
O:JA&L POETRY PAMPHLET SERIES

A Writer's Portfolio



BUTTONHOOK PRESS

An Imprint Of OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters

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Set in Garamond and GARAMOND ALL CAPS.

Made available online and/or printed in the USA and elsewhere as a novelty and
commemorative document celebrating the poetic works of Tushar Sen.

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Richard Stimac and his new book *BLOOD, WATER, AND STONE*
[available now from Spartan Press.](#)



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THE CREATION OF ADAM
BY MICHELANGELO (1508–1512)

The body is already there—
formed, placed,
resting in the slope of earth
as if the ground
still holds its weight.

Nothing is missing
that can be named.
Only this—
a span no measure can close.

He does not rise.
One arm extends,
the wrist slack,
fingers uncommitted—
not reaching,
only available.

Across from him,
motion is gathered
and held.
Not arrival—
but force,
drawn tight
around a single direction.
Figures press within it,
contained like breath
before release.

The hand comes forward—
index fixed,
the rest withdrawn,
as if the charge
must pass through
one point only.
Between them,
air holds—

a thin field
where contact waits
without occurring.

The space does not close.
It carries.
A breath
not yet taken,
a word
not yet shaped,
a life
not yet claimed.

He lies
with the ease of something
that has not begun.
The other does not waver.
Still—
no touch.

As if the instant
must remain open
to remain exact.
The distance stays,
and in it,
the weight of what is given
without being held,
what begins
without crossing,
what exists
because it has not yet
become.

THE FALL OF LUCIFER
BY PETER PAUL RUBENS (1620)

The fall begins
before the body descends.

A shift in direction—
small enough
that the heavens
still appear willing
to contain him.

Above,
the air remains ordered.
Wings hold their structure.
Light continues
across the surface of armor
without interruption.

Only the movement changes.

Around him,
the others begin collapsing
through the opened height,
their bodies turning
within a gravity
that has already decided them.

No fire follows.
No abyss announces itself.

The distance alone
becomes irreversible.

He does not reach upward.
That is already finished.

Instead,
the body holds
its former shape
while passing completely
out of the order
that gave it meaning.

Feathers scatter
through the descending air
like fragments
of a structure
unable to survive separation
from its own source.

Below,
darkness does not rise to meet him.

It waits—
vast enough
that even now,
while light still touches him,
the fall appears endless.

And in that suspension,
between radiance
and disappearance,

the face remains turned
not toward the abyss,

but back
toward the height
that continues existing
without him.

IB

Ib Railway Station is famous for having the shortest name of any railway station in India. Located in the Jharsuguda district of Odisha, it derives its two-letter name from the nearby Ib River, a tributary of the Mahanadi.

Paint flaking from the walls, a clock no one remembers to
wind,
the bench painted a year ago still gleaming like a waiting
bride.

A faded timetable, a loudspeaker squeaking louder
than its feeble announcements.

Tracks stretching away both ways further than sight.

A handpump, giving more than it should,
water falling into a dent in the ground,
every time a parched hand pulls.

Tea craving the cup, steam tired of the kettle's pout,
Tilu hasn't served a soul since dawn,
flies hover over empty glasses,
heat trapped in them like stored power.

TC babu, dressed as usual, walking the length of the
platform.

Express trains roar past without slowing,
not even a glance for this stop;
passenger trains vomit a few locals,
who disperse faster than the steam
of the tired engine, chugging dutifully.

The old banana seller, not seen today, she was ill, they said;
the monkeys cleverly skipped their shifts.

At the counter, a man half-asleep on his chair,
under a creaking fan, he studies too hard at night school;
they say he has potential to be a ticket collector someday—
blind to the occupational hazards:
the noon sun piercing the sparse shade
of the tree where the collector stands,

picking repeat offenders every day;
his attendance painted in salt—
white rail routes on his black blazer
he postpones taking to the dry cleaner, fifty miles away.
Another passenger train arrives,
and Ib wakes from another siesta.

THE UMBRELLA VILLAGE

The block officer arrived at noon
in a white jeep full of dust.
A loudspeaker tied to the roof announced
that the internet was entering the village.

Nobody reacted.

Only *Babban's* buffalo
lifted her head from the pond
and bellowed loudly toward the fields.

The officer smiled.

He said now letters could travel
without bicycle or train,
that anyone could speak to anyone
at any time.

Dadi Setu said,
“Then write to *Raju*,
tell him to come home.
Laali is of marriageable age now.”

The officer bent toward his assistant.
The assistant whispered back,
“*Raju* is in jail.”

By evening
the tower had begun rising
on *Nandu's* wheat field.
He stood in the dust
beating his chest.
His compensation hadn't arrived yet,
perhaps stuck in a “digital server”.

A battery arrived on a bullock cart.
Honest Media called it green tech.

Two oxen trudged in circles all afternoon
recharging the tower battery.

Rumour spread quickly.
The tower with its flashing red light
clicked pictures all night,
for quiet surveillance.

Umbrellas were held open after dark
by those passing beneath
the new postman's tower.

From the tower's height
umbrellas drifted through the village
like cautious black beetles.

THE LABYRINTH (CHAKRAVYUH)

Before the labyrinth,
I had a name.

I must have—
but it won't survive the entry.

Identity is the first thing
the walls consume.

Once inside,
there will be no distance
between me and the labyrinth—
only a lethal proximity.

No enemy either—
just something wearing my voice,
moving ahead of me,
bleeding when I bleed.

Every step forward
is regressive—
a subtraction.

