



fiction

Symbiosis

by Purabi Basu

THE FULL MOON AT EASE, MEL-
ted and protruded from a serene
sky : It cuddled every object of
nature as if the silent night entwined
with true enlightenment. And Sumi,
with her alert and curious eyes, gazed at
the kindred garden searching every
prose and cons of airy display. Batabi
grew in its full bloom and Kamini stood
still in a romantic posture spreading its
bounteous branches, perhaps trying to
allure the white night. As her eyes
began scrutinizing the flutter of lilacs,
stayed ecstatic in their brilliant
complexion, she dropped her sight near
a corner - amused, thrilled or surprised.
Sumi grew skeptic; coming out into the
veranda, she lowered her brows by some
measurement for eyeis approval.

All asleep, sharing the tranquility
of undisturbed earth. The whole city
turned so calm in an eldritch illustra-
tion as to ignore a drowsy eye. Little
haze about to spread in coldness, be-
tween sombre air and happy earth,
playing hide and seek with street light
that separated the two houses by miles.
Such placidity is hardly seen. Sumi
tried her eyes once again, then quickly
got to her feet and moved towards the
bed room.

Akash was sleeping, resting his body
on a wide divan beside the bookshelf, as
if the earth was never coalesced with
harsh reality. Turning aside, Sumi
looked at her barren bed with a pity : a
sunken, deep curvature of her head on
the pillow showed her desperation for
getting a sleep. The other pillow was un-
ruffled, of course, it didn't reflect her
wishes. Itis Akash who once said, I am
anxious more about me as my nerves
are not so strong as yours. Besides, you
may also think I didn't mean what I
said; all my promises were hollow.

You know Akash, life ends in death
and nothing happens thereafter. Death
can pulverize all our pride and compla-
cency just in a momentis decision. Even
then, life hankers for acquisition and
we live for that allurements. Why should
I understand you?

I do understand everything, but I will
never force you nor I'll need or ask for
anything. What I believe is- I'll remain
yours forever and nothing will tear us
apart.

Nothing remains after death. I be-
lieve that too. But I can hear Rabi say-
ing how could you forget me, so soon? .
An instant feeling of guiltiness seized
her mind.

Leave it to the time. Only that would
heal. I was not in a hurry at all and I
would wait even longer though your
parents insisted.. You see, how a single
woman struggles in this culpable society
of ours. And if she is a young widow
or a lady of some beauty she falls easy
victim to our knavish sympathy. How
could I leave you in a situation like
that. For this I agreed to marry now.

Sumi came out to veranda again.
Covering herself with a long black
chaadar, she started to pore over the
intricate moon, as if, her attention
could reveal a few secrets. In her garden,
the little rubber plant, which was so far
frowning at her, stood lavishly with a
spooky thirst in its look. It was, in fact,
bought to add some verdant beauty to
her drawing room. Some how it had



been displaced and it might be the rea-
son why it could receive more attention
now.

After being married to Akash when
Sumi first came to office, she, with an
air of displeasure in voice told her col-
leagues that her two-room flat was visi-
bly unfurnished with mere display of
books, magazines and audio cassettes
the real possessions of a bachelor.

Then, buy some plants and flowers.
Raka, one of her good buddies, told her
in a concerned voice. They nourish our
mechanical mind. Soon you will get rid
of your monotony, she added.

To her immense surprise, Just on the
following morning, a boy assumingly
thirteen or fourteen years of age, came
to her office with a healthy rubber plant
in his hand saying els it you looking for
plants?i. Surely itis an act of enthusi-
astic Raka, Sumi murmured, recovering
slowly from her state of astonishment.

It was quite healthy with its stem
bearing a large remnant of earth. And
as the boy started breaking tender earth
into pieces, there came out thousands of
vibrant roots, in a protrusion revealing

its inner strength and robustness.

Even you donit need to take care.
Just leave it in a tob and it will grow
habitually, reassured the boy. Sumi
nearly forgot about tob and earth-
two elementary needs to spring up a living
object like plant indoor. The boy him-
self came forward to buying those and
took extra money from her assuring
that he would be back within just half
an hour. The clock, ticking slowly over
her worried mind, struck at five but
still there was no trace of the boy. Her
sense quivered a little and wasting no
more time she called Raka on phone.
No, Raka didn't tell any body about
Sumis necessity. Then, how he came to
know all about these ? Her brows
shrank in disbelief measuring the
depth of her instant annoyance.

Such fraudulence is not unusual
these days, said Raka in a loud and
confirm notion. He has certainly
played a trick on you. But Sumi, with
the last debris of hope, fixed her eyes at
the way he departed. The boy, however,
didn't reappear. He cheated.

