The cover features an abstract painting of a tree on the left side, with dark, expressive brushstrokes for the trunk and branches. The background is a vibrant, wavy pattern of colors including yellow, green, blue, and red, creating a sense of movement and depth. The text is overlaid on the upper right portion of the cover.

The Riveraine Muse

A HALF-YEARLY MAGAZINE
OF ART AND CULTURE

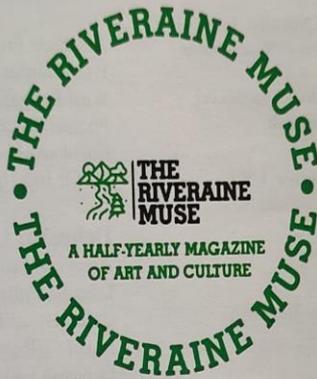
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AIMS:

THE AIMS OF THE RIVERAINE MUSE ARE TO EDUCATE, TO INSPIRE, TO AID CREATIVE, CRITICAL AND HUMANE REFLECTIONS AND TO IMBUE ALL WITH PRIDE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR SHARED CULTURAL LEGACY.

SCOPE :

THE SCOPE OF THE RIVERAINE MUSE INCLUDES LITERATURE, ART, ART HISTORY, CINEMA, CULTURAL HISTORY, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS.

Price : 200.00

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EDITOR : TAPAN KUMAR GHOSH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

MEENA ALEXANDER

Gold Horizon

BASHABI FRASER

A Lonely Race

Teesta and the Transforming Flood of 1968

SUDEEP SEN

Driftwood

Acrostic

Sigrid

Guinness

St. Lucia

BINA SARKAR ELLIAS

River

Book Is A River

Ode to Bangladesh

In Benaras

River Retreat

A River of Song

Like a river of ink

CHRYS SALT

Frog Song

AURA CHRISTI

The Trembling Utopia

The Poet

A shadow ineffably floated

Night, you stranger

Omphalos

CECILE OUMHANI

Fragments of a Creek Diary

RUI COIAS

Alexander's Travel to India

Geography

Travels

AMLANJYOTI GOSWAMI

A river collects her thoughts

Cobalt Blue

Billet-doux

GJV PRASAD

Just Reality

Go Back

Our Heritage

Our Land

NANDINI SAHU

Sisterhood

Medusa

Pulling Heart Strings

The Subliminal

VINAY SHARMA

alphabet

in the unnoticed dying of insignificant things

death and a ½

delubrum

SAIMA AFREEN

**An Interrupted Dream of a Refugee Child
Return**

DEBASISH LAHIRI

Varanasi Quartet

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

INTRODUCTION

Every interjection is a river. Every essay has a river at its heart. Being riveraine is the very condition of living. The river is both harmony and randomness, insouciance and economy. As a metaphor, or simply as an effect of the earth's version of 'proof of life', the river is sunken deep inside us: our civilization and our measure of space.

The further down-river we travel, the further up-river we find ourselves. A river is memory: memory that is a vision of the ocean, born as desire, deep inside the crevice of a mountain, that may never be an ocean. – A river flows. It flows between epistemes of its own making. A river chooses the places it flows between: its electrodes betwixt which plies the current of dreams that both know and defy death. Perspective itself is riverine. We go further and further away from the mark, only that the wake of our departure closes in on it.

Don't we see better from the interdicted bank of a river – the left bank of Lethe?

The Riveraine Muse was born not far from a river. In fact, it was born on a parallel course, though land-bound. At the time it was this peculiar ubiquity of rivers that impressed the title upon us. – At *The Riveraine Muse* we decided that our first issue should actually address the fact that we are all trying, to either flow into, or flow out of rivers. History, Art, and daily life stand, sometimes knee-deep, sometimes up to their necks, in the tidal backwater of a millennium of rivers. We wanted our offerings to be as close to this theme as possible.

It was one of the earliest decisions of the editorial board to have an exclusive poetry issue as the inception of our magazine. – We began with the intent to curate: perennially, an editorial flaw. We believed in the cartographer's lie. We believed in the legend of rivers on a map, supine and in-place. We were gullible to its suggestion of peace as control. The destinies of rivers are as inescapable and final as our own, we thought. As we read the flow of contributions from all over the world we woke to a new reality. We realized the outlawry of water and ideas, the fresh banks they could break or make.

The connection between poetry and rivers, tidal rivers, stood out for me. The venous careering of articulation and the shared cache of ideas to the ends of the earth, balanced, by the arterial infusion of inspiration via allusion and the imagination. Poetry is hard to police, to manipulate. Rivers were difficult to control too, once upon a time. Although we have built dams and bridges for the corralling of rivers, their insouciant spirit throbs in every undulation of every wave and slap of water on bank or prow. The attempts to sanitize are also afoot, have even for ages. But, happily with very scant success.

The socio-political bind of the novel, to which has been added the commercial imperative of the publishing world, is defied by poetry. The sheer range of poetry that we present to you in this issue – voices of power, insight and beauty -- that course transversally over space and time should be a fillip to your intellect and an upliftment of the spirit. Distinguished poets from the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Romania, Portugal, and of course India, feature in this offering from *The Riveraine Muse*.

Poetry compels hope. Even in the unforgiving darkness of the Minotaur's lair, mere imagination of Ariadne's hair can build a shaft of sunlight to pierce the labyrinth. Do keep hoping and reading!

DEBASISH LAHIRI
POETRY EDITOR

MEENA ALEXANDER

Gold Horizon

I.

She waited where the river ran that summer as the floods began — stones sinking,
fireflies murmuring in paddy fields,

herons on stumps of tree the axe planted where little else would work and everywhere the mess of water.

So you have entered a new world. her voice was low, growling even. There was nothing humble in her voice.

Sometimes the dead behave in that know-all-way, ploughing the ruts of disaster, their unease part of our very pith, what the axe discovers marrow and meat to us.

