

# THE MISSING SLATE

For the discerning metropolitan.

WINTER 2011





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'Man' by Ahsan Masood

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“ What has happened here will do  
To bite the living world in two,  
Half for me and half for you.  
Here at last I fix a line  
Severing the world's design  
Too small to hold both yours and mine.  
There's enormity in a hair  
Enough to lead men not to share  
Narrow confines of a sphere  
But put an ocean or a fence  
Between two opposite intents.  
A hair would span the difference.  
— *Boundary, Adrienne Rich* ”

## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

7

Dear Readers,

The second issue started off as a celebration of what we had accomplished with our first, coupled with the realization that the real work was only just beginning. We've done something new for this issue: brand new look, brand new articles and some of the best fiction and poetry we've read, ever. It also marks the departure from an all Pakistani team to include a more diverse and cosmopolitan editorial team. But more importantly it heralds a crucial announcement: we cannot be neatly boxed and categorized under just one banner. We are a representation of the global citizen in an increasingly globalized world.

Instead of bringing out an issue for Pakistanis by Pakistanis, The Missing Slate serves as a representation of Pakistan itself, to the world at large. It also gives aspiring Pakistanis a chance to see what others their age are doing with words and canvas. We dare to dream it so that others can dream and make it happen. The Missing Slate is the living testament to the power of dreams, determination and sheer grit.

In my last letter, I mentioned the floods and this issue we've placed them front and center with a dedicated photo essay to remind both ourselves as its citizens and survivors, and the international community at large, that this is an important issue. In the final stages of content production, news came in of Salman Taseer's death at the hands of his guard. The [former] Governor of Punjab was shot by his guard, a member of the Rawalpindi Elite Force in Islamabad. He was the lone political opposition against the Blasphemy Law, which we, among other publications, stand up against.

This issue also sets out to send a message loud and clear with its punch-in-the-gut cover features from voicing the previously unvoiced LGBT population in the country, to addressing the blasphemy law head on, to talking about pop culture's increasing influence on our lives and how we view sexuality. This Valentine's Day we are sending out a message of love: love others, tolerate others, accept everyone without discrimination.

But The Missing Slate is an arts and literary journal at its core and to that effect, we present some of the best fiction from both sides of the Atlantic framed by poetry that will tug at your heart and mind simultaneously. All along, we have kept to our signature style of coupling great content with equally brilliant visuals, this time courtesy of Ahsan Masood, our core spotlight artist. But it isn't just art, photography and words we feature. Justin Mashouf is an Iranian-American documentarian who sits down with TMS Features Editor, Madeeha Ansari to talk about his project and time in Pakistan. A true visionary and one whose career we hope to follow closely. We will be looking to feature more inspiring filmmakers in the months ahead.

So what I said in my last letter still holds: the first issue was the appetizer and this is the first course. It is The Missing Slate team's sincerest hope that you enjoy this uniquely cosmopolitan issue for the truly discerning metropolitan.

If you would like to send in your feedback, even better! We would love to hear your thoughts. You can email them in to [comments@themissingslate.com](mailto:comments@themissingslate.com).

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Maryam Piracha

Editor-in-Chief, The Missing Slate



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## YOUR SLATE

**Your Slate/Your Words/Your Rules.**

**We asked our readers on Twitter and Facebook whether they agreed with the common advice: “write what you know”. Here’s what was said:**

“Disagree...writing is meant to be creative, imaginative. If you write what you know, you’re just repeating stuff.” - @mohamadmustafa

“Depends on what you’re writing. I’d hate inaccurate facts even in a work of fiction.” @sidrat\_a

“If you write what you know, you’re contributing something no one else can. Writing from imagination/dreams isn’t for everyone.” - @amnamela

“I firmly agree for one basic reason: You can only rock a turf when you know you own it.”  
- @mehreenkasana

“If it makes you write, doesn’t matter if you know or not.” - @thekarachikid

“Disagree! Because I don’t know shit, and would please love to read shit.” - @ayaz\_khan

“Write what you know or write to convince that you do.” - @NabihaZeeshan

“Disagree. Sci-fi, y’all. You can’t always write only about what you know. That’s what research and imagination are for.” - @BinaShah

“Agree if the writing claims to be realistic; a 30yr old cannot fully understand the emotions of a 50yr old, but can do fantasy.” - @ns\_ahmed

“I think a degree of ‘what you know’ is required to create a conceivable reality that others can believe in.” - @Inky\_voice

“Write what other people know.” - @sesmith01

“Agree. There’s always a coherent flow and truth in such writing.” - @madihariaz

“A left brained person must’ve said that. It is the prudent, practical approach but I think it stunts spontaneity; that spark which galvanizes true creativity. Of course, you can’t go in blind either, research is key. If someone were twisting my arm I’d be inclined to agree with this statement. But I, myself would choose a concoction of writing what I know and throwing caution to the wind.” - Anam Rafiq

“I think my brain juices would be mercilessly unfazed and unaffected in that case, but would be quickly smitten by the additional and imperative ‘want and will’ to write what one knows. Without the substantial pump of inspiration and inclination, all endeavors are meaningless.” - Sadaf W Khan

**What our editors said:**

“Personally think it’s a combination of the two: inevitably you do write what you know when you write about people, but conjuring things up and backing it up with solid research brings the piece to a completely different level.” - Maryam Piracha, TMS Editor-in-Chief

“If writers were to write what they know, then writing wouldn’t have been a process of discovery, an exploration but a description of what we are aware of. As a writer I would prefer writing with prior basic knowledge, for example - what the landscape of a scene is, how it looks, how it feels - but I’d let the story take me off to new and unfamiliar places inside of me, which only through creating can one discover.” - Omri J. Luzon, TMS Articles Editor

“Writing about what you know, things you’ve experienced or lived, has a greater depth to it than what you’re pretending to experience when you write about something you’ve never actually lived through firsthand.

For instance, I could never write a Sweet Valley High book. What do I know about California, its weather, its geography, the feel of its sunlight? But an Islamabad Valley High? You BET I could pull you into that one, dear reader!” - Asmara Malik, Associate Editor of Poetry

**What our writers said:**

“I think I disagree. I’ve been told that without a vivid imagination, creative writing becomes a tad boring. So if you only write what you know, the readers might rapidly lose interest!” - Wajiha Hyder, Contributing Editor

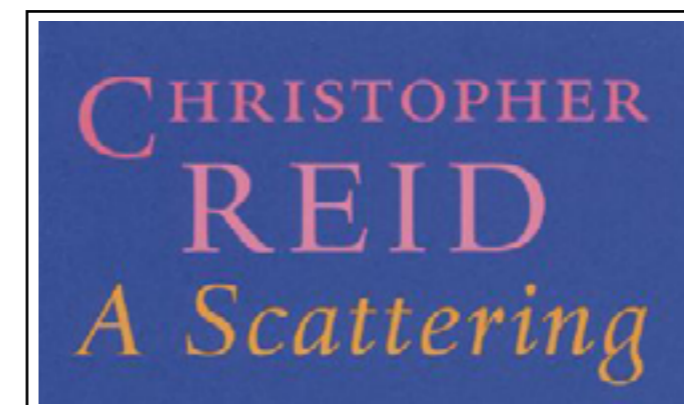
“I’d say I agree and disagree. I think ‘write what you know’ is good advice for young and emerging writers, as that way, they’re not juggling unfamiliar subject matter along with all the technical aspects of writing. Also, as they’re less likely to have large amounts of time and money to devote to a project, it negates the need for extensive (and potentially expensive) research.

Once a writer is more confident in their abilities though, and more established, I think it becomes much less useful--they out to feel able to write about whatever grabs them (which, of course, may well be ‘what they know’). And in fact, if an emerging writer wants to take the risk and has the time and money to spend, then I say go for it. If the passion is there, I certainly don’t think writers should feel obliged to turn a blind eye to a subject because it’s not immediately familiar. Of course caution must be used—ill-educated writing can have disastrous effects for an author.” - Gareth Trews, Contributing Editor

*Would you like your words and thoughts represented, too? Follow us on twitter @themissingslate, or be a fan of us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/themissingslate](http://www.facebook.com/themissingslate) and keep your eyes peeled for our next talk back session!*

## THE CRITICS: A SCATTERING

by Jacob Silkstone  
*Poetic repose.*



A Scattering, Christopher Reid  
Areté Books Ltd, 62 pages (Paperback)  
ISBN: 978-0-9554553-6-0

Recently, on the British literary scene, poets have tended to play Bertha Mason to prose writers' Rochester: enigmatic, bewilderingly 'other', rarely discussed in polite company. Consequently, it was considered a major surprise when Christopher Reid was let down from the attic – or perhaps the garret – to be given the 2009 Costa Book of the Year award.

Reid's triumph was encouraging: the prevailing view had seemed to be either that 'traditional' poetry should be left to die quietly, or that the moribund form should be poked and prodded until it morphed into something closer to rap. Reading *A Scattering*, it's hard not to view the collection in its prize-winning context. Why has it garnered more critical acclaim than almost anything else published this millennium?

Similarities with previous Costa Prize winners are immediately apparent: of the four poets to have been awarded Book of the Year, three (Douglas Dunn, Ted Hughes and now Reid) were writing collections based on, or around, dead wives. The other winner, Seamus Heaney, was translating *Beowulf*, but perhaps Heaney has always been a special case. *A Scattering* is a response to the death of Lucinda Gane, Reid's partner for nearly three decades, and it sets out to map her illness and its aftermath in unflinching detail.

Understandably, the poems – three long sequences and twelve shorter pieces under the collective title 'A Widower's Dozen' – are deeply personal, and the reader occasionally feels as though they are intruding on Reid's grief. At his most successful, Reid opens the poems out to explore wider resonances, as in these stanzas from *The Flowers of Crete*, which acknowledge the obvious limitations of writing:

You don't want their botched text.  
You want the breath, pulse and footfall  
of the girl who dashed out into sunlight like to-day's  
through where maybe that door was –  
then slammed it behind her.

The title poem functions as a muted mission statement: Reid describes the way in which 'elephants,/ finding bones of one of their own kind/ dropped by the wayside' will 'chuck them this way and that way,' a 'scattering' which 'has an air/of deliberate ritual'. The closing lines surely mark the first time that a poet has placed an elephant in the role of muse:

may their spirit guide me as I place my own sad  
thoughts in new, hopeful arrangements.

'Sad' may strike certain readers as an underwhelming choice of adjective, but it typifies the collection's overall tone. Reid realises that poetical pyrotechnics become meaningless in the presence of deep grief, and *A Scattering* is consistently restrained, sombre, achingly elegant. Schubert is invoked in 'The Unfinished' – a quartet that 'weighs in the balance/ the relative merits/ of major and minor/ and struggles to postpone the choice.'

Of course, Reid is fully capable of shifting into a major key when he considers it necessary. Throughout the collection, there are flashes of humour, of defiance. Occasionally his ethereal free verse forms itself into rhyme, as in 'Exasperated Piety', ostensibly an account of Henry James' last days in London, which ends on an image of 'an old writer, gagging on the ghost-rich air.'

Early in his career, Reid was burdened with misleading comparisons to Craig Raine, his teacher for a brief period at Oxford and a fellow poetry editor for Faber. However, as Michael O'Neill points out, 'Raine admires Picasso's bold distortions; Reid invokes the intimate interiors of Vermeer and Vuillard.' *A Scattering* sees Reid at his most intimate, and from that intimacy – as with Vermeer and Vuillard – emerges genuine art.

*Jacob Silkstone blogs about books and the publication industry at Alone in Babel. Visit his blog at <http://aloneinbabel.themissinglate.com>*



Project A: The Guild  
is the guild for all artists run  
by ambitious twenty-somethings.  
Through our Book Club series we have  
reintroduced a culture of reading books  
that threatens to be lost on a new generation  
of Pakistani Youth. The Islamabad chapter  
of our Book Club is meeting monthly  
at Clique Cafe.

For information regarding this month's  
selection and the event page,  
you can find us at:

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<http://www.twitter.com/#!/projectaguild>  
<http://projecta-theguild.tumblr.com>

## 3 THE CRITICS: CAFE HEADLION

by Tehniat Aftab

A "professional" eatery.



As young open minds open to experimentation, my friends and I enjoy exploring new places and ideas. Finding new locations in which to both eat and socialize are a special treat. After hearing a recommendation that described a bustling centre of exchange in good ideas with a unique menu, we decided to investigate the new eatery, Café Headlion. Situated in Clifton, Karachi, Café Headlion is an addition to the numerous cafes in Karachi. Café Headlion is the first marketing and advertising café which offers great food for both the stomach and the brain. Headlion holds marketing events, debates, campaigns, and discussions, all under one roof. It's all about promoting different products from up and coming brands. Events like 'Marketing 360 Debate', or 'Marketing 360: The Reality behind the Reality Shows' take place. Locally renowned marketing related personalities frequent the café, such as Yasir Riaz the Director of Brand and Strategic Planning for Geo TV, Ali Raza Merchant, the Director of Synergy Group, or Umair Saeed, the Account Director for Blitz DBB.

Although it attracts several big names, the management treat everyone with the same encouraging and open attitude. Upon entering the café the first thing you see is the waiting area: a dark red wall with writings in chalk. The whole café consists of two rooms: one is a small conference/discussion area, and the other is the eatery. The conference room is lined with shelves of books and DVDs. I particularly liked the interior of the discussion room; it has a unique contemporary look with dark wooden furniture, scattered books and magazines on the table and low hanging ceiling lights. Despite the welcoming setting, the lights are very dim, which sets a different mood

than one of a working ethic. The café's eating area has brighter lighting with large comfortable black sofas and red walls which continue from the waiting room.

The café has a very interesting menu that consists of many unique dishes. In the sandwich department, besides the usual beef and chicken burgers, Café Headlion's Brandwich is their speciality. It is a Club Sandwich with a Twist, served with a choice of potato wedges, fries or baked potato. Venturing away from typical café fare, there is even a seafood menu. The names of the dishes are reference the famous marketers to help tie in the theme of marketing. Items on the menu include a fish and prawn dish with the name Lever's Marketing Mix inspired by William Lever, founder of the multinational giant Unilever; a succulent fish fillet dish named Mademoiselle Innocent, inspired by Richard Branson, the mastermind behind the Virgin Group; an Egyptian dish, named The Egyptian Beauty, inspired by Mohammad Al-Fayed, the man who defines beauty with Harrods. They have a delicious chicken menu as well which again has names inspired by famous people. Dishes include the Chicken Alfredo (Giorgio Armani: a dish with creamy light Alfredo sauce); Rupert Murdoch, a creamy chicken curry with kaffir lime leaves and crunchy peanuts; Swoosh Steak (referencing Nike, the popular sports clothing store), a hearty chicken steak with sautéed veggies, gravy and mashed potatoes; Trip to Morocco, spicy chicken kebabs served with ratatouille. The entree menu also follows the naming fashion, with items such as Warren Buffet, buffalo wings with a tangy sauce; CSR – Caesar Salad Revisited, a light, crisp and fresh salad; The Greek Tycoon, rich greens with fresh feta cheese, ripe tomatoes and a mouth-watering vinaigrette; Designer Skins, hot potato skins stuffed with crunchy herb and olive oil tossed croutons, topped with cheddar cheese, mushrooms and a creamy spinach sauce. They also have cocktails; Leo's Colada, a coconut and pineapple mix; Material Margarita, inspired by Madonna is a tangy drink; 360 Punch, is a dynamic blend of 6 fruits. For desserts, they have Forrest Gump, a dessert made from caramel, chocolate and layers of biscuits; Apple iPie, inspired by Steve Jobs or finally the Monroe Cheesecake, just as fashionable as its namesake. To top it all off, everything is well priced.

If I could give an Ebertian thumbs up, I would give two. Despite the wide number of eateries in the area, Cafe Headlion stands out among its peers in excellence.

## THE CRITICS: CATFISH

by Bilal Iqbal

Painted friendships



Cast & Credits

Directed by Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman

With Nev Schulman, Ariel Schulman and Abby Pierce.

Released by Rogue Pictures

Running Time: 86 minutes. Rated PG-13 for mild sexual references

Yaniv Schulman, a New York-based photographer, gets a photograph published in *The New York Sun*. Three months later he receives a painting of it in the mail. The painter? Eight-year-old Abby Pierce from Ishpeming, Michigan.

An online relationship ensues, with Yaniv providing Abby with photographs to paint. She in turn mails the paintings to Yaniv. Ariel Schulman (Yaniv's brother) and Henry Joost (friend) start documenting the relationship a few months later, somewhere towards the end of 2007. *Catfish* is born.

The documentary starts when Yaniv receives the third, or fourth (he himself is not sure), package from Abby. A telephonic conversation with Abby's mom, Angela, quickly reveals that Abby is incredibly talented (having just recently sold two paintings for over \$7,000).

The friendship with Abby paves the way for Yaniv to become friends with Angela, Vincent Pierce (her father), Alex Pierce (her brother) and Megan Facchio (her elder half-sister), or the "Facebook family", as Yaniv refers to them.

The background for the story is told quickly, through a series of email conversations. The "characters" in this documentary are revealed through their Facebook profiles. A selection of images help introduce the viewer to this Facebook family that is so very active online. They are all talented – a family of artists.

The seeds of romance between Megan and Yaniv

are planted right from the start. The stage is set. The family is almost too good to be true, a modern-day fairy tale, except that it's real.

But all may not be as it seems.

To go any further would be to spoil the story. Universal bills *Catfish* as a reality thriller and a "riveting story of love, deception and grace within a labyrinth of online intrigue".

And while it does have its moments of suspense and thrills, that is not what the story is really about. At its heart the film is a tragedy. It documents the freedom that the internet affords us, to break free of our worldly shackles and be whatever we want to be. But at the same time, the events in the film unravel the fantasy to reveal a medium whose escapist promises are but an illusion.

The documentary has stirred quite a controversy. Is it real or fake? The skeptics question the convenience of how the events turn out in the film, unfolding to reveal a rather well-knitted story. And authenticity is very important for the effectiveness of the impact that the film is going for. The filmmakers' insist that everything presented in the documentary is 100% true. For their part, the people in the film act perfectly natural, like regular people. Sure the directors might have omitted a few things here and added a few details there to make the story compelling, but that does not make it any more of a lie and less of a documentary.

Documentaries generally have a hard time making it past a limited audience. There is this stereotypical format that springs to mind the moment one hears the word "documentary". Perhaps the most compelling argument in favour of *Catfish* is that it is nothing like a conventional documentary. The editing is slick, the music apt and the heavily zoomed-in computer screen (to the extent that the pictures are pixelated) and Google Earth give it a tech-savvy look. Yet it has a raw feel to it, which makes it refreshing.

The human future is not at stake here. There are no shocking reveals that will change the way you look at the War on Terror. *Catfish* documents a compelling, tragic story of a woman whose dreams may never come true.

One may think of it as a study of the human condition. It may not offer the grandiose visual oomph that its competitors will be selling, but reality does not need to.

Bilal Iqbal reviews films and blogs about film theory among various other film paraphernalia at *The Second Frame*. Visit his blog at

<http://the2ndframe.themissingslate.com>



## 5 THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE

by Salman Latif

*Urdu on its death bed?*

Language is not only a vehicle to transmit human thoughts and feelings, it also chronologizes human evolution. Despite having such profound importance, human languages have both eroded and evolved over time due to both social and political factors. Often, foreign invasions also entail a cultural colonialism, replacing local languages with the invaders' lingua franca. The emergence of "culturally superior" nations overshadow domestic languages, sometimes even eliminating them.

The death of a language is like burying a hundred thousand souls: writers, poets and their treatises. With its demise are eroded many human traditions from the memory of mankind and the many pearls of human intellect are abandoned forever. Today, standing as we are a smidgen into the 21st century, Urdu faces a similar threat.

Pakistan's national language has, for centuries captured the glory, tragedy and poetry of the sub-continent. People from all walks of life have pursued their literary ambitions through Urdu's rich lexis, well-fostered by a rapidly evolving vocabulary. This has produced an extraordinary volume of literature in which poetry is exquisite, and its subtle prose stands uniquely in contrast with other world literatures.

The ghazal is without a doubt the most acclaimed of Urdu's poetic genres. It is a unique poetic form combining rhyming, same-meter couplets and a refrain. The ghazal has been established for centuries as a direct, personal expression of human intuition, embellished with the most creative of the components: the qafia, or the alliterated consonant, stressed throughout a poem; radeef, the rhyming words; and ista'arat and tashbeehat, which allude to specific traits through analogies. It is here that the best of Urdu poets dwelt for the better part of their careers, creating impressions of human rigor and tragic love. Of late the ghazal has evolved bringing free verse into its fold. The latter has a taste of its own, being a *recherché* treat when coming from the pens of masters like Amjad Islam Amjad, Ahmed Faraz and Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi.

Some extraordinary chapters of Urdu literature make it essential for modern historians to preserve its legacy. As an exile in Rangoon the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar's verses are the fine strokes of a consumed artist; a subtle decry, erupting from an

individual forced to live in shame and absolute destitution.

ان حسرتوں سے کہ دو کہیں اور جا بسیں  
اتنی جگہ نہیں دل داغدار میں

Tell these longings to go live elsewhere  
My bruised heart shall contain no more  
(Bahadur Shah Zafar)

The tragedy vested in this verse elevates it from a mere couplet to a leaf from the annals of Pakistan's history, registering a personal yet poignant anecdote of the fall of the Mughal empire through the shades of literature. A clearer cultural and historical analysis is possible only when considering this literary inheritance in retrospect.

Urdu prose also has a unique history. From the 17th to 19th centuries, the prime mover of Urdu prose was narration or 'Dastan' (tales). However, over time, this genre evolved into a socio-political tool that was used actively by Indian scholars to further the sentiments of nationalism in a British-dominated sub-continent. Scholars like Muhammad Azad, Altaf Hussain Hali, Shibli Nomani and Sir Syed utilized this medium to extend their ponderous views to the public.

However, it was the short story that emerged to be Urdu prose's most powerful form. From Manto to Premchand and Quratulain Haider to Ismat Chughtai, a diverse spectrum of ideas was painted across the canvas of the Urdu *afsana* (short story). Specifically, the *afsana* was brought to its zenith by the brilliant prose writers during independence. The chapters of a bloody independence, divorced from biased sentimentalism were penned in a form that depicted the bitter truth. The *afsana* thus became the voice of the clerisy, furthering tolerance through the bruised post-independence masses. Ghulam Abbas, Krishan Chander, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi and Bedi are some of the brilliant *afsana* authors.

Flash forward to the 21st century and Urdu stands at the brink of artistic and aesthetic extinction. It has lost ground in its homeland and is set to perish in the face of an increased lingual and cultural "borrowing". To allow a loss of this magnitude; to stand by doing nothing as a cultural heritage dies, effectively means effacing our own identities. The proud Khudi of Iqbal, the ingenious two-liners of Ghalib, the flowing lucidity of Dagh's pen, the wit of Akbar Allah Abadi et al have perished. It would spell extinction for the

recorded course of our cultural evolution and of the different facets of human thought that described our independence.

Language is the cornerstone for a civilization's identity. If we don't brace ourselves against cultural colonialism, Urdu as a language will eventually wear away and with it, centuries' long traditions of discourse and intellectual contemplation. It's time that such forums and institutions are given space in public discourse which can actively portend a revival of Urdu language. An already fragmented society like ours desperately needs a national commonality today – if only to remember and revive the glory that was once ours.

اردو ہے جس کا نام ہمیں جانتے ہیں داغ  
سارے جہاں میں دھوم، ہماری زباں کی ہے

O' Dagh only we know what (this language) is called Urdu

Our language is celebrated all over the world  
(Dagh Dehalvi)

*Editor's Note: If you would like to respond to this piece, please send in your comments to [feedback@themissingsslate.com](mailto:feedback@themissingsslate.com). We will publish them at our discretion in the following issue.*

## 6 CURE ALL

I do not know you  
and, yet, I feel the urge  
to give you fashion advice  
against carrying,  
under your arm,  
a brown feathered chicken  
in the business district,  
because it demonstrates  
you have a lot of cluck  
not the pluck  
you wish to employ  
to conquer financial institutions  
in need of reform  
or, at least, a devilishly good spanking.  
The whole chicken thing  
might work  
if you change out of your  
business blues  
into some voodoo costume —  
New Orleans tradition—  
then pray to all of your  
checkbook balancing ancestors  
for success.

— Kenneth P. Gurney

*Kenneth P. Gurney lives in Albuquerque, NM. He edits the New Mexico poetry anthology Adobe Walls. His latest book is An Accident Practiced. To learn more about Kenneth visit <http://www.kpgurney.me/Poet/Welcome.html>*



*Right: 'Past' Ink on Paper, 15 x 22.5 inches  
by Ahsan Masood*

## 7 UNOPENED LETTERS SENT HOME : 1986 ~ 2001

by Asmara Malik

*Poetry meets prose.***Monday, September 25**

I'm not sure about you in this din  
of galaxies crashing about our feet.

In your uneasy sleep you speak of a Sarhad  
where

empty skyscrapers smolder beneath baleful  
suns. So

compelled, I walk the silent streets of Islama-  
bad, until dawn

until it is too late to return home, amidst other  
transient ghosts

who do not speak my tongue. We walk...

**Tuesday, September 26**

He cannot sleep.

An overhead speaker announces that the bus  
will be late, we apologize for the inconvenience, than-  
kyouforchoosingtotravel... the rest of it becomes a  
blue Doppler-fade-away as he walks back to the park-  
ing lot. It is 3 a.m. He will not find a cab. He will not  
be going home. He leaves his bags on the steps of the  
bus terminal. Somewhere in the time it takes for him  
too unshoulder his bags and the moment they hit the  
soft clay-colored earth, he realizes that he is tired of  
lying to himself.

He is not going home.

The man at the khoka pours his chai into a  
chipped glass mug, milk blooming downwards and  
outwards within amber gloom.

He calls him sahib. He leaves him his last twenty  
rupees.

**Wednesday, September 27**

2.56 a.m. They let him sleep in the garden of  
their small house, the Balochi woman and her daugh-  
ter. He dreamed of billowing red cloaks upon the  
sands of Thar and women singing on the crumbling  
walls of abandoned forts in Rajasthan. He woke up  
but he doesn't think he did. He doesn't think he's ever  
really awake. Later, he dreamed of his mother again  
after a long, long time. She stood at the window of  
his old house in Quetta and pointed at the sky. One

by one, from the North to the South, every star in the  
sky fell, until the hemispheres were starless and naked  
night stared directly down upon us all. The lakes of  
Balochistan do not have names; they have myths. The  
mountains have names because there are many, many  
mountains. They gave him roti in the morning. The  
daughter gives him her chappal. She calls him bhai  
and asks him to bless her. He thanks her and tells her  
she needs no blessings.

