

Performance Poetry with Reference to Agnes Meadows and her "Palestinian Poems"

by Said I. Abdelwahed

Professor of English Faculty of Arts, Al-Azhar University of Gaza

In our way, we're the recorders of history right now: AIDS, racism, sexism, homophobia.

Kevin Powell -- Don't Feel No Way.

"I say what I think ... I write what I see."

Agnes Meadows -- "First Interview."

This paper is an introduction to Performance Poetry, the most recent poetic phenomenon in USA, UK, Australia and perhaps other parts of the West. It offers a discussion of the origin, ideas, form, content and music of Performance Poetry, with reference to Agnes Meadows as an English woman representative of this art form. Meadows connected herself in a special love and relationship with Palestine and its people. She enhanced this relationship with writing many Palestinian Poems (N.B. Poems concerned are annexed to this paper).

The modern poetry that emerged in the final decades of the 20th century has taken a variety of names such as "Poetry Out Loud," "New Poetry," "Rap Poetry," "Hip Hop," "Slam Poetry" and finally "Performance Poetry." On modern poetry, in his book *The New Poets' Society*, Brad Gooch writes:

It happened in the '50s and the '60s, when the Beats showed up on the glossy page of *Time and Life*, and it's happening again now. Something like Beat poetry is, indeed, back. Rap and hip-hop are bonding with poetry as jazz did before them. Coffee-houses in which poets perform on postage stamp-size stages under a single spotlight have opened in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Nashville. Well-worked poems have been dismissed in favor of quick, spontaneous combustion. A slew of new, often multicultural, poetry magazines have emerged: *EyeBall* (St. Louis), *Mixed Media* (West Orange, NJ), *Poetry Plus* (Philadelphia), *Young Voice* (Chicago). Most significant, poetry and politics are once again angrily arm in arm.¹

Performance Poetry takes the shape of a part of the Western culture in late 20th and early 21st centuries. In early 1950s Raymond Williams believed that the questions of culture are directly raised by the great historical changes in industry, democracy and class.² Then in mid-1970s, Stuart Hall saw the term culture as distinct patterns of life developed by social groups to give expressive form to their social and material experience.³ Within each culture there are subcultures with different social and material understanding.⁴

In the light of those visions of culture and subculture, I tend to view Performance Poetry as a subculture. In an established manner, traditional poetry is known for its inherited and regular forms, rhymes, rhythms, contexts and language, whereas Performance Poetry takes us to other atmospheres trying to find expression in new forms, incorporating a mixture of many sub-cultural elements, for example, rap and hip-hop.⁵

Performance Poetry could be about anything and Performance Poets are conscious of what they are saying in style and in what ways they are saying it. The poet decides the words in a situation for her/his poem; the whole point is that there are no rules for Performance Poetry, and thus the arena shows only individual performances and talents. Some Performance Poetry is only a style and no substance, which can be only fun.

Sometimes, Performance Poetry is multi-cultured and with no restraints. This could include a wide variety of themes and subject matters: personal experiences, sexuality, race, feminism, gender, ethnic consciousness, cultural identity, images of travel and cross borders, grand universal human subjects, and sometimes the poem says the unsayable. Unlike the conventional poem, Performance Poem enjoys new style, content and language. It pays attention to feelings and meanings rather than shapes, forms and structure; it uses everyday language rather than velvet, pompous and eloquent language. The poem comes out in simple and easy words without barriers or old fashioned and obsolete words.

For a better understanding of Performance Poetry, I would like to think of the difference between reading a poem and performing a poem. Reading a poem means that I stand or sit to read out a poem for audience but this situation could make the words of the poem flat, and thus, it turns the poem into a bad one. While performing a poem means that I read the poem with dramatic and theatrical way. In other words, all inner feelings and bodily gestures of the poet become part of the poem in performance. This means that there is something in the poet that she/he wants to bring it out using words in a poem, thus the poet becomes demonstrative, expressive and impressive.

The poem comes out from inside the poet and thus she/he gets involved in it to the extent that sometimes the poet finds herself /himself in performance, either walking, or jumping, or dancing, to make the poem clear and understandable. By this new style, the poet puts her/his thoughts and feelings into a poem, But when style often wins over substance with some Performance Poets, the outcome is a bad poem. Meantime, when the poet marries between expressive words and clever performance, the outcome will be a tremendously good poem. Regardless of rhyme, rhythm and other poetic devices, Performance Poets believe that the good poem is the poem that moves you whereas the bad poem is the poem that does not move you. In the end, the audience and how they react to any poem, represent the best judges of that poem.

While Wordsworth defines poetry as "a spontaneous overflow of imagination," Performance Poets see poetry as spontaneous but not imaginative. Rather, it is all about the reality of life depending on the principle of non-locality and life experience. Ideas could come to the poet on seeing something suddenly happening in the street. It is no matter whether the poem is with rhyme or with no rhyme, and whether it is with rhythm or with no rhythm. For example, some of Agnes Mead-ows poems do rhyme and some do not, and also some are with rhythm and some others are not. In other words, Performance Poetry is what it is; it is what is accessible to the listener. Hence comes the question: what differentiates between Performance Poetry and prose? Performance Poets argue that writing techniques and performing the poems make differences.

The first appearance of Performance Poetry as an art form was made in Chicago in 1984, by the construction worker and poet Marc Smith. He started the idea and made

several appearances for performing poetry at Chicago Jazz Club and the Get Me High Lounge. Later, Smith developed himself and his ideas by suggesting hosting weekly poetry competitions to entertain the Sunday regulars at the Green Mill Lounge. There, stand up poets are rated and judged by audience judges from that Chicago bar. In the beginning, poets were not allowed to use special costumes, props or any music.

