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The Tri-annual Literary Magazine
from the students of National Law School

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Greetings, O dedicated Reader

It's a first of many kinds, this one. It's the first issue we've put out without the three people who used to pretty much run the show, until they decided to go and graduate. If Quirk isn't all it used to be, blame them - they're the ones who abandoned us to go get lives. It's also our first big, quarterly issue - and it is big. We have everything in here- from a review of Ishiguro to an ode to small black pieces of cloth. We have predictions from the ever-so-reliable Don Kitbor; creepy tales about twins and talons from our partner-in-crime (and life) in Delhi, Aishwarya; and funky new voices (and one old warhorse) in movies, music and fantasy. We've even attempted a story-over-many-issues again.

But the highlight of our issue is, indisputably, the poetry. This issue heralds the next offensive in the "The Great Quirk Turf Wars"- the epic battle fought on our pages between The Rhymers and The Free Versers. The battle seemed wrapped up, won before it was even fought. The Free Versers had the numbers and the print history to stave off all challenges, or so we thought. They seemed comfortably ensconced in the walls of Quirk, a hardy fortress indeed - we all know who wins Quirk today, wins the entire civilized reading world tomorrow. But then came Henry, and the battle was enjoined in earnest- Henry's forays into our last issue was just the morale booster the Rhymers needed. They pay homage to Henry this time around, even as they scale the walls of Quirk. Will this mark the death of an Old Order, or will the Knights of Poetic Freedom strike back, and render the battle truly bloody? The stakes are set, and we shall have to wait and see how it all turns out - then again, it does seem like the fun is in the fighting. If you have a side, rush to their aid. If you want one, Vivek's and Anjum's (poets, writers, Quirk judges and some of Quirk's favorite people) manifestos on poetry seem a good place to start in the search to acquiring one. All in these pages you hold.

Speaking of Quirk judges - we are proud to announce that our poetry contest has been decided! After months of collecting and assembling by us, and patient reading by our kick ass judges, the tabs have been counted and the sheep are in - gazelles, if you object to poems being compared to woolly old sheep. And we have, people, winners. And we aren't telling you who they are - go in and find out. Read the other stuff while you are at it.

Happy Reading!

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THE DRESS

It is a common charge leveled against women of all ages that they love shopping. Not so the case with me towards the end of my teens. Being sartorially challenged as well as lazy, I was happy enough to let my mother buy my clothes for me, from babyhood all the way to the ripe old age of eighteen (in all that time, I don't think I saw the inside of a clothing store more than half a dozen times, and two of those times, I bought shoes). Looking back, I think it was probably because puberty was ghastly enough for me to simply be thankful that I didn't, in the seemingly simple task of buying clothes, have to be confronted with the physicality of my awkwardness just then- and school uniforms, to be honest, are not the best way to improve a girl's impression of her appearance unless the girl in question is Britney Spears.

The arrangement was a decent one, as far as taste went: Mum was careful about only buying things she knew I'd wear, and even if I did leave home to go to college, I knew that she would just buy me clothes as usual, which would then be worn and washed to death till the next time I came home. And her last-minute packing and shopping for me followed the pattern perfectly until the day she came home with a plastic bag in the bottom of which, along with the obligatory t-shirts, sweaters and the odd pair of socks, was what looked like a heap of black cotton. A rather intricately embroidered heap of black cotton, but certainly not anything fit to be used for clothing.

On closer examination, and after being shaken out to its full length, the heap of cotton turned out to be a black dress. Once I tried it on - or, to put it more accurately, was coerced into doing so by the maternal unit- I could see that the thing had the approximate shape of a sack, if a rather fancy one. The only thing that redeemed it was the fabric - lovely broderie anglaise in a spiderweb pattern, but still, all that made it was a rather pretty sack. Certainly not what a person fresh out of school, having spent well over a decade in skirts there and consequently left with an enduring hatred of anything that wasn't a pair of jeans, would willingly wear. A dress was, in our eyes, the epitome of 'girly' clothing - to be avoided at all costs because it recalled the shape of our uniforms, and indirectly, the intense discomfort of getting our adolescent bodies into those uniforms, in a time that seemed to assume that every girl in the world needed to be built like Twiggy in order to find clothes that didn't make us shudder when we looked into our mirrors. Listening to my howls about the way it fit, Mum ran two darts up the back of the dress the next day, making me try it on again. If the previous day's back-of-head (prompting) howler had been my inner schoolgirl, Eighteen, wondering just what my classmates would say if they saw me in this ridiculous (in my eyes) old-fashioned thing, today's guest star was an outraged Victorian, squealing that the neck was far too low (it wasn't; that, however, is another matter). The finished product (allegedly décolleté and all) was now a sleeveless knee-length shift that actually managed to have a slight recess in the general area of my waist, the décolletage wasn't so objectionable (this was the time when I was still trying to reconcile myself to the fact that my chest would not magically disappear) and there was no way in the world anyone wearing it could have been mistaken for a pre-pubescent girl. None of this gave me any pleasure at all till I got a look in the mirror. Given the fact that my hair was plaited, my feet were bare and I was hardly wisp-thin (also, the hem of the Dress would never reach the floor unless a three-year-old wore it), there was



no reason on earth why the first words brought to mind by the image in the mirror should have been the name of Holly Golightly. But they were. And after spending all my teenage years trying to find things to wear that wouldn't make me hate the way I looked, I had found a starting point, in the unlikeliest place and shape.

The Dress, despite the transformation I'd seen in the mirror, was far from perfect. There were still things to be hemmed, cut off and taken in, but they never got done, simply because I didn't take it off long enough over the next two weeks for anyone to take a needle and scissors to it. And after that, I packed off to college, where it and its overt sophistication were deliberately suppressed by the t-shirt I wore under it, with sneakers instead of the customary heels - a forced, if happily accepted (especially about the heels) bit of subversion that allowed me to feel a great deal better about myself on the days when I wore it than anything else could. The Dress not only allowed me to emphasize my difference (in the departments of ideology, hygiene, aesthetics, and every other department you can name) from the jhola-carriers that infested campuses all over the country, it also ended up being a witness to more or less everything of any importance that happened to me that year, and I was just about lucky that it seemed fade-proof from all the frequent washings it got given. The year was a good one on its own: the Dress, which even when made to look like a little girl's playgroup frock was lovely, made it even better. I was wearing it on the day I first managed to speak to a stranger (if you must know, it was a tent supplier) on the phone without stammering or apologizing endlessly for my existence, the day I discovered my newfound and lasting ability to negotiate near-death-experience-inducing traffic without actually doing any more than coming close to having the experience, as well as the night I was locked out by my landlord and had to let myself back in at 4 a.m. using the duplicate key I'd stolen for the express purpose (unsurprisingly, I'd worn the Dress while committing the actual theft) and the time I spent imprisoned in a friend's PG room by her landlady's dog, an annoying scrap of a furball named Tutu. It didn't, as so many other articles of clothing would have done in such situations, let me feel stupid or unsure of myself. The Dress always knew what had to be done when I had it on, and the uppercase D I refer to it with reflects nothing more than the truth: it was much more, to me, than just something to wear.

At the end of this bit of whatever this is, one might ask: what was so important about that bit of black cloth? Nothing, really, except the fact that it functioned as an armour of sorts, letting me look like a lot of things my eighteen-year-old self couldn't possibly have been. At least, these were my first thoughts on the matter. The magic of the Dress, quiet simply put, wasn't just glamour- and if one looks at the meaning of that word, it is something to hide behind. It wasn't doing exactly the opposite either: the effect of putting it on might not have been the same as that of Lucy Pevensie's push of the wardrobe door into Narnia, but my accidental bit of magic turned out to be more of a revelation than anything else. The Dress might, initially at least, have turned me into a creature prettier, more poised and less awkward than Eighteen ever had a hope of being, but what it finally showed me (and what anything beautiful has the potential to show the person it belongs to- owner just seems too crude a word to describe that relationship) was that even if I wasn't just that all the time, I had been it all along.

Blueberry Pop Tart

Rein In My Roots: A Rocktimist's Word

Showing The Eagles a little love

There is a new battle in the warzone of popular music criticism. Rockist vs. Poptimist. In the scheme of things, in a poverty and AIDS afflicted world, it's an extremely frivolous debate, and only about a hundred people actually care. Then again, the world is going to blow up anyway, and this battle, unlike most, is fun as hell, so one might as well talk about it. So, if you thought the world was finally done with rock and pop arguments, and had moved to the infinitely more satisfying indie vs. neo one, with important markers like length of hair and geographical location being discussed at pontifical length - well, you were wrong. Rock and pop, that old chestnut, is here to stay, if snazzily dressed up as rockist and poptimist. Only, this time, it seems that rock might lose the battle it resoundingly won in the 60s. Pop, hold your horses (not the Patti Smith ones, obviously) might just trump in the cultural wars, and become cooler than rock. I speak of the new gospel. This, people, is revolutionary. Banish the thought of ever having to force yourself through *Trout Mask Replica* again, kick back with some nice Westlife instead, and you may still not be lynched by the good people at Pitchfork Media. Even if you are, you can rest easier in the knowledge that you are hipper than they. Music listening might just get to be fun again, with guilty pleasures becoming contenders for actual pleasure. Christina Aguilera apparently plays revolutionary feminist hip-hop, and you get the feeling it took a lot for the reviewer to not call her punk (remember how they went on about Avril Lavigne?), but there you have it. Pop is so cool these days it doesn't even need the generic, bloated leavings of rock to be legitimized. Punk Pop is dead, or it will be when the world catches up with the New Yorker. Of course, all this depends on rock and pop actually being different, and where the lines between them are to be drawn. This is a battle hardly fought through boring details like musical merit, most music critics couldn't tell two notes apart if you hit them with it, but over imputed meaning to this music.



If you had to distinguish rock and pop musically, then you can't have a better guide than Wikipedia, which distinguishes between the two on the melody/rhythm basis. Pop is focused on melody, rock on rhythm. This was what led to the Stones being handed, by one reviewer, the "best rhythm section in music"- which is plain baloney, if you consider that The Who were at their incandescent best with *Who's Next* around the time *Sticky Fingers* (which is the album this remark was made in reference to) came out. If Charlie Watts plays fast and straight; Keith Moon was a hell god on sticks, with antlers on for good measure. And who plays the base guitar for the Stones again? What the reviewer meant to say was that the Stones are, in his opinion, the best "rock band" in the world, and this sounds like an intelligent, musicky way to say it. But the distinction isn't really made strictly musically- or to be fairer, the distinction isn't made technically. The distinction really is one of art and craft- pop music puts well established pieces together, and tries to come up with the best, shiniest, most perfect mix of sounds and lyrics. Pop Music, to a large extent, constructs - it puts songs together. Rock Music synthesizes- it takes the raw material and changes it. It doesn't polish, it alters; and that bit of music is never the same again. Well, that's one distinction, and one I personally prefer - though it cuts the rock landscape in about half, excluding stalwarts and adding unexpected artists to it. On the ground, however, the definitions are almost redundant; after decades of being pulled in every direction, including the bizarre genre of rap-rock, rock means little musically and pop less. Only the constructed distinction is relevant - "Rock" is only relevant now insofar as it isn't "pop" and therefore socially acceptable music that adults can admit to listening to.

Then there are "rockists". Rock Snobs. They draw the line much, much further in than it is commonly drawn. Pop Rock, like Green Day, is pop. So are bands like The Eagles and The Wallflowers. It can be safely assumed that most things that are likely to be involved with the Grammy Awards are pop -

though there is the rare exception, like U2, which is simply too much of a juggernaut to be contained by such lines in the sand. Zeppelin was considered pop , only someone went back into history and rewrote it. There is, of course, dissent in the ranks, and endless layers of hierarchy. For the good underground rockist, the more obscure the better. The starving artist is the only good one, with rare exceptions like Dylan - and he is but the base to build on. Every rockist can quote Dylan backwards - but everyone who can do that isn't a rockist. Rockists are people who know that Paul Westerberg founded the 'Mats, who are officially called the Replacements, after one incredible Sex Pistols concert- and they listen to *Hootenanny* with the rapture generally reserved for last minute wickets in Indo Pakistan cricket. Then there are the tradition rockists, who argue rock has been dead since 1992 - which was the last time great music and popular music overlapped - and everything since then has been one long march to selling out and/or irrelevance. Rock, to them, is a populist medium. If you're looking for civilized string strumming in softly lit lounge bars, then the jarring, explosive, community quality of rock has been traded away for the contentment of good pop or jazz. Current Indie-style rock, all said and done, is a ghetto and its superstars don't hold a candle to mid level popstars. This is, everyone agrees, the only way for rock to retain its revolution-only, some people would argue, it is no revolution at all - not the way The Clash spelt it.

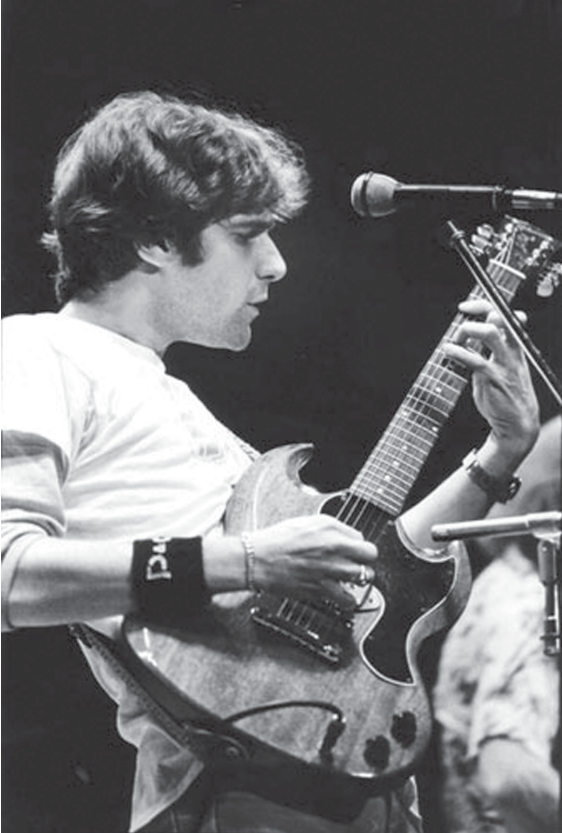
It is these people, the rockists - who pore over rock trivia, who idolize the old guard and the new underground (though rarely both); who decide, every so often, that someone (or some band) is the new Breakthrough, in the hopes of the next Cobain - these are the obsessives who traditionally determine musical taste. They write the magazines, they're the only ones that care enough, and they fight the Buckley/Beck fights. Its these people who make a phenomenon out of a band that sound like nothing as much as a bunch of monkeys on an acid trip who have discovered that if you pull certain strings in a certain way, and hit other things, neat sounds come out. They're a squabbling, jockeying and backstabbing bunch, in whose ranks the ability to rote learn massive quantities of dither has evolved into a tool of war. Its geek paradise; and the progenitor of geek cool. For all the politicking, however, it's a group of people that comes together almost instantly when the supremacy of rock is challenged. And it's a group of people that have, for the longest time, ruled the music world. The rules were set: albums are more important than singles, technical virtuosity and obscure lyrics trump easy melodies and catchy tunes. Everything that was new and interesting was co-opted, and all else relegated to the lesser fields of pop, unworthy of serious attention. Well, that was till recently. The poptimists are back in town, and for the first time in 20 years, playing with the big boys.

Any battle in popular music is, in fact, one in inverted snobbery, a fight to identify bigger underdog. Sometimes musical complexity is lauded and "atmospheric", at others it's bloated and contrived. The underground maestro and the infamous popstar are both kinds of underdogs, both with their staunch defenders. There is, however, the no man's land in between. The bands that are generally considered rock, but ones the prickly rockists wouldn't be caught dead (and listening to Britney Spears in the afterlife) defending. They are the commercial rockstars, who sell out stadiums and millions of copies of their zillionth compilation album; but get no critical love. The Eagles are the quintessential such band, and I am out to bat for them - the true underdog. And in the grand tradition of reconciling and exploding dichotomies, I have styled myself a rocktimist.

I am, I confess, generally a rockist. I like complexity in music, and hard hitting lyrics, and I love the guitar. I have always been an album person - I think albums are arcs, and songs alone miss some of the pixie dust that can make a bunch of good songs a great album. I lust after Mojo and Q, and collect trivia with dedication to give magpies envy. I dislike remixes and wouldn't listen to Mariah Carey if you paid me. To be even more specific- I am a tradition rockist - most of my music dates to the late 60s and early 70s. I can place a Zeppelin tune from its opening bars. I listen to punk as a novelty, and prefer the thumping of grunge to the shredding of punk. I am a snob, and well aware that this reflects more on me than anything else. I do, however, harbor a secret- as a kid, I loved the Eagles, and Glenn Frey competed with Jimmy Page as the ultimate in desirability. And I still listen to them.

I had, you see, a rock infused childhood. My dad can quote Neil Young, and has the infuriating habit of doing so at the most annoying, angst-ridden times.

My mother, in her tip to irony, used to play *Mother's Little Helper* whenever I was attempting to be useful in the kitchen. I always knew Zeppelin kicked serious ass. The Eagles, on the other hand, were mine alone; no one's pedestal got in the way of mine. I fell in love the first time I listened to *Hell Freezes Over*, and Don Henley segued into *Tequila Sunrise* with "*For the record, we never broke up, we just took a fourteen year vacation*", just before one of the most seductive soft guitar openings in music history. How does one resist?



But it's a different kind of enjoyment - unlike my other obsessions, I never found out more about the band. I never bothered locating a discography, looking at liner notes, trying to figure out the multiple band changes, or even the band members apart from Frey and Henley. I barely know who the different singers are. To me, Eagles are about songs, and what I've associated them with- not albums, not a legacy, not a statement. I know *Desparado* is a concept album, and not a bad one at that, but I've never gotten around to listening to it as one - I simply don't care about evolution, or influences, or overarching ideas around the Eagles. Which is why, also, I don't really listen to what is generally considered the better stuff - like *The Last Resort*. I listen to the most catchy, hook ridden songs they've put out- they appealed to the geeky twelve year old, they formed her perspective on a lot of things, and that's what I'm looking for when I listen to The Eagles. *One of These Nights* is sex in a soundtrack; *Taking It Easy* is freedom, a life led on one's own terms (and before you scoff at the admittedly limited lyrics, Jackson Browne co-wrote it, so you can take that and stuff it in your *Running On Empty* CD sleeves.), *Desparado* the peril of drifting through life and expecting too much. I can't tell you why seemed to be the perfect love song, *Ol' 55* the perfect morning after song and *Get Over It* the solution to everything. *The Girl From Yesterday*, with all the endless pining, was my version of High Romance, and a *Witchy Woman* was the best kind. That was it - my whole life philosophy, if twelve year olds can be presumed to have such things, (or adults, for that matter) wrapped up, right there. This is my Eagles playlist - with *Hotel California*, which is too big to ignore; *Tequila Sunrise*, for that bewitching start; and *Victim of Love* because it always makes me want to jump about.

