

Lapis Lazuli

An International Literary Journal

ISSN 2249-4529

www.pintersociety.com

VOL: 9, No.: 2, AUTUMN 2019

BOOK REVIEW

REFREED, INDEXED, BLIND PEER REVIEWED

About Us: <http://pintersociety.com/about/>

Editorial Board: <http://pintersociety.com/editorial-board/>

Submission Guidelines: <http://pintersociety.com/submission-guidelines/>

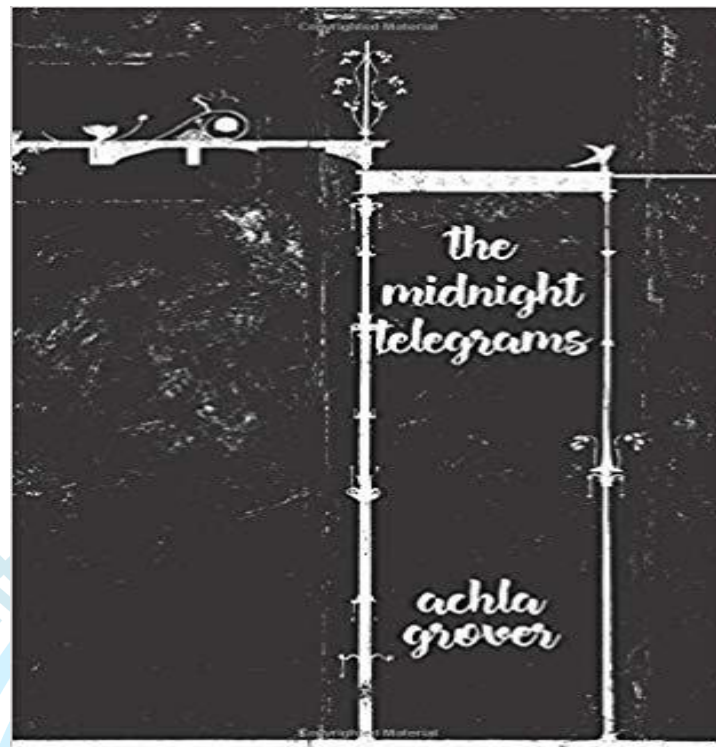
Call for Papers: <http://pintersociety.com/call-for-papers/>

All Open Access articles published by LLILJ are available online, with free access, under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial License as listed on <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Individual users are allowed non-commercial re-use, sharing and reproduction of the content in any medium, with proper citation of the original publication in LLILJ. For commercial re-use or republication permission, please contact lapislazulijournal@gmail.com

The Midnight Telegrams By Achla Grover

Reviewed by Nisha Misra



Title: *The Midnight Telegrams*

Author: Achla Grover

ISBN-13: 978-8193940327

Edition: 1 (2018)

Published by Red River, New Delhi, India.

The Midnight Telegrams is not just an anthology of poems but a journey of within from within to within. Achla Grover, a budding poet, in her maiden attempt leaves the readers spellbound with what definitely may be canonised as mature workmanship. A fashion designer by profession she is able to intricately weave colourful emotions in an essentially black and white fabric. She seems to pick up, analyse, re-shape and simply other times drop a moment or a feeling randomly selected. Like a child looking for and juggling with words in the most complicated as well as simplest ways is the hallmark of the selection under study. A poet in the making, the poet and the process is a recurring motif on display which makes the read all the more interesting.

Thirty-seven verses divided into five sections, namely, 'Fire', 'Air', 'Earth', 'Water' and 'Space' the poet invokes the five elements that make our being. Every section

preceded with an epigraph, notwithstanding the obscurity within, serves as a befitting introduction to what lies ahead. The first section 'Fire' reverberates with all that a woman is, wants to be, could be or should be. The fire becomes symbolic of the woman literally as well as metaphorically on one hand while on the other it is also the man's carnal desire signified. Words like agony, anguish, desire, want, rebellion, silence, violence, revenge, remorse, inhibition, reflection, retrospection aptly describe what this section deals with. The problematics of man-woman relationship and the inherent power-play reverberates through the nine short poems. The beauty of the pieces in this section is that woman is not a caricature of herself, drowning in self-pity, rather a force, an energy not so easy to be contained. Like in the poem 'Smoke' Achla wonderfully depicts the vengeant spirit of a woman in mere five lines:

He burnt
Every emotion
She held within
She is now a dragon,
Breathing fire. (14)

Or as in the poem 'Hangover', the poet writes, "she was like a morning hangover/ his head kept spinning every time he had her" (17), and a plethora of emotions are laid bare before the reader in mere two lines!

