

HERE *and* THERE



Poems by

BASIM FURAT

Basim Furat is an exciting new voice in New Zealand and world poetry. In *Here and There*, his first book to be translated into English, Furat explores his life as a refugee 'in the far away' (New Zealand) and his displacement from his homeland, Iraq.

His book is filled with 'a passion for cooing' and memories: his childhood in Iraq, the early death of his father, and his service in the Iraqi army.

Here and There is a moving account of the struggles afflicting those who live in exile.

"In *Here and There*, Basim Furat has found his untrodden path to the outstanding panorama of exiled Iraqi poetry. He 'Got sick of wars, and found comfort in the shade of exile', but that sense of imagined or temporary peace of mind will give way, in no time, to the permanent questions of what is essential: one's destiny, as an individual and citizen." - Saadi Yousef

"Basim Furat writes to us from 'outside the borders of home,' bringing into New Zealand poetry the memories of Arabian jasmine, peacocks, doves and nightingales, the sighs of date palms, the revelation of oranges, 'dreams growing on the balconies,' as well as warplanes and trenches, insults and sanctions, the details of barracks, the nightly password, 'the smell of bombardment in the corridors of [his] life.' Writing, as he says, 'embraced by / a sky that doesn't belong to me,' we are lucky that he is publishing his poetry for New Zealand to embrace, poetry which now belongs to us as well." - Anna Jackson

HERE AND THERE

Basim Furat was born in Karbalaa, Iraq, in 1967 and started writing poetry when he was in primary school. His first poem was published when he was still in high school. In early 1993 he crossed the border and became a refugee in Jordan. Four years later he arrived in New Zealand. The death of his father when he was two years old, the fact his mother was left a young widow and his compulsory military service for the Iraqi army in the second Gulf War have had a large influence on his poetry. His poetry has been published all over the world, and has been translated into French, Spanish and English. His first poetry book in Arabic was published in Madrid in 1999 and the second one was published in Amman, Jordan, in 2002. He is a member of the Union of Arab Writers and is the New Zealand co-ordinator for *Joussour*, an Australasian Arabic/English magazine.

Also by Basim Furat

Poetry in Arabic

The Vehemence of Cooing
The Autumn of Minarets

Here and There:
a selection

Basim Furat

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Edited by Mark Pirie

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To Iraq, as homeland, nation and memories

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Coming To Be

Translated by Abdul Monem Nasser

My father:

An ancient sadness;

My mother:

A book of sadness.

When my father opened the book,

I came to be.

I

Here and There

Translated by Abdul Monem Nasser

Aotearoa, Aotearoa

My sweet refuge!

Your streets are lean like the waists of women

Flanked by dancing trees

Your gardens take me to the Hanging Gardens

Which always lie in my memory

Your rivers are unlike the Euphrates:

I see them starting to sweat

Beside the glamour of the Tigris

Your mountains bring me to Assyria and to the Four Deities

They astound me and sneak into my dreams

Why did you not open your arms with joy

To the chariots of my ancestors, who taught language to the clay?

Why did you hide so far away

When the champion of Uruk went to swim in Bowen Falls?

There were no snakes to pilfer his eternal glory

Your solitude smites your beauty

And my grief pours from lips

Signalling to the crouching oceans

Tangaroa, I count my loss till the open-end

While Tane Mahuta chapters the weeping and chirping

Your clouds interlace, stealing joyfulness away

They sip tea and drink with us in cafes

And angrily protest for nothing;

The winds batter your bashful coldness

It is Tawhirimatea, ever intoxicated

Your Sun with ageless braids
Leads the morning to seduction
And your roads lean on passersby
To beg their worries

The hills that never take
Off their robes of green
Drive my longing for desert sands
That case the rivers and towns

Your shores are becoming weary
From the wailing of waves
That pound with their primitive progeny
And their womanly wanderings
Till they become satiated by the sea

The sea, with its slander,
Plays the tune of its scandals
Unaware of ships of unrest within my head

Your rains are questions of the Lord with no answers
Whenever the cold is close to our last breath
We take refuge in the kisses of our loved ones

When the hands of the clock sleep
Homelands procreate beauty
Overshadowed by Ranginui in his kindness and his moons

Your cities are replete with women and flowers
With winds that mar their silence
And on their sides beaches revolt
And trees, alarmed and baffled, look at me

I am overburdened with agonies
My homeland knocks nightly on my door
Should I open it?
I, running away impetuously
From the narcissism of wars
I, a firm believer in day break with no grudges,
As well as that shrivelling tremble before the onset of dusk

Infinitely South

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

And I say: In the far away
There is something calling for remembrance
In cities exhausted by the sea
I dump my dreams
I have souvenirs from wars
And from cities: wounds
I have the tears of reeds,
The sighs of date palms,
The revelation of oranges
The blood of myrtle
There ...
On the map of my childhood
I leave my innocence pierced
By the rot of the military
Whose barracks stole me from home
And threw me into exile

God and I are alone
There is an eternity seeking shelter in me
And forgetfulness abandons me
Leaving the smell of bombardment
In the corridors of my life
And in the far away I say:
War takes me by surprise and sweeps away my happiness
All I catch is a mirage
Without a passport
The Euphrates ignites its waves for me
All things point to you
But nothing reminds me of you

The heavens bend for you to cross
A thread of butterflies waits at your door
The singing of birds reaches you
And a transparent coo touches the paper
And in the whiteness of it all there's a long revelation
And I say: in the south there is a south

