IDENTITY AND IMAGINATION:
DAVID MALOUF AND HOSSEIN VALAMANESH
IN PROCESS

IHAB HASSAN
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

And what see I on any side but the transmigrations of
Proteus?

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History"

I

We do not know what imagination is. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge
have given us their sublime accounts, as have other Romantics,
down to Gaston Bachelard, who thought it was the flame burning at
the summit of mind, "the region of the metaphor of metaphor." We
do not know, but I prefer to think of imagination as motion, migrancy,
displacement, a flickering gift, a knack of seeing otherwise, a way of
moving away from identity, things as they are — including identity.

But let us admit it: in moving away, we die to some things. We learn
loss even as our minds consume one identity to flare out into another.
Does imagination, then, confirm our homelessness, our perpetual exile,
in the world? Not exactly. People feel exile, imagination is free. Yet,
feeling exile, men and women may come to reality wounded in their
identity, nursing a secret ache.

*

What, then, is "identity," in Egypt, America, Australia?

Though mysteriously made — no, not simply "constructed" from the
outside, no more than imagination is — identity remains as wary of
imagination as is imagination of identity. Rightly so. The mackerel, the
starling, the warrior ant adhere to their kind with primal ferocity. But can
human beings settle for solidarity by blood, tribe, nation, class, gender,
color, caste, religion, linguistic habit? The Sophoclean chorus chants:
"Many are the wonders, but none more wonderful than man;" the Bible
boasts that God created man in His image; and humanists never cease to
proclaim each individual unique. Is our race just whistling in the dark?
Regarding blood and belonging, I fear that human beings remain closer to the warrior ant. E.O. Wilson’s “epigenetic rules” still hold their ground. Rules? Reading the dispatches of madness in our time, I wonder, for an instant, if Georges Bataille may not be closer to the mark. Instead of rules, he proposes a “surplus” of cruelty, an “expenditure” of frenzy, a “supplement” of destructiveness in human affairs. Death, violence, and sensuality, it almost seems, rush to fill a crack in creation, a discontinuity in our being. And imagination itself, though it abhors sameness, may mingle and conspire with identity in this lurid metaphysics.

Forget metaphysics; see how fantasy, if not imagination, holds sway over the killing fields. In Blood and Belonging, Michael Ignatieff shows in chilling detail how the desperate will to belong — call it “nationalism” for short — must violently dispossess others while fabricating myths, no, big lies, of its own. Hence the “high volume of untruth,” needed to sustain current vocabularies of moral self-exoneration. But belonging needs, beyond self-exoneration, blood, needs terror producing more terror. Ignatieff concludes with a statement that almost reaches back to Bataille, as it reflects on the “staggering gratuitousness and bestiality of nationalist violence…”

The most fraught episode – it touches the human mystery – that Ignatieff relates concerns Milan, a young woman of Kurdish descent, born and bred in Melbourne. She leaves home, which she regards as no home, to join Kurd guerrillas, the peshmerga of the PKK, in the mountain fastness of the Caucasus. Indoctrinated in classical Marxism, she bears a Kalashnikov, speaks softly, and endures extreme hardships, together with women warriors of her chosen kind.

Why? To belong? For purity, self-immolation, self-transcendence? For a meaning, a value, a certainty that could take all life by the throat? Or was it, beyond all that, at the behest of some irresistible demon lover, Death itself? Call it “idealism,” if you wish – I won’t. Ignatieff calls it, with concealed distaste, “happiness.”

Milan’s cause all but abolishes the division between individual and group. She has embraced a kind of belonging so intense that those who share it may look like mental slaves to an outsider like myself. To themselves, they seem at last to be free. For that is what is most striking about Milan, as she smiles, shakes my hand and dashes back to the mess tent: she is truly happy here.
Ihab Hassan

Milan may be my mirror self, who left Egypt and firmly rejected “belonging” on her terms. Milan may be John Walker Lindh, who left California to fight with the Taliban. Milan does not yet know that identities multiply, held in the spiritual fabric of the imagination, as the Franco-Lebanese writer, Amin Maalouf – the “other” Maalouf – has so lucidly argued in *In the Name of Identity*.

Imagination, spirit, displacement: they solve, resolve, dissolve identity, but not where History freezes imagination and identity congeals.

