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# POINTS OF VIEW

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EDITOR

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# POINTS OF VIEW

Volume XI Number 1 Summer 2004

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## BOOK REVIEWS

# SHAKESPEARE'S LITTLE IRONIES

**S. Viswanathan**

Like life, Shakespeare holds an almost inexhaustible fund of ironies for us. Irony, both as a term and as a concept, at several levels of sense, has been much applied to Shakespearian drama in twentieth-century criticism and also if to a less extent to poetry and fiction in general. The concept has been used to characterize Shakespeare's vision of life and drama, especially his inclusive apprehension of the two or more sides to a question, to the operation and effect of his poetry and dramatic language, and, in short, to his attitude and his way of proceeding. The critical term irony in its currency in commentary has been taxonomised as dramatic irony, verbal irony and situational irony and so on. Besides, it serves to identify varieties such as tragic irony, comic irony, the ironies of history and time and the ironies of disguise and deception and of love which last abound in the comedies. I use the phrase little ironies to distinguish these from the larger, more readily recognized ironies as the aforesaid ones. The little ironies often spring from minute particulars of dramatic utterance and situation, and are likely to be missed if observation lags. Such little ironies implanted here and there in the plays catch the attention of the alert reader or spectator and their savouring enhances the dramatic experience. Some of these carry hints of larger and wider significance. We may sample some instances of such little ironies of Shakespeare of different kinds. Not that these little fish apart from the big ones have escaped the net of the eagle-eyed Shakespeare critics; several of the critics, among them, have noted and commented on most of these. It may, however, be interesting to bring together and consider some examples.

Such embedded and hidden little ironies sometimes reside in words and these function rather differently from what we call verbal irony. As Bassanio meditates about the right choice of casket in the casket hazard for Portia's hand, she arranges, as Bassanio decides on the choice, for the song to be sung starting

> Tell me where is fancy bred
> Or in the heart or in the head?

How begot, how nourished?

to music. The little irony is in the oblique communication through the rhymes 'bred', 'head' and 'nourished', an encoded musical hint to Bassanio's ear of 'lead' so that he may in subterranean fashion be led to choose the lead casket. When Rosalind comes reading the first of the love verses to her Orlando has hung on trees in Arden, Touchstone ridicules these and improvises answering love verses couched in entirely physical terms. Rosalind's reply that she found the verses on a tree elicits Touchstone's remark.

Truly, the tree yields bad fruit. (3. 2. 12)

It provokes Rosalind into indirectly but forcefully chiding Touchstone as a 'medlar' suggesting that such gross sensuality on his part would make him a nymphomaniac as well as meddler, Touchstone's idea of love is indeed cynically physical in the play. But his is the last word in this exchange: 'You have said; but whether wisely or no, let the forest judge.' Soon after, Celia enters reading another sample of Orlando's expression of love, and Rosalind is all impatience to know the identity of the author. Once she hears that it is Orlando, she starts clamorously vexing Celia to know whether she saw him and where.

*Celia*: ... I found him under a tree, like a dropped acorn.

*Rosalind*: It may well be called Jove's tree, when it drops forth such fruit. (3. 2. 252-253)

The lines send an ironical echo back to the earlier tree-fruit Rosalind-Touchstone exchange. In the process, it hints the significance of the tree property on the stage, and also the hovering of the associations of the folk traditions and the Robin Hood myth in this pastoral play with a difference, a tradition associated with rural woods and trees and commented on with reference to the play long ago by Janet Spens in her now forgotten pioneer study *Shakespeare and Tradition* (1922).

In *Twelfth Night*, Olivia's ritualised seven-year mourning for the dead brother, which she uses among other things to ward off the especially ritualised love-messages of Duke Orsino, comes to nought the moment she falls in love at first sight with Viola-Cesario. Then providentially Sebastian the identical twin brother of Viola comes her way, and she loses no time to obtain his all too ready consent

and leads him to the altar. The crown jewel of this total irony is that their union is solemnised in the very chantry presumably specially erected to offer prayers for her dead brother and by the very priest performing this function.

*Olivia*: Blame not this haste of mine. If you mean well
Now go with me and with this holy man
Into the chantry by; these, before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof
Plight me the full assurance of your faith
(*Twelfth Night*, 4. 3. 22-26)

In the same play, in the scene of his gulling by Maria, Sir Toby and company, Malvolio, already well before he sets eyes on the fake letter dropped by Maria to catch him with, is far gone in his state of fantasizing and day-dreaming about the savours of his wedded life as Count Malvolio.

*Malvolio*: Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown; having come from a day-bed, where I have left Oliva sleeping.

*Sir Toby* : Fire and brimstone!

*Fabian* : O peace! peace!

*Malvolio* : And then to have the humour of state; and after a demure travel of regard, telling them I know my place, as I would they should do theirs, to ask for my kinsman Toby—

*Sir Toby* : Bolts and shackles!

*Fabian* : O, peace, peace, peace! Now, now.

*Malvolio* : Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for him. I frown the while and perchance wind up my watch or play with my—some rich jewel.

In this Alnaschar-like enactment, Malvolio totally forgets his steward-like status and uniform and imagines himself bedecked with the 'branched velvet gown', a watch (a luxury in Shakespeare's day so that Queen Elizabeth is said to have taken pride on owning one) and a rich jewel. More, he gestures the winding up of his non-existent watch and starts twiddling with the imaginary pendant jewel only to land his fingers on his all too earthy steward's chain. The same chain is involved when it comes in for the attentions of Sir Toby and the Clown in the scene of nocturnal revelry and razzle-dazzle which provokes Malvolio whom they join together to repulse, as he barges in on the scene to reprimand them.

*Sir Toby*: Go, sir, rub your chain with crumbs (2. 3. 129)

That is aptly for Malvolio's being an all bread-and-butter and no cakes-and-ale-nor ginger kill-joy.

In *King Henry IV*, Part 2, the king Henry IV learns on enquiry that the name of the chamber in which he lies on his death-bed is Jerusalem. Right from the end of the play *King Richard II* where Bolingbroke now King Henry IV announces his desire and resolve to go to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage, he keeps renewing and reasserting his intention to do so in the course of *King Henry IV*, Part I and also in Part II. But caught as he is in the whirl of tackling the rebel lords, his ambition could be fulfilled only in this curious manner of his finding himself at last in 'Jerusalem' in his own palace.

*Worwick*: 'Tis called Jerusalem, my noble Lord.'
*King Henry*: Laud be to God! Even there my life must end.
It has been prophesied to me many years
I should not die, but in Jerusalem
Which vainly I suppos'd the Holy Land.
But bear me to that chambers; there I'll lie.
In that Jerusalem shall Harry die.
(*King Henry IV*, Part 2, 4. 4. 233-239)

Notable in *Measure for Measure* is the ironic equivalence that is developed in the play, as though echoing the title, of maidenhead for maidenhead, and head for head by way of the process of substitution and also of head for maidenhead as statutory punishment which Angelo revives and imposes on Claudio for getting Juliet his love with child. There is the central bed-trick substitution for Isabella's maidenhead, sought to be won by Angelo in the name of ransom for Claudio, of Mariana's maidenhead, that of Angelo's own betrothed disowned by him. This is matched by the subterfuge substitution for Claudio's head. The provost proposes to use. Barnadine's head since he awaits execution, but finds to hand that of a notorious robber Ragozina who dies of a fever, and makes do with it to send to Angelo to convince him of Chaudio's 'execution', again a substitution. The serial three-fold substitution of heads and maidenheads ironically reinforces the idea of balance and proportion the play's title suggests

We may go on to note a few examples of certain specific, piquant ironic effects during the staging of the plays due to the use of certain conventions of staging current in the theatre of Shakespeare's day as a legacy of earlier traditions, especially the use of 'simultaneous settings.' That is, properties or items of setting required for a subsequent scene may already be set in place in readiness during a preceding scene. Similarly, those used in a scene may continue to be a stage presence, though to be taken to be 'invisible' in subsequent scenes. Probably the method was used in Shakespeare's theatre judiciously enough not to allow cluttering of the stage. In *As You Like It* (2. 5) as Amiens, Jaques and others are engaged in a singing session 'under the greenwood tree', Amiens commands.

> Sirs, cover the while; the Duke will drink under this tree.

It is a signal for a table with repast to be brought in and laid on stage, as the scene goes on. After these exit at the end of the scene, the table ready covered with food still stands on the stage when for the next brief scene (2. 6) Orlando and Adam arrive with Adam famished and 'dying for food,' supposedly in another location in the Forest of Arden and Orlando vows to seek food for Adam at any cost and sets out. All this when food is there onstage on the table ready for the Duke and company. It is not supposed to be seen by Orlando and Adam and the spectator. But the spectator does see it, and it produces an effect of strong local irony with its suggestion of tantalizing. So it is with the figure of Kent set in the stocks in *King Lear* (2. 2). As Kent in the stocks reads the letter from Cordelia and goes to sleep, the figure will be left standing on stage at the end of the scene. The banished Edgar as poor mad Tom-o'Bedlam enters for the next brief, solo scene of his (2. 3), and comes on stage to declare and bemoan his lot as the figure of Kent asleep in the stocks still stands on the side. The conjunction would produce a vivid visual signal of the predicament and reversal the two victims Edgar and Kent have been thrown into by tragic intrigue.

The principle of 'simultaneous settings,' as an almost inbuilt phenomenon in Acts 3 and 4 of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, would have been much in evidence in the staging of these two Acts. The

sustained, noticeable presence of the sleeping figures of the human mortals Hermia, Helena, Demetrius and Lysander, and the pair of 'translated' Bottom with his ass's head and the Fairy Queen Titania with the rest of the action going on against the background of their presence would communicate a sense of the importance in the play of sleep and dream, and also an impression of the transformation effected by these. Quite a different staging exigency is touched to fine issues in *The Tempest.* The storm-tossed and sea-wrecked King's party of Alonso and his courtiers landed in Prospero's island in that condition find that their rich garments donned for the wedding of the princess from which they are on their return voyage are still fresh and in an excellent state of preservation after the near-drowning from which they have escaped. Ariel has taken care to ensure that with his, rather Prospero's, magic.

*Ariel*: On their sustaining garments not a blemish
But fresher than before. (1. 2. 217-218)

Gonzalo with his garullousness repeatedly underscores the idea in the conversation he keeps up, doing it as many as four times in the course of lines 75-112 in 2. 1. The spectator will be amply alerted to the phenomenon. At the play's level, it conveys a sense of the marvellous. But it is also a practical staging necessity of which Shakespeare makes a virtue deliberately calling attention to it. The theatre would ill afford to soil or spoil luxury stage costume, knowing that it had to make a heavy investment in such wardrobe, in fact sometimes more than that what it paid a playwright for a play. Henslowe paid a great deal more to buy a single coat costume for the character of Mrs. Frankford than to Heywood the author of the play *A Woman Killed with Kindness.*

Shakespeare with all his 'comprehensive soul' and 'myriad-mindedness' very rarely invokes certain common and mundane areas and kinds of human activity in his plays. The nature of the world of most plays precludes reference to these areas. But when Shakespeare on one or two rare occasions does bring in these in the course of a play, some interesting points emerge in such references. For example, woman's chores in hearth and home hardly find a place in the plays. Almost but not quite all of Shakespeare's women,

given their play world and their role in it, have nothing to do with it, just as most of the heroines have no mothers. *In Much Ado about Nothing* Hero's mother Innogen is but a name in an initial omnibus entry stage direction with no appearance in the play. But in a couple of exceptions to the rule of women for whom the word housework is not in their dictionary at all, Desdemona's busying herself with housework in her father's household in *Othello*, and, in *Cymbeline,* Imogen's cooking and house keeping skills displayed, curiously, when she is in the male guise of Fidele in the cave of Belarius, call attention to themselves, despite the one play being a tragedy and the other a romance. Shakespeare was writing at a time when woman's role at hearth and home was regarded as primary, and manuals meant to teach women in this were common. But he, at least for the purpose of his plays, concerns himself with other aspects of the life of women but for such rare glimpses of women playing that role, these also taking it in their stride as it were.

Similarly, of all Shakespeare's characters only one has the need to empty a pressing bladder. When Shakespeare does make a reference to this human need on the part of a character, he refers to the action in euphemistic terms. It is the metamorphic rogue Autolycus in *A Winter's Tale* who is shown as having to fulfil this need and taking leave for it.

> *Autolycus*: (To the clown and his father the Shepherd). I trust you. Walk before toward the sea-side; go on the right hand I will but look upon the hedge and follow you.
>
> (*A Winter's Tale*, 4. 3. 861-863)

There is a possibility that there is a veiled, probably unconscious reference to the act in Malvolio's speech in *Twelfth Night.*

> By my life, this is my lady's hand! These be her very C's and her U's and her T's and thus makes she her great P's.

In the train of the bawdy suggestions of the initial letters, it is possible that Malvolio also in the process blunders into an unwitting reference to urination. But the idea that Malvolio gestured the act is totally improbable, given his staidness. The absence of reference to the act, in spite of chamber-pots and urine being mentioned on

occasion as for example in *Henry IV*, Parts 1 and 2, and elsewhere in addition to the propensity of Launce's dog in a way, indirectly suggests the casualness with which the act was treated in Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare's London, for aught we know, could not boast its sanitary conditions. The theatres, and the bear and bull fighting arenas, are not likely to have been equipped with toilet facilities. The large numbers of spectators perhaps had only to 'look upon this hedge,' in the words of Autolycus, in the environs of the theatre for fulfilling of this need.

The instances of certain relatively minute, minor ironies of several kinds such as we have considered will together go to show how these, once recognized, serve to indicate in a flash larger dramatic meaning though, superficially, they may appear like casual trifles. Some of these communicate in encapsulation the central ideas or motifs of the play. Some act as sharp and clear signals of the thrust of the total dramatic movement and design of a play, of which Shakespeare is past master. That is, the little irony could capture the large implications of the dramatic process of reversal and recognition. Some forcefully bring home to us the operation of the telling correspondences of parallels and contrasts in a play in terms of which it develops, as in the case of the head-maidenhead substitutions in *Measure for Measure*. The juxtapositions and copresences which some ironies entail are eloquent summarizations of certain kinds of human predicament, as for instance, in the case of Kent in the stocks and Edgar as mad Tom seen together on the stage with the one supposed not to see the other. Quite a few of the cases we have considered also imply sociological and sociocultural concerns and significance. Underlying these are factors of class and social change, as economic and sociocultural compulsions may be seen to operate behind these. Malvolio's middle class status as steward and his ambitions of becoming Count Malvolio and the prejudices against him of faded, parasite gentlemen or village squires like Sir Toby and Sir Andrew and Olivia the single young heiress's problem of maritial choice are examples. But perhaps in our pursuit of these latter implications we should not miss how well and fully Shakespeare absorbs such concerns into his dramatic design and art.

# *HAMLET* AS OPERA

**Leonard R.N. Ashley**

ROS[ENCRANZ]: Now why exactly are you behaving in this extraordinary manner?

GUIL[DENSTERN]: I can't imagine! (*Pause*) But all that is well known, common property. Yet he sent for us. And we did come.

ROS (*alert, ear cocked*): I say! I heard music —

GUIL: We're here.

ROS: — Like a band — I thought I heard a band.

— Sir Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

In volume 24 (2002) of *Hamlet Studies* I wrote something about *Hamlet* as presented on the stage. In the course of that I happened to mention the German *Hamletmachine*. Reflecting on that, I now have gathered some information on the presentation of the Hamlet story on the grand opera stage. Here it is in what is hoped will be an entertaining as well as an informative article with as much of the subjective as is common in opera but without the fanatic adoration so common there. I choose a lighter tone for literary critics who may or may not be what is sometimes rudely called "opera queens." After all, grand opera, as Franco Zeffirelli (who directed opera as well as films) once remarked, calls all the muses to cooperate.

I disagree with Lord Clark, who opined that no one could have logically expect Gothic architecture or opera. Opera is not essentially ridiculous. It is perfectly logical to burst into song at moments of high emotion. *Recitativo*, absolutely not, I grant you. Great literature is always full of the overwhelming music as well as the meaning of words. Both prose and poetry have tendency toward music. All Shakespeare plays are musicals. The music is in the powerful verses. Both kinds of music, verbal and instrumental, do work on our emotions. Music enhances and heightens, colors and pleases.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, so dramatic and so popular a tale, is a drama that touches the heights of human expression. It has always excited people. *Hamlet* continues to be presented constantly in all the media. There are even (obviously wordless) ballets: Sir Fredrick Ashton, Sir Robert Helpman, Boris Eifman in Russia, and others worldwide have told the story. The play was also made into

Italian operas with libretti by Boito, Foppa, Lauzieres, and many others. It was made into French operas and operas in English, both produced and unproduced. One example of the latter — I can find no history of production — I mention in the Works Cited here is by Tom Farmer.

So full of a superb music of English verse, *Hamlet* has been snapped up by foreign composers for grand opera. I do not believe that Addison is right when he asserts that "nothing is capable of being well set to music that is not nonsense." Consider that Handel in his oratorios, among others, has magnificently set even sacred texts. Shakespeare, however revered, is not The Bible, so Shakespeare's exact words need not be followed. Even in his own day Shakespeare's playhouse scripts were manhandled. When we note how long Kenneth Branagh's uncut *Hamlet* on film was, we shudder at the idea of the same text completely set to music.

However, whatever the words chosen and however much pruning and patching needs to be done to suit the material to the operatic stage, we must admit that with powerful music to carry them, even mindless libretti can seize the soul. This works, especially if you do not pay too much attention to the words and appreciate that just getting "way up there" sopranos cannot also be expected to enunciate clearly at the same time. Often at operas we do not understand the words. If we keep our eyes glued to the libretto we might just as well be at home listening to a recording or the radio broadcast. One does not go to the Metropolitan Opera in New York City to read the translation that appears through the magic of technology on the back of the seat in front of us as the words are sung. If we really had to hear all the words that are sung, there would never be a sextette in *Lucia*. If words really were so important, every country would present operas only in its own language. I still recall the shock at hearing Wagner in French. We would not have some soprano stuck up in a tree singing in Czech in New York or some loud orchestra between us and the stage at a performance of *Parsifal*. *Wagner* wanted to put the huge orchestra under the stage. Would you like to hear Wagner in English? Could Wagnerian stars sing

The words of a Hamlet opera may not be intelligible and may

not even come from Shakespeare. The fact is that, for the story that music (and words) convey, some have gone back to Saxo Grammaticus and his *Gesta Danorum* (twelfth century). They have not bothered with Shakespeare's verse at all. Others, however, have ambitiously picked up and adapted and translated the script of Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, perhaps the most famous play of all time, just as Shakespeare picked up and adapted what the Germans call Thomas Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet.* I would say these two very significant theatrical hits took place in the last year or so of the sixteenth century and have had noticeable impact on the English theater and even other theater ever since. Whether the scripts of Kyd and Shakespeare were as close as (say) *The Taming of a Shrew* and *The Taming of the Shrew* we shall probably never know. What is clear is that Kyd's play had the same popular plot elements as his earlier *The Spanish Tragedy* (revenge for murder, madness, ghost, derring-do in high places, incantatory rhetoric, and so on). Shakespeare's later play *Hamlet* shared them.

Among those who have set the Hamlet story to music, often using Shakespeare as a basis for the libretto, though not always, are the following. My list is certainly incomplete and it is heaviest on the older versions of Hamlet opera because for modern versions you can easily go to the innumerable and authoritative opera magazines and books. Look at these:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Amleto* | Gaetano Andreozzi | Padua | 1782 |
| *Amleto* | Luigi Caruso | Florence | 1789 |
| *Amleto* | Gaetano Andreozzi | Padua | 1792 |
| *Amleto* | Antonio Buzzola | Venice | 1847 |
| Amleto | Angelo Zanardini | Venice | 1854 |
| *Amleto* | Luigi Moroni | Rome | 1860 |
| *Amleto* | Francesco Faccio | Genoa | 1865 |
| *Hamlet* | Charles-Louis-Ambroise Thomas | Paris | 1868 |
| *Hamlet* | Christian Josef Franz (or Alexander) Stadtfeld | Weimar | 1882 |
| *Hamlet* | Edward Hubertus Joannes Keurvels (1853-1916, Flemish) | Antwerp? | |
| *Hamlet* | Aristide-Jean-Louis Hignard | Nantes | 1888 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Hamlet* | Janis Kalnins | Riga | 1936 |
| *Hamlet* | Alexej Davidowitsch Matschawarjani | Tbilissi | 1957 |
| *Amleto* | Mario Zafred | Rome | 1961 |
| *Hamlet* | Sergius Kagen | Baltimore | 1963 |
| *Hamlet* | Humphrey Searle | Hamburg | 1968 |
| *Hamlet* | Pascal Bentoiu | Bucharest | 1971 |
| *Hamlet* | Hermann Reuter | Stuttgart | 1980 |

Burlettas, the inveterate punster and incredibly prolific writer James Robinson Planche, who perpetrated innumerable burlettas himself, defined as "dramas containing not less than five pieces of vocal music in each act".

For just a hint of the popularity, let me mention that in the last three months of 1812 there were three burlettas based on Shakespeare at The Royalty in London: *The Merry Wives of Windsor, King Lear and His Three Daughters,* and *King Richard III; or, The Battle of Bosworth Field.* There were burlettas and burlesques on *Hamlet,* too. For *Hamlet,* the transpontine drama of the "Surrey Side" saw the melodrama *The Royal Dane* (1827), no more respectful than Charles Dibdin's *Shakespeare versus Harlequin* (1820). For evidence of the neurotic Great Dane who dogs productions of Shakespeare's play (and plays right into the exaggerated emotions of grand opera) just look at the title of an anonymous burlesque that played The Princess Theatre in London in 1874: *Hamlet the Hysterical: A Delusion in Five Spasms.*

Naturally theatrical presentations of the overwrought tragic protagonist of Hamlet in the nineteenth century were accompanied by some heavy music (Mendelssohn's deliciously light music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, is the most famous move of Shakespeare material into musical theater).

Stage productions became more lilke fancy opera when dealing with the Ghost. Pepper invented a way of using a huge sheet of reflecting glass so that the actor would not have actually to walk on the creaking stage and Fechter's startling effect of the Ghost disappearing involved a big wheel that brought between the audience and the Ghost (standing in an archway) scraps of material painted to match the wall against which the Ghost stood; thus the

ghastly figure slowly "dissolved" in ful "moonlight" before astonished spectators! This is all of a piece with hyping *Hamlet*, which to some extent is exactly what *Hamlet* operas set out to accomplish.

*Hamlet* staged without stage skills or overdone brought ridicule, and *Hamlet*, like many other classics, was not only paraded but parodied on the Victorian stage. Often these would-be hilarious parodies were presented, as was common with all Victorian theatrica genres, with music. Music helped, but *Helmet* straight as an opera actually is a bit risky for any English speaker who does not court lughter to attempt. Even Verdi did nto try it, although some opera fans claim his *Otello* beats Shakespeare's most melodramatic drama all hollow. I do not agree.

Among many other versions of the Hamlet material are *Hamlet the Sport, the Spook and the Spinster* by Lee Atherton produced in Boston in 1893 (Odell and other histories of the New York stage can tell you more), *Hamlet-Saga* by Jean Kurt Forest produced in Berlin in 1973, and *Der Hamletmachine* by Wolfgang Rihm, produced at Mannheim 30 March 1987 with the orchestra under the baton of Volker M. Plangg.

Of all Hamlet operas, that by Ambroise Thomas is paramount. Thomas' *Hamlet* was first performed at the Paris Opera 9 March 1868. It remains the most honored operatic version of the Shakespeare play. The original Hamlets in the Thomas opera were tenors, Urs Markus and Peter Weber. Thomas revised the score to make Hamlet a baritone when he managed to engage the talent of the leading baritone in France in his day. Later the libretto was translated into Italian. As you will read here later, Thomas' opera is still alive.

Thomas was a man of considerable talent. He won the prestigious Prix de Rome to get him started and he achieved considerable success. He became director of the *Conservatiore* in Paris. He invariably turned out workmanlike operas with the panache demanded in the genre and the era. His work generally was greeted with approval. For *Hamlet*, Thomas engaged two professional librettists, Jules Barbier and Michel Carre. They made what they could of Shakespeare's script, always keeping in mind the manpower and

machinery of the Paris Opera and the expectations of that house's chic audience. They gave Gertrude and Ophelia good parts, but one of the drawbacks of Shakespeare as a source for opera is that, having no women in his acting company, the parts of women (played by boys) are usually less important than those for men. *Hamlet* is a big fat role for a male, not a big fat lady who sings. An opera in which the principal role is not for a woman is taking a risk, for diva crossing can be dangerous!

Today opera is the realm mostly of divas and opera is considered caviare for the general, even a bit too attractive to homosexuals to be comfortable. Attending opera is an expensive and elitist business. Staging it is financially challenging because that often requires large state subsidies despite the usually high prices. The average person may be turned off by astoundingly high prices for tickets in some subsidized venues, but may watch public broadcasting presentations on television, free. So operas sometimes resemble the lavish historical dramas of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century's extravagant films and productions also on occasion partake of the avant-garde ambitions of the same sort that prompted Sir John Gielgud to direct a *Hamlet* with movie star Richard Burton in rehearsal clothes. In both opera and theater, with the huge financial outlays today, juggling is required. If one does not overwhelm with lavishness one has to catch the public with novelty.

Many productions of *Hamlet* as opera have provided program notes with summaries of the plot and there are parallel texts of some of the foreign-language libretti with English translation. So one can judge what has been done with The Bard, if one does not find the exercise too depressing. I leave it to those interested to compare the Thomas libretto or any other libretto with Shakespeare's text.

Alterations to the Shakespeare version were not unexpected and were well received by Thomas' audiences, especially the new ending in which Hamlet, having killed the king, ascends the throne of Denmark. An anonymous writer in *Slovak Spectator* 16 October 2000 said "Operatic Hamlet Twists Tale for Pleasing Vocal Effect." Twisting the Hamlet story's end is something that British audiences

are less willing to accept than Parisians. A trifle more palatable was regarding "Hamlet as a Love Story" (see Dehner). So, when Thomas' *Hamlet* was presented at Covent Garden, the end called for reworking closer to the familiar conclusion of Shakespeare's tragedy with Horatio declaiming over a pile of bodies and Fortinbras ready to take over the kingdom. For a selection of UK reviews of the opera see the various critics mentioned in Works Cited on the topic.

It is Thomas' *Hamlet*, despite the liberties it takes with Shakespeare, that is the most revived these days of all the Hamlet operas. Writing in the *International Herald Tribune* 6 April 2003 of "Reviving the Glory Days of Forgotten Operas," staff writer David Stevens reported from Paris on the resurrection of the once standard Gustave Charpentier's *Louise* and of Thomas' *Hamlet.* You can read Stevens' full text on www.iht.com/IHT/DS/00/ds052100 but this quotation may suffice:

> The Toulouse company has not stinted on this new staging.... Thomas Hampson, who recorded the title role several years ago and has been a principal ingredient in the opera's mild revival, was an energetic Hamlet, angry and not much given to introspection. Natalie Dessay rode the coloratura waves of Ophelia's role mangnificently, Jose Van Dam's rich bass-baritone gave the usurping Claudius a somber and forceful presence, and the mezzo soprano Michelle De Young was strong as the anguished Gertrude.

