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Creativity: Special Issue - The Unity of All Things
Issue 5



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Issue 5
The Unity of All Things

A Journal of the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs)
Edinburgh Napier University



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The Unity of All Things

Foreword

We stand at the crossroads today at a critical point of time in human history, as scientists tell us that the pandemic which is having a devastating effect on human populations across the world, is the result of thoughtless planetary degradation which has accelerated climate change. We are guilty of depleting our green mantle and exhausting the earth's resources through unmitigated economic growth and development. We have read about a world where an invisible enemy stalks the planet, bringing destruction in its train in dystopian literature, but now this has been translated into our real world, as people are told to self isolate, work from home and not meet friends or family in person. Children have been introduced to the virtual classroom and playgrounds are off limits. The joy of student community activities, of classroom debates at universities have been taken away from university life and replaced by blended learning. We have read in history about fearful times when the plague struck, and the effects of Spanish Flu as it swept across countries – an experience which remains close to our living memory. And more recently we have encountered the dangers imposed by SARS, Ebola and MERS, but these now seem either in the recent past or limited to some regions and hence not as terrifying as SARS COV 2 with its global reach and disastrous effect. As lockdowns continue in different countries at different stages and international borders close to countries reeling under a second wave of a new variant, we concede that these are unprecedented times.

We have heard many writers acknowledge that they have found it difficult to write during the lockdown. Yet some have found themselves responding to these times and what has emerged are lockdown pieces. Artists have expressed their inner turmoil and/or searched for a peaceful core, bringing back meaning to a life which seems to have receded beyond our grasp. When we contemplated this issue, we asked ourselves how Rabindranath Tagore would have responded to this new transformed reality. We believe he would record his thoughts and views in his writing, his paintings, his lectures, talks and letters, as he always did at every critical moment in his life. He would not turn away from this grim reality and with his authorial integrity, he would have spoken his mind without glossing over the facts, propelled by the powerful imagination of the writer philosopher and pragmatist.

Two years after World War I in August 1920, when Rabindranath was in London, a letter arrived addressed to 'Sir Rabindranath' from a mother who asked the Nobel Laureate where

she could find a poem by Rabindranath which her son had recited to her before he left for the battle front, the lines of which the mother found written in his pocket book which was returned to her after his death. The poem was 'Parting Words' and the quoted lines were:

When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

The poem referred to is from *Gitanjali* (1912) and the writer of the letter is Susan Owen, mother of the poet Wilfred Owen who died seven days before the armistice. This is an example of one great poet recognising the power of poetry by another great poet. And Rabindranath's urgent message to us today would be to value and protect this 'unsurpassable' world. Owen has said, 'All a poet can do is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful', which is why rather than write about the glory and heroism of dying for one's country in a War, Owen has written about the pity of War in his poems. Owen's words are reflected in Rabindranath's work. Rabindranath too feels that writers and artists have a crucial role to play in society, especially in critical times. They cannot stand apart as mere observers and remain disengaged from the current reality. They are a society's conscience and voice.

Alan Wald in his review of Enzo Traverse's *Fire and Blood* (2016) has said

We are in an exceptionally new situation, but elements of older experiences may clarify our vision if one finds the proper means of access'.¹

So what role do writers and artists play in these exceptional times? Do they stand apart or do they engage with the times and reflect on 'older experiences' to 'clarify our vision' in order to understand how we have come to this or does the imaginary give them a window of opportunity to look to the future and ponder what lies ahead and consider how we can shape our future?

In 'The Religion of the Forest', Rabindranath says,

We stand before this great world. The truth of our life depends upon our attitude of mind towards it.... For us the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realizing our own selves in it through expansion

¹ Alan Wald, Review of Enzo Traverse's *Fire and Blood* (2016) in *Solidarity*, July-August, 2016.

of sympathy, not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union.²

His friend and educational collaborator, conservation architect and environmentalist, Patrick Geddes, shares a similar view when he says,

...the conservation of Nature, and...the increase of our accesses to her, must be stated more seriously and strongly than is customary. Not merely begged for on all grounds of amenity, of recreation, and repose, sound though these are, but insisted upon. On what grounds? In terms of the maintenance and development of life; of the life of youth, of the health of all....³

Writers and artists have responded generously to a call from *Gitanjali and Beyond* to contribute to a special issue dedicated to the ‘extraordinary’ times we live in – to commemorate our global suffering, lest we forget. The response has been like a flock of starlings arriving on our horizon like so many missives of truth, hope and freedom – endorsing all that we hold precious, which writers and artists give ‘voice’ to in work that will stay beyond these strange times. In their pieces they have confirmed that we can renew and retain this planet and life on it through the ‘expansion of sympathy’ to ensure the ‘conservation of Nature’ in a new consciousness that proposes ‘The Unity of All Things.’

This issue comes with five sections: Prose, Poetry, Drama, Art and Reviews - albeit from a wide range of perspectives, which nevertheless share a deep concern for the sanctity of life. The Prose section includes memoirs, both of personal and professional experiences, a short story, and a translated text which are all reflective and moving in their honesty and originality. The poetry has flowed here in a steady stream that carries the ‘truth’ of poets’ responses to the past year and a continuing consciousness of a new reality, and reading them has been both exhilarating and restorative. The play with its multi-media approach is refreshingly innovative. The art work, which cannot be done full justice to in digital copies, still speaks for itself – being expressive and meditative in its visual appeal. The reviews that

² Rabindranath Tagore, ‘The Religion of the Forest’, in Ed. Sisir K. Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), Vol 2; Also see Eds. Bashabi Fraser, Tapati Mukherjee and Amrit Sen, *A Confluence of Minds: The Rabindranath Tagore and Patrick Geddes Reader on Education and the Environment* (Edinburgh: Luath Press 2017; Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati Press, 2017).

³ Patrick Geddes, ‘Ways to the Neotechnic City’ in *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Study of Civics* (1915, Creative Media Partners, LLC., 2018); Also see Eds. Bashabi Fraser, Tapati Mukherjee and Amrit Sen, *A Confluence of Minds: The Rabindranath Tagore and Patrick Geddes Reader on Education and the Environment* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2017; Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati Press, 2017).

conclude the issue are of significant publications that have been published during these times when in-person book launches or readings have not been possible – so these critical analyses, with the creative pieces, affirm the power of words and images, for which we remain immensely grateful. We hope that this issue will prove to be enriching, enjoyable and restorative for all readers as it has been for us.

Bashabi Fraser, Chief Editor

Special note

We perceive the world by our senses, but it is in our mind and heart that we understand and feel it. Issue 5 of *Gitanjali and Beyond* explores this realisation creatively, at a time when humanity is caught in the cobweb of crisis ushered in by the Covid 19 pandemic. This issue, *The Unity of All Things*, brings together writers and artists expressing their perspectives in revelations which are illuminating, reinforcing Rabindranath's idea of self-realisation that humanity is capable of. This issue shows that merely expressing concern is not the solution, as an underlying ethos propels writers and artists to confront a crisis and protect culture in a celebration of the power of the imagination. This issue reinforces the need for an inclusive humanism that recognizes humankind as part of a continuum which, if jeopardized, brings peril.

Rabindranath Tagore in 'Dharma' states the need of the human soul is to be at one with the Supreme soul through which one can experience love – the love of universal-man in this universal human world.⁴ In a world wrecked by instances of hatred, Rabindranath would have understood the true meaning of 'spiritualism' which is love and fellowship, which helps us to know the 'truth'. As an Associate Editor of *Gitanjali and Beyond* I feel this issue will touch every individual who wants to look forward to a better tomorrow as 'whenever we see the welfare of man in any society, there is spiritual power behind it...[truth] has to be acquired through spiritual means'.⁵

Saptarshi Mallick, Associate Editor

⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Essays on Aesthetics*. Trans. Amitabha Chaudhury (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2017), p. 263.

⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *Pather Sanchoy [Gleanings of the Road]*. Trans. Somdatta Mandal (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018), p. 15.

Section I:

Prose

Notes from a Gallery

Beth Junor

Sometimes in life we pull the threads of the past up around us – for protection perhaps, although I've always only experienced this action as natural, essential for survival. Especially for the privileged in today's world, that is those of us who have enough of the basics of food, shelter and health arising from these, survival can move beyond the physical to become also cultural, political and spiritual. My gallery of Scottish and European contemporary art in the town of St. Andrews on Scotland's north-east coast arose out of the UK government's austerity policies. It was during swingeing cuts to public services that I began to draw the threads of the past around me, not for comfort but to lead me into the future, to my gallery.

'The' past. I do not write 'my past' since every action we undertake in the public sphere has been made possible by those who have gone before us.

J. M. Barrie wrote, 'I think one remains the same person throughout [life], merely passing from one room to another.'

I'm not materially wealthy by any means and never have been, yet life has led me through a palace of riches. Each different room has been populated with the best of people, living and dead. The doors have been kept open, so that the community outside, local, national or international has been able to enter at will while my own work has reached outward. I've had one life as a young activist, a professional life as a speech and language therapist, and now I have my own art gallery. Running a gallery, like the first two, is also a social undertaking. I've signed off another codicil to my contract with community, which every human being enters at birth and can fulfil according to circumstance and choosing.

In 2017 austerity cuts to public services began to hit home. I and two other experienced colleagues in speech and language therapy were facing redundancy. My two colleagues were younger and perhaps hardest hit. I could take early retirement at the same time, so began preparing my payback project to the arts that had always sustained me in life. I came to my gallery from the literary side, specifically poetry and non-fiction - I'd already edited the letters of Valda Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid's wife) for instance. Music and paintings too have always given me sustenance.

I read everything I could around the skills and knowledge I'd need and undertook training. The nature of galleries was already changing and I wanted mine also to be a place where anyone could walk through an open door and feel welcome, ask any questions and not feel they needed to be an expert to appreciate art. I wanted it to be a place of discussion, debate, learning and discovery – communication again, the trait that defines us as human beings, the gift that manifests itself in many forms, whether through spoken or signed language, the written word, music or the visual arts and education. I deliberately described it as showing 'Scottish and European Contemporary Art' because I see Scotland, now and in the future, as part of Europe. For a gallery in St. Andrews, the town of my *alma mater*, with its strong historical relationship with Europe, the description was perfect.

There's been a continual dialogue within my gallery, an exploration in each exhibition of the relationship between the literary and visual arts. Poetry, novels, evoke imagery within us – unique and essentially private to each individual. With painting the imagery is out there, available in a form that can be shared between people, a catalyst for sharing life's experiences. Yet sometimes we struggle for words to describe the impact a painting has on us. Then, a poet can articulate this for us. Lyn Moir's sequence of poems about Velázquez painting *Las Meninas* (1656, Museo del Prado, Madrid) is a fine example of this. It's a circular relationship.

It's an enormous privilege for a gallerist to witness the responses of gallery visitors. The artist is back working in their studio while I've been able to hear people's stories of what a painting or poem means to them. Having Sandy Moffat's monumental new composite portrait *Scotland's Voices* (2016-17, oil on canvas, 170 x 230cm) in the gallery for a prolonged period was a marvellous experience, to meet so many people who told me how the musicians and writers depicted had touched their own lives. During Sarah Longley's exhibition, which featured a triptych of paintings from her father Michael Longley's book *Ghetto*, people would come in and speak about how the WW2 Holocaust had impacted on the lives of their own family and friends. Ruth Nicol's *East Neuk* solo exhibition conferred a status on local people's familiar landscapes and elicited expressions of a great love for the land of Fife. It's the gallerist's responsibility to convey as much of this as possible to the artists.

We had a lengthy lockdown in Scotland from March to July. The local government BID (business improvement district) group distributed posters in time for re-opening that read

‘Social Distancing in place here’ with the ubiquitous symbols. I cut off this line and replaced it with ‘Physical Distancing and Social Cohesion in place here’. Language as a tool for thought.

The artist Nalini Malani¹ (b. 1944, Kolkata) doesn’t use the phrase ‘social distancing’ because it contains echoes of India’s caste system. She has spoken about the impact of the pandemic on her home country of India (she is now based in Mumbai and Amsterdam) – of how the hurried implementation of lockdown and the sudden halting of public transport left migrant workers stranded in cities, forced to walk long distances to return to their home towns and villages, and of the impossibility of households keeping apart from each other in poorer, crowded neighbourhoods. So it has been globally – as seen in similar reports from Brazilian favelas, prompting renewed calls for a universal basic income.² Malani notes,

The bourgeoisie in India have been protesting as part of the Black Lives Matter movement, but very few people are looking at how marginalised people are treated in their own backyard.³

What a powerful virus this is, exposing the fault lines in all our societies!

I’m moving my gallery online for now, in adapting to current changed circumstances. I’m enjoying learning new skills in filming and editing, for enriched online content – interviews, poetry readings, studio visits that will be posted on my website from November. We live in a democracy that demands constant vigilance – not only regarding how we treat each other as individuals when times are hard, but also of how the state is treating us. One of the most odious pieces of news to emerge recently is that the London government has been lobbying the US to support a controversial new warhead for Trident missiles – a letter was sent in April, yes April, at the height of the pandemic in the UK. It’s unconscionable. What kind of future culture is being created in this pandemic? These are questions that need to be asked, addressed thoroughly. When we first went into lockdown in Scotland in March, my thought was, ‘Ok so now our children can’t go to school, we’ve a health service at breaking point, we can’t get flour or yeast in the shops, we’ve no libraries or theatres or galleries to go

¹ Nalini Malani’s exhibition ‘Can You Hear Me?’ is at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 23 September to May 2021. www.whitechapelgallery.org

² Mara Nogueira (Birkbeck, University of London), Aiko Ikemura Amaral (LSE Latin America and Caribbean Centre) and Gareth A. Jones (LSE Latin America and Caribbean Centre) in <https://tinyurl.com/y4wu6nnz> 3 June 2020.

³ ‘Art Without Borders: Nalini Malani’ by Debika Ray in *Apollo: The International Art Magazine*, September 2020.

to...two thirds of the world's population would be quite justified in saying 'Welcome to our world.' ' Now I'm filled with grief and anger whenever I hear of us losing sight of life enriching values alongside the most tragic loss of all, of so many lives lost here and around the world through war, poverty and this pandemic that is relentlessly exposing it all.

Beth Junor is Director of the Junor Gallery, <https://junorgallery.scot>. Here she is editing a series of pamphlets, *Artists and their Work*. She worked in the NHS and education as a speech and language therapist for 25 years, latterly specialising in childhood autism spectrum disorders. She translated *I Am Special: A Workbook to Help Children, Teens and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders to Understand their Diagnosis, Gain Confidence and Thrive* by Peter Vermeulen, London: Jessica Kingsley, 2013) from French. She edited and introduced the letters of Valda Grieve (*Scarcely Ever Out of My Thoughts*, Edinburgh: WordPower Books, 2007). She is co-editor with Angus Calder of an anthology of poems from wars (*The Souls of the Dead are Taking the Best Seats*, Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2004). She wrote a history of women's resistance to the stationing of first-strike nuclear weapons at Greenham Common, where she lived in a tent for three and a half years (*Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp: A History of Non-Violent Resistance*, London: Working Press, 1995). Beth is also a poet and is currently learning how to make short films.

Happy Clappy City

Tom Hubbard

Language, it seems, can see us through this: not to mention science. The discourse has inspired us to verbal variants, none of which are all that new. There's the finger-wagging 'We're all in this together' (though some are more in it than others); 'there's light at the end of the tunnel' (a perennial favourite of cornered politicians); we'll get back to 'normality' (wasn't it 'normality' that got us into this mess in the first place?) The corona clichés tumble out continuously, as the upcoming generations of, say, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Greta Thunberg call for radical action, rather than pious verbiage, on the inequality and climate emergencies that the plague has made visible in the countries of the blind.

'The Country of the Blind' is the title of a short story by H. G. Wells. His novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) was perched on my shelves for a long time until I took it down again last spring, at the height of the first wave. The pattern of initial complacency and scepticism now seems pretty familiar.

'Haven't you heard of the men from Mars?' said I. 'The creatures from Mars?'

'Quite enough,' said the woman over the gate. 'Thanks'; and all three of them laughed.¹

You can almost see the smirk of the 'libertarian' anti-vaxers.

The Martian invasion, though, accelerates, and the trim Home Counties are caught up in what we'd now call 'unprecedented' horrors. The unwelcome visitors reach London and all seems lost. At last, though, it's the Martians, not the humans, who succumb unexpectedly to what in Scotland we call a 'smit': unaccustomed to earthly contagions, the Martians are routed by an 'invisible enemy', our home-grown bacteria.

H. G. Wells's many fictional Armageddons include *The Time Machine* (1895), with humanity split into two tribes: the effete Eloi living above ground in what appears at first to be a perpetual paradise, all luxury and no work, and the rough Morlocks, the subterranean labourers who keep the whole thing going but who exact payment by clambering to the surface during the night to grab and literally devour members of the upper world. Wells's other works, with their antiseptic, authoritarian utopias, are less appealing to readers: maybe we prefer our horrors to be a bit raw.

¹ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 36.

It was that writer's contemporary, E. M. Forster, who came up with what he would describe as 'a reaction to one of the earlier heavens of H. G. Wells.'² This was the short story 'The Machine Stops', first published in 1909. The very title echoes Wells, as above, and here again we find motifs of overground and underground dwellers, if now in different contexts.

A little over twenty years ago I was preparing to return to Scotland after a short research trip to London. I had time to put off at King's Cross before catching the train, so I resorted to the station buffet. At a table adjacent to mine, there were two smart-suited guys sitting, facing each other, and they appeared to be colleagues. I expected them to start a conversation – but each was holding his phone and paying attention to that. I couldn't help but wonder at the time (the late 1990s) if their only means of communication with each other.

It's a situation foretold in E. M. Forster's story, his only foray into science fiction. I'm not the first to point to the remarkable predictions, in this tale, of today's technology. The internet, social media and video-conferencing have their benign and sinister possibilities, both; Forster concentrates on the sinister. In his vision of a mechanised totalitarian future, people can communicate with each other only via screens, but the rebellious Kuno insists on meeting his mother Vashti in physical space:

'I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine. [...] The Machine is much, but it is not everything. I see something like you on this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you. That is why I want you to come. Come and stop with me. Pay me a visit, so that we can meet face to face, and talk about the hopes that are in my mind'.³

During the lockdown, however, we have been only too glad to have the likes of Zoom and Skype to keep in touch with at least the simulacra of our family and friends, but like Kuno we long for the real thing. Our attitude, then, is more ambivalent than his.

The novel *La Peste / The Plague* (1947) by the French writer Albert Camus narrates the progress of a deadly scourge in the Algerian coastal city of Oran. Algeria was then an integral part of France and the book has been questioned for concentrating on its European population at the expense of the indigenous North Africans. Camus intended it rather as an allegory, with the plague standing for the German occupation and the collaborationist Vichy régime. Camus had been involved in Resistance activity during these dark years, and the fight

² H. G. Wells, *Collected Short Stories*, (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 6.

³ H. G. Wells, *Collected Short Stories*, (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 110, 111.

against the disease in *The Plague* is clearly analogous to the struggle against the Nazis and their accomplices.

As with *The War of the Worlds*, there is a pattern of initial, near total complacency which must eventually yield to the accumulating horror: ‘Our townsfolk [...] went on doing business, arranged journeys and formed views. How should they have given a thought to anything like plague which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views?’⁴ It is hardly surprising that Camus’s novel enjoyed a revival during 2020. As for ‘exchange of views’, though, 2020 hardly abolished that...

Dr Rieux is the medic who leads the ‘Resistance’ to the disease. As the novel proceeds, it continues to depict situations only too familiar to us at the present. There are the cruel statistics which persist even as the plague shows signs of flattening out: another doctor, feeling positive about developments, nevertheless falls ill himself and dies. It all reflects the violence which persisted through the days just before France’s liberation and De Gaulle’s famous walk down the Champs-Élysées. In the novel, locked-down services steadily resume, but Dr Rieux loses his best friend and comrade-in-arms against the plague, then learns of the death of his wife from whom he had been necessarily separated.

Oran comes to life: there is rejoicing, dancing, embracing. Disease/fascism has been defeated, for a while, at least. In 2021 we, too, hope to celebrate as the vaccination increases and COVID is eliminated if not quite eradicated (whatever may be the difference between ‘eliminate’ and ‘eradicate’). No doubt Boris Johnson will both claim and receive credit for the work of scientists and NHS staff; if his hero Churchill had won the 1945 election, there would have been no NHS. Johnson never utters the name of Aneurin Bevan, the founder of the NHS: that wouldn’t fit his narrative. Many of those who have ‘clapped for carers’ remain unaware of the UK government’s running-down of health and other public services over the past decade and more. That said, we know of more thoughtful, more focussed applause for beleaguered staff, together with a shared compassion for those in their care.

As Wells’s and Camus’s novels draw to their close, there is a striking similarity in their last utterances:

It may be that in the larger design of the universe this invasion from Mars is not without its ultimate benefit for men; it has robbed us of that serene confidence in the

⁴ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, (London: Penguin Books, 1966) 34.

future which is the most fruitful source of decadence, the gifts to human science are enormous, and it has done much to promote the conception of the commonweal of mankind. [...] It may be, on the other hand, that the destruction of the Martians is only a reprieve. To them, and not to us, perhaps, is the future ordained.⁵ (*The War of the Worlds*, Chapter 10, 'The Epilogue', p. 191)

Forward to Stuart Gilbert's translation of *La Peste*, Part 5, Chapter 5:

And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperilled. He knew [...] that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years [...] and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city (252).

Tom Hubbard is a novelist, poet and literary/cultural historian. His most recent book is *The Devil and Michael Scot: a Gallimaufry of Fife and Beyond* (Grace Note Publications, 2020).

⁵ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 191.

Pulak's Mother

Debapriti Sengupta

Very early in the morning an old ailing person, Ritadebi - the resident of a quintessential small suburban town of West Bengal, India, has boarded the crowded local train that will take her to Calcutta. The railways are the cheapest medium that facilitates the transportation of thousands of commuters everyday to the economic hub of the Eastern state. Ritadebi's son, Pulak, is a resident of the city along with his wife, Niharika. Their three roomed flat was unable to spare a room for the 'unsophisticated' Ritadebi. She receives no financial help from her son and works as a household help in several houses and earns a meagre amount at the end of every month. She has a phone but that hardly rings - maybe once in six months. Her son is too busy to care about his mother.

However, yesterday has been an exception. Late at night, her phone rang. At first, the ringing tone of the phone had left the old woman startled. Immediately after that her motherly instincts triggered. Why is her son calling her so late? Has he fallen into any trouble? With trembling hands she picked up the phone.

'Hello ma, you have to come tomorrow at Sealdah railway station. I will meet you there and give you a packet. You will have to hand over it to a guy named Ratan who will meet you at Gede station', spoke Pulak in one breath without giving her a chance to speak. Ritadevi, being the motherly figure she is, was unable to refuse her ignorant son. So here she is, getting smashed in the ladies compartment of the train.

The train was moving past landscapes and so was her consciousness. She was thinking of all the bitter words she had to listen to when she asked for a day's leave from her masters.

"Do you think that I will give you money by only seeing your face?"- shrieked Mrs. Dutta. "You can go today but tomorrow you will have to do double the work."

In those households she is referred to as 'pulak er maa' (mother of Pulak); she doubts whether anybody in this world knows her real name. She was suddenly broken off her trance by the sound of hurrying footsteps hurling past her.

Oh! I have reached.'- she thought to herself. She slowly, bent in pain, de-boarded the train and tried to find her son amongst the sea of people.

Suddenly a man in a shining green coloured shirt and trousers was seen to approach her. She, at first, couldn't make out the face but the posture seemed familiar. Then she realised it was indeed her son in shining trousers. Pulak came and dragged her towards a deserted corner and without any greetings shoved a packet in her hand.

“The train is waiting at Platform No. 9...Go...hurry up. Don't forget to get down at Gede station. There a man named Ratan will find you; he has your picture and don't DOZE off...”

With these words Pulak hurriedly left and within few moments got lost in the crowd. Ritadebi was in a deep trance and few questions were troubling her a lot - how can an illiterate person like Pulak manage to afford such expensive clothes and mobile? And what is there in this packet?

She sat down on a bench and opened the packet - it was filled with a white powdery substance. Suddenly the television screen of the neighbourhood club flashed before her - is it what she is thinking? Does this packet contain drugs?

She decided that she will first verify that this is not something illegal and then deliver the packet. So she asked a hawker where the railway police station was and he showed her the way. She went there, and after initial rejections, managed to talk to an officer and narrated her whole story. She then boarded the next train accompanied by two police officers in civil dress. At Gede station she stood in front of the railway ticket counter as instructed by the police and waited for Ratan to arrive. After ten minutes she saw a man approaching her. At the very moment he was caught red handed by the police. After initial interrogation Pulak was also caught.

Ritadebi was in the newspapers the day after that. She had managed to punish a whole drug dealer gang and has saved many people from this dangerous habit. On the following Republic Day she was awarded with a pension by the government. She sometimes laments about the fact that she might not get to see her son again but then her peace of mind is restored when she is reminded about the lives of numerous people that she has saved.

Oh! and for a matter of fact everyone in the neighbourhood now calls her by her name and not as 'mother of Pulak'.

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fragments*Meaghan Delahunt*

i'm happy but i miss people,

i miss

when we come out of this,

will i

will it

will we

will

the world

shrinks

to my much-washed palms

a pandemic disrupts the grammar of a life. the idea of the future, the idea of the past and the present. the active becomes passive – we're now objects 'done to' by the virus. old-school grammar and linear illusions fall away.

here, the fragment comes into its own.

i embrace the fragment in-and-of-itself and i gather the fragments to form a different sort of whole.

*

beginnings

when it started, i was on the third draft of a book about mothers and daughters, death and creativity. as the year progressed, i just couldn't get back to this book about death. a number of friends lost their mothers (and fathers). a dear friend died very suddenly of cancer. the live streamed funeral became commonplace.

when it started, i thought i'd carefully record each day. this is important, i told myself. take note. everyday life is now part of the historical record. honour it.

that was my intention but i couldn't sustain it. i got covid during this period and struggled to focus, but in any case, the meticulous recording of life-as-it-was-lived became tedious. after six weeks of lockdown, i gave up. my journal barely notes what was happening to me, let alone to anyone else.

boris johnson in hospital was about it.

at this time, i became fixated on the news, immersed for hours in online newspapers. while i became more and more outraged by the everyday troika of covid, trump and brexit, a friend rang to say that she completely avoided the news and was reading all of henry james.

*

the good doctor says

*dr. rieux decided to write the account...so as not to be one of those who kept silent, to bear witness...*¹

¹ The quotes in bold italics in this section are from Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Penguin Classics, London, 2013

the fiction of the 20th century barely mentions the 1918 spanish flu epidemic. hemingway, fitzgerald, gertrude stein, orwell all lived through it. freud lost a daughter in its third wave. fifty million people died worldwide, yet there is little mention of this in writers' letters, diaries or novels of the period. and yet, although fewer people died, we have numerous accounts of the great war.

after a year of the current pandemic, as a fiction writer, i completely understand why.

war is tumultuous. it involves danger and excitement. it is the business of men and the enemy is clear. there's a designated arena of conflict: outdoors. there is an army. there are forward marches, drone strikes, bombs, retreats. each day, something different; dramatic, heroic and dangerous.

a plague is tumultuous, but it is also incredibly boring. it is endured indoors. it is domestic. largely, it's viewed as women's business: to care for the sick, to school the children, to provide food, to clean the house. it is mundane and repetitive work. the enemy is in the air we breathe, the people we are close to, the surfaces we touch. it is airborne and invisible. no drone strike can kill it. there is nothing dramatic or heroic about sheltering indoors with women and children. *the great gatsby* is not set during quarantine, for a reason.

during the daily routine of the first lockdown – exercise once a day, shopping once a week, the regular cleaning of surfaces, the eternal washing of hands and masks — who had the energy or even the desire to write fiction, especially fiction about covid?

we have nothing left but statistics

dr. rieux walks with me to the shore. he's never been to leith and i've never been to oran, but as i'm re-reading *the plague*, he's now a constant companion.

re-reading, i'm simultaneously the catholic school kid – reading the book for the first time as a metaphor for evil and nazism – and the woman of mature years, reading it as a factual account of u.k. life in the covid-era.

on january 27, 2021 a friend writes: *the old folks' home over the road just played auld lang syne on the speakers and all the staff (and some public) were standing outside with their heads bowed. not sure whether it was to mark a long-term resident passing, or the atrocious landmark of 100,000 dead in this country. where are the rolling heads? "we did all we can." bullshit. i loathe them.*

*

my friend's funeral was down near the scottish borders. i got a lift to the crematorium with a mutual friend. i sat in the backseat, masked. she sat in front, vaping while driving, with the window down.

after the service, my friend's god daughters came up for an illicit hug. we then went outside and hugged everyone else, all of us masked, careful to avert our faces.

the green hills brooded above as the empty hearse drove off.

we all carry the plague

it's how not to pass on the infection, dr. rieux maintains. *that's the issue*. he hands me an eco-wipe and together we swab telephones and doorknobs and remote controls and banisters.

he tries to wipe clean a large orange man, on the television screen. the man is the president of the united states and appears to be inciting riot.

but that will never come clean, says dr. rieux.

each of us has the plague within him

rieux says this as an angry white mob storms the capitol building in washington and we pause our cleaning to watch: mouths open, eco wipes hovering in mid-air.

and all the while, nothing more important happened than this great marking of time.

a neighbour in her 70s notes: *we're now all forced to think about our age; conscious of it in a way we weren't before.*

another friend says: *we're all just stuck at home, getting older.*

the daily walk; the nightly netflix; the weekly shop. people either still have work or they don't. there's not much in-between. the precarity of furlough makes people anxious. will they still have a job in six weeks, six months, when will furlough run out? people who still have work complain of exhaustion and sleeplessness, glued to computer screens all day. people who don't have work line up at food banks, apply for universal credit and/or wait for the government to give them a fraction of their former self-employed income. i apply to be a contact tracer and never hear anything back. a friend actually gets one of these jobs and starts work in a call centre near her home town. she works for a private company who've been granted a contract for nhs england. she has to tell the people she contacts that she's calling from scotland. she works 8am - 6pm in mask and gloves. she cleans the surfaces and door handles on the hour and shares a room with six other people, all socially distanced. in her other life, in the time before, she was a linguist and a language teacher but the pandemic hit and her classes evaporated. when she was first employed, the contact rate was around four

people every four weeks. it was abysmal, she said. after christmas, and the relaxed restrictions down south, cases spiked and the call centre went into overdrive. her job description keeps changing. now she listens to stories of bereavement and heartache.

i'm glad i never got the job. but i would love to hear the stories.

*

the ancients in leith

little drummer boy

time slows, it's no longer clock-time as before. now, even in cities, we notice the changes in sky and temperature and birdsong and leaves falling or buds emerging. this is natural-world time. the way our ancestors in caves understood it. as if we've emerged from a long meditation with our senses on high.

for some reason, i'm thrown back to primary school. we'd assemble each morning under the australian flag to sing 'god save the queen' – a tune i still despise – then march in formation to class. this was the 1960's. before we marched, we had to mark time, singing out: 'left– left– left– right– left', with one hand on the small shoulder in front of us, raising our knees, marching on the spot. and then the drummer boy would signal and we'd move off, swinging our arms in line to the sound of his drum. as if we were army cadets and not tiny, fragile humans. in summer, as we marched, the crates of bottled milk for our morning break curdled in the sun and the kids dropped like flies.

lockdown is the place in which i'm an ageing child, forever marching on the spot and never moving forward, cruelly deprived of the comfort of the shoulder in front.

doon yer tea and eat yer bread.

during lockdown – who knows which one? – this graffiti appeared all over leith in edinburgh. at first i think it's a protest against tory indifference. a sardonic commentary, in scots, on 'let them eat cake.'

i try to find out more about this graffiti, which appears in acid green, on bridges, hoardings, communal rubbish bins. what i discover explodes this revolutionary myth:

soccer casuals, states one comment on reddit.

the same people responsible for 'jesus sooks farts', says another.

five herons become two.

during the first lockdown, in march 2020, spring bloomed, the weather was warm, and on our daily walks i became entranced by lochend park in leith. half-submerged trees stand in the middle of the loch and i've always privately called it 'the drowned park.' now i become obsessed with its birdlife, in particular i'm entranced by the herons. in spring and summer i see five herons, all standing angled away from each other on different branches, like a dysfunctional family. the pandemic now impacts how i see the natural world: 'the socially-distanced herons', i say to myself. during winter, and after the loch freezes over, only two

herons remain. who knows if the herons were all related? and what i long to know is this – where have the other three gone?