*

For nearly half a century, forever it seems, Australians have worried and queried, challenged and asserted, their identity. This used to be an American *angst*, that Jamesian “complex fate,” before the American imperium set in, making its fate ever more complex.

 Barely a century ago, in *The American Scene*, James alluded to the “inconceivable aliens” of Ellis Island, off “remarkable, unspeakable New York.” Any “sensitive citizen,” looking in, he remarked, comes back from his visit to the island wholly changed: “He had thought he knew before, thought he had the sense of the degree in which it is his American fate to share the sanctity of his American consciousness, the intimacy of his American patriotism, with the inconceivable alien; but the truth had never come home to him with any such force.”

 How, I wonder, would a third generation Australian perceive the aliens at Woomera or Christmas Island, even though three decades of political correctness have scoured public speech? And how would a “new Australian” perceive them, say that Afghani immigrant, reported in the *Bulletin*, who finds Pakistani racist, or that Ethiopian refugee who says, “The only expectation I had was that I am safe [in Australia], and then after that I was ready for anything that came up…”?

*

Here, an Australian scene comes to mind. For three months at the end of 2001, my wife and I lived in Australia while the grim news of the *Tampa* refugees played itself out, refracted in a hall of political mirrors, the general elections of that year. On November 6, P.E.N. Australia held a reading in Sydney, at Glebebooks, to focus on the plight of refugees, both in detention centers and at sea.

 Warm, stuffy evening, the second floor of the bookstore closely packed with lively leftists, liberals, literati in colorfully-threadbare or
chic-bohemian attire, a feeling of festive seriousness at first, as if all those books lining three walls – I sat next to a shelf of Sufi poetry – emanated a sense of high purpose, taken in through our pores. Eight writers read from their work or spoke, the first David Malouf, the last a quiet, tense, Arab-Australian woman, a journalist active in refugee affairs, whose testimony cast a pall on the gloom already gathering in the room.

The testimony oppressed me; I never sewed my lips or glowered at the world behind razor-wire fences or prison bars. Did Australia need to make an example of “the wretched of the earth”? Couldn’t the country – not the poorest, not the richest – afford to give the “illegals” dignity in rejection? Can we dump the mess on an election year? And why did I need to sit in this airless room to experience the bristling weight of all these questions, like porcupines thrown in my lap?

I thought then of Hiam, Yemeni born, in Eva Sallis’s eponymous fiction, and of her “mad drive” – she calls it that – into the Australian night after the suicide of her husband, Masoud, a Palestinian. Years Down Under bring no balm to their exile; the wound to Arab pride, Arab identity, will not scar or heal. When their daughter, Zena, “goes with” a South African, Rüdiger, her father, damaged, dishonored, self-loathing, kills himself in silent, almost listless, rage. (The beautiful Zena had screamed at her parents, “What makes you think I’m still a virgin?”) Never mind that the novel, in delivering Hiam’s “madness,” can seem overwrought. It persuades us of one affliction: the grating of values, the agony of identity, can prove lethal. For too many, alienation does not stop at carceral walls. And indeed, as Sallis shows in her second novel, The City of Scallions, something deadly inhabits the will to belong.

Back to Gleebooks. For everyone, throughout the evening, there was never doubt where the blame lay; no nuance in the implicit indictment; no probing of larger issues. Such as the nation state, which defines citizenship, issues passports, enforces borders. Such as the regimes – and their torturers – creating refugees in the first place. Such as the mind of the Australian majority, outside the bookstore. Such as the psychology of exile and the economics of migration. Still, this was no moment of philosophical finesse; the prestige of authors, at that time and in that place, served an imminent cause. Imagination ceded the floor to partisanship, a moral and civic identity to be sure, infinitely more benign than other identities now savaging the world, yet identity still, demanding self-sameness, demanding conformity to a parti pris.

Except for David Malouf. He did not dissent from the occasion, no more than I did, but neither did he participate in its sanctities: he simply read a passage from An Imaginary Life about Ovid’s exile. In Malouf’s
Ihab Hassan

I have always considered *An Imaginary Life*, more than a novel, a consummate fable, the quintessential story of our stories. It concerns language, identity, imagination, change, death; it enacts them. And it is so miraculously compressed, it glows.

I have always considered Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* a ludic myth of myths, driven by great Eros, the diapason of Love in all its forms, and of identity lost in all the forms of creation – Proteus is but one trickster example. Identity? It is in Ovid a shape-shifter: that is, an aspect of imagination.

