

Bush Writers,

1940 - 2012

Witness Seminar



**November 23rd 2009
0930-1400**

The Open University,
Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, London



Bush Writers
Seminar
November 23rd 2009

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Bush Writers
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The purpose of this seminar is to bring together *Bush Writers* (former and current, published and aspiring) to share their experiences of and memories as “secret agents” of literature amongst broadcasters in and around Bush House.

The seminar is part of a larger research project and partnership between The Open University and the BBC World Service.¹ It examines cosmopolitan and diasporic cultures at Bush House, 1940 to 2012 which will mark the moving out and end of the Bush House era (see page 10).

Presentations by contributors will be followed by audience participation and discussion. We expect the style of the event to simulate and emulate a live feature broadcast. The presentations will be recorded and the material may be represented on BBC and/or Open University websites (see page 11).

We hope to plug a gap in public and academic knowledge about Bush House and the remarkably polyglot and cosmopolitan cultures that have contributed to making it a globally respected institution that can speak in many tongues to audiences around the world. With a few notable exceptions (for example *Modern Poetry in Translation*, Special Issue, No 22, 2003 edited by Daniel Weissbort) very little work has been done on the subject of writers of and at Bush House.

We would like to thank all the writers who have agreed to participate in the seminar and for the time they have dedicated already to our research.

Marie Gillespie and Zinovy Zinik

20.11.09

¹ The seminar is part of interdisciplinary collaborative research project entitled ‘Tuning In: Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service’. It is funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council Programme ‘Diasporas Migration and Identities’ (Award reference AH/ES58693/1). The project is based at the Open University



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Timetable

0930-1000 Refreshments and Welcome

1000-1010 Welcome and Introduction Marie Gillespie and Zinovy Zinik

Chair: Professor Susheila Nasta (Chair in Modern Literature, Open University)

1010-1150

1010-1020 Anwar Hamed

1020-1030 Zuzanna Slobadova

1030-1040 Nick Rankin

1040-1050 Salwa Jarrah

11.00-11.15 Coffee Break

1120-1130 Priyath Liyanage

1130-1140 Achala Sharma

1140-1150 Khalid Kalifa

1150-1200 Emal Pasarly

12.00 - 13.00 Open discussion and closing address by Susheila Nasta

13.00-14.00 Lunch

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Questions

Has the cosmopolitan culture of Bush House informed your writing and if so how?

How have the themes of translation, migration and mobility (actual and imagined) across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries featured in your work? *(How have experiences of migration affected your writing? How do you translate ideas/stories in your writing? Do you think that a diasporic perspective [being insider and outsider or having ambivalent ties] is important to your writing?)*

Has your work for radio affected your style or practice as a writer or vice versa? *(What's the difference between writing for radio journalism and fiction, poetry and other genres?)*

Have the social, literary and artistic networks in and around Bush House contributed to your literary career if so how? *(Are there regular meeting places at Bush House or outside, such as the Freelance Rooms, pubs and café's where writing is discussed and promoted?)*

How and when did you write while working at Bush House? Maybe you even wrote your novel or poems on the night shift? *(Did you write at home at night to relieve the pressures of reporting bad news or on the train or on the night shift?)*

Issues for general discussion:

How has Bush House culture changed in your knowledge and experience? *(What have been the key turning points in Bush House culture? How has the working culture changed and how has that affected opportunities to write for radio and other genres? Is Bush working culture cosmopolitan and if so in what sense?)*

Bush House career and life trajectories

(What opportunities exist for combining journalistic and literary career at Bush House? Do you know of Bush writers who have been celebrated in their own language/home country and ignored in the Anglophone world or vice versa?)

A website for Bush writers past and present?

(Do you have any suggestions about what a BBCWS website on literary lives at Bush House would look like, what materials might be posted there, and what activities and interactions might be fostered?)



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Biographies**

Chair: Susheila Nasta

Susheila Nasta is a critic and literary activist, editor and broadcaster. Born in Britain in 1953, she spent many years in India, Holland and Germany before returning to Britain and completing her education at the Universities of Kent and London. Before moving to the Open University in 1999, she taught in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary's, University of London and became founding Course Director of the MA in National and International Literatures at the London University Institute of English Studies. She has held full teaching posts and visiting fellowships at a number of academic institutions both in the UK and abroad including: the University of Cambridge, Portsmouth, North London, Mumbai, Delhi and the University of the West Indies. She remains: Visiting Research Fellow at Queen Mary College, University of London, Associate Fellow of the Institute of English Studies and is an Elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Faculty member of the Ferguson Centre. She has served on several national bodies including the AHRC subject panel and has been judge of a number of literary prizes. Currently she is a member of the Steering Committee of the AHRC Diasporas, Migration and Identity initiative and Advisory Editor of the Spanish journal, *Atlantis* and the *Journal of West Indian Literature* published in Barbados.

Contact: s.m.nasta@open.ac.uk

Anwar Hamed

Anwar Hamed is a Palestinian-Hungarian novelist, poet and literary critic, who was born in the West Bank in 1957, and is currently working for the BBC Arabic service. He has published different literary genres, in Budapest, Beirut, Amman and Ramallah, in Arabic and Hungarian. Of this his novels include *The Bridge of Babylon, Stones Of pain, Scheherazade tells tales no more, The game of love and pride, and other idiocies, Valse Triste, Seventy two virgins and a confused lad (unfinished)*. He has also published a multilingual collection of poems called *Mind The Gap*, and wrote his master thesis on literary theory which was entitled *An Attempt at the Definition of the Function of Literature*.

