



MAHMUD KIANUSH
Of Birds and Men
Poems from a Persian Divan



Mahmud Kianush

OF BIRDS AND MEN

Poems from a Persian Divan

Rockingham Press

Published in 2004 by The
Rockingham Press
11 Musley Lane,
Ware, Herts SG12 7EN
www.rockinghampress.com

Copyright © Mahmud Kianush, 2004

The right of Mahmud Kianush to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77
of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN 1-904851-00-2

Printed and bound in Great Britain
by Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk



Contents

I - Of Birds and Men.....	7
DREAMS.....	8
WHITE IN BLUE.....	9
LOVE IN BOSNIA.....	10
YOU FLEW AWAY.....	11
TREES.....	12
TRAVELLERS.....	13
FAR BECOMES NEAR.....	14
NOT I, BUT MY WORDS.....	15
REMEMBERING.....	16
AFTER FORTY YEARS.....	17
IN HER BLACK EYES.....	18
A DROP OF DEW.....	20
FACES AND FEATHERS.....	22
COME BACK.....	26
VERBAL COMMAND.....	27
IMAGINATION.....	28
FOOTSTEPS.....	29
DIDUS INEPTUS.....	30
MYSTERY OF THE VOID.....	33
NEW WORLD ORDER.....	34
LIKE A DUMB PARROT.....	36
IN WONDER.....	38
MY PEOPLE.....	40
FLUTTER ON.....	41
FLAMENCO.....	42
POLITICS.....	44
SELF-IMAGE.....	45
EAST AND WEST.....	46
THE RED ROBIN'S GOSPEL.....	48
SELF-DOUBT.....	50
WILD DUCKS.....	51
A WHITE PIGEON.....	52
CUCKOO.....	54

II - To Live Again.....	57
AT THE THEATRE.....	58
CHANGE	59
TO LIVE AGAIN	60
BONFIRE	61
WAYWARD KITE.....	62
LOTTERY	63
THE NAKED EYES.....	64
BROKEN.....	65
A CHILD IS A POEM	65
EPISTLE ZERO.....	66
MOSSES.....	67
HIDE-AND-SEEK	68
BURDEN OF MEMORY	69
DICTATOR.....	70
IN ALL THE COLOURS	71
IMPOTENT MENACE.....	72
INNOCENCE	73
WHEN IT COMES	74
UNDER AN OAK TREE	75
ANOTHER BATTLE.....	76
THE MOON.....	77
ABOUT THE POET.....	78

I - Of Birds and Men

DREAMS

Flying in a dream
Gives me the joy of the sublime;
But how can anybody know
That no bird has ever dreamed
Of hands!

WHITE IN BLUE

Light,
 colours,
 songs;
Wings,
 wings,
 wings;
But of all the colours
Only when White
Sings in Blue,
An awakening rainbow appears
Across the dome of ennui.

LOVE IN BOSNIA

Soon the chicks will fly,
And will no more remember their mother,
Who will no more remember her chicks.

A grace or a curse,
I can never forget
Whatever has happened on earth,
Not even the loneliness of God
Before the creation of Man,
Let alone the Bosnian girl
Who hanged herself today
On the kindest branch of a tree,
On her way to Despair,
Out of the cruel, treacherous Hope.

I wonder whether
It was before
Or after being raped
By a lost soldier,
When on Death she bestowed
Her whole virgin Love!

YOU FLEW AWAY

Our eyes met in silence,
At the point of bewilderment,
Where the Black Jungle lost
Her loneliest child.

Ashamed of my innocence,
I closed my eyes,
And in darkness
You flew away.

TREES

At the bus stop,
On the other side of the street,
The trees seemed stoically silent
In their agony of exile.

I said to myself:
“Perhaps they are possessed
By the spirit of steel and stone;
They invite the birds
Only to make them blind and mute.
They are an ugly confusion
Of angry graffiti
On the walls and windows!”

When the bus arrived,
The trees stared at me
With their blurred green eyes,
As if saying:

“You have sold your eyes
To distrust and fear,
And your ears
To the melancholy of thoughts!
Who forced the birds to lose
Either their pride
Or their freedom?”

TRAVELLERS

Happy are the birds
For they always live
As travellers.

At international airports
People naturally forget
The conflicts of their beliefs,
And peace returns to their hearts,
Because in their minds
They are all travellers:
Only there and then
They do not belong
To illusions.

FAR BECOMES NEAR

The stars filled my eyes
With the infinity of the Unknown,
And my heart
With the despair of emptiness.