In a curious hand Raka examined the

plant by gently pulling its healthy crux.
While doing this, she, all on a sudden
shouted in a shrill voice, as if sheis
wounded or acquired some insect bite.
Look whatis in there, pointing her fin-
ger to a metallic wire, which, with an
intention to defraud, clasped a whole
bunch of fresh roots not inherited by
the plant. What an infuriating surprise.
The boy has given you a taste of his
swindling creativity only, Raka cried
out in sorrow and anger. You could, at
least, call me while buying this con-
tinued she, drawing clear dissatisfaction
over what Sumi did ignoring her.

With her beguiled heart Sumi stayed
at her office till evening. She didn't
know what to do in such. The deceitful
boy had taken away all her faith entic-
ing her trauma with unceasing wind. To
get rid of the problem, she, all at once,
decided to throw the plant away. But as
she called up the whole sequence of
happenings showing respect to her
longing, she changed her mind and car-
ried it to her house wrapping with an
old newspaper. Coming back home, she
lit the lamp. Her heart sank a little in

an weird and unknown dispersion of
air. She knew Akash would be late as he
ed be busy working for his weekly pub-
lication of literary magazine coming
out next morning. By the time, her ser-
vant came, though very late, with the
grocery, and she, picking a sharp Daa in
a manner of impatience, took him to
the garden. With the aid of her servant,
Sumi placed the plant ; her careening
hands poured water around its mien in
an effort to enliven a quiescent spirit.
From thereon, the plant was watered
twice daily for 10 straight days in ac-
cordance with her instruction. Akash
knew all about these but hardly showed
any curiosity until her enthusiasm
turned into madness, what a nonsense
act ! Goini crazy about a mere branch of
tree ! Isnit it absurd ?i Akash pointed
towards her over-enthusiasm.

Donit you really see Akash that the
plant is regaining its vigor day by day ?
Sumi tried to receive an approval of her
act. You are really going insane. Rubber
plant, by nature, is hard and succulent.
It will simply take a little more time to
end up in a dead branch. Itis been

shown to be alive just for the moment
being as you serve water to it twice
daily.i, reiterated Akash to make her
understand the very simple fact.

But Sumi stayed unmoved. Her cu-
riosity began to expand with every day
passing and she, soon, developed a
habit of spending more and more time
behind nurturing it. She was simply
carried away. Even, while she was in a
week-long vacation to Barisal, the
thought of plant grasped her all the
time.

Returning home just today, she first
remembered her plant ; her patience
collapsed moving in eddies of intense
emotion. She came down and unlocked
the main gate in a careful feet without
disturbing the silence ; then ran
straight to the backyard following the
flight of irresistible wind. She was
overjoyed with lunar invitation. The
soft breeze pulled her to a certain emo-
tion where she felt her body empty and
beyond gravity, as if in a moon. Heart
throbbing so loudly that she no more
could cope up with its rhythm and los-
ing her last drop of energy, sat near the
plant. A pair of just-borne leaves, pro-
truding from their shell in a twigs
configuration, announced an ardent
prayer to the psychedelic moon. She
bent forward, laid her nail to the poste-
rior of the leaves immersed in a light
green diffusion. A blush of crimson
there bearing a resemblance to the new
born baby soaked with fresh human
blood.

Sumi ran back to her room. eAkash,
wake up pleasei, she drew a pause to his
sleep pulling his arms in a hectic jerk.
Being interrupted in the middle of his
serene sleep, Akash took a little time to
accommodate the situation. His drowsy
eyes were still not organized for a re-
cognaisance.

Come with me, I will show you
something wonderful out there.., in-
sisted Sumi and wasting no more time
dragged her husband to the lively gar-
den. Akash now felt nervous. His in-
quisitive sense, going over her ani-
mated face, tried to read her mind.

Both knelt down near the plant for
an wondrous happening on earth. And
Sumi, with her careful hands, tossed
the leaves away to reveal the secret.
Akash buoyed a little, his eyes delved
into her frenzied face and then stuck at
the new born duo. A mysterious silence
grasped the whole earth and they were
converged in a wordless conversation.
All their words, thoughts and contem-
plation immersed in a lurid melodrama
of moon. Akash drew her to his broad
shoulder. At a distance, fogs climbed
into the light post and started melting
down to earth reminding some frag-
ments of transient life.

Sumi now, let her consciousness
grow unresponsive to every earthbound
action.

Will you forgive me, Rabi ? For the
last eight years I've shared with you
whatever good and exciting happened.
But today, on such wonderful moment,
surprisingly, I forgot you for a while.
Please, Rabi, donit get me wrong.

Akash was calling her. Sumi stepped
forward to her own home, to her very
own life.

