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VerbalART

A Global Journal Devoted to
POETS AND POETRY

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Oct – Dec 2020

Chief Editor:

Dr VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

Assistant Editor:

Prof. SHASHANK NADKARNI



AUTHORS P R E S S

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AUTHORS P R E S S

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

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POETRY

ACHYUT SARKAR

Fire Engine

The fire engine runs deep in the forest,
There is no wildfire, it's raining.
The fir, pine, redwood, they all
Dancing in rain
Move away from boulevard.
The engine runs without hindrance,
Ringing the fire bell.
The riff is reflecting from leaf to petal.

Rain stops
Day ends
Autumn sky becomes crystal
All the leaves, petals turn blue
Stars silently fall on the forest

Fire engine never returns back.

ACHYUT SARKAR

A Morose Man

I met that morose man at the bus stop.
He was sitting there with empty hands.
It was office time and everyone were running.
He came to me and narrated his dusky saga.
A film of sadness masked my face,
I held his hands. I advised and encouraged the morose man.
All the office goers stood still,
The bus shed, morning wind clad in diesel,
Ten o'clock sunshine, a channel five girl-
All felt sad for the morose man.

...

Then I jumped on my bus and everyone did the same,
Bus shed, morning wind, sunshine, the girl
Started running to their lovely office.

...

The man remained sitting there with empty hands.

ALAN COHEN

Flawed

To succeed now, to be, to love
We must promise to fail, to rampage, to ravage later
Further up and farther on
In some more decisive realm

It is not that we are imperfect
But rather that we carry within
The nuclei, the seeds, of our
And our world's destruction

We are the peril that haunts our days
And intimidates our nights
We are our own deaths
And the deaths of everyone

And everything we know and love
All beauty, all truth, all goodness
No wonder we create escape clauses, escape hatches
Fantasy worlds of eternal perfection

We have no choice but to hate what we are
Some part, at least, of us, something within
And recognize that all that is would be better, more secure,
sounder
Without us; if we were not and had never been

ALESSIO ZANELLI

Cosmic Nemesis

Somewhere amid the eons, a micro black hole
peeped at the edge of the solar system,
probably overlooked, certainly ignored.
The sun continued shining, unperturbed,
tirelessly fusing hydrogen into helium,
as it had been used to doing for billions of years.

The tiny visitor advanced,
slow but unswayed by any gravitational pull
along the plane of the ecliptic,
heading straight to the fulgent centre,
invisibly majestic, totally undisturbed,
not the slightest wake behind it.

Without even realizing it,
from first to last
all the planets were swallowed,
just like every minor body,
silently, one by one,
as if with a snap of space time.

And not even when it came to be its turn
the sun, aglow from time immemorial,
worried about the minuscule orb,
reducing quickly, inexorably,
eventually disappearing
annihilated inside it.

One less point of light
now dots the stupendous galaxy,
its absence unnoticed,
as the sight-escaping devourer of worlds
proceeds on its endless path
to where it all began.

ALESSIO ZANELLI

Lone Wolf

(In memory of Neri)

Seeing how hell-bent and heretical he was,
could he not determine to bite the big one
exactly at the onset of a global catastrophe,
id est the doggone SARS-coV-2 pandemic?
If keeping his nose clean was not his forte,
this one time he just didn't have it coming.

Weeks pass, curves flatten out,
unease increases, uncertainty reigns,
it all looks incongruous, ordinarily surreal,
as if time had been arrested, confined in space.

And so we forget, as stunned as ever,
about a humble chest, or maybe an urn,
what's left of a lifetime friend sealed in it,
stranded somewhere in Southern Africa,
ignored, waiting for air traffic to resume
and some officer to sign the paperwork.

Locked apart, in silence, weirded out,
his chums recall the good old days.
Among so many assigned of late,
his tiny lot is the sole still intact.

Yet sooner or later we'll gather there,
to raise our glasses and say a prayer,
wearing smiles of sadness and regret,
angry, but armed with one consolation:
what truly matters is not the destination,
but having gone part of the way together.

So long, lone wolf, detached from your pack,
sleepless though no longer hunting or hunted.
You venture deep into the night one last time,
without a word, without a tear, without fear.

ANDREW SCOTT

The Tunnel

This tunnel seems to go on forever
completely dark in this passageway
the brick walls are wet with slime
giving the feeling of dampness
that runs through the body

Have never felt so alone
with every indecisive step taken
no one ever takes the same steps
as each tunnel is different

At times, wish for company
to share the experienced fear
in where this hole leads

Hold on to all hope
that past spirits will guide
as I cannot see, only feel
the cracks that are stepped in

Breath and believe
that there will be
a tinker of light
in this life's tunnel

ANDREW SCOTT

Freedom Road

Centuries ago, many walked this road,
slaves seeking freedom from the chains
of their abusive owners.

You can feel the ghosts
of the men and women
that wished to not be owned
in the soil of the Freedom Road.

Their prayers with every step,
taken during the dead of night.
Constantly fearing being found
in the escape of the captive life.
Their sweat of fear paved the Freedom Road.

Encoding symbols like a puzzle
to arrive home to home.
Hoping the persons could be trusted
for food and rest
before continuing the journey
through the Freedom Road.

The pain is endured
by being cramped
from walking at night,
hailed in a boat.

Taken away by the feel
of the glowing Promise Land
paved by the freedom Road.

AVDHESH JHA

In the Streets of Guangdong

Being driven by the time, habits, and traits
Although at ease and luxury, with the leisure of song
Early, very early, in the morning, I woke up of curiosity
To have a glimpse of life in the streets of Guangdong.

Out of comfort, next to the Yeste on the pavements, awaiting,
I saw many waiting for bus and cars, as if held by tongs;
Awaiting their signal were the bus, cars, and pedestrians,
Restlessly, I saw life resting in the streets of Guangdong.

As if an extravagant lady, suddenly, a car blocked the way,
Blowing aloud, the bus behind shouted to prove her wrong
Each one hurried, some rushing on a bicycle, some on mopeds,
Worried, I saw the life running in streets of Guangdong.

Running with an apple or orange, some young girls were
gushing
Towards their destinations, while some just loitered around,
With some cop keeping a watch, some cleaners cleaning,
Nonstop, I saw the life at the stops in streets of Guangdong

The workers breaking the road and the merry girl busy with
phone
Striking with the pole aside, shy, looking here and there kept on
her song;
Some people sitting around, chatting and smoking, with some
hawkers,
Boosted, I saw the life in non-boosted streets of Guangdong.

The same street in the night, as if tired, lonely and so silent,
Restless, it posed a threat, with the beats of resting heart,
In that silence, I felt the busy hearts wandering in that street,
Lonely, I saw the life in the crowded streets of Guangdong.

AVDHESH JHA**I am the Past**

Sometimes back, you were the praise for me,
The key to my dreams, hopes and aspiration
Unknowingly you came as the caprice of life
How pity; as if a season, unknowingly you left.

Often when we were together, you were a charm,
Erotic and exquisite; you turned life frolic and zephyr
With passage of time, now, I hardly ever hear from you,
It seems, for you, I am no more, for I am brumal night.

With my new time (old age), you found new friends,
Restricting you to lament for the memories of past,
This makes unnecessary for you to remember me,
You may remember me, you may not, for I am the past.

Back in the past, I have been the change agent for you
You added a lot to me and so did I, whether a horse feather,
Intrigue or grand stand; infallibly we have been heart some
How I wish your instauration but now, only, you are my past.

Based on the past stand the present and so it is gemutlich
Future is destined based on the past and merry present,
An over glow, when I think of you, I feel, I hardly cared for you,
My proud privilege and fantasy, ah! that you were present.

BEVERLY MATHERNE

Fusion

(For Roger)

Skin sizzles skin,
Famine kiss, serpentine embrace,
The joy of it all. How did two specks
In the universe collide, hold so fast?

BEVERLY MATHERNE

Walking at Dusk When the Moon is Rising

(For Marcel, Heather, Taylor, and Sylvan)

Walking at dusk when the moon is rising
Over Iron Ore Heritage Trail, our hunger sated
With grass-fed beef, sweet potato, arugula,
Avocado, and kraut, we drink the Big Dipper
Overhead, hear a small thing hurry underbrush.
We hope to spot a snowy owl.
The children long for snowflakes
On the tip of their tongue.

BISHNUPADA RAY

Hilltop

walking trekking climbing
short of breath and panting
I felt like a yak on the way up

but once on the top
lighter than a butterfly
I felt like a floating blob

hills are hard
but after the survival
they put mint in the throat.

BISHNUPADA RAY

Daredevil

where angels fear to tread
they rush
to win the stunt of life
or to lose it to death
in an instant.

BISHNUPADA RAY

Astray

no alarm rang when I went astray
nor any sign of lapse showed up
indeed there was birdsong and twitter
indeed there was applause and cheer
indeed there was a lot of pleasantness
and amid that seductive pleasantness
I know I did lose my way

hardship tells me in the aftermath
depending on how much I can suffer
I may get back to my charted path
or I may lose it altogether.