The woman of forty ignores that
For my father was the most cheerful of all the murdered
His bravery left us with hunger and the gloating of others
And through thirty lunar years my mother waited
Until she herself became waiting ...
Now my childhood darkened by poverty and orphanage
Is poking its tongue and scoffing at me
And my life is darkened by war and exile
Wherever I lie, I find the Euphrates lying beside me
Extending its dreams to me
Dreams crammed with bombs and sirens
I wake up and roam the streets
Weakened by memories
I exchange the splinters of bombs with roses and poems
The aggression of bombardment
With Mulla Othman Al Mousilly's lute
And the Maqams of Al Gubbanchi

For the sea is made wet by the songs of sailors
Tears resting on its shores
How it keeps lovers and children amused,
Shells falling asleep on the eyelids of waves
And rocks reclining on its lap
Counting the wishes falling from those passing

War also has its anthems
Those that drenched the bosoms of mothers
With wailing and anxiety
Its windows wide-open for waiting
With no-one approaching
Its doors eroded by sadness
And its doorsteps crumbling
With dreams dragged along the streets
Oh streets, when will I see ...
The death procession of my grief? -
Those pale streetlights exhausted by the frost ...

And for the war ...
Bombs whose heads rest on
The pillows of our bodies
And sleep inside us -
The murdered - and in their pockets
Sparrows quarrel with the morning
And play with an orphan star forgotten by the night
Letters flow with the dawn

And I say:
Oh gasp of the south
Oh son of the sun
And the rivers whose mouths spit catastrophe
Just as prophets and holy books emanate from you
Wars always fail you
And you find yourself outside the borders of home
And once you think of home
You are swallowed by exile
You blow your years and ashes is what you find

And scared that your dignity might be buried
Every night you have a party
For the Tigris in the farthest south
There's no south behind me so I can say:
Here's my homeland
Nor is there south in front of me to cut through
I am the absolute south
Equipped with a long history of war and tragedy

Glories polluted by the whips of the Governor
And the General's medals of 'honour'
Strip me naked in the forbidden land
My night is filled with the details of barracks
The nightly password
The officer on duty
And the death squads

All the women I've known
And all Women
Whose lust I shall poison
With my foolishness
Have smelt the neigh of hurdles in my breath
And my hallucinations
Have provoked their womanliness
In the night's darkness

And I say:
Oh gasp of the two rivers
To shake hands with my alienation
Shall I set my roots on fire
And cast my thirty years out to sea
To make a feast for the fish?

Must I remove my shirt
Which is filled with bombs,
Insults and sanctions
To be embraced by
A sky that doesn't belong to me?

And I say:
Oh gasp of the two rivers
In the far away
There is something calling for remembrance
In the distant cities exhausted by the sea
I dump my dreams
I have souvenirs from wars
And from cities: wounds

I crossed the borders accidentally

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

The only loser of the wars was me.
So, I hung them up reluctantly,
And went searching for myself
And destruction was whinnying in my shoulder.

The smell of splinters
Is a prolonged nausea;
I pull the repeated defeats
And line them up on the table
So that they will wound the decorations.
I hang up a long history on the window
And hang up my life on a bullet
Suspended from a far away heaven;
My fingers are remnants of ancient cities
And the seal of the dead are my steps.

Oh Sun wait for me,
To pick up my mornings from a pavement;
There is nothing on it but my body
And remnants of skulls decayed by alienation.
Depart away not,
To let me gather my splinters
From a hole in the clouds.
I distribute my years among the newspapers and journals;
My years are dried like sultanas.

Those ashes of wars suffocated my soul
And dried the oil of childhood at my door.

The door released me
Stinging my mornings,
And countries escaped between my fingers.

I crossed the borders accidentally -
My decorations are question marks,
Distances are whinnying
And their coldness kneels on our lives
Crushing our days,
And my dust is covering the walls and windows
But does not come near to my stature.

Since the stroll of the first war -
I mean the foolishness of the General -
I have entered the city
Like a dog
In whose face the houses are barking.

My mother arranges the stars, which are mixed
With her hair,
And drinks tea in which she dissolves her sadness.
Roads are streaming on my feet
And the fruits of the trees are dangling
On the horizon.

Horizon is an illusion for the eye -
Who can hold its shadow?
Our mistakes are a homeland leaning on a spear
And our dreams are growing on balconies.

I Paint Baghdad

Translated by Abdul Monem Nasser and Abbas El Sheikh

Whatever I wish, I wish
I release the dawn, to feel a night drowned in blackness
I write the history of Southerners on my mother's gown
In the rain I discard the death shrouds of pain,
Trailing from her braids
A cemetery of years stretches along a street
Filled with scars of war
A mourning is engulfing our lives
I breathe nothing but destruction
I try in vain to open a window there
I see nothing but beaming defeat
I tower over all and saddle the horizons beneath me
Behind the words fringes peer intensely
And billboards search for Jawad Saleem

It seems time is embroidering an exile for the gowns of palm trees
I undo its buttons and read:
Childhood means queries never ending, ever and ever more
Or queries that grow at the moss of days
Here the evenings settle whenever the sun departs
As if from the womb of an agate
The waiting is but wisdom that takes me to certitude
My lifespan curls along the frozen rain
And under the wandering gazes of virgin clouds
Or
Swaggers frivolously under the spillage of warplanes
And my body, to which splinters are addicted,
Takes refuge in the taverns of exile

