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The Journal of
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Literatures

Edbiyat

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AIMS AND SCOPE

The aim of *Edebiyat* is to provide a forum for scholars working on Middle Eastern literatures (chiefly Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hebrew, although articles on 'minority literatures, e.g. Armenian, and on the Ancient Literatures of the Middle East will also be welcome) and related comparative studies in which to publish scholarly articles, translations, and brief communications. The emphasis will be on work of a high academic standard, representing the current state of the art in literary studies. Comparative studies between related Middle Eastern literatures and East-West comparative studies will be particularly welcome, as will articles on the relationship of literature with other arts and media (visual arts, music, theatre and film) and applications of contemporary literary theory (structuralism; semiotics; literary anthropology) to the literature of the Middle East. The focus, however, will be on practical demonstration of methodological approaches rather than on purely theoretical discussions. *Edebiyat* hopes to promote a dialogue between scholars of Middle Eastern Literatures and their colleagues in other disciplines, particularly those engaged in the study of other literatures (Western and non-Western alike), and an active exchange of views and information. *Edebiyat* will also provide reviews of books and information on forthcoming events of interest to its readers (conferences, workshops, competitions, etc.)

Notes for contributors can be found at the back of the journal.

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L'écrit et le cri: Giving Voice in Assia Djebar's *L'amour, la Fantasia*

Joanna Goodman

'*L'amour, ses cris*' (*'l'écrit*): ma main qui écrit établit le jeu de mots français sur les amours qui s'exhalent; mon corps qui, lui, simplement s'avance, mais dénudé, lorsqu'il retrouve le hululement des aieules sur les champs de bataille d'autrefois devient lui-même enjeu: il ne s'agit plus d'écrire que pour survivre. (Djebar 1985: 240)¹

L'amour ses cris (*'l'écrit*): my hand as I write in French makes the pun on love affairs that are aired; all my body does is to move forward, stripped naked, and when it discovers the ululations of my ancestresses on the battlefields of old, it finds that it is itself at stake: it is no longer a question of writing only to survive. (Djebar 1989: 214)

Assia Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* is about history, war, conquest, and culture as much as it is about breaking out of silence and re-membering the self. Rooted in the discord between the oral and the written word, the narrative revolves around the theme of voice: it aims to reevaluate the French voice that dominated during the years of conquest and colonization and to give voice to those who have been silenced. With "mémoire nomade et . . . voix coupée" ["nomad memory and intermittent voice"] (255; 226), Djebar re-creates her own past at the same moment that she intervenes on the terrain of French war chronicles and transcribes the oral histories of women during the War of Liberation, acting at once as autobiographer, ethnographer, and historian. These roles intertwine to the point of coalescence and ultimately construct a link between personal and collective memory. This linkage is played out in the action of the narrative itself, where private experiences echo collective ones, and the process of constructing an identity in the "interval between patriarchal culture and colonial heritage"² mirrors the process of re-telling the past to include those histories overlooked and silenced by History. Through a complex and multidimensional narrative that speaks the struggle of Algerian women as it uncovers the French letters that "parlent, dans le fond, d'une Algérie-femme impossible à apprivoiser" ["speak, in the deepest sense, of Algeria as a woman whom it is impossible to tame"] (69), Djebar uses her own voice to assess and assemble interpretations of a void in collective history, exhuming the buried cries of her ancestors and attempting to bridge the gap between *les cris* (cries) and *l'écrit* (writing).

techniques used by a major Andalusian poet. Since such an inventory does not exist for many Arabic poets, this work will be a valuable tool for future research.

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Sad Songs with Henna Leaves: Urdu Stories in Translation *

Domains of Fear and Desire. Urdu Stories. Edited by Muhammad Umar Memon. Toronto: TSAR (The Toronto South Asian Review Publications). 1992. Pp. vii + 264.

The Tale of the Old Fisherman. Contemporary Urdu Short Stories. Edited and with an Introduction by M. U. Memon. Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1991. Pp. 197.

The Colour of Nothingness. Modern Urdu Short Stories. Edited and translated by M. U. Memon. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991. Pp. xxx + 193.