It was not a long time when Green Mill Lounge became a center stage for Performance Poets and their poetry began to have other centers and activities in various places in Chicago and elsewhere. In 1985 Performance Poetry became recognized and moved to large cities like New York, Los Angeles, Austin, London, Sydney. These cities have many active and creative groups of Performance Poets working hard to transform the Western understanding of poetry. Also, they challenge people's complacent views of the world they live in. Among the various activities of Performance Poets is a small magazine entitled *The Hollywood Review*, published in Los Angeles. Performance Poetry has been spreading very fast and gaining much supporters and many admirers.

Performance Poetry could be viewed as "a representation of a 'solution' to a specific set of circumstances, to particular problems and contradictions,"⁶ however it is still true that "its material is subject to historical change."⁷ On this cultural phenomenon, Agnes Meadows writes: "Performance Poetry sets out to rock people in their seats, to say 'Wake up and smell the coffee guys ... what you see is not what you get.'"⁸ Performance Poetry is a "revolution" against the established rules of poetry writing and reading, and a pathway to the millennium with clear vision and a detour from situations that tend to propagate stereotypes, traditional images and established frames. Performance Poets work towards giving the viewer the spirit, courage, and concern to encourage others in their struggle for basic human rights and freedom. In this context, Performance Poem came to be a quick poem against the well-worked poem. It is performed in coffee-houses, INTERNET cafés, and bars. In simple words, Performance Poetry found a niche on the streets rather than on the page.

To encourage Performance Poetry as a new type or art form, competitions are held in different places in what Performance Poets call Poetry Slams, and prizes are offered for the winners. The Americans are more serious about Performance Poetry than any other nation, thus their prizes for the winners are much more generous than the prizes awarded to the winners in UK and Australia Slams. Also, Poetry Slam started as a means to enhance public interest in poetry reading and to discover talented people and new poets. There, poetry readings are staged in public places for everyone to hear and see. Performance Poets from everywhere come to compete in the Slams. Usually, the organizers of the Slam choose, at random, five of the audience to be judges.

I believe that choosing the panel of judges is basically identical to choosing the jury members in the English court system. Performance Poets read their own constructed poems where each poet is allowed three minutes with ten seconds grace period to read her/his poem or she/he loses points of the final score which is normally out of ten. For objectivity, the highest score and the lowest score are always omitted from the final judgment. Of course, it is normal that in such situations you find a great number of horrendously bad poets either because of their discouraging performances or because of their distasteful words or because of both. On the other hand, you see two or three tremendously good poets. Poetry Slams have become the right place for Performance Poets to discover new talents and gifted people.

The idea began to take a national shape with Slam Poetry readings and competitions moving from Chicago to major cities in USA. National Poetry Slam became a real event in August 9, 1997 as it was officially legalized and became a USA tax-exempt organization to encourage promoting Performance Poetry as an art. They held poetry festival in a different city each year and high prizes are awarded for the winners in the competition. The greatest Poetry Slams are held in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Austin, and also held in London and Sydney. Each time teams of four-person each competes in the Festival. In 1999, of the forty eight teams participated in Chicago Poetry Slam, eighteen teams advanced to the semi-finals on a Friday night. Then the top four teams competed on a Saturday night finals. On the other hand, there is a poetry reading competition by the individuals who perform under different criteria. In the Slam there is a major event and a number of gigs in separate places in the area.

Form and content of Performance Poetry vary depending on what the poet says in the poem. For example, the excellent Black poets whether British Blacks or African-Americans enjoy a distinctive style conducting out of Rap and Hip-Hop. Their poetry constitutes part of the new phenomenon of Performance Poetry. So much of it stems from black ghettos and slums both in USA and UK. Performance Poetry has given the Blacks a voice at least, a positive, legitimate voice which is heard by everyone, and which people can really give an account and relate to. They use their Performance Poetry as a strong tool to fight against oppression, and thus they use it extremely effectively, to express all the rage, and anger accumulated over years of racism, prejudice, bigotry and hatred. Their poetry gives expression to cross cultural situations they live; some-times it expresses nostalgic feelings and national nightmares.⁹ The equally excellent white poets are also distinctive, but in a different way. Most of Performance Poetry is about socio-political meanings and humanistic matters of life.

Overall, the major themes of Performance Poetry tend to go deep into questions related to injustice, freedom, sexism, feminism, racism, dogmatism, intolerance and domestic violence – all those universal themes where poetry really can make a difference – as well as love, tolerance, relationships, humanistic feelings and life. For example, most poetry from Black poets tends to speak about anti-Black racism, discrimination and other politics of domination, and their search for identity in USA, UK and sometimes elsewhere. Performance Poetry gave outlets to the upcoming generation towards new avenues of expression.

The importance of music to Performance Poetry depends on the individual poet. Rap and hip-hop poets tend to use the music of the drum beats as an integral part of the poetic package. Some Performance Poets do use music, but music is not vital to a fantastic performance by a terrific poet. Some of the best Performance Poets work entirely without music, and they keep good performance. Some poets do not like performance wins over substance. Agnes Meadows is one of those who do not prefer performance to master over meaning, and she prefers great poetry to a great performance where the words lacked something.

