

Poetry: Volume 3, Number 4, 2011

The Origin of the Problem

David Wolstencroft

Doctor, I am flawed.
When I read T.S Elliot, I'm not reading Tennyson.
I don't hear influences.
I can't track the history of poetry.
I blame myself, I blame my innate incompetence and/or laziness.
I also blame my teachers
Sometimes I blame university curriculum, neo-liberalism's rationalizing of English and
History Departments (a sympathetic judge would find them 80% culpable).
I blame postmodern ideologues in the faculties too
On bad days I blame the weather
the calendar
the clock
the change in locks
Depending what's happening in the news, I blame
Washington
Houston
Barcelona (I have a working holiday booked in Spain for late September)
Madrid
The Bask country
Uruguay
Helsinki
The Fall of Singapore
The bombing of Pearl Harbour
Port Arthur
The pretensions of a scholar
An ex-girlfriend, or two
Pizza
Pacifism
Unfulfilled potential
A misspent youth
The inane
The absurd
Absurdism
The theatre of the absurd
Maternal absence
Streams of consciousness
Maternal absence

Absence
Bourgeoisie liberalism
Bourgeoisie neurosis
Accountability
Papal infallibility
The Council for Doctrinal Inquiry
Cardinal Dr. Ratsucker
European Values
European design principles
The subordinated status of interior design, relative to architecture
Women
Lovers in a Dangerous Time, sung by Bruce Cockburn
Lovers in a Dangerous Time, sung by the Barenaked Ladies
Going Down Swinging
Repressed desires, emotions, and memories
The canon in all its repressive, authoritarian glory
The BBC
BBC 4
Melvin Bragg
The global conservation crisis
Madonna
Souvlakis (I've eaten a lot)
Other hamburgers of Greece
Intimacy
The irrational
The Id
Madrid (again)
Lego land
Playschool
Nap time
God damn SLAM POETRY! And all other attempts to turn 'Poetry' into STAND UP COMEDY!
That's it! SLAM POETRY!
What a relief! I am whole again! I knew it wouldn't take too long to discover the unconscious origin of the maladaptive, self defeating symptomology.
SLAM POETRY, internalized, like oppression, like patriarchy, alienating me, true to your particular strand of contemporary psychoanalytical orthodoxy, not only from my true nature, and true desires, but also from efficient, timely, on-line, high-impact relevant pedagogy!
WHAM SLAM THANK YOU MA'AM!

David Wolstencroft teaches in the School of Applied Media and Social Science at Monash University.

Ode to Columbus

On a New Jersey Transit Train

Anne Mabry

The mix on the train is not usual 9-5
 but Jersey City high school kids.
It's Columbus Day.
The black youth with the lean muscled arms and red cap askew
 cradles the white chick with long black hair.
She slouches languidly into the blackness.
Their four friends play hiphop on the i-pod
 without the requisite headphones:
 “If using an electronic device or radio,
 wear earphones” says the PATH sign.
They don't see it
 in their own world of coolness.
“Fuck that shit” claims the i-pod listener's companion.
She's tough.
I bet her mother is too,
 but crying inside.
The two girls with their DD bags and cups of iced cappuccino
 regard cooling the man with the double-layered bags,
 reused until the Duane Reade letters crackle.
He lines the bags up neatly.
He has his pride.
“Probably homeless,” they think.
I want to shield him from their sneers.
He could be my son, or father.
“Nihilism” is the word my student had trouble using in class.
She should have sat next to me on the train today.

Anne Mabry is Associate Professor, ESL Program, New Jersey City University.

Monsoon

Amitava Nag

only sometimes
the city reels,
water oozing
from every pore
inside,
outside,
top,
right -

everytime else
she sleeps
and prepares,
to celebrate
her win.

Amitava Nag, a software engineer by profession, is a creative writer and film critic.

Freewheeling

Indranil Acharya

The moon was full
The sea was violent
Sick desires of yore
Throbbled in silence.
Raindrops hammered
On the windowpane
Lightning grew more frequent
Dormant anger of yore
Burnt in silence.
The room was pleasant.
None came in-
None went out-
Only the ceiling hung low...
Bulldozed the mind
With thousand cogitations;
An emptiness prevailed;
Innate worries surfaced in silence.
The lizard approached
The insect sat glibly;
Attacks stealthy and inscrutable
Ignited the memories of yore
And devoured the soul in silence-
The organs, the consciousness- the being.
Flippant
Fierce
Fetishistic
Furious
The dull tom-tom of adjectives begins
Falls flat on the floor of..
Circular starts and finishes
Blur the divide between
The victorious and the vanquished.

Indranil Acharya is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, West Bengal.

