

column

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The Spirit of Anti-parochialism

by Arun Gupta

PAROCHIALISM IS A TERM which refers to the existing trend of disciplinary boundaries at universities. The disciplines or departments are all kinds of autonomous provinces working in isolation. The idea of an university probably did not arise with a view to segregate university education. In recent times many professors and scholars at universities throughout the world have been thinking of interaction within the academia with the emphasis on interdisciplinary awareness.

Interdisciplinary studies is becoming a major trend in modern education. Disciplinary education according to some scholars has oriented our students to the extent of limiting them to narrow provincialism. They say that along with specialization, a student must have some encyclopedic knowledge so that education makes her/him culturally literate, not only parochially literate. Within disciplinary boundaries, an intellectual spends his/her energy within spaces turning away from large missions of knowledge. This is colonizing one's views inside disciplinary ghettos.

If we look at our intellectual history in any field, we see that important inventions and creativity have always been due to the thinker's interdisciplinary awareness. Take the history of

science for instance, major discoveries have been made by using the insights from two or more than two disciplines.

Literature is by nature interdisciplinary: a combination of many humanistic studies. In contemporary times, the university departments of literature have been thinking of making the syllabus more interdisciplinary. At many South Asian universities English departments specially have introduced courses like Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinary American Studies and Interart Studies.

Interart Studies is a very exciting example. In Interart studies, the focus is on humanities that emphasize on the special role of the arts. Thus the understanding of humanities enables to comment and complement the arts like literature, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, film, photography, and "almost art". Interart expert David Martin says that the role of an artist is to reveal values, and thus humanists study to reflect upon values. The purpose of this kind of study is to learn values communicated in the arts and by doing so deepen our terrain for value decisions and energize our interest to enjoy life. This type of humanistic study and understanding extol our cultural existence.

Factual objective information is provided by science and technology.

Humanities gives us subjective insights. It helps us develop intellectual ability and critical wisdom and these benefits shape our identity, our subjectivity as human beings.

Interart studies provides a scholar the understanding of social, cultural and scientific values upon art. It also develops an awareness of the various ways of seeing and critically understanding a work of art.

One day while interacting with my students in a class, I was looking at Michelangelo's *Ignudo* and thinking about the epic scale of man, his/her severe, superhuman, graceful, athletic, surpassing strength. To understand this wonderful creation of God in her/his full dynamism, we need the insight of humanities whether in formal education or general awareness. Maybe Interart studies prepares us to focus on what we lack to understand ourselves, the human being.

To understand human beings as well as her/his surrounding, one discipline, one point of view, one perspective is never enough or reasonable. Possibly this call for sense of proportion is one of the strengths of interdisciplinary awareness.

About the writer: Arun Gupta teaches English at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu.

profile

Albert Londres, The Prince of Reporters

by Pierre-Albert Lambert

IT WAS SEPTEMBER 1914. ON A road in the Champagne region, east of Paris, a young man was drawing near to the front on his bicycle. Owing to a lack of staff, his newspaper had promoted him to war correspondent, the day before. He rode into the town of Rheims and luck was on his side. German artillerymen were shelling the cathedral and he was the only journalist to witness the event.