Then the flight
Of a golden eagle
Broke the infinity,
And explained the Unknown
As Bright, Blue Hope;
And the melodic call
Of a blackbird
Filled the emptiness
With the fragrance
Of white jasmines.

NOT I, BUT MY WORDS

A few notes,
Mostly soft,
And when harsh,
Still musical,
With no arrogance of distinction,
Eager to merge into each other
In a few different arrangements
To make a few simple messages,
All easy to imitate,
Easy to remember:
Sufficient to keep love
As novel and fresh
As the life of
New generations.

O songbirds,
I was sincere in my intention
When I created Words.
I wanted them to be
Clear, honest mirrors
To my thoughts and feelings.
You know
It was impossible to live
Without being understood and loved;
But the folly of sophistication
Became the curse of my life,
And Misunderstanding began
With the satanic power of interpretation.

Now not I,
But my Words
Rule over my World,
And Love withers away in silence.

For Anthony Hyman

REMEMBERING

With the smell of the sea
Mixed with my ancient blood,
I watch the diving birds
Picking the ripened fruits
From the exuberant bushes of the waves.

Feeling blissfully light and fresh,
My memory opens
To the faceless, forgotten lovers,
Whose ashes had been scattered
Over the sea.

After an adoring look
At the infinite blue,
I close my eyes,
And the darkness fills my mind
With immortal wings
And white blossoms.

AFTER FORTY YEARS

They have five children;
They could have twenty:
Though with all their desires and hopes
For an endless future,
Two were enough
To populate
A new planet.

For forty years
Their sky was covered,
Piece after piece,
With rainless, black clouds
Of unasked questions,
And they always lived
In a desert of doubt.

Two by two, the swans
Are sailing on the lake;
And the sun is shining
As faithful as ever.

IN HER BLACK EYES

In her black eyes,
Which were shining
With a gentle smile
At a delightful vision,
I began to see
A happy small boy,
His head full of fairy tales,
Returning home
Through the green fields
In the gathering darkness
Of an early summer evening.

The carefree boy
Was murmuring a song
In which a nightingale
Told a silent red rose
Of his burning love.

The carefree boy
Was also striking
Two cool, flinty cobbles
Against each other,
And smiling with delight
At the galaxies of sparks.

Then the gentle smile left
The girl's black eyes;
Her beautiful face
Suddenly grew dark
With a glare of disgust.

She was a young, proud hawk,
Deceived in her hunt
By an old, fleshless pigeon,
Rotten and nauseating
Long before the blow of death.

She turned her eyes away,
As if saying to herself:
“How I hate
The ugliness of lust
In the dying eyes
Of decrepit, old men!”

In the sandstorm of her disgust
I began to see
An old dying vulture,
Abandoned by his flock
To rot away in anguish,
And be spat upon
By hungry, laughing hyenas.

The happy small boy
Stopped singing,
And threw away the flinty cobbles.
In a sudden gust
Of a freezing wind
He lost his hope,
And sinking deep in his sorrow,
Began to cry.

A DROP OF DEW

A drop of dew
Glimmering
With the colour of its base
In the silvery light of dawn
Can remind us
Of many, many things:
Its appearances depend
On who,
 where,
 and
 In what mood we are.

In the silvery light of dawn,
Following the night
When Hypocrite the Tyrannous,
In a godforsaken land,
Charged a young sceptic
With blasphemy
And sent him to the firing squad,
This drop of dew,
Is a sea of sacred blood
In which are reflected
The forgotten, glorious faces
Of all who have been killed
Since the beginning of Thought
Only because they wanted to say:

“I love freedom!
I have my own Ideas,
And my own Ideals!
I also am the Truth!”

But a drop of dew
On a rose petal,
Or a green leaf,
Or an apple blossom,
Or anything else,
In the silvery light of dawn,
For a little bird
Is always only
A drop of water:
The awakening drink of the day.

Her thighs are still firm,
With such vigour of passion
As those that can fascinate the best seeds
At the highest peak
Of any young man's pleasure.

Her breasts are still full,
And shaped with such charm
That can give the hands of old dying men
With ecstasy of life,
Excellence in the art of stroking
To write the finest ghazals
On their sphere of bliss;
And with such rich hidden springs of milk
That can suckle
Up to weaning time,
The healthiest triplets of love.

But men are not like birds:
They have faces,
And the face must be beautiful
To be desirable and loved.

Among the birds
The male must be beautiful and strong,
And the female
Healthy and fertile;
While among men
Wealth and social position

VERBAL COMMAND

According to my proverbs
I can never kill
More than two birds
With one solid stone;
But according to my verbal command,
Time and time again,
I have easily slain
Millions of my brothers
With one hollow word.

