

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

An excerpt from *Foreign Madam and the White Yogi*  
a novel in verse

## Chichester and the Bhagavad Gita

Atlantic crossing by air  
a touch down at Gatwick  
a cockney Indian giving directions  
a chrome train south to Sussex  
a mess of bags kids passengers  
a red brick city going green  
a journey winding toward sunset  
a pulling in at Chichester Station  
a ticking taxi to a country cottage  
a friend's cottage lent for a long weekend  
an old brass key beneath the mat  
a hill of bags dumped in the hall  
a welcome note under the fruit bowl  
a rag-doll child carried upstairs  
a sleepwalk dance to their beds  
a ceramic lamp left on between them  
a creaky, slow descent downstairs  
a fire built up from the wood box  
a cup of tomato soup with rye  
a quiet relax in front of the fire  
a slowing down to red coals  
a chiming clock, its after-silence  
a fragrant stick of nāg champa  
a nestling into forgetting  
two souls recharge on a velvet sofa

\*

"Mum, can I pour?" "Mum, can I flip?"  
asked Pauline, asked Adele. "Mum, where's the sugar?"  
"Mummy! Where's the lemon juice?"  
"Take it easy. I'll try the pantry."

Pauline dragged an animal squeal from a chair.  
Up there, they perched, Adele spatula-armed

Chris Mooney-Singh. 'Chichester and the Bhagavad Gita'.  
*Transnational Literature* Vol.10 no.2, May 2018.  
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

on their lazy Sunday pancake fun-day,  
although it's Monday. Forgetful, happy

they're sprinkling English sugar on lemon juice,  
knife and forking through the filigree crepes,  
until the buttery nostalgia starts to bloat.  
"Mum, when are we going home?"

Dissatisfied it came, that same complaining.

\*

Yogi slumped on the front room floor  
the *Bhagavad Gita* in his hand,  
picked up that day in Singapore,  
a guide book to his promised land.

The *Gita* was a Q and A:  
Arjuna is on the battleground  
quizzing Krishna why he must slay  
beloved ones. His heart unwound:

*better to let the heart object  
before killing off kinsmen, gurus.  
One bad act has its ripple effect.  
Arjuna slumps before the Kurus\**

like poor Yogi on the floor,  
wondering how to win his fight  
with little girls still waging war  
ever since his wedding night.

\*

Now came their outing hour with hats and coats  
from the winding Dimple Lane toward Chichester.  
Paul had headphone ears, Dele had fox glass eyes  
sitting with adult minders; now taxi time trundled

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\* Dynastic clan including both warring cousin factions of Pandavas and the Kauravas that are centre character of the Mahabharata.

down hedgerow lanes banked by lavender fields.

A snowy gaggle of geese waddled onto the road,  
the barking terrier of a man came running behind,  
arms waving. White honkers skipped and wrangled  
through a hole in a hedge. "Look!" said Yogi stepdad.  
The girls plugged in devices, blocking the Enemy.

\*

*Nine  
AD  
Nor-  
man  
spire  
kept  
God  
inside  
safe  
towns  
see the floor-plan centred cross go altarwards  
progress pilgrim humbly step up to Heaven  
then  
back  
to  
earth  
Does  
the  
higher  
life  
start  
when  
needs  
are  
met?  
Please  
tell  
right  
now*

\*

Left to wander about  
Adele and sister Paul  
dawdled down the aisle  
not so very impressed  
by the nine-point star  
parquetry underfoot,  
neither the vaulted roof,  
cross-ribbed like a Viking  
longboat upside down,  
nor the arches in stone  
supporting a long nave,  
nor each polished pew  
lit by candleholders,  
nor the organ playing  
tunes decidedly dead  
to funky ears. They will  
walk the aisle to meet  
their future husbands,  
receive rings, take vows.  
Today, however, they  
are far too young to care  
a fig-leaf for anything  
other than strawberry,  
double-ripple ice-creams  
they have been promised.

