



Fragile Innocence

Balcony





Balcony

A literary magazine with an International reach

Editor

Jill Charles

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Editor

Jill Charles, IL, USA

Group Editor

Ranjita Chattopadhyay, IL, USA

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Kajal & Subrata, Kolkata, India

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Krishnakoli Bose

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Front Cover

Fragile Innocence – Oil on Canvas



Krishnakoli Bose lives in Melbourne.

Heart & soul Calacian.

Professionally Cloud Solution Architect.

“My analytical left brain is always being challenged by my creative right brain with music, painting, poetry, photography yet to find the winner...”

My favourit quote “Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.”

– Oscar Wilde

Saumen Chattopadhyay

IL, USA

Front Inside Cover

Stained glass window



Saumen is an avid outdoor enthusiast and enjoys hiking, trekking, and photography. He also takes part in recitation, drama, mind science. Saumen is an entrepreneur in the field of investment research and portfolio management. He lives in Chicago.

Tirthankar Banerjee

Perth, Western Australia

Title Page



His interest in photography started in student days. Much later the long nights in the dark-room were replaced by hours behind the computer and focus shifted from Black & White to Colour. He likes to show the images as they are and does not approve of computer gimmickry.

Tirthankar is an engineer, specializing in Renewable Energy.

Gautam Bandyopadhyay

Boston, USA

Back Cover

Rainbow from Balcony



Dr. Gautam Bandyopadhyay is a retired technology and innovation management professional with more than forty years of industrial experience in multinational corporations. Writing & photography is his retirement-hobby.

Suparna Chatterjee

Perth, Western Australia

Back Inside Cover

Through a convict's lens



Suparna is a Senior IT project manager in the public sector. Amid tight schedules, her dream of becoming an author thrives, driven by a passion for storytelling. Her narratives echo the migrant's grief, seasoned with lived experiences and the joy of travel. Balancing work with the enchantment of motherhood, Suparna finds laughter, love, and a craving for precious time with her family.

Our heartfelt thanks to all our contributors and readers for overwhelming support and response.

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Editorial



I am living in the midst of Chicago winter, while it is the warm season for my *Balcony* community in Australia. White frost covers the trees. Icicles hang from the roof on the coldest days and deep snow falls outside my window as I work from home. I appreciate my cozy home in winter: the fireplaces, cooking in the kitchen, my cat purring on my lap and my family around me.

This winter my red amaryllis flower bloomed indoors for the second time. The bulb had been dormant in the garage for three months before it flowered again. It reminds me of art that comes in a burst of inspiration in everyday life.

In this issue of *Balcony* you will find many inspired poems, stories and articles. Love of country inspires Alfred Taylor's *India, Oh India*. An epiphany in the desert appears in M.C. Rydel's *80 Days With Angels*. A girl moves toward womanhood in Lakshmi Kanchi's *Rose bush*. Dennis Haskell recalls Alfred Taylor's extraordinary life in *Obituary*.

No matter what season you are in, *Balcony* welcomes you to read, learn, and enjoy.

Jill Charles

Balcony English Editor

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In Memorium

On April 15, 2021, we had the honor of hosting Alfred Taylor, the renowned Australian poet, at the launch of the inaugural edition of the Balcony, the English publication by Batayan Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering cultural exchange. Mr. Taylor captivated the audience, especially those with Indian heritage, with his reading of the poem “India, Oh India,” featured in this edition. The profound love and wonder expressed in his verses left a lasting impression.

The experience of having such an eminent figure among us was truly remarkable. Following the formalities, Mr. Taylor further endeared himself to everyone with his gentle and kind demeanor, even charming the youngest member of our group – my one-year-old grandson.

Regrettably, this encounter proved to be our first and final direct interaction with him, as his untimely passing cut short our expectations. Although he is no longer with us, his enduring work ensures that his poetic legacy lives on indefinitely.

India, Oh India

India, Oh India,
How graciously you treated me;
What... have I done
To deserve such
A privilege;
Your honour and valour
You have bestowed upon me,
Have enthralled me,
So enthusiastically
With no doubt
An overwhelming impression
Upon my heart:
Chennai, Delhi and Hyderabad,
I see a wonder in you
Which I have yet
To encounter again.

India... Oh India,
My partings with you
Are not yet over,
My sails are set to be
Engulfed by
Your wondrous mist
Which will clean my soul
On the shores
Of your land.
India... Oh India,
My longing for you
I cannot understand,
Safe on my own shores,
But still I see
The Bay of Bengal
Is calling me.

Alfred Taylor

Published in printed Balcony (Vol 2, January, 2021)

Alfred Taylor: Obituary

Alf Taylor (19 November, 1945 - 29 July) was the leading Nyoongar writer of his generation and the author of six literary works published by Magabala Books. One of them, *Long Time Now* (a collection of short stories), was translated into Spanish and published in Barcelona as *Voz del Pasado*.

A member of the 'stolen generation' of black children forcibly removed from their parents by the white colonial government, Alf spent his childhood, from the ages of 5 to 15 in New Norcia Mission. The experience is unforgettably recounted in his 2005 memoir, *God, the Devil, and Me*.

Alf taught himself to read, and always remembered the 50s children's books about Dick and Dora which enabled him to become literate.

When he and I gave public interviews he would often tell how as a kid, walking into the library 'his little heart would go boom-boom-boom', the way it later did as a teenager when looking at the beautiful yorgrah (indigenous Noongar language word for women). Out of that limited education came his remarkable books: it is by any measure an extraordinary achievement.

Alf was humble, unpretentious, kind, friendly, with an unfailing sense of humour. He was a courageous, gentle man with a generosity of spirit unmatched by that of anyone else I ever met. His imagination was bigger than the whale that swallowed Jonah in the Hebrew legend.

Alf gave invited readings of his work in France, England, India, Spain and throughout Australia. Senator Dorinda Cox spoke of Alf in the Australian Parliament on Tuesday 1st August.

Alf was chosen for an Honorary Research Associate attached to the discipline of English at UWA and the Reid Library will hold his papers in their Special Collection. A film was made about his life in 2016 and was shown at the Revelation Film Festival and at his funeral. Another film about him will be shown on SBS around October and the Centre for Stories in Northbridge will be hosting a celebration of his life and work. Alf visited Chennai, Delhi and Hyderabad, and had a great affection for India.

