

THE MISSING SLATE

For the discerning metropolitan.

FALL 2011



THE MISSING SLATE TEAM

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Butterfly by Sonja Dimovska



Photography by Aieez Mirza

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“

I.

A dove into a mirror;
A crow into a tree.

II.

There is a word missing.

— Bipolar, A.R. Chase

”

Archer Rose Chase is the unanticipated amalgamation of a Marine Biologist, a conservative Christian, and the sudden collision of science, religion, and art. She finds it ironic that her bio is longer than her poem.

6 A WORD FROM THE EDITOR ~ IN ~ CHIEF

Dear Readers,

When drafting this letter, I realized something which, between editing, team shifts and recruiting pitches from our staff editors, was forgotten for a little while. The Missing Slate's celebrating its first birthday this issue. We've come full circle from who and what we were on October 15, 2010.

The inaugural issue was an exciting one to work on. We were just getting our team in order, finalizing what we were going to cover, going crazy trying to get the right mix of content and visuals. My team and I promised ourselves it wouldn't be like anything else we'd read or worked on. It wasn't. While we addressed a lot of important issues then, it was the second issue that really set the course for what we were going to do. We covered the blasphemy law and (some would say by extension), the LGBTQ community in Pakistan along with showcasing creative talent the world over. It also set a precedent: we'd make an effort to rein ourselves in for the odd numbered issues. But for every even numbered issue, hell would rain down on anyone who set out to subjugate important ideals, both in Pakistan and in the literary world.

The Missing Slate began as a cross-cultural enterprise, to show Pakistanis and South Asian writers the wonderful world outside their comfort zones. While we still pay tribute to that, our vision is expanding as we continue to grow, to the credit of our international and diverse readership, to cover true cross-cultural literature. Why limit ourselves? We celebrate literature and art in all its forms, wherever it is in the world, and expand our boundaries of discovery to other countries, nationalities, cultures, you name it. Art is art, right?

The TMS team is a living example of that concept, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for the time and effort they've put in, the unflinching loyalty and support they've given us. I am honored and humbled to be part of a team that believes in the power of literature as much as I do.

The poetry team who started as three women and turned into a team of two girls and a guy, are each phenomenal poets in their own right. They are so worthy of judging the work of others to see what makes it to the TMS slate and what doesn't. Areej, Asmara and Jacob, you balance each other out and give poetry a new standard.

The stellar fiction team who've been through radical changes and were, for a while at least, an all-girls outfit too. Commandeered by Heather Peterson, we established a yardstick of great fiction. We have unfortunately lost her to the Creative Writing MFA program in Gainesville, Florida where I have no doubt she will blow everyone away. She will be succeeded by Haider Shahbaz, our new Senior Fiction Editor. Aamir Aziz and Maliha Iftakhar, the two fiction editors, especially Maliha who took on additional responsibilities and has done so well. Tehniat Aftab, thank you for being there from the beginning and for knowing the right time to say goodbye. We couldn't have established a process without you.

Maria Amir whose passionate, insightful voice and quirky wit makes her a charming and instrumental part of our Features Editorial team. Madeeha Ansari who is so conscientious and god-awfully talented, she's gone from an Articles Editor editing the work of others to a Features Editor, responsible for writing her own. I salute you both.

Omri Luzon who began his sojourn with us as Contributing Editor before being promoted to Articles Editor and is now responsible for his team of editors, as Senior Articles Editor. Articles Editors Aaron Grierson and Wajaha Hyder, you've come far from where you started and thank God you've taken us with you. Gareth Trew, Salman Latif and Nick Sharaf, thank you for writing unflinchingly about things you felt passionately about.

But the measure of a successful magazine is its marriage of content and design. If I am the disciplinarian of our little merry gang of geniuses, Moeed Tariq, its Creative Director is the genius behind the genius. My creative partner, friend and confidant, it is his artistic vision that translates the words we collect and drop at this feet, into something magnificent. TMS would be nowhere without him.

To the team he commandeers: Hassan Sagheer, our inimitable Creative Lead who's taken the fiery temper of a perfectionist Editor-in-Chief, and born it with flawless grace. Nabiha Zeeshan, his capable assistant and who's

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been with us from the start, what would we do without your innocence? Samra Alauddin, genius in a bottle, design samurai, Assistant to the Creative Director, and a razor sharp wit to match.

Ghausia Rashid Salam is a tiny girl from Karachi, Pakistan with a big voice and a passion behind it. She joined the team in this issue as my assistant, reminding me to do things I'd forget, wresting control from my tired hands. Thank you for helping me breathe.

I apologize for making this letter longer than usual, but felt this team of magnificent individuals deserved the spotlight. If this reads like an Oscar acceptance speech, my apologies: I've been accused of wiling away precious hours YouTubing.

Happy reading!

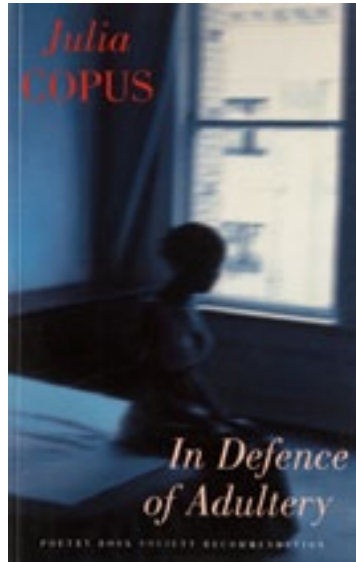
Sincerely,

Maryam Piracha

Editor-in-Chief, The Missing Slate

8 THE CRITICS: IN DEFENCE OF ADULTERY

by Jacob Silkstone

Julia Copus, *In Defence of Adultery* (Bloodaxe, 2003)

The American poet Jennifer Grotz once said that 'Poetry is philosophy's twin sister. The one that wears make-up.' More generously, it's possible to imagine poetry as a trendier older sister to science –leaning and loafing at her ease with a cigarette and a glass of Merlot while etiolated science stays inside and pores over the physics homework. And yet, as poets from Miroslav Holub to Ruth Padel would be quick to point out¹, poetry is a science too: precise, patterned, always questing, sometimes beautiful.

Julia Copus' interest in the scientific side of poetry is apparent from both content² and form: *In Defence of Adultery* is written with a precision that suggests multiple drafts, although there's nothing to match the intricacy of Raymond, at 60, the 'specular poem'³ included in Roddy Lumsden's *Identity Parade*. Precision is not necessarily an enviable quality in a poetry collection: the precise poem risks becoming the controlled poem, evoking unwanted images of an anxious 'helicopter poet' hovering over each line, afraid to lose her hold on the language.

Fortunately, Copus is good enough to relinquish control when necessary. The best writers⁴ are able to vary formal, classically-eloquent lines with snatches of the colloquial, as Copus does in these lines from 'Loch':
 'a loch had approached us, overlapped
 with noctilucent cloud and stopped

just short, at the edge of us. What's all that white stuff? I asked –and it was swans drifting out from under a mountain.'

The endearing clumsiness of 'What's all the white stuff?', with its suggestion of the inarticulacy all of us are prone to suffering while trying to describe the spectacular, prevents the 'noctilucent cloud' and the 'swans drifting out' from seeming overly grandiloquent.

At the heart of the collection lies, naturally enough, the title poem, in which Copus describes how 'We don't fall in love: it rises through us the way that certain music does. . .'

Or do we? Keats noted that 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design on us', and Copus' 'defence' never risks sounding didactic. After a strident declaration in the eighth line ('Yes, love's like that') the poem sinks back into 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts', ending on a meeker note:

'And whatever
 damage might result we're not
 to blame for it: love is an autocrat
 and won't be disobeyed.
 Sometimes we manage
 to convince ourselves of that.'

Poetry can sometimes seem like a balancing act on the fine line between pomposity and reticence, but Copus' sense of balance is close to perfect. 'An Easy Passage', published last year, won her the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. Expect that award to be the first of many.

References:

1. Holub would be even quicker if he hadn't died 13 years ago.
2. See, for example, the 'list of demonstrations used in physics lectures' in the partially-found poem 'Home Physics, the account of her father inventing 'the world's first electronic antibiotic', and the 'fission and fusion' which holds *In Defence of Adultery's* first section together.
3. Essentially a mirrored poem in which the last line replicates the first, the penultimate line replicates the second, and so on. Googling 'Raymond, at 60' is strongly recommended.
4. Shakespeare being a particularly good example.



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:

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

THE CRITICS: JANE EYRE

By Emma K. Gold

Not a plain Jane

Cast & Credits

Directed by: Cary Joji Fukunaga.

With Mia Wasikowska (Jane Eyre), Michael Fassbender (Edward Rochester), Jamie Bell (St. John Rivers), and Judi Dench (Mrs Fairfax).

Written by: Moira Buffini

Released by Focus Features

Running Time: 121 minutes. Rated PG-13 (for thematic element including brief violent content and a nude image).

Jane Eyre is a truly timeless tale; written by Charlotte Bronte in 1847, the novel is wildly popular and draws much the same audience as Jane Austen's work. There have been over a dozen film adaptations of the story so it's difficult to imagine how this Jane film could be new. Surprisingly, screenwriter Moira Buffini and director Cary Fukunaga manage to breathe new life into the old story and recreate a classic tale without feeling trite.

The biggest difference between this adaptation and others is the structure of the narrative. Most film versions of *Jane Eyre* begin at the beginning, following Jane from the time she was a little girl through her school years until she becomes employed at Thornfield Hall and meets Edward Rochester. In the new adaptation, the audience meets Jane in the middle of her story, immediately before she is rescued by St. John Rivers. By changing the beginning of the story, suspense is maintained throughout the narrative and the dragging beginning of the novel, and many film adaptations, is avoided.

Suspense is the name of the game in this particular version of *Jane Eyre*. The creepiness of the story is something film adaptations often miss but by maintaining that aspect of the narrative, Buffini and Fukunaga connect the film to the current trend of dark romantic fiction. Perhaps the resurgence of dark romantic popular literature is what allowed for this particular adaptation of Jane in the first place. After

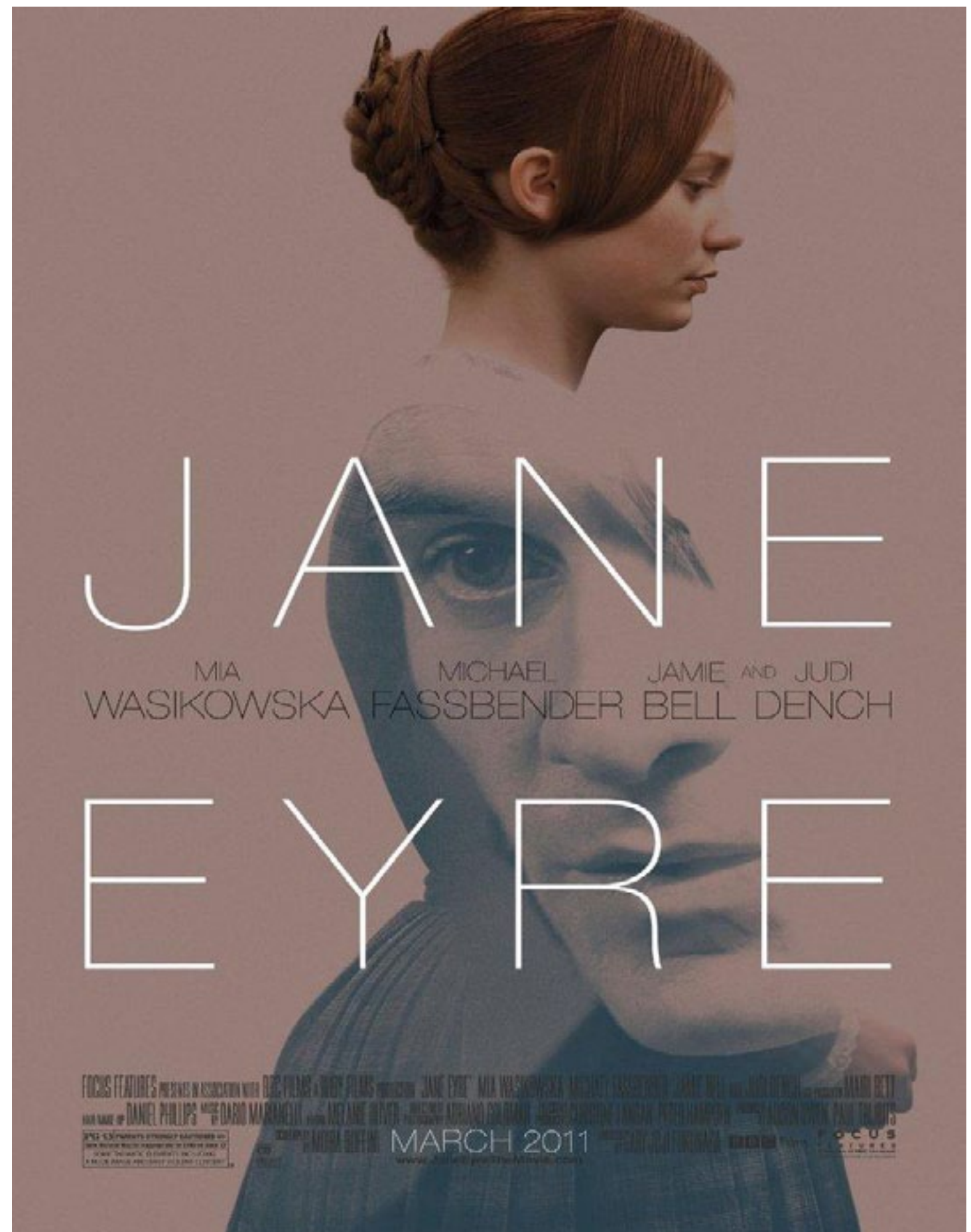
all, the Brontes are the original queens of the dark and tragic tales of love and woe.

Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender both fit their roles of Jane and Edward wonderfully, although perhaps Fassbender is a little too handsome to play the decidedly average-looking Rochester. Wasikowska's Jane is stoic and reserved, as she should be, with appropriate hints of passion, but her chemistry with Fassbender seems a little fickle. There was a spark between them once or twice but not nearly as much as there could have been.



Pictured Above: Mia Wasikowska and Jamie Bell

Overall, Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* is a fine work of film, capably acted and with breathtaking locations and costumes and a refreshingly original take on a familiar story. It's definitely worth seeing, especially if one is a fan of either the novel or its various film adaptations, but it's unlikely to inspire much passion in the viewer and not a prime candidate for the definitive film version of *Jane Eyre*.



12 THE HARD WORK OF POETRY

by Salli Sheperd

Poets are constantly crippled, creatively. It's the way it works. You write a line and, just now, right now, it seems like it's the best line in the world to date. It's a shiny, beautiful line, a thought, an image so remarkably profound that you are in awe of yourself, or (if you are a seasoned poet) in awe of that angelic being which sits on high in your mind and occasionally drops little scraps of poetic manna into your head. Now, you only need to write a poem around it.

And fail.

Because the poem takes over, sprouts a million legs and scurries in directions you had no real intention of it going – and now the Wondrous Line of Glory and Poetic Win doesn't fit. You have to either change it or take it out and save it for another poem. Or make it a haiku-like short poem on its own, so all those other words don't assault it again. If you're an experienced poet, you'll probably just store it in a .txt file or on a post-it note somewhere and lament it until you're old and nothing matters any more.

Or you take the poem and break all of its legs, and put it into forced labour to serve this tiny god of a phrase or line, which it does unwillingly and badly and the poem is just shite as a result, and you go sour on the idea and scrap it, or worse – post it up as your latest bit of genius and consider all criticism of its glory a kind of drooling madness that people really ought to be cured of.

It's really important, as a poet, to take the approach of the closed fist VS. the open hand. It's an old Buddhist thing, grasshopper, which goes something like this:

“If your hand is closed tightly around one coin, it is not open to receive a fortune. If the hand is always open, everything will fall out of it. Be flexible. Open and close your hand, as necessary.”

Or, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch so aptly put it: “Murder your darlings.”

Clinging for your life to these bits of brilliance you write and so admire, or to the one style of poetry you feel ‘fits’ you, is to kneecap yourself creatively. I see it in a great many inexperienced poets (and not at all infrequently in better ones and worse, in myself) and it can become a vast stumbling-block in one's progress as a writer.



Ailce by Abigail Larson

“ If your hand is closed tightly around one coin, it is not open to receive a fortune. If the hand is always open, everything will fall out of it. Be flexible. Open and close your hand, as necessary. ”

This is not to say that those styles, ideas, lines and phrases that we so adore and are excited about need be thrown out for creative poison – I don't believe we must literally “murder” our darlings. What I mean is: be flexible. Let go of your genius, try something daring. Hold a beginner's mind, let yourself see that your Emperor of a poem is wearing no clothes (except, perhaps one shiny and incongruous silk scarf).

It can be crushing to admit that your style doesn't suit your idea, that your image doesn't gel, that your phrase is out-of-place – that all the elements of your shiny, new poem simply are not working together as they should to make it the Very Good poem it ought to be and – in your head – is (albeit, sadly, nowhere else). It can be depressing. It hurts, sometimes a lot.

That's why the majority of poets are terribly emo, and why they're all so arrogant on the outside—we criticise ourselves so often and so thoroughly, it's like twenty lashes to hear someone else say it. The arrogance is really prophylactic against the pain we feel in our freshly-salted wounds.

But all the very best poets (aside from being dismal masochists) know that they have to get past that very damaging and limiting layer of self-protection and grow creatively, by letting go of all their rigid habits, and

14 ideas, and opinions. Not all at once (that's a ticket to a padded room, if ever I heard of one) but as they come up, possibly over and over, in increments, one at a time.

It's not easy, and may lead to bouts of depressive mania in which one is likely to delete all former work as tedious rubbish and then drink a bottle of absinthe while listening to Muse and weeping into a hanky.

Then, when you sober up, if you're smart, you scabble to recover the files or sticky-tape together all those torn pages, get over yourself a little and get back to work with the intent of learning why the poem isn't working, and admit that maybe all those people pointing out the faults of the piece are not evil bastards trying to destroy your poetic soul but are right, and trying to be helpful, and really you knew, deep down, anyway, that it wasn't working. But perhaps something can be salvaged.

Or perhaps not. I recently went on a rampage of reading through five years' worth of poems and have not laughed (nor snivelled) quite so much in ages as looking at my early poems through the eyes of hindsight. What utter rubbish they are! And worse— how I once defended them, coddled them, clung to them, my precious baby darlings, the apples of my creative eye. And now I am, myself, one of those horrid people who see, and poke sharp sticks at, all their flaws. It's tragic. It's hilarious.

There comes that point where you realise that in order to fix your poor, kneecapped poem perhaps you ought to take a few weeks (months, years) to study the mechanics of sonics, meter, enjambment and so on, and read tons more poetry written by Very Successful poets so you can see how they made their poems work. And then rewrite the thing, from scratch if necessary. Or simply leave it for dead and move along to the next effort.

It's what I call "the hard work of poetry" – precisely because that's what it is. You are not perfect and never will be, and neither will your work be, so accept that— and view every piece you write as a tiny, tiny, stepping-stone to somewhere better, and nothing more.

You'll be a happier (and better) poet for it. Hopefully.

Hanky?

Salli is an Australian poet who has had her work published in various journals including Magma, Mimesis, Umbrella, The Chimaera and, most recently, The Flea and The Centrifugal Eye.