DEBRA AMIRAUT CAMELIN**Walking the Path of a Beach Labyrinth**

Burned into my wooden staff are footprints
of forest animals: deer, coyote, fox, hare, raccoon.
I'd like to think their woodland wisdom vibrates
through the rod as I trace furrows in the sand
like a crab.

Connecting lines and dots, a primordial pattern
emerges on the ocean floor at this low tide:
a meandering and unbroken path resembling
brain matter is held in place by the circle's edge
instead of by a skull.

Gifts from the sea adorn the labyrinth. Tangled seaweed
lies in its centre like a misshapen crown and tiny white shells
like garment pearls pepper its path. I lay down my staff
at the entrance and bow before stepping into the practice
that untethers my imagination.

Settling into the walk, each purposeful step brings me
closer to the labyrinth's centre where creation coalesces
with the divine. My interior silence is juxtaposed
to the swelling surf's sound – a stern reminder that when
I leave, the labyrinth is reclaimed by the sea.

DEBRA AMIRAUT CAMELIN

The Swing

The reproduction of Renoir's *La Balaçoire*
hung on my living room wall. You
didn't want it but how I relished bold strokes
and indulgent layers of greens, blues and golds
that formed bourgeois Parisian folks
flirting on that swing.

I last saw you sitting tête-à-tête
with your mother in that little café. Our eyes
locked in that moment when I got up to pay.
Your face framed by the same pixie cut
briefly exposed in bushed brown eyes
a gaze of what might have been before
I walked away.

I heard that you were riding
when your father died. You always
did find peace astride a horse in a canter.
Too bad funeral arrangements swung
the family upside down, left siblings divided
with love nowhere to be found.
And then you were gone and with you
our childhood banTERS.

DHRUV SOMAYAJULA

Man: The God

I picked a rose today,
for my girlfriend who smiles and says,
“Thanks, this brightens my day.”
And thus, I win her over every day.

The rose existed for that purpose,
I’m sure, because it brought smiles to us,
De-thorned and de-nailed, this rose,
Scissors rendering its evolution to dust.

But what’s the big fuss about?
I killed it and gave it life,
made it matter, caused a human smile,
isn’t the immortality worth a petty crime?

We protect our own, the world over.
We give it meaning in our own words,
We make children look for diamonds,
and we do it all for our human’s smile.

Kill, conquer, dominate, vanquish, burn,
we cancel living things for our fine dining.
Every animal is a predator, but none more
than man. Man is the peak. Man is God.

A vengeful God, killing and maiming for
pleasure, for money. For a moment of magic,
he causes a lifetime of grief. For a smile
from his pretty girl, he causes a rose to wilt.

DHRUV SOMAYAJULA

Social Pandemic

A question I often think of,
I happen to ask again today.
Why some have solid earth beneath them,
While many others fall, die with their homes faraway.

This plague does not discriminate, I'm sure,
But we exhibit different symptoms in this nation.
Some stay safely in their home, stocking up meat and rice.
Outside shutters are down, people robbed of their vocation.

This plague is a test on us all for sure,
But the real enemy has always been out there,
Visible among the people sitting at home,
And those walking miles with feet and stomachs bare.

After a hundred miles, someone collapsed from heat and hunger.
The mafia called a doctor, asked what's wrong with that cropper.
The doctor looked the man, didn't even reach for his pad,
He had seen this many time before, "Oh that's nothing, he's a pauper."

Someday, I shall sit with the comfort of my shoes,
surrounded by my peers, able to take part in that discourse,
I will rail against it to the papers, while they keep walking,
walking miles on tired feet, crying themselves hoarse.

DJ TYRER

Boredom

Tick-tock passing time

Moment in eternity

Boredom setting in

Dreams of immortality

Smothered by boxset bingeing

DJ TYRER

Butterfly Love

Heart soars
On wings of love
Many-hued silk
Embracing you
Unfailing and unafraid

DJ TYRER

Forever Young

It must be twenty years now
Since you chose to jump
I've grown old
But in my memory
You're forever young

DONNA PUCCIANI**Evergreens**

We used to walk among them, hand in hand,
embraced by green, their sudden cool in summer
always a surprise at the end of a sun-blind meadow,
where the path turned north and deep
towards the lake. In winter, their shelter called us
into snowy shade, a welcome break from wind.

Now, on the hard ground, the needles lie
on a communal bed of pain, the scourge of pine wilt
stripping them from the ground up, year by year.
The trunks bare themselves, a gradual death
creeping upwards to await the Reaper's gladsome visit.

And now, we mourn the dry brown needles
mounded on the forest floor, comrades
in their own mortality, but wanting, like us,
to hang on to a few more hours of verdant life,
reaching towards the sun.

DONNA PUCCIANI

All the Rest

The trees are mostly barren now,
their leaves once green, now fallen
or hanging on with a brown dolor.
Even the burning bush has flamed out
in a final conflagration, while hydrangeas
nod their puffed heads like afterthoughts.

Only the viburnum, which never bloomed
a pretty summer white but just sat dully
between two backyards, now flings
gold coins to the gray sky. The spent stars
of honeysuckle are falling through
trellised space. All color disappears,
save the austerity of dun branches,
the white innocence of silent snow.

Believe in the light! It will return
in the late afternoons of February,
a new minute each day, then
the celebration of the clocks,
their hands clapping little hallelujahs.

For now, the dance of a million
little deaths is observed, treasured.
What would trees, or any living thing,
be without sleep, a season of hibernation,
a dark night of the soul and the body,
to be still, to gather and store the strength
to bloom again, or just to be.

GARY BECK

Resources

The lame, the halt, the blind
only survive in a city
if they have services
that let them function,
despite disabilities.

The homeless are neglected,
abandoned on the streets,
survival questionable
as the rich feast
without a care
for the needy.

GARY BECK

Urb Tune

The rhythm of the city
sometimes hard to feel,
throbs incessantly,
a beguiling pulse
flows us on our way,
frequently unnoticed,
moves us along,
keeping a beat
unless interrupted,
will see us safely
to destination.

GERMAIN DROOGENBROODT

Countercurrent

The water of the stream
that knows no bed
and weak-willed flows
merges and disappears
in larger water
only the water
that flows countercurrent
will find a bed
and the source.

GERMAIN DROOGENBROODT

The No Man's Land of the Dream

The morning glow washes with white clouds
the greyness from the sky
hidden between the branches of the trees
sings a bird out his desires
a Song of Songs
in the no man's land
of the dream.

GERMAIN DROOGENBROODT

Heart

Don't listen to the heartbeat
as ticking of a clock
whose duration is finite
but as a wonder
one can hear and feel
in the innermost
of one's own being.

GUNA MORAN

The Basic Book

Forecast of weather
On the face of the sky
News of tide
High and low
On the swinging waves of sea

Am I at peace
Are my near and dear ones
In pain
Face is the carrier of the concealed answers

Gist of the book
At the preface
Full volume of expression
At the face

The face is not just a face
It is the preface of personality
(One can understand the heart looking at the face)

Life means an assortment of words
Sonorous body means an open book

We are each
A coverless sounding book

Face is our prefaces
Therefore
At the moment of conversation with the guests
We ourselves understand
That was not clearly told
reading the preface

The face is the original basic book
That can be read and heard
Without learning the alphabet

(Translated from Assamese by Bibekananda Choudhury)

GUNA MORAN

One World One Person

At midnight
A person from a certain world
Suddenly comes alive

Since waking up
Till hearing the wake-up call of birds at dawn
He prays silently for the well-being of the world

He feels unexplainable love and compassion
For all the beings in blissful sleep
And all the strange gesture they make
And things they do
After break of sleep
Everything comes alive before his eyes
One after another

His eyes shine
Things around him appear to turn visible
Even through the pitch darkness of midnight

The visible pictures turn slowly verbose
He would get off the bed and go for a morning walk
After listening intently for some time

During the morning walk
He sings paeans of humanity
Amid the cacophony of silence

The trees standing guard for the world
Listen intently
The stray dogs
Sleeping with their faces snugly rested between their legs
Would not make a single sound
The morning star gives the man company
Turning into a witness

As the dawn breaks
He vanishes into the melee
No one knows
No one sees
A person from a certain world

(Translated from Assamese by Bibekananda Choudhury)

JAMES G. PIATT

A Melodious Symphony

In the shelter of the early morning hours as I lay in my warm bed half asleep, I hear crickets' strumming their violins; the chords they play merging with the sounds of Coqui singing frogs creating a symphony of harmonious chords. The melodious symphony, trickles into my somnambulant mind producing traces of happy memories, causing me to smile.

JAMES G. PIATT

A Mother

Her hands reach out to soothe the weighty sorrows on a small quivering brow, her smile fills a sad heart with hope, her love covers mist of gloom with optimism, and her continence covers the sad moments with a joyful glow when the day appears dreary, and lost.

JAMES MULHERN

Piano

On that gray day, you chopped the grand piano with an ax.
Surrounded by yellow and red leaves on the hard earth,
you raised your arm to smash it all apart.

