



MARILYN HACKER

GHAZAL: *kana bahran m'a beini wa beiniki*



Was there loyalty, envy, devotion between us ?
More like a dizzying pendulum's motion between us.

After the silence and the damp morning chill
a new conversation would grate like corrosion between us.

There was too little or too much to say,
not enough words, too much emotion between us.

Who'll be the first to make the indelible move,
pick up and drink down the vial of potion between us ?

Orgasmic fireworks were a metaphor :
there was a different kind of explosion between us.



Must a mountain crumble before we can really speak ?
Must I wait for an aeon's erosion between us ?

The morning light spells its name on my white coffee cup
but it aches with absence : *there is an ocean between us.*

Nieces and Nephews



In July, when Tsahal was bombing Gaza
and we marched, and there were flags and brawls
Lamis waited for me on the corner, smiling
in a lime-green sleeveless dress, not her daily jeans.
There were three cop cars parked in front of my building
and Lamis shouted giddily in Arabic
“She’s the terrorist, here!” I pinched her,
shushed her, laughing “Half those cops are Arabs!”
We went to a café, drank wine. She told me
her niece had finally been freed from prison
in Damascus. She lit up her cell phone



to show me the 19-year-old girl's photo.
The second of her older sister's children.

Naima's Ismaël on the Corniche, sunlit
in a rust corduroy jacket, white shirt open
at the neck, smiles next to his aunt in paisley
hijab and movie-star dark glasses.
Wind scuds the waves beyond. Out of Mosul
for the first time in his life, she, out of danger
for the first time in six months. The last
check-point, the last baksheesh, the abaya
shoved into a suitcase. A walk on Sunday,
a future open as the wine-dark sea.

I drank wine in the same café with Rasha
last week, at midnight, talking about meters—
blank verse, alexandrines and al-mursal –
though she was keen to go outside and smoke
in the insidious slant winter rain.
“Have you heard from Lamis? I haven't seen her
in a month, she didn't answer an e-mail.”
“Her nephew,” said Rasha, “died in prison
under torture.” The first of those five children.

I'll meet Ismaël in Beirut with Naima.
In Beirut, no one arrests the daughters
or the nephews of the neighbors these days,
so she can bitch and moan about the neighbors
and how her students can't translate as-Sayyab
“Nothing but Iraq...” The rain is falling
on all the suburbs where it lives in exile
and Lamis isn't answering the phone.

Marilyn Hacker is the author of thirteen books of poems, including *A Stranger's Mirror* (Norton, 2015) *Names* (Norton, 2010) , and *Desesperanto* (Norton, 2003), an essay collection,



Unauthorized Voices (Michigan, 2010), and sixteen collections of translations of French and Francophone poets including Emmanuel Moses, Marie Etienne, Vénus Khoury-Ghata and Habib Tengour. *DiaspoRenga*, a collaborative sequence written with Deema Shehabi, was published in 2014. Her awards include the Lenore Marshall Prize in 1995 for *Winter Numbers*, two Lambda Literary Awards, the 2009 American PEN award for poetry in translation, the 2010 PEN Voelcker Award and the international Argana Prize for Poetry from the Beit as-Sh'ir/ House of Poetry in Morocco in 2011. She lives in Paris, and is an editor of the French literary journal *Siècle 21*.