

The Enchanting Verses Literary Review

Issue XV March 2012

ISSN 0974 -3057



Published by The Enchanting Verses Literary Review

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Editorial

Ah, poetry. What is poetry really? Honestly, I do not know. If I knew the answer to that question I guess I would have stopped writing– forever but I am glad – that’s not the case. Some of the old poets say things like. “In any event poetry, pure literature in general, religion – I include religion, in its essential and undogmatic sense, because poetry and religion, touch each other, or rather modulate each other; are, indeed, often but different names for the same thing – these, I say, the visible signs of mental and emotional life, must like all other thing keep moving, becoming...” Well, Thomas Hardy was hell of a poet. He was enormous talent and he had a keen eye for details but I am not the same. We are different. We are not divided by the centuries but by the creatures dwelling within us. They feed on modern verses. Poetry is the oldest art form. The first one but we, the poets of today, are children of our own time. Now we use the old words but we put them on page in some new way. Poetry? Poetry is moving on. I am not saying that there will never be again some new Dante, Pushkin or Shakespeare, but me and you, the new poets, we are the children of the modern ways, of the new dimensions. We write each line with the pain of today, we use the paper of our skin, our nails into poems – deep. That is how I and all of us write and the craft of poetry is moving on– Evolving.

To be honest I do not like to read poetry from authors that I didn’t found on my own. But I was pleasantly surprised to see and read these great poems submitted to The Enchanting Verses Literary Review and I was convinced once again that our Ars Poetica is full of such brightly shining talents.

In the new issue of the great magazine The Enchanting Verses Literary Review you can read some of these poets – wonderful wordsmiths, with deep knowledge about the beauty of the line, the way it should sounds, the true power of the verses. Enjoy!

~~~Psycho Kanev (Guest Editor)



**Published by The Enchanting Verses Literary Review, ISSN 0974-3057.  
Published from Kolkata, India.**

## **The Enchanting Poet for ISSUE XV March 2012**

*Awarded for his efforts to popularise and showcasing quality poetry from all over the world.*

**Roger Humes** is a poet, editor and computer graphic artist from Claremont, California. He is the Founder Director of The Other Voices International Project and the International Poetry Editor for Harvest International, an annual arts and literature magazine. His works have been featured in Arabesques Review, Sentinel Poetry magazine, Hudson View, Art Arena, Poetic Diversity and many others. He has released a chapbook, *there sings no bird*.

### **Since Before I Read Your Poems**

*by Roger Humes*

Since before I read your poems  
I have loved you,  
since before I found your soul  
repeating my thoughts  
prior to when I uttered them  
I have loved you,  
since before your face  
walked the depths of my heart  
I have loved you.

I have loved you before our time was born, I have loved you before the sky was formed,  
I have loved you before the stars settled into the universe and found at last their names.

I have loved you before either of us knew of love, I have loved you before you were aware of  
our connection,  
I loved you before when silence was the only companion who shared the journey of my days.

So ask me not what this moment brings  
when you cross my thoughts  
with a slight smile played  
upon the fingers of my words,  
ask me not for this is an instant  
where all that is required of us is to listen to the sound  
of Solomon's harbinger wafting idly the wings of Sheba's dreams  
while your reflection observes in the teacups of my existence  
an offer of the surety that at such a time a breeze breaks  
the most sardonic of quiet

with the whisper "I have loved you..."

**Editor's Choice for ISSUE XV, March 2012**

**Lost Landscape  
by Joan Mc Nerney**

I am driving down a hill  
without name on an  
unnumbered highway.

This road transforms into  
a snake winding around  
coiled on hair pin turns.

See how it hisses though this  
long night. Why am I alone?

At bottom of the incline  
lies a dark village strangely  
hushed with secrets.

How black it is. How difficult  
to find what I must discover.

My fingers are tingling cool, smoke  
combs the air, static fills night.

I continue to cross gas lit streets  
encountering dim intersections.

Another maze. One line  
leads to another. Dead ends  
become beginnings.

Listening to lisp of the road.  
My slur of thoughts sink as  
snake rasps grow louder.  
See how the road slithers.

What can be explored? Where  
can it be? All is in question.

**Author Bio:**

*Joan Mc Nerney was born in Brooklyn, New York and now resides in Ravena, a town outside of Albany, New York. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in English from the Board of Regents, New York State Excelsior University. Most of her professional background has been spent in the advertising business. Her poetry has been included in numerous literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, BlueLine, 63 channels, Spectrum, and three Bright Spring Press Anthologies. She was recently nominated for "Best of the Net" 2011. Four of her books have been published by fine small literary presses. She has recited her work at the National Arts Club, Russell Sage College, McNay Art Institute and other distinguished venues. A recent reading was sponsored by the American Academy of Poetry.*

**Heavenly Places**  
**by Branko Cvetkoski**

I take everything from you  
And each moment return a blessed  
emptiness.

Oh, words  
Cold corridors for passing by!

Like earthenware  
I receive the shower  
Of your overwhelming ness  
And at the bidding of a humble hand  
I scatter you midst tables and furrows.

Emptier, I resound in space  
Light and cold,  
Echo before the builders of the domes,  
Under the foundation of the arch  
I take up my urn  
And stare in apathy  
High up  
And emptily...

Oh, marble dust,  
Oh, heavenly places!

(Translation: Dragi Mihajlovski and  
Graham Reid)

**Author Bio:**

***Branko Cvetkoski** was born on 21st June 1954 in the village of Slatino, near Ohrid. He is a distinguished Macedonian poet, literary critic, publicist and a translator. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology, Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and thereafter worked as a journalist at the Nova Makedonija Daily. During the 1990s, he was editor and editor-in-chief at Kultura Publishing House, secretary of the Macedonian Writers' Association, president of the Ratsin Meetings' Council, director of the Macedonian National Theater, editor-in-chief at the Stremež Literary Magazine and was one of the founders of the Balkanika Literary Foundation. In 2000, he founded and was editor-in-chief for several years at Makavej Publishing House and editor-in-chief of the Knževno Žitie Literary Magazine. He received the Miladinov Brothers Prize, Struga Poetry Evenings, Молумвен веј in 1993 and most recently Sergei Yesenin Golden Autumn Medal of the Russian Writers' Union in 2011. He is also a fellow of the Macedonian Writers' Association, member of the Macedonian PEN Centre and honorary member of the Bulgarian Union of Writers and presently he is director of Brakja Miladinovci City Library - Skopje. He lives and works in Skopje.*

**My Renaissance Mother**  
**by Ben Nardolilli**

She still believes heaven awaits her,  
But that in a past life, she was a di Medici,  
One of the magnificent ones  
Strolling the piazza, bringing  
Out forks and feathers  
For the royal tables of Europe to use,  
She was a Florentine then,  
Though she hates spinach now,  
She keeps an eye out for all the world's  
banks  
And takes an interest in mergers  
While contemplates her own web of  
deposits.

Yes, she was once a di Medici,  
Michelangelo was her gift to the world,  
Now she does not need to be my patron.

**Fragmentation**  
**by Linda M. Crate**

all the quandaries in the  
world could not solve you —  
but you're no enigma to  
me; I know the topography  
of your antics better than  
the lines of my hands, your  
garden is one of spoiled fruit;  
you're a fruit fly without his  
sense of smell, a ballerina  
without any sense of balance —  
you shroud yourself in mystery  
because that's the only thing  
that works for you, you don't  
want anyone to know how  
useless you are like a broken  
china doll you have nothing to  
offer the world but fragments.

**Author Bio:**

*Ben Nardolilli* currently resides in Arlington, Virginia. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Red Fez*, *One Ghana One Voice*, *Caper Literary Journal*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *Super Arrow*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Pear Noir*, *Rabbit Catastrophe Review*, and *Yes Poetry*. Recently, his chapbook *Common Symptoms of an Enduring Chill Explained* has been published by *Folded Word Press*.

**About bio:**

*Linda Crate* is a Pennsylvanian native born in Pittsburgh and raised in the rural town of Conneautville. She has a Bachelors in English Literature. She has been published recently in *Magic Cat Press*, *Black-Listed Magazine*, *Bigger Stones*, *Vintage Poetry*, *The Stellar Showcase Journal*, and *Ides of March*.

**Tea Party**  
**by Julie Heckman**

Lies, glamour, gossip and Earl Grey tea,  
turbulent tales boiling in china cups,  
elegant sacraments of blue-haired ladies  
pinkies stuck up in the air, hiding  
their pain or boredom or  
unleashing their  
hidden affairs.

Crimson glass roses, feathers and jewels  
crowned with wide-brim hats and trim,  
gloves, lace fans and perhaps some  
pearls, are appealing to these  
extravagant young  
and proper  
old girls.

The guild does not approve of:  
Cola  
Tortilla chips or  
Piercings of the tongue

Invitation is by “Tea Bag Only,” which is  
merely a device, to project the status of  
a seriously affluent wife. Shaved legs,  
polished nails and Gi Gi’s Brazilian  
waxing, will enliven you as one of  
the girls but may  
seem a little  
taxing.

**Author Bio:**

*Julie Heckman is a sixty year old who loves reading and writing poetry. She grew up in California and attended college majoring in Graphic Design. Here she started her own business called Julian Berlin Graphics which specialized in selling greeting cards.*

**The Undelivered Pitch**  
**by Robert Laughlin**

“I don’t care what you’re selling. Stay  
away.”  
And click.  
I didn’t have a chance to say one word.  
I work at home,  
no sounds around me of a boiler room.  
My pity wakes:  
I’d called a man so much alone that he  
would know  
the person calling him could only be a  
telemarketer.

**My Daughter, You Come from**  
**Sanshui**  
**by Chris Bays**

*In the Guandong province of China,  
Sanshui district nestles amidst the  
Zhujiang River Delta, a confluence of the  
West, North, and Sui Rivers.*

You come from a lotus world of pearls and  
sun  
beyond snake handlers, factories, and  
fisheries  
where Lubao’s ancient temple gathers  
lullabies  
for Tao, Confucius, and Buddha in spring.

You come from a Lotus world of jewels  
and sun  
beyond rice fields, sullen guards, and  
steaming night trains  
where Buddha sleeps in plush forests of  
your smile,  
reflecting light in harmony of three rivers.

You come from a people of lotus, love, and  
sun  
who bundled, kissed, and carried you  
beneath the moon

**Author Bio:**

*Robert Laughlin lives in Chico, California. His poems have appeared in Bryant Literary Review, Camroc Press Review, elimae, The Orange Room Review and Pearl. His website is at [www.pw.org/content/robert\\_laughlin](http://www.pw.org/content/robert_laughlin).*

trembling and feverish to our sanctuary  
beyond snake handlers, factories, and  
fisheries.

**Author Bio:**

*Chris Bays teaches English at Clark State in Ohio. Prior to teaching, he was a business owner and world traveler, having lived in Germany and Turkey and visited most of Europe and parts of China. His haiku received Honorable Mention in the 2008 Key West Heritage House Robert Frost Poetry Contest. Silenced Press nominated him for Best New Poets in 2010. His work has appeared in Acorn, Cantaraville, Contemporary Haibun Online, Frogpond, Haibun Today, The Heron’s Nest, The Houston Literary Review, Ink Sweat & Tears, Modern Haiku, Poetry Midwest, The Orange Room Review, Shamrock: The Journal of the Irish Haiku Society, and elsewhere. His first koanpoem, a form he invented, was published this past summer by twenty20 Journal.*

**Lone Walk**  
by Jessica Bates

Grains run  
Hours long  
Wasting the shore

Soft tongues  
Lap at the hours  
Speeding up and  
Slowing down

Fire sets  
Behind the tongues  
Ceasing time  
For a single breath  
Casting away shadows

**Author Bio:**

*Jessica Bates* was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana but grew up in Chesapeake, Virginia. She is now attending Peninsula Catholic High School as a senior. She is enrolled in a creative writing class. She has recently been published in literary magazine *In Medias Res*.

**Nothing To Pawn**  
by Aftab Yusuf Shaikh

Forty days will complete the wait,  
Tomorrow is the feast to arrange.  
Forty days ago her husband died  
Or just went away for a change,

She has to feed a crowd by herself,  
Said a priest of practices old,  
For only then the Lord will take the dead,  
Only then will peace embrace his soul,

Scared by a senseless ritual,  
Knowing not from where it came.  
If the dead man gets no peace,  
For the wife it is a great shame!

Done with the bracelets,  
Done with the necklace,

**Quiescence**  
by Jessica Bates

Lost in  
Indecision  
Time flies,  
In waiting  
For clarity  
That will  
Not come.

Questions asked  
In vain,  
No answer  
Silence rings  
Louder than  
Ever, deaf  
To all  
The world.

Over with the locker, done with the locket;  
All things owned were now things gone  
Nothing left with her to pawn,

Now notion less she looks at the rich man,  
Stares blankly at him for a while,  
The pawn broker, the wicked man,  
Looks at her daughter and smiles.

