Amir Or

THE MUSEUM OF TIME

2007
CONTENTS

The Hours

Plate 1: The Right View
Plate 2: Testimony
Plate 3: The Looking Glass
Plate 4: Love Bed
Plate 5: The Journey to The World
Plate 6: Camera Obscura
Plate 7: Reflection
Plate 8: Poet
Plate 9: Alma Mater
Plate 10: Bloom
Plate 11: Twilight
Plate 12: Sand and Time
Plate 13: Shadow
Plate 14: Dryad
Plate 15: The Desk
Plate 16: Art

Here

Succession
Orpheus Prayer
Here In The Land
Shift
Whirlwind
Foreigner
Home
On The Salt Shore

The Maze

The Temptation
I - In the Big House
- Safety
II - Eyes
- Waves
Old Song
III - Glittering
- Solo
IV - This Time He's Born
Peace
V - Altar
- The Cage
- The Cows Grazed
Pet
VI - The Dreamers
VII - Cracks
- The Conqueror
- Glory
- The Orchestra
Sunset
VIII - Circle
XI - Game
X - The Pictures
The Maze
Face
By the Temple
CONTENTS

The Hours
Plate 1: The Right View
Plate 2: Testimony
Plate 3: The Looking Glass
Plate 4: Love Bed
Plate 5: The Journey to The World
Plate 6: Camera Obscura
Plate 7: Reflection
Plate 8: Poet
Plate 9: Alma Mater
Plate 10: Bloom
Plate 11: Twilight
Plate 12: Sand and Time
Plate 13: Shadow
Plate 14: Dryad
Plate 15: The Desk
Plate 16: Art

Here
Succession
Orpheus Prayer
Here In The Land
Shift
Whirlwind
Foreigner
Home
On The Salt Shore

The Maze
The Temptation
I * In the Big House
** Safety
II * Eyes
** Waves
Old Song
III * Glittering
** Solo
IV – This Time He's Born
Peace
V * Altar
** The Cage
*** The Cows Grazed
Pet
VI – The Dreamers
VII * Cracks
** The Conqueror
*** Glory
**** The Orchestra
Sunset
VIII – Circle
XI – Game
X – The Pictures
The Maze
Face
By the Temple
I

THE HOURS
Plate 1:  The Right View

And if I had portrayed for you
this soft bluish light
the tremulous reflection of the poplar in the water
when a convoy of ducks is crossing the pond
and beyond the circular shore line
the bushes and the bay and the green mountain
melting into the cloud-sky in the rain –

wouldn't you search my eyes with a prying searchlight
shoot a duck or two down between the lines
and pray for the monster to emerge from the sea
agape upon your flesh a sky-high mouth
to redeem you
from this divine dullness?

But there's no need. Here, I'm sketching it for you –
the cross and the nails the convulsions the pain
wave after wave in his butterfly's wings –
your glowing faces the landscape
and finally his wonderful cry
the pleasure-strike hitting into your flesh,
the quivering thrill –

Just one more minute. Patience. I'm almost finished.
Plate 2: Here

Here is my testimony:
about fifty, father to an eight-year-old (you don’t see that),
making words into poetry, loved, hated (don’t see that), actually
a kind of wild creature, here:
soul cuts, rebellion, lips – too sensitive, all eyes (as you see)
and actually what a mirror betrays is no deeper
than what it doesn’t. What a mirror mirrors
is a two-dimensional Being-card,
framing the appearance of the Wanted.
One portrait glancing into a moment from the crowd of the soul;
and the soul?
What can I show you about it which you don’t already know?
Here’s the wheat-stalk which grew out of nothingness
here the knife
that cut it from the One.
Plate 3:  Looking Glass

And if the world emerged from this reflection
from the cascade of light on the opaque zinc screen
a room within a room an eye within an eye
falling upon the polished thought –

would you see
sea and land trees, animals lights in the sky

when your face liquefies down what can be seen
quivering passion facing quivering passion

and fish swimming on in your chest
to the sea?

An image within the image of the falling mind
wings flapping in vain against the reflection of air

and at last the crash
the liberating bang –

splits are rushing across the glass surface
blood's flooding the eye cracks
long caravans are stretching out to the horizon
nations migrating

into the textbooks,
mother and child and a flaming sword
time breaks,
smithereens.

If you go on looking so much
you'll miss the main bit fail to catch

the concentric ripples spreading in the mirror
the echo of glugging sound passing through it

and the face of the water returning to stillness.
Plate 4: **Love Bed**

In the corner of the room – pleasure. A pink tongue lapping each drop of milk from the cat's veins.

Fish swim the lower belly –

   it's painful for them

but they know nothing about it nothing at all.

The body's quiet now. It's all leftovers.
The spirit breathing gently above it
is left to its reflection –

   a mirror-bird is spreading, with difficulty,
       a single wing.
Plate 5: *Journey to the World*

The spirit is falling the small body
shakes below with the big one
when a savage sea is pounding a depth into both
and the casing is the interior,
grasping, shrinking, wriggling, swallowing
– like a throat or an intestine –
its prey.

Electric pain throws him out of the womb
towards faces leaning over opening thighs
to the sky of the room and further
to the room of the sky rounded over his eyes.

Faces, faces and more faces
from the sea, the cities, the burning air – –

Bones squeak, crack, split under-skin
ants are crawling down the eye holes.

Walls are changing into more changing walls:
a cradle, a bathtub, a street, a grave.

Down below

a crying.
Plate 6:  

**Camera Obscura**

Darkness doesn’t distinguish between things
doesn’t recognise you
except by your voice wandering among the echoes;
by the sour smell of your fear  by your desire
to rip your image out of the darkness
to rip a shadow for yourself  out of the shadows.

Darkness is a womb without walls –
there’s only myself inside myself.
In the dark locked room  a child learns
to listen, touch, be
pulse and skin.

* Camera Obscura: literally "dark room". A darkened enclosure having an aperture through which light from external objects enters to form their image on the opposite surface.
Plate 7:  Reflection

These are reflections that became frozen for ever.
This is the mirror room of memory:

A child in the darkness plays hide and seek with shadows
sinks into the secret places of the stairs
    turns into shadow.

A child in the darkness
separates from his image dreams his face inwards.

In a mirror of darkness he reveals light –
    and sees.
Plate 8: **Poet**

Teacher’s speaking he hears her
there are no words there only music.

two trees sway in the window ink shapes in the note-book.
He counts the dream shapes: two trees teacher’s speaking
his lover closes a window.

