

All this water...
pouring in
my hands and
I am ever thirsty



The poetry and renderings of
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*An amazing woman initially collected a few of my poems, convinced me that it was poetry
and used some words to put it in context. She was and will always be the poet of my life,
even if she does not know it!*

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I tread hesitantly, as if on hallowed ground. In order for the beauty of the poet's words to shine through, I must minimize my intrusive presence. Allow me then only a few comments.

This anthology is not a collection of disparate poems. It is instead a life story told in myriad places and in measureless moments. There is no recounting of space or time here, no attempt to live the past vicariously through cautious words. These poems are vibrant and immediate, written in the eye of the storm and in the fray of the battle. To read them — to feel their acute pain and molten aestheticism — is like watching a poet at work, to feel the ink still wet on the pages. In my mind, the poems are therefore fragile expressions of a deep-rooted existential despair — a despair that comes not simply from lost loves or lost lives but from the Sartrean realization that to be forced to live is a “freedom rather like death.”¹ And thus the title, All this water pouring in my hands and I am ever thirsty.

Although this is a life story, as real as it is fantastical, as are our ordinary and extra ordinary lives, it seems appropriate to refrain from matching events and sites to “actual” ones. No editorial sleight of hand will be able to put into neat order the intricate ensembles of meaning that overlap and collide through the pages of this work. I will therefore not tell you anything about the poet. In many ways, he is as relevant as he is irrelevant. Poems always speak from within our souls and therefore cognizance of the material bodies that accompany such souls is useful. And yet, poems are always incomplete indicators of our torments and desires. Closure is possible only in the act of reading and in the gossamer connections that this establishes between hitherto unrelated biographies and destinies. But such closures are never secured and guaranteed: All this water pouring in my hands and I am ever thirsty.

In order to facilitate such blurring of boundaries, I have chosen to break with the tradition of chronological ordering. The spirit of the poems, I felt, called for a disruption of linear time — a recognition that our lives are always haunted by intimations of the past and contemplations of the future. Here are some borrowed words to explain what I mean.

I began then to think of time as having shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away.²

I leave you then to look down through these poems into hidden pasts and fading futures. I leave you to the sense that there is no inexorable journey to a predestined point — there is only what you choose to find. All this water pouring in my hands and I am ever thirsty — I give you a set of poems whose dynamism comes from the dialectic between the water and the thirst, between the sun and the shade, between the relief and the anguish. Perhaps at the fulcrum of this incessant movement lies our salvation: the ability to live and to face up to the act of living.

¹ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*.

² Atwood, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*.

I

Existences



City

On Wisdom

(Translation from Arabic inspired by Khayyam)

Happiest is she who has no
curiosity
Or he who accepts little
without anger or intensity
Among the rubble, they are
like a morning Blue Jay
Not an owl that screams at
night with all generosity.

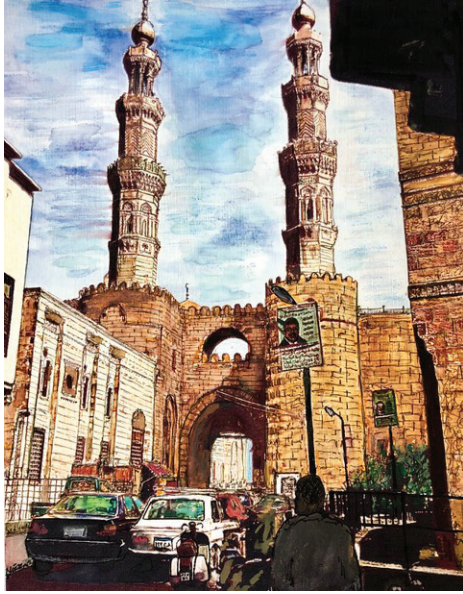
Why is it that we always knock
the door of the unknown
And when it opens we cannot
even meet what is known?
How sad it is for a heart that
has not recovered
To be hit without cover, again
and so soon.

Oh, my sick body, pain has not
left you yet
Nor did I achieve my peace and
years passed.
The time has come and I am
still ignorant
Of the book of life and its lack
of intent.

My heart is like a prisoner in
my chest
How many times did my will
seek to destroy it?
But every time I tried, I was
always shied
By tomorrow's call of what is to
come yet.

My heart has been tired of the
love of beauty
My chest has been exhausted
from the words of duty
Why is it God you so wish, and
still not grant my wish
All this water pouring in my
hands and I am ever thirsty.

Bahrain, January 20, 1995



Bab Zuwiyla, Cairo

Amazed Am I

(Translation from Arabic inspired by
Salah Jahin's Rubaiat)

Amazed at thee time and still amazed am I
You make my heart blood-cry
How is it that I can find for myself a way
When I am one who entered this world without a say?

Forced upon me thee morning, forced upon me thee night
I did not walk into this life nor was I given the right
They carried me in as I arrived without a light
And tomorrow, I leave they will carry me out without a fight.

The road to heaven cannot remain blocked
Someday its gates will surely be unlocked
Who is there? I asked, after I knocked and knocked
And since I knew not who I was, I pondered and flocked.

As winter comes all windows close and nothing is said
Except for a ray of sun from a spider's web as thin as a thread
Sure, in the night of winter many things go dead,
But many others survive and live without a dread.

I am young, but I feel I carry more than a hundred and one year
Lonely but inside me are words crowded and sincere.
Afraid, and it is within me that there is this fear
And I am often dumb, can't speak the words nor can I hear.

If there be peace in this world and safety and security
If there be no evil, no fear and no poverty
Of all the things in this world, if only we owned our destiny
I would bring into this life a thousand sons with no sterility.

I stay up all night and go to all places far
Then once, coming back at night I saw fear
It was like a barking dog blocking all that is near
So, I wanted to kill it, but the coward in me feared.

My son, I give advice until I lose my voice
Do not reject it, take it without it being offered twice
And if you see the ghost of the God you killed, the God of dice,
Ask why it did not fight against your knife once, twice and thrice.

Beware thee bird flying high in the sky
Do not think that you are the chosen one to fly
Eat your worms but remember in returning as you die
In the earth, those worms will eat you back without a cry.

I said one word and it had two meanings
Like two identical twins, each one containing
Good and Evil, and when the Evil twin is not sustaining
Then the twin of Good is the only one remaining.

And spring entered laughing, but it found me sad
It called my name, I did not respond, nor was I glad
It placed its flowers beside me as water and bread
But can roses revive those who are already dead?

Life is like a fallen leaf without the spring
Cold and colorless but who knows what it will bring
No, look carefully and you will find that you are wrong
For a winter flower can only grow in a winter strong.

