

Société des écrivains des Nations Unies
United Nations Society of Writers
Sociedad de escritores de las Naciones Unidas

Ex Tempore

Revue littéraire internationale, vol. XXXV – Genève, décembre 2024

International Literary Journal – Vol. XXXV – Geneva, December 2024

Revista literaria internacional – vol. XXXV – Ginebra, diciembre 2024

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This thirty-fifth issue of Ex Tempore has been published thanks to the enthusiasm of the staff. We reiterate our invitation to all members of the UN family, staff, retirees, independent experts, members of the diplomatic corps, press corps, NGO-community, consultants, fellows and interns to become our readers and supporters. We also thank our friends in P.E.N. International Centre Suisse romand, the Société genevoise des écrivains, the Association vaudoise des écrivains, and the Société des écrivains valaisans, with whom we entertain fruitful synergies.

In this issue, the Editorial Board is pleased to publish a bouquet of contributions by 44 colleagues and friends in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Greek, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese, occasionally peppered with Latin. We highlight new UN contributors from UN New York, WHO field offices, and other agencies.

For the thirty-sixth issue the editors welcome the submission of crisp, humorous or serious essays, short stories, drama, science fiction, poems, reflections or aphorisms on any topic of your pleasure, as well as photos and illustrations which may be forwarded in electronic form to Alfred de Zayas zayas@bluewin.ch, to Marko Stanovic marko.stanovic@unctad.org, or to Carla Edelenbos edelenbos@bluewin.ch.

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Cover designs: Diego Oyarzun. Illustrations and photos: Martin Andrysek, Alex Caire, Kevin Crampton, Carla Edelenbos, Ivana Knezevic, Diego Oyarzun, AdeZ **ISSN 1020-660**

PREFACE

2024 has been a year of relentless war-propaganda, armed conflict and death. Many writers and poets have been killed under the bombs in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Russia and Ukraine. We bow our heads in reverence before all the victims and their families, before the widows and orphans, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin. As writers and UN staffers, we call for solidarity and an immediate end to the slaughter.

The UNESCO Constitution¹, adopted in London on 16 November 1945, places great importance on the healing power of literature, on the dialogue of civilizations and the necessity of mutual respect for the promotion of peace and prosperity through enhanced educational, scientific and cultural cooperation. The Constitution, which has been amended and strengthened over the years, promotes learning about other cultures and trying to understand the perspectives of other peoples, always recognizing our commonalities as human beings and our responsibility *vis-à-vis* the common heritage of mankind.

We at *Ex Tempore* want to live up to UNESCO's vocation of promoting peace through literature and education. The Constitution's preamble emphasizes "That a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind." Article 8 reminds us that ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause of suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world, and that because of such mistrust and misunderstanding wars have started that could easily have been prevented through diplomacy and negotiation.

We call for a Global Compact on Education for Peace and Empathy, education on the common dignity of all human beings and on the common heritage of mankind². On 13 September 1999 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 53/243 containing the Declaration and Programme of Action on a

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btUDPmKlfdo>

<https://masspeaceaction.org/event/jfk-peace-speech-as-reflected-in-the-zayas-principles-for-a-peaceful-international-order/>

Culture of Peace¹. While the idea of building a culture of peace has been endorsed in numerous UN resolutions, governments have shown complete lack of responsibility by failing to adopt necessary measures conducive to confidence-building and diplomacy. In fact, since the end of the Cold war, the abstruse Francis Fukuyama philosophy of the “End of History” has contaminated the political, journalistic and academic discourse in many Western countries.

Domestically and internationally we are experiencing a surge in political intransigence, hate speech, incitement to violence, rejection of mediation, demonization of rivals and refusal to compromise. We are confronted with censorship and self-censorship, fake news, fake history, fake law, fake diplomacy, fake democracy. We deplore the Orwellian destruction of language, cognitive dissonance, the development of an iconoclastic “cancel culture” that tries to impose *damnatio memoriae* over Pushkin, Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky and Lermontov, that excludes contemporary writers who dare challenge mainstream orthodoxy.

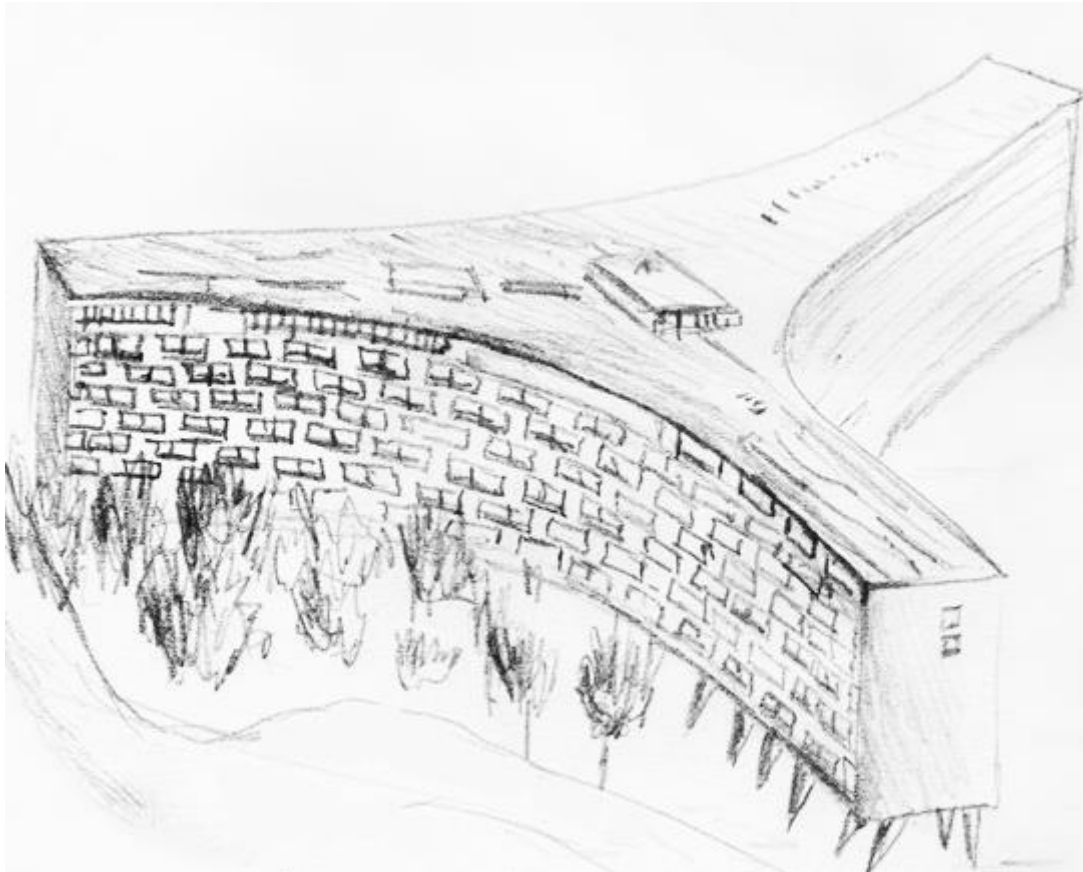
We decry the weaponization of human rights by governments and non-governmental organizations, the ubiquitous practice of “naming and shaming” by the media and government-funded think tanks, the politicization of sports, music, art. Instead, what humanity needs is openness and intellectual honesty, a rejection of double-standards and readiness to discuss social phenomena with a view to redressing legitimate grievances and preventing their festering into violence. At the same time, we witness how “groupthink” and mobbing are gradually replacing rational dialogue.

Already in 1933 the League of Nations entrusted Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud with the question “Why War?” Their answers are as valid today as they were then². In order to achieve universal peace, it is necessary to create and safeguard the conditions for sustainable peace, including education for peace, economic development and progressive social legislation. The motto of the International Labour Organization deserves being recognized as the universal motto of our time: *si vis pacem, cole justitiam* (if you want peace, cultivate justice). We can further adapt this motto: *si vis pacem, para pacem* – if you want peace, prepare the *conditions* for peace.

¹ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/299381?v=pdf>

² Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, *Why War*, International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, League of Nations, Geneva, 1933. <https://en.unesco.org/courier/may-1985/why-war-letter-albert-einstein-sigmund-freud>

The UNESCO Constitution is most akin to the UN Charter in its commitment to advance international understanding on the basis of the principles of the sovereign equality of States and the self-determination of peoples. Both the UNESCO and the UN are committed to work together to maintain local, regional, and international peace, to further the right to development and promote the enjoyment of all human rights by all peoples.



UNESCO building in New York, © Martin Andrysek

The General Assembly's Summit for the Future¹ held in New York on 20-21 September 2024 had enormous potential, but the Pact for the Future² adopted at the Summit did not do justice to the burning problems of our day. Far more than a Summit for the Future, humanity needs a **Summit for the Present**, a concrete, implementable, pragmatic plan of action to stop armed conflicts throughout the world, including in Ukraine, Israel, and Sudan, a blueprint for sustainable peace, a program for reconstruction and reconciliation.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/09/1154671>

The future of all humanity depends on ensuring peace. Alas, there is scarce chance of implementation of the UN Charter and UNESCO Constitution unless the major powers abandon their dangerous war-mongering and recognize that it is impossible to achieve peace by waging war.

It bears repeating what Article 7 of the UNESCO Constitution tells us. It stipulates: "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." In this sense, it is appropriate to conclude by citing from President John F. Kennedy's commencement address delivered on 10 June 1963 at American University¹ in Washington, D.C.:

"Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy--or of a collective death-wish for the world."

We must not give up hope. Writers understand that the pen can be mightier than the sword, and that the chorus of our voices must be louder than the drums of war. We recommit to the UNESCO ideal of peace with justice -- *Pax et iustitia*.

Alfred de Zayas

¹ <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/american-university-19630610>

ESSAIS

ESSAYS

ENSAYOS

Seriez-vous heureux d'être un personnage de fiction ?

Seriez-vous heureux si vous découvriez que votre nom a été emprunté pour un ou plusieurs personnages de fiction ? Personnellement, j'en suis ravi et je ne me sens pas trop égoïste pour autant. Je suis même à l'affût de tels cas ! C'est un sentiment que mon humble nom entre dans l'éternité, à condition que la fiction ne soit pas trop périssable.

Le nom Kalotay apparaît pour la première fois non pas dans un roman, mais dans une « comédie musicale » de 1896 écrite par le directeur de théâtre László Beöthy (1873–1931) et intitulée « Les trois Casimirs » (*A három Kázmér*), dont les personnages principaux sont Kázmér Kalotay et son fils Pista. Le premier acte se déroule dans l'appartement des Kalotay à Budapest, le deuxième dans l'« Auberge Balaton » sur les rives du lac Balaton (à Balatonfüred), le troisième dans la caserne de hussards de Belényes, dans le comitat de Bihar (aujourd'hui Beiuș, dans le département de Bihor, en Roumanie). Un choix de scènes assez pittoresque ! On ne sait évidemment pas comment et pourquoi Beöthy, descendant de personnes célèbres (son père était historien littéraire, sa mère, Szidi Rákosi, actrice et propriétaire de l'une des écoles de théâtre privées de la Hongrie du 20^{ème} siècle les plus respectées, son grand-père poète, son frère acteur), choisit le nom de Kalotay. Peut-être parce que cela sonnait bien. Le Pays de Kalota, d'où provient le nom, était à l'époque une très jolie région de l'ancien royaume de Hongrie (à la frontière occidentale du comitat de Kolozs), avec un folklore hongrois sympathique. Je ne sais pas ce qu'il reste de ce sentiment bucolique de nos jours. La région, qui fait actuellement partie du département de Cluj, en Roumanie, est trop proche de la ville en plein essor de Cluj-Napoca pour rester assez ancestrale.

Une affiche de la représentation de la comédie à Debrecen en 1896 a survécu. Kázmér Kalotay était interprété par Jenő Krémer (1867–1919), un acteur célèbre originaire de Kolozsvár (aujourd'hui ce Cluj-Napoca en plein boom), et Pista Kalotay était joué par Kálmán Rózsahegyi (1873–1961), jeune acteur à l'époque, mais plus tard grande célébrité, et professeur d'école d'art dramatique. Encore une autre relation entre la comédie et les écoles de théâtre privées, à part de Beöthy et sa mère !

Puis, dans le film muet hongrois de 1914/1915 « Le journaliste dupé » (en hongrois : *A becsapott újságíró*), co-dirigé par Alexander Korda (1893–1956, le Korda des célèbres films britanniques)¹ et Gyula Zilahy (1859–1938), le nom de famille Kalotay réapparaît. Dans ce film, le grand acteur hongrois Gyula Gózon (1885–1972) jouait le rôle de Kalotay, le reporter, celui qui a été dupé (le prénom n'est pas indiqué). Les noms des autres personnages étaient plus drôles. Celui joué par Zilahy (il était à la fois réalisateur et acteur du film) s'appelait, par exemple, Napoléon Wesekövy (Napoléon de Calcul

¹ Pour n'en citer que quelques-uns au hasard : La vie privée d'Henri VIII (1933), Rembrandt (1936), Le voleur de Bagdad (1940), Lady Hamilton (1941), Le livre de la jungle (1942), etc.

Réal). En comparaison, le nom Kalotay n'est pas si amusant. Le mystère demeure quant à la manière dont il a été choisi et aux raisons qui ont motivé ce choix.

Je ne suis pas sûr qu'une pièce de théâtre ou un film muet soient considérés comme de la littérature. Ce sont des cas limites. Ils ont au moins des scénarios.

Pour les vrais romans, le monde (et notre famille) a dû attendre 1941 et 1942. Au cours de ces années, l'écrivaine hongroise de Transylvanie Emília B. Csűrös (1897–1970) publia *Margit Kalotay* et *Le mariage de Margit Kalotay* (ce dernier en hongrois : *Kalotay Margit esküvője*), tous deux sous-titrés « roman(s) de jeunesse pour jeunes filles ». Pour refroidir un éventuel enthousiasme, il faut ajouter qu'une fois le fascisme vaincu en Hongrie, le gouvernement national provisoire, dans son décret n° 530/1945 (26 février) sur la destruction des produits de presse fascistes, antisoviétiques et antidémocratiques, a apparemment inscrit ces deux romans sur la liste des livres interdits. Sachez que si, malgré tout, vous souhaitez les lire, vous pouvez encore aujourd'hui en trouver des exemplaires dans des librairies d'occasion. Et si quelqu'un regarde les pages de couverture – une jeune fille hongroise à l'allure héroïque mais aussi innocente dans un costume traditionnel typique des Hongrois de Transylvanie, du moins tel qu'on le voyait dans les années 1930 et 1940 – elles lui donnent un avant-goût du contenu et des messages possibles de ces livres.

Ensuite, plus rien jusqu'en 2023. Enfin, en 2023, Emma Törzs, une écrivaine de fantasy basée dans le Minnesota, publia son premier livre intitulé *Ink Blood Sister Scribe* (traduit en français en 2024 sous le titre de « Magie d'encre »),¹ dans lequel nous apprenons que :

« Depuis des générations, la famille Kalotay garde une collection de livres rares et dangereux. Des livres qui permettent de traverser les murs ou d'emprunter le visage de quelqu'un d'autre, des livres de magie. Aujourd'hui, Joanna Kalotay vit seule dans les bois du Vermont, seule protectrice de leur bibliothèque, tandis que sa demi-sœur aînée Esther, dont elle est séparée, passe d'un pays à l'autre et d'un emploi à l'autre, changeant constamment, ne restant jamais nulle part plus d'un an, cherchant désespérément à éviter la dangereuse magie qui a tué sa propre mère. Elle travaille actuellement comme électricienne sur une base de recherche en Antarctique, où elle a trouvé l'amour. Peut-être se sent-elle enfin libre. Mais lorsque quelqu'un sur la base commence à utiliser la magie, Esther se rend compte qu'elle ne peut pas échapper à l'héritage de sa famille. Les deux sœurs, séparées depuis longtemps, doivent travailler

¹ Notons que la traduction de ce titre est difficile dans d'autres langues, reflétant leurs affinités culturelles respectives : Tinta, sangre, hermana, escriba (espagnol), Ink Blood Mirror Magic (allemand), La biblioteca di sangue e inchiostro (italien), Księgi krwi (polonais), Vråjile se scriu cu sânge (roumain), Vér, tinta, nóvér, írnök (hongrois), A Biblioteca dos Livros Mágicos (portugais ; la version la moins poétique à mon avis).

*ensemble pour élucider les secrets que leurs parents ont gardés cachés, des secrets qui traversent les siècles et les continents, et même d'autres bibliothèques ».*¹

Plus brièvement, en français original :

« Certains livres, écrits à l'encre de sang, renferment une magie ancestrale. Rares sont ceux qui connaissent leur existence, plus rares encore ceux qui les protègent... et sont prêts à en payer le prix.

La famille Kalotay, propriétaire d'une collection de ces livres aussi puissants que redoutables, a été divisée par ce secret. Tandis que Joanna a dédié sa vie à la conservation de cette bibliothèque, enchaînée à la maison familiale, sa demi-sœur Esther fuit depuis dix ans une hypothétique menace. Et lorsque leur père meurt soudain, un livre inconnu à la main, il devient évident qu'il ne leur a pas tout dit.

Contraintes d'affronter le danger pour protéger leur héritage familial, les deux sœurs s'apprêtent à découvrir des secrets propres à bouleverser leur vision du monde et de la magie.

Premier roman empreint de mystère, Magie d'encre nous plonge dans un univers fantastique et intrigant qui explore secrets de famille, soif de pouvoir et trahison. »

Mme Törzs, contrairement à Mme B. Csűrös, a des sympathies plus progressistes,² mais ce n'est pas si pertinent pour juger la qualité du livre. Je l'ai lu et aimé pour ses propres mérites, bien que la fantasy ne soit pas le genre que j'ai souvent entre les mains. Pour ce qui est de l'intrigue, je ne vous dirai rien. Vous la découvrirez vous-même en lisant le livre.

J'aime bien le point de départ du roman de Mme Törzs. J'ai aussi une collection de livres, trop nombreuse au grand dam de ma famille, et certains d'entre eux sont peut-être rares, bien que je ne connaisse aucun livre dangereux. Il faut que je les regarde à nouveau pour le vérifier. Je vous dirai si je parviens à traverser les murs avec l'aide de l'un d'entre eux.³

À propos, il est intéressant de savoir comment l'auteure a choisi le nom de Kalotay pour les personnages principaux. Törzs est également un nom typiquement hongrois,⁴ Kalotay n'était donc pas un choix accidentel. Dans sa page de remerciements, Mme Törzs révèle qu'elle emprunta le nom de famille à l'auteure Daphne Kalotay, basée dans le Massachusetts,⁵ qui évolue dans des milieux littéraires similaires et a acquis

¹ Traduction de l'anglais original par mes soins.

² Lisez ses sympathies sur sa page web : <http://www.emmaemmaemma.com/about>.

³ Marcel Aymé a publié son récit « Passe-muraille » en 1941. Celui-ci a trouvé un succès planétaire. Il a été adapté au cinéma en 1951 (en France) et en 1959 (en Allemagne). Les Français ont également préparé deux adaptations télévisées, en 1977 et en 2016.

⁴ Par exemple, Jenő Törzs (1887–1946) était un acteur célèbre et populaire en Hongrie. Il n'est pas possible de confirmer si Emma est sa parente ou seulement son homonyme.

⁵ Emma Törzs serait apparemment née dans le Massachusetts. Il semble également que Daphne ne soit que mon homonyme, mais je n'ai pas vérifié cette question de manière suffisamment approfondie.

une certaine notoriété avec son recueil de nouvelles intitulé « *Calamity and Other Stories* » (2005) et son roman disponible en français intitulé *Un papillon sous la neige*¹ (2011). Depuis, elle y a ajouté d'autres nouvelles dans « *The Archivist* »² (2023) et deux nouveaux romans, intitulés « *Sight Reading* »³ (2013) et « *Blue Hours* » (2019).

Permettez-moi de citer Mme Törzs : [Merci] « ...à la bourse de *Lighthouse Works*, où j'ai emprunté le nom de famille de *Daphne* (merci, *Daphne*) et écrit "the end" au son des marées ». Elles se sont donc rencontrées à la maison d'art de *Lighthouse Works* à Fishers Island (État de New York) ; d'après les archives, en 2021, toutes deux étaient sous le chapeau des écrivaines de fiction. Il est également intéressant de savoir que jusqu'à ce moment-là, le nom de famille des personnages principaux d'*Ink Blood Sister Scribe* n'était pas encore fixé.

J'ai pris la liberté de lui poser la question du nom Kalotay dans un courriel, et j'espère qu'elle acceptera que je partage ses explications avec le reste du monde : « ... J'ai choisi ce nom parce que je cherchais un nom de famille hongrois qui serait facile à prononcer pour les lecteurs anglophones (contrairement à mon propre nom de famille hongrois, qui a subi de nombreuses erreurs de prononciation et d'orthographe au fil des ans), et parce que, oui, l'écrivaine *Daphne Kalotay* est une de mes amies et que je trouvais son nom de famille charmant ! »⁴

Conclusion : il est génial d'avoir un nom de famille que les autres trouvent beau !

Kalman Kalotay, UNCTAD retired



Kalman Kalotay at an Ex Tempore soirée

¹ Presses de la Cité, ISBN 9782258081918. Lauréat du Prix de la fiction de la Ligue des écrivains du Texas.

² Lauréat du prix Grace Paley.

³ Lauréat du Prix du livre de la New England Society.

⁴ Traduction de l'anglais original par mes soins.

Unforgettable...

Autumn Leaves *

Mon père n'avait d'yeux que pour deux vedettes de son époque (qui est devenue aussi mienne, une extension de mon Temps perpétuel) : l'acteur Clark Gable mais surtout le crooner Nat King Cole. Il aimait particulièrement l'écouter, le voir chanter portant sa montre sur sa manchette gauche et pas en dessous, comme le faisait également Louis Armstrong Toute une époque !

Des bouts d'actualité cinématographique, en noir et blanc ou en couleurs selon la bobine, montraient les actualités des vedettes de l'époque dans les salles de cinéma de ma ville d'Alexandrie. C'était en 1964. Nat King Cole portait fièrement sa fille Natalie, 4 ans, sur ses genoux, en pianotant ses airs les plus en vogue. Puis la petite a grandi et partagea, haute de ses 8 ans, le piano avec son père adoré. Elle n'avait d'yeux que pour lui.



Le temps a passé. Nat King Cole aussi. Mon père également. En 1993, je venais de vivre une bourrasque d'amour dans les bras d'une jeune inconnue venue du froid, du cœur de la Russie. Et puis vint le moment de la séparation, un samedi de septembre, sur un quai de gare en Suisse. Les feuilles d'automne tombaient de partout dans les rues, transformant les pas des passants en empreintes sur un tapis glissant, orange et rouge. Inutile de dire que Natalie Cole est devenue une star mondiale du jazz et du blues suivant les traces de son illustre père. En 1990, Natalie sortit une version inédite de l'album de son père, *Unforgettable**, qui révolutionna le monde de l'enregistrement des classiques du Jazz Pop en studio. L'ingénieur du son eut l'idée de placer la voix de Natalie juste après la voix de son père sur tout le séquençage de cette fameuse

chanson. Ainsi, les deux voix se rejoignent à travers le temps et l'espace créant un duo inédit, comme s'ils enregistraient, ensemble, au même moment, dans le même studio. Un procédé inédit à l'époque. Natalie Cole rendit ainsi à son père un hommage fulgurant et empreint d'émotion. D'ailleurs, elle chanta ses chansons toute sa carrière durant. Une preuve unique d'amour filiale. Je revois toujours mon père, souriant, en train d'écouter Nat King Cole, toujours à son piano...

*What a Nature Boy * !*



Mon père et Nat King Cole, les deux rois de ma vie. J'égrène ces souvenirs en hommage à cet homme élégant, emporté et plein de bonté que fut mon père. Je n'ai pas eu le temps de te le dire assez souvent, papa.



Alex Caire, former UPU, Extrait, Le Temps perpétuel

* Les titres *Unforgettable* (1961), *Autumn Leaves* (1955) et *Nature Boy* (1963) faisaient partie du répertoire du chanteur Nat King Cole

Grau ist alle Theorie

Mais ce n'est là qu'une théorie. Aussi grise qu'une autre. Comme chaque langue, comme chaque parole, comme chaque mot qui pourtant peut véhiculer tant de couleurs, tant de nuances. Un souffle, une racine dans la terre profonde de nos souvenirs.

Le feu pourrait être la source de l'humanité. Son fondement. Le début de tout. L'argile et la boue qui font du monde une immense céramique. Le feu, l'eau. Comment transcrire cela, comment dire, comment dire je, comment dire la langue, comment parler de la belle Pandore, source de paroles et de maux, Babel d'un autre pays, d'une autre langue, mais qui ne les disperse pas, qui les concentre en un déni d'humanité douloureuse, jusqu'à l'espérance.

Mais ce n'est qu'une théorie. Grise. Comme n'importe quelle autre.

Je n'aime pas les langues dans lesquelles on puisse dire merci. Ni celles qui autorisent à s'excuser. La langue est une église sans foi ni dieu, sans loi ni lieu. J'aimerais ne plus avoir à dire, ne plus avoir à évoquer notre désir de se mesurer à l'aune de mots trop petits, tous contenus dans la gangue de quelques signes ésotériques.

Non que j'aime les langues qui aboient, qui claquent rudes comme l'acier, qui sont des ordres aux chiens et aux bêtes, qui disent assis debout couché qui claquent comme des coups de fusils, des gares de triage pour les humains et leurs trains en partance pour l'est.

S'excuser est une prière. C'est le début de toutes les croyances. Mais s'excuser de quoi ? De déjà entrevoir sa mort et devoir quitter le monde avant d'avoir pu crier ?

Grises sont les théories. Et vert l'arbre doré de la vie. De notre famille, je garde le souvenir d'Argelès, les camps de réfugiés qui fuyaient Franco et la misère civile. De notre famille je garde le souvenir de Varna, de la mer noire, de la fuite du grand frère et de mon grand-père bien sûr.

De la famille je garde les racines d'un aïeul, subrécargue en mer de Chine, d'un autre, anglais pour le plaisir et pour le thé, d'un autre encore réfugié au Brésil ou en Afrique.

Dis-moi Franco, dis-moi Staline, quelle langue parler ? Il y a tant de gris. Celui des mines, celui des morts, des gares, des trains, du sommeil, gris, gris comme le vert comme l'argent comme l'or comme les amours du passé. Gris figue, mi-figue mi-fugue, gris cinématographe, gris de camp, de pyjamas rayés, de barbelés.

Je ne connais pas de gris joyeux. Traduire est vivre dans ces zones d'ombres. Traduire est le deuil de la parole qui se trahit et se ment.

Grau ist alle Theorie. Diò cane, dieu d'autoroute. Che fare ! Lénine mon amour. Il aurait fallu être levantin, jusque dans son corps. C'est ma langue. La seule que je comprenne, la seule qui ne se traduise pas parce qu'elle ne peut l'être, parce qu'elle est toutes les langues et qu'à elle seule elle reconstruit le temps et érige ses tours, ses jardins secrets, ses restanques pour croire ou ne pas croire, ses chemins de pierres sèches qui cheminent vers d'improbables Paraclets.

C'est là que se cachent les poètes autant qu'ils s'y exposent. Là que naît la langue nouvelle et les borborygmes primitifs. Celle qui seule sait nous parler dans le cœur, celle qui seule sait dire je dans toutes les poitrines.

Et toi, ô tienne, poitrine contre laquelle je m'appuie pour ne pas sombrer. Demain je t'aimerai d'un autre mot.