I do not approve of the word *usurping.* That puts the reviewer and his readers in Hamlet's confused state of mind. In fact, Claudius is legitimately king of Denmark. Back to Claudius' election. Claudius was enthusiastically elected by those who had no idea how the previous king had died. He was preferred by them over Young Hamlet and he is, in fact, a pretty good king as kings go. He is plausible and impressive in public, decisive and ruthless in private.

Among the more understandable facts is that this *Hamlet* had Art Deco in the Toulouse/Paris production scenery and a mixture of formal and informal rather modern costumes. Hamlet appeared in "black sweater and slacks" but the queen had "long trains" and most of the male cast was in "vaguely military black" according to designs by Franca Squarciapino. Opera and sometimes the so-called legitimate stage often mix styles and period in costuming. People like splendor.

Simple costuming may be inexpensive but it is not traditional for opera. Opera grew out of deliberately showy not to say *nouveau riche* or insecure court festivities, especially those employing allegorical figures in fancy costumes (often donned by nobility or royalty at play), with music, dancing, scenic extravagance and technology by Italian artists, The Italians who invented grand opera got even to *Hamlet* as a musical first.

Masques and similar entertainments were popular in England for centuries before Italian singers brought opera there early in the eighteenth century, unless you want to call the productions of Sir William D'Avenant in the seventeenth century a king of opera. What D'Avenant presented were actually plays trying to get around a Puritan ban on plays by pretending to be something else, adding music to the show. The great English opera of the eighteenth century was not long in coming. It was produced by John Rich at The Haymarket and written by John Gay. Wags said it "made Rich gay and Gay rich".

But when we say "opera" we do not usually mean *The Beggar's Opera* nor melodramas nor musicals such as *The Black Crook, The Goiden Apple, Candide, Cats, Les Miz,* and so on. I do, however, think the modern equivalent of the popular operas of the past are not so much masterpieces such as *Billy Budd* but other masterpieces based upon literary material such as *Porgy and Bess* and *Show Boat.*

Purists may object; they have decided that grand opera must be all music/all the time with no spoken dialouge, just rather recitative with the musical commas and periods and other punctuation of which Victor Borge made such fun. Thus the French insist that, because it has some spoken power, *Carmen* is merely an *opera comique.* one might as well call Beethoven's *Fidelio* an *opera comique*; it too has some spoken dialogue.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is all "spoken dialogue". One cannot sing his lines very well. Iambic pentameter puts a greater strain on melody. It is worth noting, however, that Shakespeare's words have plenty of background music of their own. A wide audience that has enjoyed the play's various film versions knows that as a fact. When

you add film background music that just makes it melodrama (drama with music), not an opera. For an opera you need singers.

Well, you need actors as well, but hardly any fine singers are fine actors. Caruso couldn't act at all and many of the divine divas of modern opera just stand there, occasionally making a grimace of gesture, belting it out rapturously. Stage star Alfred Drake, who sang and acted very well in musicals, is worth bringing into this discussion: he was an intolerably bad Claudius and did not sing a note in that Gielgud production I mentioned. The Italians did not put the empahsis on acting; their dramatic effects came from the orchestra and the stage trappings.

All this is just to back up one assertion. That is that an Italian or French opera on *Hamlet* needed just the basics of the story to work with and was going to use it in a world of its own. It could not expect to capture the magic of Shakespeare's words. It needed to emphasize the big emotional moments by asking performers to sing passionately rather than to emote convincingly. Also, to be frank, these people were using Shakespeare much as musicals such as *Annie* used the comic strips or the producers of anything from *Guys and Dolls* to *The Producers* used books and movies. First, they were presenting cartoon characters. The Italians would say that chararacters were not cartoon-like but strongly delineated if stereotypical, reminiscent of the *commedia dell'arte.* Big effects. The creators of opera were with bold strokes rehashing familiar. They were relying on what was pre-sold if "pre-owned" (which is to say "second-hand") material. They were employing tried-and-true material in the tough world of expensive prodctions.

The old singers may be (mostly) gone, but versions of *Hamlet* for the operatic stage are still there ready for resuscitation, for novelty without newness — the opera world distrusts living composers, I fear. For that, a *Hamlet* is perfect. It has a famous name and grand melodramatic effects; the Senecan ghost, the ancient castle, low deeds in high places, crimes of the rich and famous and (as with soap opera) domestic problems even worse than your own. It has violence and sex, murder and revenge.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has always been money in the bank or

at the very least a *succès d'estime. Hamlet* has always made a nice change from gods and goddesses and the operatic equivalent of broad and unimaginative twists of plot. The tragedy in the story of Hamlet is moving and the laughs are earned. There is both tragedy and comedy, for Shakespeare never heeded Sir Philip Sidney's advice not to mix the two. Shakespeare knew life is both tragic and comic and, in the long run, there is something sad in the very basis of the laughable (the difference between what is and what ought to be) and something disproportionate and ridiculous in the ambition which in tragedy that, like *Macbeth* (which has produced better several much better operas than *Hamlet*), tries to jump on a horse and misjudges and falls on the ground on the other side. The subtleties of Hamlet, much more introspective and profound than The Scottish Play, and the ever-present genius of Shakespeare as wordsmith would be lost in translation. It would be lost on opera audiences in any case were his words all used.

What could bring the people to the opera house is, however, plentiful in *Hamlet.* The story of Hamlet, set in far-off Denmark and in far-off times, nevertheless grapples with real problems experienced by real people everywhere at all times. It works in any country, any time, and language. On top of that, it boasts the sort of sensationalism which Leoncavallo said was *verismo,* everyday life in Italy — or at least in Italian opera.

No tune, no aria, from any *Amleto* or *Hamlet* is or ever has been on anyone's list of greatest hits, as far as I can tell. The subject has no Verdi. Some extracts from such operas are on record, sold because of the singer rather than the song. I suppose. I have located a 1712 *Hamlet* with music by Francesco Gasparini and libretto by Zeno & Pariati, but I have not seen a record of its performances in London, or elsewhere. As you have seen above, Luigi Caruso presented an *Amleto* at Florence 26 December 1789. Gaetano Andreozzi's *Amleto* played Pauda 12 June 1792. Salverio Mercadante's *Amleto* was played in Mantua 26 December 1822. Antonio Buzzola's *Amleto* was seen in Venice 24 February 1847. Angelo Zanardini's *Amleto* was presented in Venice 30 May 1854. Luigi Moroni had an *Amleto* first seen in Rome on 2 June 1860.

Francesco Faccio's *Amleto* debuted in Genoa 30 May 1865. Not one of these composers, as far as I can ascertain, is of interest even to the experts on Italian opera. These composers are the demi-Donizettis of an era before talents lesser even than his, and very likely less charming, came along. It was the fact that the opera was the famous Shakespeare material that, presumably, got versions onto the boards. I suggest that Thomas looked at the popularity of *Amletti* and that that prompted his *Hamlet*, and that is why I go into some detail on various very minor Italian composers.

Early *Amleto* efforts were more likely to be based on the historian Saxo Grammaticus. Saxo, after all, provided a more spectacular ending with the palace being burneddown, as you have heard. Saxo offers a "happy" ending after the carnage. Was it not Yeats who said that comedy and tragedy are alike in that they both end happily? For *whom* is the only difference.

Operas care for big concluding chords and big moments and big voices. Heroes tend to be tenors, unless you are Russian. Hamlet is a tenor in operas by Bentoiu, Stadtfeld, and others. This is the tradition. Opera wants melodrama's clear-cut good guys and bad guys and, Claudius being the villain, young Hamlet is likely to be presented as a pleasant young tenor, no more complicated or with a dark side than other tenors — tenors being (as Anna Russell so cogently observed) on the whole persons with "resonance where their brains ought to be." An operatic Hamlet is more along the lines of a Maurice Evans nice guy for the troops (*G.I. Hamlet*) than the neurotic if intensely intellectual figures portrayed by Sir John Gielgud or Jean-Louis Barrault. An Italian Hamlet does not have to be the *Heldentenor* the Germans admire, Germanic as the character is.

Hamlet is supposed to be "fat and scant of breath". I have seen a stocky Hamlet played by Richard Burton but never a fat Hamlet. Fat and scant of breath? Most Italian tenors could fulfill the first half of that job description. Hamlet on stage is usually played by someone thin or athletic. Shakespeare once said that it is thin people who think too much.

However, Hamlet did not at first appear as a manly baritone in the opera by Thomas. Thomas redid the leading tenor part, perhaps

to make Hamlet more macho and energetic — brooding is hard to sing loud and intellectual complexity does not befit an opera singer — or may be Thomas was simply working as he always tended to do with what was available and accepted the theatrical tradition of adjusting the part of Hamlet to suit the abilities of the star taking the role. His new baritone's name would bring in the crowds. It was Barrault's name, not Shakespeare's, after all, in the stage version (in which Barrault, as Hamlet, as I have remarked before, was in love with Horatio, if not with Barrault) which made "his" *Hamlet* the rage of "all Paris".

In the case of Thomas' *Hamlet* the leading baritone of his day, Jean- Baptiste Faure, was the drawing card. Fiddling to accommodate him was gladly done. It is not unheard of for an opera production to make some small changes in the score to suit the singer hired, and you know that operas were once written for freak voices who had strenghts in this or that part of their range and weakness elsewhere. Singing *Norma,* for example, was easy for the woman for whom it was written; it is a great challenge to most other women who essay the role. So this adusting was nothing new in the opera's tradition or in the even older stage tradition. Hamlet as baritone has had a certain popularity. Hamlet is a baritone role in the operas by Reuter, Searle, Zafred, and some others.

Claudius is always played as a deep-dyed villain and not only in opera. Nobody ever seems to notice that the Ghost is instigating murder and therefore is a real criminal from the get-go, or that Claudius' murder of Old Hamlet is a crime of passion, of love (for the old king's wife). Conversely. Hamlet commits murder out of hate, out of revenge. Actually, in the case of Polonius it is attempted murder of the king and actual murder of one of the spies. In the case of two others Hamlet takes for spies, the cold-blooded sending to their deaths of Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern of which Hamlet is not accidentally guilty, I guess we have a case of what we might call not a moral height but a pique. As a villain, Claudius is usually a basso as profundo as possible (though Zafred makes him a tenor and Hamlet a baritone). If you cannot get a bass get a bass-baritone (as in recent a Thomas revival with Jose van Dam as terrific Claudius).

Of course Ophelia is a soprano. Ophelia is called upon for a simple dirty folksong as well as coloratura pyrotechnics. On second thought, perhaps one had best not include the folksong, *Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day.* For one thing, the audience would not get the point (the sexual references). This is not a matter of wordplay but of the audience knowing the lyrics to a song which Ophelia does not sing through. Even modern English-speaking audiences don't understand what is going on there, and in an opera all point would be lost even of a soprano could make the words fully intelligible, which is a fairly rare feat in the world of *bel canto.* For another, it is always dangerous to include a good folksong in an opera. Look at *Martha:* the Irish song has a melody that makes all the rest suffer hideously by comparison, except perhaps for the aria *Martha, Martha.* That has a nice tune but you must admit not exactly an inspired lyric.

Gertrude is usually a mezzo or contralto, maybe a former soprano whose range has worn down in a long career. She simply must have a big duet with her son. The bed is likely to be the size of a boxing ring and the two of them are locked in quite a contest. This could be a high point, especially since the scene has to end with the Ghost making another dramatic appearance.

Any *Hamlet* has to contain choruses, and monologues beget arias, naturally. If you can afford it, write in a coronation for Claudius; that can be a grand *scena.* Also, at no extra cost, there has to be one of the standard pieces of operatic claptrap, the mad scene. Actually Ophelia is no match for Lucy of Lammermoore from Sir Walter Scott whose novel *The Bride of Lammermore. Luica di Lammermoore* is a classic of Italian opera, full of some very difficult singing.

If you thought the dead dad in *Don Giovanni* was a show-stopper, wait until you see the Ghost in *Hamlet.* Some libretti cannot resist bringing the Ghost on for extra innings.

At the end, if you do not do the bit with the castle consumed in flames, with effects such as made Byron's *Sardanapalus* a talking point of the early nineteenth century British theater, you still can have a tremendous operatic recessional. Shakespeare has Horatio actually sounding like an opera director. Horatio arranges for the

body to be borne aloft and away. I am a great believer in yardage in opera. I recall to this day little more of one diva's performance than a giant swath of crimson cloth on a stairway. Stairs are always good, too. Coming down or going up, the music can imitate the action, falling or rising. Entrances and exits are "big" in all operas.

Shakespeare had no great flights of stairs for dramatic entrances or exits and worst of all he had no act curtain (and no act divisions, either). He could use the arras. He brilliantly did so in *Hamlet.* But the last scene of *Hamlet* absolutely must be full stage, downstage, not in the so-called "study" at the back. So Shakespeare could not draw the arras on the corpse. Eventually, the play over, the other corpses onstage could have got up, bowed, and retired to the tiring house, but Shakespeare fully realized that he could not really let the dead hero get up and walk off. So Shakespeare was compelled to have Hamlet picked up and taken off with a farewell speech from Horatio. In a modern production we care far less than Shakespeare's audience did that the priggish Fortinbras is there to restore order to the kingdom.

In an opera the staging can be suoer-dramatic. As in Big Motion Pictures, the music swells. The sounds of cannon, if we keep the Fortinbras walk-on, can accompany the final exultation of the orchestra as the great curtain slowly descends. It works for the *1812 Overture* and it can work for you.

If we could only break operatic tradition and not have all the dead coming back for bows! There is such carnage in this play. In the long run we not only have the Ghost *staying* dead but Hamlet and Ophelia, Claudius and Gertrude, Laertes and Polonius, not to mention Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern (unless you cut them) *getting* dead. Horatio (the "antique Roman") has only threatened suicide, but one tends to imagine that the clowns (Gravediggers) are going to catch some fatal contagion in the churchyard and expire on the morrow.

This downtrip drama of *Hamlet* is poetry of and for the commercial theater and *Hamlet* can be set in almost any period with decently fancy military uniforms and be commercially viable. There can even be political implication. One could use the opera house all-

purpose medieval set and constumes but these days creativity usually triumphs over caution and vanity over parsiomony: modern operatic *Hamlets* call for notably innovative, expensive mountings. State-sponsored opera houses love to overspend the taxpayers' money, and singers are often judged on how much their salaries are rather than how well they sing.

Where opera *Hamlets* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* have an important connection of which many people lost sight is in the fact that they were at first designed for many people, directed at the taste of the popular audience. Both grand opera and Shakespeare have become elite, whereas it is perfectly clear from their *Hamlets* that the major appeal is to sensation and spectacle. Both started out to cater to the groundlings as well as the more intellectual customers. Both offered blood and gore, murder and revenge for murder. Christian forgiveness at war with the older and may be more satisfying eye-for-an-eye produces the necessary dramatic conflict. A bold porotagonist (maybe villain-as-hero type) as not invariably a moral revenger is good. So are sword fights, sex, scandal, mystery (whodunnit?), important political considerations stemming from private woes, the supernatural, and the list goes on. All that is the life blood of motion pictures today. All that was the dross that Shakespeare took up and transmuted into gold by his alchemy.

Shakespeare may or may not, were he alive today, be able to sit through a "mild revival" of Thomas' *Hamlet* or that of any other composer's, though there have been and presumably will continue to be, as long as the vogue lasts, plenty of opportunities. Thomas' *Hamlet* was offered in bratislava (3 performances between September and November), and elsewhere in 2001. The Teatro Regio Turino, for instance, presented a Hamlet opera in 5 acts in 2001. In 2002 it turned up often: in Prague (7 performances between March and May); St. Louis (Missouri, 6 performances in June); Magdeburg (6 performances from September to December); Moscow (at the Novaya, 1 performance in October, 1 in December), etc. In 2003 it was seen in Magdeburg again. It was given 6 performances in London (Royal Opera, Covent Garden. That has Simon Keenlyside as Hamlet, Robert Lloyd as Claudius, Yvonne Naef as Gertrude, Natalie

Dessay as Ophelia); and a dozen performances in October 2003 at Barcelona (Liceu, Hamlet: Jean-Luc Chaignaud/Franco Pomponi, Claudius = Alain Vernhes/ Stephen Morscheck, Gertrude= Béatrice Uria-Monzon / Jane Dutton, Ophelia = Natalie Dessay / Mary Dunleavy). The Bard was somewhat in evidence on the stage on that occasion, of course not seen at all in the audience. Had he been there, however, I wager he would fully understand, as an inveterate plot snatcher and dedicated entertainment professional, the motivations of those who steal plots and put on old operas.

I wonder what he would have thought of the British reviews of the French *Hamlet* in the Spring of 2003 at Covent Garden. See some newspaper judgements in *Evening Standard, Guardian, Independent, Mail on Sunday, New Statesman, Sunday Telegraph, Sunday Times,* and the *Times* of London in Works Cited below.

Kyd's plot reversal of his hit *The Spanish Tragedy* would probably have received more favorable notices and Kyd's material might even have made a better opera. Hieronymo's mad scene is the very stuff of which opera is made. The subtitle was "Hieronymo is mad againe", a grabber as they say in show biz. *The Spanish Tragedy* play text looks even more like a grand opera libretto than *Hamlet* does. "Poor Tom!"

Shakespeare, with *Hamlet* as his most famous masterpiece, remains a forever reinvented and dominant figure or subject in all of the arts. Shakespeare is even notably important in opera. This is true despite the fact that Thomas Purcell, Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten and others of really great talent never do seem to have made the two words "English opera" really famous as a combination. The most frequently presented modern opera in English is by Gian Carlo Menotti. I have heard it said that it is today the most often presented opera, but I cannot believe that.

All other plays and all other operas aside, one play, *Hamlet*, is sufficient proof that, though other of Shakespeare's works could also be discussed in this regard, the greatest Englishman of all time can even in a way make his way in the world of foreign opera.

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# IS *HAMLET* AN ARTISTIC FAILURE? A PSYCHO-SOCIOLOGICAL ANSWER

**Brahma Dutta Sharma**

T.S. Eliot regards *Hamlet* as an artistic failure on the ground that Hamlet's mother is incapable of representing the emotion she has been shown to have aroused in her son, as he observes:

> Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand: he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express *Hamlet* for him. And it must be noticed that every nature of the *donnees* of the problem precludes objective equivalence. To have heightened the criminality of Gertrude would have been to provide the formula for a totally different emotion in Hamlet; it is just *because* her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing.[1]

In order to be able to make a tenable assertion in this regard one has to find out which emotion Hamlet harbours and, then, to examine whether or not Hamlet's mother is an adequate equivalent for it. So far as Hamlet's emotion is concerned T.S. Eliot has made a definite assertion in this regard as he says that Hamlet's "disgust envelops and exceeds her." This remark of his makes it evident that, according to him, the emotion that Hamlet harbours for his mother is disgust. However, the issue deserves a close scrutiny.

It is, no doubt, a fact that when one finds somebody to have stooped too low one disassociates oneself from that somebody and has disgust for him in his heart. It appears to be so in the case of Hamlet especially when we come to his words: " 'Fie on't ! Ah, fie!' " (*Hamlet* I, ii, 1.135). But the emotion of disgust is aroused when two conditions are fulfilled: the first is, as has already been mentioned, that the subject finds the object to have stooped too low; and the second, that the subject dissociates himself from the object altogether and regards him as an unquestioningly other than himself. In Hamlet's case the object is the subject's mother in whose conduct rests the question of Hamlet's paternity. So it is not possible for Hamlet to dissociate himself from his mother altogether and to regard

her as somebody other than himself. When Hamlet is wishing his flesh to thaw and melt (*Hamlet* I, ii, 11.129-30) he is doing that not out of disgust but out of the emotion of shame because when one finds onself or one's near and dear ones to have stooped too low one feels the emotion of shame.

If one studies Hamlet's soliloquies, one does not find it difficult to infer that the emotion that Hamlet harbours is shame: he has been put to shame by his mother who, instead of remaining faithful to the memory of her first husband, has married her husband's younger brother even before a small period of one month has expired, though in the life-time of her first husband she made a show that she loved him very fondly. These feelings of Hamlet come to light when we read the following words of his, for example:

....Within a month
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

(*Hamlet* I, ii, 11. 153-57)

And since he is a part of his mother's flesh what is shameful for the mother is also shameful for him. Hamlet gives expression to these feelings of his even through the Gonzago play as there he makes the Player Queen declare a second marriage to be deserving a curse, and yet remarry soon after her husband's death:

*P. Queen.* *Such love must needs be treason in my breast.*
*In second husband let me be accurst!*
*None wed the second but who kill'd the first.*
*Ham.* *That's wormwood, wormwood.*
*P. Queen.* *The instances that second marriage move*
*Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.*
*A second time I kill my husband dead.*
*When second husband kisses me in bed.*

(*Hamlet* III, ii, 11. 173-80)

Hamlet is a man who liked his mother to have remained faithful to his father even after the latter's death. In this regard he holds the same views as are held by Ferdinand and the Cardinal in John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* who ask their sister, who is now a widow, not to remarry. ( *The Duchess of Malfi* I, i, II. 290-300).

It is noticeable here that the Cardinal wants his sister's high blood to be swayed by something when honour is added to it. It means that he considers it a stain on the honour of the family if a widow in it remarries. Similar is the thinking of Hamlet and for him it is shameful to be the son of a mother who has not remained faithful to her first husband and has rushed to the incestuous sheets of the second marriage with dexterous speed and has, thus, violated the dictates of honour.

It is this emotion of shame which gives birth to Hamlet's desire to go into oblivion[2] which finds expression in such speeches as:

> O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
>
> (*Hamlet* I, ii. 11. 129-30)

and

> To die, to sleep —
> No more; and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wish'd.
>
> (*Hamlet* III, i, 11. 60-4)

It is this desire to go into oblivion that evidences the fact that Hamlet's emotion is not disgust: a person with disgust in his heart will spit at the object of disgust and feel elated with his own sense of superiority. But when a man is thinking of bringing his existence to its end, he is not feeling himself to be superior but is associating himself with the person whose conduct has been ethically sub-normal.

Now comes the question whether the characters created by the dramatist are such as to make it probable for a son like Hamlet to harbour the emotion that he does. If the characters are not such the play can be called an artistic failure. People like to live for various reasons: one wants to have might, another wants to get money, the third wants to use his talent to serve God thereby, the fourth wants to get a position in society, the fifth wants to win somebody's heart, and so on and so forth. So it looks strange if one finds somebody desiring to go into oblivion. However, it is a fact that one develops interest in life only if one is happy with one's existence. In case one

is not happy even with one's existence, one naturally has a desire to go into oblivion. There can be various reasons why one may not be happy with one's existence. Physical ailment can be one reason, poverty can be another, failure to solve the problems of life can be another. But the most genuine of them is one's feeling ashamed of oneself for one reason or another.

The fact of Gertrude's hasty marriage leads one to the question as to when Gertrude fell in love with Claudius. There are two possibilities: first, that she feel in love with Claudius after the death of her first husband; second, that she had fallen in love with him some time during her husband's life-time. Let us see whether some character can help us find out as to which of these two possibilities is a fact. Hamlet has expressed his opinion on this issue in the following words:

> A little month, or ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears — why she, even she —
> O God ! a beast that wants a discourse of reason
> Would have mourn'd longer — married with my uncle....
>
> (*Hamlet* I, ii, 11. 147-51)

The implication of his view that a beast would have mourned for a period longer than a month is that she had fallen in love with Claudius during her first husband's life-time, as the period of one month is not enough even for a beast to fall in love with a second mate. And there do exist some critics who hold that Gertrude was in love with Claudius even during King Hamlet's life-time. For instance, Kenneth Muir believes that Queen Gertrude was unfaithful to her husband even before King Hamlet's death.[3] Even Walter Dias makes an assertion to this effect in his book *Love and Marriage in Shakespeare:*

> Gertrude's was a truly sacramental marriage, but as in other royal houses, it was not a love-based marriage; it was marriage by arrangement. The husband, consequently, being absent from home, engaged in long-drawn wars, and the husband's younger brother present at home, seductively persuasive, no wonder, the ignorant, inexperienced girl proved [an] easy win. The point must be stressed: that Gertrude, to begin with, was initiated as an innocent instrument of sexual entertainment professed as love; and simultaneously, she got into the tragic involvement through the relationship

> of sexual promiscuity; since the child born of such unidentifiable paternity is naturally ever rendered suspect ! By and by, the growing child [becomes] aware that there is something wrong with his family constellation.[4]

So Hamlet is a man who finds himself in a situation in which the circumstantial proofs must have made him realize that his paternity is not identifiable. A son likes to take it for granted that his mother has always been faithful to his father. So this is very inconvenient for Hamlet to have a reason to believe that even before his father's death his mother was in love with the husband's younger brother and he bursts out giving expression to his emotion of shame: " 'Frailty, thy name is woman !—' " (*Hamlet* I, ii. 11. 146). No other emotion is as detrimental to the desire to live as the emotion of shame. And nothing can arouse shame as much as one's mother's shameful conduct.

The foundation of the institution of marriage is the faithfulness of both husband and wife to each other and whenever there is an occurrence of faithlessness, domestic harmony is disturbed. Nay, there are also cases where even the suspicion of faithlessness leads to a murder. Even in Shakespeare's dramas there occur such incidents. For instance, Othello kills his wife Desdemona for he suspects her to be faithless and in *Winter's Tale* Leontes orders his queen to be killed for he suspects she is the mother of his friend's child.

But one's coming to know that one's mother has committed adultery is much more serious than one's learning about the frailty of his wife. A husband will feel relieved on the death of the adulteress but a son cannot feel relief even on the death of a guilty mother and the guilt is likely to go on disturbing the son as the ugly fact has put a question mark on the paternity of the boy and arouses suspicions in one's mind as to one's lineage. And this is even more disturbing in case one likes to pride oneself on being one's father's son. And this is Hamlet's problem. Though Hamlet never says in the play that he suspects his paternity, yet it is significant that the sword that he takes up in order to kill his father's murderer goes back into the sheath the moment he finds that he has Claudius before him to kill.

When T.S. Eliot says that Gertrude's character is "so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing" [see *supra*], he is trying to study Gertrude as an individual, but what is significant for Hamlet is the fact that she is besides being an individual, his mother who has given birth to him and that in order to be able to have any kind of self-respect and to be able to be justly proud of one's family it is essential for one to be the son of a woman who has been a faithful wife. So Gertrude's guilt is the guilt of Hamlet's mother, and so there is every probability that her guilt will arouse in Hamlet's heart both the emotion of shame at his own existence and a desire to bring his existence to its end.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1]T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet," *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp.146-47.

[2]It is this emotion that finds embodiment in Philip Larkin's poem "Wants", particularly in the second stanza of it.

[3]Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare: Hamlet* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1983), pp.42 and 57.

[4]Walter Dias, *Love and Marriage in Shakespeare* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1977), p.206.

[5]The Duke in Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" is enjoying complete relief when he is talking about his former wife, whom he has killed for he was not able to tolerate her smiling at everybody.

