

Four Poems by Priscila Uppal

At the National War Museum in Seoul, Korea

My guide book warned
it would take at least three
hours to see everything.
Now I believe it.

I could spend a half hour
alone staring at the great Korean
battle ships, giant turtles with spikes—
unbeatable on the sea as no Japanese
could jump aboard without spearing
his own heel or worse.

I'm struck by the immensity
of the grounds, the preserved airplanes
and missiles, the grant staircases,
the glittering water perimeter.

The maps confuse me.
One kingdom, then three, then—
offspring borders rotating
on a spit. Next the country
split like a faulty seam.

As people desist, decline, devolve,
war weapons advance.
Hearts build secret tunnels
out of once-shared soil.
We tourists buy ice cream &
cups of popcorn.

The peace bell struck on
the hour, every hour,
a reminder of hope.
Or to hope.

My guide book warned me
its the largest museum in the nation.
Now I believe it.
Why not the world?

I Sold My Future Life on Ebay

I'd been hoping for at least a solid two mil—
enough for my present life to retire on the south coast
of Barbados, banana daiquiris morning, noon, and
night, and my own private catamaran from which
to taunt and torment the tropical fish.

A bidding war ensued, but uncertainty finally deterred even
the most salient and hopeful. No guarantees of a happy life,
a long life, a productive life. No transferable memories
or DNA or religious inclinations. No geographical
or historical preferences accommodated.

Just one life out of billions.
Once you've been assigned a body, of course,
it's nearly impossible
to give it up, no matter the dreary circumstances. But to pay
for a life and it not live up to expectations—
criminal. Who has the heart for such disappointment?

A frugal few, hedging their bets, have been hoarding
future lives. As of midnight, mine appears on their list.
Not really what I imagined when I prepared the post,
but there's nothing I can do about that now. *C'est la vie.*

I might end up in a storage locker or downloaded
by a stock holder. I might end up in my beloved Caribbean
on a ten-speed, or spraying pesticides
in a weed-riddled backyard.

At least I can say I orchestrated my own auction, circumventing
the old masters, who bought and sold us, bought and sold us,
without a thought to our futures, body or soul.

I Spent My Savings on Salvation

I Spent My Savings on Salvation
& what's left:

a banana-coloured bikini, two unwritten memoirs,
& a suffering-of-the-month subscription.

I rode the bus because the Devil
told me it would be more Catholic & now my neck
aches & I can't lift my legs past a shuffle.

Every morning angels tie my blindfold—
I crash into bad decisions,
traumatic memories & the untold confessions
of my misguided, thrill-seeking soul.

In the collection plate I drop
diamonds, diatribes, and diabetes.
I gain more loyal followers from the diamonds,
but what-to-do? I'm a Marxist at heart,
though I channel champagne
& elitism through my chakras.

Theology mutates nature.
I trample my mind with sublime terror & then throw \$ at it.
My yogi promises prime bankruptcy-protection rates.

I love you soul,
& not for your \$.

No Postcards

No postcards
of the stone pillar monument—
a rarity in war history—
in Quebec City dedicated to the memories
of both the winning and the losing sides.

Montcalm/Wolfe in the same type,
same block letters, French facing Chateau Frontenac
(the most photographed hotel in the world),
English facing the citadel of North America's
last walled city.

Students roll joints underneath.
Fat tourists wish it wasn't blocking their view.
Only old angry separatists and young eccentric
Professors stand stunned by the current
state of affairs.

No postcards either
of the abstract geometric sculpture—
only mentioned on walking tours as an 'eyesore'
bestowed upon the city—a bathroom shower stall a child
could have conceived, cubed strip of light
in the darkness: *Dialogue With History*.

In five days, I didn't see a single person go near it;
not even to laugh.

Maybe I'm not the person to be writing this poem.
A Quebecois poet, writing in French,
whom I have ignorantly never
heard of, is probably writing all about this historical deflection
with more knowledge, and tact, and beauty, with a sense
of the complexity of the sculptures and how they intersect
with contemporary consumerist culture.

I am the daughter of Trudeau—a double ethnic
who sets up shop in Toronto, a specialist
in poetry and English literature.

Maybe this is none of my business.

But I want to buy postcards
of the Montcalm/Wolfe monument

and *Dialogue with History*.

Not a single store stocks them.

Apparently, people don't write *wish you were here*

or *having a blast* or *missing you* on events

that forever changed the fortunes of North America.

And for those others like me there are digital cameras

to capture the concrete images if not the habitual

disappointment

a new immigrant feels when encountering the past without

knowing how to care for it:

what to discard, what to keep, what to fortify,

and how to make it all fit into boxed shapes

only misfits will admire in the rolling darkness.

Ghazals and Other Poems by Wali Alam Shaheen

Ghazal-1

The shelter is humid and so hot again

How can I manage to not rot again?

Tangled in cobwebs of my lot again

A day I wanted to see not again

Sanded and polished, the air in my lungs

Was packaged and sold and re-bought again

Hammered to a cross in unsure terrain

Heavens, good heavens, this not again

Defogged, the message is clear and loud

With eyes no doubt on dot again

Denied the choice to repay in kind

They died in shame of a harlot again

Shabeen, as always, on New Year's Eve

Prepared a list and forgot again

Ghazal-2

Unending ocean nights, and shorter river days

The golden calm is here to dream of better days

With dots, stars, and slashes, leaking all the warmth

The global village functions in cooler, cyber days

It's not an easy time, with every plan on hold,

But heart is crisis-ridden even on quieter days

Caressed by morning breeze, on narrow nature trails,

I ride on fragrant waves, well soaked in summer days