his answer. "Happiness is relative; but contentedness is a non-perishable treasure, on the other hand. You may not realise it, but it is. Do you think you would ever want to continue living without at least one percent of satisfaction or contentedness? It is this factor that is enriching you with hope required to live a life..."

The sermon covered topics such as discussing the ultimate question: meaning of life, three factors that everyone should focus on disseminating; peace, justice and equality and how they're correlated with the economy of the state. Regarding the latter, Hussein mentioned that deliberately to target all members of the audience, who were a mixture of all status of society. "What might make a wise person wise is to never 'accept the feast of a people who turn out the beggars and invite the rich'" (Imam Ali's "Nahjul Balagha" or *The Path of Eloquence*, Letter 45: 545). "God imposed livelihoods of the poor in the Richs' rites, thus no poor suffers from hunger unless a rich person has taken excessive pleasure off the poor man's share, and God will question them (the rich) on that' and by that, the economy remains as stable as a kingdom of wise people" (3:328).

He continued, "Wise people should never allow ineffectiveness of several enterprises, human-energy or even humans themselves - that might be advantageous to the economy of the society." "Our economy is not defined as either 'Private' or 'Public,' since both have their disadvantages in addition to their advantages. We need to look at the problems of both economies to avoid them. A 'Private' economy does not satisfy the requirements of the poor; instead, restricts their freedom as a result of taxes, trade investments, etc. It also raises vanity in rich people since it has no limit to their wealth. This creates a gap between the rich and the poor, which will only increase with time. As for a 'Public' economy, it is a machine for producing inconsistencies in life, as it compiles the disadvantages of both a 'Private' as well as a 'Public' economy. It does not open opportunities to inventions and innovations, since it raises authoritarian figures at the expense of the citizens..."

As Hussein ended his sermon, the sun faded. Beyond the neighborhood, Hussein and Salman spent miles walking alone for pleasure. All they could hear at the moment was the friction produced from each other's slippers on the dry ground under a noon sun. "Never feel scared to ask a question, young man. I can tell there's something causing you to daydream." As a response, Salman smiled, not knowing how to appreciate someone like Hussein.

"I'm as thirsty as the dry ground under me, and nothing will quench my thirst other than your wisdom. I need you to enrich me regarding your successful governance, aligned with your indescribable modesty. The love for you is apparent on those peoples' faces!" Hussein waited for few more seconds before speaking, in case Salman wanted to add more. He never liked to interrupt anyone at all, no matter what they said.

"My dear Salman, never say: 'I have given authority, thus I should be obeyed when I order, because it engenders confusion in the hearts, weakens the religion, and takes one near ruin. If the authority in which you are placed produces pride or vanity in you, then look at the greatness of God over you and His might that you do not even possess over yourself. This will curb your haughtiness, cure you of your high temper and bring back to you your wisdom which had gone away from you.'" "Remember Satan's Original Fall which was the result of his excessive pride against God's omnipotence, and you will understand what I mean..."

All his life, Salman had revered the vision of his master, Hussein, of a world of justice and a world of peace and a world of absolute equality. "The people are two kinds, either your brother in your religion, or your equal in creation" (566). "This also addresses the issue of bonding, which would reduce crimes and punishments as a result. However, you will always see exceptions. For those who insult you, pardon

them. By that, you will embarrass them, and best of all suppress their further evilness. Taking such action would not just be beneficial to you as an individual, but will benefit the whole society as you halt a chain of evil behavior. Consider the statement in the Holy Qur'an that states '[F]or that we wrote to the Children of Israel that killed a soul without soul or corruption in the land as if he killed all the people, and recited as if a life of all mankind, and Our messengers came to have based many of them...'” (Surat Al-Ma'eda, 32).

Whilst Salman's active engagement heated the on-going conversation, the air around them got colder. Glancing from afar, Hussein and Salman realized a group of energetic youth gathered around a fire in a perfect circle paying full attention to the centre of focus. As daytime broke to an end, it became quite difficult for anyone to look at the source of the attention; however, the auditory sense became crystal clear. The source of the attention was a charismatic voice reciting eloquent verses of poetry. As soon as Hussein and Salman reached the entertainment, the attendees steered their attention to Hussein's presence. "Please don't make me feel as if I've interrupted you, please go ahead with your eloquence, dear son," feeling embarrassed yet flattered, Ahmed – one of the young men in the group, continued vibrating poetic verses. This time, gesturing his words towards Hussein panegyrically:

You all, the respected descendents of the blessed Apostle,
are the reason for happiness.

If I was only to increase my love,

but no way can my heart withstand that much love.

I have said that to the telegraph that passed by, which picked up my darkness,
to be enlightened by your blessings.

Words, there is a black cutting off,

the description has no definite capacity for you.

Everyone applauded in no time, which was the herald of the end of the entertainment that surrounded fire in a night-circle...

"These few lines about you are nothing compared to my indescribable reverence to you, sir."