He sits in the margins of the page trees sway in the note-book
his heart’s turning with the clock and now – the bell:

He closes his eyes. Hears.
*There are no words there,* he writes.
Therefore we've all gathered here for the expected graduation stretched out on the grass in the promised land where honey's being licked from young thighs and milk being sucked from our chests along with the blood, fat and marrow; we wipe our lips in satisfaction gloating at ourselves full of meaning we don't want to have.

But we feel no pain we're munching and spitting, like a cashier going through a supermarket trolley, the correct answers voice and tone and come out by the book, in a winged buzz – a swarm of thoughts belonging to nobody.

The rest is a piece of cake – we inherit the earth the beds the words

Night’s falling.
Long angular shadows are cast from the sphere overlapping the sun on the procession of I’s leaving heading home.
Plate 10: Bloom

When the dead are planning their next birth
cemeteries smell like spring.

They're coming closer than dreams
roaming away from their worlds
to die into the world.

You grasp them suddenly your body winces
when they move on past you as if you were a ghost.

The dome of the view a blue sky, a few light clouds
is a thin curtain powerless to shield you.

Sounds of bells and sea-shells come close to your ears.
Every breath you take is presence.

In spring everything reveals itself in flesh again.
Glittering mirrors are hanging in the wind eyes blooming everywhere.
Plate 11:  **Sand and Time**

Touch this with your eye.
Do you see it?

Only a lonely crow
is piercing the morning with his uncanny urgency.

The trees are still deep with night
enfolding dimensions in their foliage caves.

My eyes take a morning walk, roam the half-light world
where dream and wakefulness

aren’t yet distinguished
from shadows and leaves.

A lazy sun’s rising in my lazy eyes
a cool blue emerges from the east.

I’m leaning against the sea
at the back of my heart:

to enter and be entered
is all we do.
Plate 12: **Twilight**

Spirits are wailing over the lake, pleading with you to open for them a heart, an eye, a body to feel once more through the animal of flesh to bite, taste, take pleasure, smell.

They remember the bodily sensations of an animal, a tree or an object – rain, heat, movement, weight.

They've been here before, aeons before us as the shepherds of bodies among creatures of dream; haven't left with the rest to the lighter realms; stayed behind in forests and caves, in the margins of your eyes and the desolation of night.

But they're not immortal they wither and fade to a voiceless howl a transparent hunger.

Even the shudder they brush onto your skin is merely the craving touch of nothingness against the real.
Plate 13: **Shadow**

Like the body in dream it's all too easy to forget.
It grows bigger as your light sets;
first it's just a cub of darkness – pulled out of your heart
  licking your ankles with its warm tongue.
And when you think of it it's almost endearing
  The dead toss a white bone to it.
But in an hour it's as large as your step,
biting you with each step, hungry to be.

The more it darkens the more you apprehend,
your footsteps slowing down on the bridge –

the night is a river an elongating animal
  a maw of darkness a hundred snake teeth.
The night is water and chill.

Now you're scared you appease it
with a bone, a hand or another love –
doesn't matter.
At any rate before long
you'll become one.
Plate 14:  **Dryad**

She starts at dusk in the trees
sunk deep into the essence of shadow
their edges still half material as green as the heart.

She's nesting within herself deep in its water
her branches shadow arms taking roots in the dark.

Twilight's already grey and so are the eyes.
She sinks slowly
her thighs water and cold black earth humus
just a flickering glitter passing through leaves –

Eyes. Hunger

Your feet are sinking and opening your navel moist and cold.
Your face rustling.
Roots are branches groping for a face –
Plate 15:  **The Desk**

I'm not in the right world. No. Everything's eyes the people, the walls even when they're closed they're alien staring at my alien face that's lit with a sulphur light incapable of healing. The reading lamp's barking at the pages sinking into the desk, a cheek's twitching, fermenting under the eye, the ashtray scattered with bones and ashes.

This treacherous pen's movement
    that scratches the city
        sideways
            like a crab
        and goes on delightedly
            cutting into the world
                up to the margin of the page
                    and beyond –

isn't mine. Should die. Should have never been born.

I'm fixing what I can. Yes, it's going to hurt. Don't look, don't touch the stitches; walk on in between the lines. There you'll find the right poem
Plate 16: **Art**

This was the eighth day of creation:
clouds absorbed burning brush-strokes
across the bluish-grey width of the sky.

Our souls struggled towards the fire
like beautiful insects
but the plane – was all forwards, drawing out its line.
Indifferent to the heavenly cataclysm
it passed far above.

At dawn under lampshades of clouds
the being-artist dipped his brush in thin light
and peaceful autumn was silently drawn into the tops of the plane trees
gradually matching them with patches of roof
among waterfalls of Russian vine.

The air’s clean of thoughts;
what can be seen - nameless, packed with dreams.
Between patches of wandering worlds, the world’s
slowly rising
here and there, in my eyes.

---

II
Succession

Appu, the first wise man, the half-human, was squatting, sticking out his lips, in front of the ears of barley which had grown from seeds fallen from his palm. For a moment he picked his nose thoughtfully; then stuck his finger in the wet soil, placed a seed in the hole and invented agriculture. That’s how, say the ancient texts, Appu lay with the earth. In one syllogism, Appu saved man from the darkness of the eternal present and gave him past and future; with one syllogism he taught people to desire what’s absent. This is how Appu entered the cave of death and discovered in it - culture. Therefore the proverb says, *All of our science put together is no more than a nit on Appu’s skull.*

Hashi, the sixth wise man, stole barleycorn, stole the virginity of the earth priestess and stole fire from the heart of the flint mountain. He ground the flints together; he kneaded the priestess; he baked the earth. This is how Hashi invented bread. In one hour, say the ancient texts, Hashi stole poverty from the rich and foolishness from the wise. Therefore the proverb says, *Is Hashi here? – Mind your pockets! All of our wealth put together is less than Hashi’s poverty.*

Goma the Blind, the eleventh wise man, was the first to discover language. He slapped his belly, which made a dull sound, but in vain. *Bread!* yelled Goma until people learnt the secret of sign and signified. That’s how, say the ancient texts, Goma pointed without a finger and saw without eyes. In one word Goma saved man from time and place and made the will grow wings. Therefore the proverb says, *All of our texts put together are as the eyes of Goma.*
Nano, the one-hundred-and-eighth wise man, looked around and saw nothing. He listened and heard nothing. He touched and felt nothing. With Nano, say the ancient texts, redemption came to the world.
The Orpheus Prayer

Death and yet more death    sand and more sand
We have stood in the square hungry to be

and, like mountain shadows,
covered the city with pictures of a waking sleep.

