

To my friends – they know who they are
– *Eric*

To Marie, Margie, Rosa, and all in SBASSG
– *Tom*

To You, Good Listener, who met me on my way
– *Sylvie*

In memory of Beti Rhys (1901–2003)

*When the night has come and the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we'll see
No I won't be afraid – no I won't be afraid
Just as long as you stand by me*

*If the sky that we look upon should tumble and fall
Or the mountain should crumble to the sea
I won't cry – I won't cry – no I won't shed a tear
Just as long as you stand by me*

(© Ben E. King, 1961)

Preface

Tom Cheesman

Eric suggested the project of creating this book as we drove from Swansea to Llandudno, skirting mountains and the sea, through the invisible internal borders of Wales, on the eve of St David's Day, 2003.

Refugees from many lands have spent time or settled in Wales over the centuries. Some of the earliest poetry in the Welsh language, written over eleven hundred years ago, is poetry of exile, lamenting the brutality of war, the traumas of displacement and bereavement, the sorry fate of the outcast – “Songs of Heledd” and “Afflicted, Abercuawg” are examples. Later, Welsh industry was built by economic migrants. In the thirties of the last century, many refugees from fascist Europe were made welcome here. So too, later, were exiles from South American dictatorships or communist Eastern Europe. For many decades, Cardiff's long-established Somali community has repeatedly taken in new refugees. There have been many others. But only since 1999 has the British government's policy of ‘dispersal’ made Wales officially host to literally hundreds of refugee families and individuals from scores of different countries – or would-be refugees, ‘asylum seekers’, sent here to await decisions on their fate.

Sylvie, Eric and I asked friends and friends of friends for poems and stories (fiction and non-fiction) for this book. Brief notes about the editors and contributors can be found on the following pages. About two dozen asylum seekers and refugees – men, women

and children – have contributed. Most of them are new to Wales, though a few have long been living here. We have also included texts by half a dozen other writers of Wales, and a sample of work produced by South Wales schoolchildren in Eric’s workshops. The refugee work ranges widely, from stories and poems by thoroughly practised writers – some appearing here in English for the first time – to raw expressions of feeling and perception by people who have never attempted creative writing before. All attest to the double value of refugee writing: to work through personal traumas, and to communicate with the world as individuals, instead of as the faceless, bogus bugbear of much UK media and ignorant public opinion. The fact that several asylum seekers prefer to remain anonymous is testimony to their profound insecurity.

We intend *Between a Mountain and a Sea* as the first in a series of publications. These will feature writing – and, we hope, visual arts – by asylum seekers and refugees in Wales, and also include work by any other writers and artists who would like to be involved. Please contact us through www.hafan.org or at the Heyokah Centre, Swansea SA1 6BG.

Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group is a voluntary community association of refugees and other local residents. We run a drop-in, organise social and cultural events, and help people in crisis. We depend on donations. See details on the back of the title page.

We hope that this book will convince readers that Wales is as lucky to receive such talented incomers as they – we hope – may feel lucky to find themselves in such a relatively welcoming country.

Notes on Contributors

Eric Ngalle Charles grew up in the small village of Buyea, in Cameroon's South West Province. He left the country in 1997 aiming to join relatives in Belgium, but found himself stranded in Russia. After three years he succeeded in obtaining papers to travel to the UK. As an asylum seeker, he edited a newsletter for DPIA and participated in a project led by Prof. Terry Threadgold of Cardiff University, offering workshops on poetry and displacement to schools across South Wales. He was profiled in HTV's documentary series 'Melting Pot', and his poetry was translated into Welsh at the St David's Eisteddfod (2002). He is currently studying for a BSc in Business Information Systems at UWIC, giving writing workshops, and working on two books: a collection of poetry, *Bag of Letters*, and an autobiographical novel, *Way to Britain*. He has a daughter and a stepdaughter, and plays football for Avenue Hotspurs, Ely.

Tom Cheesman was born in Liverpool and grew up in County Durham. He is a senior lecturer in German at Swansea University, a volunteer with the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group, and a trustee of the charities DPIA (Displaced People in Action) and Croeso. He lived in Germany and France before settling in Swansea in 1990. He translates German poetry and fiction and helped edit *Home and Away: Diaspora Voices (Index on Censorship 31/3 2002)*. The poems are mostly based on conversations with asylum seekers, refugees and others attending SBASSG's Friday drop-ins at the Heyokah café in Swansea.

Sylvie Hoffmann is a freelance artist, storyteller and teacher, and also volunteers with SBASSG. She was born in Thionville, France, in 1947. She emigrated to Britain in

1973. For four years she lived as an ‘alien’ and had to catch a ferry back across the channel every few months in order to come in again with a new visa. Finally on 6 January 1978 she was granted indefinite leave to remain. She studied French and English in London and took a PGCE in Swansea, where she has since taught languages and creative writing in various schools and colleges and worked in cultural projects, such as with Travellers. She has two daughters, a BA from Swansea Institute in Architectural Stained Glass, a licence to fly, and a Welsh GCSE.

A.K. lives and learns in Swansea.

Isabel Adonis is a mother of four, writer, artist and teacher, home educator and working philosopher. She lives in North Wales with her partner.

Moira Andrew, born in Scotland, has lived and worked in South Wales since 1988. She is an ex-headteacher, now a freelance writer and lecturer. She has published two collections of poems for adults, and many poems for children, including the collection for primary school teachers, *Language in Colour*.

Rebekah F. is 10 and lives in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Andy is 8. He comes from Albania and lives in Newport.

Anahita Alikhani studied Art to MA level at the University of Tehran, and worked as a tutor there. In 1998 she began working as a journalist with German, Austrian and Turkish television teams. Detained and tortured after reporting on student protest demonstrations, in 2001 she fled the country. Recently granted leave to remain, she won a place on a multimedia journalism course with the BBC. She volunteers for the Welsh Refugee Council and SBASSG and is working on a film about asylum seekers for Valley and Vale Community Arts and for the British

Council's A Sense of Place project. Her text, translated by Parvin Leloi, is available in full on www.hafan.org

Abdalla A. Bashir was born on Dagarty Island in the Nile, near Karma, Sudan. He studied medicine at Juba University, specialising in psychiatry. After practising in Sudan and Qatar he came to the UK as an asylum seeker in 1998. He took an MSc at Cardiff (with a thesis on spirit possession in intercultural psychiatry) and is part of DPIA's Refugee Doctors Programme and the BE4 project on mental health and social needs among ethnic minorities in Cardiff. His stories have been published in magazines in London and Qatar, where his first collection – *Al-Ruyia* (The Vision) – will soon appear. "The Court", his first non-academic publication in English, is based on the execution of religious leader Ustas Taha – "Africa's Gandhi" – in 1985 in Khartoum. He is working on studies of concepts of the human person and of spiritual evolution. His wife and daughters in Qatar were unable to join him for three years; he learned in May 2003 that they would be able to come to Britain at last.

Grahame Davies was brought up in Wrexham. He is a poet, editor and literary critic, working both in Welsh and in English. The poem 'Rough Guide' is from the collection *Ffiniau / Borders*, by Elin ap Hywel and Grahame Davies (Gomer, 2002). The English version is the author's own.

Menna Elfyn is the writer in Welsh best known outside Wales. Born in 1952, a much travelled and passionate campaigner on Welsh and international issues, she describes herself as a Christian anarchist. Besides five plays, two television dramas and a novel, she has published eight volumes of poetry, including the bilingual *Eucalyptus: Detholiad o Gerddi / Selected Poems 1978–1994* (Gomer), and the recent bilingual collections *Cell Angel* and *Cusan Dyn Dall / Blind Man's Kiss* (Bloodaxe). She both wrote

and translated “Gwenoliaid” (“Swallows”) specially for this book.

Anonymous are around a dozen contributors to Sylvie Hoffmann’s “Swansea Collage”, as well as the authors of “Can Heledd” (“Songs of Heledd”) and “Claf Abercuawg” (“Afflicted, Abercuawg”). These are among the oldest Welsh poems, dating to the middle of the 9th century. Heledd is thought to be a Welsh princess from present-day Shropshire, most of whose kith and kin were slaughtered by the invading English. The speaker of “Claf Abercuawg” is an outcast and an exile, literally or metaphorically a leper. The translations by Jenny Rowland (*Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion*, 1990) were adapted for this book by TC.

Humberto Gatica was born and educated in Chile. Until his detention in October 1973 under the Pinochet dictatorship, he was involved in community arts and cultural projects with shantytown dwellers, peasants and forestry workers. Released from prison in August 1974 with his wife, he left Chile for Argentina. He came to Swansea as a refugee in October 1975. In 1981–84 he worked in a community arts project in a coal mine in Mozambique, returning to Swansea because of the civil war. Since 1987 he has worked as a technician on the Photographic Art BA degree course at Swansea Institute. Occasionally he publishes poetry in magazines (usually in Spanish) and participates in photography exhibitions.

Hamira A. Geedy is from Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan. She is a qualified GP, trained in Shiraz and Tehran and with 17 years practice in Tehran and Mahabad. She is now an asylum seeker living in Swansea with her two children. She wrote her story in English. It happened to people she knows well.

