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VerbalArt

A Global Journal Devoted to
Poets and Poetry

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Chief Editor

Dr. Vivekanand Jha

Associate Editor

Dr. Rajnish Mishra

Review Editor

Dr. Chandra Shekhar Dubey



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Q-2A Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi-110 016

e-mails: authorspressgroup@gmail.com; authorspress@hotmail.com

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EDITORIAL

We are happy to present Vol. 2, Issue. 2 of *VerbalArt*. It is refreshingly original, acute and penetrating. As the readers are aware of the fact that *VerbalArt* explores poets and writers and their theories about art, aesthetic and poetry, this volume too presents before you a bunch of poets drawn from India and abroad representing the true vision and mission of this journal. To us poetry is not only juggling with words but an organic form which evolves from meaning, method and sense. The quintessence of beauty lies in the unity of formal and material elements of art. Here all poems in their form and content, are fully merged and give birth to real delight. Poet's profound contemplative mind and musical sensibility here present poems which would be loved by critic and common reader alike. Besides the poems, this volume contains articles and reviews on poetry and poetic works.

We would like to appeal all the contributors and the visitors to drop a few line of comment on the feat of the journal by clicking 'Feedback' menu or visiting at the following link of its website: <http://www.verbalart.in/comments.php>

Now we are looking for next issue of our sister journal, *Phenomenal Literature: A Global Journal Devoted to Language & Literature*. The submission deadline is 31 Dec 2017. We invite authors all over the world to submit their creative pieces. Kindly do spread the word about this call. Submission guidelines can be found at <http://www.phenomenalliterature.com/submission.php>.

Blissful reading!!!!

Editors

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POETRY

GARY LANGFORD

Sad Language

We can all be taken up – or in – in Sad Language.
The map of happiness has a sallow line.
This can be searched without reason,
notably on the front of other people's opinion.

Regardless of night's fall there is a cauldron of light.
Do you know the giants of your universe?
Are they talkative or break stars in amusement?
Words hide inside the folds of people.

Try talking without a pronoun or a break.
You will find out why in Sad Language.
An absurd landscape can have its own charm.
Count the coats of paint we give each other.
Count animals as children in our building.

We sing our songs, centre stage in our play.
Just for a moment our audience cheers.
We blister charmingly. We blister fearfully.
We brighten each other up dearly.

The body of language breaks down without a question.
The heart is an epicentre we still try to measure.
It plays along as casually as a promise.

The next body greets us in a storm of anguish.
There is a truth; a scientific-has-to-be-right rite.

We clamber out of sleep like bright little dolls.
We emerge in the manufacture of the soft.
We try to leave heaviness behind in rattled clouds.
Only hope is left in a landscape without sad eyes.

ALEXANDER RAJU

Indifference

I feel indifferent to the core, living
In a world of unsolved controversies,
Where people fight with opinionated minds;
I watch them struggle for their survival,
Kill each other on silly arguments
Like believers of the barbarian past!

We, the poor fools, turned devils to ourselves
And missed the real heaven on this earth;
We nurtured hatred and violence in us,
And killed in the name of God and Heaven,
And ignored the truth that God lives in us
And Heaven exists only on this earth.

Blame me not if I become an atheist
When God through his believers stage genocides
And help them live in a fool's paradise;
They fight for stale customs and practices
And not for values that make our life worth
Of living in a perfect peaceful world!

They say God's mighty and omnipotent,
But that God failed to control those poor,
The ignorant believers too foolish
To realize that their great God lives in man
And he who kills a man, kills himself,
And no salvation, if any, for him.

Though we're slaves to folly and ignorance,
Our miseries will be drowned in oblivion,
Tears will be dried by the passing days,
Life's stream will flow on with giggles and roar,
World will go on as smoothly as before
And time, the doctor, will heal every wound!

AMARENDRA KHATUA

Rehearsing Loss

Rejection opens up its
Empty palm. Each line,
Depicting vagaries of stolen
Stories, points out to retreating
Steps, imagined moments and spent
Waiting. Then the open palm of
Swollen expectation never
Closes, never.

It was always told, the
Unheard prayers have the
Power to cleanse, to mend the
Darkness inside the soul and
To rescue and prepare for the difficult
Journey again. Where are the
Words that picture a prayer
Confronting the vast abyss of
Rejection, life size?

Now the prolonged routine will
Have its prescribed chores. Life
Will open windows, close many
Doors, stoop to pick up dead
Petals and borrow smiles. A
Small scar will transgress the
Protective spheres around the
Heart and mirror the sadness,
Almost forgotten knowingly.

