

WHITE NOISE

English Department Newsletter

May 2016



Cover Art by Vidhipsa Mohan

Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi

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Editorial

Wait, what is that? Can you hear it? Can you feel it? That nagging at the back of your mind as you lie in bed till ten in the morning when you have to submit an assignment the next day? That bittersweet feeling as you meet a friend after ages knowing that tomorrow you will have to retire to your mundane life. The fleeting blush of a magnetic glance, the rushed excitement of a first kiss, the uncalled for nostalgia of a mother's hug, the transient constraint in a father's voice that forms a knot as he sees you off at the station, or a single evening of solitude under a moonlit night as you feel a wisp of your hair caress your cheek with the wind blowing past it. Or the wonder of cosmic "coincidences", the consequence of which is much larger than the implications of your own life, as they work together, in solidarity. Our question to you is: where do you think these sentiments or contemplations derive their importance from? Think awhile and tell us, is it not Time – the Eternal Witness? Time, due to which these moments are held in precarious balance and compartmentalised in the special core of your heart because of their ephemeral and irrevocable nature.

In order to encourage such reflection, we dedicated this semester's issue to TIME and received an overwhelming response: ranging from pieces on epics, gruelling academic papers to visual poetry. These projections attempt to capture the essence and beauty of Time occasionally adding a tablespoon of humour with the comics (yes!) and at other times a splash of aesthetic brilliance through sketches. Where some have tried to define a subject as abstract as Time in their own terms, others have attempted to shed the shackles that are constructed with the use of Time. This semester's issue is a collection of ideas on the myriad colours of Time along with some translations put forth by our very own peers, of writers transcending the limitations of time and space.

Before our readers embark on this journey of contrasting perspectives, we leave them with something to ponder on: What is Time? Is it stagnant or evolving? Is it reckless and harsh like calamities or is it that wise-old-being that begets wisdom in turn? Whether Time is all of this, or nothing at all, is something that we may never know, but it is the cognizance of these serendipitous meetings of the mind with "Time" that bewilders us with the resplendence of what we call "Time".

We would like to thank the entire faculty at the English Department for their timely suggestions for this issue.

Oindrila Gupta

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A Little Girl's Day

The Devil Wears Westwood

Time is a progression of moments,
But memory is my time machine.

Omnipotent time waited for none
But tables have been turned by capitalism.
Time is now a paradox,
It is the controller as well as the controlled;
Time controls the rich,
And the rich control the time (of the poor).

Each stroke of the clock is a reminder of an action to be performed:

7 o' clock – reach school,
5 minutes for breakfast and 10 for lunch,
45 minutes to play on the ground,
For the rest of the day, sit and study but make no sound.

With the mechanisation of our lives complete,
We have no time to retreat.

How time flies and the sun sets,
It is the hour to be back home.
Mumma has told me that wolves prowl, disguised as men,
To fill their appetite and then blame women
For not keeping track of time.

This late hour was not for them to roam – this was not their time
We have categorized time,
Subjective, objective, time zones, mornings, evenings and noons;
Still how little time does each one of us have?
Eliot could measure life with coffee spoons.

This precious good serves as an effective bribe,
Elections can be won by the promise of good times.
My grandfather tried to buy favourable time,
By wearing some dubious stones and giving the holy man a dime.

The yield was even less than the last time.
Yes, memory is my time machine,
But it has its own limitations; the Future cannot be seen.

With the clock striking 6, I am back home
While my mother waits near the phone.
Every day at 6, my father calls from Japan,
This is how we spend a day's span.

Aishwarya Gosain
M.A. English (Previous)

I.

The moon swallowed up the shadows of our mortal trinkets strewn carelessly across the streets: the solitary streets. Throbbing with nervous little heartbeats craving basic excuses of being in denial; We allow the wolf in sheep's clothing to hunt us out in the open right under the incandescent bulbs, which add a mocking tint to those nubile bodies we are so eager to offer. That man doesn't need a crown to make those endless women kneel down on their knees before him: night after night, treason in between the crimson sheets. Trace out the outlines of this sadistic revolution on the streets. The solitary streets.

II.

Her blackened eye happened to be circumstantial evidence. But we are so attuned to swim inside those flat television screens retelling our extraordinary saga of make-believe that we cast it aside as nonchalantly as crushed ant skulls under our feet adorned with soles. Souls which threw up in disgust when they saw you empty the bowl filled with blood and sweat. Also that steamy stew you cooked up with arteries and veins, still pumping relentlessly. Be wary of staining your satin shirt which cost you an entire regiment of dreams that were not yours. Beg, borrow, steal. That's how you stitched up that personality to die for.

Debopriyaa Dutta
M.A. English (Previous)

A previous version of this poem appeared online on allpoetry.com

My Dad

My Dad
If I had you,
I would not cry
If I had you,
There would be no reasons to lie
If I had you,
These times could happily fly
If I had you,
Give life another chance, at least I could try.
If you were here,
I would have someone to care
If you were here,
To ill-treat me, no one could dare
If you were here,
Life would not be a mess
If you were here,
I would be care-free, I guess
Now that I don't have you
I fear
Every hurting word
A tear
Wish you were here
I would not beg
Relations with conditions
I would never regret
You were my support, my lifeline
You would laugh and make my world shine
In your embrace, I grew to touch the sky
Watching you smile I wish I could die
The world seemed so small but I was so glad
That was a time when I had my dad.
Now the world is so big but you are not around
To watch your li'l girl wearing a frown.
I twist and turn my heart to mend
Wish you could come back and this misery would end.
I stumble, I fall and I hear people say
"Look at her" and they block my way
They curse and laugh with evil in their eyes
With pain in my heart I look up in the sky
I then remember when times were bad,
You were always there to hold my hand
Joys were small but I was so glad
Once upon a time when I had my dad.
When rumours spread like fire
And the world stands against me
I'll still rise for I know from somewhere far above you
would see
Your daughter standing tall, maybe with bruised knees
You'll be a proud father then and for a moment our
worlds will freeze
With faith in my heart, for a great winner I shall be.

God will give me a chance and reward me with
your glance
I will cling to you, kiss your head and our hearts
will bleed
With a sight so blissful there's nothing I wish I had
I know time will be short but I will be glad
That will be the time when I'll have my dad.
"Thank you god" with gratitude I will say
For giving me a chance to see my father today
I am back in reality and the world is staged
Where I fight for rights and never let my heart be
caged
Time has passed only memories remain
I learnt to cherish life and never let any moment go
vain.
Meeting was brief but I was so glad
Once again, when I had my dad.

Suma Sankar

M.A. English (Previous)

Is There Time?

Stationary at one place
But my heart runs a marathon
I calm it down saying
It's not too bad yet,
There is time.
I hear people shouting
I see people hurt
My heart wants to leap out
But this time, they calm me down, they say,
It's not too bad yet,
There is time.

People turn rogue
Take matters into their own hands
This time I let my heart rule
But they tell me to calm down, they say,
It's not too bad yet,
There is time.

I keep waiting for the time to come
The time to do something
To stop this hysteria but
The time never comes
And yet it has passed me by,
As I now stand immobile
Looking back at the moment long gone.
For matters are different now
And now there is no time.

Shubhali Chopra

M.A. English (Previous)

Numb

He beckoned me to raise my hands high
I pushed my limits and let out a cry
Eyes shut, fists furred, agony rippled through my spine
I then conformed, and lay down in a position supine.

Panting and sweating,
My eyelids were almost down
As I trudged along the everlasting mill,
The chills I felt, knew no bounds.

Hurling gibes at me, he pressed me more.
I bent my knees as my thighs became sore.
Every inch of my body crumpled up
I couldn't feel anything, everything was so numb.

My shoulders slugged against the dragging weight
I suppressed my pain but it wouldn't fade.
Whimpering, crying, shambling along,
I knew he could see nothing wrong

Who gave him the right to rule over my body?
Ordering me, directing me – He has monopoly
Though I gave myself in, to be treated like that
All efforts I made, seemed to fall flat.

I don't mind him controlling my diet or my walk
Numbing me so much, that it seems like a crime
Seriously, one has to go through a lot,
To reduce their waistline!

Niharika Mathur
B.A. Program, First Year

Why Solve A Crime?

Why solve a crime?
Is it because the victim
should be given justice?
Or
Because the criminal
needs to be punished?
The government does it
for judgement.
The media, for TRPs;
the CID on television
for money.

But, why solve a crime when,
'THE MAN WAS IMPOTENT',
'THE GIRL, A CON',
'SHE SAID NO TO ME',
'TO TEACH HIM A LESSON',
'I NEEDED THE MONEY',
'HE WAS BLACK AND I, WHITE',
Is all that THEY say
LATER !

THEY tell us their tales,
'I USED THE KNIFE',
'I THREW HER DOWN THE TERRACE',
'I USED ACID',
'I STRANGLER HIM',
'I BURNT HER ALIVE',
And we listen,
LATER!

Why solve a crime when,
'SHE IS DEMENTED',
'SHE, A RACIST',
'HE, A RAPIST',
'THEY ARE EVIL',
'THEY ARE BUTCHERS',
And
'HANG THEM',
'STONE THEM TO DEATH',
'KILL THEM',
Is all WE'VE got to,
But LATER!
Blinded by the anger,
Blinded by the fury
We talk about it
But only LATER!
'IT WAS NEXT TO MY HOUSE',
'HE WAS MY FRIEND',
'I KNOW THAT PERSON, VERY WELL',
All this, and still LATER!

So, why solve a crime?
When LATER is when we'll do,
The little something that could have been done.
Why solve a crime?
When LATER is when we'll wake up?

Apoorva Mishra
B.A. Program, First Year

This poem won the Third Prize at the Atul Krishna Binodini Devi Creative Writing Competition, Janki Devi Memorial College (14/10/15) and previously appeared in the 2016 issue of the college magazine–Apoorva.

Pitiless Time

Time has no pity.
It ends by eating up
Everything that comes to face it.
Why does it rule our lives?
Who gave it a warrant
Of reigning the living?
What a callous tyrant.
Where does it go?
Nobody's got a clue.
What a cunning illusionist,
Almost brutal in matters of interludes.
Living on its edge,
We too get eaten by this
Monstrous time.
Knowingly blind, we are all,
Mere clients of time.
Selling ourselves, thinking
We save ourselves some of it.
Little do we all know,
It gets slippery, as tight as we hold onto it.
This slimy, this incessant time.
Belongs to nobody, is neither yours, nor mine.

Aisha Wahab

B.A. (Hons.) English, First Year

Athazagoraphobia

the street lamp died last night based on a whim;
a mere fancy
a willful contrivance of emotions
I sit on the garden fence plunged in darkness
grinding my veins till they're a bunch of bluish-
back knots
tangled and tense.
with drowned images struggling to breathe a little
on the surface
just a little.
how many times have we tried to excavate our flesh
to reach beyond our mortal selves
Last night I found my rusty soul beneath layers of
abuse,
caresses and shame;
when I reached beneath the two healed hickey marks at
the base of my throat
I trembled in vivid remembrance –
the night choked me violently by the throat yet once
again.

Debopriyaa Dutta

M.A. English (Previous)

I Beg Your Pardon

On a dull foggy winter morning,
Mischievous rays of sun shining,
Birds and insects are in their abode,
I am here, standing all alone.

My skin is peeping out through my
Tired, tarnished and tattered cloth;
Key-holed pants are embracing my
Frail, filthy and fragile legs.
Bruised feet of shattered hopes,
Touching the cold grains of sand.

I wait here with expectant eyes,
For, a rupee coin would suffice.
I have stretched out palms for a life,
To fill my shrunken intestine,
Yet leaving it craving for more.

No hand to caress my hair,
Sans a lap to bear my tears
Orphaned on the pavements,
I beg for a life throughout.

While I have two legs to stand,
My friend has four legs to walk.
He gnaws the unused bones;
And I look at him without hope,
From dawn to dusk I am stagnant,
My hands and feet moving still!

I survive on bread crumbs of mercy
Only to beg, beg and beg more.
Inside my soiled half blanket,
I twist myself and dream again,
Ah! That two-rupee coin...

Suma Sankar

M.A. English (Previous)

Toska

You start confronting, analyzing, dissecting, and that's
when the hysteria sets in.

You remember

that bright sunny day when your head was spinning
with impotent anger and you just stood in front of
those faceless monsters and smiled;

a dusky afternoon so orange that you felt sick as your
fingers entwined aconite blossoms for a loved one;
all those nightmarish déjà-vus and phone calls where
he laughed at you along with his friends and ravaged
your scars from afar –

carelessly unapologetic and dripping with nonchalance,
your mind stringing madness love consumption inhuman
lust cannibalism all at one go and
exploding inside you like a sudden and chilling death;

Death,

which grabbed your throat in your sleep when you
recounted all those names that wronged you

wronged

scarred

pillaged

excavated

and what about all those times you spent pleading with a
stranger to not kill themselves at 3 a.m.

on your cordless phone;

what about those visions of lovemaking which now
mock and mock you:

oh, these earthly abominations

coupled with unanswered voice-notes and unsent letters,
break you.

I look down at my cracked and damaged skin and I weep.

Debopriyaa Dutta

M.A. English (Previous)

Prisoner of Azkaban

A convicted murderer? A death eater?
The one who lied, the one who betrayed?
Black sheep of the Black family
Backstabbing Secret Keeper in the eyes of all
He was the Prisoner of Azkaban

It creates differences, to be a bit different
To be in a household where
His ideals were seen as an abomination
Boldly walking out, trying to get a fresh start
He was the Prisoner of Azkaban

They say I can lie for you, I can die for you
I would do anything to protect you
He made the meanings of these words come to
life
He won true friends with his zest and warmth
But he was the Prisoner of Azkaban

Few people were there around whom his soul
revolved
A Marauder and a Godfather
“Both light and dark” inside him together
He says “What matters is the part we choose to
act on. That’s who we really are.”
But he was the Prisoner of Azkaban

But the curse hit and beyond the veil, he’s gone
It was love for which he died
And so Padfoot was sent to Prongs
“The ones who love us never really leave us”
He is our Prisoner of Azkaban

Abeen Bilal

B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year

Saudade

I.

The pen is a double-edged weapon.
Heals the reader, cuts the poet open.

