

POET TO POET: LANGUAGES OF THE HOLY CITY ISRAEL & SCOTLAND, 2007



(left - right) Yael Globerman, Polly Clark, Rody Gorman, Antony Dunn, Ayman Agbaria, Nidaa Khouri, Amir Or and (front) WN Herbert holding Lucy Forrester

Saturday 28 April

Early evening, and three poets have been wandering around Heathrow Terminal 4 for some time, unaware that they're all in the same room. I'm the last to arrive, soon running into WN (Bill) Herbert, Polly Clark and her husband, our tour administrator Julian Forrester. This marks the reunion of a group that undertook a similar project in China in 2005. Rody Gorman is the new boy, but we try to be nice to him nonetheless. Flight leaves at 10.30pm, and no one sleeps properly. Except Polly and Julian's six-month-old daughter, Lucy.

Sunday 29 April

We arrive in Tel Aviv at 5.30am, and our first sight outside the airport is a colonnade of palm trees stretching away into the distance. Bill and I decide the airport must be right by the beach. We are about 25 miles wrong, as the improbably slow drive to Tel Aviv itself proves. The taxi drops us at the Hotel Cinema on Zamenhoff Street, a gorgeous Bauhaus - yes - cinema, decorated here and there with some extraordinary projectors and other mechanical paraphernalia and antique film posters. We decide against the sensible option of a quick sleep and head for the beach.

Everywhere we look the streets are decorated with Israeli flags - some of them fantastically large, hanging down the height of four or five storeys, some of them in streams of bunting. It suddenly dawns on us that this being 2007 means that we're here as Israel turns 60.

Monday 30 April

We leave Tel Aviv in a minibus and head for Jerusalem, taking a sort of sideways route that takes longer than a quick zip down the motorway, but which takes us through some real desert, among bedouin camps and real live camels, and then very close to Ramallah, a Palestinian city in the West Bank. This is the moment we get our first glimpse of the notorious Israeli security wall, or the West Bank Barrier, draped with flags and dotted with watchtowers.

We stop for a quick peep through the gates of the Knesset, then head for the hotel. We're staying at the YMCA, apparently, which has given us all visions of bunks in dormitories, and of having to do a bit of sweeping before we're allowed to go out in the mornings. But Jerusalem's Three Arches Hotel YMCA on King David Street is like no other YMCA on earth. Doubling up as a multi-faith centre, it's a perfect base for this kind of project, being one of a very small number of sites in Jerusalem which is recognised as an acceptable place for members of 'opposing' groups to meet peacefully and to work together. It seems to be quite a centre for literary activity and dialogue, and it feels very exciting to be here. It's also one of the most beautiful hotels these poets have ever seen, designed by the architect of the Empire State Building and dominated by a tower that's visible from almost everywhere in Jerusalem.

There we meet our guide, 22-year-old Noa, her younger brother Boaz and their father,

Gabriel Levin. Gabriel's an Israeli poet who's published two collection of his own poems in the UK, *Sleepers of Beulah* (Sinclair Stevenson) and *Ostraca* (Anvil), and has a third on the way called *The Maltese Dreambook*. He's also one of the founding members of Ibis Editions, a small press and non-profit organisation in Jerusalem dedicated to the publication of Levant-related books of poetry and belletristic prose. The press publishes translations from Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, French and other languages of the region - exactly the kind of cross-pollination that Poet to Poet seeks to create.



Boaz, Noa, Gabriel & Rody in the Old City of Jerusalem

Noa, Boaz and Gabriel lead us through the garden containing King Herod's tomb, and up the hill to the Jaffa Gate, one of the great entrances to the Old City of Jerusalem. Walled and divided into four parts - the Christian Quarter, the Jewish Quarter, the Armenian Quarter and the Muslim Quarter - it exists in a state of surprising, highly-strung equilibrium. We learn that the tension is particularly apparent between the Jewish and Muslim communities, given that their respective holiest and third-holiest sites occupy precisely the same square feet of ground on the great platform built by King Herod, known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to the Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary.