I could only wonder. You were a man raised to think
crying was weak. Strength and power should define you.
Men like you could not voice their secrets or despair.

You shattered the instrument, exorcising its shiny veneer.
Resin-impregnated paper, dovetail joints, wooden ribs,
and polished mahogany scattered around you.

Slowly the curved outline of the piano became a ragged mess.
The soundboard heart cracked. Small planks of air-dried wood
joined the miscellany of strings, keys, and padded hammers.

I thought of my mother, the day she moved out,
how you changed the locks and emptied every closet,
destroying each vestige of your shared lives.

If I had left the window to join you outside,
I would have seen your tears,
glistening strings on the soundboard of a broken soul.

JAMES MULHERN

Brother

On our way to the dance, we made a fire under the bridge.
Snow fell outside the darkness of our shadowed space.
We sang about the bottles of beer we raised with gloved hands.
You lay your arm over my shoulders. Your face glowed in the flames.

Twigs crackled and bits of paper rose in the smoke.
Snow glistened under the streetlights beyond the bridge.
In a while we'd step into the cold brightness but for now
I loved the dark space, the circle of fire, and our song.

In the blackness of my bedroom, sometimes a fire
blazes and I see our pink faces before the flames.
I hear our voices and the sighing of the wind.
Your arm crosses my cold neck and hugs my shoulder,
and I dream we never stepped outside our hallowed space.
The snow was so cold and the streetlights too strong.

JAMES RAGAN

Upgrading the Universe

Imagine still that you can upgrade the universe,
not in order to know what quality of suns
a larger hand has shaped, but to believe that the source
of the world-mind a leaf inhabits, is not lost and gone,
how in the scudding of an osprey across a stream
or the flight of rocks beneath an axle rod
or the lift of wind above the lightning's tamed
flare, it is essential to claim one will, one pure thought.
Imagine that you are or were a little man,
unrestrained, a limp codule mucked in rain,
riding the comb-rake of fingers across the mane
of your imagination's dry mind. Imagine with such a brain,
that you could begin to rage the world out of bedlam,
out of denial. You are now the I that I am.

JAMES RAGAN**Tattoo: A Dream the Night Before Your Birthday**

You insist the colors are not important
nor the background, flesh
pocked where you tried to find
a way out of yourself. Instead
you praise the needlework,
its webbing spanned across each breast,
and reflect on how you warmed the slab,
how the needled art stretched you
inside out, to prick the thews,
to get to where the blood thins,
to pin the wings to your ribs.
One butterfly. You forget
how long and deep into its flight
it carried you, spinning out
its weave in skin, in blood.
You remember only its eyes –
searching deeper and deeper for life
in some lost part of you – and finally
a flame, a chrysalis, and light

JEFFREY ZABLE

That Extra Something

From the burning rocks to the strangling trees,
Neanderthals, Cro-Magnons, and Ice Age Lunatics
hitting each other over the head for available space.

While I sat back and watched it all on television
drinking a glass of champagne and wondering
when Charlemagne would enter the scene –
which he eventually did, topping everything
in his time.

And though the great ones come and go and we
follow them to the grave on mostly the same path,
you have to admit that some got that extra something...

JEFFREY ZABLE**Trying to Make Some Sense of It**

Yes, I've read thousands of books and done a lot of different things, but truth be told, I feel that I know very little about this life and I probably have less understanding of why I'm here than ever before. But then, just to protect my ego self, I think that maybe I'm here as a witness and that after I'm gone, my writing will be recognized as a testament to what it was like to survive a mostly unhappy, unfulfilling existence, which is certainly not unique to me, except that when it's your only life and you hoped for so much more, you wonder whether it was worth it to keep struggling for so little in return. This, ultimately, just food for thought, as I continue on my way, trying to make some sense of it. . .

JEVIN LEE ALBUQUERQUE

Angler

Fly fisherman

focus-fly

patience

practice

B

U

D

D

H

A

river cleanse

wash all who dare

A

w a y

JOSEPH HART

Dickinson

Her melodies on God,
Clover bells and bees,
Heaven and eternity and birds –
All her tiny poems
On subjects such as these
Are precious – too much so
For clumsy words.

JOSEPH HART

Proust

Linear forever,
By a steady hand and sure,
He made a perfect music out of noise.
Proust said that an artist
When he is mature
Will write about the things that he enjoys.

KEITH INMAN

Badges on Sparrow Wings

'meet the new boss, same as the old boss'
Pete Townsend

Unfettering her feathers
she grooms ideas
of school within a flock

the free flight of clan
under winter's blue
and beige banner of cold

huddled in hedges
as light, borne
among the flutter of badges

over red, yellow and black
drifts of dawn snow lifts
under the singular orange stripe

toward tropical thought.
How could bird-science have lost
to the Bhirddists pure order

of rank bullying the bands
flapping their flagged wings
in the crisp, cold night.

KEITH INMAN

Under the Pear Tree

after Joan Didion

I wear her old straw hat,
pulled down
over my eyes,
and ease the chair back
into zero-gravity.

Blossoms are barely visible
through holes
in the weave of space
but not the bees
she knew were there.

LARAINÉ KENTRIDGE LASDON**A Bird and the Hand**

A sleek silhouetted hand reached across the land.
Pierced and pinched between skeletal fingers
she saw a fluttering of blue and gold feathers
and heard the thin clatter of a tiny bladed beak.
The wind slid, slipped and whipped around her room.
A gaudy summer dress flapped in distress.
A green glass bowl teetered at the edge of doom,
prophesying it's death of a thousand shards.

She floated towards the jeweled bird,
leaping onto a gazelle as blue as an old moon,
whose speed and soft brown eye, unerringly
carried her as Hera in her chariot,
toward the shadowed hand
that was obliterating her world.
But her wilderness protected her,
a reservoir of truth protected her,
courage coursed through her.
She would save the strange creature.

As she got closer she saw
the bliss of her soul enter the tiny bird,
it's feathers kissing her vermilion lips.
She watched it preen, stretch and release a strange
unearthly shriek as its peacock plumage
unfurled, a glowing fan of mystical beauty,

an ancient symbol of immortality,
unlocking the grip of the deathlike hand
weakened and limp, allowing her to breathe
and reconnect to life, even as she faced death.

Aah, the infinite sweetness of life,
the smallest of droplets of breath
fall like fine mist onto her damp pillow.
She smiled a small smile
and pulled her old blue and gold quilt
around her thin, quivering body, listening
to the sounds of an ordinary day.
The clinking of teacups; tinkling silver spoons,
the whistle of the kettle in the kitchen,
the bustling rustle of late afternoon.

She closed her eyes, allowed at last, a peaceful rest.
A single peacock feather drifted gently through the air
and, as if giving thanks, landed lovingly on her breast.

LARAINÉ KENTRIDGE LASDON

Elastic Anxiety

First working, then
thinking. Perspiring.
 Considering

moody ideas of suicide and birth,
 ebb and flow, transformative experiences
like the first Viking canoe, oak and pine
bent to sway and heave on open seas while

 a few hardy men watch warily as
gulls soar, their only control of nature
an open sea, a single oar.

Acrobatic, problematic, systemic depression,
bending, stretching with elastic anxiety,
hoping for the snap that breaks the ropes,
the mediocre tropes that bind me to the
shore, landlocked, marooned until
my shouts frighten black beach ravens
out of the forests of masts and in the
flash of their wings I notice myself at last.

M SHAMSUR RABB KHAN

Double-Dealers

Many a saints sitting in the sanctorum
Or lying buried under the tombs
Or hanging in the wall, garlanded
Respected, adored and worshipped
By millions – men and women – who
Believed the stories of their sublime
Of holy deeds, of sacred preaching
Of simple living and sacred sacrifices
Handed down from era to era
Enhancing their status, and adding
More followers every generation
But such great souls, in fact, many of them
In their lives that they lived were rapists
Or criminals, or hypocrites, or scheming thugs
Many evil-doers of past are saints of today

Many a living figures sitting on the power chair
Or leading a religious movement
Or grand teachers of sects with huge following
Or past criminals, now charismatic leaders
Of faithful – men and women – who
Are, many of them, aware of their evil deeds
Of their leaders, of religious teachers
Who talk nicely of lofty ideals, human values
Of high ethos, of national interests
Are, in fact, heinous evil-doers
Or criminals, killers, rapists or hypocrites

But in death, as in life, such double-dealers
Will get a tomb or a temple, their photos
Will adorn the high walls, a god-like worship
Or a bust in the square, still and erect

In life, faithful certainly were known
Of the hidden or suppressed crimes
Of their idols, of their heroes
In death, they happen to imagine
The other side of the picture, the evil
Deeds of their idols, of their heroes
But faith, o time, blind faith just erased
And forgot the evil, in life, as in death
That has created many devils sacred saints

M SHAMSUR RABB KHAN

Hatred

When your face tightens and turns
At the sight of the other
When your heart groans and sighs
At the naming of the other
When your eyes fire the fury
At the approach of the other
When your teeth grin and gnaw
At the meeting of the other
When your lips abuse and curse
At the presence of the other
When your limbs shake and shiver
At the sitting of the other
When your hands fling and fly
At the face of the other
Either you sulk in anger or plan to kill
End of the other, you say, is God's will

MATTHEW JAMES FRIDAY**Mother and Daughter**

A staggering hot July morning
in Mont Sur Lausanne. A mother
and daughter brave the street
together, Mother's arm holding
up her trembling trophy, her
daughter dressed for summer,
with legs that won't comply,
a body that bounces, puppet
on twisted strings. A triumph
these two are, ignoring the sun,
the stares of pitying onlookers.
The collaborative courage that
collapses and reforms every step.
Here is the very best of all of us.

