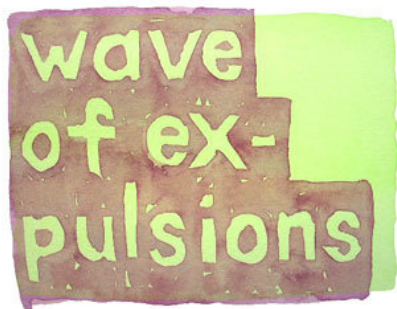


Story for performance #621
webcast from Sydney at 07:30PM, 03 Mar 07



Source: Robert Tait, 'Revenge: student activists expelled', *Guardian*, *New York Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 03/03/07.

Tags: [Iran](#), [death](#), [incarceration](#), [literature](#)

Writer/s: [George Alexander](#)

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For nights on end I lie awake with a laptop for a pillow. Some nights the cursor incandesces, burns as beautifully as an Arabian taper in the dark. Below the earth, under the empty signalbox, it can be as perky as nightclub neon.

The letters build a sequence out of a mad drive that closes in on an introverted world of a party in progress in the high gloss shimmer of a Tehran university campus. Voices wash and recede like waves. They're all there, then they're gone. The delete key undoes them all. The delete key swallows letters backwards. It's a kind of disappearing ink. Waves of expulsion. Then there's lots of blank screen like the sky reflected in a desert well or the mercury backing of a mirror.

If they dig under the switched-out signalbox they'll find me here on Rumi Road.

But I'm the negative of who I used to be. They called me Al Azzizi, I was the vice-secretary of the Islamic Students Committee. I met with some mischance and I've fallen to another sort of body. I'm like one of those transparent figures on Persian ceramics. I can't bend the course of things to my own direction, but there's stuff I know. It's the longest look you can take of life. Yet from my shallow grave I might as well be sending my messages into the billions of galaxies: CQCQ, this is WGOZ. Radio contact with the future, or is it? Communication between stations you can't pick up yet. Just the buzz of tiny conversations across the city.
soul brothers?
...small wonder...
...strung out on downers...
...smoke on the water?
...sorry wrong number...

I was early retired to this sepia scrub under a defunct signalbox, like a serpent baking inside a log, among the scorpions and spiders with their cobweb maps, and a cracked vase on its side pouring out dried leaves and larvae. How did I get here? Some bullet-head from the Basij loyalists dragged me from the edges of a demonstration against Mr Ahmadinejad. They were to segregate female and male students, kill off the campus magazines and demolish buildings belonging to the students committee. Campus guards were also ordered to refuse admission to women wearing makeup and 'too short' coats.

'Wanna go for a drive?'

'Dunno.'

'Get in the van.'

They hit me on the back of the head and the dark came down like a camera's hood. Then the van, freeway, the drive over unsealed roads, just some rough gash through the desert, then the beep-beep of a reversing lorry over railroad tracks. Then salaam aleykum, baby.

The cursor throbs like an alarm clock after a power short.

Down here with my skull in the stones under the chill damp soil there's lots of white noise that I hear. The wind passes through the date-palms and cypresses and the overhead wires hum around dusk like the burden of a song. In that sound I can just hear the pot smash and the earth spray. If I look up I can see my new wife Niyaz looking down with a watering can.

Now there are all these students from Amir Kabir University, these characters, like tentative ghosts emerging from the laptop. The cursor clicks backwards and forwards along the lines. They appear and disappear and reappear. After waves of expulsion, there's Yasmin and Shirin, there's Little Hossein and Big Hossein, there's Shabnam, playing at putting her finger close to the flame of a candle, then changing her mind and quickly pulling away. Lives criss-crossing like ripples in a pond. There isn't a whole person among them, and I include myself as a fragment. They all break up. The delete key undoes them. i-z-i-z-z-A: the delete key swallows letters backwards. Type n-o-o-m, and the moonlight dissolves the brick walls.

As for the others. Coffin after coffin will float above the pallbearers: the vice-chancellor Ali Reza Rahai, and the cabinet minister's aide, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the dictator and all of his thugs. Out the mosque doors, each taking their separate journeys into the dark towards the fire. I'd like to let go of them all, but not till they've been to hell and back like me.

Dancing phosphors on the screen make a wreathed trellis on my laptop, a four-cornered fluidity, like writing in or with water.

The cursor flickers weakly on the border of your vision there in another part of the world. As if it was carlights moving across a valley floor. You can see them suddenly through the gap in the trees in the low hills, then they disappear out of sight. Delete. No more lights. Tonight there is only the night moaning around the blackness.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by George Alexander.