

Presenting the third edition of Quirk. Impending examinations and the lure of vacation schedules have contributed to what has been a whirlwind of a ride - and we've vanquished deadline lethargy with a turbo-charged production process so as to bring out an issue in double quick time, quirky standards intact. Our mission remains the same as always: to spark a literary revolution - college style by helping build a vibrant and articulate literary community of students. As always, we solicit your support, your creative outpourings, and your shared enthusiasm. In January, we asked ourselves why we were doing this. "Why Literature" was the result. In March-April, we hazarded a peek into the more introspective "Indifferent College Student". In our third offering, sometimes a hedgehog, sometimes a fox, and maybe sometimes both - the Quirk Team features "The Artist and the Critic" in its continuing search for quirky themes to explore. As with our previous edition, we were simply overwhelmed by the response from India's student community. Still unsure of whether or how much our nascent endeavour has progressed, we once again pledge to continue the fight for a truly participatory, literary community of college students. Do react to the ongoing effort. Contribute. Criticize. Abuse. Praise. Keep in touch through our evolving web presence at <http://www.quirk.in>.

The Hedgehog and the Fox

The Greek poet *Achilotus* once wrote about the distinction between two important animals of his world, the hedgehog and the fox. He said: "the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Isaiah Berlin, to whom I owe a titular debt, would disagree with me, but the analogy is appropriate to explain the opposition between two equally important characters of our world – the artist and the critic. To parody, the artist is the hedgehog, and knows one big thing – that is, the nature of his art; the critic, on the other hand, is the fox, and knows many little things – from comparative creative styles, to the history of the art, to the inconsistencies in an artist's creation, to its social narrative. The quarrels between these two, the hedgehog and the fox, if you like, are legendary, and an interesting place to begin an examination of each one's roles.

The genesis of this 'creative tension' that dominates the relationship between the artist and the critic, is perhaps to be found some place else – in a space both wish to occupy, but find, to their consternation, is already too cramped – that of the *public intellectual*. For the struggling artist, the critic is a vulture, one that lives of the rotting carcasses of destroyed writers, painters, and performers. For an established one, a critic is a parasite, one that feeds on *her* text, and claims a right to its interpretation. And for one who has just received public acclaim, she is god, a strange paradox in which the artist's apotheosis is orchestrated by her, but a godly romance that will hardly last the length of the honeymoon.

And what then of the critic? Was she a failed writer, dramatist, or painter, or does she sincerely believe that the world is more accessible to the artist because of her pertinent observations, or that the true nature of the art more evident because of the lines she weaves through it, her recondite stratagems, her deliberate references? The answer is a difficult one, primarily because the critic is an obscurantist, one who reveals herself in little things, like the fox, in many (ph)fac(s)es, in bit observations, and rejects any one defining theme. But she is there, very much present, always and already interpreting, telling the world the

nature of its own art. She is there because the public invariably relies on her, in what to read, what to see, what to listen to.

What obligation, then, falls upon the critic? A responsibility as onerous as that of explaining/interpreting art and communicating to the public requires, most importantly, that the public be not thrust with the unacknowledged biases of the critic, of a uniformed mis/understanding of what the art claims itself to be. Dylan's caveat to any aspiring critic, that one must not criticize what one cannot understand, serves well here, a warning to anyone who falls in love with the words she uses and forgets its intentions. So, to understand, one must have, above all, a sound sense of the past, a knowledge of how things were, in *all* senses of that art. It also requires an ability to identify the redemptive power of the art through its occasional brilliance, and not serve merely as an interpreter of maladies.

A minute to pause, to examine, to reconsider the alignment. Is the critic then, through the imperative *necessity* of her role, occupying by default, the position of a public intellectual? Is she through her own little ways, putting across a larger picture of what the nature of art should be? Is there a metamorphosis of the fox into the hedgehog? The possibility is entirely conceivable, and is best shown when one finds that the most famous critics are also social commentators, common philosophers. The memory of the famous American critic Susan Sontag illustrates this well. Sontag lived and died as a critic, of both literature and other occasional forms of visual art, but is more widely recognized and acknowledged than her contemporary 'reviewer' Pauline Kael, on account of her frequent literary journeys into an 'outside-art' world. However, Sontag also performed another crucial act; that of claiming the narrative for herself in the writing of her occasional novel. The metamorphosis is thus sealed doubly, if only temporarily.

A more common, but equally troublesome event is when the artist turns critic. Is it not possible that dissensions come to an end when a narrator of

eloquence, a Salman Rushdie, a Peter Ustinov, a Girish Karnad, has authoritatively delivered on one's work? Who could be more capable, more competent to evaluate another, knowing the trials and tribulations of the artist's mind? But here too, the problems are manifold. If artists and critics are eternally poised against each other, the artist and her colleague share no admirable affections. A critic, one might say, has at least the professional competence, however poor it may be, to remark on an artist's work but an artist is merely 'creative' in her criticism; (Who, for example, is Nabokov to denounce Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* as 'vulgar?') Arguments of another day are conveniently realigned to fit the occasion.

(I shall not in this piece go to that dark corner where I have hidden my assumptions – that the hedgehog and the fox are universal mammals, not just suited to European climates, or that all art is similar, nor that in our part of the world it is conceived differently, more communal, or more plural; that ritualized dichotomies of artist/critic are omnipresent. Perhaps these assumptions were not true earlier, and are true now, with the invasive cultural logic of different phenomena, but I shall not dwell upon their veracity here.)

In the final summation, who wins the war of the wor(l)ds? For a moment, I am tempted to say the critic, for it is she who has determined the art that I have seen. But the instinct is tempered with the knowledge that a public's memory is a final judge, and in this at least (I must say with a tinge of sadness), the artist and her work have already won. No public remembers the critic, or the content of her argument, but an acclaimed work lives on for its own quality. Sontag, as she finally acknowledged, said that the art should speak for itself. An artist would agree that her work needs no erudite spokespersons, no meddlesome interlopers. Perhaps Wilde's comment would serve as a consolation to the critic: that in the critical examination of an artistic work, a critic uses all her creative skills, that in the process, the critic *is* the artist.

ABU MATHEN GEORGE

The Artist and the Critic (Home)

The paralysed mute genius discarded on a chair
like a fashionable Goya nude
while parents caring play gin rummy with friends
social in room next.

He was brought to lunch to cheer him up
to give him a feeling of being amongst people
who liked him and whom he liked
till he was served extra large desert and
abandoned like a frustrating Rubik's cube
I mean, wouldn't you play gin rummy instead of
spelling out letters he scrawls untidily yet
painstakingly with his fingers on his pant leg?
In the tastefully decorated locked bedroom, the
large dog paws at the door handle
and whines plaintively at his uncharitable
situation.

You can't have a large dog running amok with
an invalid patient can you?
And besides, everyone's thinking that he might
just knock over the rummy table.
'He's the lord of the house', has been heard
oft. 'We never tie him up' is pedestrian here
well, the poor lord's whimpering for some
attention in your bedroom, madam!
And in the darkened pearly bedroom aft
with 'Stairway to Heaven' trilling quietly
He writes poetry
slowly, softly, calmly, surely
judging His brother, His neighbour, His mother,
His people.

