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# *Other Words*

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE WRITING



**“They planted your body in the sand as a standard  
Which rouses the wadi by day and by night.  
Curses be on them who have built a blood-lighted beacon  
To guide to vengeance the generations of tomorrow.”**

**The Prince of Poets Ahmed Shawqi**

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## Introduction

The stringent delineation of poetry as merely comprising rules, rhythm, and forms serves to exclude a substantial portion of human artistic creation: humans transcend mere moments of eloquent speech and poetic imagination; they immerse themselves in the transcendental realm of literary experiences. As I have expounded elsewhere, poetry embodies life itself—a manifestation of human existence encompassing inner and outer struggles, pain, pleasure, and, notably, adherence to the divine message of Allah. Within this comprehensive framework, the life of a Muslim emerges as an exemplary artistic expression; particularly in contemporary times—where many exemplify resistance against the immoral, unjust, and self-serving constructs perpetuated by the West and embraced uncritically by the East.

Never in Islamic history have Muslims found themselves so disoriented, adrift, and powerless—unable to assert control over their own narrative. This state of disarray among Muslims can be likened to what I classify as 'bad poetry'; some among us have succumbed to the allure of Western culture, transforming into burdens akin to those described in Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden". The betrayal by such Muslims is what emboldens the West to assume a moral duty—as purported in Kipling's poem—to civilise non-white races; however, this notion is far from the truth: historical evidence demonstrates the Western involvement in conflicts worldwide and the exploitation inherent in colonial endeavours. The Western world, in contrast, perceives its culture as 'good poetry'—a misguided perception indeed.

The requisites for producing 'good poetry' extend beyond mere knowledge acquisition, literary prowess, or intellectual acumen: they encompass moral courage, principled consciousness, and spiritual depth. Islamic history abounds with personalities exemplifying such 'good poetry'—the life and deeds of the revered Omar Al Mukhtar of Libya serve as a prime illustration. His courage, sincerity, and unwavering commitment to Islamic principles not only offer solace and inspiration to contemporary Muslims; they also expose the hypocrisy prevalent among certain scholars and rulers—elucidating the essence of 'bad poetry'. Hence, the elegiac poem penned by the prince of poets, Ahmed Shawqi, immortalising Omar Al Mukhtar, remains a testament to the resilience and defiance inherent in the Muslim soul: Omar Al Mukhtar

embodies not only the timeless essence of 'good poetry'—but also a direct connection to the literary message conveyed by the 'Other Words Journal'.

The resilience and conviction embodied by the great Omar al-Mukhtar in his resistance against the Italian colonisers resonate within the spirit of the authors of this volume; it is both remarkable and inspiring that so many young Muslims—living in the West—are able to resist the negative influences of contemporary culture with their pens; just as Omar Mukhtar resisted colonisation with his sword. Colonisation persists in various forms—and it is through the pens of our young poets in this volume that its final blow may be delivered; indeed, it is safe to say that the mental stronghold of colonisers is weakening. These young Muslim writers and poets will undoubtedly wield their pens—and, echoing the great Irish poet Seamus Heaney, they will "dig with it". This act of literary excavation—by the grace of Allah—holds the promise of revitalising the Muslim spirit; reinstating it as a beacon of enlightenment for humanity once more. Although time has created a distance between Omar al-Mukhtar and the contributors of this present volume, it is certain that Omar al-Mukhtar remains alive—not only in the consciousness of the writers of this volume—but also in the consciousness of all Muslims. Our contribution to resistance differs from that of al-Mukhtar in one key aspect: as writers and poets, our battle is with the pen; nevertheless, it is an important battle—I hope and pray to Allah that this effort reawakens resistance. May this journal serve as a modest contribution to the battlefield with the mighty pen; Inshallah, the glory of Islam will prevail—as Allah has promised in the Quran:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظَاهِرَهُ عَلَىٰ الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

Abdul Hai  
July 2024

## Abdul Hai<sup>1</sup>

### The great Omar al mukhtar

Silence cries in the red desert,  
Ropes hallowed by the purity of your neck,  
North African wind, sweet as heaven's breath,  
the desert lion, and the foolish Italian—  
You never died on that glorious day—  
If only Italy could match the worth of your sandal.

With every injustice wrought by the white man—  
You stood firm;  
The Great Bengal Famine,  
Robben Island, Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib,  
Palestine, and the little girl from Gaza—  
With your gallantry, she faces devils.

Ahmad Shawqi's lines praised you,  
While I and others live your struggle.  
Evenings of blood-red skies and dead bodies,  
Gaza's wounds and wailing mothers.  
Men like you are rare and full of hope.  
History will speak of the great dogs of Khan Yunis—  
And the betraying, shameless Arab rulers.

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul Hai is a passionate enthusiast of literature, adept in various roles within the realm of books: he's a devoted reader, skilled bookbinder, meticulous book restorer, and a leisure writer. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Social Science from Birkbeck, University of London, complemented by a certificate of higher education from the same institution. Presently, he's pursuing postgraduate studies at the University of Wolverhampton.

## Mahmoodulhasan Bhaiyat<sup>2</sup>

### un-Ode to My qarīn

Swirls around my heart,  
octopus-ink whisperings,  
lies of al-waswās.

### Windows are for Watching

She would always sit there and stare down  
below at life chasing and squealing, screaming  
and storming, sitting and chatting. She would  
do tasbeeh and watch, leaning into the blinds  
and into living from afar, caged in by her old age  
and refusal to step into fresh air. Even getting her  
to walk in the living room took two grandkids  
egging her on, and even that happened only twice.

I never understood her curiosity for what went on  
in our stretch of houses. I would even question  
her at times, but now that she's back home and  
her room has become mine, I sit at my desk  
and the outside calls me as it called her.

I hear kids arguing, maybe one even swearing  
at his bike or perhaps his sister, and another  
admonishing, telling the girl she shouldn't  
use the hose without asking the owners.

"But he does it."

"He's their neighbour, you have to ask.

Look, you didn't even turn it off!"