Hussein nodded as a response, which was followed by his gentle comment, "the innocent sparkles in your eyes while you were reciting told it all. They showed the purity of

the purest heart, Ahmed my dear son.” Ahmed couldn’t help but blush in front of his master after he heard the pleasant praise that rang in both of their ears. “So back to the most important subject, are you ready for the greatest step in your life, son?”

“Only if I receive your last-minute words of wisdom, sir.”

“Of course, my son. You will hear by almost everyone you meet on how marriage is the greatest step you will ever take. I’m willing to say it too, but in a different way.” Almost half a minute elapsed until Hussein uttered the golden words, at last...

“You, as your future wife’s protector, are expected to place the ultimate balance correctly when you deal with your wife, in terms of her full rights and her self-respect. A woman is a valuable creation from God, son; she has everything to do with developing a society and raising generation after generation. When women were humiliated and objectified during the Pre-Islamic era, the enlightenment period shone its message afterwards via the new religion of Islam as women became more valued and praised. Thus, you as a believer of this faith should never turn your back on this aspect. Learning from the past, you see the Prophet’s daughter as the greatest example, Fatima-Zahra’a who behaved as a religious, yet a significant political figure within her society. She led women after her to adopt her actions and beliefs, which resulted in a more productive society. Therefore, you see here that the absence of a woman’s role also means the hindrance of the society’s development, since women act as the essential ‘right arm’ of men in completing men’s aims in social, political or religious affairs. Women and a society’s development are directly proportional. Now, it is your responsibility to apply my advice throughout your marriage life.” Ahmed, who was once the young boy and student who was raised in a lively and a respectful environment at home, tried to absorb every word uttered by his master...

After they saluted each of the wedding attendees, Salman and Hussein decided to return home and continue their work. As they headed towards the wooden door, Hussein raced to open the door first for Salman to enter before himself. This act seemed to cause some annoyance, which was evident in Salman’s unspoken response. “Modesty my son, let’s have a sense of modesty” Hussein answered Salman’s body-language. They each sat on the brown rug that settled simply on the floor. Salman’s quill started at the very word that forced a tear out of Hussein’s eye as he remembered his father’s tragic death a few years before. Hussein took a deep breath and started again - dictated knowledge to his student. He gestured to Salman, his student, to continue recording knowledge that is mightier than sword, without stopping. The papyrus became filled up; Salman pulled another papyrus to fill it up as well with knowledge of the boundless realm...

Note

‘Private’ is similar to Capitalist, ‘Public’ to Communist

Man in Gallabiyya Leaning on Column of Rifa'i Mosque, Cairo

By Nur Soliman

I like to think I blend in, with my pale brown *gallabiyya*,
Into the stone walls of the *Rifa'i*. The spot of blue vest
At my throat gives it away, I suppose, but nobody notices.
The air is cool under stone arches, damp with the clouds,
And I stand for a while in silence. The air is clean with the
Scent of dust and rosewater from the dim carpeted halls.
I stand at the staircase, it's after 'asr now; the blue Cairo sky
Is vast and overreaching. Dotted with aerals, laundry, birds.
The sun is pearly over my *gallabiyya*, and runs down to my
Feet still cool from the marble. I will probably have to go
Back to work now; it's hard work being the coffee-server at
The office. Those men, working hard in those dim offices,
Are always shouting for tea with, "Hassan! *Shai!*"
And it's always, yes, "*hadir*" from me, before I'm back with
The glasses of hot, sweet tea. But not now; I told them I'd
Be out to pray for a bit, so let me stand here. Egypt is dusty
In the afternoon, and the boys are still dragging their donkeys
Through to *Darb al-Labbana* with those mounds of lettuce.
Lettuce used to be sweeter fifty years ago. But it still looks
Good to see it in the sunset light, the deep, dusty green bright.
Egypt is dusty. From my throne of blind stone arcade, from the
Old, tall colonnade, I see that below, across from the cobble
Road, wear on cars, wear on men, wear on women with their

Heads bent under fresh, hot bread or folded clothing, I want
To stand here just a little while, to let the cool wind pass over
My weathered face, brown with the sun. I can stand and look
Past the city, past everything to see the Nile, and be still. I can
Pretend that everything is still and peaceful, and I can smile
To see the bridge of sunlit water like a vein, that wide
Bridge of life around which teems the flocks of Cairo.
“Ya Nil ya sabir al-ghuyuub! Ya waahib al-khuld bas da min zamaan!”
Bas da min zamaan, he should have said. It only does that sometimes.
It’s the glint of rose and silver on the pale gold and blue,
It’s that gleaming triangle of water between the dusty trees and
Streets that twinkles like a mirror of air, a silence that rises on
The arcade and blows over with the breeze over the steps, and I can
Lean over the column and stand in the silence, letting the cool come
Over my *gallabiyya* and let me stand and rest.

Note:

The line of poetry translated above from the Arabic originally reads thus: “Oh Nile! Charmer of the Unseen! / Ye giver of eternity to Time!” “The Eternal River” by famed Egyptian poet Mahmoud Hasan Ismail, early 20th century. The line above has an ending altered with “but that was long ago” in the colloquial Egyptian Arabic.

