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GJLL



**Phenomenal
Literature**

A Global Journal devoted to

Language and Literature

A Peer-Reviewed Print Journal

Volume-9, Issue-2 | Jan – Mar 2025

Chief Editor:

Dr VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

Assistant Editor:

Prof. SHASHANK NADKARNI



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PHENOMENAL LITERATURE

*A Global Journal Devoted to
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POETRY

1

Under Care

AMARENDRA KHATUA

I am the crownless king, Come,
Let us use the belief of fingerless
Hands. Come, let us teach geography to
The legless travelers. Come, wearing the
Hearts of the broken sighs. The blind,
the deaf, the dumb men searching
For themselves in the long waiting
Queue of poverty-bring them together \
And come to me.

I do not have my kingdom nor the
weapons to slay the enemies.
I do not have a treasure house to be
opened for all of you with a large
century of promises. Whatever is there,
will be there like faith flying like a
lonesome bird, wearing morning's wings,
All over the sky of our living.
Before it is evening, the moonlight of
Assurance returns, responding to the loud call.

I shall take your tears off your injured
Eyes in the hollow of my palm. I shall
Sail away with all the light years of
your waiting from your grieving days.
I shall annoint your bodies with cream
of fulfillment's loving time. Shimmering
sunlight on the top of the trees which show me
All your healing wounds in preparation
For another day, another battle for need and care.



2

Shaman's Curse

ANDREW SCOTT

I am among you as a normal man.
Not one of you can see the real me.
You do not see the lightening bolts
filled with your thoughts and feelings
hitting through my body causing tremors.

The wave of emotions received,
the tears and fears of each passing person
have me fighting back with internal emotions.
There are times I can hardly stand.

The hair on my skins crawls
when the deceptive ones energy is felt.
Knowing what is happening
in their mind's dark closet
unleashes a shivering anger
that I have to battle inside.

Sadly, good or bad, I cannot intervene
and take away the freewill of people.
The hand of fate are to take over.

I attempt to walk away
so I cannot see the end result
that my body feels.
The curse of this Shaman.



3

Pulled In

ANDREW SCOTT

When I think I am free,
I get pulled back in
at the most unexpected time.
When will you let me be?

How I continue to get pulled here?
Wish I could not remember.
Pretend I am strong,
however, like everyone,
I have a hidden weakness.

I keep to myself,
hoping the people close to me
will not see the stress
of trying to make it
so they do not know.
Deep down, I feel they do.

Wish I knew what the trigger was.
When I feel that everything
is completely under control
the feeling hits out of nowhere.
If I knew what brought it on
I would try to avoid it.

Feel strong at this moment in time.
I could fend off anything.
My body and mind says this.
Trying not to think and look over my shoulder.
Waiting, knowing at anytime
my weakness may pull myself in.



4

Father–My Godliness

AVDHESH JHA

In all my freeze, you remained the feeling of the breeze;
Only to swallow my misdeeds and pave my way for deed,
The softest of softs, the ocean of emotion with sky like heart;
Amidst all odds, equally, you fought my battle like the reed.

Caring all my care, you bestowed your blessings and love,
Only to help me end the other and's by the end of day,
How affectionate of you, irrespective of your age and pain,
You hardly missed to ensure my comfort with your ray.

With your absence, now I lament my richness with you
The life; full of simplicity, patience, perseverance and piety;
My diety, who lived for me and died for me; Now I know,
You were and you are the Godliness and God for me.



5

Conversion

DR. ERNEST WILLIAMSON III

trust the empty mirror
over the birch next to its reflection.
place your brick red lips next to me.
deface whatever faces you
until my face climbs behind the void.
in sight of me a change in you
wishes well a coming veil,
lit with cherry smelling candles.
bright chariots carrying unscripted scripture
deriding thunder in clap of hand.
after the crash from the high
tides of hurt learn new screams.
but as with any death
silence reaping soot of shadow
rarely reveals all that is intuitively untold.



6

Wishing Stars

FHEN M.

I wish I was a butterfly
I'll grow wings when I die.

I wish that I was a phoenix
I'll rise again from cinder and ashes.

I wish I will live forever
forever young and forever fair.

but wishing stars fade, die
wishing stars fade and die.



7

Viewpoint

GARY BECK

Most of the guys I grew up with
are dead, or in prison,
mostly forgotten
except the few who made it big.

One guy is a famous rapper,
wears fur coats, diamond rings,
has a big posse
that follows him everywhere
in expensive limos.

One guy is a big drug dealer,
wears fur coats, diamond rings,
has a big posse
that follows him everywhere
armed with automatic weapons,
travels in armored SUVs.

I don't think of them much
while driving the bus
five nights a week,
four to midnight
on a Queens route
far from where I live.

Sometimes, riding home late at night,
I'm tired from wrestling the big bus,
taking shit from everybody
so I don't get written up
by an undercover rat
looking for violations.

It's usually not too bad,
except at rush hour
when drivers get crazy,
passengers crowded together
afraid of catching Covid,
a weirdo acting out.

But the pay is alright
and the benefits are good.
I got eight more years
til I get twenty
and retire with a pension.

The boys'll start college soon,
but I worry about Keisha
hanging out with black activists
do in what she thinks is right,
pushing me to get involved.

I made a choice
to get a secure job,
not do crime, not die young,
so my kids will have a chance
to do better than me.

We don't talk much,
but I guess they understand
we've got a pretty good life
in a difficult country
that gets crazier and crazier.

Something's real wrong
when people go nuts,
are full of hate,
shoot up schools and churches
until no one feels safe.

I don't like to think of that stuff.
I'll just do my twenty,
maybe a few more years
for a bigger pension
and stay out of trouble.

But once in a while late at night,
going home in the subway,
I think of the rapper, the dealer,
with a little envy for what they got
that I'll never get.



8

Time

GERMAIN DROOGENBROODT

Is time anything else
but the reflection
of something that exists

—or not exists

a cloud of smoke
that arises and returns
to nothingness?



9

A Few Rays of Sun

IRMA KURTI

I spend the day welcoming these few
rays of sun; they somehow manage to
warm my body and my soul. But I
can't escape the night: it is dark,
it holds me suspended in its arms.

The distance between us doubles; the
rays that used to warm me slowly
fade away; around me, only shadows.

No sound of your voice, which, like a
rainbow, pervades my days. It's only
me and my thoughts of you in a long,
endless night, which, like train tracks,
expands and stretches towards nowhere.



10

**Austrians here are Stricter than the
Bourbons**

IVAN POZZONI

The Austrian, of true Aryan stock,
is very strict, does not charm,
achtung kaputt kameraden, demands maximum flexibility
so as to put the whole of Europe back in the 90,
bombs the Milan stock exchanges absolutely free,
better than Radetzky or Bava Beccaris did.

We could try again with a tobacco strike,
mixing hashish with marijuana with detachment,
although I don't think the lotto strike would work,
we are too far removed from the uprisings of 1848,
now the whole nation is pulling to get to the morning,
dreaming of cashing a pair or a five of a kind.

Hoping for a return of the Bourbon dynasty.
the Milanese are not accustomed to revolution,
pawing, clamoring, shitting you off,
returning the next day to the office to work,
not having the energy of the good-tempered Sicilians,
the only special-status region to protest with pitchforks.

Here the Austrians are stricter than the Bourbons,
Merkel thunders from Brussels threatening resolutions
of the European Council, in which sit supranationally paid

the various front men of one or another multinational
corporation,
undecided, with all-Teutonic scientific rigor,
whether to bankrupt Greece or a farm in Valcamonica.



11

Born Backwards

IVAN POZZONI

Why do I keep writing?
B., like Bangladesh, was
sixteen years old, on the windowsill
of the balcony of a Milanese high school,
but sixteen years was not enough
For God to embrace her in his leap.
R., as Romania, was
thirteen years old, feeling a hundred,
and no angel
was flying by her side.
E., as Ecuador, was
thirteen years old, with no Genoa
reminded her of Quito,
in the solitude of her dress
off-brand, disintegrated.
C., like China, was
twelve years old, worn out quickly,
looking out on a balcony
with the desire not to see the world,
throwing herself into the vortex
of performance anxiety.
Their names are not difficult
to forget, they are names
- like me-born in reverse,
pressed against the glass
of the windows of life
jumping from the asphalt.



12

Notes on Silences

JAYDEEP SARANGI

There are days for full sleep, shadows deep
weary pains to open our eyes and reading
all birthday cards and new year gifts
recall every word, love every loss.

Whistles loathe thorns in love.

Knock, knock, knock beyond the moon light on doors
reflected to wake calls for drowsy minds
retrieved stories, their unsaid language.

More than moments, letters mingle souls.

If she has half-forgotten all these years for gathering snows
and the wind

let me remind her how things started, matured, still growing
knowing each other the most like the Ganges to its myth.

Parral to Moorgate I hear her silence rising
on my sinful eyes without any synonym,
memories unfold page after page like stories of the stars.



JEFFREY ZABLE



14

Green Rain

JOAN MCNERNEY

I woke up
looked out
my window and
saw green
pouring down trees
cascading over
emerald grass.

This noon
swollen wet
bursting water
now even heaven
is tinted jade
as birds linger
under branches
listening.



15

To all the Lovers in the Audience

JOHN GREY

To all who carve their love in tree bark,
or scratch it into a school desk
or spray paint it on a rock,
I thank you for your outwardness, your honesty.

I bless public affection whether
it's two huggers in a park bench,
a lingering sidewalk kiss before parting,
or an unmistakable eye-lock across a café table.

Get it out there is what I'm saying.
Even if it's old and reduced to occasional hand-holding.
I get enough sleazy headlines glaring at me.
I want to be reminded, encouraged, comforted even.

So touch each other in public
with the constant news of how you feel.
Share a straw. Run fingers through hair.
Rest a head on a shoulder.

And if I'm nearby, so much the better.
If you grab my attention, I need look nowhere else.



16

Taking The Census

JOHN GREY

Neighborhood's white,
and her skin is as brown
as the covers of their Bibles.
She's walking through,
taking the census,
but she sees more faces behind glass
than at the front doors.
An old man glares down at her,
as if one look will send her back
to wherever she came from.
She marks down his address
as "nobody home."
One woman is relieved
when she realizes
that the young woman
has not moved in up the street,
nor is she casing the houses.
Her family information.
gushes out like a waterfall
of kids, husband, and mother
with early Alzheimer's.
But most of those
who do answer her questions
are more guarded.
One or two do their best
to instill in the intruder

just how white they are
like the color's an Olympic gold
and her shade is lucky
if it's the bronze,
At one house,
she hears a muffled cry from inside,
"There's a spic at the door."
So there's nobody home there either.



17

The Dance

KATHRINE YETS

Push me backwards
and spin me.
Lead me into the rhythm.
My hips rigid.
Each movement
trust.
Push me back
and spin me.
I close my eyes.
Yours are much open.
Feel my hands sweat.
Feel my heart quicken
with each misstep.
Push me back and
spin.
So close.
I move wrong.
We begin again.
I move wrong.
I catch up.
I move wrong.
You forgive me.
I move wrong.



18

At Peace with Art

— after Mori McCrae's Endowment

KEITH INMAN

sometimes the unobstructed view
doesn't make sense —

the deep forest gnarled
in cohesive matted awareness

and you think, among the cacophony
that the world is sound



19

Whistling Bats

KEITH INMAN

in the singing of bats
war has broken out

bringing a license of lies
to bury
the truth under

spent shells
body parts
and tumbled stone roofs

as if
there were no sanctity
where the sun reigns

where a father
shot the child
of his brother

and a son
killed his mother's
cousin

while an aunt
strapped a bomb
beneath her breast —

these children of god —
what is it they do
to their soul



20

Cut Corner

LES WICKS

I have seen borders.
There have been those who pay no regard,
stride across them. One looked back at me
her contempt was breathtaking.

Have been so close
could smell the foreign herbs
understood unique problems of being *over there*
while watching embers of those emigres' bright past.

My future was burnt as well —
important people played the tom-toms
the hungry just hummed.
To step over, shuck
your sacks of success or vacancy
of friends
& property.

There was a photo of me naked
another of my tears.
For a while humanity was a humiliation.
when I had nothing to do with me.
Growing up seems more about surrender
Convinced or convicted
one day I will step over.



21

You Have a Choice Even If

LES WICKS

Good children don't run away.
Clothed in guilt, a dire stripe,
they know life is dance steps
watch their parents' fatigued waltz
& speak only when there's nothing to say.

Wicked children think twice
before they come inside.
Bad kids turn around too often.

Treacherous doors fake open
no one slaps anymore but
somehow there's a canning process –
bright jeep tins
sugar & tepid heat
love you honey
take you everywhere zero.

Good children never disappoint
laws will named after them,
their fines will always rhyme.
They believe inside lines
& will go on to lay more.

Jacqui tried to be
lied to be.
But.
Because fixed on something bright
she lit fires.
Jacqui excelled in edges
we naughty folk love her.



22

Birds

MANDIRA GHOSH

I asked a few birds about
The directions
About the rotations
And of the forces
And the power of
The branches they perch on.

About the sky
Which is their home
About the sea
Where they are directionless
And then
About the this warzone earth
That they begin to abhor..



23

The Dreameries with Egyptian Cats

PAWEŁ MARKIEWICZ

I looked at the window of my villa
and it was midnight.
The brown cat meowed.
He is the guardian of many blissful melancholies.
He is the crimson memory of philosophers.
He is a signpost for golden-hearted poets.
I am tender ancient sage.
I am the poet of time.
I am a becharmed friend of the dawn.