In inventing Ovid, then, David Malouf has found his true subject, his necessary angel you might say; and in writing *An Imaginary Life*, he may have also written his own imaginary autobiography. As Malouf says of Ovid’s other major work, the *Ars Amatoria*, “the real subject is the poet himself,” in his mercurial and multiple presences, “as guide, joker, confidante, provocateur, storyteller, picture-maker, mock-scholar, mock-sage, magician, stage-manager.”

But I have no space here to flesh out this point, only to adduce its topical reference. For the plight of the protagonist is also that of the poet in the face of power everywhere: playful, satiric Ovid against solemn, monumental Augustus, the pen seeking unerringly the chink in imperial might. But does Roman Dacia also hint the “Great Australian Emptiness” of forty years ago, as Patrick White put it in “The Prodigal Son,” recall the “unnamed earth” waiting for the latter-day imagination of the white man to give it name and shape? Did David Malouf, back then, feel exile in Italy or in Australia, that same Italy which was Ovid’s home until the poet (Ovid/ Malouf) found his true home in the emptiness (Asia/Australia)? These questions lead us to real, not imaginary, autobiography.

* 

Some may wonder about the “identity” of a second-generation Anglo-Lebanese writer born in Brisbane. Others may ask, how Australian is he after all those years spent abroad? Airy as they may be, such questions linger like cobwebs in the mind of certain readers.

We are all hidden from one another, from ourselves even, in partial eclipse always, a meniscus of darkness, shadowed and shifting according
to a whimsical sun. How describe the identity of another? Why prescribe or mummify it? Is national identity an Iron Maiden with a passport? We know that some Australian writers left for the northern, the older, world. Some, like Malouf, returned. Some returned only to visit, and their story, ably told in Ian Britain’s *Once an Australian*, is richly diverse. Other writers never left at all. Are they the true dinkum Australians?

In his essay called “The South” – no, not *Terra Australis*, but the “real” south, up north – Malouf writes:

> On a soft, sunlit morning in March 1959, just a few days before my twenty-fifth birthday, I stood at the rails of an Italian liner, the Fairsky, and after a five-weeks sea-voyage that had taken me via Singapore, Colombo, Bombay, Aden and Port Said, saw the Bay of Naples open before me, and utterly familiar in the distance the dark slopes and scooped-out cone of Vesuvius – all just as I had always imaged it, like the breaking of a dream.

It is the intensely “imaged” scene, wherever it may be, that makes it, for certain writers, more real than some brute, bullying, ontological presence. (Malouf, at least, does not feel “born,” gliding into the Bay of Naples, as Peter Conrad says he felt, riding his first red double-decker, crossing Waterloo Bridge.) Where’s the betrayal of identity here?

Youth, moreover, wants to wander, to reach out by risking itself at the limits of what it knows. Seeing Malouf off on the *Fairsky*, Judith Rodriguez captures the catalytic moment, a moment as decisive for individuals as it proved for Australia – think, pell-mell within a decade, of Gough Whittam, the end of White Australia, the Vietnam War, the loosening bonds of the Commonwealth, the coming of transcontinental jets. Rodriguez remembers in *David Malouf: A Celebration*: “We in our early twenties were fish in a shoal, all darting the same way and caught in the same light. Aghast, it seems – and has it changed? – at being on an island we might never escape…” But now, for Rodriguez as for Malouf, “the real and necessary and present Australia” has proven enough to bring many back.

True, some writers, artists, intellectuals, have found something essential to themselves abroad, whether they remained or returned: Henry Handel Richardson in Leipzig, Patrick White in Alexandria, Christina Stead in London, Martin Boyd in Pisa, Manning Clark in Oxford, David Malouf, perhaps, in Tuscany. But all this warrants no handwringing about an Australian identity, which Bernard Smith loosely defined three
decades ago, in his *Antipodean Manifesto*, as a dialectical relation with the North, marked not simply by colonial domination but, more subtly, by hidden cultural interactions, projections and introjections, unequal reciprocities. What else, indeed, is history but evidence of human inter-debt, tradition but uniqueness woven into the larger, variegated fabric?

