



poems

Poems by Sudeep Sen

Flying Home

I meticulously stitch time through the embroidered sky,
through its unpredictable lumps and hollows. I

am going home once again from another
home, escaping the weave of reality into another

one, one that gently reminds and stalls
to confirm: my body is the step-son of my soul.

But what talk of soul and skin
in this day and age, such ephemeral things,

that cross-weaves blood and breath
into clotted zones of true escape.

What talk of flight time and flying
when real flights of fancy are crying

to stay buoyant unpredictably in mid-air
amid pain, peace, and belief: just like thin air

sketches, where another home is built
in free space vacuum, as another patchwork quilt

is quietly wrapped around, gently, in memoriam.

Single Malt

The single malt
explodes

from its husk,
swirling

in the cranium
of its own

shell,
flooding

the mind
with images

that alternately
switches

Shutter speed
and lens

distilling
sight,



that whisks
away
from the mundane,
what is
absolute
and essential,
and leaves out
what is not.



A Blank Letter

An envelope arrives unannounced from overseas
containing stark white sheets,

perfect in their presentation of absence.
Only a bold logo on top

revealed its origin, but absolutely nothing else.
I examined the sheets,

peered through their grains —
heavy cotton-laid striations —

concealing text, in white ink, postmarked India.
Even the watermark's translucence

made the script's invisibility transparent.
Buried among the involute contours, lay sheets

of sophisticated pulp, paper containing
scattered metaphors — uncoded, unadorned,

untouched — virgin lines that spill, populate
and circulate to keep alive its breathings.

Corpuscles of a very different kind —
hieroglyphics, unsolved, but crystal-clear.

Zaragoza Skies

Under the glassy Zaragoza skies
where the sun penetrated ones skin

sculpting to baptise a new story —
I stand transfixed, just as one does

at the unexpectedness of a kiss —
a script that would not

conclude to its measured end.
The skies write out

a narrative which humans
must choicelessly follow.

even though it may include pain.
But in pain lies unstated happiness.

ity of passion
that remains frozen.

unborn, but simmering,
like the melting sky's expansive heat.

Beyond the Balustrade

Waves... loud enough not to make noise. EDGAR Allan Poe
Colliding waters dissolve your mother tongue. Alan Wall

The sea, the waves — its foams caressing the grains,
every grain of this cinnamon island and its sand-speckled edge.

We breathe, we breathe, and breathe the sea —
soaked air again, and choke, in the freshness of its honesty.

honesty that is not defined by mother tongue, or the waves,
or even the strong winds — the very same

wind that runs its fingers over our skin and our
mind, picking undetected emotions hidden under our

translucent skin. And at the end, it is the silence
of the turbulent foam, its sumptuous froth of poetry and

of rhythm, born accidentally from bursting globules on
sand, that coalesces everything — friendship, insanity, unreason.

Mermaid Purses

Leathery sacks,
transparent, sewn together tenuously
with gossamer strings

at their ends, part only slightly, as
they reveal soft shark-skin inside
and the silver tinge

of its outer scales, as
one sees the floating womb
cut gentle arcs, preparing

for a later life. As its back
faces translucent aqua light of the deep
sea, green and blue merge with

the brown of the larva, as
the egg's oval matches the ballet
pirouettes of weightless polyps.

the languid unsettling of sand,
and the slow careful
re-settling of its

grains. In these purses, grand
score-sheets fill themselves,
cadences marking

the wavelengths of high trills and
low grunts of mis-named 'mermaids'
and the 'real' fish,

inflecting tones and
scales of an ancient reed: the gentle song
of water, weed, and the sonar suite

of the under-sea. Here, and
now, the infant shark muscles itself —
learning the rules of shifting

maritime trade — and
the rules with which to rule
his kinsmen, his kindred, his king —

ship of the ocean depths — and
the politics of shrewd waves
that under-cuts even fluid mechanics.



At Dalhousie

(Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada 90-91)
by Rebecca Haque

Running for the morning class,
French for reading.