Performance Poetry has made one step forward from the poetry that appeared in the period between 1960s-1980s. Already the style of John Cooper Clarke,¹⁰ the Mersey Poets or the Liverpool Poets ¹¹ is seen as rather old hat, although lots of new poets still use that particular ranting style as their own. Performance Poetry represents a strong return to meaning against the 1970s poetry of irony and nonsense. But, it is still that unlike the poetry of 1960s-1980s, Performance Poetry is hard to analyze. Agnes Meadows writes: "The moment you start to analyze it too thoroughly it loses its passion, becomes part of the establishment, stops being rebellious and archaic, and dies."¹²

Performance Poetry attempts to solve poets problems with writing techniques and expression. It is also a break-through with all the established types of poetry to go out to new horizons for more freedom. It is to mean that nothing remains a holly to poets in the twenty-first century. With all these assumptions, it is still that the challenge is ahead for Performance Poets, and days will give a judgment and the most accurate statement on their poetry.

With this introduction about Performance Poetry, I would like to take the English woman Performance Poet Agnes Meadows as an example. She is avid believer in Performance Poetry as, in simple words, she sees that "Performance Poetry refuses to be fossilized and captured. It's a living dragonfly, not an insect in amber."¹³ It is interesting that most people are unaware that Agnes Meadows' mother tongue is not English, but German as she was born of a German mother and an English father. At first, she could not speak English at all until she was six years old, when her family moved from Germany and came to live in the East End of London. Her early years were not easy, and her early problem was that being a child speaking all German language and nothing English, and coming from Germany to live in London after World War II. Thus, in her childhood she learned about prejudice first hand, but she realized very quickly, that while she was not strong enough to tackle her bullies with her fists, she could defend herself with her expressive words. Thus, the word constitutes the beginning in her fight for human-ity including social and political concerns, in general, and for women, in particular.

Agnes Meadows wrote poetry as a child. Her earliest reading was Thomas Malory's Morte D'Arther then she started reading Elizabethan poetry – Marlowe, Donne, Shakespeare – and also the vast body of Celtic poetry and literature which most of it is unanimous. She is well read in the history and religion of Britain in the Pre-Roman era. Interestingly, as well, is that her most favorite poets are not European as she loves the poetry of Khalil Gibran, and also Rabindranath Tagore, the Persian poet Ibn er-Rumi, and just about any Celtic poet. Most recently, Agnes Meadows began to read poems by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish;¹⁴ she expresses her admiration and love to his poetry. She has written two books of poetry, entitled *You and Me* (1998), and *Quantum Love* (2000), and produced two CDs of her poetry with music, called *Agnes Meadows* (1998), and *Blues Shakin' My Heels* (2000). Then, after several visits to the West Bank and Gaza, she developed a positive relationship and love with the people, and the land. On different occasions, she composed some poems related to the Palestinian people and cause, she called *Palestinian Poems*.¹⁵ In addition to writing poetry, she has also taught creative writing, and she currently offers Poetry and Performance work-shops. Only one of her *Palestinian Poems* is published, but she has been reading and performing those poems in various liter-ary events in Palestine, UK, and elsewhere.

Agnes Meadows mentions that she has a real problem with the contemporary English poetry scene, simply because, so much of it is inaccessible to the average person, and its themes are obscure and immaterial; sometimes it is pray to funding/establishment cronyism and reverse snobbism which is the death of real creativity. This is why she is involved in and passionate about Performance Poetry – because it can be highly challenging, immediate, passionate, accessible, and all the rules are there to be broken.¹⁶ Her triumphant note is that she attempts to sound humanistic issues and also she pays attention to women's question, then she shows concern in linking between poetry and life. Throughout my reading of Agnes Meadows poems I found out that for her, love and life are intertwined. Someone has always to suffer, and love is not always pleasant. Overall, there is a deep humanistic feeling and concern in her

verse (see Palestinian Poems), and also implied in her poems is an understandable bias for the female view (see "Chain," "You and Me," "Another," "Beyond Reason," and "Run")

Agnes Meadows currently lives in London. She enjoys much experience in a variety of domains in life. For example, as a young woman she worked as a journalist, arts fund raiser and freelance consultant. Currently she writes Performance Poetry in which she attempts to explain and portray life in her own words. When she was fifteen years old she began traveling around the world visiting many countries and places and thus gaining life experience and making friends; she has made a home in places as diverse as Mexico, the Philippines and Turkey.

Agnes Meadows poetry embraces a compendium of thoughts and variety of subject-matters ranging between the physical term and symbol, to medieval dancer and humanistic issues. All those appeared in her impressive short poems which she personifies and performs when reading. The whole body of her poetry explains a consolidation of a major talent with some new things in it. Also, it is a reflection of her urban experience, the things she has seen and felt, at home and overseas. Having worked with Indian Classical Dance for many years, she has written and narrated shows for some of the UK's leading Indian Dancers, and toured with them in the UK. Her enthusiasm for her art form manifests in readings all over the UK.

Agnes Meadows enjoys her established reputation which is still growing up on the Performance Poetry scene both in London and other parts of the UK. She held the Best Performer Award in Ferrago Slam Club 17 for two years (1998 and 1999), and is currently the Champion of Farrago UK Slam.¹⁸ During 1999, she began developing a solid international reputation, performing not only in UK but also in the USA, Turkey, Spain and the areas of the Palestinian Authority (West Bank and Gaza).