**Author Bio:**

*Aftab Yusuf Shaikh* has been writing since the age of eight and has ever since written more than a hundred poems. His poems have been published in a number of magazines including *The Istanbul Literary Review*, *Skipping Stones*, etc. He has self published two collections of poetry titled *Hero and Poems-Twenty Ten*. He writes in English, Hindi and Urdu. He is currently pursuing his Bachelors in English Literature from the University of Mumbai.

**Fall Morning In Providence**  
**by John Grey**

Death collects  
red and brown  
along the limbs,  
is flattered by the wind  
into something lifelike.  
It's morning in my eyes  
but a long dark evening  
deep in my bones.  
And the sun picks up  
where ancient history left off,  
brilliant but ultimately confused  
as the first leaves take their tumble.  
Another day,  
beautiful but deadly.  
There is a chill in the air  
that the light was not expecting.

**While Wondering How Much The  
Family House Will Fetch**  
**by John Grey**

Swimming pool, algae skin competing  
with chlorine for greenness; the concrete,  
once as hard and fast as rules, now  
cracked  
here, there; rusty recliner, think I'll recline  
my rust; the sun at least, though ancient,  
feels new; no gas grill, no family, just  
Esmeralda  
baking up a tan; almost naked, hips  
pointed  
away from having babies, bikinied breasts  
oblivious to eyes and their deceitful  
hormones;  
so this is the old house, to be divided up  
four ways, two sons, two daughters,  
I'd take the pool if I could gouge it out  
of here; where we live, it would be found  
art;  
suburban glory, do laps, just don't drink  
the water;  
top it up when it leaks; relax in it and  
bronze the paleness out of you;  
the past is dead; long live its status  
symbols.

**Author Bio:**

*John Grey is an Australian born poet and works as financial systems analyst. He has been recently published in Poem, Caveat Lector, Prism International and the horror anthology, "What Fear Becomes" with work upcoming in Big Muddy, Prism International and Writer's Journal.*

## **Animal**

**by Jerrold Yam**

First, trails of kohl like a raven's errant wing  
lacing the upper lid, then smatterings of nude  
and coral, almond, hazel, mussel-bronze  
opening the eye's film noir, salt grains  
washed up on a cheek's satin beach. She tilts  
your face gently backwards, look up, look away,  
her fourth finger, freed for a moment from its belt  
of silver, scrawls the finishing touches of rose  
and ochre, nature's gown pressed to the lips like petals of  
fire. And her heart races for no good reason, she  
believes her life incised, picked clean and hollowed  
like the hushed valour of a photograph, her unguent life-force  
distilled, poured down the chalice of your face  
with each wayward stroke. An hour before dinner,  
dishes brewing in their own enclosures, the blush  
of moon like a face averting the world, she feels her womb  
calling out, this is her plea, parched echo of a tomb, last  
scraps of colour dragged across the room.

### **Author Bio:**

*When not engaged in National Service, **Jerrold** (b. 1991) indulges in cheesecake, circuitous jogs and the occasional plot to sneak his Dad's car out to supper. He will be pursuing undergraduate Law at University College London in 2012; his poems have appeared in the Quarterly Literary Review Singapore.*

## **Bath**

**by Jerrold Yam**

With one arm cushioning the neck, legs barely  
grazing the edges, she lowers you into a tub  
of brick-red plastic, the kind to complement  
homes as excuses for sentimentality, its hide  
wide-rimmed and caving in at the sides, minimalist, no handles, excavating your composite  
like a prize. And her hands dig at warm water,  
piling crystal soil over a net of skin, your mouth is  
shuddering with glee, your limbs are four knots  
of rope maligned for a nobler purpose. Show me  
the world, you seem to say, show me all that I will leave behind. When you are fished  
out of its tarnished pool, your thumbs crumpling  
from the exchanges, the rituals, your quiet head  
assured, then dried and reclothed, she will leave  
the light on, water spilled like scraps of love,  
she will be the first to welcome you home.

**Morning Raga**  
**by Namita Sethi**

Sparrows chirp, tuuwitting tailor birds,  
The raucous din of jungle babblers  
Seven brown sisters shoving each other;  
The scarlet -chested woodpecker,  
A paradise fly catcher,  
Parakeets screech, oriental robins:  
Resplendent in formal black and white;  
Arrive with the singing mynas and  
bulbuls,  
To greet dawn's light.  
Crows squawk as the purple sunbird  
And the crimson breasted green  
coppersmith  
Alight on a green, green neem tree;  
Mingling with other guests that bring the  
whiff  
Of colder climes, and long flight.

Sometimes a peregrine falcon  
Swoops down with great might,  
Scattering the startled doves

**Identity, Unknown**  
**by Sweta Srivastava Vikram**

The ants in the wall  
don't know me.

The roaches breeding  
on the leftovers disregard me.

The house lizard mocks  
my inability to detach.

The tides in the sea  
urge me to forfeit.

My absence creates the presence of a fact:  
I didn't exist for those I lived.

Out from the silk cotton tree.  
With longing, the bright hued  
Kingfisher eyes the fish pond  
And dives in a flash of blue

Here squirrels swivel past  
Pecking pigeons,  
whoosh them away  
With the swish of tail  
To get at the grains.  
Here butterflies : orange, black,  
Icy blue and ivory pale  
Flutter their wings  
In synchrony with urban leaves.

The heart slows down,  
Made quiet, quite still  
Till with the insistent cuckoo  
It bursts into bird song.

**Author Bio:**

*Namita Sethi teaches English at a college in Delhi University.*

**Author Bio:**

*Sweta Srivastava Vikram is an award-winning writer, poet, novelist, author, essayist, columnist, educator, and blogger. She is the author of three chapbooks of poetry: "Kaleidoscope: An Asian Journey of Colors," "Because All Is Not Lost," and "Beyond the Scent of Sorrow." She is also the co-author of two poetry collections: "Whispering Woes of Ganges & Zambezi" and "Not All Birds Sing." Niyogi Books in India published her first novel "Perfectly Untraditional." Her first nonfiction book of prose and poems, "Mouth full," will be published in the UK in 2012. Sweta's work has appeared or is forthcoming in literary journals, online publications, and anthologies across six countries in three continents.*

**Anger (Sly Tongue)**  
**by Umamaheswari Anandane**

Unsaid words  
Wiggling its tail  
Between the closed den  
Ready to land  
With a sharp remark

Pressure builds  
Within more silence  
As I still....  
Hold on to my patience  
Releasing my steams  
Through a long sigh

My fingers entwined  
Eyes closed

**Wandering Soul**  
**by NeelamChandra**

The zest weeps  
Enthusiasm is desolate  
Zing is cheerless

The story  
Of happiness and glee  
Is forgotten

Erased and wiped  
Like faraway memories  
On sand dunes

Round pebbles  
Which once fascinated  
Seem meaningless

What remains  
Is the sad fact of life  
Spiky but true

One is not  
A body full of life  
But a wandering soul

I wished hard  
That I would get space  
To unearth this quake

Time the slow healer  
Rescued me late  
I have already done the damage  
The animal is now resting  
In peace within its cave  
Guarded by 32 walls

**Author Bio:**

*Umamaheswari Anandane is a freelancer content writer working for CityDirect, Pondicherry. Although she belongs to the Engineering background with 3 yrs experience in Web Development, she loves writing poetry (few published on online magazines).*

**Author Bio:**

*Neelam Chandra is an engineer by profession. Writing poetry and fiction is her passion. More than hundred and fifty of her stories/poems have been published in various leading Indian as well as international magazines such as Enchanting Verses, Frog croon, Ewoman etc. Three of her children's story books have also been published. Her poems/stories have been published in various international anthologies . She has won second prize in a competition organized by Pratham Books (Chuskit competition). One of her story has won an award in a contest organized by Children Book Trust, India in 2009. She has also been awarded second prize by Gulzarji in a Poetry Contest organized by American Society on the topic 'Poetry for Social Change'.*

**At the gates of Borgha**  
**by Priyanka Dey**

The nonchalant prophecies  
Often return an amused smile  
Away from the chromic door  
I stand, at the gate of Borgha.  
The palace set up, like a gem  
Decorated into a clumsy whim  
The grills are cold, ember black  
They sing to me, a tale of tales, untold.  
And the more I see,  
The more I know  
The vassalage of Goddess Tara  
Occult writers, describe the Mother  
The Queens and haridasis, hymns and  
fables  
Write the story of time at Borgha.  
Carts of gold, steel and coal  
Sweaty hands and empty pockets  
Still protruding ears to hear the happy  
shrill  
But they are cursed, the men at Borgha  
Never would a woman be conceived there,  
And when they protest,  
Shadowy reminisces of a sinned past,  
haunts.

**Hum...**  
**by Prem Kumari Srivastava**

Let's sing  
the ballad that celebrates  
life, endurance, and continuity.  
Oblivious to everyone around  
the Fakir sings  
beyond caring, for his Murshid  
there, in 'ten million years',  
like the old woman  
outside the Regent's Park tube station  
singing the song that has seeped  
through the knotted roots of infinite ages.  
Intertwined and hidden beneath the earth.

More like the rusty Khurpi

Mother Tara, deflorated by one of their  
brethen  
Lay in blood, soaked in disgrace  
Her body, covered in ochre,  
Her face mutilated.  
A man, appears on the other side of the  
gate  
Lust, staring into me,  
I loathe with venomous hatred,  
As I turned around and left.  
The city of Borgha must remain sinned  
Till the Holy water is found again.  
I shall take births, but not come to my  
abode  
Till they know they are sinners of Borgha.

**Author Bio:**

*Priyanka Dey, pursuing her Masters in History from Delhi University, is a prolific poet. Her poetry is mostly available through online forums, while her blog is a virtual stream of poems. Though her artistic soul embraces other art forms, words have always been her first love. The language she uses is that which relates to the lay man, but which is nurtured by the ethos of the Indian as well as global culture. The following poem is part of her anthology on Women, she is currently working on. Presently, she is also working on her first full length novel.*

been there  
from generations to ages,  
but not found a place in the showcase of  
the drawing room.  
Let's at least ...hum!  
the ballad that celebrates.....

**Author Bio:**

*Prem Kumari Srivastava is an Associate Professor of English at Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. A Visiting Shastri Fellow at University of British Columbia, Vancouver in 2010, she has several research publications and presentations (national and international) to her credit. Her poems have been showcased in Indian and African journals and anthologies.*

**The Ant**  
**by Rizvana Parveen**

On a summer day,  
an ant walks in my garden  
its slender body and elbowed antennae  
risen  
looking for food all the way.  
For the way is dry, I must say  
with dried deep yellow leaves on every way  
and creates a path without delay  
on the hardened brown earth all the day.  
As it moves slowly  
on the mother earth  
I watch its movements thenceforth  
and follow it closely.  
A tiny bit of food it found  
picks it up with its mandibles fit  
and moves carrying it

**Beware**  
**by Shikha Saxena**

Illumine illumine illumine the world O  
candle  
But not at your cost  
God has not granted consummation as  
your lot  
You are serving in the moments of crisis  
like a pawn  
When you will be consumed then who will  
hail the dawn  
When you will embrace a tranquil calm  
Then who will relish all the charms  
  
Thy struggle has defaced your beauty  
Beauty has become a beautiless beauty  
Then O candle illumine the world but  
preserve yourself too  
So you may enjoy the fruits of your life's  
sue  
  
Beware of the hand that is coming to lit  
you

all the ground.  
Soon follow an army of ants  
tracking the trail of their friend  
and they begin to attend  
to fulfil their winter wants.  
What a unity and harmony!  
I wonder calmly  
in their social colony.  
And when I prefer to stay indoors with  
ease  
the ants are toiling with all their might  
to stay in delight in winter breeze.

**Author Bio:**

*Rizvana Parveen* currently resides in UAE. My poems are published in e-journals *asianamericanpoetry.com*, *The World Haiku Review*, *poemhunter.com* and *poetfreak.com*.

It will lead you to be consumed ceaselessly  
Hence illumine yourself to illuminate the  
world  
And the message may spread forth  
Only consummation is not your lot

**Author Bio:**

*Shikha Saxena* is an assistant professor of English in Maharaja Agrasen Institute Of Technology, affiliated to Guru Gobind Singh University Delhi. The author has published several papers in national and International journals. The author is also an ELT expert. Recently presented a paper in an international conference organised by *elta@i* and *Relo*. The three poem is a part of 'secret verses'. The poems have not been published anywhere.

