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# RE-MARKINGS

Vol. 5 No.2 September 2006

Stanley Crouch

Charles Johnson

Jayanta Mahapatra

Jonah Raskin

Ethelbert Miller

David Ray

S. Ramaswamy

James Giles

Upton Sinclair

Krishna Kripalani

Maya Angelou

Bhisham Sahni

Khushwant Singh

Rabindranath Tagore

Shashi Tharoor

Ivo Andric

Rukmini Bhaya Nair

Science Fiction

Draupadi

Partition Fiction

THE BEST IS YET TO BE  
**10<sup>th</sup>**  
Issue

CHIEF EDITOR : NIBIR K. GHOSH  
EDITOR : A. KARUNAKER

# **RE-MARKINGS**

**Vol. 5 No. 2 September 2006**

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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

*The winds will blow their own freshness into you,  
and the storms their energy,  
while cares will drop away from you  
like the leaves of Autumn. – John Muir*

It is my privilege and pleasure to greet you all with the tenth issue of *Re-Markings*. In a short span of five years the journal has gradually evolved as a useful guide to the ever-expanding frontiers of human experience. It has not only provided a perfect platform for addressing specific issues and concerns central to the human predicament in a hostile world but has also been instrumental in creating a powerful climate of opinion to enhance the understanding of our relationship to time, climate and space.

I distinctly remember how, when we launched *Re-Markings* in March 2002, friends, well-wishers and detractors had warned us about the dangers of extremely high infant mortality rate that beset academic journals in India. Drawing strength and sustenance from the huge reservoirs of trust and faith created by patrons, contributors, subscribers and admirers, this humble enterprise has succeeded in leaving its indelible imprints on the shifting sands of time. Responding to the earlier issues of *Re-Markings*, Charles Johnson, has observed: "All in all, with its impressive global range and vision, and especially the international writers included, *Re-Markings* is magnificent, critically and creatively. Congratulations! There is really nothing quite like this fine publication in America." Prof. M.L. Raina is no less eloquent in his appreciation: "The journal carries promising articles and has a variety that is not to be found in the Indian journals that come my way." While mourning the sudden and untimely demise of Shri Bhoopendra Hooja, Chief Editor, *Indian Book Chronicle*, on 9 April 2006, I distinctly recall his inspiring words following the March 2003 issue of the journal: "One admires (almost envies) your 'debut' with such a flourish and wide support. The journal has established its mark – so early in its infancy – at least among the 'elite' – scholars, book-lovers, critics. It goes to your and your team's credit that with only three issues, one as good as the other, you have carved out a place for yourself and the *Re-Markings* amongst the half-a-dozen or so special select literary journals in India." In saluting the immortal soul, I can only say that we shall ever cherish Shri Hooja's presence in our midst as an ever radiant lighthouse of inspiration. While it is quite natural for us to be swayed with such praise and appreciation, we shall not forget the burden of

responsibility that comes with accolades and shall remain committed to both ethics and aesthetics in giving the best to the readers.

I deem it a great honour to welcome the distinguished celebrities on our newly constituted advisory board. By contributing their creative energy in the form of stories, essays, articles, poems, and reviews in this and earlier issues of the journal, they have embellished in no small way the cause of this academic enterprise. I greatly appreciate their enthusiasm in being so realistically involved in promoting the cause of *Re-Markings*, something that is exceedingly rare to find in literary journals where names of luminaries are often used as mere ornaments. I also extend a hearty welcome to Ms. Katy Howe who has so happily consented to share the editorial responsibilities.

The current issue promises a rich fare of literary delicacies characterised by infinite variety. Stanley Crouch, one of America's most provocative and iconoclastic social critics, reflects on the complexities of authenticity. S. Ramaswamy presents his views on women in Science Fiction and Jonah Raskin offers a critique of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Archana Sahni provides a perceptive analysis of the 'draupadi' story in the light of various interesting inter-related contexts while Gurdev Singh Chandhi gives a comprehensive survey of Punjabi partition fiction. Mojgan Abshavi attempts to show how Maya Angelou's autobiography becomes the living enactment of her politics of the self. Ajit Mukherjee sheds light on the problems of a translator. The poetry section contains exquisitely beautiful verses from Jayanta Mahapatra, Ethelbert Miller, David Ray, R.K. Bhushan and Krishna Bose. Short stories by Charles Johnson and James Giles provide a glimpse into the American brand of the genre. Also noteworthy are contributions from the young debutants -- Poonam Yadav and Sushil Kumar -- besides reviews by M.L. Raina, Rajul Bhargava and S.S. Sharma.

It is perhaps a happy coincidence that *Re-Markings*, like the equinoxes, appears in March and September each year. The vernal and the autumnal equinoxes set the globe in perfect gravitational balance and become the harbingers of the Spring of life and the fruits of its Autumn. I am optimistic that *Re-Markings* will continue to offer, through a clockwork precision of the biannual event, the hope and cheer that one finds in the songs of Spring and the music of Autumn.

**Nibir K. Ghosh**

**Chief Editor**

### ***To The Editor***

“Thank you for sharing your editorial (March 2006) with me. You have dared to touch some delicate nerve points. Criticism, it must be recognized, painfully demands from all of us the utmost honesty and sincerity in saying the truth. I recall Mulk Raj Anand's predicament in his “Apology” in recognizing the importance of humanistic value of truth; that truth is beyond rationalism. The tendency to conceal truth cannot be equated with the truth of the human condition. The western idiom and eastern thought have been at war. I have for years struggled to see Forster's meaning in the last few pages of *A Passage to India*. ... Keep up the good work!”

**-Dr. Kamal Verma**, Editor, *South Asian Review*, University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, USA.



“Your editorial is indeed admirable - and quite provocative for an 'advocate' of theory like me! Seriously, though, I think you have raised a number of issues: how do we use theory in understanding literature and culture, instead of creating an arcane specialisation to compete with technology, IT and business management, a knowledge over which our refusal of access to the uninitiated guarantees our 'expertise' over the subject? I, too, am worried over the overuse of jargon and deliberate obscurity as signposts of profundity: I am currently burdened with a Ph.D. student who searches the thesaurus for the most difficult, the most obscure word for expressing an idea that could easily have been expressed in more accessible terms! That is a major problem that I currently face. I am writing a book on disease and cultural identity (on a fellowship from the Social Science Research Council, New York), and everything I write I give to my wife Sumitra to read. She is a housewife and has a Master's in English, so I assume that whatever she doesn't understand needs to be rewritten and simplified. And, believe me, it's really difficult to do it - it's so much easier to simply imitate the language and style of the 'masters'. Your editorial also brings up, though indirectly, the question of how we teach theory to our students: do we teach them to understand it, or do we simply give them a sample of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, postmarxism, postfeminism, post, post, post, etc., to simply pick up a few catch phrases and techniques here and there? In fact, there are so

many questions your editorial raises that I am tempted to respond to it  
- maybe this would be my first contribution to *Re-Markings*."

--**Dr. Dilip Das**, Behrampur University, Behrampur (Orissa).



"Here is my spirited response to your equally spirited editorial! I enjoyed reading and thinking about your writing. As an English American liberal feminist scholar specializing in contemporary American short fiction by women writers writing in a multicultural postmodern field, it often astounds me that my fellow scholars try so hard to impress their peers by using as many obscure words from the OED as possible when composing a piece. Like it or not, ours is a field that requires a dictionary be glued to one's hand at all times if a full understanding of the "jousting" that takes place between scholars is to be reached. The ability to apply theory to literature (or rather, applying literature to theory as seems to be the more usual case) is a well-honed skill that one struggles to obtain. Scholarly discourse affords a paradoxical dilemma in which scholars (should) strive to make their work readable while at the same time maintaining a veneer of respectability and aloofness that behooves even the most discriminated of readers and writers. Yes, obscurity empowers people to climb the mountain of career advancement (this is a point that in and of itself requires further criticism), if I may borrow another metaphor from your editorial. However, what is the point of utilizing obscurity in our writing if all that is accomplished is pushing readers (scholars and students alike) away due to intense density and verbosity? Why not use a more efficient means of communication and allow for a certain amount of simplicity (Don't be shocked! "Simplicity" is a harmless word!) that will allow others further accessibility?

