

# **Hannibal Alkhas (1930-2010): A Painter with a Passionate Love for His Mother Tongue**

*Marcel E. Josephson* \*

## **Introduction**

Hannibal Alkhas was born on June 15, 1930 in Kermanshah, Iran. He was the son of the well-known Assyrian writer Addai Alkhas (1897-1959) who was a driving force in the establishment of the Assyrian literary magazine known as *Gilgamesh* and the revival of modern Assyrian literature that it helped to inspire. After graduating from school in Iran, Hannibal came to the United States to further his education. He studied philosophy at the Loyola University of Chicago for three years and then attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he received his B.F.A. and M.F.A. He returned to Iran following the death of his father and taught for five years at the Boy's College of Art in Tehran. At the same time he established the Gilgamesh Gallery, which was the first modern art gallery in Iran and helped to launch the careers of many modern artists in Iran. Hannibal soon earned a reputation as one of the most important figurative painters<sup>1</sup> in the country. Hannibal's career as an artist and a teacher was marked by several migrations between Iran and the United States. Over his long and fruitful career, Hannibal inspired students at several prominent institutions such as the University of Tehran and the University of California at Berkeley.

Hannibal's father ensured that his early education included learning to read and write his native language, modern Assyrian. Throughout his career Hannibal was inspired by the Assyrian language and Assyrian historical themes, both ancient and modern. In addition to painting and sculpture, Hannibal expressed his talent in Assyrian poetry that included both original compositions and translations. Hannibal passed away on September 14, 2010 in Turlock, California.

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\* Marcel E. Josephson compiled and published a collection of the poems of Hannibal Alkhas in 2009 entitled *Hannibal Alkhas: Selected Works of Poetry* (<http://www.lulu.com/content/8015829>). Some of the material in the present article was presented in a program celebrating the life and poetry of Hannibal Alkhas recorded for Atour TV (San Jose, CA) on October 12th, 2010. Parts of this material were also used by the author in his speech at the commemoration of Hannibal organized by the Assyrian American Association of San Jose on November 6th, 2010. The author wishes to express his gratitude to David G. Malick for reviewing a draft of this article and providing suggestions for improvement.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.hannibal-alkhas.org/> for an extensive sample of Hannibal's paintings.

I was very fortunate to have closely known the late Rabi Hannibal Alkhas over the last few years of his life. Upon his passing I decided to write this article on his very unique personality and his poetical works in modern Assyrian. I have tried to highlight a few of the dimensions of his personality and show how they are reflected in his poetry.

My first encounter with Hannibal Alkhas was in Tehran in 1971 at the Sharif (formerly known as Aryamehr) University of Technology, the school I attended for my undergraduate studies. In poetry night he held for his father's commemoration at this school, without any visual aid and merely from memory, Hannibal drew a portrait of Nima Yushij (1897-1960), Iran's founding father of the contemporary poetry. As a young Assyrian I felt extremely proud of having within my community such a talented and skilful artist. Having known Hannibal through his works for many years and in person for the past few years, I would say that Hannibal belongs to humanity and our Assyrian community should be proud that he was an Assyrian.

Although Hannibal had been encouraged and challenged by his father to write poetry in Assyrian since he was 15, it was not until he was 40 that he started writing in Assyrian. His first work in Assyrian was a translation of one his own poems from Persian entitled *White Friend, Black Friend*. This was due to the support and encouragement of the late Rabi Nimrod Simono (1908-2004), an esteemed colleague of Hannibal's father. Hannibal's works in Assyrian consist of some 700 hand-written pages and cover a wide variety of styles including quatrains, triplets, *ghazals*<sup>2</sup>, tribute to friends and prominent individuals and children's poetry.

**Hannibal had a tendency to get his audience involved with contrasting elements.** He would build a case around the elements that he had in mind. He would then draw a meaningful conclusion. His first poem in Assyrian, *White Friend, Black Friend*, summarized below, strikingly represents the use of contrasting elements by Hannibal.