Translated by Shawkat Haider

poem

Requiem for Shadhapur, Savar

by Tapan Jyoti Barua

It's here, oh here
The bestial bullets charged in a volley
And to utter woe cleft the air.

It's here, right here
The grimmest day cracked an abyss.
And the bullets vampiric pecked the unbent heads.

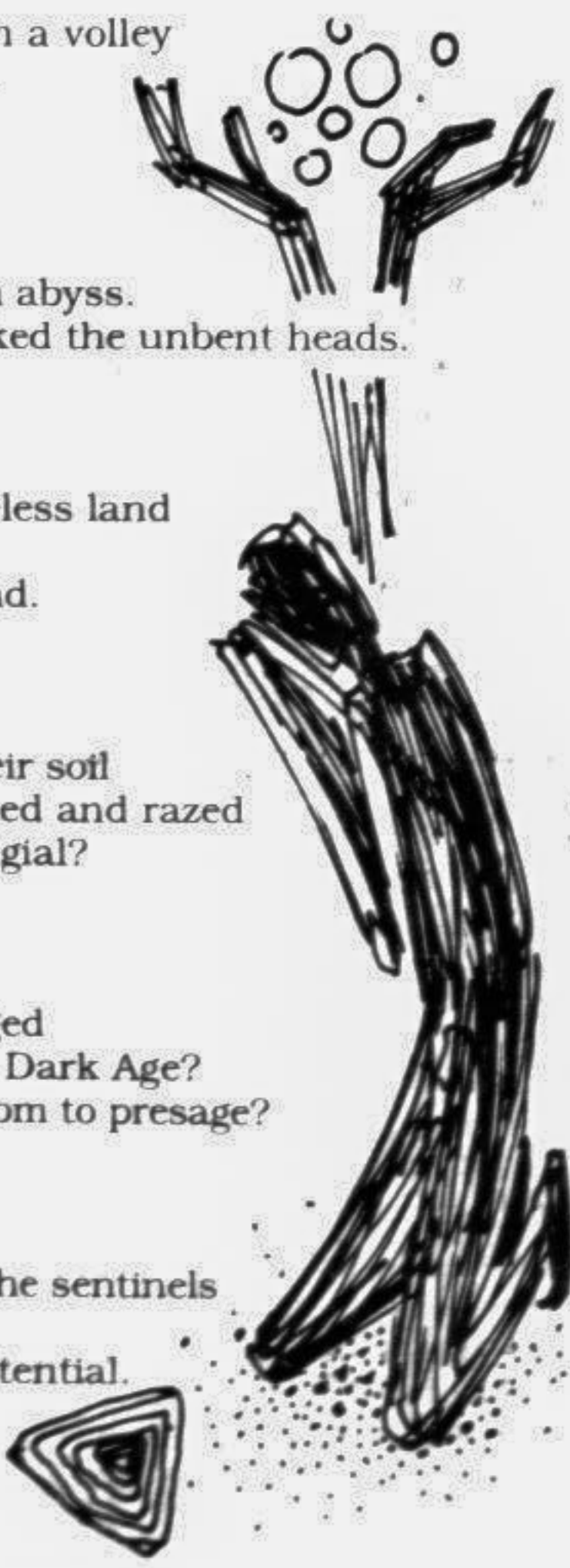
Nobody heard of this defenceless land
It is now too full of deaths
To go dead in memory's strand.

Was it because they loved their soil
The earthiest folks were racked and razed
And left thus, less than vestigial?

Was the sky convulsed, enraged
At the carnage, a script from Dark Age?
Or was there even a worse doom to presage?

Let me kneel unto the dead, the sentinels
In spirit never to fail,
Let me feel the mounds, penitential.

Here, oh here
Who will glance and heal the scar
Or history will just deem — it's all over, all over.



criticism

Emily Dickinson : In the Attic of her Mind

by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

THE title of this piece
on Emily Dickinson
(1830-86) started grow-
ing partly after having
come across 'the cellars of
the soul', a quaint descrip-
tion supplied by Dickinson
herself that caught on. All of
Dickinson's critics are not
in the same league as R P
Blackmur who makes an
incredibly contemptuous
comment about Dickinson
being a poet who 'wrote
indelibly as some
women cook'. Nevertheless
turning 'cellar' into a label
for Dickinson and pursuing
to make references about
Dickinson's 'painful
neurotic tensions', her
'romantic genius' and 'self
conscious' posture make
one wonder whether critics
were not striving to make E
D out as, what in 'feminist-
speak' is called, 'a sign of
exception'. Seeing a female,
artist or not, as a sign of
exception in most general
terms means that the female
is perceived as unphallic,
antithetical, irrational,
unrepresentable, powerless,
deviant, inscribed outside
culture and seen as a threat.
Without converting E D into
a dogmatist, or a
practitioner of feminism it
is possible to infer that this