So what's it like there? she asked.

I replied: As the Hudson pours the river wall clings with glinting stones. Yet what's so bright makes for odd imaginings.

Sometimes I feel as if a metal bowl had split, dented by blows from a woman's fist and bits of spelling lessons,

shards of script struck from a past locked into privacy

(this is the immigrant's fury, no, who understands my speech, further what is my speech?) dropped, pounding as rice grains might.

You think that bowl's your head your words a crypt! Look at your feet! How can you stand addressing me?

I heard her laughing bitterly. What's with you? I shot back What's with the dead, sheer jealousy?

Her fingers waved a whitened scrap, paper or cloth I could not tell.

She held it out to me: Take! Eat!

I saw the sari that bound her dropping free, feet cut at the ankles, severed from calves and thighs, slicked with red earth.

Water poured in short streams over her mutilated parts.

She stood, shored by a single elbow against a mango branch.

II.

Place names splinter on my tongue and flee:

Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozhencheri, Khartoum, Nottingham, New Delhi, Hyderabad, New York, the piece work of sanity —

stitching them into a single coruscating geography

(a long drawn breath in an infant's dream might work) ruined by black water in a paddy field.

We wrestle on wet ground, she and I, living and dead, stripped to our skins, naked, shining free in

the gold of a torn horizon.

Our thrashing is not nice. Her ankle stumps shove against my eyes.

Words bolt, syllables rasp — an altered script, theatre of memory I could never have wished.

Breathless I search for a scene, a mile of city blocks, iron bridges scraping short hills,
asphalt pierced with neon
plots, the rage of sense:
Bodegas in the Barrio, Billy's topless bar, Vineeta's Video Store crammed with cartons of
Nutan and Madhuri
— 'Kya, kya hum kon hai? Idher hum kon hai' 'Namal ivide ara? Ivide namal ara?' —
The mixed up speech of newness, flashing as a kite might, pale paper on a mango
branch.

III.

She waited where the river ran, that summer as the floods began.
Is this mere repetition, or the warm sprawl of time, inscribed in limestone?
Who can cry back into a first world a barefoot child on a mud forking path, fields gold
with monsoon water,
haunt of the snail and dragonfly?
What makes the narrative whole?
Beneath my cheek I feel her belly's bowl thick with blood, the woman who waits for
me.
Are these her lips or mine? Whose tongue is this melting to the quick of migrancy?
I touch raw bones, the skull's precise asymmetry.
As rivers north and rivers south soar into tongues of mist parting all our ribs
I hear voices of children whisper from red hills:
An angel, you have caught an angel!

(From *Illiterate Heart* (Tri-Quarterly Books/ Northwestern University Press, 2002) c.
Meena Alexander, 2002, all rights reserved.)

BASHABI FRASER

A lonely Race

A river's journey is long and lonely
Like the veteran long distance runner
A challenge from start to finish
An adventure at every ripple of my flow
I have no consort or companion
No mother's arms, no sibling's rivalry -
I am a witness through time
I revel in reminiscence and reflection
I mirror heaven's fury and kindness
I salute panoramic vistas
I lash past every urban sprawl
And lap around humble villages.

I am a solitary meanderer
Journeying to my finishing line
Which does not make me a champion
But swallows my singular identity
In a churning burial ground of eternal oblivion.

(Edinburgh, September 2016)

Teesta and the Transforming Flood of 1968

Where the Kanchenjanga lifts its
Proud peak, opening its ample arms
Wide to capture the majestic stride
Of the sun from the moment it disarms
The horizon, you churn out from the glacial
Chain that reflects the splendour of the range
Which becomes your impetus to court danger
As you break free to fulfil your destiny.

I have stood at the edge of Teesta Bazaar
Balancing my cup of cha, warily watching
Your seething green waters below,
As you warred with the Himalayan rocks, matching
Their resistance with your own.
I have leaned over Coronation Bridge
To send a wishing pebble down
To dive into your cavernous breach
And heard its whimpering refrain.
You were my girlhood river Teesta,
By whose echoing gorge at Sevoke
I have picnicked, where the vistas
Of ranges were witnesses to a bond forged
With youthful awe, that would soon be revoked.

I grew up along your strenuous length
Revelling in your heaving depths and strength
From the ruminating peace of Kalimpong's perch -
Before you leapt with intent and lurched
Towards Moinaguri and Jalpaiguri,
Those thriving towns where life's pace
Had known the grace of generous days.
But you had not a mother's dreams
To nurture, cherish and sustain.
The Rangpo, Lachung and Rangeet bring
Rich tributes to your widening plains
They fuel your ambitious zeal
That flouts all prayers and appeals.

I have seen how in one memorable year
You moved the heavens to tears
The retreating Monsoons were strained back
Pulled by their hair to feed your banks
The sky was afraid to clear for days
The incessant rain shared heaven's pain.
Your appetite could not be quenched

Till you had mercilessly drenched
The land over which you thrashed with glee
In destructive, vicious ecstasy.
While cities slept, your waters crept
Through prosperous streets
Whose dignity you sought to break.
Before your waters could retreat
You urged the placid Karala
To join your dance of dolour.

But the folks of gracious towns
In Moinaguri and Jalpaiguri
Were not willing to be drowned
And bow to you in defeat.
They swung back with alacrity
To contain you with gravity
And let your fearful beauty
Turn from awesome splendour
Transforming your ingenuity
To confirm your sanctity -
In your life-affirming qualities
Of compassion and candour
That today call forth
Our admiration and wonder.

SUDEEP SEN

DEREK WALCOTT QUINTET

(R.I.P. | January 23, 1930 – March 17, 2017)

DRIFTWOOD

Castries, St Lucia

At the end of this sentence, rain will begin.

— D.W., 'Archipelagos', Map of the New World

1.