Dennis Haskell is Emeritus Professor at the University of Western Australia and one of Western Australia's most significant poets.

Dennis Haskell

Gautam Bandyopadhyay

Immigrant Experience – What is in a name?

I arrived in Berkeley, CA from Kolkata on Sep 21, 1969 to start my graduate studies in engineering. The next day, I went to my department in the University of California, Berkeley campus and met Prof. Fulrath; I communicated with him from India during my application process. He was a tall handsome gentleman in his late 40s. He extended his welcoming arm to shake hands and started to say, “Good to finally meet you Mr. Bandy.....” But he stumbled with my 13-letter last name Bandyopadhyay. I smiled and politely tried to help him walk through the pronunciation in my usual well-practiced response from many similar previous situations, “it is not as difficult as it looks.... the 'y's are silent... etc. etc.” He listened carefully and then asked me with a grin on his face, “Can I call you Gus?”

I did not know what he meant by his question. I nervously looked at him. The next thing I heard from him was, “So Gus, now that you are here...” and he continued his instructions for me for what I needed to do to get started in the department. In the next ten minutes of this conversation, he called me a few times with my new 'name', and he introduced me to his secretary as 'Gus'. The secretary smiled and said, “Welcome”.

Prof. Fulrath then instructed me to take a 15-minute ride in a shuttle bus to go up the Berkeley Hills to Lawrence Radiation Laboratory (now known as Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory) to do necessary paperwork related to my research. The financial assistantship that I received from the university was awarded from this lab. Before I left for this new location, he called a number in the Lawrence Lab and, once again, referred to me as Gus and requested them to help me when I get there.

As I was walking out of the building, I was a little confused. Did it mean that suddenly I had a new name for myself? This is not what I expected during my first visit to the campus. Not surprisingly, when I got to the office of the Lawrence Lab, the young lady welcomed me with my newly acquired name.

The name given to me by my Ph. D. Professor in Berkeley within the first five minutes of our meeting, stuck with me throughout my professional career for the next 50 years!! As much as I disliked using a 'cooked-up' name with my Western colleagues, I realized over time that this solved an unanticipated problem for me in my working life in USA it was an easy way out from explaining every time what to do with the floating 'y's in my last name.

Actually, most Westerners would agree that my first name 'Gautam' is not too difficult to say, but just looking at the 13-letter y-infested last name most people are intimidated, and they would not even try my simple first name. But switching to 'Gus' took that uneasy feeling out from the conversation and made me less of a 'foreigner' to them. So, I made peace with my professor-given name for my entire professional career for the last 50+ years.

This was not the only time that I was surprised with a name change in my life. It happened once before in 1962. Prior to my Higher Secondary (high school) final examination, I submitted all necessary forms with '*Goutam Banerjee*' as my official name that existed in my school admission record since I joined school in third grade. Surprisingly, the official certificate came back as '*Gautam Bandyopadhyay*'; the spelling of the first name was changed and the last name was changed as well to the longer original Indian version of the name *Banerjee*. Board of Secondary Education, West Bengal took it upon themselves to make these changes without my knowledge and consent!!

The change in the spelling of my first name was not a problem. Bengalis use many variations of English spelling for even common and popular names. Some standardization was not necessarily bad for the naming system. However, I was annoyed and upset with the change in my last name, although to me or to my family, Banerjee and Bandyopadhyay were the same surnames. In my mind, all Bengalis knew that too. Bandyopadhyay is the original Sanskrit version and a common last name of

Brahmins from the Bengal region of India. This was a mouthful for the Britishers during the colonial period just like the way it appeared to my professor when he first saw the spelling. Thus, the Anglicized and simpler version of the same last name evolved as Banerjee. The two names coexisted peacefully in Bengali society without any conflict. The default identity was almost always the shorter, simpler version used for all normal communication and records such as official school records. The longer Indian version was commonly used for Bengali social occasions such as weddings. It was never a confusion to those familiar with this peculiar nuance.

Incidentally, Banerjees were not the only victims of such name change by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education; other common anglicized Bengali names such as Mukherjee, Chatterjee, Ganguly were also changed to the original Sanskrit forms of Mukhopadhyay, Chattopadhyay, and Gangopadhyay, respectively. Furthermore, many other common Bengali last names that were often spelled in many different ways were changed to a standardized version as dictated by the bureaucrats.

I was never sure why the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education took it upon themselves to make this major change officially without consent. It was possible that after Indian independence, the country was in the mood of Indianizing everything including names impacted by the British colonization. Even new names for cities such as Kolkata for Calcutta, or Mumbai for Bombay were a few of those well-known changes back to the original Indian versions. My anglicized last name appeared to become a victim to this Indianizing hype of the moment!

Unfortunately, my earlier belief that everybody knew Banerjee and Bandyopadhyay were variations of the same name, was grossly unfounded; most people including many Bengalis outside of Bengal did not know this simple fact. I learned this when I took my first job in Bombay. My instinct was to introduce myself to my new colleagues and friends as Banerjee (by habit and my identity in my youth), but most of them would have a bewildered look - they thought I had a different name! Then I went through this monologue of how both names were the same etc. etc., but no matter how many times I explained and wanted to go back to Banerjee, my

effort failed. I realized then that thanks to the whim of the West Bengal Board of Education, my identity from my youth was changed forever. Suddenly, I developed a strong empathy for women who had to give up their maiden names after marriage and had to get used to their new identities. Thankfully this policy was abandoned after a few years; the newer generations do not have to go through this unwanted trauma!

After several failed attempts to teach my new colleagues and friends of the origin of my name, I gave up and started to use Bandyopadhyay in my conversations and communications. I reluctantly accepted the change.

When I arrived in America, I already knew the challenge that I had to face with my last name, but I was well prepared. Thankfully, my Professor made my life easy with a simple solution that saved me from explaining every time that the surname should be pronounced without the 'y's and the pronunciation was like BAN-DO-PAD-HI, and the silent 'y's were there because the spelling mimicked the Bengali spelling!!

