



Ishtar's Songs: Iraqi Poetry Since the 1970s

Soheil Najm

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Iraq's poets have suffered imprisonment, exile and death for the truths they have dared to tell. Poetry is not a luxury in Iraq, but a vital part of the struggle for the nation's future. This is poetry that is feared by tyrants and would-be tyrants.

Dan Veach, poet, founder and editor of The Atlanta Review

Out of the ashes of decades of war come the voices of those who have survived its stark realities. Ishtar's Songs is filled with hope, bitterness, startling beauty and a love of country that defies the vicissitudes of political, social and military upheaval. The poems are beautifully translated and the vision they project - a vision of a resilient people who have suffered for so long and whose history and culture go back thousands of years - is rendered indelibly for future generations. Required reading for every American who wishes to grasp the complexities of Iraqi culture.

Mike Maggio, poet, author, deMOCKracy

Little one flies and then lands.

What about those who are flying all the time?

This is what poetry is! ...

Imagine heavenly imprints that perish under the heavy attack of senseless forces. Imagine every day hopes that will never share the destiny of the Phoenix to be reborn. Iraqi poetry is like the sun light. Slowly, but surely it warms you up.

Sabahudin Hadzialic, poet, translator, editor Diogen pro culture magazine, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Iraq's painful recent history is vividly personalized in these lyrical poems. The love, hope, anger and despair of these poets bear messages we very much need to hear. What burns brightest among these poems is our common humanity.?

Sam Hamill, poet, founder of Copper Canyon Press and Poets Against War

What a marvelous compendium of contemporary poetry - a wide spectrum of Iraqi voices sing of tragedy and irony, love and helplessness. Everybody here is out of work, Adil Abdullah complains, asking, "What vast shame will touch their souls in the morning / when they discover by its light / that what they ate yesterday / was the flesh of their sons?" Ahmed Adam, killed in Baghdad in 2005, laments with bitter irony, I was late twenty years this morning! Baqir Sahib asserts, I have no choice but to be a wolf of words. Striving for some ray of hope, Husein Ali Yunis declares, now all of us are Don Quixotes.

These richly diverse poems offer intensely moving, often searing portraits of a legendary culture torn apart by the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, war against Iran and U.S. led invasions. Here is the deep heart and soul of a nation torn asunder yet somehow still observing, striving, celebrating.

David Radavich, poet, author of Middle-East Mezze

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