



# Austere Lights

Ali Znaidi

**Austere Lights**

**Ali Znaidi**

Copyright © Ali Znaidi

Locofo Chaps is an imprint of Moria Books.  
More information can be found at  
[www.moriapoetry.com](http://www.moriapoetry.com).

Locofo Chaps is dedicated to publishing politically-oriented poetry.

Chicago, USA, 2017

## **Prologue: Five Haiku Poems**

a well-written discourse  
interrupted by whores'  
scents.[... politics]

fake birdsongs...  
politicians'  
electoral speeches

fairy tales...  
politicians'  
electoral speeches

election day...  
politicians put on their best  
attire

summer lightning...  
more lights  
but no rain

## **Whispers and Fragments**

Displacement. Metaphor, relocated.  
Home, ephemeral abode.

Some prefer wandering. Others  
prefer stagnant swamps. Wings of a sparrow.

Work in progress...

If only everybody could move. Displaced  
tents, new historiographies. Whispers and  
fragments. We are still wondering. Awakening.

Morning named perplexity.  
Desire to move, curbed.  
Fathomless horizon...

## **just a trademark**

ships & compasses  
seas & submarine creatures  
\*

the starfish is on the beach  
\*

a lamp emanating joy  
if only not trodden  
\*

joy is irrelevant  
\*

capitalists tread upon anything  
details of joy are canned  
& sold  
\*

—the starfish is just a trademark

## **Ways To Suffer**

Faint light is every layer of light repressed. A rainbow is different waves of colour compressed, forming the various layers of suffering. This is a common perception of shared impressions & convictions. These common impressions: A common method for all voters (& thus for all non-voters) to suffer in colourful manners: more taxes, more fierce capitalism, tear gas of various types, arrests, spies on phones, holiday gifts: rising prices, demons themselves!

## **Archeology of Darkness**

It's the cave. I have to admit  
that our inner essence is the cave. We are  
silhouettes billowing through bush mesh.  
We are shapes of an almost empty algorithm.  
We are the plucked leaves of the dark bush.  
The smog-stained pollen blackens our bodies to  
approximate the excavations. We are the barks  
of a black birch tree. Our crows know themselves.  
An era of another cave begins.  
Now every wall mirrors a synecdoche of a bigger cave.  
Crows on a bough lamenting light.  
The ground rots away from the oil leaks.  
If we move without caution,  
cushions of our memories will burn  
and the crows will not be there  
to sprinkle our cremated ash.  
It seems that we are initially the underground.  
We sing caves, but no one parrots our songs  
only the (wounded) crows.



## **Untitled**

The solar system  
hasn't got any idea  
about 'the wretched  
of the earth,'  
or the oppressed,

otherwise  
the sun wouldn't  
rise.

## **Austere Lights**

No moon tonight. Instead, only bits of  
golden fleece adumbrated by mist.  
The light faded away bit by bit  
to the rhythm of the lunar eclipse—  
something akin to distant lights of a plane  
swallowed by a hungry sky's mouth.  
Thunder. Lightning. & a cigarette  
between two frigid fingers—  
I was beginning to wonder if  
these lights would hold;  
if I would hold.  
I wonder if light tonight was  
administered to fit into  
the austerity measures.

## **Orgasmic Reverberations**

This exhausted body exhibits  
undressed  
wounds.

The bones are exposed.

The marrow is in the raw.

Pain is being turned into a song.

—Sad beats echoing orgasmic austerity  
measures.

## **a decapitated rainbow**

politics necessitates lies...

— a flashing blue thick mascara hiding  
thin brittle eyelashes

... & when the political discourse destroys  
dreams

...& when politicians' words turn to be just  
pop-up guns

...& when their words are woven into pulp  
fiction

the great dreams, the translucent colours  
soon to be a decapitated rainbow

thin light represses thick light!

## **Counter Silence**

Light withers in the cemetery.  
This cemetery is a sea of tar  
housing inky bodies.

Only worms like to lick  
those antiquated bodies  
devoid of post-modern spiritual lanes.