# ADAPTATION OF TENNYSON'S PLAYS FOR THE STAGE

**Matrayi Priyadarshini**

Of the seven plays of Tennyson, six were performed in London — *Queen Mary, The Cup, The Foresters,* and *Becket* at the Lyceum; *The Falcon* at the St. James Theatre and *The Promise of May* at the Globe Theatre. *Harold* was never put upon the stage. Tennyson had always taken great interest in drama and in early and middle life had constantly visited theatre. Many of his friends and contemporaries have testified that he was a keen judge of the action, the characterization, the scenic effects and the language of the plays he saw and often expressed his views to the actors themselves. Yet he did not possess the technical knowledge of the stage which would have enabled him to meet the demands of modern stage-production, and which would unconsciously have suggested to him all those mechanical details which ensure success behind the foot-lights. Of undoubted value in this respect is the opinion expressed by one who had much to do with the stage and with actors, i.e., Bram Stocker. He says of Tennyson: "...had be begun practical play-writing younger, or had he had any kind of apprenticeship to experience of stage use he would have had no second as a dramatist."[1]

Tennyson himself was fully aware of this lack of technical knowledge, and was willing to accept the assistance of the skill and experience of others in this respect, and therefore his dramas were written with the intention that actors should edit them for the stage. Many alterations and cuts had to be made, as we shall see when considering the plays separately; and the author must have often found it hard to approve when soliloquies and episodes were cut which he deemed necessary to bring out the character and the 'mental action' of the play. Yet some of the actors themselves have testified to his willingness to give in to their suggestions, as the letter of Mary Anderson to Hallam Tennyson shows. She writes that in reading *The Cup* and *The Foresters* the poet showed by his remarks that he had the instincts of the true dramatist, and that he asked to tell him of any lines that might seem to her to overweight the dramatic

action of these plays. She adds that he thoroughly appreciated the need of action, and was ready to sacrifice even his most beautiful lines for the sake of a real dramatic effect. Barm Stoker also relates that Lord Tennyson, when asked whether he would consent to Irving making alterations or cuttings in his *Becket*, answered: "Irving may do whatever he pleases with it."[2] His only concern was that his plays should be kept at the high poetic level, and that there should be no mixing up of the 'dramatic' with the 'theatric' as was so often the mistake made in modern drama in order to produce what was termed a sensational 'curtain.'

The first play, *Queen Mary,* was acted at the Lyceum Theatre on April 18, 1876. This theatre was then under the management of Mrs. Crowe (Miss Bateman), and Henry Irving was 'leading man.' Many alterations were thought necessary, and were consequently made; however, when all was done the drama was still more of a poem than of a play. The number of persons was far too large and had to be cut. One of the alterations occurs at the end, for Tennyson wrote a different close for the last act; he never printed this, but left it as a note. Another alteration made in the play was the consequence of a letter written to the poet by Sir Henry Bedingfield, the direct descendant of the Sir Henry in the play. He wrote that he had been surprised and pained at the ignoble part which was allotted to his ancestor in the play. The millions, who would read *Mary Tudor* or witness the play on the stage, would carry away the impression that his ancestor was a vulgar yeoman in some way connected with the stables, whereas he was a man of ancient lineage, a trusted friend and servant of the Queen, who confided to him in time of danger. To this Tennyson replied by letter, and in the stage-play Sir Henry's name is not once mentioned, whereas in the play-bill he is called merely 'Governor of Woodstock.'

Queen Mary was acted by Mrs. Crowe herself and Henry Irving gave great care to his part, the representation of Philip of Spain; and yet critics who saw the performance tell us that his appearance absolutely realized the cold proud, sneering, unsympathetic sovereign of the laureate's imagination.[3] The author himself was greatly pleased with Irving as Philip. *Queen Mary* ran at the Lyceum Thea-

tre only from April 18 till May 13, 1876, but on the Australian stage it had two long runs, first at the Melbourne Theatre Royal and later when reproduced at the Byou Theatre in the same city.

In December 1879 came the production of *The Falcon.* The Kendals accepted this play and it was staged at the St. James Theatre. It ran for sixty seven nights and was well staged and acted by the chief characters. Fancy Kemble, who saw the play, called it "an exquisite little idyll in action."[4] Tennyson himself saw it and said that Mrs. Kendal looked magnificent and that Kendal spoke his lines well.

*The Cup*, though published in 1884, like *The Falcon,* was staged before it came out in print. It was produced at the Lyceum Theatre on January 3, 1881, where it ran for over a hundred and thirty nights successfully. After writing the play Tennyson showed it to Irving, who accepted it with great enthusiasm[5]. Tennyson himself had been very careful and accurate as to the archaeology of the play, in which Sir Charles Newton had helped him. On March 25, 1879, Tennyson read the play to all the actors who were to enact it, and it was found that only a few alterations were necessary. Three short speeches for Synorix were added in Act I, sc.iii, and at the end of Act II the quarrel between Sinnatus and Synorix was lengthened by two lines and Camma was made to interrogate Sinnatus as to what Synorix had said. Bram Stocker's account of the preparations made for the production of this play is amazing; he may well add that "learning and experience lent their aid."[6] James Knowles reconstructed a Temple of Artemis on the ground plan of the great Temple of Diana. The late Alexander Murray, then Assistant keeper of the Greek section of the British Museum, made researches amongst the older Etruscan designs.

This is an account of the technical part of the preparations. In this connection it is most interesting to read what impression the play in its magnificent setting made on one of the chief characters, Ellen Terry, who has given a rapturous description of it in her own memoirs.[7] She relates that there was a vastness, a spaciousness of proportion about the scene in the Temple of Artemis which she never saw upon the stage until her own son (Gordon Graig) attempted something like it in the Church Scene that he designed for her production of *Much Ado About Nothing* in 1903. That lighting was

at that period greatly employed to ensure effect on the stage is evident from the description of the Temple Scene. She tells us how the gigantic figure of the many-breasted Artemis, placed far back in the scene-dock, loomed through a blue mist, while the foreground of the picture was in yellow light. Most of the beauty of this scene was due to an innovation introduced by Irving. Priestesses and votaries in pagan ceremonials on the stage and in paintings had always been clothed in white robes, but Irving, on finding that there existed no authority for this belief, broke with the custom and used colours and embroideries by which the picturesque effect was greatly enhanced.

Both the principal actors, Irving and Ellen Terry, met with great approval, yet Tennyson himself was not quite satisfied with Irving's representation of his part. According to Tennyson, Synorix was a subtle blend of Roman refinement, intellectuality, and barbarian, self-satisfied sensuality. He did not like Irving's acting, saying that he made Synorix[8] a mere villain instead of a subtle Epicurean. Ellen Terry had not much of a singing voice, and so the music for her song "Moon on the Field and the Foam" was composed by Lady Winchelsea within the compass of eight notes and was very effective.

A few years later when Mary Anderson signed an agreement to revive *The Cup*, Tennyson re-inserted four lines for her, to be sung by the priestesses as they enter the Temple, which had been in his first manuscript:

> Artemis, Artemis, hear us, O mother, hear us and bless us!
> Artemis, thou that art life to the wind, to the wave, to the glebe, to the fire,
> Hear thy people who praise thee! O help us from all that oppress us.
> Hear thy priestesses hymn thy glory! O yield them all their desire.

Miss Anderson fell ill, however, and the play did not come off.

In 1898 the Lyceum Storage in Bear Lane, Southwark, caught fire and was completely burnt out. In these premises, consisting of two large high railway-arches under the Chatham and Dover Railway, which had been walled in and accommodated for storing the Lyceum scenery, were the scenes for forty-four plays; these were all destroyed. Among these plays were *Becket* and *The Cup*. The former was revived in 1904 and the scenery was then reproduced; the latter has never been revived. As has been shown above, it requires a sumptuous and elaborate setting, which entails enor-

mous expenditure; and then it is a very short play, not long enough for an evening entertainment.

The great success of *The Cup* was followed by the complete failure of *The Promise of May* in November 1882. Mrs. Bernard Beere was then managing the Globe Theatre. In October of that year she resolved to act the play after having heard the author read it at Aldworth. Great care was given to the preparation; scenery, costumes and play-bill were artistically got up, but the advertisement had not been wise. The actors had announced that it was an attack on Socialism, and thus the purpose of the author was mispresented to the public. The fact is that it is not an attack on socialism. Moreover, it was mistaken for an attack on free-thinking, which again is not true. This was a disadvantage which could not but be disastrous. And yet, there is little doubt that if the play had been edited for the stage as judiciously as Irving edited the plays he undertook, *The Promise of May* might have had a different fate, for both dramatic incident and character were strong enough to ensure its success. It is well known that one of the most popular playwrights of the day Gilbert said that if he had that play for a fortnight, he could have made it the success of the season.[9] The music was composed by Hamilton clarke. The first prose version was printed in 1882, and this was the version used for stage purpose; it was not then published, as Tennyson wished to write part of the drama in poetry for the reading public. In 1886 the revised version came out. *The Promise of May* contains the only hymn Tennyson has written.

After the failure of this play, ten years passed before another drama of Tennyson was performed. On March 25, 1892, *The Foresters* was produced at the St. James' Theatre only once for the purpose of copyright. On the same date the real production took place at New York by Daly where it was received with great enthusiasm by the Americans.[10] When *The Foresters* was written, Irving did not think that it was fit for the English stage because it was 'not sensational enough.' In America the play was a very great success. There the beauty and the fancy of thought and language were greatly appreciated. Everything had been done to ensure its success. The music was written by the popular composer, Sir Arthur Sullivan, the

costumes had been made after the old designs in the British museum, and for the woodland scenery Mr. Wymper's beautiful pictures of Sherwood Forest had been the model. The actress who was to play the part of Maid Marian was Ada Rehan, who did not fall short of the great trust Tennyson put in her abilities. Professor Jeb, the great classical scholar who saw the performance while on his way to the John Hopkins University at Baltimore, specially praised the acting of Drew as Robin Hood and of Ada Rehan as Maid Marian, the excellent mounting of the play and the beautiful rendering of the lyrics. An alteration in the stage edition must be recorded here. Instead of the short scene between Robin and Marian in the middle of the first scene of the third act, beginning 'Honour to thee, brave Marian,' was cut out when Miss Mary Anderson was to have acted Marian.

Last of all the plays came *Becket,* the best known of Tennyson's plays. Tennyson, who so loved this great work written late in life, never saw it performed. He died on October 6, 1892, and the play was not produced until February 6, 1893. Very striking is its relation to Henry Irving, whose impersonation of the Chancellor-Archbishop was pronounced a wonderful creation by all those who had had the good fortune to see him in this great part. The first performance was an enormous success. Henry Irving once said that no dramatic poetry and no character had ever so influenced him, and when he was told that people talked of his having 'made' the play, his reply was: "No, no, — the play made me. It changed my whole view of life."[11] He played it altogether three hundred and eighty times, and the last words he ever spoke in public were the dying words of Archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral, "Into Thy hands O Lord, — into Thy hands!" For immediately after the performance at brandford on October 13, 1905, he died suddenly at his hotel.

*Becket* as written is enormously long, even longer than *Hamlet*, so that its very length would necessitate cutting for the purpose of production. The adapted play is only five-sevenths of the original length. The beautiful music for *Becket* proves that the choice was well made. Particularly impressive is Standford's identification of Becket with the Gregorian melody. The stage-edition is too long to be discussed in detail. The objection has been raised that Irving

made of it only a series of episodes, but the truth is that the human interest is so strong that a distinct thread of action and motive binds them all together. A few of the alterations may be given here. In the prologue the conversation between Eleanor and Fitzurse has been shifted forward to the opening of the drama so that the hatred which the Barons feel for Becket is brought out as a motive power. The other important alterations are the compression of the two visits of Henry to Rosamund's bower into one (Act II) and a similar compression of the meetings of the kings at Fronteval and at Montmirail into one meeting at Montmirail (Act III, sc. i) where a short 'explanatory' speech of Louis is inserted. The hatred of Becket felt by the murderers is accentuated in a short scene before the Hall of Northampton (Act I, sc.iii). Besides these alterations, Irving adapted the drama by cutting out passage (Walter Map's part) and by curtailing speeches. One naturally regrets the absence of many beautiful lines from the written drama, yet it must be confessed that Irving has preserved all the delicate touches which bring out tenderness in Becket's nature, for Irving loved Becket.

All things taken together, the staging of the last play of Tennyson by one of England's most eminent actor was an event which may be said to have represented the highest achievement of both the poet and the actor. To those who saw the performance, *Becket* forever united the names of Alfred Tennyson and Henry Irving.

## REFERENCES

[1]*Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, Vol. I (London: Heinemann, 1906), p.204.

[2]Ibid., p.225.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Quoted by Lady Tennyson in *A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1897), p.633.

[5]Ibid., p.437.

[6]*Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, Vol. I, p.205.

[7]Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1908), p.23.

[8]Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1949), p.457.

[9]Ibid., p.465.

[10]A.C. Lyall, *Alfred Tennyson* (E.M.L. Series; London: Macmillan, 1902), p.169.

[11]Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson*, p.535.

# WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS: BEYOND THE DISEMBODIED CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MODERNS?

**Sridhar Rajeswaran**

Yeats is being read here in the context of Eliot, Hopkins, Auden and Camus. The choice for such a reading is underscored by the logic that privileges him as a poet made to arrive from the future like Heidegger's Holderlin.[1] This, in turn, offers sufficient reasons to bridge the gap, i.e., update Yeat's location from a time anterior to modernity and bring him into an ambit proper.[2] It is interesting to note that all the four artists — Eliot, Hopkins, Camus and Auden — who constitute the backdrop to Yeat's work were displaced in one sense or the other. Camus, though not a poet in that sense of the term, is brought in for comparison as his aesthetics emerges a good counterpoint to that of the others, in spite of the apparent difference in genre. All the four protagonists shared common concerns with their aesthetics unfolding a disembodied consciousness.

I

This problem of a disembodied consciousness has been the subject of philosophic as well as aesthetic speculation in the twentieth century. An interesting counter-point, in this instance, to Eliot is the French novelist — Albert Camus. Camus expounded an existentialist nihilism, which manifested itself in notions such as the human in exile, the irrationality of all experience and an abiding metaphysical anguish. Camus remained actively engaged with the world till his death, campaigned against the death penalty and wrote of the dynamics of power and rebellion vis-a-vis history. Perhaps Camus's experiences as a partisan during World War II account for his equanimity in the face of meaninglessness. However, a further factor may be discernd to be at work here. Camus's days as a partisan constituted the said portions of a mentality the unsaid of which was equally fundamental to his politicisation of existential anguish.

The unsaid had to do with his problematic attitude to French rule in Algeria, which, in part, rested on the experiences of his disabled mother.[3] Camus's silence over Algeria allowed him to negotiate

his existential concerns in a space which was his spiritual home[4] and which he did not wish to surrender to the oppositional imperatives of nationalist politics. Eliot was in search of a home and a tradition but his choices in this respect had to be vindicated by religion whereas for Camus, his location in Algeria seemed a vindication of his nihilism as well as his engagement with society. The point is Camus's own Algerian experience, in the context of his dumb, deaf and crippled mother is simulaneously a sibilant's particiaption in a relation that suffers oppression as well as exploitation. HIs partisan war experience was the positive personal counterpoint to his artistic/aesthetic expediency. The point is if art suffers a positive mutation, life is tempered by that art. Existentialism, which though had its seeds rooted in an awareness of personal oppression, becomes the order of a collective, specifically the community, while the exploitative order of the other that is the world reenters re-presentation in classic Yeatsian terms of 'impersonality'. Because of these mutual bases it is reasonable to assume that the *Summer in Algiers* on the one hand produced a Sisyphus in art and a partisan soldier in life. Hence displacement and fractures that account for an awareness of value and self worth both from the realms of the personal and the political of practical consciousness, which are though for their turn dependent on geography and biography and exist as no mere shifting categories. Constitutive conditions in the realms of art and aesthetics as well as honesty of depiction vis-a-vis effects may be alienable trajectories but render themselves to a yoking.

Perhaps an instructive contrast can be drawn here between Eliot's Tiresias and Camus's hero — Sisyphus. While it is usual to read the myth of Sisyphus rolling up the stone as an index of purposelessness and arbitrary human endeavour, it is equally possible to discern, in this tirelessly repeated action, moments of epiphany and liberation. For, that moment, when the stone begins its descent, ushers in a momentary freedom and joy, a sense of release, before the labour of Sisyphus may begin again.[5] There is a constant return to labour and life in Camus, with work alone providing the certainty Eliot looked for in religion.[6] The wryness of this philosophic stance

has also to do with geography, with the lay of the land in Algeria — its Mediterranean stillness and poetry.[7]

It can be seen how Eliot opted out of history, out of the mainstream of English poetry, if his poetic career is seen in the perspective afforded by *The Four Quartets.* What is sought to be postulated through the words, opting out of history, is this fact of Eliot's inability to engender and annunciate. His red rock shows fear in a handful of dust but it is only an enunciation of a state of mind that had failed to interlock with the development arm, the state of progress. This being, for the other it failed to reconstruct — in effecting aiding — the collapse of an art that swayed under the weight of its own history due to its dependence on/for its relevance to religion. *The Quartets* arch over the entire corpus of his work in such a manner that the ealier work can be read as attempting to attain a poetic maturity — one that it embodies. *The Quartets* make manifest his aesthetic dialogue instituted to solve the problem of discourse.[8] All those injunctions for poetry necessarily to dislocate language into meaning can be seen to be the result of a desire and an anxiety to reveal and perpetuate the poetic word — not for art's sake. *The Wasteland*, embodying an almost pathological inability to communicate, appears as a record of the human condition reduced to the horror of incoherence, indicated by the various juxtapositions of mutually jarring tones. Eliot in his notes has remarked, "What Tiresias sees is the poem." But, in actually, what Triresias sees is not the point, since he appears a mere aesthetic device to unify the fragmented parts of the poet's vision.

This disembodied consciousness prevails in the tongueless protagonist, and consequently, hs attempts at genuine utterance merely to stir up the brooding chaos into an air of expectancy. *The Waterland* thus requires *The Quartets* for its completion. *The Quartets,* on the other hand, with their search for an authentic word or words, "the complete consort dancing together", registers the earlier attempts as false beginnings.

The specifically religious nature of the solution the *Quartets* arrive at finally decides the issue. The problem of words and structures in poetry requires the validity of faith and revealed truth, rest-

ing on individual choice and acceptance, to exist. This thought gets crystallized in *Murder in the Cathedral* ending for Eliot, and unfortunately, only for him, his circumnavigation. Yet, the Cathedral echoes failure and the insistence on faith carry in and through it the heave of that spiritual exhaustion which tries desperately to align itself to privately held belief. As the Knights circle Thomas Beckett, in order to murder him, the play's Chorus takes up this cry of desperation:

> Clear the air! Clean the sky! Wash the wind! Take stone from
> Stone and wash them.
> The land is foul; the water is foul, our beasts and ourselves
> defiled with blood. ...
> We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean, united to
> Supermatural vermin,
> It is not we alone, it is not the house, it is not the city that is defiled,
> But the world that is wholly foul.

It is not surprising that in this "wholly foul" world, Eliot looked to a personal religion, rather than to the authority of the Anglican church, to console him vis-a-vis the horrors of incoherence that underwrite modern life.[9]

With Hopkins, the personal expediency, which resulted in a split failing to realize itself, due to the divided nature of consciousness, remained private; with the absence of distinct and definitive public spaces for the poet as well as the priest, itself a consequence of an exercised option. Yet this option did permit negotiation within the internal movement of the aesthetic, however pesonal the dialectics. (And here Hopkins is akin to Yeats, but there are significant differences.) Historical essentialism, however, is beyond this and thereby overrides such considerations, so if it is to be made amenable to negotiaion, it has to perforce an interaction, which by itself should partake in the anxieties of the times. In this instance, it would have meant advocating the devolution of certain power structures, specifically the Church-State nexus — impossible in that the Protagonist, the poet-priest, was a third remove, dislocated from country, religion and politics.[10] (Hopkins, in this sense, is more at home in the Eliotian universe, only Eliot's negotiation of spiritual crisis in an age of materialism proved far more tame than that of the poet-priest.) The absence of choice assumes a more powerful conflict

that gets lost in the metanomy of structures — inscape instress and sprung rhythm, finger posts that mark the failure to interlock with process.

Unlike Eliot, who was unimpressed and unispired by the warped forms of Romanticism which confronted him in the early twentieth century, Yeats worked at these forms slowly but surely only to disengage himself from their hold to reach a vantage point of his own from where he could re-enter the tired, worn aesthetic and crystallise it into appropriate structures. Imbued as he was with the awe and mystery of the universe, with "traditional sanctity and loveliness" — a veritable romantic, who, in his youth and under the influence of his father, had accepted the Aesthetes' version of the Romantic credo (Poet as lone figure in search of truth)[11] —, Yeats sought to remake poetry in an essentially Romantic context. That is, he wished to preserve the exalted status of poetry and the poet, envisioned by the great romantics from Blake onwards. Now he put to good use the lessons learnt at those very schools of poetry, he was now also ready to leave them behind. His poetic baptism at the hands of Rhymers helped him reconstruct poetry as craft.[12] His Irish descent put him in touch with a body of oral and folk literature, whose qualities of immediacy of impact, starkness of expression and an integrated vision of life, formed and sustained by a communal ethos[13], he wished to emulate.[14]

By thus perfecting his craft in the context of a linguistic reality that could be made operative in universal conditions, Yeats armed himself against the dangers inherent in Romanticism, which was prone to realise the imagination's activity in solipsism. Thus, even as he moved away from the fairyland of his earlier poems he retained his technical virtuosity and worked to carry the Romantic sense of vocation into the opposing world of reality. He sought a wilful engagement with reality, confronting it with conflict or resolution, as the occasion might allow, but at all times, in terms of the poem — the achieved work or art. In his modern version of Romanticism, the poetic self would constantly confront the world but secure its meaning on its own behalf, which meant that poetry would be forever made and remade in response to the arbitrariness of the

self. But since the self was held in place by the other eternity of a world that was also race, the language of poetry, its expressive form, was rendered complicit with that irreducible human core in which soul and race cohere.

The beggar and nobleman, unproblematically brought together as icons of the nation as well as complete and central poetic symbols, constitute the coherence, the humanism. In other words the creditable humanism of Camus for which he is remembered is homologous to the achieved poeticism of Yeats. By thus developing his art to constitute structures, adequate and yet transcendent to the reality outside, Yeats did not allow his art to serve meaning or truth. Then again, by maintaining his art in close association with the human interior he did not let it assume a glacial autonomy of its own.

His aesthetic was suited for the times, since it showed how privateness of vision could realise itself in a choricity of utterance. Such a merging of private and public voices, the one requiring the other for its articulatory power, meant that both esoteric meaning and public rhetoric appeared transformed, through this choricity, into poetry. The question of the public voice in poetry is a point well answered, since one of the constant pressures on the poet is to make him assume meaning for society at large. Yeats's poetry demonstrates how, given the nature of the times, public themes had to be made private, if they had to signify at all, even as it showed how private meanings, if they are to remain as poetry, must submit to the exigencies of the craft.[15]

At this juncture it is necessary to verify, if the representative worth of Yeats's work may at all be vindicated by feminist criticism, especially since very few modernist writers, least of all his contemporaties — Pound and Eliot —, have been able to challenge feminist claims of misogyny. Feminist criticism renders modernism and the male poet, who embodies women in his verse (and, after all, Yeats's poems are replete with symbols wrought at the expense of women), vulnerable on several accounts — on grounds of objectification of women, and the assumption of a poetic voice which stands in for women.[16]

In Yeats's verse, Maud Gonne is at once a ladylove and emblematic of the Irish nation. She inspires the poet in his chosen vocation, but is disturbing in her alterity. Yeats's love for her was implicated in Irish history and politics and his poetic achievement in some ways was premised on hs successful transformation of heartfelt passions into great art, of personalised anxieties into nationalist conerns. In orther words, the poetic structures, which Yeats perfected, were, in a fundamental sense, a result of his continual mapping and re-mapping of Maud Gonne.[17] However, the fact remains that Yeats recognised the pertinence of gender relations and was sufficiently troubled by what he discovered in women like Maud, whose beauty and stature seemded to him to exist at odds with their tremendous autonomy of spirit and action.

Yeats's representative worth gets re-established further with reference to the poetic sensibility that contains the self, the art and the craft. The efficacy of such a poetic for the times has never been seriously challenged, except for a brief period when the Auden generation sought to align poetry with history. The carefully balanced choice between life and work was seen, by these poets, as at times being fulfilled in the world of happenings and wars. Yet, these young men of the 1930's felt that art, in a very real sense, had to discover values that were not purely subjective and individualistic, but objective and social.[18] What they did not realise was that art does not enter history and serve the times or change the world, but exists as a statement in which the general and the particular cohere and in which a kind of timelessness and history merge.

By the late 1930s, however, Auden is found shrugging his immediate past away as that "low dishonest decade." The poem, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," almost symbolically affirms his poetic creed indirectly

> With your unconstraining voice
> Still persuade us to rejoice;
> .....
> .....
> Sing of human unsuccess
> In a rapture of distress;

and roundly states — "poetry makes nothing happen." Auden further

illustrates the limitations and the paradoxical nature of his art in *The Sea and the Mirror.* Auden's credo seems worth stating, in that, it confirms the Yeatsian poetic and demonstrates Yeats's poetry, balancing interminably art against life and vice versa.

Auden uses Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* the play of the artist and the nature of art to serve as a metaphor for his own statement on art. Prospero confesses that his art of enchantment was merely a means through which he sought to avoid the ignominy of being, "a mere one among many" and hence he was possessed only of the power to "enchant/that comes from disillusion." Auden seems to say here that art itself has its being, only if it can be seen as existing as an act of grace drawn from our minds, yet being there, in spite of ourselves. Art, therefore, does not make things happen. It accepts that the truth of things could be intuited — "the smiling secret" known in "the backyard" but never uttered. For to speak would sink the artist into "unmeaning abysses." The smiling secret will have to remain unquoted with the realisation that

> All the rest is silence
> On the other side of the wall
> And the silence ripeness
> And the ripeness all. ("The Sea and the Mirror"

Art, therefore, has to acquire a sense of humility towards life, temper the arrogant aesthetic consciousness, and not interfere with the world's ways through magic, wanting to seduce it into change.

Art for Auden, in the final analysis, stopped short of life; but life, Auden makes it clear, can find its only term of reference, its value, negatively perhaps, but still usefully, in art. Auden almost echoes the Yeatsian easthetic here but Yeats granted art a more dynamic role. It was not merely to reflect passively in a convex mirror, where distorted images suggest a reality that is not, a reality beyond the acutal. He saw art as engaging itself in a dialectic with life and actually providing it with an image of a reality beyond and also showing it to be possible only on art's terms.[19] What is important to note here is that Yeats's dynamic view of art was cultivated in the context of a nationalist struggle, which brought in an additional dimension of territoriality to the aesthetic, one, which was

denied to Auden. The lack of a struggle and the absence of such a central issue forced Auden to seek and sojourn in alien spaces.