I should state at the outset that initially I declined this journal's kind offer of *The Tale of the Old Fisherman* (hereafter *Tale*) and *Domains of Fear and Desire*

(hereafter *Domains*) for review because of my rudimentary knowledge of Urdu. But I was easily persuaded and soon after embarked on an odyssey that involved reading upwards of sixty Urdu stories in translation by thirty writers as I traversed four continents. In Bombay I chanced upon *The Colour of Nothingness* (hereafter *Nothingness*) and decided to include it in the review.¹

Tale and *Nothingness* are preceded by lengthy critical introductions. With the exception of the first part of *Tale*, which contextualizes Urdu for the unfamiliar reader — no doubt omitted in *Nothingness* because it is published in the subcontinent and presumes this knowledge — the introductions to the two collections are vexing in their similarity. The later *Nothingness* introduction (May 1991) very closely mirrors the *Tale* one (August 1988) both in paragraph structure and in language. For instance, in *Tale* we read, "And although Sharar's many romances flout with impunity every law of probability and play fast and loose with history, they were greatly loved for their soothing effect" (10), and in *Nothingness*, "Sharar's romances, of which he wrote many, flout every law of probability and play fast and loose with history. But this didn't deter the Muslims from loving them, mostly for their balm-ing effect" (xii). Or, "Although naïve and simplistic from today's perspective, these stories carried within them the germs of some of the future developments in the form" (*Tale*, 15), versus "Naïve and simplistic from today's perspective, these stories nonetheless carried within them the germs of some of the future developments in the form" (*Nothingness*, xv). Pages 22-24 of *Tale* are repeated almost verbatim on pp. xix-xxi of *Nothingness*. Naturally, when Memon is discussing the stories in each collection, his comments differ, but the introduction to *Nothingness* is based almost entirely on that of *Tale*.

I have drawn attention to this similarity not to derogate Memon's efforts but to sensitize the reader to the fact of resemblance. The duplication is likely to affect only a few consumers, as *Nothingness* appeared in India and *Tale* in North America, but it would have been preferable had Memon produced in *Nothingness* a new or, at any rate, different introduction for the benefit of his readership. The only departures in *Nothingness* from the earlier version of the introduction in *Tale* are the removal of the discussion of the emergence of Urdu and the laudable addition of a list of writers Memon found it impossible, for reason of space and practicality, to include.

Memon writes in his Introduction to *Tale* that the "good and accessible translations" in English that exist of the Urdu short story concentrate "on the works of a few old masters such as Manto, Bedi, Ahmed Ali, Krishan Chander, Aziz Ahmad, Ismat Chughtai, and Ahmad Nadim Qasimi, but seldom venture into the hesitant, complex world of the contemporary writer. I have therefore tried to select writers who have received little or no attention in a Western language, even if in so doing I may have picked up one or two rough-hewn and tentative pieces . . ." (31). Of considerable literary-taxonomic interest, then, is the fact that, in spite of identical motives for

producing *Tale* and *Nothingness*, "to present the texture and flavor of the modern Urdu short story, both as a daring experiment and as a more refined heir to the traditional form" (identical words at *Tale*, 31 and *Fisherman*, xxix), the finished products are quite different, as I shall try to show below.

Tale opens with a story by Zamiruddin Ahmad (1925-90), "First Death" (1962; tr. Memon).² It is the story of the reproach and punishment of a young boy by his family for having struck a bully who was beating up a defenseless man. The artfulness with which Ahmad makes us sympathize with even the petty concerns of all the characters is admirably conveyed in Memon's translation. The only character spared Ahmad's sympathy is the boy's father, who requires the boy to be made *murga*, i.e. to assume the demeaning posture of a rooster. Unable to take the punishment for long, hungry, eyes full of tears, the boy takes his sympathetic grandmother's advice and goes to ask his father for forgiveness for something he believes was not wrong, but just. With the words "Please forgive me, *abba*. I will never do it again!" (11), the boy dies his first death.

Zamiruddin Ahmad is one of eight writers included in all three volumes, and *Domains* is moreover dedicated to his memory. "Sukhe Sawan", in *Nothingness*, forms part of Ahmad's first Urdu collection of the same name which appeared posthumously in Karachi in 1991; the story had, however, appeared in the Delhi-based *Shaaor* in 1988. It is the sensuous and very sensual story of a widow's day, from the moment "She [wakes] up feeling embarrassed and sweaty" (1) to the moment she "gently tosse[s] the flower strings into a heap by the pillow and facing them [lies] down on the same bed she had made around noon" (13). The flow of visitors to her house and its courtyard provides the cadence for a life whose other rhythms have ebbed — her husband, her now happily married daughter. The streaming rains and moisture-saturated winds provide another such rhythmic modulation: "A bewitched moon luxuriated over the softness of her belly, planting kiss after impatient kiss, like a lover gone mad . . ." (11); "The rain showered its pearl-strings over her upright, self-possessing neck, her proud breasts, her bashful back, her exulting hips." It is in rain that she finds the romance and eros she denies herself by refusing to remarry despite the gentle urgings of her maid, Bua.³

"Purvai — The Easterly Wind" (1987; tr. Memon) is, like "Sukhe Sawan", a story from Ahmad's later period, after a twenty-year silence that coincided with his first twenty years in England. In this story too, female sexuality is important. But as with "First Death", it is in the domestic interactions of a family that Ahmad chooses to show this. When the young boy in the story asks his mother what Purvai is, she answers "One of the effects of purvai is that it cheers up the saddest person, for a while at least, and . . ." (36). The "and" is provided later by the boy himself, after the mother has refused the advances of a husband she seems unquestionably to love, and after a mysterious, non-erotic (and nostalgic?) interest in the appearance of a certain

man she sees in the street: When Purvai blows "it causes old hurts to start aching again . . ." (42). We can only guess at youthful love, at unrealized dreams, at separations, as Ahmad brings us back into the domestic orbit of husband and wife. She turns in early and when her husband joins her, he stands watching, "stunned. Free of the last restraint of modesty, her sleeping body somehow seemed fully awake in anticipation of someone" (43).