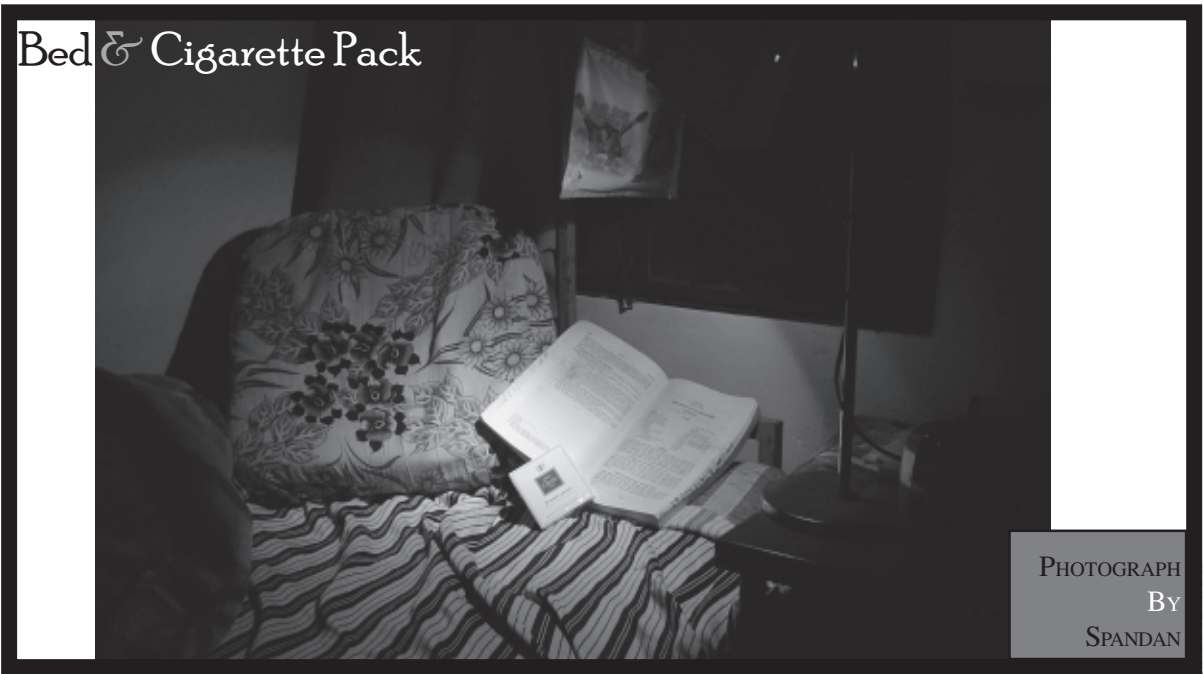
Poetry is a bitch sure,
but it beats the hell out of being uncomfortable
sitting with what was visibly a healthy alive man
genius

and poetry doesn't scratch you or dirty your clean *kurta*
with its muddy paws, does it?
Write on, brother!
And so we live on each day
as, for attention
the genius groans and thumps his feet
the canine cries and whines and whimpers and snarls
till soon, both become one with the disquieting "makes me
wonder" that's escaped from beneath His door.

Man qua animal or animal qua man?
Makes me wonder.
Mummy says "Watch TV *baba*, we'll be leaving soon."
Mummy says "Quiet doggie, they'll be leaving soon."

And writing His poetry, He quietly atones.
for of them all, He is the biggest sinner
for He sees, He knows, and still He shies.

ABHAYRAJ NAIK



Quirk

AND THE EXCUSE FOR THE WEEK IS THAT I SLEPT

ART

And the excuse for the week is that I slept. I would rank it marginally worse than, ‘No inspiration.’ These excuses, worded well and timed right, can make you actually feel that it was beyond your control, while serving to quell the rising doubts of your true potential.

Dear Critic,

I’ve been told that when one writes anything one must always be aware of one’s audience. As I write this I wonder if every one of my previous articles and poems had an invisible covering letter to my critics.

Poems, I am sure, initially, I write for myself entirely. But when someone reads and understands, or guesses the innuendo, then I am beside myself with silent jubilation, like a mini purpose-in-life thing being fulfilled. In the case of entries for a poetry writing competition, however, it would be rather difficult to say what exactly the pivotal motivating factor is. I want to participate. I want to put down what I feel. I want someone to read it, like it and hopefully rank it well. I also want to be able to know that I have submitted a ‘worthy’ piece: something different, maybe a twist in it somewhere, or maybe a subtle innuendo. But which of the ‘wants’ is the strongest, is a tough question.

With my poems, as with my sketches, I wait eagerly for a comment; something to tell me that my expression has gotten past someone else’s doors, received a moment’s attention, and deserved a remark. When the observation made is on the harsher side, a part of me flinches, like the tortoise withdrawing into the comfort of its shell. But when the

tortoise has been given a few minutes to think, it is quick to realize that criticism can be a good thing. For one, it shows that the observer has set some obviously high standard for you, which of itself is a big compliment. Besides, it is also an indication of the direction in which improvement has to be made. And for pieces with which I am myself unsatisfied, improvement has to be a good thing.

You know, considering how much I enjoy writing, it’s quite surprising that I often need generous dozes of prodding before I begin. Another excuse flutters shyly at the periphery as I realize that this piece is much shorter than the treatise on ‘The Artist and Her Critic’ that I had unabashedly dreamt this would be. Apparently (as per the excuse) there is ultimately not much to say because all of it is old wine in a new bottle anyways, right?

This really would have been a better contribution to “The Artist and His Excuses.”

Yours truly,
Priyadarshini Kedlaya

PS. The above piece is dedicated to all who have ever commented on my work, and especially to Deeksha, Supriya, and Vishak.

Mutant Super Hero: A Sketch By Ruden



AND I SEE ART IN EVERY CURVE OF YOUR FACE,
THE LIGHT IN YOUR EYES, THE RADIANCE OF YOUR SMILE,
I TRY TO APPRECIATE YOU AS I WOULD HIGH ART.
AS IF YOU WERE THE VENUS DE MILO,
THE VITRUVIAN MAN,
HYACINTHUS OR APOLLO,
HEPHAESTION OR ADONIS.
NO. TO ME YOU ARE DAVID,
FOR I SEE NO FLAW IN THE CURVE OF YOUR WAIST,
THE LINES OF YOUR TORSO ARE ETCHED IN MY MIND.
SUCH A NONPAREIL CANNOT BE BUT DIVINE,
NEVER TO CLAIM ME FOR HIS,
AND NEVER TO BE HIS, OR HERS, OR MINE.
MY PENCIL, MY NOTEBOOK AND I HIDE IN A CORNER,
WE CONSPIRE AND PLOT, WE SCHEME AND CONNIVE,
WE SPECULATE AND REFLECT,
WE COVET AND YEARN,
FOR THE PYGMALION OF YESTERDAY
HAS RETURNED TO LIVE TODAY.

AND AT NIGHT I RETURN TO MY DARK, LONELY ROOM,
AND I FEEL YOU COURSE THROUGH MY VEINS,
I FEEL YOU PULSE THROUGH ME,
AROUND ME,
WITHIN ME,
AND I FEAR I WILL EXPLODE INTO A MILLION TINY
FRAGMENTS,
FOR A PRESENCE THAT HAUNTS ME,
FEELS ME,
PUSHES ME,
DRIVES ME,
AND I FEEL YOU SO FAR AWAY.

FOR YOU ARE WORSE THAN A WATER-NYMPH,
A SPRITE,
A PUCK,
MORE ELUSIVE THAN THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL.
I PINE FOR A DIANA THAT CHAINS ME TO HER WORSHIP,
A PARAGON WHO PLAYS ME FOR A TANTALUS,
AND STILL MORE I ADORE YOU,
I CRAVE, I DESIRE,
AND YET SHALL I COMPARE YOU TO A MONET OR A
RENOIR?
A VAN GOGH OR A REMBRANDT?
A RODIN OR A MICHELANGELO?
NO. FOR IN A MOMENT, YOU SMILE,
AND THE WORLD HAS BEEN WASHED AWAY
AND ALL PALES BEFORE THE MASTERPIECE THAT REMAINS.

TAM SIN

THE ARTIST AND THE CRITIC (AMBROSIA EVAPORATING)

On a day of brilliant clarity when he was seventeen Raghu decided he wouldn’t participate in the world anymore.

This sordid world he refused to accept
and it would be with the likes of Shakespeare,
Joan, Newton, Rosa, Gandhi, da Vinci, or Chaplin
that he would live
and with no one else.
For how could one substitute the potential

of inventing tragedy and comedy and drama and
an era
of a saint born to define ‘martyr’
of looking at the light from a star and then figuring
out relativism
of sitting in a bus and unshackling equality
of being thrown out of a train and dreaming a
nation
of making eternity cry in art
of laughing pure and silent

with today’s silicon tits and McDonald fries?
‘Ich bin Berliner’ was a heart-rending symphony
when marked with today’s *el presidente* pretzel
spree

And so a life is shorn of meaning
the butterfly consciously metamorphosing into an
eternal larva.
You see, because I was born in a wrong generation
seemingly devoid of all meaning
I shall refuse to be Newton or Shakespeare or any
of them
even if it is me I’m shunning.

And so, dreary intelligence and abject cynicism
have consumed yet another victim.

ABHAYRAJ NAIK

I was sitting at home in front of the TV, with the rest of the family: my aunts and uncles and cousins who had come down to visit us taking advantage of the Christmas holidays, when there flashed on to the screen the first video images of the now infamous Tsunami of December 26th, 2004. News started to arrive about the magnitude of the damage, the amount of human life that had been lost, and details regarding the places where the sea had flooded in. On the screen flashed a textual message declaring that the coastal town of Nagapattinam had suffered immense damage. One of my aunts was immediately on the telephone trying to contact my other aunt who lived in Nagapattinam. She couldn't reach her.