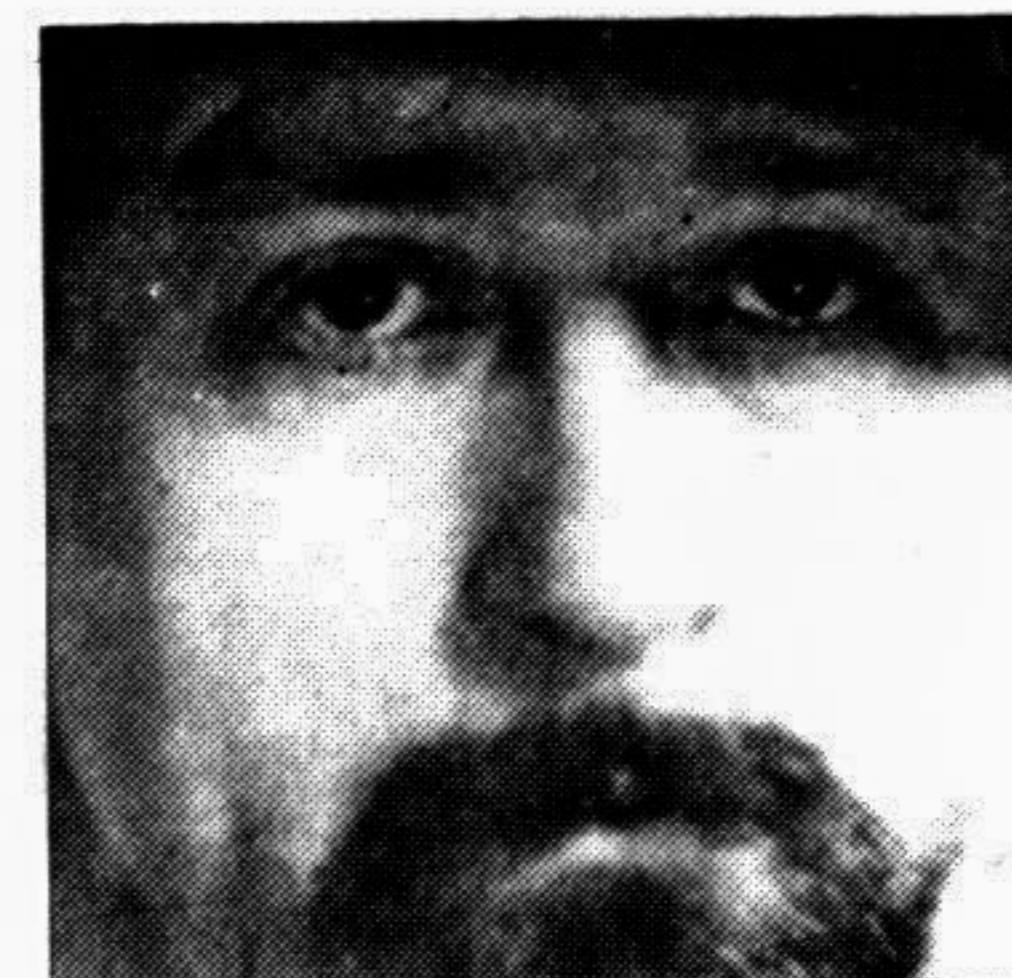
"They bombed Rheims and we saw it". His article, which appeared on the front page of *"Le Matin"*, caused a sensation. This page of history and poem to the glory of the martyred cathedral was the first article that Albert Londres signed with his name. Suddenly he was famous. From then on, he was present on all the fronts, on the Somme, on the Yser and in the Dardanelles, with his poet's face marked by the palour of a former tuberculosis victim, his light-brown pointed beard and his eyes burning with unsatiated curiosity.

Albert Londres was born thirty ears too soon, in Vichy, in the centre of France. At the age of 18, after he passed his *baccalaureat* higher school certificate, his hotel-keeper father placed him in a firm as an assistant-accountant. But he hated figures. The only thing that mattered to him was poetry. He knew all Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle and Heredia by heart. So, Albert Londres fled the provinces and went to Paris where he knocked on the door of the director of the *"Petit Parisien"*. He was taken on as the gossip columnist and sent to cover parliamentary events until that day in 1914.

When the war was over, he was sent to Italy by *"L'Excelsior"*.

There, he joined the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, the *condottiere* poet who left his lyre for a gun and took Fiume. It was a heroic epic which delighted its readers.

Albert Londres then went to the Middle East where Arab nationalists were creating problems for the British and French occupiers. In March 1920, he re-



Albert Londres

vealed Soviet Russia to his readers, "an asylum where the mad appeared to have put their wardens in straightjackets and were governing".

Then he took the pulse of the European capitals whose thrones were threatened: Athens, Ankara, Sofia, Belgrade, Vienna and Berlin. Distant places beckoned to him and he went to Japan where he described the Samurai who were becoming westernized.

In 1922, Albert Londres dealt with the misery of the deported convicts in *"L'Enfer Vert"* (the green hell) of Guiana. A change of direction appeared in his career. From then on, he was to support those who suffered. As a righter of wrongs and a seeker-out of hidden scandals, he would offer his voice "to those who do not have one" and he would "wield the pen in the wound".

This was not always to the taste of his newspaper directors and so he changed employers often. Because of his independence of mind and his impertinence, he sometimes stormed out over nothing. To the director who reproached him, saying, "Sir, your article is not in line with the tone of the newspaper," he superbly replied, "Sir, a reporter only knows one line, the railway line!". For eighteen years, Albert Londres travelled all over the world, with

an old pigskin suitcase for company. He could not drive a car and did not know English. Yet, he went everywhere, scrutinized everything, ferreted around and asked questions. Each of his investigations lasted several months, at the speed of the steamers and the railways of the time. China was three weeks away from Paris by sea and two weeks away by the trans-Siberian.

