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RE-MARKINGS

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Journal of English Letters

Wole Soyinka

Tanure Ojaide

Jonah Raskin

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Re-Markings, a biannual refereed international journal of English Letters, aims at providing a healthy forum for scholarly and authoritative views on broad sociopolitical and cultural issues of human import as evidenced in literature, art, television, cinema and journalism with special emphasis on New Literatures in English including translations and creative excursions.

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EDITORIAL

It is my privilege and honour to greet the members of the Re-Markings' fraternity with a feeling of excitement and humility on this precious moment that has brought us to the landmark 25th anniversary of our publication since we began our adventurous journey in March 2002. In the vast continuum of time twenty-five years may be a mere speck but I wish to reiterate that what we truly need to celebrate is not the time span but our commitment to consistently provide a platform for the dissemination of ideas and concerns related to vital vibrant issues across the globe.

As a student in school I used to be fascinated by William Wordsworth's line, "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky." Today, I can say with a great deal of confidence that, among other avowed aims of Re-Markings, I hold paramount the need to bring the hues and shades of the uplifting rainbow of hope to the pages of the journal through debates and discourses on every conceivable issue that urges and compels us not to turn our gaze away from grim reality be it that of religion, race, colour, caste, class, gender, language, nature, community, nation or what you will. There can be little doubt that what we see all around is bound to fill us up with gloomy despair but it cannot be denied that what stirs us through such disconsolate terrains is our responsibility to believe and keep marching ahead in sync with the line from Rabindranath Tagore's "*Jodi tor dak shune keu na aase taube ekla chalo re*" (If no one responds to your call, move alone) or with Arthur Hugh Clough's poem "Say not the Struggle nought Availeth."

Through 1500 plus articles, interviews, essays, stories, interviews, poems, memoirs, reviews and other variant genres like films, television, mass media, journalism and social media, Re-Markings has been able to showcase efforts made by individuals and communities to uphold the quest for truth and justice in whatever way possible. If established and acclaimed celebrity writers and academics have been adorning the journal with their brilliant creativity, it is heartening to mention that we have spared no pains to encourage and motivate young upcoming scholars and teachers to contribute their very best to the journal. Through our rigorous peer-review process and constant mentoring we have guided these enthusiastic youngsters to enhance their skills to understand complex texts and issues by adhering to meticulous and ethical norms of research and express their observations and views with clarity in lucid jargon-free language and style.

The current celebratory number of Re-Markings offers a kaleidoscopic range and variety of significant material catering to troubled landscapes on planet Earth in every possible domain of existence from ancient Kapilavastu to contemporary Africa, America, India, Australia and other spheres of human existence. Many a heart of our avid readers is bound to 'leap up' to see the towering presence of

the first African Nobel Laureate in Literature – Wole Soyinka – at the top of the list of contributors in this volume. It is especially noteworthy that his poem shows the path of resistance and activism as medium of transforming the world by challenging the status quo approach adopted by the wielders of power everywhere. It is a matter of great significance that when the esteemed Soyinka was approached to contribute to this edition of Re-Markings, he instantly agreed to share his rebellious poem. Remarkably bold and strong even at the age of 91, the writer, playwright, poet and activist – who dared to cause affront to the dictatorial attitude of Donald Trump towards artists and intellectuals without bothering that his outspokenness would deprive him of his US citizenship – told Dr. Tijan Sallah that he was happy to learn that Re-Markings found his poem ‘usable’. Such a unique gesture of humility from a person of his stature reminded me of the lines from Kipling’s poem “If”: “If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,/ Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch, ... / Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it.”

The voices from Africa in this issue succeed in bringing to the foreground the immensity of the power of narratives that have emerged from a continent that had for long been relegated to the epithet of a ‘dark’ and ‘uncivilized’ part of human civilization by many obsessed bearers of “the White man’s burden.” Likewise, narratives of traumatic disasters not only make us aware of the human ability to unleash mass destruction through Nuclear bombs and other lethal arsenals but also highlight how the resilient power of the struggle of survivors have motivated succeeding generations to remember, like Hemingway’s Santiago, that “a man can be destroyed but not defeated.” No less important are events like the Operation Blue Star that wrought unimaginable havoc on a particular community whose collective motive had always been ‘seva’ or service to humanity. Besides the post-colonial discourse on Macauley, the illuminating essays on teaching poetry, the Paika Rebellion in Orissa, the battle against vested interests to preserve and sustain the environment and thought-provoking insights into the arena of marginalized populations – be it the Dalits in India or the African Americans in the world’s most powerful democracy – have greatly enriched the contents of this beautiful bouquet of ideas. It is no small matter that, taken together, the contributions here amply reflect, like the rainbow, the spirit of harmonious multiculturalism cutting across divisive barriers and boundaries of discrimination and prejudice.

To all distinguished members of the Advisory board, editor friends, eminent contributors, passionate readers and ardent admirers of Re-Markings, I place here on record my everlasting gratitude. Thank you, one and all!

Nibir K. Ghosh
Chief Editor

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NOTE FOR READERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Provided in the current PDF of Re-Markings March 2026 are the first page of each essay/article. For electronic version of any contribution or the whole issue, please contact the Executive Editor at remarkings@hotmail.com

Poetry

THE DEATHLESS BATTLE HYMN

(for Fidel Castro at 100)

Wole Soyinka

The ancient battle hymn still resounds, but
In warped tonalities. *Esa bandera...*
The question is: who waves the flag striped –
Humanity? That flag being unclaimed, orphaned,
Shall we archive as centennial loss, a world
In tatters, hovering on the twitch of a final
Self-immolation? *La historia me absolvera* -
Even History needs a world to inhabit.

Barbarians strut on land and sea, from
Sahelian bloodied sands to arctic wastes
The battle hymn no longer calls to soul
Like cymbals, massed to march
To youth chorales – no, it's the screech
Of rusted pots and pans in children's
Famished hands, eyes big as ostrich eggs
Scanning bare horizons for relief.

Ese cielo? Drum rolls in the sky, but these
Are droves of drones delivering death
On innocents, smothering that other human
Pang that will not be denied – the eternal
Pang of – freedom. *Realpolitik* rules the skies.
Power cites history as alibi, robs humanity
Of the present. What strange bedfellows
The century has spawned! *Esta tierra* – si!