What ever happened to just enjoying literature and sharing our ideas and findings with others who are equally enamored by the joys of the written word? Maybe we should all take a step back...no, make that two steps back...and just read a book or a poem for the sake of reading it. Let's enjoy art for art and not read something to search for the latest and greatest breakthrough in literary theory. Those breakthroughs will become apparent through reading. Let's apply our reading to our theories and not the other way around."

--**Katy Howe**, Rhode Island College, Providence, USA.



## CONTENTS

The Problem of Authenticity

*Stanley Crouch / 9*

Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle*: America's  
Forgotten Novelist and His Legendary Novel

*Jonah Raskin / 21*

Women in Science Fiction

*S. Ramaswamy / 25*

Gizmo

*Charles Johnson / 29*

Unpeeling the Layers of Draupadi

*Archana Sahni / 35*

Four Poems

*Jayanta Mahapatra*

Fruit / 47

Poem of the Sleepless Nights / 47

A Disturbed Sky / 48

The Years / 48

Wonderful! Re-Markings / 49

*R.K. Bhushan*

Five Poems

Ethelbert Miller

Whatever Lola Wants / 51

Che / 51

Curtains / 51

Grace / 52

Grace Notes / 52

Two Poems

*Krishna Bose*

I Still Adore You / 52

The Lost Universe / 53



Two Poems  
David Ray  
Friends / 54  
Even as Birds / 55

The Freedom of a Translator: Tagore's  
*Chokher Bali* and Krishna Kripalani's *Binodini*  
Ajit Kumar Mukherjee / 56

The Trauma of Partition in Punjabi Fiction  
Gurdev Singh Chandhi / 61

The Streets of Laredo  
James Giles / 71

Daring to Hope: Maya Angelou's Writing the Self  
Mojgan Abshavi / 83

Facts Through Fiction: Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and  
Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*  
Poonam Yadav / 91

Shashi Tharoor: A Profile  
Sushil Kumar / 95

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Ivo Andric's *The Bridge on the Drina*;  
*Bosnian Chronicle or The Day of the Consul*;  
*The Damned Yard and Other Stories*  
M.L. Raina / 98

Rukmini Bhaya Nair's *Narrative Gravity: Conversation,*  
*Cognition, Culture*  
Rajul Bhargava / 103

Neera Singh's *The Night Halt and Other Stories*  
S.S. Sharma / 109

## THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

*Stanley Crouch*

Our own troubles with authenticity can inspire us to look at problems that arise in and out of our country because I truly believe that the American future is the future of the planet at large. We continue to grapple with the many problems of freedom, which means that we must address integration on every front. Integration is demanded of us and has been demanded of this nation from its inception, regardless of the bigotry that sustains the variations on tribalism that are at the root of xenophobia, the universal villain of a thousand masks, many of which have been and are still being stripped away. There are very complex relationships between xenophobia and visions of identity that arrive across our national lives and show themselves up as versions of dilemmas and victories. As we examine these relationships, we see things that have international implications, that demand a maturity when we scrutinize the heritage of Western literature, that call on us to cut through the Gordian knots of cross-influences, and that provide us with models from our own literary history that can we can use to build our own ships and take sail on the blues-dark sea of experience.

As a nation, we find ourselves confronting a set of cliched conceptions based in the narcissistic concerns of the public - its weight, its looks, its vacations, its income, its spiritual concerns, now so frequently shifted from the world of faith to that of fast food from the gods. The interweaving of appetite and creature comforts has begotten industries devoted to specialization that could inspire high-quality fiction. That is because the story of precision, as it arrives in the individual life, is an aspect of experience that we do not share with the great past, which was dominated by craftsmen, not precision engineering (which has a unique meaning in our democracy). When we are not focused on the narcissism that arrives when "the pursuit of happiness" is established as a democratic goal, we love the scandals. They tend to humanize, shock, and breed contempt. Yet another set of ideals can either be mourned with great sentimentality or dismissed as further proof of how superior cynicism is to any other kind of assessment.

- **Stanley Crouch** is an American columnist, novelist, essayist, and television commentator. In 1993, he received both the Jean Stein Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a MacArthur Foundation grant.

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**UPTON SINCLAIR AND *THE JUNGLE*:  
AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN NOVELIST AND  
HIS LEGENDARY NOVEL**

*Jonah Raskin*

In 1934, when the novelist Upton Sinclair ran for Governor of California as a Democrat, and received nearly one million votes, the popular American humorist Will Rogers described him as "a darn nice fellow." Indeed, Sinclair lived a very nice life in Southern California. He had a very nice wife and very nice friends, like Charlie Chaplin and Albert Einstein. He didn't smoke, drink or carouse, and he basked in the fame he'd achieved by writing dozens of books, including, of course, *The Jungle*, his 1906 muckraking novel - celebrating now the 100th anniversary of its publication. Literally, that book so nauseated readers about conditions in the meat packing industry that it helped to bring about the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act. Translated in 17 languages, it has been read around the world. Sinclair lived another 34 years, after he failed to win the race for governor of California in 1934. He continued to write. His 1943 novel *Dragon's Teeth* won the Pulitzer Prize, and he continued to mix in politics. But for the most part he vanished from the pages of American literature and from the stage of public life. When he died in 1968, at the age of 90, he seemed like a relic of another age, and so indistinct a figure that readers frequently confused him with Sinclair Lewis, a writer with whom he had little in common, except for the name Sinclair. Now - though a new edition of *The Jungle* has just been published by Penguin - Upton Sinclair remains largely unread, unknown and still confused with Sinclair Lewis. It seems likely that he will remain largely unread, though he still has fans and supporters. The historian Lauren Coodley would like to rescue him from obscurity, and persuade readers to see him as a giant in 20th-century American culture and politics. To achieve that end she has edited *The Land of Orange Groves and Jails*, a collection of his writings. She has also provided an enthusiastic introduction to his voluminous body of work and his long life, casting him as a model citizen.

- *Dr. Jonah Raskin is the author of six major books. At Sonoma State University he teaches journalism, media law and the theory of communication.*

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## WOMEN IN SCIENCE FICTION

*S. Ramaswamy*

Judith Merrill is perhaps the best known woman anthologist of science fiction. In fact she has been called "The Queen of science fiction anthologists." What I mean to do here is to comment briefly on two short stories by women writers. Some writers like Octavia Butler, J Mildred Clingerman, Miriam Allen Deford and Maria Russell are well-known women science fiction writers. The two writers chosen in the present context are Zenna Henderson and Karen Anderson. The titles of the stories are "Subcommittee" and "The Piebald Hippogrif." Both are typical science fiction stories. Anthony Boucher, talking about science fiction says, "There's life in the old girl yet just when the muse of science fiction seems to have settled down into drab retirement, she suddenly decides to emerge with all of her old charm and sparkle, and we are once more enthralled." One exciting science fiction novel had appeared earlier in the year in the juvenile field, when Madeleine L'Engle made her science fiction debut with "A Wrinkle in Time" (Ariel), and the veteran of juveniles-to-pleasure adults, Andre Norton, sustained her high reputation with "The Defiant Agents" (World ).

Judith Merrill summarizes her muse on science fiction in three stages: 1. What hath God wrought? 2. What hath man wrought? 3. What hath machine wrought? Through these three stages she traces the development of science fiction. In stage one -- In 1844 it was of course the telegraph and the sentiment then was probably the only predictable (perhaps the only permissible) but yet what was significant about the telegraph was precisely the fact that God had not wrought it. It was not - like fire, the wheel, the arch, or even the telescope - a new way to use, understand or control some "natural" phenomenon. It was, specifically, a human creation. In stage two this was the kind of miracle, man made, that generated in imaginative writers the new kind of explanatory fantasy that became science fiction. In stage three "What hath the machine wrought" she says: "This was the wonder that brought about what is generally called 'modern science fiction' - the school that started with Wells and Verne, Chesterton, Kipling and Forster ... the kind of speculative work that constitutes most of the best of science fiction today, where the invention, is often dropped...