Although a gentleman-reporter with his carefree elegance, he still remained a poet and Bohemian, but one of luxury. From sleeping cars to luxury hotels, he led a rich life, although he was always short of money. He was a champion for highly imaginative bills of expenses. For example, enquiry into the brothels on the Chinese frontier (one is only human): 600 francs. Purchase of a mule on 10th November: 1,500 francs. Sale of the mule on 25th November: 1,500 francs. Total 3,600 francs. In Paris, the newspaper's cashier had a laugh and then paid up. This journalist was certainly well worth it. His signature increased the sales and the readers enjoyed his limpid style, his special expressions and his words which scored a direct hit.

In May 1932, Albert Londres returned from Shanghai on the *"Georges Phillip"*. Between two drinks, he confided to his travelling companions that he was bringing back "an explosive report on international drug trafficking" for his newspaper, *"But hush!"* Off the coast of Djibouti, fire broke out on board. The journalist perished in the flames while he was attempting to climb over the rails. Naturally, the hypothesis was raised of an attempt on the life of a man who disturbed.

An *"Albert Londres"* prize honours his memory every year. It rewards a young journalist whose writing has been distinguished by a jury of seniors. This award was created by his daughter, Florise, whose mother, who had died at the age of 20, had been the journalist's one great love.

L'actualité en France

two poems

by Farhad Mazhar

Tell Me, My Tagar

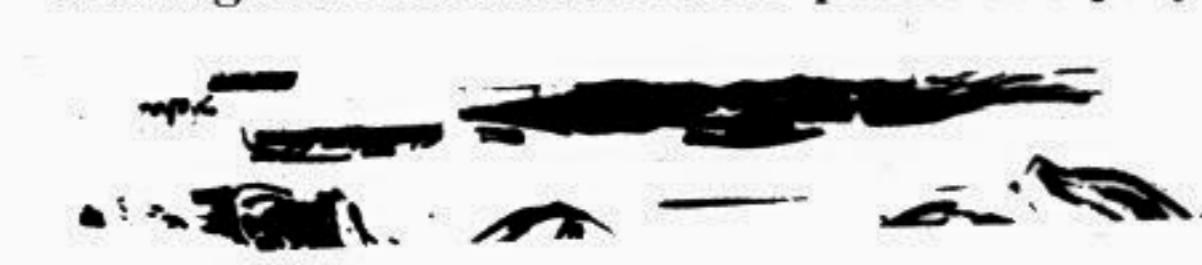
Tell me, my tagar, did you bloom in the Garden of Bengal,
Bearing the language of Gabriel's white feet
In your alblion petals; having you, I kneel
In this flowery place among flowers.



Beloved flowers, like grains of sugar, did you bloom
Like light in this Bengal? The soul fills with radiance.
Where did you get so fair? In many gardens on earth
Are many flowers but not Bengal's tagar



Today I'll spread the place of the prayer-rug
Aiming the flowers heart; the petals like prayer beads



I'll count for ninety nine names the world over
To publish again the laws of flower and petal.



Give witness, Flower, on the day of the Last Judgement
The poet's days are spent in beauty's prayer.

New Testament

Sometimes the world's dark troubles my eyes
It seems that Tamerlane's dark horse
Has stood to cover Everest's radiance and ice
Alas no light no light — I'm helpless in vast India