We're led through crowds of tourists and impossibly young-looking soldiers with big guns towards the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Boaz is coming up to the age at which he needs to work out what to do about Israel's conscription to National Service. He's about to have his first interview with the army, in which he'll be told what to expect from the army, and in which the army, no doubt, will assess whether or not Boaz is for them. It's likely that they'll think so - a huge proportion of the country's young people end up in the army for three years in their late teens. Only the *haredim*, or ultra-Orthodox Jews, are exempt. There's no recognised Conscientious Objector status - the word is that trying to claim it lands you in military prison - so those unwilling to serve have to prove themselves unfit for service. Demotivation works as a get-out clause, apparently.

The courtyard outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is packed with soldiers, all very young - and many of them girls - standing around laughing and smoking. Some of them are holding four or five guns at once to give their colleagues a break. The Church itself is a Piranesian labyrinth of high vaulted ceilings, tiny ornate chapels, staircase after staircase downwards and catacombs carved out of the rock, punctuated here and there with shafts of dusty light coming in from cruciform windows. We're shown the alleged (hotly debated, archaeologically) sites of the scourging, crucifixion and burial of Christ. There's a pretty high level of kitsch tourism about it, despite the very real nature of many people's pilgrimages to this place, but one of the most striking - and inexplicably moving - sights is the gathering of women around the slab on which Christ was supposedly laid after his removal from the cross, the Stone of Unction. It's set into the floor under a suspended row of lamps, and a dozen or so women are gathered around it, on their knees, furiously pouring perfumed oils onto it and polishing with cloths at the surface of the stone. The smell of incense from various parts of the building mixes with these chemically floral and fruity scents into a completely overpowering cocktail. And this anointing, apparently, goes on all day, every day, year after year.

One of the reasons I was picked by Polly for this project is the fact that I'm a Christian - and because my faith does inform my poetry to a more or less conspicuous degree. I'd not been sure what to expect of my own reactions when face to face with these sites of pilgrimage,

and the atmosphere isn't really conducive to any quiet contemplation - there's a constant racket and inescapable crowd-surge, in fact - but I was surprised that my first personal reaction was one of disappointment. It's all amazing to look at, to touch and to smell, and there's a souvenir-type wow-factor about walking in the very footsteps of Christ, but the true spiritual heart of it feels curiously inaccessible. No hint of the 'Jerusalem Fever' that overwhelms a number of pilgrims, then...

Another strange sight: the rooftop house in the Christian Quarter, complete with brightly-coloured slide and swings, surrounded and roofed by barbed wire and draped with Star of David flags, and the father of the family leaning against the wire and watching us and the other tourists taking photographs of his barricaded home.

We've been invited to dinner at the house of the Palestinian writer Mahmoud Shukair, a fascinating man born in 1941, a former member of the Palestinian National Council, who's been imprisoned twice for his political remarks, and who was deported to Lebanon in 1975. Eighteen years later he returned to Jerusalem - one of 30 or so prominent Palestinians to be conspicuously invited home by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.



Bill, Mahmoud Shukair, Polly, Antony & Rody

The talk is of peace. Mahmoud's house gives him a tremendous view of several miles of the Wall that separates him from many members of his extended family. He's hopeful for the future, and his vision is infectious - a little Israeli moderation here, a little Palestinian moderation there, and the public hunger for change will do the rest. He's also apparently sanguine about the self-censorship required of Palestinian writers. When asked if he's angry about it, though, the answer's a simple 'yes'.

Mahmoud is famous throughout the Arabic reading world as the founder and leading light of the Short Short Story genre. Rody, before we left the UK, had translated a number of Mahmoud's Short Short Stories into Gaelic, and he reads some of them to

Mahmoud, who reciprocates by reading them in the original Arabic. Then Polly reads the English translations of them that appear on Mahmoud's website. We suddenly get a real taste of what this four-languged project is going to be like when we get into the real work next week in Scotland. The evening ends with an impromptu poetry reading. I get most of the way through my poem Lisdoonvarna from memory; Polly cheats by furiously scribbling her (very short) poem Hedgehog into her notebook to make sure she doesn't go wrong in performance...