MATTHEW JAMES FRIDAY

The Same Dance

In the same village as Hesse
I see the same gnats dancing
in the green-lit light of dusk
between softly conducting trees,
the breeze that's a ballet's breath.

We see a dance where death
stalks the days; a frantic swirl
of mating chances, sudden swerve
from a chancing dragonfly, clumsy
moth staggering into wakefulness.

An hour later, the sun limbos
below a glowing mountain ridge
and the electron excitement
fizzes into mystery, leaving
a gathering night's silence.

MICHAEL KESHIGIAN

Wildflowers

What is love
but the dried up bulbs
the gardener insists on planting
to everyone's objections
that irrationally burst
into magnificent dahlias.
The lunacy of uncertainty,
a fascination of delight,
most often unpredictable.
Wild grow
the flowers of the heart
in the garden of our lives,
wilder still
blooms affection.

MICHAEL KESHIGIAN

By the Swimming Pool

The women share a secret,
chattering,
until we enter their circle,
giggling,
when they think we can't see.
We ask them for a hint,
but they intentionally turn away
then smile delicately
from the corners of their mouths,
increasing our need to know.
Perhaps it was something
they did long ago,
consequences notwithstanding,
the memory possessing
an enduring fascination.
It might explain their camaraderie,
the way they rest their chins
on the curl of their fists,
stare at each other
with intense intrigue.
Tell us a story
or give us a clue.
Whisper a sentence
or even a word
that might carry
in the warm summer breeze
when you close your eyes
to remember.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

Group Therapy

Wind chimes.

It's going to rain tonight, thunder.

I'm going to lead the group tonight talking
about Rational Emotive Therapy,
belief challenges thought change,
Dr. Albert Ellis.

I'm a hero in my self-worship,
self-infused patient of my pain,
thoughtful, probabilistic atheism
with a slant toward Jesus in private.

Rules roll gently creeping
through my body with arthritis
a hint of mental pain.

Sitting in my 2001 Chevy S-10 truck,
writing this poem, late as usual.

It's going to rain, thunder
heavy tonight.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

Fiction Girl

(Transition)

Drawings, then poems flip over to fiction;
the flash girl rides this ghost of the invention.
Insecure in youth, switch girl from drawing
to poetry, extension flight, outer fiction space,
yours is a manner of words at work.
Mercury is a god of movement.
A new skill set, brain twister, releases 100 free plays.
Life is a version of old times, fresh starts, torn yellow pages.
I focused on you last night; I watched your head spin
in sleep, a new playhouse of tree dreams, high shifting.
Changes are leaves; I lift your spirits to the gods of fire,
offer you thunderbolts practice your shooting in heaven
or hell, or toss back to earth.
Change is a choice where your energy flows.
No computer gods will help this poetic journey.
May you cry out loud on route to fairytale creations.
You are the chemist, the mixer girl shifting gears.
Creativity is how the gallery of galaxies cement.
Flash fiction lines cross stars.

NATALIA FERNÁNDEZ

All Those Heroes...

All those heroes
were reduced to ashes
to stones
no longer able to hold
the slow steps of melodies
pulled up from the entrails.
The abyss is open
where the darkness of the heroes
imitates immortal wounds

NATALIA FERNÁNDEZ

Time

When the spectrum of light touches us...
everything has already happened.
We are late for the appointment with our life
– In fact, we never come –:
We are past in its purest form.

NELS HANSON

Ten Minutes

A mockingbird's lifted throat
ripples seven times as it swallows,

tail upright, tangent to yesterday's
amber sun. Sudden whir, the ruby

hummingbird arrives, considers
a red salvia, departs the wicket

gate. Gold finch, a pair, yellow
breast and gray, delicately perch

at the blue bath's edge, together
dip beaks and thirst quenched

settle on a guava branch, black
eyes searching mine to know

who offers cool water. Scrub
jay, brash, assuming ownership,

dunks itself again, again, pauses
to shiver 100 drops and with

rough cry flies off on business
more important than my own.

NELS HANSON

Year 1

Do you hear? The returning doves
flew in the dark, silver starlight on
wingtips, black eyes flashing beacons
while we slept. Now from pear tree

in bud, lit eucalyptus by the creek,
red roofs, dry rain channels waiting
for nests – In the rays of its falling
waters everywhere ring-neck dove

stand cooing and cooing to a risen
sun. Good Doctors, you can help
us to survive but not to live. Only
doves can, the way the gold light

touches blond breast feathers now
rose, *You bring a sweet surprise!*
their old song among these ruins
this January Sunday of our Year 1.

NILAMADHAB KAR

Jump

There, on an altar,
You wait spreading your wings,
To take the plunge,
You wait for the wind, and
Wait for the right one.
Oh, you still wait...
Doubting yourself, and the time goes...
Irrevocably.

Stop. Just stop waiting any longer.
Jump! Jump to your glory.
The invisible air will lift you up.
Forces will favour the brave.
To your glory, jump!

NILAMADHAB KAR

Just try to be there

Life is like that,
You do so much, but
Someone sometime must pick you up,
Turn for you. Click. Open the door,
The right one
Hold your hand. Pull you up. Give a push.
Or kick, if you need

Then, there is no turning back.
You move on.
Surpass your dreams.
Live the life of your passion.

But someone, at the right time
Should pick you up

You just try hard to be there,
At the right place at the right time.

PANKAJAM KOTTARATH**The Curse of Apple**

The apple in Eve's hand grows envious
at her seductive feminine beauty
freely offered at will to Adam, both nude,
and their innocent indulgence in pleasure seeking,
the oldest game of creation on earth
in the Garden of Earthly Delights
where people enjoy a plethora of pleasures
making it lustful like a human being.
The scenes in the garden entice the apple,
make it crave for similar pleasures.

Primal urge of the apple growing in leaps and bounds
it begs Bosch to make it a male and he agrees
with a condition that it should ride horses,
camels, eagle-lion and other creatures
and will be expelled from the garden of Eden
for the ancestral sin of disobedience of God
with a curse that its seeds will carry in small measures
cynogenic glycoside, a mixture of sugar and cyanide.

PANKAJAM KOTTARATH

Forgive Me

The pink paper was a bomb, it trembled in my hands
The words in it fluttered before me as cumin seeds
I was shaking like a leaf, as one riveted by dark spirits.
Letters in the telegram rapidly started to be misty.

My throat had a frog in it, words deserted me
All outside sounds faded away into some distance
The drum beats of my heart alone fell in my ears
I was a statue in flesh and blood breathing heavily.

Mom, you started your next journey, without me by your side.
Would I ever be forgiven for I could not be present there,
hold your hands for a last time and kiss your forehead?
It would have been painful for you to leave without seeing me.

My heaving chest, choked with memories, wanted to explode.
Forgive me Mom, I didn't have wings to fly and come to you.
Till my last breath I will carry the weight of this guilt
You are in my everyday prayers; Will it wash off my sin?

While I hold me responsible,
punish myself for the ruthless realities,
that kept me away from you under forced circumstances,
Whom could I punish for the reckless rigidities of man
having denied me the chance of a last look
even at your mortal remains?

RAJIV KHANDELWAL

Death of a Parent

The whatsapp call
From the neighbor
Informed the death of father

Before I could absorb
Involuntary reflex impulse
Wished, father should have postponed dying
Provided at least a six months extension

For being in a new country
With new job
 Survival
 Is not easy
On top of it
Covid restricts
Intercontinental movements
Due quarantine rules

Micro moments later
The gloom
Of shock, numbness, denial, sadness
Despair engulfed
And I lived the loss
Felt by a paralytic
Who literally has his body

Yet nothing

The untamed grief
Longed for the sea

RENÉ VAN DER KLOOSTER

Glory Bound

Hell yes, glory bound
I am supposed to be
this time around

as if it was ordained,
but am I supposed to obey
something so illusive

something so inhuman
as if I should transform and
transcend my character

or exchange it

but for what?

they don't tell you that
they throw you in the abyss
those sincere angelic beings

screaming hell at you
the endless time your fall lasts
because they like that word

hell yes
that is how they advertise
that I am bound for glory

the fall the prerequisite
to sprout my wings
which hurts
like hell

RENÉ VAN DER KLOOSTER

God Help Me, I Am

like a newborn
I look up

look!
something appears
in front of me

or it was already here
it existed before I came
celebrating the anniversary
of its immortality
with mortal guests
like me

in the midst of THIS
I was brought
effortlessly
though
the difficult part
is about to start

God help me, I am

RISHABH GUPTA

Dance with you!