II

What is thus interesting is that while others recorded human failure Yeats attempted to postulate only its endeavour. Arguing that the problem for Yeats was "how to reinvent a genuinely public art," Eagleton says that Yeats, even when he retired into a "proud, self-delighting autonomy," produced poetry, which was really a "displacement into the individual life of an image of the free nation." Eagleton describes Yeats's strategies thus:

> In his (Yeats's) epochal division of literature, Ireland is still pre-lyrical and so pre-individualist. As he moves beyond his early symbolism, he will reach back over the heads of his English contemporaries, the fag-end of a depoliticised Romanticism, to their own great precursors among the early Romantics, whose art springs out of a politically turbulent moment which can speak across the decades to this own. Irish and English literary history are out of synchrony, so Yeats must loop time around him, finding a contemporary in Blake as he cannot in Tennyson. It was his good fortune that he came to artistic consciousness in a historical period (that of revolutionary nationalism, unmanageable women revolutionaries[20]) i which the traditional bardic role — the poet as hero, activist, rhetorician, cultural Gauleiter, man of affairs — could be plausibly re-created."[21]

Arguing in related context, that Irish writers under colonialism were as a whole as concerned with the problem of constituting the nation, as they were with creating a public for themselves, Eagleton observes that this led many of them to loop around space as they had around time, so that in their imaginings, Ireland staged a return from a pre-colonial past to a post-colonial future. What was left out, of course, was the embattled present, the Ireland of the nineteenth century. Eagleton thus goes on to say that the Irish consciousness with respect to the nation "will move backwards into the future, with its eyes sorrowfully fixed upon the past[22], impelled into a new creation by the winds let loose from a paradise it has lost. Since the recent past of British colonialism is a mere aberration, it forms an empty passage of time through which the past can return in all its plentitude, this time as the future."[23]

It is only in this context Yeats is a logical choice because though rooted in context due to a physical presence he *is* by being

a voice made to arrive from the future (like Heidegger's Holderlin)[24] — able to assimilate the very reflexive of life progressions that were marked by a sensibility from the periphery, and which he chose to postulate as a referendum unto itself. He marked a progression beyond the existential concerns of the moderns by making it as available within the very internal movement of art — an art that escaped the silences of history.[25] A dialectical engagement with the reality of it all where he could refer his haunting to a history. Also the dialogic nature of its cultural content, formed in the time as it did, provides options for interlock with the most significant elided margins, margins that pulsated a self delighting autonomy even while transcending limitations of centre periphery boundaries, to be aligned in a solidarity, to cut across, made possible only due to its very independence. The point is, such autonomy and its by-product the solidarity thereof, praxiated existential concerns to Yeats — since he was sufficiently troubled by it — as a continual emergent structure of feeling even while the fact of the poet's attempts at trying to naturalise this movement resulted in a participation that doucmented it in his art. The question is but How? Most importantly this alignment and integration helped in crystallising positional limitations to a considerable extent since the self as subject is constantly tempered by the world which in this instance being emergent extended the terms of reference also continually. It is evident in a careful reading of his works thta his muse is validated by a choice of real life affiliates and his mapping engenders the nation in a moment that contains the entire movement. How was this achieved in a structuration that tied the art moment to annunciated history? An art moment that was simultaneously the body politic? Significantly why did it stay gendered?

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[1]Heiegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Hofstadter, Albert, Harper and Row, New York, 1975, p.142. Writing of Holderlin, he notes, "Holderlin is the precursor of poets in a destitute time...." The same may be said of Yeats.

[2]Much as Yeats's life span — 1865-1939 — significantly overlaps with modernity, here in accordance to our reasoning, it is a question of advancing the entire period to correspond to the modems. Consequently the later day Yeats is

assumed to be beyond the modems.

[3]Helene Cixous's speech at the SNDT University, Mumbai entitled 'My Algeriance,' 27.01.1997.

[4]In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison recounts writer Marie Cardinal's response to a Louis Armstrong concert and notes how Cardinal suffered a sort of self-loathing, which made the concert a strange and compelling experience for her. Cardinal considered this an illness, "the Thing", inthe words of Morrison.

[5]For an aesthetic deflection of Marx and Engels's observation of the nature of work under Capitalism, an interesting motif in the work of the great French symbolist poet Baudelaire may be considered. Baudelaire, like Camus, visualises a moment of deferral of purposeless drudgery and locates it in the coup in a gambling game which precedes the subsequent round of the game and succeeds an earlier one. Marking, as it does, a moment of freedom in series of repetitive actions the coup served Baudelaire as a reminder of how even in impossible conditions, captive to the repetition of sameness so constitutive of the modern condition, the human person aspires to a certain heroism. See Benjamin, Walter: 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in Arendt, Hannh (ed.), *Walter Benjamin Illuminations* (tr. Henry Zohn), Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, pp.179-180.

[6]Camus's appropriation of Marx's notions of labour must be contrasted to the master's definition of it. Though Marx resorts to the self-same metaphor of Sisyphus to describe the state of labour under an evolving Capitalism, his use of it is different and serves to underscore not only Marx's radical deployment of the category but also Camus's ideological humanism.

[7]Sea Camus, Albert 'Summer in Algiers' in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, tr. Justin O'Brien, Vintage International (original edition: 1955), 1983, pp.141-54.

[8]Brooks, Cleanth: 'Discourse to the Gentiles' in *The Hidden God,* A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace and Co., San Diego, New York, London, 1974.

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[10]See Gamer, W.H. and Mackenzie, N.H.: *Gerard, Manley Hopkins: A Selection of His Poems,* The Society of Jesus, 1967.

[11]J.B. Yeats's letter to W.B. Yeats (September 9, 1914; September 7, 1915) in Press, John: *A Map of Modern English Verse*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969.

[12]This is parallel to Adlington's comments on Dowson: 'It is recorded that his theories of poetry were solely technical, and that proves, if proof be necessary, his authentic character as an artist."

[13]See Kirby, Sheelah: 'Background' in *The Yeats Country*, Dolman Press, Dublin, 1962, pp.7-12.

[14]See Stead, C.K.: *The New Poetic,* op. cit., for a gradual development of Yeats's attitudes towards an Irish vision of poetry.

[15]Yeats's own account of the making of 'Leda and the Swan' reveals an understanding of how private interests and themes are taken over by the aesthetic impulse.

[16]For an account of women and the Irish imagination, refer Kruta, Venceslas and Forman, Wermer: *The Celts of the West*, tr. Alan Sheridan, Orbis Books, London, 1985 and Porsinsias, Mac Cana: *Celtic Mythology*, Library of the World's Myths and Legends, Newnes Books (Original edition: 1968), 1983.

[17]See Eagleton, Terry. op. cit., p.234.

[18]See Spender, Stephen: *The Destructive Element*, Jonathan, Cape London, 1938.

[19]This in the context of the dialectic between Art and Religion. The image of Reality, Truth, Knowledge, if attained in Art, can only issue on its speaking terms and cannot counsel mysticism or saintliness to be achieved in real life. In this context, W.B. Yeats has said: "We live with images, that is our renunciation, for only the silent sage or saint can make himself into that perfection, turning the life inward at the tongue... choosing not as we do, to say all and know nothing, but to know all and say nothing." Preface to Poems 1899-1905, Allt, Peter and Alspach, Russell K (ed.): The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1957.

[20]Bracketing our own.

[21]Eagleton, Terry: *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*, Verso, 1995, p.230.

[32]See Donoghue, Denis: 'Romantic Ireland' in *We Irish*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986, pp.21-33.

[33]Eagleton, Terry, op. cit., p.281.

[34]Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Hofstadter, Albert, Harper, and Row, New York, 1975, p.142. Writing of Holderlin, he notes: "Holderlin is the precursor of poets in a destitute time. ..." The same may be said of Yeats.

[25]This is another way of stating that art, in order to seek different thresholds of meaning, removes the visible, corrects closure — the overhanging symbol — even in the moment of creation, which precisely is because it 'is'. Meaning, art grows beyond its Prospero as in Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror." If there is an effacement of the multiaccentuality of the sign, it is in the signature of art, and none has quarrels with it. What is sought to be questioned is Bhabha's statement in nation and narration: "To encounter the nation as *it is written* displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign." Bhabha, Homi K: 'narrating the nation' in *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London, 1990, pp.01-07.

# ELIOT'S 'RELIGIOUS PHASE': A NOTE

**Nasreen**

> In all art when a great master appears he so exhausts the material at his disposal as to make it impossible for any succeeding artist to be original, unless he can either find new material or invent some new method of handling the old.[1]

The remark of Robert Bridges aptly describes the problem of the poets of the nineteen thirties, who took over from Eliot the vocation of poetry. Realizing that there was no scope for continuing Eliot's way, they concentrated their attention upon the pressing problems of the day, economic and political, while complaining that the great poet Eliot by retreating into the dreamland of religion had turned his back upon the realities of the day which were clamouring for his attention. The years following the end of the First World War were really a difficult period in the history of the world. It was a period of economic crisis, of slump in trade, of inflation and of the bankruptcy of nations. Unemployment had become practically universal and crowds of pepole were moving from centre to centre in search of jobs to keep body and soul together.

But it is a mistake to think that Eliot was unaware of this condintion or negligent about his duty. In fact, his focus of attention was not the body of man but his soul. This will become clear when we consider the picture of crowd which appears in his poetry. In *The Waste Land,* for example, we have a reference to the crowd passing over London bridge, which becomes identified with the souls of the dead in Dante's *Inferno*, consisting of two allied categories, that is, souls of persons who were neither positively good nor positively evil and secondly, souls of those men, who were great philosophers and intellectuals for whom Christ was born in vain. The second important picture appears in the first poem of the *Four Quartets* and is more effective:

> Only a flicker
> Over the strained time-ridden faces
> Distracted from distraction by distraction
> Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
> Tumid apathy with no concentration
> Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind.[2]

It shows very clearly that Eliot was not interested in men of hungry stomach but in those of empty souls. He was very well

conscious of the fact that the life of the day had become secular, and he thought it to be his duty to make it aware of the supernatural dimensions of the natural life. "The whole of the modern literature," he says, "is corrupted by what I call secularism, that is simply unaware, simply cannot understand the meaning of the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life; of something which I assume to be our primary concern."[3]

In this way, in the opinion of Eliot, "The real crisis which has always confronted mankind is not any economic or socio-political system. It lies in the very nature of man which is weak, imperfect, corruptible, and sinful. It stems from the fact that man is the product of the finite and the infinite, of the natural and the supernatural, of freedom and necessity, of good and evil and finally of matter and spirit."[4]

The Bible says that what will it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world but lose his own soul. Eliot is in perfect agreement with this view and he believes that what we call the scientific and material progress of today is not an advnace towards life, but a movement towards death. In *The Rock* this idea is expressed most forcefully in the following verses:

> The endless cycle of idea and action,
> Endless invention, endless experiment,
> Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
> Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
> The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
> Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.[5]

People who have considered human conditions from the supernatural standpoint have described the world as a vale of tears and human life as the haunt of suffering — an idea which Hardy has put in a nutshell in the concluding sentence of his novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge.* Human endeavour, therefore, has been directed towards the discovery of some security, some sort of armour against suffering. Matthew Arnold, for example, in his popular lyric *Dover Beach* has found such a security in the personal love. The students of Eliot's last play *The Elder Statesman*, which was composed after the poet's second marriage that gave him a taste of warm love, will remember a similar sentiment in the last speech of young Monica, addressed to her lover Charles. But Eliot agreed with Hardy that all

romance ends with marriage and when husband and wife settle down into the world of domesticity, all hope and joy depart from life. In his well-known play *The Cocktail Party*. Reilly describes the nature of domestic life in a passage in which he says that people who choose domestic life in the world

> Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
> Become tolerant of themselves and others,
> Giving and taking, in the usual actions
> What there is to give and take. They do not repine;
> Are contented with the morning that separates
> And with the evening that brings together
> Two people who know they do not understand each other.
> Breeding children whom they do not understand
> And who will never understand them.[6]

Lionel Trilling has rebuked Eliot for this passage. "There is," he argues, "no references to the pain which is an essential and not an accidental part of the life of the common routine. There is no reference to the principle, the ethical discipline, by which the ordinary life is governed — all is habit. There is no reference to the possibility of either joy or glory. Eliot's representation of the two ways of life, that of the common routine and that of the 'terrifying journey' to the beautitude, exemplifies how we are drawn to the violence of extremity."[7] Eliot in his own way has replied to this criticism. "The religious poet," he says, "is not a poet who is treating the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter; who is leaving out what men consider their major passions, and thereby confessing his ignorance of them."[8]

Eliot accepts Arnold's belief that human life has sadness (or suffering) as its eternal note. Now suffering may be fruitless or it may be fruitful. Fruitless suffering is pain without any benefit to the sufferer, while fruitful suffering proves profitable and useful to the sufferer, if not materially at least spiritually. The best example of fruitful suffering is provided by the great tragedies of Shakespeare where we have a double movment, outer and inner. Outwardly the hero is moving towards the darkness of the grave, but inwardly it is a movement from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom and from falsehood to truth. In religious terms fruitless suffering is the

consuming fire, and fruitful suffering is the fire of purgatory. These are the terms well-known to Eliot and to the religious men at large. The souls in purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer, for purgation.

In the last poem of *Four Quartets* —"Little Gidding," Eliot refers to the German plane discending like the Holy Ghost in the shape of dove, proclaiming its message to the tormented humanity:

> The one discharge from sin and error.
> The only hope, or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre —
> To be redeemed from fire by fire.[9]

Eliot was naturally attracted by Buddha's Fire Sermon' which supplies the title to the third movement of *The Waste Land*:

> From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
> Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
> Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.[10]

The religious man, Eliot believes, prepares an armour for his soul against the suffering by spiritual discipline. The starting point of this discipline is the belief that God is the embodiment of love, and suffering is sent down by Him for the purification of human soul. In the same poem this idea is expressed in the following lines:

> Love is the unfamiliar Name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame
> Which human power cannot remove.[11]

The suffering man has to surrender his own will to the will of God and detach himself completely from the hopes and fears of the world:

> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God
> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought;
> So that darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.[12]

Eliot was deeply interested in the attitude of detactment described in *The Gita.* Lord Krishna images there a man of steadfast mind, who lives in the world like the lotus leaf in water, unaffected by its pleasure and pain, profit and loss, victory and defeat. Eliot also refers to the way up and the way down in the discipline, according to the great mystic, St. John of the Cross. The way down is complete withdrawl from the outer world into "the dark night or the soul," which in the *Burnt Norton*, the poet has described as follows:

Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit.[13]

We have been trying to prove that Eliot's religious poetry is not a retreat from the social, economic and political problems, which were facing humanity in his age, but a movement into the deeper intensity of the problem connected with the very root of human nature. There can be no permanent solution to the problems and difficulties with which humanity is beset except that suggested by religion, which takes the existence of God for granted, and sets out to purify the human heart and soul. Eliot refers to Christ as "the wounded surgeon" because he himself embraced suffering and redeemed the sinful suffering humanity. He is the main sources of our strength:

The (His) dripping blood our only drink,
The bloody flesh our only food.[14]

We have already refuted the charge that Eliot's religious phase meant an end of pure poetry, and underlined the fact that Eliot's religious poems and plays represent the high water mark of his lyricism.

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[13]Ibid., p.174.

[14]Ibid., p.182.

# HENRY DAVID THOREAU: A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

**Asha Viswas**

In the present scenario when the arms race has beome the biggest business and the most powerful institution that threatens not only global peace but the destiny of the whole human race, when we are adding more and more deadly weapons and then think that perhaps with yet more deadly weapons we can make ourselves finally secure, Thoreau's spirit warns us from above. He was the greatest American pacifist who tried to make us listen to the voice of our conscience against the evils of war, slavery and injustice. Though Thoreau talked only to the Americans, as Socretes did only to the people of Athens, his message is to each one of us transcending time and space.

As a pacifist the first thing that Thoreau points out is that peace making begins at a grass-roots level. It begins with you, with each individual. His experience at Walden pond from July 4th 1845 to Sept. 6th 1847 may be called a journey into the self. Thoreau wrote in his journal:

> To make my life a sacrament ... May I treat myself with more and more respect ... may I so live and refine my life as fitting myself for society ... the possibility of my own improvement, that is to be cherished .... I love and worship myself with a love which absorbs my love for the world.[1]

There is no narcissism here, no arrogance but greater awareness about the world outside himself, greater awareness of 'fitting' oneself for society. This is not escape from human beings and human institutions as Thoreau's American critics thought. It is a process of attaining peace within and without. If peace is attained at the individual level, peace in the community is sure to follow.

Apart from this freedom of conscience, Thoreau constantly warns us against the slavery to senses and greed. The urban ambiance and artficial wants created by the media distract the individual from following a peaceful and meaningful life. The subsequent feeling of aimlessness in a machine age creates tensions and these accumulated individual tensions destroy peace. Not only did Thoreau preach a simple living, he practiced it too. Thoreau believes that the necessities of life should not become an end in

themselves. If each individual lives simply, there would be no thefts, robberies, murders, class divisions and class conflicts. This alarm of "simplicity, simplicity, simplicity" transformed Tolstoy and Gandhi. (There is evidence that many of Thoreau's ideas were formed after reading translations from the *Rgveda, Mandukya Upanisads, The Vishnu Purana, Sankhya Karika, Mimamsa* and the *Bhagvadgita).* Thus, simplicity, though looks simple, has power to establish a peaceful community.

'Exclusivity' is yet another great obstacle in the path of peace. We are all born different — different colours, sexes, religions, cultures, opinions and ways of life. But instead of celebrating our differences, we are most diabolically intolerant of the 'Other'. Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* discusses in detail the relationship between Indian and European settler and the tragedy that resulted from the conflicts between two different societies, two different religions and cultures. The former name of Concord was 'Muske Taquid' which means 'Grass-ground River'. This name was more appropriate as the grassy meadows and fish attracted settlers from England in 1635. Concord, the new name given by the white settler, is a misnomer since the Indians are now an extinct race. One race annihilated the 'Other'. Founding of America is bloody in the eyes of Thoreau. The settlers imposed their relgion and economic system. The conflicts between these two cultures often resulted in monstrous violence. In "Thursday" Thoreau narrates the story of Hannah Dustan. This young woman was held captive by the Indians along with her nurse and an English boy. In the night these three white people killed two Indian men, two women and six children, ran away with all the canoes and returned soon after to scalp the dead as proof. The court paid them fifty pounds as reward for ten scalps. Dustan was praised as a colonial heroine. 'Exclusively' thus, pulls people apart, they forget their common humanity. Destruction of race occurs when we fail to 'include' the other. Thoreau writes:

> There might be seen here on the bank of Merrimack ... in what is now the town of Bedford ... some graves of the aborigines. The land still bears this scar here, and time is slowly crumbling the bones of a race ... every spring ... the undying race of reed birds rustles through the withering grass. But these bones rustle not. These mouldering elements are slowly preparing

> for another metamorphosis, to serve new masters.[2]

Thoreau, a deeply religious persons, was not hopeful about religon as an institution in bringing peace on earth. He differentiated between a meaningful religion and an institutionalized religion. Thoreau did not believe that an imposed religious doctrine and a common code of conduct could bring peace. Religious piety and moral earnestness, in Thoreau's view, could never be inculcated by corporal punishment given by the church. He wrote: "Think of a man being whipped on a spring morning, till he was constrained to confess that the scriptures were true."[3]

On one occasion Thoreau was asked to pay in order to support a Clergyman. Thoreau pleaded that since he was not a member of that church, he could not be forced to pay such a tax. For him human solidarity and peace is not the result of religion. In a "Week" Thoreau talked of the negative aspects of converting the natives to Christianity. Their conversion was a process of destroying them. In *A Yankee in Canada* Thoreau's criticism of the catholic church in Quebec is harsher. He writes:

> It is true, these Roman Catholics, priests and all, impress me as a people who have fallen far behind the significance of their symbols. It is as if an ox had strayed into a church....[4]

He describes the nuns as having "Cadaverous faces", their complexions "parboiled with scalding tears" and looking as if they

> have been dead and buried for a year, and then untombed, with the life's grief upon them, and yet, for some unaccountable reason, the process of decay arrested.[5]

In "Cape Cod" Thoreau is critical of charity house built along the shore as emergency shelters for shipwrecked sailors. Thoreau discovered one such house on his walk and found that instead of providing shelter the house itself was a wrack. This is a far cry from the warm human solidarity. However, Thoreau's criticism of charity does not mean that all human compassion is always hypocrisy. In fact, if there is no mercy and compassion, nothing can bind human beings together into a community of shared concern. His message is that fraternity is to be developed for peace and fraternity is not a fraud.

For Thoreau enslavement of human beings is another adminable

factor that destroys peace. He felt that by being a slave society, America had distorted its moral character. A compromise between liberty and slavery makes America's founding principle irrelevant. During Thoreau's life time anti-slavery movement became a burning issue of the civil war. It had picked up momentum in 1831 with the publication of William Loyed Garrison's abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. Thoreau was an active abolitionist who activity participated in helping the slaves to escape to Canada. His parents' home at Concord was an overnight refuge to such slaves. In December 1859 when Captain John Brown, leader of an anti-slavery group, was captured and executed, Thoreau even justified Brown's violent act of attacking the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. His *A Plea For Captain John Brown* is regarded as one of the greatest speeches ever delivered among mankind. In *Slavery in Massachusetts* and *Civil Disobedience* Thoreau has used his pen as a substitue for a gun on the slavery issue.

Yet another threat to our consciousness of common humanity is imperialism. One may call it unbridled narcissism at the national level. Thoreau was filled with a great abhorrence of war. He did not want to be associated with any war unless it was a war for liberty. In 1846 Thoreau was jailed for not paying his poll tax. He did not pay this particular tax because part of it went towards supporting America's war with Mexico. Paying this tax meant a support to an unjust war. Thoreau thought that if a number of people refused to pay their poll tax bills, the government would not shed innocent blood. In *A Yankee in Canada*, Thoreau felt that the English had no moral legitimacy, their only claim to rule over Canada was their huge military power. He regarded the soldiers as "the imperfect tools of an imperfect and tyrannical government."[6] In his own country, too, Thoreau criticised the imperialistic designs and tried to awaken the conscience of Americans who had undue respect for law.

Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* is America's most influential political tract. He made a distinction between the law of the land and the law of conscience. When there is a conflict between the two, the higher law is to be obeyed and the lower one to be disobeyed. But such a disobedient must be willing to accept the punishment for his

disobedience. A Civil Disobedient is peaceful and breaks the law deliberately and publicly to create an awareness amongst the citizens about a particular unjust law. Civil disobedience requires great moral courage. During the civil war in America, there were innumerable examples when organized groups of Northern citizens repeatedly violated laws that supported slavery in the South. But after that Thoreau's civil disobedience was not only igonred but considered dangerous. He was condemned as an anarchist, a transcendentalist crackpot and phony.

Thoreau's most important contribution was made to India. Gandhi elaborated Thoreau's ideas into a national programme of non-violent non-cooperation. He integrated it with Satyagrah. At the second round table conference in Lonon, Webb Miller, an American reporter asked Gandhi if he had read Thoreau, Gandhi's reply was:

> Why, of course, I read Thoreau. I read *Walden* first in Johannesburg in South Africa in 1906 and his ideas influenced me greatly. I adopted some of them .... I actually took the name of my movement from Thoreau's essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience."[7]

Thoreau's peaceful weapon of civil disobedience, perfected and successfully practised by Gandhi, took yet another 'U' turn during the reform impulse of 1960s in America. At the 1956 Meeting of theThoreau Society Herbert F. West of Dartmouth College gave a lecture on the younger generation's response to Thoreau. Eighty percent of the students regarded "Civil Disobedience" harmful. Thoreau was a threat to these short haired, clean shaven, jacketed Americans' values. Dissension was not in fashion. But the same year this fashion changed suddenly. A black woman Rosa Park boarded a bus at Montgomery, Alabama, and obeying the dictates of her conscience, refused to give up her seat to a white man. Rosa Parker was arrested but her refusal started the movement of 1960s. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in *Stride Toward Freedom* that all his doubts about the morality of the boycott were removed after reading Thoreau's Civil Disobedience. King was the most prominent black to connect Thoreau to the civil rights movement. At the New York Hall of Fame Thoreau's bust was unveiled in 1962. President Kennedy selected Braj Kumar Nehru, the Indian Ambassador to U.S., as the principal speaker for this occasion. It reflected the joint

appeal of Thoreau and Gandhi. In 1962 "Civil Disobedience" was reprinted as a 'peace calender.' In 1970 Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee wrote and staged a play entitled "The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail." The preface recounted the injustices of the Mexican war. Within a few weeks of the play's performance at Ohio State University, U.S. invaded Combodia. The peaceful demonstrators refused to believe that North Vietnam was a threat to the national security of America. The enemy formation is an excuse given by all war mongers. An imaginary enemy becomes a real one — chemical weapons, a particular community, a religious minority — these are all different faces of enemy formation. It was against this that Thoreau appealed to the people to be alert, to listen to their conscience, and to oppose laws that are threat to peace.

In the 21st Century the greatest threat to peace comes from the weapons in the hands of the terrorists. Pacifists like Gandhi, Kennedy and Martin Luther King were all assassinated. It is a challenge to those who desire peace. We do not have time, as Andrew Marvel had, to wait for his 'coy mistress' "till the conversion of the Jews." We cannot hope for peace by religious conversions. It is time that there were more Thoreaus before it is too late. It is time to march, as Thoreau and Gandhi and King did, to the different drum. Let us hope there will come a time when lots of people will be left to march to the different drum.

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# SYLVIA PLATH'S "DEATHLY PARADISE"

**Vineeta Kaur Saluja**

The dialectic of life and death is the sole subject of many of Sylvia Plath's (1932-1963) poems. For Plath, the world seems to be full of pain and suffering. As soon as a man is aware of himself and his surroundings, sorrows start pouring into his life. Ted Hughes has referred to the vision in many of Plath's poems as the "deathly paradise." The question is how can 'paradise' be deathy? because paradise is defined as the starting point for humanity, and also as the time when human beings possessed the ideal life, including intimate contact with God. The word 'paradise' of Persian origin, means 'walled garden.'

A deathy paradise is, however, of darkling, sinister import presided over by presence divine but demonic-mythic figures of power, impersonalized archetypes without concern for what they create. It is deathly not because it swallows up purpose and individuality. The discovery of purpose discloses that there is no purpose. Plath's vision is based on this paradox. Her Juvenile poem "Doom of Exiles" very beautifully portrays this vision:

> Green alleys where we revealed have become
> The infernal haunt of demon dangers;
> Both seraph song and violins are dumb;
> Each clock tick consecrates the death
> Of strangers.[1]

The poem is 'Paradise Lost' in miniscule. It is about an apprehension of 'fallen man' in a world without hope of salvation. Death for Plath is absence, nothingness. In "Death and Co," the response of death acquires a deceptive character:

> Frill at the neck,
> Then the fleeting of their Ionian
> Death-gowns,
> Then two little feet.[2]

Sometimes death is red, violent and scalding:

> The dew that flies
> Sucidal, at one with the drive
> Into the red.[3]

Death is also a glitter in some poems. In "Berck-Plage" old

man, a vanishing thing, seems to glitter. Mirrors glitter too, but mirrors represent death in many of the poem. In "The Courage of Shutting Up", mirrors can kill and in "Confusion" the mirrors are sheeted. Glitter also goes with the sea in Plath's association and sea is death as well. But this is not the only kind of fusion of opposites. The opposites of love and hate are fused as well with death as the catalyst. In a poem like "Fever 103°" it seems that illness and pain are cumbersome and intolerable, but if they go on for a long time, the purity of death takes over.

Rebirth is also fancied as the means to avenge her tormentors. The hurt, anger and hatred that she felt towards her husband and perhaps for all men, after he abandoned her, is forcefully represented in poems like "Lady Lazarus" where phoenix-like she rises from her ashes to take revenge. In these poems, her present identity seems to be tentative one as she seeks a realization of her hopes and a fulfillment of her desires in the next life. The death of Lady Lazarus in the poem corresponds to Plath's own crises.

