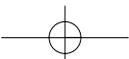
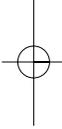
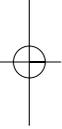


SEE HOW I LAND





See How I Land

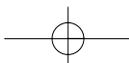
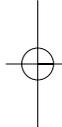
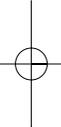
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SEE HOW I LAND

**OXFORD POETS
AND EXILED WRITERS**

EDITED BY

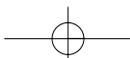
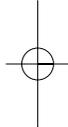
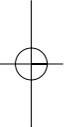
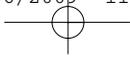
**Carole Angier, Rachel Buxton,
Stephanie Kitchen and Simon White**

WITH A FOREWORD BY

Shami Chakrabarti



The Heaventree Press



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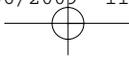
Staff and volunteers at Asylum Welcome – notably Jean Kaye, Nikki van der Gaag, Heather Steele – and at Refugee Resource – Simon Stagg, Dave Todd, Amanda Webb-Johnson – gave us many kinds of crucial support. Both organisations also made financial contributions.

At Oxford Brookes University, we would like to thank Professor Linda Fitzsimmons, Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities, and Professor Janet Beer, Vice-Chancellor, for their ongoing support of the project, as well as Edwina Towson, Deputy Director of Legal Services, and the PR team: Kate Moore, Dave Penney and Ed Reed.

The Oxford Literary Festival and its director, Angie Prysor-Jones helped with the promotion of the work, staging readings of some of the poems in their unpublished form at the Festival in Christ Church College, Oxford in April 2009.

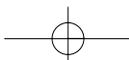
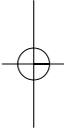
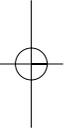
Our publishers, the Coventry-based Heaventree Press, run by Jon Morley, gave a valuable commitment to the project from the outset.

Finally, we would like to thank all the writers and participants who gave so exceptionally generously of their experience, their creativity and their work.



Asylum Welcome

The project and this anthology have from the outset received a great deal of help from Asylum Welcome, and particularly from one of its trustees, Stephanie Kitchen. Asylum Welcome was established in 1996 to work with asylum seekers, refugees and immigration detainees. Advocacy and media work are an important part of what it does. This is not the first time it has helped to publish writing by asylum seekers and refugees: *The Story of My Life: Refugees Writing in Oxford* edited by Carole Angier (Charlbury Press, 2005) and *How the World Came to Oxford*, edited by Rory Carnegie and Nikki van der Gaag (Oxford Literary Festival, 2007) are both available from Asylum Welcome (www.asylum-welcome.org).



Contents

Foreword <i>Shami Chakrabarti</i>	9
Introduction <i>Rachel Buxton, Carole Angier</i>	11
A room of ghosts <i>Carole Angier</i>	15
Dawood Jamie McKendrick	17
Dheere Gregory Leadbetter	21
Sadia Abdu Siân Hughes	25
Normalisa Chasokela Annemarie Austin	31
Abraham Conneh David Dabydeen	35
Amina Benturki Carmen Bugar	41
Yousif Qasmiyeh Bernard O'Donoghue	45
Eden Habtemichael Lucy Newlyn	53
Jean-Louis N'Tadi Chuma Nwokolo	57
Nazra Niygena Anne Berkeley	63

Deji Ogundimu Afam Akeh	69
Filda Abelkec-Lukonyomoi Vahni Capildeo	73
Adepeju Olopade Maria Jastrzębska	79
Ali Askari John Fuller	85
Biographies	91

Foreword

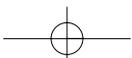
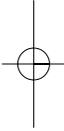
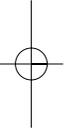
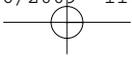
Human rights and the arts are intrinsically connected: both elucidate and celebrate our humanity.

Our civil rights are supported by the arts, because they are capable of transmitting meaning and values as nothing else can. Similarly the rights and freedoms so cherished by artists – rights and freedoms which many of the writers in the following pages have been denied – are defended by human rights laws such as freedom of speech, thought, religion, and conscience.

In *See How I Land* the intersection of arts and human rights is vividly demonstrated. It brings distinguished names in contemporary poetry together with new voices from the refugee and asylum seeker communities. By so doing, it challenges us to think again about the fraught questions of sanctuary and immigration. More than this – it asks us to think again about what it is that we, as humans, value, what it is that we share, and what it is that we desire to protect and to celebrate: freedom, safety, family, and love.

Ben Okri has written that “Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals or nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations.” This anthology tells us new stories. If we here in Britain in the twenty-first century can learn to include these stories as our stories, we can begin to expand that secret reservoir of values, and enrich our nation and ourselves.

Shami Chakrabarti
Director of Liberty



Introduction

How and why this anthology came to be

See How I Land arose out of the 'Oxford Poets & Refugees Project'. This was an initiative funded by the Arts Council, and launched by the Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre and the Oxford charity Asylum Welcome in autumn 2008. It brought together 14 published poets (most of whom were Oxford-based) and 14 exiled writers (most of whom were refugees or asylum seekers). Each established poet worked one-to-one with an exiled writer over a series of three half-day workshops, held at Oxford Brookes in November and December 2008, and led by Carole Angier.

Each pair was asked to work on three items:

- a piece written by the exiled writer, mentored by the established writer;
- a poem written by the established writer, arising from or inspired by the experience;
- a jointly-authored paragraph providing a context for the two main pieces – explaining, for instance, where the ideas came from, whether or not translation was involved, and how particular words or forms were agreed upon.

This is the source of the structure of our anthology, in which each pair of writers is represented by a cluster of work.

We had several aims for the Oxford Poets & Refugees Project. First, we hoped to see the production of some new, high-quality, thought-provoking literature. Second, we wanted to enhance readers' awareness of the human stories behind the politically-charged issue of immigration. But perhaps most of all, we wanted to give a voice to those whose voices are seldom heard, and whose stories are so often judged 'lacking in credibility' by the UK asylum system.

Many refugees' and exiles' lives are shattered by the trauma of forced migration, and by the tremendous loss that accompanies it. But the compulsion to tell what has happened, the sharing of stories and narratives, constitutes an act of hope and affirmation: the act of communication, of reaching out through words, presupposes that someone is listening.

Greg Leadbetter and Dheere suggest something of this in their explanatory paragraph. Before the first workshop, they

tell us, Dheere hadn't written anything for a long while. However, "he had a strong impulse to communicate", and "wanted to produce a poem that said something about what he has been through, lost, and held onto as a survivor." His poem, 'Not Music', ends with just such a potent image of survival. Greg's poem, 'Translation', speaks likewise of redemption as well as loss; and it is from this poem that we took our title.

Rachel Buxton

The workshops and the work

The plan was to start with a set of workshops for the exiled writers alone, to help calm their nerves: about writing in English, of difficult things; about writing itself, which is nerve-racking for anyone.

But when the time came, we realised it was better to introduce the pairs straight away, and let them deal with everything themselves. So the workshops contained not only the exiled writers, of every level of experience, but all the Oxford poets as well – including many so distinguished that I had admired them for years. Now, therefore, the nervous person was me.

Nonetheless, the first workshop began. It is becoming more important every day to tell your stories, I told everyone, to counter the tabloid scare-mongering of 'swamping' and 'cheating'. You can be witness writers, like the great Italian author Primo Levi. Levi said that the stories of Holocaust survivors were like the tales of a new Bible. I did not say: this book will be a new Bible – I wouldn't be so bold, and it would only make them nervous again. But I hope and believe that in a small way it is true.

Let's introduce ourselves, I said, like this: think of an image that conveys you – the first thing that comes into your mind when you think of yourself. Now tell us, together with your name.

It was only fair that I should begin. My image was the scene at the end of *Schindler's List*, in which hundreds of people pay their respects to Schindler's grave, and all are descendants of Jews the Nazis tried to kill. Rachel's was the gum trees in her Australian home, catching fire from the sun. Everyone followed.

There were rivers and a bright blue sea, there were birds and mountains and beloved people; there was a family sitting at breakfast in an English garden (which I could see the exiles from Africa found hard to believe).

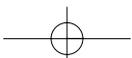
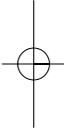
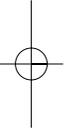
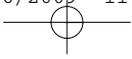
Several people kept this first image for their poem – Yousif Qasmiyeh’s idea of holes, for example, and Normalisa Chasokela’s image of a little girl looking into a light. Others moved on to memories called up by our second exercise, which was to write a letter, or went in other directions entirely, as they worked together over the next two sessions. Beloved people were still the strongest presences, or rather absences – lost families, friends, neighbours. The natural world came a close second, filling our Oxford room with flowers and birds, rivers and trees. And then there were the individual images – Amina Benturki’s horse, Eden Habtemichael’s ice, and Dawood’s multicoloured tablecloth; among the Oxford poets, Maria Jastrzębska’s fires from driftwood, Annemarie Austin’s bridges, and Jamie McKendrick’s “burly, unscareable rats”, to name just a few.

The results were fascinating, and not only melancholy. As Rachel has said, the collaboration between Greg Leadbetter and Dheere produced two beautifully redemptive poems; and Afam Akeh’s account of England even managed a note of sly humour (“in summer the natives are friendly”). There are some truly dark notes – Abraham Conneh’s killer, for example, and Adepeju Olopade’s abusive husband; and last but not least there is some fertile ambivalence about our project itself. “Neither of us revealed matters of the heart / Or ate, or stayed long enough to warm up”, Carmen Bagan wrote; and our room, which I saw as kind and bright, seemed to her “cooped-up”. She wasn’t the only one. For Anne Berkeley too, working with Nazra Niygena, brightness – as perhaps for most of the writers in the room – was elsewhere. “In a room thick with coffee and overcoats”, she wrote,

Nazra bends to the paper. Her eyes
follow the trail that winds from her pen
out through the Oxford fog, the dripping trees,
back to a village clearing, where a man
tends avocados and sweetcorn in the early sun.

We hope this book will start a trail from their pens to here.

Carole Angier



CAROLE ANGIER

A Room of Ghosts

After a disaster
this is where we come:

a bright clean room,
blue chairs

trestle tables against the walls
small hills of biscuits

(shortcake, chocolate chip, custard cream)
hot flasks of coffee and tea

But this time there are
no strangely silent children

no hollow-eyed grandparents
no mattresses on the floor

We are not here to be rescued
We are here to remember

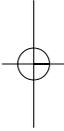
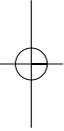
We are here
to tell

This kind light room
is a room of ghosts

the ghosts of children, sisters, friends
lost or left behind

the ghosts of mountains, rivers, seas
that were our homes

If you listen
they may speak



DAWOOD & JAMIE McKENDRICK

We spent the three workshops talking about Dawood's journey from Iran to Britain. Dawood has learnt some English, but for the details of his story we needed the expert assistance of Sheherazade McKean, a Farsi interpreter.