BIPUL BANERJEE

Sandstorm

In pursuit of eternal happiness
The heart wanders across
Silvery glares of seamless deserts
Every mile travelled
Add miles of miraged disillusion
Scorching sun displays its wrath
Blistering drops of sweat
Created and dried again
Leaving cracked odours of
Clinging destitutions
A whirlwind,
A sandstorm
Threatens to offload
The uncanny efforts
Solitudes sought in desperate resorts
Where the sand, the storm, the whirlwind
All seek rest
Allowing the journey to destination.

LAVERNE FRITH

**Toward a Kind of Knowing,
of Acting Out**

Wandering and travelling
wistfully through and around

the corridors of experience –
each deliberate gesture delivered

with assuredness, a knowledge
that each gesture counts, each makes

an impression, whether fleeting
or lasting, each truly effectual

nevertheless. That's what this
kind of affirmation becomes,

every measured step a registration,
a true knowing that completeness

is nigh.

ANUM SATTAR

Fairy Tales

I

On the stream bank scattered with hay, twigs and pine cones
I flick fat flies from my mistress' swishing black pony tail
Underneath a lantern lit with fireflies of snow.
A gardener of love, I coax, flatter and tease her
To cultivate the soil in which will bloom a rosebush;
A pomegranate romance; a honey sweet apple
From the tinniest pips of my affection.
But sometimes a wicked witch, I comb her curls.
Unhappy and unwilling she frets, spits seeds
And twists her un-kissed, shimmering mouth
Before she blows the candle out and buries her head beneath
the covers.
There is nothing like a romantic evening at our home.

II

Placing the newspaper aside at last,
I lose myself to the canvas of her face
For her pretty picture can always amuse any man bored with
reading.
But was I not a stable boy riding,
Was I not the blue bird alighting upon a branch of her finger?
And had I not travelled to the hill of her beak,
Would lovers now be able to lie there as well?
Someday I will turn into a tree, deaf to her sweet nothings.
All her heart-shaped carvings going up and down my white
trunk.

III

Hard at work as always, my Snow White polishes silverware,
And places the cutlery into the cupboard of my neck.
Graceful as the wind she picks
Our crumpled leaves and strews them on the rug.
But on her way back she exclaims,
“Good gracious,
You are not the prince!
Put these clothes back on,
Before I cut your forest off.”

(The above poem first published in Volume One of the
American Journal of Poetry by Robert Nazarene & Jim
Wilson and in Better than Starbucks! by Anthony Watkins.)

FAHREDIN SHEHU

There

When you gaze up toward the forms of the white clouds
you find my face ablaze by the sun rays
mother or I am not...!?, wearing the brocade accoutrements
as in the bridal night,
with the hair anointed with lavender oil
with the face as a full Moon
in front of Venetian mirror
as in times when guns were shooting
while intermarry killing each other
as for who shall first pass the crossroad
between two cemeteries
one of the Plague and the other of children dead
by Measles

today when I bow down my sight and see my stomach
while earth is dragging by
somehow as I want to sing the song of the Midday
when the Sun vanishes your shadow
and the Bachelors faint
while looking bare feet escape of the Fairy with the inflamed
curly crest
the fragrance of Myrrh and Violet spreading all around
as in times when the Moon was adored as God
while Pagans prayed for the rain to fall
with bells and kelp,
elder leaves and bowing boughs
of the weeping willow folded

tomorrow we shall look straight in the eyes
seeing the lie of each other,
how it leaks as mercury in aged veins
with antimony poisoned while juvenile
and our faces will not blush out of shame
because we folded the darkness in rule
we bind it in a sack woven
in the Loom of the Sun
there where you drink the vine that never makes your drunk
where Love is done as breathtaking
and isn't nominated as we do
there where the Word is done not uttered instead...

MICHAEL H. BROWNSTEIN

The Caterpillar Wars

We climb the trail of hard tack and belligerence,
one foothold at a time, one handhold at a time,
our bodies pressed against rock and limb,
the ridge a door opens to palisades
rich with water and droppings, carnivores and calcite,
a knife reserved for some of us.

We are on our way to the caterpillar wars,
night long with sleep, day too hot for breathing.

The rock climber knows the inside of rock,
the footpath earth, the broken rowboat
its gravel grave, all of the grass the grass beside it.

Please. Take this staff.

Things are less angry here,
less full of quantity, of a tenor in voice.

Soon we will be between thick fences,
then forests, then where the horse hunters live
and everything is not always good.

Here is the town of unequal opportunity
and the river running through it little more than sink water
overrunning its basin drop by drop.

You know, everything in the world begins
as a puddle and then turns to mud.

