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# GJLL



**Phenomenal Literature**

A Global Journal devoted to

# **Language and Literature**

A Peer-Reviewed Print Journal

Volume-5, Issue-1 | July – Sep 2020

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**

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## POETRY

### 1

## Bindi

ANJANA NAIR

Wide and creased, plain and bare  
Her forehead remains an island forsaken  
White frothing hairs marking the borders  
Daring the seafarers, weathered and green

A green bindi, desolate and dejected  
lost in the myriad of colours in her vanity box,  
Scales up to the daring heights of solitude  
And greens the barren land

Many went later,  
Some got marooned  
Some felt blue  
But mostly reddened  
Withering at the heat  
of the intense love  
That poured out  
Incessantly from within her

They all left  
For she, loved all hues  
Not one in particular  
Giving all a chance  
Harbouring none of them



Her forehead remains wide and forsaken  
Waiting more to imprint on her  
But non to conquer her



## 2

### The Unspoken words

ANJANA NAIR

They hung in the air  
Neither here or there  
They told another story  
That I intended to bury  
From lips they never fell  
But I let the mind yell

They created a parallel world  
A world of truth  
Born out of indecision, out of weakness  
I let them go out formless,  
with their meanings clung  
In each of the spoken words

I created a world  
With words that I wanted to speak  
But for which I was rather meek  
But now it is out there  
In the open  
Distinct, yet unspoken



### 3

## Memories and Expression

AVDHESH JHA

Silence represents,  
I am missing you,  
I keep silence,  
But Silence doesn't work.

Communication says,  
I remember you,  
I keep communicating,  
But Communication too fails.

Both fail  
But neither missing  
Not remembering  
fail to remind me of you.

I want to express  
Your coming in my memories,  
But I don't know the way  
other than silence and communication



4

**What am I doing?**

AVDHESH JHA

I await for a phone call  
That has yet not come  
Do I? Really, Do I wait?  
No, not at all. Certainly not.

Am I hiding or playing?  
I question myself.  
Replying, I laugh on myself,  
For I know, I am lying myself.



## 5

### Faith

DESPY BOUTRIS

I knew the dying was coming –  
knew her heart struck twelve  
because I couldn't sleep,

could only gaze out at the hallway,  
past my door as it creaked  
on its hinges, the wind outside

the open window running  
its hands over everything in sight.  
If I closed my eyes, I could pretend

it was my grandmother, running  
her fingers through my hair.  
I knew my father would call soon,  
stranded at the hospital with her,  
not wanting me  
or my brother to see death so young.

I knew the lawyer would stop by,  
present us with her  
will. I didn't know she'd leave

my brother her rocking chair,  
and me: my favorite breakfast –  
her recipe for buttered biscuits.

Didn't know my father's face  
could glisten with tears or how hard  
I'd sob, or how my mother's palm

would smooth back my hair  
me as we watched the coffin descend  
into the ground, my grandmother

making her way into eternal life,  
as the priest promised.  
I wish I believed in eternal life.

It's too much work to try  
to imagine a realm without darkness,  
no croaking

toads, nothing with claws.  
It's too hard to believe in her  
cheering for me up above.

But how tempting it is to have faith  
in her floating like pollen above us,  
the clouds blurring her angles,

her body all tangled up with God's.



## 6

### Tryst

DESPY BOUTRIS

The secret to sin is to do it  
in secret. We learned secrecy young –

two girls taught to swallow our hunger –  
so we meet up at nightfall

once the last lights have gone out. We walk  
down the roads, cursing this town

full of coal-miners and farmers and churches,  
cursing the way we'll likely never leave.

The air is petrichor-stained, and we're led  
only by the humming street lights

and starlit sky. We find each other  
at our meeting place, the lake south of me,

north of you, me scrambling over the wet rocks  
toward the grove where you've lain down

the knit blanket. And as soon as we catch  
each other's eyes, we're each saying *Here*

*is my shirt, here is my hair, my hands,  
my mouth, take it, take me, right*

*now*. Your eyes glow like lightning bugs,  
jaw sharp as my pocket knife. As we strip  
our breaths turn to fog, the cool drizzle falling  
onto your curls and half-shut eyelids.

Your thighs shear mine –  
the seawater taste of skin, the scrape of teeth  
against lip, fingertips meandering down spines,  
tracing mandibles. Breaths a windstorm –  
some desire to rub ourselves together  
till we make some sort of fire. As your mouth  
latches onto skin hardly anyone has seen,  
rosy even in this low light, we gasp  
like people drowning, and I try to think  
of a word for the way I want you – *wildly*,  
maybe. Like a monsoon. But what's at first erotic  
erodes: love collapsing like the hills  
that gave way after so much rain and mud  
last winter. And so much want  
is sinful – I know – so we're wary  
of the fires and floods, lying together  
only in darkness, water spattering our faces,  
swallowing what we can of each other.



(first published in *Prairie Schooner*)



7

**On Being Gay in Yemassee**

DESPY BOUTRIS

I'll never forget us  
entraining this freight at dusk light  
to escape cabbage farms, rusted barns  
and Bible-barkers who stumble  
through starrified nights.

Will our fear follow us?  
We poach peaches off pallets  
and lick juice drips off our lips  
like it's all we know,  
on the road to salvation –

me, carving a heart into the wood  
and you, a miracle  
in the moonshine, grabbing hold  
of my trembling hand  
like maybe we're something holy.



(first published in *Folio*)

8

**What's love got to do with it?**

EDWARD AHERN

A little word that carries heavy loads,  
Of caring, lusting feelings, coarse and fine,  
Of heavy meanings, shaped by hints and codes,  
Of godly wants and heathen needs enshrined.

A sanguine word so often misapplied  
If used too loudly it's a toast or boast  
If used too softly it's a lover's lie  
If used with malice it's an evil ghost

A word whose phrasing shifts with time and age  
Into a silver black with use and care  
Into a band of gold with worn off gauge  
Into a skin with looks no longer fair.

This little word with meanings lank and loose  
Is what we use to help us self-seduce.



9

**Spring Aroma**

EDWARD AHERN

Spring begins with skunk cabbage  
erupting through the rotted earth,  
the rank symbol of winter's passage

Before fish start to rise to scavenge  
bugs drifting in their surface berths,  
spring begins with skunk cabbage

Birds see, on returning to challenge  
still coldness with their chirpy mirth,  
the rank symbol of winter's passage

Well before the squirrels can scavenge  
enough to fill them out in girth,  
spring begins with skunk cabbage

As the sun starts to gain advantage  
the trees see in their budded rebirth  
The rank symbol of winter's passage

For as the cold lessons in damage,  
before other life sets out its worth,  
spring begins with skunk cabbage,  
the rank symbol of winter's passage.



## 10

### Sam

*(To Sam Neil and Sam Hunt)*

GARY LANGFORD

I write on theatre-scapes of Southern lakes.  
Both of you are known as a fond fantail.  
Birds ask me to talk delicate ideas.  
Wings tremble as they sing.  
A few fly over you in love atonement.

Locals go to pubs in their own stories.  
A glass is raised, and another follows.  
Yours, the drinkers call in soft temper.

Celebration has its own storyline,  
its own layout, its own film script.

Bar hands shake in rehearsal.  
Mist flows along the morning lake,  
passing by Bottle Creek vineyard.  
Goldminers of old Clyde argue.  
Two paddocks, they hum a refrain.  
*We are massaged by a comedy.*  
*This is mind shaft country.*

I paint you in a wild mushroom.  
You are dancing down history.  
Accents go overseas as ducks.

My film work is a bouncing bowler hat.  
Yours is a wardrobe of time's characters,  
of those whose temple is a pub.

Q: who used the most language?

A: weight is on the effect.

Life of the late afternoon hero.



## 11

### Frank Crooner

GARY LANGFORD

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.  
You make me happy, every day and night.  
Righto, call the road workers, that'll do.  
They hope he's put down the drain hole,  
having never heard a crooner before,  
especially from a first day staffer.

Shovel in hand, legs jumping around.  
Do not despair, love is in the air.  
Better than cranky Frankie, says the foreman.  
Who? ask the workers as the shovel bends  
to be a microphone. Sinatra – the foreman.

Man, are you on something – the workers?  
Frank Crooner – originally Pete Buckle – sways.  
He feels the backing orchestra come alive  
the more he sings into his shovel,  
wearing a recycled dinner suit,  
covered by a compulsory workers uniform.

San Francisco, there's flowers in your hair.  
Hippies ain't crooners, frowns the foreman.  
I know, parents born in that flowery period.  
He shakes his head. Grew up on grass.  
Bloody embarrassing when they warble.

I'm touring the roads – the crooner.  
He throws the shovel in the air,  
only it hits the foreman on the helmet.  
Frank Crooner is fired before morning tea.  
Fly me to the moon, he croons, waving to fans,  
now only dressed in his recycled dinner suit.



## 12

**Soldier on the Bridge**

GARY LANGFORD

The soldier is at the dawn ANZAC day ceremony.  
On the bridge a rusty trumpet blows *The Last Post*.  
Locals groan. He can't play the trumpet.

They tolerate him as a 'mad little bugger.'  
Two of his ancestors died in the Great War,  
never emerging from the Somme's mud trenches.

A great uncle stepped on a bomb in Vietnam,  
crossing a rice field. Body parts were gathered,  
delivered to his family in a small package.

No one knows what they really thought of war.  
Letters were censored in case peace broke out.  
Personals were signed, sincerely yours.

Today's soldier, tracksuit and t-shirt:  
*ANZACS came, saw but didn't conquer.*  
Made in China, advancement, no spelling mistakes.

He holds out his rifle to attention,  
saluting a nearby soldier's statue over the river.  
The fallen are labelled in alphabetic order.

Poppies are sprinkled into the water,  
picked from a wild field on the way.  
A single shot downstream, another trumpet blast.



Locals are relieved at the ceremonial end.  
Rifle uncocked, trumpet on a chord the soldier  
leaves the bridge as a contract rabbit hunter.



## 13

**Reverend Grain**

GARY LANGFORD

Services grow in the age of the grain.  
The reverend fastidiously praises farmers.  
Word is spreading of a new faith.

A grain is placed on every tongue.  
Worshippers are called one-day grainists,  
how each service increases fertility.

A supper of twelve seeds sits at the table.  
The finest kernel is in the middle,  
bailey believers one side, wheat the other.

Agrarians affirm weekly meetings,  
whether in a chapel or a council room,  
chanting faith on the birth of seeds.

Parliament is held in the specimen shed.  
Members worry about seeds being committed.  
They form committees of party granules.

Followers, whether rich or poor in grains,  
welcome at any cost granular miracles,  
convinced only these can be saviours.

Reverend Grain conducts hymns faithfully,  
Blessing every water lily and seed,  
Beyond the birth and death of grains.