An empty heart is nothing to celebrate
It contains no love, no feeling, and no hate
Even to sadness my heart you cannot relate
Imagine one day, you may get it all without a wait.

Laughter said to sadness: "Why don't you cheer up?
Winter will be gone and spring will come soon
Like chalk on a blackboard, you prevail in the total sum
Indeed, you will always only win some and lose some."

So sing your song to beauty my heart
And dance in my chest from right to left
It is not impossible that tomorrow will keep you abreast
For every moment offers a thousand possibilities ahead

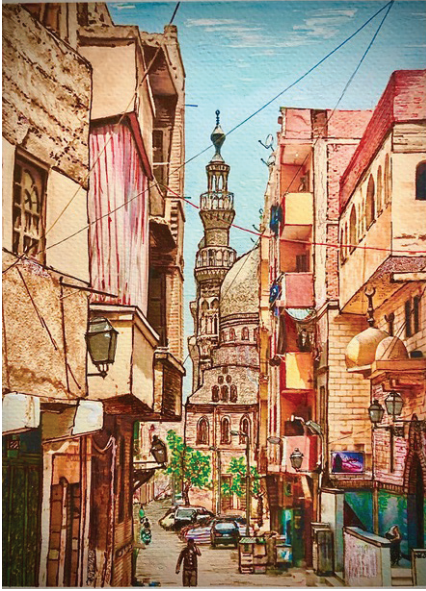
Dance around it with grace and pizzazz
Life is like a pretty woman in need of romance
She worships your elegant movement as you dance
But if you dare look at your own feet, you collapse.

I heard a drop of water inside the sea
Tell another drop, "Don't go in, in the deep,
I am scared you would drown with no retreat"
So, I asked "Mindless is he who is scared of fate."

Oh, if my lover and I can sail the sea
In a ship by ourselves with nothing to see
To land in the island of peace and joy, where
Sadness would be long gone and we are set free.

I am the one who always dreams the impossible dream
I see the moon I jump high and scream
I try to reach but why do I do the extreme
And why do I do it when my heart is full and lean?

Tunis, Berkeley, Bahrain, October 1994–February 1995



Somewhere in Cairo

II

Wanderings in North Africa

For those of us who go through life even half awake, the contours of the nightmare are often terrifying. To be socially responsible is not only to take action — this must itself be preceded by an understanding of this horrific reality. And thus, the unrelenting harshness of the imagery in these poems. These are truly in the finest tradition of existential agony. And yet, this is a humanized existentialism. Nietzsche, after having declared that God was dead, found no hope, no way of assuaging his cynicism and pain. These poems do not posit comforting alternatives, but they do recognize that to survive the death of God, and to recognize that survival, allows the hope of humanity and the joy of pleasures as simple as the winter flower. That these might be mere fantasies, impossible dreams, is at once the point and beside the point.

Tunis

They asked you not to worry and not to complain
for you are in Tunis where God will sustain.
I came to you Tunis and I was received
with open arms and a welcome unbelieved.
And now I leave you sad, content
that in distance I will still be glad
for there was no boring moment no boring day
but a life full of life, I must say
As I leave you, I hold you in
One day I will be back again.

Tunis, December 20, 1994

An Empty Life

Empty life, empty life

Give it up, do not survive
You tried hard, you tried slow
You've tried everything but low
Don't despair, the end is
near
And when it comes, there
will be no fear.

Emptiness is not so dear

Nor is it a simple or mere
Condition of blankness, of
repetition
Condition of sorrow and
recession
Do your best to end in
dignity
Surely, no one knows the
true reality.

I am not black, I am not blue

I'm only held up with little
glue
Give me a rope, hand me a line
Pass on to me a little bit of
what is fine
I will survive though I don't
wish
The only wish is to go
without a glitch.

If only I can guarantee it

Or assure myself it will be
done with wit!
Give up my friend don't wait
too long
Give up right now while you're
still strong
The mind aches and the
body desires to succumb
And only a fool would sit
and wait for it to come.

So act and act or simply live

You will not be given and
should not give.

Tunis, October 23, 1994



Water

Lonely

Lonely and cold
No woman to talk to
Sleep with or hold.

The daughter of Eve
Left me behind without
A whisper, a smell or a sigh.

To live alone is no fun
So what do I do
I go out and run.

I run and run, but where do I go
Can escape myself
And how do I do?

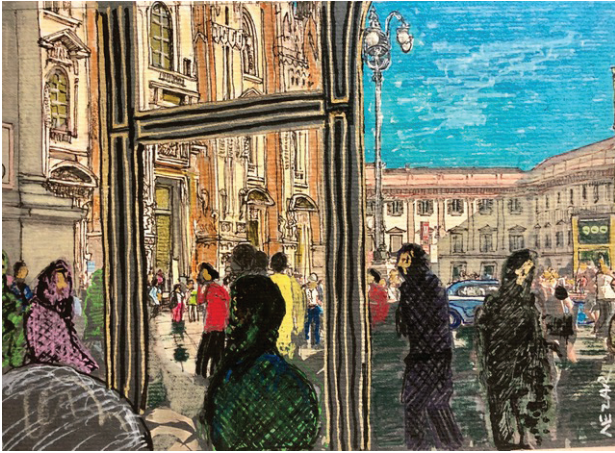
What I really want is to go out in the field
With beauty and company
And with nothing to shield.

I tired of living in a mood depressed
When will it cheer up
suppressed?

My poetry all my poetry
In pain and fear reflects
The sorrow, the sadness
Of a loss, a death in all respects.

I want to change it
Now and then.
Surely I can,
But only when?

Tunis, October 28, 1994



Milan Galleria

A Scene from the Window of a Street Cafe (A Ten-Minute Poem)

She laughed at him a beautiful
laugh
Her lips were wet
Her face was full
Her breasts were screaming
out of her dress.

And then she walked in elegant
grace
Her movement straight
Her body shakes
Only to reveal, a face as clear
with desire and fear.

Satisfaction she gets from life
no doubt
Her hands say so
Her eyes are proud
She may be heaven for a
moment sweet
For a moment gone without
retreat.

But she moved too fast
The whole encounter did not
last
Thirty seconds or more
With another bore
To leave me a decade
Thinking in store.

Tunis, October 23, 1994

Another Scene from the Same Window – A few days later

It seems this café is haunted,
with its window
Haunted with scenes of love,
sex and desire.
They walked, talked, and
looked around
only to decide that this was not
a place for fire.

So they stood out, and from the
same window
I could see the sexy movement
of tender breasts
a single touch from him to her
was answered by a sight and a
soft caress.

Two others came and sat in
front
I could no longer see the full
extent
and in between I felt the brunt
enough to sense the full intent.