I later went to that unlucky place during my vacations to visit my aunt. Though I haven't often been to that old house where my father and his sisters were born and brought up, I had very vague memories of the place. I did remember having seen a large hall leading into a courtyard surrounded by carved wooden pillars, supporting a tiled roof on wooden crossbeams. This time around, I was greeted by nothing but wreckage. The large hall was all but imposing. All that had survived of the hall and the courtyard were the doorframes and the pillars, which retained their charm and beauty. Nothing remained of the walls except a few bricks here and there. The tiles from the roof were strewn around. The wooden crossbeams that hadn't floated away just lay there. All that remained of the old house were the rooms of what used to be the back portion of the house and the rooms directly above them, on the first floor.

After dinner, I went out to sit on the terrace. After having finished her chores, my aunt joined me and started to narrate the incidents of that fateful day: "All those fisher-folk came running along this street. They were shouting out something, but I couldn't make out what. A little earlier, I heard a loud booming sound. But I thought that it was some large ship that had bumped into the harbour or some other mishap of that sort. Such things happen a lot in this harbour. It is an old fishing port and the old jetty has been revamped into a harbour. Then someone told me that the sea had flooded in and they said that I should go along with them to the temple on the other side of the town for safety."

She continued her narration while patting her pet, the stray dog that she had taken in: "I didn't go, but I went upstairs and decided to wait there till the waters had withdrawn. After all I thought, this would not be bigger than the usual storms and sea flooding that takes place every year during monsoon and this is was off-season after all. You see, our house is quite far away from the beach and it gets flooded but rarely. But this time the waters came right up to our street and even into the house. The waters weren't very high, but enough to do the damage. The last time it had been flooded to this extent was when your father was six years old. I was a young girl then. I am the first daughter-in-law of this house and was only seventeen then and had been married for two years. Your grandmother taught me much of what I know today. She was a very able woman. Managing both the homestead and the school. It's a tough job. Not many can do that. Now it is different. All these modern conveniences. Press a button and the work is done. It was not like that then. She was a wonderful housekeeper and could have made a good mother. Such a pity that she could never be one. She was a child widow and your father and his sisters and my husband were her sister's children. Your grandmother died during the birth of your youngest aunt. Then the responsibility of looking after such a large brood fell upon her shoulders. Apart from the domestic work she was one of the best headmistresses any government school could ever have."

She rose to go into the house to get some mosquito repellent, saying as she did:., "so many things have changed, the family has scattered away so much, the old families have died away or moved, the old ways are gone, but this mosquito problem hasn't." Settling down again, she applied the cream on her legs, and was soon scolding her dog for licking the cream off her legs. She continued: "That year the monsoon storms were severe and the tank opposite our house overflowed its bund and the waters rushed into the house. We didn't have the first floor then and your grandmother had to look after all of us in the midst of all that. She got together a few large tables, and placed a few smaller tables on top of those and got all the younger children on them first and the elder ones after that. Your eldest aunt was already married by then and she was at her in-laws place. Another aunt had gone to visit her. The only children left at home were your father and his two sisters and the servant girl."

"Your uncle was away at Madras, where he was working in a research lab, while pursuing his Ph.D. and I was here while carrying my first child. We had nothing to eat but for the sweets and *murukku* that had been made for Diwali the previous week. Your grandmother had to wade to and fro between the kitchen and the hall in neck high water to fetch those. No one could make *murukku* like her, you know. She was an excellent cook...She had to cook for almost 8-10 people everyday and nothing was ever overcooked or underdone and there was always enough to go around once and even for second and third helpings..."

"The tsunami was not as bad as that storm of 1956," she continued, "but it did more damage than that storm. You see, the house is very old now and in bad need of repair. It is almost 120 years old. The Madras ceiling had started falling off in several places. Many

[N.B. This is something I wrote while half asleep, trying to recover from a dream sequence that lasted, or seemed like it lasted, three seconds (real-time). That is why it is titled the way it is.]

There is a boat. And the water it floats on has become so foul that the boat flops itself side-ways, as though it has died, or maybe fainted. Someone told me you would want to stay away from the kind of water that the boat floats in - it still floats, even after its collapse, the way a dead body does. But it is important to know whether the water has always been like this or whether it has become this way, whether all water is noxious and whether the noxiousness will ever go away (if the noxiousness never goes away then we will all succumb, that is why it is important to know). Someone told me that it is the boat that poisoned the water, but I'm not sure whether this is true. Stomachs can't digest themselves, and boats don't commit suicide, at least not by turning blue of their own poison.

Maybe the boat didn't die, maybe it lost balance- it was a paper boat after all, and paper boats have a tendency to draw water, as though boat bottoms are roots, which they are not, boats only have anchors to root them (and paper boats drift - sans steering or brakes), and soggy bottoms may not be very good centres of gravity all the time.

Someone told me that it was a tiny green floating island that toppled the boat. It looked like an island, but it was actually a lot of moss and leaves with stems attached - it may even have been a flowerpot, except that it didn't sink, at least, not immediately. From the corner of your eye, you saw a pair of hands swiftly withdraw after positioning this green island in the water that lapped at your feet. (It is funny, the water hungers or thirsts and it is thirsted after - this is a food chain of sorts). While you contemplated the offering and wondered if polite refusal would unleash a cataclysmic cycle or maybe linear chain of things that would always be held to be your fault, you saw the boat keel over. Maybe you thought the green island had made the green water too green and too deep for the boat, and maybe that is

of the wooden beams were damaged by termites. That is why the hall and courtyard didn't survive. The tiled ceiling fell through. Had the furniture been there, everything would have been damaged. The old Burma teak console tables and roll-top desks and the rosewood claw-foot sofas and chairs - everything would have been broken to pieces. I managed to save most of them. It was pure chance. Last year after the *Navaratri*, I decided to move upstairs. The ground floor was too large for a single person."

"I locked up most of the larger pieces of the furniture in the old kitchen in the back of the house, and I took all the old *golu* dolls that your grandmother had upstairs. It's been almost twenty years since all the dolls have been displayed. I decided to do that last year. I placed them on thirteen tiers, the way they were usually displayed and I prepared a different *sundal* for each day according to your grandmother's recipe."

Dream Boat

why you decide not to pluck the flowerpot island out of the water. (But even if you had chosen to accept graciously the anonymous gift (or offering), the island was already gone). It is unlikely that anyone knows what you thought, but you didn't pick up the island, and the water blinked shut over the jade eye that had spent with the boat its last moments - and you probably don't know or remember what happened either. Someone told me that no one knows whether the island sank or dissolved or disappeared, the same way no one knows whether the boat is dead or shall stand upright again when it recovers from its fit of fainting. No one really knows very much - no one is really sure whether the green island was even there in the first

place. All that we can see is the green water that tries to seduce us, while gently rocking the sleeping (or dead) boat. We can see the blue boat on the green water. It has two shades of blue - wet blue that is dark, and light blue that is dry and powdery. No

one knows how long the boat shall float before the magnetic depths of the ugly green water claim it. If such a thing does happen, no one knows whether we will be there to see the boat lose its powdery matte sheen and go under, or whether we shall be there to receive it when it does.

Though there is so much that we don't know - there is a single unanswered, unanswerable question that plagues me more than any other: Did the green flowerpot island make the boat slip? Was it evil (only if it were evil would it have been so mean to the boat) or do we fear the island only like the water we fear because we don't want to drown? Maybe we fear the island because we don't know where it came from - or maybe we know and remember the hands that abandoned it to your discretion, and fear or resent or hate those hands for reasons that we can't remember or are trying to forget.

Someone told me that the green island was evil - which is why no one liked it and some feared it - and which is also why the boat rests on its side before making the long journey to the bottom of the green water - a journey which all of us will also have to make because the water is insatiable.

INKY P. STINKY



‘LIGHT’ for Richa Roy

BY ARUN SAGAR

Tsunami Paid Us a Visit

She was used to calling my grandaunt - grandmother - which was how my cousins and I knew her and had always heard about her. "There used to be almost twenty crates of such dolls. They were kept in large teakwood boxes. I also took the old photographs - otherwise termites would have eaten them up. But the Ravi Varma paintings have been damaged. There were so many of them. They used to be hung in a line all the way around in the hall. Water had seeped in through the frames. The Saraswati picture is completely damaged." She was talking about the Ravi Varma prints which were a priced possession in our family. I distinctly remember seeing one such print with the picture of a goddess and that of toilet soap. That's what those prints were. Goddesses and cosmetics. They were cut out from advertisement posters.