My Sincerest Thanks

By Mariam al-Enezi

You have opened a door, lighting a fathomless depth of iron.
By love's true breath you have brought the sun
And every star brighter.
It's a midsummer night's dream
For you have taken away troubles sewn by the devil's hand.
You brought to my stars fortune and delight
Whished upon by years brinked by hope's respite.
Life is now a fairy's whisper of winter gone south,
Opening good fortune to spring's glee.
Gone are depression's misgivings that plagued too many too long.
Gone are those peevish bickering that burdened our souls!
Now, not only did you give me life,
You set yourself upon love's unyielding throne.
By overcoming the struggle to come forth
And prove you love in return,
You have overcome all's greatest enemy –
The heat of anger's sorrows.
I thank you upon my heart and soul
For ridding your eyes of their purposeful fog
To come forth to us.
May peace and good fortune follow you
With every step you still have to take.
My Sincerest Thanks.

Them and I

By Fatma al-Sumaiti

Caught in a place

In mid air

I took the punches, I swallowed the blames

I rolled around as they kicked my existence

They stabbed me with their words

They drowned me with their hatred

They squeezed my heart for the juices of their joy

They kicked my all with forces of their hell

I flew in the air

I felt the pain

I saw the dark

I froze

In mid air

This is the moment

This shall be it

The moment where all pains swim in a pond

The second where all doubts smash on certainty

The instant when you fold in the darkest hole

In mid air

I took the beating

I took it all

I lost my voice

I fell into silence

I crushed into the surface

I did not bleed

They killed me

They left.

They walked away

They left a memories-lavished trace

Step

Step

Steps

They gathered their waters and walked away

I left the floor

I shook to stand

I shivered aggressively

Pain

I felt the knife

Its sharpest teeth rattled my insides

I thrust it out

I never bled

I forgot my sound

A passage

Step

Step

Shadows... them.