BREAKING BONDS

by Salman Latif

What prostitution really means

Ever since humans started to live in groups and communities, they began to develop a set of regulations which would govern their way of life. Over millennia, as humanity has evolved, so has its concept of morality. We have come a long way from the moral canons of our ancestors, to devising moral codes with far more rights and freedoms.

The nature of such a moral code for a society is almost always exclusive, with few exceptions. This implies that a certain faction of a society comes out to be better humans than the rest, at least in their own eyes. To reiterate the divisions set by religion, some are pious and the rest are sinners. And the latter are divided into further categories – some are casual 'sinners', some are simply at the other end of the spectrum with different points of view and some are downright hell-bound. While the first two stabilize society through an ideological dichotomy, generally those in the latter category are the ones to face the serious consequences of society's moral verdicts. Such judgement is inevitable, since the moral code brings a scale for judgment which it measures society against. That, consequently, leads to different evaluations of people around the world and their respective placement within a society, whether or not they know it. Such segregation also leads to discriminatory behaviour and stereotypical attitudes against those less elevated on the moral scale. Among those who fall within this domain, prostitutes are perhaps a faction that is universally vilified.

Prostitution is said to be one of the oldest professions. However, a fleeting look at the contemporary world reveals that a certain level of discrimination towards prostitutes exists everywhere. For conservative societies, it is a cantankerous existence that is pushed into a dark, vile corner. And for societies with relatively liberal outfits, though prostitution has been legalised, its employees continue to be disdained and discriminated against.

Stereotypical attitudes toward prostitutes, both men and women, include treating them as worthless human beings, and in doing so, often deprive them of many of their basic human rights. In conservative so-

cieties, separate localities have been defined for prostitutes where they must live – if they leave, they can never openly proclaim their profession without becoming a target of taunts and dirty criticism. As such, they cannot engage in any sort of business with other citizens, which means they cannot admit their kids to regular schools, engage in normal activities beyond the limits of their slums or even try to move on to other means of livelihood without their history being aired like dirty laundry. Consequently, generation after generation is forced into the same fate. Even if they wanted to, society doesn't let them abandon prostitution, refusing to admit them into its fold of 'normal' beings.

Interestingly, popular media and literature both have held a near-constant fascination with the sex trade industry. Scenes of prostitutes being beaten, made to do disgusting things, being involved in drugs, are not unfamiliar to cinema-goers. Porn is yet another part of the popular media market, now easily accessible over the internet, thanks to the open-source media revolution. A number of studies demonstrate that those who watch porn have much less respect for women than those who don't. This, too, contributes towards shaping a disgusting image of a prostitute.

Literature, on the other hand, offers a profounder view. Writers all around the world often focus on prostitutes in their writing – most citations in popular fiction are more realistic, humane and bitterly revealing. From South Asian authors to Russian novelists to more familiar European and American writers, literary works cite prostitutes as regular people, with consciences and sentiments no different from other members of society. In his short story Anandi, Ghulam Abbas, a notable Pakistani short story writer, explores ideas about the inevitability of prostitution. His story tells the reader how a group of prostitutes are forced out of the city to a distant, barren locality. Contrary to what one might expect, years later that barren locality becomes a flourishing town because of the very presence of prostitutes. Abbas demonstrates how prostitution is part of the basic human desire to feed and it can't end until we do.

In electronic media, Hollywood movies are perhaps the most widely viewed entertainment medium. Popular films like Chicago do portray prostitutes in a realer light, elaborating upon the factors that govern their lifestyles. Pretty Woman tries to depict a pros-



stitute as a normal person, with a certain innocence, beauty, and purity of heart. It tries to show that selling your body doesn't necessarily mean that a person becomes devoid of true feelings and worth. Sadly, most Hollywood movies show quite the opposite image and do nothing to help dismantle deeply rooted misconceptions about the sex trade.

Considering the basic elements of human nature, it seems as though stereotyping cannot be helped. It has been present since the earliest days and will continue as long as humans have a tendency to satiate their egos by deeming certain individuals as low or morally inferior. This phenomenon in turn begins to seep into the public stratosphere.

The lack of any organized attempt to correct common assumptions and faulty perceptions further strengthens the status quo. The masses are not made aware of the economic needs attached to the profession of prostitution. Those who indulge in this profession mostly do so because of the lack of any other engagement that can bring them enough financial gain to sustain them and, at times, their families. This presents a direct question about the economic opportunities available to prostitutes.

However the greatest stake remains the question of morality. Perhaps this is because a majority of the population still associates religious connotations with extra-marital relationships and, religion is the first yardstick they grab whenever the question of prostitution is brought up. As a result, the issue is both defined and discussed in the wrong light and the victims become objects for ridicule and criticism.

This does not mean that such discriminatory behaviour can't be eliminated, or at least contained. In the last century, most of the world has moved on from considering women as lowly beings to accepting them as equals. This has been a huge step forward and was accomplished through the constant pressing of fair education, increased awareness and the right literature. The same can be achieved for prostitutes if all these tools are utilized today to help spread some truth—and nuance—about the profession of prostitution.

18 WATN: FEMINISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by Areej Siddiqui

Veiled Threats

Recently, the government of France has happily adopted the language of feminism to aid xenophobic ends. Specifically, France has employed “feminist” rhetoric in order to pass a law banning the Muslim veil, first the hijab in public schools and then the full-face veil or nikab in public spaces. The fine for stepping out of the house wearing a full-face veil is 150 euros and/or classes in French citizenship. “The veil affair” draws on other issues too - those of citizenship, individual liberty, and state secularism.

The ban was supposedly instated “in the name of the liberty and equality of women in a secular country” and is meant to target radical, separatist Muslim communities within the French republic, even though the law itself does not mention Islam or the veil by name. There are several implicit premises being put forth here. The first is that no “liberated” woman would willingly wear a veil, because, apparently, being liberated means (un)dressing for someone else’s comfort. Second, in radical Muslim communities, women are oppressed. Third, the principle way in which this oppression manifests itself is through women being forced to wear a veil. And fourth, as an oppressed Muslim woman (who wears the veil) one cannot adequately partake in French citizenry.

What qualities must one possess to be a French citizen? One can only assume that French citizens are liberated (what does that even mean?), equal (to whom and by what standards?), secular (but not if you’re, say, Roman Catholic), not radical (unless you’re radically secular?) and not separatist (unless you count marginalizing an entire sector of the population). It is to be noted that France has not collected religious or ethnic data in its census since 1872 and the most widely used figure—5-6 million French Muslims—is at best a guesstimate. Arguments about radical Muslim separatism and veiled women being a threat to the French assimilationist tradition, then, are widely unsupported.

The oppressed-woman argument is rather self-defeating: If you are a Muslim woman who wears a veil, you are oppressed. If you are oppressed, you cannot fully participate in the republic. Since you cannot fully participate in the republic, we are going to make that par-

icipation even more difficult by penalizing you for the state in which you may appear in public spaces. We are not going to set up social programs that might make it easier for you to live independent of your (presumably) oppressive male relatives, for example, setting up livable women’s shelters, instating policies that might economically benefit women so that they have the resources to leave, making mental health facilities more readily available and so on. Instead, we will withdraw the comfort of not being a stigmatized social group, making it harder for you to reach out if help is ever needed.

This kind of militarist feminism (if it can even be called feminism) was last seen coming from former President George Bush, who even now insists that “[it is not] in the interest of the United States or the world to... stand by and watch women’s rights be abused [emphasis mine].” It must be glaringly obvious to everyone, except Bush and his supporters perhaps, that being in a warzone is not conducive to ensuring that anyone’s rights are respected. Nevertheless, the tone of the argument is the same: Muslim women need saving. It all sounds well intentioned, doesn’t it? They only want to help. And with honour killings, gendered labour division, and reports of horrific acts of violence against women, concern for women’s safety is hardly unfounded. Yet the steps being taken do not seem to be about helping women in difficult situations at all. In fact, assuming that violence against women occurs in only one segment of the population is detrimental to the safety of women from other backgrounds, in other situations. It ignores the fact that oppression manifests itself even in demanding women to be uncovered and that sexism manifests itself differently in “developed” countries, but it does manifest.

Indeed, the debate is just another attempt at using women as pawns in a “man’s” game. The true target of these so-called feminist arguments are the men behind these “oppressed women”. The fight is between the “terrorists” and the privileged white politicians, and women are being thrown about like bargaining chips. Hardly a feminist argument, if you ask me.



DEXTERITY

your

is calculated by a sudden lucky-dip

sawdust gets up fingernails

a random gift is dusted down

unpacking reveals a whistle

home thoughts from the inside are now

too expensive

attempting to kill off the bed and

bread maker is enough

an avaricious urge
brings out the worst

a schism splits the house

the temple within

the glue

comes unstuck

liquefaction oozes over a garden for long-term sleepers

flowers rear up like deformed haloes

I'm trying to kiss you

but your reflection glides on the lake / a mirage walker /
a pin-up for collectors

you're bound for glory chorus the air-born bugs
the wind-shot butterflies

a turbulence of shags shakes trees

and sets off small explosions of leaves

you're the beautiful one I whisper

as I pass through torn curtains
cobwebs entangled in split ends

jammed doors

wide open

to the blood'n bone man

an origami brainwave

unfolds / then flutters / whistles

then falls to the table / flops dismally

I've taken this peculiar stand I chuck in my worst shirts my shoes my underwear this skin-
coloured armour – which moults annually – and if the conditions are amenable for the scenic trip
I'll chuck in old hats too for something more practical to stick on my head

my screen lights up for the pageant

of the coming of the long white cloud

I manipulate this aspect without flinching

my knife cuts deep / / at islands ripe in the flesh

—Iain Britton

Iain Britton's poetry has been published in Agenda, The Reader, Warwick Review, The Wolf Magazine, Nthposition, Blackbox Manifold, Great Works, London Grip, Scythe Literary Journal, Leaf Press, Horizon Review, Reconfigurations, Harvard Review, BlazeVOX, Drunken Boat, and the International Exchange for Poetic Invention etc.

Oystercatcher Press published Iain's 3rd poetry collection in 2009. Kilmog Press (NZ) published his 4th in 2010. For more information, check out his website: www.iainbritton.co.nz

22 MISSIONARY POSITION

By John Wesick

“You want something, Mr. Terry?” The braless Indian girl moved closer to the table, and the corner lifted the hemline of her tattered, silver dress even higher.

“A line for me and my amigo.” Terry placed a few ten-thousand-peso notes on the table and slid them toward the girl’s smooth thighs.

“Thanks, Rev.” The other man at the table, an Aussie named Gilroy, raised his bottle of Aguila beer in salute.

Gilroy was a squat, muscular man with shoulder-length blonde hair whose khaki vest marked him as a tourist. Nobody who’d been in Colombia for more than a few weeks would be caught dead in one of those.

Minutes later the girl returned with a mirror complete with two lines of cocaine on its surface. Within seconds after she set it down, the first line had already disappeared up Gilroy’s nose.

“Ah, this is the life.” Terry bent forward and snorted the second line with the same rolled up bill that Gilroy had used. “All this and wholesale prices too.” He leaned back as the jolt of excitement slammed his nervous system.

“So.” Gilroy rubbed his nose. “I’m taking those two German girls clubbing, tonight. Want to come?”

“Why Gilroy, I’m surprised at you! Asking a man of the cloth to go out whoring with you!” Terry’s laughter broke out into a series of coughs. “Not tonight, mate. I have to write my monthly report to the home office.” He motioned to the serving girl. “Juanita, I need a little physical therapy.”

She led him by the hand up the rickety stairs to the bedrooms that were rented by the hour.

Dear Mrs. McNulty,

Sorry not to have written earlier but I’ve been a little under the weather. Fortunately, the chloroquine seems to have the malaria on the run and I should be back on my feet in a few days. Ramon has been like a mother hen. I know I should be grateful but it’s hard to sit on my hands after making so much progress converting the FARC guerillas. You remember Subcomandante Marcos? Well, he agreed to let me preach a sermon to the camp next time I visit. That is if I can stop Ramon’s

fretting about my return to the jungle bringing on a relapse.

Sadly, things have been difficult in San Cristobal. The police arrested Maria’s son on some trumped-up charge and I had to bribe them with the church renovation money to free him. This delayed needed repairs but I’d gladly put up with leaky pipes and peeling paint to know that a member of my flock is safe. Although, if you could see fit to send a little extra in next month’s remittance, we could sure put it to use.

Yours in Christ,
Terry

He clicked the send button and his e-mail went from San Cristobal, Colombia to the Pan American Gospel Fellowship in Raleigh, North Carolina. The words had come easily to Terry that night. No doubt they’d been fueled by the afternoon’s stimulation. He left the cyber café and hurried down sidewalks jammed with peddlers’ wares on the cement. Hopefully, he’d make it to the Papagayo Hotel before Gilroy and the German girls left for the night.

He was alone on a dark, deserted street, his footsteps echoing off the walls of brick buildings. Something didn’t feel right. He stopped but the footsteps didn’t. He turned. A dodo bird in a leather jacket, Tasmanian tiger, giant passenger pigeon with a baseball bat, and some kind of zebra with stripes on only half its body were tailing him. When he crossed the street, the animals followed. When he quickened his pace, they matched his stride. He reached into his pocket for his Glock and realized he’d left it in his car. He ran.

“Can’t you go any faster than that?” The zebra laughed while galloping beside him.

He almost didn’t notice the passenger pigeon swinging the bat from above. He ducked in the nick of time and the Louisville Slugger whooshed over his head.

Heart hammering and breath ragged, he came to the top of a crest. The parking lot was on the other side of the river. He could see his Hummer in aisle G. Muscles burning, he made for the bridge. As he set foot on the metal, he heard a growl behind him and felt the Tas-

manian tiger’s teeth puncture his ankle. Stumbling, pain stabbing with each step, he forced himself to keep going, the thought of the Glock in his hands drawing him onward. He knew that if he looked back he was a goner.

The passenger pigeon landed in front of him, tapping the baseball bat against its palm. Terry skidded to a halt and turned to see the others approaching.

“What do you want from me?”

“Payback,” the Tasmanian tiger growled.

“But I never did anything to you.”

“You made us extinct.” The dodo bird flicked open a butterfly knife.

“Yeah, happy Urf Day, motherfucker,” the zebra said.

Terry looked back and forth. There was only one way out. He climbed onto the rail and jumped.

Green light woke him. It was everywhere. Like a drowning man Terry thrashed until he clawed the sheet off his face. His head hurt. He’d never mix cocaine and barbiturates again. A naked woman sat up next to him with her skinny, tattooed arms crossed over her D-cup breasts.

“Who are you?”

She answered in German, not the harsh German of World War II movies but the sexy German of Marlene Dietrich and fishnet stockings. Terry understood none of it but he liked its tone. He also liked the decaying elegance of the woman’s bruised thighs and her dyed hair’s black roots. After learning several new words for a woman’s body parts he searched the threadbare hotel room for his pants and found them soaking in the bathtub. He took a soggy walk to his own hotel, changed, and returned to the cyber café to check on his remittance.

My Dear Reverend Elgan,

Barbara has been forwarding your monthly reports to me and I’m impressed with your selfless dedication to the Lord’s work. Each year the trustees award the ten-thousand-dollar Herman K. Walters Grant to the missionary who best represents the Fellowship’s work. I’m proud to announce that you are this year’s winner. The funds will be in your next remittance.

Yours truly,

Bishop Alvin Townsend

Terry clapped his hands and spun his chair in a circle. With that much money guaranteed he could put his long-delayed plan into practice. An hour later he was standing outside the iron gate of the largest mansion in San Cristobal.

“I’d like to see El Gordo,” he said into the intercom.

A remote-controlled motor swung the gate open. Terry entered and followed the driveway past a Mercedes and a BMW to the front door where a bodyguard, whose suit jacket was too small for his massive upper body, frisked him. Satisfied Terry carried no weapons, the man showed him into a wood-paneled study where the drug lord was watching soccer on a flat screen TV that covered an entire wall.

“Sir,” Terry said, “I’d like to offer a business proposition that could benefit us both.”

Despite his nickname El Gordo was surprisingly thin. He wore a scarlet smoking jacket and sat in a La-Z-Boy recliner.

“Go on.” El Gordo set down his cognac.

“You might say I’m an expert on tourism. The local attraction that draws the most visitors from all over the world is your fine product, but the problem is distribution. That’s where I come in. If you could advance me a kilo, I’ll repay you once I’ve sold it.” Terry folded his arms satisfied that even if he didn’t sell anything, he could still repay the drug lord with his award money.

“You want me to sell you a kilo?” El Gordo’s laughter could be heard all the way in Medellin. “My friend, I only deal in quantity.” He looked Terry up and down while holding his cigar between his knuckles. “What the hell. You amuse me. I’ll front you a kilo but beware of Colombians with chainsaws, my friend. You saw the movie ‘Scarface?’ Well, if you don’t repay me, the same will happen to you.”

The bodyguard ushered Terry out and after a bit of a delay produced a bag of white powder, which Terry hid in an Adidas shopping bag after trying a little sample. Outside the mansion the flowers were a deeper red and the peoples’ smiles glowed. Terry’s pulse sounded like hail on a tin roof and he practically skipped back to the hotel.

He was so absorbed in his plans that he didn’t no-



Leptinotarsa Decemlineata by Sonja Dimovska

tice the unmarked car tailing him. The next thing he knew, two guys in sunglasses and leather jackets had his face shoved against a wall so they could handcuff his wrists behind his back. The larger of the two spun him around.

“Hey man, what the f-”

“I’m Captain Benitez of the San Cristobal Police.” The smaller cop fished the passport out of Terry’s pocket. “You’re under arrest for narcotics possession.”

They hustled Terry into the back seat and drove off, turning left on Calle Libertador away from the city center and police station. Terry began to recognize this for what it was.

“All those lawyers and courts are so inconvenient. Don’t you agree?” Terry twisted to take the weight of his handcuffed wrists. “Perhaps I could pay you the fine.”

“Fine?” Captain Benitez said. “I could lock you up for twenty years.”

Terry began bargaining. The big cop took a meandering drive while they negotiated the bribe and after a tour of beautiful, downtown San Cristobal they settled on three thousand dollars. That and the price of the confiscated cocaine would use up Terry’s award money. It was a painful lesson but at least he would walk away from it in one piece.

“Just one thing,” Terry added. “It’ll take me a few days to put together the money.”

“Three thousand five hundred,” Captain Benitez said as he stored Terry’s passport in the glove compartment.

When the car stopped in front Terry’s hotel, the big cop unlocked the handcuffs and released him.

Terry was already coming down from the cocaine when he returned to the cyber café and found another e-mail from the bishop.

My Dear Reverend Elgan,

There’s been a change of plans. Your messages of hope have so inspired me that I want to see your ministry with my own eyes. Therefore, I’m coming to Colombia to award your check personally. I’m really looking forward to it. It’ll do this old preacher’s heart good to get out in the field again. I arrive on the 15th.

Yours truly,

Bishop Alvin Townsend

PS – Sadly, since most of my outreach was spent in Africa, my Spanish is not up to snuff. If you could have someone pick me up at the airport, I would greatly appreciate it.

Terry stared at the monitor. If the bishop found out he had no church, it would all be over. Everything began to irritate him, the cigarette smoke, the woman talking in the telephone booth, and the cashier who needed a shave. Then Terry had an inspiration and reached for the keyboard, his fingers composing a symphony of deception.