## Analysis of Veronica Valeanu ' poem (I)

by K.K. Srivastava

*Veronica Valeanu is Romanian poet and writer. Her writings can be accessed at [www.agonia.net](http://www.agonia.net) and [www.survivivore.wordpress.com](http://www.survivivore.wordpress.com)*

Having read many of the poems of Veronica Valeanu as available on [www.agonia.net](http://www.agonia.net), I select the poem (I) the latest one as posted by her for analysis. I will like to lay my cards on the table by stating six parameters that should qualify a poem as a good poem and in doing so I will try to keep lens of my mind free from chromatic aberrations. First, in a good poem telling is neither sufficient nor essential. A poet encapsulates what a novelist can take pages and pages to describe. A poet summarizes while it is for the novelist or essayist to expand. One's job is to squeeze; the other's to release. A good poem is one that thrives on its own form of evocation. This encapsulation-evocation combination makes the insight bloom again and again, in another mind-that of a reader. Second, a good poem does not begin until it is finished. It begins only after the poet has completed the last line and decided not to visit the poem again. Third, a good poem evolves images that are such as to stimulate in a reader a sort of curiosity that sparks immutable responses and meanings thereby opening, in the mind of readers, what Jorge Luis Borges calls a maze of forking paths from which several realities may flow. Fourth, a poem raises more questions that it seeks to answer and thus constitutes camera obscura where readers grapple with the prospects of getting most accurate meanings of both questions and answers. Fifth, a good poem is an exercise in what psychologists call, "free-floating" ideas i.e. the poet is not subjected to again what psychologists call, "functional fixidity" or "blinding effect". In simple terms, a poet does not suffer from a set of ideas or a combination of set of ideas and thus is able to look beyond these; beyond the boundaries of what is readily available in his mind and should be able to intuit and articulate pure essences. Finally, a good poem always remains inconclusive because the moment a poem concludes itself, it will cease to be a poem. Disputants may question these parameters of good poetry. They are at liberty to substitute the above by their own. Difference of opinion coexists along with opinion itself. Now the poem and then analysis:

### (I)

Bodies remain inert, while spines  
are shaking off the morning energy,  
grinding it around, into the nostrils  
where we switch interiorisms.

This is the air  
that is rubbed  
since we consider not enough  
neither for the big movements  
nor for the big draughts.

A woman is alert. She is running along with  
the train.

Doors open, then close  
hundreds of people get into motion  
not knowing what has been lost.

She touches nothing for the body:  
there slide her particles,  
into the nostrils of her town-body.

It hasn't sniffed at anything, so far,  
to trepitate.

And nothing touches her back.

A general analysis of this short poem reveals following features. First, it provides a closer analysis of five elements – time, memory, movement from unconscious to conscious, loss and the agony that comes from sense of loss. Second, there is presence of one identity and many identities; and their presence seems to involve their making, unmaking and remaking. Third, the imaginative- perceptual processes

applicable to this poem have inbuilt ways of self-makings which happen to be flowing from self-awareness; essential for writing a poem like (I). In this poem a personal undercurrent seems to be rising to the surface of the poem; a new stone resisting the flow of a new stream. Poet uses her ability to assimilate the dynamics of loss into a framework of a poem without distortion of human character or loss of human character in abstraction. Fourth, she glimpses through the remorseful sense of waste at failure or weakness of human existence and relationships just lost and with eliminating awareness, she moves from quiet to quieter imagery. She does not make an attempt to minimize what is harsh or ugly about an experience but her poem is a revitalizing force when it comes to finding words for describing that experience.

(I).???. Even though poet's meaning is somewhat obscure, poet's sophistication is clearly evident from the lines. The choice of title (I) is at once an indication of the idea of restraint and of liberal usage of metaphor. (I) is the individual, but the multitude is made out of many individuals. The (I) in the title can be the alter ego of anyone, and everyone. As the Creator in Hindu scriptures says, "I am one but shall become many." (I) is a via regia to we (Sigmund Freud uses the term via regia in the context of interpretation of dreams as a means to gain knowledge of unconscious). From the title itself, the sense of loss of self, and the idea of melding into the infinity of the multitude is carried forward. Critical perception leading to a multilayered commentary on existing feelings, sensations and imaginations is a ruling faculty here; an experience trapped within the closed circuit of the poet's consciousness. How thoughts and feelings play in the context of moving and stationary train is indicative of a flux of the mind which continues with its continual change. Demarcated states, in such situations, cannot be an outcome of a state of succession but a part of a continuous flow-the poet performs two tasks separately but simultaneously: the task of self-thinking and self-observing. Hence, the title (I).

These are aspects that are closely linked to the alienation that comes from dwelling in close proximity with the multitude, or in an urban environment. Time is no longer immortal. It does not evoke reminiscences. Urban existence

has wrecked the intimate tenacity of existing in a particular moment.

*Bodies remain inert, while spines  
are shaking off the morning energy,*

Morning is the time of energy, when the body reawakens, but when a body becomes duplicatable, it evokes a sense of bodilessness. There are thousands of different versions of the body unfolding around the self, each having been written and overwritten by the pen of the humdrum. It is here the movement from unconscious to conscious: that awful separation from the state of inertia, morbid and indeterminate i.e from sleeping state to waking one where dreams dissolve succumbing to realities, sometimes unwelcome occurs. Relevant here are the lines I remember of one of my favorite authors Marcel Proust from his book *Swann's Way* ".....in a keen frost, I would feel the satisfaction of being shut in from the outer world" and a bit later, "I could still believe in their possible presence for memory was set in motion now.....and the good angel of certainty had made all the surroundings objects stand still." It is the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness that hallucinates; that chills. In (I) poet explores the relationship of the past with present and brings to the fore uneasy, strained states of consciousness. Images in poem (I) come to poet in borderline interval between the sleeping state and the waking moments. Such a moment of exquisite delicacy, alien to the physical state, can hardly be experienced by the normal five senses. This is a fluid moment; she transfers experiences accruing to her to the store of memory that helps her step out of the bounds of the solid world and step into a world of sombre hues and pseudo-realistic visions that seem more real than reality.

*grinding it around, into the nostrils  
where we switch interiorisms.*

Along with the body, time too has been edited and deleted into a limbo, and there is nothing left for the morning energy to do, except

wafting around the nostrils that have ceased to be a part of the fragile thing that we call individuality.

Memory's role in any poem hardly needs any reemphasis. So is true of (I). Memory has an inexplicable propensity: it gathers to itself other memories sometimes relevant and sometimes irrelevant. In his book *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson explains this tendency in terms of what he calls, "by natural return of the mind to the undivided unity of perception." In this poem, the reality revealed beneath the surface of every day life is not the reality dictated by a single memory but by a sort of disjointed memories that stay concealed in the depths of that single memory but leads the poet' mind to living unity of perception .

*This is the air  
that is rubbed  
since we consider not enough  
neither for the big movements  
nor for the big draughts.*

The allusion seems to be to the rushed, predictable atmosphere that we breathe and walk through everyday. The atmosphere that makes us place the mind, and perhaps the soul, on the assembly line, where it gets reconfigured into a predictable apparatus, which is bereft of individual memory and focuses solely on collective thought. Suddenly the (I) or the individual can't remember what comes next. What comes next? Memory has stopped scrubbing, reliance shifts to the instinctive and intuitive.

*A woman is alert. She is running along with  
the train.*

*Doors open, then close  
hundreds of people get into motion  
not knowing what has been lost.*

Is the train not a metaphor of the urban way of life? And doors a metaphor for opening and closing of ideas and ideologies. Doors opening and closing refer to uselessness of time as

writes celebrated Indian poet, Jayanta Mahapatra in his book of poems, *A Rain of Rites*, "Somewhere/a door opens and shuts/Years elapse quietly behind." The idea of a woman being alert is symptomatic of many women and many men being alert. By making allusions to a particular woman, the poet is intending to point a finger at the modern way of life that most of us seem to be living. This is a way of life where there is constant motion between consciousness and unconsciousness and vice versa. When the train of life arrives, you board it unconsciously as many others are doing. Many people get into motion, "not knowing what has been lost." What is it that has been lost? It is the sense of consciousness or of individuality or of both. Her preoccupations are with what seems to be moving out of reach, the nature of space and distance, their relationship-a railway platform-crowded but empty with nothingness in it; reminding me of T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "Unreal city/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn./ A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many." Or another poem by Eliot, *A Cooking Egg*, "The red-eyed scavengers creeping/From Kentish Town and Golder's Green." Red-eyed scavengers here refer to people who collect the remnants of lost hopes and creep from their dreary suburbs to the city for various jobs of daily routine. In (I) loss of plurality of voices and importance of immediacy of perception cannot be altogether discounted.

There is an idea of timing in this poem: the scene seems to be at rest as well as in action.

Or is it an experience of a shock of identity loss resulting into suffering such as leaving the compartment and entering into original identity by getting down to platform and start moving amidst the strangers?

*She touches nothing for the body:  
there slide her particles,  
into the nostrils of her town-body.*

Despite living in a densely crowded urban jungle, all of us have known solitary confinement. Modern city of today is not a physical city alone. It is the city of the mind which further splits into the real and the phantasmagoric stimulating cerebral agility of the poet. The poem masks the sense of indifference beneath the quotidian surface of a city life, sense of failure and emptiness of life

in a modern city, irony and pathos of human existence. While our physical selves remain in close proximity to thousands, if not millions, the soul inhabits isolation chambers where thought is not possible. There is loss not just of memory, but also of the sense of association, of human relationships. Life unfolds like layer cakes, where memory and relationships have been baked in so tightly that nothing can be deciphered. Everything beyond is uncertain. Like the opener in Samuel Beckett's play *Cascando* "I don't answer anymore./ I open and close." And then the same opener, "From one world to another, it is as though they drew together."

*It hasn't sniffed at anything, so far,  
to trepidate.*

*And nothing touches her back.*

It is in these lines that the spotlight is finally turned on the lingering sense of loss – which, in a subtle way, has been colouring the entire poem. The poet seems to see life as a kaleidoscope of meaningless and the predictable that typify the contemporary urban

experience: a decadent, meaningless journey through the madding crowd. Contacts and relationships are superficial, you can't touch anything, you can't even sniff at it and nothing touches you back. The bodies are in contact, they are interacting on a physical plane, and yet the mind is comatose.

To round off, (I) meets almost all the parameters set forth in first paragraph above. This poem is dense with marvelous imagery. The verse is alert and swaying. (I) oscillates between verity and verisimilitude—a hallmark of a poem that stays with readers for long. (I) is not a poem one can read quickly and move on swiftly. A discerning reader will find inventiveness and newness in each line of the poem. Meaning falls away; it melts away.

Veronica's literary world, comprising of imagination, intuition, illumination and reflection, is a thinking world, where thoughts prosper and glow and where within each thought is nestled another thought; each avidly waiting for being converted into poems, possibly elevated to a higher musical and intellectual level.

*About the Reviewer: K. K.Srivastava is Indian poet who has authored two volumes of poetry *Ineluctable Stillness* (2005) and *An Armless Hand Writes* (2008). He can be reached at [kksrivastava\\_ran@yahoo.com](mailto:kksrivastava_ran@yahoo.com)*

## Wordsworthian Romanticism in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Nature and the Reflective Capabilities of a Poetic Self by Paula Hayes

It has often been commented that Jayanta Mahapatra stands tall, above the shoulders of others, as the father of Indian poetry, while some scholars have given him the honorary title of the grandfather of Indian poetry. Born in 1928 in Cuttack, India, Mahapatra is still alive and writing great poetry. He is a physicist, as well as a poet. Whichever way we perceive and approach the writings of Mahapatra, whether we see him as the father or as the grandfather of modern Indian poetics, either way his writing is imbued with the spirit of Romanticism. Mahapatra's Romanticism is on par with Whitman, Wordsworth, and Keats, but particularly Wordsworth. It is not surprising that a physicist should find the natural environment as cause for poetic investigation; for, science and art overlap more than most people believe. What perhaps is somewhat unexpected is that a physicist-turned-poet should not paint the world as modernly mechanistic, but rather come nearer to approach older forms of Romanticism. This is not to say that we do not find a strong sense of the *deterministic* in Mahapatra's poetry; for, we do. Nature is a deterministic medium in Mahapatra's poetry, but it is not a mechanistic medium. That sense of determinism, or of the inevitable, is never a straightforward denial of beauty, of the sublime, or of the spiritual; to the contrary, Mahapatra's determinism is qualified by aesthetic admiration for the sublime as found in the natural world.

By Romanticism, I am applying a very specific meaning to the term. I am referring to the great tradition of work that stems from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and onward, that began in Europe and spread as a trans-Atlantic art form. Romanticism refers to the ability of the poet to seek through his or her inquiries of nature the reflexive meaning of the self, the consciousness, and the memory, in so far as all three of these components or elements of being are defined as constructed projections onto the world. Romanticism, unlike Enlightenment forms of thought, asks the artist and thinker to suspend rationality and return to the irrational characteristics of the mind. Irrationality as understood in Romanticism is not the lack of reason, but rather it is a way of measuring the emotional and psychological phases of self against reason. When reason dominates to the point that feelings are repressed, there is a need to reopen the psychical wounds of the emotions. Romantic poetry does just that—it explores psychical wounds but through the symbolic language of nature and through the projection of feelings, emotional states, and moods onto the natural world. Thus, by a Romantic use of nature images, motifs, and symbols, I do not mean that nature is always

thought of as idyllic; rather, by Romanticism, I mean *the psychological impressions that the poet forms when in solitary reflection on nature*. These impressions can be positive, negative, and indicative of the sublime, of pleasure or of existential crisis and suffering.