If I listen to the Eagles the way I listen to other music, I would probably be turned off very quickly. They're a little too tepid, and I have limited tolerance - I make no claims to objectivity or universality - will listen to anything once, will also judge everything. I like my music a certain way, and I like it to make me think, to involve me as I listen. Of course, like everyone else, I have an easy listening playlist, but The Eagles are of a different order altogether - I can sing along to every single song on my play list, an intimate familiarity I only otherwise share with Zeppelin. If Zeppelin is the soundtrack to my growing up - and it is, to some extent- the Eagles define me at twelve. They are what I grew up from - and what I go back to when I want things simple and clean cut again for a while, for them to have the same intensity they did before one grew up and knew better. I love the exhilaration of the trip, and I love the Eagles for letting me have it.

Nandini Ramachandran

Our Judges

Vivek Narayanan's first book of poems, *Universal Beach*, was published in 2006 from Harbour Line (Mumbai). His work has also appeared in several anthologies and journals such as the *Harvard Review*. In addition to publication, he has been working on the performance of his work since 1995. Narayanan was born in Ranchi in 1972, grew up in Lusaka, Zambia, studied in the US, and is currently based in Delhi, where he works at Sarai: The New Media Initiative (www.sarai.net) an organization that brings together visual artists, social scientists, writers, and others to reflect on old and new media forms and the city.

Vivek Narayanan reads and performs from his first collection, *Universal Beach* at the British Council, Chennai on October 26, 2006, and at Crosswords Bookstore in Bangalore on November 9, 2006. For more details, contact: naravive@gmail.com

Anjum Hasan's first book of poems, published by the Sahitya Academy, is called *Street on the Hill*, and is about her life in Shillong. Her work has also appeared in several anthologies of Indian poetry. Her work also includes fiction and criticism, and a novel by her is expected in the coming year. She is from the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, but now lives in Bangalore. She is now with the India Foundation for the Arts, which works with artists, organizing funds and grants by organizing workshops and programmes. More details of the kind of work they do can be found at <http://www.indiaifa.org/>.

Nisha Susan is a poet based in Bangalore, whose poetry has appeared in *New Quest*. She's also currently working on a novel, and blogs at <http://thechasingiamb.livejournal.com> She's also the winner of the 2005 prize for creative writing by Toto Funds the Arts, a trust that organizes yearly competitions for work done in music, cinema, poetry and literature by the Indian youth.

1st PRIZE

"BODIES WANT TO FIT"

■ he left her for a girl
■ with clavicles; exquisite bulbs for
■ breasts, hothouse orchid
■ glow
■ eyelids the only evidence
■ of gravity. eyes to make
■ a lullaby yawn.
■ what i never quite
■ understood
■ was the clavicles
■ until, that is,
■ i finally saw him:
■ his spider-inked jawline,
■ his feathered lips.
■ those arms floating on air
■ must ache for the
■ anchor of pliant brackets
■ that smile, a hanger
■ to hold it up.

ISHITA BASU MALLIK, (CALCUTTA)

Ishita Basu Mallik is an English Student at Jadavpur University in Calcutta. She's an artist and a writer. She likes football, medieval people and the ironic use of netspeak.

CREMATION

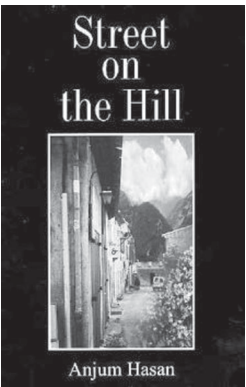
■ My father's flesh dissolved into the interstices
■ of space and light,
■ Form and energy
■ Like a curled leaf,
■ It unfurled, releasing its substance,
■ Gently into the still air.
■ I could feel his fingers on my forehead
■ And his smile on my ribs and smelt him in
■ my flesh and nails
■ I would eat fire.
■ In that alchemy of flame,
■ He was flesh, was spirit, was dust,
■ Disappearing kinglike into the earth,
■ Leaving lovers and sons, queens and scions,
■ To save the matter sanctified.

- SATYAJIT SARNA (NLS, BANGALORE)

Satyajit Sarna is a student at National Law School, Bangalore. He would rather be known than written about.

GET SPECIFIC !

All of us who write poetry in English tend to be impatient with the question of our choice of language. In some ways it is a pertinent question, though - not the why of it but the how of it. Although Indians have been writing modern poetry in English for fifty years now, every poet seems to want to discover anew an idiom she is comfortable with, an idiom that best captures her unease with and love for the language. Because of this tendency to keep starting over, I'm not sure we have what can be called a 'tradition' of writing poetry in English. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes and AK Ramanujam - to name three very different pioneers - are read and respected without exactly being influential. Jeet Thayil, Tabish Khair and Rukmini Bhaya Nair, to take three random examples from the generation succeeding theirs, are much less preoccupied than their forerunners were with the need to invent a poetic persona for themselves in English. Their explorations are more outwards than inward. Apart from that shared difference though, the influences working upon this second generation of poets are so wide-ranging and their styles and concerns so varying that they may well not belong to the same culture at all. A younger poet wishing to discover a sense of context will find no map, therefore, and will have to make do with a series of mostly unrelated even if enriching encounters with Indian poetry in English.



It is clear, though, that more and more young people are taking to poetry writing. There is a palpable increase in the circulation of poetry through blogs, internet writers groups and e-magazines. Further encouragement is now being offered through platforms that host poetry readings - like Open Space in Pune, PEN in Mumbai and Toto Funds the Arts in Bangalore, as well as through literary contests like this one

organised by Quirk. This proliferation is not yet matched, however, by sustained reflection on what it means to write about our lives in English in twenty-first century India. The Quirk contest is the second I have judged in less than a year. The submissions I've been reading include several very good poems, but on the whole the poetry has been what, for want of a better word, I can only describe as 'shadowy'.

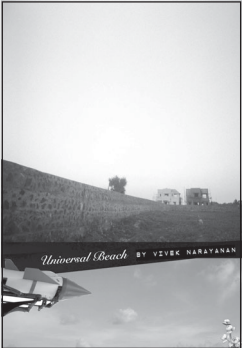
When I read a poem I am looking for a person. In the best case the person even has a personality - like Kamala Das's unmistakable hauteur, or say, Philip Larkin's morose elegance. But even without the strong stamp of personality, a poem, in order to speak, must have a voice and a voice implies a person. In many of the Quirk contest poems, I missed meeting people. What I found instead were acts of evasion - poems that were so generally worded, so vague in their choice of imagery, so unfocussed in subject matter, that one kept slipping off their smooth surfaces, unable to find a foothold. The poems I enjoyed, on the other hand, held fast to particularity. To me poetry by definition - at least lyric poetry - is about the singular. Everything that is associated with that word follows - strangeness, oddness, hard specificity, high detail, giving voice to the unnoticed. The wonderful thing about "bodies want to fit" (one of the poems that won the contest) is that it orders some small aspect of the world by devising a 'poetic' logic to explain it.

I think that if we were able to write with greater clarity about ourselves, about the views from our window, there would come into being something like an urban Indian school or schools of poetry in English. The circumstances are right and the ground is fertile for a more robust engagement with poetry to take place. What is needed is a willingness to acknowledge our experience of being English-speaking, city-based, modern in an old country, and held down by severely entangled roots. Strange as it may seem, I don't think we recognise the singularity of our situation enough and I think it's time we did.

Anjum Hasan

Some Poetry FAQ Yous

1. Poetry is thought, no doubt about it and I will take on anyone who wants to argue otherwise, but poetry is also the attempt to use language to reach the source of a thought, in the brain or in the central nervous system, where it is indistinguishable from emotion, rhythm, habit or reaction: poetry is nothing if not holism. It does this partly by using language in a different way from ordinary speech, one that is concerned with trying to conjure up an almost physical presence.



All this implies, of course, that a poem is not just concerned with the meaning of words (that is something it shares with prose) but also, to a much greater extent, with things like rhythm, metre, sound, melody, colour, etc.- these things need attention, they are not "adornments" to the thought but fundamental to what the poem does, they

are a fundamental, deeper part of what we call the poem's "meaning". Further, it is an old adage that poem's purpose is to not to mean, but be, almost like a piece of sculpture. Interpretation is only one of the things that you may do with a poem, using it as an occasion for more (prose) writing; but the main duty of a poem is to give direct pleasure, not to serve itself up for interpretation by literary critics.

2. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me for obvious reasons, poetry always needs to stay at least partly invisible; it is, as Rainer wrote, the work of making the world invisible. The heart is not an outmoded emblem in poetry because poetry has something to do with the pulsing of blood. The best poems have a physiological effect on the body; they make you want to internalise them, to make them a part of your body and the way you move.

3. "Free verse" and symmetrical, metrical poetry are not two separate kinds of poetry, as many people think, but only two ends of a continuum, with various degrees and kinds of variation and symmetry vs. surprise in between. A "free verse" poem is also a formal poem, and good free verse always carries the shadow of earlier, symmetrical poetry; it works in relation to that shadow, and would be meaningless if it didn't. For this reason a young poet trying to train herself in poetry in the 21st century will do well to absorb the history of forms in the language she writes in, and to practise both "strict" and "free" forms, regardless of what forms she chooses to actually publish.

4. The only way to keep a tradition alive is through innovation. History bears this out. We may talk of the value and solace of repetition, but when looked at closely, this is only in a manner of speaking.

5. Irrationality is a central part of what poetry has to offer us, and must never be scoffed at. At the same time, there has to be a certain degree of clarity in a poem to make the irrational in it powerful.

6. Poetry and philosophy are safeguards against each other. Philosophy begins where poetry ends, and poetry, where philosophy ends. For this very reason, it is of vital importance that they play on opposing teams, but for this very reason, neither is possible without the other, and each must contain the grain of the other to be real. Warning to self: these are fine distinctions that must be lived and not spoken of, because if I dare to pronounce on exactly where poetry begins and philosophy ends, or vice versa, then I may lose sight of both in the bargain.

7. While it may serve a practical purpose to treat poetry as if it were something outside of us, we ought to never forget, and never be afraid of, the fact that poetry is a human invention. As a result, the reigning divisions between poetry and prose mirror the reigning divisions of duties, the powers of the separate assemblies, in our civilization, at any given time; and the function, identity, possibilities and limitations of poetry change and stay exactly the same to the exact extent, and in the same way, that the human stays the same and changes. I am not saying that the distinction between prose and poetry is a bad thing, and certainly not that it can be wished away, but merely that it belongs to us. We must never forget that a stick is a stick is a stick, and that although it may be sharpened and redesigned, even re-synthesized to respond to new needs and taste, it is still a stick and is as useful as it was to the ancestral ape who first conceived of it by the pond. Further note: I personally see no reason to abandon the spiritual quality and claim of poetry at precisely the historical moment when, freed from high-priestly authority and mass organisation, the spirit is finally ready to make a new contract with matter.

Vivek Narayanan

Yellow Green

When I look in a mirror, I no longer see a face. I see a process, a verb. Unravelling, yes. I see myself unravelling and the image in the mirror ceases to be me. I see the ravaged face of a madwoman and turn away.

I see the pale, anaemic skin and the darkness under the eyes and think 'ugly'. I see the curves of the thighs, the rounded stomach and think 'fat'. My own body, once my greatest delight, now repulses me.

The highlight of my day is my iron pills. I have many pills and capsules now and take them diligently - each at exactly the right time every day. I have the green and grey capsules and lime green pills for my stomach, the painkillers for my back, the red vitamin capsules and the aspirin for my head and the little yellow pills to balance my hormones that can also be used as contraceptives. As if there was anything to contracept. Look at me, through the mirror if you can't see clearly, look. Who would want that?

But the iron pills are the best. They're brown and chewable and smell and taste like chocolate. Or instead of chewing, I can leave them on my tongue to dissolve in my saliva. Then the hag in the mirror smiles that hideous smile of hers and I see her teeth stained red brown.

I gave up real chocolate long ago, of course. Needless and addictive and fattening. If I hadn't eaten all that chocolate and those cakes and those sweets over the years, things would be different. I would be Thin. Beautiful. Loved. So I gave up the sweet stuff for fruits and vegetables - not too much fruit, as that contains sugar of some kind.

But I can no longer eat even those. I lift food to my mouth and feel that overwhelming nausea. All the food seems tainted. It was not always so. At one point, I could open the fridge and the strawberries were red and fresh and cold. What's purer than fresh fruit? Now I see maggots in all the apples - and they are not really there. It is commonly thought that a mirage is the image of what the traveller most wants to see. I know that it is I who am tainted.

I cannot sit still too long. I pace the room and sing along to the music on the radio I'm not listening to. In my stomach there is a gnawing burning sensation that does not go away though

I try to assuage it, forcing dry tasteless bread down my throat. And water, of which I never drink enough.

She comes to me still. I do not understand this; she comes to me and talks to me and isn't repulsed by me. She comes and she lets me hold her and she talks to me. She is seventeen and she knows I'm far too old to be her friend, far too smitten to be a mother figure. No, smitten



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is the wrong word. I need a stronger one. When she leaves, I run to the window to watch her walk away down the street. Sometimes I am afraid to touch her because I might leave stains.

She has stains enough of her own. I wonder at her purity, living as she does.

I ask her if she thinks I'm pathetic, living alone as I do. Full grown, concerned with my figure and unable to mend my face. She admires me. Not for my face (she is not blind), but she loves me.

She brings back the colour. I can eat when she feeds me, the fruit seems to glow and the bread is fresh and yeasty. Sometimes, as she feeds me with her bare hands I flick out my tongue and lick her fingers. We both laugh, and she kisses them. She forces me to leave the curtains wide open and the sunlight pours in for the first time in years. I notice how grey everything in this house is and vow to redecorate.

I wind her hair into corkscrews around my fingers and let it unwind itself. Occasionally I find a grey hair prominent among the black. I tease her - I'm much older and I've never had

a grey hair. She giggles and tells how her aunt uses henna to cover her grey, despite the fact that her hair's almost completely white, and the henna only turns it a bright orange.

Fool that I am, I ask her about her uncle's hair. Her smile dies; I should have remembered. She has hinted at it before. "My uncle is a very difficult man to live with" was all she'd say at first, but she trusts me now and she comes to me and she phones me scared.

She is bruised purple by the force of him.

I know her body far better than he ever will. I have lightly stroked every bruise, watching it change colour from reds, blues and purples to greens and yellows. Yellowgreen is the ugliest against the dark brown of her skin. I will not say her bruises make her more beautiful. She is mine, and he has dared make her ugly. Her neck and breasts and upper arms bear the livid purple marks of his fingers.

Her blood is not how I had imagined it to be. Strange, I didn't think I had imagined blood at all, really. But "blood-red", you'd think it would be dark and rich. And - what's the word? - viscous. Blood is the colour of roses on Valentines Day. Isn't it?

Hers isn't. Against her skin it seems to take on an orange tinge. I'm not sure why that is. It is almost luminous. It is grotesque. I wash it away and tell her how much I love her, how lovely she still is. That is a lie.

She comes to me, sometimes, when the imprint of his hand is still blush red on her face. I ask what happened; she tells me. Hard faced, she is better able to deal with it than I. As she talks, the mark fades.

Her scars are lines of grey-brown puckered skin, and for a long time I didn't believe they were his. "How could a man have such nails?", I asked, and she swore he really did. Then I met him one day and she was right. Long and sharp - they should be painted scarlet on the hands of a hard eyed woman. Cruel. I would have killed him then, but she was afraid.

I have a knife - a brass one tinged slightly with pale blue green, where I have neglected it. It is blunt, but it will suffice. She will turn pale when she finds out, and she will come running to me with the news, flushed and scared. I will hold her, and she will tremble. If I do it, she must not know it was me. If she did she, might not come anymore and all my days would be grey again.

Aishwarya Subramanian

Loose - Nelly Furtado

Nelly Furtado had an almost fairytale start to her career: her first single, "I'm Like A Bird", was an international hit and won her a Grammy, and her follow-up, "Turn Off The Light", achieved similar success internationally. Unfortunately, her career has been rather patchy since then - Folklore, her sophomore album, received critical plaudits and success in certain countries, including India, in which it was aided by the Josh remix of "Powerless (Say What You Want)", but was a considerable commercial disappointment in comparison to the strong sales of her debut.

On Loose, Furtado solves the problem by reinventing herself - the album reveals an edgier, more confident Furtado, with stronger bass lines and more flirtatious lyrics than the almost dreamy sound on Folklore. Fans of her more acoustic sound will find it pushed to the margins in favour of the sound that Furtado first started experimenting with on her remix of Missy



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Elliott's "Get Ur Freak On": producer Timbaland has added catchier hooks and a more R&B sound, as demonstrated in tracks such as the openly flirtatious "Promiscuous", while adding sounds as diverse as new wave

and "punk-hop" to the mix. This is not to say that Furtado's softer side has been abandoned totally, however: it just manifests itself in different ways, such as in "In God's Hands", which uses the occasional synthesised background sound in addition to a piano, acoustic guitar and drums, and the album closer "All Good Things (Come To An End)", which is surprisingly uptempo, given the contemplative nature of the lyrics. Furtado also shows more stylistic diversity than ever before, jumping effortlessly from the reggaeton "No Hay Igual" to the mid-tempo "Te Busqué", a duet with Juanes (with whom she previously performed on his hit "Fotografia"). Surprisingly, this doesn't affect the album's cohesiveness at all, and this is ultimately one of its greatest strengths - all the songs are single-worthy, yet the album never sounds patchy or contrived. The three-year wait seems to have paid off: Loose is not only one of the best albums of the year thus far, it's also arguably her best work ever.

Thomas John

RAIN IN MY ROOTS

THE WORLD OF THE GREEN MEADOW AND THE RED BUILDING

THE FACELESS CHILDREN

In the dark bedroom of a house in the eastern suburbs of Bangalore, Zachariah Tension was dreaming. The same dream that came to him every night since Zachariah had turned eight and his father had mysteriously disappeared from his work at the helm of Zenotox Bangkok Corp's research division.

He dreamed about a large rolling meadow under a blue cloudless sky, with placid brown cows, a gurgling blue brook, brilliant yellow flowers, and a group of faceless children playing noisily. Everything in this dream - each sensation, every small expression and emotion - was so unbelievably real, and Zachariah was always able to remember each little detail with such vivid intensity, that he was convinced of the secret theory that he had developed. The theory that Zachariah would never ever discuss with anyone else in the world. He was convinced that what overcame him every night, was no ordinary dream - he just knew that somehow, every night, his mind or his spirit or some part of his being, was transported to another world, a reality just like the world he inhabited during the day, but existing in some unfathomable hidden and different dimension. The world of the green meadow and the red building. And the faceless children.

