

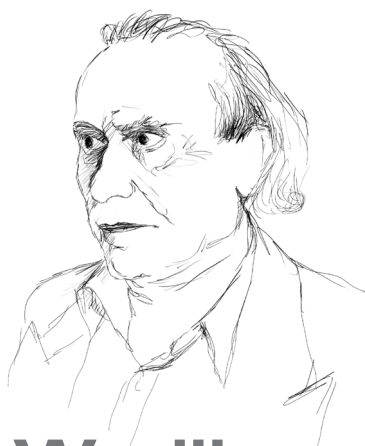
# Wadih Saadeh

---

## A Secret Sky







**Wadih  
Saadeh**

---

**A Secret  
Sky**

**1992**

Translated  
from Arabic by  
**Anne Fairbairn**

Ginninderra Press

# Contents

Introduction	5	That Day	26
Preface	8	Companions	27
Shadows	10	He Said	28
Glances	11	The Companion	29
Lilies	12	Life	30
The Dead Are Sleeping	13	His Face	31
Dawn Death	14	Names of the Dead	32
Night Visit	15	The Conscience of	
Hunters	16	One Who Is Absent	33
Threshold	17	Drowning	34
Leaf	18	With Them	35
Mysterious Sky	19	The Place of Roses	36
Homecoming	20	My Mother	37
Absence	21	My Father	38
A Tree	22	Destination	39
Words	23	The Exhausted People	40
If	24	Migration	41
His shadow	25	Walking Away	42

# Introduction

When I first studied Wadih Sa'adeh's poetry I enjoyed his work so much I decided I would like to compile a volume of his poems. For many years I have been endeavouring to build a bridge of understanding between Arab countries and Australia and between the Arabic-speaking community in Australia and English speakers. My serious interest in Arabic poetry began in 1980 when I met Dr. Hussam Al Khatibe, Palestinian Professor of Arabic Studies at the university of Damascus. He told me that Arabs are passionate about their language and are by nature poets. He explained that although poets still write classical poetry, using the same forms, metre, rhymes and images that have been used by poets for more than a thousand years, many poets of this century are finding new forms to express more adequately how they feel about the immense changes taking place around them. He recited poems by Syrian poets Nizzar Qabbani and Adonis (Ali Ahmad Sa'id), Iraqi poet Nazik al-Mala'ika, Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan and Lebanese poets Khalil Hawi and Unsi al-Haj, leaders of the free verse movement.

As a result of expanding contact with the West, a growing sense of the significance of the individual emerged in the work of Arab poets. This was reinforced by the poetry of the Mahjar (migrant) school which consisted of poets who migrated to the Americas. The most influential, of these was Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) who founded a literary

society, Al-Rabitah Al Qalamiyah (The Pen Club) in New York in 1920.

After World War II, encounter with western poets, especially T.S. Eliot, had a profound effect on Arabic poetry, both technically, with greater freedom in form and metre and also in content. Poets began to express feelings of loss and even despair as they observed how the West, by championing the tyranny of money, creates an inner wasteland. These feelings were compounded by the gradual erosion of traditional values in the Arab world.

Many Lebanese poets, including Said Aql and Salah Labaki, influenced by the French symbolists, found freedom by turning inwards for expression, often using private (some times incomprehensible) symbols.

Lebanese poet Yusaf al-Khal, returned home after seven years in the United States, to found Majallat Shi'r (Poetry Review) in Beirut in 1957. This became the most influential forum for innovative poetry. Poets published in this journal continued to use symbols; many also experimented with avantgarde forms by blending classical techniques with dada, surrealist forms and existentialist ideas.

This journal encouraged the concept of poetry as a unique expression of personal vision by publishing the radically innovative work of Arab poets, as well as the work of Yeats,

Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, Edith Sitwell, T.S. Eliot and French poets such as Mallarme, Jaques Prevert and Paul Eluard, who continued to influence change.

The extraordinary richness of the Arabic language provides a medium for developing unlimited innovation and flexibility of form while maintaining a unique poignancy and vividness of imagery; poets can choose from an immense vocabulary for metaphors, allusions and symbols, to give precisely the nuance of meaning required, often so elusive in other languages.

Wadih Sa'adeh's poetry conveys the essence of Lebanon's tragic wars. Each poem is as fresh as a water-colour, as though the poet is creating, with a soft brush, images of a half real world, each line a painful wound, each word a splash of blood. The poet's agony is made more intense by his gentleness of expression. The history of the development of poetry in Lebanon has helped to shape Wadih's work, but I believe his poems demonstrate a unique vision drawn from the simplicity and the spiritual harmony he enjoyed in his village and surrounding fields during his childhood, an innocent vision he holds in his heart to this day. In his poetry this vision is poignantly juxtaposed with his painful memories of Lebanon's brutal wars and the suffering of his fellow Lebanese.

