

جذور

وأغصان

ROOTS AND BRANCHES

Poems in Arabic and from Arabic

By the students of
Oxford Spires Academy
2016-17

From a workshop by
Adnan Al Sayegh

With Translations and Transcriptions by
Ala Owaineh, Julia Bray,
Mohamed-Salah Omri, Linda Woodley,
and
Saad El-Rifai

Edited by
Kate Clanchy, Writer in Residence OSA



OXFORD
COMPARATIVE
CRITICISM &
TRANSLATION

creative
multilingualism

The Poetry Hub at Oxford Spire Academy are grateful for the support of Prismatic Translation, a strand within Creative Multilingualism, part of the AHRC's Open World Research Initiative programme.

The AHRC funding has supported and extended our work with individual bilingual students and has allowed us to print this pamphlet, one of a series by very gifted school students who have a second language at the root of their creativity.

Introduction

I am sitting in the corner of a classroom at Oxford Spires Academy. In front of me, kids are grouped around a table; at the head of it stands the distinguished Iraqi poet Adnan al-Sayegh. He is speaking, with great dignity and emphasis, in a language, Arabic, which I do not understand. Later, I learn that he has been explaining how poetry can be about absolutely anything.

After a while he ceases, and a small commotion makes its way around the table. The children are reaching for pens and paper; there are ripples of chat; they are writing. Later (again), I learn how moved many of them have been, first to hear Arabic spoken formally in a school environment, and then to be helped to use it, by itself or in combination with English or sometimes French, as a medium for writing poems. I also get to read the very striking poems they have produced, which now, along with others written in follow-up workshops, are gathered for you to read in this anthology.

This project is funded by a government body, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), as part of a big investment in the value of languages called the Open World Research Initiative. The branch of this that is based at Oxford University is called 'Creative Multilingualism', and the twig of that branch

which connects to Oxford Spires is called 'Prismatic Translation', and is hosted by St Anne's College. The key ideas are: that languages are important; that they are important because they are creative; and that translation is part of that creativity. Moving back and forth between one language and another (even one you do not know well, or are just starting to learn) can help you come up with new forms of expression, and new ideas.

Though I didn't understand exactly what was happening, this was what I saw around that table, as the young writers rummaged among languages in search of the right words, sometimes asking for a nudge from the Oxford students Rawan Yaghi and Samuel Moss who had come to help out, as well as from the research assistant on the project, Rachel Dryden, who has also helped in the production of this volume. It has kept on happening in other workshops at the Oxford Spires Poetry Hub, which Linda Woodley has carefully choreographed and Kate Clanchy, with help from Shukria Rezaei, has inspirationally led. Already this year there has been work in Polish too, which has created another booklet; other languages will follow in the coming years.

Yet this volume has an especially startling punch. Here are stark poems of war and suffering; wrenching poems of homesickness and loss;

beautiful poems about nature and everyday life; poems of protest, hope, and rage. Perhaps there is something therapeutic in the act of writing, for young people who have experienced so much violence and dislocation. But the poems also have value in themselves. They are small acts of creation to hold against a fracturing world. Read them.

Professor Matthew Reynolds

To Make a Homeland

man 'allamani
kayfa u'assisu watanan
sayuthibuhu shukru l-qalbi
wa shukru shshiryani ttaji
shukru l-'asfuri ddari
shukru ttufahi shshami
kuntu lahu aydan 'abdan

Can anyone teach me
how to make a homeland?
Heartfelt thanks if you can,
heartiest thanks,
from the house-sparrows,
the apple-trees of Syria,
and yours very sincerely.

Amineh Abou Kerech (13)

For the Love of Syria

The night comes
And I feel inspired to write a love poem
The poem begins at night
and the sky is covering her land
I have all that love and love alone

I am writing a poem about the love of Layla
But my hope has died and
Nothing can heal it
Not being near or any words

If my heart suffers and misses her
Maybe that will stop the fire inside.

Nour Remadna (12)

Layla – a poetic term for loving something or
someone passionately

Poetry

الشعر

Poetry is the spark when a fire burns to its fullest
It is a vulture circling over its prey;
The eye of a tiger expanding when
He sees the bright, red blood
Clenching on the neck of a deer.

