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# RE-MARKINGS

Vol. 6 No. 1 March 2007

Charles Johnson

Samuel Beckett

Thomas Pynchon

Bharati Mukherjee

Contemporary  
African Poetry

Canada-India  
Relations

The Vagina  
Monologues

Jhumpa Lahiri

Anjana Appachana

Special Section:

W.H. Auden

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# **RE-MARKINGS**

**Vol. 6 No. 1 March 2007**

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Re-Markings, a biannual journal of English Letters aims at providing a healthy forum for scholarly and authoritative views on broad socio-political 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

*Thousands are still asleep...  
But shall wake soon and long for letters.  
And none will hear the postman's knock  
Without a quickening of the heart,  
For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?*  
- W.H. Auden, "Night Mail."

Happily ensconced in "another kind of wood," Auden may acknowledge with a condescending smile this humble greeting to him on the centenary of his birth from his admirers in India, where his poetry survives, half a world away from the "valley of its making." It might possibly quicken his heart to see Edward Mendelson - the celebrity Executor of his Literary Estate - join the *Re-Markings* fraternity in remembering him as one who "became the most universal of modern poets by being the most individual." Auden may nostalgically remember David Ray who had the privilege of chauffeuring Auden when he visited Cornell University in the 1960s. Auden might possibly be delighted to see, in the Special Section devoted to him, the "Address" that he had so articulately delivered at the 1951 Session of the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom at Bombay, an address meant to remind people who govern "of what they do not like to be reminded, that the government are people and not numbers." It is a pleasure to remember a poet for whom the freedom of the individual always remained a matter of primary concern.

W(ystan) H(ugh) Auden (1907-1973) began his career thinking and writing about what the world would be like if men could create an earthly paradise. Exploring the terrains of democratic Athens, the New Jerusalem and the Ideal State, Auden experimented with all available theories and ideas to resolve the political, social and economic crises that beset his own civilization. However, his chief concern was not to become a political person but to find a formula for saving "a world that has had its day." In the process, he adopted what he could accept politically and use poetically. But when History intervened to show him the limitations of his euphoria, he conceded in no uncertain terms that "Poetry makes nothing happen," a statement that has resonated time and again throughout the twentieth century and after to stir up the debate concerning the role of poets and the true functions of poetry. Alarmed by political systems which attempted to remove economic pressures and incentives by substituting them with "social and

Governmental ones,” Auden realized that in politics the individual is a mere statistical entity. As a result, his concerns rightly shifted to the creation of “healing fountains” in the “deserts of the heart.” He began meditating on the richer functions of poetry and saw art as both an escape from and a revelation of reality:

*We want a poem to be beautiful, that is to say, a verbal earthly paradise, a timeless world of pure play, which gives us delight precisely because of its contrast to our historical existence with all its insoluble problems and inescapable suffering; at the same time we want a poem to be true, that is to say, to provide us with some kind of revelation about our life which will show us what life is really like and free us from self-enchantment and deception.*

Like the ‘hawk’ or the ‘helmeted Airman,’ Auden had the remarkable ability to tell the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate. Auden valued sincerity above all things, be it life or art. In his view, “The secret of good art is the same as the secret of a good life; to find out what you are interested in, however strange, or trivial, or ambitious, or shocking, or uplifting, and deal with that, for that is all you can deal with well.” Taking cue from Old Masters, Auden could visualize the extraordinary nature of day-to-day ordinary human suffering and yet reveal how life remains a blessing. Endowed with an innate gift for “memorable language,” Auden never failed to convey the thoughts of “a wise man in the speech of the common people,” attributes that ensured his permanent presence in eternity’s Hall of Fame.

Besides the comprehensive Special Section on W.H. Auden, the present issue of *Re-Markings* offers a rich spectrum of creative and critical renderings that include Charles Johnson’s story, “Kamadhatu,” Ramaswamy’s glowing centenary tribute to Samuel Beckett, a comprehensive survey of contemporary African poetry, insightful deliberations on writers of the Indian diaspora in the United States, an analysis of India-Canada relations, a critique of Pynchon’s allusive fictional world, a bouquet of verses and a passionate review of *The Vagina Monologues*.

*Re-Markings* is grateful indeed to all the contributors who have made this volume memorable.

**Nibir K. Ghosh**  
**Chief Editor**

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## SHORT STORY

### *Kamadhatu, A Modern Sutra*

(For Martin Hughes)

*Charles Johnson*

*The body is the Bodhi Tree;  
The mind is like a bright mirror standing.  
Take care to wipe it all the time.  
And allow no dust to cling. --Shen-hsiu*

Thus have I heard:

Not far from Osaka, deep in the forest, there is a 1400-year-old Buddhist temple called Anraku-ji, which in Japanese means “peaceful, at ease.” But the young priest who took over the care and upkeep of Anraku-ji not long ago, Toshiro Ogama was his name, felt neither truly peaceful or at ease, and having said something as puzzling as that, it is now necessary, of course, to tell you why.

When Toshiro Ogama was fifteen, both his parents were killed in an automobile accident in Kyoto. An only child, he was suddenly an orphan. His parents’ funeral, conducted by a priest in the Pure Land tradition, and their cremation were engraved into the emulsion of his memory. At the crematorium, they were incinerated at 800 degrees centigrade. Their bodies burned steadily for two hours. They had a thirty minute cooling-down period. Finally, their bones were crushed and mixed with ashes---all total his parents each weighed two pounds at the end---and they were given back to Toshiro in two white urns. Those containers, which he kept and placed beside the altar at Anraku-ji, led him all his adult life to listen attentively whenever he heard the Buddhist Dharma or teachings. And what more? Well, he was painfully shy and, like the English scientist Henry Cavendish, he could barely speak to one person, never to two at once since four eyes looking at him made Toshiro stammer.