I am without pleasures, or glories
My dreams have all but let me down
Isolated in a most far-flung Diaspora
Elegized by my calamity
And guided by my wreckage
I chase the trails of childhood
And stitch together my aspirations
That have been trampled by tanks
I spot the signs of fear, pouring from my pockets
And as the sea is similarly isolated
It begins to share with the exile its estrangement

No one resounds in my voice
I have stolen the memory of my forgetfulness
And although I have tried a thousand times to hide the Euphrates
Instead I have hugged it
And the screams of guns have dripped from my chemise
I have painted a clear sky through which to escape
Only for it to be robbed by rockets
I have painted a brook and have said: Al-Hussainiyah river it is
But the airbases take me from it
I have painted a minaret and a palm tree
Lonely, I have been arrested, but still I held onto my mirror
And the days slapped me, whenever I shouted: *Father, oh father!*
Because the more I go deeper into his death
He entombs my dreams in dust
I hurt not the timidity of violets
Though their rustle is now intimate with the dew
I put on the glasses of time in the room of my wishes
Silence gulps me down through the folds of farewell
And I remember that in order to not awaken the jasmines,
I must gently brush their petals with my hands

My rags mocked the bombers, yet beyond my doorstep lay
a mirage
That window too is a map that clips off the wings of waiting
And rubs out what may be encrypted by imagination in the mind

I had waved to the trees: Protect my shadow from the madness of
their steps!

But I was pelted by Void
The seasons shed their garments, so the South could pass by
Jubilantly, dejection opened out the keys to my defeat
How could I pilfer joy from a wreck?
Should I shoot down my headstone?
Pallid is the warmth of my palms
Pallid I am when my wrists denude their melodies
I shoot down my headstone

Now stars rest on the lap of sea creatures and shine for me
By one hand I mend my heart,
By the other I care for the rose not to fall into delirium
I care for the balconies not to crumple into a swamp flushed
with heaven
The ocean clutches me, as it falters with my innocence
Doubts climb the edges of time
Piles of syllables scramble on the sides of words

I made you hear my song, yet you only made me hear my burning
I led rain to your door, its fingertips slipping against my forehead
I set loose my lullabies to the gardens,
As I appeared before an inferno of the butterflies
And my destruction was witnessed by the flowers and by the
sparrows

Then, upon my pages dreams awakened

I filled up a ditch of light, my shades were denuded
For the whinnies of sin could no more guide women to my inferno
I entombed wind on the corpse of gods
I broke down the whimpers of dusk on the windows
That point to none but me
And do not succumb to the nakedness of a wailing one
Lost in the rumbles of defeat

Now shall I name a rendezvous to entertain my friends -
Without the pomp of companions, or the adornments of angels
Nor with the crimson dew that draggles the scent of exile?
Could it be true that thirty compasses missed me
Except him, the passport officer, so reluctant to leave my memory
So that I might redouble within the shades of words?

The ocean took refuge in my bed, as did the desert
In each dream songs were drowning
And borders became thirsty by the closeness of their spans
My palms bled with ice that faltered whenever mist peeled
off my lungs
On the borders of my forgetfulness, the reeds awakened
Only to be sunk by the songs of the sparrows
Shall I now call upon my thirty years so as to protect
The stature of Narcissus from my virility?
More of wonder in the traps of the text!
More astonishment at elegies of drunkards as the dusk falls ...

*Oh, entice me to witness the desolation of the date palms
And gulp the residue from the glass
In which our mirrors crowd together!*

An embrace interrupted only by strafing

Translated by Muhiddein Assaf

I am astonished at what my hands will release:
Love and withered memories the siege has sapped and dried.
My days propagate blackness here.
I release rains and greenness from my autumn
While wars are compounding in me,
My memories moisten with exile.
Between my heart and the pavement
A long embrace that has not been interrupted
Except by strafing.
Dark lines, hunger, grievous sights
Of women who carry the fruits of seduction inside their jeans
Tighten like my country ... my habitual madness.

Waiting is flashes from our eyes
Eating away streets.
Leaves fall on the pavements.
As they open their blossoms
All the seasons gather in my palm.
Every road to you becomes a spark.
The ashes of my days' everlasting windows
Break their silence to let the angels look down
Rinsing the air from the clamour of the distant horizon,
With peppermint-washed hands.
My light contemplates peeling the foam off the seas
And maybe the coasts too.

O wave, my pretty friend!
Strike the sky with your staff,
My ancestors fall with the zodiacs

Performing in the temples of stars
You will go with me,
To lodge the labyrinth in its lethargy,
To lodge the light which missed its paths in my forests
Come!
Let us moisten the darkness
And let the shade bathe in your dew.

Tell me:
Are these fields from your nectar?
The ember whose spring is my heart
Is looking for your heart to fall into,
While my fingers are wounded by a sky that is not mine.
Planets I concealed with jasmine
Take their rest in my pockets
Fearing these wars that always desire me
Hanging my shirt as glory to someone else
Then slip away to paint my childhood with coal.
In front of God I stand lonely
And count my sins.
Those on my right hand have been eaten by the planes
And those on my left hand have been swallowed by the war.
How then shall I embrace the light?
My shadow seduces me,
So I epitomize madness.
I cast insanity upon my hook, fish bite my words
Letters abandon me for a piece of paper
Suggesting a home, a woman and two children.
Ah! I remember I'm homeless
And wars still follow me and change their shape.
The splinters are my permanent cough;
Soldiers' boots have deformed my memories.

All in my palm becomes ashes
Where will I keep the kisses of the river
That one day entered the city in the guise of a boy
Whom the soldiers raped?