They were suddenly joined by
many others
Standing, leaning, talking to
each other,
but they were not conscious of
their presence
No friend, no father, no sister,
and no brother.

I persisted and watched this
crowd outside
from such a face my eyes could
not depart
when they reached ten or more
it was the end, I was sure
when does shielding my sight
dissolve in the face of light.

But unlike all scenes in life,
this was too sweet
and as they moved
I could only see
what was below the waist,
ironically when the window
cleared
I could no longer see except the
feet.

In a second, they all disappeared
never to be seen again indeed.

Tunis, Same Café, a few days later



North Beach, San Francisco

III

Landscapes of the Soul

These poems are evocative of the lonely figure in the city. And it is as if we, as readers, are voyeurs of this soul's stream of consciousness — much like reading a novel by Joyce. The emotions express a deep discomfort and dissatisfaction with life. But this is not the dis-ease of being in a foreign place. Here, the present itself is as foreign as the places to which we travel.

To leave it at this would be too simple — a story line as predictable as the inevitability of pain. Instead, in the street cafe poem, we are transported into a magical voyeurism that explosively captures the tensions of what Berman calls “modernity”. In this evanescent but powerful moment, we see “her” through the poet's eyes. The encounter intensifies the sense of loneliness and longing, but it also imbues the cafe and the city with a humanist sense of possibilities, even if it is simply that of a decade's worth of thinking. And it is this that keeps the “rope” at bay.



Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco

Notes before Sunset

(At the Marina)

A few drops of water, splashing
Rocks piled up on the shore,
cracking
Getting a little wet
Withstanding the wind.

A structure standing up in
water
On forty-some unvertical
columns
A skyline in a distance
A dog at some proximity.

He comes, sits at my feet
Provides some warmth, then
leaves
Four birds head towards me
They start in a horizontal line.
Magically it turns vertical in
less
Than a second.

It is a very windy day
Yet still beautiful
Why am I not enjoying it?
I have never known
How to enjoy anything alone!
I am not only alone, I am lonely.
'Tis not a condition that I enjoy.

But this is good training for the
end.
In the end that is what it will be.
Life is not fair. Some get more
than others.
Those who don't keep trying
hard
to grab Things from life.

But they are better off knowing
that
Life is not fair. For justice to be
truly served,
then those who came into this
world with others
must now pay back and leave
alone without the others.

Berkeley, July 5, 1994

Some Day in July

“When the Sun Refused to Set”

It was a strange day
Unclear and muggy
But mysterious and inviting.
At the marina it all
Came together. The water
Almost green as the sky was
gray.

I waited for the sun to set
It was setting behind some
dark clouds
It was there, one could feel it.
It was not strong enough
to penetrate the water
condensed
Between its path and my eyes.

Yet it was there, I felt it
So I waited for it
To come down, and I waited!
As it tried to sink into
A lower layer of clouds
It redefined what was around it.

Suddenly a gray band of sky
Formed underneath the clouds
Which still hid the sun.
And the sun appeared now
Suspended from those clouds
Falling down into the ocean.

Yet it was not seen, so
I waited and waited for it
to Make the final push.
Finally, a few rays of light
below the clouds
Pushed through and out.

Only then did this very thin
Bright orange line form
between
The upper white cloud and
The lower, fog like, gray band.
The orange line extended
As if to eternity, but in reality
It formed another horizon in
The realm of gods.

Again, I waited and waited.
Finally, a little bit of yellow
light
Appeared at the bottom of the
white clouds.
But it was not the sun. Instead
It was its sister, its reflection
on the gray band of sky.

In only a few moments
The light started to flicker
The sun may or may not have
set.
But if it left any reminder,
It is that even if we cannot
See it, seeing its sister,
Twin sister would tell us
Most of the truth.

If only life was that simple,
Or that symmetrical.

Berkeley, July 21, 1994

Horizon Mirage

(Looking at the Eastern Gulf)

At the horizon, gazing
while listening to love
appeared a stretch of land.

It was under the sea,
thin as a sliver, the
making of a god's hand.

Looking carefully, oh how amazing
to see such beauty, and
calm in such a small island.

But is it, can't help exclaiming,
can thinness be so pretty
when it's only a few drops of sand?

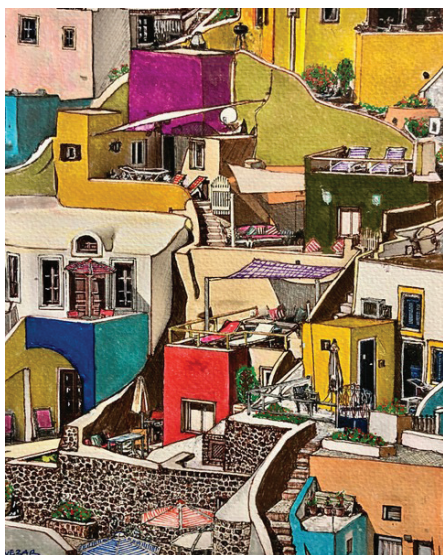
And time passes by, waiting
for the pour of love to empty,
the mass tums into beads on a strand.

I look again, carefully staring
the stretch disappears, suddenly.
did it give up and not contend?

Was it a mirage, I was thinking,
did it appear and make it boldly
on a water surface that did not fend?

It was the tide simply bringing
the cycle of change insistently
and love was there to remind.

Bahrain, February 3, 1995



Nubia.Santorini

Ten Houses

(A Poem that Ended Suddenly by Request)

Ten houses standing by
on a stretch of soil
 extended within
White, elegant, pierced
with heads like
 houses of tin.

Lights flicker from
the third, the fourth
 and number ten
People moving in and out
reflections and shadows
 of groups of men.

Smoke envelopes the
beautiful woman as
 the cigarette bums in her fingers
The glass of beer
stays chilled as the
 cigarette moves from finger to finger

A green dress withholding
a beautiful body from
 the eyes of the holy
With the rising smell
of burning tobacco, black
 descends, sensually, slowly.