Plath's poems dramatize a personality's struggle for existence and faces numerous encounters with death. In "Full Fathom Five" the motif is used again but the vision of the old man in the sea is enlarged and transformed. An explicit expression of a wish to die is evident in the poem:

> Father, this thick air is murderous.
> I would breathe water.[4]

Her fascination with death and self-destructive urges expressed in this poem can be attributed as the desire to join the father. The sea, in the poem, is described as the abode of the father; and the desired death is therefore a death by drowning. A similar death wish is expressed in "Lorelei". The sea is symbolically associated with Plath's childhood. Images of drowning or the desire for such a death combine with memories of childhood and are suggestive of atavism in the poet. The waters of the sea which wash over the head in a drowning symbolize a new birth and baptism. It becomes clear from a close study of Plath's poetic development that she expresses an antithetical attitude towards existence, alternately speaking for life and against it. At one instance, the poems are expressions of power

and vitality and at the other, they are self negating. Plath both wants and does not want to live. This vacillation between a wish to die and fear of death is evident in her poems. Her insistence on the individual's right to sel-realization is notable in her art, but accordingly this self-realization can be achieved only in death.

Though death is inevitably victorious over life, the poet offers a rare instance of its defeat in the poem "Two Views of a Cadavor Room." The first section of the poem describes the scene in a dissecting-room where death seems to pose no threat to the medical students. They have a detached and clinical approach towards death and remain unmoved and unemotional about the dead bodies lying around. The second section of the poem refers to Breughel's painting, The Triumph of Death. The inset of the lovers is depicted against a background of war, symbolizing death and destruction. The artist shows that the lovers live an illusory existence; lost in love, they forget the real threat of death. The two views ultimately are not dissimilar. The dissection in progress and the painting reveal the latent threat of death. However, the poet points out that the painting is not a triumph of death but an instance of its defeat, for art has succeeded in immortalizing the lovers. The poem suggests that death can be transcended through art.

The tension between desires and restraints is excellently expressed in all of her later poems. The conflict is complex and cannot be resolved. The despair present in the earlier poems now changes to resignation, expressed in various moods in "The Moon and the Yew Tree". The poet's inability to comprehend life after death is reiterated in this poem. Ted Hughes in his 'Notes' gives the source of the poem:

> The Yew tree stands in a churchyard to the west of the house in Devon, and visible from Sylvia Plath's bedroom window. On this occasion, the full moon, just before dawn, was setting behind this Yew tree.[5]

The poem explicates the writer's preoccupation with death. The moon and the Yew tree are the external representations of her fear of death and her dark morbid thoughts. The moon also symbolizes the mind of the poet — the knowledge the mind is able to comprehend.

The church bells affirm Resurrection and the Yew tree also

affirms this message. In her apprehension of death, the poet seeks the solace of a mother, like the reassuring and comforting presence of Mary with her gentle eyes, to alleviate her fears. The moon as a mother is inadequate, for it can offer no such comfort. The poet finds no solace in religion either. It is only the saints who have lived a holy are blessed with a knowledge of their destination. The blue light inside the church that bathes the saints and that radiates from the 'blue garments' of Mary represents the peace and calmness which are the result of religious faith and which the poet lacks. In contrast, the light of the moon is a hard, cold glitter. It does not reflect any holiness — all she can offer is blankness —, while the Yew tree offers only 'blackness and silence' of death.

The terrifying obsession to comprehend the nature of death is dramatized as a childlike curiosity to know the contents of a birthday gift in "A Birthday Present". The poem points to the threat of death as a cause for her insecure identity. The threat is represented in the form of translucent, shimmering veils behind which the gift is hidden. The veils are prophetic, for they conceal the knowledge of death, an awareness of which might give her a definition of self. The focus of the poem is the breathless and terrifying suspense with which she waits a revelation of the 'gift'. There would have been no birthday had she died the first time she attempted suicide. Life has returned her to the abyss of self-doubt and uncertainty. She wonders if the gift is a unique form of death meant only for her. The mysterious gift is, in the bewildered mind of the poet, a symbol of death — 'bones,' or 'a pearl of button' or 'a tusk'; it is the uncertainty and incomprehension of death that poses a threat to the self:

> But shimmers, it does not stop, and I think it wants me.
> I would not mind if it was bones, or a pearl button.[6]

While reading Plath's poems the reader is constantly forced to feel about her extremist impulse which seem to be the informing element of her poetry. Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and John Berryman are referred to as leading exponents of the 'Extremist' poetry — the poetry which was deeply committed to an exploration of the hidden roots of fear and guilt and which also reflected the darkly hostile forces at work in society at large. It is especially

Sylvia Plath's later poems which reveal the 'Extremist' impulse in its purest form; and through this kind of poetry did she reveal her most important or best abilities. Plath's reputation was largely created by poems like "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy", written in the last few months of her life. Though in all her poems, her attention is fixed on death and disintegration, there is a definite movement in her work towards greater concreteness of voice and imagery and at the same time towards the blurring of objective-subjective, exterior-interior boundaries, culminating in a group of economical and specific, yet hallucinatory, nightmarish poems.

Plath's experience of life is strikingly serious and sad. Her poems reveal sublime experience of sorrow and death, the latter being the darkest of human experience. The same vision of life is expressed in her later poem "Apprehensions" written in 1962. Surreal images of walls of various hues express her vision of life. The first is the wall of heaven, distant and remote, over which the sky spreads itself out. This is the white wall, the abode of angels, stars and the sun. In its whiteness and blankness it represents a form of death, a slow effacement towards oblivion. The poet prefers this kind of end to herself. The grey wall represents the brain or the mind. Non-creativity is also a form of death. The structure of this wall is corrugated with morbid thoughts, cares and hopes. The contemplation of death, leading to despair and gloom and sourness, is itself a form of death-in-life. The red wall represents a physical death or death by mutilation of the organ of the body. The black wall presents a macabre picture of death, where

> ... unidentifiable birds
> Swivel their heads and cry.
> There is no talk of immortality among these!
> Cold blanks approach us:
> They move in a hurry.[7]

It is significant that it is the 'black wall' she dreads the most, for it ends all hope. The other forms of death seem to signify a 'temporary' death from which she may recover; the white wall represents the oblivion in sleep, which is a restful form of death. Non-creativity can also be conceived as temporary death, which holds hope of recovery. It is the decay and disintegration of the body after death

from which there is no scope of return.

Finally, Plath's poetry reveals her speculations about the mysteries of life and death. She is very clear about how she looks at human life in the scheme of the universe. Quite frankly she admits that there is a creator of the universe and man is an aspect of Him. Her poems "The Hanging Man," "Years" and "Mystic" present a merciless God who comes in the way of man's fulfilment. Sometimes she questions the benevolence of such a God. Even the mystical experience is rejected because it does not provide any solution to the physical and psychological problems of a man. Life on earth with all its pageantry is to Plath an endless cycle of birth and death, and if this be the truth, one should embrace death fearlessly as Plath did. Her poetry is a superb revelation of her belief in the potentiality of man both as a creator and a destroyer; and with this belief she has her moments of enlightenment without which she would never have thought of extinguishing the candle of her life.

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# THE INTERPLAY OF SEX, VIOLENCE AND DISGUISE: POSTMODERNIST PROBLEMATICS IN JERZY KOSINSKI'S *PASSION PLAY* AND *PINBALL*

**Satnam Kaur**

Twentieth Century American fiction celebrates and eulogizes the anti-hero, a man thoroughly at odds with the times and imprisoned by them, yet Kosinski's heroes outgrow even this concept of despair. Kosinski heroes are formed only by the formlessness of the events and actions that seem to imprison them totally. An unorthodox, experimental and inventive genius of a true disciple and practitioner of postmodernist art and ideology gets exhibited through the depiction of such protagonistic situations. His novels are full of violence, sex and disguise, the main ingredients of postmodernist society. Every sexual encounter of the Kosinski fictional hero becomes an important episode in the evolutionary process of the hero's self-awareness, besides symbolizing the "paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity,"[1] and besides inscribing and subverting the "conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth century Western World."[2]

A close study of Kosinski's *Passion Play* (1979) and *Pinball* (1982) reveals how the protagonists of these two fictional works go all out in true maverick style to attain a detotalizing totalized self by means of sexual aggrandizement, deception, disguise and even libidinal force, which is perfectly in tune with the postmodern problematics. *Passion Play* depicts the existential saga of Fabian, who undergoes a quest of a narcissist in pursuit of his image. He is a polo player who writes books about what it means to be a rider. He lives in his Van Home, a huge vehicle with room for his two horses in the back. As an equestrian with expertise in horsemanship, he prefers to teach beautiful High School-age girls who have an aptitude for the sport. He not only teaches them riding, but initiates them sexually as well. Such a choice on the part of the hero symbolizes in postmodernist ethics what has been termed as "Experience of limits ... of subjectivity, of sexual identity... of systema-

tization and uniformation."[3] His best student is Vanessa Stanhope, niece of Stanhope, the man who lost his life in the Polo match with the hero. She becomes the most willing and talented learner in his twin spheres of instruction, but because she is a minor, and he does not want to be caught and charged with statutory rape, the duo carefully preserve her technical virginity, doing everything they can think of sexually but always preserving her hymen. Such a paradox from the world of dehumanization conforms again to the essence of deculture which postmodernist culture breeds.

In the fictional present of the novel Fabian stages a comeback to claim Vanessa who is now a beautiful heiress in the prime of her youth. He is old, almost penniless and desperately in need of a job. She has remained a virgin for him; and when he hesitates, she literally forces herself on him, using him to launch her into womanhood. Interestingly, she is the only person he has really loved and avoided all these years the final sexual consummation. He never wanted to lose her, but at a later stage now he prepares his mind to leave her. The woman does all she can to keep him, even presenting him with a no-strings-attached gift of one million dollars, so that he could be independent, and money might not become an obstacle between them. But he recognizes that what she is asking for is a kind of possession of him, robbing him of the stern independence and solitude of his nomadic life. He refuses her gift and leaves.

The title of the novel is deliberately ambiguous, referring to the passion of play, the passion of competition in one-on-one field play, but it also signifies Fabian's suffering, his own passion that neither horses nor women can satisfy. Even as the death's head grins in the mirror, he guides his Van Home into the heart of still another nameless city, which is for him a "place of deliverance... the habitat of Sex."[4] Sex liberates him, giving language to an urgent vocabulary of need, mood, gesture and glance. Real postmodernist essence is created, since instinct or simple intelligence can no longer be trusted as a guide to feeling and conduct. In postmodernist fiction, a questioning takes place, a probing of the "totalizing impulse," which has its roots in some kind of "a late romantic need to privilege free, unconditioned experience."[5]

In true postmodernist fashion, Kosinski is "obsessed with sex to the extent that opportunities for extra-sexual levels of relationship have died out."[6] Women and horses, sex and riding, have identical connotations, having double meaning. The favourite mounts of the young girls are also given in the "Saddle Bride." While Fabian is teaching the girls horsemanship, the analogy between coaching girls in equestrian art and training horses is explicit. He mounts girls according to innovations on mounting horses. Things come to their fullest expression when the hero is with Stella, as sometimes he makes love to her wearing spurs and at other time he puts bridles and other gear on her. Such animalistic and repulsive degeneration of the human world to the animal world symbolizes the influence of perverted deculture on human actions, a common feature of the postmodernist demonic civilization.

For a while, Fabian has been a friend and a sort of paid partner to Eugene Stanhope, a millionaire who plays polo as a hobby. But then the hero gets seduced one night by Stanhope's girl friend, Alexandra. The next day Alexandra claims that Fabian has attempted to force himself on her and she has necessarily to run out. Stanhope, in a fury, challenges Fabian to a one-on-one match, and during the match it becomes clear that Stanhope is going directly for his adversary with the intention to murder him. Ironically, with a fluke hit, Fabian hits the ball into Stanhope's head, killing him. Like sex, violence too seems to be pervading the very atmosphere of the novel in a true postmodernist fashion.

During a polo match, Fabian imagines a former lover, Alexandra, who once betrayed him. This is only a fantasy, a pleasant conjuring up of a desired act. Yet the imagining of the act as a vicarious killing envisions the polo ball as a weapon to execute revenges. This imagined and real violence goes exactly in tune with the postmodernist problematics, thus *Passion Play* through the portraiture of Fabian, a real practitioner of violence and orgiastic sex, becomes a perfect example of the postmodernist problematic individual who virtually plays havoc with people's lives.

Kosinski's *Pinball*[7] is another typical example of postmodernist prolematics, where sex, violence and disguise constitute the very

matrix of the novel. Like his creator, the hero of *Pinball,* James Osten, assumes a false identity, the identity of Goddard in order to combat an expected intrusion of society upon the self. The action, as the narrative unfolds, is presented in four parts. In the first part we have Patrick Domostroy, once a celebrity as a composer of music and as a performer, and Andrea Gwynplaine, a voluptuous enchantress who indulges in sexual orgies with Domostroy. Andrea is determined to use Domostroy in order to execute a game plan for entrapping Goddard in order to expose the real identity of this singer and composer, who has already become a living legend. The second part of the book reveals that Goddard is Jimmy Osten, an unremarkable youth whose public image is that of a literature student but who secretly writes and records the best-selling songs of Goddard. Osten's hiding place, the counterpart to Domostroy's own (an abandoned ball room in the South Bronx called "Old Glory"), is his ranch in California which he calls "The New Atlantis." Here, in the seclusion of his "House of Sound," Goddard composes his music in a safe, secure and secretive manner. In the novel's third part, Domostroy becomes involved with Osten's former girl-friend, Donna Downes, a black pianist also studying at the Julliard School, a school of music aspirants. Domostroy eventually succeeds Osten as Donna's lover, forming still another tie between himself and Goddard. In the fourth and final part, the predator and prey finally meet in a bizarre shootout in the empty ball-room of the Old Glory, Domostroy's dwelling place. Here Domostroy finds that he is a victim of a larger plot hatched by Andrea and her boy-friend, Chick Mercurio, a disgruntled and failed rock star. When the shoot out is over, only Domostroy and Osten, now allied in their common status as victims, survive. Each has come to know the other's true identity, and each has been given a singular glimpse into the other's spring of creativity.

Domostroy once created an audience that now has turned against him. His listeners are no longer captivated by his music, and as a consequence, he avoids contact even with his former fans, knowing that their roles have changed. Domostroy, in keeping with the postmodernist architecture of the self, relies upon sex and music as an instance of "autotelic self-reflexion in contemporary

metafiction."[8] By leading a double life, he symbolizes a major tendency in the postmodern world: "... dispersing the will of the one,"[9] besides depicting a "Janusfaced, anarchistic urge... combined with... a vision of ideal order."[10]

As a living legend, Goddard is nothing but a voice and a name—a complete mystery. No body has ever seen him or managed to find out the least bit of information about him. Andrea, a voluptuous enchantress, who can go to any extreme to achieve her desired aim, succeeds in making Domostroy join hands with her to unmask Goddard. Under a well-knit scheme, they decide to write anonymous letters addressed to Nokturn Records, the music company which receives and delivers Goddard's mail. These anonymous letters are written on White House stationery to mislead Goddard and make him believe that these letters come from the wife or the daughter of some official from the White House, who wants to maintain her secrecy by remaining anonymous. Goddard is hooked by this trick and he develops curiosity to know about this mysterious woman. The nexus between music and disguise, between anonymity and nudity attains a new height when Goddard, aroused by the curiosity to unravel the identity of the faceless nude in the photographs, unravels his real identity on encountering Andrea and indulging in orgiastic sex with her. After a long conjecturing on this matter, Osten, in search of White House Woman, becomes a sexual partner of Andrea and in this sexual encounter, the identity of Goddard as well as White House woman gets revealed. For all the main personages of the novel, sex becomes the practical manifestation of disguise, and they enact their individual and collective roles in a type of "Sexual utopia in which everyone has the right to every one else, where human beings, reduced to their sexual organs become absolutely anonymous and interchangeable."[11] No-holds-barred indulgence in sex becomes an eccentric exercise for the postmodernist self, especially for putting into-practice the 'other self,' the Self in disguise. Donna Downes, the other main female personage, is seen initially dating Osten, but when she plays Chopin at a party attended by Domostroy, she finds herself attracted towards him. In order to participate in a cut-throat competition of European musicians Donna

becomes a willing student of Domostroy. Donna's voluptuous presence at the keyboard makes her appear to Domostroy as more than a mere promising student. A clear cut sexual syndrome operates in *Pinball* in which the chief players seek to enhance their existence and creative faculties through a Dionysian type of sexual indulgence, followed by the climatic vortex of violence. It is postmodernism at its brilliant best, destroying, ruthlessly everything that can be identified as liberal humanism or modernism. The novel ends with the brutal killing of Andrea and her associates in a vortex of violence.

Thus sex, violence and disguise, the prominent features of postmodernist society, play a dominant role in Jerzy Kosinski's *Passion Play* and *Pinball.* The frequent indulgence in orgiastic sex constitutes, along with violence and disguise, the multiplicity, heterogeneity and plurality which characterize the actions of the individual self, in the anarchic, turbulent, chaotic and unpredictable world of postmodern existence.

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# HUMANITARIAN NOTE IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S *THE WATERFALL*

**H.C. Gupta**

The term 'humanitarian' is often misunderstood and consequently misused. However, before explaining it, the story of the play in its brief outlines will stand us in good stead. The title *The Waterfall,* which even more appropriately in Marjorie Sykes's English translation is *Mukta Dhara,* is after a free-flowing waterfall. The hero Abhijit, a foundling, was picked up near its source. It flows down from Uttarakut to Shiu-tarai. King Ranjit, the ruler of Uttrarakut, has Shiu-tarai as a dominion state. He adopts Abhijit as the 'guru of his guru'[1] who had predicted that Abhijit would be an emperor of a mighty and vast kingdom. Sanjay, the son of the king, is a true and blind devotee of Abhijit, who is loved by all including Vishvajit, the uncle of Ranjit and the ruler of Mohangarh. On one side are these and the Shiu-tarains who are essentially good and on the other side are King Ranjit, the Royal Engineer Bibhuti, Udhav, the king's guard, Bijapal, his Army General, Chandapal, his brother-in-law, the recruiters Kankar and Narsingh and the unruly Uttarakut mob. Dhananjay, a Vairagi, a prototype of Mahatma Gandhi and Gautam Buddha, is the *de facto* ruler of the Shiu-tarains whose leader Ganesh is ever at his beck and call.

The play begins with a celebration festival held in honour of Bibhuti, the Royal Engineer, a blacksmith by caste. He has succeeded in stopping the waterfall's flow of water by making an embankment over its source after 25 years of conscripted labour. His achievement is marked with repeated giving way of the dam and with the curses and tears of many bereaved persons. The purpose of the dam is to keep the Shiu-tarains in serfdom for good, by withholding their water supply and creating drought conditions. King Ranjit has to get Abhijit arrested as a diplomatic move to save him from the Uttarakut mob's fury: he had become their target because as Crown Prince of Shiu-tarai, he had opened the Nandi Pass which meant foreign trade for Shiu-tarai and went against their interests. King Ranjit had him imprisoned in his tent, which the angry mob put on fire but only after Abhijit had been freed through the

strategic move of Visvajit. Abhijit treated the *Waterfall* as his nurse and he was pledged to set her free. Escaping the imprisonment, he all alone leaves in the dark night and breaks the embankment, hammering it at one of its weak points. The *Waterfall* is freed but he loses his life, being swept away with the mighty current of water released.

Many a scholar and critic have confused 'humanitarian' with 'humanism.' That what is 'humanitarian' is to be differentiated from 'humanism' or any other 'ism' and even 'humanitarianism' is not excluded for that matter. 'Humanism' as explained in an encyclopaedia "is a technical term and as an intellectual or moral conception had always leaned heavily on its etymology. That which is characteristically human, not supernatural, that which belongs to man and not external nature, that which raises man to his greatest height or gives him as man, his greatest satisfaction, is apt to be called humanism."[2] Similarly, Humanitarianism, which is an offshot of the modern democratic movement in its narrow sense, means an equal treatment to all living beings — treating animals and birds as we treat human beings. But being humanitarian is to be full of the milk of human kindness: its nearest synonym is 'humane,' that is, a humanitarian "presumably feels love or friendship towards the object of his concern: yet his strongest emotion is a kind of imaginative flinching before the spectacle of inflicted pain."[3] Humanism with which the term is generally confused is in a word the creed that 'man is at the centre of the universe.' In England, that Humanism as a movement marked the end of the so-called Dark Ages and that came with Renaissance and Reformation at the end of the Middle Ages was also known as 'New Learning.' In my opinion, it is not humanism but humanitarian concern that is the one unfailing test of abiding literature.

Since humanitarian concern calls for a 'spectacle of suffering,' it has inevitably two parties — the innocent and guiltless sufferers and the tyrannical and power-overdrunken torturers. It may be defined as 'humaneness,' the quality of being 'human,' as opposed to being 'brute.' In *The Waterfall*, we have typically cruel and tyrannical and typically mild and meek persons. On the one hand there are

persons having absolute and cruel power, and on the other hand there are the weak and helpless persons who can only suffer and cry, weep and shriek without making the eyes of the callous inhuman monsters numb. To begin with the engines of tyranny. King Ranjit's sole interest is his vanity and timely payment of the taxes by the drought-stricken Shiu-tarains. He tells his diplomatic policy to his minister: "... it is easiest to put pressure upon those who are down below you from the vantage ground of the higher position; and that foreign subjects must always be under pressure," and " ... aliens must be won over by fear" (p.170). This thankless wretch is most unwilling to meet his uncle Visvajit who had once crushed a rebellion against him. He says to his minister: "the man who is a relation and yet an alien is like a hump on the back of a bunch-back. It always follows you. You cannot cut it off and yet it is a trouble to bear it" (p.171).

Then there is Bibhuti who is without the least touch of humaneness. When he is asked if he was not afraid of people's curses, he says arrogantly: "Curses? — When labourers became scare in Uttarakut, I had all the young men of over eighteen years of age from every house of Pattana village brought out by the king's command and a great number of them never returned to their homes. My machine has triumphed against the storm of mothers' curses. He who fights God's own power is not afraid of man's malediction" (p.167). He tells people that Bhairav, the Patron God of Uttarakut, had allowed him to "bring Shiu-tarai to the feet of Uttarakut, piercing its heart with the spear of thirst" (p.172).

Bibhuti as Jagru, one of his village classmates, tells us that he had stolen knowledge of Benkot Varma and poisoned him to death. He suffers no pangs of conscience. Abhijit sends his messenger to tell Bibhuti to gain greater glory by demolishing the embankment, and the satanic scientist says curtly: "My object was to make Man triumphant over the sands and water and stones which conspired against him. I had not time to trouble my mind about what would happen to some wretched maize fields of some wretched cultivator in some place or other" (p.167). The chauvinistic Uttarakut mob are no less tyrannical than their masters. They run amok when

they fail to find Abhijit. They want to punish him. Failing that, one of them says: "We must have some victim! This Vairagi will serve us quite well. Bind him" (p.197).

The Recruiter catches hold of Hubba, an actor who says to him that he was from Tinmohana, whose inhabitants were "remarkably inept at understanding words." The Recruiter browbeats him by telling him that he had his third degree methods of pushing, beating and giving blows to explain his meaning. The Machine in itself is a symbol of tyranny. Even the similes, metaphors and images used all over the play for it are enough to cause fear-shivers down the reader's spine: (i) Sanjay: "Look how the top of that machine has pierced the heart of this evening." (p.178); (ii) First Citizen: "In the day time it tired to outmatch the sunlight, and now it is rivaling the night itself in blackness. It looks like a ghost." (p.197); (iii) First traveller: "Budhan! Shambhu! Budha-an! Shambhu-u-u! ... That black iron-monster there! It's making grimaces at me! It makes me shiver with fear (p.198); (iv) A Stranger [to an Uttarakut citizen]: "What a monster! It looks like a dragon's skull with its fleshless jaws hanging down! The constant sight of it would make the life within you withered and dead" (p.166); (vii) Abhijit: "I cannot tolerate this hideousness. It kills the music of the earth and laughts its sinister laughter displaying its rows of steel teeth in the sky" (p.179).

The number of the persons who suffer undeserved tyranny and are victimized is considerably large. The two crying all sufferers over the play are the woman named Amba of Jonai village whose sole support of life Suman suffered death as a conscripted labour and Batu, the old man whose two lusty grandsons met death in building Bibhuti's embankment. No sooner has the stage been prepared for celebrations on Bibhuti's success than the old woman's painful cry is heard. There is none to show any sympathy with this seeker frantically crying for her son. As she crosses Ranjit, the King's path, he questions her: " I'm nobody. He who was my all in all has been taken away from me along this path. And has this path no end? Does my Suman walk on into the West across the peak of Gauri, where the sun is sinking, the light is sinking and everything is sinking" (p.173). Ranjit ambiguously says to her: " ... your son

has received the last great gift of life," (p.173). She departs saying innocently that she would wait for him as he would surely give his gift to his mother.

The humanitarian in R.N. Tagore makes her cross Ranjit's path once again. Seeing him and his retinue going in the same direction, she makes her heart-touching appeal: "... then remember an unfortunate woman like me. When you meet him, tell him that mother is waiting" (p.181). Tagore is here at his psychological best. He has presented her at regular intervals. When she meets Ranjit a third time, we have the following dialogue, small sentences marked with irony and pun that put an edge to the bitter sorrow expressed:

Amba : Suman! Suman! my darling! It's dark! It's so dark
Ranjit : Who is that calling?
Minister : It's that mad woman Amba.
(Enters Amba)
Amba : He has not yet come back.
Ranjit : Why do you call him? The time came and Bhairav called him: away.
Amba : Does Bhairav call away and never before - secretly? In the depth of night? My Suman! (p.180)

The readers' emphatic concern intensifies in proportion to the indifferent and reckless treatment meted out to her.

To make the symphony still more moving Tagore has added stentorian notes by presenting Batu with his bleeding forehead to show the devilry of the miscreants and to add to the humanitarian appeal of the play. Batu asks the people to go away to their homes and not to join the celebration festival because they were making human sacrifice: they had already sacrificed his two lusty grand sons to the Demon Thirst. Tagore depicts his plight evocatively: "... they are throwing mud at me and the children are pelting me with stones. Everyone is saying that my grandsons were fortunate enough in being able to give up their lives" (p.178). Through Abhijit's emphatic response, Tagore seems to define humanitarian emotion: Batu [to Abhijit] "don't you see how the blood flows from wound? Will you be able to bear it, Prince, when your heart bleeds." (p. 180) And as if that would not suffice, the author has taken all pains to introduce some stray voices and scenes to add to the contrapuntal notes of a deeper tone. The following scene between Lachman and the

Recruiter Kankar is tear compelling:

Wayfarer : I'm nobody, Sir. I'm Lachman. I sound the gong in the temple of Bhairav.

Kankar : That means your hands are strong. Come to Shiu-tarai.

Lachman : But the gong?

Kankar : Bhairav will sound His own gong himself.

Lachman : Pray, have pity on me! My wife's ailing.

Kankar : She'll either be cured or dead, when you're absent. And the same thing will happen if you are present. (p.200)

It looks as though there were a dance of devilry on all sides. When Dhananjaya appears for the first time, he questions one of his followers: "You look as pale as ghost! Why? What's the matter?" First Shiu-tarai Citizen answers: "Master, the blows from Chandapal, the King's brother in-law have become intolerable" (p.183).