\*

Margaret and her lover rock  
side to side and forget the clock,  
  
finding respite as two, not four,  
like Richard the Earl and Eleanor  
  
who clasp palms in white repose,  
lap dogs snoozing at their toes

of Arundel's tomb once noble throne,  
six hundred loving years in stone.

And yes, today life gasps at death  
as loving marble holds its breath.

Chagall uplifts now red and blue  
Creation's dancing stained-glass view,

and fires of love ride up, roughshod  
across the panes breathed on by God.

Inspired, the Yogi slips  
a simple kiss onto her lips.

\*

Lunch and double ice cream. A signpost walk  
to museums, pubs, a flower show, cream tea,  
an hour's stroll around the Roman wall  
that's been five metres tall two thousand years.

The girls were not adventurers - just bored  
and scuffed their sneaker heels upon the path,  
this history walk far from Adelaide,  
talking about Papa.

"Can we call later?"

I'm tired, Mummy," moaned Pauline. "Let's go!"  
While Dele played Glass Eyes. Poor Margaret  
knew the game was up. It was time to get  
a sleepy cab at the Square.

Away they went.

Ms Earphones hardly saw the languid river.  
Ms Glass Eyes paid no heed to the bumpy bridge,  
stone-masoned, where those haloes of black gnats  
were fish-food hour above the emerald scum.  
A man was casting a fly beyond the midges.

"Stop the cab," said Yogi.

"Do we have to?"

The girls complained.

"Yes, for a second," he said.  
The driver braked. Yogi wound down his window  
to see the taut line whiplash – a leaping fish  
was making its escape across the water.  
The angler worked his line. Soon all heard  
the scream of the reel as a fighter took the bait.  
The fish lunged off to the right, until the angler  
checked him as he raced, causing fibreglass  
to bend and make a parabola in air.  
The fish exploded through a hole in the scum  
and flew till the dorsal smacked back like a hand,  
then plunged once more, grappling with coated line  
taut against its body. The warrior fought  
with one last lunge upward from the algae depths  
as if to ram the enemy and then fell slack.  
The fight was over. The fisherman reeled in  
and scooped the prize of silver in his net.

"He caught it, Mummy!" said the fierce Pauline.  
Adele was silent. She was ever thoughtful,  
while Yogi was remembering his father –  
the weekend angler with an outdoors ego,  
so deft and quick, unlike inadequate Yogi.  
They once went fishing up the Shoalhaven River.  
Yogi caught nothing, while the Expert coaxed  
a big brown trout from its hide-hole with a spinner  
cast out and dropped below the spitting falls.  
The fish was childhood thrashing up against  
his Dad.

He flinched and wound the window up.  
"Hey mate, let's go," said Yogi. And so the cab  
pattered homebound back to Dimple Lane.

\*

Arriving back, they bathed and lit a fire.  
Yogi piled up steaming pasta mountains.  
Cheesy peace achieved, the girls were lolling  
each side of their mother's comfy contour  
possessing the country of her blanket lap.

He sighed upon his own chair, separated  
from the threesome on the mainland sofa;  
and did he not deserve a passing glance?  
He counted up three countries left behind.  
What was his role? The bagman? Staring ahead  
Margot stroked the fringes of her girls,  
as red to green the fire along the log  
inflamed his neediness. Where was that set  
of Bhagavad Gita Cards? He rescued them  
from the cushion crevice of his armchair,  
then shuffled hard, a forlorn bibliomancer,  
selecting one at random:

*O Arjuna,  
The best of yogis sees one Self in being after being  
and feels each single pain and pleasure as one's own.*

How far was he from yoga's skill in action?  
He decked the card, thinking: at least he could  
sit back to watch the sun set in the yew.  
The trickster tree was shuffling a clutch of larks.  
He tightly held the Gita Cards and worries.  
*Funny*, he thought. *Is this the lesson then?*  
*Become a tree and learn to shuffle birds?*

The girls slept on. At last, she looked across.  
Most men make raids like north men and take off.  
but he was her Green Man. Carrying girls upstairs  
he seemed relieved. At last, she needed him.

***Chris Mooney-Singh***