

Is Dying Like Waking?



Abu Mahmoud Luther Clark

Text, design, and author's photo ©2009 Luther R. Clark Jr.
Cover Illustration: "Eye to Eye" ©2009 Tahura Huda Turabi

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

The author can be contacted at abumahmoud786@gmail.com. If you would like to use this material in a derivative work or would like to publish it in print or on-line, please drop me a line. I'll probably say yes.

"In Season," "The Sun," and "Penance" first appeared in *Amaranth*. Vol. XVII

"Miniatures" first appeared in *Bartleby* Vol. XXVII

"Humanism," "Debris," and "Spider Webs" first appeared in *Hidden City Quarterly* Vol. I No. 2

“I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings:
it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”
-William Wordsworth

Table of Contents

ToS	4
Is Dying like Waking	5
Landscape #1	6
Reflections on my 22nd Birthday	7
Signs	8
Gaza	9
Miniatures	10
San Juan	11
Palm	12
Humanism	13
Chains	14
Spider Webs	15
Zekr	16
Debris	17
Memory	18
'Is' does not imply 'Ought'	19
Silence	20
Stone	21
Al-Andalus	22
The Horrors of a False Spring	23
Winter Resumes	24
Ravana	25
In Secret Reverie	26
Alphabet of Loss	27
Naked	28
In Season	29
The Oath	30
The Fool	31
The Sun	32
Penance	33

ToS

If you agree to use our software
you are subject to the following
terms and conditions:

No copying, pirating, hacking
or otherwise acting
as if you own your computer.

If you lose your original copy,
we reserve the right to sell you
a new one at twice the price.

We will collect data about you,
documenting your every
twisted fantasy
to sell to our friends at Bestbuy
and the FBI

If you chose to delete our software
we reserve the right to
use the back door
we've left on your system
to send you reminders
to reinstall.

If you choose not to except
our terms and conditions
it's already too late:
we've phoned back home
and logged your IP.
Your bill will be in the mail.

Is Dying like Waking

Is dying like waking
to the light of another life?
Will I wipe the sleep from my eyes
and wonder at my fading dream?
Would I be the dream or the dreamer?
If memory fades with waking,
then I evaporate into the cool air.
If it endures, I endure
through an endless stream of lives,
each waking into the other.
What hope is there in life everlasting?
I shall either change and die
or endure to no end.
Sleep is best then:
Joy is perfected in passing.

Landscape #1

Flying in the confident breeze,
the flags overstep their bounds
and tile the path to-
Where?

A future where blood and tears
briefly mingle before subsiding
into the sickly-pale void?

Perhaps they form a platform
for the contest of giants,
each easily assured of victory,
each blow making the other bold,
until the spectators are drawn in
and hurled like boulders.

Or they are a vast and composite shroud,
the covering of some slain God,
whom the mourners conduct to the shores of Lethe,
before abandoning their charge to the slow, silent waters.

Reflections on my 22nd Birthday

It's raining manna as I drive through
the broad road to the north
memory burning in my mind
groaning wheel turning in stained hands.

In reflection my life becomes a trembling
mummers dance; movement with a deadly
certainty, a frantic pace and no purpose.

No religion, no philosophy can alleviate
my suspicions, suspicions without form,
inchoate and rooted deep in my heart.

Faith in saviour gods, submission to empty
rituals and the laws of the dead and damned,
indifference sprinkled with pity...

No solution, no solace, not even sincerity,
no salvation as the manna turns to blood
and the traffic moves on.

Signs

Cacophany rings from the trees
as amorous birds roost.

Startled, they take flight,
higher,higher,
striving to break gravity's
adamantine bonds.

But soon Death calls,
the Decree takes wing,
and like slain Angels
they plummet
to a lonely grave
among the stones of Earth.

There are signs
for those who think.

Gaza

Steel angels rain down fire
upon women, children.
Glittering in the madding sun,
they return to Zion.

Are they conscious of what they do?
Do they knowingly purchase death with death?
Death visited upon school children.
Death visited upon the disabled.
Death visited upon the sinner and the righteous.

No. Cold steel and hot chemicals
are only tools,
monuments to the malefic of the
Western mind.
And so the curse rains down upon
the unfortunate,
before blowing across the green line
and engulfing Zion itself.

Miniatures

Miniatures, I shape miniatures;
like a Moghul chess board
on a table
carved with flowers.

An autonomous universe,
it's own law
it's own perfection.

Possibility playing itself out
in the corner of a room.