Once upon a time a little boy lived in a town where it never snowed. One chilly winter it finally did snow. Very excitedly, he made a snowman and called him "White Friend". He would play with his white friend until he lost him to a meltdown as the weather warmed up. Disappointed, he complained to his mother about the loss of his white friend. He then took his mother's advice and made another friend, this time a mud man and called him "Black Friend." The friendship between the two developed rapidly. But once again the temperature dropped and snow fell, covering the mud man. Next morning the little boy noticed that his white friend had returned, but his black friend had disappeared. He was puzzled. As the weather changed, there was another meltdown and his black friend was back but the white friend had disappeared. Later on the winter rain washed away the black friend as well. Perplexed and seeking comfort after

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<sup>2</sup> A *ghazal* is a poetic form consisting of rhyming couplets and a refrain, with each line sharing the same meter.





"بِكِدِّ فِكِّ كَتَمَتَّ!  
 دَتَّ بِي كِي تَمَّ دَمَتَّ!  
 تَدَّ دُذَّ دُجَّ حِي!  
 مَدَّ مَسَّ دَمَّ تَسَّ كِي!"

*Pearls on her dress and her hair were shining  
 Golden objects and gems on her hands and her chest were sparkling  
 Servants were standing eagerly to follow her orders  
 Wealthy guests were congregated around her  
 Musicians and performers were singing  
 And the elites were dancing to light tunes  
 Food, drink, and sweets  
 Were fragrant, delicious, and abundant  
 All of a sudden the woman saw her husband  
 With torn clothing and smelling like fish  
 Out of embarrassment, she turned around  
 And ordered a servant:*

*Take the man out  
 Who smells like fish  
 Tell him to wait outside  
 His mistress will see him there*

**Hannibal always looked for his father's approval.** While abroad for his undergraduate studies, Hannibal had married a non-Assyrian woman and that had greatly disappointed his father. Hannibal returned to Iran after his father passed away. Below are excerpts from his popular poem *O Urmi Urmi Urmi* in which Hannibal has a monologue with his father. Hannibal is telling his father about his accomplishments in the years he was away from home. Hannibal makes references to his paintings and poetry. This poem informs the reader about a broken father-son relationship where the son is endeavouring to mend the relationship. Hannibal had a great deal of love and respect for his father and he was fascinated by his father's accomplishments and talents. Marrying an Assyrian woman in his second marriage made him feel that he had paid the debt to his father. Hannibal always missed the emotional aspects of the father-son relationship. In this poem, he wants to get close to his father; he wants to touch him, to embrace him, and yet, in a delicately coherent manner he wants to appease him. He is defending his case before his father by showing his









I have hung on my ears  
 Your words like ear-rings  
 Your golden poetry  
 Your inner thoughts  
 The love you had in your heart  
 The fire you had in your chest  
 I have it in my heart, my chest, and my blood  
 O Urmi Urmi Urmi

نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ وَ مَدِيْنَةَ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ دِيْنِ مَدِيْنَةَ  
 دَقْنِ سِيْرَةَ هَيْكَلِ كَبِّ فُتَيْبِ  
 كَبِيْرَةَ دِيْمَكْتِيْ كَبِّ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ شَعْبِ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ  
 دَهْمَةَ هَذِهِ سَبِّ وَ هَيْكَلِ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ  
 هَيْكَلِ كَبِّ كَبِّ كَبِّ ، فَدِيْنِ  
 مَجِّ كَبِّ كَبِّ كَبِّ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ  
 سُبُوْبِ كَبِّ دِيْنِ كَبِّ  
 مَكْمَلِ كَبِّ كَبِّ كَبِّ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ  
 نَ تَحِبُّ حَبِيبَةَ كَبِّ

O my father let me sing  
 O my father listen to me as I narrate  
 As I interpret my vision and dream  
 As I look into your tearful eyes  
 And as a son embrace my father

*So I receive wings from you  
You are the means of education  
So my soul and yours unify  
And lift our feet from the ground  
We become two birds flying  
From village to village as guests  
As a painter (son) and a poet (father)  
We view the plain of Urmi  
Your name taken from its churches  
In her arms your mother raised you  
Urmi mother for my mother  
O Urmi Urmi Urmi*

**Hannibal was filled with love. He followed his heart.** He freely expressed his feelings when interacting with people. He was a very happy individual. His poetry is filled with references to love and the heart. In 230 pages of his selected poetry works he has used the words *love* and *heart* 218 times.