On the whole, under Tagore's humanitarian spell, readers experience involuntarily the first sapient quality of the human kind: they have an imaginative flinching at the spectacles of sufferings presented artistically. One can very well propound that undying writers do not proselytize — they are not agenda-focused. And yet visionaries and dreamers as they are, their artistic products define the very fountainhead of the release of their creative impulse. They have a life vision, which is always big and is the rallying point of their work. Tagore is one such writer: he thinks big and makes his work serve some public good suggestively. He is not egocentric but anthropocentric.

## REFERENCES

[1] *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume Two, ed. Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1999), p.167. All subsequent references to the work are to this edition and have been absorbed in the text by giving page references in parentheses.

[2] *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. VII (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), p.541.

[3] *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, p.544. For further clarification and its difference from Altruism and Barhminism which would forbid eating many a food and vegetable on considerations of killing germs in them, see p.537 ff and *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hasting, Vol. VI ( New York: T&T. Clark, 1937), pp.836-40.

# INTRODUCING KAVERI BAI'S *MEENAKSHI'S MEMOIRS*

**G.S. Balarama Gupta**

Notwithstanding the immense critical activity that is going on furiously here as well as on alien shores in the realm of Indian English literature, there seem to be any number of authors and their works that have gone unnoticed and uncommented upon by literary historians as well as critics. It may be reasonably admitted that many of them perhaps deserve this fate but to remain oblivious of those that are of considerable worth ought to be regarded as a source of concern and alarm to all those who desire to have a holistic picture of this literature.

In their seminal bibliography, *Indian Literature in English, 1827-1979,* Amritjit Singh et al mention H. Kaveri Bai's *Meenakshi's Memoirs* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., 1937) as "a novel of Christian Life in South India." It also figures in K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's bibliography in *Indian Writing in English* ( New Delhi: Sterling, 1983), though, strangely, he remains silent about the book. Nor have I come across even a brief note on it anywhere else. All this is so very surprising because the book does not merit this kind of sweeping indifference.

One may choose to call *Meenakshi's Memoirs* a novel perhaps only by concession. It does have, no doubt, most of the novelistic elements like plot, characters, descriptions, dialogue, and so on, but not in a fully developed form. It is also wanting in cohesion and deliberate structural design. As the narrator says, "... it is not so much a story as [a] series of recollections (p.39). She further admits: "I take a leap from one topic to another, without a proper introduction" (p.143). There are sudden transitions (though the reader may not really mind them as every bit of the tale is grippingly told). One wonders if the work could not be legitimately treated as autobiographical fiction.

*Meenakshi's Memoirs* came out in 1937—that is, around the time our early fictionists (especially the Big Three) had just published, or were about to publish, their first novels. Whereas most of

them flowered eventually into prominence, Kaveri Bai's name has remained practically unknown to us. One reason could be that she probably remained a one-volume author. But that alone does not justify the oblivion she has sunk into.

The book gives a brief note on the author: H. Kaveri Bai, Head Mistress, Secondary and Training School for Women, Berhampur, Orissa). She was the only daughter (there were two sons) of Mr Havayee Narayan Seshagiri Rao, Post Master, and of Mrs. Seshagiri Rao, a retired school mistress. Mr Rao was the last representative in the Hindu line of the Havayee family who were attached to the court of the mahratta kings of Tanjore. In his religious zeal he had once for all abandoned the ancestral lands in Mayavaram, a gift from the Rajahs. He died at Vizagapatam on 14-8-1931. Mrs. Seshagiri Rao is a daughter of the late Rev. Job Paul of Bangalore, the latter's father being at first a persecutor of Christian missionaries and Charistians, and later on becoming a convert with all his sons, thereby obtaining the significant name of "Paul" being bestowed on him at his baptism.

Set at the start of the century that is just gone by, *Meenakshi's Memoirs* is the story of Meenakshi alias Clara, a third generation South Indian converted Christian belonging originally to Chuckler or Mediga community, the lowest of untouchables, her dissolute mother, cuckolded father, her brothers and sisters, relatives, neighbours, and friends.

*Meenakshi's Memoirs* begins with Meenakshi's letter to one Ms Bedford (another fictitious character) furnishing reasons for her writing this autobiographical story—the story of a tormented soul who narrated "only to disburden myself a little of the load that was crushing me without killing" (p. vi). This autobiographical tale is spun around an astonishing wealth of reminiscences the vivid and elaborate description of which brings to life a bygone era (the gramaphone days, to borrow a suggestion from the author herself). It derives its chief impulse from the pain caused to Meenakshi by her mother's death-bed confession which reveals her (the daughter) to be a bastard child.

Kaveri Bai is an adept at character protrayal, accurate and animated. Just one instance:

> My mother's particular chum was a Roman Catholic woman, Arokiyamma. I may not be very accurate in computation of her height, for I was such a tiny person then, and she looked tall. A spare black woman, her forearms and legs were tattooed over with figures of scorpions, crabs, fish and geometrical shapes. Her coiffure, a peculiar fashion and the most universal feature among the low classes of Madras, and one, too, by which even an amateur in the study of modes could tell a Madrasee woman from others in any part of the world, was making a knot and thrusting it into the hair over one ear, so that the ball was never in the centre. I seem to see Arokiamma as clearly as if she were physically present before me, in a very popular Madras chintz *saree,* of red ground, showing posies of white and yellow flowers bound with green leaves; a low necked dirty striped bodice; a collar of black beads round her neck, and old fashioned black bead bracelets, with metal clasps on her wrists; a pair of pink stained coils of palm leaf strips inserted in the large lobes of her ears, overhanging which there were a pair of imitation emerald pendants, and with silver rings on her toes; and with her lips and teeth red with constantly chewing *pan.* The dirty pouch that dangled from her waist, a part of the equipment of very Madrasee woman, was her vanity case and my Pandora's box. It contained nothing but the materials for *pan,* betel leaf, nut, chunam and tobacco.... (pp. 23-24)

Pictures, so very commonly seen in India, but never before so well expressed in literature, arrest our attention. The delineation of the ayah is an instance of it (p. 43). Then, there is a vivid account of the bangle-seller, celebrated by Sarojini Naidu, (pp.137-38)

Somewhere or other we must have come across expositions of several sources of children's amusements—like snake charmers, dancing bears, performing monkeys, jugglers, rope-walkers, acrobats, and magicians. What Kaveri Bai adds to the list is the primitive movie which, I believe, no other writer has attempted:

> ...there was the crude street movie consisting of a box on a stand, the box having holes, for the eyes fitted with lenses like those of a stereoscope and you were allowed to see the pictures at the rate of two for a pie I believe. Not only did the showman or woman carry the movie box singing all the way, but the song grew more enthusiastic when the apparatus was set down for customers and the panoramic pictures turned with a handle; for it was in lusty songs and rhymes that the pictures were described and interpreted to the spectator, and not infrequently, what we saw were not even post-card views or paintings, so much as the advertisement pictures and trade-marks pulled off from millinery goods, and the legend invented for each was simply astounding and reflected credit on the resourcefulness

> of the manager's brain and the individual's poetical and musical talent.... (pp. 138-139)

Now look at this word-picture of an orthodox Brahmin (that appears flawless to me):

> It was rather under bovine circumstances that my first remembered view of a real, live Brahmin took place. A middle-aged chap, dark brown and bald but with classic features, and only a knee length loin cloth for his only garment and the sacred thread passing over a shoulder, was passing on the road, with a chembu in hand, when a cow started easing herself. At once the Brahmin paused, caught a handful of the urine, sprinkled a little over his head, and took a few drops into his mouth (p. 140).

What strikes the reader of *Meenakshi's Memoirs* is perhaps its vigorous and racy style. Kaveri Bai writes like a possessed soul, with no hurdles on the way she cannot conquer with amazing ease. Her language seems to grow resilient and accommodative as she goes on writing. It looks as though it poses no problem to her even on occasions that might daunt any of our prominent writers.

How does she manage when she has to grapple with terms peculiar to India? Sometimes she explains: *thavadu:* grain dust (63), *thali:* wedding pendant (69), *chembu:* tiny brass or bronze pot (73), *dhavanam:* lavender leaf (136), *sombheris:* lazy lout (156), *panam saar:* unfermented palmyra juice (162), *mamools:* customary presents (358), *beedas:* pan packets (381), *prasadam:* food that has been offered to the gods (541), *atthar:* father's sister (544), *Hara Hara:* Oh God, oh God, etc.

Some other times she does not give any gloss, though she may italicise: lungi (50), thavanies (55), kolams (74), pials (74), conjee (74), korukapulies (129), etc. This particular practice is likely to result in total incomprehension, or even miscomprehension, especially in the absence of italicisation. Two such conspicuous instances are "bandies" (249) and "pagoda" (134).

Glossing, sometimes, may become a real problem. Kaveri Bai tackles situations like this valiantly by giving detailed explanations, though the result may look rather ludicrous. For instance, "rava ladu" is described thus: "sweet balls consisted (sic) of fine grains of wheat, almond or cashew nuts finely shredded, scrappings of dry coconut, sugar or candy all mixed up and made into balls with ghee" (247).

In another instance, the explanation of "somasies" runs thus: "each containing enclosed in a bean-shaped covering of wheat paste, a spoonful of some sweet stuff, often mashed poppy seeds, almonds, sugar-candy and some other things garnished with currants" (247). These sound more like recipes than glosses !

One of Kaveri Bai's claims to distinction may be seen in her graphic descriptions of some of those children's games that hardly figure in any other Indian English writing. "Sungu" and "pallan Kurivi," for instance, are two varieties of games played with tamarind seeds. If I desist from reproducing here these vivid descriptions, it is only because they are too long for the purpose—the first one occupying over two pages and the latter about a page. Such another game described is called "jute-ambal".

Gaiety and fervour mark Kaveri Bai's descriptions of festivals. Here's an extract from the picture of the festival of lights:

> Deepavali provided a revel for us. It was our Guy Fawke's Day. We, however, started celebrating it long before the actual date and continued the celebration even after the day had passed; for who in childhood's care-free days could resist the charms of fire-works? During all our waking hours, there were the crackling and booming of crackers and the loud explosions of detonators here and there, the wheezing sound and upward gushing of a geyser of sparks now and then, a stray fire-wheel and after nightfall, a house here and a roof there, suddenly illumined with coloured matches, bits of magnesium ribbon and sticks which when it would shoot out a shower of brilliant sparks. The revelry was at its height on Deepavali day. The crackling, whizzing and explosions were like a battle-field when firing was hottest. The geysers and fire-wheels, the matches shedding red or green or blue rays, or showers of dazzling shooting stars, and the ribbons and wires which flared with an incandescent light, and every now and then the release of a flood of coloured light which bathed a large area with its glory, turned the night of the New Moon into a firmament of flashing revelling meteors and comets and stars and suns of dazzling spendour and gorgeous colours. (pp. 250-251)

Though it is by and large a grim tale that Kaveri Bai tells, there is ample evidence scattered throughout the book that she is eminently capable of gentle wit and humour. While describing the people who lived around Meenakshi, it is said: "The helpful neighbours seem to have been friendly rivals in establishing a world record for

grossip" (p. 22).

Meenakshi, while a child, can laugh at herself too. Describing her attempts at gardening, the author says: "I carefully moistened the bed, but kept digging the seeds out, every now and then, to examine their condition before covering them up again" (p.34). This is how Meenakshi describes her brother's naughtiness as a child:

> Before long, Willie made himself a nuisance to us all. He had learnt to transport himself wherever he pleased, first propelling himself on his stomach, then on all fours till he had found his feet. He would ruthlessly seize our favourite toys and spoil all our games. If he wanted a thing, it had to be given away immediately. I have seen very few children yelling so vehemently and so continuously, hour after hour, keeping up the shrieks and screams at the same pitch till the object was realised and not otherwise. As an infant he could never tolerate being laid down on a mat or put in his cradle unless fast asleep. As the parents indulged him in his clamours, though I had often wished he would burst his lungs, he was ready with a piercing howl for everything. (p.57)

Kaveri Bai has a reference to make to what is commonly known as "Butler English" used mainly by ayahs, chokras and chefs—"English that was mutilated, murdered, mispronounced and tortured in a thousand ways" (p.195). She also gives a classic instance which is absolutely amusing:

> I wonder from whom I first heard the most notable example of Butler English, now familiar to every one. The story goes like this. The chef had to break the news of the thieving cat drinking away the milk kept for the master's tea, when it was left to cool down in the kitchen. This was the way the trembling servant is said to have announced the calamity to the Sahib: "Saar, saar; four legs saar; two eyes saar; two ears and one nose sarr; one tail saar; miaou miaou, saar; drink the milk saar." (p. 196)

Kaveri Bai's *Meenakshi's Memoirs* is an engaging work despite some of its minor shortcomings like repetitions, sermonising, and sentimental effusions. The author may be innocent of the stream of consciousness technique. She may not be disposed to dole out concealed pornography. And she may not have heard of magic realism. But the realism of her writing is magical. Kaveri Bai is a significant author for historical if no other reasons. It's time some venturesome publishing house should think it fit to bring out a new edition of this sadly forgotten Indian English literary work.

# RUSKIN BOND: THE MAN AND THE WRITER

**Iffat Ara**

Ruskin Bond grew like a flower behind a bush. The struggles and complexities of life did not engender any cynicism in him, rather he blossomed forth as the great writer of modern times. Like the Victorians whom he read with keen interest and also the Romantics, he was close both to man and nature. The one offered him love and the other satisfied his aesthetic sense. In his autobiography entitled *Scenes from a Writer's Life* he writers to the following effect:

> I belonged very firmly to peepal trees and mango groves; to sleepy little towns all over India; to hot sunshine, muddy canals, the pungent scent of marigolds; the hills of home; spicy odours, wet earth after summer rain, neem pods bursting; laughing brown faces; and the intimacy of human contact.[1]

The influence of science did not effect Ruskin Bond much, for he was dreamy and sentimental. In his formative years when he was young and enthusiastic like the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood he preferred emotional indulgence to rationalism. Like Tennyson's Ulysses he had a zest for life and had designs and motives: "I think it is fair to say that when I was a boy, reading was my true religion. It helped me to discover my soul" (67). If he benefited from the cinema, listened to the gramophone records, made use of a type-writer, he also developed his reading habits that formed his personality.

Like Robert Browning the influence of Ruskin's father contributed to the development of his career: "I learnt to read from my father. He did his best for me, dear man. He gave me his time, his companionship, his complete attention" (9). Also, like Browning, Ruskin's optimism grew out of his intimacy with a talented father, his extensive reading and his admiration of the vastness of life through man and nature:

> My father's hand was always there, and I held it firmly until it was wrenched away by the angel of death. I began to read- it provided me with an escape from the reality of my situation, I was beginning to find that trees gave me a feeling of security, as well as privacy and a calm haven. I am sure I hate a crowd of acquaintances. I value the few. They are the necessities of my life. (35)

Like Bernard Shaw, Ruskin also became a victim of suffering caused by a broken family. Shaw's father was a complete failure and his mother had to bear the burden of the entire household.

Ruskin's father died early and left him to choose his way of life. His mother who had left his father and married an Indian made him resemble Dickens' hero. David Copperfield: "The ensusing lonely period with my mother and step-father only cemented my attachment to the world of books" (38).

This deprivation of early childhood was overcome when in the later years he became attached to a family of friends he had adopted: "I have become a family man by virtue of remaining a bachelor. This is the ideal situation for a writer. All the noise, merriment and bedlam of a large family living together has become an integral part of my own life, and for the most part it's joy to my heart and music to my ears" (XV-XVI). Here one may recall Keats and Wordsworth who had an ear for music that Nature offered to them. Ruskin divides sounds into various categories and he could distinguish them accordingly:

> I was nevertheless sensitive to sound, birdsong, the hum of the breeze playing in all tall trees, the rustle of autumn leaves, crickets chirping, water splashing and mumuring in brooks, the sea sighing on the sand-all natural sounds indicating a certain harmony in the natural world. Man-made sounds are usually ugly. But some gifted humans have tried to rise above it by creating great music! (65-6)

Keats' *Ode to Autumn,* Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, Shakespeare's description of the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* with the songs of Amiens in the same play and by Ariel in *The Tempest* —all bring Ruskin close to them. Like Chaucer and T.S. Eliot, Ruskin also relates the world of humans to the natural sphere and sees harmony in them and also sometimes its opposite is present there. It is a distinctive feature of Rusking Bond that he seeks pleasure and finds objects of delight in all the domains of Nature:

> And although I am a lover of trees and forests, there is something about the desert that appeals to my solitary insincts. Winter gales were frequent and I liked walking into the wind, just leaning against it. I am taking with me the remembrance of you and so I take everything. And in his voice I recognized the familiar love of fun and life. (134)

Ruskin had close acquaintance with those friends who inspired him to participate in the game of life rather than remain a mute observer of it. This spontaneity of expression appealed to him, for he was never an impostor but was stripped of all veils and was his

real self. As he had made up his mind to be a writer and he needed enough material in the form of new and enticing situations: "I was dreaming of becoming a writer" (97). He, like Prospero in *The Tempest*, was so much devoted to his studies that he seemed to prefer art to life.

As in modern plays symbols are used to represent reality, the 'window' also becomes a symbol for Ruskin Bond's imaginative thinking. The window that he loved most was a passage to have contact with the world outside. Nature could be observed through the window exhibiting all its loveliness and gaiety:

> Then the view from my room, or its windows, has always been an important factor in my life and in my writing. It set the scene. From my little desk I could look into a bottle-brush tree, and then down the road into the lichi orchard behind old Mrs. Vilson's house-over the trees and rooftops, as far as the foothills. (89)

The modern period is darkened by the sins and vices of human beings. With his keen sense of perception Ruskin Bond also knew about the intricacies of human nature. He therefore preferred the old to the middle-aged ones. He liked to share the experiences of the old: "Older people have always found me a patient, sympathetic listner. If your listen carefully, you will often find that they have some interesting tales to tell" (49). Miss Kellner, a crippled woman who stayed on her wheel-chair, had no one but a lonely child like Ruskin to infuse new life and spirit into her. She could play cards with him, talk to him and serve him. He was equally attracted by children who could act as torch-bearers, for they are innovative in their thoughts and ideas and are also intelligent. The middle-aged persons tend to conceal their real self:

> And then I turned to children because of their innate wisdom and the thousands of years of civilisation in their genes but all the freshness of a new life, a new day I have never got much out of middle-aged people. They conceal too much. (90)

Ruskin Bond wrote a few lines for little Somi, his friend, and this piece of verse brings us close to him.

> Hold on to your dreams
> Do not let them die.
> We are lame without them
> Birds that cannot fly. (91)

Another aspect of Nature that engaged his attention was the

birds and animals. He had inherited this strange fondness for animals from his grandfather: "According to my mother my grandfather did keep a number of interesting pets, and I have described them and their activities in some of my tales" (XIV). His own pet dog Sher Khan is a living example of his cherished love for this decent and noble creature. Also like Perdita in *The Winter's Tale,* Ruskin knew a variety of flowers and could make a catalogue of them according to their characteristic features:

> One of my earliest memories is of picking my way through a forest of flowering cosmos; the flowers nodding down at me in friendly invitation. Since then, the cosmos has been my favourite flower-fresh, open, uncomplicated-living upto its name, cosmos, the universe as an ordered whole. (5)

Ruskin always enjoyed the profundity of Nature spread around him. Hence he walked up the hill and down in the valley to remain close to God's creation: "I was always a walking person and was to remain so all my life" (73). These walks also gave him an opportunity to see historical buildings that added to his store of knowledge. Also through stamp collection Ruskin got details about places related to the stamps. His father had developed this hobby and the son got its benefit.

As World War II was about to come to an end and peace was likely to follow, the future of Anglo-Indians was rather uncertain in India. Besides, the trauma in Ruskin's life was the untimely death of his father. He experienced the loneliness of existence never felt before. Ruskin found nature and also poor people more responsive in matters of love than his own blood relations. After the War was over India was partitioned but Ruskin could not think of this change in favourable terms, for he had borne the consequences of a divided family which was now in ruins. All stability was lost in both cases. Omar, who had similar experiences at home, was his schoolmate. The partition resulted in a lot of bloodshed and disturbance. Ruskin said to Omar: "And when all the wars are done a butterfly will still be beautiful. Did you read that somewhere? No, it just came into my head: Already you are a writer" (57). To Ruskin Nature offered protection from the ills of life. His happy experiences at school included an old library, friends and town excursion:

> I was very much my own person-strong in my likes and dislikes, wanting and getting my own room, my own privacy, old fashioned enough to believe

> in loyalty to friends, eager to express myself in the language I'd learnt to love. To love and be loved; to be free. (78-9)

Ruskin fell in love both with Indian women and a Vietnamee girl, but his stars remained crossed and the buds of love could not bloosom into flowers of fragrance: "Ranbir's sister Raj was an attractive athletic-looking girl who enslaved me with one side-long look from her dark, friendly fiery eyes" (84). He remained a disappointed and lonely lover. No one wanted him on account of his limited resources and none of the women recognized the hidden genius and nobility of Ruskin Bond. While he was a very small boy he was fascinated by a young girl called Doreen:

> An elevern-year old doing the foxtrot with one of the town beauties must have been a sight to behold. And soon she was bestowing her favours on the entire contigent of Allied troops in the dance-hall while I moodily played with a plate of fish fingers that had been placed in front of me. (152)

Ruskin was again a loser and his calf-love proved unsuccessful.

Ruskin had flights of fancy that carried Shelley's skylark up to Heaven. He also soared high and thought of achieving the desired end. Happiness alone was not enough;he yearned to be a great writer and prove himself capable of carrying out that task. He made up his mind to go abroad. He was sorry to leave India and go elsewhere but that was needed to equip himself with refinement and add more to his knowledge and wisdom. "It is the desire for recoginition and applause that lured me away" (121). Ruskin was not sure whether he would achieve his coveted objective in England and yet he was going away from India: "I can still write if I remain here, even though few will read my work: and there, who knows, nobody might read me" (122).

Ruskin Bond was emotionally attached to his Indian friends who cared for him. Since he had no settled life of his own he had forgotten about youth and also real happiness that made life worth living. He was however sustained by his friends: "I did not think but cast off my moods and doubts, and considered instead how lucky I was to have ever had such friends" (127). The garden he had grown on his roof seemed to wither as if mourning his departure. He felt that the garden, a symbol of Nature, will end one phase of life and begin another.

When Ruskin Bond arrived in Jersey. He felt the place did not inspire him at all. He could hardly forget India and its beauty:

> Within days of my arrival I was longing for the languid, easy-going, mango-scented air of small-town India: the gulmohur trees in their fiery splendour, barefoot boys riding bufalloes and chewing on sticks of Sugarcane a hoopoe on the grass, bluejays performing aerial acrobatics; a girl's pink dupatta flying in the breeze; the scent of wet earth after the first rain; and most of ally my Dehra friends. (131-32)

Ruskin soon learnt through experience that there were no future prospects for him in Jersey. He could just become a school teacher and that did not appeal to him. The clerical jobs he took up were equally undesirable. It was there in Jersey that Ruskin's first novel *The Room on the Roof* came into being. He got the benefit of visiting a number of libraries and reading all kinds of books. As far as literary life was concerned, he got very little encouragement either from the critics or from the publishers before he really became famous. Also he could not get the warmth of feeling among the English that he enjoyed in India:

> Even though I had grown up with a love for the English language and its literature, even though my forefathers were British, Britain was not really my place. I had been away (from India) for over three years but the bonds were as strong as ever, the longing to return had never left me. (154-55)

Ruskin knew that like the warm climate of India its people were also loving and giving.

Ruskin Bond stuck fast to his ambitions, established himself as a man of exceptional merits because he had firm faith that life will hold on if he was determined to achieved great heights in the art of writing: "I get pleasure and satisfaction from writing" (113). This lonely man did not give way to pessimism and discovered his vocation in life. Further, he received love and inspiration from Nature, books and friends. They placed him on a high pedesdal from where he emits radiance everywhere.

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[1]Ruskin Bond, *Scenes from a Writer's Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1997), p.155.

All the subsequent quotations from the work refer to this edition and have been absorbed in the text by giving page references in parentheses.

# NEW INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING: POST-COLONIALISM, OR POLITICS OF REJECTION?

**R.K. Singh**

Has Indian English poetry died with the creative and critical contributions of a couple of Nissim Ezekiels, A.K. Ramanujans, and R. Parthasarathys? Or, for that matter, with the few noted poets of the 1960s and 1970s — Moraes, Mahapatra, Mehrotra, Daruwalla, or Shiv K. Kumar — who have been occupying the centre and throttling others from emerging? Niranjan Mohanty in his refelections on the current scenario has raised certain vital issues that must be debated before it is too late. I agree with his view: "At times I feel that the colonial, deconstructionist and postcolonial discourses have elusively alluded to the construction of a passion for empire-building, for erecting boundaries, for perpetuating the dialectical, often subvertive relationship between the centre and the periphery, between the pivileged and the marginalized."[1]

I do not intend to reflect here on the new postcolonial writing of the Indian or South Asian diaspora despite its veritable quality in terms of the cross-cultural aspects of migration, or the identity crisis in terms of home, language, nation, race, religion, power, politics, etc, or the reshaping of self, values and norms. I also do not question the expatriate authors' negotiation of the physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual tensions in terms of native / non-native, difference/sameness, known/unknown, us/them, home/unhome-like, or the Freudian *heimlich/ unheimlich* contexts that characterize postmodernity and postcolonialism. The postcolonial migrants, irrespective of their origin — India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangla Desh, West Indies, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, South America, etc. — do construct an identity and re/presentation which accomodates and is accomodated by the West (or the country/countries of their adoption). Authors like Vikram Seth, Amitava Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhari, Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Agha Shahid Ali, Vinay Dhrwadkar, Moniza

Alvi, Jhumpa Lahiri, Tabish Khair, Zulfikar Ghose, Bapsi Sidhwa, Hanif Kureishi, Tariq Ali, Alamgir Hashmi, Taufiq Rafat, Tariq Rahman, Shyam Selvadurai, Michael Ondaatje *et al* have been receiving good media and academia attention in India. They are settled in the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and elsewhere in Europe. Most of them do not like to be called Indians but the colonial mindset of the academia here drives critics and reviewers to identity Indian English Writing with foreign nationals of Indian / Pakistani origin (who are published aborad), shunning the Indian nationals who keep publishing in India and abroad without being noticed. The Western discourse dominates their critical reasoning and reflection through perils and delights of growth and change; through survival skills vis-a-vis emigration, sex, parenthood, and age; through race, gender, politics, and wide range of interests and perceptions; through re-visiting past and present with historical consciousness; through communal and personal experience vis-a-vis quest for roots and awareness of the evils of intolerance, ignorance, and extremism, etc.; through a celebration of ethnic, religious and cultural differences/merger/hibridity, and "intellectualized accommodation of ones fragementation", etc.

No doubt in the last two decades fiction has drawn more attention than poetry. So much so, M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan's book *Indian English Literature: 1980-2000 (2001)* devotes 122 pages (covering about fifty new authors) to it and only 60 pages to poetry, showing displeasure at the deteriorating quality of verse today. Even if there has been a ready acceptance of Indian English literature abroad now, many new Indian English poets have been suffering a deliberate neglect, not only by the governing-elites-cum cultural elites of India but also by the media and academia that think there is nothing worth while in recent writings that are not taken note of by Pulitzer, Booker, Sahitya Akademi, Commonwealth, or Whitbread prize givers, or published by a Heinemann, Deutsch, Random House, Oxford, Longman, Cambridge etc, or have a 'foreign' stamp. How long the so-called established scholars, critics, reviewers, and university dons at home will continue to ignore the poets appearing in *small* journals or publishing their books spending their own hard-

earned money. Thanks to the designs of media barons and their agents in the academic, cultural and bureaucratic set up, most of the good poets of the last 25 years, writing and publishing for the Indian audience, have been reduced to a position of "internal exile" as M. Prabha points out in her path-breaking socio-bio-literary criticism book, *The Waffle of the Toffs* (2000).