Drip,

Drip,

Drip,

Drip,

Drops of ink oozed out of my pen like blood –

You are still in my veins.

And here I am, making art out of our tragedy,

Isn't it strange?

How the same human can be your unforgivable sin,

And your unattainable salvation,

A dagger, and

A balm as soothing as crashing ocean waves –

Killer

Saviour

Murderer

Martyr

Two sides of the same beating heart.

II.

We created a world of our own,

Weaved it out of daisy chains, laughter, and carefully-caught regrets,

Driven together due to a sense of loneliness – and feelings of more than lovelessness

Our souls were so cramped with things which were left unsaid,

That they engulfed us.

Well,

She was right.

You left.


Left behind memories of love-despaired eyes and carelessly rolled-up shirt sleeves

Fragments of half-forgotten aftertastes and fragrances,

Memories of tempests without and within, of

incessant bickering

and



lovemaking;

Your beauty still haunts me.

Every time I see you in corridors & streets,
Passing with such indifference & nonchalance,
A thousand icy knives,

twist my heart.

You were the closest thing I felt to home, & I tried to live inside you, but, alas, no.

Some people

simply

fade

out

of

our

reach.

You lit a cigarette but it failed to set my heart aflame.

But the pain felt like a dull thud inside my head.

Oh, you are so beautiful –

You were art in motion

Satan in salvation

But now you are the most familiar stranger that I know.

Whose eyes now behold a thousand beautiful faces,

Whose lips now sigh a thousand pretty names.

Debopriyaa Dutta

M.A. English (Previous)

A previous version of this poem appeared online on *allpoetry.com*.



Dusk

While walking away from the fair I realised that they were not my kind of people. I was never meant to be one of them. I had to, therefore, devise a strategy to leave before it was too late. They seemed happy with or without me. I could not have contributed to their collective existence in any manner. They clearly were not in need of an artist. They were somewhat content in their miserable existences and I, as an artist, was responsible for inducing more misery in their lives.

As I walked away from the city, I could finally take off my mask of pretence behind which I had been hiding years and years of pain. It was a self-imposed iron mask which I had to take off with a lot of difficulty. I had my reasons for wearing the mask. I was tired of caring too much and for a change, pretending not to, did not hurt. However, I have spent many a sleepless night in thoughts of losing myself and the artist in me.

One tends to think a lot while walking and I am no exception to this. Am I a misfit? Am I an oddity in this society? Is my perception flawed? Or, am I the only one with enough courage to embrace the truth behind everything? Is that why I am not a part of this city anymore?

Now I had reached near the suburban areas. The landscape had changed accordingly. I could no longer see the web of electric wires above my head and I was thankful for that. They were almost suffocating. The road seemed to be never ending. After each mile there was an electricity pole with birds perched on the wires. They were free in the true sense of the word.

I realised I had grown too used to the comfortable dwellings of a city. I was a slave of the leisurely life that I earlier condemned. To be living in the suburbs was not something that I wished to do. I realised that it was growing dark and I didn't want to miss the amazing sunset. I saw the once magnificent sun setting in the west and decided that it was the direction I had to take. I choked the artist in me to death because more than comfort, I needed society to live in.

Heading west, towards the city, I put the mask back onto my face. It hides the tears!


Sagarika Chakraborty

B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year



Man and Time

Today, man is in a state of flux. The concept of who a man is, has not remained the same over time. During the Renaissance, Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was seen as the convergence point of man and God. The Crucifix then became a powerful image where the reconciliation of God and man can be witnessed: where God becomes man and man becomes God. Renaissance man is therefore an interesting figure, who is well aware of his immense potential contained within the physical frame of his body. Dr. Faustus (the fictional creation of Christopher Marlowe) who struggles to ascend from the domain of the created to the realm of the creator – through knowledge – is a prototype of the Renaissance man. Faustus fails to get redemption and goes to Hell, which shows that man may exercise his knowledge and cunning but has to do that without crossing a limit. This limit which is a constraint to the agency of man, has been taken up in the gravest



manner possible in another Renaissance play, *Hamlet*: in the very words of Hamlet – “to be or not to be”, this conflict can be sensed.

Existence. Existence is the root of all complexities. “Now that we are alive, what do we do with our existence?” It’s a question, asked not just by Renaissance man, but by men of all time-periods. What to do with the inner strength, potential, and desire, now that we have it? Which way do we direct it, what do we do, what not to do, what to be, what not to be and so on. In this flux of emotions, desires, ideologies, and doubt, man does the same. S/he searches for a constant: something or someone eternal, constant, never-changing. In the search for the eternal, we find two answers: God and Time.

Here, the concept of Time becomes interesting. Just as the concept of man may change, but men remain, in the same way, the times may change, but Time remains. Time here, although immeasurable and uncontainable in itself, interestingly when put into a man’s power, is reduced to fragments of hours, minutes, and seconds. Man’s worldly pursuits are levelled against this tampered time and the artificiality and hollowness of his struggle are magnified through this process. In today’s time, man values time in terms of how much money he can gather in it, hence the interesting phrase “time is money”. As if adding a utility value to even close relations was not enough, time is also commodified. One’s existence is commodified. It’s as if time, which stops for none, would be or could be stopped by man and the paper notes he makes.

Time evades the clutches of man, however great the struggle of man to control it. Time passes and here lies the paradox: Time while passing remains, and while being inconstant, is eternal. It’s not just Time that is inconstant but the ideologies which rule in each time period. With changing times, there occurs a change in the power structure, the ruling class, manners, fashion, intellectuality, principles, and geographical boundaries. Now, in this postmodern world, nothing remains constant and, as mentioned in the beginning, everything is in a state of flux.

Even the present time of flux will not remain constant. In this inconstancy lies the scope for change. It is here that we need to employ our human agency. It is now that we have to wrestle against time which seems to overpower us. Here, lies hope. Hope that we might be able to conquer our existentialist crisis in a better fashion in times to come. Not through a mad rush after money (and all that comes with it) but through love – a priceless, genuine, and innate gift that we are born with. The abundance of love within, which we have never explored. The rare jewel within our own being which is timeless. We need to use love as a weapon to subdue time and to shape it the way we want. To change time as it passes and to leave the world a better place to exist in – for our future generations after we have made our graceful exit.


Elizabeth Benny

M.A. English (Previous)



Pink Floyd’s Idea of Time

Tired of lying in the sunshine, staying home to watch the rain.
You are young and life is long and there is time to kill today.
And then one day you find ten years have got behind you.
No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.



A stark warning is wrapped in the beautiful lyrics of Pink Floyd's 1973 classic 'Time', from the album *The Dark Side of The Moon*. It begins with chimes and bells similar to the alarm clocks that we wake up to everyday. Does that strike a chord? Yes, a wake-up call!


The bizarre beginning of the song draws upon the same idea, i.e., a wake-up call for all of us who choose to ignore the fact that time is slowly drifting away. This unnerving universal message of impending death and the fluid nature of time is put forth in the perfect package of a hair-raising guitar solo and superb vocals.

The message it gives is that, we usually sit around waiting for a sign to show us what we should be doing with our lives. When we are young, we feel that we have all the time in the world, but time sneaks up on us and we don't realise it until it's too late. Then, we have to run, try to make up for lost time, but it is too late, as we will be old and death will be approaching. As we get older, our days get shorter and we don't have time to do anything. This song ends on the aforementioned note, leaving us frustrated and agitated.

The symbolism, instruments and lyrics evoke the all-encompassing theme of Time in a brilliant way. This timeless piece of the Rock and Roll legend, Pink Floyd, anticipates the post-existentialist era where we distract ourselves from the existentialist questions by keeping ourselves busy throughout the day. It makes us realise that we should shake off our tedious lifestyle to enjoy life because. . .

And then one day you find ten years have got behind you.
No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.

Aishwarya Vishwanathan
M.A. English (Previous)

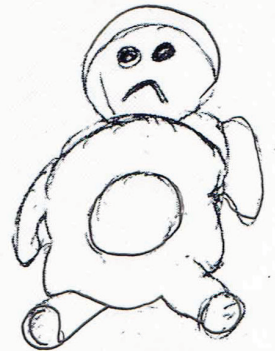


In the following pages, you will see comics created by students during the “Comics: Methods and Histories” workshop conducted by the Department of English. The workshop offered a brief history of sequential art through the ages so that students could understand the genealogy of “comics” today. Students were shown images of different styles of comics, and books by various artists were also circulated to acquaint them with the visual vocabulary of comics. As students of literature, they were naturally disposed to using words instead of images. But, over the course of the workshop, they began to comprehend how images and text can be combined together as a powerful means of communication. Students went on to create their own one-page comics on a range of themes and ideas. They were encouraged to develop comics in a style of drawing that they were most comfortable with and focus on the interrelationship between text and image. The workshop enabled students to understand the process of text production while also helping them to expand their notions of what constitutes a “text”. This is the first time that *White Noise* is publishing comics.

A. P. Payal
Workshop Facilitator and Faculty, Department of English

WITHOUT BOOKS, LIFE IN THIS WORLD WAS SOOO DULL!!

Im so Bored



THEN COMES THE PHOENIX, AND BESTOWED THEM WITH AN ENLIGHTENING ENTERTAINMENT



Come my child, This is All you need to stay happy and busy



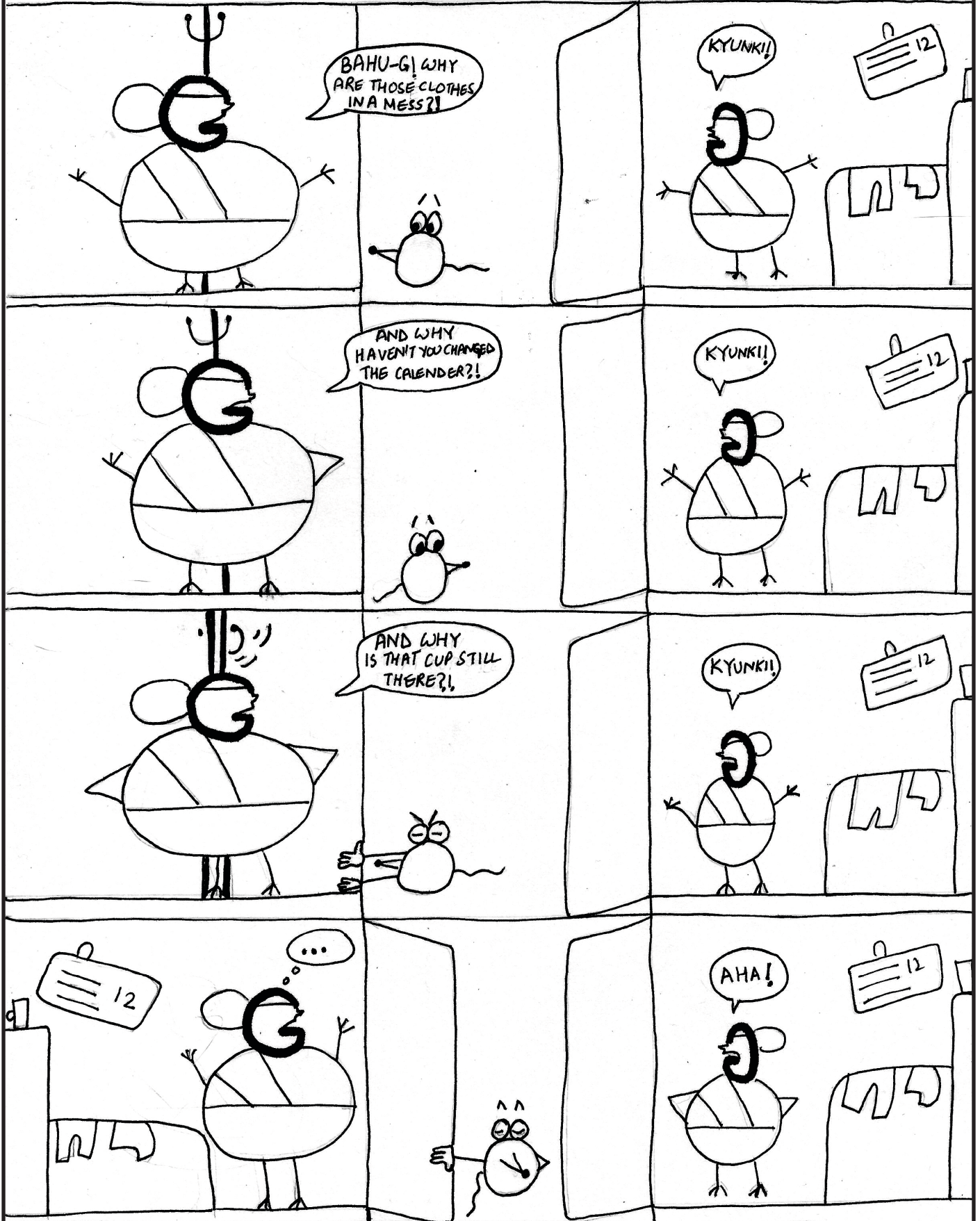
Books! Oh wonderful. I've heard so much about them! Now I get to touch them! See them & Read them. wow! so much to learn.

