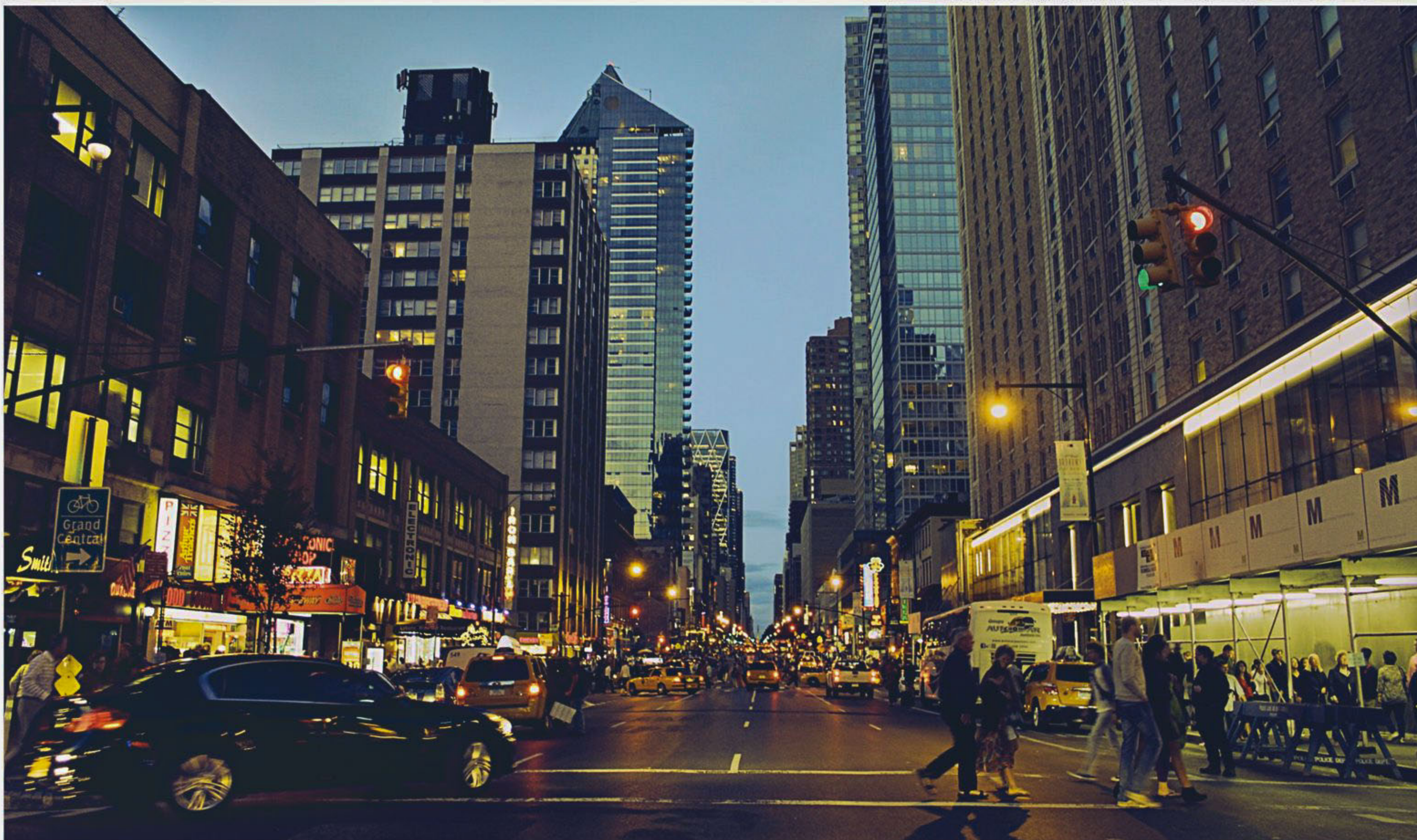


# THE NEW PLOT AGAINST AMERICA

JOE TREASURE



In his novel *The Plot Against America*, Philip Roth imagines two years of alternative history for the United States. In the 1940 presidential election, Charles Lindbergh, the aviator and Nazi sympathiser, defeats Roosevelt on an anti-war platform. The drama is played out on the national scale, but what captures us imaginatively is the impact of the new regime on the Roth family in Newark, New Jersey, as witnessed by seven-year-old Philip. (Putting his real childhood self at the centre of a story that in other ways departs so obviously from reality is an audacious move typical of Roth.)