Dear Bishop Townsend,

It is with great disappointment that I beg you not to come here. It’s not safe. There have been several disturbing incidents that I have omitted from my reports so as not to alarm Mrs. McNulty. Most involve kidnappings. As you may have heard, the kidnappers often send the victims’ body parts to their families to ensure payment. And even when the ransom is paid, the victims often turn up castrated or dead.

In addition to civil war and narcotics trafficking we’ve had an increase in street violence. Two local gangs, the Quinidos and the Santa Fes, have been battling it out for turf. The innocent get caught in the crossfire too often for comfort.

Sir, I’d love to hear of the lessons learned from your service to Our Lord but I’m afraid it will have to be through e-mail. San Cristobal, at least at present, is just too dangerous.

Respectfully,

Terry Elgan

The reply came almost immediately.

Terry,

Thank you for your concern but I’ve learned you can’t do the Lord’s work unless you’re willing to take risks. In my ministry I’ve faced down Mau Maus and angry Hutus and God has always protected me. And at 80 years old I don’t have much to lose. If God wants to take me, then I’d rather it be while I’m doing His service.

See you on the fifteenth.

Alvin

It had to be him. The bald man in a Hawaiian shirt stepped through the sliding glass doors into the airport lobby and searched the faces of waiting tour guides and limo drivers. He had a wiry build and carried a worn, leather travel bag that looked like it had been dragged on the pavement all the way from North Carolina. Terry considered abandoning the bishop to the crowd and unfamiliar language but that wouldn't get him his award money so he held up a cardboard sign with the bishop's name in magic marker. The bishop nodded, smiled, and approached.

"Bishop Townsend, nice to finally meet you in person."

"Please call me Alvin." The bishop had a surprisingly strong handshake for someone in his eighties.

"Let me carry your luggage." Terry took the heavy bag and nearly dislocated his shoulder. "I have you staying in the Hotel Dorado. We can catch a cab outside." Terry lugged the suitcase toward the exit. If his scheme worked, the bishop would be on the very next flight back.

As planned, Gilroy and a Russian cokehead named Sergei, who was once the number two Elvis impersonator in Vladivostok, were waiting outside in front of a 1978 Buick Regal. Both had dyed their hair black to appear more Colombian, but the coloring had left stains of their foreheads. On a nod from Terry Gilroy approached.

"Quando la perro va pepe." He pulled a toy pistol from his pocket and motioned toward the car's back seat. "Quando la perro va pepe!"

"We better do as he says." Terry feigned a look of panic but it was hard given Gilroy's pathetic Spanish. How long had the Aussie been in this country, anyway? "If we cooperate, he'll probably just drive us to a bank machine and make us withdraw the daily limit. If not..." Terry swallowed.

He turned and reached for the car door but a commotion made him look back. Somehow the old man had gotten hold of Gilroy's gun hand. He delivered a devastating punch to the ribs and flipped the Aussie head over heels so he landed on the sidewalk like a piano dropped from a twelve-story building. The toy pistol went flying. Spectators applauded. Sergei panicked

and stomped on the accelerator. Tires squealed as he steered around taxis and pedestrians. A startled grandmother hopped to the curb as her walker disappeared under the Buick's tires. Sergei lost control, plowed into the side of a green and white city bus, and fled the scene chased by the bus driver and several angry passengers.

Meanwhile, the bishop was stomping Gilroy's ribs. Terry winced each time a New Balance walking shoe struck flesh. After a dozen or so kicks he realized he ought to step in and save his pal.

"Look!" He touched the bishop's shoulder and pointed. "There's our cab."

When they got in the back seat, the bishop asked, "Should we call the police?"

"No, they were probably in on it."

"Strange sounding Spanish, the guy was speaking," the bishop said.

"It's Quechua, the local Indian language."

"Quechua, right." The bishop pointed at the cab driver. "Ask him if he's accepted Jesus as his personal savior."

Terry translated.

"Si," the driver said. "Soy Católico."

The failure of the bogus kidnapping meant that Terry had to create a church from scratch. Problem was he hadn't gotten out much. In fact, the only person he knew with a suitable space was Lorena, the madam of the brothel where he spent the Fellowship's money on women and blow. Fortunately, he was a good customer and she agreed to lend the downstairs to him for a modest fee.

While the bishop rested from his long flight, Terry got to work, taking down the liquor posters and moving tables into the storage room. He arranged the chairs in rows and tacked crosses on the walls. There wasn't much he could do about the bar except hide it behind some paint-splattered plastic sheeting.

For a rest he took a seat in the office and ransacked Lorena's desk for some blow. All he found was a pair of pink, crotchless panties, which he examined while trying to refine his plan. Now that he had a church, he had to figure out what a pastor actually did so he could fake it. His past experience at the Haynes Non-Denominational Bible Church was little help. All he'd done there was repeat sermons he'd copied off the Internet until the



Photography by Aiez Mirza

trustees fired him for an inappropriate relationship with a minor.

Sermons! He still had the CDs from Dr. T. Jefferson Passnauer's Hour of Praise. Once translated into Spanish, the bishop would never know the difference. What else could he do? Terry spun the panties around his index finger. The sick! Terry stuffed the panties in his pocket and rose from the chair. He had an idea.

"What is this place?" the bishop asked as he followed Terry up the steps to a turquoise, concrete building.

"Drug treatment - I try to help Colombia's cocaine problem however I can."

Seeing their bibles and clerical collars, the sleepy guard removed a set of keys from his pocket and unlocked the front door. There didn't seem to be any organization in the lobby, just unshaven patients in bathrobes and a bored nurse painting her nails carmine red behind the reception desk.

"Terry, que pasa?" A thin man with haunted eyes and a prominent Adam's apple rushed over.

"Hola, Miguel." Terry shook hands and asked in Spanish, "What are you doing here?"

"The wife threatened to leave unless I quit the cocaine so I came here for a week until she calms down. It sucks. You can't even get beer." Miguel pointed to the bishop. "Who's he?"

"Someone from headquarters checking up on me." Terry nodded to the bishop who smiled, not comprehending the Spanish. "I have to pretend to be a priest so they'll keep sending money."

Miguel nodded. Such scams were common practice among addicts everywhere, many of whom were Terry's friends and were in this very facility. Soon Jorge, Fidel, Carlos, Esteban, Roberto, Pablo, Porfie, Juan, and Guillermo gathered, swapping stories and complaints.

"Hey, do me a favor, guys," Terry said. "Pretend we're praying so I can impress the bishop."

They got on their knees while Terry recited a few "Nuestro Padres." As Terry and the bishop rose to leave, Miguel asked, "You got any stuff?"

"My friend, a priest's job is to bring comfort to the sick." Terry handed him a bible. "You'll find all you seek in here."

Miguel's eyes grew bright when he opened it and found the bag of powder hidden in the cavity Terry had hollowed out of its pages.

Next morning, the bishop by his side, Terry stood in front of his congregation of coke heads and prostitutes. He'd snorted a couple lines to give him inspiration for the service and the room was expanding and contracting like a whale's lung. Giselda, the transvestite, was looking good in the front row with her beehive hairdo and leopard-print miniskirt. Juanita and the rest of Madam Lorena's girls, at least the ones not working upstairs, had dressed more modestly. Gilroy was there, too. Now blonde again, he sat in the back row wearing shades to disguise his bruises. He'd even brought the two Germans. Terry smiled at the one he'd slept with and tried to see down her shirt. What was her name again?

"If you'd like to say a few words, I'll translate." The floor seemed to give like a trampoline as Terry stepped away to yield the podium to the bishop.

"Thank you. Thank you, Reverend Elgan for allowing me to speak today." He turned to the congregation. "And thank you for worshipping with us this fine Sunday morning. When I first began my ministry almost fifty years ago..."

Giselda batted her heavily made-up eyelids at the bishop as Terry translated. It wasn't a good translation. When he didn't know a word, he simply recounted the plot of a movie he'd seen. In this case it was "A Few Good Men" with Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise. Ten minutes into the talk a man in mechanic's overalls entered and looked puzzled until he spotted Juanita in the third row. Then he jostled through the crowd and tried to pull her from her chair. She slapped his hand. A series of shooshes silenced their heated whispers and the mechanic trudged upstairs alone.

Strangely, the bishop didn't appear to notice. After translating the thirty-nine-minute introduction, Terry began his cribbed sermon in Spanish. Even though they understood little, the cocaine tourists sat politely, all except Sergei who mumbled and scratched the imaginary insects swarming his neck. All that squirming made Terry's skin crawl but he fought the urge to tear off his shirt and run for the showers. Gilroy bent forward to hide behind someone's shoulder while he snorted a line. Giselda winked and licked her lips.

"Poshyol ty!" Sergei stood and jerked like an epi-

leptic.

"Hallelujah!" Terry shouted. "They shall speak in new tongues!"

He continued his sermon but when he reached the part about the Apostle Paul saying, "You can't handle the truth," the sound of a prostitute's fake orgasm came from upstairs.

"Qué amigo nos en Cristo!" Terry sang to cover the noise.

The prostitutes joined in but Giselda opened her legs revealing that he/she wore no panties. Terry shoved his hymnal in the bishop's face to block the view and motioned to Gilroy to get her out of there.

"What's going on here?"

The singing stopped. All eyes turned to Captain Benitez at the entrance.

"We're having a Sunday service with our distinguished guest, Bishop Alvin Townsend of the Pan American Gospel Fellowship." Terry reached for the plastic bowl on the table. "Friends, it's time to pass the collection plate. Please give generously so we can pay the license fee for our new renovations."

"Excellent!" Benitez smiled. "Please continue."

The service concluded with a few more hymns. After Terry gave Benitez the collection money and shook hands with his congregation, the bishop spoke.

"That woman, the one with the spotted skirt."

"Yes?" Terry held the railing as if an earthquake would begin any minute.

"She genuflected when she entered. We don't do that in our church. Speak to her about it. Won't you?"

A few days later Terry, the bishop, and Sergei (a.k.a. Ramon) were in a battered Toyota on the road to Hayacampo. It was better to brave leeches and yellow fever than risk another fiasco at "church". The car hit a bump.

"Chyort voz'mi!" exclaimed Sergai, a.k.a. Ramon, from behind the steering wheel.

"Quechua?" the bishop asked.

Terry nodded and closed his eyes. The longer they spent driving through the jungle in search of the nonexistent Subcomandante Marcos and his band of Christian FARC guerillas, the better. Terry had chosen a safe region to travel through, no guerillas, paramilitaries, or

illicit meth labs. In about a week they'd return empty-handed to San Cristobal just in time to put the bishop on his plane home.

The car's bouncing lulled Terry to sleep. He dreamed of Juanita unbuttoning her shirt to reveal her brown-tipped breasts. Her hand reached for his zipper. The German girl was there too, naked except for a spiked, Prussian helmet. Sergei slammed on the brakes, jolting Terry awake.

"Chto za huy!" the Russian said.

A dozen men in camouflage fatigues blocked the road. All carried Kalashnikovs and hid their faces behind bandanas.

"Looks like we found your friends." the bishop smiled and got out.

The guerillas yanked the others from the car and shoved them down a muddy path that led into the jungle. When Terry reached for the cocaine in his shirt pocket, a guerilla shoved him so he went sprawling face first in the dirt. His reward for not scrambling to his feet fast enough was a rifle butt in the kidney. Even worse, he lost the cocaine. After a few minutes they arrived at a clearing. The guerillas positioned their captives on one side and then crossed to the other.

Games will be games but when the FARC guerillas chambered rounds into their assault rifles and aimed, Terry realized the fun was almost over. Sergei babbled in Russian. They say your life passes before your eyes in these situations but all Terry could think about was the cocaine he'd lost only a few hundred feet away.

"For God's sake," Bishop Townsend bellowed. "If Subcomandante Marcos learns that you've killed us, he'll have your asses!"

When they heard that name, the guerillas lowered their weapons. What Terry hadn't realized was that the FARC actually had a subcomandante named Marcos. Having long lived in the shadow of the Zapatista leader with the same name, the FARC's Marcos had chosen to take the guerillas on a raid deep into government territory. Many of his men would die but at least the TV reporters would finally be talking about him instead of that other guy.

After a long, mosquito-bitten slog through the jungle they arrived at the FARC camp, a ramshackle assortment of dingy tents, bearded guys shaving with rusty machetes, and busty leftist women in tight olive-drab T-shirts. Terry had no time to admire the ladies.

3 He and his friends were shoved into the subcomandante's tent.

The man sitting behind the walnut desk looked familiar but Terry couldn't place him. Then he remembered. Subcomandante Marcos bore a striking resemblance to Norm from the TV show "Cheers". That is, if Norm held a Colt .45 pistol and spoke only Spanish. To Terry, finding Norm in the middle of the Colombian jungle seemed unlikely but no more unlikely that finding a two-hundred-pound desk in his tent.

The bishop poked Terry in the ribs. "Ask him if he's accepted Jesus as his personal savior."

With nothing better to try Terry did as so. The subcomandante's laughter could be heard all the way in Chiapas.

"I believe religion is the opiate of the masses," he said. "And you know what happens to drug pushers in Colombia?"

"They buy mansions and fast cars and have lots of women?"

"True." Subcomandante Marcos inserted the magazine into his pistol, chambered a round, and aimed at the tent pole. "But we still shoot priests. Nothing personal, mind you. It's just that reporters love a good priest shooting." He lowered his weapon. "Of course, they love the story of a guerilla showing mercy to a worthy adversary even more. I'll give you a sporting chance. Preach a sermon on Sunday. If you can convince me there's something to this faith of yours, I'll let you go. If not..."

The millipede crawled out from under the dirty bowl. It moved each tiny leg deliberately as a Tai Chi master. Terry took off his shoe, smashed it into a splotch of yellow goo, and went back to reading his bible. Neither Sergei nor the bishop had understood the conversation so Terry told them they were to be the subcomandante's guests until the Sunday service. There was no need to worry them. He'd explained that the guards were there to protect them and that they had to remain inside their mildewed tent due to an impending AUC paramilitary attack. Each day they woke early. The bishop led them in prayer until the guards came with a meager breakfast of tepid water, rice, and a banana. The menu repeated for lunch and dinner with the addition of some gristly meat.

The head and humidity came long before midday. They sat shirtless and unwashed, listening to the whine



Photography by Aiez Mirza

of mosquitoes and the guards' laughter. Terry flipped through his bible trying to remember the sermons of Reverend Doctor Passnauer but all he could recall were a few fragments. If only had hadn't lost his coke.

"It's no good." Terry closed his bible. "How do I preach to a bunch of atheists and killers?"

"You've got to scare them." The bishop leaned forward. "Let them know what's in store for them after they die. Nothing brings a sinner around like a good hellfire-and-brimstone sermon."

Terry nodded and looked at Sergei. The Russian would be looking a lot worse if he were going through withdrawal. He had to have some coke. The next time the bishop left for the bathroom, Terry confronted him.

"You holding?"

"No, no have."

"Come on man, don't bullshit me. You'd be freaking now if you didn't have any coke."

"No have!" Sergei held up his hands.

"Just give me one line. I'll pay you a hundred bucks when we get back. A hundred bucks, man!"

"Am I interrupting something?" The bishop entered and went to his cot.

"No!" Terry glared at Sergei. "Nothing!"

Terry went back to his bible but the King James English seemed opaque. Soon he was fantasizing about a FARC woman, her frizzy hair under her fatigue cap. In his mind he wrestled her cargo pants over her hips. The she slit his throat. He closed the bible and turned to the bishop.

"What made you become a missionary?"

"I suppose God did."

"Come on, Alvin. That's not an answer. Why did you choose to risk your life in countries where they didn't even listen to you? You could have done any number of other things."

"It's where I can do the most good." The bishop took a breath and let it out. "A doctor can heal the body for a lifetime but a minister heals the soul for eternity."

"I'm not getting anywhere. Maybe you should give the sermon Sunday."

"And steal your moment of glory? No way!" The bishop put a hand on Terry's shoulder. "Everybody has doubts, son, but the going ahead anyway, that's faith. Open yourself up to God. Let Him speak through you

The days passed until it was Sunday morning and Terry found himself with bowels loose, standing in front of the assembled guerillas. He hadn't had any blow for over four days. How was he supposed to function? The bishop stood by him and took his hands.

"Lord." He bowed his head. "You've given us the chance to preach Your word to ears that sorely need to hear it. Let us accomplish Your will. Amen." He squeezed Terry's hands and sat down.

Terry looked at the faces, the sneers, the looks of boredom, and the subcomandante's jagged metal grin. Each of the fighters held an assault rifle. Terry had no idea what to say.

"Let me tell you about my church," he said in Spanish. "It's located beneath a whorehouse. Most of my congregation are addicts except for the putas. I don't think they use. We have a transvestite named Giselda who's so good at makeup that she fooled the good bishop here."

The guerillas laughed.

"You may ask why I don't have a better church, one with upstanding members like mayors and businessmen. Maybe it's because I'm not upstanding or maybe it's because my church is what a church is supposed to be, a place we can practice acceptance and forgiveness. If God made both scorpions and lambs doesn't He love the scorpions too? And doesn't it take a scorpion to preach to the scorpions?"

"That's about all I have to say to you. You may want to shoot me now and that's okay. I just ask that you let my friends go. This so-called ministry of mine isn't their fault. It's mine."

Terry stumbled out of bed around noon. Bleary-eyed and head aching he made it to the bodega a block from his hotel for coffee and a newspaper. It had been three weeks since the incident in the jungle. To his surprise the guerillas had released them and after awarding Terry the ten thousand dollars the bishop had flown back to North Carolina with a glowing report about the work he was doing in Colombia. Terry had paid off Captain Benitez and El Gordo with the money, leaving him pretty much where he'd started.

He found a table near the entrance, opened the paper, and found a picture of Subcomandante Mar-

cos. Government soldiers had killed him and his FARC fighters near Hayacampa. Even in death this Marcos had been relegated page two.

Terry reached for his cup. There was a reflection of Jesus on the coffee's surface. He stared at the long-suffering eyes and tired expression like that of an exasperated mother. Terry shook his head. He really needed to cut back on the blow. He placed a few coins on the table and walked away, leaving his coffee untouched.

Jon Wesick's stories have appeared in journals such as Space and Time, Zahir, and Tales of the Talisman. He's also published over two hundred poems in small press journals such as The New Orphic Review, Pearl, Pudding, and Slipstream. One of his poems won second place in the 2007 African American Writers and Artists contest.



Places and Faces by Benjamin Heine

A WOMAN, A PROSTITUTE, A VICTIM

By Wajiha Hyder

Caution: human trafficking at large.

There are days when you unknowingly stumble upon something so surprising, it lures you into the suppressed realities of a world consciously concealed by the deceitful tools of silence and taboo. It was perhaps one of those crucial days when, on my way back from a friend's place, I noticed something mildly disturbing. There, on the balcony of a lavish house, I watched a rather creepy man casually smoking a cigarette with a gaudily dressed woman by his side. The sight in itself was not as startling as the hour: bordering midnight. The balcony was grandly lit up, inappropriately so in the evident absence of any celebration. The area – DHA – was purportedly one of the classiest districts of Lahore. Later, I was shocked to learn that this house belonged to a celebrity, much notorious for her dubious activities.

Prostitution is one of the oldest, yet the most enigmatic of all professions, deeply embedded in the subcontinent's culture for longer than its citizens care to acknowledge. "Tawaif" was the word commonly used during the fêted Mughal era which lasted for a near total of three decades. Prostitutes represented a class of women who, despite their origins, had a comprehensive command over the performing arts and impressively sophisticated mannerisms.