**Hannibal was very critical of irresponsible stances within our Assyrian community.** He would criticize and question the motives that were not aligned with the true interests of our nation. He has an interesting poem entitled *A Heated Discussion* that clearly shows his disappointment with those who do not address the real issues in our community. In this amusing and well structured poem, Hannibal addresses one of the most troubling issues of our Assyrian community. Precious time and resources are consumed in our organizations in trying to solve imaginary problems. Little or no attention is paid to solving real problems that require practical and hands-on approaches. The characters in the poem are typical elderly villagers who are having a heated discussion in which each one claims that if they were such and such known world leader, they would have done great things. The village has a great need for fresh water which is currently being carried to the homes by the women of the village from a far away fountain up in the mountains every day.

The elderly are inconsiderate of this serious issue and are busy talking big business. The observant 15-year old young Ashur interrupts their discussion, calls their attention to the issue at hand and challenges them to get their shovels and start plowing a gutter to allow the water to flow from the fountain to the homes and to use it to run mills to grind grain. Ashur is rebuked by the elderly for not thinking BIG! Finally, a wise man in support of young Ashur concludes the discussion by saying “those who just talk big are like fools who build their homes on the sand.”

بُدَّ نَمَكٌ ذَهَبٌ ، دُوبَتَم ، لَبَّتْ ،  
 لُبَّتْ ، كَبَم ه ، مَهْبَتٌ ، مَبَّتْ ،  
 لُذْمَكٌ ، كَمَكَه ، كَبَمُ ذَكَبَه ، ٢٨ هُكٌ ،  
 لُبَّتْ هُكٌ ، لِهَسَس ، مَبَّتْ لَك ، مَمَكٌ ،  
 سَهْ ذ - دِصَقٌ هُتِي كَمُ دِي دِي دِي  
 مَهْبِي مَهْ ه كَذَمَكُ كَبَّتِي تَضَمَكُ

*One day David, Dadisho, Isha,  
 Ishaya, Pious, Yokhanan, Misha,  
 Iramia, Paulus, Gewargis, Touma,  
 Avraham, Eskhaq, Mikhail, Shouma  
 The elders of the households  
 Were sitting atop of a hill having a heated (rhymed) discussion*

سَجَلُ ذَهْمَكُ مَمُ ذَلُ كَسَجَلُ مَكُ ، وَكَمُ ذَا  
 دَبُكُ مَبَّتْ لَبَّ مَهْ ٢ هُكُ هُكُ مَمُ ٢ مَمُ ذَا  
 دُذَمَكُ هُجَّتِي ، بُمَكِي ، هُكِي  
 لُبُّ دِي هُذَمَكِي حَمَمَكُ مَهْ هُكِي  
 مَبَّتْ لَبُّ ، وَذَلُ ، لَبَمُ ، مَمَكِي  
 لَبُّ مَمُ هُكِي ، لَبَمُ ، مَمَكِي  
 مَمُ لَبَّتْ لَبَمُ ذَلُ ذَمُ مَبَّتْ هُكِي  
 مَهْ لَبُّ مَمُ لَبَمُ لَبَمُ لَبَمُ

*A hill nearby a small village  
 That had a great need for water  
 Women both old and young with buckets  
 Atop of their heads and their shoulders would bring to homes  
 The water needed for sowing, cooking and drinking  
 For bathing and laundry  
 From a fountain far away from the village up in the mountain  
 That had been an ongoing labor*

ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ

*The beautiful sun rays  
 Were shining upon those busy with discussion  
 Their heads were getting hot by the wine going around  
 Which everyone in the order of seniority was dinking*

ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ

*David with a passionate heart was saying  
 I am left with no other thoughts  
 Than if I were Hitler the leader of Germany,  
 I would have dropped as many bombs as there are grasshoppers  
 Atop of the Kurds to wipe them off the earth  
 So that the anguish of my heart-ache will finish*

ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ  
 ܘܒܫܘܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ

*Dadisho was saying, if I were Stalin,  
 I would have thought even a second of hesitation to be wrong  
 To throw the Turks in the sea so they would drown  
 So that their existence would be terminated*

ۡمَكَّدَ ۡسَوَّ ۡبَعَثَ ۡذَوَوِ ۡكَا ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَسْفَحَتَّ ۡدَلَّ ۡاَسْحَبَ ۡمُصَوِّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ

