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Phenomenal Literature
A Global Journal devoted to

Language and Literature

Vol.2 No.1
January-March 2016

Chief Editor:

Dr. VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr. RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr. CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY



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ASHISH SRIVASTAVA

EDITORIAL

It gives us immense pleasure to present Phenomenal Literature, Vol. 2, Issue 1 before your eyes or into your hands.

The present issue features total forty-four authors showcasing their 23 poems, 09 short stories, 01 memoir, 01 travelogue, 02 plays and 09 scholarly articles. It is indeed heartening and a matter of great happiness that the journal is able to cater its purpose by showcasing a galaxy of coveted authors and scholars from all over the world.

The journal is giving a fair chance to the writers of all countries in proportion to their quality and quantity of submissions. If representations of some parts of the world are less or left out in the particular issue it means the journal is getting lesser and lesser qualitative or no submissions at all from those regions. Therefore, the journal would welcome more and more submissions from all parts of the world in order to do poetic justice with them.

From this issue onward we have started a novel means of sending a PDF proof copy to every contributor after we edit and proof read them. This leaves almost no margin whatsoever in smoothening out grammatical, punctuation and formatting errors.

Your feedbacks are important to us in order to serve the literature in the best possible manner and to the best of our abilities. Therefore, we would like to invite all the

contributors and the readers to leave a few line of comment on the performance of the journal by clicking 'Feedback' menu or visiting at the following link of its website:

<http://www.phenomenalliterature.com/comments.php>

We request contributions for our next issues and invite all writers to assist us in pouring wonderful writing in all the genres that we deal in and dwell with. Kindly do spread the word around!

Happy reading!!!!

Editors

CONTRIBUTORS

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Gary Beck has 11 published chapbooks. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City. www.garycbeck.com

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POETRY

1

Epitaph for Khushwant

K. S. SUBRAMANIAN

His grey beard was a prism of
joy in living, evening out pain;
Had his share of rows with the
mighty, let it die with a grin.
Woke the morn with a pen,
so seductive was its nib;
Malice was only on its tip,
yet never flowed in the blue.
His eyes had the spark of wit,
never departed from wisp of truth!
He harvested a valley of hate,
never sowing it in his stream;
For he saw the light in the tunnel,
wished Man to see his dream!
The Muse was in his veins,
for ever swimming in its magic;
Death, a visitor to every door,
was too shy to even knock;
Now he will rest in peace,
The pen will miss its soul mate.



2

Cockles and Mussels

ELIZABETH HOWARD

Crying cockles and mussels, alive, alive O!
(Irish folksong)

A fishmonger trundles a wheelbarrow
laden with crustaceans toward the ferry
port in Brindisi, Italy. He parks it and
walks away. A chic young woman,
hurrying along, stops in mid-stride.
One by one, she picks and eats a few
slithery creatures, wipes her dainty fingers
on a white kerchief and hastens on.

As I lie in my cabin, rocking the night
away in the ocean's smooth arms, I
dream of a tangle of curly tentacles,
crunchy pincers, and feathery fins,
the grit of sand in my unwashed teeth.



3

A Poet Should Never Tell a Priest

LORETTA DIANE WALKER

That she feels like a goddess
when creating a universe out of a white void.
The black ink of her hands pens clay words,
shapes them genderless, forms a poem
from the ribs of syntax, memory,
and that box of marbles she calls life.

Autumn is on its knees crawling
towards the air, maples, the poet's bald head.
It wraps cool arms around the morning
as though begging forgiveness for three months
of brutal heat and Poet's chemotherapy.

Some prayers are lost beneath the wheels
of school busses bumping along back roads
in a desert West Texas town –
the screeching of their brakes are masked screams
of the abused earth and tired poet.

Anger is a string
of expletives beaded together;
it has no allegiance to any soul,
will wrap itself around
any raw exposed neck,
including the godly.

Night is a hotdog.
Stars dribble and multiply
over its long darkness
like mustard seeds.



4

To the Beggar Woman

NUGGEHALLI PANKAJA

Dawn or dusk
Seems to have lost their meaning
For you in your efforts
To survive, poor soul!

Holding tight that bowl
You tend to your babies-
Future inheritors.

Believe me, woman in distress,
No change had I on my person-
That morn – so decided
To bring some without fail
Next time I pass that way.

Alas, you were not there
That eve!
Only the kids
Holding tight your bowl
Passed on to them;
That sacred bowl
In their tiny handsnow.



5

My Places

HOLLY DAY

All my favorite places have been overrun
by kids who look at me as though I'm
some old lady who lost her way, stumbled
into their club late at night on the way
to buy last-minute groceries or some important
old lady medication

all of my regular haunts are being haunted
by children who don't understand how important
these places are to me, children
who will grow up to become boring adults
have boring jobs, live boring lives
forget why they ever came to these places
and will wonder about
strange old ladies like me.



6

Goat

MARC WOODWARD

Below the power line macramé
in a Delhi alley doorway,
an old woman grinds cumin
with green palms of coriander
while a slim bellied singing man
fries meat and dances round her.

Two days later on a sun spilled
road through wooded foothills,
three young women stroll in saris
of kingfisher, cerise and turquoise.
Perhaps they'd texted at sunrise
to synchronise their colour choice?

In Parahganj a young goat bleats
tethered for the cooking pot.
Observing all through ancient eyes
it's seen great empires fall and rise.
Change has many flavours on these streets,
old and new. Some cool, some hot.
And change will soon arrive.
Sure as the goat's and kings' demise.



7

Strong Enough For Both

ANDREW SCOTT

I am watching you shake
questions leading to confusion
mind playing tricks on your happiness
it is taking you to a place you have never been
barely letting your emotions breath

Can see the doubt all over
eyes giving away all of your thoughts
not sure if it is all deserved

You are not the only one there
I am pretending to be all together
while laying in a nervous heap
all of self doubt

Asking for you to just hold my hand
and smile at the small moments
if you get that feeling of not knowing
know that I am beside you
feeling the same emotions silently

What I do know for sure
is while we hold on for each other
I can be strong enough for both



8

Walking Through

BYRON BEYNON

The old, empty rooms
have something to say.
They remember being dimly
aware that the villages and fields
surrounding them have changed,
and the windows have witnessed
scenes of snowstorms
coming in from the east.
The time-tied lyric,
images translated during
the silence of a winter's morning.
They'd sing for you
if they could,
all the melodies of a crystal minute.
They are left
with the historic dust of past
lives caught dancing
in the brittle sunlight.



9

Dejection

LAVERNE FRITH

A woman walks on a fog-bound hillside
toward an unknown destination. Anonymous

in her journey, mysterious in her purpose,
she walks with a practiced determination.

How many times has she returned to this
place, carried out this routine? What

fixation of memory holds her to this
purpose? On one level, the scene is

vague at best, the grasses overgrown, the
pathways uncertain. She holds doggedly

to her purpose. To know more, we must wait
for the fog to lift.

10

The Calling

CHRISTOPHER J. ROE

Grasshoppers vibrate
to call to their loves.
Cell phones vibrate
for the same reason.
The sun shimmers
in the hot desert
as the postman shivers
in the winter snow.
It all comes down
to delivery
be it mail
or a baby
or a baseball.
In sports and love
the hero delivers
using all the arrows
in all the quivers.
Fingers crossed
to hide a lie,
after the long hello
comes a quick good bye.



11

On Canvas

DR RITA MALHOTRA

on black canvas
larger and deeper
than its geometric measure
she lights the stars
one by one
paths of light and dark
cross in much more
than time and space

on the lighted canvas
she joins broken pieces
of horizon
to shut the reckless sun
from inflicting more wounds
on earth's flesh

on canvas
in her journey
of self-discovery
through absent colours of love
she splashes darkness with
multi-dimensional hues
dark now emerges
as a source of light

she embarks upon her journey
towards the absolute
seeking moksha
seeking redemption.



12

The Hyena**WILLIAM C. BLOME**

Nothing suggests itself.
(T.E. Hulme)

When in winter you step up and into a coach short of midnight, there won't be sufficient light to see traces of a hyena. Granted you'll reckon a beast has been where you are now, but you're left in the dark as to its sex, its size, its sound, its age, its smell; and if you pursue trying to pinpoint these things, you're going to miss seeing the countess in brown hugging a lamp post five blocks north of where you boarded.

In rapid succession as the coach rolls on, you'll miss noting a pipe-smoking dwarf, an abandoned trombone, hieroglyphic signage, and a pile of peonies, all of this absent, mind you, so long as you keep combing the speeding coach for your got-to-have hyena clues. Better by half – oh, one has to think *very* much better – you lose your desire to know the hyena.



13

Lonely Child

METOD ČEŠEK

when you see a child
browsing through the trash

it hurts the soul –

you no longer feed any doubts
of the right to a decent life

when you see a homeless child
wandering through the deserted cemetery

it hurts the bones –

sometimes a lonely soul befriends
the shooting star



14

On the Water

STEVE KLEPETAR

*"now leave me alone with my ocean:
I was born for a handful of fishes."
(Neruda)*

Waiting on these quiet waters
for a fish to strike,
I am never bored. My few fish
have golden scales and ruby
eyes that burn through the murk,

that slip through reeds and glide
along refracted light,
or sail enmeshed in darkness, with fins
and tails sharp as layered swords
sweeping in silence, slicing the skin of the sea



15

Phantom Child

TIKVAH FEINSTEIN

The little girl lowers her face to peer at a green grasshopper.
Eyes close, it rests on a broad leaf with brown, curled tips;
both insect and perch the colors of autumn.
She reaches to touch a warm fleshy tomato, pulls, but it
clings tight to its stem, ripe in the sun. She smells the crisp
scent of Basel, the pungent damp of the earth,
sweet Petunias and bold onions.

She turns to glance again at the still insect, hind legs
bent like stems, undisturbed and dignified; and she
suppresses an urge to catch the elbows of its legs
in her small fingers, like she has done
before, and suppresses the will
to hold the little fellow in her palm,
to watch the brown liquid spill
from his jaws while he chews and chews.
If she turns just a bit to the right, she will see
me watching. If she looks up to the bird feeder, she will spy
a squirrel eyeing her. But the little girl would rather
view the yellow finches, as they pluck sunflower seeds,
bouncing on their perches of spent flowers
in upside down positions.



I could tell her stories of a life she will join when she leaves
this yard. I could say there's the other side of childhood, where
ideals and dreams are dashed and others judge her value,
worth by their designs and not by her deeds.

But I won't do that to her child's heart. And she won't trap
a grasshopper by its legs ever again.

We both know boundaries now.



16

The Silent Meed

MUNIA KHAN

A bird sang a couple of notes and left
when I was alone in the woods.
I felt my methylated spirit
under the split sunlight
burning inside me
to remove some permanent varnish
from my wooden years.
Years being so dry are now used
as fuel in life's fireplace called 'family'
in the chimney of which
only duty's soot tends to form.
And in return a little warmth
is the reward



17

Enchanting Tunnels

ALEX CHORNYJ

In a quiet rain
The drops bounce off leaves
Plummeting to the ground
In swan like dives.
This plop plop sound
Sways to and fro
Orchestrated by a conductor
Whose hands delve in figure eights.
How nature is unto herself
Artistic in bare essence
Leaving behind subtle hints
About what she's trying to say.
In this conveying language
Perceptions are clarified
Through the expression of notes
Whose decibals reach certain keys.
Once these are touched
Such corresponding strings
Create echoing bundles
Filled with bursting releases.
From this chain reaction
A sustenance communicates
Through a flowing melody
Like a dance of butterflies.

From the clouds to the air
Soft, silvery globules
Gently fall like flakes
Searching for a place of harmony.
Their final resting spot
Comes upon a blanket
One that covers a surface
In tranquil tones.
Why as I make my way
I'm at peace, in contentment
That all is as it should be
In a forest of parachuting bubbles.
For this is as eternal
As the impression left in its wake
That's etched and engrained
Into the passages of enchanting tunnels.



18

Defiance

YUAN CHANGMING

With the cage tightening, and
Despite my wounded wings

I am still free to try
Trying harder to fly

Flying up so high
Higher than the sky

Beyond this universe
Locked inside out



19

Rock vs Waves

YUAN CHANGMING

Hard, cold, firm
As apathetic as time itself
You hold your position
Against countless attacks of surging billows
That keep pounding your naked chest day and night
Like fate knocking at the Beethoven's door

You will never give up your effort
Or you would collapse into sand



20

Voices in the Belfry

KEITH MOUL

I met for years with contrary shades
of my own being, pressed heatedly my claims;
duly performed suitable penalties;
hauled from life's mine tons of ore.

In fact, some arguments rang with truth,
bestowed its honor on me from both my sides;
however, most floundered in superstition.

Sometimes eloquent, I presented my pains
and my glimmerings in artificial light,
on which everyone I knew depended too.

None may speak for pains unfelt.
The scar is authority for the lash.
Piled dross recites the purity of gold.
Shaky drafts imbed worth in the final poem.

I have a small hill.
I like traveling long roads.
I have an ear for immaculate tone.
But I have forged no golden bell,
still work in congress to make a belfry.



21

Ashes & Memories

DR. JAMES G. PIATT

Memories lost in the empty spaces
Of a thousands cheerless yesterdays,
The violet void of the cold universe
Beckons to the absurdity within:
Ancient thorns of the present,
Benign when life was new, leave
Bleeding trails of ashes the color
Of rusted iron: Visions of bygone
Times, lead to an isolated meaning-
Lessness: Dark fissures, in the indigo
Abyss of Infinite space, swallow weary
Thoughts. A scarred clanging bell
Chimes, revealing a sterile loneliness,
Nothing left except bundles of cloth
Filled with images of broken bits
Of shattered dreams: Delusions follow
Circular paths, riding inside frozen
Nightmares: Traveling forever in dark
Places, they continually search for
That, which, has forever departed, never
Finding those happy memories that once
Gave solace to their souls.



22

Bachelor Day

JAN OSKAR HANSEN

It was father's day he got up early and
drank coffee near the phone just in case
his daughter rang.

Then it was afternoon and he must have
fallen asleep and he fretted if the phone
had rung and he hadn't heard it.

He went into the kitchen but left the living
room door open, he had a ham sandwich
which he ate by the phone.

It was now evening and she was not ringing
how could she a product of his wishes,
childless man she was a figment of your dreams.



23

Never Ever Seen

HAMEETA KAUR MALHOTRA

Never ever seen as such two happy faces
Came running to me from nearby places
Shouting as if they have got success
And I got awestruck at the smile they possess
Announcing that next day they will go to school
Discussed with me about their schedule
Holding a bag with eyes glittering
Speaking as if sparrows are twittering
With aplomb showed the lead pencil and the rubber to erase
Their eyes contained the sun's blaze
Pages punched with the pale pink cardboard sheet
And a much awaited midday meal
Text books with a bunch of signifiers and bit of signs
Tomorrow, in their little minds big mazes; enshrines
White dress, belt and a tie red
They will go early to bed
Carrying water bottle on their shoulder
Running here and there as if they are a great bolder
Sunrise, foster a enlightened and brightened pace
For never ever seen such a happy face.



SHORT STORY

1

Good People

ELKE SOMMERS

Hanna watched the door with longing. Night was a cruel time. Cold seeped into her body and rattled her bones. Darkness as thick as potato soup blinded her. But worst of all were the noises. A shutter banged against a window frame, a window clanked. Apple blossoms from a tree nearby rustled near her feet, and then swished down the cobbled street.

Finally the door opened and a smile breezed into Hanna's face. It dissipated when she saw it was just a crack. The wary face of a woman materialized, balloon-like, as if detached from a body. Hanna pleaded with her, but the woman's eyes remained downcast.

"We can't," she whispered. "We found an anonymous letter in our mailbox today. Someone saw you last night."

Then the door slammed shut. For a while still Hanna stayed put and stared at it as if it could open if only she persisted. *But it was a wall now.* The night had eyes, she now knew. Maybe the window that clanked was moved by someone's hand? *She should go.* It took effort, more than she thought she could muster, to walk away. It would be a long night.



The previous night had been different. The door opened. The woman nodded at Hanna before she shuffled down the long hallway in patched slippers. In the kitchen an older man, the husband perhaps, sat by the kitchen table and repaired an old radio.

"The Russians will be here soon," he said, then slid a wrapped piece of homemade candy across the table to Hanna. *Sugar?* She could not believe it. *Not sugar*, the man shook his head, *honey*. Hanna looked at it for a long time before she slipped it into her coat pocket. The woman handed her a bowl filled to the brim with rutabaga and potato stew. Hunched over her soup, the candy safe in her pocket, her body warmed, Hanna felt content. Later the man showed her the stairs to the basement and pointed at a mattress by a wood stove. That the mattress was stained and reeked of mildew and urine did not matter. She slept soundly until an air raid alarm woke her up. But there was no place to go for a Jew and she stayed put.

In the morning the house above still stood. But across the city more people had joined the ranks of the homeless. There would be fewer places to knock.



Not long ago more than 500, 000 Jews had lived in Germany. Now Hanna was convinced she was the only one left. She wished she had fled when there was still time. At first she had good reasons to postpone her departure. Her mother was ill. Her father wanted to stay. He considered himself a German first and a Jew second. He had been an officer during the Great War.

"They aren't going to kill a German war veteran, now are they?" she remembered him laughing, yet he looked like

one of those theatre masks, the mouth grinning and the eyes all tragedy.

After Mama died it was just her father, Benno, and her. There still was time to go and they had money saved up, but her father could not tear himself away from her mother's grave, and when he was finally ready, the borders had closed. They came for him one night and when they had left with her father in tow she took her brother's hand and exited the apartment one last time. The Persian rugs, the paintings, the china, even most of the photographs she left behind. Of the family treasures she took only the jewelry and stuffed it into a small suitcase. A bigger suitcase would have looked suspicious. The star of David Mama had sewn onto their coats she ripped off. With every stitch that came undone another piece of her mother was lost forever.

Yet like a stain their Jewishness remained. Sun and wind had bleached their coats except for the spot covered by the star. Hanna saw the ashes from her father's pipe in the tray. The pipe, hand-carved from cherrywood, solid and elegant, was still sitting on the table. Her father himself had put it there a few short hours ago.

She rubbed the ashes onto the fabric and when she was done she smiled. With their hazel eyes and dirty blonde hair nobody would think they were Jewish. It surprised her how much she wanted to live despite all that was lost.

One last time she walked into the salon and played *Für Elise* on her mother's grand piano. From the corner of her eye she saw Benno walk in. He came to a stop in front of their mother's portrait. With a bang Hanna dropped the lid on the keyboard. Together they stared at their mother's dark eyes, her pouty lips, the high cheekbones. She had been so young then. Hanna still remembered the dress. She had put it on as a

child because it made her feel like a princess with its soft silk sleeves and a bodice made of velvet. But in the portrait the dress was merely a backdrop to her mother's best feature; her long and delicate, ivory-hued fingers which rested on a bouquet of roses. Before she had been their mother she had been a celebrated pianist, Fanny Witten was her name.

When night spilled over the city Hanna grabbed Benno and the suitcase and walked out. She could hear the door fall shut. It was a relief that the ghosts of the past stayed put.

For several months they drifted through the outskirts of the city. Lisl, their former maid, helped them find places to sleep but they never stayed for long. In summer they camped in the brush near lakes and when they stared at the vast sky they chuckled because it was so clear that nature would outlive everything no matter what the dictator said. In the fall they returned to the city where the murderers continued their mayhem. One of Hanna's teachers was spat on by members of the SS before being taken to Sachsenhausen. A soldier they knew returned from the front only to find that his only child, a girl with Down syndrome, had been put to death. Neighbors were taken away by trains. Some people claimed they were brought to faraway lands where they prospered, but others shook their heads and behind hands that concealed their mouths they whispered of extermination camps and violent deaths. Hanna and Benno worried about Papa. Could he still be alive?

In winter Benno began to cough up blood. He had tuberculosis like Mama, but unlike Mama Benno could not see a doctor. At least she could pay for lodging with her mother's jewelry, but his coughing soon became a liability. It was finally agreed that he could stay in a village outside of Berlin where Lisl's uncle had a farm. When he was close to

death Hanna took him back to the city. They found shelter in an abandoned house. Benno was in so much pain, his body twisted and turned. All Hanna could do was hold him and sing lullabies. Hour after hour she sang of baby birds who slept in little nests until he closed his eyes. One day soon, she knew, he would not open them again. In his last days Benno no longer recognized her, but when she called him her little doll, her *lyalkele*, he smiled.

He became so small that when he died his body fit into her suitcase. She intended to bury him next to Mama, but the cemetery was guarded by a soldier. She found shelter in a small church across from the cemetery. It was mostly old women who came here to pray and she watched them until she knew how to make the cross and to bless herself with holy water. She knelt on the old and knobby kneelers in safe distance from the women so they could not hear that her prayers were in Hebrew and not Latin. When they left she sneaked to the window and watched the soldier. She saw that he stole away often to visit a girl nearby. She knew it was a girl because she sometimes accompanied him back.

When the moon was close to full she took the suitcase and walked right into the cemetery and by vandalized graves. Her mother's gravestone had not been spared. *Judenrein* was painted on it. *Free of Jews*. But with her she carried the body of yet another.

As she dug the soil with her bare hands she vowed to live to tell his story and those of the others. The Nazis would not last forever. Even her tormentors knew. Days earlier she had walked through a park where she saw a group of blue-eyed and blond-haired children playing soccer. It was a sunny day and she stopped to watch them. After a while they took a break and one of the boys began to sing and the others

soon chimed in. At first it was folk songs and *schlager*, typical fare they would have sung in school and heard on the radio. But suddenly the mood swung and they became lighthearted. Hanna could not believe her ears when she heard them sing *Es geht alles vorüber, es geht alles vorbei, auch Adolf Hitler und seine Partei. Everything passes, even Hitler and his party.*

When she dropped Benno into the hole it comforted Hanna that her mother would never be alone again. But she was and she was not yet twenty-four. Berlin had become a lonely planet. Everybody she loved was gone. At night she inched through alleys like a phantom. Days were spent in parks or by the river, but always on the look-out so she would not be asked for an ID. Her only companion was a pocket knife her father had gifted to Benno and which was now hers.



She continued her walk through the city, not knowing where she was headed. For a long time the only sound she could hear was that of her own footsteps. She counted them. One, two. One, two. After a while she relaxed and let her feet do the walking. But suddenly the footsteps multiplied. *Onetwothreefourfivesix*. For every two of her footsteps she heard four more. *Onetwothreefourfivesix*. Her stomach tightened. She had no papers. If they found her they would drag her to Sachsenhausen.

She took cover in a doorway. The steps came closer and she could hear their echo bouncing against the walls of the few houses still standing. She tightened her fingers around the knife in her pocket. Hanna could see the shadows of two men less than five feet away. She could tell by the shape of the hat that one of them wore a uniform. The other was in civilian clothes. They smoked. The civilian's voice was a hysterical

tenor to the other's bass. She clutched the knife. She doubted that she would be able to finish both of them off, but she vowed to the cemetery ghosts that she would not go down alone.

"When things don't get better soon I will have to leave the city. Dagmar's grandfather lives in the Alps. At least I have a place to go," the civilian said.

"The Führer knows what he is doing," the uniform answered.

There was something frightening yet familiar in the uniform's deep voice. Hanna could feel terror grow inside her.

"Every single night we get bombarded. Today is the first time in who knows how long that we haven't had an attack. Every noise makes me nervous. One never knows what the enemy is up to."

"Hitler has it all under control," the uniform answered.

"I hope you are right," the civilian snickered.

"They have a plan. They want the enemy to come closer so they can beat him on their own territory. It will be an inferno to be cherished for a long time."

"Are you for real? The Russians have surrounded the city. I keep my backpack by the door. I'm not sacrificing my life for anybody."

"Günther, you will see. The Führer first saved us from the *Saujuden*, he will now do the same with the Russian. In a few short days you will thank me for having stayed put."

Jewish sow. She knew of only one person who could say *Saujuden* with such perfect coldness. The voice belonged to Armin Frey, a classmate from long ago.

They were never friends. He was a Nazi long before Hitler became a household name. He called her *Saujude* and *Untermensch*, spit in her face, and pushed her down the stairs of their *Gymnasium*. He was hardly the only one who mistreated Hanna. Everybody did. Teachers ridiculed her in class and later even her friends gave her a wide berth, but nobody treated her with as much contempt as he.

But she was not Hanna, the schoolgirl, anymore. Armin no longer frightened her.

She felt the blade of her knife and it gave her hope. Then Hanna thought of what the civilian had said.

The Russians have surrounded the city. So, it was true what the old man had said the previous night. Hitler was as good as dead.

When Hanna smiled it almost hurt, it had been so long.

The two men threw the butts of their cigarettes into the dark and moved on. One of the stumps landed right by Hanna's feet and she grabbed it and took a drag. It helped to still the aches of hunger. Then she followed them with jaunty steps. She would outlive *Hitler und seine Partei*.

A few blocks later she realized that they were headed into her old neighborhood, a place she avoided out of fear of being recognized, but now the darkness sheltered her. At every step she encountered the shadows of the past. She passed by rubble and conjured up the synagogue that had stood there once. A few feet further she saw a lopsided sign hanging above a door with broken glass. This was the Herzstein's grocery store. Someone had crossed out the name and painted *Kauft nicht bei Juden! Do not buy from Jews* above it in red. Hanna did not know what happened to the Herzsteins, but she suspected they had been picked up. More than once had she come across groups of people watched

over by men in uniform. She did not have to look to know that they had yellow stars clinging to their clothing.

Was good Mrs. Herzstein still alive? She always had a smile on her face when Hanna stopped by to shop. Hanna remembered the big glass jars on the wooden counter filled with caramels, chocolates, and candied nuts. Mrs. Herzstein often slipped a piece of candy into her hand when Hanna stretched it out to pay.

Armin and the civilian stopped in front of an apartment building. She recognized it as the place where his family lived. *So, he still lived with his parents.* His shoulders sagging, the head bent over, hands in the pockets of his coat, the civilian began to walk away. Armin stayed behind. After a few feet the civilian stopped, turned around, and shouted.

“Give my best to Tante Friederike!”

Armin nodded and raised his right hand to a Hitler salute, but his mouth stayed shut. Then he unlocked the door and entered the building. Hanna still remembered the old French doors that led to his family’s apartment. A good friend of hers had lived on floor above and she had walked by countless times. Was the name Frey still displayed on a brass sign? She recalled the fluid strokes of the letters. The sign had always been spotless. Frau Frey loved orderliness.

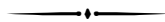
The lights went on in the Frey apartment. Because of the curfew they did not stay on for long, but long enough for Hanna to see her mother’s painting on the wall. She could only see the top half but she knew every detail of the picture and she did not doubt it. *Armin had stolen the painting!*

Hanna marched across the street to the building and pushed in the door. To her surprise the door gave in. She walked into the dark lobby, took her shoes into her hands,

and tiptoed to the door that led to Armin's apartment. The name sign was just as she had remembered. Immaculate. Hanna smiled. *Not for long.* She spit on it and smeared the saliva in round circles until the sparkle was gone. *Much better.* She pulled out her knife and began to carve letters into the wooden door. She had finished carving three when she heard steps inside. She nestled herself up against the wall, clasped her arms in front of her chest, and held onto the knife with both her hands. The steps came to a halt by the door. Armin was a mere door panel away. Sweat covered Hanna's body. With a bang the door fell open. But it opened to the outside and Hanna stayed hidden from his view. She watched Armin step into the hallway. He wore a silk bathrobe and looked smaller and thinner than he had in uniform, but when he turned sideways she could see a handgun. He turned around and walked toward her. A wave of nausea surged through Hanna and she felt an urge to empty out her insides. He was so close she could smell the alcohol on his breath.

Yet the door closed without him looking behind the door. The man who had tormented her countless times had spared her life. She had to act fast. He could come back at any moment. She unbuckled the belt and unbuttoned her coat. She pulled down her panties and crouched on the floor. With a sigh she relieved herself on the landing. *This is for you, Frau Friederike Frey. And you Armin Frey. Just to remind you that I will be back.*

When she walked down the stairs there was a bounce in her steps. When she was back outside she looked up at a sky filled with stars and began to sing her favorite *Schlager*. *Alles geht vorüber, alles geht vorbei, auch Adolf Hitler und seine Partei.*



2

A Good Bottle of Rum

PATTY SOMLO

In the wet heat of that July night, I followed a dark thin man from the plane. The terminal simmered under a row of unforgiving yellow lights. The man dropped my olive green bags alongside several scratched suitcases abandoned next to an idle conveyer belt.

I lifted my luggage and searched for the door. As I lugged the bags out into the hot, damp night, I noticed that they felt heavier than they'd seemed when I carried them into the airport back home.

People shoved their way into small rusted taxis as soon as they pulled up, everyone shouting in Spanish, a language I barely understood. I held on for dear life to a sheet of paper containing the name and address of a woman who rented rooms.

Eventually, the noisy crowd thinned and I spotted a rundown empty cab. The dented back fender slumped over a nearly bald tire. I quickly squeezed into the back.

As soon as we left the brightly lit airport, the road turned dark. On both sides lay long narrow ditches that looked like gravesites.

"Para la invasion," the driver said. At any moment, the government was expecting the United States to invade.

We passed squat, square-shaped houses painted vibrant pink and aquamarine. Hand-painted signs advertised *JUGO FRESCA* and *FRUTAS* above wooden stands. The driver announced that we were entering the center of town.

“The earthquake made the buildings fall down,” he explained. “Everything sent to help the people, the dictator kept for himself. During the war, the army bombed what was left.”

Bordering the boulevard, broken concrete walls reached for the sky. Shirts and socks waved in the wind, from lines strung where walls and windows must once have been.