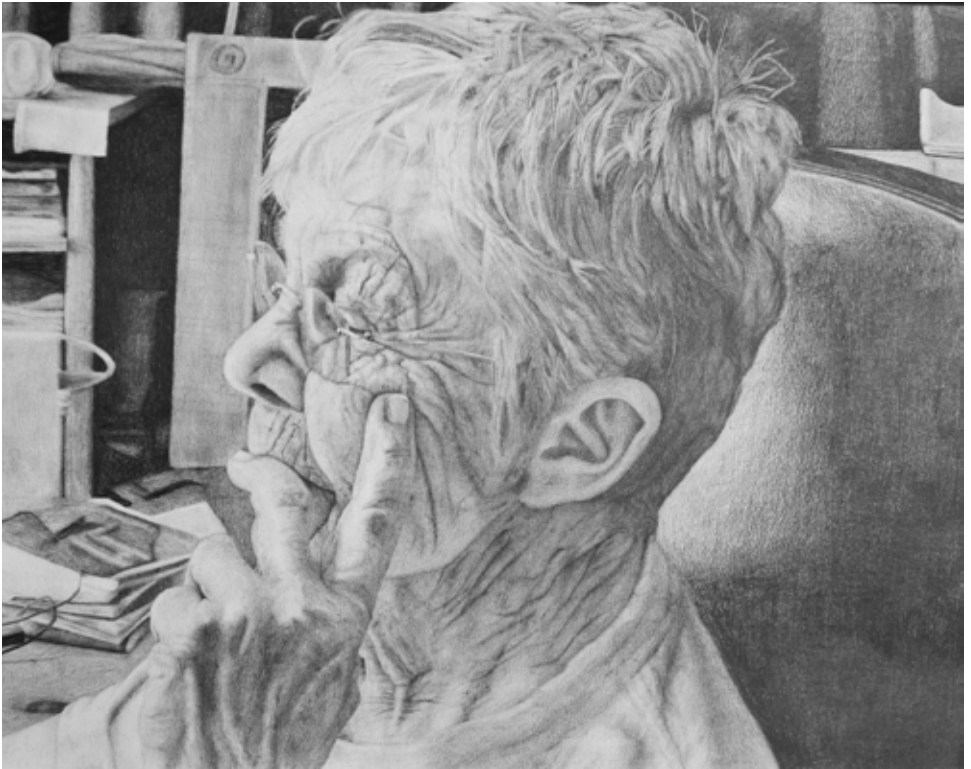
They glared and boggled

I gave them their knife

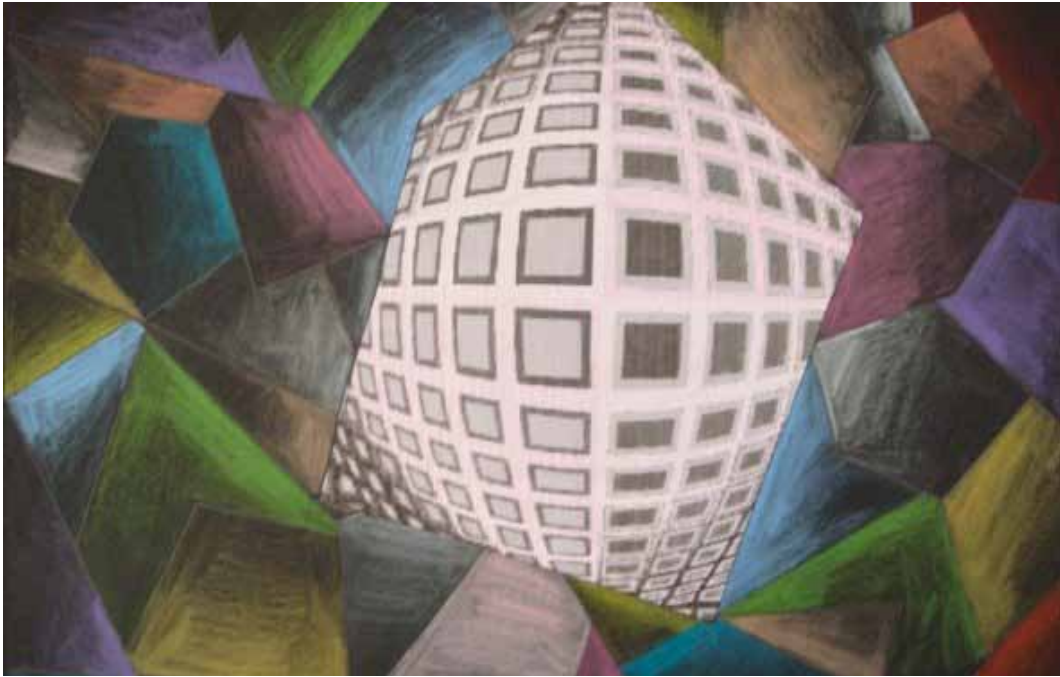
I walked away.



Art Work
graphic design / painting /
3D / photography



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Name: Yosr Abulwafa

Title: 13

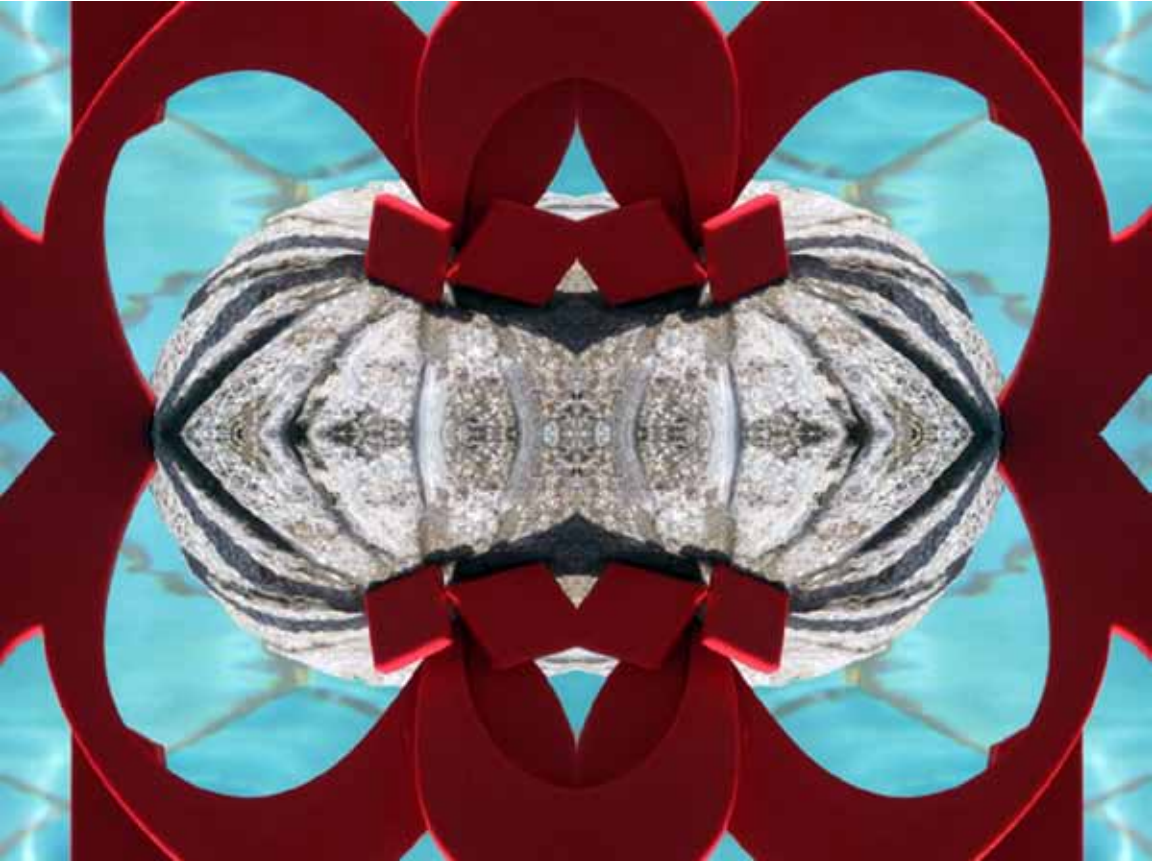
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Medium: Pen and Pencil Colour





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Name: Maryam Hosseinnia
Title: Butterfly
Size: 10 x 7.5 inches
Medium: Photoshop + InDesign CS 3

Name: Yousef Shaban
Title: Emphyrean
Size: 600 x 1000
Medium: Photoshop



START



THE PROCESS

In my process, I photographed at the different stages. I did, I started by dissecting my letters and sliding them into a white space. Then I cut the letters on a foam core and adjusted the light and shadows. Lastly, I used different materials to create my letters.