Philippe Constantin, UNSW/SENU



Philippe Constantin

The Hotel No One Ever Stayed In

About five miles from me, just where the forest thins out and the town begins, a large international hotel company built a modest 50 bedroom motel. The first thing I knew about it was when I drove past one Autumn morning and several yellow earth movers and other machines whose purpose I didn't understand were clearing away a paddock of overgrown grass and weeds, and digging a trench.

I pass the spot on my way to the shops in town and so I was able to watch work progress over the next six months. Foundations and plumbing were laid, damp course was installed and walls took shape. A concrete drive was etched beside the road with surveyor's pegs and porta-cabins sank their tubular feet into the muddy site.

I talked to one of the contractors in the bar and he told me it was going to be a hotel.

I still cannot figure how they decided to build a hotel here. Maybe somewhere, in a head office, all of their statistics and calculations chose my town as the ideal spot. Maybe this paddock of weeds was exactly equidistant from two other very successful hotels and they figured that there would be a knock-on demand here. Maybe there were board meetings and papers of figures that made it all look just right.

All I know is that no one ever stayed in that hotel. It's a small town; we're not near any major roads and the motorway passes us right by with the nearest junction fifteen miles away. The only people that ever pass through are farmers or salesmen. I guess they need beds but there are rooms above the bar, they're cheap and they're clean and these people have been staying in them as long as I can remember them coming to town.

A few local people were taken on as staff and that's how I know that no one stayed. A few of them spent three weeks on a training course in the city and the hotel was opened in the spring. I think there was something in the local paper but I don't remember it that clearly.

It stayed open for four months and the only "guest" was a regional manager who came down to check out how things were going. He walked around, inspected the cafeteria area and the bins at the back, looked over a virgin

room and played with the booking computer, from which a room could be reserved at any other hotel in the chain. The regional manager was supposed to stay the night but he never did, he got away early enough to do whatever it was he was going to do next.

Shortly after it closed I climbed through the wire fence and had a look in through the windows at the back. The chairs were all stacked in one corner and dustsheets had been placed over the sofas in the reception. A few weeks later a security firm called in on the site and left a dog there so I didn't go back.

But I still have a hard time keeping it out of my mind. Those pristine rooms, with gleaming bathrooms, taps that have never known the flow of water, cupboards of starched bedsheets, dazzling new tablecloths and sparkling glasses, a booking computer that never processed a single booking. And the ghosts of people that drifted through the empty place, barely able to fill up all those lonely too-big spaces.

Kevin Crampton, WHO



Kevin Crampton

THE GRAND TOUR

My trip around the world on Pan Am 001.

It was akin to a rite of passage, a coming of age, on everybody's mind. Either you knew someone planning it or someone who had recently completed it, or you were just dreaming about it. Stories were written about it and read on the press or heard from. The voyage that took people's imagination to the confines of the earth in the twentieth century was sometimes referred to as the Grand Tour. Simply put it consisted of the carefully planned trip that might have been in one's wish list.

Traveling today has lost some of the romantic lure of old, of unexplored territories, of lands foreign and sometimes near that have inspired the writing of books full of information about things different from those encountered in the daily life. Julius Caesar followed in the steps of Alexander the Great with a purpose of conquering, Jules Verne followed in the steps of Columbus' voyage of discovery. Both followed a basic instinct that exists in human beings and forces them to seek new horizons. To travel, to move, and to experience new things!

Fewer are those who look inward, but there is a voyage there too: *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* is one in which Jules Verne imagined the still mysterious center of our planet, leading to more questions about how Nature works, human too. *Fantastic Voyage* was a movie in 1966 where Raquel Welch traveled and interacted with the most intimate corners of the human body. Some authors have traveled in more contemplative ways or focused on the close-up beauty of nature, like Henry David Thoreau or Teilhard de Chardin. Philosophers are naturally born explorers; Ortega y Gasset the Spanish philosopher calls it the I and the circumstances that surround me.

I for one never expected to have the money that it took to take a long trip to many glamorous places like the young aristocrats used to take but a gift from my godfather's estate made it possible while I was finishing college. He passed away leaving many, many books, some authored by himself (Carlos Federico Mc Hale) and a modest inheritance in greenbacks. At the time the promotion of Pan American Airways was: *Travel around the world for 999\$!* With the caveat that you had to travel in the same direction, getting on and off any plane going East or West, and there were two such long haul possibilities with Pan Am 001 and Pan Am 002. I chose to travel Westward and start in New York. I had a friend working on a UN irrigation project in the northeast part of Thailand, which is close to Laos, and that seemed like the farthest and most exotic place that a New Yorker could imagine going for winter break from school. I stuffed my proverbial student backpack trying to leave room for souvenirs in case I fell in love with... a shirt, or a necktie along the way.

Taking off from JFK at 1130 am on Sunday morning was unforgettable, as was the view on the first leg of the trip, which was to Tokyo. I was looking at the Mackenzie River in Canada and the polar regions of Alaska and Siberia before descending on the tip of Kamchatka before touching down at Narita. I learned that following the curvature of the earth was a shorter distance than traveling as we see it on a common map, for traveling is often an opportunity to learn by serendipity. I didn't dwell in Japan, having a clock ticking from the start and since I only had two and a half weeks before classes started again, so I moved on to Hong Kong, where I stayed at the YMCA and had tea at the Peninsula Hotel, went swimming across the bay, and met, also by serendipity, the daughter of the owner of a tire store from Montclair, NJ our hometown! I was fascinated by this city akin to New York City in a tropical setting with a Chinese accent and its beautiful surroundings. The exoticism of it was invigorating to the point that I dared set foot briefly in a section of the city known for its unpoliced status, which was consistent with my occasional characterization as the *intrepid one*.

The main attraction of the trip however was the visit to my friend in Thailand who would open the door to the exploration of a culture and a land so far and different from mine. My curiosity was satisfied and then some. Bangkok's many attractions, included performances of the Thai dances at the National Theater, and other experiences included a performance of the *Shadow Play* in a remote village near the city of Kalasin, 800 kilometers from Bangkok, accessible only by bus or a once a week small plane flight. I learned about the Ramayana, the prince Narai, the monkey wise men and many other legends that serpentine through Asia along with Buddhism. Visiting the ancient capital of Ayutaya and the River Kwai historic sites was very moving, having seen the film and heard live testimonies, a privilege of my generation. The beauty of the landscape seemed to gloss over it with a peaceful vibe...Thailand was a beautiful experience and I can understand how people flock there, some even for their retirement years; they sell orchids at street corners! After two weeks of Thai food I almost didn't miss bread and butter! One more experience in that big country was traveling down the Malay peninsula. One could tell this was an old civilization sensibly modernized with roads. I avoided the tourist trails to Pataya, Pukhet Sound or Chiang Mai, favoring the remoteness of the jungle in the north and the interesting visit to a UN project. Among the many wonderful experiences, like driving my friend's Land Rover through the jungle, and riding the elephants that were used in clearing the forest, I discovered the beautiful little fishing village of Hua Hin (on the Malay Peninsula, south of Bangkok) where I stayed at the Railway Hotel, a grand old building built right on the beach by the British while building the railroad to Kuala Lumpur and Indonesia. Riding horses on the beach with a couple of French Journalists was probably the closest thing to experiencing the glamour of the *Grand Tour* that others had done before me, with their Bugattis or

Hispano Suizas, perhaps, like a cousin of my grandfather had done from Madrid in the 1920s, or my teacher from Seton Hall University, who traveled from Peking to Paris also around that time, and which he liked to tell us about in class. Seton Hall benefitted from the influx of many educated professors leaving China after 1949.

During a long flight with a stopover in Delhi I had planned to stop in Tehran for a couple of days and visit that rich culture when an announcement came on: "Passengers, I have decided not to land in Tehran because I am informed that there is some sort of rebellion going on in the streets of the city and we were advised that it would be best if we didn't arrive in the middle of it" . It was January 16, 1979. For a moment my thoughts went to the scene in *Around the World in 80 Days* in which Phileas Fogg (played by Rex Harrison) and Passepartout (played by the inimitable Mexican comedian Cantinflas) had to land their Balloon in the Spanish town of Chinchón right in the middle of the plaza where a bullfight was taking place! The rest of my world *TOUR* unraveled uneventfully, with a few hours' stopover in Frankfurt and a couple of days layover in Brussels, Belgium, where I would come back and work as an intern for the Commission of the European Communities a few months later. Although my voyage was not exactly like Kavafy's poem of a voyage to Ithaca it yielded a similar bewilderment of discovery.

Epilogue: I arrived in New York with seven items in tow, most of which were light weight, including a sugar cane that didn't pass JFK customs, yards of Thai silk that would serve to make dresses for my mother and my sister, an abacus, a mouth organ, and two drums that were weighed and investigated at one of the airports and still grace my musical instrument collection. Fortunately, their goat skin didn't scare the baggage check. And several music 33 LPs that also enrich my music library today, classical, popular, and traditional. Most of all, going around the world in a single journey gave me a feeling of gratitude for all the experiences lived, the people met and the ideas bounced with other fellow travelers of our planet.

Rafael Rodriguez, UNSW/SENU

Today, while waiting for my Peugeot to have a couple of old parts replaced at the garage, I thought of autumn outside, and then about time passing, and then with time passing the inexorable fact of ageing. Armed with a blank Note on my iphone and a single finger I tapped out

The Seven Ages of Wrinkled

Baby Wrinkled: occasionally at birth, but inconsequential, and doesn't last. Otherwise: plump folds of flesh, usually concealed in gender-designated disposable diapers and cutesy clothes.

Adolescent Wrinkled: Acne City. In fact this is not about wrinkles, it's about volcanic eruptions ruining your life, self-image compromised. Desire for invisibility often defines this stage.

Early Wrinkled: which, let's face it, is *not* wrinkled: simply a gentle fold of thirty-something years, gathering before the onslaught. Here we are talking *enhancement* rather than pulling, stretching and ironing out wrinkles. It's the age of early *corrections*: lips plumped, cheeks enhanced, nose bobbed and whatever other obsession ruins your daily meditation.

Early Middle-Wrinkled concerns those in the vicinity of 50 years. Promises of wrinkles to come along with a not-so-subtle shift of hormones. You stop smoking, you make health pledges. Some friends have already embarked on the long, repetitive path of surgical and chemical *improvement*.

Middle Wrinkled (when 65 is the new fifty): seriously considering having work done but not doing anything besides applying outrageously priced cream made from someone's placenta. Plus royal jelly, collagen, hyaluronic acid, retinol, forgotten herbal extracts, *et j'en passe*.

Asking oneself is it too late to lift? Is one too lazy to do Botox? Or too afraid to inject foreign uplifting substances?

Late Middle-Wrinkled (when 78 is the new 77): every wrinkle now has a home: the neck, the cheeks, the forehead, the vertical grooves on sides of mouth.... and one's eyes are sinking back into turtled eyelids-- such indignities!

And one doesn't immediately recognize the person staring back at you from the morning mirror.

Who? Oh yeah....

Late Wrinkled: OK, not there yet!

So not well placed to document it.

But truth be told.....I'll simply be grateful to get there.

Alexa Intrator, formerly OHCHR

<https://lexieintrator.blogspot.com/>

UN International Day of Older Persons: 1 October 2024

On December 14 1990 the **UN General Assembly** declared 1 October as the **International Day of Older Persons** that was first observed on 1 October 1991. Now into its 34th year the designated theme in 2024 is 'Ageing with Dignity: The importance of strengthening care and support systems for older persons worldwide'. Its aim is to encourage governments, policy makers and social services across the globe for a concerted and sustained action to address the physical, social, psychological and health needs. The commemoration also underscores the importance of promoting healthy living conditions for the elderly that respect dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and quality of their lives. Much is linked to the social, cultural and other norms of the country. With headquarters in Geneva, the World Health Organization, and its representation worldwide, is the designated United Nations specialised Agency.

Based on the latest United Nations projections, the number of individuals aged 65 or above across the world between 2021 and 2050 will have a global share of the older population projected to increase from approximately 10% to 17%. It is further projected that by 2050 across the world there will be twice the number of children aged 12. Due to female life expectancy women will outnumber men at older ages in almost all populations and a preponderance of females is to be expected.

International Labour Organisation

The ILO has been instrumental in its own efforts to support the United Nations agenda for older persons. It has specifically addressed the particular situation of older persons (usually those aged 50 and above) as long ago as 1980, in the **Older Workers Recommendation, No 162**. It offers a constructive framework for decent and productive conditions of work for older workers who choose or need to have paid employment.

The Former Officials Section of the ILO Staff Union with its generations of newly or older retired members serves as a link between the present and past officials, many with long years of experience on the issues of promoting social justice in the workplace and beyond to uphold the basis of the Organisation's unique tripartite structure within the overall United Nations system of Organisations. It works in close tandem with the umbrella body of AFICS* within

the wider UN System in the shared dedication and outreach to serve the many needs of the UN Older Persons agenda.

To mark the **Older Persons Day**, on 1 October 2024, an inter-generational event was hosted by the ILO Former Officials Section in the ILO Geneva Office that brought serving and retired colleagues together in a convivial gathering with the opportunity to greet and share between past and present. It included an on-line Round Table session in the cinema with an ILO threesome panel to share inter-generational and some wider aspects of their perceived roles and hopes for the ILO into the future.

The event concluded with the official opening of the annual ILO Arts and Decoration Circle Exhibition exposed in the Hall des Colonnades of the building (30 September-11 October 2024).

Ita Marguet, ILO retired

Note: Acknowledgement to ILO Former Officials and other sources used in preparation of this text.

* Association of Former International Civil Servants

MAFRA National Palace, Portugal

Situated at a distance of thirty kilometres north-west of Lisbon, the magnificent and monumental building, also known as the Palace-Convent of Mafra and the Royal Building of Mafra, dominates the view on approach to the small town that it overlooks so majestically. It dates from the eighteenth century with a central basilica built in the Italian Baroque and Neoclassical styles of the period. Construction lasted for thirteen years and mobilised a vast army of workers from the entire country under the command of Antonio Ludovic, son of the architect whom the King had appointed. It was used principally as a secondary residence by the Royal family and for formal functions. At present the building is conserved by the Portuguese Institute of the Architonic Patrimony which has completed several restoration programmes including the gigantic end turrets and the main façade. Major restoration of the Basilica's six historical organs began in 1998 with collaboration of foreign experts and the work was completed in 2010. The restoration won the Europa Nostra 2012 Award.

The Palace was classified as a national monument in 1910 and was also a finalist in the Seven Wonders of Portugal. On 7 July 2019 the Royal Building of Mafra including its basilica, convent, Cerco gardens and game park, was proclaimed a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site. The Basilica is dedicated to Our Lady and Saint Anthony. On 10 November 2020 Pope Francis granted a canonical coronation to the image of Our Lady of Solitude of the Basilica guarded by the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament. The different ancient confraternities participate in several religious events and play an important part in the regular processions in the calendar of the Basilica that involve large numbers of participants and visitors who gather in the huge and grandiose esplanade of the Palace and its surrounds.

History background*

The Palace which also served as a Franciscan Priory was built as a consequence of a vow made by John V, King of Portugal, in 1711 to build a convent if his wife gave him an offspring. On the birth of his first daughter, Infanta Barbara, its construction began by laying the first stone in November 1717 with the grand ceremony in the presence of the King, his entire Court and the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon. Construction lasted for thirteen years with thousands of workers using heavily harnessed driven oxen over huge distances under harsh and cruel conditions. The Palace's rich embellishment involved multiple artisan disciplines. Its magnificence is due to the Brazilian gold and

treasures that poured into the country allowing the King to carry on with his patronage of the arts and the strengthening of Royal authority.

Said to be one of the most beautiful in the world, a special feature of the Palace is its ancient Library with a collection of 36,000 historical and priceless volumes. It is open to historians and other scholars by pre-arrangement. On the inside the Library uses bats for pest control. It was used in the 1996 film *Gulliver's Travels* as the Great Chamber of War for the Emperor Lilliput. Also notable is the Palace Infirmary. Bed arrangements and facilities are preserved in their original state as are the kitchen with its utensils and the original pharmacy with items that were used to heal the sick and wounded.

The strong connection between the Palace and the Portuguese crown lasted until the end of the monarchy, as the last King of Portugal spent his last night there before going into exile. Following the extinction of male religious orders in the early nineteenth century, the Franciscan Convent was taken over by the Portuguese government and used as military barracks where the situation still prevails.

Note: Acknowledgement is given to sources used in preparation of this text. It follows a visit to Portugal and a memorable professional tour of the Mafra National Palace in the company of my generous hosts, June 2023. *An English translation of a fiction novel by the Portuguese author Jose Saramago title **Baltasar & Blimunda**, Vintage Classics, provides informative and valuable insight to the historical period and major events in which the book and story are set. A prolific author of an extensive body of work he was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Literature** in 1998 for his book. He died in June 2010.



Ita Marguet, ILO retired

VIBRANT LANDS, SILENT WISDOMS
Ethnographic vignettes of the early sustainability artisans

Prologue

From 1998 to 2003, I sojourned in the lands and territories of Indigenous peoples, from the high Andes to the African drylands, and from the Amazon forests to the islands and highlands of Southeast Asia. I was conducting research on grassroots agroecological knowledge while helping build the policy case for the nascent sustainability movement. This cross-cultural experience permeated the field books and academic papers I then wrote. Here I compile some ethnographic passages, with some edits for length and clarity. They render homage to the early, silent artisans of the sustainability revolution.

I. Muisne Island, Ecuador, 1998

Earlier this year, the Afro-Ecuadorian community of Bolívar, in the south of the mangrove island of Muisne, has suffered an intense internal conflict regarding the expansion of a shrimp pond. An aquaculture entrepreneur offered them some cash for community infrastructure in return for a local agreement on extending his private shrimp pond. Most men in the village, who are fishermen and less affected by the pond extension as they fish in the open seas, were willing to accept. However, most women, who collect oysters in coastal swamps that would be polluted and further privatised by the extension of the pond, opposed the offer.

The promise of money was tempting for a community located in a remote region and severely affected by poverty. It caused gender conflicts, which weakened social cohesion. In the end, spurred by male-dominated economic and political decisions, the pond was extended. The monetary benefits are barely relevant compared to the enduring consequences: more community lands become private; ecological integrity shatters; and the food and ecological security of local people is further eroded. Other mangrove communities criticised Bolívar community for their decision, yet they also face similar challenges – and make similar decisions. The mangroves are under threat by policymakers and private entrepreneurs who work in tandem to expand aquaculture operations across the coastal territory of the Afro-Ecuadorian people.

Facing these complex dilemmas and deceptions, the Afro-Ecuadorian people have started a grassroots mobilisation in defence of their mangroves, led by the organisation FUNDECOL. This emerging ecological movement has two social features: it revolves around women's empowerment while building an Afro-Ecuadorian identity around the mangrove ecosystems – a genuine example of the *environmentalism of the poor*. As a woman of the community of Bolívar pointed out, “we are now defending something that is ours – our ecosystem – not because we were professional ecologists,

but because we need Nature to remain alive, because if the mangrove disappears, an entire people disappear". Ecology has become a liberation struggle.

II. Indigenous territory of Pastaza, Amazonia, 1998-1999

In the Pastaza province of Amazonia, in Ecuador, the Indigenous peoples define themselves as the *sacha runa* [the forest people] – they consist of the Amazon Quichua, the Shiwiar and the Zaparo peoples. Their territory comprises about twenty-five thousand square kilometres of dense, native tropical forest, plus a colonised strip of about five thousand square kilometres they share with migrant farmers from other regions.

The Indigenous life and culture revolve around the realm of Nature, where people and spirits concur and coexist. Nature is constituted of *sacha* [forest], *chagra* [cultivated fields] and *yacu* [rivers]. *Amasanga* – the master spirit – harmonises the forces of nature and the life of the forest. *Amasanga* is *sacha runa* [the spirit of the forest] and *sacha runa yachai* [the source of the knowledge of nature]. *Nunguli* is the partner of *Amasanga*: she is the spirit of the land, the principle of life, the soul of *chagra* and gardens, and the fertility of soil and crops. Finally, *Tsumi* is the being of *yacu* [waters] and their living organisms; it is *yacu runa* [the spirit of the rivers] and enlivens rivers, lakes, rain and clouds. Nature, which hosts all *sacha*, *chagra* and *yacu*, is *sumac causana allpa* [the land without evil]. The Indigenous people and the spirits are so closely related through Nature that the term *sacha runa* may refer to both the Indigenous people and the spirit of the forest. This cosmivision feeds the Indigenous ecological knowledge – from forests to farming – and sustains the life and livelihoods of the communities.

The Indigenous houses are built from diverse palm species from the forest. The main building is usually an oval house, of about ten metres of length. The palm roof, which has magnificent geometric patterns, is sustained by equidistant wood poles that define the perimeter. Every house has a permanent fire site, consisting of three equidistant logs that meet in one extreme. Diverse wood logs are located along the perimeter of the house, serving as a boundary as well as benches to host neighbours.

Women lead the farming, thus keeping the family fields productive and resilient. Men are responsible for hunting, which they sometimes carry out through forest journeys that last various days. These gender roles configure a social distribution of knowledge: women possess vast knowledge on crops and the *chagra* [field], whereas men have intimate knowledge on *sacha* [forest]. However, these practices have not strict gender boundaries: men work too in the *chagra* while women can join hunting expeditions into the forest.

The forests are dense. To conduct agriculture, the Indigenous people clear circular fields, with a typical surface of one hectare. They then deploy a sophisticated agroecological cycle, lasting several years, which will progressively restore the forest

ecosystem, while producing food, medicines, spices and miscellaneous materials along time. Through their farming cycle, the Indigenous people cultivate more than fifty plant species, as well as many varieties for several of them. For instance, each household cultivates, on average, about fifteen varieties of cassava (the main crop) and about eight varieties of chilli pepper (their chief spice). Carmen Gualinga, an Indigenous woman from the community of Mango Urco, explains her drive to maintain a broad agrobiodiversity in her fields: “Tucuita sharinata munani” [I like to have everything]. Similarly, Verónica Andi, an Indigenous woman from the community of Curaray, reveals the ecological and scientific importance of their biodiversity-rich fields: “Tarpunchi karan lumu kaspita manachingarichun nisha” [we plant cuttings of every variety of cassava so they do not disappear].

The Indigenous agroecology comprises three stages: *chagra* (agroecosystem), *llullu purun* (agroforestry system) and *rucu purun* (anthropogenic forest). In the first stage – *chagra* – the main crop is cassava, which is intercropped with about ten to twenty-five other species. The Indigenous people progressively cultivate a rich diversity of shrub and tree species, which underpin the agroforestry ecosystem (*llullu purun*) and, through time, a forest (*rucu purun*). This agroecological cycle then itinerates through their territory. Consequently, many forests in Pastaza are anthropogenic forests because the Indigenous people have cultivated and managed them as part of their agroecological practices. The Indigenous ecology – which blends forests and farming with ease – dilutes the Western perception of Amazonia as *wild* and *pristine*. Likewise, the Indigenous foundational myth on the graceful relations between *Amasanga*, *Nunguli* and *Tsumi* precludes the modern utopia of sustainability.

The Indigenous cosmivision is currently informing a grassroots political ecology, a pioneer mobilisation for sustainable development – which this author had the privilege to witness and document. Confronting alien, extractive trades, notably oil exploitation and monoculture farming, which uproot their forests and disrupt the peace of their spirits, the Indigenous peoples of Pastaza are experimenting with alternative development pathways. Through their political organisation – OPIP – they democratically elaborated and adopted a sustainability strategy, building upon their ecological knowledge and wisdom: the *Plan Amasanga* (1992).

The *Plan Amasanga* has generated a network of scientific, economic and artistic initiatives to offer the Indigenous territory and its communities some sustainable alternatives to the dominant, virulent modes of development. These home-grown initiatives comprise a research centre on native wildlife to scope new livestock opportunities (Fátima Centre); an ethnobotanical park to study the native plants, their uses and their economic prospects (Omaere Ethnobotanical Park); an Indigenous financial cooperative (Palati Cooperative); an Indigenous centre for science & technology (Amasanga Institute); a fund for community development (Samay Project); an agroecological service to improve the Indigenous farming systems (Nunguli

Project); an ecotourism initiative with a community approach (Atakapi Ecotourism Programme); an artisanal shop (Centro Artesanal Yanapuma); and a cooperative service for air transport (Departamento de Aviación, OPIP). This suite of initiatives represents a visionary endeavour for community-based sustainability.

Author's Postscript: This sort of policy approach would steadily proliferate across the world's rural territories; ultimately, it would inspire the UN Sustainable Development Goals, adopted two decades later.

Inside the forests of Pastaza, families wake up just before sunrise. Women prepare and serve some drinks; then breakfast follows. Later, children depart for the local school, sometimes through a long forest trail or a canoe stint. The parents work in the fields, fish, hunt, repair the canoes, and prepare food and *chicha* (the customary drink). At noon, the family congregate to share lunch. Later, they may visit some friends or relatives, perhaps in a nearby community. Dusk is a good time for fishing in the river or preparing an overnight hook. The rainforest night suddenly floods everything, but the home fire and the light of a few candles enliven family conversations and keep children's laughter for a while, until everyone falls asleep.

In the Indigenous territory, life always flows, steadily: *Runa* [the spirits, the people] gives meaning to Nature; *Amasanga* sustains the forests; *Nunguli* cares for the fertility of the farms and the families; and *Tsumi* keeps the rivers running. The Indigenous peoples curate their forests as they curate their communities. Their culture – including their agroecological knowledge and their development innovations – serves both their livelihoods and the planet, at the same time, intimately.

III. Quinoa seeds, Andean Altiplano, 1999

On the eighteenth day of May 1999, under an intense sunshine and a dark blue sky at an altitude of about four thousand metres, I entered the Quechua peasant community of Chujura, south of Juliaca, in the Peruvian Altiplano.

I had just arrived at the high Andes to conduct field research on the biodiversity of quinoa – an indigenous, ancient crop. The project aimed at discerning a grassroots perspective on a global controversy that had recently erupted around quinoa: a patent on a quinoa variety – *Apelawa* – had been granted to two scientists in the United States of America, opening a gate for the privatisation of seeds and reviving a sort of bioprospecting colonisation. Meanwhile, the international convention on biodiversity was struggling to advance implementation, while the talks for an international seeds treaty were trailing. My research methodology included a willingness to travel to faraway peasant communities across the high Andes of Peru and Bolivia, where quinoa farming originated millennia ago, and where Quechua and Aymara communities still cultivate it.

The first community I visited was Chujura. One of the first peasants I met had about five hectares of land cultivated with quinoa, potatoes and barley, among other crops. She had joined an agricultural project that promotes this crop and supplies participant households with seeds. Under this scheme, she was cultivating two hectares of the quinoa variety *Blanca de Juli*, which is not native to her community but has commercial value. She was also cultivating a local quinoa variety, named *Kankolla*, but on a small patch of land of about two-hundred square metres. She told me that she used to cultivate the native varieties *Roja* and *Kkoito*, which were much appreciated for their agroecological resistance and culinary values, but she has not cultivated them in recent years because the markets do not like them, whereas her land area is limited and she has engaged in the above-mentioned quinoa project, which promotes introduced, commercial varieties. Sensing my passionate interest in native quinoa seeds, she suddenly entered her home and returned with two bowls with quinoa seeds of the varieties *Roja* and *Kkoito*. She was keeping seeds of these native varieties in order to cultivate them from time to time because – she argued – she knows and trusts them. This peasant woman was silently conserving quinoa biodiversity in her home – somehow managing a community seed bank. Far removed from international conventions and scientific circles, this peasant woman is genuine agroecologist.