*

i stop to read the notice on a beehive-shaped building near the loch. apparently, this 17th century dovecot was once used as a kiln for burning clothes in the great plague of 1645.

down on leith links, there's another memorial to the 1645 plague that killed half of edinburgh's population. in 2016, seventy-nine bodies were found in a mass grave beneath the playground of st. mary's catholic school on the links. in 2018, a funeral was held, attended by the schoolchildren, and the bones of the plague victims were finally laid to rest.

other plague-times

my greek teacher sends me pages from *the history of the peloponnesian war, book two*.

*this, then was the calamity which fell upon athens, and the times were hard indeed, with men dying inside the city and the land outside being laid waste.*²

thucydides describes the plague, which, like covid, affected all organs of the body. he evokes the denial, the misery, the conspiracy theorists, the difficulties of burial and of mourning. how the poor were disproportionately affected. like re-reading camus, it seems as if thucydides is writing about now; as if thucydides has come to leith.

*

endings

² Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book Two, Penguin, London, 1972

it's spring again, marking a one-year cycle of lockdowns and the highest death toll in europe. a year in which vaccines were developed at speed and are now being rolled out across the world.

on sunday 28th february 2021, one of my sisters texts from melbourne, australia, where covid is almost zero and life is very different to here.

she'd been to a big party the night before and wrote in fragments which made me happy:

drinking bubbles and dancing,

today, sore feet and sore head.

Meaghan Delahunt is a novelist and short story writer based in Edinburgh. Her work has been widely anthologised and translated. Her most recent novel is *The Night-Side of the Country* (UWAP, 2020).

The Scars of History

Amrita Dasgupta

Sitting on the fifth floor of the university accommodation in King's Cross, London; it was becoming difficult for Suchorita to pen her final thoughts for the PhD upgrade paper. Though she loved her research topic thoroughly, the sound of the vacuum cleaner next door—the wheeling of the busses on the adjoining street — the siren of the police car parked opposite to her building, divided her attention. She thought, it was always easy to concentrate amongst the cacophony of Kolkata or the darkness filled silence of the Sundarbans—world's only mangrove tiger land. In searching for an answer for the lack of concentration, she failed to acknowledge the sense of belonging and personal comprehension that Kolkata or Sundarbans expressed for its guests or dwellers. In London, she felt out of place. On her way to becoming a feminist historian, she recognised the intensity of the bordering practices in London. The cops are always extra careful of the brown and black population. It has been the same in any public place that she had been to since her entry into the United Kingdoms. Enough reason to miss obscure places from the Global South, where the sense of spirituality has not yet been entirely lost to the claws of modernity and exclusion. Back home, it would be the early hours of the day when she felt comfortable to write. Devoid of the urban cacophony she could unite with her inner self to create sentences which made sense to her sentimentality — provided worded existence to her optical experiences. One such ocular encounter is the pecking of the sparrows from their nest in the small ventilator of Suchorita's dilapidated Kolkata house.

Since childhood, Suchorita had learnt to remember places through her olfactory sensations. Kolkata to her was the jaggery filled winters or the incense packed Dugra Pujas in October. Sundarbans was always fishy—fishing, prawn, and crab collection are a major source of income in the tiger land. However, the metaphoric meaning of the word shall unravel itself later. And London very bland, making your nose run as soon as you are out in the tempestuous wind. In the 90s, Suchorita's father took her to the Sundarbans for the first time. She came back home disappointed on not being able to spot a tiger or even a small crocodile. To fulfill her wish of seeing a tiger, Sundarbans became a yearly pilgrimage for their family. Alas! Till date, she has not been able to spot any except for hearing the parched roars on silent nights from her Dulki guest house. The desire to spot a tiger must have been the calling that she became a researcher of the life and culture of the Sundarbans islanders. Though she

did not witness the tiger or its paw prints during the months of her fieldwork in the winters of 2018, she was still met with the consequences of living with the tiger.

One night, while all lay asleep, there was a sudden knock at the door of Suchorita's room. Kanu Mondal, the manager of the Dulki guest house had come to wake her up. In breathlessness, he exclaimed, "Didi, the house behind our resort has lost its man to the tiger! Come see." Suchorita barged out spilling several questions for Kanu. Kanu remained silent. Not knowing how cold it was outside the room, Suchorita shivered forth for the household in distress without having wrapped herself in the shawl. On reaching the venue, she was shocked to find no one there. She was informed that the members along with the widow had gone to the local police station to file a complaint about the missing body. She was also told that this shall help the animal attack widow claim financial security from the government. Such securities usually come in the form of the *bidhoba bata*, West Bengal Government's widow pension scheme. Suchorita enquired, "Dada, where did it happen?" Kanu obediently replied, "Where else? The same place. Pirkhali. This is the twelfth case of this month." Pirkhali is famous for its tiger attacks, but because it is abundant in fish and crabs the islanders are forced to visit the area and try their luck at having a good catch. The cases of death by tiger attacks are always under-reported — it might be a government ploy or the incompetence of the local authorities to record and report the proper numbers. It is common for the tiger to leave its prey half-dead at the spot of the attack. And come back later to pull it away to its den for a feast. But this time, the tiger did not leave the human carcass at the point of attack, rather dragged it into the forest. The men on the boat were so frightened for their own lives that they could only chant lines the from *Bonbibi'r Johuranma*. They could have saved the fellow fisherman if they tried to scare away the tiger by throwing stones at it or by lighting a fire. But in such a circumstance, you are never really prepared to work in a trained fashion. It is always a new experience — jolting — even if you have had seen tiger attacks before. It is, however, entirely different to have heard about it and experience it first-hand. Suchorita thought it best to leave the premises for the night and come back again the next morning to imbibe the situation and gain more information about the bureaucratic dealings. She did go back to see the widow the next morning after a scheduled interview with a sixty-year-old tiger attack survivor but had no questions for the people in the household. Now she stood as a silent observer. The life of a researcher has taught her to be patient and, in some ways, humbler and accepting. She felt sorry for all that she took for granted till date — the home, the groceries, nightlife, branded clothing, and accessories. Suddenly she was made to

feel the burden of the carbon footprint left by her and her likes on the environment throughout history. These people among whom she stood was now in the frontline to face the repercussion of the exploits made by humans like Suchorita. Sundarbans is being gnawed at by the rising sea levels. The islanders have no place to go to. They must depend on the forest for survival. But the forest is what belongs to the non-humans. And this gives rise to the never-ending clash. The sense of unity established by the dictates of Bonbibibi is thrown into disequilibrium. Following the attacks, the people are compelled into villainising themselves. Toeing the line of the tale in the *Johuranama*, they believe that those that are attacked are greedy. Because they were taking more than that is required from the forest, the Bonbibibi punished them in the form of an animal attack. This amounts to immense psychological burden and social ostracization.

A small hut with a solar panel on the thatched roof beside a pond where women sit cleaning the utensils — the preview picture of Santosh Mondal's homestead on Suchorita's DSLR camera captured the silent encroachment of urbanity on simple rural lives. Santosh Mondal is a tiger attack survivor from twenty-three years back. His twelve-year son had saved him by hitting the prowling tiger on its head with the boat's oar. The tiger had just jumped — positioning itself to land on the neck of Santosh when his son noticed it and immediately reacted to the situation by hitting the tiger on its head with the oar held in his hands. The tiger had lost its sense of direction and had landed on the bow of the boat — half its body hanging in the water. But this did not allow Santosh to go unharmed. While the tiger sought ways to land safely, it had placed both its claws on the left shoulder of Santosh and dragged it all along his back and left thighs before landing. The trauma of the attack has rendered Santosh voiceless. Hearing how the lack of medical facility in Sundarbans results in the death of animal-attack survivors, pained Suchorita. Either the poison spreads or the blood loss is irrecoverable. Nonetheless, stars had been in favour of Santosh, and he survived till the time he was being transferred to the Nil Ratan Sarkar (NRS) Hospital in Sealdah, Kolkata. It is the hospital nearest to the Sealdah Station, hence the selection. The transfer of animal attack survivors to the specific hospital has nothing to do with speciality treatments. Suchorita met the son, Mahesh — now an adult — maybe, a hero to his clan. If not, obviously a hero to his family. He was rather thin and not at all a well-built man which would reflect that he must have handled a tiger in his young age. But we must not judge a book by its cover. Suchorita placed the consent forms beside her and fixed the camera on the tripod to record what Mahesh has to say. He narrated the incident for Suchorita to record. The lines

that kept ringing in her ears was, “I thought I lost my father. He is alive. But we have lost him. He no more speaks. Mother says that the claws of the tiger have certain poison in it which can kill a living being little by little. Since the attack, my father has been embroiled in dermatological troubles and mental break downs. The doctor calls it Post Traumatic Disorder (PTSD). We call it the curse of the Bonbibibi. What use living like this? I do not blame the forest. The forest gives us food. I do not blame the tiger. The tiger is saving the forest. Thereby, it is saving our livelihood. Otherwise, the rich men would have deforested the area for sky-scraping buildings. I do not espouse sending my children away to the city. If we leave, who will respect the forest? Who will take care of it? Not all are trained for it. For example, you. It is not like Kolkata. People here are simple. Not busy and lost after wealth. We can survive here only if we can forge an equilibrium with mother nature. If not, we will be washed out. If we go, people like you will also go with us.”

The scar on the body of Santosh Mondal resembled the scar of history to Suchorita. Though historians mean the colonial borders when they talk about the scars of history, Suchorita, found in the scar her own and society’s involvement in creating it. The scar, which like the concept of maintaining sovereignty in new nation-states reflected the division between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Somehow, we have not been able to keep the West separate from the East. In aping the West, we have harmed our own. And this cannot be altered. Alteration can only be induced if unity and equality are sought and preserved through faith in spirituality. But in a fast-moving world, such changes are delay. And everyone wants progression. It is for us to think where this shall take us. Where it shall end. And if the end is something desirable.

Suchorita removed the camera from the tripod. It had been recording the interview of Mahesh and Santosh. Santosh, however, only sat on the chair with no visible expressions while Mahesh spoke from beside him. Placing the camera in a variety of angles in her hand she clicked a few pictures of the visible scar. A part of it near the neck still had an open wound — may be due to the dermatological problems, Santosh has been encountering since the attack. One of the shots captured a tiny fly sitting by the gaping wound. The wound reeked of pus. The fly had fishy intentions. It was there to garner its food in clever manners and after that, it would fly away without any responsibility of payback.

Amrita Das Gupta, a PhD student at the Department of Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Reflections

Jane Ep

We live in challenging time - a time to realise how important it is to have friends and family.

I moved from my friend-base some twenty years ago and as a consequence lost the casual contact I had with those friends. The day to day events of my life, those events that would fill a coffee date seemed hardly important enough to put into writing, even by email. So contact dwindled to birthday and Christmas greetings despite me thinking of them often. Then, one night last year, when we were in lockdown avoiding an invisible deadly enemy, I saw a full moon emerge from clouds. It was a wonderful moment. Moon light illuminated the path before me and I wondered if my friends across the country had seen the moon too. As soon as I got home, I sent email greetings telling them of this encounter and established the conduit to say 'I'm thinking of you.'

Each full moon thereafter, I have written with a summary of my month. Perhaps, had world events been less worrisome, if my own mind-set had been more positive, these monthly exchanges would have remained a simple, welcomed, 'hello' but they became increasingly miserable. It became an opportunity to dump my worries and woes because the first thing you are encouraged to do when your mental health takes a downward spiral is to talk it through. The last thing you realise, and no one tells you, is how tedious this is for the recipients!

Reading over my texts from one month to the next, I realised just how repetitive and dour my letters were. Nothing was resolved or made better despite the sharing. So, I had a choice: stop writing or stop complaining. I didn't want to break off the communications now they'd been re-established. So I decided to stop complaining about my lot and to find something else to say. And that has been more therapeutic than I could have imagined. I've become more creative, content with myself and resilient to the hardships of the restrictions. I've learnt to use my time more effectively.

I've shared my thoughts on abstract subjects like how to be a Good Samaritan in a socially distanced manner. I've given my views on the restrictions, on new hobbies, recycling, redecorating, on the loss of income and on not spending money. These longer missives rambled across thoughts and experiences. I've described the old past-time of letter writing

from the stilted formulaic letters composed at boarding school, comparing them to the chatty notes I send to my mum now residing in a care home. I've also shared my achievements making things from abstract art, fancy cakes to soft toys. And I've shared the story of how I began to write creatively, writing stories, observations of character and, more recently, poetry. Moreover, I took the liberty, for a liberty I feel it was, to include examples of my art work, pictures of the things I've made and examples of my poetry. However, these communiques are different from meeting face to face. These moon-letters, or moon-logs as one recipient called them, are one-way 'blind' exchanges. And that's a worry. I cannot see the recipients' reaction. I have to trust. I realise, where I might bring a homemade cake or loaf to share, I'd be unlikely to bring my art work or poetry if I popped around for coffee. The response to homemade food is one thing we can all understand, but, for some reason, it would feel embarrassingly childish to offer up my art or poetry to unsuspecting friends. It would presume a response, an appraisal. How would they feel put on the spot like that? Fellow artists would know how to respond, but my moon-log recipients are practical people not prone to fanciful excursions into creativity. And poetry might be a step too far! Would there be a impenetrable silence or a change of subject? Would I trust my friends to tell me if they found my poetry was truly awful or my artwork naive to the point of childish scribbling? Would I believe any praise? I know I would read their face rather than hear their words.

There are specialist occasions for presenting such things; specialist recipients experienced in delivering a measured response, knowing it will be taken without hurt. There are numerous popular T.V. programmes where participants dance, bake, potter, paint or offer up their entrepreneurial endeavours for critique and I squirm every time thinking of my friends considering my work. But I realise, it is academic because I would not have put them in that position in person. Thinking it through, if I saved my creative efforts for those increasingly such specialist events, it would mean I'd have very little to say to my friends and they would never see, hear, read or know how much my creative achievements mean to me. I think that would be a shame.

It is odd to be grateful for the lockdowns. The pandemic has been a terrible thing for so many, but it has also enabled many of us to find something within ourselves that might not have been discovered otherwise. For me, it has provided the opportunity to reconnect with old friends, to be brave, to share a part of me previously, if not secret then definitely not for general consumption. I can be proud of my efforts regardless of its reception. Would I have

explored my creative side, shared so much or written my moon-logs at any other time? Probably not.

Jan Ep is the writer persona of Jane Prior. She writes fiction in both long and short forms and dabbles in poetry. At school, it was noticed that she was 'something of a story teller' but she did not coming true to her calling in middle life. To date, she has won a number of prizes for her short fiction. Two of her short stories were published in DC Thomson's *My Weekly* magazine and her poems have appeared in *Dundee Writes*, a small press magazine published by the University of Dundee and in an exhibition of work by artist Moira Buchanan. Since completing postgraduate studies, she has completed two novels and has another as a work in progress. During lockdown, she discovered Surrealist Automatism or accidental or automatic drawing. This technique suppresses conscious control over image making allowing for free-expression. Her art can be seen at *Miscellany Jane Recreations* on *Flickr* or *Facebook*.

Sweet child

Laura Lukasova

You know the time when everything seems not-real? You can watch the clock ticking, *tick tock tick tock*. With every clicking sound your life is nearing its end. And yet you can't feel yourself. The sunlight glows at the dust particles in the air. As the Nature throws confetti. You hear a bird outside. His song about a predator disrupting his territory - probably another representative of homo sapiens sapiens - brings you joy. The cherry blossoms cover the black of the streets. It's Spring, the light travels on the wall and you wonder how it feels. The nature is waking up.

Where is your mind, my dear? Where are your thoughts? Whose name you whisper when the darkness covers you as the softest satin blanket. Who are you afraid of?

Sweet child, tell me something I don't know. Tell me, where is your heart?

The Summer heat holds the life down. You are no longer worried about tomorrow. The life always finds its way. Who are they...? Sharp light in your eyes, intoxicating sparkles on your tongue. Your head is light, your body can levitate. New places, new voices to fill the hole inside your chest. Old friends. Old habits to break, maybe. To let you forget for a second or two. Nothing more. You see your window, thinking about Mr. R and his serenade. But you don't have a balcony...

Why is your heart scared of the future when nothing is sure yet. Where do your thoughts travel? Is his skin hot? His lips loving? Sweet child, tell me something I don't know. Tell me, where is your soul?

Rain washes away the dust and bright colors. Nothing seems to be real, nothing makes sense anymore. Sitting in your room, wondering, why it doesn't feel good. Looking for happiness within yourself while being prisoner of your own head. Aren't we all at the end of the day? Some enjoyed festive feast, some hid. Nobody knows. Nothing makes you happy anymore, even your thoughts are heavy. The world tries to be loud, tries to hide the fear of cold. Enjoying the last warm day, the last minute, oh please, let me sit one more minute here. Let me... but don't leave me. *Tick tock tick tock*. You hear it again. In your sleep, in your dreams. Everywhere.

Where does the broken soul go? Why are you still waiting? It has been a year, your tears dry, your lips aren't soft anymore.

Sweet child, tell me something I don't know. Tell me, what's the price you're willing to pay for your freedom? How much do you value it? The sharpness tastes bittersweet, you know that. Are you afraid? Think...

Sweet child, you don't remember the Winter. One day is on your mind, the blue eyes, the soft voice. How the look touches your heart. Tastes so sweet, was it real? Or did you just see two ghosts...?

Sweet child, now you're free. You belong to yourself. Your heart is afraid even more. Nothing is how it used to be. Not you, not...

Do you feel your heartbeat? Can you feel your blood rush through your veins? Can you?

Sweet child, tell me something I don't know. Your lips don't whisper the name anymore. You're finally free.

Find yourself, don't forget it. Breathe. There is a new hope. You can walk freely, you don't have to be afraid. The end is near. The life is slowly returning and you can see the world as you always dream.

Sweet child, tell me everything.

Laura Lukasova is a Ph.D. student and teacher. She always dreamed about writing and tried since childhood to learn as much as possible. During the school years she found out how much she actually likes literature and she decided to change her study field from Genetic to German studies. University years haven't been the best time for writing something different than academic work but she managed her internship in an amateur magazine and after the internship ended, she stayed there for three years and wrote about literature itself but also came with short stories and poetry. She's a great lover of canine, good food, and long walks. Photography, drawing, over drinking with coffee and so many other activities fill her life day by day.

Looking Back: Life trapped in a Pandemic

Swarnava Chaudhuri

Masks, respiratory ailments, deaths. People going stir-crazy in isolated rooms. It is like all your nightmares have been bundled in an episode of ten months long T.V. series where everything is in a halt.

When I was in third standard, I would come to the dining room and tell my mother or grandmother “I don’t want to go to school today”. My grandmother always told me “be careful what you wish for, God works in mysterious ways and the universe is listening to everything we are saying now”. I always laughed it off, I know it was true, but I knew I could handle whatever God, or the universe threw at me that would make me not able to attend class. Or I thought I did anyway.

22nd March, 2020. The last day of our University, the last day of our gatherings in the Indian Coffee House, the last day of getting disgusted about one another’s stupid jokes, the last day of our friendly cricket matches, the last day for the world to get into a busy, clumsy day as well, before the lockdown due to the COVID-19. I remember that night before the dawn of our ‘new-normal’ morning. It was as if, the world had plunged into an eerie silence, as if time had stopped, as if we all were holding our breath. We knew something bad is going to happen but nobody presumed that the pandemic would get this worse.

I had seen my fan turn and turn hundred times a day. I have stared at the same blank, grey wall for time immemorial. I woke up in the same tender bed that I have had since four years. And I had seen the same people, my family, for days on end. This cannot be real. It was everything but real. It was like; life has been paused and put into a never-ending continuum of time. University was not a place we could go; class is just an awkward video chat over our tablet. We had to be careful about what we eat and drink and use - but was not it always like that? Did we ever see our friends in real life? Did we ever touch a pen or pencil? Did we ever go to the University? The remnants of another universe were around me, but that world felt so different. It was nice in some ways, but terrifying in others. Maybe my now is the future for others. Am I even making sense anymore? Maybe the leftovers of that

‘new world’ have changed me. Or maybe this is the time to utter the immortal lines of Act V, v of *Macbeth*:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!¹ (V, v)

27th January, 2021. I am writing this and when I look back it feels like I was living through something big, so big that it fills up the outside air like thick syrup. Every once and awhile, a little seeps in and you get the vision of that bygone time just like Harry Potter got the vision of Lord Voldemort. I could die out there, my loved ones could die. It is hard to forget what came before.

After all these things we cannot afford to lose hope. After witnessing people dying all over the world, the time can only get better. Perhaps aptly expressed by Roy when she states,

What is this thing that has happened to us? It’s a virus, yes. In and of itself it holds no moral brief. But it is definitely more than a virus. Some believe It is God’s way of bringing us to our senses, others that It is a Chinese conspiracy to take over the world. Whatever it is, Corona virus has made the mighty Neel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth longing for a return to normality, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists and in the midst of this terrible despair it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew, this one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can chose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our databanks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly with little luggage, ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it.²

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Macbeth*, (India: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

² Arundhati Roy, *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction* (India: Penguin, 2020) 214.

Swarnava Chaudhuri is presently pursuing his post graduation in English from The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata.

Journey

Olga Wojtas

He died many times, in many different places. From the first time he was born, his mother taught him that death was not an ending. There is only reincarnation, she said, reincarnation of the ego in human form, and you will determine what you become. Each time, he listened to her, and so each new death brought progress.

In Sumatra, he was lonely, lonely and sullen, and his descendants strove to appease him, afraid of what he might do. They played music with drums and gongs, anxiously hoping it was to his taste. His mother cried, deaf to the sound.

In Indonesia, they carved his likeness on a cliff face, so that he could stand sentinel. They dared not look at him directly, but only out of the corner of their eye. In what sense was he guarding them? To keep them safe or to keep them captive? His mother cried, her eyes blinded by her tears.

In Japan, they guarded him. This guarding too was open to debate. Ceramic figures were artfully placed to appear to protect him, but their stance was such that they would also protect the living from his unquiet spirit. His mother cried, partly from grievance, partly from fear.

In Scotland, they admired his scholarship. They took his head, and hung it in the darkness of a deep cave below a place of learning. Then they sealed the entrance to the cave. Admiration can be coincident with fear. His mother cried, caressing the rough stones as though they were his brow.

In Egypt, his heart was feather-light, and each day they watched him emerge from darkness to rise up in his golden boat. Despite the lightness of his heart he was very far from them. His mother cried, remembering his childhood sturdiness.

In China, they calculated what he would need, and fashioned banknotes to bribe the wrathful judges of the underworld. A blaze sent him the necessary funds, and fire also consumed the shapes of a passport, a mobile phone and a sports car. His mother cried to see the means of escape.

In Ghana, they calculated what he would want. They built him a coffin in the shape of a jet plane and the livery of a luxury airline. His mother cried to see the speed with which he could leave her.

In Mexico, they came to visit the grave with his favourite food and drink, with sugar skulls and marigolds. They laughed and sang and invited him to join them.

And his mother cried, but she also laughed and sang, proud to see how well-loved he now was. And she prayed that his travels had not yet ended.

A journalist for more than thirty years, **Olga Wojtas** was Scottish editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* before she began adding creative writing to her portfolio. She lives in Edinburgh, Scotland, where she attended the school immortalised in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. This inspired her postmodern crime novels, *Miss Blaine's Prefect and the Golden Samovar*, and *Miss Blaine's Prefect and the Vampire Menace*, published by Contraband. She is the recipient of a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award, and has had more than forty short stories published in literary anthologies and magazines.

Walking with Eileen

Jim Aitken

*‘When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.’ -
Gitanjali, Rabindranath Tagore.*

Sometimes I would go out for a walk on my own and sometimes Eileen would go for a walk on her own, but most of the time we would go for walks together.

When the news of the virus first broke I decided to stop my classes. I had been teaching a course called *Scotland in Union and Disunion* with Adult Education, along with a course on *Rebellious Women* with the Outlook Group for people with mental health issues. I also had to stop my course on Creative Writing with my Community Education class for older, vulnerable adults. I stopped these classes not just because I was worried about my own health but because of all the other people in the classes maybe catching the virus.

For the first few weeks of the pandemic we hardly left the house and our faithful son, James would bring us our groceries. At other times Eileen would order what we needed online. Slowly we gained confidence to go out, armed with face masks and pocket hand sanitisers. On our earliest walks around our local park and nearby gardens we noticed the buds on the trees beginning to burst. This haiku managed to express our new situation:

‘Spring 2020’

*Coronavirus
spreads its deadly contagion
as the first buds burst.*

While the human world saw itself in the starkest of terms with a pandemic raging against it, the more private and separate world of flowers and trees, birds and other wild life carried on as before, oblivious to what was happening in our world. A case of worlds within the world. This world we entered into on our walks and talks became the non-medical antidote to the world of Covid-19.

Of course, these worlds are linked inextricably because of the way we have plundered nature; abused nature by destroying habitats and capturing wild animals for sale in markets. Something had to give and what was given was Covid-19.

As the medical professions and front-line workers kept life going, there were fewer aeroplanes in the sky or cars on the road and this was giving planet Earth some respite. And our respite from the grim daily broadcasts was to wander in wonder:

‘Embankment’

*The long grasses on the embankment
flow to the side as the breeze blows
and look like green hair trailing in the wind.*

*And amid it all the oxeye daisies
follow the long grass stalks with their own,
looking back at us with a hundred yellow eyes.*

Trees came alive as the leaves came out, creating the greatest of all fashion shows in every shade of green. Some of the taller trees – the horse chestnut and copper beech – had an aristocratic air of aloofness about them. They brought to mind the same comment made against Tagore but as we passed by the trees each day I began to think that maybe Tagore’s detractors had it all wrong about him. No matter how we observed the trees and watched how they were at all times and in all weathers, they remained remote from us yet their very existence was enabling us to breathe. They were not aloof but simply detached from us. This was what Tagore’s critics unknowingly detected – a detachment that is the very essence of Hindu practice. These trees seek the light and that is why they are tall, reaching higher each year for the light and the higher they go in their search the more majestic and aloof from us they become. Rather than conclude that the apparent aloofness of such trees – or of someone like Tagore – is in some measure condescension toward us, why not seek to emulate both trees and Tagore by seeking the light ourselves?

And the trees were totally inclusive in all that they did. Often we would detect birds sitting on their branches, all kinds of birds, insects and squirrels. The trees made no signs to say *No Crows or Blackbirds Here*. They were a welcome stopping post for all regardless of colour or feathers. We detected asylum seekers and migrants perching on their branches,

resting their wings after long flights and no questions were ever asked and no passports required. And all trees play their part in this way showing us the folly of our ways.

In America another virus was raging. It was the virus of racism. With the death toll mounting due to Covid-19 and due to millions of Americans howling at the moon, their view of the world divorced from nature and from light, violence was the result. The foundations upon which this nation was built were beginning to creak. The near genocide of native Americans and the long dark shadow of slavery and racism saw the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement. Doves and blackbirds had no clue about this and carried on being doves and blackbirds. And swans swimming in the pond may have looked up and seen a few crows fly above and simply considered them birds like themselves and carried on swimming.

What was going on in America made me think of those villagers in ancient India who prayed to Lord Shiva. With murder and mayhem going on around them they asked Shiva to intercede on their behalf. The demon of ignorance, *Apasmara Purusha* had created this chaos in their lives and they begged Lord Shiva to rid them of this demon so that they could live lives of peace and harmony.

Shiva danced the dance to end all dances with arms flailing and mesmerising the demon of ignorance. In no time at all Shiva had the demon underfoot and stability was restored to the lives of the villagers.

But with the world today in a similar kind of chaos once experienced by those ancient villagers, *Apasmara Purusha* must have hid behind some rock for thousands of years before creeping out again to cause his customary chaos.

With wars waging and bombs falling, with moronic T.V. screening all over the world and in Tagore's own nation a form of Hindu nationalism was rampant that he would have loathed. For him Hinduism was India's great gift not just to India but for all who sought light. There was nothing narrow or confining about this great system but this new nonsense was spreading across continents and in America it had become a serious menace. It was a country spiralling out of control through a combination of greed, need and ignorance.

As the wet summer made its way into golden autumn we attended each day new fashion shows. This time the colours had changed into red and gold and yellow. The silver birches seemed to merit our attention most with their long, thin bodies standing like upright pencils with their paint work flaking. But more than this, much more than this their falling leaves fell like soft, golden coins and made us a carpet of burnished gold to walk upon.

One night, feeling restless with all that was going on, I got up and went into our kitchen. I heard two owls calling each other and after returning to bed and rising in the morning, I remembered the owls from the night before and came up with another haiku:

‘Owls’

*Two owls were calling
in the early morning dark.
That made three night owls.*

Our walk that day involved the spotting of a couple of tree creepers scouring the barks of a tree in our nearby gardens. We noted their delicately hooked beaks that were rounded like the tops of broken off finger nails. The roads were slippery that day with ice and snow and the river near our house was running fiercely.

And a running river is the image of the way the world and ourselves within it have always flowed. Sometimes it can be fierce and at other times it can be tranquil or maybe even sluggish. If only we could clear all the debris from its path it could run all the more smoothly. And if only we could clear all the detritus from our minds then our lives - and the nature of our world - could be so much clearer and so much better.

All our lives are like rivers flowing into the vast oceans where we all merge and maybe what moisture remains of us will be soaked up into the clouds to fall back down on the rivers all over again. And to fall on all those we loved and left behind, their wet faces the kisses we give them with our immortality.

Only a few devotees of *Apasmara Purusha*, greedy and divisive in their pursuit of the illusions of power and wealth, clog up the river of our underlying and unrealised Unity. For we are all One despite them and one day it can surely be realised that there is only the one race, the human one, existing in the one world we should all be looking after.

The naked trees along the riverbank, their branches at their tips like coral, stood and waited for new life to emerge. They were plastered in the most beautiful frost:

‘Winter 2020’

*The branches are white
with a thin coat of silk gloss*

as the frost glistens.

And as we noted the first new buds and snowdrops of 2021 we realised we had been witness to *unsurpassable* sights. We had entered into a wonderfully welcoming world outside our house and like Immanuel Kant, who took the same walk each day through Königsberg and thought great thoughts, walking with Eileen led to the recognition that our time here is precious as we are ourselves.

Jim Aitken is a writer and poet who once taught English in a large secondary school in Edinburgh. He was also a Multicultural Development Officer and prepared the first anti-racist guidelines for the city. He now tutors with Adult Education in Scottish Cultural Studies as well as working with the Outlook programme for people with mental health issues. He has been published in a number of anthologies and magazines. Last year he edited *A Kist of Thistles: an anthology of radical poetry from contemporary Scotland, published by Culture Matters*. This year he will be editing a follow-up anthology of prose.

Wind Beneath My Wings

Anjana (Jhuma) Sen

He changed his mind as soon as he stepped out. What appeared to be a beautiful autumn day from indoors was indeed a beautiful autumn day outdoor as well. Oh, but it was cold!

‘You should have worn your blue jacket,’ he could hear her say. ‘This old thing needs to be retired now, for goodness’ sake’.

‘You’re always right,’ he muttered as he went in again, careful to remove his shoes before walking the short distance to the cupboard. He put away his beloved parka before donning the smart fleece lined jacket she had bought from M&S a few years ago. Lacing his brogues at the door, again, it occurred to him how he had started doing all the things she had nagged him to do for 34 years.

‘You trained me well, Dee,’ he grumbled as he double checked the doors before walking away.

He didn’t go out much these days, there didn’t seem to be any point. Their friends had respected his request for privacy and space, and the phone calls and casseroles were not as forthcoming as they had been a few months ago. He was grateful for that. He had no words, even for his own friends. The only person he could talk to was their daughter, but she was young and busy, and leading her own mad life in London. He always tried to paint a bright and busy picture for her when they chatted. She saw through it though, he knew she did, they had been so very close, the three of them. But she let him pretend, giving him some time to ‘cope’.