There must now be many hundreds of thousands of parallel and similarly epic journeys undertaken by people desperate to leave impossible situations, each one in its own way both unique and representative. These journeys require courage and endurance, particularly for those – the majority – with little money, and often subject the travellers to unbearable hardships. Even if they reach their intended destination, a whole new set of difficulties and uncertainties awaits them. When Dawood set off from Iran to Turkey he was in a group of a hundred and fifty people, mainly from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Along the way he was prey to ruthless exploitation by various paid 'agents' who were responsible for arranging the stages of his journey, as well as being utterly dependent for his survival on his fellow-travellers, and on the rare acts of goodwill he encountered. Many such travellers die en route, and most well know the risks they are running.

Dawood, who has written many poems before leaving Iran and since arriving in Britain, has offered one of these, 'Night Letter', for the anthology. This was fluently and effectively translated by Sheherazade. It deals with the bitter experience of exile. The only explanatory note which the translator suggested it might need concerns the image of the rainbow-like tablecloth – this refers to the colourful array and variety of the neighbour's food rather than to the fabric of the cloth itself.

Jamie's poem relates to a small portion of Dawood's story. It deals freely with the material, and though written in the first person, makes no pretence to speak in Dawood's own voice.

DAWOOD

Night Letter

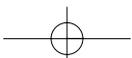
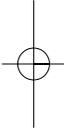
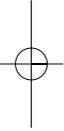
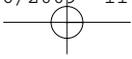
sometimes I scribble over my name with a black pen
to leave no trace though maybe a trace remains
sometimes I see a dead sun in the looking glass
as I look at myself I paint the mirror black
I always write about the moon and sun
night scares me yet I write about the moon
tonight and every night I'll write a night letter
a stricken letter from the stars to the moon
saying how darkness suffers from the lack of moonlight
our sun was asleep – God's will had veiled it
if I say God does not exist I may be hanged
they'll call me an atheist – God will be angered
my God knows only that I'm homeless wandering
close by the sea longing for a drop of water
my next door neighbour's daughter sleeps hungry
when she asks for bread her mother says there's none
misery is all my brother's seen since youth
this was his destiny my mother said – God did not care
another neighbour plays with bread
God slips between the fingers of his hands
his tablecloth's more vivid than the rainbow
we are as different as the earth and sky
though both of us are human born into the same world
if this is how I had to be – maybe God's will was unwilling
why was He not willing? Did I not pray enough?

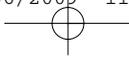
JAMIE McKENDRICK

Odyssey

“Burly, unscareable, only the rats
were at home in the camp at Patra
– you can see for yourself this foyer of hell
if you go on holiday to Greece.
I stayed, unsure how to leave, nine months in all,
apart from the two days in hospital
after being picked up by the police.
I survived, unlike Ali
whom I’d been with from the start – we’d argued
and agreed every step of the way, walking by
night through the mountains to Turkey,
avoiding landmines, praying for rain
to drink, rationing out the tinned food
we’d thought to bring, our trainers in tatters.

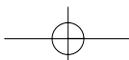
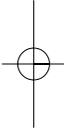
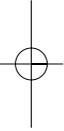
That day we had a lunch of rice
then said goodbye. He chose a lorry
he was hoping would board the ferry
to Ancona. You have to hold on for
dear life above the back axle
to a sheaf of oily wires – one pot-hole,
a sudden stop or an acceleration,
and chances are you’ll lose your grip and fall.
To send his body back to Iran
would have cost many times more than
the few dollars we kept hidden
in a bar of soap, carefully hollowed out
and sculpted over. All we could do
was bury him by the camp at Patra.”





DHEERE & GREGORY LEADBETTER

At the beginning of the project, Dheere hadn't written anything for a long while, but he had a strong impulse to communicate, partly due to the isolating effect of being made to stop work – after six years – due to a change in the UK asylum rules. He wanted to produce a poem that said something about what he has been through, lost, and held onto as a survivor. At the same time, the thoughts and memories which such a poem would draw on were both all-consuming and difficult to express. Dheere began the process by writing down something of his experiences alone. This process of recollection was continued face-to-face with Greg, who wrote down what Dheere said and, through questions that picked up on certain aspects of Dheere's story, began to find a shape for the poem. A draft was produced, which Dheere and Greg then finished together.



DHEERE
Not Music

Mum and Dad knew the war
would come. They argued about it:
Mum wanted to leave before it
began, but Dad wouldn't go
until it happened. I found out later
that he'd arranged our U.K. visas.

When it came I was going to school.
I heard a noise. Ta ta ta, tun. Ta ta ta, tun.
I asked my Dad what it was. He didn't want
to frighten me, so he told me
it was music. I saw smoke nearby.

The next day we stayed in the house, but
they came. My Dad's driver was working
for them. He opened the door
for them. By the time they had gone,
I had lost my family.

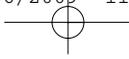
They were coming for me, too,
but the driver told them
He won't see us again.
So I am the survivor,
left to see everything.

After the war started people asked
which tribe you belonged to.
They never did before. But hate
brings hate and it's followed me
here. It's the first question
my countrymen ask. But
that country is no longer my home.
That life is lost, and all I have left of it
is photographs
and the man
in the mirror.

But there's a beach on the Indian Ocean

DHEERE

where I went every Friday
with my family. With many families.
That will be there long
after the fighting has stopped
and the pyres have gone out,
ready for a time
when people will be strong enough
not to fight,
but to survive instead.



GREGORY LEADBETTER

Translation

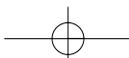
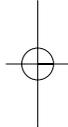
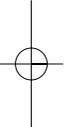
Take away the hands that held me,
the eyes in which I first saw
love, the mouths from which I learned
to speak.

Take away the house I played in,
the bed I slept in, knowing
they were near. Take their footsteps
from the earth.

Take the city and the sky with it,
the streets I walked looking
for them, take the plane from around me
in mid-air.

See how I land with what they gave me.

Hands that are ready to hold,
eyes in which you will see
love, a mouth that is learning
to speak.



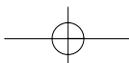
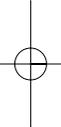
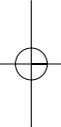


SADIA ABDU & SIÂN HUGHES

My daughter's name is Hunan. It means Love that was Lost, Returned to Me. There is no word for this in English. When I chose her name, my family said I should take the name of one of the daughters of The Prophet, but my husband said, "Leave her alone. Let her have this one thing." My son I named Murad, which means a Wish, or Desire of the Heart.

In English you cannot call your child 'Wish' or 'Longing' but in Arabic you can do this. My third child, Ahmed, was named for The Prophet, but in my heart I call him a new name, Sabri, which means My Patience.

When we write together we find there are words for a feeling in one language, and no word for the same feeling in another. You might search forever in the dictionary and never find the right word. It doesn't exist. If you listen to someone's feelings, you must listen for more than the words. You have to listen with your heart.



SADIA ABDU

For Hunan, Murad and Sabri
(Lost Love Returned to Me,
Desire of my Heart, My Patience)

I am writing this my history book
a message to my children
they might read it and they will know
where I am, that I have not forgotten them
they are part of my heart
I want them to know
I am nothing without them

I was born in Mogadishu, from the Ashraf tribe, which they call 'Re Hamer' meaning Red Skin. I grew up in Saudi, where my father was Imam of a Mosque in Jeddah. When I left school I worked for Saudi Airlines. I had a good life. But after my parents died, my residence visa was not renewed, so I returned to Mogadishu with my husband and two children. Then suddenly in Somalia the problem was civil war.

The first people to attack are the Hawaia tribe, and they start killing, and burning houses and raping women. Everyone was leaving to save their lives.

With some others from our tribe group we escaped to the mountains. In the evenings the men went out to try to get food and water. When the shooting was quiet in a village we came to look for food, and we found an empty house. But one of the Hawaia saw us and told the soldiers "There are Ashraf in that house."

In the night the soldiers break down the door and start beating the men. They beat my husband, and break his nose with the end of a rifle. And then they start choosing the women and I was one of those women. And they get us naked and they tie our legs and arms to four stakes in the ground and they rape us one after another. They hold up the faces of our husbands, and force them to watch. The women are screaming and the children are crying. Our suffering is their pleasure. Then they drink and do it again. And when they finished they heated metal spikes in the fire, and branded us like animals, on our hips and our sides and our thighs and our private places.

SADIA ABDU

After, one of the women bled to death. I remember she was very pretty, very young. There was no hospital, no medicine, no treatment. I was bleeding, and at that time I did think, perhaps I would die too. My leg was broken from the end of the gun, with the bone sticking through. They did this when they tied me to the ground and I was fighting them. My arm was broken too. My back was injured and I could not walk.

There was an old woman who tried to help. She put spider-web on the burns to dry the skin, and she knew about herbs, so she got leaves from a farm and gave them to me, so we could start moving, very slowly. It was like a nightmare, hiding from the soldiers, defending ourselves from wild animals. After one month we reached Kenya.

We came to a village called Voi. We worked for a farmer there, not for money, only for shelter and food. We had a round hut made of straw, no windows, no door, no furniture, only a bed made of sand with animal skins. If we want to cook we get the wood from the forest and make a fire.

The beautiful thing there is waking in the morning, and hearing the birds in the trees along the river, and the people grinding fresh coffee beans outside their huts, the smell of the coffee, and the green hills all around.

We worked in the fields every day, in the heat. I cannot dig the fields or work like the other women, but they help me, and no one tells the farmer. If they need someone to go and prepare food, they send me, because it is easier for me to sit and cook. My son Murad quickly learned the language. He learned to climb trees like the children there, and to play their game with stones and circles. My daughter Hunan was quiet. She was a very sensitive girl, always staying with me, helping me. She could see it was painful for me to move.

I had my third baby there, and I was very scared. For the first two, I was in a Saudi hospital. Now I was injured, and far from help. There, the custom is, when a woman goes into labour she leaves the village by herself and goes far away. But the women saw that I was afraid, and they stayed with me. The baby was born healthy, a boy, and we called him Ahmed.

But we had no money, no passports, nothing. I need help for my injuries, but there is no help for us there. My bone is still sticking through my skin. My burns will not heal over. Then my

SADIA ABDU

husband finds Somalis in another village, and with their help he gets to a city, to a telephone. He calls his brother in Saudi and asks him to send money. His brother promises 5000 US dollars. He finds a smuggler and asks him to take us to any country where we can find refuge. The smuggler says 5000 dollars for each person.

My husband decides I must travel first. I do not want to go without my children. The youngest is only one year and seven months. But in Muslim families, the husband decides, the wife can say nothing. So in the night time the smuggler comes and takes me away. I am crying for my children but my husband promises his brother will send more money, and they will follow. I need help, and I cannot get it there. So I trust him. I have to go.

I flew to the UK. At the airport the smuggler took my forged Kenyan passport and destroyed it. He said 'You don't know me. My job is finished'. And he disappeared. A Somali friend of my husband met me at the airport, and the next day I went to the Home Office to register as an Asylum Seeker.

