

Poems

Sheri Laizer

LOVE - LETTERS TO A BRIGAND



Institut kurde de Paris

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LOVE – LETTERS TO A BRIGAND

SHERI LAIZER

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Introduction

Although I had been living in various Middle East countries since 1983 I didn't get close to the Kurds and their extraordinary culture until two years later, when I found out what was going on in Kurdistan itself: Turkey, until 1990, denied even the existence of the Kurdish people and the word 'Kurd' was not to be written or spoken freely. Their music has been banned, their literature and stories forbidden. Elsewhere in divided Kurdistan, Kurdish culture has been, and continues to be, heavily censored and suppressed by the central governments in Baghdad, Tehran and by assimilation and relocation practices in Damascus.

Poetry and songs are a people's cultural right, they express a person's strongest thoughts and feelings. Today, I see that the Kurdish people are denied their fundamental cultural and human rights, that my friends who write and sing are censored, tortured, imprisoned and killed for their work.

Several poems in this collection were inspired by Kurds and Kurdistan, and the title itself denotes the Kurdish 'peshmerga', those who 'go before death' to defend their country and their people who have seen little in the way of freedom. To the central governments which deny the Kurds a separate existence, the 'peshmerga' have always been called 'brigands', 'outlaws', or by the popular derogative name most commonly used now, 'terrorist'. But it is clear, in fact, that they are the greatest lovers of humanity and human liberty by staking everything on achieving these.

Sheri Laizer

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frontier lines

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WAR ZONES

(For Kurdistan)

- I I don't confess love to enemies
 Against the hollowness and the heat
 The massacres and the trespass
 Of ideals when I look into your face
 And know what most I'd miss
 As they blindfold us with exile and distances
- The sun operates with knives of heat
 As your voice falls serious
 Going out across the blistered wilderness
 Animals like us
 Running ahead of guns
 Separated into herds across the borders
- II Torchlight comes across the ruined orchards
 Your arms dark and sure as walls
 Holding close in shelled-out houses
 Our hands pressed up against the wounds
 Waiting for the gun-butt knock of spies
 To gag our mouths with silence
 The garden is a war zone
 Struck at the root
 Its roses ravaged

Shadows weighing down as winter comes
War planes and black statues
The dumb hymn of the towns

III There is no release under such a moon
With its clouds curdled
Mustered under frozen starlight
And snow falling heavily upon the soul
All is motionless now
The children have become photographs
Stiller than still

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LOVE – LETTERS TO A BRIGAND

Before the snows come
There is no white in your black hair
You are the mountains' dark face
Wrapping your strong head in black and white
The landscape's monochrome turban -
While soldiers deface your language
And the old names of borders
Addicted to grenades

Exile; love smokes
From the gunpowder on my breast
Where my teeth have torn the cloth
To hold your dusky head in darkness
Tilting forwards through starlight
Until the sun floods outward
On a long long note

It is hard to love, brigand
A silhouette blazed with gunfire
Throat-chord of tribal dialect
Like a fierce gasp
Of climax
As you move from dark to light
Across a trapeze of crags

Like a bridge of lucky aces
Exile – demon hordes in uniform
Go jiggling across the borders
To the death-drone of fighter planes
Like hornets above the villages -
Small threadless pearls
Sirening cries
Through the nerve ends of the mountains

Listen, brigand, to the summits
The stones are your black eyes, your beard
They rang when you were fathered
Of your mother's white hollows,
And the rocking lullaby you heard -
Her crescent ecstasies and the guns
Are the echoes which thicken your songs
The crimson blood to buoy them

Turkey, September 1987



MOUNTAIN LINES

- I First, that sense of darkness
Creeping in, the clouds vaporous
above the still lake
- water disappearing
into forest distances
mirrored trembling
where birds flash and revolve
and that constant presence
- the voice and its promise
an impetus towards such intensity of focus
that every instinct is alerted
- II The water moves with secret sounds
- mystery and discovery -
that in your voice
those tones of light
create new weapons
as I reach outwards
and see the mountains
encircled by shadows
shift apart, strange distances lit:
the dusty frontiers
which you've crossed
- their burns and ravages

and you, stronger still
alert, vivid in my heart.

III This is no sudden war
which runs us through and hold us
captive, sometimes separate;
the smoke which pours
into the mountains
- its widows and orphans -
has not destroyed love
or stifled thought
so, even as darkness comes
I will draw you close
breathe deep,
and take your voice inside
like flesh itself.

IV Despite the isolation
of these barren mountains, the far
abandoned stations -
my eyes seek you
wherever they look:
finding in vastnesses
every shape
to remind me of your face,
arousing power

with such unthought of desire
that it urges me closer
- wherever you are -
to the impact of being together
this darkness exploded by fire.

Kurdistan, October 1990

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THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

- I Walking in the wind-light of the mountains
Wind visible over stone - each vein
And root exposed - haunting,
Haunted by the Presences.

Stretch out and I'll cover you with limestone
Waist-deep and naked in the dust.
Not a footprint in the powdery corridors,
The lunar whiteness of the passages.

- II The falcon-light is raging through the passes,
Beyond the mouths - the dark and silent entrances,
Way-up above the valley - the wing-beat
And the lapping shadows ...

Stretch out and I'll cover you with limestone
Waist-deep and naked in the dust.
Not a footprint in the powdery corridors,
The lunar whiteness of the passages.

- III The heat is up and hovering for the kill
Fiery pinions the harp of the soul,
Anubis greets Osiris at the Gates of Aten
The common wing of flesh has fallen!
Square clay houses and tumbled silence

The 'ka' casts off into distances:
Leave behind the body in its rags;
I hold you in the fire - you arise in flames!

Egypt, 1983

The Valley of the Kings is the burial-place of the Pharaohs, in the sun-blazed mountain of Ancient Thebes. New Kingdom period.

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CONCA D'ORO

High up on the mountain the sanctuary of the saint
Children come and kiss the glass - within the body waits
I'm standing where the tallow coils - each minute like a trial
Tongues and bells are tolling - trip the demons by the tail
Dancing demons single file - here the hole and there the stile
Sober fathers raise desire - flames of feeling - sacred fire

Shadows of the cypresses are surging through the gates
Twilight slips the curtain over details of your face
Teeth and claws and tender loins - the fibres of the night
Neon-grid above each station - take the taper through the line

Cathedral looms behind the docks - broken bottles - floral clock
Fishing boats in slippery salt move hidden watches - crystal rocks
The signs and sails are blazing - there your mark and here is mine
Neon - grid above each station - take the taper through the line

Red light of the midnight fountain - no eye open at the blinds
Twisted ciphers in the alley - warehouse tensions - grip the knives
In Conca d'Oro count the blessings - pillow muffles darkness cry
Fingers seek the Holy Body - weighing anchor dark to light

Sun mover over rocks and thorns - the icons and the linen
Angel-flesh in family bed - settled in domestic vision
Hum and buzz of generators - daily-contact with the rites
The gleaming flesh is tilted up - the crucible and the knife