Part of the bannister-railing is absent
in spite of its strong metal-rivet moorings.

Termite-eaten, consumed by the sea,
I can see its woody skeleton float faraway

among the surf, its salt-scarred coat
tossing and struggling to keep afloat

against the waves' incessant lashing.
There is music in its disappearance —

a buoyant symphony,
note-strokes resurrecting life,

a new story — history restored
by resilient fingers of a master artist.

Wheelchair and weak legs
are inconsequential impediments —

his mind sparking with electric edge,
whiplash wit at its most acerbic.

There is generosity for family, friends —
those who are gone, and remain —

and thirty new poems,
an intricate magic of ekphrastic love.

2.

In the front garden facing the same sea
with Pigeon Island on the horizon's left,

lies a cluster of wind-eroded oval rocks —
their shapes mimic a lost egret's nest

or a ballerina's curved arch —
a stone-memorial for a close friend.

3.

The driftwood is now out of sight —
part of his house donated to the sea —

in gratitude the sea sings
a raucous song,

folded cumulonimbus echo
in synchronicity — a soundscape

absorbing his commandment:
At the end of this sentence, rain will begin.

* * *

ACROSTIC

Deep seas of yesteryears wash new froth on your home shores.
Egrets, sea gulls, circle the ruddy skies waiting for perfect thermals to
Rise — ripe air-currents — wingspans larger than civilizational memory.
East tries to meet West, North tries to meet South, Poles magnetize in a
Kaleidoscopic churning — saturating the sea-sky's azure, a brighter blue.

What is it with an Antillean story that makes 'the other' so pale,
And its art so grand, epic — under the Caribbean's sharp, lucent light?
Lot remains to be unearthed, much remains unspoken, unwritten —
Cotyledons unraveling without nature's aid or human touch.
Om mani pad me hum — O the jewel in the lotus — that Himalayan echo,
That primal sound — chant from a mother's womb, a uterus scream —
That life-force balancing points — trying to find an elusive fulcrum.

* * *

SIGRID

A froth-laden sea sloshes and laps the Castries cove
at the craggy foot of Derek's St Lucian home.

The peaks of Pigeon Island stand
looming in the distance, as shadowy lighthouses —
their rays guiding Sigrid, as she walks
from room to room in search of her companion.

The wind-swept curtains wait in the wings,
and linen sofas are stretched off-white,
as is the easel's canvas, with its unfinished painting.
The bungalow's wooden frame and furniture
fights the sea's deep blue brine — the salt's corrosive
consummation — a rift between wood and water.

I remember DW in shorts, sky-coloured T-shirt
and a wide-brimmed hat, sitting on the porch
revising his handwritten poems slowly, one by one —
Sigrid coming out to check on him with a kiss —
with iced-lemonade or a snack, medicines perhaps,
or a cordless phone with conversations-on-hold.

Inside, books on the walls, tables and elsewhere
flip their pages open in silence —
a prayer for a fine weather-worn man,
an inevitable conclusion of a Homeric epic, echoing
his words, "in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History."

* * *

GUINNESS

(for Derek Walcott)

The 'dark sleep' beer seeps in
gently into the mind's crevice,
dulling the nerves, sparking

a lightness in the blood-stream
that quickens the corpuscle-flow.
The head gathers froth, cream

simmers in chilling
particles, swirling in gentle loops
as it descends to the cunning

bottom of the glass' wide curve
and transparency. Here,
deep in its belly, it curls,

threatens to roar, the flow
of an unknown sound, incipient
rumblings of a liquid volcano.

* * *

ST. LUCIA

Tropical, fecund —
colours refract

marrying
black to brown —

our skin-tone
grace notes.

Words knit
brotherhood,

camaraderie,
art, poetry —

nothing else
mattered more.

* * *

BINA SARKAR ELLIAS

A RIVER

a river
once ran

through
my girlhood

bearing boats,
and fish,

and laughing
broods

of naked
children

browned by
365 suns~

days of
innocence

unsullied
as its water.

today
the river

has met
the ocean,

its pure
white foam

bears
treasures

of lost
islands,

fruit of
the womb,

and shoals
of kinship.

the river
now is ocean,

the ocean
is sky,

the sky
my skin~

a nimbus
of light.

*

A BOOK IS A RIVER

a book is a river; a voyage into the unknown on a paper boat. a book is a harbour where boats meet, bearing parables and thoughts. a book is a searchlight illuminating thoughts rooted in a forest. a book is a forest, its leaves dense with words; its words are flames kindling our senses. a book is the sum of all our senses that flow like a river. a book is a river of words that encircles the universe. a book is the universe of life; a book is life that un-skeins a constellation of experiences — a book is an experience of living and seeing and telling. a book is a river.

*

ODE TO BANGLADESH

rivers run
into rivers
from Ganga
the Padma is borne
your people
are our people
even if lines
are drawn.
your music
is our music
we speak
the same tongue
our fish swim
in your waters
our hearts are
together strung.
our soil
may be divided
by battles lost
and won
our arteries
like our rivers
will forever flow

as one.

*

IN BENARAS

in Benaras
walls have stories~
the river is a book.

*

RIVER RETREAT

the river shrank
in despair
of the waning rain.
consort through
a blue moon of
lush memories~
now inconsistent,
a vagabond lover.
in the vapid afternoon
of unforgiving light
the river dreams
how once the rain
fell with sweet longing
how once
its liquid touch
kept fish fertile
dragonflies singing
and birds content.
palm trees at the
edge of life, saluted
their romance.

the epic passion
of river and rain
is now desultory.
a smudge of water
waiting for its
fugitive lover
waiting for
unseasonal rain
to wash the drought
from its eyes.