*Isha was saying, if I were Roosevelt,  
 I would have strengthened the determination in my heart  
 That there would be a time that I could massacre and finish  
 The Muslims before I die*

ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ

*Ishaya was saying, if I were given money  
 I would have saved all of us oppressed and suffering  
 And this existence day and night  
 Would have passed in dance and celebration*

ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ  
 ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ ۡاَوَّ

*Pious, Yokhanan, Misha, were taking turns  
 Fighting with kings and finishing winners  
 Iramia, Paulus, Gewargis, Touma,  
 Avraham, Eskhaq, Mikhail, Shouma  
 Were plotting and planning and solving problems  
 And calling the world leaders donkeys*

ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ

*As they were busy with appealing talks  
 Defeating one and raising another,  
 There was sitting 15-year old Ashur  
 Among them and listening to calculated talks  
 Where the elders were solving problems in their imagination  
 Killing one entity and creating another*

ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ

*He thought for a little while, his blood boiling  
 Of the trouble burdening his sister and his mother  
 He raised his hand to ask permission  
 And once granted he spoke:*

ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ  
 ܘܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܗܘ

*If we get our shovels and start plowing  
 Would we not be more recognized?  
 Let's dig a ditch between the fountain and houses  
 And reduce the labor our women are enduring  
 If we work one month we will finish the job  
 And that will provide a great deal of relief for years*

مُهَيَّبَسْ كَسَهْ ، مَبْتَن تِيكِيَتِي فُذَاهِي  
 اَهَبْ كِي يَذِييَن تَن يِيَتِي هَكَلَهِي  
 يَ ، فُصَلَسْ مَبْتَن نَسَبْ كُجَهْ هِي  
 تَمَسَكَن كَمَدَدْ بَك سَبْت تَاهِي  
 دَجَبْ بَكَه دَقَسَلَسْ مَبْتَن كَه يَبَدْ  
 مَهِي نَس فَتَبَلَن مَبْتَن هَسَبَدْ؟  
 حُدْ لِي يَبَدَدْ مِي كَلَمَن تَمِيكَلَهْ  
 نَس اَيِه دَتَن يَكَه هِي مَدِيكَلَهْ  
 نَدْ تَاَذ دَاه لَسِيَدَن اَهْ كَسَهْ ، فُصَدَهِي  
 تَن لَعَدْ كَلَمَن تَاهِي فُجَهْ هِي :

*Let's direct the water such that  
 We can turn mills for grinding grain  
 If we get the water to homes,  
 There will be a big change in our lives  
 How about we take up shovels in our hands  
 And cheer up the sad?  
 As they heard these words from the young man  
 It looked like many hearts were disappointed  
 One after another quarreled  
 And took turns to rebuked the young Ashur*

دَقَمَم دَب تِيكِيَتِي مَهْ مِي لَقِيَتِي كَمَدَدْ  
 اَهَبْ اَسَمَمِي كَم يَكِيَتِي ، كَه دِي؟

*Why are you asking prominent people  
 To think about insignificant things?*

بَسْبِ كَمَكْتِي دِي يَهْتَدِي  
 اَسْمِ اَسْمِي كَبِي سَقْدِي؟

*We are waiting for powerful governments (to help)*  
*Should we think about digging a ditch?*

تَبِي كَه اِيك هَبِكْ يَهْتِي  
 اَسْمِ اَسْمِي كِي دِي تَل مَقْ؟

*Should we leave the world to expire*  
*And think about a mill for the village?*

دَبِي كَه مَقْ تَبِي كَه تَدِي  
 مَبِي كَه تَمَل دَجْدَس تَبِي؟

*Should we stick to the village and ignore the world;*  
*Forget about the sea and remember a ditch?*

دِي مَم مَكَم مِ تَكْ مَبِي كَه يَمَمِ  
 جِد دِي سَم دِي كَبِي تَم تَل مِ مَم مَم مِ!

*Get up boy and find your mother*  
*As your mouth smells like mother's milk*

بَد مَبِي هَبَدِي مَبِي كَه اَك دِي مِ  
 تَل اَمَه ذ مَكَمَل مَبِي كَه مَبِي كَه  
 تَبَد مَكْ دَمَل اَم دَج مَم مَم مِ  
 اَم مِ اَدَك دِي تَل مَبِي كَه مَبِي كَه:

*A learned elder got up on his feet*  
*And did not abandon Ashur*  
*With a loud voice he shouted*  
*This golden verse proposed by poets*



"بِك كَمَسَ بِيَدِي بِنْد هِيَكِ خِيَكِ،  
حِي تَعِب هَجِيَتِي حَلِيَتِي حَفِيَتِي."

