

## AGENDA

LEBANON

FILM

Youssef Chahine



**Madina Theater, Hamra, Beirut**  
**January 28, 29, 8 p.m.**  
 +961 1 753010  
 Winding up the Madina Theater's tribute to legendary Egyptian film maker Youssef Chahine this weekend are a screening of his 1997 film "Le Destin" on Saturday and a screening on Sunday of a celebrated documentary about the director. The 29th is Chahine's 80th birthday and he will be present, flying in especially from Cairo, for the occasion.

## EXHIBITIONS

**A Tribute To Nuha al-Radi**



**Madina Theater, Hamra, Beirut**  
**January 29 - March 1**  
 +961 1 753010  
 The Iraqi writer, diarist and artist Nuha al-Radi who died tragically early in Beirut in 2004 was famous for her personality, her ceramics and sculptures and most importantly for her "Baghdad Diaries" from the first Gulf War in Iraq. This exhibition organized by her family and friends features examples of all Radi's work in tribute to her fantastic life and talent, and is an expression of her inexhaustible personality.

## Just a thought

I hope that I may always desire more than I can accomplish.

Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1475-1564  
Italian Architect

# When bombs speak louder than words

Hanif Kureishi's new book explores the Western-Islamic divide

Omar Waraich  
Special to The Daily Star

LONDON: Hanif Kureishi looks decidedly glum. Sitting in his agent's office in London's fashionable Notting Hill, his hands knotted with solemn purpose, he also looks much older than his author photo showing the imperious visage of a younger and more self-assured writer.

But in the flesh the grizzled Indo-Anglian novelist, playwright and diarist exudes a quieter strength. The pain of decades past is inscribed across his face - especially upon his brow.

It's almost tempting to evoke

## 'Lets not hear anybody else, and let's not stop being English'

Dorian Gray here, but that would be churlish.

Offending people has always been a strong suit of Kureishi's. Staid people naturally loathe him for it. Others, however, have pored over his raw and opinionated writing with something approaching enthusiasm. "The Buddha of Suburbia," a novel, acquired a cult following and inspired David Bowie to record an album of the same name, while the screenplay for "My Beautiful Laundrette," his first film, clinched an Oscar nomination.

He is also a deft hand when it comes to non-fiction. Last

year Kureishi released a thoughtful little memoir, "My Ear at His Heart," and won wide acclaim. The volume explored his relationship with his Indian father, the influence he may have wielded over him, and his own, very personal development into a writer.

It is with not inconsiderable force and eloquence that Kureishi has brought his pen to bear on matters of race, class, liberalism and multiculturalism in contemporary Britain.

His latest work "The Word and the Bomb," is an attempt to divine the roots of Islam and the West's longstanding quarrel. Except that the vast bulk of the material isn't particularly new. Rather its pages comprise a collection of prose - including some fiction - that has been wrought over the last two decades, and closes with two essays on last July's horrific London bombings.

Why is it, the one-time enfant terrible of Brit-lit begins by asking in the opening pages of the book, that the relationship between the West and Islam, particularly political Islam, has "evolved from one of constructive discussion to one of a refusal to engage?" And why do we now find ourselves in this appalling conflagration, where "the bomb speaks louder than the word?"

"At times events can provoke one in a different way," Kureishi says. "After the bombings in July, and after reading and hearing what other people said and wrote, I asked myself: Well, what do I think about this?"

Writing, he says, helps animate that process - it crystallizes one's thoughts.

"It's not as though you've got these things to say and you just write them down. You say, 'I want to think about this.' One of the objects of writing is to find out what I need to say."