Agnes Meadows has been twice a Guest Poet with the major Performance Poetry occasions of USA Austin International Poetry Festival ¹⁹ and Fringe Feast.²⁰ There, she gave poetry performance, then she took parts in workshops all over Texas, USA; she toured in Dallas, San Antonio, Conroe and Houston. This included reading in Spanish, drawing on the three years she lived in Mexico. She has also featured at some of New York City's leading Spoken Word venues, including the internationally renowned Nuyorican Poet's Café,²¹ and Steve Cannon's Tribe's Gallery.²²

In both 1999 and 2000 Agnes Meadows was invited to perform as part of the Sixth Mediterranean Poetry Festival ²³ held in Bodrum, Turkey. There, her work was filmed for Turkish television. She also gave readings in Istanbul, including some readings at the Pera Palas.²⁴ In October, 1999, Agnes Meadows was invited to perform in the Sixth Palestinian International Poetry Festival ²⁵ held in East Jerusalem, then for giving readings in the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, and in various branches of the Palestinian Writers' Union.

In May, 2000 she toured different Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza for poetry performance, and in the summer she worked with the British Council of East Jerusalem in an Arts Summer Camp ²⁶ for young Palestinians at Beit Jala near Bethlehem in the West Bank.

Agnes Meadows believes that everybody has the right to self-expression, and to find their identity via the written and spoken word. Thus, everybody can write poetry if she/he chose to do so. For her, poetry can be a universal key, allowing people to discover or rediscover themselves, their own voice, expressing the things that they feel are important, the things which touch them deeply, make them angry, joyful, or sad.

In other words, Agnes Meadows believes that poetry is an expression of the passion of life, and that life without passion is no life at all. She says that poetry to her, is: a way of expressing the inexpressible, finding a voice amongst all the shouting, communicating the whole range of life's passion and all passion of life, confronting demons (whether they're personal, political, emotional, spiritual) and adding confrontation to the forefront of your vocabulary. It's a way of saying 'Did you see that? Wasn't that the most wonderful, joyful thing ever!' 27

In 1998 on assignment by the British Council, Agnes Meadows visited Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza) for poetry reading. Later she was invited by the Palestinian PEN 28 to take part in the sixth International Palestinian Poetry Festival held in East Jerusalem.

Agnes Meadows' poetry books *Quantum Love*, and *You and Me* are subtle and powerful collections of humanistic and feminist poems in motion. In them, she expresses her concern of love and declares her advocacy of free speech to the extent that she wrote two erotic poems in *You and Me*.

In Agnes Meadows' *Palestinian Poems*, place and time are interchangeable. "Desert" is a poem in which she expresses her feelings about Gaza. First, she knew that Gaza is a desert but her visit to Gaza changed her mind as regards time, place and people. (Appendix I) Agnes Meadows writes what she can see; life experience is her first step in all her poems. She has a gift for the immediate, and she has a confidence in it.

During her visit to Gaza and in Nusirat refugee camp, which is located in the middle area of Gaza Strip, she came across a cultural event of a traditional Palestinian wedding march or Zaffah. She was moved by that situation as a new event and cultural experience to her; she stopped the car and joined that Zaffah. The whole situation was impressive on her and immediately her poem "Gaza Wedding" came out (Appendix II)

Though Agnes Meadows is not a politically minded poet, her *Palestinian Poems*, in general, are deeply-moving and they represent her new experience. Her visits to Palestine opened her eyes to many new things and provided her with experiences that she never knew about before. She began to learn first hand about the question of Palestine, the Palestinians, their miseries, hopes and aspirations, freedom, legal rights and human needs, and their insistent dream of an Independent State. Such Middle Eastern political terminologies have become of certain meaning and good sense to her.

Moreover, she went farther as when the political situation turned hot and bloody during the Uprising of the Holy Shrine or Intifada of Al-Aqsa Mosque (October 2000). She watched on TV how the innocent Palestinian child Mohammad Al-Durra was shot dead, with cold blood and with unusual insistence, by an Israeli military sniper. One of the immediate responses to that situation was a new poem she wrote and dedicated to Mohammad Al-Durra. (Appendix III). This poem shows another side of the poet's personality: her humanity. It was the first poem that I read on the crime a couple of days after the death of Al-Durra. The film of the murder was transmitted by Channel II of the French television to move her feelings deeply, and thus to constitute a reality that stirred up her mind and emotions to write the poem with honesty and clarity. Agnes Meadows playing on words is considered as one of the alluring elements in her poetry. She portrays polyphonic composition, recurrent verses and varied images in her poems. In "Ten into Eleven -- Doesn't Go," she could see that the Israeli sniper's killing of the innocent Palestinian child is identical to killing a child in the holocaust. Overall, there is a poem replete with feeling, pain, power, strain, hope, doubt and sadness. The poem is impressive as it pays more attention to the word and the

meaning. Over all, those uttered words are replete with humanistic resonance and meanings that come out to you in a quiet voice that has such authority.

