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**Phenomenal
Literature**

A Global Journal devoted to

Language and Literature

A Peer-Reviewed Print Journal

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Chief Editor:

Dr VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr RAJNISH MISHRA

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Prof. SHASHANK NADKARNI



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PHENOMENAL LITERATURE

*A Global Journal Devoted to
Language and Literature*

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POETRY

1

Spinoza and the Spiders

BILL YARROW

"After protracted studies Spinoza [sic] would...unbend his mind by setting spiders to fight each other."

– Isaac D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*

The author of *Ethics* takes a break from his geometric philosophy to watch spiders fight each other, the sight of which convulses and dissolves him in immoderate laughter.

The author of *Ethics* unbends his mind by collecting spiders and placing them in glass jars hoping they will, to his greedy amusement, attack, wound, and ultimately kill each other.

The author of *Ethics* sees nothing but entertainment and mental relaxation in life and death struggles of creatures from the insect world set against each other not by Nature nor Fate nor Chance but Man.

The author of *Ethics*, blind to the irony of a world in which a sadistic God pits human spiders against human spiders in a glass-jar grudge-match existence that ends in catcalls, cackles, cadavers, and yawns.



2

**Like Beowulf in the
Arms of Grendel's Mother**

BILL YARROW

You take my hand as carefully as you
would brush a rain forest butterfly
off my arm. With the urgency of desire,
you press my hand, intransigent
and unalloyed. You hold my hand
as if it were a future filled with travels
to Fiji and Taipei. As carefully as if
you were a master glassmith, you
touch my embarrassed fingers. With
the caution of a new surgeon, you
massage my modest palm. You pretend
you are brave, like Beowulf in the arms of
Grendel's mother, but are you not cowardly?
Afraid to embrace a languid diagnosis?



3

Onwards Journey

AVDHESH JHA

Having remain unheard from me,
You may enquire, if I am just a call away;
Being unanswered, you may turn anxious
With millions of reasons for lack of response;
Late night or next day, you may inquire again,
Only when, you may hear, HE IS NO MORE.

Stunned, shocked, puzzled and surprised, in agony
Without voicing your voice and balancing yourself;
With millions of questions only to reply on your own,
With the flashback, allowing you to rest with the unrest,
You may like to ensure the formality of obituary
And speechlessly, you will only exclaim and sigh within.

With the broken heart flooded with turmoiling emotions,
And the cremation of tears having its burial only within;
Shattered, you may wish to share but without any help,
Hereby, you may, in fact, you have to accept the fact,
With schedules, you will turn busy hardly keeping me alive
With all those hunting and the obscured memories within.



4

Yet to get the Freedom

AVDHESH JHA

Ubiquitous is the flogged
Silent noise of inflation,
People are yet to get the Freedom;
Unquenchable is the power craving,
Resting on the cheap and mean ambitions of the rulers,
People are yet to get the Freedom;
The beginning and end of the essay (the poor people),
Always struggling from the slavery of their poverty,
They are yet to get the Freedom;
People say, it's morning, there is the light,
But many struggling with the darkness of the mind
They are yet to get the Freedom.



5

Pandemic

BISHNUPADA RAY

in the virtual classroom
of our social contract
faces recede like postage stamps
on the contact screen we gaze

our deepest uncertainties
breathe through our N95s

the clean-all is a kick
to punch a hole in the soul
a black eye of fungus

so our essentials we check
the one lesson we teach and take.



6

The Poem I Wished to Write

BISHNUPADA RAY

I come across in a journal
it is born before I could write
and the elements match
my mental conception of it
and I like to own it as mine

it has the same landscape
same signs of direction
same throbs of reflection
so that I have no difficulty
to see my heart in the mirror

happiness and unhappiness
I know I hushed my feelings
suppressed the inklings
and lost a poem I now read
the poem I wished to write.



7

On the Nature of Love

DAVID JAMES

If I was a billionaire,
I'd still carry you through the door
to our honeymoon suite
on our wedding night and say a prayer
of thanks to God for your love.

If I was homeless, on the streets
of Detroit, and you ignored my call
for a little change, I'd forgive you
and still kiss your sweet lips in my dreams.

If I was dying in the yard, sprawled
out on the grass and could only see the blue
sky above, I'd imagine your face
smiling down at me.

And if I was born in another time,
three hundred years prior, in a place
you've never heard of across the sea,
I'd invent you and keep
you in my brain, cut wood for the fire,
stroke your hair, let you lie down
in my bed while I sing you to sleep.



8

Claiming A Kingdom

DAVID JAMES

"In the long run, we're all dead."

John Maynard Keynes

There's nothing comforting about this.

Fuck you, Keynes. You're right,
but I don't want to think about it.
I'll raise my finger and fist

to the stars as I dance and sing
in the moonlight.
Here in the short run,

I'm going to break every rule –
run with scissors, eat raw fish despite
the warning, spoil my grandkids with sundaes

and books, burgers and French fries. I'm done
with planning for the future, blah, blah.
I'll kiss my beautiful wife until it hurts,

raise a glass of whiskey to the morning sun
and claim my kingdom.
I refuse to let death gnaw

on my bones, even if I have no choice.
Fuck the truth.

I'll sit out on this lovely day, in awe

and in love with everything I see, and everything I don't.



9

Fated Status

ED WOODS

Ease of morning awakening
even sunlight is tired
it slowly crawls up the wall
across the room
onto my bed footboard
Eventually warms toes to nose

Time will force me to stand
yawn in solemn excitement
same routine different day

Tea as I wake up and make plans
hopefully to fruition of pleasure
or become a passenger in a railcar
on the rails of The Boredom Express

I should have developed tenacity
found drive and incentive
but early in life I fated my quest
as a well-adjusted underachiever



10

One Skeleton

ED WOODS

My contribution to life
did not make headlines
and went through life unnoticed
devoid of one Thank You

To me this is safety achievement
of dangerous employment
completely event free

I retired content my family name
is off the media radar
Clean records and great memories
leave only a self-skeleton
to worry about



11

Talk Between Us

FALEEHA HASSAN

‘Where you are going’
I read it in the driver’s eyes as he stares in the mirror at me.
Although the sky is so far away
no wing can collide with it, however I’m worried about who’s
flying now
‘There, I pointed, on the edge of the sea!’
‘No bus stops there!’
‘Imagine one and let me out, I will put all these waves in my
bag,
Spread them whenever and where.
With bare hands I always separate thorns from my days,
In the south of the south, I live full of madness and
perfection.
My dream is so wide but I have no hope of finding hope.
Leave me here. By the way,
I am a poet.’

12

Old Friends' Selfies

FALEEHA HASSAN

They were beautiful
Like a very early morning
They were delicate
Like a breeze afraid to be born in July
Their eyes were like forgiveness
Now withered behind misty glasses
I see them posing on the phone screen
Leaning on "It only takes second!"
Their forced smiles quickly vanishing
And as soon as the game of capturing happiness in a picture
ends
They will scatter like pollen in a bee's feet
Carrying with them wishes and even the smallest of dreams
With most of them getting lost in the crowd!



13

**When You Die You're
Dead Unless You Go To**

GALE ACUFF

Church and learn there's an Afterlife, it's
Heaven or Hell and depending on how
you've lived you go to one or the other,
that's at *our* church but at the one across
the street everybody goes to Heaven,
when they're dead that is, so nobody goes
to Hell, everyone's forgiven, after all
that's why Jesus was crucified so I
can sin and sin and sin and sin and still
get forgiven over there but traffic
is always bad, I might get run over
and wake up dead in the wrong place, Hell
I mean – what we need is a traffic light
or a crosswalk but still I'd look both ways.



14

I don't want to die, not ever, *never*

GALE ACUFF

In a word but at both Sunday School and regular school I have to, someday I won't be anything but plain deceased and of course I wonder what that will be like and both my teachers say *Nothingness*, may-be they've been comparing notes but I said *Well, ain't nothing still something* and my teacher at regular school corrected me, my grammar, and at Sunday School my teacher just smiled and said *Well, we'll just see, won't we* so I said *Sometimes I just can't wait* and she said *Well, when you're nothing you'll wish you had*, like she knew what she was talking about so I just answered *Yes ma'am*. God damn it.



15

Call-ups

GARY LANGFORD

The more part-timers are appointed,
the more rulers are anointed.
Speeches are seldom needed.

Call-ups approach Hazy Hollow.
Contracts control tomorrow.
Small businesses are insects.

Permanents hang their heads,
closely examining their feet,
in case they are guillotined.

Families hold on to kiss-kiss.
Offspring try not to be sprung.
I burns the people's eye.

You become daily news.
Others enjoy putting you down,
drinking cups of call-ups.

Fall back is playing a clown.
IPhones break up *and* still charge.
Clown again. Clown is a friend.



16

Small Creatures

GARY LANGFORD

Small creatures arch each night.
The more invisible they are,
the more we walk with them.
Not once do they ask for faith.
Doubters frown doubtfully.
There are doors of fear and failure.
We try not to read our names.
We try to believe in small creatures,
especially when they have windows.
They are the new architecture,
living in our gardens,
measuring modestly.

Twelve goatheads are for sale.
Each weighs in metal panes.
I offer to spell this as pain.
Goatheads are unimpressed.
I try a dozen engineers.
Only small creatures agree.
Goatheads want me breaking down.
Or is this up in goat-talk?
Dialogue is less than a minute.
I adapt into a soft shoe shuffle,
unable to make goathead charts.
My small creatures perform the art.



17

Thoughts & Prayers

GEORGE HELD

are profusely offered right after
the gunfire of mass murder: preachers
and legislators, mayors and governors
reflexively offer “thoughts
and prayers” just before they defend
the right to bear arms,
the ultimate law of the realm.

But thoughts and prayers are cheap, a ritual
response after a massacre ends and
the victims are counted and carted away.

Though no one deserves to die because a guy
with a gun has a bad day, survivors and kin
will still receive lots of “thoughts and prayers.”
How do they make you feel?



18

Leaving

GLÓRIA SOFIA

My poet, who left us
Waiting for a lifetime.
Living in each verse

You death,
You never called my name
Just warm poetry
Sweat in the breath
Of your cold fingers

So,
Compass without north
Writer with no station in the soul

You left that beauty sad
In this sleeping body
Only sleep

And in the spirit
You abandon the poem
In this tired heart
A decadent poet's life



19

Turbulence

JAMES MULHERN

The twenty-something blonde offered
to lift my suitcase to the overhead compartment.
The thin boy with glasses said he'd push my cart
of groceries if I wanted help to the car.
The high school girl behind the glass
passed a senior ticket without my asking.
My principal inquired, "When will you be retiring?"
My neighbor (close in years) has cancer.
My doctor said men my age have difficulty peeing.

I've taught stories about rites of passage my whole career
– a first kiss, the first date, marriage, and children.
When the young woman looked at my gray hair
and offered to lift my luggage,
I thought of these *other* rites,
and the Last Rites, too.

As the plane rose through the clouds, I felt turbulence.
Outside the rain-pattered window was solid blackness.
I saw an old man. I knew what was behind me.
I knew what lay ahead.

How odd that an act of kindness made me think so much.
When we landed, the suitcase seemed heavier.
My exit was clear.



20

Leaves

JAMES MULHERN

That fall day we raked leaves from behind the shed.
Smell of earth and wet decay rose in the cold air.
We could see our breath.

Worms and beetles scattered through a fence.
I saw dirt and thought we had finished.
“Not yet,” you said.

The gray sky grew darker and the wind chilled.
When your flashlight showed not a speck of leaf,
You said, “We’re done.”

Today I look at the wet leaves below.
I kneel and clear your grave.
Again, I smell the earth and feel the biting cold.

The damp leaves shimmer like tears, not many,
that drop on the yellowed grass.
“We’re done,” I hear you say.

I say a prayer, cross myself, and rise.
I see my breath and imagine I see yours.
I should leave, I think, but not yet.



21

Big Plans

JASON RYBERG

These black railroad tracks,
after the snow has melted,
sprawling in every direction,

where a hobo lays his head on a rail
and listens for any life that might be in there,
to tell him of the next arrival;

his partner, the skinny scarecrow with the
sleight hitch in his giddyup, has somehow
acquired a fresh goose-berry pie that was
cooling in a window sill,

and he's got big plans for the next town,
pal, big plans.



22

The Impression He Left

JOHN GREY

He was last seen on
the top step of a tenement stoop,
downcast, head lowered,
yet pushing no buzzer,
not asking to be let in.

He was delving into what brings a man
to one place in particular,
in sunlight suggesting good things
with a face dragged down by the opposite.

Out of his mouth – nothing.
His fingers threaded, squeezed almost to death.
His height seeming half of what it was.
His cheeks ashen, chin unshaven.
He gave the impression
of someone leading a slow dog on a leash.
Only he was the dog.

Then, reaching up on hind legs,
he did press that buzzer.
Submissive and grateful,
he was ushered inside.

When last seen,
he was a three-story tenement
on a typical block
on the south side of town.
Every eye was closed
by a curtain.
Every mouth was silenced
by a door.



23

On A January Morning

JOHN GREY

Life simple but hard.
Slow trip from house to barn and back again.
Everything is snow.

Street's packed
like a suitcase.
No difference between
parked car,
sidewalk, fence or path.

Trudge inside, shake scenery from boots,
toast fingers on fire, thaw from blue to white.
Locked out of the world,
in thrall to the flame
and the people around me –
what else is there to do but remain.



24

Account for Average Wear

JOHN ZEDOLIK

My weeds are worn, the warp and weft
exposed, ragged right angles off

the cuff and open lattice of thread
inviting any thorn and serrated edge

to snag and shred down to the possible
unweaving of the fabric, spinning

to air (unspun!) and a pile of tangled
hair from no head, if given enough

pulling time, as my flesh will when
that hook finds an errant bit so start

my turn to stone and bone that will
last even dry and unthinking in its doom

longer than any duds no matter
the quality of its artisan and their loom.



25

Trust

JOHN ZEDOLIK

Rain has drummed upon the morning
so the humidity is up, and feet
are clinging to our floor's hardwood

so take a bit more of the second
to place the sole, raise it again,
feeling the surface holding the skin

the extra time a warm comfort
to reassure one walks on solid
foundations whose boards and beams

will not collapse into the maw
or shudder as if on tropical stilts
in a hurricane wind, reaffirming

our solidity and mass that must
heed the pull of gravity mother
who whispers to us that we are

not yet air and less, light as ghosts



26

Cry Not My Daughter

K V DOMINIC

Cry not my daughter
Wipe your tears
Your journey has only begun
Miles and miles to voyage alone
through tempestuous ocean of grief
Your tears can never
quench the desert minds

Cry not my daughter
when wolves snarl at you
This world is full of wolves and vultures
None is there to drive them away
Let lamb in you
rouse as lion
and charge at them
lest they tore you to pieces



27

Famine's Feast

KEITH INMAN

The sparrow hawk swoops glides
up to the high wire
clutching his harvest mouse

Their spare row crop stoops outside
under the skies fire
crutching this hard-set house



28

That Sweet Fermenting Nectar

KEITH INMAN

Butterflies cue in the ears of flowers –

Black-eyed Susan withers
in the corner

Other flies move in
and the air sours



29

Exploration

MADHAB CHANDRA JENA

If you see me
through a telescope
I look like a moon in the numbed sky
turning the whole atmosphere
from despair to silver.
The valleys and mountains
on my carcass appear like a hare.
If you see me
Under the microscope
My beauty bones appear like
the skeleton of a dinosaur
modest moles on cheek like mountains
If you see me without any instrument
I am a sparse woman
Only few meters away from you
Made of earth water fire
Space and air
like you delimited with all disaster.



30

Most Poems

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

Most poems are pounded out
in emotional flesh, sometimes
physical skin scalped feelings.
It's a Jesus hanging on a cross
a Mary kneeling at the bottom
not knotted in love but roped,
a blade of a bowie knife
heavenward.

I look for the kicker line
the close at the bottom
seek a public poetry forum
to cheer my aspirations on.
I hear those far away voices
carrying my life away-
a retreat into insanity.



31

Drinking Buddy

NGO BINH ANH KHOA

Although my eyes behold the lovely sight
Of nature, deep within, my heart knows naught
But lonesomeness. The sun, however bright,
Cannot undo the woe-entangled knot;
The stream, however fast, can't wash away
The festered anguish clinging to my head;
Though numerous are the things I wish to say,
Naught but the wind shall hear the plaints here said.
Since my heart's not in it, no natural scene
Before my misted eyes is beautiful;
Fine wine turns stale, and sunbeams pale. All seem
To wane, becoming tainted by the lull
Of aging gloom, whose shadows quietly thicken
Around this drunken soul by sorrow stricken.