River Retreat, Cheruthuruthy
March 20, 2013

*

A RIVER OF SONG
(for Pete Seeger)

along the fragile
map of earth
flows a river of song;
your songs~
a sacred river
seeking a history
of lost flowers.
a river of song
wending into
the deep ocean
of compassion.

a river of words,
your words~
weave beside the
dark banks
of bigotry,
washing souls
of the besieged
and persecuted.

your clear-eyed
hope, hammers
its rhythm
on waters muddied
by the greed
of man, where
little boxes
of mediocre minds
float like shallow
bubbles.

a river of love~
your love
bathes the debris
of humanity
with your songs~
your songs

that will echo forever.

CHRYS SALT

Frog Songs

Frog Song 1

I was exhausted, desperate,

flailing at rock fall, clay slide, no escape,
no purchase on the slimy side.

Then, scooped from mud and grit,

I saw my crouched green watchfulness
as from afar, cupped in the furnace of strange hands,
my tongue protruded ready to touch his.

Then oh, release! A flight through light and air,
free fall, bright swill and cool anointing balm,
weed stroke in bubble dappled deeps,
my silk smooth element
washing the frantic moment clean.

He only hears me croak.

Would that his ear might catch
the nuances.

He did not hear me offer him my skin,
but stood for several moments on the bank
a mirrored shadow, gazing down
too big and strong he seemed for gentleness,
and then, content to see me dive,
grew small and disappeared into the trees.

Frog Song 2

He knew my glittering eyes from dreams ago.
I stayed with him.

His wound's bright mouth was closing
where I licked.
Nested in swansdown, silk thread,
coloured beads,
sang Frog Song on his bed,
how Frog was born of the last snowflakes,
how being small became a mountain,
how he 'would live life like a story'
when the wound was clean,
from mouth to mouth
to poems,
The Tale of Skookum's Dream.

Frog Song 3

When Raven stole the sun,

and day was made,
mine was the gift of Elements
to pass from land to water,
enter dreams,
sing frog song in the ears of men.

I shine, I shimmer as in dreams I can,
I slip inside him, stealthy as a knife,
lay sweetmeats at his door,
lead him in Woman Shape
through gilded rooms,
with glistering furniture.

Show him a window pointing north,
a twisty trail, a mountain sliced to stairs,
arrows of water leaping red ravines,
uncharted ways, to salmon runs.

Set him by Hammer Water's child,
chit- chattering with rock in chuckling sun.

Give him a gold tipped walking stick,
bear meat, a pick, a cooking pan.

Show him in weedy deeps,
the seam he'll find
beneath dark wings of overhanging pine.

Note: It is said that Skookum Jim Mason, a Tlingit Indian had three dreams which led to the first discovery of gold in the Yukon and started the stampede that was later known as the Klondike Gold Rush. These dreams were passed on in First Nation oral tradition and informed these poems. From Skookum Jim and the Klondike Gold Rush (Indigo Dreams Publishing 2020).

AURA CHRISTI

The Trembling Utopia

I believe. I confess. With fear and trembling I ask:
My Father, Who Art in Heaven,
who am I, to wrench from You my daily power,
to hear the love-laden discourses
of the void, of nothingness?
Who am I to gaze around with a thousand eyes at once,
Awaiting the heralds of mistakes, wrongdoings, Babels
Come to the heavens and unto the all-forgetting grounds?
What am I? From which kingdom have You brought me here?
What am I doing here?
And why am I savouring the taste of darkness,
of cold, of suffering, of sleeplessness, of death? –
a wounded, reasoning beast, growing as years go by,
into a shattered miracle, a utopia, free from trembling,
trembling into fear again...

The Poet

He knew which of them were equal
with the uncanny fact of their birth,
although they only saw in him a sleep-walker,
at other times – an occurrence at dusk,
a hesitant peak of the fears of the night.
Nothing more.

They spoke of him every day
as of a Great Intruder
arrived by chance to the memorable banquet
of the human – oho – of the far too human.
And they would forget him almost every day,
for if they didn't – they would be dead.

They knew him from readings in their teens.
He was exactly like back then, like in the books:
an insignificant, good, beardless child,
unusually lively, who – for some reason which
nobody knew – got round them, thus getting round life.
To him the unwritten poems were the mountain, the water,
the elephant, the trees, dawn watched by a stag.
And something else, invisible, impossible to deny.

They saw in him the child. Yes. That silly child.
Ignoring the god cradling somewhere in his tiny body,
through whom he contemplated the world, equal to his own birth.
They were alive only when uttering him.
They earned their living out of speaking of him.
Then, precipitated, they hid from themselves
into forgetfulness, sleep, fear...
He knew which of them were equal
with the uncanny fact of their birth.
After them, the few ones, he was running, running...
Of the traces he left, even now
other poems erupt, leaving the bark blazer of greatness
on trees, graves, the stag's eye, in clay.
Who, Domine, would have believed?!
Such giant beginning!
Such beginning...

A shadow ineffably floated

Like a musical typhoon
in the desert of glass
she was coming, oh, coming
into my chained peace.

How beautiful she was!
The god, crouching like a mouse
in my heart,
was waiting for her, minute by minute...

My awaiting,
wearing the body of the muse
Calliope,
with knees up to its mouth, was waiting for her...

At the zenith of delirium
of tin,
like a steam rather than a creature
would she pass me by.

A prisoner in the always
indomitable light
of my hardly unleashed
royal expectation,

a shadow of a ray,
of an angel, of a girl,
ineffably floating
on my face
of an eternal stranger,
of an eternal object of dreams.

Night, you stranger!

Here comes the promised evening: straight, thin, tall.
The hour draws near: ever heavier on my shoulders.
Here comes terror – a sigh of the gods, maybe.
You lie down in the grass – a strange homeland –
and start slowly counting in your mind that smoulders.

No one. Just a rustle, a groan or the heavy
tread of who knows whom, close by...
As though someone made of steam were carrying
the blue vessel of the sky towards enlightened Apollo,
careful to keep it on the balance of his head.

