



## interview

# An Imaginary Conversation between Purnendo Potry, Alan Ginsberg and a Reader

by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

R: I was intrigued you chose to call your collection of poems Kathopokothon. Talking about what has already been said — does this begin to describe what you meant to do?

PP: As I see it, pictures are meant to be signs that we have made our own. Written words need not contain whatever words spoken deliver. I don't think I create anything that is not perplexed by these contexts. Communication has stopped being the sole god a long time ago.

R: This should put me off the question I was going to ask you — nevertheless, here goes: why is it there is so much of what could be called narratives of the everyday, being willfully churned out when these are no more than an antithesis of way things are, at least in poetry?

PP: Do you mean that poetry is unreliable? I don't think that there is any contradiction or antithesis that a reader cannot deal with or is not capable of deciphering.

AG: I would see this as a trap. Antithesis is a bad word. Poets "re-incarnate the gaps in Time and Space through images juxtaposed" making "a sort of a mad dash for consciousness" or

meaning. Only you know what you have done is confess that this cannot be done.

R: The readers then quiz whether you are the 'mad man bum' or 'the angel beat in Time'?

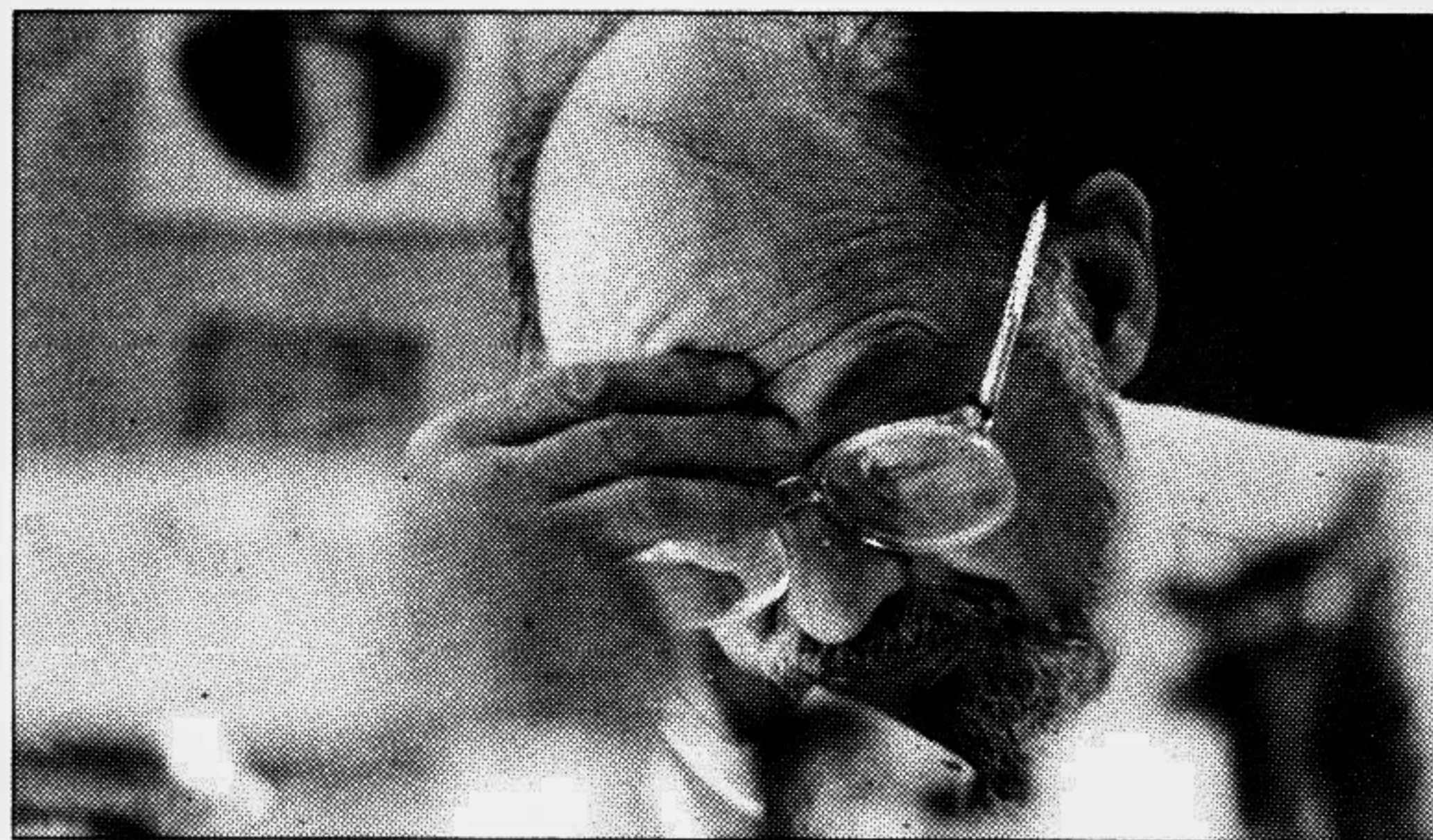
AG: T S Eliot felt rampant individualism was discourteous, let me tell you that I don't share his repugnance. He despised Blake's eccentricity. I don't mind being what I am or the way I write.