It was off though, but far be it from me to tell  
Him from up here and meddle in their quarrel.  
He turned it on then off, then I heard the  
clicking of the nozzle change and the screams  
of the younger two getting wet, and I chuckled.

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<sup>2</sup> Mahmoodulhasan is a hafiz, qari, and a pre-med student. He has won several international Qur'an competitions, and is a huge fan of Arabic poetry. He also loves climbing trees and foraging for fruits.

With unscripted plays like this, who wouldn't want to sit and peek from the upstairs window?

### **At Bloom's End**

The blue light of twilight and the opposite seat in the subway make the outside seem like a far away's tundrous gloom, where rough men on steeds might herd and roam.

I find myself in the window but I do not recognize what I see passing by beyond me—  
I'm a traveller in my own land. I drop

a drowsy sakura on the brick-laid platform for someone else to find an out-of-the-blue pink wonder. And

for my mother, I'll find  
another full flower,  
for my mother, I'll bring  
the whole tree home.

### **Cold Echoes of a Sleeping Street**

I run home from the bus stop,  
following the winding walkway.

Sleazy streetlights scantily illuminate my way,  
populating the street with my running shadows.

Late autumn leaves scatter in the wind,  
scuttering in the shadows where mice should be.

### **Liminal Serenity**

If I had to choose a limbo,  
it would be the backseat of my  
father's grey Toyota that one  
later third of a night in Ramadan—

my outstretched right  
arm keeping the door open

and my left holding my  
messenger bag to my side,

while the cool, quiet breeze  
of the empty masjid lot  
lulls me to sleep right there,  
on the edge of my seat.

### **Ode to a Wall**

Walls. Walls and tunnels,  
those wonderful walls of tunnels—  
they keep us alive.

To have written or drawn on walls  
is to have lived and not died.

Walls stay standing long after  
we are laid down and turn to dust,  
but they too eventually fall.

Such is the nature of this existence.  
Dust we are. Dust we were meant to be.

For us, there is no baqaa' (بقاء);  
For us, there is only fanaa' (فناء).

Death is what awaits us;  
Death is what liberates us.

These words I write on a new wall.  
I know not where this is. Perhaps a tunnel,  
perhaps a cave, perhaps a prison.

A wall I've left—from there to here  
I've come, following footsteps of others  
who shared with me that wall.

The wall still is. The words still are,  
though many have been erased.

A spec I am, like dust of chalk I fly,  
carried in the winds of change

## Farah Rosli <sup>3</sup>

### Eternal Encounter

Everyone we met in this world  
is to teach us lessons.

Up until now,  
I'm still trying to figure out,  
What kind of lesson  
do you have to offer me?

Other than falling in love  
and falling deeper into  
the submission of God,  
I truly felt that  
from you,  
whom my path entangled with.

And ever since our paths crossed,  
my poetry inventory  
is a ceaseless flow.  
Let alone the essence  
of candour in my prayers.

Oh to be you in my story.  
A figure who will never die.  
As I,  
will always keep you alive  
eternally in my prayer.

The time might flew,  
memories might fade,  
the Heart might stop,  
breathed might suffocated,  
humans might die.  
Civilizations might collapse.

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<sup>3</sup> Farah Rosli is an English language and literature student in IIUM. Passionate about writing and poetry as she sees sentimental and intrinsic value in everything. She loves to share her writing in the form of coherent wordings and capture the beautiful essence of life through her words inspired by most of her experiences.

Soul would decay,  
but the poetry essence of you  
will immortally remain.  
Either in my prayer nor paper,  
You will,  
be remained.

### **Soil of Acacia**

I planted the seed of Acacia  
in the embrace of silent dawn.  
I water the seed with a faintest hope  
for the seed to sprout,  
through the Earthy land.

To me, this soil  
dozed off not because it's dying  
yet it was numb,  
though the body is constantly alive.  
This soil,  
hasn't been enlivened  
with the water of happiness  
but was burdened with tears.

Nonetheless, I nurture the seed,  
In this soil longed dead,  
Sorrowful soil stepped by tears.

But God,  
Bounded Man's finite grasp,  
The soil turned out fertile  
due to my continuous Fajr tears.  
Blossomed not an Acacia  
but a whole garden of scented Acacia

## Aadil Farook<sup>4</sup>

### The Ummah's Cry

Let the flower of sanguinity bloom  
Whether the zephyr of conquest blows or not

Let the clouds of unity  
Whether the rain of tranquility falls or not

Let the strings of struggle be plucked  
Whether the melody of triumph echoes or not

Let the shades of brotherhood prevail  
Whether the color of love forms or not

Let the sagacity of revelation rule  
Whether intellect's grasp captures it or not

Let the wings of faith take you far  
Whether reason's ascent reaches there or not

Let the fervor of heart behest you  
Whether mind's consent is granted or not

Let the alchemy of religion transform you  
Whether tribulation's heat melts you or not

Let your ship sail to the shore of sainthood  
Whether the rock of calamity hits it or not

Let your eyes drown in tears  
Whether your limbs sinned or not

Let the rhythm of the Quran fail your senses  
Whether your ears hear the beat or not

Let the words set your spirit ablaze  
Whether the language estranges you or not

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<sup>4</sup> Aadil Farook is a Pakistani-based independent researcher, writer, and translator who has received numerous international awards for his contributions to world peace. Farook can be contacted at [www.aadilfarook.com](http://www.aadilfarook.com).