IMAGINATION

A kite of nylon,
In the shape of an exotic bird,
Fluttering in a gentle wind
With prismatic radiance
Under a peaceful, blue sky.

Under the peaceful, green canopies,
On a faraway island,
The festival of plumage
With the poetry of colours,
And the music of patterns,
Illuminated
With blissful songs and dances.

In my imagination
I see my hands holding
Myriads of long strings
Tied to the thin legs
Of all the birds of Paradise.

FOOTSTEPS

It was dark and still
Like the eyes of a corpse:
I was not lost,
But I did not know
Where I was going,
For many years had passed
Since I had left my home
To forget the pains of betrayal.

In the dead silence of the night
I heard heavy footsteps,
As if someone was following me
With a naked dagger in his hand.
Then,
At the height of my fear
The sudden singing of a nightingale shone
Like a thousand torches,
And I turned with courage:
You were standing there
With your empty hands outstretched,
And a sad smile on your face.

I asked you who you were,
And in a friendly tone you said:
“I do not remember!
I am not lost,
But many years have passed
Since I left my home ...”

Or the foolishness of those Islanders,
Who enjoyed your flesh,
But did nothing to protect your eggs
From monkeys and pigs.

Whatever was the cause
Of your extinction,
It was beyond your will and power.
Similar to yours was the fate
Of the Fearful Lizards
And their winged cousins
Sixty million years ago
When, perhaps, a huge
Asteroid happened
To collide with the Earth.

I am Human;
My intelligence is my fitness;
I have weapons
With which I can destroy
All my enemies,
Even those Koranic evil spirits
Which are no more invisible
To my cosmic eyes:
I can clearly see
The hidden faces of darkness;
I can hear the heartbeats
Of the farthest stars;
With a lightning
Flashed from my wisdom
I can explode to vapour

Any impertinent asteroid
Before it can reach the orbit
Of my divine planet.

Yet,
 sometimes,
 I,
The Master of Universe,
Am afraid of myself,
Because I dig out and waste
The future fruits of the Earth
And make it barren;
I replace the vital air
With the poison of my arrogance;
I feel that someday
By the fiendish magic
Of my glorious power,
All the living things
Will turn into stone.

I am Human,
And unlike you,
 Dodo,
Too intelligent, to survive.
I am my own extinction:
Armageddon is my head,
But God lives in my heart:
Perhaps I am the Phoenix!

MYSTERY OF THE VOID

The higher a bird can fly,
The sharper are its eyes by nature;
And by nature it is
That no bird does ever lose
The sight of the Earth;
And if it does,
Even I would cry:

“O wretched bird,
Have you been possessed
By the spirit of a man
Himself already lost
In the mystery of the void?”

Under my feet lies the Earth,
With my roots firmly set
In its nourishing heart;
And yet,
I see it only when,
Walking,
 with my eyes beyond the stars,
I would stumble
 on its solid,
 reproaching,
 presence.

NEW WORLD ORDER

I am the peaceful memory
Of a small volcanic island
In the middle of the Pacific Ocean,
Before the invention
Of adventurous canoes.

It is an early sunny morning
Of an early summer Sunday,
In the middle of the last decade
Of the Twentieth Century:
But the air is not delirious
With the opium of Heroism;
Nor the horizons in flames
With the psychosis of Glory;
And the Virgin of the heavens
Is not yet deflowered
By the Demon of Immortality.

I am just awoken
By the cry of joy,
Risen from an ancient dream
In which my eyes
Were flowers;
My fingers ripened fruits;
And my mouth
Sweet and fragrant with love.

Let us talk in your language,
O little chaffinch
Worshipping the light
On the green hedge:
I want to forget
The tearful eyes of the old man,
Dispossessed of his homeland,
All his past now buried
Under the ruins of all his future
Somewhere
In Yugoslavia the Disintegrated,
At the dawn
Of the New World Order.

I want to forget
The frozen fear
In the eyes of a small head
Severed with a sharp machete
From the body of a girl
Somewhere
In Rwanda the Independence-stricken,
At the dawn
Of the New World Order.

I want to forget myself:
Let us talk in your language,
O little chaffinch!

LIKE A DUMB PARROT

After millions of years
I broke my dumbness
With the word Love,
And it became the keynote
For the music of Life,
With millions of songs.

Soon there came a day
When I found myself
Lost in the labyrinth
Of my Vocabulary.
In my wanderings
I thought and thought hard
Until I could make
A quintessence
Of all my words:
A shining torch
For my long journey
Around and across
The darkness of the unknown,
And that word was Goal.