Modern and contemporary reinterpretations of Romanticism quite often will reposition the idea of nature or the natural world in terms of the geographical, the regional, and the locale. Geography, region, and the locale are characteristics of *place* that are important to Mahapatra as a poet. Often a reader's first entrance into Mahapatra's language is through his ability to depict a *scene* (as a lyric moment, not as a narrative). The scenes that Mahapatra chooses to describe are always assuredly related to a specific locale. The initial way readers may experience Mahapatra's Romanticism is through the relationship of the poet to his land, village life, and the countryside. Bijay Kumar Das in *The Poetry of Jayanata Mahapatra* writes about the symbolic function of *place* in Mahapatra's poetry—"Thus, landscape has a great significance in Mahapatra's poetry so far as it enables the poet to search for his own self in order to understand the world in its proper perspective" (15).

To use geography, region, territory, and landscape as a way of communication (and as a means to express the needs of the self) is a technique similar to Romanticism's use of nature as a mimetic device for self-reflection. Das confirms the mimetic quality of geographical references in Mahapatra's poetry when he describes how landscape is often used as a cathartic device. The critic Das does not perceive mimesis *necessarily* as a feature of Romanticism in Mahapatra's writing; instead, Das sees the mimetic as part of Mahapatra's realism. Das writes, "The landscape also helps the poet to alleviate his suffering" (5). Though Das does not use the term mimetic in this statement, nonetheless, what he describes is a *mimetic function of art*—suffering is purged by the artistic and aesthetic creation of the poetic self. This poetic self is validated and made *imaginatively* and *psychologically* real, through a projection of the self onto natural landscape. The use of landscape to help dispel suffering in Mahapatra's poetry is analogous to Wordsworth's use of nature to dispel suffering.

In spite of observing how Mahapatra uses landscape to shape a discussion of the poet's inner self, Das' appraisal of Mahapatra falls just shy of placing Mahapatra squarely within the tradition of

Romantic poets. Instead of a Romantic, Das sees something more of the modern, albeit contemporary expression of spirit in Mahapatra's verse; and, so, instead of positioning Mahapatra as a Romantic poet, Das decides to position Mahapatra as a realist. Das writes,

Sun and moon, dawn and dusk,  
day and night, heat and dust,  
mountains and sun, rivers and  
hills, sky and earth all are  
incorporated into the texture of  
his landscape poetry in his effort  
to depict the predicament of  
modern man in an irreligious  
milieu. He is not a romantic poet  
to sing songs in praise of the  
beauty of nature. He is a realist  
who sees life against the backdrop  
of landscape but does not run  
away. He sees life in life's terms  
and, therefore, a calm serenity  
governs his landscape poems (15-  
16).

I would argue there are instances in which it seems that Mahapatra does broach the praise of nature, even if his praise is tinged with a condition of pessimism. Das' point that Mahapatra's poetry expresses the inner condition of an irreligious age is possibly open to some challenge. There is no reason to believe that there is not a spiritual dimension to be had in Mahapatra's poetry; true, if we are looking for the spiritual to come up in traditional forms, we will walk away from Mahapatra believing his work is irreligious. Yet, if we redefine what the spiritual may mean in an era that questions traditional religious institutions and traditional religious rituals, we can begin to find examples of the spiritual in Mahapatra. The spiritual in Mahapatra is equivalent to nature itself, and his appreciation of it is not ritualistic or prone to one-sidedness. He does not believe that nature is only representative of what is good, but also of what can be harsh punishing. Arguably through his acceptance of the good but also the punitive aspects of the natural world, Mahapatra is able to build a Romantic position of the sublime, or awe of that which is transcendent within nature. As Rabindra Swain describes,

Indeed, he [Mahapatra] is a child  
of the earth and sea, sun and  
wind, of the tradition in which he  
is brought up. All of these taken  
together have richly shaped his  
Oriya sensibility. The various  
aspects of Orissa, its flora and  
fauna, its enchanting landscape  
vividly summed up in the image  
of 'the indigo waters of the  
tropics' and the 'eternal half-light  
of rain' which exist amid the  
squalor, poverty and drudgeries  
of daily life, its customs and  
festivals which have enriched his  
sensibility, find sensuous and  
detailed expression in an

apostrophe, sweetly addressed as  
'my ancient love a hundred  
names' (95).

To understand this point, consider the poem, "The Shadow of Day." The poem moves through a series of images that represent the artifices of modern life, its technologies and its bureaucracies. Tangled up with each of these artifices are also small and neglected reminders of nature's beauty—the bowl of fruit in the bowl, the drifting clouds, the day's soft shadows. Mahapatra uses the poem, thematically, to question his own voice and the voice of others as having any authorial or final meaning for the modern world or even for daily life. Though the human constructions of language may miscarry, nature does not. And, so the poem offers up the gift to the reader of recognizing that there is something greater than what human reason can offer—there is nature, which though inherently irrational in the sense that it can be destructive without the destruction having human meaning, it is also rational in the sense of its ordered patterns. That the poet also attributes to "instinct" his urge to embrace the 'other,' to 'put his arm around,' someone close and dear, signifies that the poet is drawing a connection between the finer aspects of human nature with that of the natural world. The poem is about the modern failure of language, the ineffectiveness of language to communicate authentic presence, but also about the replacement of these modern letdowns with the return of the poet's own private memory of nature. This return is embodied at the poems' close where language gets metaphorically swallowed up by the "shadow of the day."

The bright day winced at my step.  
Where was it I could go?

The doors were shut, the parties  
over, something hung over us

like a cloud that will not bring  
rain.

Embarrassed, I looked around for  
ripe fruit in the bowl.

It was an ordinary day: cut  
flowers in the vase,

the Leader on the television, the  
stained mirror

that seemed to forgive me evil,  
and

Sunday lotuses that betrayed the  
hour

when they began to bloom. And  
everyone calm,

following the old proverbs meekly  
into the world.

For an instant I wondered  
 whether the ethereal  
 voices of flutes had died out,  
 whether I had any choice  
 when I put my arms around you,  
 almost by instinct; or only to  
 conjure up  
 over and over again, the crust of  
 days set aside  
 was one of only lying to oneself  
 when one pretends  
 one was doing something one did  
 not like?  
 What I find now is no more  
 a monstrous secret between us;  
 they are asleep,  
 and I will repeat my words,  
 getting them wrong again,  
 filling my tongue and mouth with  
 the swift shadow of day.

An example of where Mahapatra is more openly *critical* toward nature would be the poem, “The Season of the Old Rain.” The poem begins by describing the rainy season of a village—as readers we are not specifically told where, which village. We have only a description of impressions, of scenery, to help us grope our way through a sensory-derived vision. As the discussion of the rainy season is given, the poem quickly brings up the subject of “decay and death.” The poem’s use of the flora allows the mind to secure itself against the metaphysical knowledge that there is “decay and death” in life, in the world, in nature itself. There is much attention to the details of landscape—the jasmine, the bamboo, backyards, bodies of water, the gray sky. Mahapatra projects his own realizations—“This is the time when the fruit of my life/seems humble and tender against the dark banyan”—as a way of constructing self-determinacy. This is revealed within the first ten lines of the poem. The first ten lines reveal a Wordsworthian sense of wholeness to be had in nature. As Aidan Day writes of Wordsworth, “Nature is important insofar as it manifests the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind and at the same time provides an objective, material barrier which allows the individual subject to recognize transcendence without being overwhelmed by it” (44). Additionally, just as we may witness a mood

(or moods) in Wordsworth, so we encounter a mood in Mahapatra’s “The Season of the Old Rain.”

This is the season of the old rain,  
 always with much to answer  
 before time is done  
 with decay and death and  
 shutting our minds  
 to the jasmine's reason that keeps  
 growing  
 in backyards on the edge of water.  
 Here is the bamboo  
 dropping beads of twilight on  
 earth's stricken floor;  
 bent and outstretched, gesturing  
 gloomily into a gray sky.  
 This is the time when the fruit of  
 my life  
 seems humble and tender against  
 the dark banyan,  
 when the season comes alive with  
 memories of earlier years.

In the next eleven lines of Mahapatra’s “The Season of Old Rain,” the poet speaks of the beauty of the rainy season, the beauty of natural elements, of the moon and water. As he describes the beauty of these natural elements, he is offering up to his readers a definition of the sublime. The poem also turns away from depicting a mere appreciation of nature to take up the unfortunate subject of death. Through the contemplation of the corollaries of life and death, Mahapatra seeks to penetrate through the illusions of modernity by allowing the senses to return to nature, to yield to the place in which there is knowledge of what is transient and what changes, as well as knowledge of what is eternal and immutable—youth fades into old age, life fades into its opposite, the sun fades into the moon. Mahapatra’s Romanticism may very well be tinged with eastern religions and its conception of *maya*. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, *maya* is a word that describes the physical world as caught in the perimeters of transience and of the impermanence of time. *Maya* is believed to be spun by the immortal ‘hands’ of Brahma. Thus, *maya* represents the illusions or tricks upon senses, of the mind’s play with phenomenal forms. Behind *maya* there exist the eternal forms that underlie spectacles and occurrences.

And when one's hand, suddenly  
 lightened  
 from the weight of elusive beauty,  
 is almost ready

now to touch another's. One knows  
 how the moon has tricked the  
 mind, surrounded  
 by the loves one has slowly grown  
 old with.  
 Traveler, where is it you belong?  
 Perhaps watching the old woman  
 marooned on a treetop  
 hemmed in by a wild layer of  
 water called death,  
 the unseen touches me with one  
 of its  
 lonely wet winds, unearthing  
 a vein of life.

Here, there is a spiritual meaning to Mahapatra's meditation upon nature. Mahapatra's spiritual meaning is derived from Hinduism, while Wordsworth's spirituality is informed by Christianity. Both Mahapatra and Wordsworth use nature symbolism in their poetry as a way of expressing personal forms of spirituality, though not necessarily piety. In the last section of Mahapatra's "Season of Old Rain," he meditates upon the meaning of the old woman that he observes. Memory is always comingled with strange forms of desire in Mahapatra's verse. The form of desire depicted in the last twelve lines of "Season of Old Rain" indicates the need for the poet to confess his own apprehensions about what it means to age and what it means to observe the ruggedness of the rainy season, as the torrents of rain cut against humanity. The rain is old, as old ancient as human breath, as ancient as civilization itself, and even before. Thus, the emotions of the poet are projected onto both the image of the woman, as well as onto the elements of nature—onto the sun, the rain, and the fruit to be harvested.

Perhaps here in her eyes the  
 rebellious season  
 held an answer to whatever I  
 sought,  
 having walked up to the place that  
 grew darker  
 against torn homes and flattened  
 hearths  
 and where the sunset threw up its  
 bloodied hands.  
 Once I remember I turned to  
 death  
 As symbol of my age's memory,  
 and the rain

was green on the grass that chose  
 me my palimpsest  
 not to learn. And now, it carries  
 one away,  
 the seen miracle in those eyes,  
 closing and opening,  
 revealing neither sorrow nor hope  
 nor loss  
 and cutting down the fruit of my  
 silent season.

The critic Das writes, "Unlike Wordsworth, Mahapatra does not review nature uncritically" (16). I would suggest, however, that both Wordsworth and Mahapatra are critical of nature and do not accept nature without analysis. Perhaps what Das means by this is that Mahapatra examines nature for how it can be cruel toward humanity—the unkindness of nature is to be found in nature's indifference toward us. The sun shines on the sinner and the saint alike; but likewise, the extremities of nature can cause harm to the good and the evil alike. In this way, nature transcends humanity. But we must also revisit this idea that Wordsworth and the Romantic tradition treats nature uncritically.

Wordsworth does not always sing the praises of nature just for the sake of compliment, and Wordsworth often takes a critical stance toward nature in his poems. The quintessential Romantic poem, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," is a lyrical meditation on nature and landscape, but the poem is hardly a simple one evoking mere admiration of nature. True, there is the ecstatic dimension of adulation of nature in "Tintern Abbey," but there is also something far greater that is expressed, and that is the mood of the poet. If we revisit Wordsworth's mood in "Tintern Abbey," we find that it is somber, melancholic, in moments even depressive, and certainly it is "critical" of both humankind's relationship to the natural environment and of nature itself.

Wordsworth begins "Tintern Abbey," by recounting how time is spent, as he opens with 'five summers.' The poem speaks of a return—the return of the poet to the landscape, but also the poet's own self-awareness that by coming back to the green groves he is able to partake in the larger cyclical dimensions of the seasons. The poet's sense of self, the identity that he takes on when he is reconnected with the landscape of Tintern Abbey, and the poet's consciousness as it deepens in contemplation of the landscape, is part of how the poet unites himself with the cycles of an eternally present time (as eternal time is measured by the seasons, five summers, five winters). As Wordsworth's consciousness revels in the *place* of Tintern Abbey, so landscape becomes the occasion for the poet's consciousness to turn toward the dismal, as well as toward an inner feeling of seclusion (represented by

Wordsworth's mentioning of the "Hermit's cave"). While this is not the whole of "Tintern Abbey," note that the following lines excerpted from it indicate how the lyrical meditation upon landscape becomes an 'event' for the poet's consciousness to discover hidden aspects of self.