These three stories, the opening stories of each collection by alphabetical accident, inevitably set up expectations about the remainder of the three volumes. In this regard, *Tale* is outshone by the other two collections, perhaps because, as Memon himself confirms, some of the stories in it are rough around the edges. Khalida Asghar's "The Wagon" (1981; tr. Memon) is described by Memon in his introductions to both *Tale* and *Nothingness* as an all-time favorite (but is, in *Nothingness*'s parallel paragraph [xxiii = *Tale*, 2, 6], attributed to Khalida Husain!). A very skillful deployment of a terrifying symbol of evil and oppressive power, a pervasive stench, the story, in a very good translation, falters at the end with an unnecessary attention to closure: "And this evening I find myself on the bridge, waiting for the wagon . . . waiting." Masud Ashar's "Of Coconuts and Chilled Beer Bottles" (1974; Memon), Intizar Husain's "The Seventh Door" (1955; tr. Javaid Qazi), Memon's "The Dark Alley" (1963; tr. Faruq Hasan) and, from *Domains*, Enver Sajjad's "The Cow" (1970; tr. Memon), Hasan Manzar's "The Beggar Boy" (1982; tr. Memon) and Qurratulain Hyder's "Hyena's Laughter" (tr. F. Hasan and Memon) all suffer from the same preoccupation with closure. Suppression of the closing lines of these stories would, in my opinion, have proven more effective. Be that as it may, Ashar's "Coconuts" is a tense and controlled exploration of a number of issues pertinent to the split of Pakistan into East and West — a theme also explored in Parween Sarwar's "Hearth and Home" (*Domains*; tr. Memon and Wayne Husted) — and resonates, for me at least, parts of Sadiq Hidayat's *The Blind Owl*.⁴ This resonance I also detected in Surender Parkash's "Wood Chopped in the Jungle" (*Tale*; 1988; tr. Sagaree Sengupta), a story of anonymous elements in constant flux and fusion.⁵ The translator has successfully conveyed the incorporeality of the writing, but the story itself relies on an artifice I found tiresome. The images of snow in the jungle and of holes pierced in the head, hands and feet of the corpse, rather than augmenting the story, diminish what power it has in its inversion of values, space, time and syntax. Muhammad Salimur Rahman's "Siberia" (*Tale*; 1979; tr. Memon, Ursula LeGuin, and W. Husted), on the other hand, displays, in an excellent translation, a skilful deployment of motif-inversion.

The stories in *Tale* that struck me the most were Iqbal Majeed's "Two Men, Slightly Wet" (ca. 1971; tr. C. M. Naim), Hasan Manzar's "The Poor Dears" (ca. 1982; tr. Memon), and Memon's "The Dark Alley" (1963; tr. F. Hasan). "Two Men", which first appeared in this journal in 1976, is the story of the criticism by one man of another for remaining trapped under a porch during

a rainstorm rather than trying to make a dash through the rain, and their subsequent discussion about it when they meet again in a coffee-house. "The creative vision is trained on a delightfully subtle point" (29), or conceit rather, but it is successful. "Poor Dears" is a superb self-exploration by the narrator — a writer — that centers on his relationship to the people he meets on one of his trips to Pakistan, wholly mediated, structurally and psychically, by his relationship to and with his assistant Cathy, deftly developed by Manzar through the careful placement of a sentence now and again. The closing lines almost give the game away but not quite. "The Poor Dears" is one of Memon's numerous excellently translated stories. Memon's own contribution to *Tāle* is also a superbly controlled narrative, revolving around the death of the young daughter of a *mauli* and the initial failure of the unnamed mourners to find her grave and bury her, though it is really of an existential failure that Memon writes.

Memon mentions that he has included Saleem Asmi's "Fire, Ashes and Water" (1961; tr. F. Hasan) because it is "the only successful story of its kind . . . employ[ing] multiple-narrators to view an extremely complex event from three separate perspectives" (27). I did not come away from it as if I were "walk[ing] away from the terrible feeling of a lush meadow laid to waste in the wake of a terrible storm whipped up by the violence raging deep within the human psyche" (27); those words better describe for me Asghar's "The Wagon". And "The Tale of the Old Fisherman", which is not a short story but the opening chapter of Abdullah Hussein's 1963 prizewinning novel *Udās nāstān* (Sad Generations), was evidently included to provide "a refreshing counterpoint to Krishan Chandar's two rather gushy stories about the same incident" (28), the 1919 massacre of Indians by the British. This attempt at thematic balance is a little unusual, as is the choice of a novel chapter.