A spell suffuses everything with its poisonous vapour.
Ecstatic gods are hording from trees – into the spirit nigh.
In the untarnished peace that scrapes the dust,
my night, you stranger, sister ever since,
come, that I restore you from blood, as sky.

Omphalos

I

Isthm of light and nerves,
indecorously unveiled among cypresses,
among live phantoms of gods
and the shadows of Apollo's dolphins:
silent, childish.
Sculptured from the magma of the vault,
Somehow lost,
Its face towards the nature of things
that throb in the centre of the world:
O, Delphi! Delphi! Delphi –
land crumbled in from myth!

Men, women, children,
passing nearby,
watch mouth agape, whisper...
Then –with an undefined smile –
proud and ashamed, they touch you,
hesitate, then touch you again and again.

I stand my place. Some time
that moment will come, I say. Then draw near.
I'm a footstep away, a breath away.
And I'm trembling. Trembling. Trembling.
I start counting in my thought.
And don't put out my hand
towards the feverish sphere,
half sunk in the clay
or in another kind of light –
isthm, lost and firm,
standing face to face
with something one ought not to see.
Breathless, I stand motionless.
I sleep a strange sleep within –
what a clumsy messenger
the other century is sending!

II

Tired, too tired to be touched
by people's hands,
by the half-closed eyes of the stones,
by the planets rotating
round nobody's spindle of air,
like serpents drawing circles
on a rock that smells of the end.

Tired, yes, tired to be licked by cats and dogs,
by the hungry fingers of people,
by the dark light of stars,
by the shadows of columns cornered by the moon,
by the Parnassian walls leaning in the clouds
that feed on its patience
of lead, of millennia.

There he is, , coiled unto himself.
simulating temperance, the way the sun
mocks its route, perceived,
second by second as a gift.
The silences that nestle in the marble
or in walls have taught him immobility,
and standing in a place made him learn contemplation.
O, saintly contemplation, giving out
bitterness and bliss!

Completely sick and tired
of the exclamations uttered
in all the languages of the world,
he stands there: motionless, proud,
equally careless and lost.
Omphalos, Omphalos –
Planet the size of a god's nail,
the size of the tip of the spear
handled by the beautiful Artemis,
the size of the ring of Apollo's mother,
the one chased – out of Hera's command –
by Python.

Yes. He stays and stays up there,
among the shameless cypresses,
tracing in his thought the path of the olive-tree serpents
that have feasted overfull
on the memory of the huge reptile.
Meanwhile, golden centuries have passed,
millennia, wars, legendary friendships,
alliances among angels and gods,
betrayal, cowardice, love,
floods, scorching heat...
And he is the same and yet someone else,
second by second
and this – all the time! –
waiting for the words
of a language only spoken
in the mouth of the one who...
In the mouth of the one who...

III

He has never, but absolutely never slept,
for fear of waking up in somebody else is alien to him.
And even if he fell asleep, he'd wake up crammed
in the fear of being touched by birds,
by the shadows of trees, by lost clouds, by people.
Wherever he turns, things
remember themselves,
the shape they were set in.
His terror rotates planets high up.
In its sleep we cuddle, waking
in the shell of our own forgotten body,
which we keep remembering till we become
- some of us – mounds of bones,
others – small piles of words.
Then somebody tells us we have passed
through something that resembled.
painfully little, life.

He stays awake for us all,
for he knows in case he fell asleep,
he wouldn't hear that word which
- oho! – could save us,
not him, since he doesn't need
to be saved and probably us either!!
Who should know the real reason
of his endless wakefulness?
Who can hear his songs
of lonely, stony giant?
It's impossible that he shouldn't sing;
And this, almost all the time!

If he, Omphalos, stopped singing,
we'd simply die,
all of us, in an instant.
The absence of song means death.
His silences reveal us to ourselves,
forcing us into being, between eden and hell.

IV

Let us turn to our great patron god, Apollo!
Let us pull ourselves away from the divine rock's vicinity.
Otherwise, we'll start little by little spoiling
its perfection that breeds seeds into the trees,
columns, rhododendrons, felines.

First of all, we'll invent a mouth for it.
Otherwise, how should we allow it to sing
with its mouth closed? Then, ah,

we'll set other limits on it, and – first of all – a body,
woe, like so many others, just fit to be laid in a grave!

Ah, and then... Smell would prevent it
from being itself, to grow out of fear
and make us be born alike
out of fear's womb!
And its hands would make us take it for
a tree or a column,
a plant or a slow feline.
In its eyes the female vulture would nestle,
olive trees would quickly throw their seeds,
obstructing its godly sight.
Its feet would take it to the rusty spindle
of planets.
And...

“No and no!!” shout at the top of their voices
The Lares of moss of the stones. Let's delay its end.
Yes. It's nothing but a rock, a kind of sphere,
of which only half can be seen!!
That is less than we wanted.
It's not even good to eat. Besides,
through this grey stone
nothing, absolutely nothing can be seen!
So let's leave the stone alone.
Let's go to Apollo as fast as we can.
Let's go to the patron of light and arts.

Or – even better – let's push Antiquity
ahead, in the future, somewhere far away!!
Let's imagine that everything is but a game.
Yes, nothing more than a game or a myth
found in a forgotten book, with mouldy covers,
– written by a hierarchy of outdated Lares –
out of which nobody understands anything
nor could he see the way in which Omphalos
shows us how much eternity is hiding in us.

V

Omphalos, sublime stone, lost among temples!
Only touched by a gaze,
where you found for an instant your rest,
and returned – beast or bitten ghost – into nature.

Nothing has crushed you, destroyed you, touched you,
but, perhaps, it was long ago and we will not find out.
Stand lonely and straight, you endless one.
You're trembling and crying, waiting in your language.