Hurghada, April 1, 1995

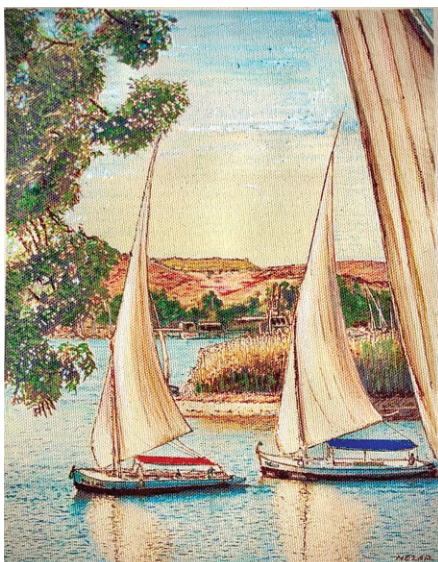


Ramadan Lanterns

IV

In Other Words

To contemplate and describe landscapes is perhaps the most obvious of poetic habits. There is in this set of poems a reverence for natural beauty as pristine as the Romantic poets. And yet, such landscapes are steeped in emotions of anguish and love. Their portrayals belong to the phenomenological, rather than empirical, tradition of understanding nature. For here what is seen is inseparable from who sees. Accordingly, all that is seemingly “natural” is inscribed with changing meanings. This then is what Eliot called “objective correlative”: poems that describe sets of objects, situations, chains of events in ways such that these descriptions become evocative of particular “structures of feeling”. And these are structures of feeling as universal and timeless, and yet as unique and specific, as the loss of love, the fantasy of love, and the presence of love.



Nile, Aswan

In Her Words to Him

(A Poem that May Never End)

All my life I was the woman
With the brittle smile
A person who underneath a facade
Felt alone and cold like a marble tile.
You ask me about my condition:
The question is what condition?
A dark image by my favorite artist
Epitomizes my self definition.
Shades of grey in a silent pose of grim composure
An existence constituted of geometric lines was my exposure.

My life was mired in a web
Of deception...then all changed.

I used to enjoy being at work
During those early days
And although I would feel dreadfully sick
There were no nays.
But I remember the short sleeve,
The nasty bruise,
Rubbing it, the twisting pain,
The heart attack, I presume.

And though the mood was dark
It all must have left a mark.

Walking down the Kasba,
Hearing our footsteps echo on cobbled path
Mingled with voices drifting from houses just passed.
Dinner at the restaurant
All I could think but dared not confront or explain
Was that I did not want the night to ever end.
Back in the room
We talk and talk, I do not feel the time or leave
A sense of incompleteness leaves me no reprieve.
Then came your confession
And my response or lack of it,
There was nothing to indicate a perfect fit.
And on the plane,
I write you again, like a twenty four-year old,
Of your keen unbearable awareness of the world.
I speak of you as the teacher,
A role that requires a certain distance in between
I speak of gratitude — too trivial to demean.

I refuse the invitation
But withhold the intention.

Then you came home or
The only thing that seems like home.
I remember the sound of rain,
The cigarette smoke in the balcony of your room,
The writing on napkins to make sense
Of the need to be together,
The dripping hair, the texture
Of fog, the desire to stay forever
The reading of poetry in
Arabic to me, communicating a Calvino city,
The sad look at the airport,
And my look back in a sense of duty.

I am by myself
But truly I am not.

I write to you of feelings
Despite the tremendous distances
As we both construct meanings
That transcend our individual existences.
I wonder if any of those countless
People who walk by ever felt such happiness.
The days are bearable but when darkness falls
It is mainly then that I contemplate your absence.
I look forward to a day where
I could see the city through your eyes.
I want to break the pregnant time
Rife with meanings, heavy with silences
For when I am with you, I feel
I have unburdened a hundred histories
I feel I have told a thousand tales
And visited a million memories.

And now we are about
To meet again, I count the moments.

Ochre fields pulled taut
To meet cellophane blue skies,
Bare trees that hold
The morning mist in clustered ties,
Shimmering surfaces of birds
Hovering over our heads,
Burning lilac skies
Stretching to an orgasmic sunset,
Water that would curve its way
In an attempt to explore
Through quaint towns, bodies merge
Making love, discovering each other's soul.
Your face is bathed in neon light,
I touch your hand, you hold me tight
My head is nestled against your chest,
Your breath blows against my breast,
Your flesh against my skin,
In me, you are more than a kin.

I write you of feelings
Some past, some are about to come.
indeed your presence has
Allowed me to experience freedom,
Freedom to express

The core of my being,
Walking at the edge of a
Mighty ocean after a lifetime of being
Trapped in a windowless
Room with eyes thirsty for seeing.

I write of feelings and positions,
Desires and decisions.

I feel your presence every
single sleeping second,
every single waking moment,
as I revisit with you the past.
Your presence has altered the world
Not only is the future changed
But so is the past, at last.
I would like to spend every rainy morning
Waking up with you, looking at you
Your silence, your gaze,
Your caress, your embrace.

I am in dire need of your touch.

You speak of death
I speak of life
Cruel jokes god plays on
Humans will cause us no strife.
We are the stunning
Hybrid culture, don't forget
How better to live our lives
Than with the other, a union we beget?

In this day of love
I have born my soul
And given you my heart to hold
In your gentle hand
What can possibly be left to give.

I see paths of a dancer
A heart suspended from the moon
Seemingly by a gossamer thread
Being free but anchored
Secured by the lover.

The universe is a stunning poem
Recited to me and composed in your words.
Shades of grey, like imprisoned birds,
Through your loving eyes are turned
Into brilliant colors and free souls.

Now, I am tenuously bounded by fluid lines
My soul flowing in and out of your life with zeal.
Foregrounds and backgrounds merge,
All silences broken to reveal
The voices within and without
The voices that for so long I chose not to hear.

I can no longer use the images
Of my favorite artist to define myself
I delight in your creation of our moments,
In your reconstruction of the memories we share,
And in your gentle and passionate endeavor
To envision our future, nothing to compare.

In all of this and so much more
You will always be my favorite artist.

Cairo, March 15, 1995

A Talk about Love

(After my father's poem written on the same day
50 years ago)

She sat there talking to me about love
 A beauty whose beauty fully endears
She sat there talking to me and she did not know
 That her beauty had overpowered my heart with fears.
I ask her: "What is love" implying
 that my heart has not known it, what a shame!
She answered as she discovered what
 I was up to, and I could see in her eyes some blame.
I was so taken that I almost believed that she was mad
 " So talk and I will let go of the little lie, don't be sad."
She said: "Did you not experience it?"
 I said: "Yes, but only in the form of words from my friend
I have not tasted it but often yearn for it
 So if I ask you, I sincerely do not mean to offend."
She said: "It is the world and all that is on it."
 I answered: "Was I wrong to seek a closer definition?"
She answered explaining, but my ears did not hear
 As my eyes were struck with the sweetness of her condition.

“It is the axis of the universe
That extends from pole to pole
Ask the earth about it as it wanders
Fleeing from east to west as it soars
Ask this flower about it as it spreads
Its perfume when it whispers to its leaves
Ask the river water as it flows what
Its soul has rubbed off the soil as it leaves
Ask the poetry that you write, what it
Means for all that you try to hide eventually shows
Do you understand now what it is?”
I said: “Your magical story overwhelms and awes
But my question was about love
And you have spoken in allusion
So let’s talk again about love
But this time with no illusion.”

