

The Jigsaw of Dis-coloration: Anti-Caste Poetics and *The Absent Color*¹

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Abstract

The article is a critical review essay that contextualises, discusses, and theorises anti-caste poetics in the context of discussions on Dalit aesthetics and experience vis à vis postcolonialism and subaltern studies, foregrounding an English poetry collection by a/nil, aka, Anilkumar Payyappilly Vijayan titled *The Absent Color* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2023). I propose that a/nil's poetry, in comparison to discussions on world literatures, demands a specific labor in reading; his writing produces an annihilation of a given sensibility in reading poetry. I suggest that his poetry works like an inverse jigsaw puzzle, offering an anti-caste critique of a *varna*-centered world which is in place. *The Absent Color*, I argue, un-colors this world of deceptions, using discoloration (like annihilation) as a conceptual framework, to critique the world colored by caste.

Keywords

Poetics, Critique, Caste, Dalit, Subaltern, Theory and Experience

The message, just like the poem, was addressed to no one in particular. And yet both have addresses: the message is addressed to the person who happened across the bottle in the sand; the poem is addressed 'to the reader in posterity,' to me if I find it and, in finding it, become the poem's 'destiny.'

—Mandelstam

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¹This article is dedicated to the memory of Namdeo Dhasal (1949-2014); on his 75th birth anniversary and his 10th death anniversary year in 2024; and for his singular contribution to the emergence of the Dalit Panthers and the plural reception of his literary thought across the world.

I'd given my poetry notebook
 Long ago to Kabir as a keepsake.
 But there's no Kabir in this bazaar.
 The one who stands here accosting passers-by is me.

–Dhasal

I still write poetry
 And nothing happens...

–a/nil

Talking of a poem reaching its destiny, i.e., to the unaddressed reader, Paul Celan—a Jewish poet writing in German—had described it as “a letter thrown to sea;” whereas Osip Mandelstam—a Jewish poet writing in Russian—likened the poet to “the shipwrecked sailor who throws a sealed bottle into the sea,” and the poems are messages to be picked by their “secret addressee” (“Message in a bottle,” 2004). And Namdeo Dhasal, the iconic Marathi-Dalit poet, remembers of his poems as a poetry-notebook left with Kabir—the fourteenth century poet—as a keepsake; and Kabir himself is now absent. Dhasal, thus, had to accost the passers-by in the bazaar in the absence of Kabir, likening himself to the fourteenth century poet. a/nil, aka Anilkumar Payyappily Vijayan, relating with these masters of verse in different languages from a different time and space, writes in *The Absent Color* (2023), that he still writes, and nothing happens. Absence and nothingness fill their poetic world; and for a/nil's poems, the reader—just like Celan's, Mandelstam's and Dhasal's—is not readymade, dispelling all arguments about the reader as an active agent of the author. A Dalit writer, often, is in search of an unborn reader but a writerly Dalit—a Barthesian figure—is always in search of a reading that is often absent (Barthes, 1973, p. 2); for it would be a reading against the scripting of caste.

Dalit Aesthetics and *The Absent Color*

The Absent Color, a recent publication of Navayana celebrating its twentieth year as a foremost Ambedkarite publishing house, is a collection of poems written in English that it gifted itself and the world. a/nil's verses now share space along with a few names in Navayana's published shelf: of Dhasal, Rajkumar, and Kandasamy's poetry in English (also as translation). This book, the publisher believes, would challenge “our ideas of ...what makes great poetry, and what is expected of so-called ‘Dalit poetry’” (Singh, 2023). In a sense, *The Absent Color* critically departs from recurrent themes of “suffering,” “rejection and revolt,” “narrations of experience;” and significantly, the promise of “consciousness and commitment,” which Limbale, the literary critic, had enshrined as “an aesthetic of Dalit literature” (2004, pp. 30–33). Yet a/nil, although sharing these concerns that were raised by Dalit literary critics in the past, moves away from them as well, thus signifying a creative arrival; critically departing from definitive destinations.

In a similar vein, cautioning us of presumptive analysis, Henry Louis Gates Jr., the renowned literary critic and African American scholar, writing on “the race for writing on race,” had suggested that:

We must, I believe, analyze the ways in which writing relates to race, how attitudes toward racial differences generate and structure literary texts by us and about us. We must determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. But we must also understand how certain forms of difference and the languages we employ to define those supposed differences *not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other*. Similarly, and as importantly, we must analyze the language of contemporary criticism itself, recognizing especially that hermeneutic systems are not universal, color-blind, apolitical, or neutral (1985, p. 15; italics mine).