- **Dr. Charles Richard Johnson** is a novelist, scholar, and essayist. He holds the S. Wilson and Grace M. Pollock Professorship for Excellence in English at the University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

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## **SAMUEL BECKETT: A BIRTH CENTENARY TRIBUTE**

*S. Ramaswamy*

Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin in 1906 and like John Millington Synge and Sean O' Casey grew up as Protestant – “almost a Quaker,” he told one interviewer. His comfortably situated middle class parents gave their son a good education, first at Portora Royal School (where Oscar Wilde had been educated), then at Dublin's Trinity college. In 1927, at the age of 21, Beckett received his *baccalaureate* in French and Italian, and an exchange lectureship at the *E'cole Normale Superieure* in Paris. During his first long stay in Paris he published a long poem “Whoroscope.” In 1931, he returned to Trinity as lecturer in French and a candidate for the Master's degree. Although he completed work on the advanced degree, Beckett found teaching uncongenial; since 1932, except for occasional short visits to his family, Beckett lived in France. He died in 1989.

Beckett is an enigmatic figure because he is ambiguous, ambidexterous and ambivalent, with the result that it has not been clear whether he should be classified as Irish or French. His writings in English and French are of equal value and importance. From 1927 until the late 1940s, Beckett wrote in English. His earlier publications included a critical study of Proust, a collection of short stories, “More Pricks than Kicks,” a volume of poems, *Echo's Bones*, two novels, *Murphy* and *Watt*, and an essay on James Joyce. Since 1937 Beckett's residence was a Paris apartment. Since 1946 he began to write almost exclusively in French. Most of his fictional characters and settings have remained Irish in flavour. Visiting Ireland when World War II began, Beckett immediately returned to Paris. He said “I preferred France in war to Ireland in peace.” During the Nazi occupation he took refuge in the unoccupied Zone in South Eastern France. In 1945 he returned briefly to Ireland, joined the Irish Red Cross and soon was back in France as interpreter.

- **Prof S. Ramaswamy** has been a Senior Fulbright Fellow at Yale, in their famous School of Drama. He got the British Council Scholarship twice, and has been a Shastri Indo-Canadian Fellow at McGill University.

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## CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS: MAJOR ISSUES

*Anupma Kaushik*

Canada-India relations have been characterized by distinct warmer and cooler periods. The relations grew significantly in many areas for decades and then went through a period of decline, only to rise to a high point once again. It is natural to assume that Canada and India should have a strong relationship given their similarities: English language; continental size; colonial past; commitment to democratic values: federalism; multiculturalism; parliamentary institutions; desire for international peace and security; and presence of large Indian diaspora in Canada. Some of the above factors as well as personal ties between Indian Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, and Canadian Prime Ministers, Lester B. Pearson and Louis Stephen St. Laurent, resulted in the short honeymoon between the two countries during 1950s and 1960s. During this period there was a convergence of interest and commitment between Canada and India at the United Nations and in the Commonwealth. In the seventies' decade a number of factors forced the two apart: 1974 nuclear device explosion by India; India's growing closeness to the Soviet Union; human rights violations in India; growing fundamentalism in India; and the patronizing attitude of Canada. Stung by allegations that fissionable material used in 1974 explosion was obtained from the Canadian CIRUS nuclear reactor, Canada severed bilateral nuclear cooperation with India in 1976.

New opportunities to improve bilateral relationship arose when India instituted major reforms of its economy in the early to mid-1990s. However, relations took a dip due to India's nuclear tests in May 1998. Canada placed its political relations with India on hold, leading to decline in other spheres too. In 2001 Canada decided to re-engage India to pursue the broadest possible political and economic relations with India and since 2003 there has been a steady maturing of the relationship from one of engagement towards one of partnership. A major difficulty in bilateral relations between the countries has been India's nuclear program.

- **Dr. Anupma Kaushik** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration in Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan.

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## PROMINENT POET-PERFORMERS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POETRY

*Thomas K.K.*

African Literature has been passing through a transitional period. The fetters of colonialism are being broken and African Literature, especially African poetry, is trying to assert its own identity. African poetry is a vast ocean comprising two genres: one is based on rich ethnic cultures and oral literatures (now called oratures) handed down orally for many generations with additions and re-creations and after colonization written down in hundreds of African languages. The other is influenced by western traditions and written down in European languages; and is called by writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o as "Euro-African poetry" that "signifies the neurotic state of the colonized" (Chiwome 35). In the post-colonial/neo-colonial period some of the poets have been aware of the need to "deconstruct the colonial reality in order to rehabilitate African poetry" (Chiwome xii). With this intention many of the new generation poets like Osundare, Anyidoho, Mapanje, etc. turn back to their roots. For, as Osundare says, "in the intricate dialectics of human living, looking back is looking forward; the visionary artist is not only a rememberer, he is also a reminder" (Osundare x). These poets freely borrowed themes, techniques and ways of expression from oratures and ethnic cultures in their attempt to make themselves more communicative to their compatriots. This newly transfused blood has given new vigor and vitality to African poetry.

The recent tendency in African literature is an overemphasis on tribal/ethnic cultures and oratures, which most of the writers consider superior. Over the last four decades there have been serious attempts at collecting, translating and publishing these orally transmitted narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, tales, lyrics, heroic and epic poetry. Oral literature is both a reservoir and a creative expression of cultural values, hence a vehicle for propelling a society along its moral path.

- **Dr. Thomas K. K.** is Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Institute of Language Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

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## **LIFE MASKS A VOID: PYNCHON'S USE OF ALLUSIONS AS POST-MODERN STRATEGY**

*Mohammed I. Mahameed*

Thomas Pynchon can be categorized with those writers who display a persistent strain of doubt towards biography and aversion for publicity. After going through his works one can easily perceive that as a writer Pynchon is missing from his works. He had very early died to his public and only bequeathed us his works. This led to more speculation and explanation as critics sought the man behind his fiction.