Was she there or wasn’t she?
A stranger in my body, able and yet unable, I tried the air:

“How many more years will we walk these dead sands?”
The mountain is glimpsed like a vision or a mirage.

Sands move on underfoot    like a memory with no beginning,
and each place    is every place.

Does the way go up or down? Are you here, behind my gaze?
Is my gaze there, ahead of me? Where have we come from?

Alone, the two of us have crossed vast marshes
on the slowly melting faces of the drowned.

For years we’ve been immortal.
In the attic, in Amsterdam, we saw terrible sorrow in the window.

How much longer shall we walk
between death and death, sand and sand?

A new past give us, a new death give us.
Give us this day the life of the day.
Here In The Land

Here in the empty land in the diminishing time
alive yet not alive dead and not yet dead
pacing like immortals on a darkened road –

we've never been and are not and what can befall us
that could possibly hide the worst of it all?

We rise daily at dawn
to go round and round the city of non-being
in the processions of judgement
and like bruises on a beaten skin
our dragging footprints mark the earth, blackening slowly.

Seven times we encircled the city sounding our throats
but its walls didn't fall they move round with us

around one more undeciphered tiding that dawns without light –
and hangs above us like a lot not yet cast.

Our necks are stiff from staring upwards
with dislocated pupils soaring beyond our eyebrows and forehead,
agape at a further-on that blows a new name into our chests
and spreads at our feet one more abyss ajar,
a box of echoes for the howl.
Behind the TV, the generations of the tribe are passing:
demons of quilts smelling of naphthalene,
ghosts of a deserted laundry-cupboard,
portraits in an album and store-room mirages;

Repeatedly they peer with a decaying eye
    leaping from the corners with a crumbling leg
and with a mouth full of earth sigh throatlessly
    "We haven't lost hope yet…"
And we all repeat after them an endless supplication
rolling on like a wild, though unheard, laughter

– Oh, fading God whose name's forgotten,
    endow us please with day or night –

Between the tallboys along the sideboard and all the way up to the pantry,
we, Destiny’s firstborns and still too young for trepidation,
tread on their faces ruin after ruin
and through the glaze of our wide opened eyes
seek a mirror or a death
    within forgetfulness.
Shift

After some time the death-bird
started to cut through the murmurs of night.
On a blue coffin

sparrows were gathering straw-stalks and gleanings for a wreath.
Keening women, whose breath was getting short,
burst into their marvellous lamentation:

Even he who’s free of everything

isn’t free from being himself.
Whirlwind

In the journey that doesn’t end everything and nothing are like waves; arriving not-arriving –
and where am I?
I have no mouth nor face, only a longing and a desert.

Give me an eye to expel the mind into the fire;
who I was I don’t remember I have no tomorrow, only now
only you, like a star I won’t stop calling out for.

And I pass like a shadow until you rise in the east
into a world of grey shadows; until I’m thawed like the frost
and burnt in the light and I can return to you, saying
that I’m already here.

Give me an eye to revive a memory that hasn’t been erased
from the soul that crossed the whole desert with you,
from the water to the fire; who I was I don’t remember.

Wandering on a camel the moon is my witness;
if it fall and die I will bury my face
between sand and sand.

Give me an eye to expel the mind into the fire,
and in the midst of what there is
let me dance empty as a whirlwind
until we fall here like shadows.
Let thirst drink from the well
for it will remain like a burning memory
chiming after us that the herd’s nearing
and evening’s falling again like a baby to a breast
as everything turns to one
as night wraps up the tent and the heart again.

And then I too return – a sound that has no beginning,
a song without end, wordless:
who were you all? I don’t remember,
only a longing and a desert.

I have no tomorrow, only now, no grave, only a star,
and from that place like hunger
I come to the heart that doesn’t end

and here I break:

everything and nothing are like waves arriving not-arriving;
if I have no I then who’s inside?
Only a longing and a desert.
**Foreigner**

He wakes on scorching sand between wall and square.  
In front of him the convoy halts as in front of a forgotten memory:

is he just a road-marking, is he a signpost or a record,  
was he left here at the fork in the road

for a moment or for ever? The body that stiffened  
didn’t die: look, he’s not alone.

Figures without shadows, casting no reflections,  
carry him to be burnt

on a pile of fire-wood, dung and libations of oil,  
under a heap of flowers.

Is this a man or a fish?  
Will he live or go, with his pallbearers, through the gate?

His hands, legs and neck are fixed in position,  
in this one step with which he walked out beyond sight

and vanished into his shadow. His gills froze in a last breath,  
his shadow remained behind him, yellow,

thrown down like a monk’s habit, emptied-out,  
to be trodden on by any passer-by along the rutted path
which runs between huts and peddlers’ stalls.
Shadow, figure, costume were scorched like a fiery image
in the reflection he left here: in a lover’s eyes;
looking out from a mirror-world on the house wall;
and in puddle-creatures flickering between rain and light.
Now he wakes, a disembodied figure carried like loot.
The funeral paces inside the slow silence
as if in a thick, congealing liquid.
the wailing women aren’t seen,
but their voices rise in lament: Ya-hoi! Ya-hoi! Ya-hoi!
The congregation is submerged, not fully cut out of the dark,
dragging after the pallbearers like a long wake of shadow or foam
following a crab on-shore. Waking, he places his feet
on ground he didn’t reckon with and hasn’t remembered this time either;
tries a movement like a calf
standing up for the first time on four feet
Already the body-bearers recoil, even though movement’s not visible
to the casual eye, but crawls inside his limbs like a branch growing.
He’s been abandoned on sand in a square, in front of a wall
and while an age passes he finally stands.
His shadow grows up the wall, opens like a mouth wide onto the square,

he pulls the limbs of absence down towards him,
stretches out his hands to everything behind.

Now, when he remembers
he hesitates to touch what brought him here,

the greatness which fell from him with a single thought.

