

Ushantha O'Donnell

'A Covid Pondering'

I chanced upon an open bookstore today – amidst the furore of Covid-19 lockdown and plethora of surgical masks colouring the winds. Lots of down-cast gazes and squinting eyes poking out from behind paper shields. Sheepish stares peered at the shared sinful pleasure of being let out of mortar cages. A careful waltz of distance to rival the Viennese was being orchestrated in the aisles as rare bibliophiles sampled the fragrance amongst the tomes and savoured the titles salaciously. In truth, I was looking for a coffee this morning as my home was already a shrine – a living variation order dedicated to my adoration of the written word.

I stumbled for a second, for my waltz was less accomplished than my verb, and fell into a fortuitous eavesdrop. I wish I wasn't being cliché, but a lofty-heighted fellow wearing a dark polo-neck sweater, was engaged in a conversation with a coquettish lass in charcoal apparel. She looked up at her conversation consort. They paid no heed to my presence as their gazes were firmly fixed like the North Star, and also, I had the pleasure of the 'non-fiction' bookcase to linger behind.

I overheard him tell her that she's beautiful whilst the waltzes continued unabated in the background.

She, with a look of atheism in her russet eyes, asked him how he could possibly arrive at such a conclusion when they were both wearing masks.

"Because of the book you are reading," he concluded, gesturing to her hand. A copy of *Love in the Time of Cholera* was resting in her grasp.

And the masquerade was complete. Beauty is in the eye of the book-holder in the time of Covid-19.

I slipped away surreptitiously with a hidden grin that played plainly in my eyes as I reflected, for once, not upon the cost of Covid-19, but its value.