PP: Its interesting you call the act 'trap' — the trap makes you want to 'Howl'.

AG: Puns, Potry! I have been accused of writing about filth, I suppose they seem coarse, foul. I don't see why howl need only be seen as frustration or outrage. I have not been able to show perhaps that we howl (we all "inhabit the animal soup" if you would look at I, of Howl and other poems of mine) and this gesture is a form of release.

R: You talk about confession, limits of reincarnating the gaps between image-word-thought, you talk about release — aren't you using a Buddhist idiom to say that this purgatory and once again found himself in prison. He did not defend himself and kept quiet. He knew it was untrue. That was enough.

AG: I use what one would call filth



Alan Ginsberg

Photo by Nasir Ali Mamun. Nasir lives and works in New York

and disorder for a purpose, and bless — there is nothing blessed about anything. You might think that the profane, the mad and dangerous make up a nice static purgatory hole — I think otherwise. I admire Buddhism. It is not about recycling, really. I think it is interested in 'happening'. I have visions of things

— and don't that let you get on about me being a mystic or an user of hallucinogens.

R: I wouldn't have done that. The American Anthology calls you the great unbuttoned "sidewalk bard of America." Purnendo Potry, what makes you write?

PP: Unlike Alan here, I am an Eliot

person, I believe in individualism that is not obstructive. I believe art — not just writing — any art can make, should make a difference. Am I thinking of what, J S Mill called the 'internal culture', perhaps I am. I am also talking about a political responsibility, without compromising anything along the way in terms of who you are or limiting one's freedom to have ideas. I hate being dictated to. I think that is offensive. Ginsberg's anger is something that I can understand, but not reproduce.

R: We seem to be moving inevitably towards the leftist brand of politics you both were interested in, at some point of your lives. How did you deal with your disillusionment if there was any?

PP: I don't think I like this question, so many things — not just any brand of politics — are exasperating. How do we — I deal with it? I create. Other people physically bring down walls. I cared deeply, I have a "been there, done it" kind of experience as far as politics go — but as I understand it, progressive ironically means forcing and revering its own fixities. I realized at one point that I had stopped being able to do this.

AG: Watching the bent generation

transform itself into a yuppie generation was disconcerting. I protest — I rebuke — I shock — and this is not enough. I wish I could do more.

R: You both had been moved by Bangladesh's struggle for independence in 1971.

AG: It was absolutely infectious. Witnessing Bangladesh at that time from the border — was incredible — sharing someone's trauma and elation can be called the freak gifts of history.

R: Purnendo Potry, you have an ostensible interest in history. I read your book on Calcutta, with envy.

PP: Talk to me about Calcutta, talk to me about the Nineteenth Century Bengal — this chat could go on forever.

R: Poet, fiction writer, painter, filmmaker, historian, critic — will the real Purnendo Potry please stand up?

PP: No more to tell about what has already been told.

R: Alan Ginsberg, do you wish life would have been different for you.

AG: Would I have wished, the preferences I made were different — no! would I have wanted to skip psycho therapy — perhaps. Belonging in the same anthology as Walt Whitman — I am not complaining.