Poetry trembles before you,
Spitting off the tip of a pen,
Or growing like a tumour
On the side of your head.

Poetry defines the writer's strength:
It is weakness portrayed on the page.

Tariq Omar (16)

A Homeland

وطن

tanghamu] hama'imuha fawqa ra'si
wa tabki ma'adhinuha fi 'uyuni
uhawilu rasma biladin takunu sharikata shi'ri
wa la tatadhakhkhalu bayni wa bayna
zununi
wa la yatajjawwalu fiha l-'asakiru fawqa
jabini
uhawilu rasma biladin
tukafi'uni in katabtu qasidata shi'rin
wa tasfahu 'anni idha afada jufuni
uhawilu rasma madinati l-hubbi ssalamati
tta'awuni l-khayri
takunu muharraratan min min jami'i l-'uqadi
wa l-harbi wa l-damari wa l-mata'ibi

Syrian doves croon above my head
their call cries in my eyes.
I'm trying to design a country
that will go with my poetry
and not get in the way when I'm thinking,
where soldiers don't walk over my face.
I'm trying to design a country
which will be worthy of me if I'm ever a poet
and make allowances if I burst into tears.
I'm trying to design a City of Love, Peace,
Concord and Virtue,
free of mess, war, wreckage and misery

Amineh Abou Kerech (13)

Damascus

دمشق

This is Damascus
This is the cup and the soul
I am Damascus

Lava Mustapha (13)

'Rūḥ' – Soul

روح

Soul

Multi coloured

Tastes like fruits of summer

People laughing

It means the language of love and connections

Between different people and culture.

Aoab Ahmed (12)

Perfect

Oh, the joy of everything being perfect,
No worries, everything is just perfect,
Going out with friends, late night family games,
Starting new chapters, experiencing life.
But all this can change in the blink of an eye.

Everything can start to tremble.

Razan Mirghani (17)

The Shell

Bang!
My heart was beating
Nowhere to run or hide
Mothers and children fleeing
Why do they have to suffer?

Pregnant women looking for help
Hospitals destroyed, gas invaded the atmosphere
I quickly found my feet
Stumbling; desperately needing help
My deep cut, crimson red,
Blood spitting out like volcano's lava

I see a small figure in the smoky horizon
A man with large bags of aid
Looks like a doctor
With a long, curly, white beard
He looked like a wise man
I screamed for help

He carried me to safety
I asked him about himself
He said he couldn't let people suffer
'It's about the innocent people
Not just about yourself'.

Fahad Seif (15)

العيد في سورية

يا عيد أرجوك قف و تمهل
و لا تدخل علينا بحزن، وإلا فإرحل
وأعيد لا تفاجئنا بمجيبك ووتتعجل
فقد دُمرت أرضنا ، فكيف نرحب بمن هل
فملا بس أطفالنا امتلأت بالدم
وقلوبنا كسر ها الحزن والهم
يا عيد كُنّا في بانتظار على أمل
ولكن الآن لا نريد، فلا تسأل
واعذرنى، دموعي لا تصوغ الجمل
فحال وطني يبكي دماً، وما الحل؟
فالأسد قتلوا اللجنة في الرحم
واعتدوا على بلد الإيمان و الحكم
ولا تأتي أيضا لبكي على ما فعل
يا عيد، خير الكلام ما قل ودل
فعيدنا نصرٌ وشاهدة من الله عزّ و جلّ
يا عيد، لاتحزن الكلامي، فقد ذقنا العلم
ولكن العقوبة لمن بدأ و أجرم و ظلم

To Eid

Oh Eid, please stop and slow down.
Don't come to us with grief, leave.
Eid, don't surprise us. You arrive too early.
For our land is destroyed, so
How can we welcome guests?
For our children's clothes are covered in blood.
For our hearts are broken by grief and worry.

Eid, we were waiting for you with hope,
But we don't want you now. I beg you:
Don't ask to come in, and pardon
These tears which choke my sentences
For the state of my home makes
Me cry blood and what to do?
For the Al Assad family kill the babe in the womb
And sack the country of faith and wisdom.

