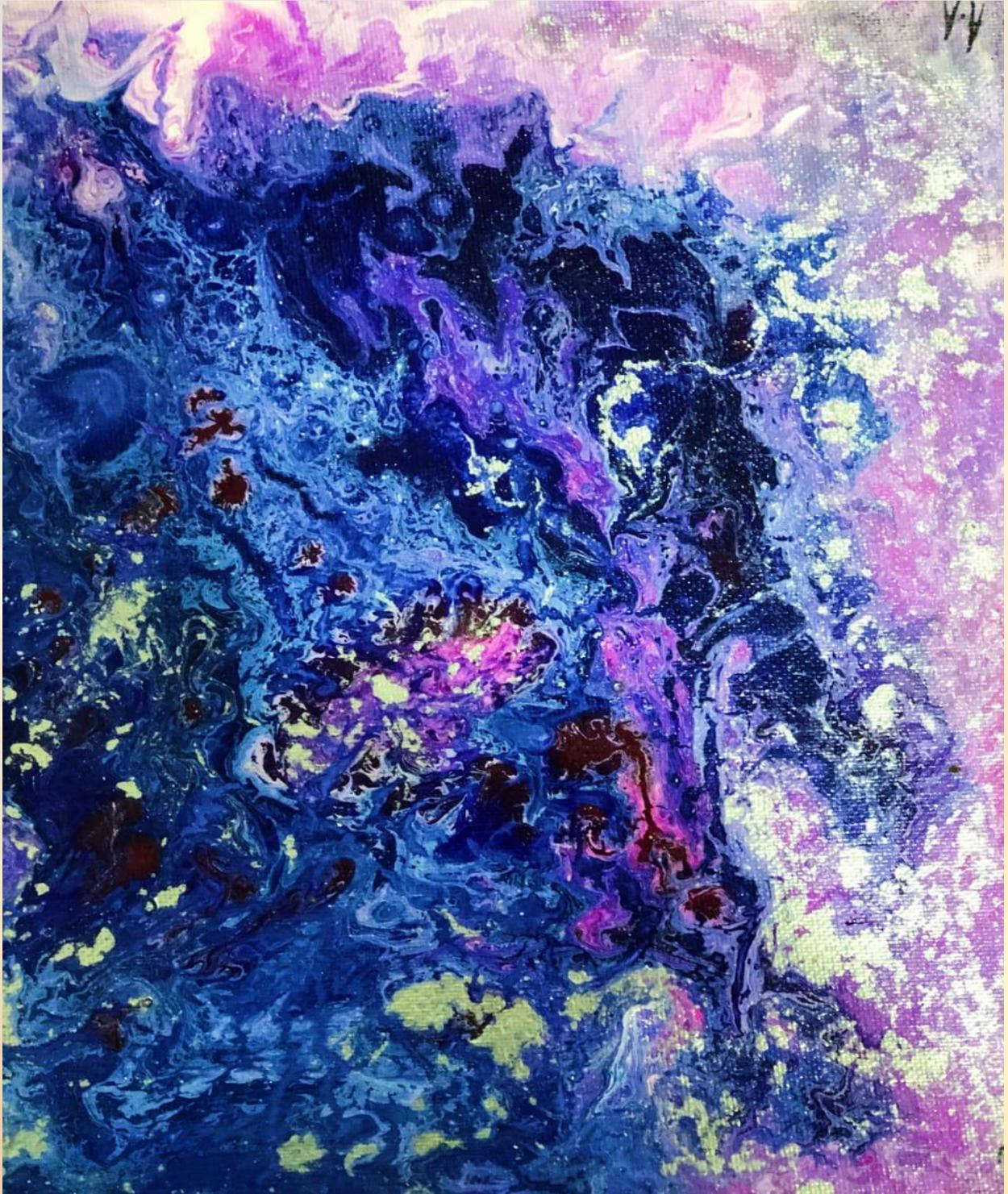


Verbos Incendium



VERBOS INCENDIUM

ISSUE NO. :9/20

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MATA SUNDRI COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

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I WONDER...

I am not sure where to start,
From the thoughts that boggle my mind

Or feelings that bother my heart?

I wonder where to start.

How do I tame these thoughts?

What if I get lost!

I wonder what these little things mean,

I wonder what it's like, to be me.

Nothing has stuck around,

I wonder what if it had.

Not all that I have might last forever,

Then why should I care about its existence?

I wonder whether it would all become perfect...

Perfect, one day.

Would I still be looking for my way that day?

Will I even tread on this path that day?

That one fine day.

I wonder why it has to be this way.

Why do I have these wings?

When I can't flap them my way.

I wonder why I have these dreams,

When I am to live in others' fantasies.

I wonder how it is my destiny,

How is this my fate?

When it is decided by them,

And all this while, they just play.

I wonder whether this little boat
Would be able to send huge waves in that vast ocean.

I wonder whether I'd be able to
Rise from the ashes of my abominable past.

I wonder whether I'd be able to go all the way up.

But how can I?
When I've been looking down, all this while.

Will this motivation ever come around?

I wonder when that light will turn green.

When will I finally live my dream?

I wonder when those scars will heal.

When I will finally not fret about

What all this is going to be.

I wonder what I want Me to be?

What if one day,

There's nothing left for me to wonder.

Will I then be, all-encompassing and free?

I wonder...

I wonder...

-Ankita Sharma, II year

UNWRITTEN

Should it be something personal?

Or pertaining to someone else?

A prose? A verse?

Maybe with some depth,

Or without any cuts...

Glee seems unfamiliar,

Gloom feels pretentious.

Is there even a need for such a realization?

She sits down one evening,

A pen in her hand, a pretty notepad in the other.

The lines on paper, travel to the streets inside.

There are too many paths,
With boards without any sign.

She could write on them,

Fill them up.

But how can she?

While standing at this crossroad.

Why is it so hard?

Haven't I done it before?

Will my thoughts ever align again?

Maybe it's too much...

But it has always been too much,

Yet the surface remains untouched.

A clean sheet, with nothing to write upon.

"Have you opened that box yet?"

Asks her mother, yet again.

"Will do, now." she replies.

Searches, but doesn't find.

No trace of it anywhere.

Maybe later

She thinks and goes back,

To that same old place.

Manjot Kaur, III year

SCARLET

It was just another day in the lives of Lily and Scarlet. The sisters lived in a magnificent palace in a faraway land. They also had access to the barren ground around the palace. It was rather a gigantic place to be inhabited by just two people.

It was just another day. The difference was, that it was a stormy day.

Lily and Scarlet were in the main hall of the palace. They were painting. The mornings were usually spent there and if they were not painting, they would sing, stage a play, read books, or indulge in any other activity to keep themselves busy. There wasn't much to do in the palace anyway.

"What are you drawing?" Lily asked, peeping into Scarlet's canvas, who was sitting opposite to her, on the ground.

"Oh! I am drawing Rico playing in the garden." Scarlet said looking at Lily and smiling. As if on cue, Rico, Scarlet's pet rabbit, came hopping around and sat beside her. She pet him a little and said, "What are you drawing? Another one of your abstracts arts, hmm?"

"Yes, you know me so well." Lily also smiled now.

"Come on! Draw something else for a change. Abstract art means just splashing random colors around."

"Yeah?" And what is wrong with that?" Lily asked raising her eyebrows.

They continued to work when suddenly Scarlet started fidgeting with her brushes.

"Where is it? Where did I put it?" she mumbled.

Lily noticed this, "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing. I can't find the paint brush."

"It is right there, beside you."

"Oh!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing..."

"Come on! Tell me. What are you thinking?"

"It's just that I was wondering how we got here."

"Oh!" Lily stared at her painting.