Those bodies take the shape of  
formless lusterless holograms  
dissipating in a myriad of labyrinths.

Death is insinuating through the clayish walls  
looking for a shadow;  
for smothered sounds:

That bee which died yesterday  
is still buzzing.

## **The Politics of Resistance**

These clouds adumbrate the sun.

The sun; a body draped in the clothes of work.

The clouds adumbrate the sun

to make the horizon look more expansive.

Sisyphus concocts careless murmurs; a kind of poesy,  
to endure the futile work of ceaselessly rolling the rock  
to the top of a mountain.

Under the shadow of the rock, meanings of boredom fleet.

Under the shadow of the rock, meanings of resistance ooze out  
from the womb of the adumbrated sun.

Drops of blood come in succession.

Red algae grow on the wings of these cotton creatures.

What's imprisoned in the sun is only liberated by the clouds.

## **A Sonnet for Resistance**

More than outcries: I heard her scream,  
while she was sinking in the abysmal offing.  
More than outcries: Her screams were splitting  
every cloud in the sky. Before the screams there was pain.  
During the screams there was pain. Before and during pain  
there are screams. There's no problem with pain insofar  
it becomes a painting. There's no problem with screams  
insofar they become creams to anoint her wounds.  
There is no problem with wounds insofar  
they become tales: {past & prospective},  
{memories & prophesies}...  
Why weep when you can tell? The future is here again:  
There are glimpses of liberty  
looming in the offing.

## **Words Rinsed**

Everything is alphabet.  
Everything has a name blossoming  
from a nomenclature.  
Every sensation.  
Every metaphor.  
Every colour.  
Every trauma.  
I have to ponder on names again:  
those buds of oppression and resistance.  
{Sea, salt, water,,}:  
Every molecule is alpha.  
Every single creature is alpha.  
Why then is it so hard to find the clue?  
Yes, words can be misleading,  
but I have a penchant for them.  
They are the only things that I could rinse  
using just my ruminations  
in an attempt to mould them again.



## Rebellion

*(after "Leavening" by Chad Heltzel)*

Things sprout in the spine: Thorns.  
Thorns of rebellion & a thistle.  
The silky skin of standardisation is stung.  
Your untamed ink steering clear of  
that mummified river because  
standardisation is your foe. & your  
thorns only sprout in a field of mutiny.  
A vineyard of anger. Outcries extricated from  
the throats: Jubilance of pigeons. A dinner  
w/ the Freedom Muse. Sheep expelled.  
Two cups of untamed ink,  
ecstasy of dissent.

## **Words for Rebellion**

Antiphons, anthologized.  
Antelope, elopement.  
A line of ants, discipline.  
And from this picture,  
anti-climax. This eucalyptus tree:  
Life, sap. We might grasp.  
Rebellion. Leaves, leaf, falling.  
Rain, then rainbow. Rogue sun.  
Melting redness, lipstick.  
Kiss: a song against silent lips.  
Words for rebellion need to bloom  
again.

## One Vowel

*“Kill anything that speaks!”*

This is the dictator’s motto.

*“Just enjoy those mute arias!”*

These are the dictator’s preferred tunes.

Yes, you can kill speech.

You can cut tongues.

But don’t expect to sleep well & snort  
because a **BOMB** is planted in every  
silent tongue.

Just remember  
that one vowel will ooze through the sieve  
of any silencing system.

—One [VOW]el will wake you up  
full of fear.

## **It Must Be a Voice**

Hollow wall devoid of theories.  
Errant bees steep into the holes.  
Exhalation of buzzing voices.  
Hence, limitless possibilities of  
smearing the quietude behind closed doors.  
Quietude is boring. So it must be a voice.  
The solution is in murdering silence  
w/ shrilling voices.

Silence is unbreathable.

It must be a voice. It must be  
a breather.

We won't feel release unless the voice  
begets candelabra & outcries.

## **Life Is Meant To Be Inhaled**

Like a rainbow that yawns in an embryo's imagination  
a deposit of zygotes smiles against death.