1 March 1967

Translated by Muhiddein Assaf

What a madness that curtails the poem: *I mean you!*
My hands do everything in free will; my eyes are expatiating.
The defeats that dwell on my lips are glories of war for others.
I do not approach but my heart dries,
Theft crashes my memory and its
Prison cells change me into a ragged shirt.
Exile flows down my shoulders, and on the windows
I see questions from those who've disappeared.
My suns break in the basket of pain,
My neigh dissipates before it can be heard.

I am Basim Furat ... *Oh God!*... do you know me?
Police stations are tattooed on my skin, and my mother
Does not see the splinters when she combs my youth.
She dissolves wax and myrtle over my dawning
With her aba that looks like my days,
And sweeps away the warplanes, drawing me as she pleases.
Is this because I carry my nation in my shirt pocket
And beneath my tongue two rivers are rumbling?

I run after my death, and my corpse follows me.
My nation is a long autumn: a flood of nausea.

Light hides under your hat, and on your chest questions blossom.
For a rose I sing, besieged by sadness.

And you are unaware of what it means
To leave our kisses on marble
Letting air slip between our knees.
You take a chance - you take it all.

My cold hand spans the returning horizon,
The sea exasperates me: another star falls under the dream.

1 March 1967: I expropriate my father's caliphate.
I strike at his strength,
And ruins dangle from his mouth.

1980: I follow my corpse - I am decrepit,
My route riddled with yearning.
They leave me between two orphaned mountains and go.
I glance at their steps - yawning - but they do not notice
That my shirt is wet with dews and rubs the sleep from its eyes.
Their screams are preceding them.

Why is my heart a coat? Between your lips
Wisdom awakens and delights the moon.
Why can the larks not imagine the secret of our departure?
Why should the fields narrow
And our lives start to cough
And our mirrors spit on their mirrors?
Do not bend.
My hallucination is a window wider than a horizon,
Higher than the clouds of our pleasures
And the banners of the defeated.
Its fragrance creeps over your legs
And slips between your fingers ... as dynasties ... *dynasties*.

The letters are in the house
But the verse takes its shape.
Who granted the city this mouth
To swallow poems and fields?
And I find not a door for freedom.

II

Suicide

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

The voice of the skies has cracked from her pagan silence,
The violet sings in lust for her smile
And the angels supplicate for the fading grief
Between her eyes.

My love ...
May the wilderness gather the remains
Of a passion moaning in your hands,
A passion of cooing
A passion of departure,
A passion of the poem in exile
Which recites a wailing for her roving poet
Between the dust of dating or the rain of memory.

Why was I burnt by the warmth of her turning?

I might be the last of the returnees
From the maze of her pastoral forests,
Pasturing my suicide
While it is resorting to the bleeding of the sublime question:
Why am I in love with you?

The fingers of my soul play with your hair.

Honey is fermenting on your tongue

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

I am trying to restrain my shooting stars in vain;
My neighing is flowing and you are my desired one.
It is just in vain ... deliriums!

How did you leave the doors and roads spinning around
And not take notice of the stars falling between your fingers?
At that moment I was nowhere,
But suddenly you wetted my soul.
For you I draw on the passages of estrangement from other
homelands

And the heaven between my fingers is forlorn.
I cover it with mewing poems
And head to you, hearing the forests singing
And the seas stay aloof.
I see a desert moistening
And head to you, listening to silence,
Taking with me nothing but the geography of pain -
And I never arrive ...

*Will the rest of my life be enough
And a little of dreams?*

You are my holy soil,
Your eternal morning is budding with poems.
You are the wave,
We crown your childhood with your glamour.
You are our mirror;
In your hands are the keys of wisdom,
And on your tongue honey is fermenting.

Probability of Two Rivers

Translated by Muhiddein Assaf

Mirrors,

Are these brilliant hearts on all compass points -
Our eternal waiting for splendour.

Mirrors,

Are stations that expect, transparently
Your appearance to smell the fragrance of shabby.
I see the dance of mirrors happy with your angelic,
Sitting in front of them.

I am hearing their songs

In spite of your harshness

And I remain jealous of the mirrors.

So why do you accuse me of desertion?

Is not the jealousy the rebellious face of love?

Jealousy is an emancipation of the senses from its quiet world

An excitement of feelings in your fields

The shout of the soul while it is battering your high walls

The madness of the heart which is astray in your forests

From the Babylonian Joy till the last poem of Al-Sayyab

At the midday of Basrah -

Unattainable. The woodcutters do not know

Only the hunters of the footsteps of life -

Like the exhalations of Kais Ibn Al-Mollawah which the old

In loveliness and verse

Continue to their immortality with smiles.

As a scholar fiery with passion

On your pages my days flow.

In your textbooks my love sets
Three sad states
Where the rivers Tigris and Euphrates cross
Separated
And their passport is always hope.
In the end fish are confused on the coasts
My beloved ...
Perhaps the Euphrates is jealous of the Tigris
From the in-flowing tributaries?
Jealousy is love's ember;
By its extinguishing love will die,
And by its glowing it will die.

Yesterday your sad eyes were looking at me disillusioned
While I wrote that my heartbeat throbs on your lips.
I release psalms to protect you from your shadow.
On your breast my revelation quarrels
With your sighs;
Your sighs themselves are quarrelsome.
I'll make the stars into a necklace, embellished by your neck
And wonder flirtatiously.
The dews of your neck are my flames!
You are the sorrow of my sorrows and the release of my madness!
You are the beginning of my beginnings
And the first commencement!
For your sake, I drove all the Myths until they sank in the sea,
The throne of the Goddess Ecstasy in your palms!
You, for whom words entreat:
Blackbirds learn from you how to broadcast their longings
To grant existence to what has been missed.
You, for whom swallows migrate while
The Dove is crying out for your love.

