

Other Words

An International Journal of Creative Writing
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Editor's Note

The news, whether on mainstream or social media, is perhaps the largest repository of horror stories in the present world. Perhaps many of us numbly scroll past the atrocities on a daily basis; perhaps we stop and sigh, feel despair and helplessness, and wonder if peace and justice are mere words. Yet from time to time, we come across instances of compassion, bravery, and resistance that restore a modicum of our faith in humanity. One such instance is the valiant journey of the flotillas toward Gaza. Staying true to the values of the Islamic Literary Society, this issue of the Other Words Journal acknowledges those individuals in the flotillas who put their conscience before the fear of consequences. We sincerely hope that the featured stories and poems, irrespective of the subject they deal with, will resonate with the readers and help them cultivate values that would contribute to the building of a more just and humane world.

Afifa Alam Raisa
Chief Editor
January 2026

Introduction

Injustice, as a principal instrument, has long been a defining hallmark of the West in its various forms and manifestations. The Western world, through its once-celebrated empires, frequently demonstrated the capacity either to inflict direct harm and exploitation or to support those who excelled in perpetrating injustice. Historically, black- and brown-skinned peoples were regarded as marginal or inferior within dominant Western worldviews. Yet this tendency towards oppression was not limited to those visibly different; the West also showed little mercy towards populations whose skin colour resembled their own and whose religious commitments, in many cases, were grounded in the same theological principles.

A striking historical example of this dynamic can be found in the Great Irish Famine, which resulted in the deaths of one million people. The principal parties responsible for this catastrophe were the British government and the landowners. While the English establishment continued to enjoy a comfortable and luxurious life, the people of Ireland suffered and died without meaningful support from the British authorities. During this period, the Muslim Khalifa, Abdul Majid, offered to donate £10,000 to provide relief for the Irish population. However, Queen Victoria objected, claiming that such a contribution would render her own intended donation of £2,000 comparatively insignificant. In deference to the royal request, the Sultan reduced his public donation to £1,000, yet he did not abandon his efforts to aid the Irish people. Instead, he devised an alternative plan: when the land route was blocked, assistance would be sent by sea.

Consequently, the Sultan loaded three large ships with food, drink, and medical supplies and dispatched them to Ireland, possibly constituting the first such relief flotilla. Although the English authorities attempted to obstruct this mission, the ships navigated around England, broke the blockade, and delivered life-saving provisions to the Irish population.

A comparable situation emerges today. The people of Gaza remain under siege by the Israeli state, and, unsurprisingly, the British once again play a significant role in sustaining this siege through political and material support. Yet, as in the nineteenth century, the sea has become a pathway for resistance, and a new flotilla has now set out to challenge the blockade imposed on Gaza. The sky above, the ocean beneath, and the creatures that traverse them stand as silent witnesses to this contemporary flotilla as it confronts the forces opposing its humanitarian mission.

The world's leaders, including those who ostensibly raise the voice of Islam, remain silent and incapable of meaningful action in the face of the killing of children, women, and the elderly, restrained by fear of political pressure and attachment to worldly interests. It has instead been ordinary people of all faiths and of no faith who have taken to the sea to challenge the injustice imposed upon the people of Palestine. For this reason, those flotillas that braved the waves of oppression and raised the flag of freedom must be praised and acknowledged, irrespective of whether they share our worldview.

An example of such recognition is found in the conduct of the Holy Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), who praised Mut'im ibn 'Adī, a polytheist, for his support of justice. Although the siege remains, time has shown that a sense of justice still endures in this world. To recognise this extraordinary display of integrity and solidarity, this issue of *Other Word: An International Journal of Creative Writing* celebrates those courageous individuals who have risked everything in the pursuit of justice. Poetry and stories play a vital role in awakening the sleeping soul, particularly among us, the Muslims, for justice is a hallmark of Islam and of the Muslim community. Allah, exalted be He, says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلّٰهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ ٱلْوَلَدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ ؕ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوَّلَىٰ بِهِمَا ؕ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا ٱلْهَوَىٰٓ أَن تَعْدِلُوا ؕ وَإِن تَلَوْا أَوْ نَعَرَضُوا فَلِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is best to protect their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate from justice. If you distort the testimony or refuse to give it, then know that Allah is certainly All-Aware of what you do.

