

Sasenarine Persaud, *Love in a Time of Technology*. Canada: Tsar Publications, 2014. 72 pp. ISBN 978-1-927494-43-1.

The Latin American, Caribbean, Canadian, North American Yogic Realist poet and author Sasenarine Persaud, was born in Guyana, lived in Toronto, Canada, then relocated to Florida. Recently, Persaud has penned (word processed) a fresh, slim (72 pages), volume of poetry called, mischievously, *Love in a Time of Technology*. It was published by Tsar Publications, Canada, in 2014. The book's title is an all too obvious nod to that great Magical Realist writer, Gabriel José de la Concordia García Márquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, but I shall leave it others to elucidate this nuanced referencing.

We live in a world of multiple narratives. Persaud's "Love in a Time of Technology," the book's title poem, walks the same well-trodden path, if not in the same worn moccasins, as William Henry Davies' poem, "Leisure" (15). Persaud suggests that the fault for man's gradual retraction from his milieu is technology's siren call. More specifically – the "Internet." Perhaps Persaud's persona chooses to heed Circe's words (in *The Odyssey*, by Homer), as she suggested that it was better to

Steer wide;
keep well to seaward; plug your oarsmen's ears
with beeswax kneaded soft.... (*The Odyssey* 256)

to stem that Siren call. Or one could simply leave the router switched off.

Persaud's persona talks of a forgetting of all that is natural by internet acolytes – of "*how foxes yelped at night*," "*how mongrels roamed in packs howling and barking*" and of "*fowl-cocks chain crowing*" – due to being immersed in technology. For Persaud's persona the Internet is the danger which ultimately leads to all life, and interactions, being confined solely to it and, ultimately, to a total and exclusive absorption by technology, and the forgetting of the world exterior to its portals, love being no longer strong enough to break the Sirens' spell.

And you will part as you have met
through the portals of the Internet.
(*"Love in a Time of Technology"* 3)

Not forgetting, but remembering, I tracked down a 1940 recording of the voice of William Henry Davies (on the Internet). He was reading his best known poem "Leisure" (on YouTube). Davies' persona considered that one problem lay not with technology, but with the unwillingness of man to take time to be an authentic part of his milieu, and thus not able to observe simple pleasures in his environment. The siren call of the Internet was not part of Davies' world, and

yet the author recognised a growing inability for human beings to appreciate the here and now, caught, as they always are, in the rush of life.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
 And watch her feet, how they can dance.
 No time to wait till her mouth can
 Enrich that smile her eyes began.
 A poor life this if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare ("Leisure" 15)

William Shakespeare had suggested that we move "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast" (*Romeo and Juliet* 94). Persaud, in "Orchids," walks a little down this path with Davies to say:

You are looking
 to Scotland or beyond China
 to an American or Canadian
 headland for paper birch
 while here in your own yard
 the shrubs you both planted
 dry before your eyes.... ("Orchids" 7)

Distraction and forgetting moves us away from what is before us. Yet is remembering more helpful? Researching for this review of Sasenarine Persaud's latest poetry book *I*, unleashed from my mast, ears unplugged, listened to that siren call of the Internet (digital technology). I draped Logitech headphones over my ears, plugged them into my computer, and listened to the BBC iPlayer Radio programme "Poetry Postcards," and (ironically) proceeded to souse myself with Persaud's poem "Georgetown."

I encountered an auidial jangle of North Indian (Bhangra?) music, I heard of Peraud's former home, in Guyana. I was told of Guyana's "East Indian" population forming 51% of the general population, and of the historical replacing of African slaves with indentured Indians. I was informed, that, after years of inter-racial strife, many Indians and white plantation owners had left Guyana, and that Sasenarine Persaud too had left, and returned to visit, after more than a twenty-year absence.