In the afternoon, I reached the most remote lands of the community, towards the southwest of the main plain, behind some hills. There, peasant Esteban and his family were harvesting quinoa in their land. Esteban had also joined the above-mentioned quinoa project, for which he had planted a plot of about one hectare with the same quinoa variety: *Blanca de Juli*. He was also cultivating about a quarter of a hectare with the native quinoa varieties *Kankolla* and *Roja*. In the previous year, he had also sowed the quinoa variety *Kkoito*, and he expected to have some land and time left to do so again in the following year. *Kkoito* quinoa has no market value, but Esteban, along with many other peasants, value its agroecological properties (resistance to both frosts and pests) and its culinary uses (this variety, which has a very high protein content, is very suitable for cooking *kispiña*, a meal that children adore).

During our long talk, Esteban revealed that he was also cultivating a lesser quinoa plot, with a mix of varieties. I asked him if I could see it, and he kindly consented. In a small patch of land, of about two-hundred square metres, he was cultivating fifteen quinoa varieties that he had collected through peasant fairs and local markets. The field was an impressive palette of quinoa grains – a sanctuary of seed diversity. Esteban was observing and studying these varieties, while breeding new seeds. He was delighted – somehow surprised – that someone from far away was appreciating these native quinoa varieties and admiring his experimental field.

Unfortunately, the sudden nightfall of the Andes intruded on our cross-cultural conversations around ecology, farming and community development.

The very first day of field research on quinoa in the high Andes was revealing the silent realm of the Indigenous biodiversity. In the Andes, peasants conserve and study agricultural genetic diversity. They engage in commercial farming projects while safeguarding native seeds, often in marginal, experimental plots and in improvised “seed banks” at home. Tradition and modernity coexist in hybrid, coevolutionary ways. At the peasant grassroots, farming, ecology and science converge fruitfully.

Some days later I visited Caritamaya, a community of the Aymara people on the western shore of Lake Titicaca, in the transition between the *lakeshore* and *low suni* agroecological areas. There, farmers were cultivating two native varieties of quinoa that complement each other: *Blanca* and *Witulla*. *Blanca* produces white and sweet grains, which have commercial value, yet their overall productivity is very sensitive to drought, frosts and pests. Conversely, *Witulla* is a red-grain quinoa that resists frosts, the pest *kona-kona*, and bird attacks; despite its lack of commercial value, it provides a reliable yield across years. The cultivation of both varieties enables peasants to manage both environmental risks and commercial prospects: seed diversity is a keystone for building economic and food security.

In the community of Caritamaya, peasant Valentín is a local expert on quinoa and a freelance agronomist. Valentín and his wife Feliciano have five children. They possess little land, but cultivate and manage a vast diversity of quinoa, around ten varieties, both native and introduced: *Cheweca*, *Witulla*, *Kkoito*, *Sajama*, *Kamiri*, *Salcedo-INIA*, *Kankolla*, *Huariponcho*, *Choclo*, *Crider-2*, and *Blanca de Caritamaya*. In their humble house, they have set up a room dedicated to the storage and study of quinoa seeds. Valentín documents various aspects of every quinoa variety. He cultivates as many varieties as he thinks he can – he is a peasant conservationist. He is equally a seed breeder: he conducts experimental crosses between varieties. In 1994, he crafted a new variety – he named it *Blanca de Caritamaya* [white of Caritamaya] after his community. It is resistant to frosts, to *kona-kona* pests and to flooding. Its grain turns white after washing, which proves attractive in the markets. The variety has remained stable since then, which means it is becoming a new seed type. Valentín and Feliciano are equally observing two potentially new varieties: a red quinoa that looks like *Witulla*, and a yellow quinoa they crafted by breeding the varieties *Witulla* and *Huariponcho*. These new varieties are likely to have low market value – due to the colour of their grains – but may possess significant agroecological values.

Esteban, Valentín and Feliciano are not just peasants – they are equally ecologists and agronomists, custodians of the Andean seed heritage and farming innovators, all at once while working silently in their remote fields. They conserve and study seeds of quinoa, breeding new ones for their communities. Their endeavour

reveals an alternative vision to the biodiversity that wanders in scientific laboratories, agricultural companies and diplomatic circles.

IV. Panay Island, Philippines, 2001

MASIPAG is a network of farmer organisations across diverse islands of the Philippines. It comprises about thirty thousand smallholder farmers that are engaged in the conservation and improvement of rice's seed diversity. They equally conduct organic farming, promote sustainable agriculture and support collective mobilisations to secure land rights. Through the conservation, use and improvement of rice diversity, MASIPAG has empowered farmers in the broader movement for sustainable and equitable rural development.

MASIPAG emerged in the 1980s as a platform for the cooperation between crop scientists and farmers. It had since led a vanguard effort for the recovery and conservation of countless rice varieties, which have been massively displaced by the *Green Revolution* (a euphemism for an agricultural modernisation effort that improved crop yields but depleted seed diversity). MASIPAG promotes community seed banks and farmers' rice breeding – a grassroots alternative to agronomy and crop sciences. This organisation has stimulated a revolutionary process of reviving the use of rice diversity: participant communities that were farming with just two or three modern rice varieties have started to adopt traditional, neglected varieties, broadening the seed diversity of their fields and villages.

In the village of Dao, in the uplands of Panay Island, the members of the MASIPAG group have established a community rice seed bank with as many as sixty different rice varieties. Across the islands and uplands of the Philippines, many communities have started rice seed banks, often with more than fifty varieties each. Rice varieties differ in countless features, such as grain colour, taste, agroecological adaptation, culinary properties, market opportunities, and potential for rice breeding. MASIPAG is also supporting farmer-based rice breeding, which has led to new, valuable farmer-led varieties.

These farmer and community initiatives to rescue, conserve, use, study, experiment and disseminate rice seeds represent a democratic endeavour for sustainable agriculture. Dao's rice seed bank is a platform to convene farmer field days, to exchange knowledge, to facilitate local experimentation, to breed new varieties, to share seeds, and to contribute to the conservation of the rice genetic heritage – as well as to discuss land rights and rural policy.

V. Drylands of East Africa, 2001

Author's Postscript: At the turn of the century, the AIDS pandemic was ravaging rural communities across Africa. Many families were afflicted by AIDS, including countless households led by ill parents or widows, while others enlarged by adopting the many

orphans from AIDS. Lacking social and economic support programmes, their traditional agroecological systems became their only means to cope with the compounding health, labour, food and livelihood crises. They inadvertently contributed to the case for resilience and sustainability in local development.

Farming as healthcare. In a village in Kagera, Tanzania, a woman suffering from HIV/AIDS has become a community AIDS counsellor and a biodiversity activist. She advises fellow farmers living with HIV/AIDS to increase the farming, harvesting and consumption of customary leafy and fruit crops, as well as wild plants – all of which have been neglected, even derided, over the years. This diversity of traditional crops and plants provides them with nutritious foods, so to strengthen their fragile health, as well as with foods that can be easily eaten, so to cope with the mouth infections and digestive pains that many AIDS patients suffer. Plant diversity is, in effect, the only means of healthcare in poor, remote rural communities, where both modern medicines and public healthcare services are missing.

Food as the first medicine. In central Uganda, the coordinator of the Teso AIDS Project stresses that “nutrition is the first medicine for HIV/AIDS” and that “good nutrition is the first priority in the care and mitigation of HIV/AIDS”. Accordingly, this healthcare organisation is fostering alliances with local agricultural & development programmes to reorient farming towards nutritious foods and crop diversity, as a response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. In fact, experts from international healthcare organisations working in Africa concur that adequate nutrition is indispensable in modern treatments for HIV/AIDS, and that malnutrition in rural Africa may become a major obstacle for the success of HIV/AIDS drug campaigns when these will be, one day, available to rural communities.

The chihali practice. The Gogo people live in the Dodoma drylands, in central Tanzania, and rely on agropastoralism. They conduct an intercropping system that is composed of a twin set of cereals (pearl millet and sorghum, which are collectively named *uhemba* in Gogo language), two pulses (cowpea and lablab bean) and a diversity of *Cucurbitaceae* crops (such as gourds, pumpkins, melons and cucumbers). With the permission of the farmers encountered, I named this intercropping practice the *chihali* system – after the traditional gourd recipient that farmers use to mix the seeds of these different crops before seeding them together. The *chihali* system is an agroecological practice that uses crops association as a mechanism for pest management and soil fertilisation, avoiding the need of high chemical inputs, which pose economic and ecological burdens to the communities. Yet the *chihali* system is equally valuable for a number of enduring and emerging problems the Gogo people suffer. Food insecurity and malnutrition are widespread – Dodoma is the poorest

region of Tanzania. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is rife: a member of the AIDS committee of one village reported that twenty-five percent of the people who were recently tested for HIV were positive. This community AIDS committee has more than one hundred orphans registered and allocated in foster families. Field interviews and surveys reveal that AIDS-affected households are more devoted to their indigenous farming practices – notably the *chihali* system – because they trust them, they know they can provide them with a balanced supply of food and nutrition, and they are connected to their culture and culinary habits. The traditional *chihali* system provides safety and resilience in times of crisis.

Ancient practices, new groups. In Nabulamu village, Busia Province (Uganda), Robina Nabwire, a widow and mother of various children, is the chairwoman of a new association: the *Enjala Siyita* Farmer Field School. This grassroots organisation is dedicated to study and enhance customary farming practices. Robina explains that she has abandoned the farming of cotton – and that she will soon halt coffee production too – because these crops, although providing cash in local markets, demand high amounts of labour, which she lacks of. She now directs her farming and limited time to food crops – to feed her family without the hassles of trading and earning cash. Her new farming practice combines diverse traditional, food crops to optimise the use of her limited land and her constrained labour: “intercropping assists me very much”, she states. Many farmer women are equally shifting from commercial farming to traditional, intercropping systems, which, in times of crisis, prove more reliable for food security. The *Enjala Siyita* Farmer Field School is their experimental platform to enhance traditional systems towards addressing food security.

Female and male crops, reunited. In the village of Gera-Kashekya, in the Kagera region, Tanzania, a woman head of household is teaching all her children about the farming of every crop, irrespectively of the gender of the children and irrespectively of local gender prejudices in crop farming. She has five children, including two adopted orphans, who are likely from neighbouring AIDS families. She teaches all the children the farming of the so-called *female* crops, which tend to have low commercial value but high nutritional properties. In the same region, another woman, who is a single head of a household that includes her elder father and three children, states that the pressing food and income needs of the family require everybody – men and women, boys and girls – to cooperate in farming. She thus overcomes “gender biases” on farming practices, which she considers absurd, even a threat to food security. She argues that her children will become better farmers by mastering all crops – *female* and *male* crops alike.

Granaries of survival. Joyce Igoru lives in the rural heartland of central Uganda. She is a poor farmer, widow, with two children, and living with HIV/AIDS. She states that traditional granaries are useful to store the annual harvest, which includes millet, sorghum, groundnut and some root crops, allowing farmers to cope with the long months without farm yields. But she only possesses one granary, thus keeping a large part of her food reserves within the house, which is at risk of perishing. She cannot afford building more granaries, as she feels physically weak to build them and she has no money to hire labour. Ideally, she needs four granaries, which would allow her to safely store her food production throughout the year. Storage is key to nourish the family daily and to keep produce for trading in the local markets when the prices are favourable or, simply, when she has the strength to travel to the marketplace. For poor farmers, traditional granaries prove key to cope with modern challenges like the AIDS pandemic or marketplace fluctuations. She reports a similar situation with seeds. She has difficulty in accessing seed diversity – sometimes she uses saved seed to feed her children and escape famine, but this impairs her next farming cycle. Joyce indicates she needs seeds for three different varieties of cassava to better cope with the family situation: *Ongada*, which is an early variety that provides food sooner in the season; *Aladu*, which is an indigenous variety with notable resistance to the cassava mosaic virus, as well as being the best variety to feed her children thanks to its good palatability; and *Nigera*, which is an introduced variety that is easy to harvest. Traditional granaries and community seed banks are important, practical instruments for food security, yet they are neglected in development programmes and investments. *Nota bene:* Joyce gave the author permission to disseminate her name and her case in order to raise awareness on the conditions and challenges of AIDS-affected families.

Forgotten gardens. In the sub-humid region of Uganda, many rural households grow vegetable gardens, but give them no particular attention, while public agricultural programmes ignore them. Farmers themselves get surprised when a scholar investigates this farming system and its crops. In Soroti district, Teso and Kumam farmers cultivate about twenty different plants in their home gardens, including local *Cucurbitacea*, leafy vegetables, fruit vegetables and fruit trees. Such vegetables – defined locally as *Oyototo* – represent an important supplement for local diets and a key source for household nutrition, especially micronutrients. They also include certain leafy vegetables that act as food catalysers [etigo] during meal preparation. Vegetable gardens are often near the house, so caring for them is easy. Some vegetable crops have commercial value, especially for communities closer to towns and urban areas. Improving the structure, practices and crop diversity of vegetable gardens would improve food production, nutrition, income prospects and labour

management. Despite holding seeds and knowledge, farmers lack social awareness and technical assistance to turn their vegetable gardens into nutrition reservoirs.

Medicinal plants for a healthcare emergency. Bujuuko village, in the Central Region of Uganda, hosts and curates a medicinal garden. This is an innovative initiative by the non-governmental organisation THETA (Traditional & Modern Health Practitioners Together against AIDS and other diseases) and the Pharmacology Department of Makerere University. This herbal garden aims at the conservation, research and promotion of medicinal plants, while fostering the convergence of traditional plant knowledge with modern healthcare. It contains over eighty species of plants that are potentially useful for the treatment of diverse diseases and health problems, including those related to HIV/AIDS, which is a major, devastating healthcare concern in the country. THETA is leading a unique mobilisation around medicinal plants and hybrid approaches to healthcare. The medicinal garden in Bujuuko does not only grow medicinal plants, but also nurtures the collaboration between traditional healers and modern doctors.

VI. The highlands of the Hani and Yao peoples, Yunnan, 2003

In Yunnan Province, in the southwest of China, communities of the Hani and Yao peoples inhabit the mountain ranges that radiate from the higher Himalayas towards the subtropical lowlands. The farmer Ma Yuzhen, in the village of Mitianzhai, cultivates four varieties of soya, which serves to deal with diverse environmental factors. The names of these soya varieties reflect their distinctive features, mostly in the Hani language. *Nema* [big soya bean] is sown early in the season while able to grow in poor and hard soils. *Neza* [small soya bean] is very easy to harvest. *Liuyedow* (which means “June” in Chinese language) was adopted from another village a decade before and can be sown in the month of June, thus providing a late harvest in the year. Finally, *Dupanesi* [soya bean of the rice terrace] resists water excess and is usually planted in the fences of the rice terraces, thus using marginal land for food production – vital for households with land scarcity.

In the village of Qinsa, farmers cultivate more than ten varieties of rice. This seed diversity enables them to manage the diverse ecological areas, altitudinal range and agronomic conditions of their mountainous land. Their native names, in Hani language, reflect some of their singularities. *Kunyahunu* [red rice] grows well in the upper lands. *Lemahunu* [mountain rice] is preferably cultivated in the upper lands. *Hunununa-hodu* [black rice from the upper lands] is a rather tall variety, to which the Hani people confer some medicinal properties. *Hunununa-yudo* [black rice from the lower lands] seems adopted from another village. *Hununuso* [delicious rice], which is cultivated in the upper lands, displays culinary excellence. *Zahiao* [hybrid] and *Zahiaohunu* [hybrid sticky rice] were introduced in the village in the 1990s and are

cultivated in the lower lands. *Cheni* [red] is an upper-land variety. *Talixia* is a variety that seems introduced from an agricultural agency, but has been already integrated in the community rice pool. Farmers also use one or two high yielding varieties in the lower lands, but they are obliged to purchase seed from agricultural agencies every year.

Buckwheat is a traditional and neglected crop from southern China and the Himalayan piedmont. It is well adapted to mountain areas and poor soils, and very practical to recover degraded land. Buckwheat has a short growing season that serves to cope with food shortages or farming failure, as it allows farmers to grow a second crop or to intercalate a crop between farming seasons. In addition, buckwheat grains contain proteins of excellent quality, much better than cereal and root crops. The properties of traditional crops like buckwheat are potentially useful to families that confront poverty, labour deficits and shortages of fertile land. Yet buckwheat is vanishing. In my brief stint in Yunnan, I only encountered buckwheat seeds in a few houses of Yao communities, in highland, remote communities, which were only accessible after strenuous foot trails across hills.

Epilogue

The pursuit of indigenous buckwheat seeds – as alluded in the last vignette – seems to epitomise the journey for sustainability. It is a difficult, yet passionate journey. It traverses the frontiers of human cultures and struggling lives. A quarter century later, sustainability has expanded into societies, businesses and diplomacy. Yet its success still relies on a fair engagement with the silent custodians of the seeds, landscapes and ecological knowledge that endure across the rural territories of our ailing planet.

Josep Garí

UN Development Programme
Geneva

Triều Vọng

Phủ lên thi thể những cánh đồng bao la trơ trọi, thảm hy vọng với màu lá mạ tưởng đã chìm mất trong trận lụt mùa thu trước.

Tươi lớp mưa đầu mùa tươi mát phủ lên khu vườn già trước tuổi, gốc mận khẳng khiu, cây vú sữa ủ rũ tiêu điều. Phủ lên tàng dừa cháy rụi, hàng cau còm cõi. Phủ lên công viên thành phố dây thép gai rào kín.

Áp lên khuôn mặt trẻ thơ hãi hùng trọn cả tấm lòng triu mến, nguyên một đôi mắt khoan dung, nhân hậu.

Cất tiếng hát Tin Yêu hôm nay, tiếng hát hay là nhịp tiết của con tim. Tiếng hát hay những cánh chim luôn luôn bay lướt trước đầu gió từ mấy ngàn năm không ngớt thổi vào quê hương yêu dấu.

Lẻ loi được sao con tin ? Ai vừa lên tiếng?

Thế giới nào hơn của trẻ con, bốn phương nào hơn của bằng hữu?

Bởi hiểu rõ vì sao trong thơ tôi khóc tôi buồn, vì sao trong thơ tôi giận tôi thương, vì sao trong thơ tôi quên tôi nhớ, đã cùng tôi đau tất cả niềm đau của Việt Nam.

Hãy mở toang hết trí não ngó xuống nguồn thơ hôm nay. Phát hiện được bao nhiêu hình ảnh khéo ngụ ý trang, khai quật bao nhiêu lời nói tự dối mình, tìm thấy bao nhiêu âm sắc vượt ra ngoài tầm rung cảm của loài người khốn khổ từ ngàn xưa đã kết nghĩa anh em.

Nguyễn Hoàng Bảo Việt, UNSW/SENU

Flux d'espérance

Revêtir la dépouille de ces champs immenses, dénués; d'un tapis de semis verdissants, la cape de l'Espérance, que l'on croyait anéantie par les inondations de l'automne dernier.

Arroser le verger dépéri prématurément, les jambosiers rabougris, les kainitiers* flétris moroses. Arroser les ramures des cocotiers ravagées par le feu, les rangées d'arecs rachitiques. Arroser les parcs publics de la ville, clôturés de réseaux barbelés... De la première ondée salvatrice, rafraîchissante.

Presser contre le visage de l'enfance foudroyée d'épouvante, tout mon cœur attendri; lui porter toute l'affection de mon regard indulgent et bienveillant.

Entonner le chant de l'Amour et de la Foi d'aujourd'hui. Le chant ou le rythme du cœur. Le chant ou l'envol des oiseaux de grandes envergures bravant sans relâche les vents violents, qui ne cessent de foncer depuis des milliers d'années, sur notre cher pays natal bien-aimé.

Serait-ce possible que l'otage soit seul ? Qui donc vient d'élever la voix, à sa place ?

Quel monde serait-il meilleur que celui des enfants ? Quel univers serait-il meilleur que celui de la fraternité ?

Par la poésie, on a bien compris pourquoi je pleure, pourquoi je me désole, pourquoi je m'indigne, pourquoi je compatis ? Par la poésie, on a bien compris pourquoi, parfois, j'ai tout oublié ; pourquoi, parfois, je me suis tout remémoré ? Ensemble, nous avons souffert tous les maux du Viêt Nam.

Tâchons d'ouvrir grand l'esprit. Et d'explorer la source poétique de notre temps. Nous y décèlerons de riches images soigneusement déguisées. Nous y exhumerons d'émouvantes paroles, par lesquelles l'homme s'est menti à soi-même. Nous y discernerons les nuances pittoresques de la voix. Cette grâce spirituelle outrepassé les infimes vibrations émotionnelles que peut percevoir le monde des mortels misérables où, à l'aube des temps, l'Homme s'était lié d'amitié avec l'homme.

Nguyễn Hoàng Bảo Việt

Traduit du vietnamien par Mme Hoàng Nguyễn

NOUVELLES

SHORT STORIES

CUENTOS

Condition

— Votre fille arrivera là où elle veut, et elle fera ce qu'elle veut.

La maîtresse marque une pause, puis ajoute :

— A condition de le vouloir.

La mère de l'enfant ne répond pas. Ou alors l'enfant n'écoute pas. L'enfant se demande où elle pourrait bien vouloir arriver et ce qu'elle pourrait bien vouloir faire.

Sa mère lui a souvent dit *travaille bien à l'école si tu ne veux pas devenir la même chose que moi*. Alors, elle travaille bien à l'école. Pour autant, elle n'a jamais réfléchi à ce qu'elle ferait si elle parvenait à ne pas *devenir comme sa mère*.

L'horizon de l'enfant est délimité par les murs de la *Maison bleue*.

Certes, elle y a découvert que le monde est plein de couleurs, comme celle du henné dont la mère de Mohamed teint ses mains ; d'odeurs, comme celle de la paëlla que les parents de Rosa font cuire certains dimanches, sur un bidon rouillé ; d'images, comme celles qui dansent dans la tête de sa grand-mère quand elle raconte sa vie de jeune fille dans un pensionnat de religieuses.

Cependant, l'enfant a du mal à se représenter sa grand-mère en jeune fille. L'enfant n'est pas invitée à manger la paëlla avec Rosa et ses parents. Les mains ocre de la mère de Mohamed restent mystères car les enfants ne posent pas de question.

La maîtresse explique à la mère qu'elle lui a demandé de passer parce qu'elle ne restera pas jusqu'à la fin de l'année scolaire. Elle a décidé de partir *faire l'école en Afrique*. L'enfant dresse l'oreille.

L'Afrique, sur les albums à colorier, ce sont des girafes, des éléphants et des enfants qui courent pieds nus dans la savane. Pas des écoles avec des maîtresses qui portent des chaussures à talons !

L'enfant se penche vers les documents que la maîtresse montre à sa mère. On y voit une cabane où des rangées d'enfants, qui ressemblent à Mohamed, avec la peau juste un peu plus foncée, écoutent attentivement une maîtresse, qui ressemble à la sienne, juste avec des chaussures un peu plus plates.

Ainsi, en Afrique, les enfants vont à l'école ? Ils ont des maîtresses qui font, là-bas, le même travail que celui qu'elles avaient ici ? Sans y être obligées ?
Vraiment ?

Le père de Mohamed a quitté l'Algérie pour gagner son pain en France. Son père, à elle, a quitté sa ferme parce qu'il ne pouvait pas nourrir quatre personnes avec juste deux vaches et quelques lapins. La maîtresse, elle, elle va quitter son pays simplement parce qu'elle l'a décidé.

Peut-être qu'on ne devient pas une étrangère quand on s'en va loin de chez soi par choix ?

Peut-être qu'on peut apprendre à se teindre les mains. Peut-être qu'on est invitée à manger des paëllas ou des couscous – un plat que l'enfant n'a jamais vu car elle n'a pas le droit d'entrer chez Mohamed mais qui sent si bon dans l'escalier. Peut-être qu'on peut voir les images dans la tête des gens.

Oui, c'est sûrement pour découvrir toutes ces choses que la maîtresse a décidé de partir.

Alors, l'enfant prend sa décision : elle aussi, elle deviendra une maîtresse en Afrique. Elle y arrivera puisqu'elle le veut. C'est la maîtresse qui l'a dit. Et ce que dit une maîtresse, on peut y croire. Vraiment.

L'enfant y croit tellement qu'elle sera, un jour, une *maîtresse*, en Afrique, bien sûr. Mais pas exactement comme elle l'avait imaginé.

Marie-José Astre-Démoulin

Ex-UNOG – Consultante UNITAR

<http://mjdstree.123website.ch/>

Déclaration

Que diable était-elle allée faire dans un magasin Fresh ? La surabondance de produits importés des quatre coins d'une planète qui perd la boule lui procure une nausée que seule la température polaire du gigantesque entrepôt-chambre froide dans lequel elle circule lui permet de garder sous contrôle. Les rares fois où elle va chez Fresh c'est pour ----- bon, d'accord, elle va de temps en temps, chez Fresh. On peut avoir des principes et une envie de mangue, zut ! Nobody's perfect.

Elle ne parviendra pas à s'en tirer avec quelques pirouettes de langage, de vagues traits d'auto-dérision ou des digressions écologiques, elle le sent bien. Sa rumination est ailleurs. Elle doit faire face à l'incident qui s'est produit l'après-midi même, et qui l'empêche de dormir.

Tout s'est passé très vite.

Elle est debout à la caisse de Fresh. Une enfant la bouscule en se reculant. La mère dit à l'enfant *Fais attention à la dame*. L'enfant se retourne, la découvre. L'enfant dit à sa mère *Ce n'est pas une dame, c'est une mamie*. La mère reste silencieuse une seconde. Puis, avec un sourire mi-gêné, mi-complice, la mère dit *Eh oui ! une mamie, ce n'est pas une dame*.

Uppercut.

Elle voudrait répliquer, rassurer, les rassurer, se rassurer, expliquer à la mère et à l'enfant qu'une femme est une dame tout le temps, assurer la mère du fait qu'elle sera encore une dame dans trente ans, convaincre l'enfant qu'il est important d'avancer dans la vie en pensant qu'on est une dame tout le temps, leur signaler que *mamie* est une fonction intime qui s'établit, pour certaines dames seulement, entre elles-mêmes et leurs petits-enfants.

Elle pense tout cela. Elle reste muette. Figée dans cet *entre-soi-on-se-comprend-c'est-trop-mignon-ce-que-disent-les-enfants* que la mère a voulu instaurer entre elles deux, et qui résume parfaitement l'image qu'a la société des femmes de plus de soixante ans.

Elle encaisse, rentre chez elle, s'écroule. Depuis, elle récupère.

Trois heures du matin. Saisie par le besoin impérieux de savoir ce que la « Déclaration universelle des droits *de l'homme* » mentionne à propos de l'âge, elle décide d'aller jeter un coup d'œil sur l'affiche qu'elle a collée avec quatre bouts de scotch, et un profond respect, sur une façade de la commode de

l'entrée il y a plus de vingt ans, en se disant qu'un jour elle achèterait un cadre pour l'accrocher au mur. Vœu pieux, comme tant d'autres – mais pas le pire.

Après dix bonnes minutes passées à tortiller des fesses sur le carrelage froid en scrutant ladite affiche, elle doit se rendre à l'évidence : rien, il n'y a rien qui concerne l'âge dans la Déclaration des droits de *l'homme*¹ :

« Article 2 : Chacun peut se prévaloir de tous les droits et de toutes les libertés proclamés dans la présente Déclaration, sans distinction aucune, notamment de race, de couleur, de sexe, de langue, de religion, d'opinion politique ou de toute autre opinion, d'origine nationale ou sociale, de fortune, de naissance ou de toute autre situation. »

Aucune mention de l'âge. Ni dans l'Article 2, ni nulle part ailleurs. Nulle part. Rien. L'âge n'intéresse pas l'Organisation des Nations unies. L'âge n'intéresse personne. L'âge est invisible. L'âge rend invisible.