I dance secretly with you in
my heart
where no one else can see
under the moon light away from
hassles of world just you
and me
marking the presence of
eternal feeling
of joy, I realised the presence of
you in me
at each stage getting omens
of realisation of these
dreams, by unlocking the
chains to flee
with pen in one and paper in
another hand
portraying them in beautiful
scene

ROBERT L. MARTIN

Musical Stories

With melodious seductions and tenacious tentacles
As troubadours roam chanting symphonious canticles
A stirring melody that wanders up, over, and through
Deep mysteries of unknown sources, a witch's brew

Suffusing the soul with moods and moving pictures
Playing with the heart with random conjectures
Putting me into stories that I cannot escape
Filling me with pleasure, my mind left agape

I remember the day when she moved me into dreams
A portrait of my life with so many themes
We danced through the night and so the night after
Our hearts were young, our spirits filled with laughter

Or the day of her funeral when my tears wouldn't stop
When sad cellos fill my ears, they make my heart drop
Portraits of my life, conjured up through memories
Musical stories bring me back to open diaries

An ode to the persistent strong arms of music
But poetic and silken as they caress and stick
Moving me up to all things I can remember
From September through the days 'til next September
An ode to all the beautiful stories that music told me
An ode to Musical Stories

ROBERT L. MARTIN**The Travels**

A travel from the home of sound,
As quiet as a place inside the womb,
From a stirring of the listless tides,
A quiet thunder into a sweeter air,
A note plucked on a string of the harp,
A riding with the Gods of music
Upon the backs of swiftly moving steeds
On a pilgrimage to the ears of the heart,
Racing across the crimson sunsets
Through rose scented conduits,
Along an exotic path to an exotic isle,
To a sacred place where the spirit lives,
A blending with other notes into a family
Of another name but on the same mission,
The same softening of the hearts of iron,
The anti-lovers who
Submit to the power of music,
Who built their universe on grounds of stone,
But whose knees weaken like a virgin's kiss
Upon her launching out into the sea of love,
And her drifting wherever love leads her to,
Where the music dictates the feelings to be felt
And thoughts to be thought,
Where the anti-lover loses his manliness,
His identification with the lone wild beast,
Oblivious to the enchantment of sound,

The language of the music dictators,
The ones who travel through the ether
And land on a place in the heart,
A place reserved for his beguilement.

All hail to the power of music,
On its enchanting travels
That moves the immovable
And tames the wild beast.

ROBERT NISBET

Christening

Clouds, gathering in the West,
and the forecast of a later rain,
to lap the windows of the Swan Inn.

Faint sounds of traffic from outside
the church, as the family cluster
to the foremost pews.

Crowds, idly passing the building,
offering the christened child
a vague untutored blessing.

The font, splashing tradition
and water and devotion, the child
crying, the relatives rapt.

Welcome, child, the world can still be warm,
for all its grey perimeter

ROBERT NISBET

Rivulet

He's been struggling this morning,
and goes slowly to the store,
but she, blonde barmaid lookalike,
welcomes him to the hosiery department
with open grin, sorts out socks
for him and sends him on his way saying,
Now you go off with a smile on your face.
In the doorway he meets a girl of eighteen,
collecting for her school's Third World project,
and he tells her that he too, twenty years ago,
taught in that same school.
He donates a two-pound coin, so that she smiles
even more happily at a half-woken, unshaven
man of thirty, following in, struggling
with a busy son, but he's charmed by the smile,
so relents on the evening's football ban
and the boy goes off with a good grace
to his violin lesson, where Miss Rees
is so taken with his sprightly bowing
that when she's later brought a parcel in
she offers the postman a cup of coffee.
He drinks with her, tells her village stories,
and only later, back at the sorting office,
is he cursed harshly for being late
and is the morning damned and dammed.

ROGER G. SINGER

The Past Walked By

close,
under the heaven
I knew
casting memory
shadows
from past seasons,
gliding, finding flight
like a leaf circling,
its life dependent
on a breeze
for travel
to the greatest
distance,
lightly aloft,
refraining from
touching the
ground

ROGER G. SINGER

Laying Back, Looking Up

meditation under clouds,
eyes reaching upward
looking for an angel
and a miracle in the breeze

whispering a birthday wish
while waiting for its release,

and chances are, the belief will
settle within, like a candle
protected from winds of
change and seasons yet

SANDIP SAHA**Bleak Future**

Man and woman are two halves to sustain life.
But God has given weeds like terrorists....
They cannot help growth of life as they themselves
are depended on others to continue their own lives.

Mankind is drying up vitality of the society in many ways.
Rape, corruption, murder, abetting suicide, depression...
have made the society unlivable.

Woman, on the other hand, is ascending
in education, sports, creativity what not.
But, I am afraid, I foresee an undercurrent spoiler.
Her growth in social fabric is becoming cancerous.

In many countries there are cases
where women are burnt alive after marriage.
Most of them are genuinely oppressive.
But in many occasions the matter is quite different.

Due to so called education, woman has become
career oriented and their earlier role is demeaned.
Now a caring mother and serving daughter-in-law is
replaced by a woman who dumps child in babysitter and
misbehaves with husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law.
She carries a baggage from father's house
which spills arrogance, hatred and disrespect to in-laws.

For her, everything about her parents and their house is immensely better than what she gets in in-laws' place. She gradually turns a happy family, before son's marriage to a hell which ultimately ends up to violence or divorce.

Human society will lose the institution of holy marriage in future.

It will run recklessly for sometime before total doom arises.

After all, earth took birth one day and also will die another day.

SARAH BROWN WEITZMAN

Whitman Whispered Me

I can never live locked in
the random land, held back
by hills far from waves.
for Whitman whispered me.

I must have the scud and
squirm of sea life near
and be on shores renewed
in those wild rhythms.

I must scan the perfect force
of a rising surf before it is lost
in confusions of foam drawn on
tides of anticipation that turn

our rhymes and by the beauty
of such men's lines who've set their craft
upon the seas that swell in all of us
until this stranded life lies deep

in some real sea stirring vaguely
to each new moon's command
returned to our grey beginnings
in the artless sediments of time.

SARAH BROWN WEITZMAN

The Memory of Water

Even those born under its sign
peering over the rail into depths
unimaginable beyond

light and warmth
where huge hungers heavy with eons
wait in the slime

even they remember nothing
of a time before time
before light, before land

when there was only water.
Salt though our tears
we have forgotten

those grey beginnings
but moving like rivers
though unfocused lives

always this great thirst.

SUNIL SHARMA

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning nudges dulled
conscience of commerce**

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years ?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers, –
And that cannot stop their tears.

– From: “The Cry of the Children”

She heard them, and recorded the cry, the first female poet one to do so, in August, 1843, this Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The poem resonates with me in the year 2021, with a revisit, long overdue but finally done, on this warm evening in Mumbai – different time-lines and contexts. I feel the pain of the children finding a gentle medium, and, that medium articulating their lost voice, lyrically, for the brothers controlling the society and modes of perception.

Dickens, too, took up the social call but Elizabeth showed the way to the crass world through such a sensitive poem about the disadvantaged in a free land.

Elizabeth, you are the prime mover of such a text with a heart and conscience.

You altered perceptions and raised questions.

Ideas.

Words.

Expressed emotions.

Charged-up imagery.

No doubt, you were rediscovered, last century – and continue to engage through this resurrection.

SUSAN P. BLEVINS

Cosmic Dance

There is no doubt. It's been proved.
We all are one. We share the molecules
of saints and sinners alike each time we
breathe in and out, Jesus and Gandhi,
Hitler and Stalin. They are us and
we are them. No escape.

And we come together now with
Science as our heavenly father,
Spirit as our divine mother,
and their troublesome offspring,
the Universe, expanding and flourishing
just like any other growing thing in nature.

SUSAN P. BLEVINS

Cosmic Thoughts

I know that there's another world beyond the dark mantel of night sky,
I know because I peer through the moth-holes in the black velvet fabric
which allow light to stream in from other worlds. We call them stars.

I study the cracks in the night sky, that allow the music of the spheres to
stream down upon me to fill my head with heavenly tones, the original
sounds of our creation, the universe both instrument and music.

They allow us a glimpse of where we go when we die, a return to whence
we came into this world as new borns, with wisps of heaven still clinging
to our innocent forms, composed of the same elements as the stars.

Call me crazy, but I have the insane desire to swallow the night.
The next
clear, star-filled night we have, I'm going outside, opening my mouth, and
swallowing the entire firmament. Ultimate oneness with creation.

TIKVAH FEINSTEIN

Emma's Hands

I had read my poetry, revealed a childhood of music;
father's violin remembered through my words.
Strangers, we share a table after the program.