Five years have past; five  
 summers, with the length  
 Of five long winters! and again I  
 hear  
 These waters, rolling from their  
 mountain-springs  
 With a soft inland murmur. Once  
 again  
 Do I behold these steep and lofty  
 cliffs,  
 That on a wild secluded scene  
 impress  
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion;  
 and connect  
 The landscape with the quiet of  
 the sky.  
 The day is come when I again  
 repose  
 Here, under this dark sycamore,  
 and view  
 These plots of cottage-ground,  
 these orchard-tufts,  
 Which at this season, with their  
 unripe fruits,  
 Are clad in one green hue, and  
 lose themselves  
 'Mid groves and copses. Once  
 again I see  
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-  
 rows, little lines  
 Of sportive wood run wild: these  
 pastoral farms,  
 Green to the very door; and  
 wreaths of smoke  
 Sent up, in silence, from among  
 the trees!  
 With some uncertain notice, as  
 might seem  
 Of vagrant dwellers in the  
 houseless woods,

Or of some Hermit's cave, where  
 by his fire

The Hermit sits alone.

In comparison to "Tintern Abbey," Mahapatra's poem, "An Evening by the River," produces a similar Wordsworthian effect. In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth describes how stored away in his consciousness is a *memory* of the landscape, of the place, and that the memory is so powerful that it can be evoked, almost at will. The evocation becomes a set of images that in the absence of the real landscape serve to connect the poet to the psychological impressions of the actual place. We find this same technique in Mahapatra. In the second stanza of "An Evening by the River," Mahapatra describes the *effect of absence*, of being away from a remembered place, upon the memory. We also come to see how the floodgates of imagined, recalled impressions can press upon the mind with great waves of intensity. In Mahapatra's poem, we find the following words in the second stanza.

But what makes sense unless one  
 lives in things  
 made by ourselves? In tales lost,  
 in an absence,  
 in an awakening burnt to ashes  
 to face this image of my inner  
 sense of defeat?  
 I recollect the sunlight rustling  
 the leaves  
 of your eyes, and I stop and  
 retreat underneath  
 with the moment so I don't lose it.  
 When you come back tomorrow, I  
 know, your smile,  
 like the blossoms of this wild  
 creeper on the bank  
 will merely look about us, will  
 reveal nothing.  
 And now beware, the words of  
 this poem say,  
 of going with it into dream  
 or of making it seem like the last  
 words of a prayer?  
 beware of the unreasonable wind  
 inside  
 that tries to surpass this one  
 which rises now  
 spiteful and mean, tying the birds

to the trees in the dark.

Sunlight, trees, birds, the movement through shadows of dark and light, move the poet to a spiritual acknowledgement that all of these elements, when recollected in the imagination of the poet's own mind, act as a "prayer." Here, we have at last the spiritual quality of Mahapatra's Romanticism. The river banks may not recall the

invention of the poet's consciousness, his love for another, or his visitations and walks upon the river's edge. The natural world is indifferent to his being. Yet, the poet comes an epiphany that it is in the self's inventions, the stories the self creates for itself and for others that there is meaning to be had in the natural world. It is in the poet's consciousness, in his use of memory and in what the Romantics called "the tranquility of recollection," or in what Keats' called "negative capability," that a projected image of self onto nature gains its ultimate value.

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**In the Wake of Images: Minimalism in Jayanta Mahapatra's *Bare Face*  
by Paula Hayes**

*"Art excludes the unnecessary"—Carl Andre*

*"Even the headless torso of Ghandi*

*In the city square can speak.*

*Like truth, unsaid most of the time,*

*Yet almost said."—poem, Sometimes, Jayanata Mahapatra*

The subject of this discussion is a close reading of the contemporary poet, Jayanta Mahapatra's book *Bare Face* (2000). The work, *Bare Face*, is only one out of sixteen books of poetry written by Mahapatra. In fact, the poet from Cuttack, India, can most humbly boast of an international readership and reputation. Recently, within the last two years, Mahapatra's already established literary career has gained renewed attention. The year 2009 was a good year for Mahapatra; for, he received the prestigious Allen Tate award for poetry, the SAARC literary award, and the Padma Shree Award in India (for a citizen who has made a significant contribution to the country's literary development). He has earned, in the past, the American *Poetry Magazine's* coveted *Jacob Glatstein* award. These global recognitions are certainly merited for the eighty three year old poet. It might surprise some to know that Mahapatra came to poetry later in life than most feted poets. He was already forty when his verse was first published; the majority of his working adult life was spent as a scientist in the study of physics. Mahapatra is known to western readers by the fact he has published in some of the most competitively prestigious poetry journals in America, such as *The Chicago Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *The Hudson Review*, to name but a few. Mahapatra is a memoir/essayist, humanitarian, and most of all, a poet.

*Bare Face* stands out as an exemplary collection of poems that reveal Mahapatra's ability to describe the invisible—shadows, emotions, memories, the observations of the mind that can never be seen *but only* depicted symbolically. Even while Mahapatra is able to paint for us, his readers, a picture of what cannot be seen externally (but only felt internally within the consciousness of an

individual self), he is simultaneously able to reach further to express the quotidian life in its most stripped down, essential terms. The quotidian life is that which most people would call the mundane, the ordinary, the expected (not the unique), the usual (not the unusual). For Mahapatra, the quotidian life is the life of a village, to be found in the remembrances of his native Orissa—in the timid bellowing of animals, of candles lending shadow to a night vision of a temple. Or, it is in the rain, in the wetness of the land, in the dryness of the mind. We see an example of this very anti-western kind of quotidian life in Mahapatra's poem, "Silence." It is a positive affirmation of the east as much as it is a denial of the west that we find in Mahapatra's poems. In "Silence," he graciously writes,

Rain, all night.

Capacious, like the body of a  
woman.

And the heat, intolerable.

A cow lows once.

Strong smells of fish and palm-  
toddy in the air.

One doesn't wish to say anything  
at all.

How will cross over?

The water, running out from the  
feet, ends up nowhere.

In "Silence," the minimalism of the quotidian life is in the ability to incorporate descriptions related to the five senses through the use of images. The odors of fish, the way air gains the stench of land, the way a woman's body brings natural and maternal heat. "Silence" is also a good example of the fact that Mahapatra's poetry is always asking of readers to think of questions—how is a woman capacious? What does it mean to "cross over?" What is death? What life—is it a mental state, somewhat like a meditative positioning of the mind? Are we to draw a parallel between women, death, uncertainty, and rain? What is the linkage, the connection? This is what Mahapatra's minimalism provides—a way of

exploring questions, linking images into a string of associations, leaving some of the work of constructing solid conclusions up to the less than solid, indeterminacy of the openness of the text and the play of interpretation of the reader.

Where the west and east overlap is the concept that the quotidian life is filled and regimented by custom, by needs and necessities, by the close circle of those we keep near us. If the quotidian life extends at all beyond this it is often by some chance encounter and then the quickening begins to move past the chance encounter and back toward the regulatory measures of one's normal daily routine.

So, it is in Mahapatra's sketches that he can give us both the invisible world of thought as well as the quotidian life, the everydayness of a village to such a degree that even a western reader who may be unfamiliar with what village life is like can begin to 'feel' as though he or she *has been there before*, if in a past life or inside the constructed imagism of the poem. To be inside the poem is what Mahapatra's minimalism seems to accomplish. The minimalism creates a *daja vu effect* within the poem's *life*. His images create a feeling of *having seen what the poet has seen* (even if we have not), and so we want to think that we too are bound inside the life of the poetry by that same force that binds and habituates the poet toward a set of ideas, a way of *seeing the world (literally)* that becomes a *perception of the world (metaphorically, impressionistically)*. It is through this dual process of painting for his readers the inward, mental and emotional world, a world that comes with the price of silence (ideas, conceptualizations, questions, the dialectic movement of rationalizations butted against *irrationalizations*) and the outward, living world of the physical (of nature itself, of a *naturalism*) that we encounter Mahapatra's *technique* of using minimalism.

Let's ask a question of this art device, though. What is minimalism? In terms of an aesthetic movement, it spans a range of genres from music to the visual and plastic arts, to include sculpture, architecture, fiction, meta-fiction, and poetry. As a whole minimalism is one small component of modernism. Historically, the minimalist movement was a reaction to World War II and the post-war culture that followed; thus, it begins in the late 1940s but extends into the counterculture of the 1970s. As with any art movement that spins out of a war, minimalism expressed the intellectual disillusionment produced by having witnessed the pain and suffering of war. Much like the literary and art cultures of the 1920s and 30s that had been disillusioned by the First

World War, and had reacted by producing works that demonstrated a mistrust of society, so minimalism demonstrated mistrust too. But in the special case of minimalism the mistrust was aimed at the production of values, of what had loosely been called the 'moral,' so that religion, God, absolutes, and all abstractions came under intellectual scrutiny and artistic fire, as doubt spread as to whether a society, a community, or a civilization could ever create a cohesive definition of any of these concepts.

Minimalism brought with it an enormous energy, as it tried to capture on canvas and in print, in stone sculptures and buildings, in language and in paint, what it meant to exist in a world where all the old values needed to be re-evaluated and overturned and all the new values had yet to be made because no one trusted in social institutions enough anymore to bother to create any more values. If art was not about the business of perpetuating or creating values within the art object, what then was it about? The answer minimalists gave was that it was about art itself, about images, about visualizations (even novelists and poets had the new burden of carrying out the creation of visualizations through words, though a sparse and economically fragile use of words), and about the expression of an emotional malaise, a numbness, and an angst about the future of everything.

Of course, in one regard the concept of using or applying minimalism never really disappeared after the movement itself died down; for, well into the 1980s, 1990s, and even in our present century, we can find examples of minimalism, and Mahapatra's poetry is one such example. Here, I would like to give a quick review of the genre distinctions of minimalism and some of the major tenets associated with each genre's use of the aesthetic form. By providing this kind of survey, it will help lay a foundation for understanding what minimalism can include. In its more generic sense, minimalism is often used to reference any art that lacks ornamentation.

Minimalism is a way of describing art that is used to represent the convergence of the concrete with the abstract, though without using an excess. The mistrust of intellectual abstractions, such as religion and God, or law and tradition, within society, meant that abstractions in art and in the literary had to be presented in a new way that could recover the relationship of the abstract to the concrete. If religion was lost in the new future, would it be mourned for the loss of the spiritual or the loss of its temples? If tradition is unloosed, would the oppressed still suffer or suffer less? These are the types of questions, or ways of interpreting

minimalism, that Mahapatra asks in his art of poetry.

Minimalist art as a whole abides by the principle that “less is more,” and so relies upon the most stripped down, barest of measurements to express the artist’s concerns. In one regard, what is at times coined minimalist art is also interchanged with abstract expressionism, so that at one time an artist may be called a minimalist and at another time the same artist will be called an abstract expressionist. One complaint against minimalist art is that it is too meager, too understated, and often for all its efforts to express a correlation between the concrete and the abstract it is deemed as underwhelming. Minimalism uses the bare essentials to convey a point; the result is that the concrete is often forgotten, abandoned or overlooked in favor of trying to comprehend the technique of representation. We might think, for instance, of the paintings of Franz Kline or Mark Rothko. In architecture, we recall Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s *German Pavilion* in Barcelona as an example.

Conversely, by positive standards minimalist art can supply what more ornamental or formal art forms cannot—minimalism can accomplish the expression of a single quality of the object, idea, or concept being depicted within the minimalist art form. That is, a minimalist painting can draw attention to just a wave of color, to color itself, its arrangements and juxtapositions. *Or, a minimalist poem can call the reader’s focus toward the language itself, to a single image created by the language.*

In music, minimalism is associated with composers such as John Cage and Philip Glass. Principles of minimalist music include a basic use of *repetition and reoccurrence*—this could be a *repetition of tonal elements, of motifs, a constant return and reprisal of elongated notes, or the transparency of the percussions in a song*. In fact, minimalist composers, like John Cage, will deliberately expose each particular note thereby destroying harmony in the piece; this is to call attention to the parts of the construction of the compositional piece. Harmony is not the goal in minimalist musical composition; instead, *dissonance and tonal distance* is the aim. In this respect, minimalism bears a resemblance to its cousin, postmodernism, that also aims at creating disparate meanings and destabilizations of the authority of interpretation in art.

In the visual and plastic arts, terms such as literalist art or ABC art are often used interchangeably with minimalism. The literalist

and ABC art movements grew in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s, in the generation that had been affected by the Cold War culture produced out of the post-World War II climate. The goal of these movements was likewise to reduce the art object to one particular element—this could be to reduce the art object to a stripe of color, to a wave of paint, to a geometrical shape. The result is the diminution of realism, the total loss of the artist’s subjective being as imbuing the art object, and an increased demand for audience interpretation.

In one strong sense, the reduction of the art object to one particular part of the art form parallels what in post-structuralism is referred to as the “death of the author” or the disappearance of the authorial interpretation from the literary work in favor of the reader’s interpretation. Likewise in the visual and plastic arts, minimalism ushered in a “death of the artist,” whereby the subjectivity of the artist becomes much less important than the objective place of the art object *or of the viewer’s freedom* to interpret the objective nature of the art object. The more the artist recedes in the minimalist work, the more the art object protrudes to the foreground of the art experience.