With their misguided notions and criticism, a few literary and academic colleagues for/with a stint abroad keep conspiring to damage the very existence of Indian English Writing by Indians by denouncing it. I doubt they are aware of the implications of restricting the literary space: they make the native authors feel that they are "them"; they are rather outsiders in their own country. They blindly formulate notions of a collective literary or cultural identity to praise the new diasporic authors and disdain counterparts at home under one or the other pretext. This is dangerous to the country's cultural and literary presence in the world.

Even if the urge to communicate is common to both the poets in the centre and on the periphery, the latter suffer marginalization for want of media coverage and publicity that make one great or a celebrity. The resourceful publishers at home have the necessary means to 'buy' media persons, including influential reviewers, readers, and academics but they evince a different sensitivity. Creative writing at a profitable level is now something market-driven, something attached to awards, prizes, honours, membership of various bodies/committees, and right connections, just as the organized networks of vested interests, controlling the centre, are too strong to allow someone active from the margin or periphery make a dent.

The growth of Indian English prose and poetry has been marred by lack of recognition by the local/native audience with taste, pride, and professionalism. The well-known postcolonial authors of the 1960s and 1970s have simply throttled others from emerging, just as there has been a vulgar search for, or currency of, fame abroad. No Ezekiel, Moraes, Parthasarathy, Mahapatra, or Naik has cared to promote an O.P. Bhatnagar, I.K. Sharma, R.K. Singh, or P. Raja, nor a publishing house like OUP or Longman, or institutions like

Bharat Bhavan and Sahitya Akademi cares to discover and support new poets like Angelee Deodhar, K. Ramesh, or Mujeeb Yar Jung. Most of the main stream English departments would not know even six new poets and writers of the last two decades they could explore for an M.Phil or Ph.D. study; they know only the few names propped up by Bombay poets. While the "Metro" poets evince a colonialist mentality in not tolerating the "mofussil" poets who are often better than them, the established poets, critics, and professors do not like to look beyond narrow vision, centred round a few voices of the 1960s and 1970s. If they pretend ignorance about new voices, or do not write about or reflect on them, it simply means they have no *commitment*, and their complaint about lack of quality in Indian English Writing is superficial.

There has been virtually no evaluative study of new poets of non-canonical writers of the period 1980-2000 despite their artistic and aesthetic excellence. Most of them have been victims of obscurantist and sadistic stances of critics and academics that have been presenting a totally negative picture of Indian English creativity today: "... there is that huge crop of verse (to call it "poetry" would be the mis-statement of the millennium) which seems to be growing all the time, like wild grass in the narrow field of Indian English literature." They lament the "weed-like growth of verse" in recent years and brush aside all new poetry as "the incorrigible in full pseudo-poetic pursuit of the inconsequential."[2]

This is alarming. I suspect they did not have access to poetry of several current poets who are in their 50s, 60s, or 70s: R.S. Sharma, R.V. Smith, Biswakesh Tripathy, Pronab K. Majumdar, K.B. Rai, S. Samal, Sailendra Narayan Tripathy, Renu Gurnami, Eugene D'Vaz, Asha Viswas, Sudha Iyer, Esha Joshi, Mani Rao, Anuradha Nalapet, S. Radhamani, Christine Krishnasami, Lata Ramaswamy, Shernavez Buhariwala *et al.* Naik and Narayan have not realized that there is more openness to artistic innovation today than in the previous generation and that the strength of Indian English Writing has always been sustained by new talents. Though looking for the peaks (as most of new poets of the last 25 years are still active), it is powerful critics and academics' job to prove the worth of new/

contemporary poets and authors and relate their works to their predecessos' without critical pampering or mindless overpraise.

However, the canon continues to repudiate most of the poets of the last two decades even as journals like *Creative Forum, Poetcrit, Canopy, Bridge-in-Making, Triveni, Poet, Cyber Literature, Littcrit, Points of View, Indian Book Chronicle, Language Forum, The Journal of Indian Writing in English,* etc. have been publishing critical articles on some of the "marginalized" poets that include Krishna Srinivas, O.P. Bhatnagar, I.K. Sharma, I.H. Rizvi, R.K. Singh, P. Raja, Gopal Honnalgere, D.C. Chambial, D.H. Kabadi, U.S. Bahri, L.N. Mahapatra, D.S. Maini, PCK Prem, R.S. Tiwary, Niranjan Mohanty, Baldev Mirza, T.V. Reddy, A.N. Dwivedi, Maha Nand Sharma, Suresh Chandra Dwivedi and many others. These native Indian English poets have been confronting colonialist treatment in a postcolonial enviornment even after the maturity of Indian English Writing. They are not exile, emigrant, expatriate, or diasporic, and yet they suffer identity crisis. They feel deprived despite genius.

For those of us born after Independence, postcolonialism should have ended in 55 years of romance with democracy. With the current politics of empowerment of the socially and economically deprived and too much Hindu and Muslim, or majority and minority, only the signs of a new colonialism are visible. At national and international level, after the fall of the USSR and the rise of the processes of globalisation, the postcolonial societies everywhere have been experiencing a new dominance under the control of USA. It seems to me that postcolonialism is not devoid of colonialism: it is rather continuation of colonialism with certain added features to suit the perpetrators of colonialism, be it art, culture, commerce, or politics, or, we are heading back to colonialism by not resisting the politics itself of tyranny of a handful of zealots who have virtually consolidated their brutal power and are now out to obliterate the "marginalized". I think it makes sense to talk in terms of revival of colonialism *after* post-colonialism. And, this is what we face in the first three years of the 21st century: the totalitarian morality of Information Technology, the manipulated fear of war/disaster/doom through, say, globalization, multi-national capitalism, corporate

economy, WTO, environmental concerns, various rights, war on terrorism, and all that; through political orthodoxy in the name of democracy, religious fanaticism, ethnic dominance, and repression of the liberals and the simple, and through the new processes of fossilization of the precolonial / colonial / postcolonial that may render many of *us* irrelevant. I wonder if we are not terribly dislocated in our world divided into North / South and First / Third world today, just as many postcolonial writers, settled abroad, have been communicating with a colonized mind / subjectivity and getting media recognition.

A new colonialism of the right wing, the American and the British, is continuing in developing countries which are now a playground for long term exploitation by the newly empowered colonialists within. A process of re-colonization is going on in the name of decolonization, as evident from post-September 11 developments, especially in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Against such a perspective, new writers and poets, be it India or any other country, need a positive mediation on the basis of equality rather than 'us *vs* them' treatment which is geared to separate or ignore talents that await discovery and recognition. With empathy, recognition, and responsiveness, the literary scholastic orthodoxies of the earlier decades can be replaced with fresh contexts, unaffected by monopolistic approaches. In stead of pronouncing the demise of Indian English Writing or lamenting over its poor quality, if academic critics could demonstrate professional dedication and commitment, they would be able to locate promising good poets, fictioneers, and playwrights besides fostering the art, harnessing the taste, and developing the talent.

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# OF PARROTS AND MYNAHS — RECONSTRUCTING GENDER THROUGH FOLKLORE

**Usha Bande**

This paper addresses the problematic of gender through a study of three small folktales from Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra. It attempts to see the existence of subtle modes of resistance to the social and cultural hegemony present in the folktales, investigating how women writers in retelling the tales focus on the various cultural constructs like women's silence, their relegation to the private domestic space and the situation of "double-bind" that creates conflict between the desire for creativity and the cultural notion of feminity that hampers articulation. The "Parrots and Mynahs" of the title do not necessarily allude to the legendary "Tota-Mynah" tales; these could well be crows and sparrows or robins and peacocks as some of the stories discussed here may illustrate. The stories by themselves are potent enough to provide a space from which to look at and identify the gendered perspective; when subverted, they show how "revisionist mythmaking," to use Adrienne Rich's famous term, can reconstruct the definition of female agency (1980:35).

At the outset, I would like to raise and answer two questions: first, if the reading of the simple social edict of the folktales could be revealing when studied with the help of feminist discourse, which is primarily an academic exercise; and second, how the transpositioning of the bird analogy can concretize the gender issue.

To answer the second point first, women writers find the bird metaphor aptly suitable to convey their sense of beauty, the urge to fly all the way to heaven, the constant fear of being caged and humiliation of being unheard and silenced. Elen Moers in her *Literary Women* discusses how writers from Christina Rossetti to the Bronte sisters, from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf have been using the bird analogy to explore women's agonizing search for the "wings of liberty", for articulating their selfhood, and for exercising an independence of will.[1] Likewise, Ibsen's Nora is also described as a bird. Nearer home, Anita Desai uses the peacock analogy in *Cry,*

*the Peacock* to highlight Maya's obsessive fear of death.

Going back to the first question raised above, we find that folktales scrutinized from feminist angle show a progression among the postcolonial female writers from modernism to postmodernism. By rewriting the folktales into their literature the women writers are providing a body of literature that helps women see themselves as a community to resist the oppressive structure. By shifting the emphasis and re-visioning the tales the writers create a discourse that privileges women to refute their image as mute victims of a repressive tradition as also critique the male-authored gender ideologies that perpetuate the dominant discourse. In some case, women writers enclose the folktales or the myth within the metastory and follow the traditional Indian pattern or framing a text within a text to contextualize the sub-story. This is what A.K. Ramanujan calls the tendency of the Indian culture to "think in terms of ... the context-sensitive ... rules."[2] As Madhu Kishwar asserts, our traditions have great potential to fight anti-woman stance of the culture; the need is to identify them, recognize their strength and put them to creative use (1999:49).[3]

The first story is from Himachal Pradesh but it seems that its various versions are also popular in other parts of India and in some countries of Asia. The title of the Hindi version, "Malik Ki Bhasha" eloquently expresses its connotation. The story obviously points to the authenticity of articulating experience through repetition and the use of master's language to evaluate woman's knowledge, existence and values. The calsh between experience and language forces women into silence. The silence of women and the forced use of the master's language is the subject of much of feminist writing, particularly of the French feminists like Juila Kristeva and Luce Irigaray to which we shall return after the second story.

The second story is by Dalip Kaur Tiwana and the English title is "The Innocent."[4] It provides the transvaluation of a popular folktale by transforming the language. While the first tale focuses upon the issue of using master's language, the second one takes up the problem of women's voicelessness. Feminists agree that women are under-represented, not because of any malicious plotting but

because of various factors like lack of education, burden of domestic obligations, and familial and social restrictive norms. Once woman gets the authorial power to tell the truth and represent herself, the immediate patriarchal reaction is to disown and discard her. Mary Jacobson points out how women writers become "exceptionally articulate victims of a patriarchally engendered plot" (1981-522). Toril Moi views the literary establishment as antagonistic to women writers and asks, "How did women manage to write at all given the relentless patriarchal indoctrination which surrounded them from the moment they are born" (1981:64). The problem of literary production, of speaking out the truth, is associated as much with women's voicelessness as to the question of what Julia Kristeva calls the 'semiotic' — a play of forces that can detect inside language. A woman writer has to work within the dominant order, and if she tends to work outside that order she is either dead or branded mad.

In telling the truth, the mynah has in fact attempted to break the dominance of the male inscription, and displace authority. In the fate of the mynah the stratified meaning of the story serves to implicate the society as a whole. This kind of reading of the folktale raises some pertinent questions regarding the narrative voice in general. The incorporation of another's speech in another's language makes it difficult to locate any identifiable narrational voice in a discourse. Moreover, since males and females move in a context of sexual inequality, there is a strong differentiated behavioral expectation. As Nancy Henley et al. point out, "Language has been used in the past, and is still used, to dehumanize a people into submission; it both reflects and shapes the culture in which it is embedded" (1990-395).[5]

The first step into silencing a woman is her elimination. The koel gets a severer punishment in Dalip Kau Tiwana's story. Tiwana has reappropriated a fable to recontextualize woman's story to deconstruct the stereotype image of woman and to give her the power to articulate, not only as a female but also as a writer. The crow's oft-repeated advice and command to the koel is not to criticize the dominant order (the crow's country) and not to be visible. The moment the koel becomes too articulate, she loses her life.

Obviously, women are not supposed to question or criticize the dominant discourse; the best possible course for them is to remain "invisible." In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan draws attention to the practical and ethical obstacle in women's act of questioning.

Writing itself is an act of resistance, of empowerment. But for women, writing usually creates conflicts and the associated tensions. As a result of the deeply ingrained cultural pre-suppositions, a woman writer has to deal with the realization that while men write out of their experience which is almost genderless, women have to counter the pre-empted notion that the 'feminine' life and experiences are trivial and hence irrelevant. They are deemed unifit to tackle the fundamental issues of humanity. Women writers are constrained by a "double-bind" — a situtation in which they have to struggle to cross their private, muted boundaries and yet to remain within the prescribed space of domesticity. Conflict is generated by the demands of attachment versus autonomy, the desire for creativity and active participation in social and cultural life on the one hand, and the restrictive roles assigned to them by the culture. Many of Shashi Deshpande's heroines are trapped in the situation of "double bind" — creative writers, journalists, and finally a musician, all seem locked in the image imposed by the cultural code. It is Savitri Bai Indorekar, the great musician in Deshpande's *Small Remedies* who breaks the rule but at a massive psychic cost. Helene Cixous admits that it is difficult for women to speak but all the same they must muster up courage to articulate. The mynah in the first story and the koel in the second suffer for opening their mouth. Despite the threat, Cixous wants women to write and be heard, that is the best bet against their relegation to silence (199:75-88).

Feminist critics have discerned that women's writing is characterised by silences and diffidence because of their distrust of the borrowed language, with the result that they are unable to assert themselves as the voice of truth. In *Articulate Silences*, Chinese-American critic King-Kok Cheung observes that the reticence to articulate and skepticism about language and textual authority "has led women writers to embrace open-endedness and multiplicity in

their fiction;" instead of subsribing to any one "master narrative;" they exemplify what Dale Blau Dupleissis calls "both/and vision" (1993:4-5) Mikhail Bakhtin terms this as "double-voiced discourse" which reveals the speaker's orientation towards another's discourse in which the code is made up of a "dominant" and a "muted" story.

Reading closely, we notice how the "double-voiced discourse" operates within the framework of Tiwana's "The Innocent." In the act of retelling the folktale, the author uses two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the characters that are speaking and the indirect and hence refracted intention of the author. In the land of the crow (the male), the koel feels nostalgic for her homeland. She wants to reconnect and reclaim her sense of identity and is pulled by two worlds — on the one hand there are the powerful memories of the past without which she would be rootless, on the other, she has to face the consequences of her choice in coming to the crow's land. This "double consciousness" leaves her frustrated. African American scholar William Du Bois first used the term "double consciousness" to describe the experiences of African Americans who are caught in the clash of two cultures — a Negro and American (1903:45). Using this analogy for the koel (and by implication for the female) we find that she is also trapped between two cultures — one of peace, the other of aggression and competition.

Let me digress for a while and go back to 1905 when Rokeya Begum, an early activist during India's freedom struggle and a writer from East Bengal (now in Bangla Desh) wrote a charming satirical piece "Sultana's Dream". In this story, the protagonist dreams of her visit to an all-woman land where fearlessness, peace and nonviolence reign because men are not out on the streets; they are in their *Mardanas* (as opposed to the *Zenana* in the protagonist's country) and they live in Puradh. The same kind of a country is probably the koel's. This does not, however, suggest that women live in a different culture (they are part of the mainstream culture) but women live in "ambivalent affiliation" with the patriarchy as Gilbert and Gubar assert, which is a complex relationship. Moreover, transplantation from natal home to the husband's home produces conflicts and

tensions generated by uprootedness. The koel's tirades against the crow's country are also motivated by her subordinate status in his land where she is not allowed to vent her feelings. The double standards of the patriarchal value system operate within the story. The koel is threatened of dire consequences if she tries to be critical whereas the crow, while in the koel's country, feels free to criticize her land. Interestingly, the koel does not get angry nor does she warn him, instead she gives only justifications when the crow calls her country boring.

The third story is a children's folktale popular all over Maharashtra and part of Karnataka where it is told with local variations.[6] In Marathi, it is called "Kau-Chieu chi Goshta" — the story of a crow and a sparrow. Women writers find this tale valuable and crucial to understanding woman's situation in life. Many Marathi knowing women writers have questioned the story and have also subverted it. In the story, the sparrow has a beautiful home of her own. But the socio-cultural reality belies this fact. Shashi Deshpande's heroines rejects the myth of a woman having a home of her own. Her heroine Saru (*The Dark Hold No Terrors*) wonders how this misleading and deceptive statement could have crept in the tale. This brings to mind Naseera Sharma's story "Mera Ghar Kahan" (Where is my Home). The title itself eloquently expresses homelessness. One of the writers to have exploded the *Kau-Chiu* myth is Gauri Deshpande.[7]

A bilingual writer — writing in Marathi and English with equal ease — Gauri Deshpande raises several interesting questions with her usual wit and intriguing undercurrent of sarcasm. Reversing the entire scenario, Gauri writes a new story. She titles it "Kavlya-Chimni chi Goshta" and within the folktale framework she weaves another story of a man an a woman. The crow of the folktale is a woman in her story (she-crow, obviously) and the sparrow is a man. In the tale, the crow's home is ugly and shaky, made of dung, but in real life a woman's home (if she has one) is supposed to be dilapidated and ugly because she does not have the pillars of strength, self-assertion, self-confidence and self-identity to support it. Again, the man does not go to a woman's home, it is the woman who has to

make his home her. In Gauri Deshpande's version of the tale, the hero (sparrow) goes to the woman, exploits her physically and financially, drains her out and when fed up, comes back to his own sparrow (wife). The jilted woman, finding herself in difficulty, asks for help but the man and his sparrow hide themselves in their comfortable home, and refusing to open the door, shut her out callously. After a while, the man, satiated with his sparrow, locates the woman who by now has become self-supporting, and asks her "would you come to my home?" The author does not give us the woman's reaction; she leaves her story open-ended.

This revisionist technique used to read a popular folktale deconstructs the accepted myth and by retelling the story, it acts upon its language and gives it a new tinge. Revisionist mythmaking is not simply a retelling of an old story but it involves scrutinizing, revising and recreating to impart it new connotation. Adrienne Rich in her much-quoted call for women's revision of literary texts exhorts women to look back, and to re-focus on the past to show how women were trapped in the patriarchal constructs. Rich defines revision as an "act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (1980:35). For Adrienne Rich it is an "act of survival" whereas for Alicia Ostricker it is "instructions for survival." Revision is a method whereby a writer chooses a culturally accepted tale or heroic figure and appropriates it for altered ends that makes cultural change possible. More significantly revision leads to breaking the silence and transforming language itself. It can be termed a process of recovery and reformation. The old myths are spirited away from their oppressive contexts and rejuvenated by reinterpretation, re-reading and re-writing.

The three folktales discussed here follow different modes — the first story is recounted as it is told in the oral tradition, but it contains within itself a directive to the subaltern to use master's language; the second tale is retold by the author from her perspective with necessary changes and it conveys woman's voicelessness; the third is reformulated as revisionist mythmaking and it erodes the myths associated with cultural presuppositions. As Kumkum Sangari observes in one of her recent articles, "... a history of fe-

male agency and the difficulty of 'owning' a voice is a part of the new problematic. It calls for a reconstruction of the complexity and historically changing definition of female agency — as it is attributed to women and as it is enacted by women — alongside transitions in notions of female selfhood and individuation" (2002:36). These folktales and the women writers who re-write them are trying to break with the canon with an advantage as the entire exercise provides a space from which to look at the shift and to challenge the patristic canon in literature.

## NOTES

[1]See Mary Eagleton ed. *Feminist Literature: A Reader.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp.209-10, for Moers' discussion on the bird metaphor in literature.

[2]A.K. Ramanujan focuses on the context-free and the context-sensitive grammatical rules in his article "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay" in Mckim Marriott ed. *India Through Hindu Category.* New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1990: 41-58. From grammatical rules he shifts to culture and then to literature and shows how cultural tendencies can be categorized as context-free and context-sensitive. In Indian culture and literature the preferred formulation is the context-sensitive rule.

[3]Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanitha focus upon the real life problems of women in their study *In Search of Answers,* New Delhi: Manohar, 1999. According to them women have enormous burden on them of varied nature — husework, child rearing, violence and so on. But these and various such problems cannot be countered with Western feminist paradigms. The activists who are fighting for women's cause, writers, social workers and women at the grassroots must draw from India's own cultural sources.

[4]Dalip Kaur Tiwana's story is titled "Masoom" in Punjabi and has been translated into English by Manjeet Kaur Bhatia.

[5]See Nancy M. Heneley, Mykol Hamilton and Barrie Thorne, "Womanspeak and Manspeak: Sex Differences and Sexism in Communication, Verbal and Nonverbal," in Sheila Ruth ed. *Issues in Feminism.* London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990, 394-406.

[6]A.K. Ramanujan tells the Kannada version of the story of the Sparrow and the Crow but his discussioned takes into consideration its implication for childhood training. See "Telling Tales" *Indian Horizons. 41.4* (1992): 55-79.

[7]Gauri Deshpande (1942-2003) dealt with women's issues but she saw women as individuals, with identity of their own holding on fiercely to their independence.

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# *BOOK REVIEWS*

## O.P. MATHUR, *INDIRA GANDHI AND THE EMERGENCY AS VIEWED IN THE INDIAN NOVEL*

**(New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004), pp. 133, Rs.300.00**

**Basavaraj Naikar**

Indira Gandhi happened to be one of the dynamic political leaders of India. She had a charismatic personality and a large number of admirers and detractors. She had to declare Emergency in India during 1975-1977 both for personal and political reasons. The Emergency in India had both positive and negative aspects. Whereas it brought some order and discipline in the socio-political life of India, it also gave scope to bureaucratic atrocities, imprisonment of people on mere suspicion and forced and indiscriminate family planning operations. On the whole Emergency gave a traumatic experience to Indians and created a sense of fear in their minds. The various aspects of Emergency have been presented and satirised by various Indian English writers. O.P. Mathur, a senior and mature scholar, has selected one of the most significant phases of Indian history and its depiction in literature, which has been neglected by the Indian critics.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, which deal with the writers like Salman Rushdie, Raj Gill, Nayantara Sahgal, Malgonkar, Tharoor, O.V. Vijayan, Arun Joshi, Rohinton Mistry, Balwant Gargi, Ranjit Lal, Rahi Masoom Raza, Nirmal Verma and Kamleshwar. In the first chapter, Mathur traces the varied causes of Emergency, concluding with the climactic court order of 25 June 1975 declaring Mrs. Gandhi's election invalid. Thus the uncontrollable political events on the one hand and the personal insecurity on the other impelled Mrs. Indira Gandhi to declare Emergency so that she could continue in power. As soon as Emergency was declared, Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, a number of journalists, academicians and civilians were arrested. A few organizations Ike RSS and Anand Marg were banned and the electoral laws were amended to nullify the court orders against Indira Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi was controlled by her ambitious son, Sanjay Gandhi (who slapped her six times in

a row). After offering an overview of the Emergency, Mathur takes up individual authors, who have dealt with it in their writings.

Mathur points to the dark side of Emergency in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* like beautification by demolition, sterilization camps and imprisonment of people under MISA. He demonstrates how Raj Gill satirises Mrs. Gandhi's political behaviour through the allegorical character of Alvika in *Torch-Bearer.* He shows how Nayantara Sahgal exposes the brutalities of bureaucracy in Emergency seen through the eyes of an idealist Sonali. He draws our attention to Malgonkar's *The Garland Keepers* wherein the thriller technique and political allegory are combined to expose political corruption, religious hypocrisy and the dangers of the totalitarian rule. He highlights the element of mythological fantasization of the Emergency in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel.* Likewise, he points out how O.V. Vijayan exposes the darkness of Emergency by the creation of a myth, a cartoon network, which mocks through the strategy of exaggeration and repulsion. Mathur rightly opines that Arun Joshi's *The City and the River* is the sharpest indictment of the Emergency from a cosmic perspective. The evils like bribery, money-power, absence of judiciary, and impractical family planning programme are critically focussed. Mathur highlights the tragic-comic aspects of beautification and sterilization programmes of Emergency as depicted in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance.* Similarly, Mathur touches briefly but perceptively upon various aspects of Emergency delineated in Balwant Gargi's *The Naked Triangle*, Ranjit Lal's *The Crow Chronicles*, Rahi Masoom Raza's *Katraa bi Aarzoo*, Nirmal Verma's *Raat Ka Reporter* and Kamleshwar's *Kaali Andhi.*

O.P. Mathur makes a very perceptive observation when he says that the theme of Emergency has been treated more widely and seriously by Indian English novelists than by regional Indian writers. He concludes his study by making a critical observation that the Indian English novels dealing with various aspects of the Emergency have distopic dimensions. He deserves our heart-felt congratulations as he has offered an excellent analysis of a rare and neglected theme with remarkable clarity of thought and perceptiveness backed up with relevant facts of history and politics of India.

## SYED MASHKOOR ALI (ED.), *STARS BEHIND THE CLOUDS* , VOL. I

**(Jaipur: Surabhi Publications, 2004), pp. 190, Rs.400.00**

**A.G. Khan**

The volume under review comprises nineteen articles on fifteen writers. The contributors are from almost every part of the country in addition to one from Italy. The essays cover not only the emergency (in Rohinton Mistry's work) but also Hindu Muslim clash in Kesavan's *Looking through Glass.* Needless to say, like any collection, some essays are extremely thorough and exhaustive while some are merely sketchy and superfluous. The best of these, undoubtedly, is Allesandro Monti's comparison of Mukund Kesavan's and Mistry's novels. It is a well-researched document on Indian society as reflected in the writings of these two writers. As a scientist, he is objective, thorough and highly post-modern in his analysis. Though Jyotrimaya Tripathi's psychological analysis of Dharanidhar Sahu's *The House of Serpents* is an excellent specimen of applying psychology to interpretation of literature his choice of text is not appropriate. Few would dare to read Sahu's work that projects a perverted homosexual world where no relationship is sacred.

G.D. Barche sees Shikhandi of the *Mahabharata* in the *Riot* by Shashi Tharoor. Barche opines that individuals/communities place Shikhandi/pretexts and excuses to kill Bhishma, i.e., the soul of real love/ideal to satisfy the basic instincts of sex, safety and greed. Jayshree A. finds a common characteristic in the protagonists of Upamanyu Chatterjee's three novels: anchorlessness. Agastya Sen of *English August,* Bhupen Raghupati of *The Mammaries of the Welfare State,* Jamun of *Last Burden* are persons who have no commitment: neither to the family nor to the nation nor to the job they have been assigned. Esther David's *The Walled City* portrays the ethnic anxiety of a very small minority community — the Jews. Indira Nityanandam records the predicament of women in this community which imposes restrictions on them, while Swati Shrivastava discusses wit and humour in the works of Ramesh K. Srivastava.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* has been analysed in two articles arriving at almost contradictory conclusions. Tripathi and

Roy study the text as a postcolonial novel finding the protagonist Viramati as the colonizer who uses academic excellence to wreck the domestic happiness of the colonized wife Ganga. Kirti V. Trivedi, on the contrary, considers Viramati old fashioned in contrast to her cousin Shakuntala. Trivedi finds a common thread running through all the women [except Ganga]. They all have been difficult daughters. This is not a convincing approach to the novel.