Emma tells me of raising a family of musicians
that left no time for her ambitions.

Her aged hands lay between us, palms open.
"These are working hands," she tells me.

This woman could have been the grandmother,
lost to the Holocaust. My generation not spared,
our parents made orphans, families
carried off to death camps. We are led
by the ghosts of lost relatives.

"Let me see." I smile and touch thin skin,
examine fleshy deep lines in the palm.
"No, these are not working hands," I tell her.
Oh gentle ancestor, I do not say.
"These are the hands of an *artist* who *worked*."

I cradle her hands in mine, hold them snugly,
bask as the surprise of a smile
spreads over a wizened face, a smile that reaches
deep inside me
carries a people's history,
our brave hopes.

TIKVAH FEINSTEIN

Age of Reasons

Saddled with grey,
planted in independence,
I am a separate sprout.
My lusty youth was magnificent,
but aging is indecent.
I hide myself from cruelty,
tongues with blades like plows
till my private garden under dark, rocky ground.
We who mount the horse of middle-age in
a world prizing youthful flesh,
become invisible.
Society would bury us even while
our freed minds expand and grow.
Wearing bodies where ova have become still, women like me
are left to nurture what remains of ourselves
and our choices.

BOOK REVIEWS

1

Review of Rajiv Khandelwal's Poetry Collection, "Dwelling with Denial"

MARIA CRISTINA AZCONA

(*Dwelling With Denial*, Rajiv Khandelwal, The Poetry Society of India,
2020, ISBN: 9789389213195, pp. 130, Rs. 320/-)

From the very beginning, we feel compelled to mention the fluidity of sounds in Rajiv's use of language, joined to the fluidity of his thoughts, internally.

This poet has that rare combination of talented metaphors and at the same time, musicality of words.

I call these artists as singing writers. Personally I always try to do the same thing, sometimes I find a great result, what you can name The Pearl and sometimes not.

The sound L in the title is a symbol, an anticipation of the precious characteristic of the book

We find several poems related to common life, in a declamation to somebody else

Do you know
What happened to me last night?

Other poems are denouncing the mad direction of his country economics life and he uses denial as demonstrating from the absurd in an ironical way

It is neither about the outrage India endures
Or the swirl of rage
Suspicion

Hatred
 Enmity
Against offenders
That we Indian citizens feel

Then he also creates ironies with religion, because he has a total liberty of expression and he plays and enjoys his own sense of humor

My thanks
Due not to God
But to the street dog
Who by constantly glancing
Towards our house

In the poem critical comments, he tells us about success but his granddaughter doesn't like it so he feels that he fails

The poet shows humor combined with good writings and musical sounds. Here using the alliteration of T

Possibly educative
A page flipping kid friendly narrative
To be recited every night
But
The preschooler looked up at me
With a bemused expression and concluded:
"Nana – you do not know how to tell a story
I am leaving
Nani is better"

As always

My efforts
 Fail

In the poem The Debt, in my opinion one of the best at this collection, he creates a mosaic on India's endemic poverty and uses the alliteration of W.

In many poems he uses concrete poetry strategies like

But the surrounding mood
Felt comforted
 Connected
 Contented

Also the author shows an exquisite sapience

The first glimpse
And I was awe-smitten

Like Dante with Beatrice

Something clicked
 Anchored
 Really resonated

And when he combines all his skills, Concrete poetry, alliterations, musicality and fluidity of thought, AND society critics, We are sure we are in front of one of the best Indian poets in English

The poet is among two sides: The society poetry and the romantic poetry. He emerges as an excellent poet in both styles

Soothing sounds of waterfall
Soft music of birds mating call
Both audio merging
Sinking into the ambience like mist

Finally I can say I enjoyed the reading and wish to read more of his poetry.

I hope his poetry books find worldwide recognition even through translation and will be enjoyed by many.

**Review of Chandra Shekhar Dubey's Poetry
Collection, "The Door and the World"
DR RAJNISH MISHRA**

(Dubey, Chandra Shekhar. *The Door and the World*. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2020. Print. pp 84. Price: Rs. 395. ISBN: 978-93-90155-38-5)

Poetry is the truth of heart. A poet is not unique because he "invents" the themes of his poems, he is unique because he discovers their truth and then gives it tongue. Dr. Chandra Shekhar Dubey does exactly that in his anthology *the Door and the World*. He explicitly declares the themes of his poems in the preface. Their range is vast and they are united by the element of oneness, as the poet declares, they: "intrigued my mind, and stirred my soul". It's a thin volume with sixty-nine poems in all in eighty-four pages, but that does not mean that the poet's creative output is meager. One look at the topic shows the wide range that the poet's imagination encompasses. The volume begins with "Healing Prayer" and ends with "Om Sai". In between there are poems with titles viz. "Urban Jungle", "Being", "Divine Rain", "Day of Judgment", "You", "Desire" and "Memory" to name a few.

A book that begins with an impassioned invocation to the "illuminator of cosmos" definitely aspires for things great. The diction of the opening poem places it in the tradition of poetry with *gravitas*. The inversion in the last line in "spiritual flames bright" is not just an ornament. It has deep Miltonian undertones and prays to the muse to convert the "riddles of pain" into something rich and strange. It can be said that the

prayer made in the opening poem did not go unheard for the poems in the volume do show sparks, fire and flames in words, lines and verse paragraphs. In a way these poems are metaphorical doors to a universe seen yet unseen, heard yet unheard, spoken of yet unknown. “Door” declares that boldly in its closing lines. When they are open they bring, and look at the choice juxtaposition of pairs here, “rains of hope, wind of love/ light of life”.

How can a modern urban man escape his destiny? So what if he happens to live, in what many have disparagingly called, the “ivory towers” of the academia? He is still a resident of an “Urban Jungle”, i.e. in the city he lives to earn a living. That is especially true when he has the comprehensive soul of a poet. His heart aches too just like that of the common man. The only difference is that the ache is more painful, as it’s more intensely sensed, lived, re-lived and finally congealed as a snapshot of a pumping, pulsating, dying heart. When the narrator locates his subjective and “meaningless existence” in a vast desert dry of love and compassion with a series of dystopian images, one cannot help but think of the sense of loss and ennui from nearly a century ago. Who has not faced the Hamletian dilemma of “To be, or not to be” in a city where “living is burden” and “peace is meagre”?

It’s not just one alienated soul that awaits resurrection in the hell that is modern life, though “up, above the world, so high” the moon may struggle to “cuddle the wanton clouds”. The soul remains “Accursed” and consigned to burn in its own hell of desires for eternity. How else can the modern existence affect a sensitive soul? How can sanity be maintained while inhaling the toxic air, being submerged under “tides of hatred”, and feeling sea-sick tumbling in the ocean of “faceless faces”? “Gloom” asks disturbing questions that arise from an alienated modern urban mind. Shouting all the time: “Was this my city?”

From a city known for its lust the mind tries to escape. It escapes to the oldest living city, at least of India. It tries to find spiritual solace in *Kashi*. Alas, even at “Assi Ghat” the all cleansing Mother *Ganga* flows defiled! Even their eyes can see nothing but “greedy wolves preying at innocents”.

That the tradition never dies, albeit it changes its garb, is proven when one looks at the juxtaposition of images in “Two Spheres”. The metaphysical yoking of life with constellation, of one hemisphere with another, and then the surprise twist towards “to live and let live” make this poem unique yet conventional in ways more than one.

Wantonness is not limited to the moon. The bees have their share of it too, as “Divine Rain” shows. The vision of an “enchanted world” is more than just an escapist ploy. It’s a clear invocation of the Platonic Truth through “*Satchidananda*” that’s a Sanskrit portmanteau for the journey from truth that radiates its effulgence into the sky of consciousness to eternal and unadulterated bliss. The exhilarating thrill of the discovery of the intrinsic oneness of being and the mystical union of *atman* with *brahma* is brings the element of sublime in the poem. From the land of ideas, the travel to the land of hard realities is instant. The “Conversation” between the “silent night” and the “salubrious day” focuses on the lockdown and the corona virus and their effect on human cities and beings.

The recurring theme of the union of an individual’s entity with the cosmic being binds the sections of the anthology together. The “rhythms of universe” in the “music of nature” can be heard in every metaphorical corner of this mansion of Professor Dubey’s poems viz. the one titled “Healing”. It is in poems like this that the tradition of Upanishads flows directly on to the pages. Like a whiff of the fragrance emanating from the parched Indian soil right after the first monsoon showers comes the fragrance of the “eternal bliss”. It’s not that the poet’s

imagination is limited only to the time and space that went into its making. It looks from heaven to hell and pierces through the darkness of the present time to the blinding flames that'll arise on the "Day of Judgement". This anthology offers a tribute to George Floyd in the form of a poem in which Floyd gets to narrate his own story. "Pity, mercy, forgiveness", the foundation stones of Christianity have just washed away from there and the Western civilization stands on the new foundation of cruelty, ruthlessness and revenge, as is made clear in the victim's indicting voice.