Cairo, March 21, 1995



Embarcadero, San Francisco waterfront

V

Love

These are poems that break with the tradition of writing in a unitary voice. Instead, they are rich with polyphony — with intricate dialogues in which the boundaries between self and other are constantly violated. Who writes? Who speaks? Even, who reads? These are rendered moot questions. Good poetry tends to do that. So does love. Are these real voices, actual conversations? Or are they simply poetic and human fantasies? But then, who among us is wholly real? Who among us would dare claim such a status? Who among us would choose to live only in tangible moments?

Love

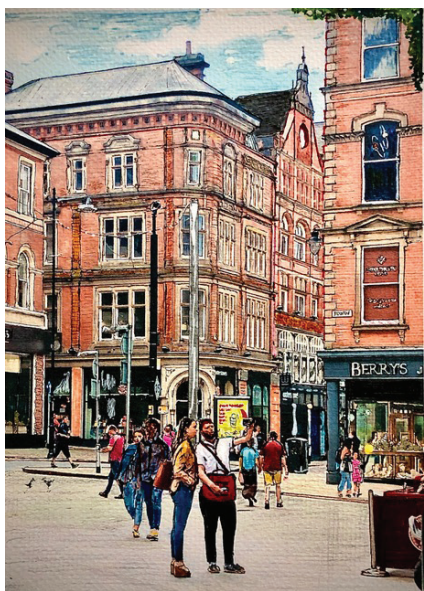
(Inspired by Abu al-Qasm al-Shaibi's Arabic poem "Love")

Love is a flicker, a magical light
born out of the sky a star so bright
To tear the eyelids of time and so
remove the veil from the face of night
Love must be a godly spirit,
whose days are winged by a sunrise light
It travels the universe and sprays its dust
for the world to star and shine all sight
Without it you would not have known
the earth, the sky, the horizon, or a single site
Love is the wine-fall whose rocks
are gentle, so drink and step in fire and ice
But you're not drunk, can't feel
the freeze or burn, do step in twice
Love is the ultimate goal of life
reach it and be at peace, forever no fight.

Bahrain, February 11, 1995

No Time

There is no time
 you always say,
there is no time,
 there is no place,
for us to be,
 that is the duality,
for “us” and place –
 an irreconcilable fact
that is all imaginary.



Nottingham, UK

VI

More

To Love You

Your voice
on the phone
in a distant land
withholds all passion,
your words
measured and composed
turns a discussion
into a session.
As you tell me
I am transformed
from a teacher into a student
As I seek to liberate myself
from you I am transfigured
into a mere subject
of your kingdom.

To love you is to learn.

In a blue car
you hold my hand
amidst traffic stalled
we talk of betrayal and
and love in a cruel world
Your eyes are soaked
with pain.
My voice trembles,
I am unsure
to imagine life,
bereft of your presence,
is too hurtful to endure.

To love you is to stake my
claim.

Your eyes settle on mine,
a glimpse of an earthly triad
white house, blue water, green
grass
a heavenly time to be glad
a sight of memories desired
where struggles are forgotten
not conspired.

To love you is to make history.

Your hands and eyes caress me
In the shade of a maple tree
caressed by the curve of the bay
From public eyes we shield
what we may
our love, our kisses
cast a magic spell
On this enchanted place
made in immortal and gentle

To love you is to be spellbound.

You read me poetry
I read your poetry
Your fingers trace the geometry
A wavy mirror reflects
an image so fine
of our emerged existence
a different culture, a different
language
Yet we cannot figure out
which is yours and which is
mine.

To love you is to be a poet of
life.

You fall in my arms asleep
on a night when the moon
is so white in the sky so deep
enamored with the light.

I kiss your body with my eyes
every inch of skin
no nerve will die,
I sleep eventually replete
awake at your gaze
everything is so complete

Bodies wrapped together
in a small apartment tendered
mundane with rhythms of life
Peaceful they are rendered.

To love you is to be able to rest.

You make love to me
probe my inner secrets
while I lie revealed.

I am helpless not to be,
unable to resist this tide
I embrace the burning need.

To love you is to make love.

In your eyes,
I see the explosive desire,
In your touch,
I feel the passion, the fire,
to hold you within
And thereby be whole.

To you love you is to be alive.

About the Nature of love

About love I ponder,
I often ask myself what it is
and I wonder
What is this elusive notion,
A feeling, an emotion
or another world

Why do we fall in love?
A question I have asked
myself a thousand times,
and I still don't know
How do we fall in love,
and on whose authority?
Why do we shed those who love us
As we yearn for those who don't

Is it the nature of the human soul,
Is it the agony of the human body,
Is it the whim of the human mind!

And I remember Australia,
This magical land
Plundered and explored
But still waiting to be lived.

On a flight, August 1996

Encounter

I write to you at the end
of another
sad encounter
pregnant with possibilities,
ripe with desire.

And now that you are gone
I must face the harsh reality
of the meaning of your absence.

I find myself going
to the same places
that we have gone to
together,
playing the same marbles,
shopping in the same stores
wanting to buy the same things
as if the sheer act of doing so
would resuscitate your being,
your presence in my world.



Downtown Oakland, 2020

You Say

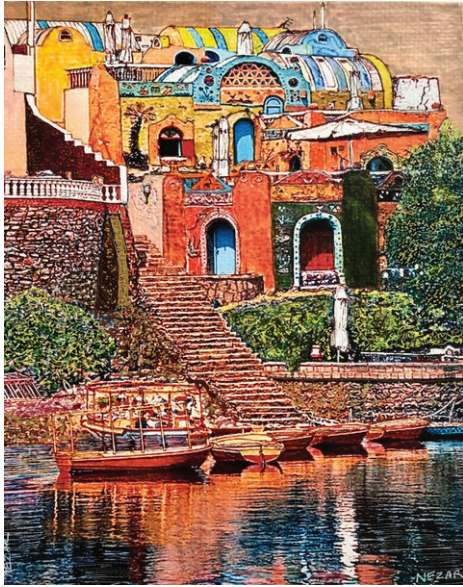
You say I am a poet,
 but you must be wrong
A poet, I know I'm not,
A novice, that is more like it.

I think that this is love
 and I know I am not strong.
Desire, love, yes that must be it.
Does it add or take away from us a bit?

How is this possible when we just met
 and decided it was worth the fling.
A candle that was just lit,
A piece, a package, a kit.

Love does not think
 does not know what it will bring
Does not know a time to set
Does not make a place to sit

Love is indeed like a strong string,
 Attached, connected and grit.
Please do not let go of it,
Never let go of it.



