



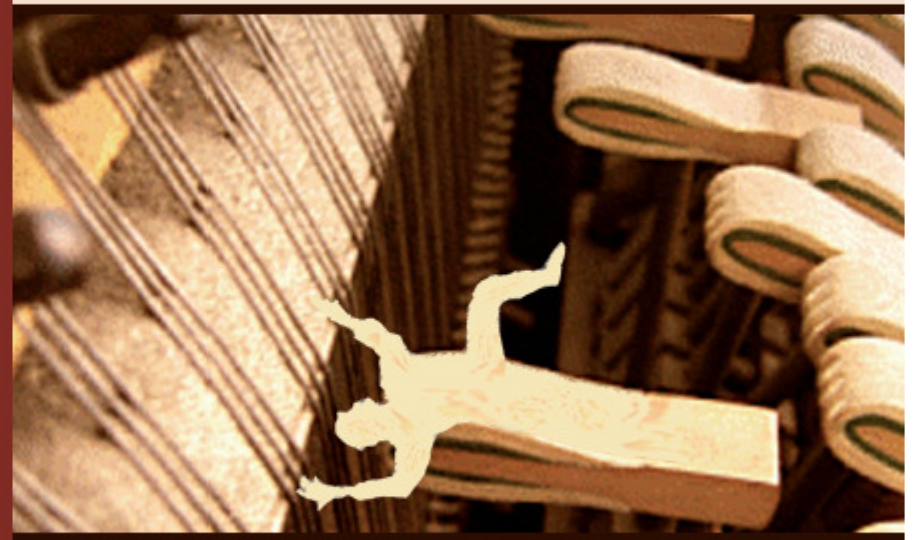
She was, in fact, a model of pudency;
her tasteful clothes exasperated her mother.
Only Kamal ever saw what boys shouldn't see;
which was, of course, because he was her
brother,
and he *loved* her, she knew, so why couldn't he?
She, too (like Kamal), adored their estate.
She adored her parents, and stayed up late
to read her Joyce and Tolstoy scored
by her father's piano. And she adored
her brother. O reader! I hear your question:
'Adored? Not *loved*? There's no suggestion,
is there, of romance morals might forbid?
Did she feel the same as *he* felt?'

She did!



KAMAL BOOK ONE
ZIREAUX

KAMAL



BOOK ONE
ZIREAUX

About the Author

Zireaux was born in California. He migrated to New Zealand in the mid-1990s and now lives with his wife and two children in Auckland. Over the last few years, Zireaux has given poetry recitals to audiences in America, Canada, the U.K., South Africa, India, Pakistan, Italy, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Lithuania, Australia and New Zealand.

About the Editor

Bernardo Winson lives in New York City. He holds a Ph.D. in English Literature and works as an independent publisher. He discovered Zireaux during a visit to New Zealand in 2004.

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Cover photo: A falling figure superimposed on *Inside Look at the Mechanism of a Piano*,
as photographed by Tomek Dud.

KAMAL

BOOK ONE

A Novel in Verse

ZIREAUX

*To you, great astronaut! To you who's flown
a spaceship through the dim penumbra of
this world; who's shot into the cold unknown
and pressed a boot upon that orb above;
and who (and here is where you stand alone!)
has landed gently back on earth,
becharmed a husband, given birth,
and waited in the check-out queue
at grocery stores while someone who
(your friendly greeting unreturned)
discerns no earthly merits earned
– no brand-name clothes or skin – and shoots a look
that says: 'just who are you?' To you, this book.*

. . . and to my father

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Introduction

I'll keep this introduction brief:

Kamal, the book, is first and foremost about Kamal, the boy, the protagonist, the hero, trying to survive in a world that's utterly indifferent to his passions. Book One is composed as a poem of five cantos, in structured, mostly iambic tetrameter or pentameter rhyme, totaling 5,472 lines.