It is hoped that this volume will play a small part in nurturing that enduring sense of justice.

Abdul Hai
Operations Manager
January 2026

Abdul Hai¹

Flotilla

The wave beats softly upon the seabed,
And the creatures wonder at her pain,
Blue turning into black and then burning red.

The sky looks down with heavy heart,
Her eyes watery and wanting to drain,
She gathers thunder, trembling apart.

The bird, gliding high, grows unmoored,
Its wings forget the language of wind,
It flees toward names not yet known.

Fifty vessels between sea and sky
To break the injustice of evil hearts,
Carrying Gaza's cry through the world's unmoved hand.

¹ Abdul Hai is the operations manager of the Islamic Literary Society.

Nagat Mahmoud Ahmed Elamin²

Nanjoumi

I do not know when this rumor began, but suddenly it spread like wildfire. Men and women passed it along until chaos filled the village. Nanjoumi became the obsession of everyone—men and women alike.

Nanjoumi returned to the village after her husband died in a workers' demonstration. She came back alone, broken, to live with her father, who owned a field where he grew yams and cassava. The city had swallowed up all his children, and he remained alone after his wife's death. When Nanjoumi returned, he was overjoyed, and she began helping him with life, selling the farm produce at the weekly market.

When the rumor started and reached the neighboring villages, our village market suddenly became one of the most important in the region. Nanjoumi would squat beside her goods, and within minutes, everything was sold. Men crowded to buy from her without bargaining, paying with respect and admiration.

When she went to church on Sundays, all eyes followed her: men with affection and admiration, women with resentment, and the boys sweating nervously. After the service, the priest would greet her with a special salutation.

Nanjoumi was happy with her new status as a respected widow of a martyr. For the first time, she felt that something good had come out of her husband's death. She worked with her father in the field and went to the market. A veterinarian visited them (unannounced) and told her she could increase her income by keeping poultry and selling eggs and meat. Days later, the blacksmith arrived—also a stranger—and offered to make cages for her free of charge.

Then came the agricultural engineer, telling her that changing the irrigation system would increase production, and offered to do the work himself.

² Dr. Nagat Mahmoud once taught theatre in Sudan; now he lives in Qatar. "Nanjoumi" was written and translated to English by the author. It was first published in Arabic in Ufuq, July Issue, 2008.

Later, the police officer arrived, responding to an old theft report her father had filed five years earlier, and assured him the tools would be returned.

Next, a physician asked why she never came to the clinic. She said she was fine. He replied, "Let me make sure," and measured her blood pressure—and her father's as well. Then the school principal came and told her they were forming a mothers' association and wanted her to join. She replied: "But I have no children." Finally, the village chief came, telling her father he could expand his land into the neighboring plot if he filed a request, bringing the papers and promising to return the next day.

All these visits aroused suspicion in Nanjoui and her father. The father said: "Perhaps your husband was a great man and secretly worked with a political movement." Indeed, whenever she passed through the village, men rushed to help her, while boys begged to work in her field for free.

One day, the priest came saying he had decided to visit his flock. The father was overjoyed, especially remembering that the priest hadn't even come when his wife died. With repeated visits, neither Nanjoui nor her father was surprised anymore.

A year passed until the cassava harvest season came. That morning, Nanjoui saw a huge number of men heading to her farm offering their help. She thanked them, and the harvest was completed in record time compared to before.

As I said, the village market flourished and became a destination for the surrounding villages, and no one knew the secret. Then it became clear that the malicious rumor haunting Nanjoui was the cause.

Until one day, the priest stood during mass and angrily declared, "In this village, there is a cursed woman! She has become the obsession of men, and the Lord will curse her in this life and the hereafter. She gives to whom she pleases and withholds from whom she pleases, stirring discord among husbands, brothers, and neighbors. We must all stand together with the Lord to expel her from our village."

All eyes turned toward Nanjoui, who was stunned.

The priest went on shouting, “This woman is a witch! She has contracted a demon in the form of a serpent and lodged it in her womb, granting satanic pleasure to those she chooses while denying others!”