Tuesday 1 May

Noa joins us for a trip to the Dead Sea, and a curative float. Bill and I are keen to experience the famous mud, and in moments we're like a scene from *Apocalypse Now*. Then Bill ruins it all by getting some of the Dead Sea in his eyes, and staggering about, temporarily blinded, begging for someone to fetch him a towel. Rody, quite sensibly, has stayed on the shore and is writing poems in safety.

Once Bill's recovered, we make a last-minute decision to visit the Qumran National Park, just west of the Kaliah-Sedom road



Bill & Antony in the Dead Sea

on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea. We understand that we can find some of the Dead Sea Scrolls there. We're wrong, as we discover soon after we've paid the admission fee. It's worth the visit, though. Qumran is famous for being the base of a break-away ascetic Jewish sect, the Essenes. It was the Essenes that wrote and stored the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered two thousand years later in 1947 by Bedouin shepherds. We scoot round the excavated series of ritual baths and reservoirs (the Essenes were rather keen on ritual bathing, it seems) and then stare out at the mountains for a while. They're riddled with caves, and though we don't know exactly where the scrolls were found, it's good to imagine that we can see the very sight. It's also good to be out in proper desert, where the only sound is the crunching of dusty stones underfoot.



Julian Forrester & Bill, Via Dolorosa

The afternoon's spent back in the Old City, with Noa as our guide. She takes us on an incredibly winding search for a felafel restaurant which, she claims, sells the best felafel in Jerusalem. After an hour or so's hunting we find it and pack ourselves round a small table, very excited. Felafel's off the menu. But it's brilliant anyway, notwithstanding the Malty Beer, which is a kind of caramel pop, and is foul.

At the end of the afternoon, two of Noa's friends join us for a beer and a convivial nargila of apple tobacco. They're both students, currently on strike along with the rest of Israel's student population which is protesting at the government's spending on arms and the military at the expense, as they see it, of the education system, and at the lack of student representation on the government's education advisory committee. They've been out for two weeks, and the Universities are beginning to threaten them with the refusal to give passing grades to striking students. Noa's friends are surprisingly relaxed about the threat of failing a year, and determined to stick with the strike for as long as it takes.

Wednesday 2 May

Bill, Rody and I head out early to visit the Western Wall, and embark on a guideless quest to get inside the Temple Mount compound containing the El-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock - attempts which were thwarted at gunpoint on several occasions yesterday. Bill and I lose Rody somewhere in the maze of tiny streets, but finally make it through a wooden walkway to the Mougrabi, or Moors' Gate, above the very contentious Jewish excavation at the foot of the Western Wall. The compound is breathtaking, with the sun glaring off the Dome of the Rock and its green, blue and yellow mosaic work making an iridescent turquoise, and the view out over the Golden Gate across the Kidron Valley encompassing the tomb-littered Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, and a fairy-tale gold-minaretted Church of Saint Mary Magdalene. It's incredibly hot, and we sit and stare for a good while. Bill and I head off along the Via Dolorosa, get spectacularly stiffed buying some souvenirs, take in some of the Stations of the Cross in the wrong order, buy the perfect falafel at last, then leave the Old City through the Lion's Gate and climb down the valley and up the other side onto the Mount of Olives. Realising we're going to be late for our lunch guests, we speed back down the valley and around the city walls, clockwise past the Dung Gate and the Zion Gate, suddenly stopped in our tracks by the view out towards Bethlehem, carved up by mile after mile of Wall, which snakes arbitrarily up and down hillsides, through and across street after street. A muezzin call starts up from the al-Aqsa mosque, almost immediately joined by another from across the Kidron Valley, then there are six or seven simultaneously, from all corners, making a sound that echoes and echoes until the air's solid with it.

Lunch with Peter Cole and Adina Hoffman, the other founder members of Ibis Editions.