I looked at the aperture of my home
and it was meek morn.
The black cat purred.
He is the protector of the soft, eternal treasure.
He is silver recollection from dazzling nature.
He is a sign of an ancient charming culture.
I am a primeval charm.
I am a lyrist of spell.
I am a companion full of hearts.

I looked at the casement of my habitat.
It was time – Blue Hours.
The fawn cat drank milk.
He is the custodian of musing, Dionysian legends.
He is the golden remembrance of philosophers.
He is an indication of the Golden Fleece.

I am prehistoric thoughts.
I am a bard from wizards.
I am familiar of Plato-cave.

May three cats be shrouded forever! – thus
in the tenderness of the stardust,
fallen in love with amaranthine-celestial Gods,
in afterglow of amazingly tender druids.



24

April Winds (V3)

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

April winds persist
in doing charity work
early elbowing right to left
their way through these willow trees
branches melting reminiscences
of winter remnants off my condo roof
no snow crystals sprinkle
in drops over my balcony deck.
Canadian geese wait impatiently for their
spring feeding on the oozy ground below.
These silent sounds
except for the roar of laughter
those April winds—
geese hear nothing
no droppings from the balcony—
no seeds.



25

Down by the Bridge

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

I'm the magic moment on magic mushrooms
\$10 a gram, amphetamines, heroin for less.
Homeless, happy, Walmart discarded pillow
found in a puddle with a reflection,
down and dirty in the rain—down by the bridge.
Old street-time lover, I found the old bone man we share.
I'm in my butt-stink underwear, bra torn apart,
pants worn out, and holes in all the wrong places.
In the Chicago River, free washing machines.
Flipped out on Lucifer's nighttime journey,
Night Train Express, bum wine, smooth
as sandpaper, 17.5 % alcohol by volume \$5.56—
my boozier, hobo specialty wrapped in a brown bag.
Straight down the hatch, negative memories expire.
Daytime job, panhandling, shoplifting, Family Dollar store.
Salvation Army as an option. My prayers. I've done both.
Chicago River sounds, stone, pebble sand,
and small dead carp float by.
My cardboard bed box is broken down,
a mattress of angel fluff,
magic mushrooms seep into my stupor—
blocking out clicking of street parking meters.
I see Jesus passing by on a pontoon boat—
down by the river, down by my bridge.



26

April Winds (V3)

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

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in doing charity work
early elbowing right to left
their way through these willow trees
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down by the river, down by my bridge.



28

Know Yourself

MITHIL JHA

It wasn't hard to be kind and empathetic to feel the pain,
And so was it hardly hard, to feel the passion of compassion;
However, the ignorance, prompted for the selfish motives
Motivating for the life, without the self and full of illusion.

Pathetic it is, with all knowledge, we hardly know ourself
And what more, if at all, we know ourself as others declare;
Most of which remains more of what we wish and want,
Beyond the fact of veiled character and persona for care.

With completeness of this infinite universe, know that,
Nothing was not yours, neither for you; not even siblings,
What you found by destiny was only to lose; For there is
Nothing to earn or lose lest the heart to live and blessings.



29

Storming Heaven**MOYA RODDY**

You only had to mention something – job interview, coming
birth,
some unexpected diagnosis and my mother would storm
Heaven,
beseech the Virgin, lay siege to saints although
she had her favourites: the Little Flower, Martin de Porres,
St. Jude for Hopeless Cases. She'd pray morning noon
and night, do novenas, visit churches holding special
devotions;
grottos where she's add one more candle to the glowing
numbers –
then just as suddenly stop: the rest, she'd say, is up to Him.



30

A Human Story

NATALIA FERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ-CABAL

I

They threw the books
into the bonfire
and the smoke is now just
a sheet music
of ashes that pushes
the retina until it blows it away.

II

Destiny, said a child
too adult,
is an unreadable line
in the palm
of the hand.

III

Another child
hoped that
the lavender would bloom
and give us clues
to understand
life.
But it only came
a delayed scent

mixed with camphor
and a photo album
without photos.

IV

Intoxicated by the
fullness of disappearing
I set foot
at the point where
the birds are rapturous
and the wind suffocates.

V

We, so uncertain,
we overcame so many
things, but we were
unable to
understand
and to forgive.



31

Counting Stars

NEELAM SHAH

The barren empty canvas is the skies,
Painted all in black to represent,
The darkness of the nights,
Dotted with tiny white paints are the stars.
So many tiny balls of gases burning millions of miles away,
I began to count them in my sleepy mind.
It took some time counting the stars for hours.
The sky appeared to be pitch black, I counted,
Some more stars without a single flaw.

Gazing across the developing space, a cold harsh Wind blew
gently across my face, and with nothing to stop me seizing
this night, I watched as more stars appeared into my sight.

No emergence of any grey clouds to stop the brightness,
As the stars lit the sky, they gave me reasons to dream.
And as the pitch black dark sky began to fade away.....
And become lighter at dawn, when the sun slowly started,
To rise. I lost the count of stars.
As a new day was born.



32

Postmodern Brewery

QUDSI RIZVI

You are drunk —
Yes, inebriated,
with the heady liquor
your Great Master, Capitalism, pours —
packaged, labeled, and sold
as a 'new identity,'
brewed on 'Feminist farms,'
with emancipation guaranteed.

Effervescent,
a postmodern flavor bubbles over —
a flavor spelled in nakedness
that markets their wine
while your sexualized body
is consumed,
gazed upon,
used.

Look closely —
the 'highly commercialized' expert gaze
measures your contours,
commodified for allure,
shaped to attract.
And in return,
you do get money,
you do get 'freedom,'
but at what cost?

Blinded by the glow of sexualized fame,
you stumble further,
tipsy on glamour's mirage.
Played, fettered,
drawn deeper into the snare—
a gilded cage of exploitation.

The deceptive system chuckles,
counting its profit
as you sip again from this bitter cup.
Enslaved anew,
in this modern masquerade,
you swirl your wine
but cannot see
the bars around you.



33

Lies That Shade

RAM KRISHNA SINGH

How long shall I seek freedom in the myths we unmake
licking hairy darkness or feeling sweetness of hips
through untamable wildness of the heart chase images
that abide circles of paroxysm ascending from
the mist and raw voices staring spume in the faces
as each star twinkles uncertainty crossing the moon
what is left to slice out of the passage through red light
except old sorrows ready to leap to the bone?
now there's nothing to hold on to against lies that shade
bondage of nearness and the horizon I couldn't touch



34

Absurd Maze

RAM KRISHNA SINGH

Here they make a hue and cry
threat adversaries of direct action
to save *sanaatan* from vandals
desecrating the idols with hammer
painting slogans to decimate
a generation gone wild in *aastha*

bulldoze shelters, lynch or burn
for sins of ancestors or homes here
the macho blokes mad in power
can't show an image of what they've done
to save fellow brothers in neighborhood

keep looking for greener pasture
in Europe and America that shun
spreading further darkness for natives
trapped in apocalyptic ruin
with dystopian designs they all play
games of survival in absurd maze



35

The Drifter

RAMZI ALBERT RIHANI

Many years have passed.
In his journey, he chased fulfillment
but caught wisdom.
Wisdom got him fulfilled.
A circle is complete.
Is it the process or the end?
Unable to separate both, his process never ends.
Fulfillment and wisdom become one.

He found out why he was born.
He went looking for himself,
then decided to recreate himself instead.
The stronger he was, the harder the encounter.
Sometimes, storms come to disrupt your life,
and other times, they come to start your life.

He never dwelled on his agonies in life.
He used them as the foundation for his strength.
What he does not have given him his freedom.
What he has fades it away.

Even dreams take a little time.
The day he stops dreaming,
his dreams come alive.



36

If All Were Virtuous

SHAFKAT AZIZ HAJAM

If all were virtuous, nothing would be unfair.
None would be rapacious, none would take lion's share.
There would be no witch, there would be no wizard.
There would be no guile, slaying or any fraud.
Your joys would be mine, my woes would be yours.
You'd enjoy my success, at your failure I'd shed tears.
No one's expectancy would be ever hurt.
All would venerate each other, none would spread dirt.
If it were really so, the well off would have built my nest,
Where being knackered at forty, with my fam,
I would be taking rest.



37

The Trial

TAPAN KUMAR PRADHAN

Are you sure this is what happened –
Your statement, I mean
is it all true?

*How many times shall one speak under oath?
I remember I dreamed a lot – during daytime
even in classroom, sometimes teacher asked
something, and I answered hurriedly, and ya'all
ya all those girls burst out laughing, laughing...*

There is not a single injury mark. No tear
on the clothes. I mean, no signs
of any struggle at all

*Father took me once to the ol' butcher's shop
I saw the giant steel blade glisten, dripping red
With a single white flash the bird was silent
Not even a flutter in the wings, no croaking*

Can you tell us exactly how it happened, I mean
the exact position. How many were they
the exact places they touched

*it was a narrow alley where even noon was dark
a bearded shopkeeper used to sit me on his lap*

*and offer me candies (and a doll). Later the boys
snatched my doll away, and pulled out all its hairs
When I cried they put two oranges inside my frock
and pressed till I was drenched. Holy cow, they teased*

Our lady officer who conducted the finger test
has this to say, I mean – how do I say
I mean, you are habituated to it

*Yep, the campus does it to you, as you sleepwalk
into smoking den at 2 am, before its lonely nights
devour you. If you kept away, you did not belong*

The dress you were wearing that night
Is it, I mean - is this what
you normally wear?

*I was a rebel girl. The little pink double frilled frock
my dead mother got stitched for my twelfth birthday
I hated it. The moment I reached home I threw it
on the floor. Tomboy – they called me. Tomboy*

But you did know all of them, didn't you
You knew 'em for last six months
You visited that flat earlier

*Yes! Yes! I did all that. Yes, I alone am guilty!
Hang me. Shoot me. Rip open my abdomen
Bloody finish the work you've already started*

Long ago.



38

You

YUCHENG TAO

you fly away, my love,
with the pale moonlight,
the pale hue
on my face.
i am fragile after the loss.
the passing years
curl like mist
at my window, leaving
traces on my hand —
that is your past.
i try to forget
and rebuild myself,
turning my brokenness
into whole wings,
hoping to find you.
you are like a dove,
flying far away,
the pale hue
on my face
beneath the moonlight



SHORT STORY

1

Who is to be blamed?

K. V. DOMINIC

"Mama, our class is making a tour to Mysore-Bangalore-Ooty on 29th of this month. Our entire classmates are going. We also want to go with them," Bindu told her mother Saritha.

"Yes mama, please request papa to grant us the permission," Salim supported Bindu.

"How much is the charge?" Saritha asked.

"Only two thousand rupees per student. It is a three day tour," Salim replied

"Four thousand rupees is a huge amount for us, dear children. We are poor people and we earn our livelihood through the daily wages your papa earns by working in the cardamom estate," Saritha said.

"Mama, we have never gone for a tour and it is the last occasion we have got to go with our classmates. If there is no cash with papa now, let him borrow the amount from the estate owner whom he has been serving for many years. He can repay the amount by installments," Bindu suggested.

"Okay, let papa come after the work. I shall tell him. Now you go and do your homework," Saritha replied.

Bindu and Salim are the twin children of Saritha and her husband Majid. They are studying in the 10th standard in the nearby government school. Saritha and Majid belonging to Hindu and Muslim families loved each other and married despite their families objected to. After the marriage since the parents didn't permit them to live in their houses Majid took a rented house not far away from Saritha's parents' house. Majid was a hardworking man and he could easily meet the expenditure of the house. The twins were born to them after a year of their marriage. Gradually the resentment that Saritha's parents had to her daughter dissolved and they gave 20 cents of their agricultural land to her. Majid could build a small house there with the money he earned through the daily labour. Fortunately, the State government granted him three lakhs rupees under the housing scheme for the poor. Majid and Saritha decided not to have any more children since their education and bringing up is a costly affair. Both Bindu and Salim are very bright students and they are the top rankers of the class. For that very reason they were the most favourites of the teachers.

Majid returned after his work in the evening and Saritha presented the matter of the tour to him. He went to the room where the children were studying and told them: "Mama told me that you both want to go for the excursion."

"Yes papa, we have never gone out of our State. This is a golden opportunity," Bindu replied.

"We will never get such an opportunity, dear papa," Salim added.

"Okay, you are granted permission. You may enroll the names to the class teacher. I will somehow amass the money needed for the tour. After all, your enjoyment and happiness is our happiness. Now, continue your studies," Majid said.

The tour day came and Majid accompanied Bindu and Salim to the school early morning for the see-off. There were some thirty students gathered there for the tour. Their parents were also present there to bid them farewell. The bus with the students started the journey at 7 am. Bidding them goodbye and best wishes Majid returned to this house. After breakfast he went to the estate for his labour.

It was monsoon season. The season started late this year instead of the regular beginning in the first week of June. It is the end of July and it started raining heavily from the morning. Monsoon is always a nightmare for the people living in the high ranges. Landslides are regular catastrophes in many mountains and hills. In a thickly populated State like Kerala that is small in size, people are compelled to risk living in small houses on the slopes of the hills. When it is continuously raining in the night one can't sleep peacefully.

Majid returned home in the evening after his labour. Both Majid and Saritha felt the absence of their children in the house. It is for the first time that they are going to sleep without their children beside them. The rain continued uninterruptedly. The red alert of rain conveyed through the TV news worried Majid and Saritha and after the dinner they went for sleep.