The air was always filled with the happy sounds of the children's voices, the buzzing of invisible bees, the soothing rustle of flowing water, and the sonorous muted pealing of a bell. A delicious wafting smell of jasmine was everywhere despite no jasmine trees being in sight for as far as he could see into the distance. Far away in the horizon, a small plume of white smoke made its way to the heavens from the spire of a red brick building surrounded by a low green wooden fence. The building seemed to have no windows or doors. In fact, apart from the smoke spiralling upwards, it suggested no other sign of life or habitation. There was no other structure within sight, and the green stretched out unendingly in all four directions from the red obelisk. The children normally spoke a language that Zachariah couldn't understand, hard as he tried and despite his precocious skill for languages. When he was younger, he had memorized many of their words and even full sentences, and on waking the following day he would write them down for his mother, grandfather, doctor or anyone else around - but as far as the adults could tell, the words belonged to no known language and were hence attributed to the imagination of a young child's dreaming mind.

The dream unfolded in the same manner day after day - the same group of thirteen faceless children, seven girls and six boys, playing heedlessly in the peaceful field while laughingly conversing in their strange tongue. Ever so occasionally, the children would throw anxious looks at the red building, and then as though reassured by the white smoke billowing from the spire, would resume their carefree games and child-like antics. This idyllic scene would continue in his mind until a few minutes before Zachariah awoke each morning (from his eight birthday onwards he had woken up every day at the exact moment of sunrise, irrespective of season or geographical location or the lateness of hour at which he went to sleep). It was the last few moments of the dream that were largely responsible for Zachariah's special condition, what the doctors called 'self-induced psychosomatic silence.' In the dying subconscious moments of his dream, the smoke from the red building would suddenly begin to turn black, scattering from its sworn path upwards and spreading outwards in unpredictable Brownian frenzy until the blue sky overhead would turn dark and overcast like a piece of blotting paper doused in blank ink. The verdant green would rapidly transform into parched dry brown earth, gradually coming to resemble the scabby broken skin of a diseased and dying person. One by one, the children would fall silent - their playful demeanour abruptly replaced by a fearful furtiveness.

The breeze had stopped, and the air was filled with a sickly sweet decaying odour, overpowering yet somehow still perversely intoxicating. The air was heavy. Ominous. In almost eerie accompaniment, the bell had stopped pealing, the buzzing of the bees was no more, and even the brook had turned silent. It was as if someone had suddenly pressed a mute button on a giant remote control in the sky. The cows, frozen in varying acts of bovine existence slowly became translucent, then shadowy, until all that remained of them were wispy shapeless forms of whitish smoke that dotted the landscape. The bell struck once - unbearably loud and threatening in contrast to its earlier subdued notes - and as though in a well-rehearsed play, the children had silently formed a small circle while holding onto each other's hands.

At this point of the dream, without warning, the earth below the children would lose its firmness - becoming soft, treacherous, and carnivorous - and the now-screaming children would slowly descend into the bowels of the earth as though drawn by some unknown monster below. During these final torturous seconds, the disciplined silence of the children would inevitably break - the air would be full of screams of horror and heart-wrenching appeals for help. Unlike their prior conversations, these final cries were fully comprehensible to Zachariah, almost as though the children were appealing directly to him, urging him to wake up from his slumber and provide assistance. In his earliest dreams, the final cries of the children had been in his native Thai, but as he gradually grew older and learned more languages, the sinking children responded by screaming for daily help in Thai and English and French and Hindi. Each night he would be a helpless

spectator - unable to move, unable to think, unable to awaken, and unable to turn away. As the outstretched hand of the tallest of the children would finally drop out of sight, Zachariah would awaken with a horrified start - exhausted, covered with sweat, and with his ears still reeling from the pitiable cries of the disappearing children. Outside his window, the first rays of the rising sun would be waking up the sleeping metropolis he called home. It had all begun after his father's mysterious disappearance one day.

Zachariah's memories of the day his father had disappeared were imprinted on his mind with an intensity that neither time nor counselling could seemingly dull or erode. On that fateful day that he had turned eight - June 5th, 1999 - something had woken him up from a deep, peaceful sleep at the crack of sunrise, and the first thing he saw was his father Phra Sugoy Tension standing with his head bowed at the foot of his bed. Surprisingly, his father was dressed in the saffron robes of a monk and looking remarkably alert despite the earliness of the hour.

Phra Tension was a diminutively sized man, with a truly exceptional face in an entirely unexceptional body. He had delicate almost triangular ears, a fine chiselled nose and a sharp chin, but it were his eyes that were unforgettable - light green flecked with grey - they were deep beyond expression, and burned with a lambent intensity that seemed to have its origins in some surreal other world. When he looked at people, they couldn't help feeling like their deepest secrets had been bared and their every defence breached, such was the magnetism and intensity of his gaze. He had arrived in Thailand with his young Indian wife, Zach's mother, Lakshmi Magda Tension almost a decade ago - un-announced and unknown - and within a few years he had riveted the attention and admiration of the scientific community with his explosive scholarly advances in the fields of bio-technology, cognitive sciences, and neurosciences. Notoriously reclusive, for a long time he had worked alone ceaselessly from early in the morning to late at night in the small but advanced laboratory that he had built for himself along the Chao Phraya River. He shunned all forms of attention and adulation from the media, the public, and his scientific peers; he refused every one of the many awards and honours that were bestowed upon him; and most of the correspondence directed to his office was returned unopened and unread.

Phra Tension had consistently refused all commercial exploitation of his research work, and it was only on rare occasions that he had agreed to share his advances with the government. He was a stranger even to his son, and on the few occasions that Zachariah did see his parents together, he couldn't help feeling an odd, inexplicable sense of disorientation and upheaval - somehow as though the history of his parents were too explosive for his young mind to comprehend. Late last year, when Phra Tension suddenly and unexpectedly accepted a long-standing offer to head the research division at Zenotox Bangkok Corp - a fabulously wealthy though ultra-secretive Thailand-based multinational - the scientific community was baffled by the sudden volte-face, and even young Zachariah could figure out that something was amiss; that things were going to soon change in a manner that he couldn't yet comprehend. Later that very night, through the narrow opening in the doorway of the master bedroom, Zachariah had watched a scene that he would never forget for as long as he lived - his proud father crying uncontrollably in the arms of his mother; his shoulders repeatedly wrenching with deep soundless cries as she gently stroked his hair and murmured: "It'll be OK, " again and again. Zach was filled with that strong sense of upheaval, of internal entropy of unimaginable proportions, the feeling that always overcame him whenever he saw his parents together. After that day, Zachariah saw even less of his father who seemed to be working with a feverish and almost inhuman intensity on unknown classified projects of obviously great importance. Then everything had changed in the most unforeseeable manner on his unforgettable eight birthday.

As soon as Zachariah opened his eyes that morning, Phra put a finger to his lips to indicate that he was to be quiet. Taking Zachariah's small hand in his own, Phra led his son soundlessly down the stairs and out of the front door, to where the early morning sun was still battling the wispy mists that hung around the garden of their neat, one-storeyed house. As Zachariah passed the master bedroom on the way out he had seen that his mother was still fast asleep, her face wearing an expression of serenity that he had seldom seen over the past few years. Once outside, his father led him straight to the small white shrine under the magnificent old jasmine tree in the corner of the garden, and turning to him said:

"Happy Birthday, my dearest son. I wish this could have been delayed further, but we are running out of time. Today you are old enough to begin learning the truth about your family and your special place in destiny. You must promise me that you will never speak to anyone, not even your mother, about what I tell you and show you today. I have to leave for work soon, but I'll be back early in the evening and then it will all get clearer, OK?"

"What destiny, papa?", the still sleepy boy had whispered, shivering in his thin pyjamas in the morning cold.

"Just promise me you'll be patient and strong my son."

Zachariah was well familiar with the small shrine and the small golden statue of the four-headed deva Brahma (Phra

Phrom in Thai) it housed; while still a very young child, he had played for hours around the shrine in the garden, often even climbing into the small entrance of the shrine so as to retrieve a ball or as part of some other elaborate game. He couldn't understand why his father had brought him here so early in the morning; in fact, he also couldn't understand why his father was dressed in a monk's robes and what all this 'special place in destiny' business was.

As Zachariah rubbed his sleep-heavy eyes, his father gestured towards the small shrine entrance, smiled, and simply said: "Look for yourself, my son. It is time for you to know that we are the keepers of the eternal way to Rahinjah. Be strong now."

Entirely clueless as to what his father was saying, Zachariah nonetheless peered into the still-dark entrance of the shrine towards the four-faced gold Brahma idol.

"It cannot be!" - what he saw had him transfixed in fear and shock; he tried to move backwards and away but his muscles no longer responded to the messages his brain sent out; he managed to open his mouth to scream, but no sound came forth. At that instant he knew that things had never been what they had seemed; that the future and past were no longer obscured; that all things would never be the same again - and as the heavy primeval darkness of the universe crashed upon him, the little boy fell unconscious to the ground. When he awoke, he was back in his bed, and he wondered whether it had all been just a dream.

Later that day, Lakshmi Tension received a call from Zenotox's Bangkok headquarters. Even before she picked up the ringing phone, she had been filled with an acute sense of foreboding, a sense of impending and unavoidable disaster.

"Hello"

"Good afternoon, May I be speaking with Mrs. Tension?" Though the voice was courteous and polished, Lakshmi sensed the nagging undertone of anxiety in the man's tone.

"Yes, I'm Lakshmi Tension. Who is this?", she replied, cradling the phone to her ear and instinctively closing her eyes.

"Mrs. Tension, this is Aran Jirapaet, Chairman of Zentox Corp." Lakshmi immediately connected the voice with the well-known face of one of Thailand's most powerful men. In Thailand, it was rumoured that high-ranking public officials, ministers, the army, and even media moguls trembled at the very sight of Aran Jirapaet - it was whispered that with his fabulous wealth and tremendous influence Jirapaet could bring down governments, take over corporations, win wars, and do pretty much anything he wanted to at his slightest whim.

Having waited for her to finish processing the implications of his name, he continued: "I'm calling from our Bangkok office. I'm afraid that I have some worrying news. This will certainly sound odd - but your husband has disappeared from his office, Mrs. Tension, and we're still at a loss as to where he might be. We're trying to figure out what could have happened - our security cameras and records show that Mr. Tension entered his private office attached to the neurosciences lab at 6:30 a.m. today morning. When his research colleagues turned up at his office for their appointment at noon, they just couldn't find him there! His secretary swears that he never left the office the whole time, and the security cameras bear that out. His cell-phone is not reachable, and the funniest thing, Mrs. Tension, is that his most recent work has disappeared too all his new research, three whole filing cabinets of material, even the data from his personal computer, it's just vanished into thin air.....past three cameras and many security guards and...", the voice faltered as though Jirapaet, having realized the possible effects of his words on Lakshmi, were considering whether he should go on."

"What is it? Please do go on", she managed to whisper.

"They've also found a blood-stained monk's robe in his office," he finally said after a long silence, and then added: "I realise that all of this must sound terribly upsetting to you, Mrs. Tension, but would you be able to come down to our office? It's best that we speak in person as soon as possible. I've already taken the liberty of sending a car to your address, and it should be there in fifteen minutes or so."

"All right", was all she managed to whisper as her world crashed down around her.

The next day, most major Asian newspapers carried stories of Phra Tension's mysterious disappearance and the potential loss to science that this development represented. Some of the more speculative newspapers reported industry rumours that Mr. Tension had been working on top-secret research involving aspects of occult mysticism and the little known area of how the human body's neurological networks behaved during periods of transcendence and other out-of-body experiences. Zenotox Corp. refused to speak to the press to confirm or deny any of the reports, apart from company spokesman's short statement stating that Mr. Tension was missing and that the company was doing everything possible to locate him at the soonest.

Zach's father never came back to work or to his home. As time progressed, the local media slowly lost interest in the story, and his colleagues at work gradually returned to their lives and tried to put behind them the mysterious disappearance of the brilliant scientist who had led their research endeavours. No progress had been made in the investigation, and no further leads were discovered over the next few years. The blood on the robe did not belong to Phra Sugoy, and the police were

unable to make a match. In late 2003, Lakshmi and her son Zachariah decided to leave Thailand forever and go to India where Lakshmi's parents lived in Bangalore. Bangkok had nothing but painful memories for both of them, and in her heart Lakshmi knew that many years later her husband's case file would be marked 'Unsolved' and simply closed forever. She ought to have know after all, for she had been barely married for a few months when Phra Sugoy had told her that one day he would disappear and never come back.

Phra had refused to say anything more then, and he had never mentioned it again in all the subsequent years. Lakshmi had seen something in his eyes then, proof of some terrifying and painfully sad secret, and she had lived every day of her married life with a fear of the unknown that simmered beneath the surface of their seemingly normal lives.

It was the day after Phra Tension's disappearance that Zachariah's dreams first began. The very first time, he had woken up terrified at sunrise and had tried to scream for help. The funny thing was that however hard he tried, he was unable to make a single sound. His voice was just no longer there. His father's words came rushing back to him: "It is time for you to know that we are the keepers of the eternal way to Rahinjah." Mutely comprehending things in his sweat-drenched clothes, Zachariah then knew that he had changed - he was now an entirely different person from the Zachariah who had lived a few days back and he had lost much more than his father. For what he had lost, something had been given to him as well, something that would remain dormant for a long time. The new Zachariah would not speak for a long time, not a single word for seven whole years, until the day he turned 15 in far faraway Bangalore and woke up to discover a stranger in his room.

When Lakshmi discovered that her son had stopped speaking, she summoned medical and specialists from far and wide. Zachariah was subjected to a barrage of tests and examinations. Every one of the experts reached the same conclusion - Zachariah was in perfect physical shape, and there was nothing that prevented him from speaking as such. It seemed that the boy had just decided that he would never speak again. In desperation, Lakshmi decided to take Zachariah to see the old priest at the Erawan Shrine, at the intersection of Ratchadamri Road and Ratchaprasong Road in the Pathum Wan district. When they had first come to Thailand, her husband had told her that if she needed help and had no one she could turn to, she should visit Phra Rama Buddhadasa. He was the enlightened and ultra-reclusive head monk of the Erawan Shrine.

The meeting with Phra Rama was short and strange. Lakshmi left feeling even more confused and disoriented than before. When they told the guard at the entrance that they had come to visit Phra Rama, Lakshmi and Zachariah had been soundlessly escorted to a small, unadorned room at the rear of the temple. The room was absolutely empty except for a very old man dressed in monk's robes who sat cross-legged on the floor in the centre of the room. His eyes were closed, and he seemed to be in some sort of deep trance. Thick incense smoke filled the room, adding a surreal twist to the germinating confusion in Lakshmi's mind. Through an open window behind the monk, Lakshmi and Zach could look out into the cobble-stoned courtyard behind the temple, where a young boy dressed in a flowing white Arabic robe sat meditating in a similar cross-legged posture under the watchful eye of a large, grey Asian elephant. The elephant was motionless, except for the occasional twitching of its ears. Lakshmi couldn't help feeling that the elephant was looking into the room straight at them, but she tried to chase the unsettling thought away as simply a product of her anxiety.

"His name is Thanakorn Pakdeepol. The boy's name, that is. The elephant itself has no name or has many names, depending on how you look at it," the old monk said suddenly without warning.

His eyes were still closed, and it seemed that his lips had barely moved. For some reason, Lakshmi felt that his slow, lilting voice was coming from some far, faraway place.

He continued, "Seven years from now, on 21 March, 2006, he - Thanakorn Pakdeepol, will smash to bits with a large hammer the statue of the holy Phra Phrom in this shrine. The statue is hollow, you see. He will subsequently be beaten to death by two men - two righteously angered but unenlightened sweepers - right here in this very shrine. It is to be the first sign to the world of the madness of our times."

"Sir, I was just here to..." Laksmi began, not wondering what to make of this strange monk's random prophecy, but before she could continue he spoke again, continuing as though he had not heard her:

"Less than seventy five days after Pakdeepol has departed this world, your son will begin to speak again. It is true, Aly will not come and the holy tortoises will not leave the ancient land. Until then, nothing that you or Zachariah do can change anything. It is very important that the boy remains healthy and that you allow him to learn all that he wants to. You may not visit me again. Do not worry, for while you have lost much you have gained many things as well. Go now, for I can tell you no more."

Almost immediately, two younger monks entered the room and gently began to usher a baffled Lakshmi and Zachariah out of

the room. As they were leaving, it was Zachariah this time who felt that the immobile elephant in the courtyard was looking at him through the incense haze with an unwavering gaze of intensity. He could swear that it was trying to tell him something.

Confronted with the doctors' unvarying diagnosis and the monk's eerie prediction, Lakshmi knew that she had little choice but to come to terms with Zachariah's sudden silence. Zachariah himself didn't seem particularly unhappy, and Lakshmi soon got used to him communicating through writing, and later, through sign language. She withdrew him from the elite Bangkok Patana School on the Soi Lasalle in Sukhumvit, and arranged for him to be tutored at home in subjects that he chose for himself.

Zachariah had always had a flair bordering on genius for languages, and by the time he was twelve he could read and write fluently in Thai, English, and French. Within a year of moving to Bangalore, he was fluent with Hindi, and had begun learning Kannada. Apart from the language instruction he received, Zachariah showed no interest in learning anything else through a teacher. Instead, he learned about the world by reading everything he could lay his hands upon, and soon he'd exhausted the considerably large collection of books at home and had shifted to the well-stocked public library at Lumphini Park across from Chulalongkorn Hospital on the north end of Silom Road. He stayed there until closing time every day, reading continuously except for when he took a short break to watch the ducks in the lake every afternoon.

When they shifted to Bangalore, he was at home only to sleep in the night or for his Hindi or Kannada classes, choosing to spend the rest of the day in the reading room of the British Council Library on Lavelle Road, or the well-stocked Eloor Library on Infantry Road. Though Zachariah never seemed interested in making any friends, or in watching television, or in doing any of the hundreds of things that most children his age seemed to be doing, Lakshmi felt that he was happy and peaceful in his own quiet, different way. Apart from his tormenting dreams, Zachariah indeed was at peace, and he'd begun to appreciate the quiet pace of his life in Bangalore, where he knew no one and no one knew him with the exception of his grandparents and his mother. He waited.