Then like a child
So amused I became
With my toy Machine
That I lost the word Love,
And my shining torch
Flickered down and died.

Now like a dumb parrot
I am spellbound
With the rhythmic sound
Of my satanic toy;
And all my words
Have lost their values
As mere synonyms
Of that magic sound:
Mo
 ney,
 Mo
 ney,
Mooooo
 neyyyyy ...
Moneymoneymoneymoney!

IN WONDER

In his vision
The whole universe
Is a blank canvas;
And his soul flows
Into his fingers.

In his ecstasy,
He passionately mixes
Simple, blind pigments,
And with an artless brush
He creates again
The paradise he has lost.

In his divine art
The trees and flowers
In their beauty and charm
Rise above the work
Of the dumb Nature,
For they grow and bloom
Out of his dreams.

In exile on Earth,
By taking precedence
Over God's creation
Perhaps he wants to forget
The Garden of Eden.

Yet, sometimes, when he looks
At a white lily,
Or a stately oak,
He feels he is lost
And wants to cry.

To hear the melodies
Of his thoughts and dreams,
He creates his own
Graceful songbirds
With wood and metal;
And when they sing,
God listens in wonder,
And all the angels
Go into rapture,
And lose their innocence.

Yet, sometimes, when he hears
The simple song
Of a willow warbler,
Or a blue tit,
He feels he is lost
And wants to cry.

Sitting in silence,
And sunk in sorrow.
He has forgotten
His own image.

FLUTTER ON

Flutter,
 flutter on,
And keep the Sun shining
With love.
And the Earth alive
With green smiles.

All the stars serenely throb
In peaceful blue dreams
To the rosy rhythm
Of your fiery wings.

Flutter,
 flutter on,
And give the air
The smell of jasmine
And the taste of honey:

You are the miracle bird,
Risen
From the memory
Of the Sun's Womb
In the heart of the Earth.

Flutter,
 flutter on
 my heart.

FLAMENCO

He is the son
Of glorious Mithra,
The god of light;
And in his veins flow
The blood and milk
Of Anahita,
The goddess of Water.

He has a throat
Of the crystal of happiness,
And vocal cords
Of the silk of love.

When he chants his hymn
In Praise of the Day,
The spell of sleep breaks,
Darkness melts away,
And the gate of Dawn opens
To the festival of Life.

In his royal attire,
Reflecting the beauty and colours
Of the most precious jewels
With which legends and history
Have adorned
The wealthiest kings and emperors;
And his sacred head,
Gracefully crowned
With fames of glory,
Lifted high above the terrestrial;
And his shapely chest swollen
With the breath of bliss,
He majestically stands
On the top of the world.

POLITICS

Standing up in the sunshine,
I look around the world:
It is all a naked desert,
With not a single green bush
In which a small bird
Can take shelter from
The burning wind of despair,
And sing its loneliness away.

Our minds were green mirrors,
Radiating with white blossoms
Of joyful mysteries,
Pulsating in the boundless universe.
Now they have turned
Into dead wood,
Surrendered
To the termites of politics.

Standing still in a green robe
In this naked desert,
Taking the simple image
Of a hopeful tree,
I may be saved
From damnation
By a lost small bird
Which may rest on my head
To think and remember
A forgotten song.

SELF-IMAGE

Life without a mate,
Be it in a cage,
Or with all the freedom
Of the universe,
For you,
O Canary,
Is a void of agony.

Silent but restless,
You move around,
Like the shadow
Of a mute thought
In the moonlit night
Of a cemetery.

They give you a mate
By hanging a mirror
On the wall of your cage:
Naively beguiled
By the image of your self,
You begin to sing:
Your heart a happy garden
In the Springtime of love.

But we humans see
In the magic mirror
Of self-deception
The real image
Of our desired mate
In the sunshine of life.

For Russ Willey

EAST AND WEST

In the East,
Where I opened my bewildered eyes
To the suddenness of life,
And swaying between
Nostalgia for Womb
And the tormenting fear of the Self,
I let my eyes take comfort
In the blue bosom of the sky:

It was not a star,
Nor an aeroplane,
But a wood pigeon in flight
Which excited me
To stretch out my hands.

In the mysterious passage
of childhood,
Somewhere in the East,
The clear silence of trees
Was a mirror
In which I could see
The green image of my loneliness;
Yet, the cheerful sparrows
Which enjoyed their long chitchats
In the pavilion of our persimmon tree,
Did inspire me
To think of birds
As the winged words and songs
of trees.