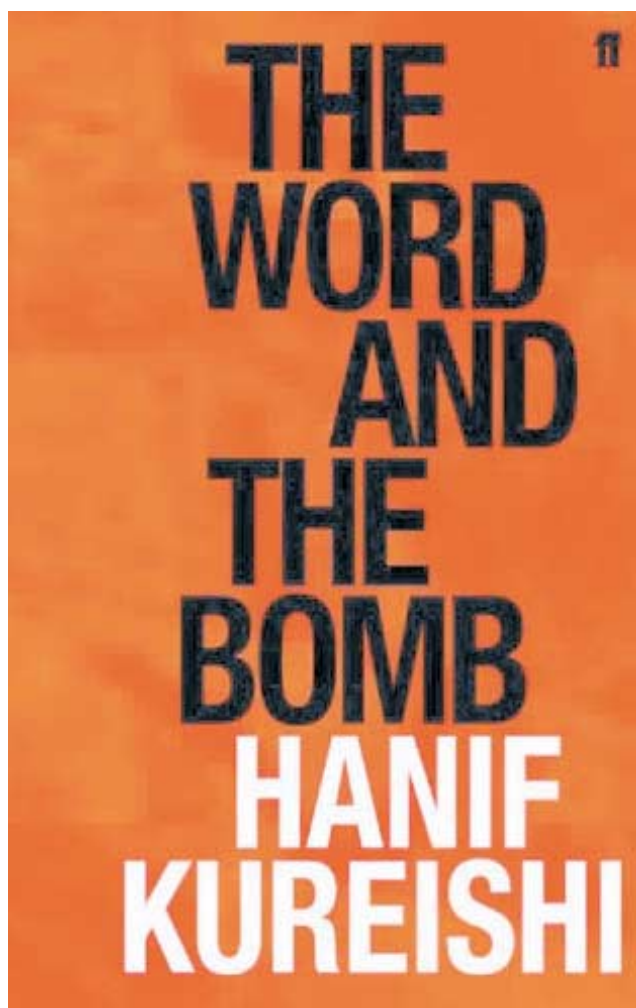
Is it a markedly different exercise than composing fiction? Kureishi nods.

"You're more free when you write fiction; you can do anything you want. With non-fiction, you have to think quite hard. It has to stand up in some way, and be sensible. Whereas with a novel, the madder it is, often the better."

"Each different form," he continues, "whether the play, or the novel, or the essay, has its constraints, has its pleasures, and has its difficulties. And that's interesting, because as a writer you want the right amount of difficulty. It's something you look for actually - difficulty."

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks, difficulty constantly harried liberals like Kureishi. Civil liberties - including the freedom to speak freely - swiftly came under assault. And several voices in the public sphere, including prominent liberal ones, clamored for less multiculturalism and more "Britishness."

"Let's shut the door, they're saying, and let's not hear anybody else, and let's not stop being English," Kureishi summarizes indignantly. "The whole debate is about what can be said. Are Muslims allowed to say that they hate gays? Are



they allowed to say that they hate the West? Are they allowed to say that you should blow people up in response to what went on in Iraq? What are the limits of what can be said? And that to me, as a writer, is obviously fascinating."

The reflections set down in "The Word and the Bomb" first formed in its author's mind when Khomeini howled for the blood of his close friend and mentor, Salman Rushdie. The notorious fatwa, alas, won approval among vast ranks of believers both in Britain and the Muslim world. Copies of "The Satanic Verses" were ritually torched in the streets, and overwhelmingly by people who never read the book. "That," Kureishi vows, "is when the shit started."

## 'The attacks are part of a recognizable exchange of violence'

It provoked him to write "The Black Album" and "My Son the Fanatic," stories that trace the evolution of alienated Muslim youth in Britain into hot-headed types who seek redemption in Islamist fundamentalism. And, in the process, they are relieved of all confusion. This is precisely what makes them so dangerous. As Deedee Osgood, a character in "The Black Album," explains, "They are devoid of doubt."

The debate over the publication of "The Satanic Verses" was, Kureishi insists, "essentially about whether you have the right to insult other people. It's not whether Salman Rushdie in the Satanic Verses does or does not insult. The question is about the right to insult other people and their

deepest beliefs, which may be their religion. "And it seems to me that one has that right. But then of course we get into all sorts of arguments about where Muslims may insult, say gays, or women, or other minorities. What do we say about that? It's a pretty puzzling and difficult debate, and a debate that one will never decide about, one will just keep going on arguing about."

But it isn't just the fundamentalists that Kureishi chooses to flay. He demands an argument with Western liberals too.

There is a failure, on their part, to even begin to conceive what it is that drives these young Muslims into the wide, enveloping arms of fanaticism. Western citizens - who inhabit a largely liberal and religion-free world - fail to grasp, according to Kureishi, "what it is to burn with a sense of injustice and oppression, and what it is to give our lives for a cause, to be so desperate and earnest. We think about these acts mad, random or criminal, rather than as part of a recognizable exchange of violence."

Kureishi cares not to elide mention of the West's violence, particularly as regards the Arab or Muslim world. "The Iraq war, we were told, would be quick and few people would die," he writes in the book. "It is as though we believed that by pressing a button and eliminating others far away we would not experience any guilt or suffering - on our side."

But does he believe we can successfully forge a path out of this parlous predicament? "Only with a robust and committed exchange of ideas - a conflict which is worth enduring."