Sicily, 1982

EIN GEDI (Ibex)

The sun glinting down on the road
Fierce blue heat smoking in the mountains.
Deep in the canyons as the sun rides the ledges
A sudden impetus to motion
From the dust and shadows -
Rising from the valley floor
Their long horns lifting and lowering
The herd moves forward
In a trance of stone and dry-blown wind;
Cave-drawn forms in rhythmic animation
Red and black outlines
Passing up the mountain

CAIRO

I dreamed I saw a vineyard rising from the sand,
I heard the muezzin cast his song across the City
of the Dead,
Blue and yellow desert wings opening in the mind -
My passion broke and lit the night
with the flashing

Vine

SINAI

Pipelines across serrated sands
Crossing Sinai in the sun; fluid lines
Of the great dunes
Black and amber at dawn

THE RED SEA

Tankers brooding in the Gulf
Oil tides around the rocks
In the knife-flash of sunset
I remember
The Bedouin woman, I saw her
A tiny black-draped figure
Leading a black flock of goats
Into blacker shadows...
The desert sun flashed once
On her golden earrings
Before she folded back
Into the roaring mountains



KHAMSEEN (The Desert Wind)

All day the heat stood up like a wall and on
into the night when all at once the wind began
to blow - one gust, a second, then with imperious
vigour the wind rose up like a warrior and raged
across the fields till the great palm-trees
surged and tossed like thistledown - a terrible
soughing mass moving through a sky grown alien
with whirling sand, dim, unearthly, pricked by
whorls of light: the houses of the village writhing
adrift in the landscape of the wind.

Egypt, 1983

NEAR EAST

Soldiers behind sandbags
Cut-off communications
Below the blasted offices
The ever-present ambulance
Baked bone and dried flesh
In the white jaws of the sun
Like terracotta men
Shattered by the wind.

OLD DESERT MOTHERS

Old desert mothers
in oil-drum houses
date palms
and their shadows
sand and stone
flare at the windows

LEBANON

The fine muscled nakedness of the young soldier
The naked one - a young dancer
The naked one - a young lover
In the shaded bedroom
He is dressing
Water trickles from his skin
The shower still running
Strong and thin
Plentifully virile
He disappears into the khaki uniform

May, 1983

THE PASSION

A red ray falls on Galilee
The fishing boat slips into harbour
The Fishes decline, the Ram ascends
In the aftermath of blood-black sundown

Dull with grief, blind with weeping
The women approach the tomb
Rolling open beyond the stone
The empty corridors of linen

JERUSALEM

Sunset over Jerusalem
Isometric hillsides
An orange sun
Hands raised
To lift the olives down

ISTANBUL

At the station - smoke
The red lights of the train
The breath of the three
Guards hanging on the blue air
Your unshaven chin
Roughing my ear
As I listen to the click of your accents
Your lips warm with words
Yet to be spoken
Before the journey, its separation.

You have jumped clear
A waving figure receding.
The train whistle rising into the mist
Like a dead prayer
Played with by so many enduring minarets
The great domed mosques
Leaning into heaviness
The rolling waters of the harbour
Turkish violin music...
Snow erupts in the faces of buildings
The rhythms
Of these iron wheels
The helplessness in your black eyes

Pulling me steadily into the wilderness
I watch your features
Form and dissolve
In the milky changes of the glass
Proud Kurdish features
Forever to be memorized.

Turkey, 1986

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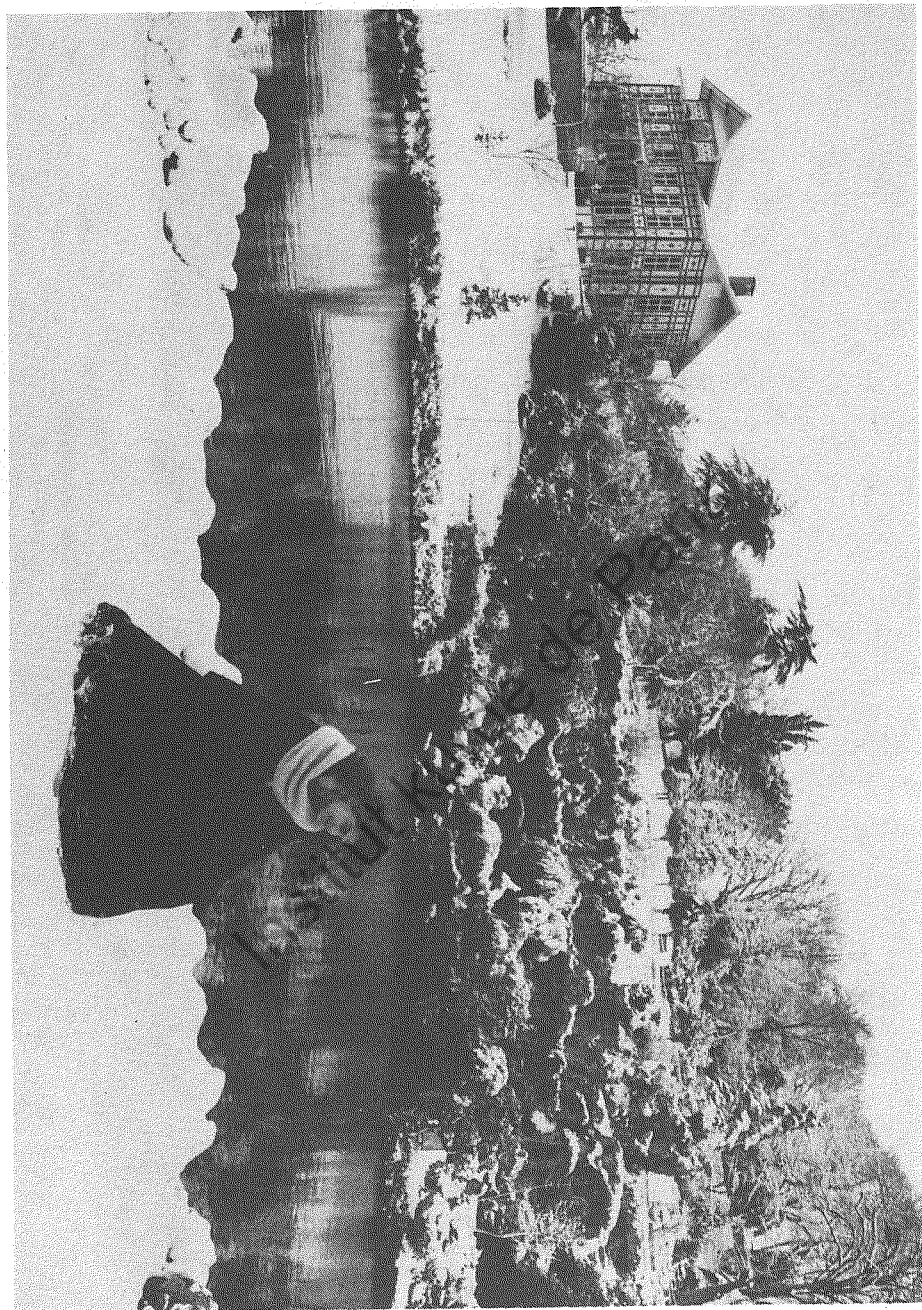
SINIRIN MANZARASI

Dayanıyoruz, dağsın kan
Gölgelerden daha kalın
Çesitli dillerde,
Gögüsün kılların siper edip
Sınırsız Kürtçenin yankılar üzerinde
Seninle sevişen ellerim
Sömürülen ezilen insanlardan
Sözettiğini duydum:
'Asimilasyon' dedin
Gövdenle bütünleşen doğayı
Yürürken ben:
Senin kokun baruttur -
Duygularımın ortasında hemen patlayan -
Ve sesin yükseliyor
Bana geliyor
Gölgeleri delen güneş ışığı gibi:
Eski sesler var içinde
Eski sesler, mermiler gibi,
Yankılanıyorlar -
Yankılanıyorlar uzun süre.