And here child. Take this. Now you have the power to create a new world

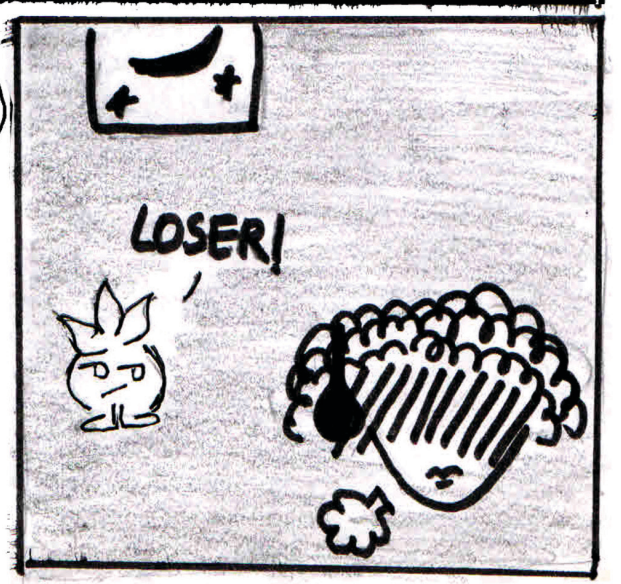
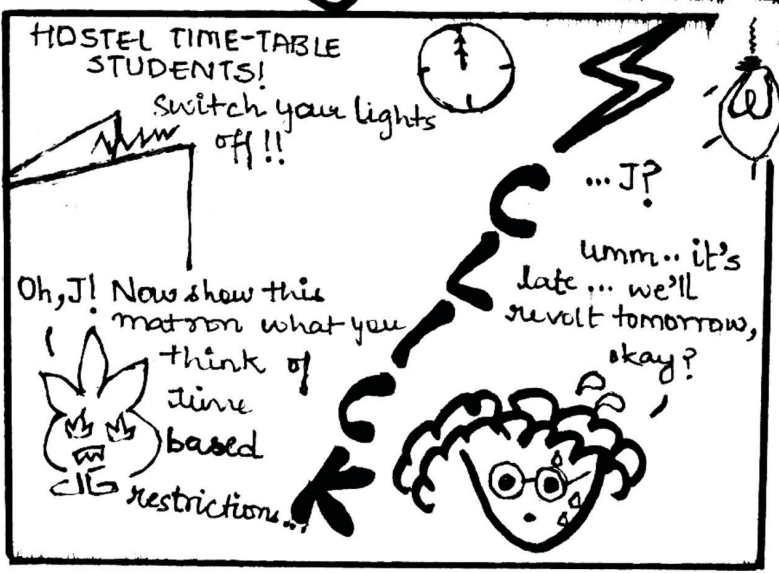
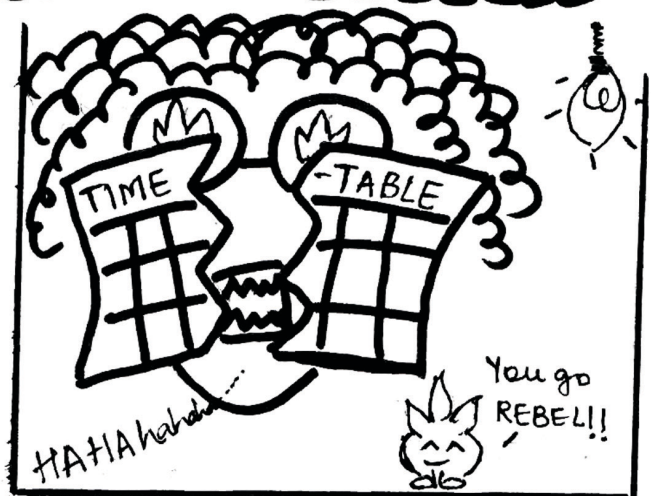
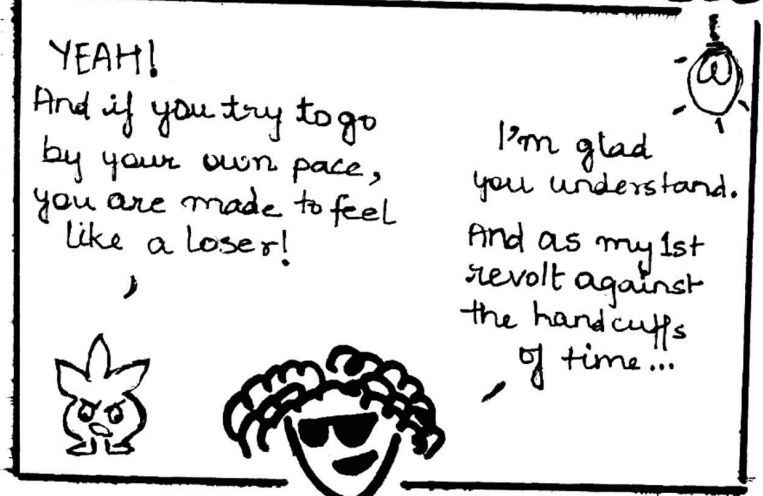
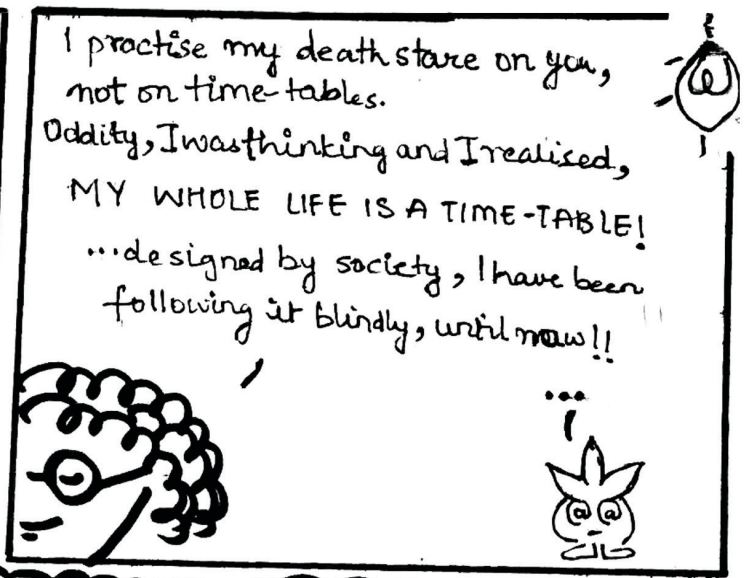
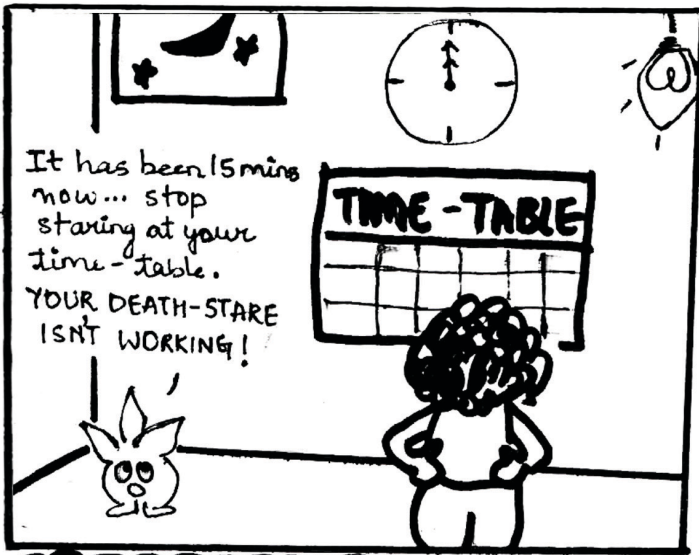
AND FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS AND WRITING, SO MANY NEW WORKS EMERGED THE BEST SORT OF ENTERTAINMENT WAS BROUGHT TO THIS WORLD!

BOOK STRUCK!

THE KAHANICLES OF MAA-G & BAHU-G



KYUNKI SAAS BHI KABHI BAHU THI...



'Rebel without a Pause' by Jahnvi Gupta
B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year

Heteronormativity in Homosexual Fanfiction

Sandhra Sur

B.A. (Hons.) English, First Year

Roland Barthes famously argued that the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author. The emerging phenomenon of fanfiction writing turns the reader into a co-author of the text, not only metaphorically – at the level of interpretation – but tangibly, at the level of penning down the interpretation and making it available to anyone with access to the internet. “Fanfiction” is a piece of writing which creates a narrative featuring characters from a pre-established text. One of the most popular domains for fanfiction is the *Harry Potter* series. On the fanfiction website “Archive of Our Own” alone, the *Harry Potter* fandom contains over 91,000 pieces of writing by fans, out of which almost 45,000 works are tagged Male/Male or “Slash”. Slash fanfiction is a sub-category of fan-written literature which involves characters of the male sex in a romantic and/or sexual relationship. These depictions are often critiqued as being “non-canonical” and out of character. The adjective “canonical” refers to content that is actually part of the work on which the fanfiction is based. Since the canonical *Harry Potter* universe is predominantly heteronormative – a world where heterosexuality is ostensibly shown to be the only sexual orientation – fanfiction appears to have a subversive potential gaining special significance since the outing of Albus Dumbledore which took place on the *Pottermore* website. There had been no explicit reference made to Dumbledore’s homosexuality in the primary text. Fanfiction turns what was originally a sub-text into the main text, giving voice to what had been shunned and silenced. At the same time, some depictions of slash relationships reinforce heteronormative gender roles, where there is a clear “woman” in the relationship. Even though the subversive potential of *Harry Potter* slash fanfiction cannot be ignored as it presents an alternative to the heteronormative narrative, it includes problematic portrayals of gay relationships where heteronormative gender roles are re-enacted.

J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series is an amalgamation of a *bildungsroman* and a heroic narrative, tracing the eponymous protagonist’s various adventures as he grows into a man by fulfilling his destiny of slaying Lord Voldemort. The *Harry Potter* universe is a predominantly heterosexual one and Harry’s heroism reflects the “triumph of a rather traditional notion of manhood” (Pugh and Wallace 190). The archetypal trajectory of a heroic figure’s life involves single-handedly defeating the enemy, procuring a love interest and proceeding to live happily ever after with her. Even though Harry insists that “I had a lot of help with all that stuff” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 306), he is the one who singularly delivers the death blow upon Voldemort. The epilogue “Nineteen Years Later” establishes the completion of the socializing process as a happily, heterosexually married Harry sees his children off to Hogwarts at Platform 9¾. Pugh and Wallace observe that “the reinstatement of moral order at the end of *Deathly Hallows* creates a space for heteronormative relationships to triumph” (190). The primary narrative, in its traditionalist resolution leaves little scope for subversive sexual identities.

In spite of being heteronormative in principle, oblique references to LGBTQIA characters are made within the narrative. The title of “Weird Sisters”, a “very famous music

group” (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 341) may be read as an inter-textual reference to the three witches of *Macbeth* whose gender remains ambiguous throughout the play – even though they are described as the “weird sisters”, connoting a certain femininity, they are bearded. Pugh and Wallace observe a “latent queerness” in the canon, discussing the “coming out” metaphors employed in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, whereby Harry is extracted from the “cupboard under the stairs” and introduced to the whole new world of witchcraft and wizardry (Pugh and Wallace 267-268). Albus Dumbledore, the chief architect of the plot, is the most noted possible queer character in the story. However, there is no mention of his homosexuality in the novels, apart from the salacious insinuation of the infamous reporter, Rita Skeeter, who claims that the relationship between Harry and Dumbledore has “been called unhealthy, even sinister” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 29). In the chapter “King’s Cross”, when Dumbledore finally reveals the darker ambitions of his youth, he makes no mention of his love for Gellert Grindelwald which had presumably clouded his judgment. Three months after *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was published, Rowling revealed the nature of Dumbledore and Grindelwald’s relationship, much to the delight of many fans: “I think a child will see a friendship and I think a sensitive adult may well understand that it was an infatuation” (qtd. in Tosenberger 187). The fact that Rowling chose to “out” Dumbledore after the series had been concluded points to how the homosexual narrative was symbolically placed on the outside.

The subversive potential of fanfiction lies in the fact that it gives a distinct narratorial voice to homosexual narratives which have been rendered sub-texts by heteronormative ideological structures. According to Tosenberger, “slash” fanfiction allows a space for adolescents to express homosexuality in terms that are not merely abstract and conceptual, as seen in Young Adult Novels, but also carnal (188). She claims that the published medium of Young Adult Novels aims to contain adolescent sexuality and adopt an educative tenor in describing sexual relationships, skirting free of so-called sexual deviancies. The medium of the internet, on the other hand, is free from such obligations. With the added benefit of anonymity, adolescent writers are free from the stigma of expressing said “sexual deviancies”. Since most fanfiction is written by women, it is seen to have “feminist implications” expressing a woman’s “fantasy of equality between romantic partners” (Tosenberger 189). For certain models of fanfiction, such as the “buddyslash” model (Sudis qtd. in Tosenberger 191), where characters graduate from friends to lovers, this “fantasy of equality” may be applicable. However, due to the sheer scale of fandoms it can also be argued that slash fanfiction, by women writers, exoticises and fetishises gay relationships.

There exist a multitude of slash fiction categories, and while some subvert the heteronormative narrative, many representations of slash relationships conform to gender binaries by feminizing one of the partners in a gay relationship. The most extreme of heteronormative impositions lies in the sub-category of “Mpreg” or “male pregnancy”. This category of fanfiction implies that there is a clear “woman” in the gay relationship and that an “ideal relationship” entails giving birth to a child. On “Archive of Our Own” there are over 1,600 works tagged “Mpreg”. The most popular slash pairing of Harry/Draco with more than 13,000 pieces of writing on “Archive of Our Own” follows the “enemyslash” model (Tosenberger 191), which contains enough tensions without the inclusion of crisis over sexual identities. There is fan writing in the “Drarry” grouping which does deal with themes of homophobia, but it is more prevalent in the “buddyslash” model. A large number of

“Drarry” fanfiction assumes that homosexuality is accepted within the wizarding world, unlike the muggle one. However, homosexuality assumes a heterosexual character in this fictional space where homosexuality is regarded as normative. Even fiction that doesn’t contain the Mpreg tag performs a reconstruction of heterosexual gender roles. For instance, in the popular fanfiction *Chasing Draco* by dracogotgame, there is a clear feminisation of Draco Malfoy. In the text, Draco’s father, Lucius Malfoy, is desperate to find a husband for his shrewish son. As last resort, he seeks out Harry Potter, who embarks on a courtship affair with a reluctant Draco. Eventually, Draco does soften up, in the likeness of a typical wife:

Draco had learnt to pick his battles. If he gave the man these little victories, he was more likely to get his way on more important things. He tried not to think about how that reasoning made him sound a lot like a wife.
(dracogotgame 13)

The *Harry Potter* fandom is a gargantuan space, playing host to a wide range of fanfiction. The anonymity that the medium of the internet provides gives writers freedom to publish non-heteronormative narratives. The act of writing about homosexuality in a predominantly homophobic culture is an act of subversion in itself. However, some portrayals of homosexual relationships tend to act out the gender binaries of a heterosexual relationship, where same-sex characters act out the roles of a “man” and “woman.” While the subversive potential of fanfiction is to be acknowledged, the loopholes of the medium must also be explored. Further research on the actual impact of fanfiction on acceptance of homosexuality could shed light on the actual societal repercussions of the depictions.

