

### Writing

We love stories because they are logical, they have a beginning, middle and end. We have beginnings, middles and ends but our being is a constant striving for the logic of existence and since that is completely elusive, we cling to the notion of consistency so that we can turn our lives into stories, fictionalise them, because we must make sense of our being in this world, this universe, this infinity in which we are illogically finite.

### Fact and fiction

Fact is really fiction and the more facts we put together to create an orderly, logical pattern to make sense of life, the bigger the fiction.

It's what Hindus do when they make murthis (statues) that they worship. They give form and shape to the formless to make it easier to see and understand but what they understand are the forms, creations of their own minds, fictions, behind which remains formlessness.

It is what a best selling novelist and conspiracy theorist does when he begins by setting out a list of indisputable facts and then goes on to create a pattern into which they fit beautifully logically, a pattern that illustrates the wonderful capacity of the mind to find order in randomness and thus gives us the most compelling fictions. Conspiracy theories are expressions of a primal dependence on order and logic to make sense of our lives, to turn fact into fiction.

Some people call the fictions that we create narratives and grand narratives and decry them for posing as reality but they are our lifeblood, more necessary to us than food for our survival. When narratives become antiquated and oppressive they are replaced by new narratives and try as we may, we can never escape the fictitiousness of our existence. It is our reality – an ambivalent reality in which fact is fiction and fiction fact.

### Foreword: Jailbirds and Others

For me, a writer is a filter of experience – experience both lived and observed. So when I write, I am inspired by real people and I write about real people.

My characters do not come straight out of my imagination They leap out of life into my imagination where they become involved in a struggle for freedom because that is what I am interested in – defining freedom.

I see writing as the documentation of the individual's or individuals' pursuit of freedom. Because freedom has positive connotations and we assume we know what it means, we take it for granted. But, in fact, total freedom is frightening. It makes the onerous demand that one take responsibility for creating one's life. To avoid that responsibility, most of us submit to the security of social norms and values even when these become restricting.

The characters in my stories are women for whom life within the social contract has become a jail sentence. Some break through the regulations and find the freedom to be themselves; others, fearful of breaking rules remain trapped in the prison of social conditioning and never find themselves

### **Prologue to Mynah Bird Tales**

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It's what Hindus do when they make the murthis (statues) that they worship. They give form and shape to the formless to make it easier to see and understand but what they see and understand are the forms, creations of their own minds, fictions, behind which the formlessness remains.

It is what a best selling novelist and conspiracy theorist does when he begins by setting out a list of indisputable facts and then goes on to create a pattern into which they fit beautifully logically, a pattern that illustrates the wonderful capacity of the mind to find order in randomness. Thus he gives us the most compelling fictions because conspiracy theories are powerful expressions of our primal need for order and logic to give form and shape and, consequently, definitive meaning to existence.

Because our lives, shaped by birth and death, are finite, we project that finiteness on existence and spend all our efforts trying to find the beginning and end of infinity. And that – a thing we cannot do – drives our every endeavour.

We look for a beginning, a middle and an end in all things and thus propel ourselves into the creation of fiction.

Some people call the fictions that we make of our lives, narratives and grand narratives, and decry them for posing as reality but they are our lifeblood, more necessary to us than food for survival. And when they become antiquated and oppressive and interfere with our capacity to create, which is basic to survival, we get rid of them. But we do not free ourselves from narratives, we simply replace the old with the new. We can never escape the narrative condition of our lives and the fictitiousness of our existence.

It is our reality – an ambivalent reality in which fact is fiction and fiction fact – faction. Mynah Bird Tales are overtly fictitious but they are no different from the fictions of our factitious existences.

Tomes have been written about fiction and how it is classified and structured and what makes perfection of its forms. But here, fiction is simply a synonym for order, the real primary need of the human being. Being human is to be constantly in search

of the explanation to reduce the whole of existence into orderliness that gives understanding. So we are perpetually preoccupied with finding patterns, sequences and consistencies so that

we can find the answers that will reveal our destiny. And the more we impose meaning on our existence in the universe, the more the truth recedes into the infinity of space.