Six poems that paint the canvass of the second section 'Air', breeze around the world of superficiality, as in the poem 'Fly Little Elephant, Fly!', silently while on the other it also reverberates with a self-reflexive tone as is apparent in poems like 'Conversations' and 'Verses'. The process of writing or the poet in the making is beautifully described in a casual conversation between a man and a woman. In this sense, the poem also becomes autobiographical in nature. It resounds with the presence of the poet giving expression to her passion for words which for her is a liberating experience. No wonder that this feeling of emancipation echoes throughout the section, nay, the entire anthology. Her word-play in this section is at its best in the poem entitled 'Phases', "there was a time/I got glued to faces/Until I realized/They are but/'phases'" (26).

The writer-in-the-making and the process of writing continue in the next section, entitled 'Earth', more prominently. In the poems 'A Day in March', 'a Tryst with Summer', and 'My Workplace' the poet at work becomes evident further accentuating the autobiographical strain. Earth which primarily symbolizes birth becomes an apt symbol of the birth of a new poet in the field of poetry. So as in the first poem of the section 'A Day in March', the poet becomes the farmer "seeding the words/ in the soil" (33), or as in "A Tryst with Summer", she is a wanderer "trying to catch/hold of the words/off her head just/a while ago" (34). Achla Grover seems to be making the reader aware of the poetic passions that seethe within her awaiting their release. The suffocating mundane office life in the poems 'Perfect Office Meeting' and 'My Workplace' reflect the poet's attempt to find order in the chaotic universe by organizing the random words into something meaningful. Achla Grover's ingenuity becomes obvious again in the poem 'The Yellow Swing' where her use of chemical names for iron and oxygen like 'fe' and 'O2' make the poem an interesting read. Her eye for detail becomes evident in the manner she lays bare the minute details of what seems to be a garden setting. "under the rusted canopy/of 'fe'/ the hinges ache/abundant O2/indigested/... antenna raised/the fuzzy thieves/play hide and seek/... weathered debris/ play meek audience,/ while aching hinges/mock aloud" (42-3).

Compelling the reader to think as well as enjoy at the same time Achla's poetry seems to derive inspiration not just from within but also from the immediate surroundings.

That the immediate environment inspires as well as gets mirrored in Achla's poetry becomes evident in the section entitled "Water" as well. Comprising of four poems, the section departs from the man-woman dichotomy while only in faint strokes showcasing the poet's self as a writer in the poem "Blue Blood". In the poem "Window by the Sea", poet's keen eye for observation is evident in her panoramic view of the river Ganga flowing under the bridge, the vast desolation of the concrete structures abuzz with lifeless souls mechanically carrying out their daily chores. Monotony underlying urban life is the key strain that runs through it. The longest poem of the section, nay, the anthology itself "The Wandering Wisdom" in Achla's characteristic manner symbolically traces the experience and adventure of a random ship anchored at the coast as she writes:

Hey you —
Pompously anchored
Smokestack crown,
Are you a wayfarer? (51)

There is a beauty in her personification through the use of visual words. Symbolism at her best also renders the poem somewhat obscure for an unassuming reader.

In the section, aptly entitled "Space", the anthology completes a full circle with the man-woman relationship and its simple complexities being again subtly explored. Be it the "Autumn Leaf" ruminating over the past or "Illusion" chasing the "shadows we made, once" (61), nostalgia resonates with a deafening silence. The separation in "Stories from the Stars" has a poignancy of its own making the reader wonder over death or distance being the defining moment. There is an enigmatic magnificence in Achla's poetry which is apparent in her thoughtful dissection of the very idea of a 'thought' in the poem "Spaceship". The metamorphosis of thought into word, the transportation to the other and its transformation back to where it had begun from are very interesting.

To sum up, Achla Grover's maiden attempt at the collection *The Midnight Telegrams* reflects the very honesty as a writer that defines her work. The poet living breathing in her comes alive in her poetic canvas in the manner she plays with the words, paints word-pictures and conjures up symbols which are very much her own. Like a true poet she does not tell but shows. Her poems are like peekaboo into the world outside and the world within. She plucks a moment from time and caresses it until it reveals itself. Her love for moments is reflected in the epigrammatic structure of her poems with quite a few of not more than even two lines, aptly justifying the title "The Midnight Telegrams". However, it is also the very telegraphic nature of her writing that accounts for much of the obscurity in her poems despite her simple style. But at the same time, it is this very characteristic of her work that renders it enigmatic.

BIO-NOTE

Dr. Nisha Misra is currently working as an Assistant Professor in Amity Institute of Corporate Communication, Amity University, Noida (Uttar Pradesh, India) where she teaches both English Literature and Communication Skills. She has done her Ph. D from Himachal Pradesh University (Shimla) in Australian Literature. She is actively involved in presenting papers apart from various paper publications to her credit. With a penchant for writing, both creative and critical, her area of interest is fiction as well as poetry.