Majid and Saritha never dreamt that it was going to be their last sleep. The morning of 30th July 2024 broke out with the most tragic news of the series of landslides that occurred in the villages of Punjirimattom, Mundakkai, Chooralmala, and Vellarimala in Wayanad District of Kerala. Many government agencies such as the armed forces, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), fire and rescue services, and forest and wildlife authorities, as well as volunteers, launched a

large-scale rescue mission to search for the survivors. It was reported that 420 people died, 397 people got injured and 118 people were missing. Seventeen entire families died. More than 1,555 houses and other buildings including schools, a dispensary, the panchayat bhawan, the electricity board office, and 136 community buildings were damaged. The landslides also devastated a total of 600 hectares of land, including 310 hectares of farmland.

The house of Majid and Saritha was swept away in the torrent of water and mud and their bodies could not be traced out. Thus they were among the list of those who were missing. The tragic news shook the entire State and the country. Cancelling the further tour, the bus with the school students returned. There was an outburst of loud cries and wails from the students when they saw the devastated expanse of large areas where their houses existed. They were all crying for their parents and siblings. The volunteers led them all in the bus they came to the relief camps that were opened in the neighbouring village. Even the school they studied was also taken away by the waters.

Professors Raveendran and his wife Sangeeta were viewing the tragic news of the landslides in the TV. They were deeply moved at the tragedy that befell to the poor victims. Both of them are professors in the department of English in the government college at Thiruvananthapuram. They are well settled and lead a very comfortable life. Unfortunately they have no children.

Watching the news, Prof. Sangeeta exclaimed: "Why is God so cruel to the poor? If they could afford to, those families would have lived comfortably in the low ranges

rather than living in the ecologically sensitive areas. Who is to be blamed for this tragedy?"

Prof. Raveendran replied: "Why should you blame God? There are reasons for natural calamities. To great extent, man is responsible for such tragedies. God has never requested men to live on those hilly slopes. He created this bountiful planet and it can accommodate and feed all the human beings and other beings. God has never divided the land among the people. He hasn't created division among the people—haves and have-nots or the rich and the poor. If those land owners in the low ranges shared their lands to the homeless poor people there would not have been any need to occupy the hilly forest areas, live there and invite such tragedies."

Prof. Sangeeta: "Darling, you are talking about a utopian socialist society where all are equals. Man being selfish this idea won't be practical. In fact, the government could have dissuaded the people from living in those sensitive areas. Moreover it should find safe places where houses should be built for the homeless and job opportunities should be given to them for their survival."

Prof. Raveendran: "You are right, dear. The state should be a welfare state. One main reason for the recent landslides is the deforestation and the innumerable quarries mining the rocky hills. The explosion from the quarries shakes the grip of the soil on the rocks. Government should definitely stop function of such quarries. Similarly there should be control over the construction of huge buildings under the resort mafia on the sensitive zones."

Prof. Sangeeta: "Darling, look at the flash news moving along the videos of the landslide site. There are five children who have lost both their parents. Among them are the twins-- a boy and a girl. Why don't we adopt them? It would be a

great service and no doubt the children would make our future life full of happiness.”

Prof. Raveendran: “That is great idea, dear. At this age we can’t expect to have our own children. We have undergone much treatment for it but that was of no use. We shall visit the relief camp at the earliest and make a request to the government authorities for the adoption. I hope there won’t be much difficulty to get those children since none of their relatives would take the burden of looking after them as they are all poor people. Before visiting the camp, let us contribute a good amount to the Chief Minister’s Distress Relief Fund for the rehabilitation activities.”

Prof. Sangeeta: “I was about to tell you that, darling. Let us contribute one lakh rupees each from our salary account. We shall do it online now. We shall visit the relief camp next Sunday and make a request for the adoption.”

Both of them remitted one lakh rupees each to the CMDRF through their mobile phones. As decided, they visited the camp the next Sunday. They made their request to the camp authorities and they showed them the twins—Bindu and Salim. Though they appeared very sad there was some charm on their faces. The professors longed to hug them but remained silent. Unless the formalities are over they can’t own them.

The children remained in the camp for another week and they were given counselling as to regain their normal mental stage. After the psychological treatment for a week they could cope up with the reality. The professors visited the camp again and the teachers of the twins were present there. The teachers told Bindu and Salim that Prof. Raveendran and Prof. Sangeeta would be their father and mother and they would take them to their house at Thiruvananthapuram where

they will continue their studies in a government school. Both Bindu and Salim were happy to hear this glad news. Thus all the formalities of the adoption being over, the professors took Bindu and Salim in their car to their house.



Note: The story is a blend of imagination with historical facts.

2

Finding Philip K Dick

ANTHONY ILACQUA

"Vicky, please," Phil said. "Stop laughing, at least."

"I don't think I've ever even seen you read a book," she said. She took a deep breath. "Now that I think about, I've never seen you read anything."

"I read," Phil said.

"When?"

"Well, I read a lot in college."

"Philip K Dick?" she asked.

"Well, I was named after him."

"Dick?"

"Philip," Phil said. "That was funny."

"Okay, I'm trying to understand," she said. She became suddenly very serious. She looked over her shoulder to the clock, a cheap plastic thing with football helmets for the numbers. It was almost eight o'clock. "I gotta go to work," she said.

"Yeah," Phil agreed.

"We can talk about this in the afternoon," she said.

"Yeah," Phil said.

"Maybe you can come to your senses," she said. She laughed again only this time it was sizably less sincere. "Just

so I have something to think about today, who's idea was this? Yours or Charlie's?"

"Mine," Phil said. "Charlie hasn't heard about it yet."

"When did you talk to Charlie?" she asked.

"Well," Phil said.

"You haven't," she said.

"No," Phil said.

"So you want to ride from here to Ft Morgan on your bicycle with a best friend you haven't seen in years to visit a grave of a writer you haven't read?"

"Yeah," Phil said. "I guess."

"Aside from the obvious problems with this plan, when was the last time you rode a bike?"

"Oh," Phil said. He looked at that bike everyday hanging in the garage. "A long time, I guess."

"I've never seen you ride it," she said. And in the ten years of marriage she had never seen him do any sort of activity. "You have my blessings Phil. Ride half way across the state."

"Thanks," Phil said. "That's really great."

"And for the love of God, ask your doctor's permission. I have to go."

"See you tonight," Phil said. He reached toward her. She gave a terse hug and walked heavily through the kitchen toward the garage.

Phil watched her car pull from the garage, through the driveway and onto their street, South Judson Street. He slowly retreated into the depths of the house and back to his

coffee. "Doctor's permission," he said. He shook his head. The last several trips to the doctor had not gone well.

Yeah, the cholesterol was too high, yes, per-hypertension, yes, the diabetes will come should he not lose weight, but he had stopped smoking and that had to be something. Phil drank about half the tepid coffee and then put the cup in the sink. He looked at his watch, he thought about Sports Center, it was what he watched at this hour anyway.

At the kitchen table he wrote a list on a purple sticky note: *call Charlie & Dr. Wong. Get a Philip K Dick novel. Tune up bike.*

He looked at his watch again. It would be too early to call Charlie. He didn't feel like doing the other stuff. He walked away from the kitchen.

In his bedroom, he sat on the edge of the bed. He slowly fell to his back and closed his eyes. He remained on the bed for several minutes, until he felt himself slowly starting to nod off.

On his way to work, he stopped at a drive thru, the one fast food joint that sold burgers for breakfast. Later, Phil brushed the greasy crumbs from his suit as he turned into the office parking lot. He pulled into the closest parking space after circling the building. He switched off the car and remained still for a minute.

Few people came or went from the building during the mid-morning. Phil always came late, he stayed late too. He dealt with the Pacific office and they were one hour behind. The real advantage with the Pacific office was that they knocked off for the day early too.

In the foyer of the building, Phil touched the up button in the elevator landing. The bell rang, the doors opened and Phil just stood there until the doors closed again. He turned his head and then his body and looked at the stairs which led to the mezzanine. They weren't even a full flight of stairs, but it wasn't often, practically never that Phil climbed them.

He cracked a can of Coke at his desk. He drank half of it in one gulp while he waited for his computer to open up.

He typed "Exercise for fat guys" in the search bar. When the results came up, he scanned the headings but didn't open a single web page.

He counted the cans of Coke on the shelf, seven cans. He could drink them all today, not an unlikely thing to do, or he could drink one a day for a week. The one a day Coke idea seemed horrifying. He drank at least three six-packs a week at work. Coca-Cola was how he vanquished the cigarettes.

He swallowed the last of the contents of the can and looked at the label, settling on the nutritional facts. He tossed the empty can away.

He stared into the computer screen. In the search field, Phil typed: "What is a calorie?"

It was really just a procrastination. It was, a calorie, after all. It was the amount of energy it took to raise one liter of water one degree Celsius.

Phil picked up the phone, pulled at the cord. How antiquated. He touched a few numbers then placed the phone on the base. In his breast pocket, Phil opened the cloth to retrieve his small phone book. He opened it, looked at the letters along the edges of the pages.

Charlie's number hadn't changed, at least not from his memory. Phil pursed his lips. He lifted the receiver with a

level of determination he hadn't had the first go around. He pushed the numbers on the pad quickly and waited patiently.

The other end went through. It began to ring and Phil began to fret a little. He pulled his sleeve up and looked at his watch. "It isn't too early," he said. He hadn't heard the end of the ringing. *Too early for what? Hello?* "Oh," Phil said. "Charlie?" *Yeah?* "It's Phil," Phil said. *I know,* Charlie said. "Have I called at a bad time?" Phil said. *No Phil, what can I do you for?* "Well," Phil said. "Well, how are you?" *I'm fine Phil. What's your business?* "Well," Phil said. "Well, this is what I want," he said. He took a deep breath. "Well Charlie, I'm calling because I want to take a bicycle tour to Ft Morgan, maybe two or three nights of camping on each side. In Ft Morgan we can see Philip K Dick's grave. And I want you to go with me. What do you say?" *You want to ride bikes?* "Yeah," Phil said. *Why are you calling?* "I just want to go on a bike tour," Phil said. *Why?* "Well, we went on a ride before, and it was the greatest time." *That was twenty years ago.* "It was the best time of my life." *It's too late. Too much water under the bridge.* "Charlie, Charlie," Phil pleaded. "You still love Philip K Dick?" *Yeah Phil, I do. I don't think I love you.* "Fair, please. That's fair. But please, it's not too late." *Thanks for calling Phil. So long.* And he hung up.

Phil stared at the phone. He put the receiver down. He waited what felt was just long enough before he dropped his face.

Two cans of Coke later, Phil decided to call Dr. Wong's office. He made an appointment. And that call, seemed so much more successful than the call to Charlie. There were too many things now to consider. But the biggest thing, of any real event was to get off to see Philip K Dick.

Phil left the office early. He felt guilty about it, but there weren't any other reasons to stay. It was time to go.

He drove to the small used bookstore on Main Street. Phil had never been in it before. He'd had no cause. Vicky read books, but he hadn't read a book for years. Not since college.

He pulled the door open slowly, and with some effort. He breathed easy after he got inside. The place seemed stilled. He figured it was stilled only because he had come in. He walked toward the counter. The two women stopped what they were doing and stared.

"Do you," he began. He breathed heavy. Too much sugar, too much caffeine, it was all clear now. Do you? Do you have? Do you have any books to help a fat guy? Do you have any books to help a fat guy get thin? "Do you have any Philip K Dick?" Phil asked.

"Oh," one of the women said. "Yes, Sci Fi," she said.

"Maybe in classics," the other said.

"You know," the first began as she walked from behind the counter. "He died broke, no one knew that he was a genius. He wrote stories that became big time movies: *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *Minority Report*."

"He's buried in Ft Morgan," Phil said.

The clerk stopped. She turned and faced him. She looked into his eyes. She looked from one eye to the other. She smiled. "Ft Morgan, Colorado?"

"Yeah," he said. "Do you ride bikes?"

"Bikes?" she asked.

"Yeah, do you have a bike?"

"Why, no," she said. "I never learned how to ride one."

"It's too bad," Phil said.

She looked far away and to the distance. She looked back to Phil and then focused on him. "Yeah, it really is."

"Well, you can still learn," Phil said.

"You're heavy," she said.

"I'm going on a diet," Phil said defensively.

"No, oh no," she said. She was defensive now too. "I didn't mean, I didn't mean that, I meant that you're deep."

"I'm going on a pilgrimage," he said.

"I thought you said diet?"

"Same thing."

"Oh," she said. "Phil K Dick." She turned and started to walk between two aisles of books. Phil walked close to her. He waited and looked at her and she looked over the spines.

"I've wasted my life," Phil said.

"Yeah?" she said keeping her eyes on the books. "I've wasted my too."

"I doubt it," Phil said. "No, I've really wasted mine."

"Me too," she said.

"Well," Phil began. "I'll at least have Philip K Dick."

"You'll always have Philip K Dick," she said. "Anything else?"

Phil looked at her, shook his head and smiled.

She turned from him and began to walk down the rows of books. When she got to the end, she turned to face him. "So?" she asked. "How have you wasted your life?"

"I've just been lazy. I lost my best friend and I'm losing my wife and chances are my doctor won't have good news for me."

"Oh," she said. "Heavy."

"Yeah," Phil said. He turned back to the books. He took all three of the Philip K Dick options. He was surprised to see the woman still standing at the end of the bookcases. He smiled and nodded again. When he neared her, he slowed his pace.

She looked into his eyes. "You know," she began. "Your life doesn't need to be a waste from here."