Our destiny is not revealed, it is created .

Our lives are a finite moment in an all-encompassing infinity. And it is that condition of being, the finiteness that prods us into creating our destinies as we attempt to reduce that infinity into something with a beginning, a middle and an end; and so to the fictionalising of our existences.

We are all the authors of our lives and as such are constantly involved in creating the fictions of our existences, the narratives that spell out our individual sequences. Some people don't realise this. Some of us, like Gansie, (in Gansie Stories) simply anticipate that our lives will be a series of disasters and end in tragedy and that becomes the pattern that we impose on ourselves. And, like Gansie, because we do not acknowledge our authorship of events, we are filled with despair and unhappiness, curse our fate and blame everything and everyone around us for the misery into which we have plunged ourselves.

Other people, who understand their responsibility in creating their destinies, are aware that they are making choices and decisions and imposing their own unique meaning on the unknown. They are conscious of creating their own narratives and when things go wrong, they simply look back and say, 'That was a poor choice.' Then they make more choices in search of exciting new discoveries. They do not know exactly where they are headed and when they arrive at what appears to be a destination, they experience a sense of achievement and fulfilment and for them the whole adventure has been worthwhile. But that is not the end. The new destination simply provides another jumping off place that leads them further into the unknown.

### **Introduction to the story Real Virtuality**

And that brings us to Mynah Bird. You may have noticed her edging out of the stories towards the end. The old bird, who had originally aimed for a century and at first had wanted to stave off for a few more decades that goodnight, into which she was determined not to go gently, opted for immortality instead. And in her search for immortality, had begun to ponder the nature of human existence and on recognising its resemblance to fiction, thought she had found a way out of the finiteness of her existence.

She accepted that everyone has to die but she came to see that if you happen to be in a story, you're in luck. You can live forever. Look at the Eumenides – they have been around for at least two thousand years. But Mynah Bird, knowing her author wasn't Sophocles, decided not to take any chances. So she escaped into another reality.

Tomes have been written about fiction and how it is classified and structured and what makes perfection of its forms. But here, fiction simply is a synonym for order, the real primary need of the human being. Being human is to be constantly in search of the explanation that will reduce the whole of existence into an orderliness that will lead to understanding. So we are perpetually preoccupied with finding patterns, sequences and consistencies to find the answers that will reveal our destiny. And the more we impose meaning on our existence in the universe, the more the truth recedes into the infinity of space.

But destiny cannot be revealed, it must be created.

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something with a beginning, a middle and an end; and so to the fictionalising of our existences.

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In this story Mynah Bird had to die. It makes logical sense and that's fiction. In real life, with its

complex of narratives, things do not tie up so neatly. At least, we don't perceive our behaviour to have the consistency of a fictional character whose life fits into a logical pattern that leads to a predetermined end. But we live with a belief in that sort of determinism and we sigh and say, What will be, will be.

Mynah Bird being a character in a story obeys the dictates of cause and effect and is trapped in the pattern that is imposed on her.

But she is a figment of imagination, and when she dies can be brought back again and again.

And so she is.

In the old days Mynah Bird had been imprisoned in an ethnic ghetto but after the miracle of 1994, she naively imagined that all prison conditions had disappeared. It did not occur to her that after years of social conditioning, the notion of living in a free society would be anathema to many and that efforts would be made to preserve the old under the guise of the new.

Though she was resourceful and quite independent, Mynah Bird entered retirement with some apprehension. Now that she had passed through the gate that put her outside of society, outside of working with others to build the reality in which she lived, she wondered if she had what it takes to keep her self-esteem and human dignity and continue to create the story of her life and not take the easy way out and die.

Because she was unsure of herself at first, when someone recommended that she join a senior citizens' association that was involved in all kinds of enjoyable activities, she decided to give it a look in.