Agnes Meadows demonstrates the usual concern about matters of life, humanity and death. Her poem on the death of Al-Durra was her second poem on the death of someone. The first time she was moved by the reality of the death of one of her friends named Roger. Facts and life realities are something that Meadows handles deftly as in her two poems "Roger's Funeral" and "Ten into Eleven, Doesn't Go." In the first poem she remembers the death of one of her friends whereas in the second she mourns the death of Mohammad Al-Durra reflecting that the tragedy of this event lies in the experience of mundane facts. On the death of Muhammed Al-Durra, Agnes Meadows said to me: "When I saw the film, I cried and now things have become personal to me."²⁹

In those two poems, I notice that Agnes Meadows uttered words are replete with human resonance. Her voice has such authority, compassion, authenticity, seriousness and honesty. In relation to those two poems and situations, I realized that her poetry combines light touches and deep insights; decorated but not impersonal, ironic but not evasive, moral but not hectoring. For example, to answer my question: What do little things mean to you? She wrote a poem entitled "The Significance of Small Things." where the small thing to her was a tear, but it is of extreme significance (Appendix IV). Agnes Meadows writes in rhymed verse which she seems to find most natural. This adds to the musicality of her poems. In addition, there is a sentiment behind her music. This could account for the success of the work in those poems. She does not pretend that her view point is definitive: it is her own viewpoint that comes from what she can see.

Agnes Meadows confirms her humanistic feelings in her poem "Outside My Window" (Appendix V). It was November 5 when the English were celebrating one of their religious days with fireworks and enjoyment whereas on the other side of the fence there was an Israeli shelling on Bethlehem. The poem came in solidarity with the Palestinians, and thus she handles the freedom issue with predictability and determination. Her humanistic concern has served to enhance her poetic capabilities. Earlier, Agnes Meadows showed a genuine concern and compassion in her poem "Palestinian" (Appendix VI). The poem was published in *Quantum Love*. It tells the story of a Palestinian meditating his present situation and dreaming about his future in the middle of the conflict of the balance of power. In the end the Palestinian determines that the enemy will not win.

In general, the East (e.g. Istanbul, Jerusalem and Gaza) is a special flavor for Agnes Meadows. It occupies a space in her mind and poems. Each one of those locations has a memory in the poet's mind. For instance, Istanbul is a special place as she has good memories from ex-marriage there, and she has many friends in Palestine. Living in Turkey has provided Agnes Meadows with a hoard and sensory impressions dissimilar to any she might have amassed in England, or as a visiting tourist to the place. She is fascinated with Istanbul and its Eastern cultural "pearls," Nature in Turkey and the people left a positive impression in her. Also, she is currently developing a special case of admiration with the place and the people in Palestine.

Agnes Meadows' most recent effort and achievement was her organization and direction of an event of Performance Poetry under the title "Poetry for Palestine." It was held on December 8th and 9th 2000. Thirty one Performance Poets from UK and

USA participated. The event was also an occasion for Agnes Meadows to raise funds for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. 30

Like the case of Performance Poets, railway stations, coffee-houses, cafés, Internet cafés, alien rooms are Agnes Meadows chosen locations. Though she experienced reading poetry with performance in Performance Poetry Cafés in many places, but they may turn out to be completely elsewhere like her readings in the Palestinian Universities. Another example is what happened with her in London, on a Friday night at 2:00 a.m. in October 27th 2000 as she was going to the supermarket where she met two young ladies who had a chat with her. They turn out to be Palestinians studying at the London School of Economics. She told them about her Palestinian Poems including the poem for Mohammad Al-Durra which she read for them, early in that morning, in the middle of the supermarket next to the fruits and vegetables. 31 To say the least, Agnes Meadows is very optimistic about Performance Poetry. She believes that poetry belongs to everyone, and that it is not elite. It knows no boundaries; it can, it is and it should be written by everyone regardless of where they are, their material circumstances, or emotional conditions. It is the first and last tool to intimate change. It can foster the profoundest love, the worst turmoil, the deepest hate. In the beginning was The Word. She is trying a valuable attempt to describe what has been happening recently in the British poetry in an unconventional way.

The whole package of Performance Poetry is about what is contemporary in life. But because there are no rules for Performance Poetry, I believe that, by time, this new type of poetry will constantly keep changing, mutating, wearing a different face, having new forms, contents, styles, deliveries, performance values, different tone and voice, and may be other things. Accordingly, there will come a time for this new art form either to settle down or to disappear and only to stay in books of history of poetry. In other words, whether Performance Poetry will become a major genre or not is still unknown.

Finally I think that this study is still one step on the way to explore Performance Poetry as a new art form. It needs extensive follow up and research to reveal new horizons with a variety of other female/male Performance Poets.

Appendix I

DESERT

(Gaza, Palestine – 12 May 2000)

The common misconception is that Gaza is an overcrowded city surrounded by sand. While it is an overcrowded city, it is not surrounded by desert. Instead Gaza is

A desert of rooftops,

A desert of empty streets, and roads leading nowhere,

A desert of denial,

A desert of delusion, deceit and divided hearts.

A desert of torn-up land,

Of pride and plenty unequally distributed.

A desert of stones used to build barriers,

And of stones thrown into the world's eye.

A desert of stolen wealth,

Of stolen dreams, and stolen unity.

A desert of smiling children,

A desert of henna-handed grandmothers

A desert of dancing, and running and one-voice singing.

A desert of rich earth,

A desert of sunflowers and wheat fields,

A desert of thorns, of ravens, and small creatures.
A desert of hands stretching to touch heaven,
But finding only empty skies.
A desert of good-byes, of barbed wire, and weapons.
A desert of tomorrows, tomorrows, and tomorrows.
Hope still flourishing despite removal.
A desert of transformation, and unbroken faith,
A desert of triumph
And the last word of solution.