Under the Government's "Just Folks" scheme, Philip's older brother Sandy is persuaded to spend the summer with a tobacco farming family in Kentucky. Worn over by this experience, he volunteers to work for the newly created Office of American Absorption. He encourages other Jewish city boys to join him in assimilating into the mainstream protestant culture of the American heartland. The Roth parents are profoundly disturbed by this social

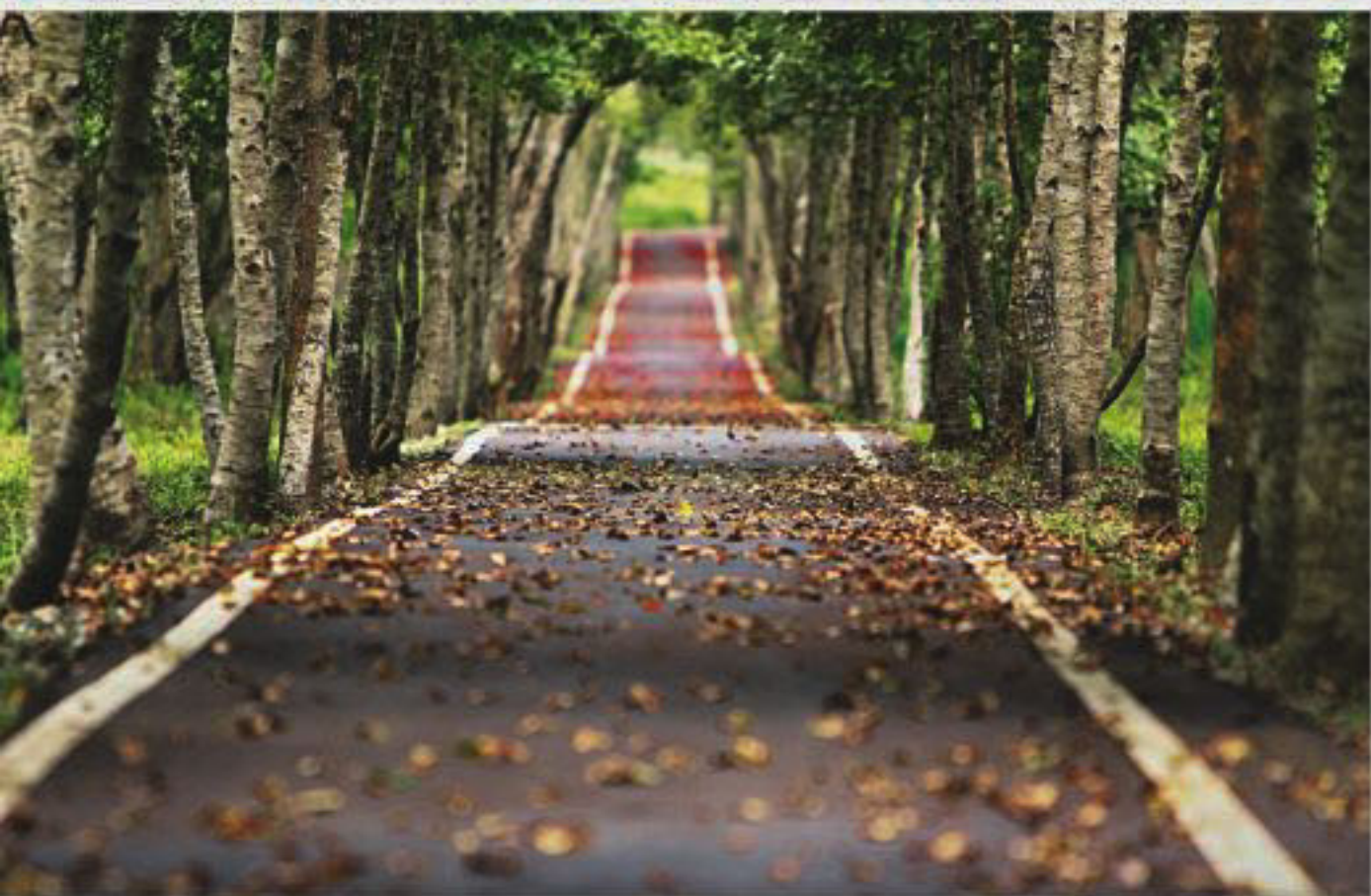
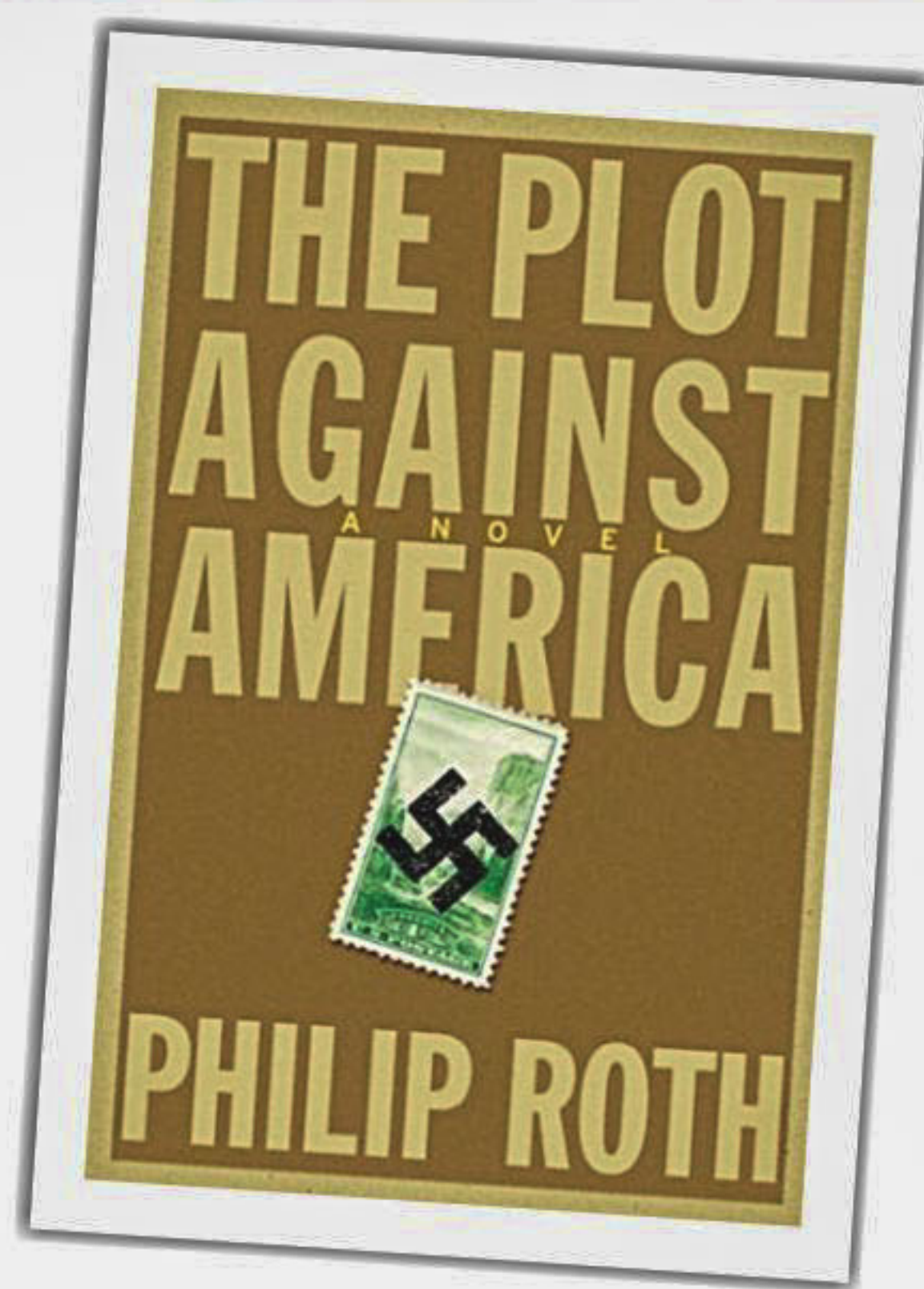
conversion of their older son. While the family is torn apart internally by conflict between those inclined to collaborate and those determined to rebel, outside the home they encounter increasing levels of antisemitism. There are anti-Jewish riots and neighbourhood curfews, Jewish friends lose their jobs or are compulsorily relocated, and the authorities turn a blind eye to acts of racist violence and murder.