His voice rose, “When the widow Nanjoumi passes by, boys hide their bulges with their schoolbags, and men sit down so their erections won’t show!”

Thus, in a ridiculous slander, all the men of our village and the neighboring ones believed it. And the trade in men’s tight underwear flourished...

Monica³

Prayer of Acceptance

I release fear...
the need to be strong.
I let life flow—
just as it once dreamed.

I don't need to know the meaning.
I look beyond fear...
with trust in my eyes.

In the unknown—
I sense a purpose.
No map. No compass.
Still... I walk.

I accept what stays.
Even when it hurts—
that, too, is me.

Let the weight fall from my heart.
Let rebellion rest.
Let resistance soften its sorrow.

I open my soul—
pure... unarmored.
Let love flow freely
within this fragile shell.

Let sadness tremble,
but tremble gently.
Let joy...
sing softly in the silence.

³ Monica is a writer, freelancer, and mom who draws inspiration from the rhythms of everyday life. Through her work, she explores themes of identity, healing, and the small miracles that make each day meaningful. Writing is both her passion and her way of connecting with others through shared stories and experiences.

God guide me.
Through shadowed days.
When I cannot change—
show me instead:

How to love the difficult.
How to doubt...
but not lose faith.
You know the way.

Help me hold myself again.
In my imperfection—
a miracle lives.

In fear and in glow—
one thread, one story.
And with love...
I gaze into my “because.”

Let paradise grow
in the quiet corners of me.
Let grace bloom—
like May.

Through storm and sun...
day by day,
let the silence of prayer
keep flowing.

In this one breath—
I am here.
In this moment—
I am.
Without fear.

Afifa Alam Raisa⁴

Call Back My Heart

Call back my heart, Lord—if my soul must stay—
Hold with love, closer to You
Than a believer's sigh in a tyrant's den.
Soothe it, Lord, for what can soothe eyes—
Gaze stripped of sight
By a veil that hangs between?
Though this be brittle and a glass blemished—
A drifting lump and suppurative—
Your Grace heals all flaming stains.
Then whom else shall my heart find,
If not my Lord—
You, whose love cuts deeper
Than a mother's for her lost child?

⁴ Afifa Alam Raisa is the chief editor of the Other Words Journal.

Imran Shah

Parable of the Pro-Palestinian

In the slow accessibility,
Of masked reality.
In the consequential eye opening,
Of major events unfolding.
In the face of disdain and social sighs,
Of people's hard, rash and insecure eyes.
Hopeful and transparent,
Our chants, vocalised and transparent,
"Free Free Palestine!
Free Free Palestine!"

.....

And so we marched on.

And in the conclusive researching,
Of colonisers continuously amputating.
In judicious feelings arising and ricocheting,
From witnessing bodies bombed and shattering.
In the horrified collective acknowledgement,
All aligned in directional advancement.
Mature and cultivated,
We loudly lamented,
"Gaza Gaza don't you cry,
We will never let you die!"

.....

And so we marched on.

And in the organic mobilising,
Of masses of humanity, beaming.
In the derived lessons of dignity and unity,
Of Palestinians striving and resisting.
In the continuous advocacy,
Of their oppressive and shocking stories.

Rising with a bolstering number
Awoken from our slumber,
We shout,
“In our thousands, in our millions,
We are all Palestinians!”

.....

And so we marched on.

And in the conceptual maiming,
Of the occupation’s semantics and schemings.
In the convicting slow collapsing,
Of the apartheid’s abilities and dealings.
In our creativity and fluidity,
Of our coherent, unyielding and strategic activity.
Complex and able,
Powerfully we dictate our parable.
“From the river to sea,
Palestine will be free!”

.....

And so we march on... ..

The Cleansing Fire

Ash falls down on this land again,
Solvents cloud the air once again.
Suffocation and stifling,
The slow crunching of fabric unravelling.
As the light ash oppresses in high density,
As annoyance turns into sheer savagery,
Colour diminishes from this beautiful land.
Almost systematically in hand.

Who are those that have created this?
Who are those that have let this persist?
It is those of the Sky.
Those who look over us so high.
They have chosen to behave small minded and blind.
They have chosen supremacy in their kind.
They have forgotten it is the Heavens and Earth who ordained their role and tasks.
They have forgotten this truth hidden behind their ideological masks.
And thus they have chosen to be insincere.
The lies that have confounded them, they adhere.

