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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

Recently, I've been a frequent visitor to the U.K. and Ireland, and I do read a great deal of the poetry that has been written and is being written here. My publisher is based in Manchester, so I feel directly involved in this poetry scene although my observations are those of an outsider. As an Indian who studied and lived in the U.S. for some time, now lives in Germany, and is today writing these lines from Spain, I wonder whether the role of poetry today is really very different in all of the above mentioned countries.



Sujata Bhatt was born in 1956 in Ahmedabad, India and raised in Pune, India. She has lived, studied and worked in the United States, and is a graduate of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. She has published two collections of poetry with Carcanet Press, England and Penguin Books, India: *Brunizem* (1988) won the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia). And *Monkey Shadows* (1991) was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. She received a Cholmondeley Award in 1991. In Spring 1992 she was the Lansdowne Visiting Writer/Professor at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. She now lives in Bremen with her husband, the German writer Michael Augustin, and their daughter. Sujata Bhatt works as a freelance writer and has translated Gujarati poetry into English for the *Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets*. Her work has appeared in various British, Irish, American and Canadian journals and her poems have been widely anthologized and have also been broadcast on British, German and Dutch Radio. Her new collection *The Stinking Rose* is due from Carcanet in February 1995.

SUJATA BHATT

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Recently, I've been a frequent visitor to the U.K. and Ireland, and I do read a great deal of the poetry that has been written and is being written here. My publisher is based in Manchester, so I feel directly involved in this poetry scene although my observations are those of an outsider.

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What indeed is the current role of poetry? To provide some relief from the stupefying noise of the media; to provide another means of communication than that used by 'our' politicians. Poetry should say something valuable without resorting to the jargon-laden language increasingly used by many lawyers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, let alone literary critics and other professional recipients of our craft. Poetry creates a quietness in the language, a silence that allows time for all the intricacies of slowly unfolding words. Poetry gives back patience, tolerance and a certain dignity to the language. This is not to imply that poetry should remain a solemn affair. On the contrary, poetry is a very spontaneous and vigorous *play* with words that stretches language to its true limits. Poetry can reveal absurdity and joy in breathtaking forms. Ultimately, poetry exposes a layer of being and a view of reality that ordinary speech cannot encompass.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, I see the poet as an ecologist conserving not only a vital dimension of language but also the human bonds connected with such language.

Throughout the world, however, poetry affects the lives of very few people. It is a voice without amplifiers. The role of the poet is like that of a Greenpeace crusader in a tiny boat challenging a supertanker filled with chemical waste. And although the waste continues to be dumped in the seas, at least a few people are made aware of it. Ten years ago only a handful of people with a green chip on their shoulder seemed to care about our environment. Nowadays, significantly more people are seriously concerned about the problems of pollution, and the first steps are being taken to prevent greater catastrophes.

Why, then, should the poet not hope that at the *fin de siecle* more people will realise how vital poetry is?