You're coiled up in yourself.
Maybe you were carved from a god's ray
and someone forgot in you his trunk,
catching his breath in my soul.
Or maybe you hid in a sphere's dream
and left with us here only your shadow of stone.
Omphalos, star mourning, knot of mysteries,
heretical pollen, fragment of egolatric magma!!

(Translated from the original Romanian by Cristina Tătaru & Maria-Ana Tupan)

CÉCILE OUMHANI

Fragments of a Creek-Diary

I

In the garden below
a creek runs deep into the woods
further than daylight can reach
the earth smells of moss and ferns
centuries linger among somber trees
water's endless murmur fills the air
ripples into quiet thoughts
with unheard tales from the past
proud tribes sharing memories
of harmony with nature
and long-silenced grief
unchanging echoes of lost voices
what ink could inscribe their words?

II

Summer rain on the window blurs the morning view
a meadowlark is poised
slight and tiny
on the wooden fence below
jet-black eye searching the grass
it flies off to the creek bank
stops dead by a brown shape
lying on a flat grey stone
wings spread wide open
it hops around the body
helplessly pecks at its feathers
two or three times
do birds grieve as humans do?
has it seen the black vultures
steel-like figures up in the sky?
the creek murmurs on
unperturbed

III

Noon soon comes in the garden next-door
piano notes float high among the trees
with deep bass beating out to a clear sky
weary hydrangeas droop on the lawn
the voice of the creek recedes
covered by a plaintive saxophone
tales of sorrow held at bay
memories ignored and obliterated
long-gone dreamers' visions shattered
on the boulders of rumbling waters
a dark window on a white wall
facing a drawn blind on the next house
tyres screech along the curb
as lives unfold side by side
forever kept apart
by too many unspoken words
humid night rustling with life
soon comes down the street
the creek shines
silvery line stretching below the moon
deep into the woodland
along slopes that never meet

Bangall, New York, 2018

(Translated from the French by the author.)

RUI COIAS

ALEXANDER'S TRAVEL TO INDIA

You wandered an interminable life across the earth,
suffered exile, piteous jealousy, futile faith,
labour-arrested lovers plundering your beloved's face.
You saw traces of having been no one's shadow,
impudent eyes, the reflection of iron on the rampage,
hints of Alexander's puerile dominance, contemplating Gaugamela.
You set off from a transient port towards the Levant,
leaving emptiness behind, seeing all of time,
and in the first Winter, by the cardinals of its ashes,
you started the endless crossing, the incessant history.
You knew, because the pine tree of youth can be glimpsed through tears,
of the shattered name in a cloudy mood measured without ropes,
and of the favourable sea breeze in the second Winter.
In exchange you pursued that which rules the fortuitous man,
whispering in marble palaces that are but stones,
failures to which no one had ever knelt.
By the third Winter you discovered the hemisphere, and by the fourth,
non intent on war or order to change the kingdom,
you chose to adorn aqueducts with the mantle of streams,
sitting by the pool breeze, in the evening's lingering fever.
Whomever you approached, in their indefinite path,
without a place except that which fades inside a patchy mind,
in that which branches out and becomes the very web,
has spread with you the duty to pass through everywhere.
And by the fifth Winter, and the sixth, you stitched up the blood,
brought the skin on to the river bends, welcomed that which falls apart,
and were at last capable, with the belief of a stealthy migrant, of understanding
that all is lost yet in another place, and after this in yet another
and that by the end of each morning in another morning
all is uncertain, just like a dandelion in a field of wheat,
as muted as the exhausted vein of the unburied.
In the attic where night and day roam
the wind replies, cutting the chalk and the rye, and the candle,
shimmering in the light of the veiled stars already gone,

trodden, voiceless, swallowed up by the seventh Winter,
spears the heart and the ruin — the meridians undress, fly away
in twenty five years that were just kissing yesterday, and be it told or untold
the pleasure that brings a peak of torment, inflicted
by lips that only women know
in the turmoil of Varanasi's death waters,
tests the flame of the merit, endurance and song of
the beginning and the end of your power on earth.

(Translated from the Portuguese by Ana Hudson)

GEOGRAPHY

Nothing exists that hasn't had a beginning.
Even in the distance, a clear lit speck,
in territories stripped from all limits, on
sands that flow from unknown seas,
we only contemplate the extent of what we perceived.
If fields in livonia lead to fields in masuria,
if tiles are smoothed in tepid bath waters,
and further on graveyard follows graveyard, and
in their midst, in the roughness of silesia, the birch wood stands;
if the sun is the flame of the olive oil crumbling the bread
or the chipped lightening on the walls of helsingør;
if the death plot is everywhere the same,
be it in leuk's blind skull or in the tallinn concertina,
in the meek pine cones, on the bare ended roads,
it is because we modulate in one place what has seeped from another.
Even unwillingly, or perhaps it's the shadows on the move,
even in what divides our steps on the corn fields,
in a dispirited town, in the emptiness of erasure,
we weave no more than the line that joins the curve
whose fine foliage comes to be buried under our feet.
Even if laboriously minutia we detach the places,
detailing their diversions and extremes,
the similarity between what they are and what we thought they were;
even throughout regions intersected by extensive trains,
where night will fall in scales of lavender,
we'll follow the same story, the dragging of the same ground,
the slope under the same wind and the same successive twilight,
the same darkened hollow life of every single place.
In that which repeatedly sucks us in,
as we yearn for whatever comes to pass further in the next cove
smoothing with our hands the oak trees on whose bark we inscribe,
like others before us, our sinuous names, our loves,
we constantly return to the point where all is repeated and begun,
of which we grasp a mere minute — an instant,
the blade mediating between this year and the next.