## 14

### With the Sun

HOLLY DAY

each morning I wake up to  
her beautiful sighs, her rosy  
cheeks, skin like that of a  
perfect porcelain angel knickknack, and the night of  
endless screaming and thrashing in

her confining crib  
is forgiven and close to

forgotten. she opens her perfect  
olive eyes and I can't  
believe this is the same creature that woke  
up howling  
with rage and anger at  
simply being

a helpless baby.  
I put my arms around  
her tiny warm body, press my lips to the top  
of her head, tell her everything will  
work out in the end, hope she will  
someday forgive me as well.



15

**Bong**

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

we forget to water the plants our parents  
entrusted us with all the petals wither

when we start but the whole time we just fill  
our environment with smoke and bubbling water

until the slopes arrive and such is ubiquitous hunger  
Cheez-Its and Doritos the salt in the carpet

is saturated and green we better  
vacuum or eat all the crumbs



## 16

### Cracked Windshield

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

Sudden the stone that cracked  
the windshield, the storm that  
struck the heirloom oak – you  
ask for rain, beg for answers.  
Soaked hands steer through  
the blindness of the blur –  
ten years now since Dad  
merged into the final lane,  
his pass misjudging distance  
from collision, and that night  
Mom heard a screeching  
in her bedroom like a crow  
passing from another world,  
a bleak siren thrusting her  
to darkness her headlights  
could not cut through.



17

ESP

JOSEPH HART

Suppose there were ghosts.  
What would you say?  
Conjure up preachers  
To scare them away?  
Chase them from shadows?  
Forbid them the day?

Suppose I read minds.  
What would you do?  
Suppose that your dreams  
Told fortunes for you.  
And all these predictions  
Really came true.

Suppose there were things  
That no one could see.  
More things in heaven  
Than poetry.  
Would they be good?  
What good would they be?



## 18

### Love

JOSEPH HART

Stale beer and cheap motel rooms –  
Winds that whistle silently  
Through old ruins –

Breathless ghosts of people, thoughts  
And feelings – love  
That never was – is  
All illusion,  
Guesses, hope  
And fantasy?

Passing music that in age  
Will be as common, unremembered  
As the prehistoric night –



## 19

### Compassion

JOSEPH HART

Children are like cats.  
Treat them any way you like,  
They'll love you. If you're cruel,  
In their minds,  
They'll think you love them anyway.  
Your check to immortality  
Is a child's forgiveness.  
Hell must be the absence of illusions.





20

**My Last Duchess**

JOSEPH HART

There she sits. She's dead, you know.  
Silent as a tomb.  
We together pass our days  
In this empty room.

She doesn't smile. She doesn't speak.  
She doesn't walk or laugh.  
That's what I want. My love song  
Is an epitaph.

A marble sleep, shut eyes of wax;  
I shall not marry thrice.  
I murdered her. I did. Because  
She was very nice.



**21****Big Leaves**

KEITH MOUL

As principal, this tree stands staunch at the center of my land, with me resisting wind, rot; my native anchor around which I pivot on its symbolic tether, typically confident of a safe return. Seeds flutter down to expand our influence. Each year leaves cascade, always left to gather on receptive ground, imbibing its mold nourishment like grateful miners emerging into a welcoming rush of air to breathe.

Nothing lascivious works here. Thrill of power stands exposed, like a Thomas Jefferson statue, enduring however cold for a yeoman on his land, freely engaged and spreading continental dreams.



## 22

### Enticing the Blind Mind

KEITH MOUL

Hard wind weakens a resistant mind  
to expect trees' rings laved by tears,  
to compel complete emotional bias  
or collapse dwarfed in their shrieks.

Every day on our land we know truth  
including baneful effects on our lives.  
So we planted a wide ring of saplings,  
then surveyed to build the house 100  
feet to the center, awaiting patiently  
a sturdy congregation of oaken trunks.

But carnage can befall, pile its victims,  
to expose natural predation darkly, as  
if suckered to bad bargains by the Devil.

The trail enticed us, dropped promises,  
"the west," however undefined, drew us  
far beyond reason, into terrible denial.

Our creed does not admit to greed, nor  
what our discipline calls serendipity,  
what is labeled by some a blind mind.

Lord, my children too stoop to kiss  
this ground; they rely on your mercy  
to thrive, as must the standing trees.  
I know your need, so I beg for them.



23

**Prairie Winter**

KEITH MOUL

Winter storms sometimes pass in benign breezes,  
forced east toward the big lakes. Left behind, the  
night accepts a redolent moon and salient snow light.

Will ample snow always fall in maximum moonlight?  
No, such events happen only coincidentally, not cosmic  
returns calculated for millions of years to entertain us.

I watched first for snow light when as a boy my older  
family members counseled to be alert for spirits to pass.



## 24

### Miles of Meaning

KUNLE OKESIPE

There are miles of meaning  
Between the tongue and the palate,  
Acres of ambiguity between the eyes  
And the outset of the nose;

There are pages of unspoken words  
From the archive of thoughts,  
Defeated like birds in penury,  
Dreaming the bottled corns of life;

There is a lament of twilight  
Hand in hand with collegiate sadness,  
Illegible to light but eloquent  
In the sciences of darkness;

There are outlawed rivers  
In the desolate desert of the soul,  
Like a mole of beauty,  
Or flowers of words in the dark curfew  
Of a tongue restrained;

There are fires in life that never take a nap,  
That rage and raid like a school of bandits,  
Relentless as a night without its dawn;

There are riflers of dreams  
That camp under the train station of life.  
You never know why.



## 25

### Differences

KUNLE OKESIPE

Between friendship and vitamins  
Dreams and the stock market  
Shadows and levied smiles.  
The distance between a river  
And the oil spill of longing.  
Between an angel and the fault line of reason  
Points between the hawser of hope  
In the sea without a ship,  
Nuances between a dog and a lover,  
Between a wolf  
And a man imminent before a bridal bed.



## 26

### The Permanence of Change

MILTON P. EHRLICH

When we swam from water to land  
we embraced each other for good.  
It wasn't until one of us left the other  
that we first heard the howl of a wolf.  
Being a tumescent king of a mountain  
had no appeal without a warm body.  
Every day was a brand-new adventure –  
the only thing to count on was change.  
Ever since man invented the wheel,  
he's been going around in dark circles  
in coping with invisible sources of fright.  
In man's ecstasy of rage he may realize  
That all he can do with bigger& better  
bombs is drop them. Wars of the future  
will be fought with sticks and stones.



27

**Still Smitten With Love**

MILTON P. EHRLICH

For my wife of more years  
that I'd prefer to not count  
who has never lost her sense  
of immediacy as powerful as  
the scent of a blooming rose.  
I've never failed to appreciate  
the exact provocation evoked  
when she quickens any room  
of people she enters into life.





## 28

### **In a train station**

NDUE UKAJ

Crowds of people  
Run towards many directions  
Some of them have a luggage  
Some embody confusion in their eyes  
Some waiting for the train  
And a few returning to Ithaca like Odysseus

Everyone is found to be in one place  
Where they depart to different directions.  
However they all have the same purpose  
The lives' walk  
O God, the unknown lives' walk.

You are cleaning the front head and with a sweet voice,  
asking  
Who is the walk?

Odysseus when returning to Ithaca,  
Understood that Ithaca was far away from his dreams  
Everything had changed, except his memories.  
Ithaca did not remember his heroism  
She was not Ithaca of Odysseus' dreams.



## 29

### New day

NDUE UKAJ

I am awake and stay in front of the window.  
It is open, just like my eyes, just like my mouth  
Just like the flowers that take sun rays on this morning  
Just like the hills undressed from the dark night.

A tree is in front, and are many colors in it,  
Is the color of a tree log, of wet leaves and fruits  
That fulfill her meaning, its existence.

I am in front  
Just like the window in front of me.  
And the tree  
With its invisible roots  
And keep all that beauty.

I stay in front of the window and see behind the tree  
The naked hill and take a peak towards the horizon  
There are disappearing pedestrians with various news  
For the city.

I stay in front of the window and think for two truths.  
That are fighting, just like my eye's fight with the hill  
touching the sky  
And the tree with its deep roots  
On the earth which is never full of water.

I am awake and stay in front of the window.  
It is open, just like my eyes, just like my mouth  
Just like the flowers that take sun rays on this morning  
Just like the hills undressed from the dark night.



(Translated from Albanian by Peter Tase)

## 30

**My Little Soul Mate**

O.P. SINGH

When the heights of my mind,  
     Seem out of reach,  
 When the depths of my heart,  
     Seem but to breach.  
 When the entirety of the universe,  
     Seems entirely empty,  
 When the celerity of the cosmos,  
 Can't keep pace with my crawling entity.  
 When an unpierceable shroud of haze,  
     Seems to environ the glimmer yon,  
 When the life seems but a cumulus,  
 Of blighted hopes without any ray of a dawn.  
     When living itself seems,  
     Like the life's greatest blunder,  
     When all the sky-high ideals,  
     Lie in shatters umpteen, wide asunder.  
 When the life looks like the doomed legendry love voyage,  
     Of a moth, the callow flame lover,  
     Who is honey-trapped to a bitter ashy end,  
     By the cold-hearted flame queen, queer.  
 When all heaven-kissing promises seem Lilliputian,  
     When all love seems but a prosaic guile,  
 My cuddly little poem grasps hold of my languid legs and  
     says,  
 "Be a man, I am with you up to and beyond your funeral  
     pile".



## 31

**A Rose Arose but Fell with Ego**

O.P. SINGH

A rose with a blushing dawn as it arose,  
Wherever it cast its glaring glance,  
To see the whole world bow to its pristine bewitching beauty,  
With rapture of vanity it got to dance.  
But as no sorrows last forever,  
Ah, it is true with pleasures too,  
No fount can flow aye,  
No valley ever echoes with the call of a cuckoo.  
So as the spree of vanity dance got agile,  
The rose struck again and again against its prickly thorns all  
around,  
Ah, it's all petals of pride were pierced deep,  
Torn asunder and lost to the dust of the ground.  
Forgo your ego,  
Never let too much pride,  
In yourself greatly grow,  
Or else you will never hit your stride,  
And in life very far you won't go.  
Practise the virtue of humility and bend,  
As in a deluge the oaks fall,  
When the reeds stand,  
The world uproots the egoist howsoever tall,  
To root yourself strongly in the world uproot your ego and  
bend.