The death of the author leads to the birth of the reader and this brings us to look for symbols and allusions as attributes of the post-modernist stance. Pynchon's novels are full of curtaining narrative strategies. If one looks carefully into his works everything seems to relate to something else. Pynchon's interest in arts provides a balance with science and his analysis of mechanics and cybernetics is full of allusions to films, paintings and music. His command over both the disciplines grants sublimity to his work and makes his allusive range unfathomable and his fiction obscure. All of Pynchon's allusions, whether scientific or artistic, form a pattern which gives a unity to his novels. These allusive patterns present a contrast between the entropic, voidward drift and the possibilities for transcendence implicit in the materialistic and the spiritual view of things respectively. In the mysteries of modern science Pynchon sees scope for existential optimism which stands out against both age-old spirituality and age-old materialist science.

Besides science, Pynchon is attracted by literature as well. When coal in the earth is described as "swaddled in layers of perpetual night" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 166), there is suggestion of Sir Thomas Browne: "But seeds themselves do lie in perpetual shades." There is ample use of musical allusions in the works of Pynchon: *V.* is full of references to Stravinsky, Mozart, Warner, Schonberg, Puccini and Vivaldi. In *The Crying of Lot 49* there are references to Bartok and Muzak Vivaldi as well. But *Gravity's Rainbow* mentions a host of composers including Bach, Beethoven, Verdi, Orff, Tallis, Britten.

- **Dr. Mohammed I. Mahameed** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Tafila Technical University, Tafila, Jordan.

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## THE TROPE OF HOME IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *WIFE*

*Ambreen Khanam*

Bharati Mukherjee is a contemporary postcolonial writer who presents her themes in different dimensions. In her novels she depicts the problems faced by Indians and other Third World immigrants to America. Mukherjee is primarily concerned with the problems of women immigrants. She takes into account gender politics like social inequalities, ideological structures and biases. This paper is an attempt to see how her novel *Wife* mirrors the immigrant experiences in the U.S.

Mukherjee's experiences in Canada led her to see herself as an expatriate and this theme is reflected in her writings. Her own crisis in Canada was grievous. She was misunderstood by her American family and also by society. Mukherjee felt upset when she realized this and also when she saw other people experiencing the same thing. She regrets that she had a bad time in the 1970s in Canada. She felt that there was a strong bias against Canadian citizens of Indian origin, especially in Toronto. She diverted her attention from Art for Art's sake to matter-of-fact writing. Mukherjee spent her childhood in England and also had some exposure to America. She did not suffer the pangs of identity crisis or cultural transplant during these early visits because she went with her parents and sister.

When writing *Wife*, Mukherjee herself was going through a dark, neurotic phase. When she married Clark Blaise she gave up her cultural identity and everything else for the sake of this white man and her only role was that of a wife. In spite of belonging to an upper middle class family, brought up by liberal parents who gave her an elitist education, she was bound to the duties of a wife, almost in the way they were defined by conservative Indian society. Role fulfillment as Clark's wife had the same stress, tensions and burdens as it did for any conservative Hindu Bengali girl from Calcutta married into a Hindu Bengali family.

- **Dr. Ambreen Khanam** is a Ph.D. in English from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

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**NOSTALGIC OVERTONES IN DIASPORIC  
WRITINGS: A STUDY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S  
*INTERPRETER OF MALADIES***

*Sunita Agarwal*

Expatriate writing, born out of the dialectics between displacement and relocation, belonging and alienation raises theoretical formulations which provide fresh perspective to creative works. Expatriate writing implies cultural travel, a nostalgic reminiscence of home – the culture of origin - and an anchoring in the new world - the culture of adoption. The need to reestablish one's roots becomes the chief concern of diasporic writers who shuffle between the physical and psychological borders of two cultures. Their effort to locate and assimilate in a new culture and their nostalgia for nativist country creates different contestations. Exchanging one tradition for another, one culture for another, and one home for another, the expatriate writers create and inscribe "alternative worlds." Initially, the immigrant survives by nostalgia for the past. Nostalgia sustains memory, even creates it. It is this memory that stops the writer from being easily consumed by the new culture. It is the only weapon for fighting what Milan Kundera calls the "organized forgetting," forced upon us by the New World. This memory is sometimes not accurate. But, as Monica Wehener argues, "Memories do not in obvious and ordinary sense 'exist' until they are remembered, until they are brought back into waking life and understood by the individual as memories, separate from the present. This is one reason why they are so slippery and difficult to conceptualise, and why too, of course, they are such a source of fascination" (35). As such memory, invented or real, and nostalgia play an important role in the diasporic writing and in its various attestations.

The term "diaspora" is widely used to describe all sorts of migration and displacement. Whatever be the kind of migration, diaspora, above all, is a human phenomenon - lived and experienced. Jhumpa Lahiri, a second generation expatriate writer, has very powerfully recorded the diasporic experiences of immigrants.

- **Dr. Sunita Agarwal** is Assistant Professor in the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

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**DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES IN ANJANA  
APPACHANA'S  
*INCANTATIONS AND OTHER STORIES***

*Alka Saxena*

Anjana Appachana made her debut as a writer of fiction in 1991 with *Incantations and Other Stories*, a collection of evocative women-centered narratives. Her first novel, *Listening Now*, was published in 1999. After completing her B.A. from Delhi University and M.A. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Appachana left India in 1984 to live in the United States. A recipient of several awards, two Hawthorn Fellowships, the O. Henry Award and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Appachana's focus is invariably on diasporic experiences related to displacement, cultural crisis, rootlessness and marginalization.

Although Appachana has lived in the USA for over two decades, her writing is firmly rooted in India. She says, "When I write, I live there again....I hear the voices of my family and friends all of whom are so far away from me physically."<sup>1</sup> She has stated in an interview why all her main characters had to be women: "I write about women because I'm very close to the women of my life. Women matter deeply to me and their stories, those told, ring endlessly in my ears. I can't write from a man's point of view. I don't understand how their minds work. I wrote what came to me and what came to me were the voices of these women. I could barely hear the men's voices." Despite living in the US she has not made any concession to the western audience in her use of language or in the narration of her stories. Appachana claims, "The women in my book are Indian women...the question of restraining their voices or actions in order to feed a western audience didn't even occur to me."

*Incantations and Other Stories* portray the tragedy of those caught in the whirlpool of modern India. Although Appachana's stories emerge out of her stay in Arizona, there is little in them to suggest that the author has ever been away from India.