Cope! That was the word everybody used. All the cards, the well-meaning words, the hugs...they all came with the same wish “I hope you find the strength to cope.” He did not want to cope. He just wanted her back so he could get on with life again.

Walking on briskly towards the shops, he passed the little duck pond. It was getting cold and the poor ducks looked hungry. She always brought titbits for them, and instinctively he rummaged in his large pockets. There was no duck food, but he brought out a handful of assorted receipts and tickets. From when he had worn this jacket last. Staring at them, an entire kaleidoscope of memories washed over him. Almost as if someone had poured a bucket of home cinema over his head. Noise, chatter, colours, smells and laughter, all buzzed around him and he made his way gingerly to the bench by the pond.

He didn't need to look at the clump of paper to know exactly what they were. Two Scot Rail return tickets from Whitecraigs to Central, a lunch receipt from their favourite Thai restaurant and the movie tickets.

He could hear her now, her everyday bossy little voice cross at him. Again!

'*La La Land*, Dave, I had said *La La Land*.'

'Well, it's my birthday, I get to choose, and I want to watch *Train spotting*,' he had retorted, uncharacteristically holding his ground, leaving her at a loss for words for once.

They had enjoyed the movie together, having watched the first one, also together, over twenty years ago. But did not give up on her *La La Land* and made him promise to get the tickets for the following week. He had not really wanted to, with a silly name like that; she should just go with her friends. And of course, she had gone on and on about it over the next few days.

Till she collapsed at work five days later.

He whispered to her that first night, through her tubes and monitors at the ICU, 'I've bought the tickets for your movie, love, even used the Meerkat deal. Wake up now, and we can go on Tuesday.'

As usual, she didn't listen, did she? No, she hung in there for a few Tuesdays and then slipped away in February, just as her first crocus started to peep up through her lawn.

'She didn't stand a chance, David,' the doctor said to the little group of shocked and stunned friends and family. Dave and Poppy crumpled into each other; their world ripped apart by one devastating cardiac arrest. Who even knew her heart wasn't strong?

The funeral had been remarkably easy; father and daughter went through every motion like well oiled robots playing a part. He had refused to speak publicly, but their friends had insisted.

'Deena was all about words, David,' Maggie, her best friend had said. 'She would be gutted if you said nothing.'

'Ay,' her husband Morgan added, 'she'll probably dictate the lines to you when you're up there, so don't worry.'

That had given Dave the idea of going through their desk to hunt out a speech he had given recently. The speech that she had written for him to make at his retirement farewell dinner less than a year ago. Just like she wrote all his speeches over the years, and lord knows there had been a few towards the end when he peaked at his career. Reading this one, he found himself weeping quietly, it was quite perfect!

The crematorium had been bursting at its seams. They should have booked a larger place they had thought. How did Dee *know* so many people? There were their friends and family of course. There were her colleagues, her book club girls, her writing club friends, her walking partners, and her yoga club people. There were his colleagues, Poppy's friends, their parents. There were people from their street he did not know. Even the owners of their local cafe were there. And almost as if they had all mutually agreed to, no one was in black. The room looked like a rainbow had burst open in it. She would have loved it; he couldn't help thinking, as he went up to the podium next to her casket.

'Some of you may remember me reading out from this very piece of paper when I retired. This is what Deena had written for me to say out loud. It had made you smile then, and I had read it out with a chuckle in my voice. But today, when I stand here, next to her for the last time, no words can better describe what my wife meant to me.'

He could see his Poppy trying hard to smile. Like him, she too had not really accepted what was happening. He searched for the relevant paragraph and started to read,

"As you all agree, I owe everything to my beautiful young (she was only three years younger, this had made people giggle then, it made them smile now) wife. I am who I am because of her, and the only reason why I was made the Managing Director of this Company was because she chose to selflessly set aside her own life to look after our home and hearth. Dee, I don't say this very often, but you are truly the wind beneath my wings.'

Looking up at a sea of moist faces in front of him, he had added again, very softly, 'she was indeed the wind beneath my wings, and I don't know how I can fly, or indeed, even walk alone without her.'

Poppy had decided not to say anything, she couldn't, she said, and he did not insist. But to his utter surprise she came up after he had finished, held his hand, and said to the casket, 'Mummy, I can't let you go without saying anything.'

She had then sung the baby lullaby that Dee used to sing to her at bedtime. The casket had gone down into the bowels of the crematorium, accompanied by the beautiful clear voice of their daughter who had not sung a tune since quitting her school choir.

True, Deena could not have planned her own funeral better if she had tried.

Sitting on the old bench by the duck pond now, Dave felt a cool gentle breeze blowing into his face, as if to say, 'Hey big boy, quit feeling sorry for yourself. The wind is back beneath your wings.'

With renewed energy, he stood up, deciding against his usual trek to the Co-op for milk. No, he would instead try and recreate that day with his wife, he decided on an impulse.

He walked up to the station and got his return ticket to Central. In the City, he walked up and down Buchanan Street listening to the buskers, dropping coins into their hats like she did. He even went into that ridiculous tea store where they sold outrageously expensive pots and mugs and bought himself a bag of Oolong tea leaves. However, he drew a line at dawdling in the Haberdashery section of John Lewis, where she could quite easily spend ages. When he got hungry, he walked up to their Thai restaurant and had the fish cakes. He didn't need to have conversations with her anymore; she was helping him to do all this for himself.

On the train ride back home, he started making little notes in his head to call a few people. There had always been an understanding that he would start his own Engineering Consultancy after retiring. Well, he was going to start now. He was only sixty-four after all, and his job here wasn't done. That was her line, wasn't it?

'My job here isn't done,' she always said.

'I'm not going to mope anymore Dee,' he whispered, causing the young girl in pink hair sitting across from him to shoot a quick raised eyebrow look in his direction. He smiled back at her before getting off at his stop. And all the way back home, there was this lightness of being, which was the wind beneath his wings.

The phone rang later just as he had boiled the kettle to have some of his new tea.

It was Poppy.

'Dad, guess what's on telly tonight? Channel Four, 9 pm.'

'Oh, Poppy love, I'm not up to watching TV tonight, I'm going to be working on some new ideas I have,' he said, telling her a little about his plans to start working again.

She was delighted, just as he knew she would be. However, she insisted,

'Daddy start working tomorrow. Tonight, watch TV. It's *La La Land*.'

Anjana (Jhuma) Sen started writing (semi-seriously) two years ago, when struggling with an empty nest in her fifties. She stumbled upon Eastwood Writers, a local writing group affiliated with the Scottish Association of Writers. Encouraged by a few awards (Falkirk and Eastwood Trophy), she decided to delete the above ‘semi’ and begin to get serious about writing. She participated in the 2020 Poetry Marathon and the Scottish Writers Centre Roulette Speakeasy 2020 and she is currently waiting for the anthology to be published, which will feature a few of her poems. She grew up an army brat in India and gained her degrees in English there. After a brief career in advertising as a copy writer, she chose to follow her husband around the world. Living in China for two years, and Zimbabwe for five, before ‘settling’ in Glasgow in the year 2000.

Physicians personal journey through (the story of..) COVID

Rita Rigg

The situation for primary care had been changing regularly since the outbreak of Covid19 here in Britain, with frequent revised advice, accelerating to daily updates. It was hard to keep up, to find, at the time I needed them, the right referral pathways which were also changing daily. Time spent dealing with this was eating into the allocated 10 minute consultation time, let alone the time spent with more than normal frequent, rigorous hand washing. The pressure was palpable for all members of the team from the receptionists, to the nurses, to the GPs. This anxiety, pressure and stress were recognised by the NHS who set up a support service to help us manage, unheard of and unprecedented. The NHS has not been known to care for those who care. I had begun to feel the emotional discomfort of uncertainty.

On the 15th March 2020 I was prompted, unprepared but strongly driven by the strength of my concerns, to stand up after Mass to speak to the congregation. I tried to convey to them the importance of taking the situation seriously, to be prepared for what was to come and to learn to follow with confidence and humility the guidance of our experts. And then...6 days later I sent the following email to a few friends "I am now unwell with suspected probable Covid 19. I have consulted occupational health (took me 4 hours to get through, run off their feet no doubt) and they have confirmed this likelihood. Frustratingly there is no testing for us as yet. I guess I was exposed to heavy viral loads whilst working almost full-time last week when the virus was definitely circulating in the community. We had no personal protection equipment. I am at risk because of my asthma. I nevertheless am fit and healthy generally. I don't feel great, like a really bad flu but now on day 4 although weak my lungs seem ok. I am anxious and anxious for my family. Self isolation is strict and being locked in my room with no human contact is much harder than I imagined. I am too weary and weak to use FaceTime and WhatsApp or even to make a phone call to communicate. So unlike me...but I pray and hope. I managed to dress and walk around my garden for ten minutes yesterday midday and slept for 10 hours afterwards. I am grateful to you for thoughts and prayers. It feels very consoling to know people are with you in spirit when you feel so alone. I realise there will be many who are and will be affected but again pray that by the time they are the virulence will have lessened."

Day 5...halfway there...perhaps...it was not a great night, restless, burning up, sweats. This was disappointing after a better day yesterday. It has been a very strange journey to date...in brief, I slept, confined to one room, for the first three days. Telling people was a hard decision. Tony was the first one to know, when realising that I was probably coming down with typical symptoms I explained to him that he needed to go into another room. That was in the early hours of Tuesday morning (first day). It so happened that first thing on Tuesday morning at about 8 one of my closest and dearest friends phoned me about a different matter. I shared with him my suspicions and concerns that I may have Covid 19. Later on that morning another friend texted me, asking me to join her for a walk. I told her too. Some 15 hours after my first symptoms I told one of my sons. The next day I told the rest of my children. I did not want to worry them and it was a balance as to whether or not to tell them. They have been a tremendous support. I have, over the past day, told friends and family. Knowing the support, love and prayers has boosted me no end and quelled my anxiety. It was a hard step to take but I was very glad I did. It is the self-isolation that is the most difficult. It is very strict when one person has the symptoms. The restrictions for the person with symptoms last 7 days at least. They apply to all close household contacts for 14 days, with no exceptions for going out. This is in contrast to the advice which applies to the rest of the “well” population which allows for outings for 2 essential reasons. I have to stay alone, away from my husband, confined to my bedroom, with my door closed. We are lucky to be able to have a spare room. The bathroom is not en suite. Every time I leave my room I put on gloves and a face mask and ensure no one is around and will stay away from the area I have been in for as long as possible.

The virus is spread in droplets from the respiratory tract which are expelled if you cough or sneeze. The droplets hang around the air for possibly 24 hours. The house is well ventilated but it is cold outside. I don't really notice this. Before I leave the bathroom to return to my bedroom I wipe clean all the hard surfaces including the handles on the doors. The virus can remain on hard surfaces for at least 42 possibly 72 hours. I make sure that I have closed the door behind me. No one is allowed, following the guidance from NHS inform (“stay at home” advice if you have symptoms) from going in that room and in my room. Two or three times a day I go down into the kitchen, again trying to fit in the logistics of no one being around for some time before and after I leave my room and then again before and after I enter and leave the kitchen. I have to eat all my meals in my room. I have no appetite. I keep all the dishes, cups, glasses I have used during the day in my room until I can take them down

myself, wash them thoroughly, and put them in a different compartment in the dishwasher. Any towels or a dishcloth or oven gloves I use cannot be used by anyone else. I am, maybe 15 minutes in the kitchen doing this and putting my washing in the washing machine. The effort of having to complete these essential tasks at a time that I feel most energised saps all my energy.

The first three days I would just return to my room and sleep. Yesterday I spent some time in the garden and how I cherished it. Feeling the sun beating on my face sitting on a garden bench in the fresh air listening to the birds was such a pleasure. I realise how lucky I was to have that garden space. In my room in the mornings I see the sun stream through the gaps in the curtains. When I open the curtain and look out the world seems an unreal distant place and incredibly beautiful...the bright yellow daffodils and forsythia just blossoming in the garden are pretty and cheering, the new life of Spring. Looking out the window facing the road and the front of the house I watch for people. There are very few around and I watch as they pass each other on the street, turning their heads away from each other and making sure that the distances between them are at least 2 m. I watched the Watson's children go to school yesterday and return home again, listening to the chatter of their voices soon to be silenced for goodness knows how long. A friend kindly dropped in some provisions for us. To shop online we would have to wait till the middle of April for delivery. I asked her to let us know when she came, so we could collect them, from the front door when she was gone and not leave it there for the birds or the cat or the fox to steal. She did this but I had my phone switched off. She rang the bell. I leapt out of bed to make certain that the door was not answered until she was out of harms way. I then went to my window to wave at her. That first human "contact" with the outside world was I have to say a very poignant moment. I waved to her and her husband from my room and smiled and wept. I watched them leave.

It is odd the way I feel, happy and blessed yet incredibly weary and exhausted. I am constantly nervous about my breathing although it is absolutely fine and my oxygen saturation levels are regularly 99% which is excellent. But I imagine that my lungs are tight I imagine I have got chest pain. I want to talk to people I know I can, but I feel too tired to hold the phone for any length of time. In bed I clutch Rosary beads, given to me by a friend, a tiny cross given to me by a friend, and my inhaler. I leave the phone switched off under my pillow I have no idea why. Day 8 Thought for the day - Today I am feeling stronger. On waking this morning these were my thoughts. I am grateful for my life, for the comfort of my room, for the love, support and connected prayers of so many from all over the world, for the

realisation that such uncertainty lead me so directly and immediately to seek refuge in my God, for the joy of my family for whom I wish I had spared these anxious days, for the faith and hope that all will be well in whatever shape that may take, and again for the hope that all of us may stop and think and reset our compasses to what really matters. I have learnt an enormous amount in these last few days within the confines of my room, my heart and my mind that never stills. Perhaps one day I will be able to share those lessons and help others. knowing and understanding full well that we are all different. Day 9 Today's reflection - I am now free from symptoms. I am tired physically but mentally I feel stronger. Mentally I suffered - indescribably, totally unexpectedly, and in a way I had not experienced before. I have seen and experienced tragedy not only through my work but also on a personal level at a young age, seen suffering, illness, children dying and yet always found ways of dealing with this usually through my faith and prayer and through human relationship. I have been stunned by how my mind seemed completely out of control, unable to focus, unable to rationalise, and unable to pray. The sheer physical impact paralysed the control I had over my thoughts. I felt too tired to put into place all my usual grounding techniques like praying, meditation, mindfulness, distracting methods, even simple breathing. For the first 2 days I was too tired to even put on a CD, using the player I luckily had in my bedroom. And I cried. I cried a lot. I cried for fear, for my family, for the loss of control, for that feeling of suffocating, for knowing I could not have any direct contact or closeness with anyone, no nurse, no one, not even my spouse. Now that that has passed thanks to so many who rallied around my bedside, virtually speaking, I spare a thought for all those who in their everyday normal lives have no space in which to social distance, who have no home to "stay at home", who have no one who seems to care for them...and there are too many of them.

We as a society must tackle this and all of us do our bit in our own ways. I ask you to take care. I pray things will settle. My son a doctor is working as a volunteer in one of the Covid 19 hubs as well as continuing his usual GP work. His wife is also working as a GP. Other members of the family may voluntarily work as part of the NHS family. How wonderful for us all to have the opportunity to become part of a big family and to feel supported by this family...is that not what we have missed over these years! Please a prayer for all of them and for their families. Many thanks for all your prayers and support for me, grasping and coming to terms with my own vulnerability...and is that such a bad thing? Day 10 - At last! It is amazing how all the simple things we take for granted and almost resent because they seem mundane and time wasters become such a joy and treasure and feel like

great achievements when you have not been able to do them for a while! Responses to “so what did you do today” may go like this for me. I got up, I showered and washed my hair and how good that felt. I went downstairs relaxed, with no gloves or masks, felt the freedom of moving around my own house, I ate porridge, drank coffee, and savoured them — delicious. The ultimate joy - I, sat beside and close to my husband, saw and conversed with 3 of my 4 sons and 3 grandsons from Perth, Australia, London, and Surrey. We laughed and chatted and were in awe at how technology could bring us all together at the same time from all the corners of the world. Then the sheer exhilaration of actually going outside! The outing was wonderful but still nerve wracking, I jumped every time I saw anyone, ensuring a wide berth. There is no way you can fulfil the 2 metre gap requirement on a narrow pavement so I would either walk in the middle of the road, risking my life, or dart into the closest garden, alleyway or shop portico and wait till they passed. I so hope I can get antibody testing to confirm the infection so that I can start to relax, to ensure I will be safe when I return to work and that I pose no risk to my husband or anyone else. I have joined the great British home choir, spent time on the computer, watched a bit of TV...and that is how I spent my exciting day! A massive achievement...and I gave huge thanks for it. Two additional positives today. All NHS Lothian healthcare workers who show signs of Covid 19 or who are having to self isolate because a member of the family may have it, will be eligible for the testing. Just one day too late for me but I am delighted for my colleagues and the present depleted workforce. Tonight at 8.00 pm the nation was called to applaud all NHS carers. A colleague commented “I have just witnessed the clap in Morningside! Lots of whoops and cheers and clapping. There were Church bells ringing! It was very touching to know that there is such appreciation of what we are trying to do. Something to remember in the gratitude diary!”

In the next few days as I regain my strength I shall record many more positives I am sure. Examples would include how people expressed their love and care, from all over the world, from Canada to New Zealand to Hong Kong, family in India all with their own problems, held out their arms and their hearts to me and embraced me. Prayers in abundance from everyone of different religions, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and of no religion. A letter I whilst sent pleading with a senior member of the NHS to supply PPE and testing was responded to with warmth and thanks and signed “with best wishes and NHS love”! At last....

Rita Rigg has been a GP in Edinburgh since 1995. Over the past year Dr Rigg has been working in the COVID triage hub providing the first point of contact for doctor advice for all people in Edinburgh and the Lothians (>800000 people) with suspected or confirmed COVID. She continues in her role as an appraiser and a tutor for medical students at the University of Edinburgh.

Halakaršana

Rabindranath Tagore

An Introduction

Parantap Chakraborty

On 14th July 1928, (12 Bhadra 1336) Rabindranath Tagore spoke on what was to be the first of many *Halakaršanas* at Sriniketan. His address first appeared in print in the Aswin 1336 BE number of the periodical *Prabasi*. The event and Rabindranath's thoughts on it, are significant insights into how Rabindranath on the one hand romanticized about farming being the first communal activity yet resisted a retrogressive mythologization of it. He had perpetually argued about the necessity improve the awareness of the cultivating community before any true development is possible. To grasp what he was attempting here we must look at the greater historical context and Rabindranath's position in the contemporary debates on agriculture and land reforms.

Sriniketan was the site where, the experiments with the rural reconstruction that Rabindranath started at Selaidaha, became more wide ranging. What Sriniketan meant to Rabindranath is visible in the fact that he addressed the workers either during the anniversary of Sriniketan or on the day of *Halakaršana* almost every year.¹ The term rural reconstruction was first employed by Rabindranath in a letter to Lady Abala Bose in 1908.² Rabindranath saw *Halakaršana* or ploughing as the chief activity of the village economy hence sustaining the core of an emerging nation. Rabindranath was of the belief that farmers need to be trained in

¹ See Dikshit Sinha, *A Poet's Experiment in Rebuilding Samaj and Nation: Sriniketan's Rural Reconstruction Work, 1922-1960* (Bolpur: Birutjatio Sahitya Sammiloni, 2019), p 163.

² Ibid. p 2

better farming practices before they can become self-reliant and achieve any kind of progress. This view was controversial, and it can very naturally be read as Rabindranath's inability to divorce himself from the class privileges of a zamindar. It was the crux of his response to Pramathanath Chowdhuri's 1926 treatise *Rayater Katha* (the story of tenants). Rabindranath agreed that land belongs to the cultivators, and not the zamindars. Although he was against altering the conditions of tenancy and argued that the farmers had to be made self-reliant before the zamindars can retreat.³ However, merely pinning it to his class position diminishes the complexity of the argument.

In a letter to Nirmalkumari Mahalanobish, written a few days before delivering the address, Rabindranath explores the significance of this ritual. He invokes Balarāma,⁴ in the earlier iconographic form of the agricultural deity. Rabindranath sees the alcohol loving mighty god with the plough in hand, being a possible parallel for the European civilization with its love of the drink, physical strength, and superior technology. He believes that the better aspects of the European civilization must be accepted. Refers to a newspaper report that laments the deplorable condition of the farmers in Bihar. Whose perilous condition, the reporter thinks, is due to the machinery farming equipment employed by the British. Tagore disagrees, for him European technology must be embraced not rejected.⁵

In another letter to Nirmalkumari, written a bit over a year after this (19th October 1929), Rabindranath further develops this idea. He states that the Mahatma has done great disservice

³ Ibid. p 299.

⁴ Balarama, in Hindu mythology, the elder half brother of Krishna, with whom he shared many adventures. Sometimes Balarama is considered one of the 10 avatars (incarnations) of the god Vishnu, particularly among those members of Vaishnava sects who elevate Krishna to the rank of a principal god. He may originally have been an agricultural deity, for as early as the 2nd–1st century BCE he was depicted holding a plowshare and a pestle, with a snake canopy above his head. Among the earliest Brahmanic gods to be given sculptural representation, he is always shown in paintings with fair skin, in contrast to Krishna's blue complexion. The stories associated with him emphasize his love of wine and his enormous strength. (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Balarama". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 19 Feb. 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balarama>.)

⁵ Rabindranath Thakur, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati-1986) vol. 14, p 848.

to the nation by involving the farmers, who form three-fourths of the country, in his insistence spinning of the innate Charka. He would rather have them yield more crop and believes that initiating a discussion on farming practices would have been a much greater service to the nation.⁶

It is interesting that though Tagore is critical of the mechanized weapons of the modern age, he was ready to embrace technology when used properly. He was repeatedly raising alarm about the fact that the cultivators or tenants, however, romanticized are not at present equipped by themselves to improve their conditions. In this address, Rabindranath has read the *Ramayana* as an allegory of the agrarian Aryans fighting for their exclusive knowledge of the plough, hence the abduction of Sita in the hands of the Rakshasas, the non-Aryan tribes symbolizes a theft of that sacred knowledge and the subsequent victory of Rama, therefore, stands for the retrieval of that knowledge.

⁶ See Sinha, p 464

Halakaršana

(Delivered at the *Halakaršana* in Sriniketan on 14 July 1928 / 12 Bhadra 1336)

Translator: *Parantap Chakraborty*

When the earth emerged from its aquatic bath and became able to sustain life the first home of that life was the forest. Thus, the primeval life of human beings was as forest dwellers. The *Puranas*¹ tell us, the lands which are now large deserts, burning in the heat of the summer, were in the past great forests like Dandaka, Naimisha, Khandava.² The Aryan colonists found their first shelter in these forests and found life in the fruit of these forests and in the deep solitude they took the first steps towards self-awareness.

In the first stage of their existence the early humans were hunters of animals. They were then revolting against the life sustaining mother earth. In this age of barbarism, the idea of *maitri*³ had eluded these people. This savagery was inevitable.

¹ Purana, (Sanskrit: "Ancient") in the sacred literature of Hinduism, any of a number of popular encyclopaedic collections of myth, legend, and genealogy, varying greatly as to date and origin. Traditionally, a Purana is said to treat five subjects, or "five signs": the primary creation of the universe, secondary creation after periodic annihilation, the genealogy of gods and patriarchs, the reigns of the Manus (the first humans), and the history of the solar and lunar dynasties. There are traditionally 18 Puranas, but there are several different lists of the 18, as well as some lists of more or fewer than 18. (Doniger, Wendy. "Purana". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 Jun. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Purana>.)

² All three ancient forests were often referred to in Puranic Literature as well as the two epics *Ramayana and Mahabharata*.

³ Maitrī, (Sanskrit), in Buddhism, the perfect virtue of sympathy. Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. ("Maitrī". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Jul. 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/maitri>). Rabindranath Tagore often referred to this concept. In "Nationalism in Japan" (1917) for example, he states 'The ideal of 'maitri' is at the bottom of your culture, – 'maitri' with men and 'maitri' with Nature. And the true expression of this love is in the language of beauty, which is so abundantly universal in this land. This is the reason why a stranger, like myself, instead of feeling envy or humiliation before these manifestations of beauty, these

The depth of the forest would impede the path of human beings. It was a shelter on one hand, and an impediment on the other. Those who attempted to traverse this inaccessibility were forced to form small groups and dwell within their limits. Each group was constantly suspicious and hateful of the other. It is this mindset that made their religious rituals designed to take human life. Human beings became the most potent enemies of themselves, an enmity that is yet to end. The constant battle was to deprive the other of such isolated homelands and cattle grazing areas. The other animals that exist on earth do not practice such destruction of its own kind.

It was in these early settlements encircled by the inaccessibility began early human life full of thuggery and cruelty and this ferocity was celebrated in song, dance, art and religious rites. Then at some point, human beings fortuitously discovered their path of progress. The first step in this direction was the discovery of fire. The remarkable power of fire that influenced nature was experienced in that era by humans. Still fire in its many forms is the carrier of civilisation. It was this fire that provided the first *mārga*⁴ of religious rites for Indian Aryans.

Then arrived agriculture. It was through agriculture that human beings bonded with nature. It kindled the creative power hidden in the womb of the earth. Before this, food was required in small amounts and by chance. It was controlled by a small number of people and therefore it promoted selfishness and encouraged violence. It also gave rise to morality and ethics. It was agriculture that made cooperative possible. Because, what holds a large number of people

creations of love, feels a readiness to participate in the joy and glory of such revealment of the human heart.' See Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1917), p 92.

⁴ Marga, (Sanskrit: "path") in Indian religions, a path toward, or way of reaching, salvation. The epic *Bhagavadgita* (or *Gita*) describes *jnana-marga*, the way of knowledge (study of philosophical texts and contemplation); *karma-marga*, the way of action (proper performance of one's religious and ethical duties); and *bhakti-marga*, the way of devotion and self-surrender to God. In the *Gita* the god Krishna praises all three means but favours *bhakti-marga*, which was accessible to members of any class or caste. (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Marga". Encyclopedia Britannica, 19 Feb. 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/marga-Indian-religion>.)

together when the congregate is *Dharma*.⁵ It is the duty of *Dharma* to suppress the hatred and awaken the sense of good harmony. As livelihoods get easier it becomes simpler for *Dharma* to establish the bond of unity. In truth it was agriculture that laid the foundations of righteousness in the human civilisation. Agriculture immediately followed fire in the stages of civilisation. It was through agriculture that human beings developed kinship with the land, and it formed a major era. This facilitated the primacy of the bond of friendship in human society.

The forest-dwelling society of ancient India was divided into many branches. Its rites were designed to pray for the good of one faction or another. They imagined special powers to specific mantras which were given prestige as they believed it would help them to gain money and defeat the enemy. However, because the goal of this was an outward outcome, it was geared almost entirely towards materialistic goals; the narrow competitive mind-sets were valued. It did not see the release of the greater sense of unity.

Then came an era that we may call the age of the Rājars̥i Janaka.⁶ It saw the advent of two kinds of knowledge. On the practical side agriculture and on the spiritual theology. Agriculture freed society from the chains of narrow selfish goals and made possible the unity of larger populations through the same livelihood. And theology made the spiritual

⁵ Dharma is a polysemous word and exceedingly difficult to pin down to one translation. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: In Hinduism, dharma is the religious and moral law governing individual conduct and is one of the four ends of life. In addition to the dharma that applies to everyone (sadharana dharma) — consisting of truthfulness, non-injury, and generosity, among other virtues — there is also a specific dharma (svadharma) to be followed according to one's class, status, and station in life. Dharma constitutes the subject matter of the Dharma-sutras, religious manuals that are the earliest source of Hindu law, and in the course of time has been extended into lengthy compilations of law, the Dharma-shastra.

⁶ In the epic *Ramayana*, Janaka, is the father of Sita. The Historical Janaka was an ancient Indian king of Videha (in Mithila), approximately in the 8th or 7th century BCE. The rulers of the Videha kingdom were called Janakas. It is difficult to ascertain if the two Janakas are the same. See Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2006.) pp 42-51.

Rājars̥i is an epithet that denotes sage-king (*rāja* king, and *ṛṣi* a saint).

declaration – *ātmavat sarva-bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati*⁷ (those who understand the other as themselves have truly perceived their selves).

We see semblances of the importance of agriculture to the Aryans in the *Ramayana*. It was from the furrow that Sita was born, and it was the unploughable land that Rama made ploughable.⁸ It is this ploughing that connected the north and south of India traversing forests and mountains.

Much effort had to be given to defeat the rakshasas, who were the archenemies of the Aryans, and to protect and rescue their newfound knowledge from them.

Humans were overcome by greed while inheriting the gifts of the earth. The agricultural fields won over the forests and eventually developed a monopoly and gradually started replacing it. The earth was being rendered naked by the culling of trees for various purposes. They turned the air warmer and nearly depleted the fertility of the land. The Aryavarta⁹ that has lost the shelter of the forest is now faces unbearable sunlight.

Keeping this in mind we had organized the Vṛikṣaropan,¹⁰ only a few days earlier, it is the sacred festival of replenishing the wasted treasure of the mothers by prodigal children.

Today's ritual is not about arithmetical balance. We will perceive it as a revival of the happy memory of the beginnings of agriculture, which holds the central thread of human existence, human beings coming together as one, the granary the world being one.

⁷ *ātmavat sarva-bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati* is a Sanskrit śloka.

⁸ Sita was raised by King Janaka; she was not his natural daughter but sprang from a furrow when he was ploughing his field. Rama won her as his bride by bending Shiva's bow. (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Sita". *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 29 Mar. 2018)

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sita>

⁹ Āryāvarta (Sanskrit), lit. "abode of the Aryas". Traditionally regarded as the between the Himalaya and the Vindhya ranges, from the Eastern Sea (Bay of Bengal) to the Western Sea (Arabian Sea)

¹⁰ Vṛikṣaropan (lit. Tree Planting) is another festival started by Rabindranath to plant saplings in and around the university campus.

After the age of agriculture came machinery. Its iron hands have sometimes caused mass murder and on other occasions have filled life with things to be consumed. The unbridled greed of human beings now knows no limits. Once when the livelihoods of human beings were of a limited nature, and they were cruel rivals of each other. They were always ready to strike with weapons at that time. That striking ability has now increased manifold. The boost of wealth is as also lead to the growth of greed, and society has been contaminated by weapons. In the old days people murdered each other out of greed, but those weapons were weak, and the amount of death was minimal. Otherwise in this long era would have created a mass grave spanning the breath of the earth from one sea to another. Technology has handed human beings with many weapons of mass destruction, and the death toll at the end of a war exceed several hundred. The suicidal human race has become an enemy of itself and set sail on the flood of destruction. Human beings started with primeval barbarity; they were motivated by greed. The last stage of human existence is also disastrously barbaric; here too it has found itself in the jaws of greed. A huge funeral pyre has been lit, and along with human beings their morality, their knowledge, and their fine arts will ascend it.

Today we will remember that day when the earth served its children limited food with her own hands, which was enough for their health, and their satisfaction — which wasn't so abundant that the human beings with their ugly greed could forget their true selves and engage in violence on its pile.

12 Bhadra 1336

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Section II:

Poetry

*Chrys Salt***Mountain Voices**

So used they were to broken things,
smashed oil lamps, wine jars,
rattled urns, the creak of houses,
tumbling masonry,
they just shrugged off the portents
of a mountain's rage,
repaired their fallen walls
and soldiered on.

Those who could read the writing in Spring wind,
sun's scribbled messages on ice,
told the prospectors it was dangerous,
warned of a snowpack in the mountain's throat,
before it raised its mighty voice and spoke.

So when Vesuvius spewed its guts,
and two millennia on a slice of snow
broke loose from nature's moorings,
smothering everything,
too late in either case
to call for gods, too sudden
for the moment's fending off.

Some were found curled to fetuses,
or fused together in a last embrace.
Some frozen in a running shape,
or curled like cats asleep
heads on their forearms
under ash or snow,
perplexed perhaps to hear their mountain roar

before the snow or lava outran everyone.

*'Do we learn anything from history,
the stranded polar bear, the rising sea?'*

When writing this I found a photograph,
an unnamed man in glasses,
balding, elderly.

He holds against a sky blue shirt,
a plaster cast -
the body of a child from Herculaneum,
hands splayed across the tiny back,
so tenderly
you'd think the child
and his heart might break.