The second day I was in the UK my husband telephoned his friends in London to ask, did I arrive safely? They said yes, she is here now. And since that day I never heard from him again, and I have no news of my children. I have no idea what happened to them. I don't know if they are dead or alive. If they died, I must bury them and accept my destiny.

I received good treatment for my injuries. I trained to work for the Airlines again, and found work. When I saved enough money I travelled to Ethiopia to look for the children. There was no news of them. Then I went to Egypt, but again I found nothing. Someone took a message to Voi, but in the village they said, they left, no one knows where they went. I will never give up searching for them. I will never give up my life because one day they might come for me, and I must be there for them.

Hunan would be twenty-three now, and Murat two years younger. The youngest, Ahmed, would be ten. Every day I pray for them. I pray that God will protect them, and that I may see them before I die. Allah is Great.

SIÂN HUGHES

Winter

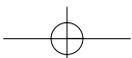
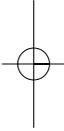
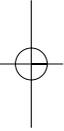
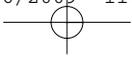
It's late. Our shoes on the concrete path sound small and far away, the trees are blacker than the sky. No stars. The little one says "Can I run home?"

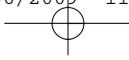
and she's gone, silently, over the grass. The night swallows her breathing. My eyes do not have time to adjust. My feet keep on moving: I believe

in the gap in the hedge, the kissing-gate, the muddy edge of the field along the playground, the moon behind clouds, the time it takes

for a pupil to dilate. If I call her, she will answer me. There's no need to call. Under the streetlamp by the corner house, she'll be waiting, or if not,

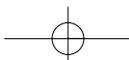
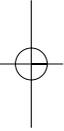
at the turn in the road, by the garages, on next door's drive, under the porch by the front door, stamping her feet, shouting "What TOOK you so long?"





NORMALISA CHASOKELA & ANNEMARIE AUSTIN

Normalisa's ideas for her poem arose from Carole Angier's workshop: the image of the child and her tears in the lamplight was a starting point, and the workshop letter addressing that child and praising her strength took her further. She wrote a longer prose version of her image, which provided all the other images of this poem, especially those in the last verse, which keeps nearly all her original wording. Some phrases changed in discussion, for instance "cold hard floor" became "concrete floor", "paraffin lamp" became "home-made lamp". When Annemarie suggested making the material into a lullaby with a refrain, the first version of this refrain addressed "little girl", but this became "little one" for a fonder feeling and better agreement of vowel sounds. The penultimate stanza then arose from the wish to bring out the causes of the child's sadness and the voices of the adults who were supposed to be caring for her.



NORMALISA CHASOKELA

Lullaby

Little black girl sitting on the rug
laid on the concrete floor.
It's very quiet. Nearly dark.
Be strong, little one, be strong.

You lift your face and stare
up at the home-made lamp.
Its flicker catches tears
in your eyes, on your cheeks.
Be strong, little one, be strong.

It's warm but you're lonely.
It's peaceful but you wish
the sadness would go away.
Be strong, little one, be strong.

You think maybe no one will come
for you again. No mother for you.
Only the cruel ones who say
"No one wanted you." "That's just
what a rejected child would do."
Be strong, little one, be strong.

The windows are open
but the air is hot and thick.
A big moon. Small crickets
make noises that sound
like rhythms to a song.
Be strong, little one, be strong.

ANNEMARIE AUSTIN

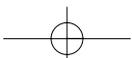
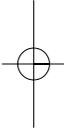
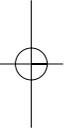
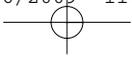
On The Way

When I came to our meeting
I walked up the hill towards it
and my walker's hill was taller
than the one for cars and buses
which sank below that pavement
as I rose towards the summit
till I might have stepped sideways
to the double-decker's upstairs
if it had stopped next to me.

I thought mine was the real hill
and that other they drove along
a pressed-on, stamped-down
excavated contour – for the height
of the trees kept pace with me
as I climbed like a hang-glider
who hauled her struts and sails
to an apex she might take off from
trusting her weight just to air.

I'd remembered another route
the Ottoman bridge in Tirana
which formed the small hypotenuse
to a two-roads right angle and
short-cut its corner off – enough
of a function once the stream had gone
just to wind and three dry rocks
so the bridge was its own watershed
an up-ramp of river stones then down.

And I climbed and crossed it
and climbed it and crossed again
for the pleasure of breasting
the light as I crested its hill
and a sense that to be on the way
satisfied as suspension between
rough waters which had been and
floods to come – trusting that bridge
as arched substance in the air.



ABRAHAM CONNEH & DAVID DABYDEEN

Abraham and David were one of the two pairs who never met: Abraham is based in Liberia, where he works for Oxfam GB, and David is in the UK.

Abraham sent David poems by email at the beginning of the project. David wrote back asking him to write more “objectively”, on a person or landscape, and to restrain from using phrases like “I feel”; instead to convey his personal emotions through imagery.

Abraham submitted ‘Little Dare Devil’. David was excited by the rice-bag image (given the situation of food security in Africa), and the tyrant’s love for Yokohoma-built women. These were idiosyncratic moments in the poem, as was the description of what the tyrant did with his hands. David’s contribution to the poem was to tighten the language (cutting out superfluity of adjectives, unnecessary conjunctions etc.), to correct the grammar, and to rewrite the ending, the last two lines. David also blurred Abraham’s wording about love and sex (“love or sex”) to “sex (or love)”, to suggest that the tyrant confuses the two, and perhaps has the redemptive possibility of wanting his sexual exploits to be transformed into love.

Abraham particularly appreciated David’s inclusion of rain in the closing lines: rain is a symbol of blessing in Liberia and in Africa more generally, so the poem ends with a message of hope rather than despair.

David’s piece, about tyranny and kindness and the hope of rain and wealth, is the beginning of a novel, *The Gallery*, he is currently writing.

ABRAHAM CONNEH

Little Dare Devil

His name is 'Little Dare Devil'.
This superslim dark-complexioned awesome creature
Could fit neatly into a 50kg bag of rice
Twice, yet larger than life, and so brisk and notorious
A fighter in spite his size. He never shies away
From assignments no matter the risks.

His glacial and thirsty red eyes have seen
Violence and death beyond measure,
Without apology. His sudden smile
With his bushy moustache trimmed always
Like a scorpion's tail ready to sting its prey:
Somehow or other and everywhere,
People fear 'Little Dare Devil'.

He's often seen with a sophisticated handset firmly in his left
Hand, and ever-ready loaded pistol held to his side.
He prefers to talk alone on his set, and walks with bow-legs
Or open arms as if he owns Liberia.
No one dares interrupt when 'Little Dare Devil' begins to talk.
Violators must be prepared for his ever-ready hot advancing bullets.
The entire gang keeps the silence of a cemetery.

'Little Dare Devil' likes to wear armless cotton T-shirts,
Inscription written in red bold letters, DARE DEVIL.
He likes to be called that, rather than his parental name;
Every time that name is called, he smiles cynically, and with pride,
Responds by beating his chest twice with his right hand
And shouts, "Yeah it is me! You can say that again!"

His boys talk of him with great admiration and respect
They say 'Little Dare Devil' goes wherever there is fire
At the war front. He is fearless during combat and likes light-complexioned
Medium-shaped women with bottoms as big as YOKOHOMA tyres
And no woman dares refuse or reject his request for sex (or love).

ABRAHAM CONNEH

After the end of both waves of fighting, in 1997 and 2003,
'Little Dare Devil' did not undergo the DDRR* process in camp.
Now he's an empty shell of what he once was and possessed –
An idle ex-combatant with no job, and a potential armed robber
Looking for the next opportunity to make a living through violence.

One rainless night he met his end. Now that the devil is dead we can
Talk again, laugh even. And the rains will come again.

* Disarmament, Demobilisation, Resettlement and Reintegration

DAVID DABYDEEN

From The Gallery

Lady Elizabeth came into our lives like a perfumed vapour, misting the eyes of my master through which he imagined the treasury of El Dorado. Not that my master, Dr John Richmond, was a man of need, for he was the inheritor of his father's fortune in Scotland – a silk merchant no less – and instead of lavishing it on porcelain, paintings and the pursuits of Priapus, he had trained instead as a surgeon – years of ascetic study – and as soon as he was certified by the Royal College of Surgeons, he abandoned Edinburgh for Demerara, his only motive being pity. I was a child of eight when he bought me, I know because he tallied my teeth and told me "You are eight, young Francis", not only giving me my age but also my name, for before I answered other masters when they shouted out 'boy'. I marvelled at his cleverness in accounting for me by a mere examination of my mouth, and the name Francis had a kindness to it, and I resolved, even with a mind as yet untutored in the discipline of loyalty, to behave as the son of Dr John, for that is what the niggers whom he moved among called him. "Dr John, tek look at me jigger-foot, Jesus go bless you plenty-plenty"; "Dr John, me belly like it breed worm, please for a syrup". They displayed their cuts, bruises and swollen parts, and he reached into his bag (which it was my proud duty to hold, following him through the canefield) for ointments and liquids and plasters. He dispersed his medicines, not only identifying each but naming each nigger first: "Joseph, this is a tincture of veronica, it will increase the celerity of the blood's motion", or "Moses, this liquor, an infusion of hartshorn and copperas, will strengthen the head and stomach". None of them understood, but such was the mellifluity of his speech, and the novelty of hearing their names, that they swallowed whatever he gave and seemed to be cured at once. We left the canefield to their singing as they slashed away with their cutlasses: "Hey-ho-day! Me no care a dammee / Is rock me rock in de arm of mammee." It was as if Dr John had lifted from their minds the burden of work, the bundles of cane that they hoisted on their shoulders to carry to the factory, like so many pallets of the lepers cured and following Christ along the path to Gethsemene. Dr John was like God to me; he died when I was 15, the seven years in his

DAVID DABYDEEN

presence were like seven days, too too brief, but still he had made of me a new world in that time.

