



## **The Proof of Love**

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***“I announce the great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste, affectionate, compassionate, fully armed; I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold, And I announce an end that shall lightly and joyfully meet its translation.” —Walt Whitman***

When my friend asked me to write a piece for this issue, when she asked me with love if I would like to write about the letters I translate and post on my blog *Al-Harakat*<sup>1</sup>—letters beloved for their directness, subtlety, nearness, and distance; letters I spent a long time reading, reading about, preparing to translate, and attempting to explore—I did not hesitate to accept.

I wondered what I would write about, however. I wondered if what I would write would do the letters justice. Justice to how I felt about them, at least. Justice to the deep love that saturated them. Oh the pain and hell we go through when we find ourselves caught up in our desire to do justice to our love for something!

I also realized that writing about what we love allows the world to share that love with us. I know that translating and publishing these letters to begin with is an invitation to the world to partake in this love, but to write about this love itself is a step further down the road of revelation and communion.

In some of those letters, I found my siblings in ingenuity. We shared together the visible and veiled pitfalls of raging patriarchal societies. With them, I also experienced those premature lives, presented to us by the world on a plate of arrogance, questioning our intelligence, for the mere reason that we were born with a “flower” between our legs (because we have to trim and mold ourselves to suit the pious fantasies of honest porn consumers).

In a letter to Anaïs Nin,<sup>2</sup> Henry Miller<sup>3</sup> wrote,

1 *Al-Harakat* is a blog that publishes texts translated from English .<http://alharakat.blogspot.com/>

2 A Cuban-American writer.

3 An American author and artist.

***“I say this is a wild dream—but it is this dream I want to realize. Life and literature combined, love the dynamo, you with your chameleon’s soul giving me a thousand loves, being anchored always in no matter what storm, home wherever we are. In the mornings, continuing where we left off. Resurrection after resurrection. You asserting yourself, getting the rich varied life you desire; and the more you assert yourself the more you want me, need me. Your voice getting hoarser, deeper, your eyes blacker, your blood thicker, your body fuller. A voluptuous servility and tyrannical necessity. More cruel now than before—consciously, wilfully cruel. The insatiable delight of experience.”***

I believe that art is that wild dream; everything that results from it afflicts my soul with that abundant wildness. It makes me confront my fears and the fears of others, but at the same time it liberates me from those fears and forces my mind to think. In every one of its forms, I see our lives abstractedly. The life of the lover and the beloved. The meeting of the similar and of contradictions. The accepted and rejected. What is prevalent and what has been dethroned.

It makes me think about my whole journey. The beginning. It started with the music my parents liked, with watching the joyful musician, with the unique essence, Khader Bashir,<sup>4</sup> saying in a televised interview dating back to the seventies, ***«When I admire myself, I like to pretend I’m a bulbul. Why not? Aren’t they a lovely sight?»***

I feel like art is similar to that feeling: admiring one’s self and unleashing one’s imagination. Perhaps Emily Dickinson<sup>5</sup> said to herself: ***“I will be a bulbul. I will admire myself, and I will bestow upon you a lovely sight, unique writing, and complete abandon. And throughout all this, you will fear and despise my identity. You will strip my feelings of their causes. You will hand them over to the reader—the reader for whom you erased my life as I knew it. And you will do all this as I lie in my grave!”***

4 Khader Bashir is a Sudanese singer. Considered to be one of the pioneers of singing while playing a riq, Bashir has a special school when it comes to style, composition, and performance.

5 A queer American poet.

For a long time, I knew that I would see the world through the lens of art. Perhaps through a painting by Chaïm Soutine,<sup>6</sup> spitting lovely torment into our faces, or through a haunting book by Gloria Anzaldúa,<sup>7</sup> exposing me to an eternal labyrinth, or through a story devoid of the violent, hypocritical motive of political correctness, or through a film that carries death as a message of welcome, farewell, and familiarity as in *The Battle of Algiers*,<sup>8</sup> or the night ritual,<sup>9</sup> Aicha Kandicha,<sup>10</sup> Lalla Meera,<sup>11</sup> and Sidi Moussa<sup>12</sup>: the spirit of the sea, who inspired blues and jazz in a world with a craft that is devoid of the love of comrades ... the eternal love of comrades, but it will never be complete without Walt Whitman.<sup>13</sup>

I love all the arts. All forms and artists. From among them all, I chose translation as my profession. I translated everything I loved: poetry, fiction, hip hop, poems, boxing, philosophical and academic books, mysticism, photography, cinematography, and the great letters exchanged between lovers. My interest in these beautiful letters is multi-layered. Letters fascinate me, and I think letter writing is the most intimate form of writing. In letters,

6 A Russian expressionist painter.

7 Gloria Anzaldúa is a queer feminist Chicana researcher and writer.

8 *The Battle of Algiers* is a historical Algerian war film produced in 1966, co-written and directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, starring Brahim Haggiag —as Ali La Pointe—and Jean Martin and Saadi Yacef.

