

I was a small slap with the back of the hand. He occupied the front seat, alone. A gesture of respect. The bus now whirred through some jute fields. Occasionally, it bumped when the road was not smooth. The damp odour of the crop, like that rotten snails give off, filtered through as several of the window panes were broken at the corners. His mind kept flipping back on the morning incident as a beetle keeps tumbling over on the same pile of cowdung. He thought, I must keep myself present. In front of him stood a shiny aluminium frame with a large tinted glass in it, separating the space for the driver. The glass displayed a 'No Smoking' sticker at the top beside a printed sheet containing vital statistics of the bus. The driver's seat was mounted on a pedestal, but behind the tinted glass everything looked chocolate-coloured. The driver's straight back was in full view, an image of unflinching concentration and effortless ease. Some figures were forlornly working on the jute-crop under a sky overcast with rain-bellied clouds. He pitied their ignorance, but loved them, though the history of deprivation had been rather long, and was irreversible.

It was a reflex movement. Quick, involuntary. Caused by the baby's shrill cry. He stuck his big toe, the size of a plum, into the joint of the mosquito-net as his mother was folding it up for he had already woken up and needed his mother's care. He had a moment's look at her face, now turning crimson, eyes downcast, showing complete unpreparedness for it. He turned himself over hiding his face, in shame, against the pillow. He was to leave for his journey in an hour.

The bus sped past the jute fields and entered a 'beef' with flat lands on both sides of the road stretched upto the far horizon which wore hazy blue in the October afternoon. The sun now broke open some parts of the clouds, and the landscape got flushed with a light-marigold and sandy. He wanted to sever his thoughts with the past, but as an adolescent boy sees his oath to God crumbled before the next turn of urge comes, he found himself going over in mind back to the slapping-incident. It was an act of carelessness, at least he saw it that way. He noticed this in his wife before. Probably it was not that a reflex action, but a reaction that had taken a long time in mounting up. They recently moved to a new house with a balcony facing the east. It was a hot July evening. He was sitting in the balcony tending a hot cup of tea. A big moon — glossy and round

like a porcelain rice-dish — was already pasted there on the lower ridge of the sky-dome. It had yet to take on the shine of the night. The crows, in mad rush for home, criss-crossed and dotted the sky with their black shapes. While some patches of cloud still glowed with a sunny tinge.

Khadiza, his wife, came slowly with some tea for herself in a cup. She pulled the remaining chair close to him, and as she sat she beheld the beauty of the evening for a while. Then she said that the music teacher wouldn't do. She wouldn't elaborate. But later she did.

The music teacher, a good-looking middle-aged man with a shiny bald, came around behind her pretending to take a look at the photographs hung on the wall. She was engrossed in tuning her sitar, but suddenly two hands came down around her neck, and she, as if snake-bitten, took only seconds to stand on her feet and dash for the bedroom which instantly locked her into security. He apparently showed no concern. But the music teacher stopped coming on his own. And he thought, the dare of the embrace became possible because he was lax in his protectiveness.

She wore a felt-hat, this student, with white top and broad rim. The sunlight shot through the sash and fell across her face at a peculiar angle. Her nose at a point matched with her eyes which were quizzical, betraying silent curiosity in others. Her lips were thin, very attractive. And her face, tea-coloured, 'archipelagoed by pimples' on the right cheek. One of them grew really to the size of a mole. Larger now than even when he noticed it in the morning. Need she be asked to take medicine? In his bag, tucked away somewhere, must be a medicine-kit to meet emergencies. But he would not make himself offer it. All of hers of help take on a meaning as if you were a little too eager to oblige others. It alerts others' antennae — of women's particularly. Women have it in-built to make you feel unwanted instantly. I have had enough of this, he thought.

"Go, Ahmed, they like you. There will be a special bus this time," his colleagues told him, evading their own responsibility. He counter-conspired. Coming home, he calculated, went over the pros and cons, as if it was not a trip he was taking, but a decision similar to what a conscientious surgeon does before he adjudges an operation to be fully a necessity. A couple of sight-seeing, some places to go to, the shrines to pay homage at and donate, and free supply of pictures (that, of course, after the tour is finished).

"Last time you said you wouldn't go."

readily as one's mind goes over and over again upon the thought of a lost opportunity.

On the edge of the pool many sat on stones shaped like eggs of prehistoric dinosaurs. He chose a rather big stone, its surface a mass of black, and porous like the back of a gigantic turtle. Just to please himself maybe, he soon got himself engrossed in a game invented on the moment. The water was roaring down in millions of white marbles, and he found it real difficult to follow any one of the drops with his eyes. The precipitation was so thorough that he would even miss it as it travelled half-way. Then he would again sweep his eyes upward, catch another drop, but would lose it sooner than later. He would choose yet another drop. He felt like being completely taken away by the pleasure of the game, when he awoke to the presence of a figure over his shoulder. He turned his face and found the student with the white hat just bending over him. Her little pleasing smile was buttered on her face. "Sir, I want a photograph with you."