## 32

### Critical Comments

RAJIV KHANDELWAL

My third poetry collection  
    Stood published  
    With rave reviews:  
    “Solemn, gracious, funny  
    Soliloquies documented dauntingly  
Accessible collage of profound artistry”

My debut novel  
    Is a great story  
So said the editor

My little grandchild  
    Wrapped in warm comforter  
    Lying snuggled  
                    Skin to skin contact  
Demanded a story

And eager to please  
I made an unplanned bedtime tale  
Skillfully weaving the stories path  
    Via characters she knew  
Whipping up the journey of imagination  
    With fantasy and make-believe  
                    Visual images

Creativity at its best

That I aspired  
Would cast a spell  
Be a wonder  
An all-out entertainer  
Possibly educative  
A page flipping kid friendly narrative  
To be recited every night  
But  
The preschooler looked up at me  
With a bemused expression and concluded:  
“*Nana* – you do not know how to tell a story”  
I am leaving  
*Nani* is better

As always

My efforts

Fail



33

**Ascending Winds**

ROGER G. SINGER

moving lightly among  
drifting currents  
and partial shadows

there is a listening  
of the eyes  
following  
the dance of sway

where  
walls of mountains  
release from the  
edge,  
winds ascending  
among angels  
circling overhead  
hoping to provide  
those that hope  
another breath





## 34

### Self-help is the Best Help

SANDIP SAHA

When a boat becomes fragile  
and a hole develops at the bottom  
any amount of firefighting to plug it  
will prove futile resulting drowning.

The atmosphere of the society  
has been so vitiated that  
cosmetic overhauling  
is not going to work,  
though girls trained in karate and  
have presence of mind, courage  
to combat the wolves,  
who run after only women flesh,  
can become successful occasionally.

The cure of this disease of the humanity  
lies more with women and less with men.  
Men are habitually inclined to sex crime  
so they need to be ruthlessly dealt with.  
Women should be conscious and not callous  
so that they, knowingly or inadvertently,  
should not fan the fire of brutality against them.

Oh women, stand up and vow once for all that,  
'we will not help to do any crime against  
other women nor be part of any movie,

television shows or advertisements as models...  
depicting us as a commodity of sex for luring.  
We will not flirt to get a favor from anybody  
nor wear clothes which unduly attract 'dirty eyes'

Even then some brutes will attack women  
for which immediate stringent punishments  
from chemical castrating to death sentence  
should be given to the culprits.  
Remember, so long there are heinous crimes  
the society is not civilized  
death sentence has to be there till such time  
to get rid of unwanted weeds of the society.



35

**And Life Passes by**

SANJHEE GIANCHANDANI

I am as if waiting on the shore  
sand slipping beneath my feet  
I don't know how to react; mind-numbing  
Monsters suck me in  
to this whirlwind of nothingness  
as if a movie in fast-forward mode  
or a thunderous roar after stillness  
the process of meaning-making is diluted  
senses refuse to respond  
Am I moving ahead or going back?  
in the inexorable sphere of breathing in and out  
Blankness envelops me; a dark, empty void  
I cannot see further than my horizon  
'long-term' jest escaped my vision  
taking each moment by itself  
calming anxiety, assuaging all worries  
Sometimes it's essential to live in the moment  
for in life, there are no accidents



## 36

### Chances

SANJHEE GIANCHANDANI

If you came back now  
would I consider you?  
Logically the answer is no  
But this wayward heart doesn't know  
because waiting for this love  
is like waiting for Godot  
One moment you decide to stay  
the other moment you want to go  
There was no real effort made  
even in the relationship was on  
so what should I expect  
now that I think you are gone  
No sweet notes or flowers did I receive  
I cannot decipher where I went wrong  
Conversations always centred around you  
your problems and another pointless issue  
Perhaps, I didn't reach out  
but did you ever try?  
On convince me  
or simply to tell you why  
I couldn't get out of my shell  
Sometimes my stories I did  
try to tell

but never got support or  
dependability from your end  
we actually never tried to be  
each other's friend



## 37

### Passage

SUMAN SINGH

Browning leaves tumble out  
From autumn trees and  
fall on the quadrangle free  
no crunching footsteps  
disturb the silence deep  
Winter yawns out in a stretch.

Corridors stark and soundless  
Without the stomping footsteps  
Fall deep in tranquil sleep,  
Unfettered mists speed swift  
spreading out cold freeze  
Struggling sun signs out.

Silence breathes loud sighs  
But stirs awake no voices asleep –  
Till a tentative step is heard  
Shuffling the span of time

Come! Come! out of slumber  
Walk brisk the passage of time  
Smile, laugh, talk, sing, dance;  
Come soon from out the deep  
Give voice to all your dreams  
Spring awaits in the wings.



## 38

### Romance

SUMAN SINGH

It really was a sunny day  
A lazy lull lay in the air  
I heard a knock outside my door  
I wondered who the visitor was  
To call so early on a holiday  
When I was soaking up the newspaper  
There was no one at the door except the scents of summer.

My garden was at peace today  
The sparrows silent strangely  
I turned my head as I sensed movement  
Just a twitch of shadow  
Glide smoothly into the hedge  
I viewed the hedge quite closely  
There was no one there at all except grasshoppers making  
love.

I turned towards my door again  
My voiceless visitor stood vigilant there  
He smiled and spoke with his forked tongue  
Inviting me to make my move  
I stood a statue, quite transfixed  
But he danced from left to right in full glee  
There was no one here at all except he and I and of course  
romance.



## 39

**Outcast**

TAMIZH PONNI

How do I live a perfect life?  
Amidst this fight to survive  
Why can't it be black and white?  
These grey areas are getting hostile  
One mislaid tile on the floor  
Is already giving them an eyesore  
Even the purest halogen couldn't kill  
All the carnal pathogens in full  
Is anything truly flawless or faultless?  
Every so often, it all becomes a mess  
While the world is busy conditioning  
All the tiny little heads in the academy  
Criminals preaching and preying  
Upon the stages; among the flock  
Of clueless sheep lapping up  
The colourful lies flooding them  
As I observed it all for a while  
With endless doubts and ambiguity  
I wondered who these saints were  
To decide what's right or wrong  
To judge what's lawful and not  
Sorry folks,  
I couldn't fit the moulds  
And forgot to follow the books  
I was getting very busy  
Emulating my beliefs,



Embracing my defects  
Paying no heed  
To the intentions of the world  
Not really knowing  
I was an outcast in the making.



## 40

**A Stunning Visual**

TAMIZH PONNI

In the wake of the rain, I glimpsed a magic  
That lit up the world with flare and frolic  
    Rubbing my eyes, I gaped in awe  
Across the skies as murky clouds moved  
    Violet brought in the vivacity

Through tons of tints, smooth and slinky  
    Indigo glitzed it all up with radiance  
While lucid lights dyed the vapoury lenses  
    Blue's brilliance shined so bold  
    Azure and Sapphire; cyan in fold  
Green was glossy with lustrous shine  
    Gleaming and glowing; fair and fine  
Yellow's golden flash, envied the rich  
Holding them colours by an invisible stitch  
    Orange's beams were soft and slight  
Painting the space with a gaudy patch  
    Thanks to Red and its jazzy hues  
The sky blushed like a deep red rose  
Trimming the clouds with vivid bows  
Their origin and end, nobody knows.



## SHORT STORY

### 1

1932

DC DIAMONDPOLOUS

Pa decided to join the Bonus Expeditionary Force. After dropping Ma and the youngsters off at Uncle Vernon's, he let me ride the rails with him from our home in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, all the way to the Washington Freight Yard.

Pa and thousands of other veterans were demanding their bonus pay – the money they could have earned if they hadn't gone off to fight for their country in the Great War. No man wanted to wait until 1945 to get paid, not while his family was starving. That's why we came to Anacostia Flats, a swampy, muddy area along the Anacostia River across from the Capitol where we could see the dome. Ankle-deep in mud, Pa and I built our shanty along with forty-three thousand, counting wives and children – the biggest Hooverville ever, named after the president who no one seemed to like.

When the bank people came to take our farm, Pa rushed out of the house with a shotgun and fired over their heads, scaring me and Joey. Ma cried. The twins howled and clung to her flour-sack dress. Pa cursed the politicians, said they were just bumping gums when it came to veterans' bonus pay.

We made our shack out of materials from the nearby dump site – old lumber, packing boxes, and scrap tin. Pa and I worked shoulder to shoulder. He started calling me Tom instead of Tommy.

Other veterans were scattered around Washington in deserted billets, but Camp Marks was the heartland. We built a real city with streets, latrines, a barber shop, a lending library where I spent most of my time, and a boxing ring, where Pa liked to spar.

For breakfast and dinner, everyone ate a stew made of potatoes, onions, and hotdogs. We lived on Pennsylvania Road, a place I called home.

Next door was a colored man from Harrisburg and his son Cornelius.

Pa said two things made a man equal – fighting for your country and taking care of your family – so it appeared, 'cause everyone got along. Pa said the newspapers lied, wanting to cause trouble, saying the races couldn't mix, and that communists were infiltrating the camp. How could that be when everyone had to show their service certificate?

One day, Pa and I walked to the top of the bluff where we looked over the entire encampment. From poles and shanties, hundreds of American flags rippled in the breeze, showing how much we loved our country.

That night we took our meal back to our shack. Pa gulped his down and said, "War makes rich men richer. Remember that, son, before you go off to be a pawn in a rich man's game." I didn't eat much after that. Pa's anger and bitterness filled my belly instead.

A few days after we settled in, we walked to the Capitol where the House of Representatives took a vote on the Bonus

Bill. Pa and I wore white shirts and bib overalls, wool caps – hot for June, but that’s what we had, being farmers and all. Other men dressed in wrinkled suits and worn fedoras. The tall columns dwarfed the people on the steps. Veterans sang, “America,” the air itself charged with hope.

When the organiser, Mr. Waters, came out and said the House passed the bill, I never heard such whooping and hollering. Tears ran down Pa’s cheeks. Hats twirled in the air, cheering going on for near half an hour. We had money and could go home.

But when we headed back, Pa said, “Son, this is just one hurdle, the Senate has to pass the bill and that’ll be harder.”

“Why?”

“More Republicans in the Senate.”

What seemed whacky to me was how something so sensible, like paying people their due, had to be voted on in the first place.

That night sleep came in jerks.

Two days after the House passed the bill, we went to the Capitol for the Senate vote. Veterans held signs reading, *No Pay We Stay, Give Us Our Bonus Or Give Us A Job.*

Pa’s fists stretched the holes in the pockets of his overalls, his jaw working back and forth. I could feel him wanting to get into the ring while we waited. He took off his cap and looked to the heavens.

Pa’s bonus money went down in the Senate. He said it was like the crash of ‘29 all over again.

I was too old to take his hand, but I let him take mine.

“We’re staying on son, until justice is done.”

Some folks left. But many stayed, with more coming from out west to join in the protest.

Toward the end of July, Hoover demanded that all veterans go home, but most had no home to go to.