Although Pakistan is a declared Islamic state, with a law in place which clearly forbids the practice of this trade, prostitution has been blossoming in this country. Continuing from the British formalization of the "red light district" and the protection afforded to workers by law-enforcing governmental agencies, much of the sector's overwhelming expansion would not have been feasible without the guardianship of some of the most influential men in the country.

In the late '70s, brothels were officially closed for the public, and forced many sex workers to migrate to the main residential areas of major cities. The profession thrived, and the country's darkest secret, which was once contained in the "red light district", also began to attract women from the not so "wrong side of the track".

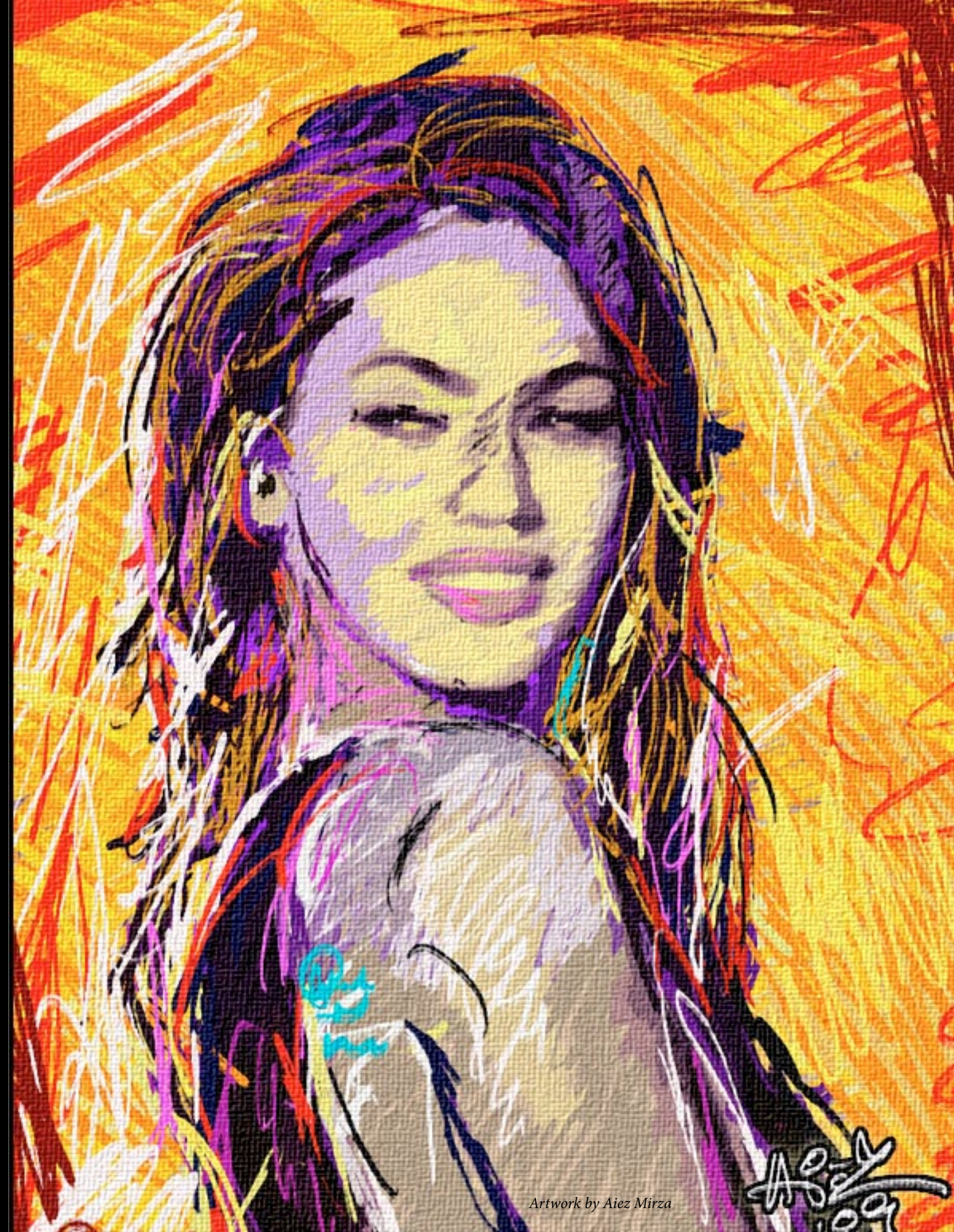
"These days, camouflaged brothels can be found

out all over the posh areas of society," observed Hareem, a blogger, who was taken aback on finding out that her much loved Chinese parlor, "Rosie", was in fact running a brothel in disguise. "It is really next to impossible to track them down and find out what they're actually up to," she continued.

No discussion about the red light district and its rapid promulgation into mainstream society would be complete without mentioning Fauzia Saeed's almost-bible of the subject, *Taboo*. Her work spans a total of ten years and gives a magnificent insight into the practice of prostitution in the region over centuries, the myths of the profession, the dilemma that these ill-fated people find themselves dealing with on a daily basis and the overall gender inequalities which have forever plagued South Asia.

Ever since this business has spread out to the more aristocratic areas of Lahore; even foreigners in Pakistan are not finding it difficult to find casual companions for a careless one night stand.

“The protection afforded to workers by law-enforcing governmental agencies, much of the sector's overwhelming expansion would not have been feasible without the guardianship of some of the most influential men in the country.”



Artwork by Aiez Mirza

“But you have to have some real good contacts to procure a female TV star or a well-known actress, if you want to hire one. They usually come with a massive price and are only accessible to top politicians, businessmen or well-off foreigners” says Saman, a budding sociologist conducting her thesis on prostitution in Lahore. “I was surprised when it came to my knowledge that many second-rate hotels are now offering young girls to their clients upon request. Good contacts, again, are an absolute necessity. Most of these hotels would not want their secret to be out for the obvious fear of notoriety,” she continued, refusing to take any names.

It is common knowledge that short-time guest houses offering hourly rates are on the rise these days, giving a massive boost to the already blossoming sex industry in the city of Lahore. “Child prostitution is also one of the rarely discussed issues in this country, but even when we have knowingly turned our backs on it, the problem is staring unashamedly at us,” says Saman.

Pakistan is an underdeveloped state where technology usage has expanded (and is expanding) at an extraordinarily rapid rate. Unlimited and relatively cheap access to the internet and mobile phones has made it much more difficult to trace these cells; something that

“Pakistan, where the average daily wage earner has no more than Rs. 400 to take home to on a daily basis, is gravely infested with porn mania. A thing that was limited only to the not-so-easily obtainable VHS cassettes in the 80’s is now available at the simple touch of a button.”

also brings us to the ever flourishing porn industry in the state. Pakistan, where the average daily wage earner has no more than Rs. 400 to take home to on a daily basis, is gravely infested with porn mania. A thing that was limited only to the not-so-easily obtainable VHS cassettes till the 80’s is now available at the simple touch of a button with the ever thriving internet technology in the country. Pirated porn CD’s and DVD’s are quite effortlessly available now at every nook and corner, for a meager amount of Rs. 100 or so.

For some women, prostitution works as a quick fix to their problems in life; in Pakistan, it is rare for a woman in the lower middle class to go out to work and she is usually not very highly educated. If something happens to the husband or the major breadwinner in the family, she is left with few feasible options to feed her children.

Poverty, lack of education and a generally prejudiced mind-set regarding women are some of the root causes of this dilemma. “Unfortunately, women who have been forced to take it up as a profession as the direct result of being born to a prostitute are alarmingly less now,” says a disappointed Saman. “Most of today’s sex workers have either chosen to engage in this trade, or they have accidentally found themselves at the doorstep of a procurer.”

Changing the general mindset of people about women in this region is a cumbersome process, which not many are willing to gladly undertake. Both men and, quite sadly, many women have become quite hardened to the gender discrimination in this culture. They have continued to be sold as a commodity throughout the world since time immemorial, and will probably continue to be treated that way until the end of time.

Unless, of course, there is a conscious effort to overturn this trend. Perhaps, the time has come for the privileged classes to rise and stop the rapid progression of the sex trade industry. To not simply leave it to the social workers of the country, but to start addressing it in the manner required by such a delicate and deeply pressing issue. After all, change, doesn’t just announce and let itself in.

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TALK THE WALK

By Maria Amir

Time to drop the 'S' word

“Because women’s work is never done and is underpaid or unpaid or boring or repetitious and we’re the first to get fired and what we look like is more important than what we do and if we get raped it’s our fault and if we get beaten we must have provoked it and if we raise our voices we’re nagging bitches and if we enjoy sex we’re nymphos and if we don’t we’re frigid and if we love women it’s because we can’t get a ‘real’ man and if we ask our doctor too many questions we’re neurotic and/or pushy and if we expect childcare we’re selfish and if we stand up for our rights we’re aggressive and ‘unfeminine’ and if we don’t we’re typical weak females and if we want to get married we’re out to trap a man and if we don’t we’re unnatural and because we still can’t get an adequate safe contraceptive but men can walk on the moon and if we can’t cope or don’t want a pregnancy we’re made to feel guilty about abortion and...for lots of other reasons we are part of the women’s liberation movement.”

—A general appeal, quoted in The Torch, September 14 1987



Miss Gaunt by Abigail Larson

It really shouldn't be surprising but it is.

Millions of women all around the world marching to reclaim a single word. A word, that by definition, was designed to insult them. Over the past decade, fewer women have banded together to protest against sexual abuse, for fair wages, against honour crimes, the closure of girls schools in several countries, terrorism and for a woman's right to abortion, but somehow, SlutWalking got everyone's attention.

One might suppose it has a lot to do with packaging – the word 'slut' has a certain cache with advertisers and journalists alike. It rubs some the wrong way and others take it to mean an expression of independence – either way, it sells. Yet, this does little to address all ethical objections associated with the labeling of women with regards to their sexuality. There is a host of problems associated with trying to reclaim abusive terminologies and a different set of concerns follow any attempt to neutralize terms such as 'slut' or 'nigger'. An egalitarian society would not allow for such concepts to exist and thereby obliterate the terms but obviously, we are far from that yet.

SlutWalks began on April 3, 2011 in Toronto, when a police Constable Michael Sanguinetti suggested that if women didn't want to be victimised and raped then "they should avoid dressing like sluts". What followed was an unanticipated banding together of women from all over the world, strutting the streets of Chicago, Glasgow, London, Sao Paulo, Sydney, and most recently, Delhi in droves. Scores of women were observed protesting clad in the most provocative clothing they could manage, walking the streets as living, breathing emblems of one of the earliest feminist slogans: "However we dress, wherever we go... Yes means 'yes' and No means 'No', means 'no', means 'no'". The reaction to these provocateurs has naturally been varied and widespread, but there are few who can deny the effectiveness of their march, at least in the symbolic sense. If a protest, at its best, is designed to draw attention to a problem then SlutWalking has certainly done just that. What remains to be seen, however, is whether or not this particular vein of rallying proves effective in theory and whether it will hold up to the ever-changing denominations of modern feminism.

At first glance this doesn't appear to be the case. After all, why would women want to reclaim a word so deeply rooted in misogyny and that has been devised under a self-perpetuating patriarchal gaze? Then

again, there are several strands of feminism that seek to redefine the roles of women from within communal frameworks – that while, ostensibly patriarchal – allow for barriers to be broken. This would include feminists in Saudi Arabia protesting by insisting on driving vehicles even though it goes against the law, and female athletes in Pakistan, facing immense social pressures in venturing out on the fields in trousers and T-shirts. Regardless of whether or not it confines to anarchist views, these women are pioneers in their own right and they are breaking patriarchal definitions from within. They could just as easily refuse to have any part in combating the misogyny that surrounds them by insisting upon a universal, all-encompassing, single standard for women to be in place before they make their moves but that would prove both impractical as well as naïve.

If one were to extend the same narrative to SlutWalking, it would entail opening up prevailing stereotypes about female sexuality to vigorous criticism and debate. Today, the word 'slut' tends to describe "A person, especially a woman, considered sexually promiscuous", but the term is rooted in the Victorian definitions of a harlot, essentially used to denigrate slatterns and unclean women (even further). But as tends to be the case, the term came to be linked to all the negative

“Why would women want to reclaim a word so deeply rooted in misogyny and that has been devised under a self-perpetuating patriarchal gaze?”

adjectives men began using to distinguish between the women they married and the ones they preferred for a night's romp. Henry Fielding puts this most offensively...forgive me, effectively, in Tom Jones:

“However, what she withheld from the infant, she bestowed with the utmost profuseness on the poor unknown mother, whom she called an impudent slut, a wanton hussy, an audacious harlot, a wicked jade, a vile strumpet, with every other appellation with which the tongue of virtue never fails to lash those who bring a disgrace on the sex.”

Not much has changed as the 'S-word' continues to colour the implicit 'loose character' of women all around the world. From burlesque fishnets in Copenhagen to sleeveless kurtas in Pakistan, fashion tends to operate as a parallel force now synonymous with feminism. The term has taken root in various forms and in hundreds of global dialects. Naturally the words vary too – in all likelihood, due to overuse – slut and whore invariably morph into 'randi' and 'gashti' in Punjabi and nearly every language has its own accompanying adjectives. There are countless examples of cases in Southern Punjab where honour killings are not even investigated if the accused states that the woman was having an affair. For instance, on July 13, a man killed three of his daughters in Rahim Yar Khan simply because the girls chose to meet their fiancés with their heads uncovered. The police case officer explicitly stated that he could not 'get involved', given that the guardian of the girls had stated the reason for the murder was that the girls were 'fahsh', a desi anagram for vulgarity. Interestingly enough, the antonym for slut tends to be stud in most psychosexual and social contexts. The connotations of this particular twist imply that men generally adopt the term 'stud' in self-congratulation, and employ the word 'slut' to denigrate women who display exactly the same behavior.

Either way the narrative, the parameters, the language and its application generally come from men. In different countries the words mean different things and nearly every time the appellations rise in direct proportion to a man's libido. The more a man is turned on by a woman's unapologetic flaunting of her sexuality or looks, the more likely she is to be termed a slut or some equivalent thereof. Rebecca West made a solid point when she said:

“I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call

me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a door mat or a prostitute.”

How one ultimately regards SlutWalking will depend mostly on how highly one values definition and symbolism over practice and experience. This grading curve tends to affect much of feminist debate and it certainly holds sway when it comes to keeping up appearances – no pun intended. The fact that some men seem to be in control of, first labeling a woman a slut, and then insinuating that this label excuses or even invites rape is abhorrent and inexcusable. SlutWalking – while a rather knee-jerk response to rally against the insinuation – is proving to be a visually powerful tool in denouncing its implications.

The closest corollary for the issue in Pakistan, is the most recent SlutWalks held in Delhi. The fact that the issue was even taken up in India is intriguing since taking a stand alone, is reflective of how various strands of feminists in India are branching out of conventional 'honour issue' debates and into feminist discourse analysis. “I couldn't dream of the same thing happening in Pakistan. Firstly, we just (what? Have?) different issues. This is a Muslim country and by implication that places limitations on what a woman can and cannot wear and how she can and cannot act. Pakistani feminism, at least mainstream feminism cannot be individualistic,” says Aurat Foundation counselor Nighat Qadir. “Feminism here needs to be about the collective. All we can hope for is justice, education and an over all tolerance for women's rights. We aren't anywhere near a discourse about personal choices and radical feminist expression,” she added. A practical woman would do well to distinguish between her environment and her ideals.

What the SlutWalk movement raises is the potential dialogue on the journey from 'should' to 'is'. Any potential revolution finds its grounds in a firm ideology. Theory must come before practice and the assertion that women 'should' be allowed to dress as they choose without fear of being raped is sound and solid in theory. But practice is a different story. Aurat Foundation representative Mehmoona Sabir said that Indian feminism was branching out beyond Pakistani women's rights, primarily because of the diversity of their population. “Indian women come from dozens of different denominations, cultures and faith and a multicultural society is by nature forced to adopt and inculcate democratic norms and ideals. Indian women can SlutWalk to protest rape but if Pakistani women did, they not only

would be raped but in all likelihood they'd be killed," she said, adding "this isn't to deliberate on whether or not SlutWalks are a legitimate feminist movement but regardless the right to protest is not equal everywhere. Certainly not in Pakistan."

Often times the word "slut" is inherently indivisible from the Madonna/whore binary opposition that has categorized women into two large castes from as far back as we have been able to trace human existence. On the other hand, the solution to escaping such labels certainly doesn't lie in lionizing promiscuity. Also, the way a person chooses to dress is a relatively poor indicator of their sexual appetite, if at all. What are the indicators of such supposed 'sluttishness'? Is it too much make-up or dressing like fashion models on television or does it comprise of come-hither glances and brazen speech? In the case of the former, who does one implicate - the media and fashion industry? Are these conglomerates responsible for the ever-increasing counts of rape? And are women who wear burka's but still have a healthy sexual appetite exempt from the flimsy labels? Do we disregard female athletes who choose to dress modestly but behave promiscuously from this banner or is it reserved exclusively for women who choose to doll up? Where does one even draw the line to classify women into this tidy little label?

Where SlutWalks are concerned, I find myself in rare and unprecedented agreement with British Tory MP Louise Bagshawe, "promiscuity is not equality." It is hard to accept the notion that abandoning corsets and burkas somehow implies taking up arms in latex. The same premise also links in well with Naomi Wolf's definition of female beauty in 'The Beauty Myth'. Wolf wrote that women should have "the choice to do whatever we want with our faces and bodies without being punished by an ideology that is using attitudes, economic pressure, and even legal judgments regarding women's appearance to undermine us psychologically and politically". She said that women were under assault by the "beauty myth" in five arenas: work, religion, sex, violence, and hunger.

A recent and interesting take on this overemphasis on femininity, in practical terms, is the adoption of the term 'Shemale' by hundreds of members of the Pakistani Hijra population. The transgender communities' political representative Almas Bobby, recently went on record in several television interviews stating that people tend to disregard gender disparity and bi-

“Often times the word “slut” is inherently indivisible from the Madonna/whore binary opposition that has categorized women into two large castes from as far back as we have been able to trace human existence”

ology when they refer to hijras as khusras . “We will use ‘Shemale’ because we want to be known and recognized as women. They use the term to make fun of us, saying we are men acting and dressing like women. They use it to make us sound like disfigured beasts but we will use it to secure our position in society,” she said. While the attempt by the hijra community to reform the term ‘shemale’ is commendable, the same respect cannot be ascribed to SlutWalking. The latter attempt involves trying to reclaim a word that describes perception rather than gender and the said perception is not empowering.

Ironically, the beauty myth also identifies the same five spheres that also link in to areas where women

are defined as 'sluts', whether in character, appearance or supposed practice. This is why women need to battle against the branding itself. Whether in Pakistan or in Canada, women should be fighting to expunge the word 'slut' from every language as generations fought to expunge the words 'nigger' and the post-colonial 'savage'. In principle, the attempt to reclaim the word slut, is an attempt to put a fresh spin on perhaps the most outdated of four-letter words.

One that categorizes women's appearance and/or beauty according to how men have seen and continue to see fit to define it.

The attempt fails even before it has begun.

References

1 Mr Chesterton in *Hysterics: A Study in Prejudice*, *The Clarion*, 14 Nov 1913, reprinted in *The Young Rebecca*, 1982

2 The colloquial term used to describe cross dressers in Pakistan. The term is often confused with or used synonymously with the term 'hijra'. The latter, however, describes a biological condition, whereas the former applies to a fashion choice.

