

A poet unafraid to be vulnerable; a writer frugal – all the more to let you roam free in your imagination and six books that demand attention this year. Today's SLR promises to entice, excite and exercise your reading capacity. Enjoy!

MUNIZE MANZUR

A TAPESTRY OF WORDS WITH TARFIA FAIZULLAH

Born in Brooklyn and raised in west Texas, Tarfia Faizullah is the author of “*Seam*”, winner of the 2012 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award.

Her poems appear in American Poetry Review, Massachusetts Review, among others and have been anthologized in many collections, including “*Best New Poets 2014*”. A Kundiman fellow, she is the recipient of an AWP Intro Journals Project Award, a Ploughshares Cohen Award, a Fulbright Fellowship, a Copper Nickel Poetry Prize, a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize and other honours.

Tarfia is a poetry reader for New England Review and is a contributing editor for Asian American Literary Review. She is currently the Visiting Professor of Creative Writing in Poetry at University of Michigan.

In the following editorial interview, Tarfia arouses our senses with a metallic clink and her magical arrangement of thoughts:



SLR: What is it about verse as a form of creative expression that attracted you more than prose?

TF: Poetry is the bridge between prose and song — I love that the smallest of poems can convey huge and magnificent ideas. And I like the constrained format of poetry — the way it can challenge you to adapt but maintain your own integrity.

SLR: Why did you choose the title “*Seam*” for your collection?

TF: My friend Amanda Abel chose the title, actually. It was originally “*Interview with a Birangona*”, then “*Heroine*”, and I thought both titles were problematic because they were either too narrow or too broad. I had expressed my frustrations with these titles to Amanda, and after reading my manuscript, she called me and said one word when I picked up the phone: “seam.” I love that title because it is specific but can be seen as so many things in so many contexts. It's a wonderful metaphor for the lines between us, how they are woven, how they unravel.

SLR: What did you love about Bangladesh while doing your research here? What do you miss about it now that you're back in USA?

TF: I've been coming to visit Bangladesh with my parents since I was a little girl, but until 2010, I never lived there for any sustained period of time. I love the possibilities of Bangladesh, its wildness, its struggle between the modern and the ancient. I love *phuchka* in all its forms, and the clink of metal spoons on metal plates. I love the countryside, all its vast shades of green. I love the people, all of them, how they are sad, resilient, proud, self-conscious, loyal. I miss everything about Bangladesh — its full and complicated entirety

makes me love it.

SLR: Looking back, what three things would poet Tarfia 2014 tell the novice poet Tarfia?

TF: Write what is necessary, not indulgent. Learn all the forms, both in the West and the East. Do not be afraid to be vulnerable.

SLR: What aspects of Bangladesh interest you as a topic?

TF: I'm fascinated by so much in Bangladesh. I'd love to interview the female freedom fighters who were in combat during the war. I'm also interested in how technology affects culture, and I'd be interested in learning more about how that's affected Bangladesh and its culture. I'm curious about class issues, the problems of colonialism, and gender dynamics in Bangladesh. I'm also interested in how Bangladesh distinguishes itself from the rest of South Asia, and how Bangladeshis view themselves in relation to the rest of the world, and how they view the rest of the world. I'm fascinated by how Bangladeshi history is taught and passed down between generations.

SLR: If poetry isn't about rhyming words, what is poetry about?

TF: Arranging thoughtful language to create magic and meaning.

SLR: You are a poetry reader for New England Review and contributing editor for Asian American Literary Review. What, in your opinion, is 'bad' poetry?

TF: I don't think there is bad poetry as much as there is lazy poetry. For me, a good poem is one where I can see the vision of the poet in every line. That vision is compelling and interesting; and it changes and confirms the way I think

about the world.

SLR: Juggling your other duties as teacher and editor, how do you find the time to write?

TF: I don't find time to write. I just do it, when I can and when it strikes me. I also don't think writing is sitting down with a pen and paper or laptop. Writing is what happens when you're in the world, noticing it, and considering your place in it. For me, that is a daily practice. I move through the world as a writer: in that way, I am always writing.

SLR: As the Visiting Professor of Creative Writing in Poetry at University of Michigan, who are some poets you are incorporating into the curriculum reading list?

TF: Natalie Diaz, Rumi, Robert Frost, Nazrul Islam, Jamaal May, Anna Akhmatova, Vieve Francis.

SLR: If you could ask any famous poet one question, who would you ask what?

TF: I would ask Rumi: “Where were you and how old were you when you realized you had to keep writing poetry?”

SLR: What are you working on next?

TF: I'm working on a second collection of poems titled “*Register of Eliminated Villages*” and a memoir titled “*Kafir*”, as well as some translations. I co-edit a press with poet Jamaal May called Organic Weapon Arts Chapbook Press and Video Series, and we're really excited about the new books we're publishing this coming year. I'm also in collaboration with emcee and producer Brooklyn Shanti, and I'm working on a documentary photography project.

The Enigmatic World of Junot Díaz

M. Fouzul Kabir Khan

The Cheater's Guide to Love by Junot Díaz published in *The New Yorker* has a dramatic beginning:

“Your girl catches you cheating...She could have caught you with one sucia, she could have caught you with two, but because you're a totally batshit cuero who never empties his e-mail trash can, she caught you with fifty!”

The rest of the fiction is about yearnings for the unforgiving fiancée from year 0 to year 5, when the fiction ends with the protagonist realizing that, “The half-life of love is forever.”

The yearnings for the unnamed ex-sweetheart are rather deep.

