

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM



This symposium celebrates the life, work, and influence of the poet and teacher Agha Shahid Ali. A former Hamilton College professor, National Book Award nominee, and beloved poet of Kashmir and America, Shahid brought to our attention not only a global perspective on poetic language and

forms, but also a profound respect for poetry's importance in the world. Like the English Romantic poet Percy B. Shelley, Shahid believed that poets were the world's "unacknowledged legislators." In this regard Shahid's volume "The Country without a Post Office" stands as an exemplary volume of work in a brilliant career.

Along with an exhibition of materials from Special Collections in Burke Library and a chance to see and hear Shahid reading his poems in the Digital Humanities Center, the symposium includes a panel discussion on Shahid and Kashmir by distinguished artists and scholars.

The Beloved Witness Project would not have been possible without the generous donation of Shahid's papers and manuscripts by his brother Iqbal Agha Ali and sisters Hena Ahmad and Sameetha Agha Murphy.

The events of this symposium are dedicated to them and the memory of their brother Shahid.



Postcard from Kashmir

"Kashmir shrinks into ^{my} your mailbox,
your home a neat four by six inches.
You always loved neatness, so now hold
the ^{half} half-inch Himalayas in your hand,
the city of Srinagar a sunset blur.
~~the maples drowning their skeletons~~
~~in the Jhelum's shallow reflections.~~"

"This is home. Be sure from that distance,
this is home. And this the closest
you'll ever be to home. When you return,
the colours won't be so brilliant,
the river never so clean, so
ultramarine, And your love
never so over-exposed.

Things here are as usual--though
we always talk of you.
The snow isn't melting,
we're scared of another drought.
And we're waiting for your return,
and if God wills, some early blossoms
and, if God wills, some early blossoms
and, if God wills, some early blossoms

Waiting for you is like waiting for Spring.
We are out of focus,
a giant negative, black and white,
lies undeveloped.

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Agha Shahid Ali

THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS OF THIS SYMPOSIUM:

- The Office of the Dean of the Faculty
- Digital Humanities Initiative (DHi)
- English and Creative Writing Fund for International Writers
- Burke Library and Information Technology Services
- Asian Studies

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DIGITAL HUMANITIES
initiative

12 October
Penn State

The Beloved Witness Project:
Agha Shahid Ali and Kashmir

September 19 - 20, 2014
Hamilton College

PARTICIPANTS



PATRICIA O'NEILL

CO-DIRECTOR OF THE BELOVED WITNESS PROJECT
Professor of English at Hamilton College, she teaches literature, film and digital humanities.



HENA AHMAD

CO-DIRECTOR OF THE BELOVED WITNESS PROJECT
Professor of English at Truman State University, she teaches postcolonial studies.



IQBAL AGHA ALI

TRUSTEE OF THE AGHA SHAHID ALI LITERARY TRUST
Department Chair and Professor of Operations Management at University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



MIZRA WAHEED

JOURNALIST AND NOVELIST
His most recent novel, set in Kashmir, is *The Collaborator*.



MUSA SYEED

INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER AND WRITER
His film Valley of Saints won the Audience Award for World Cinema at Sundance 2012.



HAYLEY DUSCHINSKI

DIRECTOR OF CENTER FOR LAW, JUSTICE AND CULTURE, OHIO UNIVERSITY
Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, she has participated in multiple forums concerning law and politics in Kashmir.

EVENTS SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

- 4PM: BURKE LIBRARY
Reception for guests and Hamilton community
Special Collections Exhibition of the Agha Shahid Ali Papers presented by Christian Goodwillie
- 7PM: SCIENCE AUDITORIUM
Film showing: *Valley of Saints*.
Q &A with director Musa Syeed

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

- 10AM: DHi / CHRISTIAN JOHNSON LOBBY
Introduction to the *Beloved Witness Project* and the Digital Humanities Initiative by Janet Simons
- 1PM: BRISTOL CAMPUS CENTER, 2ND FLOOR
Panel Discussion: Shahid and Kashmir
Participants:
Patricia O'Neill, Professor of English, Hamilton College
Musa Syeed, director of *Valley of Saints*
Mizra Waheed, author of *The Collaborator*
Hena Ahmad, Professor of English, Truman State University
Haley Duschinski, Professor of Anthropology, Ohio University
- 3PM: Break
International Writers Book Sale
- 4PM: BRISTOL CAMPUS CENTER, 2ND FLOOR
Readings:
Iqbal Agha Ali, reading Agha Shahid Ali
Peter Balakian, author of *Ziggurat*
Mizra Waheed, from his new work



The Beloved Witness project is a Mellon-funded digital archive of the video-taped readings, personal documents, letters, and manuscripts of Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001). New technologies will organize, display, and allow interaction with the archive from multiple formats and devices, including materials for mobile devices. Our aim is to show how technology might be used to reveal what is unique in a poet's oeuvre and how teaching and literary scholarship in a digital environment allow a new globalized approach to poetry and culture. Ali's life and work offer an exemplary model for humanists to bear "witness" to a world of lost tribes, of political and ethnic conflicts, of the pain of exile and of the possibility for transformation and reconciliation.



The archive is a collaborative effort which will expand through contributions of letters, documents, critical perspectives and creative responses from colleagues, friends and readers of Shahid's works.

If you have any materials to contribute or if you would like more information, please contact the project directors:

Hena Ahmad (hahmad@truman.edu), or
Patricia O'Neill (poneill@hamilton.edu)

The Beloved Witness Project is part of the Digital Humanities Initiative (DHi) at Hamilton College. For more information about DHi, please visit us on the web at: [www.dhinitiative.org/about](http://asa.dhinitiative.org)

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