Zuzanna Slobodova

Born in Czechoslovakia, Zuzanna studied at Comenius University in Bratislava. She stayed in Britain after the Russian invasion in 1968, and graduated in Psychology and Philosophy from Oxford University in 1972. She worked for the BBC from 1980 to 1998, first at Bush, then at the BBC Monitoring. She has been writing and publishing since childhood.

Nick Rankin

Nick Rankin makes radio and Nicholas Rankin writes books. But they're the same man, born in England and raised in Kenya during the Mau Mau era, the backpacker who worked and wandered in Spain and South America in his twenties. In 1986 he joined what was then BBC External Services as a scriptwriter in Central Talks and Features. The next year Faber published his first book, *Dead Man's Chest: travels after Robert Louis Stevenson*, which was praised by Graham Greene. His second, the well-reviewed

Telegram from Guernica: the extraordinary life of George Steer, war-correspondent (Faber 2003), built on a World Service radio documentary he made about Picasso's 1937 masterpiece. Rankin left the BBC staff in 2006 to complete his third book, the best-selling study of camouflage and propaganda *Churchill's Wizards: the British genius for deception 1914-1945* (Faber, 2008). However, he still loves working in radio, and his most recent three-part series for BBC World Service were PIRATES (2008) and GOLD (2009). Rankin is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a member of the NUJ and the Society of Authors.

Salwa Jarrah

Salwa Jarrah was born in Haifa, Palestine in 1946. In 1977 she began her 22 year career with the BBC Arabic Service, after having worked as a translator, writer and programme maker at Iraqi Radio and Television Establishment. Whilst working for the BBC Arabic service she made and presented a large number of programmes including Question and Answer, Oasis (Desert Island Discs), and Listeners' Forum. She was the first Arab broadcaster to produce and present a sex programme for the BBC under UN sponsorship in 1994, which was a huge success. In 1989 she was promoted to senior producer and worked in that role until retiring in 1999. Salwa has three novels published in Arabic, *Rocks on the Shore*, *Insomnia*, and *The Fifth Season* which is set against the background of her radio work.

Priyath Liyanage

Born in Sri Lanka, Priyath came to Britain in 1984. He is head of the BBC's Sinhalese Service, and has been working for the BBC World Service since 1992. In 1996 he studied for an MA in Drama from Goldsmiths University, London. His screenplay *Ira Madiyama [August Sun]*, written in 2005, was directed by Prasanna Vithanage and screened in more than twenty international film festivals representing Sri Lanka. *August Sun* has been critically acclaimed and has won numerous awards in Sri Lanka and around the world. It was screened in the London Film Festival and was shown on Channel 4 television. Priyath has translated several of the works of Italian Playwright Dario Fo for production, he also writes poetry.

Achala Sharma

Achala Sharma worked for the BBC for 21 years, joining the BBC Hindi Service in 1987; she was head of the service from 1997 to 2008. In 2003 she was awarded the World Hindi Honour at the Seventh World Hindi Conference held in Suriname. The award honoured her significant contribution to the development and popularity of the Hindi language in the field of broadcast and literature. Other awards include Katha UK (a literary organisation in London) honour in 2004 for the collections of plays, and ABU award for the programme 'Rajiv Gandhi Assassinated' in 1991. Achala is a well known name and voice to the listeners of BBC Hindi Service. For almost 18 years she was instrumental in turning BBC Hindi into a leading Hindi-language radio and online service. Among other achievements, she has to her credit two collections of radio plays, *Passport* and *Jaren (Roots)* which were recently released in London. Her published works includes three collections of short stories and two volumes of radio plays.

Khalid Kalifa

Khaled Al-Berry was born in Sohag, Egypt 1972. He has a degree in Medicine from Cairo University. He has published his memoir, *Life is More Beautiful than Paradise*, and novel, *Nigatif (Negative)*. His latest work, *The Lady of Beauty*, which is colloquial Egyptian



poetry, is to be published in Egypt soon. Khaled joined BBC in November 1999; he works as Broadcast Journalist for BBC Arabic Service.

Emal Pasarly

Emal Pasarly was born in Kunduz, Afghanistan. After the soviet invasion of Afghanistan during the 1980s Emal took refuge with his family in Peshawar, Pakistan. He has been living in London since 1993 and working with the BBC World Service Pashto section since 1996. Before joining the BBC Emal was editor of a monthly magazine, DEWA, for Pashto literature in London. Emal has four collections of short stories, two novels and a collection of Dramas in Pashto.



Bush Writers
1940-2012
Project Outline

Aims of Project

- To document the works of Bush writers via a series of witness seminars aimed at eliciting oral histories/testimonies of working and literary lives at Bush House.
- To collaborate with Bush writers (past and present, famous and aspiring) to create web materials (audio, video, text, image) that bring to public awareness and celebrate the creativity and cosmopolitanism of Bush writers/workers.
- To contribute to BBCWS 'Moving Houses' Heritage Project which aims to document the working cultures of Bush House before departure in 2012.
- To contribute to the BBC History website and document the contribution of the BBC cultures and creative workers to British cultural life.
- To contribute to the broader academic project based at The Open University which examines diasporic cultures at BBC World Service (see below).

