

## *Literary Adviser*

I pore over playscripts, aware  
 Of the qualifications needed  
 To sort one writer out,  
 Guide another in the right  
 Direction; my own paranoia  
 Bubbling quietly, as I remember  
 My admin officer saying: *You're only  
 A cog in the wheel. We have to keep an eye  
 On all this outside activity.*

As I sit at my desk, the rockets  
 Go up. Roman candles sputter  
 Into life. The last play  
 Was about an Irishman  
 Who resembled John F. Kennedy "somewhere  
 Around the left ball". Now I am on to one  
 With a dumb guitarist, a gang of Glasgow  
 Bacchantes. I can't see it being done;  
 But read on, looking for a good line.

Towards midnight, I put the bottles  
 Out. On one side, the squibs  
 Are being lit. On the other,  
 The girls are on the beat. An Indian,  
 Leaning on a door-jamb, looks inscrutably  
 At me. Half an hour later,  
 When I shut the storm-doors,  
 His cigarette-butt has gone —  
 And the bursting stars, red yellow and green.

Meanwhile you are lying in bed,  
 Waiting to bear the child we both wanted.  
*So long as it's normal, we say,  
 That's all that counts.* Things  
 Will be taken care of, when the time comes.

I make out my report: "The characters  
 Are stock, the emotional line somewhat  
 Naive . . ." I stop, and put down  
 My pen — who after all am in the same boat.

Stewart Conn

## *The Dhobi Poem*

In the morning the washed  
 undergarments smelled of water  
 in the road-side ditches and  
 thin bamboo poles fixed  
 crosswise over the whole of the land of India.  
 A sagging jute cord supported  
 the monsoon sky, binding  
 all fears into  
 a prayer of no more rain.

The indigo applied to the white  
 clothes was going thinner in the drizzle.  
 Coins had changed their faces  
 and markings and worth in the local bazar.  
 Rumbblings in the sky and lightning  
 hastened him on the  
 beating-stone in the dhobi-ghat, for ages.  
 Price of indigo was still going higher.  
 The milk-goat had died last winter.  
 Kanwali will have to wait another  
 year for her golden bangles.

For centuries  
 cross-legged  
 the dhobi sits  
 thinking of the rising prices of  
 indigo and lamenting  
 the death of the Sun-god.

Feroz Ahmed-ud-din