Eid do not weep over his deeds,
The less you say the better. This Eid
Is a victory and a martyrdom from Allah almighty
Oh Eid, don't be saddened by my words
For now we have tasted the bitterest
And may he who started this, who oppressed
and who wronged us be punished.

Einas Hadler (18)

شعر عن سوريا

يا سوريا يا عشيق... وصوت أنين، كم اشتقت إليك يا حبيبي
سمعت صوت صراخ... فماذا أفعل من أجلك؟
جناحي مكسور كجناحك ولا أستطيع أن أفعل شيء ، لأنك
أنت بيتي الأول و الأخير...
لكن الله معك في كل شيء
ولو غادرت أرض وترابك الحنون، ورائحتك الياسمين،
سوف أرجع مهما كان السبب ومهما بقيت الحرب و الدمار
سوف تكوني جميلة بعيون الجميع، واذا لم تكوني يا حبيبي
فلن اكتب شعر لأجل.

A Poem About Syria

Oh Syria, my love
You are moaning
How I miss you
Oh my love
I heard your screaming cry.
What can I do for you?
My wing is broken like your wing.
I can't do anything
Forgive me.
But Allah is with you in everything,
Even though I left your land and merciful soil
And your fragrance of jasmine
I will come back.
Nothing will stop me
Because you are my first and last home
Even after what the war has done to you
And with all the demolished buildings,
You will still be beautiful in our eyes.
If you are not here, I will not write poetry for
Anyone else
May Allah protect my home
And my people
Amen
Oh Lord of all the Worlds.

Amineh Abou Kerech (13)

أنا من الشام

أنا من الشام

من أرض يرفع فيها الناس قطعة الخبز من الأرض

مشان ما بتنداس

من أرض بتعلم الأم ابنها لا يدعس على نملة آخر النهار....

من أرض بيخفي فيها المراهق سيكارتته عن أخوه الكبير

احتراما

من أرض يسقي فيها العجائز الياسمينه كل فجر ..

من أرض قهوة جيران في الصباح..

من أرض تفضلي يا خالة وأمرك عمو والسهر والضحكات..

من أرض تحملت كثير وصبرت مثير وعم تستنى الفرج...

يا رب تحمي الشام يا الله .

I am from Syria

From a land where people pick up a discarded
piece of bread

So that it does not get trampled on

From a place where a mother teaches her son
not to step on an ant at the end of the day.

From a place where a teenager hides his
cigarette from his old brother out of respect.

From a place where old ladies would water
jasmine trees at dawn.

From the neighbours' coffee in the morning

From: after you, aunt; as you wish, uncle; with
pleasure, sister...

From the land of innocent natures, kind hearts,
good company and laughter...

From a place which endured, which waited,
which is still waiting for relief.

Dear God. Oh God, please protect Syria!

Amineh Abou Kerech (13)

My Martyr Brother

أخي الشهيد

My martyr brother, you are going out of life.
Now you are lying in my heart and splitting
me into pain.

Do you hear me, my eyes?
Eyes, will you come and witness this world
with me?

For you are still alive. You are not a symbol.
You will not bend from hope. You will light
The fire of my revolution, but cannot light
my brother.

Now my pen bleeds for him. Now I regret.
There are tears in my eyes.

*

I will never forget the paradise of the highest
paradise, Lord.

I will never forget the paradise of the supreme
paradise, Lord.

Brother, Our Lord will be your dwelling place
And your last home and my prayer.

Lord, grant that I may bless you again.

Lord, grant that our deaths may gather us
together

In a testimony for the freedom of our land.

*

My brother, on one date, wait for me.

Einás Hadler (18)

War and Peace

الحرب و السلام

War, the opposite of Peace,
The reminder of tears of death and cries of fear.
War, destroyer of hope,
Destroyer of what we believe in
And destroyer of our homes.
Fear spreads throughout the souls of families
Fear spreads throughout the Earth...as we destroy
it...
No reward, no love, no hope.

The way we live our life is not decided by war
But by our choices, feelings and how our souls
connect with others.

Why do we not acknowledge our love for others?
Why do we not listen to one another?
Why do we not destroy the urge for pride and
glory?