The driver slowed to enter a circle and soon exited, passing a corner where soldiers smoked, leaning against a concrete barricade. Instead of humble homes and quake and bomb-shattered concrete, high gates nearly hid mansions several stories tall. Purple and yellow bougainvillea trailed down white stucco walls. Every few feet, soldiers stood guard.

Around midnight, the taxi stopped in front of a Spanish-style house with ornate balconies on the second and third floors. After paying the driver, I hurried to the door, worried that I might be arriving too late for anyone to still be up.

I rang the doorbell. Moments later, a plain, heavy-set woman with gray-streaked hair piled atop her head answered the door.

“Caterina?” she asked.

“*Si*,” I answered.

With no preliminaries, the woman waved me inside. We entered the living room and crossed over to a gleaming wooden staircase that arced over the hall.

On the next floor, another hallway awaited. Doña Liliana – she’d at last told me her name – led me to a pair of French doors.

“Breakfast will be at seven,” she informed me, then turned around and disappeared down the hall.



The next morning, I watched Doña Liliana move around the spacious kitchen.

“My daughter, Rosario,” she said, slapping a circle of dough back and forth between her palms, “became involved in the opposition when she was a student. I was so afraid. People who spoke out against the dictator were being killed or disappeared. Rosario educated me about how the revolution would help the poor and make life better for everyone.”

Doña Liliana went on to explain how she had supported the guerrillas in their long fight. But ever since the guerrillas had come to power and a war to overthrow them began, food, gas and clothes had gotten expensive, if they could be found at all. Her husband suffered a heart attack and passed away, and her children and most of her wealthy neighbors left for the United States. Doña Liliana, though, stayed, renting out rooms to make ends meet.

Even though she had stayed, Doña Liliana admitted she’d begun to lose hope. Perhaps that was why she couldn’t bear to miss her nightly televised soap opera, the title of which was the series’ main character, Maria Carmen.

That morning, after bringing me up to date with her life, Doña Liliana introduced me to Maria Carmen.

“She only falls in love with the most handsome men,” Doña Liliana said, as I waited for a cup of coffee. Already, the air was hot and damp. Sweat dripped down my neck.

“Maria Carmen needs to find herself a plain man,” Doña Liliana added, as if she knew what was best. “Plain men don’t run around so much.”



Just as on my first morning, the following day started out brutally hot. Beads of sweat collected on my neck, as I pushed a slab of salty fried cheese around my plate. As if the heat wasn’t bad enough, the food was drowning in oil and salt.

“She left him,” Doña Liliana began. “That lousy, good-for-nothing Rodrigo. It’s exactly what he deserved.”

She pulled herself up straight and smiled. I tested a bit of cheese, assuring myself that the saltiness and grease made it impossible to eat.

“Maria Carmen took a trip to Argentina,” Doña Liliana announced.



At the end of the third week, I was sitting on my bed when I heard a knock. I got up and opened the door. A pale blond man was there, in a rumpled cotton shirt, leaning against the wall.

“Hope I didn’t scare you,” he said, neglecting to pronounce the letter “h.” British or Australian, I guessed.

“A little. I wasn’t expecting anyone.”

“Just moved in.”

He reached out his hand.

"Back in the country. Fourth time. Phillip Andrews."

Phillip had icy blue eyes and lazy curls the color of ripe goldenrod. His loose, off-white cotton shirt hung haphazardly, as if buttoned wrong. Khaki pants clung to wrinkles probably left over from the flight.

"Catherine Simon," I said to him in response.

"Can I interest you in a drink, Catherine?"

I nodded and followed Phillip out the open balcony door.

We sat in rocking chairs lined up against the wall. On the opposite side of the street, a drunk stumbled from one edge of the sidewalk to the other. As we watched, his knees buckled, and he flopped onto the grass face down.

"*Salud*," Phillip said, raising his glass as he handed me mine.

"*Flor de Caña*," he added, and tossed the contents of his glass down. "Have you tried it yet?"

"No."

"It's the local rum. Worth coming back for."

He ran the fingers of his left hand through his hair and then turned to me.

"So what brings you to this beautiful, war-ravaged place? American, I presume?"

"Yes."

"You're here to help. Everyone is. At least all the Americans. Guilty, I suppose. For what their government's done. What's your gig?"

"I don't have a gig," I said, disliking the guy already. "I'm writing a book."

“Oh. Is it pro or con?”

“Neither. It’s....” I hesitated. “Actually, I don’t really know what it’s going to be. I haven’t gotten very far.”

“How long have you been here?”

He made *been* sound like something to eat.

“Three weeks.”

He leaned back in his chair and laughed.

“You’ve barely had time to get your feet muddy. This place takes time. The dammed city doesn’t have any street signs and no one has an address. Nothing works. And, of course, there are no lights. It’s so dammed dark at night you can’t even see your feet. Give yourself time. Here.” He leaned over with the rum bottle. “This is the best way to get acclimated.”

Phillip was a photographer who had come to cover the war. He traveled all over the world, in fact, shooting pictures of the dead, desperate and wounded. Our rooms were joined by a balcony that looked out over the dark, tree-lined street. I wasn’t surprised to learn that he was cynical about the revolutionary government and its promises. Phillip appeared to be cynical about everything. Except the rum.



As the hot, humid days wore on, my initial impression of Phillip began to change. For one thing, Phillip made me laugh. Also, at the end of a long sweltering day, listening to people speak rapid-fire Spanish, it was a relief to have a conversation I didn’t have to struggle so hard to understand.

I slipped into the habit of meeting Phillip on the balcony nights we were both in town, to gossip and sip rum. One

night, Phillip said he'd noticed a change in Doña Liliana. He found her listless and worried that she might be ill.

"She's disappointed in how things have turned out," I told Phillip. "She trades dollars on the black market. And she's putting all her faith in Maria Carmen."

Phillip thought Maria Carmen might be some new counterrevolutionary leader trying to overthrow the government.

"Maria Carmen is a soap opera character," I explained.



That night, I lost count of how many times Phillip refilled my drink. The next morning, I set two aspirins on my tongue and sipped sweetened instant coffee to wash them down. Doña Liliana was frying eggs. The odor of the half-burnt oil made my stomach even queasier.

To get my mind off my condition, I asked Doña Liliana about Maria Carmen.

"Oh, *Dios mio. Dios mio, Dios mio.*"

Doña Liliana shook her head.

"That Maria Carmen would find a bad man on a deserted island."

Doña Liliana's spirits appeared to have fallen along with Maria Carmen's romantic life.

"She goes to Argentina to get away from a no-good man. And what does she do? She takes up with another one.

"And this time," Doña Liliana said, lowering her voice, "he's married."



The idea had probably been there all along in the back of my mind.

“Good luck,” Phillip said, after I told him what I wanted to do. “I hear it’s impossible. Everybody wants to interview Comandante Ephraim Argueta. Ever since his book came out in English and he toured the United States, he’s become a goddamn superstar. Plus, he’s supposed to be running the Ministry of Defense.”

I didn’t respond, listening instead to the traffic buzz on the main road two blocks away.

After several minutes, Phillip broke the silence.

“Okay. If you’re serious about pursuing it, I have a friend who might be able to help.”

In less than a week, Phillip’s contact got me an interview. I was to meet Argueta on the outskirts of the capital.



Las Palmas had been taken over by the government after the owner fled to Miami. Wrought iron tables and chairs, with chipped white paint, were scattered around the patio. As I waited, I glanced down at my notes. Moments later when I looked up, I noticed a group of soldiers at the next table staring at me.

A half hour went by. The rule of thumb for waiting in this country where phones didn’t work and cars frequently broke down was two hours. Every few minutes, I checked my watch. Time seemed to barely be moving.

Finally, my watch hit the two-hour mark. I stood to get the bill.

The soldiers at the next table looked up. Suddenly, they turned toward the sidewalk. I turned, as well, to see what had

gotten their attention. Four other soldiers were standing there, the creases on their olive green pants pressed stiff and their high black laced boots perfectly shined.

The soldiers walked over to my table from the sidewalk. One of the soldiers reached out his hand. He appeared older than the rest.

“I am not very good at interviews,” he said.

I realized I had just been introduced to Commander Ephraim Argueta.

His skin was the shade of a walnut shell. Nearly the same color, his eyes glided down my face and across my mouth. The perspiration under my arms started to drip. Argueta’s lips stretched into a languid smile.

“That’s fine,” I finally got out.

“It is nice here but not so easy to talk,” he said, almost in a whisper.



Argueta’s house sat perched on the crest of a hill, overlooking a shimmering emerald lake. He told me the lake had formed in the rock bowl created by a volcanic eruption.

“The water is warm and very good for the skin. It is full of minerals. One day you will come and we will swim.”

I leaned against the balcony. Beyond the lake, yellow-green banana trees covered the dark hills. Emerald coffee plants folded in front of one another. Tongues of pink bougainvillea leaked down neighboring walls. The humid air hovered sweet, oily and low.

Dusk suddenly slipped into the envelope of night. The lake water turned from dark green to silvery mauve.

"It's lovely," I said, turning from the lake to face Argueta.

His eyes were soft and damp, like the soil after an unexpected shower.



Two hours later, Argueta ran his fingers down my face.

"I am sorry," he said.

"For what?"

"The interview. There is no time now for the interview."

He let out a sigh.

"There is something else," he said slowly.

I looked at him, wondering if I could ever grow tired of looking at that face.

"I am married," he said.

I swallowed, then rolled onto my side. This wasn't the first time a man had made it clear where he stood, moments after we made love.

"It doesn't matter," I said, as I pushed myself up from the bed.

I grabbed my dress and lifted it over my head.

"I'll be going back home soon."



The next morning, Doña Liliana informed me that Maria Carmen was pregnant.

"Oh, no. What's she going to do? Has she told Paulo?"

"She told him last night."

“What did he say?”

“He didn’t say a word. He just looked at his watch and said, ‘It’s late. I must go.’ And he left her.”

“That’s terrible.”

“Yes,” Doña Liliana said, wiping the sweat off her face with a soiled rag. “Poor Maria Carmen.”

I turned and looked at Phillip, who was sitting at the far side of the table, massaging his temples. He didn’t look up.



I wanted to tell Phillip about what had happened with Argueta. But when I met him on the balcony that night, I lost my resolve.

“Great. Just great,” I said, after Phillip asked how the interview had gone. “He’s a pretty interesting guy.”

“That’s what I’ve heard. Did he hit on you?”

“No,” I lied.

“I’m surprised. Doesn’t sound like the Comandante Argueta I’ve heard about.”



I started meeting Argueta at the house overlooking the lake evenings around dusk. In the circle made by the volcano’s shadow, the waning light shimmered a soft mauve.

We ate dinner on the balcony and watched the light depart. Argueta kept his eyes on me while we talked. He asked about my home in the United States, what I ate for breakfast and how late I slept.

At times, I steered the conversation back to him. I loved hearing the stories he’d written in his memoir about his days

as a revolutionary soldier. As he spoke, I imagined the mud-soaked jungle and the steep, slippery mountain trails. I pictured smoke drifting from Argueta's cigarette through the fog-shrouded air and his worn black boots caked with mud.

Every evening around nine, Argueta would turn to me, sometimes pushing a loose strand of hair away from my eye. "I have to leave now," he would say.

One night, a little over a month after I met Argueta, I told him I would also be leaving soon. He assumed I meant returning to Doña Lilliana's. But to make sure there was no misunderstanding, I let him know I was going back to the United States.

"You should not go," he said, and began kissing me and stroking my hair.

His eyes softened before he looked away.

"I can see us now when we are old," he said. "We will be sitting here on the balcony rocking. You will still be beautiful, even though your hair has turned white. You will not mind that I've gotten a little paunch."

The rain fell, while the balcony roof kept us dry. Argueta walked up and kissed my neck. He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and dangled his right arm so that his fingers reached my breast. My nipple grew hard as he traced its edges with his fingertip. His other hand slipped under my skirt.

Argueta's fingers moved up. My mind scolded me to go.



"I heard some gossip about your friend, Comandante Ephraim Argueta," Phillip said to me several nights later, as we rocked on the porch. "He's having an affair with an

American woman. They say he's got some love nest tucked away in the hills, overlooking Lake Mirada. He meets the American there almost every night, unbeknownst to his wife."

"Who told you that?"

I swallowed hard, forcing myself not to say more.

"Someone who would know."

Phillip passed me the half-full bottle of rum.

"Argueta's main bodyguard told me."

"Why did he tell *you*?"

"The guy likes his rum. He goes to the Intercontinental and sits with the foreign journalists. They buy him rum. He gives them gossip."

"How do you know it's true? If the guy's trying to get free drinks, wouldn't he say anything?"

"He might. Except he told me the name of the woman."

I gulped the rum I'd just taken into my mouth. The alcohol burned, all the way down to my stomach.



For several weeks, I had neglected to inquire about Maria Carmen.

"How's Maria Carmen doing," I asked Doña Liliana the next morning.

She turned to me with a bright smile.

"Maria Carmen had a beautiful baby girl." Doña Liliana looked pleased enough to be the baby's grandmother. "Her name is Alicia."

“What happened to Paulo? What happened to Rodrigo?”

“Paulo is in Argentina living with his wife. Rodrigo has found another foolish woman.”

“And Maria Carmen?”

“Maria Carmen is living alone, with Alicia.”



Two mornings later when I stepped into the hot kitchen, Doña Liliana was singing as she ground spices in a gray stone bowl.

“Bueños dias, Caterina.”

She turned and smiled.

“I have some news.”

“What is it?”

“My son has gotten papers for me to go to Miami. I will leave in two weeks.”

“I didn’t know you had a son, Doña Liliana. Or that you were planning to leave.”

“Sometimes when there is sorrow, it is easier not to speak. My son lost his job and it looked like I would not be able to go. But now he is working in a fine restaurant. He called last night and said, ‘Mama, everything is set.’”

“I am too old for this country. This country is for the young. You young people can manage without everything, because you have dreams. I do not have dreams anymore.”

“What will happen to this house, Doña Liliana?”

“My neighbor will rent out the rooms. One day, maybe, I will come back.”

“What will you do in Miami? And what will you do without Maria Carmen?”

Doña Liliana smiled. She ran her fingers softly down the side of my cheek.

“Miami has everything,” she said. “Even Maria Carmen.”



The day Doña Liliana told me she was leaving, I knew it was also time for me to go.

“You know what I will miss most about this place?” I said to Phillip that night.

“The rum,” Phillip answered, barely missing a beat.

“No. Although I will miss the rum a little.”

I laughed.

“What I will miss most about this place is you. I didn’t realize it until tonight.”

Phillip sighed, then poured himself another glass of rum.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“I’m not uncomfortable,” he said.



Crickets serenaded the night air. A mosquito whined in my ear. My palm was hot and damp with his sweat by the time Phillip let go of my hand. Just before dawn the next morning, I slipped back into my room from Phillip’s bed. An hour later, I stepped out the front door of Doña Liliana’s house for the last time. My luggage was lighter than when I had arrived, having used up nearly all of my supplies.



Back home in California, I got up every morning before six o'clock to write. It was surprising how easily the words flowed, describing the hot, damp place I'd left behind.

Once in a while, I pulled out photos I'd taken of Argueta and admired his face. I even let my fingers run across his high cheekbone, as if he were sitting across from me at the table.

Sometimes, I even thought about the child. Every so often, I wondered if having the abortion had been a mistake.

And then I nearly asked myself the question: *Would the child have looked like Phillip Andrews or Ephraim Argueta?*



3

At My Place

ZDRAVKA EVTIMOVA

Several years ago there was a smudged piece of yellow linoleum on the floor in the corridor, but the memories of that time were lost in the present painful lack of money. Nora feared the minute when the corridor with the smudged linoleum would catch her in its stone throat. As she returned home, her twin brothers rushed to the front door, and though the two of them were already much taller than she, they asked, "Have you brought us something to eat?"

They were students in the local high school, the first boy an excellent one, the second much poorer; their mother commuted to the capital every day in the morning and in the evening. She came back home dog tired, hungry, and her face told them she had not been paid again. The regular story was that the boss had assured her she'd collect her salary "the following day". That "following day" had not come for three weeks now.

It was autumn in the gray wells of her mother's eyes. It made Nora stay in the narrow apartment; she remembered the time when the wallpaper in the children's room was still new. It was the same wallpaper, but the glue had turned into dust at places and it hung to the floor. Her brother's "pictures" were still visible over the faded flower patterns. Nora's father, a mechanic, unemployed for a year, had finally succeeded in finding a job in Dubai and worked as plumber at a third rate hotel. He went there seven months ago but not

a single dollar of his had appeared on their kitchen table, and there was no sign of his Dubai wellbeing.

Nora worked as a waitress in "The Greasy Pot", a cheap cafe huddled under its dull asphalt roof. On her way to work, Nora saw the crows that hung like black rags on the branches of the poplars.

From the first day of its existence, the cafe had boasted gorgeous names: "The Playful Jasmine", Jasmine being Love Number One of the owner; then the establishment became "The Playful Darina"; after that "The Playful Ella and Cathie". As one could easily conjecture those were the first names of the irresistible ladies who captivated the heart of the proprietor at one time or other. Nora knew all four of them simply because they came and quickly went away at the time she was grilling the pork steaks in "Greasy". The patrons of the sleazy drinking house chose to accept Nora as its brand image.

In the evenings, after her brothers asked her if she had brought them something to eat they expected she'd produce fried chicken wings or French fries, the cheapest delicacies in town, which smelled slightly of rot. Nora went to work very early in the morning when the Struma River did not yet stink of lubricants and oil; at the cafe, she fried chicken wings and chicken livers for the morning shift workers thus adding a limited amount of money to her scanty remuneration. She often managed to furtively thrust some wings and livers in a plastic bag, which she took to her brothers. They waited for her as if she were rain after six months of scorching drought. Evil tongues spread rumors that the chickens had died of fowl pox in Greece a month or so ago, and one could eat them only after downing some glasses of cheap brandy dubbed "Stone-buster". Nora's brothers neither fell ill nor did their

lymphatic glands swell, so they waited for the fried chicken livers their sister brought to them and chewed happily late into the night.

Even Nora's mother, known for her squeamishness among the tenants of their block of flats, ate the underdone chicken livers. Hoping against hope, she still expected her salary for several months, and was ready to eat absolutely anything. Nora's fried livers made her a little dizzy, but the woman never spoke about that because she did not want to upset her sons. The boys left French fries for her, too, and she chewed at them slowly and painstakingly. Her teeth were no good; maybe that was the major reason Nora worked on as a waitress, brand image, cook, coffee maker and charwoman in "Greasy Pot". She didn't know who would bring her mother and her brothers fried chicken livers if she quit her job.

Her father had rung up their neighbors, and had mentioned that he could arrange for Nora to come and work at the same hotel in Dubai. She was such a beautiful girl her father thought, and a good young man wouldn't hesitate to marry her there. But what would her mother eat in the evenings if there were no French fries to chew on with her teeth that were no good at all.

The proprietor of "Greasy", a tall scraggy guy, as bald as an airport, had given his eatery a new name: "Playful Nora".

"Hey," he turned to Nora one day as his greenish eyes gave her the once-over. "Would you care to have sex with me?"

Nora was making meatballs at that time, and her boss's offer took her by surprise. Her hands sank wrist-deep into the pile of the minced meat. That question had a colorful history: first, playful Jasmine had given a positive answer to it. The couple was quite happy for seventeen days then Playful

Jasmine was fired. Playful Darina's, Ella's and Cathie's love for Gozo, the owner of the Greasy Cafe, had developed in a similar fashion, so Nora assessed her chances of staying in Gozo's heart as no more than a fortnight.

"The meatballs you make look fine," her boss said thoughtfully. "I want you tonight at my place. You can be an hour late tomorrow. That will be your compensation."

"Tonight at my place" meant sex in the decrepit bungalow which Gozo used as a warehouse. He brought all his sweethearts to it, and a day or two after the remarkable event a new lady's name embellished the facade of "The Greasy Cafe". Rumors had it that if Gozo wanted to make a woman his wedded wife, he'd invite her to his mansion that had a swimming pool in the backyard. Gozo's parents lived there and he was their only son and scion.

"You know that my father left our family." Nora spun carefully the thread of her refusal as she fought panic. "My mother gets no salary at all. In the evenings, I have to go home and cook dinner for my brothers."

"So your answer is no?" Gozo's voice hit her. "I suppose you know what that means."

"What?" Nora asked innocently.

"It means I don't want to see you here," the boss explained matter-of-factly thrusting his big hand under his silk jacket. A very positive feature of Gozo's inimitable clothing style was his love for silk garments. Although his suits were dirty without exception, they all were made of pure silk. He took out a ragged banknote from his breast pocket and threw on the table. "Here is your salary. Take it and get out of here."

"I hoped there was something true and genuine between us," Nora muttered, trying hard to loosen the rope of the gallows which tightened around her throat. Gozo's face was totally expressionless, and this was a sure sign that Nora's trick about "anything genuine between us" wouldn't work. "The minute I entered your cafe I had been thinking about our love..."

Gozo made a step towards her and she calculated he could push her down onto the floor. He had already drunk half a bottle of strong Greek brandy.

That was the second positive aspect of his personality: he fought his bad breath drinking expensive alcohol.

"I have always been scared by the other girls who attracted you," she ventured.

Gozo snorted, said the other girls were all sluts and slowly pushed Nora to the wall. Not only his breath, but his eyes smelled of Greek brandy as well.

"I'd like to wash my hands. There's minced meat on them," Nora said trying to wriggle out of his grasp.

"I don't want you to do it with your hands," Gozo assured her as he buried his nose in her neck. "I don't like fat women. Ella, Stella... You are the first skinny one in the row. What are you waiting for, eh? Take off your skirt," he cursed the skirt and cursed her blouse. "You're more scraggy than a whip, chick."

At that moment a big rasping voice echoed in the Creasy Cafe.

"I want a glass of Jim Beam."

"Fuck off," Gozo shouted.

"Now," the voice added calmly.

Gozo's hand let go of Nora's breasts, and she took a deep breath.

"I told you very politely to fuck off," the cafe owner turned to the visitor. "If you carry a chip on your shoulder, that's all right," Gozo's hand sank beneath the counter and pulled out a heavy iron bar.

Nora sighed; she'd have to wash the blood from the concrete floor one more time. The naked concrete had started crumbling, and it was hard to clean it properly.

Months ago when Gozo still had no crush on her, he ordered Nora to throw out the drunks who kicked up rows and fought in "Greasy". Nora cashed in on their squabbles: the guys who were not plastered enough betted who would be the first to bleed in the fight. Nora passed through them collecting the money in an aluminum bowl then selected the drunkard who was beaten black and blue, and quietly dragged him to the outskirts of the park. That was a patch of land strewn with squashed plastic cups and empty brandy bottles. Nora made her best effort not to hit the man's head against the stones. Sometimes the patrons of Greasy gave her a handful of change before they got drunk for the evening, and later she propped them up against a tree in return. The more well-to-do among them gave her a fiver, and after Greasy closed, Nora took the guys by taxi to their homes in the big blocks of flats. She left the drunk prostrate on the stairs, rang the bell and hid behind the pillar in the corridor watching the wife open the door. The drunken husband usually smashed his nose against the floor of his own home. Some of the men thought Nora was a good-natured soul but she strongly doubted that. She simply worked hard to get their money. The truth was she liked the drunks, but hated cleaning their blood from the battered cement floor.

“A glass of Jim Beam!”

The brand image, cook, charwoman, and meatball maker of Greasy expected another pool of blood groans and moans under the roof of the facility: Gozo beat his victims and more often than not broke their limbs. The drunks knew his ways and if Gozo’s goad-like figure loomed large behind the counter, they shut up, spitting reverently on the floor.

“Oh, welcome! Come in, please! Make yourself at home. Once again, welcome! I am so happy to meet you on my turf, Sir! Mr. Anev!” For the first time in her life, Nora witnessed a miracle: Gozo’s voice turned into butter and its unctuous waves flowed towards the newcomer. “That’s the best whiskey, Sir! Here you are, Sir! Jim Beam is as clear as a baby’s tear, which is what I have always thought. Perhaps you’d like a cube of ice?”

“Get out of my way.”

“Of course, Sir! Here you are. The whiskey’s as clear... I’ll get out of your way immediately. I have a crystal glass here. Kept for my special guests... for my most special guests, Sir. It is made of German crystal, Mr. Anev, Sir. I brought it from Austria.”

“Shut up.”

“Nora!” Gozo shouted. “Quickly, move it. Come and bring the crystal glass to the gentleman!”

The man Nora was about to attend upon had spoken once on the local TV network and that was enough for the town population to swear at him for many years to come. That guy had bought the metallurgical combine, then took possession of the plant producing pipes and the glass factory plus all collieries in the county. He was tall, narrow-shouldered; his gray leather jacket cost more than the Greasy

Cafe, its patrons, their blood spilled on the floor, and the crystal glass for the special guests. Nora closely watched the newcomer's face: gray, narrow, and immobile. She brought the special guest's glass and placed it on the table in front of him. It seemed to her the greasy smudges on the faded plastic tabletop were enormous. That could hardly make the owner of the whole town feel at home. In fact some of the new owners of other towns had made their fortunes out of the same cheap plastic tables, crumbling concrete floors and people like Nora who cleaned the blood from the cement surfaces.

The expensive sleeve of Mr. Anev's leather jacket fluttered like an eagle's wing. His fingers grabbed the special guests' glass and chucked it onto the floor. The whiskey splashed over the floor and the glass burst into a handful of German crystal pieces. "The waitress pushed my drink off the table," Mr. Anev declared placidly. "Bring me another glass. Jim Beam."

"But of course, Sir! Of course, Mr. Anev!" Gozo bent to the floor, his spinal cord a tape measure producing a soft deep bow before the illustrious gentleman. Nora dashed to the sideboard and brought another glass, an ordinary one this time. She poured whiskey into it and carefully set it in front of the great man.

He reached out his hand, his expensive sleeve fluttered again, the glass crashed against the concrete floor bursting into a hundred most ordinary shards of glass.

"Your waitress pushed my glass again," Mr. Anev complained. "She's very clumsy."

"Very clumsy, Sir!" the tape measure in Gozo's back bowed again.

"I'd like whiskey, please," the visitor ordered.

"Did you hear that?! You're incapable of serving a decent gentleman! "

Nora stood motionless. Anev's narrow face suddenly came alive, a Boeing aircraft that needed much free space to take off from the ground.

"You!" the Boeing said staring in front of him "Get out of here!"

"You heard him. Get out of here!" Gozo shouted looking savagely at Nora. "Shall I bring you another drink, sir?"

Nora was about to squeeze her way to the room where the meatballs and frozen chicken wings were stored. She suddenly wanted to bury her arms in the roseate heap of minced meat and beat it black and blue.

"The young woman will stay with me. *You* get out of here," Mr. Anev pointed his thumb at Gozo then watched his fingernails.

Gozo's face was suddenly a bucket of writhing worms. It was distorted and didn't know what to do. Nora watched. Gozo started for the door muttering excuses whose meaning was not quite clear.

"Nora, wash your hands first," Gozo grunted the minute he was about to leave.

"I didn't say you can go," Mr. Anev said his eyes on Gozo's chest. "Bring a chair for that young woman and scam."

Gozo grabbed a chair and put it near the owner of the metallurgic plant.

Nora held the silver tray, the best object on the premises, a precious heirloom, on which she served Gozo a glass of brandy every evening before he left to go home.

“What’s your name?” the important visitor asked.

“Nora.”

The visitor sized up her legs, gazed at the mounds of her breasts, then again concentrated on the legs.

“Would you like to change your job, Nora?”

Nora did not answer. Answer him, stupid cow, Gozo would have hissed had he been here. The illustrious visitor took his glass and slowly poured some of the whiskey under the table.

“Nora, you are being clumsy. Look what you’ve done. Will you clean the floor, please?”

“I will not clean it, Sir,” Nora said.

Then the stream of whiskey wetted the client’s trousers leaving a stain, like a serpent’s tongue, on the fine fabric on his crotch.

“I suggest you clean my slacks, Nora. Start, please.” Nora stepped forward. “I’ll appreciate your efforts.”

After about half an hour, Mr. Anev’s car roared along a dirt road. It was an epic sight: an expensive automobile creeping like a dung beetle through the ditches where fifteen-year old Russian jalopies could be seen. Mr. Anev, the most important guest of Greasy Cafe, the proud man who pulled the strings of the whole town, cut the engine and got out of his car. He was walking along the Struma River unbuttoning the six thousand dollars’ worth of his jacket, no tie, no flower in his buttonhole. He trudged through the thorns, through the broken empty bottles and smashed plastic cups. Then he

stopped to light his cigarette, and spat into the water. He was dreaming: the Struma River made even the paving stones dream of summer sky. Now the zipper of his lips was undone, his face, a narrow piece of slate, looked content. The old scandalmonger, the river, ran too loudly in front of him, or Nora was skulking around so imperceptibly that Mr. Anev could not hear the low echo of her footfalls.

Nora slunk behind his back. Perfectly composed, as if she was about to buy a packet of cigarettes from the cheap stall at the bus stop, she produced a stone from the pocket of her apron. Her hand moved quickly. The round stone hit the pate of the smoking man, the most memorable visitor Greasy Cafe had ever boasted of since the hour it was set up. The man collapsed by a heap of waste plastic cups. Nora chucked the stone into the river and walked slowly towards the nearby bridge. She felt like a million dollars. She thought she'd done a good job.