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Identity and Self-Discovery: Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*

Debopriyaa Dutta

M.A. English (Previous)

I read *On the Road* in maybe 1959. It changed my life like it changed everyone else's.

– Bob Dylan

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, which was published in 1957, is considered one of the most important works of twentieth century American Literature. It marked the apex of 1950s Beat Literature – a reflection of the social and cultural ferment of the early Cold War era. *On the Road* transports us to that world of the 1950s which was far removed from the middle class suburbia of the time – bop music, spontaneity, recklessness, drugs, and promiscuous sex. It is a brilliant blend of fiction and autobiography, and Kerouac's point of view as the narrator, Salvatore Paradise, is emotionally charged, making all the characters and events a reflection of his own feelings. Kerouac's portrayal of his lifelong friend – Neal Cassady, as the “great amorous soul” (Schellinger 44) – Dean Moriarty, is the central achievement of this novel. The persona of Sal, based on Kerouac himself, is an equally skilful creation. The duo embarks on five major journeys across America, which correspond with the five parts of the novel. They encounter a multitude of adventures along the way: the naïve Sal “shambling after” (6) the unpredictable whirlwind called Dean Moriarty.

On the Road can be interpreted as a tale of self-discovery. It depicts Sal's journey as he sets out to test the American Dream by trying to pin-down its promise of unlimited freedom by following Dean's example. Kerouac initiated the quest theme, when he expressed his intention to organize the book as a quest narrative, while writing and re-writing the Original Scroll of the novel, as early as March 1949. In the introductory paragraph, the narrator Sal tells us that he has just recovered from a serious illness – “everything was dead” (2). It is then that he decides to travel across America, marking the beginning of his life on the road. The purpose of these cross-country trips might appear directionless and meaningless at first, but Sal is on a quest for self-discovery and enlightenment, a search for a spiritual cure. Though Sal and Dean rush back and forth, gathering “kicks” (20) along the way, their real journey is inward. Sal searches among the fringes of society for signs of authenticity and meaning: “Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me” (10). It is the search for a new self and the narrative offers a feeling of constant motion, a frenetic search for meaning in an America that is very different from the middle class ideal. The quest motif bears a close connection with the concept of individual identity. *On the Road* can be seen as a portrayal of an American romantic vision of identity, which makes universal claims about the transcendental potential of the individual. The transcendental moments in the novel generally take place “on the road” and there is an emphasis on the journey rather than the goal itself. Dean is associated with both mobility and American Utopianism. For Sal, he represents the realisation of this Utopian dream, which is akin to Walt Whitman's romantic notion of “the perpetual journey” from his poem *Song of Myself* (1892). This idea is a characteristically American approach to travel: “a symbolic act, heavy with promises of new life, progress, and the thrill of escape” (Carden 78). Dean is the physical embodiment of all of the above. In a period marked by war and

rapidly developing industry, the West became a vast repository of nostalgia for a simpler time. The road became the only bridge between the past and the present, between fiction and reality. Sal suffers from this sense of nostalgia throughout and his fondness for Dean is because of this very longing for the past:

Yes, and it wasn't only because I was a writer and needed new experiences that I wanted to know Dean more [...] but because, somehow, in spite of our difference in character, he reminded me of some long lost brother; the sight of his suffering bony face with long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood in those dye-dump and swim holes and riversides of Paterson and the Passaic. (9)

However, since figures like Dean, Hassel, Eddie, and Carlo Marx, are mere attempts to recapture the spirit of the lost frontier, Kerouac suggests that Sal is pursuing a utopian ideal twice-removed. Like the youth of America – whom Kerouac addresses – Sal searches in people for something that will free him from normalcy, and grant him spontaneity and freedom. The road for him becomes a means to achieve an existence, defined by A. Robert Lee as, “Life, if it were to matter, would be lived existentially at the edge, confrontation, shock-tactic, obscenity when needed, sex or marijuana virtually on demand, endless reading, love-ins, happenings.”(2) These “happenings” enrich Sal's narration, which is often incredibly poetic and romantic. He describes the Mississippi River as “the raw body of America itself” (9), while travelling to Iowa in a hitchhiker's car. The Mississippi is the divide between the East and the West, the old and the new, between complacency and hope. For Sal, it is “the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future” (10). The promise of making an imprint on the “white like washliness” (50) of the West, which is akin to the hope of the Promised Land, appeals to Sal.

For the modern American utopian traveller, America is unique as a culture because its mythic origins are located outside the original boundaries of the nation. Sal, like so many other Americans, derives his national identity from a region where he has previously never been. Thus, his westward journey takes on a decidedly spiritual tone. Discovering the West becomes the same as discovering the self, a trope which has been repeated constantly throughout the American road-trip genre. Though travel writing traditionally structures itself around what Mary Baine Campbell calls the “old motifs of the journey – home, departure, destination, the liminal space between...” (263), Sal's idealisation of the West subverts this by conflating all three: his search for the mythic West renders the journey as a kind of spiritual homecoming. The destination is not rooted in one specific place, but rather in the liminal space of the road itself. It is in the West that Sal and Dean can expose themselves to new experiences. They can test their limits, taste love, and understand the world and other people. Sal meets a Mexican girl named Terry and decides to live with her and her son, imagining himself as a “man of the earth” (63) as he picks cotton for a living to support them, feeling ecstatic despite the difficulties of living:

Her father was yelling at her; I could hear him from the barn. I smelled mashed beans and chili. The old man growled. The brothers kept right on yodelling. A California home; I hid in the grape vines, digging it all. I felt like a million dollars; I was adventuring in the crazy American night. (91)

What Sal enthuses over as “a California home”, Kerouac reveals as a place of poverty, frustration, anger, and despair. But Sal’s raptures cushion him from recognizing the grimness of existence. He soon leaves her as he heads into the great world, wandering aimlessly, looking for something more. He leaves behind responsibilities, emotions, and decisions as he embarks on a journey to San Francisco with Dean and Marylou in the former’s Cadillac. Robert Hipkiss explains the significance of the car, “...to them the automobile is the means of escape from unpalatable social relationships, a means of annihilating unwanted feelings of remorse and rejection” (47).

Each successive destination – San Francisco, New Orleans, and Denver – offers the possibility of the fulfilment of the quest. Sal however realizes that Dean’s frantic moving and travelling is not a romantic quest for adventure or truth, but is rather a sad and lost circling of the past. Sal is disillusioned, and his identity becomes a shifting concept. His perception of himself is clouded and he admits, “I didn’t know who I was” (10). While roaming aimlessly on Market Street, delirious, alone, hungry, and empty, he has a vision of his long lost “mother of about 200 years in England” (110) and he says:

I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels [...] I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn’t remember especially because the transitions from life to death and back to life are so ghostly easy [...] the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it. (157)

This experience of spiritual death and rebirth enriches Sal as an individual; it is instrumental in bringing about self-knowledge, and he is closest to meeting himself in the journey on the road, in the journey of life. The road is an expression of all spiritual roads that lead to heightened religious experiences and expansion of the mind and soul. The cross-country trips, thus, are a symbol of growth of consciousness. Sal and Dean discuss topics like honesty, musical creativity, existence of God, death, reincarnation, politics, sex and religion throughout their journey to Denver, where they attempt to find Dean’s lost father. Both of them are in search of a symbolic father to replace the one who favours industrial growth over a spiritual one. It is during this trip that both of them talk about “a state of transcendence and self-knowledge which can be achieved through methods referred to as the undefined “IT”. “IT” exists beyond socio-historical and spatial constraints. Kerouac’s message embraces the need to pursue and cherish individual freedom: the freedom of mobility, the freedom of “making it your own way” (157). The definite meaning of “IT” is deliberately not explained by the characters, because the meaning of “IT” differs from one person to the other, and acquires new definitions with the passage of time. “IT” is an un-definable feeling, sentiment or inclination; all the characters in the novel are in search of it. Dean tries to explain his version of “IT”:

“Now, man, that alto man last night had IT – he held it once he found it; I’ve never seen a guy who could hold so long.” I wanted to know what “IT” meant. “Ah well” – Dean laughed – “now you’re asking me impon-de-rables – ahem! Here’s a guy and everybody’s there, right [...] All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he *gets it* – everybody looks up and knows; they

listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT –". Dean could go no further; he was sweating telling about it. (187)

The mysterious "IT" to which Dean repeatedly refers seems to have its root in music, time, and melody. He tries everything to achieve that state – he goes from woman to woman, completely lost, only to end up with four children he cannot support. Dean's disjointed utterances reflect the destabilisation of meaning in Cold War America. The American Dream contains sharp contradictions, giving rise to a growing undercurrent of discontent with consumerism, something that is reflected in Kerouac's characters. This dissatisfaction prompts Sal to search for "Paradise", which makes him long to be someone else, someone outside his own time and place. This desire to belong to another race or caste is revealed by Sal's fascination with people of other cultures and ethnicity. The word "fellaheen" (63) – borrowed from Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918) – appears frequently in the novel. It is a term that is used to describe people considered to be outside history and culture. Sal desires this transference of identity because he thinks it will propel him across the border in search of an immediacy and soulfulness lacking in his own life:

At lilac evening I walked [...] wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night [...] I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions; that was why I'd abandoned a good woman like Terry [...] I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America. (164)

Sal has naïve dreams about being coloured and poor because as a white middle-class man, he has never had to face the problems that these romanticized groups of people have had to, everyday. Sal reacts in this manner because he is searching for something more exciting and mysterious – something other than his existence as Salvatore Paradise. This explains his attraction for "the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars" (7). Like the original 120-foot-long scroll on which *On the Road* was written, all journeys, no matter how long and rambling, must eventually come to an end. Mexico City, which is Sal's final destination in the novel, is portrayed in obverse relation to an oppressive America – a place, which is a paradise of freedom, an idyllic spot in contrast to America. Sal romanticizes the landscape and reveals that he feels integrated and merged with it: "The atmosphere and I became the same" (268). In the Mexican jungle, Sal completely loses his identity as the inside and outside merge. He becomes the atmosphere, erasing both ego and world. Nothing remains save motion and sensation; his identity dissolves; and his existence fuses with space. The trip ends in disaster as Dean once again abandons Sal, leaving him alone, sick, and

feverish. Disillusioned with the “dark roads of America” (191), he wants to return to his home in New York. Mark Richardson convincingly argues that Sal’s dream, with America’s prairies, stars, and sparklers is just “the impossible dream of *On the Road*: its wild utopia, the joyous America that exists nowhere beyond the border of this fiction” (193). All the characters trespass boundaries, legal, and moral, in the hope of finding a belief on the other side. Their quest for deeper religious and spiritual meaning through their journey on the road is their only salvation, their gift to humanity. The narrative ends with a sense of disappointment and emptiness, where “nobody knows what’s going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old” (193). There is a sense of nostalgia for the past and a sense of uncertainty for the future. In our modern world, where illusions and hyper-realities constitute the norm, a search for the authentic may perhaps be amongst the most noble of human functions, especially considering the dystopian risks inherent in such a search: a keen sense of sadness and regret which Kerouac invokes throughout.

I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, or actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. (159)

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Improvisation and Agency in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

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According to Stephen Greenblatt, “the heart of a successful improvisation lies in concealment not exposure ... even a hostile improvisation reproduces the relationship of power that it hopes to displace and absorb” (253). Before delving into the nuances and contradictions of improvisation and how they are played out in Renaissance theatre, it is imperative that the term be defined. Greenblatt’s idea of improvisation is inextricably linked to power: it is not a mere impromptu response – it is a calculated impromptu response within a given power structure. It entails one’s ability to draw on extant structures and twist them to one’s own advantage in a manner that naturalizes the new, improvised order. Improvisation is hence a blend of hegemonic and subversive – one may even go as far as to say, that it establishes hegemony through subversion (227-229).

As a medium of expression, theatre is improvisational in its very nature, since the final spectacle is a product of the collective imagination of the playwright, director, actor, and set designer. Renaissance theatre in particular, may be considered even more so, as it played host to subversive elements while appeasing power patrons. The central contradiction in the coexistence of individual expression and its containment within the same framework defines not only Renaissance theatre, but the age as a whole. Improvisation thus becomes a mode of fashioning. In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* characters improvise by fashioning identities and situations in accordance with their circumstances. In doing so, they do not go beyond the playwright's script, but they subvert the script of societal conventions. While Viola and Sebastian fashion new, fluid identities in Illyria, Sir Toby orchestrates circumstances to keep alive a sense of play and foolery on stage. Both the main plot and the sub-plot hinge on the improvisational abilities of characters raising questions about gender, sexuality, and class. However, while the main plot reaches its resolution in a state of mutual compromise, which reinstates existing norms and social mores, the sub-plot embodies Greenblatt’s spirit of improvisation by establishing hegemony in its subversion.

Improvisation entails “the ability and willingness to play a role, to transform oneself ... acceptance of disguise, the ability to affect a divorce ... between the tongue and the heart” (Greenblatt 228). The play’s protagonist, Viola, embodies the spirit of improvisation from the opening of the play. She takes on the role of Cesario whose identity remains ambiguous till the end of the play. Viola’s initial intent of posing as a eunuch in Duke Orsino’s court never manifests itself; instead she poses as the Duke’s boy attendant, going as far as to woo Olivia in his stead. The fact that Viola does not stick to the plans she had originally crafted, highlight her improvisational character – she fashions herself in accordance with the circumstances, rather than following what has been already established. Malvolio describes Cesario as “standing in the water, between boy and man” (Shakespeare 132), highlighting the character’s liminality with respect to gender. According to Homi K. Bhabha, liminal figures are extremely powerful in terms of deconstructing establishments (2-5): Viola certainly deconstructs the dominant paradigm of gender and sexuality.

