

GHAZAL OF PAIN + 4

BY

RIZWAN AKHTAR

**WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes…***

*In Rizwan Akhtar's 'The Man Who Talked to Trees,' the text is almost as elusive as his theme; "as a child the question chased me like / an apparition disguised behind language." Still the imagery is soul-stirring. In 'Ghazal of Pain' the poet's words are sharper, even searing, each verse ends in "pain." Here's the first, "do not take away the memory kept with pain / there is a chance of total erasure, another pain!" Bear in mind Akhtar has translated his work from Urdu to English. I have always been envious of mother tongues, certain I'm missing out on something. 'Nusrat Fatah Ali Praises Muhammad pbuh' is beautifully hommage to the singer "the Pavarotti of East frees himself from chains of notes / setting the audience to a Sufi swirl, a séance by Rumi." His final two entries feel more whimsical the last one actually in the form of a villanelle. He's a good read. (Spacing is poet’s own.)*

***The Man Who Talked to Trees***

silence plucked out something from night

like a tennis ball thud a measured wind

played a belated volley on a jaded turf

*a century ago* father told me there was

an old man who had the habit of telling

stories to trees and shrubs (ran a rosary)

but why should he converse with trees

as a child the question chased me like

an apparition disguised behind language;

Dad's lips emitted wrinkled plosives

masticated details, we cuddled vacant

when the old oak made noises, faked

the man talking to us what if he had left

behind an army of dwarfs flecking trunks,

poetically bearable I added more things—

warm quilts, only the yellow bulb flickered,

an excuse of prowess pretending to sleep.

***Ghazal of Pain***

do not take away the memory kept with pain

there is a chance of total erasure, another pain!

declared “insane” after Laila’s separation Qais

wanders disheveled-What brought him this pain?

remember! the day walked barefoot on the roof,

came the storm; how we mingled rain with pain!

close as breath you invoked a dormant ghazal

Imagine! you have the talent of morphing pain!

after taking strain of writing this ghazal in English

the palate revolts in Urdu, and it doubles the pain

the night we stole a moment to reiterate couplets

lunging touching heaving bodies enjoyed this pain

the beloved roams streets riddled with Mutiny

soldiers, rebels, lovers, & this poet lives his pain.

***Nusrat Fatah Ali Praises Muhammad pbuh***

*Oh! Muhammad wearing the black robe, no one like you*

words lift a sacred angst; in-between he pauses-

the Pavarotti of East frees himself from chains of notes

setting the audience to a Sufi swirl, a séance by Rumi

in Theatre de la Ville, his party coaxes the burnout;

drenched in Persian wine dervishes stagger,

in the autumnal hush of Fontevraud Abbey

the Singing Buddha baptize the parched, his voice

lingers over dust-filled alleys of Lahore-

where shrines stage vertigos of Dionysian lovers

*How beautiful God has made Muhammad stand by have-nots*-

puffy cheeks he continues like a Promethean on

Olympian heights -*had there been no Muhammad*

*there wouldn’t have been any World*, supplication pours

angels in heaven inebriate, on earth Nusrat intoxicates.

***We Loved October***

October brought a page loitering on

an ochre turf rabbits' excrements lasted

the smell changed from dewy to mild

putrid, a nude acacia stood over us

gulping the last dregs of tea, I dozed.

A tired wind settled on barks shaking

a brown presence poked at faces

a tinged evening while the sun

still not subdued created shadows

with a delayed smile, I groped.

What is the reason we stopped talking?

instead of words relied on heartbeat

now unable to hold hands watching

the gardener reciprocating to early

moods of a winter for us, we loved.

***The Way to Love***

(a Villanelle)

hope of finding you in front of me is a bliss

so many dreams and now this meeting

having you was also kind of a miss,

loved you every day, a form of distress

searching the right word for greeting

the art of waiting; an amiss,

further down your body, I caress

our creepy heaving

not a good sign; a complete mess!

panted over your wandering tress

eyes broke their vows, peering

a day come we were meant to press

before I lost two moments, my abyss

more time I needed, before weeping

over the loss, heart convinced is a bliss,

whatever is given I will have to confess

it is evident that you are grieving

how I confused more or less

left to fix this which never was a bliss.

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *I think for me language is a triggering point. It sets the process subsequently derailed by an uncontrollable ceremony of imagination giving birth to form. So, I stick to the rule: form dictates content. I am enamored with Robert Frost, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. To that end, I could not get over Heaney’s line ‘the music of what happens’. I come from a place that has been ruled by British colonialism therefore I am also conscious of representing my local structures of aesthetics. Arabic and Persian poetics is my formative influence.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Rizwan Akhtar is a writer from Lahore, Pakistan. His debut collection of Poems Lahore, I Am Coming (2017) is published by Punjab University Press. He has published poems in well-established poetry magazines in the UK, the US, India, Canada, and New Zealand. He was a part of the workshop on poetry with Derek Walcott at the University of Essex in 2010.