

BOOK REVIEW

A lover and dreamer

Reeshad is a dreamer and a believer as well. His faith is in the supremacy of the "Supreme", though people around him like to take him for a child who loves to float in the world of fantasy, writes **SR Shaheed**

Moments in Surreality (Ballad of the Soul)
by Reeshad Rabbany
Published by : Bol Para
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THE word 'Surrealist' has been defined by Andre Beton of France as 'Pure Psychic' 'Automatism' by which it is intended to express through a medium either verbally, in writing or in any other way the true process of thought. The object of Surrealism is to free the artists from normal association of pictorial ideas and from all accepted means of expression to give freedom to the irrational dictates of their subconscious mind and vision. For the commoner like us surrealism aims at expressing what there is in the subconscious mind. Thus a painter or a poet may depict a number of unrelated objects as seen in a dream. Reeshad is a true surrealist who makes an attempt to present, what he dreams, through his poems by exploiting his natural gift, what one might like to call as poetic.

Prof. Serajul Islam has rightly said in his "Foreword" that the poems of Reeshad are about dreams, really dreams that will never come true but are necessary for those who have seen them. Reeshad himself has admitted in the "Introduction", he is constantly being driven by the simple two-word question "what if" and he himself has worked out an answer that might satisfy his inner self only, and a reader joins Reeshad, consciously or unconsciously in his endless search for the ultimate. Thus in "Tomorrow" he takes the readers to

"witness the emergence of a surreal new day
Promising to lustre the world with its Radiance of advancement"
but he prepares the reader to pay
"The price for killing nature
And exploiting the simple mind"
with the depiction of
"The future is
Probably scintillating
By the explosion of a
Nuclear device perhaps."

Reeshad continues his endless query in his "The ballad of a nymph", perhaps the best of the lot. Here he tells of a nymph who was seen by the poet

"frolicking and dancing
to some unearthly ballad
inaudible to human ears"
She was a heavenly beauty
"As she closed her eyes
and lifted her head towards the clouds
she was smiling as the rain drops
fell softly
caressing her"
The reader becomes entranced and
"wish they could stay here for ever
wished the moment would never end"
and ruefully muses with the poet
"wished she was still there
with him trying to shelter him
with her drenched saree"

Has Reeshad been influenced by the so-called suggestive indefiniteness blurring the distinction between the actual world and that of dream and reverie? But the dreams and sensitivity to colour, sound and image that accompanied him were never to leave him. Thus in "Predictably Unpredictable" we see Reeshad telling a story

"Trying to make colourful pattern
out of the ordinary
black and white frame"
but again sounds a note of caution
"Aren't we just creating holes in the loop
diving into certainties of uncertainties
making unpredictable predictions
who knows really?"

Reeshad is a dreamer and a believer as well. His faith is in the supremacy of the "Supreme", though people around him like to take him for a child who loves to float in the world of fantasy. Thus they pity him. Perhaps, his pathetic sentiments fail to move them. They try to get rid of him by giving him alms but Reeshad is unmoved. Because

"He has the most powerful
face on his side
he has faith"

In a "Ravenous Life" we come across a man who was once strong but now meanders here and there and follows a winding course and thereby

"discovered a world that's no less
than the heavens
described in the bible"...

"that's a magical blend of darkness
and light
where all the colours bleed into one

in a fashion
that can never be comprehended
in the material world".

Here we see Reeshad's controlled use of metaphor

"He is in the song
that you see through
the night wind's harassment
of jittery leaves"

A surrealist Reeshad is not devoid of romantic feelings and we find his poem "Loves Wait" filled up with the air of romance as we find him taking recourse to the objects to express his feelings for a long wait when

"The hands slowly tick away
as it reaches nearer
to the moment
of our reunion
my love and I
together again"

Can we expect a more poignant manifestation of a lover's "wait" for the beloved from a teen-aged poet? With the poet we let our tears roll down the cheeks when wait is over with the beloved failing to join the lover.

Reeshad is anecdotal and thus in his another poem we are brought face to face with a "Street Child"

"who wakes up to the
harsh coldness of the wintry night...
his vision bleared",

Vision is Reeshad's natural habitat and that made him use the word 'bleared' and not 'blurred'. The former expresses too much whereas the later is a commonplace. Our heart bleeds to see the street child scrambling for ords, not with human beings in the person of waifs and strays, but with the dogs who

"...don't seem like too
challenging an issue
just throw
of a stone
should dissipate them."