woman who admitted being
interested in creating
'circumferences', an
activity of the mind not just
as the defensive (mostly
feminist) critics in their re-
spective purposes. The focus
on her personality and her
spirit can seem fatiguing
since there has been so
much of this already. A de-
parture from such status is
one which brings back into
the reading the rooms,
chambers, doors, windows,
passages, stairs, that seem
to be strikingly left more or
less invisible whereas E D
can be best understood in
terms of such 'circumfer-
ences', that are extensions
both of the 'home' and 'her
mind'. Postmodern feminist
critics have been eagerly en-
gaged in showing how
'home', as an inscription of
stability and culture, needs
to be deconstructed. Femi-
nist discourses have been
addressing female exclu-
sion, alienation, the femi-
nine-repressed and female
madness. The complexity of
this zone was laid bare by S
Gilbert and S Gubar in their
ground breaking work *Mad
Women in the Attic* (1979).
These considered create a
fresh perspective from
which E D might be read all

a reclusive, fitful female
poet. This has been so be-
cause it serves the reductive
(mostly male) critics as well
as the defensive (mostly
feminist) critics in their re-
spective purposes. The focus
on her personality and her
spirit can seem fatiguing
since there has been so
much of this already. A de-
parture from such status is
one which brings back into
the reading the rooms,
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this zone was laid bare by S
Gilbert and S Gubar in their
ground breaking work *Mad
Women in the Attic* (1979).
These considered create a
fresh perspective from
which E D might be read all

over again.

Harold Bloom a major
male canonist has shown in
The Western Canon (1995).
how E D creates an interplay
between 'space', 'the dark'
and 'the blank'. To this list I
think we should also add
'home'. In poem 465 (her po-
ems were untitled) a fly
buzzing against a window
pane deflects if not desecrate
the grandioseness of mys-
tery. Or consider 280 : 'I felt
a Funeral in my brain/And
Mourners to and fro/Kept
treading-treading till it
seemed/That Sense was
breaking through — ...'
And then, a Plank in Reason/
broke, And I dropped
down, and down—/ And hit a
World, at every plunge/And
Finished knowing — then
—/'. And what about 461 in
which a child-bride nestled
in her virgin room fumbles
in her childhood prayers as
she hears the household stir
('Angels bustle in the
Hall/) and trembles as
('softly) Future climbs the
stair'/. The throes between
marriage and death are in-
distinct. The ordinary room
and the ambivalent wait put
gloss on the spiritual con-
tent and not the other way
round.

The use of 'space' as a

theme in E D's works has evi-
dently registered, precipi-
tating discoveries of E D on
'the verge of sanity' or the
'edges of aloneness' (my ital-
ics) and yet somehow all of
this indirectly evokes ges-
turally a closed female space
that is tentative about itself,
is precarious and unstable.
In the hands of Harold
Bloom E D is re-revived! He
celebrates the way E D was
conversant with as well as
detached from what Bloom
calls 'the immense legacy of
the male tradition.' Bloom
alleges that the feminist
critics are unable to see this
and 'continue to treat Dick-
inson as a comrade rather
than as the rather forbid-
ding figure she necessarily
is'. One cannot help notic-
ing that E D's inclusion and
canonicity is wrought with
problems. Her merits critics
like Bloom may believe, is
that she possesses 'a (male)
mind'. This sort of point of
view shows that placing a
female subject/artist intel-
lectually is perceived as a
problem. While Bloom needs
to be appreciated for going
on record saying that E D
'had the mind of all our po-
ets, early and late' — he de-
flects from his generosity
by saying that her 'canonic-

ity results from her
achieved strangeness and
her uncanny relation to the
tradition' (my italics). This
comments on the way the
female mind like the female
artist often is seen through
symptomatic explorations
of female exception and
'otherness'.

The attic situation or E
D's retreat has only nomi-
nally to do with the impos-
ing father/father figure (her
own father and Col. Higgin-
son who read her works and
suggested improvements) or
the mother who did not
'care much for thought', or
her romantic relationships
that did not work. Neither
should her retreat be seen as
a posture betraying a half
hidden anxiety to localize
her territory. The chambers
and rooms into which she
took a retreat, made possi-
ble the perspective she was
searching for. Even Bloom
acknowledges that Dickin-
son had taken Emerson and
Nietsche's perspective to a
new height. Neither the per-
spective or the retreat is pe-
culiar or erratic or induced
by womanly nerves — rather
these work well in showing
E D as an artist who
'thinks' space with envi-
able success.