Winter: slipping on the icy sidewalk,
Grinning, as I pick myself up.

Ecstatic, in the freezing rain.

Trees, leaves, boughs,
The world — everything,
transported to an enchanted
Fairytale evening.

Ah! Fairytale forever!
Magic, simply magic.



reflection

Emerson at the Millennium

by A M M A'abad

Things are in the saddle, and ride
marking.
— Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

A little homage to Emerson
would not be out of place as
the 20th century sinks its
own weight of sin towards
mankind and the environment; and as
the millennium approaches to raise
some mixed hopes within mixed souls.

Emerson! thou shouldst be living at
this hour. Bangladesh has need of thee
(under USAID if necessary). She is a fen
of stagnant and overflowing waters;
and the old lemon is not working effi-
ciently or benevolently. The country
boats are rudderless, the Sarangs
(captains) of the launches are ruthless,
and the ship of the state appears to
have grounded in the over-slimming
Buriganga river, which goes through
the heart of the metropolis Dhaka. But
neither hi-tech R&D nor space technol-
ogy can conjure up another Emerson,
the benign American spiritualist who
elevated the souls of millions of drifting
humanity in the New World.

Many would like to take Emerson's complete works to the lonely island of Robinson Crusoe (if there is one in this crowded Earth of six billion souls). What keeps him fresh and alive is the glow of transcendentalism which makes one return to him time and again for the genuine warmth of his solacing thoughts. His homely homilies on the divinity in man were aimed directly at the wandering minds at the mundane plane, seeking anchors rather than floating straws. Thus the readers became lifelong companions.

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When the time comes, the master appears. Emerson came on the American scene just when he was needed by the budding nation — a divine grace (at least to those who believe in such heavenly wire-pulling — using technically

compatible terms). His contribution to the development of the American mind cannot be measured directly, but imagine the state of the United States today without the radioactive effect of Emerson's thoughts whose half-life has not yet arrived.

The young minds as students the world over have read and re-read his famous essay on Self-reliance. But Emerson really takes over during the maturer years of the readers, emitting scintillating glow between the lines. After going through this essay, I rushed to the college library (decades ago) and read up everything by him and about him; and during the subsequent years started collecting his writings. Here is a lovable, readable philosopher, but his mastery of the English language opened

up his audience.

He is food par excellence for the parched mind seeking more than the daily pasture. For a start, there is no better stimulant for a reflective mind. After such a conditioning, adventures into the realm of philosophy are undertaken with more confidence, and credibility.

The environment today is not at all reflective, as the millennium approaches, and Emerson recedes from the electronic screen, and the global leadership shrinks to the size of the Global Village. What is the Information Age without the time to stand and stare, and contemplate for a few wasted moments; while the other orbits are chasing one another? In this Age of Changes, changes will occur, but with

how much control? The key issue today is control, not empathy.

Emerson was more of a wise man than a philosopher. Cool words of wisdom are like oases in the lonely mental deserts we harbour without destination. What Emerson said to Carlyle also applied upon him, "The comfort of meeting a man of genius is that he always speaks sincerely." Local applications are not restricted, in the sense a genius is beyond restriction.

Emerson was perpetually busy with man's number one question: "Why?" He had two powerful tools to respond to this eternal question: great originality of the mind, and exceptional moral courage to be honest with one's line of thoughts. These, combined with the matchless grace of his pen keep the

readers spellbound. Many of his sentences do not say much, but the subliminal effect peeps out later, throughout life, as others around note the subtle changes in the personality of the individual reader. Even now when I try to analyze some of my stands, I discover that many of the ideas took germination during the first phase of the recycling of Emerson's ideas.

Emerson was hardly ever dramatic. His quiet magnetism discouraged repulsion. Any person who missed Emerson wasted a greater part of his inherent capital. Time, as a set mind is hard to mould. He may not teach anything to many, but the benevolent touch might tickle quietly inside the readers.

