

# ASEBL JOURNAL

## Good Books

*THE SCARLET LETTER*,  
NATHANIEL HAW-  
THORNE

*ANATOMY OF CRITI-  
CISM*, NORTHRUP  
FRYE

*THE SCIENCE BEHIND  
WHAT MAKES US  
UNIQUE*, MICHAEL S.  
GAZZANIGA

*WHAT STORIES ARE:  
NARRATIVE THEORY  
AND INTERPRETATION*,  
THOMAS LEITCH

## Good Quote

“An old but true adage about education says that education is what remains when everything you learned has been forgotten.” Marshall Gregory

What do you think?

## Philosopher of Note

MARTIN BUBER

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## Word

MANDALA

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gtague@stfranciscollege.edu

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## Literature and Relationship Metaphors ALEXANDRA GLYNN

*Therefore all things  
whatsoever ye would  
that men should do to  
you, do ye even so to  
them: for this is the law  
and the prophets. –  
The Sermon on the  
Mount (Matthew  
7:12)*

The question of ethical behavior and its relationship to literature is pleasantly discussed in conjunction with the relationship metaphors. By the relationship metaphors I simply mean those of husband and wife, father and mother, mother and child, father and son. And these relationships we look at and think of as being lived where

there are neighbors who are not in the relationships, but have their own such relationships themselves—to give an example, we watch the relationships in Anna Karenina, but as watchers, although we ourselves have the same relationships in our own lives, we, from the perspective of the novel, are neighbors. We are in the audience described in the opening lines of *The Scarlet Letter*.

“A throng of bearded men, in sad-colored garments and gray, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded,

was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.”

Take *The Scarlet Letter*. It is fraught with nothing for those who have no wiring in their heart concerning the relationships among a wife and husband, father, mother, and child. A collection of the neighbors, randomly chosen, consisting simply of a certain small girl named Rose, unrelated and unassociated with a young woman named Hester, who is unrelated and unassociated with a young man, a minister,

## IN THIS ISSUE:

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A Fascinatingly suggestive article by Alexandra Glynn that explores the metaphor of *relationships* in literature.

### PAGE THREE:

A Stimulatingly sensitive and honest interview of poet, writer, and teacher Kamla Kapur—interviewed by Dr. Nilanshu Agrawal.

cannot be a novel, cannot be literature, cannot be ethics, is indeed inhuman, in the sense that it has no meaning for humans. Indeed, the meaning of what it means that Hester has the minister's child and that child is Rose, is so already-known by the reader that it is never discussed as itself, only implied in every sentence. Meaning, or sense, or essays on the novel, cannot be written except in that space of already-answered meaning, which is contained in that place Hawthorne calls the interior of the heart. And that the meaning known by all of us is not matched in the novel, since Hester's child has the "wrong" father, is almost more well known, more revolutionary, than if he had the right father, just as Chesterton wrote in "The Eternal Revolution": "A strict rule is not only necessary for ruling; it is also necessary for rebelling."

Take also *Jane Eyre*. Again here nobody has ever written or spoken a syllable concerning this book that is not entangled in the meaning of what a man is and a woman is, and what a wife is and what a husband is. We can exchange Mr. Brocklehurst with Mr. Rochester, we can recast the genre, turning it from a novel into a painting in which there are two trees, one Jane and one Rochester, and yet in so doing we have left the scene of the already-answered meaning as much as a mother erases from her mind the memory of child she gave birth to.

One of these perhaps even more fundamental relationships than those mentioned above is the simple one of neighbors. That is, one person, and another person and the unspoken and ever only partially discerned meaning emanating from the facts of these two. Martin Buber said it this way: "There is no 'I' as such but only the I of the basic word I-You..." No piece of literature in any culture has ever not had I-You; but it is so much deeper and higher as fundamental architecture of a piece of literature that at my first thought *Crime and Punishment* came to me as a work of literature I felt we might not discuss so pleasantly in our concern for drawing into the light the contexts of the relationship metaphors and ethics as we can, say for example, in *The Brothers Karamozov*. For in *Crime and Punishment* what do we have? No father-son, no brothers...if it so vividly lacks husband and wife, father and mother, mother and child, father and son, we, the readers and critics of *Crime and Punishment*, as the neighbors in observation of the events in the novel—how is it that we are not startled and coming up continuously empty, having met nothing fraught in the first pages of the novel? Indeed, the literature reader and critic, does feel only but "a general though languid interest" in hearing about Mr. Lebeziatnikov's family situation in the bar—his wife, his daughter.

