I loved your point about Dylan.  Music truly can be revolutionary.  I felt like that came through somewhat in *Lyric's Alley* but felt Nur's music was more about his own healing journey rather than that of his nation.  On the other hand, Soraya rejecting traditional limitations on women by pursuing her medical degree seemed even more revolutionary to me; however I was left wondering if she ended up abandoning that pursuit when she consented to marry Nur's friend, Tuftuf.  Ultimately, I was left with a lot of unanswered questions while I was reading, and once I finished this book, which is my idea of a piece of literature that really gets its reader thinking!  
  
Thanks so much for such a thought-provoking series of conversations!  
Elana

**From:** Betsy Bailey  
**Sent:** Monday, April 20, 2015 5:20 PM  
**To:** Elana Cohn-Rozansky  
**Subject:** RE: Conversation Sandwich #3

Hi Elana:

I am glad you as you finished *Lyric’s Alley,* you felt that the each of the story lines was compelling.  I agree, and for that reason it is difficult to pick a favorite. I was happily surprised to see Nabilah grow up and embrace something bigger than herself;  moved by the depth of Soraya’s heart; and gripped by the many twists and turns in Badr’s life and how throughout it all, he maintained faithful to all he valued.  But if I have to pick a favorite story line, I’ll go with Nur.

I have always been intrigued by novelists who, through their characters, show us something about the art of writing.  I loved seeing Nur grow as a writer, and in the process, move through his pain.  Coincidentally, at the same time I was reading *Lyric’s Alley*, I came across two recent, extensive interviews with Bob Dylan.  It was interesting to see Nur emerge as the “poet of love and hope” and voice of a new Sudan while also reading about Dylan, so often called the revolutionary voice of his generation.  In the interviews, Dylan discussed his writing process and emphasized how music and stories from the past inform his songs.  He said that although he is alone when he writes, he typically feels he is engaged in dialogue with those who came before him and those who may later sing his songs.  I wonder if Nur – who had been cut off from so much of his world by his accident – felt that too.  Perhaps it was not so much the act of writing or the fame he achieved, but the fact that his work connected him to a world so much bigger than the hoash or even his university, that healed him and propelled greater and greater work.

As always I’ve enjoyed sharing our responses to a book.  Looking forward to next time!

Betsy

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**From:** Elana Cohn-Rozansky   
**Sent:** Sunday, April 19, 2015 9:33 PM  
**To:** Betsy Bailey  
**Subject:** Conversation Sandwich #3

Hi Betsy,  
  
I bet you were wondering if I had forgotten about my third Conversation Sandwich!  It was a slow-go through *Lyrics Alley* but mostly because of all my traveling and my desire not to schlep an almost-finished book with me. Thankfully, I had a few peaceful moments last week to get through the final few chapters, and I am thankful for that.    
  
Many of my initial issues with the book were resolved by the end, especially the very measured tone and rhythm of the book  which at first felt overly formal and a little dry but then felt intentional.  As the book progressed, I was noting some very beautifully crafted sentences and moving and emotional passages including those written about Nur's growth as a poet and Nabilah's recognition of the power of family.  I found myself with each chapter re-evaluating which story was capturing my attention the most--Soraya's love for and allegiance to Nur; the tutor Badr's focus on bettering his life and his devotion to his God, wife, children, and incapacitated father; or Nur's passion for and dashed hopes about Soraya which leads to the poetry that ultimately frees him and gives his life purpose? By the end, they were equally compelling.  
  
So, two questions for you:    
  
Did you have a favorite story line or character?    
Why was Nur's poetry so powerful?    
  
I kept wondering if it was the writing itself or the fame Nur got from the writing that helped him heal.  Have you seen the documentary *Finding Vivian Maier*.  It definitely makes you think about what art is if no one sees it...  
  
That's it for now.  Looking forward to reading your response.  
  
Elana