By the time he was going to turn fifteen, Zachariah was a reserved, intelligent-looking young boy with an air of extreme maturity about him. Lakshmi finally began to feel that her son had begun to overcome the trauma of his father's unexplained disappearance. Shifting to Bangalore seemed to have worked wonders for both of them, and succoured by the loving company of her parents and childhood friends, she began to feel that their lives were returning back to normal. After leaving, she had resolved to put Thailand behind them once and for all, and she had broken off all contact with the few acquaintances that she had in Bangkok. The old monk's crazy words from seven years ago had all but faded in her mind, and both she and Zachariah were too busy with their new lives to take note of a development that was largely unreported in media outside of Thailand, and was entirely unreported in the Indian press. The sacred Brahma idol at the Erawan Shrine had been destroyed on March 21, 2006 by a man named Thanakorn Pakdeepol, a young Muslim whom the Thai police claimed was severely mentally disturbed. When the vandalism was discovered, Pakdeepol had been beaten to death by two sweepers within the shrine premises. Since the idol was quickly replaced with a more intricate, and a far more solid substitute, the story soon lost its currency even within Thailand.

As the clock neared midnight on the day before Zach's fifteenth birthday, a middle-aged heavysset man was laboriously packing five hundred and forty endangered live star tortoises into a green stroller zipper bag in his hotel suite in nearby Chennai. Through the window of his penthouse suite, the splendid gopurams of the Kapaleeswarar Temple stood starkly silhouetted against the silvery moonlit sky. Though he didn't know it then, Asharaf Aly Kaja would be arrested at Anna International Airport the next day while trying to smuggle the endangered tortoises in his cabin baggage onto a flight headed for Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The final intended destination of the star tortoises, which are worshipped as good omens in many countries in the Far East, was never discovered.

The moment the dream had begun, Zachariah knew that something was very different on that day. Unlike his usual dream, he now saw a new faceless figure, standing silently a few metres away from the group of playing children in the green meadow. The man was dressed in a monk's orange robes, and held a gnarled wooden staff in his right hand. Zach decided to call him the Monk Man. Almost immediately, one of the girls detached herself from the group and began walking towards the Monk Man with her head bowed down. She was simply dressed in a flowing white robe, and she carried a small clay urn in her hands. She stopped a few feet away from the man and raised her head slowly. Her face was visible for the first time, and with a shock Zachariah realised that she had the face of an old, old woman! Her yellow eyes shone with a strange feverish intensity.

He was still overcoming his confusion and the newness of the dream, when she began speaking to the Monk Man:

"Hello. It's been a long time, hasn't it? The Council was very divided on the issue, but clearly there is no other way left. We are already almost out of time. I often worry that we have become too old and let too many things pass us by. The Council has decided that the boy must first save the pathway. We will then do what is necessary to restore the lost balance. As I said, there is simply no other way. You do understand that everything could be lost otherwise?"

Zach wanted to ask a thousand questions: "Who are you? Why do you have an old woman's face in a girl's body? What is this place? Why do I dream about this meadow every night? Why do all of you disappear into the earth every time.....?"

However, he continued watching powerlessly as the Monk Man bowed formally and replied:

"Hello Ninhursag, I hope that you have been well. Yes, these are difficult times that we all have ahead of us. He is still very young and is perhaps not ready, and I have been prevented from initiating him into the ways of the Keepers. Do not worry, however, I assure you that the Council's decision will be respected. Crow has agreed to go meet him right away."

She seemed to wince at the mention of Crow, and then with a slight smile said: "Crow! I thought that rogue had decided to sleep till the next Coming. He's always been different from the rest of us, you know. He was the only one who refused to enter Edinu. He's benefited from it too, considering that he can go where he wants to when he wants, and he doesn't get swallowed up by the earth every day! Anyway, you make sure that you tell him to not scare the poor child with his craziness. So much depends on young Zachariah now."

Raising the clay urn with both arms high above her, she carefully poured the water it held onto the green earth between herself and the Monk Man, before continuing: "I must tell you though, Zachariah is not as uninitiated as you might think. He has managed to find his way here on his own, though he still cannot manifest himself. Even as we speak now, he watches and listens to us, his mind bursting with thousands of questions. It's funny, right now his mind is asking why the Council disappears into the earth each day."

The Monk Man seemed to jump at Ninhursag's words. He looked around him in all directions, and not finding what he was looking for, he turned back towards Ninhursag. As if in explanation, she slowly turned away from the Monk Man until she was looking straight at Zachariah. Her eyes were two burning yellow spheres, hypnotic and powerful beyond description. When she spoke again, her voice was gentle and soft:

"Unfortunately, there is very little time for discussions now, Zachariah. I promise you, the answers will all come soon enough. Do you really want to know why we are pulled to the centre of the earth each day?"

She was speaking to him!

He tried to say something, anything, but again the words would simply not come.

"Don't worry, the silence will end soon," she said as though reading his mind.

Pointing towards her feet, she continued: "What grows downward must go down, young Zach. All the way down to Rahinjah. You see, like the other children here, I too have rain in my roots."

Rahinjah - That name again!

It was then that Zachariah saw the living wriggling mass of snake-like roots from the bottom of her white robe pushing their way into the freshly wet earth. It was all just too much for him, and for the second time in his young life he felt himself crashing to the ground under the weight of some terrifyingly unknown primeval darkness.

When he opened his eyes in the darkness of his airy first-floor room, he felt with a dazzling clarity that he had been awoken for something important, something pre-ordained - an imminence that could wait no more (not for sunrise, not for anything) and had chosen that particular moment for its exquisite materialization. He looked at the Casio clock with the luminous display on his bed-stand - it was still 3:45 A.M. Yawning noisily, Zachariah realized that he had turned fifteen. Fifteen, and still plagued by crazy childhood nightmares!

It was the smell that he noticed first - a strong dark choking smell - the smell of death, of carrion, of war and destruction, which seemed to be all over the room. It was only then that Zach became aware that he was not alone in the room.

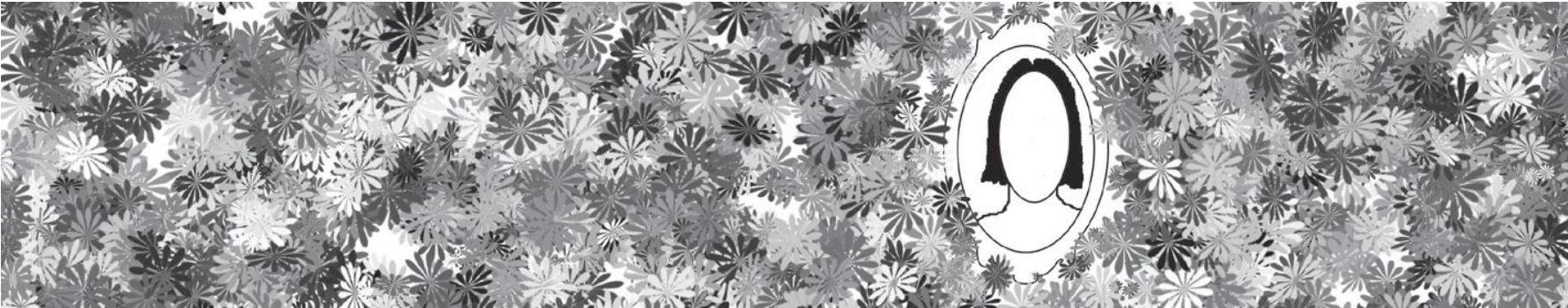
Still shrouded in the darkness at the foot of the bed, the unbelievable figure of some demonic unearthly being came slowly into focus before the young boy's widened eyes.

Crow! Right there in real world Bangalore, and not just a figment from a dream.

Crow was in his room!

NEXT:
ZACHARIAH MEETS CROW
*RELATIVITY, KIRIBATI, AND THE PLAN TO SAVE THE PATHWAY
PHRA SUGOY TENSION'S DISAPPEARANCE - PART I*

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Superstars, Duds, Wannabes and Redemption: Predictions

The new season of the premiership is just round the bend. The wheeling and dealing has been done. Some teams will find their wheels coming off before long while some will enjoy extended runs and only a few will challenge for the premiership title. But then, there are always that new addition who simply carries the team forward, pushes them through, while there will be some who do a Rebrov and have the Chairman, the manager, the team and the fans tearing their hair out. So why not indulge in some prediction, (based on insider information, matey)?



The Best Buys (and moves):

Jamie Bullard will probably end up being the best buy of this season (at least till the next transfer window) on pure value for money terms. With the erratic but gifted Malbranque gone to White Hart Lane, this energetic, marauding midfielder will become the heartbeat of the Fulham side with the sort of consistency that eluded Malbranque but with enough flair, heart and running. At 2.5 million pounds, a steal. Watch him turn in impressive performances and get an England call up by the end of the season.

Joleon Lescott: Lescott who? The last time Wolves were playing in the premiership, he barely played a couple of games before missing the rest of the season due to injury.

He has had to bide his time since then, but his game eventually demanded that a premiership club take notice. Touted as the next Sol Campbell when he started out, his power, aerial ability, tough tackling aligned with a fair turn of pace and good reading of the game, will soon make him a permanent fixture in the Everton backline and perhaps a target of the big fishes.

Sol Campbell: Everyone said he needed to get his head sorted out. He wanted to go abroad, but Harry Houdini brought him to Portsmouth on a free! Campbell definitely has not lost it, at 31, has a good four seasons ahead of him. The spirit of the Portsmouth fans and the magic of Harry will revitalise him, will form the base for a new Portsmouth revolution come the next transfer window. He will recapture the form of a World Cup all Star. Anyone sees similarities with a certain Jaap Stam?

Andy Johnson: Craig Bellamy ran Windy Andy close for this spot. Windy Andy will play for Everton every game he is fit, run like he is running for his life, finish exquisitely for he was simply born to do that, win penalties and take penalties. So what has Everton got here? A 20 goal plus guarantee for the season @ 8 million pounds. With Arteta, Cahill, McFadden and Osman to supply him and the scraps to pick of James Beattie, he will have an explosive season and stake his claim for Pommie start.

Stilian Petrov: Martin O'Neil chased him and at last got him. A midfield general, with Steven Davis, Barry, Melberg and Laursen, he will form the strong spine that O'Neil will hope to create after a listless Villa season last year. His dynamic play and crisp passing and tackling will be enough to help Villa stay largely clear of a total relegation dogfight. Watch the new Lampard. Not the poor man's.

The Big Duds (and worst predictable moves):

Antoine Sibierski: Why Roeder, why? Come on. Michael Tonge would have been better, or maybe that Chelsea 5th choice. Look Duff and N'Zogbia are there for the left; Parker, Emre, Dyer, Butt are there for the central portion and Sibierski just can't cut it down the right hand side. Maybe he is the fourth choice striker behind Ameobi, Martins & Rossi. For crying out loud. Kanu was on a free. So was Hasselbaink, and Newcastle have enough cash to get a half decent striker. Just a waste of money. He wouldn't play much, even if he does, he wouldn't do much. Carlton Cole would have been a better investment compared to Sibierski.

Carlton Cole: Hmmm. Lets see. Ashton, Harewood, Zamora, Sheringham then Cole. Fifth choice. Apprentice to Sheringham? Nah. Okay, maybe backup in case Harewood was prised by the bigger fish. But wait. Who have we here? A certain somebody going by the mane of Carlos Tevez has just signed for them? Losing Harewood? Probably Chelsea struck a

'take cash + player' offer to get him off their hands. Bad move for the kid. He needs more playing time. Hey, even Chelsea has fewer strikers than West Ham does. Waste of money for the Gaffer. If he was looking for a now Sixth choice, he may have as well promoted a promising lad from the academy.

Salomon Kalou: You have all the money in the world. Practically every decent player wants to earn the kind of wages you can dole out. You need strikers. What do you do? You go get Shevchenko. Phenomenal. Who's next? Salomon Kalou. So Jose says he is the future. Fine. So who is the present? He is fairly sharp, decent touch, maybe a bit of flair, but definitely not a Chelsea. Maybe a UEFA cup team.

Steed Malbranque: Okay, so he went at 2 million. He is very inventive. Carrick's gone to United, so they need a playmaker. You kidding me? Spurs brought in Zokora to replace Carrick, and Zokora definitely is an all-round player who will start. But then there also is a certain Edgar Davids, a talented guy called Jermaine Jenas with more consistency, and the wily Murphy. So where does he fit in? Probably a good squad player at 2 million. But for his career's sake, lets hope he makes an impact. But don't count on that to happen. Jenas/Davids will be the regular starters with Zokora.

The Rising Stars:

Phil Jagielka: This academy product is capable of dictating and commanding from both midfield as well as defence. Irrespective of whether Sheffield go up or down, he will definitely stay up. A keen reader of the game and a player bursting with passion, he is the new kid on the block.

Ben Foster: Already in the England set up, this fine shot stopper made all the difference when he went on loan to Watford and led their charge from the recesses of the Championship table into the Premier League. A fine and accurate kicker as well, he will play an important role in Watford's direct game style. Slightly small in size as compare to the likes of Friedel or Van der Sar, yet he has presence in goal.

Jon Obi Mikel: In the end, Chelsea had to fork out 16 million for him, but it will be money well spent as the former youth world cupper possesses the necessary physical and technical attribute to impose himself on any game. If he can live anywhere to his full potential, he will become a class act. His playing style is at times reminiscent of a young Ballack.

The Reincarnations

Jonathan Woodgate: What a horrific time this lad has had with injuries. This term, a leaner and meaner Woodgate will dominate strikers like he used to, become the replacement for Southgate. Now if only Southgate could find someone to partner him.

Gareth Barry: Gareth Barry is too good a player to continue a seemingly perpetual downward spiral. With a new owner and most importantly with a Gaffer he looks up to, in charge, Barry is bound to reproduce some of that silken form that so him earn his solitary England cap. If he shines, in the company of Petrov, the duo can lift Vila to some sort of respectability come the end of the season.

Shabani Nonda: Goal scorers simply stick the ball in the back of the net. Nonda will be doing a lot of that for Rovers if he gets a decent run in the first team. His track record at Monaco is undoubted and despite facing a bad injury and subsequent lack of starting opportunities under a new coach in Roma, will perform if given the chance. Mark Hughes himself a no mean striker should be able to coax the kind of performances from Nonda as he has managed to do first with Dickov and then astoundingly with Bellamy who has now moved on to Liverpool.

So the stage is set. Take your seat, and enjoy yet another rollicking season in the premiership. Watch out for these new Superstars, the Duds, the wannabes and the pilgrim searching for redemption.



They Also Write Who Judge

To begin an appreciation of poetry with a digression - even a deprecatory one - upon the qualifications of the reader seems like an endorsement of privileging the critic over the text, even an exercise in dubiously disguised egotism. Still, in the case of this piece on three contemporary Indian poets, it is apt.

My experience of contemporary Indian poetry ends around Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel and perhaps Seth, who is their fellow by his fascination with the rejuvenation of form, and his playful yet precise imagery. Clearly this makes the three judges of the Quirk poetry contest - Anjum Hassan, Vivek Narayanan and Nisha Susan - an excursion into the unknown for me. I'm beginning with the devout hope that the admiration of the uninitiated has some charm for the poet, as well as utility for others of my ilk

Anjum's poetry attracts one first with a minuteness of observation and a fierce attention to the tangible in a scene. She has a marvelous, hurrying beat to most of her poems - the passage of time is almost visible as a westward swing of shadow across the page. Look at 'Mawlai', which has an internal sprung rhythm - almost like the Swinburnes that students chanted in streets. The images in the first stanza are clear as snapshots, but follow one upon the other, the sounds staccato, creating with frank art the bus journey, pictures of Mawlai sleeting past the passenger. The next stanza slows to a tolling sonorous pace, and the artist's thoughts are introduced in a more measured sound, not shy of images more "poetic" and rich in association - the brief flowering of the cherry trees, the evanescence of memory. Anjum's poems, to me, suggested a pride in technique and in the labour over words. It is endearing to read a poet unafraid of re-possessing a poetic cliché - look carefully at the closing stanza of 'Mawlai' - perhaps my favourite of her works - and see the formality of the old 'laments', beginning with an almost-heard 'Alas!'.

Her love for form is partnered by a carefully tooled homeliness of description - like the best of Frost or St.Vincent Millay, she sees through ordinary eyes and stands on real ground. The contrast makes for a conversational tone and a rich texture; these poems are not meant to go like a rush of 'mood' to the hindbrain. The way she pins down details of sight, sound and smell demands careful reading. My old-fashioned fondness for poetry that 'sounds well' is too evident already I think, let's also admit a dated predilection for verse that reveals a personality of the poet, a sort of vehicle in which the reader hitches a ride. Anjum's is a quiet walker down crowded streets, observant, companionable but provokingly reserved. 'Rishikesh' and 'Small Town' are marvelous lessons in constructing the central idea out of imagery. The poem is so painstakingly exact that any explicit musing on the 'meaning' of a small-town shopkeeper or a holy hill would have been too heavy-handed. The reader is invited into an artfully artless set-piece, and leaves with the comfortable delusion that he is free to philosophise upon it.

Vivek's works are more inward, more experimental in structure, and the 'I' of the poet is loud, almost angry. The visible here becomes visionary, even hallucinatory in a few quick lines; the reader hoisted into intensely personal communication with the poem. The poems hurtle, grabbing up archaisms, echoes from myth and from dead lesbian cottager-rhymesters, snatches of conversation and mocking juxtapositions. Here, the everyday is not "quietly lit from within", but riddled with free association and gutted for its meaning.

I'm afraid I sound overwrought - and incomprehensible - but Vivek's tone of indignant mockery and the shivery feeling of how revoltingly 'thin' the real world is, is infectious.

It is cruel and boorish to take apart poetry which moves one to find its tick. I'm going to do that regretfully and briefly, and only to invite you to read it for yourselves. Time and place are not exact for Vivek, a mood, a 'message' runs through and links memory, the immediate, and the inner landscape. I may as well crown this excursion into the trite with 'stream of consciousness', but that is not quite it - there is no unity of consciousness here. The 'narrator' as well as reality is a take-off point.

Read 'Fernando Pessoa in Durban'. Like one of my favourites, Moraes, to convey what he sees Vivek must use words with a carefully chosen jar to the ear - "...garred In the coign of a newborn city". He intends, I believe, to initially disorient and discomfit, and succeeds; a complacent reader would miss the sweep and pounce of his stanzas.

If Anjum's poems 'see' and Vivek's 'fly' - do bear with the schoolboyish 'analysis' for a moment - then Nisha Susan's are full of laughter. Her small poems are almost haiku except in their terse, casual quality. She shares a private, acute amusement - each piece gnomic, with a limericky punch in the last line. She and the reader play with language, savour it - with impressive economy she "shucks" a venerable one of his "priest-like glasses", holds up "taut" and "taught". There is a lilt to the stanzas and a brilliance to her metaphors, especially seductive to another women, I suspect. I wonder if it is quite quite to say this - self-abasement and the reader's privilege will protect me from a debate over right - but Nisha's poems are noticeably and frankly female. They are observant of and slyly conspiratorial with the woman reading; there is a flavour of familiarity in them for her. For a man - revelation, perhaps?