Project

This project is funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council and involves a unique partnership with the BBCWS. It investigates changing cultures at the BBC World Service (1932-2012) with a special emphasis on illuminating the often invisible contributions of diasporic broadcasters to the BBC and to British cultural life more generally. It examines the cultures and politics of cosmopolitanism at Bush House and plugs a gap in public and academic knowledge about the World Service. For more information see:

http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/diasporas/themes/poetries_on_and_off_air.htm

Project Team

Marie Gillespie and Zinovy Zinik (project co-ordinators), Anna Aslanyan (translator and writer), Sophie West (senior research assistant and project administrator), Hugh Saxby (advisor), Robert Seatter (advisor), Jess Macfarlane (advisor), Alban Webb (advisor), Hannah Mills (research Assistant), Jack Latimer (web advisor).

Bush Writers Ideas for Website Materials

The material we gather will contribute to one or more of three websites:

- a) BBCWS *Moving Houses* Heritage Project (Hugh Saxby)
- b) BBC History's *Oral histories of Bush Writers* and their contributions to the BBC and British Culture (Robert Seatter)
- c) Open University's academic project on *Diasporic and Cosmopolitan Culture at BBCWS* (Marie Gillespie and Alban Webb)

The materials gathered during the research will be selected for above mentioned aims but the same materials can be presented in different versions for different purposes **and audiences**.

- **An introductory essay** by Zinovy Zinik [ZZ] and Marie Gillespie [MG] about the aims and character of the project for both public and for academic audiences
- **An interview series** (with the audio version attached, moving and/or still images) with the Bush old-timers, such as Nick Rankin and Tony Rudolf about writers and poets' community in Bush House, as seen through their personal experience: communication between different nationalities and ethnicities in Bush House and outside it, as reflected in their lives and works, intellectual and literary and political networks in London.
- **Essays and extracts** either *from* established names in literature whose careers were connected to Bush House – such as Orwell – or *about* them. Interviews by ZZ and Anna Aslanyan [AA] with those who personally knew writers like George Mikes (Hungarian) or Georgy Markov (Bulgarian).
- **Radio Voices/Literary Lives** a special feature page dedicated to works of literature with the subject of radio as the main theme of the book – such as *Human Voices* (1980) by Penelope Fitzgerald (about Bush House during the Second World War) – or, indeed, ZZ's *Russian Service*.
- **Diaspora Writers @ Bush** Contemporary writers or poets famous in Britain but hardly known in their motherland, others are familiar only to their respective audiences in their native countries. Interviews about the doubleness of their existence, who or what guided them through their first years in UK, how the radio style affected their prose writing.
- Web materials to include (among others): George Orwell, Mulk Raj Anand, William Empson, Tayeb Salih, Mahmud Kianush, Hamid Ismailov, Anthony Rudolf, David Caute, Anselm Hollo, Mohammed Hanif, Muriel Spark, Penelope Fitzgerald.
- Website could offer writers today the chance to contribute.

Bush Writers Seminar
Extracts from writers work

The Butterfly
Anwar Hamed

She, who's sick dancing with kings
Wants to fly, but got no wings

She, who dates orchids and tulips
Wants to smile, but finds no true lips

She, who blooms with every new spring
Parted with dance and will never sing

Once upon an autumn night
When the moon smiled
and her mood was right
She walked the meadows
leap by leap
Leaving behind
all the ghosts asleep

For she was called
for an evening date
And she hates to make
the full moon wait

But, then said a voice,
your leash is tight
"So what?" said she,
I will fight, will fight!

I longed for light
for so long years
But beware, said he,
this will bring tears

For light guides you
its steps never tire
it seduces your soul
it wakens your desire

But never get close
And restrain your desire
For light was born
To a wild, wild fire,
That burns, burns, burns
With flames so rough and dire



She, who yearned for a distant star

Has been looming nets so far
But the wind who sniffed the trap
Dropped false fairies in her lap
She welcomed them with a sad, sad eye
And cheered the wind, and thanked the sky

Velvet Revolution in Reading
Zuzana Slobodova

"Will you swap shifts with me on Friday?"

What a cheek! To ask for a quiet Friday morning shift in exchange for the drudgery of Friday night, the most enjoyable evening of the week for those who were lucky enough to be off work.

"*Angi Vera* is on at the National Film Theatre", she said pleadingly, "and only for one night."

Angi Vera, a daring Hungarian film with an anticommunist slant, is well worth a visit but the day in question was 17th November 1989 - the fiftieth anniversary of an anti-German demonstration in Prague in 1939, which ended in the Nazis killing a Czech student. The evening was likely to be busy and I wouldn't get home till one in the morning or even later.

On the other hand, I had had free Friday evenings for years, at the expense of the rest of the team, and my conscience was pricking me. The BBC Monitoring Service at Caversham in Reading used the highly unfair system of fixed days off. Some people never had weekends off while others had them all the time. I had fought hard to be in the latter group.

"All right", I said, making sure that my voice reflected the magnitude of my sacrifice.

The afternoon started restfully with the radio churning out the usual worthless stuff: the magnificent achievements of socialist industry and agriculture, speeches by top Party leaders, the intrigues of the capitalist West. Then sometime around mid-afternoon there came a report about minor anti-socialist activity of some kind in Prague. It had been incited by enemies from the other side of the Iron Curtain but the situation was fully under the control of the forces of law and order, the radio said. I went to sit at the computer.