"Do you remember the time before we got here, to this palace?" Scarlet's eyes implored Lily's face.

"No. I don't have any memory of it." Lily continued to stare at her painting, without moving.

"Neither do I" Scarlet dropped her head. "Maybe someone left us here when we were small or maybe our parents were kings and queens of this place and something came up and they had to leave but couldn't come back." Scarlet stated after a while.

“Maybe.” Lily picked up her brush, smiled and looked at Scarlet, “So which color do you think would go with blue and purple?”

The day turned to night, but the weather remained the same. The sky looked as if it was about to burst anytime now. But it just rumbled and stayed the same.

Scarlet sat near the window in the main hall, overlooking the garden and the front gate.

“Come Lily, sit with me, and let’s watch outside. The fireflies might come around this time.”

“Yeah, coming.” Lily came downstairs from her room. “But I don’t like this weather.”

“It’s not so bad.”

Just as they sat down, fireflies came out from the ground and started buzzing around the flowers and the plants which they had planted in the garden. Fireflies lighted them all on that dark, stormy, moonless night. The flowers were glowing differently in the yellow light of the fireflies.

“Lily, how would this garden look from the outside?” Scarlet asked, still looking at the fireflies. “Would it look the same? With the walls around it?”

“What are you talking about, Scarlet?” Lily looked at her sister, horrified. “You are letting your mind wander. This is exactly how things are supposed to be. Why are you thinking about something else?”

Scarlet remained mum.

“Speak to me, my little sister. What is on your mind?”

“I just..... I just want to see the world beyond these walls. Just once. I can't seem to understand why do we have to live here, like this?”

“You know why. You know that bad things happen when we go out. You know what happened to that village when we went out when we were younger. People died. Fire and water caused destruction everywhere. You know it.” Lily said looking straight at Scarlet.

“But that is the thing! I don't know. I don't remember anything about it, and neither do you. How can I believe something that I don't know? Which I don't even remember? I can't seem to keep these thoughts away. I want to, but they keep sweeping in my head all the time.” Scarlet said looking at Lily.

“What you need is sleep.” Lily smiled at the sudden realization. “Yes. Sleep. Sleep clears the mind, pacifies the soul. A good rest will help you.”

Scarlet looked down at her clenched hands placed on her lap.

“Come on, come on. Let's go to sleep. You will feel much better tomorrow morning.”

Next morning, the weather was still the same. Scarlet didn't get much sleep the previous night. She woke up early in the morning and started moving towards the

kitchen to make herself some breakfast. She called out for Rico while filling up his food bowl. Rico didn't come. Scarlet instantly felt that something was unusual. She called out for him several times, but no one came. She searched for him in all the rooms but she couldn't find him.

She then went to the garden, towards the apple tree where Rico loved to nap in the afternoon. "Rico?" she called out softly when she saw him lying near the tree but he didn't move.

She went over and pet him, "Rico, you shouldn't sleep here."

No answer.

She checked for a pulse. "Oh no!" she exclaimed, noticing that he wasn't breathing. She ran towards Lily's room, to wake her up. "Lily, wake up." She shook her a little.

"What happened?" Lily asked groggily, rubbing her eyes.

"Rico died." she replied, trying not to cry.

"Oh!" Lily paused, looking at her sister. "We should bury him." She said.

"Yes." Scarlet replied.

They move to the backyard, where they had buried Scarlet's previous pets. Lily started digging the ground, to place Rico. Scarlet doesn't want to look at him but she had to be the one to place him under the earth. To Scarlet it seemed almost as if they had a

personal graveyard in their backyard now. She wondered why she wanted to have a pet when she'd have to bury them all eventually. Maybe to have another living creature around. Maybe to have a connection to the outside world. She had repeated this process multiple times yet her heart felt heavy. Though today she also felt disgusted when she suddenly realized that they were living among the dead rather than the living.

Scarlet sat beside Rico's grave for the whole afternoon.

"Let's go, Scarlet. We should do something this afternoon."

"I will come in a minute." She said

As Lily was about to go, Scarlet said, "Lily."

"Yes?"

"Do you want to go out? Just once?" Scarlet searched Lily's face for an answer.

"No." Lily turned her face away from her.

"I want to." Scarlet said, looking at Rico's grave.

Neither of them said anything for a while.

"Why can't you live here, in peace? The world outside these walls is filled with cries of people whose suffering cannot be lessened even if you try, the wars, the lies, and the agony. That's what you want to see?" Lily said, almost accusing her sister of breaking the harmony of the palace.

“But what is here inside these walls? Dead animals buried one top of each other? Two people who live among them? Two people who live suspended in static, living a purposeless life over and over again?” Scarlet let out her true thoughts, almost unable to control them, backed by the pain of the death of her pet and also because of the weather. This weather was making her suffocated.

“You wouldn’t be at peace if you go out. You have everything here. You have me. I have you. That’s enough for us, Scarlet.” her sister said, almost pleadingly.

Scarlet did not want to go out, she did not want to leave Lily. But these walls were killing her. Lily was killing her. Her head hurt all the time, with thoughts she shouldn’t have thought. “I don’t know what I have anymore. I have lost my sight somewhere. I cannot see anything. The darkness in this palace.... I can’t even see you sometimes.” Scarlet smiled painfully.

Lily did not know what to say to her sister. So instead, she said, “You just need a good rest. Today was a bad day for you. A good rest cures everything.” She helped Scarlet stand up and they walked towards the palace.

Lily moved Scarlet to her bed and tucked her in.

“I won’t blow out the candle at the door, okay? You won’t have any nightmares then. You will sleep and when you wake up we will make the quilt we have been talking about for days, okay?” Scarlet turned to the opposite side. She did not want to see her sister.

“Sleep well..... You know that I love you, right Scarlet?”

Scarlet closed her eyes and said, “Yes, I know. I love you too.” Lily kissed the back of her sister’s head.

Lily moved over to the table near the door and lit a candle. When Scarlet turned around to look at her, she had already left the room. The candle remained, the only evidence left of her sister’s presence.

Suddenly, the wind blew and the window at the opposite end of the room jerked open. Scarlet watched the candle flicker and eventually die out.

Scarlet slowly reached out of her bed, wanting to close the window. Upon reaching it, she saw lightning strike something in the distance, followed by the sound of rumbling thunder. The weather was finally promising a heavy shower. She remained transfixed by the sound and closed her eyes, to feel the cold breeze. She changed her clothes and started walking towards the main door of the palace.

“Scarlet.... Scarlet. What have you done?”

Scarlet heard her sister’s voice and searched for her face. She registered it coming from her behind. She looked back and saw Lily standing inside the palace.

Scarlet had walked out the palace.

“Come back inside. Have you gone insane?” her sister swore.