The collection closes with a story by Enver Sajjad, one of the masters of the minimal prose style. "Scorpion, Cave, Pattern" (1970; tr. Frances W. Pritchett) is the clinical, septic description of a scorpion's progress through a room and of the chemistry of scorpion intimacy. It is both startling and stark and quite different from the Sajjad story included in *Domains*, "The Cow", taken from the same Urdu collection. In "The Cow", a boy tries to prevent "his" cow from being sold. The final scene, potentially tragic, is suspended by the writer's intrusion: "Somebody go there and take a look and tell me what happened next" (212). "The Bird" (tr. Memon) — also from the same collection — is classic Sajjad again. With characteristic poignancy and anatomical detail, he describes a tourist's almost pathological desire to possess a particular bird.

As an ensemble of stories, *Domains* (comprising twenty-one mostly recent stories) is by far the strongest of the three collections. I believe this is due to criteria of inclusion. In the prefatory remarks Memon writes that he has "spared" (vii) the reader the technical innovation, "the collapse of the familiar space between the writer's persona and the reader" (vi), the dizzying effects

of "very 'private' stories" (vii): "Instead, I have selected those stories that might yet be readable . . .", and in so doing he delivers on the promise, as it appears on the back cover, to bring "to the English reader, in accurate, modern translations" stories of "startling originality and breath-taking grace . . . revealing an imagination hovering upon the mystical and the romantic, the traditional and the modern . . ." These parameters, slightly different from those Memon laid down for *Tāle* and *Nothingness*, have resulted in a significant collection. All the stories are very well translated: Memon himself translates twelve of the twenty-one stories alone, and four in collaboration.

"The Plague in Jammu" (tr. John Roosa), the second story in *Domains*, is the opening chapter of Qudratullah Shahab's autobiographical novel, *Shahānāma* (1987). Memon does not explain that this is a selection from a sustained longer work, but it is nonetheless a superlative selection that skillfully portrays a young boy's discovery of sexuality and longing in ingenuous language: "Her slender lips were like rose petals, stained with the deep red of walnut bark. Her face reflected the colour of both gold and silver as though she had just bathed in milk and honey" (16). Shahab's ability to convey the spontaneity of immature desire is captured, for example, in "Underneath her veil she quickly gobbled up the ice and I licked the leaf clean. By the time we reached the market near the old palaces of the maharaja my pocket was empty. Otherwise, I certainly would have hit upon the idea of buying one of the palaces for Sadiqa Begum" (18), and in "We came to Maulvi Sahib's [Sadiqa Begum's husband] neighbourhood and spontaneously the prayer burst from my heart: please Lord, may Maulvi Sahib be dead from the plague before we arrive home and may I continue wandering the streets with Sadiqa Begum, chewing pan, eating jujube fruits, and savouring ice" (18).

The child's voice of "First Death" and "Plague" is not found again in the volume, but the remaining stories span a wide and encompassing range of voices, narrative styles and themes. Inizhar Husain's "The Back Room" (1973; tr. Caroline Beeson and Memon), is the story of the struggle of the narrator — a woman — to understand two signal events in her destiny through the prism of the influences of a legendary and ominous snake that lives in a back room.⁶ The two events are the death of her brother Battu who, as a child, jumped into wells (cf. Balraj Komal, "The Man Who Jumped Wells" [1968; tr. Memon] in *Domains*), and what her family sees as a failure to have gotten her married. In spite of the subtleties of the almost mythic story, Husain here conforms somewhat to his characterization as a conservative writer.⁸ The Husain story in the *Nothingness* volume, however, "A Stranded Railroad Car", is less conservative. In it, Husain alternates two narratives, that of his protagonist — the memory of a train journey, the passengers, a "young woman's disquietingly lovely face, her warm fleshy body" (20) in particular — and that of another of the story's characters, the story of an inexplicably stranded railroad car. The contours of the protagonist's psyche are masterfully

demarcated by the two narratives. And the protagonist's story, like the railroad car, ends stranded.

Qurratun-Nayim's "Hyena's Laughter" (tr. F. Hasan and Memon) is an almost journalistic account of events that take place at and near a rest house in the Corbett National Park. The lists of animals (35, twice; 36) at the beginning of the story, that set an informative and almost detached tone, are echoed in the name-calling at the end (47, 48). The detached tone is simultaneously shattered and reinforced by the almost casual and lyrical description at the end: "... the alligator swam towards the cave. It rested for a second under the stone wall. At that moment it was alive in a bygone age of the earth, as were the Himalayan rivers issuing from the snow, the mountains, the forests, the rocks. The alligator started dismembering the girl's body and devouring her ... " (48). Unfortunately, as with many of the stories in all three collections, the off-set final paragraph, designed to provide closure, undermines the effectiveness of the "ending".

