

Title: The Last Metaphor

Publisher: NEWLINE

Year: 2014

Author's Note:

I do not know how to write introductions. I am more fragmented than my characters. I had not written a word for two months. I was angry with myself. I broke my pen and fired the pages. The muse had left. I entered my room and sat in a chair. The chair broke as I began to type. The muse returned and sat outside. No one had read *The Guilt*, the muse told me. It did not touch a single heart in the country claiming to arrange literary festivals. I was disgusted with the writers and readers. I am not Fitzgerald and cannot drown my failure in liquor. I drink coffee and coffee is an enemy to liquor. I do not want to write. I am still guilty after writing *The Guilt* but the work did not make readers guilty. The muse looks at me but I look away. I prefer to teach but it does not bring peace. Gamma is still banging the type writer, SHERA still standing before the audience, and BILLA still doing punching SHERA. The dancer is dancing on the stage in the same spirit Gatsby look at Daisy's castle by throwing arms forward. Characters of *The Guilt* are dying for not being heard. Where is the audience? Where is the reader? No one knows. Characters are breathing their last but the audience is invisible. Probably they are cursed not to have a spectator. It is their fate and they cannot change it. Drama awakes compassion in spectator's sensibility for the characters by dissolving their shells of ego. In this sense, drama is more intense than fiction or poetry. No one understands that careful sensitivity towards the characters can enable the audience to experience empathy for society in general. Despite triggering *The Guilt*, Mustana has not left me yet and reminds me that *The Guilt* has not changed anything. He came to me in a dream and informed me that a husband and wife are thrown alive into the kiln. My art is a waste, I realized when I woke up. My phone rang up and I attended the call. A student from a university informed me that he wants to write thesis on my work. I disconnected the phone and sat down on the ground. In Pakistan only students are interested in art only because they want to complete their M.Phil. and Ph.D. dissertations. They are afraid of plagiarism, hence they search for new writers. And the interest in new

writers is merely of completing degrees. Where is a theatron? Where is Aeschylus? Where is the Greek audience? Where is Chorus? The muse is silent. I was travelling from MandiBahuddin to Gujrat when I heard the squeaking the bones and the van came to rest. I came out of the van and saw that a dog was crushed by the van. The conductor called me in but I was fixed at the bones. The driver drove the van. Suddenly, another van came and before I could stop it, it crushed the face of the dog again. I could not do anything. I was guilty again. I even could not dare to move the body. I sat down and started writing in anguish. The result was another drama and this time it is entitled *The Last Metaphor*.

Usman Ali

\*

*(The setting of Act Two is same as that of Act One. Both are sitting on the stools on the sides of the pit of fire.)*

BANKA: *(Looking at JUGNOO)* There you are!

JUGNOO: *(Staring at the fire)* Here you are!

BANKA: Would you have another cup of coffee?

JUGNOO: *(Looks at the audience)* No.

BANKA: I heard about that too.

JUGNOO: I saw it with many eyes.

BANKA: Do not joke. You have two eyes.

JUGNOO: My name is JUGNOO. I do not have eyes. I have an eye.

BANKA: I heard about that.

JUGNOO: I, JUGNOO the gangster, saw with an eye. *(The flute plays, the window bursts open, the red light floods in and falls on JUGNOO. He takes off his mask, stuffs it into his trousers, lights a cigarette and stands up. He brings a log of wood from the heap and strips scraps from it with his teeth. He holds the hand full of scraps while he chews the rest. He circles the pit and throws the strips of the log into the fire. BANKA takes off his mask, holds it in his mouth, pushes the stool away with a kick and sits down, with his head down and arms straight with hands*