This earth, not earth of hereafter. But now
Behold the grim Illusionists at work, watch
Prelates fused to Power, unctuous, robed
In pious eulogies of the unknowable
Immune to the march of time, to stirring

FIVE POEMS

Tanure Ojaide

NEW ACQUISITIONS

Of all the new acquisitions, the scariest, the solitude.
The withdrawal from multiple fronts into peepholes.
There're no visiting others, the same as not receiving guests.
There's no driving out in the new petrol price regime
or entertaining with beer or wine that would diminish one....

BLACK & WHITE

In the prayerful country of my birth,
I move into a lone position
to observe the world's gun headquarters
that I adopted as my secure home.

REVISITING WARRI

Only here proverbs are born and reborn daily.
Every mouth is overexcited and runs loose.
New rhythms stir the air from dawn through nightfall.
More songs of sorrow and hope than bacchanalia.

I SEEK TRANSFORMATION

Today I am not wearing my Apple watch.
Time ought to create but it is cracking into rubble.
I am not going to watch DSTV and its bloodbath.
I have heard more than enough of human horrors.

THEY CALL US NAMES

We left the homeland but returned now and again.
We unlock ourselves from tyrannies on both sides.
We have become a species we did not ask for.

**FAME, SOLITUDE AND B. TRAVEN:
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY**

Jonah Raskin

In this autobiographical essay by longtime Re-Markings contributor, Jonah Raskin describes the year he spent in Mexico while investigating the life and times of B. Traven, one of the most mysterious authors of the 20th century. The author best known for the novel, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which was made into a Hollywood movie, Traven rejected fame and aimed for anonymity during the whole of his literary career which began in the 1920s and ended before he died in 1969, his age and place of birth unknown. Raskin deftly weaves together literary criticism, Mexican history, Traven's biography (what little is known), and the saga of Raskin's life in Mexico City and his travels to Chiapas, near the border with Guatemala. Not immune to the occupational hazards of biography, Raskin became caught up in what Freud called "transference and counter transference." He projects some of himself on Traven and inserts parts of Traven into his own life. An excellent introduction to the perils and joys of biography, the essay also explores the nature of fame and solitude and offers a portrait of Mexican society. The essay concludes with a recommended reading list of Traven's books.

Readers of Re-Markings probably don't recognize the name B. Traven and haven't read his novels, though they might know of the movie, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, based on one of his novels. No popular 20th century writer was less known and more mysterious than Traven. The name Traven was one of several aliases that he used during his life, as well as Hal Croves and T. Torsvan. More than half-a-century after his death in Mexico City, biographers still don't know when or where he was born and why he concealed his identity, though his novels offer clues.

In 1917 soon after the US went to war against Germany he applied under the name Ret Marut for a US passport. His request was denied though he alleged that he was born in San Francisco, California on February 25, 1882. He could not have offered documentary proof of his birth; the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed all records of births in the city. In 1923 he was arrested in London for violation of the "Alien's Order." He had failed to register with the police. He was deported in 1925, when he found employment as a fireman with a ship's crew, though once again he alleged that he was as American citizen born in San Francisco.

REVISITING THE BLUESTAR OPERATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

Amritjit Singh

For many of us, 1984 continues to evoke George Orwell's well-known 1948 novel that had introduced us to *doublethink*, *newspeak*, and *memory hole*—paradigms that continue to play a prominent role in many parts of the world today. However, in the South Asian context, 1984 signals the terrible events in and around the year that remain inscribed painfully in the memory of most Indian citizens. Through several years of careful and diligent work, Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry has gathered nine substantive essays in *Chaurasi* covering a wide range of issues that emerge from Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi's decision to storm the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar (the Golden Temple) and 40 other gurdwaras in Punjab in June 1984 and the consequent violence directed at Sikhs in New Delhi and other cities in the first week of November 1984 after Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated on October 31 by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

More specifically, this edited volume is the first of its kind to offer a critical assessment of literary texts on the 1984 anti-Sikh massacres. It addresses several crucial concerns related to the reading of communal violence through personal experiences and offers literary analyses of selected texts: novels, short stories, films, and oral narratives that explore the painful subject of 1984. The essays offer an evaluation of literary works that cover a variety of experiences connected with both June 1984 in Amritsar and November 1984 in Delhi and other locations. These experiences stem from the violence faced by innocent Sikh pilgrims who had gathered at the Harmandir Sahib in the first week of June 1984 to commemorate Guru Arjun Dev's martyrdom anniversary; the trauma resulting from the brutal killings of innocent Sikh families, especially their adult males, in Delhi and elsewhere; the humiliation and rape of women; and also how Sikh women persisted in their fight for justice without much institutional support throughout the terrible 1990s in Punjab. The essays in *Chaurasi* and the editor's compelling Introduction collectively signal how survivors of the 1980s and the 1990s attempted to recover from the trauma of what they had experienced and whether full recovery is ever possible.

There have been many single-authored and edited volumes on the 1984 anti-Sikh violence dealing with the politics around the event. *Chaurasi* is an attempt to break the silence around the literary writings on the tragedy and to offer a critical evaluation of such output.

There have been many single-authored and edited volumes on the 1984 anti-Sikh violence dealing with the politics around the event.

**THE POET HARRY LLOYD VAN BRUNT:
MEMORIES OF MY BENEVOLENT TEACHER**

Tijan M. Sallah

Recently, I have been thinking of the late Harry Lloyd Van Brunt, who, in his poetic career, has gone by several names: H. L. Van Brunt in his early years, and Lloyd Van Brunt in his later. I wish to discuss how I came to know him, as well as his intriguing life and poetry. I was his student in the seventies, and attended his Writers' Workshop held at the Hambidge Center for the Arts, near Dillard, in northern Georgia. Since that experience, whenever we spoke intermittently by phone—he often referred to me as his “best student ever.” Although a flattering endorsement—I often wondered what this meant. Was it because I had published more in various genres than he ever did, or was he comparing me with other students he has had? I never bothered to inquire. Instead, I simply registered an inner gratitude for being appreciated by my former teacher—my literary maestro. I came to understand more of what he meant in a letter he wrote to me from his West End, New York Apartment dated December 13, 1996, after a phone conversation. I had promised him then that I will write an article on his poetry and our friendship, and he was excited about the prospect. He noted: “Here are the reviews of my poetry that I can find copies of. More do exist but I have either forgotten about them or did not keep copies. It's so good of you to be interested in my work after all this time. As I read your books of poems, I was proud of you, the pride one has in one's best pupil. And grateful that I was in part responsible for causing more good poems to exist.”

