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this a longing for the "British days"—as it is expressed in one of the stories—on the part of a class of people who have lost the sense of identity that hereditary power and privilege afforded.

Kapur is a firm believer in the strong fictional moral. In "The Perfect Doughnut" we read of a marriage that breaks down because the husband is not satisfied with the way his wife cooks doughnuts. In an amusing parody of the quest narrative, he embarks on a search for the perfect doughnut, which is prepared by a man called Thomas, who thinks that he is Jesus Christ. Sensing the error of his ways, the husband reunites with his wife, and thereby helps to state the conservative moral of the story: be satisfied with what domestic life has to offer. A similar injunction against wanting more than one has a right to have is found in the title story, where an anthropology student who is all too interested in ghosts becomes one herself.

Unfortunately, the tendency to moralise becomes very pronounced in some of Kapur's stories. This is matched by a sentimentality which runs through entire stories, and leads to such serious lapses as the following description of a schizophrenic: "her leaps away from people were those of a startled doe in the forest" (p. 66). Kapur also tends to state the obvious, which closes off the reader's imaginative interaction with the text, and to overinterpret the content of the stories for the reader, especially the endings, which are uniformly lifeless. As distinct, say, from the endings of Mansfield's fictions, which tend to expand the significance of the story or contribute to or sense of character, Kapur's narrator specialises in the summary address to the reader, which is more or less designed to tell us what we ought to have learnt from the story. Neither character, meaning or reader is permitted to escape from the narrator's control.

And last, but most certainly not least, we have *The Dusky Horizon and Other Stories*, by Manoj Das. These stories show realist sympathies, but it is an enriched realism, reflective of the narrative framework of experience, of the way each of us lives within the stories we tell ourselves and are told. The title story, involving a complex interplay of memory, fable and coincidence, is a good example of this. It is narrated by an old man who is in the process of reading a fairy-tale. We are brought back to the content of the fairy-tale at various stages of the story, but it serves mainly as a point of entrance to the past, having touched off memories of childhood in the mind of the narrator.

Foremost among these is his memory of Lily, a strangely dignified and self-possessed young girl, who accompanies the narrator and his friends to Peacock Hill, in search of the ghosts who are supposed to live there. But the expedition is a tragic one. A storm blows up, Lily falls

down a precipice and is killed. At this point the story cuts back to the present. We are told the rest of the fairy-tale, concerning a "sweet girl who lived in the forest". The narrator is so deeply affected by the fairy-tale that he seeks out its author, who happens to be Navin, a companion on the trip to Peacock Hill, all those years ago. Each, in his own way, has spent his life in search of a salve for a painful recollection.

It is fair to say that a preoccupation with time, with recovering or returning to what has been lost, is the point of departure for most stories in this collection. The stories seem to be acted-out within the bounds of a day and night, the recurrent unit of felt time: most stories open and close with an image of the sun in some phase of its cycle. We are aware of life being spent "beneath the sun", awaiting that darkness which brings extinction in its train. The characters tend to look back to a past in which things were better for them. In "Sunset Over the Valley", Brij Singh, a virtual cripple, has pathetic dreams about how differently he would deal with the present had he his former fitness of body. "Miss Moberly's Targets" pictures an eccentric woman who is confined to a nursing home. Her "targets" are a group of dogs, named after her ex-lovers, to whom (and at whom) she throws biscuit crumbs. The dogs, which sit outside her window and beg for food, are comic displacements of the one true target of her life: happy marriage.

In affirming that sadness and despair can accompany change, Das does not lose his ironic touch or sense of humour. In "The Bull of Babulpur", a gentle meditation on the conflict between village and urban culture, Das depicts a slick criminal lawyer who, seized by a whim, decides to drive back to the village of his birth. His passage is blocked by a bull—"symbol of the free immortal and invincible universal soul"—standing serenely in the middle of the road. Traditional culture fights back—not with the tools of conquest, but in the timeless witness of irony.

The tone of these stories is intentionally flat, and effectively so. Das resists the overinvestments of moralising and sentimentality, in a prose of sometimes rigorous realism, though delighting in the offbeat, ridiculous and unexplained. We are offered slices-of-life, but of life at its oddest angles, caught unsuspecting, and storing-up the rich ironies and contradictions of modern India. Characters are explored through psychological realism, but this makes for fine comedy when, as is typical of Das' fiction, an "average" person with an ordinary set of beliefs and