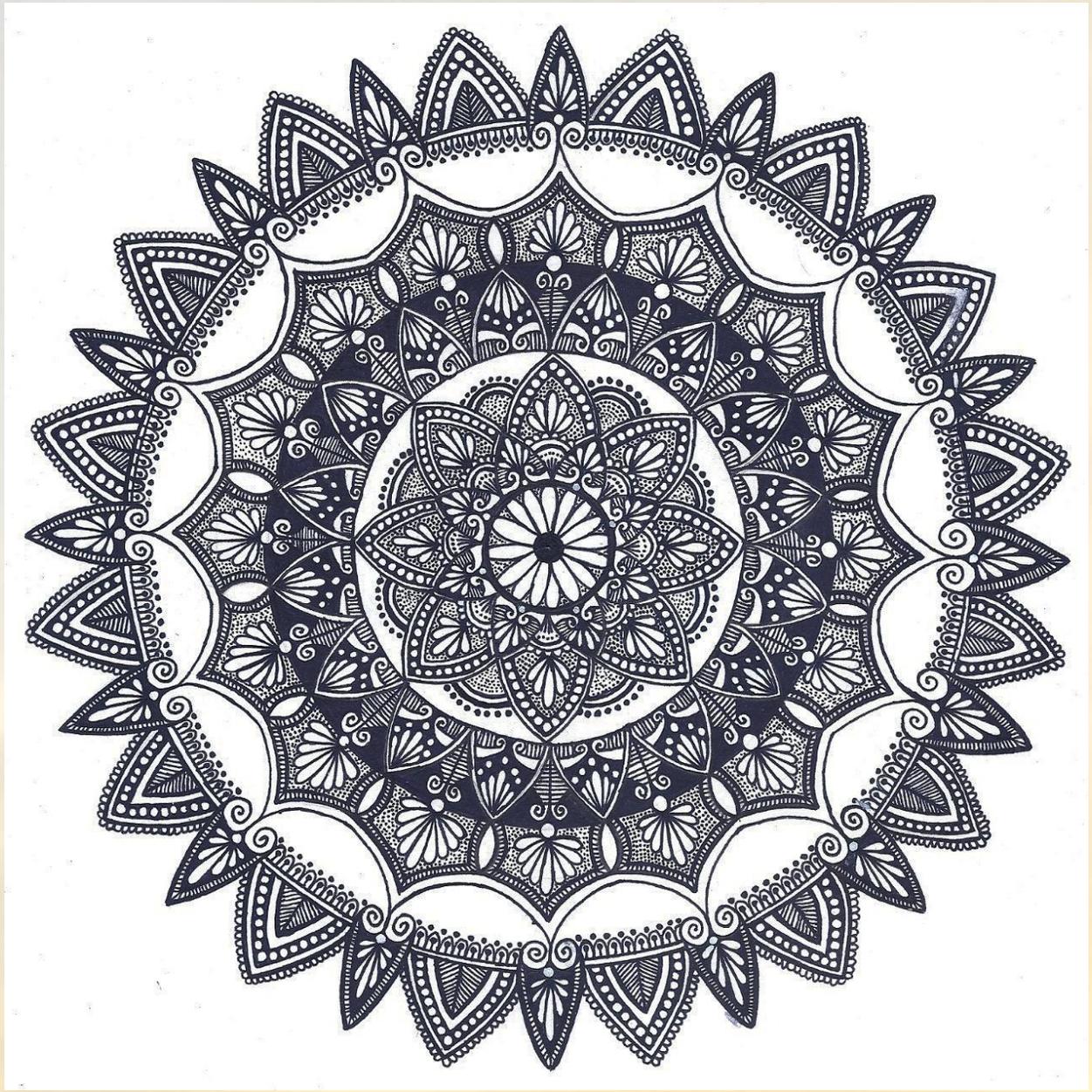
“Maybe I have.” Scarlet mumbled.

She knew she had to face her sister, so apologizing, she said, “I am sorry, Lily. I am sorry I cannot love you enough to stay. I am sorry that I feel like dying when I am in our sanctuary, when I am with you. But I have to go.” Struggling not to cry, she turned around.

She dragged her feet away from the palace. The last thing she thought was, “I will come back. I will come to her.”

But Scarlet never came back.

- Sonali, III year



MANDALA ART by SHREYA GUPTA, II year

DELHI

Painting the lives commercial and economic ,

Delhi's been a home for many.

It comes with a tag of love,

Pangs of nostalgia,

Memories and untold stories

Waiting to be discovered.

The roads known as Curzon turned Kasturba,

Aurangzeb and APJ Abdul Kalam reminisce their own tale.

From the unsung warriors,

To the named rapists roaming daringly,

From what I see, Delhi's been a warm cup of tea.

With a slight hint of ginger at certain gulps.

From long queues at the metro security checks,

To the hollow, ravenous roads,

From High street cafes to big malls,

Delhi considerably is much more than that.

From what I see,

Delhi's treasure exists in those old mansions,

Unloved streets and monuments

Subsisting of dust and mist.

Reciting their fortuitous stories
Like a long lost friend eager to tell tales.
From what I see,
Delhi's like a new journal
That you wish to write something into,
But wish to never ruin it
And keep it afresh.

-Harleen Kaur Khanuja, III year

THE GENDERED SOCIO-POLITICAL ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION

Translation as a process turns socio-cultural and political the moment the concerns of the author shift from simple communication to the adaptation of the given message and reproducing it in his/her own style, intent, context, etc. Thus bringing in the concepts of trans-creation and free translation. The text gains a new light with the perspective change. The translator, seen as a representative of its age, can never truly divorce its work from its social background.

Free translation and trans-creation give an opportunity to the subaltern and marginalized voices to be a part of the mainstream discourse. An example of this is the rise of 'feminocentric' texts in literature and translation. As propagated by Elaine Showalter in *Towards Feminist Poetics, feminocentricism*, as a technique, aims to create awareness against patriarchal hegemony. This hegemonic control spills off onto the world of literature and translation as well, because the dominance of male writers, translators, and critics doesn't allow women to gain the same prominence as men.

The depiction of the feminine psyche in canonical literature has often been critiqued for being biased and stereotypical. Women were either objectified in their literature, or were given a miniscule amount of subjectivity. In case a woman was radical enough to transgress the boundaries set by the patriarchal institutions, she was immediately labelled 'loose' or 'immoral'. In fact, any woman conscious of her sexuality was deemed promiscuous and more often than not was the antagonist in that piece of literature. In fact, such women were regarded as a cautionary tale for other 'respectable' ladies in the society. Through the power of trans-creation, various myths and legends are being re-told with newer shades, making the prejudiced minds of the readers question their ideas of normalcy. Thus, challenging the centuries old patriarchal subliminal conditioning.

Crossing the river by Ambai, talks about the anguish of Sita, who has for long, served as the quintessential example of the suffering woman in a rugged, patriarchal setup. Whereas *Fisher Queen's Dynasty* by Kavita Kane gives an insight into the epic *Mahabharata* through the point of view of Satyawati, Shantanu's queen, the woman 'responsible' for Devrata (Bhisma) taking the terrible oath. Similarly, a short film trans-creating the story of Ahalya, wife of sage Gautama, inverts the curse on whoever tries to

bat an immoral eye on her, turning them into a stone. Thus, changing the abuser-abused equation.

We need to realize that these epics were written in a totally different socio-political context. Their ideals may not make sense to us, but were relevant in the age when they were created. Taking up the example of Valmiki, the sage who composed *Ramayana*, in third century BCE. His upbringing and acculturation is starkly different from that of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who trans-created the epic from Sita's point of view in the book, *The Forest of Enchantments*, in 2019.

While Valmiki owned a hermitage and lived in the patriarchal world of monarchical rule. It is normal for him to have internalized a whole lot of stereotypes and prejudices practiced in that age, and were bound to reflect on his works too. Whereas Divakaruni, a feminist of the 21st century, teaching creative writing courses and engaged in various organizations aiding women who are victims of abusive or domestic violence situations, is bound to have an opinion reflecting the same.

Rather than the flatness portrayed by Valmiki, her trans-created text gives all the previously sidelined characters, especially female ones, a platform to tell their tale. He may have never deemed it important for women to have the agency to voice their opinions, because they always had their male relatives as spokespersons for all their needs. Though the idea that their speech was interpreted and translated through the ages, by males, according to their own convenience is highly problematic. Thus translators and trans-creators like Divakaruni help bridge the gap between the past and the present. The relatable and life-like portrayal of highly glorified characters, in these trans-created texts, make the original epics universal in a more real sense.

