

# Journal of Cyberian Cultural Studies

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**Note: This journal is completely fictional.**

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The Journal of Cyberian Cultural Studies, founded in 1996, is a quarterly review of art, music, literature, and media in Equatorial Cyberspace.

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## Special Issue: The Poetry of Zahra al-Zahra

### *About Zahra al-Zahra*

Zahra al-Zahra was born in 1961 in McGilldishu/Duchovnyville, on the day of Brynarian independence from France. Her father was a local Zaharian politician (and, briefly, Minister of Culture in the Poble government), her mother an artist of Brn-Icasian ethnicity. Zahra was awarded a French government scholarship to study at the Sorbonne in 1982, but in 1985 she returned to Brynania to complete her studies at the University of Grenoble (later, Hamrville)--in order, she explained, to be closer to her now war-torn people. In 1987 her first book of poetry (*The Peacock Laments at Dawn*) became a national best-seller, and she became (along with the national football team) one of the few cultural icons spanning Brynania's deepening ethnic divide.

Following the Hamra coup of 1995, Zahra issued a second book of poetry, *Echoes of Angst: Does Not a Zebra Dream?*. Despite her general support for non-violence, the book attracted the hostility of the new military junta, especially for one poem that seemed much more political than her previous work:

"They come in shirts of green  
Like asparagus in steel ranks, bagels of repression  
My precious daffodils recoil in subaltern shame  
Mourn the zebra  
...for the dusk of foreverness ululates like my mother's well-worn spoon."

While the last two lines of the poem remain the subject of considerable debate among scholars of Cyberian literature, the previous lines were generally considered a criticism of military intervention in politics and of President Hamra personally. On 25 November 1996, Zahra al-Zahra was arrested at her home and taken into custody. No charges have ever been laid. She has been forbidden all contact with the outside world. Reports suggest that she is being held in solitary confinement in the psychiatric wing of Hamrville Central Prison.

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### *Selected Works of Zahra al-Zahra*

It rises, and oozes the joy of boundless deserts  
Blue, like the lilies of the forest  
Spotted like the clouds of my childhood  
Can it see what I see, or is it accustomed to yoghurt of a different kind?  
I weep. And again. Yet no tears fall from my toes. Soft cotton covers it all.

Written in Zahra's own hand, experts remain divided over whether she meant "deserts" or "desserts" in the first line. The next poem, written after a visit to Helena, was later banned in Ruritania:

Cabbage. Everywhere cabbage.  
Dressed in brown and green, booted in black.  
It struts, with the arrogance of a burly sloth.  
It seeks, and covets.  
Oh children of the peacock, awake!  
Oh siblings of the zebra, safeguard your stripes.  
The new dawn it promises is an oatmeal of false promises.

Other great works:

Like the mango falling from the willow tree,  
the Birds of Freedom always survive the storm

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The Children--we embrace them with barbed wire  
The Children--we feed them with poison  
The Children--we play with them on fields of cinders  
Soon our Children will love us with guns

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Chameleon,  
Those who claim to govern.  
Shades of green,  
Promise of PEACE  
Shades of black,  
We burn with the fire of WAR  
Chameleon,  
Shed your skin.

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The snake lies sleeping in the grass,  
bloated from swallowing freedom in one gulp.  
Near by, the ants cry out,  
Struggling along beneath the weight of the Rubber Plant of Peace.

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It is fine to support the stars who want to help the moon  
but they are not going to solve the cosmos, are they?  
Only by laughing with the constellation groups will we  
be able to bring an end to the black holes and eclipses that  
characterized the solar system for so many years.

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Just as the rancid avocado rolls down an inclined plane  
So too the purveyors of evil sell their dirty laundry  
It is like the laugh of the hyena, painted in puce  
It is the sound of the wind in a box  
It is the dark stain of old oatmeal upon our patrimony  
Arise, oh people, let us hear your voices  
Your voices of freedom

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***In the July 2001 issue of JCCS:***

- The local rediscovery of the bagel-related arts
- An interview with the Royal Icasian Cacophonous Orchestra
- Dactylic hexameter or *Dawson's Creek*, which is the stronger influence on modern Cyberian verse?
- Ancient Ruritanian sculpture revealed to be five-year-old ugly paperweight
- Uqamistani political ballads