Lockdown Celandine

I've seen you many times
but not like this
dressed up in shine,
I've never stopped to say hello,
never spoke. I know
you come in every greening spring
with all your folk
seen in the swift periphery
of passing by;
I didn't see
your heart shaped leaf gloss,
specificity,
your sunbright single petal star,
Your radiant yellow yellowness
fine arcing neck
that tips your merry head agley.

Today I stopped to look at you ,
beyond the hurly burly time,
fur-tuft of stamens in your candid eye.

Chrys Salt is a poet with roots deeply planted in the theatre. She has produced four full poetry collections and four pamphlet collections and performed on BBC Radios 3 and 4, and done readings at venues and festivals across the UK and in the USA, Canada, France, Germany, Finland and India. Her work has been translated into several languages and appeared in anthologies, magazines and journals worldwide. She has been the recipient of Awards and Bursaries (various) - including A National Media Award (CRS) a New Writing Bursary (English Arts Council) a Work Development Award (Creative Scotland), a Fringe First (Edinburgh Festival). She has been a recipient of two Creative Scotland Bursaries, one to complete her collection *Dancing on a Rock* and one in 2017 for research in Yukon for her most recent collection *'Skookum Jim and The Klondike Gold Rush'* (Pub: Indigo Dreams Publishing 2020).

*Alan Spence***Kali**

I am your wildest dream, your worst nightmare,
and if you pray to me, be sure your prayer
is pure as fire, essential as the air
you breathe, then know me, always, everywhere.

My darkness is a lustre, deep and rare.
The universe is tangled in my hair,
I shake it, shake it, shake it out, and there
it dazzles, beautiful beyond compare.

See, round my neck, this garland that I wear,
not flowers but skulls - my enemies beware.
I dance my demons down, I am the slayer
of multitudes - defy me if you dare.

But love me, child, adore me, hold me dear
and in my sweet embrace know who you are.
Sing *Kali Kali Kali Ma Amar*.
Sing *Kali Kali Kali Ma Amar*.

Alan Spence is an award-winning Scottish poet and playwright, novelist and short story writer. He is Professor Emeritus in Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen and is currently the Edinburgh Makar (Poet Laureate). With his wife Janani he runs the Sri Chinmoy meditation centre in Edinburgh.

*Sanjukta Dasgupta***Ah Peace!**

Peace is a warm shawl

Within the sunless darkness

Of the serene womb

The first flash of light

The first cry

The first touch of hands

The first violence

The snipping of the cord

Peace is as fragile as a snowflake

Peace glistens like a drop of dew

On a smiling leaf sunning itself

Peace surpasses all understanding

Peace lies at the heart of every outcry

Peace is stabbed each time

As the knife enters the heart

Peace is in splinters

As the bombs drop, guns fire

Tanks roar, missiles zoom

Drones drop precise death

With diabolic accuracy.

All is toxic everywhere

Landscapes are pregnant with landmines

The skies are darkened by the wings of vultures

The thunderous fighter planes advance like sharks

Yet compassionate peace

Is an invincible passionate warrior

That nestles at the core of being

It sprouts like leaves of grass

On the charred wastelands

Of Kurukshetra and Troy

Vietnam, Iraq, Libya,

Syria and Palestine

Peace that truly surpasses all understanding

Shanti, Shanti, Shanti!

Coffin Factory

Death has been insatiable this year

Such greed for more and more

Crematoriums and cemeteries

Chock a bloc with processions

Of the inert who arrive on stretchers

For the final journey through the exit gate

Death is a greedy capitalist this year

Coffin factories have never thrived so much

The demand far exceeding supply

“We need to produce more coffins”

Thundered ministers and governments

As they wheeled past the tanks and fighter jets

“We need vaccines to reduce coffin home deliveries”

Rose the cries in the Parliaments

This festive season as drums and conch shells

Create the auspicious buzz

This festive season as Christmas trees sparkle

Sighs from the thousands and thousands of coffins

Will haunt the midnight mass

“If only you had made vaccines instead of tanks and guns”

Is the one spiralling refrain that will haunt
Those who still have an unsullied conscience

What a Skewed World!

When you say you love me

I feel you must have found out

My bank account balance

When you say everything is all right

I am sure something is wrong everywhere

When you say we are the best

I can sense we are going downhill

When you say we will conquer Space

I know we are cramped for space

In our hearts and homes

When the virus rages

We just compete with death counts

I know then nothing is under control

When you say our callous cavalier stances

Have created hotspots and containment zones

I know that there are not enough ventilators

When you say relax, we have reached the plateau

I know it is now the silence of the wasteland

It is now only sighs from graveyards

Yet hope rises in the doleful air

Unfurling its wings of assurance

Just don't say anything anymore

Let silence heal

Let hope speak

In its resonant wordless gentle voice.

Dr Sanjukta Dasgupta,

Professor and Former Head, Dept of English and Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Calcutta, is a poet, critic and translator. She is a member of the General Council of Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. She is also the President of the Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library at ICCR, Kolkata. Her published books of *poetry are Snapshots* (1997), *Dilemma* (2002), *First Language* (2005), *More Light* (2009), *Lakshmi Unbound* (2017) and *Sita's Sisters* (2019).

*Tabish Khair***O, Bard of my Land**

What happens when a necklace of songs snaps
And its beads pour like raindrops on the earth
And you cry out baffled
At the mess this has made of your music?

The hungry earth, starved of love, ravaged by human noise,
Drinks up each sound-bead, and you are left
With loud silence.

A deathly touch is on the soil, as farmers writhe
Having mortgaged their lands to banks
And consumed the last down payment of pesticide.

There are no flowers left to pluck
Though another poet, one of your butchered brothers,
Once prayed for the thorns to be spared
For they had played in the same dust with petals.

It is a sentiment you would have agreed with,
For in the largeness of your rich heart
You always understood the poorest,
The loneliest and the lost.

Would you have understood Trump or Modi?

It is a question that, like so many others,
I do not ask,

As I watch the beads of your song
Roll and disappear like raindrops in the sand of dead habits.

I will not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation of thy worship,
O Bard of my Land, no,
I will cup my hands into the blowing sand, and sip, and sip, and sip.

Born in 1966 and educated in Gaya, a small town in Bihar, India, **Tabish Khair** is the author of critically-acclaimed books. Winner of the All India Poetry Prize, his novels have been shortlisted for more than a dozen major prizes, including the Man Asian, the DSC Prize, the Sahitya Academy Award, and the Encore. He recently published a poetry pamphlet, *Quarantined Sonnets* (Kitaab, Singapore), on the pandemic, with profits being donated to a migrant worker charity.

*Tapati Gupta***Making Bridges**

Bird calls encourage me to make bridges
Over crevices of the night
Into dense leaves
Where sleeping sparrows dream.
She who wears the sun in her hair
And steps over moonbeams
To vanish into the night air
Inspires me to build bridges.
But I look in vain for
Mortar and bricks, steel rods and sand
To make my bridge.
At last the crow at my window
Offers to make my bridge with the sticks it has gathered
To build its nest.
“Why do you waste those twigs
That you have brought, how will you build your nest?” I asked .
“Your bridge is more important”, it said,
Because you cannot fly to connect with distant places.
I am better off than you. I carry the world on my wings,
My silver gray wings.”
So finally my bridge of twigs is built
And now I can go to you
Who walk the universe balancing the sun on your head,
Your feet washed with moonbeams.

Dr Tapati Gupta is retired Professor of Calcutta University and former Head of the Department of English. She is a theatre studies scholar, translator, painter and creative and academic writer. Her edited and co-edited volumes include *Tagore and Modernity*, *Harvest Modern Bengali Short Stories in Translation, Vols. 1&2*, *Bankimchandra's Bangadarshan*, *Selected Essays in Translation*, *Contemporary Indian Theatre*. Dr. Gupta has also been an art critic in art journals and reputed dailies. Her research papers on theatre have been published in journals both national and international. She has travelled extensively and read research papers in many international conferences and has been on the research team 'Ibsen Between Cultures' of Oslo University. She has been guest professor in the universities of Oslo, Leeds and Vienna. Her volume of poetry is in press now. She is currently preparing for publication a book on modern Bengali drama.

*Wayne Price***Lids**

All across the city
mouths are meeting in the dark,
as if eating the last of the words
out of warm bowls.

I dreamt I lifted
the flat white stones
in the garden like lids,
and every deep jar was full.

Moles

Their lives are a kind of whispering
under sunny lawns, like the hurry
of blood in the veins goes on
under clothes, ceilings, conversations.

Their mounds are neither towns nor ruins.
Dead, their hands upturned are pink –
nerved and naked as our own. Tall trees frame
the narrow gardens they mine.

Night comes down. Thieves in dreams
quarter their own homes. What if
the blind frenzy of moles in the ground
is the buried, lifelong panic it seems?

October Again

October again. Harvest spiders,
beetles slip indoors like prodigals.
This morning on TV
somebody told me
I must make my 'life-statement'.

My life-statement! Partial this, partial
that, and the single thought
that unwraps sleep, slits
the packet that was tied
neat as a fat cigar, so snug in its own leaf

the small cold hands of insects
might have packed it, perfect. Always
the same gift. What could be more natural?
October makes
callers of us all. Everything

would come indoors if it could: scurry-legged strings,
snails weeping themselves
against the windowpanes. Why are we
so afraid then
of wearing out our own welcome?

Llanwynno

Everything becomes a turning outward
here, either quick or slow: the narrow paths
that branch year by year, the splitting acorns
and ravelled ferns, the armoured plates of pinecones
splaying on the forest floor, the white
and brown and yellow mushrooms billowing.

Water lipping the Clydach's round stones
releases their mineral perfume, like rain
on thicks of nettles and raw, turned fields.

Memory opens like a country door
on the space the language needs to enter:
a sudden clearing – the neat, bright grass

as if something were tending it there, for
no reason, for no-one, for nothing.

Wayne Price's poems and short stories have appeared in many UK and international journals and anthologies. His pamphlet collection of poems, *Fossil Record* (Smith|Doorstop, 2015) was chosen by Carol Ann Duffy as one of her inaugural Laureate's Choices. He teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen.

*Shabbir Banoobhai***today i hugged you in a dream**

today i hugged you in a dream

it felt so real

although you are as far away

as you have ever been

and i have no means

of being closer

no means of skimming the seas

or threading the stars to form

a bridge – so that i may

stand beside you once again

and find you where i know

i would like you to be

today i hugged you in a dream

it felt so real

but then we walked

deferentially

as if afraid to test

if the warmth was real

is it ever real – this love we feel

and for whom and what we feel it?

is it not a dream we always hug

embracing the earth as we do
in days that are as long as nights
when we find ourselves wanting?

When it's Done

When it's Done

You will Know

Mountains – as Clouds

Fire – as Snow!

Cosmos on Cosmos

Of Light upon Light

To where your Love

Has taken Flight!

Silence – as Music

Stillness – as Flow

Presence Alone

Wherever you Go!

when you come to visit us

when you come to visit us
as rain, a myriad flowers
come out to greet you

when you visit us
as pain, seeking refuge from
some loneliness or loss

all doors are closed to you
and you have to sneak in
as if you are a thief

as love, you are welcome
as love-in-waiting, not
it is difficult for us to imagine

that everywhere new life
is being born – and in seed and stone
in failing flesh and ailing bone

it is you who are calling out
in love – wanting to be closer to us
than – as yet – we are prepared to be

Shipwreck

Your Praise is Home, Refuge, Shore
Your Love, the Riches of the Poor
Ever in need of the Alms of Grace!

Now is not the time to Bargain
But to revel in a Loss that is the Key
To unravelling an Eternal Mystery!

Do not fear the Shipwreck, You say
When you are already upon the Sea
There is nowhere to go but to Me!

Shabbir Banoobhai is a Chartered Accountant. He is also a well-known South African writer, his work studied at South African schools and universities. He has read his poetry at several international poetry festivals. His published writings (eighteen books in total) may be found on his website: www.veilsoflight.com. Included in his writings are spiritual and philosophical reflections, essays and letters, a novel, and most recently, a defining book on leadership titled: *Leadership as Healing*. Douglas Livingstone, the renowned South African poet, had this to say about his first book: 'An obsessive and talented poet, a precocious master of the Word and a fine lyricist to boot, almost every line of the work was subliminally ignited by the ancient great Islamic poets. Knowing Shabbir Banoobhai, the man through his work, can illuminate something of the unknown. Here, then, is a further asset to and aspect of, South Africa's uncommon humanity.'

*Jenny Mitchell***Safe to Hug**

A giant birch tree near a disused playground
stands taller every day since local children
line up at a distance, groan to wait their turn.
Time moves much too slowly now. One by one,

they hug the swelling trunk, cheeks skimming bark,
eyes clenched shut. Strange to watch lips move but
hear no sound. At times, this quiet communion ends
with a fleeting kiss given to the trunk.

It does not respond though roots appear to move,
settling in the ground as if for the last time,
deep-planted, here to stay when other trees
are long-since sacrificed, made a field of stumps.

As children walk away, chests wider now,
the birch stands backbone straight, achieves new height.

Soothing Song

I want to dance with all of you,
closely as we can, at once,
cheeks pressed together tight,
group hug for all the world,
no matter how you pray,
what languages you speak.

Let music blare, cacophony
of breath, a quick release
for all the worried sighs.
Come to my waiting arms.
The room will spin, hope
dance into the sky, sent back

as we revive. Each step
explores a different way,
leading to a stream that flows
until it makes a wondrous noise,
soothing song to help us
know that we are one.

Late Flowering Dad

It grows out of his grave, the love
he never showed becomes the grass,
green breath thick on the ground,
leading to a field with each embrace,

once held back, now rife except
there is a tree for every slap.
The forest looks so dark till nature blooms.
An alchemy of hugs denied hang low.

Reach out to pluck that goodness down,
hold against your heart, breath calm
for once, knowing death does not end life.
It only means he found a way to grow.

Jenny Mitchell has won several poetry competitions, most recently the Folklore Prize. She is widely published in magazines and anthologies, and is a Pushcart Nominee and 2 x Best of the Net Nominee. A debut collection, *Her Lost Language* (Indigo Dreams Publishing) is One of 44 Poetry Books for 2019 (Poetry Wales) and a Jhalak Prize #bookwelove recommendation. Her second collection, *Map of a Plantation*, (IDP) will be published in April 2021.

Ellis O'Connor, *West No. 3*

Exploded spray on the sea's glass skull
welled up from lost blank profounds
of eyelessness among the krill
eel beds and orca hunting grounds
would have you feel you cannot feel

how numbly ghosted lines have drawn
the zones of smashed-together wave
and rock the whitened sea-stacks gnawn
and synclines toppled off the graph
of what is measured captured known

by eye improbably afloat
the raft of seeing while the storm
thickens textures into brute
impacted darkness like a charm
to kill all blood-warmth at the root

and opiates of arctic flowers
bob drowned among the sparking shades
of one last glow the evening lowers
to where the deadlight nothing voids
taking me with it disappears

David Wheatley's collections of poetry include *The President of Planet Earth* (Carcenet).
He teaches at the University of Aberdeen.

*Joyce Caplan***Wild Swimmers at Wardie**

[for Vari]

The wild swimmers make white scars across the leaden sea.
The horizon sky dark with unshed clouds of rain that speeds
them onwards back to shore. Only their hearts are warm
as they beach on wet sand, shrieking with relief,
reaching for towels, glad to have beaten the cold,
their defiant survival almost an act of joy
before they are landlocked again.

After the Snow

The parks are full of dead snowmen, the heaps of melting snow
grown gritty overnight now surrounded by muddy grass.

We did not see them born under the hands of hopeful children
who gave them discreet, blank faces; their noses dark beacons.

The ice crunches underfoot in scales of mirrored light beneath
trees festooned with enquiring birdsong. Celebrating a New Year
each passerby breathes out a greeting of distant smoke that
mingles above us, dispersing to clearer air still beyond our reach.

Lady Joyce Caplan is a Teaching Fellow at University of Edinburgh and a member of the General Council. Chair of several NGO's including Poetry Association of Scotland, Children's Classic Concerts and the medical Charity The Snowball Trust. Also a Board member of The Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society, ScottishPEN, The Edinburgh Burns Council, The Muriel Spark Society.

Donald Adamson

Fresh Air

So much of the impurity
and wrongness in the world is like a mist
rising from the crowd,
the lungs and throats of the multitude.

Little wonder mystics, prophets, saints
look for holiness in empty space

like Benedict – years spent in a cave
until he found another way
to God: the commonality
of an order and a rule:
work and pray.

Thus it was he came to walk
the monk's path, no room for idle talk,
rather he'd shun – as sin? – the eagerness
to prattle or to open up
his nature, surge and babble with the rush
of a mountain brook – pure spontaneousness.

A narrow track he took, harshly subduing
the mortal self. Yet turning thoughts – ours too -
towards a benison – sensing those few

molecules of fresh air entering us

with every breath – breath of the spirit, say,
barely noticed, subtly infused
in thoughts and words
and music, when we sing,
or when we draw a bow across a string.

Donald Adamson is from Dumfries, Scotland, but currently lives in Finland. He writes in English and Scots, and translates from Finnish, notably the poems of Nobel-prize nominee Eeva Kilpi. He has been a prize winner in many competitions, including first prize in the Herald Millennium Competition, the Sangschaw Translation Competition, and the Scottish Federation of Writers Competition (Scots category). His collections include *From Coiled Roots* (IDP 2013) and *Glamourie* (IDP 2015). His pamphlet *All Coming Back* (Roncadora 2019) takes as its theme the third age of life. A new pamphlet in Scots, *Bield*, will be published by Tapsalteerie.

*Elspeth Brown***All Manner of Things**

Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark. Rabindranath Tagore

Plastic choking sea creatures --- Lockdown

A rainbow shines over a sandy bay,
bladder-wrack sways round rocks,
a crab shimmies low, hears a curlew cry,
water clear and clean to sea bed.

Mangroves and rainforest threatened --- Lockdown

Cacao pods, passion flowers, pangolins,
under the green tangled branches,
monkeys, cassowary, toucans
The forest gives shelter in the musky air.

Hum of the bees silenced --- Lockdown

Let flowers still grow by the pathways,
loosestrife, sheep sorrel, self-heal,
tortoiseshell, and brimstone butterflies,
natterjacks, newts, spawn in ponds.

Rising seas --- Lockdown

May the Maldives still glow on the ocean,
fish swim over live coral reefs,

trumpet fish, hawkfish and angels.

May egrets still perch on the roofs.

Bird numbers dropping --- Lockdown

Let fieldfares still visit in winter,

skylarks still sing from the sky,

tawny owls call in the dusk and the dark,

guillemots teach their young how to fly.

May there still be hope

for all manner of things to be well,

for all manner of things to be well.

Elsbeth Brown's recent publication, a poetry pamphlet, *Starling and Crane*, was published by Indigo Dreams. Previous publications are *A Crab in the Moon's Mouth*, *Markings*, and *Skunk Cabbage*, IDP. Her immediate poetry interest is in the human connection to the environment. She has enjoyed reading at many poetry events and was recently one of the first prize winners in Scottish Pen for her *Declaration of Dunbar*.

Susmita Paul

Weight of black holes

On the steps of the terrace farm I stared

At a blizzard striking the earth, opening

Up the stars in the cauldron of space:

Untimely.

My toddler looks up aghast, scratches through some,

Proudly defining them as his constellations.

I do not have the heart to tell him

Maybe they are dead,

That, he can't call them his own.

He wouldn't believe me anyway.

In front of my eyes, he leaps into them

And his form is lost

In the call of that eternal being

That exists

In the smaller than the smallest.

To my yearning he is lost

As he leaps-

Into the cosy cocoon of the helix

That exists

In the larger than the largest.

No more I stand in front of Yama

Asking him to return my Nachiketa,

For he was never mine to ask for in the beginning.

Yama: The God of Death in the Hindu Mythology

Nachiketa: 10 year old son of Sage Vajasharavas in the Hindu Mythology. His conversation with Yama is part of the Katha Upanishad.

Truth

smaller than the smallest

bigger than the biggest

In the mirror it is

Visually aligned to the principles of physics

Quarks shift and don't shift

In the water it

Bends and breaks while

Energy condensed in it grows roots

In your eyes it calms down

Spiralling into a tunnel tool

Ebbing up and down

smaller than the smallest

bigger than the biggest

It is a star that has blinked to death

And you see it shooting by.

Translation

In forms and shapes crucified,
 I don't know what can be said
 So that
 In the middle of the heavens
 a horizon emerges-
 Dazzling intentions of
 Agitated light ways
 Cheekily go forward
 One step-

Allowing the swords to perspire
 Will lead rust to trickle as cream,
 Unfailing bowls will
 Survive one more empty birth
 In Bedouin's indifference
 Will take another step forward
 To become Hiranyagarbha†

† Wikipedia defines Hiranyagarbha as “the source of creation of the universe or the manifested cosmos in Vedic philosophy”. Hiranyagarbha is a Sanskrit word literally meaning the golden egg/womb.

Susmita Paul is a bilingual writer who writes in English and Bengali. She has been published in *The New Amritabazar Patrika*, *Plato's Caves Online* and *Headline Poetry and Press*. *Poetry in Pieces* (2018) is her chapbook of English poetry and *Himabaho Kotha Bole* (When Glaciers Speak) (2019) is her Bengali poetry collection. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Pine Cone Review*. She is also a Zentangle-inspired artist and an independent researcher. Her website is: www.susmitapaul.org.

*Derrick McClure***Tae M.**

“Awa, out o my sicht!” – swythe tak I tent.
 “Awa, forhou my hert!” – my hert hears fine.
 “Awa fae my rememb’rin!” – na, thon stent
 Will ne’er get heed fae your memore, nor mine.
 Lang is the scug that faas frae hyne awa,
 An braider aye its ring o dule maunspreid:
 Sae is’twi me. Your dwams o me will caa
 Mair deep, the farther frae ye be my steid.
 In ilka place we gaed, throu ilka day,
 For ilka time we grat, or daff’t, thegither,
 Aagait an ayeathin your thochts I’ll stay,
 For some pairt o my saul bides there forever.
 Gin, sloumin in your chaumer aa your lane,
 Your tentless haun shid scuff your clarsach’s string,
 “Jist at this hour,” your thocht comes aince again,
 “Wi him, thon days, this sang I uiss’ttae sing!”
 An gin, whanplayin chess, some prattickslee
 Fankles your weirditKeing in wups o grame,
 Ye’ll think, “That’s hou his ondingbestit me,
 Thon langsyne day we played our hinmaist game!”
 Gin at some ball, still on a seat ye bide
 ’Tween dances, whan the muisic stents a wee,
 Ye’ll see a tuim chair at the ingle side,
 An think “That’s whaur he sat, thon time, wi me!”
 An gin ye tak an auld beuk fae its bink,
 An read o luvvers’ draems that dwine an fail,
 Dowie ye’ll souch, ansteik the beuk an think,
 “We twa haekent the same hert-brakin tale!”

Or gin the screiver by some kittle turn
Gies them a blythesomepairinefter aa,
Ye'll fuff the caunle out, anwi a murn
Think "Hou cuidsiccanseil no us befaa?"
Anwhan the levin flaughters 'mang the blaud,
Anwhan the gizzent pear-tree reeshleslown,
An at your lozenraininbrainches daud,
At siccan times ye'll think my spreit'snearhaun.
Sae, ilka place we gaed, throu ilka day,
For ilka time we grat, or daff't, thegither,
Aagaits an ayeathin your thochts I'll stay,
For some pairt o my saul bides there forever.

Efter Adam Mickiewicz.

To M.

“Away, out of my sight!” – at once I pay attention. “Away, forsake my heart!” – my heart hears fine. “Away from my memory!” – no, that command will never get the attention of your memory, nor mine.

Long is the shadow that falls from far away, and wider ever its ring of sorrow must spread: so is it with me. Your dreams of me will call more deeply, the further away from you I am standing.

In every place we went, through every day, for every time we wept, or played, together, everywhere and always within your thoughts I’ll stay, for some part of my soul remains there forever.

If, daydreaming in your room all by yourself, your unthinking hand should brush your harp’s string, “Just at this hour,” your thought comes once again, “with him, in those days, this song I used to sing!”

And if, when playing chess, some clever trick entangles your doomed king in bonds of sorrow, you’ll think “That’s how his attack defeated me, on that long-ago day when we played our last game!”

If at some ball you stay still on a seat between dances, when the music stops for a brief interval, you’ll see an empty chair at the fireside and think “That’s where he sat, that time, with me!”

And if you take an old book from its shelf, and read of lovers’ dreams that fade and fail, sorrowfully you’ll sigh, and shut the book and think, “We two have known the same heart-breaking tale!”

Or if the writer by some intricate twist gives them a happy coupling after all, you’ll blow the candle out, and sadly think “Why could such good fortune not come to us?”

And when the lightning flashes among the blast, and when the withered pear-tree rustles softly, and groaning branches strike at your window-pane, at such times you’ll think my spirit is nearby.

So, in every place we went, through every day, for every time we wept, or played, together, everywhere and always within your thoughts I’ll stay, for some part of my soul remains there forever.

Derrick McClure, born Ayr, educated Ayr Academy, Glasgow University and Edinburgh University; retired in 2009 after forty years of teaching in the English Department of Aberdeen University. Academic publications include three monographs and well over 100 articles on Scottish literary and linguistic topics; translations (into Scots) include *Sangstae Eimhir* (from Sorley McLean's *Dàin do Eimhir*), *The Prince-Bairnie* (from Antoine de Saint-Éxupéry's *Le Petit Prince*), *The Babel Buikbeild* (from Jorge Luis Borges' *La Biblioteca di Babel*), North-East dialect versions of the two *Alice* books and a goodly number of individual poems or selections from Gaelic, Italian, German, Polish, Swedish and French. Also editor of *A Kist o Skinklan Things*, an annotated anthology of twentieth-century Scots poetry, and of several multi-author volumes of scholarly papers. Currently working on a verse translation of the Anglo-Saxon *Andreas*.

Valerie Gillies

The Bellspool, River Tweed

Among the woods, the chapel is locked,
its bell hanging between heaven and earth,

bronze above the bend in the river
where the clear stream slows down.

Water lip, bell brim. The surface is stirred,
shirred by a breeze from the open hills

and the Bellspool is ringing today,
a surprise for anyone who hears it.

An echo of bronze, bright in tone,
again, the echo of the bell moving on,

the water lives and lets it go,
to sound in a whole new way.

Valerie Gillies is former Edinburgh Makar and Associate of Harvard. Trainer for Lapidus and member of sessional staff for Maggie's Centre. Currently Valerie is collaborating with photographer Rebecca Marr on a project called 'When the Grass Dances'. They have a Creative Scotland Open Fund Award for the research and development of new work in poetry and photography, to explore the resilience and variety of the grasses. At the outreach stage of the project, they will design new workshops to bring participants a sense of recovery and renewal.

Ross Donlon

Hope*

I comes to us late as a word, a wish that needed a name to become *hope*,
neither a sense nor feeling, being far beyond both - to have hope.

Like us, it comes from the sea, the whales' -road-that-was, but still proper
as a metaphor for being alive or more, since it flows to the future - hope.

Water, blood and sap enlivens the veins and fibres of animals and plants,
like spreading maps, the arteries we all live inside thrive with that hope.

Primal lock on the will of each living thing, magnet clamped fast to life
and the desire to go on, our instinct is to flourish, nourished by hope.

Don't wonder at my optimism. Too many dawns past prophesised the end
of everything, still I watch the sunrise, rise and rise again in wonder and hope.

**hope*: a word of unknown origin...in use in North Sea Germanic languages...as 'to wish for', 'desire'. 13 C

Ross Donlon is an Australian poet living in Castlemaine, Victoria. He has been featured at state festivals across Australia and also at poetry readings and festivals in England, Scotland and Ireland. He is winner of two international poetry competitions and his poetry has been programmed on national and community radio in Australia. His most recent books are *The Bread Horse* and *For the Record*.

*Ranita Hirji***Waiting on Rain**

I hear you cry and rush to come
But I have lost my way
Those well-worn paths nowhere seen
Before me unending waste

Where are the kindly mountaintops
Their trees teasing the sky
Urging me on with their dance of grace
As I climbed on the wind to fly

I hear you thrashing, rasping for water
To turn over enough of yourself
Your sons have returned in rotting carcasses
Begging to be buried in their mother

But you are too hard, too near your end
Your dim eyes search in vain
I cannot cry...my acid tears
Will only burn parched skin

I wait and trust in your strength to hold
Our children will heal...come back whole
And I will find my way again
To cover you all with life and rain

Cobbler: Lockdown

You crank up your shutter, it creaks a little
 And I know my day has begun
 You lay out needles, leather...pillbox open in all weather...
 Cobbling existence till your day is done.

I empty my teacup, see the first feet arrive
 Twisting in pain, soles gaping wide
 You glue with patience, bind with a stitch
 Anticipating the length of their stride.

Now more stumble in...stages of despair...
 Feet in tatters plead for repair
 You patch the tears and hand them over
 They walk again their distance to cover.

Then no feet, street empty... I drink cold tea
 Shut in, I peep out... you stare vacantly.

Grass grows on pavement, cracks fill with weeds
 Squirrels play hide and seek with birds in trees
 Cloud and sky laugh, at last they breathe
 No longer choke on smoke and dust of feet.

We wait and we wither...waste in fear...
 I must trample that grass again; you must hear feet.

Ranita Hirji is a retired Professor of English and Communications. She taught English and Communications in Mount Carmel College from 1981 to 2002, during which time she designed the syllabi for the media courses leading to the BA in Communicative English at Bangalore University. From 2002 to 2016, she was Dean of Commits Institute of Journalism and Mass Communications in Bangalore. She has considerable experience in training students in public speaking, writing and theatre; and many of her students are prominent personalities in the Indian media industry today.

Anupa Lewis

The Conservatory

A lone Lily leans over the skyscraper turf of the synthetic cloud forest, tasting the saline foam of a very blue *wallpaper sea*. Far from home, the womb of a Bone China vase yawns wide, groaning under the lurid glare of an LED sun.

Feral flowers stare, exhibiting the fierce stigma of forests hived in captivity. Amazonian Blood Orchids hiss in dissent. Indian Tiger Claws scowl menacingly. Champing jaws of Venus Fly-traps stage a mute spectacle of protest.

Alongside, tourist faces wrapped in a bouquet pose for a group selfie pout.

Entry sign: Jurassic Lawn - 2020.

Winged Fluorescence

A wayward caterpillar, a little too fluorescent green in verve,

I was expected to grow a 'decent' pair of gauze wings:

As all in the world ----

- SHOULD *be*?
- WOULD *be*?
- COULD *be*?

Er, what is technically called 'metamorphoses'!

Wings, *they* believed, ought to be ----

- Not too light as to shuttle speed and let fly too fast
- Not too wide as to waver beyond norms and let glide too far
- Not too bright as to plume desire and let soar too high

But my wings turned out to be ----

Neither the gay glitter of the early butterfly,

Nor the dry sloth of the late moth.

I grew to be a creature of twilight,

WINGED enough in heart, mind and soul,

To know where I started, and where I belong.

Anupa Lewis holds the position Assistant Professor – Senior Scale at Manipal Institute of Communication. She is the coordinator of the Tagore Centre – MAHE, Manipal. Moreover, considering communication as the broad spectrum, she has about a decade of experience in engaging lectures, being the resource person for workshops, as also organizing international conferences in various spheres of academia. Her current areas of research interest include cultural studies, comparative literature, literary anthropology, speculative fiction, ecocriticism, feminist rhetoric and narratology. On the creative front her flash fiction is published in volume one of the Bath Flash Fiction anthology titled – *To Carry Her Home*, printed by Ad Hoc Fiction (2018).

*Mario Relich***Shades of Pink**

Looking at the Amazon river dolphins,
friendly to the fishermen in their boats,
they remind us of other dolphins
we might see in open-air aquariums
or BBC wild-life documentaries,

ducking, diving, and jumping up high,
even if not pursuing any fish, nor reward.
Nothing, unless you know the river,
can prepare us for dolphins displaying
themselves in the fleeting shimmer

of startling pink flashes beckoning
us to follow them deliriously,
looking for a good time, and careless
of the amphibious black caiman,
a sinister, gloomy croc hidden below.