She too came into his life only for a short while, a mere year or so and also created of him a new world. I opened the door to a timid knocking, thinking it to be yet another nigger in distress, only to be overwhelmed by Lady Elizabeth's presence. She wore a sleeveless white dress embroidered with gold coloured thread, which drew attention to the golden chain around her pale neck and rivulets of blonde curls which defied authority for her hair was unribboned and unbonnetted. The nakedness of her arms which would normally cause a polite person to blush was embellished by golden bracelets. Whiteladies in the colony wore copious clothing, in spite of the heat, tightly laced petticoats and shawls, but this one was a picture of indiscretion. The coming months gave me opportunity to assess her figure, but left me in a state of confusion. Her sparse breasts, slender frame and tiny feet suggested a creature on the cusp of transformation. There was a youthful delight in the way she threw back her head and laughed, her curly hair dancing in flashes, altering the dour interior of my master's surgery. Her face too was pristine, and her eyes were as alert as a child's. But I noticed, whenever she patted me on my chin in greeting or ran her hand along my face, that her palm was coarse and damp, like that of Miriam, the old nigger who lived at the edge of the plantation, her hut shrouded by haba trees, she who supplied my master with native herbs. Miriam hissed instead of talking. Her nostrils billowed out at each exhalation of breath, and noisily, for her nostrils were clogged with hairs. It was neither the strange music made by her breathing, nor her snake-like way of speaking – head curling towards me and hissing through gaps in her teeth – nor the dismal habitation of straw and wattle, nor her wisps of residual hair, nor the scars on her cheeks telling her tribe, nor the thick mucilaginous mixture of plantains and gravy which she kept on perpetual boil on the stove outside her hut, the stench strong enough to entice insects to abet her appetite; all these repulsed me, but far less than the feel of her coarse, damp palm on mine as she took the money for her remedies. "Massa Dr John sah, why me must go Miriam for, I ent feel to go no-more", I wanted to protest but kept silent out of devotion to him. And shame, for pleonastic Negro corruptions, Creolese colloquialisms and

DAVID DABYDEEN

numberless phrases which mutilated the English language filled my mouth in those early days. Best to serve in silence. In any case, Dr John, sensitive as ever to my mood, had explained that our people were convinced of the efficacy of his medicines when he assured them that local herbs were used in their concoction. "The Negroes are great naturalists, they believe that whilst God visits them with sickness for their sins, he also provides, in the veins of leaves and the bark of trees, remedies and reprieves. The Negroes have among them wise ones, like Miriam, who study the configuration of stars in the night sky for clues as to the exact proportion of green things to be blended for a particular disease. In the foliage of stars and trees is the unity of God's purpose for man." I was dumbstruck by his assessment of our people and would have fallen to his feet to anoint them but he sensed my gratitude and would have none of it. He steadied me by placing his hand on my shoulder – smooth, tender palm – and ushering me to the cabinet to rearrange the vials of medicine. A practical man, my master, always containing his emotion, and mine.

AMINA BENTURKI & CARMEN BUGAN

Amina and Carmen discussed the choice of Amina's piece, the story of her trying to win a gold medal at horse racing. Amina wrote a draft of this story in English and we sat together and rewrote it. Carmen asked a few questions about the horses and about Algiers so that we could include some details and make the prose flow better.

The poem which Carmen wrote as a result of meeting Amina takes up the image of Algiers from the sea and gives her account, in a certain way, of the interaction. Because Carmen is also an immigrant, from Romania, she initially thought the two had very much in common and would speak endlessly and in great detail of their homelands. However, our common experience as immigrants gave us not the instant closeness and intimacy originally expected: it rather gave us this fascinating mutual sense of being closed off to each other. So Carmen wrote about the sense of awkwardness which came from our interaction – a lovely awkwardness.

AMINA BENTURKI

Amina's Story: A Dream Waiting to Happen

Algiers is full of French colonial architecture, but if you arrive by sea, from the distance, it is the whiteness of the houses which strikes you, not their shapes. It seems as though a row of whiteness rises from the sea. As you walk into the city you will see some high-rise buildings, some horse-racing clubs, and right in the centre there are Roman ruins, which look various shades of russet, depending on the time of the day.

I often remember the Algeria racing club, where I trained when I was a student in high-school. My dream always was, and still is, to win a gold medal at horse-racing. This club was in Karouba. The day I joined, the weather was sunny and warm. It was spring. My trainer's name was Ahmed and he was excited to help me learn more about horses and racing. Ten days later I met my horse, whom I named Laith. In our language, Laith means baby lion. He was all white, with three brown spots on his back legs. Four months later Laith and I were friends and I wanted to try my first race. We prepared for many hours and many days. This was called 'the flat race championship'.

In the morning of the race, my family and friends all came to watch me. When I arrived at the club, Ahmed looked worried. He told me that Laith had become ill overnight and it wouldn't be a good idea to push him into a run. We decided I could try another horse, even though this was a risky option. Now I can't remember his name but I remember he was a brown horse who responded to me and allowed me to ride him. We ran very well for a little time but then suddenly he threw me off. I don't remember much after that, except that I woke up in hospital with a silver medal on my chest. I still have a scar on my forehead and one on my hand from the fall. Someday I hope to go back to Algiers and find Laith: maybe I can race with him this time.

CARMEN BUGAN

Homelands

To her it used to be a row of whitewashed houses
Rising from the sea; she said the whiteness
Appears and vanishes behind the crests of waves.

The open wooden gate with the blue rope latch
In the autumn breeze was mine; and the path
Between the pear and the quince, moving under

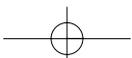
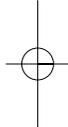
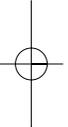
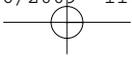
The vines of incense-tasting grapes, which climbed
Straight to the door, until the frost burned them and coated
The door-handle with white which burned my hand.

I don't know what we were doing on an island
Shivering in the November cold, as in a dream;
She speaking of horses and I of baking bread.

Homelands are where we are allowed to be,
Not where we are born or where we want to go;
She and I carry dreams of homelands in our minds.

Neither of us revealed matters of the heart
Or ate, or stayed long enough to warm up; it was as if
We both tried our best to hide our strangeness

From the strangers smiling brightly in the cooped-up
Room. As if you can live if you tie your tongue
With a thousand knots of forgetting. As if you can live.



YOUSIF QASMIYEH & BERNARD O'DONOGHUE

From our first meeting in November 2008, Yousif expressed concerns that the term 'asylum-seeker/refugee' was featuring so prominently as an overarching heading for this poetry project. Being a refugee should not require foregrounding one's legal condition above all else, overshadowing, for instance, one's personal, professional and writing history beyond and before asylum.

Both members of this writing partnership are outsiders: Yousif is a Palestinian refugee by birth, having been born in a Lebanese-based Palestinian refugee camp; Bernard is Irish.

When Carole Angier proposed a 30-second, quick-response exercise to devise an image, Bernard, like most people in the room, invoked an idyllic, and perhaps rather defensive image of his home or family, set in his native area of North County Cork. For the larger initial writing project, he responded to Carole's suggestion of writing a letter to an earlier self, by situating himself as a nine-year-old Bernard. This was a fun, and yet unremarkable creative process, perhaps the natural response of someone who has had a relatively free and unpoliticised life.

Yousif, on the other hand, responded to the first exercise with the idea of 'holes'. Initially, perhaps, this idea was provoked by the gap between the request for an instant image and the eventual response. However, the notion of 'holes' immediately widened to include a range of meanings and implications. In our subsequent meeting, this proved very productive, and Yousif planned to write a poem – closely following a modernist structure – constituted around a series of episodes: that is, holes with holes between them on the page.

The fundamental opposition which emerged is whether 'holes' are seen as destructive or creative; clearly, they can be both. We recalled the story of the Dutch boy who put his thumb in the hole of a dam and saved his country from the floods. Perhaps a further challenge is to explore an uncomfortable, intermediate position between the two. The pre-holed condition is also the child's link with the mother at birth, while the final 'hole' is arguably death. It is important, we agreed, to distinguish 'holes' from 'gaps': the latter are examples of discontinuity, with little sense of anything deeper.

YOUSIF QASMIYEH & BERNARD O'DONOGHUE

Unlike gaps, 'holes' can be seen as ingredients of a larger entity. They may even be that which ultimately defines the entity. They are also considered to be active concealers of things, and one of Yousif's episodes may explore this 'holey' function. Indeed, in keeping with the ambiguity of 'holey/holy' roles, Yousif's father rejected his son's temporary infatuation with the notion of prophecy, favouring his son's incorporation into the more productive activities of shop-keeping. It is interesting to ponder the possible trajectories of these two callings, and to ask whether the child's first preference is still acted on in the adult's writings. We quoted Dryden's "great wits are sure to madness near allied": prophecy, like madness, can be seen as a hole in the mind, with the corresponding possibilities of destruction and creation.

In addition, we discussed the issues which arise with the term 'hole' itself in English, especially its – productive or complicating – homophone 'whole'. This was exploited by Yeats in his risqué poem 'Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop':

For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.

Concluding our reflection is the recognition that translation is complex, yet artificial: this is its difficulty but also its possibility. The first issue, of course, is the problem faced by a Palestinian poet working towards publishing in English. Writing poetry in a language other than the mother tongue is notoriously difficult (yet often with intriguing outcomes), and Yousif continues to prefer writing in Arabic and translating his own work into English.

YOUSIF QASMIYEH

Holes

1
How will I die
While all
Can see me?

2
When is the rain
Going to admit
Its fall?

3
I was born
On the seam of a dress,
In the last hour
Of the sixth day,
Between clusters of stars
And the borders of a river.

I was neither
Adam reaching the ground,
Nor was I myself
In cities
Which share their water
With the agents of doom.

4
I lean on
The footsteps of my past
As I slip towards
My shadow.

The shadow which I left
Lying
Outside our house
On the morning
Of that funeral.

I am that dead person

YOUSIF QASMIYEH

But I don't know
How
He managed to escape.

5
May we watch the rain falling,
And may we follow its rhythm
Like those bereaved of children.

May we count the moons
That evening:
A moon for every face,

And for every exile,
As they roll their prayer beads
Along the journey.

6
They said: Here is the accoucheuse
Who dropped you
Off her hunch
And screamed,
On behalf of your mother,
At the crowded heads
To disperse
A shade
So the air
Might reach you;

So your trembling mother
Might place you
At the threshold
Of the shrine
Before the holy man's tomb,
With three
Thick candles
That the widow
Of the guardian
Would light
Once you awoke.

YOUSIF QASMIYEH

7

I can almost
Hear
Her exhalation
In that wind-shaken coffin,
On the shoulders
Of those
Who hoped
To hunt the moon down
With their prayers.

8

The flock of frightened angels
I follow,
Roaming at a low height
In the morning of the war.
I say:
Please stop,
So you can return safely
To your dead ones.

9

Slowly,
The caravan descends
With no invocation on the window
To save its passengers
From envy.

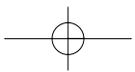
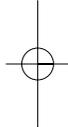
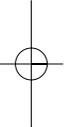
Those on board
Spend their time
Collecting cocoons
In ashen bags.

A black woman
Who has tapped
With her shoes
The courier's head
Alights, and enters the tunnel.
She kisses the charm on her chest
And punctures her neck.



YOUSIF QASMIYEH

10
Upside down
And in the middle
Of the yard
His picture was hung.
They did not change
The place of the pail.
He will cry,
And the image
Will float on the
Face of the pail.



BERNARD O'DONOGHUE

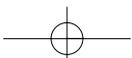
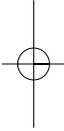
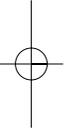
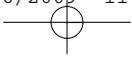
Emigration

for Yousif Qasmiyeh

Unhappy the man who keeps to the home place
and never finds time to escape to the city
where he can listen to the rain on the ceiling,
secure in the knowledge that it's causing no damage
to roof-thatch or haystack or anything of his.

Unhappy the man who never got up
on a tragic May morning, to go to the station
dressed out for America where he might have stood
by the Statue of Liberty, or drunk in the light
that floods all the streets that converge on Times Square.