When it came out in 2004, I was inclined to interpret the novel as a comment on the Bush presidency. While studying for an MA in Creative Writing soon after, I argued in an essay that it tapped into the unease of conscientious Americans in the era of the Patriot Act. At a time when an internal minority was under suspicion and subject to unconstitutional scrutiny, and the Christian convictions of the President and his circle were encroaching on public policy, Roth's 1940s Jews seemed to stand in for twenty-first century American Muslims. Of course I wasn't alone in making this connection. Reviewers had mentioned it, though Roth himself, while

strongly opposed to Bush, had denied that this was his purpose.

In retrospect I see more clearly that the story resists such an allegorical reading. The isolationist Lindbergh, eager to keep America out of the war and do a deal with the expansionist tyrant Hitler, never seemed much like George Bush, who assumed America could effortlessly dominate the world through its military might. The most obvious victims of Bush's policies were not minority US citizens but the civilian populations of invaded countries and the foreign detainees designated as enemy combatants unprotected by the Geneva Convention.

Now Roth's novel feels chillingly prescient. A celebrity without political experience, motivated by crude bigotry and ambition and indifferent to the world beyond America's borders, Donald Trump looks like Roth's President Lindbergh in a way that Bush never did. As Philip's father says of his fellow Americans, unaccountably besotted with their new President: "They live in a dream, and we live in a nightmare."