Nigel Jenkins is a Welsh writer based in Swansea. His latest poetry book is *Blue*, a collection of haiku (2002). *Gwalia in Khasia* (1995), a book about Welsh missionaries in India, was Arts Council of Wales Book of the Year in 1996. *Footsore on the Frontier: Selected Essays and Articles* was published in 2001. He is co-editor of *The Encyclopaedia of Wales*, due from HarperCollins in 1995. “Girl Reading” appeared in *Acts of Union: Selected Poems 1974–1989* (Gomer, 1990). “Borders” is published here for the first time.

Showan Khurshid was born in Kirkuk, Iraqi Kurdistan, but had to leave because of the various wars waged by the former Iraqi regime. He spent some years on the run before finding a refuge in Sweden. He was granted Swedish citizenship and considers Sweden to be a model country. The epic drama *Dream of Power* was first written in Kurdish, then in Arabic, and finally in English; it has yet to be performed or published.

Maxson Kpakio is from Liberia. He worked there as a freelance journalist for two years, and for the Red Cross and the Human Rights Group. Having fled political instability and civil war, he reached the UK and was dispersed to Swansea, where he now lives. His short drama “It Could Happen To You Too” has twice been performed by members of Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group. He has worked as a volunteer for BTCV and is currently a trainee community worker with the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service. He is a member of the Wales Refugee Media Forum’s Refugee Link Group, and his poem is based on discussions in that group. He writes: “I’d like to say a big thank you to all the good people of this beloved city, Swansea, for all their love and kindness shown me so far. I have felt very much welcome.”

Hans Popper, born in 1924, grew up in Vienna. His family fled from the Nazis in 1938 and came to Britain. After army service and qualifying as a teacher, he took a PhD in medieval German and came to work at Swansea University in 1961. Though retired, he is still an active researcher, working on medieval epics and on the philosophy and psychology of emotions in European traditions. He is a volunteer for the Samaritans and writes letters on behalf of Amnesty International.

Gabriel L. Vingu, from Angola, is a pastor of the Pentecostalist Church. He walked in Bishopston Valley on 16 March 2003, wrote his story on 20 April, and was removed from emergency accommodation in Swansea (after eight months on zero cash) to Cardiff on 25 April. His text was translated by Sylvie Hoffmann.

Million Gashaw Woldemariam is an aeronautical engineer from Ethiopia, who has been in Swansea waiting for a decision on his asylum claim since March 2002. He trained pilots for the Ethiopian airforce, with the rank of lieutenant, and was a flight safety inspector for the Ethiopian civil aviation authority.

Bird without Tree

A.K.

Orphan Bird flies in the sky
Where to live

Poor Bird looks for somewhere
His confused destination gives him the will
To live

Wounded Bird needs the Tree where to live
Somewhere

Every single bird tries hard to find the Highest Tree
To live
The Tree found between Mountain and Sea
Somewhere
Every single bird needs to be protected
Somewhere

Orphan Bird flies in the sky
Where to live

Poor Bird
Crowded by grumblings of unfriendly moods
In every place! In every sky! On every tree!
Where is the Bird supposed to live?

Wounded Bird
Oh! Innocent!
Rest! Rest! Keep Hope! Somewhere!

Writing Refugee Other

Isabel Adonis

When I was a little girl in London during the 1950s, my parents knew a Jewish refugee called Nick Gordon. That wasn't his 'real' name, the name of his family. He had changed it. He was from Hungary and he had an English wife called Sheila and a young son called Christopher. They were quite wealthy and I was often chosen from my sisters to stay with them in their flat in Holland Park. My parents were poor. In 1956 my father got his first 'important' job teaching in the Sudan and before we left for Africa, Nick and Sheila took us all up the West End and bought us new clothes. I had a royal blue sailor dress with a large white collar and new white sandals with holes in the front in the shape of a flower. Those shoes remained special for a long while, even after they were far too small and the toes cut out for my growing feet. By changing his name Nick had become one of us and not one of them; he had an English wife and he had learnt to assimilate into London society by adopting an English identity. The friendship with my parents was almost certainly based on identification and sympathy – refugee poverty, foreignness, prejudice. My father had left his home in the Caribbean, and my mother her home in Wales. They too were strangers in town.

Across the road from us in Oxford Road was a Dr Wistrich and he was a Polish Jew. I know that because I remember my mother saying so. She had a special way of saying 'Jew' like she was chewing it in her mouth as if she was savouring her hostility. I was a

frequent visitor to Dr Wistrich as I was one of those children who were constantly ill with all manner of curious illnesses.

We left Kilburn for Khartoum and I never heard about those ‘refugees’ again. My father was ‘going home’ to his ancestral origins, like the Jews ‘returning’ to Israel after generations of living ‘abroad’. But he didn’t seem to find the home he was looking for. Finally my parents split up. He went back to the Caribbean, and my mother took us girls to North Wales.

When I was older, I went to live in Bethesda, where my mother was born. I suppose that in my turn, I was looking for an ancestral home. But from the start I didn’t feel right there; I felt ill all the time. I went ‘back’ to illness, my constant companion throughout my childhood. I struggled to make a life with my two sons and I tried to fit in to what I thought was my place but my place was no place. Illness had been a way of relating to my mother, an identity with her, but it didn’t work with the Welsh community; nothing did. I was always the outsider, the in-comer, exotic, to be pitied, tolerated, resented, feared – a relationship of no relation, the relationship of stranger.

When I met my present partner, Bob, I could only just walk. I felt ready to die. Here, for the first time in my life, was someone who would listen to me. I could talk and be heard. I started to feel a sense of my own self and I knew that this was what I wanted more than anything else. I was alive: I could live and be part of life. I knew he was my chance to escape a situation I couldn’t survive.

My family didn’t hesitate to show their dislike of him. They did their very best to undermine our rela-

tionship. If the Welsh community was isolated, besieged and defensive, my own family was ten times more so. But I began in a faltering way to speak for myself, frightened and besieged by feelings I would rather not have had. Through talking I slowly discovered myself. It was shocking how much of a burden I was carrying and how it was affecting me physically. If I could have foreseen the persecution I was to endure from my family and the community, I don't know if I would have taken that road. But I had sensed a different life and there was no choice but to continue to reclaim my life. Talking to Bob had made me self-aware: a black woman living in a white town. As time went on I felt more and more black. I became what the community insisted – but when I asserted myself as a black woman, I met increased hostility.

I found refuge in writing and it was writing that saved my life even though I had no confidence at all. In one notebook I kept my 'white' writing, flat linear prose, and in another my unacceptable black writing, my true feelings. It was a long time before I could see that the two types of writing needed to be together. Eventually I gathered up all my notes and wrote a book called *Black Girl*, after Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. It was as honest a book as I knew how to write then. Everybody said my writing was good but no one would publish it. Maybe I didn't try hard enough; maybe my own ambivalence denied its publication. I still feel frightened; threats from family members still sit on my shoulders.

In my imagination Bethesda had always been a healing place; it had a religious significance. I wanted to stand my ground but there was nothing I could do.

When my mother died the umbilical cord was broken, and just as I'd left my family I had to leave the town. The day I left Bethesda it was raining and I was crying with relief. I left Bob to load the van and I cleared out of town. Bethesda was my home but I could not live there. Today I miss the few people who were always friendly, I miss the noise of the river in flood, I miss the huge trees in the woods and I miss the mountains like huge cakes with icing clouds. I miss the special tree on the bridge by the river. I don't want to return.

In Llandudno we are all visitors. Issues of identity are less obvious. I'm starting to reclaim my body as I cease to be public property. For years I had felt so marginalised and alienated from myself in the face of opposition that I couldn't even say "I". I literally couldn't own my own thoughts or my body.

I write to find a place to be, to speak my own words if only to myself. Writing is my refuge, a place to run to from a world where I often feel alienated and isolated. In *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, Langston Hughes talks about the necessity of writing from your race, writing from your culture. Most times I feel as though I'm in a culture of one, that I have no identity, no place, neither West Indian nor Welsh. I write without a place and that is what makes what I say so difficult for others to understand. There's an uncertainty and a lack of safety about the world that I live in; a not knowing over a knowing.

My critics say I should give up writing about myself, give up race, and write about somebody else, real or imagined. My writing, they say, is too personal and profound and my task as a writer is to entertain and please the reader. But I can no longer do what other

people want, or think the way they want me to think. In fact the more they balk at my writing the more determined I am to define myself and my relation to the community. It's important to me and I think it's important to others. Slowly I am finding a voice and becoming undivided, individual. It's not a voice that asserts but one that stands on no ground and has nothing to defend.

People who live on the 'edge', the 'margins', appear to threaten the status quo. New ways of looking and defining are required. The mixed race person is in a unique position to question and challenge the notion of identity and race. The term 'cultural diversity' seeks to embrace difference and in its turn creates a new racial category. For years I carried the dead weight of culture until I realised that my job was to let it all go. What is new and creative must always nourish society from the outside, and writing from personal experience is a way to challenge this kind of 'racialised' thinking.