Appendix II

GAZA WEDDING

(Gaza, Palestine – 14 May 2000)

Nuseirat Refugee Camp
Suddenly from out of the dust and squalor,
A waterfall of children ran shrieking down the rubble street towards me,
Shrieking and giggling,
Eyes filled with astonishment and laughter,
A hundred hands reaching out,
Fingers fastening onto promises my presence pledged,
Greedy for contact, hungry to be recognized,
Each touch an open door,
Each smile a growing garden,
Each welcome an oasis in this wilderness of separation.

It was impossible not to laugh with them,
Their hilarity contagious,
And I was carried like a boat upstream on that river of merry children,
Today's joy a special gift costly as any bridal dowry,
They swept me forward over the gray earth,
Leaf-weak in the face of such happy strength,
Rafting into its maelstrom. a storm of arms held high in celebration,
With the signing and the clapping coming in volley's,
Drumbeats sharp as bullets drowning me,
So that I became an island, a single tree, a sunflower
Alone in that jubilant flood.

I was given babies too hold,
Damp and decorated as Christmas trees, their exclamation mark stares plucking at my
crimson mouth.
The groom, she in his new suit, encircled me with cautious care,
His mother, ululating pride,
Holding me in her hennaed hands as if I was precious.
Torrents of bold young men eddied around me,
Insistent,
Unshakable,
Relentlessly male,
Alive to the last heartbeat,
Curious, and wanting to know more,
Though this was not the time for asking.

And for just one moment I was part of that community of gladness,
Linked to them despite betrays and the machinery of conflict.

And nothing
Coming next
Can scar or change that.

Appendix III

TEN INTO ELEVEN DOESN'T GO

Dedicated to Mohammad Al-Durra, killed in Palestine
(and with apologies to Mahmoud Darwish)
(London – October 2000)

Write this down.

He was a Palestinian.
Just turned 12, not tall for his age,
But beginning to fill out like a tree spreading its branches upward.
He did well at school
Sometimes,
Even for a boy
With other things on his mind,
And his Mother hoped his life be an improvement
On her own.

Write this down.

He was a Palestinian.
An ordinary boy growing up too fast,
Youth's clumsy fingers reaching eagerly for manhood
As if it might escape,
Clamber like a prisoner tasting his first freedom
Over hills and emptiness,
Onto the street,
Onto the anguished, burning street

Where his Father cowered, an ordinary man,
Neither handsome nor rich,
But proud when he remembered, and protective,
Witnessing with his ordinary son
That these were not
Ordinary days,
That these were incendiary days,
That these were angry, hard-running days,
That these were killing field days,
Making a mockery of Law,
Denying all possibility of innocence.

He was a child of the holocaust.
Don't misunderstand!
The Oxford Dictionary defines it as 'a wholly burnt sacrifice'
And surely that applies
In this case.

Please note
They say he was caught in the 'crossfire'.
Ten times.
There were bullets in his head and back,
Just like others of his kind with euphemism.

They'll be saying all his flat,
And that he had no right to be there
In the first place.

Appendix IV
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SMALL THINGS
(London – September 2000)

This poem came in reply to my question to Agnes Meadows, what do small things mean to you?

How do small things count, you ask?

A tear is a small thing.
It hangs in the air caught between cheek and ground.
It leaves no echoes,
Scratches nothing in passage,
Irrigates no fields,
Turns no wheels.
In everyday dust it leaves the tiniest of scars,
Hardly visible,
Insignificant to some,
How can it count? Such a small thing,
Like a ghostly key grating in some phantom lock,
A measurement of nothing,
Useless without a home,
A home torn open like an everyday envelope,
One of thousands, nothing special;
A home made of small bricks,
Small roof covering small rooms,
Each wall a hand embracing a little life,
Holding it like a child,
Such a little life, nobody would miss it,
Nobody would notice
Nor shed a single tear,
Balancing between eye and earth,
Between grief and rage,
Between fist and strike,
The smallest of things,
Engineering floods and hurricanes,
Beginning revolutions,
Signaling return for vagrant generations,
Writing cautionary messages
Everywhere.
The very least of things
Really.

Appendix V
OUTSIDE MY WINDOW
(For all the people of Palestine)
(London, November 5, 2000)

Outside my window I hear explosions fray November night
And rocket's boom, and fire cracker rat-rat-ratchet.

Crowds gasp in pagan satisfaction, faces aglow,
Wincing at the high pitched whine of fireworks rejection,
Or Roman Candles serrating darkest bonfire fantasy.

And I thin of you in war-torn dusty Strip
Where rockets seek the heat of life before blowing it to messy fragments,

Outside my window leaves are falling.
It is Autumn, trees get ready for sleep,
Baring branches, roots curling in anticipated slumber.
They turn wet pavements to prismatic copper,
Waving at us as they skitter to the ground.

And I think of you and olive groves torn out of the earth,
Their leaves gray with smoke, shaken with fright from off each splintered branch.

Outside my window children shriek,
An oral thermometer informing me of school-yard make-believe and play-time dream
Waves of ebullient innocence crest into my ears;
Teachers stand by fox-watching,
Educational Canutes holding up chalky hands to check this flood-tide of unrestrained
chatter.

And I think of you where cascading children scream in dread,
Their blood spilling onto flagstones, burgled of life by sniper's vicious bite.
Outside my window helicopters buzz, snaking through cloud- skudded skies,
An awful lot of machinery to bring us air-traffic news,
Pile-ups, cock-ups, hold-ups, and clog-ups,
Every hour on the hour here at Ratio One!