And alas the light of dynamic harmony dwindles and dims,
And all becomes slow, greyscale and grim.
But as the ash piles in thick coats,
The stench and heat of injustice smokes,
And in the occasional fresh gulps of hope,
Amber ignites, littered in starry glows.
And although the transformation's commence is slow,
In every passing moment, the flames grow ever bold.
In its vibrancy it roars in hunger,
Becoming ever so magnificent and stronger.
Spitting out flames of their own organised discord,
Consuming inhibitions, rising with flaming tongue and sword.
Fuming to those of the Sky, to acknowledge their audacity,
To acknowledge their spite and account for their hypocrisy.
In a radiance of colour and reactions,

In dramatic and dynamics convulsions,
The flames continue to clean this land.
Against those who raise a suppressive hand.

And when all is cleansed and gone,
And injustice is undone.
The flames and smoke shed into nothingness.
Their role and presence seed back into completeness.
For colour to settle and assemble,
Upon the fabric that is conducive.
To give space for life to be again,
To allow the land and harmony to be one again.

Saba Zahoor⁵

How Else, if Not with Deen?

How does one reconcile with the idea of death—
with the slow wilting of parents,
with mankind's sickening indisposition to entropy?
How does one look upon the horrors of humanity,
its fevered cruelty and its indifference to its own undoing,
and not go mad?

How does one stomach the imposing solitariness of the universe,
with the intriguing construct of time-
stretching and bending at will?
And yet, live as if fermenting,
without acknowledging the undeniable grandness of the design.

How does one come to terms with the other worldliness of the rain,
never being able to see the dark side of the moon?
How can one avert the impending insanity?
How else, if not with deen?

There's a sadness that creeps in
watching the fractals of life and death unfold,
and yet, there's an unwitting pulchritude to life itself—
a proof of love in grief.
To find, one must lose.
How else, then, if not with deen?

So we bow, not in fear
but in recognition-
that the cure of sadness
entails its acceptance.
How else, if not with deen?

⁵ Saba Zahoor was born in Srinagar, Kashmir (Indian Occupied Territory), and she is currently living in Saudi Arabia. She is an engineer by profession, an alumna of NIT, Srinagar. She considers herself a 'peasant poet' of sorts, writing from the threshold of nostalgia, where "the stars remember and the ruins whisper." For her, poetry is a wormhole to an alternate universe. Her poems have previously appeared in Inverse Journal, Mountain Ink, Fevers of the Mind, and some upcoming works will appear in The Asahi Haikuist Network, The Muse India Journal, and Critical Muslim Magazine.

The Theatre of the Absurd

Why do the young grow more weary
when confronted with life than old men?
Why did I, while strolling and humming a tune,
stop short and suddenly start crying?

It's a little hole of emptiness,
of drowning heaviness;
running deep down into my crust.
A dry well, a black hole.

Into the dense forest of intellect,
of spider's web,
I plunged for refuge and steadily
lost my way into nothingness.

I ran amuck in a field of philosophies,
of blooming absurdities-
a country where no boundary exists
between sleep and wakefulness.

I woke up suicidal in a happy nest,
at its freaking best.
But no amount of love could cure
the sepulchral heart of the solitary.

I fled from the maddening multitude
at the behest of solitude;
raging battles and, at other times,
shaking hands with the devil.

I sought happiness in stupidity—stumbling against inebriety,
marijuana in music, and the first act
of the play, death, in deep slumber.

I laughed at the lost intent
of a life unspent;

laughed on the eve of happiness,
laughed too in the throes of distress.

And then a thorn pricked me
-the prodigal son of impunity.
I had a fall, I broke my pride
-left sore under my derelict hide.

A transgressor hitherto, deaf and blind,
how shall I ever contentment find?
Unless He favours me and removes
the seal set on my heart.

Not anywhere on the world map,
nor in a mother's lap,
no peace can be attained for aye
unless the forehead meets the ground.

The deeds of a life lived heedlessly-
none shall avail even if it be-
the upheaval of seas in the heart,
the drumbeat of the tears on rooftops.