I have often heard stories about the life of my grandmother/grandaunt and I have always been filled with wonder about her. I have seen only photographs of her. She was a wrinkled old lady with white hair who wore diamond jewelry and had a very determined look about her countenance. I was told that she was widowed at the age of 10 and had been given an education by her father following the death of her husband. Her father had been of the opinion that education would be the best security she could have in the world. She went on to become a teacher and later on the headmistress of the Municipal High School in Nagapattinam. "All this happened in the pre-independence days you know, when the job of a principal was the exclusive domain of men, and the only women allowed were nuns" - was the usual remark made by

my aunts. My grandmother was the headmistress of that school until her retirement thirty years later. She had managed to look after a large household, cook and clean and keep house for seven people, and look after the administration of a school, apart from her household chores.

Sudden visits by guests were not surprising. Apart from routine household drudgery, she had to cater to the needs of her guests, not to mention her foster daughters who would stay with her during their pregnancy and leave only well after their delivery.

With all these thoughts swirling in my mind, I looked down at the tank opposite our house. The first light of pre-dawn reflected of its surface.

Something my aunt was saying just then grabbed my attention. She said: "If your grandmother had been alive during the tsunami, she would have said: **‘There is nothing to fuss about, it is a tsunami after all. A tsunami paid us a visit. That's all’**" and she would have waited until the waters receded and would have cleaned up the house and would have gone to school as usual, as though nothing out of the ordinary had taken place."

A woman of fortitude, energy and untiring enthusiasm for life. That is what she had been. She had lived her life to the full.

RAGUVARAN

Dark red drops on discoloured concrete. Spreading out in concentric rings, while some of it seeps in. Almost like the worship. Ritual-motifs that Hindus draw out before the goddess. Exactly like when a young goat is chopped into smaller pieces the way *babus* like it. On Sunday mornings this meat bazaar off Park Circus would be abuzz with activity, as early as seven, as *babus* from South Calcutta (the ones with new flats in posh complexes around the Eastern Bypass) thronged the butchers’ shops. To pick the choicest meat for lavish Bengali lunches.

The butcher’s week depended on how early he got up on Sunday mornings. The butchers’ slum outlined the meat bazaar, criss-crossed by narrow brick pathways that opened out onto the main road. Right opposite the bazaar, across the main road was the Park Circus Police Station. Some of them were friends. They picked up leftover mutton at a low price, late at night, had if the kill of the day was good. They had children. And wives.

Raja was his name. Though the police wrote down R-E-Z-A (‘REZA’) in the early hours of the morning, on their investigation record-book, whenever he was called for questioning.
Age - 15.

Occupation - Works in the butcher’s shop in meat bazaar.
Masi, his aunt found the sight of blood nauseating. He had to be back by seven, so he could be at the shop.

- Will come back in the afternoon, sir.....
- Have to open shop, sir.

For a good share of the day’s earnings, they would be let off. Raja and Kanu.

They had left school together. To work in their respective family-shops. They had learnt to set aside some change from the day’s earnings to buy *bidis*. They smoked them, sitting on the steps, in the open space behind the mosque. Watching feminine chatter through the half-open window of the whorehouse. ‘They’ were friends by day (often called ‘didis’). By night, they were objects of fascination- almost ethereal. With perfume hanging stiff as a cloud around them. Glossy colours of their lips. Matching their see-through sarees. As they walked out looking for work, towards the flyover, at the other end. They too paid part of their earnings to the Police Station. Raja wasn’t sure, but could guess.

Sometimes he saw new faces by daylight. As groups of them thronged the grocery store. By night their faces looked the same. Some mornings, when they

mischievously smiled at him, while passing his shop, he would notice a new face. Soon enough, he’d know the name attached to the face. Rekha. Molly. Baby. Aishwarya.

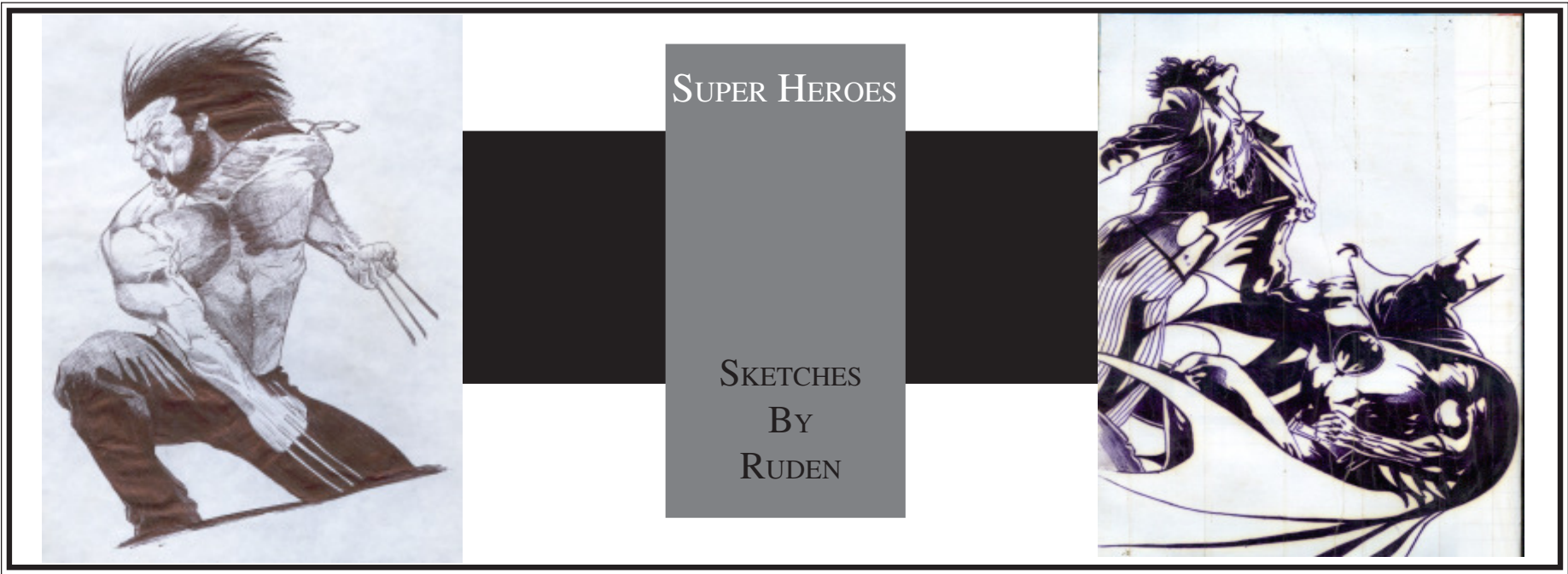
This face was a new one. He had seen her only once before. From behind the mosque. On a Sunday afternoon. He didn’t know her name. He could call some of the others, from below the flyover. They would know. It was still not morning.

She was new, so she would not have known the basic rules of the games. Never to refuse favours to the police. Never to seek work on the main road. Facing the police station.

Drops of dark red seeped into concrete blocks of the footpath. Like ritual-motifs before Hindu goddesses. Like when young goats are chopped for Hindu gentlemen.

If he called the police himself, he would be held up till the morning. Tomorrow’s earnings would be eaten into. Tomorrow was a Sunday.

ATREYEE



Mysore Mallige

As with most other grand things that one does in law school, this one also has its genesis in its tantric centre, the Cauvery hostel roof. It’s the beginning of our third year. Having gone through the wrong half of law school we are battle weary and bone tired. And the fact that the next two days are holidays and we have nowhere to go and nothing interesting to do just weighs down on our minds. ‘That’s it’, I say, ‘I am just going to pack up two sets of clothes and go to Majestic and catch any bus which goes to Hyderabad where a cousin of mine is staying’. At this, the others who are present become even more depressed; one more person has got something to do. But unable to grudge me this, they immediately volunteer to drop me at the bus stand, late as it is. Half an hour later on the Mysore road flyover, Parag suddenly stops the scooter and turns around, ‘If you don’t get a bus to Hyderabad, then lets do something interesting. Let’s go to Mysore on this scooter’. For a few minutes I am just struck by the proposal. So steeped we are in the routine that something as ordinary as taking a trip on a scooter to a place 120 kms away just seems to be a crazy idea. But over the next two kilometres, Parag drives slowly, explains, cajoles and ultimately thrills me into the plan. So much so that we decide, ‘balls to Hyderabad’, and turn back. Sister shall be told later that there were no buses left.