Unhappy the man who has lacked the occasion
to return to the village on a sun-struck May morning,
to shake the hands of the neighbours he'd left
a lifetime ago and tell the world's wonders,
before settling down by his hearth once again.



EDEN HABTEMICHAEL & LUCY NEWLYN

We began by talking about Eden's experiences in Eritrea. We considered the possibility that she might write a poem about her feelings of exile, but it soon became apparent that she didn't want to write a poem of that kind. Lucy suggested that she might switch the focus to her daughter: this would enable her to write more obliquely.

Eden responded enthusiastically to this suggestion. Since coming to the UK, her daughter Segen has become a very skilful figure-skater: her success in winning the National ice skating competition is a source of great pride. A recent newspaper headline refers to her as the "Ice Queen out of Africa", and this powerful metaphor provided a starting-point for Eden's poem. She began by writing about her own (very limited) access to ice at home, then moved on to memories of Segen's first efforts on the ice. She drafted a lengthy poem in free verse, which Lucy helped her to edit and transform into tercets. After a few suggestions from Carole this became the finished version. Eden decided to include some of Segen's words, as well as an untranslated proverb in her own language.

Eden's memories of Eritrea re-awakened some of Lucy's childhood memories of Uganda, most of them sensory and linguistic. Lucy included some of the Swahili words which she learnt at an early age, as a way of capturing her sense of double origins. The names that appear in the last two lines of her poem are evocative of places she loved as a child. They have subsequently been overlaid with darker political associations. Nakasero, where she went to school between 1965 and 1967, later became the headquarters of Idi Amin's State Research Bureau, where thousands were tortured or murdered.

EDEN HABTEMICHAEL

The Ice Queen from Africa

To fall and step again on both feet is the way of learning.

I loved an ice cube to chill me, to cool my thirst
in the hot and sunny place where I was born –
but to run around on it? *Kwah!*

Now that's what she does, my girl –
gliding on one foot, jumping on the spot
spinning round and round on the ice.

It's not a cube any more – it's a rink!
And can you believe it? – she's warm!
*Enteaminkalun tekebilkayon frig wun mwuq eyu.**

Oh pain... remember the time
over and over again falling
getting up and trying again?

For then we had never seen ice
falling as snowflakes
trodden with blades.

Now I watch her stepping on the ice.
From outside it is daunting and bitter
but it's different inside, for the little daughter.

Oh mummy, I wish the whole world was made of ice.

Falling is her way of learning
belonging and winning
leaping and shining

spinning high on the air.

* 'If you accept it, even a fridge is warm'

LUCY NEWLYN

My Lost Passport

Birthplace – Uganda *Nationality* – British

The red crate that followed us like an ark
from Mombassa arrived much later,
tightly packed with souvenirs
from the *masoko* in Kampala.

Woven baskets, polished gourds,
seed-necklaces, clay beads,
carved wooden animals – all
came back to us, like messages

drifting in from the sea,
or half-forgotten words Hadeja
had taught us, on the bougainvillea
terrace where the lizards flickered.

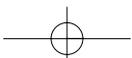
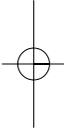
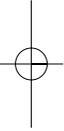
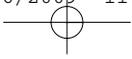
Makazi, avenue of eucalyptuses,
sun beating on tin roofs all day.
Alasiri, baked earth under bare feet,
deep shadow under the mango tree.

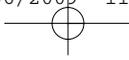
Kiniwaji, cool milk in the broken
coconut, *matunda*, pink-fleshed
papaya. *Chakula*, mashed *matoke*,
pulped root of cassava.

Thirty years later, losing my passport
was like emptying the crate again:
Kahana, rows of women, picking.
Shamba, naked children on the road-side,

waving. *Kwa heri*, thousands evicted,
never returning. *Nakasero*, *Jinja*,
Mbarara – all stained with carnage.
Moja mbile tatu nne, tano sita saba nane...

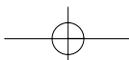
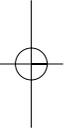
[Swahili words: *masoko* – market; *makazi* – home; *alasiri* – afternoon;
kiniwaji – drink; *matunda* – fruit; *chakula* – food; *matoke* – plantain;
kahana – coffee; *shamba* – field or plantation; *kwa heri* – goodbye; *moja
mbile tatu nne* – one two three four...]





JEAN-LOUIS N'TADI & CHUMA NWOKOLO

This collaboration between refugee and poet was built on conversations at the first Brookes workshop in November 2008, followed by phone calls and email communications. At a subsequent workshop, Jean-Louis benefited from conversations with poets Afam Akeh and Carole Angier. Since Jean-Louis' primary language is French, he prefers to write his poetry in that language. His poem 'Where are you?' was translated by Carole and subsequently edited by Chuma. Jean-Louis' poem is a response to his long separation from his family in Congo Brazzaville. Chuma's entry, 'A Requiem for Rage', is an observation on the interconnectedness of a shrinking world, and the relationship between war and peace in different parts of the world.



JEAN-LOUIS N'TADI

Where Are You?

My beneficiaries and allies,
My associates and my children,
Run the race as fighters with your purpose set before you,
Choose right roads.

Where are you, my duchess?
Your soul and mine were used to weddings,
To caresses by day and by night.
Crossing from the other bank of the river,
My spirit sighs as never before.

You, my Angels,
Guardians of my temple where nothing more can enter,
Not even a dream,
The light at the end of my corridor has vanished.
The night surrounds my temple,
Wearies my flesh, threatens my faith.

A short time is enough for dying,
My hour for revival nears, for getting up and running
Towards a true, an untouchable victory.

My telephone rings
But no sound reaches me;
Only my heart reasons that the time has come –
My sufferings must end.

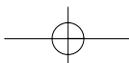
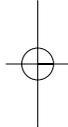
Have my riches flown away?
No! No, my blood,
You are the true innocents.
Where are you?
For my eyes cannot see your silhouettes,
My ears cannot hear your voices –
Surely they confuse everything.
My mouth has lost control of itself,
Trembles my whole body.



JEAN-LOUIS N'TADI

Where are you,
Brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, mother and others
Of the sidelong glances?
May Nature lend you her wealth,
Meet you on your road, in your race,
In every season.

Heroes of poetry and drama,
Live in the love of the classics –
Keep the faith and the hope,
And rising refuse to sit down.



CHUMA NWOKOLO, JR.

A Requiem for Rage

Six days the thinker thought, six ways
she weighed her cross: what to do
with things she cannot change?

1. does she boil in the tub of her Monday bath
at the hack of the axe she does not hear,
when it swings of an alien night, at a cot
not her own, on a street in a town far away?
2. does she fret at the thump of cannon and
the shear of shrapnel in Other Square?
3. as armaments leave her island of ease
will her tears do to slake their thirst?
can the fire from a rage removed
stanch the bleeding by a bomb discharged?
4. Thursday's tears will not animate the teddy
in the twisted rubble. what is spilled is lost,
what is bent, broken. innocence is seared,
holiness smirched, remorse futile...
5. the torture of truce keeps the dying screaming for dawn,
for euthanasia's war's resumption.
someday for sure, the cry of night's child shall cease.
and not from death.
someday for sure, the child of night's cry shall cease.
but not tonight.
6. in the meantime, the pregnant maid in black
serves dinner to the wealthy men in white
as they ink plans for bigger war machines,
to eat her progeny.

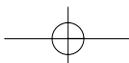
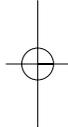
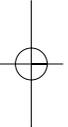
Come Sunday, the thinker bled her rage
into a larger gift for charity.
She made her peace with impotence,
prepared her child and cot, which still

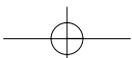
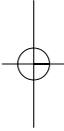
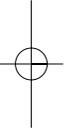
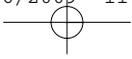


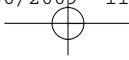
CHUMA NWOKOLO, JR.

lay at ease, for the roll of fortune's wheel,
and for night.

she polished her salaried lie until it shone
and weaved it into a shawl and wore it:
she could do nothing about what
she could do nothing about.

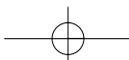
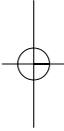
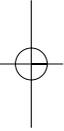






NAZRA NIYGENA & ANNE BERKELEY

English is not Nazra's mother tongue, and 'Muyinga Town' is her first piece of writing. She wrote the first draft of the opening paragraph in the first workshop. We worked on it to straighten the English. In the second and third sessions, we worked together to tease out what lay behind the statements in this short paragraph. The idea of putting the two strands together is to illustrate the complexity of memory and the opacity of language. Each of these secondary statements could itself be examined to reveal further detail, and so on. Some names of birds and plants are in Swahili, as they are not found here in England.



NAZRA NIYGENA

Muyinga Town

I remember waking up to the blue sky and Mukoni Mountain, with music from birds and different greens of all the long and short grasses and flowers. Every morning I used to walk in the forest where the Cyohoda Sud River flows. My sister and I used to run around the river bank and chase each other, picking flowers and fruits, and mushrooms during the rainy season. My brothers Toby and Sizia used to go fishing and hunting. I miss that moment. I don't know when I will get the opportunity to see that beautiful place and be with my family again.

I remember waking up to the blue sky

I had a pine bed. My sister Maxima and I shared the room. It had big windows with mosquito mesh, not like these windows.

and Mukoni Mountain,

When I looked from my window, I saw the mountain peaks above the forest. Sometimes there's snow at the top. Short trees, tall trees, pine trees, big leaves, little leaves. The forest was as far away as Tesco's.

with music from birds

From 5 am the birds start singing: the *tsië-tsië* yellow and black about the size of a sparrow, the glossy purple black *chiruku*, and the forest pigeon. And small black flocking birds – I can't remember the name. They live in the forest but if your house has a tree you will see them there.

and different greens of all the long and short grasses and flowers.

We have hibiscus, purple and white, a bougainvillea hedge thick with thorns to keep out animals and bad people, and some small plants in a green carpet. In the back we have vegetables. Before breakfast we shower, then work: watering the plants, or cleaning the sitting room, or sweeping the yard while my mother cooks breakfast. And then we go in to eat. We have cassava or

NAZRA NIYGENA

maize, pancakes or bananas or yams, sweet potatoes or Irish. I love best the smell of cassava boiling in the pot.

Every morning I used to walk in the forest

After breakfast, we go to the forest to fetch firewood for cooking, or pick bush fruits: dark dark blue-purple *zambarau*, guava, mango, and *fousadi* – like blackberries, very sweet, but they grow on a tree with big leaves. At home we grow pineapples, avocados, bananas. But the forest fruits are plentiful, and if you pick enough you can take them to market.

where the Cyohoda Sud River flows.

Yes, it is the French for *South*. The river bank has bamboo trees, mangroves and long grasses. Outside the rainy season the water is so clear you can see the fish. My brother used to catch them with a net. *Tilapia* is my favourite. They are big and black with a lot of white meat, best fried with pepper and salt and lemon. *Dagaa* are very small. We dry them in the sun, and they will keep for a year.

