

Ghazal

By Agha Shahid Ali

*Feel the patient's heart
Pounding—oh please, this once—
—JAMES MERRILL*

I'll do what I must if I'm bold in real time.
A refugee, I'll be paroled in real time.

Cool evidence clawed off like shirts of hell-fire?
A former existence untold in real time ...

The one you would choose: Were you led then by him?
What longing, O *Yaar*, is controlled in real time?

Each syllable sucked under waves of our earth—
The funeral love comes to hold in real time!

They left him alive so that he could be lonely—
The god of small things is not consoled in real time.

Please afterwards empty my pockets of keys—
It's hell in the city of gold in real time.

God's angels again are—for Satan!—forlorn.
Salvation was bought but sin sold in real time.

And who is the terrorist, who the victim?
We'll know if the country is polled in real time.

"Behind a door marked DANGER" are being unwound
the prayers my friend had enscribbled in real time.

The throat of the rearview and sliding down it
the Street of Farewell's now unrolled in real time.

I heard the incessant dissolving of silk—
I felt my heart growing so old in real time.

Her heart must be ash where her body lies burned.
What hope lets your hands rake the cold in real time?

Now Friend, the Belovèd has stolen your words—
Read slowly: The plot will unfold in real time.

(for Daniel Hall)

Notes:

Yaar: Hindi word for friend.

The epigraph of this poem was originally omitted in the changeover to the new website. Because of this, reciting the epigraph is optional for the 2019-2020 Poetry Out Loud season.

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Source: *Rooms Are Never Finished* (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 2002)



Agha Shahid Ali was born in New Delhi and grew up in Kashmir before becoming a United States citizen. The themes of exile, nostalgia for lost or ruined landscapes, and political conflict inform many of his poems. He was a superb practitioner of the ghazal, a medieval Persian lyric form of couplets loosely linked by rhymes or repeated words.

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