- **Dr. Alka Saxena** is Reader in the Department of English at D.A.V. College, Kanpur.

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## SPECIAL SECTION

**W.H. AUDEN**

### **REMEMBERING AUDEN**

*Edward Mendelson*

W.H. Auden wrote his poems as if he were addressing them to an individual reader, not to an audience, culture, class, or any other plural and collective category. When two individuals speak with each other, what usually interests them most are not such general themes as love or death or history, but their unique experiences of one particular love affair, one person's death, one set of historical events. Auden became the most universal of modern poets by being the most individual. A century after his birth, his poems remain urgent and contemporary because he responded to the events of his time in a personal way, not with a sense that the events of the 1930s or the 1960s required a special kind of response suited to their era. As he wrote in a late couplet:

*What should I write at Sixty-Four? is a question, a folly  
What should I write in Nineteen-Hundred-and-Seventy-One?*

It is an honor to write a few words on Auden on the centenary of his birth for publication in India, where he visited in 1951, and where his brother, the distinguished geologist John Bicknell Auden, spent most of his career.

- ***Edward Mendelson*** is the *Literary Executor of the Estate of W. H. Auden* and the *Lionel Trilling Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University in New York, USA*. He has edited the complete works of Auden and is the author of *Early Auden*, *Later Auden*, and *The Things That Matter: What Seven Classic Novels Have to Say About the Stages of Life*.





## **W. H. AUDEN'S PLAINSPEAK IN INDIA: A PREFATORY NOTE**

*K. Narayana Chandran*

On every public occasion W. H. Auden spoke, he celebrated poetry. He was never known to have clamoured for nor enjoyed what we call a "celebrity status" even when his sponsors lionized him. He kept insisting that poetry had more to do with ordinary people for whom the poets wrote, especially with those who had nothing to do with the written word or the lying institutions of scholarship. In such celebrations Auden spoke as plainly as he could to those to whom poetry meant as much as it meant to him. Why did he think that the poet and the peasant were on the same side where culture is besieged by officers of profit? Culture and cultivation are one. The sensual beings, those who bespeak the soil, therefore, must join hands to fight authority, the official corruptors of the word. Poetry is work, much the same task and toil one must finish before sundown, if only for the sustenance of the race. The very deep and elemental belongs to the fields where the workers are artists only in their dreams. Their right to intellectual property comes only second to their right to dream.

"If a poet meets an illiterate peasant," speculated Auden in his "Poet and the City," "they may not be able to say much to each other, but if they both meet a public official, they share the same feeling of suspicion; neither will trust one further than he can throw a grand piano. If they enter a government building both share the same feeling of apprehension; perhaps they will never get out again. Whatever the cultural differences between them, they both sniff in any official word the smell of an unreality in which persons are treated as statistics. The peasant may play cards in the evening while the poet writes verses, but there is one solitary principle to which both subscribe, namely, that among the half dozen or so things for which a man of honour should be prepared, if necessary to die, the right to play, the right to frivolity, is not the least."

- **Dr. K. Narayana Chandran** is Professor of English at the University of Hyderabad.. Awards and fellowships received by him include Career Award, UGC (1992-1995) and Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellowship, Stanford University, California, U.S.A. (1999).

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## ADDRESS

*Wystan Hugh Auden*

If I ask myself the justification of this congress [Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom, Bombay, March 28-31, 1951], the answer lies first of all in the answer to other questions. The first question is, why is it that all of us here at this moment, whether sitting on the floor, or on the platform, are bored to death and wanting to go home. Why are they bored? Why are we bored? Because this is a public meeting, that is to say, an occasion upon which nobody meets anybody! The reason for this Congress is that we are threatened by forces which would turn the whole of human existence into a continuous public meeting in which anyone who yawned would be deprived of his ration card, anyone who fell asleep shot without trial. Again, if when asked, if I were to say that any of us should go away, as I shall go away, glad that this conference was held, it will be for us not so much any resolutions that may have been drawn up, or even any practical effect they may have, it will not even perhaps be anything particular that was said by anyone. Speaking for myself, what I shall take away will be the memory of certain real faces, certain real encounters, over, I am sorry to say, non-alcoholic beverages, with real persons. Perhaps we shall never meet again, but a real encounter with anyone, if only for a second, and even if later consciously forgotten, enters once and for all into the structure and fabric of one's being.

Again the reason for this conference is the thought that we are threatened by forces which would create a world in which - even supposing they could, which they cannot, fulfill their promises of making us all as plump as turkeys - real encounters would be prohibited as not increasing production, and anyone caught off his guard with a real expression would be condemned as dangerous to the State and sent to a camp for "re-education." I have been introduced to you as a poet. What does that mean? First of course it means somebody who makes something and who therefore has a duty to see that what is made is well, and not shoddily made. Secondly, because what I make are verses which say something, it is my duty to see that so far as I know and so far as it goes, what they say is true and not false. How important the truth may be is not for me to say.

**W.H. Auden delivered this address at the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom held at Bombay from March 28-31, 1951.**

**Note: For complete article contact [remarkings@hotmail.com](mailto:remarkings@hotmail.com)**

## THREE POEMS

*David Ray*

### AUDEN IN ERROR

*"Why speak of the use of poetry?"*

*Poetry is what uses us." - Hayden Carruth*

The Great Auden was wrong now and then.  
For example, he wrote that poetry  
makes nothing happen. Not so!

I know of a poem that prevented not one,  
but two suicides, for a couple who had lost  
a child and could not bear their grief

had decided on ending it all but came across  
a certain poem that brought new hope.  
I know of poems that have saved trees,

poems that have changed minds, poems  
that have lured young men away from war,  
poems that have helped the dying die bravely.

I know of a prison warden who had walked  
beside many a convict on the last mile between  
death row and the gas chamber. A poem

uttered on the lips of a condemned man  
as they stepped into that terrible room  
converted the warden, who resigned his job.