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

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## SHORT STORY

### GIZMO

*Charles Johnson*

You're asking me how come I want this job so bad, and do I have a criminal record?

Well, it's like I always used to say to the counselors and case workers at juvenile court whenever the cops back in Boston hauled me in: I *only* committed crimes when there was a full moon. Don't ask me why, but I supposed it was related to something I read in one of my high school science books, that stuff about how the moon tugs on the tides, so I figured that, as unscientific as it seems, maybe the full moon did the same thing to the fluids in the bodies and brains of some sensitive people, causing them to go a little crazy every twenty-nine days. Or---who knows?---maybe the full moon was like those sun-flares that fritzed high-frequency radio communications with X-rays. (By the way, I got pretty good grades in my math and science classes before I dropped out of school.) Whatever the reason, the moon was just one more thing in my life that was out of control, like my whole horoscope. What I'm saying is that it wasn't *my* fault that once a month I had the uncontrollable urge to steal cars and bust open vending machines. So yeah, I've got a jacket, but I wasn't a dumb or a bad kid. I just got confused by the moon. You can tell how it made me momentarily crazy just by looking at how badly I bungled most of my robberies.

The first was in 1974 and I was eighteen-years-old. I don't know what came over me, but my feet carried me into a liquor store without telling my brain what they were planning to do. It was just before closing time and I had a paper bag with a loaf of bread I picked up across the street at a supermarket. I dropped the bread and put the bag over my head for a mask. But I was so nervous---or moonstruck---that I forgot to punch eyeholes in it. And the pistol I had, a .22, was a piece of crap I bought from one of my homies for ten dollars and stuffed with all the wrong kinds of ammunition. So there I was, Leon Earl Tiplightly, demanding that the owner of the liquor store empty his cash register, blinded by the bag over my head.

- **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 in Seattle, USA.

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## UNPEELING THE LAYERS OF DRAUPADI

*Archna Sahni*

I

The revival of mythological themes witnessed on the Indian cultural scene since the 1980's, and the ongoing debate on the woman question, are obviously related. Myths in India are not "vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations"<sup>1</sup> as Freud defines it, but constitute a living cultural idiom that orders and re-enforces reality. This paper is an attempt to understand and explain why five mythological or epic women celebrated in our culture have been clubbed together as the *panchakanyas*, and why remembering them is said to be redemptive. The paper focuses mainly on Draupadi but in order to understand why the term *kanya* is used to describe the five women, I will on occasion touch upon the other four.

The source of the *panchakanya* concept in question is a supposedly popular *shloka* of obscure origin celebrating the redemptive value of the *panchakanyas* or five maidens--Ahalya, Tara, Mandodari, Kunti, Draupadi: "*ahalya draupadi kunti tara mandodari tatha / panchakanya smaranityam mahapataka nashaka/*"<sup>2</sup>

It is not a straightforward *shloka*, as it calls five full-grown 'women' as 'kanyas', and moreover, says that their daily invocation can redeem us of our sins. Why are these five married women called *kanyas*? Who is to be redeemed by the recollection of the *kanyas*, and why is remembering the *kanyas* redemptive? These two inter-related issues shall also be considered.

According to the *Shabdakalpadruma*, an eight year girl is called *gauri*, a nine year old *rohini* and a ten year old *kanya*. *Kanya* is defined as a virgin or unmarried girl. But we find that in the *panchakanya shloka* the term *kanya* is applied to women who are not only not *kanyas* in the former sense, they all have also sexually co-habited or had a sexual encounter with more than one man.

- **Archna Sahni** teaches in the Department of English at Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab.

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## POETRY

### FOUR POEMS

*Jayanta Mahapatra*

#### **FRUIT**

Tart green pods  
hang from the tamarind tree.  
The wonder of sweetness  
builds through the leaves.  
Long shadows spring out  
of nowhere as I watch.  
The storm has come and passed,  
visible still on the horizon.  
Today I feel I am surrounded  
by a wall of dead fruit;  
they are unconcerned  
of how I have lived my life.  
They seem to insist  
I am a traveller lost in the dark  
and that the strange ceremony  
which once began in darkness  
is like the lonely mountain wind  
over the grasses.  
When I walk up the slope,  
a slow thirst for happiness  
seeks the worn doorsill  
where my dead mother had sat,  
as she sternly forbade us  
to pluck the fruit  
childhood's sunrise had shaped  
so temptingly for our eyes.

#### **POEM OF THE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS**

The crucifix on the wall holds  
a body of humiliating husks.  
Rain runs down the callused windows of our sleep.  
There is this tale of the unhappy woman  
With her body willing to be burnt to death  
and the child born blind

with the enormous eyes of sunlight  
guarding the secrets of the sky.

All I've wanted to do was to spy on God  
all my life, to feel empty and light,  
but our pains met merely on long sleepless nights.

### **A DISTURBED SKY**

The lewd calls of a caged parrot at dawn.  
I can never know what its voice is searching for.  
The sunlight crawls down the householder's spine  
while the immensities of space are numb with silence.

The voices that are heard in the garden  
hold plausible lies. The rice is more golden than ever,  
the jasmines are whiter, and the goodbyes of mothers to their  
young who die without reason are louder.

I've searched everywhere and found nothing there.  
Not even the place where I heard those voices.  
There's only something like a sky with sunken cheeks sitting on  
the arm of the chair staring at me.

Mother lay in her last illness a walking distance away,  
her feeble voice walking against the wind.  
Today my sky is the last thing I'll ever know:  
this sky of voices suffering the retribution  
of an unseen purpose's vengeance  
that knows nothing can move it  
like the sun, here or ever.

### **THE YEARS**

Like leaves returning to the tree,  
the past years sprout green;  
so much love spent at times,  
and a poet loses sight of love  
because he loads his life with words.  
Again and again the pigeons fly back,  
Planning their small strategies,  
Choosing slender weeds from the ground.



Awake and sleeping,  
I feel their exhaustion.  
I thought I saw my words  
wanting to leave my memory,  
and knew my poem had no meaning.

But the years continue to exist  
in their glass tower with the veiled view,  
with the kiss not taken,  
and the word afraid of being no more.

And these years lie in the future,  
and we do not know it.  
Words are as far away as their pain.  
In the thick cashew groves  
Policemen pick up the last clues  
of a young woman's murder; they know  
this is not the real end of the story.

- **Jayanta Mahapatra**, *Physicist and Poet*, holds the distinction of being the first Indian poet in English to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1981) for *Relationship*. His other volumes include *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten, Svayamvara & Other Poems, A Father's Hours, Temple, A Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start, Life Signs, Dispossessed Nests, A Whiteness of Bone, Burden of Waves and Fruit and Bare Face*. He writes in English and Oriya and edits a literary journal, *Chandrabhaga*.



## WONDERFUL! RE-MARKINGS

**R.K. Bhushan**

Off-spring of leanings literary,  
Being parented with care and caution  
For critical sensibility and insight,  
*Re-Markings* was born to thrive  
On the soil of rich historicity,  
Barely five summers ago.

It is growing with a grace  
To reach ahead of the race  
Ridiculing initial cynicism.  
Reciting the *mantra* of the milieus,  
Wow! *Re-Markings* warmly embraces  
The creativity in literature and language.  
Its breadth of vision startles,  
Its sense of discrimination never falters.  
Each issue turns a *guidepost*  
On the divergent roads  
Leading into the regions known and unknown.  
Looking back to the Olympian heights  
From the pastures pure and polluted cities  
Revealing the zigzags of ancients  
And labyrinths of moderns.

*Re-Markings* retains its originality of conception,  
Autonomy of choice and execution.  
While the elderly in the fraternity  
Struggle for worthiness or identity,  
It has become an envious celeb.  
The scholars and the students alike  
Feel enriched and enlightened with its freshness  
And take it as an *add-on course*.  
A gem-studded branch  
Of some thick ancient sacred tree  
Where the devotees pay obeisance  
For the blessing of discovery.

On, On, *Re-Markings*, to explore  
New domains of human thought  
For the draught-rich world  
In your editorial reflections and selections.  
I shall announce to the world:  
Heed the re-markings of the *RE-MARKINGS*  
Lest they should multiply their losses.