Orsino bids his attendant Cesario to woo Olivia in his stead, hoping to sway her desires with his Petrarchan love declarations. The Duke has scripted lines for Cesario, but Viola deviates from the “excellently well penned” (Shakespeare 143) speech upon gauging Olivia’s negative reaction. Instead, she improvises and engages in a dialogue which is in stark contrast to the rather one-sided, self-centred pronouncements of Duke Orsino. According to Jami Ake, “it is Viola’s spontaneity and her improvisational ability, not the Duke’s banal praises, that keep the conversation going and ultimately help inspire Olivia’s passion” (378). As a character, Olivia both conforms to and resists Petrarchan traditions. She fashions herself as a damsel in mourning, the ideal object of affection in the Petrarchan tradition. Like Orsino’s profuse poetic proclamations, Olivia’s mourning may be considered self-centred, as described in the telling phrase “a brother’s dead love” (31). The phrase refers to the love her brother had for her, rendering Olivia the point of focus as opposed to her much bemoaned brother. It is almost as if she misses the love her brother had for her, not the brother himself. In rejecting Orsino too, she plays the role of the archetypal “cold-hearted” maiden who spurns the lover’s advances in the Petrarchan love tradition. At the same time, in her dissection of the Petrarchan poetry Viola took “great pains to con” (144), Olivia reveals the inadequacy of the one-sided medium. “Olivia, like Viola, eludes the Duke’s efforts to reduce her to a symptom of his lovesick Petrarchan universe and resists the tendency of Orsino’s Petrarchan poetics to transform women from pretexts for verse into poetic texts under masculine control” (Ake 380). In subverting the Petrarchan tradition, Olivia employs the language of the discourse, improvising and altering its gist to suit her own needs. The homoerotic overtones are couched in the language of heterosexuality, similar to how male homoerotic desires are seen to be couched in male friendship and foolery.

Male homoerotic desire is expressed through the media of Sebastian with Antonio and Sir Toby with Sir Andrew. Sebastian, Viola’s brother, is saved from the shipwreck by Antonio. Like Viola, Sebastian displays androgynous traits:

my bosom is full of kindness, and I am yet
so near the manners of my mother that,
upon the least occasion more, mine eyes will
tell tales of me. (Shakespeare 28-31)

The gender ambiguities of the twins serve to question the established binaries of gender. However, unlike Viola and Olivia, Antonio is able to explicitly express his love for Sebastian – “I do adore thee so” – and pass it off as an act of kindness and friendship. The same linguistic facilities are not available to the women. Another dimension of male homoerotic desire is seen in Sir Toby and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Toby seems to gain an almost voyeuristic pleasure from seeing Sir Andrew attempt to woo women: “You mistake, Knight. ‘Accost’ is front her, board her, woo her, assail her” (46). Unlike Sebastian and Antonio, there is a clear power dynamic between Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, with the former having a clear upper hand. The line “Marry, I’ll ride your horse as well as I ride you” (245), sums up their relationship succinctly: Sir Toby gains monetary and sexual benefits from Sir Andrew through his improvisations.

Sir Toby, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, is a carnivalesque character whose improvisations render him the chief architect of the sub-plot. He is also the point of

confluence between the main plot and the sub-plot. He plots with Maria to play a prank on Malvolio, Olivia's old attendant, whom Maria describes as "a kind of puritan" (119). Maria writes a letter, using diction both ambiguous and specific, to fool Malvolio into thinking that Olivia is in love with him. In the conflict between Sir Toby's company and Malvolio, the carnivalesque characters may be rendered symbolic of the theatre and Malvolio of the puritans who considered it a corrupting influence. While tensions between the theatre and puritans were a major site for discourse, Malvolio is far from a stock figure. He belongs to the lower economic class, but is very proud and aspires "[t]o be Count Malvolio" (30). This desire for class transgression not only renders him subversive but also especially relatable to the modern-day audience.

The act of punishing Malvolio is an improvisational one, enabling an elevation in stature for Maria. Like Sir Toby, Maria embodies the contradiction of being both hegemonic and subversive. It is ironic that the trick on Malvolio, which punishes his desire for class transgression, gains Maria the status of being Sir Toby's wife. At the same time, Maria also challenges affixed gender roles when she engages in the battle of wits with Feste. The Fool's domain traditionally belongs to men, but her verbal sparring abilities question this dictum to a degree.

Sir Toby's stagecraft ensures that the ploy with Malvolio stretches till the very last act of the play, raising questions not only about the carnivalesque shenanigans, but the audience as well. As an interlude to the primary sub-plot, Sir Toby instigates a fight between the unwilling Cesario and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. This connects the main plot to the sub-plot and marks a build-up towards the resolution where hidden identities are revealed with the reunion of Sebastian and Viola. Sir Toby intends to deceive Malvolio "till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompts us to have mercy on him" (115-116), which ends up coinciding with the denouement. Malvolio is locked up in a dark room and called a madman and compared to the devil. The audience at this point may condemn the actions of the tricksters, but is prevented from holding a high moral ground with the evocation of the iconic Renaissance image of "We Three". The image depicts two clowns, insinuating that the third is the viewer. The audience is as much a part of the spectacle as the actors.

In the resolution of the play, the main plot re-establishes and reinforces the existent order. Sebastian proves himself to be man enough for Olivia by coming out victorious in the fight against Sir Andrew and following Olivia to her bedchamber, while Viola reveals herself as a woman (albeit reluctantly). Since Orsino cannot possess the boy Cesario, he settles for Viola – just as Olivia settles for Sebastian since she couldn't have Viola. The sub-plot, however, retains its improvisational spirit. Sir Toby's ruse with regard to Malvolio is uncovered, but he and his carnivalesque crew remain unpunished. Shakespeare, however, lets Malvolio have the last word before his exit: "I will be revenged on the whole pack of you" (355). Just as Sir Toby and company dehumanized Malvolio by calling him a madman, Malvolio dehumanizes them by calling them a "pack" for their animalesque over-indulgence. A traditional comedy would assimilate all the characters and reinstate order; *Twelfth Night* leaves Malvolio and Feste out of the societal framework. Feste concludes the play with a song about how "the rain it raineth everyday" (369) highlighting his detachment and the transient nature of the production. It is the more subversive sub-plot that is given the final voice at the end of the narrative.

An alternative title for *Twelfth Night* is *What You Will*, and there are enough ambiguities in the play that leave it open to multiple interpretations. One may read the main plot as containing subversive potential, as Viola retains her costume of Cesario till the curtains fall. In addition, even though there are promises of marriage made, no actual ceremony is scripted. Orsino's line "let me see thee in thy woman's weeds" (258) reflects the desire for reinstatement for heterosexual order, but whether Viola adheres to it or not is left open to interpretation. That being said, the main plot does not retain its improvisational and carnivalesque character to the overt degree that the sub-plot does; with the non-assimilation of Malvolio and Feste and the mischief-makers being left unpunished, it questions both existent norms and the role of the audience.

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a celebration of the carnivalesque, but also its critique. It subverts norms of gender, sexuality, and class, but also reinforces the same. The play hinges on improvisation and improvisation constitutes its spirit: it is a blend of the hegemonic and subversive. While the main plot reaches a more-or-less traditional conclusion, the sub-plot remains open ended, retaining its carnivalesque and improvisational character till the very last dialogue. In its contradictions and improvisation, the sub-plot of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* acts as a microcosm for Renaissance theatre.

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Woman: Her Own Prisoner or the Social Jailbird and the Question of the Self

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This essay attempts to engage with the question of the self of women whose very sexuality has been a tool of suppression in patriarchal societies. It is considered a given that “women were, historically, the first oppressed group” and “that women’s oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every known society” (Tong 71). From time immemorial, be it the early Greek society of Xenophon or post-colonial Bengal, the very notion that a woman has about her ‘self’ is often what has been dictated to her. In such a situation, she is almost wholly a social construct, mechanical in her ways, doing what she is required to do, serving as a mere tool for patriarchal figures, being fashioned by them, but in doing so, she has, to some degree, become her own prisoner, a hostage of her own psyche. Even when no one is imposing strictures on her, she often cannot go beyond set limits. Hence, the need for three waves of feminism and consciousness-raising groups. Femininity or the feminine self has been an apparatus for whatever was the patriarchal need of the hour and has thus been modelled and remodelled, so much so, that many women have now internalized the structure and even if there are no tangible impositions, they tend to consider themselves still to be in the firm grasp of patriarchy and conduct themselves accordingly.

The feminine self has been put to use by society as and when required without giving women much scope to develop their own thoughts or even so much as a voice. “Men have constructed female sexuality to serve not women’s but men’s needs, wants and interests” (Tong 72). If there was a war to be waged between two nations, there was a ‘Helen’ at the centre of it. If reinstating moral and spiritual values was required, in the destabilized colonial period, there was ‘Bongonari’ (the lady of the soil) to the rescue. If the very concept of the nation had to be established, we have seen India as that famed woman – ‘Bharatmata’. In all of this, the question that is often sidelined is, what about the woman herself? How much of all this did she, herself, want? Why, in the first place, did she accept such roles? “For Foucault, sex is the pivotal factor in the proliferation of mechanisms of discipline and normalisation” (Deveaux 224), implying largely that the construction of such gender roles has been the result of a play of power. Women being the historical and sexual “Other(s)” (Beauvoir 267), have been subject to domination. Shulamith Firestone claims that this subjugation is rooted in “the biological division of sexes” (12).

The situation however, is not that linear. Years of subjugation have led women to reconcile themselves to their predicament so that they now begin to impose strictures on themselves, even though they can be free of them. Herein, they become the infamous “Panopticon” (Bentham 1) prisoner – the prisoner of the self, an ill-developed, half-formed, confined persona, who has come to believe that someone is constantly watching even when no one is, “[s/]he becomes the principle of [her/]his own subjection” (Foucault 202).

From the very beginning, the girl child tends to be subjected to a number of directives and norms. It is often societal imposition that defines what her conduct should be like and

how much self-expression she is allowed. For example, in Tagore's "Streer Patra" ("The Wife's Letter"), Bindu is married off against her wishes and finds herself dying in the face of a forced marriage. Her self finds no expression at all and her voice, no listener. She is a social liability and an asset that has to be disposed off. In such a constricting atmosphere, one cannot expect one's awareness of the self to develop. For lack of proper means to express that consciousness, and live on her own terms, she sets herself ablaze, perhaps because she feels that is the only way out for such a doomed figure, who in a world of complacency, dared to transgress.

There is an intricate relationship between society and the self – one fashions the other and one is because of the other. This is evident in the case of Bimala, Tagore's protagonist in *The Home and the World*, where she is shown to have immense capacity to go beyond the bounds of the *antarmahal* (the inner quarters), her home, and step into the world of men and activity. However, in the end, she is shown, despite her capability of being an inspiring figure in the patriotic realm, to not only go back but also find solace in the confines of her home – the domestic sphere. It becomes ingrained in her, that it is the space where she is most herself and finds the best self-expression, so that even if she is given freedom by a progressive husband who wants his wife not to conform anymore to the rigid, obsolete values, or to remain hidden and virtually lost from the world of activity, she cannot accede to that. For her, the world is not her domain; instead the confines of the four walls become her world. She finds the best expression of herself at her husband's feet. Even if she has the possibility of sexual empowerment through Sandip and through her role in the nationalist struggle, she reconciles to her husband's feet, where she repents for her transgression. For her, the self is almost negated, it is just an accomplice to her husband's. In that, she is more her own prisoner than society's, since Nikhilesh and Sandip, if considered to be society personified, are ready to acknowledge her place in the 'world'. Therein lies the problem of the self which cannot reconcile to freedom or empowerment as it is so tightly bound up within itself that it cannot transgress. The self, thus becomes its very own prisoner.

An instance, however, of the development of the self may be found in Rosie, in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, where having been empowered professionally and financially, she does not turn back. She goes forth without any dependence on either of the patriarchs in her life to fend for herself. However, one of the important stimuli here for such an enunciation of the self is education. She was saved because she was well-trained in a classical dance form as well as had a Masters degree in Economics. However, not everyone is as privileged. Moreover, the concept of education, too, is problematic. In Tagore's *Gora*, Sucharita and Lalita start a school with the aim of educating girls. However, their mission is propelled not by the aim of making them self-sufficient or empowered but in order to make them better householders. The incident of the death of the young boy, Nanda, due to his mother's superstitious belief that he was possessed by some evil spirit, as a result of which he was not given any medical treatment is shown very poignantly by Tagore and serves as the backdrop for the need to educate girls. Even then, the felt need is more to learn to differentiate between superstitions and rational perspectives, rather than gain an awareness of the self through education, which Sucharita argues is why a girl needs to be taught. Even education for women, provided by women, was thus categorized. In such a situation, how can one think of the evolution of the self, if external impetus too serves to bind them down to the domestic sphere. Education should mould one's personality but nothing of that sort happens and the

educators are primarily concerned that a similar incident of death by negligence and superstition does not recur anymore. Education is just insulation against anymore Nandas dying, rather than a desire to improve the condition of the self.

Again, if the self is aware of the predicament of its confinement and it attempts to transgress, to etch a new definition for itself, it cannot. Society steps in with its strictures. The self cannot find full expression as it does not have avenues to act out its expression and still if it dares to, it will be termed as a misfit, a social outcast, a “loose woman” (Bartky 97). This is evident in Kamala Das’s poetry. In “An Introduction”, Das states:

Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. (27)

Das shows how everything is laid down specifically and how demeaning to the self all of it is, how her “sad woman-body felt so beaten” (26). She is aware not only of her feminine self, but also to what extent it is constrained – “You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her” (“The Old Playhouse” 1). Therefore, in “An Introduction” she says she rebelled:

Then ... I wore a shirt and my
Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. (27)

The solution she seems to posit in these lines, is of ignoring one’s sexuality/gender and striving for androgyny, but such distancing from one’s own identity cannot give a more subjective understanding of the same and the very purpose of upholding the cause of female identity is defeated, if one adopts a totally antagonistic stance – that of the male self, to show the pitiable condition of womanhood. It might be a desperate measure but it is also an outright negation of one’s identity. What is rather imperative is the redefinition of the self along the lines of restructured femininity, where one neither denies one’s sexuality/gender nor gives in to subjugation.

The most outright negation of the self is, when to delimit the woman’s self, her actions are marked out in watertight compartments. If she dares to cross her set space, her action is termed ‘manly’. Femininity and masculinity are not absolute. It is acceptable to be as one intends to. Compartmentalizing actions, gestures, is a major hindrance to the development of the self. This is evident in Subhadra Kumari Chauhan’s lines:

Bundeley Harbolon key munh hamney suni kahani thi,
Khub ladi mardani who toh Jhansi wali Rani thi.