*"Fools busy with heated (rhymed) discussion  
Build castles on wind and homes on sand."*

**Hannibal was very humorous.** Those who knew him well will attest to his hilarious nature. In his poetry nights he often recited his works that amused the audience most. I have selected two types of his poetry for this section, quatrains and triplets.

A quatrain is a two line verse with two parts per line. Hannibal was influenced by quatrains (*Rubaiyat*) of Omar Khayyam (1048–1123), the famous Persian poet, astronomer and mathematician. In a typical quatrain each of the four parts has 11 syllables and is recited in a 1234 + 1234 + 123 count of syllables. Rare quatrains have 15 syllables per part and are recited in a 1234 + 1234 + 1234 + 123 count of syllables. Additionally, the end of the first, second and fourth parts rhyme but the end of the third part does not rhyme with the end of other parts. A quatrain is a standalone verse that has a complete message. Hannibal's quatrains can be divided into three main categories: social, political and romantic. In his quatrains Hannibal has used a basic vernacular Assyrian vocabulary and yet has effectively communicated quite complex social and political issues. He always gave credit to the richness of our mother tongue for being able to adopt this writing style. Use of idiomatic speech in his quatrains adds an exceptional value to these poems. Below are a few examples of Hannibal's quatrains.

حَلِيَتِي لَحْمِيَتِي يَكِب مَحْمُودِي مَمِيَدِي  
يَكِب مَسْبُودِي حَلِيَتِي دَوْمُودِي مَمِيَدِي  
يَكِب مَسْبُودِي حَلِيَتِي دَوْمُودِي مَمِيَدِي  
لَحْمِيَتِي لَحْمِيَتِي يَكِب مَمِيَدِي مَمِيَدِي

*With her black eyes she burned my red heart  
With her magical singing she made my burnt heart dance  
Her heart wanted love from my heart to end  
But she was wrong; she increased love in my heart*



١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤  
 ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤  
 ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤  
 ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤

*He said he would wrap up his speech in two words*  
*He got up and stood behind the microphone*  
*He talked about good and evil; coming and going*  
*He caused headaches for priests and deacons*

١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤."  
 ١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤."  
 ١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤."  
 ١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤."

*I said: "I haven't had any wine from your jug"*  
*She said: "No creature has had any wine from my jug"*  
*I said: "If I drink I will start kissing your feet"*  
*She said: "You are playing the trumpet from the wide end"<sup>8</sup>*

١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤"  
 ١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤"  
 ١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤"  
 ١٤٤٤: "١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤ ١٤٤٤"

*I said: "Your eyes," she looked at me and turned red.*  
*I said: "Your mouth," she tightened her lips and stayed quiet.*  
*I said: "The night is beautiful and moon is full;*  
*Let us hold hands," my sweetheart ran away.*

<sup>8</sup> "You are putting the cart before the horse."

ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܒܝܫܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ :  
 "ܠܫܘܥܐ ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ  
 ܠܫܘܥܐ ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ  
 ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ"

*The young woman who was intelligent said:  
 "I wake up from my sleep with one wish  
 For the day if I give birth to a girl  
 She would ask me what the word war means"*

ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ

*I knocked at her door; she said I was early  
 I said I was thirsty; she told me to drink water from the fountain  
 I said "Thirsty for your love, I have come to your house"  
 She said: "That is why your house is ruined"<sup>9</sup>*

ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܠܡܝܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܘܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ

*I am in love and have fever from my burnt heart  
 I am whispering sweet words into her ears  
 She, with eye and eyebrow gestures to her mother  
 Saying: "This fool does not stop talking"*

<sup>9</sup> A ruined house symbolizes a catastrophic event in one's life. Her answer indicates that he has no hope of winning her love.