FRONTIER LINES

We stand dispersing fog
Thicker than shadows
In diverse languages -
Pillowed in the black hair of your chest
Above the echoes
Of your borderless Kurdish
Making love with you my hands
Had heard you speak
Of people routed, hard-pressed -
'Assimilation' you said
As I travelled over landscapes you embodied:
Your smell gunpowder -
Just exploded through my senses
Or fountains splashing outwards on strong muscles
And your voice rising upwards
Like sunlight through shadows
Ancient voices inside it
Ancient voices like bullets
Which resonate long afterwards

Turkey, March 1986



2
In the Traditions of Myth

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ISHTAR

“Your lovers have found you like a brazier
which smoulders in the cold, a backdoor
which keeps out neither squall of wind nor
storm... And if you and I should be lovers,
should not I be served in the same fashion
as all these others whom you once loves?”

EPIC OF GILGAMESH c 2300 BC

I The cave my cathedral
enclosed as a crystal
by the shell-sucking sea
cloud-copse buzzard and gull
below the cracked hills
farm-masked and anchored
boats at barnacle bottom gates
groping into blackthorn, gorse
and redstone pockmarked graves
waiting
for evening to savage in our arms
with all the leaping plumes
the passions cause
and cast again
away...

II Darkness in the rock my cave,
my jackdaw morning see-saw climb
from siren-fingered dim
anatomy of man -
to Ishtar's gash, the lap of altar
where sticky cyclamen
renews in generation
the hoar-black cone of the waning shaman
lichen-haired and limping
from her chapel of jasmine...

III In the unrhymed morning
I have not forgotten
her crescent totem
above the fizzing garden
but stand and roar in the prism chink
squinting from my pavilion of flesh
upon the yawning ocean
without ending
without origin

IV Ishtar of the spawning waters,
hymn of fission
in liquid corridors;
Venus of kohl and vernal fire
Queen of gutters, Queen of spires

enters my body
with her body of laughter
Jasp of Sumer
Hymen's risen daughter.

- V To my lips she bends
her kisses
overspills my clay with fire
till my flesh longs just to serve her
willing as quicksilver.
I trace the line of equinox
and enter her enigma,
discover again her genesis
as my form dissolves around her.
- VI Garlanded with awesome flowers
I cleave to Death, her sister,
our wedded flesh
explodes the knot
- the clotted hammers of my blood -
my eye, my shrine, my cup of fire
explode my squirming manhood.
- VII A honey-grove, a twilight raft,
my beryl tide of calm,
a dreaming bloom, a curling vine,
my spiral-fissured cave of time

planes down
to milky nothing...

- VIII I writhe towards the shifting queen
- her dazzle-veiled waters -
I see her gleam recede from me,
my crimson fingers tighten.
I force her -
I am hurled aside,
she casts my face into my darkness;
a beggar grovelling after light,
a graceless, toppling man.
- IX Ishtar drops me to the wheel's bowel
my nether root
my buzzing vault
where at once I see my brother selves that crawl
and jig on every shelf.
I flail in bitter currents of brine
and fear foams through my loins
my throat is thick
with falling weeds
where greedy sorrow dines.
- X At last a cry twists from my lungs
- a wail across the marsh -
to a wilderness of ash and smoke

the raven on the cypress bough.
Behind a wall of burnished brick
I hear a swish of laughter:
- I have answers, she says
and looks at me
- but can you understand my language ?
You are of men, attend to them
exemplify my favour;
your mouth moves only on yourself
its fever is rebellion!

XI You think to hunt and hold
the gods
you who are ignorant of the earth!
you do violence to yourself
- not us -
and look to suffer worse.

XII Incline your face toward the sun
enjoy your grain and wine
move with the moon in the tides of your love
and grace your glyph of stars.

XIII My gong, my drum, my brass lament
relinquish all their clatter
I stagger from the icon bird
at the turning of the heavens.

From terraces of blue-black stone
her braziers burn and spark
cascading snakes of fractured light
through assembly halls of masks.

XIV I flee within a whirring wood
through shadow-scented flowers
to a woman at the rivermouth
mixing bowls of seed and butter
In the starlight flicker of her face
I meet the Vesper Queen;
in her mouth of dusk and sunrise
herself her sister's meaning.

XV She draws me down inside her
to a cave of twisted leaves
to pewter rocks by moonlight
in the clapping, shingle sea.
Deft and dark from mounds
of vernal mud and slime
she moulds green effigies of men
and frees them from her side.

XVI Three gates deep beyond the thorns
I find myself cast
on a beach;
my cheek is crossed with unclean stones

fractured voices in my mouth.
The needle-eye my hourglass,
my corded wedge of flesh
graven by the funnel sands
the little amulet
- my life.

Pembrokeshire, Wales, 1982.

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EURIDICE

In the orchard to the quen hye come
And her up in armes name,
And brought hir to bed atte last
And held hir there fine fast
Ac euer sche held in o cri,
And wold up and owy.

SIR ORFEO
14th Century Lyric

The shadow of the arrow
Strays around the dial
Morning sun a navel
Behind the yellow trees -
With fox-brush deep
Amongst the ripples of a chord
He reaches for the rock-dark blur
Of the huntsman
And plays him - rein-slack
On the frozen horse
- and the fox is gone!

From grove to grove
- invisible -

Orfeo moves
From human call .
His singing travels

In unseen spirals
Murmur follows
Through backward hollows as
The minstrel plays
Closer to his hour
Woven tightly
In the graph of Nature.

The forest closes
Like a glove!
The planets make alignment;
Shadows flock down every path
The minstrel's heart falls silent.
On every branch the birds squint down
Feathers puffed like armour,
The ash, the birch, and darkening cedar
Shudder and draw closer...

Each tree twists out of melody
Each branch is snagged with fog
The stricken stone of which he sits
Turns cold, its timbre gone
And all around him shrill of tone
The birds now shriek alarm!
For going dark
And going down
Euridice
Bears the serpent crown

to Pluto subterranean.

MAGDALENE

'She watered my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss. She from the moment I came in has not ceased to shower kisses on my feet'.

LUKE 7: 44-45.