And I think of you where aerial Cobra's spit destruction among both innocent
and
guilty,
A sad un-chartered passage of ballistic tragedy filling mean streets with relentless
patience.
Outside

Appendix VI
PALESTINIAN
(Jerusalem, Palestine - 1998)
Published in Quantum Love (PP45-46)

A traveler stood in the street, ragged and terrible,
Eyes burning with grief, mouth cracked with bruises.
And with the arrogance of the possessor, I asked him,
"Poor friend, do you suffer?"

He snarled in reply,
"Do not pity me, though I am dispossessed,
"Nor ask me if I suffer.
"I will deny suffering,
"For I am no victim, gambling with the currencies of fate,
"Overturned by Kismet's hand,
"My blood giving the oppressor his empty rationale.

"I will not suffer.

"You can beat me,
"Batter me with sticks until I am broken,
"Kick me,
"Cut out my heart and make me bleed.
"You can kill my children,
"My brothers, my sisters,
"Murder my beloved whom I have touched on a thousand mornings,
"My Mother, despair etched in her eyes, emptied now by sorrow.

"Still I will not suffer.

"You can dig up my land,
"Make a desert of my garden,
"Destroy my home, brick by brick, until there is nothing left but stones on the burned earth,
"And still I will not suffer.
"You will not succeed.
"I will not give you the satisfaction of seeing my tears.

"You can strip of my pride,
"Deny me dignity,
"Drive me from my beautiful City, sitting like a pearl in God's golden crown,
"Lead me in chain into the barren wilderness
"Where there are no trees and Spring never arrives,
"Bereave my humanity,
"Humiliate my Grandmothers, my Grandfathers,
"Piss on my soul, into my mouth,
"Onto the very land which you steal from me every day,
"And still I will not suffer.
"You will not be the victor.
"You will not break me open.

"Freedom is a flame, a fire scorching eternity,
"A candle burning in cold silence,
"Burning day and night,
"Day and night,
"Day and night.
It will never be put out,
"Not by tempest, nor greed, nor corruption,
"Nor even the force of human conflict.
"It will always be there.

"So,
"I will not suffer.
"You will not see my spirit truing,
"Not hear me weeping, not touch my wet face.

"You will not win.
"You will not win.

Endnotes

1. Bard Gooch. *The New Poets' Society*. (New York: Harper Bazaar, 1993), 118.
2. Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950*. (1956, rept; New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xvi.
3. For clear representation of the terms culture and subculture and their Western references see S. Hall, "Subculture, Culture and Class," in *Resistance Through Rituals*. Eds., Stuart Hall, et al. London: Hutchenson, 1976.
4. *Ibid.* 15-20.
5. Rap and Hip Hop Poetry: Originally, the word rap means a gentle, quick and smart beat. Rap poetry is a twentieth century poetry with music. Rappers usually use heavy beat drums for their music and rhymed words, and usually wear T-shirts with tattoos on. The majority of the musicians for hip-hop poets are rappers. USA hip-hop poetry groups include: Arrested Development, Basehead, Me Phi Me. The major themes of the Rap and hip-hop poetry are mainly expressive of sociopolitical concerns.
6. Dick Hebdige. *New Accents: Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (London: Methuen & Co., 1979), 81.
7. *Ibid.*, 81.
8. Agnes Meadows, Letter to Said I. Abdelwahed, on August, 2000.
9. Please see Said I. Abdelwahed. "Sing my Song and Eat my Bread: A Reading of Benjamin Zephaniah's City Psalms." in *Philology: Literature & Linguistics Series: A Refereed Research Journal* issued by Faculty of Languages (Al-Alsun), Ain Shams University. vol. xxxi: (1999), 49-76.
10. Said I. Abdelwahed. Second Interview with Agnes Meadows - Gaza in December 24th, 2000.
11. John Cooper Clarke is an English poet from 1970s. His poetry is called motor mouth poetry; his poetry is greatly influenced by the punk movement and subculture. He developed a special interest in the terms culture and subculture, and also a belief in the necessity of the social cultural changes in arts and literature. So, in addition to his poetry, he published two articles and co-edited a book books on subculture. They are: *The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Working Class Community* in Stuart Hall, et al, eds. *Resistance Through Rituals*, London: Hutchenson, 1967; "Style" in Stuart Hall, et al, eds. *Resistance Through Rituals*, London: Hutchenson, 1976; Clerk, J. and Jefferson, T. "Working Class Youth Culture" in G. Mungham and C. Pearson, eds. *Working Class and Youth*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976.
12. Mersey Poets or Liverpool Poets are a loose association of poets and musicians who appeared in the same period of the Pop revolution that hit Liverpool in the late 1950s. Thus, they were also called the Liverpool Poets. There were hundred of Mersey Poets including the well known names of Roger McGough, Ardian Henri, Mike McCarthy, Brian Paten, and Peter Cook. The poems of those three poets appeared in an anthology of poetry published by the Penguins in 1967. Throughout 1960s the Mersey Poets held their nights in a variety of clubs and pubs reading their own poetry, playing jazz, and holding folk nights. The Mersey Poet needed a guitar to play on and a poem to read. Their poetry was instant; their poems were written mainly to be spoken and for entertainment, or for cheap/quick laugh or for instant chock. Sometimes, they found no problem is using brutal language for their poems. For those reasons altogether, it is no wonder that those poets were theatrical. Of course, the Mersey Poets believed that their poetry as new and innovative, and that they are more closely linked to lyrics than Wordsworth. They were writings about life in 1960s. However, after a decade or so that poetry was viewed as a poetry of young men or hopeful kids with nothing to write about except their hopes and dreams.