Here your womanliness is epitomized,
Your transparency is eternity,
And your sweetness is an aura.
From your springs Al-Haulage Ibn. Arabi,
Sahrawardi and Jalal Aldeen Al-Romi have drunk.
They have been the heroic slain of your fascination
And your apostles for immortality.

The Vehemence of Cooing

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

I am not a God –
To love you as it ought to be
Your domes are lofty
And the angels are guarding your shadows
With their happiness
In my hands, nothing but wars
From which I gained nothing but defeats
I am not a God
To love you as it ought to be
Your domes are lofty;
And the angels being exulted
They are guarding your shadows
Due to their happiness

And in your bosom the morning is rejoicing
While my shirt is tarnished with the corporal's whistle
I released, I said, the wind from the curls of my hair,
But still I see ripe star clusters in your lips
And the forlornness on your pillow is my rain
I hide it so that the sky will not get wet
Some sadness is awakening in our looks
Its history is embroidered with confusion

Why are the seagulls always
Flowing in your fields
And my heart is always
Full of bitterness?
I have nothing,
But some remaining wishes

I submissively sacrificed them
But they mocked my psalms
I evacuated my temples,
Except from sleeplessness
And ordered my words
To make pilgrimage
 To your infinite kingdom
 And my glances
 To your countenance
 And to your prestige
 My soul
And then I alleged that
I disclosed my passion to the butterflies
And taught nightingales to write your name
 In their singing
 And the blackbirds
 To crown their
 Quarrelsome ways
 On the waves
 And lure doves to resort to you
 From the vehemence of cooing
And the breeze
To spread its good omens in my name

In her wardrobes the wind keeps my love
 And its mysteries
And disperses as God dispenses his stars
 In our mirrors
Between your fingers
My windows are pregnant with sadness
And I am showering my praises

You did not turn
 To my outpouring of ignitions
You did not turn to my presence
 Which is full of timidness
 Or to your forced presence in my throat
I knocked at your door repeatedly
I closed all the roads
And wound up my mornings
I left my dreams widowed without a compass
Because I am amazed with your plains
 I am without a guide
Your seduction of violet
Made my feelings swell with sympathy
And commit my foolishness intentionally
Igniting the seas with my errors
 My errors which I can count

 A father defecting from conscription
 He married a girl and after three years
 And a half
He left her
 To what was so called the eternity

I was ungrateful
Because his freak impulse lured the impulse of death
 Too early

Why did passion collect me in your summer?
Now my loss is mending its streets from passers by
How can I separate your tongue from honey?

And in your hands flowers and blossomings
And in my hands nothing but remains of defeats
 And the rattling of cannons

Waves of soft kisses
Are confused in your smooth body
In your neck jasmine is shivering

And in your armpits
The willow is dancing for the breeze
And under your white jumper
There is a keeper
And the peacocks are roaming gaily

How can I tempt the nightingales
 Not to hover around you
How can I tempt the rivers
 Not to green your springs
This is why heaven is trying
 To pick up its stars in vain
 From your warm lakes
And my blood is knitting its burnings in vain
And you are laughing
After the burning is extinguished
In the holy fire
 And the glowing of your eternal light

My darling
For the forests to draw your attention
They start playing my yearning
And due to my madness
The Euphrates embraces the Tigris
 Even stronger

And the rose spreads its fragrance
And moaning in your face
Why is it
My wind
Doesn't point except to you?
And my night
Isn't guided except by your light?
And my day
Doesn't draw light except from your dawn?

Alas
Did I say I love you
But I am not a God
To love you as it ought to be

A Cold Lesson at the End of Love

Translated by Muhiddein Assaf

You laugh

This is what you know:

I offered my solicitudes, feelings and madness

On a plate of jasmine served by Narcissus

And you turned your feelings away from me

I glorified your name as much as the grains of sand

And the number of water drops

And the number of beats of the heart

But you refused my praising

I put a necklace of kisses around your neck

And bracelets of longing embroidered with flowers

I turned the springs of rivers, to spring from your fingertips

And end in your fingertips

I told you that

The Goddesses of Sumer, Uruk,

Babylon, Assyria, Athens and Rome

Desire to kneel and offer Eucharist to your majesty

But you refused

You imagined

That my cities were destroyed

My carriages were broken in the desert

It seems you have forgotten

That I have been in love

Do you recall

The fall of stars from your fingers,

The rolling of my days

Before you

The making of many angels
Worshipping around you
And plucking your words
To create from them, psalms,
That give lustre
To our existence
As they bathe in your voice?