**Thursday, September 28**

There is no solace in Sindh. Undead bones of  
priests and poets cry out from beneath the ochre earth  
of Chaukundi. He leaves knowing that the dead sleep  
uneasily. The company of ancestral echoes does not  
make eternity any easier to bear in this necropolis.  
On Makli Hill in Thatta, he turns his face to the wind  
and smells spring. The sea is a dying siren; its voice  
holds no allure. The midnight moon only exposes its  
putrid façade. The cry of the last Blind Dolphin is a  
death-rattle and he will not hear the deep sorrow of  
its loss any more. He lies down beside the river, this  
dream-snake coursing through our land like sinuous  
silk. The gentle cadence of its whispering tides tells  
him to rest. But then he remembers Harrapa and he  
knows the river is a liar. It may not be as temperamen-  
tal as the Tigris but neither is it as faithful as the Nile.  
Sindhu, the river-- one you call, the Indus. He is tired.  
He longs for no dreams. The river weeps. In the vil-  
lage, a woman's screams rend the night. Her lover has  
returned from the war in Kargil. They leave the bod-  
ies at the doors of their homes in the dead of night.  
Her husband will be buried at dawn and this land is  
not kind to widows. The voice of Punjab is a distant,  
slatternly song. He will let his feet sink in her muddy  
bosom, a queen-whore embracing her every conquer-  
or and poisoning them in their sleep.

Equinox - Between Friday, September 29 and  
Saturday, September 30

...barefoot upon

asphalt avenues, beneath the midnight moon;

awaiting the next Great Road to be laid

along the dusty cattle-tracks of Punjab. Behold!

Our...

**Sunday, September 31**

He jolts awake. The bus takes another cataclysmic  
lurch and hurtles to a halt outside a raucous bus  
depot on the outskirts of Lahore. A man, his face all  
leery smiles, asks him where he would care to spend  
the night. A little girl, her left hand cup-shaped and  
pleading, is singing in a voice both piping and weep-  
ing. Bahaar, she sings, bahaar ai. He watches maggots  
swarm across the scabrous stump of her right arm. In  
the phone booth next to his, a woman is saying "and  
I said something that sounded ridiculously like love  
and oh god I was so afraid of her laughing up in my  
face." He calls his sister and cannot say anything when  
she says "Hello?" She says "Bhai..?" and he hangs up.  
Heera Mandi sprawls languidly beneath his window.  
He watches a whore give roti to a young man with  
matted hair and wild eyes. An older walrus-man,  
with lassi clinging to his moustache, pulls her away.  
The wild-eyed man watches and does nothing. A door  
bangs shut. He falls on his knees by the fetid gutters;  
weeps.

A muezzin calls the faithful to sunrise prayers.

**Monday, September 32**

I'm not sure about you in this din of galax-  
ies crashing about our feet. In your uneasy sleep you  
speak of a Sarhad where empty skyscrapers smolder  
beneath a baleful sun.

So compelled, I walk the silent streets of Islama-  
bad,

until dawn, until it is too late to return home,  
amidst other transient ghosts who do not  
speak my tongue. We walk barefoot upon  
asphalt avenues, beneath the midnight moon;  
awaiting the next Great Road to be laid  
along the dusty cattle-tracks of Punjab.

Behold! Our shadows are caught and stretched  
between forgotten lakes in Balochistan;  
splintered to unfathomed shapes

by the exploding wings of migratory birds in  
Sindh.

Strangers— strangers passing through each  
dawn of these lands.

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raphy, late night television and Trent Reznor. She can  
usually be found lurking at <http://elmara.deviantart.com>*



Above: 'DeVinci's Shadow' by Ernest Williamson III

## 9 THE HISTORY OF MUSIC

With unrehearsed bravado you rise  
and play a difficult concerto  
that makes your cheap new violin  
resound like a Stradivarius.

You aren't even on the program,  
but the audience adores you,  
some women fainting with joy,  
men tearing up and shouting.

As you finish in a shudder  
of sixteenth notes the rafters  
rise and the night sky tumbles in,  
a glory of stars to crown you.

We surge around you laughing  
with the wonder of such prodigy.  
A week later in this same hall,  
scheduled to play a little Schubert,

you'll falter and trip over notes  
the average child could master  
with three days' practice. The crowd,  
two by two, will slip outside

and toss away their programs. For now,  
you're Orpheus strumming his lute  
and taming the cruelest animals.  
Next week these same animals

will devour you, licking the foam  
from their lips. Enjoy the miracle  
while its afterglow lasts. The stars  
tangled in your hair will extinguish

within the hour, and the hands  
that tickled that violin to life  
will feel inert as meatloaf.  
Next week after your failure

no one can console you enough;  
but when you exit, cloud-cover  
will have absorbed the mess you made,  
buffering the crudest discords.

--William Doreski

**Little Boy Blue**  
33.5 x 47 inches  
Acrylics on metal sheet

*'Little Boy Blue' by Ahsan Masood*

## 10 THE IMPERFECTION OF STYLE

by Omri J. Luzon

*On the elusive search for 'perfection' in craft.*

When you sit down to read a piece written by Baudelaire you do not expect Dickinson sentimentality, nor a Shakespearean wit or Poe's possessiveness with phonetical eeriness - you do expect a Baudelaire experience. But what is a Baudelaire experience? What makes Baudelaire a Baudelaire in comparison with Poe - is it the tonality, details, sentiment, vocabulary, sentence-construct or themes? Might it be the concepts, a certain point-of-view, an angle? Can you create your own style, by analytical and critical thinking, by learning the hypothetical curve and scale of these degrees, or by comparing different styles and reaching a sort of virgin-territory, one which is uniquely yours? What do you create in your style if not a human being, the most imperfect creature of them all, and can we, by describing the imperfect, reach perfection?

The chase for Perfection in the creative and artistic world became an obsessive occupation, a mindset which was designed to bedim the unexplainable indulgence in what we feel as complete creation in itself. We all strive for perfection, but what is that nitpick-fixation that the writer is so eager to achieve? And maybe more important - is it really what an artist wishes to maintain, is Perfection so profound that it justifies the hunt?

### On Perfection

In Rhetoric, Aristotle defined "style" as a manner of gaining and heightening effects. According to him the four main conditions of style included: Distinctions in types of style; the social necessity of lucidity and appropriateness in prose; purity in the use of language and the methods of heightening the effects of simple diction. Aristotle probably wouldn't like much of today's fragmented poetry, not to mention the more daring abstract approach, but he did create a basic platform for the art of deviation, the spirit of uprising, the source of evolvment. By defining the basics, Aristotle left an inflexible notion of what communication through writing meant (and of communication in general).

Most artists attempt to reach and touch Perfection within their art, but one has to ask just what that ever elusive Perfection is and just what is so appealing about it. When we put on our "efficiency glasses", Perfection seems to be the simplest possible form of communicating an idea. The Perfect Form of a thing is flawless, faultless, impenetrable purity. Perfect is

that which cannot be misinterpreted, because it has a clear and sound meaning that leaves no room for error. Imagine a blank page - by all communicative perspectives the message is clear - there is nothing written. The reasoning behind why it is not written, that no-message, might differ, but the bottom line is that there is no textual message, nothing that we as readers, can rationally point at without more information as to the "why".

A Perfect Communication is the clearest way of passing on an idea, therefore the conception of that idea is irrelevant. Let's say that I would like to communicate the idea that 'I bought a new pair of pants today'. The clearest way to do so is to simply state - "I bought a pair of pants today". That is an example for a flawed communication, since in no way was the idea of 'new pants' made clear. The misconception was created because it is assumed that the reader can fill the blanks, in a sort of grand understanding of things, that if not otherwise stated - the pants are new. Practicality, it might seem as an efficient enough communication, but it does leave a room for doubt, therefore it is not Perfection. A Perfected Communication would not leave room for misinterpretations, for instance: "I bought a new pair of pants today".

For Perfection, one should look for the shortest possible sentence, since if there is a more succinct way of expressing the exact same idea all other variations are flawed by default. Let's take an idea in attempt of communication - 'The protagonist's dog is set free of the leash in the evenings', now compare - 1. 'I take the leash off my dog and let him run wild every evening', with - 2. 'I let my dog run free in the evenings'. The first sentence is imperfect by introducing new ideas such as that the dog runs wild every time he is set free. The writer deviates from the attention of the main thought; the Perfect idea is now blurred by the aura of possibility. If the main idea was to communicate that the dog runs wild when he is set free, a better way of writing it would be - 'When my dog is set free he runs wild'. If the main idea was that 'Every evening, when I set my dog free, he runs wild', then the first sentence would be more fitting. But only the shortest, clearest and cleanest sentence can direct the reader to the Perfection of communicating an idea, but is that the goal of the writer - to simplify an idea to its barest form, and make it as simple to state as possible?

### Breaking Moral Codes

When dealing with prose, the function of the writer is to assume the mask of storytelling - that of



**Wound**  
20 x 30 inches  
Photographic Print

*'Wound' by Ahsan Masood*

the author. The story, much like real life, is not as motionless as a brick wall, for it evolves, changes and becomes real in the mind of the reader. There is a need to penetrate the brick-wall of passiveness and animate the world of the story. As emotional beings, we are easy to manipulate, since we all look for the fantastic in a story. Therefore, it seems that a Perfect Story is one that would make the reader deviate from the known into participation in the fantastic-world conception, which might or might not be part of our notion of reality. The job of the writer is doing just that, while maintaining the consistency and solidity, without breaking the illusion of reality, or harming the authenticity of the story. In this context, authenticity has nothing to do with the Perfect Truth, and has everything to do with reliability and credibility.

Facts, as much as that Perfect way of communicating an idea, are suddenly moved to the background, and are shifted according to their effect on the reader and not their efficient functionality. It would be a horrible thing to twist a fact in real life, to say that a person can grow wings and fly might cause one's hospitalization. But in the Fictional world fact-twisting is more than welcomed, it is expected. The moral code we are familiar with, and so eager to maintain in our law & ordered society, is not the same moral code we expect to maintain when we sit down to read a book.

In order to turn a reader into a participant, the writer must transcend the Perfection of unbiased moral ground, and use the tools in his arsenal that initiate feelings. Unlike ideas, feelings are the most personal and flexible concepts in the emotional-lexicon. The idea of 'Letting the dog run every evening', can be shifted by the addition of the word Wild, but, as we said before, that would be a whole a new idea. Similarly, if we want to evoke Sadness in the reader, we can write that the dog died, got lost, or kidnapped. Each of these ideas might cause the reader Sadness, along with new ideas induced in the reader's mind – if the dog is lost there might be a hope for reunion, or resignation at the thought that it might be better this way for some reason. Each of these reader's ideas is different and individual, but the feeling, assuming it was well executed, should still be that of Sadness. In situations such as these, the writer might break a moral code in order to allow the reader, even if briefly, the chance of deciding what is best for the characters. But without the moral questioning, the instability of dubious role-playing, the participation wouldn't be possible, the read will lose its fun. The morals society agrees on are questionable at best when it comes to the story-world, and it is the job of the writer to question the perfected for the sake of keeping the inner moral-ground of a

story.

The problem with Perfection is that it does not leave much room for other possible versions or any at all. If something can be told in different ways that are seemingly Perfect – only one can actually be so. Perfection can have no substitutes. Therefore, in a perfect world everything would be the same, there would be no individuality, otherwise communication might end in different reactions, leading to a never ending butterfly-effect that would shatter Perfection into unpredictability, destabilizing it by introducing deviations. A good writer will welcome the deviations beforehand as the nuances that shape of individuality, as the Imperfection that is the author.

### **The Imperfection of Design**

Taking Perfect communication ideas and rendering them imperfect, by changing, adding or subtracting, complicating, modifying, or filling with descriptions and alterations, can induce the effect of different feelings and ideas in the mind of the reader. An experienced writer will know what feelings and thoughts the imperfections he applies to the text might invoke. He will know that by killing the dog with a falling piano the reader will understand the joke or the effect of the thought on the randomness of life if it was a passing truck that killed it. The writer will know the need of executing these deviations skillfully, to manipulate the reader's heart and mind into believing, through an author's own unique voice, the author which the writer wishes to manifest by the cumulative of the deviations: The entirety of the Imperfection in a story should amount to one solidified voice, in order to nullify confusion and disorientation, which might lead to the loss of interest or even disassociation.

Finding the right deviations, the writer's way of diverging from the Perfect, is the harsh road to creating a story. The importance is not on what the facts mean, but how telling them affects the reader so that the idea is communicated in the way the writer sees fit. The Imperfection is what gives a piece interest, flavor, taste and smell, it is what makes a dull fact fascinating; it is what gives man wings. By keeping everything so perfect one would lose sight of how uninteresting a perfected world is. Every deviation from the Perfect Form results in an Imperfect Form. Those imperfections create versions, these versions allow individualism. If versions are different approaches to the same idea, individualism is having a consistent way of writing versions to different ideas. Individualism doesn't necessarily mean that there is no evolvment, it means that even during evolvment, that unique way of writing versions is still there. A writer doesn't have to uphold just one 'individualism'; s/he can shift and play

13 with styles and versions. But without maintaining at least one consistent 'individualism', the entire persona of the writer might dissolve in a sea of inconsistency.

The importance of searching for the Imperfection is a part of creating an entire mindset, and when spread across a collection of creations leads to the creation of a writer. Having a collection of self-contained versions is much like finding your own personal voice, then presenting it in all its glory. The more bizarre and deviant the imperfections are – the more personal it gets, assuming there's consistency and solidity. When a writer is in that mindset of searching for his own Imperfect Voice, Perfection seems to bow down to that which is an author.

The writer and author, therefore, are those who stand behind Imperfection.

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*Editor's Note: If you would like to respond to this piece, please send in your comments to [feedback@themissingsslate.com](mailto:feedback@themissingsslate.com). We will publish them at our discretion in the following issue.*

## YOUR SLATE

**We asked our fans on Facebook to pick their poison when firing up their creative juices. What works and how?**

"For writing, I use my pen and traveling journal and then the keyboard. For photography, the first thing I do is observe, trying to discern the unusual in normal situation and then capture the perfect frame."  
- Muhammad Danial Shah

"I don't use my camera for my photographs; I just use the artist within me."  
- Aliraza Khatri

"I haven't written on paper in ages. I use my trusty (Sony) Vaio. I like having synonyms and meanings of words which are perpetually zooming in my head instantly available to me. Also, I hate using Microsoft Word. It's dull, it doesn't make me excited about writing. I use my uber pimped out blog instead."  
- Anam Rafiq

"Pencil and parchment were my first and always cherished means to let the imagination and words surprise me - with music being a trusted accomplice. Sadly the tussle with time has replaced the pen with the keyboard."  
- Sadaf W Khan

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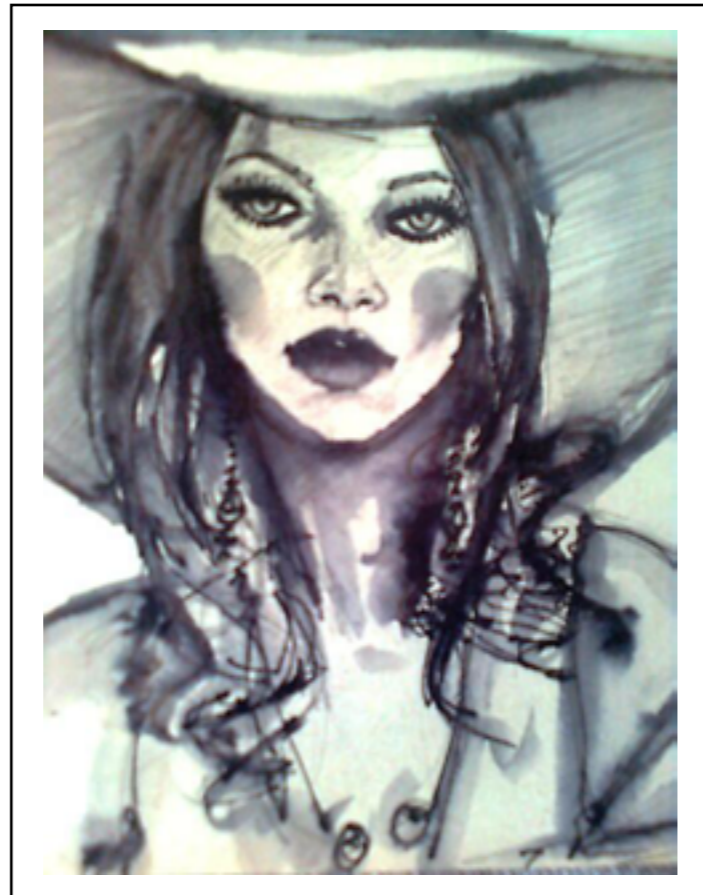
## 15 SPOTLIGHT: ARTIST AMMAD TAHIR



Photograph courtesy of Essa Malik Taimur

Painter and artist extraordinaire Ammad Tahir sits down with TMS Creative Director Moeed Tariq, to discuss what fuels him as an artist.

Ammad Tahir is an artist and teacher of Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. His solo exhibition *Leave Me to Burn* was shown at Goethe-Institut Gallery which included paintings, drawings and a video projection. His work has also been showcased along with several artists as part of a group show *Bits and Pieces* at KSA Gallery, "Dear Diary" at Poppy Seed Gallery and Faculty Art 5 at IVS Gallery, covering topics such as the increasing prevalence of terrorism and personal narratives. He has won Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Drawing Portfolio Award, VM Art Scholarship and Award of Excellence by Pakistan Women's Foundation.



Right: Kate Moss, a portrait.

**Have you always known you wanted to be a painter?**

Initially, I wanted to be an environmentalist and work for WWF (World Wildlife Foundation) but after my O Levels I realized that I wanted to work in design, particularly fashion. So for my A- Levels I chose art and design against my parents' wishes and from that point onwards, there was no turning back.

**Why choose Indus?**

I wanted to go to NCA because they have the best Fine Art Department. (But) I ended up going to IVS since I missed out on NCA's admission test. In the long run, this actually worked well for me because I wouldn't have been able to explore the kind of themes and ideas (that I was able to at IVS), in the more traditional NCA environment.

**How has your family been about your decision to pursue art?**

My family was taken aback with my decision. But my mother was supportive because she had always seen my creative side. I remember her telling me that I could do whatever I wanted as long as I could be financially stable. So I got a scholarship to study at Indus and worked really hard for the first two years.

**Where do you draw your inspiration from?**

I think 'inspirations' are old fashioned. Contemporary art is more issue-based and my work is all about sexuality and gender politics. So my muse is often lurking in newspapers or on news channels.

I keep track of developments in women's rights and sexual minorities, like the transgender community. I was quite pleased when the eunuchs won a cricket match in Karachi which was played against straight men in 2009.

**Are there any painters in particular that you greatly admire?**

I love the works of Jenny Saville, Lucian Freud and Kiki Smith. Out of the Pakistani artists I really enjoy Naiza Khan's drawings, Faiza Butt's pointillism and Asim Butt's paintings.

**What do you have to say about the local art scene in Pakistan?**

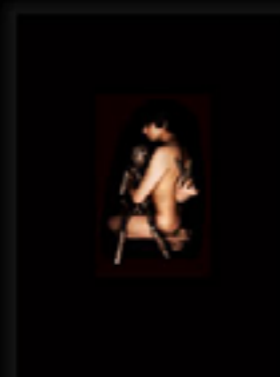
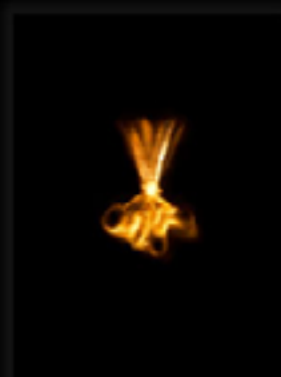
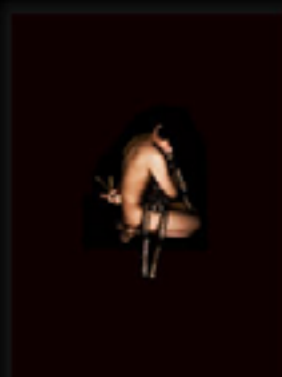
I think the local art scene is developing at a very fast pace with galleries opening up every now and then. Also it is interesting to see museums make the effort to showcase contemporary art like Mohatta Palace's recent show called *The Rising Tide*. Even the National Art Gallery is doing great in terms of featuring young and famous artists, alike.

**How would you describe your work in your own words?**

I have a parallel body of work; one which comprises the cityscapes representing Karachi's urbanized, chaotic life, and the other which is a reflection of me as a person and those who are like me. It is interesting to see the two come together because then it becomes this strange hybrid creature in a fantastical space.

Below: *Creature from a different world II*.



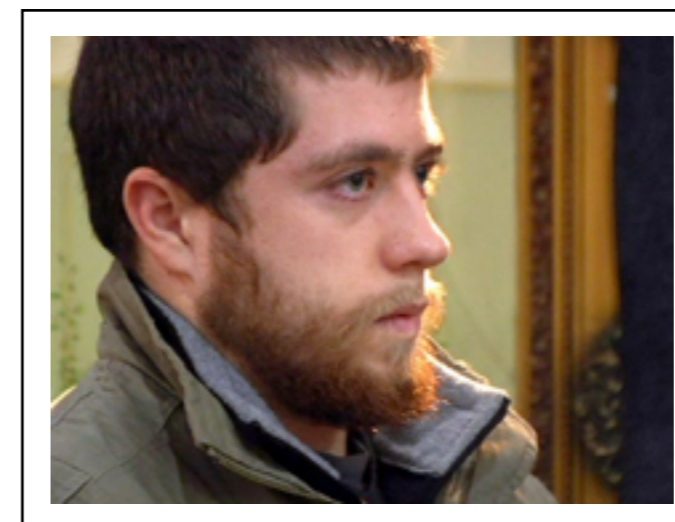


I love you so i cut you II  
(Triptych)  
30 x 40 Inches  
Photographic Print

## SPOTLIGHT: FILMMAKER JUSTIN MASHOUF

by Madeeha Ansari

*Artist. Dancer. Documentarian. Visionary.*



When I heard that an Irani-American documentary-maker was giving break-dance lessons at Kuch Khaas in Islamabad, my mind tried hard to draw the neat boundaries of a category around him. He would be confused, I thought. A second generation not-quite-Muslim, who was here to demonstrate a rudimentary kind of empathy with people he could never really understand.

Instead, Justin Mashouf turned out to be cheerfully, refreshingly defiant of stereotypes and easy categorization. We all struggle with questions of identity and he is no exception, but the difference is that it seems he has come to accept all aspects of himself: Irani, American and really quite Muslim. It is enough for him to be able to fit quite comfortably into an environment that must have been quite alien to him.

“The hugging rituals here are very awkward for me,” he smiled after bidding a b-boying student goodbye. “I never know if it’s the right hand going forward.”

When I met him, Justin had been in Pakistan for three weeks, making a short documentary about the SABAH home for orphan girls in Rawalpindi. It was a very different venture from his previous film, “Warring Factions”, which was a documentary about Iran, America, Justin and b-boying. Trying to piece together a sensible picture of this individual, I thought it would be wise to ask him a little bit about himself.

“I was born in the US and only visited Iran twice. The first time was in 2006 with my dad and the second was in 2007. However, I grew up a lot around Iranian culture because of family. Iran was familiar and like a home, just one I’d never been to before.

“In Iran, there’s a big scene of people into b-

boying. I had been in touch with an Iranian break-dancer in late 2006. It was one of those guided fateful accounts. I was on the internet on a Korean website and found a clip called ‘B-boy Hussain battle in Iran.’”

That was the inspiration for “Warring Factions”, his first major freelance venture. On his way back, Justin was detained by US Homeland Security, who confiscated the video footage. After a lengthy process of retrieval, the film was made and released online. To date it has had over 10,000 downloads, from “very strange places, including Russia and China”.

“My next film is about Muslim Americans in the prison system. This is an independent project... I’m still looking for funding. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the USA. It spreads very quickly in the prison system, particularly in the African American community. A lot of people do a lot of research and reading in prison... and Islam becomes a way to unite people, giving them spiritual grounding. For a lot of them who have lived a life of crime, it becomes a way to turn their lives around. In a way it’s like a very good 12-step programme.”

Seeing my polite smile, he laughed and clarified.

“The twelve steps to recovery from drug addiction.”

Post-modern comparison between religion and rehab; I was beginning to like him more and more.

Incidentally, this was the day Kuch Khaas was hosting a charity concert by the socialist band Laal, who set revolutionary verses of Urdu poetry to rock music. It was clear that the theme for the evening was going to be an interesting fusion of East and West. As Laal covered “Another One Bites the Dust” outside, the conversation turned to Pakistan.

“The disparities inside Pakistan are the most noticeable landmarks,” he observed. “Disparities between the poor and the rich, between the educated and the non-educated; It’s very sad to see the multiple extremes, because extremism breeds where there is disparity.”

“(Balance is important), whether it’s for the Taliban or the youth who are partying too hard. (In that sense) gatherings like this are crucial. It’s really important to have an environment for dialogue where people can come and express themselves – like this band here. I really dig anything that’s fusing cultures – Irani, American, East, West. People need to be comfortable with what they are. Allah made us all of different col-

19 ours and tribes. We're not all cast in the same mould so we have the space to explore ourselves, see where we fall."

Finally, we started talking about his work in Pakistan and his voice conveyed the excitement of sharing things that have been newly learnt. This was a project for LA-based producer Tariq Jalil, who was intrigued by the idea of a model orphanage in Pakistan in the form of the SABAH home.

"The orphanage is incredible in its uniqueness. From the pictures I've seen of other orphanages, none can compare. It's an almost upper-class upbringing, very clean. The girls go to a private school and have private tutors coming in. The pictures of the others are really terrible.

"A lot of people in the West will be comforted that places like this exist. It's not like a madrassa – the kids are taught tolerance and peace right from the beginning. There are pictures of the Kaaba and Masjid-e-Nabvi, and right next to them there are pictures of a Hindu temple, a synagogue and a Japanese Shinto temple.