In the afternoon we travel back to Tel Aviv's Hotel Cinema, where we meet up with Amir Or, Ayman Agbaria, Nidaa Khoury and Yael Globerman - the poets who will be coming back to

Scotland with us. After some drinks on the roof terrace, and dinner, Amir leaves to attend his own book launch. Yael's also winding up to the publication of her own new collection, *Same River Twice*, tomorrow. This is the heart of the Poet to Poet project, of course - a gathering of poets who, between them, work in English, Scots, Gaelic, Arabic and Hebrew.

Thursday 3 May

It seems a bit strange to say we have a day off, when all our other days here have been so light, obligation-wise, but here it is anyway. We actually start with a meeting... Julia Smith, Assistant Director of the British Council in Tel Aviv, takes us for coffee, then Bill leads us on a quick Bauhaus-tour of the neighbourhood as we walk to the beach for lunch.



Bill, Rody & Antony caught up in protest in Rabin Square
photo quite possibly stolen from BBC website

We've spent the best part of this week trying to engage with the historical tensions and conflicts that have shaped this country, so it's good to end the week engaged in the most contemporary of political moments. Rabin Square in Tel Aviv is tonight the site of a protest which attracts around 100,000 people calling for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to quit over his handling of last year's Lebanon war. It's just three days since an official interim report criticised Olmert's role in launching and running the war. Bill, Rody and I push to the front,

under the stage where speakers and musicians are doing their bit, and spend half an hour right in the thick of it. Politicians have been banned from appearing, we discover, but are welcome to be in the crowd. My borrowed-from-the-BBC MP3 recorder chooses this historic moment to give up the ghost, of course...

Friday 4 May

We're going to fly out of Tel Aviv at 8.05am, meaning a 3.30am alarm call. Nice. Bill's pulled out of the group at the moment of our first security check and questioned on his own for a little while. In the light of Polly's horror-story about having all her electronic equipment dismantled by airport security last time she was leaving Tel Aviv, the fact that this is the worst experience we have in the airport is a great relief.

Monday 7 May

Packing for the trip to Scotland, I'm listening to stories on the radio news about increasing violence in Gaza - the city where the BBC journalist Alan Johnston was kidnapped eight weeks ago. Travelling by train up to Edinburgh, then across to Glasgow, I read David Hare's *Via Dolorosa*, his one-man play based on his experience of his visit to Israel in his fiftieth year, in 1997 - also the 50th birthday of the state of Israel. I'm particularly struck by Hare's account of a meeting with Palestinian historian Albert Aghazarin, who, when asked if Israel is divided, replies, "Deeply, deeply divided. There are three Israels now. The hedonistic Israel of Tel Aviv. The austere Israel of Jerusalem. And the mad Israel of Hebron which wants only vengeance and blood."

The Brits arrive at Cove Park, on Loch Long, late afternoon. The Israelis arrived yesterday and have gone off to do some shopping. By the time we're settled into our Pods and Cubes they're back, and we meet to plan the week. We're paired up for tomorrow morning, and I've drawn Nidaa Khoury. We talk about poems we might exchange, and I pick out some shorter ones.



Nidaa Khoury, Cove Park

Tuesday 8 May

My real translation work starts with Nidaa. She writes in Arabic, and comes from a village called Fassouta, three miles south of the Lebanese border, whose three thousand residents are all Melkite Christian Arabs. Early in the morning I research her work on the internet, and it's full of sadness and anger. She's a campaigner for the recognition of the Arab villages which are simply not recognised by the Israeli government, and don't appear on any official maps. There's an extraordinary litany of the people she's lost on her website which, tellingly, is labelled as her CV. I'm suddenly in a panic that the short poems I've earmarked for her are

simply too slight to waste her time with. I wasn't expecting this kind of challenge from the project. It's a strange new light in which to look at my own work. In the end I take her a poem called Bread Line, which tells the story of Sarajevo Symphony cellist Vedran Smajlovic who played Albinoni's Adagio for victims of the Serb siege of the city in 1992, in full view of snipers and at serious risk of death. It's a poem that goes on to explore the nature of courage in the face of attack - particularly the courage to defend a faith in the face of persecution. It's not an easy poem, and Nidaa's English is more limited than that of the other Israeli poets, but something fantastic happens. There's a real meeting of preoccupations and concerns here, and Nidaa seems energized by the task. The phrase, "Spare us this day our daily dead" appears in Bread Line, and Nidaa says that the "daily dead" also appear in the first poem she's going to give me. The typescript of my poem is slowly covered with pencilled Arabic notes. It takes us over three hours to talk through its two pages, and we've run out of time before we've even seen any of Nidaa's own poems.