"Are you going to process that rubbish?" asked a Colleague Who Always Knew It All And Was Proud of Always Keeping His Cool Head.

Rubbish? There had been upheavals in many of Czechoslovakia's communist neighbours, but the country itself was suspiciously quiet. Any hint of protest was of interest, especially on a day like this. This stuck-up so and so was a complete political ignoramus if he wanted to spike this piece of news. But to process it in front of him would be tantamount to saying as much to his face. So I smiled sweetly at him and waited until he disappeared into the canteen for a leisurely tea break. Then I quickly produced the report.

"If you have time to waste, suit yourself", he said with barely-concealed rage when he found the transcript on his return.

I spent the rest of the evening imagining him subjected to various tortures in hell and wishing that the event in Prague would become really significant to show him up.

But we heard nothing more that night. In fact it turned out to be a rather quiet evening and I got home before midnight.

On the following Sunday I ran into some friends.

"Have you heard?" they shouted to me from afar. "There was a huge student demonstration in Prague, the police beat them up and killed one."

"You are mixing things up," I said with a knowing air. "That happened 50 years ago."

"No, it happened last Friday! The victim was a maths student at Charles University. How come you don't know? We thought it was your job to listen to the Czech and Slovak news."

"Well... today is my day off..."

And I felt really embarrassed because the BBC paid us extra money to buy the newspapers every day. But it felt heavenly not to have to bother with anything more complicated than *Blind Date* over the weekend.

My friends shoved the newspaper article under my nose. It confirmed what they had said. Were the Czechoslovak communist authorities daft to emulate in 1989 the Nazi crime of 1939?

When I went back to work on Monday afternoon I didn't make a beeline for the canteen to have a gossip over coffee as usual. Instead, I threw myself at the weekend output from all over the world.

An unidentified source had reported that numerous students were badly beaten up and one was murdered by the police in Prague at what on Friday the Czech official broadcast called "minor antisocialist activity". The report was taken over by international press agencies and spread around the world.

So I was right on Friday to report on that demonstration! Would the ignoramus have the decency to apologize?

Czech TV had tried its best to dismiss the news. No corpse of a student had been found, they said. They tracked down not one but two university maths students with the name given in the report and found them at home unharmed. The murder was a canard spread by the enemies of socialism, the TV reporter said triumphantly. But he kept suspiciously quiet about the rumoured beating of the demonstrators. It could have meant only one thing: it must have happened.

But now it was Monday and it all seemed to have died down. In the four o'clock news there was not a word out of the ordinary: Achievements of socialism, quotes from speeches of top communist party officials, intrigues of the capitalist West. I yawned and strolled to the canteen.

"Thank you for Friday", said the *Angi Vera* enthusiast, having her fill of food after the morning shift. "*Angi Vera* is trash. How come you liked it?"

That's gratitude for you! In the heat of the following argument I almost forgot to take the five o'clock news. And that would have been a pity. I would have missed the moment when the world as I knew it turned on its head.

The presenter sounded like a different man - he might even have been one. No mention of the achievements of socialism, quotes from speeches of top communist party officials and intrigues of the capitalist West. Instead he opened the news bulletin by announcing that an anti-government rally was in progress at Letenska Plain in Prague, attended by thousands and that the radio was going to cover it live. Live cover of a rally held by anti-socialist forces? This couldn't be happening. Maybe there was something wrong with my hearing or my mind? When my shift partner for today came in I would ask to check the recording, just to make sure that I was not dreaming or hallucinating.

How come these broadcasters, who got their jobs because they were willing to dance to the tune of the post-68 neostalinist regime, had suddenly decided to spread the news of the Prague rebellion to the whole country? Were they not afraid of the consequences? Journalists who had made a stand against the regime in 1968 had been working for the last twenty one years as stokers and window cleaners while their children were barred from higher education.

The radio put on air speeches being made by dissidents whose name had been taboo for 21 years. Some had just been freed from prison. The crowd cheered.

"What did they give you for lunch today?" people chanted.

"Bublanina", said the ex-prisoners. Bublanina is a sweet dish served as a main course, which is loved by Czech children but the grown-ups usually frown upon it, as it contains no meat. "Let the top party man in Prague live on that!" jeered the crowd.

My stomach filled with air. I felt bloated and sick. What a prosaic reaction to the event of a lifetime. The world was rapidly somersaulting and I was the only person in Britain to know it.

I realized the effect this event would have on my own life. I might possibly be able to visit my homeland, which I hadn't seen for twenty one years. One day I might even live there. But if things went wrong a lot of people I knew and loved would be in grave trouble. The events of Tiannamen Square had occurred only a few months earlier.

The rally went on and on and every word was worthy of a news flash. There was no way two people on the evening shift could cover even a fraction of it, I told the supervisor on duty. He panicked and sent us a novice from the Russian team who just happened to speak Czech. Incidental knowledge of obscure languages was commonplace in Caversham. However, he had never been trained to work with Czech material.

"We'll do what we can", he said with perfect British, or in his case Scottish, composure, and piled tapes with the hottest news for two decades in front of him, knowing as well as I did that even if we worked day and night we wouldn't be able to present the British public with more than a minute portion of the material.

