



## Article

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<http://www.ijoks.com>**Empire, Split Ethnicities, and an Explosion of Poetry***Aviva Butt*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

Guidelines to understanding the poetry of the Kurdish poet-prophet Salim Barakat (b. 1951, Qamishli, Syria) are to be found in a poem by his friend, the Palestinian poet-prophet Mahmud Darwish (b. 1941, al-Birweh, Palestine – d. 2008) – *Laisa lil-Kurdi ila al-Rih [Ila: Salim Barakat]* (The Kurd Has Only the Wind [For Salim Barakat]) (2004). For the benefit of the English-speaking reader, as Darwish's poem and Barakat's poetry (also in Arabic) have not previously been translated to English, I have included, in the body of this study, my translation of Darwish's aforementioned poem and various of Barakat's poems, namely: *Niqabat al-Ansab* (Lineage) (1970); *Kama'in fi al-Mun'atafat Killiha / Htam ma – Sihm* (Ambushes at Turns / Conclusion – A Sort of Arrow) (1985). I have appended the whole of Barakat's long poem *Surya* (Syria) (2014). The techniques Barakat introduces into the art of writing modern Arabic poetry come from modern mainstream poetry, as well as from his Kurdish and Persian background. Altogether his concept of history, which puts into sharp outline the norm of the ancient and medieval world of empire, enters the poem-of-his-being, the "work" as Maurice Blanchot describes it – and makes his chronicling unique. Discussion of the selected poems clarifies as to how Barakat became a poet-prophet, and describes the commitment he took on not only to the Kurdish nation, but also to the entire Middle East.

**Keywords:** Salim Barakat, Kurdish poet, Zoroastrianism, modern Arabic poetry, Mahmud Darwish

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**MOTTO**

*Heaven is the pedlar of belief after belief*

*There is no sign of Heaven thereafter*

– Salim Barakat, 2014

Mahmud Darwish, Palestinian poet-prophet (b. 1941, al-Birweh, Palestine – d. 2008) in his poem *The Kurd Has Only the Wind [For: Salim Barakat]* (2004) explains and presents the poetry of his close friend (younger by one generation), Salim Barakat, Kurdish poet-

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prophet (b. 1951, Qamishli, Syria).<sup>2</sup> Darwish's poem is for the most part an imaginary conversation between the two poets. The Palestinian poet of the poem expresses admiration for his Kurdish friend and looks for what it is that they so much have in common. The poem shifts from the programmatic to sentimentality, reminiscent of Barakat's style. Darwish not only corresponds with Barakat's writings, but through his putting words into the other poet's mouth, also "becomes" the other:

*The Kurd has Only the Wind*

*For: Salim Barakat*

*When I visit him, the Kurd remembers his tomorrow  
But sweeps it under the carpet: "So much for you!"  
But mountains are mountains.<sup>3</sup> And so he drinks vodka  
So that he'll keep the spectre hovering: I am  
A wayfarer<sup>4</sup> so-to-speak, a forlorn shorebird  
And my brethren are idiots. Their identity anonymous  
Shadows: My identity is my language. I... and I am.<sup>5</sup>  
I am my language. I am banished to my language  
And my heart is a Kurdish ember beyond its blue mountains  
Nicosia's<sup>6</sup> footnotes are in its qasida . . . in its qasida<sup>7</sup>  
Like with every other city. Onto a roadster  
It<sup>8</sup> downloads the actors,<sup>9</sup> and says: Live wherever  
The latter dwell in me. So<sup>10</sup>  
He chose the void and slept. He didn't dream  
About anything, since a jinn got into his words  
[His words were his muscle. His muscle was for his words.]  
Thus dreamers sanctify the past, or*

<sup>2</sup> *Laisa lil-Kurdi ila al-Rih [Ila: Salim Barakat]* (The Kurd Has Only the Wind [For Salim Barakat]) – the last poem in the collection *La Ta'tadhir 'Amma Fa'alta* (Don't Apologize for What You've Done), 2004.

All poetry in this article and in the appendix is translated from the original Arabic by Aviva Butt. I believe that to date there has been no previous translation of the selected poems, for which reason I have included them in their entirety. In the case of the poem *Surya* (Syria), due to its length, I have included it as Appendix I.

<sup>3</sup> A literal reference to mountainous terrain, which high places have spiritual significance esp. to the Kurd.

<sup>4</sup> Darwish writes the word "*musafir*" the accepted translation of which is "wanderer." In English, "wanderer" has virtually the same meaning as "wayfarer." At this point in the poem, we suddenly forget Darwish and think it is Salim Barakat talking, so it seemed suitable to translate in a different voice so-to-speak. As regards the word "wanderer," Tetz Rooke, talking about Barakat says: He embodies the restless identity of the political/intellectual refugee, an identity that we might call the Wanderer ("Feathers from heaven: or what the paprika plant said to the hero," 179 – 188, 181).

<sup>5</sup> That is, it is only when you can articulate the word "I" that there becomes an "I."

<sup>6</sup> Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, is divided into Greek and Turkish sectors.

<sup>7</sup> A conventional qasida is a poem which has two hemistiches per verse. The Arabic text has a comma after the word "qasida," and goes on to a new line. However, Darwish usually reads as a repetition what might otherwise be a comma – accordingly I have translated the "comma" as a repetition.

<sup>8</sup> His heart.

<sup>9</sup> "Actors" as versus fictional "figures;" the actors from past history that give meaning to the present.

<sup>10</sup> The narrator of the poem resumes the tale.

*Disparage the golden gatekeeper of the morrow . . .  
I have neither a past nor a future. The tone  
A white canvass . . . //*

*Their residence is clear like a cock's eye . . .  
Forgotten as the tent of the lord of the tribesmen who  
Disperse like feathers. Furrow rugs of wool.  
An eroded dictionary. Hardcover books  
In haste. Floor cushions embroidered with needle  
Of a coffeeshouse boy. Sharpened knives for slaughtering  
Fowl and swine. Video of lions.  
Bouquets of acanthus tantamount to eloquence  
An open slot for metaphor! Aha here  
The Turks and the Greeks exchange a volley  
Of curses. That is the fun and entertainment  
Of watchful soldiers edging on black  
Humour. . //*

*This wayfarer is not a vagrant, as concurred . . .  
North is south, the east . . . west  
In a mirage. The winds aren't for the journey's bags<sup>11</sup>  
The dust doesn't have a use.<sup>12</sup> Such as hiding  
Nostalgia<sup>13</sup> from others, so he doesn't sing . . . he  
Doesn't sing when he invades the shade of acacia trees  
Or a light rain moistens his hair . . .  
Actually, the wolf calls out, challenges him to fight:  
Come you son-of-a-bitch we'll beat the drums<sup>14</sup>  
Tonight, until we rouse the dead. And indeed  
The Kurd will draw near to the fire of Truth<sup>15</sup>  
Then ignite like poets' butterflies //*

*He knows what he wants from ideality.<sup>16</sup> All of which is  
Misleading. Even words' negatives are a device that fishes  
In vain. He reluctantly spurns words then adds them  
On the morrow to his vocabulary. And the alphabet*

<sup>11</sup> Journey's bags: bundles the refugees put together.

<sup>12</sup> Dust/wind (the lines, *The winds aren't for the journey's bags / The dust doesn't have a use*): an allusion to ancient Persian knowledge on the process of resurrection. See S. A. Kapadia. *The Teachings of Zoroaster*, 2013: "I cannot do better than refer to the following passage in "Bundahis," [Zoroastrian text on Creation] on this subject: Zarathustra asked Ahura-Mazda, "Whence does a body form again which the wind has carried and the water conveyed; and how does the resurrection occur?" . . ." pp. 48 – 49.

<sup>13</sup> Nostalgia: Kurdish nostalgia.

<sup>14</sup> Drums: literally, tabla.

<sup>15</sup> An allusion to *atar*, fire, flame, or light in Zoroastrian belief.

<sup>16</sup> Ideality: unambiguous thought prior to articulation.