In the beginning of this piece I made a claim to know some refugees. I was attempting to find a way in. The claiming of sameness is what we do. People often say to me, "I had a coloured friend once" or "I had a coloured girlfriend", as if voicing one's racial credentials makes one immune from racism. They want me to confirm the identification they have made by speaking as, or speaking for, ethnic minorities, or black women, or whatever. This would give my voice some authority. Without this authority of identity, it is very hard to listen, because one finds one is listening to oneself. To have no identity is to be truly alone, truly individual; perhaps even the identity of 'outsider', of persecuted minority, is easier to live with than this.

Two Stories

Andy (8)

The Dragon in the Castle

Once upon a time there was a dragon and he was hungry for food and he didn't have anything. He flew out on the sky and he found a castle and he found some soldiers. He ate all the soldiers in the castle. Then he found some real food and it was chicken, bread and cheese and then he flew back to his house.

The Soldiers Killing the Good People

One hot day the king wanted to build his face with rocks and he didn't have anybody to build it. The soldiers said to the king: We will go and look for some people to build it for you. The soldiers found some good people and they started to build the king's face. The soldiers killed anybody who wasn't working. They saw a man resting on the ground and the soldiers killed him.

Portrait of a Refugee

Moira Andrew

His bold dark eyes
challenging authority,
one of his few phrases,
“Can’t make me!”

His small lithe body
imprisoned in the cold
grey classroom for
hours on end.

His long clever fingers
knotting and unknotting
lengths of frayed string
in lesson time.

His quick lively mind
picking up fragments
of English to spit out
like venom.

His strong brown hands
lashing out at those
who cross him, especially
women teachers.

Just months ago
earning an adult wage
under the blistering sun
of Somalia.

Imagine the problems,
adjusting to a culture
where ten-year-olds
are children.

Black is ...

Rebekah F. (10)

This is what they say:
Black is evil,
It is dark,
The colour is dull.

This is what they say:
In black there's a spark,
A spark that's nasty.

These are words people say,
And this makes them sad.

Is it out of hate?
Or the colour of their skin?
But white people here
Have racism within.

from Britain Through My Eyes

Anahita Alikhani

As we see from the map, Britain is some islands off Europe, comprising four countries. It's about one fifth of the size of Iran, with a similar population, but no problems with the water supply. It rains so frequently that one grows to hate the rainy, cloudy weather. The islands are green – once in a while, when the sun shines pityingly, an intense emerald green. But mostly it's cold, wet, stingingly windy, gloomy and oppressive, and the green resembles grey or even black. Unlike in Iran, the weather is not to be trusted.

People's faces change according to the weather. In sunshine they smile, but if it's cloudy they frown grimly and easily lose their tempers. They never stop complaining about the weather. However, contrary to what Iranians believe, the British are mostly straightforward, loveable, kindly towards others, patient and polite, at least outwardly. Many experienced charity workers make life easier for us strangers. The way they devote their lives to others regardless of colour or race or religion was very strange to me, having been constantly told that westerners have no time for anyone else, no compassion, forgiveness, generosity or love. I have found a great deal of affection here. (. . .)

Some young people in the street look very strange. If you look at them they tell you off or swear at you. If they don't want attention, why make themselves look so odd, even frightful? For them this is what freedom means. They can't believe that in my country, long hair or short sleeves means a night in a police cell, leaving

in the morning with shorn hair, a haggard look, and most likely painful bruises, resulting from a beating. Many of them are highly educated, but uninterested in politics or history. They take their liberty for granted. Only we who have suffered in prison know how valuable it is. It's just like water: it rains so much here, they don't know the value of water: for us, it's life itself.

The tv news reports some murder or abduction every night. The difference in Iran is that there, the people getting killed are mostly reporters, writers or thinkers, murdered by the regime's henchmen. (. . .)

People love the arts and collecting artworks. Yet there seem to be no important works of this country's art from ancient times. In the British Museum I could not find one single ancient British brick. Everything in it was brought over from the East in the nineteenth century by archaeologists, whole civilisations packed up in the basement. Perhaps they were right to steal works of art from countries like mine, which had real talent for creating treasures but whose later generations didn't care about preserving their heritage, or took revenge on hated predecessors – like the famous Buddhas destroyed by the Taliban. If only this government and the Queen were as powerful as Queen Victoria and her governments, those statues would still be safe! And Blair would have been consoling the Queen, telling her that Iraq has wonderful ancient walls, statues and vases, as well as gold and diamonds! Now we must wait and see if the stolen treasures of Iraq's looted museums turn up in Britain and America.

The Queen symbolises British independence. She makes public appearances, pays no taxes, is very rich, lives in a glorious palace, and answers to no one. Sixty

million people work to keep her family in luxury. Without the Queen coming to openings or ceremonies, tv would have no programmes, no tourists would come, Buckingham Palace would stand empty, and Britain would be dependent, God forbid!

Since none of her tasks require any mental effort, it would be better to choose a Queen among the beauty queens, so beauty would come to be seen as a facet of independence, which would be all the pleasanter. (. . .)

Unlike in Iran, not many people are homeless here. Even the animals are luckier than animals in my country. There are few stray animals, and no one throws stones at the pigeons or at cats and dogs. The only 'homeless' animals here are slugs – 'snails without homes', as we say. I feel sorry for them – nobody takes any notice of them, or asks why they lost their homes. I have never seen so many slugs in my life. They always appear after rain. Perhaps Mr X, who wants to become an Assembly Member and is unhappy because asylum seekers are lodged in furnished homes, should be thinking more instead about these poor homeless snails – after all, they get no support from the UN. But perhaps he doesn't know what the UN is!

The government here respects the people and their rights. In my country nobody has any rights, but here even asylum seekers do. I personally am very grateful to the government and the people here. One can be relaxed speaking to the police; one can even get to like policemen. Here people's talents are recognised and cherished. In Iran they knock you down and force you to stay at home for most of your life. The privileges here are the gift of a free society, where it isn't criminal to be critical.

Five Poems

Eric Ngalle Charles

My First Language

Oil and water
Never blend –
One stands up,
One beneath.

“Like a gorilla
And a monkey
Claiming oneness,” –
Look closer –
“The monkey is monkey
And the gorilla gorilla.”

That’s not me.
In captivity I eat banana,
In the wild savagery.

Contained,
Leaving my roots,
I was a goat.
I had three kids.
You – a lion –
Had just one,
Still devouring mine.

I replenish my kind,
You wait your turn.

I trespass,
Being a protectorate,
Not knowing
So many distant borders –
What's the difference?
Not deserving the treatment.

Then I skip,
Learning to jump,
Like doctor Jack Mapanje,
The queue staring at me –
I don't have a face
If that's all I am,
As if my mother abused drugs.

Feeling sorry for me
With vouchers as in child play,
Buying food from Tesco
As the fat lady
Questions my strangeness
And witnesses point a finger.
I thought I was a scarecrow.
So be it.

Clarify intent,
Teach truth in history,
Then they may
Not laugh at me.

Then you ask,

What's my first language?
Ask my granny.
Oh no, the generation's gone,
Still confused
Which language they spoke.
I thought
I am Portuguese,
Never owning a plantation
Of my own,
Then I thought
I am German,
Then I realised
The English kicked
The kingdom out.

They said
I was French –
Oh no, Marie! le bread!

Thanks to the queen –
Queen Victoria that is –
I was given the name
Charles.
Rumours say he was the great.
Maybe I'm a Mormon
Tracking a family tree.

Communism never thrived,
Blaming the heat.

Here in Wales,
Starting with "Bore da",
Still wondering –

A first language?
Studying English,
An adopted tongue,
Through life –
What makes you think?
I know my language,
Existing passively,
As others came
And others left,
Surprised why
I speak in tongues.

Friends

The tale is simple.
What if I had friends,
And my friends had friends,
What if I knew
My friend's friends,
And my friend's friend
Knew my friends?
The land would be full of peace
And crops would grow where planted.

What if my friend's friend
Did not like my friends,
And my friends
Did not like my friend's friend?
It would just be you and me.
Then on tree tops
Woodpeckers will sing
As the elders sit for the day.

Comment [E C1]:

What if you 'cleansed' my friends,
And I 'cleansed' your friends,
And it was just the two of us?
Let the rivers tell
The untold sorrow,
The grief of one such land –
Then it will be you and me.

What if on your way down
You meet my friends,
On my way up
I meet your friends,
Like those in the days
Of good old Samaritan,
What will be the tale?

Questions

Why, oh why?
Like a young girl
Using a basket
Fetching water for the village.

Stooges since time began,
Like an old statue
Forever facing west,
Blown into a sea
That never filled.

Why – ?
Mountain high,
Segmented by years,
As old women stand and gaze,
Telling tales of times
They were in love.

Shaking heads,
Wondering,
Is she happy?

Happy she is –
Can't you tell
By her wrinkles?