Analyzing Divakaruni's trans-creation with respect to Valmiki's epic, one can identify a handful of arguments incorporated by her, with reference to the current social scenario. Thus strengthening the idea of translation or trans-creation being a highly socio-political process.

Sita gains a certain awe in Divakaruni's narrative, as opposed to her repeated victimization in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The idealism at the heart of the epic, as portrayed by the sage is punctured by her. The characters become more human and relative as opposed to the ideal, heroic ones. While Sita has been showcased as the 'perfect Indian woman' who bears her life of hardship and suffering with silent stoicism, Divakaruni adds layers to her character, by making her ask questions, seethe with anger at injustices, feel jealousy, hatred, love and even sexual longing. This is totally against the deified image of Sita.

Her identity is always derived from that of Ram's, she is a goddess because she had married a god, she is a helpmate to the king, she is the mother of the king's children,

and she is the ultimate tool for revenge. However, Divakaruni provides her the space to grow as an individual. In the trans-created version, she is deemed a goddess for her healing abilities, she earns the title of 'queen' by performing welfare acts for her subjects, and she single-handedly fulfills the duties of both the parents for her children.

Taking up the case of Surpanakha, she has always been demonized for her act of being wayward about her sexuality. If raised in a religious, Hindu household, one is never told to be like Surpanakha but Sita. She is always described as this ugly, form changing monster. Divakaruni's Surpanakha is more human than monstrous. Her one transgression is to demand love in a society where women are expected to be coy and submissive. Her awareness of her sensuality is nothing but a threat to the male ego. In the text, we see even Sita sympathizing with her case. Surpanakha's 'transgression' of speaking out and demanding the fulfillment of her desires leads to disfiguration and humiliation.

The trans-created version also mentions characters like the much reviled Kaikeyi. One tends to forget her valor (as the only queen to charioteer a king to war), sharp intellect, and exceptional combat abilities. Likewise, Mandodri, Ravan's queen, is overshadowed by her husband but Divakaruni brings out, through certain interpolations, her character's true essence. She is showcased as the only trusted advisor of Ravan. Lastly Sita's mother, Queen Sunaina is brought to the lime light by being showcased as the real brain and might of the kingdom of Mithila. She was the hidden administrative head of a kingdom with a humanitarian king.

Thus Divakaruni's text helps us identify the characters' struggles for equality, respectability, and even a certain level of autonomy in one's life. The idea of autonomy can be substantiated by how only in the end Sita is able to gain a certain amount of agency when she chooses death rather than another humiliating trial of chastity. The text reveals the hypocrisy and the manipulative nature of the male centric society.

Divakaruni, as a translator and trans-creator identified the inherent trends and moral needs of the society and thus, was able to successfully deliver a text which fulfilled the needs of the reader while leaving an imprint on the society, which, for some, may be greater than the original text itself.

This brings us to the conclusion as to how translators and trans-creators need to keep up with the changing trends in the socio-political structures of the society, so as to be able to deliver effective and powerful material. This is because they, as translators, are harbingers of making messages universal and no matter how hard they try, they can't make the process apolitical.

Nandini Dogra (II year)

(This paper was presented in a national seminar on 'Translation: Theory, Context and Praxis' held in Zakir Hussain College (E.) and was awarded the Second prize in the undergraduate category)

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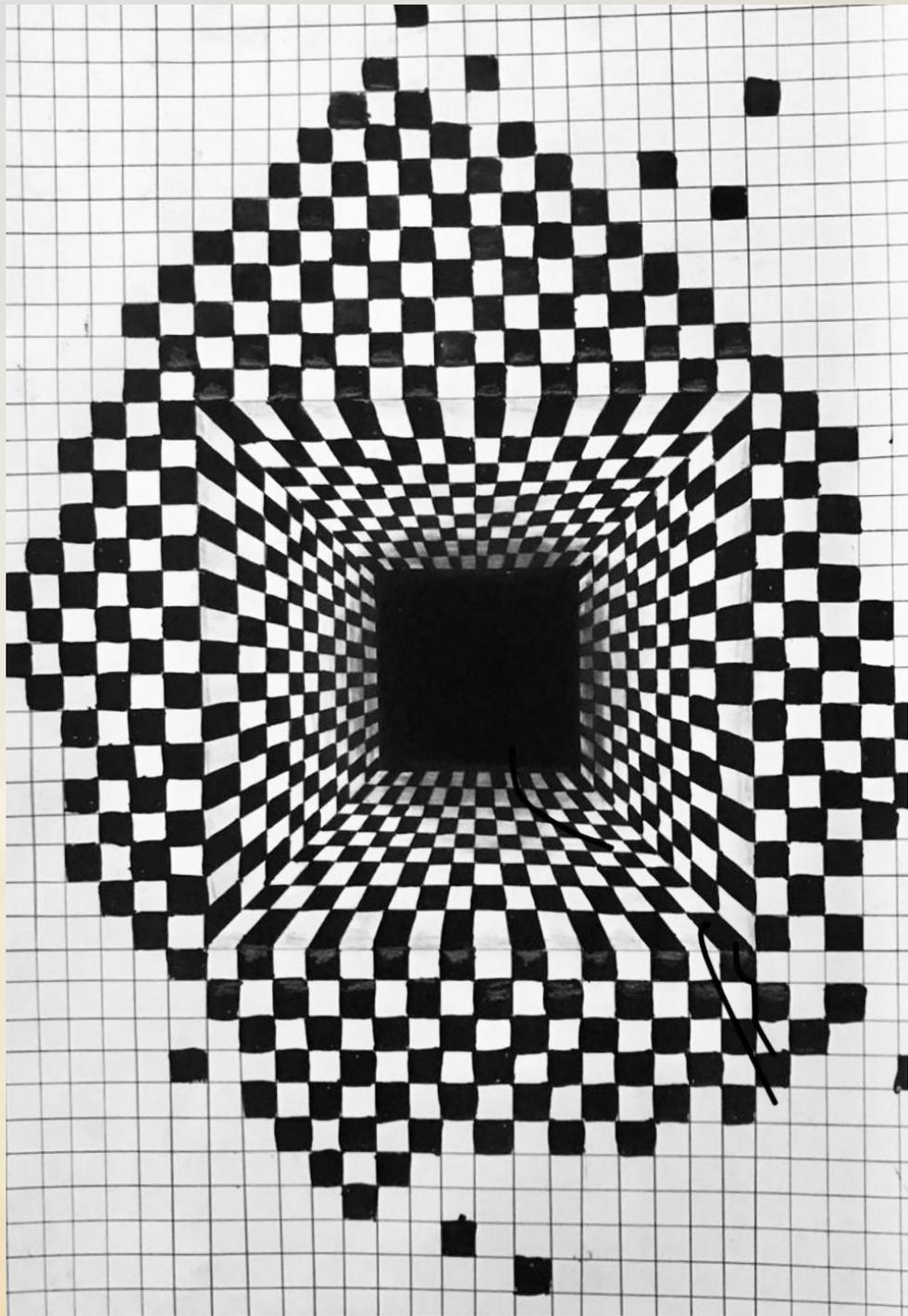
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SINK INTO THE FLOOR by AAFREEN ANJUM, I year

DRUNKEN SKY

The winter, breathed her last

With a heavy pour.

The wine; in my hand

Tastes a bit sour.

I can hear her pitter

Patter on my windowpane.

Her last cry for help

Lost within the storm she breathed.

I say the wine tastes a bit

Salty, with the sky that's drunk

On a single cup, of this wine

Made of heartbroken souls.

The wine never tasted this

Bitter, with the unspoken words

That winter left, of the frozen heart

That once burned with life.

Yet I still drink this wine,
A wine of varied taste,
'cause this empty unbeating heart,
Yearns for the emotions this wine burns.