Let the verses carve endless paths in you  
Whether your mortality bears it or not

Let the chapters unlock new vistas for you  
Whether knowledge is expended or not

Let life's pendulum hinge on Sunnah  
Whether the air lets it swing or not

Let yourself traverse Muhammad's path  
Whether his footsteps are followed or not

Let his attributes envelop you  
Whether you saw him or not

Let his lamentation stir you  
Whether you heard it or not

Let salutation provoke him to greet you  
Whether he is present or not

Let piety unseat talent  
Whether prestige is bestowed or not

Let belief defy logic  
Whether the world has changed or not

Let deeds engulf means  
Whether time-space cater or not

Let yourself shatter the fetters of West  
Whether you are mocked or not

Let a Sufi be mightier than a tyrant  
Whether he is feared or not

Let holy warriors be as worthy as the genius  
Whether they are envied or not

Let your soul wear the vicegerent's attire  
Whether your body is worthy or not

Let your will write fate  
Whether the Grand Pen has dried or not

Let the cosmos connive for you  
Whether you knew it or not

Let your acts alter history  
Whether it is sealed or not

Let God rejoice in your creation  
Whether the angels comprehend it or not

Let Him hail your existence  
Whether Satan surrenders or not

Let He await your return  
Whether you yearn for it or not

Let Him embrace your being  
Whether you earned it or not!

**Allama Iqbal<sup>5</sup>**  
Translated By Adnan Mahmud<sup>6</sup>

**بندی اسلام**  
**Occupied Islam**

ہے زندہ فقط وحدت افک سے ملت  
وحدت ہو فنا جس سے وہ الہام بھی الحاد

وحدت کی حفاظت نہیں ہے قوت بازو  
آتی نہیں کچھ کام یہاں عقل خدا داد

اے مرد خدا! تجھ کو وہ قوت نہیں حاصل  
جا بیٹھ کسی غار میں اللہ کو کر یاد

مسکینی و محکومی و نومیدی جاوید  
جس کا یہ تصوف ہو وہ اسلام کر ایجاد

ملا کو جو ہے ہند میں سجدے کی اجازت  
ناداں یہ سمجھتا ہے کہ اسلام ہے آزاد

Hai Zinda Faqat Wahdat-E-Afkar Se Millat  
Wahdat Ho Fana Jis Se Wo Ilhaam Bhi Ilhaad

Wahdat Ki Hifazat Nahi Be-Quat-E-Baazu  
Aati Nahi Kuch Kaam Yahan Aql-E-Khuda Daad

Ae Mard-E-Khuda! Tujh Ko Wo Quwwat Nahi Hasil  
Ja Baith Kisi Ghaar Mein Allah Ko Kar Yaad

Miskeeni O Makhoomi O Naumidi Javed  
Jis Ka Yeh Tasawwuf Ho Wo Islam Kar Eijad

Mulla Ko Jo Hai Hind Mein Sajday Ki Ijaazat  
Nadaan Yeh Samajhta Hai Ke Islam Hai Azad

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<sup>5</sup> Original: Allama Iqbal .

<sup>6</sup> Adnan Mahmud is a student of hermeneutics and has a serious appreciation for Hindustani poetry, finding solace and inspiration in the works of celebrated poets such as Allama Iqbal and Rabindranath Tagore. He translates sub-continental languages, primarily Bengali and Urdu, as a dedicated hobbyist.

In unity of thought, the nation thus thrives;  
Where unity fades, faith itself even derides.

There is no shelter for unity without the might of arms,  
Naught prevails here through metaphysics alone.

O guileless supplicant! Thou dost not wield that power,  
Retreat to some cavern and tally Allah's name.

Eternal poverty, subjugation, and despair:  
He who wishes such mysticism, let him invent such Islam rare.

The Mullah, permitted but to pray in the occupied lands;  
Believeth—foolishly—that Islam freely stands.

**Farrukh Ahmed<sup>7</sup>**

Translated By Adnan Mahmud

**রাত পোহাবার কত দেৱী পাঞ্জেরী?  
How Long Till Dawn, Master?**

রাত পোহাবার কত দেৱী পাঞ্জেরী?  
এখনো তোমার আসমান ভরা মেঘে?  
সেতারা, হেলাল এখনো ওঠেনি জেগে?  
তুমি মাস্তুলে, আমি দাঁড় টানি ভুলে:  
অসীম কুয়াশা জাগে শূন্যতা ঘেরি।

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<sup>7</sup> "Farrukh Ahmed was an ardent admirer of Allama Iqbal and translated many of his works. Thus, allow me to introduce Farrukh Ahmed via Allama Iqbal using a parabolic story:

*Long ago, on a majestic monsoon night, the Musalman-E-Bangla began their Du'a al-Qunut. You see, they had a Shikwa! "Why hast thou bestowed the great Allama upon the people of Al-Hind?" they cried, "Hast thou forgotten us? How are we to pen our pain unto thee?" In Arsh-Al-Azeem, a commotion commenced.*

*Farrukh Ahmed was the answer to that Dua.*

Farrukh Ahmed stands as an unsung figure in the chronicles of Bengali literature. Celebrated as the 'Poet of the Muslim Renaissance,' he infused his writings with the richness of Islamic civilisational thoughts, marked by a prominent use of Arabic and Persian lexicon, a testament to his deep engagement with Islamic culture and heritage."

রাত পোহাবার কত দেৱী পাঞ্জেরী?

দীঘল রাতের শ্রান্ত সফর শেষে  
কোন দরিয়র কালো দিগন্তে আমরা প'ড়েছি এসে?  
একী ঘন-সিয়া জিন্দিগানীর বা'ব  
তোলে মর্সিয়া ব্যথিত দিলের তুফান-শ্রান্ত খা'ব,  
অস্ফুট হ'য়ে ক্রমে ডুবে যায় জীবনের জয়ভেরী।  
তুমি মাস্তুলে, আমি দাঁড় টানি ভুলে;  
সম্মুখে শুধু অসীম কুয়াশা হেরি।  
রাত পোহাবার কত দেৱী পাঞ্জেরী?

বন্দরে ব'সে যাত্রীরা দিন গোণে,  
বুঝি মৌসুমী হাওয়ায় মোদের জাহাজের ধ্বনি শোনে;  
বুঝি কুয়াশায় জোছনা-মায়ায় জাহাজের পাল দেখে।  
আহা পেরেশান মুসাফির দল  
দরিয়া কিনারে জাগে তকদিরে  
নিরাশার ছবি ঐকে।  
পথহারা এই দরিয়া-সোঁতায় ঘুরে  
চ'লেছি কোথায়? কোন সীমাহীন দূরে?  
মুসাফির দল ব'সে আছে কুল ঘেরি।  
তুমি মাস্তুলে, আমি দাঁড় টানি ভুলে;  
একাকী রাতের ম্লান জুলমাত হেরি।  
রাত পোহাবার কত দেৱী পাঞ্জেরী?