Life requires steps, exercises, & smouldering  
embers. Afterwards, life is meant to be inhaled;  
totally inhaled; not exhaled.

& it's my job to exile sensations of death,  
adding saccharine breath to the cloying life.

Life is larger than to be worn by a place;  
by a sinister sensation.

See! Even breasts try to avoid the confines  
of the bra.

Everything tries to escape the confines  
of the cage.

Everyone tries to escape death.

## **Even If Just Ice**

I still believe in justice,  
although it turns to be just ice  
because glacial entities  
sooner or later will melt away  
in the mud of thorn fields  
& every drop of water  
will circumcise despair  
& despotism.

## **Of Recipes and Justice**

Everyone feels they own the copyrights of the secret recipes  
of the cosmos. When mercury completes journey across the sun  
some tear up the recipes to remain the sole chefs,  
while crimsoning grey ash to remould their own sunrise.  
No one will ever dare ask about the ingredients.

No one will cast doubt on the rays.

Nothing here can be questioned not even the beams,  
although they are a universal common property.

In the scorching light of the sun no one will utter a word or  
sign, and they even refrain from answering questionnaires,  
but the questions remain there. Is it a devilish scheme?

Is it tyranny revisited? Who counts the drops of lachrymal  
eyes?

Who puts those archives of pain in the prongs of forklifts  
to be moved to the outskirts of the city?

Why mystifying the aches of aching hearts?

There's sadness in the chest as there's still a lack of pure  
recipes pulled from deep inside the sea.—I'm not thinking  
of capitalist manufactu[red] salt.—[Instead,] I'm thinking of  
a natural salt free from the flavours of tears.

## **The Nectar of Justice**

I can't grasp this chaos  
without microscopic geometry.

Invisible particles are sinking  
into water.

Already  
my heart has ascended into the sky.

The world expands and moves.  
I could taste the nectar of the pure mist.

I could taste the nectar of justice,  
while fog stretches and stretches

luring the tyrannical flies  
to a cosmos of hellish lakes.



## **Thorns Will Burn**

You think you don't live in trauma? Think again!

You are always on the edge like a broken violin.

Although you are trembling, you can coerce the wildest desert of fear.

Did you see those thirsty lizards & how they followed the trail of the nomads?

You can trace a line in the vastness of the desert.

You can follow the path of freedom despite the thorns of cacti.

Thorns will burn without the sun & the agents of evil will burn without fire.

Bury your trauma under the dust! Don't swallow your wrath & fury!

Look at this child playing the broken violin with a small bamboo reed!

You can live in the riddle of fear, but this is just a temporary exile.

The storm is approaching & the lightning will pierce the sky, but freedom is just being uploaded in the people's chests.

Silence is a calamity. So silence it with your wrath & fury!

Don't mourn the fall of birds! Rather, sing their fluttering wings!

It's time to play the (broken) violin... Sweet, sweet like the chirp of the nightingale.

**Sonnet in which every storm brings  
a little bit of plumage**

Birds thrive on the expansiveness  
of the sky!

—They space their wings  
against the orthodoxy  
of eventual silence.

—such  
is a tomb built  
of dry clay;  
subjugation and its subcategories.

A wing is a howl.

—Feathers protesting—,  
their lustre never oxidizes.

And every storm brings  
a little bit of their punk plumage.

## **hope inside the garden**

Those lines are crosscurrents inside the silence.  
Those poetry books are cremated.  
I ponder on those crimes.  
I find no clue.

I observe and observe.

I see birds everywhere  
in this garden.

The chirping is a resistant poem.  
The wings are resistant poetry volumes.

Fences are utterly burnt.

## **Acknowledgments:**

The author gratefully acknowledges the editors of the following publications and sites in which some of the poems of this chapbook first appeared: *I am not a silent poet*, *Dissident Voice*, *The Camel Saloon*, *CounterPunch Magazine*, *In Focus Magazine*, and *United Poets Laureate International: World Brotherhood And Peace Through Poetry*.

\*] “Five Haiku Poems” previously appeared in *I am not a silent poet: A magazine for poetry and artwork protesting against abuse in any of its forms*.