Warning about the force of writing against fundamental signs of domination, i.e., the commodity of writing itself; the text operating as the technology of reason, Gates had argued against the immersive use of language to define supposed differences, which not only reinforce but also in vain create and maintain otherness. Raj Kumar, on the other hand, writing on Dalit literature and criticism, describes them as “creative expressions of a people who were *silent* for a long time” but who invariably inaugurate “new aesthetic values” (2019, p. vii; italics mine). Dalit is a “speaking subject” in the context of Dalit movements across the country. Dalit has the proclivity to do menial and manual work *silently* as seem fit within the caste system. When she becomes the writerly subject, who demands a reading, she becomes a force, more than a voice, against “fundamental signs of domination.” These two theoretical concerns and tensions, in a way, germinate a/*nil*’s poetry.

Carrying that rooted vein forward from Gates to Raj Kumar, I propose that, to engage with a/*nil*, one needs to purge his poems of readymade contexts, whether they are implicitly historical or explicitly political. Abounded by allusions that are impersonal, hermeneutic, and often esoteric, each of his poems may create its own context; and a context within which other poems and references could be read. Sharmistha Mohanty, writing on the cover, terms it as “a voice which has read everyone but imitates no one;” whereas Akhil Katyal describes his language as “wildly allusive, demanding and whimsical;” and for M.T. Ansari the lines are “unexpected... unruly and even uneven yet affecting all things around” (1). Albeit, a primary question may beg the readers: what can one write about a color that is *absent*; of that which is not *pre-sent*? How does one respond to a verse on it? And what if one is brought into a “mysterious” situation in which it is not easy to understand all the causes of what one reads? Poetry may become an enigma of a kind, one of a kind, and very unkind in such a situation; especially when the poem’s destiny is playfully absent, negating, and nullifying everything around. Anti-caste poetics may then demand a specific labor to undo the trivialities that are made out of the context of caste.

Purging Trivialities against a Poetic Context

If the *triviality* is over, can I move on to the question?

—Kumar to Spivak

It is, perhaps, instructive to reflect on a recent diatribe between Prof. Gayathri C Spivak, the literary scholar, and Anshul Kumar, a student, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, to understand the enigmatic labor behind reading *The Absent Color*. Ostensibly, the fracas was over Kumar’s “incorrect” pronunciation of the name “WEB DuBois”—the twentieth century radical African American intellectual—which Spivak repeatedly corrected (Lakshman, 2024). Nevertheless, the event became an intervening discussion on “Can the Subaltern Speak?”—the cult text written by the famed scholar in the late 1980s (Kumar, 2024). The student identifying himself as a Dalit later engaged in a verbal harangue against Spivak on social media, in which he used several invectives. The exchange initiated a debate in scholarly circles too, raising questions about demonstrative creativity and performative propriety on the one hand, while underscoring the experiences of humiliation and the violence of imposed speechlessness on the other. In one of the engaging discussions on the issue, poet a/nil as Anilkumar P V, prosaically comments thus:

When correct pronunciation is dictated by the Savarna, it serves as an entry token to the citadels of knowledge for people like Dalits, who inhabit the outermost ambit of the Savarna universe. The Savarnas not only close the door but also strip Dalits of their right to freely navigate a language that is unique in its spelling and pronunciation, a language notable for its fluidity. This fluidity allows for the *formation of new identities*, distinct from the languages and spaces in India that are overdetermined by casteist and feudal practices and phrases (2024; italics mine).

Paradoxically, Spivak interpreted the “speechlessness” of the subaltern only as an abject of the West, earlier, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), thereby recusing any local dominance on navigation. In comparison, however, Gramsci had defined the subaltern as those “social groups” that are economically exploited and socio-culturally dominated. But in an unapologetic deployment of Foucault, Deleuze, and a reclamation of Derrida’s theoretical premises in probing Indian women narratives as subaltern history, Spivak had given examples of Hindu law in Sanskrit—the locally dominant, caste-centered, yet self-privileging world view that castigates women and out-castes, relegating them to the outermost ambit—as the native culture of the subaltern in colonial India. This was singularly pitched against the colonizing west that is foreign, rather than that which is also within. This is, perhaps, a misdeed.