I head off for lunch wondering how we'll ever find time this week to achieve all that we want to do. The expectation is that we'll each have completed one translation and one new poem by the time we go home, but I think we're all hoping to achieve rather more than that.

I spend the afternoon with our other Arabic-speaking poet, Ayman Agbaria. He breezes through a couple of my poems (Mosquitoes and Nematode Worms), then talks me through a couple of his, I Will Apologize To My Ghosts and Clothes Pegs. After an hour or so I've got a pile of notes and some ideas about how to get going, and by the end of the evening I'm somewhere close to a first draft.



Amir Or, Yael Globerman & Ayman Agbari, Cove Park

Wednesday 9 May

Up early, and working in the centre, I surprise myself by getting a new poem written. Polly's tale about the dismantling of her lap-top has been fermenting over the last ten days, and suddenly it's turned into something. It goes through quite a number of titles, and it suffers a lot of tinkering over the course of the day, but it gets done.

GIRL WITH GUN, BEN GURION AIRPORT

She pulls you from the check-in queue
and has you unpack everything,
your souvenirs and smalls, and opens up
your lap-top, key by key, to make
a scrabble for the x-ray screen.
You're clean.
But all the oleander miles from Tel Aviv,
Ramallah and Jerusalem,
in the back seat of the taxi
you've been swallowing your words
in tiny, tidy packages.
Sit tight.
The taxiing is done.
Ignore the balling of your gut.
This must not go off sooner than its time.

It'll no doubt get revised again in time, but it's a relief to have met one of this week's two targets by the time Nidaa and I reconvene to look at some of her poems, *The Time Is Over*, *In The Name of Love* and *The Temple of the Regime*. They have a high rhetorical style, which is going to be a challenge to translate without sounding portentous or pretentious. And, in the case of the very short *In The Name of Love*, when Nidaa translates a line out-loud as we're talking through it, she sometimes hits on what sounds like a perfect idea. And then what? Do I use her perfectly-formed, off-the-cuff translation, or cast about for something else, just for the sake of making it entirely my own?

In the afternoon, a quick session with Amir Or, one of Hebrew poetry's leading lights. He gives me the middle poem from a sequence of three (Polly's been given the other two) which is a comic tale of a failed romance. In Hebrew, it rhymes and has a strict rhythm of iambic pentameters. Amir jokes that I have to replicate both...

In return, he gets two poems from my second book, *Flying Fish*. Amir's English is very good indeed, so it's only strange little details that trouble him - 'cuttlefish', say, or 'budgerigars' - and the strange little contractions that appear here and there - 'fox-fluttered' wings and 'uprushing rungs' of a ladder. *Wrestling With Angels* alludes to the biblical story of Jacob, and Amir's pleased by how at-home my poem sounds when translated into Hebrew.



Yael Globerman

Thursday 10 May

I spend the morning working with Yael. She takes three poems from the manuscript of my third book, *Bugs* (*Lepidopterist*, *Peace on Earth* and *Bugged*), and we work through them carefully. She writes them out in biro, in Hebrew, on yellow paper, pencilling various synonyms and alternatives into the margins and marking up one to two words that she'll need to check later. It's incredibly exciting to watch my own poems being transformed into another language before my eyes, and strangely exposing, too. Yael's a rigorous inquisitor, and every detail - every allusion - of the poems gets turned over and dissected before she'll write

anything down.