*in a cupped position. JUGNOO walks downstage and fixes his eyes at the feet of the audience.)* Firefly I was. Closed my light and withdrew my wings. I hid myself in the bush. With one eye opened I saw that squirrels were motionless. Bees stopped buzzing and flowers withheld their smell. The Sun shot its arrows towards the people who held the two brothers and threw them down. *(He stops and goes to BANKA and drops the ash of his cigarette into his cupped hands and returns.)* I saw from a hole in the leaf that the hands of both were tied. A lizard pointed that a tall man had a chain of iron. A group of ten to fifteen people pounced upon them. Audience also stood around watching the show. A leaf trembled and I looked upwards. *(He again walks to BANKA and drops the ash into BANKA's hands and returns.)* The roots coiled within the bush as blood dropped on the earth. I came out of the bunch of leaves. I saw glint in the blood. A gust of wind stormed the tree and there was silence again. The brothers were dead within ten minutes. *(He drops the stub towards the feet of the audience.)* Five minutes later a crow noticed that the boys were being beaten. The boys were dead and only the crow knew it. They were innocent but were declared terrorists. The bodies were dragged on the untarred road. Asphalt stuck to them. *(He looks down at body and becomes silent. The flute playing ends, the window closes, JUGNOO puts on his mask, BANKA also puts on his mask, drags the stool and sits on it.)*

BANKA: What do you eat?

JUGNOO: Everything.

BANKA: You do not forget.

JUGNOO: *(Gazes at BANKA)*

BANKA: Everyone does.

JUGNOO: *(Jumps in the air)* But I cannot.

BANKA: That is the law. Forget and live. JUGNOO, forget. Do not challenge the law. You take law into your hands.

JUGNOO: You believe that.

BANKA: You do not have to believe to accept.

JUGNOO: Have you accepted?

BANKA: That does not matter.

JUGNOO: Why not?

BANKA: *(looks at the audience)* Because they have accepted.

*(JUGNOO rushes to the bed, picks up the bottle of scent together with the pillow and runs towards the body. He sprinkles the scent over the body and drops a handful of flowers over it. BANKA continues to look at JUGNOO. He goes to the rope and holds the corner.)*

BANKA: *(Dropping the rope into the pit as fire has become slower and smoke is rising.)* What is it?

JUGNOO: A rope.

BANKA: What does it do?

JUGNOO: It goes into the darkness.

BANKA: It breaks.

JUGOO: It has to.

*(JUGNOO takes off his shirt and smears his body with charcoal. BANKA also stands up and tears his shirt and smears his body with charcoal as JUGNOO. JUGNOO Picks up the rope, ties its one end around BANKA's neck and the other around his own, both move round the pit, looking into it. This movement continues till the window closes.)*

BANKA: It is interesting.

JUGNOO: What?

BANKA: Was no one there?

JUGNOO: For what?

BANKA: To save the boys as you were busy in eyeing them.

JUGNOO: There were thirty people.

BANKA: Sure?

JUGNOO: (*coming close to BANKA*) Dead sure! I counted on my fingers.

BANKA: I saw you were busy.

JUGNOO: I was afraid, BANKA.

BANKA: And you are like others.

JUGNOO: What?

BANKA: You did nothing.

JUGNOO: They were not afraid. After committing the robbery, I ran hard. Police was after me. Every siren shook me. I did not sleep for two days. (*JUGNOO narrates the events like an expert storyteller and BANKA listens to him with curiosity. JUGNOO, at times, stands up and, at times, sits down.*) On the run I was. You parted and fear ran from throat to my stomach. Why I do not understand. I have never been afraid in the past. My feet entangled in a coiled string and I stumbled. I groaned but I wiped dust from my mouth. An arrow was about to pierce my neck from behind, I thought. But there was nothing. I stood up and gathered my energy and ran. I was sure to be arrested. I felt alone as you left. I came out of the pipe and took a cup of coffee. People talked about the doctor being killed. I gulped the coffee and strode off. I heard the hooter of a police van and ran harder till I came to a water pump under a tree. I heard the noise at a distance.

BANKA: Hooter of the police van.

JUGNOO: No. The noise of the people.

JUGNOO: (*He comes down stage, holds BANKA's hands in his hands and makes him sit close to the body.*) I also mingled with them. I spoke louder than them. I also hooted.

BANKA: Then?

JUGNOO: A circle around the brothers. Two beat them and the rest watched. I was also standing. Divided between police and the boys. The police van arrived and the policemen came down and stood silently. I was in fear. I watched the boys being beaten to death. I had done violence but I had never seen it. I had

never seen it BANKA. I had never seen it. Doing and seeing are very different BANKA. I am telling you it is true.

