

MUSINGS

Sweetheart

AINON N.

My heart and I, we both have matured. This heart beats too fast; faster than the average heart, literally. And yet again, as I belong to the female species, my heart has the upper hand over my male counterpart. We have faster heartbeat. Well, if I live the average lifespan my heart will have the luxury of keeping me alive by beating approximately two and a half billion times, give or take! Of course, it all depends.

Nurse A was getting all necessary information from me to start the trail of paperwork. The good natured nurse C walked in, took one look at me and proficiently announced, "Ah, she is too beautiful, I am taking her." "Don't I get to keep her?" nurse A retorted. Between the two I attempted a merry quip, "Do I get to choose?" As I followed C through the corridor I could hear the harmonic pitch of several pumping hearts attached to the monitors. Quite sometime ago I had compromised with out-of-my-league medical terms magnetic resonance imaging and positron emission tomography that ascertained the status of my life, yet it didn't stop me from asking the technicians a myriad lighthearted questions! They indulged my facetious queries. Eventually I met my heart on the monitor, its four chambers faithfully hard at work. I smiled at the allegory: I have appropriated my heart to my family and the unknown. And to think that few accepted while others questioned my motives!

A touch of melancholy shadowed my thoughts. The story of the heart is not about me. It is always about loving you, in context, a feeling that gives a lift to the soul. Again I took a hard look at the monitor and was enthralled by its rhythmic sound --- the beat, the tone, the measured innocent murmur in between. What a foolish parable! Indeed, it is not the heart but my analytical mind, albeit the brain's circuits, that interpret what I selectively choose as pleasure and weeds out hurt that alters my perceptions, mixing and matching images and words, and finally creating for me a coherent whole --- a meaningful script. As my brain contrives an explanation, so changes my mind. Such was the premise when I extracted the abstract reasoning about love from the repository of my thoughts I had

stored the other night:

At the end of a long conversation on what not(s) B said, "I bask in the light which comes from glorious you! Did you enjoy the journey among the stars this evening? Or were we two rivers on our way to a coming together? Or was the river in me rushing to meet the expansive sea in you?" To which the Broca's area of my brain composed, "Oh, for heaven's sake go, away!" And the spontaneous reply by B was, "I invoke my right to freedom of speech! Why? You afraid you will fall in love?" This he delivered with such seriousness that I started laughing. The gleeful chuckle was good for my heart. I had forgotten many desirables of life. The ques-

know in the end it will be only I by myself and my silent heart. Then again love is...

Sunflowers wild dance in breeze

Silence of dark night

Songsong of mountains

Resonance of flute soul-deep

Bliss of meditation

The fury of tempest

Sleepy eyes of a child

Warmth of an embrace

Longing for one who never is

To be one with self

Love is the madness of ecstasy

Like a gentle breeze

Twining the vines of a soul
With fragrance of flower clusters

Of wild rose

To love

Is to love softly, wild and awkward

Never to be complete, never once

Death is love

Love is but I

(And no, I did not tell B about this infinite array of run-off thoughts! I am powerfully drawn to the mind that has the creative capacity to craft love into what the heart desires!)

I snapped out of my reverie as the tests neared an end. Noticing the concern I asked: So, how is my heart? As I passed by their cautious smile into a sunny day, the blue sky seemed bluer and the manicured flowerbeds seemed to display more colours than usual. I let the day be...sine die, deciding to take no less than a tear and a smile as Gibran would have said. As I walked to the car the lyrics came in fragments, of Jim Croce humming:

If I could save time in a bottle... / If I had a box just for wishes and dreams that had never come true/ the box would be empty except for the memory of how they were answered by you / but there never seems to be enough time / to do the things you want to do once you find them...

Love should not be an accidental afterthought! My brain, the maker of words and the visual artist of perceptions, proclaimed: Who am I to question the poetic charm of the throbbing heart and its arcane dealings? Seriously.

Ainon N. writes from Carbondale, USA.



tion caught me by surprise. Can a reaction be as discernible as Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*? So, if I think it will ...lead to the conscious awareness (of love)? B unknowingly initiated a sequence of a complex reasoning process that forced me to decode my emotions and understandings of this sublime feeling. His pronunciation of the question led to an unexpected reaction: the impression of a piano in me tuned Nyman's the heart asks pleasure first, a reflective melody! The notes announced the sensibility of serenity which sketched for me the deep love of music, or rather the intensity that goes with it. It is that love I seek in people. Yet, I

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Remembering 1971 and other things

JULIAN FRANCIS

I was deeply moved by the very wonderful and sensitive 'Remembrance' 'A daughter remembers' by Qumrun Nahar (Daily Star, November 26th, 2011) and it brought many poignant memories of 1971 back to me but made me also think about other people.