Nubia, Santorini

Desert Eyes

Grey peaks against azure skies
as if hands held in prayer, I see your eyes
a hundred chants told by
a hundred whispers for our pasts and our future.

In your eyes.
I climb these rocks
to find you alone
amidst clouds of desert dust

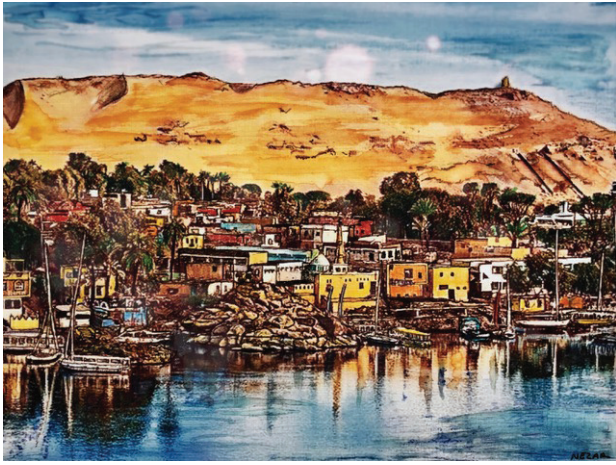
For relief, our eyes settle on water floors
blue in its depth tucked against gravel shores
we tread on white sand,
resettled at the bottom of ancient seas
timeless existence in a landscape with no trees.

And in your eyes
I wade through a lifetime of pain
to find solace
in the domain of lust.

We search for a home in blocks of white
stucco rhythm against slivers of light
I see life's home, rendered clear
reflected only in eyes so dear

In your eyes
once opaque
I see your soul
and stay I must.

Hurghada, Luxor, March 1995



Nile, Nubia

Blue

How many shades of blue do I see
seven or eight I am sure it must be.
I look, I gaze with an instant blaze,
I drink it all to empty this sea.

Then I see a small island of blue
in the middle of a sea, all full of blue
and I see a line that is truly fine
at a horizon dotted with drops of dew

But I also see other islands
linear, fish like on strands,
truly thin like a shark's fin,
and in the blue, they quietly stand.

I looked aside for a second as my eyes run
back to the place but the blue is gone
where did it go, how can it be?
This is unfair, this is no fun.

And in its place, came a breezy haze,
it was so strong, I looked in total daze
but did not find the land behind
and though my mind insisted,
my eyes collapsed in total faze.

Silver indeed, it has become
a single plate, a shining sun
on water and sky; what a divine tie
to be etched in memory
for years to come.

But silver did not last,
a moment or so and it was a distant past
then shades of grey appeared astray
confused, bewildered,
they spread so fast.

Even the grey was beautiful indeed
it broke the unity but spread the seed
for another divine union of time
and place, that sight and mind
cannot fully read.

When darkness descended,
came a confident black
or shades of it in elegant track
and only the flicker of a ray of light
divided sea from sky's back.

Bahrain, looking at Beit al-Houra in the Persian Gulf, February 2, 1995



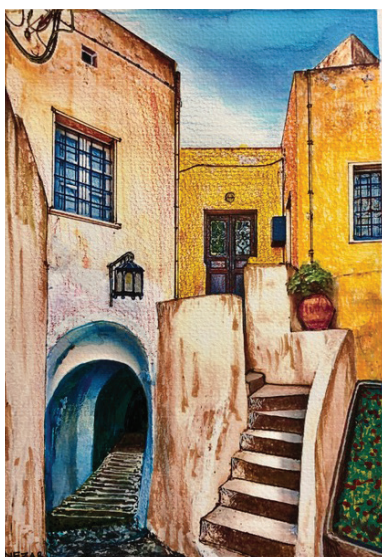
Delft, Netherlands

Love is my Culture

(Inspired by my father's poem in Arabic titled
"Love is my Religion," London-January 1946)

Culture may divide us but love unites us
 and what is culture if it is not what we feel.
I loved you from the very first encounter, I said yes
 to nascent love but one that is indeed so real.
And I slept content, my soul free of life's fuss,
 my heart and mind engaged having made their deal.
So let's enjoy the warmth of youth, for it is
 from the pleasures of life that we must grab a steal.
And let's submit to the call of love and trust that
 God forgives all sins of love once revealed.

Cairo, March 25, 1995



Nubia, Santorini

A Feeling

A little bit of tenderness
is what my heart desired,
a warm hug and sweetness
without an attempt conspired.

It all started with a kiss
nothing lost, nothing acquired,
what a wonderful life it is
after a time of being tired.

Don't think so much of risk
enjoy the moment at hand,
enjoy the beautiful sky, the brisk
winds that pass by and be glad,
but try and don't always over think,
someday, you'll never again be sad

Berkeley-Bahrain, January, 1995



Downtown Cairo, 1940

Inflicting Pain

Why is it that we seek revenge
on people who are innocent of a mistake
towards us or because of us, yet we do.
Why do we subject them to such
pain and suffering and we still take
it for granted that they will ultimately go.
Why do we inflict unhappiness
on others who for God's sake
know little of their fate or so
Life is not so safe, yet
every day we engage and partake
in acts and scenes that make it raw.
But those who have the courage
must stand up and retake
the ugly things we also saw.
If only it were that easy
for life to simply remake
relationships between friend and foe.

January 2, 1995



Mapping

Mapping a Poem

I ask myself why don't I
write poetry anymore
the answer, clearly,

Well, I'm not sure.

Perhaps it is the moment,
perhaps it is the distance,
so, I put down anything
my mind did witness.

Do I only write when I am unhappy?
it seems so and if so,
then what a shame.

Do I only write when I'm in love?
indeed that is where I am or
can it all be just the same?

Do I only write when I am in pain,
but this will always be so,
t's not a matter of fortune or fame!

Do I only write when I am alone,
since it is not so now,
will my soul ever again be tame?

Poetry cannot be about the act of being articulate
an articulateness that both chains and frees the soul.
Now I do not know if I want to articulate
or talk, or explain, or do any of these things anymore.

What is my story, I Keep asking myself?
Why is it that I simply cannot forget!
Is it not an ordinary story, one party gave
but from the other there was nothing to get?

Let's return to a time before time,
a time so close with no specific date,
and compare to time
where there is peace and a soulmate.

What did I have?
I had love, containment, and some predictability,
giving me a feeling of security and stability.
What do I have?
I have love, passion and uncertainty
do I really want this spontaneity!

What did I lose?
Only a peace of mind
and memories left behind.

What did I gain?
A placeless time and my fate,
a timeless place and a soulmate.

Innocence paid — a new life is made.



Nubia.Santorini

And Conditions...