## profile

# Jean Giono, The Song of the South

by Jean-Marc Dupuich

*The French writer Jean Giono was born in Manosque a hundred years ago. Until his death in 1970, he had remained in that small town in Provence in the South of France. He was the son of a cobbler and an ironer and, at the age of 16, he worked in a bank which he left in 1929 to devote himself to the profession of being a writer. His fictional works create a world in which the heroes act in passion, first of all inspired by a carnal love for the earth and then by a Stendhalian love for life.*

GIONO DID NOT LIKE HIS CENTURY, which was a century of wars. At the age of 20, he was sent to the front. He was at Verdun and the *Chemin des Dames* where he saw crushed bodies that had been torn apart, hanging on branches or bloody in the mud, and the dead! "All of life had been taken out from there, except for that of rats and worms", he recalls in *"Le Grand Troupeau"*. It was a flock of sheep in forced transhumance, left behind by the young shepherds who had joined the flow of soldiers marching towards the slaughter.

He managed to escape the great slaughter of the First World War and swore to himself "never again". When the time for mobilisation in 1939 came, he was sent to prison for two months.

His crime was that he was a pacifist. He had wanted to believe in peace. He spent the war working at literature and full of self-doubts, unable to complete his novel. In 1944, France was liberated. He was suspected of sympathizing with the collaboration government and once again found himself in prison. He did not defend himself and kept quiet. He knew it was untrue. That was enough.

Basically what was reproached him was still his pacifism, and his love for the earth which he had gone on extolling in *"Colline, in 'Regain'"*, in *"Le chant du Monde"* (*Song of the World*) and *"Que ma joie demeure"*. Petain had made the peasant the model of invigorating virtues in his "national revolution". That was enough for an assimilation to be made. But what could be

compared between the images of a rural, regimented France and Giono's Dionysiac and libertarian vision?

His love for the earth impregnated his being. Man and nature had the same essence and the same "full flesh". The "juice of the sky" flowed right into the tenderness of the heart, whence a spring rose and welled like the water of springtime and impregnated the landscape with pleasure.

A love for the earth is a resonance of all the senses. The damp smells of the woods and the grasses where, ripe with sunshine, the paths and stones arouse desire. Love enjoins from time immemorial, just as the mountain wind becomes enamoured of the olive-tree or the cypress. "The earth orders", says

Julia (in *"Le Gradd Troupeau"*) seeing Madeleine steal away to her lover.

—the real bothers me—

Giono did not like his century of destruction, an era of machines which emptied the countryside and filled the towns, killing the unity between men and the seasons, the age of money and progress which stole time, diverting the real riches, the savour of seeing, the knowledge of feeling and wondering at the beautiful in this world. "There had been wind, but it had ceased, and the stars had burst like grass. They were in tufts with roots of radiant gold, sunk in the darkness and which raised shining clouds of night". That is in *"Que ma joie demeure"*.

In that novel, written in 1935, Bobi's

attempt to restore the golden age turns out to be in vain. He abandons the Gremonde plateau and dies struck by a thunderbolt in a southern storm. Giono's world is not idyllic. In it, nature and men suffer from violence. It is a stage full of "sound and fury" in which Henry Miller recognised Faulkner. Life is beauty and tragedy, passion in short, savoured in connivance with the forces of the world to begin with, and then, as the ill extends, Stendhalian. And the heroes are free beings.

The war and post-war years led Giono, after his translation of *"Moby Dick"*, to a work of fiction in which the characters belonged less to the earth and more to History (reviewed by the author of course). Cholera ravaged Provence in the 19th century and the

handsome Angelo Pardi in *"Le Hussard sur le toit"* (The Hussar on the Roof) crossed the region. There is, moreover, some resemblance between this young Italian aristocrat and Stendhal's character Fabrice del Dongo. Already in the war trenches, the soldier from Manosque never parted with his viaticum, Stendhal's novel *"La Chartreuse de Parme"*.

"The real bothers me", he confided. So he wrote to change it, in a language which flows like blood, finely pulsating. And it is a real pleasure to read his work, seduced by the music of the words gathered, one would say, in the very hand of the devil as they so much make one believe dreams for the truth.

L'Actualite en France

## poem

### Ageing Love

Helal Kabir Chowdhury

Love for her has not ceased Heart is yet to be teased.



Years after today in my ponder She appears in a day dream wonder.

My notes for her kept in a waste basket, revolts now in good taste.