Glory comes from our good actions, the way we
speak, the way we

Choose to live our lives.

There is no need to kill our fellow beings; there is

No need to destroy the Earth.

Instead of Killing, help.

Give food instead of giving fear and pain.

War, the opposite of peace,

The destroyer of peace,

The generator of fear

The generator of hate, pain and blood...

Aoab Ahmed (12)

Survival

Over the years
We have lived and died,
But only the fittest survive.
Since the first man
Set foot on this Earth
Our goal was to survive.

Since millenniums ago
The only way to survive is
To kill, to fight, to annihilate.
We need to stop, to look and open our eyes
To see the beauty of this wonderland
But all we think about is despair.

We never ask ourselves, why do we fight?
Why do we go to the trouble
of killing others we don't even know?
Once you step on the battlefield,
all you think about is survival.
Hours and hours
travel by
in the blink of an eye.

Ibrahim Karsani (12)

Seed

The swords that clash,
The guns that blaze,
The words that scar like knives,
Like kindling added to a fire,
Fuelled by hate; demise

The clock that ticks,
The hours that fly,
Those that age,
The newborn's cry,
A shrilling cry, a cry of war.

Those who are safe
And those who are there
What do you really know?
A bullet is a metal seed
A single one can grow.

Sara Al Dahwani (14)

Misrepresented

Somebody tell me please,
Who's caring for the refugees?
Hearts war-torn
Only want to flee to peace

They claim to be believers
'Messengers' of the truth
Their ugly message unvarnished
Unveiled for obvious deceit

So why are we all painted
No, tainted with grime
Of which possesses one colour
And never will it shine?

Judged by a cover
Don't do that – Ummah abroad
Ducking for cover

Mubarak Salim (14)

Ummī – My mother

أمي

Mum - she loves me
She has all my respect – if it wasn't for her I
wouldn't be here

Ayman Elhawati (12)

Peace

السلام

The word Salam – peace
It means love,
Colour of the world,
Sounds like birds singing,
Feels like hope.

Ibrahim Karsani (13)

The word Ummī – mother

When I think of the word mother,
I feel mercy and safety
The meaning of the word mother
makes me feel secure
Your mother is a gift
from the Lord of all the worlds.

Nothing compares to your mother.

Mohamed Remadna (12)

Mum

أم

I feel like a stranger in this life
I am thinking of my mum at this moment.
She was very ill.
I went to her and found her gravely ill.
I recited Quran for her
I found her with tears and pain
I went to my dad and told him
Come and see mum – she's very ill
My father told me and my sister to go out of the
room quickly
After half an hour
My father came and said 'Ask for Allah's mercy
for her
And to pray for her.'
In the end we will all go back to Allah
So at the time I said Alhamdulliah

Alhamdulliah – All praise belongs to God

Sarah Mohamed (17)

Ghazal: My Country

Have you seen the dust of the martyrs in my
country?

How the world's bodies accumulate in my
country?

Do you know how sad I feel when I when I see this
scene

When I see children killed in front of me in my
country?

When I can do nothing but pray from them, my
people,

When I wish to do everything to save my country?

I hear the news but what can I do for my
country?

I, young Einas, who loves her country.

Einas Hadler (18)

Traffic Lights

Stop:

To think you must stop reviewing previous
Mistakes,
Allow yourself to move on

Get ready:

Don't expect,
Don't get lost in your world of imagination,
But hold power over it.

Go:

For once,
Continue with your instinct
Instead of over-thinking,

Plunge into your future.

Aala Dayab (17)

A Glimmer of Light

la tahzan wa tantazira l-farah
wa la tabki amama l-insani wa tantanzira
shshafaqa
wa la tada' qalbaka bayna yaday ahadin wa la
tantazira rrahma
wa la tufakkir wa tantazir man ya'mil laka
wa la taqif makfufa l-aydi wa tantazira nnatija
wa la taqif wa tantazir man yarfa'ka
wa la ta'yas wa tantazir man yazra'a l-amala
dakhilaka
wa la tamut wa anta 'ala qaydi l-hayati

شعر عن البلد

مشتاقاً ان اذهب إلى الوطن الذي خلقنا فيه
و نشأت فيه والذي حلم حياتي كان فيه، ولكنه القدر و لكنه
القدر لا يريد ان أذهب إلى دمشق التي
أعطتني روعي
دمشق لما كانت الشمس تشرق على غرفتي و كان العصفور
يزقزق على نافذتي ولكن دمشق الام.