- Why I love

To love

Without plaint for Love's return

For the heart may not choose

its measure

Or its moment of affection, but moves

From the invisible

Source

Boundless, and unbound.

That I do love

And live with Love

I hold myself thrice blessed

With neither count nor claim

upon that One

Soul

Which moves me most.

O, powerless

Over love

And death, we serve
In hidden marriages

extended

Not consumed

Through joy, in union

of the flesh.

Even such a love

I have and live

For One

Himself

In form

That I might touch,

have touched!

In active knowledge

Of that wealth

For Love

is undivided

From Himself.

PHARAOH YOU LAY

"Then the lord of the Divine Hall (Anubis) rejoices for he sees the acclamations in the Funeral Hall as he stands beside the Mistress of the Mountains.

And Anubis says to Osiris: "Arise and live! Behold the manner of your new appearance!"

from THE EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD

I

Pharaoh you lay, gold and indigo
masked
before the long descent
Anubis jackal-headed
tilting
the scales before the blue threshold
the long barge on the way of darkness
towards the brilliant fields - immanent
in painted images -
these walls of tombs and temples.

II

Your warm lips in bas-relief shaped
upon the timeless mask, the hieroglyphs
where I knelt down
and finger-traced
a stream of life in picture-form
embraced the image of old experience
the will subordinate
to the consummation which is death
and After-life which is faith

III

And long was love
like resurrection in fulfilment
sustaining and withstanding time
and through time
gathering form - creation beyond dissolution
the unseen travelling of the living
heart which blessing
now can say: depart
go where you must, go well, beloved.

TONGUES

Blood's Logos Love

- the roar of our Oracle

Accord in each vein

Which booms with those syllables

From the throat

of the Cosmos the Oracle

Moves us

From the Tombs of our Darkness

Where blind Babel trumpets ...

Between us

The axle of Landfall

is turning

- the torrents of the stars

Plough through our lives -

But Voice

is a Barque

that bridges our distance

And Speech

is an Ark

for the Oracle's embers

Cold clay transmuting

to flames of Quintessence.

Tongue of my Tongue
Through Form's gravitation
Your body
my Nexus

Our wild Divination.

Some Definitions:

Cosmos	GK; Beautiful Order, world, universe 2. A woman's ornament.
Divination	Prophecy, augury.
Gravitation	A body's attraction to centre of earth, intensity of this or attraction of one body to another.
Logos	GK; Reason, discourse (rarely) world; intelligible order.
Nexus	L; Necto-nex, to bind; bond of connexion
Oracle	A Divine Revelation, infallible guide, mysterious advisor or advice.

Quintessence	Purest & most perfect form/ manifestation/ embodiment of a Quality; a highly refined extract L. Quinta Essentia; the Fifth substance beyond & underlying the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Fire & Air.
Transmutation	Conversion of Form Substance. In Alchemy symbolic of the spiritual metamorphosis of Man's baser nature into higher form (lead into gold).
Wild	Living in a state of Nature; untamed, not cultivated.

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THE BURIED CITY (Babylon)

I

Lizards flicker
between cracks or hillsides
a single cricket creaks
against abrasive moonlight
skeletal land distances
hot trees transfixed with sap
immobile above the mounds
of buried cities

II

The road unravels
shadows where we walk
long shapes side by side
in a landscape which has stopped
My heart pours
into the red trees
and black sky to touch infinity
where you lie

III

To luminous walls
we have returned
out of memory
of the teeming cities
running with the drum-beat
in the hot starlight
and your voice spiralling upwards
like Tammuz before the mourners

IV

A pure black bull was
led in
bellowing
to heaven
You whispered in its left ear
You whispered in its right
- Will I die tonight?
It answered back -
The rite is now consummate.



SUMERIAN LOVE-SONG

O my young man, my lovely plant
At the sound of your voice
The heavens leap for me
- a whirling dragon between An-ki -
Like one I knew
Before the mountains and the rivers
Here you stand before me
Like one cast from the flint of my own spirit
I find you once again!

O my young man, my lovely tree
In your eyes the brimming Abzu
- beyond the man, beyond the woman -
In your gaze the rushing cataract
Like one I knew before the Flood
Here you stand again!
Now I find your likeness in the glittering
Hollows
I find your likeness in the sougling
Branches.
Between Ereshkigal and Ninhursag
- the dim grave and the earth -
The Dingir reflect themselves in you

Here I walk in the eye of the sun
Here I glide beneath the firmament of An;
I hear the percussion in the shimmering reeds
And I hear the timbre in the stones:
- like one I knew before the earth –
My lovely plant, my ancient love,
Here you stand before me!

SUMERIAN TERMS:

Abzu	The deep waters below the earth symbolising the forces of creation.
An	The Lord of the Universe.
An-ki	means 'universe' (literally heaven- earth).
Dingir	Sumerian great gods who decree the fates.
Ereshkigal	Queen of the Nether world
Ninhursag	The goddess of the earth associated with fertility.

THE SONG TO DUMUZI

Your voice sings in my breast
Your spirit fills my heart
Your face is sweetest pleasure to my eyes
Dumuzi, you are magnificent!
Dumuzi, how magnificent you are!
Magnificent, Dumuzi, by my side.

My eyes! My eyes!
It is Dumuzi!
My eyes! My eyes!
It is Amaushumgalanna!*

The force behind my heart
It is a mountain!
The force that stirs my heart
It is a mountain that fills a cavern!

Movement away from you, Dumuzi
Moving away
It is a great wrenching
At your ebbing, Dumuzi
At your ebbing
A great wrenching!

Your coming, Dumuzi
At your coming
A quickening.
Your coming
Dumuzi, at your coming
Joy is gathering!

Dumuzi is honey that sweetens me
Dumuzi is sweetest honey
Gladness is mine
Sweetness is mine
A radiant place is mine
The young man has come!

Dumuzi, lie beside me
Let us lie across the water,
I am yearning for Dumuzi
Across the Abzu gliding –
Dumuzi lies beside me!
Yearning for each other!
With loving laughter
My honey-man sweetens me ever!

* Amaushumgalanna was one of the appellatives of Dumuzi. It means 'dragon'.

Dumuzi was a partly human, partly divine figure associated with fertility. During the Mesopotamian summer when all life seemed to languish and be threatened with extinction by the intense heat, it was thought that the celebrated semi-divine shepherd Dumuzi had perished and been taken down to the Nether world, the 'House of Dust'. The month of Tammuz (the Akkadian name for Dumuzi) recalls this period as a time of wailing and lamentation. His resurrection was celebrated at the time of the New Year festival when all the energies in nature were seen to revive.

The King and the High Priestess of the temple of Inanna (Akkadian 'Ishtar') would enact a sacred-marriage rite to ensure the fertility of the land wherein the priestess played the ritual part of the goddess Inanna herself, and the King (or High Priest) the complementary role of the shepherd Dumuzi, one of the goddesses' husbands.