If I make it out—
will I be free?

Or will the edifice of the labyrinth
take residence inside me,

an invisible design
repeating itself
in every choice I make?

To kill or be killed—
that is not a question of war,
but of failed choice.

Some battles do not demand decisions.
They demand participation.

Violence does not care
which side of the blade
you stand on.

It only cares
that you belong to it.

A man who wakes
and begins to move
is not awake.

He is deeper gone—

walking inside a dream
forgetting that
it is just a dream.

Reality, at that point,
is just a shadow unnoticed.

And then comes
the light of decision—

cold, indifferent, complete.

A white, vertical light
that removes shadows
so nothing can hide—

in that light,
from cowardice to courage,
everything flattens.

On one side of the scale:
impotence—
the refusal to act.

On the other:
manhood—
the excuse to destroy.

And the YinYang balances at the center—

阴阳

sharp enough to cut both ways,
clean enough to look honest,
heavy enough
to decide everything
without ever being decided.

Note from the poet: Drawing on the ancient Indian concept of the Chakravyuh—a war formation designed to entrap rather than merely confront—and the broader use of labyrinthine strategies in early warfare, this poem reimagines conflict as a system that dissolves identity from within.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

TUSHAR SEN is a finance professional who also engages in sustained creative and scholarly writing. He is the author of *Pandora's Box*, a collection of short stories available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Audible. In 2020, he wrote and produced the short film *Zulfi*, which screened internationally and received 22 laurels across film festivals. He recently got selected for LADAKH - closer to the moon Residency Program for writers. His poetry has appeared in *The Mathematical Intelligencer* (Springer-Nature), *The Deronda Review*, *Sortes*, *Lekh*, *Indian Review*, *Writers Resist*, *SpecPo Verse*, *Flora Fiction*, *New Verse Review*, *The Gilded Weathervane*, *Ecological Citizen*, *Military Review*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal* and *Afrocritik*.

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~ Robert Shapard

co-editor of many Flash and Sudden Fiction anthologies, the latest are *Sudden Fiction Latina: Short Stories from the United States and Latin America* (2010) and *Flash Fiction International: Very Short Stories from Around the World* (2015)

“Pamelyn Casto’s valuable book *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker* is an astonishing illumination—a total history of the form with essays, strategies and exercises; lessons, examples, how-to’s, markets, marketing, contests, anthologies, prompts, advice from pros, new directions (flash film!), reader psychology even—it is all here, with hundreds of internet links. There will never be a fuller single resource, with a good teacher’s encouraging tone about it, to boot. You can say flash fiction begins with Aesop; with Casto you can begin anew.

~Kent H. Dixon

translator of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2018) and co-editor of *Stone Wall Book of Short Fictions* (1976)

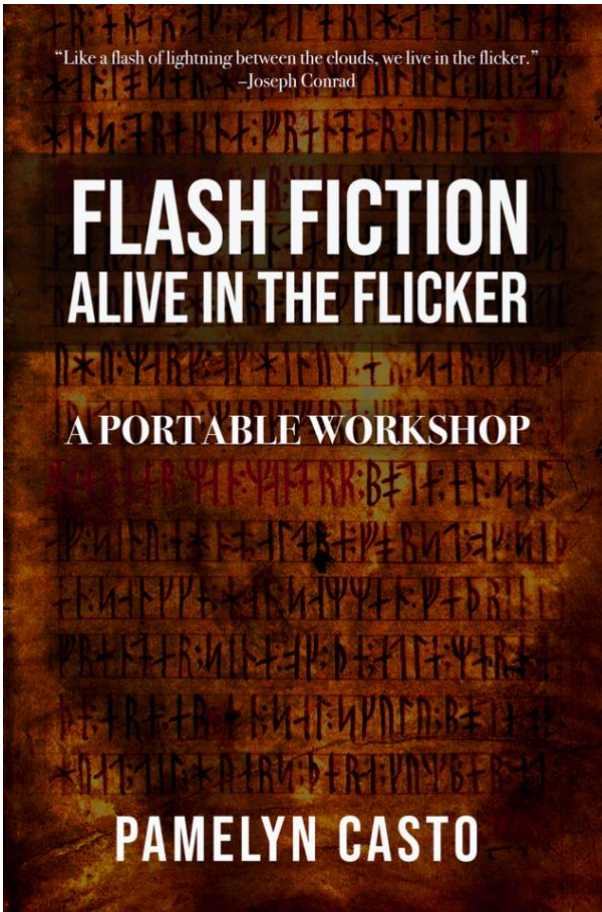
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editor of *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction* (2009) and founder of *The Best Small Fictions* (founded 2015)

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AMAZON REVIEWS

for Pamelyn Castos's *FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker*

Daniel J. Nicholas

Reviewed in the United States on August 26, 2024

Verified Purchase

If I were to teach a class, this book would be required reading or a course outline for discussion. Bravo, Pamelyn! In addition, I look forward to your monthly blog to start up again.

David Lignell

Reviewed in the United States on November 23, 2022

Verified Purchase

Pamela Casto's new text, *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker*, is a must have "portable workshop" workbook for anyone who desires to learn and practice the many forms of flash fiction.

W.R. Rodriguez

Reviewed in the United States on October 5, 2022

Verified Purchase

An authoritative overview of the genre, combined with practical advice on the writing process and an abundance of writing prompts.

Norman Jensen

Reviewed in the United States on April 2, 2024

Reading is great but hands-on prompts are even better.



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