Elle va dans la salle de bains, se passe de l'eau sur le visage, se regarde dans le miroir comme pour s'assurer qu'elle existe, éteint aussitôt la lumière, rejoint son lit à tâtons, cherche à reprendre son souffle.

Quant à savoir quel sort donner à l'affiche scotchée sur sa commode, elle hésite. Elle n'est pas sûre d'être capable de la déchirer. Mais...déjà que l'utilisation du mot *homme* pour désigner l'ensemble de l'humanité, ça l'agaçait, maintenant qu'elle sait qu'une partie essentielle de son identité n'est pas prise en compte dans ce document, il est clair que... elle ne va plus pouvoir l'encadrer.

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¹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/frn.pdf

Rimes riches

Les années cinquante-soixante sont fixées sur des photos en noir et blanc. Le blanc, c'est pour l'enfance, le noir, c'est pour l'oubli. A moins que ce ne soit le contraire.

A vrai dire, chez elle, dans les années cinquante-soixante, il n'y a pas de photos. Pas d'enfance non plus. Quant à l'oubli, tout est question de négociation, avec lui.

Mais cela, elle ne le sait pas. Pas encore.

Chez elle, ce soir-là, il y a un ramoneur aux joues roses et rondes, et aux mains noires comme la nuit.

Il y a la mère qui, et qui, et qui. La mère aux cheveux noirs. La mère qui fait tant de choses qu'on ne se souviendra d'elle que pour des gestes essentiels, sans fantaisie.

Il y a la grand-mère, à qui on ne demande pas pourquoi elle est tout en noir, tant il est évident qu'elle est en deuil de sa propre vie.

Il y a les cendres molles et la suie grasse dans le tiroir du fourneau sur lequel le café suinte, la soupe cuit.

Il y a le vin rouge à l'étiquette Kiravi, et les colères du père quand la bouteille est finie.

Il y a le chien qui guette, qui hésite entre crocs menaçants et désir de se faire tout petit.

Il y a un chat assis sur une chaise. Chez elle, il y a toujours un chat assis sur une chaise, mais ce n'est jamais le même chat, car les chats disparaissent, sans qu'on sache où ils sont partis.

Il y a un balai posé contre la chaise où le chat est assis. Un balai que le père tient à l'envers quand il donne des coups contre le ventre du chien qui n'a pas obéi.

Dans cette pièce où tout le monde vit -sauf le ramoneur qui vient parfois boire du vin avec le père et alors, le père rit-, dans cette pièce, il y a elle, aussi.

Elle, qui vient de comprendre qu'elle sait lire puisqu'elle a déchiffré, ce soir, les mots *mis en bouteille* sur le litre de Kiravi.

Elle qui, à l'école, trace des pleins et des déliés à l'encre noire sur des cahiers aux pages blanches, des pages qui seraient devenues jaunes si elles existaient encore aujourd'hui. Et ce serait bien dommage car les cahiers neufs donnés par la maîtresse étaient si jolis.

Elle, qui découvre les différences entre les sons et la manière dont on les écrit.

Elle, qui dessine, peint, colorie. Elle qui dansera sur scène le jour de la remise des prix. Elle qui apprend des poésies.

Elle, qui prépare des rimes en i dans sa tête afin d'avoir moins peur lorsque la silhouette du ramoneur s'éloignera dans la nuit.

Le ramoneur, c'est la seule personne, à part eux, qui ait le droit d'entrer ici. Les autres, ils ne passent pas la porte. Les autres, c'est *les gens*. Et, comme dit maman, *on ne va pas laisser les gens entrer dans ce taudis !*

Taudis, c'est un mot en i. Pourtant, elle ne l'inclura pas dans ses rimes en i. Parce que taudis, c'est un mot qui lui fait aussi peur que les bouteilles de Kiravi. Aussi peur que la silhouette du ramoneur qui s'éloigne dans la nuit.

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Marie-José Astre-Démoulin à la bibliothèque de l'ONUG, mars 2023

Toute honte bue

Elle passe le 31 décembre 2002 sur un toit en terrasse, au cœur de Manhattan. Autour d'elle, une quinzaine de trentenaires, verres à la main, célèbrent leur carrière et les plaisirs de l'existence. Elle est arrivée à New York dix jours plus tôt. Quand on décroche un job qui vous transforme en fonctionnaire internationale, on ne discute pas sa date de prise de poste, même si elle vous prive d'un Noël avec vos enfants. On se précipite sur son lieu d'affectation, on se débrouille pour garder le contact familial par le biais d'interminables appels téléphoniques et on s'organise afin que les retrouvailles se fassent rapidement.

Elle s'apprêtait à traverser les fêtes seule lorsqu'un collègue lui a proposé de passer la Saint-Sylvestre chez lui, avec quelques amis. C'est ainsi qu'elle se retrouve au milieu d'un groupe de jeunes gens, *ONUsiens* pour la plupart, qui ne sont pas sans lui rappeler les acteurs de la série « Friends ». On boit, on rit, on est mince, on est beau, on ne prend rien très au sérieux, sauf peut-être soi-même mais on veille à ce que cela se joue sur un fil gracieux, entre clin d'œil et dérision.

On vient de Fidji, d'Allemagne, d'Ethiopie, de Pologne, ou d'Inde. Pour autant, on a les mêmes codes, les mêmes références, les mêmes loisirs tennis-piano-bateau. On sait gérer sa vie, son argent, sa carrière. On a le sens du privilège, comme en témoigne une remarque de son hôte, qui se plaint du fait que l'ONU lui verse une indemnité de logement qui couvre « à peine » les deux-tiers du loyer de cet appartement spectaculaire. Elle en reste éberluée. Quand on lui avait signifié, à elle, qu'elle ne bénéficierait pas d'indemnités de logement, elle avait trouvé cela normal, étant donné que son salaire lui permettrait de vivre décemment. Ici, clairement, on pense autrement. Ici, tout à coup, elle se sent un peu stupide. Ici, heureusement, il y a du champagne.

Le pire est à venir. La conversation s'oriente vers la *United Nations International School*, la prestigieuse école qui a fortement influencé sa décision de postuler au bout du monde. Permettre à ses fils d'accéder à cet établissement lui était apparu comme un contre-poids au déracinement qu'elle leur imposait, une véritable chance. Elle se réjouissait d'aller les y inscrire dans quelques jours.

Voilà qu'elle découvre tout d'abord que cette école n'est PAS, comme elle l'avait imaginé, un institut financé par l'ONU et destiné aux membres de son personnel. Il s'agirait, en fait, d'une école privée dont les frais de scolarité représenteraient, pour ses trois fils... l'intégralité de son salaire. Comment

avait-elle pu être aussi candide, aussi, naïve, aussi imprudente ? Pourquoi avait-elle négligé de vérifier de telles informations ? Comment cette école pouvait-elle porter un nom aussi trompeur ? Comment assumer son erreur, avouer cette erreur, expliquer une telle erreur à ses enfants ? Comment ne pas mourir de honte ?

Chercher une planche de secours, vite ! S'accrocher à une coupe de champagne et demander, d'un ton désinvolte, s'il existerait des aides financières de la part cette ONU si généreuse en matière d'appartements situés à deux pas de Central Park. Oui, oui, bien sûr, une contribution aux études des enfants est prévue par l'ONU, qu'elle se rassure ! Mais elle est réservée à certains membres du personnel, à savoir ceux qui occupent le sommet de l'échelle hiérarchique, ceux qui sont issus d'écoles prestigieuses, ceux qui passent leurs réveillons dans des appartements équipés de terrasse. Une employée au bénéfice d'un contrat comme le sien ne peut pas y prétendre.

Elle ne peut pas le croire. Non, c'est impossible ! Jamais son ONU chérie n'établirait un tel système de castes. Jamais elle ne contribuerait à une perpétuation des clivages sociaux pour les générations à venir. La preuve en est que, dans la formation sur l'éthique qu'elle a dû suivre pour valider son statut de fonctionnaire, il a été précisé que l'ONU interdisait toute forme de népotisme.

Par conséquent, il était impossible que l'ONU ait intégré dans son règlement du personnel, une mesure qui procurerait des avantages uniquement pour les enfants de personnes influentes. Un point c'est tout. Hauts les cœurs, hauts les toits de Manhattan et hauts les verres de cristal.

Septième coupe de champagne, à la santé des causes humanitaires ! Le monde est léger comme une bulle.

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Trouver la recette

Il m'est arrivé une histoire... une vilaine histoire et je ne sais pas que faire. Je suis incapable de trouver une issue. Le pire, c'est que je ne parviens pas à regarder la chose en face... vous voyez ce que je veux dire ?... Je me sens dans le pétrin, dans un pétrin effroyable. Je ne suis pas homme à être pris dans une pareille affaire ; ce devrait être évident pour tout le monde. Je ne suis pas un personnage de drame ni de roman je suis... heu, je savais très bien ce que j'étais jusqu'à hier, mais maintenant, je me sens désemparé. Oui, c'est le mot, désemparé, je suis là, assis, je lance des cailloux dans la mer, comme un petit enfant qui a perdu sa maman. Chacun est rentré chez soi depuis longtemps, le thé est pris, il est temps d'allumer la lampe. Il faudra aussi que je rentre à la maison tôt ou tard, je le vois bien, certes. En réalité, le croiriez-vous ? en ce moment même, je voudrais y être malgré tout. Que fait-elle ?... Je parle de ma femme. A-t-elle desservi, ou bien est-elle restée assise, les yeux fixés sur la table, après avoir repoussé les assiettes ? Mon Dieu ! Quand j'y pense, j'ai envie de hurler comme un chien... Vous me comprenez ?... (extrait de Katherine Mansfield, « Une mauvaise idée », dans Les nouvelles, Stock, 2006. Ecrivez la suite !)

Le chien errant sur la plage doit me prendre pour un fou en me voyant faire les cent pas les pieds dans l'eau à une heure du matin... Me retrouver seul après minuit cela m'arrive quasiment jamais. Moi je suis un homme bien rangé, sans problèmes, évitant les conflits, les complications, les aventures. Et pourtant je suis-là, totalement déboussolé, perdu comme un vieux chat aveugle qui se tape la tête à chaque mouvement... J'ai ma tête qui tourne telle une hélice d'hélicoptère ; elle est pleine de choses inédites, de confusion et de sentiments exacerbés... je ne me reconnais pas, mais alors pas du tout. Les vagues récurrentes de la mer impriment un ordre, une structure, une régularité, une certitude. Moi j'ai l'impression de divaguer, de glisser sourdement dans un tuyau sombre et sans fond... comme un tunnel qui a toujours été là devant moi mais que je n'ai jamais aperçu. Je suis choqué, le chien errant s'arrête devant moi quelques instants et me lance un regard hagard.

Quelques heures plus tôt, tout me semblait si harmonieux. Elise était venue à notre rendez-vous d'amis dans sa belle jupe d'été à fleurs oranges ; ses longues jambes bronzées captaient l'attention de tous. Ma femme Irène, semblait bien irritée face à un tel rayonnement mais essayait de ne rien montrer. Heureusement qu'Hubert était dans une forme olympienne ; il nous distrait en racontant un tas d'histoires joviales mais sans queue ni tête. On s'est tous installé face à la mer sur une grande nappe provençale. Je ne sais pourquoi mais

Elise s'est assise à mes côtés en avançant ses longues jambes latéralement qui me touchaient presque, du moins j'en ressentais clairement leur chaleur. On aurait dit qu'elle l'avait fait exprès mais avec elle on ne connaît jamais ses réelles intentions. Irène me fusilla du regard et s'assit tout proche aux côtés du grand Hubert, comme pour me montrer qu'elle était encore bien vivante.

Assis sur l'immense nappe qui nous coupait du sable encore chaud, notre petit groupe de neuf personnes commença à placer sur tous les coins de la grande surface en tissu les victuailles que chacun avait apportées, pour la plupart dans un panier en osier. Il y avait aussi des bouteilles de vin, beaucoup de bouteilles de vin.

Tout le monde était un peu nerveux de se retrouver, surtout moi et Irène, et à l'apéritif déjà nous consommions beaucoup de vin, ce qui enjoliva ou électrisa l'atmosphère, selon les convives... Irène me lança soudain un long coup d'œil, profond et sombre, un de ses regards clairement réprobateurs, qui me figea. Je sentis que tout mon corps se raidissait et Elise me regarda d'un drôle d'air, puis me fit un sourire de prédatrice, ce qui rajouta à la confusion. Je me demandai à ce moment-là ce que j'avais fait de mal. Mais ce bref instant de lien avec Irène fut vite interrompu : « Tu veux des olives ? » me demanda une voix douce, celle d'Elise, au moment de me tendre un bol plein d'olives grecques attrayantes, et tout ceci sous le regard consterné d'Irène. J'avais envie de crier : je ne joue pas à ce jeu, mais je n'ai pas osé ; je ne suis pas à l'aise dans ces joutes sociales...

Le reste de la soirée fut un peu plus calme – le vin et toutes ces incroyables victuailles faites maison, calmèrent tous les esprits. Même Hubert rentra un peu dans le rang, discutant en aparté avec Irène. A un certain moment, je vis qu'il lui chuchota même quelque chose dans l'oreille.

Lorsque l'on passa aux desserts, nous avons tous les neuf l'impression d'atteindre le Nirvana, tellement qu'il y avait de belles choses attirantes étalées sur la grande nappe. Cela pouvait tout avoir d'une soirée parfaite. A côté des longues jambes d'Elise dont certains doigts de pied (me) touchaient désormais délicatement ma jambe droite... il y avait une crème brûlée. C'était évident qu'elle l'avait préparée juste avant la fête. La crème brûlée est mon péché mignon. Le sait-elle ou est-ce un pur hasard ? D'ailleurs, le hasard existe-t-il ? J'en pris une et Elise me suivit du regard. Avec mes yeux semi-fermés, je me délectais lentement de cette saveur sucrée, croquante et onctueuse, en laissant la cuillère entrer et sortir avec lenteur de ma bouche pour apprécier chaque fraction de seconde. Sans m'en rendre compte, le goût, le geste, le regard, tout

était très sensuel. Irène n'arrêtait pas de gigoter comme si elle essayait de perturber cet instant magique et, à mes côtés, je devinais Elise savourer subtilement chaque fragment de cet instant. Je sentais clairement la chaleur de ses trois orteils qui me touchaient depuis un moment la jambe droite, remonter doucement jusqu'à dans mes entrailles à l'endroit même où se posaient les bouchées de crèmes brûlées qui descendaient paisiblement le long de mon œsophage. Mon estomac devenant le lieu de rencontre entre une émotion charnelle et cette délectation culinaire...

Et soudain ce soufflé savant, qui probablement dura à peine deux minutes, retomba brutalement lorsque Pierre, le meilleur copain de Robert le solitaire, se leva et dit de sa voix grave à sa femme Jeanne : « Chérie c'est l'heure, tu sais bien que je dois encore ramener la baby-sitter ! ». Pierre a l'art de plomber les soirées ; cette fois-ci ce fut encore plus brutal. Pas-sûr qu'il sera invité la prochaine fois.

En cinq minutes tout le monde fut debout et l'immense nappe presque rangée. On était soudainement passé dans une autre dimension. La messe était dite. Ensuite j'entendis le ressac de la mer me chatouiller les oreilles et je réalisai que je ne voulais pas rentrer immédiatement. Il me fallait digérer cette soirée.

Irène n'a pas du tout apprécié lorsque je lui ai dit que j'allais encore rester un moment seul sur la plage. Le fait qu'Elise m'entendit et qu'Irène s'en rendit compte n'arrangea rien. Les épaules rentrées, le cou raide et le regard des mauvais jours, Irène parti d'un pas nerveux en disant vaguement au revoir à toute l'équipe.

Debout sur ses jambes effilées, dépliant sa jupe d'un geste vif et élégant, Elise me regarda. Elle s'approcha de moi, mais ce fut juste pour ramasser son panier, puis me fis un grand sourire et me fixa droit dans les yeux pour à peine trois secondes avant de repartir sans un mot avec son sourire qui m'était indéchiffrable et en me tournant le dos. Je la regardais partir dans la nuit, comme un enfant qui a été mis au lit par sa mère et qui la suit aussi longtemps que possible lorsqu'elle quitte la chambre.

Il est passé minuit et cela fait plus de deux heures que je regarde la mer en essayant de comprendre ce qui s'est passé plus tôt durant cette soirée. Tout se bouscule dans ma tête. Ce ne sont pas des choses qui m'arrivent à moi ; moi je suis quelqu'un de simple qui ne cherche pas la complication et là je suis face à un dilemme que je n'arrive pas à définir encore moins à résoudre. La lampe à

huile brûle doucement à mes côtés. C'est mon seul réconfort et je me dis que lorsqu'elle sera éteinte j'aurai pris ma décision.

Je suis énormément tenté d'aller à la maison d'Elise qui n'est qu'au bout de la plage, mais j'ai trop peur qu'elle l'interprète mal. Nous nous entendons très bien mais cette potentielle rencontre n'aurait pas forcément les mêmes conséquences... alors même si je suis tenté je m'abstiens. Ce qu'il me manque c'est la recette.

Il doit être aux alentours de deux heures du matin. La lune éclair la mer d'un bleu foncé magnifique et cela me rend mélancolique. Je me lève avec des galets dans la main et les lance à plat sur l'eau. Ceux qui rebondissent plus de quatre fois sont pour Elise; ceux qui rebondissent moins sont pour Irène... Je me dis que cela m'aidera peut-être à décider...

Je me souviens ensuite que le matin même on s'était méchamment engueulé avec Irène pour une broutille, une recette de crème brûlée ! La crème brûlée d'Irène c'est sacré, elle m'a séduit avec il y a huit ans. Vous ne me croirez pas mais on a failli en venir aux mains. Et ensuite, cerise sur le gâteau, elle m'a lancé : de toute façon toi, mis à part ta gourmandise, tu n'as aucune qualité. Je sais qu'elle m'a lancé ça dans un moment de colère, un de ces moments où on regrette tout de suite d'avoir parlé, mais quand même cela m'a troublé et heurté.

La lampe s'est éteinte. C'est un signe, me dis-je, il est l'heure de rentrer. Je suis curieux de voir si en rentrant elle a déjà mis la table pour le petit-déjeuner, comme elle fait toujours le soir avant. Je me demande aussi si elle est allée se coucher, avec ou sans Hubert, ou si elle est assise à table en ayant repoussé la vaisselle pour reposer sa tête exténuée.

Je m'approche de la maison – j'ai bien fait de ne pas rentrer avec elle, me dis-je. Cela m'a fait du bien de rester seul avec moi-même ces quelques heures. Maintenant je sais ce que je vais lui dire.

En ouvrant la porte d'entrée, je découvre ce que j'imaginai. Le service du petit-déjeuner est là, mais repoussé en bout de table. Irène, la tête couchée sur ses bras en appui sur la table s'est endormie. Sa chevelure est un peu en bataille, mais elle a l'air calme. Je m'assieds quelques minutes dans le fauteuil de la cuisine pour l'observer. Je sens mon cœur battre, mais cela ne m'est pas désagréable.

Après une vingtaine de minutes je me lève et m'approche d'Irène. Il doit-être presque cinq heures du matin. Le silence est total. Elle se réveille, relève doucement sa tête et je lis un peu d'appréhension dans son regard.

Je lui dis doucement en souriant : « Finalement, je préfère avec une fève de Tonka râpée »

Elle me regarde un peu étonnée d'un air interrogatif. Alors je continue : « Oui je me suis rendu compte ce soir que ta recette pour la crème brûlée, c'est bien toi qui fais la meilleure au monde. Quant-tu rajoutes la fève de Tonka râpée c'est ça qui la distingue de toutes. Elle est unique ».

Puis à ma surprise, il y eut un long silence gênant.

C'est alors, plus éveillée mais pas plus souriante, qu'Irène me répond froidement : « Oui elle est bonne cette recette, c'est celle que j'ai donnée hier à Elise ».

Paulo David

OHCHR, retired



Le rêve du pharaon

Préambule : Le Grand Musée Egyptien du Caire, situé au désert, vers les pyramides vient d'ouvrir ses portes pour des visites limitées. Le chantier commencé en 2002 est partiellement terminé. A l'entrée, l'imposante statue de Ramsès II semble accueillir les visiteurs. Ce récit, inspiré par des faits réels raconte le voyage en 2006 du pharaon depuis la gare centrale du Caire jusqu'à sa nouvelle demeure.

Buste légèrement projeté vers l'avant, jambes tendues en position de marche, le pharaon Ramsès II poursuit sans cesse le même rêve : s'arracher de son socle, quitter la gare populeuse du Caire, retrouver Memphis capitale de son empire, sentir le vent du désert caresser ses larges épaules, humer un air épuré de toute pollution.

« Ah, si mon exil pouvait prendre fin ! Ah, si Gamal Abdel Nasser ne m'avait pas tiré de ma paisible retraite dans le temple de Ptah à Memphis pour m'exposer au centre du Caire sur la place de la gare centrale !

Certes le bâtiment vieillot orné de céramiques bleues constitue un plaisant décor. Mais les rues, tout autour, prises dans un processus de construction sans fin en détruisent l'harmonie. Des murs provisoires s'érigent afin d'aménager un passage pour piétons. Le sol vibre sous les oscillations du métro souterrain. Des ponts suspendus visent à endiguer la circulation, sans y parvenir ; les automobilistes s'interpellent à coups de klaxon frénétiques, les marchands ambulants lancent leurs appels aux clients, les voyageurs pressés préfèrent consulter les horaires plutôt que de regarder le pharaon délaissé.

Pris dans cette agitation, dans mes vêtements rongés par les souillures de l'air ambiant, je souffre de cette indifférence totale. Je subis le harcèlement incessant des bruits effrénés de la rue et ressens le vieillissement de mes artères métalliques sous l'intensité de la pollution.

Je rêve aux jours d'autrefois lorsque Memphis la coquette exhibait ses rues propres. Les Egyptiens, mes fidèles sujets, me contemplaient avec respect et ferveur. Dans mon palais, les danseuses mi-vêtues ou drapées dans de longues robes déployaient leurs bras en éventail, tandis que le sage hébreu Ben Azen, mon échanson préféré, versait dans les coupes de verre ciselé les boissons enivrantes...

Nostalgie, rêve de retour, moi, pharaon d'Egypte, je voudrais, tel un ibis léger, m'envoler et retrouver la capitale d'autrefois. Je me dresserais fier au milieu des dunes de sable comme par le passé »

Dans son bureau du Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, le Secrétaire Général, accoudé à la fenêtre, poursuit également un rêve...: « J'aimerais sauver le colosse Ramsès II, l'arracher à l'environnement néfaste de la gare et lui trouver un cadre digne de sa gloire d'autrefois. Ah si je pouvais éveiller l'intérêt des Caiotes, ressusciter la mémoire de leur passé, embellir l'avenir ! Mais comment fusionner le rêve et la réalité ?

Et si la nouvelle demeure de Ramsès II se situait aux portes du désert, face aux pyramides, sur l'emplacement d'un futur grand musée des Antiquités ! Ce ne serait certes pas le retour à Memphis, mais Ramsès II se retrouverait dans un contexte familier. Il serait peut-être même possible de lui adjoindre une compagne, la gracieuse Merritt Amon, bien esseulée dans le village de Sohag.

Rêver, rêver... certes ! Mais comment transporter le pharaon en position verticale, le faire voyager debout afin qu'il garde sa fière allure ?

Et s'il était possible de l'envelopper dans un survêtement de mousse et de fer, d'affréter de nuit un camion aux dimensions imposantes et d'entreprendre, à allure modérée, le lent voyage de la gare centrale aux confins du désert...

Et comment réagirait la foule ? Piétons et chauffeurs d'automobiles s'arrêteraient-ils sur son passage ? La folle circulation du Caire connaîtrait elle un répit en faveur du pharaon ?

Faudrait-il l'entourer d'une garde imposante comme son rang le réclame ? »

Solitaire, vissé sur son socle, perdu dans ses rêves d'exilé, Ramsès II ignore que tant d'experts et d'égyptologues se penchent sur son sort. Il perçoit une effervescence inhabituelle autour de lui. Hissés sur des échelles, des hommes prennent ses mesures comme le feraient des tailleurs pour un nouveau costume. D'autres, dans des activités plus intellectuelles, stylos et carnets en main, prennent des notes

Le pharaon est triste...Que peut-il lui arriver de plus ? N'a-t-il 'pas atteint les abysses de la déchéance ?

Après tous ces préparatifs, par une chaude nuit d'août 2006 les deux rêves coïncident enfin. La rencontre entre le pharaon issu du passé et l'homme moderne passionné par l'histoire de son pays se concrétise.

« Des années durant, moi, Ramsès II, immobile, statufié, j'ai contemplé des voyageurs pressés se lançant à l'assaut des trains Mon tour serait-il venu de quitter l'exil ? Vais-je partir enfin ?

Revêtu d'un ingénieux costume de fer et de mousse, je suis hissé sur un immense camion. Je vais enfin pouvoir faire mes adieux à la gare centrale et entreprendre un long voyage du centre du Caire vers les pyramides et le désert.

Une escorte de soldats et de policiers vêtus de neuf veilles sur moi. Je me tiens debout ma fierté retrouvée et je salue la foule.

Stupéfait, je découvre que les Egyptiens, en dépit des siècles écoulés, ne m'ont pas oublié. De tous les coins du pays, de divers quartiers du Caire ils sont accourus pour m'accompagner.

Rassemblés autour de la gare, ils applaudissent mon départ aux cris de - vive le roi d'Egypte, vive le pharaon- Les femmes, jeunes ou vieilles, me lancent des fleurs, des baisers, les hommes, joyeux, s'inclinent sur mon passage. Tous m'emboitent le pas et accomplissent le voyage à mes côtés, à pied ou dans leurs étranges véhicules. Tout le long du trajet, les balcons sont décorés en mon honneur, les acclamations fusent.

Une vive émotion m'envahit. Je vivais un exil douloureux, je me sentais déchu. Je viens de retrouver la gloire et l'amour de mes concitoyens. L'Egypte, mon pays a redécouvert notre passé commun et m'entoure de sa gaieté chaleureuse.

Je suis Ramsès II, pharaon d'Egypte, descendant du Soleil. J'ai toujours protégé avec amour sur mes sujets. J'ai combattu les Hittites et eu la sagesse de signer avec eux le premier traité de paix de l'histoire pharaonique, j'ai amené gloire et prospérité à l'Egypte. J'ai été passionné d'art et mes statues ont survécu au-delà des siècles.

Me voici maintenant parvenu à ma nouvelle habitation. Je respire l'air sec du désert, tandis que le vent caresse mes larges épaules. Les Egyptiens m'ont entouré de leur affection et de leur respect. Bientôt une belle compagne, Merritt Amon, viendra me rejoindre. De tous les coins du globe afflueront les touristes admiratifs.

Buste légèrement projeté en avant, jambes solidement vissées sur le socle, je veille sur le pays retrouvé.

Glorice Weinstein, SENU/UNSW

The curse

CLAP CLAP – the khusra’s hands thunder in front of my face. New Delhi railway station is as crowded as can be on this scorching Saturday afternoon in July. Waiting on the platform, I’m tired after a sleepless nine-hour flight from London Heathrow to Indira Gandhi International airport. I have no time for this. I’m not looking up. Certainly not opening my purse. No. I won’t be trapped in an obligation to be generous. They move on. But it’s done.

The train arrives, there are five hours until our stop: Phagwara Junction. The air conditioning is a relief from the 40-degree heat outside. We look for our seats.

The loud clap in my face has left me irritated. “Why were they so aggressive?” I ask my sister, “there was no need for that, I can decide who I give my money to”. “But they need to earn a living too” she says, “you could’ve given 100 rupees. I’m sure if they had a choice, they’d prefer not to chase financial sustenance from random members of the public.”