* * *

But let us return to Malouf’s autobiography, *An Imaginary Life*, a spiritual autobiography presented as fable, displaced identity, dispersed the self in imaginary steppes, a horizon of the universe. But what of his real autobiography, so plainly, so tantalizingly, named *12 Edmondstone Street*? Does it finally give away the identity of David Malouf? Hardly. Not an ethnic, not even an Australian identity, anyway. The decisive moments of self-perception come with visionary remembrance, epiphanies of imaginative recall, presaging Malouf’s future life in art.

If the Old Country means anything to Malouf, it is the silence of his grandfather, who could speak no English, his dignity looming against the distant violence of Lebanon. Did I say silence? The old man held court in a corner table of the family store, regaling his compatriots with stories his grandson could not understand: “Listening at the edge of the circle, with my chin resting on the bent cane back of a chair, I would get so lost in the telling that I almost understood: not the words but the tune.”

Malouf’s own father, born in Brisbane, is a clean-cut Catholic, shy and reserved with his son, who volunteers at St. Vincent de Paul and plays League on Saturday afternoons. Malouf’s mother, London born, brings England to *12 Edmondstone Street*, keeps Australia out, well beyond her verandah’s lace. So, naturally, Malouf and his sister played Australian toughs, out of earshot: “Him and me done it this arvo. I betcha we did.” I see no great revelations of a writer’s identity in these circumstances; I see more in the interior geography of Number Twelve, the domestic landscape of a child’s imagination.

Topographies show contours, borderlands. Such limits matter to a writer, the fierce flip-flop of inside-outside, so common to artists in every clime. The family arrangements require Malouf and his sister to sleep on a verandah, beyond their parents’ bedroom window, a small, nocturnal exile he desperately resents. “A verandah is not part of the house. Even a child knows this. . . .” Malouf says. “Each morning I step across the threshold and there it is, a world recovered, restored.”

447
RELIGION and the ARTS

But what better borderland than the dark, dank space below Brisbane bungalows, a forest of creosote-brushed posts, a black sky with cracks, through which the secret life of the house sills: “There are no clocks down here. There is not even language… To come down here, up under the floorboards and the life of rooms, is to enter a dream space….” Indeed, the work of David Malouf may owe far more to verandahs and under-floors than to all the cedars of Lebanon.

Imagination, however, dwells fully in the body, the body of Malouf and the world’s body. Flesh tingles, objects breathe. It is a sensuous, sensual space, the space of this writer’s childhood, suffused with libido, the libido of poesis and of vivid recall. This body, the “experiencing mind-in-the-body,” serves as limit to what we can know of reality—a limit but also a door. Hence: “We have only to dare one last little blaze of magic to pass through.”

All I have said underscores my tacit theme: that in Malouf, identity is not determinacy but freedom; it is imagination. Yet something is missing still. There is a somber, complicating episode at the very end of 12 Edmondstone Street, closing a section titled “The Kyogle Line.” Malouf is ten, on his first trip out of Brisbane. The time, July 1944; the place, a train chockfull of troops, lurching toward Sydney. In the middle of the night, the train stops somewhere; Malouf and his father take a slow stroll on the platform. It is a moment of rare and quiet intimacy. But a crowd has gathered around one of the wagons, muttering of “Nips” and “Japs.” Three Japanese prisoners huddle in the wagon, as in a cage. As father and son walk away, the bond between them breaks. It is an isolating moment. We then discover that Malouf’s grandfather, past eighty, had once been apprehended as an “enemy alien” before his son secured his release “on personal grounds.” Malouf’s father never speaks of that episode. The author concludes 12 Edmondstone Street with words of studied ambiguity:

Their [the Japanese prisoners] presence imposed silence. That had been the first reaction. But what it provoked immediately after was some sort of inner argument or dialogue that was in a language I couldn’t catch. It had the rhythm of the train wheels over those foreign four-foot-eight inch rails—a different sound from the one our own trains made—and it went on even when the train stalled and waited, and long after we had come to Sydney and the end of our trip. It was, to me, as if I had all the time been on a different train from the
Ihab Hassan

one I thought. Which would take more than the sixteen hours the timetable announced and bring me at last to a different, unnamable destination.

William James once said that origins prove nothing. I concur. But experiences do shape us, lastingly, to their own bizarre end. David Malouf, on his first journey away from home, found himself on a “different train,” bound to another destination. This, I suggest, is the destination of all serious artists, transmuting identity into imagination, closure into the openness of existence. But the wounds of experience, though they may change or fade, never leave the soul immaculate. In some artists, these wounds sing.