“One that categorizes women's appearance and/or beauty according to how men have seen and continue to see fit to define it. The attempt fails even before it has begun.”

44 HERO FOR HIRE

By Milo James Fowler

It's like a new car or a girlfriend. Sometimes you really want something, and you want it so bad, you know your life will be ultimately complete once you get it. Well, that's how much I've always wanted a Samurai sword. Blame it on Akira Kurosawa or Tom Cruise, but I've just always had to have one, for as long as I can remember. But after I got one, I didn't know what to do with it—kind of like my last girlfriend.

Watermelons and pumpkins were fun for a while, but it got a little messy. I kept the blade sharp enough to slice through just about anything.

Once, I considered using it on the cat that kept leaving mangled sparrows on my doorstep. I mean, why kill a sparrow? Where's the fun in that? The stupid cat didn't even eat them. I could almost understand it if he'd been hungry, but I'd seen him before swatting a dead hummingbird between his forepaws for no apparent reason. Just some kind of innate malevolence, I guess.

Anyhow, there I was with my Samurai sword, and I knew I couldn't keep hacking up produce or start using it on the neighbor's pets. So I put an ad in the paper. It said: Hero for Hire, then my phone number.

I knew all the cool moves because I'd seen all the cool movies: Kill Bill one and two, Seven Samurai, The Last Samurai, Heroes—that was an old TV show, I guess, but it had its moments. I read up on the code of the Samurai on Wikipedia, and I realized I couldn't keep my skills and sword to myself. I'd gotten a great deal on eBay, and I had to use the sword for good.

The ad had been in the paper for about a couple weeks. No serious takers yet. A few prank calls, but I didn't really mind. They just didn't understand what I was advertising.

I thought about clarifying a little: "Self-trained Samurai with sword available upon request for problems, big or small." But I thought that might be illegal somehow, or it might require some kind of license. I didn't want it to sound like I was a hit man. The last thing I needed were cops on my doorstep. I got enough surprises already with the dead birds and all.

So there I was one fine Thursday morning after my graveyard shift at Target, stocking shelves and driv-

ing the forklift around without running into anything important. I had Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody screeching out of my speakers and the floor of my living room meticulously cleared of the usual bachelor debris. I was ready to begin.

"HIYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

The guttural hiyaa is always an integral component of any self-respecting Samurai's first series of poses and forms.

I lunged forward, hilt gripped in both hands at my side, blade pointed behind me. I whipped it out and thrust it into the belly of the first invisible Ninja adversary. He let out a shriek of both surprise and agony before he fell to the floor and lay still.

One down.

But there were more. Ah, yes. They had me outnumbered.

I spun to the left, sword gripped horizontally at neck level. The unsuspecting Ninja caught it in the jugular and shrieked as blood gushed upward like a fountain. Then he hit the floor.

In slow motion, I caught sight of a Ninja in the kitchen with my well-trained eye. He was wise to keep his distance. And he was sneaky—in a lethal way. His hand jerked to his black belt and whipped out a few standard Ninja stars, hurling them in my direction.

CLANG! CLANG! SHIZANG!

The ninja stars were no match for my Samurai sword. I dispatched them easily and with extreme prejudice, snapping the blade side to side in front of me.

Oh yeah. I was that good.

My next forms included the Crouching Tiger, the Hungry Monkey, the Graceful Sloth, and my personal favorite: the Prancing Meerkat. All well-executed. All very lethal. The piles of dead invisible Ninjas around my living room, dining room, and kitchen were my witnesses.

But they were dead.

Practicing with my sword always worked up a sweat, so I stripped off the soaked red bandana from my forehead, the drenched white polyester gi I'd gotten from Party City last Halloween, even my soggy Target-brand boxers and socks. That's right. I got naked.



By Cory Windland

Then my phone rang.

Sword in hand, I sprinted to the kitchen counter and took a moment to catch my breath before snatching the handset from its cradle.

“Hello?” Sweat dribbled into my mouth from my upper lip.

There was a pause, silence. But I knew somebody was there. I could hear him or her breathing. Not in a nasty way, like those prank callers: more like this person was waiting for something.

Maybe they were second-guessing the prospect of calling a “hero for hire”. Maybe they didn’t know if I would be able to help them solve their problems. Maybe they didn’t know what to say. They just needed me to get the proverbial ball rolling.

“How may I be of service?”

“You can pick up your laundry.”

“Mom?”

“Expecting somebody else?”

Sweat sputtered as I blew out a sigh. “I told you I’m expecting a call!”

“That was two weeks ago.”

She was right. What could I say to that?

“Listen Darrell, I know you need your privacy and all that, and since you moved into the cottage out back, I’ve tried to give you your space, but when it’s your laundry I’m doing like I’ve done for the last twenty-seven years, and you just leave it here like you expect me to haul it out to you—”

“I’ll get it.”

“It’s on top of the dryer in the garage, like always.”

“You don’t have to tell me.”

“Well, I can’t assume you know where it is.”

Click. Dial tone. Always awkward. I blew out a sigh and grabbed my gi from the floor. Yuck, it was sweaty – and a bit stinky. When had I washed it last?

The phone rang again, and I snatched it up.

“I’m on my way, Mom!”

Silence. No breathing.

“Is this . . .” A frail voice began. “The Hero for Hire?”

Yes it is! I wanted to shout it from the rooftops and click my heels together. I was stoked.

“Yes,” I said in a deep voice, striking a debonair pose with my drenched gi draped over one arm. “How may I be of service?”

“How much do you charge?”

I frowned. It had never crossed my mind. “That depends . . . on the job.” I thought that sounded good. “What’s your problem?” That hadn’t come out right. “I mean, what—?”

“I was robbed.”

I nodded. “Okay.”

“What?”

“I mean, I’m sorry to hear that. What did they take?”

“My laptop. I had it listed for sale on Craigslist, and they came for it, came to my home. They took it and left without paying a cent!”

“That’s awful.”

“You’re telling me!” A cough. “So what can you do about it?”

“Me?” Of course me, idiot! “Right. Um . . . What did they look like?”

“They were big and ugly.” That was it.

“Okay . . .” I frowned. Not much to go on. “How many were there?”

“Two.”

I nodded, trying to form a mental image. “When did this happen?”

“Just an hour ago.”

“Did you call the police?”

A pause. “They’re no help.”

I bit the side of my cheek.

“So you’ll help me?”

I surveyed the mayhem I had wrought all around my living room and dining room and kitchen. The Ninja corpses had vanished, as per usual. I shrugged.

“Sure.”

“What?”

“Yes. I’ll do what I can. You can give me all the details when we meet.”

“I just gave you all the details.”

I frowned. “Right.” Dead air. “So . . . Where do we meet?”

“Can I trust you?”

“Of course.” I was, after all, the Hero for Hire.

“Meet me at my home. I don’t get out much these days. Are you familiar with Mission Village Drive?”

Of course I was. It was my street. Fascinating. Oh, what a tangled web we weave . . .

“Well?”

“Yes, I know it.”

Another cough. “I’m a few blocks down from the Stadium Market. 2938, blue house with white trim. Got that?”

Five houses down from mine. “I can be there in a few minutes.”

“Well now, you must be some kind of hero. You going to fly?” A hoarse chuckle.

I couldn’t help but grin. “You leave that to me.”

“Okay then, I’ll see you soon.”

I set the phone in its cradle and shook my head. My first case. It was going to be awesome.

I tugged on my soggy gi and re-tied the red bandana around my head. I was good to go. I just needed some way to transport my sword. Guess I should have gotten a scabbard on eBay when I was making my fateful purchase. Glancing around, I spotted the black plastic bag sticking out of the kitchen trashcan. Why not?

I chucked the trash onto the floor—Taco Bell wrappers, mostly—and wound the bag around my trusty blade. Good enough. Anybody driving by would have no idea what I carried under my arm. I’d just look like a karate student on his way to the dojo. . . with a strange package under his arm.

Maybe it wasn’t the best idea.

But nobody would think I was carrying a real sword. They’d just think it was one of those wooden practice swords. Anyhow, I didn’t need to worry about it – I had bigger fish to fry. Somebody had robbed one of my neighbors, and I was going to do something about it.

What’s the saying? About starting in your own backyard? Well, that was me.

Head held high, I strode from my bachelor pad into my parents’ backyard, then crept on tiptoe down the side yard past the garage.

“Darrel, is that you?” Mom called from the laundry room.

Not now, Mother—I’m a man on a mission!

I dashed forward and scaled the gate, dropping to the other side with the stealth of an evil Ninja. The gate shuddered, then swung open behind me, crashing against the garage. I guess somebody forgot to lock it.

“Darrel?”

Mom’s voice faded behind me. Because I was running.

“Hot, hot, hot,” I gasped as the gravel scorched the tender soles of my feet. I briefly considered going back for my Crocs, but then I remembered that I read on Wikipedia that a Samurai would never wear Crocs. So I forged ahead, ignoring the third-degree burns on each foot, passing one house, two, three, four, until I arrived at the vacant driveway of 2938.

You’d think I would know who lived five houses down from me, but the truth was, I did not. Does that make me self-absorbed? I don’t think so. After all, wasn’t I the one with the ad in the paper offering my heroic services for the good of humanity?

Head held high, I strode up the hot driveway and rang the doorbell. There was one of those security screen doors, the kind with the black iron bars that make a home look more like a prison. The front windows had them, too. I’d hate to be stuck inside there during a fire.

The front door opened.

“Are you him?” came a frail voice.

I squinted to see through the dense mesh of screen. There was a plump, shadowy figure inside, at least a foot shorter than me.

“Yes, we spoke on the phone—”

“You don’t look like much of a hero.”

“Well—”

“You look more like that dumb kid who lives up the street.”

“Uh . . .” This wasn’t going how I’d hoped.

“You’re still living with your parents?”

I nodded mutely.

“How old are you now?”

“Twenty-seven.”

The figure gasped, shocked. “When I was your age, I’d already popped out half a dozen kids!”

“May I come in?”

“Why?”

"I . . ." I raised my chin. "I'm here to help you."

"I don't want your help."

"But you said on the phone—"

"That's when I thought I was talking to a hero."

"But you said you were robbed—"

"I was." A short sniff. "Not that you can do anything about it."

My shoulders sagged. My Samurai sword suddenly felt very heavy.

"You want in?"

"Okay."

"Not you." The pitch and tone of voice changed abruptly as the deadbolt on the security door slid open. "Come here, Baby. Come to Mama."

The barred gate swung open wide, and I had to step back to keep from getting smacked in the nose. A chubby grandmother stepped out in her fuzzy slippers and purple flowered muumuu and held out flabby, wrinkled arms to welcome. . . the cat.

My vision clouded crimson and zoomed to focus with crystal clarity upon the feline that sauntered up the driveway like it owned the place. I saw nothing else. I could feel the blood boiling up from the core of my being. My nostrils flared. My fists clenched the Samurai sword in its black garbage bag.

This was Fate, if ever I had been witness to it in the real world. In movies, it was something I expected. But in real life, when does this sort of thing actually happen?

It was destiny. I could feel it.

Sparrow-Killer, you have left your last bird on my doorstep. Slowly, with the stealth of a highly trained Samurai, I unsheathed my sword, allowing the summer breeze to grasp the bag and take it away. It floated in slow motion across the lawn like a tumbleweed.

"What's that?" the grandmother asked.

But I was beyond hearing her. I had entered what can only be described as blood-rage. Yes. I was in the zone.

"Time to die, kitty," I said through clenched teeth.

"What?" said the grandmother. She was a little hard-of-hearing.

"Time to die, kitty!" I yelled, brandishing my



Office Mates by Emily Smith

weapon high and striking the best pose I have ever struck. If only Akira Kurosawa could have seen me.

"Are you crazy? Get off my lawn." She beckoned the kitty closer. "Don't pay any attention to him. He's just that dumb kid from up the street. You come to Mama."

Yes, come closer, kitty, and meet your doom! Slayer of the innocent! Destroyer of the hummingbird! Sink your hellish fangs into my blade!

The cat's amber eyes glanced up at me, then looked away, obviously uninterested. Oh, but it should have been interested, for I held its very life in my hands.

A car pulled to the curb, motor running, and a door swung open. But I barely noticed, because I was in the middle of that full-on blood-rage I mentioned earlier.

"Ma'am?" came a deep bass of a voice from the curb.

The grandmother screamed. "It's them! It's them! Oh God Almighty!" Frantic and a bit terrified, she shuffled backward in her slippers, beckoning to the cat in a frenzy. "Quick, come inside, Precious! Come inside!"

The red tint to my vision faded, and I turned from the nonchalant kitty to face the very big and very ugly guy now headed up the driveway.

"It's them!" the grandmother screeched. "They're the ones! They're them!"

"Ma'am?" The man, a large, dark-skinned guy in an enormous Chargers jersey and black Dickies shorts, came to the end of the walkway and stopped, frowning at me. "Everything okay here?"

"What do you want?" she demanded, standing just outside her door but clinging to the security screen and peering through with jittery eyes. "Why have you come back?"

That's when everything became clear. To me, anyway. The kitty was no longer my concern—even as it crept forward and started to slink against my bare ankles, swishing its great, bushy tail—

"Is this one of the robbers?" I asked, my attention split between the giant in the jersey before me and the wicked feline working its soft, furry voodoo on my shins.

"Yes—get him! Get him! What am I paying you for?" she shrieked.

"You haven't paid me anything," I muttered. It

was the truth.

“Yeah, sorry about that.” The giant fished into a wide hip pocket and came up with a wad of bills. “My bro’s a real dumbass. I thought he’d paid you for the computer, and he thought I did.” Massive shoulders arched upward then collapsed, and he grinned sheepishly. “I got your money here.” But he didn’t come any closer.

He knew a dangerous Samurai when he saw one. I shifted the hilt in my grip, and the sunlight glanced off the blade, flashing straight into his eyes. He scowled, wincing and holding up a fleshy palm.

“What’s your problem, man?”

“You’ve got my money?” The security door eased open. “Is that what you said?” She sounded like a gentle grandmother all of a sudden.

“I don’t have a problem,” I said.

“What?” she demanded. “Shut up, you. And get off my lawn already. Go on home to your Mama.”

“You supposed to be some kind of ninja?” the man asked.

“Samurai,” I corrected him.

“Yeah?” He chuckled quietly, deep in his enormous chest. “Where’d you get that cheap-ass costume? Party City?”

“Yeah.” And it was on sale.

The man laughed out loud. “He givin’ you trouble, lady?”

“Yes.” She turned to scowl up at me. “He won’t leave!”

“I’m trying to help you,” I said.

“I’ll get rid of him, if you want,” the man said.

“Yes please!” she said.

I frowned. This was not going well at all. “Give her the money you owe her. Then I’ll go.” I hefted my chin and adjusted my pose slightly. I was starting to cramp up a bit. Posing for extended periods isn’t natural for a Samurai: we’re meant for fighting. My highly trained muscles were itching to get started. “I’m here to see justice served. That is all.”

“What?” The grandmother dug a finger into her ear.

“You’re gonna get yourself served, you don’t clear out.” The giant lumbered forward with obvious menace in his frame.

“Stop right there!” I tried to flash the sunlight into his eyes again with my blade. It didn’t work. I backed up, shuffling my bare soles across the grass. The cat followed, purring now as it wove some kind of figure eight hex around my ankles, rooting me to the ground. I found myself frozen where I stood, unable to change poses. What is a Samurai without his poses? “Get away from me!” I hissed down at the cat.

It glanced up at me long enough to hiss back. Then it scratched up my shins in a sudden violent fit, claws distended from furry limbs, striking in a blur of demon-possessed speed. I screamed in both shock and fury—not to mention pain—and brought down my sword, striking once, twice, thrice. But the kitty was too fast, dodging every lethal blow with more skill than any invisible Ninja I’d ever faced.

“Gimme that.”

One strong hand clamped down on my arm and twisted it, and I cried out as another hand tugged the blade from my grasp and tossed it away.

“Here you go, ma’am.” A second ugly giant had appeared out of nowhere, identical to the first. He lifted up the cat, suddenly docile in his grasp, furry legs dangling limply, and handed it over to the grandmother.

“Why, thank you,” she said, gathering the kitty to her flowered bosom and stroking it with adoration. “You boys look so much alike—so handsome! Are you twins?”

“No ma’am,” said the first one with a grin, even as he gripped my arm in a merciless vice. I struggled to pull free, but he only tightened his hold.

“Oww,” I moaned.

He ignored me. “Here you go.” He handed her the wad of bills with his free hand. “Had to stop by the ATM. Two hundred, yeah?”

“Yes.” She took the cash and pocketed it in her muumuu. “Thank you.”

“Our bad.” He nudged his brother.

“Yeah, sorry ‘bout that,” the brother mumbled.

“Water under the bridge, boys, water under the bridge.” The grandmother beamed. The cat purred, nestled against her chest. “Say, how would you both like to come in for some milk and cookies?”

Both of the ugly giants grinned appreciatively and nodded. “Cookies would be great.”

“Follow me,” she said and disappeared inside.

The giant’s brother followed.

“No cookies for you.” The giant shoved me onto the lawn and I fell sprawling beside my Samurai sword. He glared down at me with what possibly could have been mistaken for disgust. “Take your toy sword and go home, fool.” He maneuvered his bulk to head into the house.

“It’s not a toy.”

“What?” He stopped to fix me with a fierce scowl.

“It is a Samurai sword.” Slowly, I reached for the hilt of my blade and rose to my feet before him. “Have you no respect?” I had intended for my voice to come out strong and even, just like a hero’s. Instead, it lilted a little there at the end like a yodel or something.

The scowl remained on the dark brow of the giant. He was trying to stare me down, intimidate me. It wasn’t really working. After all, I had stared into the eyes of a demon-possessed kitty only moments ago. Compared to that—

“Whatever,” he muttered with a chuckle and stepped into the house, leaving the security door to crash behind him. “Sorry ma’am,” his voice came from inside.

The breeze picked up, rippling the dry hem of my otherwise sweat-drenched gi and returning the black garbage bag to me, floating across the grass like a ghost, brushing against my right leg. I stared down at it and remembered my bleeding shins.

Another time, kitty. Your days are numbered. I now know where you live.

Laughter erupted from the house. I nodded to myself. It was time to go. My work here was done. According to the tenets of the Bushidō, as summarized on Wikipedia, I needed no reward. I could go home with honor.

With my Samurai sword hidden in the garbage bag and tucked under my arm once again, I trotted home, grimacing as the soles of my feet made contact with the hot pavement. This, I could endure.

For a few yards, at least.

“Hot, hot, hot,” I gasped.

“There you are!” Mom greeted me in the garage, the door wide open. “Forget something?” She gestured

to the heap of unsorted laundry balanced precariously atop the dryer.

I nodded. This too I could endure. I was, after all, a Samurai.

Milo James Fowler is a teacher by day, writer by night. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in over 25 publications, including The Best of Every Day Fiction, Bards and Sages Quarterly, and Daily Science Fiction. Stop by anytime: www.milo-inmediasres.com.

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VACATION

Arizona was a dry attic we broke
into. You told me how we entered in a window
splitting under the weight of sunlight,
how the crack closed and opened like lips. You told me
I could put my finger on any crevice and feel
shadows of coyotes and quartz slip
into my fingerprints. You said,
“Even the sand reflects turquoise.”