Lo! The sinner finds happiness
only in repentance;
and the kingdom of Solomon
on a prayer rug.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Last Rites

I'm free of you, pagan,
with your last rites:
the fire end of a matchstick
and the dried yellow papers
inked with verses.

You were far away
in another country when I died.
You observed two minutes of silence
in memory of
my two burning couplets.

The night glowed as the letters danced.
I watched my S's writhing in pain
and B's yielding at last
amongst the ashen vowels, reciting
a death tale.

The will is lost.
But don't weep, infidel.
It's a beautiful end:
the paper curls, closing in on itself, embracing the flames.

The air is cold. I breathe my last.
What an exquisite delight!
A part of me burns, turning
into ash; another dissolves
into a wisp of smoke.

Mufti Khalidul Haq⁶

Death's Regret

I found him, the angel of Death.

He crouched on the ground, wearing his dark armour, waiting.

Have you ever felt sorry for any who became your victim? I whispered.

Never, responded the Dark Angel, his voice reverberated, filling the entire void.
Never . . . save twice.

Pray tell, mighty angel, I asked.

Listen carefully, he said.

The Child

A terrible flood had ravaged through the land. Houses had been demolished, trees had been uprooted and bystanders had been swept away. The flood had been fierce; the inhabitants had never seen anything like this before. The wreckage had been carried far, far away from its home.

Suri opened her eyes. The sunlight made her squint. She felt strangely light when she knew too well that she should be heavy. She realized with sudden panic that the load in her waist seemed to be absent. Summoning all her available strength, she began to stir and tried to sit up. She felt weak, the strength had been sapped out of her. She couldn't get up. She lifted her head.

Near her right leg, she could see a pink form. Her vision was blurred, so she had to blink a number of times to see clearly. She could see a tiny face and a tiny

⁶ Mufti Khalidul Haq began memorising the Qur'an in Jami'a Islamiyya (Tunbridge Wells, Kent) and completed it in Darul Uloom London (Chislehurst, Kent). Thereafter, he began the Alimiyya programme and completed it in Madrasa Arabia Islamiyya (Johannesburg), where he also pursued a specialisation in Fiqh under Mufti Muhammad Sa'id Mutara and Hadith under Shaykh Fadlur-Rahman al-A'zami. After graduating, he served as an Imam in many mosques. Currently, he teaches Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh at college.

body. Her heart swelling with tender love, she joyously noticed the tiny chest rising and falling.

How could it be? Suri could not remember anything. Her new-found happiness gave her strength to now heave herself up. There was a sharp pain in her back as she tried to sit straight. She reached out to her babe. The cord was still attached, though she didn't notice. All she could do, as she held the infant boy in the palms of her hands, was to look at his serene face, sleeping without any fear or care in the world.

Suri felt herself smiling. She took a deep breath and brought the child closer to her face. She tenderly planted a kiss on his soft, ever so soft cheeks.

* * *

This was when His Command came. I was to take the mother of the babe. Indeed, I felt compassion for the child: who would tend to his needs? But His shall be done. No mortal may tarry here; all must leave this ephemeral realm.

What of the second, O Dark One? whispered I.

Pay heed, said he.

The King

The entire city's inhabitants gathered for the event. It was a beautiful day: the sun shined her glory onto the earth. There was a sweet breeze rustling the leaves. There was an excitement in the air as they all awaited the king's arrival.

The people whispered amongst themselves. Will they be let in to see the wonders kept therein? It was rumoured that King Shaddad was able to secure a tract of paradise and now barricaded it behind the golden bars. Others said that an angel had come at the king's bidding to blow heavenly breath onto the land, causing it to blossom with unearthly delight.

A soldier called out for order. The regiment fell into line and stood straight. The people gasped as they observed the procession now approaching them.

Hundreds—nay, thousands—of young maidens with wooden baskets containing flower petals scattering them on the ground. Behind them were huge warriors, clad in black garments and wearing silver-steel masks shaped into a gruesome, fearsome mould. They marched, the sound of their boots made the people fear for themselves. Then came the most extraordinary sight of all.