Now in the West,
Where I am watching
The sun of my dreams setting,
My English friend,
Just returned from a visit
To my Island of Birds,
Tells me in a strange tone:

“Well, Mahmud,
It was very enjoyable;
But I honestly don’t like
Your Sparrows and Pigeons;
And wonder what the hell these pests,
These Flying Rats,
Are doing there,
Among your Nightingales
And your Birds of Paradise!”

I smile in silence,
and keep to myself
The apocalyptic response
That begins to flame in me:

“Yes, you are right, Russ;
Unfortunately, like us,
unlike other birds,
Sparrows and pigeons,
Have infected the life
In towns and cities
With the pestilence
Of overpopulation;
Yet, for the life on Earth
They may not be
As deadly a pest
As we are becoming!”

THE RED ROBIN'S GOSPEL

When the Red Robin perches
On the top of the Pomegranate Tree,
I know that it has for me
A happy message from you,
And I listen with delight.

Each drop of its song
Is a paradisiacal spring in the air.
I drink it with faith,
And forget the promises
Written on my bewildered soul with fire:
Promises of hopeless dreamers
Who spoke through the ages
Of false darkness
About happiness in the Other World.

I believe in every word
Of the Red Robin's Gospel.
From the top of the Mount Pomegranate,
Sitting under the holy Sun,
The small bird
Gazes over the serene sea of grass,
And sings its universal words,
And in them I hear you
Talking clearly to me
Without Gabriel standing between us.

Your message has never been written,
So it cannot be read by eyes.
Moment by moment
Your Word is the re-creation of life,
And the gift of reading it
Is here in my heart,
Linked through all the galaxies
To the tiny heart of the Red Robin,
Sitting on the top
Of the Pomegranate Tree.

SELF-DOUBT

Do not let my hands beguile you,
When they offer you seeds:
They are restless with desire
For touching you with love;
They wish they could become a bird
like you:

Whiter,
softer,
purer
Than the virgin snow
On the summit of the Mount Damavand
Under the summer sun;
But they themselves are beguiled
By the innocence of my heart,
And they do not know
That somewhere, on my way to God,
The angel in my heart
Was choked to death
By the poisonous mist of Madness:
The infection I call Wisdom.

Only in rare moments,
When my hands begin to shake
By the horror of what I see
In the mirror of Self-doubt,
The look of a roasted pigeon
On the plate of Life
Penetrate my palate
Like a burning venom.

WILD DUCKS

O wild ducks.
Floating away in thousands
In your self-rowing boats
Across the hanging ocean
Towards another warm land,
Do you have valid passports
With proper visas?

You wild ducks would not laugh
At me and my advice;
You are too free
To know anything
About freedom;
But I,
A man of the Twentieth Century,
Have no country:
I am a stranger anywhere I go,
Because I know
What freedom is
And because I fight
To reclaim it.

For Brian Bull

A WHITE PIGEON

Man was standing
On the roof of his ivory tower,
Looking up
At the floating white clouds
For inspiration.

He was not sure
If all he had done on earth
Since the beginning of time
Could ensure
His immortality;
And he was reviving
His imagination
With wonderful memories,
Making a new plan
In the light of which
He might see himself
Shaking hands with God,
In the pleasure garden
Of eternal fun.

A white pigeon, flying,
On its way to the nearest pond,
Dropped a piece
Of its unwanted thoughts.

Man wiped his forehead
With the back of his idle hand
And, in anger and frustration,
Looked up again
At the floating white clouds,
Wondering on which to put the blame:
The white Pigeon,
The white clouds,
Or on the height
Of his ivory tower!

CUCKOO

It was a mid-spring dawn in Nishabour,
Or was it a mid-winter sunset?
And the willow trees
Were dancing in a gentle breeze,
Or were they dead still
In the solemn silence of a heavy snow?
And Omar Khayyam,
When searching for a striking rhyme
To suit the last line
Of an unfinished Ruba'i
Or perhaps still trying to select
From amongst the parading images
The best few for his theme,
Suddenly heard a cuckoo
Calling him from
The ruins of Persepolis,
Asking in mournful notes:

“Where... where...where...
Where is that might,
That glory of the past,
For the pride of which
The King of Kings
Felt free to talk to God
More as a rival
than a friend?”

Some thousand years later,
Somewhere in the Godless,

Kingless Empire
of Machine,

When hope is sterile,
And lies are divine,

I,
One of Omar Khayyam's last true sons,
In the desert of my solitude,
In the ruins of my soul,
Am asking the cuckoo of the clock:

“When ... when ... when
When will Man stop drinking
The hemlock of the Past
To the triumphant reign of the Future,
While in the Present he lets
Love die unlived?”