*Bestows fantasy as a ram<sup>17</sup> for his convictions, and meaning  
To language: I myself take vengeance on absence.<sup>18</sup>  
I do what the mist did to my brethren.  
And I torture my heart as if a game.<sup>19</sup> It isn't  
As I'd want. And I don't love the land more  
Or not as much because of poetry. The Kurd has  
Only the wind, it dwells in him and he dwells in it.  
And it's addicted to him and he's addicted to it, since he's free . . .  
Free from attributes of land and things . . . //*

*He would accost so-and-so: O builder of freedom!  
O ram of everlasting ties! If you see  
Your father hanged then don't lower him from the sky's rope,  
And don't shroud him with your pastoral anthem's cotton.  
Don't bury him, O my son, but let it be the winds<sup>20</sup>  
And Kurdish command of the Kurd in exile,  
O builder . . . there are many eagles around me<sup>21</sup>  
And around you in the spaciousness of Anatolia.  
My token funeral is symbolic, so take the ash  
To its fate, pull! Your primordial sky  
To your magical vocabulary. But beware  
Of the sting of wounded hope, and indeed it's a legendary  
Monster. And you now . . . you are now  
Free, O yourself a builder, you are free  
Of your father and the curse of names . . . //*<sup>22</sup>

*With language you've triumphed over identity  
I said to the Kurd, with language you've taken vengeance  
On absence  
And he said: I'll not go to the desert  
I said and not I . . .*

<sup>17</sup> Ram: here meaning "ornamentation," an allusion to Zoroastrian architecture at the time of the Sassanid empire. *Khavarenah* (glory), mentioned once in Zarathustra's Gathas (Hymns) and subsequently used to describe especially kingly glory, was symbolized as a ram.

<sup>18</sup> Darwish now talks about himself.

<sup>19</sup> Darwish tortures his own heart. He admires the Kurd who is free.

<sup>20</sup> See online: <http://www.avesta.org/mp/bundahis.html>: See Chapter 30:4: ". . .they prepare the raising of the dead . . . 'Whence does a body form again, which *the wind has carried and the water conveyed (vazhid)*? And how does the resurrection occur?'"

<sup>21</sup> The eagles are birds of prey that consume the flesh of corpses set out for burial. On burial customs, see online e.g. <http://www.deathreference.com/Vi-Z/Zoroastrianism.html>

The "builders," which is to say modern day pioneer fighters striving to establish a Kurdish nation-state are likely to die under the spacious skies of Anatolia, i.e. Anatolia in Asia Minor, the territory of ancient empires. The Anatolian plateau remains as the major part of modern Turkey. See below, Barakat's poem *Ambushes at Turns / Conclusion – A Sort of Arrow*.

<sup>22</sup> Darwish is referring to the Palestinian tradition of keeping count of the names of their Palestinian forefathers.

*And I glanced towards the wind /*

- *Have a good night*
- *Have a good night*

The Palestinian poet introduces the personae of the poem, himself and his friend who drinks vodka, that is, he drinks from the ancient Zoroastrian teachings.<sup>23</sup> The friend then explains something about himself, and also about his Kurdish compatriots whom Barakat in his own poems subjects to a similar type criticism:

..... *I am*  
*A wayfarer so-to-speak, a forlorn shorebird*  
*And my brethren are idiots. Their identity anonymous*  
*Shadows: My identity is my language. I... and I am.*  
*I am my language. I am banished to my language*  
*And my heart is a Kurdish ember beyond its blue mountains*

*Nicosia's footnotes are in its qasida . . . in its qasida*

The line “*Nicosia's footnotes are in its qasida . . . in its qasida,*” presents the perceived historical phenomenon that is ever present in the outlook of both poets. Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, where Barakat sojourned in the 1980s is divided into Greek and Turkish sectors, just as the qasida, the poet says, has two hemistiches per verse. Nicosia's split ethnicities are perceived as the result of conflict and the breakdown of Empire – a situation giving rise to an explosion of poetry “in the footnotes.” The poet goes on to explain more about his friend, the wayfarer: “*He chose the void and slept. . . .*” His “tomorrow” is in his dreams, a good place to be; in his dreams, his tomorrow has continuity with his yesterday. And speaking of continuity, with the words “*you are free / Of your father and the curse of names . . . .*” – Darwish implies another commonality, the two poets' concept of lineage. One could say that lineage in Asia Minor goes back as far as the archaeological site Gobekli Tepe on the present-day Turkish border with the modern nation-state of Syria.<sup>24</sup> Darwish as a Palestinian has a list of names to at least partially record his lineage. Barakat, as a Kurd, has recourse to the Iranian *Book of Kings*, which records the list of kings from the earliest Persian Empire. Since, otherwise, Middle Eastern history is recorded in scripture, exegesis, legends and sayings, and also in the accounts of poets from ancient times, both Darwish and Barakat as poets feel an obligation to take on the burden of chronicling. Their chronicling is done through their creativity within the discipline of the modern concept of “literature.” As a creative writer myself, I would define the term “literature” as: written output as distinct from scripture, scripture that is extant in its original language. The inspiration for literature is the scripture

<sup>23</sup> Vodka, a Russian drink. Prophet Zarathustra is thought to come from near Russia. Since their language reflects the ancient language of Prophet Zarathustra's scripture (the Gathas), the Kurds are considered to be from the same area.

<sup>24</sup> On Gobekli Tepe, see online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/04/21/ancient-stone-carvings-confirm-comet-struck-earth-10950bc-wiping/>; shows sculpted relief in the stone describing a comet that inaugurated the ice age – presumably before use as burial site described online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%B6bekli\\_Tepe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%B6bekli_Tepe)

that formulates the Middle Eastern traditions for our civilized, societal and cultural existence. As modern poets, who produce modern Semitic poetry, Darwish and Barakat are familiar with not only the scriptures prevalent in Islamic society,<sup>25</sup> but also with the mysticism inherent in teachings dating far back into antiquity and especially in the case of Barakat – the artistic creativity of our forefathers as seen in for example architectural wonders and sculpted reliefs from even as far back as the Bronze and Stone ages. Moreover, they are obviously well-versed in the literary output throughout the ages of both East and West – not a small achievement in itself, since just as Kohelet warns in the biblical book *Ecclesiastes* (12:12) to the “making of many books there is no end.” They are no doubt aware of the dichotomic typological distinction between literature following Homer and literature in the footsteps of the Hebrew Bible or Arabic Qur’an. For Homer and the Greeks, aesthetics were of great importance. For Darwish and Barakat, the aesthetic goal has no relevance to their mission as poet-prophets writing in Arabic. The three main implications of these poets’ adherence to the manner of modern mainstream literature are that firstly they write a multi-layered poem, one with “background.” And secondly, that the poet is able to step in and out of his personal life story into the collective consciousness of the nation. The poet is able to “personalize” his message by including himself in the poem, writing in the first person. With the lines of his poem become close and personal, he is able to insert his modern message into a background fraught with mysticism. His then multi-layered poem resonates with symbols that reach out into the Middle Eastern world of today both synchronically and diachronically. And thirdly, in the manner of scripture, especially the Hebrew Bible, Darwish and Barakat write a terse narrative. They streamline. There are no details included that are irrelevant to what they have to say. They leave interpretative gaps, above all space in a polysemic text so that there is ever present background. It is a text ever relevant to an audience or readership, ever open to new interpretations.

From here, one obvious question is why the obsession with burial and the hereafter? We see this when the Kurdish protagonist, says:

*O ram of everlasting ties! If you see  
Your father hanged then don't lower him from the sky's rope,  
And don't shroud him with your pastoral anthem's cotton.  
Don't bury him, O my son, but let it be the winds  
And Kurdish command of the Kurd in exile,  
O builder . . . there are many eagles around me  
And around you in the spaciousness of Anatolia.  
My token funeral is symbolic, so take the ash  
To its fate, pull! Your primordial sky*

*To your magical vocabulary.*

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<sup>25</sup> Both Darwish and Barakat are Muslim; on Darwish's affiliation, see the soon to be published article by Aviva Butt, “The Spaces between the Silver Dots: the Interface between the Study of Sacred Texts and Techniques of Translating Semitic Poetry to English.” Barakat is Alawite, as is his compatriot, the Syrian poet, theoretician and leading exponent of the neo-Sufi trend in modern Arabic poetry – Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber) (b. 1930).