শুধু গাফলতে, শুধু খেয়ালের ভুলে  
দরিয়া অথই ভ্রান্তি নিয়াছি তুলে,  
আমাদেরি ভুলে পানির কিনারে মুসাফির দল বসি  
দেখেছে সভয়ে অস্ত গিয়াছে তাদের সেতারা, শশী;

মোদের খেলায় ধুলায় লুটায় পড়ি'  
কেঁদেছে তাদের দুর্ভাগ্যের বিশ্বাস শবরী।  
সওদাগরের দল মাঝে মোরা ওঠায়েছি আহাজারী,  
ঘরে ঘরে ওঠে ক্রন্দনধ্বনি আওয়াজ শুনছি তারি।  
ওকি বাতাসের হাহাকার,-ওকি  
রোণাজার ক্ষুধিতের!  
ওকি দরিয়র গর্জন,- ওকি বেদনা মজলুমের!  
ওকি ক্ষুধাতুর পাঁজরায় বাজে মৃত্যুর জয়ভেরী!

পাঞ্জেরি!

জাগো বন্দরে কৈফিয়তের তীব্র ভ্রুকুটি হেরি,  
জাগো অগণন ক্ষুধিত মুখের নীরব ভ্রুকুটি হেরি!  
দেখ চেয়ে দেখ সূর্য ওঠার কত দেরি, কত দেরি!! ॥

How Long Till Dawn, Master?  
Is Your Sky Still Filled With Clouds?  
Have The Stars, The Crescent, Not Yet Woken?  
You At The Mast, And I, Forgetting To Pull The Oar:  
The Infinite Fog Wakes, Surrounding Emptiness.  
How Long Till Dawn, Master?

At The End Of A Long Night's Weary Journey,  
Upon Which Dark Horizon Of The Sea Have We Arrived?  
What Dense Dark Door Have We Arrived At,  
Chanting Elegies For Aching Hearts In The Storm-Tired Dream,  
Softly Sinking Into The Victorious Sound Of Life?  
You At The Mast, And I, Forgetting To Pull The Oar;  
Only The Endless Fog Before Me.  
How Long Till Dawn, Master?

Sitting At The Port, The Travelers Count The Days,  
Perhaps Hearing The Sound Of Our Ship In The Seasonal Wind;  
Perhaps Seeing The Sails Of The Ship In The Mist And Moonlight.  
Ah, The Anxious Caravan Of Travelers  
Awake On The Shore By Destiny,  
Painting A Picture Of Despair.  
In This Path-Losing Current Of The Sea,  
Where Are We Drifting? To Which Boundless Distance?  
The Caravan Of Travelers Sits Besieged By The Shore.  
You At The Mast, And I, Forgetting To Pull The Oar;  
Witnessing The Dim Cruelty Of The Lonely Night.  
How Long Till Dawn, Master?

Only In Neglect, Only In The Mistake Of A Whim,  
Have We Lifted The Illusion Of The Fathomless Sea,  
By Our Mistake, The Caravan Of Travelers Sits By The Water's Edge  
Seeing Fearfully That Their Stars, The Moon, Have Set.

In Our Play, Our Indulgence, Our Squander

They've Wept The Bland Misfortune Of The Night.  
In The Midst Of The Traders' Caravan, We've Raised An Outcry,  
Hearing The Sound Of Weeping Rising In Every Tent.  
Is That The Outcry In The Wind—Is That  
The Hunger Of The Impoverished!  
Is That The Roar Of The Sea,—Is That The Pain Of The Oppressed!  
Is That The Hunger-Stricken Ribs Playing The Victory Of Death!

Oh, Master!  
Awake In The Port To The Fierce Scowl Of Accountability;  
Awake To The Silent Scowl On Countless Hungry Faces;  
Look And See How Long Till The Sun Rises, How Long?

## Alaa-Uddin<sup>8</sup>

### Winter winds whisper,

In the dance of pleasures over months gone by,  
I'd trade my time and , no question, no shy.  
At the edge of my mind, in the late night's embrace,  
With you in my thoughts, in this endless chase.

Winter winds whisper, tales in the cold,  
Dark clouds gather above Istanbul, bold.  
I've sought in the earth for a sign, a plea,  
Yet silence surrounds, an unanswered decree.

Why the rejection, am I not love's kin?  
Am I too ugly, too weak, or too strong within?  
Break this enchantment, this spell that binds,  
Free me from the echoes of love that blinds.

In the quietude, where answers reside,  
Let truth unravel, let love be our guide.  
Aid me in understanding, the reason untold,  
Like Mecnun enchanted, by Leyla's hold

### Echoes of Nineteen Years

In the silence, a whisper, a mournful song,  
"It's all gone," the refrain, bitter and strong.  
Pressing lips together, tears in abeyance,  
A heart trembles, caught in the dance.

Oh Allah, witness these 19 years,  
Of happiness once, now drowned in tears.  
A sickness creeps, sleep eludes the night,  
Focus shattered in the absence of light.

Through joyous years, now a distant dream,  
A voice transformed, what once did gleam.  
Hatred and slander, bitter seeds sown,  
In the garden of love, now overgrown.

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<sup>8</sup> Alaa Dean Alzalam, from the UK, has over ten years of language teaching experience. He holds an MA in TESOL, an MEd in Islamic Education, and a PGCE. Alaa has taught at prestigious institutions including The University of Sheffield, University of Hull, and Qassim University, KSA. He is currently teaching in the English language prep school as well as coordinating the pre-faculty module, at İbn Haldun University, Istanbul. Alaa enjoys traditional heritage art and crafts such as Arabic calligraphy and paper marbling. On weekends, he enjoys visiting museums and exploring local historical sites in and around Istanbul.