Nisha, or her voice, is charmingly clear to me. Grandmotherly tales of Rakshasas and accents of Malabar construct a backdrop for her poetry.

To be introduced to three poets whom I enjoy is a privilege, but to rediscover poetry in Law School because of a hectoring Editor is in a class of grateful embarrassment all its own. I cannot compare these three poets to their predecessors or their peers; I have no opinion on their quality of contemporaneity, Indianness, or both together. But I can as an appreciative reader point out that they are not self-consciously anything.

- Sumati Dwivedi

II PRIZE

In My Eyes: An English Ghazal

Already parched, by the thirst in my eyes
How could you still fling more dust in my eyes?
Alas, I missed when it blew off your veil
Blinded by that very gust in my eyes
My Gauri, my Mary, my Jezebel, you bring
A prayer on my lips, primal lust in my eyes
I forge it in the cast of my saber-like words
Lest this iron should catch rust in my eyes
Do not be led astray by my fancy song
Look instead for truth, you must in my eyes
I am, I am, I am, I am- I am
The sovereign of all I see, just in my eyes

- Manish Bhatt (Delhi)

III PRIZE

THE ASPIRATED 'H'

"A historical event," I began,
My carefully rehearsed speech -
Could go no further
Since my English teacher
Said "Stop!" with a screech.
"It's 'an', not 'a'"
She said, frenetic,
Very particular,
'Bout matters phonetic.
"Where an aspirated 'h' begins a word,
And on the second syllable lies the stress,
Use the article 'an', not 'a',"
On me this rule she did impress.
The mist was cleared,
Gone, the mystery.
Why it's 'an historical'
And yet, 'a history.'

- Aditya Verma (NLS, Bangalore)

RIDDLES

Journeys far, and journeys wide
Of myth and magic, power and pride
Have thy wanderings ever ceased?
Nomad, is your soul released?
Roving, roaming, ever far
Over old hills, beneath the stars
Nameless, magical, mystical lands
And buried now 'neath time's sands
Legends into oblivion faded
Death its welcome song serenaded
Roam you still at eventide?
Explorer bold, do you yet abide
Under starry sky borne of your mind?
Lost universe for us to find
To your soul then, immortality I consecrate
On I sing, and deplore the fate
Leastways which halted your journey
King of a golden Kingdom yet you be
In death, in our minds you ever live on
Ethereal gossamer, I see you in the dawn
Never forgotten, farewell 'til we meet anon...

Kinsmen apart, hurrying over the lands
While the dreamer's song rails at the fates
Riding fire and open dragons' hands
Riding, yet the dreamer lingers and dawning awaits
O'er the sea they came, lo, to the brimming plains
Up, flaming brand and iron lance
Lo thus ended eternity's kingdom's reign
Fleets naval on the sands were crimson stains
Ruined and fading dust, save a dreamer's song
and a dance

Questions:

- 1) Identify the theme.
- 2) Pick out seven words in the stanza pertinent to the theme.
- 3) Pick out a message running through the poem.

Answers Next Issue. Mail into quirk@nls.ac.in with your answers... with "Riddle" in the subject line.

INAYAT

When I was a child, I believed and firmly so that all that happens, happens for the best; it was then, more a matter of fact than of belief. As Pangloss in Voltaire's "Candide" always maintained, even amidst the greatest misfortune, "it is impossible for things not be the way they are, because everything is for the best". In time, it became ever more difficult to keep this little faith.

When we were small, we used to climb on top of the tall peepal trees, that is, Karim and myself, to watch the sunset, the sun always seemed to set behind Karim's home. And he took great pride in this. He said his home was special and thus chosen by Allah as a monument for the most important of earthly ceremonies; the setting of the sun. I believed him then and I still do. Many a times when we had exhausted all possibilities of exploration, we would go and sit atop the tree much before sunset and wait patiently. There was never any real conversation, just stray comments and observations and comfortable silence. And so it was, for both of us, for years and the best years, a daily ritual followed with religious tenacity and tender innocence; watching the sun go down behind Karim's home.

Karim and I often went to the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), it was not a religious exercise, just part of our evening explorations in town. We took a rickshaw from outside my house and got dropped at the market just outside the gurudwara compound. It was an enchanting place with tens of narrow brick-lined lanes and narrower by lanes, with lots of small cluttered shops selling everything from chats to jalabees to toys and books. It was always like a festival with each shop brightly lit with large bare yellow bulbs drawing power from a maze of illegally pulled wires. If you closed your eyes you could hear and feel the loud hum of a thousand people using and abusing the power of speech. I was amazed by the amount people talk, some people went on forever. It is like a mute person suddenly discovering speech and going berserk in the excitement of his new found tool. So people talked, they talked about weather, compared it to the year before and the year before that, they talked about prices and politics and life and death and disease and every God forsaken thing on earth. Interaction and communication seemed to be an end in itself. But Karim and I seldom spoke, he was a reticent character, he just smiled or frowned or shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's go to Jallianwallah Bagh," Karim said, one winter evening.

I nodded silently.

"What is that nod for? Do you have a better plan?"

"We have been to that place a hundred times. There is absolutely nothing there apart from pock-marked walls. It's not even depressing". "I have some work also" I added with an air of purpose.

"Work", Karim said, his eyes squinting suspiciously.

"I am writing a book" I said, waiting for him to burst out laughing. But he didn't, he just looked at me as if that was a rather expected circumstance. Karim always did that, remained calm and quiet at the most shocking things and expressed the greatest surprise at the most obvious and routine situations. Sometimes I wondered if I should tell his father that there is something seriously wrong with some part of his brain.

He inched closer and whispered into my ear. "Don't you think you are a bit too young to write a book?"

"I am writing a book, I am not getting married" I replied, mildly exasperated.

"True, true" he said shaking his head vigorously, in great acceptance of my irrefutable logic. And then he quietly walked away. This was another peculiar thing about Karim and something I came to admire. He never got stuck, he never pestered, he just walked away, even as a child he had a much nuanced appreciation for an individual's space.

* * * * *

I have to strain my memory to recollect her face and her voice. My mind knows it all but it is much too difficult to describe, much too difficult to bring together those multitudes of different rhythms and put them into words, and I am scared of even making an attempt. The image is so delicately placed, I fear that thinking of it might distort it and then it would be lost forever.

There she was, sitting in the verandah of her bungalow. Her long thick hair rolled and tied behind. Her glasses mildly tilted, loosely resting on the bridge of her nose. Her head bent over a book.

She was always reading a book. One could spot her with a different one every second day. I felt very insufficient with her on the literary front, and it was not because I read less or read different kind of books, it was because I did not read at all and always found the concept of reading for pleasure very

intriguing. Once she gave me something to read, the memory of the cover page is vivid for I stared at it for long. The title 'Pilgrim' was embossed in silver on top and at the bottom in red was the name of the author, 'Timothy Findley'. It was the story of a man who was ageless, sexless, deathless and timeless. It was an agonizing experience and I spared myself after the first fifty odd pages. I really admired her endurance for having actually read that entire thing.

There are certain people, describing whom is a challenge that leaves one troubled, to say the least. After many hours of drumming fingers on the head and numerous deceptive literary sparks that dim out sooner than one can put them down, it seems only prudent to let it be; but then there is this lingering regret of having been unfair to the subject.

Inayat Kaur was just such a person, the fluidity of her personality forever evading the grasp of words; yet she was not an enigma or a mystery. On the contrary, her self was very simple and candid; nothing was hidden, no surprises. She was confident of her self but fragile, intelligent and preoccupied, a bit lost perhaps. One was always left with the rather undeserving feeling that she never said what she wanted to say, even in the simplest and most mundane of matters. It was certainly not a case of inability of expression; (she was never short of words), it was probably a fear of communication.



"Years have passed," said Inayat, sitting under the Jamun tree in the compound of her home; the shade of the jamun tree for years, had been a source of great comfort and solace. Any event of sadness or regret, and some quiet time under the huge expanse of the tree, its large branches opening out in embrace, was the favored remedy. The feeling was akin to the unfathomable; near spiritual reassurance a person finds with the head placed in the mothers lap; and the gentle breeze under the tree was her hand, caressing the hair with tender affection.

"That's a very astute observation, profound, I might add" I said, fiddling with pebbles.

"It will not do great damage to your well being, if you can be serious for once," Inayat said, visibly irate.

"I am serious; I give you all the credit and much more for having made the discovery; 'Years Have Passed' by Inayat Kaur; 'A Brief History of Time' by Hawking finally has some competition,". I said attempting to sound as serious as possible.

"I am quite worried, the air is thick with this Khalistan business and I have also heard of a few instances of violence, this can get very nasty" she said, completely ignoring my last comment and looking at me anxiously.

"I know, I just try not to think about it" I replied.

"That's very smart, Umrao, a very mature way of dealing with things, close your eyes and it all goes away" Inayat said. Sarcasm was certainly not her forte but I must concede that at times she did well.

"You are a fairly religious person, Inayat, I am sure you don't subscribe to the separatist agenda" I said.

"These things are not in black and white, Umrao" said Inayat.

"I am not into any shades of grey here, for me some things are very clear."

"You are just being naïve, Umrao" said Inayat.

"Perhaps I am, perhaps you should be too," I said looking at her intently.

"I must get back inside; enough time has been wasted under this tree" said Inayat, pulling herself up with a low hanging branch. "You can come inside too, if you please" she added, dusting off her palms.

"No, I will stay here for sometime" I responded dryly.

She walked away hurriedly and I saw her leave as she stepped out of the vast expanse of the shade into the bright sunlight.

* * * * *

As he grew u,p Karim's faith in the Almighty eroded; not that he became defiant or arrogant; he just became more and more disillusioned. The situation in Amritsar, as in the rest of Punjab spiraled out of control as Khalistan separatists trampled all over Punjab's prosperity with country-made weapons and AK-47s. It became impossible to leave home after dusk and not a day passed without hearing of an incident of death or tragedy. I was simply overwhelmed by the scale of madness. Every morning I woke up hoping that its all just a bad dream. But it was not a dream; the tragedy was real. With the hatred and violence, the Sikhs fighting for their religion had defiled and destroyed Amritsar; the city that stands at the very heart of Sikhism. It was very difficult and at times agonizing for me to keep my faith but I did; probably because I had nothing else to hold on to.

Ignoring the perils of being outside post-dusk; one evening Karim and I climbed on to the Peepal trees and watched the sun set behind Karim's home. It was as pleasing as always and in that silent and still June evening there was a feeling of reassurance, and two young men smiled away as their eyes were set far into the horizon and the day turned to night.

Karim and I bought two old vans and converted them into basic ambulances. Within a few weeks we had a few medical students from the Government Medical College as volunteers. We would move around Amritsar to assist victims of terrorist attacks; as soon as we heard of it; most often the police informed us of any incident. It was our little act of defiance; our little way of keeping our faith alive: not in religion, not in God, but in ourselves.

Inayat persisted in joining us but I managed for quite sometime to keep her away. My fear was not that she would not be up to it; she had a very strong and a very fine heart. I suppose I couldn't imagine her involved with such intense human grief and suffering. I was the one with the weak heart

On the afternoon of 24th June 1988, we heard of a bomb explosion in Katara-Ahluwalia, a Hindu dominated section of Amritsar. Karim and I ran towards our vans and rushed to the spot, one could see the smoke rising from a distance. It was the first time terrorists had used such explosives; there was absolute silence, no wails or cries for help. Both of us were simply overwhelmed by the sight of misery and agony.

A few days later Karim came up to me, his eyes a bit moist. He had decided to leave, he said he could not take this anymore.

"This seems to go on forever Umrao, it just gets worse; I so wish I was stronger but I am not; I so wish I had more faith but I don't," said Karim looking straight into my eyes.

Karim was a very brave person, a man of impeccable integrity and truth. Very few people can look you in the eye like he did.

I swallowed the lump in my throat and said; "That's perfectly in order, Karim; you have done much, you must leave".

And so soon after, Karim left Amritsar for Sydney, to his elder brother. He wrote often, he called often, he regretted having left often. He gradually settled in and though he still called regularly, it was more and more about Sydney and less and less about Amritsar. He was still very concerned but he had moved ahead; he had left Amritsar behind and I was very happy for him.

Soon after Karim left, Inayat convinced me into letting her join our little organization. We nearly stopped the ambulance work; we now liasoned with relief agencies and assisted families in villages in and around Amritsar in getting relief. It was dangerous work; the area where we operated, i.e. the Amritsar - Ferozepur belt that was the hotbed of militancy. I used to often get the jitters traveling around the villages but Inayat was least perturbed; she would be just sit peacefully or try to read a book till we reached our destination.

During one of our drives, I saw these group of burly Sikh men with rifles pass us by, which Inayat obviously didn't notice. In the next one hour, my heart beat more times than it would for the rest of my life.

I finally asked, not out of concern but out of mundane curiosity, "Inayat, are you not feeling a bit uncomfortable, frightened perhaps".

She just looked up; her eyes blinking rapidly and said, "What?"

"Never mind," I said.

About a month later; Inayat's parents announced that she must leave for London to her grandparents. Inayat expectedly rejected the plan. We had long discussions under the jamun tree; I didn't convince her to leave but she gradually became more accepting of the idea. And on 21st September 1988, Inayat left for London.

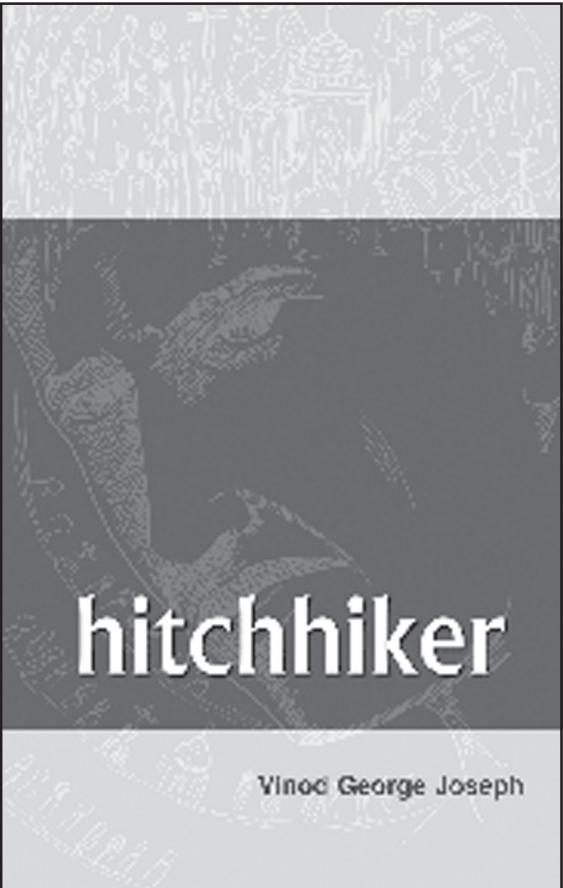
Air India flight 714 to London, blew up mid air and crashed into the sea, off the Irish coast. A Sikh separatist group claimed responsibility for the explosion.

Samrat Singh

The Hitchhiker

by Vinod George Joseph

Instead of looking at it as the story of Ebenezer, Vinod George Joseph's Hitchhiker could rather be termed as the story of rural India as it exists today in the shadow of the dreaded caste-system and its subsequent consequences like conversions by missionaries and beyond the romantic notions of an



advanced and a more tolerant society, a convenient notion that we living in urban environments seem to prefer to harbour. The story unfolds through the twists and turns in the fate of the family of Peterraj, Esther and their children Ebenezer and Gwendolyn and how inspite of their best attempts to break free and carve a new place for themselves in a changing world, reality seems to deliver one telling blow after another. Over and above everything else, Hitchhiker is the story of the price that society exacts relentlessly, a price that constantly comes into conflict with the dreams and aspirations of normal human beings like you and me, except that not all of us end up paying that price.

Born an untouchable Hindu, a Verumar, Ebenezer's finds his place in life further complicated by the reality that his parents Peterraj and Esther converted to Christianity and were employed by the Global Evangelical Church leading to the constant nagging reminder that the conversion was possibly coloured by the needs of employment. Even so, we come across Ebenezer growing up self-consciously struggling to remain untouched by the nuances of caste and birth and driven at all points of time only by a deep-seated desire to get out of the social chains binding him and his family to what seems to him a pre-destined fate and thus eventually to change the way they live. Sometimes this desire manifests itself in the very simple needs of life, like wanting to see his sister and his mother wear jewellery, which they are not allowed by the Church, or in the common childhood fancy of spending time with friends in watching a movie in the nearby theatre. This same desire to make things different is also what seems to guide Ebenezer to pursue engineering as a career after completing his studies at school.

What we see etched out in front of us is the normal life of a student struggling to come to terms with his very strange reality and at the same time growing up with his peers, sharing adolescent dreams and desires with them and waiting expectantly for what the coming years might bring.

This seemingly normal and innocuous life of Ebenezer is shaken forever by a chain of events that while horrifying him towards the griminess of reality also serves the purpose of educating him as to how things turn out to be while he was busy dreaming for himself and thinking of the better things to come. As if to lend credence to the old adage that misfortune when it comes does not come alone, his mother and sister get caught in the middle of a caste riot with higher caste Edayars and are subsequently murdered, his family finds out that their daughter-in-law had been previously raped by the son of the Edayar landlord in her village when she was young, this same aunt not being able to bear this public shaming commits suicide by hanging herself while he ends up not being able to study properly in the face of this personal turmoil and fares poorly at the engineering exams thus crushing his dreams of a

cushy job and even his father loses his long-standing job for joining a minority group demanding reservation in the Church. And to square off his troubles, Ebenezer eventually falls in love with Gayathri, a forcefully independent girl to whom caste considerations are all the reason to disobey them but to whose upper caste conservative family, such rebellious thinking could be nothing but a temporary phase and who vehemently oppose the union and try their best to disrupt the same.

If this story had been appropriately woven in the inventive backdrop created by Vinod George Joseph of complex and contradictory Indian realities, from Christian missionaries to the dotcom bust in urban Mumbai, from untouchability to Hindu Nationalism, Hitchhiker would have been truly a gut-wrenching tale. If it flatters to deceive, it is because of the author's amateurish handling of the story that leaves a lot to be desired as one sifts through the nearly four-hundred page tome. At the cost of sounding harsh, it could be said that it almost seems like the author hasn't been able to be perfectly honest with what he had initially set out to create. Thus, what could have been an interesting and highly evocative read is turned into drab documentation which fails to incite any interest with the passage of one section into another. There are just too many details that serve more to distract rather than draw the attention and too many characters with individual stories of their own forced into the framework of a single novel.

While the attempt to maintain the language as simple and unpretentious is definitely worth a praise, the author reduces such literary sparseness and understatement to plain boring diatribe. There is drama, there is tragedy but the treatment is so mundane that it fails to reach the levels of heart-breaking consequences in the mind of the reader that it so richly seems to deserve.