## To Jenny

MD MEHEDI HASSAN

Daddy died,  
Black beard grew: mommy left me.  
I was lonely, so lonely!  
I don't love my mommy  
But go with the wind, I'll love you Jenny.

Kissing love: I died;  
Kissing fantasy: I flew-  
You know: Men love flying.  
I don't have a penny  
But go with the wind, I'll love you Jenny.

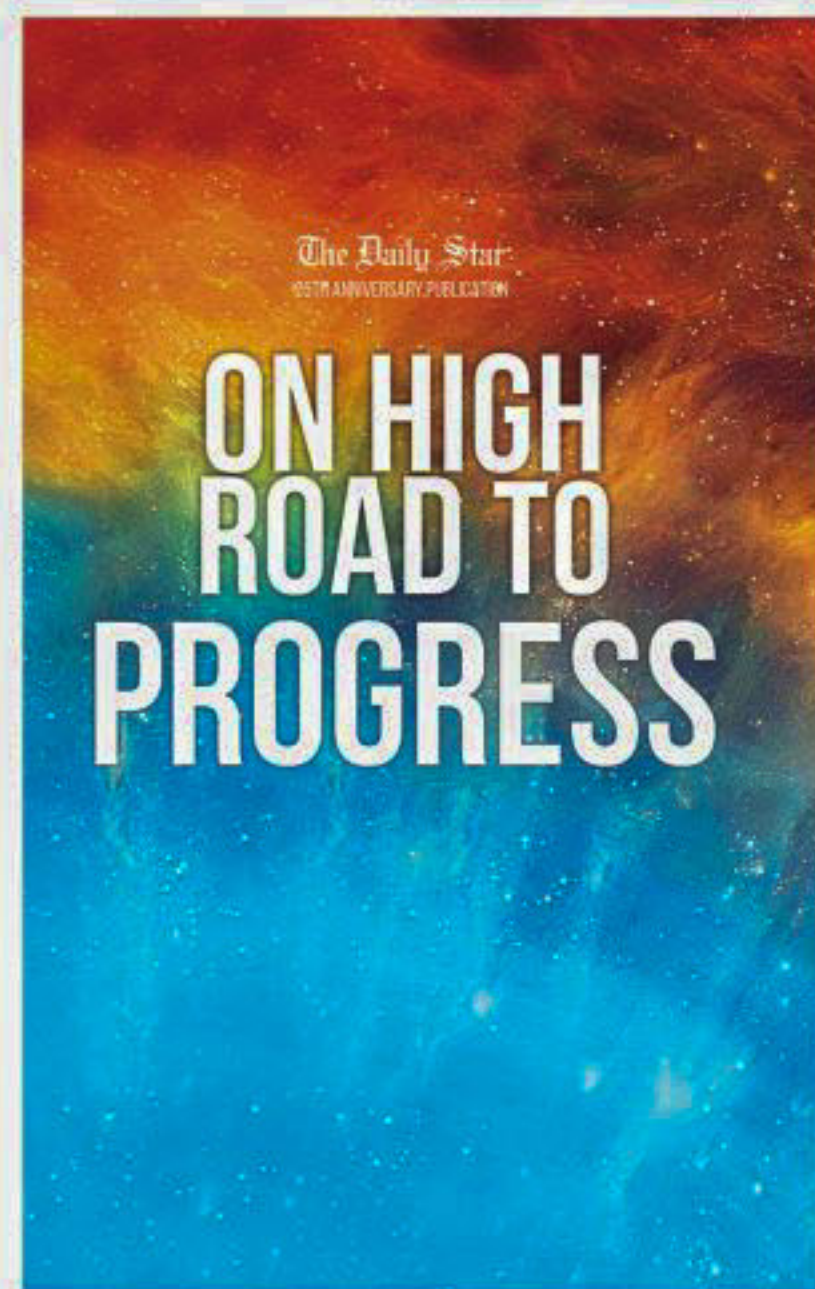
I haven't seen the colours of rainbow  
And I'm characterless, you know;  
Today I missed Monihar's night show.  
Nobody cares about your ex named Johnny  
So go with the wind, I'll love you Jenny.

## ANXIETY

MOHAMMAD SHAFIQUIL ISLAM

(Dedicated to VS Naipaul)

Every morning I wake up with a fear  
After so many sweet dreams  
The world impels my life to go on  
But things do not always seem  
To keep my path smooth  
Thorns prick you to hurt and  
To lead you to creativity  
Still you discover anxiety in every word  
You want to write  
In a 14-line poem you write anxiety  
13 times misspelling once or twice too  
And go all out to end  
The poem with a happy line  
But a voice wakes you up  
And you write promptly  
How dearly anxiety loves me  
I seek to know the cause of my fear  
An unknown fear of failure  
To distinguish the real from fakes  
Anxiety takes me away  
Far away to an unknown land  
Where I truly belong to.



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