In return, Yael gives me a couple of poems from a long sequence called *The Couple*. Since I can't be the rigorous inquisitor with the Hebrew itself, we have a ranging discussion about the poems' other characteristics. Yael explains them well, but seems to find the process frustrating at first. We have a breakthrough when we get into a conversation about how excruciating it can be to translate your own poems, spinning out all the carefully constructed, compact lines into unwieldy, gangling, inadequate explanations of what they mean, and how they came about and how jolly clever they are. Something about sharing this sensation makes a real difference, and make a start on a whole new clutch of pieces from *The Couple*. It's a very measured, moving piece of writing, and it's clear that translating it is going to be fantastically hard work. It's a long session, and hard work, but as Yael heads back to her pod and I tidy up the table, I'm struck by just how much fun I've been having for the last three hours.



Bill, Rody, Laura, Amir

A couple more hours' work on my own in the afternoon, then there's an impromptu early-evening symposium on the balcony of my Cube; Amir, Rody, Bill and me, with novelist Laura Hird (who lives in the Cube next door) drinking cheap red wine in glorious sunshine, looking out over the duck-pond and Loch Long.

Friday 11 May

Very, very early morning, I finish my translation of Amir's poem. It follows the rhyme pattern and the rhythm of the original Hebrew, and I'm suitably smug. Early morning, and we stage a reading of translations for the staff of Cove Park.

Despite having had such a short time to get started on this work, we've got more translations done than we can reasonably ask an audience to sit through. One translation each, then, for the audience, and after they've gone we sit in a circle together and read out some of the rest. There are some brilliant moments - Bill discovers that Amir's translation precisely replicates the rhythms of the original English in Hebrew, and looks as delighted as a human can; we discover that we do have some translations of Nidaa's poems after all. And there are some disappointments - none of us has yet managed to complete a translation into English of Yael's poems. And there are some exciting developments which we hadn't planning - Ayman and Amir are planning to translate each other's work from Hebrew to Arabic and vice versa, and Rody's translating some of our English poetry into Gaelic.

The time catches up with us too soon, and the Israeli poets are rapidly bundled into cars and driven away towards Edinburgh, where they'll be shown around by representatives of the British Council in Scotland. Bill, Rody, Polly and I go our ways, too, but this is really only the beginning of the project. We've all this week's draft translations to finish, and we're all planning to continue to exchange work by e-mail, and there's talk of a second leg of the project, to take our work to live audiences in Israel and the UK.

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Poet to Poet: Languages of the Holy City Biographies

Ayman K. Agbaria: Palestinian-Israeli poet and playwright Ayman Agbaria was born in Umm Al-Fahm (Israel) in 1968. Agbaria is the author of the Arabic collection of poems *Scattered...Please Do Not Gather Me*, published in Shfaamre (Israel) in 1997. He also wrote *The Bus* (drama, 2003) and his last play, *The White of the Eye* (2004), was produced by Almedan Theatre in Haifa in 2005. His poetry has been translated into Hebrew, and has appeared in several prestigious literary periodicals. Agbaria completed his PhD in Educational Theory and Policy and International and Comparative Education at Penn State University. He has two graduate degrees, one in Criminology, from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the other in International Development and Social Change from Clark University. He has worked for the Israeli Association for Community Centers and the Shatil organization of the New Israel Fund. He also founded and chaired the Informal Education Program for Arab students at Beit Berl College. His most recent position was with the *Comparative Education Review*, working as a co-managing editor. Currently, Agbaria is a postdoctoral fellow at Haifa University.

Polly Clark was born in Toronto in 1968 and brought up in Lancashire, Cumbria and the Borders of Scotland. She has pursued a number of careers including zookeeping at Edinburgh Zoo, teaching English in Hungary and ELT publishing at Oxford University Press. In 1997 she received an Eric Gregory Award for her poetry and her first collection, *Kiss* (Bloodaxe, 2000), was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Her second, *Take Me With You* (Bloodaxe, 2005) was a PBS Choice and was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize 2006. A collection of her short stories was recently published in the anthology *Ellipsis 2* (Comma Press, 2006). From 2000 to 2004 Polly was Poet in Residence for the *Southern Daily Echo* in Southampton, a unique collaboration between a newspaper and a writer which was short-listed in the Arts and Business awards 2002. Polly's interest in international literature has led her to organise translation exchanges between the UK and other countries, and in 2004 she co-ordinated and chaired Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Ford's tour of provincial theatres in south east England. In 2006 Polly Clark received a Scottish Arts Council Writer's Bursary. She lives on the west coast of Scotland.