For the first time in law school, both of us are awake and bursting with work at six in the morning. Eight thirty sees us just outside the mess of the supposedly planned industrial estate that hovers just at the edge of Bangalore, always threatening to engulf the garden city with its smog. In fact it’s a trial to get out of this initial bit of road, after that the entire journey feels nice. Make no mistake

though, the road is quite bad; the Golden Quadrilateral ensuring that it is dug up everywhere possible. And the roadside is not exactly all green like one might see, a little bit more into the countryside. But this is rocky country and every now and then when one goes over an undulating slope on the top one is rewarded with a previously unseen hill rock looming over the road. Ramnagaram is one of the most favoured places among amateur rock climbers in the country.

But one is never far away from the haunts of the urban youth. We find a huge board saying ‘Café Coffee Day- 8 eight kms ahead’ and realize that we are actually looking forward to sitting in the familiarity of all the Coffee Day menus. And as soon we enter the place, we meet our would-be hosts in Mysore, Apurva’s parents, sitting over a hot cuppa. They are going to Bangalore to pick their daughter up. It’s a small world.

We end up reaching Srirangapatnam after four hours, mainly because we take umpteen breaks in the way. One for a fag, one for tea, another for gum. And in each of these stoppages we take care to remind ourselves of the historic nature of the journey; how everyone in law school will look up to us after this.

There are three-four memorable things to see and do in Mysore and Srirangapatnam. Visiting the Mysore palace is a must for generations whose idea of royal lifestyle is based on the TV. The grand wedding chamber, the view from the durbar hall, the weapons in the armoury — everything is breathtaking and everything is king-size in this palace and all of them leave one thinking that those were the times.

The other thing to do is to go to the Chamundi hills which overlook Mysore. There is a temple on the top of the hill which is quite venerated. Pay a special darshan fees of Rs.20, cut the queue and get your two private minutes with Maa Chamundi. The best thing to do on Chamundi Hills is to catch the sunset and then the breathtaking sight of Mysore lighting up.

But the defining experience of the entire trip is in Srirangapatnam. For all those brought up on Sanjay Khan and the ‘sword of Tipu Sultan’, this is where it all began. Stand on the ramparts at the edge of the island and watch the Cauvery break into two in front of you; one can just see the British breaking in front of this formidable barrier (they actually could not break through for two months).

It’s been a year since then and things have moved on. We have gone on other much longer and tougher trips; Parag’s Vespa scooter (which he named ‘the Mean Machine’ very much in the same spirit in which he calls himself ‘Blackstorm’) has made way for a monstrous Thunderbird. But on a lonely day I still take a bike and go down Mysore road a little distance to awaken my mind; Parag has made it a ritual to go to the Café Coffee Day the day before exams. Nostalgically remembered and frequently referenced, a journey can put wanderlust in a man. Don’t ignore it.

MANoLiN

IN ADULTERY I THRIVE
THAT LONGING CONSTANT FOR
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
LAUGHED DID I HARD AT THE MONK
WHO SOLD HIS FERRARI
WHEN THERE WAS ONE TO SELL.
FOR KNOW I NOT THE FEELING
OF THE HIMALAYAS AND GOOD OL'
VEGETARIANISM?
I KNOW NO THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND
DOLLARS
NOR NO FERRARI IN POVERTY THIRSTING
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
THE ABSTAINER AND THE CELIBATE
UNIVERSAL VOYEUR OF PEACE
IN SIMPLICITY DID GANDHI REJOICE
HIS TRUTH AND IDEAL
AT ELEVEN BREATHED TOBACCO
AND AT FOURTEEN A WOMAN.
AT A RIPE OLD AGE DID PREACH
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
THE VILLAGER IN THE CITY
AND THE COUNTRYSIDE VACATIONER
THE OWNER OF THE CITY
ALL BECKONED IN WORK AND PLEASURE
INTELLIGENTLY DEvised TO CATER
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
KARNA OF MAHABHARATHA
THE RICH GIVER OF WEALTH
DOWN TO THE KAVACA AND KUNDALA
THE SHEPHERD IN THE ALCHEMIST
THE POOR SEEKER OF TREASURE
FROM SPAIN TO EGYPT
ALL BURPING OR HUNGRY, FOR
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
TIME AND MONEY DID MY GRANDPA
GIVE TO WORSHIP AND RITUAL
HAVING KNOWN NO MEAT OR ALCOHOL
IN BLISSFUL SMALL TOWN EXISTENCE
UNTIL THE REVELATION TO HIS DEAR
GRANDCHILD
THE MEDICAL COLLEGE YEARS
OF CIGARETTES AND ENGLISH FOOTBALL
OF TUXEDOS AND HAVING KNOWN JAZZY
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
LOST ON FOREIGN SHORES
THE LAND FORGOTTEN
BUT OH-SO-INDIAN THEY WANT TO BE
LOVE BUBBLING IN EVERY VEIN
FOR THE MOTHERLAND HAS BECOME
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
IN DEFENSE OF THIS RICH CULTURE DOES
STAND
THE FAMILY MAN SO ORTHODOX
WHO ONCE FREQUENTED EVERY STREET OF IL
REPUTE
AND CALLING THEM OF THE STREET SCUM
THE CASUAL INDULGENCE OF THE PAST;
THE TASTE OF THE OTHER.
THE STANDARD OF STYLE
AND INDULGENT BLISS
THE CONFIDENT ASSESSMENT
THE MAN WHO KNOWS ALL
AND DOES ALL
HAVING FOUND HIMSELF IN TROUBLE
AND GLORY
THE MAN OF TASTE
WHOM EVERYBODY BOWS DOWN BEFORE
AND WHO DOES NOT PREACH THIS OR THE
OTHER
MUST HAVE KNOWN
THE TASTE OF EVERY OTHER.

SUHAS NARASIMHA BALIGA

SHOVE YOUR BIGOTRY YOU

ABHAYRAJ NAIK

I get scalded each time that man at the *desi* cabaret
vomits out a muffled *ladieez alloud nahi undar*

or stupid Sarah shuts out Jagdish with
'Of course you cannot come, we're going to be talking girly stuff'
giggles over telephone line pregnant

or invitations say 'couples only'
and still deny Rahul and Anand entry, coz 'two stag males'
is not a fucking couple is it? 'This new generation has nothing but
nonsense in their heads!'
Never mind if Rahul loves Anand such that Juliet cries: "A kindred
soul is thee"
and they fuck too, if you were wondering but shy to ask
but it doesn't matter coz there is no couple, no *ladkee* see.

Or when the audacious begging *hijra* in the stinking train
compartment
is shooed away with the oxymoronic "I said no, you sexless bitch"
that too delivered in chaste Hindi
with as much disturbing natural ease as
the ubiquitous exclusive "Father's Name" in all official stationery.
Mother Goddess WHO?

Shove your bigotry you
vaginal, anal, oral, virtual, what
I refuse to be scalded
she, he, it, them, we.
It's we.
Remember, it's we.

Live at Leeds

The Who

Review by Arun Sagar

Anyone who's ever seen the "Woodstock" movie will know that the 'Who' were a formidable live band at their peak. Hell, "formidable" doesn't even begin to describe them – they were the most ass-kicking, walloping, crashing, wall-rattling, thunderous live act ever. A little known fact is that the Who held the record for the loudest concert, until they lost it to Deep Purple many years later. **Live at Leeds**, a recording of a concert at Leeds University on February 14th, 1970, is the album that most firmly established the Who's reputation among the general public who never actually got to see them.

There are several versions of this album around, so I better clarify which one I'm talking about. The original release featured only six tracks, but the one most widely available now (and the one I own) is a reissue with fourteen tracks. I have heard there is yet another remastered release with almost the complete performance of the evening, including the complete "Tommy", but I haven't seen it yet. There are also some bootlegs supposed to be floating around, but of course you hardly ever see those things in India (or at least I don't....please tell me if you do).

One of the best things about the reissue is the detailed liner notes, which include photographs, press clippings, and a detailed review. In fact I've read the little booklet so often that it's going to be difficult to talk about the album without echoing what's written there, but I'll try....