"All right," he said, half-pleased and half-uncertain. As he made an effort to stand up, she protested: "No, Sir, you keep sitting, I'll sit beside you." The stone was big, but its top was not so flat as to accommodate two people. A male-student advanced towards them willing to be photographed. She quickly thrust her camera into his hands and pleaded, "Ay, no, me alone with Sir." He smiled derisively but stood in his place and shot.

As she sat beside him, he felt a little thrust on his side, kind of boring a sensation into his system. He suddenly relished imagining her youthful energy, her bodily shape. He thought of the snapshot which was to materialise an individualised and isolated moment to be preserved. Of what consequence? He almost threw this thought at himself jokingly. The thunderous sound of the water-fall suddenly increased in volume, or he thought it did. He felt something being gone a miss. Something that reflected his being slightly ever disorganised in his relationships. The burnt edges. Hurt, he wondered — why allow himself to be used? He wanted to shut his ears against the thundering sound. Then emerged from no where the incident in clear detail. After the slap, Khadiza's face changed, its brown shade quickly turning crimson, her eyes quietly lowering themselves in shame and insult. Deep down something panged in him. A trust that was not to be toyed with! He rued. The girl stood up as the picture was taken. She was saying something to him which he could not catch because of the thundering noise of the water-fall.

# The Slap

A Short Story by Mohit Ul Alam

# Dylan Thomas : Poet of His Critical World

by Shawkat Haider



He was a cult in his own time as well as a poet for all times.

I am a painstaking, conscientious, involved and devious craftsman in words, however unsuccessful the result so often appears, and to whatever wrong uses I may apply my technical paraphernalia. I use everything and anything to make my poems work and move in the directions I won't them to: old tricks, new tricks, puns, portmanteau words, paradox, allusion, paranomasia, paragram, catachresis, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, sprung rhythm. Every device there is in language is there to be used if you will. And the twistings and convulsions of words, the inventions and contrivances, are all part of the joy that is part of the painful, voluntary work. — Thus, Dylan was a bard and a minstrel and a Welshman; even if he worked in an alien tongue, it was his natural tongue; he knew no other.

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born on 27 October, 1914 in Swansea, Wales. He was a Welsh poet, whose lyric poems are among the most captivating in 20th century romantic verse. Oddly enough, Dylan spoke no Welsh. There, again he inherited the contradictions of the history of his country and his family. From his father, a cultured man and a would-be poet, he inherited his intellect and literary abilities and as a Welshman, he was born to a land split between stern nonconformist rural tradition of the naturalist north and mountains and the softer English growth of the southern towns and cities. He studied English and nothing much else. From the age of four, he had been read Shakespeare by his father, long before the words had meaning, but were only sound after sound, signifying thunders and wondrous nothings. Thomas in his early years found out that he hated academic disciplines and he ended his education at Swansea Grammar School. Between ages of 15 and 19 he wrote at least 4 times more than the later years of his life.

Dylan wrote some of the most stirring, passionate and eloquent verse in modern literature. From the publication of his first book 18 poems in 1934 critics recognised him as a brilliant and original poet. This volume bewildered and fascinated readers with its extraordinary verbal and musical energy and with its exploration of emotional extremes.

These extremes, alternately ecstatic and morbid, revealed his obsessions with love, death, religion and the sound of words. Then he moved to London and published twenty five poems in 1936. By the time he married Caitlin Macnamara and tried hard to be a family man. He believed that poetry is a solemn art; in 1939 he put together a volume of 7 stories and 16 new poems called map of love, still completely personal, these demonstrate a much greater interest in external world other than his own world, Swansea.

His love of life and exuberant sense of humour are revealed in his prose fiction and drama as well as in verse. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Poet* published in 1940, is

about his youth in Wales. It represents the full imaginative rebellion of Dylan from his secure childhood and youth, swaddled by villas; reveals more of the fears and faints of childhood, that Welsh sense of sin and wickedness that was a hidden anchor always in his free soul. His war poems, few as they are, contradicted his public attitude of cynicism and alienation. In particular 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid' showed a profound grief at the shock of war and its outrageous murder of innocent people. Dylan did also toil at some of the finer poems in his next volume, *Deaths and Entrances* with poems of superb virtuosity like *There was a Saviour* and amid a whole galaxy of wonderful things *Poems In October* and *Fern Hill*. The balance and ease and sensuousness of these were the true labours of a man who had grown out of the willful obscurities of youth into careful simplicities of age. He looked resolutely into his inner adolescent world of symbol and myth, of sex and God and death. He was the opposite of Plato, who wrote of his lost love.