Another living, breathing creature
bright as the dolphins, if more lethargic
is the pink iguana, and it's to be found
totally isolated in the Galapagos,
living on the luxuriant, shiny green

vegetation growing on the slopes
of the smouldering Wolf volcano
in the lush island of Isabela,
Darwin, had he known about them
like the other iguanas he saw there

would have wondered how
such a freakish reptile happened
to evolve its pinkish coloration,
so far from *red in tooth and claw*,
and observed that its sensitive skin

allows the blood in its veins
to look pink on the outside.
A creature far too proximate
to an active volcano, it's rare
and found nowhere else.

Less endangered, but elusive,
the pink robin can be found
in the remote rainforests
of southeastern Australia.
Small and sooty-feathered,

apart from its lilac pink chest,
it's quietly unobtrusive, and
often looks for insects, but it's not
related to the robins I sometimes see
in my back-garden doing the same.

But it also pleases the eye;
river, volcano, rainforest, all
are habitats in which animals,
conch-shell pink, still survive,
quirks of opulent evolution.

Mario Relich is a poet and critic, and on the Board of Scottish PEN. He is based in Edinburgh, and is a regular contributor to *Scottish Affairs*, which is published both in hard-copy and online. His Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh was on philosophical dialogue by David Hume and others during the Enlightenment.

*Subodh Sarkar***For You, Sara Gilbert**

The sky suffered all toxins.
The earth drank up all sins.
Forest – a witness of all killings
Yet, Man has no exit to open.

Still, man is alive for man.
Away from his deadly weapons
I wouldn't worry if were we able
To love humans a little more.

Jealousy has ruined you and me
Greed leads to more greedy secretion.
Take away the land, encroach the soil.
The rice bowl is pierced into two.

The earth could have been more beautiful
If the weapon of power is taken away
If we could throw out all cursed missiles
Each house would have been heaven.

The lost world will be back
All you and I lost.
We don't want to lose the evaporated dew drops
We can cure all abandoned homes.

You are my mother, mother of all
You are the youngest sister, a healing herb.
You stay awake and rub all sobs
You never split a man from a man.

Two eyes of the world are awake
O my darling sister, a healing herb,
A universal nurse for all who ails us all.
You never split a man from a human.
[Translated from Bangla by Jaydeep Sarangi]

Subodh Sarkar is a Sahitya Akademi winning renowned Bengali poet, writer and editor of the *Bhashanagar*. **Jaydeep Sarangi** is a poet, academic and translator anchored in Kolkata.

*Basudhara Roy***Keeping In**

The world shutters up. I follow suit.
Only to realize there's no one place
where I fully belong. Home, walled in,
loses concavity. Flattens out like a lounge,
a place of transit wanting one to only
bide patiently. To not stay, grow, belong.

I walk our rooms like lines of a poem
I have always known by heart. Only now,
there is more here. Fear lines the walls like
dense memories of finger-prints. Silence has
more questions to ask. Laughter finds ways
to avoid mirrors. Suspicion stretches wearily

under the dining table like a homeless cat. I
feel its thick fur under my feet. Condiments,
grains, I have never befriended before, stare
me in the face. They promise my famished
nightmares boiling pots, well-fed hearths ablaze.
Do I have enough for our need, I ask myself,

but having never really learnt need's arithmetic,
I let go. I decide, in walling in, I must play host to
them all. I scrub floors, water plants, offer damp
clothes, hair, pillows to the sun. I allow myself,
for a moment, to be taken in by the unchanged
smell of coconut oil on my palms. Their little

noses pressed to the glass, the children's
longings remind me of the world's edges,
of tender fish hungers at an aquarium's
corners, of caged birds, of freedom on a
leash. I dig out with both hands the gravel
in the heart, beckon to the brood, sing a song.

The Premise of a Promise

Not every
 promise, they will dismiss, is a
 promise. And if promises, they say, are meant
 to be broken, is a promise merely a word that's spoken
 and if some promises indeed are to be honoured and kept,
 how would those few be marked from there stand who
 shall aver their date is due or crown the one who keeps
 them true and what will be fall them who miss and
 who maintains the defaulter list and how vast,
 how long, how wise, how small, who
 knows what's a promise
 at all?

But not till the
 moment you train your eyes to the
 bewilderment of words do you realize there
 is no ground beneath a promise's feet for it's a word
 destined to seldom meet its yearned intent and were you
 steadily set to pursue its bent, you would find a promise in
 its utter steadfastness is simply a word peeping over a
 fence and in a moment's heady assurance,
 performing a turn in the air over
 its temporal tense.

It's the
 epiphany of a consonant,
 a vowel's satori, a desire's wild pirouette.
 Its ambition defying its drab finitude, it seeks
 the future's embrace in a dreamy ball room promenade
 aspiring always to close the gap, to bear into tomorrow
 today, and pin the moment to eternity in an utterance's
 resolute way, forever in love, always in medias res,
 succumbing relentlessly to gravity's call,

forever poised in an arabesque
in time, a victim always
of its tireless
fall.

Basudhara Roy is Assistant Professor of English at Karim City College, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India. An alumna of Banaras Hindu University, she holds a Ph.D. in diaspora women's writing from Kolhan University, Chaibasa. Her areas of academic interest are diaspora writing, cultural studies, gender studies and postmodern criticism. As a poet and reviewer, her work is featured/upcoming in anthologies and magazines like *The Helter Skelter Anthology of New Writing in English*, *The Aleph Review*, *The Kali Project*, *The Poetry Society of India*, *Mad in Asia Pacific*, *Teesta*, *Borderless*, *Muse India*, *Shabdadhuchha*, *Cerebration*, *Rupkatha*, *Triveni*, and *Setu* among others. She is the author of two books, *Migrations of Hope* (Criticism; New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2019) and *Moon in My Teacup* (Poetry; Kolkata: Writer's Workshop, 2019). Her second poetry collection, *Stitching a Home*, is forthcoming this year.

*Stewart Sanderson***Adder**

Ethereal, she shivers
through the wet heather –
woken by our footsteps
where she lay sleeping
in the sun-warmed centre
of the path, uncoiling up
the hill like a sheep-wide snake.

Umbrage taken, she gives
us a dangerous hiss
as she departs, her voice
almost a wildcat's spat
displeasure, but with something
older – a cold-blooded anger –
writhing underneath it.

Fumbling for my phone
too late to take a picture
of what's gone – the frame
filling only with moorland – I feel
as though I'd just stumbled
and reached out to stop
my fall on an electric fence.

Eagle

On days when the weight
of each grey minute
gets too much, I'll let
the memory of it
float back out
over the summit
of Ben Dorain: a sight
to be wondered at
as it shifted its great
wings and cut
away into slate-
coloured clouds, grown fat
with rain as yet
unfallen; shot
with strips of sunlight
where the spectrum split.

Juniper

If you like, this too can be a poem –
a sprig of juniper
plucked in the Cairngorms
in the nineteenth century
and currently taped
to a card in the Smithsonian's
cavernous basement.

Tonight, as the city
gets drunk on artisan gin
let's raise a glass to this
desiccated fragment
of a tree forgotten
in the rain-dark to the north.

Then tomorrow morning
as a thousand bedrooms
simmer, the spirit dissolving
into memory less ether
why not take the car out
to the Trossachs and cut
a branch of the same?

Let it lie for a century
and a half, its green leaves turning
brown, berries once pregnant
with intoxication
shrivelled to peppercorn
spheres, aging as verses
do, gaining new meanings
from the dust they gather.

Seraphim

Quarrymen, delving
in Devonian sandstone
would happen upon

angelic shadows –
fossils which reminded them
of carvings they'd seen

on old churches built
before the Reformation
swept such things away.

Therefore they named them
seraphim, the burning ones
perhaps assuming

these creatures swimming
through red rock were evidence
of Lucifer's fall

being what remained
of those who rebelled with him
and were hounded out

of heaven, tumbling
headlong through the atmosphere
into the Earth's crust.

Stewart Sanderson is a poet from the West of Scotland, currently based in the West Midlands, where as well as writing he works as a Local Authority Arts Development Officer. The recipient of an Eric Gregory Award and three times shortlisted for the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award, he has also held Robert Louis Stevenson and Jessie Kesson Fellowships. He has performed at festivals across the UK, notably Aye Write!, the BBC's Contains Strong Language, the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Ledbury Poetry Festival and St. Anza, as well as travelling to North Africa and Russia as part of British Council translation exchanges. Widely published in magazines, he is the author of two pamphlets, both published by Tapsalteerie: *Fios* (2015) and *An Offering* (2018). His first full-length collection, *The Sleep Road*, will be published by Tapsalteerie in October 2021.

*Priyanka Joshi***Like Water**

I knead and I recall
 a time when I was once like water -
 powerful, fluid and free.
 Then I fell into this...hole.
 Parts of me sprinkled down,
 cascading droplets onto a pillowy mound
 of multigrain milled gold.

Irreversibly changed in shape,
 unable to escape,
 the fingers of time began to swirl.
 Coalesced my Self with 7 grains:
 chef, teacher and maid
 playmate and safe space
 entertainer and 24-hour snack bitch.

But I am still water,
 binding these grains together -
 now a multigrain multitasking masterpiece.
 Resilient in this sticky melange of life's new normal,
 where pangs of guilt hit me like fists
 and not-good-enoughs knead me into submission.

So I continue to bend
 adapt myself and mould
 because henceforth, normal is on hold.
 And being chapatti flour isn't such a bad thing,
 for even the humblest of dishes
 can offer tastes of the divine,
 when prepared with gratitude and love.

A round roti rolled
 in circle of trust.
 And in this new heat of life's kitchen,
 I undergo my transformation,
 lay myself down and engineer my re-creation.
 And like the white moon with her scars and imperfections, I will arise.
 Wholesome Brown soul food,
 for these two hungry little bellies, hearts and minds.

Priyanka Joshi is a London-born Wolverhampton based Optometrist and performance poet. She turned to poetry shortly after the birth of her first child, a life event that brought with it much inspiration but more so the essential need for self-expression to heal through post-natal depression. The need to share her story and raise awareness of PND was spurred by the lack of understanding of maternal mental health she encountered within the South-Asian community. Taking to the stage just 2 years ago sparked a love affair for spoken word, going on to become a poetry slam champion and regular at open mics, a member of the Wolverhampton Punjabi Women's Writing Group, and performing in the Wolverhampton literature festival. Reflection, love, identity and mental health are just some of threads running through her fledgling body of work, taking readers and listeners alike on a personal and deeply emotional journey.

Richard C. Bower

Sunshine Smiles Upon My Face

I close my eyes
 Sweet dreams arise
 I listen to the birds
 Listening to every musical verse
 And in the music and dance
 That bursts with complexity and delight
 I open my eyes
 I see vivid colours, in leaves and in flowers
 Amid patterns rejoicing in the garden
 And, like an enchanting carpet beneath my feet
 The ground becomes alive
 Connecting me with the earth, and with the trees
 My body becomes one
 With the sky and the surroundings
 It's motion, it's energy
 Falls behind in memory -
 And looking up
 I see the stars
 Red, blue, and green
 Iridescent colours passing across
 Like living jewellery
 Luminous inwardly
 Breathing and flowing with the same life that's in me
 As all is aligned
 Evoking a sense of beauty
 Like the teeth of a beautiful woman
 As she smiles
 Transposing exuberance
 As everything comes alive
 Within this moment

Richard C. Bower is the international selling author of both 'POSTMODERN' and the newly released 'Sanctuary'. Recognised by UNESCO Nottingham City of Literature and Nottinghamshire County Council as one of the area's most prominent writers. Collaborated on work with BBC Radio, Mansfield Town F.C. and OCD UK amongst others. Described as "Byron, Bukowski and Kerouac" all rolled into one.

*Santosh K Dary***A Better Life**

I remember the life we left behind;
lying under the veranda in warm nights,
listening to Maajis fairy-tales,
saw shooting stars as the fireflies danced.

I remember listening to the night,
the hoots of an owl, whistling of crickets,
the wake up calls from our cockerel
as the blanket of mist lifts for another glorious day.

I remember chasing white butterflies,
in the blossoming mustard fields.
We sat eating sweet sticky mangoes,
under the shade of a giant peepal tree.

I remember crowding around Maaji,
when she milked the bakri.
She let me catch the dhaar,
streamed straight into my mouth.

I remember the farewells to loved ones,
as the train left the platform.
We whispered, waved, our goodbyes,
our chunnis drenched in tears.

I remember the aeroplane journey,

the humming and popping in my ears;
my stomach fluttered with excitement,
we were like birds in migration.

I remember England, my first thoughts,
the never ending gloomy grey clouds
as I breathed in the heavenly air:
I saw angels with golden halos.

I remember living in a crowded house,
behind firmly closed doors.
In shared facilities, chaotic compassion,
diverse languages - understood by all.

I remember when Beeji cooked,
she kept doors, windows firmly shut,
in an attempt to conceal the smell of curry,
to the already hostile neighbours.

I remember sharing with three other children,
lying on an fraying single mattress,
trying to block out the cries, babbles
of a new born and her mother's sighs.

I remember recreating a new life,
like altering a garments to fit my size;
thriving in tradition, transforming cultures,
like a variety of flowers, in a bouquet.

Today I review my life like a film,
enriched memories over five decades.

I smile, speak in the mutual language of love,
I've embraced this journey to a better life.

Punjabi Words

Maaji grandmother

Bakri Goat

Daar stream

Bijee Mother

Chunnis a long scarf

Weaving Dreams

For no found reason, I begin to weave;
removing the layers of 'if and buts',
mulling over the maybes, possibilities,
gliding through darkness to find dawn.

For no found reason, I begin to weave,
to escape the cage that bounds,
in uncharted territory, no shelter in sight.
lost on journey, as my tears forms rivers.

For no found reason I begin to weave,
searching for blooms in snowstorms;
to feel their scent forever.
Let healing to be done and start afresh.

For no found reason, I begin to weave
in the rain, happy rainbows.
Stars sparkling like my *koka*
treading on thorns to magic places.

For no found reason, I begin to weave;
reach out, be boundless, limitless
like the seconds on a clock.
Magic rugs lift, smiling like my *bindi*.

For no found reason - I have woven;
dropped stitches, stained with loss,
held together with the golden thread.
Done! My dreams have been woven.

Punjabi words

Koka – Nose jewel

Bindi – Forehead jewel

Santosh K Dary is a member of the Punjabi Women's Writing Group and has attended a creative writing course run by Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Wolverhampton. She has read her stories at the Wolverhampton and Ironbridge Literature Festivals and at events celebrating Diwali and Vaisakhi with other Punjabi Women. Santosh has contributed to collections of Japanese poetry, featured in *Ripening Cherries* published by Offa's Press. Earlier this year the Arts Foundry published her childhood experience in the *Living Memory Book* and *The Faith Initiative* magazine has also included her poem 'A Divine Journey' in its publication. Santosh took early retirement from social work with the local council office to spend time with her family.

Chris Agee

The Rainbow Poem

Well, when we finally came back again, there
it was: *the cypress absence*, ramifying. But some days
later, something else happened: a rainbow arcing
over Brdo and our now-solo cypress, for
the first time ever (for us). As if clarifying
the beauties of absence. Like the one
in “The Village” the afternoon of Miriam’s death
when hailstones darkened our windshield for good.

The Cypress Poem

Yes, we lost that second cypress to the saw
of an idiot neighbour: an immense squarish one,

paired with ours

like an old couple reaching across an untended wall.

But soon enough

I saw three other smaller cypress above another neighbour's
stone-roofed shed, like slim arrowheads or svelte swords

I had never thought about or dwelt upon. A lesson in itself:
vistas of incremental change after a great clean-cut change.

The Dove Poem

Because we were late, or later, neither
 the golden oriole nor the blue-fronted jays, almond-seeking,
 came this year – but something else did
 come: the beautiful doves, in a heart-flutter
 and flurry of purple grey and white insignia flashing
 in flocks over rooftops under gloomy cloud...

Lesson? *Listen*: It's Vojka's oft-times

Always expect the unexpected. Like the small
 perfect cat that walked into the night – and never
 came back. Or this, the poem.

Chris Agee is a poet, essayist, photographer and editor. He was born in San Francisco on a US Navy hospital ship and grew up in Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island. After high school at Phillips Academy Andover and a year in Aix-en-Provence, France, he attended Harvard University and since graduation has lived in Ireland. His third collection of poems, *Next to Nothing* (Salt, 2008), was shortlisted in Britain for the 2009 Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry, and its sequel, *Blue Sandbar Moon* (The Irish Pages Press), appeared in 2018. He is the Editor of *Irish Pages*, and edited *Balkan Essays* (The Irish Pages Press, 2016), the sixth volume of Hubert Butler's essays, published simultaneously in Croatian by the Zagreb publishing house Fraktura. His new poetic work, *Trump Rant* (The Irish Pages Press, 2021), has just been published. He lives in Belfast, and divides his time between Ireland, Scotland and Croatia.

*Elizabeth Uter***Maybe Dreams...**

Everything is alive, energised by spirit.
 The dream may last seconds, hours, lifetimes.
 I marvel, wonder at my thoughts, images, sensations
 cherished in my mind in my rapid-eye sleepy time.

What dimension did I sleep in?
 Did I travel to the fifth and back?
 Forget my dreams of winding city streets
 where skyscrapers hunt like dinosaurs,
 ruling pinked-in skies with orange dots.
 What's my spot in a zig-zagged Urban Dreamtime?

They say sleeping, dreaming is like dying,
 I don't believe - it's travelling to the same place but different times
 the gate of entry opened by the original seed of me.
 for my life in the world is faraway, illusion.
 Here I see, understand the true nature of the universe.
 Dreams, epiphanies, cosmologies Gods, angels, aliens,
 others, diverse ways of making life manifest
 - all within the pattern. Thinking is the key
 - at one and the same time - there is good,
 - not so good, bad, not so bad
 - but balance is sublime.

Everything's impermanent, changing
 - oracles, visions, discoveries, in a flash.
 Explained as 'signs and miracles 'happening on each plane.
 The orbiting moon pulling me
 to this sudden awakening, of a spiritual nature,
 whether from object, scene, event, or memory in mind
 — there is knowledge, insight, surprising
 when the mind suddenly grasps what it already knows.

Light seeps into my eyes, the dream dissolves,
 my third is open - I am back from rides to the other sides -
 in two shakes of that funny lamb's tail.
 Which one is real? Does it matter?
 It's immaterial then real ... the words and the Ouroborus'
 hurdy-gurdy strikes up a favoured tune,
 it plays: 'The Hurly-Burly 'once again.

Elizabeth Uter is an award winning poet, winning the 2018 Poem for Slough Competition: <http://www.bringyourownfuture.net/poetry-competition/>. She's taught poetry workshops for Farrago Poetry, read her work at Queen's Park Literary Festival, 2019. Is published: Bollocks To Brexit Poetry Anthology: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bollocks-Brexit-Anthology-Poems-Fiction/dp/1916459331>; Reach and Sarasvati magazines; Bewildering Poems with The Willesden Junction Poets: https://www.brent2020.co.uk/site/assets/files/1015/bewildering_by_willesden_junction_poets_small_file.pdf; video poems for the online literary magazine 'Bakings': <http://www.thebakehouse.info/index.php/bakings>; Commissioned works: 2 Brent Archives at Willesden Library/Learning Through The Arts exhibitions - 'Back From The Western Front, The Forgotten Soldiers Of WW1, '2017-2018 and 'The Story of Windrush Migrants, 'April - May 2019; 'In The Deep 'for Verse in Dialog/Apples and Snakes/University College London performance at the Free Word Centre.

Simon Fletcher

Gall Wasp Takes a Bow at ‘The Globe’

[For Cherry & Kuli]

I know, I know, it’s true that I’m the cause
of all this thespian action on the boards;

if I had not produced such marvellous galls
there’d be no power-crazing climbs, no falls,

no tales of love or blood-soaked tragedies,
no pastoral or doubtful comedies.

The ink that’s ground from our grubs’ homes
is mixed with soot to write of castles, thrones

and all the other studied whys and whats
of man and monarch, their unending plots.

The Chettles of this world can’t get along
without my golden dust or print a song

or sonnet on their finest paper, no,

without my mark there'd simply be no show!

Notes: A tiny wasp, *Andricus kollari*, causes marble galls on oak, collected for their high tannin content, used in ink-making. Henry Chettle was a printer in Elizabethan London.

Daisy Riot

In May the daisies riot in the grass
above my house. Their white gloss florets sing,
their golden button hearts print golden rings
of pollen kisses neat on all who pass.

My gloomy neighbour, Mr Order, hates
their youthful verve. They're far too frantic, free,
so bundles them in wheelie bins to be
re-cycled with the trampled garden waste.

I nurture them, each one, and like the bees
adore to see the daisies in full bloom,
they scatter light and love, bring vavavoom,
and fill the house with happiness and ease.

Yet when we're both no more, have passed our hours,
we'll both be pushing up the vivid flowers.

Common Spotted

The pale pink orchids mark this meadow,
stretch as far as eyes can see,
the margin of the limestone cliff.

The purple scribbles, looping lines
and patterned dots on lower lips
are hieroglyphs for fly and bee

and tell them charming nectared tales
of all they want, a birthday list;
oblique as cuneiform to me.

Refuge

Capitalism's gratuitous wars and sanctioned greed have jeopardized the planet and filled it with refugees. Arundhati Roy

In warm, high meadows, well above the beach,
we sat and heard their stories raining on
a bone-dry afternoon.

They talked about injustices, the lack
of water, food in baked and desperate zones
we knew so little of.

Their attitude was testing, near the mark,
as if they knew who'd pushed them to the edge,
to arid, marginal lands.

Our comfort blinded us to their distress,
perhaps we should have done a little more
to understand their pain,

what caused such anguish, homelessness and fear,
perhaps we didn't want to know their lives,
their dark and hungry mouths.

Simon Fletcher is a widely-published poet and writer who lives in Shropshire, England. He's manager of the ACE - supported Offa's Press: www.offaspess.co.uk. He's won various prizes and awards and read his poetry on BBC Radio Shropshire and the BBC Asian Network. He MCs the monthly online literature event *Virtual Voices*. Simon's read his poetry in Britain and abroad, including in Pakistan, Norway and Germany. Since 1994 four full collections of poetry have been published. He's also collaborated with Debjani Chatterjee and Basir Sultan Kazmi, as *Mini Mushaira*, on two joint anthologies. He was a literature development officer from 2001-2013, in Wolverhampton Libraries, and set up Offa's Press in 2010 to promote and publish poetry in the West Midlands. His most recent collection, *Close to Home*, Headland, 2015, was described as "beautiful, poignant, joyful poetry." He's recently been a 'poet on loan' in West Midland libraries.

*Ali Whitelock***the town itself, let us admit, is ugly***

lunch time. day 347. i slice my fish thin, fry it in crisco. it comes out a little dry though perfectly edible. i do not take a photo do not post it on instagram i have never baked my own sourdough bread. the man who drives the grocery truck will bring new fish in three days along with the kleen-o-pine, hand sanitiser, toilet rolls—assuming there is no current reenactment of culloden in aisle nine. in the old days we rubbed newspaper together to make it soft, hung the fragile sheets on a nail poking out of the toilet wall. when we came out of the toilet, mum's bend over so i can read the headlines never grew old. but who has newspaper at home these days? an ipad streaming the news in h.d. cannot be used for anything other than reading the news in h.d. now mum's stuck in scotland while i'm in australia and qantas regret to announce there are no available flights at this time please check back again later. mum says she's worried we won't meet again. i tell her of course we'll meet again now spotify's bombarding me with vera lynn. in japan they sold more copies of the plague in one month than the past thirty one years combined, i mean who'd want to read a book about a plague during an actual plague? when my copy arrived i masked up, sanitised the package, peeled off the final frontier in its plastic defence. to be honest i found the story slower than the meserve glacier, duller than the last flicker of the imaginary candle i refuse to hold to it — am i even allowed to say that? few of us dare to be honest these days because, you know, cancel culture. i got one third the way through camus' open quotes close-quotes masterpiece & tossed it aside in favour of the crown on netflix which i always said i'd never watch but you get so bored. i liked season three better than season four. i ended up feeling sorry for charles. i only mention the fish now because in the old days i ate so little you see. in the slow moving coup of this new-normal it's my head that head rumbles with hunger while my days blacken like sliced avocado oxidising on the chopping board of my existence & cravings i cannot satisfy stagger like my drunk father through the deserted streets in the deprived council estate of my mind. but it is not all doom & gloom. for example, my dietary intake of animal protein has increased exponentially. it is an achievement of sorts. if the vaccine under delivers there is comfort in knowing i may end this life with increased muscle mass, less brittle nails—perhaps even the thick luscious hair of my dreams.

*from Albert Camus' *The Plague*.

**in
the
event
of
a
lack
of
oxygen.**

HOLD the earth in your hands / be careful—she is hot / talk
to her tenderly the way you might your mother at the end of
her days / honour her / place her somewhere she might rest/
perhaps the mantle piece between your bone-china swallow
mid-flight & your fake brass barometer the shape of a ship's
wheel that will not steer us out of the storm we are in /
despite her dishevelment, tell her how lovely she looks /
offer her tea / a scone / horlicks if it still exists / slip her
feet into soft slippers / massage her shoulders rounded
from the burden you have placed on them / cradle her in
your arms /
now go to the mountains / yes, *go* / facetime will not suffice /
tell them you are sorry / return with no selfies—this is not the
time / now go to the rivers / listen to them / let them tell you
their stories / do not interrupt with your lies about your
recycling / like you are not guilty of slipping glass jars
& clean cardboard into the wrong bin / now get down on
your knees & beg their forgiveness / do not worry their
banks are no longer muddy your levis will stay dry /
understand in the event of a lack of oxygen no yellow
masks will drop from the sky / remove your stilettos /
leave all your personal belongings behind / tip toe

past earth's bed / leave a note under her pillow / apologise
profusely / tell her you'd drunk too much / that you weren't
in your right mind / that you didn't realise just how much
you'd loved her till she was gone / speak when she speaks to
you / if your shame will allow it make eye contact / answer
her questions with an honesty that will feel alien to you:

yes we had ample opportunity / yes money was more
important than water & air / yes we're tired of our empty
promises too / yes coal yes carbon yes methane yes
plastic / yes dollars yes pounds yes euros yes yen / yes
vegan yes sweat shops yes you warned us no we didn't
listen / yes we saw the signs / yes we ignored them /
yes the bees are in default / yes the banks are foreclosing
their hives / yes we should have planted more lavender
more rosemary more bottle brush / yes flooding yes fire
yes species extinction / yes we should have been kinder /
yes we should have stopped to think before we fucked her /
yes we should have pulled out sooner / yes oral

contraceptives yes STDs / yes we should have used a
condom / yes we are sorry / yes look at this mess now.

Ali Whitelock is a Scottish poet and writer living on the south coast of Sydney. Her latest poetry collection, *'the lactic acid in the calves of your despair'* is published by Wakefield Press, Adelaide. Her debut collection *'and my heart crumples like a coke can'* (also Wakefield Press) has a forthcoming (2021) UK edition by Polygon, UK. Her memoir *'Poking seaweed with a stick and running away from the smell'* (Wakefield Press & Polygon) was launched at Sydney Writers Festival to critical acclaim. Ali has read at festivals and events around the world including The Edinburgh International Book Festival (2019) and The Edinburgh Fringe (2018 & 2019).

Holyrood Haiku*Christopher Jupp*

dawn stillness

a warbler's song tips

the tallest reed

meadow breath

sifting the willow floss

a titmouse

fog
only the ghost
of a seagullwinter saga
from the crag's crevice
raven croaksbasalt columns
from below the cairn
a *pibroch*

Christopher Jupp has been a tutor in philosophy at the universities of Memphis, Stoke-on-Trent, Edinburgh, Stirling and St. Andrews. He is a published translator, essayist and haikuist. Over the course of the last two decades he has conducted multiple bird surveys for the *British Trust for Ornithology* and *The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds*. Two collections of his haiku and haibun, *Ionascapes* and *Sequentiae*, are forthcoming with Mushroom Leaf Press.

*Shanta Acharya***All You Can Do**

Here's your thunder stolen by others,
your losses, ships that never return.

Here's your life passing slowly by,
your body of song promising all it can do.

Here's your heart reaching out to others,
your thoughts fresh rays of sun.

Here's your dream scattered across the sky,
falling stars not knowing what they can do.

Here's hope, gold at the edge of the rainbow,
casting a spell on us as we go.

Here's your fear walking in front of you,
thinking there is nothing you can do.

Here's my hand, place yours in mine,
I'll show you the world is yours.

Here's your true love waiting for you,
your tree of life, radiant in bloom.

Here's what you do, what you can do,
it's your future, make of it what you will –

Here's life in all its squalor and splendor,
here's your world and all you can do.

[From *What Survives Is The Singing*; 2020]

Aspects of Westonbirt Arboretum

If you can discover the first leaves of honeysuckle unfolding,
fly fearless on a magic carpet of snowdrops in spring.

If you can rejoice with the flowering cherries in April,
tall columns of mahogany-red bark crowned by clouds
of blush white blossom, fragrant brides against the sky.

If you can be startled by clumps of primroses in bloom,
by bluebells waist-high, a purple haze on the woodland's floor,
by orchids, wild garlic, and dandelions, you will encounter
the spirit of the arboretum exuding from each leaf and bower.

If you can watch the bumble bee tumble out of a foxglove's throat
and hear the laughter of Silk Wood ringing through The Link.

If you can rest in the venerable oak's dappled shade
in the tranquillity of filigreed foliage,
mosaics of maples in bronze, copper and ochre,
a thousand and one shades of newly born green,

you will have a vision of heaven with all its munificence –
rhododendrons and azaleas, camellias and magnolias,
clusters of pink and red, mauve and purple, white and yellow.

If you can sit under the autumnal canopy on a mattress of leaves
as the afternoon sun refracts the rich, kaleidoscopic colours
and hear the excited voices of children blend in the breeze.

If you can listen to the sound of acorns falling,
worship the Japanese maples in crimson, gold and ruby,
flaming lanterns against the sombre yew at dusk –
you will be one with the universe, free.

[From *Imagine: New and Selected Poems*; 2017]

Something To Do With Love

Surveying the locked down map of my world,
 windows opening to landscapes of uncertainty,
 Time dances like a god in the changing light.
 Dwelling in possibility, I take nothing for granted –
 accept life as it comes, not the way I want it.
 Something to do with love, a prayer to protect
 us from an innocent touch. As the death toll rises,
 so does fear and courage. Key workers keep carrying
 on, laying bare the injustices of our world.
 Knowing there is no going back, we hang on
 with the furloughed, believing in blue skies, bird song,
 and spring in the dreadful winter of our hearts.
 Hope lives like a virus born with a message –
 Life's a gift, a thing of beauty, cherish it.

Shanta Acharya, born and educated in Orissa, India, won a scholarship to Oxford, where she was awarded a doctoral degree in English. She was a visiting scholar at Harvard University before joining an American investment bank in London. Her doctoral study, *The Influence of Indian Thought on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, was published in 2001. A poet, novelist, reviewer and scholar, her poems have been widely anthologised, appearing in major publications in the UK, USA, and India. The author of twelve books, her latest poetry collections are *What Survives Is The Singing* (2020) and *Imagine: New and Selected Poems* (2017). Her novel, *A World Elsewhere*, was published in 2015.

Brian D'Arcy

It's Ecology - stupid.

Loud I heard a woman's laughter.
Stripped of light, stars fled the heavens.
No cruci-fiction on the hill.
Guided by the umpire's finger,
Mother Nature stamped and strutted.

She who laughs last laughs last alone.

No Ice - Scream

Rebels chasing failing freedom.
Heads hiding deep in shifting sand.
Tempting as a poisoned apple -
Abundance of absurdity.
Existential - not a reason.

No fairy tale, No ice - high C

Inheritance

Church bells rusting in the silence.

Shattered glass lies suicidal.

Blossoms shrivel in the lost-land.

Broken dreams no longer matter.

Togetherness now worlds apart.

Children whisper to their shadows.

Brian D'Arcy was born in Rossendale, worked in the cavalry, aeronautics, and higher education before retiring from Sheffield Hallam University. He is a prize-winning poet for children and adults. His latest collections include: *Ghost Horses Dancing* and *Hidden Haiku*. He chairs The Healing Word, a cancer support group, and is Treasurer of Mini Mushaira.