When turning to literature in fiction the works of Hemingway and Raymond Carver best represent the movement. And in poetry the works of William Carlos Williams give us linguistic equivalents to the minimalism of the visual and plastic arts. Poetry’s use of minimalism is akin to other modernist movements that also sought to attack ornamentation and unnecessary embellishment in the use of language, reduce the artist’s supreme authorial power to dictate textual meaning and textual interpretation, and to place greater need for the reader to understand the role of context (including irony) when formulating interpretations—to this degree, minimalism in poetry is related to Dadaism and even Asian Haiku. Again, the principle of “less is more” is what prevails in minimalist poetry.

If we look globally, at the transnational arena of poetry, minimalist poets include such well-known authors as P.P. Ramachandran, a Malayalam poet whose work has been described as and praised for being minimalist. According to the respected poet, E.V. Ramakrishnan, Ramachandran’s is said to be “the most accomplished craftsman among the poets of the 90s” in part because his expertise in managing “minimalism [creating an] understated quality [while negotiating] the micro-politics of everyday life.” This “micro-politics of everyday life” is what I referred to at the start of this discussion as the quotidian life, the reutilization of the ordinary of experience. Within the circle of global minimalist

poets, we find not only Ramachandran but also Mahapatra.

The origins of Mahapatra's poetry, which if it is to be classified as a version of minimalism, was birthed out of the poet's childhood pain as well as out of the suffering of others that he witnessed in the poverty of his native land of Orissa. Like many minimalist artists—the whole lot, the painters and the writers alike—and similar to those participants of other abstract art movements, such as expressionism, surrealism, and modernism more generally, Mahapatra was greatly affected by World War II. It was with the fears produced during World War II and in its aftermath that Mahapatra started to connect the emotional suffering he experienced in his childhood with that of the physical suffering of those people hurt by the war's impact upon India. Mahapatra's childhood memories are filled with the contradictory feelings of a boy reared in western colonialism. At times treated very roughly by wealthier peers at the westernized educational institutions he attended, he found himself retreating as a boy further and further inward to the life of thought, imagination, and feeling. The emotional and psychological life of his boyhood never left Mahapatra, and so when the Second World War came he found himself 'mapping' the war's toil upon the land and the people of India onto his previous wounds suffered as a child raised in a colonial culture. Through these rough and raw connections, over time, Mahapatra discovered a language of his own to describe this common ground of pain. In his autobiography, Mahapatra tells us the following about his perception of the Second World War.

But times were different then. I am talking of the time when World War II had just began. Blackout had been imposed; an air base had been established beyond the river which encircled our town. The newspapers carried daily accounts of the war...This was Orissa then: the poverty of huts and hovels sunk into the red earth of squalid side banes, and the bare needs of our people. The wild growth of vegetation around us, and the misery and disease. The beggars apparently everywhere: the crippled and the blind...young girls and boys with their eyes gouged out by the scourge of pox: and the ever-present lepers...All this was something, I realized then from which there

could be no escape...they had to suffer their torn, maimed lives in apathetic silence. I thought of the sickly smell of rotting guavas on the soggy ground. It appeared there was not much difference between rotting fruit and faceless people; the smells of decay and life and death had become one. And it made me watch my world in...stupor, waiting simply for something to hide me.

We see in the description how the war impacted him in a way that left permanent psychological scars. The war also produced on him a poetic inclination to begin to mentally pick through the rubble of debris the war brought and sift out strong images—images of the dying, of the infirm, the maimed, the crippled, the diseased, the elderly, of forgotten and ruined youth, of a sick land that devastated. Smells, the aural, the oral, began to come together in Mahapatra's mind.

Personal crisis, too, led Mahapatra to seek an outlet to express pain. He mentions in his autobiography how the death of his people, which happened over a period of years and not in one instance, culled in him a deeper sense of how life makes mysterious imprints upon the human imagination. It seems based upon what Mahapatra writes in his autobiography that the war led him further toward the desire to understand how the imagination uses the impressions of others' miseries as a vehicle toward symbolic manifestation. The fact that Mahapatra was so greatly affected by his people's struggles during the war points as well toward the rootedness of the poet.

In addition to the war, there were other influences upon Mahapatra that eventually led to his becoming a poet and may have contributed to the development of his minimalist use of language. One such influence was seeing his grandfather's diary, written in the language of his people, Oriya, and not in the English he would study through a westernized education. The literal, physical sight of the alphabet, of the letters produced a mystical effect upon Mahapatra. He writes the following in his autobiography or personal memoir of what it was like to see his grandfather's legacy of language.

One evening on his brief visit home, Father brought out an old, tattered notebook from somewhere and called us near him. A faraway look kept flitting in his eyes; of something unbound, of distances that

appeared to edge his usual fatherly bliss with gloom. We watched him as he opened the book gingerly and pinpointed to the already-yellowed first pages on which a childish scrawl was beginning to turn brown. The Oriya alphabet on the page was difficult to read; the letters were in a script mostly used by rural, unlettered folk. Father pointed at the writing and said simply, "Your grandfather's."

What the notebook or diary of the grandfather came to reveal was the recording of an event in the history of the land. As Mahapatra notes, "In the year 1866, a devastating feminine had struck Orissa." But the recording of the event as retold by Mahapatra is filled with imagery, an imagery that creates a strong sense of suffering, tells of feelings of unrest and emotional anguish, or internal disquiet, fears and disharmony. Mahapatra writes in his memoir about his grandfather's diary, that it contained images and information about the nineteenth century pestilence, and again how that carried with it the realization that the human condition was often largely characterized by a futile and shapeless suffering.

Though the English, whole ruled the country, made frantic efforts for the movement of food grains into the province, no rice was available, especially in the villages. There were no roads, and communication on a few...pathways was only the help of bullock carts. Even the tamarind trees were stripped of their tender leaves as people began pouncing on whatever they could find.

Describing the double-nature or double-consciousness of his childhood experiences, Mahapatra writes also in his autobiography that his life, his childhood mainly, was torn between the influence of the west (in the auspicious shape of missionary religion) and that of traditions, of the equally auspicious Hindu rites and culture. He tells it this way,

So, as children, we grew up between two worlds. The first was the home where we were subjected to a rigid Christian upbringing, with rules my mother sternly imposed; the other side

was the vast and dominant Hindu amphitheater outside, with the preponderance or rites and festivals which represented the way of life of our people. Two worlds then; and I, thinking I was at the centre of all; trying to communicate with both, and probably becoming myself incommunicable as a result through the years.

That Mahapatra should call the Hindu customs an "amphitheater" points to the formation of an artist temperament within his childhood. Everything he witnessed, from his grandfather's notebook or dairy, his education at schools, even religion, and later the Second World War, each and all became occasions for the formation of impressions of what life represented. Out of these impressions, images arose, congealed in the mind, and eventually made their way into poems, though much later in Mahapatra's life.

In his short autobiography, Mahapatra's tells how he spent years as a student. One of the most important memories was that of witnessing the mighty power of the River Ganges. In Mahapatra's poetry, rivers hold a special place, signifying everything from life to transition into death, to the disquiet of an intellectual's mind. In his autobiography, he writes the following.

Many of my evenings were now spent on the ghats by the river. The Ganga reminded me a little of the river of my childhood, but this was wilder. The unending flow of the vast sheet of water awed me: it made me embrace the mysterious. During the rains, the river became so wide that one could not see the far bank; and the steamers with their hollow, resonant sirens moved me as they moved off from Mahendru Ghat.

The banks of the Ganga seemed to hold on to the spirits of the death along with the movement of life itself. I perceived the hush of ritual with sun-worshippers bathing on misty mornings, in the tremble of lifeless flowers on worn-out steps, and with the dead burning day after day on their wood pyres at dusk. Above all, I

experienced the stillness of time as never before: and for the first time heard the reverberation of words...

Let's turn our attention now from the autobiography or personal memoir of the poet to the work of art itself, the poetry. The poem, "Traveller," starts by describing a simple occasion, that of an evening walk by a village temple. The bells ring out from the temple each evening, and the reader may presume at the same time. The scene turns away from such a quiet, peaceful image to the stirring of fear and violence. The temple becomes a place of unrest, not of life, but of death, as the wanderer passing by the temple finds his attention captured by a dying girl, laying waste in her mother's arms. Contrasted against the girl's dying and the mother's attempt to calm her screams is *nature*. Mahapatra paints the picture of the temple as shrouded by naturalism. Mahapatra writes,

Every evening  
the bells of the temple close by  
rest their easy weight on the  
bones;  
its times again to wonder  
what I'll do with what I learn.  
A warm vapour rises  
From the darkening earth like a  
hope.  
Somewhere, inside a room,  
A girl is dying in her mother's  
arms.  
Elsewhere, someone  
revenge himself for his broken  
life.

The time of bells gives way to the time of nature, that of nature's movement. The girl's death then becomes fixed in the middle of society's unnatural rendering of time, as symbolized by the bells of the temple and perhaps even to a degree by the temple itself, and that of what is natural or genuinely real, the deer trotting through the land's vegetation. What then does the temple itself symbolize—is the temple a metonym for religion, of Hinduism, or ritual, rites, sacrifice? Why is the girl shuddering in death? Why is the girl inside a room, representing the female as shrouded and unseen, of feminine suffering as un-witnessed? Is she

sacrificial? Or is the mother sacrificial because she holds the girl down in her arms? Is the wanderer, a consciousness of supposed objectivity, the sacrifice because of his neutral, unmoved, passionless observations?

These are all questions Mahapatra deliberately leaves unanswered as part of the puzzle of the violence of his poetry, and so much like the American minimalist fiction short story writer, Raymond Carver, the language of minimalism becomes synonymous in the work of art as the language of a carnal destruction. For Mahapatra, like Raymond Carver, minimalism carries the weight of *depletion*; that is, it *expresses the feelings of crushed souls, scattered lives, ruined lovers, denigrated women and men without a sure sense of the moral*. Minimalism in Mahapatra, like in Carver, or for that matter, as in Hemingway, is the art of despair. The process of writing for Mahapatra is a "painful" one; he has noted this in his autobiography.

Language had always fascinated me, and no, crowded down by words, I was taking risks with my first poems. The poems hurt me as I went on making them; they were awfully compressed poems, and betrayed the feelings in them. It stupefied me, the process of writing, building a poem.

And yet, there is something slightly more in Mahapatra's minimalism, and it is that working concurrent to the images of suffering are other images, those of naturalism. Thus, there is a kind of harmonious balance created in Mahapatra's minimalism—between death, longing, anguish, and that of the assurance of naturalism or nature's continuance. We do not necessarily find this balance in the American writers of Carver and Hemingway; naturalism in both of these authors only works to confirm violence in the universe. In Mahapatra, naturalism undermines the violence and thereby leaves us with a queasiness of wondering what is real and what is not, what is an illusion and what is concrete, what is subjective and what is objective—it the queasiness of existentialism that finds its ways into the poet's application of minimalism. As Mahapatra goes on to write in the "Traveller,"

Movement here has purpose:

It is not cold and tired.

The deer chasing the new growth  
of grass.

The drum thumping against the sky.

The woman with her knees drawn to her chest.

And the wind that deceives itself

It has tellingly carried the scream of the girl

Who is dying in her mother's arms.

My knowledge and my time

Fail to quiet the night

Unlike the flutter of birds.

I try to wear this weight lightly.

But the weight of the unknown buries me.

Thus, the poem ends by a reference to what institutional forms of religion cannot bring for Mahapatra; he cannot accept that we have absolute knowledge of the after-life, or even of the meaning of why we suffer in this life. All that he can affirm is the animation of the wind, the pattern of the birds and their flight, that the natural world *is* and that somehow we too are within this natural world, somehow struggling beside the deer, the birds, and the grass. But struggling for what we do not really know.

This lack of epistemological certainty brings the poet to a metaphysical place in *Bare Face*. In the poem, "One Clear Night," he writes of God as at play with humanity. What is the world if not God's world? But if we cannot grope our way through the darkness of the soul to distinguish illusion from the real, is there anything to conclude except that God is the master at play? While this metaphysical position would leave many of us with cold shivers, it leads the poet to an existential freedom. Mahapatra says this,

Over the hills to the lonesome sal trees

The shadows of the night play God once again

Over the fields; the morning's orchids bloom

As new forgiveness, Freedom, the puppet,

Sways to the pull of unseen masters.

And death walks as always without haste,

Into the sun, the growth of all things.

There is, in fact, existential *loneliness* floating inside the poet's brain. This loneliness forms the poet's path to freedom; it is not to be feared as many might imagine. The occasion of the poem is lost love or the end of a love; but Mahapatra uses that as a bridge into trying to separate the false images he has created for his life from that of what might be deemed as an authentic self. He cannot reach the place of this authentic self, but only make the realization that he has lived untruly and against himself. This acknowledgement leads to the "grief" in the poem, more perhaps than the end of love. He feels himself apart from God; for the poet and God are on two different paths, though the poet's path leads to a freedom of the mind.