BANKA: But they also watched.

JUGNOO: But I was on the run. I was in fear. My arms were different from theirs. My palms were broader than theirs. I was barefoot but they wore shoes. I had never beaten with sticks as they did. I always used guns you know because beating with guns is more brutal than hitting with sticks. Spit was circling in my mouth and not in theirs. But in sound of the breathing we were all same. I was the perspiration coming from the body of the brothers. I was the gash created in the body of a younger boy. I was not hurling insults at the boys. I closed my eyes but when I opened them I saw that my fingers resembled their fingers. In breathing we were all same. I looked away when they kicked the face of the younger boy. I wanted to run but I could not. I was sheltered by the crowd. They were there. A van of elite force. They stood in the crowd. *(The flute playing ends, the window closes and JUGNOO unties the rope from his own neck first and then from the neck of BANKA. Both sit down and begin to smoke.)*

BANKA: They did nothing to save the brothers.

*(Long Silence.)*

BANKA: *(Looking at the rope and picking it up)* The rope can help.

JUGNOO: This is the body.

BANKA: You can feel it in the darkness.

JUGNOO: It must be saved.

BANKA: What about the living?

JUGNOO: What about the dead?

BANKA: What about the rope?

JUGNOO: What about the well?

*(JUGNOO stands up and walks towards the body.)* The earth cannot keep it.

BANKA: You are not a gravedigger.

JUGNOO: They are very good. Many are killed daily. They are buried and no one knows about them. Why cannot I bury one body?

BANKA: *(He throws the rope down and begins to wind it around his arm.)* They have poisoned the canals and streams.

*(A knock at the door. Both look at each other and the door. The knocking grows louder. Both aim for the door and run. They fall down but stand up again. BANKA is behind JUGNOO and then JUGNOO behind BANKA as they step towards the door. They take positions at the door. The door opens with a bang, both shriek and fall down. The flute plays. No one is outside. They close the door.)*

JUGNOO: *(Coming close to the body. Kneels and prays. The fire goes out and BANKA comes downstage and stands right behind JUGNOO, gazing at the audience.)* Oh God! Help your JUGNOO. Bless me to help the body. Earth has become stubborn. It refuses to have more bodies. Dig a grave and stones emerge. What times? No one can save us.

BANKA: Building new roads and making new hospitals but ignoring the stagnant pools.

JUGNOO: I bury the body but it comes out. The rain. Yes. The rain. The more water goes down the more bodies come out.

BANKA: A monster sleeps in the water. Held the water tight in the wrench of its fist. It is sitting at the bottom of the ponds. The water circles around it. It does not come out. It is quite underneath the water. People pass by it.

JUGNOO: Let me wash the body. Bless me to sprinkle holy water on it. Bless me to close its eyes. They are creatures. Respect for them is dead.

BANKA: The monster changes the color of water. Apparently cool and composed. Their guns are useless.

JUGNOO: *(Prostrates)* Oh, God. Allow me to grant dignity to the body.

BANKA: They did nothing to save the brothers.

JUGNOO: I did nothing. The earth cannot keep it.

BANKA: You are not a gravedigger.

JUGNOO: They are good at burying the dead. Why cannot I burry one body?

BANKA: (*He begins to wind rope around his arms, legs and torso.*) They have poisoned the canals and streams.

JUGNOO: Oh God! Help your JUGNOO. Bless me to help the body. Earth has become stubborn. It refuses to have more bodies. Dig a grave and stones emerge. What times? No one can save us.

BANKA: Building new roads and making new hospitals. (*Roaring laughter*) They call it progress. (*Stares hard at the pit*) They ignore the stagnant pools.

JUGNOO: I bury the body but the earth vomits it. Stop thunder and rain. The more water comes down the more bodies will come out.

BANKA: A monster sleeps in the water. It holds the water tight in the wrench of its fist. It is sitting at the bottom of the ponds. The water circles around it. It does not come out. It is deep under the water. People pass by it.

JUGNOO: Let me wash the body. Bless me to sprinkle holy water on it. Bless me to close its eyes. They are creatures. Respect for them is dead.