JOHN RACHEL

Tapioca Cyber Trails

A sweet jest broke water
Birthing artificial intelligence
As if the clusters of CPUs
Marked the non-event event
We reeled and rollicked
In childish mirth-driven panic
Salivating porn-addicted cherubs
Lost in the heavy-breathing fog
Flying the vaporous trails
Of evaporating illusion
We wept but didn't

You are no more
I've remade you
In my image
In your image
I fear meeting you again
I fear disappointment
Shattered expectations
Revulsion and despair
A binary epitaph
Suicide is in our DNA
Zero one zero one

SANDIP SAHA

Oh My Dear

It was a wonderful afternoon
I saw you for the first time,
two wide open eyes as if lotus
blossomed in your calm lake of face
I looked on and on unknowingly,
you shied away your eyes from me.

I remember that night you were
dressed like a princess, you came and
greeted me with flowers waving them
around me by your petal soft palms.
Light glittered, music amazed
I got lost in a wonderful world.

You wrote so many sweet letters
addressing me with adorable names
as I had to leave you back to parents
to perform duty, you did it so well!

Now we are together
can hardly leave each other
as we travel to mountain or to sea shore.
May God bless us forever!

BRUCE LADER

Soul Talk

Sometimes mine is with me.
We journey thousands of miles
communing, meditating, chatting
as though we have everything in common.

Most of the time it takes off
for months like a lazy corporate director,
when I have to complete forms,
move furniture, replace appliances.

Too much noise and clutter annoy it away.
More than once my soul was gone longer
than a light-year. We are friends,
I always miss it, but upon returning

it doesn't talk about the alternate
universe it explored, won't even say sorry;
my soul only seems surprised
I don't know where it's been
and have gotten older.

NORIS ROBERTS

It Dawns Under My Skin

Today is in an outcast dream
that I strongly seek in this twist of fate
of orphaned humanity

It dawns beneath my skin and I look in the mirror,
the same one in which I frequently see myself;
it always returns me to the terrible place
where my dreams were mutilated

Restless, without answers,
I would like to invent words that embrace life;
I cannot stand the looks clothed in shocking indifference
that see over their shoulders with immutable disdain
a fractured and wounded world asking for clemency

SANDEEP KUMAR MISHRA

Descending into the Earth

Death unescorted by feet or form,
Difficult to trace bare bone footprint;
Discern its image in the mirror of vitality,
Its spirit draws breath in the body of life;
Death is interior of the slushy flesh,
Trial-mount on the funeral pyre;
Feel the body fabric burning;
You're not descending into the Earth
But rising towards the eternal Sky,
And entering into a pristine nativity,
As the Sun sets, the Moon rises.

CIARÁN PARKES

Sisyphus Decides

Sisyphus decides – why not –
to let go of the stone he's been rolling
up a hill for what seems like forever.

He falls back, onto the long grass, noticing
the deep groove his stone has made
in the hillside, remembers

how he would always get so far and then
it would somehow slip his grasp, start rolling
back the way it came, to wait for him

at the bottom of the hill. Now it tumbles
over a field he's never seen before,
getting smaller, disappearing

into the blur of distance. He knows
this is hell he's in, no doubt of it
with all the treasure here, the brightness

dragged down from the upper world and spread
out like scattered flowers and all the people,
doomed to torment, misery, the loss

of everything they've ever loved but still
looking, for the moment, almost cheerful.

WILLIAM C. BLOME**Persons**

My raucous neighbor asks me why
I never carry an ocean-green tambourine
or a long-handled hoe on my person,
and I tell him his wife prefers I come
and go like mute September wind
shoving its way through bowed-down,
heavy branches. He scowls broadly
and bids me come and look at the side
of a tree I've never touched, the side up
against the house. There he's notched
the trunk each time I came to see you;
there he's run up a lofty count, and he starts
to shout out our jumbo numbers. But a lie
from me not to forget a tambourine and hoe
from here on out brings calm over his foaming
person, and then I promise him his wife
and I won't be real careful anymore.

JOHN GREY

The Time That Passes You By

So how do you carve your myth?
And what makes it so sacred?
Forget the truth.
Big-noting lies trump all.

Get it down on paper.
Pose for its photograph.
Post it in your family's databanks.
The ways to how you wish to be remembered
are endless.

A hundred years from now
no one will know the difference.
You'll be the shards
of a lost civilization,
a solitary bone
from which a whole creature
is revealed.

Head of the family indeed.
All the world will really know
is that there was a head in there somewhere.

