

# The Berkshire Eagle

SPOTLIGHT

BOOK REVIEW

## BOOK REVIEW: 'Two Tales' traces forbidden love and forgotten futures

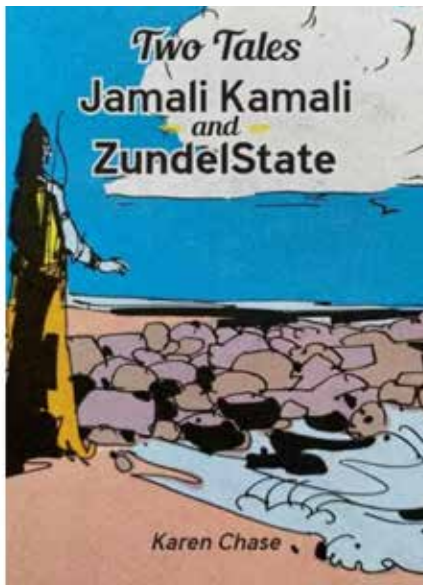
2 hrs ago



Jennifer Huberdeau  
Features Editor

What is history? And who does it belong to?

Is it fact? Or just the favored narrative of the time, that has become accepted as the truth?



Fact and fiction meet in Karen Chase's "Two Tales: Jamali Kamali and ZundelState," one a modern love story inspired by the past; the other a futuristic tale that yearns to understand our present.

### 'JAMALI KAMALI'

First published in India in 2011 as "Jamali-Kamali: A Tale of Passion in Mughal India," Chase's epic poem, now "Jamali Kamali," was inspired during a residency in India. There on a Delhi side street, she encountered the Jamali Kamali Mosque and Tomb, the final resting place of Shaikh Jamali Kamboh, a renowned 16th-century Punjabi Muslim poet and Sufi saint, known by several names, including the alias Jamali. Kamali, who is buried with Jamali, was a disciple of the poet, but his identity is unknown. In oral tradition, the pair are said to have been lovers.

Chase details in the book's forward how she was all but consumed by the need to write after visiting the tomb. Was she channeling the ancient lovers?

Processing repressed emotions? Experiencing a moment of divine inspiration?

To Chase it did not matter. She wrote and wrote, an epic poem of love, of carnal desires, of the need for secrecy poured forth. The poetry kept coming, sometimes raw and visceral; other times endearing, almost always in the voice of Jamali. In the last of the four-part poem, following the death of Jamali, we finally hear the voice of Kamali, wrapped in grief, unable to mourn how he wants to publicly; yearning for his lover to return, not in life, but in his dreams, so they can still be together. He finds peace in the fact that they shall be reunited, in death, in a tomb with "white marble graves buffed to a shine."

Chase's fiction has since become fact for some, her words being mistaken for those of the long dead poet. She once strived to correct the record, but has since learned such efforts are Sisyphean in nature. To Chase, what matters is her story of love, one that knows no boundaries of gender, of caste or of time, continues to inspire.

## **'ZUNDELSTATE'**

In her novella, Chase transports us to the bleak dystopian future of 3090, where history is outlawed, art is banished and dreams are extinct. This is ZundelState, a society in which the government controls every facet of being, where life is lived ever so publicly. There is no such thing as the self. Instead of black and white, there is brown and white. White is Elsewhere, the public state; brown is the retreat from Elsewhere, otherwise known as Home. Elsewhere is where everyone is the same, the goal of ZundelState. Home is a small reprieve from the collective. Punishment is not execution, but homelessness, banishment from tiny bit of self that remains.

Marianna and Joe are opposites, mirror images of each other. Marianna works for the state, desires to be in good standing. Joe considers himself a historian, sneaks off to the fields of trash where history lays in ruins and tatters. The past is mired in misunderstanding, misconception. Joe believes that knowledge comes from consuming books, he bites into them to learn. He licks slivers of Albert Einstein's brain, believes he's transferring knowledge. Marianna buys paints instead of meat, creates art that she sees in her sleep.

Is dreaming possible? The part of the human brain that created dreams and another that created poetry disappeared when human evolution eliminated them. But Einstein foresaw this, created a formula that passed on the ability to dream to his DNA descendants. They dreamed in silence until this couple of odd ducks, Marianna and Joe, dreamers, fell in love. Color comes into the world. And then Pavel, a stranger from 500 years before, arrives offering knowledge to Joe, sexual freedom to Marianna.

Is this a lesson for present day? A warning? Or just a place where fact and fiction come to dance inside a writer's mind?

"Two Tales: Jamali Kamali and ZundelState" by Karen Chase Published by Guernica Editions  
194 pages, \$18.95

What: Launch of "Two Tales: Jamali Kamali and ZundelState"

Who: Karen Chase

Where: The Bookstore, 11 Housatonic St., Lenox

When: 4 p.m. May 4

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