Slowly he loosens himself from the death-spasm;
slowly he looks towards the reflection and shadow
he left behind:

a wife and two daughters, a boy of five
and an old mother who’s still standing,

like an echo that came back to its voice,
on the river bank

where the ashes were scattered.
Home

Once more this house has been erected  westward eastward  left and right
and man came in and stood there:  a god facing  his new interior.

Who spoke up  so that it happened?  Who invested stone with meaning?
Who set a name in endless sky?  What did he lack?  What did he hope for?

Faceless night covers with its wings  the fish's spasms on the hook.
On the Salt Shore

Songs darken on the banks of death.
Day travels on — a wandering kingdom —
and the sea, like a giant placenta,
is facing land, touching transience.

Time's an old pit
in which the song's ever darkening —
once more, round it death-years will be counted
like strips of whiteness in the fog.
III

THE MAZE
The Temptation

This was the temptation: 
to rub the I against the you,  
our thought against its images.  
To feel.  
We were there before, you remember,  
without mother or father, without navel,  
marked only by the first cut.  
Free of weight, measurement, destruction  
we wandered inside each other, dreamt worlds,  
lived.  
But the stakes were too low,  
the risk – only a game.  
Desire was action,  
instantly complete.  
And that’s the way (remember?) we got here too:  
by a single desire,  
by a glance.  

And now we’re here, in the viscous air,  
rubbing this in, with effort –  
every single sensation, every meeting.  
Our suns rise and set,  
our worlds get old,  
but here:  
suddenly we find  
a new wrinkle in our soul,
and this – is for real. It’s real. Finally we can lose, destroy, finally we are alive. For a moment we can even die.
I

* In the Big House

In the big house / deep inside / the endless labyrinth of rooms / she's sitting on her bed / brooding. / Does she remember?
Images of another place / outside / are coming in. / Green slopes. / Sheep. / Small earthen houses / surrounded by long rounded clay walls. / Where was it? / Was it her life? / Trying now even harder / trying to recall her own / she sees herself / playing / in the sunshine / by the village brook. / Fleeting images of foliage, water, faces; / mother? /
Now, to be sure / she's alone. / It's the bed and the guard. / The blank walls. / Can she bribe him? / She has nothing to trade / except her body / but it belongs to the ruler / whom nobody / – not even if you wish to die – / disobeys. / And what does he want of her? / he's not even embodied. / He's electric pain / splitting her knowing her / through the stomach and skull / every cell and thought / played like strings of agony / under the waves of his touch.
Has she / through the endless crooked corridors / run off with the guard? / Has she found her way / through the labyrinth / of images? / She can't remember / if she is that woman, / if it happens at all, / in the big house / deep / inside.
**Safety**

She was a bar singer / and kept on singing / in the occupied city / alone / with nothing to protect her / except / his desire. / Now she's sitting / for the last time / staring at the oval mirror in her small backroom / where she first yielded / her body to his pleasure / for food and safety. / Later on / she learnt to love / his handsome / impassive face / his Nazi uniform / and even / his limpid cold touch.

When she gets pregnant / he / obnoxiously mutters / something about 'the blackmailing slut'.

She / comes right away / on cloud nine / saturated / with her own life for meaning, / pacing the grey Budapest streets / to the double heart beat / inside her. / But he doesn't listen. / Forces her / to have the abortion / pays for it too / and makes sure.

Although she wanted this baby / coveted it so badly / this one token of love / this luxury of having / a real life / to care for and nurture – / but who'd dare to / disobey him? / Yes, she was being so afraid – but only until afterwards / when back home / aching and empty / of life and death / she has neither fear nor hope left / to protect her / from not wanting / any life / to care for.
II

* Eyes

In the 4th century BC / he's the new Commander of the Guard – / boots, sword, helmet and all. / He's the commander / and she's / smiling. / Ah temple guards! / They're on the watch all right! / But never see / the young priestess / burning / in the inner shrine / in the eternal fire / she's guarding. / Yet she, / the holy virgin she is, / is burning and seeing: / him. / And it's sweet / and wild / and even sweeter / sacrilegiously sweeter / yes!

When the outrage is found out / – it's an old woman that sells statuettes / (fate can be so insulting!) – / she makes the mob believe / she was had, deflowered, desecrated / by brute force. / And truly / how could she help it? / He was all fuel / all weapon / thrust by the gods / into her flaming / flesh. / Her thighs are still / trembling. / But he too / as he well deserves / is burning now / in the holy flame / in the pleasure-pain flame / of this eternal instant; / aflame like a moth / in her unabated embrace. / Later / much slower / burning in the city square / he's besieged by those eyes / white-hot needles / all over; / but here, among them / he finds hers / in an instant. / Butterflies covering his arms, / fire-ants up his thighs, / he's watching it transfixed / hyper-present / epiphanied: / a debauching lover / a god, a sinner, / guilty / of every crime and fate.
** Waves **

Later / some eighty years later / they're back. / On a godforsaken Anatolian sea shore / in a small muddy village / where people / are hardly talking – / it's her mother that finds out / she's pregnant.

It's early morning / crimson sky / waves are coming in, / one more sun's rising; / she's only fifteen / but the law is timeless / and now time's / no more.

And he's there too / very close / in the grey air / still hovering / around his foetus body / encased by hers / which he finally enters / completely / when they were beating her belly / hard with the sticks.

He hears the world now – / endless sound of seashells / waves coming in – / and there he is, / hovering again / above her bleeding corpse / above his bloody foetus flesh between her legs / when it's really all / over now.
Old Song

Even the lightest separation has sorrow in it.
What we saw and were has passed,
fallen from our eyes and gone
piling one more autumn on our chests.

Even the lightest separation has sorrow in it
but when two lovers go their own way
the heart burns unconsumed, uprooted but not rootless,
too heavy to bear.

Even if we shared the shadow of a tree on the road,
these lives of ours have passed like shadows;
or if we shared happiness in a view of sunset
our sun has set with it

into a dark sea.