I was there, with my pick
and my shovel, jogging Sherman Alexie
and this is what it means over asphalt where animals kept licking,
eyes hard like the petrified wood we searched for,
our hands dusted, the scorpion tattoo on your back moving
beneath the sunlight, mirage. We sang tongues across tongues,
sipped copper stars, trying to capture the absence
of blue fields in a documentary about Apache trout.
I remember thumb wrestling for the last travel

sized toothbrush, our canteen leaking, mint toothpaste
sludge on the inside of my cheek. The horizon
was always a sterling knife over a flame, all reflection
and bleeding and premonition. You were the real painted desert,
poured cowboy aesthetics into broken glasses, and I was thinking of wire
and string. Knots and twine. I said, “There. Over there,”
pointed, only to move and find there and there
in the light revealed on your collarbone,
and shirtless, you were cracked, too, all lines
and edges, an architect of small springs we invoked
in our fights. We will agree upon the mirages,
how we listened for Geronimo and the wind
slid against our bodies, a wetness, hydration. Our postcards
pulse with sand and cacti in daylight, words like border
and canyon pinched into a space the size of a freckle.

—Mary Stone

Mary Stone's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Thunderclap Magazine, Hobble Creek Review, Notes Magazine, A Clean Well-Lighted Place, Down in the Dirt, Mochila, and others. She received the 2011 Langston Hughes Creative Writing Award in Poetry. She lives in Lawrence, KS, where she teaches English and co-edits the Blue Island Review. She is also a reader for Gemini Magazine.

54 A NAKED INDUSTRY

By Aaron Grierson

Entertainment: illegal. Employment: dangerous.

Each of these words has been used to describe the pornography industry. It is one of the longest standing industries and has grown in variety, if not popularity. This is due largely to the advent of the internet, which is connected to essentially everything now. The internet contains extensive archives ranging from the iconic Playboy to videos filmed in a hotel, or even those of a vintage age. Acquisition has become as easy as Google. Traces of billing and shipment have dissipated due largely to purchasing digital videos online, or pirating them for free. For the industry, the ease of accessibility is great. For parents wanting to monitor their teenagers' use of the internet, perhaps not so much.

Rather than just being an easily available outlet for hormonal teenagers, the internet's stock of pornography is a goldmine for connoisseurs of a particular artistic medium. This is a bit of a stretch, of course, both for people of strict sensibilities and the general population. This is especially poignant when compared to some of the more outlandish subgenres of pornography. The bulk of the media, when not involving vegetables, household items or animals can be like any other movie, only with fewer clothes. The actors can be just as laughable or convincing as those in Hollywood, as can the sets, make up and any digital effects rendered. However, pornography is far from standard viewing material for the average moviegoer or internet pirate. It can be dirty and downright inappropriate, but before we proceed to thrash pornography for being a manifestation of an abhorrent vice, it is only fair to take a look at the positives, for a full picture.

The most obvious of these is the industry's lucrativeness. It makes a substantial amount of money for the actors, directors and distributors involved. The steady paycheck is a definite bonus, and a major advantage in the current world economy. The internet is an integral part of this, because distribution - and by extension, income for those involved - is spread more quickly than ever before. Connections are made through billing or even just discovering new material to view and enjoy, much like YouTube's rating system.

As with any digital attraction, retaining a con-



The Sweetest Dream by Sonja Dimovska

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sumer's attention is critical to their satisfaction, thereby funding production. This is one of the more virulent features of pornography. Rather like videogames and movies, it's absolutely everywhere on the internet and is often free to play, despite many streaming websites having a minute cap per viewing session. Limited time aside, pornography can have an effect similar to that of video games. That is, rather than turning them into blood thirsty criminals as angry parents often claim, or people with a chronic urge to engage in rampant sexual activity as one might expect, it does quite the opposite. Studies have shown that in the case of video games, crime rates are actually lower, despite claims that violent video games lead to a penchant for violence outside of the digital world. The same can be said about pornography keeping people entertained for an hour or more at a time. Even if it doesn't prevent extreme crimes, it does keep the regular urges under control when other outlets, such as an honest partner, are unavailable. It might not be the best of habits, but it beats a heroin addiction by several hundred dollars a month.

At the same time, chafing aside, there are of course many darker, less friendly aspects associated with pornography. Perhaps the most obvious is child pornography. Not to be confused with teenagers emailing dirty photos to a significant other, child pornography isn't really a public industry so much as a tumour attached to the concept of pornography as a whole. Often, one of the major issues is the violence that enters into the creation. While it has no direct connection with the internet, save perhaps some live feed for sadists, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge this particular area in pornography and try and prevent it from happening. Ideally, there is a lot of nonviolent photography and filming, but that does not improve the situation by much, nor would it stop the spread. One of the main drawbacks of easy distribution via the internet is that this unclean content can be on thousands of webpages, without anyone really knowing until they happen across it, or read about it in the news.

Distribution made easy by the internet has other problems too. While it may not affect producers in any way other than their income, the sheer amount of pornography can lead to addiction problems. As with other vices such as gambling, this can lead to massive bills and serious money and personal issues. Although there are

56 the safeguards in terms of minute limits on some websites, there are so many sites out there that these limits become nearly inconsequential for the devoted that are willing to scour the internet to fill their cravings. The solution? E-clinic! Or getting unplugged, although this seems impossible given the interconnectedness of the internet with our lives. From social networking right down to satisfying our most primal instincts, the internet has it all. Even a website called Food Porn! (On a side note, this is great to visit if you enjoy cooking or baking, are an artist or just really, really like food.)

There are many stereotypes about pornography, the people in it and those that watch it. I can recall my younger days where a good friend of mine was made fun of for watching pornography, despite the fact that no one, perhaps save his parents, knew whether he did or not at the ripe age of thirteen. It's also unlikely that all actors and actresses are dumb, in fact some of them are not only earning millions but do it through wise and well planned strategies, actors such as Ron Jeremy are a perfect examples. Some are just trying to get through college, to make better of themselves. But these stereotypes can lead to reclusion, self-esteem issues, and other problems. Oftentimes it seems that the solution is to withdraw and inhabit the internet, but the internet is a giant circle of interconnected aspects of life - everyone and everything is touched in some way.

Distasteful as it may seem to some, the pornography industry is eternally alive. The internet is the modern connection from pornography to society, the most up-to-date and likely the one that will last the longest. Despite the common conception that pornography is a bad thing for society, it seems reasonable to estimate that cumulatively, naughty video hosting sites have more hits to date than YouTube will in its lifespan. It is one of the elements that has kept society going forward, through money spent, time wasted and a growing source of jobs despite being more and more removed from the eyes of general society.

Regardless of how inappropriate it can be, pornography is often a risqué form of art using some of the most beautiful and diverse models out there: human beings. Despite the digital connection pornography tends to carry for its viewers, we have to remember that for all our enjoyment or disgust we are watching human beings provide people with a service, and often more than one. This by no means should call for public claims of respect or even endorsement of pornography. Rather, it



Mystical Dialogue by Sonja Dimovska

57 is more of a call for a mindful middle ground, where two things are different from the current trends. First, that neither viewers or creators are scorned and the employees of the industry have the same safety regulations that other industries do. Second, that children are left out of the aptly named adult film industry. For the pornography industry, the internet has been the next step in what is not so much an evolution as an expansion, a beast we created and struggle to keep in check.

58 100,000 POETS FOR CHANGE

By Omri Luzon

Activist poets.

You might have heard of it already; or you might have never heard of it and have no idea what I'm talking about. Either way, 100,000 Poets For Change will be sweeping across the world, and you should get on board!

So, what is it all about?

100,000 Poets For Change is a global event taking place on September 24th, 2011. The main idea behind it is for poets, writers, artists – anybody, actually – to get together to create and perform, educate and demonstrate, simultaneously with other communities around the world. Artists of all forms are gathering in countries such as Britain, the USA, France, Australia, Israel, Afghanistan, Albania, Belgium, Chile, China - and the list goes on!

Each country is taking a twist on the subject of change, where in every city different events will be held to promote poetry, education and culture as means of making voices heard. This is not exactly a call for political action, for the ideas do not speak on a specific political agenda. It is all about Human Rights, equality, understanding and culture. This is a waking call for society - we are here, as artists, as citizens, as people, and we care more than you know.

The event is arranged locally, which goes to say that in every country there are a few organizers who voluntarily took on the organization of related events. For example – public poetry readings, music shows, free lectures by spokesmen and artists, free poetry pamphlets distribution, theatrical displays, street shows, exhibitions of literary art, and more.

This is the time to pick up the glove and show that you too can do something! It doesn't need to be something grandiose, you don't have to start calling the entire world. It would suffice to take out your favorite poetry book and gather your friends in a public park to enjoy some poetry on the 24th of September. And if there's a local event – you can either contact the organizers and participate or simply go, support and enjoy the freedom that we should all be knowing.

100,000 Poets For Change is about to start and the excitement can be felt all over the web and the media.

Check out the Facebook page of the group and you'll feel the energy seeping out of your screen. This is truly, and whole heartedly, an event that is all about you.



<http://www.bigbridge.org/100thousandpoetsforchange/>

A list of events and organizers of the 100,000 Poets For Change in Pakistan:

Event #1:

Lahore, Pakistan

ORGANIZER: Ghalib Khalil

CONTACT: ghalibkhalil@live.com

Location: Johar Town, Lahore

Event Description: "Lets Imagine. (100PTC)". This event will be organized in Lahore by Ghalib Khalil. More than 50 participants will be gathering to recite Punjabi verses and folk songs to celebrate the Punjabi folk poets and to help sustain and continue the legacy of their impressive and revolutionary work. Poets Like Bulleh Shah, Ghalib and Iqbal will be celebrated. Location and Time to be announced, contact organizer for details.

Event #2:

Malakwal, Pakistan

ORGANIZER: Muhammad Shafiq Ansari

CONTACT: shafiq_dost@yahoo.com

LOCATION: NGO (Community Participatory Development Organization Pakistan), House No. 486, Ward No. 4, Malakawal

Time: 7pm

Description: Poets, writers, social workers, human rights activists, will speak and read poetry about the possibilities of change through literature. Readers

include

Abudal Rauf Gondal, Mian Sharif Zahid, Faisal Mukhtar, Tanveer Zahra and Muhammad Shafiq Ansari, Awarish Nadeem, Faisal Mukhtar Gondal, Kashif Aqeel, Atif Warriach and more!

Event #3:

Sakrand District Shaheed Benazirabad Sindh, Pakistan

ORGANIZER: Abdul Hameed Arain, Executive Director Community Development Foundation

CONTACT: cdfsindh@gmail.com

LOCATION:

Mahar Colny Union Council

Pir Zakri Taluka

Sakrand District Shaheed Benazirabad Sindh Pakistan

TIME: TBA

Event #4:

Rawalpindi and Islamabad

ORGANIZER: Shahida Latif

CONTACT: overseasinternational@hotmail.com, overseaspakistani@yahoo.com

Organizer: Muhammad Shanazar

CONTACT: shanazar@hotmail.com

TIME: TBA



The Inuit and Aleut don't really have twenty-seven different words for "snow" and "ice," but for the purposes of this poem they might as well.

We might also add that Anglo-Saxons and other Germanic Norse tribes of the Dark Ages had fifty-four words for "vagina," including the very poetic "maidenhead" and "whispering eye."

Ancient Mandarin, nineteen characters for "sword," but forty-three for "rice"—not counting the fifteen spoken words to discriminate cooked from raw, steamed from fried from sticky-ball, wild from domestic.

Pre-Unification Hawaiians had only one word for "pineapple," but Kamehameha VII's (also called Kamehameha, the Feeble) magnum opus was to regulate a usage dictionary for the inflections en vogue among his people, including generic, imperative, diminutive, interrogative, and expletive.

For all this, there is no word in English of any variety, any dialect of the Mother-tongue of a new era (a language which adds "sushi" and "adios" to its dictionaries), not one word that approximates the feeling of living in borrowed skin, epiphanizing your ancestral and memetic inheritance in a tidal pull of lunar clarity.

—Mike Berteaux

*Mike Berteaux is fast approaching thirty and has the erroneous notion that his poetry will be immortalized after he dies. His poems have previously been published in *The Clearfield Review* and *The Missing Slate*.*

SPOTLIGHT: ARTIST SONJA DIMOVSKA



Sicilian artist, Sonja Dimovska, sits down with Creative Director Moeed Tariq, to discuss her work, her sources for inspiration and what a day in her life is like.



Dragonflies by Sonja Dimovska

Have you always known you wanted to be a graphic artist?

Graphic art is a medium I most frequently use to express myself. I have a feeling as if I have been doing that for my whole life. I have always found graphics as something very close to me, since my early beginnings. An unpremeditated choice of mine but quite a compelling one for me. Destiny, I presume...anyhow, I have actively started exploring it as a discipline some 20 years ago.

Can you recall the first drawing you ever made, what was it?

To me, a drawing is a predecessor of all things happening further in the process. A beginning of my existence as a person and further on as an author/artist; I like the clarity of drawings, the way they expose all the tiny blemishes, accidental or on purpose they are all inevitably visible. It is a component of my reality, a composite part of my stories. Perhaps I can't vividly remember my first drawing as I cannot recall my first steps or first words uttered.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

Mostly, from all the things that surround me. From the people around me, my close friends, my own dreams, from both the beautiful and ugly life experiences, but above all – from the nature.

Are there any artists in particular that you admire?

Yes, there are artists who, during my aging as an artist, have been close to me in their sensibility and have been inspirational, and there still are such people but they really are numerous and I do believe they have all had their influences during different periods in my creative opus.

Tell us a little about your hometown of Skopje?

Well, this is a tough one – let's say it is a capital city always at the verge of its 'metropolis-to be' quest, a cozy and peculiar place on the Balkans, where I was born and grew up, once completely destroyed by a terrible earthquake and rebuilt by the world solidarity hands; a place where, nowadays, 'Disneyland and antiquity' meet together and where past tries to combat the inspiring

future. I believe you might have to come and visit it in order to understand it...and love it

What was the inspiration for your collections called 'Insectarium Intro I and II' and 'Colored Insectarium'?

Perceptibly, the insects themselves - that micro world literally takes the whole of me. It all began when I was trying to see what most of people do not even notice. I wanted to explore these brand new forms for me and at the same time beat my inner irrational fear from insects. In the process, the compositions started building upon themselves spontaneously, even more because, as I previously mentioned, I had nature itself as a source of my inspiration.

Your creations resound as deeply personal, how much of your own self do you put in to your work?

I presume each artist puts a great part of him/herself into his/her works. My case is not that different at all. Perhaps one of the major characteristics of my works is particularly this one. My works are a reflection of my inner life that I decide to share with the specta-

tors. At times they are even too personal, yet it is my way of communicating with the outside world. Everything I cannot express in words, or I find it unnecessary to explain, is expressed through my imagery.

Have you ever thought of choosing a different career?

I have never seriously thought that there is another reality for me than the one I have created for myself. I have always known, deep inside me, what I have been predestined for. To me, this is the only way in which I can truly express myself and the only way for me to communicate to the world.

What's a normal day in your life like?

It something rather too normal, I believe. Daily routines do not avoid me at all. I try to avoid the huge trap of the so called daily routine and realize the original nature of myself right in it without destroying it and without attaching to it too much...

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



One can perceive my works in two different ways; the observer may experience them at a purely emotional level or, as well, find the essence of the existence of a completely different universe, so close but yet so far away from us.

My part of the communication with the audience ended up with the very first imprint of the graphic sheet, everything else that remains is the life of my works that depends on the purity of thought which I tried to convey. I hope I succeeded in that.



Roving Eye

SPOTLIGHT POET: KAREN ALKALAY-GUT

Interviewed by Omri Luzon



Karen Alkalay-Gut is a professor at Tel-Aviv University, the Chair of the Israel Association of Writers in English, Vice Chair of the Federation of Writers Unions in Israel and the board member of the Yiddish Writers Association. She is also a coordinating editor of the newly revived Jerusalem Review and a trustee for the Alsop Review.

Titles are just titles – they do not tell us who the person is, who the poet Karen Alkalay-Gut is. ‘Behind the Words’ is a series of in-depth discussions with contemporary writers and poets in which we’ll try to get to know the poet - this time, the remarkable Karen Alkalay-Gut - a little bit better.. It should be mentioned that the interview before you was conducted in the middle of the humid Israeli summer, in a very hot and un-air-conditioned office in Tel Aviv University, and the effects of it will be greatly felt.

Let’s start easy, shall we - coffee or tea?

Depends on where I am, what I’m doing. I was asked by my grandchild, “What is your favorite coffee?” and I answered, “The coffee I’m drinking now”.

Where are you from?

When I first came to Israel and was introduced to a famous poet – Ben Zion Tomer, who read my poetry, he said – “I know where you’re from, you were born orphaned”. I was born in London during the Blitz, my parents were escaping from Lithuania through Danzig, and came to England for the war [WWII], to London, from the war! After the war we were thrown out and went to the United States, and I grew up there and moved to Israel on ’72. So I’m from where - Lithuania, Danzig, London, Rochester NY, Israel or somewhere else?

We’ll settle on From then.

Agreed – From it is. [laughing]

What is your favorite genre for reading?

I am now reading a novel of the 20s or 30s by Ada Levenson called ”Tenterhooks”, about illicit love. I usually prefer poetry because it is shorter and more intense. I like wholeness, to have a whole experience in one sitting, like Edgar Allan Poe said about poetry – you should be able to read it from beginning to an end in one sitting. Novels demands going in and out. I love plays actually, but they also demand going in and out. Poetry is a one, single, immediate experience, and I like that.

What is the first thing you look for when you open a fresh new book?

Weight! [laughing] Heavy books are difficult for me! But I’m not kidding about weight – if it’s a heavy

“ AFTER ”

I would probably have been okay
I mean I didn’t even know
for sure it was actually rape
until I got home and saw the blood
and nothing really hurt
except where my head
got slammed against the steering wheel
but the old stories were true:
I was damaged goods
from that very moment
There was a guy named Richie
who was nice the first day
in science lab, and sat with me on the stairs
while I blubbered away –
but he lost patience or maybe
got warned that frat boys stick together
—and suddenly switched lab partners
and never talked to me again
except to warn me that women
who cried rape could easily be turned
into whores in court.
I missed him, but I guess I understood.
Especially when all these guys
suddenly wanted to go out with me
and vanished when they learned
I could drink and drink
and never forget
the horror of touch
They probably went home
and told each other
they too
had me willingly
and I was hot
From then on my friends
were all the other social rejects,
the smart kids, the gays, the teachers.
And I never go to a class reunion
although my heart hungers

”

book of poems, then you say that this is a narcissistic poet [laughing], a heavy novel on the other hand might be a summer experience, or something to keep you in another world all year.

What is the last thing you expect to find when you open a fresh new book?

The most important thing is that it absorbs me, that I can fight with it and love it and experience with it. I don’t want a book to reflect me or my opinions, I want a book to teach me something new and maybe something old.

What time of day is best for your writing?

When I have a minute free [laughing].

OK, now that we know a little bit about you, let’s really get to know you - who is Karen Alkalay-Gut?

I don’t know yet, I’m only 66! Who is Karen? Let’s see, I am a person who very much enjoys the present and what I’m doing. I don’t like to brand myself, so the idea of “who is”... I should have started out with – I’m a professor, or I am a poet, a mother, a grandmother, a wife, or the daughter of -, the sister of -, etc. None of those incorporate anything about who I am, but they help to explain something about me.

It takes me back to the idea of titles and what they say about a person. So, how do you think, if at all, the moving around the world affected you and your art?

First of all I am not committed to anything – not a group of, or a school of anything. My first language was Yiddish, which has no national boundaries and is dying. But it is in some ways above the culture, so that I never became totally a part of any culture.