Here, the woman’s spirit is not acknowledged but instead her valour is attributed to be ‘manly’. So, even if the woman takes up the sword, she does that in the garb of the man, such is the irony of her situation; such is the denial of her selfhood. A true act of patriotism is reduced to a normal male act of bravado. Sometimes, the woman has to deliberately put on the male guise as a means of pseudo-empowerment. Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, takes on the appearance of a man, Ganymede. Shakespeare, here, shows how these gender roles are social

constructs and how easily interchangeable. However, a positive side to this cross-dressing motif is that even in the disguise of a man, Rosalind is never bereft of her inherent feminine self which guides her when she advises Orlando on how to woo Rosalind. One is rarely outside one's self, the very identity, the crux of one's being; it only awaits realisation.

Another very positive example of the reconciled, developed self is the character of Kira Argounova, in Ayn Rand's *We The Living*, who by the end of the story comes to a reconciliation with the self and ceases to be either a social or her own prisoner. She challenges the stereotyping – be it education, be it her relationships with men or her sexuality. She does not confine herself and posits her individuality, her 'self' as the supreme. She subverts the male-female dictum in terms of her relationships with Leo and Andrei. Even in her death she etches out a memorable place for herself, a freedom from patriarchy, from a constricting nation, a caged existence. She dies struggling to find that utopian world that would suit her emancipated self.

For the self to develop, it needs certain conditions. As much as societal imposition is harmful, a complete isolation is not ideal, either. A balance is what is needed more than exclusivity, and this has been expounded in Tennyson's "The Princess". The prince pleads that a war against men would not do them any good, rather ruin everything that they have worked for. Here, Tennyson advocates that the 'New Woman', one in whom intellect and feminine consciousness abounds, is the embodiment of female sexuality as well as intellectual empowerment. For her, the mind matters as much as her sexuality and she need not forgo one for the other. Again, to achieve that, she does not need to move away from society to create an exclusive domain for herself. That is not ideal for the development of the self. It develops through inclusiveness. Similarly, the self comprises not only of the body or the intellect. If Princess Ida forsakes the society of men to gather intellectual knowledge, Chitra in Tagore's play, *Chitra*, wants to entice Arjuna and therefore seeks bodily charms. However, she soon grows weary of being a slave to her body and cannot see her empowered self of a warrior being compromised for the sake of her sexuality and thus laments – "I found that my body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon!". She is not ashamed of being a woman and reaches an understanding that body and intellect should go together. She understands that physical beauty is transient and thus, falls back on her intellect and has a true understanding of the self. She intends, therefore, to go to Arjuna in her own plain self shorn of her enhanced, mirage-like beauty. She no longer wants a perfect body since she is one with her self – her true self.

The self of the woman will only develop if she is allowed to etch out a role for herself rather than allow societal impositions to fashion her. The very definition of woman needs to be figured out by her at first, devoid of her social relations as daughter, sister, wife, mother, et al. There is a need for demythologizing the whole ideal of the woman who is almost always either deified or cast away as something pernicious; she is either the angel in the house or the witch. In Ray's movie, *Devi*, the woman is shown to be moulded by the fallacy of her being the reincarnation of the goddess Kali. She, hesitant at first, but ultimately accedes to this misconception and begins to think of herself as the goddess. However, through a string of incidents the situation is reversed and she falls from her pedestal pitifully. When she comes to terms with herself, she cannot recognize herself nor does anyone realize her worth as a

woman. In such a situation, it is imperative that the self be understood per se, not necessarily as that which it is understood to be by others. Another instance of dealing with polar opposites as manifested in the self of the woman, is Freud's "Madonna-Whore" Complex (250). In such a situation, Sigmund Freud observes, the man perceives the woman as either mother-like, pure, saintly or as base as a prostitute. Therefore, the female self was seen predominately in such set definitions. In *The Home and the World*, Bimala sees herself not through her own eyes but through Nikhilesh and Sandip's. She, at once, fashions herself in a British way of life (on Nikhilesh's insistence) while later on, as Sandip wishes to see her in Veena Das's words as "Vande Mataram ... Vande Priyam, Vande Mohinim" (72).

The development of the self is hindered at the very initial stages if one is not informed about sexuality and the intricacies of the body. "On the subject of sex, silence became the rule." (Foucault 3). This withholding of information is fatal as it results in a fragmented idea about one's own sexuality, and if the very foundation is flawed, from where will the self draw its sustenance from? Kamala Das in "An Introduction" recalls:

I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. (27)


This is an instance of how a girl begins to understand her sexuality. She is so little informed, as if sexuality is something shameful. This lack of information results in a fractured self and therefore it is easy to turn women into "docile bodies" (Foucault 138) to be moulded as and when anyone wants to, for one's advantage.

Monique Deveaux and Sandra Lee Bartky argue that femininity is a social construct. One profound example of the same is the figure of goddess Durga. Durga manifested herself, or rather was constructed by patriarchal gods such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva to suit their purpose of defeating Mahishasura. Indeed, she is worshipped and celebrated as the embodiment of 'Shakti' (Power) but what is rather overlooked is, if that is the ideal of femininity as then it is merely a sham since it shows the very concept of femininity as derivative from patriarchy. Therefore, there is a need for a redefinition of the self both from within and without. Monique Deveaux is of the opinion that "by conceptualizing women's relationships to their bodies as both a reflection of social construction and of their own responses to (and mediation of) the cultural ideals of femininity, it would avoid the pitfalls of a static 'docile bodies' paradigm of subjectivity" (244). Only then the society, at large, would "take seriously the issue of women's empowerment, their capacities for self-determination and freedom, and the conditions in which these flourish" (244). Thus, the self should ideally, neither be socially fashioned nor bound in by itself. After three waves of feminism, a perfect "Ich und Du" (I and Thou) (Buber) relationship between the intellect and sexuality, should ideally be established. No more reign of oppression; no more self-policing; but to herald the new woman with her new intelligibility who is sure, to quote Kamala Das in "I Shall Someday", to –

... leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me ...
... I shall someday take
Wings, fly around ... (48)

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Deconstructing Duryodhana – The Villain

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We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.

– Montaigne

Friedrich Nietzsche's famous remark, "There are no facts only interpretations", stands true for *The Mahabharata*. *The Mahabharata* may be called a family saga and it is often read as a text about *dharma* and *adharma*. It depicts a stage where actors play their good and evil parts. It is presented as a mirage of real life. Most of us are, from our very childhood, conditioned to believe in the nobleness of the Pandavas and in the villainy of the Kauravas. Put in this context, Nietzsche's remark suggests that there is no absolute good or evil. Poststructuralism is a school of thought that maintains that the consequence of structuralism is radical uncertainty. It argues that language does not just reflect or record the world, but rather shapes it. So that *how* we see the world is *what* we see. Poststructuralism emerged in France in the 1960s and Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida were closely associated with it. What poststructuralists thought about the 'construction' of an individual's identity is that the idea of the human being as an independent, static entity is false. It is a product of social and linguistic forces. This paper attempts a poststructuralist analysis of *The Mahabharata* by referring to alternative representations of Duryodhana like Bharat Bhushan Agrawal's "Mahabharat Ki Ek Sanjh" and Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya*. I will be attempting to deconstruct the traditional reading of the character of Duryodhana by presenting him as a construction of a *dharmic* and *adharmic* world where winners had the power to language.

According to poststructuralist thought, the meanings that words have, can never be fixed. Meanings are always contaminated or are embedded within their own history. Thus, in *The Mahabharata* when Duryodhana disrobes Draupadi, most in the palace rebuke him. Writers like Agrawal and Neelakantan indicate Duryodhana's perspective that if he disrobed Draupadi in front of everyone, didn't Yudhishtira stake her in front of everyone, thus, creating a decentering in *The Mahabharata*'s narrative universe. Due to this decentering, the 'protagonists' in the "Dicing" scene lose their importance as absolute signifiers. Thus, the blame for the act of disrobing is equated with the act of staking, proving the foolishness of Yudhishtira and positioning him to be as villainous as Duryodhana. The war, from all the accounts that we get from the present epic, was certainly annihilation for both the sides, although the Pandavas won it. Derrida's theorisation that we cannot know anything for certain poses a threat to much accepted beliefs. It is also worth noting that the tone in poststructuralist writings is usually urgent, euphoric, and self-conscious. An important insight which Duryodhana gives during the lake-conversation in *The Mahabharata* is that he strictly adheres to Kshatriya dharma and fights bravely, thus presenting the image of an able king. The notion of Kshatriya dharma originates deep within the system of the four castes of Hinduism. It can be argued that from the very beginning, Duryodhana is considered to be a villain only because he is on the losing side. The victors are just as good/bad as him, but it is the process of the narrativisation of history/myth that constructs some as villains and others

as heroes. For example, when Yudhishtira stakes Draupadi, Arjun, and Bheema, the palace wails in misery, shocked and numb. However, how many call him a villain or rebuke him for being unjust? Most call him helpless and ponder over his situation. For poststructuralists, individuals are the product of social and linguistic forces. Thus, if Yudhishtira is presented as unfair to Arjun and Bheema, at least at this point in the epic, it is not his condition, which makes him so but his own societal and linguistic urge to defend his own ego.

Derrida works with the idea that the structure of primitive thought is binary and it is this binary which is used to construct some as heroes in opposition to the villains in narratives. For him, the “opposition is systematic with the reduction” (Derrida 136). Agrawal and Neelakantan evoke pity for Duryodhana who reveals to Krishna, his greatest sorrow will be that the world will never come to know what the Kaurava thinking was, because it is always the victors who write history. His sorrow is not because of the Kaurava defeat in the war, but because every evil thing the Pandava side did will be covered under the guise of *dharma* saying it was wrong, but it had to be done for the protection of *dharma*. This thought of Duryodhana highlights the reductive nature of binary oppositions. No matter how many *hatyas* the Pandavas may have done, they may always rule the story. If Duryodhana is considered *adharmic*, it is because Yudhishtira is considered *dharmic*. One can critique language with the study of a history of concepts. Herein lies the dark history of *The Mahabharata*. No matter how much research may have been done, hegemonic discourses have not really focused on a critique of language in *The Mahabharata*. Due to this narrative construction, Duryodhana has lost his credibility for some. However, with the alternative works of writers like Bharat Bhushan Agrawal, Anand Neelakantan and theories such as poststructuralism, *The Mahabharata* allows for new insight. More heroic aspects of the supposedly “un-heroic” characters come to light. These works also highlight the moving tale of a prince and a prospective emperor wronged by fate, his father, and his friends. They intend to provide alternative interpretations of the epic. “Mahabharat Ki Ek Sanjh” and *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*, posit different shades of Duryodhana, thus enabling a deconstruction of how his character is traditionally presented and perceived.

History is often written by the victors, wherein they present themselves as heroes. It can be argued that the Kauravas were not bad; that they had every right to keep the throne. On the surface, *The Mahabharata* is the story of the downfall of an arrogant prince leading to an unnecessary war – but it can be argued that for Duryodhana it is the loss of a world. It is the loss of narratives that will create a deep hole in the understanding of the war. It is the defeat of *dharma*.

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The Kamala Nehru College Department of English has been collaborating with Katha India, a non-profit organization that is committed to the literacy to literature continuum, and works with producing and publishing quality translations of fiction and non-fiction for children and adults. Their ongoing project is called *Translating India/Understanding Diversity*, under the stewardship of noted poet, critic, translator and academic Dr. Sukrita Paul Kumar, Aruna Asaf Ali Chair, Cluster Innovation Centre, University of Delhi, with support from IGNOU. The following translations were undertaken as part of this project: the students were asked to pick up any short story in their mother tongue and translate the same. After they sent in their stories, a session was conducted at the Katha centre with practising translators in different languages who helped them edit and refine their translations. The aim of this particular activity has been to hone the skills of the students and build comfort and proficiency in at least two languages so that they are able to translate. This project also seeks to build a network of enthusiastic young people who can aid and assist each other in the task of translation and also bridge the rich, plural linguistic culture of India. The translations into English included in *White Noise* were edited and finalised by Sylvia Sagolsem, faculty in the English Department and are being published here for the first time.

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Grief-Stricken


Translation of Pushkar Nath's Urdu story "Dard Ka Maara"

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B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year

When the little English girl passed by the shop for the third consecutive time, Samad Ju turned his face away from the hookah pipe and looked at the tiger cub toy, which was placed on a carved walnut stool inside the shop. It looked as though it was waiting for its mother. He smiled a little but then the next moment, the smile changed to a desolate expression. Just like trees get covered and surrounded by snow during the severe cold nights of January, sadness surrounded him as it turned into sorrow.

Samad's shop had been situated on the river embankment from the time during which the British had been residents there. The foreign men and women used to take walks on the embankment in the evening. The music of Walter could be heard in the Srinagar clubs throughout the night. At that time 'Samad and Sons, Taxidermist' was a famous shop. The



British used to buy various stuffed animals from this shop, like cheetahs, the birds of Wular Lake, the ducks of Manasbal and so on. Samad had learned the art of stuffing animal skin with cotton from his father, Ramzaan.

Ramzaan himself had been an illiterate man, but his hands were gifted. People, like the well-educated British lot, used to praise his work beyond limit. Those very Britishers had introduced foreign education, medicine, silver coins et cetera in our country. It is said that one of the British rulers, George VI was so happy with his work that he presented him with a certificate which included praise like “If Ramzaan had been working in London, then King George VI certainly would have honoured him with ‘Sir’ after seeing his work.”

But it was a sorrowful matter that Ramzaan had lost his certificate and everything that he owned, in a fire accident at his home. In the blink of an eye, everything had burned down to ashes. At that time, Samad was around 18 years old and the Second World War had just come to an end. In this accident, Ramzaan got paralyzed. Consequently, Haaji Ismaeel lost his favourite worker.

Ramzaan taught his son Samad everything about the work of a taxidermist. It’s as though the talent was transferred from father to son. Samad definitely made his father proud. There was a popular rumour amongst the people of the embankment that a British colonel’s daughter had once suddenly kissed the rough, rugged hands of Samad after seeing a wild hen he had made.