Antony Dunn was born in London in 1973. He won the Newdigate Prize in 1995 and a Society of Authors' Eric Gregory Award in 2000. He has published two collections of poems, *Pilots and Navigators* (Oxford Poets 1998) and *Flying Fish* (Carcanet OxfordPoets 2002). A third, *Bugs*, is forthcoming. He has translated poetry from Hungarian, Dutch and Chinese. He has written three plays for young people, *Timewarp 2000* (York Barbican Centre), *Shepherds' Delight* and *Goose Chase* (both for Riding Lights Theatre Company). He lives in York, where he works as Head of Communications for York Theatre Royal, and as a tutor for The Poetry School.

Yael Globerman was born in Tel Aviv, Israel to Holocaust survivor parents that came to Israel after world war two from Poland. She is the author of the novel *Shaking the Tree* (1996) and numerous short stories. Her debut book of poems, *Alibi*, was published by Helicon Press in 2000 to great acclaim and received the ACUM Award for Poetry and the PAIS Award. Her new poetry book, *Same River Twice*, is forthcoming in May (Helicon Press). She translates a wide range of poetry from the English, and is currently working on a collection of poems by Ann Sexton to be followed by a selection from the poetry of W.H. Auden. Her translation of the poetry of Stephen Spender is due to be published in April 2007 (Keshev Press). Yael studied film at Tel Aviv University and has co-written a number of scripts and a play. She lives in Tel Aviv, teaches creative writing in Oranim College and works for Babel Publishing Inc. as a scout for books published abroad.

Rody Gorman was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1960 and now lives in the Isle of Skye, Scotland. He has published the poetry collections *Fax and Other Poems* (Polygon, Edinburgh, 1996); *Cùis-Ghaoil* (diehard, Edinburgh, 1999); *Bealach Garbh* (Coiscéim, Dublin, 1999); *Air a' Charbad fo Thalamh/On the Underground* (Polygon, 2000); *Naomhóga na Laoi* (Coiscéim, 2003); *Tóithin ag Tláithinteacht* (Lapwing, 2004); *An Duilleog agus an Crotal* (Coiscéim, 2004); *Flora from Lusitania* (Lapwing, 2005) and *Zonda? Khamsin? Sharaav? Camanchaca?* (Leabhraichean Beaga, Inverness, 2006) in English, Irish and Scottish Gaelic. His selected poems in Irish and Scottish Gaelic, *Chernilo*, were published by Coiscéim in 2006. He has worked as writing fellow at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye, An Lanntair in Lewis and at University College Cork and is editor and co-publisher of the annual Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry anthology *An Guth*. Among his Gaelic translations are works by Cavafy, Yeats, Prévert, Neruda, Kavanagh, Holan, Milosz, Rósewicz, Larkin, Popa, Holub, Aspenstrom, Snyder, Longley and Armitage. His English translations include poems by Donald MacAulay, Sorley MacLean and Iain Crichton Smith. He has received bursaries from the Scottish Arts Council and An Chomhairle Ealaíon as well as from HI-Arts, the Royal Literary Fund and the Society of Authors. He has worked as Convenor of the

Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee of Scottish PEN and as Specialist Adviser for the Scottish Arts Council, and as songwriter, lecturer, creative writing tutor and adjudicator of literary competitions. His poem *Callimachus ri Port* won first prize in the Gaelic section of the Strokestown International Poetry Festival 2006. He is currently working with Roddy Woomble and other musicians and singers on a project of Gaelic versions of songs by Bob Dylan.