Au Revoir

It was the first
And probably the last time
She missed work
Just to be with me
She did not look in my eyes
When I looked at her
I realised she was crying
But she did not want me
To notice her tears
I had been separated
From my mother
Quite a few times
But there was something
Strange about this separation
Internally I was elated
But seeing one's mother cry
Is never a good sight
You begin to wonder
How bad things really are
When I saw my mother crying
For a moment I thought maybe
Staying at home
Resigning myself to fate
Was the best option
But it would have been madness
She hugged me still avoiding my gaze
Then she took my hands into hers
And slowly but steadily
She gave each of my fingers
A gentle bite

Paying tribute to an
Old village adage
Knotting and sealing the fact that
As I struggle to climb
The thoughts and prayers of
My relatives would be with me
As mine would be with them
 I almost burst out in tears
But I was embarking on a journey
Of which I had no concept
The least I could do was cry
Instead the combination
Of joy and sorrow
Within me released itself
Through a very faint smile
 My sister her husband
And some friends
Who knew my circumstances
Stood by amazed
By what they thought was
Me being courageous
Not knowing that whatever
Courage I seemed to be showing
Was born out of fear
Fear of the unknown
 I was dying with
Apprehension and nostalgia
But most of all
The fear of never being able
To see mother again
Where I was going
Was up to God

Playing With Your White Hair

For Mr Ndanga

First lessons in life –
Playing with your white hair,
With fingers stroking
Like boats breaking
Through the tides
Of the black sea,
Once like the darkness
That forever screened the sky.

Our conversation
Of love and passion,
So to speak,
Like you,
An Omega.
You were a Protestant.
What greater love expressed
From father to son
Than playing with your white hair.

With searching eyes
Like those of a young chimp,
My relative! –
Though I was made of clay.

Behind you I stood,
Tracking those lines
Leading to your first white hair,
A novice,
Searching till you fell asleep.
Begging to sleep,

I tangled your hair,
Forming plaits
Like a barbed-wire fence,
Traps
For when you comb your hair.

A merman,
From a long journey he came.
Dried fish,
Sea weeds,
And a pair of shoes –
Gifts for Christmas.

Never rode an “iron horse”.

With blissful heart
You gave us food
From your grape vine.

Memory awakens –
Dearest Dad,
Let me play
With your white hair.

Mr Ndanga is the man who taught me most of the essential skills in life. When I was a young man my mother was involved in a ghastly motor accident – the remote cause of that accident has always been blamed on me. My sister had just been posted as headmistress at a nursery school in Mundemba in Ndian Division. Here she met Mr Ndanga. My sister's baggage consisted of my little sister Queenta, my cousin Collins and myself. He loved my sister and brought us up as his own children even when they went on to have their own two kids, Evenye and Fonta. His love and attention to us remained the same. He taught me maths, how to write and how to be independent – all this he taught me while I searched for his white hairs. He told me stories of great men and even got me interested in the tragedy of King Lear and the demise of Tzar Nicholas II.

To this day I call him father, and he still advises me on most things in life. My stay in Russia put our relationship on hold, and when I first came to Britain I relished the opportunity of writing a letter and chatting on the telephone with him. He is retired now and lives in Tiko, South West Province, married to my sister. He still can't ride a bicycle – an "iron horse". Queenta, Collins and I are all away from home. However, I travelled the furthest.

– ENC

The Court

Abdalla A. Bashir

There was no space, not even a marginal one, to make room for the sad feelings which burgeoned inside me at that time. Nor could I find an answer for any of the tragic questions which were burning inside my mind. All that I could find was a solemn accusation directed by myself against myself. I was driven by the tragedy to the verge of accusing my own mind. I suffered the heat of that experience to the extent of adopting the opposite extreme. Sweeping all of that aside, I began by splitting my mind into many compartments: for the judge, the accused, the jury, some honorable figures, and the audience. But this failed to lead me onto a path away from the cacophony of the dilemma.

I narrated this to my friend. He said sagely: “This is the fate of all witnesses of the age.” Astonished, I asked him: “Then I am neither the judge, nor the accused?” As if he had expected my question, he answered: “Witnesses like you never hesitate to become both judge and accused.” I said to him sharply: “But I was defending the people.” At once he solemnly replied: “It is better for you to go back to the witness box – that one, in front of the audience, not facing the jury.”

I must confess that, when I took refuge in my friend’s village, I wanted to spare myself the bitterness of lingering in that tragic, crime-smelling city. In doing so, I never expected so much congruity between my intuitions and what my friend later suggested to me. It was as if an invisible courier had conveyed to him what was taking place in my internal court of justice.

There is no harm in going back to the original stage of events. There it would be easier for me to realise my deepest feelings. The heat of that tragic experience touched the core of my existence and matured my character. Then the ashes covered my once flourishing national hopes, my hopes that the spirit will bloom in my homeland, and the dawn of peace burst through the darkness.

It was within this paradoxical context that my friend inundated me with pearls of wisdom, and goaded me back to the witness box. He said: “Once again I draw your attention to the fact that your diligence and eagerness to harmonise power and wisdom will lead you to assume more complex roles in the court of the age. Condemnation will be your share, and your star will rise – but under the gallows!”

When I visited my friend, I was carrying nothing, save the notebook in which I wrote the details of my defense, the very same notebook which I carried to the court. I shouted, pointing my finger towards the chief judge, thus insulting the dignity of such a respected legal institution. I proclaimed, in a thundering voice, that the absence of all factual evidence from this foul-playing court turned it into a cesspit of crime. I lifted the documents I had at my disposal so that all could see them.

It was obvious that my behaviour had nothing to do with legal professionalism. My friend could always see that faint veil which was blinding me to the truth. Thus he kept trying to push me back to the witness box, undressing me of the barrister’s heavy gown, and persuading me not to insert my name amongst the noisy clatter of their swords.

“A platform in front of the people?” I asked. “Yes,” he replied confidently. I turned round to see it. I saw nothing, save that lonely desk on the floor of the hall. It was partitioning the audience from those ivory towers, within which the illustrious bald-headed judges sat behind a large semi-circular table. They sat sculpture-like, whispering to one another and cold-bloodedly looking down on everyone in the hall. That was provocative to me. So much so that I forgot even the most elementary principle of the profession, the very fabric of my role in representing the sophisticated standards of a respected standing judiciary. At this climax I shouted again, raising my finger and condemning the complete absence of fairness. My finger pointed this time towards the fleet of flesh occupying the middle position in the ivory tower. I had thus achieved the most grievous possible violation of the core of their alleged legality.

“This man has lied to God, and the only verdict is death!” shouted a harsh, fanatical voice. The noisome stench of what they had contrived the night before. And this very court, representing a mere stage for the industry of tragedy, ran in accordance with that theatrical golden rule!

The last thing I remember was that I posed a question about the meaning of the death announced by the judge, as follows: “Death? Do you mean exile beyond those barriers that block our eyes from seeing further?” I also remember, very vaguely, that my question was followed by a hubbub among the audience. This was then followed by a loud, regular tapping upon the semi-circular table behind which the judges sat. The word “Mahkama” followed, after which, silence prevailed. From within that silence, and all of a sudden,

the harsh voice erupted again, with what seemed to be a reply to my question: “Death, death and not exile, you idiot!”

After that I cannot recollect anything, except some remote voices from the corners of the hall: “Viva justice! Viva justice!” Then again the harsh voice: “Mahkama”. Exhausted, I leant on the desk, resting my head on its surface. At that moment, I fell into a slumber-like state, and saw myself travelling through a tiny hole in the wall of time. At the end of a long tunnel of light, I met my friend who had died a long time ago. I saw caravans of Sufi mystics travelling through crystals of spiritual light. I felt as though my internal court of justice had been rearranged, or I had discovered a bi-directional path between two worlds.

When I awoke and lifted my head from the desk, I was showered with the broad smiles of the sage, decorating my country with birds singing lovely and lively in its wide blue skies – peace.

Mahkama: court (Arabic).

Refugee Haiku

Tom Cheesman

Cut open apple
Shared as the shelling began
Dappled with her blood.

Flying to Europe
Frozen to landing gear – strange
Fruit import business.

Sun, surf, sand. Several
Beached figures, severed fingers
Of a palmless hand.
Burning false papers.
Their value with the spirits:

Bridewealth, medicine, land.

Woken up, pulled out.
Roadside, night, traffic, signs: “NEW–”
Is that “YORK”? No, “PORT” – ?

Pouring a kettle,
Chrysanthemum wounds flash back:
Tea ceremony.

Caught at the border,
Watching a man ahead get
Quickly macheted.

Seasons slowly change.
Cherry blossom falls again.
Still without status.

Leaves on wet pavement.
Stripes, swirls, patches of dying.
Living at random.

Fact is, I never been
Anywhere else, never known
Kindness of strangers.

Ffoaruriaid,
'Fugitives' or 'refugees':
Tricky translation.

Rough Guide

Grahame Davies

It happens inevitably,
Like water finding its level:
Every time I open a travel book,
I sail past the capital cities, the sights,
And dive straight in to the backstreets of the index
To find that in France, I'm Breton,
In New Zealand, Maori;
In the USA – depending on which part –
I'm Navajo, Cajun, or black.

I'm the Wandering Welshman.
I'm Jewish everywhere.
Except, of course, in Israel.
There, I'm Palestinian.

It's some kind of complex, I know,
That makes me pick this scab on my psyche.
I wonder sometimes what it would be like
To go to these places
And just enjoy.

No, as I wander the continents of the guidebooks,
Whatever chapter may be my destination,
The question's always the same when I arrive:
“Nice city. Now where's the ghetto?”

from Heledd's Songs

I am called wandering Heledd.
Oh God, who has taken
My brothers' horses and their land?