I see your smile in my cigarette
It is framed in my miserable room
And in my miserable life too
Your smile is swimming in my imagination
And leading my dreams like a prisoner of war
Your smile accompanies me like my breath
I smell in it the odour of the sea
And the aroma of the orange
I smell in it the perfume of my sad home
The smile of my home that is hiding deep sadness
And you are hiding under your smile
The sadness of my home
You are my home, are you not?
Oh, you my pain and the pain
Of the bought country
You are the whole of my sadness
And the sadness itself
I fear for you to be protected from yourself and myself
You are the wholeness
And the whole of everything
Should I say: The wonder of the souls' throbbing
Has been lost by your neglect
Should I say: You find pleasure in dropping
My dreams from their throne
Then erasing them like erasing a word from your note book

Have you enjoyed seeing my grief
Ramble under your windows
And roads to reach you?
Do you know that the streets ... gardens ... are in white
Because they smell your scent
As you pass by?
You, the first wind
The anarchy of storm
You, the greenness of my days
Have you not read my hymns over your lower lip?
Have you not read my anxieties before your bright honour?
You should know:
You are my dependency
 hope
 yearning
 and longing
I am now as a great man, who finds himself
Like a dwarf before a pretty woman,
Like you
 ... And ...
 Cries

I Love You Not

Translated by Abdul Monem Nasser

Maybe I love you,
But poetry follows our dreams.
Maybe I love you,
But the candles
Are replete at your door,
Calling to me.
Maybe I love you,
But your echo
Embraces my memory
And I drown
In the labyrinth
Of your femininity.
Maybe I love you,
But your smile
(That poem which defies being written)
Ravishes me.
Your madness
Ravishes me too.
I gulp love, in a trance,
Yet claim:
I love you not,
I love you not,
I love you not.

Jeanette

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

The warmth of your hands has a song
That is not sung by nightingales -
Like a radiance relaxing on beaches
That is always receiving the morning.

With you my sadness resorts to nothingness
And my childhood rejoices
Like it hasn't rejoiced before.

Your gait is glorified by Poetry
And my lasting, ardent passion for your femininity.
I squeeze the nectar of the sun for you.

All cities are nothing but jawary
Practicing singing
And getting confused before the chants of your lips.

Ah, I call to you!
May you let my sinking boats
Cleave through your waters

Let me feel your light
In the loneliness of life.

III

My Rank: Defeated

Translated by Abdul Monem Nasser

A refugee,

Yes, I am a refugee.

Got sick of wars

And found comfort in the shade of exile.

From my father,

I inherited ruin.

From the barracks,

The taste of degradation.

Years of hunger

Whinny in my lips.

In airports, I have fallen:

I have fingerprints,

And on my passport

Slaps from security men.

At the borders

I have a memory swelling with pus,

And from the past

I have the spittle of warplanes

(That immerse us in a tasty bowl

Ready for destruction).

My shirt is wet with the dew of minarets,

The yearning of the people

And the pleas of friends.

For my mother: the chore of waiting,

Until waiting itself became skilled in waiting,

While all the time eyes classified me:

A refugee, a refugee ...

At the noon of July the twenty-second, 1996,
Karbala embraced Hiroshima
And I became a number in the U.N. archives.
I am a refugee;
My visage: shores of agony.

Mighty men
Who carved valour on their shoulders
Sank between my shores,
And the prophets
Sought shade beneath my transgressions.
I am a refugee.

The recklessness of an officer
And the stupidity of a Sergeant
Smuggled the nation,
Awash in an oil-truck of grief.
So, I came home from the war,
With my rank: *Defeated.*

No Looking Back

Translated by Abdul Monem Nasser

You kindled yearning
In your corners
And you raised your longing
As a banner
For all who arrive and depart.

You did not say farewell
To those who turned your life
Into a cesspool,
Brimming with pain.

You blessed them
And moved on
Without looking back.
So, they followed you.

The Howl of the Fox

Translated by Yahya Haider

My mother is
Verses of Henna defeated by love.
She became widowed,
Her lovers' longing leaning towards the end of the night.

Now, agony empties its wailing upon her bosom,
Her memories run over by wars.
What can the palm trees say to the minaret
As the crucified Al-Hussainiyah River passes
Through the wind of the North's people?

A pomegranate branch breaks from untold grief.
Each night she wipes away the blood and dust
From the forehead of the Euphratesian
And cries out:
"A murder in Al-Tufuf stretched out my weeping
And abandoned me to eternal grief!"

She carries books made from saffron
And hides others made from priceless gems.
She nears the Prison of Al-Sindi where my father lies -
My father who fought a hundred wars
From original sin's day of birth
To the rebellion of nuclear tribes against authority.
She holds for him the sun and the moon
And eleven wishes to keep his resolution.

And when my father was killed and his head severed
The Al-'Alqamy River wiped its tears and absconded
With two hands glowing with fertility and regret.

Now, my mother ascends the hill
To be a witness to the howl of the fox
That echoes in the city
The work of the final murderers.

And after when they paraded my father's head in the cities
My mother, with her spit, ornamented the Calipha's face
And drowned the flame of his depraved candles.

The shattered sea bowed down
And winds paid their condolences;
She threw the skeletons of palms trees
And the marble of domes to the heavens;
So the planets and stars became.

The dawn was my father's blood.
There were seventy trails in his body
Each leading to seventy oranges and shrines.
People were soon his allies
Once their minds burned
From the shock of his fate.

They sent books gilded with adjuration,
Embellished with prayer
And bejewelled with wishes
To crown a messenger devoid of revelations.
But they knew the taste of their mourning
And went to the women whose lives were broken.
They offered them all to the God of waiting
Burning the candles of their femininity at night
Supplicating
Weeping
Wailing

Hopeful that the Al-'Alqamy River
Would again sing to the Al-Hussainiyah River and return
Supplicating to Al-Hurr
To give them my father's handkerchief
That still clasped his arm
To stop the bleeding from the Ommawi sword.

Now, my mother wipes the crystals from her cheeks
And cries out to me:
"What do you hold in your right hand? *Oh, you poet!*
Release your poems!
Mesmerise all poets!
But never bow, except before this Oriental marble!
Pray only
To the minarets and pigeons,
Read
The chants of the angels of peace inscribed on golden domes,
And for heavenly speech not to rot on your tongue
Step off the glory of language!"