Kamal was written by Zireaux, a fact I would never deny. He is the true creator, the official birth-parent so to speak. Nor would I deny him the legal copyright to this book, as you can see in the copyright notice on the imprint page.

To argue a case here for my rights to the custody – or, in this case, the assigned copyright – of *Kamal* would only cast a bleak courtroom's shadow over the book's God-given right to lead a happy normal life in the warm, nurturing minds of readers like yourself.

To those readers and critics who may question my decision to publish *Kamal* without its author's permission, I implore you to proceed with your reading and interpretation of *Kamal* as a work of art rather than to allow myself, or Zireaux, or anyone else to sully your experience with questions about the legitimacy of this book's existence.

I think you'll find that even if Zireaux claims I have no rights to publish his work, his consent, in fact, is expressed, albeit obliquely, in the very book you now hold in your hands – through its narrator, its main character and themes. And whether or not the right is granted, it remains incumbent

upon us, as compassionate beings, to preserve a specimen made vulnerable by its beauty (even if we aren't its original creator!).

In this regard I believe my publication of this book and my accompanying footnotes – meant to make *Kamal* accessible to readers from even the remotest outposts of the English language – represent the least I could do to fulfil my most basic obligation as a literary scholar and human being.

– Bernardo Winson, Ph.D.
July 25, 2007, New York City



Canto the First:
A Complicated Grief



How our narrator can wait no
longer to begin his tale . . .

I – *achem* – be clear, unthrottled throat! –
I do not seek to hail the Muse of Epics.
I'll sing this tale even if my notes
should make dogs howl and editors dyspeptic
and readers seize the DVD player's remote
to watch more handsome heralds in action
(A-list artists like Lucas or Jackson,¹
whose instruments are loud and long
and far more profitable than any song
I could pipe!). *Because my story's ripe!*
I cannot wait for that perfect type
of angel! I'll settle for a spirit more modest
– a muse for a poet who'll never find a goddess.

1 George Lucas and Peter Jackson, movie directors renowned for their epic storytelling and special effects.

Never? O surely I could search the Net
for inspiration – 'scarlet AND lips,' etcetera,
a yearning Humbert 'Googling' his lost nymphet
(nymphomaniacs, most cyber Jet Setters are!).
But what if heaven's website tried to get
my own details? I'd frighten off the Sirens!
They want deformities, like Byron's
foot,² or synesthesia in childhood,
the taking of drugs and lovers like Wilde would;³
and friends at the *New Yorker*! I've never
been published.⁴ I've never been told I was clever
by courting agents. I'm married, happy and rich.⁵
A life too tame for muses to bewitch.

2 Lord Byron, English romantic poet (1788–1824), was born with a clubfoot.

3 Oscar Wilde, brilliant 19th century Irish poet, playwright and novelist (1854–1900).

4 Zireaux appears to construct his narrator from the same creative compounds which have served so many authors over the centuries – that wonderfully cohesive mixture of reflective honesty and inverting invention. When these lines were penned, Zireaux, too, like his narrator, had never been published (this being his first published work). The poet, however, had already received an abundance of critical acclaim in New Zealand – features in the major newspapers as well as more serious scholarly attention in the university journals – for his public readings, which were very well attended (as this editor discovered when visiting a Kiwi academic colleague, who invited me to attend one of Zireaux's readings in a very wet of June 2005. It was my first encounter with Zireaux. My host and I stood with over a hundred other people, compressed into a single body on wooden floorboards designed to hold a maximum of 40, a tail of latecomers curling down the narrow stairwell).

5 As for his narrator being 'married, happy and rich', Zireaux may have felt the same about himself at one time but, for reasons I won't go into here (see my article, 'On Meeting Zireaux in New York City,' which appeared in the *Slater Review*, and the online edition of *Listen Closely* magazine, March 2007), I suspect there was a growing dissatisfaction with his domestic life which is reflected in the increasing extramarital yearnings of *Kamal's* narrator.