As the prices of raw materials were hiked, Samad could not work with Haaji Ismaeel for a long time.

Samad’s mother was suffering from tuberculosis because of the accident that took place in his house. Only the bourgeoisie and the rich could pay the doctor’s fees. So, in order to collect money, Samad sold the items that he’d made at various shops to the foreigners living in the houseboats of Gagribal. His luck reached a turning point when, just before Independence, Lord Gordon decided to go back to England, leaving behind his shop named ‘Cigars and Candy’. Coincidentally, Samad had gotten hold of the shop and within a few months he established his business under the name ‘Samad and Sons, Taxidermist’ and became extremely famous. It was due to a combination of his talent, hard work and simplicity that he achieved much status and fame. He had now earned his place among the elite members in society.

He got up and gently began stroking the back of the tiger cub kept on the walnut table, and then observed the glass eyes that he had fitted into its face. It had taken him 15 days only to complete the face. He touched the sharp pointed teeth that he had made very carefully. He believed that a nearby observer would definitely feel like this tiger cub was about to raise its left paw and pounce on someone.

The girl might have observed the same thing, which made her come back to the shop again and again. When she entered the shop in a very shy and queer manner and stood in front of the walnut stool, a strange sound escaped her lips. It was neither a scream nor a gasp of awe.

Samad felt like it was the sound that children make when they see the sun rising for the first time.

In a very cordial but hesitant tone, she asked Samad about the price of the cub, to which he replied, 'Rupees 2700'. She didn't answer but gazed at the tiger cub again and exited the shop.

At around 2 p.m., Samad was about to go into another room to have his lunch. At that very moment, the girl came again and stood in front of the shop, stared at the toy wide-eyed for a few seconds and softly walked away. Samad took note of her lips quivering.

As the girl went by his shop for the third time, he was absent-mindedly stroking the fur of the tiger cub and thought of the time when he was around 18 and had lost his home in a fire. He remembered how his lips used to quiver whenever he saw a beautiful house or a Chevrolet. Till date, he had not understood why it used to happen. But obviously times change. He now owned a house in Magarmal Bagh, had two cars. Every Sunday he would take his grandsons for a ride. Occasionally he took them to Khayam or to a movie in Firdous Cinema and always made sure that the smiles on their face would never turn to quivering lips.

Although he had workers working for him, he had crafted the tiger cub himself, the previous year. Something had drawn him into making it, as if the artist inside him had suddenly risen ... and now ... the little girl was drawn towards the expression of his talent, his work of art.

Samad, bringing the image of the girl to mind, realized that he had gone through the same thing himself. Temptation at that young age takes hold of a person. He felt pity for her! Oh poor little girl, desired to have the moon in the palm of her hand. But when one doesn't even possess a common mirror, the moon seems so far off. Out of sight, out of reach ... but still close to her heart. Close to her soundless quivering lips. He realized that she may not be wealthy enough to spend that much money to fulfil her desires. How awful it is to be in such a situation when your heart draws you to one thing but your empty pocket takes you in another direction! It makes you helpless, miserable and full of despair, which is a sin.

Samad decided that it was in his hands to help the child. He did some calculations on a piece of paper. He deducted the profit and the labour cost and decided to sell the tiger cub based on the cost of the material used. The Almighty had already provided him with enough and he was grateful for that. This little gesture would bring a smile on the child's face and whenever she'd see the tiger cub, set as a beautiful decoration piece at her own house, it would remind her of Kashmir.

When the girl approached the shop again, she stated in a very soft voice, "I can't help it. I'm in love with the tiger cub but I can't afford it. Things in *Kaasmir* (speaking Urdu like the novice she was) ... too costly. Ahh! What to do?" She looked down with a sigh.

Samad smiled down upon her and said, "I know madam. I understand your problem. But don't you worry, don't you worry at all. I have an idea. I'll sell this tiger cub at cost price. I've done all the calculations. Only material cost ... getting me? So it comes down around

1,780. I just want you to be happy, my child. That way, my lord will be happy with me.” Samad’s tone was full of affection and enthusiasm.

“What did you say? You just deducted 1000. Oh my god! How could the cost be reduced so much, in just a day? I’d been warned in my country ... that the people of this country are all cheaters. They were right. I’ll take it for 500. Now tell me!”

Very slowly these harsh words pierced through him, running deep like poison. He was shocked and dumbfounded.

“Listen, 500 is what I’ll give you. Give it or leave it. You fluctuate the price according to your own will and make us haggle and bargain.”

Samad wanted to say something but only soundless quivering escaped his lips. No words were expressed. He stood up. Picked up the piece of paper on which he had done all the calculations just a few minutes ago and began shredding it to pieces, as if in a daze. My lord! It was as though the tiger cub had pounced onto his chest and pierced, with its pointed teeth, Samad’s throat.

Alone

Translation of Mahasweta Devi’s
Bengali story “Ekla”

Eesha Roy Chowdhury

B.A. (Hons.) Psychology, First Year


It is a Saturday evening and Tilak is watching TV. Mother and Father are out on their weekly shopping trip and are supposed to visit Uncle Bishu, Father’s closest friend, afterwards. It will be around 7 by the time they come back.

“Do not open the door to strangers,” Father had told Tilak. “If the doorbell rings, you must check if it is us.” He had gone on and on with many more such instructions.

Tilak doesn’t like the movie they’re showing on TV but he’s watching it anyway. A moustachioed man on the screen has been singing to himself while harvesting paddy for quite some time now. Action movies are so much better than this nonsense!

All of a sudden, a miracle happens! The man, his song, the paddy fields disappear and Tilak sees a strapping young boy around his age, standing in the middle of the television screen.

“Hey Tilak!”



Tilak is dumbfounded. Is this a part of the movie?

“Is anyone at home?”

“No, there’s no one,” Tilak finds himself saying. “Just me and my cat, Mouri.”

“Oh, I see!”

The boy jumps out of the TV screen and Tilak sees that he is as tall as him. Bare bodied, wearing a pair of shorts and with a head full of curls, the boy smiles and asks, “I hope you didn’t get scared?”

“Where did the movie go?” Tilak wants to know.

“Sent the moustachioed guy to a real paddy field. Of course he’s still singing in that hoarse voice of his but the villagers there will soon give him a taste of his own medicine!”

“Medicine?”

“You know what I mean! You think they’ll let him go on singing songs like ‘Oh My Sweet Paddy’?”

What an adventure! But Tilak asks, “What is your name? And what on earth is happening?”

“My name is Alone.”

“Alone?”

“Yeah, Alone. I was sitting on your TV antenna. When I found that you are alone too, I came down here. Tell me, does anyone like being alone?”

“Does that mean you’re from another planet?”

The boy pretends not to hear him. Instead, he says very gravely, “I got rid of Mr. Moustache. Now, let’s see what he’s up to.”

“And how will you do that?”

“The TV is right here!” The boy sits down next to Tilak. And what a surprise! A completely different scene on TV! There’s a crowd in front of a grocery store and a stern-looking man in a *lungi* stroking his beard, and there is Mr. Moustache, looking like he’s just about to cry.

“Hey, where did you come from?”

“Believe me! I’m not here!”

“What do you mean?”

“The movie in which I play a farmer harvesting paddy and singing, is being aired on TV. The real me is playing cards at his home in Calcutta at the moment.”

“Are you mad?”

“Please believe me! My name is Vijayendu Mitra. In all my movies, I play a farmer who sings while harvesting paddy.”

“Why the hell were you singing like that?”

“Because I was harvesting paddy!”

A brash young man comes forward and says, “Well, we harvest paddy too! Who the hell sings then?”

“Who sings then, huh?” Everyone choruses. “Harvesting crop and singing while wearing a towel over white briefs, were you?”

“Please let me go!”

The man in the *lungi* says, “Even the sickle is made of tin. Are you a paddy thief? But then there is no paddy in the fields either. You must be mad!”

“I must be! Now please let me go!”

“Where will you go?”

“Why? Calcutta, of course!”

Calcutta!

Everyone bursts into laughter. The *lungi* clad man asks, “Do you even know where you are?”

“No sir. I feel dizzy.”

“You are in the Gopalpur village under the Kanthi division in Midnapore. Kanthi is a 16 mile-bus ride from here. From there, you catch a bus to Calcutta. And it’s raining today. The bus to Kanthi isn’t plying.”

Mr. Moustache continues to cry.

“What is all this?” Tilak asks.

“Let him be. Will put him back in the movie later. Come, let’s talk. So this is your cat? Why have you named her ‘Mouri’?”

“Should names always have a reason behind them? Why is your name ‘Alone’?”

Alone smiled. “Because I visit people who are alone.”

“Can you go wherever you want?”

“Of course.”

“Even to my grandma’s?”

“Oh sure. Wait. Grandma ... Baruipur ... single-storey house ... she’s chopping betel nuts ... a dark, skinny man is chopping hay in the yard.”

“Yeah, that’s Chituda. Grandma has three cows. That’s why she can never come to Calcutta.”

“I’ll go to her when she’s lonely. Mouri? Hey, Mouri! Gosh, just look at her sleep!”

Mouri stretches her limbs and sits up. She yawns and says with perfect enunciation, “Will you even let me sleep? You didn’t even let me sleep on the terrace the other day. You’re horrible!”

What? Mouri can speak?

“You heard her speak, didn’t you?”

“Will she talk to me?”

“What would I talk to *you* about?” Mouri asks “You people are so stupid, a conversation with you would make me laugh.” And with a smile, she walks out of the room.

“What a monkey you are!” Tilak exclaims.

“No, don’t! Don’t call me a monkey! I’m turning into one. See, I’m growing fur ... a tail ...”

“Oh no! No you’re not a monkey! Please don’t grow fur and turn into one! Mouri is talking, things in the movie have become messy and now you’re turning into a monkey! What am I going to tell my parents?”

“Why would you say anything? Do you tell your parents everything?”

“Definitely!”

“Oh yeah? Did you tell them that you were the one who’d broken the neighbours’ window with a slingshot? That you have *phuchka* after school every day? That you kick your friends on the leg while playing? That you were the one who ruined the alarm clock in a fit of experimentation?”

“This is amazing! You know everything about me?”

“E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G,” Alone says. “I keep track of the lives of so many lonely boys like you.”


“Are you for real?”

“Do you think I’m a ghost?”

“I mean, you came down here through the antenna...”

“Do ghosts have arms like mine? See for yourself. Let’s arm-wrestle.”

His arms really do feel like those of a human. Tilak loses in arm-wrestling to Alone.



“How do you keep sitting there on the TV antenna?”

“I move from antenna to antenna.”

“Where do you live?”

“I go wherever I want. The rhinoceros in the zoo was feeling really lonely. I stayed with him for a couple of days. I visit the fairy statue at the Victoria Memorial every night. She’s very lonely too.”

“Poor thing!”

“Not at all. The British had put her there and she acts like them too! ‘Why is Calcutta getting so dirty?’ ‘Why is the Maidan shrinking?’ ‘Why are you cutting all the trees?’ A hundred complaints!”

“Will you take me along one day?”

“Definitely not!”

“Then why don’t you stay here?”

Alone can’t help but laugh at that.

“What will you tell your parents about me? That I’m a friend of yours who jumped out of the TV screen?”

“I’ll make something up.”

“I thought you never lie?”


“Fine, I’ll tell the truth.”

“Will they believe you? Do you think grownups will believe you when you tell them all this stuff?”

No. It really is impossible to get grownups to believe you. Grownups never want to believe anything. Tilak had once told Father that the pterodactyl was about the same size as an ordinary crow. He knows such things because he reads. But Father had said, “Don’t talk rubbish!”

Tilak is very prone to injuries. “I’d fallen down while playing” or “Tiklu had pushed me” are what he usually tells Mother but she says, “Don’t talk rubbish! You must have brought it upon yourself!”

Listening to Uncle Bishu makes him cringe. “Tilak, you’re going to be in the news one day! By the age of ten, you’ve had so many injuries and fractures under your belt! Oh, you’re just like a soldier at war!”



“So you can see that, right? Mother, Father, Uncle Bishu ... no one’s going to believe you. Just try telling them that Mouri can talk.”

“How did you know what I’d been thinking? Please tell me, how do you always know?”

Alone pretends not to hear.

“Anyway, your parents will be back any time now. Let’s talk about your school until then.”

“School? Why do you want to talk about school?”

“You hate school because of the Math teacher?”

“Oh, don’t even get me started about him! The way he punches us!”

“Let’s have some fun with him.”

“How?”

“Just watch.”

Alone tinkers around with the TV set and what does Tilak see? The same balding head, the mole above the brow, the baggy pants and bush shirt ... it is the Math teacher no doubt! But why is he crying, sitting on the banks near the Hooghly Imambarah?

“Talk to him.”

“Can he hear me?”

“Try.”

“I’m scared.”

“You’re feeling scared?”

“You talk to him.”

“Would have been nice if he could see you. The thing is, he can only see the one who talks to him.”

“And when I go to school?”

“Why would anything happen? Okay, I’ll see. Excuse me, Mr. Gopesh? Mr. Math Teacher?”

The Math Teacher is dumbfounded.

“Who are you?”

“What are you doing over there?”

“Are you a student?”

“No no. My name is Mr. Alone. My question is, why do I see you on TV? Can’t one even watch a movie without you around? This is why everyone in the neighbourhood calls you Slinky Gopesh. You keep slinking about!”

“TV? Me? This is spooky! Downright spooky! I was just out to buy tea leaves!”

“You came all the way to Chinsurah to get tea leaves?”

“My head started to spin all of a sudden. Then I found myself here. Oh, heavens! How did I end up in Chinsurah from Bhawanipore?”

“Why wouldn’t you? This is your punishment!”

“Pray, why? Why am I being punished?”

“In the past seven days, you’ve punched nineteen boys in class, spilt snuff on the notebooks of three boys and travelled without a bus ticket for four days out of seven. You’ve also thrown empty banana skins on the street and thus contributed to your son’s broken leg.”

“Who are you, son? A God?”

“I’m Alone.”

“Please help me get back home, son!”

“You can always travel from Chinsurah to Calcutta. You have money for the tea leaves with you. Remember, the more the punches, the harsher the punishment. I’ll send you to Ladakh next time.”