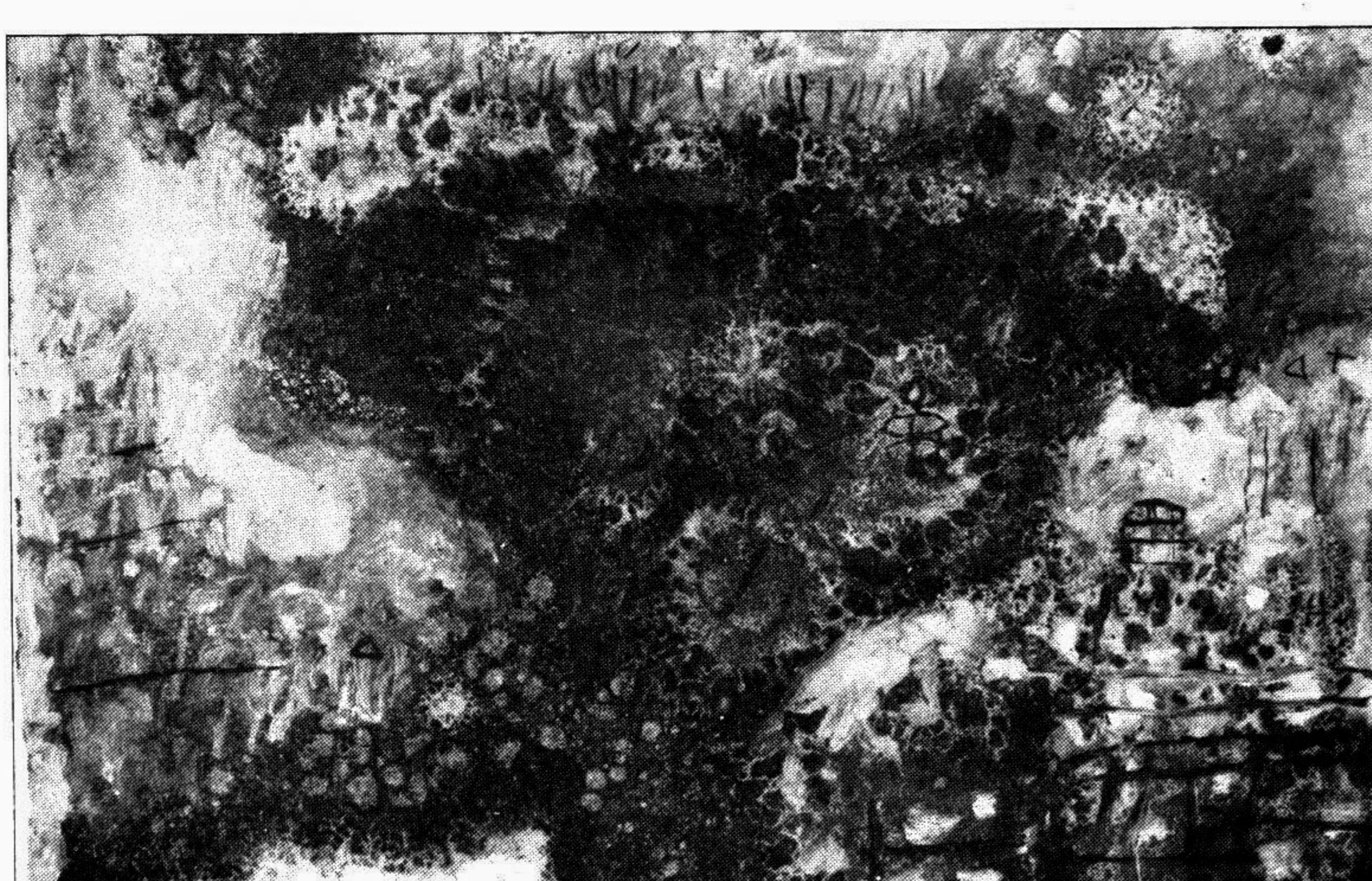


I'm no Mongol, no Turk, no Mughul nor
Valiant Aryan, nor the true ancient Dravidian.
Not born as Brahmin's or Maulavi's son
I am the new arrival on earth, in soil's soul.



The gospel of amlaki-planting you sowed in my spirit
In the news of the vegetal womb I'm almost the
immaculate Mary
Lord, give me good sense, then, give me the word.
Tell me "be", let me give birth to life
In the Bay of Bengal — let me lie full length — prostrate
myself
in sand-salt-conch-mud-shores
In Bengal, in such dark...

Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Avalon
Foundation Professor of Humanities at Columbia University.
These poems are from Mazhar's *Ebadatnama* or Book of Prayer
which is included in the Post-modern Poetry Course taught by
Gayatri herself at Columbia.



Painting by Kazi Ghiasuddin

Mahatma Gandhi fitted the pre-qualifications: he was a politician, he went to jail, and he too was one of the masters of English prose. Any volunteer to accompany me on this solitary journey?

On the other hand, some good writers bend over in humility in judging their own worth. Robert Benchley took fifteen years to come to the conclusion that he could not write; but then, he said,

it was too late for him to change, as by that time he had become famous. Some people are simply deaf to fortune's overtures, equipped with a musical pen, rather than the musical ears.

Once a talented writer, E L Doctorow, thundered thus: "Planning to write is not writing. Researching is not writing. Talking to people about what you are doing is not writing. Writing is writing."

As for the reader, displaying a book on the shelf is not reading. Talking about books is not reading. Buying books is not reading. Asking about books is not reading. Reading is reading. Let us peep beyond the full stop. Hanif Qureshi, of *tanduri* and TV fame, is caught between the horns of an amiable dilemma. He finds two types of readers not happy with his writings: those who

had been mentioned in his writings, and those who were not.

"Truth never lies in a woman's eyes." She did not like the quotation. An amendment was offered, "The love in the woman's eyes, lies, lies and lies." She got mad. Get even, she was advised. "Getting even is one reason for writing," confirms Wm Gass. Got it? I couldn't.

According to G Flaubert,