A life devoid of those credentials
which writers require – the Yale-at-sea
which Melville had,⁶ or that essential
diploma of wit – the jail degree
which made Voltaire so consequential.⁷
No war. No firing squad (concocter, it,
of Dostoyevsky's doctorate⁸).
I've never even smoked! My name,
Arcady, itself evokes the tame
suburban streets and shade-smear'd grass
which I, like Virgil's hero, alas,
would one day flee – O what a claim! I sought
to find a richer *Bucolic*. Aeneas I'm not.⁹

- 6 In chapter 24 of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the narrator, Ishmael, remarks, 'A whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.'
- 7 Voltaire, the French playwright, poet, novelist, philosopher and human rights activist (born François-Marie Arouet, 1694-1778), was imprisoned in the Bastille for allegedly writing verses satirizing the aristocracy.
- 8 The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) was arrested in 1849 and forced to stand before a firing squad – a mock execution as it turned out, with his sentence commuted to four years of exile and hard labor in Siberia.
- 9 Here we receive our first hint of the narrator's migration from America to New Zealand, a background expanded upon in *Canto the Second* (and a background, incidentally, that matches Zireaux's). Aeneas is the Trojan warrior who, in Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, founds the city of Rome after fleeing a besieged Troy carrying his father on his back. Ridiculing the notion he is anything like Virgil's hero, the narrator says 'he sought / to find a richer *Bucolic*' – a reference both to the bucolic beauty of his adopted country, New Zealand, and to Virgil's *Bucolics*, or *Éclogues*, pastoral poems about the shepherds of Greek Arcadian lore.

But hear me out – I *near my autumn years!*¹⁰
The sun shines low upon the sea, which heaves
beneath its silver breastplate. A south wind clears
out summer's comfort and chills the yellowed leaves
that hang like badges on trees – those brigadiers
who've never fought wars, but hearing
the rattle of distant canons, and fearing
their forces won't respond to commands
untested by battle, would rather stand
tall and be slaughtered than be retired!
Perhaps my 'sell by' date's expired?
Is it true what Robert Graves once said,
that any poet over thirty's dead?¹¹

- 10 Zireaux never reveals his narrator's exact age in *Kamal*. As for Zireaux's age, I'd estimate around 38 or 39, though his thick curly hair perhaps makes him look younger than he is.
- 11 The narrator misquotes slightly here. Robert Graves, the 20th century English poet, novelist and critic, actually said, 'Most poets are dead by their late twenties,' as quoted in the *London Observer*, on November 11, 1962.

And was I ever fresh? I was! Like Spring
I was! I swear that no one's felt more loyal
passion for her Highness Beauty! To sing
until she wept! To kiss her pink and royal
cheek! To hold her hand, two wedding rings
enfolded in our fingers! I knew,
however, these visions wouldn't come true.
I was like the peasant who –
though well attired – must jump to view
the Princess from behind the throng.
My dress was right. My lineage wrong.
Her carriage crushed my roses. A Moses or Milton
I'm not¹² – but nor will I sing for Paris Hilton!¹³

12 It may be noted that the English poet, John Milton (1608–1674), in the beginning of his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, calls upon the muse of Moses for inspiration.

13 Well-known socialite and superlative actress without talent (born 1981 in New York City), daughter of real estate magnate Rick Hilton and great-granddaughter of hotel magnate Conrad Hilton.



Lord Byron (1788–1824): "... I'd frighten off the Sirens! /
They want deformities, like Byron's / foot ..."

Paris Hilton (born 1981): A Moses or Milton / I'm not –
but nor will I sing for Paris Hilton ...'

Yet look – my story’s bucking in its chute!¹⁴
My hero on its back regardless! Dare I
leave imagination bard-less and mute
just because immortal maidens care not
for a star-less suitor of scar-less repute
– and the kind of life, in truth, like an ad
for *life insurance*? Adventures I’ve had
in youth were mostly on computers,
or televisions (those deadpan tutors).
Professional parents; the sort who wish
their Jewish brood were *less* Jewish.¹⁵
Their parents worked hard so we could have it all.
I thank them. Now let me introduce Kamal . . .