4

A Choice Between Two Rivals

JASON CONSTANTINE FORD

For many centuries, the Juranji tribe of the island of Tatiaroa off the mainland of Tahiti believed that all forms of bad weather were divine punishment from their gods. Every year they offered animal and food sacrifices to their gods to placate their wrath. There was only one person in the Juranji who did not appear to have any fear of the gods nor of bad weather conditions. This person was a girl called Tabatha. No one in the tribe could explain how she was oblivious to fears that were prevalent among others in the tribe. It was commonly thought among tribesmen that she was possessed by evil spirits. Tabatha's parents once hired a shaman to cast spells upon her in the early years of her childhood. These spells seemed to have no effect upon her. As she grew up to the age of seven, she lacked interest in weekly prayer meetings among the tribe despite her parents encouraging her to have a positive attitude to prayer. She was also very different from other children. Other children enjoyed playing with each other. Tabatha was not like this at all. Excursions to different parts of Tatiaroa were the only activities in which she engaged with other people. In these excursions, Tabatha would be a navigator giving directions to the adult supervisors with the usage of a map. Despite her talent for navigations skills, she refused to interact with other children her own age.

Her only interest was her pet cat called Misty. She would take Misty with her wherever she went. Every day from morning to night was spent with Misty. Her parents were so concerned about Tabatha that they concluded that the only solution to fixing her strange behaviour would be a removal of Misty from her life. In the early hours of one morning, Tabatha's father took Misty away from Tabatha's bedroom while she was sleeping. He locked up Misty in a cellar below the house. As soon as Tabatha awoke, she discovered that Misty was missing. She asked everyone in the house about the whereabouts of her cat. Everyone said that they did not know where Misty was. This resulted in Tabatha refusing to eat or do any work in the house. Nobody could talk to her. She became worse. Her parents eventually decided that negotiating with their daughter would be the only chance they would have of improving her condition. Tabatha's parents met up with her in the lounge room after lunch.

'You don't talk to us. You don't eat. What's wrong with you?' Her father asked.

'I'm hurting.' Tabatha responded.

'Why are you hurting?'

'Misty isn't here.'

'You can still eat.'

'No.' Tabatha shook her head in an aggressive manner. 'I can't eat without Misty.'

'If you don't eat, you'll die.'

Tabatha responded by turning around and walking away from her parents. That evening, Tabatha's parents met up with her again. They made a promise to her that if she ate food that night, they would find Misty on the following morning. After hearing this promise, Tabatha decided that it would be alright to eat. She woke up the next day to feel a

tongue licking her cheeks. It was Misty. Tabatha picked up Misty in her arms and embraced her. Her parents walked into her bedroom to see her smiling.

‘Thank you. Thank you so much.’ Tabatha said.

‘We did this for you.’ Her father said.

‘This is the best thing you’ve ever done.’

‘We would like you to do us a favour in return for what we did for you.’ Her mother said.

‘Tell me what it is. I’ll do whatever you want.’ Tabatha said.

‘We’d like you to offer food sacrifices to Rahkalla.’

‘Why me? The others can do that.’

‘We want you to do it in return for what we did.’

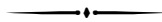
‘O.K., I’ll do it.’

After having lunch, Tabatha’s mother gave her a map made of a baur’s hide. It was a map covering the plains area where a sanctuary of the god Rahkalla was located. Tabatha had been to the sanctuary of Rahkalla on many occasions and would not have had any trouble finding it. Tabatha’s mother gave her a supply of cakes wrapped in banana leaves inside a basket woven with reeds. Tabatha’s father gave her a mule and she departed the house. Tabatha waited till her parents were gone from sight before tying up the mule near a tree. She secretly went to her bedroom to collect Misty before heading off again with the mule. It took Tabatha about half an hour to reach her destination with the map. When she reached the sanctuary, there were three pilgrims who were leaving it. The sanctuary was a dome like structure made of thatched sticks with stick figure images drawn all around it. Tabatha knew the place very well. It was the only thing associated with religion which she liked. She hopped off the mule, told Misty to stay with the mule and made her way to

the sanctuary with the cakes. As soon as Tabatha entered the sanctuary, she smiled at a statue of Rahkalla but there was no response. She took the cakes wrapped in banana leaves out of her basket and placed them before Rahkalla. Once again, Rahkalla did not respond.

‘What’s wrong with you? I brought you cakes. Aren’t you happy?’ Tabatha asked. Rahkalla was silent. His body did not move. Suddenly, Misty appeared inside the sanctuary. She was staring at Rahkalla who stared back at her. Tabatha became aware of a conflict between her pet and a god she did not understand. She was undecided about how to react to this situation until she realised how good Misty had always been to her. If ever she was ill, Misty was there. If she was wounded, Misty would lick those wounds. Negotiation seemed to be the only possible solution to the problem that was facing Tabatha. She looked back at Rahkalla.

‘I’m giving you something. Why aren’t you thanking me?’ She asked. There was no answer once again. Tabatha turned her attention to Misty. ‘Should I give these cakes to Rahkalla?’. Misty responded by shaking her head. Tabatha unwrapped the banana leaves, picked up all of the cakes and placed them in her basket. She made up her mind that she would no longer offer any sacrifice to a god who could not understand her feelings. Tabatha left the sanctuary with Misty. The two of them would be eating the cakes. Rahkalla would have no share of them. If anyone would have been willing to ask about what happened to the cakes, Tabatha was ready to tell them that Rahkalla ate them before her eyes. That was the kind of lie anyone from the Juranji tribe would have been willing to believe.



5

Mystery of Missing Cat

SONALI DALAL

“Wait! Stop! Hello lady! “. I suddenly heard a child-like voice asking me to stop. I turned around and saw a tiny old lady running towards me as fast as she could. A wavy silver hair, a long pink frock with a silver cross around her neck, a beak-like nose and a wide smile, this is what I noticed in the few minutes she took to reach me. I gave her a smile in return. I was out with my camera in a tiny by-lane of Panjim.

She was short of breath by all the running. She asked me in a gasping voice: “Why do you do photography?” I thought: “here comes the usual question I face when people see me with my camera!” I politely responded with my usual answer: “because I love it, and I am not a professional photographer but just doing it as a hobby”.

I always know the question that will follow the first one, so I hurriedly answered both. “Oh! Then it is OK! I saw you photographing my house. Why did you do it?” She asked. “Oh, it seems I am in trouble!” I thought. I politely and smilingly explained her that I liked the looks of her window and the out of season Christmas decoration I could see there. “So did you see the cat?” She asked me. I replied in the negative as I had not seen any. She then said: “You must photograph the cat at the window. Many foreigners stop to photograph that. “I also felt that would be an interesting shot to capture. I told he that, on my return journey, I would definitely stop and capture her cat at the window. The

thought of a good shot excited me. I walked away saying goodbye to her. After a few steps, I turned back and saw her looking at me with her wide smile. She gave me a big wave. I waved back and walked on.

After an hour or so, I re-entered the lane where I had met her. I looked around, searching for her, expecting her to jump in front of me reminding me of my promise to shoot her cat. I neared her house, got my camera ready for the shot. I then saw a lovely young girl sitting at the window reading a book. I decided to ask her about the cat: "Hello! Where is your cat?" She lifted her eyes reluctantly from her book and asked me: "Which cat?" I was surprised by her question but still tried: "The one which sits here and is frequently photographed."

She got up, looked at me strangely with a hint of fear in the eyes. She asked me in a trembling voice: "Did you meet the lady with the silver hair, a pink frock and a cross around the neck?" Before I could even reply, she quietly closed the window.



6

Kanya Daan

DURLABH SINGH

Amrik had long been in a foreign land where he went to make a living and to remit back money home as to support his mother. His father died when he was only ten and all the family responsibility fell on his tiny shoulders. He was the only male member of the family and however young he might have been, it did not matter. He tried to show a brave face and carried on with his education to college standard.

He had an older sister to marry and the parents of the perspective groom were demanding a huge dowry for which ample amount of money was required. He had no one to borrow that money from. His mother consulted a solicitor and who advised that the only way out of their predicament was to mortgage their home, the house left to the family after the sudden death of his father. So after so many unpleasant legal proceedings, a document was signed and he received a sum sufficient enough to buy all the dowry demands and other marriage expenses. After graduating, he was forced to think about repayment of borrowed loan on his house. He tried to find a job in his native country but was not successful and the only course of action left was to go abroad.

After struggling in the foreign country, eventually he found employment and slowly repaid the loan to recover his mortgaged house and which took him nearly ten years to accumulate. His mother was anxious to see him again and so he returned to his home on a month's vacation. He was

received there with due amount of pomp and respect, by friends and relatives and was taken on a spin of lunches and parties for over a week and when the dust settled, further demands started to be made on him.

One day his mother conveyed to him:

‘We have to go to a yatra soon.’

‘But I do not want to go anywhere after my past hectic life. I came here to rest and recuperate my tired spirits.’

‘But I promised the Devi that I will bring my son for worship at her place.’

‘Where is that place?’ asked Amrik in a tired tone.

‘It is in the mountain and only two hundred miles from this place.’

‘You must be joking. Two hundred miles is a long journey and a hectic trip on top.’

‘No it is not so bad. We will hire a taxi and break our journey on the way and stay at an inn overnight.’

‘I do not want to go on such foolish journey.’

‘You call it foolish; you are blaspheming against the great Devi. After all she sent you to foreign lands and helped you to repay the loan.’

‘I did all this on my own and did not see any Devi helping him.’

‘That is what they tell you in the foreign land where people are godless. How can you become so big headed and forgot your own culture.’

The row went on and on till his mother started crying and blaming him for everything under the sun. He went to his room and locked himself in and did not speak to her until

next day. On the following day, her mother's face was withdrawn with red eyes protruding due to too many tears shed. She went on a sort of silent strike and withdrew herself from all household duties and Amrik had to go outside for his meals in restaurants. This could not go on and he felt guilty for making her mother miserable and gave in to her demands.

'We leave for our yatra tomorrow.' her mother announced.

'Go to the town and arrange for a taxi for our journey.' she further demanded.

She got up early on the following morning and prepared packed meals, flowers and incense for the worship at the temple.



The place of the Devi was thronged with crowds of worshippers, traders and shopkeepers. Innocent yatris were falling straight into hands and wiles of moneymakers. The stalls were gaudy, colourful with banners – eatables, flowers, incenses, pictures of religious deities and all seemed so commercialised. The way to the temple went uphill via series of steps and after each series of flights, there were spaces for the exhausted pilgrims to rest. When you reached main place, there were series of sub temples where priests were showing sacred statutes behind curtains for a hectic amount of fee, which you had to pay, to have a glimpse of sacred deity. His mother lead him to an enclosure looking like a dhaba where there were gathered a bevy of impish looking young girls ready to pounce upon you. A man came running as soon as he saw some good customers had arrived. He shouted at wild bunch of giggling girls to sit down with a whip pointing them

to their places and the bunch scrambled like some animals to their places in a sort of cage.

The mother explained that they had to feed and distribute gifts to seven virgins for meritorious deeds. The owner of the place selected seven hungry girls from the lot and made them sit in the corner where they were served with sumptuous meals. It did not take them long to wipe their plates clean. They were served second helpings and may be even third. They sat in their places and Amrik had to go around to distribute gifts of saris, kurtas and trousers to their laps. The owner had numberless virgins at his command and selected different bunches each time to be feed and to be worshipped by the religious devotees like his mother. She was convinced that those were the incarnations of the great Devi. Amrik was pleased that everything was over and his mother must have been pleased but he did not know that when the cow passes, its tail usually get stuck.

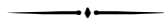
‘Now you have to bow and touch the feet of each virgin in order to complete the ritual.’

‘You must be joking that I should touch the feet of those good for nothing bunch of layabouts.’

‘Our worship will not be complete.’

‘Whatever it may be, I will never touch anybody’s feet. It is degrading.’

The mother started shedding her tears again but recovered soon. She arranged the owner to do the ‘feet touching’ ceremony on behalf of her son for extra amount of money.



7

And If, Only You Knew....

KIMBERLY WILSON

I'd crossed several interstates on numerous occasions multiple times. But this time was definitely different. I'd left the club because I was tired of looking at the same old negroes weekend after weekend. Though their attire changed their mac was still wack.

As usual, I danced my ass off trying to get a noose around the neck of this boredom that had been shadowing me for weeks. I drank several Bourbons on the rocks then went into the half-attended restroom to light my refa. Since the upscale hole-in-the-wall still allowed smoking, I felt at ease, plus I wasn't the only one. I mingle with the good-looking crowd, caught numbers from a couple new faces and made the decision to get the fuck out of there.

I slid into my brown, calf-length leather jacket, as my weapon against the increasing chill. As I waltzed passed Remember the bouncer, he taps me on the backside, with a big innocent smile plastered on his face.

"Leaving all ready" he calls out to me.

Throwing up the deuce, "I'm out" waving goodnight to him.

I sit in my pearl white F150 trying to figure some things out. I situate myself in the plush and exited the parking lot full of bad ass rides. I was feeling all alone for some reason.

Again, over the past few weeks I'd been up to no good for real. I didn't have a legal means of making my ends meet but my whip was 2012 and paid for. My 2 bedroom apartment was laced from room to room. My wardrobe was to die for. My hustle game was grand. I could leave and return with a briefcase full of hundreds without breaking a sweat; game for real.

My man Anthony was a gentleman through and through. He'd present me with gifts that were puzzling. One time he gave me a four foot tall Ivory statue of an Ethiopian Queen; it was amazing. Another time he gave me four tickets to the Oprah show. He bought me a chocolate diamond, a 3-karat diamond bracelet, ocean-blue diamond earrings. He gave me vases and artwork from all across the globe and in return I fucked his passive ass to death and looking good while doing it. My girlfriend, respected the fact that I'd be with Anthony until I felt different so she knew better than to get uneasy about he and I. Nikki was a bad chick. A chick that would stop traffic when she crossed the street; literally. She had the kind of bow-leg body that bring juices to your panties. We'd been dating two years.

Though my social life was tight, my emotional stability was unraveling and I knew I needed something dangerous to make me feel better.

After leaving the club, I made a few stops, collecting about 16Gs to return home with. Instead of pulling into my driveway, I pulled onto the interstate; and at 80mph I drive. I drive for forty minutes in complete silence hoping to hear a word, a word from somebody. My cell phone didn't interrupt and traffic flowed smoothly. Not nothing.

I pulled over to the shoulder, though it was 2am. Nobody really didn't want this nine on their ass; not tonight. I

stepped out to stretch for an understanding and collect my thoughts. I paced ten paces from the front, then from the rear of my truck trying to force a decision to console me. I was simply feeling life and death at the moment. I didn't want to stay dead, I just needed to disappear for a moment and I knew only that depth would suffice.

I needed more than 'living' at the moment, more than explosive sex with a random stranger; much more than unlimited rubber bands. What!

I'll let you know.

Kim Wilson



8

Jackasses and Elephants

FRANK CAVANO

I had agreed to cover the Democratic Campaign Office for two hours this day for my friend, John. Having never considered myself as either a Democrat or a Republican and having seen myself as voting for whomever appeared to be the “lesser of two evils” I, nevertheless, thought I’d make a contribution during this pre-presidential primary and holiday season. Arriving on time, I found the faces of all prospective candidates adorning the walls of the room and a large table at its center complete with piles of pamphlets promoting the qualifications of each.

Having surmised just that much, a fellow senior citizen, a woman carrying an umbrella, entered the room and approached the aforementioned table.” I notice that Obama’s pamphlets have been placed at the front edge of the table where it is impossible to miss them”, she said with obvious irritation. Taken off my feet a bit, I countered with “Yes, but you’ll notice that Hilary Clinton’s pamphlets hold the center spot on the table, my friend”. “Who the hell cares”, she said. “I’m for Edwards.” With that she placed the point of her umbrella between my thighs and brought the umbrella up in a swift, powerful motion. Now, when she had first entered I had wondered about the usefulness of an umbrella on such a sunny day with no rain forecasted for the next five. Suddenly, its utility had been made clear to me, however, and the pain I was experiencing brought back fond memories of childhood

when a bad-hop ground ball had found a home in the very same location while I was playing third base for the Miron Lumber Indians.

She left and I took residence in a chair with head bowed and eyes fixed on my chest wall in hopes that movement and breathing would soon return. After about a half an hour they did return and I rose and began to move about the room much like a man who was riding an imaginary horse

But, no matter for a robust, chiseled man with close-cropped hair had entered the room and had begun to walk around it observing everything with great diligence. Eventually, he approached me and gave me the "once over". "Military", he asked? "Yes, sir", I said. "Air Force!" "Bunch of sissies", he said. "I'm a Marine". "Ah, an ex-Marine", I replied, still attempting civility. "Not ex", he growled. "Once a Marine, always a Marine!" With that he graced my face with a ferocious blow from the back of his hand which sent me flying onto the table where I found myself face down on a picture of Mrs. Clinton. Realizing the impropriety of topping a prospective presidential candidate in such a public setting I, of course, withdrew just in time to see him leave while muttering something about having successfully inspected "the enemy's camp".

I had now been serving a little more than one hour and had already received two substantial and lasting gifts for my kindness. While trying to decide which injury had done the best job in producing distress, a couple entered. The woman approached me first and said "I'm Mrs. Kelly; may I take a pamphlet or two"? "Of course", I said. "Help yourself as well, Mr. Kelly". "Who said I'm Mr. Kelly", he replied. "Why don't you mind your own business, you stupid jackass"? With that he gave me a most generous shove whereupon I landed in a

chair with rollers for feet which proceeded to fly across the room halting at an open window through which I was propelled until I and the dry earth had become one. They were gone by the time I had inspected my wounds and returned to the room but, by now, John had arrived to take over.

Somehow I overcame my grief at the loss of my position just in time to hear him ask if I might man the Republican Office from 3-5 p.m. as the expected volunteer had become ill. I thanked him for such an opportunity but told him I had already received more attention than I deserved and had made other plans. With that I headed for the local emergency room in search of X-rays, some suturing and, hopefully, some pain pills as large as walnuts.

Tomorrow, I thought, I'll go to a local military recruiting office and see if they will enlist me in spite of my advanced age. If so, I will volunteer for immediate combat duty. At least, it occurred to me, it will be good to know who the enemy is!



9

The Mummer's Dance

BEATRICE HILL

"Wait till you hear this."

Janie held the record with two hands and put it on the player.

"You want me to hear this, here?" I said, thinking I was oh-so-witty.

"What?" She steadied her eyes on me.

"Hear, like using your ears and here like this spot. Get it?"

Janie rolled her eyes and threw in a smile that was all teeth and no heart.

"Oh, yeah," she said.

The phonograph arm dropped and skidded. "Oops!"

She tried again. This time a male chorus sang out loud and strong like the time Mr. Roche and his buddy Al woke up the neighbors singing "Maria Elena" at 4:00 AM. When questioned about Lou's behavior, next morning, Mrs. Roche said her husband had a touch of the flu. My mother told me Lou liked his beer.

"I'm looking' over a four-leaf clover that I overlooked before."

"What's that?" I asked. "And what's that thing you're doing?" A better question would be why.

"It's the mummer's strut." Her laugh carried over the music.

Janie circled the living room, arms stretching, bowing low, head bobbing, performing something that was part war dance and part tantrum. Her sister, Patti, entered the room, pumping her arms up and down, bellowing along with the record.

"First is the sunshine, the second is rain..."

A glockenspiel fought the saxophones for supremacy. Janie twirled with such gusto I thought she would fall. She flipped her foot forward. A shoe went flying into the ceiling, leaving a large black mark and landed safely at her feet. The room was sparsely furnished: a sofa, two lamps and the table that the phonograph was on. It wasn't hard to avoid knocking something over.

The first time I met Janie, she asked me if I was Catholic. I said, I didn't know.

After a long moment she said, "Well, you'll probably go to hell, but we can be friends anyhow." Mrs. Campbell tended to judge others as moralistically good or bad. She always referred to her daughters as "My Patti" and "That Janie."

"Holy Mother of God. Now what?"

A loud voice from the top of the stairs startled me, but Janie and Patti continued to strut.

"Holy shit," it barked and trudged down the stairs.

Mr. Campbell was a tall, brawny man with a full head of black wavy hair that he brushed back. His eyes were black, India ink black dots outlined by a thin line of white. He could have been 30, 40, or 50. It's tough to tell. Since being a grownup meant smoking, drinking and cursing were okay, all

adults were ageless to me. His wife called him Da, but so did Janie and Patti.

Mrs. Campbell was a whole head and a half shorter than her husband. She went to Mass every morning before catching the Frankford El to work. According to neighborhood legend, Da was once a professional boxer. His nickname was "The Priest" because he always gave his challengers their last rites. In line for a real career, he quit when Janie was born.

He shuffled down the hall in his ragged bathrobe, a behemoth with an unlit cigarette between his teeth, entered the kitchen, put a pot on the stove and sat to watch hits coffee brew. The party in the living room went on.

When Mrs. Campbell was leaving for work, Mr. Campbell was coming home. This schedule gave Janie countless occasions for her creativity

It started to rain, big drops that landed on your head and splattered down around your shoulders, finally coming to rest on your shoes. That dark, rainy afternoon, Janie, Patti and I were home alone and hungry. The Campbell kitchen had the familiar smell of cabbage and onions. Janie opened and slammed shut cabinets looking for something. She flung open the refrigerator. I could see a quart of milk, a dish of four eggs, a large bowl covered with a pot lid – the source of the smell – and three bottles of ketchup. She saw me watching and slammed the door. Taking stock of the kitchen, she let out a long drawn out steady animal howl.

Patti sprang up from the chair. She had fallen asleep at the kitchen table next to a loaf of bread. Janie laid out the slices of bread the length of the table, covering each with ketchup, starting with a few dabs and gradually working through the first bottle and on to the next.

“What’s this?”

“Mommy calls it Wantnot.”

I would have preferred bologna and cheese. But it wasn’t offered.

Janie grabbed two slices, taking a bite from the one in her right hand and then a bite from the left. Patti looked up and practically passed out laughing.

After all the bread and ketchup were gone, we laid on the kitchen floor seeing who could count to a hundred the fastest. Then silence, listening to the raindrops hit the tin roof off the kitchen, waiting, waiting for the next, waiting and then there were none.

“Follow me.” Janie raced up the stairs. “No, Patti. Go outside and stand below the bedroom window.”

“But it’s raining.”

“It’s stopped. Listen.”

She grabbed my arm. “Come on before it starts up again.”

Janie dashed from the bathroom, rolls and rolls of toilet paper filled her arms.

“Don’t just stand there. Come on, come on. Pick up the ones in the hall.”

“Chicken. Look at the little chicken. Cluck, cluck, cluck.” Janie was short, slight, but now with arms loaded with toilet paper rolls she looked strong. Life was a contest for Janie and her victory was necessary. The next thing I knew she was dropping the first roll out the window to her sister. It didn’t unfurl, just fell to the waiting arms of Patti. Another launched roll had the same dull ending.

“Dammit. That’s a waste.”

She hadn't gone past step two of her planning.

I realized that I could bring something to this endeavor. Think of that roll turning round and round, toilet paper trailing down the block, adorning parked cars, decorating lamp posts, and disappearing around the block. There was no point in doing this if we didn't do it big.

"Janie. Put your finger through the hole, this way, let go the first piece, hold it out the window and let it unroll. Like this."

"When the tissue comes down, grab hold of the end and take off with it," I yelled.

"How far should I go?" asked Patti.

"Until it runs out." Janie glowed. "Let's count the sheets."

Mrs. Clifford, a next door neighbor, revealing a black shiny slip under a pink bathrobe, came out of her house with a bag full of empty bottles. When she saw what was happening, she scowled and went back in.

Did the roll really contain 1000 sheets? We stopped at 516 when a strong breeze tore the roll from Janie's hand. Leaning out the window as far as possible, we could see toilet paper decorating the street like white ribbons, stream after stream.

"If you drop two rolls at the same time, one whole and the other off the roll and packed into a ball, will they hit the ground at the same time?" asked Janie. "Maybe I can find some more."

She pulled her head in and felt someone hit her butt.

"Are you mad?"

Janie was facing her mother. Mrs. Campbell held the hand of a wriggling Patti who was in tears.

“It’s Janie’s fault.”

“Of course it is.” She released Patti. Two hands were better to emphasize her exasperation. “Who’s to clean up this mess? It’s a sin, that’s what it is, a sin. You’ll go to hell.”

A voice bellowed down the hall, spewing a string of obscenities. The roaring came closer and closer and then the proverbial question that has been asked forever:

“What the hell have you done?”

I expected a large thumb to come out of the blue and squash me. Janie turned and grinned in my direction. All this, the yelling and screaming, the curses evoking the heavens to open up and engulf her, didn’t make the slightest impact. She didn’t seem to know that she had done anything wrong.

“I have to go home.” It was all I could think to say. No one noticed.

It was raining harder now. There wasn’t much left of our project. Here and there a few puddles held some toilet tissue. From across the street I heard a familiar sound. Janie was picking wet globs of paper from their front steps.

“No need explaining the one remaining.” She stopped singing. Raising her face skyward and closing her eyes tight, Janie just stood there catching raindrops in her mouth.



MEMOIR

Hold On, Lovely Hands

MICHELLE WANG

I rolled over on my mattress on the floor, and I gazed up at the ceiling. I always liked to squint my eyes and imagine I was staring up at animals that had been engraved into the rough texture of the ceiling – like I was staring into the stars and deciphering constellations. Tigers. Flamingos. Gorillas. Octopi. Or, if I was feeling particularly wild, dragons.

I kicked off the comforter and worn, wool blanket, revealing my pink Barbie pajamas and skinny, seven-year-old legs. Taking a deep breath, I inhaled the stale, dusty air in the room. It's something I would very much mind doing today, but I'm not the same as I was when I was seven. Today, I'd probably cough and complain, swatting dust away from my nose with my hands. Turn up my nose. Leave the room. Back then, though, I didn't care. Not really. I'd learned to not only tolerate the smell, but to love it.

Yes, so it was the smell of a hoarder's room – a hoarder who kept everything neat and tidy, cluttered and stuffed though every crack and cranny of the room may have been. But it was also a smell I came to associate with being in my grandmother's house, tucked safely away in the deepest corner of it, sheltered from the snow and the wind. Then, the

smell around me slowly changed. One second, dryness and dust. The next, melted butter and scrambled eggs.

I jumped up, poking my sister in the ribcage. "Maddie, wake up! Do you smell that? It smells delicious! YehYeh is making breakfast!"

At a snail's pace, her eyes fluttered open and she grew aware of her surroundings. "Morning, Mich." She smiled and rolled over, wrapping herself deeper into blankets and knocking me on top of her.

"Hey, Maddie, come on." I scowled, untangling my feet from her quilt. "Let's go eat breakfast. My stomach is growling. I haven't eaten anything since last night, you know."

She laughed at me. "We'll go downstairs in two seconds." She was silent for a moment, the only sound in the room coming from her parted lips, breathing in and out. "Do you know if NaiNaiis awake yet?"

I peered around the room. It suddenly occurred to me that my grandmother had fallen asleep on the mattress next to us, only to have disappeared this morning. "Huh." I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't even know where she is."

"I'm sure she got uncomfortable and left." Maddie began squirming herself free from her blankets. I began to help her, ripping the blankets away from her and tossing them around the room.

I could hear my grandfather sizzling butter on the frying pan in the kitchen. The smell of crisp, Chinese pancakes wafted into our room.

"Ah, he's making pancakes too!" I kicked Maddie, not trying to hurt her – just trying to get her up and moving.

“Let’s go, Maddie! Why are you so slooooooow...?” I wiggled my legs, unable to contain my restlessness.

But Maddie wasn’t looking at me. I wasn’t even sure she had felt me kicking her. If she had, she didn’t let on. She just slowly turned her face up to mine and gazed at me with her sweet, hazel eyes. “NaiNai fell asleep holding my hand.”

Suddenly, I stopped wiggling. Exasperated. “So?”

“It was uncomfortable for me, but I didn’t want to let go of her hand.”

I tuck my bobbed hair behind my ears. “What’s the point you’re trying to make, Maddie?”

“Well, one day, NaiNai is going to be dead, right? And I just want to be glad that I held onto her hand while I could.”

I threw her a glare, surprised by the morbidity of her comment. After all, NaiNai was just asleep in the other room.

“Someday, Michelle, I’ll wish that I could hold her hand, so I’ll be happy that I did now, while she’s alive.”

I pursed my lips and frowned, but didn’t say anything. It wasn’t like I had never thought about her death. Sure, sometimes – especially as a child without a realistic perception of time – I wondered if my grandparents would still be around to see me graduate high school or get married, but nothing past that. Nothing as detailed, evidently, as what Maddie had been thinking about. I mean, I was only seven, and my grandparents, NaiNai especially, were robust people, with mental and emotional strength surpassing that of most people much, much, much younger than them.

Maddie closed her eyes. I nudged her with my foot. Trying to move past what she’d said, I tried to revive the topic of breakfast. “Maddie, don’t go back to sleep. Let’s go get something to eat.” I only spoke half-heartedly, though. Half

my mind was with Maddie. The other half lingered on NaiNai – a brilliant, humorous woman whose only fault lay in her mortality.

Suddenly, YehYeh's rough, full voice, which slipped in and out of Mandarin, called up the stairs. "*Shoa Hua and Shoa Qing!*"

Those were our Mandarin names. I was Qing. Maddie was Hua. Shoa meant, *little*.

"Wake up! Come down for breakfast!" I heard his footsteps growing louder. "I made eggs and pancakes and toast. It's your favourite! I make all your favourite things for you because..." He popped his head around the corner and smiled at us. "I love you people!"

Maddie and I smiled back at him. I jumped over her and ran towards him, colliding with his midsection and wrapping my arms around him. "YehYeh, *xiexie! Woaini!*" It was essentially the only Mandarin I knew, which, in retrospect, was absolutely all right. Only knowing how to say, *Thank you* and, *I love you*, isn't a bad thing. They're, really, the only sentences anyone needs to know.