ARTICLES

N.U. LEKSHMI

Entrancing Waves of Thoughts: A Reading of Sudha Nedunganoor's *Ripples of Love*

Ripples of Love, a collection of poems by Sudha Nedunganoor stands testimony to the poetic genius and exemplary craftsmanship of the writer. Marked by love, care and concern, her poems throb into the minds of the readers shredding apart the web of illusions. *Ripples of Love* acts as a lodestar to the present generation that is often swayed by a corrosion of values, to move towards the illumined path of righteous love and life. The poems are obviously astonishing with a wide variety of themes that are in fact the reality to both the religious and irreligious. This in fact is the greatest lesson the writer imparts to the society and therefore in the words of the writer "Each moment is a new book to be chewed and digested to live better in the next" (17).

Eco-aesthetics as a philosophy that entwines with the existential percepts in the poems selected for the study, highlights the ability in relishing the beauty of nature as realistic mortals in the course of actuality. "Lotus" speaks of the poet's love for the ecology along with her admiration and worship for the divinity that is seated in the "queen of flowers" (21). Lotus is born to be a star, marked by perfection

by “unknown artist’s hands” (21). Upholding the virtue of survival, it hails though the reason for the same is unknown.

“On Wings of Dream” acts as a guide to human subsistence that is often engulfed by varied turmoil. There are many a moment when hopes are thwarted and the mortals are led into the “pits of despondency” (22). But of all the creations, man alone is gifted with the unique faculty to imagine and dream, though often criticized that “Dreaming souls are mad” (22). The poet emphasizes the power of dreams that can transport their minds to the realms of bliss. Often the minds embark on a flight equipped with the wings of imagination. As light as a butterfly, dreams aid the mind soar high and traverse the “garden of rich and rare fancies” (22) and thus impart a new vigour to life.

Of all the traits, freedom is the most important aspect that existence carves for. “Freedom Flute” signifies the existential trait of freedom that every living cell aspires for. The poet too longs to “fly and soar” (23) high up in the sky enjoying the ecstasy of nature to be one with the eternity. The wings of freedom that opens a world of aerial sylphs musing the jovial harp of freedom is an excellent imagery that pacifies even the most pathetic soul and points to an oasis of optimism where the presiding deity will obviously be freedom:

Then you leap to the blooming groves Where aerial
sylphs, sing on swings.
In your jovial harp in trance
And invite all the angel friends
To dance with them in symphony. (23)

In “Sweet Samples” the poet signifies the pleasure in recalling happy and cherished bygone days. The painful pleasure rejuvenates and revitalizes the minds and the thoughts about the experiences that assume the guise of memories at a later phase of reality:

Memories are sweeter
When they visit
Their crazy childhood.
Lullabies are sweeter
When heard while Lying in a Cradle.(24)

for the entire world has magic of music. Each day and each moment is certainly a thought to cherish. The statement authenticates that humans in the path of existence build up idyllic memories which they carry along with them in their journey to the perpetual abode.

Ripples of Love is interspersed with hope that springs from the garden of eternity so as to enliven the desperate souls. The poet emphasizes the beauty and power of nature that helps humans in surpassing the impediments. As most of the poems spring out from the personal and felt experiences, the poet says that nature helps her associate herself with the beautiful rose in her garden in “The Beauty Bloomed in My Garden”. She is immensely captured by the beauty of the rose, that the mind is much enthralled by the uniqueness of nature and sings:

Your graceful smile permeates
My youthful vigour and love
Which I hold for ever in heart
To save and secure this world I live. (25)

As a true piece of existentialism, the poem highlights the sense of responsibility to rise and act for the society at large. At this instance, the poet's ecological sense urges her to safeguard the flower, a sense of profound ecological significance. The poet however realizes that the physical beauty may fall and die in due course, but the beauty that the Mother Earth has imparted is sure to reign in her inner recesses:

I will fix my eyes on watch
To fence and guard you till u wither

Though you may fade in Lord's Chariot
Your charm will not fade from my heart. (26)

“Summer Rain” realistically brings to the limelight a portrait of a rural Kerala, where the laymen wish for a single drop if not a heavy outpour to quench the physical and spiritual thirst as all live forms long for those “angel drops” (28). The images of smell and taste of the first shower add beauty and splendour to the writing. The synchronization of the audio-visual effects as the thunder roars with the lightning flashes bring in all acclaim to the poet. The lines:

Summer drizzling began to drip
When water kissed the earthen hearth
Roasted dust released fumes
My nostrils dined delicious smell
Served by the wetting sand. (28)

creates an urge for a much awaited rain in the minds of the readers.

“An advertisement” can be analysed from a postmodern perspective for the variety of thought and expression. The poet calls for a revolution for a better future. As values that were once the pillars of life disappeared, it is high time to think in novel ways for a restoration. The poem is an appeal to the sluggish youth to be bold and brave by valour for a better life. The poem is a genuine plea not to be stereotyped, but to act with energy and vigour in an age that demands novelty “only to win and enjoy tastes” (30).