The reader is confronted with a big question from the street child

"why can't they not show me
a little love not hate?"

why can't they not just treat me
like a human being"

But the question remains unanswered as the answer is not known to the reader and the child as well,

"He still does not know the answers
and I don't think he ever will"

and with the struggle for an answer the child sinks into deep slumber and starts dreaming the dreams of a new and different vision of the world.

The Street Child dreams and the reader heaves a sigh!

The anthology of twelve poems end with a "Crying Country", a country that once enjoyed peace and tranquility, fell prey to the marauding colonists. She was freed by her children, only to be molested, to be a witness to

"The piercing intonation
of a distant bomb
that engulfed the lives
of hundreds of her children".

Capable of deeper and wider insight Reeshad ceases to be any more surrealist as the vague suggestiveness that dominate his other poems is conspicuous by its absence and the dream imagery has yielded its place to a contemporaneous reality that is equally crude and cruel. The poem is an outburst, a crying for solace of the frustrated soul, be it land or the people inhabiting it.

Reeshad is only 19 and as Aly Zaker has said that he has a long way to travel. But he has already made a bold step and time is not far when he will be greeted with both hands by luminaries now shining in the field of literature. I wish him all success.

Finally, the review will be incomplete if it is not mentioned that the book is well got up. Barring few printing errors the book has come to us with a print that will not strain our eyes is an achievement of the publisher and is sure to commend itself to the reader.

Attacking juvenile delinquency

The author dealt with the theoretical concepts of causation of juvenile offence, nature of offence, treatment pattern in the family, family background and living conditions, influence of informal companionship and mass media factors influencing juveniles behaviour. He also recorded the opinions of the subjects regarding the factors which influences their anti-social behaviour. Boys identified companionship of informal groups, unsatisfactory family life as major causative factors, writes **Najmir Nur Begum**

Juvenile Delinquency: Dhaka City Experience

By Abdul Hakim Sarker, published by the Human Nursery for Development (HND), Price 450, Pages 297

IN the context of present day situation, a publication based on empirical study on the socio-economic conditions of the juvenile delinquents of Dhaka City is most welcoming. To-day's juvenile delinquents are future criminals. Even nature of crimes participated by the juveniles have changed to a great extent. Now a large number of juveniles are actively involved in violent crimes like rape, extortion, kidnapping and murder. The increased rate of violent crimes committed by juveniles have generated anxiety and tension among the people about the future of our society. Parents often are disillusioned and helpless to control their children. The book serves an important role by throwing light on the causative factors of delinquency and collecting the views of people dealing with juvenile delinquents in their various capacities. I congratulate the author for showing his sensitiveness about the problem of our society by rightly selecting the topic for the Ph.D dissertation and finally, for giving it a book shape.

The study was conducted in 1980's with a view to examine the various manifestations of the problem. Data were collected from a sample of boys undergoing correctional treatment having been judged as offenders together with some of their parents and guardians. The book also examines the effectiveness of justice system in controlling juvenile delinquency, reviews recent legislations and court ruling on the rights of youth offenders. Families played an important role towards the behaviour of the juveniles delinquents. Dysfunction families which could not set a definite role for their children or standard of behaviour in front of them, could not meet children's increased social and economic needs and above all, could not control their behaviour were the factors primarily responsible for their children's delinquent behaviour. The author also indicated the existence of a "deviant sub-culture" which influenced boys to a great extent for drifting to deviant pattern of behaviour.

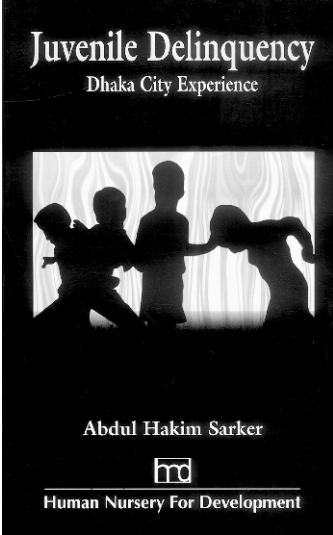
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encing juveniles behaviour. He also recorded the opinions of the subjects regarding the factors which influences their anti-social behaviour. Boys identified companionship of informal groups, unsatisfactory family life as major causative factors.