Then, as though guided by a fateful breeze,
A fly descends upon my cup, and I,
Brought out of my dark reverie, soon grow pleased
With my new drinking buddy dropping by.
Oh, busy fly! Oh, travel-wearied soul!
You're welcome to my-now our-feast, so dine
And sate your yearnings now before you go
Back to your wandering way. Embrace the fine
And little joys that life may give and be
As merry as can be, my short-lived friend;
Let all your existential dread by glee

Be cleansed before this fleeting life shall end.
A toast to you! A toast to me! Let's drink
And watch the sunbeams unto darkness sink!



32

The Walking Wounded

NOLO SEGUNDO

I see us everywhere anymore,
at the supermarket or the mall,
moving slowly, often cane-less
(old folks can be vain too) along
a sidewalk like lost zombies, and
of course every time I visit one
of the plethora of doctors I rely
upon to keep my rusting body
and creaking heart working....

Why did I not see old people
when I was young?
They must have been there,
in my world of swiftness and
sex, of sprawling on a beach or
dancing under the boardwalk
or driving fast enough to
challenge death itself---but
when I saw old people---and it
seemed rare back then – it was
like watching a scene from an
old black-and-white movie,
not quite real, even quaint---
I liked old people and I loved
my Nana and Pop-pop, but only
now in my 8th decade do I know

how much they had to put up with
in living a long life, how time has
a tendency to whittle away your
strength and confidence and grace,
shrinking your bones, drying out
your joints, slowing your brain
and poking holes – oh, so many
holes in your memory....

I am not as fond of old people
now I am one – it is the young
I now see fondly –
but they can't see me....



33

Ocean City

NOLO SEGUNDO

I saw it then as my own little Shangri-la,
for I was very small and knew nothing
of the big world, the grown-ups' world.

And for the child-me it was nirvana,
that little town on a barrier island
between the gray, cold, untamed and
endless Atlantic Ocean and the quiet,
near somnolent bay where the boats
of the less brave could sail safely....

I could ride my bike from Nana and
Pop-pop's little house on that bay,
feeling as free as the myriad seagulls
swirling forever above my head –
I 'd ride 'cross town to the boardwalk
and if I had a dollar, see a movie by
myself, feeling like a proud little lord –
I remember as though yesterday, and
not 60 some years, my favorite theater,
with its long darkish hall that looked
like the entrance to a pirate's den,
lined with displays of model sailing
ships, mostly men-o-war chasing, yes,
pirates, but never catching them....

But most afternoons I was happy to
just sit quietly on the porch of my
grandparents' house, smelling the
dinner Nana was making while I
read of countless dreams in books,
books that captured like a pirate
his prey, and took me round the
world in the finest and fastest
sailing ship of all – imagination!



34

In The Bewitched Aviary**(The sonnet according to Mr. Shakespeare)**

PAWEŁ MARKIEWICZ

Helots muse about moony Golden Fleece of the **condor**.
Drudges think of the dreamy eternal dew of the **hen**.
Philosophers ponder on winged fantasy of the **crow**.
Kings ruminate on a picturesque gold of the **jay**.

Priests contemplate the dreamed, soft, meek weird of the
woodpecker.

Masters daydream about nice marvelous songs of the **tern**.
Soothsayers dream of fulfilled gold of the **yellowhammer**.
Knights philosophize about poetic dawn of the **wren**.

Hoplites fantasize about a red sky of the **sparrow**.
Athletes describe the most tender treasure-charm of the
snipe.

Gods remember an enchanted, dear temple of the **seagull**.
Goddesses recall fairytale-like heroes of the **kite**.

Poets commemorate the elves-like heaven of the **owl**.
Bards reflect on most amazing dreamery of the **rook**.



35

Soothsayer – Fortuneteller

(Poem of not-Hindu for Goddess Krishna)

PAWEŁ MARKIEWICZ



full chalice and I become an existence
when your memory shines
the dreamy chalice –
I miss
and I want it
a cup without blood comes true
magic of the dew – fulfilled
I am a blissful butterfly
for your sake
you turn dew into essence
into fog over the volcano
as well as into numinous sacred cow
and I am the magic of the night
a spring and a miracle
the heart with many songs
I adore this rainbow
you paint a revelry in it

the heart of the poet
my soul – dreaming
in your dreams – memories
to this cornflower

You are your glorified soul
a rainbow of being and perfect
fleeting wings of poetry
in your soul-cave – dwarf
in this pond – mirror
your mirror loves
a melancholy
the cave darkness
the light from the moon
rest in me
in you a thousand lights
of winged being
I have found myself
in your
butterfly like heart
I will you
in the breeze
and in a seagull
of the mornings



36

Encounter

RAMZI ALBERT RIHANI

Surrounded by students with faraway looks
"Don't fear the unknown" the teacher said
It is a place of discovery
With comfort, you get complacent
With encounter, you approach celestial spheres

Abstract makes you think
Mystery makes you dream
Like colors added to a grey winter sky
They create spring in the middle of a desert

Hundred years later, the pupils become gurus
Teaching their grandparents what heaven's like
Years of searching
A minute of enlightenment
A cycle of life, a rhythm never-ending



37

Unwritten Verses

RAMZI ALBERT RIHANI

The ink is dry
The poet hasn't finished his poem
He repeats the unwritten verses
Like a mirage in a desert
Memory reigns
Scrambled thoughts rush like adrenalin
Waiting for the moment
To descend on paper.
Dust awaits the rain
To wash away glimpses of reality
A large river overflows with rainbows
And fills the city with make-belief fantasy.



38

Turnkey*

RITA ANDERSON

Shoeless, I wander behind the house as if, from
there, I could slip, unnoticed, into the past,
a meadow the wind has swept clean. But moon-
less nights have no shortcuts, the yard still
bald in spots, garage leaning. In the driveway,

your car does not block mine in so I stand in the empty
space, wondering what I look like from behind. Taking
sunglasses from the dashboard, I stare at the two of me
that stare back, mouthing the wisdom found in babble:

As long as we learn, should it matter who teaches us?

Yes, I tell the awning, It is the undeveloped part of us
that's called forth, but who is prepared for the blandness?

I pull at the torn bits of bumper sticker I can't remove,
thinking,

If growth is like soiled berries sprung from blackened husks,
then there is *proof* of backing the wrong horse.

A permanent smear about your appearance. . .

In the house, the heater whirs back on, promising a zone
that never varies but I linger, putting the lid on the trash
can, replacing a broken porch light. Toiling as long as I have
under the slow hand of my own education, I know that
even if memory is *leaving a light on*, images without resolution

cannot keep the sky lit. But, we need not have been *rained out*.
If only we'd cupped our hands together and drank, Home
would've
been a green-carpeted breathing space, and we might have
survived

the idea of a perfect thing
made ready to inhabit.



* real estate term for a property owners can just "turn" the "key" and move into, in mint condition

39

Use My Arms

DR. ROGER G. SINGER

use my arms

to hold back
the wind

to open all
your doors

to carry
the umbrella

to bring you
breakfast

to carry your
coat

to bring in the
birthday cake

to hold your
favorite books

to collect the
shells we love

to dance
for no reason

to carry the
flowers you grow



40

Human to Animal

SANDIP SAHA

I find an increasing trend of domestic despair
about six decades back when I was a child
I used to find several siblings in a family
now many do not have any sister and brother
due to economic pressure and competition
couples do not bear more than one child
over and above that both parents are working
who will take care of the child?

Caring a child is a secondary responsibility now
demand of work place is so high
guys and gals cannot do justice to take care of child
home chore is manipulated somehow
most of the time eating outside foods
that are highly detrimental to health
full of cholesterol, trans fat
that make their hearts weak
causing heart ailment in young age.

These were enough reasons to cause despair
but situation is becoming more and more complex
husband and wife are not satisfied with spouse
due to easy availability of opposite sex
they are inclined to enjoy with more partners
this breaks the institution of marriage
everything looks like free for all.

I speculate of a growing free society
where there will be no sanctity of parents
siblings are already partial
half-brother or half-sister
no pure brother or pure sister any more.
Human society is gradually getting abolished
where love is going to be vanished
and replaced by lust and only lust
a society similar to that of animals.



41

Incomplete Drafts

SRINIVAS S

Every incomplete draft has a story.

Some have a past, some a future.

Others are stillborn children, buried
In wildernesses untouched by time.

This is an incomplete draft:
If it seems complete, it does
For it speaks of incompleteness...

So, the more it says, the more incomplete
It will be; and the sooner it resigns
To its fate, the more life it will have

At least in imagination.



42**Farewell****SRINIVAS S**

Of endings we talk, but 'beginnings think;
And of beginnings 'breathe, but endings feel.
In languages we sail, in them we sink;
But silence is where we preserve our steel.
So, pay it heed, and 'twill forever tell
That worlds do not abide within the word –
That thought induces twilight skies to spell
Its loyalty to stars or singing birds.
Farewell in letter is a twilight sky;
In spirit, it embraces day or night,
Commanded thereto by our trials and ties.
A little fancy though can make us light:
It speaks of birds as wingèd stars that sing;
And sings of stars as flightless birds that wink.



43

Unafraid

SUMAN SINGH

Deep musings scatter like the pigeons,
startled by a door opening,
disturbing their feed of grains that lie
sprinkled in a corner of the front yard.

Soon sparrows make small inroads
into the corner, left vacant by pigeons,
just like small hopes that creep slowly into the mind
band together, spread out, bring comfort
The sparrows feed now, unafraid.



44

Promise of a Birth

SUMAN SINGH

their frameless bodies gently glide,
flowing robes curtain out light,
outstretched arms seek entrance
into a world spread wide –
moistened breath sprays clouds
foretelling tales of coming showers
zooming down from skies
dropping a message of delivery
pregnant mists, hold promise of a wet birth.



45

Empty Laundromat, Watertown

WILLIAM DORESKI

No one's at the laundromat.
No one is clean anymore
because of the pandemic.
The yellow plastic chairs turn
their backs to the concrete walk.

I stare at the inset doorway,
hoping that a ghost will emerge
with a stain-free bundle of sheets.
The business is open and willing.
The ranks of washers and driers

stand disciplined and ready
for infusions of quarters to spark
their brawny electric motors.
Don't people realize how filthy
the world has become? Please,

everyone, come and inhabit
this laundry, strip and wash everything
and leave cleaner than at birth –
the warmth of your freshly dried
clothing authentic as love.



46

Fog Lines

WILLIAM DORESKI

Skeins of power cables sagging
against the fog. A milepost:

five hundred and nineteen miles
from wherever we started.

The train slides through monochrome
we can't pin to this place or that.

Only somewhere, the power poles
the only verticals allowed

to mar this flat-earth vision.
We agree that sometimes only fog

can ease us back into ourselves,
a shade of gray that overlaps

and diffuses the blacks and whites
of the photographs of our childhood

when every horizon severed
one crisp world from another.



SHORT STORY

1

The Twenty Second

MICHAEL TYLER

Brother You Won't Find Anything There

Even now she will not let me be. Her hair is stroked and she replies a simple, 'I am sleeping'. I roll over and all is failure once more, and I stare at the wall and consider tomorrow.

I wake early and dress. She still sleeps and I move quietly, the morning stirs and I leave my ring in a bowl on a bedside table. I will take the rifle wrapped in brown paper and a man will make his mark.

I wait at the end of the drive. I answer, 'Curtain rods,' as I lay the brown paper package across the back seat of my co-workers car. It is cloudy and the street glistens early reminder of morning rain.

I carry the paper package under my arm and nod at fellow workers and climb the stairs and ready myself for a morning of moving boxes. It is quiet and I am silent and the minutes tick by.

It is time for lunch and the building is near deserted as the audience gathers. I remain behind and walk to a window and place a box here and place a box there until I am surrounded. I kneel and I am sheltered, I am sheltered as I wait and eat chicken and the minutes tick by.

I will wait and I will remain quiet and the moment will arrive and there will be gasps and cries and crowds will flee in wild abandon. And sirens will sound and I will stand and those below will witness as I take to the wind.

Blasphemy On A Friday

It was a late decision and a decision that would haunt me for years to come. We witnessed history but as to the cost ... well, as to the cost a man never can tell.

The morning of the motorcade I decided to keep the kids out of school. The wife was far from pleased, 'once in a lifetime' was an argument that held little water it seemed. We arrived late but found a comfortable spot on the grass embankment near the end of the motorcade route.

'Once in a lifetime,' I repeated as the children ran up and down the hill. The wife had on her Sunday best, as did we all and we mused at the mood of the crowd on such a morning, a curious mix of wonder and wild expectation. He was far from popular but the man sure could draw a crowd.

Many held cameras and I kicked myself for not bringing my own. Still, we would be present as they drove past and the kids, though barely out of diapers, could say they'd seen a President, alive and kicking and in the flesh.

As the cheers grew louder I yelled at the kids to come see, my boy at my feet, his sister at her mothers. The motorbikes came first and then he appeared. Lean and bronze, teeth from a Colgate commercial, right hand waving, basking in it all. The Governor and his wife were in the front seat but all eyes were on the back seat as the cheers grew and many hands waved many hopes and many dreams.

A shot. Many later said it sounded like a firecracker but I'd been in the army reserves and I knew a rifle shot when I heard it. My training kicked in and I grabbed my wife and threw her to the ground as I lay upon my son. 'Cover your head!' I yelled as a second shot whipped by so close I could feel the sucker. 'Cover your head!' I repeated to my wife, but as for me, I had to look, instinct be damned. My head rose and I saw the President with his elbows astride, his hands clutching at his throat. Pure unadulterated shock. And then a sight most sickening, a blood red halo as the Presidents head rocked back. I knew then he was dead and despite the immediacy of it all I felt a hint of the grief that was yet to come.

The car accelerated as sirens screamed and the motorcade roared toward the underpass as those remaining took a collective breath.

And then mayhem.

Many shrieked and covered their eyes, some held their heads in their hands, but most took flight like deer disturbed. Many ran past my family and I, up the hill and beyond. I looked at my boy and my girl, both in tears, and my wife whose face held a resolve that was virgin to me. Someone had dared risk harm on her children and forgiveness would be a long time coming.

A Picture And A Verse

He is gone when I awake and the house is all the calmer for it.

He holds hopes we will once more live as a family and I agree but I will go to hell before I answer his call. One can only take so many black eyes and tearful apologies and so 'I will not relinquish today,' I think as I wander to answer the baby's cry.

Ruth runs from the kitchen, hands covered in soap bubble and tear streamed cheeks.

“Turn on the television! God it can’t be true ... let it not be true.” She fails to wait for me to turn the switch and anxiously turns it herself leaving bubbles round the edge.

The television slowly sets itself and a man with a cigarette stares at us both. “The President has been shot. I repeat, the President of these United States has been shot.” Something within me rebels.

I turn and rush to the garage. There to the side are the remains of our marriage, boxes upon boxes, but it is the blanket I am seeking and there it lies, undisturbed, concealing the rifle.

‘The rifle is here’, I tell myself as I return to the house. A bird lands on a windowsill and I remind myself, ‘The rifle is here.’

Ruth is beside herself, hands to her cheeks she listens and breathes deeply and wipes an eye as the man continues his tale.

The President is dead.

The President is dead and the rifle is wrapped in the blanket.

It is absurd and yet it is all I can think as Ruth cries and the baby cries and the man speaks for us all.

I dry the dishes as Ruth washes and the baby sleeps in the quiet of the afternoon. We both turn our heads to the knock on the door and as we approach the thought returns and as Ruth opens the door I reflect calm amongst chaos. Two police officers speak in quick, harsh tone and I fail to understand and look to Ruth who simply speaks and I

understand the word 'house' and the word 'search' and I nod in reply.

They search the room in which we slept and the lounge where he played with the baby and there is a pause and I lead them to the garage and they take box after box and finally the blanket as it folds across the policeman's arm and I put my hand to my mouth and all is fragment and pall and isolation and I recognise the sparrow as it falls.

Announcing Your Plans Is A Good Way To Hear God Laugh

And it's an hour into my shift as I knock on the door. "Open," he replies.

"Looks like it'll rain today," he says, "shame, damn shame." A politician to the last, more than aware a wet motorcade is as good as no motorcade at all ... image is paramount. The First Lady has made an effort to accompany him down South after all.