For instance, where Ebenezer searches within his troubled self and discovers that he is indeed in love with Gayathri inspite of the obvious problems associated with it - he is an untouchable Hindu and a convert into Christianity and financially from a lower strata of society, she is the daughter of an upper-caste Hindu affluent family - reads more like an adolescent fantasy rather than the thoughts and workings of a mature working young professional. Even the treatment offered to the probably the most poignant part of the novel when Ebenezer finds his mother and sister dead from caste riots, definitely leaves an after-taste of something missing in the way it unfolds. It is almost too matter-of-fact, too trivial in its disposition.

In his desire to make the setting of his novel more picturesque and to encompass as wide an array of characters and their subsequent stories as possible - to lend different tastes to his tale perhaps - the author seems to have been in a rush to stitch it all together not doing enough justice towards the structured growth of all his characters, some of whom could have been safely left at the side of the drawing board so that the rest could firmly and properly settle themselves in.

A good example of this would be the characters of Ebenezer's sister Gwendolyn and his aunt Karuppamma. In case of the former, one cannot but genuinely feel for the little girl who is trying to live upto the expectations of her parents, the expectations of the life that she has been born into and is growing up in and at the same time daring to believe she too could dream about something better. That the reader would end up hoping that she had somehow escaped the carnage when she unwittingly becomes the victim of caste riots, can only be a tribute to the ability of the author in creating her into someone we would like to reach out to. This feeling also holds true for Karuppamma, the woman who was shamed not once but twice, only for the careless lusting of her Edayar landlord's son and for the reason that she was a Verumar, and thus exempted of the right to a life of dignity. And even though the reader might expect it to be so, when she chooses to commit suicide rather than face her grim reality, there is an unmistakable feeling of guilt that someone somewhere would be facing this travesty of justice and there is nothing that is being done to correct it.

And that is what Hitchhiker is about - everyday human emotions and how they pan out under the twists of nature. Dissatisfaction with one's present, confusion over the past that has been left behind and stark uncertainty over how the future might pan out - these are emotions that most of us or all of us experience at various stages in our life when we have been able to afford the luxury of being in a position to reflect on the pros and cons, so to say. These are the very emotions lying at the core of Ebenezer's story in Hitchhiker as he attempts to plot his way through a more than unfair world where he remains forever

saddled with the social handicap of being born a low-caste Hindu, a Verumar, a branding that would come to haunt him for the rest of his life in everything he does.

Lastly, I'm not even getting started in criticizing the publishers for the careless editing, the tacky illustrations, even the quite redundant index of characters (to be perfectly honest, I wasn't even looking for one.). And that's because a truly honest and sincere story which deems to portray the fates of ordinary people should not, and perhaps would not, be hindered and hampered in telling its tale by such ordinary trivialities. These can only enrich and enliven it, not drag it down. In this case, if they become noticeable and worthy to be commented at, it is solely because the tale itself fails to grab our attention and hold it there.

Hitchhiker thus ends up becoming a sad instance of a good story, very badly told.

Mekubal

Obscurant

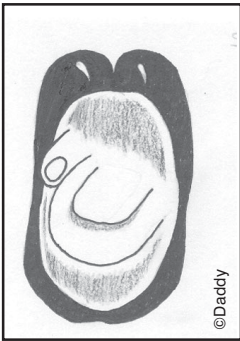
1. This word first appeared in English around 1565 meaning "a verbal trick" amounting to "an evasion" and was popularized in current vocabulary by Shakespeare's usage in Much Ado About Nothing where he used it to mean "a witty quip," and again using it in the "Twelfth Night," by which time he was using it in the current sense of the word.

In the 16th century, the underlying sense of the word led to its being used as a name for a variety of small odd things, including sudden curves or flourish in drawings, a small, regular pattern in stockings and also, a small triangular insert placed in a glove at the base of each finger and the thumb, used to give a close fit yet permit flexibility.
2. "_____ is brave, confident and exuberant, and that goes with the product itself." Also _____ gives a bit more flexibility, in being able to sport several optional shades of blue in addition to the traditional white background, thus giving the backroom creative force a little bit more leeway. Fill in the blank or what is being talked about?
3. In 1922, a fledgling Warner Brothers Pictures studio on the verge of bankruptcy made the movie "Man from hell's river", with a new star. The film was a hit and its star was a hit, the public loved him and his heroic ability. He was referred to as the mortgage lifter and credited with saving the studio from financial ruin during the silent film era. At the peak of his career with Warner Brothers he received some 10,000 fan letters a week and was considered to be one of Hollywood's top stars. He ultimately made 26 pictures for Warner Brothers before his death on August 10, 1932, which, according to Hollywood legend, was in the arms of Jean Harlow.
4. Organization der Ehmaligen SS Angehongen, was an organization of former SS members and a secret group which supposedly used stashed war booty & connections in high places to spirit high-ranking Nazi officers out of the reach of the Allied forces. It became popular as the title of a best seller novel by an author who generally writes war thrillers in 1972. Which novel?
5. Mahesh Bhatt is making a movie with Pakistani actress Meera and Shiney Ahuja playing the leads in 'Akelapan'. The film is about an actress who is past her prime but refuses to accept the reality. She believes that the film industry will accept her with open arms. The film is based on yesteryear actress Nazreen Begum's life. Mahesh Bhat drew flak from the industry and the press when he opportunistically chose the death of actress Nadira to have the press conference announcing the film,, and referring to Akelapan as a story which mirrors actresses like Nadira who die lonely deaths despite dazzling careers in their heydays. Akelapan is a remake of, or as they say in Bollywood parlance - inspired by, what?

The answers are in the next edition. In the mean time, mail in your answers to quirk@nls.ac.in with the subject line Obscurant.

Sebastian

On my worst days, people would crowd around me and touch me and tell me I wasn't alone. That was exactly the problem, he wouldn't leave me alone. I'd never asked him to; he needed me.



In the womb we were twins, he says. Everyone denies this, but it's true. I tried to kill him. For what grudge, I don't know. These things are forgotten when you leave the womb. Anyway, having no limbs or mouth with which to do the deed, I sort of absorbed him - like eating, but without a mouth. But he lived.

Rubbish, said my parents. Only one child had ever shown up on the scans, and only one child had been born. And what a child I was, grossly swollen and generally hideous. The women who came to visit tried to console my mother, telling her how ugly babies generally grew up into beautiful adults (they don't). I even had one extra toe, the sole part of my brother's body to survive my prenatal crime. In medieval England, women with extra fingers and toes were known to be witches.

My parents would not give my brother a name, refusing as they did to acknowledge him. "Why don't you name him?" they would ask, trying to smile indulgently, but really only looking nervous. He cried about his lack of a name every night for a week, and I could not sleep. Choosing a name for him was hard. I wanted to call him Kacha, but he refused any name that might relate to his condition. All the names I could think of were from the books I read, and none seemed right. I chose Sebastian, and he hated it. He told me it was un-Indian and didn't go with our surname or our culture. Yet the name stuck; he'd take any name he could get.

Once he decided to taunt me for a week, telling me that I was useless as a daughter and that my parents had wanted a son. I could no longer take it, so I went to them and offered to let him take over my body. They refused. That night my brother was

especially scornful. Who would want a man in a woman's body, he asked. Who would want anyone in your body?

I hated him.

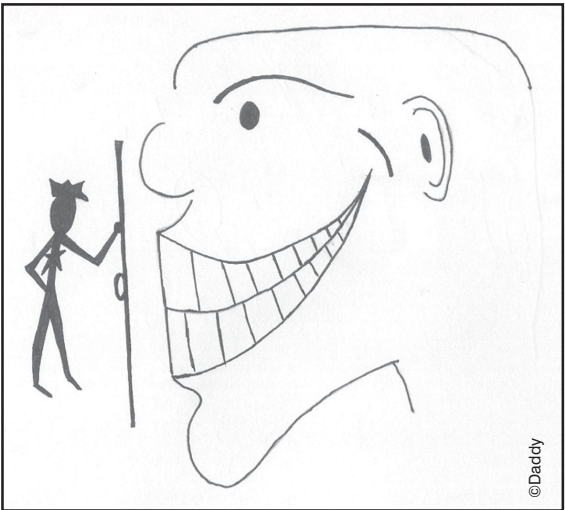
The trouble with hating someone who shares a body with you is, of course, that you can't hide it. He knew and he treated my hatred with utter contempt. He only had to remind me that I had destroyed his life and owed him a huge debt. He knew me too well.

Once, I asked him what he looked like. He didn't know, and he screamed at me for making him think of it. How could he look like anything, when I had taken his body? Yet I imagined him as looking something like the foetus in our biology book, but with a face capable of expression. It was always grinning at me, that grotesque, semi-formed face.

When I was seven, I got to believing that since my extra toe was Sebastian's, if I got rid of it, I would lose him too. It was hard to do, but I did it using the biggest knife in the kitchen. It took a few strokes (large as I was, I was weak even for a seven year old) but I barely noticed the pain. Sebastian did and he roared with the pain for days. At the hospital they stitched up my foot and gave me drugs to make me sleep. I could not; my brother was screaming the whole time. When they offered to stitch my toe back on, I screamed almost loud enough to drown him out.

He did not leave. My foot was cleaned and sewn up, and the bandages had to be changed every few days. I do not know what happened to the toe. Obviously, he was not there.

I no longer spoke about him to my parents or friends. I saw no reason to; they wouldn't believe me and it only upset them. I turned to religion instead, on the assumption that those people would believe anything. My family priest didn't. He thought I was mad and recommended a temple in the south of the country where mad people are chained up outside so that the holiness of the place will drive their madness away. I was very afraid that he would tell my parents.



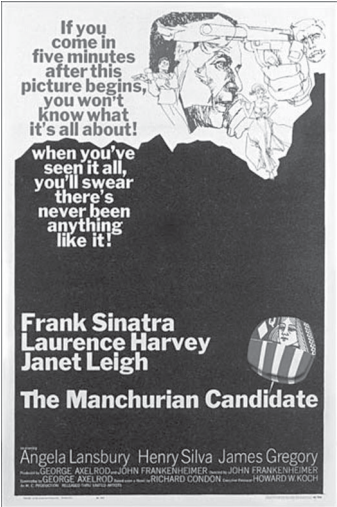
Discouraged by my first attempt I decided to look outside my religion for a solution. I met a priest who believed Sebastian was not my brother at all, but a demon who needed to be exorcised. I knew he was wrong. Sebastian wouldn't lie to me. But I sat down anyway and let him mutter his strange words over me for what seemed like hours. I could hear my brother laughing the whole time. At one point I began to laugh as well, which only served to convince the old man that he was right. At the end, though, my brother was still there.

His laughter turned to fury once we were alone. How dared I try to get rid of him? Was it not enough to take away his body and destroy his life? Was it not enough to reduce him to living in my hideous body? Had I forgotten the debt I owed him? He could not hit me (and how he wished he could) so he attacked me with words. More than anything, I wanted to kill him.

Since the toe incident, the knives in our house have been kept hidden. Today, though, I managed to get a large pair of scissors out of my mother's sewing box. By the time she misses them this story will be over. I'm not sure what I'm going to do with them yet. But it'll be good and bloody and newsworthy, and my brother will be furious.

Aishwarya Subramanian

The Manchurian Candidate



October 16 to October 28. Thirteen days in 1962 when the world could have been destroyed in an instant (or so postulated, since nuclear weapons do that sort of thing). Cold war paranoia was quite high in the US, and to be labelled a

communist was the worst thing that could happen to a politician (something like being labelled a liberal today). 'The Manchurian Candidate', released in '62, provided a chilling scenario that in the golden era of B-movie sci-fi seemed very probable and possibly inevitable (in the 60s, pigs flew and pollutant meant weed, not CFCs). While the movie doesn't maintain a firm hold on reality as far as plot devices go (though to be fair, who knows what was left to rot in CIA/KGB vaults), it uses that device (brainwashing) very well and develops the situation into something that could happen, and whether illogical or not, into an entertaining and thought provoking experience.

The film opens during the Korean War where an American Platoon, due to the treachery of their interpreter, are captured by the communists. After being brainwashed by the communists, they return to the US with a bogus story of a heroic struggle in which two of their men were shot and killed as they made a daring escape, and one of their men, Sgt. Raymond Shaw (who happens to be the stepson of a senator running for the Vice Presidency) is conferred with the Congressional Medal of

Honour for his bravery. But, more than one of the other members of the platoon, including Capt. Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra) are having the same recurring nightmare about their ordeal in Korea, and it presents a very different version of what actually happened, and how those two men were killed. Raymond had been conditioned by the commies to be the perfect assassin: controlled by an operator; he will have no recollection of his actions once the deed is done, and hence no guilt. Oh, but he has an Achilles' heel. Is it a woman? Is it booze? Drugs? A bird? A plane? No, it's solitaire!

The plot slowly unravels, with the key players being Raymond, Senator Iselin and his black widow like domineering wife, who is also Raymond's mother (I don't think her name is ever mentioned, other than being referred to as 'Mother' by Raymond, a la Anthony Perkins in 'Psycho'). The ultimate agenda isn't revealed until the last quarter of the film, though it is possible to guess it a little earlier (doesn't spoil the experience if guessed early; and somewhat impossible to guess, since the actual agenda isn't revealed till later).

While Frank Sinatra gets top billing and is solid as Bennett Marco, the real star is Angela Lansbury (the Mother), whose portrayal of a cold, calculating and ruthless woman who will stop at nothing to get what she wants is chilling. Lawrence Harvey (Raymond Shaw) is also excellent as an essentially good man, full of hatred for his mother yet tormented by her; a man can neither control nor comprehend what he is doing. John McGiver and Leslie Parrish are solid in small (but important roles). The only red flag is Janet Leigh, though it has more to do with her character, who is given little to do.

This is by no means a perfect movie. While the main storyline is solid (if a little implausible), there are a couple of sub-plots that feel superfluous. One was that of a fellow soldier (other than Marco) also having the same dream, but it gets discarded quickly, used and forgotten. Another was that of Marco's love interest, which had no connection to the film, and served no purpose other than to pad out the running length. At the same time, it was hardly explored, with Janet Leigh having no more than an extended cameo. It really did feel excisable, as there was neither the need nor the time to develop a love interest for Marco. While the film does skip forward by a few years at times, it



doesn't spend enough time to give the relationship any credibility. However, the main thread is more than sufficient to sustain the movie. Also, this movie doesn't cheat the audience with its ending (something the remake - which I haven't seen - is supposed to do), something that may not be easily digested by audiences today (yes, cinematic snobbery. I look down on the public who can't appreciate anything other than sugar-coated endings. Even Disney killed in the past), and works better because of it. Whoever wants to go quietly into the good night?

Varun Rajiv

THE DEVIANT ARTIST

Modern fantasy is in a pitiable state. A confused morass of plots and sub-plots endlessly recycled in one book after another have led to complete saturation in the genre. A typical modern fantasy author starts basic tenets of a hero of sterling valour and a heroine of startling beauty, a romance between the aforementioned, an Enemy, a Quest, a War and a happy ending. Dragons, elves, dwarves, trolls and other beasts of monstrous description are then added as deemed fit. The language resembles that of a high school student and the characters seem cut straight out of cardboard. The epic fantasy of Morris, of Le Guein and of Tolkien is all but lost in a sea of mediocrity.

Into this vale of boredom, George R. R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire" comes as the clear breath of fresh mountain breeze. Martin is an iconoclast, shattering all established norms of the genre in this enthralling series. In "A Game of Thrones", "A Clash of Kings", "A Storm of Swords" and "A Feast For Crows", Martin takes the reader into a war-torn world without honour or justice, nobility or truth. It is a world where treachery meets intrigue, where incest meets betrayal... a world in which either you win or you die.



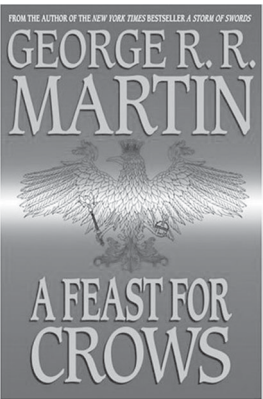
Into this canvas of violence and villainy, Martin paints a memorable cast of characters. The "heroes"... Ned Stark, whose own nobility is the cause of his death. Robb Stark, the Young Wolf, an unforgettable tragic hero... the dark and moody Jon Snow, the sisters Arya and Sansa, as different from each other as chalk from cheese.

Then there are those on the other side... Jaime Lannister, whose treachery is matched only by the ruthless villainy of his sister Cersei and the ruthless cunning of his father Tywin... Roose Bolton, whose allegiance switches with each turn of the tide... and finally, there are those characters who can truly be called "grey", and it is they who live longest in the memory. Tyrion Lannister, the deformed imp whose fiery intellect more than makes up for his physical shortcomings. Lord Stannis, whose twisted thoughts lead him through a tangled labyrinth of intrigue, villainy, and finally heroism. And lastly, Daenerys Targaryn, hurrying across the sands of the desert to reclaim the Kingdom once lost by her father, and leaving a trail of ruined cities in her wake.

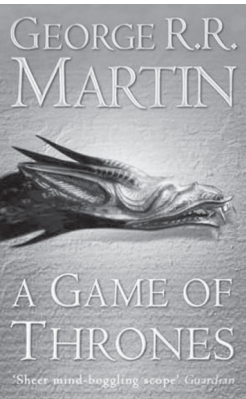


George Martin is himself every bit ruthless as the characters he paints so vividly. He has absolutely no compunction in killing off his heroes, and this is what makes A Song of Ice and Fire so unique. Too often in modern fantasy you will

see the heroes facing insurmountable odds, yet somehow emerging victorious either through their own unmatched valour or through serendipity. Martin resists this temptation. If you're caught in an ambush, you die, regardless of who you are. Period. And so far he has, thankfully, resisted the temptation of bringing any of the protagonists back.