Thin the breeze, thick the misery.
The furrows remain; their makers do not.
So piteous that those who were are no more.

In the time when they were fair
The daughters of Cyndrwyn were loved:
Heledd, Gwladus and Gwenddwyn.

I had lovely sisters.
I lost them, every one of them:
Ffreuer, Meddwyl and Meddlan.

I also had sisters.
I lost them all together:
Gwledyr, Meisir and Ceinfryd.

Afflicted, Abercuawg

My spirit craves to sit a long time on a hill,
Not that I will up and go:
My journey now is short, my home desolate.

Piercing the wind in this barren place.
The woods dress in summer's fair colours.
I lie feverish today.

Doing nothing, unaccompanied,
Unable to get out.
The cuckoo is pleased to sing.

In Abercuawg the cuckoos sing
On flowering branches.
Woe to the listener lying sick.

In Abercuawg the cuckoos sing.
To my heart it is wretched
That one who heard them now hears nothing.

I hear the cuckoo on an ivy-covered tree
And tug at my clothes
In grief for all I loved.

High above the great oak
I heard birds singing there.
Noisy cuckoo, all remember lost loves.

Endless song, full of longings,
Leave-takings, plunging like a hawk:
The loud cuckoo of Abercuawg.

Noisy the birds, damp the valleys.
Moon shines at chill midnight.
Sore sickness makes my heart raw.

Noisy the birds, damp the valleys,
Long the night. What's rare is praised,
And I deserve the reward of age: sleep.

Noisy the birds, wet the shingle.
Leaves fall, the exile's spirits falter.
Tonight I'm sick indeed.

Noisy the birds, wet the shore,
Bright the sky, generous the wave.
Longing withers the heart.

Noisy the birds, wet the shore,
Bright the generous motion of the wave.
What the boy loved, the man longs for again.

Noisy the birds on the highlands of Edrywy.
Loud the cry of the hounds hunting the moor.
Noisy the birds again.

Hilltop hazy; tip of ash-tree slender.
Shining waves roll out of estuaries.
Laughter is far from my heart.

Today is the end of my month
In this abandoned hostel.
My heart is raw. Fever has me.

Cattle in the shed, mead in the bowl.
Wisdom avoids strife, patiently
Forging a bond of understanding.

Cattle in the shed, ale in the bowl.
Slippery the paths, fierce the down-pour.
Danger at the ford. Treachery in mind.

Treachery's a mind-made evil.
Grief comes with atonement, swapping
For a little thing, a great one.

So much wickedness.
On Judgment Day
Only the true will shine bright.

Cups are lifted, an enemy defeated,
Men make merry over ale.
The stalks are withered. The cattle in the shed.

I have heard the heavy wave pound
Loud between the shingle and the beach.
My heart is raw with misery tonight.

The oak-tree tip branches. Bitter tastes the ash.
Sweet the cow-parsley root. Laughing the wave.
My face reveals my heart's distress.

The leper was a squire, a bold warrior
At a king's court.
May God be kind to the outcast.

Exile

Humberto Gatica

I abandoned
my bones
in the uncertainty
of the airports
I get lost
in cities
under the nightmares
of lugubrious hotels
Some night
somebody dies
in my dreams
In others
I chase my way back
to the music
of my rains
and my broken
landscapes

Gwenoliaid

Menna Elfyn

Fe ddeallwn wenoliaid,
briwsion ar fwrdd yr ardd,
yn llygad y drws.
Deallwn eu llwgu,
eu hawydd i dorri bara â ni.

Ac onid adar ydym ninnau,
adar nid o'r unlliw?
Eto'r entrych yw'r encil,
unigedd, cyn cyfannedd,
torcalon yn pigo'r pridd.

Ac ym mhob ffurfafen
mae mudo, cymysgu
â'r ddaear am nodded.
Fforddion ar aden,
eu clwyfo gan hanes,
yn chwilio o'r newydd, nyth,
man gwyn i orffwys.

Yr adar, a'u plu cynnes?
Dylent gofio yr *heb*-ogion,
yn serio'r tir,
yn chwilio'r tir comin.

Un wên, a wna wanwyn,
un wennol yn llunio'r haf.

Swallows

Menna Elfyn

Birds we understand,
spend crumbs in garden,
at back-door's eye;
understand their need
to break bread with us.

And are we not birds who
don't always flock together?
The sky a high refuge,
lonely, knowing we'll land, meet
beak's needs, at heartbreak.

And in every firmament
migrators mingle, mixing
heaven and earth for shelter,
wayfarers a-wing,
histories' hurtled,
seeking anew a nest,
a fair resting-place.

So those birds, warm-feathered,
should remember the withouters
scouring the soil
in search of common ground.

One smile a spring,
one swallow making summer.

The Gallows-Tree

Hamira A. Geedy

Siamak was ready to leave his family. He looked at his brother Mansore and asked: "Don't you want to come with us?" "No," Mansore replied, "I love Jaleh. I want to marry her. And someone has to care for our mother and little brother." Siamak kissed Mansore and went. Mansore wanted to have a child and a good family with his cousin Jaleh. Little Khosrow was only ten.

Siamak was with the Peshmerge. He believed in equal pay for Kurdish workers. After the Islamic revolution, the new government was against Kurdish equal pay. Most people in Kurdistan belonged to the Kurdistan Party, opposing the new government. They wanted to tell the new government that Kurdish people were like everybody else in the country. They needed factories, hospitals, schools. They also wanted to speak and study in their own language, as well as the other languages in their country. But the new government refused these requests. The Kurdish people said: We are a rich country, we have petrol and uranium. The benefits should be shared among all the people in the country. But the new government did not accept this.



One day three years later, Mansore is walking to the city centre to buy dry milk from the pharmacy for his small baby. The special patrol cars of the Pasdars, the government police, can be seen everywhere, driving around looking for people they believe to be against the new government. Mansore is not anxious, because his brother with the P.K. has gone. They all left the city so

that the people would not be in danger. They are staying on the mountain.

Mansore is happy, because he has a good family. He has a beautiful wife and a lovely little girl, Afsaneh. His only worry is his mother. He knows she prays and cries every night, worrying about her son Siamak.

On his way to the pharmacy, Mansore saw his schoolmate, Mahmood. They kissed each other and asked about their lives. "I heard you were married," said Mahmood, "and it was good news for me. But I have not been able to. I am on the mountain helping the freedom fighters. My mother is sick and I'm on my way to buy a prescription for her." As they were speaking, suddenly a car stopped near them and four officers got out. They arrested Mahmood and took him into the car. Mansore was stunned. Then two of the men got out of the car again and arrested him too. Before he could say anything, his head was covered by a cloth and his hands tied behind his back.



One month later, Mansore's mother was sitting watching tv with her youngest son and her sister-in-law. "Twenty-five days ago I met my son in the prison," the mother said. "He told me he had never done anything against the new government. They were looking for Mahmood and they were both near the pharmacy. He said to me: 'I never had any contact with the P.K., just once I gave Mahmood a pair of boots. Mahmood was from a poor family, most of the time his classmates helped him.'" "Don't worry, mother," said Khosrow, "Mansore is innocent." Mother replied: "I told Mansore: Don't worry, my son, the head of the innocent will go under the gallows-tree, it but won't go up."

While they were speaking, the normal programme on the tv was stopped. The announcer said: "Hail to the leader of the Islamic revolution! Two criminals arrested by our officials will now speak about their crimes." Then a mullah came on and said that these two men would speak of their crimes against the Islamic revolution. The tv showed Mansore, but he did not look like the same Mansore. He was thin, dirty, his face full of hair, with small eyes. No one could believe this man was the same Mansore.

He said: "I am Mansore. I was with the P.K. I killed many Pasdars and other officials. I destroyed many tanks before the army arrived in Mahabad. I have always fought against the Islamic revolution." As the next man came to speak, Mansore's mother screamed: "No! He never did any of those things! He never even went away from the city for long. Why is he lying?" Khosrow said: "Listen to this boy, mother. That is Ali. Six months ago, when the army of occupation arrived, the people were demonstrating against them. That time Ali took a potato from a shop and threw it toward them. The Pasdar arrested him. I know him. He would never go with the P.K. He was studying at high school. He is also lying on tv. I don't know why."



Three days later, the mother was allowed to see her son alone, in a small room in the prison. Standing by her son, she wanted to hold him in her arms, but he wouldn't let her. She was shocked. "Why? What has happened to you? Why did you say those things on tv? When did you do those things? Where? When did you kill anybody?" Mansore slowly opened his clothes and showed his mother his chest. His chest was full of blis-

ters and infections in the skin. The surface of the skin had been burned with irons. He said: "I am sorry, mother, I couldn't tolerate this burning." The mother said nothing. She just looked and slowly cried.

Mansore continued: "Ah, mother, while they were burning me, they were saying to me: If you sign what we write, if you speak to the people on tv, you'll be okay in prison. Now they don't torture me any more. As I told you, and I told Siamak, I'm not a hero. I am breakable. That's why I couldn't be a Peshmerge. I believe in Kurdish equality, but I'm not so strong. Now mother you should go. Please give many greetings to my wife and say sorry to her. Please kiss my little baby. I loved her, I loved you, all of you." A man came in: "The meeting is stopped. The time is over." He tied Mansore's hands and took him out.