And the wooden bird,
Chained to the wheel of time,
Replies,
In notes alien
To the rhythm of my heart:
“Never ... never ... never!”

II - To Live Again

AT THE THEATRE

The curtain goes up,
The scene absolute darkness,
The magician invisible:
Suddenly a big explosion
And when the chaos
Takes the rhythm
Of a soft melody,
With turning notes of light,
A lump of rock
Becomes blood and blossom,
And now you see a Universe
Of wonder and beauty.

While at the theatre
Enjoy the magic,
For if you rack your brains
To discover the secrets
Of the Magician's act,
You will lose the excitement.

CHANGE

Having said goodbye to an old friend,
Whose new face
Set fire to my memories,
And walking through the corridors of late Autumn,
I lost the warm, green Summer of my veins
To the dark, naked branches of trees,
And felt cold and barren in my head.

A strange fear prevented me
From looking into my mind
To see if my heart had not turned
Into a black hole
Taking in all the fallen leaves of Time.

How hopelessly the falsehood
In the smile of an old friend
Can darken the face of the world!
For me walking through the corridors of autumn
Had always been as blissful
As the festival of songs and colours
In Springtime.

BONFIRE

In such a long, cold Winter
With the deadly breath of an ice age,
What we need
Is making a bonfire
Of all our memories:
How else can we wait
For a new Spring
That may never come?

Let us sit and count the stars
As they melt
On the palm of our hands.

For Dr. Manouchehr Sabetian

LOTTERY

Eyes heavy with the agony of dreams,
Feet struggling against the chains of deprivations,
Hands hanging with the burden of emptiness,
And hearts cold with oblivion.

Happiness is a sacred vineyard
Spread all over the Earth,
But only those who stand and watch
Have the time and the right
To drink of the Wine,
And to smile at themselves
In the mirrors of Power.

When tired, hopeless and thirsty
You return from the Vineyard,
They see the flames of anger in your eyes,
And, hiding their fear,
They offer you Happiness
In the empty bottles of Lottery
To intoxicate your nerves of revolt
In colourful dreams.

THE NAKED EYES

I tried and tried
To see things naked
With the eyes given by Shame,
But it was all to no avail.

I had to travel all the way back,
From the City of the Moon
To the ruins of my Dreamless Land,
To regain my naked eyes.

I passed through the mountains of Hate and Fire,
Across the oceans of Blood and Sorrows,
And asked the spirits of Leopards and Superb Starlings
To help me in my search
Among the shadows of White Plague and Red Poverty,
In the cinders of fig trees.

Today,
Having returned to the City of Nightmares,
I kissed the Water
With my naked eyes
And found her skin
Sweeter than honey
And more enlightening than wine.

Now I am resting
With my eyes on the naked wall,
Listening to the soothing symphony of Silence.

BROKEN

A plain,
Horizon to horizon
Covered with snow,
Devoid of motions and sounds.

Staring into
The shining darkness of my head,
I see myself a tree:
Its trunk the toil of breathing,
And its foliage
Confusion of consciousness.

Broken are the borders of my body,
And the Infinity is felt
As light and comforting
As Nothingness.

A CHILD IS A POEM

A child happily smiling
Without hopeful thoughts,
Or happily asleep
Without sweet dreams,
Or happily crying
Without any sorrow,
Is a poem
Still unwritten.
With the truth of nature
And the perfection of life.

EPISTLE ZERO

I am the friend of God,
Coming from the Nothingness,
With the experience
Of those three unknown seconds.

I have a message for you:

Love Thy body;
It is all Thou hast;
It is Thou and Thy universe.

The space
With all its galaxies,
Born and unborn,
Is Thy head;
The sun
Thy heart and Thy eyes;
The air Thy lungs;
The earth Thy entrails;
The light Thy thoughts,
And the darkness Thy doubts.

Blessed be Thy body.

MOSSES

So poor, so humble, the mosses,
Yet the happiest nation
In the world of plants:

Their togetherness
Is the same
As their love of life;
All equal
In their enjoyment
Of water and sunshine.

Who is my enemy
But I myself,
If I do not,
Or cannot, love you?

HIDE-AND-SEEK

Every day
A new galaxy is born
In my universe
With fresh eyes of hope
Open to the old deepening darkness,
Where God keeps on hiding himself;
And every day,
Feeling to be closer to Him,
I smile like a child
Playing hide-and-seek with his father.

But how unfair!
The game will stop unfinished,
And my universe will explode
Like a bubble
With a sigh.