“And” can start a life,
“And” can make a situation,
and I wait,
I contemplate,
and night delivers me to the
tomb
in cold condition.
The wind blowing off my face
like the breath on my beard.

And the universe redelivers me
as a beast in the dark,
lying, being torn by
its own claws.

And this suspended darkness
unwraps a veiled fate in ice.
Is this the magnificent spring,
the season when I smell
eternity,
or this the shadow of a dark
night extended silently?

And tears like waves in a sea
carving names on rocks as
they recede,
and peace in your lovely eyes
like a sword cuts through time.

And all the beauty in this world
is summoned to the service
of the queen of eyes.
And the grapes suspended
from the vines
are already turned by
a touch into wine.

And I put you to sleep
my dear love
with a shortness of breath
under these star-filled skies,
and those lights stand guard
to our secret
and secrets that will remain
buried deep in stone.

Gualala, May 30, 2002



Nile, Nubia

Sitting on a cliff

I sit on top of a cliff
overlooking the ocean
thinking of you.

As near as you are
you are still so far
and my thoughts
have to travel to you.

You are happy today
and so am I
at least I should act so.

And underneath me,
Is a raging sea, waves
colliding with rocks
erasing my pain too.

You call my name
I call you back
you don't hear, I don't
see and nowhere to go to

And the flatness of this
cliff is all I can touch
with me eyes since
my hands cannot do.

The cold breeze comes in
and I shiver
my body retreats into clothes
and I go back to
thinking of you.

Gualala, May 30, 2002



Delft, Netherlands

Words and Drawings

To draw with words,
to write with drawings,
that is what I do for you.

With music in the background,
and emotions flowing,
you remind me of the postman
and the pure innocence of love
in an age of dismay.

I try to speak my mind
but I can only speak my heart
and the heart aches
it aches of misery and pain
I do not know which pain,
the pain of your departure
or the pain of our impossibility.

At this moment,
I dare defy the impossible,
I dare stand in its way
and declare my will,
resolute only to dissolve in your arms.

And when my constitution is gone,
there will be no more me,
and then I'm happy
for it is then that the word will
become a drawing
and the drawing would become a word
and I would own you at last.



Somewhere in Italy

Aging

As I age
I find myself looking
more and more at that
which stole away the
years from me.

I know
they are no thieves
all they have is time
ahead, time that is
gone from me.

So, how
does this work?
We are all born together
with a total number of
years to live.

No one dies
young or old,
before their time,
they only live
what they are.

And someone
else simply gets
the remainder of what
they were or
supposed to be.

A total number
of years for humanity
an infinite fraction for a
human being calculated
individually and
collectively
on the difference
between
being and becoming.

It is those years, unlived
which maybe the essence
of what God may be.

October 10, 2000



Nile, Giza

Dawn to Dusk

Morning, son of dawn,
will die,
don't ask
how and why?
Contemplation of life
prolongs its agony,
so forget this melancholy.
Your face at noon,
content without a cry,
gay, smiling
without joy,
a noble try,
turning to dusk.



Nubia. Santorini

An Act by Teller

Of Magicians Penn & Teller

The performer holds a rose
in front of flood lights.
On the screen behind,
the shadow of the rose
petals start to fall,
and after each petal
shadow falls,
the performer has to tear
its real corresponding petal.

In reversal of roles,
the performer holding
the stem supposedly
accidentally
puts his finger on a thorn.
Nothing happens to
him but miraculously
the shadow of the finger
starts to bleed.

The shadow is a mirror
Reality is the shadow.

December 1997



Florence, Italy

The Making of a Requiem

One day I suggested that
a requiem is
not just a performance
about death
but an act of composition,
or so it seems
or so I want to believe.

You have been at it
for a while now,
but the city has not
yet been put to sleep.
In fact, it seems to me
that your requiem for the city
has breathed new life into the
city.

Does a city deserve celebration
as it dies?
Does it deserve anything at all?
Does this particular city
even deserve it, after all?

I wish I knew,
but all I can say
is that cities are
like veins that
pump life in us all,
and that even a veins
as they die,
the intellect that they fed
hangs one for a while
to become the cities we like,
as we become the cities
that we kill.

A requiem is only
composed so that
we can live it,
for much of our lives
are simply performances.

Mendocino, September 2000

Rope

I often dream of this rope
I go to bed thinking of it,
waking up thinking of it.
But then, I think where?

Sometimes it is hanging from a tree
Sometimes it is hanging me
Most times it is just there.

Sometimes it is hanging from a stair
Sometimes it is looking at me
Most times it is a stare.

I feel the texture of its knots
I smell the odor of its substance
Sometime is it around my neck
Most times, it is simply a friend.

Oh rope, when will it be
for in the end
You are only me.

September 11, 2001

Love

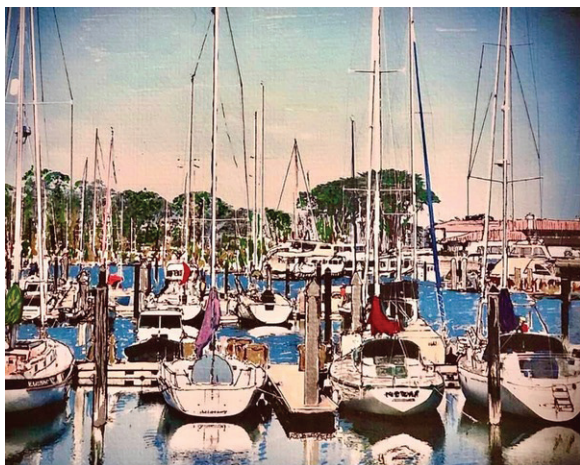
What I want from you is love
what I need from you is love,
and only love.

As I think of the days
as I think of the nights,
hours that have passed by,
could not think of any rites.

Surrender was the name
of my play, of my new game,
Will it leave me satisfied
or change me to be tame?

Love is this weird thing
Full, yet hollow as a ring,
enticing, but repelling us to
dust, after enduring its sting.

Undated



Marina, San Francisco

Imagine

They say that an ocean
has a billion billion things
and more,
some float, some sink
some simply live
Imagine them all
summoned to a mountain top
kneeling in front of you
Imagine them waiting too
for the mere sight of you.

They say the sky is full
of minute objects
it is as old as time
it always had its stars
even when we do
not see them.
They say it is as new
as the first ray of light
and as lasting
as the last sunset,
imagine all these conditions
together and then.

Imagine a sea
suspended in mid air
like a dish hung
by a gossamer thread
tilting and tilting
starting to bend
until it breaks
and it becomes a great waterfall
from nowhere to nowhere
washing everything in its path
my love for you is like that and
more.