Across the void, all day it is night inside,

In loneliness alone, God takes a different way home.

And I can find myself lying about my life.

But tonight grief and I can stand together,

Our voices no more raised in disparate words

As when we first tried to understand each other.

The topic of God is a sub-text or recurring theme in *Bare Face*. But is religion and God the same in Mahapatra's poems? And whose religion does Mahapatra chose to represent? In the poem, "Abandoned Temple," he gives us another sketch of a Hindu temple. The image is quite visual. We can imagine the temple fading in soft light emerging from votary candles; the seasons too are fading, as autumn passes into the harsher absence of winter. There is stillness across the land. No wind.

Abrambly thicket of blackberry canes

Squats, a votary, before it.

Another autumn slowly ticks away.

Veils of mist smile on nervously

At this victim of unmoving grass.

Such a simplicity to the expression of what a temple looks like. But the poem moves forward to describe a second image, that of youth and childhood innocence contrasted against the fierceness of the temple's architecture—its paintings, its gilded gods, its sculpted bodies. And these images belie the innocence of Mahapatra's personal memories of childhood.

A wandering boy hurls a rock  
through

The ruined entrance. Shadows in  
retreat fly;

Of serpent-girls, elephant-gods,  
fiery birds.

Mosquitos slap the Silva lingain  
ignorant silence.

A long shiver running down the  
shrine.

Thus, the poem contorts to a position of dialectical opposition. The temple cannot truly hold the innocent. And yet, the boy is there, present, in his full innocence. The temple is haunted by the spirits of the past—of priests we might guess. The minimalism of images is there too in the language of the poem—against the temple scene, a lone white flowering vine curling its way up the temple like a god-snake. The moon bounces off the white flowers, and we can imagine the flower being further illuminated, made paler and whiter. We see again the intrusion of the natural upon the human platform. Again, naturalism is always ready to invade religion and life in Mahapatra's poetry.

A ghost holding its gaze to a  
distant tenderness.

In an expanded pupil of stone

A whitened hibiscus twists its way

Along the phosphorescent t wake  
of a moonbeam

Toward a winter-life of ritual and  
innocence.

Naturalism as juxtaposed against symbols of religion are scattered throughout *Bare Face*. Another example is the poem, "In the Time of Winter Rain." In this poem, there is an added dimension to Mahapatra's usual naturalism,

though, and that is the imagery of the mightiness and auspiciousness of India's rivers. Comparing the mind or consciousness' ability to travel or wander backwards, to create memories, that at the same time propel the thinker forward, to the Mahanadi River, Mahapatra more comfortably positions himself in the midst of the natural realm in this poem.

We learn to smile in a time of  
winter rain.

Under a wet sky it's no meager  
comfort

To feel the radiance of noon in  
our palms,

The almond-eyed boats clutching  
time in their fists

In the Mahanadi River, the light  
shoulders of

Peaceful lotuses floating  
motionless.

As the poem develops, Mahapatra searches the meaning of memory and how it brings him back to the referential point of childhood as an essential framework of experience.

How I have waited, shaped by  
memory,

These many years without  
knowing exactly why.

Does childhood spread out all the  
way

From the hills of innocence to the  
horizon of the sea?

These hours belong to us,  
resembling mimosas

That grow through the fungi of an  
adamant earth,

Where our tears, just our tears,  
weave illusory balance.

Yet, the poem also moves in the direction of most of Mahapatra's works, eventually toward the violent. Destructive forces are shown to be unleashed against the defenseless—old men and young men. The helpless are just that in the poem—without aid. The poet is left only to recount what he has seen, to tell the stories and hope that in the telling there is some recompense. Even the image of the rocks that

the women are tied to—symbolizing female oppression—in the sense of the imagistic reminds one of a temple. Nature, as usual, is there in the poem, as both background and foreground, and it is humanity that is somewhere, stuck in the middle.

Perhaps the wind blows cold, and  
the old men

Evoke the image of the dead,  
finding themselves

Wandering in the chimerical  
darkness of our eclipses.

In the writings on ancient rock,  
young women

Bound and gagged, etch the grey  
walls

With their dead brown bellies,  
their joyless eyes.

On the pages of palm leaves they  
dance, lonelier than ever,

Stone-bodied courtesans swaying  
to the dark water.

A place that never leaves the poet's mind is that of his native origins, Orissa. Nothing so beautifully expresses his constant mental return to his birthplace as the poem, "Watching Tribal Dances in an Orissa Village." He writes,

Moments of ages past, of the  
power from the earth,

Of shadows of tree and quartz,

Of the drained silence of  
starvation

So certain tomorrow and the day  
after.

These knowledgeable hands of  
mine bind me.

Another Orissa village's grief

Sits motionless, like a baleful idol.

Such grief does not move.

It merely weakens my hands

To find solace in the ashes of past  
cremations,

Lost words.

Ultimately, where can all these images lead us—images of violence, dismissal, neutrality, destruction, helplessness, religion, temples as still-life, memory, and naturalism? For Mahapatra in *Bare Face*, it brings us to a place of rest, a still point, a momentary lapse, created lacunae of the consciousness and spirit, a temporary stasis—that is, to silence. In "Only Twilight," he describes the essential structure of silence—it is formed out no place and ends in no place (is eternal, like the eternal beginning of creation as described in the *Rig Veda*). Silence is also that which can reach the poet's mind in its freedom away from the place of the religious. Silence is what wraps and curls around nature itself when the mind lost in contemplation finds itself. Silence is perhaps the place of God or it can be the absence of such a place. Is silence death or is it the meaning of life? Mahapatra asks. *Seeks*.

Only twilight, that begins  
nowhere and ends nowhere,

Touches me like nothing does.

It's femininity, quickened with  
childishness,

Stands out apart;

It brings in loss, beauty, the  
nearness of the soul.

Someone I have forgotten

Pauses in that warm darkness of  
sparrows

That crowd back at dusk, their  
bodies

No more tensed for flight. Nests  
are full.

Stubbed fields across the river,

Stretch out their hands, secret  
allegiances.

Mahapatra lends to silence that attribute he considers most eternal and divine, that of the feminine. While so many of Mahapatra's poems speak of the oppression of women and of the wrongful oppressive silencing of women, when describing external silence he makes it feminine to lend to women strength, perhaps. What better time of the day can there be to explain the predicament of the mind lost unto itself, except that of twilight, a time caught between two other times. Thus, the poet Mahapatra is in *Bare Face* caught between two

times—childhood and age, life and death, the past and the present. One wonders only where the future is in Mahapatra's poems.

Was this twilight simply an idea,  
Working it through the years,  
from man to man,  
An immobility between death and  
life?  
Born of this sad gold, the night  
Opens one more cage, loosening  
The animals of reveries through  
the trees,

So that we would be quiet

And our silence would have no  
consequences.

Does Mahapatra mean this, though? Does he truly believe silence would be without consequences? What would such a world be like or a place within or beyond this world be like where there are no consequences? Does this imply a lack of the ethical or the moral? Or, is something beyond either? These are questions the poet never answers, for any answer would spoil the game of language, the game of art. It is in the endless play of the image and what the image can bring, the endless reign of open possibilities that the poet Mahapatra imagines what a freedom that hurts no one might look like.

## Works Cited

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## Poetry in the digital age by Sunil Sharma

*Poetry is reinventing itself in the digital age.*

The eternal spirit is interacting with the zeitgeist of the 21st-century and in the digital avatar is more slim and sexy than its earlier historical form. And it is dispersing quickly to every corner of the cyberspace with a flick of a digital mouse. Communication was never so fast and effective and feedback so prompt. In fact, the Internet and other communications technologies have augured well for this literary form that has the innate capacity to renew itself with every passing social formation and survive to tell the tale---in verse. Entire communities are getting formed that appreciate the poetry and encourage the poets to continue plodding on. Most of them are fellow poets that are hyper on the internet. You can call them hermeneutic communities that promote poetry in big way. The critiques and the positivity mark the friendly exchanges between poets and readers/poets. Most of it is so spontaneous that you, as a member, feel that you are participating in a live event. This feeling was earlier experienced by the privileged poets of the medieval royal courts or later on, in the Parisian salons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of a more democratic Europe. With the advent of the market forces in developed capitalism, the lucky writer got the royalties but lost the touch with the amorphous audience dispersed across a vast land mass. You just wrote for an abstraction called Reader. You hardly met or interacted with this being, unless you were a Tolstoy or

Hemingway. Occasionally, some caring readers wrote back and their authors replied. In later half of the last century, you just could not connect with your favourite Marquez or Neruda or Mann or Grass or Sartre, as they had been made invisible by the markets. There were no addresses or phone numbers--no access to them, unless you were from The New York Times or the Parisian Review. Everything was a big PR exercise. It still is. Try to reach out to a Pamuk or Okri in the crowded Jaipur Literary Festival and face the humiliation of being a fan. If it is Sir Naipaul, then God save your skin as a plebian questioning the great Olympian. Go with a TV crew and camera, chances get bright of getting up, close and personal with the celeb writer. In that case, you do not know what to ask beyond the inane, "What do you write and why?" The literary exchanges never looked so crass and ordinary and manufactured. The digital age has changed all that and empowered the ordinary person and made them poets. And the new social media celebrate this burst of creativity from the ordinary person. In fact, it makes a busy professional go creative---by combining various media like visuals, pictures, photographs, music and written words in a strange alchemy that appeals to a post-modern consumer most strongly. They can innovate and experiment. The New-Age Guy is placed at the center of this digital revolution by the market forces. And changed old modes of perceptions and communication. It is true democracy unleashed by the knowledge society for its knowledge

workers. You are in the flow, in the unending process, called information, and, if properly equipped, can process it fast to remain updated. A real remarkable tech development that has dramatically altered the broad contours of our horizons. Poetry is fast adapting to the spirit of the times. It has gone digital. It is online. And renewed itself by integrating within the digital mainframe. Most of it is multi-media. You can also call it the PPT (PowerPoint Presentation) of poetry. The traditional poet is devoid of the PPT Poetry, if they are not upgraded or a netizen. The Internet is a young medium and appeals to the young more than the adults but the latter are catching up as the logic of a computerized universe compels every age-group to go computer-literate and overall tech-savvy. But since the young are more skilled and better upgraded in navigating the depths and widths of the infinite cyberspace, they have a better advantage than their seniors. And the young are a poet by heart. Like the young Greeks, they can see Poseidon in sea and hear the sirens sing and the nymphs flitting in the forests. The freshness of vision transforms the grey and ugly world into a livable romantic one. They have hope---as compared with the adult cynicism, crudeness and disillusionment---and a unique radicalism that is impatient with status quo, scholasticism, sterility, fossilization and desertification of any kind. Conventions are to be overthrown. Barriers broken. Fresh winds to be welcomed. And New Poetry is born! Aided by the social media. Here is the how of it. Poetry is very flexible. The first poets of the world---Greeks, Aryans, Mayans, Chinese, and Persians---saw gods in the verdant valleys and hills

and rivers and recorded the interactions in their long oral poems called epics that, later on, could never be replicated, although hugely imitated. The sacredness was gone. The gods had left. And the eyes could not see the retreat. Later on, as machines arrived in a different age, cheap publishing made the printing, circulation and reading of books more widespread and variegated. Middle-class, literate and leisurely, became patrons and novels were avidly read by the women of the Renaissance Europe. Machines, literacy, leisure, libraries, and journals accelerated the dispersal of these ideals across the West. Aristocracy declined; bourgeoisie were dominant. French Revolution consolidated their hold. America happened. Democracy found a continent once roamed by the so-called primitives. That is a different story. Poetry left the court and arrived in the market place. Cultural literacy was on. Facilitating its gradual growth were universities, dons, critical canons and its severe formulators and arbiters like Arnold and publishing houses looking for profits. Poetry was stuck up in upper-middle-class homes. A successful banker Eliot saw and advertised waste-landish existence for all and no hope for the human race and praxis in a greedy world fighting world wars. Then the radical 60s happened. Colonies ended. Governments changed. Revolutions were staged and some, aborted. Theory was installed. All thoughts were de-constructed by traditional academics with a variety of post-labels as their badges. Nothing was certain. Meaning, value, author, text, ideology, identity were all in flux. Despair was once again enshrined. Absurd was fashionable. Fragmentation was the rule. Neurosis was called art.