14 This metaphor refers to the rodeo, in which the ‘bucking’ bronco is held in a ‘chute’ or cramped pen, before being released into the ring with a rider on its back – the rider hoping to stay mounted as long as possible.

15 While this line implies our narrator is Jewish, as for Zireaux himself, my research remains inconclusive. Zireaux doesn’t look or act, in any stereotypical way, Jewish; and the one time I raised the topic of religion with him – during a casual exchange after one of his readings here in New York (in the basement bar of a green-painted, Double-Dutch Colonial building on First and Bowery) – he was elusive: ‘My parents were *fond* of Judaism,’ he said. ‘But my mother was most passionate about Buddhism.’ (‘On Meeting Zireaux in New York City,’ see footnote 5).

Wherein we’re introduced to
young Kamal and all his loves –
his parents, butterflies, painting;
and his greatest passion of all . . .

He was raised, like me, on a large suburban estate
near Hollywood – but that’s where we part ways.
Artists can no more shape their hero’s fate
than parents, in children, can themselves portray.
But to ensure my critics don’t equate
Kamal with me, notice his skin:
a Bedouin brown, a melanin
I’m lacking. His mother’s Pradaen dark,¹⁶
but that’s Apollo’s brutal mark
from hours naked on beaches and lawns,
or in the booths of tanning salons,
to keep in vogue an actress whose age now stalks her
more than her fans. (*My mother was a doctor.*)¹⁷

16 Most likely a reference to the trademark colors of Italian fashion designer Miuccia Prada, who established her reputation through a line of handbags in shades of dull brown, tan, ecru, army-fatigue beige and so forth.

17 Here, when I asked Zireaux if his mother was a doctor, the writer was cagey. ‘A doctor?’ he looked surprised. ‘My mother? My mother was a mother.’ (See ‘On Meeting Zireaux in New York City,’ as referenced in footnote 5).

And Kamal's dark skin? 'Thick-headed son!'
his mother once answered. 'Some long-lost ancestor –
big deal! That divorced Kidman bedded one
last week and all the tabloids cheered and blessed her!¹⁸
Like angels blessing a long unwedded nun!
They're great in bed (that I know).
And they didn't have EC pills¹⁹ centuries ago.'
These strong words sweetened Kamal's heart,
which always managed to keep apart
his mother's *feelings* from her *splittings*.
He found such pedigree appealing,
to think that he, like Pushkin, might have hints
of African blood from an Abyssinian prince.²⁰

18 According to many tabloids, Nicole Kidman, one of Hollywood's top actresses (born in Hawaii, 1967, raised in Australia), had an affair with the African-American singer Lenny Kravitz after Kidman's divorce from actor Tom Cruise in 2000.

19 Emergency Contraceptive pills, also known as 'Morning After' pills.

20 The Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) had a great-grandfather named Ibrahim Hannibal, who was born in a village not far from Asmera, the capital of Eritrea. Hannibal, of royal lineage, was brought from Africa and purchased by Peter the Great.

He adored his parents. His father, a composer
for movies, was nearly deaf, and nearly deceased,
and angel-white from head to toe. 'Your clothes, sir!'
Kamal would shout, delivering neatly creased
pajamas. The door would open, the dark enclosure
release from its sepulchral belly
a creature like that beast from Shelley
(Mary, not Percy, of course²¹), stinking
of the gin he'd just been drinking,
and pale – yes pale! A vessel of alabaster
emptied of its blood! The master
would smile. And thank his son. And claim his dress.
Then vanish back to wan unearthliness.

21 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851), author of *Frankenstein*, not her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, the dreamy poet and confirmed hydrophobe (1792–1822) who wrote the famous poem about hubris, 'Ozymandias'.