(Translated from the Portuguese by Ana Hudson)

TRAVELS

He said
traveling is being able to depart for the place
up ahead,
each place impressing us only because it suggests
the next one that will come into view.
And in the end, when we let go of everything
and hear nothing but the bells' tolling,
the landscapes cease to exist, being no more
than our breathing set free.
"What impels us is our being able to bury
the body in another place;
since everywhere we've been we left our body
within sight of the place just beyond."
I understood that, without showing any fear,
he'd discovered the world's transparency,
he'd been helped by the hovering
faces of travelers.
And I remembered how time teaches us,
from early youth to old age,
to allow a pause in our eyes whenever beauty overwhelms,
a pause in our hands and eyes which are what tell us
the small part of us that always remains.

(Translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith)

AMLANJYOTI GOSWAMI

Cobalt Blue (13 ½ ways of looking)

1. **Definition:** Cobalt Blue is a greenish blue pigment containing cobalt and alumina (Webster). Sapphire of the Corundum mineral family (Wiki).
2. I am good for the blues. I cure those blues born of spirit. Other jewels are for other causes –too many to name.
3. Yes, I am the one on the great actor's finger. A cousin, who wanted to make it big, twirled around his little finger. I think he likes the good life – my cousin. It must be symbiotic.
4. If you look for me, you won't find me. The only reason I will come to you is if you are down and out, with no hope. If you have given up, just about to jump off but not quite.
5. A little bit of history: I was given up for good. The one who pawned me wanted more. He was a good soul, but once I was out, I couldn't help him. I am loyal to my next master.
6. Now, about the family: A family of three...doing well. Do you want to hear the whole story? Let me begin from the end. Yes, the end is still to come, for we gems live longer than tortoises. But we all have to begin somewhere, don't we?
7. Now, was she right in not giving me back? Was he right in selling me off? Did he pawn me and not sell me? If Satta is a gamble, isn't life too? Do I long to return?
8. If I were some other gem, what would I do? Should I ask for advice or do it my way?
9. Let the truth be told: how do planets work? Astrology works the moon. Astronomy travels round the planets. My blue is the one that brings gold. Yellow gold.
10. Why my shade of blue is different from Klein Blue. It lasts.
11. How do I work my wonders? What energies do I draw from? What do I really do? I make lightning fork, so that you can keep walking.
12. He tried to steal me. This too is a form of love, a kind of need. I should have gone back to him, but I couldn't. Fidelity held me back. I am loyal to my current master.

13. What more will come from me? An archeology of memory? A climate of eco-poetics? Perhaps the likes of me will never come again.

½: how I returned, to his shack, out of love, honour or duty? Love, of course, that corrosive monster that takes away substance, element, reduces one to stone and makes you forget who you were, before all this happened.

The Quality of Light

I wasn't dreaming this time.
Woke up in time. Tea and biscuits.
Sat on the verandah, leaves going down

One by one.
Five thirty. The sun about to set.
The bed unmade.

No bread for me, I told the girl
Just some fries.
She stared curious, then went inside.

I stepped out, heard a neighbour had just passed.
Walked down
And asked his boy, down the straw lane.

No, the body is still in hospital, he said.
I looked around, the corner shop
Closed and bolted so early.

No life on the street,
Not even for hungry dogs. I turned around.
So quiet lately. No one steps out.

Came back to watch TV. The same news.
When the nurse came, I asked
Why now?

Are you staying the night?
No, she said, this is my usual time.
I have come to replace the other nurse.

All well?
What time is it?
Six thirty, she said.

I looked at the other clock.
Yes, it echoed, from the wall.
I closed my eyes.

My wife on the sick bed, sleeping.
Is it really morning?
The many times I wondered

If dawn and dusk were one,
& how I couldn't tell, from a turning sun
One from the other.

A river collects her thoughts

An old memory chews me.
Wakes me up early.
Buzzes at ear reminds me

I am now in middle way
Lapping
Silt and salt.

Youth's zig zag turns
Round whirlpools that wiggle
All just a little mellow.

My waters lengthen, breathe deep
Find rock and pebble more easily.
These are my membranes, my veins of feeling.

Geography eludes me
Finds faith in
Easy currents of the familiar.

Once in a while, when I feel like it,
I weave like before
Z trails, bull runs, manic depressions, crests and troughs.

But mostly, it's about gathering now
Sometimes, I even tire mid-morning,
Find a familiar boatman with tea, just to keep going.

Dust eddies whorl around me
I stay back, find fields of awakening.
And they find in me, home to cavort and frolic.

I let them be, winged creatures of feather and delight.
I draw deep breaths
See distant boats, lamps sailing in evening dark

Night comes alone:
Where have you been?
Well, I didn't let on

How you came one morning, breathless, suddenly,
The sunny youngster in need of feeling
Streaming through the door

Rafting and rappelling down
The storm of my need
A rush of breeze mid-summer

Running through an old dream.

That feel, once more, ebb and flow
Salt that settled long ago

Into comfort
Rising to the surface
Tasting fine and mellow.

Somewhere in the upper reaches
Someone mutters:
Be gentle. No need to show off.

You are who you are.
Things look still,
But you are breathing. That is enough.

Of course, in such times, who listens?
I didn't
Tell anyone

How one day
You left as soon
As you came.

How you called early
And said you were afraid
Of sinking in

A vast river
With no end
And no beginning.

I understood.
You, young of urge
with much to travel

I, lazing in the winter sun
Watching how light purrs on my skin,
My sinking feeling, my liquid feet

This ambient light of evening,
where things stand still as
Those houses glistening in the waters.

GJV PRASAD

Just Reality

And will you marry her
And make her an honest woman
Asked the judge of the rapist

She felt violated all over again

The judge felt no remorse
After all rape was allowed in marriage
And he could do what he wanted
And she have the position of a wife
Win-win all around!