For instance, in a daring accusation Spivak had begun “Can the Subaltern Speak?” thus:

Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject. The theory of pluralized ‘subject-effects’ gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge. Although the history of Europe as Subject is narrativised by the law, political economy, and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has ‘no geo-political determinations.’ The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject. . . (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”)

If one just rephrases “the west” and the “history of Europe,” quoted in the paragraph, and reads it against the grain, while critically evaluating the writer’s power to pronounce, translate, and speak for a speechless abject in the practice and proposition of subaltern history and post colonialism, one could understand that the writer’s subjectivity to partially represent the east and the colonized is also, at once, an invested desire to conserve one’s privileged subjecthood. It illusively undermines others by providing a cover to themselves, all the while indeterminately concealing and pretending to be a critique in public. This unjust concealment not only inaugurates but also continues to impose criminal subjection that ejects every other becoming, in a nutshell.

Colonial Heritage and Caste of the Subaltern

As recuperation, however, Spivak intrigues us further with the question of “heritage,” more than three decades later, inviting us to rethink postcolonialism *personally*. Suavely titled “How the heritage of Postcolonial Studies Thinks Colonialism Today” (2021), she autobiographically remembers a Miss Charubala Dass—the principal of a school where she studied as a kid—whom Spivak fears that “we caste-Hindus treated... (her) direct ancestors...like animals” (22). This is presented as a personal story of her-self, as recuperation and reflection, being a part of the collective “we”—as “caste-Hindus;” however this is a misnomer. Perhaps, one may ask whether caste-Hindu, the Spivakian subaltern, is simply an alibi for a collective enclosure in Brahmin-hood, where a Miss Dass can never be a part of? It troubles because it embarks on a recuperative guise, in the name of a speculative recovery of subjecthood for the Brahmin, but at once, halting at an unreachable destiny for many like Miss Dass as heritage.

In this nostalgic endeavor to recover heritage, it is indeed Miss Dass’s personhood and history that goes for a miss; her subjectivity is evacuated and is made absent in the sojourn of the Spivakian subaltern as a concept. It is merely re-presented as that innocent, if not ignorant, native-subject, who is animistic and dehumanized, by the

Hindu law through its “sruti (the heard), smiriti (the remembered), sastra (learned from another), and vyavahare (the performed-in-exchange)” (1988). Thereby, it dismisses Miss Dass as a person, albeit, as the animalistic other of a sanskritized culture that is in turn subalternized by colonialism.

In this twisted long-drawn reading, “sitting on the heritage of postcolonialism,” the ancestry of the animal-like social groups—that Miss Dass’s people belong to—has to also make way for the inauguration of a new subaltern, Spivak seems to conclude. They should be the “illegal immigrant” now, an islander amongst city’s dwellers, without any heritage, who must seek to build bridges only as “social groups in the margins of history” (Gramsci quoted in Spivak, 23). Such demands are not only ignorant of caste as collective subjection, but they are also pretentious of its capability for violation. These proposals conceal the subjectivity of the casteist’s imagination of the world as an island, in isolation and at a distance. Doesn’t this thought disguise the Spivakian subaltern because it criminally subjugates and ejects every other becoming?

The diatribe that reminded Spivak of these gestural nuances as epistemic violence, albeit calling them out as “trivialities” that a language like English can bring to customary caste-power in academia, or in Spivak’s case, the power that English brings in the formation of *new identities* that can at once subjugate and eject, thereby, objectifying any subaltern—as marginal—to an enclosure. These formations illusively undermine the other yet provision a cover to oneself by coloring the world outside. This palette of colors (*varna*) has to be cut-sharp, laid-open, and display the innards of its pretensions, and nullified to witness the truth as bare existence through the work of language. *A/nil* in *The Absent Color* uses English poetry, thus, purging the excessive, illusive formation and inauguration of the casteist guise/gaze as the public critique.

Discoloration as Critique

In the repository we read countless names
Unknown to our childish knowledge.
The photograph was not there,
Nor the piercing cries.

Either faces and no face
Or faces without names.

(“The Absent Color,” 69)

To read such a verse on an absent photograph amidst faceless faces without names: would one—the reader—be asked to comparatively read, identifying analogies, to get it and make sense? Would there be a demand to this reading for which one must be prepared? Especially, when people allude, speak in parables, use different tongues, employ minimal words and frugal sentences, or just be economical. Do they demand attention to something else? What is this puzzling and riddling all about? These questions would plague any reader who enters into the world of *a/nil*. An inquisitive

clamor is heard as verse. Rightly so, Saitya Brata Das calls a/nil as “the poet of questions...whose songs are essentially cries—that cry out in the wilderness, in the desert of time, so that even inanimate objects start lamenting at once” (2023).