"No," Phil said. "It doesn't."

"It's like they say, you can never start too late for a new beginning."

"Yeah," Phil said. "Or a new ending."

"Here," she said. She held her hands out. "Let me take those." She walked back to the counter and began to operate the register. Phil just stared into the desk. "Well," she said at least. "Seventeen dollars, thirty two." She waited patiently and watched Phil as he counted the money. "Well, good luck to you. I hope you find what you're looking for."

"Yeah," Phil said. He picked up the books. "Me too."



3

The Trap Door

SHAURYA ARYA-KANOJIA

Imagine living in a house for fifteen years and, then, one day discovering a trap door that you had never noticed before in the garage. For years it had been there, sitting under the carpet on the floor. Shouldn't you have suspected a red flag when your husband told you he needed a carpet for the garage? After all, the garage would be the last place to require any kind of carpeting.

"Can you imagine the dirt the car would drag in?" you had asked your husband.

But he had assured you he would take care of it. "It won't get dirty," was his remark. "Besides, you won't even need to go into a garage. I'll take care of cleaning it."

You wanted to ask him how that was going to be feasible, but you were tired after a long day of scrubbing the place, unpacking, setting the kitchen, and going to the market to get some essentials. And, so, you gave in. "All right," you told him.

Your husband got the carpet he wanted. A large, brown mat decorated in the corners with an abstract design of yellows and oranges. When he shows it to you, you don't like it. But it doesn't matter, because he reminds you that you had earlier agreed to letting him keep it in the garage.

So, you relent.

Over the years, the carpet sat on the floor of the garage. Far away from your eyes, and, more importantly, from your

mind. Neither did your husband ever give you the keys to the garage nor did you ever ask for it. You didn't drive; hated to, in fact. And, besides, he had taken the responsibility of its upkeep, so it never even crossed your mind to check up on how it was.

Through all those years of your marriage, during which you gave birth to two wonderful kids, the trap door that you learned of today had been in that garage. A part of you wonders if your husband knows about it. And, if he is as unaware about the mysterious trap door as you are, wouldn't he be even more flabbergasted after learning of its presence; considering no one but he ever visited the garage?

But you know he knows about it. Maybe he even installed it. What else was the carpet bought for, if not to keep the trap door a secret? Why else had he wanted you to not visit the garage, had even emphasised he would maintain its cleanliness? How could she even have thought it possible that a man who didn't understand that socks and underwear went into their respective drawers (and not the other way round) could take absolute care of an entire garage?

And, yet, you had. Maybe because you thought it was one less thing to worry about. Or maybe you were happy your husband was finally coming around and taking initiative in household matters, something which you often complained to him about.

Nevertheless, he got what he wanted, didn't he? Yes, he carved a trap door in the floor because it led down to... something he wanted to keep concealed from you.

What exactly could it be, though? A man cave? The very concept of a man cave maybe laughable to you, but did you not notice how excited he would get each time he told you he was slipping down to the garage – to fix the car, or work on

some tools, or whatever story he cooked up that you didn't care enough to listen to?

You never bothered asking him why he was fond of the garage so much; the subject of the carpet was so old by now you didn't even remember it. *It's all okay*, you would tell yourself. *He's just a boy who needs some time away from the missus*. There was nothing to suspect. Because, even though he may have written two bestselling spy thrillers and introduced to the world one of "the smartest detectives of our modern age," in reality you haven't known anyone as absentminded as him. You perhaps even called him dumb-witted once. You were sorry you said that, but you couldn't lie to yourself that you didn't mean it.

And, all the while you lived with that misconception, he was living a secret life. Right under your nose.

Today, as you stand over the trap door, a flicker of outrage courses through your body. Married couples do keep secrets from each other. Even though you have intentionally kept him uninformed about several developments in your life (your brother's divorce, the sexually explicit messages your neighbour sends you, the miscarriage you had), but this, you think, is a bit too much.

At this point, you're beyond believing the supposed sanctuary he has created for himself downstairs is harmless. Are you so invasive a wife that he needs to find a place to be by himself underground? For a flicker of a second, a frightening thought forms in your mind. Is he cheating on you?

You push that dreadful idea away the instant it starts gaining shape.

This is preposterous, you tell yourself. He cannot possibly be cheating on you. And not because you believe he would be easily caught (after all, you've spent fifteen years in

close intimacy with him, and know him inside out), but because you trust him.

But, you remind yourself, if he wanted to keep this secret life hidden from you, why would he ask you today to go in there? "I'm out for work, honey," he had said. "Can you run to the garage and send the carpet to the drycleaners?"

He couldn't be so daft to believe she wouldn't notice the door under it. And, she knew he knew this about her, once she found the door, she would want to investigate. So, what was the trick?

He wanted you to find it, you tell yourself. He has kept it concealed all this while, but now he wants to come out clean.

When you ask that voice why that was so, it doesn't respond.

Before your mind, in its state of overdrive, would conjure any more scenarios, you bend down and lift the door. You expect a musty stink to hit you, but you smell perfume. You climb down, taking each step carefully. The fact that it's not as dark as you had expected surprises you. There's a faint glow of light. As you reach the bottommost step, you look around. The wall behind you is adorned with framed movie posters from that collection he considers his pride and joy. In the shadows up ahead, you notice movement. A slight shuffle of the feet, a soft murmur.

Your heart is hammering, your head a box of a million thoughts. Just when you think you can't take it anymore, the lights come on, and your family screams.

"Surprise! Happy birthday!"



NOVEL EXCERPT

1

Good Vibrations

(Chapter 20)

PETE MULLINEAUX

The bear-like Dr Krank unveiled three musical instruments: an electric piano keyboard, an antique type of Moog-synthesiser, and finally what looked like a large dried vegetable joined to a neck of wood covered in strings. Satisfied, he flicked back his shaggy mane of hair.

"It looks like we're in for some entertainment." The US President tried to sound upbeat against the general gloom. Russia's leader also forced a grim smile.

CERN's Head scientist stepped forward to set the stage for their next speaker. "Mr Krank has a remarkable expertise in music and sound. He's going to share that with us now."

Krank's fingers danced on the piano keys, sending out a blast of heavy rock music.

"*Smoke on the Water*, by Deep Purple," enthused the British PM, momentarily looking half his age.

The music switched to a rousing opera aria. "Ah the World Cup, Italia 90," the Italian President sighed nostalgically.

Now came the familiar uplifting orchestral strings heralding the overture from Prokofiev's *Peter & the Wolf*.

The Russian President nodded approval. "That's who we need on our side, someone who isn't afraid of the big bad wolf."

Now these optimistic tones collapsed into a rattle of menacing drums announcing the war-like 'Mars theme' from Holst's iconic *Planet Suite* – a less than subtle reminder of where they all stood. "Quite a tour we're getting," declared Australia's Prime Minister.

Right on cue, there followed the primal sound of a didgeridoo, then a mellifluous glide into the breathy sound of Peruvian pan-pipes and finally a soft lament from an Irish tin whistle.

Then the music stopped.

Dr Krank put down the keyboard and bowed, receiving polite applause. The Head of CERN stepped forward. "I invite you all to examine your reactions to the various pieces of music that you have just heard. Was it purely cerebral, intellectual?"

"Of course not, it was emotional," said India's Prime Minister. "I went from happy to mad, sad – almost peaceful at the end."

"Let us hope this episode goes that way for us," said Vietnam's President.

"Amen to that," responded another world leader.

The CERN Chief continued. "What do we *feel*, ladies and gentlemen? What deep emotions are we capable of? By asking this question we may come closer to understanding these Elders."

"They are human beings like us; at least we hope they are," said South Africa's President.

“Or perhaps we should be hoping they are *not* like us?” countered Pakistan’s leader.

The CERN Chief pressed on. “What is a human being? What is life? What is everything made of? Is it only atoms and sub-particles: purely physical and chemical building blocks? Someone mentioned memories, thoughts and feelings? Miss Tanaka earlier demonstrated how water crystals can be manipulated and distorted.”

Cuba’s President raised her hand: “These Elders may have been distorted in the same way, is that what we’re saying?”

“Dr Krank has illustrated a connection between feelings and sound; or rather, vibration: it is scientific fact, going back to Pythagoras – yes, he of the infamous theorem, that everything has a note. The Universe is made of sound, perhaps that’s why we say it started with the ‘Big Bang!’ Much of it is of course outside the range of our human hearing.”

Thailand’s Prime Minister leaned forward. “I see where this is going. You are pointing out our sensory limitations as humans, even compared with other Earth creatures: bats, dolphins, dogs?”

“And not just hearing,” replied the Argentine President. “I was reading about perfume and how our sense of smell is inferior to many creatures, butterflies for instance.”

“Even amongst humans there is variation,” added the Canadian Prime Minister. “The Inuit of the Arctic can find their way through fog from the smell of seasonal flowers.”

“It all goes to make you feel just a little humble,” offered Slovenia’s President, reflecting the general mood.

It was all perhaps too humble and subdued for some present. The Russian President threw up his hands. "Humble-bumble, comrades: we need some pride, some spirit. Above all we need a weapon!"

The CERN Chief made a gesture requesting further patience. "Ladies and gentlemen, we recognise you are politicians and not scientists. Unlike us you probably would not wish to spend a lifetime staring at test tubes or countless pages of computer data. We will cut a long story short. What Miss Tanaka and Dr Krank have revealed is a window to understanding these Elders and their technology. Think how they can travel from one place to another in an instant; they have by-passed time! They have found some way to deconstruct something as complex as an individual unique human being – into what, watery patterns of vibration – and then re-assemble the same exact package somewhere else. Even across the span of galaxies. It is a miracle!"

It was a timely reminder of the scale of the challenge facing them. Silence fell as the delegates bit their tongues.

Surprisingly, the CERN Chief offered a smile. "But, before we become too despondent, we have perhaps glimpsed something vaguely comparable here within our own modest quantum research – how some exotic sub-particles also appear to do the impossible, that is by-pass communication limits of light, be here one instant – there another – even seem to be in the same, yet different places at the one time!"

"I have to say, most of this is just a little over my head," said the British Prime Minister, scratching one ear.

"Might I offer something comparable? Imagine showing a smart phone to an eighth century Viking? In medieval times they asked how many angels could fit on a pin: even a

Renaissance genius like Leonardo de Vinci would have been challenged by a computer chip with the capacity to make millions of decisions in an instant. Remember, it took our ancient forebears untold years to learn how to break up a stone to form flints. Many more before we could harness the energy of fire. What a great leap forward discovering the hidden forces of electricity, nuclear power? We can only dream of what lies further ahead, waiting to be found in the dark energy and dark matter of the Universe?"

The eminent scientist turned to include Dr Krank "So now think further. What if instead of zeroes and ones, the current basic language of our computers, we used a more multi-layered system of musical notes to move information around? Imagine the infinite variations of tone and pitch: layer on layer of complexity we can barely dream of."

Dr Krank lifted up his second instrument. "Let me present a Theremin, or Etherophone, developed as long ago as the 1920's: no keys, I rely on a radio antennae and sensitive gravity fields to guide the rise and fall of melody." To demonstrate, 'The Bear' waved his paws around like a demented orchestra conductor, eliciting the most extraordinary sounds.

The US President led some spontaneous applause. If music was to be the answer, surely with Bach, Taylor Swift and Mr Krank they had plenty in their armoury. The CERN Chief stepped forward again. "So, I'm sure you're wondering how this connects with what Miss Tanaka had to offer us earlier?

"You have read my mind," answered the Russian President.

"You will remember she talked about 'speaking' to the water crystals. But crystals do not relate to the literal meaning

of words, which might have been communicated to them in any language, rather they pick up the *intention* in the words, the emotional sub-text, through vibrations emitted by the speaker. They are like children listening to their parents talking in another room: not hearing the actual words but understanding what is going on by the pitch and tone of voices."

Zambia's Prime Minister offered a summary: "So what we have is human beings made up of watery feelings responding to a complex layered language of sounds and vibrations?"

"Exactly, we are inching ever closer, ladies and gentlemen! Imagine the additional possibility water crystals can also possess a memory and therefore an identity; in other words they will actually know and recognise themselves. From there we have the mechanism for dismantling a human being into an infinite pattern of vibrations or 'feelings', then transporting this unique combination to another location where this bundle of information can remember itself and re-assemble."

The Russian President turned his attention from the CERN Chief to Dr Krank, like one bear warily sizing up another. "So, if they can do this to a person, they can also do the same to a whole planet?"

The Bear nodded: "The lowest musical note ever recorded is a B flat, 57 octaves below what can be found on a regular piano. It was detected coming from a black hole in the Perseus Galaxy over one hundred million light years away. The sound waves of this note were actually one million billionths below what is audible to the human ear." He paused for effect before adding more insult to injury. "If we are talking about volume, even here on Earth there are tiny

bugs that relative to their size make the loudest natural music on the planet.”

“Hey, something else I didn’t know!” exclaimed the Aussie President.

“Combining frequency of vibration with distance and time, we may add that a regular musical note passing by our ear would take something like one twentieth of a second, while the B flat I mentioned coming from that black hole would have taken ten million years to accomplish the same miniscule journey.”

As the delegates reeled, heads spinning, Miss Tanaka put up her hand, desperate to contribute. “Please, I must add something. Seemingly static crystals also vibrate: red rubies for example at four hundred trillions per second; amethysts at seven hundred trillions...”

The French President threw up both hands. “OK, we get the message! What all this adds up to is we haven’t got a clue. Mission impossible, we might as well give up, go back to bed!”