The next morning at five o'clock, someone knocked on her door. She opened. It was a Pasdar. He gave the mother a plastic bag: "This is your son's clothes. He was punished two hours ago." Then he went.



Siamak was sitting on a stone on the mountain. It was midnight. He gazed up at the clear skies with their adornment of bright moon and countless stars. Suddenly someone loomed behind him in the dark. "Who's that?" – "I'm your friend, Poola." – "Poola. Why aren't you sleeping?" – "I have bad news for you." – "Yes, Poola, I know. They have killed another two innocent men. The authorities cannot kill all of us, so they kill anybody. I don't know why my mother always told me that the head of the innocent will go under the gallows-tree, but it won't go up."

Girl Reading

Nigel Jenkins

The skirt and cardi,
the striped school tie:
it's a different uniform
she wears today,
a book that she holds
in her African hands.

The birches sway silver,
black they sway
against mountain snow.
*She makes me feel
like a child*, he said.

At a radiator warming,
she lifts to her teacher's
fatherly *shw mae*
a look of coy lustre, eyes
back then to the page.

They are wise, the others,
with fags and lovebites,
but this one's behind
for seventeen, with
difficulty coming
to the struggle with words,

for she at thirteen
was with Mugabe ...

*Like a child, he said,
the things she could teach us.*

The birches sway
against mountain snow,
and of what was done
she makes no noise:
*the first colony too
its own way to freedom.*

She turns the page,
putting, after practice,
the shine to theory,
in struggle still, a
continent away,
to bring Zimbabwe
to Zimbabwe home.

from Dream of Power

Showan Khurshid

The Theory of Shouting

(The Cunning Man is learning how to gain power.)

The Masked Man: Yes, that's the most modern theory, the theory of shouting. You haven't heard of it? Actually, no one has, because gaining power means depriving others of power. Shouting theory is based on a game, but one in which no one tells anyone else what the rules are. The important thing is to find out the rules and then play. If you leave others in the dark, you win. But how can you know the rules? – Intuition is the answer. Who has this intuition? – Those who can shout. What I'm telling you now is the greatest of secrets. Listen.

What does shouting mean? – It means either that there is imminent danger, or that a wonderful or important change is about to occur. Just think about when you or other people shout. A child cries as soon as it comes into the world. You shout when you're excited, or shocked, or angry, or when you attack. When an important person is carried in a convoy, sirens go wild, and bodyguards sometimes stick their heads out of car windows to act as extra amplifiers. Their gestures are meant to tell you to give way, but the real message is: "Hey, you, insignificant person! It's time you realised how insignificant you are!"

A child communicates through its cry, doesn't it? – For a child, the only important thing is herself. But children are gradually told: It's not only you that's im-

portant. Everyone tells them: I'm important too. Some fathers raise sons, only in order to have someone helpless under their control, to whom they can say how important they are. Thus people inhibit and frustrate one another. There are fathers who dream of pushing their sons into positions of power. But these stupid fathers first of all suppress their sons and their shouting, fearing to become insignificant even in their own sons' eyes. (Although they accept being insignificant in the eyes of significant people outside.) These fathers send their sons to the best schools of politics, psychology and economics, hoping they'll learn. And they do learn, and come back home, and the dictator cuts their throats. So these fathers actually send their sons to the butcher. What they ought to do instead, is prepare a room for them where they can go and shriek.

And in fact not all people are so suppressed. Some find a place where there's no one to tell them to shut their ugly mouth, and there they train themselves to shout and scream. Now you know this important secret, that's the main thing: find a place where you can shout as much as you want.

You see, if you go to the town square and start shouting: "I allow this! I don't allow that!", then some people will say: Let's stop and see. They will say: Rules are being made, we'd better know about them before we break them and get into trouble. Others will be very grateful to you just for telling them the rules they should follow in their lives. These are people who are burdened with a sense that they are breaking rules, although they don't know what rules they are. So they live in anxiety, expecting someone to grab them by the collar and tell them that the time of judgement has

come. They'll follow you immediately, saying to themselves: "This man means what he says. He says what he allows and what he doesn't allow. Now at last we can be sure that no one's going to beat us up for doing wrong. This man's a saint. And all these years we've lived in the hell of uncertainty!"

The only other people who need concern us are those who dare to stand in your way. These should simply be crushed. Shouting is a form of capital, it gives a good dividend. We pit the people who are attracted by the yelling against those who are antagonised by it. It's a purely administrative issue. But the key thing is that we let everyone believe that the essence of the matter is the rules, rather than the shouting. Shouting is the thing that has to be kept secret. No one must know that it's the shouting that really matters. That's the trick.

This is the most advanced theory for gaining power. But also it is well established tradition among our leaders. There was a petty clerk, back in the 1930s, who would yell and scream and swear at anything. Some people came and said: "You shout very well. Why don't you go out to those soldiers, they're doing nothing except eating army rations, go and fix them so they attack." Then they told the soldiers: "A very respectable, intelligent, exceptional person with superior powers is coming to see you." And he went to the soldiers and began shouting and yelling right away. The soldiers thought that something terrible must be about to happen. He told them: "Life will lose its meaning if you don't attack!" They got so distressed about this, even though they didn't know what it meant or what would happen if life lost its meaning, that they attacked right

away. And so this man's shouting cost the lives of 55 millions.

Another poor man, a shoemaker's son from Georgia, rather a short man, had no shoes. In the queue for his father's shoes his feet were trampled by the rich. Then he joined the party and his fortunes changed. Now he could begin shouting. So many shouts were compressed inside him, he shouted more than anyone. He shouted for the proletariat, and wiped out another 20 million. Such a great character! Only you come close.

A third example: this man lived by the edge of a desert, a good place for shouting. And he yelled and shrieked very well. Now his uncle had moved to the city and acquired some power. He knew the importance of shouting. But he was getting on and his windpipe was feeble and sore. So he fetched his nephew to the city to yell for him. But the nephew yelled for himself, not for his uncle. In fact he disposed of his uncle, and buried him and his cousin in heaven, and never allowed them back. Some say it's technically impossible to bury someone in heaven. So perhaps they're just lost on the way back to earth and they'll return some day.

My examples annoy you? – Good. That's what I want. Let your breast fill with anger, so you'll thunder and roar, so your shrieking voice'll reach the corners of the world. You, the glorious herald of the glorious and everlasting message of our glorious and unified nation to the whole world! . . .

(At this, the Cunning Man shouts and roars like an aeroplane, wild animals, a siren...)

The Partridge Hunt

This is a story about the young head of a village high up in the mountains where the partridges live. These birds sang very nicely and the villagers used to go to the mountain to listen to them, and sometimes they would catch one or two to take home so they could listen to them during the winter.

One summer they noticed one partridge that was easily distinguishable from the others: more alert, more beautifully feathered, bigger, and it sang like no other bird. So they decided to catch it and bring it to the village. But day after day they came home empty handed. What began as light-hearted sport became serious. More people were involved and they got more and more frustrated, especially as people from other villages heard about their failure. Their competence and reputation were on the line. They stayed longer and longer on the mountain and they got stressed and weary. So odd things began to happen to them.

One day a donkey belonging to one of the villagers ran off. As he chased it past the meadows of another village, people shouted: "What are you chasing? That's a donkey, not a partridge!" Another man's hat flew off in the wind, and the neighbouring villagers asked why he didn't try closing off the wind-hole, to make both the hat and the partridge fall back down to earth. A third man was hunting in the mountain when wolves attacked. He ran to a neighbouring village as the closest safe place, reached it frightened and exhausted, and collapsed. The villagers took him in, but when he came round they said nothing; not wishing to embarrass him, they ran away out of the village to find a place where they could laugh out loud.

One of the partridge hunters got so frustrated, he threw a stone at a crow and brought it down, and began to pluck it. “Oh these poor people have mixed up partridges and crows!” said some of the people from other villages. “No,” said others, “the fact is that these people’s partridge *is* a crow.” There was nothing the partridge-hunting villagers could say.

They got together to discuss what to do. Someone suggested: “Why not catch some other partridge and say it’s the one we’ve been hunting.” They were all about to agree when they noticed they couldn’t look one another in the eye. One of them, a man with an analytical mind, said: “We agree that lying is wrong. We teach our children not to lie. They feel ashamed if we catch them lying. Now we’d feel ashamed if they caught us lying. Our children won’t respect us any more. And not even because we lied, but because we couldn’t catch the partridge, in other words because we’re helpless. Some of you will say it’s because we want to deceive those nasty people out there. But we’ve never said they were nasty before. Will we tell our children not to have anything to do with them? If we do this, it will not be because they are nasty, but because we want to lie. And that’s not good.”

Some of the villagers said: “Oh Gods, why must the partridge be so complicated!” Most of them hated the analytical man. They muttered: “He just likes sounding philosophical, even if he does no one any good.” But they did come up with a better plan.