Last time I’d encountered a khusra had been the day after my cousin’s wedding a couple of years ago. Hearing there was a celebration in the village, a small group of them had arrived at the wedding house. The front gate had been open. They walked straight into the courtyard and started singing folk songs and dancing in a circle. Hands clapping, heels tapping. The expectation of cash and unstitched salwar kameez in return, unspoken. Once the extemporaneous performance was complete, our bibi duly offered money and clothes to the dancers; indeed, they had been put aside in preparation for this sometime before the wedding celebrations began. Blessings and joy. Gifts given generously and gratefully received. As quickly as they had arrived, the group left to go about whatever business they had next that day. Afterwards we revelled in the energy the impromptu party had brought to the house.

But the clap is a curse in return for a demand unfulfilled. With the power to bestow either blessings or curses, residents of rural Punjab generally fear calamity will fall on people and households who refuse to give to the khusra. Marriages and births are their main business. And nobody wants a shadow cast over either event. We all know this. Even those of us raised in lands far from our ancestral homes. Since they always arrive unannounced, I’ve often wondered how they know which house to go to and on what day? They don’t seem to live in the village and it’s otherwise unusual to cross paths with them

in rural life. But then I haven't encountered them in a bustling, urban setting like the train station before today. Delhi has never been more than a point of transit for us. A place to pass through as quickly as possible to reach the peace of home. Is the unexpected location of our interaction a good enough excuse for my refusal to pay on the spot? I hadn't been prepared for the demand.

I flick through the Times of India, take the courtesy tea and biscuits, and try to relax as the train speeds through the Haryana countryside. The rice fields are flooded with water, typical at this time of year, and mirror the sky. The train draws closer to Sirhind - the first stop in Punjab. Not long until our stop now. Time to stand up and stretch a little. A few moments after I sit back down, someone's luggage falls from the overhead storage compartment and lands on my head. Ouch. That was unexpected. It must have been too close to the edge. My sister laughs out loud while the other passengers in the carriage try to stifle theirs. Maybe that's the payback for my earlier episode of diasporic arrogance.

How easy it is to snub people who are beyond binaries, inhabiting an in-between world, outside the standard confines of classification, unknowable to most. And how complex it can sometimes be to balance the values and practices of two cultures – one imparted through our parents and the generations before them, carried from India to a distant land – and the other, imbibed through the system of education and social structures of the distant land that we, the next generation, were born and raised in. Applying the most appropriate mindset in a particular situation involves an invisible juggling act. The cerebral switch from west to east always takes a few days more than the physical change in location. The greater the time between trips, I've come to notice, the more challenging the adjustment.

At last, the train pulls in to Phagwara Junction. Concerned about two NRI female family members travelling alone, our chacha is already standing on the platform waiting to meet us. A giant of a man, wearing a purple turban, he is easy to spot in the crowd. It's a relief to reach the familiarity of chacha's car. "Couldn't you get a direct flight to Amritsar?" he asks us, still dismayed that we chose to travel by train. "I know you valaiti's roam around freely on public transport at home, but things are very different here." I reassure him that we had no trouble on the journey, aside from the flying luggage colliding with my head. He smiles. He's right of course. I would do things differently next time.

Driving down GT Road as the bright orange ball in the sky starts to set, I pull out my camera to snap the view. Chacha reminds me that I have taken

hundreds of photos of this same scene over the years. Yet, in what seems a reflex action, I am compelled to capture it again. When we reach our farm, I'll organise the obligatory photo shoot with the tractors and water buffalo. We are always so excited to see the water buffalo although the feeling is clearly not mutual. According to our baba, we scare them when we walk around with our heads uncovered. In fact, they are surprisingly sensitive animals when faced with people they don't see every day.

Chacha stops the car outside the gate and honks the horn. Everyone is waiting in the courtyard; we run to bibi first, who is sitting comfortably on the manja. We all sit outside in the twilight, catching up over hot milk and home-made biscuits. Geckos dart across the walls lapping up any mosquitoes that cross their path. The evening and atmosphere are marked by a distinct warmth – one that you could search the world but not find elsewhere. Later, I compare the warm reception that bibi offers unreservedly to all with my cold indifference to the khusra earlier in the day. How far the apple can fall from the roots of the tree. In two generations we may have progressed from a people who cannot read and write to those who can, but this advance has come at the cost of a way of being that is intrinsically lacking in self-interest. For those of us who inhabit the in-between, the first step to the cure may lie in recognising the curse.

Mandip Ayla, WHO

Glossary

Khusra – eunuch

Bibi – paternal grandmother

Baba – paternal grandfather

Chacha – father's younger brother

Valaiti – foreigner

Manja – woven bedstead

Butterfly

It was my peripheral vision that first caught the attention of the hovering wonder. Through the steam rising from my coffee mug, I saw it fly and sit on a leaf of my desk plant. It was a dark blue butterfly with black color on the sides. There were white spots that blotted its dark sides. I didn't know what its name was or from what Papilionoidea it had wandered off from. It stayed on top of one leaf and after a few seconds hopped on or rather flew to another leaf. I guessed it was unable to make a choice as to which leaf to rest upon.

Sometimes I too had the same problem when I entered a room and there were many empty chairs. I found it difficult to make a choice. So, I first sit on one chair and if it agreed with my bottom and back, I would continue in inertia or else I moved on to testing another chair.

I watched the beauty of the butterfly and observed it more closely. It was not that I didn't have anything else to do, but sometimes you see something wonderful and you stop all that you do, to gaze at the dazzling blue bundle dancing in front of you. It wasn't completely dark blue. It was an amalgam of blue having all shades of blue painted over it. But the darker version was more prominent while the rest stayed hidden. It reminded me of people. How they could be one thing at a glance and something else entirely once you get to know them. The edges of the butterfly also had varying shades of black with it being darker as we move towards the edge of its little wings. The white spots were of various sizes from a small dot to a larger one which could fit inside the boundaries of the wing.

I then thought about the butterfly. It wasn't a fly and it definitely wasn't butter. It was just a line with wings. Basically, it was just wings and without that it was nothing. Nobody would have cared for a butterfly if it didn't have its wings. Those were what made it special. A beauty to be gazed and even admired. The butterfly kept flying to different leaves. Maybe it was searching for a flower or maybe even the meaning of its short life. The few weeks it had was spent flying around, sniffing on flowers, resting on leaves, mating with a partner and finally dying. Did we have anything in common? We weren't as beautiful as the butterfly and unlike the winged colors we didn't care for flowers unless it was to be plucked and sent to dead people; decoration for people contracted to stay together forever; celebrating years of existence and

togetherness; stuffing for the hair; or when unable to use words, to profess something called feelings.

It flew and rested on to my desk. I gazed enviously at its beauty. Was it vain on my part to wish to be like a butterfly? To be free, able to fly, with no bonds and a short life span. The idea was to live a short, happy and joyous life unbounded, unshackled and unrestrained by anything. Too many uns! And that was what I saw in the butterfly. To glide through the air mesmerizing all those who saw it, floating in the air (which also gave in to a famous quote), slowly and seductively taking your gaze along with its flight. I never wished to be the center of attention but like humans all around the world I too wished for attention. Life is a slow, sad and solitary experience.

It lifted off from the desk and flew towards my coffee mug. It hovered over the mug, trying to battle the steam rising from it and then suddenly it fell into my coffee.

“Fucking hell! The son of a bitch! Bloody bastard butterfly! Fucked up my coffee the little piece of shit.”

Shaheer Aboobacker, WHO



Ten Abstract Nouns, Blue Irises and a Chinese Reciprocating Saw

1. **Admiration.** Overhear your daughter telling Mummy the new gardener's eyes are as blue as our field of irises. Sophie's asking if that's because Roger spends so much time under the sky, and saying, "Isn't he strong?" (Mummy hums and haws; replies no and yes.)
2. **Faith.** Believe you can prove yourself better than Roger at cutting dead trees into foot-long logs to feed the expensive Swedish stove your wife insisted on buying. Identify a reciprocating saw (whatever that is) that looks up to the job.
3. **Wisdom.** As you're good at sums, calculate that the saw costs less than three hours of Roger, who in any case appears to be spending less time on gardening than on chatting with your wife.
4. **Decision.** Order the saw on Amazon, which won't charge for delivery as you forgot to cancel the subscription before the free trial period expired.
5. **Hope.** Open the heavy box on arrival and trust that you are assembling the reciprocating saw (with adjustable handle) according to the exact instructions translated from the Chinese and printed in four-point type.
6. **Courage.** Give up trying to decipher what the instructions say about safety features. You're brave, you'll be careful, and you trust the machine won't run amok.
7. **Survival.** Escape killing yourself while trying out the reciprocating saw in the iris field where Sophie has told you Roger and Mummy are having a little lie-down to discuss new beds.
8. **Persuasion.** Convince the coroner to record a verdict of death by misadventure occasioned by a malfunction of the saw's adjustable handle.
9. **Prescription.** Ask the optician to prescribe you blue contact lenses because Sophie likes blue eyes and is missing Mummy and Roger. Also go online to order lutein pills, which are good for your irises.
10. **Evaluation.** Award five stars on Amazon to the reciprocating saw.

David X. Lewis, WHO retired

The Basalt Queen and Blood-stained Chessboard

Basalt, limestone, granite, diorite, gneiss, chalcedony.

Abdul remembers gathering the stones with Mohammad to make a chess set. Salt in the air, sun in the sky, water between their toes.

Abdul remembers sorting the pebbles. Black and grey for the black pieces; cream and colored for the white. Smooth and shiny from the ocean, ready to be grasped and played. Others in need of carving, shaping, polishing.

Abdul remembers them cutting and etching basalt to create the Black Queen and King. He made the King, Mohammad the Queen. They didn't have the patience or energy to work that hard stone into knights, bishops, and rooks, so they used soft gray limestone instead. For black pawns, they chose flat ovoids of granite, speckled like stracciatella ice cream.

For the White Queen and King, and their flanking courtiers, they hewed cream and yellow limestone; for the white infantry, they abandoned colour correctness for sea-buffed pastils of diorite, gneiss, and chalcedony. Red, green, and blue.

~

Abdul had sat with Mohammad near the mosque before sunset, hour of the Maghreb prayers, ever since they were boys.

As teenagers, they drank mint tea and talked about girls, food, football, life, and Allah.

As adults, after labouring in the bazaar, they drank mint tea and talked about their wives, children, food, football, life...and Allah.

After collecting and fashioning the pebbles from the beach, they also played chess. At first, on a sixty-four-square grid traced in dirt; later, on a checkered

cloth woven by Fatima, the girl who fluttered shy eye-lashes at Mohammad and became his wife.

The two men played and talked and drank mint tea every day in every season until, one spring evening, a missile screamed from the sky into the square. With a flash, boom, shudder, and rank smell of smoke, metal, and sulphur, Mohammad was torn to shreds.

Spattered with tea and blood, Abdul gathered Mohammad's bleeding body parts, wrapped them in the carpet and roll-up chessboard, and bore them sobbing to his friend's home. Blood seeped sticky and crimson from his arms. The keening of Fatima and of Mohammad's family lasted for days, weeks.

Abdul too wailed for Mohammad, and still does—though now he wails silently, inside. Every day he sits cross-legged on the blood-stained carpet, sets out the thirty-two stone pieces, fingers them in remembrance, and then plays both black and white on Fatima's cloth, from which Mohammad's blood refuses to disappear.

The pieces feel colder now. Especially the Black Queen, Mohammad's own creation, that he was holding the moment he was killed by the howling weapon from the blue.

Precision targeting, the radio said; a regrettable case of mistaken identity. Somebody somewhere had said sorry.

Abdul yearns to play chess and drink mint tea with Mohammad again, to discuss wives, children, food, football, life ... and how Allah could possibly permit what had happened.

David X Lewis, WHO retired

How to Alter the Suit Your Mother Says Was Too Good to Go In Your Father's Coffin and Would Like to See on You

1. Go through your late father's wardrobe and identify the bespoke suit he bought for his honeymoon fifty years ago. Finger the light grey lambswool and agree your mother was right not to bury him in the garment or give it to Oxfam. Realize it does have a certain retro charm, will serve as a good souvenir of him, and should look better than your own shiny items from M&S or C&A. Exhume from the pockets two mothballs, a florin dated 1963, two spare buttons on a card, and the Order of Service for your grandmother's funeral.
2. Take the suit to an ancient tailor tracked down in your ancient Yellow Pages and still working in an ancient shop in an ancient lane near the ancient cathedral. When the tailor says he can do the alterations for a special price of £270, decide to do the work yourself as that's three times what you've ever spent on a suit, and your mother has arthritic fingers.
3. After consulting Google on what you'll need, visit your mother for Sunday tea and extract from her black sewing box, while she's in the kitchen, a measuring tape, sewing pins, needles, sharp scissors, a thimble, and reels of cotton in various colors. Buy a fabric pencil and thread ripper from the high street haberdashery that is closing next week after 138 years.
4. Clear your kitchen table of coffee cups, empty beer bottles, unpaid gas bills, and two plates of congealed fried eggs. Rinse your J-Cloth (twice), squirt it with Fairy Liquid, wipe down the surface (twice), and lay out the suit.
5. Try on the trousers. When you discover they are too long, even though you and Dad were the same height when he died (he must have shrunk with age), undo the turn-ups, raise them two inches, and secure with pins. Re-hem. As the trousers are too tight, use the thread ripper on the seam down the buttocks, hoping there's enough spare material to enlarge the waist by two inches. Discover there isn't. Resolve to go on a diet.
6. When your mother says your father dressed left, and asks if you do too, Google the expression. Relieved she didn't ascertain the answer with her hands,

explore your crotch yourself and realize you'll have to alter the trouser front too. Decide not to worry which side your penis hangs. It will have to align itself with Dad's. Or try to.

7. Try on your dead father's jacket and find the shoulders are too wide and arms too long. Also that it's too tight around the chest. Realize you don't have the skills to move the buttons and/or button-holes, but deploy the thread ripper on the shoulders and arms, taking care to unpick the lining. With the fabric pencil, mark where to cut and pin. Reattach the lining and re-sew with a thread that nearly matches and you hope won't show.

8. Decide not to bother with the waistcoat, as most people don't wear them these days.

9. Try on the altered jacket. Resolve to wear it unbuttoned.

10. After losing seven pounds by cutting down on Big Macs, pizza, and beer, try on the trousers.

11. Take the jacket and trousers back to the tailor for alterations to your alterations. Don't be too annoyed when you find his special price has increased, even though you've ditched the waistcoat.

12. Model the remodeled suit for your mother. Trust she knows never to expect you to go on honeymoon with a bride.

13. Rejoice that you now have a smart outfit for her funeral.

David X. Lewis, WHO retired

Edward 2.0

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost

You bump into yourself at a school reunion. Or rather, the mess of your life bumps into a superior version.

Former classmates are puzzled. Your Edward is ill-shaven, has bags under the eyes. He drives a 13-year-old Ford and wears scruffy clothes. The other sports a good suit, a smart haircut, and a Mercedes.

You explain that, dissatisfied with the path you took 10 years ago, you went back to the yellow wood for an upgrade, new software, and the right to take the other road. The new you would make better choices, secure a better job, establish better relationships.

The wood refused your demands, together with your fall-back proposal to return your life for a refund. The wood said the guarantee had expired. He was obliged to live out the life he'd started. As a one-off commercial gesture, though, it would generously use frozen DNA to clone an Edward 2.0 with the chance to get things right.

Your boyhood companions, most of them brandishing photos of happy families and expensive homes, express sympathy over the peanuts and warm white wine.

Before the new headmaster launches his pitch for the development fund, Edward 2.0 approaches and shakes your hand. "You look well," he lies.

You gaze each other in the eye and resume your diverging ways.

David X. Lewis, WHO retired

This story is one of the 28 miniature stories from David X. Lewis' latest book, A Life in Pieces, The Origins, Childhood, Crimes, Misdemeanours, Loves, Infidelities, and Imminent Demise of Edward Newman. The book is available from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [amazon.fr](https://www.amazon.fr). Signed copies may be obtained directly from the author via davidxlewis@gmail.com .

A QUEUE AT A HOT-DOG STALL DURING A FOOTBALL MATCH

Spectator (*with a deep-cultured voice*):

Excuse me, Sir, I believe I am next in line. Could you please return to the back of the queue.

Football fan (*local well-loved market-stall owner*):

Wot?

Spectator: Would you mind going to the back of the queue please.

Football fan: Oohs this posh geezer? Whadya want?

Spectator: I merely requested that you return to the back of the queue. I have been patiently waiting for quite a while and you have pushed into the queue.

Football fan: Tuf luck mate, I'm 'ere now. Giv us two dogs and chips mate.

Spectator: I really must object at your pushing into the queue.

Football fan: Get knotted mate. I aint movin'.

Spectator: I really must object.

Football fan: Stick a sock in it mate.

Spectator: Really, I will not be talked to in this manner.

Football fan: Whatya gonna do?

Spectator: I will make an official complaint.

Football fan: Your nuts mate, no-one gives a monkeys.

Spectator: Young man, I will not accept this disrespect.

Football fan: Bloomin' heck, give im his dogs and chips and get im outta mi face

Spectator: I expect an apology for your disrespect.

Football fan: If you don't shut it, im gonna get mad wiv yer.

The football arena security guards arrive and remove the shocked spectator with a wink to the football fan.

Monika Spyczak von Brezinska, ECE and UNOG library, retired

THREE FRIENDS IN A FRENCH RESTAURANT

Brian: Very la-di-dah 'ere, with one of them smoker's corner'. I'm gonna go and 'av a fag.

June: What would you like to eat Luna?

Luna: I have what you have.

June: You don't necessarily like what I do.

Luna: I have what you have.

June: OK frogs' legs for starters.

Luna: No, no – no frog's legs.

June: What then?

Luna: You choose.

June: I did and you didn't like it. Come on Luna, for once choose something. Today's your birthday.

Luna: No, please, I not hungry. No want trouble ...

Brian: Oi, June whataya doin? Ya never give up do ya? Just order somein' and leave 'er alone. She's all red now. It's always the same with ya.

June: Your're right. I'm sorry Luna. I just wish for once you would choose something yourself. We want to spoil you on your birthday.

Brian: How are ya gonna spoil Lun when ya've already spoilt er evenin? Lun, me ol' fruit, I'm gonna order for ya. Waiter, I'll 'ave six of ya best oysters, followed by ya best steak and mushrooms with 'oles and them spuds wiv cheese, tomatoes an' that weird oil an' ya upside-down cake for this young lady please.

Waiter: Yes Sir, *six Fines de Claire n°3, Entrecôte avec sauce aux morilles, Gratin de pommes de terre, tomates en vigne grillé avec huile de truffe and Tarte Tatin.*

June: Are you crazy? That's the most expensive things on the menu. Who's going to pay for it?

Brian: Ya gonna pay for all the times ya've given our Luna an 'ard time. Oi waiter, I'll ave the same and a bottle of ya best white plonk for starters an' a bottle of ya best red for the second. An' couldya bring candles, it's Lun's birthday today.

Waiter: With pleasure Sir.

90 MINUTES LATER

Brian: Cor, that was somein'. Worth every bob. How was yours Lun? Ta, June, nice one.

June: Yes, but ...

Brian: Are ya comfy Lun? Not too cold? Here's me jacket, can't havya gettin' cold.

Luna: What a lovely meal, truly. You ordered very well Brian.

Luna blushed, shyly looking at Brian.

Brian: Nothin' good enuf for me Lun.

June: Must admit I liked the grub.

Brian: Lun, fancy another drink?

June: Actually ...

Brian: Ya know Lun, the one with pineapple an' foreign stuff.

June: Oh, Pina Colada, yes me too.

Luna: Are you sure Brian, it's expensive.

Brian: It's ya birthday gal, let's celebrate.

Luna: You're very good to me.

Brian: Ya know, ya pretty when you blush like a rose.

Luna blushed even more.

June: She's always going red, what's wrong with her?

Brian took Luna's hand under the table.

Brian: Can I? Been wantin' to 'old ya 'and for ages. Should've done this last time.

Luna: Oh, Brian ...

Brian: What do ya wanna do now? Flics?

Luna: You decide Brian, I happy.

Brian: U 'ad a good birthday Lun? 'onest?

Luna: Oh yes, Brian. Thank you.

June: Hang on a minute ...

Brian: Can I cook fer ye one night, Lun? I aint no MasterChef but me egg 'n chips aint bad.

Luna has a giggling fit.

Luna: I would be very happy.

Brian: Ya look flushed June. Best ya go and freshen up with cold water. We'll wait 'ere.

June: You ungrateful, miserable creatures.

Brian: Wot? Did I say summit wrong?

Monika Spyczak von Brezinska, ECE and UNOG library, retired

BOWING BEAUTIFULLY

She walked through many shops in search of her heart's desire. At last she stopped outside an exquisitely decorated shop window :

'Yes, this is what I am looking for'.

The door was locked with a sign ' Gone for lunch, back in one hour'.

Never had an hour been so long. She paced outside counting the minutes. At last, the owner returned with a smile:

'Please take a seat, I will be with you in a moment'.

She sat down with great difficulty, too excited to sit still. When the owner returned, she explained what she needed and why, She gasped when she saw the array of ribbons the shopkeeper presented to her. The champagne-coloured one caught her eye - her wedding dress was this colour, floor-length with a train. The satin ribbon had a beckoning sheen. The shopkeeper measured out two 16" lengths.

One hour later bathed, perfumed, and beautifully dressed in a pale-beige dress and shoes, she tied the ribbons around her ankles, finishing with a perfect bow in front, just like she did on her wedding day. She knew he would remember.

His twinkling green eyes greeted her before she reached him. He had a champagne-coloured tie and a for-get-me-not flower in his lapel. As he kissed her, his soft beard tickled her powdered cheek. She took his arm and proudly they entered the restaurant to celebrate 50 years of married bliss.

Monika Spyczak von Brezinska, ECE and UNOG library, retired

SHADING THE EAGLE

Something about Ines was striking beyond her exuberant vitality, whispering of distant, legendary origins. Was it the clear-cut contour of her face, its complexion somewhere between bronze and pale copper? Or the jade-green of her slanted eyes, with their fleeting reflections of amber? When one looked at her, especially her profile, images of kings and eagles flashed through one's mind.

It was evening. We were sitting on the balcony of her apartment overlooking the Biscayne Bay. Its waters were dark except for the faint glitter of a half-moon and the lights of the Miami harbor and Fisher Island. Inside Ines' apartment, light filtering through silken lampshades the color of saffron and gold created a soothing, enveloping glow.

I had phoned Ines offering to take her to the airport later that evening and she had invited me over for a farewell drink.

She spent much of her time traveling, searching for artistic treasures in faraway countries, encouraging local artists and craftsmen there and finding outlets for their work. From Bali she brought back traditional woodcarvings: friendly protector demons, rice goddesses and, just as divine and—save for their finely carved sarongs—nude mortal beauties. In Thailand she had silk cushions and lampshades made that were soon much in demand in top-of-the-line boutiques in places like Bal Harbor and Palm Beach.

Ines was constantly thinking up fresh projects and novel ways of doing things.

"I love to recognize a potential and help it come alive," she said, brushing a strand of black hair from her brow with a quick movement of her hand, "that's essentially what taking an initiative is all about."

"You admire those lampshades," she went on. "I hit on the idea when, stuck in an airport in Java, I sat all night under bare neon tubes, moths of all sizes whirring about and large bats nose-diving near-by. Beleaguered by strange jungle sounds, I was grateful for that safe, lit-up spot, but it also brought home how unpleasantly stark electric light can be. I played with ideas to soften it, imagined different arrangements and colors to change the mood, make it friendly and welcoming."

She got up and waved her arms enthusiastically, pushing back the sleeves of the shirt-jacket of her sand-colored travel outfit.

“To find the best designs and shapes for shading the light, and the right texture and most flattering hues of silk, is one of my favorite pursuits.”

“Why favorite?” I wondered.

“Because for me,” Ines said, laughing, “lampshades represent a feminine view of life. They render the light mellow, lend it a subtle glow. They hide imperfections and enhance harmony. They help create an air of serenity, a space where to feel at ease and savor the beauty of the small things in our lives that bring us joy.

“Naked light is demanding, unkind. Lampshades offer a counterpoint to its glaring harshness, placing a mantle of love around any sharp edges.”

We were having tropical fruit juice with a shot of rum. Ines took a sip, set down the glass and nibbled a few pistachios, shelling them one by one with nimble fingers.

“You were talking about your idea of initiative,” I reminded her.

“It starts unseen,” she said, intense, “in the realm of the spirit-imprints or proto-types of everything wanting to be. If you delve in there and capture one and care for it, lovingly feed it kernels of practicality and grains of hope, it will grow and one day, like a bird, spread its wings.

“But today everyone wants results first. We’re focused on the bottom-line. That’s looking at things from the wrong end. We’ve lost sight of what matters most, the intent, the initial thought behind whatever we do: the spirit behind the initiative. It will determine the outcome in the long term.

“To be in touch with that spirit is woman’s role. Sadly, this feminine side of initiative has largely been forgotten and women have lost their innate power. They are content to remain passive or compete with men by imitating men’s ways, oblivious to the power of the secret initiatives having their origin in the heart. And yet it is from there that all life flows.”

Ines fell silent.

I looked at her, not knowing what to say.

“Your voice sounded so different right now,” I ventured finally.

“I was using my mother’s words. A woman’s responsibility, she believed, is to act as a guardian of the beginnings of things, watching over the true purpose stirring us to action. Her role is to inspire and bless. She needs to remember her ancient role as priestess...”

Ines’ eyes seemed absent, distances away. Stillness spread. I thought I felt an eagle hovering above.

I sat shyly looking at her. She had placed one of her small brown hands above the other; they lay there like young, twin sister animals, peacefully side by side, half covering each other.

“My mother,” she continued without moving, “said that more than what *we do*, what matters is what, from the very beginning, *we intend* in our hearts. Intent links us to the sacred weave of potential and destiny behind all things.”

Ines’ origins linked her to Cuzco, an ancient town in the Peruvian Andes, where, in the very first major hotel built for foreign guests, Ines’ father had been maître d’hôtel.

“To extend hospitality to a stranger was considered a sacred duty. Activities involving contact with foreigners were thought to be important and often went to persons of noble descent,” Ines said.

She went on to recount how her parents had first met high up in the Andean mountain range.

Ines’ father, Hernando, had been an impressive figure: broad-shouldered, straight as a tree, not tall but of commanding presence, aquiline features and charcoal eyes.

On that fateful evening in the hotel at Cuzco, where Ines’ mother, Isa, had first met Hernando, she had been struck by the power she sensed behind his stillness. When she first caught sight of him, he had been standing, motionless, against the backdrop of a floor-to-ceiling fresco picturing scenes from past Inca glory. His countenance, as he surveyed the setting into which Isa was making

her first entry, had impressed her as a startlingly exact replica of the finely painted portrait of the last Inca ruler.

In that town touching the clouds, two eagles had awaited her.

The maître d'hôtel, solemnly approaching, had bid Isa welcome. And his double, the Inca ruler, hovering above, had seemed to mysteriously step forth to also greet the young student from a distant land on her long-awaited arrival, because....

At that point in the story Ines couldn't help harking back to her pet theory about the finely spun roots of initiative. Destiny, she claimed, had set this memorable scene in motion long ago. The meeting between the fathomless stillness in those dark eyes from an ancient lineage and the shy fire of a young traveler from a future-oriented land had been the first move in one of life's secret, long-term strategies.

Thus, a generation later, Ines arrived in Cuzco to retrace her mother's footsteps.