The Anniversary

Madhumita Ghosh

The pillows no longer talk to each other
Sing with a voice of soft caress
Whisper unimportant nothings
At two, three or four a.m.
The candle casts a shadow
Of two ghosts numbed in ether
Positioned in perfect equidistance
Mars and Venus each in its orbit
Like a pair of balancing beams.
Speechless monologues hit the walls
Eyes cry out loud
Scream in sibilant accusation
As silent hatred flows freely all around.
The flowers no longer tied together
Lie strewn, dismembered.

The ceiling fan revolves
In an impossible regularity
As the recriminating gametes
Refuse to hold hands.

Madhumita Ghosh (M.A. M.Phil. Ph.D in English) is Associate Professor, Department of English, Muralidhar Girls' College, Kolkata, affiliated to Calcutta University.

A City Collage

Sunil Sharma

A bored
Miss Lonely-hearts
In a frilly gown,
Leans out of
An unlit window
And looks down,
From her top floor flat---
(While the rest of her silent family watches soap on the digital slim TV)
---At the mid-night meager world
Spread out below.
The young Miss looks but not sees,
The army of the strays barking at
A drunk staggering to a bleak home
And
A homeless bearded old man
Lying curled up on a piece of
A torn old newspaper on the little pavement.
She only sees her prince
In the moon floating in the vastness of a star-studded sky,
Her prince has not turned up so far,
Despite many frantic ads in papers
(As they expect a fancy car that her middle-class parents can not afford).
But every night,
She awaits the secret footfalls
In the staircase of her tiny waiting heart,
She expects a Mills and Boon resolution to a
Third-world problem
Of the cursed spinsters living alone,
As they cannot afford a fancy car to these greedy men.

There are other sad narratives as well,
Of looking for hope in deprivation and want,
Packed together in the floors rising
Between the top floor of the high-rise

And the impoverished street below.

The Varmas no longer talk,
Mrs. Varma says she sleeps
On her side of the little marital bed of 30 years
And finds portly Mr. Varma
(He suffers from central obesity common to Indians and a low metabolism)
An obnoxious guy who farts in public,
Gorges on fatty oily foods
And his bloated body emits raw garlic smell.

This man talks of money only
And lacks in culture and art.

Mr. Varma says the fat wife of his has no aesthetic sense,
Watches Saas-Bahu serials and thinks of
Buying complete Saree stores.
Their two hapless kids
Move around the flat
With ear plugs,
While neighbours enjoy the daily fights of the ageing Varmas.
It is more entertaining than any soap.

The sleep-deprived young Executive guards his two inch personal space in the
overcrowded local in Mumbai divided on ethnic lines,
While his freshly-scrubbed counterpart in a murdering Delhi Blue line,
Hangs for the same terrestrial right,
The local warriors ready to erupt into deadly fight
Over two inches of the mere traveling space.

The SMSes and the E-mails
Send the messages fast
But create an oceanic distance
Between the sender and the receiver
Who orally don't like to talk.

My busy elder brother no longer visits us home,
Although we live on the same street,
Citing pressures of work and regular late hours,
But my paralytic dad still waits for him to call.
However, remnants of my family
Hardly talk,
We just sit and watch

The TV over lunch and dinner
In a faded home.

My friend has stopped taking my calls,
He thinks I may ask for a loan.
It is not that, I am busy, protests he.
Everybody thinks I am nuts, and out of tune like Dylan,
I talk of Marx and Allende and Che,
When the rest sit and see XXX flicks on
Imported DVDs,
Drinking rum dark.

In this country of Baudelaire,
In the dark lanes and alleys,
Bare foot ill-clad kids rummage for stale meals,
Outside the outlets of the Mac, and the big gleaming malls,
Despite crude bombs and communal riots,
The meltdown in America,
The home-alone folks live and dream
With great tenacity,
In these breaking globalised urban realities,
Turning the glittering cities into ghettos of mind,
And
Fast
Losing their glitz and glam for the one-eyed and one-dimensional denizens,
Amen!

Sunil Sharma is Principal at Bharat College (affiliated to University of Mumbai) at Badlapur, Mumbai Metropolitan Region, India.

Nobody

Pooja Sharma Rao

The solo plant on my
window sill waits for me
every evening.

A curious pigeon sits
at the same spot
and observes my tea
and reading.

Long ago Emily
Said " I am a nobody , are you a nobody too?"
Now I know
what she meant.

Pooja Sharma Rao has been a language-trainer, lecturer and Editor.

Labyrinthine Thoughts in Linear Spaces

Basudhara Roy

As the train speeds me across the countryside,
I wrap distances and unfurl memories.