**CUTTING
ADJUSTING**



PAPER

LETTERS

FOAM CORE



TORCH



SHADOW

LIGHT







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Name: Amal N Behbehani

Title: Way Down There, Is Where We Live

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Medium: photography



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Name: Amal N Behbehani

Title: Time

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Medium: Photography



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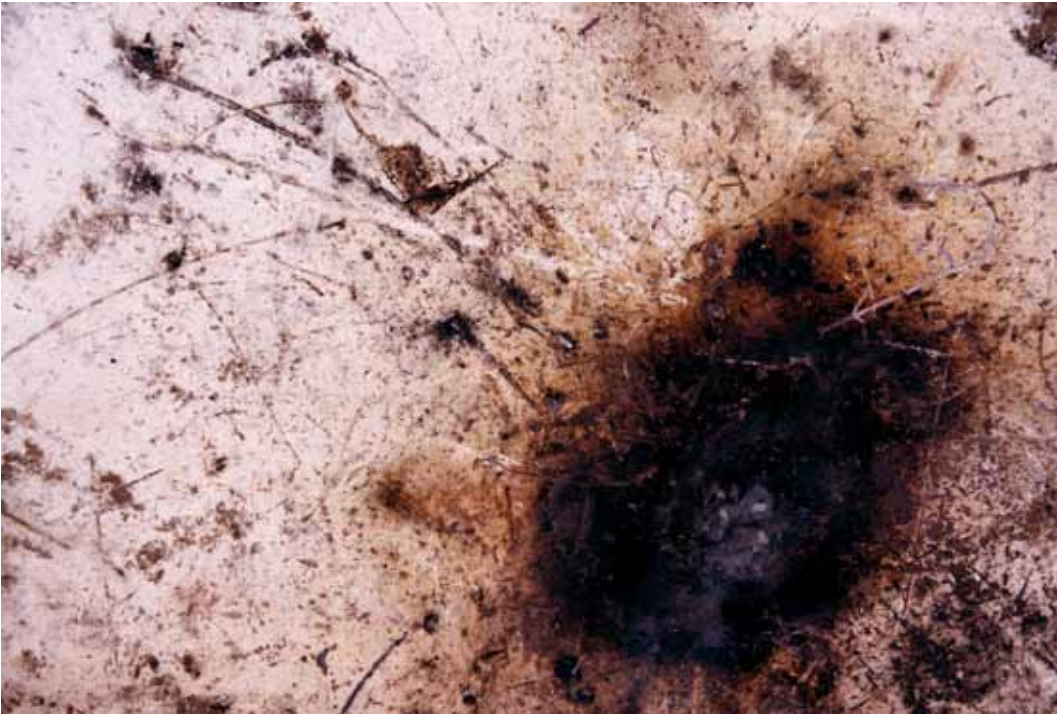
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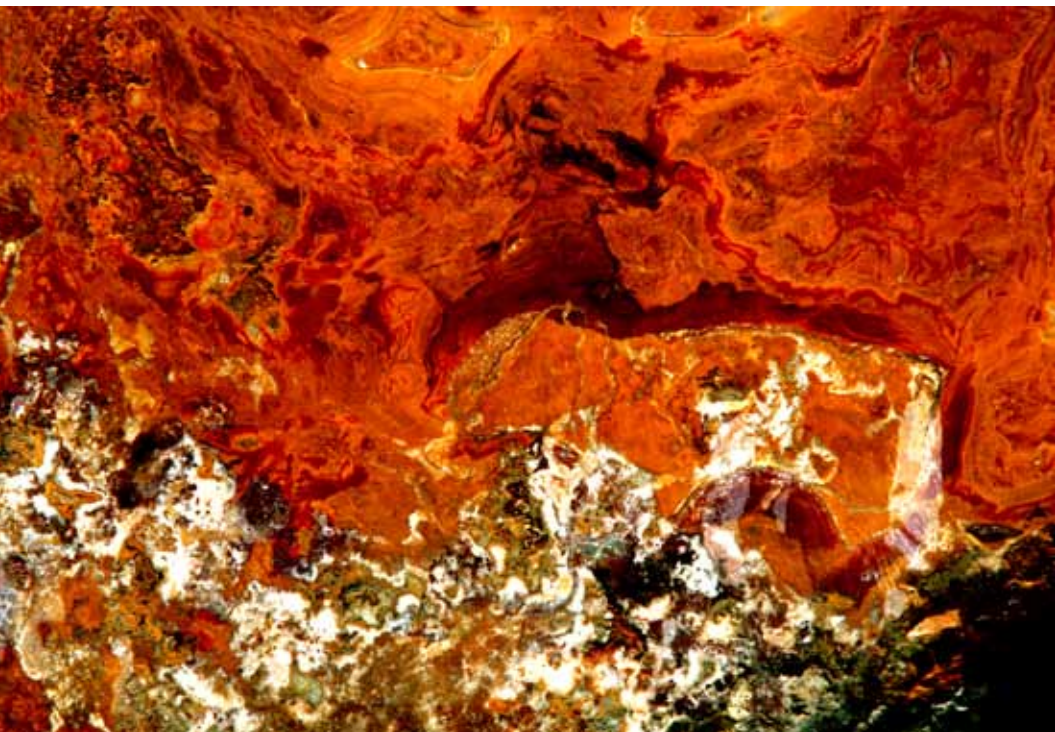
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Name: Maryam Hosseinnia