Twilight envelops all, the wind stops breathing;
but, beyond darkening light,
when they’ve circled their own sky, our eyes
will open again under lids of fog:

spirit’s still blowing through the forest,
the shadow’s still in the foliage,
and in the sunset that doesn’t end
we’ll separate for an infinity of love.
III

* Glittering

He was told to fight, / against all odds / to the very last soldier / and hold
firm / on the path to the city. / All day he was fighting / until his enemies
became faceless; / labouring / at the killing / like kneading a sun with his
bare hands. / Few obeyed him / – to live out the day – / and in his aching
heart / he thanked them for that. / Only later / victorious / celebrated /
back in the city, / when in the prearranged square / the general gave him /
the brave-soldier-medal / did he realize / how doubtful the danger was, / how
his stand was staged / just for the heroic drama / how he was himself
to serve / as a medal / to glitter on the general's chest.
**Solo**

Later on / it was mum who moved him / to the new school, / brought him over / and left in a hurry. / In this new class / every position / was already taken, / the fight was fierce / and only few of him / lived out the day. / He was lonely / and bored / and answered all questions / with accurate strikes / at the pace teacher phrased them. / So / just to hush him / she'd send him / day after day / to sit in the first grade / in silence.

Mum / on her part / told him off / for not doing his homework / and wouldn't have any / of that crap about teacher. / When there were guests for supper / she'd be boasting / – he's-so-brilliant! – / as if his heroic stand / was hers.
This Time He's Born

He was born / blessed by the city gods, / fair, gentle, / aristocratic; / rather conceited and spoiled / but sincere. / Yes, sincere, but keeping silent – / not about him, / his olive-skinned lover - / no / everybody knows, / they joke about him / how he shaves his beard / and drinks everywhere / with this lewd Egyptian. / Look at him / he's all around him / climbing / his own trembling / like a vine on a tree.

But it's not this love / that he keeps indoors / but the other, the one / whom he worships / by the first: / that barbarian goddess, / his only goddess / mother and executioner / who rules / his burning nerve ends / and the imagination of his genes. / How he has loved her / when she feasts/ on his flesh at night! / In secret chambers / in the back of his head / his eyes are wide open: / here he drinks blood and honey / from his bitter-sweet veins.

The city gods / know nothing, / people see nothing. / They watch his wild passion / but don't know / it's a ritual. / Really, / he could have been / silent forever / but one night in the wine house / his lover / mocks him about Her. / And he, / smashing his wine cup / against the floor / of his dream – / off he goes forever: / to hell with you / and to hell with this city!

Driven by a single thought / possessed / by his own sense of destiny / roaming the barbarian outlands alone / for years now / he's looking for Her. / On and on / he's moving his limbs ever slower / as if wading through mud – / growing weaker and weaker / but then once more starting over / glidingly / as if dancing a waltz / up the mountain paths.
And when they finally get him, / these savage northlanders, / her devout worshipers, / when they set the fire / on the sacrificial stake / he doesn't feel pain / he's spirit elated / ecstatic / home. / His senses imprinted only / with the sweet smell / of roasting human flesh / he's watching it all / – his body, these faces – / with devotion and horror: / this time / he's born.
Peace

A thousand years I've been walking here,
    day and night I've been wandering
    further and further.

From the Ethiopian deserts to the land of the Hyperboreans,
    from the Iberian sea-shore to the islands of the East
I've been on the road
    among the shifting dreamscapes.

In the courts of Avalon I've been an honoured guest,
    in the tents of the Khan I've stayed the night;
in restless nights I've been roaming
    in the city of the Heavenly Emperor.
I've been climbing the paths of Ararat and Olympus,
    made pilgrimage to Mecca, Jerusalem, Varanasi;
From the walls of Byzantium, from the towers of Granada
    I stretched my gaze to the ends of earth;

just that single image
    – be it brief, flying by –
I was seeking
but in vain.

A thousand years I've been pacing this world,
    my eyes have been sailing over days and seas.
I've wearied already; around earth and water
    life revolves ceaselessly.
On my bed in the nights I've been searching: where is she?
Straying, lost, I came very close.
Just a step away, like a shadow behind her,
I never ceased going about the openings of the real:
there and further – not here, not here –
there and further,
not here.
V

* Altar

They gave her just a spoonful / and she was / in the divine realm; / the
goddess was / no man's wife / but every man's woman. / She wouldn't
know how many - / worshipers come and go / faceless. / She's watching
her body / from the ceiling of the temple, / as it wriggles / all nerve-ends
charged / her black skin shining / with ointments / and perspiration. / All
thinking stops / her soul whirling / overcharged / devoured / by
consuming pleasure.
She was chosen from many / taught and trained by the priests / since she
was a girl: / the body / is the altar.
** The Cage

At the feet of the Himalaya / almost three millennia later / she's a young nimble man / with a bright-eyed hard-working wife / two boys / and a daughter. / He was in his twenties / when he built / that cage from wood and wicker / around himself, like a cocoon / on the slope of the mountain. / He's never talked again / so nobody knows why; / and now that he's become a saint / they just come daily / to offer him in silence / some rice for a blessing. / His wife too / keeps coming daily / year after year / until she losses all hope / a withering widow / of a holy / living dead. For thirty more years / he's been abstaining / from all comforts and pleasures, / fasting / meditating / but finding no freedom. / Finally, one day / as he's watching / his skeletal body / over there, far below / in this tiny cage / of wooden bones, / he sees his wife further on / climbing up alone on the winding path / and hears / his voiceless cry / filling the valley behind him / as he finally leaves.
*** The Cows Grazed

All the same / he came back to it / just before the war in Louisiana / and grew up there / into a fair and lively good-looking girl. / She came to the age / and there was talk and discussion. /

His father / mind you / was the richest / farmer in the region / and her parents too / wanted it. / He was timid / un-passionate / and so well mannered; / and he was going / to inherit the earth. / They were engaged already / when that tall captain came / with his uniform and sword / all shining on his horse. / At the dinner / in her parents house / he was courteous and gallant / but couldn't hide his fire / from her perceiving skin / while telling them over tea / some war stories from the front.

She fell for him / or perhaps / for her own passion. / The horses at the stable / kept just quiet enough / not to raise suspicions / when she went wild into a storm / of pleasure that left / her body abstract / her soul whirling / overcharged / with pure sensation. / In the morning / he rode off / to join his regiment.

The fighting was fierce / people said / at the wedding / although nobody knew / anything for sure. / Slow years have passed / one like the other; / the cows kept grazing from sunrise to sunset. / She was to live now with him / in that large farm house / locked in her wedlock / like a nun in a convent / a withering widow / of her long buried passion. / Yes, she knew that he knew / for she told him herself; / but he / said nothing at all / and nobody did / while she kept burning / all her life / her body for an altar / her memory for fire.
Pet

I look at him: a beast of memories a shrewd survivor
pacing on, sniffing
risks, prey, sensualities, space.