Oh Allah, behold these 19 years,  
A shattered bond, drowning in fears.  
Tears suppressed, eyes betray the pain,  
A broken heart, longing to regain.

Together we journeyed, the world explored,  
In studies and laughter, our spirits soared.  
Yet, oh Allah, in this bitter dawn,  
Nineteen years of happiness, all withdrawn.

In the face of illness, side by side,  
Through cancer's storm, together we tried.  
Laughter, tears, comfort in strife,  
Now memories linger, a vanishing life.

Oh Allah, witness this sorrowful dawn,  
Nineteen years of happiness, all gone.  
A tale of love, now stained and torn,  
In the echoes of loss, a soul is reborn.

### **I wish I could remember**

I freeze for a split second  
It's trying to communicate the past,  
Something so forgotten, but yet so vivid

I close my eyes for a short while  
Floating in the deepest darkness  
Hoping a time would pass by

I think for some time  
Trying to grasp a distant past  
Beckoning the forgotten time to return once more

I slide my hand slowly down my face  
Taking in, slow, deep breaths  
Searching for that time once more

It's no more.

I wish,  
    I pray,  
    I hoped I could have remembered that day.

**Usman Awang<sup>9</sup>**  
Translated by Zaiti Athirah

**Salam Benua - Greetings to the Continents**

I

HOW they have rent us asunder  
the passports, the visas, the frontiers, all names for barriers  
we are robbed of their constitution  
they delivered bullets wrapped in printed dollars  
we have to make a choice  
we must choose  
there is no other way

II

So you, my friend, have chosen snipers and bullets  
many the leaders prefer the dollars  
for this, you, my friend, have soaked your clothes  
red-grass, red-river  
tears of the children  
blood of the oppressed

III

So, you, my friend, have pressed the cactus and ground the stone  
to make food and drink  
the girls in labor had sand in their hair  
little children slung on their weapons  
and you, my friend, have darkened the sky with exploding pipelines  
others sing in prison  
for the freedom of Palestine

IV

We reeled in withered paddy fields  
the peasants have slain the virgin wood  
the paltry beginnings in the hazy quietude  
the quietude that nipped us in the bud

---

<sup>9</sup> Usman Awang was a prominent Malaysian poet, playwright, and novelist, celebrated for his contributions to Malaysian literature and his advocacy for social justice. Born on July 12, 1929, in Johor, Malaysia, he wrote under several pseudonyms, including Tongkat Warrant and Adi Jaya, reflecting his diverse literary styles and themes. Usman's work often explored themes of equality, freedom, and human dignity, drawing from his experiences and observations of Malaysian society. He was known for his poignant and evocative poetry that resonated with both the common people and intellectuals. His plays and novels also tackled social issues, portraying the struggles and aspirations of everyday Malaysians. As a central figure in the development of modern Malaysian literature, Usman Awang's legacy includes his role in fostering a sense of national identity and cultural pride. He was a founding member of ASAS '50 (Angkatan Sasterawan '50), a literary movement that aimed to use literature as a tool for social change. His contributions earned him numerous accolades, and he remains an enduring symbol of Malaysia's literary and cultural heritage.

we the few are still learning  
from all your experiences,  
and our own  
we shall consolidate the May eclipse  
at the true cause  
of this archipelago  
V  
Greetings (Salam)  
without visa  
passport  
golf  
colors  
to humanity  
all of the continents

**DOWN THROUGH THE MEMORY LANE OF AN IRAQI CHILD.**  
**Dr. Abdul Wahed, Dhiya Damia, Dr. Homam al Tabaa<sup>10</sup>**

As the rain hit the rooftop, and raced to fall and hit the soil, I gazed towards the dark sky, and a flash of memories of the tragic war when I was little came into my thoughts. Once upon a time in the city of Sulaymaniyah, there lived two loving widows who struggled to raise their children together after the death of their beloved husband. With a mix of sadness and determination, the second wife learned how to cook and keep the house in order, aided by the first wife. When the second wife had kids, the first wife stood by her, supporting and caring for the little ones. And that is how I came into this wonderful family, where love and sacrifice shaped our unique story.

In Iraq, we never had a peaceful time. Whenever one war ended, a new one would begin. When I was little, Iraq was at war with Iran. Iranian planes greet our cities with rains of bullets and in return, Iraqi planes bombed theirs. Despite the constant conflict, we somehow managed to live our lives as normally as possible. During the war, we had a routine. Our school had a basement, and whenever there was a bombing, we all went down there for safety. Every day, during school hours, we would hear the loud noise of bombs. Usually, a siren would warn us, and we would head to the basement – teachers, seniors, students, and even the food seller. As strange as it may sound, as children, we kind of liked these moments. When there was a bombing, there was no school, and we all became equals – seniors, teachers, and students alike. I would often tell my friends, "Hey, let's go to the basement again. This time, I'm sure I'll sing better than you." The teachers made an effort to keep things seem normal for us. They organized activities in the basement – singing, reciting poems, and even playing some small action dramas on a makeshift stage. There was even a canteen down there. For a few hours, we could forget about the war and enjoy our time. The teachers knew we did not fully understand the gravity of the situation, but they did their best to keep us happy and distracted from the reality of bombs falling around us.

After school, I would head to the mosque with my bestfriends to pray. They would always tease me about being the Imam because my late dad used to be the Imam there. School - mosque - home, my usual route daily. At home, I have my biological mom, who we call Dla, and my stepmom, who goes by Malika Khan. They have been taking care of me and my siblings since my dad passed away when I was just five. I witnessed them working hard to look after us. Despite the challenges of being widows, they always managed to get us new clothes and stationeries every time. When my foot stepped into my house, I thought of them first, "Malika Khan, Dla! I'm home!" I would call them, just to make sure that they are still alive. I cannot help but worry

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<sup>10</sup> co-authored: Dr. Abdulwahed Jalal Nori is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies at the AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS) at IIUM. He also serves as the Coordinator of the Centre for Foresight Studies. Dr. AbdulWahed holds a Ph.D. in Political Science, and his primary research interests include futures studies, political reform in Malaysia, and the Islamic world. He has organized and facilitated numerous workshops and seminars on futures studies.