Often, I thought about switching my last name back to Banerjee primarily for the convenience of my children. But my daughters were not in favor of such a change. They told me as adults, that they loved having the crazy, long last name when they were in school and college found the name to be a good discussion topic and a great ice breaker!! They remained attached to the exotic version and kept it through their college lives and marriages, when they both decided to shift Bandyopadhyay to their middle name. I was happy to see that they wanted to keep their roots alive for their future generations.

Today I almost forgot my Banerjee identity from my youth. Despite being reluctant in the beginning, I am a happy Bandyopadhyay now for more than 50 years. In America, I have become used to the fact that my name would be mauled or would become the subject of funny comments every time it needed to be announced at the airport or any other location. I have learnt to wait and focus on the announcer to see that curious and uncomfortable look trying to decipher the spelling, and before they could say anything, I would jump and identify myself. Like the colonial times, westerners are still struggling to figure out the role of the 3 'y's in pronouncing my surname!!

Despite all these practical difficulties, I was surprised when my wife Jayanti took my last name upon our marriage on her own wish, from her previous 3-letter last name. Her argument was similar to my daughters it is a 'crazy-long beautiful sounding Bengali name'. She also liked the fact that it generated a lot of interesting discussion in her academic community with both students and teachers. Jokingly, she would say, this was one way she could become a 'Boston Brahmin', a phrase used to describe Boston elites in the early Colonial days!!

I have to admit that it took me a while to feel comfortable with the name change. I hated to lose my identity from my youth. Nowadays, whenever I hear a complaint about my difficult name, I would tell them that most school friends of our daughters learnt to pronounce Bandyopadhyay in their grade school and middle school without any difficulty. If they could do it, everybody should be able to do it. The question is how willing are you to try?



Dr. Gautam Bandyopadhyay is a retired technology and innovation management professional with more than forty years of industrial experience in multinational corporations. Writing is his retirement-hobby. His hope is that someday his American-born children and grandchildren would be interested to read his writings to understand a little bit of their father/grandfather who arrived in USA as an engineering Ph.D. student in University of California, Berkeley, fifty years ago.

Trees can never become General Managers

Balarka Banerjee

Trees can never become General Managers. Transferrable jobs, moving from one place to another, these are not for trees. Only after changing many seats, changing many towns does one become a General Manager. Such hard work is not for trees. Trees only stand around, leaning against the railing, one after another. When the wind blows, only then do they speak among themselves, otherwise silence. So idle they are. If someone comes along and waters them, only then do they have a drink. So lazy. They only cover the hillside and fill the hearts of forests. Standing around, they grow old one day. So, they never become General Managers. And those who after many moves and much hard work become General Managers, after retirement, they want to go to a tree. So, one unknown bird song lonely winter afternoon, on a hilly path, the tree and the General Manager finally meet. One has shed his leaves, the other has grey hair. Neither speak. After a long time, the General Manager reaches out and places his hand on the tree's dry aged bark. He wants to touch his own failure. The hand that signed so many pages, feels illiterate today. The tree chimes in the wind.

Translated from the Bengali Poem by Srijato

Book : “Apel Katar Chhuri”

Published by Signet Press, Kolkata



Balarka Banerjee is a Molecular Biologist by profession and an executive in a Biotech company in Sydney. Besides science his other passions are Drama — writing, acting, directing — Poetry and Art. He likes good cinema and music. He is a foodie and a good cook. No wonder he enjoys writing about his experiences and interests.

Lakshmi Kanchi (*SoulReserve*)

Gaudhuli

I am the colour of air
before your arrival,
and now twilight sings
in shades of rising dust.

The ground is beaten soft
under the clamouring hooves of cattle
that return home after a day spent grazing.
It trembles like the leathery,

stretched skin of a drum.
The rising timbre of sounds,
the tintinnabulation of cow-bells ringing
in unison, punctures the standstill sky.

My thirsty eyes scrape moisture
from this drought, and I try to unpluck
your form from amongst these shadows
that move with a fury of a song.

I have waited for this hour,
which becomes thin and slips between
the halted breath of breeze, between
a whimper and a grunt of flared nostrils.

Time settles inside gaps, evening
becomes nightfall. Dust pulls back
from risen space and blankets
every surface in a thin coat.

And I, tinged with restlessness,
light the evening lamp in wait.
It slowly loses its flame, becomes
— *lampdust* soot and smoke.

Goudhuli: Sanskrit for twilight. Derived from the combination of 'gou' (cows) and 'dhuli' (dust), *goudhuli* embodies the hue and spectacle of light from the setting sun seeping through clouds of dust raised by the trample of herded cows returning home after a day of grazing.



“Cattle herded home in the evening in Mozambique” (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) by ILRI

Lakshmi Kanchi (*SoulReserve*)

Rose bush

In October, I transform from child to woman.

In my culture, first blood is celebrated.
Women gather and talk in hushed tones,
mother lights the lamp, while my aunt
teaches me — how to talk (how not to talk),
whom to talk to (whom not to talk to),
how to sit with my legs crossed, what to say...
This becomes important now more than ever.
Although I know it's best to stay silent.

The moon begins to pull its tides and I learn
that the wetness never leaves. With it I change
ever so slightly, like a lake changes with its seasons.
Red bangles, red *bindi* — in the mirror the girl I know
stares back at me, but even a reflection
knows *to stay quiet and still.*

In November, I grow accustomed
to the weight of my silence. This covenant
of blood that all women sign
and keep hidden with their dirty laundry,
like a shameful secret.
They wash and wash yet the stains stay,
finding a way to mark the otherwise clean,
handstitched, and soft pads of cotton cloth.

In December, I become a rose bush,
standing stark in my courtyard.
I flower scarlet red roses, sprout thorns
that are designed to curse and draw blood
without ever speaking.



Lakshmi Kanchi is an emerging Indian-Australian poet on a mission – to make poetry accessible. Her writing anatomises the complex linkages between language, culture, and perception. Author of “Lakesong”, a debut collection, Lakshmi won the 2023 Ros Spencer Poetry Prize and the 2021 Pocketry Prize, and was the Inaugural Poet-in-Residence at The Wetlands Centre Cockburn (2022-23).