She exits the bathroom, placing in an earring. "We'll be out in an hour," a look, a glance and I turn and exit.

Mother Nature is a rare temptress it appears as we descend from unexpected sunny skies, a crowd five deep greet them both as they exit, he in a dark grey suit, her in pink and already one gets the impression it is her they have come to see. The President is far from popular down these parts, one of the reasons he pressed her to join in the festivities.

As usual he is all hands on when it comes to walking the line. This makes us all anxious, but voters are voters and the man simply cannot stand to be disliked – although in contrast he often belly laughs while he reminisces of those he's screwed over along the way, a delicate balance – but then again his is a life lived on the high wire.

The man lived with a certain weary resignation toward an early death, he'd been so ill his whole life he'd come to terms with death in a manner ill-suited to someone so young. Three times he had received last rites and three times recovered.

Not one week ago he had been drinking whiskey in his suite and turned to me as he pointed out the window, "You know, if they really wanted me dead there's nothing we could do, nothing you guys could do ... all you'd need is one guy up a high rise with a rifle." His index finger became barrel, he pointed and fired, turned and continued his drink. Here was a man who had oft stared death in the eye and come away the victor.

We finally made it to the Presidential Limousine. No need for a bubble on such a clear day and so he and the First Lady sat with the sun at their back, the Governor and his wife in front with the driver and with a final wave and pearly white smile we were on our way. At least the President was on his way, we had all become resigned to remaining inside or alongside the follow up vehicle. The Limo ahead had designated running boards and handles for agents to use but we were under strict orders to remain behind. Follow up. Remain behind.

One month ago, on a similar motorcade, two of the agents had heard a blast from the crowd and instinctively sprinted, caught the limo ahead and rode the running boards the rest of the motorcade. The blast turned out to be a car backfire but that wasn't the point, and they certainly had their asses handed to them on return.

"You made me look like a fucken coward! A fucken coward!" He'd roared his normal tan face a dark red before

turning on his heels. "A fucken coward!" Once more as he departed.

Dallas had turned on one hell of a day and if anything the crowd thickened as the motorcade proceeded, screams and shouts of acclamation, applause and cheers for their President and his beautiful bride, each returning a smile and a wave. The Governor in front was lapping it up, although even he must have known that no one had lined the streets in his honor that day, still a politician will take a couple of free waves, deserved or not.

We had reached the final turn of the motorcade and everyone relaxed, it was a short drive till the underpass and then up on the motorway toward the Trade Mart for luncheon.

A blast ... a firecracker perhaps ...

All heads turned, I heard another blast and witnessed the President pull his arms up, elbows pointed, hands to throat. I jumped off the follow up and sprinted toward the Limo.

Too late.

A blood red crown, a mist as his head rocked back. I caught up to the Limo and jumped on the trunk, climbing on all fours toward the First Lady, herself on her knees in a vain attempt to gather the Presidents brain and skull. Her eyes were saucers.

"Down!" I grabbed her and threw her back into the rear seat. "Down!" I screamed as I covered the Presidents limp body with my own. Yet as we sped away I knew with a certitude in some ways strangely calming in its clarity that this was all simple protocol. No matter how quickly we

reached the hospital, no matter the surgeons, no matter the technique, he was dead.

I sat with her outside the operating theatre. She still held pieces of scalp in her hand. She could not relinquish. Her dress was stained with blood, dried darkest red. "Let's get you into a room Ma'am," I said softly, "Let's get you changed."

"No," she replied, "Let them see what they've done."



2

Reflections

MONISHA RAMAN

The palm fronds reflecting on the surface of the tranquil lake seemed like enormous bouquets lined for a parade. Linsa tried to count the number of trees decorating the edge of the lake adjacent to her house from her third-floor balcony. The glimmering dawn light formed a halo on the pellucid water of the lake as the ripples constantly flowed on its surface. On some days, this reflection of the palm branches seemed to emit some colour, like carnation bouquets in unimaginably resplendent hues and there are days when the image appeared as lifeless as the many potted plants that dry to death on her balcony.

Linsa started her mornings gazing at the lake from the balcony or the terrace of her new house. She heard the birds throughout the day, and she has learnt the names of several of them frequenting the lake. In a newly constructed housing society with a sparse population, she only had the lake to discuss the morning news, lament the state of affairs of the local governing body and cry when the frequent dark clouds took over her mind.

In the winter and spring months, the murky gloom seldom approached her. When the monsoon clouds cleared, the lake was filled with astounding colours and it seemed to her that she lived on an avian continent. Birds visited from near and far and she woke up to an aural cacophony in the mornings.

The darters, the most common migrants, she thought were patient listeners. They loved the shrubs sprouting right in the middle of the lake and did not move from there. Despite the distance from her chair on the balcony, she could sense their interest in her life. Most of them had their wings frozen at a 40-degree angle as she narrated the hate crimes in the country. They sat still and listened to the gimmicks of the political parties and the spectacle they often stage in the name of democracy. The darters were the tolerant observers; they sympathised with her and stayed steadfast by her side on those hectic days.

The herons were omnipresent. They camouflaged so well that Linsa did not know when they were present, watching her cry and listening to her tell the sad tale of her love and longing. They were multi-taskers, these white-winged herons. They patiently surveilled the surface of the lake as Linsa spent the mid mornings going about her chores and lamenting at the same time. She knew they were beside the wall separating her dwelling from the lake, politely listening. They were witnesses to the drama that unfolded within the walls of her house – the betrayal, lies, tears, unkept promises, the slander. They took flight, flaunting the pristine white of their wings when the show turned too grotesque, only to promptly return minutes later to keep up with the eternal play of her life, in which she was a submissive character and a helpless spectator.

The kingfishers were not as patient as the herons. They hid at the most unlikely places and occasionally made their presence felt. They were too haughty at times, carried an air of superiority and concealed themselves for hours. With them, she kept her stories crisp. On those rare days, when the warm mid-afternoon turned to borderline sultry noon, an occasional kingfisher would perform its gracious dance mid-

air, right above the edge of the lake before it swooped down in lightning speed and up again only to disappear from her sight. In those brief moments, she witnessed the most beautiful Henri Matisse canvas spring to life. When they flew, the birds flaunted their cobalt blue and teal green wings and tangerine neck and body, like certain parts of their body had been dipped in the setting sun.

A pair of white-breasted water hens always lingered by the shore and dunked in the water at times. They were busy at work all day, marching on the swampy land, thrusting their neck forward and backwards as if they moved to an inaudible rhythm, perhaps to the beat of the ripples in the lake or the tune of the wind that caused the waves. They seem to remind Linsa of what she missed the most—a complete affinity with another human, a partner, a companion. She avoided watching them most times.

In those sultry afternoons when Linsa's train of thoughts ran haywire, she spotted a pelican. At most times, the bird was a loner, floating calmly above what she assumed heated water. Even from a distance, she could see the pristine white of its feathers and the serrated beak and tranquillity that emanated from its graceful glide. Almost always, the white of its body complemented the colour of a distant cirrocumulus cloud. Like the cloud, the bird and the serene moment did not last long, and they floated out of sight as the day progressed.

Soon, the seasons changed and after the first summer showers, the migrant birds left the lake to their homes across oceans and hemispheres. The lake turned barren, like a river bed after drought. The reflections of the palm trees turned to a blur and Linsa could hear only the native mynahs in the mornings and the song of a lone koel in the evenings. However, on an unexpected day, when Linsa was lost in her anxious thoughts that almost squashed her airway, there was

a rare sight of a songbird, a tiny one which looked like a mix of a munia, bee-eater and flycatcher. It had the burnt orange neck of the kingfisher and the chirp of a robin. It chirped its way into her balcony and left a tune behind that lingered all day and night within her. The bird seemed to remind her that even after the show ends, you tend to carry the music within.

As the year progresses and the northern wind plays havoc, more migrant birds will take over the lake again. Linsa has always wondered if it is the same birds that visit season after season or their offspring. Like the birds, isn't the human notion of a home temporary too? Isn't migration at the core of human civilisation and history? Aren't we here because a group of steppe pastoralists moved across continents in search of home thousands of years ago, like the birds by the lake? Like the relationship the birds have with the lake, don't we all share a deep mutual relationship with the earth, a connection that perhaps transcends time? Don't we all eventually leave to seek what lies beyond the horizon? Linsa ponders.



3

Halloween in July

NELS HANSON

Then you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

John: 8:23

Arduous as Homer's *Iliad* it's now been 10 cycles of the sun – a “Platinum Decade” in the Annals of Science and Zoology – since we pledged like Musketeers to finally put a finish to all nonsense theories and nagging phobias, those childish fascinations with Terror and the Unknown, with Beasts, that neurotic obsession “Something Other” watches and records our every breath and step, hears instantly our least thought, in preparation for a *future reckoning* . . .

Such atavistic nostalgic rumors typical of mankind's early development and largely reptilian brain sapped our national will and diverted precious energies from their rightful avenues, in this unparalleled Scientific Renaissance for the most part unhindered by superstition and myth, free at last from the tyranny of hysterical concerns perhaps here and there a few ragged solitaries still cling to for warmth and hardly believe in . . .

When the world is tottering, spinning nearly upside-down, who confronts The Devil, The Enemy, where absent Angels fear to tread?

And so Benign Inquisitors leapt to action, with foils of shining intelligence!

As you well recall, from daunting beginning to victorious end, we realised the solution required the reach of

private industry with vast communications capabilities, a far-flung matrix aimed everywhere, like a great subtle microscope with myriad lenses, to note and number each leaf's last vein and speck of dust, the singular cast of clouds and waves, atmospheres of neighborhoods, haunted houses and schools . . .

And an army of skillful tireless lieutenants, employing the latest satellite and drone surveillance techniques, and interviewing in person and via Skype countless un-lauded scientific explorers, surviving witnesses and victims seldom believed, in many cases held in contempt and living for decades in isolation, and yes, some unfortunates confined to locked hospital wards . . .

Your day has come!

Let's not neglect our fearless, stealthy Contact Force, the teams of research experts and engineers supported by savvy combat-hardened Navy Seals and Green and Black Berets, the dozen French Foreign Legionnaires, and veterans of the Secret Service.

All For One And One For All!

And now to the immediate, exciting details:

As valued members of our corporate family, you are cordially invited to "Halloween in July!" – our Grand Opening on Independence Day – where you'll view many entities for the first time assembled in one place, all the "strange beings" a credulous citizenry many millions strong (children in search of gods and demons) dreaded, derided, needed, pursued and waited for on TV and late-night radio, the Web and splashed in tabloids at grocery stores –

As if starving for some savior or destroyer, a thing beyond themselves to fear or blame, the mystery of their desolation?

The late “Great Randi,” our esteemed Master of Ceremonies, the renowned paranormal investigator, skeptic and former magician – whose \$1,000,000 reward for proof of supernatural phenomena to this day remains unclaimed – will appear via hologram to warmly welcome you and yours (costume required) and present our latest “legendary” acquisitions.

Wendy, your charismatic and knowledgeable guide who’ll portray the courageous Joan of Arc, will lead your privileged group of summer “trick-or-treaters” down shady secluded passageways, among grottos and along limpid rivulets and beds of rare plants in bloom, as you observe not Noah’s ship of matching pairs but the single avatar of each one-member-only species, installed in its pristine environment to create our pantheon of captured “spirits” worthy of a public’s awe and confusion, panic, and understandable disgust . . .

Accessible as Disneyland or Safari World, The Cryptid Center provides visitors interactive, close one-on-one encounters with our well-housed and well-cared-for specimens free to roam their natural habitats, within our award-winning, safe and spacious air-conditioned preserve I toured this morning on “final walk through” before the approaching holiday extravaganza.

With a notepad I refreshed my checklist I’ll share of current attractions on revolving display, while the fitter measured for high boots with cuffs and the period’s proper regimental attire . . .

I admit I nearly stumbled, in a kind of daze at our many achievements I hadn’t seen gathered together before, so I *newly saw* each one as I approached, *as you will also*:

- *Famed Bigfoot or "Sasquatch"* with foul odor perfumed and pumped away, his heavy stick to beat against the pine's trunk if you whistle or scream after he howls
- *Moth Man* and his bat-like wide leather wings out flung as he glides vampire-like beneath his dome, circling the bridge and foam upright dummies he hourly torments and then destroys, a fearsome raptor eight feet tall
- Blood-sucking rabid *Chupacabra*, completely hairless, thrown live food (don't worry – barn rats) three times daily
- "*Fresno Night Crawler*" paper-thin, a pale cartoon Gumby missing the thorax, just head and legs, with a window so it can't escape through narrowly spaced bars
- "*Gray*" or "*Shadow Person*" lurking melancholy years in same drafty vacant hall and midway up the stairs, chronic victim and aggressor stuck in time

I had an insight I jotted down as men less grand than Napoleon occasionally scrawled for future possible memoirs, as I admired and marveled at one "odd" creature and the next –

It seems in most religious sects, after the monotheistic Pharaoh Ikhnoton and his god Aton, for "true believers" there was always really Only One:

- *Indigo Child* from war-devastated Mars, in love with astrophysics, insisting endlessly a secret is buried at the Sphinx's left paw, another hidden behind right ear, not looking up but forever working on the insoluble math problem and so is happy here, in a way among his kind
- *Generic Poltergeist* responsible for all reported activity, a ubiquitous short-wiring robot, invisible and throwing coffee mugs, red, white and blue for The Fourth, in the

old house where at 12 years old the trouble started which I see we've discretely "summarised" without "skipping over"

- *Tinker Bell* illuminating brightly as always, since small ones first clapped for her as she dwindled like a fading star, Never Never Land and Captain Hook and Peter long forgotten, evading even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, who thought her image was captured on a photographic plate and suffered needless ridicule for his devotion

Honestly, at moments I resembled a triumphant general in tears and had to swallow several grateful sobs, as I realised again the dizzying scale and grandeur, the near "impossibility" of the completed task, and began to turn "philosophical" . . .

In the wood and sea and air – a familiar voice said to me – there's not a mystery, a "cryptid" remaining, no more "as many ancient-alien-invader scholars believe . . ." or "my great-uncle's Aunt Genevieve remembered one August daybreak north of Gallup . . ."

No more galvanometers and night scopes, 24/7 motion-triggered cameras spying, suspicious machines scanning bands of "white noise" for static, mumbled words of ghosts who've nearly forgotten how to hear or speak . . .

My favorite, you ask, "Our Finest Hour," to quote a valiant but now unremembered Prime Minister of Shakespeare's isle?

I have a recurring hankering for an 18th Century sun-splashed beech-lined country lane with the King's Men galloping, though I confess I'm often drawn to the turbulent and primitive, the Gothic, wild and tempestuous landscapes and weather, lochs and moors, ruins, blanched sailing moons:

- *The Great "Nessie"* from old misty Scotland, in gigantic "see-through" lake sporting emerald fins, upraised head in profile matching the doctor's hoax photo 90 years ago, the crumbling, charming medieval castle in the windswept distance a masterpiece of reconstruction

Every fable has been discounted or tracked down, ratified, returned intact and thriving for perpetual exhibit . . .

- *Lonely Leprechaun* in green sitting on his chair before peat fire, silver buckles on his shoes and smoking the pipe fashioned from an ivory thimble
- *Kentucky Red Fox* known for the blue coat with brass buttons, graceful on two legs, front claws playing "My Darling Clementine" on her scarlet fiddle for my half a dollar, without the hint of intended bite or scratch . . .
- *50 Assorted Others* from rustic folklores, including often libidinous so-called forest and fresh-water "nymphs and sprites, viewing properly restricted by age during spawning seasons" . . .

All once-foreign beings happily at home, the ripe fruit of all our work, I wrote "*The Ship Arrives!*" like an exultant child or Odysseus, shut my notebook with the program complete and was fitted for belt with square steel buckle and pantaloons, plumed drooping hat and cape, regalia last seen along dusty roads of golden and enchanting Périgord on toward Toulouse, a certain way sometimes called to mind by strains of a ghostly hunter's horn, as if I'd ridden once to save a kingdom . . .

What else can we add, without risking immodesty, a suspicion we're angling for the Nobel of Nobel Prizes, or like d'Artagnan His Majesty's fleur-de-lisle-emblazoned scarlet tunic with Aramis, Porthos, Athos, all royal Paris and evil Richelieu looking on?