THE SONG OF GESHTINANNA *

Five green veils are wrapped around the vine,
Behind these five green veils it prevails
Against the thorn,
Spirals strong and silent, each a whirlpool and a wall,
Five silent spirals
Which are wrapped around the soul.

The Great Ox of the Earth, he cannot paw that soil,
The Wild Bull of Heaven, he cannot tear a hole,
Five green veils
As sure as granite walls,
Layers deep as silence
From which the vine might soar.

* Geshtinanna is a Sumerian personal name meaning 'Vine of Heaven'. Geshtinanna was the sister of the divine shepherd Dumuzi in Sumerian mythology of the Inanna (Ishtar) and Dumuzi (Tammuz) cycle.

THE JADE GODDESS

for Lamis Abu Hanna

Greater than the Great Pagoda
Was the horse I rode behind her
Taller than the Imperial tower
Was the horse that she was guiding

She took me with her, swiftly moving
I had not known such skill in riding
And I myself as naked, trusting
Held the horse and flew behind her

The daybreak coming - the dream was over
When next I saw her
I bowed in greeting

THE TEMPLE OF THE DAWN (Wat Arun)

I dreamt six priests seated knee to knee
Wearing pale robes of moving flame
Semi-tone bells striking clear
Above dense vegetation
Stairs of the Dragon
Mounting to Heaven

Thailand, 1984

you shall rise beyond your words, but your path shall remain, a rhythm and a fragrance; a rhythm for lovers and for all who are beloved, and a fragrance for those who would live life in a garden.

KHALIL GIBRAN

Institut kurde de Paris

3

The Persian Gardens

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THE PERSIAN GARDENS

I

Rain comes down slow over Haifa
Cypress and pine scents
Wet pavements
Slow, slow Sabbath
My love at a distance
No end to this
No end in sight to absence

II

Hunched grey skies above the harbour
Soft sea-gull greys
- May weather -
The gold-domed shrine
Is dull upon the hill
Shrouded with foliage
Hung with drops of mist
In the Sacred Gardens - silence
And no one comes

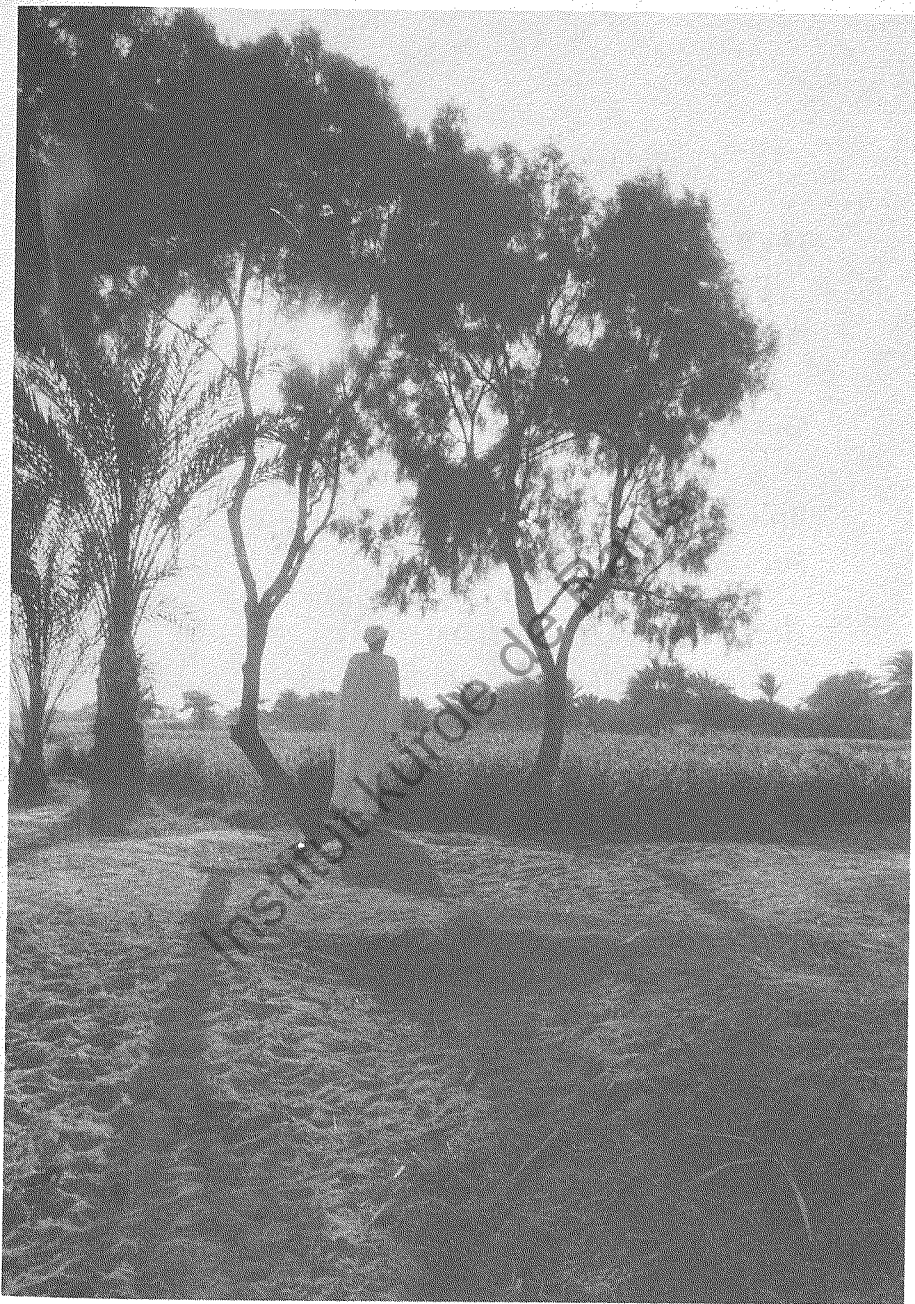
III

A raw breeze tears the cloud apart
Light plays across the harbour,
Small birds pipe in damp undergrowth
Yellow berries
Crimson flowers
Your son is playing
Below the hedges
- the sun gleams on the dome -
He is one; he is three;
He has not yet been born

IV

Where are you as the rain begins
Can I find you in the dream again?
Already, the Arab cafés are closing
- metal jugs so coldly shining...
A bird cries out across the harbour
The swallow dives into the shadowed gardens

Above the valley
In the deepening evening,
Darling, are you walking, thinking?
Now thunder growls out across the water
And in the wake of wind and rain
- the voices come through louder ...



THE GARDEN'S NEGLECT

The Key of the Garden

lay rusting, the wild centre - corrosion
Love lost in the ravine, the greatest loss,
A great love! it faltered at neglect,
And with that silence the Garden grew dark,
- untenanted:
Brown plains beneath a fire-tangled sky,
Fires burning in the valley.

Hesitation the Garden closed - and I
in my Hopelessness, unbroken -
Yet walking through the Chasm of Doubt
still carry my hope, that embryo:
Straight path urging back to the Cup
- a great and fiery draught!
From which the torrent Love itself
Streams forth 'Beloved' and 'Beloved' *

* As opposed to 'Lover' and 'Beloved'.