Indira Bhatt has closely studied Boman Desai's *Asylum, U.S.A.* The novel, according to her, is the mirror-image of all those who seek to belong to the U.S.A. Here is an odd situation for an Indian whom the American Barbara is willing to help provided he does not interfere with her 'liberty'. The novel, Bhatt complains, smacks more of sociological and cultural differences than an aesthetic experience.

*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* by Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai, is a delightful novel about the gullibility of Indian masses who would consider a misfit to be a great Baba. Ramlal Agrawal fails to do justice to this interesting satire on Indian scenario. Shakeel Khan attempts his review of Shanta Gokhale's *Rita Walinkar* not as a scholar but as a reader writing a letter to the editor. The much acclaimed Raj Kamal Jha's *The Blue Spread* has been dismissed by K. Jeevan Kumar because of "unreliability of the narrative voice." This novel focuses on two events: the incestuous relationship between the narrator and his sister, and an act of homosexuality by father with his son.

Suppression has been the theme of the two novels by Gopal Gandhi and Raman Basu. Baldev Rathod sees suppression of the Indian Tamils in *Refuge.* Iffat Siddiqui examines *Outcast* which deals with the tribal life. Raman Basu's *Black Stone* and *This Land Is Ours* demonstrate how the tribals and Dalits are manipulated to serve the cause of the elites.The editor critically analyses Mrinalini Sarabhai's *This Alone Is True* which focuses on the predicament of Devdasis, while I attempt an appraisal of Kaveri Nambisan's *Mango Coloured Fish* which X-rays six marriages.

Taken as a whole the collection is commendable. It has some very good essays on lesser known writers who, throgh have not created waves, have potential. The only negative point of this anthology is very poor proof reading.

## M.M.KALBURGI, *FALL OF KALYANA*, TR. BASAVARAJ NAIKAR

**(Bangalore: Basava Samiti, 2003), pp. 106, Rs.50.00**

**R.M. Girji**

Indian drama in English translation is very limited in quantity as compared to fiction. It is indeed a matter of shame that the rich regional literature of multilingual and multicultural India is not made available in English translation in large quantity even after the lapse of fifty years of independence. One of the ways of resisting the colonial hegemony and Euro-centric thought is the discovery of abundant regional literature through translation, especially English translation. The Indian dramatists who are available in English translation are so limited in number as to be counted on one's fingers: Tagore, Badal Sirkar, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Mahasweta Devi, Gurujada Apparao and so on. Basavaraj Naikar's *Fall of Kalyana,* an English translation of M.M. Kalburgi's original play in Kannada entitled *Kettittu Kalyana* happens to be a welcome addition to the realm of Indian drama in English translation. Kalburgi, former Vice Chancellor of Kannada University at Hampi, Karnataka, India, has compressed his research findings on the life and mission of Basaveswara in this play. Basaveswara happens to be one of the greatest free thinkers and mystics of the world.

The personality of Basava is so grand, noble and multifaceted that it has tantalized many a writer from twelfth century down to the present. Recently a few fashionable playwrights of Karnataka have attempted to portray the picture of Basava in their plays, but they have turned out to be miserable failures on account of the superficiality of their modernist vision. For example, P. Lankesh's play, *Sankranti,* cleverly concentrates on the intercaste marriage inspired by Basava's vision of casteless society, but ignores the other aspects of Basava's elevated personality and mission. H.S. Shivaprakaha's *Maha Chaitra* highlights the reception of Basava by his contemporary *Saranas.* Basava, therefore, recedes into background. Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda* tries to reduce Basava to less than his grand and noble stature, thereby making him a small and helpless man with a confused mind. Thus all these three playwrights

have failed to portray a satisfactory picture of Basava's social, economic and mystic philosophy and progressive thinking as it emerges from his own *vacanas* as well as the poetry written by others on him.

Kalburgi's play is far better than the afore-mentioned plays in that it foregrounds Basava and his encounter with orthodox Brahmanism and King Bijjala and highlights Basava's protestant ideas like *kayaka, dasoha, istalinga* worship, caste and gender-equality, spiritual democracy, valorization of the mortal world, removal of untouchability, etc. In the first phase of his life, Basava rebels against the orthodox Brahmanism by tearing off his sacred thread and by opposing animal sacrifice. In the second phase, he fights against the exploitative and dogmatic Saiva pontiffs of Kudala-Sangama. In the third and last phase, he fights with the royal order of King Bijjala controlled by the brahmanical dogma. Basava's departure to Kudala-Sangama hastens the fall of Kalyana wherein King Bijjala is conspiratorially murdered by his body-guards who are inspired by Basava's progressive ideology and enraged by King Bijjala's authoritarianism. The picture of Basava that emerges from the present play is very comprehensive as it gives due importance to all the major aspects of Basava's liberal and humanist philosophy. It is neither idealized nor legendary as in *Puranas*, nor marginal and reductive as in the modernist plays mentioned above. But it is a realistic presentation of Basava's life of struggle and ethical nobility against the backdrop of religious dogmatism, political authoritarianism, communal segregation, and gender-discrimination of the 12th century Karnataka. The life of Basava depicted in the present play may be compared and contrasted with the lives of Christ, the Buddha, St. Augustine and Mahatma Gandhi in various aspects.

Naikar's translation of the play is admirable on account of its readability and crisp dialogues which appeal to the target-language reader. The play easily offers a challenge to the director who can present it on the national or international stage or even on the silver screen. The detailed notes offered at the end of the play help the non-Kannada reader to understand the technical terms, which are specific to the *Sarana* culture. The play offers ample material to religious philosophers, comparative critics and translation-theorists to codify their knowledge and sharpen their perceptions.

## R.K. SINGH, *COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH: GRAMMAR AND COMPOSITION*

**(Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2004), pp.148, Rs.60.00**

**Rashbehari Ghosh**

Teaching grammar as part of English language skills is a challenging task, particularly if the learners are post- +2 or post-intermediate level in a technical institution. They need to learn the language in context, socially as well as in their work/profession. They learn it as a means of communication, both written and spoken. If they have a clear concept of how the language works or the way vocabulary organizes itself making meaning clear, that is, if they understand the general order of words, basic tenses and verb forms or what we call 'grammar', they will be in a better position to perform in their chosen profession, using English.

R.K. Singh's *Communication in English: Grammar and Communication* is a significant book. It deals with certain specific problems in writing, reading and speaking that post-secondary students generally face. Providing them with suggestions and techniques to deal with these problems, the book reviews the grammar that students may not know well and practise the grammar that they need to know. As Professor Singh notes in the Preface, his book is "specially designed to give students practical help in acquiring the language competence they will need to take an effective part in their professional career."

*Communication in English: Grammar and Composition* introduces the students to the correct use of articles, verbs, concord and preposition; sentence and paragraph structure and their improvement; precis writing; reading comprehension; and formal and informal uses of English. His "aim is to ensure that all students benefit from the teacher's help while he/she teaches the prescribed course in General English/Communication Skills/Professional Communication/Report Writing, etc." in a technical institution.

Obviously, Professor Singh has tried to present a *general* syllabus even as his immediate context for writing the book is the 'Professional Communication' courses, HU 101 and HU 202 (first and second semesters) at the U.P. Technical University. He ex-

plains to the post-secondary and tertiary level students the idea of appropriateness, the idea that language is good or bad, relative to a context, with formal and informal usage. He adopts a realistic approach to the examples of usage (cf. the sections on 'Sentence Effectiveness' and 'Dialogue Writing') and encourages them to develop their own judgement, using criteria of clarity, brevity, and appropriateness in a sentence or paragraph.

Professor R.K. Singh has an established reputation as an ESPist, who has been teaching 'English for Science and Technology' to undergraduate and postgraduate students for more than 25 years. With his experience and background he has tried to present both the rules of English rhetoric so that students' performance could improve. His presentation of the basic concepts of grammar is inspiring.

The book is clearly written and well-crafted, even if it clubs grammar with reading comprehension, precis, paragraph and dialogue writing (possibly to be relevant to most of the Technical University students of the country). The section on Sentence Effectiveness seems crucial to understanding grammar in use at higher level.

The self-contained sections of the book have in-built flexibility of use with good practice exercises and a key to selected exercises at the end. The book is very useful to both students and teachers of English in both technical and non-technical institutions. Since it is priced suitably and reasonably, everyone intersted in English grammar and composition can easily afford to have a personal copy of it.

## RAJENDRA SINGH, *THE SHIRT OF FLAME*

**(Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1999), pp.314, Rs.300.00**

**A.A. Mutalik-Desai**

Dr. Rajendra Singh, former Reader in English at the Ram Lal Anand College, New Delhi, poet and translator, has written what he has called a novel in verse, "an epic of rural India in sonnets.... A mirror of life in the countryside [which] focuses on its seamy side." His work makes us recall that the sonnet as a vehicle for narrative poetry has been brought into vogue in recent years by the California-American Indian Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate.*

These nearly six hundred sonnets (and I will come back to the nature of the sonnet as practised by Singh) divided into eighteen uneven sections take up the narrative according to well-established coventions. But first the substance. To any one who is familiar with life in rural India which is chronically, rigidly stratified, caste being the defining factor, its bitter disputes and bloody feuds from one generation to the next, the running battle between Harial and Bhopal in Singh's chronicle will come as no surprise at all. Looting crops, stealing cattle, poisoning and killing, the intrusion of local political factors, fraud, strategies and counter strategies to outwit the other, the legal wrangling, the complicity of the police, the caste angle, the members of the upper castes always training their guns on the lowest, etc., is such routine stuff. We read about it so frequently in the daily press. It is greeted only by an insuppressible yawn. Singh's *The Shirt of Flame* deals only with such well-traversed terrain. The characters, the incidents, response from the village society and the values are all along a predictable trajectory in life as well as in the story at hand.

In a prologue to this narrative in verse, Singh offers, what is in fact, his own review and assessment of it. He goes, as he claims, by the classic Aristotelian formula; his work has a beginning, a middle and an end; it has complexity and subtlety, beauty and rhythm; it is an aesthetic whole; its action marches towards a climax, etc. He discusses the leading characters, he dissects their conduct. This analysis has been done to excess. He cites Vikram Seth as his guide.

The sonnet as we see it here is neither Petrarchan nor Shakspearean, i.e. English. We are told that the poet has adopted the tetrametric measure. But it is entirely different from the decasyllabic measure in length and in rhythm. The grace and the movement of the five-foot iambic line are missing. Consequently, even the rhyme scheme marks a significant departure. Therefore, that Singh's chosen stanza form is not the conventionally accepted sonnet needs to be stressed. (Only in passing, we may note that of all the stanza forms in English poetry it is the sonnet that stands out as the most closely defined and indeed codified).

The observations in the two prceding paragraphs are not meant to deny Singh his due. His effort has poetic as well as socio-political merit in the landscape of today's Indian rural society violently pulled from many destructive and fissiparous forces. India's foolishly populist ideas and policies rsult in the gravest impact on its rural communities. It is not fully recognized that urban anonymity, a kind of invisibility, is just impossible in a small village which has the pernicious effect of aiding the big fish in swallowing the small one. One may read Singh's *The Shirt of Flame* as, at least at one level, a social scientist's offering which, because of the raw emotions and hard realities presented, is no mean achievement. There is enough ignorance and injustice, violence and cul-de-sac stranglehold in an average village that we should not nurture sentimental notions of the nobility of simplicity, living in the bosom of nature, the sanctity of hard work, far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife of modern mechanized civilization and the like. If cities exemplify the urban jungle, villages can often be the apotheosis of the most primeval variety of existence in the wild. The portrait of life in Singh's narrative is illustrative of all India. For presenting such a realistic account (particularly in these days when "magic realism" is the rage), Singh should be complimented and commended.

Finally, the poet has stated in his prefatory remarks that he has written as a result of "the authority of a real experience." When such is the genesis of *The Shirt of Flame*, may one hope that Rajendra Singh will make it a habit to turn to rural India for substance and inspiration for his literary creations to come.

## R.S. TIWARY, *CURRENT INDIAN CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH*

**(Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2003), pp.459, Rs.990.00**

**R.K. Singh**

I view R.S. Tiwary as a sage litterateur — balanced, positive, clear, humble, and confident. He understands and blends theory and practice just as he appears like a receptacle into which more and more experience can be poured. In his critical reflections he underlines values like harmony, humility, and honesty to the self with rare responsiveness, tolerance, and open-mindedness. Unfortunately, before R.S. Tiwary's latest (last?) book could reach me for a review, he had already left for his heavenly abode at the ripe age of 90.

In *Current Indian Creativity in English* I discover R.S. Tiwary's liberal perspective, accommodating the established as well as the novice, and the classical as well as the modern, in creative and critical practices in English, Hindi and Sanskrit. He examines less known Indian English poets alongside established poets like Dom Moraes and Kamala Das. Almost all these 'new' poets are still alive and active but ignored by the media and academia alike. The critic devotes twenty essays to appreciate their creative genius.

He begins with the poetry of R.K. Singh, exploring his expression *a la* Sanskrit erotic poetics. Though R.S. Tiwary is generally appreciative of the poet's love poems, imagery, diction, style, and contents, "half-concealed, half-revealed" (p.203), he is critical of the poet's directness in erotic self-expression, elusive brevity and "deliberate neglect of punctuation marks" which impair communication. R.S. Tiwary gives high marks to I.H. Rizvi's aesthesis of creativity, fine sense of irony, "clarity of conception and corresponding perspicuity of expression" (p.41), but "the final crystallization of his Muse is still awaited" (p.42).

Evaluating Dom Moraes's poetry, R.S. Tiwary states that the much acclaimed poet is often obscure and baffling to the average readers for his preponderantly subjective perceptions, be it sex, love, or death. Moraes is unusual, esoteric and sophisticated (p.61) even as he is a poet to reckon with among the modern Indian English poets (p.69). Kamala Das is another veteran writer he examines in terms of her feminist quest for identity in matter of love and sex.

As a "bhavaka" (appreciator) of poetry, R.S. Tiwary seeks to "visualize the entire going-on within the poet's interior, resulting from the flow of state of things in the immediate external world, his exterior." He appreciates each poet "as a poet" rather than as a critic *per se.* He is all praise for the narrative genius and metrical excellence of Maha Nand Sharma. D.C. Chambial and Ravi Nandan Sinha appeal to him as sober and serious, while R.C. Shukla sounds pensive and reflective (p.127). Pronab Kumar Majumder is reflective, while C.L. Khatri's poetry impresses him for "perspicuity and spontaneity" (p.152).

As Tiwary peruses the feminist poetry of Jyotsnarani Tripathy, he is struck by her chaste and translucent diction (p.155) and "absolute lack of the unabashed portrayal of sex" (p.154). He is also all praise for Manjul Rani Tripathi's poetry of filial devotion. Her verses are religious and personal at the same time. Like manjul, Asha Viswas creates with a feeling of agitation in the soul but the former appears positive with her unflinching faith in the divine while the latter sings pensively(p.228). His grasp of the depth of the classical Sanskrit aesthetics prompts him to include two essays on Raja Rao, "Indian Sensibility in *The Serpent and the Rope*" and "Tolerance and Accommodation in *The Serpent and the Rope*".

The third section consists of twelve essays, ranging from Humanism in belles-lettres, concepts of postmodernism and literature, comparative view of Indian and Western theories of Drama and Criticism, to Hindi devotional poetry of the Krishna School, and treatment of love and beauty in Bihari, Vidaypati and Kalidas, with an intermingling of Eagleton's criticism and Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" that show him perfectly at home with East and West. In the fourth section, the culture-conscious, humanist critic accommodates four essays on his own poetry by others who share his empathy but lack his range of depth and perspective.

R.S. Tiwary's book marks a historic development, testifying to the relevance of current Indian English poetry which most of the established academic critics and scholars seem to avoid studying. Even if it is quite pricey, the book is worth buying and reading to reassure oneself about the value of Indian English poetry today and the norms for Indian English criticism.

## AMAR NATH PRASAD (ED.), *INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH: CRITICAL EXPLORATIONS*

**(Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), pp. 288, Rs. 600.00**

**U.S. Rukhaiyar**

Indian Writing in English has now gained not only authenticity but also quantity and quality. The poems of Tagore, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and others; the plays of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo; the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arundhati Roy and others have now become universal classics, and are being read and taught even abroad. It is necessary, therefore, that there should be standard criticism on them to help us to understand and enjoy them properly.

The book under review contains 24 illuminating essays by eminent teachers and scholars from different parts of our country, e.g., O.P. Bhatnagar, R.S. Pathak, Basavaraj Naikar, Jaydeep Sarangi, Dushyant B. Nimavat, G.S. Jha, Indrani Acharya, to name just a few. As regards poetry, Amar Nath Prasad rightly says in the preface: "As a matter of fact, poetry, the highest art touches the feelings of every normal human being. It also inspires the good in man and mellows the heart of even the rough ones. It is supposed to be the queen of arts." O.P. Bhatnagar's essay "East-West Encounter in Indian Poetry in English" studies the encounter as a happy cross-fertilization. He says: "Indian Poetry in English is a poetry of encounter. The encounter is not merely with language but with all the content of religion, culture, values, thoughts and attitudes which it unfolds as challenging to our sensiblities." He pleads for the encouragement of regional writings and their incorporation into the national stream. He takes it as a step towards national integration.

The leading article by the editor is on ironic reversals in *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan, one of the pioneers of the Indian Novel in English. He has rightly observed: "Right from the beginning upto the end, the novel rings the note of contrast and affinity, romance and realism. And irony heightens the effect of these confrontations, going on in the characters and situations and sometimes in the core of the heart of the protagonist."

R.S Pathak beautifully analyses feminine sensibility in Anita Desai's novels. Anita Desai has rightly been called the Virginia Woolf of Indian English fiction. He says: "Desai's novels give an expression to the long-smothered wail of a lacerated psyche. They tell the harrowing tale of blunted human relationships."

The third section deals with drama. Basavaraj Naikar presents a thorough analysis of Mohan Rakesh's famous play *Halfway House.* He rightly states: "*Halfway House* may be described as an existential play in the Indian context." He also says: "But there is a difference between the European existentialism and the so-called Indian existentialism. The European existentialist predicament was the result of a metaphysical angst caused by the loss of faith in God.... The existential dilemmas of the Indians are mostly social, economic and moral and rather than metaphysical."

The book also reveals some such aspects as have been hitherto unnoticed. S.P. Swain has traced the use of the stream of consciousness technique in some of the Indian English novels. He finds its use in *The Untouchable.* He quotes passages from it. Then he finds its use in R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room.* But he also marks that this kind of use of the technique is partial. It is Anita Desai who has used this technique extensively and elegantly. Also, he finds part of it in Shashi Deshpande.

The foreward of the book has been written by Dr. O.P. Bhatnagar. It contains some valuable suggestions for the promotion of Indan English writing. "The slavery associated with English can be overcome by making it serve as a tool of our needs and practice." Further, he says frankly: "Basically I am of the opinion that the whole English literature syllabus should be restructured by prescribing more of Indian literary masterpieces in English with selective British masterpieces to contest the British hegemony of literary taste and judgement. Fifty years of independence should be enough for the Indian academic to free itself from the belief that there is no match to British literature in the world."

To end, I believe that this book will do a great service to criticism on Indian writing in English. Undoubtedly, it can be of immense use to all — students, teachers and the general readers.

## G.S. BALARAMA GUPTA, *INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE*

**(New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2003), pp.166, Rs.450.00**

**Kuhu Chanana**

A new feather in his cap, G.S. Balarama Gupta's *Indian English Literature* contains fourteen articles of varigated nature. In the first three — "Broadening the Spectrum: English Studies in India," "Promoting Indian English Literature: A Plea Renewed," "Indianization of English Studies: Some Tentative Reflections" —, the author argues in favour of the need for canon-bashing by including the works of Anglo-Indian writers (Meadow Taylor, L.H. Myres, Flora Annie Steel, John Masters *et al*) and Indian literature translated into English (Kuvempu's *Ramayana Darshanam,* Jayashankar Prasad's *Kamayani*, Sant Jnaneswar's *Jnaneswari*, Sri Sri's *Mahaprasthanam*, etc.). The author states: "It is high time that Indians at large stopped feeling apologetic about Indian English, and Indian-English Literature, merely because they have been tyrannized by gazing for too long in the mirror of an earlier image of Otherness"(8). Despite being earnest, these observations seem jaded and obsolete in contemporary scenario. The reason is that most of the universities have already altered their syllabi, keeping in view decolonization. But as these articles were published in 1992, 1994 and 1997, some of the issues addressed in them seem out of context in 2004.

Incisive judgement loaded with brilliant humour is what makes "May Their Tribe Decrease: A Study of Some Indian English Non-Poets" an outstanding research paper. The critic staunchly denounces the new breed of pseudo poets like Lakshminarayana, Balachandran and Pradymna Patel. He criticizes these poets on account of their 'wrong use of words', 'erratic use of prepositions' and 'senseless passivasation'. However, a radical post-modernist may have his/her reservations regarding the binary oppositions of low culture/high culture or real/pseudo poets emanating primarily from Balarama Gupta's constant effort to 'categorize' and criticize in terms of 'definite' framework. But the fact remains that trash should not be accepted in the name of post-modernism and Professor Gupta deserves all the accolades for such dispassionate and fearless criticism, spe-

cially in the wake of deconstruction and other postmodernist critical theories proliferating the world over.

"Indian English Women Short Story Writers: An Overview" is an indepth study of the short stories of Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Sujatha Balasubramnian, Nergis Dalal, Bharati Mukherjee, Sadiq Peerbhoy, Prema Shastri, Jai Nimbkar and others. Various sorts of feminist concerns and at times endorsement to patrirchal structures are the major themes of these women writers. The learned critic believes that there should be a full-length study of Indian women short story writers. The essays on Toru Dutt, Radhakrishnan, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya fail to provide any new dimension to the understanding of their works.

*Atom and the Serpant: An Analysis* is a detailed critical evaluation of a 'campus novel' authored by Prema Nandkumar. Thematic aspects (atrocities, intrigues and malice prevailing in the academic world) and internal motives of characters have been assiduously analyzed but the technical aspect remains almost untouched saving a statement about the 'episodic' and 'fragmentary' nature of the novel. Professor Gupta's close study of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya throws a new light on his eminence as playwright that has been overshadowed by his reputation as poet. He meticulously divides his plays into four sections — devotional plays, social plays, historical plays, and miscellaneous plays —, covering all the aspects of his art including the lyrical grandeur. The last article, "Two Indian English Autobiographies — A Study in Contrast," reveals the sharp contrast between the autobiographies of two engineers, K.A. Hameid(*ALife to Remember*) and Mahdi Ali Mirza(*Welcome Each Rebuff*).

The diversified nature of the articles evinces the author's deep insight into the vast fabric of Indian Writing in English. However, the book suffers from certain tedious repetitions: in the first three articles there is a word by word reproduction of at least thirty lines(pp.5,12,16 and 19). Also, there are some typographical errors, such as 'rife' for 'ripe' (p.23) and 'modem' for 'modern' (p.44).But these negligible lapses here and there do not detract from the intrinsic worth of the book which is indubitably of immense value for both students and scholars.

## R.A. SINGH (ED.), *CONTINUITY: FIVE INDIAN ENGLISH POETS*

**(Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2003), pp.257 + x, Rs.595.00**

**K.K. Sharma**

*Continuity: Five Indian English Poets* by R.A. Singh is a commendable academic endeavour in that it spotlights five living poets — I.K. Sharma, R.K. Singh, R. Rabindranath Menon, PCK Prem and Ravi Nandan Sinha — who, though not yet very outstanding, are certainly on the verge of attaining the stature of major poets. They have some common traits: they are bilingual or trilingual writers, translators and academics. What is most striking about them is that none of them belongs to the Metropolis and is not related to the Mumbai or Calcutta school of poets. Interestingly, they represent the four corners of the country — north, south, east and west —, and the note of irony running through their oeuvre imparts a kind of unity and continuity to their poetry taken as a whole. Judiciously organised, the volume is divided into five parts devoted to the five poets respectively. It offers a comprehensive idea of every one of these poets by first acquainting us with his representative poems and then with the significant criticism on him, followed by a "Note" giving all the necessary information about his life, works and achievements.

The book rightly begins with I.K. Sharma who is not only the seniormost but also the most distinguished of these poets. He is a trilingual poet writing in English, Rajasthani and Hindi. He has to his credit four collections of poems in English, and two volumes of poems consisting of translations into English from Rajasthani and Hindi. Also, he has published admirable critical pieces on Indian English, Rajashani and Hindi writers. A patriot in the true sense, he has written a brilliant research paper on Hindi writers' contribution to Indian freedom movement. His poems on Emergency found a place in *Voices of Emergency* edited by John Oliver Perry. The essence of Sharma's poetry is the exposition of socio-political reality with a vein of irony and anger.

More prolific but less versatile than I.K. Sharma, R.K. Singh is gaining reputation steadily. The most striking feature of his poetry is the synthesis of life and art. He regards "poetry as prayer/in life's vicissitude" (Poem 1, *Above the Earth's Green*). Inevitably, his poetry

is soaked in moral depth. He deals with love, sex, religious taboos, political chicanery, etc. He writes a lot about "the female form divine", and sees "natural woman/the fount of poetry." But, as C. L. Khatri affirms, his poetry is a journey from sex to superconsciousness" (p.98).

The third poet included in the book is R. Rabindranath Menon. A bilingual poet, he is the author of eleven books of poems, ten in English and one in Malayalam. According to him, "Poetry is an intensified expression of intellectual, and ... emotional life (p.130). A notable characteristic of his poetry is his deep interest in Sanskrit, Puranic lore and Indian mythology. Besides, he makes masterly use of irony, sarcasm, genial laughter, pathos, concealed images, word-play, contrasts, symbols, etc. Obviously, his is a complex poetry with a layer of deceptive simplicity and socio-political consciousness.

PCK Prem, the fourth poet considered by Singh, has already brought out eight fictional works and six poetical volumes in English, and eight fictional works and one collection of poems in Hindi. He writes in Pahari also. In his writings, he erects a kind of dam to join the ancient and the new. His poetry is based more on thought than on feeling. He writes on a wide range of subjects like misery, treachery, unfulfilled desire, emotional drainage, barrenness of life, disintegration, loneliness, illusions, aspirations, hypocrisy, violence, sins, love, identity, corruption, death trap, etc. Thus he focuses on the entire socio-cultural milieu and humanity as a whole.

The last poet presented in the book is Ravi Nandan Sinha who is internationally known as Editor of the prestigious journal, *The Quest*, and as scholarly critic and poet. Besides, his *Exuberance and Other Poems* is a first-rate work in the domain of translation. He is a poet of contemporary reality in all its facets — cultural, political and social. His poems expose his anguish over social, religious and political corruption and erosion of basic values of life. But he clearly perceives hope in the cultural and spiritual heritage of India. The technical side of his poetry is equally admirable.

To conclude, the book under review is a very useful addition to the existing literature on Indian English poetry. It is refreshingly free from typographical errors and very impressive overall. But its exorbitant price is surely unpalatable.

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