Poetry was rescued by its warriors. The 80s saw the birth of the performance poetry. Americans, smart with marketing lingo, called it slam. It released the trapped poetic energy from the tyranny of the printed page and brought it face to face with the live audience. A fad caught on, where orality of the poetry was re-emphasized. We were back to the early Grecian era where a blind Homer could see and narrate vividly the exciting adventures of the heroes against mighty natural odds and mostly survive with the aid of the sympathetic gods to a rapt audience that believed in the existence of such a sacred meeting ground of the human and divine in the limitless space of poetry. Mere act of hearing the inspiring heroic deeds made them uplifted to a rare sublime level. The tonality, the histrionics, the expressions, the inflections were all significant for the speaker/s and listeners alike. It was a personal communication between a narrator and the hearer subsequently lost. The same element was successfully retrieved by the slams. Poet was a performer, if not an exact prophet of a blind age to the beauty of poetry; poem was a vivid performance-act; audience was real and the judge. You were a narrator and yourself an author implicated in the narration before a real-time audience, ready to experience realities of the parallel realms, at that instant. The closure was complete for both the communicator and the communicatee in this literary communication situation in a real social setting of a school hall or public place. Poetry has found its voice again--in a public place. Slams had restored human touch to an increasingly de-humanized world where both author and readers were constructed as mere linguistic signs and processes by the French Theory.

Internet brought its own revolution. Those of us who were made desperate by a system of publishing that recognized the NRIs only or the elite with connections and repeatedly insulted by the bloated publishing bureaucracy for being small-town or suburban or middle-class found salvation in the social media and its enormous power. Different professionals, willing to die for their poetic Muses, no longer contemplated suicide as a more romantic or philosophical option for us, when rejected by the arrogant MNCs called publishers whose job-profile was to find and nurture new talents but who believed otherwise. Profit-mongering made risks unacceptable. And who cares for poetry in the twitter-age? They were proved wrong.

Poets, in small groups, formed online communities and posted poems. Some paired them with pictures. The rest was done by the Facebook and Twitter. The word was out. The marginalized were migrating to these social sites, delivering and bonding over poetics! A new aesthetics was on way. Language, idiom, syntax, imagery, cadence, rules were all altered. The young were impatient with the inherited world of conventions and wanted to change the rules.

They did.

The Internet gave them power. Power to publish, get heard by others and critique. Instant feedbacks, appreciation and criticism objective have made the Internet a robust medium of connectivity and communication over vast geographical distances. The world has shrunk. We are living in a global village where most are artists. It is a Greenwich Village. Females outnumber the males. Even if the Tsars do not publish you, that is not the end. You have got the avenue of instant connectivity with fellow- travellers and a rich dialogue is

possible, otherwise missing with the traditional print format. The FB has made these online groups and communities more visible through its Face -book accounts and profile pictures---the entire exercise sounds credible and human in the cyberspace. And you get satisfaction out of the printed lyrics and longer poems; the visuals enhance the overall effect. Poetry is getting re-defined in an impersonal commodified world of objects. You feel sane and restored by the invigorating exercise on these groups that promote poetry---quality one---through these lively and intelligent exchanges of expert opinions. And recognized as well. The basic aim of communication is to be heard. These sites provide such empowering platforms for the poetry warriors. The bilateral communication makes you go onwards only. Internet

has re-energized poetry and rescued it from the go downs and dusty shelves of the government-funded libraries and made it melt into the daily lives of the folks active online. Those doomsday-sayers who predicted the demise of the poetry in every age should visit these global sites and they will find the vitality and vibrancy infecting. These sites will take them to beautiful lands re-imagined by minds who have gained quick glimpses of the retreating gods--the way the Greeks did first; then Wordsworth did later on, along with Shelley and Keats. These active dreaming minds could again find the resurfacing Poseidon in a polluted sea. It is a vital sign of cultural recovery of an amnesiac age. The journey to the fascinating land of the renewed spirit has begun---thanks to some smart machines and the dialectical nature of the poetry itself. Good news for the lovers of ol' poesy.

**Beauty and attraction in Vasudeva Reddy's Traditional Poetry**  
**by Aju Mukhopadhyay**

Once a U G C National Fellow and Visiting Professor, T. Vasudeva Reddy, steeped in homogenous Indian or Aryan culture and religion is a hundred per cent conventional poet. But he does not cling to olden diction in his poetry nor remain in the traditional world only. He is at the same time a realist, romantic, lyricist and naturalist. From some of his poems it seems that he has ample love and appreciation for nature, sympathy for the have-nots including the ugly bird like crow but he has become, specially after the unexpected demise of his beloved wife, somehow saddened and subdued in his life as it seems that death often touches his atmosphere. A number of poems in his slender collection, 'Pensive Memories', spreads an air of pessimism.

Beginning with "The New Year" the poet seems uncertain about the future as he came across gloomy days in the past but hopes to see bright days ahead. "Can I Sing" ends with question at the end of each paragraph though the question marks are absent. Can one progress if someone is pulled from the back? "Can I see / a clear inward perception / with these myopic eyes / blighted and unlighted / by back-biting and jealousy". (p.12)

"Migrating Birds" is a procession of men and women in great distress, an

exodus after a national holocaust; only ribs projected of both men and their cows, weakened to the extreme, they walk to a bleak future. "The Dull Evening" and "A Violent Winter"- both present severe climatic conditions. Life is crunched under the oppressive Nature. In "Maya" he writes,

In this meaningless hazy hurried journey;

In this colossal weird world of stunning  
Maya

Fame and shame, sun and shade

Joy and sorrow lose their odd identity

And merge in vast colourless vacuum

All pomp and pride of earthly Maya fade  
into dust

The divine Maya mocks at the signatures  
on water.

(Maya. p.33)

The gloomy mood and pictures continue in "Veil of Death" and "Waiting", in "From Fallow Fields" and in other poems. That he painted nature's fury in this mood is discernible. In "Assembly of Quadrupeds" he bursts with satiric laughter with enough of humour sometimes and sympathy for the poor and gullible people under the present day politicians of our country:

A vegetarian tiger addressed the assembly

...

With wolf as my Premier, progress  
marches

Socialism sails and democracy dances

We assure you free supply of food and  
shelter

gas and grass, cheese, ghee an geese,

liberate you from the yoke of taxation; ...

Let us strive unreservedly for a merited  
society

free from caste or class, creed or breed or  
division

where cows and my tribe, wolves and  
sheep coexist ...

All the members present felt freshly elated

roared and lowed, barked, brayed and  
bleated

(Assembly of Quadrupeds. p.39)

In "Pensive Memories" he opines, "Life is a strange accident or a destined meet / A faceless eerie event or a wondrous feat". But question arises why does he paint such dismal scenes or nurtures such gloom?

Though it is not entirely personal, there was a grave cause of personal loss at the sudden demise of his wife which the poets paints in poems one after the other.

Besides this the poet finds the goings on in our society is dragging us to the dark holes

of life. But the scenes and pictures are drawn from life around us with perfect poetic expression, beautiful and attractive. Because of this Nissim Ezekiel, a different type of poet, utters in admiration that "Pensive Memories is a significant contribution to English poetry . . . . Like a gifted sculptor he chisels his poems with the deftness of a master craftsman."

(Foreword to the book; p. 8)

The occurrence that afflicts his life, the sudden death of his wife on 27 October 1998, is repeated in some poems with pain, in dejection.

Endless is this airy eerie night

No light in my life nor use of light  
when the light of my heart is put out . . . .

How was their conjugal life?

O love, your lively loving presence

Lent my average life rich fragrance

Filled it with sweet essence of flowers . . . .

I felt gracious God made us for each other

Though my half, you became my whole  
self . . . .

You are my God's gift and my breath

Without you why this journey on the  
earth? . . . .

Finally the poet consoles himself that  
after his death he will unite with her in the  
other world as it is the orthodox belief.

my searching soul should unite with yours  
before His Lotus Feet in the world unseen  
from where no one has ever returned  
Ours is the sacred Saptapadi bond eternal

that unified our hearts with spirit  
supernal.

(To My Other Half. pp.47-51)

This marriage with the bride circling  
the bridegroom seven times ('Saptapadi')  
with other rituals is according to the  
traditional Hindu marriage and it is  
considered that this bond is inseparable in  
subsequent births as Hindus believe in  
rebirth. The poet's cry is in tune with the  
belief but it is not simply the dry faith that  
he repeats; their relationship was unique  
in the modern world, an ideal marriage  
beyond all apprehension.

the life of the light

the light of my life

Now without you

all is dull, dry and dross

(Without You. p.31)

In "A Pair of Doves" he gives a picture  
how two birds in pair lived happily with  
their little ones but after the loss of the

female, "lone and lean without the spark  
in his eyes; /

With Eve's exit, Adam lost his Paradise."  
(p.41)

In "A Lone Bird" he writes, "Alas, he  
stood alone, a lone bird / waiting for his  
destined chance / to meet his other half  
afar" (p.23)

Bridal references are here and there. In  
"The Power of Love" he writes to end the  
poem, "Lovers may die but not their love;  
/ death may have its sway on all, / but it  
bows before the Lord of Love." (p.35)

This reminds us of the story of Savitri  
and Satyavan. After the sudden death of  
Satyavan as destined, Savitri followed his  
soul to the other world and fought with the  
Lord of Death, Yama, to return the life of  
Satyavan. After prolonged arguments  
Yama agrees to return Satyavan on earth  
only on the basis of the strength of love of  
Savitri. This story from Mahabharata has  
been alluded to by the poet in his "To My  
Other Half", mentioned earlier. The  
greatest spiritual epic on this theme is Sri  
Aurobindo's "Savitri".

The river Ganga is worshipped by  
Hindus as a deity. It is considered as the  
most sacred river of India purifying  
everything in this life and beyond. The  
poet describes its divine link as it flows in  
"The Ganges Flows": "she purifies mind  
and body with her alchemic touch, / even  
bones, ashes and corpses, left in her

waters; / Vedic scripts and epics spring  
from her waters.” (p. 43)

Finally I shall mention the greatest  
narrative poem in this volume, titled,  
“Sabari”. Here the poet seems joyous with  
the nature as in a forest where lives Sabari,  
a tribal woman ascetic, where visit Ram  
and Lakshman of the Indian epic  
“Ramayana”, during their search for the  
abducted Sita. Sabari receives them as  
Gods and the brothers, accepting her  
hospitality lives a night in her Ashram.  
There was no hostility between the Aryan  
brothers and the tribal ascetic as all in  
harmonious surrounding lived a God like  
life. The fact of the poet’s acumen in  
narrating this episode and his love of  
nature will be clear here.

It was abound with creepers full of leaves  
and flowers  
which bloomed with lusty touch of tender  
showers . . .  
whispered to the  
caressing bees  
that sucked the juicy sweetness to the tasty  
lees  
Yonder the Pampa lake shone in glittering  
gold  
as the bright rays of the sun kissed the  
water cold . . .  
the two Princes Ram and Lakshman, pure  
and peerless

radiant with divine light, bold and fearless,  
. . . .

At its entrance with folded hands there  
stood  
sacred Sabari, a woman ascetic, old, feeble  
and good

“O Ram, my life is blessed at your sight  
sacred . . . .

Only to see you I postponed my death to  
this hour with care.”

After accepting her invitation to stay  
the night at her Ashram and having  
enjoyed her hospitality, the next morning,

In grateful joy Sri Ram, God-incarnate,  
spoke

“Your kindness drove our fatigue away as  
we awoke;

Mother . . .

May all your penances guide you to  
heavenly poise

You are free to choose a sphere celestial of  
your choice”.

The aged Sabari, dazed in joy and supernal  
ecstasy

wasted not a moment, lit the pyre as in a  
fantasy

and leapt into it chanting Rama’s name  
filial

as her divine form ascended to the world  
celestial.

(Sabari. pp. 52-54)

So it was a case of burning herself, the last rite being chanting of Ram's name, giving no chance to modern cinema directors or writers to earn a new award each time in presenting another 'Sati', a blemish to Hindu religion and culture. Strangely though, such awardees never name who were the people who fought and abolished the system, though such systems had already been deformed to become one of the rare superstitions, long abolished to draw our attention. Who knew of what 'Sati' was the remnant. They never go to any other area; of religion or country or community to find out examples of their noble activity. In ancient India some such pious souls or yogis could leave their body at will by any means including self-immolation peacefully, not like the frenzied lunatics self-immolating to die violently for the sake of their modern political idol.

Nissim Ezekiel was so moved with the poem that he wrote in the foreword, "With its sublimity of spiritual force and diction, graphic description, natural imagery, and enchanting rhythm rises to the epic level and lingers long in the reader's memory." (p.7)

**Work Cited**

*Pensive Memories. T. Vasudeva Reddy. Madras; Poets Press India. 2005*

A poet and critic from London, A Russel, wrote about this volume, "He is a conventional poet whose mind is equipped with the furnishings of native tradition. We can read the influence of great poetry he has read and they bathe his sensibility in a baptism of transmutation." (p.62)

So this is poet Vasudeva with his spontaneous capacity to create rhythm and rhyme in the traditional contents of his poem to remain a traditional yet modern pleasing the modern readers.

At the end of the book the poet has presented some tercets said to be haiku though they differ from the Japanese tradition in content, idea and form though form may be different. However, the tercets are satiric and aphoristic, worth quoting a few:

Miles of murdered graves  
adorned by lip sympathy  
legalized by triumphant ballots.  
(No. 4)

Doctors greedily feel the pulse  
only when it swells their purse  
stethoscope widens economic  
scope. (No. 22)