“We cannot fight this thing, is that what we are saying?” concluded Iran’s President in a sombre tone.

Mexico’s President rose, taking up a boxer’s stance. “Unless we are like those little bugs: we can somehow punch above our weight?”

Throughout this challenging session, the Japanese Prime Minister had been maintaining inner calm by way of the ancient craft of origami, patiently folding pieces of paper and making a number of exquisite cranes, a bird representing peace and long life in his country. Grasping the moment, he stood and offered one to each delegate, bowing as these delicate objects were taken from his open palm. He indicated

with a wave of an arm what was now required and in a moment of reckless spontaneity the delegates launched the cranes all at once into the air. The combination of whirling fans and hot air took them aloft.

But it was too much for the Chinese President, whose boiling frustration had meanwhile transferred itself into ripping out pages from a note-book and folding them into paper war planes. With the malevolent delight of a naughty schoolboy, these missiles were now launched to compete with the cranes for the same air space.

One of the planes hit the Russian President in the neck, who stood up, looking ready to start a war, re-launched it towards the US President, who ducked just in time so that the missile did a loop de loop before fluttering to stillness in the German Chancellor's lap.

"We are behaving like children!" declared Finland's Prime Minister.

The CERN Chief sensed it was a good moment to sum up. "See what has been illustrated before our eyes, ladies and gentlemen! It is clear that for us to have any sort of 'fighting' chance we must upgrade not so much our hard-wired thinking, but our emotional software. If these Elders have feelings that have become malformed, so surely have we."

As the group checked their watches and started to break up for a recess, Dr Krank picked up the last of his instruments. "Please, if I may delay you for just a moment longer. This is a kora, from Senegal, it has twenty-six strings of improvised fishing line attached to a gourd made from a large vegetable."

As he played, the syncopated notes were like water meandering through a dried riverbed after a rainfall. Picking up speed, the tune cascaded over rocks, danced through

rapids, dropped from great waterfalls. Those delegates who had hung back from the usual charge for coffee and snacks found themselves seduced by the hypnotic sound, as the room itself seemed to vibrate with the music.

Miss Tanaka stepped forward. "Earlier I neglected to mention that crystals have been used through the ages for healing purposes?" Shutting her eyes, she began to sway, letting her whole body oscillate. Then she opened her mouth and released a note of such purity that had there been glasses rather than Styrofoam cups, no doubt they would have spun and sung too.



PLAY

1

Rough for Spectacle

(a poet's theater radio drama)

DAVID HARRISON HORTON

A: It seems very sudden.

B: What does?

A: This. It all seems very sudden.

B: It wasn't unexpected.

A: No, but sudden all the same.

B: He was ill for ages.

A: True.

B: For a good long time, I tell you.

A: I said true. Did you not hear me?

B: It's a wonder it didn't happen sooner.

A: You shouldn't say that.

B: It is true, none-the-less, yeah?

A: Right. (pause) But there's no comfort in it.

B: You were expecting comfort?

A: Some. Maybe none. It's hard to tell.

B: Expectations. They always lead to disappointment.

A: I wasn't braced for it.

B: Whoever is?

A: I mean, I knew it was just around the corner. It's just I'd never really thought about it.

B: Not deeply?

A: No, not very deeply.

B: Just in passing, like?

A: If that.

B: I've heard say it's for the best.

A: What was?

B: Not thinking too deeply.

A: About this or generally speaking?

B: Does it matter much?

A: It would give some context.

B: How much context do you need?

A: Enough. (pause) I think enough would be sufficient.

B: Would it now?

A: Most likely not.

B: Then there is some, but not enough.

A: Of what?

B: Context.

A: Well?

B: Don't think too deeply.

A: That's just stupid.

B: Well, you asked for it.

A: Did I?

B: Round-aboutly.

A: You were coming to a point.

B: Was I now?

A: Weren't you?

B: I felt there was something.

A: Movement?

B: Perhaps a breeze. Are the windows open?

A: Everything has been shuttered.

B: And yet you feel movement?

A: I think my foot is falling asleep.

B: You should stand then.

A: That doesn't account for the movement.

B: There has been no movement, just a sense of progression.

A: Have we progressed?

B: If you say so.

A: But how could we tell? I mean, really measure it?

B: We've come from this line to this other line.

A: Line of thinking? Line of origin all the way to the line of our current status?

B: What is the current situation?

A: A death.

B: So how should one progress? (pause) With a shovel?

A: At some point tools will be necessary, to deal with the physical end of things.

B: Then there is a death, and a hole.

A: It seems very sudden.

B: It hasn't been all that sudden, really.

A: Then it seems very stupid.

B: Oh, it's all been very stupid.

A: Should we take turns digging the hole?

B: And if I say I am not up to digging my half of the hole?

A: Then we can continue conversing until the turning flesh
putrifies, and alerts the local flat-foot onto us.

B: Then we should get at it.

A: Aren't we already?

B: What?

A: At it.

B: What do you mean?

A: I mean what I mean.

B: Which is?

A: That we are already at it.

B: In the midst of things?

A: Certainly not at the end.

B: Not our end, at any rate.

A: Is that enough?

B: Enough context?

A: No, just enough.

B: What is?

A: That we are in the middle of things.

B: In the thick of things?

A: Aren't we now?

B: How could we avoid being?

A: Exactly.

B: Exactly what, now?

A: The middle part is always the most tedious.

B: Am I being tedious?

A: Everything is tedious. Is it not?

B: But it does keep on going.

A: Until it doesn't.

B: And then there is a hole to dig.

A: Did you bring a shovel?

B: I think there is a spade.

A: That we can make use of?

B: It is a tool. Purpose built.

A: Is it ours to use?

B: We can use it.

A: We won't be stealing it then?

B: How could that matter?

A: It wouldn't seem right to dig a hole with a stolen spade.

B: What is right about any of this?

A: You make a point.

B: But there is a spade.

A: Have we thought of a place for the hole?

B: I can only answer for myself.

A: How could you possibly answer properly for others?

B: I have not.

A: Not what?

B: Given the location of the hole that needs digging much consideration.

A: What about near the linden tree?

B: That is one possibility.

A: Tossing the carcass into the drain ditch is also one.

B: True, but less poetic.

A: As if corpses need poetry.

B: I don't feel up to this.

A: But you are already in it.

A: I feel as if I have already done my bit.

B: And yet you are here, and obviously haven't.

A: Does it seem sudden to you?

B: No. Everything is very slow and tedious.

A: Then why does it feel sudden?

B: Because you hadn't been paying attention.

A: The air is musty. Shall I open a window?

B: To what end?

A: To get the air moving. To have something to do.

B: Purpose.

A: What?

B: You need a sense of purpose.

A: So what if I do?

B: There aren't any to be doled out.

A: We've got a hole to dig.

B: To what end?

A: The end of an end.

B: Is that enough?

A: I doubt it. Nothing ever is. (pause) Enough, that is.

B: Then let's get on with it.

A: We already have. We are in the middle of it.

B: But it will end when it ends.

A: With a hole.

B: With a different hole. Your hole.

A: As dug by others.

B: You could be thoughtful, and dig one for yourself in advance.

A: It's unlikely.

B: That's because you are selfish.

A: Aren't the dead always selfish?

B: That is their right.

A: This spade you were mentioning, where exactly is it?

B: Wherever one would store a spade.

A: So we need to go looking for it?

B: Did you think it would be easy?



A recording featuring Andrew Innes and Ian Shaw was used in "Rough for Performance" as part of a multi-media performance at Picasso Machinery in New York on Sept 29, 2017.

2

Poetic License

LARRY D. THACKER

Cast of Characters

Larry:	English professor in his early fifties
Doug:	English professor in his mid-fifties
Female Officer:	Female deputy, early thirties
Inmate #1:	Older, grizzled fella
Inmate #2, Ricky:	College dropout, Doug's past student
Inmate #3:	Young twenty-something, tough
Inmate #4:	Middle-aged biker type in leather

Scene: Buck County Jail, somewhere in rural West Virginia

Time: Late Saturday night / early Sunday morning

Act 1: Scene 1

Setting: We are in the processing area of the Buck County jail where two local English professors from the area college, Larry and Doug, who happen to also be best friends, await book after being arrested. They sit on a plain wooden bench with their backs to a concrete wall. They look disheveled. One is sobering up (DOUG), one is looking around (LARRY), overly interested in the night's jailhouse activity. The soberer one (LARRY) elbows the other. We hear the sound of

police radios, inmates yelling, phones, and conversations dimming. Doug seated stage left, Larry seated stage right, same bench.

Larry: (Thinking hard to himself, coming to a conclusion.)
Okay, so, I'll stay if you'll stay.

Doug: (Half asleep, confused, answers.) Whad'yamean, stay?
Stay where?

Larry: (Nodding around the jail's processing room.) Here.

Doug: (Pause) Here? You mean here, here, jail, here?

Larry: (Sounding a little too excited.) Yeah. Just tonight. But only if you do it with me.

Doug: Are you outta your fuckin mind? (Sobering up suddenly.)

Larry: (LARRY feigns surprise, gasping at DOUG's language.)
Probably. Yet, here we are IN JAIL, at least at the moment. Aren't you always talking about how we shouldn't shy away from material opportunities? Aren't you the one preaching at your freshmen to *Get out there and live a little! Take chances! Give yourself something to write about!*

Doug: (Rolling his eyes) Yes, yes, "tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" Thank you Ms. Oliver. Yet, we're not freshmen, we're in jail. Besides, Megan's on the way to bail us out. It's not much. Two hundred each.

Larry: A bargain, for sure. But we'd get so much more "value added," as they say, if we stayed on. Tell her to come in the morning. Please.

Doug: (Turning and looking Larry in the face now.) Are you serious, man?

Larry: I can tell you're giving it some thought. I can tell these things. Besides, we wouldn't be in this situation if you'd kept you award-winning, eloquent mouth shut.

Doug: (Pause) I beg your pardon? You're the one who neglected to mention you've been driving on a revoked license, Dr. Leadfoot.

Larry: Right, but you were distracting me, again, with that same joke you've told a hundred times, Dr. Funnybone.

Doug: Yes, but it's different every time I tell it.

Larry: Indeed, it is, that's why I let you keep telling it, hoping it'll be funnier one day. Alas, I am constantly disappointed, but hopeful. I'm pretty sure, however, that if you hadn't tried telling yet another version to the officer who pulled us over, you might not have gotten the public intoxication charge. He was gonna cite me and send us home.

Doug: No, sir, he most definitely was gonna arrest you for going 86 in a school zone.

Larry: Even when school wasn't in session in the middle of the night?

Doug: He could have spared us having to watch him pour my bottle out in the ditch. That was 15-year-old Jameson. Ah, "Pouring out liquor is like burning books."

Larry: (Thinking) Hunter Thompson?

Doug: Faulker.

Larry: Ah. That was my second guess.

Doug: But I'm sure Hunter quoted that one on numerous occasions.

Larry: He would have. You gonna call the misses and tell her not to bother tonight?

Doug: Give me a moment to breathe. Unfortunately, the threat of staying in these exorbitant digs has sobered me up when I would have hoped to maintain the buzz I'd accomplished for the night. The very thought of carrying out this mission the least bit sober frightens me.

Larry: Doing a lot of things sober frightens you. Well, just remember, "We're all in the gutter..."

Doug: "...but some of us are looking at the stars."

Larry/Doug: Wilde (Both, while nodding to one another.) (DOUG stands a little, though dizzily, turns his head and looks through a wide glass pane revealing a long room with seven men inside milling around talking or trying to sleep on plain benches or the floor. One inmate notices and flips the bird. Doug standing a little makes Larry's left-hand rise since they're cuffed together.)

Larry: Ooh, look! Levitation! (Smirking and acknowledging his lifting hand.) What's it look like in the Colosseum?

Doug: (Nodding approval.) Not bad. Low light, lots of pillows. Espresso machine. Friendly welcome crew. Casual dress. One of them even knows sign language.

Larry: Hell, let's just stay for good. Sounds better than my cold, empty apartment. I don't even have a dog these days.

Doug: Or even a fish? Shame. (DOUG tentatively raises his hand, the one not handcuffed to LARRY.) Officer? Oh, officer! Can I bother you for a moment?

Female Officer: (A heavy-boned, clerkish Female Officer, all business, looks up from her night desk, obviously bothered. Huffs to herself.) Mhmm? How can I help you, sir?

Doug: Yes, officer, we'd like to go ahead and forgo bail for tonight and deal with all that in the morning, if we might. (LARRY nods in agreement)

Female Officer: (Looking around to see if any other officers are catching this.) Oh, you would, would you? Y'all just gonna take care of things in the morning, huh? Just gonna kick back tonight and take it easy, huh?

Doug: Um...sure?

(Blackout)

(End of Scene)

Act 1: Scene 2

Setting: Both men are now in full orange uniforms. Orange work shirts. Orange work pants. Sort of like scrubs. Black flip-flops. The shirts are stenciled with *Buck County Inmate Program* on back. They're the only ones wearing orange in the holding cell. They stand out like sore thumbs. Everyone else in the cell are in their street clothes. (Both men enter the cell. The door clangs loudly behind them. They jump from the noise. Most everyone's asleep in the cell.)

Doug: Still think this is a good idea. (Whispering.)

Larry: Ask me that in a few hours after we've survived.
(Whispering back.)

Doug: So, you're convinced we'll survive?

Larry: (Looking at his wrist.) I'm not chained to you anymore, so things are looking up, I'd say...Okay, follow my lead.