13.Said I. Abdelwahed. First Interview with Agnes Meadows: A Performance Poet. London in September 14th , 2000. All the biographical information about Agnes Meadows in this paper are from the interviews by the writer of this paper and also his correspondences and letters exchanged with Agnes Meadows.

14.Ibid.

15.Agnes Meadows' Palestinian Poems include "Palestinian" (1998), "Desert," (2000) "Gaza Wedding," (2000) "Exposure," (2000) "The Horse Wespereer" (2000). Eruption of the political events and the following the severe clashes of Al-Aqsa Mosque Intifada caused a change in her life. "Eleven into Twelve, Doesn't Go – Dedicated to Mohammad Al-Durra, Killed in Palestine," (2000) and "Outside my Window." (2000). Those poems are unpublished yet. Only one poem entitled "Palestinian," was published in Quantum Love. As a Performance Poet, Agnes Meadows reads her Palestinian Poems in different occasions and different places of Performance Poetry reading in UK. Those poems are humanistic; they came in reflection to images she lived and situations, she experienced.

16.Said I. Abdelwahed, Second Interview with Agnes Meadows: A Performance Poet. Gaza in 25th December, 2000.

17.Ferrago Slam Club is the oldest Slam club in the UK, but it is not necessarily the biggest. It is certainly the oldest, and the guy who runs it has an international reputation. Agnes Meadows has been doing stuff there for a while now.

18.Ferrago UK Slam: It is the largest contest of the Performance Poets in UK, usually held by the Ferrago Slam Club.

19.Austin International Poetry Festival (AIPF) is one of the premier poetry festivals in USA. In the year 2001 they will be in their tenth year. It takes place over four days in Austin, Texas, with dozens of gigs all over the city. This year (2000) the Festival was attended by something like 250 poets from all over North America and other poets from Canada, UK, Australia, and other parts of Europe. Many poets are hosted by someone local – that is to say, a local Texan puts them up in their home and looks after them while they are in town. AIPF was started by Thom the World Poet, with virtually no money and just a head full of inspiration and dreams. Now it is huge, with committees, and a big budget, and all kinds of stuff. There is always an anthology which poets have to try to enter – not all poets who register for the festival get into the anthology. It is a very exciting insane four days of poetry. Agnes Meadows was a Guest Poet there. She did eight gigs as a part of the Festival, including reading of some of her poems in Spanish.

20.Fringe Feast is something that Thom the World Poet organizes around Austin International Poetry Festival (AIPF), now that he is no longer involved with the former running of the formal festival. He basically contacts venues all over Texas and promotes a small group of poets to those venues. He is an extraordinary poet, and an extraordinary promoter with more energy than most people half his age. So, as well as having the four-day festival in Austin, many other gigs in many other venues are embroidered around the festival, usually in the two to three weeks running up to it.

21.Nuyorican Poet's Café is a famous café in New York City (NYC). It is named probably one of the best known poetry venues in the Western world, set up by black Puerto Rican poet and run by a black man named Keith Roach, and featuring some awesome poets. It's a fabulous venue which Agnes Meadows has featured at. One night, Agnes went there as the only white poet in an all-Black Rap night, but got very nervous as she was insulted by the audience. However, by the end of her performance

she received a clap and was financially rewarded. In Nuyorican Poet's Cafe you find Latin American poets, African poets, African-American Poets, British poets and Australian Poets. All of them perform their poetry in English but they tackle different subject-matters.

22. Steve Cannon's Tribe's Gallery is an art gallery in New York City established and run by Steve Cannon is a blind Black poetry promoter, in his 70's, from whence Steve also runs regular poetry events. He is an extraordinary man, and one of the original leading names of the Performance Poetry scene in NYC. Everyone knows Steve Cannon as he also edits the Nuyorican's Poetry Magazine, and Tribe's gallery and the Nuyorican are inextricably linked.

23. Mediterranean Poetry Festival is a poetry festival organized by the Turkish PEN in the city of Bodrum every year. It attracts poets not only from the Mediterranean but also from everywhere. It is called Mediterranean because of the location rather than the nationality of the participating poets.

24. Pera Palas is the most famous hotel in Istanbul which was where everyone who had traveled to Constantinople used to stay in when they got off the Orient Express. Interestingly enough, it is where Agatha Christie wrote Murder on the Orient Express (in room no. 411). The hotel has a guest list which beggars belief. Each room has a short list of some of the people who stayed in it. Kemal Ataturk had a regular room there, which has now been turned into museum. It was a real privilege for Agnes Meadows to do reading there.

25. Palestinian International Poetry Festival: It is an international poetry festival organized by the Palestinian PEN and held annually; poets from different parts of the world are always invited for poetry reading and participation in other activities of the festival. The Sixth Palestinian International Poetry Festival was held in Jerusalem on 1st-4th October, 1999.

26. Summer Camp is the 1999 residential summer camp held in Biet Jala for Palestinian children. Among other things, of the activities practiced were writing skills and reading poetry.

27. In the first interview with Agnes Meadows she attempted to define the term poetry, so that comes her understanding of what is Performance Poetry.

28. Palestinian PEN is a Palestinian Poetry Association, established in 1994.

29. Said I. Abdelwahed, First Interview with Agnes Meadows: A Performance Poet.

30. Agnes Meadows, Letter to Said I. Abdelwahed, dated December 17th, 2000.

31. Agnes Meadows, Letter to Said I. Abdelwahed, dated October 29th, 2000.

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