Next day all the villagers climbed up into the mountain. They divided the whole mountain into small areas and assigned each to a group of people whose job was to prevent the partridge from landing for food or

water or rest. It took a few days but at last the bird got tired and confused and landed where one group was able to throw a net over it. There was a big feast. They carried the bird round all the neighbouring villages and boasted about the lessons they'd learned, telling everyone that they'd set an example of hope, veracity, and co-operation. The people of the other villages, who had no beautiful bird nor any other remarkable beast to boast of, had to admit: "Making fun of others is never an achievement, it only wears people down."

But when the partridge hunters came home, they found the analytical man waiting for them, demanding an apology, and that that they recognise his role in their success. They acknowledged the power of his analysis which they'd not wanted to hear. But now another voice spoiled their triumph, as someone from a different village said: "You've captured the strongest and most beautiful bird. What does this mean for nature? All the birds will vanish because they're less fit than this one." That depressed the partridge hunters, because they knew it was true.

But here comes the role of the young head of the village. He released the bird. But the villagers called a general meeting and dismissed him as chief. And he lived not happily ever after, but at least with a good conscience. He befriended the analytical man, and they both lived isolated from the other villagers. One day the analytical man said to him: "I think, after all, you mustn't be wise enough, or you'd have convinced them with your ideas." The young ex-chief said nothing. The two of them just stared at each other in silence.

These excerpts were written for the first time 18 years ago. For me writing would be meaningless if it were not

funny, though I cannot be certain that I succeed. Satire is a kind of revenge you take on your oppressors, and oppressors – we had a lot of them. My home town, Kirkuk, was made to feel hostile and alien to us Kurds. Now the city has been liberated, and for this thanks to the American, British and Kurdish forces. One might say that since we are approaching another era, one should forget and forgive. Indeed that is necessary, but we should also know how to avoid the repetition of the same agonies. What happened in Iraq and to the Iraqis was because of Arab nationalism and its over-ambitious plan to build an Arabic superpower, in which ethnic groups like the Kurds, and many others as well, had to either assimilate or disappear. So Saddam was not just an accident: he was the one who was able to be as cruel as it takes to fulfil that plan. And that is why he is still the hero of many Arab nationalists – though hardly in Iraq, because the Iraqis now know, some of them belatedly, what it means to be ruled by Saddam.

When I was still a kid, people used to assume that anyone who had travelled to Western countries must have learnt important things. Now it is time for me to inspect myself: what I have learnt during my stay in the West and what has changed in me? To tell the truth I still feel the bitterness I felt when I was in Iraq. Yet I feel that we have a chance now, because I know there is no need to assume that the wrong is something intrinsic to certain ethnic groups. The wrong is in the political culture and the mentality it creates. A bad political culture can create people like Saddam or Stalin. I also know that liberal democracy can allow diverse people to live together, as long as they wish to do so. This possibility was not there under Arab nationalist rule or even in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where a great many Kurds and other Iranians are also suffering.

So this is the background of my biography. It is not a biography. My biography is not interesting to me at all, perhaps because I am still not able to laugh at it. But if I ever do write it, it will be about how the years of difficulties turned me into a ghost, which is what I feel I am.

– SK

I Feel Like Nobody Here

Maxson Sahr Kpakio

Dedicated to asylum seekers and refugees in the UK

I feel like nobody here, ashamed, like everybody
Hates me,
But they don't know me, they really
Don't know who I am either,
Only they know what they read in the
Newspapers about me
And that is not me.

I feel like nobody here,
Despite the torture and persecution I managed
To escape from home, in search
Of a land of peace and respect for
Human rights – as soon as I got in,
I was put into detention centre,
And the newspapers did the rest.

I feel like nobody here,
People are being beat up and killed
Sometimes just because they are
Asylum seekers,
But please, could you find out better.

We didn't come here for this, we try to leave
Behind this, we try to find peace here, but it's
Far from being possible, not with this media.

They refer to me as bogus asylum seeker,
And they even told others that I am
Just a parasite, and a disease carrier,
But that is not me.

If it was good at home where respect for human
Rights and relative peace was like before,
I would go home tomorrow.
I didn't want to come here, I didn't want
To be a refugee either.
But I am here and I want to contribute
And fit in.
But how can I?
How can people really accept me when
All they read about me is rubbish,
Nothing but rubbish.

But I don't blame them for fear of me,
They believe
What
They read.

I feel like nobody here,
I want to meet them
And speak to them and tell them it's
Not true.
Let me tell them that I am
Not what they read in
The newspapers.

I Was Very Lucky

Hans Popper

In the late nineteenth century, the word ‘race’ became politicized and confused with the word ‘nation’. The Jews, so blatantly a mixed community of peoples, were and still are widely – whether naively, or maliciously – called a ‘race’.

Before the plebiscite confirming the unification of Germany and Austria in 1938, political slogans were painted on the pavements of Vienna. After Hitler’s victory, Nazis hauled Jews out of their flats to scrub the streets clean. Photographs of groups of local people standing around and having a good laugh were, of course, in the press.

As things ‘normalised’, everybody ‘non-Aryan’ – i.e. Jewish – could be hauled off the streets or taken from their flats to be interrogated in a police station. Sometimes they were let go again, more frequently put in prison or in a concentration camp. Prison was usually followed by release. In concentration camps, survival was a possibility, but it was rare. Also seized were people known to have belonged to one of the anti-Nazi parties (e.g. the Social Democrats), or anyone else who might be anonymously denounced, usually by the private entrepreneurs – or profiteers and gangsters – who took advantage of confiscated property. If you owned a shop or business, you were well advised to sell it and get away if you could. Some buyers were simply profiteers, but some actually helped their customers.

Acquiring passports and exit visas was not so hard, though it was complicated enough, and was made

as unpleasant as possible. Getting entry visas was always the really difficult part. Most if not all countries closed their frontiers to Jewish refugees, only letting in a trickle of small groups. One day it might be fifty to Finland, or twenty somewhere else, for no apparent reason. Special *Kindertransports* were organised for children, and a few Jews managed to get visas for Palestine (which was then under British mandate). A small number – mostly women – were accepted into domestic service in Britain. Otherwise, you had to be invited by someone who could guarantee for your upkeep. A few people crossed borders illegally, and what happened to them would depend on the grace and favour of the particular country.

Why could so few people get to safety? One reason one always hears is: “The foreigners take our jobs away from us.” Yet any economist can tell you that the opposite is the case: immigrants’ ideas and initiatives create jobs and other opportunities. The true reasons, in that time of depression and mass unemployment, were stark fear and xenophobia: fear of strangers. An animal smelling an animal from a different herd is put on the defensive. The notorious story of the ship full of refugees sailing from country to country, ending up with all aboard dead, is too well known.

I was very lucky. My mother had English relatives – her uncle had moved to London before the First World War. His wife was the mother of Leslie Howard, the concert pianist, and other artistic boys and girls. Leslie was a big earner, but also a big spender, so they were reasonably comfortable, but not really rich enough to look after us. Still, they helped where they could, and George Howard (a cousin, who was an RAF

officer in the First War) worked very hard, even visiting us in Vienna, to help us get British visas. He and a lawyer eventually succeeded in getting us out.

First we stayed in Prague – my father had family there – but the Czechoslovak authorities would not consider extending our transit visa; so on the 27th of September, I think it was, we flew to London. Why did we fly? Because we had to sign an undertaking never to set foot on German soil again (and who could have wanted to?).

When we got out of the plane in Croydon Airport, some official cross-examined us, although everything he could have wanted to know was clear from our passports and visas. How long this might have gone on and what the outcome might have been I can't imagine, but fortunately George Howard turned up, and after a few minutes' conversation, we followed him to his car.

Settling in was a hazardous matter. Work permits were almost impossible to get. We depended on chance amounts of money turning up, often from the over-worked refugee organisation in Woburn Square. Eventually I got a free place at a boarding school in the Cotswolds set up by a philanthropic Victorian millionaire. My parents had been asked by the refugee committee to run a house for refugees, and a local clergyman told us about the school. By now the war had started. Soon they were all interned. I was under sixteen, too young to be taken. It was indiscriminate mass internment, no rhyme or reason in it. Most internees were released again after a few months, allegedly on medical grounds. Young men like my older brother went into the forces. Among others, there were a good many suicides . . .

Interrogatory

Humberto Gatica

The cold silence
of the interrogation room
Tied hands

Blindfolded

Somebody smokes
and waits
Doors open and close
The faces of torture
confuse my memories
and eclipse my colours
A telephone
rings for ever
and then . . .
nothing

Only the vast night
chaotic
and eternal

Swansea Collage

composed by Sylvie Hoffmann

The following texts are based on conversations with French-speaking asylum seekers, women and men from countries including Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Congo ex-Zaire, Guinea, Mali, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. They all prefer to remain anonymous. I have translated their poems as faithfully as I can. – SH

Behind the Facades

What is behind?

Is this a church?

No, no... it's a school

Is this a church?

No, no... it's an Indian restaurant

Is this a church?

No, no... it's the old Swansea police station

What is behind?

Is this a church?

Yes, this is a church

You can come in if you wish

The Community Comprehensive School

Four girls
Why treat my child so?
Why treat my child so?