Emerson hated quotations. But we seem to like it at the academic level. No harm in ending Emerson with Emerson:

• Good-bye, proud world! I'm going home.
• There is properly no history; only biography.
• Glittering, generalities! They are blazing ubiquities.

fiction

Leech ("Jok")

by Abu Ishaq

Translated by Arifa Ghani

Continued from last week
SMAN stared.

"What's the matter? Why are you staring? Go!"
"Have you given me only one share then?"

"Yes."
"Why?"
"Why? Haven't you heard of the new law? The three-share law?"

"The three-share law? Yes, I'm supposed to get two shares according to that law."

"Huh! You get two shares? Go and ask the young master."

"I'm going right now."
"Okay, okay, you can go when you like but first put the two shares in my boat and then talk."

"No, I won't give you the jute. Let me ask first."

"Why are you getting angry with me? If the master says I should return them,

then I'll hold my ears and return them."

Wajed Choudhury's son, Yusuf, was sitting on the verandah and smoking a cigarette. Osman walked towards him slowly and fearfully. Tota behind him.

"Master, I can't understand this whole business," he said.

"What business?" asked Yusuf as he released smoke from his cigarette.

"Master, they made three shares and gave me only one share."

"Yes, that's right."
Osman stared, wide-mouthed.

"Haven't you understood yet? Don't you remember the five hundred taka you borrowed to buy a cow and plough?"

Osman seemed to fall from the sky.

"I borrowed money? When, master?"

"Yes, you'll forget everything now. Remember signing some papers last year and taking the money? I gave you money to buy a cow and a plough. That

is why you will receive one share and we'll get two. When the three-share law is passed, you will receive half as before."

"I did not take any money. Even God will not stand for such injustice."
"Go, go, man. Get out. If you make too much trouble, none of you will get an inch of land."

Osman stumbled out, holding his son by the hand.

Yusuf gave a twisted smile and said, "Three-share! This is just a rehearsal before that law is passed!"

Taking another puff of his cigarette, he repeated, "Law! Will the law be able to stop us? We can move through the eye of the needle. Let them make their law! We know how to bypass the law! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

The last words were not Yusuf's. They were an imitation of his father.

It happened last year. Wajed Choudhury had ground out these words last year as he read the news about the three-share law in the papers.

A clause in the law read "If the owner of the land provides a cow and plough or if he gives money for that reason, he is entitled to half of the harvest." It was to take advantage of this clause that he had sent his son to get thumbprints of the share-croppers on papers.

On the way back, Tota asked, "Father, how did they write it? Didn't you understand when you were putting your thumbprint?"

Osman did not answer his son. Only a long "Oh God" sounded with his deep sigh.

Tota looked at his father in astonishment. He had never seen his father look that way.

On the outskirts of the Choudhury's

compound, Osman saw Karim Gazi, Nobu Khan and another ten or twelve share-croppers coming this way.

Karim Gazi called out to him, "What, man, son of a sheikh! Where are you going?"

"I had gone to the big house," replied Osman. "They have killed me, brother. They say I borrowed five hundred taka from them."

Before he could finish, Nobu Khan said, "Oh, so you too put your thumbprint on a paper?"

"Yes, brother. I did not understand what they wrote with a twist of their pen. If I did, do you think this would have happened? The rent-collector had said 'There must be some sort of document to show you have taken the land as a share-cropper' when he took the print."
"Yes. They cheated us all in that

way."

Karim Gazi said, "Why, man, why are you returning home after such an injustice has been done?"

"What am I to do?"

"What do you mean by that?" shouted Karim Gazi. "Come with us and let's see what can be done."

He urged him on again. "What are you staring at me for, man? We are dead no matter what we do so why should we let them go without at least trying to get back?"

Osman pushed Tota and said, "Go on home."

His lethargic blood grew hot. He shook himself and said, "Yes, let us go. They have sucked the blood from our bodies. We cannot let them digest it, no matter the consequences!"

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