**Anne Fairbairn**

# Preface

I was born in a peaceful village called Shabtin, in northern Lebanon. It was a place where the people, fields, trees, rocks, birds and animals were one family. Nature was part of our being. The soil and the people were one.

I grew up among farmers who were gentle and dour. I grew up among opposites – the sterility of rocks, the fertility of fields. The fields and rocks sometimes seemed to me to be the secret faces of the people I lived among in that village.

I was about twelve years old when I moved to Beirut. Everything was different, and I was filled with a profound feeling of desolation. It was at this time I began to experiment with poetry, perhaps to escape from this feeling. Whatever the reason, poetry became my companion.

Does this mean that through poetry one is seeking once more a bond with nature? Lost innocence? Freedom?

After travelling to many countries – England, France, Cyprus, Greece, searching for my place in this world, I emigrated to Australia with my family in November, 1988. The war in Lebanon was not the only reason for this. We were seeking social justice, a regard for human rights and freedom. Even so, that lost place remains firmly in my heart, for it is the place of my childhood. I know it is a paradise to which I can never return. When I write poetry, it is to keep this paradise alive in my mind. Poetry is not just an expression of the past,



it is an act of creation, a dream of renewal, the only way for me to recreate myself as I would wish to be.

In *A Secret Sky*, I try to give life to those people who have died in a terrible war in Lebanon, or those people who were forced to leave a country which is now only a memory, a people and a place which no longer exist for me.

In my book I try to give readers a glimpse of the tragedy of my former homeland. Places like my village do not exist separately from those who lived there; they are a part of our very being, part of ourselves. Wherever I live today, my friends from the past – the fields, the hills, the rocks, the birds, the animals – are all part of me, part of my soul.

**Wadih Sa'adeh**

# Shadows

They glided down towards the sea,  
drifting from their mountains like soft shadows,  
in case they woke the grass.

Passing over fields,  
some shadows whispered farewell and slept;  
others clung to rocks and stretched,  
dragging the people back.

As they moved, exhausted,  
towards the sea,  
the sun above them was  
searching for a needle  
to stitch them once more, to their shadows.

# Glances

Leaving their eyes behind while walking,  
they rely upon past glances.

Silence is lying over their bodies,  
with soft winds of the dead  
and the spirit of devastated places.

If clouds drift into their minds,  
it rains in distant fields.

They walk.

When they are weary,  
they lay down their glances and sleep.

# Lilies

Death does not only dance in village squares,  
it dances near cockscomb, snapdragon and basil.

It is stalking near the well  
and into houses.

Death dances.

In village squares the dead melt into asphalt.

Those who stoop to gather flowers  
are hurled upwards by bullets  
to become lilies.

# The Dead Are Sleeping

They were innocent people.

They would caress their children's hair in the dusk,  
dropping off to sleep.

They were innocent, simple people,  
sweating during the day and smiling.

On their way home they would pause before shop windows,  
measuring with their eyes the size of children's clothes,  
then walk on.

They would take one step  
in the early breath of dawn  
to touch the tree trunks.

During January frosts,  
while they were watching,  
some branches would bear fruit.

Their scythes yearned for the fields,  
the air in the village was waiting for their cries.

Suddenly, their wheat became ribs,  
the breeze and grass, rooted  
in their bodies.

They were innocent, simple people.

Each evening the sun slid its silky mantle  
over their souls.

# Dawn Death

They open their doors before sunrise.  
They open the two shutters of their windows  
so the sunlight can enter.  
With the breath of dawn  
flowers drink,  
life is enjoyed.  
At daybreak,  
a beam of sunlight  
shining through a crack in the door  
lies across closed eyelids.

# Night Visit

They were telling their children about  
the guardian angel of plants;  
about a nightingale that had flown there at dawn  
to sing in the mulberry tree above their window.  
They were telling them about the grapes  
they would sell to buy new clothes.  
About the special surprise the children  
would find under their pillows at bedtime.  
But some soldiers arrived,  
stopped their stories,  
leaving red splashes on the walls  
as they departed.

# Hunters

Before killing each other,  
they trained for many years  
to be partridge hunters;  
to toss pebbles in the air,  
marking them with bullets.  
They trained to pluck the wings of birds  
to make brooms from the feathers.  
They tried to grow feathers on their hands,  
so they would become birds.  
Then they died,  
like hunted birds.



# Threshold

He was dead  
but he could feel their fingers on his forehead.  
They laid his body in the centre of the house  
on a bed they had hired,  
like the one he should have bought.  
They dressed him  
in clothes like those he had seen in city shops.  
When they carried him out to be buried,  
he left something strange on the threshold.  
After that, whenever they entered the house  
they shivered without knowing why.

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