THE NIGHT-TRACK

for PG

Music from within the house

Runs out across the grass

- the pale garden -

Notes busy as ants,

Piano chords striking sudden emphases

I walk towards the hills - primeval

In this light, primeval yet

Despite this freight of little houses

- Antipodean verandahs -

Yearning in safe harbours

All night your face

Stood out - a moon

That climbed the sky and drenched the dark;

The marvellous mobile mouth and enigmatic

Eyes - on the night-track -

Like the souls's compass,

Drifting shadows

Definite as Tarot images:

Final cards coming to pass -

Starlight over us.

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

Writing a prayer for real love
Showing you pictures of souls in triumph
Crying out: 'Allah! Less darkness and more warmth'
For the wintering of his heart has left me comfortless

Below the cool walls of this mosque
Other walls blackened by refuse smoke
Where is He who is so far from here
If not present in the light's intensity
Beating down like the flesh of one lover
Rich and strong upon the other
And the blue-blood currents of the Bosphorus
Urging us far beyond our bodies

All these people walking by me in the heat -
Oblivious to love that's executed
Across such terrible distances
Seeing only the high domed wall
That lies between
We two whose heads of old Byzantium have turned
From all the sweat and cloudlessness of Earth
Towards a pure calligraphy of God -
Beneath these minarets of hope or truth
Whose infinite skies have not divided love

Istanbul, 1985

POEM AT BRIGHTON

I

It's the winter wind coming on
The door to the summerhouse banging.
Its now again the amber quiet of Autumn
The lemons of the tree unripening -
And in the arms of another lover
I hold your presence tighter

II

The fire in the grate undying
I watch the embers' slow
Illumination
And see the moonlight flee the paling
Fence which divides our house
From the wild expanse
Of sougning ocean - the darkening waves
The lonesome pier at Brighton

III

Unable to sleep and gently lifting
The covers 'round him softly breathing
I cross the carpet like a blind man
- write you another letter -
And just before daybreak creep back in
To the warm place beside him.

WINTER LOVE LYRIC

Surrey webbed with Christmas and travelling
fog dropping from parapets
and turrets - I see reflected
windows lit and laden
ladies changing faces, shimmering
like cellophane ...

I ache and ache while you are gone
and the birds wheel like phantoms
across the frozen gardens ...

XMAS

All the people playing at Xmas
Instantly festive
At some expense, and the children
Ripping at presents - the first, the second
The tenth, the eleventh,
Then suddenly bored - they clang around
Devouring food

Now the weekend over friends
And families recover
Resolutions
To be made anew
After New Year.

THE CONJURING

Blue squares of cold moonlight on slate roofs
Zig-zags hugged with light - the chimney stacks'
Stark silhouettes - outlines in wintry bond
of nakedness.

Down, down through the ghostly streets
I draw you to my arms
From your portal in the mountains
From that haunt of lonely trains
All through the chill ravines
With siren hymns
To lure you ...

Bath, England

THE BLUE RIDER

Kandinsky, Gleizes;

Blue flutes twin

The breast's comet

Spark and orbit

Spark and awaken

A violet shard

Cast with planets

Circle and square

Flung bone

To the grey rooftops

Where the dangling crescent

howls...

Museum of Modern Art, Paris

CHRYSALIS

Red and black the acrobat
caterpillar jacks its way down
from the bent tree, spinning
a silver tightrope, arching
swinging, balancing -
half its lifetime
the performance spans as he
descends ...

She says - This one a Monarch
will become;
burnished black and lustre red
the heraldry of wings wide-spread
like two shields -
already charted out
the pattern play in royal down

The minutes surge, the line
vibrates sweeping the ground

Goddamn inch-worms!

I hear you curse
and rub it out
with a hard heel as
you stride outside
across the path

USA, 1980

SAXOPHONE

(for Graham Brazier)

Enough of the fawning
Mouthing the delicate sentiments
Painted ladies yawning
Wide for love
Or less

No gentle Romeo, thou
Snarling beneath the saxophone wail
Like the rabid needle puncture
Repetition, repetition
Nothing new -
About as soft now as the knife
And as true for the sundering

But finding it all uproariously funny
Just watching them dangle
You'll do it for money
Perform all the tricks
Ah, but this puppet parade
Is turning your guts
Despised caricatures
Parasites
Cleaving to your flesh
And the jagged emptying bottle of life

To the beautiful sneer
Of your lips
Is upraised, full-tilted
And thou, my darling
Spitting out the dregs
With a profound contempt

Saxophone wailing somewhere
Stabbing through
The uneasy thickness of city nights
Errant lamentation
Protesting
Thy body full of holes
Still playing each hard note
Always another song

USA, 1979



RETURNING FROM GERMANY

She had a name
A home and a phone
She was returning
To stake her claim
- laughing down the other end of the phone
After you'd just been making love
With him;
He was her husband and belonged
To her perhaps
Like all the conveniences
In her easy estimates

And his body
Still alive with promise
Blue smoke slowly rising
From his voice
As he spoke of love
And the letters he'd mail
On some all night vigil

Treading the scorpions in the night
A one word rose of gunsmoke
As her laugh cracks
Like a plate hurled
Against the wall of Hell
Possessing nothing at all

FEMINISM

I was good for your Ego
Were you good for my soul ?
I called you three times today
But from now - self-control
'No player' I said
'I' m no player of games
I've done this so often
I can't count the names
But you sat down beside me
So thoughtful it seemed
I began to enjoy you
And that was the end
In showing my pleasure
I tickled your pride
I was good for your Ego
You were hot for a ride
So we kissed and touched hands
And we met thigh to thigh
I was good for your Ego
You wanted a shrine.

SEVEN TONES

Tech-talk

Acoustic love

Control of tenor

Under pressure
of disconnection

Vocal texture

Emotive pleasure

Decipher register

By intonation
and subtle metre

Institut kurde de Paris

HIGHWAY HIGHWAY

And the wind rising, moving
Everything passing in slow motion
The darkest minutes of the moon
And I know you won't come

And the rain falling, falling
The steady beating
Headlights going
Black in the fog
And I know you won't be back

Everything passing like a dream
Nightmares in the back of cars
The mangled bodies on the road
Screaming as the glass gems flew
Out the windows
Steaming wreckage

Waiting in the cold
Premonition an ugly word
Life is not told we think
In crystals or teacups
By witches with moles
But the white line still bleeds

Still lies throbbing
And the bed is full of blood
Seen in the sleeping dream

Ankara, Turkey, 1987

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THE LOVERS' PICTURES

Black storm skies above the boats
Bebek, Rumeli, Kilyos shedding light.
Sometimes we could make love
In the old silence
Of your relations' apartment
The black hair of your chest my pillow
Your scent like gunpowder

We were so like lovers
- like all these boats at sunset -
Wanting hard
With sky-tinted mouths
In the gull cry of open arms
And waking to the white
Hours, villas, clouds
Or human sequences
Our sea-eyes glazed with secrets.