If you only know of the Who through Pete Townshend's grandiose, bombastic rock operas, you're in for quite a surprise with this one. The first thing you should do when you put on this album is turn up the volume. Of course, like any really good music, it can be enjoyed at any volume, but to get the full effect you should listen to it *loud*. So loud that if you close your eyes you can see the guitar flashing in your head and *feel* the drums like a second heartbeat and the distortion like a thunderstorm in your head. There's something about the interplay between the rhythm section and Pete's chaotic noisemaking that just blows my mind. Simply put, this is hard rock heaven. But before I scare off any metal-haters, don't worry, you won't find here any of the mind-numbing, soulless technical virtuosity that so much metal is guilty of. Instead, you get fantastic melodies, great harmonies, powerful jams...ok I can't really describe it, you just have to listen to it to know what I'm talking about. There's something about this stuff that just gets the blood pounding like nothing else.

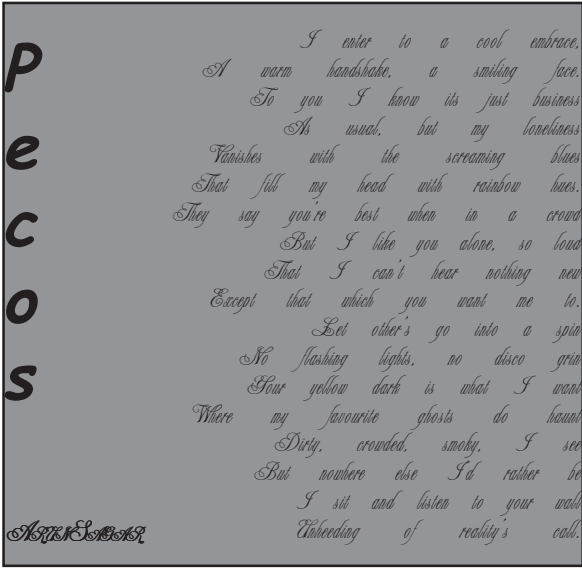
Three of the four covers on this album are absolutely stunning – fast, uncompromising, rocking with a vengeance. My personal favourite is "Young Man Blues", with its startling start-stop treatment (later imitated by Led Zeppelin on "Black Dog") and furious soloing by Pete in the mid-section. "Summertime Blues" and "Shakin' All Over" are also great, with amazing riffing by Pete and fantastic, high-speed bass runs by John Entwistle, the usual mad drumming by Keith Moon, as well as the obligatory wild solos. Note the great block-chord riffing in "Shakin' All Over" just before the solo. Also watch out for Roger's vocal performance, that powerful roar in the



chorus. "Fortune Teller" is not bad, though not as mind-blowing as these three.

Another real highlight is "A Quick One, While He's Away", Pete Townshend's mini-rock opera, which sounds wonderful, moving through several different sections before a rousing climax. Watch out especially for the great falsetto harmonies of "you are forg-iv-en" near the end. It may be hard to believe, but that *really* high voice you hear is John Entwistle, who also sang the *really* deep bass bits in "Summertime Blues" – what a range he had! This reissue contains a small snippet from **Tommy** – "Amazing Journey/Sparks", which will come as another surprise if you've only heard the original before. "Sparks" especially is fantastic...oh that bass. I read a review somewhere which compared this version of "Sparks" to "a thousand wild rhinoceroses" - and I can't describe it any better.J. A full live version of **Tommy** is available in **Live at the Isle of Wight Festival, 1970**, of which there is also a great video: hearing the Who live is great, but *watching* them is something else. (I managed to get my hands of a DVD of it with great difficulty....and no, before you ask, I'm not lending it to anyone!)

The singles, "Heaven and Hell", "I Can't Explain", "Substitute", "Happy Jack" and "I'm A Boy" are all great, though rather short and snappy (except for the opening "Heaven and Hell", featuring another great solo by Pete). The harmonies on "I'm a Boy" are especially great. Somehow, the 'heavy' treatment works really well for "Happy Jack" and "I'm A Boy", which are essentially pop ditties. The one song I find myself usually skipping on the album is "Tattoo" – every reviewer talks of its great arpeggios, which are nice enough, but the song doesn't really *do* much, and I find it a bit, well, boring. What am I missing? Oh, there's a fifteen (!) minute version of "My Generation", which starts with the song itself and then just goes of into improvisation. There's some bluesy soloing, some more random jamming, some of the "See Me, Feel Me" verses from **Tommy**, a reprisal of the "Sparks" theme, and God knows what else. The interconnection between the three instrumentalists, the way they play off each other is just outstanding throughout. What gets me every single time is the way Pete creates the false ending before the whole band just erupts onto your eardrums again like, well, like a thousand wild rhinoceroses. Incredible. There's also a performance of "Magic Bus", which goes of into similar jams, though all pegged around the song's distinctive bass line. Reading this review again, I realize how over-effusive I sound. I guess I can't help it – this is one of those few albums that you just can't get tired of. I'm also a bit sentimental about it because it was the first Who album I heard, and it converted me into a permanent fan. I hope it does the same for you.



TANGERINE MAN

He walked up to the doorstep, tangerine basket in hand,
Rang the bell and patiently waited till she opened the door.
He smiled: her expression showed she did not understand,
Understandably, what the gift of a fresh green fruit was for.

As she watched him walk purposefully down the street
The pleasantness of the sour small caught her by surprise.
She worked the knife deftly to remove the peel of the treat,
Partaking off the juicy rinds, she felt her spirits slowly rise.

The tiny bursts of sweetness that came, and again, in between
The constant, rather pungent, but just about not overpowering
Taste of sourness; the slick sheen of the peel of yellow-green;
Had her thinking of the fruit long after she finished her feasting.

Just when she fad forgotten all about the tangerine, she heard
The footsteps followed by the doorbell. He smiles and quietly,
A shiny fruit exchanged hands and he was gone without a word.

Soon, the fruit was gone too, without a word, and just as rapidly.

It became part of her routine and he was there exactly when she
Would feel the urge to indulge in another exceptional tangerine.
He would always appear, smiling, to answer her unspoken plea,
Each time, she would slice and devour and lick her fingers clean.

It was a rather rude shock to her that fateful and chilly evening
When she felt the desire and for hours afterwards he never came.
She felt restless as the longing in her grew, slowly expanding,
Till it filled her thoughts entirely: a craving she could not tame.

For many days later, she would rush and open the front door
Looking expectantly, wistfully, hesitantly, irritably, perplexedly,
Out into the streets for the answer to her incessant thirst for more,
While a bitter aftertaste remained, staining her mouth permanently.

Priyadarshini Kedlaya

Quirk

A book of names. That was what she needed, when she walked into the store, for at dawn she realized that her little baby was going to be defined by its name. Would I be insensitive in calling the baby ‘it’? It wasn’t the clash of gender or of one’s impending goodness against the tides of ignorance, but that of the consumer’s predictability against the whims of an animal subject to sudden hormonal outbursts. Which is what the market survey called pregnant women, as I recall. “Animals are what you call creatures that are defined as much by their predictability as by their capriciousness, as are pregnant women, being acted upon by the responsibility that comes with having your belly enlarged, and also by hormones that in the least can explain the acclaimed ‘performances’ of Manson.” Both Charles and Marilyn I suspect. It was not a regular survey of the seasonal fancies of moneyed people, but one of the humours surrounding this sort of thing. If you did pile up all of the existing literature on the subject: the studies, the critiques, the lectures, the journals, the biographies, and snippets of the academics’ teatime discussions, you would undoubtedly find that there lies little left to be said, and little fodder for the imagination. It has all been done. All we can do is to rephrase the old, so the consumers who cannot be bothered to do a minute of thinking, can for themselves get a glimpse of ‘modernity’ creeping into their living rooms. Rooms already cosy, decorated with glass articles of little value and a shelf of leather bound books.

It was a simple task for me, having only to direct prospective customers to the aisle housing the genre of books they were interested in, or occasionally be called upon to comment on a certain new arrival, which was well received by critics, as all books these days seem to be: “Brilliant. Thought provoking. Profound and spiced with the adroit touch of his minimalist fingers.” Yes, the backs of all these books had some incredibly vain one-liners, and it was a constant source of amusement, to watch people grab a beautiful, machine bound book and be enthralled by the comments of a reviewer from some newspaper they knew little about. I hate to be defensive, but really, this isn’t a case of me being cynically presumptuous or of me lashing out against a tiresome day job. On a number of occasions I have approached these buyers and questioned them regarding the stature of the literary critic they so willingly trusted when contemplating a purchase. It wasn’t good for sales or for my image, but I reckoned someone would eventually see the humour in my question and join me for a good laugh.