I studied creative writing under Van Brunt in 1977, while in my senior year at Rabun Gap Nacoochee School. The Nacoochee school was home to the famous *Foxfire* journal—a nationally popular Doubleday, Anchor publication in the 1970s and 80s started by Eliot Wigginton—and ran by Nacoochee School students, who interviewed traditional folks from the Southern Appalachia mountains about their home arts and crafts, their stories and customs, and their folk remedies. The Nacoochee school was perched on the valley of Dillard, Georgia (near Clayton) in the midst of the green foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The school's environment was breathtaking scenery, a lush ecosystem of mountains dotted with maples, oaks, birch, pines, spruce and hickory coexisting with deer, foxes, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, chipmunks and other wildlife. Log cabins spattered the landscape, and so did clusters of cow-herds feasting on distances of green in the valleys of Rabun Gap.

I had come from West Africa to the US in the seventies fed on all the seductive myths of America. I had come from a Sere Kunda, a small town near Banjul, the capital city of the Gambia, which was located on a savannah plain.

**SURVIVING HIROSHIMA: A CONVERSATION WITH
CHARLOTTE JACOBS ON HIROSHIMA SURVIVOR AND
ACTIVIST SETSUKO NAKAMURA THURLOW**

Robin Lindley

Humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist.

- Setsuko Nakamura Thurlow

“Little Boy” was the innocuous code name for the uranium-235 atomic bomb that fell on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, at 8:15 AM, Japan Standard Time. The bomb exploded about 2,000 feet above the ground with the force of 20,000 tons of TNT and incinerated much of the once thriving city.

At detonation and in the ensuing months, Little Boy killed more than 100,000 people, most of whom were civilians. By the end of 1945, an estimated 140,000 people had died, although exact figures could not be determined because of the chaos and because the firestorm had cremated so many people.

Reports to the American public following the atomic bombings of both Hiroshima and then Nagasaki contained little information on how the destructive new devices affected the human beings trapped under the mushroom clouds. Indeed, the US government celebrated the new weapons while suppressing reports on agonizing radiation injuries and poisoning, complicated thermal burns, birth defects, illnesses, and other novel and horrific consequences of nuclear war. And, after the war ended, the military closed the atomic cities to reporters.

But from the fiery rubble of the devastated Hiroshima, a special witness arose who put a human face on the terrible reality of nuclear war: Setsuko Nakamura Thurlow. And, in her new book *90 Seconds to Midnight, A Hiroshima Survivor's Nuclear Odyssey* (Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press, Melbourne University Publishing), acclaimed biographer Charlotte Jacobs recounts the inspiring story of Setsuko who survived the world's first nuclear attack and became a courageous activist and moral force for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

As Jacobs recounts, Setsuko Nakamura, a talented 13-year-old student, was rescued from the ruins of the Japanese military headquarters where she had just begun work decoding and, where after the atomic blast, many of her schoolmates burned alive. As she wandered in the immediate fiery aftermath of the bombing, she saw the terrible human cost of the new bomb. She saw the burnt and dismembered remains of her fellow citizens and the stunned immediate survivors with clothes torn away, ribbons of skin hanging from bones, eyes dislodged from sockets, entrails bursting from the eviscerated.

Short Story

THE BODY

Véronique Tadjó

At week-ends, they usually slept late, which was easy to understand considering that during the week, they got up early for work and school runs. But that particular Sunday, Xolile's sleep was disrupted when he had to go to the bathroom in the early hours of the morning. He got out of bed quietly making sure not to disturb his wife, Clara, who was a light sleeper.

When he heard some noises coming from the street, he opened the bathroom window and looked outside. The smell of spring was in the air. At first, he only saw the Jacaranda trees in front of the house but his attention was soon diverted by the blue emergency lights blurring into breaking dawn. Several police cars were parked in the road. Two officers were bending over a form lying on the pavement. The window did not open wide enough for him to have a good view of the whole scene. However, he had a pang when he saw clearly the black plastic sheet that was covering a body.

Xolile closed the window quickly, realizing he could be called as a witness if the policemen spotted him. He went back to bed, lying carefully on his side. His wife turned round and asked in a voice husky with sleep:

"What's the matter? Why did you take so long in the bathroom?"

"Oh, Nothing," he said, surprised she had noticed. "It's just that there is a dead body in the street..." Then he added quickly, "But the police are attending to it."

"What time is it?"

"Must be around six." Xolile answered all too relieved that she had not registered what he just said.

He saw her pull the covers over her shoulders.

When they finally got out of bed around ten, they heard loud voices in the street. This time they both looked out of the bathroom window. Leaning against their cars, three policemen were talking loudly and sharing jokes. There was no dead body to be seen.

"It's Sunday for God's sake, Clara exclaimed, can't they make less noise? They are going to wake the children up. Surely, they must know that there are people living in this street!"

After a while, the couple heard the policemen raving their engines' cars before leaving. In fact, it coincided with the beginning of the service at the Church across the road. People had started trickling into the sacred building. It must...