(They walk over and sit together with their backs to a wall. Larry tries to strut, sticking out his chest, DOUG crosses his arms and frowns. They sit. LARRY lets out a gasp from holding his chest out. DOUG laughs.)

Inmate #1: (Sitting up nearby, arms crossed, looks up from nap, clearing throat.)

You all must be real dangers to society for them to put you in orange like that. Yep, we've got a couple of real outlaws, don't we guys? (A few others stir, looking up or over)

Inmate #3: Got me shakin in my shoes, man.

Inmate #4: Stone-cold killers, I reckon.

Larry: Us? Oh, no. Not us. No, nope, we're just a couple of really stupid guys who should have headed home a lot earlier than we did. Ain't that right, partner?

Doug: Yep, that's right, yeah, uh huh. Out too late. A few too many. Couple-a stupid old farts.

Inmate #4: Sounds like what got me locked up. A few too many. (Laughs then stops, smile turns to frown.) You couple a bad asses call in me stupid?

Larry: Indeed not, sir. We were speaking strictly about our own predicament...

Doug: ...present company excluded, of course.

Inmate #4: You all talk funny. Where you from?

Larry: Over at the college. We teach English.

Inmate #4: Oh! So, not only am I stupid, you probably think you're smarter than me. Smarter than the rest of us!

Doug: (Clears throat, a little miffed.) Seems to me we're all in jail for the night, so we've got that in common, huh?

Larry: Whoa now! Remember, "Freedom isn't worth having if it doesn't include the freedom to make mistakes," right?

Doug (Looking to LARRY, concentrating.) Thoreau?

Larry: No. Gandhi.

Doug: Ah. How apropos.

Larry: Namaste.

Doug: Backatcha.

Inmate #4: (Looks at the two of them, shakes his head and closes his eyes again, signaling how these weirdos just aren't worth it.)

(Larry and Doug seem relieved.)

Inmate #2, RICKY: (A tall, lanky, but fairly muscular man, wearing a dirty tank top and jeans and boots, with plenty of ink, stands and gives them a look. Has quietly been watching the whole thing, eyeing the two professors, especially DOUG. Stands and walks to LARRY and DOUG, hovering over them, leans closer.)

Larry: (Feigning a sudden nap, snores slightly.)

Doug: (Looks up at the man, squints at his squinting, wonders.)

Inmate #2, RICKY: (Nods, realizing something, clears his throat and speaks.) "The caged bird sings / with a fearful trill / of things unknown / but longed for still..."

Doug: (Nods and smiles, making a recognition.) "...and his tune is heard / on the distant hill / for the caged bird / sings of freedom."

Inmate #2, RICKY: Maya Angelou.

Doug: (Looking around at the cell.) Apropos. How you been Ricky?

Inmate #2, RICKY: Other than being locked up, I'm okay, Dr. Doug. How about you?

Doug: Larry, meet Ricky Lane, one of my past prize poetry class students. (LARRY and RICKY shake hands.)

Larry: You know your poetry, eh?

Inmate #2, RICKY: Well, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," just happens to be a poem I learned by heart and recited for class. But I did like the class. If they'd all been as cool as Dr. Doug's class, I might not have dropped out. And don't worry none, I've got your backs in here. These guys are all hot air, anyway.

Inmate #1: (Stirring from his nap.) I know some poetry! "There was an old man from Nantucket!"

ALL (Laughing.) Whoa, whoa! Hey now! Whoa!

(Blackout)

(End of Scene)

Act 1: Scene 3

Setting: Later in morning. Sun rising. Still in the cell. Same inmates along with DOUG and LARRY, but the others are semi-arranged sitting on the benches as if it were a classroom with DOUG and LARRY out front. (DOUG is standing facing everyone.)

Doug: ...and that's the difference between simile and metaphor, you see? These are very useful in poetry, especially when you want to say something but indirectly.

Inmate #3: Now why would I want to say something, but not say it? Why not just come out and say it.

Inmate #4: Ain't you in here for dealing, man? (INMATE #3 nods.) Well, ain't you ever had a secret word or phrase for what you were do in? For what you were sellin'?

Inmate #3: Oh! Sure! Like this one time I told people how if they wanted some good fine dank weed, not to just ask for it, they needed to say, "The trees around here seem greener than usual."

Doug: Pretty close! Good enough.

Larry: What if I said, "Hey, man, this dank weed is like breathing in a smooth green spring day, heh, heh, heh."

Inmate #3: Sounds like you've enjoyed a few spring days in your time.

Inmate #4: Simile!

Doug: Yes! Yes! (Gesticulates excitedly.)

Inmate #2, RICKY: Dr. Doug gets excited about his poetry sometimes.

Female Officer: (Enters stage left, jingling keys.) Heads up, cell two! Doug! Larry!

Doug / LARRY: Here! Present!

Female Officer: (Looking them up and down with a cocked head.) How could I miss you two? Your bail's posted. You're free to go.

All Inmates: Aawwww, man! Awww, c'mon, stay awhile longer.

Doug: Time to go. We've got classes to teach tomorrow morning. But you know what, I think I've enjoyed our time just as much. How about you, Larry?

Larry: Same here. (Stepping out of cell. Turning to FEMALE OFFICER before walking away.) We appreciate your service officer and enjoyed our time in your fine establishment, but always remember: "A jailer is a much a prisoner as [their] prisoner."

Doug: King?

Female Officer: No. That's Gandhi. I've heard that one before. Believe me, I've heard them all before.

(Blackout)

(End of Scene)



NON-FICTION

1

The Repeated Rhythm of My Feet

PATTY SOMLO

My husband Richard passed away on a beautiful fall morning, after four and a half years of treatment for stage four cancer. Though I'd known the cancer wasn't curable the moment we received the news, I wasn't the least bit prepared emotionally to lose him. I lay on the bed with my arm around Richard's too-thin shoulder for what seemed like hours and sobbed. Only when the men came from the funeral home to take his body away from me did I get up.

For four and a half years, I had been Richard's only caregiver. A childless couple, for nearly thirty years we were as close as two people could be. If it were possible, and I think it was, cancer and the Covid-19 pandemic brought us even closer.

During the years I cared for Richard, my life was not my own. Everything in that time revolved around Richard's treatment and how he was feeling. I'd suddenly been hurled into space, floating in some alien world where I knew nothing and no one. I had no place now where I could plant my feet and feel safe.

Yet, there was one thing. The thought came to me late that afternoon, after the hospice nurse left for good. I had

made all the necessary calls to family and friends and sobbed several times. I could now go for a walk.

I took a moment to wash my face, pressing cool water against my swollen red eyes. Now that I was alone, I needed to take extra care with everything. Before leaving the house, I checked more than once. Front door keys. Yes. IDs. Yes. A little money, just in case. Yes. Then I stepped out the door.

The day was as lovely as it could possibly be, windless and warm, but not hot. The sun was low, making the red, yellow, and gold leaves on the trees and sidewalk shimmer, as if small fires had been set below them.

My neighborhood in a small Wine Country city north of San Francisco is old. The mostly one-story, compact ranch houses were built in the late forties and early fifties. Dotted with trees of all sorts, including tall palms, some, like the massive Redwoods, have been here since long before the houses arrived.

My next-door neighbor Diane already knew that Richard was gone. I suspect she had seen the hearse drive up and park, something I had thankfully missed. She was standing out front, so I stopped a moment to talk. After expressing her condolences, she asked if my house had good locks.

I left her as quickly as I could, wanting to get going on my walk. There wasn't much traffic on normally busy Sonoma Avenue, since it was Sunday. I crossed easily and nearly felt an embrace from the familiar street I landed on, where I'd walked almost every day since the pandemic started, when the gym where Richard and I worked out was closed.

After all the crying and the heightened stress of the preceding two and a half weeks when Richard was in

hospice, I felt open in a way I suddenly found soothing. Years before, I had learned a simple walking meditation from a book written by the great Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. At the time, I was suffering from depression and acute anxiety. The repeated chant helped me focus on my breath, to quiet the dark, worrisome thoughts. When I practiced the meditation during a walk, the world around me – the colors of flowers, trees, the sky and clouds – appeared clear and bright. It was as if I'd put on a pair of glasses and my eyesight improved a hundred times.

As I walked away from the home Richard and I had shared this past decade after returning to California following twelve years in Oregon, I was seeing the beauty around me, the way I did years back when practicing the walking meditation. The tears seemed to have washed away every thought. For four and a half years, I had worried about Richard, obsessing over every side effect, each test, one after another of the changes that arrived as his condition worsened. New concerns would soon arise, I felt sure, but for the moment I felt that a terrible weight had been lifted from my shoulders and walking was as easy as sitting still.

As I made my way up Shortt Street, I knew this one thing. Walking would save me. Even though I was a widow now, completely alone in the world, with no close family and no husband, walks would restore my spirit, and even in this darkness, bring hope and light.

I knew it, in part, because just getting out of the house on this terrible day had already made me feel better. I also knew it because for nearly all of my life, no matter where I lived or what problems or disappointments I was wrestling with, I had always walked.

The summer before I entered the fourth grade, I was wrenched away from the place I still love most in the world. For three glorious years before that summer, I had lived with my parents and two sisters on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii. I barely remember the inside of our house, except for a dim memory of the narrow living room and a compact dining room on the left side. On the other hand, I have no trouble recalling many favorite places outdoors.

After Hawaii, we moved to Mount Holly, a small, rural New Jersey town. To find somewhere I might be happy in an environment so different from the one I had considered home, I walked.

Saturday afternoons, my destination was an old narrow house. Up a steep set of stairs from the sidewalk sat the town library. Once a week, I opened the door and listened to it whine, before stepping into the dimly lit entry, where I breathed in the musty odor of damp old books. Each week, I returned a book and checked out a new one.

To get to the library required me to walk down Main Street, which I loved. The street was lined with large eighteenth-century homes, many painted white, with rounded columns and wide lawns in front. Ancient trees shaded the walkway. In the fall, leaves were raked into piles below the curb and set on fire. Decades later, the smell of woodsmoke takes me back to those long-ago walks.

Especially in the fall, I also liked to hike up the Mount, a hill for which the town was named. I would gather red, yellow and orange leaves as I went and carry them home. There, I'd press them between sheets of waxed paper in one of my school textbooks, hoping the vibrant colors wouldn't fade.

No matter where I lived after that, I walked. Then, and for years after, I struggled with a low-level depression, though I didn't realize it and that I should have sought help. Instead, I self-medicated, not by turning to alcohol or drugs. The medication I used was to go for a walk.

I spent twenty years living in one of the greatest cities for walking in the world, San Francisco. Stepping out the door of whichever apartment or house I was living in at the time, led me in different directions to glorious views and destinations. One Victorian house where I lived with several roommates sat blocks from the entrance to Golden Gate Park. I would set out from home, just past where busy Stanyan Street started in the Haight Ashberry, made famous by the Summer of Love. I'd take a right turn on Stanyan and walk past the bike shop, a taqueria, and McDonald's, where guys hung out and smoked, until reaching the start of the park. In moments, I could look across John F. Kennedy Drive to savor the elegant white Conservatory of Flowers, where the latest artistic arrangement of blossoms would be displayed out front.

On weekends, that section of the park was closed to cars. Just beyond the Conservatory, a boombox would be blasting disco or R&B, and men and women in sparkling skin-tight pants and tops would be spinning on skates.

Past palms and ferns, I would keep going, soon taking a detour uphill. In moments, I would reach my destination, Stow Lake (renamed recently to Blue Heron Lake, to honor the Great Blue Herons that nest on an island in the lake every spring). From there, the walk unveiled one delight after the next, because the manmade lake, like everything in the park, had been designed with contemplation of beauty in mind.

Whether my walks took me to the park or up a nearly ninety-degree hill to Nob Hill and then down ninety degrees to Chinatown, or past the mansions on Presidio Heights, those long strolls soothed my mind. If I was facing a problem that needed a solution, the repeated rhythm of my feet taking one step after another put me in a receptive state to find some answer that hadn't been available to me before. As I walked, taking in the dreamy reflections of trees and clouds in Stow Lake or the view of the Palace of Fine Arts, before sunset when the walls were drenched with golden light, I found hope, feeling a door beginning to open that had previously been slammed shut.

The late afternoon I walked following Richard's death, I realized almost instantly. I still had this one place that was mine. Yes, the love of my life was gone. His passing meant that I would lose so much, more than I could even imagine at that point.

But the walk assured me. Looking at trees and flowers, feeling the warm breeze on my arms, noticing the way sunlight graces the leaves that in autumn put on the most splendid show, in other words, going out for a walk, would comfort and soothe me, a reminder that the darkest part of the night occurs just before dawn.



ARTICLE

1

An Analysis of Structural Repetition in *The Kumulipo*: A Global Heritage in The Polynesian Creation Myth

CYNTHIA SHARP

Appreciating the paradox of the oneness of humanity begins with immersing ourselves in and learning from a variety of unique cultural texts. The epic Hawaiian chant *The Kumulipo* by Keaulumoku, recorded as a poem by Rubelite, Kawena, Kinney and Johnson, entwines supernaturalism with a genealogy of evolution, using a structure of cantos enhanced with repetition and duality of land and sea, male and female, from the island's unique position under the changing stars.

Repetition is a vital technique in oral tradition as geography, history and creative forces morph into a chant. "Born" is a keyword repeated through the poem, along with phrases such as "The night gave birth." Like Homer's *Iliad* or the *Bible*, the voice suggests a long narrative, held together with the reverberation of creation diction. The voice indicates that this information has been passed on through generations and language, an all-encompassing creation story that deserves to continue to be performed to be remembered. The numinous style allows us to wonder what comes first, the idea from the stars or the life in the womb, as composers take on the task of categorizing evolution as genealogy.