- Tenzin Nyidon, II year

THE MANDALA

The term Mandala comes from the Sanskrit word *Mandal* (मंडल) which means a circle. Wikipedia defines it as, "a geometric configuration of symbols with a very different application." In contemporary times, it refers to an art form comprising intricate patterns and practicing it is said to be therapeutic. In many religions and spiritual traditions, it is used for meditation and is said to improve concentration and enhance memory. It is a symbol of unity and connection with the universe. The artwork is well organized and contains repetitive patterns. Though the most preferred shapes used for its structure are circles and squares but nature-inspired designs like the moon, flowers, and hills are also very common. Some other art forms similar to Mandala are Zentangle and Doodle.



This is a Yin and Yang Mandala which signifies the balance in nature. Yin and Yang is an oriental concept. In simple terms, it symbolizes the presence of and relationship between opposites and how they complement each other to become whole. Yin is the feminine, dark, cold and inward source of energy whereas Yang is the masculine, bright, hot, active and outward energy; the adjectives associated with both are infinite. The idea behind this concept is that both are equally important and one cannot exist without the other. Just like the moon would lose its charm and significance without darkness, both binaries co-exist to bring out the beauty of one another. The theory becomes all the more interesting by its belief that extreme good or extreme bad are unrealistic and the world is a mix of both. The small dots (in the Mandala above) represent the idea that both carry the seed of another. Simply highlighting birth would eventually lead to destruction and vice versa.

My inspiration for this Mandala was my fascination with this theory and its relevance. It can be applied to something as phenomenal as the universe as well as to an ordinary concept of heterosexual matrimony. No two things can be the same and this concept promotes balance and equality. The innermost circle contains the symbol of Yin and Yang with the dots replaced by the Moon and Sun. The outermost pattern inside the biggest circle is a series of two different designs that are repeated to form a ring. Outside the biggest circle is a series of curvy structures which consists of flames to represent the fire element of nature. The black curve and two small circles resemble the

seaweed and water bubbles represent the water element. By placing them side by side, I have created a wreath around the circle which looks majestic and aura-like.

Mandala serves as the metaphor of life where every subsequent ring symbolizes growth and pushing further one's boundaries. Paradoxically, the shape of a circle that is often associated with limitations and restrictions, is the flexible element of Mandala which allows it to grow in size, making it look more majestic. For this very reason, I prefer a circle over other shapes for my art because it denotes that what binds you also has the key to your liberation. Another way I compare Mandala to life is by the presence of flaws and errors in an art piece. If you zoom in this picture, you will find many faults in the pattern. However, every imperfection comes together to form this (taking my liberties) beautiful design which is soothing to look at. Our lives work on a similar principle: it's the shortcomings and flaws that make a person complete and humane. The idea of symmetry sounds relaxing but is robotic and mundane. The imperfections make the life and art more joyful, pleasant and easy to relate with. Clichéd as it may sound, but this is what the art form has taught me. It has helped me in understand the importance of asymmetry and accept what used to make me feel vulnerable.

- Shreya Gupta, II year



MIDNIGHT DREAMS - BATMAN by SHRUTI GUPTA, II year

DEVIANT

Maa always said

How I was

An obedient child.

Waking up early,

Doing chores,

Going to school,

Finishing my lunch,

Doing the chores,

No time for homework,

Helping Paa play with me,

Sleep (I dreamt of how happy my life was).

I was an obedient child.

(Was)

My giggles of laughter

Giving space to

Horrendous screams,

Coming out of a

Mouth, I couldn't

Recognize

As my own.

My agonized agony

Silenced loudly

By mother's expletives.

I didn't want to wake up,

I didn't want to do the chores,

I wanted to go back to school (and never return),

I never packed any lunch,

I hated playing,

I dreaded sleep (Paa's happiness dominated my 'dreams' now).

I was deviant now.

I am a deviant child.

I am.

Or am I?

I'm not sure.

My insecurity took up

The spaces of surety

That my being possessed

(My only possession).

Their loud noises, fill up

My head.

They screech,

And shout,
And swear,
And rage,
They laugh too!

At me,
Why wouldn't they?
Wouldn't you too?

There is no space it's all quite chaotic

My mind is filling up, I think.

Its capacity
Overflowing, already.

Do you think?
I should store it all?

I have decided
(I have, not them, I did),
Not them.

I have decided
To pack my ears.

Folding my lobs,
From the top,
Near my ear ring,
And from the middle.

Stuffing it into the hole
(Just like he did,
Only I don't feel pain now).
Problem solved.

I am a deviant child.

I am.

I can't hear myself saying it,

But, I am.

-Nandini Dogra, II year

BIRDS OF PREY: MOVIE REVIEW

Birds Of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn), is a 2020 DC franchise and the second installment of the DC universe to revolve around a female superhero, or in this case an anti-heroine, Harley Quinn.

It is directed by Cathy Yan and written by Christina Hodson. It stars Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn, Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Huntress, Jurnee Smolett-Bell as Black Canary, Rosie Perez as Renee Montoya, Ella Jay Basco as Cassandra Cane, Chris Messina as Victor Zsasz and Ewan McGregor as Black Mask. This female ensemble of directors, producers, writers and actors made it a highly anticipated movie among the critics and comic book fans.

As the title suggests, the film is Harley's journey of self-realization after her breakup with Joker. Her interaction with the other characters like Helena Bertinelli, Huntress, and Black Canary who constitute the team of vigilantes also form an important part of the narrative. They join forces in the film to save Cassandra Cain, a teenage girl who pickpocketed the code encrypted diamond from the misogynistic villain of the movie, Black Mask.

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Margot Robbie, who is also the producer, pitched the idea for *Birds of Prey* to Warner Bros. in 2015. Under the direction of Cathy Yan, the film is shot through the perspective of Harley Quinn and much of the first half of the movie is narrated by her. She breaks

the fourth wall and directly addresses the viewer which enables the audience to get acquainted with the events that happened post the movie *Suicide Squad*.



(Harley Quinn in a scene from the movie)

The dismal city of Batman's Gotham is also transformed into a vibrant, sunny and colorful Gotham of Harley. In a comic-book-style narration (similar to the *Deadpool* movies), Harley addresses all of her crimes to the audience which resulted in her making a lot of enemies. This, combined with Harley's humor, makes her world of Gotham happening, quirky and chaotic on the one hand and gloomy and lonely on the other. Cathy Yan explains in an interview, "She [Harley] is very capable of darkness, she's capable of a lot of violence, but at the same time she loves glitter and pink and she's quite the manic pixie girl. There's a duality in her, and I tried to reflect in the

duality of Gotham as well because everything is told through her eyes a bit in this movie.”

Without the Joker, her value of existence is questioned and doubted throughout the movie. She, in one of her vulnerable moments, says, “A harlequin’s role is to serve. It’s nothing without a master. And no one gives two [f***] who we are beyond that.” The only reason Roman Sionis after her is to get revenge upon Joker.

Some critics, too are of the view that she cannot be her own character, noting that even if the movie itself is about Harley, she still needs other characters to draw her value from. Robbie had pitched the film to Warner Bros. in 2015 as "An R-rated girl gang film including Harley, because I was like, Harley needs friends. Harley loves interacting with people, so don't ever make her do a standalone film.”

Even though movies like *Wonder Women* and *Captain Marvel* had previously dealt with issues like women empowerment, *Birds of Prey* is different as it showcases how different women come into their own. Harley herself narrates, “The Joker and I broke up. I wanted a fresh start, but it turns out I wasn’t the only dame in Gotham looking for emancipation.”