Aside from burial customs having been throughout the ages an intrinsic part of the collective way of life, and an interesting historical phenomenon, there is a different kind of concern, urgent for poets seeking to further the very existence, which includes not just physical existence, but identity, of their nations. Literary critics have repeatedly accused Darwish of being obsessed with death. Such critics could not be more wrong. What Darwish and Barakat both want to know is the *exact* process of resurrection, what takes place to use Darwish's frequent expression "beyond the skies." They see the details of burial, resurrection and also reincarnation and the period of time involved as being all important to the perpetuation of the life of the nation.

In the 1980s, Darwish lived in Paris, and Barakat sojourned in Cypress writing and working as managing editor of al-Karmil, the journal Darwish had founded. It was during this period that Darwish matured as a poet seen especially with his collection *Fewer Roses* and his long poem *The Hoopoe*;<sup>26</sup> the latter uses as frame a long epic poem of 4,600 couplets by the Persian theoretician of mysticism Shaykh Farid al-Din al-Attar<sup>27</sup> (b. ca. 540/1145-46 at Nisapur d. 618/1221); accordingly, Darwish, the modern poet, is corresponding with the writings of this early and somewhat enigmatic Persian scholar-poet, a follower of Prophet Zarathustra, who has been acclaimed by present day Shi'a Muslims as being a precursor of Persian Shi'a mysticism. Darwish published his series of fifty poems, each about ten lines in length, the collection *Fewer Roses*, in 1986, and *The Hoopoe*, as said a very long poem, later in 1990, as well as another series of poems each approximately the same length (one page long) entitled *Eleven Stars over the End of the Andalusian Scene* in 1992.<sup>28</sup> One cannot help but wonder how it is that in the same period, Barakat wrote a series of what is for him "short" poems, twenty-one poems on twenty-one pages! – in 1985.<sup>29</sup> For convenience sake, I have entitled this series [At the Next Turn]. Much later, but nonetheless a series of poems structured much like Darwish's *Fewer Roses*, he published forty-four poems entitled *Weights*,<sup>30</sup> which are often about ten lines in length, sometimes five lines, in 1998-1999.<sup>31</sup> It does seem that especially in the 1980s, these two poets remained in close contact; Barakat in fact travelled now and again from Nicosia to Paris. Not only the structures of their collections of roughly this period, but also their themes, bear a remarkable similarity. It seems that they conversed not only on the journal Al-Karmil, but also about their mutual creativity in general, poems in the making.

Although there is no title to Barakat's series [At the Next Turn] of 1985, there is a short introductory verse of four lines, with a comment on the poet's "tomorrows":

*Turns. A midday of feathers.  
Diligence describing the night.*

<sup>26</sup> Mahmud Darwish: *al-Hudhud* (The Hoopoe), 1990; *Ward Aqall* (Fewer Roses), 1986. It seems that Darwish composed these two works over a period of time and more-or-less simultaneously.

<sup>27</sup> "Shaykh" in the Shi'a tradition is a way to address respected religious leaders; "Imam" is used only for the most revered.

<sup>28</sup> *Ahada 'Ashara Kawkaban 'ala Akhiri al-Mashhadi al-Andalusi*.

<sup>29</sup> Salim Barakat, *al-A'mal al-Shi' riyah Salim Barakat* (The Poetry Works of Salim Barakat), 2007, 351—371.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Mathaql*.

<sup>31</sup> Salim Barakat, *The Poetry Works of Salim Barakat*, 513 – 557.

*Unearthly dust,*

*And a tomorrow as if an enemy stalking strange alleys.*

Darwish did not see the actualization of a united Palestine, and nor did he expect to during his lifetime; he expresses this very clearly when grieving, he says: “*Since I agreed to The Peace Accord – I no longer have a present / That I will pass tomorrow on the shoulder of my yesterday.*”<sup>32</sup> His friend Barakat, who shares his obsession with the morrow, does not concern himself with the historical phenomenon of the “nation-state,” and, so he does not express an opinion about whether or not Kurds need one. He does, however, object to the idea of dying for the sake of creating a united Kurdistan, or nation-state be that as it may. He takes on himself as a Kurdish poet, and actually, a poet-prophet, to provide assurance of a continued identity and a perpetuation of the nation. His interest turns to the detail of how perpetuation takes place . . . through what happens after death. Barakat is in a better position than Darwish from the perspective of his background and deep knowledge and identity with the Avestan and Zoroastrian perspectives to give an imaginative and detailed account.

Then, how does this knowledge, as expressed in the most ancient extant monotheistic scripture, the Zand-Avesta, and derivative texts and traditions such as the more recent Pahlavi texts – how does all this relate to especially the Qur’an and Muslim traditions, the starting point in the lives of both these poets. Essentially, that is a question that goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, as an aside, there are especially legends on the connection of Islam – Islam’s prophet and Ali, the Prophet’s paternal cousin and son-in-law – to the religion of the followers of Prophet Zarathustra. One of these, a legend related by Ervad Marzban J. Hathiram,<sup>33</sup> also tells us about “desert” as wanderings with a symbolic meaning. I am not talking about that familiar story of the wanderings of the children of Israel when they left the captivity of ancient Egypt, according to the biblical account in the Book of Exodus. More than once have we seen “desert” considered to be symbolic of ritual purification! At the time of the Sasanian Empire (224 – 651 C.E.), Dastur Hathiram relates, in ancient Persia just prior to the Islamic period, Dastur Dinyar, actually, Dasturan Dastur (the Priest of Priests), inadvertently broke his mother’s heart and caused her death. The Shahenshah e-Iran (the King of Kings), who loved this “wise” man dearly was obliged to administer justice and banished Dastur Dinyar from the Empire. All this was according to predestination, since “Dastur Dinyar was to become Salman-e-Farsi, the Wise Persian who would be one of the closest advisers and constant companions of the Prophet. . . .After many years of wandering [in the desert], Dastur Dinyar met a caravan of Arab traders, proceeding from Mecca towards Syria. They were from the Quraysh tribe . . . .”<sup>34</sup> Dastur Dinyar as Salman al-Farsi of Prophet Mohammad’s household, the same Salman al-Farsi as mentioned in the Qur’an, carried out the mission entrusted to him by the Wise One (Wise Buzurgmeher) at the Sasanian court to “ensure that the safety of Iran and its ancient religion is always safeguarded.”

<sup>32</sup> The poem “I am one of the Kings of the End” in *Ahada ‘Ashara Kawkaban* (Eleven Stars), 1992: Darwish’s poetry collections are to found online at <http://www.darwishfoundation.org> .

<sup>33</sup> Ervad Marzban J. Hathiram is a present-day Parsi priest, i.e. dastur.

<sup>34</sup> See Hathiram’s blog: <http://www.frashogard.com/the-migration-of-parsis-to-india-3-dastur-dinyar/>



To return to Darwish's above poem *The Kurd Has Only the Wind*, Darwish concludes: "I said to the Kurd, with language you've taken vengeance / On absence / And he said: I'll not go to the desert." The poet's creativity, his "language," allows him to step into the world that is revealed to prophets. "*The Kurd has / Only the wind, it dwells in him and he dwells in it./ And it's addicted to him and he's addicted to it, since he's free . . . / Free from attributes of land and things . . . //* Barakat has only the spiritual, Darwish says. It leaves him free.

Mahmud Darwish wrote his above poem in 2004 about four years before his death and about ten years before Salim Barakat would write his poem *Syria* first published in 2014. As can be seen, Darwish rightly understood his friend's great potential. I have translated from the original Arabic published in the Syrian newspaper Al-Mustaqbal under the heading: "*Qasidat Jadida lil-Sha'ir al-Kabir Salim Barakat: Surya*" (A New Poem by the Great Poet Salim Barakat: Syria).<sup>35</sup> The poem *Syria* uses sarcasm to point out the lack of logic in Syria's present tragic sequence. One has the feeling that the poet is exerting self-control in what is essentially an outburst of grief behind a mask of sarcasm. He searches for the logic in the present scenario, and unleashes his sarcasm. The poem is essentially programmatic (a technique of modern mainstream poetics); and with this technique and techniques of repetition, the poet distances from his personal explosive reaction to the real life situation and at the same time creates changes in meaning through repetition as he builds up tension.

