

AN ODE TO A NOBEL-PRIZE-WINNING RACIST

Natasha Chopra

“Ships laden with wheat were coming in from Australia docking in Calcutta and were instructed by Churchill not to disembark their cargo but sail on to Europe. And when conscience-stricken British officials wrote to the Prime Minister in London [Winston Churchill] pointing out that his policies were causing needless loss of life, all he could do was write peevishly in the margin of the report, ‘Why hasn’t Gandhi died yet?’”

-Dr. Shashi Tharoor

You orator, you historian and scholar, you
Owner of honorary Air Force wings, you
Not surprising chancellor of a PWI, you
Nobel prize winner in literature, you
Knight of the Garter, sir, you
Prime Minister of England, you
Prime Minister of Colonization, you
Defender of Avoidable Famine, they
Called you king of defending
Exalted human values, do they
See the irony in the white
Of the paper they write that on, they
Hired Mr. Oldman to play you
In that film that won too many awards, do they
See the irony in hiring an abuser of women
To portray an abuser of an entire nation,
Do they?

Do they know the British didn’t have tea until they
Were the largest exporter of tea without growing
A single leaf on their own soil, they
Stole the crops from under amber noses, were they
Bothered by the brownness the boiled leaves
Left in the water? Is that why they
Mixed in milk of Indian cows, to counteract its
Brownness, to whitewash yet another delicacy,
To dilute the news of my ancestor’s starvation,
To distract from the fact that India was starving,
To tell themselves that India wasn’t starving,
To convince themselves
that Gandhi wasn’t dead (yet), to convince themselves
They had no blood on their hands (yet)?

The winners rewhite, oh I'm sorry, I think
I meant the winners rewrite history, they
Created an entire Wikipedia page
Just for your lengthy list of honors, but they
Didn't make one for your racism, I
Find that interesting that I
Didn't learn about your racism until I
Saw the sadness in my father's eyes, did you
Know that he inherited that glossiness, that distance
From his parents – his parents that were born under
A Union Jack, the amalgamation of imagery
Representing other colonizers,
Colored white from the skin of the supremacists,
Colored blue from the droplets of the Indian Ocean,
Colored red from the blood of my family.
Colored anything but brown.