Blowing up of Ace Chemicals building (the place where Harley and Joker began their relationship) is equated with blowing up of Sionis (aka *Black Mask*, a fictional supervillain) at the end. In order to free herself and all the female characters in the movie all oppressive and limiting symbols of male domination in their lives are blown to ashes, either metaphorically or literally.

Many critics lauded this as a refreshing take on female empowerment which was unlike Marvel's usual practice of forcing the message of female empowerment down their viewer's throats. This is evident in the concluding fighting scene of Marvel's latest movie, *Avengers: Endgame* in which there was an unnecessary shot of all the seven female characters coming together to help Spider-Man.

ACTION SCENES

One of the most celebrated aspects of the movie is its action sequences. Whether it is Harley shooting policemen with firework inspired non-lethal grenade rounds, or her beating up goons when water splays all around her, or the funhouse ending sequence where the female cast comes together to fight Sionis, the audience are left awed and wanting for more. The movie adopts a unique approach in showcasing gore and 'bone-crunching' action scenes. This is particularly important as it is one of the few female-superhero oriented movie, with an R-rating.

LACK-LUSTURE CHARACTERS

Although, the movie garnered positive reviews overall, it has been criticized for its failure in developing the secondary characters, such as of Helena Bertinelli and Black Canary who assist the protagonist in her quest. Likewise, another secondary character, Cassandra Cain character is very different from her comic-book counterpart and is

treated as a mere supplement whose sole purpose is to become a link between Harley Quinn and the other characters of the team of *Birds of Prey*. As Nicole Ludden notes in her article in *Arizona Republic*, "Certainly, Quinn's eccentric escapades are the film's focus, but casually accompanying her with a gang of notorious female fighters from the DC universe seemed like a secondary plot line larger than the story itself."

The direction of the movie fails to explore the complex villain, Black Mask, who has an obsession with black masks and peeling human faces. The sadistic layers of Roman Sionis's character, such as his killing his own parents, disfiguring women's faces after his failed venture into the cosmetic business, his association with the 'False Face Society', and the making of the notorious black mask from his own father's burial casket are not even hinted at in the movie. His right-hand man, Victor Zsasz, is also neglected and his complex relationship with Roman is never fully explored. Thus, the villains of the movie are portrayed as rather weak and bland when compared with the other DC villains such as Enchantress, Zod, Doomsday or Lex Luthor.

-Sonali, III year



MANDALA ART by SHREYA GUPTA, II year

PIERCED HISTORY

Pierced history,

Hang the timelines;

Some falling to pieces.

Rest appearing with shines.

Swords, heavily thrown,

Over this fall.

Wounds Ripping,

Vermilion spots.

Yet they stay rigid,

Refusing to shatter.

Rest, just mix up.

In this earthly matter.

- Chavi Sehgal, II year

EXPLORING THE GOD-DEVIL DUALISM IN BRYAN FULLER'S HANNIBAL



NBC's three-season series *Hannibal*, developed by Bryan Fuller, is arguably one of the goriest show on television. The show was a psychological thriller based on the novels by Thomas Harris and focused on the relationship between FBI criminal profiler Will Graham and Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a forensic psychiatrist turned serial killer. According to reviewer Libby Hill, "Intentional or otherwise, Hannibal Lecter is not the devil; he is

god. He is that force in his universe that exists in concert with, but still wholly outside the world at large. He is something unnatural. He is the danger. He is the unknowable presence lurking in the shadows. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient.... Devil as god, manipulation as love, this is how Hannibal crafts a story and re-imagines a known quantity. And in doing so, Fuller et al. have succeeded in making not just a cogent adaptation but one of the finest dramas on television, all by tapping into the inherent terror of being made over not in God's image, but in Lucifer's." According to Richard Lodgson, the unholy reverence that people felt for Adolf Hitler and the strange and unsettling reverence that viewers feel for the character of Hannibal Lecter signals a perverse kind of spiritual fulfillment .

In episode eleven of the second season, following their attempts to murder each other, Will and Hannibal are sitting across from each other in Hannibal's office, and between them is an image of Shiva- who has traditionally been associated with the power to create and destroy. Hannibal reveals his affection for Will when he compares himself to the Demi-God Achilles and Will to Achilles' friend Patroclus, both Trojan War heroes, who have a passionate relationship with subtle sexual undertones. The show too has obvious homo-erotic hues between the two. Certainly, this relationship between a cannibalistic serial killer (Hannibal Lecter) and a sociopathic profiler (Will Graham) with empathy disorder proves fascinating enough to cause the viewer and Will to temporarily ignore the evil that lies at the core of Hannibal's character. Taking this observation one step further, Will's admiration of Hannibal is like Bryan's admiration

for the character of Hannibal. A lot of screen space is given to the cooking of the delicious food items but the scenes of Hannibal actually procuring the meat are rarely shown. Conveniently, the audiences are trapped in the aesthetic of the beautiful dishes presented on the table.



The poster for season one. It's easy to see the prominent role that food plays.

Hannibal, as the spiritual center of Fuller's world, seems to offer viewers a temporary refuge from the world outside. This sense of refuge is part of the illusion geared to entice the characters in the series as well as the viewers into a kind of complicity that is equivalent to allowing oneself to be consumed by Hannibal.

However, the whole series is about the power game between Will and Hannibal who cannot live with each other but also cannot live without each other. Hannibal might be the modern God or Nietzschean Superman but it would be incorrect to say that he

holds all the power. The power dynamics drastically shifts as he surrenders himself to the FBI just because he doesn't want to give up the opportunity of seeing Will again. While Will, by giving up on Hannibal, ends up being in the position of power

Season 1 has a cold dark palette it is most evident when we are alone with Will, an almost pretty but "rotten" (cold shades) faded color surrounds everything; only when Will is with Hannibal do we get a glimpse of vibrant colors. Will's outfits have a cold monochromatic palette of dark greens and blacks. Darkness and faded colors surround Will's life except Hannibal. Their mind palaces are well lit too. Almost all of their time in Florence has a warm dream-like palette. When Hannibal gets imprisoned and Will returns to his 'normal' life, we are back to really dark cold colors around him.



Deleted epilogue scene, Will's and Hannibal's shadows are merged.

These colors, light, and shadows begin merging by the end of season three which also happens to be the concluding season. Light on Will's left side and dark shadows on his right, while dark on Hannibal's right and light at his left symbolizes their personalities.

Will is nice and helpful on the outside (his left side that faces outwards) but his dark and twisted side is facing Hannibal (he reveals his other side just to Hannibal). Hannibal is the opposite: He is psychopathic on the outside (his dark right side that faces outwards) but the light side is facing Will: the part of him that is capable of love and this side is just for Will.

Will tells Hannibal, "We are conjoined." Taking in consideration all the points it means that a slow synthesis of God/Devil (Hannibal) and Human (Will) happen. Critic Alexandra Carroll notes that, "The collapse of distance between subject and mediator to become monstrous double of the subject". Hannibal-as-monster mirrors someone human that is Will. The boundaries which separate individuals become fluid. In Fuller's world, God is dead and the Devil is the new God and man's separation from the monster is not feasible.

The deleted epilogue scene makes everything clearer and at the same time is open to multiple interpretations. The scene was deleted because Bryan had planned some more seasons and he didn't wish his audience to get a closure on Will and Hannibal's relationship. A simple interpretation could be that Man (Will) abandons God (Jack) when he is finally corrupted by Devil (Hannibal). Even in this interpretation of clear cut binaries of God, Devil and Man, there is one thing which is clear, no matter what the outcome maybe: Both of them die, which would represent a victory of Will over Hannibal. After all, with both of them out of the world, everyone else is safe; or both of

them survive, which would represent, in a way, a victory of Hannibal over Will, bounding them to live together in a cannibal life.