Dhiya Damia Zuhairul is a final-year student pursuing a degree in English Language & Literature at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She is dedicated to making a meaningful impact through her work in creative writing and journalism.

Dr Altabaa holds a PhD in Philosophy, Ethics, and Contemporary Issues from the International Islamic University Malaysia. His research interests include creative and critical thinking, Islamic and comparative literatures, and spirituality and mysticism. He is the Associate Editor of Journal of Islam in Asia and a member of the editorial board of Al-Tajdid Journal

about them, especially with the constant threat of bombs hanging over us. In every Iraqi home, we have a basement. It's like a safety net – when there's a bombing, your house might get wrecked, but if you are underground, you are safe.

After the Iran-Iraq war, there was another conflict involving the United States and European countries. Saddam, who was the president of Iraq back then, decided to invade Kuwait after the Iran-Iraq war. The U.S. and European countries told Saddam to leave Kuwait, but he refused, leading to another war. This time, America bombed Iraq. After the war, they imposed sanctions on Iraq, meaning no countries could sell any goods there. It caused a lot of problems for us – groceries became super expensive. Getting basic things like sugar felt like buying drugs. We'd ask people everywhere, even in hidden alleys, "Hey, do you have sugar?" This went on for years, and we got used to not having sugar. We started using dates instead. Thank God Iraq had plenty of cheap dates. Strangely enough, it was a bit of a blessing because, back then, not many people got diabetes. The same thing happened with other products – meat, chicken, and even eggs became hard to find. My moms were pretty smart about it, though. They got ten chickens for our backyard, so we had our own eggs.

Malika Khan and Dla always made sure we never went hungry. They worked hard to ensure we had plenty to eat and that we never felt a lack of anything, especially in the absence of a father. Even now, I vividly recall the advice they consistently shared with us, "Stay positive no matter what happens. Everything is from God. We strive for peace, even if it seems elusive. Alhamdulillah, we say, no matter what challenges come our way."

War after war, chaos after chaos – it seemed like an endless cycle. One of the darkest chapters in my life unfolded when I was just eleven. Forced to flee to Iran due to the war with America, we found ourselves living on the border. This time, things were different. As the night fell and Ramadan fasting continued, the ominous sound of bombs echoed. I witnessed people hastily leaving their homes, carrying backpacks on their backs. I urged my mothers, "Let's go, let's get out of here. It's not safe anymore." "No, my son," they replied, "no one is going to harm us. We are old women, and you're just a child." The harsh reality hit me – we only had each other. The army... it was just us. "Listen, I really think we should move. Even our neighbor just left, and with everyone else gone, we can't stay here by ourselves."

We resorted to walking due to blocked roads and heavy traffic en route to the border. The journey took us three days, during which we faced relentless rain and stormy weather. Despite occasional stops for meals, the persistent downpour posed a challenge. Fortunately, we managed to avoid falling ill, but sadly, some individuals succumbed to the harsh conditions, particularly the elderly, who couldn't withstand the weather. All vehicular traffic came to a standstill, forcing everyone to proceed on foot. The path to the border involves constant uphill and downhill stretches. Amidst the crowd, my stepmother needed a restroom break, instructing us to wait. However, after a prolonged wait, she never returned. As we waited anxiously, my younger brother, exhausted and sleepy, seized an opportunity when a truck filled with people arrived during heavy rain. He sought shelter there and fell asleep in the truck, which then started moving. Regrettably, we lost track of my brother in the process.

As the sole male in the family, I felt the need to exhibit strength. Not a single tear escaped my eyes when I faced the loss of my loved ones. Our journey persisted, and after three days of relentless walking, we reached the border. Upon reaching the Iran-Iraq border, we endured a two-

year stay in a desolate environment, devoid of buildings. Nestled in the mountains, we connected with our fellow Kurds. Fearing the Iraqi army's violence, we chose not to live under Iraqi rule. Escaping the country became our best option for independence. Settling at the border, we continued our education, facilitated by the United Nations at an educational centre—more a place to keep children occupied than a traditional school. During those two years, thoughts of my stepmother and brother lingered. Unaware of their whereabouts, a tip led us to another camp where, to our relief, we found my stepmother. My brother, who had crossed the border and ended up in Iran, was taken in by a caring family. Although he returned well, the adjustment made him hesitant to communicate with us. The surrogate family, having nurtured him as their own for two years, felt a sense of sorrow upon his departure.

Following the resolution of the war, I returned to my regular school in my city, Sulaymaniyah. I continued my education there until the age of seventeen. At that point, I made the decision to pursue higher education abroad. Malaysia became my destination of choice, and I, along with some friends, applied online for admission to the International Islamic University Malaysia. Fortunately, our application was successful, and I commenced my academic journey at IIUM. Without interruption, I pursued my undergraduate, master's, and Ph.D. degrees, completing them all at IIUM.

Subsequently, IIUM offered me a position, marking the start of my journey as one of the lecturers at the university. While I settled into my new role, my friends returned to Sulaymaniyah. They embarked on diverse paths—entrepreneurship, politics, lecturing, and further studies in the UK and Germany. Our paths diverged, and here I am in Malaysia.

Though I yearn for my hometown, with its mountains, food, and people, I make it a point to visit annually. My life's trajectory has been far from simple—I've scaled mountains to learn about A, walked for days to explore B, and migrated from my homeland to understand C. Throughout these challenges, I always bear in mind that Allah is watching over me. He presents hardships to shape me into the best ummah for Him. Gratefully, these trials have borne fruit; I now reside in a comfortable home, am well-fed, and blessed with the best family—all thanks to Him.

**Dr Mai Jianjun<sup>11</sup>**

**God Muhammed Muslim**

No gods, but God, the Sole Supreme,  
No them, but Him, in every dream,  
No begetting, nor begotten, beyond compare,  
Nothing is like Him, the Ultimate Glare.