My star, you are raised to the stars in the skies.  
O to see you as the heaven does with many eyes.  
Of all poets of his generation, he alone seemed to have been influenced by the work of TS Eliot, then preeminent in English poetry. Dylan was a genius both at poetry and at prose, and his waste of words was chiefly in his conversation, not from his pen. His whole life enriched his later and greater poems. Dylan's images came from the subconscious controlled by logic rather than from the spontaneous subconscious. His early prose suffered not only from the obscurities of surrealism, but from the need to offend gratuitously.

He had become equally famous as a boisterous, heavy-drinking man who seemed determined to die young. That respect for death was echoed in:

Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes.  
(Bury the dead for fear that they walk to the grave in labour).  
His life-long cry from the heart at his failure to write more poems is expressed in:  
"To take to give is all, return what is hungrily given"  
Puffing the pounds of manna up through the dew to heaven.

The lovely gift of the gab bangles back on a blind shaft....  
Dylan's intention in the poems was clear to him. All his life, religion had bothered him and the world had dumbfounded him. He could not escape God because of the beauty of His creations. He was unwilling to believe in God, but his very thoughts and words and rhythms were suffused with Biblical themes and heavenly reverence, for a natural God or God in nature.

If Dylan had any political label, he must have been classified as a 'romantic socialist', entirely for his own advantage, yet with freedom for all.

He made little for himself and his family and wrote with bravado, "I want society, not me, to have places to sit in and

over their heads. They know it is acting. They know this is poetry and they know it is for them."

His unfinished novel, *Adventures in the Skin Trade* is an extended story, not strictly autobiographical, but bearing a relation to the two parts of his experience, his own actions and the actions of his dramatised self. The hero of the story would actually do what Dylan dreamt of doing and never did.

Dylan, himself was a talented script-writer who was escaping from that dreaded solitude that is the necessary confinement of poets.

Despite his succession of illnesses, he managed to publish *Collected Poems*, the most intricate of all his verses and thus proved himself to be the great poet his father always wanted to be who died on the words, "It's full circle now".

Just before death he completed a radio play 'Under the Milkwood Tree', — describing with tender humour a day in the life of eccentric residents of a Welsh fishing village.

Dylan considered himself a devoted poet, dedicating all his life to the service of his muse, restricting his themes to a few great and inevitable subjects. There's tremendous word-play in his verse, of ecstatic delight in combination of opulent sounds and highly exact, unusual meaning in presence of serious puns. His saving grace beneath his bluster and arrogance was his humour.

Dylan died in New York on November 9, 1953. He was a

cult in his own time as well as a poet for all times. He beautifully captures the rampaging life style of the man and the poet — his strength and weakness, above all his art. He was a suburban boy who knew his ability, a genius in pursuit of innocence through self-destruction, a lover of home who could not stay there. His romantic revolt unleashed a certain coarseness and richness of language, an affirmation of the holy myths rather than a snivelling at God, an orgy of the irrational as opposed to the careful classification of what was meaningful or significant.

His plays shall sound for him as long as there are ears to hear. Let himself be his own last best witness:

"Man himself is a work, Today he is a dirty piece of work. But tomorrow he may sprout wings under his serge shoulders, be faced and sided like Aquarius, who is the first sign of the vital year."

So much for Dylan's hope for humanity, and finally, for his hope for himself:

... And every wave of the way  
And gale I tackle, the whole world then.  
With more triumphant faith  
That ever was since the world was said.  
Spins its morning of praise.  
Dylan on the platform was certainly his own best ambassador, although off it, he could be his own worst diplomat. In this love of show, he was a people's poet, a true medieval minstrel.

# A Poetic Journey to the Mysterious World of Love

## BOOK REVIEW

**Title of the Book** : *Brishtie Bhije Bhije (Under a Rainy Spell)*  
**Author** : Gholam Moyenuddin  
**Published by** : Academic Publishers  
**1st Print** : 1983 **Page** : 46 **Price** : Tk 40.00

and had a happy union with her. Then separation occurs, his beloved eventually deserted him. But he did not get frustrated. He was emotionally shocked, but unlike other poets, he did not brood over this separation any longer. It is certain that he is susceptible to sorrows and miseries, but he is amazingly gifted with the power to take all sorts of sad events very easily. In the poem *Sky*, he maintains that sorrows and miseries make love pure and perfect. Through sad experiences of love, he experiences the presence of pure and innocent love. To him, love is as pure as the light of the moon:

"Love becomes immaculate white moonlight  
Through burning and burning."  
His love appears to be transcendental and crosses from its mundane experience to the infinite; it becomes universal. In *Sky*, he says —  
"Instantaneously you became infinite sky  
Over the whole earth."  
The same theme is also identified in the poem.  
As I See You:

You are omnipresent, as if in all corners of this planet. Now in blues, now in greens! Like Wordsworth, he discerns the presence of his love everywhere in the universe. But he differs from Wordsworth to the effect that Wordsworth takes love to be love for nature as well as for God. This gives rise to the philosophical idea of Pantheism. On the other hand, Gholam Moyenuddin takes love as the love between two human beings — between a man and a woman and particularly between a husband and a wife which is in keeping with the social values. His love centres mainly on human relations.

