

Book-Review

Duane Vorhees' *Gift: God Runs Through All These Rooms*

Inam Hussain Mullick

Gift: God Runs Through All These Rooms

Duane Vorhees

Hog Press, 2020.

ISBN: 978-1941892442

Reading Duane Vorhees' *Gift: God Runs through All These Rooms* is a journey in wisdom and aesthetics. Here is a poet who is as well-versed with philosophy and the scriptures as he is with the craft of poetry. So his agile wordplay is more than just wordplay and hints at serious matters and concepts.

In *Circumstance at the Center of the Circumference*, the author engages in a democratic, multi-cultural spiritual dialogue which he intersperses with compelling imagery like “A disputatious bluejay argues over the head of the wheelchair woman.”. Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, Krishna and Ra—all communicate with the poet in an equal metaphysics.

Quotidian is a short but recondite musing on the passage of time and memory and how one's world-weary, inner queries may find a resolution if one observes even the repetitive nature of things, how meaning may be found in the very mundane. This commentary on time and its mysteries continues and extends in *All History Is Prophecy*, the poem ending on a note of historical wistfulness, “I’m in Hiroshima, just waiting for the plane.”; and in *On Returning*

Home Anew after Half a Century “where ghosts and memories forever reign”, “but the sky! the sky remains”.

The book is quite a memoir and a poetic travelogue—places and geographies sometimes transcend into fantastic description, like in *Cambridge, Goodbye Again* where “Riverside’s gold willows are young brides at twilight.”

There are poems that are more conversational and marked by a sense of postmodern humour even in the face of personal revelations, and as an instance of this, I quote the whole poem *Let’s Play House*: “I said, “Let’s get more personal.”/ I didn’t know what would happen,/ that you would act like a vacuum/ and treat me like the furniture.”. This is juxtaposed with the more magical title for this section, “needles in the sky, sewing up all the stars”; thus, throughout the book, Duane dexterously varies his tone between the lyrical-imaginative and the demotic. A sweeter, though melancholy, vision of longing emerges in *Flowering Tree*: “Buddha turned me into a tree/ and I grew along all your paths.”

In *Slumber, O Slum!*, serious societal themes of identity and poverty are taken up, alongside “Sin, hope, despair, righteousness”. Indeed, there are regular protests against the evils of authoritarianism, in various dimensions and scenarios and this makes the book an important sociological treatise. His observations on India in *Yes, I Have Been to India* disturb and amaze—his lens is a truthful one.

Symbolism plays its part, and I am particularly enlightened by *The Seven Fires* where he writes, “The fire in front unlocks the warrior from the sword./ The fires at the sides churn cities and rivers into mud.”.

A reader of Duane's works may safely consider him a very important voice of our time.

About the Reviewer

Inam Hussain Mullick is a poet, composer, photographer, performance artiste and independent scholar from Kolkata, India. He is the recipient of a Certificate of Excellence, presented to him at Poetry Paradigm's Kavi Salam. His photography has been awarded by The B/W Minimalists and Fuoco Visuale. His poetry, fiction, photography and articles have appeared in various anthologies, journals and magazines in print and on the internet, including *Cologne of Heritage: Incredible Bengal*, *Love My Religion*, *Poetry with Prakriti*, *Duane's PoeTree*, *Xart*, *Hyderabad Express*, *Microsoft Create to Inspire*, *Prosopisia*, *Neesah* and *The Statesman*. His digital painting has appeared in *Xart* magazine. He has penned a column, *Random Harvest*, for *Evolve*, *The Statesman*. Readers and reviewers have compared his poems to the magic realist prose of Marquez, the paintings of Jackson Pollock and the verses of Eliot, Lorca and Rumi. His publications in print include *Roses for the Madhouse* (Cult of Beauty, 2010), a handcrafted collection of poems, *Winter's Electric Architecture* (Hawakal Publishers, 2016) and *The Magical Life of Inamorato* (Writers Workshop, forthcoming). He is the Nodal Officer of *Poetry Paradigm*. He has read and performed at prominent art events, festivals and spaces in India. He edits *The Cauldron*, *Dolchhut*, *Erothanatos* (Poetry Editor), the quiver review and writes the blog 7Xi at www.inamoratopublications.blogspot.com.