*Debasish Lahiri***Nocturne before Rain**

The message on the mantelpiece read:

“fear death by night”.

after a lifetime

of fearing death by light

it was about time.

i wonder

who left the message:

must be one of a party of straggling stars

out of chime with the universe,

with soft hamstrings of light

lingering

on every patch of ether,

feeling all the time

what stepping on nothing is like

till they are out of breath too.

this must be a message from the very last of that crew,

the last star

to beat the first of the October rain.

Something is stuck in the clock’s throat.

alarm bells are ringing,

somewhere.

what toll shall the clock’s cough,

or gasp,

take on time?

time like the stars is fresh out of breath –

it is best to hit time in the gut,

now.

between hard pants,

doubled over with pain,
what might time's swear words be?

When a man dies, or a candle,
a cold wick of breath
burns darkly
like the memory of flame
in the nose.
when tears die in the night
no comet brooms through the blind lawn of the milky way,
no rain wets fumbling memory on a starless porch,
no light or sound gives away
the passing of tears,
undead for eternity
like fire
in the gutter of a candle.

Ripples

When rage beats dawn on the edge of cities
 a hollow note,
 an unremarkable ripple,
 is raised in potholes and sewers,
 in ponds that abscond during the mustering of time
 in cities,
 in rivers that coil with water
 as though guilty of disturbing the poise of a city
 with their seawardness.

I sit beside a pond –
 self-deprecating green camouflage
 on blue skyvisage –
 I sit beside a pond,
 two misnomers consoling each other
 at dawn,
 fugitives
 from the witness of televisions and history
 and watch
 an unremarkable ripple.

What careless stone or frolic fin
 or the painful power that turns the once-loved
 into heavy objects
 raised this ripple,
 I shall never know.
 I watch an unremarkable ripple
 doomed like Leander in schoolboy myths
 never to reach the shore
 where Hero or the morning cormorant

would watch with inscrutable grief.

Ripples that make no landfall,
 ripples
 that never become the tremor in the morning tea
 or the tilt and the spill of the red gut of grape
 in a fine evening Bordeaux:
 isn't history a naked Archimedes
 rough-landing in the bath tub,
 wondering,
 "What a wave do I raise"?

I watch an unremarkable ripple,
 unfinished, unmade by the water's call to calm.
 I watch ripples,
 shape-shifters –
 all the million heartbreaks
 the million lumps in the throat
 the million catches in the breathing,
 all stilled by the frown of Father Time.

A ripple is a refuge,
 a cry, the last,
 against that curfew against cries.

Next time you see a ripple without origin
 on a sheet of water
 pass not by in your city haste.
 Watch it
 lunge desperately for the shore of another heart,
 and fail:
 who knows, it might be the gasp and the tear

you tried holding back,
and failed,
last night.

Debasish Lahiri teaches English Literature at Lal Baba College, under the University of Calcutta. His poems have appeared in *The Journal of the Poetry Society of India*, *Muse-India*, *Indian Literature*, *Inkapture*, *The Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *Six Seasons Review*, *Byword*, *The Punch Magazine* and *The French Literary Review* among others; in French translation in *Siècle 21*, *Europe*, *Recours au Poème & La Traductière*; and in Portuguese in *NERVO: Colectivo de Poesia*. His four books of poetry are: *First Will & Testament* (Writers Workshop, 2012), *No Waiting like Departure* (Authors Press, 2016), *Tinder Tender: Poems of Love & Loitering* (Authors Press, 2018), *Poppies in the Post & Other Poems* (Authors Press, 2020) & *Legion of Lost Letters* (Black Spring Press, UK, 2021 forthcoming). Lahiri is the recipient of the *Prix-du Merite*, Naji Naaman Literary Prize 2019. He is an honorary member of Maison Naaman pour la Culture.

*Charlie Gracie***Since March 2020**

Four times I've touched a human
aside from the incidental brush of hand.

Magi, as he slung his bodhran onto his back
for the Balquidder road
in the grey smir
a tìoraidh on his strong shooder.

A hug for our Katie and her man
a squeeze for the life of me
on the news of a child next year.

Graham. A handshake on the death of his mother.
Nearing a hunner years she was
when the guid folks that saw her off wove flowers
between her fingers for his final visit.

Charlie Gracie grew up in Baillieston, Glasgow. His poetry collections, *Good Morning*, (2010) and *Tales from the Dartry Mountains* (2020), were published by *Diehard Press*. His first novel, *To Live With What You Are* (2019) was published by *Postbox Press*. His work has appeared in a range of anthologies and journals, with some listed for literary prizes, including the Bath Novel Award, Cambridge Short Story Prize, and Bridport Poetry and Short Story Prizes. He was the 2020 official Scribe for the Federation of Writers (Scotland) and is a former Chair of the Scottish Writers' Centre. He now lives on the edge of the Trossachs.

*Anjana (Jhuma) Sen***Season of Disquiet**

You? Hey You? Yes, you!
You, my young Self from last year
let me try and get one thing clear.
If you knew then what I now know
which way would your 2020 go?
When you were at the Oval last June
chanting at the Men in Blue,
cricket slogans were the only tune
not, this, that was awaiting you.
In the theatre that night, bright city light
was there no two-meter rule?
Social distancing, we call it now
no office, no shop, no café, no school
Did you know this Virus would come
and change the fabric of our lives?
Did you know so many would go,
it's a gamble who survives.
How young you were this last summer
Cocktails, Goa, Monsoon.
Your last vacation for a while
then the nightmare started soon.
Your parents beat a hasty retreat
and dodged this Covid bullet
While folk died and cried, denied, defied
and now flounder together in it.
But don't worry, we braved it out and isolated
meeting friends to stave off doom.
We write and read and heal ourselves
in this fantastic world of Zoom.
So you now know and so do I
there has got to be a reason.
Spring may come and spring may go
we will ALL survive this Season.

Anjana (Jhuma) Sen started writing (semi-seriously) two years ago, when struggling with an empty nest in her fifties. She stumbled upon Eastwood Writers, a local writing group affiliated with the Scottish Association of Writers. Encouraged by a few awards (Falkirk and Eastwood Trophy), she decided to delete the above 'semi' and begin to get serious about writing. She participated in the 2020 Poetry Marathon and the Scottish Writers Centre Roulette Speakeasy 2020 and she is currently waiting for the anthology to be published, which will feature a few of her poems. She grew up an army brat in India and gained her degrees in English there. After a brief career in advertising as a copy writer, she chose to follow her husband around the world. Living in China for two years, and Zimbabwe for five, before 'settling' in Glasgow in the year 2000.

Sue Whitmore

The Book of Virus

This book from the Ancient of Days -
describes a time of plague, of masks,
of portents, pomanders and bad air,
days when god-bound paranoia drove us to our knees.
Now it challenges our proud technologies.

Nightly on our screens the secular priests
intone at lecterns, looking grim -
and rattled faith is somewhat reassured by number,
for humbled hubris doesn't suit the modern heart
struggling with fate's untimely whim.

And so we live with rising graphs,
industrial scale losses, Intensive Care,
failed algorithms spawning digital crosses.
No touching child, or friend, or mother -
now we must be cautious with each other.

As in a different book, another age, another life
isolated figures in de-peopled streets
scuttle off to anxiously home-cage.
Those with gardens re-discover Eden for a while
and for a while the planet breathes.

But those confined to homes where life is vile
and dark frustration seethes
have endless weeks of fear to grieve,
trapped in a lost paradise
where Adam beats up Eve.

Poet and artist **Sue Whitmore** studied at University College London, Central and Wimbledon Schools of Art. Word and image in childhood books have led her to a lifelong commitment to imagination and the human experience expressed through both poetry and art. Her multiple lives have also included theatre design and printmaking. She exhibits widely in Britain and abroad, including the Royal Academy, and has been a member of Greenwich Printmakers for many years. She enjoys performing her poetry, which has been broadcast and published in many journals, and convenes a Stanza of the Poetry Society. In 2012 she was made 'Champion of Culture' by Art in Business for her contribution to the arts. Publications: '*Sue, Realist: A Selection of Poems & Drawings*', 1992 and '*Blood, Fish & Bone*' [*Books I & II*], 2017, a pamphlet, '*Human Interest*' - commended in IDP's Geoff Stevens Memorial Competition in 2018.

*Riddhiman Roy***Homecoming**

For an entire year I have been waiting,
Looking forward to my untimely rising.
It isn't just another palsy vacation,
No, it is my holy Invocation.
And in the air I hear the prayers forthcoming,
It is almost time for my homecoming.

I descend on the rolling white meadows,
Take rest under the lofty tree's cool shadows,
I run around near my Father's foothills,
Reliving all my childhood thrills.
And in the air I hear the bells forthcoming,
It is almost time for my homecoming.

As I walk through the muddy lanes,
I see myself, through the artists' window panes.
Here I am made of straw and clay,
The artists' hands beautifully at play.
And in the air I hear the conch-shell forthcoming,
It is almost time for my homecoming.

Upon lofty mansions and narrow lanes I descend,

Upon courtesan's houses and decorated Pandals I descend.

All religious and gender barriers I transcend,

All women are me and I am all women in the end.

And in the air I hear the drum beats forthcoming,

It is almost time for my homecoming.

And then you bid me farewell with tear in your eyes,

Smear red vermilion on my face and whisper prayers in goodbyes.

In me you see your mother and your daughter,

But yet you go to immerse me in the water.

And in the air I smell the disdain forthcoming,

I will come again for another homecoming.

As I leave I hear women getting beaten,

I see young girls by society's lust getting eaten.

And those mouths that have abused me,

Hear this, your prayers are poison to me.

And in a world where I see misogyny forthcoming,

Will I be welcomed again for another homecoming?

Separation

The meandering Yamuna flowed,
Through Vrindavan it bent and bowed,
Her dark water as if reflecting the disdain,
As Vrindavan bid the dark-skinned boy farewell in pain.

They had always known that His stay would be short,
But every moment in their lives, immense joy He brought,
Remembering how butter He stole and His friends He fed,
Bittersweet tear everyone without exception shed.

There was one face in the crowd He couldn't see,
For the last time maybe, with Her, alone He wanted to be.
He took off from the crowd and went inside the woods,
From His waist He took out his flute and cross legged He stood.

Ayan Ghosh's wife sat at home and churned milk for butter,
She wept without consolation, today all Her tears were bitter.
It was as if not the milk but Her heart was being churned,
She couldn't believe that Her love, He, had spurned.

And in the moonlight's trance they had danced all night,
His dark skin reflected and radiated the love and shone bright.
And in the morning, forests of flowers they walked through.

Had his love only been fun and play? Was it ever true?

In the woods his pink lips He put to the flute,

And She knew it was for Her, She was absolute.

All Her rage She lay aside, not a second longer She spent,

The music carried Her, off Her feet, to answer love's beckoning She went.

And there He stood beautiful as ever, benevolence emanating,

In the darkness of the dusk, He stood, love radiating.

They did not speak, just on His shoulder, She placed Her head;

The flute played songs of love, loss and life; their hearts heavy it made.

She sat on a rock, and He sat at Her feet;

In their hearts they gave love a seat.

And the river and time, gently trickled by,

They had lost themselves in each other's eyes.

It was moonlight again and they danced their last dance.

It was only ecstasy; pain of separation did not stand a chance.

And when the birds chirped and the water reflected the first rays of sun,

They wiped their tears, they knew their time had run.

She did not cry anymore, as near Her feet He knelt on the ground,

For the last time the flute played a mournful sound.

He had said that it is Her love that played His flute,

It was the tune of love, always pure, never dissolute.

She was his muse and music, the flute was never again played,

At the feet of His love, His flute, with great reverence He laid.

And She looked at Him, and saw a teardrop in the corner of his eye,

She knew His love was true, it was celestial, and She will always be His Rai.

They walked hand in hand, blessing the surrounding with a divine persona,

Amidst Gods and men alike chanting in love, Radhe-Krishna,

In praise, Radhe-Krishna,

In reverence, Radhe-Krishna.

The Storm

There was a storm brewing,
And rage it was spewing,
I could smell it from afar,
It was particularly bizarre.
For a storm wasn't supposed to come today,
But it came without a warning anyway.
And as it made its way towards me,
It shook the earth and uprooted every tree.
It was as if Mahadev's cosmic dance,
No other thoughts today stood a chance.
The thick black clouds roared like a monster,
The crackle of the thunder sounded sinister,
It was as if the oceans were being churned again,
Except today there wasn't any elixir; only Halahal to gain.
Halahal was spewed all over my world,
Dousing it in poison as confusion whirled.
I knew I could stop it, only if I tell the truth,
But who will listen to me, it'll only make me a monster uncouth.
Every time I gain confidence to speak,
I am ignored, other topics over me peak.
And every time as I sit by the window,
I realise that I have forever been stuck in limbo.
I am stuck between being who I am not and being who I want to be,

And as I light a stick of cancer, I watch the smokes that are freer than me.
They can take any form and shape, there is no one to judge,
They can escape the grills of my window while I can't budge.
I think the poison of these thoughts, make my brain invoke the storm,
As progressively, to engulf me, it becomes bigger and bigger and bigger in form.

Riddhiman Roy, B.Com graduate from St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, is the founding president of the Literary Society in St. Xavier's Collegiate School. He has won numerous recitation competitions nationally at various cultural festivals. He has participated in various poetry readings organised by Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library and has been invited to read his poems at Yuva Sahiti organised by Sahitya Akademi, India. He is working on his first poetry collection for publication.

*Em Strang***Snow**

Beloved, the snow is swirling and I am
a single flake, falling. Each flake
alongside me sings as it falls
and I too am singing. The whole field
is resplendent with song.

I look for you here, but there is no looking.

My eyes feel you instead, in the deep
roots beneath rock and grass,
where I have melted into us.

What need is there for courage now?

Us

Here in this deep pool
inside the old silver river
a single fish leaps
in the moonlight,
like a lover calling
her Beloved.
All around the stars
are still and the water
is loose to her shape,
lapping, easeful,
or the river is a dream
of the eternal
longing to be whole,
a single multiverse,
caught between the banks
of one reality and the next,
calling and leaping
up

Em Strang is a poet, novelist and founding director of Scottish charity, Three Streams, offering workshops and retreats in Creativity, Contemplation & Action. Her writing preoccupations are with nature, spirituality and the relationship between the human and nonhuman. Em's first full collection, *Bird-Woman*, was published by Shearsman in October 2016, was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Best First Collection Prize and won the 2017 Saltire Poetry Book of the Year Award. Her second collection, *Horse-Man*, was published in September 2019. Her first novel, *Quinn*, was shortlisted for the 2019 Fitzcarraldo Editions Novel Prize.

*Donal McLaughlin**from: a steady trickle*

Author's note: I do not keep a diary. Since July 2019, however – influenced by a young, emerging writer I very much rate: Sean McMenemy – I have at times written short, third-person narratives that Sean has labelled *The McLocks Diaries*. Initially, I imagined that these (sporadic) pieces might be a way of writing about Glasgow but, for the past year, their main focus has been my lockdown walks in the local countryside. More recently, I have been writing a ‘steady trickle’ of haiku, inspired sometimes by walks, sometimes by what I have been reading, watching, listening to. The following are taken from that second, unintended, now on-going diary. A date is provided only where appropriate.

embracing winter?

so much bloody easier

if trump's voted out

24oct2020

*

grey wagtail

twerks at its reflection

tail oh-so-erect

*

thaw after the frost:

path back to squelching / a

peely-wally wren

*

...summer anywhere:

winter this out & we can

summer anywhere

*

christmas day need

to see buzzard, wagtails, deer:

strictly one-way just

*

...have mercy on us

and on the whole world – mum’s plea

daily at three

*

DUP MP

forgets tae “un-mute” –

schaden freude pur ur whit

*

catch it unawares

before day takes over

a world still asleep

*

survival –

the most any of us

can ask for

*

Acknowledgments

‘Embracing Winter’ was the theme of the programme *Out of Doors*, on Radio Scotland, the weekend the clocks went back. / ‘summer anywhere’ builds on something Seamus Heaney said in an interview in 1973 – as highlighted by the poet & critic Hayden Murphy in his Christmas card to friends last year. / ‘have mercy on us’ uses a response taken from ‘The Divine Mercy’, a novena recited by believers at three o’clock, the ‘Hour of Great Mercy’. / The DUP MP in question appeared on *The View*, on BBC Northern Ireland, on 14 January 2021. / The final two poems were found in Jessie Kesson’s *The White Bird Passes*, and Billy O’Callaghan’s *Life Sentences*, respectively.

Donal McLaughlin is the author of two short story collections: *an allergic reaction to national anthems & other stories* (Argyll), and *beheading the virgin mary, and other stories* (Dalkey Archive). A founding member of the Scottish Writers’ Centre, he is a recipient of the Robert Louis Stevenson Memorial Award, was Scottish PEN’s first *écrivain sans frontières*, and is a former Hawthornden Fellow. As a translator, he was shortlisted for the Best Translated Book Award (USA) in 2013, and awarded the Max Geilinger Prize in 2015 for his translations of Swiss fiction, many of which have been published by Naveen Kishore’s Seagull Books in Kolkata. That Donal’s passion for short forms extends to haiku is now no longer a secret.

*S. J. Litherland***Breath of the Virus**

Frost on the lawn retreating
before the spring sun. It says I'm
not substantial I'm pencilled in.

The birds are at their happiest
courting in the sky they
have time for it. Spring undeterred

by blight on humans suffering
when disease is airborne
on the wing. The fate

of the planet is arbitrary
the weak will go and the strong.
The half life of the virus

on the breath pencil strokes
of life pencilled in a sketch
not quite finished interrupted.

A half soul seeks its page
to write, it's so old it has no
thought except commandment

to seed the earth messenger
not the message returning to
first days stammering, stuttering.

Wrote its incomplete script,
its forerunner pencil marks,
the ghost of a beginning

an error of linkage. Such are
stumblings of life the awoken
twist of symmetry division

the advent of the host to be.

In Abandoned Grounds

Evening light behind black trees and one bird
dark-winged glides across the beauty of winter.
I walk here through seasons, each bench enamelled
with a name. Art and war were housed together.
Benches left like tombstones in a graveyard.
A new housing estate will strip the scene
of memorials and the lake not spared.
Cold wind on New Year's Day, a dousing keen
air not to raise hopes high, keep them in place,
hands in pockets, head down, comfort from crows,
single black question marks stalk without grace,
they ask for truth on a wildscape of grass.
The crow unfavoured by the world or word
is writing the script today as Corvid.

Isolation

for my four grandsons

The sky's flimsiest clouds could not be
fabricated, not by all the endeavours
of finest silks or muslins. High winds
had spun and re-spun countless threads
in gossamer of different weights.

The clouds' finesse free to all,
the skies empty of planes, *look up*

the moon is rising in a veil, nature
is grandstanding, the spring of no games,
no cricket, no whites on grass, sky
melodies of palest blue and gauze.

The trees are turning green, a fuzz
of spring, the trees like young men
in their step, the sap in their limbs,

like grandsons at Eastertide, like them.

Nostalgia

for Linda Saunders

Dear friend we can't undo the lockdown

of nostalgia. We were young when we met.

We walked through the garlic woods of Durham,
the white streams, swam in fissures between rocks

on the hills, walked our lives and our language

into memory like a cinema reel which starts
without warning; the projectionist
in the high up office has a cupboard full.

Deep moments pushed up from bare ground.

They were phantoms vanishing as they came
like the sirens over the trees to the hospital.

What we learn, the past will insist

that memories live in rooms quite apart.

S. J. Litherland is working on her 8th collection while living alone and self-isolating in a new property during the pandemic. Recent collection *Composition in White* (Smokestack 2017) is her book of England: cricket, Brummie aunts, Bohemian artists and the war shadow, a state of the nation archive of a life-long socialist. She mentors writers and is a founding member of writing collective Vane Women and Editor of its Press. Collections include *The Work of the Wind*, *The Absolute Bonus of Rain* and *The Homage*, nominated for Cricket Book of the Year. Poetry from *The Apple Exchange* was selected for Bloodaxe *New Women Poets* and *The Forward Book of Poetry 2001*. She has won two Northern Writers' Awards and twice Commended in the National Poetry Competition. Born and bred in Warwickshire she has lived in Durham since 1965.

Alan Riach

Since Then: 1 Spring

‘Now I’m scared,’ he said. Schedules scrubbed, visa expired, window closing.

All other planes but his that night were cancelled. We drove to Glasgow

Airport, through spooky waves of mist on almost empty motorways,

Through almost empty city streets, around the road to the car park,

Past the wire mesh fence, the planes beyond lined up on the runway,

Silent on the tarmac, parked, wingtip to wingtip. In the hall, six people,

Perhaps, looking like miles from each other, until the whispering doors

Slid open, and the disembarked passengers walked through. We all

Got home by midnight. Since then –

Lockdown. Homework. The computer’s disc fills and slows things down.

A rationing of exercise, of news reports, the visible, of spring.

Easter days, the sunshine: transparency hides in the air the invisible

Virus that flies in transmission, light and night, day and dark, the inimical,

The killers. So to resist: making selections, company kept. But looking

At screens is not reading people. Ink and paper come from things

You touch and smell and even taste. Intellect is physical. A property of body,

Throat and muscle. The shape of a head, the lifting of it, the glancing of eyes.

Birdsong persists. Since then –

Since then there’s modesty, and reach.

Card games, meals, and nothing is ever the same, now, is it?

Except what is, the best of what there is. To remember,
 To act upon, to be reminded by. To bring to bear.
 That kaleidoscope of greens in those trees overby.
 The squirrels racing, leaping from high branch
 To branch on high. Or zipping over the road, ahead
 Of oncoming tires. Scotland's rainbow greys. And rain. Replenishing rain.
 What goodness commends. Since then –

Since Then: 2 Summer

Enclosures secure. Summer opens sunshine in extending solitude.
 Travel over-ruled, unwanted. The books come into their own.
 Old books, unread or un-reread for decades. And allocated time is set
 For music: Let's get reacquainted with Vaughan Williams. What goodness
 There was in that man. And to complement, Prokofiev: spiky,
 Sharp, self-protective, yet then when you least expect it,
 So tender in the giving, so utterly strong in the song of love and praise.
 Begin with these to reinstall the virtues at whatever level they reach.
 But still you wonder what the words might mean: Since then –

Birdsong draws away, mornings start in silence. Hours to days,
 Days to weeks, weeks to months, and then? What then?
 Each room becomes a person in itself. We're fortunate.
 We have more than one room. And wealth enough to be
 Unworried and without anxiety, so much as many others.

Face masks for the ventures out to shop for what necessities

Are. Plan for further travels, just – imagine them.

A thirty-six hour summer holiday, not too far away.

Return. Exhausted. Since then –

Dawn without birdsong. Gloom gathers time.

The brutes of all the world are at each others' throats once more.

Preparations start. The world is now online, to some advantage,

Just as it curtails the breathing of the different air of places

Other where – the portals open, the contacts make themselves

Possible, the work in this new nature starts again.

The pressure starts: where is this taking us?

What ending is beyond the master plan?

Wondering begins again, since then –

Since Then 3: Autumn

Slow dawn, less light, not so much awakening

As slowing down, a growth of darkness. Long silences

In which the hostiles multiply, a pertinence of sadness.

After a retreat of fear, a tide of fear returning. Fools dance

And kiss, and kill themselves because

Their need to be so close, simply for the company,

Is weakness. Government enwraps itself

For siege, employs more laws for thuggery,

Control. Never before so clearly seen, the need

For borders, how they can protect. Never

Before so clearly seen, the brutal inhumanity

Of London. Since then –

Rainy days and rainy days and long dark rainy nights.
The gutters fill, the birds gone home, the study is a cave
Of warm retreat. How fortunate we are to have such things
As books, how far advanced from screens, to see in ink
And paper what the trees and resin, pigments, octopuses,
Blood, can do, when used with such selective purpose
As good writers may. The world returns us to the world
Through such as these. While outside Osrics thrive.
The flourish of the fancy hat, the swirl of feather,
Smile of charm, in which such depravity beckons,
Entitlement will know no tether.
Such is public discourse now, since then –

So long*For James*

So many mornings come, unwelcome:

the sky dark, the air cold, the call to rise and go

A hard sound from the necessary voice,

the body once again propels itself

Into a day of long farewells, of silences,

of memories and hopes. The clichés turn

Again and here we are, again.

My father or my uncle or the clock, whatever

Summons the awareness,

self-determination focusing, a long drive,

A long flight, a long voyage, ahead.

Pilgrims, comrades, partners, friends,

The navigator tells us, time to move.

The tide has turned, is running out.

She's swung as you slept. The anchor rope is taut.

All presence now becomes a mindful keeping.

You'll treasure it, but later. Up anchor, now, and concentration:

knowledge to the point of all delivery.

Dress for the road. Gather the gear.

Check the essentials. Now, cast off.

SciFi Truth Poem

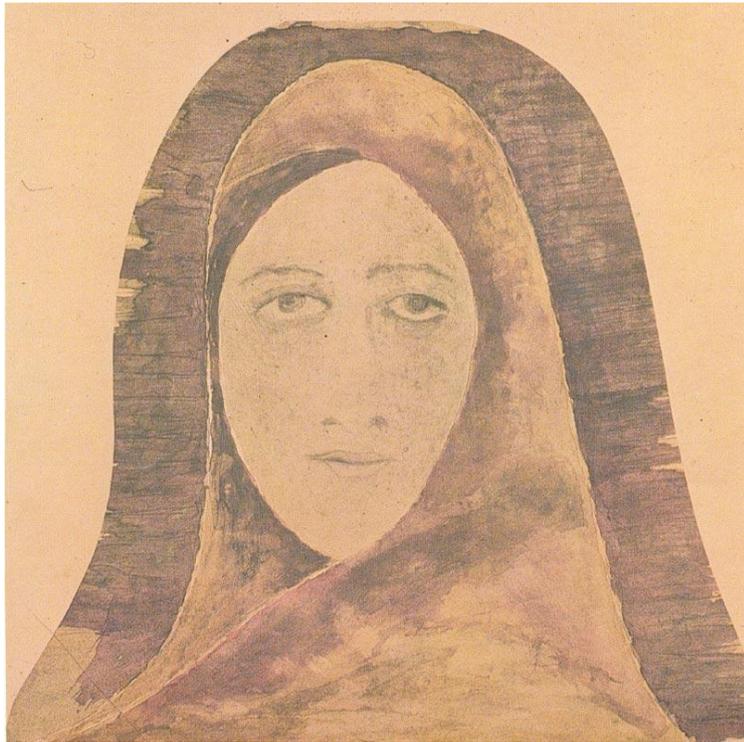
It was that feeling when I opened the book and read
 The first sentence: 'The earth, as every schoolboy knows,
 Is hollow, and habitable within.' *Tarzan at the Earth's Core*,
 1930. 'No,' I thought, 'that isn't true.' Is it? What is this world
 I'm standing on? And then the night sky, Mars, the Moon:
 Those miles and miles and miles of old Barsoom,
 The never-known before inhabitants of planets, orbits, habitats,
 Beyond the farthest star, and lost in time to all but those
 The Time Machine was built for. Or sailing through the air
 To continents unkent with wily Captain Nemo, or deep beneath
 The oceans in the Nautilus, visiting Atlantis and
 Cathedrals undersea. How many worlds, what universes
 Opened to my open-eyed enquiries? The horror-filled,
 With no return available, Poe's maelstrom, the Planet
 Of the Apes; the endlessly surprising, where dispossessed
 And those who japed, asked if androids dreamt
 Of electric sheep; the science-fuelled and speculative
 Studies, where cosmic rings and corridors connected,
 Rama found a rendezvous, the Odyssey through space
 Found Home out there, and then, returned
 To where the word for world is forest.
 That final one I'll name, with thanks, by
 Ursula Le Guin: the last small book
 My grandfather read, not long before he died,
 He smiled, and said, 'It's true.' That happened,
 1979. Imagination's what it takes to get there.
 Truth is what you find along the way.

Alan Riach (b.1957) Poet and Professor of Scottish Literature, Glasgow University. Born in Airdrie, Lanarkshire, studied at Cambridge and Glasgow, worked at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, 1986-2000, and has been back in Scotland since 2001. Books include poetry: *The Winter Book* (2017), *Homecoming* (2009) and *Wild Blue: Selected Poems* (2014); criticism: *Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry* (1991), *Representing Scotland* (2005), and co-authored with Alexander Moffat, *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland* (2008), described in the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'a landmark book', and *Arts of Independence: The Cultural Argument and Why It Matters Most* (2014). Riach and Moffat are also the co-editors of the annotated edition of J. D. Fergusson's radical manifesto-book *Modern Scottish Painting* (1943; new edition, 2015). Contributor to numerous books and journals, co-editor of *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature and Scotlands: Poets and the Nation*, and General Editor of the Complete Works of Hugh MacDiarmid.

Debjani Chatterjee

Inspired by two Rabindranath Tagore paintings

Photographs of Tagore's paintings are taken from internet sites that describe them as being in the public domain. But the author and publisher will be pleased to acknowledge any copyright holder if notified of inadvertant omissions.

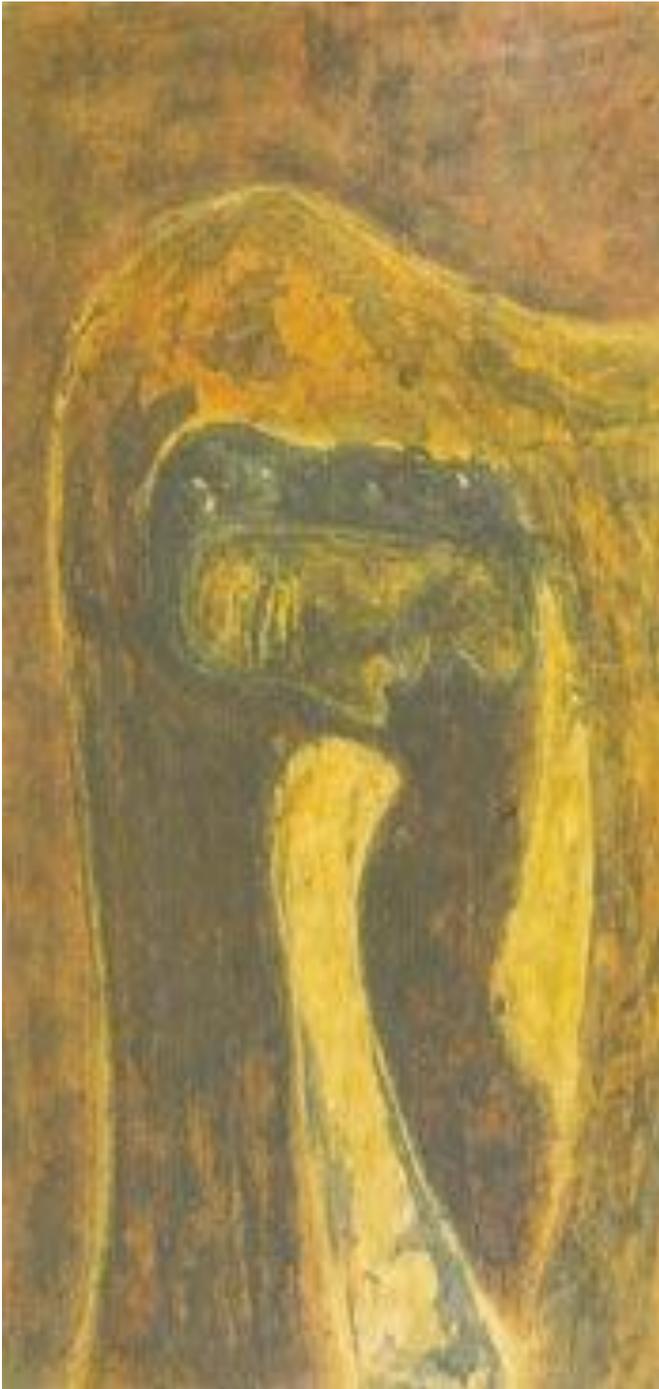


Lost and Found

Sarada Devi died in your lonely childhood;
 losing a mother is sorrow indeed.
 Then Kadambari, the friend of your heart.
 Wilde would have observed: 'careless on your part!'
 But when Mrinalini, your life's partner,
 also died, followed by precious daughters,
 Renuka and Madhurilata, grief
 was beyond expression, your silence reigned.