Allah, His name, the Almighty Lord,  
“Be, there it is”, His power revealed,  
Does as He wishes, His sovereignty revered,  
In everlasting eternity, only His face remained.

From Makkah's sands, a noble birth,  
Muhammad, embodiment of truth,  
A servant first, to Allah he bowed,  
A messenger chosen, his mission endowed.

Seal of prophets, his title divine,  
Mercy to all the worlds, his mission shine  
On Judgment Day, his intercession sought,  
For his followers, a mercy brought.

In the depths of the soul, Tawhid's call,  
From lips, Shahadah's truth shall fall,  
In righteous deeds, our faith unveiled,  
Towards the Hereafter, our journey hailed.

Muslim, a title, a sacred trust,  
In the Quran, our faith robust,  
Following the Sunnah, our righteous guide,  
In Jannah's bliss, our souls abide.

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Mai Jianjun, deeply rooted in Islamic faith, holds a profound respect for history, particularly Islamic chronicles. Captivated by the expressive power of poetry, he frequently intertwines themes of belief and love in his verses. At the International Islamic University Malaysia, he cultivated a diverse academic portfolio, earning a bachelor's degree in Human Sciences, a master's in Management, and a PhD in Islamic Thought and Civilization. Today, Dr. Mai nurtures young minds within the same institution, imparting the rich knowledge and experience gained from his multifaceted academic journey.

### Infinite Blessings

The morning prayer unfolds my day beautifully  
the serenity glowing all over my being.  
It envelops my day and existence with beautiful blessings  
And makes my face glow with peace  
The prayer continues to follow me  
Perhaps  
I may forget my Lord.  
To renew my submission and  
Love for Him  
In the humdrum of life  
As nights roll over into brilliant light  
bringing freshness of  
of possibilities  
hopes  
and dreams.  
Another chance to renew and revive.  
Do you take notice of the way Allah  
has nurtured and loved you this far?  
The hungry birds that take flight  
by His will,  
to mysterious sources full of delight  
and return to their nests satisfied.

Do you not count your blessings,  
Where would you begin,  
If not at the very beginning  
and if you were to count  
you will return humbled and in awe  
And come to the Truth  
That Allah is Al-Haqq  
Your Truth and mine  
And the blessings you started counting  
were as infinite as the ever-expanding universe  
So, let us raise our hands in absolute gratitude  
And bathe in His Divine Light

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<sup>12</sup> Fahmida Sultana has been writing poetry for over two decades. Her love of poetry came about from discovering the renowned poet, Rabindranath Tagore. She discovered her voice within poetry and is inspired by her faith and the beauty of creation around her. She naturally thinks deeply about nature and life and it is Fahmida's hope that her fellow readers resonate with her words and to feel a greater connection to God through her poetry. An educational professional for more than 20 years.

## **The greatest gift**

Among the greatest gift is this  
humble heart that sits in obedience  
in this fragile, earthly body  
holding fiercely to every letter  
of His Truth  
The Truth that is He  
and I am from  
Him  
The Divine Noor  
My very existence, a dhikr  
orbiting all the way back home  
To Him

My shimmering conscience  
an illuminated throne that is  
serenaded in His Divine Love  
The dome of remembrance  
The heart beating with the awe of Allah

Only death will annihilate this earthly body  
and my soul will live on for an eternity

## **Sacred**

Let my heart find  
You  
In Prayer  
In sacred words  
whispered alone

Let my heart find  
You  
In the violet gleaming  
beads of praise  
uttering Your pearly names

Let my heart find  
You  
In your Holy words  
revelations from heaven  
miracle for the earth  
and mankind  
The honoured Angel Gabrail  
that transported the divine revelations  
at the speed of light  
flowing effortlessly

28

between two differing worlds  
How Allah makes it all easy  
Allah says Be and it is.

Let my heart find  
You  
in all that you have  
carefully created,  
from my passing breath  
moment to moment  
to my passing days,  
to my passing months  
to my passing years  
from the life within me  
from the life to come  
to my eternal home.

Let my every breath be  
in Praise of You

### **Myriad Voices**

Among the myriad voices  
my lonely head spins  
like a whirlwind  
trying to decipher  
the meaning of all this

There is a message behind all this  
heart break, pain and chaos  
trials and tribulations they are called  
Do not slip from the straight path  
the path of salvation of the soul orbiting  
manifesting my own celestial plan  
a unique blue print of my life  
the one life I have to try all that is destined  
to fall and rise  
to fall and rise  
to fall and rise

like in salah, a deep reminder  
always a reminder that I am not of here  
My real home is the elsewhere  
Where?  
beyond the cosmos  
searching for me in all this chaos  
afraid to lose the little me that I have  
Am I me or made up of the different  
29

conversations and utterings of other people

People surround me with their dreams and fears  
forgetting the state of  
the soul right in front of their eyes.

Life's secrets remain floating somewhere in the Light  
who is there to willingly hold my hand and guide me along this  
labyrinth path with a lamp glowing bright  
carrying a heart full of love  
I travel through time with quiet moments of recitation  
my Isra Al Miraj  
breaking the laws of physics  
with His Divine Name  
and finding the end of all paths  
As-Salam

### **Holding the rose**

It is only a tiny rosebud  
a flower of God's design  
But I cannot unfold the precious petals  
with these clumsy hands of mine.

The secret of unfolding the flowers  
is not known to I  
A simple servant  
Allah opens the flower so sweetly,  
when in my hands  
they fade and  
Die

If I cannot unfold this rosebud  
This flower of my Lord's design,  
then how can I think I have wisdom  
to unfold this life of mine?

