TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

East And West: A Plan for World Peace

East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet. – Rudyard Kipling

Shit is holy! – Allen Ginsberg

Thanks to Uncle Freud we know
How seemingly trivial things like jokes
Or a slip of the tongue
Can open a trapdoor
To the turgid depths of the Unconscious,
Its unsuspected eddies
And cross
And countercurrents.

Other little things too,
I dare say,
Are loaded with
(hidden) meaning…
Umm…take for instance
Styles of cleanliness
Which, it's said,
Is next to Godliness –
Enough to tell you
There's more to it
Than meets the eye.

Consider the ways we clean genitals or bottoms,
See how culture locks us into intractable difference.
You could sum it up in a smart soundbite:
EAST IS WASH,
WEST IS WIPE!

True,
And yet,
Like all binary oppositions,
Readily deconstructed.
The Chinese are wipers,

Kaiser Haq. 'East and West: A Plan for World Peace.'
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Their ancient forebears in fact
Invented toilet paper!
The French on the other hand
Invented the bidet –
One reason why
Anglo-Saxons consider them rather peculiar!
Ancient Romans used a stick
Attached to sponge and soaked in brine –
Something like a modern toilet cleaner.
Before toilet paper in the West
Rags, straw, leaves, what have you,
Or, as Dryden's 'MacFlecknoe' reminds us,
Remaindered books; and across
The Atlantic, the Sears Catalogue
Came in handy for a wipe.
Eskimos used snow or tundra grass,
Arabs sand and pebbles.
And the Maori, Hottentot, Amerindians and all
Our other cousins
Packed tight into this topsy-turvy planet?
Scope for serious research here
And interventions for the cause of world peace!
Let us break down silly prejudice!

A friend got into an argument with a Westerner.
'How,' said one, 'can you bear to touch
Your unclean bum with your hand?'
'And how can you,' the other came back,
'Leave a layer of shit on yours?'
Gentlemen! Gentlemen! one would feel like interjecting,
It's terrible that we don't revere
Each other's gods – let us at least
Respect each other's bottoms!
In the ways we clean up
There's variety to rejoice over – not cavil –

And even lessons in philosophy :
60% of Westerners

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Wipe back to front
And take a good look at the soiled paper
Before dropping it in the bowl –
Isn't it piquant homage
To the Socratic injunction
Know Thyself?

Let us therefore give the matter due attention,
Let us organize televised toilet festivals
Where UN ambassadors from every nation
Will discuss and demonstrate varied means
Of washing and wiping.
Let 5-star hotels
And holiday resorts
Offer a sampling of exotic toilets:
Igloo toilets dispensing snow and tundra grass,
Desert tent toilets with sand and pebbles,
Elizabethan toilets equipped with rags,
Augustan ones with first editions of Thomas Shadwell,
American ones with 19th century Sears catalogues,
Roman toilets where guests in togas
Apply a saline sponge-tipped stick,
Southasian toilets where guests in lungi or dhoti
Pour water out of lota or bodna
As they wash.

Already,
We can proudly report,
The nations have been drawing closer
To each other's toilet habits –
Every corner shop here is well-stocked
With toilet rolls,
And judging by testimony on the net
Westerners seem happy
Directing a jet of water bottomwards
From an innovative nozzle
Before they wipe –
All without encouragement

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From government or international agencies.

A little concerted effort
To further the process
And we'll have a better world by far.
And so,
Let world leaders gathering
To talk peace
Generate mutual goodwill
By cleaning each other's bottoms!
Should they still
Grumble and growl
Mahatma Gandhi from high heaven
Will pipe in:
'Stop all this hungamma!
Have an enema!'

Kaiser Haq

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