Now I enter - he’s mine; go out again –
and set him free.

My dear thought how were you made flesh?
my savage pet, let's go out –

I give him some food, coffee, a cigarette.
Walk him down the hill,

throw him now a pain, now a pleasure,
like a bone to a hound eager for the hunt.

He presses hard, but I,
a many-selved god, a spendthrift of bodies,
fearing to lose this one too,
hold him on the tight leash of attention,

hold on and hold on, hold until I’m held
and enter, and he’s mine –

and here I am: once more dressed in flesh,
once more haunting the forests of memory.
VI

The Dreamers

He was fast asleep, / his family beside him. / They'd been hibernating now / for many dream-years, / their circle unbroken. / The mating wake-up ceremony / seemed to be now / a distant prophecy / of dreams to come.

He had pain in his lower belly / going down / his buttock and thigh / in the body / of a fat woman / about twenty six years old / and so pregnant / he could hardly breathe. / It was twins, he knew. / One of them / was his mother. / He raised his mind to her / and saw he was squatting / on a river bank / amidst the shrubbery.

His mum's dream came in: / she was floating there / midstream on a raft / motionless, covered / with red and yellow flowers. / She wasn't dead though, / only drugged. / What do you mean? / he screamed to her.

As if it was some response / the other twin entered, / middle-aged / plump / triumphant, / carrying on his shoulder along the riverside / a sake barrel for the forest temple. / Oh yea, / the sales at the fair / had exceeded his hopes. / Simultaneously / noticing each other / he and mum halted.

Mum's fine thought the dreamer, / feeling the weight / of these heavy breasts / on his huge stretched belly, / but who's the other twin? His own answer made him float; / there was sea-sound / rumbling in his ears / and these base notes / echoing all over. / He was in his other body now / dreaming in its womb / about the sake barrel. / Oh yea, / the sales at the fair / had exceeded his hopes.
The flower-covered woman on the raft / came closer. / Simultaneously / noticing each other / they halted / remembered: / two children / running laughing / hand in hand / in their brown naked bodies / on the muddied jungle path by the banyan trees.
VII

* Cracks

The first time they met / their poetry / was still / instantaneous creation. / They hadn't dwelt in flesh and blood yet. / He watched the play of mind-ripples / coming and going / through it all. / It was many thoughts ago, / before this world, / when one god was tempted / to betray / his fellow spirits / for those shining images / of power / and loneliness. / He just watched that fallen spirit / with silent pity. / Watched what had happened / and the downfall that followed, / stoically despising / the fooled traitor / who / in his turn / never forgave him / this cold burning thought. / Like cracks spreading in a glass pane, / in a flicker of a thought / the timeless union of minds / was shattered / forever.
** The Conqueror

The second time / he came in flesh; / an invincible conqueror / a giant / of body and presence. / He entered the gate past the huge walls, / paying no attention / to his defeated enemies. / He banned them from the city / but granted them their lives – / a generosity for which / he was / all the more hated.

She had long been there, / that fallen spirit; / an old witch / in her sixties now / manoeuvring / the debauched city regent / whispering / her will in his dreams / ruling through his mind.

First she tried / to talk sense / into the newcomer, / to offer her services / pander and flatter. / Later / having failed / to win his attention / she plotted to poison him / got caught / but still won / not even his anger. / Finally she asked for mercy – / where will she go now, / an old helpless woman? –

Begging on the crossroads / she's never forgotten him. / He's been always present / twice imprinted now / on her immortal mind / with letters of pain.
*** Glory

The third time he came / she was a man, a colonel, / commanding a camp / of the Cappadocian legion / in the service of / the *mare nostrum* empire: / well born, snobbish, stylish, well spoken / with high Latium accent / over his secret desire.

The sun was low / between the trees on the roadside / when he marched / in a young warrior body / with an aspiring heart / towards the camp to enter / the gate of glory and fame. / It was at very first sight / the colonel hated him; / but the general / gave him a cohort / and he paid him back / with his sword-work.

He was aloof, self contained / ignoring the colonel / and his stirring and plotting. / His leadership was natural / his disdain / apparent. Though lower in rank / and provincial by origin / the general entrusted the battlefield to him.

His spirit was high, unswerving and epic / and in battles and banquets / he was the leader of men; / trust and love / made the soldiers follow him / yet trust and love / were his downfall too.

One moonless night / after drinking and revelling / with his buddies at the camp / when he came back to his tent / boisterous, red-eyed / intoxicated with passion / with a handsome soldier, / his young bodyguard / fuming with jealousy / left his post. / There and then / under a single cloak / in the dark of pleasure / the daggers got him / too swift for him to see them / for what they were.
The Orchestra

The fourth time she found him / in the conservatoire. / In the last grade / slept with him / and later on joined / his orchestra. / She came soft spoken / self effacing / hungry / still hunting for energy / in whomever she could find it. / His presence made her understand / his music assured her. / Seeking greatness of meaning / was the food she was after. / It took some years / but at last / she turned his colleagues / into daggers; / the company of assailants / summoned up again.

Yet he couldn't forget / that love they once shared / and not knowing what that love was, / half deceived by emotion / he still wondered how it all / went so astray. / Wandering deeper and deeper / into a treacherous jungle / of sanctimonious words and faint recollections / he was lost like a blind man / unable to see her / among the winding thickets of intrigue and sham.

He was drained / exasperated / his downfall inevitable / when his bodyguard emerged – / a dark eyed woman / rustling with memories / cutting through the thickets / towards rescue and correction: / to atone for his desertion / and claim him / for a husband. / Three words were enough / – Assassins! Watch out! – / just enough to see / the drawn daggers / for what they were. / He banned them from the city / but granted them their lives – / a generosity for which / he was / all the more hated.

This string is still loose, / it's time is not over: / he sees it stretches further / many thoughts ahead / beyond power / and beyond loneliness.
Sunset

In this vulnerable, resting, sunset light
the eye is thickened with shadow, deepened by absence.
Things hang in space, ground down by being seen, transparent –
and the mode they exist in now
is their mode of fading away.

The creating eye has weakened;
and the world that streamed – is almost already all sea;
whoevers in front of me, behind me, at my side –
is me, but isn’t here.
And it’s already late. And the day’s over.
And we were left here, alone.

