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Suheil Badi' Bushrui (1929–2015)

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Suheil Badi' Bushrui died on 2 September 2015. He was a unique teacher who transcended boundaries and cultures, was loved by royalty (including HRH Prince Charles); by Heads of State, who trusted his guidance; by generations of students at his various universities; by his family, his world-wide legion of friends and—in particular—by little children. All recognized that in him the transcendent was immanent.

He was born, of Palestinian nationality, in Nazareth on 14 September 1929, and as a boarder from the age of nine attended St George's Jerusalem, a British school established in 1899 and run by the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem. It served as a place where Christians and Muslims would send their sons for secondary education; where Arabic, English and Hebrew were spoken.

Suheil's headmaster asked him one day why he thought he was there. 'To receive an education', he replied. 'Good heavens, no!' came the headmaster's reply. 'You are here so that we can make a gentleman of you.' Throughout his life he remained an Anglophile, and revered the English education system, through which he rose with intellectual ease.

His formative earlier years were very different, neither Christian nor Muslim but Bahá'í. His father Mirza Badi' Bushrui was brought up by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of the founder of the Bahá'í faith. Suheil spent his early youth under the direct influence of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian and Head of the Bahá'í faith from 1922 to 1957. At the age of 18 Suheil, bilingual in Arabic and English, began translating the writings of Shoghi Effendi. The Bahá'í faith was his throughout his life.

From his scholarship at St George's School he won a studentship to the University of Alexandria from 1950 to 1954, when he graduated with a B.A. First Class with Distinction. It was in English, with a minor in Arabic and Islamic studies.

From 1954 he was Lecturer in English at Khartoum Technical Institute, which he left in 1959 to take up a British Council Scholarship as a research scholar in England at the University of Southampton under the tutorship of the scholar-poet F. T. Prince, who remained his life-long friend and mentor. Suheil's Ph.D. thesis became the award-

winning book *Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions, 1900–1910* published by Oxford at the Clarendon Press in 1965.

A lectureship in English, and Arabic Language—later a Senior Lectureship—followed at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1962–66. When there was a violent coup, in which the President of the country was assassinated and fighting broke out on the streets, it was time to move.

He left Nigeria to take up a post as Associate Professor of English at the University of Calgary, Canada, for a year before moving to a similar post at York University, Toronto. Then, in 1968, he took up a position at the American University of Beirut where his father had taught English during the 1914–18 war before he joined the Civil Service in Palestine.

Before 1971 the number of students reading English at A.U.B. fluctuated between 12 and 20 undergraduates, and 10 to 15 graduates. Under Suheil's Chairmanship of the Department of English the numbers rose to 80 for the undergraduate degree and 71 for the postgraduate.

By the spring of 1983 the Civil War in Lebanon had become so all-consuming that Oxford received him as a Visiting Professor at St Peter's College; and in 1985 he was invited to join the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland. In 1993, at the same University, the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace was established, the first of its kind in a US academic institution, with Suheil as its first incumbent: a capacity in which he served until 2008. On retiring from the Bahá'í Chair he was instrumental in establishing the Lisa and George Zakhem Kahlil Gibran Chair for Values and Peace in 2009 at the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. Here he remained, teaching long after retirement.

Such an outline tells only half the story. The other half is Mary, the wife he married in 1954 when she was a school teacher in Alexandria, and a neighbour, and he a student at the university. She spoke no English, only French and Italian; he only Arabic and English. Their unlikely romance blossomed as he wooed in Arabic and she responded in French. As with King Henry V's courtship of Katharine, Princess of France, there was just enough comprehension to awaken romance. Suheil and Mary remained devoted to each other for the rest of their lives.

But those lives have been tried in the fires of external violence, and grief.

There were no enforceable international air safety and maintenance regulations in the post-war years, and on an Air Egypt flight out of Cairo—the only airline operating—Suheil, and Mary with baby Nadia

on her lap, found themselves in the air on a 'plane that had become unsafe. The pilot announced that in view of this he would try to return to Cairo. Some passengers panicked; all prepared for the worst. They were lucky.

Six months later Mary's sister Louise, two years older but 'emotionally my twin', with her two children aged nine, and nine months, had the same experience, but one wing came off in flight and all were killed.

Later, after his twenty-year marriage broke up, Mary's brother took his own life. She says that these and other events, such as the destruction of their home and the loss of all their belongings in the Lebanese Civil War, would have been too much were it not for Suheil's unfailing patience and understanding, and strength of spiritual resources. He would tell her: 'Never say "If only . . ."' Look ahead, not back, and always be grateful for the bounties that God has bestowed on us.' As a result, neither over-valued physical possessions. Their love was their rock.

Perhaps Suheil's most lasting legacy arising from his many roles, from diplomat to charismatic lecturer and teacher, lies in the written word. His final book *Desert Songs of the Night: 1500 Years of Arabic Literature*, edited with his son-in-law James Malarkey and published by Saqi Books in 2015, is magisterial in its erudition and yet accessible to all.

Most Westerners when asked about Arabic literature cite *The One Thousand and One Nights* and little else. This anthology sets out to go some way to remedying our ignorance. Starting with the pre-Islamic age, it takes the reader through the Abbasid Dynasty and five other literary ages to the modern, while not excluding the *Holy Quran* and the *Arabian Nights*.

Behind this publication lie a number of books bringing Arabic literature to the English-speaking world, such as *The Wisdom of the Arabs* (2002) and *The Essential [Kahlil] Gibran* (2005): on the latter he was the world authority.

But, as the foremost translator and interpreter of Anglo-Irish literature in the Arab world, he also wrote *The Wisdom of the Irish* (2005), and with Tim Prentki *An International Companion to the Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1990). He also edited *A Centenary Tribute to J. M. Synge* (1972), and with Bernard Benstock *James Joyce: An International Perspective* (1981), both published by Colin Smythe.

A major legacy is *Speeches and Articles 1968–2012 of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales* (2 vols), compiled in collaboration with

David Cadman, which covers critical social, cultural and environmental issues. Suheil also translated and published extracts into Arabic. His Fellowship of the Temenos Academy, whose Patron is The Prince of Wales, was one of his most valued honours, and Suheil contributed untiringly to the Academy's intellectual life, a contribution reflected for instance in the Temenos Academy Publications *A Defence of Poetry* (2000), *The Sacred in Literature* (2010) and *W. B. Yeats's Search for a Spiritual Philosophy* (2013).

Suheil was a man filled with dynamic energy, unfailingly good-natured and courteous, in whatever group a creative colleague. He was driven by a love of mankind that sought to heal conflicts, bridge cultures, evoke the best of the past to teach the young and bring into being a spiritually generous future beyond materialism. He loved wisdom wherever it might be found, and with his far-ranging erudition and international experience—Amine Gemayel, the former President of Lebanon during the Civil War to whom he was a trusted advisor, was an old pupil of his—embodied not *realpolitik* but morality, not the convenient fix but the lasting good, not the merely effective but the genuinely just. His integrity was obvious, his vision transcendent, his personality joy unconditional; and of him and those rare souls like him it can truly be said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers'.

He leaves his widow Mary, his daughter Nadia and her husband, three grandsons and a great-grandson.