So you don’t call yourself, for example, an Israeli poet.

I am a person who writes poetry. Yehuda Amichai [a famous Israeli writer -http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yehuda_Amichai] said – I am not defined as a poet, I am a person who writes poetry. An individual who writes poetry, and I adopted that from him. Am I a poet? Yes. Am I an Israeli poet? If you want to limit me – yes. I don’t think I write for Israeli audience most of

the time, but some un-existing Yiddish audience, that disappeared 50 years ago.

Then maybe we can say that the only limitation you have as a poet, is the limitation of your own thoughts.

Possibly. It could also be that when someone says that he is beyond all limitations that he is about to be put away in a mental institution.

I thought we'll get there! [laughing]

But I find that I have that kind of critical sense and that kind of being a part, and being apart, of things.

And still we can't get away of definitions, so – you are a female.

Yes. Although I have used the opportunity to dress up in drag when I was 8! [laughing]

And you do write poetry. So how does the two combine? How do you incorporate the subjects of femininity, sexuality, etc.?

Every topic is tainted with gender, because, as I told you before the interview, I saw a play about a cancer patient yesterday, and it's a female cancer patient, so here treatment by the doctors, the way she perceives the treatment, chemotherapy as a kind of invasion of the body, a kind of romantic invasion of her body, is not sexual and is sexual. So everything you see and experience is influenced by gender.

In harsher poems, such as - "Ahrei" ("Afterward" in Hebrew) or "Porno Ladies", we read a stronger critical voice emerging. They feel like impressions, but at the same time – much more.

Yes. I'm a political being. I am involved in politics. "Ahrei" is about rape in the sixties, which is only now coming to be defined clearly. There are all kinds of abuse of women that was considered OK, the fault of the woman. This poem was written from the point of view of the woman that still, kind of, blames herself. Not only the rapist, but the whole of society would have blamed her for the rape. In "Porno Ladies", I'm trying to talk about the fact that porno was, at the beginning, exciting, but it became more and more extreme to the point of being ridiculous. It is a popular topic, but unless you're in great need [laughing] – you can't look at it seriously.

Many researches connect Porno and Violence, for example -

I think that we don't really realize to what extent our sexuality is influenced by politics. In John Donne's poetry there's always this interrelationship between religion and sex, and I think that sexuality is determined by everything around you. And even choices of sexual preferences, homosexuality, heterosexuality. I got into trouble many years ago by saying that all the American women poets were turning lesbians, and the reason is because they needed freedom. Not a biological choice as much of a choice of individuality and freedom that wasn't given to them. I guess I was hinting there that to some extent we make our sexual decisions by political ones.

In your poem "Reader Response" you write - "Verse is the antithesis / of communication." – What is verse for you?

Writing a poem, which is very intimate and close, is not the same as intimacy. If I write a love poem, at the moment I write I say to myself – "This is how I feel about you". But by writing it down, by publishing it, I have made it not a communication between me and you, but a public statement. Therefore – it is not a communication. And I think that people get mixed up with the intimacy of a poem and the intimacy between a relationship of a poet and the poet.

1980, I think that my first book in Hebrew came out, entitled "Butter Sculptures", and was very erotic for Israel of the time. I used to get letters by unknown men – "I love your poetry and I love you too", I got marriage proposals! So, you know, that of course led me to say – "Hey, it's not about you". I like the freedom of being whatever I want to be in a poem, whereas in life – I don't know how to tell lies.

So is poetry all about lies?

No, but I mean – in real life it would be lies. I do a lot of dialogues with Aristotle, stuff like that, if I really saw visions like that I would be put away. I like to have the freedom in the poem of making up a situation and enjoy that situation. I don't want someone to think that I actually did this, not that I'm ashamed of the possibility that I actually did this, but as soon as you confine it to reality – it's a confinement.

“ PORNOLADIES ”

In this series they are all blond –
shoulder-length hair that their partners
can sweep away from their mouths
while they are bent over, as if
caressing them but really
clearing the debris
so the camera
can move in for the action.
You can't tell
if the color is real
because they are shaved, prepped
for operations. As are their partners
whose faces they never really get to see,
standing around for their turn, keeping
their spirits up with fast-moving hands.

In this series the men
never take off their shoes
even when they're on the beach
and the sea engulfs all five of them
and the woman they are all
trying to enter. What really gets in
is the sand, I'm sure, its black
grainy texture sharp
on her white skin.

And I am thinking how she
prepares for a shoot like this—
the hairdresser, the barber, the
gynecologist waiting on the sidelines
to inject her with antibiotics— how
she goes over the script,
the choreographed positions,
consideration for each
of the partners waiting
in a doggie circle,

”

What is the importance of poetry for you?

The amazing freedom of the imagination that allows you to go beyond reality, that allows you to dream something that isn't actually get, and to create it. Now, that's where the connection between the importance of poetry and the importance of life is – I can imagine in poems situations and then, sometimes, fulfill them or go beyond. I once wrote a poem in which I wrote, "The sign that you've lived a good life is that your children forgive you, not because you deserve it but because you've taught them to forgive". Now, that took me very far in my relationship with my children. Because I've made a lot of mistakes, parents make a lot of mistakes, but I have trained them to understand human beings.

Avra CaDivra, is a book of chants. How did it come to be, what is your connection to the world of magic and magical possibilities? Do you believe in magic?

Yes! But what kind of magic? The idea of Avra CaDivra, or abracadabra – the magic word, basically comes from Aramaic – "Abra CaDivra", "It happens as it is said", "The word makes the world". You make it reality by saying it. That's what I was saying about poetry changing lives, and ways of thinking, which changes the world. It's not like a cult thing, which I got into, you know, or magic charms (although I do use them though – there are times when you're in trouble, like an operation that I'm about to go, and I say a couple of poems, which put me above the situation, and they comfort me. Some of them are not nice about the dentist! [laughing]).

In your book - "So far, So Good", there's a lot in common between the world of magic and myth and that of poetry. What do you think about this idea?

I think that Magic, Myth and Poetry are the same, are very similar. They are always right alongside of us. I live in the real world, I help run a business here, you know – I'm a realistic person, I live in the real world, read newspapers, watch Weeds [laughing] --

It's a good show!

It's back! But the real world here is a very difficult world to live in. and to be able to cope with it, you have to have that person next to you that you just made up. When you are in a dangerous or uncomfortable situ-

INTERRUPTED LOVE

I am entirely unprotected

You are moving above me
in a form of congress

and I am thinking that the dream
of someday having a child with you
was born in the town Cervantes called
home

that you will never
leave your wife

And this flat we have used
for our little meetings
is suddenly sordid

and you are really
as a lover
not very communicative

Even this meeting
wasn't planned
to end in sex

and it is the wrong
time of month

and now
you eject
a strangled cry
as if unwilling

to let your pleasure
be known

and I shout what
have you done

and you slowly
turn to me

surprised I have a voice
and say

Sorry
I was thinking
of other things.

ation you make you something, it doesn't take out of the situation – it helps you cope with the situation. I don't want to escape but to work with, and magic works with. You can fantasize and want it to be, and it happens when you want it to be.

You write a lot of witty whimsical poetry, and it is always a great fun to read those works. Like the food/refrigerator poems, or "BeBeit Ha'Caffe" ["In the Coffee House" in Hebrew], "Animals of Tel Aviv". So I have to ask - are you somewhat insane?

I knew that we would get to that! Apparently, see, I'm very sane. The craziest thing about it is that I'm very sane, that I cope with a great deal of many different experiences, etc. I have insanity next door if I want it! I worked in a mental institution for a couple of years, and many of my friends wound up in the institution. And the only difference between them and me was the freedom of imagination – I have a crazy imagination, I can go anywhere with it, but I would come back when needed. They could go and not come back. They didn't have the control over it.

I believe in insanity as a way of life, an option.

I think that the heaviness which accompanies the association of the word "Poetry", might be a key element for contemporary Poetry's downfall. And therefore, maybe the fun and laughter is important to make poetry contemporary and accessible.

A lot of people say the opposite – that humorous poetry isn't serious. But it seems to me that humor is one of the most intelligent ways of coping with situations. It gives you the stepping aside.

You know, those refrigerator poems are very serious! I mean, they are funny but some of them make you contemplate. I have in my bathroom a series of poems, that have been plastered in strategic places, for ten years, and there's one above the toilet so that if you are looking there you are not paying attention to... Anyway, the poem sometimes is a distraction from the proper goal! [laughing]

And still, looking at your poetry, one cannot avoid the harsh topics of sex, sexuality, individuality, and politics – which is there in poems such as "Live war". But we also have poems such as "Poland", were has the heaviness and the lightness together. It's an interesting way of dealing with these issues, and

I think that it takes courage to write so bluntly, and still, fine. So, how do you get there, what gives you the courage to write in such a way about such delicate topics?

It's the crazy person in me! [laughing]. I don't know. I know that it is connected to being an outsider and an insider at the same time. To be part of a culture, and at the same time to be a little bit outside. Saying things that are not quite right, but sometimes get farther than you can get when you say the proper things.

A very good friend of mine was having a very proper dinner party, and sitting next to him was a very proper lady, and he didn't know what to do. He finely turned to her and said, she was about 50 years old – “So how are your teeth?” [laughing]. Now, he was the senior book editor of the New York Times, a very important person, and he thought – “That's it. She's not going to talk to me ever again”. And she was so thrilled that someone picked a subject that was so close to her heart, because everyone suffer somewhere from teeth, and it was like – you cut through all the bullshit to something that is serious, really serious, by saying something funny. And it's a very interesting possibility for intellectual manipulation of freedom.

Before we reach the ending of the interview, how does it feel to have a good resume of published poetry behind you, do you still have that excitement before each new book? Do you feel the same for poetry as you did at the beginning? How does it feel?

Nothing.

Nothing?

Nothing. First of all, I said at the beginning of the interview that the coffee I like is the coffee that I'm drinking at the moment - the poem I like is the poem I'm writing. Whatever I've done – I've done, it's over there. You don't look for the fruit of your work, you look for the work, you enjoy the work itself. I don't see that I have a distinguished record, if I look at it critically I say – “Pfft. What have you done?” What I usually do is look at what I do now. Sometimes I look too much.

You mentioned a coming book?

There's a book of poems and photographs of

Galapagos, which is relating to the world – it's not a travel book, it is about how you come to a place that is different and you can't get your ground, and you come to a point of – “Yes! This is it!”, and say that you can connect to his iguana, but it hates me. And you realize that actually you should be afraid, that it is not an ideal world. But that's in Hebrew.

The other book – there's an audiobook coming out in Italy, a dual language audiobook which is being recorded and mixed as we speak.

A disc is coming out of my group Panic Ensemble, the second disc of this group, coming out in September.

But! If you've noticed I'm not mentioning the body of my works in English, because it's ready and I haven't done anything in finding a publisher, because my publisher went bankrupt. So if you know anyone out there... [laughing]

So we now move on to a fast round. Answer as intuitively as you can - your favorite book?

“Ferdinand the Bull.” It's a children book about a bull who won't fight in the bull fight, and he sits and smells the flowers that they throw into the ring.

Your favorite poem.

Depends on the moment. At the moment - Theodore Roethke “The Moment,”

A word/phrase that turns you on.

So to speak.

A word/phrase that turns you off.

Nothing in itself turns me off.

A genre you'll never write in.

A genre that doesn't exist! I don't know what I'll do tomorrow.

A genre you didn't try and wish to give a go.

When I was in grammar school I wrote plays for the class, and we produced them and I starred in them. But since then I haven't written a play. I'm trying to write a play now.

Cursing or no cursing in your art?

If you mean using bad words...

No, I mean CURSING.

Nah.

The most embarrassing piece you ever wrote.

There's this thing in the first album of Panic Ensemble called “Jewish Women”, and it was written about the book of Judith, which is about this woman who saves the town of the Greeks, probably, by killing the leader – getting him drunk and cutting off his head. So, I wrote this song for the group – “They always do it, those Jewish women, promise you everything and then cut off your head” [laughing]. Alright, when we recorded it there was a section I did in Yiddish, that is the translation of the same thing. They asked us to be on London and Kirshenbaum [a famous Israeli talk show] and I was out of the country, so they took the German trombone and trumpet player, who is a wonderful player, and he did the Yiddish but he did it in German accent. And as soon as it went into German it became anti-Semitic! It suddenly became Nazi, and that was very embarrassing. Then I realized for the first time that interpretations can go very far! [laughing]

Ouch! What is success in the literature world for you?

What is success? I don't even know what success is. Just let me get this book out! [laughing] I'm not going to win any prizes in Israel, because the prizes in Israel go to Hebrew writers, I'm not going to win any prizes in America because they are for Americans, so that's out. Nobel! They never give the Nobel prize for poets, so you know – we're free from the desire of success!

If you were to meet any writer/artist in the world – who would it be and what is the first thing you will do/say?

First of all – I meet them all the time! Just this morning I had some coffee with Yeats, he doesn't drink coffee well, you know very nervous. And it was very interesting, and he was talking about planning his day and as usual he wants to stay in bed and write. And we discussed that, because that's what I would like to do – stay in morning in bed, next to Yeats, and you know, sit and

correct poems. And he said that – you can't be expected to do something like that. And I said – “Why?”, and he said – “Well, you're not me”.

There are so many people I would like to meet, so many things I would like to say, and so many that I have met that I didn't say it to them. See – this picture [in her office] is of Dan Ben-Amotz [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dahn_Ben-Amotz] and me, I went abroad when he got sick, and when I came back he just had this party of saying goodbye to the world, because he was dying. I regret most of all of not having the chance to see him before he died, and not knowing what he was talking to me when he was alive – because he gave me a lot of information and advice that I didn't understand.

I would like to thank Karen for this really remarkable interview, and invite you all to enjoy her works and art on - <http://karenalkalay-gut.com/> .

SPOTLIGHT ILLUSTRATOR: ABIGAIL LARSON



In this short interview, Ms Larson—illustrator extraordinaire—talks about her craft, how she got started and what inspires her (among other things) with Creative Director Moeed Tarique.

Abigail Larson once had early ambitions of becoming an opera singer and joining the circus, and though neither of those ended up out, one can't complain after seeing her work. She began drawing with ink and painting with watercolors and soon developed a taste for flat digital coloring.

Her greatest artistic influences have been Arthur Rackham, John William Waterhouse, and Edward Gorey. Any spare time that isn't spent basking in darkness or watching re-runs of *The Addams Family*, is spent creating art for private clients, illustrating books, and spending time with her favorite long-legged beasts, ghouls, ghosts and various other things that go bump in the night.





First things first: why give up the dream of becoming an Opera singer?

Severe stage fright! I could never perform in front of an audience of any size.

Have you always known you wanted to be an illustrator?

Well, it came on as I found out more about the world of illustration. I always wanted to be an artist, but once I discovered that all my favorite artists worked, in fact, as illustrators, I looked into the profession. I always had a passion for creating characters from books I had read, so it seemed fitting.

Do you remember the first drawing you ever made? What was it?

The first drawing I can recall was of my future self in an elaborate wedding gown. My mother was working as a seamstress at the time, and often made wedding gowns, so I was naturally inclined to design my own – with little regard to the purpose of the thing!

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

I draw inspiration from so many wells. Mostly from literature and history. I think our world's history is so enticing. I love learning about how people once lived, and the strange things they wore and believed. I also draw inspiration from the culture of death and the macabre. I'm not sure why, but I think it has to do with my bizarre love of the things most people cringe from. I think our fears and superstitions reveal so much about ourselves, and I love to explore these things and interpret them in an endearing or tranquil setting through my art.

Are there any artists in particular that you admire?

Oh yes, very many – both alive and dead. Arthur Rackham, Dr. Seuss, Edward Gorey, and Kay Nielsen have been lifelong inspirations to my work. I love that they were all doing something different with their art in their time. These men all took imagination to a new level, and that vision lives on even today. I deeply admire the ability to make such an impact on the world. As for my fellow artists, I love the work Tony DiTerlizzi, Chris Riddell, Tim Burton, William Basso, and Gris Grimly

are coming out with – and that's just to name a few. I'm always impressed with a thriving imagination.

Would it be right to assume that Halloween's one of your favorite holidays?

Of course! We celebrate life constantly. We mustn't forget or fear that we all die, and it's appropriate to celebrate death as well. And who doesn't like playing dress up and eating candy?

If you could illustrate any already existing body of work, which one would it be?

Hmm... that's a tough one. I think I'd like to make my own version of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" or "Harry Potter." But I've also considered illustrating nursery rhymes, fairy tale and short story collections.

How much of your own self do you put into your work?

I always put a little bit of myself in my work. Sometimes it's less noticeable, but it's there in each of my pieces. I think that's a necessity for an illustrator, because they primarily work with another person's vision.

What's a normal day in your life like?

I don't have normal days, I'm afraid. But I suppose many days go like this: I wake up and make my bed, have some coffee, and draw pictures. Later on I have some wine, and think about life and death, and listen to some music. Then I draw some more. When Mr. Cain comes home, he makes dinner and we talk. Then I read something interesting and go to bed. Most of my days are sporadic in the level of interest. Some days I don't do anything at all. Some days I won't sit still for five minutes at a stretch.

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

I would say that my work is imagination on paper. It's quiet, thoughtful, endearing and strange – to me, anyway. Many people say my work is dark, but that's only because of my subject matter. I think my characters take on a new life after I draw them, because as I outline their shapes, I am bringing them to life. I like to hide a story in the images that the viewer has to read. There's no right or wrong way to interpret my work, because I

want to encourage people to exercise their imagination – which I believe many people do without meaning to.