The study was primarily conducted by social survey method. The "deviant sub-culture" pointed out by the author which surrounds the problem could not be studied as such. This "sub-culture" is very important and interesting area in understanding delinquent and criminal behaviour in a society. Future researchers might concentrate in studying this "deviant sub-culture" by adopting ethnographic method of study.

The author has indicated in different chapters some measures to be taken to curb the growth of this problem. What was expected that on the basis of his indepth understanding of the situation, he should have provided in his book a separate chapter dealing with his learned recommendations for the parents, families peer-group, school, correctional authorities and society as whole to deal with the problem.

Saying goes: knowing the cause, solves half of the problem. The author has empirically dugged out the causes, which would help



understanding of the situation, which in turn, would help controlling it at its onset.

This book is valuable addition to the present knowledge in this field. Academicians, researchers, planners and policy-makers, social workers and students will find this book very useful and informative. I wish its wide circulation. I again, thank the author for his initiative.

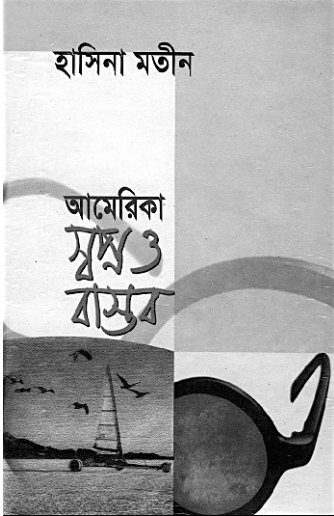
Najmir Nur Begum is Professor Institute of Social Welfare & Research at Dhaka University

America: A melting pot

This book is a result of hard work of many years but has fallen ten years behind as the references show, writes **Kazi Ihteham**

America: Swapna of Bastab (America: Dream and Reality)

by Hasina Matin, Published by Bangla Academy, February 2001.



A book of 223 pages including an index, 6 pages of maps and 34 pages of different photographs collected from different books is a good specimen of a composite work written in Bangla. There are as many as thirteen chapters in the book covering varied subjects for example: 1) Naming of Western Hampshire as "America," 2) The Arrival of early Inhabitants, 3) The Current Research on Early Men, 4) The Policy of the British and the Americans about Native Americans, 5) Other Trends of American Revolution, 6) The Relationship and Conflicts between Americans and Indians, 7) The Awakening of the blacks in the United States: Educational Aspects, 8) Migration: From

America, and 12) Is America a 'Melting Pot'?

The book is by far about the inhabitants of America starting from the early settlements to the last, that covers Red Indians, White Europeans and Black Africans, and finally all people from all races, colours and creeds. Race is a mischievous term and it creates many misgivings including superiority of race, colour conflicts and many other contours within the American society. If the chronology is maintained in the book Native Americans should have got precedence than others. In that sequence the migration of the Europeans should follow it which ranked 8th in the book. But the author has her prerogative to arrange them, and I accept it with good grace. All theories regarding how the name America came into being were meticulously analysed. Some

of these theories are funny and fallacious but they still linger on. And it is rightly put by the author that Columbus never knew that he discovered a new land unheard by the Europeans. Today Columbus is not taken as a great hero, and the Columbus Day parade is denounced by native Americans.

This book is a result of hard work of many years but has fallen ten years behind as the references show. It might be the delay in publication. But there is ample scope of revision and addition which the author would do to make it up-to-date in the next edition. The get up is good, but news-print paper marred the quality of other pictures inserted at the end. Its a delightful reading. The book should adorn the shelves of those who are eager to know about the people of America.

Kazi Ihteham is professor of History at JU

INTERVIEW

The master of all he surveys

Alexei Sayle tells Phil Daoust why he gave up screenplays for short stories

WHEN Charles Dickens toured America in the late 1860s, a friend who had not seen him for many years was shocked by how much he had changed. "I sometimes think," he wrote, "I must have known two individuals bearing the same name."

