Mohannad al-Azawi was his name, a Sunni, just twenty-seven. Pigeons were his trade, canaries too—but nightingales his passion. And in his shop on afternoons, he would often tell the tale of the wonderful Oiseau that warbled in its gilded cage, while the Emir of the East bowed low, oh so slow, in his scarlet pantaloons, crooned “Araaaaaabaha, baazoom!” And the Wazir of the West danced to the chant, in his very pointed shoes, played duet on his oud, cried “Wallazoon, Aa’arooon!” Men dressed in black dragged him away, his body found next day, his skin, a map of bruises, drill holes in his face and legs. He died in a world where an ancient rift (who would be Caliph at the Prophet’s death) can touch a lover of nightingales, where flagellants whip themselves bloody in frenzied prayer to commemorate a martyrdom—a land of visitations by angels and broken promises made by Gods.

Dr. Bronson (ΑΩΑ, New York University, 1966) is director of Reproductive Endocrinology and professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Stony Brook University Medical Center. His address is: SUNY Stony Brook Health Sciences Center School of Medicine, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Medicine, Stony Brook, New York 11794-8091. E-mail: rbronson@notes.cc.sunysb.edu.