Imagine a clear sky
as ancient as Rome
as far as the horizon
as deep as the sea
protruding as a glass dome
tilting and titling
until it falls
on its own
and it becomes a ray of light
with no origin or destination
bathing everything it
encounters
my love for you is like that and
more.

We have not yet counted the
five billion stars
Imagine that for each human
being
there is an equivalent star
imagine them all as people
imagine them all as possible
friends.
I can think of a time
when desert folks
must have done that
and went about
talking to each of them.

I tell you how
we can count the stars
how we can measure the light
we look at the sky
with the naked eye
we look in a square prism
and we see them,
inch by inch,
yard by yard,
and we form a canvas.

Some constellations have forms
embedded within them,
others are given forms by us,
and others have no form at all
that is only so
if you had a form
in your head.
I love the stars
I want you to love them with me,
in here there is no reason
to be scared but only
cause to celebrate
to be able to know
that every sky
needs a naked eye
to render its being.

You are Love

(Inspired by a song of Umm Kulthoum)

All those hearts circling you, wishing
one day for your company and intent
And I, whose heart you hold and own
is deprived of your love and content.

My night has become too long,
crying for you, blue and pained
I laugh, but I am the wounded
Could it be that I am still strong?

I can never complain of your
love regardless of any agony
and still I get jealous of those
whose love for you is more timely.

When my eyes and your eyes meet or may,
it is love between us, what can one say
and when I ask my heart about you
the flames of love light up the way.

I believe my heart for what it told
and my tears run again, am I too old
knowing that you may remember
your love will forever be beyond the mold

My love is unconditional, I love you far and near
and I maintain your love with no fear
and whenever you go, I keep my love and my word
and I never forget what was said or shed a tear.

My memory tells me all has been said,
you stay away, my heart is blind
all that is possible between us is now dead
for me to live with the words left behind

I long for your eyes, even in front of me they are
as you occupy my heart and mind like a star
as the night passes vacillating between hope and fear
but for your love you know I will always endure.

And when I meet someone who loves
You. I raise your name
as I ask what has become of you and what
have you done with all the fame
I ask and ask if he loved you as
much as I
if he stayed up all night in
your lovely eyes.

You are the hope I live for,
you are the passion I call my soul
the love that awakens me with its call.

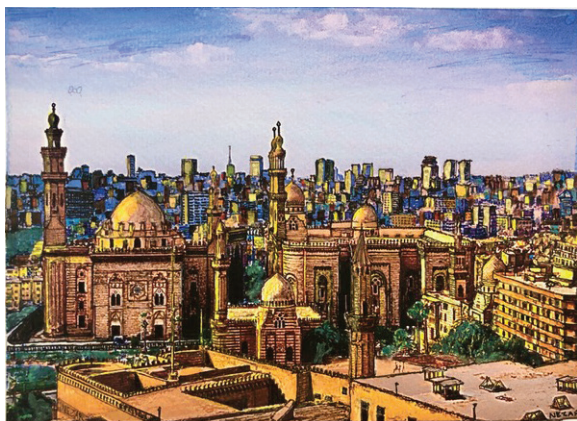
You are the love,
the only love
that makes me sane
and in you love
I did not complain.

The Woman with Dark Eyes

I write
to the woman with the dark eyes
I write to you,
with no lies
of a contract
between two lovers,
a contract
with no vows,
no pledges, and no bothers
a simple agreement
where two parties
agree to a treatment
not to do any harm
to one another
or to commit to another
never to become a dove
and no matter what happens.
not to fall out of love.

VII

Political



Old Cairo.City Skyline

Why am I Not Amazed at this City?

A man driving a motorcycle
moving fast against the traffic,
imagine this, imagine everyone else
moving in the proper direction
simply accepting,
not even questioning
Very cool tempers as they reach
a non-respected
red light at the intersection.

This is not the city anymore!

Is this a big joke, or just
an unbelievable scene
if you're not from here,
as people impatiently race,
a tremendously entangled
grid is formed,
little movement, lots of tension,
the God of traffic
overlooking intervenes
and moves the problem elsewhere.

Suddenly the Mu'ezzen calls,
the gridlock is resolved
though no one ever conformed.

1995



Paris, France

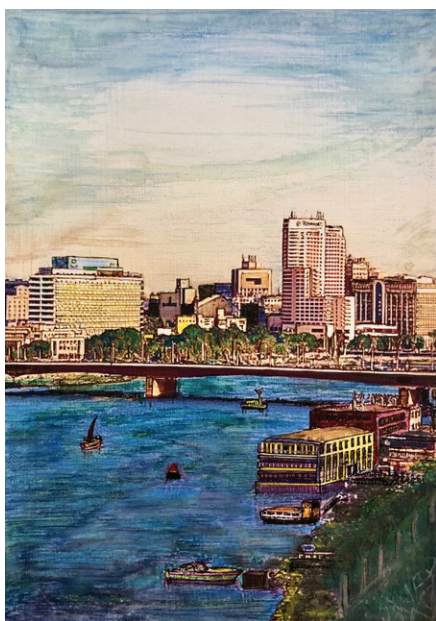
Not his Country

This is the story of a man
without a home,
a man who for some
reason still comes back,
a man who lost his
house and has no room,
and everything
else he needs, he lacks.

No this is not his country

He looks around and sees
familiar faces, but they were all strangers
Veiled women, women in
turbans, men in white robes,
it all looks like a desert
in a wild sanctuary and he is a ranger
but the creatures are actually
people and most of them seem doped

1993



Nile, Cairo

This is not my Country anymore!

I see a camel sitting
 in the middle of the bridge,
 refusing to continue the journey,
he was on his way
 to the slaughterhouse.
 Cars go around him
his keeper pushes
 and beats him
 but he does not budge,
in a while, the butcher will come
 to behead him on the spot,
 all done in-house.

Could this have ever been my country?

I read and speak the language,
 I even do it better than
 those who live here.
But I am a foreigner,
 even though I understand
 all the scenes around me.
Of tens of acts or so,
 only one appears logical,
 the others are mere
 conditions of madness,
 so abhorrent, unacceptable
 even to see.

I do not want this to be my country anymore!

1994



Nile, Mansoura

I come from a long line...

I come from a long line of
peasants, tailors, contractors,
builders, and other ordinary folks.

Few were wealthy
most were poor,
but all were Fallaheen.

I come from a long line of
People, all of whom
I do not know and
may never know.

None were important
some were significant,
but all were Fallaheen.

I come from a long line of
ethnicities, I am told
one or two were Turks,
one of two were Greeks,
but again most had become
Fallaheen.

I probably come from a line
not long,
not short
simply unknown

And perhaps I come from no line at all.

Berkeley, June 1, 1999



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