**THERE IS NO CAUSE FOR CONTROL:
EVERYTHING IS UNDER ALARM!**

Tess Onwueme

The history teacher was still writing out questions on the blackboard when the principal's car suddenly screeched to a halt in the school driveway. She dashed out of the driver's seat, headed for our classroom block. Nobody needed to tell us to brace up. Stand at attention. You dare not move, nor stir, for Sister Martha's combustible spirit guzzles the air. "I will deal with you!" her Irish chord struck jarring notes of a bell on the concrete floor. My God, who's Sister going to deal with now? My tired eyes flashed into the sports field, freezing at her six-foot apparition. Suddenly, a brusque macho voice flared up. "Woman, shut your big mouth. Otherwise, I'll seal it for you!" The voice thundered from the convent within walking distance of our classroom block. A man? Threatening Sister? He's playing with fire. The stunned faces in my class spoke, loud. Eyes dilated. We sat on the edge of our seats. Even the history teacher. Nobody said a word. We just sat there, staring, and hoping that the history teacher would get curious enough to step out and check out what was happening out there. Or better still, even cancel the exam session altogether. Ha! The wishful thinking of students! One thing was certain. We were all under this white woman's spell. And Sister ruled with silence. It wasn't really what she said that sliced your pride and composure. No. The damage was done with her piercing turquoise blue-green eyes, darting, stabbing, and shredding the inner cloaks of your being. Sister Martha? Didn't take nonsense from anybody. Not even from the teachers. Right in front of us, we've seen her box teachers who came late to school. Sister Martha flew into a fistfight with the soldiers, now holding the school security hostage, and stomping the bulky man to pulp with the boots and butts of their gun. Like famished bees smelling nectar, the army crashed the gate. Sacked Holy Child Girls. Our history teacher instantly declared that our exam was over and hurried with our papers to the staff room. Flash floods of army-green camouflage uniforms rushed in, spreading like seaweed, and blanketing our sports field. War has come to our school. And Holy Child Girls is...taken. "Give me woman. Give me food. Give me drink!" The army swarmed. Sister, too, was charged. Ready. Our feet led us outside. Flying on top and over each other. Breaking glass windows and jumping out of our classrooms. All roads just led to our school gate fenced by the marauders. Sister was running to the convent. "Come. Sistah-Babe! What you carry? Beta wine? Give me drink!" The soldier with runny mouth hijacked Sister Marie: '*Dominus vomitus!* Not so de priest drink for altar? Hey! Like the Holy Father, me too, will drink, Sistah," the soldier suddenly swung as if landing with wings spread out. Grabbed Sister Marie's breast. Stripped her bra. Swooped and gobbled her down. Poor Sister Marie! I moaned. The revelry intensified with the rape of the innocent. Then it turned into a carnival. They turned to us girls for their bacchanalian feast. Many got eaten.

THE HOTEL MALOGO

Helon Habila

The sun was setting when I got off the bus and entered the empty hotel bar. Most of the space in the dim rectangular room was taken up by iron chairs arranged round iron tables, the white paint peeling off to reveal the rust, brown and streaky, underneath. The wooden windows were closed and a single light bulb in the ceiling illuminated the room faintly. A long counter with whiskey bottles on shelves along the wall behind it covered one side of the room. A door behind the counter stood ajar.

"Hello," I called, dropping my bag on the rough concrete floor. "Is anyone here?"

A man in a dirty yellow singlet came out wiping his hands on a towel. "Yes?"

"I want a room."

He looked me up and down with his sickly yellow eyes, and I could tell he was trying to determine my age.

"You get money?"

"Yes."

"A room na fifty naira for one night. You fit pay?"

I had four hundred naira in my pocket. He reached into a drawer and brought out an old register. On the tattered cover was handwritten in blue ink: Hotel Malogo. He opened a page and lifted his pen.

"Wetin be your name?"

I hesitated. "Diaz."

His pen hovered. "Diaz? Which kind name be dat?"

His anaemic eyes betrayed his confusion. "How you spell dat?"

I spelled it for him.

"How long you wan stay?"

"Three days." I'd get a job and move to a more permanent accommodation as soon as possible.

"You pay now, plus fifty naira deposit."

"But . . ."

He closed his register with a bang. I paid and followed him down a corridor and up a flight of concrete steps to the first floor. My room was the second to the last in a long row of rooms on one side of a dark, uncarpeted hallway whose walls gave off a musty, airless smell. He flicked the light switch on and off a couple of times to prove that the light was working, then he turned to the fan.

HOW DOES POETRY TEACH US? WHAT DOES IT TEACH? AN ESSAY IN NOTES

K. Narayana Chandran

Apart from exploring relations that bind Poetry and Teaching in common pursuit, I stop by certain unexamined premises and uncontested bromides. Poetry has no theory aside from the teaching it affords. The following sections only argue that Poetry is what Poetry does, a truism that its theorists find too plain to dispute. Unless Poetry teaches, it makes nothing happen. This essay is structured rather loosely although a subheading for each note anchors the main idea that drives my thoughts. The final note here ties up my major concerns into a single sheaf. Repetition and overlap of themes in some passages are not accidental. They occur when some forethought leads me on to an afterthought, and sometimes turns me backward. I often seek the support of metaphors to understand two things that purport to do the same thing at once.

TEACHING, POETRY: both are widely misunderstood. They are misunderstood by the uneducated public just as widely by those who think they know a great deal about the world around them. Not to speak of those who do not care about either. No wonder then that poet-teachers, and teachers of poetry, find themselves challenged by those who are cynical about poetry and pedagogy. That said, any news of the obsolescence of either, like Mark Twain's death during his lifetime, is greatly exaggerated.

Think now of either Poetry or Teaching as a window. Open the window. No one will see only the window unmindful of what view it affords, what one sees beyond the window. Likewise, either Poetry or Teaching is a frame for the other to afford better view. Let us assume an open window in teaching so that what we see from here, others can see us from there as well. Georges Hugnet, the French graphic artist used to say: "The window was to the bird what the wing is to the day." This is the poet's metaphor for freedom, a wing only the bird can see in the window that opens to the day. An affordance must be open like a window.

Teaching

Teaching is most widely misunderstood especially where it is supposed to take place, in modern schools and colleges. Either the word is taken literally as *tuition*, someone trying to teach one pupil or small groups a given subject outside or besides formal classes in an institution; or as *coaching* the young undergo in order to perform well at a competition.

MACAULAY: TO WHIP OR NOT TO WHIP, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Shanker Ashish Dutt

For close to two centuries, critical perspectives on Thomas Macaulay have been explicated by postcolonial academics, statesmen, administrators, columnists, legal scholars and reformers. He has been pilloried for Eurocentric prejudice, epistemic violence, cultural and linguistic engineering in the impositions made by a dominant colonial apparatus foisted upon an unresisting people. On the other hand, generous appraisals include his contribution to education, administration, governance juridical measures, the initiation of a scientific temper and social reform. The introduction of English in India had enabled the assimilation of the ideas of rationalism, civil liberty, constitutional self-government, studied substantially in English. that translated India's quest of freedom into a historical reality. Macaulay's evaluation through genuine engagement by academics and scholars of different disciplines as well as an ill-informed, benighted kakistocracy makes a theoretically and historically informed balanced critical exploration stimulating and challenging.