My sister and I

She is my twin and after the evening meal we tell stories or sing, the old stories about foolish boys going to market, stepmothers, the same stories as here. She is my twin and we left Burundi together and arrived here in England together. So why does she have to leave and I do not? It does not make sense.

used to run around the river bank

There are crocodiles and hippopotamuses, and when we see them we run away. But a hippo can't run very fast because he has fat legs.

and chase each other picking flowers and fruits and mushrooms during the rainy season.

After two or three days of the rainy season the yellow mushrooms come up in the small grasses under the big trees. Some mushrooms are brown and as big as a

NAZRANIYGENA

football. We know all the bad mushrooms. If you see a bird or a monkey eating a mushroom, you know it is good.

My brothers Toby and Sizia used to go fishing and hunting.

I did not go with them. It is men's work. Women's work is collecting firewood and fruit, cooking, weaving baskets, making pots. When they are fifteen, men will fight for their village and to protect their women whenever there is trouble or a woman is raped. Women don't fight.

My brother Sizia

was a hardworking man who liked farming and gardening, and he was artistic – he could draw. A talented man, friendly and kind. He was strong, stronger than Toby, who is here in England.

It was Christmas so we were at church because my mother is Christian, but Sizia was on the farm. We heard voices, shouting. We went out and saw Sizia. He was dead.

He was 21. It was the Tutsi. That's why we tried to escape – my mother and father too, but we lost them on the way. My father is a good farmer. My mother is a kind woman, who used to sew, weave, crochet, make baskets and pots, skilled at tailoring and farming. She said they were going to Goma. It's been a long time. I hope they are still alive.

I miss that moment. I don't know when I will get the opportunity to see that beautiful place and be with my family again.

ANNE BERKELEY

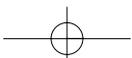
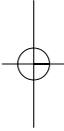
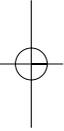
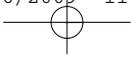
Before the Shouting

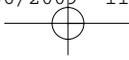
I wake to the blue sky and Mukoni Mountain and all the greens of the forest and the music of the birds

— Nazra Niygena

In a room thick with coffee and overcoats
Nazra bends to the paper. Her eyes
follow the trail that winds from her pen
out through the Oxford fog, the dripping trees,
back to a village clearing, where a man
tends avocados and sweetcorn in the early sun.
The boys are off fishing; her mother is indoors
and cassava steams from the cooking pot.

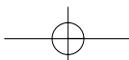
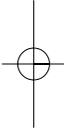
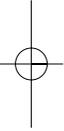
Thousands of miles away, thousands of days,
where no one can reach her or help,
she watches the page where words condense
on the mosquito mesh. Morning slips through
as she opens the window and listens
to the forest birds: *tsië-tsië, chiruku.*





DEJI OGUNDIMU & AFAM AKEH

In his contribution, Deji describes a state of mind which is repeatable across the spectrum of that part of the immigrant population in Europe known as asylum seekers. His poem draws its theme from an earlier uncompleted narrative in which he had attempted to record his thoughts and emotions regarding the refugee experience. Though Deji is greatly challenged by his present circumstances and also yearns for the people of his homeland, he has remained actively and positively engaged with the community from which he currently seeks residency status. It is from this sense of being 'here' and also being 'there', and the tensions of belonging to both, that Deji's and Afam's poems are drawn.



DEJI OGUNDIMU

Voyage

Without preparation
with much necessity
I set out on a journey
to catapult myself
out of a terror
that could devastate
the future of generations.

I'm on a journey, will I return? –
to my birth place, my earthly origin
where my creeds
and deeds are cherished
by a trusting audience,
where my fearless views agree
with the yearnings of many.

I'm on a journey, will I return? –
to my Aarinola
upon whom I stood
towering above worries,
my amiable half,
whose absence denies me
my most needed help.

I'm on a journey, will I return? –
to Awwal and Azeem
my invaluable offspring,
between us exists a bond,
a blessed fraternity.

My wonderful friends,
I'm on a journey, will I return?

AFAM AKEH

Asylum Welcome

On certain nights you hear them
in wind-echoes whispering your name,

the lost or left behind.
You are here and they are not.

Morning fades them at its many queues.
This present demands you dump the past.

To be or not to be. Trackers sniff a trail
to your rear, smell your fear, howl to the world.

They are looking for shit, and think you are.
This is how it is now, rooted out

like a wind-tossed leaf,
suddenly alien to the beloved earth.

It is packing and unpacking,
learning the locks of shut doors,

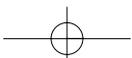
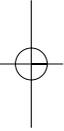
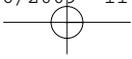
the constant picking and weighing of words,
the silencing of things not said,

what in words, without blood, feels unreal.
To each passing day its promise.

You are not who you were.
You are Dick Whittington now.

You hear the bells of London
and nurse your dream.

Weather is the principal rogue
but in summer the natives are friendly.



FILDA ABELKEC-LUKONYOMOI & VAHNI CAPILDEO

The first group exercise – to produce an image connected with one’s writing – brought from Filda the image of a crystal rock with elastic ropes in motion to and from it. The power and naturalness of Filda’s metaphors was immediately evident. Nonetheless, poetry’s reputation for inaccessibility and Filda’s own intermittent access to formal education made her have doubts about her ability to write – this despite her record of publication. In turn Vahni was in awe of Filda. There was her ease with imagery. Then there was the age difference: Filda had years of wisdom in dealing with terrible experiences and their aftermath. She had built a creative and family life. Vahni’s doubts also concerned the appropriateness of applying her own academic training to Filda’s memories and her gift of spontaneous poetic speech. At this first meeting we did not directly discuss the tragedy that preoccupied Filda and would become the subject of her poem. We identified a few concepts which were better expressed in Filda’s Ugandan languages, talking about connotations, allusions, and the potential of multilingual texts.

An informal one-to-one meeting at Vahni’s flat led to an intensive discussion of poetry. Filda was clear and adamant that she wished to work with and within the tradition of English-language poetry. We sketched an overview of poetic traditions, looked in detail at some forms, and read poetry aloud together. Reading aloud would become an important part of our working method.

The topic of the poem emerged at the third meeting. Coincidentally, Filda had just been given a document with details of the circumstances attendant on her husband’s death more than twenty years before. The murder of Filda’s husband, and her work on a lament, occasioned a process of mourning and catharsis, including vivid dreams. Vahni’s job became to transcribe Filda’s conversation and uncover or select the images and rhythms that occurred with startling richness and frequency and truly belonged in the poem’s fabric.

The poem evolved through our reading aloud successive drafts to each other. Filda originated the text and Vahni reflected it back. We worked on technique at the level of the individual

FILDA ABELKEC-LUKONYOMOI & VAHNI CAPILDEO

word or line as well as shaping the flow of the narrative. For example, Filda identified the limited vision of oppressors with a devouring monster, the Obibi. We talked about the Cyclops in literature and decided it was appropriate to use both the words 'cyclops' and 'obibi'. Considering voice, we also discussed the implications of context and responsibility. The role of the media in magnifying yet diluting death is touched on in the text. Phrases from a letter were imported into the poem. We looked at various forms, both lyric and experimental, closed and open. Filda found that collage, changes in lineation, and the use of different speakers (techniques that might be considered 'modernist') appealed most to her sense of the complexity of the situation and the need to convey intimately what might be alien to the reader.

Filda gained confidence and clarity from this exercise. It was necessary to decide when the poem was finished, as she is a keen and patient craftswoman, always ready to rethink and redraft. Vahni felt it necessary to approach this material with care and humility. She realised that she wished to provide a supplement to Filda's account and a tribute to her writing. Vahni tried to make the darkness of the monstrous events felt by writing in the voice of the Obibi. This poem failed. She tried to bring home the marvel of Filda's courage and tenacity by writing a short praise poem. This poem alludes to BK.Luwo, the drop-in textile workshop which was founded by Filda.

For both of us, working on these topics and thinking about poetic form elicited a lot of material for further writing outside the bounds of one or two poems.

Additional note from Filda

I had originally wished to write on the power of resilience and perseverance, but two days before the date of the first workshop I was handed a diary belonging to a lady who had visited our country twenty years after fleeing for political asylum to the UK.

In the diary was an account written by an eyewitness which, after 20 years, finally revealed to me what had happened to the one I loved.

FILDA ABELKEC-LUKONYOMOI

In the Kingdom of the Sighted: Part of Me

Walking taller than generals – himself not tall
Sitting with children – children of war
Sifting sand – sifting with bare hands

As nyakidi presses paste from the sesame seed
As the jaws press song from the breath
So the sand sifting presses joy

Joy from the heart
Flows into the children's hearts
Melting pain into song

Obibi, Cyclops, you grave who's ever craving,
You outrage, putting a price on his head
You hate the truth of his tongue
You outrage the truth of all tongues

Is it sesame seed he presses for its paste?
Is it pain he presses for its song?
Is it love he presses from his heart?

The media announce death: his.
Once more proclaim death: his.
Repeat. Report. He is killed.
How many times is a man killed?

Nyakidi slides over minkidi: daughter and mother stone
The melody slips free
He and the children – children of war – played
Displaced – in place – hearts powerful and melting

The eyewitness writes:
"We buried his body
under the Yago tree,
near his cattle kraal,
on his farmland.
But
the NRA soldiers

FILDA ABELKEC-LUKONYOMOI

dug up his body,
cut off his head,
taking it with them for display.”

Now I am just trying to compose myself
And make it clear in my mind.
You hear: “He has been killed.”
Again: “He has been killed.”
I believe it.
I may take longer – much longer
To bring myself together
To overcome the pain.
“So take it easy on yourself.”

When I am slowed down
In the kingdom of the sighted
Where the blind were king
That is part of me gone

[Luo words:

Obibi – a monster whose hair keeps growing each time it is sheared,
crushing the spirit of the *dobi*/barber.

minkidi and *nyakidi* – grindstones. A large and a small stone are used
together, conceptualised in Luo as ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’.]



VAHNI CAPILDEO

Filda's Workshop

Filda

descends the stairs

descends & descends the stairs

dignity & wisdom & a quivering stick

happiness in this unadapted building

happiness adopting even this building

River

vertical loom

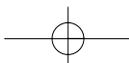
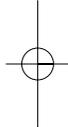
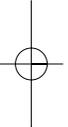
improvised vertical loom

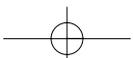
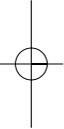
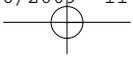
threaded splendidly to navigate the air

women bringing bales of cloth have waited

women re-shaping cloth so it is fitting

“Come talk, laugh and break isolation”





ADEPEJU OLOPADE & MARIA JASTRZĘBSKA

During this project Adepeju was living in a women's refuge and her life was in turmoil. She had never before done any creative writing. In order to protect herself and her young children she has written under a pseudonym and all the names in her piece have been changed.

Her letter evolved from an initial writing exercise set by Carole. Adepeju chose the form she felt most comfortable in, though the content of her letter is anything but comfortable. It took immense courage, strength and determination to write.

