



1987

One Hot Summer Day...

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Recommended Citation

Bhambri, Kusum, One Hot Summer Day..., *Kunapipi*, 9(2), 1987.
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol9/iss2/12>

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Abstract

It was hot and sticky, humid was a better word to describe the weather, with the sun sending down wave after wave of unrelentless sweltering heat. The sizzling temperatures made movement a problem, and laziness descended on Leila, along with a heaviness that made it difficult to think clearly. 'These must come off,' she said to herself crossly; the layer upon layer of clothing that covered her body, making it impossible to discern any visible shape, made her feel unattractive and nondescript. At first she had struggled valiantly against the imposition of another form, this strange covering, like another being hanging upon herself.

7. The multiple textuality is even more evident in the first editions of these two works. In *The Ledger* (London, Ont.: Applegarth Follies, 1975) two copies of original ledger entries flank the double-page title page. That page reproduces a survey map of the Bruce County family home area, with a holograph encircling of its precise location (in broad black) and a holograph note adjoining this: 'Yes, that's the place. RK' (in thin red). On the left side of the page the title information is superimposed in red on map area which remains visible, palimpsest-like. The General Publishing edition contains none of this, and while it attempts to duplicate the exciting typographical juxtapositions of the original text proper, it barely succeeds in merely suggesting them. In *Seed Catalogue* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1977) the poem proper, printed in green, is superimposed on a palimpsest-like still visible copy of pages from a seed catalogue, complete with illustrations, reproduced in gold, and suggesting a recessive prairie intertextuality. The colour of the paper is light blue, and the three colours suggest spring and autumn wheat fields and a prairie sky respectively. Green and gold are also the official colours of Kroetsch's *alma mater*, the University of Alberta. All these effects are lost in the General Publishing edition. The considerable impoverishment from the originals of the most readily available edition of these works is regrettable, and not only on aesthetic grounds.
8. Jack Healy, 'Fiction, Voice, and the Rough Ground of Feeling: V.S. Naipaul after Twenty-Five Years', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 55:1 (Fall 1985), p. 46.
9. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the Humanities Institute of the University of Calgary, whose award of a 1986-87 Fellowship allowed me to research this article.

KUSUM BHAMBRI

One Hot Summer Day...

It was hot and sticky, humid was a better word to describe the weather, with the sun sending down wave after wave of unrelentless sweltering heat. The sizzling temperatures made movement a problem, and laziness descended on Leila, along with a heaviness that made it difficult to think clearly. 'These must come off,' she said to herself crossly; the layer upon layer of clothing that covered her body, making it impossible to discern any visible shape, made her feel unattractive and nondescript. At first she had struggled valiantly against the imposition of another form, this strange covering, like another being hanging upon herself. It was an

unspoken rule of the regime that women must cover themselves in garments that did not fit tightly, leaving their hands and face free, or they must wear the *chuddar*, a kind of cape that covered their bodies completely so as not to attract or in any way tempt the opposite sex. She wore the *chuddar* like a shroud outside but in her own house, under her own roof, the only place she could do as she pleased, she refused to let it near her body and on her arrival home she would tear it off in disgust. But time, force of habit, pressures and circumstances had all triumphed, so that in the end she would simply don the ill-fitting garments she wore outside; the overflowing and drab array that transformed her into another person, like the countless many.

The blinding heat made her feel miserable and sticky; realising that moaning would not help her enjoy her only day off from work, she decided to go inside and change. Rummaging through her wardrobe she found a pair of comfortable jeans and a tight fitting T-shirt that belonged to another time. Donning the clothes hurriedly before she changed her mind, she then had a quick look at herself in the mirror. She was glad she had, the mirror was proof of how attractive and youthful she was. A bow to her hair added the final touch and feeling immensely pleased with her appearance she went to the garden to sit in a shady alcove with a favourite book.

It was some time later that she felt rather than saw something unusual happening. She could not quite place it, but the growing prickly sensation that someone was watching her persisted. 'But,' she reasoned with herself, 'there was no one she did not know around her. This was her home and all those in it, Reza, the gardener or Ali, her husband's chauffeur, had been working there for years.' Shrugging the feeling aside but unable to concentrate on her book, she decided to write a letter. A few minutes later while engrossed in her letter-writing she was distracted by the buzzing sound of a bee nearby. The sudden sound startled her and as she jerked her head up abruptly, her eyes clashed with the gardener's. Unexpectedly confronted by Leila he was unable to hide or disguise the expression on his face. It was full of longing, his eyes had a look of glazed desire while his face had a faintly suggestive air. Shaken but unable to bring herself to say anything, Leila hurried inside.

The warm familiarity of her room reassured her; tossing herself on the bed, she tried to collect her troubled thoughts. These, however, were soon broken by strange murmurings, a staccato beat in the background. Used as she was to all Ali's songs, this one sounded totally unfamiliar. Deciding to investigate, she went out to the garage only to be confronted by a saucy look from Ali while he continued to sing some lewd songs.

Deeply disturbed she tried to pull herself together, it was all getting out of hand. It was like coming face to face with a bunch of strangers, people who had worked for her family for years were behaving very oddly. It was bizarre.

Chiding herself for imagining things, she felt she must do something to occupy herself and she went out to the garden to help Reza with the new vegetable patch they were planting. This pastime normally afforded her immense pleasure, but today for some unaccountable reason she felt uneasy and uncomfortable in Reza's presence. Whenever she dug a hole to plant a seed, he would correct her, telling her she was not planting it properly. He then proceeded to demonstrate how it should be done; this involved their hands touching, something which would not normally bother her, as he was an old man and almost one of the family. But it was happening much too often and quite unnecessarily.

Then it hit her like a bolt from the blue ... of course they were all behaving strangely, she had suddenly turned their ordered, carefully contrived world upside down and chaos reigned. In a situation such as this they no longer knew how to react and behave.

Used as they were to seeing women covered outside and modestly attired within the confines of their own homes, the sudden metamorphosis of Leila from one of many to a voluptuous and attractive body had unleashed long forgotten and suppressed feelings and desires. It was like looking at forbidden fruit. As realisation dawned, Leila hurriedly excused herself and went to her room. There, she immediately stripped off her jeans and T-shirt which some time ago had made her so happy. She knew it was dangerous to continue wearing them. Used for so long to seeing women covered it was not possible to simply change and imagine men would not be affected. She saw the wearing of loose, unattractive clothes as an oppressive duty she had to obey. She realised now she must wear these clothes for she no longer had a choice. Even within the confines of her home she must remain covered from herself.

She put on the familiar drab clothing and resumed her household chores. At once she felt a sense of reality, of saneness and perspective as she saw the gardener planting the seeds and heard the chauffeur singing his daily *avaz*. Life for her had changed drastically both in and out. It was strange to feel that though she did not want to wear the *chuddar*, or the long loose skirts with buttoned shirts and headscarfs, she felt more comfortable in them than in what were ... the clothes of her choice.