The whipping boy of substantial postcolonial criticism, Thomas Babington Macaulay was the spotlighted protagonist of a contentious cultural debate in India, a '*ragebait*' (the word chosen by OUP as word of the year) at the start of the winter of 2025. It relates to the story of English in India, the academic, cultural and administrative conditions of its emergence that warrants the exploration of its disparate consequences. It begins with William Bentinck's English Education Act in 1835, a legislative successor to Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) which is one of the most influential, consequential and debatable documents in the history of colonial India that refashioned education, culture, governance and administration in the Indian sub-continent. While framed as a progressive intervention aimed at modernising Indian education, postcolonial critics have demonstrated that the *Minute* functioned primarily as an ideological instrument of imperial domination. From a post-colonial perspective, Macaulay's *Minute* reveals the epistemic violence, cultural hierarchy, and calculated deployment of education as a tool of colonial control with racial overtones from contemporary multicultural perspectives. On the other hand, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, one of India's distinguished nineteenth century novelists spoke with approval of the 'two of the treasures we have culled from the rich mind of the English – love of Independence and the art of Nation building'. (qtd. Bagchi 155)

TIM WINTON'S *SHRINE*: DRAMATIZING TRAUMA

Mukesh Ranjan Verma

Based on the death of a teenager in a car accident, Tim Winton's play, *Shrine* is a moving play on the theme of loss and trauma. It shows how the death of their son, an only child, leaves the parents shattered. They lose their bearings and have no hope of resuming their earlier lives. The loss affects them in different ways. While for the father, the son was an extension of his elite social life, for the mother, he was a part of her being. There is also an affected third person, a socially marginalized girl who had been in love with the boy for a long time but had come close to him a day earlier than his fatal accident for which she holds herself responsible. My paper tries to analyze how Tim Winton, a prominent contemporary Australian writer, has succeeded in evoking the sense of trauma in his play by quick succeeding scenes, fluid in time and memory.

Tim Winton, who has written a large number of novels, short stories, non-fictional books, children's books, and, of late, plays, is one of the most distinguished contemporary Australian authors. While his first novel *An Open Swimmer* appeared in 1982, his latest novel, *Juice* came out in 2024. His novels have been adapted for films, television serials and radio productions. He has won Miles Franklin Award four times – in 1984, 1992, 2002 and 2009 – and two of his novels were shortlisted for Booker Prize in 1995 and 2002. Apart from having won several other literary awards and nominations, he was declared the Australian National Living Treasure in 1997, given Centenary Medal for service to literature and the community in 2001, and awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2023.

Tim Winton came to play writing rather late in his literary career. His first play *Rising Water* was produced on the stage by Black Swan State Theatre Company in Perth in 2011 and was published in 2012. His two other plays so far – *Signs of Life* and *Shrine* – were published in 2013 and 2014 respectively. *Shrine* was first staged by the Black Swan State Theatre Company on 31 August 2013. The director of the play, Kate Cherry observes in her "Director's Note":

Shrine goes to the heart of parenthood. We love our children, we want them to fly, be fearless, daring, rise above the crowd, be the leader, take chances, and yet because we love our children we want them to be safe, fit in, take no chances, not stick their head out of the crowd, live forever, and never hurt themselves. Parenting is a delight and a terror; as a new father wrote to me once, it is like having your heart ripped open and filled with everything, love, joy, pain and terror. (402)

**THE BUDDHA AS AN EPIC HERO IN
AŚVAGHOṢA'S *BUDDHACARITA***

Nibir K. Ghosh & Sunita Rani Ghosh

The paper makes an attempt to examine and evaluate the life and personality of the 'Enlightened One' as depicted by Asvaghosa in his immortal classic *Buddhacarita*, translated from Sanskrit into English by the acclaimed Indologist Edward B. Cowell in 1894/1895. Following the chronology of events beginning with the birth of the Buddha till the moment of his attaining enlightenment under the holy tree, the paper emphasises the epic grandeur of the heroic thoughts, experiences and utterances of the principal protagonist who, distressed by the sights of old age, sickness and death, makes a steadfast and unwavering commitment to liberate mankind from the throes of unmitigated misery.

The life of Buddha has an especial appeal. All my life I have been very fond of Buddha. ...I have more veneration for that character than for any other—that boldness, that fearlessness, and that tremendous love! He was born for the good of men. Others may seek God, others may seek truth for themselves; he did not even care to know truth for himself. He sought truth because people were in misery. How to help them, that was his only concern. – Swami Vivekananda (98)

Swami Vivekananda's eloquent veneration for Gautam Buddha lucidly resonates the admiration and esteem that Aśvaghōṣa (80-150 AD), the earliest known Sanskrit poet and philosopher, has expressed in *Buddhacarita*, his immortal creation celebrating the exemplary life of the Exalted One from the time of his birth to his attainment of Enlightenment. A brahmin by birth who later converted to Buddhism, Aśvaghōṣa became a true Buddhist in flesh and spirit and sincerely followed the Eight-fold Noble Path initiated by the Buddha. On account of his multi-sided genius, Aśvaghōṣa became a prominent figure as a poet and spiritual counsellor in the reign of Kanishka, the Kushan Emperor recognised in Indian History as a powerful ruler engaged not only in expanding his empire but also in spreading the ideals of Buddhism. Inspired by Kanishka's patronage and encouragement and urged by his own devotion to the Buddha, many of Aśvaghōṣa's creative works viz. *Buddhacarita*, *Saundarānanda* and *Sāriputra-Prakaraṇa* provide indelible imprints of Lord Buddha on his astounding creative abilities. In Aśvaghōṣa, notes Roma Chaudhuri, one can also find "many clear instances of a compassionate desire for inspiring, teaching, helping, serving, reforming and uplifting others." (Chaudhuri 14)

**HERO, MYTH, MEMORY AND DISCOURSE:
THE LITERARY AFTERLIVES OF BUXI JAGABANDHU
AND THE PAIKA REBELLION**

Tanutrushna Panigrahi

This paper investigates the literary representations of Buxi Jagabandhu, the iconic leader of the Paika Rebellion of 1817 of Odisha, situating him at the intersection of history, memory, culture and literary imagination. While archival history foregrounds his role as a military commander and leader of the first anti-colonial resistance in Odisha, literary texts present him through the lenses of myth, folklore, and nationalist discourses. Drawing upon two major Odia literary texts on Jagabandhu and the Odisha Uprising of 1817, one, *Buxi Jagabandhu*, a play by noted Odia playwright Manoj Das, and the second, *Athara Shah Satara*, a novel by Godavarish Mishra, the famous Odia novelist, this study explores the textual appropriation and symbolic reinscription of Buxi Jagabandhu. The paper employs frameworks from postcolonial theory, subaltern historiography and cultural study to examine how these literary pieces recreate history, negotiate themes of resistance, collective identity and indigenous agency in the face of colonial hegemony. The literary afterlives of Buxi Jagabandhu do not merely reconstruct a forgotten hero of early nineteenth-century Odisha, but create counter-narratives to colonial historiography, thereby reinforcing the cultural nationalism of Odisha within broader Indian freedom struggle discourses.