On the banks of the world
there we sat down, imploring our souls -
There we weep, eyeless,
when our gaze sinks into the great sea
and we suddenly remember
who we have been.
VIII

Circle

His hair tied in a pony tail / his high cheek bones gleaming / he's been sitting in their circle / setting forth his intent / along with theirs / for a timeless aeon / of common meditation. / The closed zone / of their circle / has been covered / with incandescent intention, / a dome of tangible energy / consolidating above them / looming into matter: / a vaulted world / a complete, impenetrable, luminous / prison.
IX

Game

He was flying / bright coloured / airy / in elegant pirouettes / and diving / among the stars: / what freedom / of thought- motion / turned instantly / into the real!

'How beautiful' / thought he / just before / something / somebody / hit him / with a beam, / shot him down / in quite another / game among the stars. / 'Just for some fun!', / he thought painfully / as he fell down like a fly / from the stars / of his thought.
X

The Pictures

He remembers / the quivering / of the butterfly-shaped / side extensions / on their snake-like necks. / They look / like small dragons, / erect on their bellies / like dancing cobras.

They set their mirrors / just to ambush him; / his body / although still a dreamlike image, / is the hostage: / don't resist or they'll take it / away from you. / What they do to him first / is make you / agree / they'll do it. / They seem to him ludicrous / but you want to play.

They try to get him / through the body, / making him protect it / while their eyes / are hypnotizing him / into uncanny images of desire and pain.

He's all tied up now / by his own energy / while they show him the images / through their own bodies / – or is it his? –

being split / cut in half / from the crotch and up / all the way through / into the sky of the skull / from where he's watching with trembling and awe / those ghastly sadomasochistic / revelations: / sex-and-pain / mortification / flagellation / crucifixion / – a religion / of cruelty and body passion – / now transplanted into his cells / to be re-enacted / dispatched / into the history of his kind / in many lives to come.

But wait! / Watch it closely – / can you? – / it's all a tale told by images / that their eyes are transmitting. / It's what happened / to them, not to you / once they / in their turn / took them in and possessed them.
Their bodies / are like words / – it's your body / that's reading them – / Ah! The crucified snake! / The split serpent's passion! / Here body and antibody / predator and prey / live in one mind together.
See / that you are / what you see; / watch the story-tellers / not the story! / Or else – / they're you / what's the difference? / They're just another race / embodied / in this universe of separation, / where having and not having / are tangibility and hunger. / Yourself now / see them, understand them –

And he sees it. / He knows / yet can't resist the temptation of / experience. / Here, he's taking in the images / to become his own body / his very own hostage / in his very own image: / to dress it and keep it / to torture / and worship it.
The Maze

By the sides of these paths / leading into each other / the bushes have grown wild and luscious / and ferns / are crawling over / their deepening shadows. / Walking there / slowly / he notices those flowers nestling in the green / gleaming soft whiteness / shy and delicate / and their lucid beauty calls out to his soul. / He's gazing at them enchanted vulnerable with emotion / caressed by their shapes / caressing them with his eyes – / when he suddenly recalls / there was something he should find here / further on / in the centre of this maze / where he'd be told / what his mission / in life was to be.

Reluctantly he quickened / his pace through the curves, / overcoming the call of beauty around him; / now walking real fast / then setting himself running. / - there's no way back / there's no looking back - / on and on / but in just a few minutes / he reaches / the centre.

There / on the ground / rests a white flawless flower, / quite similar in shape / to the ones in the bushes / but much bigger and richer / with many more petals / and a cushion-like centre / alive and stirring / changing hues and appearance. / There he's sitting crossed-legged / trying to figure out its meaning: / yes, the flower's beautiful / yet not more than the others / and it's somewhat / exaggerated, less natural, less real. / He's staring at it / from one side / and from another – / from all four directions / and then hovering above it / still cross-legged in mid-air / but in no way wiser.

After a while / it occurs to him / the centre of this maze / might still be a bit further / round the next turn, he thinks / and walks on / and sees / a black hole, a pit in the path / into which he now / lets himself fall; / somewhat unconcerned / yet still wishing / to be through with it / he's falling / forever / without moving at all. / Timeless ages / of falling / till
he finally reaches / a huge hall of a cavern / under the earth / so big that it
has / hills and shrubbery, / its own sky above / and its strange unseen life;
/ and in its midst / he spots / the very same flower / changing colours and
tones / decaying / then renewing / its radiance and breath.
Realizing he's still / in the very same spot / he's just left behind / he
wishes / remorsefully / he'd stay where he started: / with the flowers in
the bushes / where he was being in peace / full of meaning and presence, /
enjoying it all / and desiring nothing. / He wants / out / of this maze
please / and as the flower's shrinking / folding and unfolding / under his
cheerless gaze / he looks more closely / right into the blossom / and as his
gaze falls there / withered like a leaf / he becomes aware he's watching /
his very own palm: / opening, closing.
Face

My head is a cloud on the face of the lake;
    the wind
    is peaceful.
Mountains and mountain shadows,
spots of grey and light,
travel over the mirror of water.
Spots of, shadows of, faces,
a long
    long procession.
Faces that have been
    will always be
here within here within here:
on the shore of an eye the dead gather
    to bathe
    to rise
    and be.

My face on the face of a lake,
ripples on the face of ripples:
Troy, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome
rise and fall
    fall and rise.
Smoke still rises from city walls,
swords still glitter at dusk,
I rise and fall, fall and rise.
Faces that will be always have been;
grey spots in the mirror of water.

The Museum of Time © Amir Or 2006
By The Temple

By the temple / Assad's begging bread / Abdalla's begging money.
Nearby / among the booths of / incense and charms
Mustafa's begging stars / and Issa's begging love / stretching out / their begging bowls / gaping.
Mansur's begging truth / from every passer by / Jallal begs freedom /
Omar – life.
And he? / He's begging nothing / yet no one gives him any.

His begging bowl's filled / with glances and stares / thought-alms / word-alms / air, fire, earth, / kingdoms / elixirs / salvations.
He turns his begging bowl upside down / and empties it. / Yet it's still quite full.
"Dear Self," he writes on it / fills it with wine to the brim / and drinks up in one gulp;
ah, it's not empty!
He smashes his bowl / in one go / broken pieces / yet it seems to be now / even fuller; / multiplied.
By the temple / Assad's begging flesh / Mustafa – pebbles / and Omar – walls.
By him / by the temple / there's no temple.
**Glossary**

**Plate 7: Reflecton**
* the secret places of the stairs: originating in Song of Solomon 2, 14, the phrase became a term of secret knowledge in Jewish mysticism.