- Shruti Gupta, III year



KARMA POLICE by AAFREEN ANJUM, I year

INTO THE WOODS

In the twilight glow,
With heavy breathing,
And fluttering fingers,
I wandered.

My heart sang,
The song of fear

Mixed with the whistles
Of autumn leaves,
My mind echoed it rhythmically.

Lost in the enchanting woods,
I had strayed from my path.

Moving aimlessly in the woods
I found myself,
Finally, on that twilight.

- Harleen Kaur, II year



ONLY ART SAVED ME, EVERYTHING ELSE BETRAYED ME by AAFREEN ANJUM,
1 year

UNFORTHCOMING SUITOR

Calm outside, storm inside.

I wonder how you avoid the chaos.

Sitting on the pavement seems to be a good task.

Yet you deny what you do,

Why? If I may ask?

Without your consent, I've explored a different side of you.

It often confuses me,

Who is the real you?

Naive, childlike, innocent.

Are you?

Vulnerability is all I see in your eyes.

Too good to be true, if I may say so.

I'll end here,

Some things are great left unsaid.

I hope you won't forget what I just said?

- Ishta Handa, II year

THE END OF ALL STORIES

By the bonfire that night, the old man stroked his beard and told me a story. Each story seemed like a continuation of the last one as if all these stories together would have some larger than life meaning. "This story will be the end of all stories." Mr. Jensen smiled crookedly. I felt a little uncomfortable, I readjusted myself while dried leaves crackled under my feet, that little noise seemed to be the only natural sound I could hear, it seemed to echo and I knew Mr. Jensen's voice would engulf the whole atmosphere. In no time I would only hear him, the natural sounds of my dark surrounding would not be heard as if they just submerged themselves in the air.

"So, what was the final conclusion of those series of stories you hear from my father?" asked, Mr. Jensen's son and my dear friend, Sid.

"Somehow it never feels like it's the end. For five nights he has been telling me how this story would be the last but it never is, he has been fooling/duping/deceiving me." I said.

"You haven't told me what these stories are about. He is my father yet he tells you all the stories." He said as he rolled his eyes. "I just want to know the conclusion." His eyes sparkled eerily and looked almost unearthly .

I went out of the house hypnotically.

"You didn't tell me the story" I heard a whisper, sending a shiver down my spine and I turned to see it was Sid. He laughed and was telling me something but I was looking at the darkening night sky with crows flying above me.

After a few moments, I finally turned my gaze on him.

"Are you even listening his stories? I haven't heard from him since five days, and here you are telling me you heard the story from him." He looked at me with perplexed eyes. I felt afraid of him suddenly. His mere existence was making me feel scared, I felt a cold wave of breeze touch my skin and shut my eyes for a few seconds. Taking a deep breath, I opened them and asked him, "Here you are, asking me about the story but not your father whom you haven't seen for five days."

"He doesn't care about me, I don't care about him. You don't either, you just want to hear the ending of his stories." He said coldly. I felt colder than before. Why was I feeling so cold?

Suddenly, I pushed him and he fell down, I picked up a stone and bashed his brains out with it.

She killed me because I killed my father five days ago. I thought she would have gone to meet him, and when she wouldn't find him there she would go home but she continued to go there. I even wondered if on the pretext of meeting my father she was

meeting someone else. Now, it doesn't matter. I am dead. Then, I saw her walking towards the bonfire near our house. I followed her, I screamed her name but she didn't hear. I realized I could hear my thoughts but not my voice.

She sat near the bonfire, my dead father was also there.

"Sid killed me, that's why I couldn't come to you. If I tell you the ending no one would ever visit me. So I shall never tell you the end." He said.

She got up, slipped and hit the rock with which she killed me with and began bleeding. I ran up to her, to help her but she smiled looking at me, "Just like the story, this will be an endless ritual and you will also be forever trapped with us." Her wounds healed and my father screamed, "She died too that night! She died too!"

They both cursed me to never be able to speak. I knew the ending of his stories.

I had known it always.

- Shruti Gupta, III year



CATHY AND HEATHCLIFF BY SHRUTI GUPTA

MY CHOICES

Lost amidst the stars,

I found darkness intriguing.

Serene and comforting,

This is simply inexplicable to the moon.

Lost amidst the deepest waters of the endless ocean,

I embraced the solace on the shore.

Dusty, messy and unorganized,

Just like me.

This is totally unacceptable to the waves.

Lost amidst the petals of roses camouflaging the thorns,

I chose to etch the pain.

Piercing the flesh in a thousand different ways,

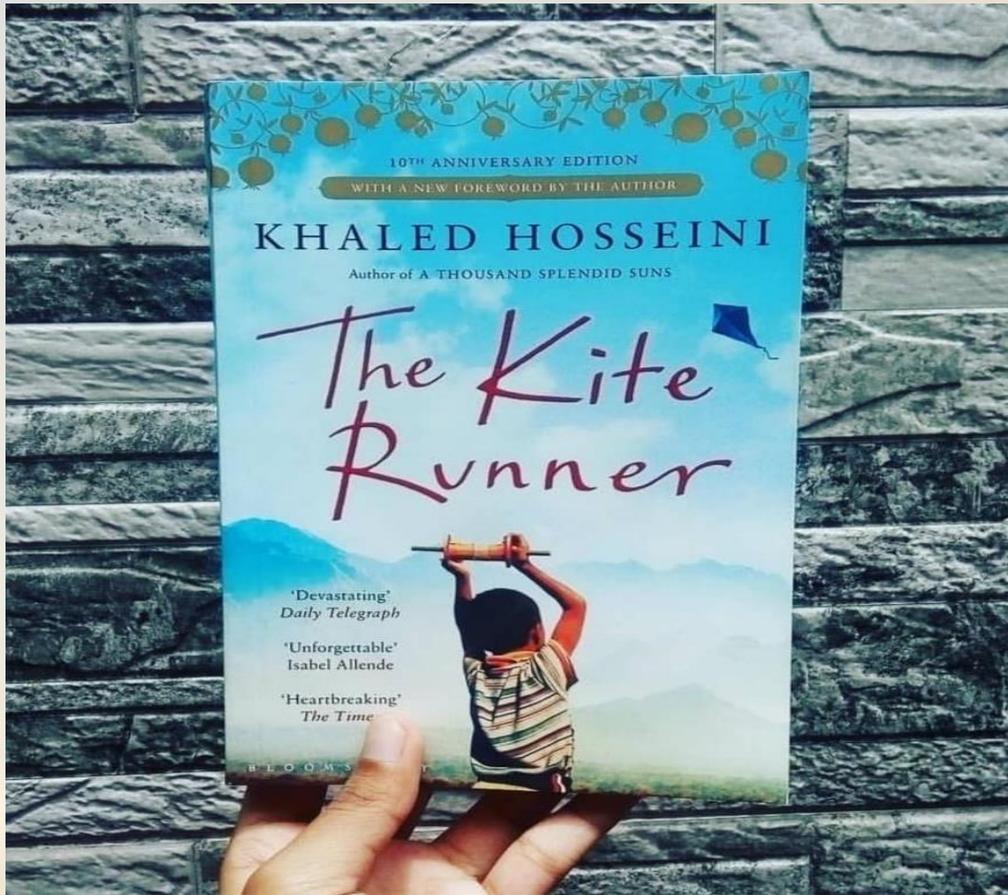
This is painful yet ecstatic.

Lost amidst the sky,
I found the undertones of blue more beautiful
Than the bright sunlight of the wicked Sun.
This doesn't blind the eyes, but soothes a chaotic mind.