So she asked, “Do you have a book of names? I’m expecting and I want to make sure my baby has everything the world can offer him.”

“Expecting what Ma’am?”

“Excuse me? Young man, you have a terrible sense of humour. Now please...”

“Aisle seven. All the world has to offer!” I chuckled in the only inoffensive way possible, which was straight in her face.

“And in the event you find the book not meeting your requirements, might I make a suggestion? We have more than a thousand books, of authors with different names. I can assure you that one of those names will suit your ‘expectation’ quite finely. Chaucer, Flaubert, Plato, Burgess, Naipaul...I could go on and on. Quite an assortment of unique names.”

She turned abruptly with a faint smile; the kind that comes about when you attempt to resist a surge of laughter by tempering it with a small amount of scorn, and what results is a quirky and mysterious first

meeting with a stranger. I couldn’t help resting my arms on the counter and lowering my head down in a wilful act of submission. This was a trendy bookstore, well lit, stylistically arranged, and with walls, windows and floors polished almost to extinction. This was the kind of place you wish Bonzo, Page and their troupe had trashed. After me sequestering the notable works for my own private collection, of course. She must have been in the first months of her pregnancy since I couldn’t discern any abdominal protrusion as she passed by. These days I have begun to observe these sorts of things: thoroughly meaningless and otherwise insignificant events and people; I just cannot relinquish this nasty habit of watching people, just as I can’t the playing with acids and stones.

I guess this is what happens when you spend much of your day locked away in a dimly lit room listening to the melancholic crooning voice of Cocker,Q frighteningly changing tempo, yet retaining that indescribable mood he so deftly creates, that pricks your every cell, that leaves you chained to your bed, eyes locked to the ceiling, your thoughts motoring away into a spiral of absolute chaos. The pristine hue of post punk beats throbbing against your momentarily dazed sensibility, accelerating your restless youth to the point of frenzy, so intense that you know you have long since escaped the lulling sanity all around you. This is in a different class of its own.

A BOOK OF NAMES

Walking through the Galleria is as close as you can get to a psychedelic experience without having to hop the fence and enter the realm of chemically induced states of heightened perception (or distorted perception if you want me to be non-judgmental). The opulence on display is so overwhelming that instead of creating a dynamic ambience that would define a generation supposedly bursting with energy, all it does is showcase their static and resigned lifestyle. This place is swarming with adults as boring and lifeless as the crass and dimwitted students who will soon replace them. This isn’t a generalized theory fabricated from assumptions and my distaste for the existing class divide, which is so prevalent this day in growing Indian metropolises like Bangalore. A few days back I stumbled upon a note that had been left at a table at a nearby coffee bar.

I definitely overestimate the amount of time spent thinking during the day, and I sometimes wonder if this is an act of regression. It takes a toll on your body, and on your mind. Five blue capsules down and I’m tired. So very tired. I do not want to give in to sleep, for this is the only time I have to myself. I know I have lost, because I never understood the rules of the game. Things keep piling up: misery upon misery, gloom upon gloom and a thick quilt of darkness covering all the sadness already accumulated. When this transcribes to a material loss, each gives strength to the other, in an endless cycle, until you feel crushed flat into the ground. My body has learnt not to fight. Sadly I do not think my mind will ever learn. I don’t think I have ever valued myself as a human being to an extent less than what I do now. It is hard to get things done in such a state. And somewhere deep down you know, it is only such things which will in the end rescue you from the deep slumber you now find yourself in. Things that need to be done. Like shooting yourself in the head and ending it all.

What was I to make of something as strange as this? It isn’t something you come across everyday and it did

keep me up a whole night. But let’s put that aside for the moment. I must tend to the lady in search of a name, though any reasonably observant person would know she was in search of a lot more. And who could blame her? In this chemical generation any parent would be soaked in worry, apprehensive about raising a child in this increasingly complicated world. With theories aplenty I still find it hard to utter any consoling words when I meet someone such as her, and that does weaken my confidence in conversing with people.

“Are you sure all you want is a name for your unborn child?”

“What do you mean?”

“I know it must be a scary proposition, fostering an infant within you and wondering if you have the strength to provide for it. Could that possibly be the real reason for your coming here today?”

She burst out laughing, as if to say “You spend way too much time with books, which is why you cannot differentiate between the trivial and important, between the melodramatic and dramatic.”

She said rather plaintively “The psychology section is in aisle thirteen, isn’t it?” without the slightest trace of a smirk at that, which meant she really did possess a sense of humour. I certainly looked foolish at the moment, but I didn’t feel so. We laughed together. It struck me then that the events of the last few days, and more importantly the last few minutes, were in some vague sense a confirmation of the theory that I had been working on my entire waking life. It was a simple theory: every single aspect of life, of creation and destruction, of art, of screaming cars and 3G cellular phones, of terrorism, of survival, of immaculate Goan beaches, of education and a career, of boys and girls, of sex and conformism, of depression and joy, of relief and murder, of generation wars, of morality and nihilism, of ‘Pulp’ and ‘The pixies’, of genius and arrogance, of Jesus and Allah or Shiva and Thor, of normality, of wives and whores, of globalisation and the Shiv Sena, of immigration and ‘culture’, of alienation and pretension, of the ‘idea’ and the novel, could all be explained as a matter of choice. Choice was in essence the core of my theory, which meant doing away with the concept of absolutes and shedding the vile skin of conceit which ascribes meaning and a purpose to the frail skeleton of human existence.

While running the bar code scanner over the back leaf of the book she just handed me, I noticed it wasn’t a book of names. It was titled ‘EASY ACCESS TUNNEL,’ by an author I had not heard of earlier, so I can’t say much about it. The glaring title in bold however did in some sense reveal much of what might possibly be enclosed within those frightening covers.

“Why this?” I had to ask, to complete the transaction that was as yet unfinished in my eyes.

“What does it matter? Just another statistic, isn’t it? An added sale to your monthly performance review?”

With that she grabbed the packet from my hand and strode comfortably back into the sterile madness of the Galleria, her hair swaying in unison with her feet, almost mimicking their every movement. It certainly was an easy access tunnel, though the sane seem to be hard pressed to state which direction was the path out of darkness, and which the one into light. Just as she retreated past my line of vision, I heard a gunshot, followed by a chorus of screams. I had this strange feeling, accompanied by a certainty that this had something to do with the suicide note I had chanced upon a few days ago. What can I say? It really is a mad world out there. Eventually its alluring claws will knock on your door, and only then will we truly understand and feel what millions of human beings do. Only then will we see the face of tragedy, and find that in no single aspect does it resemble the face we had conjured up in our heads and so vainly splashed on canvas or scribbled on a piece of paper.

RAGHU .S

STILL LIFE



BY ARUN SAGAR

So have I heard on Africa's
burning shore,A hungry lion give a grievous
roar.

William Barnes Rhodes,
Bombastes Furioso, sc. IV

Wilbur Smith's screaming inspiration in poetic verse. So profound in meaning, *he* did choose to borrow it. The heroism of man, the violent yet charming mystery of Africa. Man with and man against nature. These striking dualities churning in harmony and blazing against the midday African sun. *Burning Shore* is the first book in the Courtney series, and not unlike the Ballantyne series or books like *Cry Wolf*, it is the rediscovery of the primitive and hopeless vulnerability of man against the forces of earth and wild. About how, outside the protective arms of civilization, man still cries in her lap whom he thinks he has dominion over. The parent who never allows you to grow up. Kafka's *Sons* redefined. And like the story of Kafka, there is the interminable fight. Of maturity and glory. The war ending undecided. And on Africa's burning shore, does the lion roar. And in grief does she roar. For like all of his books, this story is a tale. A tale of the brave, a narrative of lore. The story of a devastated woman who seeks a new life in a new continent. Centaine Courtney's introduction to Africa spans out over a pregnancy, a ship wreck, a desert, a tryst with the jungle, a lifetime with the *San* or the bushmen, a second love, and an afterlife she had hope for before setting off. The book calls itself an adventure novel. The adventure would slay a reader of Alistair Maclean's mysterious tales of suspense and hanging on cliffs. For this is an adventure not of the body, but of the soul. Feeding a savior to a shark, drinking from the stomach of a freshly fed dead baby seal and biting into the 'sickly sweet corruption' of maggot infested flesh of fish, in search of survival. Not for the weak hearted. And certainly not for the unromantic. Every page is a mammoth description of character and will. No man or woman, good or bad, imagined by Wilbur Smith inhabits the mediocre, in mind or body. The eternal romantic in