أَيْبُ بَدَدِ قَلْبِي لِي لَيْسَ مَمْلُوءًا بِدَمِي ، كَيْسَ عَدَدِي  
 أَيْبُ سَمْعِي قَلْبِي لِي لَيْسَ مَمْلُوءًا بِحُبِّي ، كَيْسَ عَدَدِي  
 أَيْبُ مَتَمِّسِي دَحِيظِي قَلْبِي ، وَيُجَدِّبُ قَلْبِي ، كَيْسَ دُكْعِي  
 لَهْفِي دَلِيلِي قَلْبِي لِي لَيْسَ مَمْلُوءًا ، كَيْسَ عَدَدِي

*If I say my chest is not full of blood for you, it is not true  
 If I say your love has not made my identity vanish, it is not true  
 If I say the poem I composed for you and read for you in future  
 On the lips of those fallen in love will not be recited, it is not true*

لَمَّا جَاءَتْ سَمْعِي سَمْعِي سَمْعِي  
 تَكَلَّمَتْ هِيَ وَكَلَّمْتُهَا هِيَ  
 لَمَّا جَاءَتْ سَمْعِي سَمْعِي سَمْعِي  
 دَلِيلِي قَلْبِي لِي لَيْسَ مَمْلُوءًا ، كَيْسَ عَدَدِي

*I thought, when she comes I will embrace her with all my love  
 I will kiss her day and night to my fulfillment  
 She arrived and saw me but did not let me  
 Hold her hand even for a greeting*

هَذِهِ جَدِيدِي دَسْمِي مَمْلُوءِي بِدَمِي  
 هَذِهِ جَدِيدِي دَسْمِي مَمْلُوءِي بِدَمِي  
 هَذِهِ جَدِيدِي دَسْمِي مَمْلُوءِي بِدَمِي  
 هَذِهِ جَدِيدِي دَسْمِي مَمْلُوءِي بِدَمِي

*Flowers in the orchard if far away from your face, do not blossom  
 Birds in the sky if not for you, do not fly  
 When you disappeared from my sight,  
 For Hannibal in your poem nothing was found except for sorrow*



بُحْتِجُ حَمَلًا يَدِي سَهْدًا يَدُنِي  
 حَمَلًا تَمَّعَ هِيَهْدًا مَبِيَّيْجِي  
 نَتِي جَكِّي فَذِيهَا كَمَتِي بَدَّ عَمِي  
 مَبِيَّجِي تُوذُوذِي هَمَفَتِي حَمَلِي جَسِيَّجِي

*Clouds in sky are running around like white sheep  
 The sky is sewing a blue curtain over the sea  
 I am standing there, spreading my paints over a glass  
 Mixing blue with yellow and red with green*

لَبِي كِي لَتَتِي دَكِي كَهْهْ \ اَهْجَبْ كَلَسَكُمِي  
 نَتِي دَبْتِي حَبْتِي يَدْتِي مُسَكُمِي  
 حَمَلِي مَبِيَّجِي اَهْ مَبِيَّجِي اَهْ حَبْتِي  
 جَلْتِي هَبْتِي لِي اَهْ لِي فَحَدْتِي مُسَكُمِي

*We have people that have no hope to change  
 To change their miserable life into a happy life  
 If you ask them about their principles they will say:  
 You cannot teach an old dog new tricks*

هَمَجْتِي حَمَلًا لِي مَتَّجَسِي لَتِي كَبِي  
 حَمَلًا دَهْهَدْتِي لَتِي كَبِي لِي حَبْتِي بَلِيهْ؟  
 نَتِي مَبِيَّجِي مَبِيَّجِي دَبْتِي مَبِيَّجِي  
 مَبِيَّجِي حَمَلًا مَبِيَّجِي حَمَلًا مَبِيَّجِي لِي بَلِيهْ؟

*Tonight there are no stars in the sky  
 Where is the moonlight tonight?  
 I am full of desire for drinking with my sweetheart  
 Why is her heart empty of love and her jug empty of wine?*





*I created new poetry*

مَهْ عَسْتِي بُدَايِي كَدِي كَب

*I poured beauty over paintings*

عَم كَدِي حَيَّة دَايِي دَدِي كَب

*Like water from a fountain I flowed*

لِي مَيِّ مَيِّ مَكْبِي كَدِي كَب

*If there is wisdom in judgment*

لِي لِي مَهْ دَعَايِي مَهْتِي

*A color will find its color*

كَمِي حَضِيحِي كَمِي كَمِي

*Pigeons do fly with pigeons<sup>11</sup>*

مَهْتِي حَفْصِي مَهْتِي مَهْتِي

*Deep in the cold ground*

حَقِي دِي دَايِي مَدْبَدِي

*My deceased mother buried*

يَعْبِي مَهْتِي مَدْبَدِي

*The most troubling painting<sup>12</sup>*

مَهْتِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*Having waited for her and for her love*