**Peace**
* Hyperboreans: legendary people held by the ancient Greeks to live beyond the north wind in a region of perpetual sunshine.
* Iberia: the ancient name of Spain.
* Avalon: the legendary island paradise to which King Arthur was carried after his death.
* the Heavenly Emperor: a title of the Chinese emperor
* Varanasi (=Benares): an ancient holy city in India by the banks of the Ganges.

**6: The Dreamers**
* Sake: a Japanese rice wine
* Banyan: an East Indian tree with branches that send out roots which grow down to the soil and form secondary trunks (*Ficus benghalensis*).

**7: Glory**
* Cappadocian: of Cappadocia, an ancient district in Asia Minor.
* Mare Nostrum: "our sea" – a Roman epithet for the Mediterranean Sea.
* Latium: the district round Rome.
* cohort: a tenth of a legion, about 400 soldiers.
* Provincial: a native of a provincia, a country or region brought under the control of the ancient Roman government. Usually their inhabitants didn't have a Roman citizenship.
**Note on the Language:** the poems in this book were written bilingually, in Hebrew and in English, in the same creative process where each language-version reciprocally involved the other and impinged on it.

Exceptions to this process are *Succession, The Orpheus Prayer, Shift,* and *Old Song* which were translated from Hebrew with Fiona Sampson; and *Foreigner, Whirlwind* and *Faces,* translated by Helena Berg.
Poetry Books by Amir Or

I Look Through The Monkeys’ Eyes  
Eqed Publishers, Tel Aviv 1987

Faces  
Am Oved Publishers, Tel Aviv 1991

Ransoming The Dead  
Bitan Publishers, Tel Aviv 1994

So!  
Hakkibutz Hameuchad Publishing House, Tel Aviv 1995

Poem  
Hakkibutz Hameuchad Publishing House, Tel Aviv 1996

Day  
Hakkibutz Hameuchad / Tag publishers, Tel Aviv 1998

The Song of Tahira  
Hargol Publishers, Tel Aviv 2001

In translation:

Poetry is a Criminal Girl  
Arabic, (El-Sha’ar Fata T’ashar El-Mujrimin)  
Faradis publishers, Paris 1995

Miracle  
English/Hebrew,  
Poetry Ireland, Dublin 1998

Drowning, He Breathes Living Water  
Macedonian, (ДАВЕИ СЕ, ДИШАМ ЖИВАВОДА)  
The Pleiades Series of the SPE International Festival, 2000

Language Says  
English,  
Poetry Miscellaneous, Chattanooga USA, 2001

Poem  
English,  
Dedalus Press, Dublin 2004

Day  
English,  
Dedalus Press, Dublin 2006

Let's Speak You  
Romanian/Hebrew, (S’ Te Vorbim Pe Tine)  
Poem and selected, Vinea Press, Bucharest 2006

Poem  
Polish, (Wiersz)  
Portret Publishers, Olsztyn 2006

"I’m leaning against the sea at the back of my heart", says Amir Or, and relates the impressions of an emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey to the inner landscapes of the soul. In The Museum Of Time he leads language through a gallery of images, incarnations and identities, and uses the pictures of imagination as traces for a quest starting before birth and ending beyond art. Or reclaims poetry as a genre of experiential thought and invites the reader to a
challenging and stirring journey. "If I have no I then who’s inside?" he asks, and answers by opening for us the window of poetry to our existential depths in one of the more captivating books of contemporary poetry.

AMIR OR, born in Tel Aviv 1956, is a poet, translator, and editor. He is the author of seven volumes of poetry, and his latest book in Hebrew, The Song of Tahira (2001) is a fictional epic in metered prose. His poems have been published in more than 30 languages, as well as in eight volumes published in Ireland, the U.S., France, Poland, Romania and Macedonia.

For his poetry he has been awarded the Prime Minister’s Prize, the Bernstein Prize and a Fulbright Award; as well as Fellowships at the University of Iowa, the Jewish-Hebrew Centre of the University of Oxford, and the Heinrich Boll Foundation, among others. Or has also published several books of translations into Hebrew, including The Gospel of Thomas (1992), Limb-Loosening Desire (An Anthology of Erotic Greek Poetry 1993) and Stories From The Mahabharata (1998). For his translations from ancient Greek he received the Honorary Prize of the Israeli Minister of Culture.

In his youth Or lived in India and the Netherlands and has worked as a shepherd, a constructor and a restaurateur. He founded a therapy and meditation centre in Jerusalem, and studied philosophy and comparative religion at the Hebrew University, where he later lectured on Ancient Greek Religion. He has published articles on poetry, classic studies and religious studies, and has taught poetry in universities in Israel, the UK, and Japan.

In 1990 he founded Helicon Society and since then he has been Editor-in-Chief of Helicon's journal and series of poetry books. In 1993 he set up the Arabic-Hebrew Helicon Poetry School. Or has also edited other literary journals and several anthologies of Hebrew verse in European languages. He has founded and directed the Sha’ar International Poetry Festival, and is national coordinator of the U.N.-sponsored Poets for Peace.
Time Museum founded 17 years ago as the first time museum in Iran. Time museum is located in the corner of Parzin crossroad, Zaferanieh, Valiasr street. The museum building. It seems like various arts such as sculpture, enamel, and mosaic have been represented at the wheels of time. On the second floor of the museum, conventional pocket watches, watches owned by prominent political and historical characters, and also specific clocks relevant to time stamping cards, shift guards, ships and army in different types can be visited. At the calendars spectacle, you can see the evolution of time measurement tools, prototype of the oldest dated Persian document, mechanical watches from ancient and Pre-Islamic era to more contemporary ones. The British Museum and British Museum Shop use cookies to ensure you have the best browsing experience, to improve functionality and to make advertising relevant to you and your interests. By clicking on any link on this page, you are consenting to our use of cookies. (Last updated: 6 December 2018) Find out more. x. This site uses cookies. By continuing to browse the site you are agreeing to our use of cookies. Find out more. x. The British Museum. Visiting. Membership. opening times. the Design Museum The museum is open late on the first Friday of every month until 20:00. Open every day (excluding Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day) from 10.00 to 18.00 â€“ last entry 17.00. the Design Museum Shop Open daily 10.00 - 18.00. Plan your visit. Exhibition Prices.