San Juan

Shrouded in green articulations,
stucco exploding like a rainbow,
the house at once establishes its
hegemony over the guarded street.

Formed by bits of Al-Andalus,
shaped by necessity,
cruel necessity of the Caribbean,
it is an ersatz life-raft for
the silent watching shapes inside.

Palm

Oh my beautiful palm,
oh sweet Lazarus
in green tones
shedding khaki.

How can you thrive in abuse?
How can I become like you?

Humanism

I too will die.
Sinuous cracks,
creeping into my heart;
shimmering panic.
Will it dissipate,
an illusion?

Am I the animal, man,
destined to strive,
for a time,
slave to passions
determined eons ago?

Or has something new
been tossed up
upon this shore of heaven?
Can I look up from earth
and see myself,
a reflection of a reflection
proceeding into infinity?

That which I am
when I am human,
ideal, eternal
survives.

Chains

The atmosphere takes on a chill,
it seems as if the stars are dying,
a lonely universe has lost its heart.

The cold bites at me as I consider
what lies inside a prophet's grave,
bones or just dust?

I am afraid to leave my prison cell,
terrified of nothing,
terrified of something;
but isn't the prisoner's duty to escape?

The agony of impermanence weighs on me.
my self-made chains chafe and sting,
yet I tremble before the prospect of removing them.

Once 'when I heard the name of the Prophet,
the chains fell off' but now this name is simply another link,
making the chains stronger.

Spider Webs

My God, my God,
Why have I forsaken thee?
Permanence shed for illusion,
chasing the phantom of my own desire,
through a mutating maze,
an organic living thing,
a prison spun from my own being.
I, the spider at the heart of it,
seeking what prey I can lure
with sweet words and false face
pounce
when they realize, with horror,
that there is no center.

Zekr

Zekr is like a fire
kindled by two sticks.
Nothing at first
but the hollow
call of emptiness.
But then a spark
then a flame,
and then a blazing fire,
consuming my being,
consuming all of creation,
with the love of Allah.

Debris

That nightmare feeling
that I'm about to wake up
has returned
but I never will wake up
and I am trapped in a world
with its own frightful necessity,
grinding onwards
until I am trapped in the gears.

I found our wedding album
amid the detritus of our love.

My mind is clouded, heavy
with knowledge of you
that I no longer have a
right to possess.

Memory

Memory is like a broken record,
each repetition failing,
succeeding, failing,
sketching the outlines
of decaying order.

The record breaks-
spontaneous, creative
static.

'Is' does not imply 'Ought'

Science slew the gods of metal and stone
and replaced them with words and numbers,
an empire of reason spread across the oceans.

Juxtaposed:

The shadow of a word, its traceable echo.
the word left unsaid in all sensible conversation,
that unspeakable, unforgivable word: 'ought.'

Silence

The silence of you
expecting more,
my tongue still
aching to move
as the tension cuts in,
eating at me like a legion
of locusts devouring a field.

Stone

I watch my children play by the garden sandstone
seeking bliss among blossoms and scraping rough stone

The young immortals play with all sincerity,
their blessing will disappear like a water-loved stone.

Even now I try to recall the first embrace
of their warm hands. Memory is a failing shew-stone.

Each line once cast is slowly erased, the decay
defining an image in relief on wearing stone.

Sweeping the world up within his scrying mind
'Bu Mahmoud keeps his silence like a brooding stone.

Al-Andalus

The song of al-Andalus is carried on the wind in silence.
Only silence can be loved because it is silence.

The echo of Arabia carried in the blood of moriscos
and in the language of the conqueror, defying this silence.

The cities of light are extinguished and the gardens
of Medinat az-Zahra cry out in anguish. The answer is silence.

Letters loosened from the page cascade from soaked leaves,
a river of ink drowning the words in bookish silence.

'Bu Mahmud meditates on loss and survival. His grief and his joy
vie within him for mastery in undermining his silence.

The Horrors of a False Spring

The horrors of a false spring:
Green shoots wither in ice,
a spontaneous abortion.

Green emblems of hope
gripped in cold jagged hands
blossoms blasted black.

Nature's joke on her subjects
flesh of trees
cracking like laughter.
The teeth of a false smile
shining like a row of tombstones
over a mass grave.

Winter Resumes

Withered stalks fall to earth,
branches laid bare like bones
jut shockingly against the sky.

The stirring wind provides
a semblance of life,
an illusion strengthened
by the subtle chime of a bell.