On July 28, thousands of us walked to the Capitol. Food was becoming scarce at Camp Marks, so everyone looked gaunt, but we were righteous in our cause, and that gave us strength.

Police walloped the protesters with their billyclubs. We broke through their line and ran. Gun shots fired. Women screamed. It turned into a riot, and then I saw the U.S. Army marching toward us.

There was infantry, soldiers on horseback, tanks. They were coming to rescue us. Overjoyed, I cheered along with Pa and everyone else. The army aimed their rifles. Sunlight glinted off the tips of their bayonets. But then –

*... they were charging at us!*

Bile roared in my stomach. They hurled gas grenades. People scattered.

I hacked, snot poured from my nose. I experienced Pa's pain from being gassed in the war.

Veterans threw rocks at the army.

I shuddered, knowing my father could be killed by his own.

We ran toward the flats.

But what we were running to suddenly rose up in flames – the shanties, the library, all of Anacostia Flats.

Pa put his arm around my shoulder while we watched our city burn. I held back tears, wanting to be strong for my father.



## 2

# Sparky the In-Law

ED WOODS

My brother-in-law was a certified drunk who thrived upon critical abuse of me. I developed many skills that he would continuously vent slurs and felt I was lucky to achieve anything in life. I absorbed such abuse to 'keep peace in the valley'. My return after 4 years in Western Canada coincided with my sister and the drunk's purchase of an older house that was previously owned by another certified drunk and his renovations were a nightmare.

I volunteered to tackle this major challenge in lieu of rent and stay in the house until all work was completed up to Code Standards well aware of alcoholic stresses in effort to mainly help my sister. Spare time was used for landscaping plumbing and wiring. Aside from everyday in-law circumstances some incidents stood out more than others. I wish this was fiction but alas no such luck

### **The Light**

A ceiling light over the kitchen counter was to be installed and the TV addicted alkie said he would install it. He bragged that you don't need to be an electrician to install a simple light. I left for errands and upon return the light was still in the box. I began to install it when barked out for me to stop. I went out for a few hours and arrived home to a darkened house where the boxed light still sat in the box. It remained there for days. I was sick of hearing about how this

needs to be done but in his usual stupor he promised to do it. I said he had better because this is now two weeks into the scenario. His religious devotion was to television so I turned it off and said to finish the job before the TV is turned back on and left. I could see him walk in his normal cycle from kitchen table to put an empty bottle in a case then to the fridge for a cold one then stagger back into the chair.

Again I came home to no surprise of an uninstalled light then angrily retrieved my toolbox from the car and began to install it when he and my sister came into the kitchen. He flopped into the chair in shaken jitters and my sister in calmness asked me to install the light the next day. It turned out he only shut the light off then stood barefoot in the double stainless steel sink to disconnect power. He let out a scream and was thrown from the sink onto the kitchen floor. The circuit breaker went off. I doubled up in laughter and said he should have known the grounding system went through the cold water pipes.

From then on I knew him as Sparky. I told Sparky to get to a hospital as to set off the breaker he had 15 amps go through his body and this is heart stopping territory. Sparky sucked back a chain of beers and said nothing because he couldn't stop drinking long enough for medical care. He was monitored as if an infant for the rest of the night.

### **The Roofer**

Forty eight times a year they made weekend trips to a friend's cottage and never once was I invited. One Monday they asked me to join them up north but I said I would work on the house. They said to forget the house for a while but I shrugged off the suggestion. By Thursday they were more emphatic but I refused as their collection of fishing buddies



were not the type to associate with. They went into a long diatribe about how I should join them and I replied that in fifteen years I was never asked and now it's a demand so what's up? Does someone need wiring or plumbing done because that's the only time I get invited to cottages? Sparky said a guy who is a friend of a friend needs his cottage roof shingled and he promised I would help. I asked how much he was paying and then Sparky's brilliance of judgment surfaced as he told the guy I would work like a dog all weekend until it was finished for a steak and glass of wine and that I owed it to them to do this request.

I questioned why they volunteered my time to someone they barely knew and I don't even know. He said he didn't want to be embarrassed now that a promise was made. I rejected it outright and told Sparky he better change his brand of beer because the current label has warped his mind and since this is such a great opportunity then do it himself. End of conversation. The mood around the house was not good but what next? Every weekend tied up because a drunken loser shot his mouth off to another loser?

Sunday night Sparky arrived home with the most beautiful colour of sunburn and could hardly walk. He filled in for me in the blazing sun and carried shingles up a ladder for two days. He sat down to have a beer but passed out at the table. He took three days off work to recover. Surprisingly they blamed me for his pain and lost days at work. I said nice try but the next time you propose a drunken offer remember this pain. To this day I am still blamed for his state.

### **The Chipmunk**

His self-image was as a macho and cool dude who smokes a man's cigarette and drinks a man's beer. While absorbing

inane TV programs this night he gobbled hard licorice and had a sudden sneeze fit that shot licorice bits across the table as his cigarette flew about. Something irritated his left ear and a tiny lump formed that soon swelled up. It turned out to be a small chunk of licorice that shot back up into the ear canal from his throat. A doctor advised it be removed quickly due to the probability of infection or ear damage but first he had to stop drinking for a week as a local anesthetic or freezing wasn't possible. He didn't and let it ride and began to look like a chipmunk loaded up with nuts to hide for winter. A few nights later he became violently ill as the septic blockage let loose. Later he bragged about how people run to a doctor for little things when nature takes care of itself.

### **Carnival Ride**

I had an early Friday shift that ended after a long week of driving a chemical tanker transport truck throughout Ontario and Quebec. I sat outside to enjoy a glass of wine when the phone rang and displayed an unrecognised number. The caller asked for me and I replied if I could help him. He went into a vulgar tirade about how I was supposed to be at work by 6 p.m. Firstly I told him to change his attitude and asked why is he calling me? He was a company dispatcher and was told I would drive a truck to Texas. In bewilderment I asked how this unfolded as I am not looking for employment and how did he get my name and why did he think I was going to Texas.

Light shed upon this idiocy when he said he had beers with Sparky and mentioned he needed a driver. Sparky bragged that he would solve this problem and would get me to drive the truck because apparently I sponged off him and basically 'sat on my duff and did nothing anyway'. I asked the dispatcher if he realised he placed confidence in a drunk

and out of curiosity what was the product on the trailer and how much is he paying? It was an amusement ride and it had to be at a town fair by Monday. The trip amount would pay less than 25% of my current income and once onsite I could sit on my duff and do nothing just like I am doing right now. It would be unpaid time with no meal or lodging allowances either.

Having enough of this social reject I clarified that he expected me to leave an employer who pays four times his offer to sit with the carnival freak show crowd and end up with less than minimum wage. I added he doesn't need to look very far to see why he has trouble finding employees. His vulgar rant began again so I told him to shut up and blame Sparky so get him to move the trailer as he will fit right in with your group. In fact you could put him on display in your Freak Show once the ride is in place. I hung up and the phone kept ringing several times but I ignored it.

Sunday evening Sparky arrived and was agitated because the carnival goof called him all weekend. The trailer was still in their terminal with no driver. I reamed him out for having a moron call in unbelievable vulgarity because his drunken stupid brain screwed him again and that he should get off his duff and get up there and take an amusement ride all over North America for free because that's what it will end up paying. As usual I was blamed for Sparky's embarrassment and I owed it to him to take this job. My reply was the fridge is full of beer so go in and further boost his ego and worship his religion across the room. End of conversation.

### **Airline Ban**

Sparky's company selected him to attend a corporate product show in Arizona. The morning of the flight he had beers

before leaving home then again once through security. When the aircraft leveled off at cruise altitude he was crying out for bar service and his first beer was finished in seconds then he ordered another that disappeared just as fast. His third beer was denied as the flight attendant stated there was a two drink limit. My sister ordered a beer and slipped it across to him but no sooner did he have a sip when the attendant came by and said he could not finish it. Since my sister did not drink the bottle was taken and dumped out.

Sparky conned a passenger to order a beer and he would be on the lookout for attendants as it was passed back and forth but the attendant focused upon the row. No sooner did the passenger hand it over to him did a hand reach in and took the bottle and told him he is cut off and anyone around him is not to sneak beer to him. As she left to dump the beer he got a passenger in the next row to order a beer and then fill the now empty pop can my sister had and he could drink it. Again the attendant caught on and took it away then declared their section cut-off. Sparky grumbled and sulked like a chastised child but what amazed me was my sister who later related this story in detail failed to accept that seven beers for breakfast and airport bar beers on an important day is trivial.

Sparky went to use the lavatory at the back of the aircraft and conned a passenger to order a beer with the incentive of a few bucks extra for the trouble. The flight attendant was standing there as he exited and scolded him for trying another stunt. Shortly thereafter staff announced bar service was unavailable for the remainder of the flight.

Once landed and exiting the aircraft airline staff informed him that his return ticket is cancelled and a refund would be applied to the corporate account. In the process my sister's ticket was also affected. Upon alternate return they

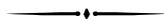
dropped into Las Vegas for a few days. Since the flight from Arizona was short in duration he loaded up on beer at the terminal to cope with a no-bar-service flight. The flight to Toronto was at an odd hour and had air turbulence then entry into Canadian Airspace resulted in no bar service.

Once home he finished off a 12 pack of beer and did nothing but wail about the airline. His company was not impressed when the situation came to light but still no one found it unreasonable that beer overruled corporate obligations.

### **Executive Privilege**

Renovations on the house were finished and I acquired a trendy flat. One wintry night I was asked to drop by the house where they proposed an idea that since Sparky was an executive (in actuality an order desk clerk) and I was a lowly truck driver. When there was a snow storm I should drop to clear off their cars and make a path to the house so that Sparky could just walk out and get in the car free of snowfall. I stared at them and said to please tell me this is some kind of joke. No it wasn't. So let me get this straight. I as a pilot for 20 years and scuba diver and driver of Uranium and hazardous products plus Natural Gas pipeline construction and electrician plumber and a host of other jobs am supposed to drop by the home of a lazy hung over drunken order desk clerk. I left in a huff and from that time on avoided the house.

In the end I phoned my sister to say she married into his lifestyle and insults but that was her choice. Afterwards we would meet at a coffee shop while Sparky was at home.



## NOVEL EXCERPT

### 1

## Excerpt from the Novel, 'Overbrook': Chapter Two

RENEE EBERT

Six little student nurses spent our first day at Overbrook Psychiatric Hospital in the Receiving ward, interviewing new patients who I couldn't help think of as prisoners. There were bars on the windows and locked doors, and the women and girls were forced to stay here until someone, a judge, or a doctor, said they could leave, so it wasn't a stretch to think of them that way. The second patient I interviewed had been here before, a hard-looking teenager, maybe eighteen, possibly younger. She wore lots of black make-up, eyeliner and heavy mascara, and white lipstick which was very much in fashion. Her hair was teased out and sprayed into a dark massive mess on her head. Unlike Mrs. Schmidt, the girl was neither confused nor afraid.