- **Dr. Raghu Kul Bhushan** retired as Head, Department of English, Lajpat Rai D.A.V. College, Jagraon (Ludhiana). Author of the poetry collection, *Sentinels of the Soul*, he is a frequent contributor to *Re-Markings*.



## **FIVE POEMS**

*Ethelbert Miller*

### **WHATEVER LOLA WANTS**

Stan Kenton fixes his shirt  
and pants. Life is nothing  
but a big band. How come  
the dead no longer swing?

I walk through the kitchen  
to the alley behind the club.

Two guys - getting high.  
Notes in their arms.  
Music in their heads.  
Needles singing blood.

### **CHE**

We are walking to La Paz  
with your smile in our hands.  
The mines and fields are dancing together.  
Our hats sit on the top of our heads  
like the mountains we live in.  
Do you remember when you stopped  
to catch your breath?  
Was that the day you decided  
never to sleep or die again?  
Do you know the wind never forgets?  
Everywhere your face.

### **CURTAINS**

The war was already inside our house  
So I took down the curtains that had blocked  
The sun and walked down the street to the corner  
*WHERE FLIES FLEW IN AND OUT*  
of two bodies resting in the street  
I covered them with curtains  
after looking into the windows of death.

### **GRACE**

I was in New York for a few days.

I looked around and couldn't find you.  
The streets and stores were crowded  
but no one had roses. So I walked around  
searching for your fragrance.

I needed love as much as air.  
Why didn't the rain fall from your lips?

### **GRACE NOTES**

My belly was never full when I was a boy.  
I slept in a back room in the Bronx. Richard,  
my brother, dreamt of becoming a monk.  
*MERTON? IN SOUTHERN STATES PEOPLE BOWED*  
their heads against segregation. Restaurants  
had colored signs and no menus. It was a time  
of hunger and a taste for change. Amazing grace?

- *E. Ethelbert Miller has been the Director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University since 1974. Author of poetry collections like *Andromeda* (1974), *Where are the Love Poems for Dictators?* (1986), *Whispers, Secrets and Promises* (1998), Miller has also edited many anthologies, including the highly-acclaimed *In Search of Color Everywhere: A Collection of African American Poetry* (1994) and *Women Surviving Massacres and Men* (1977).*



## **TWO POEMS** *Krishna Bose*

### **I STILL ADORE YOU**

I still adore you  
for the tinkling whispers  
you phew on drystone walls  
the niche of the night's blackness  
does not stir you  
like a cheering cup.

You still walk  
among the rivulets  
who have left imprints in dryness

your nibbling fingers  
try to feel the last petal  
the deep-set eyes strain to find  
the jewel in the sand-bed.

You still catch up  
the ravishing dance of the Lodhas  
in desolate wilderness  
you shed the shreds of Autumn  
with an infinite meaningfulness  
as you glide into  
the fringes of a different planet.

### **THE LOST UNIVERSE**

The end came at thirteen  
Puspa had to leave  
with her teardrops clinking  
misery tweaking  
fear horsing around.

Her eye soullessly combed  
the left-behind universe  
She stopped to feel the pulse  
of her father's affection  
Her playthings scattered in her clockless room  
reminded her of a carnage  
The edge of her mother's anger  
split her into halves.

She had to complete the circuitous voyage  
No anger, no mirth  
was possibly her own  
The generation of trees standing by  
spoke of no guilt  
She was holding in her fist  
the wishes of her ancestors.

- ***Dr. Krishna Bose is a Calcutta based poet.***



## TWO POEMS

*David Ray*

### FRIENDS

My wife and I spend an hour with a Korean poet.  
We sip tea. He refuses cookies repeatedly.

He tells us he finds America a strange country.  
I tell him I find it the strangest of all,

always have, always will. He tells us his son  
has trouble in school, is too shy to make friends.

No one speaks to the son. He gets scared  
when bullies shove past him in hallways.

The son would like to have a best friend,  
the poet tells us. I would too, I tell him.

My poet wife offers him another cookie.  
Again he politely refuses. He apologizes

because his book has no picture on the cover.  
I tell him that's okay, but to please sign

on the cover. My wife and I each give him  
a book. We sign on the covers. Parting,

both he and I start to offer a handshake,  
then switch to the option of Namaste,

pressing palms as we did often in India.  
"We bow," he says and bows as we have seen

in war movies. I too bow, it's easy. I feel  
humble. Today, the day after, it occurs

to me that our hour with tea and cookies  
and swapped books was about as close

as we'll get to finding our ideal reader,  
a best friend, a true meeting of minds. But  
I must find a dark suit and learn to smile endearingly.

### **EVEN AS BIRDS**

*"We all die, even birds. And so  
I went out into the world"* --Maxim Gorky, *My Life*

You were two years old -- or ten, or twenty, or fifty --  
the first time the world opened before you as if

meant only for you, your advance into the green  
or the blue that was like a sharp gong sounding

on the air, or perhaps a swarm of molecules busy  
as bees stung your eyes, and after that the clouds

seemed to part just for you, not the jet plane in which  
you were a passenger, and never again could museums

compete with scenes of such gold and glory as you  
beheld by strolling the earth. Since that day when

you first saw or heard the strange message of nature  
you have had an odd faith that nothing is quite

random or not designed by some divinity. You  
have honored as many gods as a Greek or Roman,

yet rarely have managed to believe in the light  
within you, the one others claim they see in your eyes.

- **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).



**THE FREEDOM OF A TRANSLATOR:  
TAGORE'S CHOKHER BALI AND  
KRISHNA KRIPALANI'S BINODINI**

*Ajit Kumar Mukherjee*

Krishna Kripalani's Binodini is a translation of Tagore's Chokher Bali, published in 1903. The novel heralds a new age as it is the first Indian novel which openly talks of extra-marital love and sex. It is a complex and non-conformist novel which shows a larger spectrum of middle class life: the orthodox aunt, doting mother, spoilt son and the suffering wife. But there is more, the young widow, Binodini. The placid surface is racked by psychological storms and four main characters, Mahendra, Bihari, Asha and Binodini are tossed about. Sisir Kumar Ghosh rightly comments about the novel in his Rabindranath Tagore: "The strongest passion known to mankind carries the novel along" (71).

The novel is not a usual love-triangle story. It is much more than that. Mahendra, a doting son admitted to medical college as a student, marries Asha, fixed for Bihari by her widow aunt Annapurna. Mahendra's mother Rajlakshmi reluctantly accepts this because she cannot afford to displease her only son, the apple of her eyes, "Like a kangaroo cub he continued to nestle in the maternal pouch long after he had been released from the womb" ( Binodini 1). Bihari is the friend of Mahendra who is treated in the family as the son: "The mother looked upon him as a necessary and serviceable adjunct to her son, a sort of barge towed by her son's steamboat, and was accordingly and in way fond of him" (2). Mahendra accompanies Bihari to see the bride and he himself chooses to marry her. Mahendra becomes a doting husband and forgets his study and college. This ravenous devotion to his wife angers his mother and she blames Asha and her aunt Annapurna. The novel takes a different turn when Binodini, a widow, a daughter of Rajlakshmi's friend arrives at Mahendra's place with his mother. Rajlakshmi had gone to the village and there she fell sick.

- **Dr. Ajit Kumar Mukherjee** recently retired as Head, Department of English, S.B. Women's College, Cuttack (Orissa).

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## **THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION IN PUNJABI FICTION**

*Gurdev Singh Chandhi*

Partition of India was an event of special importance in the history of the Indian sub-continent. It was a harrowing tale of death and destruction, of rape and abduction involving millions of innocent people. Punjabis paid the highest price for the freedom of their nation. There must be many examples in the bloody history of mankind where the extent of violence has been as great or even greater, but it is probably true that there has never been such a huge exchange of population. This change was completed in the shortest period involving the greatest number. The exchange of population between Turkey and Greece, known as the biggest in the world, was completed in a year or so, whereas the transfer of eight million people occurred only in three months in the case of the state of Punjab. In Bulgaria and Greece, the national minorities had the right of leaving the country of origin and emigrating to the other country under considerations which guaranteed them full value of properties left behind, whereas in Punjab (East and West) the minorities were made to quit their homes in the most adverse circumstances created by communal riots, and they had to reach the country of their destination very often as paupers (Kirpal Singh, 114).