In much the same way that "Hyena's Laughter" is quite different from the other stories in *Domains*, so too is Hyder's story in *Nothingness*, "Confessions of St. Flora of Georgia" (tr. Hyder), quite different. This is the story of a sepulchred corpse, Flora, who exacts a year's additional life for herself and her neighbor (Father Gregory) from an apprentice angel. The angel obliges but cannot give the two flesh so, disguised in habits, the skeletons wander about the countryside and, by helping a man seeking asylum, end up in the United States where they spend time and money living it up. On their last day alive, Gregory reads Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" — quoted in full — to Flora, who is depressed by it as it reminds her of the home she once knew and was forced to leave. To cheer her up, they go to a ball where they are found out. All this is recounted as a confession — as the title indicates — to God. The language is accordingly respectful but casual. This perhaps explains the inclusion of some phrases that at first blush seem out of place: "But now, blast it, I've lost my rosary" (47), "we all had a really fun time" (51), "the Commies closed down this convent" (60).

Abdullah Hussein's "The Refugees" (1981; tr. Memon) and "The Rose" (*Nothingness*, 1982; tr. Memon) are both wonderful stories. Both treat issues of momentous importance in the lives of their main characters and successfully, if quite differently, evoke for the reader the reality, if that is the correct abstraction, of living. "The Refugees" is prefaced by a paragraph that closes, "And just as man's greatest asset is the duration that is his life, so the essence of a story is the event on which it is based. This story, too, derives its meaning from just two days in Aftab's life. That some thirty years separate those two days is quite another matter" (50). This explicit recognition of the desiderata of the story and of the storyteller's art is also obvious in Hasan Manzar's "The Beggar Boy" (1982; tr. Memon) — the rather gritty story of the nature of a young beggar boy's resistance to the urgings of a family of benefactors that

he convert from Hinduism to Islam: "But Hastinapur has nothing to do with our story. For one thing, our story isn't that old . . ." (105). "The Refugees" is essentially about how the main character, Aftab, returns to his home town to try to come to terms with his father's unexplained suicide. The explanation Aftab's son gives thirty years later — he thinks the man who took his life was a neighbor, not his grandfather — is disarming and lovely and transforms Aftab's disquiet and distance into the palpable recognition that "If there was anything he knew with certainty, it was this: he belonged here . . ." (77). "The Rose" is about the emotions — anger, acknowledgment, lust — that lead to the consummation of a love between a man, Naim, who did not know the woman had long desired him, and a woman, Sarwat, whose unrequited desire has been mocked and thwarted by a marriage, practically arranged by Naim, to another. The dialogue that precedes their night of wordless and unmatched passion is brilliantly suggestive, as are the dialogue and interaction that follow it, largely for what is not said and for the psychic implications of the consummation.

"Obscure Domains of Fear and Desire" (1984; tr. J. Qazi and Memon), by Naiyer Masud, is a long seven-part story about a man's discovery of himself, his desires, and, quite literally, of domains of fear and desire, principally in houses he visits but also elsewhere. The inclusion of Masud in *Domains* makes up for his absence in *Tale*, an absence Memon calls "heart-wrenching" because "His fictional world is entirely underivative and unrivaled" (31). The English title (the Urdu title is simply "Ojhal") is no doubt meant to evoke Buñuel's and Louys' *Cet obscur objet du désir*. Whereas in those works the suggestion of madness is subsurface, in "Obscure Domains" it is clear from the italicized opening and underscored in the following passage one page from the end: "I have not sworn an oath of silence. It's just that I do not need to speak. This has been made possible for me by the kind people who live in this house. They spotted me somewhere, recognized me, and told me that for many generations our families had been very close" (102).

Madness and love are the subjects of Jeelani Bano's splendid "Some Other Man's Home" (1979; tr. C. M. Naim), one of the finest stories in *Domains*. The narrator is a man whom all, except his young daughter Chun-Chun, decide is mad. His wife, like many others, is after the pension he denies them, but Chun-Chun wants to fly away with him. At one point, she brings him pieces of paper she has cut up and tells her father it is money. The innocence and honesty of a child and the (so-called) madness of an adult are interwoven to produce a story that is a startling and tragic commentary on sanity, devotion, and greed.