But then the rest of the team, who were supposed to be resting at home, turned up. The reception of foreign media broadcasts was so good in the Thames Valley that they had heard Czech radio at home and decided to come in to help.

Under any other circumstances any self-respecting Czech or Slovak or any other former national of a communist country, whether or not he or she had been living abroad for most of his or her adult life, would have sneered at this zeal for work. It would have been seen as bootlicking, trying to gain brownie points from the management. But on that day it felt like the right thing to do.

I worked late into the night, and after a short sleep in BBC accommodation, worked again all next day. I came home the next evening exhausted, wishing fervently for a news-free environment, a hot bath and bed.

The child ran to the door to welcome me. She was dirty, dishevelled and still in her underwear.

"Mama, where have you been?" she cried. "Daddy doesn't want to play with me. And I've had nothing to eat."

The flat looked as though it had been hit by a bomb. In the middle of the mess, there was my Czech-born husband sitting in front of the TV. It was showing the British coverage of the events in Prague.

I quickly sat down next to him and did not move until midnight despite the howls of the neglected offspring.

The month that followed was rather busy. There was one rally after another all over Czechoslovakia, the Party fell, the government fell, the parliament fell. We worked overtime every day. Prague was the number one news story throughout the world.

By December the presidential elections were coming and students in Prague were chanting "Havel to the Castle". There was no time for Christmas preparations. I took wrapping paper and a sack of presents to wrap on my way to work. I got entangled in the rolls of Christmas paper and covered in cellotape while my fellow travellers, with true British politeness, pretended not to notice.

Christmas came and went and then the Hungarian team became over-excited.

"What's happening?" I asked with disdain as they ran up and down looking rather important. Nothing of importance could ever happen in Budapest, I reckoned.

They hardly found the time to say: "Ceausescu".



Of course! Caversham employed no Romanian translators but Hungarian radio was always avid for any gossip about its unloved neighbour and, besides, Romanian radio ran a Hungarian service for its Hungarian minority. And therefore it fell to the Hungarian team to keep the world informed. And they did.

"They're after him. They got him. He ran away. They're after him again. They got him again. They shot him and her too. Hooray!"

And suddenly, Czechoslovakia's bloodless revolution sounded rather boring to everyone and we returned to ordinary everyday life.

Opening of Chapter 20, '*Radio Propaganda*' from *Churchill's Wizards*
By Nicholas Rankin

'There is no question of propaganda,' Sir Samuel Hoare told the House of Commons in his capacity as Lord Privy Seal on 11 October 1939. 'It will be publicity and by that I mean straight news.' To British ears, the word 'propaganda' is unpleasant. In 1928, Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in War-Time* exposed many myths of WW1, showing how in that war 'propaganda' came to mean misrepresentation and manipulation. The connotations have remained since mostly negative; except, of course, when you truly believe in what is being propagated or put forward.

The documentary film-makers were one such band of believers. John Grierson first used the word 'documentary' in a 1926 newspaper review he wrote of Robert Flaherty's anthropological film about Western Samoa, *Moana*, saying that it had 'documentary value'. From 1929 'documentary' became the self-defining term for an important group of British film-makers associated with Grierson who were interested in 'the creative treatment of actuality'. Grierson worked closely with a public relations man of genius, a remarkable British civil servant, Sir Stephen Tallents, who had been wounded in the trenches with the

Irish Guards, and worked on social reforms with William Beveridge. In 1926, Tallents became the secretary of the Empire Marketing Board. Playing on Tallents's internationalist vision, John Grierson persuaded him that cinema could help make the British Empire 'come alive'. Accordingly, after getting some ideas from Rudyard Kipling at Burwash, Tallents commissioned a film from Walter Creighton called *One Family*, in which a small boy falls asleep over his geography lesson and dreams a dream of the British Empire. A 1930 review found it 'the most extraordinary picture yet made by a British firm'. What Tallents encouraged in British documentary film-makers was public service propaganda. These non-commercial films looked at the social utilities that linked everybody – electricity, gas, post, railways, shipping, telephones, wireless, and so on – and were the first that allowed ordinary people to speak to the camera. The documentary film-makers were not embarrassed by the word 'propaganda'. John Grierson's epigraph to Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film*, published by Faber in January 1936, 'I look upon cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist', is confirmed in his introduction to the book: Our own relation to propaganda has been simple enough. We have found our finances in the propaganda service of Government Department and national Organisation . . . Documentary gave to propaganda an instrument it needed and propaganda gave to documentary a perspective it needed. There was therefore virtue in the word 'propaganda', and even pride; and so it would continue for just as long as the service is really public and the reference really social. If however, propaganda takes on its other more political meaning, the sooner documentary is done with it the better.

Most British journalists recoil from the word 'propaganda' as though from a poisonous Snake, yet it is really a pet which sits on their desk. All journalism is propaganda when it presents a case or seeks to persuade, because the estimation of 'news value' and the ordering of an argument is intimately linked to a belief system. The greatest journalists understand this. 'I was a professional recorder of events, a propagandist, not a soldier,' wrote one of WW2's finest reporters, Alan Moorehead, of himself. Purge 'propaganda' of negative associations and see it as a branch of rhetoric, or as information directed to public service, and we may get nearer to the way the British came to see it in WW2. In 1936, Sir Stephen Tallents became controller of public relations at the BBC, where a parallel process to Grierson's 'imaginative interpretation



of everyday life' was going on among the first radio documentary feature makers, like John Pudney and Stephen Potter.