"The founder, Mr. Aslam, is a very unique person. He came back after living in the US and has been running this orphanage for the last three years. He's seventy four and is doing a great job for these 27 girls...It's because it's small that they can offer so much, but they can do it for 60. It's a wonderful vision and a model for other institutions."

Seeing how comfortable he seemed with his environment, I asked if he wanted to visit again.

"If I'm ever able to leave! Yeah, I hope to come back. I want to see more places, I want to see Lahore. Because of the security situation I've been discouraged from travelling too much this time around.

"I hope things get better here. But I think there's hope in people who are listening to others and the people in between, the moderates. I think the hope is in the young people."

As we bid goodbye, I found myself thinking he was right. If there is hope for the defeat of stereotypes, then it is certainly in young people – not unlike him.

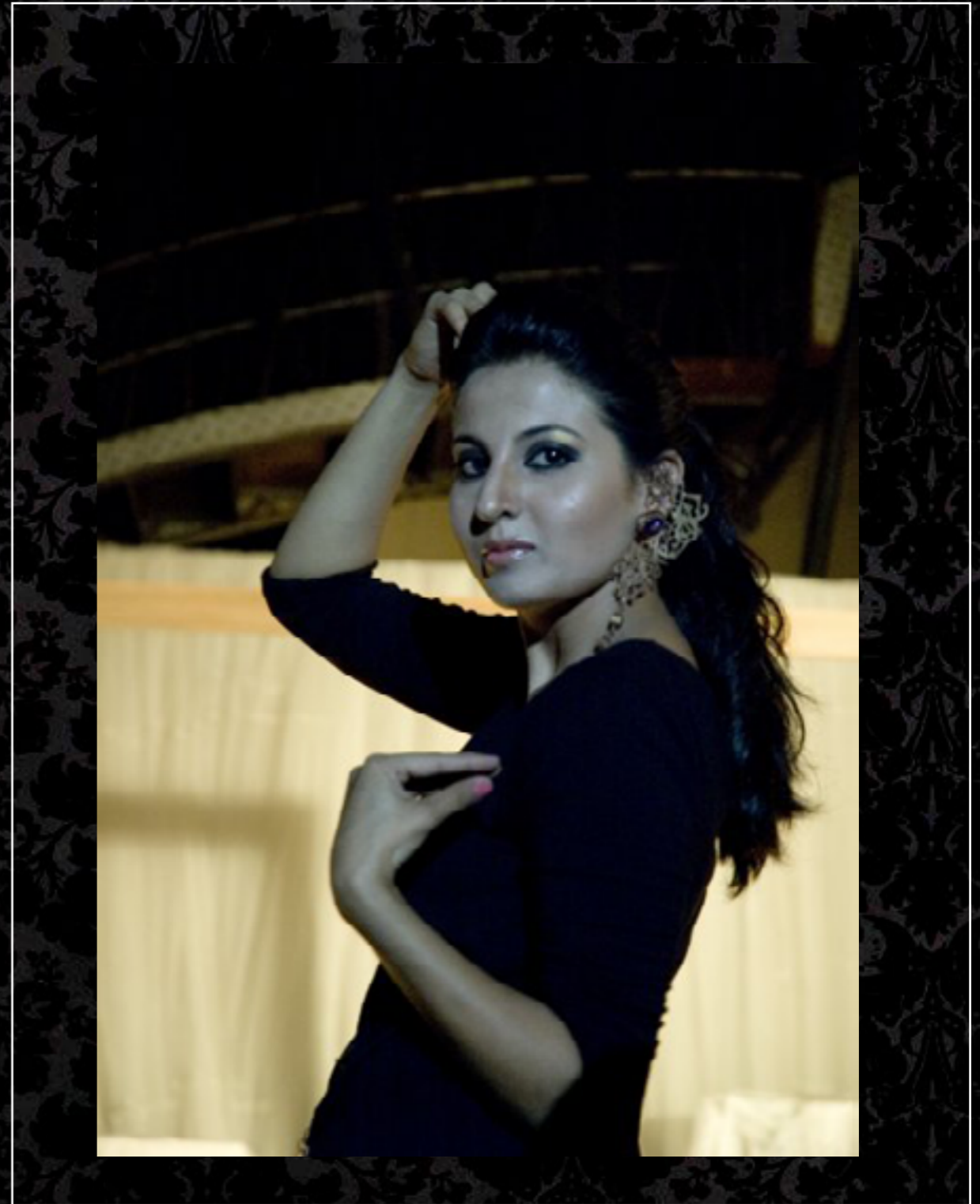


Above & Below: Photograph credit by Omid Mashouf



## SPOTLIGHT: JEWELRY DESIGNER ZIL-E-BATOOL

20



*Zil-e-Batool, in this one-on-one session with Creative Director Moeed Tariq, discusses where the ideas for her exquisite jewelry designs come from. She is a versatile Lahori jewelry designer, currently studying Jewelry Design from Beaconhouse National University. She is also a part of the faculty imparting training to students in Jewelry Design and Manufacturing. She has participated in several workshops and seminars including Gems & Jewelry Sector Of Pakistan For The Future that was held in Lahore Chamber of Commerce in April 2009. She curated BNU's 1st Jewel CAD exhibition in December 2008.*

*Photographs courtesy of Zil-e-Batool*





**Have you always wanted to be a jewelry designer? Why?**

Well, not exactly, I used to design but when I was in my level 8th I had to choose Science as my Major. So, I did my graduation in Mathematics and Computers but after that I totally went off-course because of the career issue, which is why I chose to do my second Bachelor degree in Jewelry Designing from Beaconhouse National University.

**Where do you draw your inspiration from?**

I want to revive the traditional art movements by channeling them as a new, contemporary (artistic) expression. Subjects could be present day issues or any formal expression, but from my perspective. Material and form create no limitations — I want to work in every possible material for jewelry. Today, in this new millennium, with greater freedom of expression, anyone can present his or her perspective.

**What are your favorite materials to work with and why?**

I love working in sterling silver and copper. Gold, too, but it is expensive and out of reach for many but its importance cannot be denied. Others materials like wood, feathers, junk materials, Plexiglas, plastic and aluminum, among others.

**How would you define your target demographic?**

I want to make expressive jewelry pieces that will speak to anyone in the general public. My mission is to spread my 'words' to every person. My medium could be anything but my expression is universal.

**What sets your design and design philosophy apart from other designers out there?**

My designs are a fusion of both traditional and contemporary expression. That's how I would like to work in my upcoming collections. Many designers are doing the same work but mine is quite different. Of course, 'the artist is not a different kind of person, but every person is a different kind of artist' (Eric Gillman).

**What are your plans for the future and where would you like to see yourself a few years from now?**

By the Grace of Allah, after my graduation I will launch my brand. I'm planning a few exhibitions and fashion shows and definitely want to work in the market as a known jewelry designer.

**Are there any brands or designers that you are particularly fond of?**

There are many international brands which I am really interested in working with: Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels and Bvlgari.



*Zil-e-Batool drew inspiration for this bracelet from the Colosseum in Rome.*

## 23 WATN: WHERE ARE THEY NOW? SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

by Areej Siddiqui

*A forgotten but important issue—out of the limelight.*

Sexual harassment at the workplace holds little credibility as a socio-political phenomenon in Pakistan and even less as a criminal offence. Only recently has a legislative framework been put in place to address cases of sexual harassment specifically and this movement too has been spearheaded not by government, but by AASHA (Alliance Against Sexual Harassment), a group of NGOs organized around eliminating harassment, especially against women, from Pakistani society.

Sexual harassment at the workplace is not unrelated to sexual harassment at other venues, in malls, *melas*, or on the street in general. The right to appear in public spaces as an independent citizen of the state is routinely compromised by eve teasers. Workplace harassment however is complicated by professional relationships and, quite simply, money. Women earning money i.e. enough to live independently, is considered a social dilemma. Fears of “vulgarity” and “promiscuity” spring up and the irony of it all is that such fears are dealt with through unwanted *sexual* advances, through *sexual* propositions, through *sexual* harassment, underscoring the very female sexuality that most quickens prohibitory impulses.

It is estimated that at least 70% of the women in Pakistan's present workforce have faced some form of sexual harassment at the workplace. This includes women at “progressive” or “modern” offices, and women in fields, factories, domestic spaces and other labour-intensive jobs. There are, however, class differences at play. Sexual harassment in the upper classes seems to stem from a conflation of the ideas “modern working woman” and “sexually liberated woman” and of course, what sexually liberated woman would not want to sleep with that smouldering (sic) hunk of a guy that constantly propositions her? Harassment in lower classes stems mostly from a desire for control and subjugation of women, making their sexuality available to their employers regardless of marital status.

Sexual harassment is, however, not a women-specific issue; children in the work force and perceivably queer individuals also face harassment and exploitation. To a lesser extent, men in subordinate positions also face harassment. If you are in a man-

agement position at an organization, implement the code of conduct found here: <http://www.aasha.org.pk/CompInstructions.php>. If you or someone you know is being harassed at work, contact your organization's Inquiry Committee or the local Ombudsman (as appointed by government). To have to compromise one's integrity through harassment in any form is unacceptable. To interfere with one's right to earn a living in a crushingly capitalistic economic system makes it doubly so.



Above: 'The French of France' by Ernest Williamson  
Right: 'When It Is Awakened' by Soraya Darwish

'When It Is Awakened' by Soraya Darwish

## 25 DARING TO WHISPER

by Sarah Abidi

*Voices, unheard*

Downstairs with the teacup in one hand, toting my handbag in the other, I get into the car with my father to ride to another work day. After two turns of the ignition, the CNG pumps and the engine roars. Both of us are too sleepy to strike up a conversation, dreading the workloads on our respective desks for the day. But we barely reach the main road when a public service message on FM 106.2, on raising awareness about child sexual abuse (CSA) and how to protect your child against it, shatters our mundane routine.

My first thought is, what would the maulvis have to say about this? Would there be riots, protests that a hush-hush topic was so blatantly being tossed about in the mass media? Before I can make a prediction however, I am shocked by my father's reaction. Eyes glued to the road he discreetly turns the volume down, as is his habit whenever something objectionable comes up on TV. This time however, I defiantly turn it up again, ignoring his speechless aura of disapproval. The heavy silence is admonished by a crackling voice: "Hiding the problem is not a solution."

Such is the Herculean challenge faced by Aahung in its fight against this blistering psychosocial plague on our society. Well-meaning citizens with their tabooed secrecy become accomplices to a heinous crime. Our tut-tutting silences, holier-than-thou attitudes breed the most terrible children's rights violations – violations that abound because we stifle the faint half-voices that dare to whisper them.

Still brooding, I relate the NGO's public service message to my co-workers at lunch. Hira<sup>2</sup> tells me about her experiences while researching her thesis on 'Pedophilia and the Media'. She relates some traumatizing stories; disturbing facts come to light.

Child sexual abuse, contrary to what I previously believed, happens in all social classes. The abusive perpetrator is usually someone the child initially feels safe with, and won't talk to her parents about. Extended family members are not above the vulgarity. They are the abusers in an overwhelming number of cases, while domestic servants have a smaller part than one would expect. The abused child is confused about his sexuality, does not know how to talk to his parents or whether to even speak of the cruel deed, and is shamed into silence. Few cases come to light, and even fewer are reported.

Gruesome cases sometimes make it to the head-

lines, so long as they're sensational enough for mass media. In Karachi in mid-2009, 3-year-old Sana was viciously raped and killed, her body left to rot in a manhole – by policemen, the so-called "protectors" of our security. The savages were tried in an Anti-Terror Court, borne there by civil societal anger and media pressure. However, pedophilia is rampant in our society because most victims are silenced. Once the abuse starts, a victim is told that he or she is to blame— that it is their fault because they like bad things – they are filthy and evil and deserve such cruelty. This constant assault makes innocent children more vulnerable to further instances of abuse, leeching onto their sensibilities and making them yield to their abuser. Worst of all, such a child feels like there is no one to turn to, especially not parents, and must quietly bear what comes his way. Consequently, a sexually abused child grows up with the psychological scars—infused with a baseless guilt and a growing sense of "filthiness" – lying dormant and internalized throughout childhood and spilling into adulthood.

'I started talking, but my mother couldn't believe a word I said. In the end she just cut me short, saying ok beta, don't go to your uncle next time then. Chacha doesn't do wrong things like that: take these foolish ideas out of your mind,' — *Counseling for Child Sexual Abuse, a documentary by Sahil.*

Sahil, an NGO working in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and the Northern Areas, has done some laudable work with sexually abused children. They take legal action against the pedophiles brought to their attention, filing FIRs and having the perpetrators jailed. The NGO conducts a Juvenile Rehabilitation Program in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi, offering counseling, medicines, education and recreation to adolescent inmates and generally helping them stay out of harm's way. At the same time, Sahil strives constantly to bring the issue to the public eye but raising awareness isn't easy. Occasionally a sympathetic journalist might make room for a critical piece on the issue, but such cases are few and far between. Sahil fights a difficult battle in its effort to get the issue out there through radio and talk shows.

Another NGO working extensively on the issue is Rozan. Their children's program, Aangan, keeps devising interesting new ways of interacting with its young audience. One such endeavour is Tinku and Tina, an informative, engaging cartoon clip that should be considered a must-watch for the adults in their lives too.



Pretty Toy  
20 x 30 inches  
Photographic Print

'Pretty Toy' by Ahsan Masood

NGO Aahung is the brains behind the radio campaign. Through a multi-pronged approach, Aahung's "Hamara Kal" (Our Future) program strives to build awareness and ground capacity of 3 sister NGOs, 450 schools, over 150 health practitioners, and politicians and policy makers in key positions. Branching out in this way, they shall directly reach upto 150,000 young people in Karachi, Multan and Matiari districts and indirectly affect 1 million young lives.

On 19th April 2009, Aahung in collaboration with child abuse NGO Konpal celebrated Universal Children's Day with the launch of a month-long radio campaign. The messages, saying "NO!" to child sexual abuse, were distributed to multiple radio channels for nationwide coverage. The campaign was accompanied by a helpline, answered by a trained psychologist to help concerned parents with information, basic counseling and referrals. For continued media campaigns, Aahung has partnered with Rozan which already has an established helpline at 0800-22444, operational 7 days a week from 10 am to 8 pm. The proactive initiative has become the stuff of drawing room conversations and encouragingly, people are now talking about protecting their children from sexual abuse. With this unparalleled collaboration, Aahung, Konpal and Rozan have given the issue sufficient airtime to get the ball rolling.

This approach is commendable for its simple brilliance. Nervous little voices are now being given a patient ear. With the voices rising and gaining pitch, we can no longer remain silent about this plague on our society, whose warts and tumors we are beginning to see. One must answer the awkward radio spots, must justify or explain them, must wave a dismissive hand at them - but blissful ignorance can no longer wish reality away.

#### Endnotes

i. Naveen Naqvi, *The Silent Ones*. 29th Sep 2009.

<http://naveenaqvi.com/2009/09/29/the-silent-ones/>

ii. Pseudonyms have been substituted where appropriate.

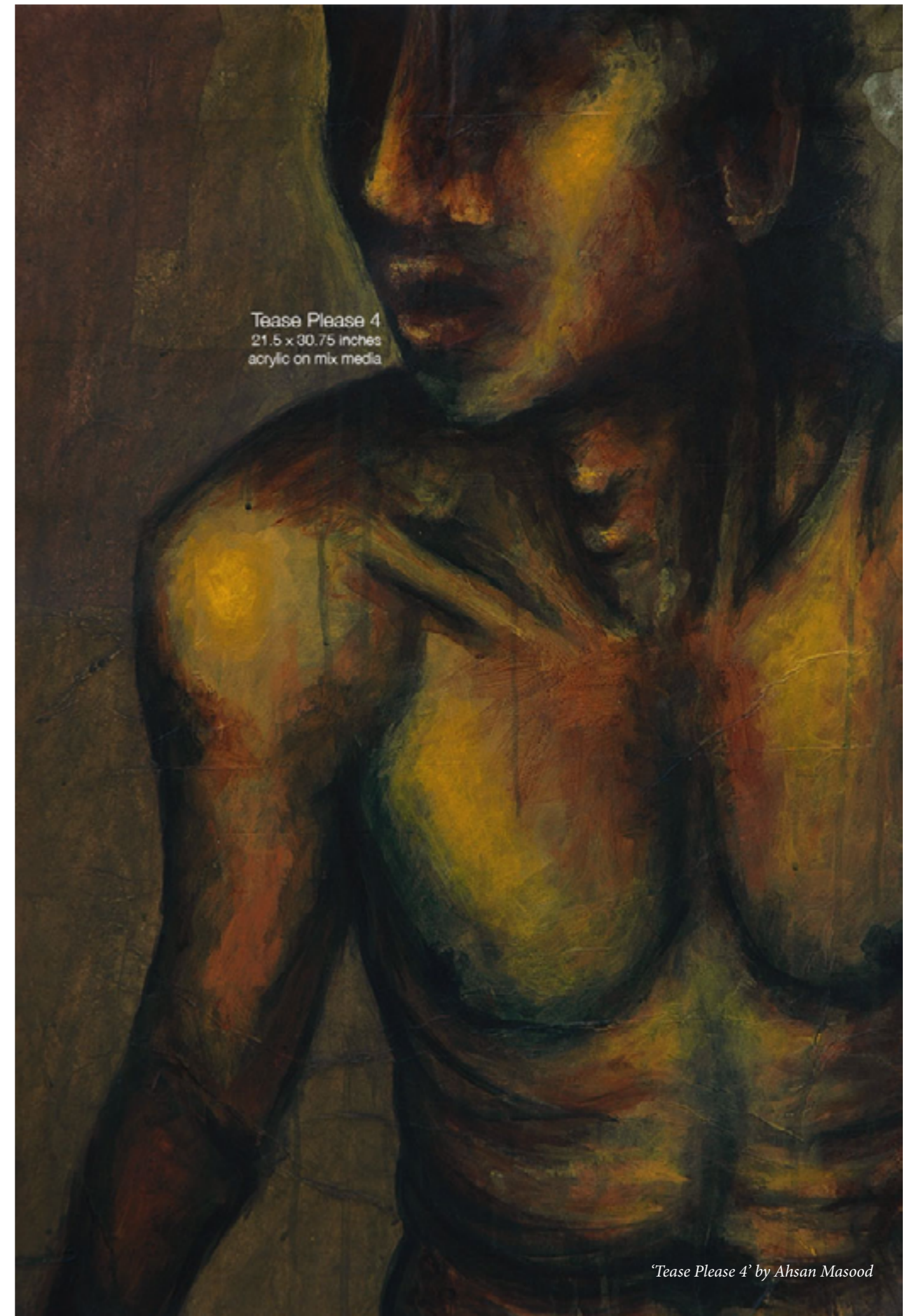
*Editor's Note: If you would like to respond to this piece, please send in your comments to [feedback@themissingsslate.com](mailto:feedback@themissingsslate.com). We will publish them at our discretion in the following issue.*

“ I was gullible. They must have picked up on that. [...]

He said, “We all know about you. We talk about you in the servants' quarters. You're the bad boy. You're the one who likes bad things...”

I never told anyone. What would I have said? It was too shameful and I was too scared.

“*The Silent Ones*”,  
Naveen Naqvi<sup>1</sup>”



Tease Please 4  
21.5 x 30.75 inches  
acrylic on mix media

*'Tease Please 4' by Ahsan Masood*

## 29 ASKING THE QUEER QUESTION

by Maria Amir

*Note: All names have been changed to protect identities.*

*“Why is it that, as a culture, we are more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands?” – Ernest Gaines*

“There is no politically correct way to be gay in Pakistan. Your very existence is politically incorrect.” At least that is what my friend Waleed tells me, adding that he discovered he was gay when he was eight or nine; denied he was gay till he was seventeen and is now dodging his sexual orientation until he can score a work permit in the UK.

Of course, this isn't to say that being gay is easy anywhere in the world, but it proves to be especially troublesome in a country like Pakistan. Many in the Western world are now trying to move beyond gender boundaries and the 'gender is an illusion' slogan has been garnering immense support among liberals, activists as well as members of the LGBT community. But Pakistan continues to stick stubbornly to its two-gender policy, often discounting its large and vibrant hermaphrodite population in the process. Regardless of the obvious oversight, the country does have a queer population (as does every country whether or not it chooses to recognize the fact) and this particular minority has recently been voicing its frustration on the internet or at exclusive parties thrown by the elite upper crust of Pakistani high society.

There is no such thing as 'coming out of the closet' in Pakistan, as the very measure of being gay is a punishable offence under religion, law and culture. The trifle queer population that has gained 'visibility' over the past decade generally involves the 'camp' gay guy and that too, largely amid fashion circles.

“There is this widespread view that the only place where it is acceptable to be gay is in the fashion or entertainment industry. No one is really willing to accept that a cricket playing, bodybuilding butch guy could ever be gay in Pakistan.”

*'Pink Invite' by Ahsan Masood*

Pink Invite IV  
20 x 30 inches  
Acrylics on paper

That doesn't really fit in with their notion of homosexuality as being a 'disease,' says a sixteen-year-old gay student in Lahore. Lesbianism, on the other hand, remains largely constrained to all girls' institutions and co-ed dorms. "Female homosexuality is hardly ever played up because its hard enough being a woman in Pakistan without painting that sort of bulls eye on your back," said a 24-year-old model Nina, adding "I've also found that over here the so-called classifications are extremely blurred. It's not as simple as looking at the 'butch lesbian' or the 'catty fashionista'. For better or worse the appearance-based boxing of queers is rare in Pakistan because we are all closeted something's-or-other. We're all hiding something here because we have to."

Homosexuality has been a punishable offence under Pakistani law since 1860. Unlike in neighbouring India, the law has yet to be repealed and the prospects of this actually happening are dim at best. The country's government has always shown resistance against the issue of gay rights, as was the case during the 2003-2005 UN voting on homosexual human rights where Pakistan was the loudest of the five disapproving Muslim countries (the others included Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia). Article 377 of the Pakistani Penal Code makes any kind of intercourse that violates "the order of nature", a criminal offense, which can be punished by life imprisonment and given that one can simultaneously be tried under Shari'a law, it's also possible for queers to be stoned to death for engaging in sexual intercourse.

"I've completely given up on the whole 'gay rights' debate in this country. That is simply not going to happen," says Saleha, a closet bisexual lawyer from Islamabad. "Sure you can come out in your own tiny circle of friends, search for others in the queer community and party in private. But there is no telling your parents and frankly in most cases, there is no telling your wife," Bilal said, adding that he married according to his parents' wishes six years ago and eventually got divorced because he couldn't keep up the charade.

It is a well-known fact that most members of the queer community end up getting married and living the 'straight' life in public. What goes on in their private lives is still a matter of debate. With people afraid of proclaiming their sexuality (straight or gay) outside of marriage in Pakistan, the LGBT community has found that the Internet is often the only real source

*'Tease Please 2' by Ahsan Masood*

of refuge open to them. "I suppose the blogosphere can be credited for allowing me the opportunity to tell people who I really was. The Internet provides a certain brand of anonymity and of course the ability to find like-minded company always helps," says Nida, a fourth year medical student.

Perhaps what plagues the queer community more than anything else is the fact that the moment their sexual orientation is made public, it becomes their one and only identity. "I experienced it even with my closest friends. I suddenly wasn't Waleed anymore I was just 'gay'. The same guy that had beaten them at sports was all of a sudden soft. I felt like I was constantly being examined for signs that betrayed my 'type,'" Waleed said of his first few months after coming out.

Queer people have to contend with gender ste-

reotypes at their most extreme. For men it is the feminine parallel, for women it is the masculine parallel and for those in between it is the paradox of picking one of both identities when they often feel conflicted about making such a choice. This conundrum is only exacerbated by the income divide that tends to separate the queer community in Pakistan. "People talk about middle class, lower middle class and upper class casually, but when you get to the queer community it is anything but. The most vocal and vibrant queer population involves the hijras and khusras in the prostitution industry. Almost all of these people are uneducated because they have been disconnected from society since birth," says Awais, who has made several documentaries on transgendered individuals and hermaphrodites in Pakistan. "Say what you will about how tough it is being gay, but even being in the closet and living the appearance of a normal life is

better than being segregated and cut off completely. I have yet to meet a literate hijra in Pakistan and I am always aware that this is our government's fault and mine for standing by and letting it happen...never theirs," he says.

Few people are willing to accept that the personality behind the sexual preference might trump the assumed identity or degree of 'queerness'. Several studies over the past decade have shown that what makes a person queer is to a great extent innate. Of course upbringing and community cultures may act as a contributing factor, but genetics has a lot to do with it.

Also, homosexuality is not just a human phenomenon and has been demonstrated in a slew of mammals including sheep, dogs and our oversexed, primitive Darwinian relative the bonobo. This reality tends to contradict the popularly held notion that homosexuality is somehow unnatural, given that there are several examples to attest to it 'in nature'.

Former Harvard neuroscientist Simon LeVay in his research "Gay, Straight and the Reason Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation," in 1991 discovered the INAH3. This structure in the hypothalamus of the brain helps regulate sexual behaviour and tended to be smaller in gay men and women. The research was considered much more conclusive than the existence of the controversial 'gay gene' and countered the commonly held and widely spread (by anti-gay elements) belief that homosexuality was merely a 'lifestyle choice'.

"I've always laughed at that assumption... that whole lifestyle choice bit. If it were a choice I would have remembered making it and I don't. I choose what to do with it but that's not the same thing. It's not like I suddenly met a lesbian and thought to myself 'I think I want to be gay, it looks like so much fun.' It doesn't work like that," Mehreen, a LUMS student said.

“People who put forward the whole choice spiel are simply stupid. Seriously?! Being queer might actually be fun in some parts of the world but who in their right mind would ‘choose’ to be queer in Pakistan?! ”

It isn't a choice it simply is," Bilal said.

The term 'queer' was adopted by LGBT activists in recent years to define minority groups and to allow them to campaign for their rights under a collective banner. It includes lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals.

The LGBT community, for the most part, has been driven underground. In the case of the hijra or 'third gender' this minority has finally begun fighting for its right to be heard and the rest of society has had to listen only because they have the 'biological defence' conclusively on their side. Recently, the National Data Registration Authority (NADRA) announced its decision to employ hijras as data entry officers, a much needed step in the right direction. One hopes it doesn't take sixty odd years for us to decide that the rest of the queer community deserves the right to choose their lifestyle and be awarded an equal playing field regardless of any such defence. People need to move beyond the discourse of a queer population that has gone underground or the groups partying it up aboveground. What we need more than anything is to arrive at some middle ground regarding our acceptance of this community. A queer person is unequivocally a 'person' first and always reserves the right to be treated as such.