In addition to the resonance of the concept of birth and the natural world as ever-evolving like a family history, *The Kumulipo* is similar to the opening to the *New Testament* in its lists of relationships, yet comprehensive in its authentic meditative combination of knowledge and culture using a streaming structure of juxtaposition between male and female and land and sea. In lines 86 and 87 the text reads, "Born the puaki seaweed living in the sea/ Kept by the lauaki sugar cane living on land," a flowing relationship between the parts throughout the poem. Land and sea, male and female are mentioned together all the way through, "Born the kele seaweed living in the sea/ Kept by the ekele taro living on land." The poem is an embodiment of a wide selection of cultural history—the positions of stars, travel, fishing and the isolation and contacts of an island under changing skies. It captures the human desire to fuse the mystical with the historical in the search for knowledge and meaning, the quest for memory if our cells and atoms could speak their journey, the universal human desire to belong to a meaningful cosmos, a relationship of caretaking and genealogy woven with the nature of land and sea in intertwined development. The epic ideas of wondering what came first are held together with repetition, contrast and specific detail.

The power of spoken word in recitals of *The Kumulipo* offers cultural value and meditative insight in the wholistic approach of the verse, repetition creating an overall encompassing organizational system for a high volume of information, maintaining reader and listener interest with lyrical flow. The sound imagery of each section breaks open microcosms into imagistic detail that cradle in their tiny presence elements of universal truth. *The Kumulipo* holds both a macro and micro approach in a relationship of duality and dichotomy though the cantos with an impressive flow and

fluidity of the text as it categorizes existence, making it a captivating balance of fusing large ideas with specific details by playing on the relationships between them, even without answering all questions, leaving readers and listeners with mystery as a door to the temple.

Citations

Rubelite, Kawena, Kinney, and Johnson. Hawaiian chant. *Kumulipo Global Heritage in the Polynesian Creation Myth*. Pdf.

ESSAY

1

Many Paths, One God

SUSAN P. BLEVINS

My father was an avowed atheist his whole life, and my mother was a christenings-weddings-funerals Church of England Christian. I consider this to be a great blessing and a huge advantage to me, as I grew up in England after WWII. It meant I was free to formulate my own ideas of God, religion and spirituality, and ever since the earliest age I was always seeking God, and questioning “Him” about life’s meaning and “His” own existence. I had from the earliest age what I would call *spiritual awareness*. I used to experience what I termed “my funny feeling”, which was basically a feeling of distancing myself from my physical body, and dwelling for just a moment in what felt like another dimension. It was not unpleasant, in fact I used to enjoy those occasions. Looking back, I think those were the times when I merged my pre-physical life with my physical life, as though I still had one foot in a remembered, disembodied world of love and detachment, where I had dwelled prior to my current incarnation. As my life in the world progressed and consumed me more and more, this feeling of an ancient connection, or a calling me back, receded, and had disappeared by my late teens.

I did not go to church until age twenty-six, when I met my future husband, an American, and went with him to the

American Episcopal Church in Rome, where we were both living at the time. Due to my background, I resisted going at first, but thanks to a patient husband and an intellectually stimulating priest we had at the time, who had also done Jungian training in Zurich, Switzerland, I was gradually drawn into a relatively broad vision of Christianity. I became very active in my church and attended many bible classes, was a regular reader, a member of the altar guild, and eventually I became a licensed lay reader. My greatest joy was in preparing the altar for communion, and later, to offer the chalice to the communicants. This service fed my soul, and I was able to offer the chalice to people with a heart full of love. Subsequently, and far more recently, a young couple whom I had known since the early days of their relationship, asked me to marry them. After initial feelings of inadequacy, and much prayer, I agreed to do it. I can say without any hesitation, that writing a marriage service for them, and celebrating their union, gave me the greatest joy I have known thus far in my life. I have several other young friends who want me to marry them when they meet the right partners, and I can hardly wait!

Gradually, my questioning, questing spirit drew me into despair and desperation when I was thirty-five, and institutional religion no longer fed my soul, which was screaming out for help by this time. My priest told me that life goes in cycles of seven years, and when I looked back at my own life I could see the big changes that had taken place every seven years, so when I turned thirty-five I was right on schedule to go into the phase of the dark night of the soul, and wander through my own *inferno*. I am fortunate indeed that this spiritual crisis afflicted me when I was still young. I was also busy doing a great deal of yoga and meditation at this time, and during this period I had several numinous,

direct experiences of God. When people ask me if I believe in God, I reply "No, I don't believe in God. I know God." This has powered my spiritual life since that time.

In desperation, after having briefly considered suicide, I went to see a Jungian psychotherapist twice a week for the first year and once a week for about two more years after that. I can say that Jungian psychotherapy saved my life, physical and otherwise. With the help of my wise and demanding analyst, I was able to dismantle the false underpinnings of my life, deactivate the power of the Collective, and return to the Susan I had been when I was born, and as I felt God intended me to be. As a result of this therapy, I fell away from the institutional form of religion, but my inner spiritual life grew in leaps and bounds and filled me with light and joy, which people noted and commented on. I was no longer tied down - after all, religion comes from *religare*, to be bound fast - but set free to soar on my own individual path to a personal and intimate relationship with God. I was individuated by the demanding, and often painful work I was doing, striving toward wholeness, and creating the structure of my life from the inside out, instead of the other way around, as it had been until that point.

Since that period of break-through in my mid-thirties, I have traveled widely, and read widely about other major religions, and found them all very similar in their message. Once you get past the external rules and regulations of the institutional forms of religion, and go to the mystical source, all religions merge.

I am a visual person, so I have come up with a very simple symbol which I think illustrates the differences and the sameness of all religions. The image is that of a very large bicycle wheel. If you place all the religions of the world, and

all their sects and denominations, along the outer rim, it gets very crowded. Human beings seem to like sects and separation, and I wonder if, in the West at least, that is a form of caste system, created to render the massive human family more manageable. The family, clan, tribe, nation, all enclose the space we inhabit and make it less threatening. We cling to the familiar.

Continuing with my visual image, from each denomination and sect on the rim, imagine a spoke directed towards the center of the wheel, the axis, *the still point of the turning world*, to quote T.S. Eliot. Around the rim, the religions chatter and puff themselves up, trying to prove their uniqueness and superiority, but once a seeker starts out along a single spoke, and sticks with it for long enough, he loses sight of differences, and the divisions slowly decrease the closer to the center he approaches. The spokes grow closer and closer right up to the center, where they all end up in the same place of mystery, the heart center, the divine source, the great silence. Mystics of all religions have always understood this, because they make the time to think, pray, contemplate, and sink down deep into the mystery of being, and to connect inwardly with the holy. In this unified center is the divine light, hence they become enlightened. We all have this invitation extended to us, but most of us hurry through life thinking more about our concerns for survival and pleasure, and we do not make time to go into a quiet space in order to be still, listen, and simply *be*. I firmly believe that there are as many paths to God as there are people walking this earth. All we have to do is accept the invitation and make the space.

I choose to believe that the mystical center is where divine love resides, which is the glue that holds everything together. Love is not a static energy. Love is always on the move, needing to give just as much as to receive. This is the

place where we can hold the conflict of opposites, and be the vessel that contains the apparent paradox of separation but also the knowledge that we all are one. This is difficult to understand without inner work. We have free will, so we can choose a spiritual path or not, and not everyone is called to such. This is the place where we can each have our own encounter with the divine, and do not need the intercessory services of priest, imam, rabbi or shaman, or the trappings of any religion. The sooner we understand the unity of all things and draw upon the larger source, the sooner we can remove ourselves from the centrifugal effect that institutional religious divisiveness can have on us, and create heaven on earth.

My spirituality these days is eclectic to say the least, a glorious mix of the many. In times of great stress and pain I repeat continuously *Allah'u akbar*, God is great, and equally, as when my mother died I repeated over and over *The Lord gives and the Lord takes, blessed be the name of the Lord*. And when just recently I lost a very close friend, all I wanted to hear was the *Kaddish* and *Shema Y'Israel* prayers repeated over and over to give me strength and comfort. When I broke my arm a few years ago and the specialist was mashing the broken bones back together through traction, rather than surgery, it helped me to sing my way through the pain with the Sanskrit chant *Om buva swaha, tat savitur varenyam*. When a voice cries to God from the depths, whatever the form, whatever the words, God hears that heart-felt cry.

Religion itself is an outer manifestation of an inherent human urge, and its expression is cultural. The urge to connect with, and express, the divine is present in all people and cuts through all cultures, demonstrating our shared humanity. Religions are like languages: they are culturally different paths to the same truth, but they are not the truth.

For example, the word “tree” is not the tree, any more than is “arbole”, “arbre” or “albero”. Autochthonous cultures created language to express the concept of “tree”. Religions too are different cultural expressions to express the Mystery, the Unknowable, the Inexpressible. This also applies to all the different words used to name *God*, which is the word I use throughout because it is a commonly accepted term, and readily understood by English language speakers, but it too is only a name given to the unnameable.

Art and religion are the usual means that a culture uses to express itself. Since the earliest times we find cave drawings depicting not only what those early peoples saw of the world around them in their lives, but also objects of veneration, such as the primitive sculptures of the female body, expressing her life-giving and nurturing power. How could those early peoples from pre-history *not* be awed by the majesty of creation? The sun, moon, stars, mighty earth formations, animals, vegetation and all the intricate life systems around us, they all inspire awe. Today I wonder if we have lost that simple, child-like sense of wonder as we observe the miracles that abound in our lives every day.

If we can grasp that all religions are leading us in the same direction, then I believe that greater tolerance will follow. We each have the responsibility to lead more conscious lives, in loving awareness of one another. If we follow our individual spoke to the source at the center of the wheel, then we ourselves will become like leavening in the dough of humanity, or sparks of light in a dark world. The need is for many of us to live a God-centric life in order to lighten and *enlighten* the entire human family, and I believe there is already such a movement afoot to bring light into a world which is apparently dominated by materialism and weighty darkness.

What we are seeing at the present time all over the world, is the disintegration and breakup of the old paradigm of patriarchal rule. If there is no dissolution of the old, the new paradigm cannot be introduced, and I think that is exactly where we are now. Those of us who are beings of light must hold the vision of peace and light for all, and through prayer and action, bring into being the new paradigm of a more feminine, compassionate, service-oriented power. This understanding cuts across all religions and is understood emotionally and psychologically by spiritual people of all faiths. The extremists of all religions are hanging on to old forms and rituals, dogma and regulations, out of fear of the unknown. We must have the courage to cast off from our old moorings, and venture forth into a new world of peace and freedom for all. Leaving the old for the new is always a risky undertaking.

As human beings of any race or creed, we all need to incarnate the divine through our daily actions of love and service, the foundation of all religions the world over. We can “chop wood, and carry water” from a place of love and humility, knowing that it is not what we do in life, but the attitude with which we do it. I know that I am not alone in believing this. I have brothers and sisters everywhere working toward this vision that we all are one. And of late, science itself is confirming the oneness of all life.

We breathe out our molecules into the atmosphere constantly, making ourselves a new body every seven years, and just as we breathe out molecules of our identity all the time, so we also breathe in molecules of everyone else! And this entity that I call “me” is changing constantly, the only eternal identity being my soul, or *Atman*, the breath of God, which animates my physical body. I am in the food you eat, you are in the air I breathe, our molecules mix and mingle

regardless of any and all outer classifications and categorizations. I love the thought of inhaling molecules of Einstein, Jesus Christ, Buddha, and my neighbor! For the doubting Thomases among us, there is the scientific proof that we are all in truth, one! I once had the physical experience of oneness when I was on the underground train in Rome. For just a moment I lost all awareness of the boundaries of my body, and felt that everyone else in my carriage and I were one. It was a transcendent feeling that has stayed with me for decades.

To sum up, I propose that we recognize our common humanity, and do away with focusing on religious differences, skin color, ethnic background, social standing, and all labels of any kind. Acceptance, tolerance, inclusiveness, compassion and forgiveness all have to be the passwords of this millennium, as well as concern for our environment and the animals that more and more are struggling to share it with us. It is time to detach ourselves from the material things of the world, and to dwell more in the 'being' aspects of life rather than the 'having' aspects. This letting go of things gets easier with age, and is surely one of the blessings that I enjoy since entering my seventh decade.

The "proof of the pudding" of any religion, is surely how we treat one another. When someone asked the Dalai Lama what his religion was, he replied "kindness". If we were all kind to one another there would no longer be any need for jails, homes for the elderly, orphanages for unwanted children, gang violence, addictions, or the need for drugs and all the other manifestations of the dysfunctional society that most of us live in.

I am not suggesting that we do away with institutional religions. Churches, mosques, and temples have all been important centers where people can gather and feel a part of a family, an attempt on the part of many to overcome

existential loneliness. What I am saying is that all religions need to return to their founding principles, which are very simple in all faiths: love God, help the sick, give to the poor, love and respect one another, and honor all people. Buddhism, considered by many to be a philosophy as much as a religion, counsels the same unity of all existence, and caring for even the smallest part of that existence is caring for the whole.