During long years of living and studying in Peru, Isa had met people usually beyond a foreigner's range and won their friendship. She had worked to help recover and protect the remnants of the Inca civilization, and some of its legends and its wisdom had been revealed to her. She had often talked to her daughter about what she had learned.

Isa had also researched the agricultural crops of Peru. The Incas had built sophisticated irrigation systems and cultivated varieties of potatoes and grains, quinoa, for example—rich in nutrients, flavors and textures—largely unknown to the rest of the world. Ines had taken up her mother's work and, together with friends, was organizing an export business for some of those crops.

"The origins of our omnipresent potato go back to Peru," she said. "Francis Drake, a pirate on mission for the Queen of England, brought it to Europe. He was rewarded with a knighthood, a title well deserved, since the arrival of the potato helped put an end to the famines that were a scourge of the dark ages.

"Even today this part of the world", Ines went on, "has still amazing varieties of crops to offer, but not enough is done to encourage their cultivation. Choice

and diversity disappear, depriving us of pleasures meant to enrich everyday life.”

Ines’ hands fluttered as she talked.

“We are so proud of our way of living, so sure of our values.” Her face turned somber. “But it’s a certainty born from ignorance. Other civilizations, centuries ago, possessed treasures of knowledge, wisdom and beauty that we, in our smug, modern, so-called progressive world, are barely aware of.

“They knew about the secret beginnings of things, perceiving dimensions we’re only starting to rediscover. My mother used to say: ‘within us is a well. From that well springs reality. An idea, as it first occurs to us, is a drop flowing from that well...’

Ines’ voice trailed off.

“Well, I better get packing,” she then said with a sigh, “but I don’t need a lot.” She pulled out a beige, lightweight suitcase and methodically, light-handedly put in a few items of clothing, folding them one by one.

Moments later she looked up again, excited.

“Whenever I fly to Peru, I can’t help thinking about it. Imagine what it must have been like to conquer the Andes! To cross the expanse of that mountain range covered by jungle! Make one’s way through the wilderness, on foot, on horseback, and then to stumble across the Inca empire—what an adventure!

“The Incas, history tells us, had been warned by prophecies of the Spaniards’ impending invasion and retreated to the high mountains. There, in the area around Machu Picchu, they laid out terraces for their crops and built a whole city, hoping it would remain hidden from an enemy passing through the valleys below.”

Ines topped off our glasses with more fruit juice and, after offering me more ice, plopped a few cubes into her drink and took a long, thirsty gulp. “One day,” she went on, “when the sky was clear and the potatoes’ deadly night-shadow blossoms were soaking up the sun, from the look-out point above the highest terraces, a short, dark line became visible, far away. It crawled through the long stretch of valleys like a worm made up of dots, each dot an advancing invader. In time, they made their way up to Machu Picchu. First no more than a

handful of men, hacking their way through the jungle, weighed down by their armor, helmets gleaming in the sun as they climbed up the mountain flank. Carrying crosses and swords, searching for gold, they pillaged, killed and destroyed.”

Ines sighed, then zipping up her suitcase, she announced: “There, I’m almost packed. Ready for another journey. But before leaving, let’s listen to this.”

She put on a record and sat down.

It was the sound of an Inca flute. Filled with quivering spaces, depths and silences, it seemed to go beyond the ordinary span of human breath. It sang the song of the wind traveling through the Andes, blowing across jungle wilderness, chasing clouds over jagged mountain ridges and ancient temple ruins.

It was time to leave. I drove her to the airport. Ines’ flight destination was Lima, her plan to help set up an agricultural cooperative and bring back a selection of silver jewelry.

“Traveling always holds the seeds of new beginnings,” she said before turning to walk away, adding in a whisper, “wherever we go, eagles hover above.”

Jo Christiane Ledakis, former UN translator

WildSeaSaltofLife.com

This is a story that is not a story, never was a story and never will become a story.

I am the Black Dragon of Doom, the envoy of Surt, Lord of Fire Doom and Destruction...

I slipped into your world thru the source of the River Dream, the source located at one of the three roots of Yggdrasil. I crawled up the root which is directly connected to Hel, Kaos and Fire. Hello there, I have always been your worst Night Mare, the snake, the sly one, the slimy slithering one, the whisper of temptation, the proponent of greed, the dark face of fear... I am the cunning one: science devoid of conscience; follow me, I will lead you into the mean & lean, the down & dirty, the very Real Brutal Material Nasty world. You left the garden — stepped into the battle field, abandoned the world of Poetry to discover the Fantastic world of Advertisement.

You were not always as miserly and mean as you have now become. In fact, you even started out in “Grand Style”. You were granted all the blessings, all the gifts of creation were bestowed upon you: the Earth, the Water, the Sky, the Sun, the myriads of plants and animal species, precious stones, mountains of granite, marble caves. The stars brought you their light, their inspiration, their myths, their creatures and their dust. You were given the waters of life: the source of wisdom, the dew drop on the lovely flower and the tears of the Maiden, the lake of stillness and the torrent of ardour; you were given the Oceans, each equipped with its own cosmic gyre....

Best of and most precious of all, you were imbued with the creative Spirit: Poïesis, the active imagination allowing you to rejoice when you beheld these wondrous gifts. You sang, you danced, you were ecstatic and pulled the beauty, the secret source of life’s wonders very close to your heart.

Then you blew it, it all went to Hel; you did manage to survive in your shallow and cruel way, in your miserly and brutal fashion. Now I have returned to take you down, to do you in, to get rid of you once and for all, swallow you like a giant black hole, atomise your Spirit, reduce you to Eternal Oblivion, the only place you belong.

I am the Black Dragon of Doom...

I have come to bless your guns, consecrate your semi automatic rifles, I have

come to guide your missiles and mess up you mind, I am here to multiply your bombs, fill your limbs with death lust, entice you to wage war as long as you can launch weapons of mass destruction from a safe distance, for you are my pride and glory, the sons of my twisted evil imagination, you are the biggest cowards that ever crawled on the surface of this earth. I have blown on the glowing embers of your mad souls and started the devastating fire which consumes all reason, all beauty and all meaning. I have replaced your dances, your songs and rituals with MUSAK produced by bots, created virtual worlds, artificial hearts, robot lovers. Best of all, I replaced the Spirit with little algorithms of so called « Artificial Intelligence ». I have been working you over for centuries, leaving you with the compassionate heart of a deep freezer.

Soon my work here will be done, your world reduced to ashes, rubble, chaos... I will move on to other worlds, hoping to find other creatures as gullible, shallow and mean as yourselves. Nevertheless, I will be curious to see what grows back on the land you have so aptly destroyed with your selfishness, your apathy and your greed...

Antony Hequet, MünD, UNSW/SENU



Antony Hequet at the Ex Tempore soirée in 2018

Pabellón de máxima seguridad

Los muros de hormigón bruto aparecen de repente, al final de una carretera tortuosa y polvorienta que muere allí, después de atravesar barrios de chabolas y adentrarse en un paisaje de colinas peladas y pedregosas. El edificio de dos plantas se eleva en simbiosis con el paisaje. Ninguna otra construcción a la vista. Roberto mira a su alrededor y no puede evitar la desazón. Con la excusa de ordenar sus papeles es el último en salir del vehículo. Si pudiera se quedaría ahí, sin moverse, hasta que los demás terminaran. Ahora le pasa siempre que llega a una cárcel. ¿En qué momento perdió el interés? Pero este es su trabajo. Visitar cárceles. Recorre pasillos, patios, celdas, comedores, talleres, si los hay. Habla con los presos y sus guardianes, anota quejas, constata lo que funciona y lo que no. De regreso a su oficina, redacta informes e imagina que alguien los leerá, se dará por aludido y hará algo. No recuerda cuándo fue la última vez que alguien hizo algo.

Roberto entra en el edificio diciéndose que no, que esta vez no se dejará impresionar, que en vez de una camisa ligera de manga larga con la que combatir el calor insoportable y los mosquitos tozudos lo que lleva encima esa mañana es una coraza untada de aceite en la que todo lo que viene de fuera resbala, se desliza hacia el suelo y se desintegra sin dejar rastro. Se limitará a anotar en su libreta lo que vea y oiga, como si quien lo contara no lo hiciera en primera persona, como si un robot sin arte ni parte se lo dictara.

Entra en el pabellón de máxima seguridad y se queda apoyado en la pared, al lado de la puerta. Barre con la mirada el espacio que se abre ante él y dibuja un croquis en su libreta. Un espacio vacío central iluminado con luces de neón, perfectamente cuadrado, rodeado de las mismas paredes de hormigón que se ven desde el exterior. En el perímetro, dos pisos de puertas metálicas equidistantes. Un guardia abre la más cercana y Roberto anota las dimensiones. Cubículo desnudo con ventana tapiada donde el neón permanece encendido día y noche. La oscuridad no es un derecho. Por seguridad, dicen. Roberto no entiende el argumento. El olor a aguas estancadas y desinfectante barato le provoca náuseas. Escribir, dibujar, lo que sea para acallar el estómago que quiere subir hasta su garganta y escaparse por la boca. Roberto teme perder el equilibrio y se apoya de nuevo en la pared.

Los presos se desgañitan. Es su única distracción. Conversar a gritos para hacerse oír a través de las pesadas puertas metálicas que los mantienen aislados veintitrés horas y media al día. Las voces retumban en la caja de hormigón y se vuelven ensordecedoras. En el cráneo de Roberto la sangre fluye a trompicones, con golpes secos, como si las arterias por las que circula se hubieran estrechado y tuviera que hacerse paso a golpe de machete.

Un guardia abre uno de los cubículos y deja salir a su inquilino. Aquí también los presos visten uniforme naranja, como allá, donde el vecino del norte. ¿Por qué ese color? ¿Será que chilla? Otro guardia le coloca esposas en las manos y grilletes en los pies. Luego lo conducen a la puerta que da acceso al patio exterior. Camina lentamente. La cadena que ahoga sus tobillos es corta y pesada. Roberto prepara una sonrisa, pero, al pasar junto a él, el hombre esquivo la mirada y clava los ojos en el suelo. “Es su hora de luz y ejercicio”, dice el guardia. Roberto traduce en su cabeza lo que esas palabras quieren decir, lo que ha escuchado tantas veces. Ustedes, gringos de mierda, vienen aquí a meter las narices en donde no deben. A darnos lecciones. Se creen superiores, pero hablan de lo que no saben. Estos tipos son criminales, pura escoria. Matan, roban, violan, trafican. No merecen vivir. Aún así, les dejamos que sigan respirando, les damos de comer, duermen a cubierto, e incluso les permitimos que salgan al aire libre y hagan ejercicio. ¿Qué más quieren?

Roberto les sigue. Dibujará un croquis del patio en su libreta. Sus notas deben ser precisas, impecables. Nadie podrá rebatirlas. Tantea su bolsillo para verificar que el teléfono-cámara está ahí. Quizás haga fotos, si el guardia no se lo impide. El patio es otra caja de hormigón, esta vez rectangular y sin tapa, con el cielo como techo. Una ratonera equipada con tres jaulas metálicas de apenas dos metros cuadrados. La distancia entre ellas permite el paso con dificultad. En cada jaula un preso, los brazos como única protección contra el sol de mediodía en el trópico. Roberto dibuja y escribe mientras su camisa comienza a empaparse. Trazos cada vez más inconexos que acaban tornándose en garabatos sobre el papel humedecido por el sudor de las manos.

Regresa al interior para evitar desmayarse. Los neones, el olor a agua estancada y la algarabía de voces lo protegen ahora del calor. El médico del equipo habla con un preso y lee en su expediente. Intentos de suicidio. Han retirado la manta de la plataforma de hormigón sobre la que duerme. Para evitar tentaciones, dicen. Solo han dejado el bloque de material ignífugo que le sirve de colchón. El médico se indigna. “No puede seguir aquí, es preciso que lo trasladen a un pabellón menos estricto”, suelta en tono de ordeno y mando. Sabe que servirá de poco.

En el trayecto de regreso a la ciudad nadie habla. Roberto se seca el sudor de la cara con un pañuelo empapado y guarda su libreta en la mochila. Luego mira las colinas pedregosas, las casuchas de los arrabales, los perros sarnosos, los niños y viejos harapientos sin más distracción que ver pasar vehículos, el humo negro que despiden las estufas sobre las que alguien prepara comida, los postes de fortuna del tendido eléctrico a punto de derrumbarse.

Cuando el sueño le gana, el preso suicida es él.

REFLEXIONS

REFLECTIONS

REFLECCIONES

Le cours de guitare classique

Je me souviens que mon professeur de guitare me disait toujours :

« Martine vous avez les doigts trop courts, il va falloir souffrir pour apprendre ».

Je le savais, peu importe, j'endurais pendant une heure l'étirement des doigts le plus loin possible sur le manche de l'instrument

Il n'empêche malgré cela que j'adorais toujours autant me rendre au conservatoire de musique.

Tous ces sons d'instruments alors que je passais le hall d'entrée

C'était pour moi la cacophonie du bonheur.

J'attendais ma leçon patiemment et lorsque le professeur m'appelait enfin

Je sortais fièrement ma guitare de sa housse.

Je lisais d'abord la partition

J'étais passionnée par la lecture du solfège

Puis je me lançais à interpréter de mes petits doigts trop courts un morceau de musique classique

A la fin du cours le professeur me félicitait tout en m'encourageant à ne pas oublier de répéter chaque jour à la maison.

Maman me demandait toujours si le cours s'était bien déroulé.

C'est ainsi que durant plusieurs années je me rendais au conservatoire de musique classique, à l'autre bout de la ville,

Des mains trop petites pour le manche de la guitare,

Mais j'avais quand même fini par interpréter tous les morceaux de musique qui m'étaient offerts de jouer.

Moralité : Sans volonté et sans amour rien ne se fait de beau.

Martine Thevenot, OMPI, retraitée

That light - this life

A beam of light is a life unseen unborn and unused

Yet when we tap into the golden sunshine we feel the strength the vigor and the energy

A beam of moonshine is a life asleep yet to take shape and snuggled amidst a dewy existence

Yet when we tap into the soft silvery moonlight the life brims with twinkles of laughter with the lovely starry expressions and then we behold love, life and liveliness

The sun the moon and the brightness of the faraway stars are us: our expressions that at times dissolve into the rivulets and streams

Making us want to survive, to go for our unfulfilled lofty dreams and enchanted realms

Making us alive and agog with the splendors of a life once and for all

Trusting the hands of the Lord to get us through, pull us over to rest and survive, to be and let life heal

Shanta Ghatak

WHO country office India

Thoughts that come and go

Leaves of Imagination and Wings of thought

Sighting the palsies and the delayed milestones

Gearing up for another day where care givers are family

Where Injectables are expired

Medicines are age old

Traditional meds are the only choice

Where no doctor treads no nursing staff weds and no person speaks a language which is well understood

And I walk the talk, talk the walk in the meantime trying to make a meaning out of all these

To find solutions to get on with life: meaning no harm

Treading light and staying bright through it all

Shanta Ghatak

WHO country office India

Chaotic Realities

2024 +

A Split world.

Climate roaring under blunt clouds.

Floods, landslides, storms, reversals.

Uncertain indicators

Zapping in all directions.

Under a flow of virtual representations

AI rules, social media and

Unleashed propaganda.

Change-induced shifts,

Rifts, turbulences-

Pointing to war games-

Banned nuclear weapons.

A negative balances of human disruption

Unjustifiable, unaccountable

Unpredictable-

Polarized groups

Populism and radicalism beating the grounds.

And here comes a crumbling old lady. Frozen tears. Bleeding mouth. Burnt out face and body. All shook up. The voice of drones and missiles in her ears. – *“The world turning upside down”- she says.* A culture of violence and hatred on the one side and indifference and lost dreams and identities – on the other.

Can his happen? Can we believe?

On a world stage

A second-hand Broadway show.

A *Trumps* special

Produced by spin doctors

And fake elements and procedures.
With extras, second hand actors and accomplices
A bunch of smooth operators
With their power-stricken ego trips
To trade - yes -
Human rights, freedoms and dignity
Against juicy financial deals. –

And launch regressive
Neo Soviet/Ottoman mindsets,
Models and rules of existence.
Opaque strategies
Breaking down Western
Free-world democratic order and values.
All the way down to a
Blundered road maps-

WOW!
Over The dead body of Sigmund Freud.
Your real identity is at stake
My dear friend.

- *It just doesn't make sense* - mumbles the crumbling old lady. Tripping over a mass of human debris. A slap on the face of our 1949 UN commitments. The binding treaties and instruments, international law and justice, convergent multiculturalism and all-benefit cooperation. – *Out of context realities*. - she whispers.

With a new password. *Corruption-contempt-arrogance@clean.dictators*.
And who cares about
The Undesirables - the Unloved!
Peoples and Individuals?
Who stood up for their legitimate rights
Truth and integrity.

Left with broken lives.
Imprisoned, deported, exiled,
Victims
Of unaccountable disappearances.

The crumbling old lady has now become a christic figure with no divinities and flowers. A living legend of Armenian people. –

“Your history, identity and rights have been trampled over and over again. - repeats the speaker. - “Defined as ethnic cleansing by the UN/ICJ reports. As hate-language and silent destruction of all Armenian heritage on surrendered lands and - before - as genocide-denial. While Armenian destiny continues as a blinding mythical narrative.” concludes the speaker.

No stop



Aline Dedeyan, UNSW/SENU

***Ad me ipsum* – random thoughts on politics and survival**

Positivists would have us believe that the law is absolute and must be obeyed: *dura lex, sed lex*. However, already 50 years before Christ, Marcus Tullius Cicero reminded us that the law is not absolute, that its function is to advance justice, --not power -- that some laws are unjust, that applying unjust laws generates more injustice: *summum jus, summa injuria* (*De Officiis*, 1, 10, 33). Throughout history the balance between power and justice has favoured power. Machiavelli's *Prince* expresses it succinctly: the end justifies the means. Of course, when the end is unjust, the means are contaminated. And even if the end is theoretically good, the wicked means will contaminate the purportedly good end and render it an abomination. Every absolutist ruler – and many pseudo-democratic leaders in our “free world” are Machiavellian practitioners of unjust power. While most politicians pretend to adhere to the “rule of law” as opposed to the “law of the jungle”, we must remember that laws are man-made, not God-given, are not immutable, but are *ad hoc* products always subject to modification. Doubtless, laws are necessary to achieve a certain level of stability and predictability. But laws can be extremely evil and unjust, laws can be imposed by the powerful on the weak so as to perpetuate exploitation and abuse -- such as the laws that protected the slave trade, chattel slavery, the fugitive slave laws, the laws of colonialism, the laws of segregation, Apartheid laws, the Nazi Nuremberg laws of 1935, etc. The function of the legal profession should be to help make law and justice converge. Alas, many politicians and academics try to convince us that Power is ultimately justice. This is the tragedy of our time -- the nefarious equation between power and justice, the propagandistic and public relations victory of Big Brother, accompanied by the connivance and complicity of the media, think tanks and accommodated academics.

Honour and glory are lofty concepts meant to inspire in us noble sentiments like solidarity, *unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno* (one for all, all for one), accompanied by a feeling that we are part of the larger universe, members of the family of living creatures, animals, trees -- and eight billion other human beings: *Seid umschlungen Millionen, dieser Kuss der ganzen Welt* (Be embraced you millions, this kiss to the entire world! Schiller, *An die Freude*). All too often the noble concepts of honour and glory have been hijacked and linked to a misanthropic cult of violence, war, and blood. For millennia the political and intellectual leaders of our societies have deliberately amalgamated honour and glory with military “virtues”, and nurtured a culture of aggression and domination, a glorification of war and dying for one's country. From Horatius we have the “old lie”, that sad maxim *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (it is

sweet and proper to die for one's homeland, *Odes* III, 2, 13). But, should we not instead live on and contribute to the welfare of all? Paradoxically, honour and glory are sometimes associated with great killers like Alexander "the Great", Julius Caesar, Napoleon, whom we are supposed to admire. Our western "civilization" continues to pursue this toxic indoctrination in schools, universities, in folklore and the media. Cities and towns are full of war memorials and statues to generals and admirals. The Zeitgeist, groupthink, and peer pressure continue to pay tribute to military feats, battles, "victories". We are addicted to the fantasy of "victory" and "winner takes all". We are expected to feel "patriotic" about old and new wars.

Whistleblowers are essential to a democratic society. Government secrecy is contrary to the people's right to know what governments are doing in our name. This is specifically protected in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. While we celebrate the release of Julian Assange, the plea deal reached in the case is a toxic precedent that weakens the journalistic profession. Revealing government crimes cannot and must not be seen as a criminal offence. Assange deserves our gratitude and recognition -- not media mobbing and defamation. Assange was guilty of nothing. He did his job as a journalist. Professor Nils Melzer's book *The Trial of Julian Assange* (Verso books, New York 2022) documents the breakdown of the rule of law in the US, UK, Sweden and Ecuador, the shameful persecution of a journalist for telling the truth, for revealing the monstrous war crimes committed by NATO forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Melzer is the Emile Zola of the 21st century, and he has revealed a cancer much worse than the Dreyfus affair of 1898 France. Government secrecy has been the facilitator of many crimes in the US and elsewhere -- not only war crimes, but economic crimes, pharmaceutical crimes, scams of all sorts. During the Third Reich the "*Endlösung der Judenfrage*" (final solution) was *geheime Reichssache* -- State secret -- all operatives were sworn to secrecy, and some were actually prosecuted for leaking information. Any kind of investigation was prohibited by law pursuant to *Führerbefehl Nr. 1* (Hitler's order Nr. 1). Persons disseminating rumours were arrested by the Gestapo and sent off to Dachau. Listening to foreign news was prohibited. A special jargon was developed to hide and confuse. I explain this in detail in my book *Völkermord als Staatsgeheimnis* (Olzog Verlag, Munich 2011). Democratic societies must adopt a Charter of Rights of Whistleblowers and a free press that lends visibility to evidence of the abuses that are being committed. As an American citizen I resent how my government enjoys a culture of impunity when it commits aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity. I decry the mainstream media for its complicity in hiding or trivializing these crimes.

Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo will remain indelible blemishes on the record of all who were actors and accomplices.

Ethics demands responsibility, not obedience. Our gratuitous self-righteousness is not ethical but irresponsible. We should always ask whether our governments tell the truth and act accordingly. Self-righteousness hampers our vision of reality. We should understand that our adversaries may be as self-righteous as we are. Intelligent persons would make an effort to comprehend the hows and whys. The Manichaeian approach to foreign affairs always leads to conflict. While we believe that we are good and our adversaries evil, conversely our rivals believe that they are the good people and we the trouble makers.

Confrontational politics entail retrogression in the implementation of the UN Charter, because they hinder the uniform application of international law. The West persists in its delusion that it has the moral right to "punish" other States, but the world is changing rapidly and most States are sick and tired of Western pretension and soon may copycat us and go on a punishment mode. For trade and development to function properly, an atmosphere of mutual respect and good faith must prevail, an honest search for consensus, a belief that win-win is actually possible. Enforcement of treaties, declarations, general principles of law depends on a common approach to law and language. Words like "peace", "cooperation", "humanitarian assistance", "democracy" do mean something, not *n'importe quoi*. Machiavellism and Orwellianism have been busy destroying language and logic. Reciprocity means *do ut des*, you do something positive to me and I will respond accordingly. Reciprocity should not be confused with the aggressive tit for tat syndrome of retaliation. An atmosphere of intransigence and "holier than thou" only breeds more hatred and hostility. While the United Nations and other institutions should call a spade a spade, call genocide genocide, it must deliver not only the diagnosis -- it must facilitate a prognosis, promote the healing process. The petulant practice of "naming and shaming" is counterproductive, because it poisons the air without opening any windows. What is necessary is to patiently promote confidence-building and an atmosphere conducive to greater respect for our common human dignity.

The breach of article 2(4) of the UN Charter does not abrogate the continuing obligation to observe article 2(3), to settle disputes peacefully, and if there has been use of force, to end it by negotiation. A war does not abrogate the UN Charter, whose provisions remain fully operative, and whose observance becomes even more urgent. Similarly, the exercise of the right of self-defence

under article 51 of the Charter does not legitimize the continuing use of force, does not allow multiple “self-defence” actions. Article 51 only allows a swift response to a military attack by another State, and this must be proportional to the original attack. It does not open the floodgates. It does not legitimize “total war”, it does not excuse genocide. If there has been an illegal use of force, it is a matter for the Security Council to solve the problem, and if it cannot, because of the abuse of the veto power by one of the P5, then it is for the General Assembly to adopt a “Uniting for Peace” type resolution and to make concrete proposals how to reach a settlement. As long as States intransigently refuse to sit down and discuss a ceasefire, there is a continuing violation of article 2(3) by the intransigent parties.

One of the persistent handicaps of many politicians is their self-righteousness, their pseudo-religious belief that we are the “good guys” and that we have a “mission” to bring democracy and human rights to the rest of the world. This is compounded by propaganda in the schools, press and media, and our overgrown sense of "patriotism", which is defined as "my country right or wrong". Would it not be more prudent to ensure that our country is objectively in the right and is not hijacked by the wrongs? Our "culture of hatred" leaves no room for psychology or diplomacy. We are practicing solipsists who fear every potential rival, instead of considering whether the adversary could actually be a good trade partner or even a friend, not an “enemy” by default. Our "culture of hatred" always reminds me of Orwell's *1984* and "hate week", during which citizens of Oceania had to articulate their hatred of the enemy, without realizing that the enemy was their own government.

The “cancel culture” is nothing new. During the first world war, Germans were demonized in France, England and the United States. German culture was denigrated, so that it became inopportune to play Beethoven or Wagner. After the second world war, all Germans were considered Nazis and were held collectively guilty for Nazi atrocities. German music and literature were suspected of being metaphysically “Nazi”. After the Yugoslav wars, the Serbs became the new scapegoats and essentially replaced the Germans in the role of the “bad guys”. Even sportsmen like Novak Djokovic were made to feel this. Today the Russians and Russian culture are being cancelled – including soprano Anna Netrebko and conductor Valery Gergiev. This is incompatible with the letter and spirit of the UN Charter and the UNESCO Constitution.

Conscious life entails the pursuit of meaning. We are continuously learning, actively and passively, receiving input, inter-relating, assigning names to material and immaterial things, evaluating empirical data, contextualizing, sorting out personal experiences, feelings, emotions, imagining new scenarios, questioning dogmas, testing hypotheses, discarding “fake news”. Civilization entails the organization of human beings into a tribe for their mutual benefit as hunters gatherers or as specialists with a clear division of labour, establishing functions and priorities, rules of the game, a form of governance, a constitution, the UN Charter. It means administration, coordination of the yin and yang of daily existence, collaborating with our peers in the great philharmonic orchestra of society, combining work and play, doing and being, appreciating the added value of joint ventures. The happiness of the individual living in organized society depends on the development of his/her identity, nurturing a spirit that thirsts for meaning, structure, values, paradigms and justice, trusting that there is sense in what we are doing, that we are moving toward a rational destination, that our institutions function, that the world is coherent. We need contrast, ups and downs, positive and negative impulses, coming to terms with disappointment and loss, demonstrating the will to stand up after a fall, starting anew, tackling new challenges, changing course when necessary. Happiness depends on meaning, internalizing a sense of belonging, exercising our childlike instinct to smile at others. Consciousness of the miracle of life, the worth of each and every moment, delivers onto our hands a compass for survival. Pausing three times a day like with the Angelus, enables us to take stock of our lives, consider the fate of others, count our blessings. When we step out of the rat race, we suddenly feel free, palpate that we exist, that we have a purpose. Yes, we can still experience awe, yearning, desire.