Within the norms of society,
Lost amidst the depths of ardor I found nothing
But those creepy traces of the repeated, gut wrenching stories.
The deeper you dive, the deeper the wound.
The choices I made are my own,
So I learn every day and regret nothing.

-Nitika Chopra, III year

Book Review: *THE KITE RUNNER* by Khalid Hosseini



Cry until your heart aches, was what I understood while I was halfway through the book. The book is narrated so beautifully, that it makes you feel as if every character has come alive in you while you witness and endure every incident with them.

Set against the backdrop of Afghanistan, through the fall of the monarchy, the Soviet intervention and the rise of Taliban, this is a sweeping story of friendship, family, greed, jealousy, honor, guilt, fear and redemption. It is also about the lives of two young boys reflecting upon the journey they have shared.

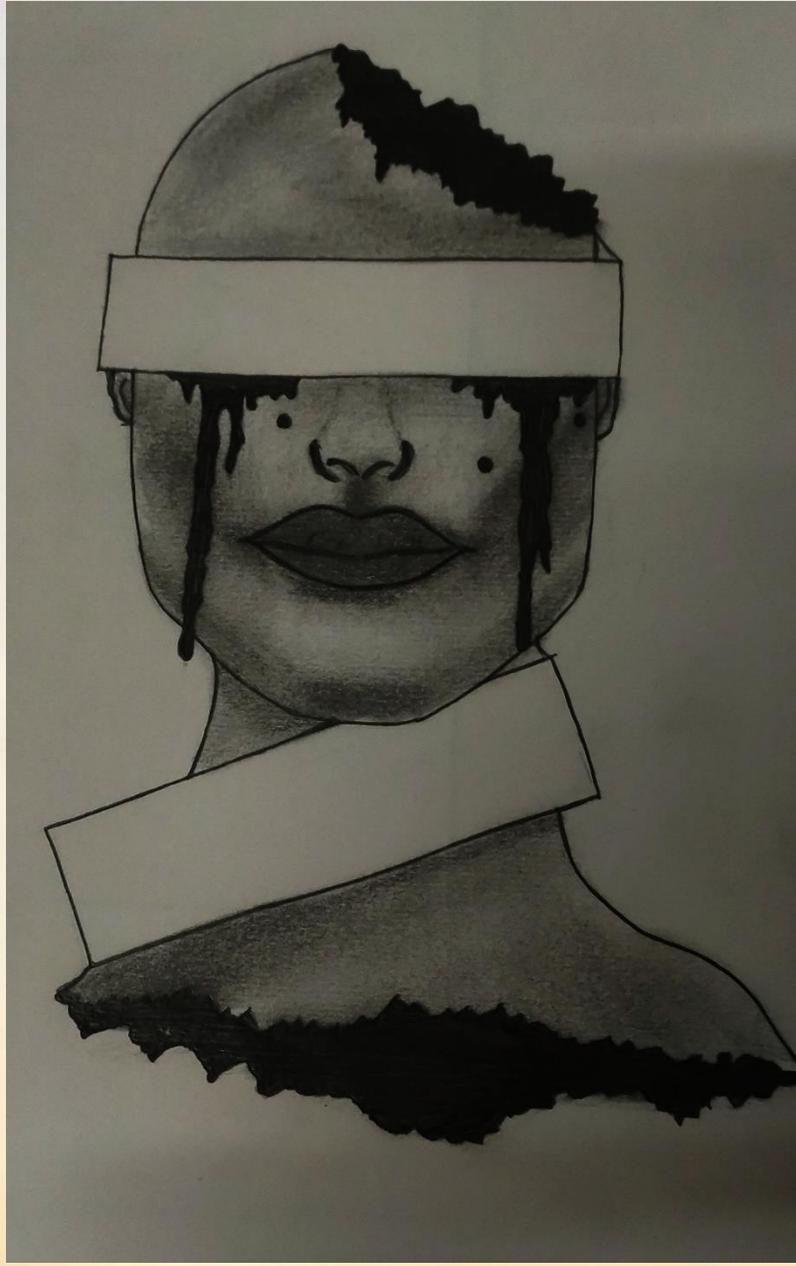
At first, you may not like the main character (Amir), but as the story unfolds, his character grows on you as you see the world through him and his journey towards redemption. The little boy Amir experiences a heart-rending journey of guilt and is desperate to amend it but his cowardliness never lets him stand in the daylight. *"But I had driven Hassan and Ali out of the house. Was it too far-fetched to imagine that the things might have turned out differently if I hadn't?"* Amir thought.

As life gives him lessons, he grasps his inner strength and strives hard to remedy his mistakes in order to lessen the weight of his guilt.

Hosseini's book explores the many layers of human relationships through his central characters, Amir and Hassan. The relationship between father and son is also very prominent in the novel. Another important figure in the novel is the friend of Amir's father, who throughout the novel provides him wisdom and guidance. He also helps him untangle his messed up thoughts about relationships in life.

A very enthralling work by Khalid Hosseini, tugging at reader's heartstring, showing us how uncertain a person's life can be. I was in love, I cried, I cringed, I felt so many emotions that can't even be penned down. But by the time I finished reading the novel, one thing I was sure of was, "life comes in a circle, and there is always an opportunity to be good again."

- Krati Garg, III year



- *Always keep your face towards the sunshine and the shadows will fall behind you.*

SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS by TARANDEEP KAUR, II year

GRATEFUL

Be happy

Be satisfied

And be thankful.

For you never know,

What turn your life would take.

From a muddy bowl to a beautiful cake

Things will be difficult you may cry,

But not trying hard you will die.

While you are alive,

Make your presence felt,

Help people who need your happy belt.

Giving someone a reason to smile,

Booking your seat in the ship of Nile

You will be happier than you think

Seeing people smile and wink!

No one will be sad,

Crying for the bad day, they had.

The world will be a better place to live,

Optimistic and happy people to pick!
So be thankful for all that you have got,
Some dream of having your lot.
Be happy with your input,
For some are dreaming of your shoe and their foot!

- Rupreet Kaur, III year

STRENGTH

Things are never constant

But this is what life is, right?

We face highs and lows,

And no phase goes slow.

We may limit ourselves from achieving anything,

But in reality we can gain everything.

We love till the very end,

Often because we bend

To keep things going.

Which often destroy

Our health or our breath,

And we're all scared of death.

What's ours is on its way,

All we have to do is keep searching

For the sun's rays.

Taking us to the light that shines,

We're nothing but a little lost sometimes.

Hold on to your trust,

It will quench your thirst,

By gaining all the strength.

- Japneet Sahni, I year

BIDING ADIEU

BATCH OF 2020

We, your juniors from The English Department, can't express how much we will miss your batch. It feels like yesterday when we first met you and it was just a matter of time before we became companions. You helped us sail through this new phase of our life. Right from warning us about the temper of teachers to coming to our rescue whenever we got stuck with an assignment, you were always there for us.



The fresher's party you gave us was an ice-breaker and we fell in love with the goofiness of your batch. Your participation in activities inspired our batch to be active. All of you have been great mentors. You have illuminated our paths in numerous ways and we hope you continue to spread your light. We had planned a Farewell party to shower you with all the love you deserve but current circumstances will not allow that to happen. We couldn't do much, hence, we wish to show our gratitude by dedicating this edition of *verbos incendium* to you. We wish you luck in your future endeavours.

PICTURE CREDITS

Cover Photo: 'A UNICORN PARTIED TOO HARD' by Afreen Anjum,

Background Image: Picture of sunset clicked by Sonali, III year

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We invite submissions– prose, poetry, art– for the next edition of *Verbos Incendium*.

For information regarding our next issue, please stay tuned to our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/verbosincendium/>

Feedback and suggestions for improvement will be more than welcome on: ejournal17@gmail.com.

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