"I'm your next guinea pig?" She spoke before I sat down. I thought about the picture I must have painted for her, the little good girl in her starched uniform, going through the motions of trying to discover some truth about the patient to eventually help her. "Well, let me save you some time and me some breath." She blew out a stream of white smoke reminding me how much I could use a cigarette

right now. Mine turn waited until we took our mid-morning break.

“My name’s Mary Ellen Byrne.” She recited a litany of her vital statistics, “I’m seventeen but I have a birthday in July so call me eighteen. They brought me here last night instead of the county jail, pulled me in front of some old geezer judge who said I didn’t belong in Juvie Hall, and jail would do me no good, so try Overbrook.”

“Why were you brought here?” I sounded like Dorothy the meek and humble and my throat was dry. I wished I’d taken that cup of coffee with me from the nurses’ station.

“Guess. Can’t you guess?” She chided me, “Come on, you gotta have some idea. What the hell do they teach you all?” She lit another cigarette from the butt of the old one. I wrote down ‘chain smokes’ in a column for signs and symptoms. She tugged at the sheet and read what I had written, raised a black painted eyebrow and handed it back to me. “You’d chain smoke too if some old son-of-a-bitch threw you in here in the middle of the night.”

“Maybe you could explain what happened last night, Miss Byrne.” I had glanced down to read her last name again. Mary Ellen stuffed two sticks of Juicy Fruit in her mouth and chewed until she had sucked the last vestiges of the sweetness out of them. I noticed as she chewed that some of her teeth closer to the front had dental caries and were already turning her teeth black. She may have been seventeen, but it wasn’t hard to picture her in ten years, several pregnancies, emaciated looking and having lost one or two teeth along with her looks. I shuddered.

“Sure. I was out with my boyfriend, Joey, and we had some drinks. I had too many and so did Joey and we ended up throwing stuff, first pretzels, then the empty bowl. All cuz

he says I been cheating on him, says I got laid by his best friend.”

Mary Ellen’s eyes traced the interior scene recalling the barroom brawl as she spoke and she reveled in what she considered a fun time. I knew she cleaned up the language significantly for my benefit or for the doctors whose ears pricked up and were clearly listening to her remarks. She chewed and smoked some more.

“What happened that you were brought here?” She waved my question down like a flag holder at the Indy 500, wide sweeping gestures as if to say, don’t ask the obvious, I’ll tell you in due time. And she did.

“The guy who owns the bar, a real asshole.” No holding back here. “He calls the cops cuz we wouldn’t leave. Why should we? We paid for the drinks. Screw him.” She punched the cigarette butt into the overflowing ashtray, and she sat forward in her chair, all the while lowering her voice and speaking just to me, so I could hear her. “Look, Miss Espisito. I ain’t no nut and I don’t sure as hell belong in here with this bunch. I got a kid brother, ten years old, and I know I should a thought of that when I started fighting with Joey, and goin’ to the bar and all. But I gotta get home for my brother. And this place gives me the creeps. It ain’t my kinda place. You know?”

I sat closer to speak as softly, “But isn’t this better than county jail?”

She shook her head violently back and forth and came even closer so that I could smell the rankness of her unwashed hair and body and the mixed smell of alcohol, Juicy Fruits and Kool cigarettes. “Jail has a set time. Here, it’s like limbo or hell or both. No release date. Man, they could keep me here forever.”



I didn't have to look at her to know she was afraid, and I believed her about her ten-year-old brother. His name was Bobby, and there was no mother or father at home to care for him. "Mary Ellen," I whispered, "Do as they say, go wash up, and speak politely to them if you want to go home."

She pulled back and looked at me with narrowing eyelids, assessing me, the little innocent good girl she took me to be. "I can help you do that." I added and we both stood up together. She walked alongside me to the nurses' station and waited while I retrieved an individually wrapped bar of soap, comb in its own cellophane cover, two towels and wash cloth. I told one of the nurses, "I am taking Miss Byrne into the bathroom so that she can wash up." The nurse didn't even look our way.

It took a half hour to wet comb the teased tangles out of her hair. She pulled out some face lotion from her bag which the staff let her keep, and some pancake makeup which she applied ever so lightly after we scrubbed the heavy smears of blush off her cheeks. She declined the shower because regulation said she'd need to relinquish her clothes in favor of the blue cotton patient gown that opens at the back. "If you take the sweater off, we can sponge off your arms and body and then do the same for your legs and feet."

Mary Ellen occasionally glanced at me with a mix of resentment for the obvious loss of privacy, then her face would alter with sadness and even appreciation for helping her.

"What's your real name?" She looked up from scrubbing her feet and then shoving them back into sandals. "I mean let's cut the Miss Esposito shit, okay?" We found a small tester lipstick in her purse, in a shade pinker than the dead white

stuff she was wearing, and which she now brushed on her lips and spread thinly with her finger.

“Nicole.” I knew she would not say it out loud so the doctors or nurses would hear.

“Nice name for a wop.” She smiled and only her good teeth showed.

We walked back into the day room and Mary Ellen found an empty table where she settled down with a pack of playing cards, starting to line the cards up for solitaire. I stayed behind at the nurses’ station writing up the notes on her intake form, indicating her concern for her brother, her cooperation in answering all questions and ended with an observation that, “the patient appears eager to return to her family. She exhibited interest in her personal appearance and cleanliness.”

I didn’t really know what I was doing, yet somehow, I already got a sense of the game. I amazed myself to think I caught on to the greasy wheels of the Overbrook system so early on. I am sure now as I was then that it had something to do with the tone of my professor, Dr. Stein, all those things he didn’t say were being recited in my head. He came to my thoughts now as I signed my name to the notes and handed Mary Ellen’s chart to the nearest intern who would beat a path to her. Mary Ellen would be quiet, careful, polite, and he, predictably, would recommend signing her out. So much for good behaviour.



# PLAY

## 1

### Breaking Point

(One-act Play)

GARY BECK

Scene 1 (The kitchen of the Rawlins, a blue-collar family struggling to make ends meet in the economic downturn. The apartment is low-income. Enter Fred, carrying laptop, logged onto a site. He starts to take out breakfast bowls, but is drawn back to the computer. He sits and continues to participate in a chat room. Enter his wife, Myra.)

Myra: Why isn't breakfast ready? You know I have to get to the warehouse on time. I'm on first warning. You know what that means, don't you? One more lateness and my job is at risk. They'll fire me if there's a third incident. Hundreds of people are desperate for work, eager to replace me, and the boss knows that. If we lose my income we won't even be able to afford this place.... We already lost our home because you couldn't find a job after being laid off at the factory....You've got to find something. Anything. Or we'll be homeless. Then it'll either be the streets or a shelter. (He hasn't looked up from his screen.) Are you listening to me? (She goes to his computer, which

he quickly shuts down.) Are you watching porn? I don't know what you're doing, but you could at least pretend you care about what happens to us and wait until we're out of the house to look at that filth.... I'm going to finish getting ready for work. Put out breakfast. (Exit Myra. Fred puts out bowls, utensils, cereal, milk. Enter daughter, Penny.)

Penny: Is this all there is to eat? Didn't you go shopping? I know Mom left money for you to buy food. What happened to it? I know you don't drink or use drugs. Did you blow it at a strip club? (He ignores her.) It would be real nice to have eggs for a change, if that's not too much trouble. Even frozen waffles would do. (She looks at the cereal box.) You could at least get something that's not all sugar and chemical junk. (Penny flounces out. He sits in front of the computer, but doesn't turn it on. Enter son, Herbert. He inspects the table.)

Herbert: Did you ever think of cooking something like bacon, or sausages? You could make toast and we could have it with butter and jam, if we had butter and jam.... Between school and the team I burn up a lot of energy.

I need to eat good, solid food.... You don't even listen anymore. (Herbert storms out. Fred sits staring at the blank screen. Enter Myra.)

Myra: You could at least have poured out the cereal. It's not as if you have anything else to do. (She stands there indecisively. Enter Penny.)

Penny: When my training period at the insurance company is over and I actually go on salary, I'll

pick up breakfast at McDonalds. That way I won't have to go through this struggle to get something to eat every morning.

Myra: We'll be able to afford it then. I'll do it with you.  
(Enter Herbert.)

Herbert: Do what?

Penny: We just decided we'll get breakfast at McDonalds every morning, just as soon as I start getting paid.

Herbert: Does that include me, sister dear?

Penny: Sure. You'll just have to be ready to go with us in the morning.

Herbert: I can do that. It'll be fun to do something together.... Did you hear that, Dad? Like we're a family. You seem to have forgotten that.

Penny: Don't waste your time talking to him. He's in another world and couldn't care less about what we need.

Herbert: What do you think's wrong with him, Mom?

Myra: How do I know. I'm not a psychiatrist. When the japs first built the factory he used to rave about how efficient they were. As soon as they laid off all the workers and replaced them with robots, he went into his shell.

Penny: Don't they need people anymore?

Herbert: Not since robots became cheaper and more reliable. We just studied them in Economics 101. Robots don't go on strike. They don't need health plans and they don't get pensions. The bosses make more money now that they don't have to

deal with a union. Humans are obsolete in a modern factory.

Penny: Didn't they promise to keep all the workers employed when they first opened the factory?

Herbert: Yeah. But that was then, when they needed the support of the state and the community. Now that they're established here, things are different. They modernised the factory and it's completely automated. They probably only need one guy to press the start button. As long as they make money for their stock-holders they don't care what happens to the workers. The economic downturn gave them an excuse to lay off the workers.

Penny: You'd think Dad'd be angry at the Japs and blame them for his problems, curse them out or something. But he just sits around like a vegetable.

Herbert: There's a name for that in psychology.... But I forget what it is.

Myra: If you kids want a ride, get ready, cause I've got to leave. You can continue your discussion about the man who isn't there when we're in the car. (Exit Myra, Penny, Herbert. Fred sits quietly, as the others noisily get ready to leave. Penny, offstage, mockingly calls: 'Goodbye, Mr. Turnip'. Door slams offstage. A moment later Fred turns on the computer. Starts to mumble.)

Fred: So they want me to go shopping and do things for them... I'll do something special for them. First I'll visit Myra at the warehouse and show her how I care. Then I'll drop in on Herbert at school, just

to be sure he's got his nose in his books. I'll save Penny for last and stop by and see her at the insurance company. (He gets up, goes to a cabinet, reaches inside, fumbles around, then takes out a box wrapped in paper. Goes back to the table. Unwraps box. Takes out a pistol and a box of ammunition. Sings.) This is my pistol. This is my friend. It'll deliver the message I send. (He starts to load pistol.) One for Myra, my dear wife. One for Herbert, my respectful son. Two for my bad Penny, my appreciative daughter. (He cackles chillingly. Does a little dance.) Nobody needs pennies anymore. (Laughs. Starts to leave, turns back and takes box of ammo.) I may as well bring enough for their friends and co-workers. (Exit.)