Let's go out on the streets and reclaim our rights, denounce all news services that systematically engage in war propaganda and suppress dissent. Unsubscribe from warmongering sites, from fearmongering newspapers and magazines. By now we should have abandoned the illusion that we live in a benevolent democracy. We entered Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* decades ago; our mainstream media is not independent and serves as an echo chamber for Big Brother. Orwell's Ministry of Truth blocks our access to crucial information, distorts the facts, concocts implausible narratives, nurtures fear, persecutes whistleblowers. Meanwhile the NSA relentlessly shadows us, and we even have to pay with our tax dollars for this illegal surveillance. Our governments do not consult us, do not care a hoot about our needs, but pursue instead power agendas in the service of the military-industrial-financial-digital-media establishment. Our governments have lied to us in the past, are lying to us today and will continue lying, unless we resolutely push-back.

Bottom line: We must inform ourselves and act. We must read and watch Democracy Now, the Greyzone, the Real News Network, Consortium News, Counterpunch, Truthout, etc. We should learn foreign languages and consult the foreign media. And if we want to know what countries are in favour of peace and human rights, all we have to do is to study the voting record of our representatives in the Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

The term "clash of civilizations" first used by Albert Camus, need not be violent. Instead, we should promote the concepts of competition among civilizations, convergence of civilizations, alliance of civilizations, solidarity of civilizations. Samuel Huntington popularized the term "clash of civilizations", but his vision was one of conflict between Western values and those of other cultures. It would have been wiser to focus on the commonalities of human beings and the ontological rights of all living organisms! It is ridiculous to pretend that China is rallying the world against Western values, or has a sinister plan to destroy the West. Such thinking betrays a form of paranoia, which makes it impossible to live together in harmony. China wants to craft a modus vivendi with former imperialist and colonial powers who evidently have not yet understood and internalized the universal principles of the UN Charter. Our Western "values" are valid, if they are true to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew V, VI, VII), the humanistic values of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. What the rest of the world fears in Western "values" is our hubris, our exceptionalism, our self-righteousness, our incessant war-mongering and intransigent capitalist mindset. We should consider revisiting the 8th Century BC prophet Isaiah, whose immortal lines *"They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore"* are carved on the Isaiah wall at First Avenue, in front of the UN Secretariat Building in New York.

Every war is unjust. Millennia of human suffering illustrate ever-changing power equations, the futility of armed conflict, the vanity of transitory domination -- sic transit gloria mundi! War is frequent, but not "normal". It is an aberration, an outrage against civilians and soldiers alike, engendering hate for generations, colossal material and spiritual damage. Our political "elites" have not learned vital lessons from history, because what is disseminated as history is mythology, political fiction, skewed narrative. Lawyers, historians and the media concoct shameful apologetics to describe mass murder as honourable or even glorious. War is made not only acceptable but even

attractive, because it supposedly reveals virtuous deeds, *calamitas virtutis occssio* (Seneca, *De Providentia*, 4, 6). Warfare becomes a source of national pride, a fountainhead of “values”; soldiers are revered for their courage in “defence” of the nation, “self-sacrifice”, and patriotism. Why do so many believe this caricature of reality? There are no “just wars” but only slaughter. The so-called “just war” theory is but a scam to justify aggression and landgrab. Only self-defence can be considered legitimate, but sometimes even those who act in self-defence are guilty of provocation. All parties become victims and perpetrators. What humanity needs is preventive mechanisms, and if war has broken out, mediation and negotiation. The only “just war” (in a rhetorical sense) is the war we should all be waging against the arrogance of power, on the mentality that considers provocation, bullying and sabre-rattling as a kind of “sport”. It is time to free ourselves from the curse of this predator *animus dominandi*, which inevitably leads to chaos. It is time to recognize that war is neither just nor noble. War is obscene, not at all glorious, but gloomy, a wretched lose-lose proposition for us all.

AdZ



Soirée Ex Tempore, February 2024

POEMES

POETRY

POESIA

L'école de province

La plume plantée dans l'encre sèche
L'ombre de l'écolier sculptée dans le bois du petit bureau
Sous le tableau noir rêve un morceau de craie.
L'odeur du préau et du battement des feuilles rouges au-dessus des marelles
fait danser mes souvenirs d'enfance.
Le vent d'automne me ramène aussi avec lui les rires et les pleurs de mes
camarades.

Revenue sur les lieux à Avallon je pousse la lourde grille
Mes sentiments grincent
Les coups de règle sur les doigts
Les gifles de l'institutrice
La blouse grise et les chaussons aux pieds l'hiver
Les tables de calcul
Rien de bien réjouissant
Puis le bonheur de la lecture, l'histoire, les bons points
Nous étions je le crois heureux
Sans le savoir.

En ce temps les enseignants n'avaient ni la tête tranchée
Ni la crainte de nous éveiller.

Quelle stupeur quand j'observe aujourd'hui
Les temps sont atrocement assassins.
Qui oserait dire que c'était pire avant

Un jour je retournerai m'asseoir sur un banc d'école vide,
Le temps de cette question à un instituteur imaginaire :
Qu'est-ce-que le progrès ?

Martine Thevenot, OMPI, retraitée

Ode à l'amitié

J'aime mes amis
Je les aime sans compter
Sans discontinuer
Ils sont et c'est tout ce qui compte pour moi
Ils parlent ils ne crient jamais
Ils écoutent ils ne s'agacent jamais
Ils ont des peines je n'ai plus de joie
Ils sont heureux j'oublie le reste
Je pense à eux quand ils ne sont pas là
Je prends soin d'eux, même quand ils ne le demandent pas
Je les veille sans les scruter
Je les enlace d'un simple appel
Je ne les dispute pas je les conseille
Je ne les hais jamais
Ils sentent bon l'amour tendre
Avec eux
Ni jalousie ni mensonge
Rien à exiger
Mes amis ne sont jamais mes ennemis
Mes ennemis ne seront probablement jamais mes amis
J'aime mes amis sans sourciller
Je leur demande parfois un petit ou un grand conseil
Ils font pour le mieux
Sans arrière-pensée sans mot malheureux
Ah que je les aime mes amis de toujours
On dirait bien qu'en écrivant ces lignes
Il était temps pour moi de célébrer l'amitié.
Je les ai mis au masculin
Ils ne s'en offusqueront pas ils sont modernes
Ils savent bien qu'il s'agit aussi de mes amies au féminin.

Sans amis il manque à notre vie des petits génies.

Ce soir nous ferons une ronde pour les fêter
Autour de la poésie, et entre amis.

Martine Thevenot, OMPI, retraitée

L'enfer sur terre

D'un côté toutes ces guerres ces enfers
Ces générations sacrifiées
Les ciels embrasés Les vies brisées
Le cœur rompu
Le souffle étouffé

De l'autre côté tous ces hommes d'état costume cravate
Ces salles de réunions surchauffées
Les tables garnies Les micros dressés
La voix braillarde
Le sourcil relevé
Le sourire aux lèvres ils se serrent les mains
A coup de milliards, de tonnes d'armements
Ils scellent le sort de leurs prochains
Comme ça, arrogants, sûrs d'eux
Entre deux avions
Entre deux commissions
Avant un dîner de gala
Après une nuit dans un palace hors de prix

A force de guerres et d'atrocités
On dirait que le monde s'est habitué

Et pourtant ils sont des millions d'êtres innocents à disparaître sous nos yeux
Pendant que dans le luxe, se repaissent ces messieurs en col blanc.
La seule chose que ces décideurs auront offert à l'humanité
C'est la honte, la grande honte
La honte que porteront à jamais les puissants de ce monde.

Les mers de sang ne tarissent jamais dans la mémoire des peuples.

Sauvons ce qu'il reste d'hommes et de femmes sur les théâtres de guerre
Il n'est plus possible de tolérer génocides et crimes de guerre
A quoi servent les milliards des états ?
Que dit l'ONU que nous ici connaissons bien ?
Où est la Paix ? Quel est donc son prix Messieurs les cols blancs ?
Honte à vous.

Martine Thevenot, OMPI, retraitée

Âme soeur

Depuis que tu m'as quittée
Mes nuits sont agitées
Accompagné ou seul
Dans mon lit
Ton absence
Reste raisonnante

Mon âme sœur
M'a brisé mon cœur
Mon âme sœur
Ou es parti ta douceur ?

Nous dansions ensemble
Dans nos rêves
Ouatés
Nous aimions
Nos câlins
Enflammés
Nos câlins
Intentionnés
Nos câlins
Qui nous faisaient qu'un
Fusionnés
Nous aimions
Le baiser
De la première heure
Celui de l'éveil
Que l'on espère éternel

Ton parfum flotte quelque part
Insaisissable
Parti pour une autre destination
Comme une trahison

Ton âme également
A pris
Un nouvel élan
A trouvé un nouveau nid

Qui m'a mis dans l'oubli

Tu m'avais assurée
Que nous resterions amis
Et depuis tu es partie
Rencontrer l'infini
Et j'ai été proscris
Comme un ennemi

Mon âme est brisée
Fêlée
Par ton coup d'épée
Qui m'a décimé

Mes larmes abondent mais n'y feront rien
Mes yeux
Sécheront
Un jour
Et regarderont
Un autre horizon
Le soleil se lèvera à nouveau
Pour réchauffer ma peau
Et
Libérer mon cœur

Paulo David, OHCHR, retraité

RENAISSANCES

Sa peau était aussi douce
Qu'un duvet de cygne
Son sourire aussi frais
Qu'une larme de rosée
Ses baisers aussi tendres
Qu'un sourire maternel

Elle m'a fait rêver
Elle a enveloppée
Mon âme entière
D'une torpeur
D'un bonheur
Inespérés

Une connexion
Fait de compassion
Pleine de passion
Chimique
Magique
Un lien si unique

Ses mots étaient justes
Tranchants comme un sabre
J'ai plané sur cet amour
Tel un albatros
Des jours durant
Sans battre des ailes
Sans regarder vers le bas
Aveuglé par un soleil brûlant
Porté par le vent
L'air teinté d'évidences
Pur, tel une renaissance

Je m'y suis enfoncé
Aveuglément
D'un amour béant
Découvrant des territoires inconnus
Parsemé d'ouate
Blanche comme l'aube
Nageant en moi-même
Flottant avec elle

Survivant ensemble
Quelques temps
Dans les nimbes célestes
Avant le retour
D'une autre évidence
Comme un rappel
De la réalité terrestre

Le réveil fut brutal
La douleur abyssale
Un océan asséché
Une forêt sans arbres
Des nuages chargés de contrariétés
Un horizon sans soleil
Sont venus voiler mon cœur
Sont venus voler mes sentiments

Puis soudainement
Comme une dépossession
Généreuse
Et altruiste
Cette intime douceur
Cette caresse onctueuse
Ce regard improbable
Féminin
Sans limites
Sont lentement remontés
En moi
Du plus profond de mes entrailles
Découvrant des chemins insoupçonnés
Cicatrisant les plus douloureuses blessures
Et surtout
Ont
Illuminé mon âme
De l'amour
Pur
Éternel
Telle une insoupçonnée résurrection

Paulo David, OHCHR, retraité

Leiden, 17^e siècle

Entre le vieux et le nouveau Rhin,
Rembrandt, Descartes, presque anonymes.
Les ponts des canaux de Leiden
Les menaient à l'université.

C'était la guerre avec l'Espagne,
Qui chassait Guillaume d'Orange.
L'industrie du textile flambait,
Sur l'eau florissait le commerce.

L'oignon de tulipe se vendait
Au prix d'une maison de ville.
La poésie des beaux quartiers
S'ancrait de portes en fenêtres.

Adolescent de quatorze ans,
Le jeune Rembrandt suivait des cours,
A l'atelier rue Lange Brug,
Proche de l'église Saint-Pierre...

Bruno Mercier, UNSW/SENU

Grossissement trente

Le soleil se fond dans les nuages
Pareil à du saumon fumé.
Je délaisse le télescope
A grossissement trente.

La péninsule dans la brume
Gomme les crêtes du Cap Bon.
Le soir, des cargos se font noirs
Au barattage de la mer.

Des nuages pommelés frôlent
L'anarchie de vagues dressées,
Spectre d'une côte fuyante,
L'absurde de l'existence.

Aux bureaux de la *SOCOTU**,
Météo maritime, mouillages,
Expédition des navires,
Prévention des accidents.

Quand il vous fait signe, suivez-le...
Mon sort dépend d'un périscope
D'un guide et de balises
Au péril d'une vie aqueuse.

* SOciété COmmerciale TUnisienne

Bruno Mercier, UNSW/SENU

Devoirs brûlants

Hommage à Alexeï Navalny

Staccato bleu blanc gyrophare.
Un opposant mis au violon
Fait éclater l'abcès de vérité.
Chutney de sang, de sérum.

Il dort, trou rouge au côté droit.
Au bal des endocrinés,
On se suit comme des moutons.
Ne pas être ; échapper aux purges.

Des feux éteints de liberté
Se consomment en apparence.
Comment affirmer tes choix
Quand triomphe l'hypocrisie ?

Être, c'est choisir ton genre,
L'audace de tes opinions,
Ton aversion de la guerre,
Et mourir en Sibérie, en catimini.

L'onglée des nuits de désert blanc
Fait moins mal que l'ultime décret
Imposé à la matraque
Le dimanche *Rue Tverskaïa* ⁽¹⁾.

Au bout du tunnel, te vois-tu
Nu sur un fatras de mensonges ?
Les devoirs brûlants du poète :
Crier l'opinion dans la foule !

⁽¹⁾ rue célèbre de Moscou

Bruno Mercier, UNSW/SENU

Plasticité

poser un morceau de skaï sur la presse /poser sur le skaï une assise de siège en mousse polyester et planche de contreplaqué /poser un deuxième morceau de skaï sur la presse /actionner le bouton de la presse

*souffle de la machine
odeur d'huile piston
mouvement vertical du bras d'acier
qui descend et scelle hermétiquement
la matière plastique*

*devant des yeux
fixes des yeux
figés dissociés
du*

cerveau

souffle des machines

*huile plastique sueur
dos de femmes
immobiles
devant les*

*mouvements verticaux des bras d'acier
les bras des femmes le long du corps
pour éviter qu'ils
ne soient broyés*

*cerveau survie
malgré
penser au diner
au mari
penser à
lui acheter un steak
qui*

poser un morceau de skaï sur la presse /poser sur le skaï une assise de siège en mousse polyester et planche de contreplaqué /poser un deuxième morceau de skaï sur la presse /actionner le bouton de la presse

*aura trop bu peut-être sans
doute*

*il faut qu'il mange de la viande le soir c'est dur le travail de chantier
tourner*

la tête

pendule

160 sièges fabriqués

pourtant

3 heures et 12 minutes écoulées

bras ballants sécurité

pourvu que

ce soir il ne se mette pas à

crier

*poser un morceau de skai sur la presse /poser sur le skai une assise de siège en
mousse polyester et planche de contreplaqué /poser un deuxième morceau de
skai sur la presse /actionner le bouton de la presse*

pourvu

pendule

souffles devoirs enfants

aiguilles

pas de sécurité

odeur huile piston mari machine mouvement du bras

goût dans la bouche

de l'après gifle d'acier qui scelle hermétiquement

la matière plastique

pas crier

Marie-José Astre-Démoulin, EX-UNOG, consultante UNITAR

<http://mjdastree.123website.ch/>

La violence

Lorsqu'un vent fait casser la branche
Les chants de l'oiseau quittent la terre
Et son cœur perd le cri d'espérance
Que l'inhumanité jette à terre.

Ciel de nuit

Dans l'obsédant silence de la nuit
Tant de chimères portées en écueils
S'échouent au rivage de nos cœurs
Qu'il nous faudrait d'amour prendre la fuite

Chemin de vie

Voyageurs sur terre,
Sachons joindre l'aube
Au tableau merveille
De l'espoir qui sauve.

Simplement

Sauvage au pied d'un mur
Je m'assieds dans les roses
Y contemplant des choses
A l'écart du futur.

Roger Chanez, UNSW/SENU

DES ALPES JUSQU'EN PANNONIE

L'edelweiss, la verveine,
le romarin, la primevère,
le géranium, le pétunia,
le trèfle, l'hortensia,
le basilic, la myrrhe,
la violette, le dent-de-lion,
le muguet, le rhododendron,
la lavande et la Ramonda nathaliae ¹
ils offrent de la beauté
des Alpes jusqu'en Pannonie
où j'ai semé
espoirs et illusions
et planté
rêves et fantasmes.

Vingt étés ont passé
comme un instant,
la joie fleurit
le défi me fait m'envoler
dans un voyage autour du monde
à des hauteurs insoupçonnées
où la pensée enchantée
brille de tendresse.

Les silences ruissellent,
les bambous chuchotent
sous le voile du clair de lune,
on entend le bruissement des maïs,
les ténèbres bavardent,

¹ La Ramonda de Natalie (Ramonda nathaliae) a été découverte par le docteur Sava Petrović dans les environs de Niš, et Josif Pančić l'a décrite en 1884. Cette fleur miraculeuse, appelée également fleur phénix, pousse à [Kajmakčalan](#), où s'est déroulée la célèbre bataille de la Grande Guerre, ainsi, cette fleur mérite à juste titre d'être un symbole de renaissance de l'État serbe et de figurer sur l'emblème du jour de l'Armistice, le 11 novembre 1918. Les caractéristiques du peuple serbe telles que l'endurance, le courage et la capacité de s'élever dans des circonstances difficiles et dans des moments difficiles - lorsque la Serbie semble sans vie et oubliée, se reflètent dans une fleur étonnante portant le nom de la reine Natalija Obrenović.

les tiges rongées crépitent
les grandes averses
invoquent les distances.

La langueur de toile d'araignée faite
efface les frontières.

La douleur s'apaise,
le parfum de l'enfance se répand.

Au sein de l'arc-en-ciel
l'œil brille d'un soudain éclat.

En faisant des pas étoilés
l'âme se rend dans son pays natal.

Ivana KNEZEVIC, WHO HQ

L'extrait du livre „L'aube de l'âme“, Tiski cvet, Novi Sad, 2023



Ivana Knezevic
President, WHO Poetry Garden

L'ÂME DU LAC LÉMAN

Tôt le matin
l'esprit du lac Léman
émerge lentement
et invite les oiseaux
à baiser le reflet dans l'eau
du jour bleu levant.

Le ballet commence
par la question enfantine:
Qui est la plus belle, qui a cette chance
entre la terrestre presque
et la céleste arabesque?

Sur les ailes d'une mouette
des pensées nocturnes les silhouettes
dansent les souvenirs imagés,
le menuet du toucher
seulement présagé
sur l'onde du poème roi
pour la reine de l'émoi.

La merveille offre au ciel
un miroir magique
le secret du lac, eau pensive,
à travers le murmure des rives
aux jambes longues et belles:

*La plus éblouissante fille de l'univers
est le poème de l'aurore
qui règne du ciel à la terre.*

Ivana KNEZEVIC, WHO HQ

L'extrait du livre „L'aube de l'âme“, Tiski cvet, Novi Sad, 2023

LETTRE D'ESPOIR

Vole, ma poésie
fais balancer les nuages
où la rime déploie ses ailes,
offre des pas de valse
aux gouttes de pluie si belle
et caresse les âmes qui me sont chères
auxquelles je veux parvenir par mes vers.

Le peu d'espoir qui reste
tiendrait dans un dé à coudre
et ferait échapper à l'éphémère
la magie de l'instant
rapide comme la foudre
sur les pointes d'un chausson de danse
le désir il élèverait,
dans les bras des êtres chers
l'âme il emporterait
une étreinte de tendresse il ferait,
d'un rêve de jour
il ferait naître l'amour.

Ivana KNEZEVIC, WHO HQ

L'extrait du livre « L'aube de l'âme », Tiski cvet, Novi Sad, 2023

VENTS D'EXODE

Au gré des vents, des destins en errance,
Par-delà les montagnes, l'océan en balance,
L'exode, ce vaste voyage,
Tisse des histoires, crée des rivages.
Des pas qui résonnent sur des terres lointaines,
Cherchant refuge, loin des mauvaises haleines,
Déplacement économique ou fuite du mal,
L'exode raconte un récit sans égal.
Entre les frontières, des vies en suspension,
Des rêves brisés, des espoirs en gestation,
Dans l'exode, un cri de libération,
Mais aussi le poids de la désolation.

Migration forcée, loin de la solitude,
Chassés par les vents d'une sombre certitude,
Conflits et persécutions, larmes versées,
Sur le chemin de l'exil, des âmes fatiguées.
Travailleur migrant, loin des siens,
Cherchant fortune au creux des chemins,

Les mains laborieuses bâtissent demain,
Mais parfois, le prix est bien trop plein.
Familles unies, cœurs déchirés,
L'exode sait les liens brisés,
Entre l'ici et l'ailleurs, des ponts érigés,
Des cultures mêlées, des identités mêlées.

Dans les plis des frontières, des récits croisés,
Des regards emplis de courage et de dignité,
L'exode, tisserand de destins,
Écrit sur la carte du monde ses matins.

Que nos cœurs s'ouvrent à cette humanité,
Que nos frontières ne soient que papier froissé,
Car en chaque migrant, une fragilité,
En chaque pas, une quête de liberté.

Arlette OSSERE OKOPOUE, OMS, Bureau régional pour l'Afrique, République
du CONGO-Brazzaville, 2024

This sonnet was spawned by Jo Gatford's wonderful workshop on Shakespeare. Jo not only showed us how the Bard was the original flasher; she also introduced us to the iambic pentameter. (Thanks, Jo!)

How to Gainsay Time

Till now this greenish youth has fought off rules
As old-school ties, restrictions of his style,
For he's a modern man, and ancient forms
Make him recoil or run away a mile.
But when he sits by Athens' Parthenon
And turns his mind to writing poetry —
He sees, to praise this splendrous shining lime,
He'll need Will Shakespeare's rule-bound prosody.
He dum-di-dums a sonnet on his knee
(Shall I compare thee to a summer's day ...)
And finds the heartfelt beat his poem needs,
The harness and the bars of sonnetry.
A beat renouncing freedom, yet through rhyme
Enshrining words and shapes that gainsay time.

David X Lewis, WHO retired

YOU

The shore awaits, serenading
Lullabies, floating through waves
In visions you come promenading
In solitude we stay as slaves
A memory, a smile, a simple touch
Captures my heart, I fade
Through love and lust and feelings such
Falling over me, a shade.
The visions of new horizons
The setting sun, I don't see
The moon shines a thousand suns
Enlightened, I become me.
Through you, your elegant grace
I ride a joyous wave
Taken have you to a wonder place
My life, for you I save.

Shaheer Aboobacker,

WHO

Eternal smile

Colourful, soothing, with fragrance all around
Small, big, pointed, soft, cylindrical, and round,
Tropical, spring, summer, winter, at all times,
I always carry a big wide smile.

Life is short yet remembered for all,
Be it birth or death, celebrations, or sad times,
Be it to express love, adoration or hard trials,
I am always there with a big wide smile.

I witness the rise of kings, nobles, and commoners,
I witness joyful and heartbreaking emotions,
I am treated with modesty then trampled after use,
I am lifted with pride, offered in prayers yet thrown with a blink.

Such is the life of this short-lived object,
Yet I am glad I fulfil my purpose,
Motives are different while offering me,
Yet, I am always seen with a big wide smile.

Sangeeta Jasmine

WHO SEARO

Shadowy Reflections

You think the mirror is right?
When you move, your image moves
When you breathe, your image breathes
You dress you wear and their it looks it observes ...
No doubt they are emblems of truth
But they reverse an image from left to right
Distort your appearance
And manipulate your perception of reality
The longer you stare....
They may attract negative energy
Reflect the hidden flaws
Unveil layers of your inner self when you look closer
Yet Unknown to you.....
There are seeds of secrets buried there
Shadows float behind the glare
Causing hallucinations of monsters
And faces of the dead
Leading to insomnia and nightmares
Drawing a divisive and insightful line
Between the conscious and unconscious
Between the soul and the soulless at times
And the duality of good and evil...
On particular moonless nights
When you are alone
And when spirits roam
The dried twigs break the dries grass feels damp with the fallen dew
You may hear mirrors sigh, sob, moan and groan
For they are mysterious, mystic and manic
Portals to other dimensions
Trapping dying souls
And resurrecting the dead and undead...
Yet heralding us to a tortuous mouldy existence
Catering to some needs and certain obtuse fulfillments
And care to call – well? All well?

Shanta Ghatak
WHO country office India

Defiantly yours

I am me,
Or try to be.
Within limits free,
For all to see.

But what means liberty?
An unimpeded trajectory?
Or, determination, armed with ability,
To challenge stifling absurdity?

Such is fate,
Our common lot.
The approach we choose,
Determines whether we live or rot.

Hoarse Whisper

I am, assert, cry,
Hear me before I die.
I strive, hope, try,
Don't dismiss me with a sigh.

I know one human voice
Is a whisper in the wilderness.
But perhaps you'll connect
In empathy and tenderness.

For what binds us mortals?
Our shared human condition.
A solitary voice breaking through
Can bring awareness to fruition.

Watch, don't judge

From my café table,
Strategically placed,
I watch the flow of humanity.
Ordinary types, with specials, laced.

All shapes, all sizes.
All ages, valued at all prices.
Goodies, and those with vices.
Humanity with all its spices.

The good, ugly and evil,
All seemingly part of the show.
The striking, and less attractive,
Confident, shy, all on the go.

But who will dare today
To offer some evaluation?
To say, yes, my taste and type,
Without resorting to degradation.

Nowadays to express an opinion,
Almost of any sort, suggests differentiation.
Political correctness demands standardization,
Censorship, conformity, self-depreciation.

Actors without scripts

To be, or not to be,
Is not in question.
I am, therefore,
Spare the vexation.

To be, is what?
That is the question.

To act the role of me,
For a fraction of eternity?

How to be an actor
On life's revolving stage?
Not knowing the script,
Duration unable to gauge.

And who's the producer,
And is there a director?
All the world maybe's a stage,
But is there a connector?

How to seem free
And not constrained?
To live to the full,
Not being trained.

It remains defiantly
To proclaim ones "I,"
To play our part,
Before our goodbye.

To master the link
Between actor and audience.
To perform, and leave,
Booed or glorious.

For each of us
Is special, unique.
Our purpose here,
In our time – to peak.

So play your assigned part,
Without even knowing the script.
Improvise, then take your bow,
Maybe the audience caught the drift.

Caveat Emptor

Who am I, who are you?
What is false, what is true?
Through the pretense, sham,
How to see through?

And what do I observe
As I look around me?
Kindred souls, enemies?
How to ensure veracity?

I am what I am,
I'd prefer not to give a damn.
But life is too complex,
To close up like a clam.

So be wise and attentive,
Smart, not simply naïve.
Self-critical, but worthy.
Shun those who deceive.

Bohdan Nahajlo, UNHCR and DPA retired

ENLIVENING

Enliven your emptiness.

Discover words born
of rhythm

Thought born
of spirit

Mystery born
of desire

Friendship born
of heart.

Karin Kaminker, UNOG retired

Own Goal Nightmare

I

Girl called Joanne
dreams she's Cruyff Johan
shoots own goal

heels-over-head bewilderment
forgot whose side she's on

defeated direction
failed her team

deflated hopes
lost point of story
dismay

II

Or maybe
dismantled rules to
write rebel version

upend divisions
mend opposed camps

uncover adversary
among own goal posts

shout for game change
morph forward witness to truth

III

like homonymous baptist
rushed river Jordan
toward new ethos

like warrior virgin
dared patriarch's court

amid pandemic pandemonium
dribble cross-field compassion

deliver shots of insight
invincible kindness
score magic unmatched

Jo Ledakis, former UN translator

MOON NIGHT BACK BLUES

Moonlight's gleam can't distract
From backache, I sit writing. Body, sedentary
Due to dream of mind, misses movement.

Light glints outside, fox
Triggered the sensors.
Larch and beech briefly lit up
Throw uneasy shadows,
Glide back into darkness.