In Pakistan, this rather basic UDHR right 'to be treated with dignity' is open to several considerations. Given the populations pen chance to resort to violence at the slightest provocation i.e. with respect to the Hudood Ordinance, the Blasphemy law or the general malaise of honour crimes, it is no wonder that the queer population ranks low on the list of priorities when it comes to human rights. "The fact of the matter is that hypocrisy is second nature to us now. We have no problems watching fully grown pathaan men holding hands in the street and cracking jokes about their sexual orientation as long as they still 'look' like men...whatever that means! But the moment you see a queen who actually embraces it, the tables turn and the world comes to an end," says Waleed.

"The hypocrisy really is astounding. Especially when one hears the scores of horror stories that take place at madrassas with grown mullahs and little boys. But obviously people tend to overlook that sort of stuff. Whenever I talk about it I am told that it is 'dangerous to generalize about something like that', and I find it astounding.

Tease Please 1  
21.5 x 30.75 inches  
acrylic on mix media

'Tease Please 1' by Ahsan Masood

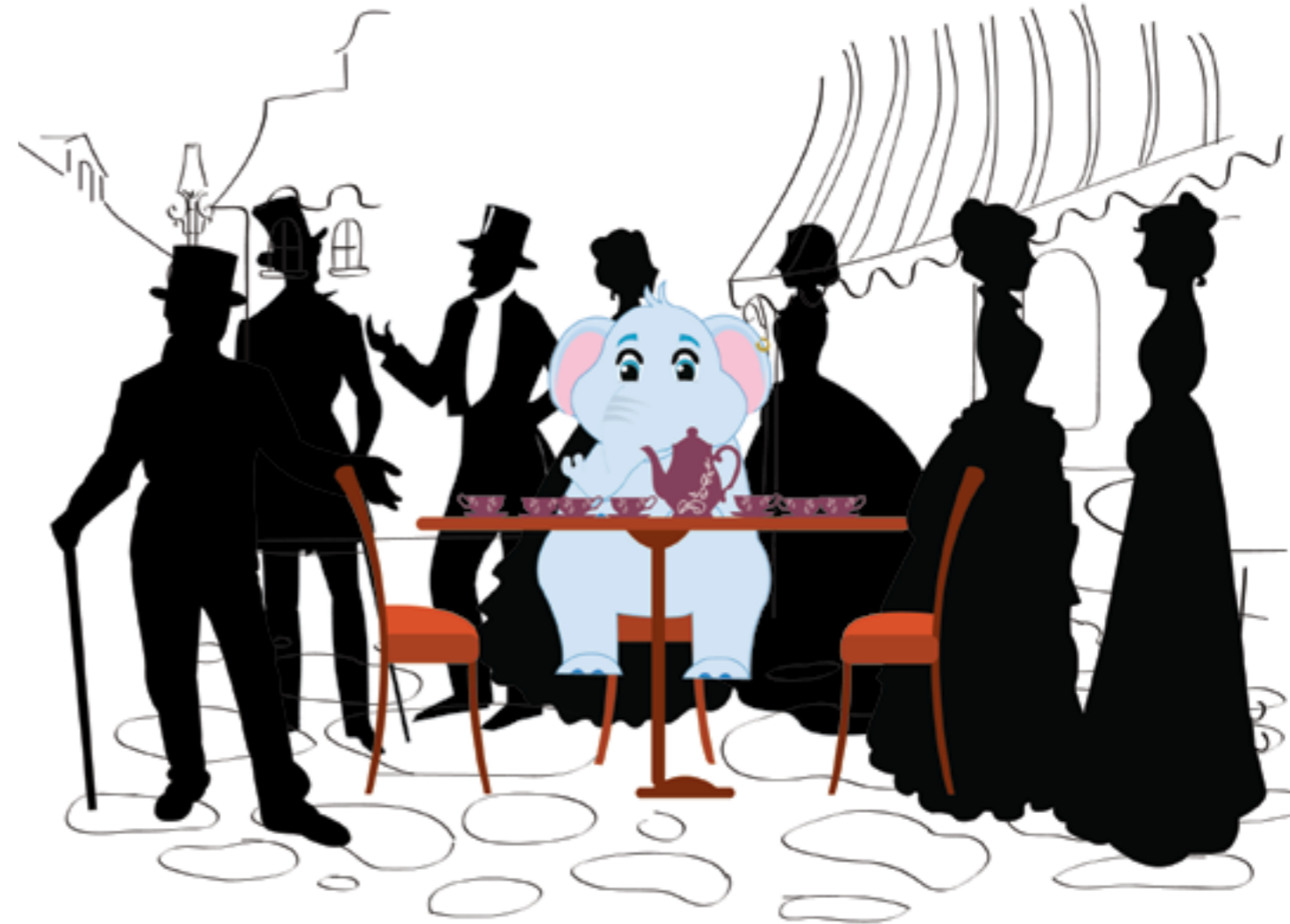
“Apparently ‘generalizing’ is bad when it comes to pedophilia, but it’s encouraged when it comes to queers,” Nina adds.”

Above all what is most distressing regarding the entire LGBT discourse surrounds the supercilious notion of 'offence'. The fact that any and everybody in Pakistan seems to consider it a basic right to 'take offence' at the sexual behaviour of two consenting adults lies at the heart of our intolerance (fragmented). In a country where sexuality and individual choices are limited and often entirely subject to public opinion, family pressure and cultural constraints, being queer becomes an exercise in navigating the perilous social sub terrain.

"See, what it boils down to is where you stand personally and how far you are willing to go for yourself. I came out when I was a teenager and I lost everything. My family disowned me and I was sent to live with an aunt in the UK, who was willing to take me

in. I knew there would be consequences to 'coming out', but I never knew they would be this big and now when my gay friends ask me what they should do, I always caution them," Awais says.

"It really isn't as black and white as 'being true to oneself' because here that can cost you everything... privately and publicly. It's about how far you are willing to go and what you are willing to give up along the way. I have several friends who weren't willing to give up their homes and families so they did the 'right' thing. They got married, they had kids and they have wives. They tell themselves they did the honorable thing by giving up that 'disgusting' part of themselves. They were forced to 'choose' to pretend to be straight every single day and I can't even judge them for it."



More tea...?

'More Tea' Illustration by Samra Allaudin

## 35 POP CULTURE &amp; SEXUALITY

by Gareth Trew

*Gaga. Madonna. Bowie.*

In late 2007, at Carnegie Hall, New York, J.K. Rowling announced to over 1500 youngsters – and subsequently the world – that Albus Dumbledore was gay. Her audience's reaction was a prolonged explosion of applause, so forceful it elicited her famous response, "If I'd known it would make you so happy, I would have announced it years ago".

Whilst there followed, naturally, a storm of controversy and debate – fuelled largely by conservatives of Bill O'Reilly's ilk – much of the response throughout the Western world was resoundingly positive: at last, a brilliant, well-loved major character who just happened to be gay, and in mainstream children's literature! This is a good indicator of how considerably perceptions – not just of what it means to be gay, but of sexuality as a whole – have changed. Acceptance of female sexuality, for example, has reached the point that women are, in principle, as free to claim and express their sexual side as men. A large part of the credit for this shift must go to pop culture and its influence.

Pop culture has been so effective in generating change, because of its role in bringing sexuality out of the obscurity of taboo, into the mainstream. The more heavily pop culture incorporates sexuality the less sensitive society becomes, which is a significant step towards realising equality. Remove fear, and understanding begins to be possible.

Secondly, many leading pop culture contributors – David Bowie, Elton John, Madonna, to name a few – have campaigned for it, and the platform created by wealth and fame is such that a prominent pop icon can be confident that their message will be well heard. Furthermore, these people are usually looked upon as role models particularly by the youth, who tend to drive social and political reform.

Lady Gaga – possibly the most influential contributor to pop culture at present – has long been an outspoken advocate of sexual liberation, particularly championing the rights of gays. Recently, she campaigned against America's absurd Don't Ask Don't Tell policy (which prohibits gays from serving openly in the military\*), and she has also joined fellow pop culture icons Cynthia Nixon and Ellen DeGeneres in fighting not only for the legalisation of same sex marriage in America, but for greater support for LGBT youth. The efforts of all three women have garnered notable media attention, helping to bring the issue

*'The Performer' by Ahsan Masood*

“ The battle for LGBT equality has been a long one, fought by many people from all walks of life. However, the fact remains that the influence of pop culture on public perception is considerable and ongoing. ”

well into the mainstream.

Combining these elements creates quite a position of power for the person with a mind to wield it, even more so today, given the universal popularity of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Lady Gaga, for instance, is followed on Twitter by over 7,000,000 people around the world. She has an enormous, constant audience – and she is one of many to boast such a following. Public opinion throughout the Western world is shifting accordingly: in Australia, for example, recent polls suggest that more than 60% of the populace supports same sex marriage. Obviously, I'm not proposing that the former is solely or even predominantly responsible for the latter – the battle for LGBT equality has been a long one, fought by many people from all walks of life. However, the fact remains that the influence of pop culture on public perception is considerable and ongoing.

At the same time, pop culture's increasing overuse of sexuality as a marketing tool also makes this very influence an area of great concern. Since pop culture is, to a growing degree, chiefly marketed at teens and pre-teens, children are constantly exposed to extreme sexuality. It is everywhere – in song lyrics and music videos; in television and film; in magazines; rampant throughout advertising. This chronic overexposure results in various pressures – to become sexually active earlier, to be worried about body image well before the body has finished developing, to value sexuality before other aspects of life. It also debases sexuality, making it something to judge and be judged by, instead of another rich and important aspect of our nature. Isn't it ironic and rather sad that pop culture, having played such a part in achieving our current state of sexual freedom, is also guilty of this debasement?

A further effect is the pressure placed on prospective pop artists, who are likely to incorporate a substantial amount of sexuality into their work and/or public persona out of the fear that otherwise they'll be less likely to succeed. As a fierce believer in artistic integrity, I find this abhorrent. Sex is important, yes, but so are countless other facets of our nature – art should be as diverse as life. Undermining this by exploiting sexuality for profit is as disgraceful as it is counterproductive.

Finally, pop culture is also largely responsible for the ridiculous Western obsession with youth and beauty, which not only promotes lack of diversity, but pressurizes aging and unconventional looking pop culture contributors to resort to plastic surgery, botox and the like. This pressure to be impossibly physically perfect – a recognised foundation for mental illnesses







such as anorexia and bulimia – is then passed on to consumers.

From the more outlandish antics of Bowie and Madonna, to the quieter brilliance of J.K. Rowling, pop culture has been, and continues to be, an important means of helping to achieve sexual liberation. Equally, however, it is guilty of grossly overusing sexuality in a way that debases it. There are so many potential positives that pop culture could accomplish, and it would be a great shame to see these as well as the substantial amount it has already achieved, overshadowed by the consequences of irresponsible commercialism.

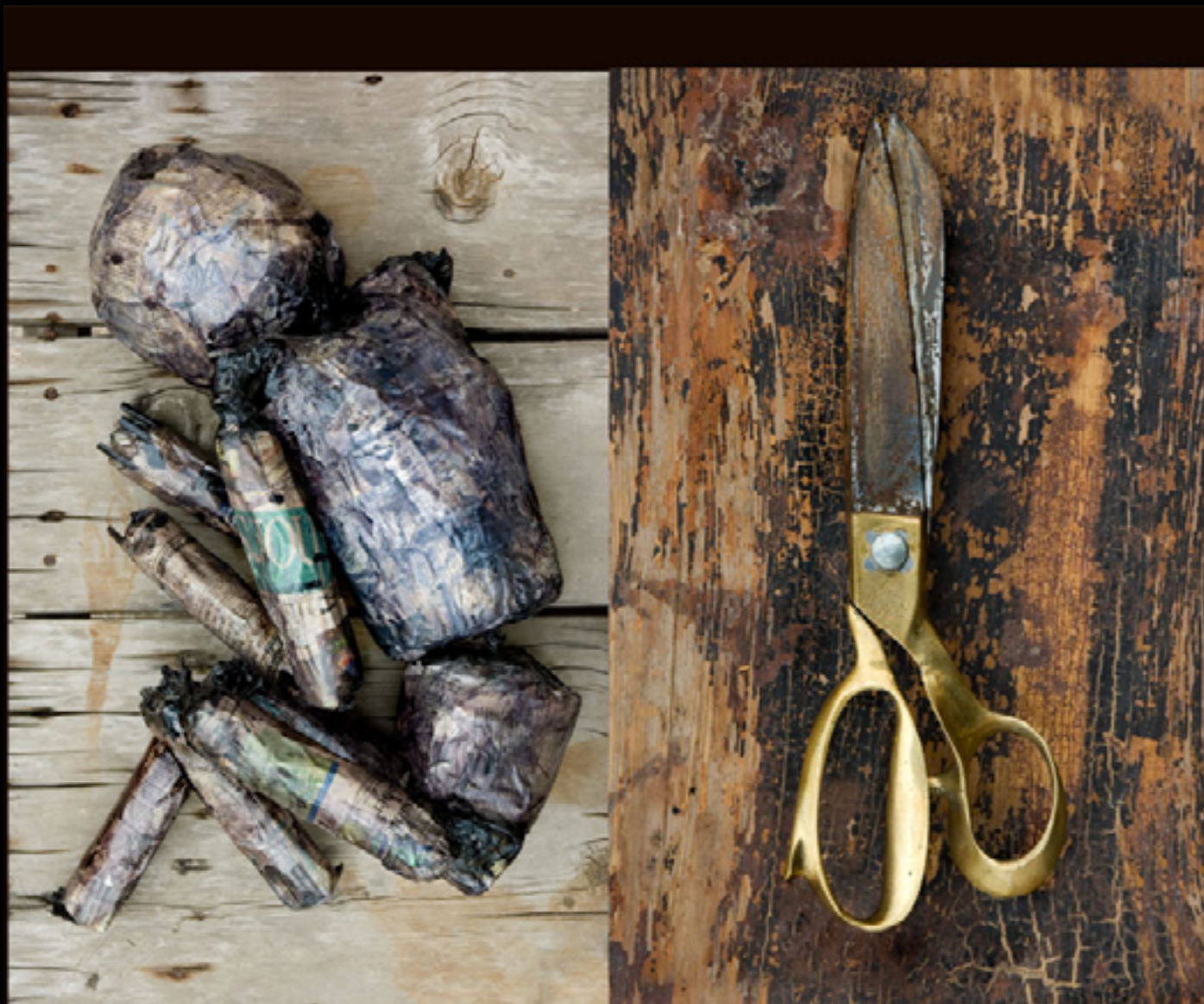
\* Though the law has just been repealed, it will remain in effect until the military's readiness for its implementation has been certified – a process anticipated to take at least a number of months.

*Editor's Note: If you would like to respond to this piece, please send in your comments to [feedback@themissingsslate.com](mailto:feedback@themissingsslate.com). We will publish them at our discretion in the following issue.*

“ Since pop culture is chiefly marketed at teens and pre-teens, children are constantly exposed. It is everywhere - in song lyrics and music videos; in television and film; in magazines; rampant throughout advertising. ”

## SPOTLIGHT: ARTIST AHSAN MASOOD





**Dinner Table**  
40 X 30 Inches  
Photographic Print

*Muhammad Ahsan Masood's journey as an artist, exploring the oft-ignored sexuality of the male psyche in the context of Pakistan's uneasy social and religious situation, has been fraught with turmoil. An admirer of the works of Sadequian and Ego Schile ("for their grotesque beauty; they give new meaning to ugly"), Masood's dream-shaped forms emerge from shadowy backgrounds, painting a netherworld of suppressed desire and denied identity.*



**The half empty swing I**  
30 x 20 Inches  
Photographic Print

"Its a struggle," says Masood of the backlash he faced from his family in pursuing the arts as a career, "Its not easy being a man, belonging to an army family and wanting to make a career out of art. Lets just say that there are good days, bad days and then really bad days. The good days are when no one asks me anything, and the bad days are when my family sees my work. The really bad days are when my mother insists on me trying to make 'less depressing work- like sunsets."

**“ Miniature artists are minting money with just a strand of hair and wasli. ”**

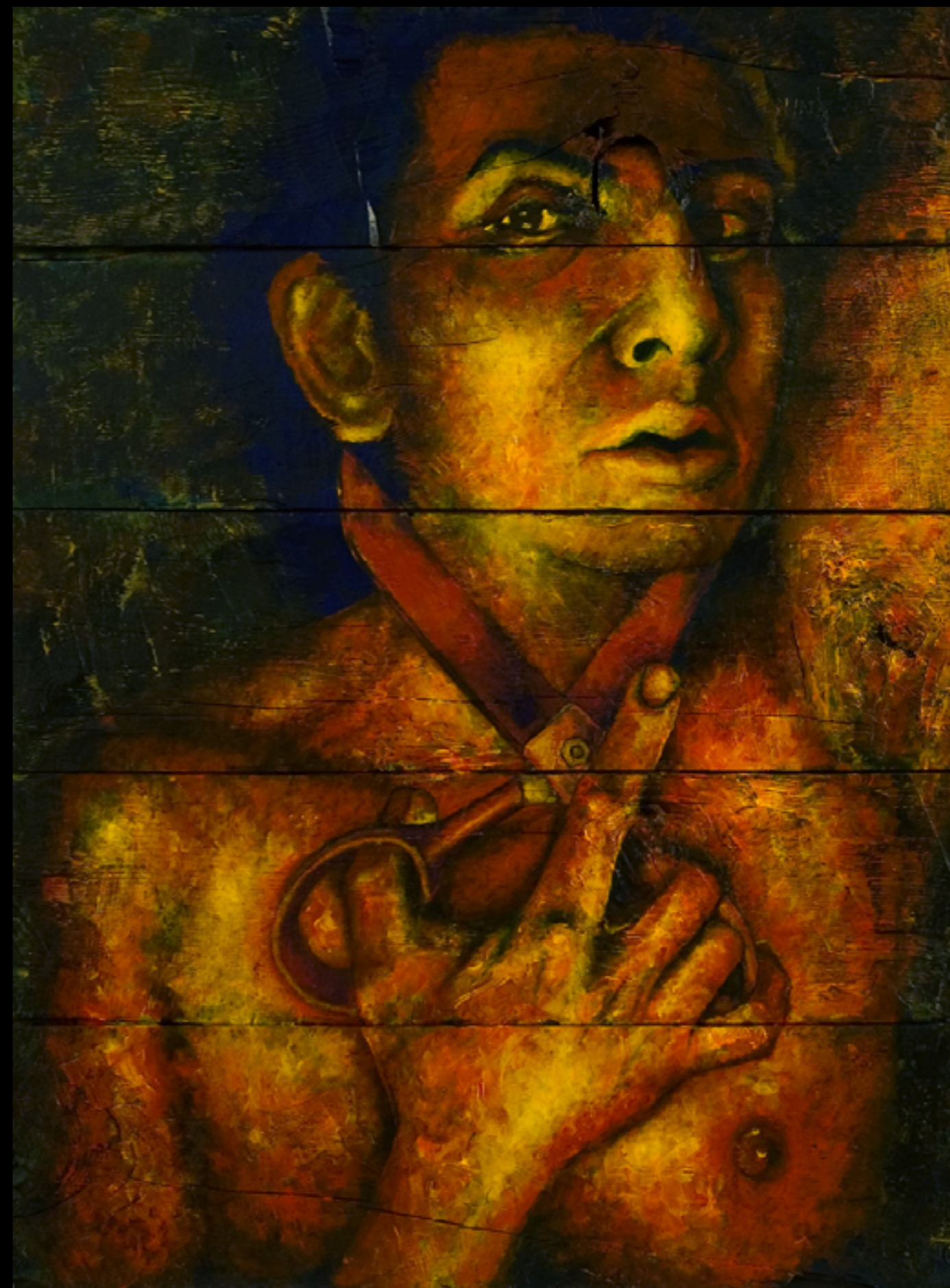
A graduate of the National College of Arts, Masood secured a distinction in his final B.F.A thesis, titled "Anti Advertising". Currently teaching 'History of Design' and 'Marketing for Design' to Final Year Communication Design students at his alma mater, Masood is well aware of the struggling art scene in Pakistan. "Especially for one who does not belong to a particular clique," he asserts. "I find very few galleries are responsive towards younger artists or try to take chances. It matters what sort of work one makes as well these days. Some art forms have greater recognition than others. I feel that photography is still a struggling medium here whereas Miniature artists are minting money with just a strand of hair and wasli."

*Below: Hot Forehead, 18 x 19 inches, acrylic on mix*



Masood describes his own work in mediums as varied as digital photography, digital art, acrylics, water paints and inks on old wood and paper, as “an extension of me, or perhaps a representation of all the voices inside my head. They are me and I, them. Having said that, I do believe that my work is very homoerotic. It tends to explore the male form and how that homoerotic form interacts within the context of organized religion and social ethics.”

A testament to the belief and commitment he has to his artistic vision is his work as a creative consultant within the resource center of ‘VISION’, where his responsibilities included developing materials and formulating strategies to better solve obstacles pertaining to street children, focusing on such taboo topics as masturbation and homosexuality. Masood also volunteered his artistic skills at OPPRSM, a young volunteer-based group working for the rights of the LGBT communities in Pakistan.



*Above: Circumcision, 44 x 47.5 inches, acrylic on wood*

When asked if he always knew whether he wanted to be a painter, Masood's response is gently ironic: "No, not at all. Though I always knew that art was my saving grace, but it being a profession was an altogether different thing. I remember when I was younger, I used to say that I wanted to grow up to be a scientist, but I didn't know how to pronounce that properly so I used to say that I want to grow up to be a sentence, much to the amusement of my family."



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## THE BLASPHEMY LAW

est 1986

“There is no greater intellectual crime than to address with the equipment of an older period the challenges of the present one – Bruno Latour”

In 2007, scientist and renowned atheist Richard Dawkins uttered a jibe against blasphemy that soon became a universal T-shirt slogan: “blasphemy is a victimless crime”, he said. Professor Dawkins has obviously never been to Pakistan.

In Pakistan, blasphemy is a serious business and the list of victims hounded by the notorious Blasphemy Law or less well known Article 295 (A,B,C and to a degree, Article 298) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) grew considerably in 2010. The beginning of the new year marks an even more visceral face of the law, as Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated by his security guard on January 4, 2010. The governor was shot in the chest over 26 times at point blank range by Mumtaz Qadri, for calling the Blasphemy Law a ‘Kala Kanoon’ (black law). This is where we are at present, the governor of the country’s largest province has been assassinated for ‘disrespecting’ the Blasphemy law itself, which in turn prescribes a death penalty for ‘disrespecting’ religious figures and texts.

Taseer’s murder was a direct consequence of his outspoken support for 45-year-old Christian Aasia Bibi, a victim of the law, who has the unfortunate distinction of being the first woman to ever be sentenced to death under the law by a district court in Nankana [1]. As sectarian violence continue to colour the daily climate of the country, instances of blasphemy also seem to have become more and more frequent with 7-8 cases having cropped up in 2010, mostly targeting religious minorities.

Pakistan’s blasphemy law is one of the leading reasons why the majority of the country’s secular left have been backed into a silent corner, by the right wing population over the past decade. The Blasphemy law and the fear of its consequences have led to mass self-censorship amongst educated Pakistanis from providing any effective counter narrative to the orthodox and often reductionist views of right-wing, televangelist clerics currently parading in the media. Rising up against the seemingly tyrannical wave of conservatism now flourishing in the country is made

nearly impossible when one considers that practically any challenges to ‘popular’ religious sentiment [2], can potentially be viewed as blasphemy.

Few in Pakistan have bothered to differentiate between blasphemy and heresy. These two concepts have become irrevocably intertwined in Pakistan’s national narrative and over the past decade, disagreement that causes ‘offence’ on anything pertaining to religion can potentially constitute blasphemy.

Pakistan’s founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah repeatedly warned against religion being relegated to the personal sphere and for it to be kept out of state matters, but his warnings seemed to fall on deaf ears. Six months after Jinnah’s death legislators drafted the Objectives Resolution, which in essence cemented Pakistan as a perennial quasi-Theocracy, given that nothing short of a state defined religion was considered an acceptable solution to the lower-income and middle class population. In 1956, the authors of the first three constitutions declared that the Republic of Pakistan would henceforth be known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan [3].

Defining and confining blasphemy is nearly impossible but in countries where it is allowed to enter the law books, it can amount to literally ‘anything’. The most vivid examples of this rest in Section 298 [4] of the PPC that states:

“Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person or makes any gesture in the sight of that person or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.”

And Section 295-C which punishes the use of derogatory remarks with regards to the Holy Prophet.

“Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed

47 (PBUH) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.”

Pakistan has been suffering for the inordinate lack of personal and political freedoms granted to its citizens. While its leaders perpetually trumpet the need for democracy, there has never been any tangible attempt to foster democratic values amid the Pakistani people. The stress lies on a democratic ‘system’, but the course to get there deliberately circumvents freedom of speech, thought and belief.

The Blasphemy Law is the most powerful example of this paradox as the Pakistani courts struggle to choose between principle and public pressure regarding the issue to this day. In July 2010, Lahore High Court Chief Justice Khawaja Sharif quashed a blasphemy case against 60-year-old Zaibunnisa and ordered her release after she served a brutal 14-year-sentence in police custody. However, that same court in October, upheld a death sentence by hanging for Wajihul Hassan for allegedly uttering blasphemous remarks about the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and ‘injuring the religious sentiments’ of Senior Advocate Muhammad Ismail Qureshi.

Another interesting twist on the blasphemy trail this year has been an additional district and sessions judge reserving order on a petition charging famous qawwal and singer Rahat Fateh Ali Khan for a song he sang two years ago. The blasphemy petition was filed by a woman named Lailatul Kubra, who said that Khan’s song ‘Aj din charia terey rang wargha’ for the Bollywood production ‘Love Aaj Kal’ had offended her religious sentiments as it denied the power and oneness of God. The case was eventually dropped as the soundtrack was released in India and the copyright could not technically be challenged in Pakistan.