III

Hossein Valamanesh paints his “identity” in forms, colors, textures, artifacts of enigmatic clarity and serene force; his art also sings.

Born in Teheran in 1949, of Azerbaijani parents, he spent his boyhood in the remote, sand-blown, ochre-washed town of Kash, in the mountainous province of Sistan-e Baluchestan. The Shah’s infamous secret police, SAVAK, practiced then, modernization by torture. In 1960, the family returned to Teheran. Valamanesh studied at the prestigious School of Fine Art, and in the evening took acting classes with the magnetic theatre director, Bijan Mofid – elements of performance coolly inspire Valamanesh’s art. In 1973, he emigrated to Australia, first to Perth, then to Adelaide, where he and his wife, Angela, a ceramic artist, now reside.

In 2001, a friend, Ian North, introduced me to Valamanesh’s work in Adelaide; I succumbed to its spell. It is not an Islamic spell, though both of us share an interest in Sufism, that mystic banana peel on which formal religions slip. It is not the spell of the uncanny, which some Surrealists cast. The art of Valamanesh drew me to itself because it projects spiritual repose, a numinous, unwilled quality, like light from some far-away, burned-out star; because his objects both recall and release their histories to the void; because his works are not argumentative, not conceptual in the sense that they depend on some idea, verbally explained. The artifacts of Valamanesh inhabit their context and push out toward the viewer from a particular place, yes; but their plastic and visual and formal values, unlike so much postmodern art, wholly suffice. In short – I say this quite unabashedly – they are objects of beauty, dialogical beauty, engaged in sundry conversations.
between identity and imagination, past and present, Iran and Australia, natural elements and Pythagorean geometries.

One assertive piece, an exception, shows a plum-colored Persian carpet spread on the earth in a mallee clearing; a fire of pyramidal sticks, Aboriginal fashion, burns at the center; a photo of the event is taken. The carpet, with its burnt hole, now black velvet cloth, was then displayed in a spotless gallery, under the photo of the live event, the carpet on fire. The piece, titled *Longing belonging* (fig. 1, 1997), may seem didactic. Yet *Longing* moves us, beyond cultural interpolation, with its irreducible mystery, as if Zoroaster had drifted into a Dreaming, and totem animals had broken out in Farsi tongues of fire.

Flames burn and flicker in many works of Valamanesh, like the purifying light of Ahura Mazda or the Sufi Fire of Love (fig. 2). Jalaludin Rumi, a favorite of the artist, writes:

> A candle is made to become entirely flame.  
> In that annihilating moment  
> it has no shadow.  
> It is nothing but a tongue of light…

Fire gives light, but light without fire gives the clearest sense of the lambent presence of Valamanesh’s art, a presence, I repeat, threatening
Figure 2. Hossein Valamanesh, *Untitled (teakettle)*, sculpture, 1994.

Figure 3. Hossein Valamanesh, *Chai, as close as I could get*, sculpture, 1998.
to dissolve suddenly into nothing – the Farsi word for “nothing” becomes an image in some works like the black mystic square hanging in my study at home. One of the simplest, most hypnotic, of his pieces is Chai, as close as I could get (fig. 3, 1998). I saw it at Ian and Mirna North’s home, months after the Art Gallery of South Australia exhibition, splendidly curated by Sarah Thomas in 2001, had closed. Ian describes it graphically in the catalogue, Hossein Valamanesh: A Survey.

Visitors approach Chai as I did for the first time, attracted by the light that emanates from the top. In a pool of light a strange, orange-brown form magically hovers. It is mesmerizing beyond the three-second which most contemporary art offers. Only on careful inspection does one realise the work comprises a glass cup of tea – chai – floating, just, in a bowl of water in the top of the plinth in which it is embedded, and illuminated from underneath. Simple. But no one picks it straight off...

The domestic aura of this object evokes for me, as do so many objects that Valamanesh exquisitely crafts, the last, luminous days of Ovid in _An Imaginary Life_, his self-possession, no, self-dispossession in humility, his surrender to the last metamorphoses. And why not? Sufis, though associated with Islam, think of their practice as the truth immanent in every creed, in every way of life. They might welcome a Quaker, a Kabalist, a Zen Master – adept all at perplexity and paradox – welcome Ovid, Malouf, and Valamanesh.