\*] “Whispers and Fragments” previously appeared in *Dissident Voice: A Radical Newsletter in the Struggle for Peace and Social Justice*.

\*] “just a trademark” previously appeared in *I am not a silent poet: A magazine for poetry and artwork protesting against abuse in any of its forms*.

\*] “Ways To Suffer” previously appeared in *Dissident Voice: A Radical Newsletter in the Struggle for Peace and Social Justice*.

\*] “Untitled” previously appeared in *The Camel Saloon*.

\*] “Austere Lights” previously appeared in *The Camel Saloon*.

\*] “Orgasmic Reverberations” previously appeared under the rubric “Poets Basement” in *CounterPunch Magazine*.

\*] “a decapitated rainbow” previously appeared under the rubric “Poets Basement” in *CounterPunch Magazine*.

\*] “Counter Silence” previously appeared under the rubric “Poets Basement” in *CounterPunch Magazine*.

\*] “Rebellion” previously appeared in *The Camel Saloon*.

\*] “One Vowel” previously appeared in *In Focus Magazine: The Cyprus PEN's Quarterly on Literature, Culture & the Arts in Cyprus*.

\*] “It Must Be a Voice” previously appeared in *In Focus Magazine: The Cyprus PEN's Quarterly on Literature, Culture & the Arts in Cyprus*.

\*] “Life Is Meant To Be Inhaled” previously appeared in *In Focus Magazine: The Cyprus PEN's Quarterly on Literature, Culture & the Arts in Cyprus*.

\*] “Words for Rebellion” previously appeared in Poets and Poems of the month (February 2016) in *United Poets Laureate International: World Brotherhood And Peace Through Poetry*.

\*] “Even If Just Ice” previously appeared under the rubric “Poets Basement” in *CounterPunch Magazine*.

\*] “Thorns Will Burn” previously appeared in Poets and Poems of the month (February 2016) in *United Poets Laureate International: World Brotherhood And Peace Through Poetry*.

\*] “hope inside the garden” previously appeared in *Dissident Voice: A Radical Newsletter in the Struggle for Peace and Social Justice*.

## About The Author

Ali Znaidi (b.1977) lives in Redeyef, Tunisia. He is the author of several chapbooks, including *Experimental Ruminations* (Fowlpox Press, 2012), *Moon's Cloth Embroidered with Poems* (Origami Poems Project, 2012), *Bye, Donna Summer!* (Fowlpox Press, 2014), *Taste of the Edge* (Kind of a Hurricane Press, 2014), and *Mathemaku x5* (Spacecraft Press, 2015). For more, visit [aliznaidi.blogspot.com](http://aliznaidi.blogspot.com).

## Locofo Chaps

2017

Eileen Tabios – *To Be An Empire Is To Burn*

Charles Perrone – *A CAPacious Act*

Francesco Levato – *A Continuum of Force*

Joel Chace – *America's Tin*

John Goodman – *Twenty Moments that Changed the World*

Donna Kuhn – *Don't Say His Name*

Eileen Tabios (ed.) – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry*

Gabriel Gudding – *Bed From Government*

mLEKALaND – *Manifesto of the Moment*

Garin Cycholl – *Country Musics 20/20*

Mary Kasimor – *The Prometheus Collage*

lars palm – *case*

Reijo Valta – *Truth and Truthmp*

Andrew Peterson – *The Big Game is Every Night*

Romeo Alcala Cruz – *Archaeoteryx*

John Lowther – *18 of 555*

Jorge Sánchez – *NowSing*

Alex Gildzen — *Disco Naps & Odd Nods*

Barbara Janes Reyes – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry, vol. 2*

Luisa A. Igloria– *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry, vol. 3*

Tom Bamford – *The Gag Reel*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Humpty Drumpfty and Other Poems*