Title: Innocence

Size: 18 x 25 in

Medium: Mixed Media + Digital Photography



Name:
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Size:
Medium:



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Title:
Size:
Medium:



Name: Maryam Hosseinnia
Title: Passing
Size: 18 x 9 in
Medium: Digital Photography



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Name: Shahad A Al-Asfour
Title: A Developed Friendship
Size:
Medium:



Name: Shahad A Al-Asfour

Title: They Rust Whilst the Memories Endure

Size:

Medium:



Name: Shahad A Al-Asfour
Title: Good Morning Boston
Size:
Medium:



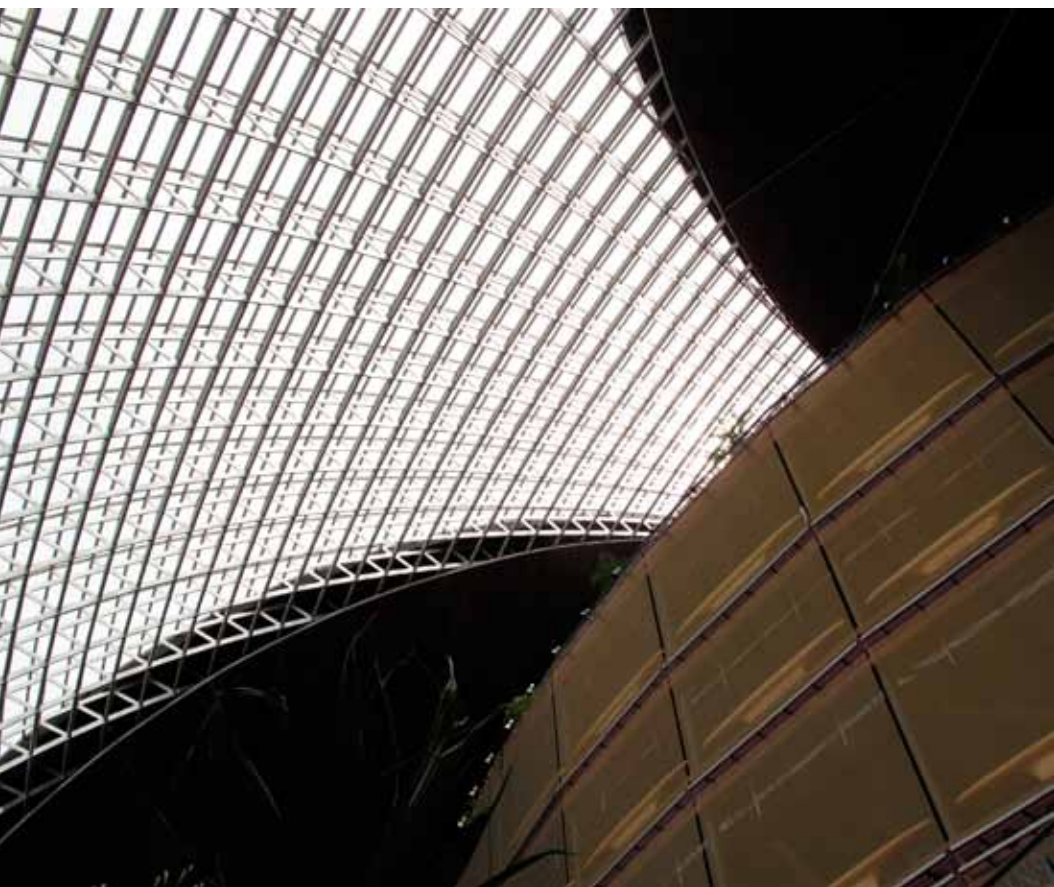
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**Contributor's
Notes**

Alia Mustafa Aref is a junior at AUK and is majoring in English and minoring in Psychology. This is the second time she has published her work in *The AUKuwait Review*. She is currently the Vice President of the AUK Art Club and is a Copy-Editor of the student newspaper *Voice of AUK*. When she does have spare time she enjoys reading books and painting.

Amal Behbehani is a junior at AUK majoring in English. This is the second time she has published material in *The AUKuwait Review*. Amal enjoys reading novels and watching *House*. She hopes to become a well-known writer.