Brush and pen gave a new incarnation
 to the women you loved.
 Your poetry and paintings brought them back.
 Master-poet and artist, all you lost
 are found again in your immortal art:
 Mrinal and iconic Binodini,
 Mrinmayi and tragic Mrignoyonee,

passionate women like Charulata,
and unconventional Giribala,
nameless women you painted forever,
women you loved and women you revered.
Now we see Everywoman in your art:
a new Eurydice sprung from the heart.



Brooding

Rodin's 'thinker' did not know the world's weight
that you, like Atlas, bear. It bows you down.

Who are you, brooding in this gallery?

Are you one who prayed in Gethsemane?

Sorrow etched deep upon your noble face,
too human for a Titan or a god.

Are your eyes closed to blot the misery?
Is your fist curled to block the memory?

Your golden robe anticipates a shroud
to shelter you from unbearable grief.
You are womankind and anonymous,
we find you gentle, we find you gracious.

Nameless, you absorb every viewer's pain,
your strong arm supporting more than your chin.
Your brooding bearing is justly famous.
Mother, see us; we are you, you are us.

Debjani Chatterjee has been called a poet ‘full of wit and charm’ (Andrew Motion). She grew up in India, Japan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Egypt, before settling in the UK. An international poet, children’s writer, translator, creative arts psychotherapist, Olympic torchbearer and storyteller; her awards include an MBE, Sheffield Hallam University’s honorary doctorate, and Word Masala’s Lifetime Achievement in Poetry. A former Chair of the National Association of Writers in Education and the Arts Council’s Translation Panel, she has held important writing residencies, and is a Patron of Survivors Poetry, a Fellow of the Royal Society for Literature and an Associate Royal Literary Fellow. Her 70+ books include: *Namaskar: New and Selected Poems*. Hedgehog Poetry Press will publish her latest collection in 2021.

Section III: Drama

Amrtāh: The Creation Chapter

(Excerpts from the dialogue screenplay of the film, *Amrtāh: The Author of Time*)

Piyush Roy

Amrtāh: The Author of Time, is an experimental cinematic expression of some enduring conversations on the ‘individual’ and the ‘Eternal’, as *wisdom culled* from the knowledge ocean of the *Upanishads*. Celebrated as fountainhead of Indian thought, the *Upanishads*, are an interactive amalgamation of centuries of meditative contemplation on spiritualism and existence, life and living – featuring some of humanity’s earliest philosophical enquires into the world and beyond. The film is a renewed engagement with some of those timeless questions, seeking personal answers in the pages of a life diary, vignettes of a photo album, collage of earth sounds and abstract nature videos.

Philosophical quests, irrespective of their era or area of origin, are universal bequests. Their trigger experiences and timeless questions are not limited to any geography’s natural gifts or exclusivity. The film’s scenarios hence, share life notes from the East and the West, each of which, could have been an independent short film in itself, and appeared anywhere on its narrative timeline featuring a rainbow of conversations between *Purusa* (the gender indeterminate Soul Self) and *Prakriti* (nature) in male and female voice, respectively.

Assembled through imageries of intuition shot over 10 years, across 100 plus locations in Asia and Europe, the film features over a 1000 characters – humans, animals, birds, bees, trees, rivers, mountains, natural creations and man-made constructions; depicted using the five fundamental, physical elements – space, air, water, fire and earth – that according to Hindu philosophy ‘make and sustain all life’. The Upanishads view the empirical world as an illusion, or ‘Maya’. It is a temporary dwelling for every this and that, the animate and the inanimate, the seen, the unseen and the beyond. And ‘Nothing’! In the film, *Amrtāh*, you get to see every this and that, which has come to shape our ideas about a film’s form today in its century-plus lifetime – still and moving images; simple drawings and exquisite *mise-en-scène*; distant conversations and grand dialogues; background noise and created music; sumptuously edited videos lingering amidst untreated, uncorrected camera recordings, captured *as it is*. The narrative is presented in a way that challenges conventional cinematic notions on beauty, continuity, characters, genre, editing, performance and meaning creation through the movie idiom.

The film’s purpose, in essence, through a *mélange* of form and content, reality and imagination, truth and interpretations, the personal and the universal – is to offer its maker’s experiencing of the seen, with a hoped for felt encountering in the viewer – *also* of the unseen!

The shared submission is an excerpt of 10 scenarios from the film’s dialogues script, featuring conversations between ‘Purusa’ (the gender indeterminate Soul Self), and ‘Prakriti’ (or nature), exploring thoughts and memories on processes of evolution from the ‘creation’

chapter of *Amrtāh: The Author of Time*. All images have been originally captured by the writer.

Scenario 11



Purusa: First Life was born.

From Life – Faith, Ether, Air, Light, Water, Earth, Sense Organs, Mind and Food were generated.

From Food, Vital Energy, Austerity, the Words, the Works and the Worlds are created.

And in the Worlds – The Name.

Prakriti: Together, these 16 parts make a person whole.



Purusa: And then, the Person takes over the Process!

Prakriti: Cannot... Ever!

Purusa: Can it? Never.

Scenario 12

Prakriti: Beyond the beings with consciousness are the one without consciousness.

Purusa: And beyond the Animate and the Inanimate...

Purusa: The stable cannot be found amongst the unstable.

The eternal amidst the temporary.

The non-born among the dying.



Prakriti: The wise looks inwards.

The fool looks outwards.

The yogi closes his eyes.

Scenario 13

Purusa and Prakriti (ponder and wonder together): Should I be Wise? Or should I be Blessed?

Purusa: The Wise one restrains speech in mind;

Mind in understanding;

Understanding in self;

Self in tranquility.

Prakriti: The truly Blessed can stop themselves from Self-thinking and Self-willing.

They can still the wheel of imagination and the senses.

Become Calm within. Experience tranquility.

Purusa: Should I then be Blessed?

Prakriti: Or should I be Wise?

Scenario 14

Purusa: Once the Buddha was asked – ‘Will the Tathagata survive after death or will he not survive?’ He acknowledged the question, but refused any answer saying – ‘My continuing to exist will give rise to one set of misunderstanding. To deny it, will lead to others.’



Prakriti: Seek not the changeless in the world of the changing.

Scenario 15

Purusa: I am Rational. Logical. Emotional... I always ask questions. How can I Believe?

Prakriti: If you are what you say, there cannot be a believer more doubt free than you!

Prakriti: Go inward, not outwards.

Interrogate mist, not clarity

Interrogate flame, not light

Interrogate desire, not knowledge

Interrogate partner, not teacher

Interrogate prayer, not study

Interrogate grace, not doctrine.

Purusa: Interrogate god, not man.

Prakriti: Faith doesn't always have to begin where proof ends.

Scenario 16

Prakriti: Ordinary People – of divided minds, oppressed by dualities, and conflict in desires – cannot be the final product of Evolution.

Purusa: Not even the intellectual, who better uses mind, life and body?

Purusa: Human intelligence has birthed sciences and philosophies, cultures and civilizations. It has made the world wonderful and beautiful.

Prakriti: Tragic and Evil, too!



Prakriti: An intellectual person is what his deep driving desire is.

As is the desire, so is the will.

As is the will, so is the deed.

As is the deed, so is the destiny.

Only those free from desire can enlarge their consciousness to super consciousness.

Their joy is the crown of Evolution.

Merely by logical arguments, convinced they are not of a greater existence or regard it as an object to be adored in thought and feeling.

They are those for whom the multiverse is no more an object, but personal life. They live the universe or rather are lived by the universal.

They Become Deified Consciousness.

Purusa: God or Avatara

Scenario 17



Purusa: The eternal is the ‘now’ without duration.

The manifested world of the past, present and the future.

Prakriti: At the core of all comings and goings – imagined and experienced – is the illusion of our self-preservation.

Scenario 18

Prakriti: Are we the elements? Or, are the elements us?

Purusa: Fluid is our nature. And so are your questions.

Prakriti: Science says over 66 percent of our body is water. And Isn’t the earth so too?

Purusa: We are creatures shaped of water.

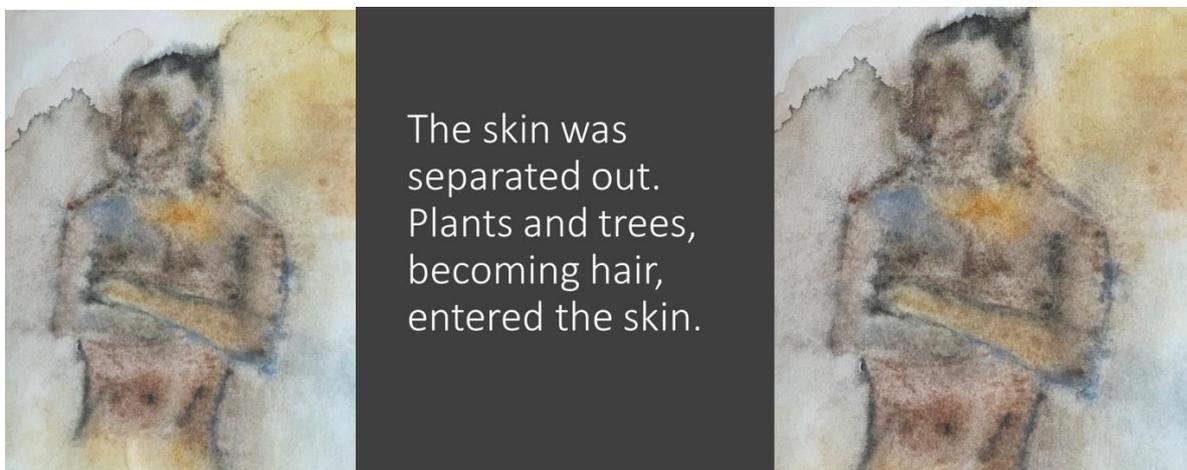
Memory remembers – from the waters, the first person was drawn, and given shape.

Memory remembers...
from the waters, the first person was drawn, and given shape.



From the shape, first a mouth was drawn and separated out.
Fire, becoming speech, entered the mouth.

Next the nostrils were separated out. Air becoming breath, entered the nostrils.
Then the eyes were separated out. The sun, becoming sight, entered the eyes.
The ears were separated out. The parts of space, becoming hearing, entered the ears.
The skin was separated out. Plants and trees, becoming hair, entered the skin.



The heart was separated out. The moon, becoming the mind, entered the heart.
The navel was separated out. Death, becoming the outbreath, entered the navel.
The generative organ was separated out. Water becoming semen entered the generative organ.

Then the ARTIST subjected such a person to thirst and hunger...

Scenario 19

Prakriti: Some eat to live. Some live to eat.

The former are free within the cage of three.

The latter spend lifetimes bound to the five chains untamed.

Purusa: The three walls of the cage are life, body and mind. Its five binds are Ignorance, Ego, Love, Hatred, and Fear.

Purusa: Humans... As enjoyers of necessity,
containers of knowledge,
receivers of care,
identifiers of difference,
and creators of memories,
cannot be Beings of Freedom.

Humans...

As enjoyers of necessity,
containers of knowledge,
receivers of care,
identifiers of difference,
and creators of memories,
cannot be Beings of Freedom.



Scenario 20

Prakriti: Know that your body is not you. It is the first of many layers that surround your personality, each less physical than the one below.

Bliss is the outermost. The lightest, as well.

Next is intelligence, then instinct, then life...and food thereafter.

Food is the first cover. The healing herb of all. The eldest born of beings

Purusa: From food are beings born. When born, they grow up by food.



I, who am food, eat the eater of food,
to become food again.

Amrtāh: The Author of Time
THOUGHT QUOTES

A Film By Piyush Roy

Prakriti: I am food. I am food. I am food.

Purusa: I am the food-eater. I am the food-eater. I am the food-eater.

Prakriti: I am the combining agent.

I am the digester.

I am the energy.

Purusa: I, who am food, eat the eater of food. To become food again!

Prakriti: Realising this; when death comes, one sheds the body with no more severe a break in consciousness than what we feel while taking off a jacket at the end of a day – rainy, cold or warm.

**Film Credits**

Source text: The Principal Upanishads interpreted by Bharat Ratna S. Radhakrishnan

Screenplay, principal cinematography and direction: Piyush Roy

Editing: Parag Ekhande

Art work: Shaikh Ayaz

Narration: Hermann Rodrigues, Roshini Dubey

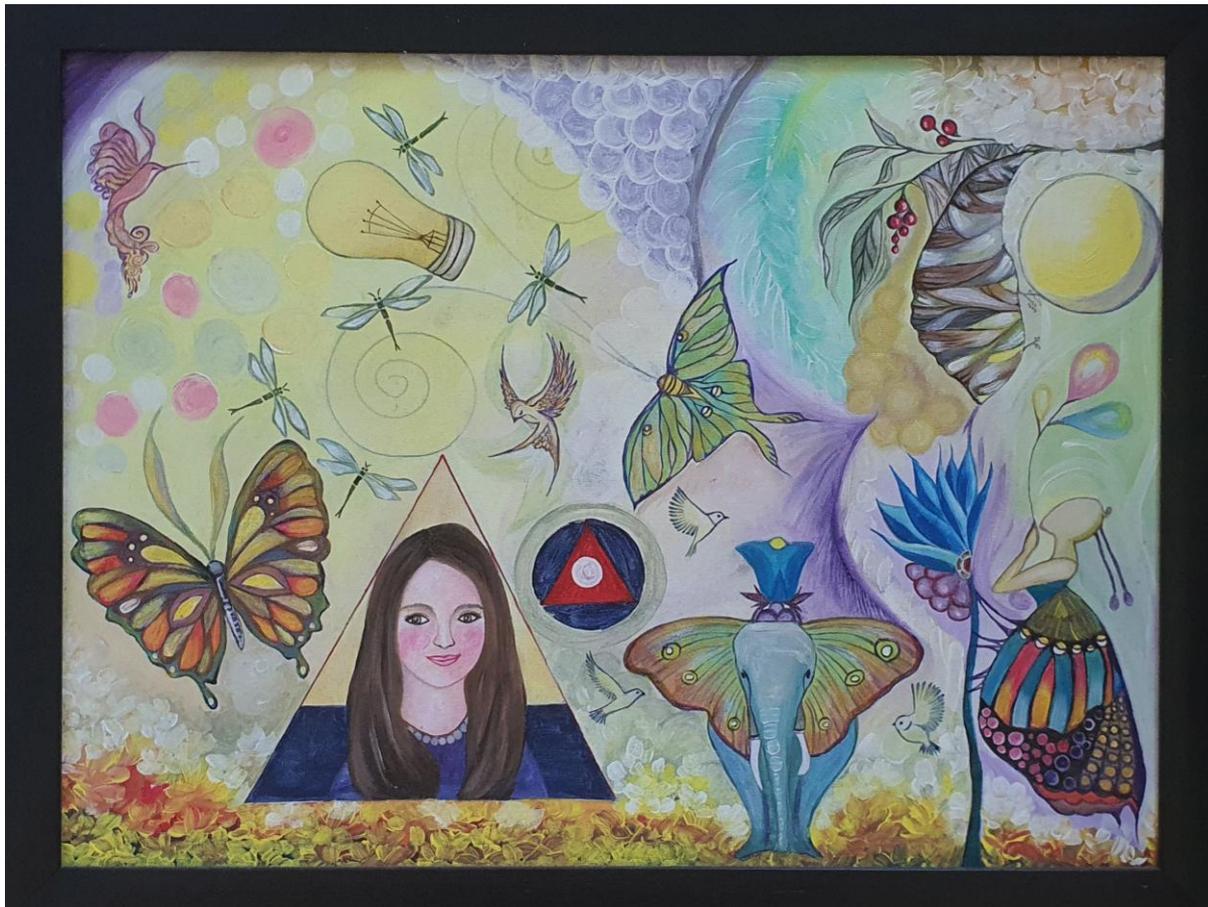
Dr. Piyush Roy is an Indian National Film Award winning critic-columnist, and an international author, curator, filmmaker and educator. Presently, he is Dean and Professor, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, R. V. University, Bengaluru. Former editor of popular film magazine, *Stardust* and film-weekly, *Star Week*, he has worked at senior reporting positions in leading Indian dailies (*The Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*) and has been published in *The Times of India Crest Edition* and *The Speaking Tree*, *The Asian Age*, *Society* magazine, *Screen* and *The New Indian Express*, authoring over 500 media publications. He's been the writer of a popular film column, 'Sunday Talkies' with *Orissa Post* (2011-2018). Author of two fiction works – *Never Say Never Again* and *Alexander – An Epic Love Story* and an online novel series, *The Millennium Batch* (2020); in 2019, he made his non-fiction and feature film debut with *Bollywood FAQ: All That's Left to Know About the Greatest Film Story Never Told* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, USA), and a critically acclaimed documentary, *Pleasures Prejudice & Pride: An Indian Way of Filmmaking*. His latest film, an experimental feature, *Amrtāh: The Author of Time* (2021), is inspired by ideas, insights and learner-teacher interactions in *The Upanishads*.

Section IV:

Art

Anupa Lewis

Ila's Worlds



Into the Blues



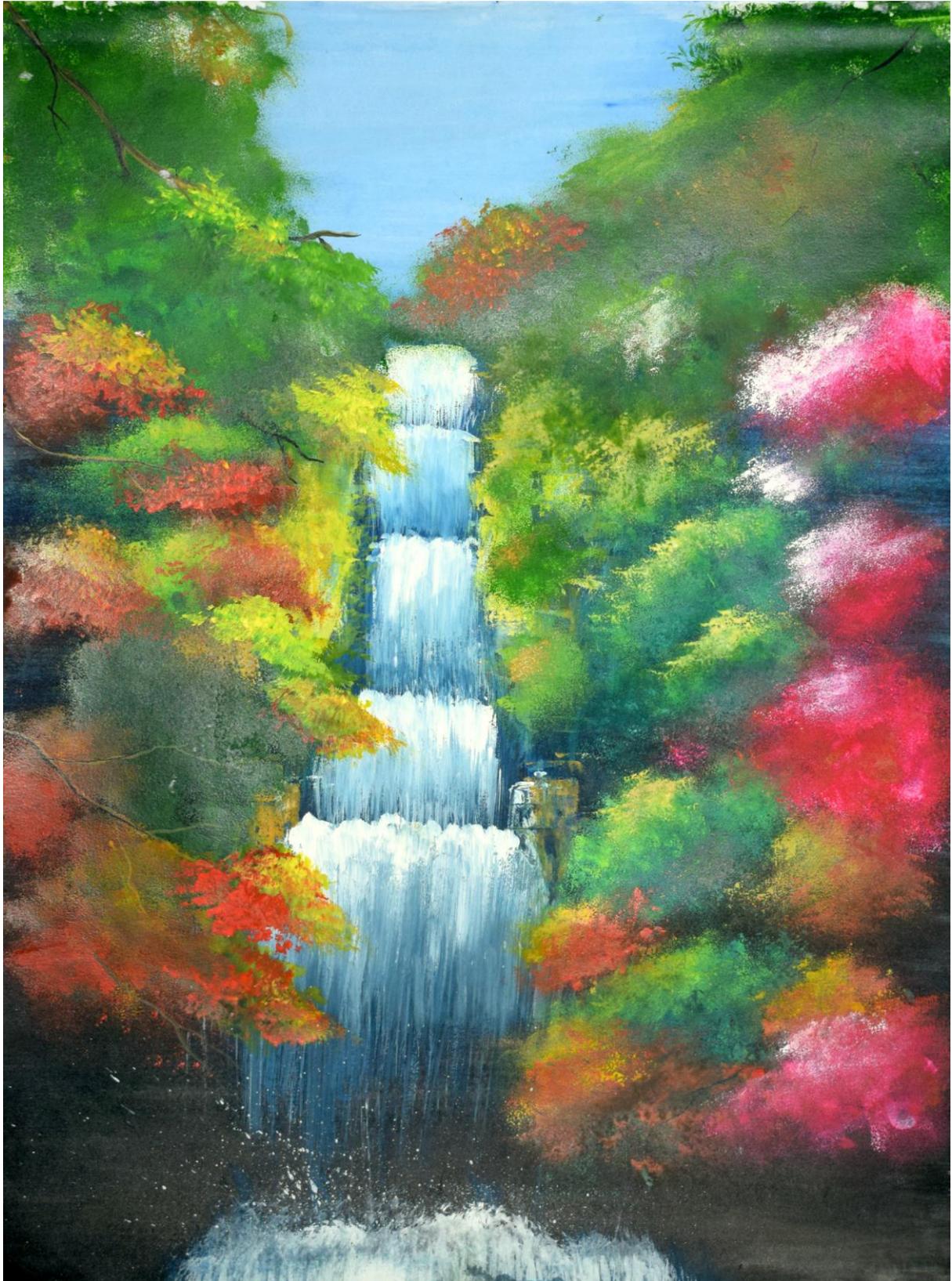
Mixed Media Spring Haze

Abstract Winter Blossoms

Anupa Lewis holds the position Assistant Professor – Senior Scale at Manipal Institute of Communication. She is the coordinator of the Tagore Centre – MAHE, Manipal. Moreover, considering communication as the broad spectrum, she has about a decade of experience in engaging lectures, being the resource person for workshops, as also organizing international conferences in various spheres of academia. Her current areas of research interest include cultural studies, comparative literature, literary anthropology, speculative fiction, ecocriticism, feminist rhetoric and narratology. On the creative front her flash fiction is published in volume one of the Bath Flash Fiction anthology titled – *To Carry Her Home*, printed by Ad Hoc Fiction (2018).

Shahil Datta

Continuity



Where the head is held high

Revival

Shahil Datta is a budding artist studying in class 8. His intimacy with Nature is reflected through his brush.

Praseed Nair

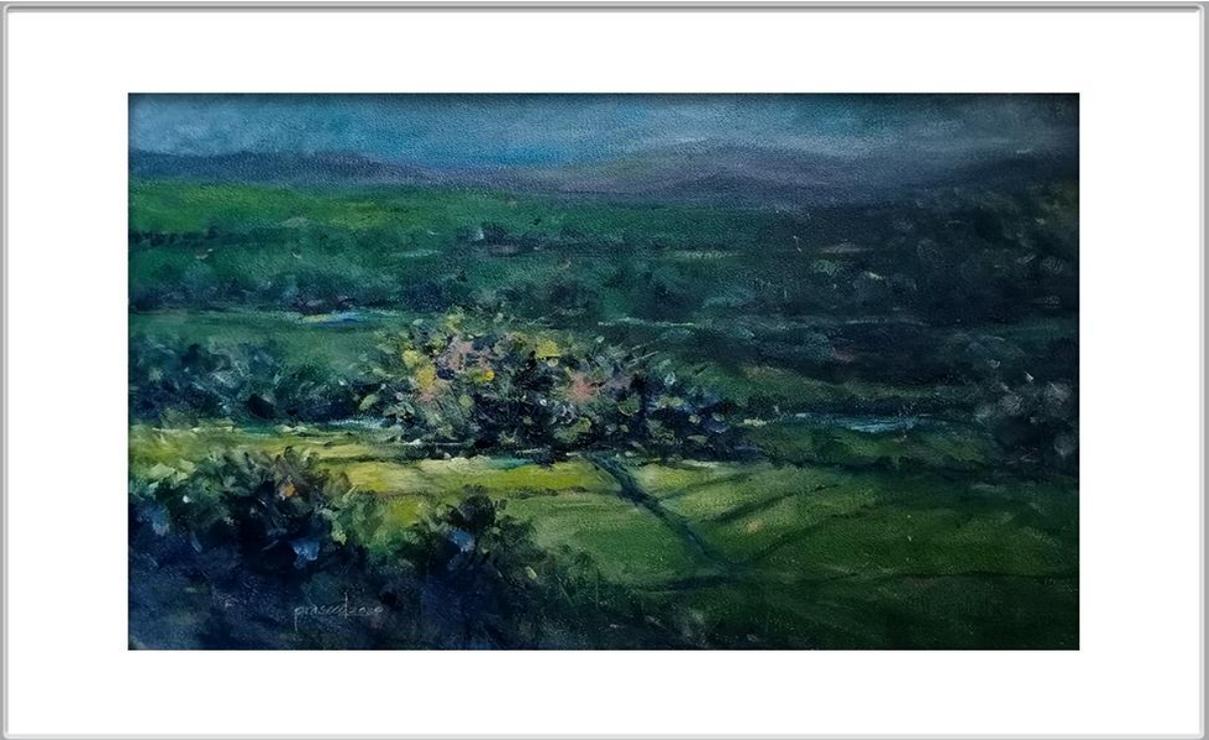
Book of Life



Colours of Nature

Leaf Lives



Lush Green

Praseed Nair is an Assistant Professor (Selection Grade), Department of Animation Art and Design at Manipal Institute of Communication, MAHE. A passionate artist by vocation, he ascribes his creative acumen to his sustained training in the Applied Arts at Gujarat University. On the professional front, Mr. Nair harbors a diverse portfolio of expertise in Graphic Design, Multimedia and 3D Computer Animation. He has operated as a Senior Character Animator for films, functioned as a Visual Content Developer in the advertising industry, apart from closely working with several leading animation studios in India. That said Mr. Nair nourishes a special love for abstract pastiche landscapes in the oil and acrylic medium, to which he returns time and again.

Sue Whitmore

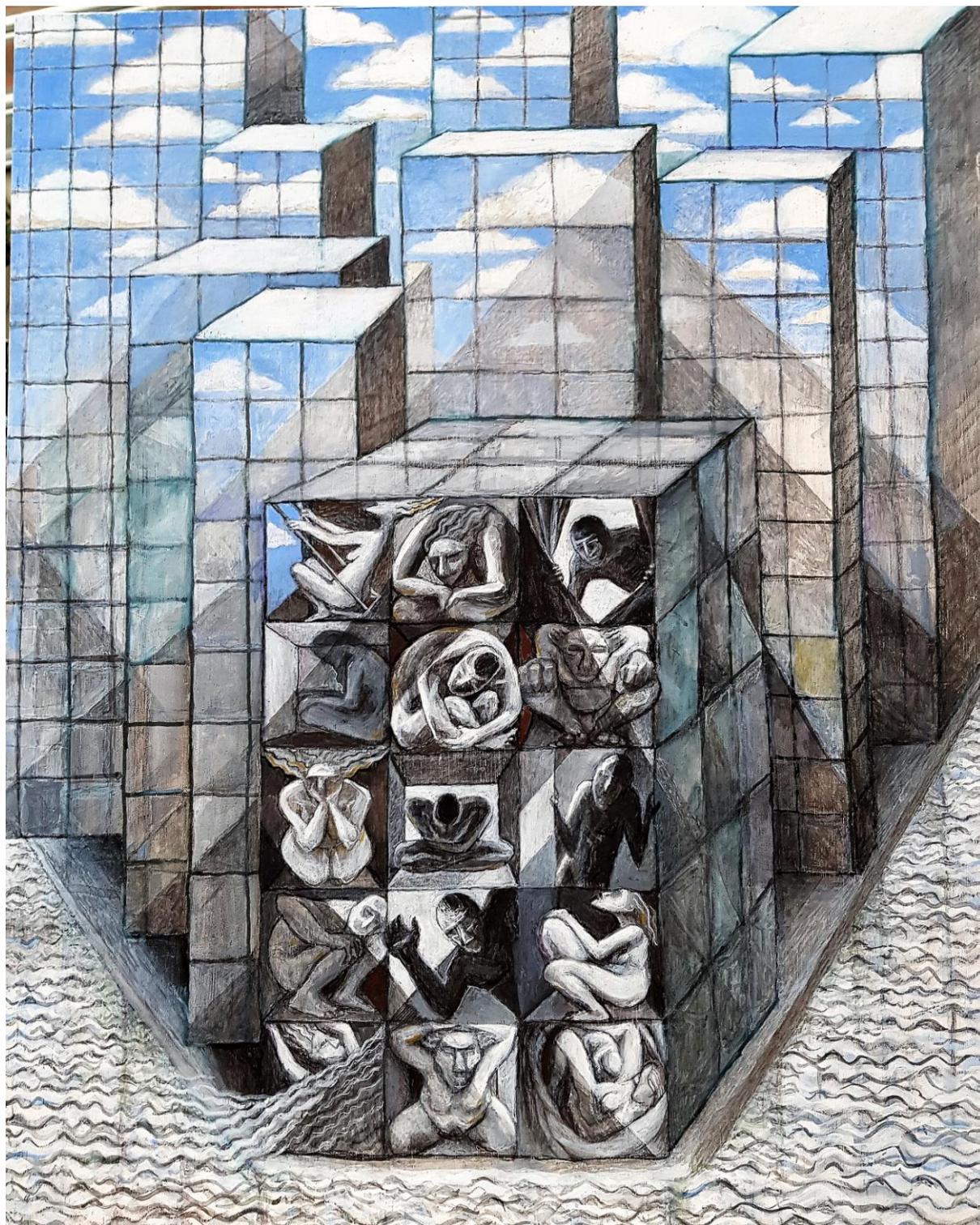
Isolation



Sardonyx Man



The Block



Poet and artist **Sue Whitmore** studied at University College London and Central and Wimbledon Schools of Art and has had a lifelong commitment to imagination, language and the human experience expressed through poetry and art. She enjoys performing her poetry and her poems have been broadcast and published in many journals. She convenes a Stanza of the Poetry Society. Her multiple lives have also included theatre design, print making and arts organisation. She has had many exhibitions in Britain and abroad, including the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. She is a member of Greenwich Printmakers. In 2012 she was made Champion of Culture by Art in Business for her contribution to the arts. Publications: *'Sue, Realist: A Selection of Poems & Drawings'*, 1992 and *'Blood, Fish & Bone' [Books I & II]*, 2017, a pamphlet, *'Human Interest'* - commended in IDP's Geoff Stevens Memorial Competition in 2018.

Section V: Book Reviews

Title of the Book: *Declarations on Freedom for Writers and Readers*

Preface by T. M. Devine, Publisher: ScottishPEN, Edinburgh, Scotland Street Press, April 2020, ISBN: 978-1-910895-42-9, Price: £9.99.

Liz Niven

Plans to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath in 2020 were expansive and extensive but, due to the global pandemic, those best laid plans were unable to materialise. Scotland, the home of the Arbroath Declaration, fortunately had some plans which would not be affected by the pandemic. The publication of *Declarations on Freedom for Writers and Readers* is both a timeous and note-worthy achievement. In the midst of isolations and restrictions, the written word has remained free.

Published by Scottish PEN, the Scottish branch of PEN's international movement, dedicated to writers' freedom of expression, it's a fitting celebration of the fourteenth century document. Written to Pope John XXII in Rome, the document sought his intervention to prevent Scotland falling under English rule. The King of England, 'ought to be satisfied with what belongs to him', and implores that they 'leave us Scots in peace'. This most non-aggressive approach to Independence allows us to appreciate the desire for 'the sovereignty of the Scottish people and independence from English overlordship', as Mario Relich points out in his polemic on Alasdair Gray's writings about the Declaration. This cross-referencing of others views adds to the multifaceted approaches in many of the contributions.

In Tom Devine's Preface, the importance of the Declaration is emphasised in several 20th century quotations. As Professor Michael Lynch attests, it is 'The most celebrated document in Scottish history'. Placed on UNESCO's Memory of the World register, it's recognised as of global importance. The Declaration is printed in full in the preface, followed by a scholarly bibliography should readers wish more.

Appropriately, this anthology is no inward looking collection of poems and prose focussing on Scotland alone. The locations visited range across the globe from Sri Lanka to South Africa, India to Thailand, Israel to Ireland. The content too ranges from the historically based Kirsten MacQuarrie's depiction of the cruel imprisonment of Countess MacDuff at Berwick, to contemporary concerns – such as Anne Murray's focus on Faslane, the controversial site of nuclear deterrents.

Three winners were chosen from the submissions and all three poems bring contemporary issues under the spotlight. Donald Adamson, in a rich Scots language considers the work of Greta Thunberg, is 'wunner in whit Freedom will be wirth/gin airth's like a brakenjaur'. Similarly, Elspeth Brown makes an impassioned plea that 'the pen be mightier than plastic particles and carbon waste'. Refreshing, current and demonstrating the document's legacy, the writers take the Declaration and reveal to the reader how it inspires them.