Home

I miss being in the land
where I was born and grew up.
Our dreams are there
but my destiny is not to be
with Damascus who gave me my soul.
Damascus where the sun rises in my room
and the birds sing at my window

Damascus, my mother.

Mohammed Assaf

محمد مصطفى، قصيدة سورية

شجرة سوريا أكثر خضاراً والحياة أكثر جمالاً
أكثر برد هنا، والجو احسن في سورية
لكني أشعر بأمان وسلام
أتمنى أن عائلتي ووطني يكونوا بأمان
ويعود السلام إلى بلدي
الحرب دمرت الناس و البيوت و الأشجار كلها
أحلم باليوم الجميل المستقبلي عندما نعود إلى الشام

The Syrian Trees are Greener

The Syrian trees are greener.
In my mind, they are more beautiful.

It's colder here – in my memory
the weather is warmer in Syria

But I feel safe here.
I enjoy the peace here.

I hope my family and my country
are one day safe

That peace returns to my country
To the flowers, to the jasmine.

War has destroyed everything:
People, houses and trees

I dream of the day, that beautiful day
in the warm green future,

When we return home to Syria.

Mohammed Mustafa (17)

لحظات الوداع

بقي لغياب الشمس لحظات، لحظات ويأتي المساء، وفي
المساء يأتي الوداع . وفي الوداع تكي العيون، ومن تلك
الدموع تنطفئ كل الشموع، إلا شمعة أوقدها دمعي كي لا
ينسى أنّ الوداع كان من أشد الآلام .
فتون ابو كرش

Farewell Moments

Sunset is moments away;
evening is coming in moments,
and with evening will come
the farewell.

In farewell, eyes fill;
And those tears
put out all the candles,
except one,

the one lit by my tears
to remind me
that farewell is still here,
still, my most intense pain.

Ftoun Abou Kerech (12)

'Al Qadr' Destiny

It means that whatever
Happens was meant to
Happen. It's a dark midnight
Blue, like stars in a night sky,
Perhaps it's a girl with
Jet black hair and a mysterious
Aura. It's the music of
Claire De Lune by Debussy.
It smells like the freshness
Of laundry, and beneath
The dark sky, has a little
Glimmer of hope, in a
Crescent moon.

Sara Al Dahwani (14)

I am from there

(after Mahmoud Darwish)

I am from there, and I have memories.
I had friends and brothers. I had
a tree around the corner from my house.

Now I have a room and I see from my window
green and cold buildings and birds still in colours.
I remember my brothers, how they died.

I want to forget everything; I know I must look
to my future. I remember I walked and crossed
the land and the sea when I came from there.

I learned all the world, yet I only remember
the tears of my brothers as they came down.
When I saw the blood on my brother's body.

I cannot forget this scene.

Einas Hadler (18)

ولادة جديدة

هجرت بلدي مجبرا وساقني القدر إلى هنا إلى هذا البلد
الجميل والشعب الطيب لكي أنسى كل الصعوبات التي
مررت بها. ربما هناك حكمة في ذلك لشيء مجهول ربما
لحياة مريحة. واصدقاء وجيران كانهم اولاد بلدي. ولمستقبل
جيد.

فتون أبو كرش

New Birth

I was forced to leave my country;
fate led me here, to this beautiful country

and these kind people so that I could forget
all the difficulties I went through.

Perhaps there is a wisdom in that unknown,
perhaps a comfortable life and neighbours

and friends who are like my own people,
and to a good future.

Ftoun Abou Kerech (12)

شعر عن الام

امي الغالية العزيزة، لما كنت أذهب إلى البيت و الحنين كان
يسبقوني، ام احبك.

انت التي ربيتيني و تعبتني علي، امي الغالية

The word Ummī –

My Mother

My beloved mother.

When I go to my house, the pain of missing her

Arrives before me.

Mohammed Assaf(12)