Anurag Galhotra is a wandering student at AUK. He started working towards getting a Business degree but then thought it wasn't fun. Now he's trying Graphic Design and claims he is extremely good at cutting precise squares. He wishes to be a successful anything.

Anwar Behbehani is a freshman at AUK, majoring in Graphic Design but would love to major in fine arts. She loves photography, art, music, cupcakes, interesting quotes, the age 17, and summer holiday. She would love to work with marine animals at some point in her life.

Anwaar Saleh al-Asousi, a junior student at AUK, is majoring in Finance. She writes, "This is the first time for me to publish any material in *The AUKuwait Review*. Reading and writing are my favorite hobbies of all the time."

Dalal Mohammad is a freshman at AUK planning on majoring in Marketing. She loves to spend time with family and friends and her hobbies include the arts, reading, photography, sports (football especially) and making crafts.

Fahad Al-Refaei is a senior at AUK majoring in Finance. This is the first time he has published material in *The AUKuwait Review* - or in any form of publication. He is an avid reader, particularly fantasy, science fiction, and mystery novels. His hobbies are playing 'Go' (an Asian board game), RPGs (role-playing games) and reading.

Fakheema N. Badri is a junior at AUK double majoring in marketing and management. This is the first time she has published material in the *AUKuwait Review*. She is a member of the Math Club and Vice President of the Book Club. Fakheema enjoys reading and watching movies.

Fatima Ibraheem is a junior majoring in English Literature. She is also hoping to minor in International Studies. Fatima enjoys writing in her leisure time, which is the reason why she contributed in *The AUKuwait Review*. The only trick, though, is to continue appreciating writing by practicing it constantly.

Fatima Al-Sabah is a sophomore at AUK planning on majoring in Communications and Media. She has been expressing her creativity through photography for the past two years and has published some of her work online on Flickr.com. Fatima enjoys inspiring people to think for themselves and to not follow other's blindly.

Fatma al-Sumaiti is a junior at AUK, majoring in Marketing. This is her third time publishing in The AUKuwait Review. She writes, "To me words are threads that sew glorious pieces of writings. Words are not merely words; they are windows to one's soul and inner reality. That is why I love writing, and appreciate a piece when I read it. I love my family, can't live without my friends, and savor my life one step at a time with music playing in background of course."

Fatma Khamis is AUK's Media & Communications Officer. She has published a photography book titled "Windows to the Soul". She has also published a collection of her personal work on Kuwait in 2008 calendar.

Ghaidaa H. Mohamad holds a double Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Environmental Science, as well as a Master's in Arabic. She completed her studies in 2006 at Indiana University, and she is now an Arabic instructor at the AUK. Ghaidaa owes her passion for a fresh perspective on life to an American teacher, Mark C. Long, and to the astounding beauty of the Olympic Mountains of Washington state, where she spent one and a half years pursuing her studies. She enjoys improvising over the piano, painting, cooking, and mostly teaching writing through nature appreciation.

Ghaneema Al-Qudmani is a junior at AUK, majoring in Graphic Design. She has a passion for drawing, photography and digital design and enjoys sport, music, playing guitar, movies and laughter.

Gholam Reza Vatandoust is currently a Visiting Associate Professor in the International Studies Program at AUK. He served as the Giovanni Costigan Professor at the University of Washington and is the recipient of the Getty Institute Fellowship. He 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 6th edition early in 2010. His next co-authored work, due to be published by spring 2010 is on The Meshkinfam Museum of Art, the first private museum in Iran.

Kevork Awakimian is a freshman at AUK double majoring in finance and management. This is the first time he has published material in The AUKuwait Review. He is a member of the Marketing Club and the Book Club. He is also a student worker in Student Life and the Tutoring Center. Kevork enjoys playing football, basketball and he likes to get involved with the community around him.

Kurt-Frederick Mähler is an instructor in the Intensive English Program. It is his first time to publish material in The AUKuwait Review. He and his wife Karen have five children. Kurt enjoys the sound of fountains and the smell of fresh baked bread. Lamees Nijem is a junior at AUK, majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Advertising. She spends her free time painting and taking photographs. Her work can be found on DeviantArt and Flickr.

Mariam Al-Enezi is a freshman at AUK and has yet to declare her major. This is the first time she has published her work in The AUK Review. She has more hobbies than she can remember, but singing, drawing, painting, laughing, reading, and talking are among her favorites. The drawing “Dragon Mountains” actually has dragons in it. Can you find them?

Marcella Janush-Kulchitsky is an Assistant Professor in the Graphic Design Program at AUK. Professor Kulchitsky’s areas of specialization are corporate and brand identity, annual reports, business collateral, environmental and way-finding design systems, and magazine and book design. Prior to her academic appointments, she worked as a designer, art director, and creative director in the private and non-profit sectors in the Washington DC area. Professor Kulchitsky also served on the AIGA Student Portfolio Review Committee held in conjunction with the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC and has lectured at the American University of Beirut. Professor Kulchitsky received her BFA from the University of Michigan, School of Arts in Ann Arbor, MI, and her MFA from the School of Visual Arts at Boston University, Boston, MA.