Faisal Justin**The Flow of Life**

Life is flowing like the tide
Days and years are passing
Age is increasing in silent
Feeling intense pleasure
Never think of getting older

The final date's getting closer
Missing gladsome of the youth
Crossing umpteen borders
Through this unpredictable life

The days are turning so quicker
Long to celebrate happy new year
No one thinks life's getting nearer
Swimming in luxurious moments
Life is not as long as we expect

The years are fading our strength
Losing fitness and body
No time for indemnifying
Losing things can never bring back

Faisal Justin**The Shadow of Life**

The sun is entering the earth
An O sun's getting a little bigger
Thawing its light all over the orb
Creatures grin by its effectiveness

Life has its shadow and sunlight
Dwelling together as one all the time
Life has its storehouse of placement
Where sorrow and delight gather

Count the blessings every morrow
Come forth with gratitude to God
Let others pursue your life's shadow
Others are gonna concede as a gem

Let the pursuing evils run away
From the shadow of your life
Make record and break record
By showing the light of humanity
Through the shade of the life

Faisal Justin – He is a poet from Minamyar. He is a prolific poet. He has a unique way of expressing his thoughts and feelings. He has composed most of his poems inside a prison.

Allen F. McNair
A New Victory in My Life

What is happening in my brain, I just cannot forget.
And the chemicals are working overtime, to my regret.
My nights are restless as sleep eludes me entire.
My whole body feels as if it's completely on fire.

I am in the hospital to find some relief and some peace.
I have the experts and the support to say the least.
I am introduced to new medicines for new balance of mind.
I have people who attend me who are gentle and kind.

Sufficient food and shelter have put my mind at rest.
I build up my energy here to prepare for the outside test.
I really don't know my exact future coming after today.
Yet my confidence grows as I continue to prepare and to pray.

As I await the moment of my impending discharge,
I gather my belongings together, feeling recharged.
My energy levels are full as I carefully dress.
My preparations for a new life, I cannot guess.

Ready to return to my secure home, I prepare.
And soon before I know it, I am already there.
Now protected from within and without.
To a new victory in my life, I am ready to shout.



Allen McNair – He is a self-taught artist and poet inspired daily by the wonders of life around me, and by my present and past experiences. From individual poetic portrayals in my early years of writing, I have graduated to writing and illustrating my self-published epic saga, *I Dream of A'maresh*.

Kayla Vasilko

“Veronica”

The meaning of love
is not found
in romance.
The definition is strong.
Unconventional. Often overlooked.
The support
of a family.
A hand outstretched.
Mountains of steps stretch too.
One soft, the other jagged, both strong.
Suddenly you're lifted to the top
because someone believes you can climb.
A grandmother's love.
Sincere and kind, real
without question.
An honest voice to ears,
that need to listen.
The best humor. The greatest advice.
The only evaluation that counts.
A grandmother's love.
A ray of sunshine
through white sheers;
warm, shining in,
reminding you you're home.
A butterfly
that lands on your hand
at the beginning of spring.

Both beautiful. Both gentle.
Both missed too soon.
Then they're gone, faded
under darkened skies
and colder weather.
Fleeting; so fast.
A grandmother's love.
You would pass
a whole day to reach one moment.
You would discard memories
just to reminisce one.
The sun's brightest
parts happen only when the clouds
move slightly to the right.
Perfection is a wish
granted once.
Then clouds cover
again. Still, you are powered
the most by that brief sight.
She will share
your shortest days
out of everyone, but she has made
the biggest difference in your life.
A grandmother's love.



Kayla Vasilko is a senior in the Honors College at Purdue University Northwest with a major in English Writing. She has been writing stories since her childhood, and enjoys experimenting with all genres. She likes using different forms of writing such as poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and novels to connect with readers' personal experiences in ways that are open to the infinite interpretation of the readers themselves. She seeks to use her writing as a platform for positive change and awareness.

D C Saha

Justification for My Fear

You killed your gallantry the day we wed
and every night busily inspected,
eyes fixed on my virginity,
in my neck, lips, or in a pleasant guise
between my thighs.

Nose on scent to find trace of another
man or perfume like marsupials seek
pheromones, your body over
mine against my wish while a drop
of water hissed on the flameless stove top.

Fifteen years have passed. I left my
happiness, sorrows behind or sometimes
trusted the posterity and wondered
if you ever thought what did it matter,
if there was no virginity of the mind?

Now you are frustrated, in a moment
of pentimento, not sure in your own
failure or for marrying a woman
who can hide things better. I wonder, why
did I tolerate these so long?

For me or for my daughter, or to justify my fear?

D C Saha

The Reflection

When growing up I was adored, indeed,
but the pearl of the eyes were the brothers
in the house, school, on the playgrounds. Never
could I enjoy the sunrise in the park alone.

Mother cooked, I watched the younger
siblings and the toys they used, Father played
basketball with the boys until
the food was ready, I set the table.

Brothers got extra help to take math and
sciences while I was persuaded to study
arts and music as if with my tender
fingers I was born to be an artist.

Shaking your booty in the football field
was always cheered on, but when you were raped
or
assaulted it was your fault -- your dress, your hills,
your make-up -- the color of your lipstick.

Bravo, when he fought around the school gym
and for you, the naughty girl in tight jeans,
teased, sometimes avoided, and
forsaken to be asked for prom night.

Eons have eloped, yet I see the shadows
of the past in my backyard, on the street,
or at work stand still, and I wonder, with
all the progress, how far back we have gone?



Dhanonjoy C Saha is a professor, scientist, writer and a poet. He is a research professor of medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, USA. Besides, his contributions to various aspects of science and literature, recently, he has started writing theme-based rhymes for children where education is intimately impregnated with entertainment. Dr. Saha is the founder and president of International Bengali Literary Society based in New York.

M.C. Rydel

80 Days With Angels

I found the evidence I needed in Arizona.
Among the rocks, beneath the thorns,
Covered by flowering red bushes,
Your Connecticut driver's license
Tossed out of a car, landing here:
Birth date and name obscured.
Six foot one. 185 pounds. Brown eyes.
Black hair. Movie star looks.
The Hartford address serves as proof.

I never believed in Jehovah.
Before I came to the desert.
The valley fills itself with voices.
The sun stares through stained glass.
Red rocks leak energy around us.
I search for his name on my laptop.
No record. No source. Nothing is there.