Hanif Kureishi's "The Word and the Bomb" is out now at all good bookstores across the Middle East.

## STAR SCENE



## Sensual Saab offers fresh spin on glamour at Paris fashion week

PARIS: Lebanon's Elie Saab offered a fresh, youthful spin on the glitz and glamour of the stars of the 1950s and 60s during Paris haute couture week on Wednesday last week.

Saab delighted his faithful followers, wrapping up the official three-day haute couture extravaganza with a romantic range of shimmering knee-length outfits and red carpet gowns. Pretty bows provided a focal point for both the collection and the female form, emphasizing the hip, waist, back or bust of the shapely Saab-clad woman. V-cuts at the front revealed some cleavage while backs were bare. His silhouette was sensual, be it body-skimming, Empire-line or strapless, and trains gently billowed behind gorgeous floor-skimming gowns. Fabrics were featherlight in tulle, organza or lace, often embellished with tone-on-tone embroidery.

For slightly less formal occasions, Saab, one of many Lebanese designers to show during Paris haute couture week, offered a short Charleston dress in gold and silver, or a soft green dress with sequins whose skirt swished and bounced as the model strode down the runway. - AFP



Kureishi's novel "The Buddha of Suburbia" acquired a cult following.

## This is how they discover...



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## su|do|ku

Sudoku is neither a mathematical nor arithmetical puzzle. It is a logic puzzle. Each sudoku puzzle consists of a 9 x 9 grid that has been subdivided into 9 smaller grids of 3 x 3 squares. To solve the puzzle, fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3 x 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9. In each row, column and box the numbers 1-9 can only appear once. To make a start, look at each of the boxes and see which squares are empty, at the same time checking that square's column and row for a missing number. Every sudoku has a logical and unique solution.

9		6	2					7
6		8	7	4	1	5		3
		4		6		2		
3	1						7	5
		9		7		3		
4	7	9	3	8	6			2
8			5		7			9

Solution to Friday's puzzle

7	9	6	5	4	3	8	1	2
2	1	8	6	9	7	3	5	4
3	5	4	1	8	2	9	7	6
6	4	7	3	2	1	5	8	9
1	2	9	7	5	8	4	6	3
8	3	5	4	6	9	7	2	1
9	6	3	2	7	5	1	4	8
4	7	1	8	3	6	2	9	5
5	8	2	9	1	4	6	3	7

## HOROSCOPE

**Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)**

You will have to make some changes regarding your direction if you wish to keep on top of your career expectations. Don't let your emotions interfere with your professional integrity.

**Pisces (Feb. 19 - Mar. 20)**

Be sure not to reveal private information to the wrong individuals. Don't take your frustrations out on loved ones. If you've been really busy, try to schedule time to spend with family.

**Aries (Mar. 21 - April 19)**

Be cautious when dealing with foreigners. You can purchase items that will enhance your appearance and boost your self esteem. Don't let any small misunderstandings get in the way.

**Taurus (April 20 - May 20)**

Face any emotional problems head-on to avoid situations getting out of hand. Overindulgence will mean poor health. Don't shy away from potential mates they want to introduce you to.

**Gemini (May 21 - June 21)**

Your determination and stamina will make your work look less and effortless. Opportunities to make advancements through good business sense are apparent. Don't overindulge.

**Cancer (June 22 - July 22)**

Travel will be fun, but expect it to cost you more than you had planned. New romantic interests are preoccupying your time. Don't allow colleagues to stand in your way.

**Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22)**

Some relatives will be extremely perplexing. You may end up being blamed if anything goes wrong. When tempers flare, keep your cool. Don't blow situations out of proportion.

**Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)**

Uncertain changes regarding your personal life are evident. Passion is inevitable in the coming days. Don't let your partner goad you into wearing your heart on your sleeve.

**Libra (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22)**

Deception and doubts may surround your involvement with friends. Don't be afraid to lay your cards on the table. Overindulgence is not a cure if you're feeling sorry for yourself.

**Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21)**

Joining organizations will provide you with stimulating romantic contacts. Do what you can but don't jeopardize your health trying to please everyone. Heed the advice of older relatives.

**Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)**

Consider making pleasure trips or participating in entertainment that will require energy. Don't let your lover put demands on you. Travel will be favorable. Resist overspending.

**Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)**

Don't neglect these problems; deal with them once and for all, then move on to more pleasurable tasks. Proceed with caution as minor accidents could cause delays today.