Maria picked up on an 'accidental' repetition in the first draft. As repetition features in the African oral tradition of storytelling and in poetic traditions worldwide, this provided a foundation for the piece. Being an architect, Adepeju quickly grasped the notion of structure when we worked on shaping her piece together. We talked about the transition from 'splurge' to finished piece and Maria encouraged Adepeju to focus on imagery.

It soon became clear how central the different meanings of 'home' are to Adepeju's piece. The theme of 'home' has also always featured strongly in Maria's own work. Maria's poem charts the experience of growing up in a displaced family. She also drew inspiration from Carole's introductory workshop which provided much needed thinking space for both poets and refugees alike.

In working with Adepeju, Maria's challenge was to help edit the rich material of Adepeju's stories and memories, without losing the naturalness of Adepeju's voice. Sometimes Maria asked Peju to write down particular memories, other times as Adepeju spoke Maria transcribed.

Adepeju found that, while she felt able to describe her experiences of domestic violence and abuse, writing about the loss of love was much more painful. Sessions brought up many tears and we grew close in what was a very intense short period of time. It felt hard to be a tough editor with someone else's painful memories but Adepeju was open to the process of making her work more powerful. Adepeju also realised she has always wanted to tell her story, so hopefully this is just the beginning.

ADEPEJU OLOPADE

Letter to Diale

Before we left, before we left our home, by the water with the palm trees on the coast, we'd sit on a log watching the sun rise through the trees.

We used to go to the beach a lot. We went to one beach where you had to catch a canoe that took you to another, secluded beach. I was scared because there was just a five year old boy with a stick paddling the canoe. You said, "Come on! People have accidents driving their car."

One time we saw a couple kissing. You talked to me about the importance of prudence... you warned me never to put my hand in a man's pocket.

I remember the first time you saw me. I was at university. I had lots of friends who came to visit me in the dorm. I didn't know you liked me. I just saw you as my best friend, even my shoulder to cry on. We could talk about everything.

It's funny how love turns to hate.

What happened?

Diale dear,

I saw you last night and you looked really sad. In the church you sat next to your senior sister who has always influenced your life since you were very young. Your younger sister sat on the other side of the aisle with her baby daughter.

I saw your disappointment when you realised that Babatunde our eleven-year-old son was not there. But nonetheless you were really excited to see Olufunmilayo our daughter who was three years old on Monday.

You held her close to your chest. You smelled her hair. You kept her close to you the whole time. I could sense that you really miss the children. For this reason I will try to speed up the contact arrangement. I think not having the children around you on a daily basis is very difficult for you. Yet, you may not have realised it, in the week before we left, before I and the children left our home, they did not see you that whole week for six days, even though you came home every night. You left for work too early and came back whilst they were asleep.

Weeks before we left, I knew we were going to lose our home, and that communication had broken down and we could not

ADEPEJU OLOPADE

sort this out. I came across some love letters exchanged between us prior to getting married 13 years ago. We loved each other so much then, more than life itself. I wonder what happened to us.

Before we left, before we left home, I found some of our letters in the back room store. These were in your suitcase that you have had for the last 13 years, letters we'd written to each other, when I came to the UK, and you were still back home in Nigeria. I could not believe the amount of love and emotion in these letters. I was afraid you would come in and find me looking through them. I quickly checked through and took some of the precious ones you would not miss, grabbed a Focus carrier bag and emptied the paint pots from it. Put the letters in the bag, and stashed it in the boot of my car.

I remember the first time you hit me, this was when you wanted me to stop breastfeeding our first child, Babatunde, at seven months old. You kicked me in the stomach.

Our parish priest sent us for marriage counselling. Even though you had agreed to this in front of the priest, you refused to go for the actual counselling. You made up excuse after excuse, and even when I arranged childcare to enable you to come for the final session, you still refused to come with me. This could have been a way forward for us. I do not understand why you refused to attend any of the sessions. You always said you know what the problem is, and that you do not need someone telling you what to do.

I remember lying in bed one Saturday morning, doing some work on my laptop. Then you came in and snatched the laptop from me. You accused me of taking £10 from your travel card. You then said that you were going to smash my laptop in two if I called the police. You really frightened me and wanted to force me to confess to something that was not true.

You do this a lot with the kids. They are so scared sometimes that they admit to things they didn't do. As I got increasingly scared, I dialled 999 and dropped the phone on the floor, crying and screaming, as my laptop contains both study and work material.

Once you noticed the police were on the phone, you picked it off the floor, gave it to me and proceeded to break the laptop into two separate halves. This was difficult so you raised your knees on the steps and used every ounce of energy in you to

ADEPEJU OLOPADE

ensure that the laptop broke in two. You did this in front of the children.

The day before that you threw me out of the study and then threatened to kill all of us one by one if you had to. This has been the greatest thing that has worried me and motivated me to leave.

A few weeks later, I tried to talk to you about sorting out the mortgage, so that we do not lose the house for the children's sake. You did not want me to talk to you about this, so I sat quietly next to you. The next thing I knew, you got up and went upstairs, then I heard Babatunde scream. I ran up to discover that you had smashed the brand new computer flat screen ... A replacement for the laptop you broke. I hadn't even used it at all. The children were using it. What surprised me the most is that it was a large 32-inch specialist screen and you had the audacity to yank it out of the mains, wires ripped by sheer force, and smash it to the floor.

I ran up the stairs and saw what you had done. I did not want to call the police because I did not want to see you arrested. I ran out of the house to my neighbour's crying hysterically. The neighbours on the other side came and called the police immediately. I snatched the phone to put it back, but the police came anyway.

Where can I stop? Not long before this you came home and just started hitting me all over. The last straw was when you threatened to smash my head, and the next thing I knew, my bowl of ice cream came flying across the kitchen, crashing on the wall right next to me, ice cream sliding down the wall.

That frightened me, it made me realise that this was really serious. It frightened me more than when you had me pinned to the floor and tried to strangle me. More than when you hit me on my head continuously. More than when you punched me in the eye the day before my school trip to Italy to visit Andrea Palladio's buildings. I could not go out in the sun throughout that trip without a bandage across my eyes.

Diale dear, I saw you last night and you looked really sad. Seeing you so calm made me wonder if we still had a future, but the terrible life we lived recently makes me realise this is the only way for us to be friends. Now we have left our home, our four-bedroomed house, me and the children. We are staying in one, small room, but I feel safer and stronger than I did before. What happened?

MARIA JASTRZĘBSKA

Kenilworth Rd

A river ran through our house.
Planting roses in its course
my mother fought it with *First Love*,

Whisky Mac, Danse De Feu as if
bare rooted shrubs could stem
a tide that shook the walls.

Roaring faster than the Piccadilly
line, it wasn't the Vistula;
it wasn't the Danube either.

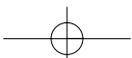
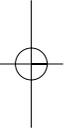
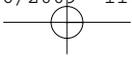
It tore through everything.
My father climbed downstairs
to fetch coke from the cellar;

couldn't he see the water rising?
My brother dived for shiny coins.
The current swept him out of reach.

Being the youngest, I watched
from a distance, convinced
I'd learn from their mistakes.

I wasted years building rafts,
the river broke each one and pulled
me under. Unexpectedly

it hurled me out. Still shivering
close to the rush of water,
I light fires from driftwood.



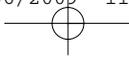
ALI ASKARI & JOHN FULLER

Our two-month collaboration was unlike most of the others, in that we never met. John was in Oxford and Wales during that time, while Ali had recently moved out of the UK. Without the resources of Skype and email, therefore, it is doubtful that an outcome could have been reached during the allotted period.

Ali provided John with a varied batch of poems-in-progress. All were in English, but one was his own translation from Kurdish. It seemed the best thing for an English poet to advise on a poem actually written in English, whatever its level of proficiency, so John chose one called 'Life', consisting of 31 very short impressionistic lines, many of them doubly or trebly indented across the page.

This text, fragmented as it appeared in its original state, revealed a latent argument about human choice and the quirks of destiny. John thought that a poem of such ambitious philosophical bent could benefit from an expansion into couplets. A fair amount of intuition of intention was necessary at this stage, but luckily (as Ali has generously acknowledged) John mostly seemed to get his sense right. As an example of what the couplets derive from, the penultimate two lines of the poem were originally simply: 'one joys /the other gives scarification'. There is always the danger, it's clear, that an intensity of obscurity or charm of usage in the original may turn out to seem too bland when clarified and versified. But both of us implicitly took the view that that it is important for readers to understand what is going on, and that a poet beginning to write in a language not his own needs to stake out some basic territory. Writing discursively is a crucial skill.

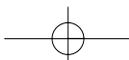
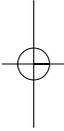
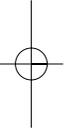
We had some trouble with the un-English phrase 'nouvel in natal', which John interpreted as the Gospel (given that we were working over Christmas). It was elaborated into a couplet about the Incarnation, which for a time seemed to fit in well with Ali's imagery of the swooping eagle. But the idea was not really Ali's. It was too complicated. It didn't fit in, and so was abandoned. Once Ali had, at John's suggestion, supplied some more lines about the decorated caves near his home village of Pishigar, the poem was more or less ready for public consumption. But is a poem ever really finished? John hopes that Ali will eventually



ALI ASKARI & JOHN FULLER

revisit the text, and put back more of himself into it.

As for John's poem, he wanted to write something that bypassed the immediate political and social problems of asylum-seeking. Those, in any case, belonged to the experience of the asylum-seekers themselves, and formed their personal material as writers, as a background to their stories. John was more interested in various aspects of the idea that we are all of us at some time or another, in our restlessness and human mobility, either escaping from unsatisfactory circumstances or in search of something better. So he used examples from his own family about 150 years ago, and wrote some sonnets. The form of the sonnet encourages miscellaneousness and short-hand speculation, of course, so he also found himself writing about languages as politically divisive and about the strange fact that we are all of us temporal immigrants when we are born.



ALI ASKARI

Life

It is like a mountain, so high no one can see,
Rising with the sun out of the sea.
Its painted caves in rocks bleached by the sun
Speak of what has passed and what's to come,
Voicing its history to the listening town
From a cave carved by the wind to look like a clown.

Angels and animals and kings, designed
As moral symbols to the reflective mind,
Look down upon the unprotected child,
Destruction and history unreconciled.
He gazes at the ascending eagle's height:
Her eyes are glistening and her wings are white.

But oh, the life of man: what can we say?
He is at once the hunter and the prey,
Waiting with trembling hand and shaking voice
For destiny to force him to his choice.
What the sun laughs at, what the mountain sees,
Is the fearless eagle's unconsidered ease.

Is life the same whether we win or lose?
Night goes and comes, and day, too, comes and goes.
The man who's conscious of all worldly joys
Is brother to the man the world destroys.
This is the point of life and destiny.
We bide our time. Our will and choice are free.

JOHN FULLER

Immigrants

1. *Babies*

We've no idea how odd we look. But surely
That will endear us to our enemies
(Our hosts, we mean) who judge us prematurely
For all the things about us that don't please?
They have the prejudice of prior existence.
They are the tall ones, lords of the ancient earth.
The only weapon in our weak resistance
Is the half-intended accident of birth.