“Please don’t! It’s cold there and I won’t know how to return! I’ll die of fear!”

“I’ll let you go this one time. But when you treat the entire class to sweets, I’ll know you really have changed for the better.”

“Please take me back home, son!”

“Why are you whining so much? There’s cash in your pocket! Just go!”

Alone switches off the TV. He strikes a pose and says, “Saw that?”

Tilak starts stammering out of excitement. “Did he really not see me? Did he just see you alone?”

“He saw Alone alone. But why are you so nervous? Boys who have to be alone sometimes can’t afford to be so nervous. You’re lucky that it’s just me. What if a burglar had broken in?”

“I would have yelled.”

“Courage. Courage is what you need. Get it?”



“I wish I could be more like you.”

“Oh, you would have been crying of homesickness had you been me.”

“Alone?”

“Yes?”

“Please tell me who you are.”

“Some other day. I really need to go now.”

Alone starts to stroke Tilak’s hair. Waves of pleasure wash over Tilak at the touch of his fingers. His eyes start to close.

“Alone?” He asks in a drowsy voice.

“Yes?”

“Are you trying to hypnoti ...”

Tilak never gets to finish his sentence. From far, far away, Alone’s voice says, “I’m not hypnotizing you. Just lulling you to sleep. Taking leave of my friends breaks my heart, the way it is breaking yours.”

“Where are you going?”

“Let’s not talk anymore now.”

Tilak falls fast asleep. Mouri snuggles up beside him. He doesn’t notice.

After having rung the doorbell incessantly, Tilak’s parents start banging the front door and screaming, thus gathering a crowd. People from the nearby flats join them.

Tilak is there but why doesn’t he respond?

Tilak’s Mother bursts into tears. Mr. Arun from the opposite flat says, “Can we have some silence? Vikas, let us call out to him together. If he’s asleep, he’ll wake up. If he doesn’t, we’ll have to break the door.”

If that dreadful roar of “T-I-L-A-K!!!!” hadn’t broken Tilak’s slumber, the door would indeed have been broken down. An uproar starts the moment Tilak opens the door. Grownups really are pathetic! Everyone was paranoid about what might have happened to Tilak.

And after that?

“Hey! What happened? Why weren’t you answering the door?” Tilak’s father shouts.

“I was sleeping.”

“Sleeping? You call this sleep?”

Mr. Arun folds his hand and says, “He is Kumbhakarna reincarnate! Good heavens! No one’s ever seen such deep sleep in years! Thank goodness, Mazumdar. We didn’t have to break down your door.”

Mrs. Shivpuri, the doctor, squeals, “If the boy eats so much rice, of course he’ll feel sleepy.”

Tilak’s mother was losing her mind wondering what might have happened to her precious son. Instead of feeling relieved to find him safe, she bursts out, “Sleep? Do you call this sleep?”

Looking at everyone around him, Tilak is certain that it won’t be easy telling them about Alone.

Mother switches on the TV the moment she enters.

The same wretched movie! But a surprise! Mr. Moustache is still harvesting paddy but he’s not singing. Instead, he’s repeating to himself, “No songs. No songs. No more songs!”

“What’s this?” Tilak’s mother wonders. “Isn’t he supposed to sing ‘Oh My Sweet Paddy’ in the last scene?”

“Oh, who cares?” Father says. “The music in this film is as terrible as Jhontu Ganguly’s songs!”

Tilak wants to tell them that people who harvest paddy in real life never sing like that. He resists.

Had Alone really come? Had he not? Had it all been a dream?

It must have been a dream! It must! But was it?

There is no denying the fact that the Math teacher did not come to school on Monday.

The next day, when he did come, he’d changed completely! No more punches, no more spilling snuff, just kind words like, “Look here, son! Did you understand that, son? Come, see, solve the math problems like this!”

The day he received his salary, he said, “I’ll treat you all to *rasagullas* on the last day of school.”

Then that means Alone wasn’t a dream?

Tilak goes to the terrace and checks all the TV antennae, thinking about Alone all the while.

He was home all by himself a few Saturdays. Where did Alone go?

He'll definitely come someday. Mouri sits by Tilak's side with her back arched and ears perked up. She and Tilak both know that Alone is real. Very real. He's probably visiting other lonely little boys at the moment. He'll turn up all of a sudden one day.

And this time, Tilak will grab him by the hand and never let him go.

Beggar's Reward

Translation of a Hindi Folktale

Vidhipssa Mohan

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A beggar found a wallet made of leather in the market. He looked into the wallet. There were a hundred gold coins inside the wallet. The beggar heard a merchant shouting, "My leather wallet is lost. Whoever finds it and gives it to me, I will give him a reward."

The beggar was an honest man. He gave over the wallet to the merchant and said, "Here is your wallet. Will you give me the reward?"

"Reward!" The merchant said with disgust while counting his gold coins. "There were two hundred gold coins in the wallet. You stole half the amount and now you are asking for a reward! Go away or else I will call the soldiers."

After showing his honesty, the beggar could not tolerate the vain accusation. "I haven't stolen anything. I am ready to go to the court."

The judge listened to both of them patiently and said, "I trust both of you. I will do justice. Merchant, you say that you had two hundred gold coins. But the wallet that the beggar found has only a hundred gold coins. This means this is not your wallet. Since there is no candidate for the wallet that the beggar found, I command that half the amount is deposited to the State's treasury and the other half goes to the beggar as his reward."

The dishonest merchant was left repenting. Now he could not say it was his wallet even if he wanted to because he would be punished severely if he did that. Because of the just judge, the beggar got his reward.

Translation of a Hindi Oral Folktale

Sukriti Pandey

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There was once a sparrow who was really hungry, so she flew here and there looking for food. She came across a chickpea which she picked up in her beak and took to the Carpenter to break. Accidentally, the chickpea fell into the hollow handle of a grinding-wheel and got stuck there.

Alarmed, the sparrow went to the Carpenter and said, “Carpenter, Carpenter break the grinding-wheel, my chickpea is stuck in there! What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I take with me abroad?”

But the Carpenter said, “Shoo! Shoo! Don’t bother me with such trivial problems.”

The bird then went to an Ironsmith and said, “Ironsmith, Ironsmith scold the Carpenter, the Carpenter won’t break the grinding-wheel, my chickpea is stuck there! What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I take with me abroad?”

But the Ironsmith too dismissed her and said, “Shoo! Shoo! Don’t bother me with such trivial problems.”

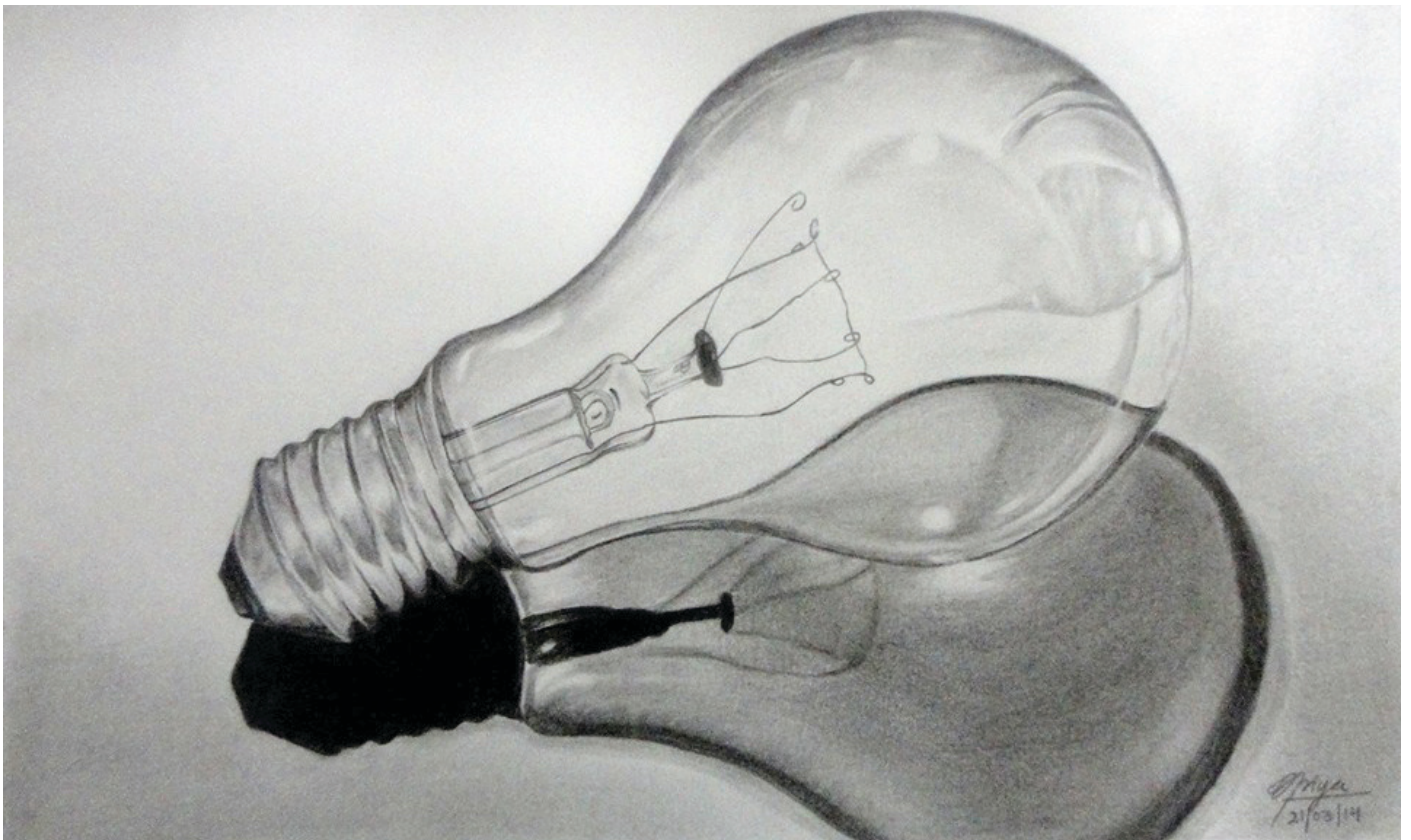
The bird then went to the Queen and complained, “Queen, Queen scold the Ironsmith, the Ironsmith, won’t scold the Carpenter, the Carpenter won’t break the grinding-wheel, my chickpea is stuck in the wheel! What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I take with me abroad?”

But the Queen too dismissed her and said, “Shoo! Shoo! Don’t bother me with such trivial problems.”

The sparrow then went to the King and said, “King, King scold the Queen, the Queen won’t scold the Ironsmith, the Ironsmith won’t scold the Carpenter, the Carpenter won’t break the grinding wheel, my chickpea is stuck in the wheel! What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I take with me abroad?”

The King then called the Carpenter and ordered him to break the wheel and said, “Carpenter, Carpenter break the wheel! Her chickpea is stuck in the wheel! She has to eat it, drink it, and take it with her abroad!”

The carpenter then broke the wheel and gave the bird her chickpea, which she happily took and flew away.



Untitled

Pencil

Anu Priya, B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year



Untitled

Pencil

Anu Priya, B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year



Saving Alice
Ink on watercolour
Anu Priya, B.A. (Hons.) English, Second Year

Saving Alice: Artist's Note

'Saving Alice' depicts the creator of *Alice in Wonderland*, Charles Dodgson (a.k.a. Lewis Carroll), reaching out to his child friend and lifelong muse, Alice Liddell. Dodgson holds out his hand towards a young Alice and tries to free her from the grips of time, but his inability to do so leaves him sad and helpless. Most of Dodgson's works explore these nostalgic undertones about the loss of childhood and innocence with the passage of time. The fear that his child friends would forget him when they grow up was something that he carried with himself. Writing to Alice Pleasance Liddell in the prelude to *Through the Looking-Glass*, he writes:

I have not seen thy sunny face,
Nor heard thy silver laughter;
No thought of me shall find a place
In thy young life's hereafter –

Carroll's relationship with Alice has been the subject of much debate due to suspicions of his supposed paedophilic interest towards her. Looking from this perspective, the artwork is a representation of Carroll's attempt to save Alice from growing up and turning into an adult. However, the inevitability of time renders his attempts futile. Sucked into the time whirlpool, Liddell grows into a woman and the relationship that she once shared with Dodgson is now just a memory.

Dodgson remained a Mathematics professor at Christ Church College for a large part of his life but behind the sombre attire of a Math don, there was a man who came alive in the company of kids. *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* are not just explorations of his relationship with Liddell but also his relationship with himself and his childhood. The puzzles, drawings, and anagrams through which he entertained his brothers and sisters as children find their way into his works and form a major fraction of both the texts. A part of his childhood is reflected in the image of Alice and the creatures of Wonderland. The topsy-turvy world of Wonderland defies the rules of reality where a single bite from the mushroom allows his protagonist to grow without turning into an adult and shrink, without returning to infancy. Dodgson's escape into Wonderland was therefore an escape from the clutches of time and from its ability to turn the present into past, childhood into adulthood. In reaching out to Alice, he is hoping to hold on to the innocence of his own fleeting childhood.

The artwork also explores humanity's fascination with preserving memories and encapsulating time through various techniques. Dodgson's fascination led him to photography, writing, and sketching. While his passion for photography allowed him to capture the innocence of the young girls he befriended, his daily journals kept alive the events of his life. Dodgson and Alice look unhappy at the hands of time but both are unaware of the timeless reality that surrounds them in the form of the art that Dodgson created in his lifetime. The pages surrounding him belong to the books that have now become ageless classics. The characters he created still remain as crazy and confusing as they were a hundred and fifty years ago when the world was first introduced to his Wonderland. Most of all, Alice, whom he could not save as Dodgson, was immortalized in history when penned down by the hands of Carroll, the artist.

The legacy of Wonderland that Carroll left behind not only saved him but also helped the countless people who read it – as they found a part of themselves reverberating in the pages of his work. Therefore, to put it simply, this artwork is a representation of a man's struggle with time and his triumph over it. In the end, the artwork makes a humble attempt to preserve itself in time by taking a final picture of itself with the Collodion Camera that Dodgson used for saving the beauty that he encountered in his life.

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