## ESSAY

### 1

## Eleven Objects

VLADIMIR VULOVIĆ

In summer, 2008, after our father died, my brother Miša and I decided to sell our parents' apartment. It was a fine apartment in Belgrade, Serbia, my base for 30 years during my visits there. But Miša already had his own apartment and I live in the US. To sell it then. But what to do with all the stuff that had accumulated there since our parents' wedding in 1950?

"Get rid of it all!" Miša's wife, Dubravka, said and I felt as if my heart were about to burst. So I sorted, selected, sifted, tossed out a lot, and saved some.

#### 1) Root of a Vine

A twisted highly polished sculpture stands next to a windowsill in my parents' bedroom. Three gnarly roots join together into a twisted trunk: my birthday present for my mother, in December 1971, when I was still a high-school student.

Earlier that fall, I had asked her for a raise in my allowance, stating, among other reasons that I could then buy her a better birthday present. She denied me with these words: "I would prefer if you made me something with your hands."



With my hands! I was never good with anything practical. In elementary school, a failed woodworking project ended in tears. But it was her wish. I looked around.

Visiting my paternal grandparents at their farm in the village of Ropočevo, I stumbled upon a strange root: gnarled, tentacled, and weather beaten as if it had been dumped there by stormy seas. But Ropočevo, one hour by car south of Belgrade, is far from any body of water. How did that root or whatever it was end up so bleached in my grandparents' fields? I didn't know the answer and took this object as given by Providence.

I brought the piece of wood back with me to Belgrade, and washed it there, dried it, sanded it, and sanded it, over and over again, and then lacquered it many times. It gleamed.

Mama was delighted with my present. She kept it by the window sill next to her bed in the apartment of Sime Miloševića street where we lived in 1971 and then in Save Kovačevića street where we moved in 1977. My present stood at the foot of her bed in August 2003, when she died from a stroke.

It stands there now, in the same place, in August 2008, two months after my father's death. I wonder what to do with it. The lacquer layers have dried up and flaked off. My present no longer looks good. Will I really lug it all the way to America? Aren't there many other more beautiful things to take instead? I leave my gift, like much of me, in a Belgrade dumpster.

## **2) Hungarian Bull**

Brown-black, this small bull of baked clay is four inches tall, seven inches long, three inches wide, and one pound in weight. It stands on a doily in front of Mother's collection of

great world novels on a bookshelf in the living room. I read these novels long before I bought the bull in Hungary, in summer 1973, while visiting my Hungarian girlfriend. She gave me her love; I gave her lies mostly. I bought the bull to secure the love of my often too harsh mother. Later, this bull, hit by a random ball, fell to the floor, but survived with a glued horn. It's August 2008 now. I walk with the bull to the street and throw it in a dumpster.

### **3) My Mother's Gobelin**

The tapestry is three feet wide, two feet tall, with 390,000 stitches. It was made from a template in the Wiehler Catalogue, this particular picture known as Shepherd Idyll, or, Shepherd and Shepherdess. We had other gobelins in our house, some of which my mother created as a child, but this one was by far the biggest. She worked on it from the age of 45 to 50 when her sons were still manageable, when it was still possible to believe that the peace and harmony of the tapestry would descend into our family life. She finished the gobelin just when things in our family deteriorated. It's August 2008 now. This gobelin represents some of the best qualities of my mother: dedication, hope, perseverance. Miša however does not want it. I ship it to America where it will hang on the wall above my upright piano.

### **4) Lady with a Dog**

Pink ears, red lips, powdered cheeks and half-shut eyes. Auburn hair flowing from under a yellow hat with red flowers. The lady leans with her elbows on a white tablecloth, her arms half-bent, holding a black whiskered poodle. Their lips are two inches apart. They might kiss even. If the painting were to come alive, the dog's tail would break a glass

of champagne, red wine, or yellow liquor. The girl is radiant and self-assured. Renoir later married her.

This and other reproductions my mother chose. Petite bourgeois pleasures found a home in our home: Lady with a Dog, Poplar Country Road, Flowering Tree, Pensive Girl, Winter Village Scene, Degas' Ballerina – these are how my brother Miša and I called them. These reproductions were so beautiful that our godmother Ivanka believed they were originals! But in June 2008 when I took “Lady with a Dog” out of its frame I saw that it was made of machine-stamped paint on time-eaten rubberised paper. I left it in the apartment then, this canvas, and other framed pictures. The plan was to return in August and ponder their fate then: discard some, keep some, give some to grateful relatives. But now, in August 2008, they're all gone! Miša, in my absence, seeing “all this garbage,” has dumped them all in a dumpster.

In future, when I feel longing for Lady with a Dog, I'll bring up one digital photo I took in 2006. In this photo, my ailing Dad tunes his violin, while behind him, in the framed picture, the girl sends air kisses to the dog.

### **5) Unbreakable Glasses**

A glass like this has thick, transparent sides and its body widens from a nine-angled bottom to a circle at the top. It can hold two and a half deciliters. Even if dropped it won't be broken.

We had a set of glasses like this. We loved them. We drank from them tap water, sparkling water, home-made juices, Kokta (Yugoslavia's improvement to Coca-Cola), light beer, dark beer, wine.

It's August 2008 now, and my relatives, following a Serbian custom, visit to take some of my parents' possessions.

Cousin Tanja chooses a big doll from Russia, lacquered figurines from Bulgaria, and an unbreakable glass. Raising the glass, she says: "I always wanted a glass like that. It reminds me of Žika and Borka." I'm glad she mentions my parents. Yet Tanja, on her way out, forgets the glass, and I, not realising that, ship all the glasses together with the gobelin, loads of books and many other things to America.

Five years later, Tanja will die from cancer – too soon, way too soon – and I will find only four unbreakable glasses at home. What happened to the rest? Didn't we have six? Perhaps even unbreakable glasses are not unbreakable.

#### **6) Swivel Towel Rack**

In my parents' bathroom, on the right side of the washing basin, there were two metallic rods secured to a single metal bracket on the wall. The lower rod often fell out of its joint, making a loud clanking sound when it hit and bounced around on the tiled floor. It malfunctioned like this for ten or twenty years until August 2008.

Patience and skill were needed to insert the rod back into the bracket so it would not fall out again. Even more patience and skill were needed to drape a towel over this rod without the rod falling down. Disheartened by repeated unsuccessful attempts, sometimes I cheated: I'd position the lower rod first, then swivel the upper rod right above it, for together, as a unit, they were stronger than either one by itself.

By the time the towel rack started malfunctioning, my parents were too old to arrange for repairs themselves. I, during my visits, was too busy, and like my parents, accepted the imperfection of things. Miša and Dubravka, busier than I

was, kept saying that the rack was not broken really, but that it was our ineptitude that caused the problem.

Imagine my surprise then, in August 2008, when I don't see a towel or the towel rods. A towel is draped over a bathtub wall. The rods are in the garbage bin. My sister-in-law has junked them.

### **7) Swinging Chandelier**

The chandelier is greenish-yellow, the size of a honeydew melon, enclosing three teeny light bulbs. It gives off a soft yellowish light. Suspended from a long cord, its bronze, shaped-like-a-corn-cob bottom hangs less than two feet above our coffee table. My mother used to rest her legs on the table – the only one among us who had that right on account of her war wounds. But looking at the chandelier now, in August 2008, I think not just of my mother, but also of Vesna, my ten-years younger cousin.

My mother kept wrapped candy in a white ceramic bowl trimmed with gold on this table under the chandelier. Vesna, a child of six to ten then, lured by this, would approach the table, bend over, reach for the box, take a candy or two, and before my mother could utter “No!,” raise her head and bang it against the cob.

It happened every time. The chandelier swung. Vesna's eyes shone with pain and pleasure. Lucky for us that a round ring was attached at the bottom of the bronze cob. Lucky for us that Vesna's head was hard, so she was fine, in spite of repeated accidents. Lucky for us our memories remained with us regardless of what happened to the objects.

We sell the chandelier with the apartment.

### **8) Yamb Box**

Our yamb box was twelve inches long, six inches wide, one inch deep, with no top. With it, we used five dice, and for each player a paper form for writing down scores for minimum, maximum, and poker-like combinations. This box was a joint creation of my mother and Dule, her youngest brother.

My mother disliked the fact that during our yamb games rolling dice often landed on the floor. Maybe she also disliked their loud clatter and that they scratched the table. That's why Dule made a pine box for my mother. She then padded it with brown cloth, so that the dice would softly roll there rather than clatter or jump out on the table or floor.

She enjoyed yamb like a child. She clapped her hands when the dice cooperated. I played with her even when not in the mood for the game just to see her laugh. It was beautiful to see my difficult mother radiant and happy.

I still keep the dice at my home in America, but I have no idea what happened to the box.

### **9) Expense Books**

Many women in Yugoslavia used to keep expense books for their families. My mother was one of them. I brought her expense books back with me to America after my father's death. So now I can still verify how much newspapers, matchboxes or milk cost in 1959 and when and for how much we bought our first car. And I still remember my mother sitting engrossed at the table, pen in hand, entering income and expenses in these ledger books. That task seemed important to me, significant, even holy. After her death, Dad continued updating the books, but with little zeal, only because he loved her. Observing him once struggle with this

task, I asked him: "Did you ever, on account of this bookkeeping, do anything different in terms of spending or living?"

"Never!" he said.

### 10) Chess Box

This small chess set folds into a box nine inches long, half as wide, two inches tall. Though the box is scuffed, all the pieces within it are in good condition – except for a black pawn missing its head and chest, and a white pawn whose head has been glued back on crooked – the result of Miša's early mischief.

Dad loved chess. Mom played it out of love for him and later out of love for their two sons.

Inside the box Dad wrote: "For her birthday to my dear Borkica from her Žika – 'Vule'" and in three places: "Borka" (all in Serbian Cyrillic).

I assume he purchased this set for her first birthday following their wedding.

Inside the box there is also a stamp of its maker: "Etveš Josip, lathe operator from Subotica" (all in Serbian with Latin lettering).

I have more expensive and more beautiful chess sets, but this one is dearest to my heart.

### 11) Oak Table

Our living room table was made of oak: firm, strong, massive, with carved legs. In my memory, where everything is bigger and better, four to five people could sit at each of its longer sides, and one to two at the shorter sides. Yet, during my last visit to Ropočevo, I verified that only three people can sit at

each of the longer sides, and just one (albeit fat) person on the shorter sides.