Anyone who remembers Alexei Sayle from two decades ago will know that feeling. Then, Sayle was a shouty stand-up in a too-tight suit, part of the same "alternative" generation as Ben Elton, Ade Edmondson and Rick Mayall. He was the first compere at Britain's original comedy club, the Comedy Store, and a star of cult sitcom The Young Ones. A Marxist from his childhood in working-class Liverpool, he fought the system (or at least kept on moaning about it) long after Elton and Co became part of it. And now? At the age of 49, Sayle is a hard-working writer. He no longer works as a stand-up, and even acting comes second to his books.

The turning point came four years ago. Sayle's career as a TV and film actor was in gentle decline, and no one - including the man himself - had been much impressed with how the handful of TV movies he had written had turned out. It was three years since Sayle had last toured as a stand-up. He had produced two books in the 1980s - a comic detective story called Train to Hell and the cartoon book Geoffrey the Tube Train and the Fat Comedian - but they were out of print, and even he could barely remember what they were about. Then he decided to try his hand at short stories. "Everything came together," he recalls. "It felt right from the very beginning."

Sayle's first collection, Barcelona Plates, has now sold more than 50,000 copies; Douglas Adams described the book as "a complete revelation". The second, The Dog Catcher, has sold 9,000 in hardback. "I tell people I'm the best-selling short-story writer since the war," Sayle says. "It might even

true."

These are nihilistic tales of greed, cannibalism, murder and joyless sex. In the title story of Barcelona Plates, a holidaying Brit causes the car crash that killed Princess Diana and "didn't give a fuck"; in that of The Dog Catcher, the drifter who has been turning tricks in a respectable Spanish village is murdered during the annual pest-shoot. There is humour - but usually of the sneering kind. And whenever the subject turns to the entertainment business (which is often), the mockery is merciless, even at Sayle's own expense. Barcelona Plates features the story of Nic and Tob, two undeservingly successful comedians whose arrival "had fortunately coincided with the rise of stupidity, the public having tired of being shouted at by fat men about things that weren't their fault as a form of light entertainment". The Dog Catcher, meanwhile, introduces a BBC commissioning editor who will not make a single decision in case it turns out to be wrong, dodging supplicants in the style of Catch-22's Major Major. Sayle, you know, is writing from bitter experience.

The cynical, sometimes ranting tone will be familiar to anyone who has seen Sayle's stand-up. Does he really have such a bleak view of life? "You know," he says, "when you write it's not all of you. It's just what you find works for you. I went through a cuddly phase in the mid-1990s, when I wrote the romantic comedy Sorry About Last Night [in which Sayle starred opposite Siobhan Redmond]. I was looking at it the other day and I thought: 'It's too nice.' What works best for me is me being black, black, black. It's not all that I am as a person, although I do have a jaundiced view of humanity." Is it cathartic? "I don't know. I am pretty cheerful."

We shouldn't read too much into his sniping at his fellow comedians, he insists. "One of the things I liked as a comic was random nastiness. It always seemed a bit pointless to me to do stuff about people who are

truly evil. It seemed more artistic to attack people who are relatively harmless." Bob Mortimer, he says, "really likes" him. It's a remark he has made on several occasions, never mentioning if the feeling is reciprocated.

The first short stories Sayle remembers reading were by H G Wells. Little Alexei's parents were dyed-in-the-wool communists, and "Wells was allowed in our house because he was considered progressive. We hated Orwell because he was anti-Stalin. And then I moved on. I went through a science-fiction phase: Asimov, Bradbury, people like that. And then Graham Greene, Kingsley Amis." Now he reads "whatever my wife's reading group is doing that month. I read it first and she never gets round to reading it." He recently finished Conrad's Heart of Darkness and is currently trying his best to get through Dickens's Great Expectations. It's a safe bet that he doesn't read much by his fellow comedians. "I was the first alternative comic to write a novel," he says with a sigh. "Fucking hell, it's a terrible legacy..."

Sayle's Bloomsbury home is in the street where Dickens once lived, and he has no qualms about identifying himself with his hero: "He was also somebody who'd had a life before being a writer," he says before attacking all those writers who can only write about writing. Sayle's own life sounds attractive enough. He has been happily married for 28 years. He no longer does the auditions he so hated as an actor, and he has accepted that he may never write the Great Screenplay. "The scripts that did make it to telly all read great, but none of them really came off the page. It's just a wonderful experience for me to be completely in control now, to do everything - to paint the scenery, do the sound, do the music, play all the parts, make the entire 'movie' myself."