لِي مَهْتِي مَهْتِي مَهْتِي

*With an exhausted and troubled heart*

حَقِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*There is no knock on the closed door*

كَمِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*Early in my youth*

حَقِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*My father planted with great courage*

حَقِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*The seed of freedom in my heart*

حَقِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*Convey my message to her*

مَهْتِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*Express my love for her*

مَهْتِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

*So that she would turn her face towards me*

مَهْتِي مَدْبَدِي مَدْبَدِي

<sup>11</sup> A proverb meaning every bird flies within its own flock.

<sup>12</sup> This is perhaps Hannibal's saddest triplet, describing his mother's burial site.



*In twenty-one syllables<sup>13</sup>*

كَمْ يَهْدِيهِ هَبْدَ هِهْ كُنْ

*Raviye can be recited*

ذَهِي دَهَب صَدَّ

*So that our language will survive*

دِيْعَبْ كَيْت سُنْ

*Calmness is our wisdom*

يَلِكْمَهْ بَكَه سِيْجَمَهْ

*Our maturity, our love for our nation*

حَمَلَهْ سَمَجْ قَلْ دَهْمَهْ

*So that we can stand tall like a cypress tree*

دَحَلْ بِيْ دَوْنِ صَمَهْ

*For the Assyrians*

قَلْ سَمَكْ دَلْ هَدِيْ

*Those on the plain or on the mountains*

صَبْتْ دِيْعَبْ بِيْ حَمَدِيْ

*I have sculpted on boulders*

صَبْتْ مَ يَهْدِيْ هَبْ كَلْتِيْ

*A nation that for its artists*

سَدْ دَهْمَهْ دَلْ دَهْمَهْ

*Does not have love within its character*

كَه كَه سَمَكْ كَه حَمَهْ

*Its days are short*

حَدِيْ دَهَبْ مَهْمَهْ

*Pearls before swine*

مَدَّ كَبِيْ صَدْرْ سَهْدِيْ

*Or eyeglasses for the blind*

بِيْ وَجْهِيْ قَلْ حَمَدِيْ

*Are like Psalms for the mute*

بِيْ دَلْ سَدَّ مَوْمَدِيْ

I had been in Hannibal's studio quite a few times. He had a verse of Persian poetry on his wall by Saeb Tabrizi (1601-1677), one of the greatest masters of classical Arabic and Persian lyric poetry. This verse is a claim by the poet on his own transparency that has resulted in his acceptance by multiple factions. Hannibal had translated this verse into Assyrian underneath the original verse. Hannibal's translation is so thorough and skillful. It has simple vocabulary and flows very pleasingly. By translating this verse, Hannibal has truly claimed this transparency to be his. He truly sought meaningfulness in life.

<sup>13</sup> Twenty-one is the total number of syllables in a *Ravi*. To satisfy the rhyme, Hannibal here substitutes the word **هِهْ كُنْ** (spelling) for **هِيْ كُنْ** (syllable).

مرا از صافی باطن ز خود دانند هر قومی  
که هر ظرفی به رنگ خود بر آرد آب روشن را

ܩܘܡܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

*Because of my transparency, different factions know me as one of their own  
As the clear (transparent) water takes up the color of its container*

The last piece of poetry I received from Hannibal came on Sunday, April 11, 2010. It is a translation of a quatrain by Omar Khayyam. This quatrain is the theme of one of his paintings and appears in both Persian and Assyrian in the painting. Hannibal made a small change in the arrangement of the translation in his note that I will keep as a precious memento of our friendship. From this quatrain alone, an astute reader of Persian and Assyrian will recognize Hannibal's skills and artistry in composing poetry in Assyrian.