Truly, it's a Grand Accomplishment, congratulations to all, on completion of our laborious and far-flung challenge demanding such constant effort and risk and attracting new dangers, contingencies not easily confronted, long nights and days and weeks, at times of weariness or anxiety the sudden shadow of the Unexpected, a threatened invasion of the so-called Truly Uncanny, as nerves bled raw and wildly again we drew our flashing mental swords to dare all foolish *Tale Spinning*, in numerous cases *Death Itself*, not to mention the occasional *alluring and uncertain adventure . . .*

- *The Mermaid*, blonde and ageless, amazingly seductive, for the children's sake donned in a tailored bodice of scallop shells almost reaching scaled hips and modestly revealing the navel, seldom swimming but sunning waterside on a rock, like her smaller bronze cousin in Copenhagen watching when young sailors pass

Now let the Word go forth:

Real Truth is at long last Evident and Victorious, just steps away beyond Plexiglas or the protective watery or electronic moats.

As we drink in the reassuring spectacle of apparent violent chaos minutely labeled and brought to order, the Final Triumph of Light from Darkness, let's pause in loyal remembrance of comrades brave and cheerful as any hardy Musketeers, fallen in Peru, the Yukon, Kashmir, Pittsburgh, and on the Australian continent, whose honored names on wall plaques etched with crossing blades are flanked by fresh wreaths of laurel . . .

And please join in sending heartfelt regards and best wishes to the sturdy more-fortunate companions who also "bore the battle," the injured still in recovery and deserving of many Jewels, Medallions and Purple Hearts bestowed by a Gracious Lady in a dream . . .

Merci!

And the others, too many who faltered, by lack of fiber or simple cowardice betrayed an oath, deserted the corps, left brothers and sisters in dire or fatal jeopardy?

They chose dust, oblivion, and forever are scattered with the wind, with Time's long ranks of those History dismisses by recalling for an instant in a thousand years . . .

Caveat Emptor, Let the Buyer Beware, I remember the English for the ancient Latin runs. Who can you trust?

I'll include one final, brief reflection from my recent notes, before I greet all at our First Independence Day festivities that promise the thrills of Christmas at Halloween, an ultimate perfect Mardi Gras and eagerly awaited Coronation, Dear Friends and Guardsmen *arrayed in a single cardinal color* . . .

It's the entry I made after I took a photo of the boy from Mars, his concentration a young Mozart's alight with genius:

There's nothing anymore to fear or perversely desire, as we return to the normal and productive, again-accelerating routine, all furtive, whispered things proved true but simply existent, concrete, of course immortal yet unworthy of any special worship or undue attention, for a little while temporary "anomalies" as our vision adjusts, "a few white hairs in God's black eyebrow," as a distant writer once remarked on a discarded topic concerning who or what made all things and why . . .

Does sight deceive me, or do I behold a great company in red?

We'll See You Monday Night!

The End



4

The Broken Soul in My Homeland

PAWEŁ MARKIEWICZ



Do you know where this world has got so much evil in it? When I was in the Osuszek-grove for the first time, I was fully grown. I went there on a bike after finding out about it on the internet, a few years ago. I drove south through my whole town, on the road to Siemiatycze, along with the place, namely: the little village of Piliki. Osuszek was wrapped in a summer mood. This is a forest clearing by a 2km long path into the forest, marked as a small memorial site. There Hitler-Germans shot about 1000 residents of Bielsk Podlaski and the surrounding area during World War II, probably also my late grandfather's young sister called Leokadia. When I was in Osuszek for the first time, I thought of a story whose witnesses were only the plaques. An angel of imagination had broken his wing at that time. His eyes caught fire.

In angelic hands there was the gold of melancholic forlornness.

My muses wept. They no longer needed joyful poems, but poetry of tearful chasms into which the corpses of men, including those of the clergy, fell. There was sadness everywhere. A god was crying. He was sad for humanity's sake. My homeland was on fire. And my sparks were gone for some moments that hurt. A spirit of Leokadia left tears that were never meant to be swept away. I was in this clearing briefly, then I came home.

When I first read about a wartime-labor-camp in Bielsk Podlaski on the Internet, it was an autumn day a few weeks ago. People had been arrested here, forced to work, murdered and tortured. There were no more witnesses in the form of walls or buildings. The angel of imagination wept tears again, poetically dark Apollonian tearlets. His eyes suppressed fire. In the angelic hands there was silver of sad oblivion. My muses burned like books in Nazi Germany. They no longer need jolly floodplain-like poems, rather gloomy elegies that are no longer able to enchant the world. The sadness unfolds wings. The god left home again. He was angry because of human souls. My homeland fell apart for many moments that cried.

A ghost of a forced laborer left behind the tears that could never be swept away. I thought about it for a long time sitting at home. When I first experienced this, I felt like I was an eternal witness to eastern Calvary.

Now I can't ride my bike to Osuszek anymore. Psychoses return with exhaustion. When I first fell ill with schizophrenia, I was 24 years old. Cause: A bad woman rented a windowless room for me in the basement of her villa. Such madness as in Wes Craven's movie *People Under*

the Stairs. The pre-eternal world has evil in it, which will become good in eternity. My poetry is people's path to paradise. To reduce evil, you must forgive your fellow man, like the gods who forgave the dead Nazis.



NOVEL EXCERPT

1

Café

MEHREEN AHMED

At Raven's Edge, Mila Chowdhury sat at The Blue Café, sipping sparkling water. A leather-bound diary was open before her. It belonged to her grandmother – Daadi Amma. She was reading it and jotting down some of her own thoughts. A wind picked up just outside the glassed window. An intermittent, twiggy knock on the pane diverted her attention. A tall gum tree stood here; a sudden blast tore off a branch and felled it on the sill. She glanced at it.

Let me write my story in the sky, she whispered to the winds. She gazed at a placid winter afternoon, silent like a still painting. Her face stood out amongst the café crowd. Not a sore thumb; there were others like her, but with more sprightly, appealing demeanors. It eluded her. Carefree, she thought. Something tore her in the gut. She conferred with an inner self and tried to understand a joy colluded with despair. Not known to her, why had it always been like that? Not to be able to separate the clashing emotions, fused within the unmarked boundaries of the soul.

Her soul, never at peace oscillated between here and there; between a temporary world of the body and elsewhere, a limitless life of the mind, or of the spirit. Of the mind, she noted with care. An inner self of becoming a dream space; more so in hibernation. Hibernation was the word. For that

was a long journey. It offered no reprieve from dreaming on a continuum. In awakening, the tall green grass had now turned into a straw. Dehydration caused hallucinations. The letter came way too late, her fate could have turned. But no, that was not written in the stars. Written off. Love, written off. She couldn't break someone's heart by accepting. Accepting – meant a defeat for Papri. Married, yes – Papri had already married him, while his love for Mila lived. It was too late for Mila. He had already married Papri. But he had a dilemma, which Papri never knew, even to this day.

Papri had nowhere else to go. It was a marriage of convenience. Still, Mila received his love letters, one too many. An imminent affair loomed at her doorstep; nearly knocked her over. She read the letters but never responded. A marriage of the heart very well could have been. But the grass had been dehydrated by then. The dehydrated grass had turned into a straw. The brittle straw clung to the earth for dear life.

She quietly went into hibernation. Now there was a stream of straw whose tortured roots lay rooted into the soil. The sand caved in. Nurtured it not, the soil lay hollow. There was a hole. A hole in the soil where she had slept, she dreamt of nothing. Awakened, hunger acted as fuel. A hunger she ate all day. She walked in a dream – a dream of life – listened to the birds of spring – broke the silence of the morn. There was silence in her heart. It whispered a dirge. It was spring. Love, in the air. The air was fresh, Mila sat under an apple tree. Fresh, red apples hung over her.

An apple tree burdened with fruit. Burdened. Her heavy heart was burdened; with so many memories. If one could paint them, then there would be that many shades of red. She buried herself deeper into the burrow. The hole which she clawed. She picked up the dirt with her own two hands. The

dirt slithered between the five fingers. It slithered right through. The waves of her thoughts flowed undulated. She wanted to see him now. After many seasons, she wanted to know what he looked like. She had given him up for Papri, because Papri was an orphan. She had given him away only to find him after all these years. Age and aging broke her now.

Broken bones, but not bad bones; they were just fine bones in the end. Hard to know. Would it be immoral to want him back in her life? She didn't have a single bad bone, they said. Alas! It was the paradox that killed her. The poison ivy crushed her unduly. Creepers, the ivy crept up the spine. The love potion, at its best, worked like magic, at its worst a delusion. Maybe, it was a delusion. She never really wanted him. She was better off without him, perhaps. Leave him to his nemesis, to his Papri, the one that he'd married, then he had second thoughts and wished that he had not married her, for he loved Mila. That was what he thought. And his thoughts turned in a while; he took Papri back. Papri, a Bengali word, meant petal in English. She was soft and sensitive. She used to say, look at me as I embrace death; this world is too harsh; far too harsh. Yes, it perhaps was for her, who never tried to do much.

Mila Chowdhury dug deeper into her trench. She had dodged a bullet. It could have taken its toll. He, Rahim Ali, would never have understood her. He was far too engrossed, with money, matter, and materialism. She, on the other hand, soared on the wings of poesy for that was the truth. It would not have worked out for her. In the end, a realisation, it was far better this way. She pulled her up and out of the burrow. The leaves under the tree were crunchy and brown. Brown, a natural process of decay, but brown because it paved the way

to new life. The dehydrated grass had turned into straw when she went into hibernation.

The straw now turned back into green grass. She felt content. Shades of pink turned her reds around. She felt not just content, but she was young again. She was a sheaf of corn; the life-giving properties of the sun; sprinklings of water. Back to the waves where life had begun as did hope and optimism. Optimism and hope had replaced the drought of the soul and the nihilism of the thought.

Mila Chowdhury burst into Dhanmondi Lake. She was with him – Rahim Ali. Affairs were common here. Surreptitious meetings, often clandestine, took place in the dark alleys of Dewangonj, not far from this lake; lovers kissed at sunset when the evening azan was heard from the tall minarets of the mosques; the muezzin's hoarse voice, mediated through high-pitched microphones stirred the believers – scurrying along for the evening prayer. Maghrib was offered just before sunset; bats self-organized to fly towards an unknown destination. Like a black alien flying ship, down the ocean's skyline, the bats set off at dusk. Hence, the rush to perform Maghrib, because it had to be offered within that very short time of the pale evening light and full darkness.

Mila Chowdhury knew him – Rahim Ali – since the war. He was her first love. He sat down by her at the lake, today. She viewed him in a new light. Her old emotions were a distant memory. She tried to meet him as an old friend – Rahim, in Arabic, meant to bestow kindness. It was okay, as far as the meaning was concerned, but to think of the sound, what kind of a name was that? Well, it wouldn't be his fault, of course, that his parents thought the little boy would grow up to be kind.

Mila smiled thinking of how he, Rahim Ali, sat down so casually looking at her as if they were still in a relationship. But Rahim saw that she gulped a desire. He didn't say much but smiled. He also had a skull cap on that mullahs usually wear regardless of prayer times. She suppressed an urge to tease him by telling him that she felt like smoking. Rahim would probably have a cardiac arrest and would perhaps leave her in peace in this tranquil moment by the Dhanmondi Lake. But she couldn't give him a heart attack because he was also betrothed to Papri – the soft petal, as the name suggested.

Rahim, however, continued to look at her as though he was about to divulge something. It was getting embarrassing for Mila, who was trying to avert her gaze. Averting her gaze was easier than acknowledging that something was not right in his relationship with Papri. Mila looked at his skull cap momentarily. He started a conversation about some house he owned. Gosh! How good his new job was? What else? That he had a foreign degree, an MBA from the University of Urbana-Champaign. Now returned as a newly appointed professor at Dacca University. He was an academic success, of course, it was just this that the conversation was stifling.

He was good for Papri. Who else was going to marry her? Mila knew Papri through a mutual friend, Shreya, and had met her at Shreya's place. Papri was an orphan growing up in her sister's home who treated her no better than the strays down the alley, deemed as permanent bingers, eating out of house and home. Still, Papri's situation was better than many other orphans. She at least had a roof over her head with three healthy meals a day. In the marriage market, since it was difficult to find a suitable man for the uneducated, orphan women, Rahim Ali was a very good catch. However,

her fair skin color and delicate features were enchanting and marketable to any man.

“What if I never find a man,” Papri had confided to Mila once, over at a tea party at Papri’s sister’s balcony, once they had become close friends.

“Well, if you never find anyone, you just never get married, I guess. You die an old maid,” Mila had observed.

“Old maid? In this house? My sister couldn’t wait to marry me off. ”

Mila thought of Papri’s many boyfriends, who would date her on a regular basis, but not propose to her. She wondered, why that had happened? Papri had many men at different stages of her life and of different ages too. Some were vastly older than her, while others were younger. Even as young as eighteen, when her own age was at least twenty-two. Tender age always didn’t mean immature. This eighteen-year-old boy wasn’t. But Papri was pretty. She attracted boys and men of all ages. When she went to school with a bag-pack on her shoulders, she’d walk down the alley in black shoes, and a white dress wrapped over her like a pinafore. Trying to walk steadily, something that she never bothered to do, skipped lightly under the bowing bamboo bush.

When the somber cloud river sat high over the bamboo bush, she waited underneath to get drenched. Often soaked, fever or not, she cared less. Rather, she didn’t care much at all, whether or not, if she could take her exams on time on account of an illness. Yes, she’d failed quite a bit. Her progress report was mostly in the red. Green was a pass. Then with her parents sudden death, she’d become an orphan overnight. She’d walked up to the bamboo bush and simply cried her heart out. The bush stooped. Stooped like a

bent spine never to be straightened. Never to understand the pangs of her lonely heart; they just listened. They listened stooping before grief and stirred in the winds.

Life, but lifelessness was more like it. Silent – the bamboos said nothing, did nothing. Still, they were alive, but without a soul, unlike humans. The truth was revealed in their presence. Questions were asked, some more cosmic than the others. Papri howled, cried, and asked, ‘Why? Why did we suffer? What did we do to suffer like this? God punished us for no reason or perhaps the reasons were off-limits to human comprehension. Would the bamboos know? Burdened with heavy wisdom. Maybe, that was why they stooped?’

The bamboo bush really meant something to Papri – a friend, who would only just listen and not talk back: a unique friendship between two living creatures: a plant and a human – but a relationship of a kind. This bamboo bush had the perfunctory function of a counsellor. A trust, it had earned in her young mind that she unburdened so completely – crying to it, talking to it about a certain harshness of life. She didn’t understand why her parents had to die. She was just ten. It caused her so much grief. Her elder sister, much older than her about fifteen years, could become a surrogate mother, yes and loving too, but she was married and had a family of her own. Papri had become a burden on them – at ten.

The bamboo bush listened without a word. Winds rustled sweet nothings through and around. Satisfied, yes, she was satisfied. Her heart was lighter. She had found her bearings here. This place which had become a spot of solace for her; she could’t stay away or stray away – summer, or winter, fall or spring; the bamboo bush, an extension of herself, couldn’t be parted with. The rainwater dripped down its leaves. Skies above, far above, somewhere the greyness

matched. It matched not above nor below but at the core, not the core of the earth; it was all a connected cycle. It matched the color of her mood, the greyness of the heart, an organic interconnection. The rain, the bamboo bush, the grey skies, and her heightened mood, are all in one chain of cosmic order. Separate, yet connected. Connected through a natural network. She loved her life, she hated her life, she just didn't know what to do with her life; her sufferings purpled like the blooming jacarandas under a silent, grey sky.

Papri had sensed a gap in her relationship with her parents when they were alive. Now that they were dead, she realised she was a frightened little girl, stricken with grief, who hid under the bed, when her father lapsed into one of his bloody moods, throwing things around, breaking them, and then crushing them under his two feet. The cause of this raging madness was because that someone in the house had done something wrong. Perhaps, her mother did something wrong. Who knew? Who knew? But she saw them all, the deep dents in the furniture, the torn-up books all along the mosaic skirt-board of the hallway. Words, from those crunched-up balled pages, popping out and moaning before her; Papri thought for a moment how insane it all was; the trashing, this yelling, and more importantly the permanent scarring of the soul.

This frightened young girl needed protection. No, her mother, a weakling herself, too, needed protection; one who did not even attempt to protect her own daughter, Papri. She just didn't know how to protect either of them. But the mother felt chided every time her daughter was chided. A weakling, she'd become complicit for not protesting. Like a zipper to secure family relationships, the mother tried to zip up the violence. She thought, in this way she would keep her family safe and intact. But it never zipped up. The zipper slid

midway from the intensity of the rage. The zipper burst at the seams from the sheer volume of grief, spilling out no matter how many times she tried to zip up; the broken jagged lines of the zipper could not be mended. A new zipper had to be sewn in; a water-tight compartment of healthy emotions to be housed.