The glue that holds our universe together, animal, vegetable and mineral, is the energy of love, pure and simple love, in its many manifestations. Love as in kindness, generosity of spirit, patience, forgiveness, and service to one another. Humanity is like a vibrant and colorful mosaic, and our differences contribute to this magnificent creation and enrich it. Each one of us is a unique and essential thread in the complex tapestry of life. I see this as cause for celebration, and a way to enrich our own individual lives, because each one of us is precious in the sight of God, and our contributions are never too small to make a difference in the world. We have cause for gratitude for our unique gifts and for the gift of life, which we take for granted at our peril.

My hope and prayer is that each one of us will have the courage and confidence to broaden our horizons to embrace, not just tolerate, "the other", because there really is no "other", there is just "us".

Looking beneath the trappings, the dogma of religions to the core of how a person lives. Many atheists follow so-called Christian principles more than many so-called Christians.

If we go to the MYSTICAL SOURCE, the words of designation don't matter, Christian, Atheist, etc., as per my image.

I AM THAT I AM - EXODUS 3.14. YHWH the sacred unutterable name of God.

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12. **Ivan Pozzoni**, born in Monza in 1976, is a distinguished Italian writer, philosopher, and editor who pioneered the study of Law and Literature in Italy. He has authored numerous essays on Italian philosophers and ancient ethical and legal theories, contributing to both Italian and international journals. Between 2007 and 2024, Pozzoni released several books, including *Underground*, *Riserva Indiana*, and *Patroclo non deve morire*. He founded avant-garde magazines *Il Guastatore* and *L'Arrivista*, and currently edits *Información Filosófica*. Pozzoni established the Néon-avant-gardisme movement, endorsed by Zygmunt Bauman. His work, translated into 25 languages, includes over 150 volumes and 1000 essays.
13. **Jaydeep Sarangi**, dubbed as 'Bard on the Banks of Dulung', is a poet with eleven collections in English latest being, *the half-confession* (2024) and Principal, New Alipore College, Kolkata, WB. He is also the President, Guild of Indian English Writers Editors and Critics

(GIEWEC) and Vice President, Executive Council, IPPL, ICCR, Kolkata. Website: www.jaydeepsarangi.in

14. **Jeffrey Zable** is a teacher, conga drummer/percussionist who plays Afro-Cuban folkloric music for dance classes and rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area and a writer of poetry, flash fiction, and non-fiction. He's published five chapbooks and his writing has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies, more recently in *Ranger*, *The Opiate*, *Corvus*, *A Sufferer's Digest*, *The Raven's Perch*, *Dark Winter*, and many others.
15. **Joan McNerney** is an American and a native New Yorker. She has recited her work at the National Arts Club, New York City, State University of New York, Oneonta, McNay Art Institute, San Antonio and the University of Houston, Texas. Published worldwide in over thirty five countries, her work has appeared in numerous literary publications. Four Best of the Net nominations have been awarded to her. *The Muse in Miniature*, *Love Poems for Michael* and *At Work* are available on Amazon.com. A new release entitled *Light & Shadow* explores the recent historic COVID pandemic.
16. **John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and *Tenth Muse*. Latest books, "Between Two Fires", "Covert" and "Memory Outside The Head" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Amazing Stories* and *River and South*.
17. **K. V. Dominic**, English poet, critic, short story writer and editor has authored/edited 52 books including 14 collections of poems—eight in English and one each in Hindi, Bengali, French, Tamil, Gujarati and Malayalam

(Translations by renowned writers) and 8 books of short stories—four in English and one each in Hindi, Malayalam, Bengali and French (Translations). There are five critical books on his poetry and one on his short stories. He is the Secretary of Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and Critics (GIEWEC), and Chief Editor of the international refereed biannual research journals *Writers Editors Critics* (WEC) and *International Journal on Multicultural Literature* (IJML). He is a former Associate Professor of the PG and Research Department of English, Newman College, Thodupuzha, Kerala, India. PhD researches have been done on his poetry.

18. **Kathrine Yets** holds many educational roles, including being the founder and facilitator of Lake Side Poets & Writers. As Co-VP of Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets eastern region, she supports poetic communities. She co-founded Better Together with Food for Thought's host Deangelo Coleman. She has four chapbooks traditionally-published through Cyberwit and Unsolicited Press. Works can be found within Woman Scream Anthology, Olit, and Eternal Haunted Summer. She is a Jade Ring Award recipient. When not writing, she can be found on the shores of Lake Michigan, taking walks with her husband.
19. **Keith Inman** has been active in the writing community for thirty-five years. He's judged contests for small Presses, a University, Public Libraries, and a few writing organizations, set up readings, helped organize a poetry anthology for twenty years (seven at the helm), did committee work for a writing organization, mentored for the League of Cdn Poets, and, helps run a writing group (Iowa style) that is still running thirty years on. Keith has published seven books of poetry.

20. **Larry D. Thacker's** poetry and fiction can be found in over 200 journals and anthologies. His books include four full poetry collections, two chapbooks, as well as the folk history, *Mountain Mysteries: The Mystic Traditions of Appalachia*. His collections of short fiction include *Working it Off in Labor County* and *Labor Days, Labor Nights*, as well as a co-authored short story collection, *Everyday, Monsters*. His newest poetry collection is entitled *New Red Words*. His MFA in poetry and fiction is from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Visit his website at: www.larrydthacker.com
21. **Les Wicks**, Over 45 years, has performed widely across the globe. Published in over 450 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 39 countries in 17 languages. Conducts workshops & runs Meuse Press which focuses on poetry outreach projects like poetry on buses & poetry published on the surface of a river. His 15th book of poetry is *Time Taken – New & Selected* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2022).
22. **Mandira Ghosh** is an esteemed author, poet, educator, and researcher. She has earned numerous accolades, including the Bharat Nirman Award 2020 and Dr. Radhakrishnan Award. A Senior Fellow from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, she has been recognized for her work in literature and education. Ghosh has published poems, stories, translations, and reviews in various journals globally. A passionate promoter of Indian culture and heritage, she has organized poetry workshops at renowned institutions. She holds an MA in English, a diploma in Journalism, and a B.Ed. She is the author of 23 books, including *Krishna in Indian Thought Literature and Music* and *The Cosmic Dance of Shiva*.

23. **Michael Lee Johnson** lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in the greater Chicagoland area, IL. He has 300 YouTube poetry videos. Michael Lee Johnson is an internationally published poet in 45 countries, a song lyricist, has several published poetry books, has been nominated for 7 Pushcart Prize awards, and 6 Best of the Net nominations. He is editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, all available on Amazon, and has several poetry books and chapbooks. He has over 453 published poems. Michael is the administrator of 6 Facebook Poetry groups. Member Illinois State Poetry Society: <http://www.illinoispoets.org/>
24. **Michael Lee Johnson** lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in the greater Chicagoland area, IL. He has 300 YouTube poetry videos. Michael Lee Johnson is an internationally published poet in 45 countries, a song lyricist, has several published poetry books, has been nominated for 7 Pushcart Prize awards, and 6 Best of the Net nominations. He is editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, all available on Amazon, and has several poetry books and chapbooks. He has over 453 published poems. Michael is the administrator of 6 Facebook Poetry groups. Member Illinois State Poetry Society: <http://www.illinoispoets.org/>
25. **Mithil Jha** is a young writer with a strong inclination towards language and literature. He is currently pursuing his education at Acadia University, Wolf Ville, Nova Scotia, Canada. He has a great passion for lore and learning and is immensely motivated with the write-ups of the classical and dynamic writers, the traditional and contemporary situations, issues and environment.
26. **Moya Roddy's** new collection *The Dark Art of Darning* was described by Rita Ann Higgins as "*enthraling... entangled*."

...daring..." Her debut collection *Out of the Ordinary* was shortlisted for the Strong Shine Award and she was also shortlisted for the Hennessy Award and won a New Irish Writing Award. Her poems have appeared in the Irish Times, Poetry Ireland Review, the North, Crannog, Stoney Thursday and Stinging Fly among others.

27. **Natalia Fernández Díaz-Cabal**, Polyglot, poet, translator, professor (at Spanish and Chinese universities), nomad, international lecturer, entomologist of words, self-taught visual artist. Ph.D. in Linguistics and Ph.D. in Philosophy of Science.
28. **Neelam Shah** holds a BA in International Relations with Researching Media Cultural Studies and Social Sciences (2014) and a Masters in Psychoanalysis (2017) from Kingston University. She is a remote Social Researcher/Consultant for MMC Economics, a freelance Mental Health Researcher for MQ Mental Health, and an Early Careers Researcher at Kings College London. Neelam is an academic journal writer/reviewer for PLOS Mental Health, Horizon, and Spring journals. Passionate about volunteering, she supports animal welfare, human rights, and environmental charities. In her free time, she enjoys art, music, sports, tutoring, hiking, and creating digital artwork and animations.
29. **Patty Somlo's** most recent book, *Hairway to Heaven Stories* (Cherry Castle Publishing), was a Finalist in the American Fiction Awards and Best Book Awards. Previous books, *The First to Disappear* (Spuyten Duyvil) and *Even When Trapped Behind Clouds: A Memoir of Quiet Grace* (WiDo Publishing), were Finalists in several contests. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *Delmarva Review*, *Under the Sun*, the *Los Angeles Review*, and over 40 anthologies. She received Honorable Mention for Fiction in the Women's

National Book Association Contest, was a Finalist in the J.F. Powers Short Fiction Contest, had an essay selected as Notable for Best American Essays, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net multiple times.

30. **Paweł Markiewicz** was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haikus as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetry in many magazines. He writes in English and German.
31. **Pete Mullineaux** lives in Galway, Ireland and has published five poetry collections, most recently *We are the Walrus* (Salmon 2022) which was featured on the cover of World Wildlife Fund's magazine *The Circle*. He is the winner of the 2023 Home-stage pFITE competition award for his environmental poetry film, 'Careful what you wish for Orangutan'. His debut novel *Jules & Rom – Sci-fi meets Shakespeare* was published by Matador (UK) in 2021. The chapter excerpt attached (2,150 words) is taken from a new work of fiction, *Innocent Planet* (not yet published).
32. **Qudsi Rizvi** serves as an Assistant Professor (Contractual) in the Department of English at Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad. A published poet, his works have appeared in numerous national anthologies and refereed journals. In addition to his academic and literary pursuits, Dr. Rizvi is an international interfaith speaker, engaging in dialogues that promote understanding and harmony. His debut poetry collection, *Shades of Solitude*, was published in July 2021. His research interests include poetic aesthetics and the interplay of literature with themes of love, mercy, and joy.

33. **Ram Krishna Singh** is a renowned, widely published, anthologized, and translated poet with over 60 books to his credit. His latest poetry collections include *Against the Waves: Selected Poems* (Authorspress, 2021), *Poems and Micropoems* (Southern Arizona Press, 2023), and *Knocking Vistas And Other Poems* (Authorspress, 2024).
34. **Ramzi Albert Rihani** is a Lebanese American writer. He received the 2024 Polk Street Review first-place poetry award. His work has appeared in several publications in the US, Canada, UK, Ireland, India, and South Africa, including ArLiJo, Linnet's Wings Magazine, Poetic Sun, Chronogram magazine, Phenomenal Literature Journal, Last Leaves Magazine, Cacti Fur Journal, Poetry Potion, Active Muse, Ephemeral Elegies, and The Silent Journey Anthology. He is a published music critic. He wrote and published a travel book, "The Other Color - a Trip Around the World in Six Months" (FMA Press). He lives in the Washington, DC, area.
35. **Shafkat Aziz Hajam** is a poet, reviewer and co-author from India Kashmir. He is the author of two poetry books titled as "The Cuckoo's Voice" and "The Unknown Wounded Heart". His poems have appeared in international magazines and anthologies like Wheel song anthology UK based, PLOTS CREATIVES online literary magazine USA, Inner Child Press International USA, AZAHAR anthology Spain, SAARC anthology, Amravati anthology Bangladesh, Litlight literary magazine, Pakistan. Currently he is working as a private school English language teacher in a school namely Hill Park International Secondary school located in his native town Handwara, District Kupwara, Jammu and Kashmir.
36. **Shaurya Arya-Kanojia** is the author of the novella, End of the Rope, and an upcoming novel, Divided. He hosts a

Spotify podcast, called The Four Boys Club. His short stories, published in national and international magazines, have been nominated for The Best of the Net 2023 and the B'k Best Small Fictions 2021. More about him can be found at www.shauryaak.com.

37. **Susan P. Blevins** was born in England, lived 26 years in Italy and now lives in Houston, Texas, where she tends her garden, looks after her cats and enjoys reading, writing and playing piano. She also enjoys drinking wine with friends and reading for the blind. While living in Italy she wrote a weekly column about food. She now writes essays, stories and poems about food, gardening and her life journey and is published internationally. Given the chance she is still ready to jump into the abyss.
38. **Tapan Kumar Pradhan** is an Indian poet, writer and translator from Odisha. He is best known for his poem collection "Kalahandi" which was awarded second place in Sahitya Akademi's Golden Jubilee Indian Literature Translation Prize for Poetry in 2007.
39. **Yucheng Tao** is an international student from China, currently studying songwriting in Los Angeles. His work has been featured in Wild Court (UK), The Lake (UK), Red Ogre Review (UK), Cathexis Northwest Press, and NonBinary Review (which includes an interview). His poems have passed into the semifinalist round of the Winds of Asia Award by Kinsman Quarterly, and many poems and fiction have been published in Yellow Mama, Apocalypse Confidential, Waymark Literary Magazine, Ink Nest, The Arcanist, Synchronized Chaos, Down in the Dirt, Academy of the Heart and Mind, and others.



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