This particular instance brought to light the fact that all artists in Pakistan walk an extremely tight rope when it comes to freedom of expression. Traditionally, the country’s musicians have been famous for pursuing sufi music, which generally employs verses penned by Sufi poets such as Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah and Sultan Bahu; all of whom would in some manner or other be culpable of heresy and blasphemy by such stringent standards. Even Pakistan’s national poet Iqbal in his legendary poem ‘Shikvah’ and ‘Jawab-e-Shikvah’, could easily be accused of ‘injuring the religious sentiments’ of some particularly sensitive Muslims.

This ‘obedience-through-fright’ mechanism perpetuated by the Blasphemy Law, though effective, largely compromises Pakistan’s standing as a progressive state. There is a limit to how much ‘respect’ is due a person simply because they adhere to a religion (even in a religious state), and similarly there must also be a limit to ‘how much offence’ can be justified to a person. Generally, one would assume the line between respect and offence in the case of religion ought to stop short of someone’s life being ended for offending another person’s ‘religious sentiments’, but this is not always the case.

According to Article 31 of the Pakistani Constitu-

tion, it is the country’s duty to foster the Islamic way of life and Article 33 stipulates that it must also discourage parochial, racial, tribal, sectarian and provincial prejudices among its citizens. However, in the case of the Blasphemy Law the opposite holds true, most people resort to a *hisbah* [5] approach, whereby vigilante justice is vindicated if it eradicates all shred of disobedience. This leads to self-censorship, which is practically second nature to all Pakistanis when it pertains to voicing radical or reformist sentiments regarding religion.

The country is a signatory to international agreements that specifically outlaw degrading punishments but time and again, the Pakistani government has failed to honour its commitments in this regard and has failed to stand up to extremist elements within and beyond its borders. Consequently (but not surprisingly) national paranoia and a tendency to act as the custodians of ‘global Islam’ to the detriment of all dissenters, has become an increasingly common phenomenon over the past few years.

In May 2010, Pakistan blocked access to Facebook because the website hosted a page titled ‘Everybody Draw Muhammad Day’. The government eventually lifted the blanket ban after Facebook prevented access to the offensive page, but in the following month seventeen websites were blocked for hosting content that the authorities considered offensive to Muslims. Meanwhile, the government has begun to monitor the content of Google, Yahoo, You-



Artwork by Ahsan Masood

Tube, Amazon, MSN, Hotmail, and Bing. The purpose, of course, has been to gauge and direct public opinion and it has largely succeeded. Bloggers throughout the country, who had been posting content that could possibly be considered too secular or seditious, began to take down their work.

Such initiatives and most notably those advocated by the Organisation of the Islamic conference (OIC), to stifle free speech based on accusations of “Islamophobia,” operate in the same spirit. Ironically, they now pertain not only to westerners but also to Muslims who may not be considered ‘Muslim enough’ by the powers that be. These measures are increasingly leading to a climate of fear and intellectual subjugation sold and marketed under the banner of “respect.” Blasphemy condenses this entire dialogue down further and distils it into ‘tolerance and respect... or else’.

What the Pakistani government needs to be focusing on at present, is not whether a 1,400-year-old religious text sanctions killing someone for offending someone else’s sensibilities, but whether this has any place in the modern world and –by extension - whether Pakistan wants to be a part of that modern world. So far, no single Pakistani politician has been willing to risk his or her life or career to oppose this law on a public forum. Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) chief, Nawaz Sharif even hitched at uttering the word ‘mosque’ when condoling Ahmadis after their place of worship was bombed in September this year. That is how deep the fear runs.

“Until now, no one has been killed under the blasphemy law... at least not officially. And yet, nearly all those charged under the law know that they are on a hit list and their number is up. As a human rights law-

48 yer Zubaida Sial puts it: “you don’t need to be sentenced. The accusation is the sentence.” ”

End Notes:

[1] Aasia was accused of passing derogatory remarks against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in an FIR registered on June 19, 2009 with the Saddar police station by Qari Salim, a masjid imam. The FIR was filed under Sections 295-B and C of the Pakistan Penal Code (both of these sections are punishable by life imprisonment or a death sentence) and the Nankana Additional district and sessions court (ADSC) upheld a death sentence by hanging. SK Shahid, Aasia’s counsel filed an appeal with the Lahore High Court against the lower court’s judgment. He said that among other allegations, Aasia was accused of denying the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). “How can we expect a Christian to affirm to Muslim belief?” he asked. No one considering the case bothered to take note of the fact that while a Muslim is required under his or her religion to believe in the prophethood of Jesus Christ a Christian (under theirs) is under no such obligation with regards to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Besides sentencing Aasia to death, Muhammad Naveed Iqbal, the ADSJ, also imposed a fine of Rs 300,000. Aasia’s case is currently awaiting appeal in the Lahore High Court and President Asif Ali Zardari has taken notice of the case.

[2] This is regardless of whether or not this sentiment in any way relates to actual dogma. What needs to be established (but seldom is in such cases) is whether or not any ‘actual’ blaspheming has taken place. Usually the accusation itself outweighs any need for proof and vigilante justice precedes any court sentence. The Qur’an threatens those who insult God or the prophet with a curse and a humiliating punishment in this life and the next. There are claims as to whether or not the execution of poets, such as Ka’ab ibn al-Ashraf (for insulting the prophet) is a precedent for executing blasphemers; however, there is little tangible support for this. On the other hand, it is said that they were put to death not for blaspheming but for sedition as there are several Hadith that state that while some were punished others were pardoned by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself. What needs to be seriously considered is which of these attitudes is to prevail in Muslim communities in the present.

However, it must be said, that the different formal schools of medieval shari’a were unanimous that anyone who insults the Prophet (PBUH) is to be put to death and differ only about the method of execution. It is this una-

nimity, which has led the Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan to rule that the death penalty is mandatory, and often leaves judges with little discretion in particular cases where the proof is overwhelming.

[3] In 1973 the insertion of the Objectives Resolution as a preamble to the constitution only propelled the country more firmly on the path of theocracy. This was followed by the second amendment of 1974 when the entire Ahmedi community, which had been part of a Muslim majority since 1947 was declared a minority community. Military dictator Zia-ul-Haq caused more destruction in 1979 with the introduction of the infamous Hudood Ordinances that are especially prone to being abused against women. Zia moved on the blasphemy law, Section 295 (an innocuous law dating back to 1927 under the British Raj) stipulating that anyone injuring or defiling a place of worship with the intent to insult any religion would be punished by two years of imprisonment or by a fine. He later added 295-B which proffered a life sentence to anyone defiling the Holy Quran but the clincher, in 1986, was the passage of Section 295-C that decreed that anyone using derogatory remarks in respect of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) "shall be punished by death" or imprisoned for life or fined.

[4] Different clauses of the same section, such as 298-B pertain to the misuse of epithet, descriptions and titles reserved for certain holy personages or places. This clause specifically targets Ahmedis as Section 298-C stipulates: "Any person of the Qadiani/Ahmedi group, who directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine."

[5] Hisbah pertains to the Islamic doctrine of keeping everything in order within the laws of Allah. This doctrine is rooted in the Qur'anic expression: 'Enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong' (Surah 3:110). The doctrine outlines the obligations of a Muslim and the obligations of a state to ensure its citizens observe the hisbah, in particular, the Shari'a law. In a broader sense, hisbah also refers to the practice of supervision of commercial, guild, and other secular affairs. Traditionally, a muhtasib was appointed by the Caliph to oversee order in public spaces and he generally acted in the capacity of an 'inspector'. In Saudi Arabia, the state establishment responsible for hisbah is the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

*Editor's Note: If you would like to respond to this piece, please send in your comments to [feedback@themissingsslate.com](mailto:feedback@themissingsslate.com). We will publish them at our discretion in the following issue.*

## MASTURBATION

Pleasure plays no part  
in this expo of  
inadequacy;

every orgasm  
is a prayer, faithless  
but fiercely profound:

please, send me someone.

--Gareth Trew

*Gareth Trew is a young, Australian poet who lives in a state of constant confusion. As well as creative writing, he is keenly interested in the performing arts -- particularly acting, though he does dabble in directing on occasion and likes to think he can sing. He is also a Contributing Editor for The Missing Slate.*



Artwork by Ahsan Masood

## THE LIMIT

by J. Scott Hardin  
Part One

The old man had left with the dawn, gone home quietly – mercifully, without saying a word. Doubtless he thought his son was asleep. The young man's back had been turned to him, but his eyes were open, staring at the dim light that crept closer with the sunrise. He had been studying its advance between the gaps in the polished, worn floorboards of the shotgun house.

It was the first time Aaron had ever seen a glow beneath flooring, but that is how houses are built in New Orleans, on stilts to allow for flooding. After the sun had made enough profit on its margin of time for inches among the shadows, he could make out clumps and clods of dirt as they slowly revealed themselves on the inky bottom.

Bright rays peeked through slits in the blinds, showing the far side of the room in oblique ladders. Aaron had never been particularly good at judging time, mainly on account of long-standing confusions about the simple things, like the difference between a minute and a moment. The floor was damp where he had been lying, and it seemed to him a long time before he found the motivation to sit up.

Unpacked boxes loomed like unrenovated buildings in a dark slum, and as he crossed his wrists over his knees, Aaron stared at the recently evacuated mattress. It was bare except for his navy overcoat, the makeshift blanket his father had used for the night. It seemed impossible to him, sweating in the August heat, that the heavy garment would ever again see a proper service.

His father thought he was lazy, and of course that was true. But it was not the kind of laziness of lounging about on the couch all weekend, drinking beer and watching sports. Indeed, that was exactly the kind of laziness the old man would have understood. It was the kind of thing that could be tolerated, a form of normalcy that was at least manly. That alone might have lent a chance that the two could have come to terms with one another on a patch of common ground.

A box of cigarettes lay on the floor nearby. He picked it up. A quick shake determined three or four souls had remained, wayward tenants clinging together inside their black paper hovel. A plastic lighter had to be somewhere in the neighborhood. When he found it, Aaron lit a cigarette.

His father had been a bona fide hippie, – or at least he had dressed like one, inhaled and ingested

50  
psychedelics like one and made epic pilgrimages to see Joplin like one. Aaron had seen a few old pictures of the skinny, long-haired waif wearing hemp necklaces and shredded trousers. Two or three times, he had heard tales of an itinerant hobo making the circuit of pastoral communes and swimming with unshaved women.

But, despite all the broken laws and the legions of challenged mores, his father had never really been an anti-government man. He wasn't among those who, for reasons of conscience or cowardice, had burned their draft cards. He was proud of his tour of duty in Vietnam, especially the cultivation of discipline that came from army life.

Since retirement, such cultivation generally consisted of home improvements and hobby projects related to wood. By this time, he had diversified his portfolio with a well-advised selection of mid-yield mutual funds, various stocks and a partial investment in a second house. Bankers, of course, remained "pan-sies" in his view of the world, but money was money.

He had also developed a persistent twitch in his left shoulder and stuck doggedly to a short, stocky third wife. Not that the woman was inherently mean or wretched, but she often left that impression because of her cackling laugh and badly bent nose. Beneath this nasal monstrosity yammered a peculiarly irritating sack of whining, interminable explications about nothing whatsoever. It could all too easily be about the embroidered lining of a set of bedroom drapes or the appreciation in the value of a chipped yellow lamp. Countryside antique and junk stores throughout the Southwest were a constant source of stupid fascination.

What Aaron could not understand was how his father, a brooding soul who had become more and more reticent over the last twenty-five years, could tolerate on a daily basis this mellifluous megaphone of monotony. The old man always slept in the guest room, unless they had company, beside a picture of his ancient mother. His company otherwise consisted of one of the esteemed chipped lamps and drapes with an evidently important lining. It was a cold room, too, and it seemed a cold life, remote from the vitality of the man in the memories. The man in the memories seemed so far removed from the dusty calcification of today that he may as well have been the man on the moon.

The past five days had been a strain. The long drive from San Francisco was made longer by five A.M. wakeup calls, the hot summer pounding against windshield's insect graveyard and a full weekend spent

51 in the company of the hook nose at the family home in Albuquerque. Aaron had felt obliged to smile and make polite inquiries from time to time at her annoyingly detailed babblings, while his maintained a glazed-over look to pass the time. For the life of him, he could not get how the old man put up with it.

Is it one thing to write off another man's fate as not one's own, some foreign destiny that does not apply; quite another, for the first time and thereafter with creeping dread, to discover that fate itself is bigger than a single man. At thirty, Aaron embarked on that strange journey that thinking men must always make. With a morbid curiosity, he began to contemplate seriously his own death. He considered also in his father's silent tolerance the guarded, now sullen vestige of a traveler long gone down the road of dusty resignation. He questioned the adage that age breeds wisdom. For the people he knew, the mind atrophied as the body wrinkled on.

After they had arrived in the Big Easy and unloaded the trailer, the old man finally said in falsetto: "Jesus, a couple of times there, I didn't think you were gonna make it."

Aaron returned a withering expression. His father knew he was edgy. There was no use hiding it, but an outright complaint would be an invitation to mockery. He knew what his father had meant: I didn't think you were gonna make it, *boy*.

The point made, the old man went on to talk about the humidity and how he would never live in a swamp, about the flying roaches here and how they paled in comparison to the insect world of Southeast Asia, above all about the fact that he had not seen very many white people in town. Around these parts, he continued, a man would have to watch his tail. A city like this was strange. He looked through the windows and out past the foliage when he said these things, squinted eyes scanning up and down the street, grappling with the possibility of unknown enemies.

It reminded Aaron of a walk they had taken along the beach when he was about ten. "Don't ever turn your back on the ocean, boy." That and having to walk fast to keep up were all he remembered of it. Searching for some kind of meaning in this sage augury, he had ever since gazed into the waves whenever he came to the ocean, following their trail to the horizon, where he could see no further. Even as an adult, despite the feeling of foolishness that sometimes accompanied it, Aaron persisted in this superstitious practice. It became a kind of ritual to him, offering him the little flirtations that always lie behind a good mystery.

Now the old man was gone, and Aaron was alone. He ate some bread and found the ingredients to start a pot of coffee. While it brewed, he meandered up and down the five rooms. In three weeks, his wife and infant son would be flying out, plenty of time to put the place in order. There was no hurry, no need to rush.

Three weeks with no screaming in the night, with none of her suspicions and superstitions, with no fighting. This would be the first time in a while he would be without the loud, plaintive noises of attachment – of ownership. The marriage was hell before it even started. It had been her price to bring the baby to New Orleans. Marry me, or we're staying here. You don't really want a kid. You're free. Just go. That is what she had said, so he made arrangements for a four-hundred dollar wedding package in Reno. A couple of the cheapest Wal-Mart rings he could find. No formal proposal.

He had to account for his relationship with his own old man, whom he had seen several summers growing up. He accepted this Trojan Horse with a kind of naïve resolve. She had lied to him about using contraception, and if he thought he might have loved her once, he never felt anything near that since.

The fellowship to the University was to be the reward. The brass ring. The big banana. Of six applications to graduate school, it was the only offer and easily the best. A couple hundred thousand in tuition and stipends - the kind of professional ticket that Aaron knew would only come once in a lifetime. He had no idea where he was going from one step to the next oftentimes, but he knew a guiding star when he saw one.

Or at least he thought he did. Sometimes in the middle of the night, when the baby drifted off for a little while and the arguments, too, had grown tired and gone to sleep, the trusted star seemed to dim. At these times, breathing in the darkness, Aaron found himself musing on the fact that the light of a star might take thousands or millions of years to make its journey to the human eye. It might disappear from the skies one night, vanish without a trace. Then what?

People always say that some things are timeless, but Aaron had never really bought into it. Instead he tried, and not all that convincingly, to wrap his mind around what the scientists call frames of reference. People say the sun and the sky and the stars last forever, but that is only because in that way they can make some headway for themselves in terms of an eighty-year lifespan. To a gnat with a number of hours allotted between life and death, Aaron was fairly

certain that a light bulb left on absentmindedly would amount to the glow of a lifetime. He envied the gnat who worshipped his bulb. The bulb was a constant, pouring out its radiance onto giddy, gathering crowds.

The cigarette had died out. There was a day to be had in this strange land. He dug through his pockets and dumped the crumpled papers and coins on the kitchen table. Picking through the past week's shorts and jeans, he found a half-pack of the old man's Marlboro Reds, various sundry change, and a ten-dollar bill. Emptying out his wallet, he scooped everything into a mound on the corner of the table, forming a pile that summed up his net worth.

Sixty-four dollars.

It would be nine days until his family arrived. Quick division informed him he would have about seven bucks a day, but this was the first time he was to live beyond the West Coast, and it would be pathetic to sit around coddling every little coin. Besides, he had left his wife with over a grand. So why shouldn't he indulge himself with his pittance?

A trip through the Gulf Coast, now that was something. He would stock up on smokes and make it all the way to the Atlantic with any luck. On the other hand, there was the getting back part. Dim memories of gas prices he had seen in town and a quick calcula-

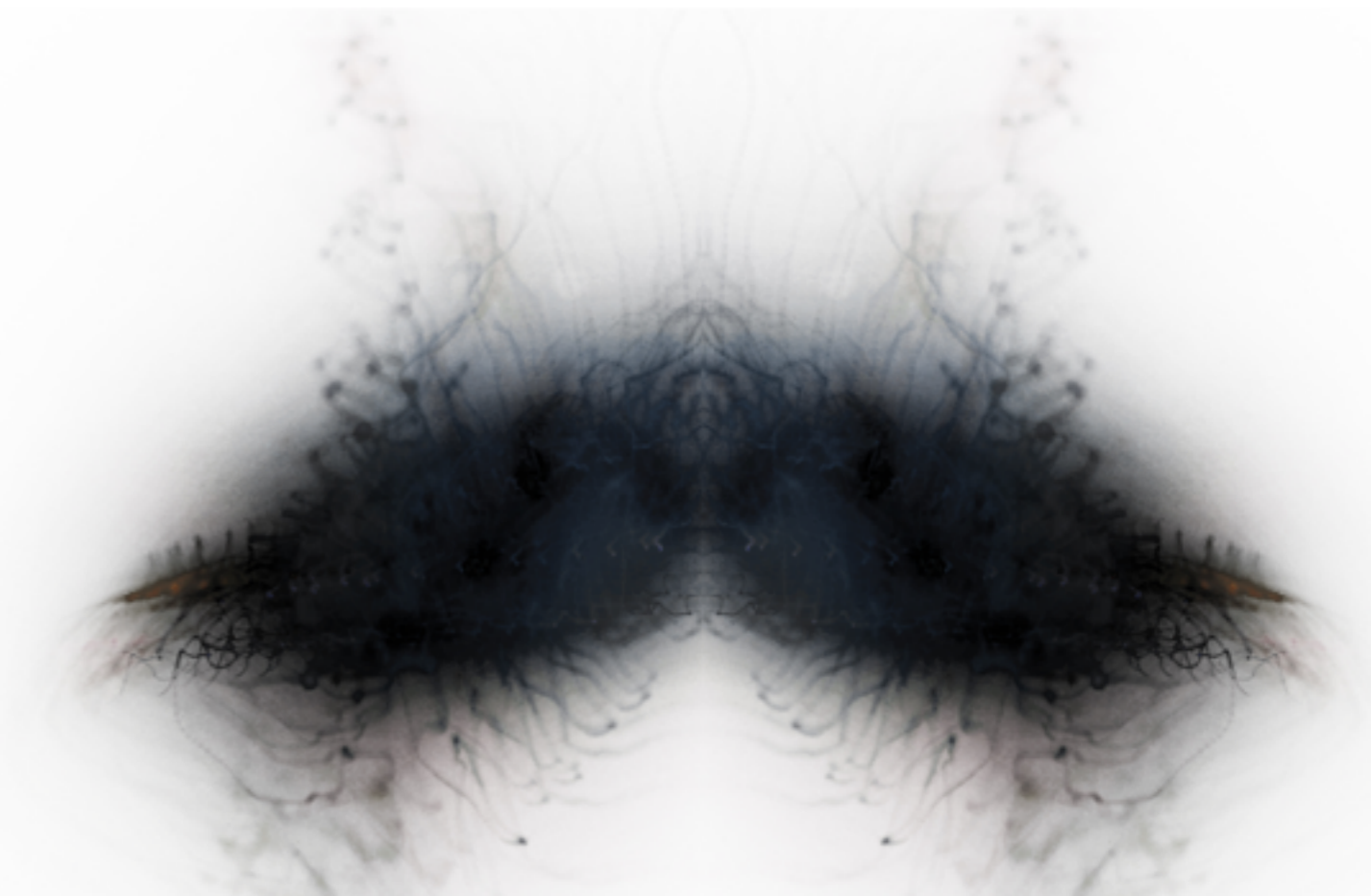
tion for mileage offered a more sobering probability than the Atlantic. Still, he wondered how close he could get.

No matter what, he was going to have to call his wife, and that necessity gave him enough pause to sit at the table and stir the change around a little. A nickel pushed its way through its fellows and swirled back absently, subject to the whimsical repartee of a dejected finger. It was a poor distraction from the eventuality of that call, but the dance of it lasted a good while. He was subject to forces beyond his control. He didn't really want to call her, but he had about as much say in it as the nickel. Swirl about as it might, it was going to be collected in the end.

Aaron rummaged around a few boxes until he found clothes that passed the smell test. He put on some raggedy looking shoes and carefully gathered up the things he would need. Wallet. License. Cigarettes and lighter. Glasses. Keys. He folded up the cash and shoved it in his front pocket. Then he scooped up the change and looked around for something to put it in.

He heard rapping at the door. He tore himself away from the dark smudge on the kitchen wall he had gotten himself lost in, and he marched to the front door.

Tap, tap, CLAP. Again, again, aGAIN.



'The Butterfly Effect' by Soraya Darwish



53 His irritation as he opened it faded instantly. The dirty tip of an old wooden cane confronted his line of sight, poised to clock him right between the eyes. It lowered to reveal a pellucid, knobby hand and an even more pellucid and knobby face.

The man must have been past ninety. He pulled back the limb and extended the other hand. Aaron grasped its cold, clammy skin.

"Well hallow thar," the man enunciated. "Name's Henry. Henry Mason. I'm yah naybah, ragh t'ovah in that blue house ovah theyah."

His stick lifted to the general direction of the house on the corner as he released his fishy grasp.

"The blue'n, see?"

"Aaron Tavenner. Nice to meet you." He looked on uncomfortably as the cane lingered.

"Well I kin see yah noo herebahts. Wheyahyah from?"

"Oh, I just moved here from California."

"Calahfownya . . . hmm?" His pale eyes gazed off at some distant land. "Well, that's jus' fahn."

Aaron shifted the coins uncomfortably among pools of sweat building in his palm. "It was a pretty long trip," he redirected.

"Oh. Oh, well yesss, I s'pose ih t'wood be thah." Mister Mason cleared his throat loudly and leaned in. "Well, I notice you got a strollah while you was ah loadin' yessstahday. Got yahself a familee?"

"Yes, my wife and my son are flying here in a week or so. It'll give me time to fix the place up."

"Ah, well uh littah familee, nah that's jus' fahn. Real fahn. An I'm shah they'll be alraht heeyah, of cause they wheel. But jus' You. Mahn. Theyeis. Care. Fuh. Like."

A tamping of cane on sidewalk punctuated these last words abruptly. Indeed, Mister Mason seemed to use his crutch as a kind of grammar.

Aaron wondered if he might have understood just the cane, if the man hadn't spoken at all. As the cane swooped across the air, he knew his neighbor had now come to his point.

"Porch monkeys," he said. "Theyeis naybah'hood is plain full ah theyem. All arahn, but pahnticulahly dahn theyah."

Aaron followed the trajectory of the cane all the way down the street. He quizzically scanned the trees for movement. Before the trip, he had perused a map of the city. He remembered that the Audubon Zoo was fairly close to where he lived, perhaps only a mile or two. He thought to ask Mister Mason if he

had called whatever animal protection services authorities, but this was a totally different world to him, a strange humid swampland with who knew what customs or rules.

Sensing Aaron's confusion, Mister Mason bent forward conspiratorially so he could make his point explicit.

"Raht ovah theyah. Theyah, theyah. You kin see 'em plain as day." The cane stabbed harshly at a house at the end of the block.

Aaron studied those trees with intensity born of insecurity. He looked and looked again.

"Theyah. Raht theyah!"

And he understood. Mister Mason meant the two black men sitting on the front porch of the house at the far end of the street. They were smoking and sitting close to one another, in the middle of conversation.

"You kin see, nah cayn'tchyah?"

A wave of nausea passed over Aaron. He felt each and every last bead of sweat dribbling down his body. He shivered and heard a few coins bounce off the pavement. Mister Mason drew up a look of jen-yoo-wine concern.

"Well, see heeyah nah, you dropped yah monay. Raht theyah."

"I have to go," Aaron mustered. "I'm sorry." He walked around the ancient native and fished for his keys.

"I wasn't suggestin' anythin' to worrahyah ovah."

He got the car door open and started the engine.

"It'll be fahn, just keep an eye aht . . ."

Aaron peeled out, away from the cane and the sweat and the porch monkeys. He remembered a grocery store with a payphone nearby, but he drove the wrong way in a random zigzag through poor neighborhoods with unknown calamities.

After a short time, he ended up in the projects. There he found the streets and corners full of some of the hardest looks he had ever seen, where invariably everyone stopped whatever they were doing to stare at him.

At first, Aaron looked back. It reminded him of bullies, the kind seen on any elementary school playground. They had that type of calculating stare, waiting for the faintest whiff of weakness that forecast the brutal pounce. When

two of them without shirts crossed the street into his path, gazes critical and unrelenting, he turned sharply down a side street. It was a dead end.

Aaron hit the brakes hard, and the tires screeched a little. The two men were almost upon him, and in a panic he accelerated into a fast U-Turn and almost fishtailed. He clipped the curb and heard a loud bang on the back of the car.

"Where you at?" the man shouted. "Whachu gon' do?"

Aaron turned clumsily back onto the main road and looked behind. The black man's arms were open wide, and he kept on yelling through a flash of smiling white teeth.

"Whachu gon' do?"

It was clear to him that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He sped away, past the brick buildings with their symmetrical lawns and walkways. His search for any semblance of a stoplight also served efficiently as a means of avoiding all eye contact.

One light soon led to another, and he followed them like beacons until at last he found a main expressway, replete with stores and gas stations and a few taller buildings. He drove along this thoroughfare for several miles, keeping watch for a name he could remember from the map. When he noticed a street car in the distance, he knew he had made it to St. Charles Street, two blocks from his house. This was progress.