That too happened but not until the accident. Her parents were killed in the crash. She was ten and growing up in her sister's house. Once she had reached the sweet marriageable age, Rahim Ali's father proposed to Papri's uncle, a family friend, for their niece's hand to marry Rahim. Without even asking Rahim, the father had given them his word. Rahim, being the obedient boy agreed to his father's wishes. He put his love for Mila securely away. Time and time again, the sun had set within its halo brightness. It was only Rahim, of all the people in the world with his fresh ideas, and impeccable reputation could save Papri from her inconsolable grief – orphaned at ten. Papri and Rahim Ali betrothed. But Rahim had asked for this meeting by the Dhanmondi Lake. Shreya told Mila that he wanted to see her for one last time.



PLAY

1

Clown Show

GARY BECK

(Mr. Barker leads in two performers to do a clown show.)

Mr. Barker: You can get ready here, but put make up on in the bathroom. No smoking.

Koko: We don't smoke.

Mr. Barker: No drinking.

Pipi: We don't drink. We're clowns! (Barker shrugs.)
Like in the circus.

Mr. Barker: There's no circus anymore.

Koko: Of course there is.

Mr. Barker: It closed over a year ago. (Koko and Pipi look at each other.) Don't you watch the news on TV?

Pipi: What about the elephants?

Mr. Barker: They got rid of them. Probably sold them for dog food. (Koko and Pipi react. Exit Mr. Barker.)

Pipi: If there's no circus, where do the parents take their kids?

Koko: To a museum?

Pipi: That's no fun.

Koko: A movie?

Pipi: They watch Cable TV all the time. They need to see live shows.

Koko: Like us.

Pipi: We're lucky that they still come to see us.

Koko: Let's hope they like us.

Pipi: You know we'll make them like us.

Koko: I worry that they'll stop wanting to see clowns. What will we do then?

Pipi: There'll always be people who want to see us.

Koko: Don't be too sure.

Pipi: Am too.

Koko: Am not.

Pipi: Am too. (They laugh.)

(Enter Mr. Barker.)

Mr. Barker: The parents and kids are coming in now.

Koko: How old are they?

Mr. Barker A lot of younger ones today. Mostly four and five year olds. But there are older ones, eight and nine.

Koko: That's not good.

Mr. Barker: Why not?

Koko: They'll try to be cool in front of the younger kids and they'll sit with their iPhones, texting with their friends.

Mr. Barker: We usually have singers or storytellers here. This is the first time we've had clowns, and only because our regular singer, the blue jay lady, got

sick. Tell you the truth, I wanted to cancel today. I don't think much of clowns.

Pipi: You'll think a lot better of clowns once you see us perform.

Mr. Barker: I hope so. Let me know if you need anything.

(Exit Mr. Barker)

Koko: So here we are again, getting ready to do our show for kids who'd rather be playing video games.

Pipi: They'll love us.

Koko: You say that every time.

Pipi: It's our job.

Koko: It would have been easier if I was born a princess.

Pipi: Why?

Koko: Then I'd have a palace and we could invite all the kids and parents and they'd be impressed and love us.

Pipi: That's sweet.

Koko: I can be sweet.

Pipi: I know... We'll make them love us.

(Enter Mr. Barker)

Mr. Barker: You two better get a move on. The kids'll start getting restless if they sit too long.

Koko: We're preparing our mindsets.

Mr. Barker: (Suspiciously) What's a mindset?

Pipi: It's our way of preparing to perform.

Mr. Barker: This is getting weird. It's bad enough that grown women should make fools of themselves clowning around....

Pipi: There's a long tradition of women clowns.

Mr. Barker: I don't know about that. Now get ready to go out there or you won't get paid.

Koko: We have a contract.

Mr. Barker: Then sue me. Get moving or else.

Koko: That's not the state to put us in just before a show.

Mr. Barker: Do you believe these girls? If you're not ready to go in ten minutes you can do your next show in Alaska.

(Exit Mr. Barker)

Koko: (To his back.) That's not the state I meant.

Pipi: What did you mean?

Koko: That we're a sovereign state.

Pipi: I don't understand.

Koko: We're bounded on five sides by air and on one side by terrestrial matter. (Pipi looks confused.) I'll explain.

Pipi: I'm all ears.

Koko: We are in front, back, both sides and on top, surrounded by air.

Pipi: Ah.

Koko: And our feet rest on the ground.

Pipi: Ah.

Koko: Thus! We exist before aforementioned points, a principality.

Pipi: Ah. Then we must always fear invasion.

Koko: Why?

Pipi: Well, neighbors being neighbors, we'll always...
How shall I say it? Poach?

Koko: Ah.

Pipi: Seek territorial expansion at the expense of others.

Koko: A perspicuous comment.

Pipi: You're so clever.

Koko: Besides. We shouldn't fear our neighbors.

Pipi: Then what?

Koko: Ask who?

Pipi: Well?

Koko: Say it.

Pipi: You're so stubborn sometimes. (Koko is impatient). All right, all right. Who?

Koko: A president who does bad things.

Pipi: What can we do about the president?

Koko: Another perspicuous comment.

Pipi: What does perspicuous mean?

Koko: That you're smart.

Pipi: I always knew you recognised my intelligence.
(Smart song and dance.)

(Enter Mr. Barker)

Mr. Barker: I thought I told you clowns to stop fooling around and get ready.

Pipi: We are.

Mr. Barker: If you're not out there in 5 minutes, I'll cancel the show and give you what's coming to you. (Starts to exit.)

Koko: We'd like to give you what's coming to you. (Mr. Barker turns back.)

Mr. Barker: What did you say?

Pipi: Koko said you'll appreciate the coming show.

Mr. Barker: Yeah. Right. Now get going.

Pipi: We'll be ready in a minute or two.

Mr. Barker: You better be.

(Exit Mr. Barker)

Koko: Once again we're being ordered around by a bully who doesn't understand us.

Pipi: It's only temporary.

Koko: So's life... I'm so tired of disguising myself in order to hide from so many horrors.

Pipi: But we still please so many people, especially children.

Koko: Pleasure is fleeting. So is everything else.

Pipi: So what's left?

Koko: Enduring until the end.

Pipi: That doesn't sound very promising.

Koko: Promises are always broken.

Pipi: No they're not! When I was six Mom promised to take me to the movies if I was good.

Koko: And?

Pipi: She did. She did. That proves promises aren't always broken.

Koko: What's a promise made to a child? Everything's collapsing around us, despite the promises of the president to make things better. Yet we still paint our faces and put on costumes to try to stem the tide of despair.

Pipi: It's not that bad.

Koko: It is. It is. Will our suffering never end? But no matter what, we go out there and entertain.

Pipi: It's our job.

Koko: We should quit.

Pipi: You don't mean that?

Koko: Why not?

Pipi: Who would make people laugh?

Koko: They'll find somebody.

Pipi: What if they don't?

Koko: They will.

Pipi: What if they don't?

Koko: They'll get along without laughter.

Pipi: They can't!

Koko: Of course they can. Laughter's not that important.

Pipi: You don't mean that.

Koko: I do.

Pipi: We can't get along without people. We need them.

(Enter Mr. Barker)

Mr. Barker: This is your last warning.

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Pipi: We'll just be a moment. (Pipi and Koko stand, put
on costumes, hat, while Mr. Barker waits. To
Koko:) Remember....

Koko: Laugh, clown laugh.

Pipi: Just don't forget we're silent clowns.

(Exit all)



MEMOIRS

1

One Column Inch

GARY LANGFORD



Every Christmas of my childhood at 776 Gloucester Street, Dallington, Christchurch, Canterbury, the South Island, New Zealand, and the Southern Hemisphere, my uncle, One Column Inch, arrived at our place with a brother and my grandfather in their battered farm truck, dressed identically in dark creaseless trousers, boots, workers shirt and waistcoat, temporarily clean. They gave me Chinese crackers and a pocketknife every Christmas for ten years. Either they wanted me to blow myself up, or stab myself, yet these rag taggle men always drank well and enjoyed themselves, the

brothers being closer to their sister – mum – than they had ever been to their mother when she was hospitalized and never returned to the farm of her family growing up. Most of all I remember One Column Inch laughing, as if he was in the middle of a giant cosmic joke. He liked us kids and was happy to play the parts I cast him in. He was the loser and I was the winner, scoring the winning runs in the last minute of nearly all the games we played, especially in rugby tests when I dived under the clothes line to applause from the spectators, er, other team, though I don't think he knew much about either this or cricket, given he had to get me out at the bare minimum of four times to his one, due to what I called, 'our age difference in cricket mathematics.' 'I agree,' he would say with a grin, having convinced himself he was hopeless with tables, chuckling further when I told him he should get himself a new one if he wanted his furniture to last. 'You're bloody funny for a brainy boy,' he added. I stared at him, murmuring '11 x 11 = 121,' for greater laughter from my loony tune relatives. I was part of the generation who grew up in the city and seldom returned to the farm. Storytelling – and being paid for this – altered all that due to a truism: *families are not short of stories*. As I grew up it was rumoured in my family that when my grandfather died, he sat opposite him at the table, watching him and doing nothing. 'What was there to do?' He shrugged. 'He was going to die. Wouldn't have mattered if I brought the whole country into the kitchen to save him?' What upset many in my family was the fact he was drinking alcohol, and he only drank alcohol when he celebrated something, let alone rowing down a bottle of whisky. His Christmas visits to my mother's place in the city ended, as did that of his brother, now a hermit on a neighbouring farm. One Column Inch began buying a new car each year, which he drove around the Okuku farm before

trading the car in for another one the following year, getting all cars from a dealer in nearby Rangiora, so he was a valued customer. His tourist trip over the summer was to drive down to the Ashley River and back, which took him half an hour along dusty roads. He was always by himself, other than the odd animal, mostly a dog, and then his favourite over-fed sheep with an unshorn coat that floated behind in a cloud. By then he was sharing what was on television with the animals that lived in the house with him, mostly sheep, as pigs preferred their trotters in mud. He said sheep had an understanding of television by means of a particular liking for American soaps, to write a letter to the stars of 'Dallas' on behalf of the sheep of New Zealand. The stars of 'Dallas' sent the sheep of New Zealand back three thank you cards with their autograph and the following words on them: *we are touched; we do it all for you; and you don't know what this means to us.* One Column Inch stuck these 'treasured cards' from the famous in sheep dung to share them with the sheep community. He was an eccentric; of the kind only perpetual aloneness breeds. By the time I got a letter and newspaper cutting about his death, he was buried two weeks, in his fifty-eighth year, a life summed up by a few words in the death column. He was dead for over a day before he was discovered, slumped over a heater on a winter's day with all lights blazing, except for his. Locals were more surprised by the farmhouse not burning down than his death. The end came, sheep baaing and television going. He was a man who lived in the seasons until all seasons became the same and he faded away, even to the animals in the house, though he kept the farm dogs out under the traditional farmers attitude to the animal – they have their duties to do and he saw himself as the mentor of sheep, not dogs. Considering how he died this was just as well. Too many years had gone by when I got

the newspaper cutting of one column inch, sent to me by his hermit brother. I was a director and writing for a Sydney theatre by then. My pocketknives were long ago lost, or given away, and the Chinese crackers imploded.



2

The Doors: A Memoir

PHILLIP FREY

I have lived a long time, though sorry to say I have not *seen it all*. As for the people I have met, virtually all are worthy to be written about. But here I have chosen to write about two of the more notable ones.

Soon after the birth of the 1960's I was at a popular bar in Midtown Manhattan. While nursing a scotch I slid into a conversation with a fellow drinker. We were about the same age, and were both from Los Angeles. He went by the name of *Moon*. He was of average height, trim and handsome, with blond hair and serious blue eyes. Moon was a good person to be with: his looks drew the women to us.

We left the bar after a couple of drinks. Neither of us could afford much more than that, and we had each roped in a phone number belonging to a future date. We had accomplished our task.

As we strolled the late-night streets Moon told me he knew someone who had a band, and that it was about time for their last set. We walked over to West 46th and entered the club, which had a descending staircase that led us into a large grotto with a small stage. The band was playing to a near-capacity crowd. It was a relatively unknown group. Hearing them for the first time, I had thought them pretty good.

They called themselves *The Doors*.

At the end of their last set I followed Moon backstage. We went into the dressing room, where Moon introduced me to his friend Jim Morrison and the other band members. We sat chatting while drinking Jack Daniel's in Dixie cups. I sipped mine because of my moderation principle, never to overdo.

A while later the room had filtered down to just Jim, Moon and me. We talked about anything and everything, which somehow led to a discussion about the mystery of the universe.

Needless to say, the mystery went unsolved.

An older, chubby man with a warm smile stepped into the room. He acknowledged Jim and Moon, and then put his hand out toward me. The handshake was peculiar. The offered hand had a thumb and forefinger with tiny brass symbols attached. The same with his other hand, I had noticed. When he said his name, it jogged my memory. Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* had been published some years before. I had not read it and told Allen I surely would.

Jim wanted to go for a walk. Allen, Moon and I thought it a good idea. It was around 3 a.m. when the four of us left the club and hit the streets. We stopped at an all-night hash house and had what was for me a very early breakfast. As the busboy cleared the table, Jim Morrison leaned toward me and asked if I wanted a tab. I thought he meant the breakfast bill. Jim gave out a gentle, deferential laugh. Allen and Moon did the same. "Naïve child," Allen said as he clinked his tiny brass symbols.

Jim explained what a tab was. Then said, "You've never dropped acid?" I told him I hadn't. He said, "Okay, how about just a quarter of one to grab some of the experience."

I thought a quarter of one would be all right. It fit in with my moderation principle. Jim's eyes patrolled the other occupied tables. He then pulled a card from his leather jacket. On it was a row of tabs. Allen and Moon took a half each. Jim took a whole one. I took my quarter part.

We left the hash house and I could swear I felt no different, questioning what was supposed to be so good or bad about LSD. Though I must say the darkness of night seemed darker than usual, and the lights of the city shone like a mass of stars. Lost in thought, about to solve the mystery of the universe, I heard Allen holler "Hey!" He and the others were nearly a block away as I stood frozen in the middle of the street.

We ended up in Central Park, where we stretched out on the grass. Except for Allen. He sat cross-legged, tapping his symbols together while chanting in a language I presumed to be Asian. Whatever it was, it was a peaceful sound.

Jim asked me how I felt. I said fine, quite fine. My attention went toward Manhattan's Eastside, where I saw the arriving dawn create long shadows over the buildings. I could not take my eyes off the scene. When the sun edged above the horizon I settled back on the grass, closed my eyes and dreamed I was a stage actor performing in *Hamlet* with Jane Fonda.

Jim nudged my shoulder and said, "Take a look at this."

I sat up and found myself before the most beautiful sunrise I had ever seen. After a while, the four of us left Central Park. At 59th and Fifth we parted. Jim and Allen went one way, Moon and I the other.

The quarter of a tab I had taken was the first and last time I had dropped acid. After all, I do have my principles.

The next time I saw Moon was a number of years later in Los Angeles. We were both pleased to see each other. I told him I had read Allen's *Howl*, was quite impressed with it and understood why it had become a landmark poem.

That was the last time I saw Moon. Possibly my fault, being the loner I have always been. I still wonder what his real name was, and still wonder why I had never asked.

I never again saw Allen Ginsberg. I suppose if I had sought him out we might have become friends, or something like that.

As with Ginsberg, I never again saw Jim Morrison. If I had, I might have thrown my principles to the wind and not be alive today.



ARTICLES

1

Portrayal of Tribal Issues and Challenges in Indian English Fiction

TULIKA SWATI AND PROF. A. K. BACHCHAN

Abstract

Tribal culture and its portrayal in Indian English Fiction has been an important topic of discussion when it comes to the issues related to the development of tribes in Indian society. Literature holds an important place in terms of the portrayal of ongoing social incidents and challenges. Indian English Fiction, however, has always portrayed tribals as 'the other world' subsiding them with general themes in literature. The different aspects of Tribal India as portrayed in Indian English Fiction have been delved deeper in the paper to bring out such narratives towards attention on a larger scale. Some prominent Indian English novelists have portrayed tribal India in their novels very profusely and precisely at the same time. Two major novels namely *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) by Arun Joshi and *A River Sutra* (1993) by Gita Mehta have been discussed in detail in the context of the portrayal of tribal society in Indian English Fiction. Tribal India has been defined as the oldest Indian concept of Cultural harmony and coexistence in Indian society. Also, the prominence of Nature in the sustainable development of tribals as well as their connection to Nature as a deity has been mentioned. The paper also deals with the myths and rituals related to the tribals as portrayed in the given novels in detail. Along with the aforesaid novels, a few other novels having tribal culture as a prominent theme have been mentioned. novels like *The*

Princes (1963) by Manohar Malgaonkar and *The Coffey Dam* (1969) by Kamala Markandaya are also among some of those major novels dealing with the tribals as their main themes.