The Autumn of Minarets

Translated by Abul Monem Nasser

Hymns of priests and saints
Prayers of martyrs
Eulogies of lovers of the Lord
The angels are still roving inside your alleys
Burning frankincense
So that your innocence is protected from the cries of Khambaba!
They imbue your dust with Henna
And they chant: Karba-elo, an ever-youthful woman
A blending of the water's perplexity with foes
An ancient name it is, in ablution by history and heroism
Sadness and no grudges
The banners of wailers flood the horizon

Oh, the most ancient of holy places!
We came to you with yearning and gems
To slip your chaste water
The flowing songs of those who took refuge in your chastity
To escape the stains of wars
Those who lean on the shoulders of Glory
And crave for immortality
Children of your course
For them, their highest esteem is but to delve in rejection
They fed their patience to Al-Hallaj
And poured their forbearance to all
They traded generosity with determination
And bound their hearts to their shields
And they danced - jubilant - till death
They ate up their hunger to fatten the muscle of death
And with their mellowness they watered the dew

While your black banners soared around the throne
To be your witness too

My exit is through Salalimah gate
Like a dutiful son I salute
And pilgrimage to the infinite
To my right, the tree of eternity
To my left, the two severed hands of Al-Abbas
Waving to me after dark
By thirst and yearning
In front of me, domes shrouded in gold
Minarets falling asleep in the palms of heaven
Time and stars tickle their eyelids
Doors inlaid in gold and silver
Palms of wailing mothers, adorned with Henna, are bleeding in lament

I discard my body before getting there
Fences adorn the rocks of Karbalaa
And history oozes with blood and grief
Turbans fill the plains, their mourning darker than the aging of time
And others are in peace with sadness and frost
Their veils scavenge intruders, only to be stabbed by security agents
Streets are born in the wombs of alleys, for hermitages to grow
Fruit gardens lean on the shoulders of cities
Fields are drowning, clicking their fingers
And beards are betrayed by their kindness
And market places that copulate

.....
.....
.....

At the end of black banners you wake up
There, check points are waiting for you.

Departure

Translated by Abbas El Shiekh

Friends depart
Followed by dreams
Lighting deep their paths of alienation
Their intimacy is forlorn
Their roads are fading
Their strength is failing
Their wishes taken by surprise
To commit suicide ... commit suicide ... commit suicide ...

They draw spring as a patch for them
And never return
Only to find autumn eating into the map of the country
They seek the help of the two rivers, but destruction in its full attire
Is running in an area called home

Friends depart
Sea is swallowing their moons
Airports are archiving them in the oblivion basket
Borders are exclamation marks in their lives
But they did not crook their cross
Their memories are still at their house
Courtyard rocking their childhood

Friends depart
Friends depart

Friends d e p a r t e d

Inhabited by bleeding

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

Those who light my candle
Their departure is emaciated
And their destruction is suspended
In remote regions of life.
Their trees became red for my sunrise
Embroidering my streams with shadowless stars.
Those who ignite their dreams in exile -
I wish they could inattentively reproduce in
The palms of my hands
And never permit the mirrors to
Reincarnate in me.

The handles of my gates are rusty;
And yet their fading waving is awake
On my doorstep;
They pierce my shirt with the myrtle
And forget my wound on the house's table;
Just like I forget the day I guarded their steps.
I teach Henna how to dance in my fingers
And the sign of carnation is nostalgia.
But here I can only buy for my soil
Flowers that aren't Arabian jasmine;
Even if the cooing is a stable memory -
Those who light my candle are inhabited by bleeding.

To language of light I lead the candles

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

What dream that dries my childhood
What dream that cracks my mornings
I am the last in the caravan of solitude
My whinnying is leaning on a desert
Flooded with mourning
And jogging under rains and the splinters of bombs
How can I let my forgetfulness
Disperse its memories in the direction of pain
And not cry: *Oh homeland, bring me back*
My innocence
So it can be stripped of everything
But the black garment!

I am touching my blood
Lonely in the parade's square
My echo is shooting the wind
And destroying my papers
Now there are no shadows for my solitude to be upright

How can I wet my forgetfulness
With the dawn of amulets
And the Arabian jasmine's stream of pain?

The beginning was two firebrands
Hastening the horizon
And whinnying at the door
Without answers
The beginning was to trim my sadness
Sagging under the weight of my dream

And now I am counting the fires of my life
My fires protrude in my memory
I have the language of shooting stars
And the lust of Archipelagos which the
Poems are unable to endure
There is no guide for my compass
Except sadness
And the dawn is packaged in testimony
To my past

I lament you, O defiance!, because your wings
Are two nooses for daylight
While the sea lets the sunset escape to identityless shore
The dusk is the geography of our blood -
Myself and Baghdad ...
We sit on a shore we know
Sipping our destruction
Oh Baghdad ...
Night is drying your darkness
By my light!