آن قصر که بر چرخ همی زد پهلو  
بر در گه او شهان نهادندی رو  
دیدم که بر کنگره اش فاخته ای  
بنشسته همی گفت که کوکو کوکو

ܐܢ ܩܨܪܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

*The palace that had embarrassed the sun from shining  
On its grounds kings had knelt to kiss it  
I saw an owl sitting on its summit  
Singing, mourning, and supplicating: Rise! Rise!*

Hannibal composed ghazals and translated ghazals by Hafez (1315-1390), the celebrated Persian lyric poet, from Persian to Assyrian. Although Hannibal started creating poetry late in his life compared to his painting, he created a large

body of fine poetry in our beloved mother tongue. The late Rabi Hannibal wanted to also be known as a poet. In the introduction to his selected poems he wrote:

مَذْهَبِي، مِثْبَبِي يَكْتَلِي مِثْبَبِي دَسْتِي مَهْ دَكَمَمَا لِي قَلِي حَايِي  
 دَمَمَسْتَابِي حَايِي. لِي يَكْتَلِي يَكْتَلِي مِثْبَبِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي مِثْبَبِي يَكْتَلِي يَكْتَلِي  
 قَلِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي  
 دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي  
 مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي  
 دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي

*Marcel, you are asking me to write an introduction for my poetry book. I would like to also be known as a poet in addition to having been known as a painter. This assessment is up to the Assyrian people when in the future they read my poetry. Then they will determine whether I have a lasting legacy or not.*

Hannibal persistently endeavoured to show the richness and adaptability of modern Assyrian to different styles of poetry. These are his own words in the same introduction:

حَايِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي  
 مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي  
 دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي دَمَمَسْتَابِي  
 مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي مِثْبَبِي

*I have composed poetry in different styles with patriotic, social and romantic themes as well as short and long tales. My objective has been to demonstrate the richness and adaptability of our mother tongue to compose poetry in various styles.*

I want to conclude with saying that the late Rabi Hannibal Alkhas was truly an exceptional poet. His works in any style he wrote complied with the technical requirements of that particular style. Furthermore, the artistic element in his work is very unique to him and renders his poetry timeless pieces of literature in modern Assyrian. He always gave credit to the richness of our mother tongue for enabling him to compose poetry in so many styles. He often used idiomatic speech or made references to our ancestral heritage in his work. His eloquent writing style was influenced by his intellectual capability and imaginative talent.

He rendered a tremendous service to our nation by contributing to the survival of our mother tongue through his works. He truly followed the footsteps of his late father in this regard. In my opinion, any reader of his work will acknowledge these statements. To me however, Hannibal lives forever. I will cherish his friendship for as long as I live. I feel so fortunate to have known him on a very personal level resulting from our close interaction in the last few years of his life. I learned the quatrain technique while typesetting Hannibal's selected poems and this inspired me to compose two quatrains for him. I recited these two quatrains for him on Saturday August 20, 2010 in Turlock when I saw him for the last time.

نَ اَهُبْخَك:

حَدُّ فُكْرِكُمْ ذِي كَمِ حَمَمِكُمْ إِذْ مَمَّ تَشْأَقِي  
 يَكُنْ بِمِ تَلْمِضَتِكُمْ هَمَمَاتِكُمْ  
 نَ تَمَّ مَذْهَبِكُمْ مَحِيَّةً تَهَيِّقُ دَمْعًا تَهَبُّدًا  
 بِمِ هَتَفَاتِكُمْ مُسَيِّمَةً هَمَمَاتِكُمْ

*O Hannibal:*

*As I enter your poetry in the computer  
 I am learning about your thoughts and capabilities  
 I, Marcel Josephson of Mar Bishu  
 Am and will remain truly and respectfully yours*

نَ اَهُبْخَك:

مَدَّ كَيْبُورِي يَبْأَدُ نَ تَمَّ مَدَّ كَيْبُورِي  
 دِي كَيْبُورِي كَيْبُورِي مَدَّ حَمَمَاتِكُمْ  
 نَ تَمَّ دَمْعًا دَمْعًا تَهَيِّقُ دَمْعًا مَدَّ  
 تَمَّ دَمْعًا دَمْعًا تَهَيِّقُ دَمْعًا مَدَّ

*O Hannibal:*

*Pearls are pouring out of your imaginations  
 Your writings create beautiful feelings  
 A day to come such that every fellow Assyrian  
 Will celebrate the fineness of your artistry and greatness of your works*