At the end of November 1971, when I was based in Kolkata for Oxfam administering a relief programme for approximately 500,000 Bangladesh refugees, we sensed that all out war was possible as the whole city was under a complete black-out at night, prepared for the unlikely event of a bombing mission by the Pakistan Air Force. At that time there was a lot of propaganda coming over the air waves and one evening sitting outside in complete darkness I listened to the Pakistan Radio English service which told us that the Pakistan planes that day had scored a direct hit on the Kolkata telephone exchange and that the Howrah Bridge was floating down the Hooghly River!

As I remember the events and experiences of 40 years ago, I often break down in tears and suffer sleepless nights when I remember the number of men, women and children, particularly children, who died in front of me, sometimes in my arms and I wonder why we could not save them so that they could return home to their Golden Bengal. Of course, Oxfam's programme saved the lives of so many but those who did not survive are the ones I remember.

Thinking about the horrors of war, I think of my own maternal grandfather who died at the end of the First World War in 1918 at the age of 33, leaving a wife and three small children behind. Every year in the days leading up to Remembrance Day, November 11th, I wear a Poppy on my shirt or jacket and explain the reasons why to my Bangladeshi colleagues who take great interest as many of them lost their nearest and dearest.

est in the Liberation War of 1971.

There were many remarkable people who visited the work of Oxfam in the refugee camps of 1971. Senator Edward Kennedy is probably the most well-known and his contribution to Bangladesh's cause has been very well documented, but one 'giant of a man' who I remember is Richard Wood, who, in 1971, was the British Government's Minister of Overseas Development. He visited the refugee camps during the monsoon when they were very muddy. He strode around showing particular concern for those who had been wounded or had become disabled as a result of injuries received during their arduous journey from Bangladesh. One of the Government of India officials, accompanying the Minister, expressed his concern about how muddy and wet Mr. Wood's feet and shoes were getting. The Minister laughed and with his walking stick banged his own leg and a tin-like hollow sound rang out.

"No problem," he said, "I do not feel a thing!" He had lost both his legs 30 years before in the Middle East in the Second World War and yet many would not have known. When he later visited some amputees in hospital, he gave them great hope when he showed off his artificial legs. I am so grateful to Qumrun Naher for reminding us of the great sacrifices made by the Freedom Fighters and their families in 1971 and for reminding all of us to

make sure that members of the younger generation are fully aware of what happened in 1971 and how and why it happened. I hope that Qumrun Naher's writing will also be published in Bangla to reach a larger number of Bangladeshi families.

(Julian Francis, who has had a long association with Bangladesh, is Partnerships Director of the DFID and AusAid supported 'Chars Livelihoods Programme')

FUTURE OF LITERATURE:

Global art-malady and its consequences

RASHID ASKARI

Dominance of electronic media: Although there lies a whole lot of debate as to when precisely the golden age of World literature existed, one thing is for sure literature's current state of affairs is at the farthest from its heyday. With the printing media's coming under the powerful influence of its electronic counterpart, pieces of classic literature are having to survive on the whims of the electronic media. As a result, they are falling easy prey to cynical manipulations at the hands of the soap opera makers. Maybe, they are saving them from sinking into oblivion, but they are taking a heavy toll on this. Increasing public interest in audio-visual media has given rise to serious misgivings about the consequence of literature. The existence of Shakespeare's plays or Dickens's novels owes more to the celluloid versions of the film-makers than to the old moth-eaten texts which are only gathering dust on the library shelves. As a matter of fact, people by and large are losing interest in the act of reading itself. It appears as if reading is a wearying task in itself. Back at home after a long day's work, people, tired and exhausted, tend to fall back upon the electronic media for easy and effortless entertainment. The habit of reading for pleasure is waning rapidly. It is a big hurdle standing in the way of literary pursuits in general.