Literature as representation of a lived experience recreates the legacy of history. Its creativity possesses the art of selection in order to be meaningful and effective. Like other traumatic happenings, the partition of India too provoked the writers to respond to the incidents related to the great massacre in a highly sensitive manner. It was a horrifying experience for the Indians in general and most traumatic for the Punjabis in particular. 1947 onwards more than five hundred writings have appeared on the subject in Punjabi language. More than hundred and fifty writers have authored works on the theme of partition. There are hundreds of poems and short stories, around fifty novels and many plays available on the subject in Punjabi language. Punjabi writers have responded more than the writers of any other language to the theme of partition, irrespective of creed and caste.

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## SHORT STORY

### THE STREETS OF LAREDO

*James Giles*

i

Derrick Cooper and I had gone to see *The Streets of Laredo* at the Bowie *Majestic* theater. We had, of course, seen the damn movie close to fifteen times (the *Majestic*, knowing a good thing when it saw it, brought *Laredo* back once or twice a year) and by now thoroughly hated it. As kids, we had loved it of course and had gone into deep paroxysms of grief when MacDonald Carey treacherously blew William Bendix away. In fact, “he killed Wahoo!” became our mantra of grief and outrage for some time thereafter—Wahoo being the name of the good-humored, mentally-deficient, and thoroughly boring sidekick of William Holden played by Bendix in the film. We had seen Bendix get it numerous times of course, especially since he had died on every damn island in the Pacific during World War II. I mean, it was like it was a personal thing with the Japanese. John Wayne, Robert Taylor, Robert Walker, Anthony Quinn, and Bendix would land on Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, or Okinawa; and the “satanic little yellow men” would get on their walkie-talkies (I had one that I ordered from a cereal box--it didn’t work, of course) and say “Please to leave big Hollywood stars alone, but Bendix dies!”

Anyway assuming that you’ve been blessed and don’t remember, *The Streets of Laredo* was the five-thousandth movie about old pal Texas Rangers who fall out over money, and maybe a little over Mona Freeman. Holden is, of course, the good guy who finally takes out MacDonald Carey (Jesus, that man once played Nick Carraway and spent about seventy damn years of his life on a soap opera!) and gets Mona, thereby proving that the rewards of heroism are mixed. Holden would of course discover that the rewards of vice are even less desirable in *Sunset Boulevard*.

- **Dr. James R. Giles** is a Presidential Teaching Professor of English at Northern Illinois University. He is the author of nine books

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**DARING TO HOPE:  
MAYA ANGELOU'S WRITING THE SELF**

*Mojgan Abshavi*

It is being widely accepted that private lives are emblematic of a cultural moment. In a *New York Times Magazine* special issue James Atlas (1996) focusing on how writers are shaping this age, talks about the "triumph" of the literary memoir and the autobiography, and links their ascendancy to the therapy-driven "culture of confession" with which they are a perfect fit. This "culture of confession," Gayatri Spivak (1998) adds, is also intimately linked with a "culture of testimony" wherein the subaltern gives witness to oppression to a less oppressed other (7). Every autobiography is also the fragment of a theory. It is also an assembly of theories of the self representation: of personal identity and one's relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion). How to situate the self within these theories is the task of autobiography which entails the larger organizational question of how selves and milieus ought to be understood in relation to each other. Usually, those who write their selves have much to say about this relationship - women, people of color, gaymen and lesbians, the disabled and survivors of violence have contributed to the expansion of this genre of self-representation by illuminating suppressed histories and creating new emphases. While some of these autobiographical texts have been formally experimental, such as Audre Lord's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Cherrie Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*, and Gloria Anzaldua's *Boderlands/La Frontera*, others have focussed more on telling a different story than on telling the story differently. Coming to Women's autobiographies, it is a genre that offers epistemological force to feminist theory though not in predictable ways.

- **Dr. Mojgan Abshavi** teaches in the Department of English, Yasuj University, Yasuj, Iran.

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**FACTS THROUGH FICTION:  
BHISHAM SAHNI'S *TAMAS* AND  
KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN***

*Poonam Yadav*

History has its own narrative, its own tugs and pulls, ebbs and flows. Historical narrative is as old as literature itself. The *Iliad* tells of the history of the fall of Troy, and the *Bible* deals with the history of the Jewish people. Historical fiction can represent a wide range of historical interest ranging from the synchronic particularities of the given moment in the past to a diachronic working of the historical process itself. The complex relation between history and narrative is not one of mirroring or containment; while we can undergo the experience of history bodily, emotionally we can know it discursively through the narrative. In this regard the rejection of an imperial, totalizing narrative goes hand in hand with abandonment of a singular monumental history. In the late 19th century a new and unprecedented interest in history can be seen to be shared between the writers of novels and their readers. The subjection of the Indians to British rule and the consequent slavery and exploitation was a fairly obvious reason for the creative writer's gaze to move to a more expansive past where valour, heroism, glory and splendour seemed infinite.

It is believed that when our lives get too difficult to handle, we consciously work ourselves into a rage or go down into depression. 15 August 1947 witnessed such a rage when India became free from a three-century old British imperialism. The partition of India on political grounds brought with itself a great change in the course of human history. This fragmentation of land and political power left in its wake a miserable and depressing tale of exploitation the consequences of which can still be felt by us.

Writers in English and in at least four languages of the country (Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Punjabi) have found the theme of partition of the Indian subcontinent to be of abiding interest in terms of understanding our present.

- **Dr. (Ms.) Poonam Yadav** is a graduate of Sophia Girl's College, Ajmer and a Ph.D. from University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

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## SHASHI THAROOR: A PROFILE

*Sushil Kumar*

Shashi Tharoor has become very important part of Indian writing in English. As a diplomat and writer Shashi Tharoor has explored the diversity of the culture in his native India. By exploring the themes of India's past and its relevance to the future, he has produced both works of fiction and nonfiction. In reaction to his works *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*, Tharoor has been referred to as "one of the finest writers of satirical novel currently operating in English."

Shashi Tharoor was born in 1956. He was educated in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, and the United States. He had a brilliant academic career with a Ph.D. at the age of 22 from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts university, by far the youngest ever recipient of a doctorate from that prestigious institution. He joined the United Nations in May 1978 on the staff of the UN High commissioner for Refugees as special assistant to the Under-Secretary-General for peacekeeping operation (1989-96). Tharoor has also served as executive assistant to the Secretary-General (1997-98) and later as Director of Communications and special projects in the office of the Secretary-General (1998-2001). In January 1998, he was named as the "Global leader of Tomorrow" by the world Economic forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Shashi Tharoor began writing fiction at the age of six, and his first attempt at a novel was serialized in the *Junior Statesman* before his eleventh birthday. By the time he was thirteen, his stories, articles, book reviews and commentaries on everything from world affairs to cricket have been published extensively in India and abroad. Shashi Tharoor is the author of seven books, including *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), *India from Midnight to the Millennium* (1997), *Show Business, Riot* (2001) and *Bookless in Baghdad* (2005). He has won award for journalism and literature. An avid reader, Tharoor reads very eclectically and enjoys reading the works of various authors. P.G. Wodehouse has been a favourite since his childhood days.

- **Sushil Kumar** teaches English at Baba Farid Institute of Higher & Foreign Studies, Deon-Bathinda (Punjab).

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### ***Book Review***

***The Bridge on the Drina*** by Ivo Andric. Translated from Serbo-Croat by Lovett F. Edwards. Chicago University Press, Chicago. 314 pages. \$15. 95.

***Bosnian Chronicle or The Day of the Consuls*** by Ivo Andric. Translated from Serbo-Croat by Celia Hawksworth and Bogdan Rakic. Harvill Press, London. 415 pages. \$19.95.