History the Punisher can't say
A lot about the future, good intentions,
Or the irrelevant charm of our pretensions.
But no one tells us we must go away
And our unsettling is far more commonplace,
Since we are immigrants in time, not place.

2. *Languages*

Who taught us the geography of blood?
Who can retrieve the speech of Paradise?
The jokes of Noah's sons before the Flood?
The names for hunger in an age of ice?
Who killed his brother for a shibboleth?
Who discovered fear? Who started fires
In countries other than his own? Whose death
Became a football field between the wires?

The human story is a long dispersal.
Our babble is a weapon in our hands
That we're embarrassed by, a universal
Accident of brief connecting strands
That strain and twist, abrasive as a rope
That binds us to our shame, and to our hope.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

3. *Here*

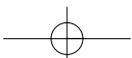
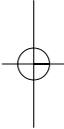
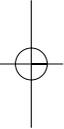
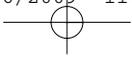
Here is the where of all belonging, light
 Of all our self-created lives. The whence
 Of limitations pointed (at the height
 Of their long century's cruel confidence)
 To what my great-grandparents came to see
 As a tantalising future, theirs by right
 And something different they could choose to be,
 Ditching their class or county overnight.

The history of every family
 Pivots upon some moment when a move
 Is made: some minor struggle to be free,
 Some little stubbornness, something to prove,
 Oppression or frustration, boredom or fear,
 When we would rather not be there, but here.

4. *Choices*

Here, said Minnie, in her Fulham terrace,
 Bearing the children of her furrier.
 (Since no policeman's daughter is an heiress,
 Seeking a fortune must be up to her.)
 Here, said Lister, heart fluttering like a mouse,
 In ill-health laying down his tools to pay
 For a spanking bran-new Blackpool boarding-house.
 (A blacksmith has a right to be a rentier.)

Where can we find ourselves but in our being
 Exactly what we know we need to be?
 That's how the human enterprise survives.
 How much more necessary, then, when fleeing
 The world's injustice, in terror of our lives,
 That we be welcome anywhere. And free.



Biographies

[Note. Some names have been fictionalised to protect, where necessary, the identity of the refugee writers for legal, political, or personal reasons.]

Sadia Abdu was born in 1955 in Mogadishu, Somalia, and grew up in Saudi Arabia where she worked for Saudi Airlines until she married. After returning to Mogadishu with her husband, she was forced to flee from the civil war in Somalia and make her way, along with her young family, into Kenya. In 1999 she travelled to the UK as a refugee, expecting her husband to follow shortly after along with their three children, Hunan, Murad and Ahmed, the youngest then only 19 months old. She has never heard from them since.

Filda Abelkec-Lukonyomoi arrived in Britain as a refugee from Uganda in 1989. Filda's initiatives have included founding the BK.Luwo women's textile workshop and working towards writing for publication. Her poetry and prose can be found in *Story of My Life* (Charlbury Press, 2005) and *How the World came to Oxford: Refugee stories past and present* (Oxford Literary Festival, 2007).

Afam Akeh, a Nigerian poet and journalist, is the author of *Stolen Moments* (1988, Association of Nigerian Authors). Some of his writings are also published online and in several anthologies. He is a founding editor of *African Writing*, which is committed to the literatures of continental and diasporic Africa, and has led poetry workshops for students and other budding poets.

Carole Angier is the biographer of Jean Rhys (1990) and Primo Levi (2002). She has edited a book of refugee writing, *The Story of My Life: Refugees writing in Oxford* (Charlbury Press, 2005) and translated and edited a book of poems from Farsi, *Lyla and Majnon* by Hasan Bamyani (2008). She is currently co-writing *The Arvon Book of Life Writing*, to be published in 2010. Carole Angier is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a trustee of Asylum Welcome and a volunteer visitor to immigration

detainees.

Ali Askari is an Afghan poet and literary activist, and formerly a student at Oxford Brookes. His work has appeared in *The Story of My Life: Refugees writing in Oxford* (Charlbury Press, 2005). He has a long association with Asylum Welcome.

Annemarie Austin was born in Devon and grew up on the Somerset Levels and in Weston-super-Mare, where she has lived for most of her life. She is the author of six collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *Very: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe, 2008).

Amina Benturki is a refugee from Algeria, now in full-time education in Oxford.

Anne Berkeley is one of the poetry group Joy of Six, with whom she has performed across the UK and in New York. Her pamphlet *The buoyancy aid and other poems* was published by Flarestack in 1997, and a selection of her work appeared in *Oxford Poets 2002* (Carcamet). Her collection *The Men from Praga* was published by Salt Publishing in 2009.

Carmen Bugan is a Creative Arts Fellow in Literature at Wolfson College, Oxford. Her poems and prose appear in *Harvard Review*, the *TLS*, *PN Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and her collection of poems, *Crossing the Carpathians*, was published with Carcamet/Oxford Poets in 2004.

Rachel Buxton is Director of the Poetry Centre at Oxford Brookes University, and Senior Lecturer in American Literature in the English Department at Oxford Brookes University.

Vahni Capildeo (b. Trinidad, 1973) works freelance for *The Oxford English Dictionary* and *The Caribbean Review of Books*. She is a Writing Fellow at the University of Leeds. *Dark and Unaccustomed Words* (Egg Box, 2009) will be her third poetry book.

Normalisa Chasokela comes from Zimbabwe. She grew up in Harare and has been in England since 2001. Though she has

written short stories before, these are her first poems.

Abraham Paye Conneh was born in Yekepa, Nimba County. He has worked as a youth worker, teacher and lecturer in Liberia and Nigeria, and is at present the Education Officer for Oxfam GB in Liberia. Abraham is a poet, preacher, advocate and educationalist.

David Dabydeen was born in 1955 in Berbice, Guyana, and moved to England with his parents in 1969. He is Director of the Centre for Caribbean Studies and Professor at the Centre for British Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick. He is the author of four novels, three collections of poetry and several works of non-fiction and criticism. His first book, *Slave Song* (1984), a collection of poetry, won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Quiller-Couch Prize. His collection *Turner* was published in 2002.

Dawood was born in Afghanistan in 1989, and came to the UK in 2006.

Dheere was born in 1977 and came to the UK from Somalia in 1999.

John Fuller has published sixteen collections of poems, the latest of which is *Song & Dance* (Chatto and Windus, 2008). His *Collected Poems* were published in 1996, and his collection *Stones and Fires* won the Forward Prize in 1997. He has also published nine works of fiction, of which *Flying to Nowhere* won a Whitbread Prize and was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1983. He is currently working on a book of poems and photographs with David Hurn, and writing an opera libretto for Nicola LeFanu. He is an Emeritus Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, where for many years he taught English Literature.

Eden Habtemichael is a TV and radio journalist from Eritrea who has lived in England for about seven years with her ten year-old daughter, Segen. She is women's project co-ordinator at Refugee Resource, where she was previously media project coordinator. Her poetry and prose can be found in *Story of My Life* (Charlbury Press, 2005).

Siân Hughes was born in 1965 and grew up in Cheshire. She lives in North Oxfordshire with her two children and works as a writer, English lecturer and in a bookshop/café. Siân worked for two years with Somali refugee women in Moss Side, Manchester, editing their stories in the Gatehouse Books publication *A Song for Carrying Water* (1996). In 2006 she won The Arvon Poetry Competition with 'The Send-Off'. Her collection *The Missing* (Salt Publishing, 2009) is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Maria Jastrzębska was born in Warsaw, Poland and came to England as a child. Poet, editor and translator, her recent collections include *Syrena* (Redbeck Press) and *I'll Be Back Before You Know It* (Pighog Press). Her drama *Dementia Diaries* was premiered in 2009 by Lewes Live Literature.

Stephanie Kitchen has been a trustee of Asylum Welcome since 2004. She is the managing editor of the International African Institute based at SOAS, University of London.

Greg Leadbetter was born in Stourbridge in 1975. His first collection of poems, *The Body in the Well*, was published by HappenStance in 2007. Formerly an environmental lawyer, he has written for the BBC radio drama *Silver Street*, and is currently completing a PhD on Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Jamie McKendrick, born in Liverpool, 1955, has published five books of poems and a book of selected poems, *Sky Nails*. His most recent book is *Crocodiles & Obelisks* (Faber, 2007). He has also translated Giorgio Bassani's novel, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2007) and is the editor of *The Faber Book of 20th-Century Italian Poems*. His translation of the poems of Valerio Magrelli will be published in 2010.

Lucy Newlyn is a Professor of English at Oxford University, and a Fellow and Tutor in English at St Edmund Hall. She has published widely on English Romanticism. Her recent publications include articles on Edward Thomas, an edition of his book *Oxford*, and an anthology, *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Cotemporary Poetry*, co-edited with Guy Cuthbertson. Her first collection of poetry, *Ginnel*, was published in the Oxford

JOHN ROLFE

Poets series by Carcanet in 2005.

Nazra Niygena was born in Muyinga, Burundi in 1981. Her family fled from there in 2001 because of tribal conflict. She attends a Science Foundation course at Oxford College, and is waiting to hear the result of her application for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

Jean Louis N'Tadi, born in 1964, is a playwright and poet. His play, *The Cries of the Cricket*, was performed in a London Eye pod in 2005. He has been involved with the Red Cross since 1984.

Chuma Nwokolo, writer-advocate, wrote *Diaries of a Dead African* (Villagerhouse, 2003) and the book of poems *Memories of Stone* (Villagerhouse, 2003). He is a lawyer, and was formerly writer-in-residence at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He is publisher of *African Writing*, a literary magazine on continental and diasporic African literature.

Bernard O'Donoghue is a leading Irish poet, critic and medieval scholar. He was born in Cork in 1945 and moved to England in 1962. Since 1965 he has lived in Oxford, where he teaches English at Wadham College. He has said that he "thrives on displacement", perhaps because it makes him write. His *Selected Poems* was published by Faber in 2008.

Deji Ogundimu came from Nigeria to the UK in 2006, leaving his wife and children. He is currently studying for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), and has a certificate and some practical experience in community volunteering. He has a developing interest in creative writing.

Adepeju Olopade was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She studied architecture in both Nigeria and the UK. For many years she was unable to return to Nigeria. She now has Indefinite Leave to Remain in Britain.

Yousif Qasmiyeh was a teacher at schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Palestinian refugee camps across Lebanon before coming to the UK in 2004. He completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in English

Language and Literature at the Lebanese University, where he also participated in a number of poetry festivals. He has published his poetry in the cultural supplement of *Annahar* and is working on his first collection of poetry. He is also translating a selection of poems by Jamie McKendrick into Arabic.

Simon White is Senior Lecturer in Romantic Literature in the English Department at Oxford Brookes University. He was a co-founder and organiser of a group called 'York Asylum 21', which facilitated poetry and drama workshops in schools and published a book of refugee writing entitled *A Gap in the Curtains* (2003).