BANKA: The monster changes the color of water. Apparently cool and composed. Their guns are useless.

JUGNOO: (*Prostrates*) Oh God. Allow me to grant dignity to the body.

JUGNOO:(*Sitting on his knees*) He was crossing the road.

BANKA: No one swims.

JUGNOO: No fences on the edges of the road.

BANKA: You do not have to jump in the canal to be dead.

JUGNOO: I was looking at his eyes.

BANKA: No surprise. No one does.

JUGNOO: He had blond hair and a long neck.

BANKA: Dust and black leaves on the surface. Sun light falls and one can see through it. Foul and ill smelling. It does not change. Rain falls into it but it never overflows. At night one can hear it sleeping, snorting.



JUGNOO: He had just woken up from his sleep.

BANKA: It is stronger than the terrorists. Tougher than the police. More composed than the suicide bombers.

JUGNOO: Sun shot its first rays on him.

BANKA: It is waiting.

JUGNOO: He came out of the fog.

BANKA: The monster is very patient.

JUGNOO: Emerging out of a meadow.

BANKA: They live around the stream.

JUGNOO: Floor was grinded in the machine.

BANKA: Their children play near it.

JUGNOO: The bells of a milkman tinkle.

BANKA: More homes are being built around it.

JUGNOO: The tree was wet under which I stood.

*(The fire leaps from the pit and both stop and start looking at it.)*

*(The door is being knocked on and both JUGNOO and BANKA rush towards each other, sit down and look at the door. JUGNOO suddenly looks at BANKA, turns his head towards the door and rushes towards BANKA, both grapple and embrace each other. They freeze and look at the door.)*

JUGNOO: Who is there?

BANKA: Who is there?

*(Both look at each other and move slowly towards the door with arms around each other's neck. They pause before the door. As they get near it is thrust open by a gust of wind from the outside. They fall down and roll to the right of stage. The door is closed with a bang. JUGNOO stands and burst with laughter. They return to the stools.)*

JUGNOO: A coward. You are a coward.

BANKA: What?

JUGNOO: You are a coward.

BANKA: So are you.

JUGNOO: Lesser than you. The knock could have finished you.

JUGNOO: If (pointing towards the body) he were not here?

BANKA: That is there.

JUGNOO: Here.

BANKA: I said there.

JUGNOO: Here.

BANKA: There.

*(Pause.)*

JUGNOO: You called me a coward?

BANKA: I never said that.

JUGNOO: But I heard it.

BANKA: *(Pointing towards the body)* He might have spoken.

*(JUGNOO moves towards the pit and sits on the stool on its right.)*

JUGNOO: *(Pointing towards the fire)* what is it?

BANKA: Fire.

JUGNOO: What does it do?

BANKA: It burns.

JUGNOO: I do not agree with you!

BANKA: That does not matter.

JUGNOO: That does matter.

*(Silence.)*

BANKA: That does matter.

JUGNOO: That does not matter.

*(Pause)*

JUGNOO: (Looking at BANKA) You said something?

BANKA: Something?

*(Silence.)*

JUGNOO: I heard.

BANKA: Are you sure?

JUGNOO: Sure like him. *(Looks at the body)*

JUGNOO: Who named me? *(Pointing towards the fire).*

BANKA: Your mother I guess?

JUGNOO: Firefly. What a name!

*(JUGNOO cries bitterly and sits down.)* No one understands me like my mother. JUGNOO's mother. BANKA I miss her. She was very innocent. *(BANKA comes close to JUGNOO)* She should have choked me when I was born. Brought me into darkness and named me JUGNOO . What a joke! What kindness! She sang lullabies to impress me with my name. She expected me to glow. *(Cries louder)* JUGNOO is in the dark. What a burden. She told me all the myths to explain the glory of my name. JUGNOO the Great who would spread light to the people. Her JUGNOO becomes a robber and is running away with a body. *(He sobs, BANKA takes him into his arms and puts his hand on his head.)*

God is great

Hurrah!

Let me pour

Whatever I have

No more

Whatever I have

Hurrah!

GOD is great

Let me pour

Whatever I have

No more.

*(They sit on the stools.)*