The internal "Alchemist" performs the essential function of "transmuting/ negative impulses into positive energy". The dyad of night and day surface once more to play upon the human consciousness and the eternal stream of time. Light floods within to dispel the darkness of the faithless night, ending into a metamorphosis of the bonded into the free. The poet invokes a "blade of grass" and the spirit of infusion with all the phenomena of nature in a Whitmanesque manner in his poem "You". The confidence of walking over "earth, water and wind" and the piercing sight that takes in "every" plant, tree, flower and leaf come together to take the wanderer to the climactic conclusion: a cleansing of the stains of past from the weary senses.

The smaller pieces towards the end are haikus-yet-not, as they do not conform to the traditional syllable pattern but to present striking images, novel metaphors and their effortless fusion, especially in the poems like "Butterfly" that present the "dapple colored spots" with the "glee of running children caught unawares"; "Rain" with the "sick earth" waiting for the first rain and, of course, "An Old Man" with his "shipwrecked body" waiting in a storm. "Om Sai" closes the anthology very aptly. The deity catalyses the mystical union of the rivers of eternal being and individual being and gives peace to the ever haunted

soul. The poems in this thin volume combine, as Dr. Vivekanand Jha very justly comments, “elegance of expression and justness of thought”, and do that in a very effortless manner. There is art in hiding craft, and nowhere in this volume can one get any indication of an attempt at making a poem poetic. They naturally are.

CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Achyut Sarkar** is a professor of cardiology. He is in medical education over three decades. He has published his books on poetry, one-act play and fiction.
2. **Alessio Zanelli** is an Italian poet who writes in English and whose work has appeared in over 180 literary journals from 16 countries. His fifth original collection, titled *The Secret Of Archery*, was published in 2019 by Greenwich Exchange (London). For more information please visit www.alessiozanelli.it.
3. **Andrew Scott** is a native of Fredericton, NB. During his time as an active poet, Andrew Scott has taken the time to speak in front of classrooms, judge poetry competitions as well as had over 200 hundred writings published worldwide in such publications as *The Art of Being Human*, *Battered Shadows* and *The Broken Ones*. Andrew Scott has published five poetry books, *Snake With A Flower*, *The Phoenix Has Risen*, *The Path*, *The Storm Is Coming* and *Searching* and one book of photography, *Through My Eyes*. *Whispers Of The Calm* is his sixth poetry book. andrewscott.scott@gmail.com
4. **Avdhesh Jha** an author, poet, teacher and observer is a strong critic with an inclination towards societal development. Presently he works with EDI of India. With ten doctoral scholars, being awarded the doctorate degree, the guide and mentor to Ph.D. aspirants, has presented several papers on different topics at national and international seminars. He has written about more than 200

poetries in English and Hindi. Associated with institutes of national repute, he has organised seminars and workshops and delivered talks and lectures at various seminars, workshops etc. He is awarded with CHAROTTAR GAURAV and BHARAT EXCELLENCE.

5. **Beverly Matherne**, the author of six bilingual books of poetry, is professor emerita of English at Northern Michigan University (in the United States), where she served as director of the Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing and poetry editor of *Passages North* literary magazine. Winner of seven first-place prizes, including the Hackney Literary Award for Poetry, she has also received four Pushcart Prize nominations. She is widely published in reviews and anthologies, including *Universal Oneness: An Anthology of Magnum Opus Poems from around the World*. With Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, and five other writers, she is the subject of bilingual writing in a completed doctoral dissertation from the University of Paris III.
6. **Bishnupada Ray** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of North Bengal. His poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies.
7. **Debra Amirault Camelin** is an 9th generation Acadian living in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Debra has been published in numerous anthologies and has won prize money for several poems. In 2019, she released a self-published book of poetry: *Light in the Mist* (a Baret Days book). Debra draws much of her poetry from her Acadian heritage and travels. Her poems are described as transporting readers through time and through space on a journey both emotional and geographical. She is a certified labyrinth facilitator with Veriditas and currently hosts labyrinth retreats in Nova Scotia that incorporate writing poetry. Debra has a Bachelor of Journalism from Carleton University in Ottawa and over

30 years' experience working in the field of performance and learning.

8. **Dhruv Somayajula** uses writing as a creative outlet, when he is not at work or busy reading anything and everything of interest. He posts his thoughts on [https:// northstartalks.art.blog/](https://northstartalks.art.blog/).
9. **DJ Tyrer** is the person behind *Atlantean Publishing*, was placed second in the 2015 Data Dump Award for Genre Poetry, and has been published in issues of *Amulet*, *California Quarterly*, *Carillon*, *The Dawntreader*, *Haiku Journal*, *The Pen*, and *Tigershark*, and online at *Atlas Poetica*, *Bindweed*, *Poetry Pacific*, and *Scarlet Leaf Review*, as well as releasing several chapbooks, including the critically acclaimed *Our Story*. The echapbook *One Vision* is available from Tigershark Publishing's website. *SuperTrump* and *A Wuhan Whodunnit* are available to download from the Atlantean Publishing website. DJ Tyrer's website is at [https:// djtyrer.blogspot.co.uk/](https://djtyrer.blogspot.co.uk/)
10. **Donna Pucciani**, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry worldwide in *Shi Chao Poetry*, *Voice and Verse*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *ParisLitUp*, *Meniscus*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Acumen*, *Journal of Italian Translation*, and other journals. Her seventh and most recent book of poetry is *EDGES*.
11. **Gary Beck** has spent most of his adult life as a theater director and worked as an art dealer when he couldn't earn a living in the theater. He has also been a tennis pro, a ditch digger and a salvage diver. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and his published books include 30 poetry collections, 12 novels, 3

short story collections, 1 collection of essays and 3 books of plays.

12. **Germain Droogenbroodt**, is a Belgian poet, translator and promoter of international poetry. He received many international awards and is yearly invited at the most prestigious international poetry festivals, nominated in 2017 for the Nobel Prize of Literature. He wrote 13 books of poetry published so far in 29 countries. Thachom Poyil Rajeevan compared his philosophical poetry with the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore whereas in Spain his poetry has been compared with Juan Ramón Jimenez. According to Chinese critics his poetry is TAO and ZEN. Several of his books, two written in India, are illustrated by Satish Gupta.
13. **Guna Moran** is an Assamese Poet and critic. His poems are published in more than hundred international magazines, journals, webzines, blogs, newspapers, anthologies and have been translated into thirty languages around the world. He has three poetry books to his credit. He lives in Assam, India.
14. **James G. Piatt** a Best of Web nominee and three-time Pushcart nominee, has had four collections of poetry; “Solace Between the Lines” (2019), “Light (2016),” “Ancient Rhythms (2014), “ and “The Silent Pond” (2012), over 1480 poems, five novels, and thirty-five short stories published in over 200 journals worldwide. He earned his BS and MA from California State Polytechnic University, and his doctorate from BYU.
15. **James Mulhern’s** writing has appeared in literary journals over one hundred and thirty times. In 2013, he was a Finalist for the Tuscany Prize in Catholic Fiction. In 2015, Mr. Mulhern was awarded a writing fellowship to Oxford University. That same year, a story was longlisted for the

Fish Short Story Prize. In 2017, he was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His most recent novel, *Give Them Unquiet Dreams*, is a Readers' Favorite Book Award winner, a Notable Best Indie Book of 2019, a Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2019, and a RED RIBBON WINNER, highly recommended by The Wishing Shelf Book Awards in the United Kingdom.

16. **James Ragan** has authored 10 books of poetry. He has read for 7 international heads of state and for the U.N, Carnegie Hall, CNN etc. and audiences in 34 nations. He's the subject of the documentary, "Flowers and Roots" (Arina Films), awarded recognitions at 17 Int. Film Festivals, including the Platinum Prize at the 49th Houston Int. Film Festival.
17. **Jeffrey Zable** is a teacher and conga drummer who plays Afro-Cuban folkloric music for dance classes and Rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies. Recent writing in *Former People*, *Ariel Chart*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Pensive Stories*, *Third Wednesday*, *Untitled Writing*, *The Nonconformist*, *Corvus*, *Uppagus*, and many others.
18. **Jevin Lee Albuquerque** grew up in California, on the local pier in Santa Cruz, fishing for striped bass. He evolved into a fly fisherman, obsessed with trout and steelhead. Recent publications include: *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *VerbalArt*, *Phenomenal Literature*, and the poetry anthology, *Universal Oneness* (Authorspress, New Delhi, India, 2020). In a former life, he was a professional soccer player. He has a degree in Latin American Studies from UCLA.