BURDEN OF MEMORY

If I am my own past
With no future
Beyond the span of life,
Why should I remember
The birth of stars,
The rise of conscience and shame,
The bowl of hemlock
In the hands of Socrates?

Being so fragile, so small,
How great is
The burden of memory?

DICTATOR

Prison,
Torture,
And execution:
Who is the real sponsor of them?

You admire him;
You worship him;
You give him the right to think for you,
Because you want to be always
As light as a bird,
And as free as a child:

Now you are nothing,
And he is you;
He is a nation.

But do not forget your brother
Who thinks for himself,
And does not want
To be a bird or a child;
Do not put him into prison;
Do not torture him;
Do not execute him,
And think!

IN ALL THE COLOURS

We burn and breathe
As a cell
In the body of the Universe.

The Sun burns in all the colours:
Green in leaves,
In our dreams and our hopes;
Red in roses,
In our blood and our desires;
Yellow in dandelions,
In our hunger and our despairs;
Blue in the sky,
In our thoughts and revelations...

The Sun breathes and dreams in the Earth,
And the Earth smiles and sings
For all the stars:
We are the Universe;
We are Nothing.

IMPOTENT MENACE

While awake,
You are afraid of darkness
Because you are watched
And you cannot see.

Darkness is full of evil eyes,
Full of hunting claws
And poisonous teeth;
Its stillness breathes
The spell of death.

But there is this other darkness
That comes with sleep:
Sweet,
Sweeter than the blood
In the umbilical cord;
Safe,
Safer than the life
In the fortress of the womb.

And only dreams,
These unwanted memories
Of the dark fears
And the futile hopes,
Prowling on the edge of wakefulness,
May sometimes play
An impotent menace.

INNOCENCE

What were the first words
I made and used in Paradise?
Were they Peace, Beauty, and Love?
Perhaps not,
Because only when the Sun sets
And Darkness comes,
Can I feel the absence
Of what I have named Light.

If it was Thinking
That made me Human,
I think I have never been Innocent.

For my poet friend, David Perman

WHEN IT COMES

It comes to me,
Not from the desert
Of the forgotten dreams,
Nor from the winter
Of the dead memories.

It comes to me
Like a sudden desire
For living free,
With no dreams,
No memories.

It is not a note
From the joyful heart
Of a passing bird,
Nor a momentary vision
Of a childhood love.

And when it comes,
I feel as vast
As the whole Universe,
Yet as light as a bubble
Of happiness.

And only when it is gone
I write again.

UNDER AN OAK TREE

In the blue rapture
Of a summer day
I am lying down
On a breathing bed of ageless grass,
Under the wondrous dome
Of an oak tree,
My eyes blissful
With the awakening melodies
Of the skylights:

Peace and freedom return;
The old age is forgotten;
The unknown lovingly smiles
With the face of the unsought;
No change in anything is desired;
No tormenting echo is left
Of the new and ancient memories.

THE MOON

The moon,
The full moon,
An unbound swan
On the shimmering lake of night;
And my eyes,
With manumitted sight,
The roaming spirit of darkness,
Relieved
From the glaring wounds of daytime.

The moon,
The happy moon,
My cosmic mind,
Naked,
Out of its tormenting cocoon:
No more poisoned
By the gravity of the phosphoric lime.

The moon,
The happy, full moon.

ABOUT THE POET

[Mahmud Kianush](#) was born in 1934 in Mashad, in the north-east of Iran. His family moved to the capital, Tehran, when he was about 12 years old.

He began writing poems when he was 12 — mostly *ghazal*, a classical Persian form similar in some aspects to English odes and sonnets. In high school, when he was about 16, having already read the works of some European writers in Persian translation, he was encouraged to write short stories and his first story, published in the *National Students Organisation Weekly*, won a national prize. Later, while still in high school, his short stories were published under different pen names in leading literary weeklies. One of these weeklies was *The Third Force, Literary Weekly* whose editor, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, had assumed the stories sent by post to him were written by a writer of his own age and level.

After studying for two years in the Teachers Training School in Tehran, Mahmud Kianush began teaching in elementary schools. At that time he was nineteen and while teaching, he attended Tehran University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English language and literature. In his first year in the university, he published his Persian translation of John Steinbeck's novel, *To A God Unknown*.

It was at this time that he began writing modern poems, using a form similar to 'free verse', but this kind of freedom of style did not satisfy his search for aesthetic innovation and soon he returned to metrical poetry, developing new rhythms on the basis of the classical ones, making them suitable for different subjects in accordance with their musical reflections in his mind. He used the same metre throughout a poem, but with lines of different lengths and with rhymes of new arrangements, in harmony with the images and meanings.