Maybe the great Auden meant that it's too bad  
poems cannot make *more* happen—or not happen.  
Or perhaps he was just in a despairing mood

or playing devil's advocate to arouse us  
to defend the power of poems, in which case  
his line itself made something happen. I know

also that "To His Coy Mistress" at least once  
was efficacious in making something happen.  
I suspect you can add examples of your own.

## AUDEN AT PRINCETON

“But you were expected to lecture,”  
they said to Auden,  
who had only read his few jottings

off the back of an envelope.  
Others brought manuscripts,  
well into gestation as books.

Who the hell did he think he was,  
bringing such trivial thoughts,  
mere musings, to the Christian

Gauss Seminars? And to make matters worse,  
the envelope was torn, the jottings  
in pencil as if scrawled by a schoolboy.

His houseslippers and malice were no longer  
regarded as insults. His demands for more  
booze could be disregarded—just warn

all the waiters and the somelier! But *this*—what  
an insult! It can hardly be called a text.  
More than one professor huddled

with others in a sly corner, looked across the room,  
hissed into iced Scotch. And the frustration  
was immense—for who could they get

more famous, notorious, prestigious? They had done  
their best, but had failed. The critic Alvarez  
was present, and pled a defense.

Don't blame him, he advised—this man invited  
had not been Auden the poet for years,  
though he went around the world,

shuffling through airports in houseslippers, slurring  
his words through a microphone, intoning  
the poems of a tortured young man

who had once lived in his skin--a worker of crosswords,  
a writer of limericks, pornographic ballads,  
fabulous sonnets and witty clerihews.

### **THE GREAT AUDEN**

Not a hitch-hiker I had picked up,  
but the great Auden,  
for I was his chauffeur that morning,

driving too fast to suit him  
as he shoved his foot to the floor  
each time a truck loomed ahead.

"Watch out!" he yelled more than once,  
fumbling for a new cigarette,  
calming himself, lighting the new

from the old. I told him what  
our local critic had said  
of his revisions, some

of his poems we loved best  
left in fragments, almost,  
in his *Collected*.

"You go back," he said,  
"and tell that critic  
they're my goddamn poems

and I can do anything  
I want with them."  
So I kept my eyes

on the road, still irked  
that he had cut  
his best line, "We must love

one another or die."  
Halfway to Syracuse  
I swerved off on gravel,

took aboard three  
hitch-hiking kids. They piled  
in the back, babbled  
  
of baseball, never knew  
who turned around  
and shushed them, was glad  
  
when they left. Plane  
was late due to storms,  
so we checked his one bag in,  
  
found a lounge  
that looked out  
on runways, scattered snow  
  
on low hills. We shuffled  
along. More than one  
stared at Wystan, his Sears  
  
Roebuck felt houseshoes.  
He ordered a martini, a burger,  
then took out his wallet  
  
to pay. I put my hand up –  
horrific suggestion!  
"Hell," Auden said,  
  
and his eyes swept the scene.  
"I can buy and sell  
this goddamned airport!"  
  
And he showed me his book –  
log of miles he had flown  
that year, readings given  
  
in most every state,  
fees paid. I wondered  
if he meant he could buy  
  
the planes too, if they  
were thrown in. I let  
him pay, yet insisted

on leaving the tip  
for that waitress who asked  
if he had ever been in a movie,  
"a Western?" Her eyes  
went flat when he said  
No, she must mean  
somebody else. "They've told me,"  
he said, winking through smoke,  
"that I looked like somebody  
famous." But the waitress  
was miffed, knew she was teased,  
waddled off in a huff,  
returned and smirked, "Chill  
Wills!" for she had invited  
others to observe him.  
She meant, of course,  
the cowpoke who was always  
a sidekick, riding along,  
good with a grimace,  
not bad in a gunfight.  
Loyal though, deputized  
when a posse was needed.  
Time to go, and we parted.  
On impulse I hugged him –  
abrazo for uncle or father  
or guru for a day. We both  
promised to write,  
share poems. He shuffled  
on out toward the plane,  
shopping bag in hand –  
on to Chicago, Vienna,  
and I stood, waved  
through the smudged window

till the revved-up plane  
took off at last,  
hoping to catch a glance  
from a porthole. That's how  
one said goodbye  
in those days. I walked back  
to my car as if under  
a grey, leaden lid – on a pot  
made of pewter. In the hushed  
air where his acrid smoke  
lingered and the ashtray  
was stuffed full  
I was struck with the heart-  
battering smart of a child  
abandoned once more,  
and brushed into blue dust  
the reliquary ash.

- **David Ray** is an American author, poet and teacher. He has served as a visiting professor in India, New Zealand and Australia. He now lives in Tucson, Arizona. His most recent books include *The Death of Sardanapalus* (2004) and *One Thousand Years: Poems about the Holocaust* (2004).





## AUDEN LEGACY IN JOSEPH BRODSKY

*M.L. Raina*

What kind of legacy would one expect from Auden, a poet who never considered poetry as a serious enterprise? In his introduction to a 1935 anthology - *The Poet's Tongue* - Auden insisted that "we do not read great poetry all the time, and a good anthology should contain poems for every mood." Auden never tired of downplaying the pretensions of bards and prophets who assigned to poetry the unenviable task of what the critic Lucy Mcdiarmid has called "saving civilisation." There is a strange double-edgedness to his attitude to intellectuals in general and poets in particular. Whereas he thought like-minded intellectuals could sustain the "ironic points of light" in the midst of all-pervasive darkness ("September 1, 1939") and that a community of enlightened people would serve as a "civitas of sound" ("New Year Letter"), he was shrewd enough to realise the futility of all such endeavour. As he says in the latter poem, "we hoped; we waited for the day/ The State would wither clean away,/ Expecting the Millennium/ That theory promised us would come./ It didn't." The abrupt closing of the last short line marks the deflation of utopian desire built in the preceding lines—a process we see widespread in Auden's political and social poems.