I cry like my earth, the rain of my mother.
Darkling hopes, everywhere, fists in chains.
And my violence and my apologies.

(“Pre Face,” 12)

a/nil’s poems read like a maze of puzzles; for instance, of “Euclidean flat/ Uncorrupted by Mafias” and of “Now neatly Riemannian/Curved, explorable manifolds” to speak of “*No Clear Demarcation*” (13) as a response to an antisemite Ezra Pound. He sings of the “Icarians flight” and of “More’s Utopia;” of a “Jew-hater” and “Metamorphosis;” and of “the Buddha and his Dhamma and Ambedkar” in “Kekule’s dream” all in a single poem as a “*Rebus*” (16)—which is a riddle, or a puzzle made up of symbols. One is then asked of a labor and a commitment to crack them to see it through. Then one may ask in retort borne by his name a/nil: how do puzzles or riddles do the act of “annihilation” in language? Would it be by riddling the reader to pose a limit to language and experience? Perhaps, *The Absent Color* enunciates such an invocation. May be, it is a poetry of discoloration against colorful difference. It is called “undo” colors--the process of negating the essence of every color. Or, probably, it is poetry about absence, of inevitability, of nothing-ness. Arresting mindless reflections that make a color what it is, by stopping, absolving, and turning it all inside, evacuating all the colors within. His poems seem to *un-color* all essential colorations. Discoloration, I propose, becomes the *in-sight* of a nil.

The spectres of bloodshed lurk in every turn of the tongue
Not pointing to things out there but in our field of vision...
... Peeled-off, poetry bleeds.

(“Of Poets and Rapists,” 22)

Indeed, a/nil states in his pre-face that he is partially insighted. Being partially blind from childhood and myopic to the colored world make his world uncolored. It is filled with “inverted memories,” which is an active inversion of sight, forgetting all memory of colors even as it un-colors all sight. It un-colors what is left “un-imagined” and “un-manageable” (11); or, in his words, it “un-dreams” in “*Mneumosyne*” (98). So many “uns” pre-fix to un-fix poetry for a/nil. His poems side-step and step-aside the conditions of poetic nostalgia for rhyme, rhythm, and romance as they become an inflected out-cry: “...unfolding and... polishing ... to have clarity...” (“*Unplannable Supplement*,” 56). They are an *unning* which “repeats the unrepeatable” as “*The Journey of the Rejected*” (62), and as a poetry of annihilation. They undo words that lessen the world of its colors, bit-by-bit, step-by-step!

An/nihilation and Writing

I am not a poet like me
 Nothing is complete for now
 Even now is in the middle
 Like a Bible without punctuation

(“I Can Only Give You This Refrain,” 34)

So, one wonders, who is this “An-nihil-er”—the poet who is not like oneself—who does this discoloration? Born in Kerala and having travelled to the North-East (Tripura in particular) as a young teacher, poetry happened to him at this dislocation, he says. All he had was a desktop with a word processor, and the CD-Rom of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (“The nothing that comes of nothing,” 2023). He returned to work in colleges across Kerala later in the 2000s and was very much alive to the post-1990s world of dis-cord and inter-net in India. Exposed to the violent complexities of the modular disengagement of caste in the southern-most tip of the sub-continent in Kerala, Anil’s “lived experiences” inherit a discolored, untouched world. Vijayakumar reviewing a/nil writes that, “those who have read Ezra Pound, Paul Celan, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, and Slavoj Zizek, and who have also journeyed through the pains and sufferings of Dalit life in Kerala may find Anil’s (a/nil’s) poems easily accessible” (2023). But that is not enough. Biography alone limits and never allows one to move on, a little closer to a/nil.

Having read Anil’s unpublished thesis titled *The Untouchability of the Unconscious* (2012)—a dabble with a two, too many “uns” there already—I can vouch that it is a tour-de-force of prosaic elegance. It read and evaluated the presence of “excessive absence,” of that which is “unseen and untouched” in cinema. Through a Lacanian engagement, it demonstrated how Dalit identity is contained and disfigured in Malayalam cinema. In the last chapter, writing on the figuration of *Ponthan Mada*, a 1994-cult film, and foregrounding the eponymous Dalit character played by Mammooty, the national award-winning actor, Anil interestingly reads the portrait of an affective relationship between an untouchable servant and *Sheema Thampuram*, the colonial landlord (played by Nasiruddin Shah), in British India. He offered a hitherto unheard or unseen comparison, of a cinematic depiction that is in conversation with Marx, Lacan, Heidegger, Zizek, Ambedkar, and the Buddha at the end. Anil “saw” something else, and “read” everything else as “nothing.” He had prepared himself as a readerly writer, a decade ago, in his own way, for this eventual encounter. These poems, however, out-run the age of his thesis; and some by more than a decade. They express and represent a distinct work of thought and experience.