Forty days of fasting just to get here.
I howl at the Pink Moon Saloon.
Coyotes and ravens like bouncers.
It's my turn to turn my back to the city
Refuse to turn stone into bread,
Or turn wind into angels.

Still, I would love to fall into their arms
Feel their fingertips save me.
But I guess I'm just not like you.

I'm here for another 40 days.
The only thing going back home
Turns out to be your lost driver's license
Your name and address
Handwritten on an envelope

*Return to sender, address unknown,
No such number. No such zone.*
This is like looking for Elvis
In a room full of Elvises.
Yet I've never been more sure
That you are here.

You are as certain as an exploding sun,
As surprising as music on a SETI array,
As fresh as the scent of ginger
That explodes out of my handful of manna.

When you are as new as the deep sleep of an infant
With my hand supporting your head,
It's time to come down from the mountain,
Head back to the bricks and snow up north,
Learn my lines for the second act;
Utter a word that has never been said.



M.C. Rydel lives in Chicago and performs his poetry at the *In One Ear Show* at Flatts & Sharpe Music Company in Rogers Park. M.C. teaches a variety of courses at the Hadley Institute for the Blind, and he teaches literature and writing at Loyola University, Chicago.

Subbarao Majety
Silence on the Mountains

The mountains are SILENT.
Neither happy, nor sad.

The Spring shined and the Green grew,
The rain sprinkled and birds flew,
But
The mountains are SILENT.
Neither happy, nor sad.

The SUN grew hot and the ground dried,
The wind grew humid and everything seem fried,
But
The mountains are SILENT.
Neither happy, nor sad.

The moon came early and the SUN came late,
The cold crept in and the snow filled the Crest
But
The mountains are SILENT.
Neither happy, nor sad.

If you think the Mountains are inanimate, think again!!!

Jay Banerjee
Remembering Grandma



‘While working on this artwork I realized I really don’t know what my grandma looked like. In a way that I could find her in a room but I couldn’t tell you if she had a sharp or round nose or if her eyes were more close together or far apart. Studying her face and drawing her really helped to solidify her face in my memory. Which is really important to me because I do not want to forget her.’

Jay Banerjee

Profile

Jay Banerjee is a vibrant and emerging young talent of visual and literary arts, based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, US. With a natural inclination towards the expressive, they have found a voice through the malleable mediums of clay and ceramics, as well as the nuanced strokes of pencil sketching. Jay was encouraged to explore artistic pursuits from a young age. Jay's journey into the arts began in the classroom, but it quickly transcended those walls as they sought to learn through experience, observation, and experimentation. Jay is formally trained in clay and ceramics possesses an innate ability to capture emotion and narrative through their work. The shading and line work in pencil sketching allow for a precision and detail that contrasts beautifully with the organic nature of their ceramic creations. Parallel to their visual artistry, Jay has the power of words to express themselves through poetry. They write with a sensitivity and depth that resonate with audiences and reflect their observations of life.

Dhiman Chakraborty

A Starry Night (a letter to my love)

I knew this was going to be an interesting night.

The past couple of days I had been reading a biography of Van Gogh (by Nathaniel Harris) reaching up to his days at Arles and his interactions there with Gauguin. Tonight, alone at home, sipping a generous portion of my favorite malt after dinner, I finished the book. It wasn't until right near the end that I realized that by a one-in-three-hundred-and-sixty-five chance, this happens to be the day that the artist-of-the-artists succumbed to the gunshot wound he had inflicted on himself a day-and-a-half earlier (ok, considering that I am more likely to read such a book during the summer break than at most other times of the year, perhaps the probability was a little higher than 1/365, but it's still small enough to qualify as a curious coincidence).

The book is pretty good. Well researched, well written text interspersed with 120+ of Van Gogh's best-known paintings printed on high-quality paper makes it eminently readable. Other than a few instances of typographic errors tarnishing an otherwise excellent publication, I have nothing negative to say about the book. The part where shortly after Christmas, Van Gogh had cut off one of his ears and presented it to a local woman of the streets, is haunting. The intensity of his feelings, which I can only imagine very dimly at best, left me wondering how it may have played an essential role in the gigantic concepts embodied in his art!

The day was good. The morning was cloudy and soaked by a gentle shower. I did a good amount of work at home. In the afternoon I ran my routine 5K with my canine companion. Upon return, I lounged myself, a cup of freshly brewed Darjeeling in hand, on our west-facing deck all alone as the sun dipped below the horizon behind the trees and houses. The setting was quiet except for the chirping of crickets and birds. In the sky above, the warm orange retreated to the West as the deepening blue marched in from the East. A few wisps of cirrus cloud bathed in bright pink and silhouetted by the maple tree in our

backyard presented one of those sights that help restore one's footing on the ground. A few drops of rain still shone on the leaves of the climbing rose bushes.

As the sky darkened enough to reveal the stars, my sight gradually turned away from the outer world and toward the inner. Now, after a shower and dinner, I am entirely immersed within myself. I am thinking of the woman who has over the past seven years become an inseparable part of me. It is not a rational thing. I don't think of reasons to love, or not love, her. I just do. What does it mean? I want to be with her, and her to be at ease.

My love, what will you think when you read this? Why do we relate so much to Vincent and other artists who suffered so much? Is it because they reassure us that our suffering is not fruitless? That it holds something beautiful, which some have been able to render into forms shareable with others, even if we have not?

I have been thinking about what we'll say and do to each other after a month of quiet. I just want to be with you and neither say nor hear a word. We could have a look together at this book about Vincent, but we won't if you don't want to. I have all those paintings engraved in my mind - some early ones crude and technically flawed, others beyond analysis, but all done with fantastic speed, energy and an unparalleled sense of urgency. This man represents the being in us that is fundamentally lonely - insecure in the absence of others of its kind, but also free from duties towards them.

It is shortly past midnight now - not too early to go to bed, especially since those terribly important and equally tedious meetings that I must attend resume early in the morning. But I am right in that zone of perfect inebriation that cannot be allowed to go to waste. I'll pour myself another dram, open Alphonse Daudet's *Lettres du mon moulin* (Letters from my mill) and read from it *L'Arlésienne* (The Woman of Arles). It's a short story about the suicide

of a young man who could not marry the woman he loved. Van Gogh chose this name - L'Arlésienne - for a series of portraits of a woman with whom he is thought to have formed a special relationship while at Arles. What makes the aforementioned coincidence so much more improbable is its combination with the fact that I picked this book up when you and I visited that bookstore together earlier this month. The book has since been lying on my bedside table.