An immense carriage, crafted from ivory, decorated with pure silver and gold. It was being carried by hundreds of men, all crouched to the floor, heaving under its sheer weight, crawling along. It was skirted with pink sheets of silk curtains. It had a huge flight of stairs. The people could not see the monarch.

The mighty carriage was brought in front of the golden gates. The people waited with wide-eyed amazement. The Petal Scatterers had alighted the stairs and anticipated the emergence of its inhabitants. Suddenly, a bevy of buxom damsels began to emerge from the carriage. Dressed in iridescent transparent fabric, generously endowed, making the male observers ache with desire. They were the Royal Concubines, experts in the art of pleasuring men.

Finally, the king emerged in all his royal glory. He wore crimson red, embroidered with gold. He donned a lavishly-embellished crown and held a matching staff. Two concubines held each hand as they guided him down the steps, the petal girls generously raining their petals at his feet. The king stood before the golden gates as they were being opened by the servants. The people cheered joyously.

What a day, thought the king. Thirty years it took to make this paradise. Every vegetation known to man had been harvested therein. The greatest craftsmen had been summoned to build a palace whose like would never be seen in hundreds of years to come. There was even an army of concubines raised in it and had never seen a man before.

The gates were opened. The king tentatively took the first steps towards it . . .

* * *

Lo! His Command came: I was to seize the king before he could lay eyes on his prize. I felt sympathy for this foolish king. He had spent his entire life building

his paradise but would leave before tasting its fruits. But His must be done. No mortal can tarry here. All must leave this temporal abode.

* * *

Suddenly, a thunderous sound began reverberating our surroundings. Even the depths of our souls were shaken. It was Him. I hastily crouched near the armour-clad angel and reverently closed my eyes and listened.

Know: the babe and the king are one.

Reach Out for the Olives

The mother spread her hands across the burnt Olive tree,
Hugged the bark,
Hugged the rotting olives,
Hugged the charred leaves.

The yearning of the mourn collapsed to the ears of her neighbors

“Shall we spread our arms to the poor woman?” Ymir whispered,

“I tried my best to extend my hands to her but the cruel husband wouldn’t let me even try and console!” Leone groaned,

“There is no use in extending yourself to her! Her husband is a victim too!” Qajar cried, lamenting as she turned her face away from the mourning mother and her cruel husband.

“Dressing in white and blue doesn’t make you pure! I shall show you what the effects of harming my olives wrath upon you!” Irum yelled, extending her stick, hurling stones at Iqrar—the husband of Palam—for he had in his drunken rage and emasculated entitlement tried to sneak into her garden!

“Have mercy! Have mercy on poor me!” Iqrar yelled, the affection of the stones and sticks not even putting a dent in his body “Can’t you see! Can’t you see! I reached out for Olives and they poisoned me! Olives harmed my Pine trees!” he pretended to fall and moan in pain!

“What a vain man!” Leone laughed, even though her swollen eyes proved that Iqrar had slammed her onto the ground without a warning. “He is nothing without his big brother, Armar! Just a philanderer who stole his wife’s land with blood and torture!” Ymir added, limping from the last beating Iqrar sent forth by the hands of her husband tied up in lies and façade.

⁷ Avis began writing as a form of survival. At fourteen, journaling offered a way to escape—a quiet attempt to make sense of the world. But what started as a private outlet transformed into a passion. Now, Avis can often be seen working on their laptop, digging into a topic or watching YouTube; their words are their loudest voice, and their best ally is their rage.

Yet, Palam wept, the charred bark, the charred leaves of smoke and dust, the rotting olives!

It was her child, that tree was Palam's own flesh and blood "If there is a merciful God that bestows upon the soul of my child! Please, hear my plea! Reach out your mercy to my Olives!" her body croaked and rattled into a deathly movement, a defying sound of bones crunching, her soul leaving her body. Yet, her neighbors couldn't do anything but rebel and watch as her corpse rot—for Iqrar would howl like a useless human and his brother would crush anyone with the loud stick in his hand.

Lying that it was God's when it was *Iblis* that covered his shoulders.

Abeer Piracha⁸

Drink Some More

I asked my Beloved,
“Why am I not yet drunk in Your love?”

He smiled and said,
“You’ve only just begun to drink.
To lose yourself completely,
you must drink more—
and more—
until nothing remains
but My love.”