For evenings on the seawall
 drinking soup thickened with coconut milk,
 melting cassava, sweet potatoes and plantains;
 for your smile in the mornings, a wave
 from your platform as we pass, the trade wind
 in our faces; for parched peanuts jumping
 out fingers unto sand and breakers exploding

on old brick groynes jutting into the Atlantic's
belly and tempering tides as stars flick on;
for conversations on galaxies, or monologues,
what if we are from beyond beyond,
aliens in this space and the ocean spray
sprinkling spectacles and moistening lips;
for a first kiss, or second riding around
the bandstand, the dance of street lights
in your eyes, I would return. I would dare all
gun-wielding bandits to walk, linked fingers
with your ghost on the sapodilla brown sand. ("Georgetown" 67)

Whether heard, or read, Persaud's poem "Georgetown" wafts wistfully across our senses. It is a fond, yet distant, remembrance of a beloved place and courtship, of an idealised, romanticised time and place, for the two seem immeasurably entwined. It is L.P. Hartley's "a foreign country" (*The Go-Between*, "Prologue"), where things are done differently. It is not the eternal regret-filled longing of the reluctant expat, but a smile-inducing recollection and perhaps the fanciful remembrance of one who has made his home elsewhere and who, ideally, would return but, and would seem always to be a but, but it is now a foreign country.

"Georgetown" struck a chord with the eternal expat in me, a decade adrift and once, momentarily, longing to retire to Penang's Georgetown. Persaud's explanation (after the reading), of how the longer that you are away, the more difficult it is to go back, resonated. I found myself concurring with every wistful line of that poem, and with the emotional, faltering, reading by the reflective author as he acknowledged that the poem talks about a then, before, when both being and time were different.

As an expat, I too might consider returning for "the dance of street lights," but different colonial street lights. Maybe there would be different lamps, no longer sturdy Art Nouveau lamps, on streets no longer familiar, but not the angst ridden persona in the Malaysian Muhamad Haji Salleh's poem "The Traveller."

It is approximately 17,655 kilometres (10,990 miles) from South American Guyana, to Penang, Malaysia. Guyana once had a 51% Eastern Indian population, whereas in Southeast Asian Malaysia the Indian population has been recorded as between 7 and 12%. Persaud's poem ("Georgetown") has all the resonances, reflections and coconut milk of that similar Georgetown, on the island of Penang, where the poet Muhammad Haji Salleh was a university professor. Muhammad writes:

take my love while you can, take my hatred,
take my weathered hand if you will,

for i shall have no home here,
 among the dull hard buildings
 where the heart cannot stay.
 for i am only a traveller
 on my way, to somewhere further than here
 ("The Traveller" 69)

For Muhamad the situation is practically reversed. Where Persaud's persona seems content with the home he has chosen, away from home, fondly remembering Guyana, fondly remembering his former loves and conjuring a romance concerning a return to Guyana (despite "gun-wielding bandits"), the persona in Muhamad's poem rails against his misfortune, chosen or not, and constantly reinforces, to the reader, the temporary nature of his stay. Though no specific destination is proffered, there are enough hints of Muhammad's traveller returning to a former abode, that which is home, his land, his people, his language.

Muhamad writes in the language of the former colonisers, as does Persaud, yet Persaud shows no longing for otherwise. Muhamad on reaching "home" (Malaysia) for many years wrote almost exclusively in Malay. The persona in Muhamad's poem has not discovered a new home, unlike Persaud's persona but, instead elucidates displacement and accuses the city he is in of being "the city that broke my heart," "stole my feelings from me" and of having "cruel streets."

Persaud's persona has made a home from home, yet not forgetting, for his is not a dislocated pining, but a calm acceptance of place, of another time and country where time might be taken to stand and stare, tend shrubs and dream of a little, perhaps of soup thickened with coconut milk.

I have only selected a few lines from Persaud's intriguing volume of poetry, 1) to elucidate the title and 2) to weigh two different senses of displacement by considering Muhammad Haji Salleh's poem as a counterpoint. My suggestion is that you try to find *Love in a Time of Technology*, and read it yourself, and if you are unable to do so do listen to this writer's poem on the internet, you will not be disappointed, but be aware of technology's distractions, particularly if you are in love.

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