Introduction

The figure of Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mohapatra Bhramarbar Ray, more commonly known as Jagabandhu or simply “Buxi”, which is a hereditary military title, stands as an indelible symbol of Odisha’s earliest organised resistance to British colonialism. His leadership in the Paika Rebellion of 1817, often described as the first major armed uprising against East India Company rule in Odisha, has generated renewed academic and cultural interest in the last two decades. Yet, his presence in the Odia imagination is neither limited to the archival record nor reducible to formal historiography. Jagabandhu, like many leaders of early anti-colonial struggles in India, lives a vibrant literary afterlife, constructed and reconstructed through plays, novels, folk narratives and cultural reinterpretations. This paper seeks to analyse the literary afterlives of Buxi Jagabandhu through a close reading of two pivotal Odia literary works on Buxi Jagabandhu and Paika Rebellion: Manoj Das’s play *Buxi Jagabandhu* and Godavarish Mishra’s historical novel *Athara Shah Satara*. Both literary pieces move beyond narrativising the historical events relating to Buxi Jagabandhu and the Paika Rebellion; ...

**ON THE CROSS: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’
THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA—AN EXPLORATION**

Shernavaz Buhariwala

“On the Cross” is concerned with the trials and tribulation which men must undergo on the way to salvation. Confusions and delusions abound and these can be partially treated through counsel and catharsis. But the real problem is traced to the original source – Man’s alienation from God. The task of recalling God and seeing his Grace manifested is the prime purpose of this paper.

The Cross appears at a defining moment in life. When man stands at the crossroads, the path he subsequently takes, is to all purposes a new journey with new offerings in its wake. His previous sojourn is then a mere photograph in an album occasionally scanned, sometimes with inertia, sometimes with nostalgia. But the Cross is a many layered symbol. The difficulties we encounter are the crosses we must bear; they drain our resources and deepen our despair, till a different kind of recovery is sighted; involving a change in direction. Consequently, the Cross rises to become a beacon of retribution and redemption. Is not the Crucifixion a pledge of the Everlasting Mercy? Is not the Good Friday of privation followed by an Easter Sunday of the Resurrection?

The above scenario from the life of Christ is suggested in the doings of a group of revelers at a holiday resort. It is a weird assortment headed by a defrocked priest – Lawrence Shannon, who is now conducting tourists residing at a motel owned by Maxine. She is a widow of dubious tendency, with whom Shannon has a connection. Among others the spotlight centers on Nonno, an octogenarian poet (who has yet to compose his masterpiece) accompanied by his granddaughter Hannah who makes dollars here and there, by selling her mediocre sketches. Each person we encounter is beset with ghosts needing to be exorcised. Each is carrying a cross with no hint of deliverance in sight. On surface, a holiday is a time to let one’s hair down, but here the subterranean intent, is to make peace with oneself. The raucous trip to Mexico must then be seen as a journey to salvation, where the benighted party must pass from darkness to light, thus replacing the piety of the pulpit, with an all-embracing sympathy, that makes for a gracious and enduring humanism. “Love in its purest terms” as Tennessee Williams has called it. “Art, he (Williams) suggests, is the closest thing we have to a collective conscience, far more than mere theology.” (Doug Wright) This pilgrimage, for what is the journey to enlightenment if not a pilgrimage, is beset with conflicts. Individual vulnerabilities, naturalistic or deterministic, hinder life’s longing for renewal.

**THE AMERICAN DREAM AND EXCEPTIONALISM IN
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN
NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE**

Konda Nageswara Rao

This paper examines how four contemporary Black writers—Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jesmyn Ward, Claudia Rankine, and Colson Whitehead—systematically interrogate American exceptionalism through their multifaceted critiques of the American Dream. Drawing on Black theoretical frameworks, including Afro-pessimism, Black feminism, critical race theory, and theories of social death, this study analyzes how each writer employs distinct literary strategies—autobiographical memoir, Southern Gothic realism, experimental lyric essay, and speculative historical fiction—to expose the fundamental contradictions between American democratic ideals and Black lived experience. Their collective work reveals the American Dream not as a failed promise but as fundamentally repudiated on racial exclusion and Black suffering, demanding a radical reimagining of national identity, belonging, and the possibilities for genuine freedom.

Introduction

The American Dream, that enduring mythology of upward mobility, meritocracy, and limitless opportunity has long served as the ideological cornerstone of American exceptionalism. This narrative promises that through hard work and determination, anyone can achieve prosperity and success regardless of their origins. For Black Americans, however, this dream represents what Langston Hughes memorably called "a dream deferred," perpetually promised but systematically denied through both legal and extra-legal mechanisms of racial control. (Hughes 426) Contemporary Black writers have undertaken the urgent task of dismantling this foundational narrative, revealing how American exceptionalism not only excludes Black people but actively depends upon the negation and exploitation of Black life.

This paper examines four prominent contemporary Black writers—Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jesmyn Ward, Claudia Rankine, and Colson Whitehead—who collectively construct a comprehensive critique of the American Dream and its underlying mythology. These writers engage with what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney term "the under commons"—those fugitive spaces of Black intellectual and creative production that operate in critical opposition to mainstream American discourse. (Moten and Harney 26)

**REVISING HISTORY: A STUDY OF NARRATIVES OF
RESISTANCE IN P. SAINATH'S *THE LAST HEROES: FOOT
SOLDIERS OF INDIAN FREEDOM***

Parwinder Kaur

Aiming to reconstruct a counter hegemonic historical discourse of India's struggle for Independence, P. Sainath, as a revisionist oral historian, collects a varied number of undocumented voices of resistance in his recently published work *The Last Heroes: Foot Soldiers of Indian Freedom* (2022). He brings people hailing from different ethnicities, religions, cultures, classes, ages and various geographic parts of India to the fore in order to provide a fresh perspective to the historical discourse of the freedom struggle. Accordingly, the study at hand mainly focuses on revising history with the inclusion of a number of mini-narratives of resistance against the grand narrative of the nationalist movement in India. The primary thrust of the present research paper is to revisit a major historical event of modern Indian history with the help of Sainath's assemblage of personal experiences of individuals; to highlight the presence of multiple mini-narratives of subalterns by debunking the myth of a 'grand' narrative of resistance in the struggle for independence; and to recognise the role of alternative or parallel forms of historiography such as oral history in the formation of fresh historical consciousness.