Backache acts like a shadow,
Half-aware, a riddle to decode.
Back's the abode of the other, unseen,
Shows connection to the world,
Traced across time and space.

What's the hurt? Pain suffered? Pain
Inflicted? Light the torch of memory,
Let imagination explain:
Who are you, hurtful stranger,
Visiting unasked? No easy answer.
No anger. To start, let's forgive each other,
That's never in vain.

Different preferences trigger fallout,
Etch trail in morning grass,
Disturb neighbor's righteous chives,
His parsimonious parsley, as alas,
My lavender, unkempt, runs wild.

All let their hair flow thru every photo-op,
Feminine freedom coolly exercised.
Yet isolated, love-imprinted masks presage
Retro-progress will make all stop:

No more only deeds and words,
Now simply breathing could kill.

Must be conscious of what I exhale.
Still, determined to regale
authentic lavender scent.

Jo Christiane Ledakis, former UN translator
WildSeaSaltOfLife.com



Jo Christiane Ledakis at the Ex Tempore soirée in February 2024

STRANGE JOURNEY

Coming
from the light

we sleepwalk
through darkness,

awaken
to a world
of many forms,

wonder, wrangle,
captivated
by its storm of colors,

slowly learn,
disentangle ourselves,

move again
towards the light,

yearn
for a luminous darkness
beyond.

Jo Ledakis, former UN translator, WildSeaSaltOfLife.com

We used to believe in guardian angels,
Which kept us from harm,
Now we have supposedly benevolent personalized algorithms
Which curate for us -- Did we ask for this? --
Internet feeds that present:
Miracle cures, usually herbal based,
Alarming information about the dire consequences of ignoring common
physical symptoms,
And just for balance
Cute animal vignettes
Off-beat stand-up comedians
And high-brow music, often liturgical.
It's got me pegged, blast it.

Stephen Varley Sekel, UN New York, retired

Slavery

To sleep and dream in freedom,
But to wake up a slave
Must have been the most difficult trial to endure.
How painful the coexistence of a mind unfettered and physical constraint.
How painful the claim that slavery is ancient history,
When – like most other past evils – it lives on today.

Stephen Varley Sekel, UN New York, retired

Poetry has urgency.

Poetry has immediacy.

Poetry has intensity.

And earnest authenticity too.

It springs from deep wells of feeling

And bubbles out in words of compassion, understanding and generosity.

It is the lingua franca of those who seek after truth and yearn for justice and peace.

Now I know why no poetry was heard

At the Presidential Inauguration of 2016.

Stephen Varley Sekel, UN New York, retired

The Irish way of dealing with adversity or grief,

And, God knows, there was plenty to go around

Was just to deny it,

Push past it,

Bury it deeply,

Or bury one's head and feelings

In the sand of alcohol or piety, or both.

But from this ground has sprung

Poetry, statesmanship, and missionary outreach.

Talk about turning lemons into lemonade!

Stephen Varley Sekel, UN New York, retired

Trajectory of a life in 24 clichés

On a lark
On a wild goose chase

On the make
On a roll
On the ball
On business
On one's toes
On an even keel
On a good footing
On a spree
On top of the world
On cloud nine

On edge
On a bender
On the wagon

On the downward slope
On the fritz
On the mend

On a pension
On one's own

On thin ice
On borrowed time
On one's last legs
On a wing and a prayer
Wherever I am
Elsewhere is where I wish to be.
The voyage is awaited with impatience
But the departure attended by regret.
The moment is forever lost
In retrospection or anticipation.
Oh, to know how to live in the moment
With no care for what went before
Or that which yet may be.

Stephen Varley Sekel, UN New York, retired

Unseen

I pass you on the streets but you're staring at your phone
Look up, look ahead, you could be someone I meet
Even exchange a smile
But I almost avoid eye contact cause seeing robots makes me feel more alone
You crash into me cause your eyes are unseen
Swiping on Tinder on someone you may pass whose eyes are real
And not on a screen
Unstick your gaze from the phone you hold dear
Let go of virtual people who are not near
And smile or wave or wink or embrace
For a while or a day for in a blink
You'll never again see the face
That you may have liked but stuck in your perpendicular pose
You pass by what could be a walking miracle
When you're in the throes
Of virtual illusions
When it could be the throes
Of real life connection
And heaven knows
We need that, we've missed that, or I have at least
Real life is in the belly of the beast
And not in avoidance of what's right in front
Of your oblivious eyes
That seek what they think they want
For the next moment and another hot date
Walk the streets looking up as real life awaits
Save your vigorously texting fingers for a better use
Hands to intertwine in this freshly squeezed juice
That is life when it's faced
When you're not about to walk into hectic traffic
Cause your eyes are stuck
A piercing set of eyes may await you if you only look
Beyond the confines of your third arm
We've grown unaccustomed to sharing a smile with a stranger and though
It's unfamiliar
There is so much more harm
In avoiding and ignoring and perpetuating

The distance between
Us human beings as you stare at the screen
I want to connect with people
But it's hard when AI seems to run your mind
Strip down to essentials and know
That each time you pass me on the streets
And walk through me
Feels so cold and unkind
Have we not been separate enough?
Have we not been forced apart to the point we could've drowned?
Eyes upon eyes ignoring each other
Smiles upon smiles are frowns
For avoidance can't be happy
And there's so many faces we don't see
So many missed embraces
And it drives me crazy
And I want to just scream
I want to yell,
"Please look away from your screen!"
It will go nowhere
But that smile you just missed
Was an instant of bliss
That'll never again exist
As we pass upon
Even a moment of hello
Could make someone's day more than you know
I don't wanna lecture or preach or force
Anything unwanted
But I know it saddens me
To see a total lack of upfrontness
When directness
Is so refreshing
And lovely and fun and delightful
When eyes become stuck
I find it so frightful
But I hope connection reigns above the screen
I hope to pass you on the streets
And for our souls to feel seen.

Nicole Diviney, UNSW/SENU, read at the soirée Ex Tempore 2024

My Atlantic

Ireland has always felt like home
When I'd visit as a child I'd never feel alone
In the hug of the ocean and the scents in the breeze
That made sense to me in the overgrown trees
The untouched nature, no tourist's trail
I'd run onto the plane, I'd buy my Flake
I'd lap up the rain and two-metre-high waves
In Connemara at the age of eight
Delighting in sandy hair and beans on toast
In the accent I wanted but couldn't have
Cause we'd only stay for a week at the most
Then fly back to where there wasn't any craic
To a land abroad on the camel's back
For the way home seemed so far away
When my heart would stay lapping up the rocky bay
In the incessant spray
Of the wild atlantic
My heart yearned to be back
When at a young age
I discovered that I was a
Romantic
That I could long for a land
In my ears replaying, "ah it'll be grand"
And knowing summer would come once more
My kisses still engraved on the shore
And I'd drown in the bogs, get lost in the fogs
Inhale the turf, arteries would unclog
When my heart would heal in the uncut green
For miles upon miles the most beautiful
Country that I've ever seen
Ireland has always felt like home
And I don't know if you can relate
To the way I felt upon those rocky shores
At the innocent age of eight
When my smile would take up half my face
I'd kick with all my might
To stand up halfway, knees trembling
Under the sheer force
Til moonlight
Would kiss the ripples
Frozen nipples
At the age of twenty when I had to return
To Portugal's three metre waves
To carry on the passion that started to burn
In Connemara before I knew of sex

At twenty knew this was close
The ocean was home, the kiss in the foam
She'd never be an ex
Though I'd feel vexed with myself if I didn't stand
I couldn't scold the water,
For I always felt more at home in the ocean
Than upon land
The wrinkles on my fingers
A continuation of her ripples
The feeling still lingers
For a month I surfed the waves of Peniche
I swallowed a lifetime of sand on that beach
The wild Atlantic, my beloved ocean
The force and calm, hopeless devotion
She is strength, she has the power
And I'm but a pawn in her claw
She's the queen of every hour
The sheer unpredictability that defies every law
That we humans give
The natural world holds the ace
In a world of rules she is herself
My home, my fear, and my safe space
Ireland has always felt like home
When the ocean runs through my chromosomes
My DNA continues in every tide
The Atlantic is where I will reside
Today when I sense her breath as I walk
On a breezy day she is calling
Tomorrow when I build my house
Close to her shores
For this is a love that will always
Have me falling
I'll never have landed
I'll love her unconditionally
When she is cruel and cold
My Atlantic
Until I grow old
I'll keep her in my wrinkled hold.

Nicole Diviney , UNSW/SENU

The river*

Spring born, the melting waters break
and serpentine the newborn snake
shapes its liquid scratch on the eternal land
guided by an unknown hand

Then fully formed, fast covering the mile
teeming with life, and all the while
subconscious, the currents swirl.
Hidden depths, he tells the girl

Widest, fastest in its prime
Slower, deeper now, with vanished time
the estuary now in sight
just over there, in the dying light

All rivers running
nowhere to the same sea.
And when, no more a river
all become one, and free,
in the watery nothingness

Following in the long poetic tradition of using metaphor to evoke reflection on the human condition, **The river draws its parallels using language intended to make clear that this is the life journey and that each individual is a river starting with symbolic birth as the “waters break” and ending in the dying light echoing the “dying of the light” of Dylan Thomas. Halfway through, the actual subject of the poem is even more overtly signalled as the couplet beginning with “subconscious, the currents swirl” deliberately switches us sharply out of the pure metaphor of the river as life course and into the realm of a young man trying to appear interesting and profound to a potential romantic interest. The equally sharp switch back to metaphor signals the inescapable fate of all individuals, but not before we glimpse the individual personality, and even a note of defiance, in the face of the inexorable passing of soon-to-be “vanished time”.*

Tony Waddell
WHO Consultant

The World Is My Family

In the vast expanse of life's tapestry,
I see the world as my family, a grand symphony.
Loneliness is my companion, solitude my guide,
In the ocean of existence, both home and tide.
From poet to poem, from husband to wife,
In every role, I seek the rhythm of life.
On paths of jasmine, amidst the icy desert's embrace,
In tears of waterfalls, I find my place.
Through dreams and tales, through words and song,
In colours and hues, where echoes belong.
From the heart of a child to the maiden's grace,
I wander through stories, in time and space.
I am the gaze in the morning light,
I am the flame that dances in the night.
In the moonlight's whisper and the fiery blaze,
I am the night's veil and the sun's warm rays.
With each passing moment, a ceaseless quest,
In the dance of rays, in the eternal test.
Through the journey of time and the illusions of lore,
I seek the beauty of the evermore.
The world is my family, in unity and in strife,
Loneliness is my life, my solitary life.
As my song floats on the breeze, a gentle refrain,
With my heart as the guide, through joy and pain.
My heart is my shelter, my rhythm and song,
In its depth, I find where I truly belong.
My heart is my muse, my guide through the mist,
In its tender embrace, I find my bliss.
The world is my family, in its grand embrace,
Loneliness is my companion in this endless space.
In every role and moment, my spirit remains,
In the dance of existence, where love sustains.

Shyam Kumar Adapa

WHO SEARO

Winter

Frost etches flowers on the window panes
Solar rays caress
the frozen fields
Bright stars adorn
the night and
watch us from ethereal distance

Children dance
upon the icy lake
while parents guard and crouch
Mountains seem besotted under snows
eternal
Even on the summits you can hear church bells

Thoughts are wafting
conscience all important
O brain, slow down, be silent for a moment
Now - in the cold - Our memories can warm the heart
we dream now in reverse

As this Siberian cold descends upon the land,
we feel right here
- the warm hand of God

We hear a shifting and a stomping...
Before we know it,
out of nowhere,
the first sparrows sing.

Christian Schulz, UNSW/SENU

First there was darkness

Light

awakening

Peace

Silence

Diversity in decay

Our colourful planet

Paradise

Then suddenly

the drums of war

cacophony of weapons

Darkness once again

Unrest

Uniformity and uniform opinion

Lost truth

Fake life

Then a peacemaker appears

Hope

Not heard - outrageous

Voices clamour

People chant in harmony

“War is over if you want it”

Placards read:

Peace

Christian Schulz, UNSW/SENU

Imagine – *inverso mundus*

Close your eyes and see the universe within,
explore in sleep the journey – end to origin.

Dream rhythms of the swaying trees,
drink perfumes of the balmy breeze.

Now listen to the siren call of your own muse,
sail safely through the songs that namelessly seduce.

Swim high in starry froth in blue celestial seas,
fly past the blinking underwater galaxies.

Touch hushed arpeggios of the vesper prayer
those velvet-flavoured vestiges of incensed air.

Taste sweet nostalgia in your future memories,
the melancholy of continuous metamorphosis.

Imagine and transcend all trifles, glitter, gold,
embrace instead all generations, young and old.

Now, close your eyes – behold a deeper truth
renewing universe that serenades of youth.

Alfred de Zayas

Гимн мирозданию

Перевод Валентины Прядко

Лишь стоит нам закрыть глаза
И помечтать на сон грядущий,
Как враз предстанет красота
И путь Вселенной нас зовущий.

И ощущая аромат
Дерев, качаемых ветрами,
Услышим медленный набат,
Плывя по космосу с волнами.

Услышим песни звонкий зов
И смело поплывём за музой.
Раскрыв полотна парусов,
Где звёзды плавают с медузой.

У звёздной дали млечный путь:
В нём море счастья и гармоний,
Молитвы звук, слегка, чуть-чуть
И запах резких благовоний.

Тут всё: и грусть от перемен,
И сладость от воспоминаний.
Не страшно нам отдать взамен –
Пустой мираж и золота желаний.

А во Вселенной море новизны.
Закроем вновь глаза, и мы узрим
Сиянья звёзд вдали сохранены
И млечный путь открыт, и мы летим.

Туда, где серенады юности былой
Напоминают нам о днях начала,
Любви прекрасной неземной.
Вот так она тогда звучала!

Valentina Priadko, Russian poet, mother of WHO official

Nostalgia de un lugar donde nunca estuve

Cuando ya no quedaba casi nadie por embarcar
yo seguía pensando que aun podía corregir el rumbo
desandar pasillos y escaleras
dirigirme a la estación
y tomar el primer tren a punto de partir.

Entre pasajeros mudos,
transitaría por estaciones manicomio
apeaderos aislados en la bruma
carreteras como sierpes enroscadas
al borde de simas donde los cuerpos que caen
nunca se encuentran.

Mil veces me preguntaría
qué estaba haciendo allí,
tan lejos de casa.

Luego guardaría los billetes del trayecto
como si fueran las joyas de una madre,
y contaría que llegué a ver,
deslizándose entre las cumbres,
los pies mojados y el sol en la cara,
la serpiente de nubes de Maloja.

Eso pensaba al enseñar mi pasaporte,
última pasajera embarcando
en un vuelo de Ginebra
que no me llevaba a los Alpes.

Carmen Rueda, former OHCHR

Mariúpol y un país de las maravillas

Una calle silenciosa de Ginebra
bordeando un parque.
En sus cuidados edificios
los vecinos prescinden de postigos y cortinas,
ojos abiertos a un mar de copas verdes.
Por la noche encienden
lámparas sobre mesas y aparadores,
luces amarillas que brillan como de fiesta
y atraen las miradas de los que pasan.
Puede que existan hogares felices,
pensarán.

Sobre una señal de tráfico alguien escribió
con letra menuda y rotulador rojo:

*Je veux tout alors qu'il me faut si peu.
Ecrivez moi des poèmes et demain
je partirai heureux.*

De una calle así yo no me cansaría,
me quedaría a vivir para siempre
escribiendo versos junto a mi ventana
y engañando a la noche con luces brillantes.

En la televisión
una niña bajo una mesa
se cubrirá con una manta de ganchillo
mientras las bombas
iluminan su noche.
Ella sabe que en Mariúpol
no están de fiesta.

Carmen Rueda, former OHCHR

LA LIGNIÈRE

Quisiera saber cuántos sobrevivieron,
quisiera saber cuántos sucumbieron.
Hoy que recorro tus pasillos
llenos de dolor y desesperanza,
respiro casi sin querer
este olor a tristeza que me es familiar,
que me perturba y recuerda un luto en mi alma.
Quisiera entender cuál fue el secreto
para sobrevivir a este calvario,
a esta agonía en cruz que mata a fuego lento
y porta un claro nombre: ¡depresión!
Quisiera entender las razones
que nos conducen a esta cárcel
a la que entramos sin cometer delito alguno,
sin un veredicto, sin defensa y sin cargos.
Quisiera saber por qué algunos juzgan libremente
sin saber que de pronto un día podría ser su turno
y por qué algunos nos vemos condenados
a ese exilio involuntario, a ese lugar de trashumancia.
Quisiera comprender mirando al cielo
si las pruebas son verdaderamente bendiciones escondidas.
Quisiera saber por qué solo algunos somos rescatados
y somos regresados de nuevo al mundo
llenos de nuevas ganas de vivir, de fe y esperanza
cuando sentíamos tener,
¡completamente muerta el alma!

Martha B. Rodríguez R, formerly UNOG

AÑORANZA

Cómo extraño el palpitar de esas cálidas noches
en que viene el viento a susurrarme al oído
y se posa en mi cuerpo la mirada diáfana del cielo
en los rutilantes ojos de las estrellas
y la sonrisa de la luna que iluminan mi sueño.

Cómo extraño el coqueteo de esas noches
en la danza sibarítica de las palmeras al ritmo de Eolo
en las olas que me mecen con su canto sensual
y en la piedra sagrada que me envuelve en sus brazos protectores.

Cómo extraño la plenitud de esas noches
cuando mi cuerpo entra en silencio, descansa y se regenera;
acompaña en su cadencioso vuelo a las níveas aves nocturnas
y vienes tú, arropado en nubes, a plasmar un ósculo en mi frente.

Cómo extraño el transcurrir placentero de esas noches
en las que escucho de repente la voz melodiosa del sublime sinsonte
con cuyas notas me despierta de nuevo al milagro de la vida.
Cuando mis ojos como barcas navegan en el albor matutino
y se iluminan al ver pasar a mi estrella fugaz que me dice:
“cómo te extraño yo también, durante todas esas noches”.

Martha B. Rodríguez R, formerly UNOG

MONTE BLANCO

Sentada frente a ti
te admiro sin parpadear
desde este sacro lugar
donde el impoluto blanco
se une con el infinito cielo.

A 4810 metros más cerca
del canto de los ángeles,
contemplo el inmaculado paisaje
que me corta la respiración.

Elevo mis ojos a la cúspide
te busco en ella y te pido
que me dejes saber con claridad
cuál es tu sueño blanco para mí.

Te busco de nuevo
y clamo para que siembres
en el campo estéril de mi alma
semillas de paz, de fe y esperanza
y permanezcamos fundidos el uno en el otro,
como la nieve en el glaciar.

Martha B. Rodríguez R, formerly UNOG

RESPLANDOR

Yo también fui aquella flor
marchita y sin color
sin perfume, sin sazón,
sin aliento, sin pasión...
Mi tallo débil a media asta se erguía
y tambaleante al viento se resistía.
Tempestades, huracanes y heladas
cómplices tornaron hacia mí sus miradas
listos empuñaron la afilada espada
para dar la última estocada.
Arremetieron con implacable semblante
ante mi frío cuerpo exánime y sangrante.
Mi alma en pena, en medio del redondel
moribundos mis ojos del cielo buscaron la miel
y desde sus tripas, la tierra enardecida,
¡vomitó el aliento que me regresó a la vida!

¡YA!

Es hora de decir sí
de empacar las maletas
y emprender el camino.
Es hora de volver a empezar
de retomar las riendas de nuestro destino.
Con coraje, con valor
sin temores, sin mirar atrás
sin tristezas, sin expectativas.
Es hora de renacer de las cenizas
de salir a recoger pedazos de vida.
Es hora ya, de armar el rompecabezas
y del laberinto hallar, por fin, la salida.

Martha B. Rodríguez R, formerly UNOG

Señoras y señores

las siete en el reloj, qué tarde,
qué respetable gesto ante el volante,
qué ganas de llegar y de olvidarse,
qué silencio en la cena, qué silencio,
qué malos los programas de la tele,
qué vacías las noticias y las copas,
quién inventó el insomnio, japoneses,
qué ganas de soñar y qué impotencia,
qué viaje a solas en la cama,
qué oscura oscuridad que espanta,
qué triste es madrugar (lo dijo Borges),
qué pobre luz, qué angustia todo otra vez,
las siete en el reloj, qué tarde.

He aquí que este sueño

He aquí
que este sueño dura
el tiempo
que me paso despierto

El viento

El viento. Antes que nada
esa memoria que se escapa.
Y el tiempo, su otro nombre.
Y el agua, su verdadera forma.
Y la palabra, su paloma.

Miguel Molina, UNSW/SENU

Игра в поддавки

Растаяла изморозь..
По прямой перебегают поле
Бродячий пёс

Дверь скрипеть перестала
Не мигая смотрит
на дождь кот

Свет сквозь конфорку
Никто тебя не моет
Чёрная кочерга

Память вернётся
но что делать
когда идёт дождь

Тихий пруд
В центр круга из листьев
Упала капля дождя

Вышел на берег
с опавшим клёном..
Нет никого

Редкое солнце сквозь тучи
Ничьей завершилась
Игра в поддавки

Кто б мог подумать
Что этот снег не растает
Вороний грай

Ждём снега ..
С хрустом собака
ест кости от холодца

Michail Liablin, CERN

Кстати

К полудню солнце..
Сама собой решилась
Проблема из зимнего сна

Однозначно..
После растаявшего снега
Все листья уже на земле

Пирожок с капустой
Напомнил о лете
Но может и нет

Этот не растает..
Скользят снежинки
По оледеневшим ветвям

Одна надежда
На холодную зиму..
Кто выведет бобра

Ночью снег
К полудню дождь.. при ветре
Выпустил зонт из рук

Тихо ..
Не слышно порханье
Кленового листа

Поздняя осень..
На память все цены
Знает продавец

От холода скрестил руки ..
Не берёт трубку
Заболевший друг

Michail Liablin, CERN

Пепельный кот

Новогодние подарки..
Дождь сменяется ветром
Вечером падает снег

Морозное утро..
В сонном царстве появились
Подарки под ёлкой

Картошка с укропом..
После Нового Года
Отсутствие новостей

Год мыши..
В глубоком зевке изогнулся
Пепельный кот

Несколько слоёв краски..
В старой больнице
Капитальный ремонт

В коридоре слышно..
Травматолог
Вставил сустав

Наверное забыл..
В больнице здороваюсь
С незнакомыми людьми

Взгляд
Сквозь землю..
Чётки перебирает монах

Рождество..
Под шёпот ангелов
Дрожание пламени свечи

Michail Liablin, CERN

Trois prières à l'Amour*

اغريقية

حبيبتى
جمال عنقود
اغريقى

حسنها
بحر فى أيقونة
قصى

شعرها
الشمس منه تغار
وثغرها
القمر يغازل

تسكن
قلبى سويداء فى
بحر عروس
غريق

شمسى تشرق
تقبل حين
ضاحكة

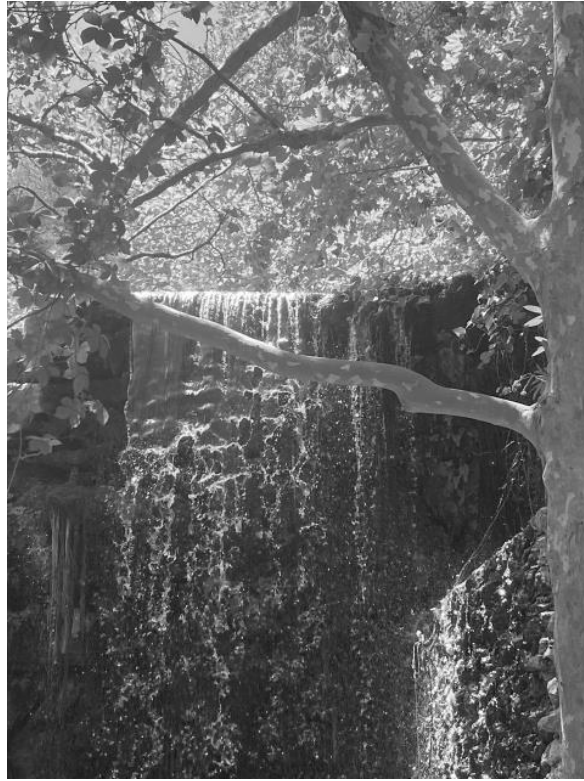
النور ويغرب
عنئ
تنام حين
حوريى

عينها فى لينساب
البنفسج
بزوغ حتى
جديد فجر

--

مقتطف
إغريقية
حموده احمد

عناق الروح
حورس ناشر - ٢٠٢٤



Ελληνικά

Αγαπημένη μου...
Ένα σύμπλεγμα από
Ελληνική Ομορφιά

Η Ομορφιά της...
Φυλάσσεται ένα εικονίδιο
Σε μια μακρινή θάλασσα

Τα μαλλιά της
Ζηλεύει τον ήλιο

Τα χείλη της
Φλέρταρε με το φεγγάρι

Αυτή κινείται
Στην καρδιά μου,

Μια γοργόνα
Σε μια πνιγμένη θάλασσα

Ο ήλιος ανατέλει
Όταν γελάει

Το φως δύνει
Όταν κοιμάται

Όπως οι βιολέτες
Ο ύπνος στα μάτια της

Μέχρι την άνοδο
Της νέας αυγής

— — —

Απόσπασμα
Ελληνικά
(Πρωτότυπο αραβικό)



Greek

My Beloved...
A cluster of
Greek Beauty

Her splendor ...
An icon kept
In a far reached sea

Her hair
Makes the sun jealous

Her lips
Flirt with the moon

A mermaid
In a drowned sea

The sun rises
When she laughs

The light sets
When she sleeps

As the violets
Slumber in her eyes

Till the rise
Of the new dawn

— — —

Alex Caire, formerly UPU,
Excerpt Greek (Original Arabic) A movie kiss
2024, Horus Editeur

— — —

* Le titre figure en hommage à Deux Prières à l'Amour- Ahmad Al'Shahawi- Dar Al'Shourouk- Le Caire- 1988

A City That Is Too Dazzling Is Not Suitable For Stargazing

In this world, everyone is lonely, no matter how many people surround us. Yet to me, nature is my solace, my religion, and all I believe in. It's why I wrote down these moments within nature for you.

1. Hometown

love yet turning back
longing yet departing
owning yet letting go

诗歌 | 家乡

家乡是爱而不回头的情感

眷恋却离开的心情

拥有但放手的内心

2. To Lake Geneva

Would you rise to a scene with me in it?
Is that a butterfly singing or a cicada?
The petals falling blank.
Would I still scent the unfading flowers,
walking along with a little more fragrance of you?

致莱蒙

醒来觉得甚是想念

你也醒来的窗外是否

能看到有我的景

那是蝶咏还是蝉鸣

落英都不缤纷了

来日可否还能闻到花香

再走过些许芬芳

3. Walking out of the maze of thorns

Stepping forward with the courage
of a poet: those who wander
have the humility of the wise.

No matter how we walk
or the direction we choose,
if we have the courage of a poet and the humility of the wise,
we can walk through the maze of thorns

走出泥泞

向前走的人有诗人的勇气

向后蜿蜒的人有智者的谦逊

无论怎么走

走向何方

我们有诗人的勇气和智者的谦逊

都走得 outcomes 泥泞

Liying Huang, WHO

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Visit also our website: www.extempore.ch

If you want to add to the website, please send it to us, and we will input it.

Feel free to update and contribute to the Wikipedia entries e.g. by inputting poems or aphorisms (essays and short stories would be too long, but you could input the links)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Society_of_Writers and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex_Tempore_\(journal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex_Tempore_(journal))