***The Damned Yard and other Stories*** by Ivo Andric. Translated from Serbo-Croat by Celia Hackworth et.al. Forest Books, London & Boston, 219 pages. \$15.95

### ***M.L. Raina***

While river banks are quarrelling, water flows quietly.  
*We have suffered so much. Now the domesticated hell sings.*  
-- Branko Milkjovic

When the Bosnian-Serb novelist Ivo Andric (1892-1975) received the Nobel Prize in 1961, he was hailed as another Tolstoy. Now that much of his work is available in new and recent translations, it wouldn't be foolhardy to say that the comparison is only partially valid. There are none of those 'silent chords playing behind the scenes' that E.M. Forster found in Tolstoy's writings. You at once recall Maslova being driven to Siberia in *Resurrection*, Dolly visiting Anna for the first time in *Anna Karenina*, or the spirited *soiree* at the beginning of *War and Peace*. Also, you do not see the perfect blend of the historical and the personal that made Tolstoy an exemplary novelist and endowed the simple domesticities of Pierre's household, the easy contentedness of the Kitty-Levin relationship or the hurting ironies of *The Kreutzer Sonata* with a significant historical purpose.

And yet, if Tolstoy is a Jupiter among world novelists, Andric is no mere asteroid. He shares with his fellow Slav a sense of history as inexorable and irreversible, and his pessimism about the grand flourishes of historical personages. Just as the omniscient narrator at the close of *War and Peace* broods over the futility of heroes manipulating history, so do the community elders in both *Drina* and *Chronicle* ruminate over the uselessness of grand Viziers and Counsels imposing their wills on ordinary humanity. In *Drina* the changeability of human fortunes in political turmoils is signalled by the great flood in the river Drina and the heavy toll it takes. "Their town had been into a

hell, a devil's dance of incomprehensible works, of smoke, dust, shouts and tumult," says the narrator. In the title novella of the collection *The Damned Yard* the Ottoman rulers turn their Bosnian colony into a prison yard and in *Chronicle* the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires bring nothing but ruin to the ordinary people of Travnik, falsifying the claims of successive rulers to have established order and peace.

The other trait Andric shares with the Russian master is an ability to see history in broad strokes rather than in miniature. It is not that he is unaware of history's impact on individual lives. What matters to the author is how the forces of history such as the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires swamp all individual self-expression. So that in an Andric novel, even though there are occasional expressions of individual assertion (as in Radisav's fatal revolt in *Drina* or Kalim's claims in the *Yard* to be prince Cem, or the sporadic romantic tumbles of De Fossets in *Chronicle*), it is history, particularly the history of conquest and rapine, that dominates lives. If Tolstoy sees all individual acts suffused with historical nuance, Andric sees large historical forces dwarfing individual efforts at freedom. Apart from Radisav's abortive revolt, *Drina* records the doomed brief eruptions of Fata (in love), of Milan (in gambling), and of Fedun (in soldiering) as instances of helplessness before the grinding historical juggernaut.

Similarly, in *Chronicle*, Hamidy Bey and Mrs Daville, wife of the canny French Counsel, appear puny, as do the townspeople in the story 'Vizier's Elephant'. Reading these works, one is saddened by the spectacle of uncontrolled and uncontrollable tyranny eclipsing individuals in their feeble attempts to break through the Schwabes, the Sultans and the minor bureaucracy whose wayward behaviour blights private lives as much as it lays waste entire territories. The fact that most of the time Andric's characters act as representatives of and participants in history goes a long way in determining their existential status.

Since many of his major works—the two novels in particular—are about actual historical periods, the general leitmotif in Andric's fiction is the material nature of human experience. Andric grounds his stories in specific geographic locations, mostly in Visegrad and Travnik in what is today's Bosnia-Herzegovina. As he returns time and again to these locations, they acquire the weight and prestige of myth and legend (somewhat in the manner of Hardy's Wessex and Narayan's Malgudi). The experiences thus presented acquire a primordial quality

and transcend the obvious relationship of the conqueror and the conquered, or in the current pomo/poco jargon, coloniser and the colonised.

This way of looking at reality as mythicised but recognisable is a signature technique in some representative non-western writers. One naturally thinks of Nurudin Farah's African trilogy, The Indonesian writer Pramodeya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, Mahffouz's Cairo Trilogy or *Children of the Alley* and, nearer home, the wonderful Bengali novel *A River Named Titash*. These books (*Titash* is closer to *Drina* in both conception and design) are mythical in the positive sense of the word. They are social chronicles but not in the manner of textbooks of fact and event. They are not documentary details of historical happenings, but emblems of how the course of violence arising from the sadistic impulses of the exploiters would shape the everyday lives of the exploited peoples.

As we carefully read Andric's work, we notice a recurrent pattern of behaviour (such as the not-so-concealed arrogance of the conqueror towards the conquered displayed by several provincial governors in *Dina* and *Chronicle*), and of the relationship of the coloniser and the colonised that form the substance of myth and legend, fostered by the fear-driven rumour mills in semi-literate societies. The fact that not many of Andric's characters have private lives of their own lends substance to their being parts of a design, even of a game in which their destinies are decided by people outside their power to control. Games, intrigues, machinations of one sort or another subordinate the individuals to a larger political destiny, larger that is, than their subjective lives. Looking for wisdom and understanding in the tragic plight of his people, Andric forgoes the historian's urge to trace causality, but focuses on the imaginative world that he creates out of history's changing tableaux.

Which brings me to Andric's status as a historical novelist. In these novels there are no great heroes but only oppressors, tyrants and bullies. Considering that Bosnia-Herzegovina was at the centre of European power play in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continues to be in ferment today, it is natural that for Andric colonialism and conquest should expose the human capacity for unrelieved evil. This accounts for the fact that the voices of those who see glimmerings of good in the midst of evil are either suppressed or are too weak to make themselves heard. One thinks of Radisav in *Drina*, of De Fosset in *Chronicle*, the small group of young prisoners



who question authority in the story "Yard" or of the faceless masses outside the courtly intrigues who continue to live resignedly in the face of evil.

Unlike in Tolstoy or Stendhal (*Charterhouse of Parma*), history in Andric is an elite business fashioned by the conquerors and altogether bypassing the people at large. Characters such as Daville's wife and Alihodja represent the silent suffering majority who, though effected by the pain the rulers inflict, are, nevertheless, mute witnesses all through. As the narrator says in a passage in *Chronicle*: "Fear lay over Travnik like a fog, weighing on everything that breathed and thought. At such times many people, blinded and maddened forget there are such things as reason and courage, that everything in life passes ... deluded by the temporary magic of fear, they pay far more dearly for their bare life than it is worth, doing base, contemptible things."

And in *Drina*: "It was not thousands of fools like that Osman Karamanli who could do anything or change anything... What was the use of all that hullabaloo when, here and now, there had come for a man a time of disaster in which he could neither live nor die, but rotted like a stake in the earth and belonged to whomever you wished but not to himself." Such despair from a former Communist (Andric was Tito's favourite), may hurt socialist-realist hacks, but is a salutary reminder of his superior talent. He did not look at history through the class-tinted Marxist spectacles. Not surprisingly then, far from bridging the gap between the Turks, Serbians and the Bosnians, the bridge on the Drina kept them apart. The river banks of Branko Milkjkovic's epitaph kept quarrelling and continue quarrelling today, while the waters get muddied and the stories of sufferings of the people of Kosovo, Sarajevo and other Balkan states make news, U.N. peacekeepers notwithstanding.

The events presented in *Drina* cover the centuries after the first Serb revolts against the Ottoman Empire. The bridge is a choral presence symbolising permanence in the midst of drift and devastation caused by successive rulers. The waters of the Drina suggest timelessness, calling into question the coloniser's attempts to impose another temporality. The story develops in the form of vignettes of one ruler after another who leave their evil impress on the soil of Visegrad. Hence the absence of a coherent plot in the traditional sense.