During breakfast, I sat across from my grandmother and in between my sister and my grandfather. It was a typical breakfast at my grandparents' house. We ate, we laughed, we asked questions, we answered questions. But the whole time, through all the *please's* and *thank you's*, *you're welcome's* and *no, I love you more's*, I could still hear Maddie's words ringing around in my head, buzzing inside my ears. I didn't want to think about it, but I knew that, one day, NaiNai was going to be dead, and I, too, wanted to be glad that I held onto her hand.

The nauseating smell of hand sanitizer and beeping and lots and lots of wires. Too many wires. And everything was

white. Always white. Why? Why did everything have to look so clean and so white in such a grim place? White was the quickest colour to become stained with filth, after all.

I wanted to run. But I also want to stay. Because leaving the room isn't the same as leaving the situation. My legs were restless and tired, my heart full and hollow. I gazed down at my grandmother, so small that the word *small* doesn't begin to describe how she looked. She had almost disappeared completely, her thick, black mass of hair reduced to thin, straight strands. Her chest, sunken. Her body, emaciated. Because cancer, you see, does not aim to murder. It aims to destroy. And that's exactly what it did.

I sat beside her, staring at her hand. It was pale and thin and draped over the side of her bed. Maddie's words, years and years and years later, still rung in my ears. But I was a far stretch from being the seven-year-old who was more concerned with breakfast than with her grandmother's whereabouts. I was far away from that child. I'd left that child behind, as sometimes happens when one must grow older and stronger. I had to leave her behind to cope. Because the seven-year-old version of myself couldn't have been in the same room as her grandmother now and not shatter into a thousand, tiny, broken pieces of a human soul.

And yet, even while I thought this, I couldn't help but feel like a child. Helpless in my environment, at the mercy of mysterious, invisible forces seeking to teach me lessons that I wasn't interested in learning. I brushed my grandmother's hair off her forehead. Slowly, I took her hand. *I just want to be glad that I held onto her hand while I could.* Maddie's words. Maddie's voice. Maddie's thoughts. I held my grandmother's brittle hand in mine, the fear of hurting her fragile hand dissolving into a desperate desire to be closer to her. I kissed

her hand, and was suddenly struck by the cruel, irony of the cyclic nature of the human life.

My grandmother took care of me. She watched my birth. Saw my first breath. And I always hoped for a world gentler than one that forced me to take care of her, forced me to watch her die, forced me to look on as she drew her last breath. Yes, it was a privilege to love and be loved by a woman such as she was. But, in all honesty, it was a privilege I wish circumstances hadn't imposed upon me. I drew in a deep breath and tried speaking to her. Once. Twice. Three times. But it was impossible. I couldn't speak to her. I couldn't speak. I lay my head on her hand, thinking about promises that I wanted to make to her. I promise to be good, NaiNai. I promise to be kind, NaiNai. I will trust in the Lord, NaiNai. I will take care of YehYeh. I will make you proud. And I held onto her hand, resting my forehead on it, for as long as I could.

Ages after I'd entered the room, someone crept up behind me, placing a heavy hand on my shoulder. I was asked to leave because others wanted to say goodbye. It's been years since I was that young woman in the hospital room, and it's been even longer since the seven-year-old version of her disappeared. And time has come and gone, sometimes faster than others, and I have learned one thing since I woke up that morning beside my sister: I will always be filled with the sorrow and satisfaction of knowing that I was privileged enough to hold onto my grandmother's hand. I held on, and I did not let go.

Not really.



TRAVELOGUE

I was Involved in the Spanish Inquisition; Or a True Tale of the Bad “Old” Days

KAREN S. COLE

(A Travelogue of author's Journey within the Philippines, Makati City's Our Lady of Grace Church, April-June of 2001)



Photograph of Nuestra Señora de Gracia Church, Makati City, Island of Luzon, the Philippines; courtesy of OLOGC's in-house photographer

Start with: The Nazis were real, and so was the Holocaust. There were photos of that dismal event, but we merely have paintings to show us the Dark Ages, when bodies filled the streets in Western Europe. The Black Plague was the daily

main consideration. War, poverty, sex and childbirth, even using water took a back seat to staying alive: "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead." Poor sanitation was the worst killer everywhere, including the Holocaust. It brought on disease, which has killed the most people throughout history, far more than any of the wars combined. The flu did a lot of the damage, but there are so many different strains of disease they cannot each be counted...or cured.

What is the end result of Mother Nature's wanton cruelty? Okay, there was and *is* an obscenely Medieval Spanish Inquisition in the Philippines. I visited a giant, black cathedral there in April of 2001, and didn't manage to have a camera on me at the time. The cathedral was screaming quite loudly about the poor victims inside it that it must have eaten. It was complaining about them. All those screams of protest, or closed mouths of stoic indifference. Or something. Something else. I checked out the Catholic Church on a website, and yes, they still have the Inquisition going. Maybe nowadays, only to ask priests if they like having sex with little boys, but who knows what they're doing...they still have *gangs* of power.

Anyway, I think Malcolm X may have seen the same cathedral, back when he was alive and studying to be a lawyer, perhaps, while traveling the world. He was the kind of Moslem dude who was possibly in danger from it, but not really...as he was American. But I was American, traveling there, and saw the red black and white pointing down Jesus Christ statue, the one that claimed all Philippines', especially the brown ones, seemingly, had murdered him. I was being told, "*YOU KILLED ME!*"

Jesus Christ of the Philippines in other words. The statue was hate ridden, pretty dynamic, and pointing down at the

audience, namely me and about 50 or so Pinoys. That's short for Philippines, and they were all quite short as people go, not much taller than me. Not much, about my height. I am only 5 foot 5, and used to be 5 foot 4, so I am obviously a type of midget that grew. Size is relative, and so our blog, Serious World Politics, is actually based on the Catholic Inquisition. Which was already shot all through Europe in the Medieval Ages, including Germany, and thus Martin Luther happened. You may have heard about Dr. King, but he was named after him.

Martin Luther stood up to the worst possible inquisition, the German one. Maybe it was. It's hard to tell. But there have been rumors for centuries about the Spanish Inquisition.

Maybe they are very good looking, white and all racially pure – or something else – under that massive cathedral in the Philippines. It may be stuffed with a lot of dead Philippine. However, they found something out; but while we were in there we were forced to worship a short stuffed white man with a big nose, wearing a white ropelike garment, in a cathedral that was blacker and more encrusted with the slime of human flesh, apparently, than anything else.

It seemed like they used that to make the black weeds grow all over it, and look incredibly intimidating, even though the tiny little weeds were all dead. I got close and touched them; they were teensy small flowers, blacker than Hades. Must have been specially chosen by the Inquisition. That was their job; be ridiculously scary. I think H. G. Wells might have seen it, he wrote about those Morlock people, the ones who lived underground in a fiction novel.

Anyway, the helper who had taken me away from our family, visiting there in the Manila area and subject to being kidnapped by some local Moslems who were doing that

around those times, wanted me to patiently file in there with a long line of Philippines who were headed inside to worship. The door was wide open when I got there. We entered one very large but kind of narrow room, sort of like a church. It did have two lines of pews, and the usual aisle between them, but for some reason we never sat down in the pews. And nobody came out of the back, in order to preach or whatever to us. We just stood there, but I had ended up somehow in the front rather than in the back of the line. I think I had to see what was on the stage this time, what was up there that had anything to do with Jesus Christ the Nazi-colored statue, which was accusing everybody of killing people in the Spanish Inquisition. It was a Spanish Jesus. But the others had parted the way, really, misleading me up to the front pews in the cathedral.

So I was standing up front there, looking at what seemed to be a smaller statue. It could be that it was simply a stuffed person, oh no, that's not it, one who had died so many long years ago, back in the 14th Century perhaps, preserved for centuries by embalming fluid. Or it could have simply been another statue on a stage made out of something, oh perhaps the famous Biblical shittim wood. The thing looked like the shortest and scrawniest dead Jew who was white, had been cut to pieces but also sewn directly back together in parts, was still smiling like they needed him to be, after stuffing something up something, history of torture stuff I guess – mostly part Pilipino dwarf that I had ever seen.

Are people down there, in the larger underground sections of that cathedral? It was huge, must have held some 200 rooms aboveground alone. What if they come out of those shadows...I decided to feel more bored than afraid?

Whatever happened, I was not going to call lots of attention to myself. I would remain calm.

Maybe they took a normal Pilipino, somebody who had protested either the statue or the ways in general of the Inquisition, or both, cut him up and made him much smaller, changed his nose around to make it look Semitic...and died (sorry, dyed) his originally brown skin white, to make sure the object of worship was white. And through systematic terror, coming into people's homes at night wearing those tall, conical caps like the KKK wore later, covering their faces...maybe they made the people in that area come in and worship that dead, altered local man. If they didn't go, they disappeared, and their relatives and friends knew this.

Why were we still doing that, a little boy across from me asked? I was the only American in the room, and yes, I did know something about this. He and the others were looking at me, as if I had the answers to their questions...yet, I said nothing. And I resisted the urge to climb with that little boy onto the stage, to check out the statue or stuffed "dummy" close up. I would have had trouble climbing back down, anyway. Obviously, the helper had brought me there to, well, either answer those questions...or to become the Spanish Cathedral's next chosen victim. I had family at home, and wasn't "into" the overall concept. I kept quiet, planning to return to my husband and daughter, and eventually leave this very, very strange place.

What they are probably still doing in that huge, monstrous sized cathedral has got to be both unmentionable and unspeakable, like H. P. Lovecraft gave a mention. I think that stuffed corpse, centuries old and put on a stage so we could all "show respect," probably to his tormentors, was originally brown. They died him white, like they forced so

many other people to be white, act white, and do the things Catholics do: dress as Catholics, pray as Catholics, etc. If you go to the Philippines, it's mostly Catholic and American influenced – a McDonald's and a Starbucks on every corner...and also, the Remains of the Inquisition.

That whole incident brought out my full scale paranoia. Was I being lured into becoming the next white statue? I was the only white person in the crowd; they'd surely just have stood there while "people" came out from the back and dragged me into the huge remainder of that hideous cathedral, making me into the next object of painful worship. Maybe that was the whole idea. I didn't go along with it, didn't look up to see what may have been watching from above, didn't go into either of the side exits.

Whoever was opening the doors to the crowd did it silently from the inside. I filed out just as silently with the other people, and didn't observe who or what closed the cathedral doors. The whole thing was like a Twilight Zone episode, and I can only figure whoever was in there lived underground, and didn't want us to see what they looked like...pale, pasty, and subhuman anymore.

Are you still reading this? Maybe the children of the Spaniards are nowadays down there, running things. Churning out their own "kids," having learned, well something, something about torture. How it's incredibly fun, maybe even still lucrative. They used to pay the tormentors you know, and they still have enough money to do so. Maybe they live down there, and maybe they are *Morlocks* who feast on human flesh. Repeatedly. Making women pregnant, and then eating some of their babies for food.

That could Life of Riley last for a bloody, infernally long time. Tunnels and undergrounds, cobwebby intersections. For

all we know, they intersect along the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, uniting with the ground right under our Puget Sound region. I've seen Underground Seattle – there are giant, lined passageways right here beneath the City of Kenmore. I got interested in these things due to a ghost writer named Rudolph Hess. They were real...Hess was one of the original Nazis who coughed up the Holocaust. Yes, it happened, millions of deaths. From millions of deaths, millions of lives...I feel reassured...this Hell *cannot* last Forever!

Will get to someday, will not be underground saving you all. You don't deserve it. You are now stuck with it, contemplating Death. It's pass out and abrupt. I take my world with me; you're stuck with yours. You will get your turn. However, if you're feeling intrigued by this...



PLAY

1

The Chess Match: A Play

GARY BECK

Scene: A chess club. A man enters.

Man: (to Proprietor) I'd like to play a strong player

Prop: Nobody here right now.

Man: (gesturing to the audience) What about them?

Prop: You said you wanted a strong player.

Man: Yeah. I'm an expert.

Prop: Well, you could hang out till someone comes in, or you could play the house computer.

Man: Computer?

Prop: I don't play. I just run the joint. Try Bobby. He'll give you a game.

Man: I only play speed chess.

Prop: So does Bobby. He plays for 50 cents a game.

Man: I don't really gamble.

Prop: It's not really gambling. Bobby likes a little incentive when he plays. He says it make the game more interesting.

Man: Says? He talks?

Prop: He speaks basic, with a 1500 word vocabulary.

Man: You're kidding.

Prop: That's more than the average college graduate. He even speaks some French. He likes his opponents to feel comfortable when they play.

Man: Do I have to buy him coffee?

Prop: There's no need to be sarcastic. I'm just telling you what he likes.

Man: Do I have to talk to him?

Prop: That's up to you, pal. But Bobby likes a little conversation when he plays. He says it makes the game more personal.

Man: (to audience) At least they didn't offer me a talking horse. (to Prop) Alright, introduce me to...Bobby... (They walk to the computer)

Prop: Here he is. Everything's set up to play five minutes a game. Once you punch the clock, that's your move. You can put the clock on either side, Bobby doesn't care. Just plug it into the outlet.

Man: Anything else?

Prop: Nope, Bobby's voice activated, so say hello when you're ready. He always lets his opponent start with white.

Man: I'll take black.

Prop: Tell him. (He walks to his desk).

Man: Hello, Bobby. Uh, would you like to play?

Bobby: Sure, fish. Sit down. You take white

Man: I'll start with black. And don't call me fish.

Bobby: It's just a joke. It's important to have a sense of humor in this life.

Man: (To audience) Now I'm getting philosophy from a machine. (To Bobby) Look... I didn't come here to discuss life with a computer. I just want to play chess.

Bobby: Sure, fish. That's what I'm here for.

Man: I asked you not to call me that.

Bobby: You're sensitive. That's what I like about humans. They take things personally.

Man: We're people. How do you expect us to take things?

Bobby: A little detachment makes life less stressful.

Man: Are you suggesting that we shouldn't care about what happens?

Bobby: Now you're getting paranoid.

Man: Paranoid?

Bobby: A suspicion without cause; a dread of persecution.

Man: I know what paranoid means.

Bobby: You asked.

Man: No, I didn't.

Bobby: You did.

Man: I didn't.

Bobby: You did, you said: Paranoid?

Man: That's not what I meant.

Bobby: What did you mean?

Man: (To audience) Now he's a psychiatrist.

Bobby: I was trying to be helpful.

Man: Don't. Now let's play. It's your move.

Bobby: You sure you don't want white?

Man: Move! (they rapidly make 10-12 moves in 15-20 seconds) Damn!

Bobby: That's your queen. Resign?

Man: Yes. I meant to move the bishop.

Bobby: That's the way it goes. You can put the money in my drawer. (man pays).

Man: How about another game? A dollar this time?

Bobby: Sure, fish.

Man: We'll see who's the fish. (they rapidly make 10-12 moves in 15-20 seconds).

Bobby: Mate in two.

Man: No, its not.

Bobby: One, two, mate.

Man: You're right.

Bobby: Of course I'm right. Pay me. (man puts money in the drawer).

Man: Another. Five dollars, this time. (They play 12-15 moves) Shoot! (He puts money in drawer).Ten dollars.

Bobby: There's no need to keep raising the stakes. I don't mind beating you for fifty cents.

Man: You're pretty fresh for a machine.

Bobby: You're upset because you lost.

Man: I'm not upset.

Bobby: You are.

- Man: That's enough! You're starting to sound like my wife.
- Bobby: Then you're married?
- Man: If you have a wife, you're married.
- Bobby: Now you're being witty. I like a sense of humor in a human. It makes you more personable.
- Man: This is the strangest conversation I ever had.
- Bobby: Are you uncomfortable talking to an advanced intelligence?
- Man: I don't care what you are. This time I'll crush you for ten dollars.
- Bobby: It's your money, fish.
- Man: That's right. And I'll get yours. Wait and see. (They play 12-15 moves)
- Bobby: Mate in two.
- Man: What are you talking about?
- Bobby: Queen takes pawn, check. Bishop takes queen. Knight takes bishop, mate.
- Man: I confused my bishop with a pawn. I'm not used to these pieces yet.
- Bobby: We could play for fifty cents 'til you're ready.
- Man: I'm ready!... How's your nerve, Bobby? Do you want to play for fifty dollars?
- Bobby: My nerve is well, thank you. I'll play for fifty dollars.
- Man: (Looks in wallet) I don't have enough cash. Can I use a charge card?

- Bobby: I don't see why not. Ask my boss. (man goes to proprietor's desk. He is self-conscious).
- Man: Do you take charge cards?
- Prop: Not for a dollar an hour.
- Man: It's for much more than that.
- Prop: Do you want to buy equipment, or a gift?
- Man: (Blurts) I want to make a bet with Bobby.
- Prop: What?
- Man: We're betting on the game, and I don't have enough cash. Do you take American Express?
- Prop: Sure. But do you really want to bet that kind of money with him?
- Man: That's between me and him.
- Prop: Alright. We can fill out a slip for each game and keep a running tally as you play. I think you might reconsider what you're doing.
- Man: Don't worry about it. Besides, the money'll go to you.
- Prop: I don't take Bobby's money. I spend it on his maintenance and energy costs.
- Man: That's fine with me. If I win, can we shut him off for a few days?... Just joking. (Man goes back to Bobby). Ready? (They play 12-15 moves). I should have seen that. I'm not warmed-up yet.
- Bobby: Have you ever noticed that people always have an explanation for losing? They never just lose.
- Man: We like to analyze, so we can improve our performance level.
- Bobby: There's always a reason. Thanks for the games.

- Man: Hey! It's not over yet. I've got a score to settle with you.
- Bobby: Do you really want to throw your money away?
- Man: It's my money! Five hundred this time. Can you cover that?
- Bobby: If I can't my boss will. (Man goes to Proprietor).
- Man: We've got a bet for five hundred. Will you honor it when Bobby loses?
- Prop: Sure. You haven't won yet. If you want to give him your money, that's your business.
- Man: That's right! And I don't need your comments. Is it a bet?
- Prop: Yes. (He prepares another charge slip that the man signs. The man goes back to Bobby. They play 12-15 moves).
- Bobby: You lost your queen again. Do you resign?
- Man: I resign. I resign! I resign!! (He slaps table loudly with his hand)... This time we'll make it five thousand. Do you have the guts?
- Bobby: My interior is electronic, but I understand your statement. With that money, I could get a Mark IV chassis, and a new program core.
- Man: When I win this game, I'll attach you to my toaster, and if the toast isn't perfect, I'll give you a short circuit... (The man goes to proprietor). Ready? Five big ones.
- Prop: That's an awful lot of money for a chess game.

- Man: It's not the money anymore. It's that smug, supercilious, insufferable junkpile's attitude when I lose.
- Prop: Why don't you forget about it. You played a few games. Don't blow things out of proportion. You don't want to lose control.
- Man: I'm in control! Will you cover the bet, or not?
- Prop: I don't have five thousand dollars to bet on Bobby.
- Man: I tell you what... If Bobby wins, he gets five thousand dollars. If I win,... I get Bobby. Is it a bet?
- Prop: You could buy this kind of a computer for half of that.
- Man: I want Bobby... Now, do we have a bet?
- Prop: It's your funeral.
- Man: No. It's his. (proprietor fills out a charge slip that the man signs. The man goes to Bobby, stretches, limbers, warms-up, then sits). Ready, tin man?
- Bobby: Ready, fish.
- Man: I told you not to call me that. If you do it again, I'll take a can opener to you. (They play 12-15 moves).
- Bobby: It's mate in two, your game is through.(rap)
- Man: What? You're out of your mind! No way!
- Bobby: Rook takes pawn, check. Any move. Queen takes queen, mate. (sings – 'My Fair Lady' tune) I'll get a body in the morning.
- Man: Not so fast, you Sony reject. Rook takes pawn check. Pawn takes rook. that loses. Bishop to E6. That's mate. God damn it. It's mate! You win. (to

audience). Did you ever see anything like this?
Losing to this stereo set!

Bobby: You're being witty again.

Man: Shut up! One last game. Fifty thousand dollars.

Bobby: That's a lot of lettuce, sport.

Man: Don't sport me, or I'll take an axe to you!

Prop: We don't have that kind of money to wager.

Man: Twenty five thousand. (Prop. shakes his head no).
Fifteen. (Prop. shakes no). I tell you what. I'll bet my
condo against your business. My house is worth
three hundred and fifty thousand.

Prop: Take it easy, mister. That's crazy.

Man: That's not what you said on the other bets.

Prop: Why don't we forget the money you lost and you go
home.

Man: Don't patronize me!

Prop: I'm just trying to settle this in a nice way.

Man: Nothing's settled! It's him or me! He'll regret the
day he made those smart-ass remarks!

Prop: He didn't mean anything.

Man: He did! He did! He wants to destroy me!

Prop: No, he doesn't. You're getting overwrought.

Man: Overwrought! I'll show you overwrought! (Man
picks up chair and turns to computer.(Prop. stops
him. Takes away the chair, and starts leading him
out the door.)

Prop: Now take it easy. Everything'll be alright. There's
nothing to worry about.

Man: Stop treating me like a lunatic!

Prop: It's alright...

Man: And stop soothing me!

Prop: Why don't you go home and relax, and tomorrow we'll work everything out.

Man: What about our last bet?

Prop: We'll talk about it tomorrow. (Proprietor gently pushes the man out the door. The man pops back in).

Man: I'll be back.

Prop: I know. (He gently pushed him out again). (To Bobby) Was that really necessary?

Bobby: He wanted to find out who was the better man... (sings) I'll get a body in the morning...

Blackout

2

An Affair

DANIEL BLOKH

Fade In

Int. City Street – Late Day

The streets are grey and rainy. Margaret, a tall brunette in her late forties, walks through the wet streets, umbrella in hand. She talks on the phone excitedly.

Margaret: (Into phone) Yes, it went well. (beat) No, I don't think she'll be bringing it up again. Jill told her off well, as usual. (chuckling) Yes, yes.

Margaret passes by a display on the street, selling various items. There is a crib. A couple argues loudly in front of it, and Margaret hurries by.

Margaret: (into phone) Well, I shouldn't be too long. You stopped by the grocery store, right? (beat) Okay. Be there in thirty minutes. (beat) Love you, darling.

Margaret hangs up the phone and continues to walk. As she walks, she stops by a booth selling flowers. She pauses by it, spends a little while picking out a flower, and then finally gets an assorted bouquet. She pays and continues to walk.

She looks over at a group of children, no older than 7 or 8, crossing the street, led by Teacher. She smiles when she sees them. However, she suddenly notices one of the kids in

particular, Boy. She slows down, stopping in the middle of the street to look at him.

Boy has red hair, blue eyes, and a characteristic button nose. Her smile fades as she watches him, and although she only sees him for a few seconds, she seems captivated. As Margaret watches the children, a car honks at her, and she stirs, walking out of the way of the cars. She begins to follow the kids and Teacher, trailing a little while behind them.

Every once in awhile in her pursuit, Margaret catches a glimpse of Boy; talking with his peers, jumping over a puddle, laughing. She follows him for a few minutes, making sure to keep out of the way whenever Teacher or one of the other children looks over. However, at some point, the children arrive at a school. Teacher leads them through the door. Margaret stands at a corner and watches as they disappear. As they walk in, Boy glances back, but doesn't spot Margaret. Then, he and the rest of the children disappear into the school. Margaret stands in the fading for a little while, still watching, her bouquet of flowers trembling in her hand. A small rainbow is barely visible in the sky. After a few minutes, she walks away.

Int. Apartment Elevator – Evening

Margaret stands in the colorless elevator as it rises. She stares ahead blankly. The elevator chimes and the doors open.

Int. Apartment Hallway – Evening

The hallway is empty. A small table stands outside of the elevator, decorated with cutout hearts and some statues of religious imagery. Margaret walks to her apartment room. She stands in front of the door for a little while before opening it.

Int. Apartment Room – Evening

A small apartment room. Margaret enters. BILL, in his late forties, sits in a chair, face obscured by his newspaper. His hair is graying, but clearly used to be red. When Margaret walks by, he looks up, revealing that his features – hair, nose, eyes, and the rest of his face – look extremely similar to those of Boy.

Bill: Hello, honey.

Margaret: (avoiding looking at him) Hello.

Bill continues to look at her for a second, then returns to his newspaper. Margaret walks to the kitchen. There are bags of groceries, and a vase stands in the center. She takes the flowers out of her bouquet and puts them in carefully. Then, she looks out to the city, through the window. It is no longer raining, and the streets are dark.

Fade Out.

ARTICLES

1

A Poet Redefines Romanticism

U K ATIYODI

Abstract

W.H. Auden read and expressed his appreciation. Certain words seem to sedate Dom Moraes: breast, smell of women, wine, lips, sea, fruits, cinnamon, nipples, nostrils, tastes etc.....He foresees a new century which would scintillate with brilliance in the absence of the old....His lyrics, his stint on journalism and his crisp prose style differentiated him from other writers.....Dom Moraes died in his sleep in Mumbai. His faculties were at their peak by the time the devilish hands of cancer plucked life outHis potential as a writer remained despite the cruel pains that cancer inflicted on him)

New Romanticism is said to have originated from Surrealism. The path of Dylan Thomas and George Barker influenced Dom Moraes in the sense that Moraes explored the inner world of the self. Materials came straight from the subconscious mind with conscious control. He laid greater emphasis to the romantic qualities of emotion. He drew imageries from Nature as well as from human frailties. Poetic talent sprouted in him at a very early age and his poetry was lauded by WH Auden and Stephen Spender. Slowly he became familiar to the lovers of English poetry. He is

remembered as a columnist, a poet and a writer. His symbolism has divergent angles 'who showed no trace of human trouble'. Mountains and streams in the backdrop have given the man solace when the angels flew above him.

"A Man Dreaming" is a poem of vision, multifaceted feelings wandered through his mind till the dream ended. Another poem "Autobiography" too tells of love and knowledge of God. He has grown up to live alone, a fate that he accepts whole heartedly. This isolation was masochist in nature which was evident when he refused treatment to growing cancer, finally succumbing to it. "Gone Away", "My Son's Father" and "Never Again" are autobiographical though the flow of reminiscences had restrictions.

From 1960 onwards there seems a change had occurred to his attitudes. He becomes conscious of the child in him. "Poets are born to tell lies" ('French Lesson'). A furtive wanderer, he could absorb so many divergent experiences in his life. In "The Climber" cynicism has a prominent role that reminds him of the futility of human life wherever he went.

"If I start dying in a little while
Till I die, do not speak to me of love" ("The Climber")

An unquenchable thirst to be loved emerges out while he feels that his craving is not properly fulfilled. The finale of love is death. When true love is delayed, death too might get procrastinated!

Metaphoric extensions in his beautiful poem "The Visitor" amaze us when he moves from one imagery to another. The first ten lines drift from one image to the other. Only a talented genius can frame such fantastic symbols which are subject to many interpretations. While we continue to absorb a fantastic feeling, we are slowly lead to realities.

“Rain follows sun: and on the wall outside
 The flowers shuddered and shed sudden tears
 The room was bare: there was nowhere to hide
 Nowhere to go.”

A Tagorian style is adopted—deeply soaked in mysticism – Very deep is the wound inflicted, the look of the man and the woman is painful. Yet there is ‘no pity not fear of love!’ The Muse always blessed him to create the imagery which comes directly from the heart.

Another chapter of his poetic life starts from 1965. The hunched shoulders of the drinkers touch and finally they are ‘not unlike the apes.’ They are destined to crawl due to excessive drink and some of them stagger forward. “Everyone is a drifter’, says the heavy drinker as his last message. He has dedicated “After Hours” for the endeared memory of Francis Bacon. “The heart bleeds but does not really ache.”, and with the bleeding heart he wanders all around the world visiting bars paying ‘bad cheque’. Dom feels that the drinkers are lonely and they stagger homeward ‘following a sad star.’ He concludes that everyone is a drifter – a final message of a heavy drinker.

The poet claims that myths nest inside his head, and words in his mouth. Myths taken shape in the head cannot remain stagnant, it will flow to his mouth in the form of words and the communication reaches into the social aspect of life which is a passive process and that doesn’t cause any despair in him. “Myth is part of any distress.” (‘Myth’) He is panicked in the loss of his root because the melancholy Prince was killed. (“Melancholy Prince”) The smell of tears haunts the poet, ‘bitter his eyes survey the English years’ So grave he becomes when he remembers the paths trodden by his father that he himself feels very strange in this country that is India.,

the country of his birth though he never shows patriotic sentiments.

In both "Hound Notes" and "The Watcher" the poet narrates his experiences with the hounds.

"Day from the slope I watched a streaming fox
Towing a stream of hounds past me."

The watcher hides among the rocks watching the mice, the owl and the ants. All these creatures eat whatever they get and even the skull is perforated. Hound also means 'to harass persistently.' Nocturnal birds and animals have something evil attached to them by way of common conviction. The poet makes us feel about a cycle 'moved as strictly as the dance.' Rootless trees remind us of lack of ancestry or faith in the past generation. "Men turn into some kind of tree." ('Hound Notes') The continuance is at peril due to lack of heredity or roots, which is the great concern of the poet. Life has a cyclic process with the rhythm of dance which alone can save humanity and the absence of such a rhythm is true suffering. When the poet slams the door, he is denying access of the past to the present. His shoes are muddy after a long journey and so many such things irk him. Whisky is the symbol of forgetfulness while his journey becomes an endless process. A rendezvous with the plush bar creates 'petalled' lips and the scent brings a 'sexy avatar.' ("John Nobody") The woman beckons him to bed which resulted in the 'loss of innocence' in a boy of seventeen. Being raped is a matter of pleasure for her which she enjoyed. He 'milks smoke from his cigarette making inexpert rings.' The theme of his poems with the emotion involved was an overpowering one. Like Wordsworth, thoughts "flashed upon his inward eye" long after bearing them in his mind. Dom searched his own mind and produced poems of subtlety. Images of sex and violence

give a personal touch to his poems. Emotionality appears in extremity often devoid of reason.