Please refer to Barakat's poem *Syria* in the Appendix below. In this poem, written in Arabic and presented in translation, we can still see that reduplicated words, a morphological process, bring about significant changes to meaning or shades of meaning. As Mirmokri and Seifori tell us there are two basic forms: full reduplication and partial reduplication, and a variety of reduplication patterns in the Kurdish language – what is added to the reduplicant (base morpheme) usually being meaningless. "It also seems that this kind of words especially partial ones are used in informal language and an ironic meaning is inferred by them."<sup>36</sup> It seems that in his poem *Syria*, Barakat whose first language was after all Kurdish instinctively leans on the methods of sarcasm built-in to the Kurdish language, using also techniques of repetition of lines or partial lines which complement the reduplication inherent in the Kurdish language – that is, repetition per se reduplicates the process of the reduplicated word. Glancing at the lines of the poem *Syria*, quoted below, immediately apparent is the word "anymore" (also: "no longer," which translates the same Arabic word) – repeated in the following lines:

- *Don't ask me to fine tune like a fine interface anymore. Crazyed the on high*
- *Rips open her bodice, and below is bespattered as if not wanted anymore.*
- *The defect! No mention of divvying up the ashes. It is not called killing anymore . . .*
- *Cruel like in the legends, dear country. I do not want territory anymore. I do not want*
- *Heaven above me anymore. Let my heart stop beating. Let the unaware passage*

<sup>35</sup> Al-Mustaqbal no.5155 (19 Elul 2014): 20. Cultural column. Soon after the publication of Barakat's poem, the newspaper's cultural column was discontinued.

<sup>36</sup>Manijeh Mirmokri and Shahla Seifori, "On the Reduplication in Kurdish language"— see the Abstract, 165.

The word “anymore” undergoes a change of meaning – in English becoming “any more”:

- *The gods are not any more outraged, O wasted shadows drinking by the goblet.*
- *Their ideologies. Heaven does not tolerate any more. Disclaim Heaven. Disclaim*
- *The brethren who do not tolerate any more. From pillar to post . . .*

Throughout the poem, the poet addresses the country Syria as “dear country.” These repetitions are so frequent that I cannot list them. “Dear country” takes on various degrees of emphasis and changes in tone, for example, the sarcasm dissolves into the depths of grief. Emphasis and a change in tempo, in this case, may be through repetition using shorter or longer lines, such as, “dear” on one line, and “country” on the next line.

Similarly, the poem throughout often uses repetitive short lines in sequence such as:  
*No verdure will bring me back to its non-being:// No devotion to mountains// It is not mountainous// Not my grandfather, the mountain// Not my grandmother, the forest// No brethren on oppressive roads// Not my sisters, the smooth rocks in river drainage// No dawn will bring me back to its non-being:// No loss or victory. . . .* In this case, the sequence is immediately followed by yet another sequence, and the suspense builds up, until we find out: “Death is unexplored; death has its wake-up call as inner tidings of the birth of a thief / From legends in waiting, it will bring me back to its non-being.” In these lines, the poet personalizes, that is he talks about his own fate, which at the same time is the fate of the nation. Ultimately he is concerned with the perpetuation of his nation.

The writer of the introduction to Salim Barakat’s *Poetry Works* cites the poem *Lineage*, published in 1970, as being the young poet’s first poem to startle and attract attention.<sup>37</sup> *Lineage* shows the young poet to be an arduous student of history. As a Kurd, he starts with Iranian history, which begins with Ahura Mazda’s creation of non-existence, that is, a universe and a world that is a result of His imagination.<sup>38</sup> On the “oneness” and antiquity of Ahura Mazda, Prods Oktor Skjaervo presents us with a translation of an Old Persian inscription, which clearly explains the role of Ahura Mazda. The inscription reads: “Ahuramazda is the great god who set in place this earth, who set in place yonder sky, who set in place man, who set in place happiness for man, who made Darayawahush king, one king over many, one commander over many.”<sup>39</sup> Darayawahush (Darius) was an Achaemenid King of Kings.<sup>40</sup> There was thus no concept of “prehistoric” in the young poet’s mind. “Prehistoric” it seems is just a figment of the imagination of modern historians! There was God, nature and the peaceful populations of the empire.

In Barakat’s poem *Niqabat al-Ansab*, which I have translated rather freely as “Lineage,” Barakat seems to be grappling with the concept of lineage and perpetuity. The spectacle of war and conflict horrifies the young poet. Born in 1951, he was only about eighteen or nineteen years old when he wrote this amazing poem. In it, he is consumed with

<sup>37</sup> See the Introduction by Subhi Hadidi, Syrian literary critic, p.9.

<sup>38</sup> “Ahura Mazda” is the way Prophet Zarathustra addresses the one God, the Creator.

<sup>39</sup> *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> The Achaemenid Empire (550 – 330 B.C.E.) was the first great Persian Empire.

compassion for the weak and especially for those suffering banishment; he takes on his shoulders the cross of suffering for the downtrodden.

The young poet's narrative brings to life the horrors of a battle for succession and the sufferings of the common people in the aftermath of the death of Prophet Mohammad. When the Umayyad army defeated the Meccans and Medinans, as a result of the fighting, the Kaaba was damaged by fire. It is evident that the poet was deeply disappointed at early Muslim history. He imagines that he himself had gone on pilgrimage to Mecca and experienced instead of the sanctuary it was at the time of the pre-Islamic poets, those horrible events:

*Lineage*<sup>41</sup>

*((This Modern Face))*

*I'm coming*

*Let every man-of-substance heed the beggar in apostasy's land from whence come  
The jabs. Across Exile's border on the eyelids of God's remnant and across the cutshort  
Sakieh<sup>42</sup> of horrified time in sight of women; the time of the Quraysh has brought them<sup>43</sup>  
Not just to tears but has bled the poor and stays the saddlebag . . . doing the rounds  
Behind downy caravans . . . so let every man-of-substance heed apostasy's land<sup>44</sup>  
From whence come the jabs.*

*((This Modern Face))*

*With no shoe, I travel towards the realms of the Persians and the city of Rome  
And I lift my face in the darkness at their questions  
And I ask my bloodied feet about the enigmatic land. And the heavenly bats murmur.<sup>45</sup>  
And in any confrontation with banishment, I shout:  
War horses whinny at the doors of the Kaaba, O Tribes of Shalim<sup>46</sup>  
And alone I expound to refugees, if not to the black stone's shadow, my robe.  
I was confused when death's pendulum swung over the face of the pilgrims  
Between the legitimate front and the jab and the swords, I was cheated  
I beset a fissure in dread's empire to detach the rivers of time  
Agony at my front and my rear mounting at a whiff of the Kaaba, glowing embers  
The desert breathes it and its tribes love a bearer of meter across the rhymes of war;  
I glare at the man of noble descent with the horsemen, and the fugitive  
Steadfast in the heat until from overhead weeping date-palms loosen the tears. .  
He vowed allegiance at the mercy of curved swords*

<sup>41</sup> *Niqabat al-Ansab* (Lineage) in *The Poetry Works of Salim Barakat*, 7 – 6; also: 75 – 76.

<sup>42</sup> Sakieh: an Arabic word used in English usually meaning a waterwheel to raise water from wells or just a rivulet.

<sup>43</sup> Barakat blames the Arab conquest for the suffering of the poor.

<sup>44</sup> The text I have reads: "Let every man-of-substance heed the beggar in apostasy's land." I deleted the words "heed the beggar," because that repeats line one of the poem. This is a deliberate edit.

<sup>45</sup> Bats: sculpted into the stone of ancient Persian architecture.

<sup>46</sup> Shalim: an ancient Canaanite god mentioned in the Ugarit inscriptions found at Ras Shamra in Syria. The descendants are presumably the peoples of the Levant.

