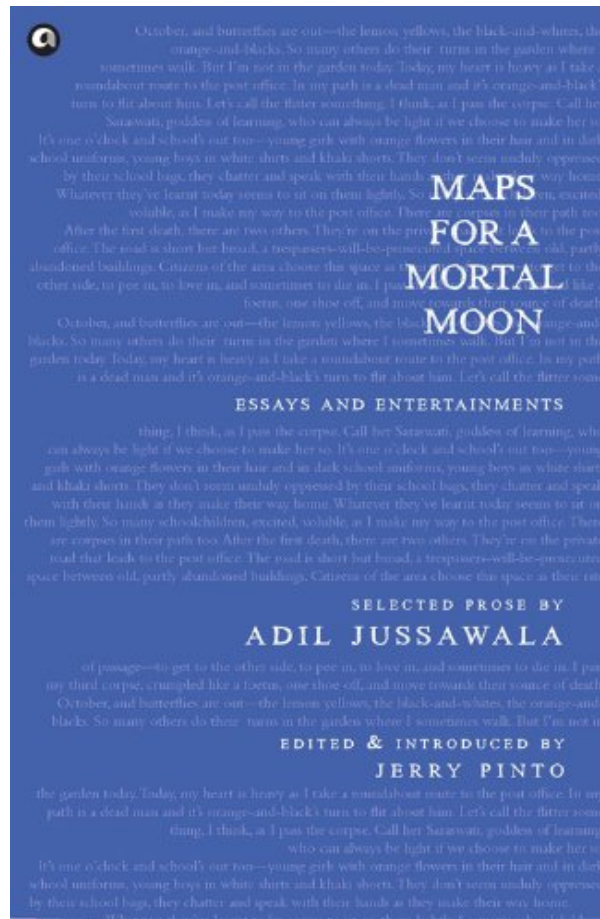


# MAPS FOR A MORTAL MOON BY ADIL JUSSAWALLA



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October, and butterflies are out—the lemon yellows, the black-and-whites, the orange-and-blacks. So many others do their turns in the garden where I sometimes walk. But I'm not in the garden today. Today, my heart is heavy as I take a roundabout route to the post office. In my path is a dead man and it's orange-and-black's turn to flit about him. Let's call the flitter something, I think, as I pass the corpse. Call her Saraswati, goddess of learning, who can always be light if we choose to make her so. It's one o'clock and school's out too—young girls with orange flowers in their hair and in dark school uniforms, young boys in white shirts and khaki shorts. They don't seem unduly oppressed by their school bags, they chatter and speak with their hands as they make their way home. Whatever they've learnt today seems to sit on them lightly. So many schoolchildren, excited, voluble, as I make my way to the post office. There are corpses in their path too. After the first death, there are two others. They're on the private road that leads to the post office. The road is short but broad, a trespassers-will-be-prosecuted space between old, partly abandoned buildings. Citizens of the area choose this space as their route to the other side, to pee in, to love in, and sometimes to die in. I pass my third corpse, crumpled like a tsetse, one shoe off, and move towards their source of death.

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### ESSAYS AND ENTERTAINMENTS

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SELECTED PROSE BY

ADIL JUSSAWALA

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EDITED & INTRODUCED BY

JERRY PINTO

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## About the Author

Adil Jussawalla has written four books of poems: *Land s End* (1962), *Missing Person* (1976), *Trying to Say Goodbye* (2012) and *The Right Kind of Dog* (2013), a book of poems for young people. Jussawalla also put together the near-legendary *New Writing in India* (1974). He lives in Mumbai.

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Welcome to the world of Adil Jussawalla, poet, columnist, critic. The essays and entertainments collected in this volume take in everything from language to poetry, from ethics to model aeroplanes, from death and addiction to travel and alienation. In these pages, you will meet poets, novelists, construction labourers, gamblers and, most startlingly, Jussawalla himself—as a boy who lost himself at the movies; as the acned adolescent on a ship watching a storm at sea; as the flaneur of South Mumbai. Poignant, witty, melancholic and intense, this is the best of four decades of prose from one of India's masters of the written word.

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The Poet Of Prose

By Vistasp Hodiwala

Page No. 91: 'Didn't you read the sign: 'Keep out. There's a mad dog on the premises and it's called suspicion.'

I have gone through *Maps For A Mortal Moon*, a compilation of essays by Adil Jussawalla (somehow it doesn't seem right to call them 'essays', so much as life-sketches), like a 'straggler', mulling over every sentence and dwelling over every punctuation.

You start reading a piece, walk smack into a line, turn it over and over in your head and wander away from the book, staring vaguely in the distance in an ephemerally suspended way; asking yourself, how does this man put down life on a page with such accuracy? You come back to the piece, having juiced the moment from that line or that phrase in sensuous search of another such moment of misty eyed lucidity, which you know isn't too far-off on that page. Or another.

And in that moment of searching and dwelling and thinking and healing, I never wanted this book to end.

We are talking about the poet of prose here. That he is a prince amongst poets is probably better known. But as an essayist too, there have been few peers in this country who can hold a candle to him. Between Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Nissim Ezekiel, Gieve Patel, Keki Daruwala, AK Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre and Vilas Sarang, there exists an entire universe of India's poetry and literature which if not exactly ignored, has never really had its due.

There aren't many people out there who have even heard of him, much less read him. Therefore, who and how many do you even discuss his life's work with?

This rousing compilation of his essays over four rich decades, a true labour of love by Jerry Pinto, is a timeless ode to a man who should be far more widely read than he has been throughout his life. Not only is this a terrible comment on the unimaginative world of India's publishing scene, but also an indictment of our own literary tastes which just hasn't done enough to recognise his genius.

For Adil's word accords a different kind of reading pleasure. It is the mysterious elation that comes out of longing, heartache, memory, poetry and 'frayed at the edges' passports. The joy of discovering the bits and pieces of the unknowable within you, the elements that make you whole without the sounding of the 'consciousness' bugle. There is life itself at play here; life in all its glorious ebbing and forgetting. What kind of serious reader would want to miss on so much joy?

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