

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Ghazals for James Foley

Yago S. Cura · Wednesday, February 10th, 2016

*(On Saturday February 27, HINCHAS Press will host a book release party at **Gus Harper Art (11306 Venice Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90066)** to celebrate the release of their first print publication, *Ghazals for Foley*. More details below.)*

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In March of 2015, I was able to raise \$1,300 on Kickstarter to publish an anthology of ghazals for James Foley, the American Combat Journalist, whose beheading by ISIS was broadcast on YouTube. Jim and I had attended the MFA for Poets and Writers program at UMASS-Amherst—he for fiction and I for poetry. Although I turned out to be a mediocre poet, our time at UMASS was spent building an ethos of service and aesthetic of witness. Jim and I had taken Martin Espada’s class on the Poetry of the Political Imagination and had really started parsing Latin American and Latino poets (outside of Neruda, let’s say). Through Espada’s class we were turned on to Ernesto Cardenal, Eduardo Galeano, Jack Aguerros, and of course, Nazim Hikmet—a slew of writers outside of the canon, and thus inconsequential to the blazer junta installed in the English Department.



Espada had done a reading at this home for pregnant teens in Holyoke called The Care Center. So naturally, Espada was like, *okay, help these girls get their GED’s*, and Jim and I obliged in the best ways that we could because we were both adjuncts in the undergraduate Writing Program and needed the money. Jim had a solid background in education, having completed Teach for America in Phoenix, but I had very little experience so I used to stink up the room a lot with how bad my teaching was. But, that’s where I cut my teeth in terms of whom I have always serviced as an educator.

In 2007, when I was teaching 11th grade ELA @ the Walton Campus in the Bronx as a NYC Teaching Fellow, who do you think was in the back of the room, scarfing on a bacon, egg, and cheese sam’wich from the corner bodega? Jim was in town for a wedding and had asked me if he could sit in on my class as we discussed Othello and Iago’s motivations outside of sheer skullduggery.

The idea to publish a book of ghazals for Jim came to me after having read an October 25, 2014 *NY Times* article, “The Horror Before the Beheadings.” The article discusses Jim’s conversion to Islam while he was being held in Syria. Naturally, the article begs the question of whether “any conversion under such duress [is] a legitimate one.” I like to think the article also addresses how maybe Jim’s biggest act of defiance was synchronizing his spirituality with that of his captors—that way they (and Jim) would all know that when they tortured him they were torturing a

convert and neophyte—not just some immoral, opulent Westerner. Jim was a one of the best guys used by some of the worst people to achieve some sort of alien fiat.

Anthologizing a collection of ghazals from colleagues, close friends, and strangers made sense as a way of overturning some of the madness and savagery ISIS displayed on that day. Obviously, even though a lot of his friends were angry at him for going back to the Middle East to pursue freelance journalism work, there was something there, in that culture, that resonated with him in a very deep and deliberate way.

Hopefully, after reading our anthology of ghazals you will feel that we have paid our respects in a way that doesn't question his conversion. And, that was very important to us: that Jim be portrayed in a way that was true to his constant evolution, and his continuous journey to know the truth, and spread his understanding of the things that sometimes know no reasons or explanation.



### **HINCHAS Press to Host Book Release Party at Gus Harper Art in Los Angeles**

Los Angeles—On **Saturday February 27**, HINCHAS Press will host a book release party at **Gus Harper Art (11306 Venice Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90066)** to celebrate the release of their first print publication, *Ghazals for Foley* (ISBN: 978-0-9845398-7-1). *Ghazals for Foley* anthologizes ghazals written to, about, or for James Foley, the American Combat Journalist murdered by I.S.I.S. in August of 2014.

There are several poets that contributed ghazals to the book: Aldofo Guzman-Lopez, Kevin Goodan, Martín Espada, Yaddyra Peralta, Ethan Paquin, Daniel Mahoney, Benjamin Balthasar, Conolly Ryan, Mike Dockins, Rachelle Linda Escamilla, and C. S. Carrier. Even fiction writers like Shauna Seliy, Matt Basiliere, Brian Jordan, Sejal Shah worked outside of their genre to contribute stunning, dynamic poems full of voice and verve. The ghazals in this anthology are pieces of powerful lamenting, and bone-crushing hope created by the students of writing that Foley studied with at UMASS—Amherst, and complete strangers whom responded to Foley's senseless death with paper and pen.

Several Los Angeles poets are slated to read at the book release. Many of the poets had already pushed for Foley's release during his captivity in Libya. They include S.A. Griffin, Mike Sonksen, Billy Burgos, Dennis Cruz, and Annette Cruz. Please join us as we celebrate the moral courage of American Combat Journalist James Foley, and raise money to donate to the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation.

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