The third winner, Jock Stein, in 'Tones of Destiny', a nod to the famous Stone of Destiny on which previous Kings of Scotland were crowned, uses his poem as a mantra wish list. Each line begins 'I want' and ranges through historical times with reference to St. Andrew, Columba, to famous people such as James Clerk Maxwell, Hume and Haining to the present day, 'I want a Government who know the time / for referenda and for prayer'. Using

his poem to reference the many famous Scots throughout history, he leaves a powerful litany of names to recall or research further.

Helen Boden, in ‘A declaration of hush’, also tackles climate change and ecological issues and particularly noise pollution. ‘Let’s see on-the-spot penalties for idling engines’, or, ‘private one-sided arguments on public transport’.

Charlie Gracie in, ‘Asylum seeker accommodation survey, Glasgow’, vividly portrays the banality of gathering statistics about ‘pots and pans’, or ‘what they think of the housing’, while the residents such as Karim, ‘lifts the tail of his shirt’, to show the ‘glisten of scars’.

It is refreshing to see some experimental, less traditional form in James Robertson’s concrete piece which plays with page layout. It’s inspired by Alasdair Gray’s famous statement, inspired by Canadian writer Denis Lee’s words that we should, ‘work as if you were living in the early days of a better nation’. The inclusion of letters from Scottish writers to seven writers under threat is an unexpected welcome addition. Initially written to mark the 2019 Day of the Imprisoned Writer, they provide a frank, powerful and often deeply distressing picture of the remarkable difficulties experienced by writers across the globe. The eloquent contribution from Jane Archer, writing to David Coleman MP for Immigration in Australia, is on behalf of Iranian-Kurdish journalist Behrouz Boochani with an apt reminder that the MPs own ancestors were once immigrants. Zoe Wicomb writes to Shakthika Sathkumara, an imprisoned Sri Lankan writer, censored and imprisoned for writing about homosexuality. Ricky Monahan Brown writes to the Mexican journalist, Lydia Cacho, constantly harassed and attacked for her exposure of corruption and abuse to the extent that she has now left her native land.

The internationalism of this anthology is a fitting reminder of Scottish PEN’s outward, generous concern for fellow writers across the globe. As a celebration of the fourteenth century document, this book might have been overtly political and narrowly focussed on its country of origin. However, it is outward looking, wide ranging in its locations and concerns.

More contributions in Scots or Gaelic in translation, might have been expected. Elaine Webster and Donald Adamson employ rich Scots in their contributions, and Finola Scott directly considers how Scots is the right voice for her, *the wurd fits ma hairtjistrich*.

Mary McCabe, in English, reminiscences of the time when, Gaelic speaking forbidden in the classroom, a hanging stick was place upon the neck of the child heard speaking Gaelic. When another child was heard speaking Gaelic, the stick was passed to that child. The last one in the day would be punished. *Tha mi duilich? I am sorry?* In a volume dedicated to declarations of freedom, we’re reminded of the many ways freedom can be removed from us.

This rich anthology won’t merely be relevant to the 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath, the poems and prose will remain relevant until humanity accepts the individual’s right to freedom. Sadly, thus, this book will remain relevant for many years to come.

Liz Niven is an award-winning Scottish poet. Collections include: *Stravaigin*, *Burning Whins*, *The Shard Box* (Luath Press, Edinburgh). Public art collaborations include text in stone and wood and she has participated in poetry Festivals across the world. Former teacher and Cultural Co-ordinator, she has facilitated poetry sessions to Scottish Poetry Library, London Poetry Society, Galleries and Museums. She has written a wide range of Scots education resources and is the author of Scots Dossier for European Bureau of Minority Languages. Awards include McCash poetry prize, Saltire/TESS and she is an Honorary Fellow of the Association of Scottish Literary Studies.

Title of the Book: *The Devil and Michael Scot: A Gallimaufry of Fife and Beyond*.

Author: Tom Hubbard, Publisher: Ochertyre Grace Note Publications, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-913162 10-8, Price: £7.99.

Energising a Cultural Renaissance in Fife and Beyond

Kenny Munro

This is what makes Tom Hubbard such a rewarding guide: a man steeped in the places and tales of the Kinrick who doesn't get run over by them, rather he manages to unfold fresh visions, partly because – as a cosmopolitan traveller and translator, all human efforts lie before him.

The international vision of Fife and Scotland expressed by Tom Hubbard in his recent compelling compendium, *The Devil and Michael Scot: A Gallimaufry of Fife and Beyond*, is crucial reading, especially at this time of social restrictions due to the pandemic lockdown.

The book opens our eyes to Fife's distinctive communities, its historic connections and encourages us to get outdoors to explore and discover the many cultural personalities and aspects of landscape and architecture which offer a creative catalyst. Chapters offer innovative guidance for tackling many coastal and inland walks across the 'Kingdom'. It is a companion to his previous works, *Slavonic Dances* and *The Flechitorium*. Both these books present aspects of Fife in a European context and now that we reluctantly engage with the negativity of Brexit these publications, also by Grace Note, and together with the new title, offer a refreshing reminder of the essential bonds and exchanges with other nations.

Offering further inspiration to reinterpret and create our own impressions is his *Fringe of Gold* (Birlinn 2008), the marvellous anthology of poetry and prose co-edited by Tom with his friend and mentor Duncan Glen. (We will refer later to the significance of Duncan Glen and his wife Margaret who ran an innovative publishing house, AKROS, for several decades and latterly from their home in Kirkcaldy).

The Devil and Michael Scot is punctuated by Tom's powerful artwork, by drawings which vividly illustrate various chapters, and I feel that his portrait of Joe Corrie (p. 114) is so strong that it deserves to be in a public collection for all to see. A former miner, Joe Corrie wrote poems and plays which have been presented to great acclaim by The Bowhill Players.

It is also poignant that this new book about Fife is represented in the *Gitanjali and Beyond* magazine. One of the Bengali sage's anecdotes, and one which is ripe for expansion, is the fact that Rabindranath Tagore's favourite childhood book was *Robinson Crusoe* based on the dramatic life of Fife's own Alexander Selkirk from Largo.

That statement surely resonates, in its expression of a mix of adventure, exploration and survival by living in harmony with nature. Tagore's deep friendship with Patrick Geddes was often expressed in a shared belief in unity and diversity, and indeed *Think Global Act Local* is a Geddesian motto with which other artists like Joseph Beuys, Richard Demarco and George Wyllie were in accord. Tom highlights the fact that Patrick Geddes undertook an extensive urban survey of Dunfermline in 1904. Despite its ground-breaking scope for a 'peoples' university' in a 'green-township' as a form of biopolis, the scheme was not adopted.

Moreover as we delve further into the book Robert Louis Stevenson, Herman Melville and of course the central figure of Michael Scot are revealed. At the centre of the book Tom has laid out an exciting and viable script for his play *The Devil and Michael Scot*, subtitled 'A Faustian tale of a Scottish magician and polymath'. In reality, we are led to believe that Scot was a Sauntering Sage as he travelled across Europe in the thirteenth century, translating scientific knowledge from Arabic into Latin. He was an accomplished astrologer and speculated with predicting destiny and fantastical theories interpreting *multiple rainbows*.

Might this breadth of appreciation of the human role in the cosmos have influenced Adam Smith's creation of his *other* significant book on mutual respect and human ecology; *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*?

Anyway Tom's insightful and often comic play possibly asks more questions than it answers as the range of characters weave a spell in the plot full of intrigue, offering a delicious interpretation of Scot's influence. It would indeed be great to see this performed as a complement to the previous play composed by musician and writer Willie Hershaw, and also available from Grace Note.

Kenny Munro studied sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art and The Royal College of Art, London. He also took part in the Oslo University Summer School in 1976 which was established by Philip Boardman, a student of the 'evergreen' Scot Patrick Geddes. For 40 years Kenny has been engaged as a practitioner of Public Art with exchanges in France, Germany and India which has spawned a film on YouTube entitled *Patrick Geddes: Discover a Living Legacy*. Kenny first met Tom when he worked as Librarian of The Scottish Poetry Library in the 1980s. Independently they have gone on to explore international exchanges but share a passion for the current significance of Sir Patrick Geddes's philosophy. They have also collaborated on various projects, such as co-presenting a lecture linking *John Ruskin and Patrick Geddes* as part of Tradfest in Edinburgh, printing a series of poetry cards and most recently creating granite poetry stones for Markinch with fellow artists Willie Hershaw and Sheena Berry. A poetry stone memorial can be found in Revenscraig Park for Duncan and Margaret Glen, also one for Charles W. Berry. Also in Kirkcaldy at Beveridge Park is a large ring of poetry stones, as a carved haiku, commemorating Tagore's Nobel Laureate centenary in 2013. Kenny is currently the Chair of The Sir Patrick Geddes Memorial Trust.

Title of the Book: *'Kobi' & 'Rani': Memoirs and Correspondences of Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis & Rabindranath Tagore.*

Editor and Translator: Somdatta Mandal, Publisher: Bolpur, Birutjatio Sahitya Sammiloni, 2020, ISBN: 978-81-944352-8-0, Price: Rs 900/-

Malashri Lal

We have, so far, revelled in Rabindranath's compassionate understanding of women and cited *Ghare Bairey*, *Chokher Bali* and other favourite texts in support. Now we have the female gaze trained upon 'Kobi' Rabindranath. Unflinching, mischievous and honest from the pen of 'Rani' (the nickname of Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis), what a delight these reminiscences are of the travels to Europe, South India and Ceylon when the Kobi was aged and insistent on having each detail recorded. Comprising of two travelogues *Kobir Shonge Europey [With Poet in Europe]* and *Kobir Shonge Dakshinattey [With Poet in the South]*, along with ancillary texts, this massive volume has been expertly translated and edited by Somdatta Mandal. It is a treasure house of memorabilia yielding charming anecdotes about Tagore with Rani's 'womanist' commentary on the side. Rani was the daughter of Heramachandra Maitra, a social reformer of the Brahma Samaj and an educationist. She married Prasantachandra Mahalanobis, a mathematician who became the founder of The Indian Statistical Institute. Rabindranath, in his later years, grew increasingly dependent on the couple for managing his affairs at Visva Bharati and his travels abroad.

How does the dual perspective of 'I' and the 'other' come about in Rani's words? *Kobir Shonge Europey* is based on a sojourn of seven months in Europe in 1926 when Tagore was accompanied by a large retinue. Prasantachandra and Rathindranath (Rabindranath's son) were tasked with collecting news reports about Tagore every single day, translating and sending them to Visva Bharati for inclusion in the weekly *Bulletin*. Rani's job was to write diary-like notes for later use. One can picture the overworked team, Rani admitting that she was drooping with fatigue at the end of daylong public functions and late dinners but still felt obligated to compose her notes and 'letters home'. In a strange twist of fate, the transcribed news reports of 1926 disappeared in Shantiniketan and surfaced much later in 1941, to be misplaced again, finally to resurface in 1969. Rani's notes, and letters that she wrote regularly to relatives and friends in Calcutta, helped reconstruct the journey but her own deteriorating health and other impediments came in the way of publishing till 1969. In essence, Rani's account moves in multiple time frames and not in strict chronology, making it a fascinating collage of experience and commentary. Alice Walker, the progenitor of the term 'womanism' says, 'Part of what existence means to me is knowing the distance between what I am now and what I was then' (*In Search of our Mother's Gardens*). Such a complex vision marks Rani's narrative.

Much has been speculated about Rabindranath's visit to Italy as the 'guest' of Mussolini. Rani's first-hand report gives the authentic story of the poet's innocence in being manipulated by agents of the State; those who kept a strict surveillance on visitors and translated his English speeches into Italian in a way that projected his support of the fascist regime. The busy schedule of Rabindranath and his unsuspecting faith in his local hosts kept the dangerous disinformation away from the poet's knowledge, and it was only later, through Romain Rolland, that Tagore realised how he had been 'used' by the propagandists.

Rani's saree clad silhouette, confidence and charm attracted hordes of admirers but one episode is worth repeating. At a formal dinner in Zurich, she notices the seven wine glasses at the table setting. Two men challenge Rani to drink wine and jest with her when she demurs. Rising to the challenge she declares that although she has never tasted wine before, she will drink each of the seven kinds of wine being served! Rabindranath, sitting across from her, is aghast and after she merrily downs four glasses, asks her in Bengali if she means to bring disgrace upon herself and him. She claims to be fine, and continues. When all the invitees stand to offer the toast, Rabindranath skilfully comes to Rani's side and supports her by his elbow. She is managing rather well, he realises, nevertheless, in a firm voice he declares that Mrs Mahalanobis and he would retire to the hotel while the party continued. His protective demeanour, and her spirited socialising show up in other instances too, including in Paris when Rani is not allowed by the Kobi to partake of the in/famous night life!

Somdatta's fluid translation takes us through the conversations, the sights, and the literary references without a hitch. Some of these are multi-lingual situations. As recorded by Rani, Tagore's first meeting with Einstein happened in Berlin in September 1926, of which Rani's memory is of "an excellent person, quite handsome and with interesting looks. The best parts are his eyes, which can be called dreamy." Einstein spoke no English; his wife fortunately did, and acted as the interpreter. We hear nothing about the content of the conversation but the atmosphere is brilliantly captured. (The famous dialogue between the physicist and philosopher was to come much later, in 1930). Throughout the journey, Rani wrote letters to her father-in-law Prabodhchandra Mahalanobis, aunt-in-law Manika Mahalanobis, mother Kusumkumari Maitra, to friend Amalchandra Home and several others. Spilling over with details, she writes frankly of the adulation accorded to the poet in eastern Europe, the frantic pace of lecture assignments, her share of womanly care-giving to Rabindranath along with Pratima Debi, and her cultural negotiations with food, language and clothing. The correspondence reveals the high level of education among women of the upper, somewhat Anglicised families, and the role of the Brahmo Samaj in opening the road to women's emancipation. In the unfamiliar realms of European cities, Rani held her own, ensuring that her devotion to the 'Kobi' remained balanced with an interpretive rendering of his predilections. No wonder that Rabindranath paid her the supreme compliment, "You are my last friend. I know even if others go away, you will not."

The second travelogue, *Kobir Shonghe Dakshinatay [With Poet in the South]* presents alluring personal notes by Rani about famous men and their foibles. The journey was made in 1928, by car, train and boat, each mode requiring its own kind of preparation. We hear how particular the Poet was regarding his writing box and his 'bedding' and the near debacle in Coonoor when Rani was not allowed by the tour organisers to send large, elaborate baggage. The group ran short of blankets and C. F. Andrews kept showing up at night trying to ration out what was available. Rani's pen-portrait of 'Deenabandhu' Andrews is utterly charming: "People know only about the seriousness and gravity of Andrews Sahib...But many people were not aware of the crazy child that was hidden within him" (334). The female gaze follows the Sahib through his quirky habit of loosing things and finding strange solutions, leading to episodes that create a lot of mirth. Rani's husband, Prashantachandra, though teased for being an over-serious scientist also provides much humour.

The meeting in Pondicherry with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is an important record of how Rabindranath was touched by the spiritual aura. However, Rani's womanly

gaze notes the Mother's blue Benarasi saree and kohl-lined eyes as a contrast to the stark white attire of the ashram inhabitants.

Tagore's influence in Sri Lanka, erstwhile Ceylon, is a subject calling out for research. He made three visits there, during the last of which, in 1934, the dance drama *Sapmochon* was staged in Colombo. The national anthem of Sri Lanka is said to be inspired by Tagore. But these are later developments. Rani's account is of the visit in 1928 when she was captivated by the glory of Anuradhapura, Kandy, Sigiriya and Dambulla. Due to poor health, Rabindranath stayed back in his residence much of the time.

Throughout these reminiscences, Rani faithfully records what the poet was writing, and occasionally reading out to his friends. The electric joy of hearing a fresh composition from Rabindranath sparks her enthusiasm. The southern sojourn ends rather appropriately in Bangalore where Acharya Brajendranath Seal was the host. *Jogajog* and *Sesher Kobita* were written during much of the journey, Rani often wondering how such different narratives could flood the writer's imagination at the same time. In acute detail she describes the completion of *Sesher Kobita* with the resonant poem "Farewell, my friend." It seems the poet, though unwell, felt the surge of creativity so strongly that he wrote through the night till 4 am. Rani, while concerned about his health, did not disturb him but silently read the poem over his shoulder, mesmerized by the sonorous verses.

Somdatta Mandal's pioneering volume makes the relationship of Kobi and Rani accessible to non-Bengali readers and researchers. Such wealth of material, carefully introduced, footnoted and explained is rare, especially in such an attractive format. Somdatta has offered important ancillary material to the travelogues. *Pathe o Pather Prante* (On the Road and Beyond It) is a compilation and translation of sixty letters that Rabindranath wrote to Rani which he selected and published in 1938. At this time Rabindranath was under the impression that the tales of his European journey were lost. Expressing his affection and gratitude towards Rani, these letters capture the experience from his viewpoint but touch on several other aspects of life and philosophy, especially on the theme of suffering. Rani, though a vivacious companion and writer, was afflicted with periodic fevers and was advised to rest in the hills. Rabindranath wrote over five hundred letters to her, perhaps to cheer her up or to speak out his troubles. In the selected letters the Poet deleted most of the personal references so this section contains rather staccato accounts.

Somdatta, as though to establish Rani's holistic personality, also publishes three essays by her - two on the Sanskrit *shlokas* used by the Brahma Samaj (*Om Pita Nohosi* and *Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya*), and one on 'Anandamela', a fair held in Shantiniketan. Rani's erudition is impressive, as also her empathy with the unwell Poet who found in her a soul-mate and trusted companion. In 1941, Rani's final tribute to the beloved Poet came in his own words, "You are greater than your deeds..." (519).

This book is to be lauded on several counts. The warm affection between Tagore and the young Rani Mahalanobis needed its demonstration through primary texts. Letters and diaries bear the integrity of an unselfconscious revelation but when the subject is an important public figure, how does the woman write of this relationship? Somdatta has chosen well to foreground the travelogues and attach supportive material from other sources. The intertextuality creates a fascinating matrix; as Somdatta says in her Introduction: "This sort of a-chronological narration makes the memoirs unique." Dipesh Chakrabarty's insightful

Foreword opens out to larger issues of Tagore's relevance today: "He remains a nostalgic undertow to the currents of hyper-nationalism that circulate among the postcolonial nations in the sub-continent today." Surely, with such framing, the legendary link between the Kobi and Rani deserves its story to be told in cherished detail.

Malashri Lal, Professor in the Department of English (retd.), University of Delhi, has authored and edited sixteen books including *Tagore and the Feminine: A Journey in Translation* (Sage 2015) and the most recent, co-authored with Namita Gokhale, *Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt* (Harper Collins, 2020). She continues to serve on juries for book awards. Malashri Lal is currently Member, English Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi.

Title of the Book: *Imagined Spaces*.

Editors: Gail Low & Kirsty Gunn, Publisher: Dundee, The Voyage Out Press, 2020, ISBN: 978-0-9955123-44, Price: £14.99.

‘setting it free’: The Essay Today

Mario Relich

Setting the essay free from the shackles of critical theory, or getting entangled in the groves of academe, is what distinguishes *Imagined Spaces*. It reads as a fiercely idiosyncratic anthology of the diverse ways in which the essay form has attracted writers in our time. Its seventeen essays by various contributors, can be loosely divided into four parts, made up of four essays each, except for the penultimate one, which is made up of five essays. The editors, Gail Low, Senior Lecturer in English, and the novelist Kirsty Gunn, are based at the University of Dundee. Dundee itself features prominently in the introductory essay, ‘Tracing Lines...Essaying For Our Times’, co-written by the editors. In fact, no less than seven of the essays, or just over a third, are co-authored, in effect dialogues, which is why the total number of contributors is twenty-four. Their essay is one of four which attempt to define the parameters of the essay form, particularly now.

Walking is a central metaphor in the Low/Gunn essay, a recurrent motif in other essays as well. The introductory essay describes one or other of the two contributors walking leisurely over the Tay Road Bridge to the small town of Newport on the other side. The contributor declares that between ‘the seagulls, the rivers and the flowers, I think this is what I want from essaying, to be surprised by and into life’ (p. 8). It’s a definition which alights on the beneficial effect an essay might have on the reader, rather than a static, limited one. The contributors, in fact, propose a kind of manifesto for what essay-writing now has to oppose: ‘No more narcissistic parades, then – life writing that is always me, me, me – but using instead personal experience to make another kind of communal story where both reader and writer might take up residence and find a home in words’ (p. 13).

Linda E. Chown, Professor Emerita at Grand Valley State University, Michigan, comes up with her own flexible definitions in ‘The Art of the Intransitive Essay.’ Her concept of *bethinking* is particularly intriguing: ‘a considering or pondering something carefully, for the pleasure of being with it, whatever it is first, and then knowing it more’ (p. 108). It’s a concept that gets to the heart of the essay form, and actually a more deeply considered extension of Virginia Woolf’s definition in *The Modern Essay*: ‘The principle which controls it is simply that it should give pleasure; the desire which impels us when we take it from the shelf is simply to receive pleasure’.¹ Chown calls the modern style of the form ‘the intransitive essay’, which ‘necessarily begins with the inner life’, as did Montaigne’s writing. Arguably, he invented the modern essay; her discussion of him suggests as much. She advises practitioners of the ‘intransitive essay’ in the following terms: ‘Probably the main new thing when you begin writing intransitively is to see *who* and *what* you are becoming in relation to your own thinking and reading and to the writing upon which you’re connecting’ (p. 195).

The exchange of conversational emails between Emma Holland and Elizabeth Chakrabarty suggests that the essay form is well placed for expressing the insecure nature of life, their contribution entitled ‘The Fiction of the Essay: Of Abstraction, Texts,

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975) 267.

Communication and Loss.’ It’s how essays fictionalize personal stories, as a way of retrieving what is lost that is most useful about the form in today’s world. Chakrabarty, the ‘Notes on Contributors’ tell us, is especially concerned with exploring ‘themes of race and sexuality’, while Holland as artist-writer is intent on ‘investigating the problematics and ambiguities of an expanded understanding of translation.’ Inspired by Lacan’s commentary on Edgar Allan Poe’s story *The Purloined Letter*, and acute awareness that we live in precarious and unstable times, both are open-ended in their discussion. At one point, the ‘object-relations’ psychoanalyst W. R. D. Fairbairn is mentioned, but his name is misspelled; the error was no doubt missed at the proof-reading stage. Otherwise, the conversation sparkles with immaculate erudition. About their approach, Chakrabarty observes that the most interesting essays ‘overturn the tradition and encourage what we’re doing, turning the gaze, exploring why we do what we do’, and questioning ‘what’s beneath the veneer of structures, perceived narratives and the fiction of reality’ (p. 186). Intriguingly, their essay ‘turns our gaze’ on seven photographs, captioned ‘Together, writing, Southbank, 2019’, of their hands at different stages writing on A-4 notebooks. The photographs seem remarkably intimate, like the essay form itself.

Philip Lopate in ‘My Love Affair With the Essay’ has a more traditional approach to defining the essay. He mentions not only Montaigne as past practitioners, but also Hazlitt, Lamb, Emerson, and more recent ones like James Baldwin, and Joan Didion. Among others, he quotes Samuel Johnson’s definition as ‘a loose sally of the mind’, but he does have his finger on the pulse regarding modern developments; e.g., saying about essays that ‘they appeal to the contemporary moment’s hunger for confiding voices, as witnessed elsewhere in TV talk shows and reality shows’ (p. 174). Lopate himself is a distinguished American essayist.

Chris Arthur, who ‘has published several essay collections’, collaborates with Graham Johnston, ‘artist and creative nomad’, in ‘Line Drawing’, one of four essays which may be said to focus on ‘geopoetics’. The section on ‘Tracing Consciousness’ is especially interesting. They argue that the essay is ideal for ‘capturing the moment’, pointing out that essayists have always ‘been fascinated by consciousness and have variously tried to give accounts of what it contains as the mind engages with whatever aspects of the world has given rise to a particular essay’ (p. 37).

Lorens Holm, who teaches architecture at Dundee, and Paul Noble, architect and town planner of ‘widespread international recognition’, provides another conversational two-hander, indeed a philosophical symposium, in ‘Politics of Small Places’. It’s very detailed, illustrated with diagrams and art reproductions of work by Noble himself. One of the illustrations reproduces Patrick Geddes’s ‘Charting of Life’ diagram from his visionary book *Cities in Evolution*. Much of their conversation is precisely about cities, ‘small places’, indeed intimate ones, to those who live in them, how they develop, and how they could be improved.

Dundee figures again in ‘Mind the Gap’, by Susan Nickalls, ‘writer, journalist, broadcaster and award-winning film maker based in Edinburgh’. She begins her essay as follows: ‘As the train I’m on clatters across the Tay Rail Bridge, I scan the rain-soaked foreshore for my first glimpse of Scotland’s new £80 million design museum, V & A Dundee’ (p. 72). Her chosen essayistic medium is the interview, and the interviewee here is the Japanese architect who designed it, Kengo Kuma. The essence of Kuma’s aims as an architect are encapsulated in the following observation on his part: ‘My stance in every field has been to be skeptical of any logic that does not have gaps. My ideal is an architecture in which truth resides in the gaps’ (p. 80). Graham Johnston’s ‘compressed charcoal on printed

paper' illustration at the end of the Nickalls essay, entitled '*V & A Dundee, Exterior Study*', which captures part of the museum's façade, makes it look like a ridged cave full of gaps, thus uniting nature and architecture.

In 'Home, Ile, Ghar, Hame', Tomwa Folorunso, of Nigerian heritage, and Hamza Hussain, of Pakistani heritage, explore the concept of 'Home', 'Ile' in Yoruba, 'Ghar' in Urdu, and 'Hame' in Scots. Both are writers, with Hussain based in Dundee, and Folorunso in Edinburgh. Folorunso makes a Freudian slip when he describes 'staring at the Scot's monument when rain hits my face', but Walter Scott of course was indeed a Scot, and one who wrote novels which do deal with issues of identity. Like Scott did in his time, both writers explore shifting identities, or 'modal shifting', enhanced by dialogue between them. Their exchange results in creative duality, despite occasional bureaucratic obstacles in their lives. As Hussain puts it, 'I can be whomever you want me to be, because that's what I do. It's easier than breathing' (p. 148). Folorunso makes a similar point about his own dual identity: 'No matter how much this world tries to force me to choose between them, they're always together, unable to exist without each other' (p. 146).

The process of creativity itself is highlighted in another five of the essays. Whitney McVey, an American artist, based in London, 'best known for her installations, sculpture and paintings', does so with aphoristic comments on her own semi-abstract work through what looks like the medium of ink. Both in her work and comments, she likes to be boldly enigmatic: 'Doubt, uncertainty are passions for the artist, only understood by those in communion with their materials' (p. 136).

Gabriel Josipovici, one of the most renowned literary critics, is more direct about creativity in his essay, 'On Being Hit in the Head by a Poem' – a refreshingly audacious title. It's a close analysis of T.S. Eliot's poem *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*, but with a difference. He is not intent on 'explaining' the poem, still less idolising Eliot, as academic critics tend to do. He tells us that he reacted to Eliot's poem viscerally, not just in terms of an intellectual appreciation: 'And that is still how it seems to me whenever I re-read that poem, or any of the poems and novels that do that to me' (p. 44).

Duncan McLean, who lives in Orkney, and Kenny Taylor, editor of *Northwords Now*, in their exchange 'The Flicker of the North' discuss the creative possibilities unleashed when re-imagining the idea of 'the North'. McLean remarks that 'tourists are attracted to places by fictional animals like Nessie and fictionalised versions of real people like Mary Queen of Scots ...', but he crucially adds that what attracts and excites you and me is just as fictional: the notion that "North" is something more than a relative geographical description; the idea that George Mackay Brown's fantasies describe an Orkney that ever really existed' (p. 127). Taylor in reply points out that nevertheless 'there's something more than the simple law of averages that means that some great writers, past and present, have come from northern countries' (p. 129). A fascinating exchange results about two Norwegian writers, Knut Hamsun, and the less well-known Sigrid Undset. While the Nobel laureate Hamsun ended up a pro-Nazi, Undset joined the resistance.

'Songs I Can't Play', by the Australian novelist Stephanie Bishop, delves deeply into the psyche of a young woman learning how to play the cello. She finds that it's a visceral process not unlike Josipovici responding to T. S. Eliot's poem: 'The challenge is to find the song in the air and run it through my body, that has developed over time like sediment and give it shape, *set it free*' (p. 23, my italics).

'A Voyage Out in Education', by Jane Macrae, a Science teacher in London for many years, explores how the curriculum in secondary schools can be made more creative. Her

project to this end was to create ‘courses based on harmony and its principles that could be incorporated into the curriculum.’ She argues that this does not entail changing the curriculums as such, but encouraging teachers to be more innovative, a process which involves ‘asking teachers to re-think what they were teaching in their various subjects’ (p. 114). One practical example, ‘a simple activity using the senses’, involved pupils ‘smelling a little heap of damp soil when reading a text about the effects of poor farming practices on the soil.’ The effect was that much was ‘revealed about the soil by connecting to it in this way’, making for ‘an enlivening experience!’ (p. 115).

The final four essays considered here look into the darker aspects of ‘being human’. In ‘You by Me: Writing Depression’, Stephen Carruthers and Fiona Stirling conduct a dialogue, much of it in a fragmented style, reminiscent of R. D. Laing, on the various stages of depression. Carruthers is a teacher based in the Scottish Highlands who describes himself as ‘a keen advocate for the benefits of creative writing both in education and mental health.’ Stirling is a writer and practicing therapist ‘passionate about exploring mental health through narratives and collaborative work with those who have lived experience.’ Her essayistic collaboration with Carruthers does just that. It is so powerful that it should be turned into a drama, just right for the modern stage.

‘Between the Lines’, by Dai John, switches the meaning of ‘lines’ as an artistic technique to an existentially dangerous military meaning. It has very much to do with territory, or ‘space’, a not entirely imagined one at that, and who actually controls it at any given time. John himself ‘has served with the military for over 30 years’, and ‘has produced a number of U.K. and NATO defence policy publications.’ His essay chronicles the psychological tensions involved during his tour of duty in the summer of 1999 as part of the Nato-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), whose purpose was to protect local civilians against the threat of Serb massacres. Based on journal entries, his essay pays minute attention to detail, and dangers faced. It has all the trappings of a cautionary short story for our times.

‘A Leaf Out of Someone’s Book’, a two-page essay by Graham Domke, ‘freelance curator and critic based in Glasgow’, is both art appreciation and poetic elegy. It celebrates his friend John Calcutta, himself a teacher, art curator, and influential critic, who died, while not yet reaching 40, in 2018, so the essay is pretty much an immediate, yet not overly sombre, response to his friend’s untimely death. Both were fond of collecting leaves and greatly taken by contemporary art. His great admiration for Calcutta is lucidly expressed in the following recollection: ‘His roundabout way of taking ideas for a walk was inspirational to all who crossed paths with him’ (p. 191). He was, in short, as Domke puts it at the beginning of his contribution, ‘a great essayist’ (p. 190).

Death is directly faced in ‘Life in the Bardo: Dying, Death and the Imagination’, by Edinburgh-based Australian novelist Meaghan Delahunt. The essay draws on her experience as a creative writing tutor in a hospice, and looking after her mother’s in her final days. It is a profoundly moving one, informed as well by spiritual guidance from Tibetan Buddhism. Suffice it here to point to her comments on the artist Damien Hirst and his famous stuffed shark. She informs us that ‘Hirst’s first shark sculpture, after only two years, had begun to disintegrate’ in its Saatchi Gallery vitrine. Hirst therefore decided to replace the shark for its new owner, a fund manager: ‘And so a new shark was caught off the coast of Australia (a female tiger shark in her middle years) and shipped in formaldehyde to Hirst’ (pp. 87-88). Her contempt for art of this sensationalist kind is unmistakable: ‘But I reject the shark as a Western metaphor for the unimaginable – for death.’ She adds that ‘such an association seems to close down an imaginative space rather than opening it up’ (p. 88).

The sheer diversity of essayists in *Imagined Spaces*, and their innovative styles of writing, makes the anthology, edited with such aplomb by Gail Low and Kirsty Gunn, essential reading. To quote from their introduction, these exemplary essays above all offer us ‘the opportunity not to write or read simply *about* a subject or an idea, but rather to write and read *into* it, write *towards* it’ (their italics, pp. 12-13).

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