“You try every trick in the book to keep her. You write her letters. You drive her to work. You quote Neruda. You compose a mass e-mail disowning all your sucias. You block their e-mails. You change your phone number. You stop drinking. You stop smoking. You claim you're a sex addict and start attending meetings. You blame your father. You blame your mother. You blame the patriarchy. You blame Santo Domingo. You find a therapist. You cancel your Facebook. You give her the passwords to all your e-mail accounts. You start taking salsa classes, like you always swore you would, so that the two of you can dance together. You claim that you were sick; you claim that you were weak. And every hour, like clockwork, you say that you're so so sorry.”

The post separation feelings are actually more complex than simple yearnings. After being dumped, “...you run around with sluts like it's the good old days, like nothing has happened.” But when Elvis advises, “Find yourself another girl,” Yunior replies, “Nothing saca nothing...No one will ever be like her.”

Junot Díaz, an accomplished author, was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New Jersey. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *Drown*; *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *This Is How You Lose Her*, a New York Times bestseller and National Book Award finalist. He is the recipient of several literary prizes such as MacArthur 'Genius' Fellowship, PEN/Malamud Award, Dayton Literary Peace Prize, Guggenheim Fellowship, and

PEN/O. Henry Award. An alumnus of Rutgers College and Cornell University, Díaz is currently the fiction editor at Boston Review and Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The fiction is remarkable for its sparse prose. There is a very detailed description of the emotional trapeze of the Yunior, from denial to pleading to contemplating suicide to hope:

“You stop sleeping, and some nights when you're drunk you have a wacky impulse to open the window of your fifth-floor apartment and leap down to the street. But (a) you ain't the killing-yourself type; (b) your boy Elvis is over all the time, stands by the window as if he knows what you're thinking; and (c) you have this ridiculous



hope that maybe one day she will forgive you.”

To all that build up, there is a blunt two word riposte from Díaz: “She doesn't.”

Similarly, while the adulterer is going through all the tribulations, and the reader is dying of curiosity to know what was going on behind the mind of the unforgiving ex-lover, Díaz provides no inkling except the brief remark in the opening paragraph, “...she swore she would never forgive. I'll put a machete in you, she promised.”

In spite of Yunior's multiple relationships interspersed throughout the fiction, the prose is without any intimate physical details. In the minimalist and restrained hand of Díaz, the best tool for a voyeur is his imagination. Salacious details

are not present, neither needed, to engage the reader.

Like his prose, Díaz is also frugal with the number of his characters; there are only a few of them: Yunior, the cheater himself; the cheated sweetheart – we do not know much about her except that she is an uncompromising native from Salcedo; Elvis, Yunior's son; and Elvis's wife Arlenny. Yunior's flings, such as the law student or Noemi, get occasional mentions.

The Cheater's Guide to Love is laced throughout with delectable figures of speech and imageries, such as, “...to defend Boston from uncool is like blocking a bullet with a slice of bread” or “It feels like you're being slowly pincered apart, atom by atom”. There are complex ones: “Every time you think about the ex, the loneliness rears up in you like a seething, burning continent...” or simpler ones, such as, “You know you can't live a lie.” They either soothe or reverberate in one's ears and vision.

I must admit that there is a generation gap between authors such as Junot Díaz and readers such as me. One realization I had while reading this work is the mainstreaming of some of the profanities that initially had uncomfortable rings to my rather unaccustomed ears. Added to that, my generation is familiar with a dictionary but not the so-called 'urban dictionary' that in the beginning affected my readability of Junot Díaz. For example, I had to consult the 'urban dictionary' several times to understand the meanings of words such as *sucia* and *cuero*, quoted in the first paragraph. There are many such words. However, having crossed the communication barrier, in the end, I enjoyed the fiction.

This work by a Facebook generation writer is remarkably candid and moral in its own way – in its emphasis on lasting bonds over ephemeral or fleeting relationships. Why?

“...because love, real love, is not so easily shed.”

Overall, *The Cheater's Guide to Love* is a good read from a parsimonious and an exceptionally gifted writer.

Dr M. Fouzul Kabir Khan is a former Secretary, University Professor and a connoisseur of fiction.

AND THEN THERE WERE SIX



The shortlist for the 2014 Man Booker Prize for Fiction was declared on 9th September:

- Joshua Ferris (US) - To Rise Again at a Decent Hour
- Richard Flanagan (Australian) - The Narrow Road to the Deep North
- Karen Joy Fowler (US) - We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves
- Howard Jacobson (British) – J
- Neel Mukherjee (British) -The Lives of Others
- Ali Smith (British) - How to be Both

Chair of the 2014 judges, AC Grayling, commented on behalf of the judges:

'As the Man Booker Prize expands its borders, these six exceptional books take the reader on journeys around the world, between the UK, New York, Thailand, Italy, Calcutta and times past, present and future. It is a strong, thought-provoking shortlist which we believe demonstrates the wonderful depth and range of contemporary fiction in English.'

This is the first list to reflect the diversity of the novel in English regardless of the author's nationality, as the Man Booker Prize has opened

up to any author writing originally in English and published in the UK. This year's panel has worked through more than 150 novels – in the opinion of the publishers who submit the books: the very best the year has to offer. The judges put a premium on craft and skill and, above all, that indefinable essence that turns these into art.

The judges will now re-read the shortlisted titles in order to select the winner, whose name will be revealed on Tuesday 14 October 2014 at a ceremony at London's Guildhall.

(source: <http://www.themanbookerprize.com>)