Peace resides on the farewell handkerchiefs which
Are dried by the rain of waiting
Peace dwells in the gowns of tears which are
Our history without doubt
I alone fill the rivers with songs
And memories
And strip the waves from their hallucinations
I am proud of my destruction
And with my destruction I scrape the rust
From the clouds

Like I scrape from my childhood the
Warplanes and trenches
I have the times of myrtle and Narcissus,
And while they are drowning in his image
I write to myself:
My mistakes
Are a coffin
Chasing me, uttering a language
That was lost by its own alphabet
Until it became homeless,
Like nations decayed from divulgence
In the cage of wishes

My mistakes:

I am my mistakes,
The mistakes of my father:
A mistake that is repeated,
My mother is a mistake awaiting a mistake
Due to a mistake,
I am a mistake counting my steps and
Make a mistake

How can I let my forgetfulness splinter?
The datepalms are brimming and moaning
I am the Sumerian
Who is heavily armed
With dreams and questions
I tentatively
Shake nostalgia from my fingers
I freeze inside my life
I shake trying in vain to remove fear from
My pillow

I caress the sweetness of the forests
And cover the shyness of the sea
Before the flighty waves
I lead the candles to light
And mend their patience
Not caring for eternity
Without caring for their fading too
I snatch the horizons and leave

I am the paradise of myself and its doomsday
I point to basil slowly
And gradually the fields flow on my bed
The shores sprinkle their wailing near me
While tears flow through windows of waiting

My longing sneaks away discreetly
I feel it
I plough in daytime
And it ploughs me at night
My yearning drags the river to its desert
And its thirst to sky
And it wails before the oneness of
Its innocence
My longing is praying in the hearth of its quarrels
Carrying the firebrand in its agony

Now, which alley will open its shirt for a stranger?
I suspend my defeats on the walls
And make nostalgia my pillow

I am but the last in the caravan of solitude
And because there are no glories to gild my life
My dreams have left me and gone
I leave my sighs on the windows
And at the doors I leave my defeats

Guide me, O Blackness

Translated by Abbas El Sheikh

Surrounded,
With the preoccupation of the myrtle
As it waves its fingers to those who are leaving
Carrying with them the questions of the rose

Surrounded,
With my dreams
Which are also preoccupied with mending
Their madness

And while the waves are dangling from my shirt
And from my palms stars are falling
And forests are avoiding the Sun
The rivers were sitting amid the blind dust

Guide me ...
How I draw my lightnings on your bed
Guide me
Guide me, O Blackness!

Glossary of Arabic Words and Terms

Aba - Traditional woman's robe in Iraq, black in colour.

Al Abbas Road - Main road in Central Business Area of Karbalaa.

Al-Sayyab (1926-1964) - A great Iraqi and Arabic poet who developed the Arabic poetry from Classical to Modern.

Al-'Alqamy River - A river that diverged from the city of Karbalaa protesting the killing of the Imam Ali Bin Abi-Talib.

Al-Gubbanchi - The best singer of Maqams in Modern Iraq.

Al-Hallaj - Sufi poet, killed and burned by the Government, a thousand years ago.

Al-Hurr - A legendary hero of the battle of Tuff.

Al-Hussainiyah River - Main river in the city of Karbalaa - birthplace of the poet.

Al-Qibla - Important gates to the two main mosques in Karbalaa.

Al-Zainabiyah Hill - Historical place in Karbalaa.

Al-Tufuf - Another name for the city of Karbalaa.

Babylonian Joy - Symbolizes the cycle of the seasons in Iraq.

Baghdad - Capital city of Iraq.

Basrah - The main second city in Iraq, located in the South. The only harbour/port in Iraq and the home city of the poet, Al-Sayyab.

Black banners - Symbol of Muslim Shi'ites.

Champion of Uruk - Gilgamesh, King of Uruk/Sumer, South Mesopotamia (more than 5000 years ago). He was the legendary figure of the famous Epic, in which the first reference to the Deluge of Noah was made.

Calipha - Political/religious leader of Muslims.

Clay - Used in the poem 'Here and There' to mean a residue of the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, on which the first writing was inscribed (c. 4300-3100 B.C.)

Hanging Gardens - Place in Old Babylon/Mesopotamia. One of the seven wonders of the world, built by Nebuchadnezzar, for his beloved wife.

Euphrates and Tigris - The two main rivers in Iraq, where on their banks the first human civilisation was established.

Euphratesian - A person who lives on the Euphrates banks and lands. Also, in 'The Howl of the Fox', meaning the poet's father.

Four Deities - City in Northern Iraq; also called "Erbil" (meaning: Arba Ilo: 4 gods).

Jawad Saleem - Famous sculptor in Iraq, created the Iraqi Statue of Liberty.

Jawary - Women slaves, very beautiful, who perform dancing, singing and recitals of poetry.

Khambaba - The Devil in Sumerian mythology.

Karba-elo - Ancient name of Karbalaa.

Kais Ibn Al-Mollarwah - A love poet who was embroiled in a platonic relationship with his cousin. He became mad afterwards and moved to the desert to live with animals.

Karbalaa - Home city of the author.

Maqams - Type of singing style.

Minaret - Tower of the holy mosque.

Mulla Othman Al Mousilly - Musician - one of the most important in the Arab world.

Myrtle - Used in funerals for young Iraqi people and for holy adornment.

Ommawi (Ommayid) - The name of the dynasty that succeeded the Caliphate of Ali and which marked the doctrinal split between the two major Islamic factions: the Sunnis and Shi'ites.

Oranges - Planted under palm trees in Iraq - the second fruit in Iraq.

Plaza of Two Shrines - City square in Karbalaa between the two main mosques.

Prison of Al-Sindi - An historical place where, during the Abbasid Islamic Dynasty, one of the twelve Imams of Shi'ism is thought to have died.

Salalimah Gate - A suburb in Karbalaa where the author lived.

Shabbooy - Special plant that gives its aroma or scent at night only.

Sumerian - Person from Sumer/Mesopotamia, Iraq.