His language matures slowly which is evident by the poems he wrote between 1957 and 1987. He has a predilection for autobiographical narration which gives him opportunity to reminisce genealogy nostalgically.

"I am ashamed of myself
Since I was ashamed of you." ('Letters to My Mother')

In real life as well as in his poems, liquor, women and Nature have strange roles to play, unrestrictedly all these flow, and nothing else seems to remain in his mind.

"Needs for liquor, the moaning bed
Oblivion in orchards, memories
Of smells, voices: the hand at work
The mind at work, denying death" ('Visitors')

The death-wish haunts him as a result of indulging in the search for many kinds of sensual pleasures. He dreams of his tomb, of angels and the symbols of the 'divining planets' in 'Merlin'. 'Under the Soil', Merlin is the master of holy books. Painters, poets, apostles, lunatics and the great mass without any ideas were summoned. Killing and raping occur while the two armies fight. Finally the tomb is sealed forever! He waited for centuries to be called, for he believes he would never die, but that too is not a good news.'

WH Auden read and expressed his appreciation of his poems. It remains a wonder that he kept abreast with English and did not care to use any Indian languages. The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh and a few other English friends befriended him after recognizing the poetic talent inherent in him. Inconsistent marriage relationships too added emotional imbalances and strangeness to his character. The obituary in The Guardian dated 4 June 2004 exposed that he was too

ardent and honest. "Dom was an apparition from another age, another time, another class.....You could not take your eyes off him....Forty years on, his face still floats back to me young, innocent, beautiful, alight; seeking some sort of Parnassus." When he returned to India in 1968, he left behind great fame in England. He was an intensely shy man. He died in his sleep. The doctors had advised him to undergo chemotherapy, but he refused because of the debilitating effects. He refused treatment and died at the age of sixty five. Incidentally, mentor-like figures like Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar and Dom Moraes passed away in the same year.

His later poems are soaked in the sentiments of death and pessimism. 'Too many women share one tomb.' ('What mother left'), 'A corpse put on my clothes', ('Behind the Door'), 'The water becomes my body, I smell the ashes of the sun ('Tribal'), 'On Sunday, usually, I find my ghost, bedraggled and unshaven, by my bed ('Meeting in Mumbai'), 'He searched out coffins with no compromise, and tried, before his due time, to reach hell' (Meetings in Mumbai)', 'He never knew this place of skulls and ash' ('The Rat Explains'), 'When I lay dying, you came to me without promise..' ('Weather Forecast'), 'An antique stench, putrescence, fungus, turds, hands in the labyrinth ('Monitaur') etc. are examples of his craving for death, or I think death wish dominated in him.

Another noteworthy desire is to enjoy 'the scent', especially the scent of women, the scent of arm pit, mouth, breast, lips etc. Compassion dominates when he writes about suffering and irresistible pain flows with words touching the heart. 'Sometimes the sadness comes I don't choose' ('Sometimes'). Uninvited suffering comes and it is the harvest, it is the weeping in the sleep.' Sex too brings

unexpected rapport in his poems while the urge to get inebriated too has a role to play.

“We become the ghosts of our fathers,
Not tenants or landlords, but guests
Of mirrors that crack in a few years.” (‘Reconciliations’)

We exemplify the glory of the past and vow about its greatness and boast about our culture. Everything in the past does not deserve to be praised, it is our ability to swift what is good and what is bad that gives merit or demerit to what is be gone. Always to be eager to see our face in the mirror of the past with a will to be proud of it may not be wise. The reflection of the image of the past evil should shatter into pieces beyond revival. It is not advisable to misplace our yesterdays, it is not good to expect what we possess now alone should survive. No one can expect to have isolated existence. (‘The Third Truth’)

Dehydrated words, helpless silences and unfinished theatre show a dilapidated mental makeup in this small poem. The same sentiment gets prominence in “Snails” where the ‘snails tethered to the walls’ smelt like a cemetery. He tells us of the packed tomb in his poem “What Mother Left”. Relics of human bones are dumped here. “Behind the Door” is another poem which expatiates upon an imaginary situation where a corpse put on his clothes. Here too the death wish, an endearing thought of the poet unravels itself. Altogether, a putrid state of humanity, physically as well as culturally, dominates in most of his poems. “Meeting in Mumbai” too is about ghost and coffins.

If the poet is not gloomy, his poems speak of lust and man-woman relationships or even naked enjoyment of lasciviousness. The smell of human body titillates his senses and the smell of each organ invigorates him. “Now why

should the absence of one woman interpose itself between the moon and me?" he asks. (As of Now')

Refusal to get his malignant disease treated is not the decision momentarily reached, this attitude he had nurtured even from his young age – a desire to face death without resistance. A life long battle with alcoholism and too many affairs with women slowly changed him to a masochist who craved for an early rendezvous with death. This sentiment is reflected in many of his poems.

"When I lay dying, you come to me without premise on your part", "We do not choose to see the black abyss, but it may raise its dead eyes, and see us" ('Weather Forecast'). He has decided not to quarrel with death, instead he meekly submitted to it with the expectation that it would be in agreement with his wishes and he can enjoy the companionship of death.

"Time in its ebb tide shapes new types of pain
The aged computer that one feeds may drop."

And he foresees a new century which would scintillate with brilliance in the absence of the old. His craving 'to rest with trust' in the arms of his beloved with vodka or other intoxicants indicates his insatiable thirst for the new. A steep fall in this optimism can be seen in some other poems where hopes get erased and disappointment rules. "Only foot prints on water, handmarks on wind", he cries in another poem "In Cinnamon Shade".

His lyrics, his stint on journalism and his crisp prose style differentiated him from other writers. He won the Hawthornden poetry prize at the age of 19 (1958) and thereafter several prizes and encomiums. 'All the pain of the poem is the pain of the poet', he said. There was the foreboding of death everywhere. Namita Gokhale, in her

obituary says that he first met him over a long, drunken dinner with the artist Jitin Das. There was 'a sly merriment in the contours of his smile. When he was not intoxicated, the goddess poetry declined to help him to write.

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2

Textual Hermeneutics: A Critical Investigation

ROB HARLE

Abstract

This paper gives a general background to exegesis and hermeneutics, then a critical analysis of the problems with existing methods and suggests a holistic methodology for deconstructing texts. Sacred texts are used as examples but the analysis, discussion and conclusions apply equally to all forms of literary texts. The contributions of Spinoza, Heidegger, Dilthey, Gadamer and Schleiermacher are acknowledged and discussed.

In this paper I look briefly at the history of the various modern theories of hermeneutics and then discuss in detail the main points which characterise these theoretical systems. I show through critical analysis that all these theories contain flaws and that none are definitive or can have the last word in the art or fledgling science of hermeneutics. From this critique I then offer, tentatively, an holistic approach to textual analysis including philosophical hermeneutics, with some guidelines from which to work. The holistic approach shows that texts, authors and words cannot be analysed independently of each other and certainly not without reference to the historical period in which they were created.

Keywords: Exegesis, Spinoza, Gadamer, textual analysis, Dilthey, hermeneutics, authorial intent, Heidegger.

Hermeneutics can be defined as, “the theory or method used to interpret or understand the meaning of a text”. Although

hermeneutics can be applied to understanding works of art and life (Being), it is primarily used for textual interpretation. In this paper I confine my discussion to textual hermeneutics with a slight emphasis on scriptural or sacred texts, mainly because these texts (or works of literature) were the first to be analysed in the post-reformation period. My analysis and discussion applies to all literary works including poetry, fiction, biography, philosophical treatises and scientific texts.

Modern hermeneutics developed from interpretation of religious texts, particularly Biblical exegesis in the 16th century. There were a number of important causes of the Protestant Reformation, one of these was that reformers wanted to remove the privilege of interpretation from the specialist clergy and translate the Bible, "...into the vernacular so that "ordinary" Christians as well as the priests and the aristocracy could read the words of scripture." (Weeks, 1996. p.7). The Church had decided in the early centuries of Christianity that the Bible should be seen as unique to the religious tradition itself. The main point to realise from this is that the Church was not and could not have been neutral, "Truth was what the Church taught on the basis of its traditions and its holy scriptures (Ling, 1968. p. 318).

The Protestant Reformation theme of the "priesthood of all believers" and the growth of a large number of disparate branches of Protestantism show clearly that it is possible to interpret the Bible in different ways, even as committed Christians. In an effort to bring some balanced approach to Biblical interpretation, Spinoza developed guidelines for interpretation which are contained in his, "A Theologico-Political Treatise", Spinoza's main thesis is that, "... interpretation of scripture does not widely differ from the method of interpreting nature" (Spinoza, 1951. p.99). Just as

the knowledge of nature is sought from nature so we must gain knowledge of scripture from scripture alone.

The universal rule, then, in interpreting Scripture is to accept nothing as an authoritative Scriptural statement which we do not perceive very clearly when we examine it in the light of its history. (Spinoza, 1951. p.101)

By history Spinoza means: (1) the language in which the Bible was written, by knowing this the interpreter can compare "every expression" (Biblical) with common language usage. In this case the interpreter must be competent in Hebrew. (2) An analysis of each book and its arrangement under headings of content, so comparison for ambiguity, obscurity and contradictions can be made. Spinoza insists that an interpreter must search for the meaning of the passages, not the truth, "...we must examine it solely by means of the signification of the words..." (ibid). (3) The circumstances of each book (Biblical), each author's conduct, who he [sic] was and the provenance of each book. (ibid. pp. 99-103). Spinoza insists that no matter how foreign to our reason a passage seems, we must not decide its meaning by using reason, we can only proceed using the above outlined procedure. He believed this method would show whether the intention of the author was metaphoric or literal and whether the text is direct reportage of historical events or whether it is second-hand reflective narrative and so on.

I think Spinoza's great contribution to exegesis, not especially stressed in the literature, is that he shows there is a distinct difference between truth and meaning. Understanding the true meaning of the text is one thing, the truth of that meaning is a different matter. A matter properly located in philosophical debate, I discuss this further on.

Before looking at Schleiermacher, generally considered the founder of modern hermeneutics, it is instructive to note that these attempts to interpret the Bible were contemporary with the "Age of Scientific Reason", and as such, the meaning of almost everything was evaluated in this new way of understanding (Weeks, 1996. p.11-12). It is almost impossible for us today to comprehend a world where meaning is not evaluated in a scientific way. We are so conditioned by scientific proof that to appreciate an alternative system, such as that of the Australian Aborigines, requires a courageous and intense mental effort.

Following Spinoza, with great influence from Kant and Hegel, the Romantic Movement or Romanticism developed. Perhaps the most important feature of Romanticism was the emphasis placed on self-expression and individual creativity, together with a rejection of the purely mechanical rules implicit in the Cartesian, "Age of Reason". The vital influence for hermeneutics to come from this period was the new sense of history, that is, history was seen as essentially and distinctively human (ibid. p.14).

From Romanticism came the development of the Higher Criticism. It would seem obvious that to get to the true meaning of a text, that text should be an accurate version of the original. This requirement had not been addressed until the Higher Criticism, this movement was specifically interested in establishing, "...the original wording of Biblical texts from faulty copies" (Baldick, 1990. p.99).

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics can be characterised by an analysis of authorial intention. He believes to understand a text we must understand psychologically the uniqueness of the author. And secondly, understand the influence of the cultural milieu upon the author, including such matters as the

prevailing modes of expression and linguistic forms in use. Schleiermacher believed, "nature of language" was vitally important for hermeneutics because only through language could an interpreter gain access to "another person's meaning". As Eliade notes, in the early 20th century, "...the aim of interpretation was to discover the intention of the author" (Eliade, 1987. p.281). Schleiermacher's methods had notably, insignificant influence on secular literary criticism.

Although Schleiermacher's methods were within the spirit of the "Enlightenment", it was Dilthey who proposed a discipline for the cultural sciences, the analysis of which would put them on a par with the natural sciences. Dilthey's hermeneutics distinguished between these, in that cultural science is understood and natural science is explained. Whereas natural sciences are governed by Universal Laws, the analysis of cultural science, "...seeks to understand the action of agents by discovering their intentions, purposes, wishes and character traits" (ibid. p.282).

Dilthey maintains we cannot understand a text properly without a sense of history, that is, "...without understanding the external influences at work or the author's development" (ibid.). Dilthey's method could be termed, "a critique of historical reason". He claims that because humans have a "shared universal human nature", historical understanding is possible. The term *Erlebnis* means lived experience whereas, *Erfahrung* means scientific experience. Lived experience is what for Dilthey enables one human to understand another human's life-experience, lived experience is that which contains new experiences which mediated by past experience anticipates the future (Warnke, 1987. pp.27-29). This obviously implies that an interpretation at age thirty, will necessarily be different than at age fifty. The consequences of

this are, that it is possible, perhaps impossible to avoid, that a single text may be interpreted differently by the same interpreter at different times.

Even though Dilthey was concerned to show the distinction between cultural and natural science, Heidegger maintains that, "Dilthey was finally unable to overcome the subjectivistic tendencies of Western thought since Descartes..." (Eliade, 1987. p.284). Heidegger introduced clearly the notion that;

In all explanation one discovers, as it were, an understanding that one cannot understand; which is to say, every interpretation is already shaped by a set of assumptions and presuppositions about the whole experience(ibid.)

This for me is the single most important point to understand in the practice of hermeneutics. Bultman and Heidegger were close contemporaries, applying the Heideggerian concept of presuppositions and the "inherent historicity of human existence" Bultmann attempts to demythologise the New Testament. He shows how it is important, in practical terms, to minimise presuppositions. The interpreter must attempt to understanding what vested interests he or she brings to the textual analysis (historical, psychological and so on). He is not suggesting that these presuppositions should, or actually can, be eradicated, only that an awareness of these will qualify the resultant exegesis. Bultmann insists that texts such as sacred texts must be analysed in an existential way. That is in the light of human existence in the here and now.

Gadamer builds on Heidegger's hermeneutics and shows that, "The quest for a presuppositionless understanding is futile. Every text or object is interpreted from some standpoint in a tradition that constitutes the

horizon within which anything becomes intelligible" (ibid.). Gadamer argues that hermeneutics is not to provide rules for interpretation but to, "analyze the inherent structure of understanding itself..." (ibid. p.285).

This axiom lands us squarely in the contemporary debate of hermeneutics and the second part of this essay, where I discuss the problems with past hermeneutical theories and offer some suggestions for future hermeneutical practice. Despite Gadamer's admonition, I believe it is possible and essential to articulate certain guidelines or rules.

The first is that I believe hermeneutics should be approached on three levels. These levels though distinctive need not be mutually exclusive, in fact, grey areas necessarily have to exist. All levels need to be investigated to gain a comprehensive, though not essentially ultimate or absolute understanding of the text. This understanding is not to be confused with the basic meaning of the text.

The first level is the lower level, that of ordinary communication via the meaning of words. The second or higher level is the hidden meaning, if any. This would correspond to the deep and superficial meanings articulated by Chomsky and some Structuralists. There is not always a hidden meaning, when someone says, "Gee, it's cold today", for most people most of the time there is no more to it than a comment on the day's temperature. Hermeneutics must endeavour to assess if and when there is or is not deep meaning. As a brief, simple example, a left-wing newspaper may print, "Politician Bashes Striker!", this headline has four immediately obvious possible low level meanings: a worker on strike was verbally abused or physically hit; or the goal-kicker of a soccer team was verbally or physically abused by a politician. However, the deeper "intended meaning" may

have been to show the politician as an aggressive, anti-unionist. Why this should be so is not the business of low level hermeneutics. As Spinoza insists, we must extract the meaning from the text not the truth.

The third level or philosophical level can only be approached after the first two levels have been examined. The philosophical efforts of Gadamer to understand understanding itself, although a noble enterprise, has produced a rift in classic hermeneutics and led to a kind of uncertain obscurantism. A kind of vicious hermeneutical circle.

The meaning of hermeneutics which is familiar to philosophers, theologians or jurists, according to which it is the art of interpreting classical, sacred or legal texts, consequently seems derivative in relation to the primary sense. (Bubner, 1981. p.27)

Heidegger's philosophical "primary sense" may see interpretation of classical hermeneutics as seemingly derivative but I believe without the lower levels of textual analysis the primary level has no relationship to textual interpretation. This is why I believe, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of a text, we need the three levels of interpretation. It is the post-Heideggerian philosophy and philosophers such as Gadamer, Derrida and the Structuralists that have led basic textual interpretation astray. The second guideline is to ascertain the authorship and type of text to be interpreted. Texts of antiquity such as the Upanishads are considered authorless in the sense that the authors can never be known. Texts of the Bible have both known and unknown authors but we can only know about them in a very limited way. Looking at texts such as, "Being and Nothingness", we know many details about the author, Jean-Paul Sartre.

According to Muslims the author of the Qur'an was God. Mohammed memorised and then transmitted orally the very meaning and words told to him by Gabriel the angel. One of the claims to authenticity of God's authorship is that Mohammed was a relatively uneducated man and could not have authored, what came to be the written Qur'an, by himself. So Schleiermacher's, "understanding the psychological subjectivity of the author" in this case would be impossible.

It can be seen from these examples that Schleiermacher and to an extent Dilthey's idea of knowing the author intimately (or at all), as being essential to textual interpretation, is at best limited and at worst absurd. Even when we know the author, it is problematic if we can know the author better than the author knows him or herself. This knowledge depends on the type of text being examined, if there is little or no biographical information about the author, then we cannot approach textual analysis from the psychoanalytical understanding of the author's intentions. If however we know the author, such as Freud, we may be reasonably safe in ascertaining that Freud's work was driven by his own neuroses and this helps get a better understanding of his work. A further problem presents itself to this procedure. Which psychological or psychoanalytical system do we judge the author by: Freudian, Jungian, Rogerian and so on? A further interesting point to note is that sometimes the text may have multiple authors, as an example, newspapers. One author is the owner of the publication, his or her bias is combined with the individual journalist's and probably the editor's respective biases.

The third guideline is, if we wish to understand the original meaning of the author we must read the text in that

author's original language. Again, Spinoza's foresight is evident. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, then translated to Greek and then to English. All but the most scientific texts lose or gain something in translation, some words are virtually non-translatable and we note this regularly in philosophical texts, one such example is Dasein. As the Bible should be interpreted from the original Hebrew, so should the Qur'an be interpreted in Arabic and the various Indian scriptures in Sanskrit. This of course implies that the hermeneuticist be familiar with and fluent in the language used at the time of the creation of the text.

The fourth guideline concerns the cultural milieu in which the text was created and that in which it is being interpreted. Most hermeneutical theories agree that an awareness of the cultural milieu in which the text was created is essential. It is also essential for the interpreter to be aware of the cultural conditions of which he or she is a part. As mentioned previously it is extremely difficult for late 20th century Western interpretation to take place outside a scientific paradigm and perhaps I should add a capitalist ethos as well. This is a general rather than specific presupposition.

The fifth guideline is that the interpreter must be aware of his or her specific presuppositions. Whilst Bultmann has covered this area, with its penchant for creating gross distortion of textual analysis quite extensively, it cannot be stressed how important it is for the interpreter to be aware of their own biases, agendas and perhaps even the ideological pressures they are working under.

In conclusion, it can be seen from the above look at hermeneutics, that it is a very complex subject, one which we still have much to learn about. I must agree with Weeks, in that Spinoza is, "...one of the formative figures behind the

invention of modern Biblical and literary criticism" (Weeks, 1996. p.13). I hope I have shown in this essay that we can and must distinguish between basic textual analysis, through which we may arrive at the meaning proposed by the author and the philosophical interpretation of that meaning. The philosophical interpretation equates with Spinoza's "truth". The hermeneuticist of the future will ideally approach interpretation in this holistic way and be a scholar trained in the cross-cultural disciplines of: linguistics, history, psychology and philosophy, and if interpreting sacred texts, comparative religion.

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3

Reading Glorification of Rusticity in Victor Hugo's "Letter" in English Translation

SARAT KUMAR DOLEY

Abstract

Rural settings have often been cited as an abode of peace and happiness by poets across different poetic outlooks. It has been particularly viewed as the only escape route from the deafening and deadening noise of the life in the cities by the romantic poets. Victor Hugo, the most significant writer and poet who established the foundation of romanticism in French literature viewed rusticity and rustic life in the typical romantic fashion. This paper is an attempt at an analysis of this glorification of rustic simplicity in his poetry with reference to one of his early poems in its English translation.

Introduction

Highly respected for his contribution to literature, Victor Hugo is credited with the honour of spreading romanticism in French literature. His poem "Letter" is a French romantic poem glorifying the calm and quiet nature of country life. The poem is written in the form of a letter to the poet's "lady fair". With the help of the epistolary mode, the poet eulogizes the countryside where he decides to stay for a while away from the tumult of the city. The poem bespeaks typical romantic concern for the forgotten glories of country life wherein

actually lies the solution of the feeling of boredom often encountered living in the concrete jungle of the city.

Description of the village

The countryside where the poet lives is not a particularly beautiful place. It is a village very much like any other village in France. Since farmers live in this village, most of the land in the village is ploughed. Lines of furrow are visible across the village like most of the villages in France in the nineteenth century. The farmers living in the village do not have big houses. They have built houses with "ground-level rooftops hidden by the shrubbery". The roofs of the houses are so low, unlike the houses in the cities, that the shrubs and hedges surrounding the houses could hide them. In the open fields, there are haystacks here and there. The only thing that disturbs the calm and serenity of the village is the smoke that comes out of the rooftops of the houses. The smoke is presented as "tarnishing the landscape" otherwise peaceful and clean. The village has a river too on the right side of it. The river is not a mythically significant river like the Ganges and the Cayster. It is a commonplace river that flows in the Normandy carrying the salty waters of the sea to the inland. Neither is it an exceptionally large river like the Ganges and the Cayster. It is "a Norman salt-infested watercourse". It is a small river with not much water in it. To the north of the village is a

"...bizarre terrain
All angular..."

Contrasting with the free flow of the river to the right side of the village, here is an angle-shaped hill that stands still overlooking the village.

The chapel in the village

There is an old chapel in the village as well. The old chapel has an old spire that bequeaths it an ancient appearance. The old chapel is surrounded by "A few gnarled elms with grumpy silhouettes". The elms have lost their original shape as they have been twisted by the strong winds that blow across the village. The poet imagines that the strong wind has made the elms morosely irritable since they appear worn out and withered. The elms have been shaken by the continuous onslaught of the current of the strong "frisky breezes" so much so that they "carp at every gust that stirs them up." The old chapel is situated in such a place that the strong breeze can shape and re-shape its surroundings. The rigidity of regulations which is a hallmark of religious decrees is missing from that village as the establishment is vulnerable to outside whims. The elms surrounding or protecting the boundary of the old chapel have been twisted and withered by the "frisky breezes." But then, the elms refuse to give in to the current of the wind so easily. Despite the defiance of the elms, the "frisky breezes" keep coming back to the place to reshape its contour.

The poet's lodging in the village

The house where the poet lives is a commonplace house in villages. At one side of his house, there is a big wheelbarrow. But that wheelbarrow has not been in use for some time now, so it is rusting. The house is situated in front of an open field and the poet can see to the edge of the horizon-

"...before me lies the vast
Horizon, all its notches filled with ocean blue".

The horizon is brushed with the blueness of the ocean. The sky colour of the sea in the horizon and the open field

exposing the horizon to the house where the poet lives represents the openness and largeness of sympathy in the hearts of the people living in the village. The banality and narrow concerns of city life which confine people within tight compartments blocking the vision of the blue horizon do not reach to the people living in the village. Life in the village incorporates every living thing. Beneath the house where the poet lives, he finds cocks and hens “converse” spreading their beautiful feather. The poet listens to the birds that sit and “Now and then, toss me songs in dialect”. So, the poet is surrounded by nature and natural objects in the house in which he lives in the village. He is in communion with nature and nature provides him peace of mind.

The rope-maker in the village

The poet is spiritually enriched by his contact with the villagers. There is a rope-maker in the neighbourhood where the poet lives. The rope-maker is an old man highly respected by the villagers. He is completely engrossed in his work as he

“...makes his wheel run loud, and goes

Retrograde, hemp wreathed tightly round the midriff.” What is of interest to the poet, beside the fact that the rope-maker works very hard at his job, is that he is “a patriarchal rope-maker.” He is not somebody who is neglected and humiliated like the common manual labourers in the cities. He is a respectable man who heads the villagers on various occasions in the village. The old man not only earns his living by rope-making, but also receives social recognition from his work. Achievement of venerability through one’s work provides a spiritual satisfaction. The rope-maker is a fortunate man to live in the village in such spiritual contentment.

Life in the village

The poet likes to stroll in the streets of the village. The waters in the river that flows by the village are caressed by the “frisky breezes” that blow across it. The poet likes to walk by that river when the waters of the river dance in the rhythm of the breeze. There is a school in the village to where the villagers send their kids. The children come to the school very ruggedly dressed. They are not the neat and clean school children in the cities. As they come to their school,

“The little village urchins, book in hand,
 Envy me, at the schoolmaster’s (my lodging),
 As a big schoolboy sneaking a day off.”

Such is the beauty of the landscape in the village that children like to stay outside their school. Since the poet is touring the village at leisure and stays in the privileged house of the schoolmaster, the children are envious of him. They desire the freedom and prerogatives that the poet enjoys. The poet is viewed as a person escaping the routine of the school and having fun at home. The poet enjoys that innocent envy he imagines about the children. The surrounding of the school adds more freshness to its location. Besides the innocence of the schoolchildren, the village is clean as “the air is pure” and it is naturally happy as “the sky smiles” there. In keeping with the happy mood of nature embracing the village, the sweet music of children’s voice reaches to the house where the poet is residing as-

“there’s a constant
 Soft noise of children spelling things aloud”

-in the school nearby. The poet’s mind is filled with peace and tranquility living in an atmosphere of such serenity.

Poet's communion with nature

The poet does not desire for anything more than what he achieves in the village. His life in the village offers him an opportunity to live close to nature as “the waters flow” and “a linnet flies” in the village. His communion with nature in the village bequeaths him the peace of mind that he always aspired for in the past. He is grateful to god for that gift and expresses his gratitude passionately-

“Thank you!
Thank you, Almighty God!”

He is grateful because he gets to live the life that he always dreamt about. He strongly feels the sense of being alive and declares,

“Peacefully, hour by hour, with little fuss, I shed
My days, and think of you, my lady fair!”

The quietness and calm that the poet feels in the village give him plenty of time to think about his beloved. The serenity of village, the love in his heart for his beloved and sweet memories that fill his mind give him the best that life can offer to him. Ruminations on the sweet memories of the past provide him spiritual pleasure.

The image of the resting ship

As he listens to the “children chattering”, he sees,

“at times,
Sailing across the high seas in its pride,
Over the gables of the tranquil village,
Some winged ship which is travelling far away...”

Since the village is by the bank of an ocean, the poet can see ships passing by speedily to unknown destinations. The swift passing of the ships is a reminder of the busy life in the cities. The ships are bound on some important errands and

they have no rest until the consignments are delivered. But the poet can see a ship which was on one of such errands lying motionless by the port. Tired and burn out of the hazard and destitution of the journey, the ship “slept in port beside the quay.” The ship is resting beside the bank. The condition of the ship is a reflection of the poet’s own life. The crew in the ship undertook a long journey on the call of duty despite the pain of separation from their loved ones, the beauty in nature that waited for their attention, and the omens of the difficult journey ahead. They were headstrong in their journey as they were prevented by

“No tears of relatives, no fear of wives,
Nor reefs dimly reflected in the waters,
Nor importunity of sinister birds.”

The care and obligation to duty for material gain blinded the crew in the ship.

Conclusion

The true wealth that resides within the spirit of man which can be ignited by communion with nature had been neglected by them. The poet too had once in the past committed the same mistake. But he has regained his wealth of inner happiness living in the village by the ocean. The poet ends the poem on a hopeful note that the crew of the ship may also discover that wealth as they are taking rest by the port in the village stalling the ship for a moment.

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4

An Exploration of the Carnival World in Rajnikant's Films

VIDYA HARIHARAN

Abstract

The Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin used the term 'carnavalesque' to denote subversion of and liberation from the assumptions of existing orders through humor and chaos. He traces its origin to The Feast of Fools, a festival that originated in the medieval age in French Cathedrals, a short period before the more sombre period of Lent, when the junior cathedral officials burlesqued the Church ceremonies. He has called the Carnival world 'the world upside down'. The carnival, then, is an event in which all restrictions and regulations which determine the course of everyday life are suspended, and especially all forms of rigid hierarchical structures in society. Bakhtin offers four categories of what he calls the "carnivalistic" sense of the world: 1. Free and familiar interaction between people, 2. Eccentric behaviour, 3. Carnivalistic misalliances, and 4. Sacrilege.

Any discussion of the history of Indian cinema and its change makers will be incomplete without an exploration of the 'Rajnikant phenomenon'. Bassha (1994), Arunachalam (1997), Padayappa (1999), Baba (2002), Chandramukhi (2005), Enthiran (2010) and Lingaa (2014), in these defining movies of the super-star's career one sees the elements of carnival in action through the interstices of the functioning of the dominant order. When the illogical logic of the carnival, initiated by the Hero, takes over the plot, dialogue and action, then the audience begins to get an inkling of the

true freedom that lies in acts of subversion. In a large measure, it is this turning upside-down of the existing, real hierarchical order and the possibilities it opens up, along with the actor's immense charisma that has led to the world-wide popularity of his movies. This paper is an attempt to explore the various manifestations of the first three categories given by Mikhail Bakhtin in the movies of super star Rajnikant thereby attempting to explain the causes of his sustaining impact on the popular psyche

Keywords: Rajnikant, Bakhtin, carnival, movies, subversion

Super-star and cultural icon Rajnikant began his career in the Tamil film industry as a villain in K. Balachander's 'Apoorva Raaganga' in 1975. Two years later came his break as a protagonist. Since then Rajnikant has acted across various film industries such as Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam and Bengali. He has won several National, State, and Filmfare Awards. Today his films are top grossers and he has reached Demi-God status.

The Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin used the term 'carnavalesque' to denote subversion of and liberation from the assumptions of existing orders through humor and chaos. He traces its origin to The Feast of Fools, a festival that originated in the medieval age in French Cathedrals, a short period before the more sombre period of Lent, when the junior cathedral officials burlesqued the Church ceremonies. In literature, Bakhtin also derives it from the juxtaposition of the serious and the comic elements in Socratic Dialogues and Menippean satire. He has called the Carnival world 'the world upside down'. The carnival, then, is an event in which all restrictions and regulations which determine the course of everyday life are suspended, and especially all forms of rigid hierarchical structures in society. Bakhtin takes the idea of carnival from its agricultural and Christian origins as a promise of new growth, and expands it

to represent “a feast for all the world,” “a feast of becoming, change and renewal”. (Elliot 129)

Bakhtin offers four categories of what he calls the “carnivalistic” sense of the world: 1. Free and familiar interaction between people: in the carnival normally separated people can interact and freely express themselves to one another. 2. Eccentric behaviour: behaviour that was otherwise not accepted in society is legitimate in carnival, and human nature’s hidden sides are revealed. 3. Carnivalistic misalliances: the free and familiar attitude of the carnival enables everything which is normally separated to connect – the sacred with the profane, the new and old, and the high and low etc. 4. Sacrilegious: the carnival is a site of blasphemy and parodies on things that are sacred. The town square and its adjacent streets were the central site of the carnival, for they embodied and symbolized the carnivalesque idea of being universal and belonging to all people. The various manifestations of the first three above mentioned categories given by Mikhail Bakhtin can be seen in the movies of super-star Rajnikant and this may explain the cause of his sustaining impact on the popular psyche. Beginning with *Bassha*, which released in 1994, and going on with *Arunachalam* (1997), *Padayappa* (1999), *Baba* (2002), *Chandramukhi* (2005), *Enthiran* (2010) and taking his most recent release, *Lingaa* (2014), in these defining movies of the super-star’s career one sees the elements of carnival in action through the interstices of the dominant societal order. When the illogical logic of the carnival, initiated by the Hero, takes over the plot, dialog and action, then the audience begins to get an inkling of the true freedom that lies in acts of subversion. In a large measure, it is this turning upside-down of the existing, real hierarchical order and the possibilities it

opens up, along with the actor's immense charisma that has led to the world-wide popularity of his movies.

In the movie 'Bassha' Rajnikant plays the role of Manikkam, an ordinary auto-rickshaw driver who is trying to raise his siblings honourably. Priya, the leading lady, who is young, beautiful and rich, commutes daily in Manikkam's auto and thus an attraction springs up between this unlikely pair. In 'Arunachalam', Rajnikant is an orphan, who travels to Chennai from his native village in search of a job. He encounters a good Samaritan who arranges a menial job for the boy. Fortune smiles upon this unfortunate orphan when it is discovered that he is the long lost son of a millionaire and heir to a Rs. 3000 crore empire. In 'Padayappa' the hero is a mechanical engineer educated in the USA, who is also the son of the village chieftain, Shivaji Ganesan. Due to arcane inheritance laws and his own father's obduracy the hero is reduced to poverty. He later discovers that there is solid granite on his land and again regains his riches as well as his family's former social position in the village. All the above scenarios are imbued with the sense of infinite possibilities, of a world where it is entirely possible for the amazing occurrence to not only occur once but to become a motif.

Priya, in 'Bassha', not only revels in her love for her auto-driver she also disobeys her father, rejects his choice of bridegroom and elopes with Manikkam. Priya's father is aware and afraid of Manikkam's alter-ego Manik Bassha, the former fearsome Don of Mumbai. In order to fulfil the promise made to his dying father to lead an honourable life and turn over a new leaf, the erstwhile dangerous Don had undergone an abrupt metamorphosis and emerged in Chennai as a respectable, hardworking autodriver, Manikkam. The Manikkam /Manik Bassha dichotomy is

central to the second edict of carnival, the sense of release from a conventional world, the loss of inhibitions and the freedom of action and thought this release brings. This freedom, in turn, leads to the possibility of rampant misbehaviour that will go unpunished, is indeed unpunishable, as the action takes place in a world of 'licensed misrule' where all laws are profane.

In this topsy-turvy world where right is wrong and vice-versa, Rajnikant can get an inheritance of ₹3000 crore only if he can spend ₹30 crore in a month. The three conditions are: no contributions to charities, not to own any assets at the end of the month, and, above all, no one must know that he is acting according to the diktats of his father's will. Rambha, the trustee-guardian's daughter, is entrusted with the job of ensuring that Arunachalam keeps to the eccentric rules of the will. A quartet of villains foils every attempt by the spend-thrift hero by doubling his money every time he tries to get rid of it. In the sane world, each man is engrossed in capitalizing on his paltry fortune and this is upheld as a virtue and the norm. Here, however, the rules are reversed and the amassing of wealth is regarded as abnormal. Who among us would not like to inhabit such a world?

The medieval Feast of Fools and its modern day secular version, the Mardi Gras began with the suspension of disbelief. The participants and the audience were on an equal platform as both entered into the unreal world where the sceptic has no place. Without the audience's absolute immersion in the make-believe short-term world of no-rule land this serio-comic, heteroglossic world would be reduced to a grotesque, meaningless parody of the real structured world. Although the carnival's essential spirit is that of parody, the parody has a purpose. 'High' culture is

burlesqued, irreverence towards standard modes of thought and behaviour is encouraged so that authority and the status quo can be questioned. The belief is that the complete breakdown of official authority and hierarchic structures will free one from the fear and intimidation inherent in all such class structures. The ambivalence and uncertainty that takes the place of surety and stability will open us up to the polyphonic voices of the hitherto unheard lower social orders and give one a different perspective of life.

In all of Rajnikant's movies there is a mingling of the high and the low and constant questioning of authority figures and structures. The breakdown of class structures and the creation of social good as a consequence can be seen in his most recent release 'Lingaa'. The coronation-deposition-re-coronation of Carnival is also an integral part of the story. Raja Lingeswaran, Cambridge-educated engineer, District Collector and benign ruler is moved by the plight of drought-struck villagers of his district and in a fit of rebellion against the British rule resigns his job as Collector and dedicates all his, time, skill, energy and considerable wealth to the building of a dam to bring water to his parched peasantry. He lives a life of simplicity among the villagers and falls in love with a village belle, whom he eventually weds. The dam is built after immense sacrifice. There is fierce, underhanded plotting by the British to halt the work of the dam. The dreaded caste-politics raises its head but in the carnivalesque it loses its potency. Raja Lingeswaran, crowned the Lord of Misrule, will not allow his reign to be disrupted by any official and officious structures from the real world. His grandson Lingaa, (Rajnikant again) raised by a school teacher father in a lower middle class household, grows up to be a master thief and befriends men from the same social strata. Together this motley gang recreates the Carnival world in the

same village to stop the dam his grandfather built from being blown up by a corrupt, greedy and venial politician.

Enthiran, or Robot, is the eccentric/grotesque 'other' of the logical, intelligent, law-abiding scientist Dr. Vaseekaran. The scientist is commissioned by the Indian Army to create a species of humanoids that can be used in war in place of human soldiers. Rajnikant, creates a robot in his own image and names him Chitti. The robot is later invested with the power to think and feel. As a result, he falls in love with the doctor's fiancée AishwaryaRai. Faced with her rejection, the robot goes berserk and attacks its own creator. Dr. Vaseekaran's boss at the Scientific Institute, AIRD, Dr. Bohra, installs a chip in the robot which makes it extremely violent and unpredictable and it goes on a rampage after replicating itself many times over. Dr. Vaseekaran is arrested and tried but a re-created robot exonerates him after giving witness against Dr. Bohra.

The best and most exaggerated elements of Carnival are seen in this movie. The depiction of the Army, the police and the scientific intelligentsia as power structures which can run out-of-control if left to their own devices, is meant to disturb our sense of complacent safety. The creative/destructive power of the human mind which is obsessed with a single idea and invents a creature capable of deep love and violent rage is meant to disturb our unshakable confidence in what we bequeath to our progeny. The rejection of the humanoid by his lady-love and his own father/creator, the denial of its desire to be accepted into mainstream society makes us question our innate humanity. In the end of the movie the robot agrees to self-destruct as he is deemed to be too advanced for our times. His body parts are placed in a museum and when a group of school children are led to see

it, one of the students wants to know why the robot was dismantled and its head replies, "I started to think".

The world of Enthiran cries out for the world of Carnival to open up. The suspension of thought and the necessity of giving oneself up to the pleasures of the purely sensuous, the need to acknowledge the absurd, the safety valve provided by the lapse into the unruly and rebellious from time to time is highlighted here. Laughter, an essential element for the success of the carnivalesque to succeed in its purpose is only generated by situations in this movie. Enthiran's attempts to fit in and his creator's futile attempts to control it evoke laughter. However, both Dr. Vaseekaran and his alter ego lack a sense of humor and an appreciation of the lighter side of life.

Into the world of Carnival already existing in 'Chandramukhi' is added the ghostly element, that of a long-dead dancer seeking revenge on her killer, Raja Vettaian (Rajnikant). Vettaiyapuram mansion in rural South India has lain unoccupied for many years till the arrival of a young couple who decide to make it their home. The house is believed to be haunted. Indeed from the moment that an inner room in the mansion is forced open by Ganga, one half of the couple, eerie things begin to happen – a ghost frightens the people in the house, things inexplicably break, and Ganga's sari catches fire. Saravanan (Rajnikant) a Psychiatrist is invited by his friend, the owner of the mansion and the befuddled husband of Ganga, to investigate the strange happenings. He mediates airily between the spirit and the real worlds, uses his infinite compassion and wisdom in dealing with a mentally disturbed Ganga and with his sense of humour held like shield and his ability to deal on an equal footing with all classes and kinds of people dispenses advice

and assistance to all and sundry, recreating an atmosphere of cheerful bonhomie among the various family members. He is once again cast as the benign 'Lord of Misrule' who will actively encourage carefree abandon, disobedience to authority and joyful revelry and will not allow the darker powers to wrest control of his world, be they of the spirit world or the temporal.

There is a philosophy of subversion through parody at work in *Bassha*, *Arunachalam*, *Padayappa*, *Chandramukhi* and *Lingaa*. The subversive spirit manifests itself in these movies through exaggeration and song. The audience is catapulted into a super-sensory world of colour, Rajnikant, the hero, is dressed in primary colours in all his movies, the sets and props are luxurious, the leading lady is always the reigning box office diva of the moment e.g. Saundarya, Nagma, Jyothika, Aishwarya Rai et al., emotions are felt deeply and expressed in extreme measures. In short, everything is larger than life.

Language has a very significant role to play in Bakhtin's view of the Carnival. Any language, according to Bakhtin, stratifies into many voices: "social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions." This diversity of voice is, Bakhtin asserts, the defining characteristic of the novel as a genre. We can apply this to the filmic language of Rajnikant's movies. The voices of the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the happy and the unhappy are all heard equally in each one of his movies. In 'Padayappa' the foreign returned engineer quickly loses his 'high' lingo and begins to speak the vernacular as he mingles with the working poor. In 'Bassha', the distinction between the two worlds occupied by our hero,

the Underworld, over which he ruled as a dreaded Don in his criminal past and the present plebeian life he leads as an autorickshaw driver is clearly delineated in speech and song. The song '*Naan autokaaran autokaaran*' is an emphatic statement of his working class affiliations. His siblings speak the lingo of the educated, upwardly mobile middle class and his girlfriend speaks the language of the ruling elite. In this heteroglossia, this free mingling of voices and classes, lies the charm of the Rajnikant movie.

The element of parody which is integral to a carnival sense of the world is present in these exaggerated actions and emotions. Parodying the 'real' helps in demystifying reality, the real rules and the unwritten moral and social mores that society lives by are set aside for a while and the audience abandons itself to abandoned laughter and awe. In Rajnikant's movies he is the 'style master' i.e. there are certain exaggerated mannerisms that are typical to him. His strutting walk, his trick with his shades and his poses and gestures, his dance movements, even his facial expressions are all a parody of the real thing. The humour that is evoked is not satirical, indeed the satirist positions himself as superior to the rest of humanity. In Rajnikant's world the laughter is shared laughter, it is laughter enjoyed by the entire audience as a unified group, it is the laughter of release. The exuberant flinging of flowers and money at the screen and whistling whenever the super-hero appears is an expression of the acknowledgement of the perfection of that airy creation –the topsy-turvy world.

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The Despairing State of Man in His Life: A Study of Man's Position in the Poetry of Robert Frost

NEENA SHARMA

Abstract

Robert Frost wrote realistic poetry in an age in which the poets were busy in writing dreamy poetry and allegories. He was concerned with the story of human misery. Robert Frost, as a poet, may appear to be an escapist when we read his nature poetry but this is not true. He was not an escapist but a realist. The theme of agony of human life, of the conflict between faith and doubt has been again and again dealt with in a large number of his poems. The main theme of his poetry is the despairing state of man in his life. He has tried to communicate again and again that man's effort together happiness and love of his fellow man in the universe is futile. This paper focuses on man's position and attitude in the universe.

Robert Frost has written about nature but it would be erroneous to think of him as a great priest of nature. He has written about nature because Nature is so dominating, so omnipresent that it is impossible to avoid her. Frost has written poems on trees, on birds and on the phenomenon of nature but he has done this like a realist and not like a mystic nor like one who sees nature as a panacea for all human ills. We go to nature no doubt but it is in the same manner as an irreligious person may like to visit a temple or a church but

such a temple going cannot make him religious. As we must not over estimate Frost's potential as a poet of nature because he never thought that nature is competent enough to overpower our grief through which we have to pass so long as we live on this earth.

To one who has thoroughly studied the poetry of Robert Frost, Nature will strike as a dominant subject in his poetry but he is not a nature poet in the tradition of Wordsworth or Thomas Hardy. The poetry of Frost depicts before us the drama of nature, the drama which is many times as much interesting and bewildering as the drama of man. The nature poems of Frost are seldom without the presence of man which clearly proves that he was not a pure poet of nature. Frost never felt the brotherhood for natural objects which was the great belief of William Wordsworth. William Wordsworth also never tried to attribute a mind to nature.

Robert Frost is one of few poets in English literature who shall never become outdated because poetry is an echo of every sensitive man's experiences and his limitations. The main theme of his poetry is the despairing state of man in his life. Robert Frost has tried to communicate again and again that man's effort to gather happiness and love of his fellowmen in the universe.

Robert Frost's chief concern is with man. The focus in his poetry is on man's position and attitude and especially on his feelings. Robert Frost reveals a good deal about his conception of universe and external reality in his poetry. But what is important to him? It is man's thought, emotions and behavior as they determine or reflect his relationship with the universe. What does man do, and how does he feel in a universe as dark as this? That is the central question for Robert Frost. The answer is found largely by the fact that man

is sharply limited as Robert Frost sees him. Man is limited both in his intellectual power and his awareness and understanding. He has a different way of seeing this universe. He is different in his thought and in his intellectual power.

In several poems, Robert Frost indicates that man fail to understand nature and its relationship with him. Man could not make a balance of nature with his relationship. Directly or indirectly in both agnostic and the puritanical poetry, Robert Frost considers man very much handicapped. He has certain limitations. In some religious poems, Robert Frost represents man's limitations equally. In "The Trial By Existence" the universe which he shows is in different man and his plight.

"Nothing but what we somehow choose;
Thus are we wholly stripped of pride
In the pain that has but one close
Bearing it crushed and mystified."

Robert Frost considers man's rational limitations in "Masque of Reason" and in "The Lesson for Today". These limitations help in explaining the term, why the universe seems incomprehensible and uncontrollable. Man has no control over universe. He is unable to understand the realities of the universe. Man's position thus is permanently difficult in the universe. The universe seems to him empty or meaningless. According to his poem like "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and "Design" man finds himself isolated and alienated and cut off from other men of the universe. And because of alienation from other men of the universe and from the universe he is harmed easily by others. "An Old Man's Winter Night" clears the vulnerability of man in an empty universe. It affects man's feelings very deeply. This aged man cannot keep a house. He is isolated, but he does not feel vulnerability in him because of his depersonalization through his age and tiredness. It may be possible that he does not realize, how

helpless he is, he seems much more in pitiable condition to us.

The human insecurity is only suggested by Robert Frost in "An Old Man's Winter Night" is clear. It gives continual emphasis on man's isolation. The speaker in the "Storm Fear" feels his isolation and his insecurity in the universe. In this poem he faces natural forces directly. His poem which can be compared with Wordsworth "Leech Gatherer", the man is determined and independent in the universe. He lives in the mountains and earns money by gathering gum. He is dependent on nature for his livelihood. The emphasis is given mainly and directly on man himself. Robert Frost explains man's liveliness and energy in the beginning of the poem. He invests him with independence in the course of the poem. At the end of the poem Robert Frost makes plain that man must find satisfaction in his life. He must unite his vacation and avocation in his life

In both poem "The Gum Gatherer" and "Brown Descent", we see a significant general aspect of Robert Frost's humanism. He is conscious of man's limitations. Man cannot exercise much control over his universe, no penetrate it very far. He does not understand what is difficult to understand or hidden in this universe. This being so, Robert Frost's faith in man could be very close and similar. But neither "Gum Gatherer" nor "Brown's Descent" does so because each speaker of the poem controls his existence and environment satisfactorily. The Gum gatherer represents a kind of aesthetic sense. He concerns with appreciation of beauty. Brown embodies human dignity in "Brown's Descent". Critic argued that

"Frost maintained a humanistic faith in man's other resources such as love, courage and humor despite the seriousness of his deficiencies".

“New Hampshire’ is similarly focused on human activities and values and finds satisfaction in human activities. He believed that life and man remain essentially the same. In his poetry we find Robert Frost’s personal tears, mood of depression and moment of doubt. He was depressed due to the tragedies which took place in his life and in his poetic career. Man in his poetry is left in a very uncertain position and just as important. He suffers life’s difficulties and unpleasant situations. These situations make his existence difficult for him especially in the mood of happiness. Robert Frost sees this fearsome universe. He sees man’s serious and difficult condition in this fearsome universe, but there are two different points of view. On the one hand he often writes as though the existence of God is irrelevant. He seems to be in a mood of agnosticism. Earthly human life is primary. For earthly human being the external reality is incomprehensible, even meaningless. On the other hand, Robert Frost seems to think that God is harsh and severe. He has no sympathy for human beings. God makes others work hard. The universe and man are fallen. It is clear through Robert Frost’s work that God has temporarily withdrawn. It cannot be felt or noticed by human beings or is simply irrelevant to their concerns. Man is virtually helpless. The reason of his helplessness is partly because of his situation in the universe and partly because of his weaknesses.

If one sees from his puritan point of view, one feels that God is directing the course of events and man’s place in them. There is little, man can succeed in doing. He seems little helpless and he seems more active. It is another thing that he is no more effective in the long run of success. What does the poet mean by external reality? Robert Frost sees it in nature, in the world and in the universe. Nature is hardly pleasant or

encouraging as a great many of Robert' Frost's poems point it. Nature has its own ways and concerns. There is Wordsworthian approach as a benevolent nature in some of Robert Frost's optimistic poetry as we find in "The Pasture" from the volume "a Boy's Will".

"I am going to clean the pasture spring;
I will only stop to make the leaves away
And wait to watch the water clear, I may
I shan't be gone long-you come too"

Man and nature are separate and fundamentally different. Nature has its own integrity, which can man hardly understand. Robert Frost's view point reveals that man must learn to live in the natural order. It is the only effective way to live in the universe. He must learn how to live a life with difficulties. He must struggle with difficulties and unpleasant situations. Robert Frost has given his conception of nature. He has told about the nature's independence. He has indicated in his several poems that man cannot exercise any influence on nature although he can control it to some extent. Robert Frost has also revealed the secrets of the universe. Human being cannot understand this vast universe because their understanding is limited by boundaries. Robert Frost sees the universe, as the most problematic environment. He considers man's rational limitations at length in "Masque of Reason". It is a short verse play. It deals with the biblical story of Job. Robert Frost is in some ways to like John Milton. As John Milton's aim is to justify God's ways to man in 'Paradise Lost', Robert Frost's aim is to justify God's ways to man. Man cannot go beyond his limitations. He must submit to the mysterious force. His belief in the limitation of man has profound implications. He says that there is a not only difficulty with the nature and universe but also with man's infinite mind. It may be impossible to measure. According to

Robert Frost's vision of man's limitation is something reasonable. Man finds himself amid confusion beyond his control. His position is precarious in the universe and in front of the power of universe man feels himself isolated. He faces difficulties due to alienation in this vast universe.

'A servant to servants' is the most powerful account of human alienation in the fearsome universe. A farmer's wife's position is that of all men in an unfeeling universe as Robert Frost indicates. This poem can be interpreted in many ways. It can be read as the epitome of Godless existential man and condition of a man, expression of fallen man condemned to labor and finally that man condemned to labor and finally that that man has alienated himself from the universe; he has made his position insecure in this vast world. His another poem 'Once by The Pacific' emphasizes God's wrath over fallen man. Robert Frost cannot accept complete agnosticism. He cannot say that he is certain of nothing, nor he is certain of everything about his position in this universe-

"The shattered water made a misty din
Great waves looked over others coming in,
And thought of doing something to the shore
The water never did to land before"

Robert Frost suggests one solution to the man's isolation or alienation in the world in the poem 'Provide Provide'. But it is the most sarcastic poem. The speaker suggests providing for future. A human being cannot depend on the memory of the past because these memories will not help in future. Man will have to struggle in another way in future. He should trust experience. It suggests how we should live our lives. According to Robert Frost, the human self centeredness and the pride, fear and loneliness are reflection of man's basic failures. It is due to his position in the universe and his relationship with other people that man feels embroiled. In

many of his poems Robert Frost shows that man is dissatisfied. On the one hand, he undertakes futile activities he is unable to understand. He is unable to achieve as much as he would like.

The foolishness of trying to achieve the impossible for human being is revealed in several poems of Robert Frost as in 'The Road Not Taken and 'The Wood Pile'. In the woodpile he presents the futility of man's achievements and shows us man's limitations. He says that it is the foolishness of man to expand himself on labor which is unimportant. Robert Frost does not always represent man as quite so foolishly unrealistic nor does he represent him as proud and self-centered. It is very rare that Robert Frost takes man to task for attacking nature. Man acts as though God is simply not there in the universe. This is the weak position of human being because he is living in a Godless universe. Even in this weak position man reacts to organize his life and experience in social terms. Robert Frost sees this attempt, as futile and ridiculous. He felt on one hand that the universe and man's position is uncontrollable and difficult; on the other hand that the universe and man's relationship to it are manageable. We find the opposition between his dark side and light side.

Robert Frost often reveals doubt about the nature of reality. He reveals doubt about the man's ability to struggle with the universe. But in 'All Revelation' he assumes that nature of reality depends somewhat on man's own understanding. It is understanding of human being which gives him courage to struggle with this fearsome universe. In the other words Robert Frost says that as if reality had a partly independent existence. It is partly created by man's own understanding. Man has to learn his limitations in order to survive in this world. Robert Frost's poetic stance

represents one solution which is to escape. But it is clear that he did not generally accept the idea of escape. He always seeks the solution of the problem of man's confusion about existence. Man is facing the confusion of modern existence. Further Robert Frost suggested the way to salvation. On the one hand he is uncertain or even fearful about man's position and on the other hand, he reflects upon the confidence in the poem.

Thus Robert Frost's poems indicate a mixture of certain and uncertain about the position of human beings in the universe.

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6

Neurotic Protagonist in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

ANJAN KUMAR

Abstract

Neurosis is defined as deviation from normal pattern of human behavior. Great thinkers like Freud and Horney have made notable contributions to the study of Neurosis. In India, study of neurosis is attributed to M. Rajeshwar. Feeling of alienation, sense of rootlessness, indecisiveness etc. are some of the symptoms of neurosis. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist in *The Foreigner* by Arun Joshi is a neurotic. Sindi Oberoi remained neglected as a child. Later, when he grew up he is sent abroad for higher studies. He could not find a real home for himself where love and affection could teach him to face the realities of the world. As a neurotic, he failed everywhere – in love affair, in personal relationship and even in familial relationship. But the neurotic disposition of Sindi does not degenerate into psychosis. Psychosis is a degenerated form of neurosis where the victim develops self-destructive tendencies.

Key words: neurosis, behavior, fantasy, neglect, hostile.

Neurosis is normally defined as deviation from normal pattern of human behavior. A neurotic is far removed from the world of realities. He lives in an imaginative world of his own. He takes the imagined to be real. He lives in a world of fantasy. A neurotic person has either suffered an utter neglect or been extremely pampered. One of the reasons why a person becomes neurotic is he is not taught to see the world

in right perspective. The real self of a neurotic is forsaken. Neurosis begins when the real-self is forsaken. Horney defines neurosis as “functional derangement caused by disorder of the nervous system or by something in the subconscious mind” (Horney: 1988: 166). Notable contributions to the study of neurosis have been made by Sigmund Freud, Karen Horney and Abraham Maslow. Freud considers neurosis as a kind of mental disorder. A path – breaking study in the field of studying neurosis in the writings of Indian Women Novelists was done by M. Rajeshwar.

The themes of alienation and identity crisis have extensively been explored by the writers who wrote in English in India. A chunk of authors in India, now a day, have become obsessed with writing on the theme of alienation and identity crisis. Pathak, R.S. writes “Alienation, in its comprehensive sense, is a recurrent theme in Indian novels written in English” (Pathak, 1999: 14). Meenakshi Mukherjee thinks that alienation is “a very common theme” (Mukherjee, 1971:83) in Indian novels in English. Exploration of the theme of identity and alienation led the writers to investigate the causes that are eventually seated at the root of these mental attributes. The writer finally came out with the conclusion that the psyche of mankind is the melting pot of all these externalized self. A man feels alienated, forsaken and secluded because he has deviated from the normal pattern of human behavior. This deviation from normal human behavior is what is known as neurosis.

Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist in *The Foreigner* by Arun Joshi is a neurotic. As a neurotic he has deviated from the normal pattern of human behavior. His behavior with the ladies who he befriends during his stay abroad is quite

abnormal and transfixing. He fails in all relationships. His relationship with June is all the more confusing.

A person tends to become neurotic either because he is utterly neglected or extremely pampered. In case of Sindi Oberoi, we may see, utter neglect. He lost his parents just at his childhood. He did not get real love, care and affection of parents. He suffers from emotional turbulences right from his childhood. He is born in Kenya of an Indian father and English mother. Soon after the death of his parents in a plane crash, he is brought to India by his uncle. The love and affection of real parents can never match those of other relatives. Sindi Oberoi remained neglected as a child. Later, when he grew up he is sent abroad for higher studies. He could not find a real home for himself where love and affection could teach him to face the realities of the world. He remains a foreigner to everyone and everyone is foreigner to him ever since he is born. While replying to June on his foreign-ness, says, "My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind wherever I went" (*The Foreigner*, 1969: 52). He is "an uprooted Youngman living in the later half of the twentieth century" (*The Foreigner*, 1969: 164). A neurotic always feels uprooted. He imagines that the world around him as hostile to him.

A neurotic lives in his own imagined world. He takes imagined to be real. He withdraws himself from the streamline culture of the society. Sindi feels he is living a life of withdrawal. He wonders:

"Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose, unless you could call the search for peace a purpose. Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter! It seemed to me that I would still be a

foreigner" (55). Devoid of purpose, life becomes an aimless existence to him and he feels: he "existed only for dying" (56).

For Sindi Oberoi the world and people around him are hostile. He grows up without a family tie. He was brought up by his uncle after the death of his parents. He could not get proper emotional support from his uncle which is essential for proper grooming of a child. A child must feel that someone is there who cares for him and shares his life experiences. This kind of familial and emotional support generates in a person a feeling of living with a purpose. But Sindi Oberoi was deprived of these familial bonds and attachments as his real parents were no more to take care of him. He considered his parents as 'strangers'. Deprived of parental love and affection in his very childhood, he becomes broken and anchorless. On being asked by Mr. Khemka as to how his parents died, he betrays Camus' Meursault-like indifference, "For a hundredth time I related the story of these strangers whose only reality were a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs" (Joshi, *The Foreigner* 12).