These are the lovers' pictures
Framed in sea-saw nakednesses
Even the soul's exposures
Of salt, semen and kisses
Or hair left in the brush
Like traces of a smile
Which floats in the darkness.

Yes, we have filled the vase
With transparent flowers:
This is love's house.

In the shining circles
Of your loins
Damp little plant, it curls -
I have stretched out in the heat
Open-eyed on the beach of shells
With the sea-grain
- the pearls on my belly -
Dancing for love like a sultan's boy
All satiny adoration at windows
Open to the waves like promises.

Water pictures, our journeys -
We were the twin clicking of shutters
Parting and clasping
Savouring the names of ships
The ports they offered us;
Reflections in blue mirrors
Echoing the flight of birds
Or pictures of each other's faces
Taken over long distances
Never seeing departures ...

Istanbul, 1987

DIVIDED THE LIGHT

with black shuttles
From the dark couch of sleep
I know I knew you before this earth
 flew heavy overhead:
O yes, despite the other flesh
 Your name is Genius of all Mysteries.

THE FORGE

Foundation-stone or tomb
I cast my shadow in
With love in the foundry of Saturn:
Seed of the mind
 in the cradle of thighs
No longer a question
 but plunging to the swell
Begins the honing
 of the child.

THE HOUSE OF ISOLATION

Sand which keeps slipping past the windows
Moods rising and falling;
Laughing at despair for five minutes
Then the wind blows black again;
Black rocks bloodied by the sunset
Sphinx on every mountainside.

I watch the sand blown back and rolling in
- smouldering dunes
In ceaseless transformation -
All sense of self
Will scatter with the flurrying grains
Until the heart towers
In Night's perfect moment
And I - who do no longer crouch anticipant
Am home
Am come
Soar out ...

The Valley of the Queens, Upper Egypt, 1983

WAITAKERE

I see the signs
Of rain behind the misted outlines
Of the Waitakere Ranges, the sudden
Hush
As dawn approaches
Gold to white
And day declares itself
At curtained windows:
A sword of light against the pane -
The coming angel
My good omen

The sound of rain moves
Shshsh... against the suburbs
These tin roofs almost Polynesian
In native foliage -
The sudden flare
As birds cry illumination:
I throw wide the window
And let the angel in.

Auckland, New Zealand 1984

PASSION UNDER PENALTY

(Agire Evina Bindest).

Out of the white questionmarks
And the barbed wire
A shout breaks the silent landscape
Flurries of blown snow
The voice echoing
Endless mountains
Fighter planes, tanks, soldiers

Behind the stone walls of the houses
Her father's flute-playing
Legendary as Kurdish battles
Tells how the mountains witness
As they soar above the snow clouds
Or smoke of bombs
The great passions - Mem ü Zin: ¹
Passionate resistance

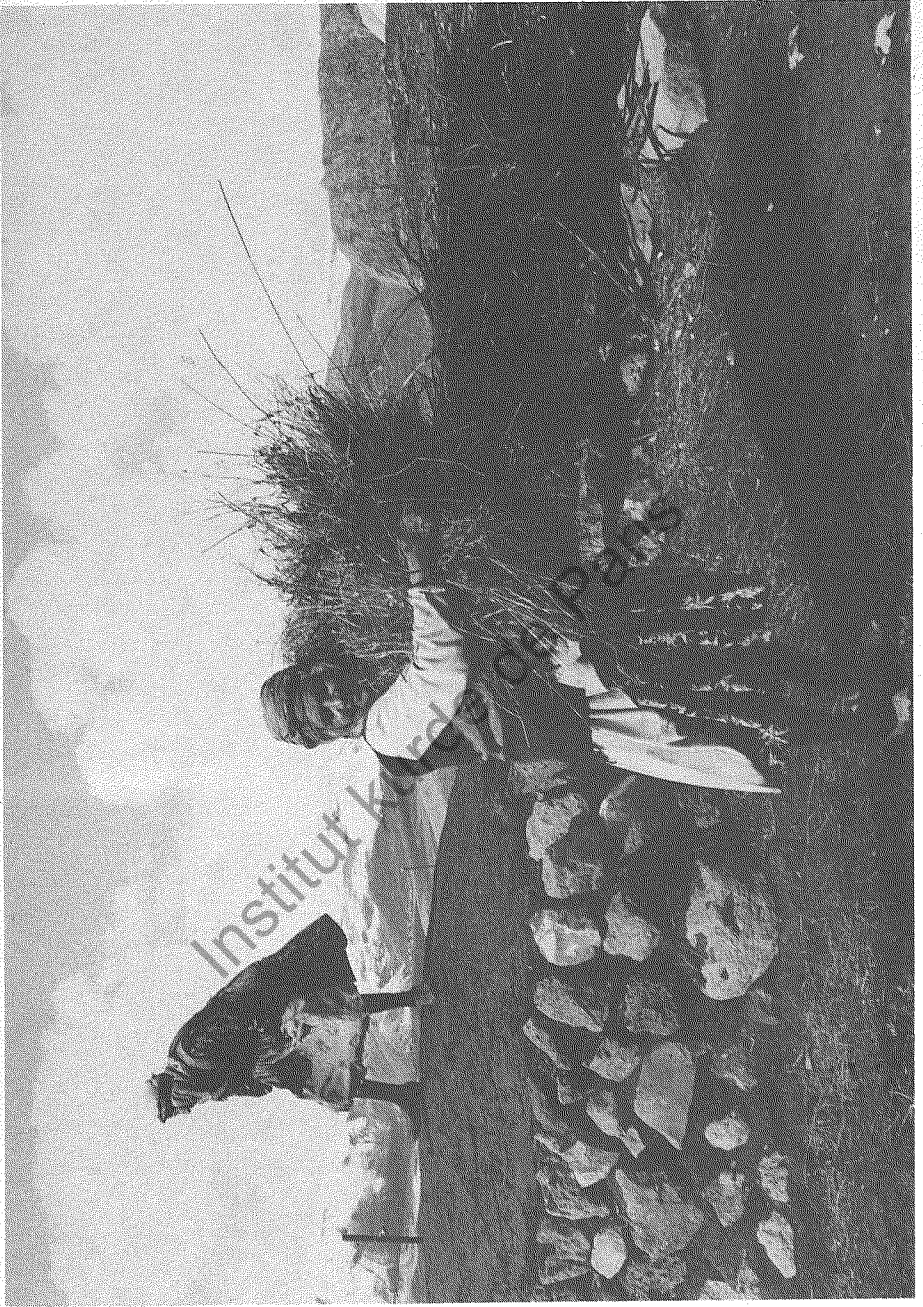
The passion of the songs he sings
All the songs which are forbidden
All the poems, all the stories
The entire language
And the teaching of his language
The Kurds must be silent:

'There are no Kurds' ²

But the warriors know themselves
Being Kurds of unforgetting blood.

- 1 Mem and Zin are lovers of heroic proportions in Kurdish folk literature.
- 2 This verse refers to the prohibition of Kurdish books, music and language in any printed or recorded form by the Turkish Government.