*I struck out eastwards, westwards, desperation struck . . .  
 . . My one face falls.  
 I strike it . . my other face falls  
 I withdraw with the pilgrims to Arafat, dusty;<sup>47</sup> crushed under hooves of wind  
 The weak  
 The feeble  
 For that we die from dreaming  
 For that we rise from dreaming  
 For that we let blood so as to behold through the blood advent of trees with day  
 The elation of a daytime in the clouds.*

The events Barakat chronicles in a much later poem, his poem *Ambushes at Turns / Conclusion – A Sort of Arrow*,<sup>48</sup> the last poem of the poet's 1985 aforementioned series of poems [At the Next Turn] have to do with the conflict between Kurdish militant groups and the Turkish state; the fighting escalated in 1984 – at which time the P.K.K. (Kurdish: *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*) was declared to be a terrorist group. In the opening lines, the poet creates a surreal atmosphere, calling up our imagination, which in turn causes our sentiments to become unreal so that our passions will no longer influence our rational convictions. The object of this technique – a sophisticated technique used with full awareness in mainstream modern philosophical poems – is to give a sublime character to the poem and allow the poet to persuade. The concept of a “philosophical poem” and also the techniques of sarcasm that Barakat uses in his poem *Syria* are techniques that stretch the boundaries of modern Arabic poetics; Darwish, in clinging to Arabic neoclassical forms, seems to have ignored mainstream poetics and its various techniques in favor of developments in modern Arabic poetics per se.

Characteristically, Barakat presents his message clothed in symbols that he draws from antiquity. In this case, we have a lioness (and the lion as king appears later in the poem), as signifying the ongoing presence of Anahita, the Lioness lady and the Queen of beasts.

“The Indo-Iranian Anahita is an ancient Persian Goddess, who became a Zoroastrian Yazata (or Angel) and is still part of contemporary Zoroastrianism. Described as a beautiful maiden, who is strong, tall and pure, she is depicted as wearing a mantle embroidered with gold and as holding the baresma (sacred plant) in her hand. She is the Goddess of all the waters upon the earth, her full title being Aredvi Sura Anahita which means moist, mighty and immaculate (pure), and she travels on her chariot pulled by four horses: Wind, Rain, Cloud and Sleet.”<sup>49</sup>

*Ambushes at Turns / Conclusion – A Sort of Arrow* (last of the series)

*The golden lioness mounts plateau after plateau with majesty*

<sup>47</sup> Arafat, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>48</sup> *Kama'in fi al-Mun'atafat Killiha / Htam ma – Sihm* (Ambushes at Turns / Conclusion – A Sort of Arrow) in *The Poetry Works of Salim Barakat*, 370–371.

<sup>49</sup> See online: <http://wiccanrede.org/2013/11/review-anahita-ancient-persian-goddess-zoroastrian-yazata/>

*Onlookers lie back, in their dusty cloaks,  
 On the wall of our predestinations,<sup>50</sup> carelessly trimming, buffing their nails, but not  
 Indifferent to major insolence, and the bones  
 Calling to be dispersed under the humane moon and the place  
 The absurdity mounts with the actuality of the dust, degree by degree,  
 Midst discarded laurels, and the suns the fugitives collect.  
 As for the mounted, they arrive from another inanity, clinging to their sanity,  
 And somewhat heated in sorting out the landscape. And nothing . . . with one gesture,  
 They mount the plateau. Moreover, their advance through the terrain<sup>51</sup> is still  
 In its infancy . . . the effect of the king's spit on their teats.*

*Thus that same landscape lurks from the outskirts of the reality,  
 Thus the pledge is fulfilled.*

*And you, my sedentary brethren, in rhetoric's tunnel, oblivious  
 You present to me the story's insurrection, and the narrators' split<sup>52</sup> . . . you did not  
 Wait for the landscape to forget your meddling and the abrupt end of the slain . . . for  
 The defeated heavens to hand over their crushed keys. With a hand light as gossamer,  
 They plunder the moonlit nights, they search the tortured waters . . .  
 And they take me as their intercessor. I hold the assurance of His transcendence  
 And strewn about are His signs.<sup>53</sup>*

*I have only that  
 My brethren have only that  
 And indeed that includes molten stone, it burns within fragile locks  
 Like a roll call, the avant-garde swarm in gratitude for the fall of minarets and saddles.  
 And right away after we raise their spirits, we embellish the report, without  
 Showing evidence – al-Murratin provide discourses about the corpses, and their shadows,<sup>54</sup>  
 With the assurance that the corpses will ascend with their shadows  
 To ascend to the pleasures of the hereafter – the magic of words whenever dejection.  
 Their distraction, a reversion to elation.*

*I have only that, the golden  
 I have only that, the landscape  
 And the certainty of the lioness moving on with her runner, dust's chariot .*

Nicosia – 1985

<sup>50</sup> The concept of divine predestination.

<sup>51</sup> *Their advance through the terrain*: here, I translated from the consonantal text, i.e. the Persian underlying the Arabic.

<sup>52</sup> "Split" as in split ethnicities, the title of this study.

<sup>53</sup> His signs: literally in the Arabic, "His speech" – *htabuhu*.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Murratin (Persian): nativist prophets of early Islamic Iran trying to revive Zoroastrianism.

At the end of the second stanza, with the lines, “And they take me as their intercessor. I hold the assurance of His transcendence / And strewn about are His signs, Barakat states his qualifications as poet-prophet of the Kurdish nation. When in the next stanza, he says: “I have only that / My brethren have only that / And indeed that includes molten stone, it burns within fragile locks / Like a roll call,” he summarizes the poem-of-his-being,<sup>55</sup> saying that the landscape, the spectacle of antiquity, burns like molten stone behind his eyelids and summons him to join the nation’s “roll call.”

Ultimately, Barakat’s view of history dictates his concept of the morrow. For me, he answers the question of why I feel a commonality in the Middle East, closeness to its peoples – all of them. In today’s world, the Middle East is sustained (for want of a better word) by what has become in a world of nation-states – divisive ideologies. There remains, if only one can see it, the spectacle – the lioness traversing the plateaus, an antiquity and commonality initiated by Empire and doctrine, all of which extends to modern times and, God willing, the forthcoming generations – as shown by Salim Barakat.

It is from the above shared Middle Eastern tradition, that we have the revealed religion of Prophet Zarathustra’s scripture, and the Islamic, Christian, and Judaic oral and written traditions. Mary Boyce, to summarize, sees Zoroastrianism as linking with beliefs of ancient (Vedic) India, and Zoroastrianism as the earliest known revealed religion, a religion that revered invisible forces (Avestan: *mainyu*, Sanskrit, *manyu*) in all things, both animate and inanimate, and not personified abstractions. Prophet Zoroaster, she says, came from the Inner Asian Steppes, where he first preached his spiritual and ethical message, a message that governed the just and ethical rule of Persian empire over both Zoroastrian population and other ethnicities. The Kurdish nation arose from that same terrain, and so it is not surprising to find that the Kurdish language reflects the Avestan language, the language of Prophet Zarathustra.<sup>56</sup> In the case of the Kurdish Syrian poet Salim Barakat, we find that although his education equipped him to express himself in Arabic, itself a holy language, nevertheless we feel the Kurdish language in the background. When in his poem *Syria*, he says: “. . . The land will sleep for years, seeding for years/ But cultivation by the disseminating spirits won’t sleep within you,” he acknowledges that thought processes disseminate into the stream of consciousness. Such is the linguistic phenomenon of reduplication, built into Barakat’s language and relayed to his Arabic. However, in this case, the poet-prophet’s creativity first-of-all finds its rich source, and dips its pen into the wisdom that is, in the language of Darwish, “beyond the skies.”<sup>57</sup>

## APPENDIX I

<sup>55</sup> What Maurice Blanchot calls “the work.”

<sup>56</sup> See Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, esp. Chapter One.

<sup>57</sup> I wish to thank my friend Dr Arnavaz Manekji Havaewalaa for her guidance in understanding Zoroastrian belief and practice as it is in today’s Iranian exile in Gujrat and the rest of India – Aviva Butt.