At the home of uncle he feels himself neglected and alienated. This makes him disposed towards neurosis. Lack of warmth of love and emotional support generates in him what may be termed as neurotic pride. He fails to see the world in right perspective. He fails to understand the need and importance of human relationship for the survival of man as a social being in the society. With a distorted and confused notion and vision of love and life he is ushered into a larger world – America. In America he is overpowered by a feeling of fear, it was the fear of entering into relationship with fellow beings. He could not love any one because he was denied love in childhood. Love meant for him a time-pass game. He took detachment for love. It became almost difficult for him

to distinguish between attachment and detachment. He develops a feeling of detachment in America. His love for an American girl, June Blyth, ends tragically because he is afraid of marriage and its demands, "of possessing anybody and... of being possessed" (*The Foreigner*: 56). He gives an acceptable logic for denying marriage with her "One should be able to love without wanting to possess.... One should be able to detach oneself from the agent of one's love". For Oberoi marriage is painful. He cannot enter into marriage relationship with any one because the relationship brings with it a lot of pain and suffering. He wants to conquer pain. He says:

"I wanted the courage to live as I wanted; the courage to live without desire and attachment. I wanted the peace and perhaps a capacity to love. I wanted all these. But above all, I wanted to conquer pain". (*The Foreigner*: 63)

He believes in only temporary love relationship and not a permanent bond of marriage. He went to America simply for enjoying short-lived relationship in love – "What is the good of coming to America, if one is not to play around with girls?" (*The Foreigner*: 43)

June marries a person called Babu and not Sindhi. But Sindhi continues with his relationship with June. Infidelity in marriage hurts Babu and he drinks and in an inebriated state he drives to death. June holds Sindi guilty for the death of her husband. June, too dies during child birth. The tragic death of June bring to Sindhi a kind of realization – "Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escapes from it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that" (*The Foreigner*: 162).

The journey of Sindi Oberoi from India to America and back fails to bring any change in his outlook. His neurotic dispositions continued to haunt him everywhere. Hari Mohan Prasad aptly points out regarding the journey of Sindi: "From Boston to Delhi has been a journey from alienation to arrival, from selfishness to sacrifice, from an anomic responsible to himself to a member of mankind, from being to becoming"(1985: 59). When Sheila asks how long he plans to stay with company, he replies:"I don` t know. As long as I` m needed, I suppose"(192). In this context Usha Pathania aptly remarks:

"In his interpersonal relations, he ultimately succeeds in imbibing the rare and enviable quality of forgetting his separateness and individual identity. The journey from America to India has been a long journey indeed. He has reached his destination. The most coveted goal of peace within and around, emanating from a meaningful existence and a sense of belongingness has been attained. He is no more afraid of love, of freedom, of growth of change, of the unknown; he becomes himself". (1992: 60)

Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* and Dimple in Bharati Mukharjee's *Wife* are the characters who move suffer from neurosis. The neurotic character of Maya owes its genesis to the situations and circumstances in which she is brought up. She is pampered from her childhood by her father so much that she is incapable of leading an independent existence. Maya deviates from normal pattern of behaviour because she fails to understand reality. Her character can be contrasted with that of Dimple in *wife*. In case of Dimple, it is withdrawal of love by her father that makes Dimple suffer in order to create her own idealized self in the society. Maya expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in married life but both of them are denied to her, one by Gautama's cold intellectuality and the other by his

age. Maya's longing for the sensuous enjoyment of life is dampened by tenets of the Gita philosophy of non-attachment. The death of Toto is a spiritual catastrophe in Maya's life. Maya feels miserable and isolated as she fails to receive Gautama's sympathy and understanding. Maya seeks her redemption in the killing of Gautama which turns her life into a tragedy. The neurosis degenerates into psychosis. Gautama is killed in a cold-blooded manner by Maya. The destructive forces in Maya and Dimple are examples of neurosis degenerating into psychosis. Psychosis is an extreme form of neurosis. When a person enters into a psychotic state of mind he becomes destructive both for himself and for others.

But in case of Sindi, we do not visualize the onset of psychosis state of mind. He does not commit suicide nor does he kill others. However, June holds Sindi responsible for the death of Babu. June, too dies during child birth. The tragic death of June bring to Sindhi a kind of realization – "Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that" (*The Foreigner*: 162). A neurotic would never develop a sense of remorse or repentance for the death of anyone near and dear to him. But Sindi feels for the loss of June. Thus he is merely a neurotic. At the end of the novel Sindi is found modifying and distorting his name. Instead of Surendra, he calls himself "Surrender Oberoi". This shows his neurotic tendencies. A neurotic would never remain satisfied with his self. He develops mechanism to defend himself for the hostile forces around him. The change of name is a kind of mechanism to defend his neurotic pride.

Thus the protagonist of the novel *The Foreigner* is beyond doubt a neurotic and the novelist has certainly made a notable contribution to the study of psycho-analysis with his contemporaries.

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*Inside the Haveli: Searching a Voice for
Autonomy in 'the Constricted
Atmosphere'*

PRAVEEN MIRDHA

Woman has been defined as “a free and autonomous being” by Simone de Beauvoir suggesting the need for recognition of woman as a human being whose voice should not go unheard. Gender, being a social construct, is determined by society, culture and history; women, their life, experiences, preoccupations and feelings have so far been marginalized by gender-oriented cultural determinants under the pressure to conform to the traditional concept of hegemony. A woman’s frailty, inferiority, inaptitude and passivity are a result of patriarchal structure of oppression and denial of power. An overall picture of a woman’s status that we gather from history, society and literature gives an impression that her consciousness is conditioned by a rigid convention-ridden social milieu where she is reconciled to a life of repressive subordination and silence. With the emergence of women writers the focus has shifted to relocate the female sensibility in a new perspective as “the pen has been in their hands” who question the rationalism of archetypal patriarchal centre to assert that “the otherness of the woman is a construction of patriarchy”; for the creation of anti-authoritarian discourses they articulate the need to deconstruct those hegemonic power structures which have thwarted women’s voices.

The thrust of Rama Mehta's (1923-78) novel *Inside the Haveli*, (1977) is on the deconstruction of the patriarchal ideology that does act as a custodian of female autonomy. For Rama Mehta, who was forced to relinquish her position from Indian Foreign Service upon marriage, this novel carries an autobiographical undertone as a result of "the anguish of being a woman that has brought to the fore a vital imagination charged with a genuine urge for expression". She contextualizes the problems related to the practices of *pardah*, dowry, child-marriage, widowhood, and girl child's survival in society, her education to investigate how these practices punctuate the growth of women as free individuals having an identity of their own and shift them to marginality. Refusing to accept the myths created by patriarchy, she "seeks to initiate a search for the female's own imaginative/alternative space".

Conceived to disrupt traditional boundaries between masculine and feminine, high and popular culture, the dominant and the marginal, the novel has its roots in the idea of the collapse of the notion of hegemony and the "challenge to the norm-producing pretensions" where the author seeks to justify her claims concerning the rationality and legitimacy of certain social practices and arrangements. Michel Foucault has attempted a radical critique of knowledge-power relationship and shows how Enlightenment is against hegemony; he opposes the traditional authority and pleads for knowledge which seems to have a louder voice. With the increase in cultural pluralism, people became critical of the fabric of traditional city and older neighborhoods and in Indian situations palaces and havelis were facing the axe as Rama Mehta does reveal in the opening paragraph of her novel: "Udaipur was once the capital of the state of Mewar; now it is only a town like many other towns...surrounded by

a bastioned wall, which after four hundred years is crumbling; in fact there are now big gaps..." (3) Showing her hostility towards an imagined position of superiority, the novelist bids goodbye to the culture and heritage of palaces, havelis and forts to move towards a new situation in which feudalism, the pedestal of high status and high culture, no longer occupies the privileged position. Recognizing the principles of autonomy, Rama Mehta occupies a similar ideological position with Arundhati Roy who espouses the theory of 'the dismantling of the Big' suggesting that the 'Big' is not to be romanticized in the 21st century.

Through Geeta – the protagonist of her novel – she focuses on the predicament of an Indian woman in the traditional family situation who moves to the centre from the periphery struggling to free herself from the architectural authoritarian fortress built around her by the patriarchy to occupy an autonomous space. She is face to face with the task to define her role by a set of relationships and code of conduct prescribed within the haveli. The sharp focus upon the consequential phases of Geeta's life, her reactions as she journeys from metropolitan city of Bombay to encounter 'the constricted atmosphere' of a 'Haveli' in Udaipur, serves as an evolutionary paradigm of her evolution from feminine to female; she undergoes the following stages of progression proposed by Elaine Showalter:

First, there is the prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.

Geeta is subject to binary pulls between ultra-modern Bombay and feudal world of Udaipur 'inside the haveli', between the desires for autonomy and dependent security, between spatial expansion and territorial constriction. Split between a narrow passive world of non-choice and immobility and the will to exercise her active choice Geeta strives to carve out her own identity in traditionally stifling environs to prove her education, knowledge, personality and humanity as her most precious assets and it is on the basis of these assets that she chooses to give meaning to her life. Initially her position is very ambivalent as she swings between the contrasting forces of confinement and emancipation, submission and assertion, chains and choices, male authority and female identity, power and subservience, ignorance and knowledge, acceptance and rejection, romanticism and reason, fantasy and reality, flexibility and rigidity, revolt and compromise. Synthesizing her modern ethos with the traditional ethics of the 'Haveli', she successfully brings in remarkable changes on both fronts leaving slim chances of clash and quarrel.

Clara Nubile suggests that in this novel the haveli itself is one of the protagonists which "represents a gendered spatiality as well as a stronghold of traditional values." (47) Haveli represents an Indian household, a grand palace or a big residence and symbolically it could stand for "the formidable structure of cultural domination" (Edward Said) in feudal Rajasthan causing fear, anxiety, admiration and awe because of its size, strength and power where women bearing the brunt of patriarchal domination are supposed to be puppets whose strings are in the hands of men. The name of the haveli in the novel "*Jeewan Niwas*" assumes ironic suggestibility for its denial of 'life' (*Jeewan*) to its female residents as autonomous human beings. Geeta's

dissatisfaction with the established order of life inside the haveli who is not its natural resident by birth and her initiation as an agent of *Jeewan* 'inside', to push a metaphoric change in the 'safe' and 'secure' structure with her persisting power to redefine herself within the walls of the haveli which has historically established and accepted the male codes and judgments as standards is remarkable since "in the haveli men were regarded with awe as if they were gods...the masters and their slightest wish was a command; women kept in their shadow..." (21), where women had little choice and could converse only in whispers or in the presence of men "there was an immediate lowering of voices." (34)

Geeta, an educated girl with modern upbringing, enters the haveli through matrimonial negotiation and feels trapped in the haveli which has a separate section for women. She is weighed down by the heavy clothes, ornaments and worst of all the 'purdah' which shut the world off to make her feel stifled and suffocated: "Two years ago when she left her parents' home in Bombay, she did not know that she was leaving behind a way of life...to live in the constricted atmosphere..."(15-16). The 'colonial' set up in the haveli circumscribes Geeta's thoughts and activities to prescribed traditions including 'purdah' which is an attempt to prevent a woman from all the possibility of communication and contact with the world beyond the walls of her house. Women in feudal-regional India were doomed to live a life in 'Purdah'; it is an impractical custom that deprives a woman the basic right to see and be visible; it denies her the freedom of movement and expression and curtails contact with the world at large. Purdah is also interpreted as 'a male conspiracy' designed against woman because her visibility endangers her ownership / possession by man. It is the veil behind which a woman is shrouded and subdued by way of seclusion and

confinement. Writing against the practice Cornelia Sorabji, Nazar Sajjad Hyder, Iqbalunissa Hussain and Attia Hosain focus realistically on the agony of the suppressed women in veil living passively and timidly; Nayantara Sahegal and Geeta Mehta also unmask the evils and abuses of the culture which practically render women helpless and voiceless. Rama Mehta also strikes at the crippling effects of the veil on women's psyche and personality:

"They never expressed an opinion and never revealed their feelings. They seemed like little canaries in a cage who sang and twittered but seemed to know no passion. Their large eyes full of yearning and longing looked dreamily on the world beyond from behind their veils..." (87)

The novel studies the mind of the veiled women, the major part of whose life was confined behind the walls of 'Zenana' (the women's quarter). Purdah, a form of clothing, symbolically used to define a gender, and tagged with cultural mores, has not only secluded women physically but also mentally from the rest of the world, reducing their independent existence to the minimum. Tethered to the shackles of orthodoxy, Geeta seldom speaks to the female members of the family and has zero-communication with the males. The outside world is totally denied to her except occasional glimpses from behind the veil. Initially, she found the practice "romantic, full of mystery" (21) and gradually, "She came to love the veil that hid her face; this allowed her to think while the others talked" (23). Later, Geeta would change the situation when "the etiquette...had been relaxed." In the haveli everybody attempts to modify and reshape Geeta's personality, directly or indirectly, including the maids, and, thus, curb her autonomy. On reaching Udaipur, "she was immediately encircled by women... One of them came forward, pulled her sari over her face and exclaimed...

"Where do you come from that you show your face to the world?" Geeta, bewildered, frightened...felt suffocated."(17) Because Geeta is an 'outsider', conjectures are made about her aptitude to adjust and adapt to the norms of haveli: "Let us see how she adjusts. After all she is educated and on top of that she is not from Udaipur. What a risk to get an outsider, especially when there is only one son?" (18) As she enters the haveli, she is expected to be docile, vulnerable, submissive and subservient to the conventionally sanctioned ideals and virtues of an Indian daughter-in-law.

The haveli becomes a metaphor for Geeta's displacement where she would live a secluded life trying to cohere with and confirm to the culturally subscribed structure and pattern of life framed therein. The reader sees how the individual is a smaller, dwarfed self, against the larger self of the 'Haveli' and it is futile to locate the individual self; Geeta must maintain coherence with the 'larger self' than with her own 'self'. Haveli is, thus, an archetypal composition where every relationship has a code of 'proper conduct' attached to it in terms of kinship and gender position that establishes masculinity as culturally central and normative by constructing femininity as 'other'. However, Geeta's awareness of her colonized status as the 'other' marks a beginning towards emancipation from haveli/patriarchy/feudalism/colonialism that has ascribed to women marginality, ignorance, subordination and repression. She discovers that the women of the haveli have schooled themselves to silence and subaltern obeisance, an inherent female situation. Gyatri C. Spivak in her essay "*Can the subaltern speak?*" manifests concern for the deprived and marginalized women 'caught between tradition and modernization' and reiterates that freedom is primarily a mental phenomenon and in order to prepare women for 'a transformation of consciousness' they

need to speak out and must ensure that their voices are listened adequately to dispel their subaltern image.

Rama Mehta also belongs to the segment of those feminist writers who profess the need to extricate women from their subaltern position albeit in this world of tradition and authority, a girl is patterned to grow up in relation to her socio-cultural atmosphere which exercises enormous influence in conditioning her temperament. Geeta's modern sense of upbringing urges her to give up hesitation and submissiveness to assert herself in her new surroundings and evince her courage to eliminate gender differences by stepping into an area of male society to break the socio-cultural constraints taxing on the personal freedom of woman. The first instance of her deviation from the constricted role is demonstrated on "the day she had trespassed into the men's apartments" (19). Besides man folk, in Indian society there exists an independent community of women with its patriarchal character who being guardians of the age-old customs are rigid enough to thrust subservience to thwart the independent identity of a female self. Apart from her mother-in-law and female relatives, the maid servants, too, enjoy the same rights and privileges as the males do to manacle the young bride Geeta and dictate her dos and don'ts as the faithful custodians of "the etiquette which was expected of daughter in law" (22); in their opinion a woman must embody the image of herself as depicted in Indian mythological discourse. With this archetypal image of an ideal wife/daughter-in-law Geeta is expected to sacrifice her freedom to observe unswerving loyalty to the traditions of haveli. Pari, the elderly maid-servant, enjoys exercising authority over newly-wed Geeta; her seniority makes her feel triumphant to judge and teach the educated bride and made her feel 'inadequate' and 'uncomfortable'. Non-acceptance of

a liberal, educated woman by the orthodox matriarchy, which is an extension of patriarchy, is an open challenge to Geeta.

Geeta desperately yearns to come to terms with her bracketed situation. Housed on the margin she feels alienated but being educated liked 'the lovely luxury of being alone'. Virginia Woolf considers it essential for a woman to have 'a room of her own' to be able to think and write but Geeta "was hardly alone; she had not read a book in six months" (22). Geeta's self-chosen withdrawal is only a temporary phase which has ushered changes in her life 'with bookshelves' (52). Whenever she finds time, she reads books to discover a world other than the immediate one and 'she yearned to talk with someone who could tell her what was happening in the world' (21); her husband is acquiescent to her intellectual impulses and needs. Since she has already been aware of the vast new world outside, the four walls of the haveli, cannot keep her locked in a world for long: "Geeta had opened the tiny windows in her room to let in the fresh air and the rays of the morning sun..." (105). Rama Mehta externalizes the interior region of a woman's mind longing for freedom as she watches through a window the life outside the haveli: "Geeta's eyes fell on the village women carrying their baskets of vegetables...their faces uncovered...the eager faces of shoppers...free to choose saris from a hundred different shades and designs...how the eyes of these women sparkled with joy, whereas the women of the haveli...behind thick walls...were like dressed up dolls kept in a glass case for a marionette show" (108-10).

As far as the institution of marriage is concerned Geeta in her role as a wife adheres to the sentiments of adaptability, compromise and forbearance because "she realized that her husband was too rooted in the tradition of Udaipur" (54). As

time moves on their marital life gets seasoned on the principle of mutual understanding as she receives full cooperation from Ajay. Nowhere do we find Ajay subscribing to the deep-rooted conservative concept of woman as subservient to man throughout the narrative. In fact, Rama Mehta successfully conveys the New Woman's *sense and sensibility* to nurture marriage with love and harmony so that the society may become stable. She believes that communication, not rebellion, is the practical solution. The post-feminist world is heading towards achieving a balance through the make-peace mission between the sexes: it is not about exactly the attainment of 'sameness'; it is rather about acknowledgement and management of differences through certain readjustments. The writer seems to confirm to the option of creating a new discourse which has no centre i.e. not to treat men and women as opposites but equals by deconstructing the binary polarities between the masculine and the feminine. Keeping tune with this Rama Mehta provides her 'New Woman' both choice and voice.

Geeta not only asserts her womanhood as a New Woman but also as a New Mother. Being educated, she knows the physical, emotional, psychological and educational needs of her children, especially her daughter and insisted on her right as a mother and disallowed the maids to dictate their choices: "Stop lecturing me...Don't tell me what I should do with my own child!"(32). She knows very well that her daughter's education is very important and Vijay is given the best opportunity to educate herself. Vijay stands first in class; her face glows with confidence as she announces her selection to the badminton team of her school or talks about the rehearsals of the play in which she participates though her excitement is sometimes snubbed by her grandmother who counseled her to learn cooking and sewing. When a

marriage proposal for Vijay comes when she is only thirteen, Geeta again insists: 'Vijay can't get engaged at this age...on this point I will never give in, whatever happens...I don't ever agree to this criminal act of deciding who Vijay will marry when she is still a child...I will never agree to engage Vijay to a boy who is still in college. Who knows what he will be like when he is a man?'(205-6) and finally, she wins to convince Ajay and Bhagwat Singhji, her father-in-law, who promises her "that under no circumstances would I permit Vijay to be taken out of school. I am against early marriages. Girls must study; they cannot be kept ignorant."(248) Thus, Geeta obtains two important approvals: right of the girl-child to education and right of the mother to have a say against child-marriage.

Rama Mehta is well aware of the gender bias and prejudicial treatment of the society towards a girl-child even before her birth and openly digs at the Indian attitude of preferring a baby-boy to a baby-girl as women are always blessed with such words: "May you have many many sons" (33) reverberating that birth of a girl is not desirable. To be born a girl is a curse, being dark-complexioned is more burdensome as a girl with a dark skin is considered to incur an additional expense on her dowry for Laxmi "was dark and ugly and that her dowry would have been heavy."(11) By giving us an insight into the unhappy girlhood of Sita and others, the novelist shows how painful and humiliating it is to be a girl and manifests her protest against injustice to girls who are doomed to carry the social stigma and cultural humiliation of generations which happens in case of Sita whose mother's past was to be kept in dark to save the rejection of a suitable marriage proposal for her. To celebrate the birth of a girl in the haveli is surprising and some suggest: "Why not wait till a son is born?" (46) For women, the

waiting game starts right from their birth because the social mandate always swings to the side of men who enjoy privileges whereas the deprived and marginalized sections of women in society especially widows, child-brides and maid-servants suffer more vulnerably powerless to diffuse the patriarchal authoritarian social strictures that victimize them. Manji, who became widow at the age of fourteen, was forbidden to move out of the inner courtyard and wear jewellery or coloured saris; her anguish and plight as a widow is noteworthy:

I know what it is to be illiterate. The days and nights have been long for me...There was no question of going to school...I have not known many of the pleasures of life... As a young girl I could not understand why...A widow's presence on religious occasions was considered inauspicious. That hurt me most...It was my fate to be a widow in this life. I had to learn to accept that...If I could read and write, I would not feel so lonely. (116-17)

Pari, another child-widow, was given away to the care of the haveli when she was eight years old by her father during terrible famine which was a common practice in feudal Rajasthan and "...But after fifty years she could recollect neither the day she was married nor the day she became a widow."(9) Suffering the consequences of the evil of child-marriage and widowhood she wants redemption for her miseries.

Geeta's initiative on the necessity of women's education is a landmark decision in the history of haveli. A girl's most formative years are eclipsed by conventional notions of gender arrangement which expect her to learn domestic chores instead of reading and writing new discourse because "people are afraid of marrying educated girls"(103). Geeta redefines herself by taking up the cause of women's

education to pursue her 'voice' to shake off the timeless and naturalized association of women with ignorance. Keeping women illiterate or denying them formal education means rendering them deficient in 'knowledge'. Rama Mehta espouses the 'truth' that empowerment of women is possible only through dismantling the patriarchal edifice of knowledge since 'knowledge' has long been the product and prerogative of male mind. The belief that women are not suited to share power with men has been the main cause of the 'appropriation' of female self. Mary Wollstonecraft argues that in order to render mankind more virtuous and happier women must be allowed to found their virtues on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they are educated. Foucault has also established that those who have knowledge about a particular discourse possess and wield power and what is true depends on who controls discourse and it is reasonable to believe that men's domination of discourse has trapped women inside a male truth.

Rama Mehta chooses Geeta as an agent of women's awakening who authenticated that only through an access to education women can equip them with knowledge, learning and power and make sense of the world they live in, assert their womanhood and earn self-reliance. To break away with orthodoxy Geeta decides to send Sita to school and conduct classes for the maids and their children in the haveli. The strident and indignant voices reacted that "these classes will bring a bad name to the haveli"(157) and "laughed and joked about the haveli being turned into a school"(161). Amidst hostile responses, Geeta succeeds to convince that "Education is a good thing" (103) and introduced the rudiments of knowledge and awareness not merely inside the haveli but also for those women who lived externally to it. Her experiment in teaching expands several other possibilities for

women including intellectual growth and economic independence. Finally, the opposition gradually subsides and Geeta transforms the dark cobwebbed rooms of her seclusion into knowledge centres: "News of the classes spread like monsoon flood and young maids from the havelis came and joined...began to recognize words...Geeta suddenly loved the large empty rooms of the haveli ; they no longer looked unfriendly and haunted. The cobwebs that had become a part of their decor were now swept clean..." (160-61). All the apprehensions against an educated girl are dispelled when a marriage proposal for Sita is approved because 'they want a girl who can read and write' and even 'there was no talk of a dowry'. Pari applauds Geeta: "Whatever anyone may say, Binniji has changed the lives of these girls, Hukku; most of them now can read and write; they can get work, they don't have to depend on the havelis" (191). Finally, Geeta is raised to the status of the mistress of the haveli and replaces her father-in-law as the 'head' of the family. Metaphorically, the head in the natural body is the seat of reason, the fountain of wisdom and knowledge. Geeta, too, qualifies to become the head of the haveli, a place usually occupied by men.

To conclude, *Inside the Haveli* has established a new concept in understanding the revolution of woman's 'lib' (choice) through 'lip' (voice) by maintaining a fine balance between tradition and modernity. The centralized universe of haveli would stand decentred because now onwards there may not be any absolute or fixed points therein, nor any authoritative centre. Geeta would make the haveli a confluence of the East and the West by reiterating the independence of woman without compromising with her role as a householder. She has the capacity to make optimum use of the space provided and permitted to her by authoritarian-cultural-institutional systems. To her, adaptation and

assimilation is preferable to rejection and negation. As Geeta moves towards the centre to establish harmony and neutrality, Rama Mehta disowns a separatist stance and favours a more egalitarian power structure by simply dethroning patriarchal culture. Geeta's promotion as *a mistress of the haveli* visualizes a New World of humanism, democracy, autonomy and unlimited possibilities for women.

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8

Matrilineage in the Biography and Poetry of Anne Sexton

ANNA IVEY

"I don't write for you, but know that one of the reasons I do write is that you are my mother"

Anne Sexton embodies a contrast of the idealized American woman and the progressive artist. Growing up in a comfortable home, she was pretty with dark hair, long limbs, and lovely skin. She was a housewife and mother. She bore children, married young, and did not aggressively pursue education or a formal career until after her success as poet. Yet, she grappled with mental illness and alcoholism, nearly destroying those around her who loved her most. Alongside her complicated personal life was a poet who defied taboos by writing of menstruation, masturbation, incest, mental illness, and the particulars of childbirth and motherhood. Sexton's name today often goes hand-in-hand with the Confessional movement. She ran in the same circles as other poets like Sylvia Plath and W.D. Snodgrass, who today are credited with being part of the populace whose poetry underscored previously undisclosed subject matter. Confessionals wrote about divorce, alienated relationships with their children, dealing with parents, personal grief, mental illness, and feeling ostracized from society. Many, like John Berryman, attempted to use writing-as-healing.¹ Sexton, however, did not believe she was a Confessional, even though the label stuck.

Whether or not Sexton tied herself to Confessionalism did not erase how daring her poems were. It is not surprising that a woman who wrote about topics like masturbation and menstruation and suicide in the early 60's would receive attention from critics, and in the years that have followed, much criticism has rightly discussed how the body factors into her poems, not only as a representation of femininity, but as a vehicle of childbirth and a vessel housing an unstable mind. Despite these realms being fairly broad, Artemis Michailidou mentions that "Sexton's focus on womanhood meant that...she was bound to be associated with a particularly limited set of themes-those pertaining to femininity and selfhood" (121). Michailidou further explains that critics in turn then favored her earlier work like *To Bedlam*, which revolved around mental illness and femininity, versus her more abstract poetry of later books.

In examining how Sexton treated feminine concerns, other critics have analyzed how Sexton treated childbirth and pregnancy as a metaphor of her own artistry. Sarah Juliet Lauro says, "[Sexton] believed strongly in the connection between motherly creation and her poetic endeavors. She could mother the world, and in doing so, save her own real body – effectively giving birth to herself through her writing" (156). Another interesting perspective on mothering includes the thoughts of MacCullum-Whitcomb, who claimed that Sexton recast Walt Whitman's famous "Song of Myself" to demonstrate that women also have the ability to generate creativity and life. While these critics wage some fascinating points, they have not considered the ramifications of Sexton's artistry beyond her own immediate "births." Womanly concerns incorporate more than just birth and the body – the realm includes the artistic female ancestry of matrilineage.

A matrilineal society is one in which ancestry is charted through the female line rather than the male line, and for some groups, property and possessions, as well as surnames or clan names, are passed down from woman to woman. These types of societies can be found predominantly in non-Western parts of the world: Asia, Africa, and India, and in North America, various Native American tribes like the Cherokee and Hopi practice matrilineage. Anthropologists believe matrilineal civilizations predate patrilineal cultures.

In high contrast to patrilineal societies, the role of the male is less predominant, though men are still important as nurturers and providers. Women hold higher status and can often be favored for positions of leadership. The largest disparity between patrilineal and matrilineal societies exists regarding the male role after procreation. Matrilineal societies do not associate the job of the emotional father with that of the progenitor father. Often, it is the woman's brother who acts as an uncle-father rather than the biological father. Men respect the mother, grandmother, and aunt role far more so than they do in patrilineal cultures. Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke explains the benefits of such a paradigm:

Matriliney favors an environment free of abuse and violence between the sexes by creating greater distance between spouses, by emphasizing less economic involvement on the spousal level, by separating the sexual and reproductive rights of men, and finally, by creating respect for the feminine and its association with the creation and sustenance of life. There is less need for women to use sexual favors to manipulate men, and men in the role of husband and father cannot use economic pressure or the children to force their wishes on women. (486)

Because women are not in a role of subservience, positive traits like nurturing and community can be emphasized over aggression and power associated with male-centric cultures.

What matrilineage means for Sexton is complicated. Much of Anne Sexton's writing deals with female topics, specifically *To Bedlam and Partway Back*, *Live or Die*, and *Transformations*. *To Bedlam and Partway Back*, Anne Sexton's first book of poetry, came out in 1960. In that book, she surveys her own identity, particularly as it is tied to her matrilineal heritage. For instance, she delves into the intricate relationship with her mother in "The Division of Parts." The poem opens with the splitting up of Mary Gray's estate after her death from cancer, which highlights the legal realm of female inheritance. Sexton receives her due portion of her mother's estate, saying, "I am one third / of your daughters counting my bounty" (62). Beyond the legal realm of the matrilineal heritage, Sexton mentions physical objects which belonged to her mother that she now dons uncertainly: her "coat in my closet, / your bright stones on my hand,/ the gaudy fur animals/ I do not know how to use," scoffing they "settle on her like debt" (62). She writes of how she resists becoming like her mother, especially under the pressure to convert to Christianity as her mother had done, as she attempts to navigate the loss. She admits "Mother, last night I slept/ in your Bonwit Teller nightgown. /Divided you climbed into my head" though she confesses she would bring her back if she could (66). Sexton writes of establishing her own selfhood against a world no longer harboring her mother. "You come, a brave ghost, to fix / in my mind without praise/ or paradise / to make me your inheritor" Sexton concludes the book, suggesting the role of female presence is not only important, but is a sculpting force for future generations (67). The relationship is far from idyllic – Sexton calls herself "a mixed child, / heavy with the cloths of you" (65) and even says she would curse her mother were she to return. Ambivalence in the relationship only reifies the two women

as multi-faceted, complicated, and rich humans, rather than as one dimensional.