I said,
“I only want the peak of Your love—
to love You so deeply
that nothing else can be seen,
that I see only You,
and You alone.”

He said,
“Then go,
and learn the etiquettes of love first—
and only then claim
that you love Me.”

⁸ Abeer Piracha earned her PhD in Literature from the University of Texas at Dallas, where her dissertation examines the misrepresentation of Rumi in the West through the lenses of Orientalism, translation, and spirituality. She teaches Composition and World Literature at Dallas College. Her work explores faith, love, and the search for the divine in both contemporary and classical contexts.

Bulbul-E-Bangal⁹

At the Edge of Silence

নতুন কোনও প্রার্থনা নাই, নাই আর চেতনার কাব্যিক ধ্বনি,
তবুও হাওয়ায় ভেসে আসুক পুরোনো এক নিরব রাগিনী।

No new prayer remains, no poetry for awakening,
Yet let a silent old melody drift upon the wind, unbreaking.

নাই কোনও ক্ষোভ, নাই কৃতজ্ঞতার আকুতি,
শুধু পচন, শুধু পতন, তাতেই আজ শান্তি সূচি।

No anger lingers, no pleading voice of gratitude,
Rot and ruin, today, in that, peace finds its prelude.

দূরে বাজুক করুণ সুর, নামহীন এক রাগে,
ভবিষ্যৎ বুঝি না আমি, অতীত ভুলে গেছি বহু আগে।

Let a mournful tune play far away, in a raga with no name,
The future I understand not; the past I forgot without shame.

এই ধ্বংসস্রুপের ঢেকে-যাওয়া দিগন্তের কিনারে,
একবার, শুধু একবার দেখা দিক প্রিয়তম (ﷺ), অনন্ত জ্যোতির ঝলকে।

At the edge of this ash-veiled horizon,
Once, just once, may the Beloved (ﷺ) bestow the ever-enchancing sight.

⁹ Bulbul-e-Bangal, originally from Bangladesh, completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Cambridge before beginning doctoral research at Edinburgh. His academic pursuits are complemented by a strong interest in South Asian literary traditions, particularly the Indo-Persian cultural heritage that has shaped the region's intellectual landscape. He maintains an active engagement with classical poetry from the subcontinent, drawing inspiration from major literary figures across Bengali and Urdu traditions. As an avocation, he works on literary translations between regional languages, exploring the rich linguistic tapestry of South Asian literature.

Zurinah Hassan¹⁰

Standing on the Jetty

I stand on the waterfront
Seeing them off one by one
Those boats
As they sail to the river of age
To the ocean of time
As I have said at the jetty
Be careful my children
May you anchor on the best land,
This is your only boat
Keep your sail afloat
Standing on the jetty
I remind my children
The ocean is a challenge

¹⁰ Zurinah Hassan was the first female writer to be awarded the National Literature Award (Anugerah Sastra Negara) in 2015. It is the highest recognition by the government of Malaysia for creative writers, carrying the title of Sasterawan Negara or National Laureate. She is also a recipient of the Southeast Asia Writing Award (SEA Write Award) in 2004.

Zurinah was born in Alor Setar, Kedah, in 1949. She received her early education in Kedah before continuing her studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, from which she obtained a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree majoring in comparative literature. She worked as Information Officer and took optional early retirement to pursue her passion in creative writing, at the same time pursuing higher degrees. She obtained a Master of Arts from Universiti Putra Malaysia and Ph.D. from Universiti Malaya in 2008.

Zurinah writes in various genres. To date, she has produced collections of poetry, collections of short stories, a novel, and a memoir. Zurinah has won writing prizes at national level, such as Hadiah Sastra Perdana, the Utusan Group Literary Prize, the National Library Book Prize, and the Islamic Short Story Prize. Zurinah's work has been translated into several languages, for example, her collection of poetry *Menghadap ke Pelabuhan* has been published with translations in English, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and French.

She has been appointed by several universities, including as Research Fellow by University of Malaya and Adjunct Professor by the Universiti Malaysia Perlis.