So, I trust in Him for His Light  
Leading each moment of  
everyday  
I will call upon Him for guidance  
and protection  
and preservation of this gift  
each step upon this pilgrim way.  
The path that lies before me  
only my Creator Knows  
I'll trust in Him to unfold  
this precious life of mine  
30

**Abd al-Haqq <sup>13</sup>**

**Ghazal - “What to Do With Honor...”**

What to do with honor if shame is the sign of your regard?  
We lie on our face fawning at the shrine of your regard  
Our breast is a black abyss of blood, a choppy sea of scars  
Every aching one afire, brimmed with the brine of your regard  
Has the shimmering scythe of dawn yet shorn the harvest of the night? -  
For the fruit of my desire swells on the vine of your regard  
Dawn to dusk, I drink away my name at inns of ill-repute  
How should I feign shame? I reek of the wine of your regard  
These tears of blood Shafaq has vested in his kerchief all  
Are precious rubies wrested from the mine of your regard

**Ghazal - “Ours Thoughts Wander...”**

Our thoughts wander in the alley-ways of your allures  
For sense cannot thread the dusky maze of your allures  
As wine-drunk lovers raveled in a bed of blooms  
Our lips fumble into florid praise of your allures  
The maudlin moth of my eye unfurled its wings  
And swayed aswoon above the becking blaze of your allures  
The Nūh of my desire, skimming over the swells of time  
Bears on, secure below the steady gaze of your allures  
Spurning the moon's touch, the silhouette of my restraint  
Melted away within the heady haze of your allures  
The dim horizon of the hapless heart of poor Shafaq  
Rages with want for the lustrous rays of your allures

**Rubā'ī – “I Roam, a Gharīb...”**

I roam, a gharīb, in the abode of love alone  
I draw, as a weary sigh, the load of love alone

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<sup>13</sup> Abd al-Haqq “Shafaqī” is a poet of Turkish descent living in the United States. He writes primarily in traditional Perso-Arabic poetic forms, on the typical themes of classical Islāmic literature.

I amble addled along the way to nowhere  
Lost, a vagabond upon the road of love, alone

**Nazm – “...In the End”**

Know nothing but hushed sorrow comes of our mirth in the end  
Prince, pauper, all alike rot in the black earth in the end

How many mighty men expire with an encumbered sigh?  
Name is of no avail, and wealth without worth in the end

**Qit’ah – “Love is a Fool's Trade...”**

Love is a fool's trade, the shrewd advise  
A game of chance - regret is all it pays!

I cast my head as a die at your feet  
Staking my honor, all, to win your gaze

**Qit’ah – “...In the Grith of God”**

They say I am a drunkard, without reason or restraint  
Cast out from the halls of grace, and limits of laud

I know nothing apart from abjection and blame  
I am a fugitive from honor, in the grith of God

مسافر

In this world,  
I am nothing but a traveller.

I am unaware of the path  
that I shall take.

But I know that whatever path  
it leads me to,  
my Lord will take care of it.

And in the end,  
it will lead me to you Ya Rabb.

For this dunya is a map,  
leading me towards my final destination.

السالم

Ya Rabb.  
My heart is filled with emptiness,  
every time it forgets about you.

But a drop of your remembrance,  
comforts my heart  
and warms up my veins.  
Filling up my ventricles  
with pearls of ease.  
As your mercy begins to envelope my heart.

I ask myself why?  
Why does this happen?

I recite one verse,  
and my soul begins to connect.  
Raise my hands in dua,  
and I am truly blessed.

For verily it is you Ya Allah,  
that heals every ache  
which lies inside  
my heart and soul.

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<sup>14</sup> Jowanah Majeed, a UK native and graduate of the University of Leeds with a BA in English Language and Linguistics, is a fervent poet and short story writer. She harbours a dream of publishing multiple books and achieving renown as an author. With a passion for storytelling and a dedication to her craft, Jowanah seeks to leave a lasting impact on the literary world.

## *Beauty of the Quran*

Your words are so beautiful,so  
delicate,  
so pure and meaningful.  
A treasure that's different from the treasures of this world,a  
treasure that we cannot live without.  
You show us the truth, you  
show us the wisdom,you  
show us courage, you teach  
us life,  
you teach us patience,  
you teach us strength,you  
teach us love,  
you lighten up our hearts with your knowledge,you  
comfort us in times of hardship,  
you give us hope  
and condemn any wrongdoing or heinous sin.

You are a miraculous book  
truly a mercy for this nation.  
When we open you,  
the darkness fades away and there is only light and lovethat  
forms in our hearts,  
making us feel a sense of peace.

You are a glorious and sacred book,  
filled with guidance and pearls of wisdom,and  
preserved in golden parchments.  
The most divine and ravishing gift from the Almighty.

But for many of us the Holy Quran is lying on our shelves,  
covered in a lot of dust, forgotten, and neglected.  
But despite all of this,  
the Holy Quran is the true saviour and guide,  
because I know that no matter what happens,  
the Holy Quran will always be the only treasure  
that will guide us back towards goodness

## *My Dear Mother*

And I guess I wouldn't know where to begin  
when it comes to the love of a mother, because  
I wouldn't know how to describe her beautiful,  
loving, and tender heart.

I wouldn't even know where to begin to articulate a love that is so endless.  
Because I know that the poetry that I writeand

the words that fill up my pages,  
could never be enough to express the love she has for her children.

A mother's love is a love that never ends,a  
love that brings joy to the heart,  
and a love that can never be replaced.She  
is my greatest role model,  
my first teacher  
and my biggest blessing.

I've never met someone so strong,yet  
so gentle.  
So humble,  
yet so wonderful.  
So loving and caring,  
yet someone who always hides their pain, and never shows it to others.

She taught us how to be gentle and kind,to  
not hurt a single soul,  
or fall into any arguments.  
But most importantly,  
she taught us the knowledge of the deen,  
and brought us up to become scholars of the deen.She  
told us that the only way to get to jannah,  
is to follow the Quran and Sunnah.

And I guess we don't realise,  
that Jannah lies beneath our mothers' feet,  
because she is our priority.  
And respecting her is the way to pleasing your  
Lord.

And so,  
the intensity of pain that lies within the depths of my heart,  
when I imagine the day my mother  
will no longer be in this world is beyond words.

Because when my heart ponders upon that day,I cry  
oceans, rivers, and waterfalls.

# Other Words

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