I am all the people I have met,
All the places I have seen.
Dreams and Realities fuse in me.
I no longer know one from the other,
Which was, and which would have been.

When I touch through thought or word,
Through finger or tongue,
I am extending myself,
Re-drawing my boundaries,
To incorporate an-'other'.

I am the old woman
With the face like baked-apple,
Who grew old without knowing youth.
Her years marked
With the bulges of her belly,
And the heads at her breast.

She sucks inside out
A curry-stained plastic bag.
Age is imprisonment.
In toothless gums and shrivelled skin.
Age is freedom.
From the breast and the womb and sin.

The child-laden girl with old eyes
Who walks uncovered in this chill
With no claim over her body,
Is the old woman's youth.
A village away, an age ahead,
Breathing the same brown songs.

The drunken farmer puking his venom
Of dry lands and spiraling costs
On his woman and her belly

Is perhaps the old woman's husband.
Kicking and abusing her fertility,
For the foetus within and its extra mouth.

Mindless of those dark hearthless nights
When the wife in bed alone could soothe,
The gnawing hunger of a stomach aching for food.
Refusing to own the child as his,
Though he knows for sure
His vigilance on his wife to be strict.

Better than her the village prostitute
Who sells her warmth for a price.
But who really knows what she is?
Abandoned by her husband, a loving wife,
Because she could not breed,
She made barrenness her fortune instead.

I am them all
The girl, the wife and the hag.
When Time and Space place me in their webs,
My songs are reborn through them.
And I grow richer in these associations.

They are the thorn birds,
Impaling themselves on the thorns of Time,
Whose songs echo, though the thorn is cast away.
And, whether my hurt or pain, my wound or shame,
Their lives in song celebrate me again.

Basudhara Roy is currently employed as Assistant Professor in the department of English at Karim City College, Jamshedpur.

Little girl

Omar Moumni

Oh little girl!
Where is your home?
Where are the children?
You should play!
Forget the plight
Oh little girl!
Where is the father?
The mother? The relatives??
Oh little girl!
I know!
I know you are a green tree
In a yellow desert
Thirsty, thirsty
For the stolen water
For life!
I know how much you resisted
Against the woe
Against the woes
Against the foe
I know it is deep
Deep inside!!
But you should not weep
For reasons that we ignore
But still, wait!
Tomorrow is coming
The next day is near
To reach your dream
To be at home.

Omar Moumni is a professor of English and Cultural Studies at Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University, Faculty of Letters and Human sciences, Dhar el-Mehraz-Fez. Morocco.

Meatshop Lane

Abin Chakraborty

A sudden swish,
A writhing spurt,
And then the wrenching of the wings.
(Could you change the channel now?)

I've stood with crumpled notes and seen
The daily act of muscles taut
That hack and pull and tear and crush
To suit the choices we dictate
And serve ourselves the dish we please.

No one minds the splattered stains
And rests in peace with newly bought
Powders that would rub them out.
(Could you switch the AC on?)

I am stunned by these images
That sting,
And sharpen their fangs
To gobble my world
Which sinks it seems,
In rivers of blood.

Weep my beloved and watch:
The streets now swarm with bombs and guns
And rend our skies with unremitting flames.
(The pizza boy is here love!)

Abin Chakraborty is working as Ph.D scholar in the Dept. of English, Calcutta University.

Nostalgia

Panchanan Dalai

I am an alien, in an alien place,
Far way in miles and mind.
I have crossed the black-waters,
Banned and barred in my caste;
Like the leopard, I have jumped
Into a different time and terrain –
So vast and so varied.

My day begins
With strange faces and strange languages;
And I cling to myself –
Lonely and speechless.

When light recedes and night marches,
I dare to look back and retrospect;
Home and imagination
Glides up and down
Like the witches' predictions,
And I wait for that moment
To take on my loss and my separation.

Panchanan Dalai is Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University.

Binary

Tariqah A. Nuriddin

Special kind
Zero One
On Off
Day Night
Dark light
Moon lit
Sun burnt
Kiss cheek
Baby's smile
Confusion
Illusion
Showcase display
Apology metaphor
Just mere word play

Tariqah A. Nuriddin is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Howard University in Washington , DC.

De profundis

P. Prayer Elmo Raj

I stole a dream
When night forgot its darkling.
Singing!
Cacophony of agony,
Listless distress,
And filthy pretense.
Insult me with your smile,
Bisect me with your tiding,
Lance my heart with glitter.
Let's go around the world
Sprinkling waters of treachery.
 Wait and dance
 Your name enhance

P. Prayer Elmo Raj is Assistant Professor of English, Malankara Catholic College, Mariagiri, Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu.