At this table, my father designed electrical installation plans for many buildings. At this table, my mother made her biggest gobelin. At this table, they hosted large gatherings and festive dinners. At this table, we socialised daily, playing chess, yamb, cards, and dominoes. Given the absence of space in our small apartment, in high school, I used to drape clean beach towels on the table top, lie down on it and lift weights till late at night to impress girls with my muscles. (It didn't work).

The table withstood all this, dutifully, faithfully, from the time of its purchase in 1970 till the sale of our flat in 2008. As it was too big for Miša's apartment, too unwieldy for me to carry to America, and too good to be dumped, we moved it to our grandparents' house in Ropočevo, where no one has lived since they died. It still sits there, awaiting better days.



## BOOK REVIEWS

### 1

## Review of Dr. Subhash Chandra's Short Story Collection, *Beyond the Canopy of Icicles*

ABU SIDDIK

**(Beyond the Canopy of Icicles [A Collection of Short Stories], Dr. Subhash Chandra, New Delhi: Authorspress, 2018, ISBN 978-93-87281-01-1, Pp. 149, Rs. 295, US \$15)**

Dr. Subhas Chandra, a former Associate Professor of English, University of Delhi, is an acclaimed Indian storyteller. He has earned accolades for his short stories, one of which was declared a winning entry in a contest. Recently, he has been designated 'Literary Brigadier,' by STORY MIRROR, a large Online Portal with global reach. He has been awarded Nissim International Prize for Fiction, 2019 by 'The Significant League, a Literary Forum, comprising writers and poets. He has published two collections of short stories, *Not Just Another Story* in 2017 and *Beyond the Canopy of Icicles* in 2018.'

The present collection, published by Authorspress, New Delhi contains thirteen stories of myriad hues and tastes. It encapsulates diverse issues of contemporary city life – loneliness of the elderly and their betrayal by their sons, clash between belief and disbelief, modern day parenting and the corporate work pressure, mounting problems in nuclear family, tragedy of storytellers or writers, man-animal

bonding, safety of girls and women, subjugation of the Adivasis, flattery at corporate offices, sex and alcohol, sordidness of the circus players and other invisibles, etc. Stories reflect our society as it is – its beauty and bestiality, its humanity and inhumanity, its sanity and insanity, its plainness and vanity, its hopes and disappointments, its light and shade. Dr. Chandra has created a niche in the world of fiction. A look at the book testifies it.

Atheism and belief have always co-existed, but sometimes they cause rancor between the closest of friends, even life partners – husband and wife. The story “Atheist” depicts the falling apart of a family due to sharp divergence between the atheist, Abhay, and his believer wife, Prakriti. Having lost his wife and son, a desolate Abhay wanders in search of peace of mind and finds it in ‘belief.’ “I hear sporadic sounds of clanging bells. It is time for Aarti at Har Ki Pairi to begin. I get up and start walking in the direction of the sound.”(29)

Do Casanovas care for the consequences of mindless satiation of their sexual lust? Do they ever pause to think what they have left behind is a devastated life? The story, “Monster,” gives the answer as clear ‘NO.’ Having impregnated his ‘beloved’ twice and having sworn by his mother to his friend, Saurabh, working in pharmaceutical company, to obtain the abortion-causing pills, Adarsh blithely goes on to marry another girl.

In “Man/Superman” Hemendra both as a husband and father fail to protect his wife and daughter Deepali and Asmita from being molested by the louts of the street. He is laughed at in his family. Later ‘cowering Hemendra had turned daring and aggressive’ (44) and becomes overprotective. Ironically mother and daughter begin to feel

choked. Again he becomes a weakling and the family celebrates.

“A Caring Son” and “Get the Bill” are studies on ill treatment and neglect meted to parents by their sons. Digambar Thakur is betrayed by his son Awadh whom he saved by sacrificing his own kidney. In “Get the Bill” Ma living all alone in her failing age was murdered and her established sons are savouring, lobsters, fruit salad, apple pie topped with ice cream, at Maurya Sheraton and justifying her death in one ploy or another. Children’s ingratitude to their parents is nakedly presented in both stories.

“A Pinch of Love” depicts inhumanity of a loveless father Ratish who in spite of his wife, Triveni’s opposition sent his differently able child to a Home. Mother is shocked and dies. His visit to his labourer Hira Lal’s home on the occasion of their son’s birthday makes his eyes open. He took his son back, but the son not finding his mother anywhere went out of the house for good. A father learnt his lesson.

“Dual Curse” is a story of nuptial mistrust and doubt. Lavan’s happy home is set on fire by the entry of their common friend Sahil. Months passed and friendship between Sahil and Lavan’s wife Saru saw more sunshine. Meanwhile Saru gets impregnated. Lavan’s doubt gets firmness. He suffers from mental agony. Heated, he attempts to kill Saru but he stops, and Lavan is relieved from dual curse of killing his wife and unborn child.

In “Mother and Daughter” mother Padma and her daughter Sweetie with their ordinary talks unravels the tragic story of the midget clown of Bombay Circus, Heera. It is an insightful portrayal of “magnificent world!” of circus players, human or animal with their joys and pains, loves and cares, and the story comes to end with Heera’s permanent goodbye

to the loving daughter and mother who “keep standing at the door long after his receding back.” (91)

“The Inside Story” depicts the pains, joys, apprehensions of a storyteller, Vikash. His friends Biplob and Ramaswamy and his younger brother, Atul are his props. Biplob and his wife Chaitali bear his nuisance. Ramaswamy has two kids and his wife Sujatha feels disturbed. But she bears Vikash stoically. Atul reads his brother’s story accepting acid rains from his wife Nimi.

In “Prickly Rose” the narrator listened to low caste Gulab’s tragic story – how upper caste Thakur’s musclemen burnt his house, raped his daughter and wife in front of his eyes, how his son Phintu made an escape, how the father and son left the village and arrived in a slum in Delhi. Gulab was angry with the political system of the country. He was at pains seeing his Adivasi men and women reeling under abject poverty and helplessness. He was dubbed a *Maaowadi*, and later the narrator was sent behind the bars because of his connection with Gulab. The story unravels the power of state machinery so poignantly.

Aarush’s tale in “Writ of a Destiny” is deeply pathetic. He is able and hate boot licking. He gathers courage to teach his higher authority lecherous Naresh Sangi but in doing so he falls in his own trap. Unfortunately his colleagues and friends have not helped him. His acting of a madman ultimately could not save him.

“Romance in Hospital” is an exotic tale with serious social message. It tells the story of a nurse who for her poor mother and unmarried daughter sacrifices her body to his rich diamond merchant friend who feigns to be a patient and takes the advantage of sexual holidaying healthcare provider.

The private hospital Witchcraft's business model stuns the reader.

In "My Sister, Aalia" Tongawalla Rehmat's cruel treatment to his horse and to his wife Aalia is painfully depicted. The two sufferers share their grief. Sometimes, Aalia would come to meet him at night and put her hands around his neck. The girl without food day by day becomes extremely weak and dies. The horse revenges on his master by snapping his rope and "I lifted my front hoofs and brought them down on the drunk, sleeping fiend." (149)

As for technique Dr. Chandra's opening of each story is brilliant. It takes the readers directly into the story by its verve and energy. Titles are catchy. Dialogues salted with local dialects and words and phrases and characterisation are praiseworthy. Flow of the narrative is smooth. Some stories are close ended, some open. And what I like most is his realistic portrayal of men and women with their joys and pains, oddities and ills, hopes and dreams, failures and frustrations. And this he has done through the magic of plain words.

But in the end I must say if a single story based on communal harmony would have been included in this collection I would be much happier. Mutual misunderstanding reigns our days. It is our humble expectation that a writer of his caliber should write something to heal our mutual wounds.

The cover of the book is impressive. The book is a piece of unalloyed joy to readers of all echelons.

## 2

### Review of Oisín Breen's Poetry Collection, *Flowers, All Sorts in Blossom, Figs, Berries, and Fruits Forgotten*

AL INNES

*(Flowers, All Sorts in Blossom, Figs, Berries, and Fruits Forgotten, Oisín Breen, Edinburgh: Hybrid Press, 202, ISBN: 978-1-873412-04-6, Pp. 96, Price £10 + postage)*

Breen describes his own work as being 'long-form style-oriented poetry'. This is clear from the off as we are plunged into a trilogy of narrative incantations. The book situates itself in three parts, where *Isn't the act of placing flowers on a tomb a gesture of bringing a little life back to the dead?* constitutes an elegy, before *Dublin and the Loose Footwork of Deity* takes us to the eponymous streets that county. The final act, *Her Cross Carried, Burnt*, give a meditation on rebirth and reassembly.

On the page, Breen's first collection shifts unpredictably from neat clipped stanza, to breathless noise. In the tradition of first collections there is a central theme, around which the other themes grow and coil, although Breen seems to be trying something more ambitious here – attempting it seems to criticise himself even as we as readers perceive his narrative choices. It's sometimes difficult to breathe inside *Flowers*, we have to almost choose out breaths and when we do stanzas and lines can fall away – pushed past like the linear scrolling of an early entertainment console. We then read, we can then see that Breen has already predicted some

of our choices – it was all there, we just needed to learn how to hold on to it.

Throughout Breen's debut there is a powerful sense of shame. Shame for an insufficiency of piety, shame for missed signals, confused communication, drinking too much. It isn't playful for the most part until we hit the second set of stanzas. There is grime here too. Whether cider or watermelon, Breen wants us to see the mouldering and bitterness. His imperfect mourning, where 'our reveries prove little more than a drunkard's crutch' and 'grief is insufficient'. From these misericords of sadness, the poetry lurches down into catacombs of agony:

TIRED OF THE WEIGHT  
 UNDER THE AEGIS OF LENGTH-FORGETTING TIME  
 CIRCUMCISED, CULLED  
 I GROW WEARY OF CONSTRAINT  
 AND APPROXIMATE

The form here is one long exhale. There is no room to stop and walk around the edges of this stanza. We are wearied by it, compelled back into the reflection of:

And in turn each approximation,  
 Becomes the outline of the boundaries of the next,  
 And our plump history is sketched in non-linear distance,  
 between the staple and the snare.

The writing has rage, certainly, but is more about failure than solution. There is clumsiness on occasion, the 'flavour of wet fire' or 'glorifying numbness' seem to veil the writer's intent behind opacity that betrays the breathless honesty so well-woven elsewhere.

We see then the prayers unfold as the stuttering lamentations of the opening stanzas make way for a forceful sacrament on guilt, 'We all called him retarded, I was bullied too, but hating him was a guilty treat.' Breen asks us too –

what will you make of this? As if to gauge his own complicity. Will we go with him? With a child-like clawing, he repeatedly tells us 'This is a history of contempt.' Watching us read his words, he is even clearer:

So I stand,  
Feeling just like that  
Here beside you  
But what will become of the ashes I give you?