He slowed to a crawl at the crossing of the tracks, searching into the distance both ways. He was not able to determine which direction to choose, so he pulled into a parking lot. He was becoming hungry, and he thought wanly that he had probably wasted enough gas or, more aptly, enough gas money.

J.B.'s Grocery was just up the street. It was a smallish building, fronted by large window panes that had been mostly pasted on the inside with newspapers depicting colorful fruits, vegetables and meats. Many of the words on them were strange to him, like "roux" and "okra" and "jambalaya".

That last had a huge bowl with whitish rice topped by heaps of other unknown substances. A closer inspection showed a series of arrows that pointed to a number of cartoonish clouds. Inside each cloud was one of the main ingredients of the jambalaya dish, including Creole tomatoes, bay leaves, celery, sausage and also a more suspicious grouping entitled "cubed meats".

One of the larger sections on display showed an enormous white powdered pastry called a "beignet" that looked soft, silky and unquestionably delicious.

54 Huge lettering above it offered a bold pronouncement: LAGNIAPPE. Whatever else happened today, he was going to eat one of those Lagniappes made of beignet.

He opened the door of the rundown grocery and crossed a dingy aisle that led to the deli at the back. A young man with an apron looked up from the meat counter expectantly.

"Hey sah, what kin I git fo' yah? We got us some uh that goood low tide shrimp in da gumbo tahday. Mmm! It's fixin' to be just fine."

Aaron hesitated, trying to piece the words together.

"Gumbo?"

"What we got here in this gumbo?" The young man – his tag said "Reginald" – passed right over the question and onto his own. "Nuthin out tha ordinary. You know, we got us them good bell pepperin, garlic and parsley an all that. Some cayenne an sausage. The roux fresh." Reginald paused a moment, drawing up some gravity. "But it's them low tide shrimp'll make the diffrents. You want some?" He pointed over to a big metal pot.

Aaron only understood half the words, and he lacked whatever braveness might cause someone to place an order for the contents in that pot.

"Do you have any sandwiches?"

"Do we got any sandwiches?" Reginald repeated with mock affront. "Do we got any sandwiches, he says. Man, we got just about any kinda sandwich there is. We got po'boys we can make with every kinda meat. You want a sausage, cutsa beef or a salami? We got chicken too, if you want. It ain't Monday, that's sure right, but it goes good with a little red beans and rice all the same."

Reginald eyed his customer for a sign that something had caught the attention of his gullet. Aaron gestured to a circular bread in the case.

"Ah, you wants a muffuletta. That's a mighty good choice, too."

He started unpacking ingredients from the case and made his way around the back of the deli, picking and choosing and muttering to himself all the while. Aaron caught bits of it, as much as cadence and slang and variable distance allowed.

"Kayn't say as we got any mozzarella, no, and we should have, too. Let's see what we got in here, some provolone and here, now, what's even better. Oh yeah, plenty mortadella."

Reginald took a big sniff of the cheese and broke into a toothy grin of reverie.

"We got us some Genoa salami, that's right." He

pulled out a big slab of it. “Always gets that. Some olive oil. That’s good for the ham.” He paused his preparations for a moment so he could stir the gumbo. “Shudda put a few more scallions up in there.” He smelled the ladle critically and placed it on the counter.

A few cuts, folds and dabs made quick work of the sandwich, and the young man handed over the smartly wrapped muffuletta and a small cup of olive salad with satisfaction.

“That’s gone be three dollars, lest if there’s something else you want.”

Aaron looked at a small sign at the far end of the meat case: *Lagniappe With Every Sandwich Served.*

“Well doesn’t it come with some lagnip?” he asked.

“Come with a wha’?”

“Lagnip.”

There was no response.

“Lagnape? Lagnippy?”

Reginald arched his eyebrow, and Aaron grew embarrassed.

“You know - those bignit pastries. I saw a picture outside. Little white squares with powdered sugar on them.”

Reginald thought for a moment before making the connection.

“Oh, you mean them *beignets* right?”

It was French-sounding. Ben-yay.

“Yeah, it says you get a lagnip with every sandwich.” Aaron pointed to the sign.

“Oh hey now, that’s *lagniappe*.” Lan-yap. “And you got some uh dat right there with ya muffuletta, hmm?”

He had meant the tiny cup of salad. It was Aaron’s turn to look confused, and this disarmed his counterpart, who had suspected he might have been trying to swindle something through a complaint.

“Nah, it don’t seem like you get it,” Reginald concluded. “Lawds not at all. Where you from, anyways?”

“California.”

“Yeah, that’s plenty far off. No lagniappe out there, I guess, ‘cept for the women, aight?”

Aaron smiled back at the conspiratorial tone but still did not know exactly what the young man meant.

“Lagniappe. It mean free. You know, buy something for a price and you fixin to get a free thing widit. Like a bonus.”

“That sounds fine,” Aaron reasoned aloud. “In that case, I want a ben-yay.”

“Nah, you got that every kinda wrong. You done got your lagniappe already. What you think that olive salad for? This ain’t no bakery.”

“It looks pretty good. Are there any places around that have them?”

“Best place you can buy gon be down at Café du Monde. They open twenty-fuh hour, too. Real cheap.”

“Where’s that?”

“Where dat? Where dat, the man says. Café du Monde down in the Quartah. You ain’t been to the Quartah yet, I guess. The *French Quartah*. Most famous part uh town, kayn’t be no doubt uh that.”

Aaron had, of course, heard about the French Quarter. It is probably unreasonable to suppose one could reach the age of thirty without having stumbled upon, at least by way of rumor and conjecture, the raunchy and libidinous tales of women who cultishly and in droves disrobed each year upon payment of cheap, plastic beads. He had even once seen as an adolescent a documentary on PBS about Mardi Gras. He remembered bitterly that the production had focused mostly on the cultural history of the parades and which socialites had established what committees whose members inspired various costumes that would ultimately form whatever grand traditions. He had caught a few scenes of screaming, drunken girls, but the clips had obviously been carefully edited for viewer discretion.

The bastards.

Aaron paid the three dollars and thanked Reginald. The young man gave him a queer look.

Food in hand, he walked outside and noticed a phone booth around the other side of the store front. He had not called his wife the day before because the driving and the hotels, the talking with his father every bit as much as the silence, had made him by turns anxious and depressed.

There could be no more procrastination. It was time to call and to deal with her predictable anger. He put enough coins in for interstate and waited for the receiver to pick up. He had begun sweating again in the sunlight. After several rings, someone picked up but did not say anything.

At last Aaron said hello.

“Oh, *now* your stupid ass is gonna call me?” she replied in a tone even harsher than the words themselves.

“I called yesterday,” he fumbled, “but you weren’t there.”

“I *was* here all day watching your son, and I *know* that’s a fucking lie.”

She was right. It was a lie.

“Keep the shit up, and you’ll see if we come, Aaron. I can tell you really give a shit about it.”

Click.

Aaron frowned when he heard the dial tone and the swallowing of the money into the coin box. He hung up the receiver and dug around for some more change. The task was made more difficult when he put his wrapped muffuletta and olive salad cup on the shelf where the phonebook was chained.

Slanted.

The food slid off quickly and, as both hands were occupied in pockets, he kept it from falling with a raised knee. He withdrew them and fiddled with the metal shelving.

Slanted by design.

He leaned in to keep his packages together and in one piece and resumed fishing with one hand only.

Four quarters.

Just a dollar for long distance.

A handful of mostly silver came back out, but several of the coins dropped loudly to the pavement as his knuckles wriggled through a tight maze. Only sixty-four cents remained, including nine pennies.

A predicament.

If he stopped to pick up the rest of his change, the entire makeshift structure he was holding together would collapse – minus the slanted shelf and its informative prisoner, the chained up yellow pages. Instead, he put the food on the ground so he could henpeck for the money. Bending over and dripping sweat on himself and every place he passed over.

But he did find the money. Coin. Coin. Coin. He heard them slink down into the machine. Coin. The phone rang and rang, until he gave up.

He jogged back to the car and retrieved a cigarette, eyeing his food while he lit it. He was sweating profusely now, and he took long, leisurely drags as he walked back. Tamping down the rivulets that had crept their way under his shirt, he drew a deep breath and let it out. He dialed the number and let it ring.

“What?”

“Look I’m really sorry, baby. It’s just I was on the road everyday, and I was tired.”

Aaron heard a sigh on the other end, which he knew was an inroad. He continued quickly so as not to miss this sudden diplomatic opportunity.

“You know how it is with my dad and Tracy. I

was up early every day and had to listen to her all the time. On and on and on. . .”

He thinned out plaintively and waited.

“Well, there’s no way I could put up with that. What about the stupid antiques?”

“Are you kidding me? You know how she is. This time it was all about different lampshades she found in every single town in every single goddamn county.”

“Ooh, no thank you.”

“I know, right? It was really bad. I miss you. How’s the baby?”

“He’s sooo cute!” Her voice trailed off as his son made happy noises in the distance. “Oh yes you are! Oh yes you are! Such a cutieeee . . .”

Aaron almost jumped when he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Reginald, the deli guy.

“Oh hey man, didn’t mean to surprise you. I was jus gonna say if you was fixin to go down to the Quartah sometime. Well I could show ya where dem beignets at.”

He held the phone out a little bit and offered his hand.

“Maybe after I get settled in. My name’s Aaron.”

The man took it happily and grinned.

“An my name ain’t Reginald. Oh hell nah. Just Reggie, a’aight?”

“Sounds like a plan, Reggie. Thanks.”

“I know you on a call now. Look, man I’ll see you round.”

Reggie started walking down the sidewalk, and Aaron smiled. Then the phone squawked at him, and his smile faded.

“What was that?”

“What, your ass can’t hear me fucking talk?”

Back to the drawing board.

“No, it’s not that. I just couldn’t hear for a second.”

Please deposit seventy-five cents for the next. . . three. . . minutes.

All he could hear was “fuck that” as he began to search his pockets again.

He found a quarter and put it in.

“– and I really don’t give a shit. Like I said, we don’t have to fucking go there. And if –”

Please deposit fifty cents.

“Hey, I couldn’t hear. Just wait a minute!”

Three minutes.

He pushed down several more coins.  
 "Hello? Hello?"  
 Silence.  
 "Look, I'm sorry. There's a lot of traffic going by. It's hard to hear."  
 Silence.  
 "Baby? Are you there?"  
 He heard a heavy sigh.  
 "Why don't you go talk to your boyfriend instead?"  
 "What?"  
 "You think I'm stupid, Aaron? Who the fuck is Reggie?"  
 "What? I just bought a sandwich at his store. He's the guy that sold me a sandwich, ok?"  
 "Fuck you."  
 Click.  
 Aaron held up the receiver and stared at it in disbelief. She was so irrational, there was no dealing with it. Still, he had to. He had resolved that he would stand by his son, no matter the price. So there were going to be about a million setbacks. So what?  
 He noticed that on the ground by his feet, the package was covered with ants. He kicked at it, but the damage had already been done. He picked it up by two half-open ends and shook it with a quick, frightened violence. A fair amount of the contents flung to the wind, but he kept a thumb on some of it. One or two of the cheeses, some dampened bread and a fat piece of sausage survived the storm, and Aaron brushed off the tiny invaders until he had made a complete mess.  
 In the end, he was too creeped out by the insects to enjoy his pyrrhic victory. He threw the whole thing down in disgust. He wiped his greasy, sodden hands over his damp shirt, trying to shake away any fugitive bugs along with the now endemic wetness.  
 Coin. Coin. Coin.  
 She finally picked up.  
 "What, you didn't hear me, Aaron? I said, 'Fuck. You.'"  
 Click.

*J. Scott Hardin is Senior Editor at The Houston Literary Review and a regular contributor with Ragazine. His work has appeared at Journal of Truth and Consequence, Danse Macabre, Bards and Sages Quarterly, Final Draft and elsewhere. Readers are invited to read more at [www.jscotthardin.com](http://www.jscotthardin.com).*

## DISCES L'AMORE

Floating upstream  
 comes naturally,  
 when you're a fish...

It's easy to go  
 with the flow of a strong current  
 destination unknown.

Floating upstream  
 comes naturally,  
 when you're a fish...

Beware of those  
 who cast the net far and wide  
 who drop you a plastic line.

For there's nothing easy  
 about struggling to breathe  
 when they've got you, hook, line and sinker  
 and they've wrenched you out of the water.

There's nothing natural  
 when you've been cut open  
 you've spilled your guts  
 because they've used their heart as bait

“

Trust is unnatural;  
 Love is cold blood-  
 ed murder.

”

*Iskra Valentine is an activist, feminist, burlesque artist and writer from Australia. When she is not tackling GBLTI issues in writing, she is out protesting them in the streets or on stage. Iskra finds her inspiration on quiet nights, reading beat poetry in the bath listening to Nick Cave with a drink in one hand and cigarette in another.*

TRIPTYCH: NO MORNING-AFTER PILL FOR MADNESS/DEAR GRANDMA/

LEMONADE, VODKA, HONEYSUCKLES

by Matthew Dexter

*A trip...three times over.*

Some call them "beauty marks," but you see them as cancer. So you're lying in bed well after midnight, scratching moles off your face using dirty fingernails, searching for answers. Beneath self-evident revelations: adolescent insecurity. You see it rising to the surface as you peel the outer edges, destroying vermilion border.

It's more difficult than you anticipated, tearing these hideous lesions. Protrusions like viscous poison drip from cheek, upper lip. But that mole under your right armpit is not much easier, hanging there like a grotesque question mark. Still, they can't totally be removed; neither can the one on your stomach. Maybe you should numb it? Use a knife. Maybe go downstairs to the kitchen, dig in the drawers for a steak knife? Take an ice cube from the freezer?

But your fingers seem so much more natural, as if they were meant to peel such ordinary blemishes.

Who the hell needs a plastic surgeon? Not you. You're a genius. Not worried about infection or the mild neurosis boiling below the surface. Fixation has taken a dangerous turn hours ago. Restless hours of digging: peeling, revealing the inner layers, a snake shedding its skin.

The inertia of exhaustion slows your mission—you give in just when you thought you'd already be holding your trophy: your milligram of flesh. In the morning, your face is sore; your armpit is purple; the pieces of the puzzle are hanging from a mirror that holds no mercy.

*Dear Grandma,*

I knew there were sharks in the water, but it just seemed right, the safest place to be. We watched from the patio sipping piña colodas, remember? Swimming parallel to the shore, their fins skimming the surface of the waves. The beach was closed after a surfer had her arm severed. The local media and everybody have taken to making a huge deal about the dangers. Especially after what you did!

Really, I feel safer in the sea than anywhere else. But I never expected you to follow me into that current Grandma. What were you thinking? I was just proving my immunity to disaster, my iron horse of a destiny; fate always protecting me where others have suffered. Mom says you swan dove into the wave?

Pedestrians were going crazy. They all thought you broke your neck in the sand when your wave crested too early. They saw your skull hit the sand. What possessed you to keep rolling down the beach, outward with that receding wave? They watched it pull you under; the sharks started struggling, swimming away from me. I rode her fins, but I couldn't hold on forever.

The sharks rode your body to shore. They said your eyes were wide open, but you were fine, safe onshore. Bloody—but nothing fatal. Lifeguards were hoping for the best, running toward you. What made you roll back down with the wave again Grandma? They say you stretched out like a log and rolled yourself back into the sea.

You always wore shower caps in the swimming pool. They say thanks to you these sharks have acquired a taste for human blood. Where did this courage come from; this atavistic sacrifice to the ocean?

I rode the wave to shore and they were knee-deep in a frenzy, brave men and Mom almost up to her waist. They were screaming, searching for you, Grandma, as you swam underwater, deeper and deeper. Seagulls singing, sun shining, and freestyle into their midst you kept swimming.

*Lemonade, Vodka, Honeysuckles*

The first thing you need to know is that we had these yellow honeysuckles growing on a vine clinging to the wooden fence beside the swimming pool that tasted so sweet. We would lie on the ground and suck them, squinting into the sun, baking our wet stomachs against the pavement, water dripping from our bathing suits, sweet heaven dripping onto our tongues. You'd bite off the fresh tip of the stem, flick the leafy bell-shaped flowers on the shady pavement, and place the *Lonicera Caprifolium* inside your lips. Bees would hover, challenging you for the delicious nectar; that's what summer tasted like.

We were schoolmates, roommates, young boys sucking honey on the ground as chicks took turns doing back double two-and-one-half somersault dives in pike position. Blue lane lines glistened. We would eat dozens of fruity honeysuckles at a time, bees buzzing as we tanned our backs beneath the Englewood, New Jersey fence; outdoor hockey rink invisible behind the blooming honeysuckles.

The smell of chlorine was enchanting. Eons nicer than those refineries on the New Jersey Turn-

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pike. We were exit number seventy-one. What exit were you? Months with no commitments, honeysuckles blossoming sweet teenage chicks wearing bikinis, splashes, birds chirping, diving board bouncing in the wind. Those were the fucking days.

One afternoon I decided to reach deeper into the vine than ever before. I must have knocked over a hidden hive or something because the yellow jackets swarmed as their tentacles broke off inside my fingers and wrist. Running for my life, I did a can opener after a couple more stung me on the ankle. "Mother fucker," I said.

The two ladies sharing an umbrella in lounge chairs were detested, my splash left their magazines wet and my obscenities were an insult to my upbringing. "Your mother must be so proud," one of them said. "Humphhh," said the other, turning her head in scorn. They were resting comfortably unaware that the bees were circling their bonnets, swarming their

half empty cups of lemonade and vodka a few inches off the pool deck. Only their Newport Lights kept the flying insects away from their faces. Blacked-out Prada and Dior sunglasses camouflaging angry yellow jackets.

By the time the ladies noticed it was too late. They were stung dozens of times before they managed to scamper into the pool. The bees hovered above their heads--they only rose for air. After a half hour the yellow jackets dispersed. "Sonofabitch," the women whimpered, tears dripping into their breasts like raindrops. I removed honeysuckles with extra caution that afternoon, sucked them like a nipple. My mother raised me better than those ladies.

*Matthew Dexter is an American writer living in Mexico. He survives in Cabo San Lucas.*

## THE FACE OF A YOUNG WOMAN IN PINK

It's painted on the portrait with velvet-like finish:  
The face of a young woman in pink  
Behind her half-shut lids coronated with the longest  
lashes:  
Her deep-seated eyes of the brightest blue  
Though dear and touching her simple stare compels  
When a flock of lust so thick darkens the irises  
The silent charm that had reigned now flutters  
Sound of wings like thunder that drums the heart.  
The dead air rippled by its unembraceable touch.

--Cyndi Gacosta

*Cyndi Gacosta was born and raised in San Diego, California. She spent only a few years of her early childhood in Sorsogon, Philippines. She studied literature at UC Santa Cruz. Her work has appeared in other literary journals such as The Walrus, Monongahela Review, The Toucan, and Vanilla.*



*'The Humiliation of Humility' by Ernest Williamson III*

# 61 HOMELESS IN THEIR HOMELAND

Photographed by Faizan Ahmed

In August, 2010 a series of floods devastated thousands of acres of farmland in Pakistan's agriculture dependent cities, leaving families homeless, their source of income wiped out and heavily dependent on the goodwill of their compatriots.

At a time when foreign aid trickled in slowly, agencies and governments distrustful of the corrupt politicians overseeing distribution, the country's various agencies came together to their aid.

These are their stories.



62 *Below: A young child in a make-shift cradle is unaware of her life hanging in the balance. The dire conditions that these children face, including a lack of proper sanitation and the potential threat of a viral epidemic, could mean the end of an entire generation.*





*A primarily agricultural country, Pakistan's crop sector has suffered a near fatal blow. The situation is a few heavy rains away from fulfilling its disastrous potential.*

***Below: With no warning and the flood waters rising at an alarming pace, villagers craft rafts for their families from things readily available, like this battered charpai afloat on empty drums.***



***Above: With aid being inconsistent at best, most survivors do not know how or where they will get their next meal. The ravaged landscape has made it impossible to scavenge for food and the surviving livestock only provides a finite source of nutrition.***



*Families pack themselves into tents that barely provide shelter, surrounded by contaminated water on all four sides.*







*Above: With no building materials and nothing but caked mud for miles, these survivors face a bleak future.*



*Above: Their land, now waterlogged, cannot sustain them. And with nowhere to go, these flood survivors have become homeless in their homeland.*

## 73 THE CRITICS: MARY

by Jacob Silkstone

*Of remembrance.*EDITOR'S  
U-DAY  
PICK

Vladimir Nabokov, *Mary* (Mashen'ka), translated by Michael Glenny and Vladimir Nabokov (Vintage International: 1989)

114pp

ISBN: 978-0-679-72620-3

So much of love is memory. Ganin, the protagonist of Nabokov's first novel, is holed up in Berlin, rhapsodising about a teenage love affair long since recalibrated in 'the labyrinth of memory.' Drawing on his own experiences in exile from 1920s Russia, Nabokov sketches a bleak portrait of émigré life: Ganin is 'mortally depressed,' absorbed in his recollections of Mary to the extent that he becomes 'unaware of time.' His few, fleeting days with Mary constitute 'a life that was much more real, much more intense than the life lived by his shadow in Berlin.'

Tellingly, the novel opens with Ganin confined in a broken-down lift with only Alfyorov, his exasperatingly optimistic compatriot, for company. In a twist that seems almost too neat, Ganin discovers that Alfyorov is married to Mary, who is due to arrive in Berlin in six days. Faced with the opportunity to turn fantasy

into reality, Ganin plans to meet Mary at the station and elope with her into an impossible future.

In the central plot strands, we see what Nabokov referred to as 'the beginner's well-known propensity for obtruding upon his own privacy, by introducing himself... into his first novel' – the inexperienced writer's fumbling towards autobiography. Aspects of the relationship between Ganin and Mary mirror Nabokov's own short-lived dalliance with Lyussia Shulgin, while the sharp dissection of Russian émigré life leans extensively on Nabokov's time in Berlin. Whether that reliance on what would now be called 'writing what you know' should be interpreted as a weakness is open to debate: in his foreword to the English translation of *Mary*, Nabokov expresses the view that such writing 'owes less to the attraction of a ready theme than to the relief of getting rid of oneself, before going on to better things.'

The easy assumption that *Mary* was simply a necessary stepping stone on the way to 'better things' displays characteristic false modesty. The final twist – Ganin realising 'with merciless clarity that his affair with Mary was already over' – throws the ending wide open enough to demand a second reading, and on closer inspection *Mary* is as multi-dimensional as Nabokov's later work. It is laced with nostalgia for 'old Russia,' with pyrotechnic imagery (rowan trees 'flamed with fruit,' a 'fan of railway tracks,' the 'translucent nail clipping' of a new moon), and with a young man's unique sense of world-weariness.

Above all, *Mary* is a complex interrogation of love: can we say that love as reality is subordinate to love as idea? In a novel bearing her name, Mary only appears through Ganin's memories of Russia – he acknowledges that 'as a living person she was only an uninterrupted continuation of the image which had foreshadowed her.' Ganin concludes that 'Other than that image no Mary existed, nor could exist' – for him, the memories of a few days spent in an ardent adolescent approximation of love supersede any possible adult relationship. Ultimately, the first, fierce love must be enough.

*"Jacob Silkstone blogs about books and the publication industry at Alone in Babel. Visit his blog at <http://aloneinbabel.themissingslate.com>"*

## KHUSHAAL PAKISTAN

by Wajiha Hyder

*Pakistan, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

The floods might have devastated Pakistan in numerous ways: the immense misery, pain and the profound loss suffered by some of the nation's poorest families will remain one of the world's greatest natural disasters of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it also brought people together in a joined and collaborated effort to help those in need. Indeed, the foundations for Khushaal Pakistan, a young organization started by three young men—political activist Samad Khurram, systems analyst Owais Barlas and marketing expert Muhammad Rafah—were laid in the aftermath. Within the span of two months, the organization traveled to Baluchistan for relief efforts and productively covered 13 flood affected areas. Their basic relief wasn't limited to the bare essentials of food, tents, warm clothes, etc. but also raised over US \$100,000.

The best laid plans often go awry and that may have been why none of this was effectively planned from the get go: the group's concentration was to raise funds which would go into another reliable organization. But, as Mr. Khurram explains, the theory was just that: a theory. "The initial plan was to focus on fundraising and financing people in the field. However, three basic issues came up: none of the organizations approached kept a record of their accounts / were transparent; most of them came with high overheads; all were inefficient and not targeted." With no formal structure in place, the solution seemed relatively simple and straightforward to these Three Musketeers: build an organization that would serve the welfare of the downtrodden. And so, Khushaal Pakistan was born. "Our basic philosophy is to develop long term solutions for underdeveloped areas in Pakistan by suggesting valid, affordable improvements that, when made, will drastically improve the standard of living in these areas."

Khushaal Pakistan isn't run in the way one might expect from a not-for-profit non-government organization: the overhead costs are usurped by the three founders while the donations cover the transportation costs. No extraneous funds are used for publicity and promotional purposes. "We need more young people to join us in our expeditions (to the sites), especially for things like conducting field research and models' analysis currently under consideration. Motivated, passionate individuals with economics and entrepreneurship backgrounds are, in particular, encouraged,"





Mr Khurram replies when asked what is required for sustaining the operation. As things stand now, before handing over the collective donations the team assesses (through intense field research) how much to give, who to give it to and just what needs to be given.

“We are planning for a long term sustainable project for all four provinces that will help people in those areas to stand on their own two feet. Although, this might take a while,” Mr. Khurram adds on the intention to switch from flood relief work efforts to a long term sustainable plan emphasized by bringing the donations schedule to a (temporary) standstill. In line with this shift, one among many projects currently in the pipeline involve the creation of a “small scale cottage industry (roughly US \$100-200,000) and linking it with foreign markets,” relevant in particular for places like Kot Addu where its citizens are skilled in carpet weaving. This along with opening it up to foreign markets will ensure that the salaries paid out to workers will be much higher than current earnings. But the organization’s plans don’t end here: “Health care and education of the workers and their children will be handled by KP as well. Should we earn profit on this project it will only be reinvested into another project,” Mr. Khurram continues.