Allen Bramhall – *Bleak Like Me*

Kristian Carlsson – *The United World of War*

Roy Bentley – *Men, Death, Lies*

Travis Macdonald – *How to Zing the Government*

Kristian Carlsson – *Dhaka Poems*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #ShePersisted*  
Martha Deed – *We Should Have Seen This Coming*  
Matt Hill – *Yet Another Blunted Ascent*  
Patricia Roth Schwartz – *Know Better*  
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Petty Poetry for SCROTUS' Girls, with poems for Elizabeth Warren and Michelle Obama*  
Freke Rähä – *Explanation model for 'Virus'*  
Eileen R. Tabios – *Immigrant*  
Ronald Mars Lintz– *Orange Crust & Light*  
John Bloomberg-Rissman – *In These Days of Rage*  
Colin Dardis – *Post-Truth Blues*  
Leah Mueller – *Political Apnea*  
Naomi Buck Palagi – *Imagine Renaissance*  
John Bloomberg-Rissman and Eileen Tabios – *Comprehending Mortality*  
Dan Ryan – *Swamp Tales*  
Sheri Reda – *Stubborn*  
Aileen Cassinetta –*B & O Blues*  
Mark Young –*the veil drops*  
Christine Stoddard—*Chica/Mujer*  
Aileen Ibardaloza, Paul Cassinetta, and Wesley St. Jo– *No Names*  
Nicholas Michael Ravnikaar – *Liberal elite media rag. SAD!*  
Mark Young – *The Waitstaff of Mar-a-Largo*  
Howard Yosha – *Stop Armageddon*  
Andrew and Donora Rihn – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*  
Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt – *Extreme Vetting*  
Michael Dickel – *Breakfast at the End of Capitalism*  
Tom Hibbard – *Poems of Innocence and Guilt*  
Eileen Tabios (ed.) – *Menopausal Hay(na)ku For P-Grubbers*  
Aileen Casinnetto – *Tweet*  
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Defying Trumplandia*



Carol Dorf – *Some Years Ask*  
Marthe Reed – *Data Primer*  
Carol Dorf – *Some Years Ask*  
Amy Bassin and Mark Blickley– *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate  
Quotes From the Underground*  
Nate Logan – *Post-Reel*  
Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump and the Pocket Oracle*  
Luisa A. Igloria – *Check & Balance*  
Alik Barnstone – *So That They Shall Not Say, This Is Jezebel*  
Geneva Chao – *post hope*  
Thérèse Bachand – *Sanctuary*  
Chuck Richardson – *Poesy for the Poetus. . .Our Donaldcito*  
John M. Bellinger – *The Inaugural Poems*  
Kath Abela Wilson – *The Owl Still Asking*  
Ronald Mars Lintz – *Dumped Through*  
Agnes Marton – *The Beast Turns Me Into a Tantrumbeast*  
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Adios, Trumplandia!*  
Magus Magnus – *Of Good Counsel*  
Matina L. Stamatakis – *Shattered Window Espionage*  
Steve Klepetar – *How Fascism Comes to America*  
Bill Yarrow – *We All Saw It Coming*  
Jim Leftwich – *Improvisations Against Propaganda*  
Bill Lavender – *La Police*  
Gary Hardaway – *November Odds*  
James Robinson – *Burning Tide*  
Eric Mohrman – *Prospectors*  
Janine Harrison – *If We Were Birds*  
Michael Vander Does – *We Are Not Going Away*  
John Moore Williams – *The Milo Choir Sings Wild Boys in  
Trumplandia*  
Andrea Sloan Pink – *Prison and Other Ideas*  
Stephen Russell – *Occupy the Inaugural*  
James Robison – *Burning Tide*  
Ron Czerwien – *A Ragged Tear Down the Middle of Our Flag*  
Agnes Marton – *I'm the President, You are not*

Ali Znaidi – *Austere Lights*

More information on Locofo Chaps can be found at  
[www.moriapoetry.com](http://www.moriapoetry.com).

Tunisian poet Ali Znaidi's poems rise up like flowers from the challenges he has faced as a writer. [...] His craft is skillful and inventive and I sense a philosopher peeking out from behind his words. He writes in English as if it was his mother tongue, but the mystical voice of his ancestral gift cannot be hidden.

— Annie Avery, editor of *Heard Magazine* (USA)