Auden alone, among the British poets of the thirties, possessed this double-focus ambivalence towards utopian schemes of reformers and revolutionaries. Poems such as "Spain 1937" and "In Praise of Limestone" (a later poem) turn a cold eye on heroes and reformers and praise ordinary people who live close to alluvial soils rather than to hard rock and have no superior ambitions. He acknowledges in the "Bucolics" sequence that "Obsession with security/ In Sovereigns prevails;/ His Highness and the People both/ Pick islands for their jails." And in "Memorial for the City" he disdains attempts to tame and subdue: "Saints tamed, poets acclaimed the raging Herod of the will: /...The grand and the bad went to ruin in thundering verse; /Sundered ..."

- **Prof. M.L. Raina** retired as Professor of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He has been Visiting Professor at Princeton and Rutgers University in the U.S.A. and Visiting Fellow at King's College Cambridge.

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**AUDEN-ISHERWOOD COLLABORATION:  
A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION ON  
AUDEN'S CENTENARY**

*S. Ramaswamy*

When I was a student of Christopher Isherwood for two years at the University of California at Los Angeles in the Sixties, I came across a poem by Auden on Isherwood. It is a portrait of the early Isherwood of the thirties, "an unpublished poem written for Isherwood in 1937 at Dover." Here is a part of the poem:

*Who is that funny-looking young man  
So squat with top-heavy head  
A cross between a cavalry major  
And a rather prim landlady  
Sitting there sipping a cigarette?  
A brilliant young novelist?  
You don't say!*

In the same poem Auden goes on to address Isherwood:

*With your great grey eyes taking everything in,  
And your nicely creased trousers  
Pretending to be nobody, to be quite humdrum and harmless  
All the time perfectly aware of your powers and  
You puff-adder  
You sham.*

This affectionate chiding on the part of Auden, while it adds another dimension to the portrait of the artist Isherwood as a young man, puts him in a nice frame. However, one thing which Isherwood never was and never liked in others was being a "sham." When Isherwood looked at anyone, even in ordinary conversation with his "great grey eyes" he was not just looking at a person but looked into him so thoroughly that he could see through any "sham." His bright and penetrating look was so disconcerting, his smile so disarmingly charming that "phoniness" was ruthlessly exposed. To continue with Auden's portrait of the young Isherwood:

- **Prof. S. Ramaswamy** has been a Senior Fulbright Fellow at Yale, in their famous School of Drama.

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## *IN PRAISE OF LIMESTONE: A REVIEW*

*Shernavaz Buhariwala*

Acknowledging his debt to D.H. Lawrence, Homer Lane and Andre Gide, Auden explained: "They taught me to express my deep abhorrence/ If I caught anyone preferring Art/ To life and love and being pure in heart." The impression thus deduced is of Art as an insular and artificial entity at odds with the overwhelming spontaneity of life. In so far as we visualise Art as only an academic discipline, such an attitude is difficult to discourage. It gets merged with what, in colloquial terms, we call "arty," accompanied usually by the cynical smile and the supercilious brow. But Art in its profound sense is, first and last, an "idea of wholeness." It must have internal unity – it may have external form. The "One" remains, the "many" change and pass. In this sense Art is what life must strive to be. The limestone frescoes addressed by Auden represent Nature and Art. Nature is the vast macrocosm of which the individual is a part. It commences at conception and closes at death only to reopen and renew in a perpetual chronicle of generations. And Art is the aspiration that propels the onward march - the goal, which is to see life steadily and see it whole.

The limestone landscape is crafted by water and wind. In presenting a scene where the images of life may be outlined, it offers an occasion for nostalgia. Thus is the reader invited home to stroll in a region of "short distances and definite places." The landscape is after all enclosed and limited like a sheltered childhood. As the child becomes a man and challenges expand, the reader is exposed to wrathful Nature, whose extravagance and immensity create these inexplicable marvels. Strange experiences cause man, in the course of his earthly journey, to rewrite and revise the ancient scripts. The process is never completed for nature can never be contained. Knowledge proves vulnerable and answers elude. But the ingénue - initiate, in his attempt to imagine a "faultless love" or the .....

- **Dr. Shernavaz Buhariwala** retired as Reader from the Department of English, Nagpur University, Nagpur.

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## W.H. AUDEN: POET OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE

*Shaleen Kumar Singh*

Many critics share the opinion that Auden's interest in psychology was more profound than his interest in the idea of social revolution. Karl Shapiro finds that it is merely Auden's fascination with psychological behaviour that renders his poetry readable, charming...and lasting."<sup>1</sup> A similar point of view is held by Richard Ohmann who feels that Auden's zeal for Leftist reform movements "scarcely went beyond their psychological impact on society."<sup>2</sup> Though such opinions may undermine Auden's serious commitment to reform society through social and political poetry, they do endorse Auden's leaning towards psychological analysis and cure to redeem a diseased society. Auden believed that a change in heart was as much desirable as a change in environment. His lines from "In Praise of Limestone" affirm this belief: "Soft as the earth is mankind and both/ Need to be altered."<sup>3</sup>

In his poem entitled "Consider" Auden presents a picture of man as the victim of a run-down civilisation. Signs of psychological malaise are more than evident. He is concerned with the problems of fear and anxiety which, if left unchecked, would deteriorate into "a polar evil, a prodigious alarm/ scattering the people, as torn-up paper" (CP 61). He wants to save man from "the immeasurable neurotic dread" and from the "explosion of mania" (CP 62). He is also worried about the fate of those lonely souls who have become alienated from society as well as from their own selves.

Auden found symptoms of disease all round him. In fact, symptomatic was his key word. Aided by his clinical attitude, he changed the forms of the symptoms of sickness into images in a landscape of mountains, passes, streams, heroes, horses, eagles, feuds, and runes of Norse sagas. The dualistic idea of symptom and cure runs through all his work. At times, they are more symptomatic than curative while, at other moments they concentrate more on the idea of cure.

- **Shaleen Tanu Singh** is currently engaged in writing his Ph.D. thesis on "Panorama of Mahashweta's Indo-English Verse."