The solution to mass unemployment and poor health care of flood victims as laid out by Khushaal Pakistan is simple: create jobs and educational establishments. This, instead of forking over money that might never find a use by people lacking the appropriate entrepreneurial skills and know-how will help creating a more stable environment. Although the initiative is still a work in progress solution and details like the cost, funding and the actual implementation need to be worked out, the real solution is altogether different: “We need more and more people to realize there is a multiplier effect of investments in the long run. The age-old charity based relief system is both awfully short-term and has a very limited impact.”

Thinking out of the box has become a bit of a necessity in these troubled times. By presenting workable solutions that tackle the heart of the many issues Pakistan is currently facing, these three young men are doing exactly that. But if this is really to work and stand a chance, then everyone will have to put in a collective effort and play a significant part in this revolutionary process. Khushaal Pakistan is a promising step in the right direction and will, we hope, be one among many.

*Editor’s Note: If you would like to respond to this piece, please send in your comments to [feedback@themissingslate.com](mailto:feedback@themissingslate.com). We will publish them at our discretion in the following issue.*

## The half empty swing II

20 x 30 inches  
Photographic Print



‘The Half-Empty Swing’ by Ahsan Masood

## VERANDA BISTRO

by Rizwan Takkhar

*Verandas Bistro, minus the 's'.*

Apparently, Verandas Bistro is a restaurant chain in the US. Someone in Lahore came up with an unbelievably creative twist on the name and started Veranda Bistro, Lahore. This one offers one of the prettiest, 'fine-dining' experiences I've come across in my eight years in the city.

My first impression of the place as soon as I arrived here for dinner last week was, "Whoa". The place has one of the prettiest dining setups in Lahore. The theme is extravagantly classy and is achieved through expensive wood and glass work. And this is just the interior dining area. The actual 'veranda' is even prettier and has this amazing "fire and water" combination theme with wood tables that suit the outside environment, umbrellas and all.

Let's jump straight to the food though. Like I often do, I tried my best to make every member of my party order something different so as much of the full menu as possible. We ordered Chicken Fettuccine, Lasagna, Lamb, and a T-bone steak.

Suffice to say, the décor really was the best thing about Veranda Bistro which is all the more shocking keeping in mind the fact that restaurants

and cafes in Lahore are enjoying healthy competition. The Fettuccine tasted like an unfortunate combination of pasta and several packs of vegetable-flavored Slanty chips. The Lasagna was served in a 3-inch diameter bowl that looked like cups for baking muffins. To compensate for the size of the serving, it was placed in a large plate lined with a ruffled table napkin. And the lasagna tasted totally desi — I've had better lasagna at desi homes in Lahore actually. The only thing I actually enjoyed on the table was the complimentary bread served as soon as we ordered. Freshly baked, served with garlic-infused olive oil, blissful!

All in all, I think the food experience was uniformly abysmal which was confirmed with the Rs 12,000 check for a party of seven—no starter or dessert—and an entrée and drink each. As a saving grace, however, I should add that the veranda area is a must-see if you are between 18-22 years of age and a Shisha-lover. Order their Shisha (they add real fruit!) and some thin-crust pizza, which is NOT a single serving as the server might suggest (serves 3). They might even throw in a complimentary Pomegranate cooler to cheer you up.

In summation: Veranda Bistro, Lahore is a great place for classy dining as long as you have a heavy purse and a cloudy judgment. A great shisha bar, however.



*Photographs courtesy of Veranda Bistro*

## 79 THE STATION AGENT

by Mohammad Bilal Iqbal

EDITOR'S  
U-DAY  
PICK

Written &amp; Directed by Tom McCarthy

Starring: Peter Dinklage, Patricia Clarkson &amp; Michelle Williams

Released by Miramax Films. Running time: 90 minutes

Rated R for language

“There are people called train chasers, they follow a train and they film it.”

“Are you a train chaser?”

“No.”

But Finbar McBride loves trains. He does not know how to drive and does not own a video camera, so instead he walks along the railroads – “the right of way”. He has just one friend: Henry Styles.

And when Henry dies and bequeaths him a piece of rural land with a train depot on it, it is time to move. So Fin packs up his bag and walks the railroad to Newfoundland, New Jersey.

The promise of a quiet solitary existence is quickly broken when Fin finds Joe Oramas for a neighbor. Joe is filling-in for his sick dad, selling coffee in a mobile van right next to Fin’s train depot. Add in a chance encounter with Olivia Harris, when she runs Fin twice off the road, and you have makings of

an unlikely trio.

Shot in Canada, *The Station Agent* features some breathtaking scenery. Be it being on an abandoned rail bridge looking over a calm lake and eating beef jerky, or sitting on a bench waiting hours for the next train to pass by, Thomas McCarthy’s camera never tries to steal the show with modern cinematic gimmicks. It lets the viewer absorb the scenery in its simplicity and then some. Neither is his script nor the demands that he makes on his actors theatrical.

Peter Dinklage plays Fin with an aloof detachment that perfectly captures the state-of-mind of the character. He is an unwilling hero who is denied his one wish to live a solitary life, away from people that have nothing better to do than make fun of his height. Not that he cares.

Olivia (Patricia Clarkson) herself wants to be left alone – not a hard thing to do if you know how to drive straight down a straight road.

If Olivia is the klutz, then Joe (Bobby Cannavale) is the life of the group. There would not be much of a film with two recluses. So in comes the happy-go-lucky Joe. With his full-of-life persistence and refusal to take no for an answer, Joe is what makes the three come, and stay, together.

They all have skeletons in their closet that they are running from. That is what makes being together so important: they cannot face them alone.

You will not find a traditional Hollywood-style closure here. But the film is not left open-ended for the sake of an artistic statement either. *The Station Agent* is a film that mimics life – full of light, even funny, moments sprinkled with a few looming dramatic realities.

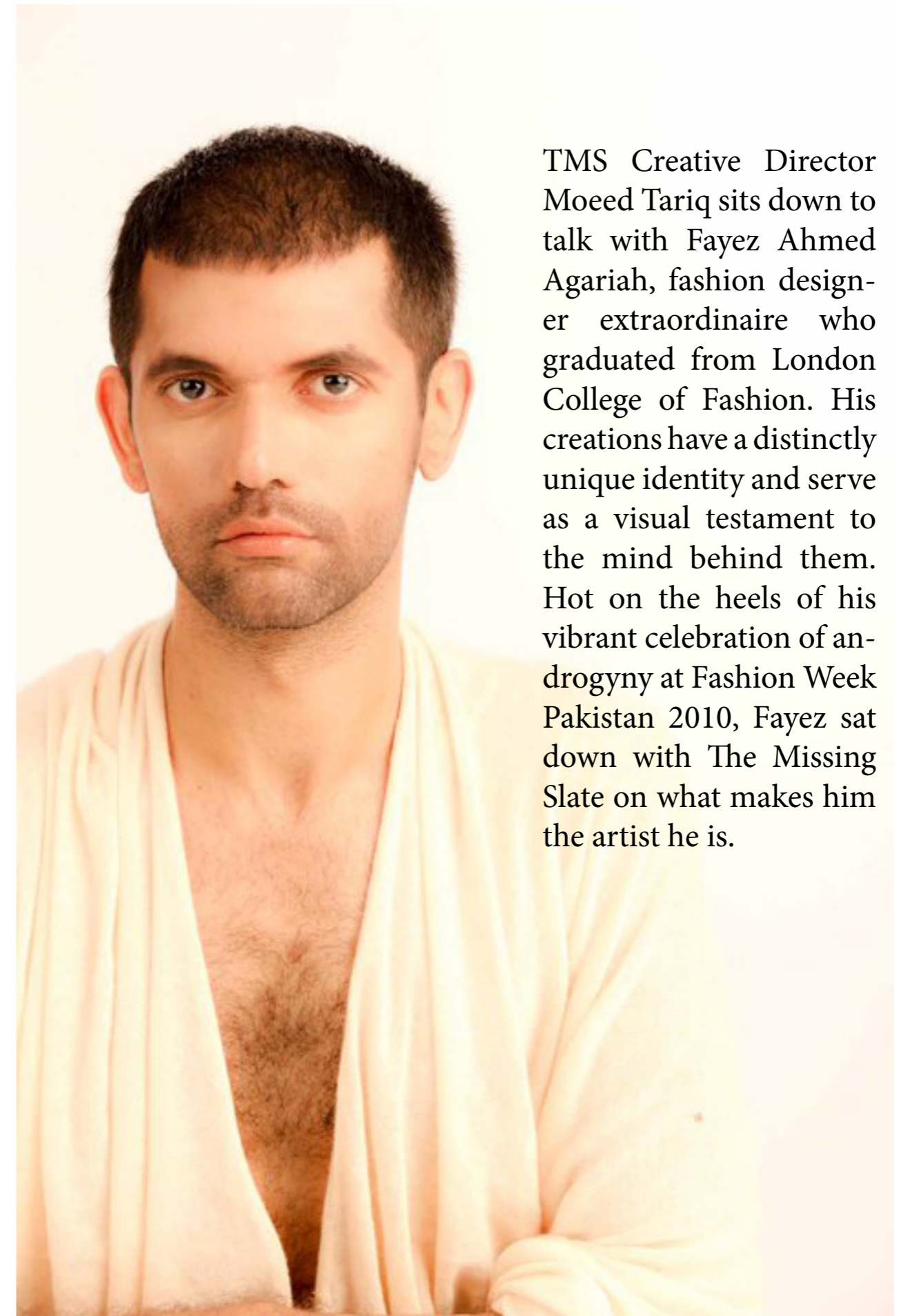
The key, perhaps, is to enjoy those lighter moments and try not to worry too much about your problems. *The Station Agent* could simply have been three people enjoying the company of each other, but it goes a step further. It invites you to be the fourth, silent, member of this group, to walk alongside the characters on their trek across the railroad for a picnic, or join them for a nice slow afternoon of train watching.

It is rare to find a modern film where the director errs on the side of simplicity and lets the characters and the story do the talking, and it is even rarer to find it done so well.

*Bilal Iqbal reviews films and blogs about film theory among various other film paraphernalia at The Second Frame. Visit his blog at*

<http://the2ndframe.themissingslate.com>

## SPOTLIGHT: FASHION DESIGNER FAYEZ AGARIAH 80



TMS Creative Director Moeed Tariq sits down to talk with Fayeze Ahmed Agariah, fashion designer extraordinaire who graduated from London College of Fashion. His creations have a distinctly unique identity and serve as a visual testament to the mind behind them. Hot on the heels of his vibrant celebration of androgyny at Fashion Week Pakistan 2010, Fayeze sat down with *The Missing Slate* on what makes him the artist he is.

*Draped Laces, Photo by Shamyk Khuhro, Styling by Humayoun Khan, Modeled by Fayezah Ansari, Year 2006.*



**Have you always known you wanted to be a designer?**

Honestly, I had no idea what I wanted to be. I was studying medicine on the direction of my parents, but I'd always been more inclined towards the arts and used to paint frequently. During my A-levels, a friend pushed me to go for what I was really passionate about, as opposed to falling into the same old pattern of doing what my parents wanted me to do. I had no idea that I'd end up in fashion at the time; I attended Naheed Raza's 'Studio Art' to polish my basics and realized that fashion was my true calling.

**Why choose LCF (London College of Fashion)?**

London College of Fashion was actually my second choice. I got into an art school in Miami but I couldn't get the visa. LCF has one of the most coveted design degrees in the world and London is one of Europe's fashion centers, so I was not at all displeased with ending up there. As I spent more time there, I began to realize that London really was the city for me. Its rich cultural and artistic history offers endless inspiration to anyone and everyone who is pursuing the arts.

**How has your family been about your decision to pursue fashion?**

To be honest? They were horrified. Like I've said before, they wanted me to become a doctor and the 180 degree turn to art was not welcomed. I had to keep on fighting with them till after I'd already graduated from LCF. It was only after I started getting recognition for my work, that they started to wrap their heads around the idea of their son being a designer.

**Where do you get your inspiration from?**

Inspiration for me comes from anything at any place, any time. It could be something as overdone as a pretty face or just the feel of a fabric. I cannot pinpoint the sources for my inspiration because I never go looking for it—it always manages to find me on its own and I couldn't be happier with our little arrangement.

**Are there any designers in particular that you greatly admire?**

Vivienne Westwood, Alexander McQueen, Gaultier, Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Rei Kwa Kobo of Comme des Garcon top the list. Others would include Gareth Pugh and Haider Ackermann.

**Thoughts on Pakistan's local fashion scene?**

Try asking me that again when there actually IS a fashion 'scene'. At this point we're between the chicken and the egg. It's just a daily performance of



*Above: The Red Diva Jump with Boa Constrictor, Model: Joshinder Chaggar, Photography: Shamyk Khuhro, Hair & Make up: Beenish Pervez, Art Direction: Fayez Agariah & Sanam Agha*

*Below: The suicide Bomber Jump and Jacket, Model: Humayoun Hakim, Photography: Shamyk Khuhro, Hair & Make up: Beenish Pervez, Art Direction: Fayez Agariah & Sanam Agha*



Mean Girls with mannequins and measuring tape thrown in. If you're someone who's ripped off another designer's work or collection you'll manage to wow your audience, but step away from the pre-set creations and what they embody, and you're pushed into the backrooms of the industry. There is no understanding in the consumers here of what fashion really means—it's simply two distinct camps—one hailing the glitz and glamor of it all and the other booing all that is avant-garde.

**How would you describe your work?**

Constant slow evolution. My work is not static. That's just the way I like it.

**We have it on good authority that you worked with Vivienne Westwood in London for quite some time but that you refuse to talk about that now? Any particular reasons?**

It was almost a decade ago. The subject's been canvassed (often thoroughly), in every interview I've given since. Although I'm always going to feel lucky that I had that opportunity but for that to be my calling card, is pushing it. Various designers have worked with the big names out there, but to cash in on that name, and to weave it into every conversation is not really my way of going about things.

**You've always been known to be a bit of a recluse in the industry and you're almost never seen mingling at the heart of the local 'scene'. Why is that?**

I wasn't exactly a recluse when I entered the fashion scene in 2000. My work was acclaimed for its out-of-the-box aesthetics and the first taste of fame did make me lose my mind for a short while. But during that time, I got acquainted with the usual set of peers from the nonexistent industry, which at that time cheered and jeered simultaneously, confusing naive little me into becoming a recluse over the next decade that followed. Over the years I slowly and gradually collected myself inwards and disappeared into my own world, which felt less threatening and relatively safer than the sharks out there—ready to devour anyone who does/did not carry the social graces of a 'professional' butterfly.

**You've only shown two collections in a career spanning twelve years and they were both avant-garde. Why avant-garde?**

Fashion in its true sense is avant-garde. I am a purist and my aesthetics do not allow me to create anything which is highly commercial and easily acceptable. I like questioning the intelligence of the person who looks at my work. There is no fun in creating an outfit which just looks pretty. A pretty ensemble



Above: Horizontal pleated black jumpsuit shot silk and chiffon. Model: Nadia Hussain. Photograph courtesy of Humayun M.

Below: Skin and Canary yellow jumpsuit in chiffon with brain coral patterned embroidery. Model: Rabia Butt, Photograph courtesy of Humayun M.

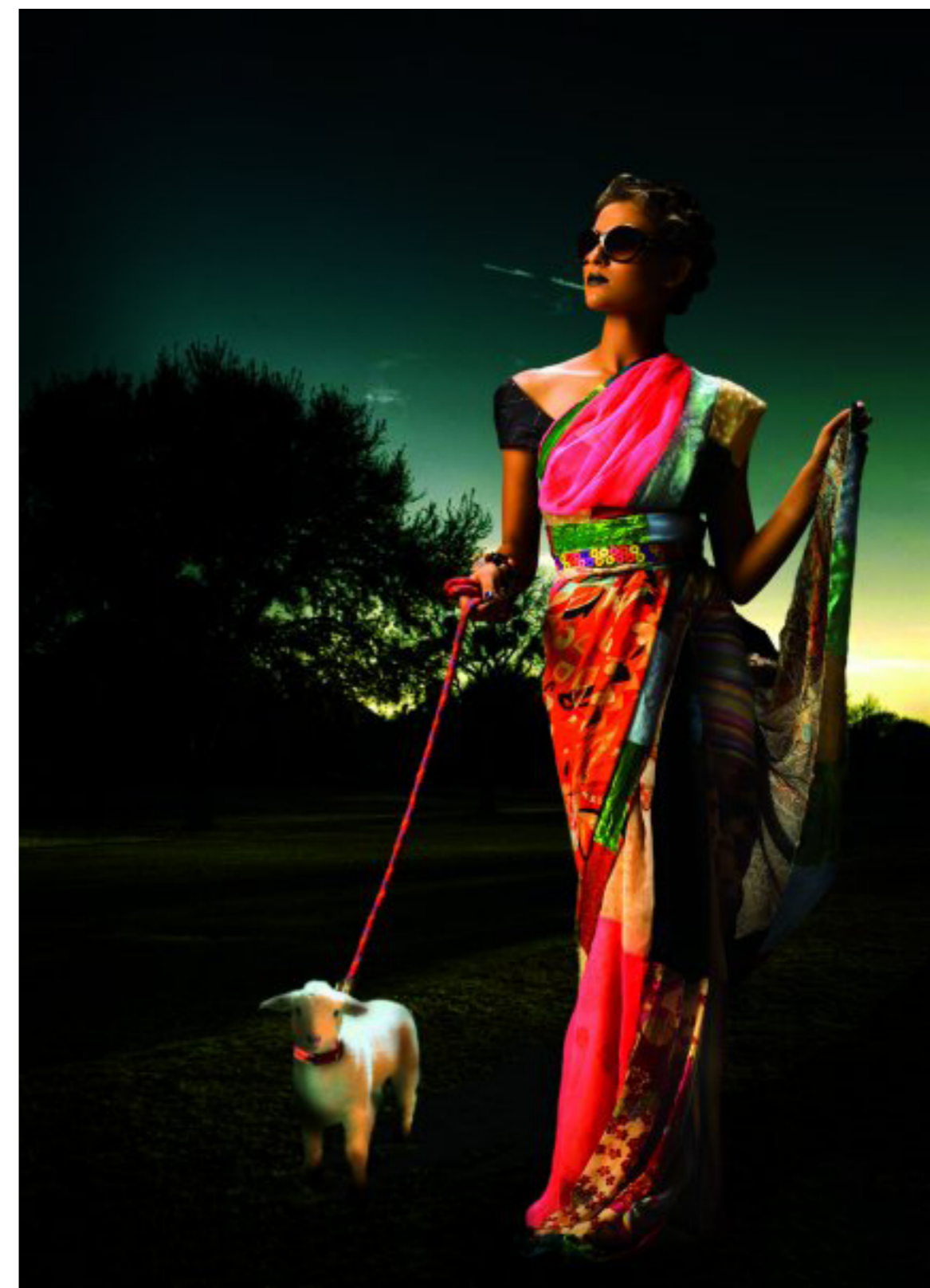


is boring to me; it's not that I don't appreciate pretty clothes but they never leave a lasting impact on my memory. In art and design anything edgy and out of the ordinary catches my attention, so I like to create things which are out of the box thus my style of work automatically becomes avant-garde.

**What do you have to say about the personal style of Pakistani people?**

Confusion a la carte! Pakistan's style is the epitome of a rat race which has started simultaneously

in all directions after a long suppressed period. The information overload has made us oblivious to our identity which was never established in the first place. Frankly speaking, we are experimenting continuously and quite paradoxically, perhaps wishing silently to come across a moment of rapturous discovery which we can miraculously coin as our own. Till then we will continue to be: 'Holly-Bolly-Lolly-woody-betcha-by-golly-me-pretty-you-ugly-me-rich-you-bitch!'



Patch work Sari with Denim Blouse, Photo by Shamyil Khuhro, Styling by Tariq Amin, Graphic Art by Nazya Amin Modeled by Nosheen Shah, Year 2008



## 85 SCHROEDER AND LUCY, NOCTURNE #9

by Dolan Morgan

*The Peanut Gallery*

I was going to visit Lucy at her school, had saved up some money and gotten a plane ticket. We weren't dating anymore, but she'd recently been dating Charlie. And he'd really changed a lot over the years. He could pop twenty-four Coricidin pills – or poor man's acid – in one night. I'd seen eight pills fuck people up so bad that all their insides were falling out, but Charlie multiplied that by three. He drank like a sponge and, according to Lucy, had some serious fucking emotional problems, real trouble dealing with shit. Broken up or not, he was flooding Lucy with love letters, splattering his heart all over the U.S. Postal service. He loved her. And he was big, tough, and ready to kick ass whenever a beer posse was there to back him up. So, when I went to visit Lucy, I feared what Charlie might do, considering our history.

Hard to believe, I know, but we'd dated for years – even though most of our conversations went like this:

"I wouldn't love you unless you were the last girl in the universe."

"Did I hear you say 'unless?'"

"Now, now, I *admit* that I *did* mistakenly say *unless*..."

"HOPE!"<sup>1</sup>

When we were that young, still just kids, eleven or twelve maybe, I abhorred Lucy and her squiggly mouth. But the more time we spent together, the more I liked her. Of course, I could never admit that I thought Lucy was wonderful, absolutely fucking wonderful. Instead, I stayed up all night in my house studying Beethoven, wearing the white off the keys (and my eyes). Meanwhile, I used up my days berating her with insults and derisions, as if I hadn't gone the whole night trying to get it just right so that maybe, just maybe I could play it perfect for her the next day. Like Joyce's idiot-ass *Araby*, I really thought this was all that mattered, that if I could do something perfect for this girl, even if it was as trivial as *Fur Elise*, somehow that would change things for me. Bullshit, of course, but I'm glad for it either way because I'm pretty damn good at the small-piano now.

In fact, one night, when we were both home for holiday, the same night that I sat parked in her driveway for hours, trying to leave while she watched from her bedroom window, I would tell her that most of the

great things I have done in my life were done with her in mind.

I meant it, too – you grow up with someone so close and it's hard not to have them involved. Add the fact that you adore them and they end up carrying some serious clout – which pisses the shit out of the practical, cold-hearted jerk in me, but dazzles the hopeless, piece-of-shit. The impetus for my work has always been not wanting to fall from her "Wall of Greatness" (she actually had one tacked up in her pink bedroom) - being afraid to fail her. She liked me, *and I felt I owed her for that*.

And I liked her too, so it was only a matter of time before we arranged a way to pay each other's debts.

"My panties are all inky." We had been kissing all night, one of the first times we had, one of those times when hours go by before you even touch each other because you're desperately afraid of what the other is thinking, one of the nights when the first actual kiss punches you in the kidney. In her bedroom, quietly, while her parents tried to sleep, we were still too afraid to take our clothes off. Neither of us had ever seen what was underneath that thin layer of color. She took my hand and placed it in the shadow of her skirt, gently pulled it up to her panties. They dripped with ink. I leaned in and kissed her neck, letting my hand rest there in the wet shadow, feeling her arms wrapped around me. I felt her color run steadily down the side of her face, mixing with my own. As my fingers rubbed along the edge of her white underwear, Lucy's hands scratched my back, pulling chips of black and red from my t-shirt. Our mouths drifted through each other. I brought my free arm up to her neck and then down her back, scraping away the blue, so it fell in opaque peels on the floor like coils from a sharpened pencil. She pulled her mouth away from mine and bit my shoulder, ripping pieces of color from my waist, exposing the bare paper underneath.

We didn't have sex that night. We just lay there, half on a pile of clothes and records, half on the floor, and scraped the ink away from each other's bodies until we were nothing but crumpled sheets of white, wrapped all around each other, soaked in sweat.

The plane to Nebraska University was small, maybe twenty eight seats. Cramped up against the window, watching the stewardess show me how to die, I thought about Linus. He'd hung himself with his security blanket two years earlier. Most everyone had

## PEOPLE WHO LIVE ABOVE STORES

*Morse Avenue,  
Chicago*

It's two in the morning  
and people who live above stores  
have sprung from their beds  
this hot summer night.  
They're leaning out of their windows  
and bellowing into the street

at the baker who launched the alarm  
in the Rogers Park Donut Shoppe.  
It's been ringing for hours  
and the police haven't come.  
Not even the firemen.  
The donuts will never get done

and it appears now that  
people who live above stores  
will remain in a rage  
leaning out of their windows  
waving cigarettes like strobes  
and bellowing the rest of the night.

--Donal Mahoney

*Donal Mahoney, a native of Chicago, lives in St. Louis, MO. He has worked as an editor for The Chicago Sun-Times, Loyola University Press and Washington University in St. Louis. One of many Pushcart Prize nominees, he has had poems published in The Wisconsin Review, The Kansas Quarterly, The South Carolina Review, The Beloit Poetry Journal, Commonweal, Revival (Ireland), The Istanbul Literary Review (Turkey), Public Republic (Bulgaria), Asphodel Madness, Calliope Nerve and other publications.*

come back home to do whatever it is you fucking do when someone dies. I don't know what I was doing there. I mean, yes, I was crying, and saying, "I'm sorry," and enduring silences with people I barely knew, out of respect, or empathy, or homage, or instinct. I was attending the funeral and the wake, and cocktail parties. But what the fuck I was actually *doing* there – what I was trying to *accomplish* – is beyond me. Linus left a note pleading to be buried in the Pumpkin



Above: "The Other Picasso" by Ernest Williamson

Patch, the symbol to him of all his "unrealized hopes, dreams, and ambitions," "the penultimate example" of his "failure to deliver something worthwhile." This was completely disregarded by his family, and Rerun's suggestion to at least etch a pumpkin into the headstone also went unheeded - everyone said it was "stupid." This really fucking ticked me off. I kept my mouth zip-locked, but *stupid*? They thought the pumpkin shit was *stupid*? Jesus H. Christ, wasn't that why he killed

87 himself in the first place?

At his wake, I got in line and had my turn to kneel at his coffin. His lines and paint were different. I wanted to smack the undertaker – he'd done Linus' eyes like crayon scrawls instead of dots. I thought about him sitting up in heaven, sucking his holy thumb, and looking down at us – looking down at me. Fuck. It was a humbling moment. What if he could see me kneeling over him, not standing up for his burial wishes? See me not buying pumpkin stickers and wearing them in silent protest? See me whining like a little bitch about my own problems, setting goals and making promises, then breaking them, not living up to half the man he thought I was, turning this funeral fucking Hallmark moment into my own self centered psychotherapy session?

Linus was a good guy – that's the point. I promised him I'd be a better person, there at his coffin. Or maybe I promised myself, but it makes me feel better to pretend I promised him.