FICTION

Richard Flanagan wins Commonwealth prize

AUSTRALIAN writer Richard Flanagan has won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for his wildly inventive and complex novel Gould's Book of Fish.

Inspired by the fish paintings of 19th century convict William Buelow Gould, it tells of Gould's 1828 love affair with a young black woman. It was chosen from a shortlist of four, which included Ian McEwan's Atonement; Alice Munro's Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage; and Nadine Gordimer's The Pickup.

The Edinburgh-based judging panel declared Flanagan's work to be "the most controversially difficult and demanding of the four books that were before us, because we detected in it a touch of genius that, we believe, will give it enduring significance."

The chairman of the panel, the Right Reverend Bishop Holloway, added that "some of the judges used adjectives like Dantean, Joycean, even grotesque."

Flanagan has said that his book, which is lavishly printed in six different colours, is designed to be much more than a simple love story. As well as a stab at the heart of contemporary Australia, it is also an antidote to Bill Gates's comment that his ultimate aim is to put an end to paper and books.

"I conceived of this book being about the wonder and glory of books," Flanagan has written. "I wanted to prove Bill Gates and his leprous ilk wrong. I wanted to show the cant of technology for the thin lie it is. I wanted to prove that far from being finished creatively and commercially, books still remained pregnant with an infinity of possibilities, that implicit in every book is the universe."

In a boost for the flagging ebook industry, the winner of the Best First Book Award was the South African writer Manu Herbstein for his ebook Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Described by the judges as a "book written with tremendous moral passion about a monstrous episode in human history," it is the first time an ebook-on-demand title has won a major literary award.

Source: The Guardian

Booker Prize value soars to £50,000

BRITAIN'S leading book award, the Booker Prize, more than doubled in value last night.

This autumn's winner will take home £50,000, dwarfing the £20,000 prize money given last year to Peter Carey's novel True History of the Kelly Gang.

All six shortlisted writers will also get £2,500 compared with £1,000 in 2001.

This dramatic act of literary inflation puts the Booker £20,000 ahead of its nearest rival, the Whitbread book award. It was announced to highlight the fiction award's success in hooking a generous new sponsor. The change means that it will keep a link in name only with the Booker group, which founded it in 1969.

The sponsor, the Man Group, specialises in worldwide alternative investment and brokerage. It takes over from the food chain Iceland. Man has promised to donate at least £2.5m over five years.

The prize will now be renamed the Man Booker prize instead of the Iceland Booker prize. The sponsorship change narrowly saved it from being called the Big Food Group Booker prize, in honour of the company which recently took over Iceland.

The fantasy author Terry Pratchett, whose 27 Discworld novels have sold nearly a million copies each, got another chance of winning a major award which has eluded him when his Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents was shortlisted for the highly respected Carnegie Medal for children's books.

The other finalists are Love That Dog, by Sharon Creech; The Ropemaker, by Peter Dickinson; Journey to the River Sea, by Eva Ibbotson; Jake's Tower, by Elizabeth Laird; the Kite Rider, by Geraldine McCaughrean; and True Believer, by Virginia Euwer Wolff.

Source: The Guardian

BOOK REVIEW

Asking for trouble

Coetzee's gloomy hero questions life's meaning in his new novel Youth, but to little purpose, writes **Jason Cowley**

Youth

By J.M. Coetzee
Secker & Warburg, £14.99, pp169

WHAT is it about himself that J. M. Coetzee feels compelled to confront? His new novel, Youth, purports to be a work of fiction. It certainly has the compulsion and internal logic of fiction - he creates a believable world and allows autonomous creations to move freely in it. In fact, Youth is less a work of imagination than a stylised memoir, in which Coetzee revisits the humiliation and struggle of his early years as a restless student in London. As such, it's a study in failure which, when read against what we know of his mature achievement - twice winner of the Booker Prize, celebrated essayist and successful career academic - feels like a peculiarly tortuous exercise in intellectual introspection, and not much else.

Youth is written, as was his earlier, less artful memoir, Boyhood: Scenes From Provincial Life (1997), in an evasive third-person, so that the young Coetzee once more becomes an actor in his own drama.