Carried on the wind,
a voice from no where
is calling to forgiveness.

Ravana

The flood gates have opened on
Kubera's island.

Ravana discovered
the bomb and the jet,
and the blood of Tamil and Sinhela
mingle in death.

Parading images of human form,
grey like an ancient photograph,
absorbing the heat they should give off,
march like marionettes,
quick to crush and to exult.

On the street, bodies made rigid by
the cold steel of hate
form silent prayers as they
stare up at the sky.

The Dream, frozen inside them
waits to be reclaimed.

In Secret Reverie

In secret reverie
I pipe away,
bouncing, raucous music
in sharp keys.

Nubile youths dance,
forgetting that
they, too, are mortal.

The music draws me out
and now it seems that
I am the audience
to a song from a world
a shadow away.

It stops- I stop,
listening attentively
as it reverberates through
my memory, passes,
and is gone.

Alphabet of Loss

How can I write with
an alphabet of loss,
A letter disappearing
each day since you left?
I am left increasingly mute,
my vocabulary of ideas
diminishing page by page.

The words that would have formed
evaporate and collect,
huddling together
in my inner recesses.

Owning my deeds is like
owning the moon.
Yet they both light
the prison yard
where my thoughts are
locked up.

Naked

I am naked like a child
before her eyes,
all escape blocked,
every defense overcome.

It is as if she can read my heart
and in my shame I cannot look away.

Does she know?
The question broods,
a shadow cast by no object,
greying the sunlight
and chilling its warmth.

Again her glance meets mine,
her lips perk slightly.
she reaches out...

In Season

Tag--- You're it!
And so it goes.
Confined each to
our seperate circles,
communicating via
verbal daggers
lobbed in haste.

It's strange how
enemies without
touching become
more familiar
than friends.

So now from year to year
I slowly uncover more
from you than any
friend could teach me
and there are times when
my only desire is to break
the circles and hold you.

The Oath

I speak the words I am given and
I am made custodian of every enigma.

I become the cauldron of all mystery,
the blackness on which a universe is painted.

Stars have their birth and death within me
and I do not shake before the fury of a nova.

I am borne in secret and so die
but come to life when I am called.

I am the Amaranth in winter
and the cardinal in summer
and the watcher at all points in between.

I am the Whisperer and the Shadow and the Other.

I am more ancient than a name,
free from every stroke of the pen
and turn of the tongue.

I am rising to claim my own.

The Fool

Heir to infinite space,
a legacy claimed by the will,
by the decisive act.

The decided habit of self
gnaws at you,
itself heir to the legacy of aeons,
to the forces of inertia,
to misguidance on the verge of collapse.

What can you carry with you but humility?
Diminishing before the act,
diminishing after,
dispersed through the elements,
you become their master.

The Sun

Simultaneous incarnation
of destruction and life,
observed through the final,
rattling haze of a dying planet,
what can I offer you?

You are the last idol,
the beginning and the end,
yet you are silent,
silent as the grave.

Are you an eye,
scanning our iniquity?
Are you a door,
a portal opening on
a world of poisonous
crimson light?

And if you turn away?
A second death for the Earth,
eternal night ruling over
crystal palaces.

No, you will not turn away.
You will watch, waiting
for the ripeness of our disease.
Then you will come to meet
your children with a
final annihilating embrace.

Penance

There is an evil in the human heart
which delights in destroying the beautiful
and in unmaking with clumsy hooves
the work of delicate fingers.

Husbands beat their wives,
one friend betrays the other,
and little boys stone rabbits
because they are accused
by the sight of innocence.

All subjects of beauty are odious
to those who have none
and in the sinner's eye
every saint is damned.

Darkness begets darkness,
the victim is corrupted,
and humanity drowns
in a sea of tears.

What can drain the sea?
What can grapple with shadows?
Only that divine nature
which can look beyond suffering
towards hope and repay pain
with kindness.

Only forgiveness can transform
a loathsome beast into a person.

About the Author



Abu Mahmoud Luther Clark is a teacher, political activist, and journalist from Baltimore, MD. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland Baltimore County, where he received the Alumni Association's Award for Outstanding Undergraduate in Philosophy and had his poetic work published in *Bartleby*. His journalistic work has been featured in the *Muslim Link*. His poetry has been featured in *Amaranth*, *Hidden City Quarterly*, and the *Ghazal Page*. He currently teaches Social Studies at an area middle school and is working on a collection of short stories exploring the theme of change and transformation.