Rich and famous, his father – or rather, his name
was known to ranking members of AMPAS,²²
(what actors call ‘The Academy’). His *fame*
was touted at that exclusive shopping campus,
Rodeo Drive, amongst the wives who came
to buy ‘some knickknacks at 2-2-2’
(Pierre Deux²³) and Kylie Minogue’s hair-do,²⁴
and a thousand and one epiphanies
from diamonds bought at Tiffany’s.
His *wealth* belonged to Kamal’s mother,
who gave her husband a room; and another,
attached, to bathe in. For him two rooms were plenty
to care for, considering his wife used twenty.

²² Academy of Motion Picture and Sciences (AMPAS).

²³ Pierre Deux is an upscale home furnishings store at 222 Rodeo Drive (pronounced Roh-day’-oh Drive).

²⁴ Famed callipygian singer. Born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1968, her typical hairdo is rumored to cost over \$5000.

Her chef, by the way – who also served as fitness
trainer, and driver, and guru (and a role
the retinue of servants loathed to witness) –
would prepare a dinner in a bowl,
with a spoon, and napkin, and submit this
soupy substance to the floor
outside his lady’s husband’s door.
The Steinway would stop its woeful whining,
(informing the house its maestro was dining).
The music would start again – revived! –
precisely one hour later. Kamal *survived*
on its sound. It helped him sleep. No Oscar award
exists for dreams, yet Kamal’s were brilliantly scored.

But see my rhymes! How they kick and leap
and try to toss us from the saddle! Where’s Beauty’s
taming hand to help this poet keep
his story straight? To follow narrative duty?
I mention Kamal’s skin; my verse then sweeps
us to his dreams! And misses the route
I meant to take! The part about
his feelings for his parents. How purely
he adored them – immaturely
in fact, for a boy well into his teens.
But that’s just it: one kind of gene
had darkened his skin, another bleached his mind.
To *both* forms of distinction, he was blind.

Innocent Kamal! His parents, to him,
a perfect match! Like sun and earth; like Jones
and Douglas!²⁵ The clamor from his mother's gym
would mingle with the Steinway's mournful tones,
composing a sort of private hymn
to matrimony! His father: Gentle,
wise, old and sentimental.
His mother: Younger, and far more ambitious
(eliding the tabloids' 'bitchy' and 'vicious'),
although aesthetically unreflective,
was cosmetically quite corrective,
and – like intoxicating perfume – enchanted
Kamal with botox injections and breasts implanted.²⁶

²⁵ Considered Hollywood's most powerful couple, actors Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas married on November 18, 2000. Douglas, son of legendary Hollywood actor, Kirk Douglas, was 56 years old, 25 years senior to Zeta-Jones and father of adult son, Cameron Douglas (from his first wife, Diandra Douglas).

²⁶ Clinically known as *botox* and augmentation mammoplasty, respectively. The former blocks nerve impulses, temporarily paralyzing the muscles that cause wrinkles; the latter enhances breast size with inflatable saline implants.

Kamal loved all of life. Those gated grounds
were paradise to him – the apricot air;
the sculpted lawns and fountains; the mating sounds
of meadowlarks (those well-groomed birds who wear
a black cravat)²⁷; and the distant browns
of St. Monica's Mountains, like coffee spilled
on orange Aurora's gown delighted
Kamal – the hills were bleachers filled
with bugs and butterflies alighted
on each seat of grass! And speaking
of butterflies, he was always seeking
them out, streaking across his private park
to net a sample of Behr's rare Metalmark,²⁸

²⁷ *Sturnella neglecta*, the Western Meadowlark is easily identified by its yellow breast with a black 'v' on it, more like a bib, really, than the 'black cravat' the narrator employs.

²⁸ *Apodemia virgultii*, white-spotted, copper-black butterfly, considered an endangered species in America.