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## AUDEN AND THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

*Sanjit Mishra*

*Love's more important and powerful than  
Even a priest or a politician. - W.H. Auden*

The scientific/industrial/commercial revolution which began around the 18th century and which brought in a number of drastic changes in its wake, finally climaxed into the two great wars in the 20th century. Sensitive intellectuals like Matthew Arnold in the Victorian age itself had delivered a note of caution for the impending doom that the humans of 20th century would have to face. His celebrated poem "The Scholar Gypsy" very aptly describes the modern age with "its sick hurry and divided aims" characterized by "Light half-believers of our casual creeds,/ Who never deeply felt, nor clearly willed," heading towards "new beginnings, disappointments new." After the first World War European society underwent a chaotic fragmentation of its rubrics and the realisation of this disruption was so acute that D.H. Lawrence had to declare in *Kangaroo* (1922): "It was in 1915 that the old world ended. In the winter of 1915-16 the spirit of the old London collapsed, the city in some way perished, perished from being the heart of the world and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes and fears and horrors."

This gloomy and disheartening situation caused by political, social and economic upheavals in general and the World War in particular saw the emergence of a new generation of poets like W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice who sought to impose order upon "the chaos of values which is the substance of our environment."<sup>1</sup> This colossal loss compelled people to realise that the world was on the brink of collapse. The Great Depression caused by the Wall Street crash had its far-reaching impact in terms of human suffering. It was against this sordid state of the human predicament that Auden sharply reacted and felt the urge to respond to the crisis with a deep sense of social commitment by using art as a powerful weapon for social reform.

- **Dr. Sanjit Mishra teaches English at M.S.J. College, Bharatpur.**

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## POETRY

### THE KISS

Sardar Panchhi

*Translated from the Urdu by N.S. Tasneem*

Kiss is not a sin  
It's not penitence  
Kiss has its own logic  
It's reflected in a radiant mirror  
Kiss is the dance of the lips  
It's the rocking of dewdrops on flowers  
Kiss is the tremor of emotions  
It's a receptacle overflowing  
Kiss is the tavern of love  
It's an impeccable lucent halo  
Kiss is the chiming of wineglasses  
It's the ritual of winelovers  
Kiss is the composing of a melody  
It's the colouring of a design  
Kiss is the craving of the mind  
It's a lingua without a script.

Only the lips convey the sense  
Only the lips decipher the meaning  
It's neither Urdu nor Sindhi  
It's not an official language  
It's not a legal parlance  
It's not ambiguous or opaque  
It's not confined to region or race  
It's the authentic language of the universe  
It's the language in which hearts converse  
It's the prayer and the worship  
It's universal in its kinship.

- **Sardar Panchhi** is a Punjabi-Urdu poet and lyricist from Ludhiana.
- **N.S. Tasneem** is the recipient of Shiromani Sahityakar Puraskar (1995) and Sahitya Akademi Award (1999).



## TRUTHS

*J.P. Das*

It has been ordained

that despots  
will command  
empires and slaves;

that false prophets  
will mislead  
disciples and followers;

that common people  
will inherit  
poverty and misery;

that fatalists  
will reap  
the ironies of karma;

and that Time eternal  
will decide  
the ultimate, indomitable  
truths of History.

- **J.P. Das** is a well known Oriya poet, playwright and fiction writer. A Ph.D. in Art History, he lives and works in Delhi.



## TWO POEMS

*Krishna Bose*

### A RAPE VICTIM

She fell like a bird  
Her eyes fired defeat  
A lump of cold, diffused air  
sailed through the aisle  
of a passage languishing in feverish delight.

The rain-slicked highways swore woes  
at the turfs of pain  
gathering like dark clouds  
The sound of lispings silence  
pulled punches here and there  
An empty vessel gutted  
in the slow, erratic fire.

### **THE KOEL'S SONG**

The song forayed with a kind rage  
among the off-beaten tracks  
The sleepers panicking a fear  
held on to the crutch of hope  
Every now and then the goat-herd  
snorted out a mottled breath.

Somewhere an evening closed down shutters  
with a kind of slow waltzing  
on hearts surging for love  
The endless scenes of defaced houses  
in tune with the capricious weather  
threw bouts of bemused grin.

The rivers dry in their beds  
tinkled white whispers  
under a carpet of black rain  
The hard soil of hunger and death  
opened up a few spaces  
for drops of nectar to settle.

Everywhere rings of pulsations  
played a hub of memories  
flushing, flashing in half-tones of dusk  
From the mass of scudding clouds  
a warm, gentle touch skidded  
on the wet, gentle grass.

- **Dr. Krishna Bose** retired as Reader in English from F.M. College, Balasore (Orissa). Recipient of the Michael Madhusudan Academy award (1999) for her poetry collection *Eternal Moments*, she lives in Kolkata.





## THE DROP-OUT BOY

*G.L. Gautam*

Back home  
I walk straight into my study  
My mind moves away from books  
to my immediate neighbourhood  
I enter the mind's dark chambers  
lit by a zero watt bulb  
like the courtyard when we are asleep  
in contrast to the study  
which is brightly lit  
To this bright light I grow indifferent  
and begin to move about  
in my mind's alleys  
where I find people  
of my neighbourhood

First, the old cobbler  
hobbling, he walks home  
at dusk from the intersection  
of the colony where he sits  
under the shelter of open sky  
except in the summer when he shifts  
the canvas seat under a tree nearby  
the faded colour of canvas  
matches bare earth's

Next in sequence  
is the strong-limbed washer woman  
whose limbs, though dark, glisten  
in blazing heat under the shed  
made from the thrown-away-things  
Her drop-out son  
goes cleaning the AC-fitted-cars  
that glitter like cruel summer sky

In the end comes  
the brahmin widow  
sullen faced, puny breasted  
yet not without desire

All are speechless except the dropout boy  
who clamours for  
I know not what?

- **Dr. G.L. Gautam** is Reader in English at Lajpat Rai (PG) College, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad. His poems in Hindi have appeared in *Samkaleen Bharatiya Sahitya* published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.