Madness has also engulfed the narrator/protagonist of the Khalida Husain story in *Nothingness*, "The Millipede" (1981; tr. Memon), in the guise, as the title suggests, of "a millipede, a prehensile, myriapodal life" (24). Just as madness is transformed in Husain's story, the inability of the narrator in Iqbal

Majeed's story in the same volume ("The Parasite" [tr. Memon]) to come to terms with his young son's death and his own need to seek help from a society he has scorned for its facile divisions, especially into Sunni and Shia, is embodied by a parasite "squirming inside" him (90). A *kērichawan* (worm, tapeworm) is integral to Memon's own contribution to the volume, "The Worm and the Sunflower" (1975; Memon), but here it is a worm anthropomorphized. The narrative recounts, in disjointed fashion, the spiritual and worldly journeys of the protagonist as he wrestles with Islamic, Buddhist, Japanese and European culture and subculture. This exploration, though difficult to follow because of its numerous and disparate references, is nevertheless engaging.

"Recognition" (1981; tr. Memon) by Khalida Husain, "The Grave" (1984; tr. C. M. Naim) by Ram Lall, "by far the most prolific writer in Urdu" (259), and "Hearth and Home" (tr. Memon and W. Husted) by Parween Sarwar are a bit obvious. The issue of a return to one's roots is far better handled by Hussein in "The Refugees" than by Lall; and Sarwar is almost clichéd in her story of the failed union between a woman from Lahore and a man from Dhaka whose mission is to unite East and West through music.⁹

Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman's "Voices" (1989; tr. Memon), snatches of a dialogue between a husband and wife in bed at night, including a framed story that might have come straight out of the *Thousand and One Nights*, belongs with the last eight stories in *Domains*. This is a group of relatively short stories, all quite different from the rest of the stories in the volume in that they each consciously rely on a technique, a narrative style, a conceit, or a twist of some kind. The title character of "Scarecrow" (1988; tr. Memon) by Surender Parkash, for instance, comes to life and forces its "owner" to take drastic measures to ensure that his land is not usurped by the creature. Balraj Manra's "Composition One" (1966; tr. Memon) is three pages of uninteresting stream of consciousness, the chorus of which is "WHAT AM I TO THE SUN?" (213-15). Anwer Khan's "The Pose" (1990; tr. Memon), like his "Artistic Finesse" (*Nothingness*; 1984; tr. Memon), is short, interesting for what it is but little more. Muhammad Mansha Yad's "The Show" (1983; tr. Memon) and Salam Bin Razzaq's "Ekalavya — The Bheel Boy" (1987; tr. Memon) exploit traditional settings and employ shock endings. "Ekalavya" relies on the same conceit as Bagalodi Devaraya's "The Lord of Earthenware",¹⁰ the insistent circularity of events, in spite of the protagonist's apparent success in overcoming history and hardship. It is quite different from "Lucky Vikki" (1989; tr. F. Hasan and Memon), a casual story with a twist for an ending.

In addition to the stories already mentioned from *Nothingness*, special attention should be drawn to Hasan Manzar's "Emancipation" (1982; tr. Memon) and Naiyer Masud's "The Colour of Nothingness" (1984; tr. Memon). "Emancipation" is about a woman's struggle to free herself from a suffocating

life. While alone in a railway car, she is molested by a guard; it is only after going through the trauma of the courtroom and of so-called dishonor — she is blamed as *provocatrice* of the man's violence and violation — that she finds freedom. The aggressor is acquitted, possibly with the "spiritual" help of a religious. Manzar then transports us forward: it is an undisclosed number of years later, perhaps in the United States. Our heroine has abandoned the inanities of a religion of oppression and convenience. A friend wonders that she still doesn't eat meat. "This has nothing to do with eating meat . . . I have been throwing coins at targets in the river all my life" (108). The pat, feel-good ending, curiously, does not mar the story and bears witness to Manzar's storytelling skills.

"Nothingness" is a story of gaping loss. The house of elders, the cobwebs, the juvenation, the surgeon, doddering but skilful, the smashed feet, all form part of a universe of pain and defeat that are Masud's own; it is superbly rendered into English by the editor. Sharwan Kumar Verma's "Deep as the Ocean" is also extremely well rendered into English by Memon. It is the story of a young boy's curiosity about a neighbor by the name of Parvati. He is forbidden by his mother even to enter her house, and is beaten by his father for doing so. We are led to believe that she is a prostitute and to suspect a liaison between her and the boy's father, but neither is made clear. What is clear is that it is she who guides the boy, cares for him as a mother would, and leaves an indelible mark on his life. This prostitute is very different from the one in "She" by the late Rashid Jehan.¹¹ In that story, the narrator encounters an aging and ailing prostitute, scorned and beaten by others. The transformation of the narrator's initial feelings of disgust into respectful compassion are ably developed in the very short space of three pages. Although Memon mentions Jehan in the introduction to *Tale*, he does not anthologize her, it seems, because her contribution to Urdu literature "commends itself to the reader more by the novelty of its artistic themes than by its artistic execution" (15).