But this is simply because in this story we are with the atoms, told to and held there where all things are deeper than tears, it is simply the boundary between the flesh of my body and the open air, deeper than that—it is that of I-You. The only condition of a plot that has gone this far is that of geography: Raskolnikov has to have become a neighbor to his murder victim—he simply cannot stay in Petersburg, and she lives in Kansas, and they have not touched. But once there is that relationship, then murder, coveting, and guilt can begin, and every premise we need to say anything about this work of literature that is ethically important is never even stated, being even as they are, ever so true, just as the fact that the first note of the St Matthew Passion is not the second note, and just as a child without a father knows better than one who has one what a father is and what it means to have one.

Perhaps another way to pleasantly discuss the relationship metaphors is to attempt to oppose the argument in this essay mentioned above that these already-answered meaning relationships cannot be escaped by mortal man. I prophesy no escape, but yet exhort all to attempt it, for the sake of enjoying a pleasant discussion about literature and ethics. As the wise ancients used to say, no book has ever been written that isn't about the ten commandments.

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## Poetry of Immense Grief: An Interview with Kamla Kapur

Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal

Kamla Kapur is a sensitive poetic voice, who lives half the year in a remote Kullu Valley in the Himalayas and the other half in California. Her poetry and short stories have been published in the original English and in Hindi and Punjabi translation in several journals and magazines. In 1977, she won the prestigious The Sultan Padamsee Award for Playwriting in English. Her full length play, *The Curlew's Cry*, was produced by Yatrik, New Delhi. A Punjabi translation of her play, *Chytemnestra* was produced by The Company in Chandigarh. Her award-winning *Zanana*, was produced at the National School of Drama, New Delhi. Seven of her plays were published in *Enact*, New Delhi.

Since 1985, Ms. Kapur has been commuting between the USA and India. Her full length plays, *Hamlet's Father*, *Kepler Dreams*, and *Chytemnestra* were showcased at the Marin Shakespeare Festival in San Francisco, Gas Lamp Quarter Theatre in San Diego, and Dramatic Risks Theatre Group in New York, respectively. She was selected by the New Mexico Arts Division as the Playwright in Residence for two years. She has recently completed her first novel, *The Autobiography of Saint Padma the Whore*, a chapter of which was published by in *Our Feet Walk The Sky* (Aunt Lute Press, Berkeley, California, USA), and a fantasy novel, *Malini in Whirlwood*.

Ms. Kapur has published two books of poetry: the critically acclaimed, *As A Fountain In A Garden* (Tarang Press. Del Mar, CA, USA-Hemkunt Publishers Private, Ltd., India, 2005) and *Radha Sings* (Rolling Drum and Dark Child Press, USA, 1987).

Ms. Kapur was also on the faculty of Grossmont College in San Diego, California for 18 years and taught creative writing courses in play writing, poetry, creative non-fiction, fiction, and courses in mythology, Shakespeare, and Women's Literature. Kamla Kapur was also a freelance writer for *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Tribune*; she had taught English Literature at Delhi University too. This multi-faceted literary genius talks to Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal in an illuminating email interview.

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**NKA:** Pain is of paramount importance in *As A Fountain In A Garden*. For example, the expression “and left me/ here, / with this absence, this gift/ of grief” emotionally presents a glimpse of the seething volcano of grief inside. Has the production of the just-mentioned poetry collection helped you in the release of your emotions of grief, anxiety and pain? I suppose, by the creation of this collection, you must have found some release, as literature is cathartic and therapeutic. What do you say?

**KK:** I don't know how I would have survived the experience of my husband's suicide without processing it through poetry. It's not to say that people who don't write poetry don't survive, or survive well, but without the outlet of poetry I might have fossilized in my grief, or developed a chronic habit of sorrow or even bitterness, and certainly a debilitating regret and guilt. Poetry that is not merely release – crying is also that – is an adventure of the soul in its journey towards itself. It demands an utter honesty of experience and expression without which writing remains only cathartic and does not touch the depth at which it becomes art. The discipline of crafting a poem with patience and honesty gave me the perspective and the detachment to pursue a subject that was very painful for me. Making art in this sense is the highest spiritual activity of humans, for it takes one through suffering beyond it.

**NKA:** Besides this despair, caused by the husband's suicide, are there certain other factors too, responsible for poetry in you?

**KK:** I was writing poetry long before Donald's suicide. Despair is not the only subject for poetry, though the passion of despair is always strong enough to make poetry well up if one is so inclined. Who can tell what the original impulses for poetry are? It is a mystery, though some causes, superficial at best, can be isolated. From the time I

wrote my first poem at the age of sixteen, I loved the intense introspection and inversion, the dialogue with my soul through words that the experience afforded. I think the impulse to make poetry – to express one’s inmost self, to connect and commune with the universe that is bounded within our souls, to give words to the amorphous stuff of our experience and thereby own it in some ways -- is common to all human beings, a basic instinct; what distinguishes the poet is the discipline and the life-long dedication to the craft which allows her to express the inexpressible.

