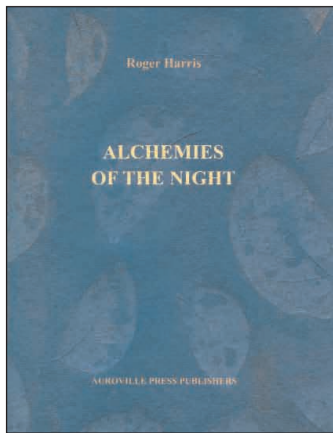


Alchemies of the Night by Roger Harris



The Auroville poems are the best known. They are high-toned, incantatory, reminding us of the larger dimensions of this dusty plateau in south India:

*This is our home
Born not of earth,
Though part of earth,
But the sky.
Of ethereal wind-swept whisperings
And a race that borders night...*

And then there are the songs of the open road. This is the edgy world of roadside night cafes, of the misfits, the marginalized and the rebels.

*Some men hit the road for love
Some men for a wrong,
And some men that lonesome highway
Is where they sing their song.*

The open road is a hard and unforgiving place. However, it is also a place of revelation, of visions not granted to those who choose the safeties of the daily round:

*And there is a song on the highway Lord
That has no human tune,
A song heard seldom but by a few
Under the cold new moon.
A song of terror a song of hope
A song of freedom dire,
That gives to those who will not tire
Lost eyes of gypsy fire.*

And then there are Roger's more intimate poems, many of which are catalysed by the memories of his beloved Sophie, who died in 1987. At first reading, the predominant feeling in these poems is one of loss and of desolation, of a melancholic lyricism:

*I'm staring at the altar
Of our last embrace
And everywhere I go
I always see your face.*

Yet even in the darkest of these poems there are hints of something else: of a way through, beyond, the darkness and grief:

*But tonight we will ride,
We will cross the great divide
We will let our dreams decide
We will let our dreams decide.*

As in the road poems, the anguish, the loss, opens the way to something else.

*As through my midnight darkness
Angel voices glide.*

In Roger's poetry, the night seems at times to be a dark night of the soul, deepening the vessel and preparing it for a spiritual dawn. But it is also the realm of mystic fire, alchemy, transformation; of Dionysian ecstasies. In his earlier poems the influence seems to be predominantly Celtic-mystical, mediated through poets like Yeats and Robert Graves. But India seemed to have deepened Roger's understanding of the mystical marriage of darkness and light, of violence and love.

*O dark and holy mother,
Who dances through Bengal,
A rapture is your presence
Compelling is your call.
Your laughter harsh and vehement
With joy cuts through our cares,
Your eyes shot with frenzy
In maddest pity stare...*



Roger signs a copy of his book for Nele at the Pavilion for Tibetan Culture.

PHOTO OLIVIER BAROT

It's dangerous to try to read too much into the ordering of the poems: not all the poems in this collection are dated, so it is impossible to ascertain the full chronology.

However, it is tempting to read the final poems as representing a new kind of poise. For example, one of the final poems, *Untitled III*, breathes an assurance, a largeness of vision wedded to psychic sweetness, which is almost Aurobindonian.

*Inheritors of love's sweetness
We shall bear the Gods' delight,
As sun-white footsteps greet us
On a verge of inner sight.*

And in *Auroville*, the final poem of the collection, the sense of longing and of loss inherent in many of the Sophie poems is now replaced by an awareness

*That when we strive to hold we break
Falling upon the barren canyon rocks,
Until, releasing all, we are one again,*

*As laughter lights our eyes
And joy does fill our breast,
As if by an unseen hand caressed
As if by some great presence blessed.*

The poet Robert Graves, a major influence upon Roger, believed that poets had a high mission: to "safeguard our poetic intuitions against the encroachments of mechanized, insensate, inhumane, abstract rationality." In this, he associated himself with an honourable tradition, stretching back via Yeats, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Blake to the seer-poets of antiquity, the 'maddened ones' to whom the gods spoke. To read Roger is to be reminded of this tradition, of those who sing the 'high notes', recalling us to the great verities – love, fate, death...and what lies beyond.

Alan Alchemies of the Night. Published by Auroville Press, 2009. Available in Auroville bookshops, Rs 110, and from Auroville.com