The awaited patriarch, Jippizan, mentioned in "The Worm", is the subject of Surender Parkash's "Jippizan" (1969; tr. Memon). This character is reminiscent of al-Hanīn in al-Tayyib Sāliḥ's "Wedding of Zein", a mystical figure whose presence colours the existence of an entire community forever.¹² Another selection which brings to mind an Arabic short story is Ikramullah's "The Needy" (tr. F. Hasan), which interweaves blindness, sexuality and need into a story about greed and devotion, similar in many ways to "House of Flesh" by the Egyptian Yūsuf Idrīs.¹³ The difference between the two stories is that Idrīs' resolves in inevitability whereas Ikramullah's, less successfully to my mind, resolves in retribution.

Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman's "The Thaw" (1967; tr. Memon) distinguishes itself primarily by its theme: the 1947 war between India and Pakistan. Ostensibly the story of a soldier wounded behind enemy lines, it treats subjects

that today's reader may not necessarily associate with the literary landscape of Pakistan and India, but which so obviously form part of the recent and tragic history of those countries. Like Sarwar's "Hearth and Home", it decries internecine violence. The closing line, "Yet another violation of the ceasefire — I wondered" (160), is a plaintive (but not naïve) recognition by the main protagonist of the persistence of violence and hatred. Ali Imam Naqvi's "The Vultures of the Parsi Cemetery" (1984; tr. Memon), though its dénouement is predictable, is an even harsher indictment of the senseless violence India has known. The story is about Pheroze and Hormoz, attendants in a Parsi cemetery. Their dialogue, some of which resembles exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, centers around their desolate existence, consumed largely by their duties of preparing corpses for the vultures according to Zoroastrian ritual. One day, they discover that there are no more vultures. The authorities are notified and an investigation launched. Pheroze later learns that "the vultures, all of them, are flocking to the Kharki, Raviwar Peth and Somwar Peth neighbourhoods . . . These idiot Hindus and Muslims are at each other's throats again. There's been a riot. The bastards, they've torched everything: houses, shops, even ambulances and hearses, the whole lot. The street is littered with corpses. One right on top of the other. Piled high. Our vultures — well, they're having a field day there. And that police commissioner . . . he said that after the street's been cleaned up, the vultures will come back of their own accord." Hormoz (read, Naqvi) doesn't buy this: "Even if the street's cleaned up — so what? What makes you think the vultures will return? This fucking India . . . there is a riot every day here, every day a fire, every day people die. The vultures'll come back? The hell they will!"

It should be apparent from the foregoing remarks that I believe these volumes deserve considerable attention and a great deal of praise. Translations of Urdu short fiction have until recently been available mainly in specialist and regional publications. With the appearance of these three volumes, Memon has, with wit and discrimination, almost single-handedly helped remedy the situation. He has selected, with obvious intelligence and passion, good stories and good translators. Barring a few technical infelicities (mentioned below), the collections read very well and recommend themselves to a wide readership. I await with eagerness and anticipation further collections by Memon (and company).

There are some technical problems and orthographical errors in all three volumes. Most occur in *Tale*: "in eighteenth century" should be changed to "in the eighteenth century" (6); "emigrant" to "immigrant" (6); "stratus" to "status" (8); "Mirza" to "Mirza" (11); "born in India hurting" to "born in an India hurting" (12); "coterminous" to "coterminous" (23); "microscopic detached" to "microscopic, detached" (24); "disbolic" to "diabolic" (26); "Slight Wet" to "Slightly Wet" (29); "forté" to "forte" (29); "hidious" to

"hideous" (62); "corss" to "cross" (85); "ben" to "been" (133); "Faik" to "Faiq" (133, twice); "feeling not at her death" to "feeling now at her death" (139); "with sense" to "with a sense" (144); and "not did it become" to "nor did it become" (146). Errors in *Nothingness*: "He himself silly" should read "He laughed himself silly" (68); in the translation of "Sailing to Byzantium", line 19 should read "in a gyre" not "in the gyre" (69) and line 23 is mistakenly repeated (69-70); and "litérateur" should be "littérateur" (193). Errors in *Domains*: "to spend there a few days every year" should be changed to "to spend a few days there every year" (155); ". . . near the station he went . . ." to ". . . near the station. He went . . ." (161); "her whole game will be ruined" to "her whole game would be ruined" (197); and "honourary" to "honorary" (259).