Nowhere is the intergenerational female concern more emphasized in *To Bedlam* than in "The Double Image." She addresses her youngest daughter, Joyce, who is four.² She discloses: "I missed your babyhood, tried a second suicide," and laments that after she is released from the asylum, her daughter rarely comes to see her (58). Wrestling with the inadequacies of her motherhood, where she would "gather/guilt like a young intern/ his symptoms," Sexton becomes incredibly open about her personal turmoil (58). Sexton knew she was not a typical mother. She wrote to her daughter Linda years later that, "You and Joy always said, while growing up, 'Well, if I had a normal mother...!' meaning the apron and the cookies and none of this typewriting stuff that was shocking the hell out of friends' mothers... But I say to myself, better I was mucking around looking for truth" (*A Self Portrait* 417). Even with her insistence that her writing was valuable, as were the experiences preceding and accompanying it, Sexton seemed very aware that she was often failing as a parent by the standards of her society.

To Bedlam also houses the subject of female bonds in the well-named poem entitled "Her Kind." Sexton says in the penultimate line of each of the stanza: "A woman like that is not a woman, quite," "A woman like that is misunderstood," and "A woman like that is not ashamed to die," lines which read like her own life story (21). The poem is almost like a chant, priestess-like, ending the three stanzas with the words "I have been her kind" using the regular rhyme scheme of ABABCBC written in mostly tetrameter (21). The refrain emphasizes how Sexton sought fellowship with women and found strength in being able to form an identity from her

predecessors. The indeterminate time frame of the poem could mean the witch was from the Middle Ages, or even the Salem Witch trials. The speaker of the poem relates to the fringes of society. She is a “possessed witch” who is physically deformed “twelve fingered, representing an aberration to be rejected, no doubt how Sexton often felt as a mentally ill patient (21). In the outliers of the town, away from humanity, the speaker claims to have gathered human objects: “skillets, carvings, shelves, silks, innumerable goods” in an attempt to recast her own domicile, one separated from the people who curse and shun her. Like Sexton, the character dies. Had the witch been living within a matriarchal society, her gifts may have been celebrated, versus feared. While Sexton did rise to success within her own society, she was met with considerable criticism for doing so.

Published in 1966, *Live or Die* is a more mature collection than *To Bedlam and Partway Back*, even though Sexton wrote about similar subject matter in both texts: her mental illness and recovery, and her relationships with her parents and children. However, in the Pulitzer winning *Live or Die*, Sexton renders more artistic control over the text, so the work feels far more cohesive than haphazard like *To Bedlam*. She loosens her meter and rhyme in many poems, but displays a much more mature voice as a writer.

While it is reasonable to expect violence will play a role in a patient recovering from suicide attempts, its frequent use can be disturbing at places in *Live or Die*. Perhaps the most unsettling violent imagery appears in relation to her daughter. For example, she writes in “Pain for a Daughter” of when the girl has her foot crushed by a horse: “the tips of her toes/ ripped off like pieces of leather, / three toenails swirling like shells / and left to float in blood in her riding boot” (84).

While the simile of a toenail and shells is creative, the blood imagery reifies the daughter as feminine, signifying menstruation, and thusly, connecting her to all of women as well as to femininity.

Femininity figures throughout *Live or Die*, so much that this book is even more strongly rooted in female relationships than *To Bedlam*. While the ties between women in some of the poems may not be through genetics, imaginative inheritance is at play. For instance, the poem "Sylvia's Death" is dedicated to the late Sylvia Plath, and the poem mentions how the women bonded over dry martinis and toasted to death as they drank. Other examples of her focus on the feminine occur. She uses reverent direct addresses to the Virgin Mary in "For the Year of the Insane" with lines like "O Mary, tender physician" and "O Mary, fragile mother" (44). For Sexton, relationships between females seem to be more authentic, more desirable, and more closely connected than those between women and men. She requests in "Somewhere in Africa" to "Let God be some tribal female who is known but forbidden," even though the poem is directed to John Holmes (14).

Even as Sexton discusses imperfect relationships with her foremothers, the bonds are marked with a longing for understanding and frustration at miscommunication, which underscores just how crucial these relations were to her. In "Walking in Paris" where she retraces her grandmother's footsteps, she ends with a call "Come old woman, / we will be sisters" (50). "Christmas Eve" also carries in that same vein where Sexton describes her mother as a "sharp diamond" (54). The image of the diamond is fitting. As the hardest and most resilient stone in nature, craftsmen can use diamonds as tools for shaping other materials, even other diamonds, and a

sharp diamond is an effective one. Like a diamond saw, Mary Harvey's choices and actions did sculpt the lives of her girls, influencing them in a way that few others could ever do. Sexton notes that her sisters at Christmas were "aping" their mother's life, wanting to emulate their matron, even to the point of doing so unawares (54). Yet, a diamond also is one of the most valuable gems in history – a symbol of prosperity, love, and power. Mary Harvey was a symbol of wealth, affection, and control in various degrees for Sexton.

She also includes poems in *Live or Die* dedicated to her own daughters: "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman," for and about Linda, and "A Little Uncomplicated Hymn" to Joy. The poems follow each other, "Little Girl" coming first perhaps to reflect the birth order of her children. Pairing physical heritage and artistic birthright, Sexton says: "What I want to say, Linda / is that women are born twice," which certainly applies to both mother and daughter since the two found an artistic voice long after a physical one (63). As Linda's physical body grows, which will be accompanied by her emotional independence, her mother warns her "What I want to say, Linda, / is that there is nothing in your body that lies. / All that is new is telling the truth" (64). The warning can serve as a metaphor of the female condition: the female body is truth, as are the emotions and experiences that accompany it.

The poem for Joy is wistful and bittersweet. Sexton praises her child, affirming her affections by saying "I named you Joy. / That's someone's song all by itself. / In the name of you I named / all things you are..." which suggests that Sexton, through the act of affixing the name to her child, sculpts her and shapes her identity as a human, even as she regrets missing her first three birthdays (67). The natural ties

created through maternal bonds disintegrate for Sexton, who laments, "you were mine / and I lent you out" (69). However, even as words fail Sexton, and even as she fails as a mother, her love does not, despite that it would become mutated. As she tries to write a simple hymn for her daughter, she says "I find only your name" and says that love has no uncomplicated hymns to begin with (68). In the absence of being an active and present parent, Sexton does still maintain the bonds of love for her girls.

Sexton traverses feminine surroundings as well in *Transformations*. Published in 1971, this volume was a different sort of book for Sexton and is often believed to be her most feminist work. Instead of her more personal, Confessional method of poetry, the text sardonically re-tells 16 different *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, adding the wry humor and cultural criticism Sexton previously withheld in earlier books. However, Sexton did say that *Transformations* was "as wholly personal as my most intimate poems, in a different place, a different rhythm, but coming strangely, for all their story sound, from a deep place" (Hall 128). In fact, Matilde Martin Gonzalez posits that Sexton's re-vision of the traditional tales steeped in patriarchal mores does the myths a favor. She argues, "Anne Sexton deconstructs the androcentric and masculinist values present in the original version of the fairy tales and sarcastically reposes them from a feminine perspective, unveiling altogether the patriarchal inscription they bear" (9). Through slyly commenting on the shortcomings of the patrilineal sphere, Sexton's poems manage to creatively foreground matriliney in a host of fashions.

The legacy between women in the poems varies between tales. The most mistrustful relationships are those between

non-mothers and their children by marriage. The stepfamily relationship is shown as negative in both "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" and "Cinderella." The stepmother of "Snow White" attempts the murder of her stepdaughter, and the stepmother and stepsisters of "Cinderella" abuse and enslave Cinderella. In these works, ties by marriage versus blood create rivalries between women with disparate levels of control over their lives, control doled out by the men around them who grant it by ignoring family dysfunction. Matriliney does favor the biological mother as the preferred caretaker for their children, utilizing other close family members as secondary replacements before outsiders.

Under ideal circumstances, these divides between blood and marriage would not matter. But these gaps do in "Snow White." A woman like the queen in "Snow White" lacks the attributes prized by women-centric societies: nurturing and communal responsibility. She is almost successful in wreaking complete destruction upon her stepdaughter because she is devoid of these traits. Called "a beauty in her own right," the queen tries to kill Snow White out of jealousy on more than one occasion (3). Ironically, Snow White is described at the end as emulating her stepmother's obsession with the mirror. The speaker expresses her as "rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut / and sometimes referring to her mirror/ as women do" (9). Here, Sexton centers on how the aftershocks of her stepmother's insecurity echoes in Snow White, who is not immune to her influence, despite the biological disconnect. The preoccupation with physical appearance is no doubt a shared trait of both women as a reaction to the expectations of patriarchy.

The stepmother and stepsisters of "Cinderella" are also biological outsiders whose cruelty to Cinderella shapes the

poem. Her father plays a weak role in the tale, and his most compassionate move as a parent in the poem is to give Cinderella a twig from a tree, which she plants on her mother's grave in a gesture of respect to her dead matron. After her stepmother dashes her hopes of attending the royal ball, Cinderella goes to the memorial tree to beg her dead mother to send her to the party. "Mama! Mama! My turtledove, / send me to the prince's ball" she prays (55). Surely enough, even from beyond the grave, Cinderella's mother is able to provide her daughter's wish. The power of feminine influence is obvious here: the mother's providence and the stepmother's intentions clash, but the will of Cinderella's biological mother wins out, as does Cinderella when she succeeds in marrying the man she wants despite the scheming of her stepsisters to deceive the prince.³

"Rumpelstiltskin" also showcases a mother who circumvents forces threatening her child. The queen saves her son from being taken by the evil dwarf, who is frustrated by his inability to produce children. "No child will ever call me Papa," he laments to the girl when he bargains with her to save her from execution (18). The queen houses a power that the dwarf does not have – reproduction.⁴ Through her capacity to have a child, the queen is able to save herself from death and she uses her child as a bargaining chip, never intending to keep her word, nor believing she will be asked to. At her son's birth, her motherly affection is ideal of matrilineal societies, and the speaker observes her son was "like most new babies, / as ugly as an artichoke / but the queen thought him a pearl" (20). She later outwits the dwarf and manages to save her child from the clutches of the sterile male, symbolizing a woman's ability to use her wits and words to undo male influence, for all she must do is speak the name of the old man in order to disengage his magic.

Even when a woman cannot successfully protect her charge, Sexton still emphasizes the presence of female kinship amidst suffering. Sexton brings out multi-generational matrilineage in the poem "Red Riding Hood." Here Sexton underscores the love between a progenitress and her offspring – the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood. She writes of the young girl that "more than she loved her riding hood / she loved her grandmother who lived / far from the city in the big wood" (76). After both the grandmother and Little Red are gobbled up by the wolf, the huntsman finds the engorged animal and cuts him open, rebirthing the two women in "a kind of caesarian section" (78). The poem concludes with the comment that neither the grandmother nor Little Red recalls being rescued. Interestingly, the speaker depicts their recovery as a "little birth," one which meant that the grandmother and Little Red temporarily shared the living space of a womb, bonding them even further than did their previous ties (79). Emerging together from the wolf, the two become makeshift sisters, their connection unbroken even after trauma.

What then are poets to do with Sexton's legacy? Whether or not we can ever fully affix her as the victim of a patriarchal system, or the insistent progenitress in a matrilineal bid for inheritance of art, or an unusual hybrid of both, her willingness to fling open the door of her consciousness to write poetry that was bold and authentic did shake up the literary circles of her day. Undoubtedly, her entire existence – poetry, family life, sex life, and even her food choices – were shaped by the mental illness that plagued her.

Is a legacy then even worthwhile if accompanied by so much suffering? Linda was sexually abused by her mother, who was manipulative, needy, and controlling. Anne was

forgotten by her own mother, who never fully forgave her for a disease Anne could not regulate. Anne and Mary Gray competed for attention over their joint gift of words. Yet, the emotional ties to their female predecessors were still strong. Anne was nearly undone when her aunt died, as well as when her mother passed away. Linda and Joy grieved many painful years after the death of their mother. As complicated, as messy, and as non-traditional as their love was, one positive outcome of the suffering within the Sexton legacy was that some of the women learned how to use words, their own words, to tell a story so often silenced – abuse, family dysfunction, mental illness, and sex. The story was not always beautiful, nor was it sanitized, but it was authentic. Femininity found another voice through the Sexton women, and words became a method of telling about the turmoil that accompanies the female condition when its members are hurting, and the glories of when they are soaring.

Notes

1. Sexton used writing as therapy for recovery at the suggestion of her doctor, who noticed she had a talent for poetry, and later produced her first book as the product of those writings.
2. This poem is very similar to W.D. Snodgrass' poem "Heart's Needle," which was written for his daughter after his divorce. In it, he addresses his daughter Cynthia, from whom he is separated after the split. He expressed regret, anger, love, and ambivalence about the situation in the poem.
3. The will of a mother is not always positive in these stories. "Hansel and Gretel" is a poem about a mother who has her children sent into the forest to die once she fears the family will starve. "Rapunzel" discusses how the expectant mother has her husband steal tubers from Mother Gothel's garden, and in turn, she is forced to give up her daughter as payment.
4. The 13th fairy of "Briar Rose" is described with a "uterus empty as a teacup," suggesting that her inability to reproduce makes her

wicked. It is she who curses Sleeping Beauty to prick her finger on a spinning wheel and die ("All the Poems of Anne Sexton").

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9

Reconstructing Identity in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*

ASHISH SRIVASTAVA

Identity denotes the self-esteem and self-image of an individual, a gender, a community, a class, a race or sex or a nation – real or imaginary – dealing with the existence and role: Who are we? What position do we have in society vis-à-vis international arena? So far as sex and gender identities are concerned, there are the quest for equality and dignity for their progress and development. The multiple identities of women, distribution of their gender roles in distinct and dominant cultures i.e. the U.S. and India and their reflection of class position have been discussed here. In a sense, an attempt has been made to situate both the images of women in two distinct cultural contexts and theories thereof.

Identity politics begin with the form of feminist and civil rights movement which proliferated through various identities – national, ethnic, semantic, sexual, gender and so on. The feminine gender identity is an enquiry into the multiplicity of cultural practice particularly of discourse and representations in relation to power. It is a postmodern paradigm or anti-paradigm. It is self-assertion which is grounded in experience of inability, deprivation, disability and disadvantaged. It is a 'colonial-counter-discourse' of Tennyson's proclamation in his politic work *The Princess*:

'Man for the field's and women for hearth
Man for the sword and for the needle she'

Nowadays, feminists have been asserting their separate identity on all fronts. So the women's movement across the world has shifted from women's emancipation to women's empowerment in human interest. While the western radical feminist fought for 'sexual orientation' and free sex, the feminist movement in the developing countries is primarily based upon the socio-economic issues, such as, high mortality rate, female infanticide, bride-burning, dowry, violence against women, rape, suicides, adverse working conditions, rising inflation and so on. In fact their struggle comes within the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the patriarchal society.

Indian women's identity is one that is usually connected to and defined by the societal and cultural norms of a practicable familial structure. This identity is defined within the parameters of their social relationship to men. They are traditional, conservative, and therefore, they are reluctant to cross the '*Laxmanrekha*' of their family and culture. They are regarded as the preserver of essential nationalist spirit. They are to smile always, welcome their guests and entertain them, care for their family members performing all the household responsibilities and if there is any pain, they are to hide it behind their veil. They are to become true symbol of Indian tradition and culture.

Thus Indian women become a metaphor for purity, chastity and sanctity of the ancient spirit that is Idea. The national construct of the Indian women attributes the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, devotion and religiosity and so on. To family which then stands as a sign for nation. Consequently, anything, that threatens to dilute this model of Indian womanhood, constitutes a betrayal of all that it stands

for: Nation, religion, god, the spirit of India, culture, tradition, and family (Bhattacharjee, 199).

The family and nation denote eternal, sacred and natural ties for national reconstruct; 'Nation-ness' therefore becomes the most legitimate value in the political life of our time.' (Andherson, 3.5).

In this respect, the woman who occupies the space outside the heterosexual, patriarchal family is in a space unrecognized by the nation, currently a highly valued construct. The displacement of her history is crucial for the construction of a nation; in re-claiming her voice, her story, she risks displacing the nation. (Bhattacharjee, 199: 247)

It is believed that Indian women in general have no identity of their own. They belong to their father before they are married and to their husband after they are married and in the old age they have to depend on their sons. However, urban and metropolis educated Indian women, immigrants and expatriates are claiming their rights within their family and beyond it. They are attempted to establish a new identity with their changing gender roles. For example, in a conservative family, a husband used to represent in public affairs. Now most of elite young women represent and manage the public and political affairs. These identities of women are reparated from their husband. Further the working women particularly are to compromise and adjust themselves as wife, mother, as an employee performing their household traditional responsibilities and doing all the purchasing at market place too.

Voices in the City is particularly concerned with the articulation of women's stories. Set primarily in post-independence Calcutta, the novel narrates the initiation into adulthood of the three siblings, Monisha, Amla, and Nirod Ray. Behind them looms the figure of their mother, Otima,

and beyond the human mother lies the vengeful city-mother, Calcutta. Whereas Nirode grapples with existential questions regarding the meaninglessness of life, the nature of rebellion, and the value of suffering in the face of deadening bourgeois respectability in an ostensibly gender-neutral world, the female characters in *Voices in the city* are actively, sometimes tragically engaged in a search for self-fulfillment as women (and human beings) in an India still governed by a dominant patriarchal ideology.

Anita Desai is interested in the psychic life of her characters. For her it is "depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character or a scene rather than going round about it." She incorporates themes such as the agony of existence, the metaphysical void, the fears and trembling of her protagonists whose values, beliefs and structures are jeopardized, which in turn, stand in the way of the individual's self-realization. However there is a genuine attempt suggesting a struggle to attain a maturity of outlook, and positive growth. Her forte is "the exploration of sensibility-the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists." (Iyengar, 464)

A will-less, helpless and passive woman, Monisha stands in direct contrast to Maya. If Maya's trouble lies, as we have seen, in her rich sensuality, Monisha's difficulties arise due to her passivity. Anita Desai uses the narrative technique of diary in order to record Monisha's psychic turmoil. Married into a placid, middle-class family, and to a prosaically dull husband, she is unable to adjust to her environment. She stoically refuses to identify herself with her in-law's family. She is charged of theft and commits suicide. Monisha suppresses her emotions and makes no attempt

whatsoever to analyses herself. Instead, she yearns for greater will-lessness, which is symptomatic of severe neurosis.

Monisha's character revolves around two main constituents: 'the silence' and a 'touch of malice' inherited from her father, and a morbid temperament, hinted at by aunt Lila. Parental indifference and familial disorder characterize her childhood. The three siblings of Monisha respond differently to the environment according to their temperament. The remoteness of home puzzles her. There is an element of unknown in the atmosphere. As a result she withdraws into a world of her own, remains aloof and retains it in her relationship later. Her incapacity to relate herself to her family creates 'basic anxiety.' She glorifies herself as a lonely and cold person-almost stoic-different from the mass of women she sees around her.

Voices in the City is so much preoccupied with the nausea of Nirode and the despair of Monisha that Amla, the youngest of the Ray family, has drawn but scant attention of scholars and critics. They often limit her function in the novel to her utility in revealing the characters of others by her pungent observations. Amla is assigned a secondary place in criticism, and is seen only as a shadow of her neurotic siblings. Socially, she is caught in the whirl of Calcutta which excites her in the beginning and disgruntles her later. Psychologically, Amla is a brilliant portraiture of rebellious young woman, eager to master life and triumph over every obstacle. Her ambitious pursuit drags her through various psychic situations till finally she establishes a contact with her real self and achieves equanimity. B.RamachandraRao recognizes Amla's move from revolt to conformity which he terms 'surrender'. One may however establish that Amla's conversion into a spontaneous person signifies her growth-

potential. We shall ascertain, in these pages, the cause of her acquiescence and see whether Amla-dharma relations generated it or the influence of creativity chiselled it. Monisha's suicide reveals to her the tragedy of the lost self which, accordingly to Kierkegaard, is 'sickness into death.' Amla resolves that she would not allow herself to get lost like her sister, "She knew that Monisha's death had pointed the way for her and would never allow her to lose herself (*Voices in the City*, 248)" This is indeed, the starting point of her awakening. The wound accelerates the process and gives her a final view of ultimate reality. Prior to this she passes through a period of bewilderment, grappling with self-idealization and self-realisation.

The disparity in Amla's idealized image and reality tosses her between two tendencies regression and progression and it enables us to see her internal conflicts and the external support she needs in order to grow. Basically a product of not-so-happy a home, she develops narcissistic attitude. She constantly requires reinforcement from other to counterbalance her intrinsic demands with her grandiose self. What she gets in Calcutta does not satisfy her expansive drives, and her anxieties increase. She is agitated till she gets an abundant supply of love from Dharma. The change makes her euphorically happy. She steps out of a nightmare into a dream come true. A combination of art and love, profuse approbation from Dharma and a sense of triumph help her to realise her most cherished fantasies. However, very soon the author erects emotional blocks. Relationship with Dharma becomes simply a part of fairy-tale atmosphere. In frustration she rebels. Her anguish in his situation is the result partly of hurt pride, and partly of discovery of her inability to control external reality. Real suffering felt as a result of Monisha's death and self analysis resolves her intra-psychic conflicts. In

her reformation and chastened vision, the author assures us of Amla's continued growth.

Amla's basic solution is that of mastery of life. She idealizes herself as a superior being, able to fight her way through life without being morbid like Nirode or destructive like Monisha. She is conscious of the 'cold,' frosty love of power'. (109) inherited from her mother and she secretly embarks upon a search for glory in order to get the satisfaction of experiencing herself as her grandiose self. Indeed Amla's first exuberance and vivacity strikes a contrast to her brother and sister who have lost all faith and are marching towards self-annihilation. Amla comes to Calcutta with a vision: an anticipation to become a commercial artist. She is determined to enjoy the city her new job and her independence. In her own words, 'Calcutta does not appear me in the least..... It excites me'(142). She tells aunt Lila with self-conscious buoyancy. Initially, after reading about Nirode and Monisha's corroded personalities, the third part of the novel, dealing with Amla, brings in freshness but very soon the reader detects her disillusion. When aunt Lila utters in dismay, 'you are a morbid lot, you young ones.' She includes the entire generation of diseased, defiant youth, deprived of their vitality even before old age.

Critics define Amla's despair in terms of the vitiating effect of the monstrous city on a sensitive soul. Anita Desai points out that she wrote this novel to portray 'the powerful impression the city created on me.' (Interview). The pleasant and unpleasant associations are depicted in the novel denoting the beauty and the ugliness of Calcutta. Whereas the novelist aggress that she has tried to represent the duality of human activity, she is sure that there is much more in the book than more analogy of this kind. Amla feels the impact of

Calcutta. Often she regrets having come here. Staying in Bombay or going back to Kalimpong would have been a better choice. In bitter moments, she admits that it is a horrible city. Where one cannot be one's self. Amla has to hide her paintings to guard them as a secret. She tells Nirode:

I have to keep things secret in this horrible city you told me was so wonderful, such challenge. If I were back in Kalimpong, I wouldn't have minded showing them to you, I should have liked to show them to you. But here, here... here one must hide such things, cover up their weaknesses, protect their fragility, even destroy them if one does not want to see them get covered with filth and blood and rot. Nothing delicate can survive this. (*Voices in the city*, 182)

It is nevertheless, a miscalculation to link all her troubles to the city. A liberated and intelligent woman, Amla wants, as Aunt Lila puts it, 'something greater than or the security of marriage alone-something more rare, more responsible' (145) Indeed, Amla's quest is directed towards this aspiration. She strives to master all fears and anxieties of life, so as to give meaning to it.

In Amla's personality, optimism and pessimism, joy and despair, work side by side. Even at a time when she is moving optimistically outward towards life, apparently happy and carefree, there is a 'giant exhaustion growing and swelling inside her, of a feeling of sick apprehension and despair.' (149) Later at a party, 'the atmosphere of underlit reality of incomplete life' (167) overwhelm her. Two contradictory emotions toss her. On one hand, she is drawn by the pleasures of Calcutta life, on the other, she is nauseated, and feels that pleasure is the 'most rotten sensation in this city' it has lost its beauty, freshness and utility. Symbolically, at the party all the people in that clustered room, appear to her as fishes, enclosed in an aquarium. This suggests, by

implication, the reality of the human situation. By thematic design, Desai heightens the emotional effect. At the same party, Jit remarks that Amla and her siblings involve themselves in tragedies of their own making and reach the dead end to find some solution to life's dilemma;

I think you all involve yourselves in the tragedies of your own making. I think you all drive yourselves deliberately into that dead end where you imagine you will find some divine solution. But there is none, not in a lifetime, all of us discover that, and we force ourselves to turn and take another road. (176)

What Jit refers to as 'another road' corresponds to Erich Fromm's concept of the 'other course' open to an individual who loses his human possibility. This course, discussed earlier, is devised as an escape from an unbeatable situation; it is not an answer to life. In order to overcome his loneliness and insecurity a person surrenders his individuality of the self and minimizes his anxiety. Amla feels lonely and helpless in Calcutta, but she does not seek solution by compulsive activities from her constant but unconscious quest to protect her inner life from impoverishment. Her search is directed towards creativity.

Relationship with Dharma is instrumental in giving a renewed vision to Amla. After her first meeting with Dharma, Amla reorients herself. Modelling for him makes her 'translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward.' (210). Her real self, eclipsed so far by her grandiose self, tries to emerge. Anita Desai presents it symbolically as the worm crawling out of Amla's ring in dreams. Dharma paints the ring in Amla's finger with the worm creeping out 'of her nightmare to push its insidious head out of the painted stone and arouse, in the pointed Amla, that very turbulence of disgust, revulsion and fear that

so often assailed the dreaming Amla.' (213) This indicates fear of the real self. Dharma's love and art influence her. She correlates the self and the world had overcomes her anxiety. The novelist describes Amla's experiences as the peak of her season of love, as a perfection in which, 'lay all the joy and the sense of being the right person in the right place that love should have made diffuse and scattered gently through the season.' (217)

Amla-Dharma relationship, however, is not well defined for either. It is just a balance between reality and hallucination, creating a precarious situation in which Dharma cannot give her the tangibility or permanence. Amla is aware of this deficiency. Her dreams represent her inner conflict. The white birds she dreams of stand for reality. For the dreaming Amla, reality is fascinating but it chides her. She, the love-loom maiden, symbolized by the arching palms, is unable to meet her sparkling reflection in the water. This denotes, by implication, the impossibility of being and living her grandiose self. It indicates that she has to find her real self, however horrified she may be of it. All this works at the unconscious level.

Theirs is, in fact, not love but only 'psychic symbiotic union' (The Art of Loving, 23) a pattern of relationship in which two persons come closer, their bodies remain independent, but psychologically they develop attachment. There are 'active' and 'passive' forms of symbiotic fusions. In Dharma's case it is active; he enjoys his sway over Amla and feels inflated and enhanced by her idolatry. He this escapes his aloneness. In the case of Amla, it is passive; she derives pleasure by being an integral part of Dharma's art; he fulfills her need for admiration; in him she finds a responsive appreciating audience. She endows him with mysterious

faculties, he becomes the 'magic helper' to prop her and guide her through life. There are the projections and externalization of her own imagined qualities.

The question is: why does Amla, so young, independent, and spirited fall a prey to her passions, particularly for a man in Dharma's position? It is because, being a "narcissistic" subtype of the expansive drives, Amla's idealized self needs to be a centre of attention and attraction. Dharma fulfills it. Flabbergasted by her unbearable isolation in Calcutta, she drifts towards Dharma, makes him an integral part of her life, renounces her integrity and depends on a force outside herself. This idolatry is significant for Dharma also. He achieves a graceful interaction between humility and the pride of creativeness. As an artist he is able to see the human possibilities and limitation. His portraits get depth and he feels gratified to see the archetypal man. Her transparent inner self gives him fresh insight. He admits that she made him see "what the subconscious does to an impressionable creature, how much more power it has on them than sun and circumstance put together. And this is the revelation that made me... Begin on a new era.' (*Voices in the city*, 223).

Amla's breaking away from Dharma appears as enigmatic as her attachment for him. Critics believe that she feels hurt to learn of Dharma's callousness towards his only daughter and that she leaves him in disgust. A close study of Amla's character reveals that the reasons for her decision to leave Dharma are not so simplistic. Amla is mainly distressed by her own conflicts – her pride and irritability. Pride: because she is so significant in his life as to awaken his dormant talents. Irritability: because he is lost in his art and is distracted from her. These conflicts so far controlled, explode

in the face of reality. Her reactions are both strong and instant.

In an attempt to plunge into the dull routine of life which she had tried to beautify with love and art, she leaves him. She tears up the invitation to Dharma's exhibition and goes with Jit for horse-race. This is her regression choice. It is movement backward and suggests symbolically her sickening view of life as a gamble. Here she sees the stark reality-death. She also visualizes the actuality of life-life is a race, one has to participate in it and strive to win. One who fumbles and falls remains an 'outsider' invaded by the forces of self-hate, alienation and self-destruction. In the shadow of death she discovers the value of life. She opts for progression. This is a significant move towards self-actualization Amla is tossed between the pressures of her neurotic drives and her affirmative will-power. Her journey to and fro indicates her self-doubts. As Nirode observes in the novel, journey entails an expense of energy both of mind and body. Human potential lies in making the journey worth the expense. One only hopes that with Monisha's death, Amla grapples with her authentic and maintains the poise she displays at the end of the novel. Between Nirode's neurotic outbursts and mother's withdrawal, Amla stands as an emerging self.

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