Keywords – Tribal, Indian English, Challenges, Cultural harmony,

Coexistence, Society

Introduction

Indian society has been an epitome of cultural harmony and coexistence ranging from flora and fauna to the various races of Homo Sapiens. In India, society is considered a structured entity having *Varna* and *Ashram* systems as mentioned in *Manusmriti*. The social relationship among innumerable races residing here is equally prominent to be depicted in literature. Literature is the thread binding cultural and social diversity in a bond of solidarity. Tribal culture and its portrayal in Indian English Literature has been an important topic of discussion when it comes to the issues of development of the marginalised in our society. Tribals are usually viewed as a hostile community residing mostly across forests, close to nature, away from the urban civilised materialistic society. They have their own arduous cultural identity which they maintain unmistakably in their ethics.

The portrayal of tribals in literature dates back to *Rigveda*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* where they have been shown holding prominent roles in various remarkable incidents in Indian Mythology and scriptures. However, Indian English fiction has been very keen on understanding tribal cultures in detail. They are usually covered under general themes in novels. Indian English Literature holds a very stereotypical opinion and portrayal of tribals. Along with bringing out the issues and challenges in their existence, the focus is on their stereotypical ways of living as well. Not

much has been written about tribals in mainstream literature, however, some prominent Indian English novelists like Arun Joshi, Gita Mehta, Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Gopinath Mohanty, Mahashweta Devi, and Kiran Desai have toiled towards opting tribals as prominent characters and themes in their novels. They have ventured meticulously, attempting at exploring tribal India in social, political, historical, and cultural aspects. The representation of tribal society in Indian English fiction has been done mostly through characters depicting the enormous range of behavioral and existential processes. There are variations as well as common features amongst all these literary pieces depicting tribal issues and challenges faced by them against different backgrounds.

Arun Joshi (1939-1993), a renowned novelist, wrote mainly on the themes of existentialism and self-exploration. His writings delve deeper into the inner self of his characters and lead them to understand themselves. The second novel by Arun Joshi, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, published in 1971, deals with the futile cry of an individual who seeks and finds his true self among the tribals, away from urban materialistic societies. Billy Biswas, the protagonist, is a young man belonging to a rich family. The only son of a Supreme Court judge, Billy has a deep interest in the tribals. Being a research scholar in the field of anthropology, his researches about tribals lead him to listen to his inner calls. The exploration of his deeper interest in tribals brings him to seek solace among the tribals of Maikala Hills. The novel opens with the mention of a tribal song of the Bhils of Satpura Hills-

“I came a thousand miles to see your face, O mountain,
A Thousand Miles to see your face.” (Joshi 7)

This song dearly addresses the mountains at the very beginning of the novel giving the feel of a connection of Billy with the tribals. The sudden disappearance of Billy from the civilised world makes him appear dead to his friends and family. But later one of his friends mentions Billy's interest in tribals, myths, and witchcraft, making it appear intriguing yet convincing enough to guess that Billy's disappearance was intentional. For Billy, there exists a strong primitive force that is there inside him, making him strong enough to break the boundaries and seek out tribals, away from an organised and sophisticated life. Billy believes that he has found his true identity among the tribals of the Maikala hills. Those tribals consider Billy as their king, a messiah, and adhere to his words religiously. They have faith in Billy's abilities which makes them think of Billy as having a special power. It is among the tribals that Billy finds his true love, Bilasia, to whom he later gets married.

In the novel, tribals are symbolised as an innocent part of society living in the vicinity of nature with equal purity in their deeds. The tribal friend of Billy, Dhunia, shows the trust and faith the whole clan has for Billy. Dhunia's innocence displays the difference between the people from civilised society and the tribals. The tribals are shown to be free of materialistic burdens and worldly strains. But the only thread that binds them is mutual trust. Considering Billy as their King is the proof of innocence they have. There may be poverty and illiteracy among those tribes residing in extreme interior areas of rural India, but that is not a valid reason to consider them uncivilised compared to the urban Indian population. *“Although rural life has been dealt with in a number of Indian English novels, Tribals as such have largely been depicted in them. This fact testifies to the conspiracy of silence against a large chunk of society that is doomed to remain marginalised and*

lead life in periphery. The reasons for this silence are not far to seek given the urban and westernised background of Indian English writers and their preoccupation with urban life and its problems. However, the reference to tribal life are sporadically mentioned in Arun Joshi's The Strange Case of Billy Biswas." (Chaturvedi)

In the novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, the existential struggle seems to be focused mainly on Billy Biswas, but it is the existential struggles of the tribals which are subtly portrayed through Billy. Though dealt with a limited extent, and only a few tribal characters visibly, the portrayal of tribals has been strong and impressive in the novel. The two major tribal characters namely, Bilasia and Dhunia, leave a strong mark on the life of the protagonist Billy as well as the plot of the novel. The loyalty of Dhunia, the love of Bilasia, and the dedication and truthfulness of the whole tribal clan of the Maikala hills towards Billy depict how they are different from the urban elite class and why Billy finds his escape in the tribals. The escape of Billy, from his mainstream life to the primitives, might appear foolish to the readers in the beginning, but later towards the end, they can find out the difference between the civilised and the primitives. It is the truth and honesty that Billy has craved for his whole life and he finds these among the tribals residing in the lap of nature. *"In this novel Arun Joshi has presented tribal life in its purest form. After so many years of independence, India still has many such tribal clans. They are still untouched by modern development and in Wordsworthian language, worldly dust has still not settled on them. Though in one way it is good but if we see it from another aspect then it is quite painful situation as well. Lot of awe surrounds the life of a tribal; their life is interspersed in many literary works. A large part of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas by Arun Joshi depicts the life of tribal in the background of Billy's life."* (Mathur 80)

Gita Mehta (1943), a renowned novelist, journalist, and documentary filmmaker is well known for the themes of cultural diversity and spiritual quests in her works. Her major works deal with historical, political, religious, and cultural topics in fiction and non-fiction as well. Her third novel *A River Sutra*, published in the year 1993, is a collection of six different stories happening near the bank of river Narmada, in Vano village. The six different stories about six different characters are linked to each other and form a novel. The binding link between the six stories is the common narrator, a retired bureaucrat, who chooses to escape from city life. After fulfilling his worldly duties, the narrator opts for the job of a manager at a government rest house in the Vano village situated near the bank of river Narmada. The narrator is unnamed yet an important figure holding the novel in a “*sutra*”, thread. The six stories in the novel are namely, the Monk’s story, the Teacher’s story, the Executive’s story, the Courtesan’s story, the Musician’s story, and the Minstrel’s story. Since the first chapter, there is the presence of tribals mentioned in the novel. The tribes of Vano village believe that the river Narmada annuls the effect of snakebites. Considering Narmada as their deity, the tribals personify her and recite an invocation praying to the river –

“Salutation in the morning and at night, O Narmada!
Defend me from the serpent’s poison”. (Mehta 4)

Nature-worship is one of the most important cultures among the tribals. Their faith in nature is always unflinching. The tribals of Vano village worship their deity which is “*a stone image of a half-woman with the full breasts of a fertility symbol but the torso of a coiled snake.*” (Mehta 4) Further in the novel, it is shown how tribal women of Vano village roam around to collect wood as fuel and to cook their food. The struggles faced by tribals are very subtly depicted through

this little segment. Though the whole novel consists of various mentions of tribes, their myths, and rituals, the Executive's story revolves mainly around the tribals of Vano village. Nitin Bose, the executive of a tea company in Calcutta, comes to stay at the rest-house to find ways to exempt himself. Nitin Bose is enchanted by a tribal woman named Rima. Rima, the tribal woman, is a tea-picker at the tea estate where Nitin Bose works. In due course of time, Nitin gets infatuated with Rima as she regularly visits him. This infatuation leads to an obsession that Nitin finds hard to get rid of. He is unable to decide whether Rima is real or merely an illusion as Nitin has never seen Rima in daylight. Rima seduces him with tribal songs which keep hovering in his mind-

“Bring me my oil and my collyrium.
Sister, bring my mirror and the vermillion.
Make haste with my flower garland
My lover waits impatient in the bed.” (Mehta 83)

A tribal priest tries to free Nitin from possession of Rima's spirit but fails. The manager of the tea state later tells him about the tribal ritual practiced to free one's soul from possession of spirits. The tribals of the Vano village come forward to help Nitin. To perform the ritual, the guards take him to the shrine situated on the bank of the river Narmada. There the tribals ask him to make an idol of the goddess with mud. Later in a procession, they take the idol to the river. Holding the idol in his hand, Nitin immerses it in the river water and chants the recitation to river Narmada. With the help of a tribal ritual, Nitin is freed from the possession of a spirit. The devotion of tribals towards their deity and their faith in such supernatural elements takes Nitin into his solution. However, Mr. Chagla explains the deeper meanings of the invocation of the rituals performed by the tribals. He

says the snake venom mentioned in the incantation is desired. It is a human desire which acts like venom if it reaches the level of obsession. The power of desire must be in the control of humans or else it will appear as the spirit which takes possession of our minds. The civilised world heads back to the tribals at the time of such needs. Such simple yet effective remedies are innumerable stored in tribal culture. Away from the basic facilities, it is the faith of tribals in nature and rituals that keep them hale and hearty in scarcity. *“Being the descendants of old civilisation, they are by no means undisciplined, uncivilised and barbarous. The release of a murky fragrance from their body is confined to exceptional cases. Their way of life is characterised by simplicity and naturalness, songs and dances, laughter and humour. This way of life may not appeal to the inhabitants of the civilised world but for them it is indispensable. In a nutshell, their life is governed by spontaneity, love, desire, selfless service, struggles and their belief in primordial power.”* (Chaturvedi 72)

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004), a renowned English novelist, in her novel *The Coffin Dam* (1969) deals with the issue of the construction of a dam around a tribal area. Natural resources are shown as mere assets for human development. The dam being built is an ambitious project to furnish the coming generations with development in power resources. Tribals are asked to vacate the land for construction purposes. The western philosophy of growth is portrayed against the Indian ideology towards nature and ecology. The western philosophy of exploitation of nature for materialistic fulfillment makes local tribals fall into misery. The conflict between material urges and the supremacy of nature and racial conflict is portrayed in a detailed way in the novel. The novel portrays many tribal characters as innocent, docile, and passive. Similarly, Manohar Malgaonkar (1913-

2010) in his novel *The Princes* (1963), set in Central India, deals with issues like the caste system, the status of women in pre-independence India, and the socio-political issues related to the royal family. The theme of conflict and connection between tribals and the royals is one of the major themes in the novel. Arun Joshi, Gita Mehta, Kamala Markandaya, and Manohar Malgaonkar have dealt with the themes related to tribals in their social, political, cultural, and economic aspects in different backgrounds and plots. The portrayal of tribal India in Indian English fiction has been realistic. The challenges faced by the tribals in these novels are almost similar to the real-life issues of tribals in India. Along with the issues, challenges, and way of life, the cultures and myths, folklore, and traditions are juxtaposed and correlated to the materialistic and sophisticated civilised society. The illiteracy and poverty prevailing in tribal India, however, do not affect the content and happiness enjoyed by the tribals in proximity to nature and the belief in the primordial deity.

Conclusion

At a creative level, there has been a considerable amount of work done about tribal society in Literature over centuries, yet there is a lot to be explored and put to print. To accomplish this task, Indian English fiction needs to come out of its urban elite perspective toward the marginalised. There is a need to understand the variations and similarities between civilised and marginalised societies. Tribal societies do not hanker after materialistic things to live a furnished life. They know how to survive with limited resources, that too mostly from nature. Nature is what gives them a place to reside and food to survive. The Earth, rivers, mountains, and every element of nature are like deities to them. They worship their means of survival as gods and goddesses. Their

mythical beliefs and folklore revolve around the thoughts of survival and the resources nature provides them. Their rituals are related to those deities in nature. Nature worship is a strong feature in itself for the tribal society. Despite being away from the materialistic society, they are rich in ways that cannot even be imagined by the civilised strata of our society. Tribals might seem invisible at the level of social and political issues, but the truth is in the records. The active participation of different tribes can be seen in national movements and struggles as documented in history. Their presence and importance are essential in completing the various strata of society as well as the environment. It is high time the challenges faced by the tribals should be brought into public knowledge. We need to learn what they go through and their struggles in survival. They are content in their ways of life but we, being a part of society, need to fulfill our duties towards them. The issues faced by the tribals all over India must be checked and dealt with by the government. Tribals are called primitives but that does not mean they don't have the right to lead a respected and fulfilling life. Literature has given the tribals an important position in creative and critical texts but that would not be enough to meet their challenges. A lot needs to be written and more to be done on the ground level.

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2

Hind Swaraj – Incessant Relevance in 21st Century

DR. MANISHA KHANNA

Abstract

A beacon of light for the millennial generation, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* exhorts a generation in a quagmire of materialistic possessions, unbridled free expressions, automation of life, relationships and conflicts, thereby destroying humanitarianism. Written in 1909 in the form of a dialogue between Author, representing Gandhi himself, and Reader, the common Indian, *Hind Swaraj* broadens its horizon to encompass the contemporary 21st century. In a colloquial language, Gandhi conveys highly contextual, complex and subtle ideas. As an observant leader he makes a distinction between positive historical renaissance – inspired attributes of modern political consciousness and the negative imperialistic propensities of exploitation of vanquished nations by the proponents of western civilisation. Hence, with neither an outright acceptance nor rejection of modern civilisation, *Hind Swaraj* is a manifesto for a new world order based on efficacy of ethics and morality over matter, “a rather incendiary manifesto” [Ericson, 1969: 217], “a proclamation of ideological independence” [Dalton, 1993: 16]. Consequently for fear of sedition, it was banned in 1910 by the colonial government.

Keywords: Neo colonialism, disillusionment, *swaraj*, reforms, coalescence.

I.

Gandhi's Civilization

Gandhi considered civilisation a moral enterprise, “a mode of conduct which points to man the path of duty” [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 13]. Therefore he set himself against the dogmas of modern west based on deplorable and unscrupulous

Machiavellianism and selfish European economic policies. *Hind Swaraj* focuses on the themes of colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism and rationalist materialism, perpetuated by modern civilisation leading to annihilation of humanitarianism.

Colonial Imperialism

Gandhi categorically insisted that, “ The English have not taken India: we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength: but because we keep them.”[*Hind Swaraj*, Ch.7] Overcoming colonialism in our own consciousness was of paramount importance to Gandhi and he believed that unless this “intimate enemy was repudiated and unless the loss and recovery of self under colonialism was addressed, Indians would be enslaved by one power or another, whether foreign or native, a loss of Hindustan with Englistan”. [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 4] He deplors, “We want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger’s nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want”. [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 4]

Industrial Capitalism

Gandhi reckoned industrial capitalism as the vehement force behind colonial imperialism, which allowed profit to degrade labor, valued machines more than humans and preferred automation to humanism. Gandhi dislikes all aspects of modernity, which he finds immoral. “Hospitals are institutions for propagating sin”, he says. He believed that railways were bad because they spread bubonic plague. Trains made pilgrimage accessible, thereby reducing the value of the repentant devotee. Gandhi dislikes lawyers and

doctors and wants professions abolished. He says, "My firm opinion is that the lawyers have enslaved India, have accentuated Hindu-Mohamedan dissensions and have confirmed English authority." He was against the modern justice system because "They became more unmanly and cowardly when they resorted to the courts of law." [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 15] He felt, "Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin. It is machinery that has impoverished India". He knew that, "India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilisation." [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 19]

Rationalist Materialism

Gandhi believed that the advancements in the realm of science and technology are curtailing humanity dangerously. "Just as dirt is matter misplaced, reason misplaced is lunacy! I plead not for the suppression of Reason, but due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself. [CW 6:106] Truth beyond science or reason was the epitome for Gandhi. It was a reality perceived beyond the senses. He emphasised upon reaching out to a reality which would give dynamism, meaning and value to freedom and hope. Gandhi believed, "India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation; they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country." [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 20]

II.