Excerpt translated from *The Fifth Season* (Beirut, Dar Al-Intishar Al-Arabi, 2005)
By **Salwa Jarrah**

She lied down on the bed, stretching her body after a long tiring day; a very comfortable feeling after a nice hot shower.

She tried closing her eyes but his face haunted her and his voice kept filling her ears. She recalled the first time she took him to a studio. She handed him a news bulletin and asked him to read few lines. He read with a very clear and intelligent voice. "I thought you said you have never worked for a radio station" she said. "I haven't" he smiled back. "I was simply imitating the way news readers read news bulletins." "Oh!" she giggled quietly and took him back to the training room.

"Can you prepare a report?" "A news report?" he inquired. "No, a light hearted item. Check today's newspapers and see if you can find a piece of news worth turning into a report." Half an hour later he came back. "I found a nice item *Ice Cream Sales Soar in Italy in an Unprecedented Way due to the Heat Wave*. What do you think?" She looked at him. He was like a happy child. "It's good. How are you going to deal with it?" "I shall write an intro, then ask few people whether they like ice cream and finish with a clip from an appropriate song about Summer or heat or ice cream." She could not help smiling. "Go ahead. I like your idea."

Soldier
Priyath Liyanage

He washed himself
he shaved his face
combed his hair
groomed all over
until he looked the smartest

He polished his shoes
ironed his clothes
shined his buttons
until they are the brightest.

He learned his craft
studied hard
practised every day
until he became the cleverest

When the day arrived
for him to act
with all his will and power
he killed his foes
until he became the nastiest.

He killed, he maimed,
he raped, he looted
he conquered the land
until he had nothing left
Some... called him the bravest.

An extract from *Rishta (Proposal)*
By Achala Sharma

Context:

This excerpt is from an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's one act play 'The Proposal' which I had written soon after the 50th anniversary of India's independence. The play was staged in London as well as broadcast by the BBC. I adapted the play in the context of India-Pakistan relations. It is based in London where interaction between Indian Muslims and Pakistani Muslims is more likely to take place. There are three characters-Changez Khan (a Muslim from India) and his daughter, Nazia (a spinster). Then we have Liyaqatullah Siddiqi whose family had migrated to Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947.

Liyaqatullah, who is in his early forties and is a hypochondriac, has come to propose to Nazia. Unfortunately, the conversation starts on the wrong footing and before he could muster the courage to propose, they end up arguing about the ownership of a small house in India. A heated argument follows. This is where Changez, Nazia's father enters:
Scene

Changez: *What is happening here Nazia? Has England lost the world cup football or there is an India-Pakistan cricket match going on? Why were the two of you making so much noise?*

Nazia: *Dad, please resolve this. Tell Liyaqat, who owns the Noor Palace in India?*

Changez: *What sort of silly question is this Nazia? Of course, we do.*

Liyaqat: *I beg your pardon Changez sahib, how can you make such audacious claim? Please, you are a god fearing person... You should know that my father's father asked your father to look after Noor Palace when they were forced to leave their home in 1947. I guess in the last fifty years or so you have come to think of it as your own property.*

Changez: *You better get your facts right young man. Your father's father had sold the Noor Palace to us when they packed their bags to go to Pakistan. You have absolutely no idea how my family helped your family to escape in such difficult times. We risked our own lives. Anyway, how could you know all this? You have been fed lies and misinformation all your life. Noor Palace belongs to the Khan family. Everyone in India knows this as a fact.*

Liyaqat: *I can prove sir that it belongs to us. I have the letters which your father wrote to my father's father.....and...*

Changez: *Forget it. You can't prove it.*

Liyaqat: *I certainly can.*

Changez: *You cannot prove a thing by shouting. Listen Liyaqat, I have no intention of acquiring your land unlawfully, but I refuse to give up what is lawfully mine. However, if you continue to blow this matter out of proportion, I will give Noor palace to a charity organisation, Maybe offer it to Somalian refugees. Yes, that is a damn good idea.*

Liyaqat: *Changez sahib, how can you give away somebody else's property in charity? Tell me. Is it fair?*

Changez: *I will do whatever I like. It is mine.*

Liyaqat: *This is exactly like India's heavy handed attitude. That is not the way how good neighbours behave Changez sahib. You are a dishonest man.*

Changez: *How dare you! You called me a dishonest man?*

Nazia: *Dad, don't bother. Listen to me, phone someone in India today and get a new boundary wall built around Noor Palace.*

Liyaqat: *So you want to draw another LOC Nazia Bano?*

Nazia: *Sure, if that would open your eyes to the truth that Noor Palace belongs to us.*

Liyaqat: Well, don't forget, if you and your father wish to turn this matter into a Kashmir issue, I too can appeal to the United Nations.

Changez: Do as you please. By the way, what did you achieve at the UN in the last fifty years? Have you got Kashmir? Listen, Liyaqatullah Siddiqi, dishonesty is in your blood. Fifty years ago, you wanted to create Pakistan, then you wanted Kashmir and now you also want the small piece of land that belongs to our family. Why did your family leave India in the first place?