*

But let us not turn the artist into a _Mutassawif_ (he who strives to be a Sufi) or dervish, though Valamanesh himself constructed, in _The lower circles his own heart_ (1993), the semblance of a whirling dervish. This artist reveals many sides, creates in diverse materials, reworks the fragments of his and our identity in vary-colored forms. Fire, foliage, sand, bark, a shirt, a blank book, a ceramic bowl, a tapered ladder, a map of Switzerland, a flooded, bronze boat, human shadows and outlines, the artist’s own thumbprint enlarged and engraved in the earth, so much else besides – all participate in the transmutations of matter into meaning and meaning into other meanings, the “transmigrations of Proteus,” as Emerson would say.

We know, for instance, that the experience of Valamanesh, working with Aborigines at Papunya and Warburton in 1974, proved critical
to his self-understanding as artist, migrant, man. Trope meets topos; metaphor maps place; all interact. And so, from the dot and pebble paintings that Valamanesh learned to make in the Western Desert, he can later construct *Dot paintings with tablets* (2001), using, instead of pebbles, various multi-colored pills – Warfarin, Anginine, Zocor – remedies for heart and circulatory diseases. In one visual pun, in one figurative leap, two cultures converge even as they continue to criticize one another; two collective identities flow like oil in water. But the artist’s interest here is not only political; it is, even more, an interest in materials, how they link areas of our experience, delimit historical periods or zones of the earth, how they reveal their noetic or symbolic qualities in the very grain of their substance.

Issues of identity, then, do pervade Valamanesh’s art – subject to the law of Proteus. They can concern individual identity, and so relate
intimately to the body, as we have seen them do in Malouf's 12 Edmondstone Street. Hence Valamanesh's fingerprints, palm imprints, torso outlines, and photographs of his head from the back, in assorted pieces, corporal self-projections all. Hence, too, more allegorically perhaps, works that merely hint the body, as in Growing up (fig. 4, 1989), showing a flat, cut-out, beige bust, mounted on a rustic ladder, pointing toward a blue ceramic bowl on the ground. Elsewhere, human silhouettes—outlined in rope, wood, paper, paint, or words—query the very notion of selfhood. Query? That is theory. Instead, Valamanesh presents us, in Untitled (fig. 5, 1995), with a neatly folded shirt, crafted of dun and russet lotus leaves, from which emanates a human shadow made of words in Arabic script. The words repeat, in jumbled form, a love poem by the Sufi, Faridudin Attar: "I tear my shirt with every breath for the extent of joy and ecstasy of being in love; now has become all my being and I am only a shirt."
The issues of personal identity also engage communal identities, art fit for public places. Between the Hyatt and the ASER Complex in Adelaide, on a handsome esplanade of the Torrens, is a sculpture of several sandstone, bluestone, granite, and wood pieces, a subdued medley of hues, titled *Knocking from the inside* (fig. 6, 1989). A broken plinth, a fractured column, stairs leading up to a split human silhouette, another concave silhouette carved out of a recumbent slab, sparse, cryptic geometries on the pavement, and an inscription of Rumi, constitute the ensemble, fragments evoking impermanence:

I have lived on the lip of insanity  
wanting to know reasons,  
thrashing on the door. It opens.  
I've been knocking from the inside!
I've walked through and around this sculpture many times, sometimes casually, sometimes rapt. The structure opens itself to skies, trees, walking paths, even to the walls of high rises around it, yet draws the viewer to an absence within itself, paradoxically, to a psychic center. You can think of all the lines of exclusion or discrimination in Australia, in the world; you can think of diasporas, displacements, splintered selves; you can think of Marxist alienation, in all its dead and live variations. But something else resides in this space, alluding to all these — our broken estate, our pathos of limits, our futility in closure — yet hinting their final irrelevance. Hinting, perhaps, the final irrelevance of art itself. The Near Ones (epithet for Sufis) would understand.

*

Identity, you say? When Hossein Valamanesh insists on recognition as an Australian, though he and others may recognize his Iranian filiations, I take him at his word, as I take myself at my word when I answer to being an American. Origins prove nothing, indeed, especially for adepts at crossing boundaries. In Valamanesh, in Malouf, this is a gift of poesis, a largesse of spirit, a way of catching crosswinds of planetary change. It sometimes seems I went all the way to Australia to fill my lungs.

WORKS CITED


Ihab Hassan