His contribution of poems, short stories, essays and translations to the leading literary magazines and periodicals soon made him famous enough to be invited to undertake the editorship of the prestigious literary monthly, *Sokhan* (Speech). After four years, he resigned from this literary post and devoted all his time to writing. However, he was then invited by the Department of Educational Publications in the Ministry of Education to examine the situation of children's poetry in relation to their five biweekly magazines which were published for the students of elementary and secondary schools. What he found was that the few poets who wrote for children thought that versifying educational and moral subjects in a simple, childish language was the only way of writing poems for children. Feeling that it was his national duty to do something about these cultural shortcomings, he began writing real poetry for children. During his eight years of contributing to these magazines, he derived certain principles from his own experience and wrote a book about children's poetry. Later this book became a manual for poets who wanted to write for children. Even to this day his poems are imitated by many poets who write for children.

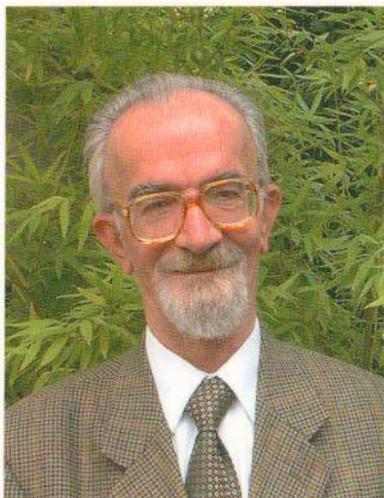
Kianush collected and published his poems for children and young adults in eight books, all of which won different awards. He became known as the founder of children's poetry in Iran. But he does not care for this title, which he believes to be quite contrary to his real achievement as the messenger of the truth hidden in the heart of perceptible realities which, in occasional blessed moments, reveals itself to him on the horizon of the artistic beauty. He says that in Iran, a country where the people, especially the intelligentsia, have since the late nineteenth century been possessed by the politics of freedom and social changes, the popularity of a poet depends on his being the artistic mouthpiece and interpreter of the political aspirations of the populace. On the other hand, a poet like himself, as one of the few who have not

sacrificed the universal principles of the art of poetry for the pleasure of temporal popularity, is considered difficult, obscure, elitist, philosophical, idealist and so forth.

Poetry for Mahmud Kianush is the language of the childhood of historical man. He believes that the first human beings began to understand themselves, the world around them and the mysteries of the universe by their poetical interpretation of everything they saw and felt, and that this is what real poets have always done and will always do. He agrees with the ancient idea that “man is a political animal”, but he adds that man must remain faithful to his primordial nature and first be a poet.

In 1974 Kianush who, as a civil servant in Iran, was an adviser to the Secretary of State for Administration and Employment Affairs in managerial and training publications, asked for early retirement, and in 1976, with his wife and two children, moved to London. For the last twenty-three years he has worked for the Persian Section of the BBC, as a freelance producer of literary, cultural, and sociological, as well as bilingual English teaching programmes.

In Iran Mahmud Kianush has published 14 books of poems, five collections of short stories, six novels and six books of literary criticism. For children and young adults, he has published five books of stories and eight books of poems. He has also translated and published works by John Steinbeck, D.H. Lawrence, Eugene O'Neil, Aimé Césaire, Samuel Beckett, Athol Fugard, Par Lagerkvist, Federico Garcia Lorca, Konstantin Cavafy and others. He has a variety of other books ready for publication (among them five books of satirical poems) but none of these has any chance of passing through the censorship in Iran. Mahmud Kianush edited and translated the anthology, *Modern Persian Poetry* (Rockingham Press, 1996), including the work of poets ranging from Nima Yushij (b.1985) to those born in the 1960s.



Poetry for Mahmud Kianush is the language of the childhood of historical man. He believes the first human beings began to understand the universe and their own existence by the poetical interpretation of everything they saw and felt, and that this is what real poets have always done – and will always do.

In a country like Iran, where since the late nineteenth century people and particularly the intelligentsia have been possessed by the politics of freedom and social change, Kianush is prominent among the few poets who have not sacrificed the universal principles of the art of poetry for the pleasure of temporal popularity. He agrees with the ancient idea that ‘man is a political animal’, but he adds that man must remain faithful to his primordial nature and first be a poet.

“With my English poems,” he says, “I want to greet the people of my second home in a simple language and let them know that I am a Persian poet.”

Cover photograph by N. Kasraian

Rockingham Press

£7.95

ISBN 1-904851-00-2

00795 >



9 781904 851004