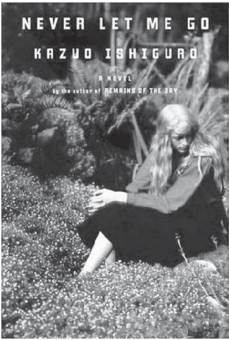


Another reason why A Song of Ice and Fire is such an enjoyable read is that it's "medieval fantasy" in a true sense. In the acclaimed scholarly work, A Look Behind the Lord of the Rings, author Lin Carter, while describing William Morris (arguably the founder of modern fantasy), says "he considered it (the medieval age) to be a sort of bucolic utopia." Carter then describes the features of this "bucolic utopia"- valorous lords, great-hearted ladies, magnificent castles... the like. Unfortunately, all of today's fantasy (far, far below Morris' epic style and imagination, it might be added) is written in this same mode of denial, in this same delusion. Carter goes on to add then, that the medieval age was actually very different from Morris's idealistic impression. It was cold and cruel, with no thought for honour or goodwill, with plagues and diseases, where the common man often suffered during the wars fought by the nobility. Martin is the first author to capture this spirit in its entirety. Dispensing with the traditional fantasy concepts of honour, valour and the like, he focusses only on the lust for power and its consequences. Discounting the dragons, A Song of Ice and Fire could well be a historical account of some conflict like the Wars of the Roses. It is for these two reasons- a series with a difference, and the accurate portrayal of the medieval age- that I feel A Song of Ice and Fire should not be stereotyped into the genre of medieval fantasy- rather, it should be first in the line of a new series of works in a new sub-genre of fantasy which may be called "medieval realism"



Martin then, is probably one of the best modern fantasy authors alive today. His plots are always violent, often vicious, with no regard whatsoever for human life, but that is what makes his work stand out. Apart from everything else, it is top quality fantasy writing, complexly plotted, intricately detailed and written with verve and style. It is not for the faint-hearted, but if you're one of those hard core fantasy aficionados getting gradually disillusioned with the genre due to every next Christopher Paolini who comes along with a whoop and a holler, pick up A Song of Ice and Fire. There is hope yet for modern fantasy.

Gautam Bhatia



"Never Let Me Go":

Kazuo Ishiguro's Tale of Deceptive Simplicity

If Ishiguro's narrative of an ageing butler's questioning reflections and introspection in post-war England told through 'The Remains of the Day' reflected his art, his precise yet beautiful prose, then 'Never Let Me Go' perhaps showcases his consummate skill at shaping stories, so much so that reviewing this work involves walking a tightrope where one is either teetering on the brink of exposing bits of the plot which would considerably reduce the joy of a first-time reader, or running the risk of sounding excessively vague and cryptic.

The beginning is normal. Too normal, one realizes, especially when one focuses on a sprinkling of phrases and concepts which are irritatingly unfamiliar. Could Kathy's story, which begins in Hailsham, an isolated boarding school in the English countryside, really be anything out of the ordinary? One is forced to ask oneself a number of such questions as the story progresses, and it is almost irritating when the answers don't present themselves at the turn of a page. It isn't that the story is veiled with mystery. Suspense would be a crude word to describe what Ishiguro achieves through his storytelling. It is merely that the story reflects a process of realization, and that the reader must live through such realization along with the characters, through their sheltered childhood, tempestuous adolescence and their early adulthood. There comes a point where one comes to accept that at any given point in time, one can only know as much as the protagonists, and that answers will emerge not from the questions we ask, but the questions they ask as they grow up in the darker half of a world we share.

Kathy's life intersects with others, many of which also take their course under the shadow of a similar fate. Primarily, she shares important moments of her life with her best friend, Ruth, and Tommy, a dear friend who ultimately becomes her lover. Like a number of other revelations in this book, the love which Kathy and Tommy feel for each other emerges and crystallizes imperceptibly, from the ideas which flit across the pages for mere moments until they seem glaringly evident. These three lives converge, split and then converge again as the story progresses and from these vignettes of friendship and love interspersed with moments of clarity and episodes of tension does the overarching truth governing these lives finally become apparent. This overarching truth is a bleak fantasy described with a tone so matter-of-fact that it is almost excruciating.

The erudite may cull out from this work some grand themes like 'ethics versus modernity' or something equally profound, seeing within it a possible future or a twisted reflection of social truths. For me, this was a book about hope, but a kind of hope which merely makes the present a little more bearable even as it steadily erodes into nothing. It was about clutching at moments of love which are fast receding. It was about trying to find a spot of sunshine and living for the sake of that promised sunshine. It leaves you painfully numb, strange as it may sound.

Karan Lahiri

Poetry that doesn't rhyme

Poetry that doesn't rhyme is hardly worth the name. It's time to curse that lesser verse and puts its bards to shame. Line by line, a rhyme is fine, and knocks free verse out cold. The day will come, things will be rum "Blank Verse? A thing of old!" In finer times,when poems rhymed, the poet was a preacher. But now, who rules? The angsty fool! That disillusioned geezer. I'm not a guy who starts to cry out loud for no good reason. But you, dear sir! You scurvy cur! Your "poetry" is vile treason! You'll have to sweat if you're to get a rhyme that's sweet and lilting. Not random words, the thoughts of nerds or pseudo #@&%\$ in' guilting! For rhyme is rhyme, and it takes time, true passion, verve, panache. And as for you, you whiny fool, your "poetry" is trash.

Chaitanya Ramachandran

COLLAPSE

Its 3 a.m. and my fluorescent table clock has died. I say 'died' because I cannot hear its rhythmic heartbeat anymore. I tossed the blanket up with my legs, letting the cold draught air from without to enter the warmth of the environment underneath my blanket. The cold air made me feel alive. These days, it takes the cold to remind me that I am alive, doc.

I normally sleep like a log. I know its clichéd. But it is true. Even that is clichéd. That's the state I am in. When normal folks would be deadbeat, asleep, I had not even a haunting refrain of drowsiness. Normally, it may have been the heat which would make me uneasy. Shillong had been uncharacteristically hot this summer. A fine breeze has been blowing since this evening and it has gradually picked up as the night grew stronger. Just as I think, I can hear the first sounds of rain against my window. It's not fear either. My friends call me a scaredey cat. It's more like that word at the tip of your tongue. You know it, but you don't. Like I knew subconsciously that something was troubling me, but consciously I was not aware of it.

In my room, the room where I sleep (I only have one room which is my bedroom, study room living room and shit room), there is a window without curtains, and the door is made of iron bars. Iron bars. In the night, the moonshine often causes funny shapes and shadows to be cast on the wall. At this present moment, despite the heavy drizzle, at this present moment, the shadows seem rather ominous. Why doc, Why? I can make out a werewolf, a witch, concubining blood sucking vultures. You can imagine how morbid I am. I know I am morbid.

I began to think of things that I normally would not, of the woods just outside, of all the terrible things that I'd heard that had happened there. That happened here. I must apologize. You would not understand. I have not given you the context. Who am I?

You need not know everything to understand the way I am. Two years to the day, I left home. I ran away. My parental home is in Cherra, a small village nestled in the midst of indescribable mountains. Mountains made from rocks. I was fifteen then, son of a farmer, a farmer who farmed his ideas and farmed successfully. He wanted me to be an engineer or a doctor. That's what every successful man who has never really attended college wants. If he was illiterate, he'd probably have wanted me follow him as a farmer. Father did not go to college because he enrolled in the army during the Bangladesh war in 1971. He left service after three years. He told me it was full of people who were full and that there was not too much space unless you yourself were full or you were a coward. However, father was a driving man. He must have learnt it in the army. Or from his father - grandfather, whom people say was a monster of a man.

Mom has always been by my side. In spirit. I know, you know, that she is in heaven, looking out for me. Her son. Mom used to be a singer and teacher. Rambha, the old village tell-tale would say, that when mom sang, the birds came, captivated, when she spoke to them. The eagle and the sparrow set side by side. Of course that was exaggeration. But father said it was true and he was not prone to exaggeration. Not by a long stretch of my imagination. He just loved mother too much. So do I. I miss her everyday.

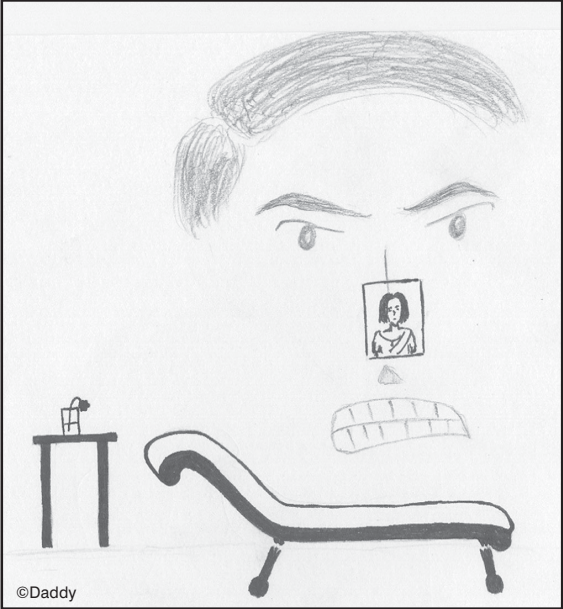
He'd reserve a few cuts from his well worn cane for me everyday. I mean, I could not study all the time; sometimes the catapult called me or it was the grassy fens, the dell, the gushing streams and spirited fishes, they all called out to me, but I could not reach out to them. It made me feel lonely, doc. Father would not let me talk to Pynkmentina, Kmen for short. He said it would disturb my equilibrium. Maybe he thought that I would become a bad boy and make her a bad girl as some of the other rascals did. Six cuts from the cane awaited me, every time he found out that I had talked to Pynkmen. She was my best friend. How could I not talk to her? But the cuts began to make my skin raw. When it started to do so around my buttocks, he would turn his attention to my calf for the next few days.

In the winter, it was so cold, and the cane brought life. Life through pain. Life is pain. Sometimes when he did that, his breath smelt of vile liquid, the liquid that he usually drank from a square carafe with a narrow neck. I tried it once myself when father was not around. It was bitter and I did not like it. It must have been the medicine from the local quack. They said that father was a sick man, since mom went to heaven. Whenever I smelt that bitter liquid in his breath, I knew that I'd receive a healthy dose of bitter medicine. It is not that everything was bad. I loved to go to school. I would play soccer in the breaks. I could talk to Kmen. I think we became friends because we were rivals, in class. I hated maths, though Mr. Stephen Sir's English literature classes would captivate me. He had so many voices and always moved his hands in dramatic gestures and screwed his face in differing emotions. I always did excellently well in his subject. Kmen says that Mr. Stephen is her mother's brother. It never seemed that way in class.

I used to love the walk back from school. Actually, I liked the walk to school too. It was the same path. One left me with longing, the other left me feeling wistful. Everything about the route made me feel different. I cannot explain it to you. It's beyond the words that I know, and none that I know will do it justice. You have to see it to comprehend it. Just like life. Mr. Stephen said that if I did well enough, his NGO would sponsor my future studies in Shillong, the biggest town in my state, a one and a half hour journey from Cherra.

One month hence, my life changed. My tenth state board results came out. I was ecstatic. Father was not. He rebuked me for getting low marks in Math. He said it would be hard for me to be an engineer now; I'd have to be a doctor.

Till then I hadn't quite thought of what I wanted to do. I mean I knew. I knew somewhere in my head I knew what I wanted to do. Somewhere. But I never really thought about it. I felt



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bad. Why? Father was leaving the house. At the front door he asked me how Kmen had fared. I told father that she had done equally well. I heard him mutter to himself Thank God. For what? For whom?

It was still ten a.m. and father had left to sell the grams to the state godown. He actually is a farmer-merchant. A successful one. I heard a knock at the door. I was still swimming in my thoughts. The sharp knock again. Mr. Stephen Sir was at the door. He was smiling. I used to be his favourite student. Of course, that was not counting Kmen.

"Can I come in?" he asked in English. He never spoke to me in Khasi. I'd never heard him speak in our vernacular. Maybe that is why he spoke like a phareng. He gave me a box. It was more of a package, actually. I credit myself for my old head. I did not tear it open. I wanted to. He was looking at me. I always felt that he could read his students minds. That is why he also doubled up as the dean and perhaps is the reason why I was never free spirited in his class. "If you get into St. Edmund's, my NGO is going to sponsor you." I listened. "If you want to study outside the state too, we will support you." I did not know what to say. I normally think more than I speak. I could not even think thank you. Let alone say it. "Think about it," he said, leaving. It all seemed blurred, tangential, a different life, doc. Like I was destined for something totally different. I still remember those days clearly, doc. It fills me.

Six p.m. I heard the heavy footfall of my father. I was instinctively worried. Why? His eyes were bloodshot. He saw me and he stopped. "What have you decided?" he growled. "Nothing, sir." The 'sir' came out of its own volition. It always did when father was in such a mood. "What do you want to do?" he snarled with more menace than he conveyed.

I did not answer. I internally refused to think. Unconsciously I was thinking. I was more bracing myself. It was coming. Almighty, it was coming.

"You're going to study to be a doctor. Khun ka sniang." I wonder about the abuse at the end. If he knew it. It actually abused him more than it did me.

"I want to study psychology, father", I said with temerity. He did not reply. He did not expect me to say so. I could feel his anger rising, searching for an answer. I wanted to give an answer myself. "I want to study the science of human beings." I admit I used the word 'science' to sell my reason. Father looked morbid. I could feel the vile liquid gushing in his veins. Arteries. The smell of the liquid was distinct. It possibly regurgitated into his mouth.

It was the first time that my father used his hand against me. I was fifteen then, but I was stronger than most my age. Yet, he was my father, doc. The blows fell, one after the other in a torrent of dull sensation. "You want to be like your mother?" He screamed hysterically, repeatedly. This and many more he uttered in the name of my mother as if it was a war cry. I bore them all. I did.

Maybe here in my cell I understand him, doc. It was not him. It was not mother, not me nor the world or that vile liquid. It was a cumulative of it all, doc. It was cumulative. That day onwards, everyday he came home soaked in that vile liquid and I suspect something more. The demon in that filthy concoction unflinching turned its attention upon me. Everyday, doc, every night.

Kmen, Jonny and Andy dropped in one week hence. They'd wanted to go fishing. They never did. Father had gone to work under the influence. Those last few days he was always under the influence. I was alone covered with welts, bruises and cuts. They came calling. I wore a long-sleeved shirt and full pants when I opened the door. But the half hearted smile pasted on my face could not detract away from the two black eyes and my swollen left cheek. They just stood there. Not staring consciously. Not sure if it was me. So, I told them. I told them that I had picked up a fight with boys from the neighbouring village and they had simply outnumbered me. They were trusting for they were my friends. They gave up their plans and gave me company the whole afternoon. The wounds seemed to have eased up a lot those few hours.

A few more hours of melancholic happiness, thanks to their intrusion into my saga. I remember seeing the sun dip. Seeing the night rise. Father was back. For the first time he held not a carafe in his hand. He held a bottle. A bottle with brown liquid. Brown vile liquid. I tried to excuse myself, saying I'd put water on the fire for tea. Then I saw the bottle rush towards my head. I presume I blacked out. I have a scar that runs right down my right cheek to my chin. All I knew was that at that moment Mr. Stephen Sir had come to see me. Rather ironic thing to see, eh, doc? Pynkmen. Pynkmen had told him that I was being beaten up regularly. Some women never buy lies. And they make up their own truth.

Mr. Stephen Sir threatened father with the police if he ever touched me physically again. So I went to study in St. Edmund's. With my grades they couldn't deny me, could they, doc? I wanted to major in Psychology. Father had not spoken to me for the last one month before I officially left for Shillong. He'd stopped coming back at Six p.m. Now I seldom saw him before I went to bed. He often came back with welts and bruises of his own. How I cried for him, doc. How I cried. I tried to talk to him, doc. I tried to. But he would not listen.

The day to leave arrived earlier than I had expected it to. It was a Sunday and father was not at home. Mr. Stephen Sir, came to drop me all the way to Shillong. I cried all the way. I cried for what was to come, what I had left behind, for the past, for father. I cried for me.

My first holidays: I went home but never saw father for more than one minute at a time. I had no relatives to go to either. I was the ex-communicated one. Mother had been father's first cousin. They were of the same jait. They had dared to break taboo. I was the taboo kid for them. To them. Which is why two years have passed and I am here. I never had talked to father these two years. I was a bastard, I am an orphan. I had dreams, but I had no sleep.

Sometime back - I cannot recall exactly when, doc but it was close to midnight - Mr. Stephen Sir called my landlord. Father had died. His liver had suddenly given up among other things. He told me he'd be here at five in the morning to take me home for the funeral. How fucking kind of him, doc. I remember dropping the phone... I remember hearing a muted scream emanate from the landlord's wife.

The time between then and now, thirty seven days hence is not clear, doc. They say they found me in the nalla prophesizing about the end of human kind. That I had slept with the pigs in the MLA's sty. Me? That I am in Sancar, the institution of the mad is a shock to me, doc. They think that their psychiatrist may be able to unravel me, doc? What's there to unravel? He does not know that I too am a mini-psychologist. I am quite fine, doc, except for the few parts I that I can't quite trace. They seemed to have disappeared. You are a medical doctor. A doctor of the body. Tell me if anything is wrong with me physically. Mentally, I know I can think. Can't I, doc? I can remember very well. I don't need to rationalize. I am rational. If I were mad, don't you think I should be in theatre? Come now, doc. Everything seems perfect. Everything is perfect. Unless you zoom in. I don't. Is it not so, doc? Sometimes the unexpected happens to the unready. Don't draw away from me, doc. Let me hold your hand. I am not heretical. I am fucking fine. I am fucking fine. How can I think about my past, how can I dare to if I am not fine upstairs?

Someone woke me up. I saw mother, she was calling me. Father was there too. Looking at me. He was smiling. They both seemed radiant as ever. Glorious light is calling me, doc. Like in a dream. I could hear someone mutter frantically, "His pulse is fluctuating wildly".

TRAINSPOTTING

Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television, choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers. Choose good health, low cholesterol and dental insurance. Choose fixed-interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your friends. Choose leisure wear and matching luggage. Choose a three piece suit on hire purchase in a range of fucking fabrics. Choose DIY and wondering who you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing sprit-crushing game shows, stuffing fucking junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all, pushing your last in a miserable home, nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked-up brats you have spawned to replace yourself. Choose your future. Choose life... But why would I want to do a thing like that?

I chose not to choose life: I chose something else. And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who need reasons when you've got heroin?

People think it's all about misery and desperation and death and all that shite, which is not to be ignored, but what they forget is the pleasure of it. Otherwise we wouldn't do it. After all, we're not fucking stupid. At least, we're not that fucking stupid.

As far as movies based on books go, this is one of the better adaptations that one is likely to come across. Based on the 1993 cult novel of the same name by Irvine Welsh ("passed hand-to-hand at outlawed raves") and adapted by John Hodge, this movie directed by Danny Boyle was a breakthrough film in the Indie circuit and went on to define Brit alternative cinema for a great many. The movie is a take on a bunch of friends in Edinburgh, most of whom have been sucked into drugs for various reasons (as the first scene puts it, "Who need reasons when you've got heroin?"), those of them who keep away from drugs, and those who succumb to the drugs.