The story he tells is resonant if overfamiliar: that of a young colonial's journey, in the early 1960s, from the margins of Empire to the metropolitan centre, a journey undertaken by Orwell, V.S. Naipaul, Dan Jacobson and many others before him. The colonial shares with Coetzee the name 'John', a background in mathematics and linguistics, and a desire to escape from 'an undistinguished, rural family, bad schooling, the Afrikaans language'. He wants to be a writer (what else?) and he also wants to suffer for his art. He takes a cramped room on the Archway Road in north London, and prepares for his emotions to be 'transfigured and turned into poetry'. In the event, he does little more than wither into aimlessness, a self-styled 'wanderer' who, like Orwell's Gordon Comstock and Forster's Leonard Bast before him, discovers how hard it can be for a provincial with literary ambitions in the metropolis.

Coetzee never once leaves the

young man's side, pursuing him in thought more than in action. Which means that the reader is locked up inside John's head for the entire book - and what a claustrophobic space it is. Consciousness is here frequently rendered as a stream of rhetorical questions: Why is life so cruel? Why must I suffer? Why am I so unhappy? Oh, all right, I exaggerate - but not by much, because John is a model of romantic gloom and willed turmoil, the kind of obsessive self-watcher who never misses the opportunity to steal a glance at himself as he passes a shop window.

Much happens to John, in Cape Town and then in London: he has several lovers, one of whom becomes pregnant; he works as a computer programmer at IBM, where he meets a regiment of blandly untroubled bureaucrats; and he writes an awful lot of verse, scarcely any of which we ever see. In fact, very little about him is shown. Speech is mostly reported, and everything is told at the same cool, measured distance, relayed through the thick filter of his thoughts.

In his wonderful comic novel Life is Elsewhere, Milan Kundera ruthlessly satirised the aspirations of the poet marqué, in the form of a young man called Jaromil who, like Coetzee's student, is sustained by immortal longings but for whom truth and beauty are always tantalisingly elsewhere. Jaromil is a clown who thinks he's a great poet, but we love him for this, even as we laugh at him, because he is one of life's holy innocents and his consequent artistic strivings have true paths.

But it's hard similarly to be moved by John, even as he drifts impecuniously from one disappointment to another.

At best, he's a monster of self-absorption; to him, other people are nothing but the means to an end of poetic self-fulfilment, hence the impossibility of conversation. Later in the novel, he takes to wandering the winter streets of London. Of course, he is a listless guide, making no attempt to animate the city through which he moves. Instead, he looks mostly at his feet.

Coetzee is a writer of deep intelli-

gence, drawn to symbol and allegory. He has perfected a kind of prison literature: his lonely characters operate in societies without any recognisable moral centre, often afflicted by a nameless menace, guilty of no sin except that of being alive. So life is a prison sentence; birth is a crime. His previous novel, Disgrace, a parable of the social dislocation of the new South Africa, deservedly won the Booker. In that novel - and again in Youth - his prose is stripped of all superfluous ornamentation. The more he writes, it seems, the more concise and wintry becomes his tone and style - the inevitable slow glide towards silence of the Beckettian that he is. Youth has none of the urgency and contemporary relevance of Disgrace, in which every sentence carried an authentic charge of intrigue. It's a book of great sorrow and regret. Coetzee is very hard on himself in creating a character - if indeed it is himself - so wretched and dislikeable. Perhaps that's his point: that he had to remind himself how much he once suffered in order to remake himself, to become the person he wanted to be, the writer he is, free from the taint of family and of the past.

Youth borrows its title from Conrad's great novella of romantic wonder that ends with a young Western sailor's vision of the Orient, of the 'East', as something mysterious and dreamlike: 'Only for a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour - of youth.' But there all similarities end. There's nothing transcendent in this resolutely earth-bound book.

Coetzee once said of Robinson Crusoe, a novel he rewrote in his own Foe (1986), that the idea of a man being marooned alone on an island is perhaps the 'only story'. He has once again written about shipwreck and ontological isolation in Youth, a work of unrelenting despair.

One hopes that through returning to the primal scene of his early unhappiness in London, Coetzee has at last achieved a form of catharsis. From here, he can move on.