POPULATION STATISTICS

Population inching up

Nationality	Aug-04	Nov-05	Nov-06	Nov-07	Nov-08
INDIAN	686	736	760	799	876
FRENCH	300	261	279	290	303
GERMAN	245	226	232	226	228
ITALIAN	82	85	89	93	100
DUTCH	84	77	75	83	78
AMERICAN	62	61	65	67	70
SWISS	42	42	50	53	52
BRITISH	53	50	51	45	49
RUSSIAN	36	40	41	45	46
SPANISH	32	30	32	33	34
KOREAN	25	20	25	19	24
CANADIAN	25	23	23	24	23
ISRAELI	13	16	21	28	23
BELGIAN	24	17	19	19	18
SWEDISH	14	12	13	14	17
UKRAINIAN	17	15	16	16	16
AUSTRALIAN	13	12	12	12	12
ARGENTINIAN	9	8	7	7	7
AUSTRIAN	7	10	10	7	7
SOUTH AFRICAN	2	1	1	6	7
HUNGARIAN	4	3	3	4	6
TIBETAN	3	7	6	7	6
JAPANESE	3	4	4	4	4
NEPALI	1	1	1	3	4
SLOVENE	2	2	2	2	4
SRI LANKAN	4	4	4	4	4
BRAZILIAN	2	2	3	5	3
BELORUSSIAN	1	1	1	1	2
BULGARIAN	1	2	2	2	2
DANISH	2	3	3	3	2
ETHIOPIAN	2	2	2	2	2
ICELANDIC	0	0	1	1	2
IRISH	0	1	1	1	2
LATVIAN	2	2	2	2	2
THAI	0	0	1	2	2
ALGERIAN	1	1	1	1	1
COLOMBIAN	1	1	2	1	1
FINNISH	0	1	1	1	1
KAZAKH	1	1	1	1	1
LITHUANIAN	0	2	2	1	1
NEW ZEALANDER	2	1	1	1	1
NORWEGIAN	0	0	0	1	1
MOLDOVIAN	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	1803	1783	1865	1936	2045

Perhaps the most significant statistic is that the Auroville population is inching up to the 2200 mark. By November 1st, 2009, the numbers had reached 2184, a growth of 6.8% as compared to 5.3% a year ago.

There are now 45 nations represented, with Taiwan and China being the new entrants, while Finland is no longer represented. The largest increase, as in the previous years, has been in the Indian population: 42.

The Indians now account for 42% of Auroville's population, similar as last year.

Overview by gender

CATEGORY	Aug-04	Nov-05	Nov-06	Nov-07	Nov-08
ADULTS	1390	1370	1464	1489	1587
male	741	728	786	788	836
female	649	642	678	701	751
MINORS (< 18 years)	413	413	401	451	458
male	221	220	215	233	243
female	192	193	186	218	215
GRAND TOTAL	1803	1783	1865	1940	2045

The French and Germans remain at second and third place at 15% and 11% respectively. The population of Italian, American, Russian, Korean and Swedish nationals shows a steady increase, while the British are still not back

to their 2005 level. Most other nationalities recorded relatively unchanged figures.

The male/female ratio of 48% females to 52% males is virtually unchanged from last year. The ratio is similar for adults and minors.

PASSING

Jan Lohman

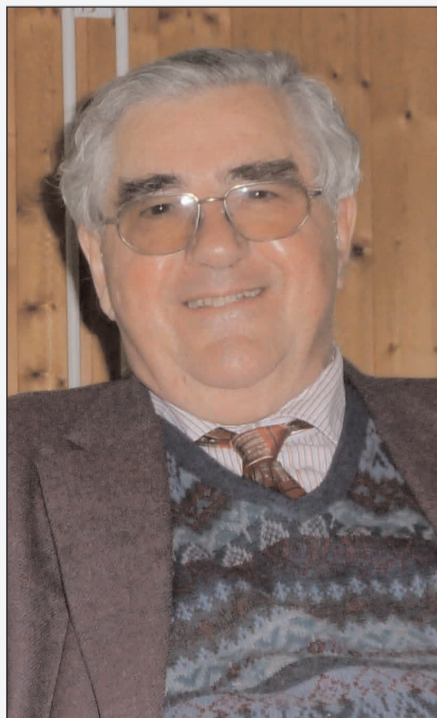


PHOTO COURTESY MAJUNA

Jan Lohman

Dutch Auroville International member Jan Lohman left his body on November 3rd. He was 81 years old. Jan was hospitalised after suffering a minor accident. Instead of agreeing to being operated, he stated that it was his time to go. He soon left his body, fully conscious, surrounded by his family.

Jan, who was a nephew of late Aurovilian Ruud Lohman, came from a strict Roman Catholic background. In his youth he joined the Benedictine order, but he soon realised that his calling was elsewhere. Through the subsequent years he painstakingly disentangled himself from the dogmas with which he had grown up and managed to come to openness required to receive Sri Aurobindo's message.

Jan was an active member of Auroville International The Netherlands for many years. He was also the board member of Stichting Aurofonds, a foundation that since the eighties has been publishing books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the Netherlands. For Auroville Today, Jan maintained the index of all published articles. He also did translations of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's works and wrote articles on aspects of Auroville, such as on the International Zone (see page 3) He was especially devoted to *Savitri*. In Auroville, which he visited yearly, he supported in particular the Matrimandir, the Unity Pavilion and Aikiyam School.

During the meeting of Auroville International in the Netherlands this year, Jan was publicly lauded and thanked for all his services to Auroville and Auroville International.

Jan left all his estate to be used for projects in Auroville.