Liyaqat: My family didn't want to be treated like second class citizens Changez Khan. It was a matter of honour for them.

Changez: Honour? Fifty years on and you are still called Muhajirs, I mean migrants in Pakistan. What kind of honour is that?

Liyaqat: Oh god! What is happening to me, why should I listen to such crap, these palpitations will kill me, my right leg seems to be paralysed, I must leave...

Changez: Yes, you must and don't ever come back. I do not wish my daughter to marry such a dishonest man.

Nazia: Marriage? What?

Changez: Yes. How could he possibly think of marrying you when he had eyes upon our property?

Nazia: What are you talking about dad?

Changez: Well, he said he wants to propose to you. He must be day dreaming.

Nazia: Oh god dad! How badly we treated him... You should have told me.

And of course Liyaqat returns and the debate goes on shifting to nuclear tests, mangoes and of course cricket.

The Call

By Khaled al-Berry

"The Call" is excerpted from Life Is More Beautiful than Paradise by Khaled al-Berry, first published in Arabic by Dar al-Nahar as al-Dunya ajmal min al-janna in 2001; a revised edition was published by Dar Merit in 2009. Life Is More Beautiful than Paradise will be published in November 2009 by the American University in Cairo Press and Arabia Books.

I descended the mosque steps calmly after the prayer, talking to a friend of mine. The school year had started a few weeks earlier, the university students arriving from their hometowns and the students at the schools returning from their vacations. At the Jam'iyah Shar'iyah mosque—the Jama'a's main mosque in Asyut—the number of worshipers was huge, larger than any I'd seen throughout the summer vacation. This was my first school year as a committed Muslim with the Jama'a. The atmosphere in the city was tense; the government had decided, as it did on occasion, that Islamist activity had gone too far and had to be stopped. At such times, the mosque would be surrounded by thousands of Central Security troops, who would prevent some preacher or other from giving his sermon or terrorize those who frequented the mosque in the hope that they would decide not to take the risk of going. The huge number of those attending the prayer could act either as a stimulus to the police to interfere or a deterrent.

On this occasion, it was a stimulus. The buzz of people talking, the sound of their footfalls, the cries of the stall keepers, the attentive expression on my friend's face—all froze, and then suddenly everything exploded. Two agitated hands pushed me from behind, feet stepped on the backs of my shoes, dragging them off my feet. Shots were fired in the air and people knocked into one another like bowling pins, moving together this way and that as though by previous agreement. An acrid smoke got into my nostrils and added to the atmosphere's other ingredients. My face burned, my whole body apparently bursting into flame, just as every atom of the air around me had taken fire all at one go.

I yielded to my instincts and ran away from the shooting, but the roaring of the Central Security soldiers and the deafening sound of thousands of feet pounding the ground to an irregular rhythm started coming from all sides and I didn't know which way to turn. I had the feeling that our house existed in a different world, one separated from me by frightful obstacles. I would run like a madman and enter a building, then retreat and flee again when the residents refused to open their doors and give me refuge. There seemed no escape from the police with their thick, electrified batons. I ran from street to street, forgetting that my age and my face, without beard or mustache, would be enough to hide me from notice so long as I walked normally. One brother from the Jama'a was holding high a crutch belonging to another brother, a cripple who sold perfumes in front of the mosque. He was yelling in the face of the fleeing people, "Stand firm! Your religion is under attack! Defend your Islam!"

I saved the scene in my memory but wasn't strong enough to answer his call. I kept running till I reached our house, where the windows were closed tight to stop the tear gas from the grenades. Through the slanting wooden slats of the shutters I could see the final moments of the battle. The security forces dispersed the people and began chasing those who couldn't run fast enough to get away, beating them viciously while herding them toward the security trucks. My tears weren't because of the gas now. I went to my bed and lay down on my back in the darkened room. I remembered the movies I had watched with the brothers, depicting the first Muslims and their confrontations with the

tyranny of the unbelievers. I fell asleep before my tears had dried.

I found myself in a dark, deserted place divided equally into narrow paths that all came together at a circle in the middle. Precisely at the centre stood a white dog, which was barking. Dogs had always frightened me, and this dog was barring my return route. I looked all around in the hope of finding a path that would allow me to avoid him. I felt a crippling fear in my legs. I couldn't move. The only light on that dark path was on the other side, but I didn't have the courage to walk past the dog and get to it. Gathering all my strength, I walked on, trembling, impelled only by the certainty that I would perish otherwise. Walking toward the dog, hastening my steps, I said in a loud voice, recalling a song we sang at the mosque, "No, we shall not die cringing for fear of the dogs. No, we shall not die cringing for fear of the dogs."

I woke from my dream still weeping.

Time

By Emal Pasarly

I woke up early. It was cold. I performed the dawn prayer. Really enjoyed it. It calmed my soul. I didn't want to wake anybody up. I made a cup of tea myself. Even if I had waked someone, who knows how willing they would have been, and in what mood. They don't say anything, of course, but I know. I know that no one else can wake up that early.

No one else has the prowess to wake up at dawn.

I took the cup with me. Let me go outside and drink it in the lawn, I thought. The lawn was wet with dew. It felt colder than I had estimated. I came back. Sat at large window's mirrors. I looked at the lawn, slowly sipping tea. A little later, I picked up my notebook. It is more fun to read those memories. Not that many books make it here from home these days. Books here are all in English. I don't know why I don't enjoy them anymore. I used to read them with a lot of passion once.