**Salim Barakat (2014)**

## Syria

*Don't ask me to fine tune like a fine interface anymore. Crazy the on high  
Rips open her bodice,<sup>58</sup> and below is bespattered as if not wanted anymore.*

*My knees fail, and Heaven fails me. Heaven lets flourish those very assailants.  
Heaven is idle. Heaven is answerable for the trickle of blood over her. Heaven  
Intensifies the chaotic madness, and the chaos dances over the dragon's tail. Heaven is  
The pedlar of belief after belief. There is no sign of Heaven thereafter. There is no sign of  
Escape for her, or that we'll descend on Heaven's ladder to the human, dear country.*

*A rupture in the soul, and a mend. Woe to the missiles in wet ancestral bones . . . and  
Ancestral clay. Woe to the missiles entrapped in the depth of a hotbed, bodies did not  
Engage them. Woe to the country, the dear country . . . the bags for the disillusioned  
To gather their clothes, and their tenacity, and children extracted in time. An auction of the  
Divine Law over you. An auction of the surety within you. An auction of desecrated shrines  
And desecrated tombs . . . dear country: A journey in the [Book] of Kings:<sup>59</sup>*

*A short stay  
And assailants, guard corps . . .<sup>60</sup>*

*There is no clearer explanation than illustrated by the sand's dividend at Divine Judgments.  
The drawbacks are insignificant since soon we will extradite the sphinx;<sup>61</sup> soon the ages will  
Receive it with steel cranes. A defect! No mention of unrelenting damage in the audit.  
The defect! No mention of divvying up the ashes. It is not called killing anymore . . .  
The scourge of your times, dear country.*

*There is nil in the summary report.<sup>62</sup> Countries provide the transit summary  
From the castles of the gods to the slaughterhouses. Pigments for painting mountains  
And for painting the sea, since myths peel away. In every chamber, a wealth of drainage*

**NOTES TO APPENDIX I**

<sup>58</sup> Kurdish and Armenian traditional dress uses the bodice. The imagery of the first two lines describes the 2014 situation in Syria, and also hints at past Persian history, when territorial Syria was included in Persian domains.

<sup>59</sup> Book of Kings, i.e. Firdawsi's *Shahnameh* (tenth century). The book chronicles the reigns and deeds of the earliest Persian kings of four dynasties: the Pishdadian, Kayanian, Ashkanian and Sasanian (about 10,000 BCE to 637 CE). See <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/10610/>

<sup>60</sup> Iran's guard corps. Iran sends help to Syria.

<sup>61</sup> Sphinx: i.e. wisdom. In ancient Greek mythology, the sphinx symbolizes wisdom and understanding. "Wisdom" also signifies "Mazd" or "Ahura Mazda," the name for God that Prophet Zarathustra uses instead of the older "Mazd."

<sup>62</sup> The audit summary report: Barakat is mocking the attitude towards what is a tragedy.

*The quantities are short and do not reach the ancient depths.<sup>63</sup> No matter. Fatigue is Indisputable. There is no dispute about the bags being lighter or heavier following The killing. God is not under dispute, but is rather their stronghold, dear country. The wares are guaranteed, beyond doubt, of a certainty, but God is The squabble. For sure there is no permeation of the water from crevasses of souls From the time they were cast. Thanks to tar, dear country.<sup>64</sup>*

*Take this! Then buckets of souls are drawn from wells of fire.<sup>65</sup> Dacca is the father lizard:<sup>66</sup> Take freedom from the rooster's crow over the ruins of a palace, dear country The idolatrous image. An obvious deception<sup>67</sup> from a window over the flowerpot of the Bloodied plant, dear country. The crafty destruction, and the scornful sneer on facing eternity Over the table. The anthems are corrupt, preserved in the salt of the era and its vinegar.<sup>68</sup> An inadvertent omission in the ink of the covenant . . . you, dear country.<sup>69</sup>*

*There is no doctrine for the morrow.*

*No doctrine for the morrow in the recurring interpretations of the sphinx by alluvial tongues. Exploits of oarsmen in the ashes in boatloads of the voices of the departed. The cargo is guaranteed, dear country. The land will sleep for years, seeding for years But cultivation by the disseminating spirits won't sleep within you. Or stop me As regards transpositions of the blood into sung-poems. Your doubts assuaged since The gods are not any more outraged, O wasted shadows drinking by the goblet.*

*Their ideologies. Heaven does not tolerate any more. Disclaim Heaven. Disclaim The brethren who do not tolerate any more. From pillar to post . . . And, an impartial leaven doesn't save the loaves from the battle's accountability. Payment. Take this. Death resolves it with yesterday's fee. . . indeed I do not seek exactitude As for a precise interface, anymore. Death does not pressure anymore.*

*No verdure will bring me back to its non-being:<sup>70</sup>*

<sup>63</sup> That is, "and do not reach the bones of the ancient dinosaurs" who inhabited the bottom of the sea.

<sup>64</sup> In the last two lines of the stanza, the poet alludes to the process of purification for souls of the dead to be purified before reincarnation as related in traditional Zoroastrian knowledge: see the Pahlavi compilation *The Bundahishm* ("Creation"), or *Knowledge from the Zand*, 30:1: "[the souls] are feeding on water." See online: [avesta.org/mp/bundahis.html](http://avesta.org/mp/bundahis.html). With sarcastic bitterness, the poet says that the souls are encased in black tar and the water will not penetrate, which is to say, these souls cannot be purified.

<sup>65</sup> Fire: the transformative eternal fire symbolized in fire temples. The well water feeds the fire in this context.

<sup>66</sup> Dacca Stock Exchange in Bangladesh.

<sup>67</sup> Translating from the consonantal text, the Persian yields something like "a mindful God." Truth is of paramount importance in Zoroastrianism.

<sup>68</sup> The Arabic reads *al-'hd*, here meaning the era of the covenant, which is to say, the Muslim, Jewish and Christian covenants – their written scripture.

<sup>69</sup> Sarcasm about what the poet sees as an initial and fundamental omission in the Muslim, Jewish and Christian covenants.

<sup>70</sup> Non-being: "Persian *ast* ('is') indicates an ever-moving chain of relations with no fixed *entity* to hold onto (every *entity*, say A, will be dissolved into "A is B" and so on, as soon as one tries to define it). Therefore, the whole reality or what we see as existence ("found" in our world) resembles an ever-changing world of *astī* (is-



*No devotion to mountains  
 It is not mountainous  
 Not my grandfather, the mountain<sup>71</sup>  
 Not my grandmother, the forest  
 No brethren on oppressive roads  
 Not my sisters, the smooth rocks in river drainage  
 No dawn will bring me back to its non-being.  
 No loss or victory  
 No road will bring me back to its non-being:  
 No virtuous parents,  
 No virtuous lovers  
 No virtuous killers  
 No death of the virtuous [those whom death does not stop as regards resurrecting  
 Their own prophets in kingdoms of death] will bring me back to its non-being.*

*Not the celestial or keenness of his daughters for the tambour  
 Not the skippers of the abandoned  
 Not navigating great dunes will bring me back to its non-being.  
 Not sleep's life under death's tree*

*It did not take thousands of years for mankind to know that orange is a color  
 And not an orange  
 And that the instincts of a wolf pack are confused by the meridian's disappearance  
 At its hemisphere*

*And along with disbelief, the nobility in according credence to disbelief in that tree  
 Of which I am its shade, it will bring me to its non-being.*

*Death is unexplored; death has its wake-up call as inner tidings of the birth of a thief  
 From legends in waiting, it will bring me back to its non-being.*

*No death is simple in great times  
 Or haphazardly fixed in insignificant times, it will bring me back to its non-being.  
 No scourge is certain the mountain is actually the highest  
 The cruel the virtuous like a good soup  
 They will bring me back to their non-being.  
 While mothers are all mothers of the drowning in the doctrines of the drowning  
 No mothers will bring me back to their non-being.  
 There is  
 Nothing*

---

ness) flowing in time and space," See online: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Being#Being\\_in\\_Islamic\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Being#Being_in_Islamic_philosophy). Otherwise, existence is "beyond the skies" and non-existence is in the created world.