But she was determined not to let people patronise her; not to become involved with do-gooders who treat oldsters like children for whom they have to provide entertaining activities. Mynah Bird wasn't after entertainment; she had no problem entertaining herself. She was after the insight that seniors have stored up within themselves.

But it didn't take long for her to realise that she didn't have the ability to access that wisdom. She was a loner and really enjoyed being alone because that's what gave her the freedom to create her life.

And the following story is one of the fictions she made of her life.

Mynah Bird had achieved what no other person on earth had ever achieved, perfect peace and happiness. She was retired, single, had paid off her mortgage, had a ten-year-old car and a small pension, enough for her modest needs. She had found ways to spend her time that gave her a great deal of pleasure and a sense of fulfilment.

Then she went and spoilt it all. Like Adam and Eve she couldn't leave well enough alone

It began with feelings of guilt.

How could she be so happy and contented in a world in which many, many poor people had no shelter, food and means of earning a living? She was living in paradise while people around her were starving. And that ridiculous social conditioning, called conscience, of which she hadn't entirely managed to rid herself, made her feel she had a responsibility to others.

So she took Gansie into her home and relegated her life to a normal one full of the discontent, regrets and irritations that come with sharing.

The stuff of which stories are made.

So here follow the tales of Mynah Bird and Gansie

People were on the move; those from slums were bumping people out of lower middle class areas, who in turn were bumping people out of suburbs, who likewise were bumping people out of private and affluent estates. And many people were making their way out of the country and into the civilized world abroad. They had all bought into the fiction of the grass being greener on the other side.

Even the prison population was on the move. It had made recidivism its rule and there was a constant flux in and out of correctional service facilities. Having honed their sensibilities and skills inside, inmates ventured out to test the efficacy of their training and returned as soon as it was time for upgrading. And the new democracy gave birth to the security complex with its fences, alarm systems and security guards, to keep them out of decent society and on the beaten track.

But Mynah Bird had no idea of what was going on in the world.

Now you would imagine that there is no more to be said about Mynah Bird and Gansie. But that's only what the story dictates. It is overtly fiction, which presents a beautifully logical and clear development towards a pre-determined goal.

But real life, covert fiction, seems messy and chaotic and why people do things isn't clear at all. So we keep searching for the meaning of life as though there is one. That's why we tell stories.

And since we are telling stories we can resurrect Mynah Bird and Gansie at will.

Forgiveness does not extend to criminals because they have repudiated the social contract. And we have decided that they are irredeemable and that makes them monsters.

And as long as they are inside, they become the *raison d'être* and private preserve of religious ministries who try to reform them and bring them back to God.

But that applies only to ones who are incarcerated whether they are guilty or not. Robbers, rapists, murderers who have not been identified as such remain good citizens.

Mynah Bird, who turned atheist when she was fourteen, had no understanding of forgiveness and God, so she had no idea of the prevailing attitude towards criminals and couldn't understand what had happened to Gansie's family.

I think it's in *The Mikado* that the Lord High Executioner sings Let the punishment fit the crime and a lot of people, especially judges, have to try to figure out everyday what that means but in fiction it's no problem – the villain gets killed and the hero rides off into the sunset with the girl.

But with Mynah and Gansie, however, we can't figure out who the villain and the hero are. Perhaps, it's because they are women and someone doesn't realise that they are supposed to be prizes.

So until we can find a villain and a hero, the Mynah and Gansie stories keep starting over.

Some people believe that love and sex are the same thing. Others believe that they are different.

Mynah Bird, who didn't have either, didn't know what to think and only became more confused watching Gansie.

You must understand that writers creating patterns are slaves to the notion of fate and destiny and what will be, will be because they believe in a beginning a middle and an end – they have experienced birth and death, you see, and wish to impose that on existence. But human beings are ephemeral creatures; existence is not.

And fiction is like existence. Stories go on forever and bestow immortality on characters.

Epilogue

Thus endeth the tales of Mynah Bird and Gansi, two women thrown together by circumstances, whose lives never mesh into a beautiful logical sequence that makes fiction and so they remain random facts floating separately through existence.