As Dhasal writes of his own poems: “For what makes one speak or write is the themes that create an excruciating turmoil inside you, heighten your sensitivity, and leave you tenderly troubled. This is the sort of inner disturbance from which my poems

come” (2013, p. 112), a/nil’s too create such a writerly space. While Dhasal’s poem “*For Vincent van Gogh*” (2013: 78) had pinpointed a missing color of the sun, earlier:

Sunflowers truly are
The self-expression of your
Experience.
But, brother,
You’ve forgotten to paint
One of the colours of the sun!

Whereas a/nil paints “*The Dance of Darkness*” (2023: 40) in every flower as a smile to the sun:

Every flower
As the Japanese have correctly surmised
Is the dance of darkness
A smile to the sun
Rooted firmly in the earth
That’s how the dancer becomes ...

Influenced by major European poets and thinkers, and the Dalit intellectual writings that made one aware and awake, like Dhasal before him, a/nil’s words are exposed to the world of continental thought, world literature, discussions on art and science, which constantly weighed against a discolored existence. His poems at once verify the world of quantum physics on the one hand and versify on an unforgiving Levinas (“*Entre Nous*,” 48) on the other. Sometimes, all of them in just 4-lines on a page. They indiscriminately read yet discretely interpret to taste and judge better, and ultimately “see” through. One gets a feeling that he looks and converses to an “inside,” all laid bare, to see otherwise. Writing, or say a reading, born of this labor also demands such a labor. Thus, it educates, excites, and leaves one in a world of allusions, of pain and loss, of collusion and confusion arranged with precision and playfulness; and they “retreat into self annihilation beyond verse” (“*The Unnameable*,” 26).

The Inversive Jigsaw

In search of a dialogue
I talked to you over and over
In desperation, in delirious fever
You gave me no answers
A shadow outside language
Homeless within language, nothing.

(“Deep Past,” 31)

Allusion is a technique of inspired labor and a/nil uses it as an instrument of thought. It works as an economical means towards a calling, unto a shared world

of reading. It anchors an experience that is shared in the act of reading a colorful world. Colors must be slashed across and nulled so that a shared world of words can coappear to mark their presence with each other. This is a sharing, where Celan (en) counters Heidegger, whereas Euclides and Reimann, Pound and Kafka, Eisenstein and Tarkovsky, Oedipus and Habakkuk, Beckett and Joyce, Hegel, Marx, and Lacan, along with a host of rejected woman characters of the Judaic-centered Old Testament, exchange a word with a touching Ambedkar in conversation with the Buddha.

In bringing together this multi-figured encounter, a/nil counters the presence of any incisive “figural” excess. Neither any red that reddens every other; nor a black that blackens, or a white that whitens, any other. But Blue–*Neel(am)*—as rain drops trickle down “on mountain-top” (“*Nostalgia for the Void*,” 79); they wash it all away, *nils* everything as nothing, as “a shadow of an inverted rain” (“*The Night and Blindness of 98*,” 73) becoming a commune of discoloration. Like the blues, it is a collusion of odd singular notes. A coming together of a “singular-plural,” an idea proposed by Jean Luc-Nancy, the French philosopher, to argue that being is always “being with,” and existence is essentially co-existence. Not as a comfortable enclosure in a pre-existing bond, but as a mutual “abandonment and exposure” to each other (2000, pp. 1–100).

It is like a dissonant musical note arranged towards an indefinite void that is heard by another ear. This is the puzzle that a/nil poses...to another ear and eye. Not any puzzle but something akin to the opposite of a jigsaw puzzle through a technique of allusion in poetic thought. A jigsaw, as we all know, is a picture of playful arrangement, a puzzle on cardboard or wood. Cut up into a lot of smaller pieces of different shapes, one is invited to fit it altogether to get the whole picture. Each part in its place makes it wholistic. However, a/nil denies this party to be a part of parts in a bondage of pre-existence.

a/nil’s “insighted blindness” (11) to *varna*—color—incites a nihilation against an ordered placement of colors. They are fixations, for him, that interlock and mosaic each other as assemblage, placing the untouched and the uncolored all pieced together into a façade of a union, all reddened, black-mailed, white-washed, and saffronised. It looks as if the dis-play is all over, and completely fixed. But when one dis-colors everything, washed away in blues, a reversive play is on as “*The Exchange Sacrifice*” (2023, p. 94):

... like the vanishing mediator
Slipped into the event horizon
Disappeared just like that
Knew this before...