My dear, I long to see you again, to nestle my face between your breasts, to roam your soft open hills, plains and valleys, to explore your damp jungles, hollows and ravines, to fill my lungs with your scent, to make love to you like only I can ... but don't get me wrong, I also welcome the calm of this brief separation - to settle down, to reflect, to reconcile with what we are, rather than what we think we should, or wish we could, be.

Will you ever know what you mean to me?



Dhiman Chakraborty lives in Chicago and he is a Professor of Physics.

Dan Weinberg

Quiet

Umbilical cord wrapped around my neck for a few minutes or was it an hour? How long? Does it matter? Who cares? I came out feet first. So cool, feet first. But, then the cord got caught around my neck and cut off the oxygen for a time-how long-a minute-hour? How long? Was it long? Who cares?

Is that an adult up there? I must not speak until there is peace in Vietnam. I must not speak to her. Why? No thinking. Never think. Like my neighbor, Donald Maris, who said he won't talk. Wow, he stopped talking. Why? Why not? What good does it do? about Vietnam War? U Thant? UN?

Lumumba got killed in the plane crash. I heard on the radio. WFMT. So quiet. It's like a voice-the radio. Why don't my family talk to me? What is family? Hello? Am I dead or alive? Does it matter? Who cares? I don't care. Can I breathe? In and out? Oh, well. That's nice. I always got Rachel. She is here. Where is she? In my head? Was she at the train station?

Where is here? Who cares? Dad says he could care less. What does that mean? SOL?? What is that? Who cares? I don't. What is geh in drerd? What is geh kaken? Shlog a heiss? Shmo hawk? Boichik?

I go to Maxwell Street to buy comic books and one day I see a Bowie Knife for sale. I am ten years old and I buy the knife as a gift for my family. I hide the knife in the ceiling in the basement next to the old oil tank. Nobody will find it there. The blade is strong and sharp.

Am I alive? When I am in school I look out the window or read the book I have. I don't do school work. Never. Can't think. Can't do schoolwork. Must not. Bad.

I walk to school alone in the summer, fall, winter, spring. All the same. I wonder, once a week, what it would be like to have someone to walk with. I am too crazy for that. Forget it. Then I stop thinking because it is bad and I can't think.

When I gave the talk about the Holocaust and my mother seeing book burnings, sitting in the back

of class, and having to leave friends, and of having the man come to the door and say "Here are your aunt's ashes," nobody said anything to me. It was 1960 and nobody talked about the killing of Jews, not yet. Why did an aunt go to South Africa and send me a carved little elephant that disappeared in the tornado?

I have three brothers. They never speak to me because we are so different in age. This makes perfect sense. Doesn't matter. I don't care. I learned that from a brother. He has a room in the same house as me down the hall. Once we had lunch together at a restaurant and I said something wrong so we never went out together again. Doesn't matter. I don't care.

Rachel is all that matters. And where is she? Somebody told me that she went to the train so I go to the train and look for her. The rabbi came to the house and sat by the piano and talked about the price of couches. Why? And Dad went to sleep on the couch and said he quit smoking after Rachel went to the train. Why? I don't care. Doesn't matter.

There was a cherry tree in the backyard but it got cut down like George Washington, I guess. I don't care. Doesn't matter. When my father drives to a certain place we go under the weeping willow tree so the branches run on the top of the car. I like that. Doesn't matter. I don't care.

I go to the park and see the trees and bushes and paths. Once I went to Columbus Park and somebody robbed me of a nickel and I didn't mind. I didn't tell anyone. Doesn't matter. Who cares? What's a nickel anyways? No good. Like me.

No thoughts. Can't think. Must not do any thinking. Need a sweet candy. Not Chelsea Fulcrum. Candy. Nestle's Crunch. Hostess Ho-Ho's. Mott's Apple Juice. I won't buy them. Sounds too young. I am old. I am retarded. I am nine years old and already old. Does that seem weird? No, perfectly normal. Where is Rachel? Who is Rachel? Why can't I remember her? She was here a minute ago. Where is Rachel? What a name? Do I have a name? Am I invisible? Can I touch my shoes? Can I touch the

sky? Is you real? The mentally ill fill the prisons. Am I in a school class? Am I real? What is real? Is this thinking? Stop.

Is this a real thing? What is real? Really. I can read the words in a book but they are only words. Words are real. I have been reading since I was two and yet I don't know what I am reading. One word, another word and there's a book. So simple. Se easy. All I can do is read. I hate reading but that is all I do. No homework, no school assignments, the teacher doesn't care so who cares? Fun? Am I crazy? No, I am smart. Yeah. Right. Like a librarian. Not like Superman.

I go for walks to the East Avenue Park and try to play with the kids but usually it doesn't work since I am so weak at baseball. Ernie Banks is a great player with the Cubs. We play one inning and then they tell me to go home. So, I go home, and throw the rubber ball against the front porch steps. I pretend there is a batter standing there because nobody will play with me. I am a pretty good pitcher, maybe good enough for the Cubs, like Dick Ellsworth or Don Cardwell. Except one time at the new Rehm Pool I dove off the diving side and had to be rescued by the lifeguard and I told nobody. It's a secret.

I listen to WGN radio soap operas and they have drama and also the Farm Report with Orion Samuelson, who is a real farmer. I get the soybean and corn prices from the Board of Trade and I hear the commercial for ADM-“Supermarket to the World”-and I think that sounds nice but a little preposterous.

I write my stories about people named Parker and Jones because I don't know any Jews in South Oak Park. Mom throws my stories in the garbage and I don't miss them. I don't care. I write my great invention about the automatic storm door opener. Why not? Nice. Care? I never told anyone.

Words are so boring. That's why I read all weekend long. Or I watch TV after we get a TV in 1963. Words are what Dad writes on yellow legal pads and he chews Wrigley's Doublemint gum at the

same time. I watch the Charlie Chan show with the fake Chinese actor on the 9 inch TV screen. So boring but so interesting. I always call for a pizza to be delivered and I am now ten years old. I disclosed this to zero people. Almost an adult. I can maybe drive next year if I'm lucky. Will I be lucky? They say you make your luck. How do I make luck? How do I make luck?