“I’m a good listener” says the School...
It is true
We speak for three hours
Communication restored

Just Arrived

The cars
I am frightened
The streets
I am frightened
The sea
I am frightened
I am frightened for my children

Swansea Bandits

broken

glass

fires lit on the

hills

twelve-year-olds who

smoke

they like to

drink

telephone

bills

we have to pay yet do not call

The Docks

The ferry from Swansea to Cork

I wish...

I bitterly want to see Paris

At Home

We get up with the sun
We go to bed with the sun
No one sends us an electricity bill at the end of the month

The British

They say “sorry” but do they mean it?

In the Fish and Chips Shop

Broad smile:
– “Are you on holidays?”

Swansea Central Library

We send each other e-mails round the computer table
A good meeting place
A safe haven

Clyne Gardens

Do you have to pay to come in here?

No, no, it's free of charge

Here you can walk in peace and safety, play football,
meditate... it's one of Swansea's best kept secrets

In May the gardens are in full bloom, they are mag-
nificent

It makes me nervous, this dog off its lead

Dogs should be on lead, some owners do not care

At the Kingsway Centre

How is your English coming along?

– “I must”

White Man

Never has any time

Rushes everywhere

Mon ami My friend
Mon pote My mate
Mon coeur My heart

The Tides

Ebb – Llanw yn uchel

“The old man ’it me on the ’ead”

Pardon?

“The old man ’it me on the ’ead”

Pardon?

“The OLD MAN ’IT ME ON THE ’EAD”

A llifo – And flow

Two young men from Cameroon...

Swansea Enforcement Unit

They came to get them in the middle of the night...

The way they knock! I was scared...

Do you need to knock like that?

What’s that got to do with you, Boy?

I’m frightened...

Boy I’m frightened.

Low tide – Llanw yn isel

Sunday Morning Patrol

On the way to church

Meet and greet in Humphrey Street

Police

He takes his time

Car parking : checked

Car tyres : checked

Sellotape holding petrol cap : checked

Driver's licence : checked

Driver's address : checked

Driver's date of birth : checked

Driver saved by her birthday

Granted leave to leave

Llangennith

Sylvie Hoffmann

As I walked on the sun
The sea came flooding in
Fluid shadow with silver fishes
Causing sand to drift

Bishopston Valley

Gabriel L. Vingu

Were I to forget all of the places and landscapes in Swansea, never would I forget Bishopston Valley;

were I to forget the Arches Hotel, which put me up in such abysmal fashion in Swansea for eight months, far from me the thought of forgetting you, Bishopston Valley;

were I to speak five times of the hardship, the difficulties and the suffering endured in Swansea as an asylum seeker, I would speak a thousand times of the solace and the joy experienced in Bishopston Valley;

valley who brought solace to my heart and filled it with joy in place of the sadness and anxiety created by the negative realities of the phenomenon of seeking asylum;

Bishopston Valley! You shall remain everlastingly engraved upon my memory!

The first time I visited you it was thanks to a walk led by Mr Ray Diddams, accompanied by his partner Olive Davies, their friends Sheila Manning and Sylvie Hoffmann, and her daughter Maria Williams, all of them people of good faith, and full of love for the asylum seekers living in Swansea, God's blessing be upon Ray, Olive, Sheila, Sylvie and Maria her daughter, for having given me the opportunity to visit you, Bishopston Valley;

when I think of the beautiful stream flowing through you, the hills and woods which make you, I shall pray to God to bless Swansea because of you, oh!

Bishopston Valley, you filled me with intense joy, may my joy abide!

I remember when we arrived by the small stream that flows through the valley, and when I exclaimed: “Oh! What a wonderful stream, Sylvie!” – “Yes Gabriel, it is a beautiful nature reserve,” replied Sylvie. – “Indeed, Sylvie. This stream is exactly like a stream that runs through Kizauvete Valley, a valley in Democratic Congo where I met up with my father and saw him for the last time, in Africa, in the year 2000.” – “Are your father and mother still living today?” Sylvie asked. – “Yes, they are still alive today and I still remember my father, and praise him for showing manly courage, in that he did not let his tears flow much as we were saying goodbye to each other that last day of seeing one another, as my mother had shed a great quantity of tears, unable to restrain herself on that last day, when we were saying goodbye, as I was preparing to leave the land of my ancestors.” Stunned, Sylvie was attentively following my words, and I continued: “I still remember well that last day when I saw my father, by the stream that flows through Kizauvete Valley, so exactly like this stream that flows through Bishopston Valley; on that day, my father and I had washed our clothes in the stream and laid them out on the stones to dry, and we were sitting near the stream, speaking of everything and nothing, when my father asked me this: ‘Are you thirsty, Gaby?’ I answered: ‘Yes, papa, extremely thirsty,’ thinking that my father had a bottle of mineral water in his bag. He replied: ‘Well, go down to the stream and drink the water from the stream!’ – ‘Drink water from the stream? No, papa, I cannot drink

that water!’ – ‘Why not?’ said my father, ‘This water comes from a spring, it’s pure, clean water.’ – ‘It’s very dirty and murky, papa. It’s not purified.’ – ‘You are wrong, my son. This water comes from a spring, it is well filtered, well purified, naturally, as it passes through the rocks.’ – ‘No, papa, I’m scared of catching a disease.’ – ‘No, no, this water will do you no harm. Watch me, now I’m drinking it,’ and my father drank the spring water in the stream and did not die, and then he said: ‘Here, take, drink. I’ve been drinking this water for 55 years, each and every time I come to the village I drink this water and it does me no harm. Drink!’ he said; and so, to please my father, I drank the water, and my father said: ‘So, Gaby, are you dead?’ ‘No,’ I replied. ‘Good. This experience will help you wherever you go,’ concluded my father.”

“It’s a beautiful story, Gabriel, thank you for sharing it with me,” Sylvie commented. “Yes, Sylvie. A living human being always has a story to tell, for someone with no story to tell cannot be said to be a human being.” With her silence, Sylvie left me time to speak and I continued: “Today I am recording another story from my life, the story of the walk in Bishopston Valley, a valley which has been visited in the past, and today was visited by me, and will be visited by others in the future. May the blessing of God be upon you, oh! Bishopston Valley, you who were the place of my joy and my solace in Swansea, and I shall never forget you, oh! Bishopston Valley!”

Borders

Nigel Jenkins

What begins for you
where the waves break
– sea or land, land or sky –

depends on where
you're coming from, depends
on where you're going to

and whether you
have legs or fins, lungs or gills.

Claiming Asylum is World-wide

Million Gashaw Woldemariam

First I will mention what I observed when I was claiming asylum in Croydon on March 25, 2002. Before I claimed asylum in the UK I had wrong ideas about who is a refugee or an asylum seeker. But after some time I was able to understand the definition of these terms.

In the course of claiming asylum I had to get to Croydon. When I arrived, there were long queues of people waiting their turn to enter Immigration. I became confused, because there were a lot of people in the queue, and approximately 80% of them were white people. I wondered if they were all working in the Home Office Immigration department. I saw a police officer at the front of the queue, guiding and disciplining as appropriate, and I tried to get some information from him about how to make an asylum claim. He told me that all the people in the queue were there for the asylum claiming process, and he advised me to join the queue like the others. I did as I had been advised. Even though there were such a lot of people waiting to claim asylum, the process was so fast that I soon had the opportunity to enter Immigration.

As I began claiming asylum, I saw a fellow countryman who was working there. I told him where I was from, and mentioned how I had been surprised to see that a lot of white people were there claiming asylum. Because I thought that, most of the time, only black Africans are in danger of being

subjected to persecution and harassment in their country of origin! However, he told me that people from different continents, of many different races, ethnic groups or nationalities, apply for asylum because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a social group.

After applying for asylum, I was dispersed to Swansea by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). In Swansea, where I am living with other asylum seekers, one morning I was explaining the situation I observed in Croydon to one of the other asylum seekers. At the time, we were both trying to prepare breakfast. I remember this guy was trying to fry an egg. I observed that he took an egg, broke it with a spoon, and then he put the egg-shell in the frying-pan and threw the yolk and white into the rubbish bin. I said to him: "What are you doing?" He answered: "What I am doing?" Then I told him he was doing vice versa, the yolk in the bin, the shell in the frying-pan. Then he became aware of his mistake and said: "Oh my God, I am going to be crazy!" I tried to cool him down. Finally he told me that he had got a Refusal from the Home Office, and since then he was in constant fear.

It is terrible. Isn't it?

A Mountain and a Sea

Eric Ngalle Charles

A story from a distance.
They were my only witness,
A mountain and a sea
Whose lips engulfed the green sky,
A lasting kiss,
Washing her waves off-shore,
Leaving behind a boat.

That for my home-coming.

The mountain
Like a giant slate,
With trees keeping vigil
Like relatives awaiting
Their departed children.

Her giant gaze
Looking down at me
Like Yomadene,
The guardian,
The mountain
Where my grandmother
Lived after her death.
A mountain of broken hearts.

That for my home-coming.
A shining mountain

Where sheep grazed,
By which means
My heart rejoiced.

That for my home-coming.

On a wet journey to Llandudno
Washing away pain and longing,
A re-born voice crying
Between a mountain and a sea.

Where voices echoed
Across the town's horizon
And conversation on common things.
Wake me from my slumber
Then this poem
Will be over.

That for my home-coming,

Between a mountain
And a sea.