## TWO POEMS

**Rudra Kinshuk**

### BETTER SLEEP

I should decorate my cottage –  
everyday I remind myself.  
But after the fruitless day's over  
I hurry to my disheveled bed.  
And my sleep is disturbed.  
The wind, while passing through  
the branches of pomegranate bushes  
in the yard whispers:  
Awakening is only  
a preparation for better sleep.

### PROPOSAL

Come to the zenith  
and discover scraps,  
broken glass, rags  
and plastic bags.  
Our soul, exposed to lures  
knows that  
movement in darkness  
is that of crabs in the soul.  
We walk, talk  
and laugh in solitude.  
But silence never comes.

- **Rudra Kinshuk** is a creative writer based at Kolkata. He edits *The Peripheral Window*, a journal of new poetry in India.

## **TWO POEMS**

*R.C. Shukla*

### **MY KNOWLEDGE IS IGNORANCE INDEED**

The knowledge with which I write verses  
Is ignorance  
Because true knowledge teaches us  
Not to sing of man but of God  
Who alone should be loved and worshipped.  
All adversities, all anxieties dwindle before Him  
Life's innumerable problems vanish at His name.  
All our sins, all our failings  
Are converted into prayers  
Provided our God is within us.  
Henceforth I shall demand nothing  
Neither love nor comfort  
But the mercy of God, His blessings  
Through which I shall feel  
I am not what I was  
And have grown stronger  
To face the ordeals of life.

I take a pledge  
I shall remember Him before I rise  
I shall remember Him before I sleep  
I shall sing for none but God  
Who alone is great  
And who, for my safe exit,  
Can show me the gate.

### **EVERY FRESH MORNING MAKES ME STALE**

Every fresh morning makes me stale  
And evening a little closer to night  
After which there will be a scene of mist  
And myself far away from light.

This is how we undertake our journey  
From here to our land of home  
Where there are stars and the sky  
And an over-hanging dome.

Earth is a fit place to live  
But there is a fitter place to go  
We have to reap our harvest  
Before we are allowed to sow.

- **Dr. R.C. Shukla** retired as Head, Department of English, K.G.K. College, Moradabad. He is the author of several poetry collections like A Belated Appearance, Depth and Despair, and The Parrot Shrieks.



## RAVANA

*Shobha Diwakar*

Ravana is not dead.  
he never died.  
Hanuman killed his image.  
The Self survives.  
He lives within  
growing baser day by day.  
It is Rama who has disappeared.  
Sita, lighted on the pyre,  
sits staring with vacant eyes  
into empty space.  
Man - Manu's registered Parmeshvar -  
is Ravana incarnate.  
The heads, ten in number,  
grow larger than life.  
Deaths - Dowry, Sati, Rape -  
quench not  
the desire of the growing Ravana.  
Burn the girl child  
at the stake of marriage.  
is Ravana dead – or alive?

- **Dr. Shobha Diwakar** teaches English at C.P. Women's college, Jabalpur.

## SHOCK MARKET – AS YOU LIKE IT

*Lanka Siva Rama Prasad*

All the world's a stock exchange,  
And all the Bulls and Bears merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances.  
And one man in his time pays for many parts,  
His acts being seven ages; At first the info-ant...  
Mewling and sucking in the stock broker's arms;  
Then the whining Screwboy, with his laptop...  
And shining mourning face, creeping like a snake  
Over-willing to work; and then the lover,  
Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his terminal's eyebrow. Then a soldier  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the clod.  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel  
Seeking the South-Sea bubble's reputation,  
Even in the Sebi's mouth; and then the Justice  
In fair round belly, paying good taxes,  
With eyes severe on bank-loans and crash deposits  
Full of wise underhand dealings  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipped fortunes.  
Becoming a spectacle in and outside,  
His youthful yearnings, well shaved, in a world too wide,  
For his Shrunk shank, Think tank; and his big manly noise  
Turning again towards childish tremble; Dream-pipes  
And good-luck whistles buried deep in quick sand;  
Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history  
Is second idiocy and mere oblivion...  
Behind bars, a child barred from playthings  
Sans truth, Sans wisdom, Sans money, Sans everything.

- **Dr. Lanka Siva Rama Prasad** is a Surgeon by profession. The Founder of WAVES (Warangal Aids Voluntary Educational Society), he lives and works at Warangal. He has published several poetry collections in Telugu.



## REVIEW ESSAY

### CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S SEXUALITY IN EVE ENSLER'S THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

*Ujjwala Tathe*

It is said that history repeats itself. Well, history has repeated itself but with a significant difference. Eve has once again entered the forbidden zone. This time not innocently but deliberately and cautiously; without any inhibitions, awkwardness, shame, and guilt. The forbidden fruit is nothing but her exploration of women's 'self' and their sexuality. Eve has taken a bold step to awaken women to celebrate their "down there" in all its complexity and mystery. Her giant step is towards the reclamation of womanhood and her own humanity. No doubt, the fall has turned out a boon in disguise. Let us salute this Eve who is strong and courageous enough in revising and/or refuting the age-old conventions, prejudices, ideas, misconceptions regarding female sexuality.

The modern revolutionary Eve, Eve Ensler, an American feminist, has challenged the male bastion by giving a call to women across the world to fight the violence directed against them. In fact, the need for this call is deeply rooted in the ideology of feminism in understanding the world and changing it to the advantage of women. Though today some women occupy coveted positions as Prime Ministers, Administrators, Scientists, and many more, the feminists still assert that there is a need to overthrow social practices that lead to the oppression and victimization of women. The last few decades of feminism were marked by a deep anger as the truth of violence against the female body was revealed in the form of rape, childhood sexual abuse, anti-lesbian violence, physical abuse, sexual harassment, terrorism against reproductive freedom, or the international crime of female genital mutilation. Unfortunately, though the learned world today is progressing with an awesome hi-tech speed, women still have to demand and fight for their right to live.

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Pick a quarrel,  
go to war,  
Leave the hero  
in the bar.  
Hunt the lion,  
climb the peak,  
No one guesses  
you are weak.

*W.H. Auden*

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