I read books before I got to Lincoln School in Oak Park. So what? Who cares? Doesn't matter.

They sometimes call me “Stinky” or “Windy” (not sure if that should be capitalized) at school. I don't know why. Words. Words. Words. Doesn't matter. Stink. What is that?

Words connect me to the World. Why? Sorry? I feel like homemade shit-The Fugs-true. MAD Magazine is so true. Al Jaffee is a good artist. Picasso was okay. Chagall was okay. Art Spiegelman and R. Crumb are good.

The morning is the best time to be alive. I like when the sun spits in my eye. And when the birds sing but when the cicadas are buzzing it drives me nuts. Quiet is the best. Maybe I'll live on that mountain when I get older. Mesa Verde National Park is cool with the sandstone and cliff-dwellers. And the desert is more alive than the city in some ways. And mountains can be like home. And the plants and animals will be so nice. And cactus are full of water.

Friends like Kurt Winter, Craig Lunggren, Robert Sulden, Chelsea Fulcrum, all gone from the neighborhood and never seen again. Why not? Who cares? Writing with Craig Lunggren all a waste of time. All lost in the hurricane. All lost in the wind. All lost words eventually find their way back home-said some poet or economist.

I take out the Oak Park garbage to the cans by the alley and see the two rats run away down towards the vacant lot with a zwieback in the fat one's mouth and a piece of liver sausage in the small black rat. I wonder if their family is doing okay.

Suparna Chatterjee

StoryTime: From Perth to the Island State

To escape the sweltering summer heat of Perth, opting to enjoy a cooler option within the familiar tracks, we decided for a short family trip to the island state located to the south of the Australian mainland, Tasmania (TAS). Separated from the mainland by the Bass Strait, this is an archipelago made from the main island, TAS, along with several other islands.

Our Bengali milieu of growing up within the warmth of many people has long evolved living in the sparse population of WA, yet the least populous state of TAS shocked our system significantly. Vibrant and popular Salamanca market on Saturday addressed our overwhelming sense of isolation that we experienced in the initial 24 hours. Even though weather of the day flicked between bright sunshine to a drizzling mystic day, circling through hundreds of shops, we were amazed at the artisanship of local artists. Produce included handmade and homemade goods including soaps, candles, jewellery, scarves, paintings, plants, potteries, wood carvings, a range of gourmet foods, fresh fruit, organic vegetables, and more. Frequent drizzling didn't impact the market buzz, accompanied by music and buskers, we lost each other many times. Lured by our own interest we wandered off to explore more. I cashed in on these disappearance act to gather precious collectibles from the place that stringent WA quarantine laws would allow yet would not be scrutinised under our critical family observation on artefacts.

Having settled in Western Australia almost four decades ago, unashamedly we can admit of our typical small-town mentality that forces us to compare with a perceived satisfaction when our own hometown shines out as the better alternative. And yet, as we travelled within the city radius, we all found our favourites that scaled far above our hometown.

My new Apple Watch rejoiced seeing me outdoors taking many tiny steps to clock up several thousands, closing rings of achievement, bringing a virtual pleasure of fitness, unknowingly providing

consumption approval for sinfully delicious desserts. I continued to gawk at every shop, awkwardly captured the stunning architecture of the city, curiously wrapped up in a Kathmandu jacket even in the summer months. Being conditioned by the warm weather of Perth even slight drop in temperature makes us to shiver and complain.

Beginning as a spectator we soon joined a noisy rally to raise voice to protect women from being yet another victim of violence, it was a display of genuine camaraderie with men, women children, and dog, all marching together. In a pursuit of getting to know the city better, my husband engaged in entertaining conversation with random friendly strangers, routinely beginning with a compliment for the town, then meandering into obscure gully of politics and sports, while I sought solace in exploring the camera capabilities of my iPhone.

The sloping mountains trapped shades of blue, grey, and black as the clouds exchanged their attires from a fleecy white to threatening dark gown, the distant trees stood like sentries on guard, watching humans over centuries, with a familiarity of the ground and moving life, they held their vertical stands, standing tall, and alone as our car zoomed past.

Our young drivers kept us entertained, while one stayed glued behind the wheels the other offered navigation help, their ongoing sibling bantering filled the space between their fast paced growing up and our parenting memories.

Magic of the landscape filled us to the brim, just when we thought this must be the most beautiful spot, another beauty emerged, drowning the immediate in an awe of wonder. We were bursting from our seams in pleasure, absorbing nature at its best and in her sincere admiration.

We reached Port Arthur, a small timber station from 1830. A feared place by convicts, with only way of transport by the sea in past is now a large historic site with colonial history of crime and harsh



Ruins at Port Arthur



Gloomy sky at Port Arthur



En route to Port Arthur



Canon on display



Holy Steeple reaching for the sky – Hobart



Quaint teddy shop – Hobart

punishment. Even after being destroyed by two consecutive fires, it doesn't disappoint tourists. Displaying burnt down penal settlement, special prison, solitary confinement cells, flogging area, a penitentiary originally built as a flour mill and granary, inmates-built church, and a commandant's bungalow surprisingly untouched by the devastating fire. A compelling story is left behind in every crevice and in every ruin. Through the drizzling rain and a cold windy day, convict stories of colonial past unfolded. It was a trip of discovery, learning and living history through a passionately yet responsibly narrated anecdotes by a resolute tour guide. Interestingly, tourists included both internal and people from across the globe, embracing the story of Van Diemen's land.

Sharing an essential reflection of life gained in a stray incident while we decided to make most of yet another sunny day in Hobart and we dedicated it to

beach visiting, after having ticked off many from our wish list, we were then on our way to Tinderbox beach leading to Bruny Island.

Our middle-class upbringing with a competitive inspiration of inching forward ahead of others within the cohort, often wraps us in a callous self-focus shell, abandoning faith in fellow human being and in the greater good. The winding narrow road catering for two-way traffic, also housed locals, meaning familiarity breeding a sense of belonging and with it an inherent confidence, resulting in some flamboyant driving, forcing cautious tourist scurrying off to the gravel narrows, dangerously close to the slope.