Andric refutes the coloniser's boast of an orderly growth and civilised evolution and regards colonialism as a deliberate eruption into the age

old communal life represented by the even flow of the river. In *Chronicle* Andric is more concerned with the pathologies and predicaments of the rulers themselves. Daville, De Maistr, the Austrian Counsel and their hangers-on (we are provided long histories of their roles) are studied from inside as well as from the point of view of the people they come into contact with. There is here a psychological layering of characters not to be found in *Drina*, for this novel probes the characters' motivations as well as their actions. Given Andric's anti-colonial predilections the colonisers turn out to be more vulnerable than the colonised, deserving our sympathetic understanding. His Communist sympathies notwithstanding, Andric is fully alive to the paradoxes of human nature.

What provides a deep folk ethos to Andric's work is his skill in telling stories and letting people tell theirs. He is a kind of story teller celebrated by Walter Benjamin in his famous essay "The Storyteller": "he does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller..." In a sense the stories in *The Damned Yard* are about telling stories. That he can listen to others indicates the communal character of his art. Even though the story "The Climber" ends painfully, as do the novels, there is a sense of ongoing life (something Benjamin found in Leskov) that remains intact in the face of calamity. This is folk wisdom at its best and assures Andric an honourable place among prominent non-western writers. He becomes a chronicler in the manner of Mahfouz's *Gabalawi* and *Harafish* or of his own Serbo-Croat folk tradition about which the great folklorist Albert Lord wrote in his classic *The Singer of Tales*.

- **Prof. M.L. Raina** retired as Professor of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He has been Professor and Head at Poona University (1979-1980) and has been Visiting Professor at Princeton and Rutgers University in the U.S.A. and Visiting Fellow at King's College Cambridge. He has published extensively on Modern European literature, particularly on Forster (1973), Joyce, Faulkner, T.S.Eliot and Thomas Mann as well as on Literary Theory and Cinema Theory and Practice. He has been Associate Editor of Minnesota Review and editor of New Quest.



***Narrative Gravity: Conversation, Cognition, Culture*** by Rukmini Bhaya Nair. New Delhi: OUP, 2004, xi+425 pages. Rs 695.

***Rajul Bhargava***

After her 1997 *Technobrat: Culture in a Cybernetic Classroom*, Rukmini Bhaya Nair once again captivates the readers with her ingenious authenticity in *Narrative Gravity*, this time to reanimate narrative with those 'magical impulses' that had got lost in the more mechanical albeit usual, syntactico-semantic analyses. Building up on Chomsky's key insight that language provides an inbuilt key to our identity, that grammar is a cognitive tool enabling us to construct 'selves', Nair, while positing narrative as a second tool, extends its scope further by ascribing to it the status of a 'natural theory' designed 'biologically, psychologically and culturally, to probe into contexts, explore hypothesis and present explanations of the enigmas' we encounter in the daily business of living, as well as of facing death (2).

As we move from the outer cover (a meaningfully chosen illustration of *Harvest* by Arpana Caur, symbolizing 'self-reflexive conversationalists, grim reapers spinning life-sustaining stories...gendered subjects mediating the rise and gravitational fall of cultures' (xi) to all that is within the covers we are struck by the meticulously well-planned and equally carefully well-executed arguments in the areas of linguistic pragmatics, cultural studies and the philosophy of language. From the many equations, through parallels, to the paradoxes everything is judiciously well thought out to sustain and validate her own position. As she navigates over a seemingly uneven terrain, through hitherto uncharted territory and thence out of the troubled waters to shore up onto a solid embankment of narrativity she makes us believe, by hindsight, that nothing could have been more (spectacularly) commonsensical than this - Why had we not looked at it this way before?

But the journey of arrival for us has been awe-inspiring, similar to the narrative movement itself from terra firma to terra incognita and back. An odd number of 259 Nair *Narrative Sutras*, in trying to reassemble the dismembered

Vac through several and appropriate traditions from diverse 'gurus', toss the pieced goddess up into thin air and then knot her up again, affirming the author's reiterated hypothesis of the paradoxical Indian Rope Trick. Like the magician in the 'native' (a word both contained and binding 'narrative') rope trick, Nair first unwinds the threads of a narrative which not only have the oft interrogated and largely accepted structuralist and dialogic strands of Propp, Barthes, Levi Strauss and Bakhtin but also the relatively lesser known, though as important, of Labov, Searle, Grice and Dennett. She then woofs and warps the discussions: of Labovian 'story-grammars', of Searle's 'speech act' and 'perlocutionary effects', of Gricean 'implication' and Lewisian 'convention' of mnemonics, of 'meme-power', and of politics of narrative as 'real' accounts, 'crisis' or 'disaster' into the anti-foundationalist and anti-essentialist idea that our stories make us up rather than we make our stories. In forging a relation between such a polyphony of voices and multidimensionality of approaches she feels one with Victor Hugo whom she quotes to have said that 'the time has indeed come when textual theorists must talk to cognitive scientists, psycholinguists and philosophers who, in turn, need to be persuaded that their theories can be successfully propelled into the 'soft' areas of literature and cultural studies' (345). Hugo is indeed being supported by recent research in narratology (Harman, 1999) and explored via Nair's third paradox in *Narrative Gravity* that story telling could be a means of reading the minds of others.

The other two paradoxes which provide the junctural and conjectural nodal points, and thus ground the book's gravity, are Searle's - how do words in fiction both have and not have their 'ordinary' everyday meanings? and Dennett's - can there be authorless narratives? Dennett's position is that we are not singular selves and so our narrative texts cannot have the singular authors we take them to have. He argues that we are machines 'designed to endlessly produce 'multiple drafts' of narrative from which we derive, fallaciously, our 'singular self-representations'(20). Searle, questioning the 'machine' position, says that machines do not have intentions, feelings, desires and therefore we cannot be them. Nair enters the debate, first acknowledging that 'by shameless recourse to

the story-teller's cloak of absolute licence' she has 'put words into the mouths of Dennett and Searle,' and then by assuming the role of a mediator she presents her own 'communicative cog' stance. According to Nair a narrative is somewhat like sex 'an interlocking device for self perpetuation'. 'Like the body, narrative, to be 'creative', needs interpretive listeners as well as active tellers' (22) She wants to replace Dennett's authorless narrative with the idea of a 'co-authored narrative', so that every self becomes a cog, big or little, in the wheel of community.

The gravitational 'centre' is staged nearly in the middle of the book, Chapter 5, preceded by an umbrella of the 'gurus', foresighting the cognitive, ethno-cultural analysis of narratives with which she 'dirty's her hands', before putting 'the icing on the cake' with the 'essence'tial sutras'. Here she 'confronts the fear of, or alternatively, contempt for, any kind of talk of grammar by presenting a substantially enriched grammar of narrative' (202). She believes that one of the happier consequences will be to humanize a concept (grammar) that has incorrectly and self-defeatingly been interpreted as mechanical. Although to humanize grammatically does appear to be ironic, but (depending on the 'human capacity for infinite perversity', to 'forget the obvious' - and) allowing for a wide latitude within linguistic interpretation, Nair goes on to restore to grammar its potential for enriching human thought. This is achieved, she tells us, by constantly adding, jettisoning, reorganizing information as a story moves along and so events are linked backwards and future events hypothesized. Implicatures are worked *into* conversation by tellers, inferences are worked *out* from conversations by listeners and inferences are related to cognition (from Greek *gnomon*, the shadow casting ... rod of a sundial - a means of inferring 'time'), an abstract entity. Every narrative has, so to speak, a *gnomon* coiled within it (and gives it a structure) which can be replicated by *memes* (Dawkins, 1991), those genes which propagate themselves by leaping from one brain to another, a process which can be called imitation. They embody a powerful semantics that vaults over cultural barriers and contributes not only to social evolution but to social integration. Sharing *memes* implies sharing *presuppositions*

about the structure of the world. These *memes* find a natural harbour in narratives, narratives in turn offer the moulds for *memes* to house themselves. And despite the fact that narratives create an illusion that there is an 'authoritative self', there is no such 'central meaner', for is the 'self' not a social construct, one inspired by inferences, an agentive human self that creates, as it is being created? It is through narrative *memes* that members of linguistic cultures are knit together and reassured that they share basic inductive premises and deductive formulas for reasoning and cognition.