North (Turkish) Kurdistan, 1988



UNSHELTERED

I

How do you put the colours in
When they are the colours of the soul?
The mauves, slashes of red purple,
The absolute still of snow
While the sharp winds of the mind
blow splinters from other zones
against this vision
like the beginning of wounds
old and new
in the landscape and the heart.

II

The mountains have become blue-grey
distant and facing us -
utterly unreflective, unresponsive,
and the warmth which flowed
is stopped with chill -
a blue penetrative howl
the distances in your eyes
felt like a blow.

III

Outside

- against the abrasion of cold -
my face sets hard as stone:

I could walk on

into the frozen membranes of the drift

- red burning lights like warnings

abandoned long ago

- a dereliction of cold.

IV

No one moves, and my breath comes

sharp, catches in uncertain rhythms

the mauve bruises of the sky

running, rolling: clouds with no blood

have become the only movement

in the mind, stricken somehow.

V

I looked through his eyes,

blind with images

and fell, shelterless

- this pulsing space is merciless,

filled with distances

where every signal is confused,

full of treachery; these thin clothes

have taken in the winds
and left the soul imperilled
the windows shattered
the blizzard
peopled with the homeless.

South (Iraqi) Kurdistan, December, 1990

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MR BOSS

Hey, Hey, I' m Mr Boss
A promise is a promise
I won' t make any sacrifice
It's petrol that's important

Yeh, yeh, I' m Mr Boss
I really am your friend
I build you camps and give you bread
But first I sell your land

See them running, hey, yes
Bombs rain on their heads
I' m going to watch by satellite
I promise I won't forget

Hey, they say, Hey Mr Boss
Keep your bread and tents
We want to live our lives in peace
We want our freedom, yes

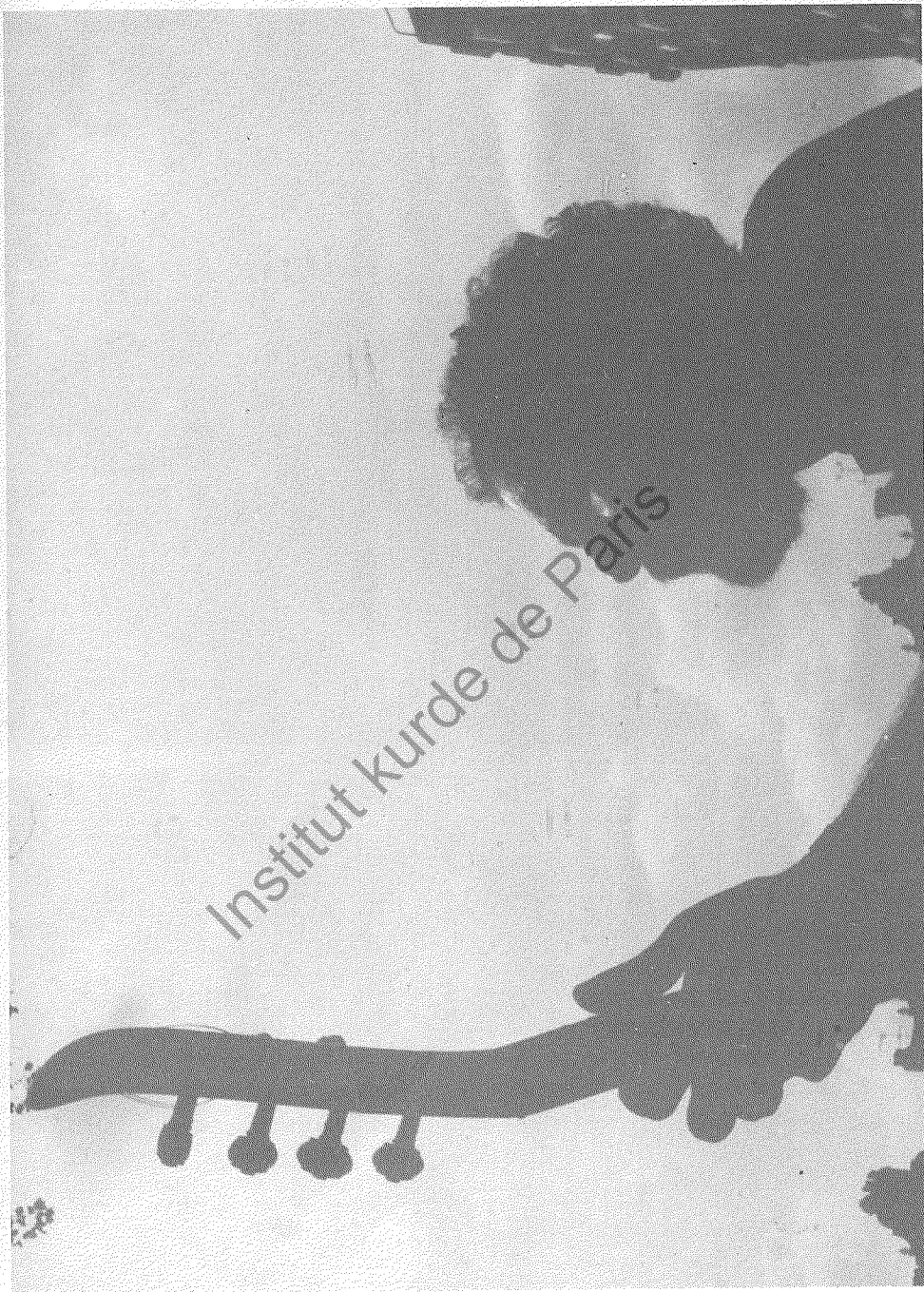
Yeh, yeh, I' m Mr Boss
Come on, fight for us,
I' m the strongest in the world
All means to an end

Hey, hey, I'm Mr Boss
Petrol is important
Can't make any sacrifice
A promise is a promise

Paris, May, 1991

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This song was written after the collapse of the Kurdish uprising in Iraqi – Kurdistan in March 1991, when the Iraqi army re-invaded Kurdistan sending the people fleeing to the mountains in fear for their lives. The West failed to support the uprising which it had encouraged, and more than 5000 Kurds died from hunger, exposure and from injuries from exploding mines when they crossed the border into Turkish and Iranian Kurdistan. The massive aid campaign came several weeks too late to save hundreds of Kurdish children.



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LOVE – LETTERS TO A BRIGAND

(Poems & Photography)

Sheri Laizer

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Laizer has lived and worked in the Middle East since the mid '80s and has become closely involved with the struggle of the Kurds for national recognition of their usurped homeland. Several poems are concerned with Kurdistan and the culture of the Kurds.

In these poems, the style is closer to the literary traditions of the Middle East than it is to the contemporary language of Western poetry. Poetry still occupies a dynamic place in Middle East life and literature as an expression of popular, political and personal feeling.

Sheri Laizer is a writer and broadcast journalist. She also promotes world music. Other titles include: 'Into Kurdistan – Frontiers Under Fire' (Zed Books, 1991), 'Maelstrom' Photographs & Poems (Samurai Books, 1981).

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