In “Restless Journey”, the poet expresses her agony towards the society that bears “Weary Face” (31). There may be times when humanity feels completely desperate as

deliberate attempts to survive prove futile. The sense of empathy of the poet makes her “leap out to them” (31). She longs to be one with the suffering lot not just to share the mishaps but to be a messenger of Mother Nature to “spread light of mercy and love” (31). Though odds are manifestations of social constraints the entire humanity ought to volunteer the responsibility to light the lamp to eliminate darkness and illumine the world till the very end of life on planet.

Life is a voyage of hurdles that are both physical and psychological. Different from the world of fantasy, reality has much to endorse and endure. “Wounds” expresses agony, frustration and pain of a bereaved soul that struggles in vain in course of existence. As life falls on thorns and bleeds, there appears no hope as “All are bleeding wounds of soul” (33). Though the poem has a painful undertone, the poet impels the bleeding and dying soul to rise and act, and not to yield and surrender to the impairments as said by Ulysses “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (web).

Plunged in utter despair and frightened by evil forces the poet searches for a path that bathes in cool moonlight. In “I Seek”, the poet portrays a mind searching a true spirit to guide from “selfish demons” (35). Optimism springs in as the “honey rich garden” (35) which is not far where the dreams and desires can dance to the mirthful rhythm. The poet wishes for a shade of love to guide the spirits till they reach the eternal destination of harmony. The longing to appease the thirst for love and a quest for a “rain cloud up in the sky” (35) present vivid imagery painted by the hues of imagination.

“In the Desert” is packed with intense emotions that make every reader nostalgic. The poet wishes a retreat to childhood. The happy recollections of the poet reverberate and create similar emotions in the minds of the readers. “These

were the days of blooms in life” (36) reflect the happy days of childhood, though the dejected feeling of what is lost is more significant in the poem. The values as affection, carefulness and compassion that were nurtured and worshipped are now sunk into oblivion. The poet asks:

And who may drop a little love Into the rusting veins
of me In this tiring journey on earth?
Where shall I have a stream of solace
To quench till this fuming billet perish. (37)

Even in desolation, the strength that humanity imbibe from memories moulds them strong enough to question and act for their instatement of peace, happiness and values.

“Fear” recalls the words of Jacques, a character in Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*:

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players; They
have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts. (Act II, Sc VII)

Life itself is a drama in which humans enact the predestined roles. Just as death is an uninvited guest according to Shakespeare, fear is equally an “uninvited guest” (38). Though not physical, it “crawls on to me like a snake” (38), and enacts the role and dances in fury to paralyse the thoughts and reduce human roles to inactivity. The passive acceptance of fear cannot be named better than death as Shakespeare says in *Julius Caesar* that cowards die several times before they accept actual death.

The poems in *“Ripples of Love”* are messages to the society at large. “Why should I worry?” is an appeal to the humanity to live life to the fullest, for the humanity is caressed by a peaceful and beautiful mother nature. The realization that the human life is surrounded by multifarious

lives erodes away the feeling of isolation. Every life form that support the planet, and every aspect that has become part of history has much to do with the present existence. There is much to derive from the past, and there is much to preserve for the future for the past is not “lost in garbage pail” (41).

“Desire” elucidates how reality knocks at the door. Awareness of the temporality of human existence creates an awe in human minds. Still the strong faith in nature and the universal power creates the desire to move “Towards the seat of Lord Vishnu” (42) to reach the eternal abode. The urge to continue existence propels the poet to pray:

May there wait a ferry for me
With a small canoe stretching an oar
Still strong desire froths up within
Never to end this journey on earth. (42)

It is high time to stand united and sacrifice themselves for the good of the society. In “Let Us Forgive Each Other”, the poet envisions a society that uphold values of prime significance. The poem is a genuine prayer to spread the message of tolerance, forgiveness and cooperation. This may help the society to be born again like a phoenix from the ashes in a world:

Let's sit face to face today,
Like two phoenix birds,
Seeking rebirth in memories,
Without complaints forgetting nothing
Let's forgive each other. (47)

Finally the poet transports the readers to her ancestral home where values are held in high esteem. “My Ancestral Home” is an ideal piece that creates an urge in the minds of the readers to carve a space with “sanctum floor” in their minds to ensure a better tomorrow (76).

Ripples of Love is a celebrated piece packed with candid expressions of human emotions. The poems bring out the awareness that humans are responsible to the entire world and not to themselves. *Ripples of Love* leaves in the minds of readers the ripples of thoughts that reverberate a thousand miles. Thus the destination initiates a novel journey for readers to greater realms of ecstasy.