When Nature Cries

I have spoken out
when they harm the hills
and wound the trees
Where I learn to write poetry

But they say
I must learn to face reality
This is the age of industry
We cannot avoid deforestation
We need more houses
for the growing population

May be they are right
but it breaks my heart
as they sit to calculate their profit
the wind is jumping on the roof
Water attacking villages and coasts
It's my people who suffer the most
Let the poor cling to lifeboats
or drift with the mud and tide
we need stylish houses
For the country's images and pride

Let the earth be sad and desperate
The country does not need romantic poets.

The Tortoise and the Hare
(translated by the poet)

Almost everyone knows this story
Of a hare and a tortoise in a running race
And everyone is surprised
When the tortoise is the winning grace

But the hare has its own story
I choose defeat deliberately
Even though I know some would laugh at me

Can you imagine
if I had won the competition
Would there be a celebration
Some would still be laughing
That I should race with the tortoise
I can do the fastest sprint
While the tortoise can only crawl
little by little

Fighting the weak deserves no honor
It is an empty battle
Fighting a rival not of your level

Now that the tortoise has won
And I have been beaten
They continue the discussion
On the price of arrogance and overconfidence

it is my intention and purpose
To let the tortoise arrive first
This way the story will stay in your mind
As a lesson to mankind

Steve Noyes¹¹

ط - و - ف

T - W - F

To walk around, circumambulate.

High time we went on the far-away hajj
and paid extravagant fares
to circle the Ka'ba, the black rock
draped in black fabric that the ancients believed
was a fragment of Venus, to centre ourselves.
Because sometimes we feel we are spokes
of a meaningless wheel.
Here we go round the end of the war
undermined so the war can resume.
O leaders of the arbitrary nations,
as you circle your previous statements,
whiff on the fungo-ball of fact,
tell us what you failed to mean.
Let us circumspectly read the press-release.
Here we go round the analog clock.
Here we go round the mulberry bush.
Here we (gingerly, fenugreekishly)
circle that fattening sinkhole.
Here we go round the aid-package,
the World Bank, the repayments,
the devalued currency.
The unintentionally drowned atoll.
At the centre of peril
is the fault of the human.
At the centre of the hurricane
is a holograph of Judy Garland.
At the centre of the people
who constructed the circle of Stonehenge
were the seeds in their stomachs.

¹¹ Steve Noyes is a Sunni Muslim and the author of ten books in Canada, including his recent poetry chapbook *The Conveyor*, which won the 2024 B. P. Nichol Prize. His other collections include *Rainbow Stage--Manchuria* (Oolichan Books) and *Ghost Country* (Brick Books). His poems have recently appeared in *The Literary Review of Canada*, *Devour*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *The Malahat Review* and *Asemana*.

س - ل - م

S - L - M

Salaam. Peace. Submission.

A universal salaam is around us
though we miss it, insensible,
the molasses of our special solipsism
but it, osmotic, slips through our cell-walls
and is the measly limitless space
electrons sillily carom around in.
Salaam, our stripling senses.
Salaam, the miraculous clemency from sleep.
Salaam, the smell of seaweed.
Salaam, the periscoping seals,
the vigilant heron on one leg,
the whisker-twitching otter,
so slick and muddy he seems
emergent from the earth.

غ - ر - د

GH - R - D

Ghurud, ghuruud. Shifting Dune(s)

We thought it was there.
We went there. It was not
there at all. It had not
obliged or succoured us
in the slightest. Its run
over rise, the burnt-
blonde full-sail immensity
of its mass. Not.

Al-ghuruud,
The shifting dunes.
Elusive, like *Al-ghuruur*,
the vanities.

Perhaps they were over here,
but we forgot. Or they only existed
in memory, or anticipation.
Weird, to grip the truth
of wandering sand. It moves.
In some ways even rock
Is liquid.

Suppose we opened
our storage locker and found
someone else's things
stacked to the cube-roof
and came again tomorrow
and found it empty. *Mata'*
Al-ghuruur. The enjoyment
Of vanities. Thrill of froth.

And the moved dune's confreres,
over there. And there.
The plural of *ghurud* is *ghuruud*.
The shifting dunes. Slow-moving
dromedaries. Utter husks.

And *Ghurid* means “to twitter.”
Enough.

Other Words

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