In this sense narratives and conversation are related. Narrativity is a conversational mechanism for information exchange since it underwrites our collective illusions of being unified, of being 'contextualized'. Psychologically, this propensity for narrative prevents us from cracking up, it provides the safety valves of release, an opportunity to get to know oneself and by implicature, others. Nair says that 'a good story is one where the listener is so completely hooked that he completely identifies with the imaginary characters and imaginary worlds that the teller conjures up, this is when *memes* are best transferred — the Indian Rope trick successfully completed. "The attraction of an inferential model lies in its attempt to mimic precisely this *flexibility* which tellers, listeners and analysts display in their meme-sensitive interpretations of narrative" (247). Thus Nair contents that "even the most minimal stories can be analysed with maximal complexity, given a theoretical approach that values inferential enrichment over interpretive economy and partial interminancy over absolute predictability. Nair goes on, in Chapter 7, to look at ethnomethodological analysis of narratives. She feels that just as schematic representations of narratives can gain enormously from a detailed study of the conversational structure into which stories are typically indexed, so too the ethnomethodological approaches need to be underpinned by more general theories of pragmatics like the Gricean and Lewisian or her own inferential model of narrativity, which try to link structure to intuition and conventions to intentions. In the next two chapters Nair looks at some of the ethical and political questions that arise

out of a consideration of narrative as a mode of cultural manoeuvring.

Though the end of the story anticipates death, as *Narrative Gravity* moves towards its end, it does not envisage a dissolution but a dislocation. The cool eddies of theory edge towards a storm, a flood, the penultimate chapter steps into deeper waters flaunting a different cast of characters and a change of theme. The theme becomes 'moments of suffering' like political violence during partition or the traumatic mishaps engendered by the wrath of gods, and the questions to be encountered are whether or not narrative theory can lend itself to capturing the objectivity of such institutionalized 'domains'. Through an interface between the official or grand narratives of disaster, the localized people's own accounts and the historical narrative she tries to decipher how and why they plait and then curl away from each other. Although there is a fuzziness of boundaries between these narratives but narratives of causality are fragile quite like our own lives, insofar as these listeners can question or doubt their authenticity. Like the body of the goddess *Vac*, they are continually subject to both annihilation and reconstruction. *Narrative Gravity*, in effect, has tried to extend the early notion of fragility as articulated in the ethnomethodological work of *Sacks*, by ultimately connecting it, via speech act theory, *Gricean* maxims and *Lewisian* conventions, to *Dennett's* idea of a 'self' which grows through narrative accretion and meme-generation.

The theoretical approaches Nair uses, of Searle, Grice and Dennett, provide the three focal points that give narratives their gravity — conversation, cognition and culture and this troika is propelled by 'morality engines' that narratives essentially are. Of these, conversation augments our sense of community and cultural belonging, while cognition or the psychological routines of inference-making and perceptual theorizing enables our sense of self. By setting up talk-exchanges between contending theorists and herself she arrives at the conclusion that narratives are obsessive modes of self construction and self protection. By convention and by implication they provide a format for defining an individual's social territory and thereby his/her unique identity

within community which lives to tell him/her whether or not he/she lives to tell the tale, since the other cogs still merrily spin along. What this book has focused on are the actual processes and theories which characterize the relentless break-up and gluing together, that gravitational attraction and centripetal disintegration of narrative parts.

Nair tells us that she has called the book *Narrative Gravity* "partly because the phonology as well as the polysemy of the second word in the title seems to resonate well with the overwhelming sense of mortality which narrative drag with it. ... (It is) locked in an onomatopoeic tackle with ... grief, grind, gruesome, grumble, grovel, grunt, grow grisly, grim, but also to keep things in proportion, grin. Then there is the semantics of gravity; cognate with the Sanskrit word 'guru' or teacher, whose words carry most 'weight' in the culture and who attracts all wisdom unto himself or herself (Vac?); gravity, also meaning seriousness; gravity, meaning a centrifugal force which attracts; and grave, shadowy half-homonym of gravity, meaning a place of burial, that space where gravity finally holds the 'self' down (25).

Through a shifting and sieving of paradigms Nair arrives at a narrative theory with a difference and factors it out so neatly and systematically that the many repetitions and the 'cut and paste method of modern word processing' that is adopted are elided by the need to make a patterned sense of her *memes*. Bravely balancing modernist and postmodernist claims of selfhood, the 'selves' that her narratives create and ground are fluid, fragile, fractured ones which disintegrate easily and yet leave behind a wholeness of cultural interpretation and a completeness of teleological cognition.

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***The Night Halt and other Stories*** by Neera Singh, New Delhi, Sporting Links, 2006. 71 Pages. Rs. 100.

***S.S. Sharma***

Neera Singh's collection of short stories *The Night Halt and Other Stories* brings a whiff of fresh air to the domain of writing a region which has been done so well by writers like R.K. Narayan, and in Hindi by Phaneeshwar Nath 'Renu'. The region in question this time is largely Shimla and its surroundings – made so memorable way back in 1880 by Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills*. Kipling's novel *Kim* is a much more significant work than his tales, which do have a special charm of their own. The same charm is abundantly there in *The Night Halt and Other Stories*.

The strong autobiographical element present in this collection gives it affinity with James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the latter of which is an outstanding example of aesthetic autobiography. One great point of interest in Joyce's work just mentioned is to where he stations himself vis-à-vis the reality that is being portrayed. This kind of 'stationing' in Neera Singh's case takes the form of her keeping herself a little detached from the narrative toll and yet being sufficiently involved in it because in almost all cases she has a personal stake in the proceedings. One of the great strengths of the book is that her irony is never of the wry or the stinging type, but is full of human concern, warmth and caring. That goes a long way in the language which she uses for framing her narratives through brief authorial comments. Some of us born and brought up in big cities might occasionally find the reality portrayed a little quaint, but there is a remarkable ring of authenticity in whatever is on offer. The lifestyle of the people living in the hills, the kind of social hierarchies present there, an occasional element of superstition in their lives which is neither fully denied nor fully asserted – all add to the richness of the texture of these stories. And yet there is no attempt on the writer's part to go out of her way to offer us unnecessary exotica of any kind. The assertion of positive human values is all that she really cares for.

A bonus which the book offers us is a very incisive insight into the way the NRI psyche operates most of the time. This has been done by others also but the portrayal offered here is much more down to earth and candid. Neera Singh's characters are quite lively, individual and lifelike. The narrative often is quite pacy. The twists the stories sometimes take are also quite appropriate because often the element

of dramatic irony or poetic justice is there. As stated by the author herself in her preface, the stories can be roughly divided into three categories. We shall take a representative story from each one of these categories and briefly touch upon them.

From the first group one remarkable story is 'The Matriarch' which charts the gradual decay in the fortunes of a family with great insight. An indiscretion on the part of the patriarch of the family leads to the ultimate sadness that permeates the closing parts of the story. What is really remarkable about this story is the way the author pins down *that* something which went out of her own life with the decline of this family. This kind of touch of nostalgia is one of the strengths of the book as a whole.

From the second category let us look briefly at 'The Prank' which locates the narrative in a twilight world between verisimilitude and what Coleridge called "the willing suspension of disbelief". The ambivalence that results is in effect a strength of the story rather than a weakness because in the hills this kind of a "other worldly" element is very much a part of the fabric of people's life and imagination.

From the third group of stories which are all very substantial 'Life Comes Full Circle' stands out for the dramatic irony which it brings into play. Life *does* come full circle for Jyotimaya, the protagonist of this tale, and the poetic justice inherent in the situation is that most of the time we get rewards and punishments for our "this worldly" actions right here and not in a world beyond.

*The Night Halt and Other Stories* is a welcome addition to writing in English by Indian women and one is quite sure that the writer has quite a few more things in store for readers of Indian Writing in English. A whole slice of life comes alive in a vibrant way and that is no mean achievement for somebody just venturing into the field. This is her debut book.

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THE BEST IS YET TO BE

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The water  
in a vessel  
is sparkling;  
the water  
in the sea  
is dark.

The small truth  
has words  
which are clear;  
the great truth  
has great silence.

*Rabindranath Tagore*

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