And I needed to be a better person, believe me. I was pussy shit. Stuck in a cycle, falling for it every time. My mother used to trumpet that the definition of insanity is "the continued repetition of an action that always leads the same bad result." And so it goes. Lucy and I used to be a team, arguing on Sundays and resolving our differences in black and white on Monday, then the next Sunday back with our hands around in a strangle hold around each others' full-color necks all over again, one of us having tripped up bullshit, in ways that seemed scripted. The arguments got worse over the years, the tensions more painful than the flirting we'd started with. Yeah, but we loved each other, Lucy and I, so, we stuck it out, forgave each other. Franklin called me pussy-whipped, but it was more pussy than he was getting, so he usually didn't take it much further than that. I won't go into how this Sunday-to-Sunday bullshit really seemed to be happening in other parts of my life, too: the Elk's Club, my work schedule, etc. The problem was that I was still a little boy, wasn't being responsible enough. I couldn't seem to grow up. Twenty-something years old and I was still a little kid. Literally- my body had barely changed.

So that's what I promised Linus - to grow up already.

Behind the curtains on that Christmas with the floppy tree, we fell backwards onto my piano, trying desperately to keep our tongues in the right places, our shoes slipping off onto the wooden floor. Her skirt hiked up, her legs wrapped around both me and the little piano, Vince Guaraldi's rendition of "Herald

Angel's Sing" washing over us from the auditorium. We were together again, our Sunday argument forgotten and the snow falling silently against the window, the colors of the walls waxing and waning to the music. We melted all over each other, an oil-slick rainbow covering the ground beneath us, and Lucy's black bobbed hair all over me, leaving streaks of black across my face. I lived for this, died for it. Getting her back was a sinking, a winning, the sex an award.

One whiff of Pigpen, though, and we halted the production. His dirt peeked around the corner and we were on the floor, trying to dress. Ink and paint everywhere. But we managed to play it off. Pigpen seemed to be placating us by not saying anything, but we placated him in return, and we all went back to singing out front with everyone else.

Since then, Pigpen has cleaned himself up, but only so much. He smells all right, but his body is ravaged by VD.

Lucy was diagnosed with herpes once. I can barely believe my memory of her, lying naked behind her therapist booth, throwing nickels in the air as she threatened to cut herself with a Swiss Army knife.

We would later learn the diagnosis was incorrect, but the cuts are still there.

Before I left for Nebraska, Snoopy busted into the bar like he owned the place, smacked some bitch's ass, and grabbed a beer. The dog had done well for himself – he was writing for a paper in the village. Woodstock wasn't far behind. It was a Monday morning, and when he saw me the dog got a knowing look. I said, "Yeah, I'll win her back, don't worry." He downed his beer and I missed class. I have no idea how many times we've had that conversation.

When I finally saw Charlie in Nebraska, he was great. I was on the porch talking to this girl, some townie, and I saw him coming up the walkway. He stopped and threw up in the shrubbery, then stuck his head up and said, "Good grief, gotta get rid of the enchilada to make room for more beer."

I smiled. My kind of guy. "Remember when you used to try and kick that football, and then you'd fall down, every time?" I laughed, resting my Heineken on the porch railing.

He cracked up, too. "Oh man, last time I did that, fuck, that was like *yesterday*."

"You're *still* doing that?"

"I can't help it."

I wasn't sure if Charlie really liked me, or if he was just playing polite so he wouldn't piss off Lucy. Later that night, talking to Jane, I caught him looking

at me strangely.

"Yeah, and quantum frame mechanics are fucked up, man!" Jane was talking about her major, her face twisted into an excited knot.

"Yeah, it's pretty freaky stuff." With Charlie looking at me, I was ashamed to be having this conversation.

"I mean really, to think that we all just, like, shit, like we're all made up of fucking... fucking *frames*? Shit, man. Like, time is passing in this fucking system? Crazy! And we all just fucking go with it." She was stoned off her ass. "I mean, have you ever seen someone move too fast?"

Charlie shook his head and walked back inside. But it really was something, to see someone run, their legs moving too fast to communicate visually, knees and thighs skipping frames. Jane lost all interest when she fell into the arms of some man who started making out with her eyes.

Earlier that day, Lucy had taken me to see her friend's recital, a quartet of musicians on piano, trumpet, clarinet, and drums. Her friend was the star, showing off his horn skills. I knew he was good when he belted out the first note. It reminded me of the best math lessons I'd ever had, the rhythm of the clarinet and drums giving charge to the trigonometry pouring out of that instrument. He was a pro. He played the harsh notes of discipline that could knock us over when we talked behind the substitute's back, and he played the soft minor arpeggios of our parents' guidance. This guy had it down, and it fell out of him like that horn was his mouth. The clarinet sounded like Uncle Ed, and as we walked through the practice room in the back after the recital, it was Thanksgiving, a slew of aged relatives chattering away, ricocheting there muted wisdom scales against the walls. I felt so young - the piano didn't have that brassy *wah wah* of middle age, just the taught strings of adolescence.

\*

The clock struck midnight and it was officially Sunday. We were on a bench talking about who we'd slept with since we last saw each other – which was not going well – and I told Lucy that Charlie seemed like a hell of a guy, that she should be a little nicer to him, maybe lay off the football trick.

"Who the fuck are you to tell me how to treat Charlie?"

"What? I'm just saying I think he's nice."

"You're lucky I'm not sleeping with him right now."

One of these arguments again. Should have seen

it coming.

"I told you I was fine with that." I wasn't.

"You're fine with it?"

"Yeah."

"Fuck you." She got in her car and drove away, leaving me on the side of the street in the middle of nowhere. I slept on some hick's front lawn for a while, but I didn't want to wake up there covered in dew. So I walked back, asking drunken strangers how I might find a blue house about yay big with a tree.

We took a trip to California, right before college. Patti had moved to San Francisco, claiming it was for the temperate weather. Her screen name was carpetliquer - she says it's a brand of moonshine. Lucy and I stayed on her couch for a week, using Patty's car while she was at school. We learned to drive the coastal highways, and under the bleeding watercolor of sunsets, the oily red and orange shimmer mixing slowly, we held hands on piers, reveling in our ability to be cheesy, walked barefoot on beaches. Her hands were cold. They never got warm, but I would spend hours trying to heat them up. Then she'd kiss my whole face and laugh.

"I love you," she said.

"I love you," I said.

She turned around in the bed, to look at me as I stood in the doorway, and I had never seen her so faded in my life. She started screaming and I knew the whole house could hear us, knew Charlie's room was right below ours.

"Is that all you have to fucking say to me?"

I imagined Charlie waking up, still drunk but starting to get hung over.

"I just can't believe you left me there." I heard someone move downstairs.

Then she smacked me. Which was okay, sometimes people do that. The second smack came down on my neck. That one wasn't okay, and I put my arms up to protect myself. She hit me again, square in the head, hard, this time knocking the sweaty color of my blond hair loose, yellow ink splattering against the wall. I jumped up off the mattress and moved quickly to the other side of the room. She hit me the whole time I was within range.

"You're fucking hitting me. That's – you're fucking *hitting* me." I couldn't believe it, couldn't even begin to process what was happening, the sight of ink dripping from my body. A toilet flushed. "I'm not going to stay here, I'm sorry." I was apologizing and I felt like an idiot for feeling like an idiot about it. I picked up the phone to get my parents to wire me money so

## DOUBLE RIPPED TWINKS

An exorbitant email from Kevin.  
Do I know him? I know of no Kevin.  
The subject 'The Wind in the Sun Run to Play'.  
Is it peotry or poetry— to some people, either,  
faces full of babies and funerals  
like rotten chicken in pink saran or  
hearty loads of syrup wrapped in talk  
like a nation—

Doubleclick, tripped to slink inward,  
hello Kevin, do I know him? Wait—  
there's but advertisement, drumming,  
'come look, come see, look and see come and'  
my English reading is irradiated on the product  
offered, the quite unmanned electro-hovel.

Lechery. Site link. Name: Double Ripped Twinks.  
There is no Kevin. The Wind in the Sun  
Run to Play is nothing. There has been  
a mistake I do not fail to remove.

What happens in the quarry, impossible Kevin,  
where all bare feet are stickseed bled to stones?  
What have you sent me, asking I enter;  
the tale, the tail, the boughs, the brunt...

Un-Kevin, this pretend, it's false, you think  
you know it all, but I've no speculation  
for crumpled souls in kruller arrangements.

Don't you know?

--Ray Succre

Ray Succre is an undergraduate currently living on  
the southern Oregon coast with his wife and son. He  
has had poems published in *Aesthetica*, *Poets and  
Artists*, and *Pank*, as well as in numerous others  
across many countries. His novels *Tatterdemalion*  
(2008) and *Amphisbaena* (2009), both through  
Cauliay, are available in print. *Other Cruel Things*  
(2009), an online collection of poetry, is available  
through Differentia Press.



Above: 'Musical Impact' by Ernest Williamson

that I could get a room somewhere, a motel maybe.

"What the fuck are you doing? Who the hell are  
you calling? Put that phone down!" She was across the  
room in seconds, her bobbed hair uneven and flap-  
ping.

I was nervous, but I tried to be direct. "I'm just  
calling to get some money wired to me so I can get a  
room and we can deal with this shit later when we're  
both - "

"Shut the fuck up." She started kicking me in the

shins, small bits of paint and line careening off me. It  
was the silliest thing, like some made-for-T.V. movie,  
getting kicked and hit, and also absolutely horrifying.  
I barely managed to tell my mom what the situation  
was. Lucy smacked at the phone and my face, her  
limbs skipping frames, and as she moved like that I  
briefly thought of the wonderful dance we used to do  
together, shaking our feet and arms all around, bob-  
bing our heads. I dropped the phone.

"What the hell are you doing? What's wrong  
with you?" I was crying.

"There's nothing wrong with me - what, you  
can't stand up for yourself?"

"What the fuck is going on?" I looked at the cur-  
tains and the carpet and the bed and the dresser and  
motherfucking damnit. Fuck.

"Shut up. So I hit you, so what? You gonna call  
your mommy again?"

The carpet and the stairs and the painted texture  
of my sweater. "Can't you see what's wrong with what  
you're doing? How can you possibly give me a reason  
- "

"Shut up. You're just a little pussy like Linus.  
Where's your little security blanket? Huh?"

She was insulting her dead brother. "That's it,  
I'm leaving." I bent to pick up my shoe.

"You're not going anywhere, because I can kick  
your ass." I actually laughed at this point, not because  
I thought she couldn't - Lucy is really fucking tough  
- but because I couldn't believe she was actually try-  
ing this tough-guy shit on me. Also, she had called  
me a pussy - what I'd been calling myself for weeks. I  
laughed and tried again to get my shoe. She punched  
me so hard in the face that my color flew all over the  
room. I had to grab the dresser for support.

I don't remember how it ended, but I never did  
leave. I sat against the door and fell in and out of sleep,  
trying to talk and not understanding a damn thing -  
trumpets and horns. Then there was quiet. Quiet, and  
I wasn't strong and determined anymore, I was in her  
bed trying to sleep. It didn't matter where I slept if it  
was going to be over anyway. Before we drifted off, I  
held her like a security blanket and cried - wept *at* her  
like she was a dead body.

The next day we barely mentioned what had  
happened. It was the best day we ever had together.  
We held hands and sat on couches without talking. We  
looked at each other and knew exactly what the other  
was thinking. We had nothing to do, so we ate. We ate  
a real fucking lot. We rented *Who Framed Roger Rab-  
bit*. We laughed and knew each other, knew each other

all day. And then, looking at her on the couch, under  
the blue-red moonlight of the television, her short lit-  
tle dress riding up her thighs, her smile a gentle pencil  
scratch, I knew that, if my mind lapsed - if I somehow  
forgot everything - I'd fall in love with Lucy, all over  
again, and let myself break on her fists because she  
asked me to.

(Endnotes)

1 Schultz, Charles. "Peanuts." July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1959

*Dolan Morgan lives and writes in Brooklyn, NY. Pre-  
viously, Dolan's stories have been featured in Cricket  
Online Review, InDigest, Broken Plate, Litterbox, Prick  
of the Spindle and the Lifted Brow. One Story, Cells,  
received an Honorary Mention in 2008's Italo Calvino  
Prize for Fiction. He has a dead (?) twin brother and  
makes PowerPoint presentations about you, among  
others.*



Above: 'Erasing The Frowns' by Ernest Williamson

## 91 GLOBETROTTER: TRULY ASIA

by Nilanthi Sangarabalan

*Hong Kong. Malaysia. Singapore.*

**Date: Tue, 2 Nov 2010 03:55:10 +0000**

Today will mark my 23rd day of having left the U.K. Not necessarily a well-known and celebrated milestone, but today is also important because it marks the last day of my stint in Asia - tonight I will catch a flight, landing in Cairns tomorrow. Fancy finding out how it's been?

### Hong Kong: 11th - 17th October

Still recovering from a cold I'd caught whilst in the UK, I arrived in the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong not feeling 100% well. If anything, the seven days there helped me get used to the environment and the idea that I would be travelling for three months.

The accommodation of choice was a complex called Chung King Mansion - a little intimidating to a first time solo traveller due to the sheer number of people bustling about and the various touts who come to offer you a room in their hostel. The guesthouse on the 11th floor I had booked into was nice and quaint, although I didn't spend much time there - having dropped my bags, I was ready to hit the city.

People in Hong Kong tend to keep themselves to themselves - not necessarily because they're unfriendly, they just tend to just go about their business. I wasn't bothered by this - a friend had lent me her guide book and it proved invaluable throughout the whole trip. Hong Kong is split into two areas of interest, the mainland and Hong Kong Island. I stayed in the mainland, but went to the island every other day, (accessible by ferry - a comfortable 10 minute ride). The area I stayed in was full to the brim with shops, mostly malls. I'm not normally a shopaholic, but here it was difficult to restrain myself.

Highlights of the week were definitely:

1) The Peak:

The journey up in a tram was exciting in itself, but the views are spectacular.

2) The Po Lin Buddha:

A giant Buddha statue atop a ridiculous number of stairs.

3) The night market:

Having not walked down the road far enough to find one night market in particular, I went back another night, found the market, and tried my hand at some bartering

4) The ferry ride to and from the island:

Watching people in suits using this mode of transport to work made me smile.

5) The night show by the pier:

A daily twenty minute show composed of orchestral music and lasers.

My hopes of gorging myself on bubble tea and dim sum were dashed when I struggled to find many joints selling either. Still without much of an appetite after being unwell, I decided to play it safe and only had a handful of rice dishes, instead living off bakery items (and there were a lot of bakeries).

You can get a fairly good trip out of Hong Kong within 4 or 5 days. Thankfully, I needed the extra two to focus on getting well. All in all, a good introductory trip.

### Singapore (1st Leg): 17th - 20th October

On this leg, I stayed with my cousin and her family, only making one day trip into the town centre.

Considering I'm not a massive art fan, I thor-



*Photographs courtesy of Nilanthi Sangarabalan*

roughly enjoyed the Singapore Art Museum (good job on the current exhibitions). Afterwards, I headed to the National Museum of Singapore - a definite must visit! In addition to the galleries dedicated to food, fashion, film and photography, there is an interactive exhibition that takes you through the history of Hong Kong, telling you about major events as seen through the eyes of the major players as well as the common people. You also get a handy companion device to guide you through, which is literally miles ahead of the audio guides we have in the UK.

Another highlight of Singapore are the jingles and adverts you see and hear on the MTR (train) system. With help from a trio called the 'Dim Sum Dobbies', you are encouraged to give up your seat, queue when the train is coming and move into the train to allow more passengers in. Yes, I hear the same things in London, but usually from the bus driver. And he doesn't even sing it, he just yells it from the front of the bus.

#### Malaysia: 20th - 30th October

The aim of this trip was to not spend the whole holiday in relatives' houses having refills of tea and being fed continuously. I am proud to say this was certainly achieved. Of the ten days I was in Malaysia, five were spent visiting Georgetown in Penang, and Malacca (both recently recognised world heritage cities). The other five were spent in Kuala Lumpur, where I took day trips.

Penang and Malacca are both worth visiting. Malacca architecture has been heavily influenced by the Dutch and Portugese and I got the feeling I had gone somewhere where time had literally stood still - I certainly didn't feel like I was in Malaysia! Penang was also a lovely area, with structures dating back to the time when Malaysia was part of the English colony.

Back in KL, I visited the Batu Caves - which house two main temples and statues of various Hindu deities. I also paid a visit to the Petronas Twin Towers. This took two attempts, as the first time I went, I arrived too late (9:30am) to get one of the 1500 or so tickets sold each morning (the ticket desk opens at 8:30am). The second time round, I took no chances and was in the queue by 7:30am. Although advertised as a must-do in Malaysia, I'm not sure this is the case, as I think you can get better views from the KL tower and don't need to get up ridiculously early to get a ticket for it. Saying that, the sight of the Petronas towers and the KL tower at night has possibly been the best night view I've seen so far on this trip. Yes, it even beats the Hong Kong skyline (just).

Malaysia was also the country where I started to truly experience the culinary delights that accompany a trip abroad. Satay, nasi lemak, hokkien mee and biryani - accompanied by ice coffee, ice Milo, or indeed, ice Nestlo (that's coffee and milo together).

I left Malaysia still wanting to do more. Considering the sheer number of relatives I have there, though, I'm sure I'll be back within a few years.

#### Singapore (2nd Leg): 30th October - 2nd November

Returning to Singapore, my stay this time was in a lovely guesthouse in the centre of town. Coincidentally, a friend from home was also in Singapore at the time, so we both did a little sightseeing. Whilst here, I also attended a day cookery class. Since I could not find a course that would teach me traditional Singaporean dishes for the amount of money I was willing to part with, I chose a chocolate tasting/demo/hands-on class instead. I may start creating my own truffles when I return home!

My friend and I also spent a day in Sentosa, which claims to be 'Asia's favourite playground'. Expecting an island with small attractions, I got a bit of a shock when I arrived and found that the whole place seemed to be an attraction. Apart from the shops the popular stops included a giant merlion statue (the symbol of Singapore), zip wire rides, a luge race course, beaches, a recently opened Universal Studios theme park and a casino. Having been encouraged to visit the casino, I paid a visit and quickly lost \$10 (5 pounds) on a poker game. Looks like I won't be going 'Ocean's 11' on that place anytime soon.

On each arrival in Singapore, I found myself falling in love with the place a little more. It's definitely somewhere I could see myself living and working in the future. Plus, bubble tea is in abundance!

#### 'Challenge Nil' update

I haven't had a great start in accomplishing the challenges set by my friends. Here are the details:

#### 1. HONG KONG: See how far you can barter a seller down on an item's price

--> If you flirt a little, attempt to connect with the seller on a common issue (he liked football, I made something up about supporting Chelsea) and if the seller is not good at maths (either due to lack of learning, or shock from seeing such a beautiful foreigner), you can barter down a cute pen from \$9 to \$4.

#### 2. SINGAPORE: Take a day long cookery course

--> Okay, it was half a day, a demo rather than a course, and focused entirely on how to melt chocolate





and make truffles rather than how to concoct an Asian cuisine to die for. But I got to make truffles and take them home.

### 3. MALAYSIA: Eat durians

--> I arrived in Malaysia just as durians were out of season - what are the chances? I did actually spend a good half an hour looking for them, but even the stalls that only sell the stuff were closed. That's got to tell you something. Found durian on my second leg in Singapore.

### 4. MALAYSIA: Visit Batu Caves and climb up and down the stairs twice (Sathiajothy Jeevaretanam)

--> Done, although I took a lengthy break between the two climbs - with 272 steps, you can hardly just start climbing them again as soon as you reach the bottom.

### GENERAL: Commit one of the seven deadly sins in each country you visit

--> Pride in Hong Kong, Gluttony in Malaysia,

not quite sure if I committed anything in Singapore - perhaps a bit of sloth? The jury's still out on that one.

### GENERAL: Get a photograph with a policeman in every country

--> This has proven more difficult, and unless things pick up in my next set of countries, may have to consider this challenge failed. Policemen in Hong Kong and Singapore both said 'no' to a photograph straightaway, the Malaysian policeman was much more obliging.

Nx

*Nilanthi Sangarabalan is a recent graduate of the London School of Economics. Coming from a family of travellers, she was hit by the travel bug from an early age and spent three months after her university education exploring parts of Asia.*

## 97 MY DIGITAL FRIEND

by Aaron Grierson

*Cyber etiquette.*

How many people exist out there that you would call a friend, or even acquaintance? Of all of those people, think about how many you've never met. Though I can count the 'friends' on one hand, the acquaintances are well over a dozen, and, like graduating high school, many others have fallen from memory since falling off the grid. I don't know about you, but I don't feel quite so out of place maintaining a few contacts I've never met; the people you can engage with online can be very interesting, or of course just as annoying as the kid cracking bad puns in math class. The wonders of the World Wide Web are seemingly endless.

Without a doubt, the Internet is becoming a more and more popular phenomenon by the year. With it comes an increasingly complex set of relationships. Not just with businesses and advertising, banking and shopping online, but with your social life too. As we're learning, willingly or otherwise, these relationships quickly become necessary to our lives through the integration of technology. We might not all understand it perfectly, but generally we get by. By now most people, especially my generation have joined some sort of "social network" like Facebook, MySpace or Twitter. Predating these social networks are chatrooms, many of which are still operational today. The testimony of their importance is in many places in these social networks. Facebook has a chatting application, many online games have lobbies where people can chat and Twitter's posting system is so excessive that it's almost like a chatroom in its sheer volume. Indeed, chatrooms have been around since the late 80's, and though I don't know what they were like, I seriously doubt they have changed that much.

Like a coffee shop or a classroom, chatrooms are lively communities where people can come and go as they please. Chatrooms have been numerous since the early 90's, but their popularity doesn't reflect this. Unlike major networking websites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, most chatrooms do not have the advertising power and so are lesser known to the general public. The other major contributing factor that affects popularity is the number of chatrooms floating around on the Internet. They are often small standalone websites with built-in chatrooms while there are far fewer social networks. One such example is Meebo, which I only happened across after some-

one recommended it to me. Not once have I seen an advertisement for the website. It's easy to see why not many people know about chatrooms, which is why they become semi-closed communities that have to pass through word of mouth, the digital equivalent or simply knowing where to look.

Over time, these communities build up a regular group of people who see many relationships blossom, despite little to no "real life" contact. Often times, as I have seen, heard, and even been a part of, these friendships often breach into the romantic sphere, as two individuals are drawn together through personality alone. It's a curious twist on social life, especially when one considers the drama most of us are put through in our daily lives. Can these online relationships really be worth it? Are they drama free?

Not really. You will still have to put up with the same rounds of taunting and fighting, although there is hope. One may find more than before. I say this because the anonymity of the Internet sometimes brings out audacity from the most docile personalities. Of course, most chatrooms also come with a handy mute option so you don't have to hear all the tantrums and hypothetical fist fights. Some people will offer enjoyable antics and others intelligent conversation that both you and they can enjoy and reciprocate. The former tend to be those who regularly hang around in the same chatroom. The latter is much rarer, even if they can come from the former group. These are the people one should keep in touch with, and often the ones where friendships would form. However sweet a particular person may seem, it's a good idea to keep your guard up online, just as it is in person.

Aside from the horror stories of teens committing suicide over cyber bullying, there can be severe downsides to taking people seriously on the Internet. There are also downsides to getting attached to a person you've never met, even if the attachment takes the form of having become used to talking to them. Just like the friends you have in person, they can flip out at you, sometimes for no reason, and never want anything to do with you again. Which of course leaves a bit of a void to fill and the more you liked them, the bigger the void. This is one of the problems with the friends we've never met. Unless you're causing or suffering emotional pain when getting to know someone in any serious manner, chatrooms, like random people who add you on social networks, are to be dealt with carefully, if not amicably. Then again, I live by the cliché that honesty is the best policy, because if you're honest, you will be able to tell which people would get along with you, and which ones won't. Let's face it, friendships are serious business.



'Cup' by Ahsan Masood

98



Lactate  
16 x 22 inches  
Water Paints on paper

'Lactate' by Ahsan Masood

## OUR VISION

The Missing Slate will be a representation both literally and visually of young, metropolitan life. Its general tone will be one of wit, satire, awareness and criticism but will not be unjustly critical.

Its journalism will not be sensational for the sake of being sensational; when sensationalism is covered, it will be backed by facts and will present an accurate, unbiased and objective picture. The Missing Slate will be above reproach when it comes to its journalism; each fact will be checked and double checked to ensure its validity and due cause. It will present a complete picture to those who would like to be kept in the know, without censor or censure either as words or photo essays.

The Missing Slate will devote several pages to rising stars in the literary, theater, film and artistic worlds, providing its readers with relevant interviews and reviews of events and the people behind them, and will be written by writers aware of the subject matter and the importance of presenting culturally and socially relevant information to its readers, in a way that will make The Missing Slate the definitive guide. The Missing Slate will in particular, keep an eye out for new (and undiscovered) talent to showcase in its pages.

The Missing Slate expects its fiction, verse and photography to be exceptional, bar none and will cover short and long forms, satirical, humorous and others in literature and critical, sharp, serious and precise in visual elements. Each piece

published will be material of the highest standard and quality, with a clear voice behind its words and lens. Both fiction and verse will be among the highlights of The Missing Slate, in presenting new and unheard voices from its readership and its editorial team. Its photography will be cutting and precise, introducing the diverse metropolitan to the unique vision behind its lens.

New artwork, in its various forms, will be showcased by young, new and previously undiscovered talent. Material will be fresh, vibrant and edgy.

Opinions, editorials and social commentaries will be presented by writers both critically and with an eye to change status quo, and will provide solutions to problems with predicted criticisms. Opinions and commentaries will, in particular, be written by writers who are aware of the situations around them and can write forth in

“Coming by evening through the wintry city  
We said that art is out of love with life.  
Here we approach a love that is not pity.

This antique discipline, tenderly severe,  
Renews belief in love yet masters feeling,  
Asking of us a grace in what we bear.

Form is the ultimate gift that love can offer—  
The vital union of necessity  
With all that we desire, all that we suffer.

A too-compassionate art is half an art.  
Only such proud restraining purity  
Restores the else-betrayed, too-human heart.  
—At a Bach Concert, Adrienne Rich ”

an entertaining, witty and satirical way but not go overboard in their cynicism.

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JUNE, 2011



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