Maryam Hosseinnia is a professor of Graphic Design and is also Program Lead of the Graphic Design Program at AUK.

Maryam Temershin is a sophomore student at the American University in Kuwait planning on majoring in English. In her spare time, she loves to paint and play classic music on the clarinet.

Mohammed Daoud is a sophomore student at AUK; he is majoring in International Studies and minoring in Economics. This is the second time Mohammed’s poems have been published. He enjoys photography, running, and travelling around the world. Monica Matta is a sophomore at AUK planning on majoring in Business Management with a double minor in Human Resources and Psychology. This is the first time she has published material in The AUKuwait Review. In her free time, Monica enjoys reading, listening to music, and simply spending time with her family.

Mubarak Al-Mutairi is a sophomore at AUK, majoring in both English Literature and Graphic Design. He enjoys taking photographs, writing poems and stories, and collecting interesting and colorful objects to fill his room with.

Nada El-Badry is a freshman at AUK, planning on double majoring in Marketing and Finance. This is the first time she has had her work published in The AUKuwait Review. Her interests include reading and writing, and she is a new member of MU-NAUK. She is also a new writer for the Voice of AUK.

Nur Soliman is a senior majoring in English. She is a consultant at the Writing Center and a contributor to The Voice, AUK's student newspaper. She has also contributed to local art publications such as Artvark and The Review. She loves learning about Central Asian culture, contemporary jazz, and comic art. Nur is hoping to study art history at graduate school in the near future.

Pauline Arthur has been an English language instructor in the Intensive English Program since the AUK start-up. She has published as a journalist. She also writes advertising copy, website content as well as editing, having served as the editor on the UN Compensation project for damages to the Kuwait environment from Gulf War I.

Rana Emera is senior at AUK majoring in Graphic Design. Her closest friend is her camera which she carries everywhere in hopes of capturing that memorable moment. She also loves writing poetry, basketball and swimming. She finds reading to be a great inspiration for her graphic work.

Reem Al-Huwaidi is a sophomore at AUK, majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Business Administration. She loves to challenge herself, and loves to master new designing programs. Her interests are photography, graphic design and art in general.

Sepideh M Behbehani is junior at AUK, majoring in Graphic Design and Communication Studies. Her favorite field is sculpture, and while still a beginner she hopes to continue in this field more seriously in the future.

Shahad Al-Asfour is a freshman at AUK, majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Advertising. Her interests consist of drawing, painting, photography, reading, writing, and listening to music. She has been practicing the arts since she was 2 years old on her family's house's walls. You can probably spot her drawing around the AUK campus in her sketchbook; she carries it everywhere she goes.

Sundus al-Bulushi is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Walah Al-Sabah is an AUK senior. This is the second time she publishes her works in The AUKuwait Review. With over 140 poems written, she aspires to publish her work in book form someday. Reading, writing, as well as collecting and writing quotes are

hobbies that this writer enjoys.

William Andersen has exhibited his artwork throughout the United States and internationally in China, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, Kuwait and Dubai. He is currently the Art Coordinator and an Assistant Professor in Studio Arts & Graphic Design at the American University of Kuwait.

Yosr Mohammed Abulwafa is a junior at AUK majoring in Graphic Design. Her hobbies include, but are not limited to drawing geometric shapes with different effects and colors, writing English “love” poems and playing basketball and football.

Yousef Nayef is a junior at AUK majoring in English. This is the third time he has published material in The AUKuwait Review. He is the secretary of the Drama Club. Yousef enjoys singing, acting, reading, and playing basketball in his spare time.

Yousef Shaban is a self taught experimental artist, attending AUK. He has been doing art and design ever since it caught his interest back in 2001 and aspires to be a digital painter. Interests other than art include music, writing, video games, and just chilling with friends, among other things.

A ‘Pastiche’: French for “a medley made up of fragments from different works”. A dramatic, literary, or musical piece openly imitating the previous works of other artists consisting wholly or chiefly of motifs and techniques borrowed from one or more sources (dictionary.reference.com).

Ubi Sunt: Latin for “Where are...?” A poetic motif emphasizing the transitory nature of youth, life...found especially in Old English / Medieval prose (dictionary.reference.com).

The Occultation; in Shia’ Islam, it is believed that one day The Mahdi will re-appear with Jesus, to fill the earth with justice and equality as it has been filled with injustice and inequity. The Mahdi is the twelfth descendent of the Prophet Mohammed, and The Hussein (whom the lament is on) is the third descendent. Thus, The Mahdi will be, one day, the demander for the unjustly spilt blood of his great great grandfather... “Prophet Mohammed said: my successors on the creation of God after me are twelve; the foremost being my brother and the last my son. He was asked: O Messenger of God, and who is your brother? He said: Ali bin Abi Talib. And was asked: and your son? He said: Mahdi, who distributes egalitarianism as it (the earth) is filled with unfairness and inequality. O God, who sent me to the right if not a harbinger...until that day The Mahdi, who will descend with the spirit of God - Jesus the son of Mary...the land shall rise by the light of her Lord from the East all the way to the West.”



Poetry
Short Stories
Creative Fiction
Art Work