Dreaming in intoxication which is love she failed to come up riding on a little dove.



## literature

# "Life" is "information processing"?

Andaz

Q: What is the purpose of life?  
A: Information processing.

That is a bold and modern definition of 'life', worth examining side by side with the versions of the traditional books and scholars. This observation was made several decades ago by the 'father' of space satellite, Arthur C Clarke.

The Information Age is only now upon us, and the effects of IT (information technology) is visibly changing the quality of the daily life of the common man. The most recent example is the hypnotic hold of the electronic mass media (radio and television) during the coverage of the ICC Trophy cricket tournament won by Bangladesh in Kuala Lumpur. The emergence of the 'global village' is also due to the IT.

The IT in life is also reflected in a publication of the Bangladesh Islamic Foundation, "Scientific

Indications in the Holy Quran" (1990, 513 pages). This book contains a collection of the relevant Quranic verses (in Arabic, with translation in English), and, below each verse, the latest scientific explanations are tentatively offered, compiled by a board of local scientists and scholars.

The message was the Quranic injunction: seek knowledge, (go out and travel, if necessary) and try to understand the working of the supreme Creator. The material is all around us, in nature, above in the sky, and in the cosmos.

For the layman, this is a good book for reorientation, wrenching him away from the clutches of materialism and its R & D interpretations; because western fundamental research is at a dead end now, and turning more and more to traditional, mystic and religious manuscript, wherein the cryptic messages from di-

vine sources, and from the saints, sufis, and sadhus echo coded messages to the modern scientists, especially for the particle physicists and cosmologists, at the two extremes of the micro- and macro-worlds, which now appear to be converging, as predicted by the wise minds centuries ago.

There are innumerable signs in the Holy Quran, whose meanings are becoming clear only now, late in the 20th century; yet a large number are beyond today's scientific analyses and interpretation. For example, pre-delivery prediction of the sex of a baby; the seat of human consciousness (now suspected to be located in every cell of the human body — the 'zikr' of the cells — and may not be located only in the brain or heart or mind). The rhythmic arrangement of the petals of the sunflower follows a mathematical formula known as Fibonacci's number 1 1 2 3 5 8

13 21. The (sea) nautilus' body design follows a log formula.

The honey bees were inspired by God, and honey is a curative for mankind. Note the tremendous energy required to produce half a pound (250 g) of honey: it takes 550 bees 80,000 field trips to visit 2,500,000 flowers. Only one pound of beeswax can store 22 pounds of honey in 3,500 cells. Each cell is a marvel of efficiency, constructed with the knowledge of solid geometry: use of minimum wax for construction of the cell walls (hexagon), for maximum volume for the storage of the honey. The bees transfer information through complex dances, now well documented. Honey is said to be good for gastric ulcer patients: bursting the ulcer, closing its mouth, and drying up the ulcer. And good for the alcoholics too. Germs falling into pure honey cannot survive, it is has been claimed

(not so with adulterated honey — the protection is automatic!).

The nose of the ship of the desert, the camel, is constructed in such a way that it entraps 68 per cent of the exhaled moisture. The food is stored in a lump of fat, and is not spread out under the skin, as in the case of the human body, to keep the camel cooler in the desert heat; while in humans the fat layer acts as an insulator of heat. The human nose is a marvelous dust cleaner and air conditioner. Regardless of the outside ambient temperature (say, from minus 20 deg to +50 deg C) the air enters the lungs at a constant temperature. Why the nose is always in front of the face? It has a magnetic director-finding sensing device.

In the Quran it is revealed that God created everything in due proportion, fitting in with the environment. For example, had the human body been three times

taller, it would have caused a lot of problems (weight, falls and locomotion) acting under the present gravitational forces (compare human activity of the moon with one fifth the earth's gravity). The size of a human baby at birth (delivery time) and has a tolerance of a hairbreadth compared to the width of the pelvis.

The effects of external and internal electric and magnetic forces on the human body is a fascinating study, described in a book *"The Body Electric"*. Some of the interesting data would be presented in a later column.

Many body actions and reactions occur in millionths of a second (and not merely in milliseconds). Such mysterious functions of the biological clock of the human body are described in the book *"The Body in Time"* compiled by Kenneth Rose (John Wiley, 1989, 225 pages). But more about it later. —DHARITRI