I write in many genres but poetry – which goes deeper than any other modes – is nearest to my heart.

**NKA:** What are the important literary works of Donald? How will you describe him as a poet?

**KK:** Most of Donald’s work is still in manuscript form, and though he was published in many poetry journals he was never published in book form. He has a long poem called *Trace* which is as fine as the best of poetry. He combined narrative and lyrics and was very influenced by Ezra Pound, who he considered his poetry Guru.

One day when I have the leisure I want to put a book of his poems into the world. It is the fate of most poets to live and die in obscurity. Unfortunately good poetry requires a highly educated, introspective, sensitized and aware sensibility, which is not very common and getting more so in our busy and fast-paced world. This has always been so, and may never really change.

**NKA:** How has your association with the Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh assisted you in your career as a creative poet? The glittering scenic beauty of the place must have provided your poetic heart with a lot of literary fodder. Please say something.

**KK:** I wouldn’t say it has helped my *career*, though it has certainly helped in forming, or rather, in-forming me as a writer. Our home here in the Kullu Valley is a retreat from life in the city which tends to be, whether one likes it or not, anxiety-ridden. We don’t even realize how the noise and the crowds affect our psyches, drain and devitalize us. Being here – we live six months out of every year here in this remote and beautiful valley --, being connected with nature, its beauty and changing moods on a daily basis, helps us (my husband, Payson R. Stevens, is also a writer and an artist) to connect with ourselves more than with people, and allows us a contemplative and reflective life which is always best for creativity, for me especially. Though I have written some poetry here, and hope to write more in the future when my other writing projects are complete, I have in the last two years completed two books, *GANESHA GOES TO LUNCH*, Classics from Mystic India, and *PILGRIMAGE TO PARADISE*, Sufi Tales from Rumi. The first book was published in 2007 by Mandala (USA), and the second will be published in 2009 by Mandala and Penguin India. But I must add that I am not dependent on geography for creativity. Given time and solitude, I can write wherever I am.

**NKA:** You have been commuting between India and USA since 1985. Any special reason for this movement? How has this mobility affected you (positively/ negatively) as a creative writer? Please make a statement.

**KK:** Till 2006 I was teaching English (Composition, Literature, Creative Writing) in a college in California, and I would come to India very often – sometimes taking a semester off, during my sabbatical, and summer and winter holidays. I reduced my workload to 50% in 2001, and my husband and I began to look for a place to settle in India for half the year. My husband is American and we have up till now not wanted to shift to India permanently. We began work on our house in the Kullu Valley in 2003 and have continued to come here since then. I love this double life that we lead for many reasons, many of them quite personal. But I feel it has brought me into contact with India which is fertile in terms of subject matter. It has allowed me to explore my Indian-ness further. I am currently working on a novel that is set both in India and the USA. The characters are both Indian and Western (though mainly Indian). This double life used to be hard, but in coping with it I have learned some essential lessons – being flexible, being at home wherever I am, being detached from place and, in a way, time. This shunting back and forth has also compressed my time, put boundaries around it, so I am very conscious of its passing, and thus more disciplined about writing.

**NKA:** As an awakened Indian writer living in the States, what do you think are the major tangling problems faced

by Indian Diaspora in USA?

**KK:** I don't know how 'awakened' I am! Certainly it continues to be my endeavor and my passion. I can only speak for myself, though many books have come out in the subject that I haven't read. The characters in my current novel are not "Diaspora" characters as such, though they are characters with some of its concerns, especially the concerns of first generation Indians in America: missing India, missing family, missing the "rawnuk," finding it difficult to cope with a culture that puts so much emphasis on individuality when people in India are more used to communal lives. The subject is immense and would take more time to explicate than I have here.

**NKA:** What are the major cultural differences between America and India?

**KK:** Now this is a *huge* question that I cannot even begin to address in an interview like this. It would take tomes! If I had to isolate just **one** of the differences (quite arbitrarily), and deal with it very superficially in a paragraph, I would say it has to do with the way family continues to be of prime importance in India while the West, still going through the growing pains of individuality, is moving more and more in the direction of individuation, a journey that Indians haven't even embarked upon yet. But global capitalization is a unifying force and we are already seeing its effects on family life in India. It is inevitable, though not quite imminent. And with this difference comes a whole host of different ways of living and being.

**NKA:** As a woman writer, did you feel any problems in your literary career? How will you describe the two cultural groups—Eastern and Western—in their approach towards a female author?

**KK:** The difficulties in my writing career have had nothing to do with my gender. If anything, this is a very fertile period for women's voices to be heard. We have female writers whose voices have reached the global stage. My difficulties were entirely my own. I think both cultures are open to female voices, and about time, too.