To him, love is very much sanctified. There is always purity and innocence in love. Like John Donne, who recognises physical relation between a man and a woman before marriage, he never accepts any illegal relationship in love. This is, in fact, the view of transcendentalism lies.

A nostalgic feeling pervades almost all his poems. Reminiscence of the past serves our life, makes love and the lovers to be permanent

# To Our Fair Ladies: With Apology

(On reading Mahfuz Anam's comments on Dec 1)

Hold your tongue for God's sake  
Let us live in peace  
The scramble for the power-cake  
Brings no country's bliss

Threats from the ivory top  
A grievous shock and shame  
They wipe with a single mop  
All the name and fame

Counter-threats from the street  
To stop the country's wheel  
They are not what all greet  
With a fervent zeal

Who takes care of whom  
When the boat is upside down  
Who bothers, if miseries boom,  
Who wears the royal gown

To ride a tiger and grab the power  
And make a Frankenstein  
They turn at the last hour  
A hidden kick-back mine

Fair ladies at a war  
Of words unfair and foul  
While the country stands afar  
With a beggar's bowl.

# Single-track Mind

There're more things in heaven and earth, Hamlet said to Horatio 'than are dreamt of in your philosophy' — hundreds of years ago.

In the diversified world of today how you feel when you still find people have hardly changed for most have single-track mind?

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# Leave this World Alive

by KR Zakhami

Don't loath that inevitable death  
Coming slowly with all its strings

Leave this world alive  
Go, wander and live  
In absolute solitude

No hums of man  
No crackle, no noise  
No friend or foe

No car, bus or plane  
No club, Bazaar  
No office or factory  
No home,  
No world, parading on mini screen

No Marilyn, Monroe or Keeler  
No Abba, Boney-M or Jackson

Go where there's no jangling  
Of any sort

Go and gather those dreams  
Shattered by this false world  
Go grow and bloom  
Fly to heavens all around  
In silence and solitude  
You will discover the infinite truth  
Suns any Gospel.

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And the very human mortals make all the happiness  
And beauty and love.  
As mentioned earlier, the poet is not pessimistic in respect of love. When his beloved deserted him, he thinks that this separation is temporary. Love is immortal. So the poet firmly believes that his beloved must return and this expectation is expressed in *Expectations*. He always looks for a secured refuge and finds it in love. All his poems echo this urge.

Love and nature play a harmonious role in poems and lend a dignity to them. No exception occurs in case of Gholam Moyenuddin also. Love and nature have been blended in his poems and presents a harmonious flow of verses. Spontaneous presentation of nature in his poems attracts us in the poem *Life Fugitive*.  
"Yellow fields of mustard flower  
The mango groves in blossom, the plum plumps  
The nectar of date tree, sweetened rice"  
Besides the reflection of every-day life in his poems also brings us nearer to nature and helps us feel natural. This finds a happy expression in the poem, *Life Fugitive*.  
"Each morn' nowadays initiates work  
The cruel hours pass on in heartless engagements  
I cribble meandering through the files"  
Poetic craftsmanship, of Gholam Moyenuddin is a vital aspect of his poems. His poems are marked by judicious choices of words, simplicity of the language and the uses of images. He has manipulated his themes and ideas in a very simplistic manner. The words and phrases like the great life that was!/Embalming sunshines all over the body in *Life Fugitive*, smooth and serene as mosque's floor' in *Come Back*; the evening descends yet over the wings of shrike' in *The River*, etc., are quite charming.

Every poem is nicely curved out by his dextrous style. His ideas are presented lucidly and in a captivating way, and every idea has been dwelt upon with the help of simple words and every day phrases. This, in fact, gives a kind of serenity in his poems and it is always a pleasure to read them.

Although Gholam Moyenuddin is an essayist, he has occupied a distinct place among the poets of the first rank through this work. We believe that he will be appreciated more in the days to come.

Another important aspect of this book is that it has been translated into English by Altah Hossain. But the translation does not mar the beauty of his poems and hence it has retained successfully the ideas and themes as expressed in its original verses. Altah Hossain has aptly represented the poems in the same poetic vein in his translation.

English translation of the work adds an added flavour to the book.

Reviewed by  
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