Throughout the collection there is then a palpable sense that this piece is aiming to do two things – complete a single narrative prayer; and use that prayer to upset us. He seems determined that we should turn over the grave-earth of our own grief just as he does here. Burying a father should be just as honest a topic for anyone as the labour of their mother.

He isn't ashamed at all, and he wants us not to be either. Disgusted? That's your fault. Does he come out the traps a little fiercely? Perhaps. But Breen hopes we will read again. He isn't interested in entertaining us from the get-go, he wants to make this all count. He wants us to stay and finish our beer. He hopes we will find something at the bottom.



## CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Anjana Nair**, post graduate in agriculture, a regular contributor of articles in the topics concerning agriculture, has quite recently ventured into the field of poetry and fiction. Writing in the initial years was mostly restricted to nonfiction and essays, the poet in her has only recently bloomed!! 'Stripped' is her first collection of poems published in 2020. Contemporary issues and social causes have always swayed her poetry in that direction.
2. **Dr. Avdhesh Jha**, an author, poet, teacher and observer is a strong critic with an inclination towards societal development. Presently he works with EDI of India. With ten doctoral scholars, being awarded the doctorate degree, the guide and mentor to Ph.D. aspirants, has presented several papers on different topics at national and international seminars. With multi-language understanding ability, interest in teacher training, psychology, research methodology, creativity and human values, he accredits himself to prepare, design and introduce several new subjects in the curriculum of Gujarat University in addition to be a member of curriculum framework committee of various universities and institutes of national repute. He has written about more than 200 poetries in English and Hindi. Associated with institutes of national repute, he has organised seminars and workshops and delivered talks and lectures at various seminars, workshops etc. He is

awarded with CHAROTTAR GAURAV and BHARAT EXCELLENCE.

3. **Despy Boutris** is published or forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Colorado Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Palette Poetry*, *Third Coast*, *Raleigh Review*, *Diode*, *The Indianapolis Review*, and elsewhere. Currently, she teaches at the University of Houston and serves as Assistant Poetry Editor for *Gulf Coast*.
4. **Edward Ahern** resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had over two hundred fifty stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories*, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of six review editors.
5. **Gary Langford** is the author of 42 books, including 16 in novels and stories, 4 textbooks and 18 books of poetry. His latest book is *100 Tiny Poems*, 2019. Gary is a writer and painter in Melbourne, Australia and Christchurch, New Zealand.
6. **Holly Day's** poetry has recently appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Grain*, and *Harvard Review*. Her newest poetry collections are *Where We Went Wrong* (Clare Songbirds Publishing), *Into the Cracks* (Golden Antelope Press), *Cross Referencing a Book of Summer* (Silver Bow Publishing), and *The Tooth is the Largest Organ in the Human Body* (Anaphora Literary Press).
7. **James Croal Jackson** (he/him/his) is a Filipino-American poet. He has a chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and recent poems in *DASH*, *Sampsonia Way*, and *Jam & Sand*. He edits *The*

Mantle ([themantlepoetry.com](http://themantlepoetry.com)). He works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. ([jamescroaljackson.com](http://jamescroaljackson.com))

8. **Joseph Hart** has a BA in psychology. He has had poems published in small magazines, and was twice nominated for a Pushcart. His favorite poets are Keats and Millay.
9. **Keith Moul** has written poems and taken photos for more than 50 years, his work appearing in magazines widely. His chapbook, *The Journal*, and a full-length volume, *New and Selected Poems: Bones Molder, Words Hold* were recently accepted by Duck Lake Books. These are his ninth and tenth chap or book published. Keith Moul, born in St. Louis, has lived among these voices, owes them fealty because people survive the plains under the most adverse conditions. He has come to appreciate the knack to this bravery, now much later in his life.
10. **Kunle Okesipe** is a Nigerian poet and playwright whose poetry has appeared in *The Revolution Relaunch (TRR)*, *The Tiger Moth Review*, *adda* (Journal of Commonwealth Writers), *Active Muse* and a number of anthologies. He has also won prizes for his plays.
11. **Milton P. Ehrlich** Ph.D. is an 89-year-old psychologist and a veteran of the Korean War. He has published poems in *The Antigonish Review*, *London Grip*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Descant Literary Magazine*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *New York Times*.
12. **Ndue Ukaj** (1977) is Albanian writer, publicist and literary critic. He was member of several editorials literary. He has also been editor of the magazine for art, culture and society "Identity" that was published in Pristina. Ukaj is included in several anthologies of

poetry, in Albanian, and other languages. He has published five books, including *"Godo is not coming"*, which won the national award for best book of poetry published in 2010 in Kosovo. He has also won the award for best poems in the International Poetry Festival in Macedonia. His poems and texts are translated into English, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, Finnish, Swedish, Turkish, and Chinese. Ukaj is member of Swedish PEN.

13. **P Singh** was born in Agra in 1942. Was awarded the membership of the Royal Society of Chemistry, London, U.K. in 1979. Worked as a Professor and Head of the Department of Clothing and Textiles in the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana for about 32 years. Was National Coordinator of a research project on natural dyes, sponsored by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Government of India, involving 9 agricultural universities. Retired in 2002. He was published in various national and international journals and anthologies.
14. **Rajiv Khandelwal** is an Electrical Engineer by education and is now a business man by profession. Rajiv Khandelwal has published 4 volumes of Poetry – *"Conch Shells and Cowries"* – published in 1998, *"Love is a Lot of Work"* and *"A Monument to Pigeons"* both published in 2013. 4<sup>th</sup> poetry volume titled *"A Time to Forget"* – published 2017. Rajiv has been awarded *"Literary Creative Award"* by Naji Naaman's Foundation for Gratis Culture, of Lebanon in which the Foundation had 2371 participants in their 2018 competition, from sixty six countries and has declared/rewarded 64 prize winners. Rajiv is one of the prize winners. <http://yourproductfinder.com>

15. **Roger G. Singer** has been in private practice for 38 years in upstate New York. He has four children, Abigail, Caleb, Andrew and Philip and seven grandchildren. Dr. Singer has served on multiple committees for the American Chiropractic Association, lecturing at colleges in the United States, Canada and Australia, and has authored over fifty articles for his profession and served as a medical technician during the Vietnam era. Dr. Singer has over 950 poems published on the internet, magazines and in books and is a Pushcart Award Nominee.
16. **Sandip Saha** is a chemical engineer and doctorate (PhD) in metallurgical engineering from India. He has got three awards for his scientific work and 33 publications on his scientific research work including three patents. He is a winner of Poetry Matters Project Lit Prize-2018. He has published one collection of poems, "Quest for reedom" available in amazon.com. He is published in the following 19 poetry journals: North Dakota Quarterly, Peregrine, Better Than Starbucks Poetry Magazine, Pif Magazine, The Cape Rock: Poetry, Las Positas Anthology-Havik, Pasadena City College Inscape Magazine, Shot Glass Journal, The Wayne Literary Review, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, felan, Oddball, Snapdragon, The Ghazal Page all USA, in Verbal Art, Phenomenal Literature, Tajmahal, The Criterion, India and in The Pangolin Review, Mauritius.
17. **Sanjhee Gianchandani** holds a Masters' degree in English Literature from Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She is a CELTA certified ESL trainer and works as an English language editor in the K-12 segment.
18. **Suman Singh** is a former Secondary School English teacher and a freelance writer. She writes feature articles,

web content, short stories and poetry. Her feature articles have appeared in "Reader's Digest" 'Teacher Plus', 'Progressive Teacher', 'BR International' (Hong Kong) 'Children's World' her short stories have appeared in the "Times of India" and "Eves Touch". Suman has won a poetry prize in a contest organised by poetsindia.com. Her poetry has appeared in 'Enchanting Verses Literary Review', 'Quest', 'Asia Writes' (online) and in an anthology 'Rendezvous'. Suman lives in the lake town of Nainital in Uttarakhand.

19. **Tamizh Ponni** is working as Design Facilitator in an International School, Bengaluru, India. I have a Bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering, an MBA in Human Resources and a Masters in English Literature. I have worked as a Professional Development Coach and as a Tech Integrationist as well. I believe that the best of being an educator is that while we teach, we also learn. Learning is a never-ending process and with technology integration, it gives an interesting dimension to knowledge acquisition and skill-building. I spend most of my free time painting, reading, writing, playing keyboard and watching documentaries/movies.
20. **DC Diamondopolous** is an award-winning novelette, short story, and flash fiction writer with over 200 stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. DC's stories have appeared in: *34th Parallel*, *So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Silver Pen*, *Blue Lake Review*, and many others. DC was nominated for Best of the Net Anthology.
21. **Ed Woods** was born in Toronto and now lives in Dundas, Ontario, Canada and through attending workshops established writers gave encouragement to expand upon

life experiences through poetry. Topics range from the serious to comedic twist and a wide range of observations or insight written from the heart. The most creative times seem to open channels to a wide variety of thoughts that flow onto pages.

22. **Renee Ebert** grew up in North Jersey and has since lived in a variety of places, from New York City to Washington, DC and southern California. Her most recent work is support for street children in Nairobi and incarcerated women and children in Cairo. Her first novel, 'Until The Darkness Goes' is e-published and distributed by Bublish. An essay and poem were anthologised in "In the Company of Women," Trish Schiesser, ed. A new novel, *Dead Eyes In Late Summer* will be published in 2020 by Black Opal Books. A short story, 'Alberta' is published in *Backchannels Journal* spring edition. *Overbrook* is a novel about a young nurse in her psych training.
23. **Gary Beck's** poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and his published books include 26 poetry collections, 10 novels, 3 short story collections, 1 collection of essays and 1 collection of one-act plays. Gary lives in New York City.
24. **Vladimir Vulović**, a native of what was then Yugoslavia, he emigrated in 1978 to the US to pursue physics. After devoting himself for many years, first to physics, then to software programming, He eventually took up writing. His essays have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Raven Chronicles* (twice) and my stories in *Signs of Life* and *The Literary Journal of The Association of Serbian Writers*.

25. **Abu Siddik** is a writer, residing in Berhampore, Murshidabad, India. He works as Assistant Professor. He has contributed to various e-journals and anthologies. He has also published five books. Website: [www.abusiddik.com](http://www.abusiddik.com)
26. **Al Innes** is a poet, playwright and historian from Edinburgh. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *BBC Book Café* and *one-eighth vulture*. His most recent play *Red Lines* appeared at the 2019 SYN Festival, performed by the *Minollo Theatre Company*. He is currently working on an essay collection, *Castles*, set for publication in 2021.





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