Spectre of commercialization: On top of these, the ghost of commercialization has befallen it as a trouble on a trouble. The writers of money spinners are rampant across the globe. Prompted by mercantile interests, they and their publishers are jointly

doing a roaring business in 'literature'. Books with high demand and high supply are considered as valuable books which have a greater market value. They are deemed to be popular authors whose books sell well. The larger the sales, the greater the authors! The publishers are investing heavily in this 'literary merchandising'. They kneel in supplication to those popular authors by giving them colossal advances against royalties. The book is advertised as a 'marvelous' read. But the 'great' authors may have not yet even conceived of it. So what? That is not at all worth caring about. Such writers are superstars and possessed of light-speed in writing. One fine day, they step into the luxury suites of the five-star hotels, and whip up a complete manuscript. Some of the writers have beaten records by writing full-length novels overnight. Books are produced sharply on deadlines with colorful dust-jackets, and then go on sale with post-publication advertisements in newspapers and televisions. Sales shoot up. Business is brisk and thriving. Both the authors and publishers make a quick profit, and go for further attempts. They have learnt what the market wants, and have mastered the craft of quickly dashing off the manuscripts.

Production of commercialization: What do these commercial authors contribute to literature? Delicious trash! They are writing tacky novels, tawdry stories, and dirty doggerels which might give heaps of immediate kicks, and bring the authors cheap popularity. These mercenary writers tend to play to the gallery, and have a field day with the vulgar taste of the general public. But what

they write is virtually dull and uninspiring. The authors are very careful to spare their readers' feelings. Things that readers are fond of must be, on no account, overlooked. The likes and dislikes of the readers, their conventions, stereotypes, and biases are carefully manufactured and nurtured by these authors. The audience's literary taste is thus held hostage by such authorial gimmicks and tricks, and the readers learn to dance to their tune. This literature is similar to the pulp literature which began to appear in the West during World War I, and remained popular in the 1930s. Pulp literature was what Aldous Huxley termed as "inconceivable twaddle". However popular it may prove immediately, it cannot survive longer due to the absence of true literary merit.

Malady and its outbreak: What we now call commercial literature is mushrooming double quick across the globe. This is an art-malady caused by an explosion of junk called literature. The whole spectrum of recent global literary scenario is laden with this junk. There are telltale signs of decadence of literature. This sort of literature is intended for profit only, without regard to quality. Although it may taste sweet, it is not worthy of being served at the same table with quality literature. It may be called 'disposable literature' for, it is to be read once, and then is tossed away. We may use it a second time, but sure, with a gun put to our heads.

Impact on genuine art: Since this stream of literature is gaining wide currency, the flow of true literature is on the wane. The soft glow of genuine art is being overshadowed

by the dazzling lights of the fakers and imitators. If anybody comes forward with a genuine work of literature, he will run into difficulty with its publication. If he publishes by himself, he will not survive the cut-throat competition with the get-rich-quick writers, the publishing establishment, and their high-selling printed debris. The outwardly unimpressive books of the helpless writers are failing to catch the readers' attention, and are therefore falling headlong into the ditch of monetary loss.

Naturally they feel demoralized, and do not want to take any identical attempts. Nor does any publisher want to take the risk of publishing the new authors' books which in turn discourages the advent of fresh talent. Small wonder that some good writers are also turning to commercial works. Although they, sometimes, write good pieces to slave their conscience, they are often alive to the possible dangers of unpopularity, and do not dare swim against the tide. Therefore, they, too, apply themselves to keeping their readers well supplied with the 'delicious trash'. The more the demand grows, the larger the supply increases, and the busier the market assumes. On the basis of demand, the supply is primed, and the price is fixed. From this view-point, this sort of literature may be called 'open market literature', which has grown as an offshoot of what we call 'open market economy'.

Literature capable of meeting the needs of the open market is surviving, and the one failing to do it is getting extinct. This is how, commercial literature, its unprincipled practitioners, and mercenary allies are growing in the dumping ground of commercializa-

tion.

Dire consequences: The world literature today is more or less damaged by this spectre of commercialization. To fulfill the limitless demands of the open market, these writers are tirelessly producing tons of trashy stuff, and the general readers are being made to swallow this with lip-smacking relish. This is a kind of literary exploitation, very crafty and cunning tricks of the trade. The tools of this exploitation are the commercial authors and their unprincipled publishers. As a result, the possibility of an ensuing plague is looming large. A deep sense of foreboding is lurking. The future of literature is getting bleaker.

Possible remedy: How can this acute literary malady be combated? There is no easy cure. Some possible remedies may be prescribed to treat it. A large-scale literary and cultural awareness among the writers, the readers, and the connoisseurs of art and literature may lead to an aesthetic change. Scales from the readers' eyes should be removed. The consciousness emanating from this rude awakening may help develop the sensibility and artistic bent for the writers and the readers. This may also help separate the sheep from the goats, and rid true literature of the false one. We ought to give a cold farewell to this fake literature, and a warm welcome to the genuine one. Although it is easier said than done, it is not as such impossible.

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