Gandhi's critique in 21st century

Gandhi's abhorrent criticism of modern civilisation had its genesis in the condemnation of colonialism, imperialism,

industrialism and capitalism. Today's neo-colonial world has different interpretation of politics, technology, industrialisation and culture due to increased cosmopolitanism. But the disenchantment in society, caught in a quagmire, is questioning the rationale of such civilisation. "The kind of questions Gandhi asked nearly eight decades ago are the ones which now face both the underdeveloped and the post-industrial societies caught up in a deep upsurge of confusion and disillusionment". [Sethi, 1979: 3]

Neo-Colonialism

The civilising mission of colonialism at its fundamental level is vehemently rejected by Gandhi. He felt that, "If Indians would but revert to their own glorious civilisation; either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone". [*Hind Swaraj*, Preface to English Edition]

The post-colonial era brought focus on the ethical issues between the coloniser and the colonised, the dominant and the dominated, the oppressor and the oppressed. With the formation of a unipolar world, post globalisation, there is a paradigm shift from the disempowerment to empowerment, dependency to interdependency. However, the present world is not a utopian world. There are deep fissures between developed and developing nations, privileged and underprivileged citizens; reinforced politically, economically, culturally and socially by the overpowering west.

Colonialism divested the Indians of their identity, intrinsic dignity, self-respect, self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Gandhi sought to redefine courage and resistance of colonial masters through passive resistance and non-violence, thereby inculcating the ideology of Indianness in the

masses; relevant today in a society governed by cultural nationalism. He believed, "the tendency of Indian civilisation is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western Civilisation is to propagate immortality". [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 4]

He argues that "Western civilisation is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed. It is a profound repudiation. Not only is western civilisation unhealthy for India, but western civilisation is by its own virtue unhealthy." [*Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 4]

Post Industrialisation

New technology reduced drudgery at work and gave hope for freedom from degrading and monotonous life. But Industrialisation also created a compulsive consumerist society with sole motive of profit and market capitalisation. Technology has mechanised our world, thereby inevitably leading to disenchantment in society.

Environmental crisis and climate change across the globe is a manifestation of this loss of innocence due to unbridled Industrialisation. New technologies are being sought to repair the damage done by old technologies. Gandhi rejected nineteenth century optimism which sought liberation of humanity with the help of science and technology.

Post Modernism

Post-modern rationalism has self-contradicted itself, undermining any claims of humanism, justice and equality. Gandhi's critique of modernity was to contain excessive rationality within reasonable boundaries without irrationally revolting against reason.

III

Gandhi's Avouchment of Indian Culture

Gandhi yearned to present a sincere portrayal of Indian culture through *swaraj*, *swadeshi* and *Satya*, as an antipode of western civilisation.

Swaraj

Gandhi interprets *swaraj* as self-rule and self-government. Self-control was the foundation of self-rule and rule over oneself was the fulcrum of self-government. Gandhi conceptualised local self-government, prioritising self-rule over self-government.

Gandhi championed to counter the colonial rule through self-respect, self-realisation of toiling masses as well as for the privileged classes by focusing on welfare of all. "My patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of freedom and peace! [Young India, April 13, 1924, p112]

The cornerstones of *swaraj* for Gandhi were self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance. *Charkha* and *Khadi* were symbolic of self-reliance, a symbol of unity of Indianness, freedom from economic dependency and equality for all sections of the society. The 21st century India realises the importance of *atmanirbharta*, consequently has focus on "Make in India".

For Gandhi, the ethics behind *swaraj* was that "real *swaraj* will not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused". [Prabhu 1961:4] Rights are legitimised by duties as they both are founded on *Satya* and dharma. Gandhi believed that, "Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.13]

Swadeshi

Gandhi believed that the quest for *swaraj* was through the implementation of *swadeshi* at grass roots level with “village as the node in a network of oceanic circles that overlapped and spread out in its ever widening embrace”. [Parekh 1995:56] “Village implied not an entity, but a set of values”. [Sethi 1979: 23] Gandhi favoured a minimal state that privileged rural over urban India and considered the duty of centralised state to appropriate what belonged to the local community and the individual.

Satya

Gandhi considered truth to be experiential, reflexive, in alignment with the path shown by the Rishis of Vedic times and the Buddha. Therefore *satyagrah* was not just a political strategy but a means to an end. The mutuality in *satyagrah* eclipsed the paradox between the oppressor and the oppressed. Passive resistance, for Gandhi was “a method of securing rights by personal suffering”. [Hind *Swaraj* Ch.17]

“Gandhi’s *satyagrah* was an ingenious combination of reason, morality and politics; it appealed to the opponent’s head, heart and interests”. [Parekh 1995: 156] Gandhi brought *ahimsa* to the centre stage of freedom struggle against the British. He was aware that adopting “methods of violence to drive out the English would be a suicidal policy. [Hind *Swaraj* Ch 15] Gandhi based his ideology on *Gita*, where *Arjuna*, a reluctant warrior is motivated by *Lord Krishna* to join the holy the battle against *Kauravas*, thereby legitimising the war against the evil by the good. *Gita’s nishkamakarma* is the basis of Gandhi’s *ahimsa* based *satyagrah*. He believed that, “the real meaning of the statement that we are a law – abiding nation is that we are resisters. When we do not like certain laws, we

do not break the heads of law – givers but we suffer and do not submit to the laws.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 17]

IV

Today’s 21st Century

The present scenario of conflicts between states, Russia-Ukraine, China-Taiwan, USA-Iran, India-Pakistan makes the ideology of passive resistance, *ahimsa*, *satyagrah* all the more relevant. The various factors which culminated in these conflicts are the collapse of socialism, crisis of capitalism and globalisation in an interdependent world and the perennial violence of our atomic age.

Post Socialism

The plethora of issues caused by rampant liberalisation and privatisation across the globe has created deep fissures between developed and developing nations, privileged and underprivileged classes of societies, *Bharat* and India. Gandhi had intuited this long ago and he yearned for an equality and equity across all the divides of caste, class and religion through *Sarvodaya*. He believed that, “in reality there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another’s religion. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.17]

He believed “the force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms. There is the harm in the exercise of brute force, never in that of pity.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.17] He inspired all, “let each do his duty. If I do my duty, that is, serve myself, I shall be able to serve others.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.20] “Impoverished India can become free, but it

will be hard for any India made rich through immorality to regain its freedom." [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.19] Gandhi emphasised on imbibing the values of ancient Indian School of character building, "it has the first place in it and that is primary education. A building erected on that foundation will last." He believed that, "those who want to become passive resisters for the service of the country have to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth and cultivate fearlessness." [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.17]

A decentralised participative democratic and human society would eliminate the iniquitous divisions caused by excessive consumerism. He declared, "but today my co-operate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of Parliamentary Swaraj in a day." [M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, January 1921] Gandhi felt, "we measure the universe by our own miserable foot-rule; when we are slaves, we think that the whole universe is enslaved. Because we are in an abject condition, we think that the whole of India is in that condition." [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.17]

Gandhi believed that any discontent in society would pave the way for reforms and bring a participative parliamentary government in India. He said, "Unrest is, in reality, discontent. This discontent is a useful thing. As long as a man is contented with his present lot, so long is it difficult to persuade him to come out of it. Therefore it is that every reform must be preceded by discontent. We throw away things we have, only when we cease to like them." [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.17] Gandhi firmly believed that, "all reforms owe their origin to the initiation in opposition of minorities, in opposition to majorities." [*Hind Swaraj* Ch.17]

Gandhi had a clear and well-articulated political philosophy leading to India's sustainable economy and believed that local self-government is fundamental to the

Indian state and Indian society as a whole. He was of the opinion that state should not have absolute power and envisioned institutions organised in concentric circles, with local self-government at the centre. These thoughts of Gandhi were fervently opposed by Jawahar Lal Nehru and Dr B. R. Ambedkar, who considered state essential for stability and progress into modernity post-independence. They were concerned about the bitter stratifications of Indian society and saw a centralised state as the only institution capable of overcoming them.

In Gandhi's views, "individual freedom could be maintained only in autonomous, self-reliant communities that offer opportunities to the people for fullest participation." [Roy 1984: 123] Gandhian decentralisation meant creating a parallel politics in which people's power is institutionalised to counter the centralising and alienating forces of the state. He favored organising the Panchayats with the Gram Sabhas to identify the locally available resources for development in agricultural and industrial sectors. Gandhi felt. "Democracy becomes an impossible thing until power is shared by all, but let not democracy degenerate into mobocracy." [Sharma 1987: 48]

Gandhian dream was fulfilled through the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution of India, one of the greatest achievements of 20th century and a milestone in the history of local self-government. The provision of Gram Sabha in Panchayati Raj System and Tribal Self-Rule paved the way for realising Gandhian dream of village self-government for "India lives in her seven and half lakhs of villages" He was convinced that, "If the villages perish, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost" Through the Tribal Self-Rule, the adivasi people are trying to protect their "Jal, Jangle and Jamin". Gandhi firmly

believed that Gram Sabhas would create a resilient India and felt that, “a day pot would break through impact, if not with one stone, then with another. The way to save the pot is not to keep it away from the danger point but to bake it so that no stone would break it” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 10]

Globalisation

Globalisation was acknowledged to be an ancient phenomenon by Gandhi and claimed that, “it was not a bigger threat to India as various races starting from the Greeks and Huns to the British had invaded India but ended up being part of the nation.” [Mandela 2003:78] However, Gandhi was aware of the perils of global society such as cultural and political colonialism, industrialisation, and commercialisation of economy, leading to strife and unrest. Gandhi’s *Swadeshi* was a more personalised and communitarian society on a humanitarian scale, where individual resources and community interests were in alignment, while “civilisation is like a mouse gnawing while it’s soothing us.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 8]

Violence

Gandhi was of the opinion that, “History is a record of the wars of the world. A nation which has no history, that is, no wars, is a happy nation.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 4] Unfortunately the modern world is suffering under the deluge of violence across the globe. His views, “to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it” are valid in the 21st century. [[*Hind Swaraj* Ch 15]

Gandhi attempted towards self-control in order to fearlessly and non-violently win over the violent others. He said, “Strength lies in the absence of fear, not in the quantity

of flesh and muscle we have on our bodies.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 8]

In order to bridge the dichotomy between rights and duties, integrating them with freedom of choice as well as an obligation of inner conscience, Gandhi’s ideology is incessantly relevant in the 21st century like a shining star, guiding humanity through a labyrinth. He believed, “Passive Resistance is an all – sided sword, it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 17]

V

Gandhi’s Coalescence

Gandhi attempts at coalescence of modernity with tradition. He acknowledges the contribution of progressive civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality and poverty alleviation to strengthen and fortify the society. He believed, “that country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has even been such a country. [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 10]

Gandhi’s *Swaraj* amalgamates individual and community, rights and duties, reason and faith, spiritual progress and economic advancement, self-realisation and political obligations. Thus, Gandhi integrates *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Gita* and *The Sermon on the Mount*. He says, “In reality there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another’s religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation.” [*Hind Swaraj* Ch 10]

VI Conclusion – Indispensability of Gandhian Ideology

All of Gandhi’s ideas can be seeded in *Hind Swaraj*. He centered on the periphery of Indian Politics with *anthyodaya*, de-brahminised Hinduism, revolutionised education through *Nai Talem*, elevated economy by riveting on *Khadi*. The social planning, democratic decentralisation in 21st century India

bears the passionate Gandhian stamp of non-violence, truth and individual freedom. The tenets of *Hind Swaraj* accentuates for an in-depth analysis and constructive dialogue in society for inclusive reforms against the disquieting issues. Gandhi's ideology that, "we would regard the humblest and the lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land" is indeed indispensable in the 21st century. [Gandhi 1962:71]

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BOOK REVIEW

1

Review of Chandra Shekhar Dubey's Poetry Collection *The Door and the World*

RAJIV KHANDELWAL

The Door and the World | A Collection of Poems | Chandra Shekhar Dubey | Authors Press (2020) | ISBN 978-93-90155-55-2 | pp 84 | ₹ 295 / \$ 15

Chander Shekhar Dubey's anthology, *The Door and the World*, incorporates sixty-nine poems on personal, social, political, philosophical, and contemporary issues.

The poet has aptly titled his volume: 'The Door and the World' as the door to the city opens, the poet visualizes a modern city as a jungle, a city that signifies rejection more than a welcome, in his poem "Urban Jungle" he says:

*In this vast ocean of humans
half live and half dead,
there is no love, no compassion
but a meaningless existence...
... where living is burden...
...and relationships are need based ...
...a life lived with condition (Pg 17)*

A 'Door' symbolizes a passageway or an obstacle that blocks one's way, so that movement of entry or exit is restricted from one site to another. Significantly, an open door is a sign of welcome, while a closed door displays unseen and unknown

possibilities that may reflect safety or captivity. In the poem "Door", the poet aptly records:

*Doors hold keys to many hopes
The door conceals many things (Pg 16)*

The book opens with a prayer in the belief that it gives strength because the 'silent giver' heals all pains. The poet writes:

*O' Illuminator of cosmos
the silent giver of all
Whose divine flames ignite
the sun, stars and moons
Heal my pains with your holy touch (Pg 15)*

The poem "CAA Protests" reveals the poet as a socially aware citizen of his milieu, saddened by the current state of political affairs and keenly observing the discordant situations. His deep contemplation is the result of this very deliberative poem where he scrutinizes the cacophonous role of the people involved. He writes,

*Who are they?
Shouting slogans, filling the air
with Toxic slogans, lies in the streets?
Knowing not what they are protesting...(Pg 57)*

In the poem "Palghar Lynching", the poet skilfully lays bare the ache and torments of the saints before they were lynched to death:

*We courted death with our stoic silence
like credulous victims of deluded
fanatics in disgraced ceremony (Pg 56)*

Such occurrences in the country consume the poet's anguish that overflows in the poem "Gloom",

*...tides of hatred swallowed harmony
in my own city I am an alien city...
...caught in the crowd of faceless faces
and blood shot eyes...(Pg 21)*

Since this volume comprises poems composed on different themes mentioned above, the book contains five poems on the global tragic effects of 'Corona' that took the world by storm. The poem "Conversation" is about the Lockdown period, when the 'alive and busy' life with its 'clamorous clutters and noisy wheels' got 'locked in their cells' due to a 'virus.' The poet writes,

*Silent night whispered to
salubrious day
"Where have you lost your noise?"
The day tweaked – 'in Lockdown' (Pg 43)*

Similarly, the poem "Grand Spectacle" paints the misery of the migrant laborers, who, having lost their jobs, were even deprived of transportation to haul them back home. Therefore, these laborers had no option but to trudge to their native villages hundreds of miles away, desolate, penniless with all hopes lost for survival, facing a bleak future.

*Broken in heart we carry
our bags and children on our backs
sweltering, sweating and panting...
...walking barefooted
with pangs of hunger
and burdens of broken dreams...*

*...What destiny awaits us
On the way or at the end of our endless journey?
.... ..
What made us cling to our frail hope? (Pg 51)*

"Migrant Labours" is a poem on the same stream of thought and once again lists the anxiety, distress, hopelessness of the laborers on having lost their livelihood because of Corona. The poet voices the agony of these miserable workers in these lines,

*We cried for help in void
in a heartless city we made home
with our sweating hands and faltering
feet burning our dreams into
lustre of their homes. (Pg 31)*

Notwithstanding the anxiety, apprehension, and depression, besides physical and mental suffering during 'Corona,' "Life will Smile again" is an optimistic poem, evoking hope and cheerfulness. The theme is on the reversal of life in all its splendor. The poet sensitively writes,

*World will smile again...
...Life will sing again selling dreams
to old and new for living and smiling (Pg 41)*

"Corona's Ghost" Pg 48-50, is an engrossing poem that narrates the birth of Corona and its world-wide disastrous effect on the human race. It reads like a mini epic for which the poet deserves accolades.