The notes on contributors are comprehensive and, where an author occurs in another collection, almost identical. *Tale* includes pictures of the authors. Whereas he has "eschew[ed] annotations or glosses, except in two or three instances" (actually six) in order "to save the work from becoming — rather, degenerating into — a text-book" (*Nothingness*, xxx), Memon has provided a useful alphabetical "Glossary" (187-89) in *Tale* that surpasses the less user-friendly "Notes and Glossary" of *Domains* (252-54), organized according to story and which therefore results in a fair amount of cross-referencing (eleven times). Also, *Domains* does not list the sources of the stories on a separate page, as do the other two collections, but instead within the texts of the contributors' biographies.

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Notes

* "Sad Songs with Henna Leaves" is the title of an English poem by the Gujarati writer Sujata Bhatt, from her collection *Brunizem* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993), 97-98, for which she received the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia).

1. Reviewed independently in *Edébiyât* 4 (1): 147-49.
2. Hereafter, titles of stories will be followed by their date of Urdu publication, if known, and the name/s of the translator/s. Where necessary, the volume will also be identified. The transliteration of authors' names follows Memon.
3. Memon draws attention to Ahmad's interest in "Duplicity in interpersonal relationships and the suppressed sexuality of middle-class women — often Muslim and married" (*Tale*, 29). Ahmad's critical work, *Khāfir-e mā'sūm* (London, 1990), explores the dimensions of female sexuality across Urdu poetic genres.
4. Šādiq Hidāyat, *The Blind Owl*, tr. D. P. Costello (New York, 1969).
5. Surender Parkash is written thus in *Tale*, Surendera Prakash in *Nothingness*, and Surender Parkash in *Domains*.

6. Cf. Mukhibodh's "The Bird and the White Ants", in *Mukhibodh Ranchanarai* (New Delhi, 1980), vol. 3, 155-168, of which an excellent but unpublished translation by Sati Khanna exists.
7. See Komal's review in *India Perspectives*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October 1992), 13, of Gopi Chand Narang, *Urdu Language and Literature: Critical Perspectives* (New Delhi, 1992).
8. *Tale*, 23, and the *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 1983 (special Intizar Husain volume).
9. See Memon's comments in "Pakistani Urdu Creative Writing on National Disintegration: The Case of Bangladesh," *Journal of Asian Studies* 43, 1 (November 1983): 105-27, where he analyzes and indicts the story (pp. 111-119), there entitled "Home and Courtyard".
10. Translated by P. Sreenivasa Rao in *From Cauvery to Godavari: Modern Kannada Short Stories*, ed. R. Sharma (New Delhi, 1992): 13-19.
11. Translated from the Urdu by E. D. Varady in *Another India: An anthology of contemporary Indian fiction and poetry*, ed. N. Ezekiel and M. Mukherjee (New Delhi, 1990): 19-22.
12. In El Tayyeb Saleh, *The Wedding of Zain*, tr. D. Johnson-Davies (London, 1968): 1-20.
13. Tr. M. Mikhail, in *New Writing From The Middle East*, ed. L. Hamalian and J. D. Yohannan (New York and Scarborough, 1978): 23-27.

Book Reviews

Cutting the Heroics

Ferdowsi, *The Legend of Seyavash*, translated by Dick Davis. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992. Pp. xxxi, 144.

Outside specialist circles, Dick Davis's new translation of *The Legend of Seyavash*, part of an eleventh-century Persian epic by Ferdowsi, may not instantly fall into the hands of a wider audience. An uninitiated reader, already daunted by a poem that continues uninterrupted for a hundred and thirty pages in this Penguin edition, might be a little dismayed to discover that the Seyavash legend comprises only a fraction of Ferdowsi's complete work, a mammoth 50,000-line epic appropriately entitled "The King-Book", or *Shahnameh*.

And yet the story itself is direct and very readable for those who may come to it, as I did, knowing the Homeric epic tradition. *The Legend of Seyavash* follows the fortunes of a Persian prince who is driven from his Iranian homeland by inadequate parenting, a mother-in-law who lusts after him and a father who fails to recognise what a good son Seyavash really is. The son flies for safety to his father's traditional enemy, King Afrasyab of Turan. This praise by a Turanian sums up the impression Seyavash makes:

You are the living representative
 Of all the world's great kings; three attributes
 Are yours, . . . /
 First that you're of the seed of king Qobad . . .
 . . . second that your tongue speaks only truth
 And righteousness, and thirdly that it seems
 Your face renews the earth itself with love. (p. 66)

Noble lineage, fine speech and good looks: the desirable attributes of a classical epic hero. King Afrasyab virtually falls in love with Seyavash, and makes him heir to the throne of Turan. At the same time, however, the very perfection of the hero stirs up jealousy among the Turanian nobility, who eventually persuade the king to have his adopted son killed. The tragedy thus has very familiar aspects; there are glimpses here and there of a Joseph and a Potiphar's wife, of Iagos, Kents, Cordelias, and above all, of King Lear. *Pace* the eponymous hero, this is pre-eminently a tragedy about fathers with too much power and not enough foresight.¹