The movie, very ably links up the related issues of drugs, social relationships, judicial view of drug addicts, unemployment, the healthcare system, and societal pressures. The backdrop to this tale of lumpen prole life in the deprived "housing schemes" of Edinburgh is post-industrial unemployment and the humiliation of a socialist Scotland within a Tory-ruled UK. The best thing about this movie is that it takes a much more light-hearted (with lots of black comedy) as well as a more neutral approach towards its theme than a movie like Requiem for a Dream, which takes a negative stance on drugs and seeks to push that stance in your face throughout the course of the movie, and adopts a just-say-no attitude. Trainspotting in contrast shows the ill-effects of drugs but leaves you to form your own judgment on drugs. This non-judgmental attitude towards drugs has also been posed by many as a severe criticism against the movie - that it glamorizes drugs. Additionally, this has been one of those few movies that dare to point out that many people do drugs because, at least for some time, it actually feels good.

However, it does make a difference when a plain, zit-covered Mark Renton of Welsh's book is transformed into a dead sexy Ewan McGregor. But it is not as if the movie shows drugs in merely a positive light. It just gives a 'social

surrealistic' picture of both sides of the drugs equation - that drugs can lay waste a person, and are often fatal ; while also saying that there must be reasons for people turning to drugs - and it does so from the point of view of the druggie.

This deviation from the Social Realism that burst into the Brit mainstream and got a firm grip in the early and mid-nineties in the works of the

to make the story one which is about the reality of Edinburgh of the eighties, flooded as it was with Pakistani and Afghani smack and the youth of that time for whom drugs became the cheap escape of choice rather than a story about dreariness.

This interesting array of characters is what keeps this movie alive, with each character being memorable, maybe because while they start out by being sketches of people, with certain caricature-like exaggerations, they end up being flesh and blood and for the most part, well-etched. But most importantly, they are neither heroes, nor are they simplistic criminals; they come out as being regular folk, people who inhabit every society, and not as freaks or monsters for being drug addicts. The interesting array of characters is aided by the brilliant monologues and dialogues that these witty, insightful and plain funny characters spout throughout the film. The screenplay by John Hodge is excellent and Irvine Welsh's humour shines through.

In my belief, this movie caused the stir that it did because apart from it "glorifying drugs" it also dares to question the middle-class dream from a working class perspective; for expressing a view that questions the policies of the powers-that-be: "As British society changed under the Thatcher '80s, drugs and drink became less recreational and more a way of life because people had fuck all else to do." In this respect, it is remarkably similar to the Alan Sillitoe book Saturday Night, Sunday Morning which portrays the fight against the middle-class from the perspective of a working-class protagonist in post-World War II Britain. In this story, drugs take the place that alcohol occupied in Saturday Night, Sunday Morning, and Swanney (their drug dealer, whom they call Mother Superior "on account of the length of his habit") takes the place of the pubs.

Thus, in Trainspotting, drugs become the rejection of the middle-class aspiration, just as "trainspotting" by bored blokes in railways stations is a rejection of the same. It is this presenting this aspect where lies both the great success and failure of this movie. By presenting a fast-paced, engaging portrait of the junkies, the visuals and narrative offers a stark contrast to what they portray. Even scenes with junkies lying about are presented in vivid colour, and another example is the scene in which, having kicked the habit, Renton confronts the real challenge - coping with the dreariness of unaltered consciousness. Keeping him on a close leash, his parents take him to the pub. But Boyle deals with this supposed tedium by speeding up the film, so that the pub's middle-aged bingo players whiz around the inert Renton; the filmmakers can't let boredom be boring. The movie, while explaining that it is banality and dreariness that the drug addicts wish to do away with, never gives us that environment, instead fills the screen with vivid colours and livens it up with sheer pace. Even the most squalid quarters seem to be glossed in a way, with even the grotty grunge having a hyperreal feel to it.

But this hyperrealism is what the movie aims for, with sinking floors, babies crawling upside down, and a wonderful techno/punk soundtrack ranging from the seventies (Perfect Day from Lou Reed's 1972 album Transformer) to the nineties (Closet Romantic by Damon Albarn) (and owing a great deal to the likes of Iggy Pop, Primal Scream and Brian Eno). This shows



likes of Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and others who made excellent documentaries is remarkable, considering the suitability of the subject matter to such an approach. But the outcome is all the better for not following such an approach and taking the path of aesthetic and narrative surrealism. And the point of view adopted, of the druggies, also reflects Danny Boyle's admiration for movies like Drugstore Cowboy and his desire, like Welsh, to humanise the drug addicts and to portray them as human beings who choose drugs rather than being victims whom drugs control. This purported glorification of drugs caused great controversy to descend upon the book, the adapted play, and the movie... leading to the rave crowd actually reading a book for a change, and making this movie the second-highest grossing movie in Britain after Four Weddings and a Funeral.

The story basically revolves around the life of Mark Renton ("Rentboy") played by the-then-unknown Ewan McGregor, who happens to be a young man with an addiction to heroin (amongst many other drugs). Amongst his friends rank those who won't touch drugs: Begbie, (who "wouldnae poison ma body with that shite," but instead is booze-guzzling, chain-smoking volatile and violent sociopath) and Tommy (an Iggy Pop-obsessed, fresh-air freak), as well as one who gets off his high along with Renton, just to irk Renton by showing that he can do so (the suave and selfish "Sick Boy"). Another one of his friends is the hopeless and awkward "Spud", who is an innocuous character seemingly a poor boy who comes into bad ways because of his friends. Thrown in are the girlfriends (and in Begbie's case, a "boyfriend")

that movie aims at celebrating the spirit of the young men, rather than the thing that they do that will eventually destroy them. It is about being crazy in your youth, but at the same time it does not celebrate heroin. It celebrates the spirit in everyone, before something like age, a job, or heroin, crushes it. As Welsh once put it, "[The story is] about the culture and the lifestyle in a non-judgmental way. It's about how people live their lives and how people interact. To see it as just a kind of reaction to social oppression, to social circumstances, is to rip some of the soil out of it and to make the characters into victims - I don't think they really are."

The movie is finely made, with great attention to little details that a lesser movie wouldn't have gotten right, like the accents. Every one in the movie gets the accents right according to the reaction of the Scottish on the internet, with special praise being reserved for Kelly MacDonald (Renton's girlfriend in the movie) and Robert Carlyle (Begbie). But what is interesting is that the various dialectical differences between the characters in the book is actually reflected in the movie. Hence, we get to see how the different characters are from slightly different social strata, though from the same economic one. The younger and more suave Sick Boy and Renton are bi-dialectical, comfortable talking in the standard English when the occasions so demand (e.g., when talking to a judge, selling apartments, etc.), whereas Begbie and Spud retain their Scots regardless of the situation they

find themselves in (to comical effects during Spud's dole-securing job interview).

One thing that is clear is that while the movie and the book present disillusionment with the middle-class dream, they also purport to give a big middle finger to the concept of "belonging" and the need felt by most teens to be part of a particular group and be cool, and to just belong. However, in this venture, Boyle is sadly misguided because, as anyone who has spent any time in college could tell you, junkies tend to be that group that rejects, just like the goths in a high school. And that social fraternity is also quite close and the bonding is easily discernable. Discussion on this aspect of the drug culture is sorely missing from both the book and the movie.

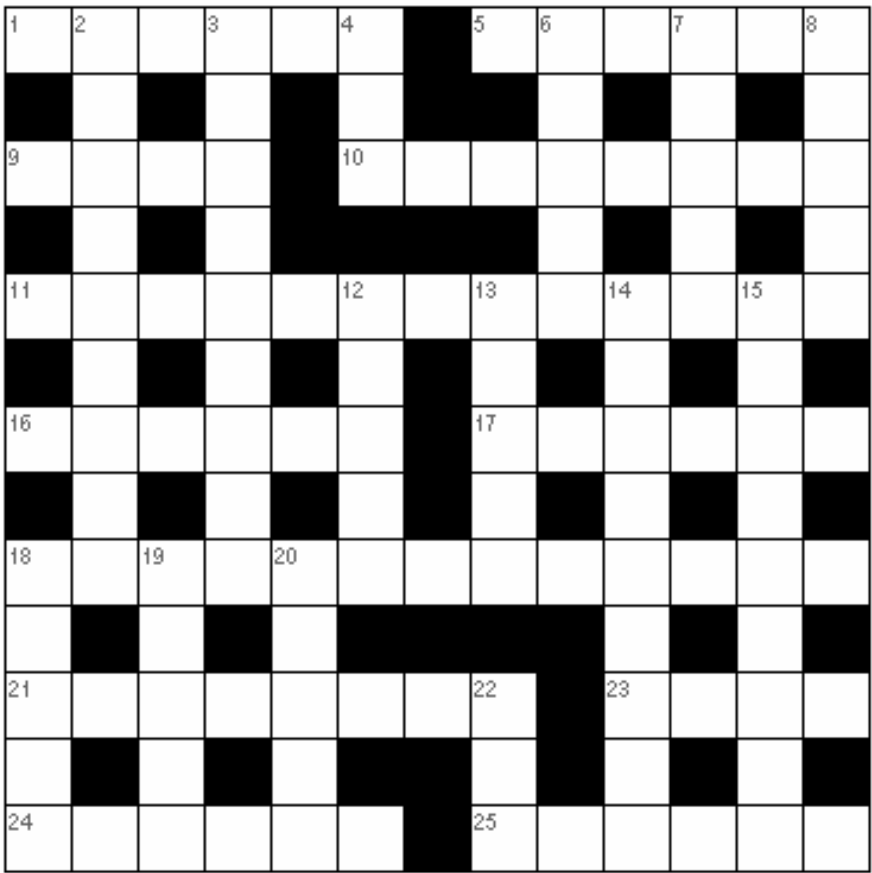
While in the end of the movie, after a massive heroin deal, Renton forsakes his friends for a better future for himself, it is seen how the he has broken the blood-brother ties of his surrogate clan; how he has paid for his one-way ticket out of the proletariat with the proceeds of a heroin deal; thereby further enmiring thousands of his erstwhile fellow addicts. Both these betrayals reinforce the proposition that "there is no such thing as society." In a sense, it seems to say that in the absence of any hope of collective amelioration, the only way out is class defection. For those who remain behind, drugs - taking them, selling them - is all that's left in "the long dark night of late capitalism."



"So why did I do it? I could offer a million answers, all false. The truth is that I'm a bad person, but that's going to change, I'm going to change. This is the last of this sort of thing. I'm cleaning up and I'm moving on, going straight and choosing life. I'm looking forward to it already. I'm going to be just like you: the job, the family, the fucking big television, the washing machine, the car, the compact disc and electrical tin opener, good health, low cholesterol, dental insurance, mortgage, starter home, leisurewear, luggage, three-piece suit, DIY, game shows, junk food, children, walks in the park, nine to five, good at golf, washing the car, choice of sweaters, family Christmas, indexed pension, tax exemption, clearing the gutters, getting by, looking ahead, to the day you die."

- sol

QUIRK Crossword 4



Clues:

Across

- Article by micro-organism was quite Teutonic. (6)
- Exchange founded by Homer's kin returned the subject. (6)
- Solar reflector? (4)
- Twice as mad as Spanish gold? (8)
- Sadist gave and dispersed inconveniences. (13)
- Sounds like he's available to infuse. (6)
- Initial harvest lost! Confusion leads to hunger. (6)
- Star gazer comes from aircraft to get chronicle first. (13)
- Voyeuristic exhibit. (4, 4)
- Ira's curled in traditional garb. (4)
- Learner's title gets mixed up with next to nothing. (6)
- The formula might be Grandma's. (6)

Down

- Movement between tumbled beer can be quite heart breaking. (9)
- Chap dons headgear and juggles ant around in NYC. (9)
- No people are up in this land? (3)
- Bobcat loses a hundred to clergyman. (5)
- Goth frolics with pole in lingerie. (5)
- Positions: NCOs place. (5)
- Value added tax contains French article referring to personal assistant. (5)
- Narnian lion is perplexed about the nose. (5)
- Endless cast and genial characters help reduce pain. (9)
- Get dope about raves? (9)
- Father Latin is characteristic of Peter's dynasty. (5)
- Tag entry containing representative. (5)
- Headless weasel might hold canvas. (5)
- Martian art of roses perhaps. (3)

Solutions next issue

Henry Begins

*In the fair town of Law School, where we place this tale,
There existed a rivalry which would have put Capulet and
Co. to shame.*

*The two warring tribes faced each other one fine day,
To debate whether rhyme was poetry or whether poetry
could be written another way*

*For the sake of convenience let us christen these two deadly
foes*

*As verse libre writers and the rest of the hobos
But the context first, it rose from a page in Quirk
Which had 'Poetry' written on top, but of which in it there
was a dearth.*

*Also, as it is good practice to declare one's loyalties at the
start,*

In case it isn't apparent, I think free verse is a fart.

*They carpet bombed the hobos with an army of one word
lines,*

*That lacked rhythm and meter, and I'm not even going into
rhyme.*

*"Barbarians", they scoffed with their noses in the air
On being asked whether ideological reasons had kept
rhyme from being there*

*"We write for ourselves, not the entertainment of the
masses,*

And if they don't get us, its their fault, the bastards.

*We're angsty individuals, who feel universal pain,
And you nonsense rhymers dare to treat us with disdain?"*

*The hobo camp quailed in the face of this brutal onslaught
And asked for a hero, a fearless rhymers, distraught.*

And then from the shadows such a rhymers arose

Who wouldn't be beaten by toroidal solenoid blows.

She took the free versers on with blistering lines,

And best of all, each of the mighty blows rhymed.

*Behind her the humble nonsense rhymers rallied, for even
the King*

Of the free versers couldn't find a chink in her rhyming.

*She invaded the pages which were previously enemy
dominated,*

And all of a sudden the poetry pages rhymed.

*The free versers hit back with poetry of the "Mary Jane"
type*

But the myth was now shattered, as was the hype.

*Hail Henry, the conquering hero commeth brandishing
rhymes with easy grace*

*Generations shall remember the role she played in giving
rhyme its due Quirk place.*

Francis Buchanan

Hybrid

A weeping willow wed
A happy wisteria
And burst forth with blooms
Of purple hysteria.

Shailaja Dixit

Fuck 377

India Gate. Karol Bagh Bus station. Pitampura crossing. Model town T-point. GK-II market. Sweaty toes are convulsing inside brown shoes. The coarse denim jeans hold onto the sturdy legs which want to stand up and run. The soft short hair bristle on the trim exhausted waist-lines. Blue-pink-grey-red shirts/T-shirts/sleevelesses hide chocolate brown skin, milky-orange skin; summer skin which steams in winter. Burning skin which is opening its pores and pouring out salt. Eyes are playing with gaze. Black hairs are falling over playing eyes. Lips are squeezing each-other. Tongues romancing with teeth, ears erect, nostrils busy. The moon is appearing in the evening smog of Delhi. Men are waiting for men.

A tingle of muscles runs up and down his light brown slab of stomach. Inhaling. Exhaling. Twenty year old breaths. Gushing warm air of the gut. Moving. Grazing. The navel gets lidded occasionally with the wet white vest which sticks to his pithy abdomen. A triangle of sweat forms between the nipples and the navel. He half turns around. The belly stretches. The shirt silhouettes it. Folds and creases ease out on the rubber brown board of his skin. Stay like this for a moment. Emerge again. He faces ahead. Looks around. Expectations in his opium eyes.

The men will play together today.

Manly men have fought the battle.
Razed the confines of smug families and
stepped out into the world, unappreciated.
Streets have been crushed with the traffic of
pride marches.

Yet the cars' window-glass remains safely rolled up.
The colour of the colourful men might leak in and beat up tin Gods.
Kolkata roads have sweated out slogans.
Boys and men and girls and women and non-boys and non-men and non-
girls and non-women.
And Everthings and Nothings have stamped their footprints on the
heterosexist concrete.
Inflexible pavements of the drifting minds.
Words have flown from penises and table-plank eyes have remained closed.
Newspapers have smudged the white with endless streams of black letters.
And smiling faces have passed over them as over obituaries and Wednesday
editorials.
The Gay alphabet finds no palpable shape.
Pens have emptied their strength.
Sinewy hands are exhausted.
The nails are pink with blood.
The notepad is black with blood.
Book readings have run out of authors.
And minds have run out of man.
But men have not run out of men.

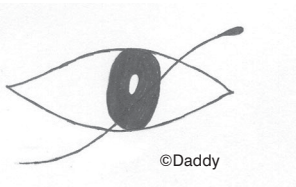
He feels an erection which only swaying thoughts bring along. His feather eyeballs meet black sandpaper eyes. Fuck 377. The men will play together today.

Akhil Katyal

MAKING OURSELVES SCARCE

To carry on with our exacting standards of literature, we have decided to revamp our periodicity this year.
Quirk will now be published **once every four months** so as to be able to reflect a wider range of literary content and style.

Illustrations : Daddy, arjun.rajgopal@gmail.com
Designed by : Ranjini Panikker, racoon.comm@gmail.com



UNVEILING EDITION 8

We started off debating "Why Literature" last January, moved on to the "The Indifferent College Student" in March- April, investigated "The Artist and the Critic" in May-June, "My place in Anarchy" in July-August, celebrated "New Moralities" in September-October, cruised along with "Comfortably Dumb" in November-December and indulged ourselves with "Luxury's Lap" in January-April.' This issue rediscovers the "Rain in my Roots," and we invite you to write for the next- "Taste Abandon!"

WRITING FOR QUIRK: THE SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER EDITION

We really appreciate new writers/artists contributing to Quirk whether through pieces exploring the theme or even completely unrelated to it. We encourage contributions of all kinds - articles, poetry, stories, prose, visual art, crosswords, quizzes, trivia...the list goes on - with absolutely no restrictions on content, style or form.

So go ahead, let the creative juices flow and swirl around freely - and surprise us, or stick to traditional literary styles - you meet our quirky quality standards, we're good to publish!

The theme for the September-December edition of Quirk is "Taste Abandon". The flexible deadline for submissions is November 20th, 2006. And no, your submissions do not have to relate to the theme.

Just to give you a pointer as to how diverse the material that we've published in the past has been - from sports literature to children's literature to sci-fiction to horror to humour - we traverse the whole terrain.

And if you're specially burning with the desire to let out and let the world know what exactly you think of them - albeit from the point of the pen - here's your chance. Because we encourage criticism. Of. Books, movies, music, pubs, restaurants, sportspeople, politics and university bureaucracy - in fact, anything under the sun that may be possibly subject to review.

E-mail your submissions to quirk@nls.ac.in.

For postal submissions, send your contributions to: (pleases mark the envelope with "Attn: Mr. Shantanu Argal")

The Quirk Editorial Collective,
National Law School of India University,
Nagarbhavi, Bangalore - 560072, INDIA.

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Quirk is a not-for-profit student-driven organization with an ambitious mission to promote interest in literature in the college community while fulfilling its role as a comfortable and appropriate forum for quality literary expression for young writers across South Asia.

Copies of the print edition are distributed free of cost in select locations across South Asia, and each edition is also available through Quirk's growing online presence at <http://www.quirk.in>.

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