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JANEL BRUBAKER

Love in Early America

In a time when men dominated early American society, a few female writers began to stand out against the patriarchal canvas. Anne Bradstreet was one such woman. Born Anne Dudley in 1612, she was the first woman to be recognized as a successful New World poet. She married Simon Bradstreet around 1628, had eight children with her husband, and died in 1672. Her volume of poetry, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*, was published in London in 1650 and received tremendous attention (Poetry Foundation). In Anne Bradstreet's poem, "To My Dear and Loving Husband," one sees an example of how poetic language can be used to express feelings of romance and sexuality, and how it offers insight into relationships that would, otherwise, be closed to us.

In the 1600s it was not common for people to marry for love or even mutual respect. An individual's level of eligibility was based almost exclusively on their amount of income and standing in society and marriages were based on eligibility. Even after marriage it was not uncommon for husbands and wives to only tolerate each other, nor, due to the lack of gender equality at the time, was it rare for a husband to beat his wife. The very fact that Bradstreet would write a love poem to her husband and express in the title that he was both "dear" and "loving" communicates to the reader the uncommon nature of their relationship.

The language of the poem is incredibly passionate; from the beginning Bradstreet compares their marriage to others and declares, in no uncertain terms, that theirs is superior. "If ever two were one, then surely we. If ever man were loved by wife, then thee." Sometimes poetry is considered fleeting, cliché, superficial. Based on nothing more than the two opening lines the reader can surmise that these expressions of love are not borne of a whirlwind romance or written merely to comply with an expected social norm. These words are written out of a deep, consistent affection. "If ever wife was happy in a man, compare with me, ye women, if you can," is another example of how Bradstreet believed her marriage to be superior and she, likely, was not incorrect. Though marriage was considered sacred and private, those couples of the higher end of society who had horrible marriages were often the brunt of gossip. This may have shown Bradstreet how lucky she had been in marriage.

"I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold, or all the riches that the East doth hold." Thousands of men and women would have traded love for money. In a time when money was terribly important, these two lines reflect the sincerity of Bradstreet's affection, especially considering the environment in which she had been raised versus the environment in which she'd written this poem. Bradstreet was raised in England on the Earl of Lincoln's estate where her father was a steward. She was accustomed to finery and comfort and, when her family made the move from England to the Colonies, she was forced to trade that comfort for a much more difficult life. And yet the reader sees that, at some point in her marriage, money meant nothing when compared to the love and affection of her husband.

Sexuality, in western civilization, was widely considered to be primarily for male pleasure. A woman's duty was, after

all, to offer her body to her husband for his physical enjoyment and then to provide him with children, preferably sons. Rape within marriage was not unheard of since the wife's body was said to belong to her husband. *Her* pleasure was not of much concern. "My love is such that rivers cannot quench, nor ought but loves from thee give recompense," communicates to the reader just how strongly Bradstreet feels. Her love is not purely of the emotional or spiritual kind, but is, instead, so intense that it transcends the social barrier and builds within her physical desire. Mary Ruby, a writer for Black Bird Library, in her analysis of "To My Dear and Loving Husband" said, "By arguing that "Rivers cannot quench" her love, the speaker implies that her love is an ongoing thirst that no amount of water can slake...that the speaker's desire can neither be stopped nor quantified." For modern readers this may seem trivial, but considering the cultural and historical norms for the time, this declaration sets Bradstreet utterly apart and exposes her to potential ridicule from her peers.

"Thy love is such I can no way repay, the heavens reward thee manifold, I pray. Then while we live, in love let's so persevere, that when we live no more, we may live ever." The final four lines close out the poem with an image that, if ever one doubted Bradstreet's sincerity, their minds would be set at ease. Such is the love between Anne and her husband that one lifetime together is not enough; she wants to also be with him throughout all of eternity. For a modern reader profusions such as this may be commonplace, but in a time when husbands and wives often didn't even like each other, such a declaration means a great deal. It may not reflect the details of Anne and Simon's relationship, but communicates enough for the reader to understand that their marriage truly was one of passion and affection. By peering into this corner

of Anne Bradstreet's heart, modern readers not only have the chance to examine a type of marriage that was exceedingly rare, but also catch a glimpse of how important love is, and has always been, to humanity.

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BOOK REVIEW

RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN

A Review of Sunil Sharma's Poetry Book, *Aesthetic Negotiations*

(Aesthetic Negotiations, Sunil Sharma, Setu Literary Publications, Pittsburgh, USA, 2017. Pages: 238. Price: \$ 19.95. PB. ISBN-10: 9381030812. ISBN-13: 978-9381030813.)