9 The Moroccan night ritual is a spiritual ritual similar to zaar in Egypt, Sudan, and other countries. One of the most prominent rituals of the Gnawa night is the initiation of the “custom.” It is a general announcement of the initiation of the «night.” The Gnawa roams the various alleys, streets, and squares, wearing different colored «capes» and traditional dress, decorated with shells, taking advantage of the opportunity to dance to the rhythm of drumbeats and «krakebs,» until the period of «Koyo» (the children of Bambara) arrives, which signals in the Gnawa custom to start the ceremony. The official Gnawa Night. The drums are put aside and replaced with the «Guembri” or “Hejhouj.” The «teacher»—who is familiar with all the stages of the ritual—begins to play it. The Gnawa perform solo dances, with the exception of «two meals» in which four of them perform a group dance. [Reference link.](#)

10 Aicha Kandicha (a possible alteration of the title of the noble lady Aisha the Countess ,Aisha Moulat Marjeh )Lady of the Swamps (Lalla Aisha ,Aisha al-Sudani or Aisha Kandisha ,a genie in Moroccan folklore .Even just uttering her strange and frightening surname Kandicha curses the person who utters it .She is one of the souls who is summoned during the night ritual.

11 Lalla Meera is one of the spirits djinn (that are summoned during the Gnawa night ,and she is the spirit of Magnaj that loves activity ,laughter and perfumes.

12 Sidi Moussa is the spirit of the sea ,one of the Moroccan night spirits as well .Sidi Moussa is blue ,symbolizing water and the oceans.

13 An American poet.

we find the purest of human emotions, such as in a letter by the American novelist Raymond Chandler<sup>14</sup> in response to a letter of condolence that he received after the death of his wife,

***“I have received much sympathy and kindness and many letters, but yours is somehow unique in that it speaks of the beauty that is lost rather than condoling with the comparatively useless life that continues on. She was everything you say, and more. She was the beat of my heart for thirty years. She was the music heard faintly at the edge of sound.”***

Or in Patty Smith’s<sup>15</sup> letter to her late lover Robert Mapplethorpe,<sup>16</sup> in which she said,

***“The other afternoon, when you fell asleep on my shoulder, I drifted off, too. But before I did, it occurred to me, looking around at all of your things and your work and going through years of your work in my mind, that of all your work, you are still your most beautiful. The most beautiful work of all.”***

I was able to see in the two letters what happens when human emotions are not forced. Someone lost his beloved and expressed that with the utmost simplicity, misery and appreciation possible, nothing more!

I love the queer messages that artists exchanged throughout the ages, and I always felt the need to translate them. Perhaps, because I realized that the world was never fair to feelings it did not understand and an identity that it could not refute or kill, but was often able to marginalize and disdain. The world is not merciful to any of them. It never understood them. Perhaps it is also because I belong to marginalized groups and I believe—though not completely—that I understand the struggle. I understand it because I am a black woman from a Third World country who has often been marginalized and scorned in various ways.

14 An American writer.

15 A pioneer of punk music.

16 An American photographer.

In an excerpt from a letter to her sweetheart, Susie,<sup>17</sup> Emily Dickinson wrote,

***“I need you more and more, and the great world grows wider, and dear ones fewer and fewer, every day that you stay away—I miss my biggest heart; my own goes wandering round, and calls for Susie—Friends are too dear to sunder, Oh they are far too few, and how soon they will go away where you and I cannot find them, don’t let us forget these things, for their remembrance now will save us many an anguish when it is too late to love them! Susie, forgive me Darling, for every word I say — my heart is full of you, none other than you in my thoughts, yet when I seek to say to you something not for the world, words fail me.”***

In this letter, Emily did writing justice. She did love justice. She did our different feelings justice. She did our perseverance justice with her sincerity. She did our feminism justice with these sentences. I realize that outside these sentences we suffer on a daily basis and on many levels, but I have taught myself—among many other tricks of survival—to envelope myself in my feelings and not surrender myself to anything else until reality forces me to the contrary. I could say the same about Violet Traviost<sup>18</sup> letter to Vita Sackville-West,<sup>19</sup>

***“Be wicked, be brave, be drunk, be reckless, be dissolute, be despotic, be an anarchist, be a religious fanatic, be a suffragette, be anything you like, but for pity’s sake be it to the top of your bent— Live—live fully, live passionately, live disastrously if necessary. Live the gamut of human experiences, build, destroy, build up again! Live, let’s live, you and I—let’s live as none ever lived before, let’s explore and investigate, let’s tread fearlessly where even the most intrepid have faltered and held back!”***

Is not love in its extreme form not normative? Is it not fanatic? Doesn’t it push us to

17 Susan Huntington Gilbert is a queer poet.

18 A queer British writer.

19 A queer British writer and garden designer

challenge life as we know it, the world as it wants us? Doesn't it introduce us to our bodies and their involvement in shaping how we feel about everything? Does it not satisfy that hunger in our souls? With every letter I read, a new door of love and a greater desire to understand the impact of that on every fragment of my body is opened within me. With every letter I relinquish moral accountability, a social pattern, a hierarchy, a distorted definition around me and others. With every letter I heal.

Translation protects me from the difficulties caused by writing: from feeling overwhelmed, from the fears that I have when I even think about it. I find solace in the writings that I read. For every feeling that I have, there is a poem, a letter, a short story, a novel or a song describing that feeling. My translation of these works is my way of expressing my gratitude with tremendous love. Despite all this, we need to start writing one way or another. We have to write, read, and share our stories. Perhaps writing is what we need to understand what is happening within our souls.

Reading what has been written was my way of finding out what was happening within me. Translating what I read was my way of remembering what I had to remember. That despite what we face as women, despite the burdens that the world has placed on our shoulders, despite the marginalization of our identities, feelings, and differences, despite all the rejection we received and will continue to receive throughout our lives, we are still capable of writing, reading, expressing, rejecting, accepting, understanding, and overcoming our pain with bloodied, fighting hearts.