<sup>71</sup> One source describes a flood long before the one of Noah's time, in which the craft was grounded on Mount Judi/Cudi, and the Kurds survived.

*To bring me back  
To its non-being.*

*Turmoil and chaos:<sup>72</sup> keep tally, dear country, what is astonishing; what does not summon  
Except in collapse.*

*Keep tally. I unload sacs of junk from shattered records. The reckoning is*

*Cruel like in the legends, dear country. I do not want territory anymore. I do not want  
Heaven above me anymore. Let my heart stop beating. Let the unaware passage  
Commence. Let stop the migration from time<sup>73</sup> to what  
Time does not know. Let stop the land's hostility upon hostility.*

*And the altercation between the Gardens*

*And the lapse of minutes fragmented with their passage  
Dear country.*

*In shoes*

*Or barefooted, the sacrificial victim passes with ease to the mountain. No.  
Let my heart not stop beating, dear country. Let it not afford a chance for a last  
Glance at what will not come back. Most likely I would not notice gravity anymore  
And not lightness anymore. The hands would be air, and hearts air. Nihilism would be  
Displacement of unbelief to a recast of unbelief.<sup>74</sup> No sea here.*

*No sea there*

*No comfort here*

*No comfort there*

*No mountain here*

*No mountain there:*

*Countries go by the book for the most part*

*And the slain do not rise to the occasion anymore. Indeed there is a harvest of complexities!  
And the winds furnish for indwelling. Low-priced moons are for sale. The slain  
And their wares are displayed at the onset of twilight. The behavior of the slain  
And the ethic of the slain in rituals of death as if at the death of a nation. The graves  
The trade off, and the exchange,<sup>75</sup> and stupefaction of aubergine at the whiteness of teeth  
In the mouths of the horrified, dear country.*

*The cutting off of the existing, at the last, dear country.*

*Many stalls for horses of stone. Many graves for verses on stone.*

<sup>72</sup> The two Arabic words together mean "turmoil" or "chaos."

<sup>73</sup> Time: the Arabic is *al-waqt*.

<sup>74</sup> Unbelief: Arabic, *al-kafr*.

<sup>75</sup> Exchange: a reference to Islamic Law.

*Have faith in tormented stone, dear country. I would not relinquish Heaven to anyone  
 Even asked, since yesterday I handed it over, with assurance, to beggars. A charitable  
 Death. The slain, charitable. This! . . . Water is ashamed of itself, dear country.  
 The wailing of the sea, and lament of the clouds. Redress: The gods' indignation redresses  
 Acts of death. And if a recess . . . even no repair to Heaven's breakage  
 And bolts. Now then! There is no heart in your hands;<sup>76</sup> no offering in your pockets.  
 Wait on! Whenever there is no heart in your hands; no offering in your pockets. Whenever  
 There is no  
 Gateway;  
 No  
 Window;  
 No house;  
 No garden  
 And no place;  
 Whenever the fear of the Lord does not know you,  
 And the Lord of the dawn;<sup>77</sup>  
 Whenever dislike does not know you like it should,  
 And does not know others like it should;<sup>78</sup>  
 Whenever there is evil the acclaim is nothing other than that,  
 And temptation is rife;  
 Whenever bodies writhe like the notices writhe after the festivities,  
 Delirium alone will explore the practicable road in all honesty;  
 Whenever daytime, it is for the vile to be admonished by despised light,  
 Then temptation, the whole of which is astronomical,  
 And its nature multifaceted, uncertain as the righteousness<sup>79</sup> of religion's indignation;  
 Whenever there is no winner, there is only wailing,  
 And places of evil and underworld;  
 Whenever the outcome courses the night,  
 Dust courses through those proud of acclaim's smoke;  
 Whenever, however, there are breaks at times of exhaustion,  
 And on exhausting days,  
 And exhaustion after years;  
 Breaks  
 From  
 The weight of  
 Exhaustion,  
 And from the  
 Onslaught of  
 Ferocity  
 As overwhelming ferocity;*

<sup>76</sup> "When money is in your hands and not in your heart." That is, a righteous man should give to the poor.

<sup>77</sup> Qur'an, *Surat al-Falaq 1*: "Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn. . ."

<sup>78</sup> Qur'an, *Surat al-Baqarah 216*: "It is possible that you dislike a thing that is good for you."

<sup>79</sup> Arabic 'affa: righteousness, integrity.

*Whenever, however, there are breaks from firing,  
 There is manufacture of sober solicitude,  
 And commensurate distress;  
 Whenever the gateway is obscure  
 And the goal obscure,  
 And the means are ranting, strategies do not transpire;  
 Whenever compassion has the imprint of rashness, it is like fish scales,  
 And those chanting anthems about the blades of belief<sup>80</sup> in a comedy,  
 And ethics of fleeing by foot; to reach the cliff by foot; for leaping with their feet  
 From  
 Blasphemy  
 Of son  
 To  
 Blasphemy of  
 Father;  
 Whenever there is a Lazuardi<sup>81</sup> monster in depictions of nation-states,  
 There is revulsion from some sides,  
 From some cities,  
 From some shores;  
 Whenever water is attuned to the birds, and that which there is,  
 That which happens nights,  
 When there is a bolt of lightning  
 When there is the extolling of suicide in their poems;  
 Whenever the scoffing, there is the feverish east,  
 And amicable myth,  
 And moonstruck men,  
 And myth of the honey – now then, dear country:  
  
 There is nothing that means anything;  
 No longer does a handshake mean a handshake.  
 No longer is it customary for the wisdom of the Gathas to pour forth.<sup>82</sup>  
 Blood sacrifice is lauded. Immortality is lauded.  
 Certain ruination is lauded.  
 Certain hunger.*

*Certain aphorisms make the hand of the suicide bomber encompass her. Compliant ruination  
 Fascinates, ruination is hilarious. The rubble of obliterated beliefs in obliterated idols,  
 Dear country. What is certain, secure? A candidate for a secure sphinx  
 And secure nonbelief.<sup>83</sup> What is secure freedom?<sup>84</sup> Where is it? Freedom*

<sup>80</sup> An allusion to extremism during Ashura.

<sup>81</sup> Lazuardi: presumably an allusion to an Indonesian novel with illustrations depicting young Muslims in an incendiary way.

<sup>82</sup> Gathas: Zoroastrian scripture (Prophet Zarathustra's hymns).

<sup>83</sup> Nonbelief: *kafr* in the Arabic.

That is  
 Without windows,  
 Or gateways. Freedom that is verdure clipped by recitals of panegyric, and freedom. . .  
 Keeness in a thimble of creativity. Hypothetical, this. Hypothesis on all too familiar ash,  
 Then sermonizing to suffering masses, dear country. With the pride of a viper. Conceit of the  
 Barking bitch, the meanings nevertheless adhering to the barbarous wisdom, dear country.  
 The stranger  
 A silent partner  
 Bless you,  
 And the invaders  
 Silent partners.  
 Since if you split up a country with wanton damage you cannot hold on to wealth except for  
 Loot,  
 Dear  
 Country  
 And since you are left in the lurch, you will not be the perpetuation anymore. Now then  
 A legacy  
 To refine the problem.  
 Now then  
 Of course!  
 Like your skeptical brother,  
 Dear  
 Country.  
 Strength is honey. Freckled women as if predestinations. Show me, dear country, strength,  
 Honey, and women, freckled as if predestinations. Or is this discouragement from frivolity,  
 Because of their lethargy, and abstinence from frivolity? Blood sacrifice is comely. Sweet.  
 Blood sacrifice is sweet in children's hands. The shrill sounds are the camels  
 Of the dead and the tambours in the hands of the dying. A slip of the tongue, dear country.  
 The killing is more  
 Dreadful  
 Than  
 The ranting  
 Of their hysterical mothers. Take that from the cities and their organs; the nations and  
 Their organs. I shall be attuned to you from the rock,<sup>85</sup> its lament that falls into rivers;  
 From fear sweating;  
 From fear worn,  
 And dissension,  
 And the legacy  
 And lingering; from fear revolting like a heart. Preferable the hearts' fall into the fall of  
 The countries  
 So that

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<sup>84</sup> Freedom: *nafus* in the Arabic.