I started reading memories of thirty years ago. I was off. I had got up late and gone to the barber's to have a haircut. I closed the notebook for a moment. I remembered that barber. He was Greek. Where might he be now? Could he even be alive? He was a short man with a large round belly. He felt tired while working. Shortness of breath. He would pull me by the hair. You got such strong hair, young man.

Used to say the same thing every time. I would simply laugh. I loved it.

My tea cup emptied. I was still thirsty. It's strange. After such a long time, I have felt like having a second cup of tea in the morning. I went to the kitchen. Before I could put the kettle on the range, my granddaughter came downstairs. Baabaa, I want some tea too. I took out milk for her from the refrigerator for her.

Her mother used to give her milk every morning before anything else. As I turned around, she had gone into the living room and turned the TV on. Turned it down, my child, I said. You are gono wake others up. She pay me no heed. I brought her the milk and reminded her once more: Turn it down some. Others are sleeping

Let them wake up, she blurted. They can't stay sleeping till Judgment Day. It's getting late.

That made me laugh. I lowered the volume myself. She got mad and turned off the TV. Didn't even take the milk from me. She ran towards my notebook. I was panicked. I thought she wanted to tear the pages off my notebook. But she started flipping its pages carefully. I stopped in front of her, just watching her. She turned a few more pages, looked at me, then laid the notebook on the floor.

Can you read this, Baabaa?

"Of course I can, dear," I laughed. "It's Pashto writing."

The girl did not say anything more. Took the milk from my hand, and went upstairs, to her father and mother.

I remembered my tea, but for some reason didn't feel like drinking it anymore. I stood in front of the large window. Saw my image in the mirror. During the past several years, hair had fallen off my head. But above my ears, the hair looked long. I looked at my watch. It was too early. The barber shop was probably still closed. Started exploring my

notes again.

I had gone to a dentist, an old Englishman. He would drill my teeth every single time. He would warn me every time: if you keep don't start paying attention Tooth such and such of your upper jaw will decay. And every time he would charge a lot of pounds. That's why I wouldn't see him unless I had to.

I turned another page. I had gone to a barbeque picnic with friends. You know, to make kebab and such. I had got a stomach-ache. The meat must not have been cooked well. I closed the notebook again. I felt hunger. Thinking of kebob made my mouth water. It had been so long I hadn't eaten meat, much less kebob. I can only eat ground beef. Even that I turn over in my mouth a few time. I looked at my watch. Perhaps the barber shop is open now. I put on my overcoat and my hat. Then I walked to the barber shop. He was just opening the shop. He is English, some thirty-odd years old, perhaps. He is a tall youth with thick hair. Dreadlocks, to be exact, like a woman's, hanging on his back. "Need a shave?" he asked me.

I sat on his chair, touching the greying hair above my ears. "No, I would like to have this hair short."

He was looking at me in the mirrors in front of me. He wrapped a piece of cloth around my neck, held the hair above my ear, and started working his scissors. Soon he was straightening my hair and brushing off hair off the back of my neck. He stood aside: "Ten pounds, please."

The phrase shocked me. I repeated to myself: Ten pounds!

I gave the ten pounds to the barber and left the shop.

I looked at my watch. It was still early. They must still be sleeping, I thought. Started walking very slowly. It was chilly. I was cold. I entered a large department store. Didn't really need anything. I saw a doll. Bought it for my granddaughter. The cashier told me twenty pounds. I was stunned. I said to myself, twenty pounds! and left the store.

I looked at the watch again. It was as if time had stopped. Let me go home, I thought. I could probably read my memoirs. That's usually good for killing time. I could give the doll to grandchild. She will love that.

I hurried home. It was quiet. They were probably sleeping. Where are you, *bachu*? I've brought you a doll. I did not hear an answer. I laid the doll aside. Grabbed my notebook. I had found a job. I was happy. It paid a pound per hour. My job was to deliver merchandise to a large store in a small truck. I would drive the truck alone.

I heard my son's voice. He had just got up. Still in his pyjamas. Probably had not even washed his face yet. Just like his daughter, he went straight to the living room and turned on the TV.

"Where did you go?" he asked me, without looking at me.

"Had a haircut."

He looked at me and frowned. "You had one last Friday. You have more trips to the barbershop than hair on your head."

I didn't like what he said, but I chuckled anyway. He had already turned his face towards television. Wasn't laughing.

--I bought a doll for your daughter.

--Why?

--No particular reason. I thought she would play with it.

--You are just wasting money. She has lessons to do. How is she going to find time for dolls?

I did not say anything. Took my notebook and started reading. My son kept saying buy a bike. I tried to talk him out of it because he had studies. He kept crying.

My granddaughter came down. I closed the notebook.

--I have brought a doll for you.

--How much did you pay for it, she asked.

--Twenty pounds.

--Ohooooooooo Baabaa, you don't understand. For twenty pounds I could have bought a computer game.

My son asked, how much was the haircut?

--Ten pounds.

--"The doll is a waste of time," he said as he was leaving the house, "And the haircut a waste of money."

My granddaughter also left with her dad. She did not take the doll. I got up and unwrapped the doll. Turned it around a few times. It wasn't fun. It didn't help me pass time.

Translated from Pashto to English by S.Junaid