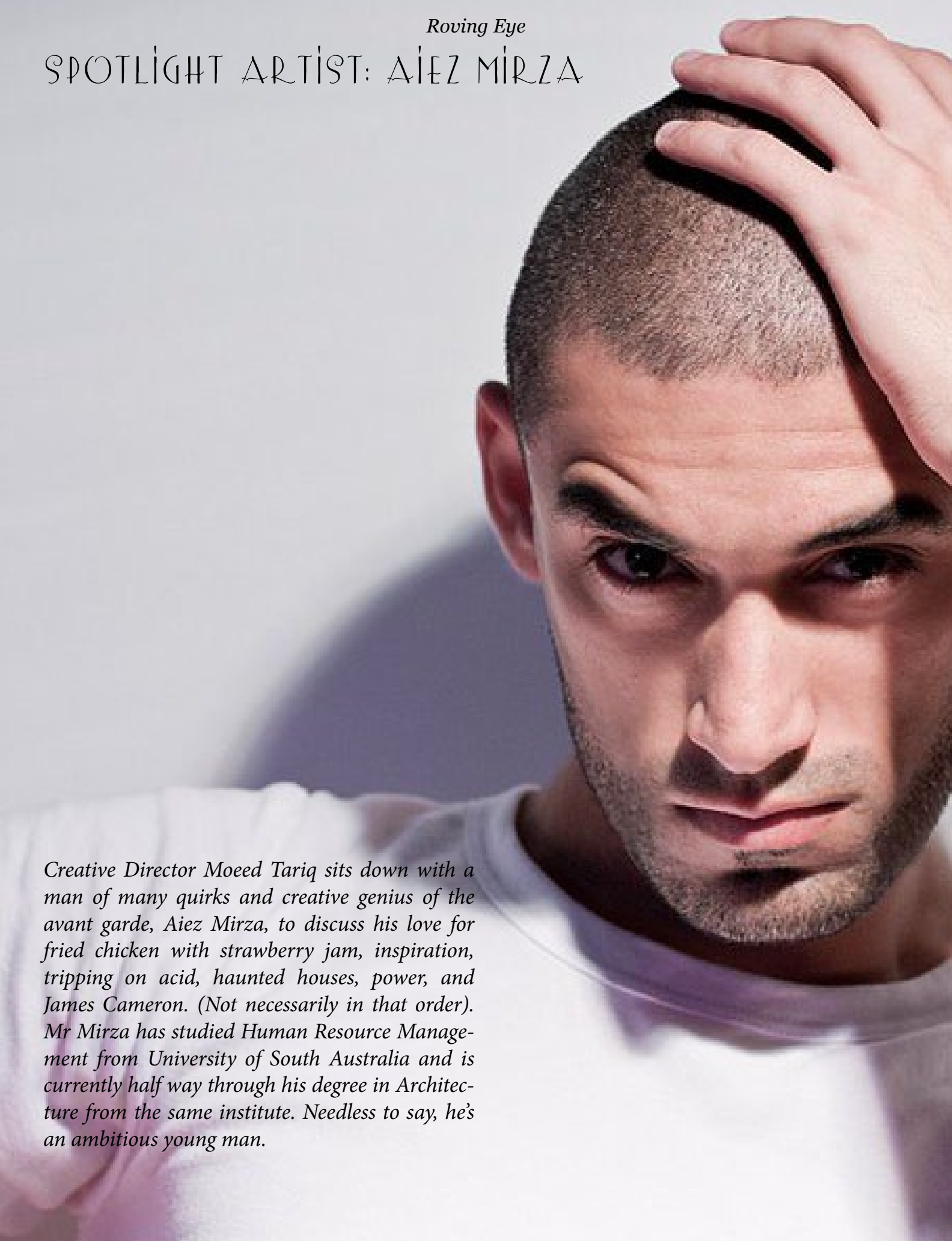




Roving Eye

SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: AIEZ MIRZA

Creative Director Moeed Tariq sits down with a man of many quirks and creative genius of the avant garde, Aiez Mirza, to discuss his love for fried chicken with strawberry jam, inspiration, tripping on acid, haunted houses, power, and James Cameron. (Not necessarily in that order). Mr Mirza has studied Human Resource Management from University of South Australia and is currently half way through his degree in Architecture from the same institute. Needless to say, he's an ambitious young man.





You seem to dabble in almost all things creative, if you had to pick one that you enjoy the most it'd be?

One thing? Really? That's like putting the bird in a tiny cage isn't it? I guess I would opt for photography but don't go narrowing it down to a specific style. Because you see even with photography it's not just that. There's always an abstract image in my mind that I need to create using my camera. Now I can turn that photograph into a painting later on using the original as merely a reference point or not. An image, an idea or the lyrics to a song, they're all potential projects. From conception right down to the finished creation, it all stays one big blur in my head with jagged colorful lines flying in all directions, that is, until I'm done and the initial idea has finally physically manifested itself.

Your photographs are sometimes almost Picasso-ish in the way they speak to the observer, which sets your view of the world as understandably and recognizably as your own. Were there ever any defining moments that drastically altered your work?

Two words, one name: Albert Hoffman. As a kid I used to have imaginary friends. I used to make toys out of plastiscene, things like Porsches and little people with jetpacks. So the crazy ideas have always been something that I've had floating around in my head. All of that sort of just evolved into what I put into my photography. In my final year of high school when I actually took up visual arts (after failing Mathematics oh so horribly) and I got to study about people like Marcel Duchamp and the Angry Penguins. That altered my perception of creative boundaries and the scope of the arts forever. I learnt that creativity just doesn't stop where society says it does. It all filters down to one basic idea, your idea, an audience and your manner of conveying the idea to them. Whatever that may be.

Your earliest creation that you can remember that you were very proud of?

In the 8th grade, sitting next to the jungle gym in Headstart and drawing Roger Rabbit's face. Once I was done I realized that I could actually draw and (if I may say so myself) do it well. The next thing I knew, I was hooked, though going public with what I could do was never something I was game for.

Why the hesitancy to take your work to the world

at large?

When I feel that it's finally presentable enough, I'll flaunt it. But until then I'm merely learning and absorbing as much as I can. I'm touched that every now and then my work gets noticed and I get asked to do the things that I do. The clients that I've had over the years, I'm truly grateful for. I just feel like I've still got a long way to go. The day I make it as a regular for National Geographic, I'll start flaunting what I do (laughs).

If you could describe your style in your own words...?

Like a bag of Skittles.

Now you've lived in quite a few places around the world over the years, where would you rather be more than anywhere else?

I don't know, that's a really tough one. I love Islamabad because it's home. I love the streets of Sydney because there's always something to photograph and I love the YAS Marina Formula 1 racing circuit in Abu Dhabi just the same because I'm always covered in tire shreds and petrol fumes. It's a ridiculously tough call for me. But between you and I, there's something about Islamabad that just feels right. Something that says there's a lot more to it than just what we see when we walk around. Hoards of potential for just about everything related to photography that could really make a global impact. Call me a sucker for the simple things in life if you will but it's got to be good old Islamabad.

Are you superstitious?

I used to have a pair of lucky boxers but none of that throwing salt over my shoulder nonsense for me. The closest I get to that is singing Stevie Wonder's 'Superstition' while driving around. And yes, I do believe in the paranormal but that's also because back in the days of high school, we used to go sneaking around haunted houses and over the years we've even lived in a few of them. A few encounters here and there have made a believer out of me.

We have that in common then, ever been spooked?

Oh plenty of times. Nothing that I'd make public you know. We all have our embarrassing moments when

we all but literally shit ourselves. I've had a few of those.

What do you have to say about the abuse of power or a lack thereof in the world at large today?

'With great power comes great responsibility'? (Chuckles) The masses in general aren't very responsible now, are they? Think about it, people on a one-on-one basis, very nice, as a mob, not so much. The struggle for power whether it's at home or in international politics is as old as our kind. As a race our very existence is riddled with it. There will always be an uneven division. There will always be the struggle that comes from that division.

You've worked with Richard Branson, James Cameron and David Wenham. What were these projects about, how was the experience what did these clients do for your wow-factor?

I had to do a private shoots with all of them. Virgin organized one for Branson and an entertainment company approached me for Wenham, he was playing Jerry Springer in the Jerry Springer- The Opera. James Cameron was visiting the F1 circuit that I work for, along with the CEO of 20th Century Fox and the director of Ice Age. The latter two are pretty nice guys as well, quiet but nice people.

I greeted all of them with an 'Okay, (person's name), let's make you famous!'. I got a cheesy grin from Branson, a hearty laugh from Cameron and a macho

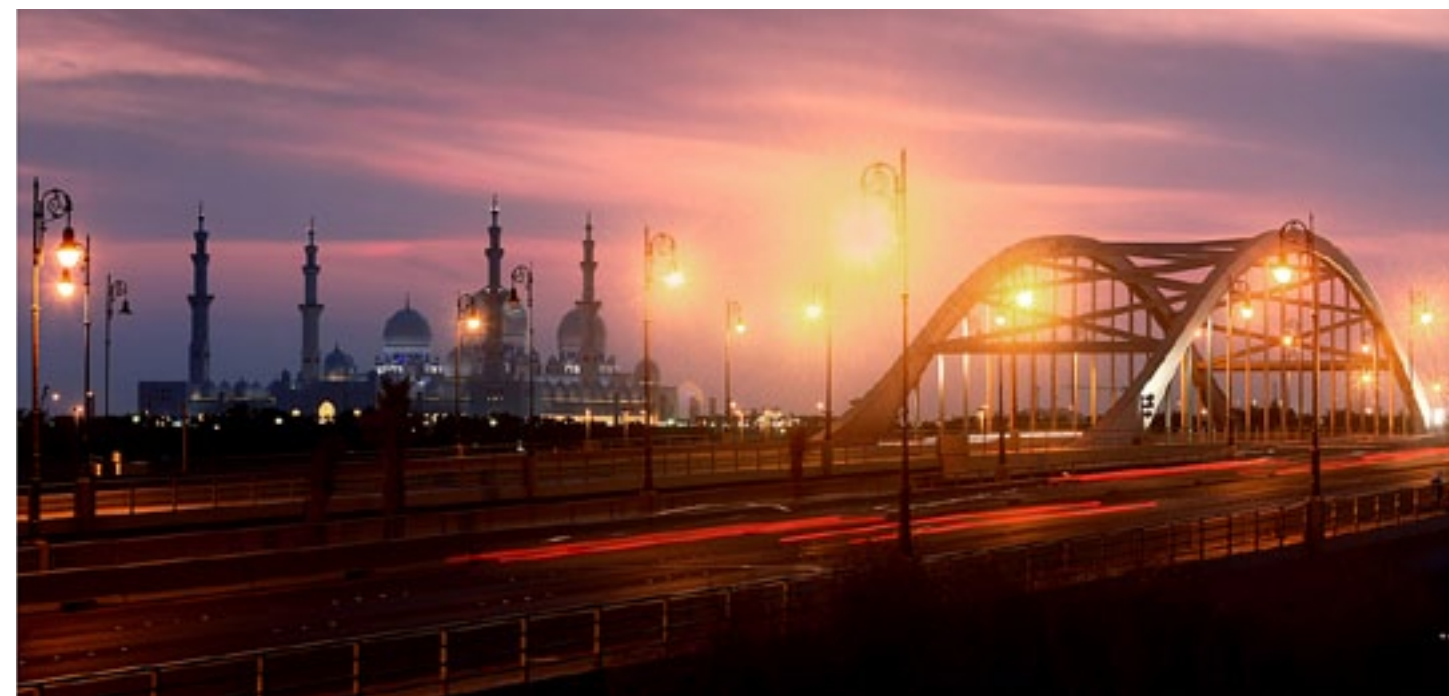
pose from Wenham. And yes, having had the likes of these as clients has helped increase the calls for private shoots, including quite a few crowned and uncrowned heads from around the Middle East. In the words of a friend of mine, my super powers include 'ridiculously large amounts of over confidence and schmoozing'.

What makes Aiez tick?

So here's me being a little shallow but there's something about the smell of L'Eau D'Issey Femme, long brown hair and big brown eyes that make Aiez a little more than tick. More inspiration for my work is linked to that than I'd ever admit. Don't ask me how it works but yes, that's just how things are.

List your most infamous idiosyncrasies for us?

Being spontaneous to the point of absurd and ridiculously over confident though I don't know where that comes from. A deep passionate love for certain bad habits though most of those I've let go of but many that carry fond memories. Can I make tripping on acid public? *Laughs* If my family reads this, I blame peer pressure. Albert Hoffman is my best friend (even though we've never really met). He introduced me to combining KFC with strawberry jam just like Elvis introduced me to Coke chicken. (Google the recipe kids, its fungus-mic) Though the latter has nothing to do with LSD, it was just, well, being a poor university student.



Photography by Aiez Mirza

88 LOVE IN A STRANGE LAND

By Fareed Zaman Butt

“The ancient Sanskrit legends speak of a destined love, a karmic connection between souls that are fated to meet and collide and enrapture one another. The legends say that the loved one is instantly recognized because she is loved in every gesture, every expression of thought, every movement, every sound, and every mood that prays in her eyes. The legends say that we know her by her wings — the wings that only we can see — and because wanting her kills every other desire of love.”

—Shantaram, Gregory David Roberts

Our flirtatious intimacy had reached an abrupt halt by the granting of a favor. It was anything but an instance of instant gratification. In the letter preceding her visit, I wrote to Yasmin, somewhat in jest:

When you are in my room, feel free to slap me on the face as hard as you like — but do it when I least expect it. Yes?

My request baffled her. Obviously, she had reservations. But soon she gave in, enticed as she was by a hidden reverie. I was hanging on her every word, absorbed in her very glance, when my plea was answered.

“You have to forgive me,” she said, tossing a subtle note of caution into her coyness. Indeed, her eyes shone bright, her voice sweet. We were standing so close, turned on as light bulbs.

“Excuse me?”

“You asked for something.”

“For what?” I said, expecting perhaps a hint.

But silence remained. I searched her eyes — and I was brutally stunned. Time was suspended: I struggled to confirm what had happened. My head was reeling. I couldn't even recall seeing her palm in flight. I only knew that a moment ago, her arm hung steady at her side. In the blast, my left hand lurched up to feel a cheek stung and an ear on fire. A ringing sound emitted from somewhere — was that a car alarm? I knew it wasn't. My tongue was numb. I stared at her in disbelief.

The slap was armed with the full swing of her arm, and shot at a speed I would not have been able to predict were I even ready. Immediately, she reached out

in an earnest attempt to touch me, to soften the effect, genuinely embarrassed, astonished, apologizing. Hence, our first physical contact of the night was like an experiment with chaos, or an act of performance art: it was pre-planned to be unexpected. We were at an impasse, as between shy strangers. Yet we were at liberty, too, to make amends.

I was the last person whom she saw as deserving of such a thing. She wanted to express this, pleading softly. The redness was reaching my ears. It is certainly something to be shaken by the shock of a slap from a girl with whom one is falling in love. I was stupefied, but for a reason that impressed me. Despite her concerns, she had done exactly as I had asked, and with the full spark of her vitality.

Her response was instinct. She understood my predicament, as I hers. I sat down beside her on the bed. In the yearning that became of our empathy, we fell silent as I kissed her lips. Communication was possible by other means. So we closed our eyes.

In the following nights, I lay alone in the room. In a few days I was to depart for a new life. If only everything could be postponed, I thought. The scent of her lingering fragrance in the bed sharpened the sting of her absence, magnifying it, turning it into a piercing thought, adding a heavy weight to my heart. I breathed.

Our initial rendezvous had begun in the garden under the stars. With our parents out for the night, the world was ambrosial and silent, yet there was music in the both of us for sitars. Fortunately, I guess, none lay at hand, as soon we found our way through the corridors of my home and into my room, entangled in her hair and in each other's arms. A fading light of a mental euphoria prevailed, the vestiges of a memory, images. And I breathed.

My mind was in an altered state. The home to which my new lover-friend returned that night also received a regular visitor, around whose finger wound the gold to which the course of her life was bound, by familial ties and the pull of Pashtun traditions.

For those short-lived moments, however, none of this would restrict its course with mine.

Goodbyes are often harder for the ones left behind. And it was Yasmin who was to leave the country



Heart of Poppies by Sonja Dimovska

before I. She called to tell me that her “Reisepasse” was on the verge of expiry and that she had to depart in two days back to Frankfurt or face deportation. There was no chance for a last meeting.

“Ok...” Both of us held our breath in the pause. “Goodbye.” And then, abruptly, there was no one at the other end of the line.

My last letter was written the night before her departure. Its message moved between the impassioned pangs of a jilted lover and the crafted determination of a poet who sought certain mastery over the tumults of competing priorities and cultural collisions.

With loving praise, I voiced the personally incapable:

The faster we travel, our passion the fuel of our flight, through misty forests, amongst wild horses, breathing together, being together... till we part. And I've come away having learned that love and pain entwine as swans making love. But now my wings are tired, my feathers ruffled and broken. Pain breaks them off and silently mends them back in more brilliant designs. I will see the sunlight as I had once seen it in your eyes.

I will never forget you.

And I signed off. Black ink etched on black posed

TUESDAY

You write the words so no one will understand, it is
 Tuesday again, always Tuesday, even when it
 is Friday and the school across the street shrieks with excitement, the
 walls have ears and you say it is Tuesday and carefully write a list
 of what you have and have not allowed yourself, because
 it is always Tuesday and the walls shake their heads,
 and trace the lines of your notes, shorter every week, but not
 every day because it is not Tuesday and you can write what you
 need, the walls do not have ears.

You do not use the phone because the words have slipped from your grasp,
 the subtle difference between careful and controlled, the words on the paper
 say I had an English degree as if it has fallen between the crack in the night
 between yesterday and today. You say, fine, a word that says exactly what
 you did not want it to, but you fold your shirt against your body, soft as tissue
 until only your hands grasp themselves, twisted like birds,
 poisoned.

—Kate Hammerich

Kate Hammerich been published in The Susquehanna Review, ditch, Third Wednesday, Barrier Island Review, Verandah Literary Journal, Grasslimb, Kill Poet, MiPoesias, The Junk Lot Review, The Legendary and has self-published two books, escape artist and hallucinations, cancer & the purple tree. She mostly spends her time rolling on the floor with her daughter and her Husky.

a daunting challenge for any reader who sought to unriddle the hidden hues. The secret letter emerged in a careful script of violet, but only when brought at a tilt in the immediate light of a table lamp or a candle. There the letters scintillated. Yet the communication was not one Yasmin would receive, swarmed as she was by family and relatives, as well as her fiancé, who rarely left her alone, now that she was leaving.

With Yasmin gone, my remaining days moved on and the morning of my own departure arrived. I was set to go. After takeoff, my airplane made its familiarly generous curve through Islamabad airspace before turning westward and continuing the ascent. I gazed through the window back at the city in which I had just spent six years of my life: a kaleidoscope of sectors, streets, and green belts — some well-planned, others sprawling, and all between a wild crescent of hills at one end and a parched, rural earth at the other — grew increasingly distant, until finally they vanished altogether behind a layer of clouds that bounced about in the brilliance of the morning sun.

My thoughts began to wander. I was on my way towards the sunny coastlines of California, known even to some in these parts as an amazing place for skydiving enthusiasts. Nearly four months had passed since the US occupation of Iraq, and I pondered at the

closest point we would reach to the occupation sites of Baghdad while passing over the Middle East. My heart went out to the Iraqi people. Suddenly, our plane emerged from above the clouds and a ubiquitous illumination flooded the aircraft.

We are free to roam the landscapes of our hearts.

The only ones to stop us are ourselves.

I, the outsider, the “A-B-C-D,” as friends would teasingly call me — or the “American-born confused desi” — would have once given everything to relive those enchanted summer evenings. Now I simply marvel at the mixing experiences young, privileged Pakistanis have yet to fully accommodate in their lingo.

Yazy... she was my grenade hurling, German-born confused Pashtun.

Fareed Zaman Butt is part-stage actor and part-diplomatic scholar. When he's not dabbling with his classical guitar or writing poetry to some pretty woman who's flying off, never to be seen again, he's busy blogging about the Af-Pak theatre of operations and transatlantic politics. Nowadays, though, you can find him neck-deep in philosophy books. If asked 'why?', he responds it's to get his "s@&#t straight."*



Papilio by Sonja Dimovska



Death And The Maiden by Abigail Larson

BREAD

doctors pure as angels, white as chefs
peruse menus on clipboards,

their exhaustion mouthed in metric
from a graveyard shift cuisine

measuring the flour, cutting off the surplus,
adhering to rules, to rules, to rules-

hospital smocks' mocking exposure
to cold air and latex

the way fatigue sets in when
bilious walls deaden,

bringing on the drone of
fluorescent blood-suckers

as a hypo plunges deep into
a fat vein, pliant and compliant,

to siphon me through the
emptiness outside the box-

a distant voice is counting backwards...
I smell bread baking

—Jade Pandora

Jade Pandora (<http://jade-pandora.deviantart.com/>) is a California native. She is the 2010 recipient of the Matthew Rocca Poetry Award (Deakin University, Australia). She has written poetry since 2001, and studied/written Japanese short form since 2007. A published poet, her books "Stolen Light", "Shooting Star", and "Offerings: 2nd edition" can be found at www.lulu.com.



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