<sup>85</sup> Rock, i.e. steep cliff.

*There will be no turning back  
 No option;  
 Only  
 Sighing  
 About the root cause.  
 A parade of exhausted cities,  
 Dear  
 Country.  
 Excuse me for saying this.  
 Excuse me for this slip of the tongue. Or do I hear right, according to the places demolished  
 Despite their names? The gist of what exhausted my lungs. Attribute my slips of the tongue  
 To the aegis of boredom, poetry endowed with meters of lamentation. Attribute my slips to  
 Drowsiness from the length of the war. Attribute to strength, the heroes afflicted by the  
 Iniquity of their weaponry,  
 Dear  
 Country.  
 Embrace the Shi'a, the hungry  
 Whereas the ordeal of revenge, plainly a slip on the tongues of prisoners.  
 Understand this from me: Heaven's solution. There is no goddess  
 Except  
 The goddess  
 Of those who cry for help.<sup>86</sup>  
 It smacks of the alien, audacity in slaughter;  
 It smacks of the alien and capacity for transport of ruined cities to the gods, the fragments.  
 Inner minarets. Inner hearts. The settlements, the mausoleums  
 Of al-Jawf,<sup>87</sup> and the settlements' fatwas. The inner Heaven, dear city.  
 The nation-states are eloquent over the appointed heads of the killing, dear country.  
 The gold is the kill. The mist is the kill, dear country.<sup>88</sup> A similitude, the road to the  
 Massacres. A similitude, the killing for the killing.  
 And the dying for death,  
 And orchards deserted for deserted orchards.  
 A similitude, the baffling uproar of gratitude that the shameless playground kicks up<sup>89</sup>  
 An illustration, dear country.  
 The sacs are torn apart.  
 Every principle is torn up too. Will you not profit from the mortality rate of the dying?  
 Take this. Aphorisms on the average flow from the tongue of sculpted images. And just know:  
 Coercion with fire leaves only cinder, and with coercion of smoldering in sleep there is a  
 Dream of fire, dear country. The created, the sands; and the created, the jellyfish, the blood,*

<sup>86</sup> An allusion to the Persian goddess called Vate – one of Ahura Mazda's seven yazatas. She is the goddess of the wind, who 'hears the cries of the world.'

<sup>87</sup> In Saudi Arabia.

<sup>88</sup> Mist is mysticism's sign.

<sup>89</sup> Playground: the powers involved in proxy warfare on the territory of a country suffering from inner disturbances.

*And various water and aquatic species. Our times are a quest for evil, dear country. Ridden with corpses. Ridden with the death of those taking leave. Sacrifices are restricted to the Stranger's interpretation of the shadows from memoirs – your memoirs,*

*Dear*

*Country.*

*Out of bounds for mothers to give birth anymore,*

*And for parents to want to give birth. They are prevented by the force of the knife*

*Over the slaughter, and the force of the carnage, and the direction of the blaze.*

*Restraint, dear country, the booty from the killing is on the pavements. Ghosts rise from the Destruction, incarnate in pillars, in ceilings, and in the walls. The crowd one by one face*

*The facts. . . the ruins. The assailants are here, dear country. The triumphant, the assailants are in your orchard – an orchard of entrails. What do you intend to do, to turn away?*

*You were a constant since you created an abode with blocked aperture, and narrow door.*

*Rhapsodic incidentals. On purpose postponing the botheration of raucous panegyric,*

*Dear country. You have done your utmost, as have I, to fathom what he does not understand:*

*Salvation is not mine; salvation is not yours.<sup>90</sup> Indulgence is*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The problematic*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. Remorse is*

*Unaffected assuredly. The rape and killing*

*Unaffected assuredly. The loot*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The degradation*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The arrogance*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The burning before the slaughter,*

*And after the slaughter,*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The disappointments*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The rancor*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The missing and dead*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. Defilement*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. Fraud*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. Betrayal*

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<sup>90</sup> Salvation is from Heaven.

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. Blasphemy*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The ashes*

*Unaffected*

*Assuredly. The assailants...s...s unaffected, likewise the mendacity, assuredly, dear country.*

*Bring them seats to come to a standstill on existence's ruin.*

*Let them bring rejuvenation along with their helping hands, homage to an inferno*

*Let them bring things worthless like frantic signs of progeny*

*Let them bring resting places hallowed like the scrotum, dishonored*

*By the trade in the whore's fornication and her bulge. Shame on you, dear country:*

*The resting place of the young girl and the resting place of the rotting bones.*

*The mendacious in resting places gnawed by the teeth of their mothers. Her bosom*

*Hidden, the chest torn – she is unable to utter a sound anymore. The below hidden*

*Like the surroundings, the insanity. A deputation*

*Gladness*

*Because of*

*Know-how*

*Rapturous gladness.*

*You shame your genesis as a country, you were not thus, dear*

*The country*

*The shackle;*

*The country, the lock;*

*The country, the gateway's queue to travel on foot. A race of savages aroused by excessive*

*Surmise. You decided, not considering return. Or that you would return surreptitiously*

*Because of the pardon for you of the refugee for his blasphemy? The country*

*The shackle;*

*The country*

*The lock.*

*The country, as for a turnabout, that was once.*

*That will not happen anymore.*

*Praise be to the skeptics,*

*And the blackguard of the skeptics, the two incomparables on the shelf. And the history of Al-Hubal;<sup>91</sup>*

*And the al-Hubal lineage;*

*And the cult of al-Hubal;*

*The reinstatement of al-Hubal, dear country. Even as whelps gnaw at them, predestinations*

*Decline. The murderers stand exposed in a world of markets, their women profit*

*From the sale of golden bones, hearts and innards at stalls for golden lineages.*

*The murderers are exempt from the current law on wealth. The murderers,*

*Their flight is in crossing from records of accounts to the blazing gardens. Interpreted.<sup>92</sup>*

<sup>91</sup> The spelling in the Arabic text is "al-Habal," and not "al-Hubal."

<sup>92</sup> The Arabic is *mutarjimun*, i.e. 'according to the mutarjimun,' those who translate and interpret.



*Blood for blood diluted and flesh for flesh torn due to the rules of the day. The murderers  
 The sober  
 Walking  
 On the  
 Silken  
 Thread  
 Of the murder. The heirs to the cities of the fathers plundered by the peoples in them.  
 And the aphorisms in them.  
 The sacrificial victims in them are as scintillating as the flags of the conquerors  
 And the garments of their whores, dear country. As for the murderers, there can be  
 No password to the paths [to Heaven] except for those on them. The eminent scholar  
 On the rudiments of [the path of] suffering,  
 And the imprint for hemorrhaging,  
 And sparking off terror. The committing of aggressions  
 With spoliation  
 From generation  
 To generation.  
 The saddlebags with the tambours of the dead reminding them  
 Of the settlement owing;<sup>93</sup> the conveyance  
 In  
 The  
 Documentation  
 Of the due processes  
 Of the burials. The murderers, the precepts,  
 And the legitimacy of the plaint,  
 And the long ages of the wisdom of the sphinx.<sup>94</sup> The murderers  
 With names  
 Or  
 Without names;  
 With refinement  
 Or  
 Without refinement. The murderers, they hibernate in the pearl of the mu'allaqa<sup>95</sup>  
 For immolation of the perennial song. The murderers, they are the rancor  
 From the bite of history upon history. The murderers, they hear encouragement  
 With the whisper in the air they breathe,  
 The murderers  
 Their joy is in  
 The perpetuation  
 Of their names  
 Along with the reproach of nations, dear country.*

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<sup>93</sup> Syrian tribes traditionally used the tambour as a call to combat.

<sup>94</sup> Implied by the choice of vocabulary in Arabic: "And the whirlwind of shock modernization."

<sup>95</sup> Collection of ancient qasidas (poems) hanging on the Kaaba in Mecca.

[From a book forthcoming in the near future]

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