W.N. Herbert was born in Dundee in 1961, and educated there and at Brasenose College, Oxford, where he published his Ph.D. thesis on the Scots poet Hugh MacDiarmid (*To Circumjack MacDiarmid*, OUP, 1992). He has published seven volumes of poetry and four pamphlets, and he is widely anthologised. His last five collections, all with the northern publisher Bloodaxe, have won numerous accolades. *Forked Tongue* (1994) was selected for the New Generation promotion, was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and was shortlisted for the T.S.Eliot and Saltire prizes. *Cabaret McGonagall* (1996) won a Northern Arts Award and was shortlisted for the Forward and McVities prizes; and *The Laurelude* (1998), written whilst he was the Wordsworth Fellow at Grasmere, was a PBS Recommendation. All three books won Scottish Arts Council book awards. *The Big Bumper Book of Troy* (2002) was longlisted for Scottish Book of the Year and shortlisted for the Saltire Prize. His most recent Bloodaxe collection, *Bad Shaman Blues* (2006), was a PBS Recommendation, and was shortlisted for the Saltire Award and the T.S.Eliot Prize. He lives in an old lighthouse in North Shields with his wife, the novelist Debbie Taylor, and his daughter Izzie.

Nidaa Khoury was born in the Galilee village of Fasuta. She is the author of seven poetry collections published in Arabic in Israel, Lebanon and Egypt, including *I Announce My Silence To You* (1987), *Rings of Salt* (1998) and *The Most Beautiful Goddess is Crying* (2000). Her daring feminist voice and existential poetry place her in an outstanding position in Arabic poetics. She has been translated into many languages and her book *The Burning Voice* (2005) is translated into Hebrew and English. Khoury studied Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the University of Haifa and Cultural and Behavioural Science at the University of Latvia. Her book *Post Monotheism* is published this year. Khoury served as Women's leadership co-ordinator and trainer, and as an instructor of teachers for the Ministry of Education, Israel. She is currently the project co-ordinator of the Arab follow up committee and teaches at the Ben Gurion University.

Amir Or, born in 1956, is the author of eight volumes of poetry. His latest book in Hebrew, *The Song of Tahira* is a fictional epic in metered prose. His forthcoming book *The Museum of Time* was written in both Hebrew and English and is about to be published in Israel and the UK. Or's poems have been published in more than 30 languages, including four books in English translation: *Miracle* (Poetry Ireland, Dublin 1998), *Language Says* (Poetry Miscellaneous, US, 2001), *Poem* (Dedalus 2004) and *Day* (Dedalus 2006). Other books of his in translation are: *Poetry is a Criminal Girl* (Arabic, Faradis, Paris 1995) and *Drowning, He Breathes Living Water* (Macedonian, The Pleiades Series of Struga Poetry Festival, 2000). For his poetry he has been awarded the Prime Minister's Prize, the Bernstein Prize, the Bat-Yam Prize, the Fulbright Award, and the Harshon Prize; as well as Fellowships at the University of Iowa, the Jewish-Hebrew Centre of the University of Oxford, Hawthornden Castle Scotland and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Achill Island, among others. Amir Or is also a teacher, translator, and editor. Or studied philosophy and Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he later lectured on Ancient Greek Religion. In 1990 he founded Helicon, the Society for the Advancement of Poetry, and in 1993 he set up the Arabic-Hebrew Helicon Poetry School. Or has published several books of translations into Hebrew, including *The Gospel of Thomas* (1992), *Limb-Loosening Desire - An Anthology of Erotic Greek Poetry* (1993), *Stories From The Mahabharata* (1998) and *To a Woman by Shuntaro Tanikawa* (2000, with Akiko Takahashi). For his translations of poetry from Ancient Greek he received the Honorary Prize of the Israeli Minister of Culture. Since its foundation Or has been Editor-in-Chief of Helicon. He initiated and developed its journal, the *Helicon Anthologies*; and its series of poetry books, both of which he edits. He has also edited many anthologies of Hebrew verse in European languages. He has founded and directed the Sha'ar International Poetry Festival, an annual week-long programme of events. Or is a founding member of the European Network of Creative Writing Programs, and serves as the National Coordinator of the U.N.-sponsored Poets for Peace.