Garry Courtney, the hardy and determined concern of Anna, the uninhibited love of H'ani, the wild charm and cruelty of Lothar De La Ray or the chummy efficiency of Swart Hendrick, all smelting into the myth like heroes and heroines of an ancient epic. Shocking, perfectly demarcated and colorfully described, the reader is steered through trials of character and strength building one upon the other. Fabricating 632 pages of livid motion picture like entertainment is one thing. Working up a fairy tale fascination for a continent is another. Set in the heart of the early twentieth century, an era crisscrossed by wars, colonizing sprints, a world war, the diamond rush, the end of Victorianism and the ever expanding reach of the white man, the background is fertile for a tale of many cultures, new lands and ruthless adventure. This white man's book on the black continent of his birth don't suffer from the colonizer's empathy that one constantly has to go through in the Englishman's tales of our 'great Indian land'. He is as convinced about the richness in culture and heritage of the African Bushmen (*San*) and people as his book. Their primitive disposition notwithstanding, their tale brings us down to our knees. Us, who surpassed them in technology without learning our way up. They who ought to teach us to live, something simply but subtly preached in *The Burning Shore* and more vociferously put forward in the Ballantyne Series. Wilbur Smith's identification of himself and his white protagonists with Africa seems complete. On a personal level, the power of human bonding and the language of human love, hate and glory all one. But the duality still seeps in through the cracks and fissures that he himself has never been able to resolve. The conquer and desecration of the *San*'s holy 'Place of All Life' by Centaine strikes a similarity with the blood thirsty fight the young Ballantyne had with his black brother of childhood. All in civilization's cause. Despite the shocking acquaintance of Smith with every little detail of the wild, the wind, the animals, the trees, the tears, the cries and of the struggles and rewards that belie Africa, somewhere down the line, he concedes to the needs of civilization, finds succor in the inevitability of Western progress and models his lament that way. His remorse with the western savagery is well reflected, but so is his prostration before the same.

The fiery statement of will at the end of the book is a somber but typical way to create anticipation for the sequel(s).

Forgiving a little unrealistic melodrama and a little piped up emotion, a sense of physical danger, the thrill of survival, an undertone of sex and bountiful fantasy raises a bleak tragic adventure to an intense mood lifter. While I rummage around for the sequel in a series of five, I stand firm on *not* lending this book to anybody whomsoever.

Suhas Baliga

Call for Submissions

May-June, 2005

FEATURED THEME:
MY PLACE IN ANARCHY

ALSO LOOKING FOR:

Poetry, Short Stories, Articles, Opinions, Reviews, Visual Art, Cartoons, Cool Quizzes, Puzzles, Wacky Undefinable Submissions, and So On.... Think Big, Think Different.

Anything That's Good and Fits our Quirky Quality Standards - We're Good to Publish. No Restrictions on Length, Content or Style.

FLEXIBLE DEADLINE:

July 15th.

ERRATA

We apologize!

In the Jan-Feb edition -

- 1.The last line in Dorian Persaud's "My Experience", was inadvertently left out.
2. In the Jan-Feb edition, the cartoon under the 'NAIRSIDE' banner was attributed to the wrong email address.

In the Mar-Apr edition -

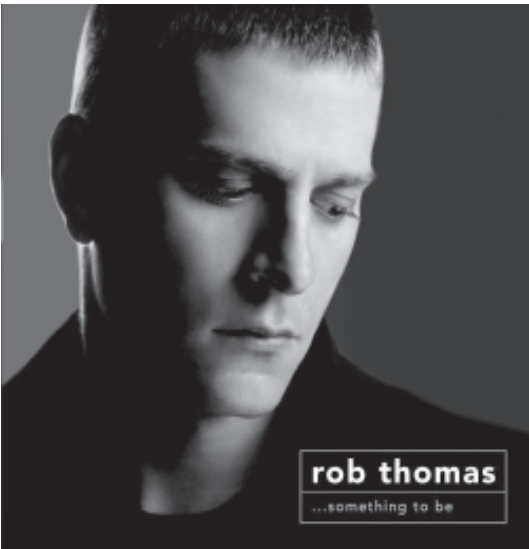
1. The title of Rick Monaco's story, "The Shane MacGowan Incident", was incorrectly spelt.
2. Ruden's sketch, is titled "Clark Kent, the Kryptonian v. Jimmy Olsen, the Amish farmer".
3. Abhayraj Naik's name was incorrectly spelt.
4. Ankur Singla's name was incorrectly spelt.

Rob Thomas
WEA International
Released 2005
Rating: 4 out of 5

It **has certainly** been a great new millennium for Rob Thomas musically. His band, Matchbox Twenty, went from strength to strength, fulfilling their initial promise by releasing hit single after hit single that simply refused to leave top-forty lists everywhere; but not before he got the chance to spearhead the comeback of Santana, co-writing and singing on the track "Smooth", resulting in sales running into millions, Grammy awards, and legions of music enthusiasts suddenly asking, "Who is this Rob Thomas, anyway?"

The result – nine years after singles such as "Push" and "Back 2 Good" made his voice a familiar sound on the radio – is *...Something To Be*, a record that hit #1 on its release for good reason: Rob Thomas has managed to sound distinct enough from Matchbox Twenty to set this record apart, yet not so much as to leave fans of the band cold. In one album, Thomas straddles the range from catchy pop-rock ("This Is How A Heart Breaks") to piano ballad ("Now Comes The Night"), with some Asian-flavoured introspection ("All That I Am"), some good old-fashioned country ("Fallin' To Pieces") and myriad other influences in between. As always, Rob Thomas's songwriting supplements his emotive voice to great effect: while tracks such as "Problem Girl" deal with thought-provoking issues head-on, the beauty of Thomas's writing lies in his ability to take on a theme as mundane as a standard-issue love song and transform it into something unique and touching, something he has done in the past with tracks such as "If You're Gone" and continues to do on this album with tracks such as "Ever The Same" and "My, My, My" – the first single, "Lonely No More", however, is a possibility the best testimony to his songwriting, as Thomas changes an up-tempo track into a in-your-face affirmation without losing any of his charm or romance. Some credit for this must go to Thomas's undeniable ability to make every song sound convincing with his slightly husky voice, a trait all too often lacking in the days of mass-produced emotion, the result being that even when he strays into what appears to be straight-up pop song (such as the title track or "Streetcorner Symphony"), he pulls out all the stops and has unadulterated fun without ever straying into inane "I want you and you know you want me" territory, although there are moments when he veers dangerously close to the edge of the cliff ("I'm not real any more / I am an illusion"). Both Matchbox and non-Matchbox fans will be alternately touched and inspired to dance around their rooms to this album - although *...Something To Be* is not about to go down in the annals of musical history as the best album ever made, it's certainly a stellar effort from a talented singer and songwriter, and every second of the album deserves your full attention.

THOMAS JOHN



CONTRIBUTE

Quirk is more than just a literary magazine. We are a not-for-profit organization with a mission to infuse life into South Asian college literature. Your contributions will help us stay independent. To make donations to Quirk, send a Demand Draft in favour of Aju John to:

Aju John,
Quirk,
NATIONAL LAW SCHOOL OF INDIA UNIVERSITY,
Post Bag No. 7201,
Nagarbhavi,

Reserve Your Quirk

Quirk is a bi-monthly literary magazine published from the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. Two thousand copies of every issue are distributed free at several places in many cities in India. You can secure your own copy of Quirk by filling out the form below and sending it to the given address.

Yes, I want to subscribe to Quirk for the remaining year [3 Issues = Rs. 60]
Enclosed herewith is my Demand Draft for Rs. 60 [Demand Draft

Number _____]
NOTE: Demand Draft to be drawn in favour of Aju John.
Name of the subscriber: _____
Occupation: _____
Company: _____
Address: _____

PINCode: _____
Telephone Number: _____
Fax: _____
E-Mail: _____
Website: _____
E-mail: _____

Send to:
Parul Kumar,
Quirk,
National Law School of India University
Post Bag # 7201
Nagarbhavi
Bangalore : 560072.