The Indian movement for independence from colonial rule, which comprises a large chunk of twentieth-century Indian history, has been mainly recorded from the perspective of a few select individuals rightly identified by Ranajit Guha as Indian elite¹ personalities, institutions, political leaders and social reformers. As per the colonial and post-colonial official records, they are primarily considered as the harbinger of an independent nation. However, the active participation of many commoners during the movement has been overlooked by post-colonial historians even as India is about to complete almost eight decades as an independent nation. They are collectively mentioned as 'masses' and their individual stories have never found a foothold in recorded history. Nonetheless, a varied number of oral historians, literary journalists and non-fictional prose writers, with their unique venture into emerging literary forms of the twentieth century, have tried to accommodate these petit narratives² otherwise ignored in the official history of the country.

P. Sainath joins the line of these authors with his recently published *The Last Heroes: Foot Soldiers of Indian Freedom* (2022). He writes a parallel history by collecting first-hand experiences of individuals who have never been able to make their way to the official history.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND THE CHALLENGE TO
ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN RANJIT LAL'S
*BUDGIE, BRIDGE AND BIG DJINN***

Amandeep Kaur & Ankdeep Kaur Attwal

Children's literature on environmental issues employs various strategies to sensitize young minds about the ecological devastation caused by humans. Such strategies are examined under the lens of ecocriticism to understand their context and their socio-political implications. In the present study, Ranjit Lal's children's novel *Budgie, Bridge and Big Djinn* is analysed for its representation of nature, ecological issues raised and the role children play as environmental activists. The novel concerns unrestricted development that destroys ecosystems and disturbs the natural balance. The author aims to raise awareness of critical issues amongst young readers and presents children as torch-bearers to uphold environmental ethics and challenges old norms. The study aims to understand the context of the narrative, the techniques employed by the author and the discreet symbolism in the presentation of human and non-human characters. An analysis of Ranjit Lal's novel *The Trees of Medley Garden* is also given a side-glance study to better understand the author's perspective and the literary strategies utilised by him for eco-critical purposes.

Anthropocentrism, which Quinn et al. define as "human-centeredness"—conferring intrinsic value only to humans, with non-human entities viewed as only instrumentally valuable (Quinn et al. 894)—is a foundational idea in environmental ethics. It "puts man at the centre, making him assess other things in the context of his needs and pleasure" (Attwal 48) and often underpins exploitative attitudes in literature and policy. Children's literature increasingly interrogates this worldview, questioning the assumption that nature exists solely for human benefit. Ranjit Lal's children's novel *Budgie, Bridge and Big Djinn* (2019) uses the experiences of its child protagonists to challenge this perspective. The story highlights how children develop meaningful relationships with nature and face ecological threats posed by human greed and political power.

This paper contends that *Budgie, Bridge and Big Djinn* reveals how children's perspectives disrupt traditional human-centred views by highlighting their intimate connections with nature and their efforts to protect it. The novel exposes the complex interplay between environmental degradation and political-economic power, questioning narratives of progress used to justify ecological harm. By examining key episodes in the text alongside foundational ideas in environmental ethics, the paper argues that the story advocates for a more...

**REWRITING DALIT HISTORY THROUGH MEMORY:
READING G. KALYANA RAO'S *UNTOUCHABLE SPRING***

Harpreet Kaur

In *Untouchable Spring*, oral and lived memories do more than challenge official histories. They rewrite them. Memory shaped by caste-based injustice becomes a political act. The novel's fragmented, cyclical, and performative structure mirrors the rhythms of oral storytelling and turns narrative into a form of resistance. Through memory, song, and storytelling, Rao recovers voices silenced by the caste system and builds a shared political consciousness. By rooting history in orality and lived experience rather than official archives, the novel asserts dignity, preserves collective memory, and transforms narrative into a tool to reclaim Dalit history.

Dalit histories have long been marginalized, as official records reflect dominant-caste perspectives, leaving little space for oppressed voices. Violence, resistance, and everyday life are often ignored or reduced to stereotypes, erasing Dalit contributions to culture, politics, and collective struggles. G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* (2000) responds to this historical erasure by foregrounding Dalit memory, song, and oral tradition as living archives. Using fragmented and non-linear storytelling, the novel preserves generational memory and transforms individual suffering into collective history. Rooted in Telugu Dalit literature, the novel engages with the Bhakti movement, colonial-era resistance, and post-independence assertion, intensified by events like the 1985 Karamchedu Massacre. Through seven generations of Dalits in Yennela Dinni, Rao blends folk songs, diary entries, and lived experience to show how storytelling and memory challenge historical erasure, recover silenced voices, and shape Dalit identity and political consciousness in Andhra Pradesh.

While *Untouchable Spring* has often been read through memory and orality as strategies of resistance to dominant historiography, this paper argues that Rao does more than retrieve suppressed histories. It suggests that the novel stages memory itself as a historical method—one that deliberately refuses linearity, closure, and archival coherence. By foregrounding fragmentation, repetition, and affect, *Untouchable Spring* exposes not only the violence of caste history but also the limits of conventional historiography in representing Dalit life. This reading moves beyond viewing memory merely as counter-history to examine how Rao reworks narrative structure, temporality and genre to propose an alternative epistemology of history rooted in lived experience and oral transmission.

Review Essay

ON THE AFTER-LIFE OF THE ANTI-SIKH VIOLENCE OF 1984

Tej Nath Dhar

The anti-Sikh violence of 1984, which was triggered by the killing of Mrs Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards, is one of the most brutal happenings of contemporary times, which, because of the controversies surrounding it, continues to haunt public memory. Ishmeet Kaur has done well in collecting nine essays, arranged in four sections, to address the varied aspects of what she calls its after-life.