The poet appears to be sensitively conscious of current affairs around the world as depicted in the poem "Day of Judgment", where he paints the picture of a black American, George Floyd of Minneapolis, who was alleged to have bought cigarettes with fake USD 20 currency bill. Less than seventeen minutes later the first squad arrived at the scene. Floyd was mauled, pinned beneath three police officers, beaten, became unconscious and died. The poem sadly captures the torturous episode in incredibly emotional words about what George must have felt at that moment of time. Here is a glimpse of what the poet assumes the man must have experienced

*...As if hell broke loose
on my chest
He pressed it hard,
And all murmur stopped
History repeats itself*

*I knew. I knew. I knew
 But with such ruthlessness?
 That I never knew, never knew
 Was my crime?
 Greater than their judgement? (Pg 55)*

Modern poets also compose poetry around their families, and Dubey is no exception to the rule. He genuinely wonders whether celebrating 'Mothers Day' on a single calendar day to articulate our admiration for her is enough. In his poem "Mother's Day" he writes,

*No words can sing mother's glory.
 How can our words script those moments?
 Freezing on a day?
 Mother makes her presence felt every moment
 Wrapped in days and years.
 Mother is constant celebration of life –
 In every breath and every sensation. (Pg. 64-65)*

In the poem "To My Mother," he clearly and in an easy-to-understand manner recounts to his readers that he remembers his mother each day, not just on one specific day, because she daily lives in his prayers,

*O' Mother! I hold you in my prayers
 for countless blessings showering on me. (Pg 63)*

Every person, at some period of his life, is bound to fall in love or experience this intense emotion. The love Poems of Dubey display the emotions of a 'jilted lover' yet, in a few poems, the poet enjoys the shared moments spent with his loved one, and this is made evident in the poem "Requiem," where he lovingly captures that moment in these lines,

*Here lying,
 in winter afternoon,
 flashing the days spent
 with you wrapped
 in moment sweet and sour. (Pg 23)*

The above quoted lines reveal that the lover is lonely in the absence of his paramour. That the poem is an outburst of past passions deeply rooted in the subconscious that has pursued his present. He confesses, "I feel like a prisoner lying in Plato's cave." The allegorical reference to 'Plato's cave' signifies that in reality the feelings and emotions felt by the poet owe its subsistence to "sketches" that "splash before [his] eyes." He writes,

*...closed to the outer world
till the philosopher in me beckons
to see the reality beyond the cave walls (Pg 24)*

Therefore, the spirit of the lover exists in the poet's mind as explicitly exposed in the poem "Being."

*...lost memories
in your smile, ...
...You live –
in my consciousness
like wine through water. (Pg 27)*

The lost lover is hence, the poet's muse, as witnessed in the aptly titled poem "Silent Muse."

*...You are my silent muse –
I translate your silent whispers
Into sounds of words, ... (Pg 34)*

The poet seems to have lost his love for reasons not disclosed to the readers, as stated in the poem "Lost Moments," where he recalls,

*...melodies molten with memories,
You redeem a stolen moment,
A lost word,
an old tale long forgotten.
In every encounter –
I live and relive those lost words,
stolen moments and forgotten tales untold. (Pg 36)*

The “Phoenix” is another poem with past love memories that recount the poet’s lovelorn self, revealed in the following lines,

*...I break into pieces, gathering the petals
of memories buried deep in dark recess...
...Your touch awakens in me
the lost memories of kisses,
the bloom of promises, words felt,
but unsaid in moments lived...
...to fill the gap between your coming
and going across the memory lanes.*

The poem "Wound," describes the poet's feelings of cooling one's heels - "I waited in silence/for days unknown," anticipating some words, with the emotion of the 'madness of a jilted lover' and the sentiment finds expression in the lines,

*...no words, no tears
from you made me cry...
...laden with splinters of darkness
tearing my heart into pieces...
...Opening new layers
of deep cut wounds.
I sat alone whole night
with the moon, wind and wound.(Pg 69)*

The poem “Accursed” is a fascinating example where the poet exposes the passionate consummation of lovers. In the lines below,

*I was lying with her
naked and panting with moans...
...Accursed I slipped into her arms
Slipping through her silvery mounds.
Like an unsavoury sailor on run
I lost to her lips –*

The poetry of Dubey is overwhelmingly imaginative. The poet must be congratulated for his descriptive/narrative poems loaded with vivid imagery, of which the poem

"Moon" (Pg 20), is a fine example. The poet has deftly employed visual imagery in the poem such as "clouds fell," "Grasshoppers whisked," "Mulberry caterpillars rubbing their nose," "silvery moon smiled," "silvery sparks," "moon blossomed." Similarly, there are instances of auditory images like "chirping birds," "rustling...scratching," "Yawned in wheezing sounds." Tactile imagery is visible in the poem "Earthen Urn" (Pg 22), "I gathered the ashes / From the cold pyre...." The Poem "Requiem" (Pg 23), uses olfactory imagery in verse, "With you wrapped/In moments sweet and sour / I cherish the sweet sensations...."

The poet's implementation of other poetic devices such as Alliteration also enriches his poetry, for example, "Lives like a life lived with condition," (Urban Jungle, Pg 17), "In ecstasy singing soul's song in satiety"(Beatific Smile, Pg 28), "From the depth of deepest despairs... / (Life's Celebrations Pg 30), "Of a divine delight dancing /.../ I float to hold the soothing spangles/ Suffused with joys, rippling and rolling.../ (Benediction, Pg 35) besides in a host of other poems there are examples of word combinations with alliterative sound effects that delight with their sound, example, 'engaging eyes', 'meditative moments', 'whispering winds', 'soothing spangles', 'clamorous clutters', 'starry spikes,, leafy legends and so on.

In a few poems, the poet tends to offer advice, as witnessed in the poem "Empathy" (Pg 32), where he writes, "A loving word to a distressed soul/ acts as an ointment to a writhing wound."

Some poems convey a philosophical bent, as seen in the poem "Two Spheres" (Pg 33), "Life like a constellation has its own pathway./Let us understand this truth to live and let live."

In the poem "River" (Pg 40), the poet makes a philosophical statement, "Reminds me that destiny of a river lies / In flowing forward and not receding." The lines are philosophical, and the reader can interpret the river as time, which flows forward and cannot flow in reverse.

Some of the poems of Chandra Shekhar Dubey have a prosaic touch, particularly the poem "Alchemist" (Pg 66), which reads like a fascinating and engaging prose poem.

Chandra Shekhar Dubey as a poet uses the language of daily life, spoken or written, for they represent clearly what the poet means, and the reader understands it just as the poet intends him to understand the same.

The poet deserves a pat on the back for this very readable volume, which could be a must-buy for budding poets who need to learn the use of poetic devices in their poems – this volume is a good read on the use of images and alliteration.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Fish Short Story Prize. In 2017, he was nominated for a *Pushcart Prize*. His novel, *Give Them Unquiet Dreams*, was a *Kirkus Reviews Best Book of the Year*. He was shortlisted for the *Aesthetica Creative Writing Award 2021* for his poetry.

15. **Jason Ryberg** is the author of eighteen books of poetry, six screenplays, a few short stories, a box full of folders, notebooks and scraps of paper that could one day be (loosely) construed as a novel, and, a couple of angry letters to various magazine and newspaper editors. He is currently an artist-in-residence at both The Prospero Institute of Disquieted P/o/e/t/i/c/s and the Osage Arts Community, and is an editor and designer at Spartan Books. His latest collection of poems is *The Great American Pyramid Scheme* (co-authored with W.E. Leathem, Tim Tarkelly and Mack Thorn, OAC Books, 2022). He lives part-time in Kansas City, MO with a rooster named Little Red and a billygoat named Giuseppe and part-time somewhere in the Ozarks, near the Gasconade River, where there are also many strange and wonderful woodland critters.
16. **John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Red Weather*. Latest books, "Covert" "Memory outside the Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Washington Square Review* and *Open Ceilings*.
17. **John Zedolik** is an adjunct English professor at Chatham University and Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has published poems in such journals as *Abbey* (USA), *The Bangalore Review* (IND), *Commonweal* (USA), *FreeXpresSion* (AUS), *Orbis* (UK), *Paperplates* (CAN), *Poem* (USA), *Poetry Salzburg Review* (AUT), *Third Wednesday* (USA), *Transom* (USA), and in the

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. In 2019, he published a full-length collection, entitled *Salient Points and Sharp Angles* (CW Books), which is available through Amazon, and last September published another collection, *When the Spirit Moves Me* (Wipf & Stock), which consists of spiritually-themed poems and is also available through Amazon.

18. **Keith Inman's** work can be found in major libraries across North America, in Dublin, and Zurich. His latest book, *The Way History Dries*, 2021, from Black Moss Press, unfolds like a novel. Canlit compared his previous work, *The War Poems: Screaming at Heaven*, to Atwood, Boyden and Itani. Keith lives in Thorold, Ontario, Canada.
19. **Madhab Chandra Jena** born in Ishanpur, Jajpur, Odisha in 1980. He is the founder of Om Krishna Arts and Science Research Association. He is M-Tech in production Engg. from BPUT, Odisha. He is the author of three books namely "Kharabela O Pheribala", "Aloka" and "Bigyan Quiz" His poetry and short stories have been published in magazines like "Muse India", "The challenge" Verbal Arts, Indian Review etc. He has also written many books which is published online in Amazon Kindle.
20. **Mehreen Ahmed**, multiple contest winners for short fiction, is an Australian novelist born in Bangladesh. Her historical fiction, *The Pacifist*, is a Drunken Druid's Editor's Choice and an Amazon Audible bestseller. *Gatherings*, is nominated for the James Tait Black Prize for fiction. Her flash fiction has also been nominated for 3xbotN, Pushcart. Her novels have been critically acclaimed by Midwest Book Review, DD Magazine, The Wild Atlantic Book Club to name a few. She is a juror to the KM Anthru Award, reader for Five minute Lit, and featured writer on Flash Fiction North and Connotation

Press. Her works have been translated into German, Greek and Bangla.

21. **Michael Lee Johnson** lived ten years in Canada, Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in the greater Chicagoland area, IL. He has 264 YouTube poetry videos. Michael Lee Johnson is an internationally published poet in 44 countries, several published poetry books, nominated for 4 Pushcart Prize awards and 6 Best of the Net nominations. He is editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, all available on Amazon, and has several poetry books and chapbooks. He has over 443 published poems. Michael is the administrator of 6 Facebook Poetry groups. Member Illinois State Poetry Society: <http://www.illinoispoets.org/>.
22. **Michael Tyler** has been published by Takahe, Bravado, Adelaide Literary, PIF, Daily Love, Danse Macabre, Apocrypha and Abstractions, Dash, The Fictional Café, Fleas On The Dog, and Cardinal Sins. Michael writes from a shack overlooking the ocean just south of the edge of the world. He has been published in several literary magazines and plans a short story collection sometime before the Andromeda Galaxy collides with ours and
23. **Monisha Raman's** essays have been published by *New Asian Writing*, *Where the Leaves Fall*, *The Curious Reader*, *Kitaab*, *Spacebar Magazine*, *The Punch Magazine*, *Planted Journal* and *Feminism in India*. Her works of fiction have been published by *Phenomenal Literature GJLL*, *Bengaluru Review*, *The Punch Magazine*, *Active Muse*, *Indian Ruminations*, *Asian Extracts*, *The Universe Journal*, *Usawa Literary Review*, *Storizen Magazine* and *Jotted*. Her work was a part of the anthology *Narratives in Domestic Violence* by the International Human Rights Arts Festival. Her first collection of stories is being represented by Zuna Literary Agency.

24. **Nels Hanson** grew up on a small farm in the San Joaquin Valley of California and has worked as a farmer, teacher and contract writer/editor. His fiction received the San Francisco Foundation's James D. Phelan Award and Pushcart nominations in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. His poems received a 2014 Pushcart nomination, Sharkpack Review's 2014 Prospero Prize, and 2015 and 2016 Best of the Net nominations.
25. **Ngo Binh Anh Khoa** is a teacher of English in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. In his free time, he enjoys daydreaming and writing speculative poetry for entertainment. His poems have appeared in Weirdbook, Star*Line, Spectral Realms, and other venues.
26. **Nolo Segundo** is the pen name of L.J. Carber. Nolo only became a published poet as he neared his 8th decade, but has since had poems in published 100 literary magazines in the USA, UK, Canada, Romania, Australia, Sweden, Turkey and India. In 2020, a trade publisher released a collection of his work titled *The Enormity of Existence*, and in 2021 another collection titled *Of Earth and Earth*. He went on to teach ESL in Taiwan [where his wife is from] and Japan. His 3rd book, "Soul Songs", was just released.
27. **Paweł Markiewicz** was born 1983 in Siemiatycze. Lives in Poland. He is a poet and writer, who likes tender flash fiction as well as haiku and tanka.
28. **Phillip Frey's** history includes professional actor, produced screenwriter and writer/director of three short films, one of which showed at the New York Film Festival. He is now devoted only to writing prose. He currently has the privilege of his short stories appearing in over 20 literary journals and anthologies.
www.amazon.com/author/phillipfrey

29. **Prof. A. K. Bachchan**, Professor of English & Dean of Humanities, Lalit Narayan Mithila University (LNMU), Darbhanga, Bihar. He has guided and supervised several research scholars. He is also a chairman of Association for English Studies of India (AESI).
30. **Prof. Dr. K. V. Dominic**, English poet, critic, short story writer and editor has authored/edited 43 books including 13 collections of poems (seven in English and one each in Hindi, Bengali, French, Tamil, Gujarati and Malayalam translated by renowned writers) and 3 short story collections in English and Malayalam. There are five critical books on his poetry. He is the Secretary of Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and Critics (GIEWEC), and Chief Editor of the international refereed biannual research journals *Writers Editors Critics* (WEC) and *International Journal on Multicultural Literature* (IJML). He is a former Associate Professor of the PG and Research Department of English, Newman College, Thodupuzha, Kerala, India. PhD researches have been done on his poetry. Website: profkvdominic.com Email: prof.kvdominic@gmail.com
31. **Rajiv Khandelwal** is an Electrical Engineer by education and is now a business man by profession. Rajiv Khandelwal has published 4 volumes of Poetry – “Conch Shells and Cowries” – published in 1998, “Love is a Lot of Work” and “A Monument to Pigeons” both published in 2013. 4th poetry volume titled “A Time to Forget” – published 2017. Rajiv has been awarded “Literary Creative Award” by Naji Naaman’s Foundation for Gratis Culture, of Lebanon in which the Foundation had 2371 participants in their 2018 competition, from sixty six countries and has declared/rewarded 64 prize winners. Rajiv is one of the prize winners. <http://yourproductfinder.com>

32. **Ramzi Albert Rihani** is a Lebanese American writer. His poems have been published in several publications including Poetic Sun, Goats Milk Magazine, Last Leaves Magazine, Ariel Chart International Journal, The Piker Press, Active Muse, Ephemeral Elegies, and The Silent Journey Anthology. He is a published music critic, wrote and published a travel book *The Other Color – a Trip Around the World in Six Months* (FMA Press, 1984). He lives in Washington, DC.
33. **Rita Anderson**, an internationally-published and award-winning writer, has an MA Playwriting. Rita won the Ken Ludwig Playwriting Award, the top national prize from The Kennedy Center for “Best Body of Work.” She has had 100 productions and as many literary publications. Rita has had work developed with The Kennedy Center, The 24-Hour Plays Project, HBMG Foundation and Creede Repertory Theatre, The PlayGround Experiment, The Barrow Group, Reading Theatre Project, Mildred’s Umbrella (Museum of Dysfunction), Moving Parts Theatre (Paris, France), Woven Theatre and The Loom New Works Festival, and she was a pilot playwright for Hyde Park Theatre Writers’ Group. Rita is Producing Artistic Director of Mélange Theatre Company, and she is Faculty at Interlochen, but the highlight of her emerging career so far was sitting on a playwriting panel with Christopher Durang.
34. **Sandip Saha** from India won award and became finalist in poetry contests in USA. He published three poetry collections including “Trial of God”, “Loving women” by Amazon, 2021, one poetry chapbook, “Toast for women”, Oxford, UK, 2021 and 105 poems in 37 journals in six countries including India, USA, UK., Australia.

35. **Srinivas S** currently teaches English at the Rishi Valley School, India. He spends his free time taking long walks, watching cricket and discussing it with friends, and writing poetry.
36. **Suman Singh**, a former Secondary School English teacher, now dabbles in the creative process. Her feature articles have found space in 'Reader's Digest' 'Teacher Plus', 'Progressive Teacher', 'BR International' (Hong Kong), 'Children's World'. Her short stories have appeared in the "Times of India" and "Eves Touch" and poetry in 'The Enchanting Verses Literary Review', 'Quest', 'Asia Writes' "VerbalArt" "Phenomenal Literature" and in an anthology 'Rendezvous'.
37. **Tulika Swati**, Research Scholar, Department of English, Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar.
38. **William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Dogs Don't Care* (2022). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.



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