**NKA:** In your long career, you have been a teacher, journalist and a creative writer. Out of these, which one is closest to your heart? Or, do you find some inner relationship among these various roles? Please explicate.

**KK:** I have given up the first two roles to focus on the last. As I get older I have limited energy and time. I had to prioritize. I gave up journalism first, because I did not want to be writing edible, fleeting print. Teaching was far more congenial in that I taught subjects I myself have learned immensely from. But it was time consuming, and now I am happily focusing on writing alone. I am also moving towards more yoga, meditation, and exercise, and reading a lot.

**NKA:** What will you say about your two novels--*The Autobiography of Saint Padma the Whore* and *Malini in Whirlwood*?

**KK:** *The Autobiography of Saint Padma the Whore* is the fictional story of a woman's quest for love and freedom. Spanning three decades, from the 60's to the 90's, it moves between India, the USA, and Saudi Arabia. It is loosely structured on the myth of Ulysses and Penelope, less as a parallel than as a contrast. An abyss of time separates Padma and Penelope, yet they share some important connections. While waiting for their mates, both weave tapestries, the former with yarn, and the latter with words; both long for a kind of partner that is truly an equal. Their stories serve as portraits of artists as women.

*Malini in Whirlwood* is the first volume of a trilogy. Malini, a young girl disenchanted and bored with the normal world, succeeds in becoming a character in a fantastic story book whose author is a magician. She finds herself aboard a magic Red Boat in a place called Whirlwood where the laws of physics do not apply, and time and space are warped. She meets the members of her crew who are strange beings called Fractidians. She doesn't quite know if they are her allies or her enemies, but each of them, whether negative or positive, teaches her a great deal. Nono teaches her to endure, Thimble the ethic and value of work, Fluff the necessity for fun, Ender hope and courage, and Tozy trust in the sometimes tortuous, meandering paths of her adventures. In the end Malini, transformed by her experiences, returns to the ordinary world, ready to participate in it while maintaining a close con-

nection with the fecund world of fantasy and myth.

**NKA:** Tell something about *Ganesha Goes To Lunch* and *Radha Sings*.

**KK:** Like myths around the world, *Ganesha Goes to Lunch, Classics from Mystic India* are traditional Indian stories which offer both a window into a fascinating culture that has endured for thousands of years, and a code for living that can be applied to the modern world. Kamla K. Kapur's *GANESHA GOES TO LUNCH: Classics from Mystic India* (Mandala Publishing, \$14.95 trade paperback, April 27, 2007), is an offering of 24 insightful tales. "They are reminders from spaceless eternity of the fabric of which we are made. They awaken us, and help us live with, and within, the mystery that is the matrix of our being."

Six one-page introductions to the sections give easy backgrounds to the major gods in Indian mythology. The myths themselves, recreated and embellished, reveal timeless insights into the human condition. Shiva and Parvati's wedding shows a love that includes, but transcends the battle of the sexes. Vishnu's incarnation as a boar demonstrates the strength of the bonds of attachment that even gods can't escape. Brahma's entrapment in the web of Maya leads him to free himself with his mind. Krishna's compassion for a little bird ensures that creation continues even within the destruction of war. Markandeya's fall out of Vishnu's mouth into the ocean of chaos, humbles him in the face of the mystery of life. These are a few of the fascinating, immensely readable and instructive tales included in the collection.

*Radha Sings* are contemporary, semi-erotic poems written from the point of view of a modern Radha to her Krishnas.

**NKA:** What are your future writing projects?

**KK:** I am currently in the beginning stages of writing two novels.

[Editor's Note: for more information about Kamla Kapur, visit her website at: [ <http://www.kamlakapur.com> ]

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ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS:

Alexandra Glynn is a song translator. She holds an MA in Old Testament Theology from Luther Seminary and an MA in English Literature from St Cloud State University. Currently she translates *Siionin Laulut ja Wirret* and *Siions Sångers (Songs and Hymns of Zion)*.

The interviewer Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal is Senior Lecturer in English at Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareilly, (U.P.), India. His interviews with a number of contemporary literary figures, as well as his research papers, book reviews, articles and poems have appeared in publications, including *The Vedic Path, Quest, Pegasus, IJOWLAC, The Journal, Promise, The Raven Chronicles, Yellow Bat Review, Carved in Sand, Turning the Tide, Blue Collar Review, Bridge-in-Making, Confluence, Poetcrit, Kaffa Intercontinental, Hyphen* and *South Asian Review*. His book on Stephen Gill is to be published shortly.

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From Rob King, instructor of applied ethics and world religions (St. Petersburg College, Florida, and a prior contributor to ASEBL), an article from the Toronto Star about linking faith and animal rights, making the claim that "It is impossible to eat meat without violence." <http://www.thestar.com/living/article/510737>