Having trusted life in the hands of a young adult in his early twenties, braces you to silence many fears and typically Bengali exclamations mostly starting with elongated Aa and E in the quiet of your dry mouth.



Elizabeth Street Pier



And here sky-blue melts in eternal blue of sea



Winding roads with a majestic view



Colonial style buildings of Hoabrt

Then, we all gasped in fear as we geared up the curly road and forced to swerve as the other car stood still with its danger lights on and all the air bags out.

Making an emergency halt along the gravel road, our younger son, jumped out in haste to help, his elderly parents counted down the anxious minutes thinking of the worst, all potential what ifs, yet he didn't flinch. Within few minutes, another car pulled right next to us, a young Tasmanian mother with her little one, equally worried about the accident she waited for our son's return and then getting down all details she called the police, requesting us to carry on with our site visit. The car was empty with no sign of the injured, giving rise to several potential hypothesis.

All through our way back we tried to rationalise with the idealistic Samaritan sharing with him our life's wisdom, warning him of the shadowy dangers.

Shaken to our core, and Bengali fear reigning high, we took solace in home meal. With fresh produce acquired on our way, cooked Tasmanian salmon with crispy skin poached in white sauce,

served with stir fried veggie and baby potatoes sealed in butter and herb, coupled with bread from a local baker.

It was my thanksgiving to life and to universe, counting ancestor's blessings, feeling blessed that our boys have turned out to be good citizen of the global world.

Merely an hour's drive out of Hobart, yet there was spell bounding beauty at every bend, my iPhone struggled with the series of photos captured, in the end, I carried them all in my heart. The dewy mountains remain wrapped in white fleecy clouds, a distant silhouette with a promise of more.

A treat comes after slog and lasts only for a brief period inspiring us to work harder to relish it yet again. And so, the memorable trip ended, leaving behind moments dipped in enchanting magic, making memories that will live with us and we will cherish forever.

Sharing some photos from our trip with a hope to make one soon again.



With a day profession as Senior IT project manager I continue to remain focussed on delivering milestones on limited budget and tight schedule within public sector, yet my dream to be an author continues to grow and haunts me. Fuelled by a passion of storytelling, I continue to write. My stories are crafted with a migrant's grief of displacement and imbued with a sense of lived experience and pleasures of travel. Magic of motherhood continues to make me laugh, love and lust for time, to enjoy my family for another day.

Prithvindra Chakravarti

Plateau Land — A Novel

By Trevor Edward Cook (*Olympia Publishers London 2020*)

Human history is vastly a 'bipod's' long journey, with one foot having dipped in the sands of time, gathering experiences and initiating activities, while the other foot is standing on the ground fighting the competitors and intruders. In its very early stages it was all trial and error that turned experiences into strides after strides, which brought success in finding a safe habitation and gathering ideas, including a sort of understanding of 'Nature'. And survival means that a solution has been achieved through surrender or the win, or through skilful negotiations. Throughout history peoples mixed with other peoples and lived with varied sets of relationships within a space.

It is the spirit of heart that has made humans accommodative with others as well as with the Nature in a given space. But protectiveness and possessiveness are perhaps inborn in them. If not, then why do these ever active underlying motives lead the humans to become greedy and selfish? Why do they go out to loot others of their properties while protecting their own in safe spaces?

In recent centuries during the heydays of Colonialism the smart states of Europe went all out to discover 'new lands' to acquire wealth for themselves. When the smartest of such states, Britain, took over New Hollandia, the new continent was declared to be devoid of human souls, Terra nullius. An extremely ridiculous claim for a so-called enlightened state believing in a faith of love and fraternity.

Surely, the migrant 'invaders' soon encountered some 'queer' souls, who had been living there for thousands of years. The new settlers had to struggle hard to live in the new land, gathering more 'chunks' of the country with its resources; and the original inhabitants had to endeavour to protect their existence, resisting intrusion and pressure. But it was not easy for the people with 'crude' tools and weapons to keep their existence safe from the conquering horde. Here comes the age-old intricate art of the heart, the accommodative nature of 'Man and 'Woman'.

'Plateau Land', a fictional work, by Trevor Edward Cook, has beautifully depicted this aspect of Australia's recent past with hard reality and a caution to the pessimist: that mixing and living with two vastly diverse cultures has been made possible due to people like Gidabul, Lou and Colin, the three chief figures of the novel, is a testament to the inherent goodness of man. The first two souls firmly believe that a country must be like a tight knit clan that shelters every soul and particle of Nature in a lasting harmonious relationship, while the other soul assures that Nature is merely a physical entity mankind must conquer to make his or her existence prosperous and comfortable.

Gidabul, a First Australian, is a renegade to his community. But he wholeheartedly dedicates his life to a model he believes will work for the good of his abandoned Aboriginal community of many Bundjalung language clans in the changed situation. Colin the settler desperately sweats to capture a fertile lush land, the Plateau Land, which he determines to turn into his permanent home. But the attainment of his goal is only possible with the active help and cooperation of indigenous men and women such as Gidabul. Thus the hard earned mateship cuts its role to shape the alliance for history to progress.

The narrative of Gidabul, Lou and Colin naturally extends to the next one with the settler family of Hamish McIntyre, Lord Willie Hebersham and his entourage and many others. If the first episode is alliance, this one is confusion. The Anglo Indian Hamish McIntyre is practically an outcast in England, his mother country, but a guy more English than an Englishman in a colony. A snob of a sort. Lord Hebersham, a privileged aristocrat, perhaps more ambitious than Colin, has to sacrifice his life at the hand of Hamish, a much lesser soul to the Lord, clearing the path to a sort of understanding with the indigenous people. An uneasiness though remains. The sequel to this episode is the finale with new times players of varied moulds of both indigenous and settler migrants. Much of the events vividly

described in this part reflect what actually happened in this Bundjalung country where the author lived a fair part of his life.

Though the scope of the narrative encompasses a vast amount of historical material, the resultant

work is skilfully presented in a short novel. The author's language is as lucid as bold and his brilliant portrayal of the characters dazzles with life. The events, harsh or otherwise, have been treated with much empathy. Reading of this fascinating work, Plateau Land, is a thrilling experience.





Rainbow from Balcony



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