19. **Joseph Hart** has a BA in psychology. For several years he has had poems published in small magazines, and was twice nominated for a Pushcart. His favorite poets are Keats, Millay and Robinson.
20. **Keith Inman's** work can be found in major libraries across North America, in Dublin, and Zurich. His latest book, *The Way History Dries*, 2021, from Black Moss Press, unfolds like a novel. Canlit compared his previous work, *The War Poems: Screaming at Heaven*, to Atwood, Boyden and Itani. Keith lives in Thorold, Ontario, Canada.
21. **Laraine Kentridge Lasdon** attended the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. She studied drama, dance and music in London and pursued writing poetry. Ms. Kentridge hosts a Poetry group in Austin, Texas and has recently issued a Collection of her work. Ms. Kentridge currently lives in Austin Texas with her husband Professor Leon Lasdon. www.austinmarketing.biz
22. **M Shamsur Rabb Khan** is an Assistant Professor, Language and Translation department, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. His short stories are published in *Muse India*, *The Statesman*, and *The Children Book Trust*. He has also written six books, several research papers and articles for journals.
23. **Matthew James Friday** has had poems published in numerous international journals, including, recently: *Acta Victoriana* (Canada), *Borderless* (India), and *The Ear* (USA). The mini-chapbooks *All the Ways to Love*, *Waters of Oregon* and *The Words Unsaid* were published by the *Origami Poems Project* (USA).
24. **Michael Keshigian** from New Hampshire, is the author of 14 poetry collections, his latest, *What To Do With Intangibles*, released in January, 2020, by *Cyberwit.net*. He has been

published in numerous national and international journals and has appeared as feature writer in twenty poetry publications with 7 Pushcart Prize and 2 Best of the Net nominations. His poetry cycle, *Lunar Images*, set for Clarinet, Piano, Narrator, was premiered at Del Mar College in Texas. Subsequent performances occurred in Boston (Berklee College) and Moletto, Italy. *Winter Moon*, a poem set for Soprano and Piano, premiered in Boston. (michaelkeshigian.com)

25. **Michael Lee Johnson** lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era and is a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, amateur photographer, and small business owner in Itasca, DuPage County, Illinois. Mr. Johnson published in more than 2,013 new publications, and his poems have appeared in 40 countries, he edits, publishes ten poetry sites. Michael Lee Johnson has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards poetry 2015/1 Best of the Net 2016/2 Best of the Net 2017, 2 Best of the Net 2018.
26. **Natalia Fernández Díaz-Cabal.** Professor, Ph. D. in Linguistics and Ph.D. in Philosophy. Essayist, poet, traveler, nomad, translator of 7 languages. Author of several books of essay (intercultural communication, gender violence) and poetry, among them: “The tree looking at light”, “Sarcoma offspring”, “The white statue of your absence”, etc. Translated into Italian, English, Arabic and French.
27. **Nels Hanson** has worked as a farmer, teacher and contract writer/editor. His fiction received the San Francisco Foundation’s James D. Phelan Award and Pushcart nominations in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. His poems received a 2014 Pushcart nomination, Sharkpack Review’s 2014 Prospero Prize, and 2015 and 2016 Best of the Net nominations.

28. **Nilamadhab Kar**, MD, DPM, DNB, MRCPsych, writes poetry, and occasionally stories and short essays, in English and Odia. His poems have been published in magazines and anthologies in USA, UK, and India. He has published three poetry books (*Tama Paainin* Odia, selected poems; *Reverberation* and *Tomorrow's Morning Sun* - translated poetry anthologies). He has edited a few literary magazines and is on the editorial board of some. He is a psychiatrist; besides clinical work he is actively involved in clinical research and publications.
29. **Pankajam Kottarath** retired from BHEL as Deputy Manager/Finance is a bilingual poet and novelist (writing in English and Malayalam), settled at Chennai. She has twenty-three books so far published, including fourteen books of poems, a translated poetry collection in French, three fictions in English and six books in Malayalam and a couple of books in the pipeline. She is the recipient of many awards such as Rock Pebbles National Literary Award 2019; Cochin Litfest Prize 2019; Essay competition award conducted by ISISAR, Calcutta in the World Thinkers and Writers Peace Meet 2019; Literary Excellence Award from Gujarat Sahitya Akademi and Motivational strips on the eve of India's Independence Day 2020, etc. She can be reached at kp_bhargavrag@yahoo.co.in
30. **Rajiv Khandelwal** is an Electrical Engineer by education and is now a business man by profession. Rajiv Khandelwal has published 4 volumes of Poetry – “Conch Shells and Cowries” – published in 1998, “Love is a Lot of Work” and “A Monument to Pigeons” both published in 2013. 4th poetry volume titled “A Time to Forget” – published 2017. Rajiv has been awarded “Literary Creative Award” by Naji Naaman's Foundation for Gratis Culture, of Lebanon in which the Foundation had 2371 participants in their 2018

competition, from sixty six countries and has declared/rewarded 64 prize winners. Rajiv is one of the prize winners. <http://yourproductfinder.com>

31. **René van der Klooster** is multifaceted. Besides an author of poetry, prose and plays (in Dutch and English), he practices visual arts, including drawing, painting and sculpting, moreover, formerly he worked as an architect and in that capacity he is currently designing lamps. Website: www.renevanderklooster.com
32. **Rishabh Gupta** is Post Graduate in MBA and now he is doing preparation for UPSC.
33. **Robert L. Martin** is the author of two poetry books; *Wings of Inspiration*, available on Amazon now and *Rhymes of the Joke Machine*, currently in production, by *Cyberwit.net*. He is published in many anthology books including *Universal Oneness*. He also wrote two chapbooks and won two “Faith and Hope” poetry awards. He is a pianist and the organist at First UMC of Wind Gap, PA <http://www.firstumcwg.org>. His main writing influences are Kahlil Gibran and Pablo Neruda. You can reach out to him at robertlmartinpoetry@gmail.com.
34. **Robert Nisbet** is a Welsh poet whose work is published widely in both Britain and the USA. In recent years he has been shortlisted for the Wordsworth Trust Prize in the UK and nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize in the US.
35. **Roger G. Singer**, Poet Laureate Old Lyme, Connecticut; Connecticut Coalition of Poets Laureate; President, Shoreline Chapter; Connecticut Poetry Society.
36. **Sandip Saha** is a chemical engineer and doctorate (PhD) in metallurgical engineering from India. He has got three awards for his scientific work and 33 publications on his

scientific research work including three patents. He is a winner of Poetry Matters Project Lit Prize-2018 and finalist in 'Origami Poems Project BEST OF KINDNESS' CONTEST, 2020, both USA.

37. **Sarah Brown Weitzman** was a National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry and twice nominated for the Pushcart Poetry Prize. She has had poems published in hundreds of journals and anthologies including *New York Quarterly*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review*, *Miramar*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *New York Quarterly*, and elsewhere. Her fifth book, *AMOROTICA*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag.
38. **Sunil Sharma**, Ph.D (English), is a senior academic, critic, literary editor and author with 22 published books: Seven collections of poetry; three of short fiction; one novel; a critical study of the novel, and, nine joint anthologies on prose, poetry and criticism, and, one joint poetry collection. He is, among others, a recipient of the UK-based Destiny Poets' inaugural Poet of the Year award – 2012. His poems were published in the prestigious UN project: *Happiness: The Delight-Tree: An Anthology of Contemporary International Poetry*, in the year 2015. Sunil edits the English section of the monthly bilingual journal *Setu* published from Pittsburgh, USA For more details, please visit the link: <http://www.dr.sunilsharma.blogspot.in/>
39. **Susan P. Blevins** was born in England and moved to Italy when she was 20, where she lived for the following 26 years. While there she had a weekly column in an international newspaper. She moved to the USA and spent 16 years in Taos, NM, where she wrote about gardens for various magazines, and is now living in Houston, TX, writing about her interesting life and travels. She is published in various

literary journals in the USA and overseas, including New Verse News, Scarlet Leaf, Chicago Literati, Qutub Minar, The Ekphrastic Review and many others. She loves classical music, gardening, reading, writing, cats and intelligent, stimulating conversation. She also enjoys reading for the blind.

40. **Tikvah Feinstein**'s poetry is widely published in the USA and internationally, including The BeZine, Verbal Art, Loyalhanna Review, Boston Poetry Magazine and others. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, she has worked as staff writer for a daily newspaper, is author of 4 books, and edited and illustrated others. Editor and publisher of Taproot Literary Review for 25 editions, her story "The Purpose of Tears" won the 2017 Westmoreland Short Story Award from Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival. She received the "Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award" for 2019.
41. **María Cristina Azcona** is an Educational Psychologist, poetess, novelist and peace researcher. Her articles, reviews, poems and short stories are continuously published in many newspapers, magazines and anthologies around Argentina, UK, India, US, and other countries. She was born in Buenos Aires City, Argentina, where she lives joined to her family. In 1998, she won First Prize in the poetry contest by the Academic Circle of Argentinean Writers. She has written and published five books.
42. **Rajnish Mishra** is a poet, writer, teacher and blogger born and brought up in Varanasi, India and now in exile. His city has shaped his psyche and his work originates at the point of intersection between his psyche and his city. His blog has his poems and musings on Varanasi: rajnishmishravns.wordpress.com. He edits PPP Ezine: poetrypoeticspleasureezine.wordpress.com. His poems can be found at [instagram@poetry.mishra](https://www.instagram.com/poetry.mishra)

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