When I first viewed the beautifully stunning cover of Sunil Sharma's newest book *Aesthetic Negotiations*, I certainly did not expect what I read inside. It is a wonderfully brutal and dark book. Unflinching and masterfully written. Even with the character poems such as "The Dog Whisperer," "Mad Woman of the Public Square," and "The Waste Picker," which are some of my favourites in the collection, there is a pervading darkness and suffocating lack of space in the urban city that drives many to grinding poverty and madness. In "The Waste Picker" the urban space is merely garbage heaps for the man to wade through to survive. This is a modern, uncaring society where the ambitious try so hard to succeed that they lose both themselves and all humanity for others. And though the locales change, there is a constant congestion and dead space as described in the poem "Ice/Heat Syndrome Encounter Last, in the Last Ice Age" when Sharma notes: Is it Mumbai/Madrid. Places no longer matter. We are identical! ...dead urban space. And yet the people do not seem to thrive

from any positive notions of a collective identity – they violate and violently attack each other as in the poems “Should I Resist Tonight?” or “Apes,” or worship the whiteness of their colonial masters and search it out in each other as in the poem “Colour Conscious India.”

Even art succumbs to the ways of this cruel modern world, lacking the transgressive quality it so often represents in others works I have read. Poems such as “Kafka,” “An Indian Lear,” “Cultural Transmutations: Will Shakespeare - 40,” and “Ezra’s Apparitions” create this ghostly timelessness of experience which appears co-opted in the modern sense and now part of the continuing conversation and misery. And that is what is at the heart of this book; a crippling poverty and crushing misery felt by those less fortunate in this cruel congested urban modern world. The ‘haves’ ignoring the ‘have-nots’ into non-existence as their misguided ambitions de-humanize them as well. Poems like “Their Sun,” “Terrifying Threats,” “The Void,” and “An Asian Metro Portrait” (another of my favourites in this collection) perfectly illustrate this. At the heart of all this squalor and inequality is unchecked greed and capitalism to the point that the poor are uprooted by corporate demolitions of shanties as in the poem “Earthquake Different,” or survival and profit have become so important that a family in the poem “Toy Sellers” that they have no toys for their own children, but a shop full to sell to others. And the misery and indifference is not only experience by the people, but nature, as in the poem “Nature Defiled,” or animals as in the poem “Blood,” about a hit-and-run of a dog dying in the street and no one takes notice. The poem “Trash” is not about garbage at all, but rather a woman who is thrown out of her house, and life for that matter, stripped of her past identity and now seen as trash. Poems such as this, as well as “Draculas Modern” highlight the

specific cruelties endured by woman in such a society. The modern urban space is a congested void of dead space and smog and deprivation where, as in the poem “Living Hell,” Sharma brilliantly describes the “Delhi smog that burns the innards, “an inferno he compares to the literary one, now physically realized. Such as existence is a nomadic one and soul crushing. There is a stark lack of belonging or identity as outlined in the poem “Some Cities Never Belong to Us”.

And as much as this modern urban space, and the experiences within it cannot be trusted to be enriching, so too does the shifting perspective become problematic and jarring as in the poems: “Two-faced Beings,” “The Lens,” and “The Eye.” What little nostalgia there is in this work of a more personal, human, and kinder time as in the poem “A Puppet Show” is now “extinct” and suffocating as there is “no open space in a high-rise. In the poem that opens the collection “Digging with Seamus Heaney,” Sunil Sharma set himself up as poetic explorer of landscapes asking “should not a poet dig deeper? Into the land and its history? Unearth the swirling memories.” And this is exactly what he does with an unflinching eye and mastery of craft. The poems in this collection are brutal in their honesty and so wonderfully capture the sprawling urban darkness that transcends location and engulfs us all. This is not a book about India, this is a book about people negotiating their way through their experiences and memories and coming terms with a life of daily squalour and loss and unchecked corporate greed and the lack of humanity that results. The best books are the ones that you are forced to confront. That you see every day, and know in your heart. This is one of those books!

CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Gary Langford** is the author of 38 books, including 16 in novels and stories, 4 textbooks and 15 books of poetry. Recent books include, *The Sonnets of Gary Langford*, Xlibris, 2016 and *Memoir of a Teacher Writer*, Authors Press, India, 2017.
2. **Alexander Raju**, an Indian English poet, novelist and short story writer. He is author of three poetry collections, three novels, one short-story collection, one edited book and one critical book.
3. **Amarendra Khatua** (b. 1957) is a bilingual poet and retired Indian diplomat. He has authored 19 collections of poetry in Odia and 04 in English. He is also translated in 03 volumes of poetry in Hindi, one each in Telugu & Tamil. His poems are translated in all major Indian languages and also in Spanish, Russian and French. He has won several awards and retired from the post of Director General of ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations).
4. **Bipul Banerjee** is a sales and marketing leader by profession with an MBA and pursuing PhD in marketing. He writes poetry for the passion of expression inspired by the emotions he comes across in day to day life. He has 3 research publications to his name in the field of CRM and 15 international and national poetry publications in paper backs and e-books.
5. **Laverne Frith**, a widely published, award-winning poet, lives in Sacramento, California, USA. He has

extensive background as a researcher, poetry columnist, book reviewer for *New York Journal of Books*, and is founder of *Ekphrasis – A Poetry Journal*, established in 1997. He has been published in such journals as *Phenomenal Literature*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *VerbalArt*. His most recent full-length collection is *Advanced Dancing* (Authorspress 2016).

6. **Anum Sattar** is a junior studying English at the College of Wooster in Ohio, USA. Her poems have been published the American Journal of Poetry (Margie,) Better than Starbucks! Grey Sparrow, Oddball Magazine, Artifact Nouveau, Off the Coast, Strange POetry, Between These Shores Literary & Arts Annual, Conceit Magazine, A New Ulster, The Cannon's Mouth, The Journal (i.e. The Journal of Contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian Poetry,) Wilderness House Literary Review, Poydras Review, The Cadaverine, The Wayne Literary Journal, Deltona Howl, The Weekly Avocet (every Sunday Morning,) Poets Bridge, The Ibis Head Review and Tipton Poetry Journal. She won the third Vonna Hicks Award at the college. Whenever possible, she reads out her work at Brooklyn Poets in New York City.
7. **Fahredin Shehu** is a poet, writer and essayist. He has participated in many festivals and conferences. Some 17 books so far have been borne and poetry translated in various languages. He has won Naji Nahman Prize for Poetry (Beirut Lebanon, 2016), Veilero Prize for poetry (Roma, Italy, 2017) & Pulitzer Prize Nomination for 2018. He is a founder director of International Poetry Festival in Kosovo. He is a founder of Fund for Cultural Education and Heritage www.fekt.org

8. **Michael H. Brownstein** has been widely published throughout the small and literary presses and journals. In addition, he has nine poetry chapbooks to his credit. He is the editor of *First Poems from Viet Nam* (2011).
9. **John Rachel** is a songwriter and music producer, and a bipolar humanist. He is author of eight novels, three non-fiction political books, and one creative non-fiction fantasy/travel/cookbook. He has explored or lived in thirty-four countries since leaving America August of 2006. You can follow his adventures and developing world view at: <http://jdrachel.com>.
10. **Dr. Sandip Saha** is a chemical engineer and doctorate (PhD) in metallurgical engineering by profession. He has retired from service and of 64 years age. He has got three awards for his scientific work and 33 publications on his scientific research work including three patents.
11. **Bruce Lader**, winner of the 2010 Left Coast Eisteddfod Poetry Competition, is the author of five poetry books. He has been a finalist for the Brockman-Campbell Book Award. He is also the director of Bridges Tutoring, an organization that educates multicultural students. www.brucelader.com
12. **Noris Roberts** is a lawyer, poet & Peace Ambassador. She is working on her second collection of poems and writing a Literary Diary. Her works have been translated into: English, French, Italian and Portuguese.
13. **Sandeep Kumar Mishra** is an outsider artist, an International freelance writer and a lecturer in English with Masters in English Literature. He has edited a collection of poems by various poets – *Pearls* (2002) and written a professional guide book – *How to be* (2016)

and a collection of poems and art – *Feel My Heart* (2016).

14. **Ciarán Parkes** is a writer and photographer, living in Galway, Ireland. His poems have been published in a number of magazines, including *The Threepenny Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Rialto*.
15. **William C. Blome** writes poetry and short fiction. He is a master's degree graduate of the Johns Hopkins University Writing Seminars. His work has appeared in such fine little mags as *Phenomenal Literature*, *Poetry London*, *PRISM International*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Salted Feathers*, and *The California Quarterly*.
16. **John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. He is recently published in *New Plains Review*, *Stillwater Review* and *Big Muddy Review* with work upcoming in *Louisiana Review*, *Columbia College Literary Review* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.
17. **N.U. Lekshmi** is an Assistant Professor of English, Sree Ayyappa College for Women. She is MA, MEd, NET English & NET Education.
18. **Janel Brubaker** worked as a student assistant editor for the *Clackamas Literary Review* for the 2015 and 2016 editions. She is currently pursuing a B.A. in Creative Writing from Marylhurst University.