Kaur discusses with fine discrimination the key expressions that have been used to describe the massacre of Sikhs—riot, pogrom, carnage, and genocide—by different social and political organizations, Civil Liberties groups, and courts, but asserts that irrespective of how it is labelled, the Sikhs were subjected to humiliation and disgrace and made to experience fear and betrayal, even though as a community, they have always followed the principle of 'seva' without any consideration of religion, caste, creed, and colour. Putting the violence in the context of Sikh politics, from 1920s to 1990s, she states that the severity of Sikh suffering continues to be remembered, in songs, poems, slogans, festivals, and novels, and films. The essays revolve round these remembrances to counter the falsehoods spread by official bodies and organisations and thus function like alternate histories.

The essay by Nandita Haksar proves that the state, "the police, the judiciary, the commissions of enquiries—all failed to intervene and stop the massacre" of Sikhs. She writes elaborately about the enormity of the violence unleashed against them, and how their calls for help went unheeded by the police. Whatever little relief they got was from ordinary people who organized camps for them, set up the Nagrik Ekta Manch and constituted fact-finding teams, of PUCL and PUDR, to establish how top leaders of the government organized the violence. She also writes how the Supreme Court advised her to withdraw cases against the perpetrators of violence and the Rangnath Mishra Commission accepted only 128 affidavits and rejected 2905. She thinks that the hostility against the Sikhs had grown over time because of the publication of Satyarth Prakash and the rise of Hindu majoritarianism.

Yasmeen Arif writes how the massacre of Sikhs resulted in the rise of the numbers of Sikh widows, who were provided shelter in the Tilak Vihar Widows Relocation Colony, where they suffered a kind of "castaway-ness." She accepts that the perpetrators of violence against the Sikhs went scot-free, but the...

HINDI CINEMA VIS-A-VIS MUSLIM REPRESENTATION

Pradeep Trikha

Mohammad Asim Siddiqui's *Muslim Identity in Indian Cinema: Poetics and Politics of Genre and Representation*, published by Routledge in 2025, provides a timely and sharp analysis of the changing portrayal of Muslim identity within Hindi cinema. It carefully examines how perceptions of Muslim identity have evolved, tracing a path from historic films of the 1940s to modern narratives that often address the complexities of post-9/11 stereotypes and the wider issue of "global Muslim identity." Siddiqui is Professor of English at Aligarh Muslim University, an avid critic, translator, and reviewer. He argues that cinematic genres, language, and various sign systems are not just passive mirrors of societal views but actively shape and communicate ideas of identity. The key issues, such as social diversity, tokenism, and marginality, analysing how these concepts are reflected and reinforced in Hindi films are investigated at great length. The sub-title, "Poetics and Politics of Genre and Representation," emphasises cinema's powerful ability to both reflect societal attitudes and influence public perception. By claiming that cinematic elements help in understanding society, Siddiqui points to cinema's deep cultural impact and the vital need for audiences to recognise how identities are constructed through film.

The "Introduction" provides a solid academic foundation for Siddiqui's main argument, which suggests that cinematic genres, language, and various sign systems are not merely passive reflections of societal views but actively shape and communicate ideas of identity. Siddiqui meticulously traces a clear evolution in the cinematic portrayal of Muslim identity, beginning from historical films in the 1930s through the late 1970s. *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) has been progressively replaced by a "Hindutva vision," which increasingly casts Muslims as the "other." This shift is more than a mere change in cinematic style; it signifies a deep politicisation of historical narratives within Indian cinema. An unprecedented surge in films structured around themes related to Muslim rulers often stems from a certain naivety on the part of directors, who may believe that retelling the past, or an imagined past, can resolve questions of cultural identity. Siddiqui's analysis is richly illustrated with specific film examples that serve to solidify his arguments. He offers sensitive readings of films by contemporary directors like Raj Kumar Hirani and Zoya Akhtar, noting how their works often defy predictable markers of identity. This is consistent with observations about films such as *Zanjeer*, *Angaar*, *PK*, *Dear Zindagi*, *Chak de India*, *My Name is Khan*, *Raazi*, *Gully Boy*, and *Gangubai Kathiawadi*.

Movies such as *Sikander*, *Taj Mahal*, *Anarkali*, *Razia Sultan*, *Jodha Akbar*, and *Bajirao Mastani* tend to reduce complex historical personalities to simple caricatures as "foreigners and despots," which deepens communal rifts instead of promoting historical reflection or unity. The change in representation seems to accompany a shift in society, social beliefs, and political thinking, ...

**“I LOVE, THEREFORE, I AM” : HARJEET SINGH GILL’S
*DIALOGUE WITH A GIRL FRIEND***

Hiba Aleem

*Ishq se paida hai ghairat-e-hayat/
Ishq hai ramz-e-hayat, soz-e-hayat (Iqbal)*

[It is love that gives to life its sacred dignity/ Love is the secret of life, its impassioned heartbeat. (translation mine)]

These lines by noted Urdu poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal come to mind when one reads Harjeet Singh Gill’s *Dialogue with a Girl Friend* (2025), for few poets have captured the essence of love and life as aptly as Urdu poetry stalwarts like Iqbal, and Gill’s poetry is, likewise, a beautiful summation and exegesis of love as the bedrock of human existence, and what that entails in all its complex splendor. Written in the format of one long poem, with questions, arguments, and conflicts punctuated by answers that resolve the day’s dilemmas, *Dialogue with a Girl Friend* leaves readers with the feeling of having just witnessed the sweetness of love blossom, thrive, heal, and also confound within eighty pages.

Opening with uncertainty and vulnerability, the poem goes straight to its first paradox:

“How are you?
I don’t know.
What do you mean you don’t know?
Because I don’t know.
If I knew, I wouldn’t be your girl friend.” (25)

The idea of not knowing how one is, and thus falling in love, is at once whimsical and sensible once you get past the first spark of quirkiness within these lines. As Gill further elaborates, love is a “lack” and a “want” (25) that is fulfilled by companionship; if one were absolutely certain (and therefore full) of oneself, one wouldn’t fall in love. Most people would label a “lack” as a weakness, and it might be read as such, until the poet goes on to use the metaphor of the harp to elaborate upon what he means; much like a musical instrument, it needs someone to play it, one needs a lover to complete oneself, and therefore, one needs a lover to know oneself.

From this first paradox, Gill goes back thousands of years to the times of the ancient Greeks, where he challenges the Platonic approach to arriving at love through reason with the assertion that love can only be experienced, being a living, pulsing, flourishing force.

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