...Oh, they smelled of blue deep
Mother warned: they go back, always
And they did, like always...

This inverse jigsaw, a jigsaw in verse, is a cutting out by discoloration—an *un-coloring* of that which is excessively interlocked and mosaiced. It had to be unlocked

and undone, negating and annihilating every color that stands as a piece in order, for a place in *sanatan*, unshakable for eternity by itself. a/nil would part apart with a riddle just like Babasaheb, his predecessor—as the vanishing mediator.

Un-Coloring as Anti-Caste Poetics

In the end, a/nil as Anil declares the “with-outness” of others that rustle down a “nothingness” in flux, which cannot just “be” by itself, even as a book of poems parting apart (“*Without You*,” 101). So, he asks us to work along. In that, this collection—a jigsaw of discoloration—demands a distinct effort, a labor of love. It is unique as an experiment in the context of “coming out” narrations of lived experience of all kinds in English. Gopal Guru in an incisive piece that inaugurated a critical discussion on experience, thought, and the question of caste in Social Sciences, had argued for the moral conditions of reflective thought and a Dalit-need for theory as a social necessity. Vulnerable to the attraction of temporal power that does not flow from “theoretical practice” but from “more glamorous and easy spheres of mobility,” doing theory, alternatively, is “a social necessity” for Dalits, Guru underlined, which demands “enduring moral stamina for resisting the temptation for temporal gains” as well as attractions that can “de-motivate a person from pursuing the spiritual” (2002, p. 5006).

In a stance similar to Plato the Greek philosopher, Guru foregrounded that poetry cannot be a substitute for theory as many Dalits try to “compensate for theoretical deficiency by doing brilliant poetry” (2002, p. 5007). He evaluated, albeit unkindly yet judiciously, that “most poetry, including Dalit poetry, is based on aesthetics and metaphors...but it belongs to the particular though it is based on rich experience.” He suggested that, “it generates inwardness and keeps some things hidden from the public imagination,” and concluded that “poetry has no conceptual capacity to universalize the particular and particularize the universal. It does not have that dialectical power” (*ibid*).

Guru’s trial on the Dalit-settlement for experience, empiricism, and elegies seem to be answered by a/nil through a revelatory *rejection*, which is indeed a poetic “rejection of rejection” (2011). Unworking a theory of poetics, by not merely versifying theory, a/nil’s poems move from the immediate to the abstract and, unlike any other, restore a radical *subjection*. Slavoj Žižek, the philosopher who validated a/nil in the cover page, remarks that “it is not versified philosophy but a true *thinking* in the form of poems...Like a sharp razor, it cuts deep into your skin” (2023: 1). As a/nil pre-faces poetically, “The other gives you tongues where the body loses the skin” (2023, p. 11), but concludes philosophically that “without you...there would have been *nothing* here for us” (2023, p. 101). Everything *is* with you here, for us.

Guru and Sarukkai, thus, in their latest work, formulate *maitri* as a new configuration of ethical relations between different socials which “has to be both universalizable and realizable”, and cannot just be “an absolute platonic ideal”. It “has to be experienced in the everyday form of human experience,” they conclude (2019, p. 194). a/nil’s

poems have labored and demand such a labor towards a new configuration. Unlike a written word that arrests the voice behind, separating and nulling all sounds, making all thought a soundless sight that is only visible, *The Absent Color* instead invites us to reverse jig both theory and poetry, the particular and the universal, the reject and the subject by sawing everything you see in excess as nothing but null in *blues*. Neither merely compensating nor definitively Platonic, but like the indefinite article “a” in *a/nil*, like a blue drop, drop by drop, it is profoundly unspecific and indeterminate. It is truly a *nil* that *uncolors*; and it is an act of love as well as thought that *moves*; travelling across in search of the “secret addressee” so as to discolor the world of pretensions. In the end, like the “*Habiru*” (2023: 7)—the rejected other of history—*a/nil* would thus riddle against all subjections and casteist trivialities:

Rainwards
 Glides the smooth flow of the balloon of desires
 Sliced from prehistory
 Barred with words...
 ... We move
 Like *habiru*
 Or do we?

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