Humanity drowned in blood
Torn to shreds by barbarity

No said the rapist's lawyer
Milord, now it would be bigamy
He would have loved to marry her then
Now he is a married man with children
How can he marry his prey of earlier times

Yes, thought the judge
He has another woman now to rape

This is fate, young woman
You were at the wrong place at the wrong time
Tempted him too early in his life
A little later, and you could have been his wife

He is a respectable man
Wont it be best to reach a settlement
Make him pay, he said
And laughed at his own joke

Go Back

**Go back
They cry
Go back
Go back
Go back to where you came from
This land belongs to us
You dirty scum
You take our jobs
You foul our air
You ugly you
Go back**

**Restore this land to us
The pure**

**We came here
Before anyone else
We did all the hard work
And killed off those who lived here
Before us
The savages**

**And now
You come
To enjoy the spoils
You coloured scum
Go back**

Our Heritage

Our heritage is the earth
Its plenitude
Its generosity
Its forgiving nature
That we test to its limits

What will be the heritage
Of coming generations
Our dreams of escape
From a planet
Depleted
Unhomed by our uncaring

What about those we killed
Before we unhomed ourselves

This earth was their heritage too.

Our Land

(with apologies to Tagore)

Where the mind is full of hesitation and the head is lowered
and the hands touch
the feet of the powerful
perpetually

Where the poor have no access to knowledge

Where every person is an island
living in fragments of domestic walls
coming together only for a riot or two

Where words create the truth
of the powerful
Where tired striving is to stay out
of harm's way

Where reason flows underground
leaving us to wander the deserts
battered by storms
of hatred lust and spite

Where
still searching for the promised heaven of freedom
we wake up to nightmares.

NANDINI SAHU

Sisterhood

“Women instinctually know how to nourish each other,
and just being with each other is restorative.” – Tanja Taaljord

Thus, I talk a lot about solidarity and sisterhood.
My sisters and archetypal sisters may hear me out!
I have been accessible yet peripheral,
non-judgmental, non-indulgent
beyond all glamour, glory and the social scanners
getting into reckless and pointless things yet.

I fancy my sisters to appreciate, in spirit,
that I live alone in the company of others living alone,
each one fortified by a lone ache of the heart.

The fact that I was born in July,
the volatile time of the year—
they need not categorize any much of my temperament.

Now there are mornings when I wake up but
I don't like to get up. Lying on the bed,
I regret my squandered years that I have been that type
who fits in anywhere. Ahh, why I have been just so perfect!

Full of campaign and stratagem, I still believe that
it's possible to change the world, this planet.
My sculpted sisters often look at me and sigh,
'I want to be a woman like you, bold and independent.'

I wish they saw some tiresome apprehension in there.
Some enduring experiences utmost.
Why only sisters? Even my mother's isolation
is getting into my nerves. It's a detrimental amalgam.
Some kind of panic of an avoidable panic, some fright.

Yet, the gulf between me and my 'sisters' has told me,
seclusion has its own goodies to offer --I cheer up myself,
which some of them make-believe not to make out.
Seclusion has become my only discipline,
my skill, my dexterity and my mental state.

These days I live in a new home, a newly
constructed house, that is, where no one lived in the past,
no one made love, no one died
nor none got exhausted. Just that,
the highlighted nature of the house makes it look

paradoxically alive and animate.
I call it, 'the power of white!'

Here, in fact yet elsewhere, I sleep poorly,
for forever I am sleep disoriented.
I boast I swank that I take its advantage, to become
so prominent and, well, such distinguished!

I heard that the female combatant
knows how to fight with the world even without a fight.
She discerns when not to raise her sword,
but as a substitute she holds up her heart.

A sister's safeguard is not a resistance
to counter others, but a sanctuary for a wretched heart.
If recuperative of each other is the case with sisterhood,
someone please refurbish, revamp me, be my
special kind of mind-and-body-double,
no matter where and what.

Medusa

I am Medusa, I merge with you, my myriad-minded-molten-man,
my melic-moon-man. See the sunny side of our youth and middle age
and let us amalgamate with our hearts beating each to each.

The melancholic sides of this mountain, these time-teethed melodies,
the knowledge of the somber moments make me amok-layered,
mist-mouthed. The mercurial mirror of my mind is in love's melodious conch.

I am the Midas of the Muse. I germinate into a misty lunation.
You moan, "can you give me only one boon, my moony-moon?
My yellow moon! Tell me in extenso. Will you be my blowtorch?"

Well, you know, I will never reduce the illumination of my sparkling eyes.
Because you claim, my eyes have been your solitary gain
in the midst of life's never-ending pain. Thus you make me some fitch.

In some birth, I was Medusa of the three Gorgons, daughter
of Phorcys and Ceto, sister of Graeae, Echidna, and Ladon --
the alarming and awe-inspiring beasts. They predominantly did butch.

The gorgeous mortal, Medusa was the exemption in the family,
until she incurred the wrath of Athena, due to her conceit or
because of an ill-starred love affair with Poseidon--that was her nocturnal notch.

This life, being Medusa, I dance with the oceanic waves, move with the sea.
The rhythm of water has set my soul free. I get into my past
surreptitiously like getting into a cave. See my 'laugh of the Medusa' epoch!

I become two people in there, one says 'yes' and one, 'no' to history.
Apparently, my beauty has surrounded you, encircled you, and
made you gasping. Though you relish my serenity even in that facade.

Just that, like a bad parent, you planted a seed and walked away.
You did most definitely so, making me Medusa. Now I have the courage
to let go of what I cannot change; now I am life's firmest, wildest catch.

Medusa is non-judgmental, audacious, beautiful, flexible yet unyielding.
Medusa is some myth and yet she is the ultimate truth.
Medusa is many lives in one life, she can be like that veiled botch.

The flag and emblem of Sicily features on her head.
Two species of snakes contain her name: the venomous
pit viper Bothriopsis and the nonvenomous sea serpent

Atractus is also Medusa. She epitomizes philosophy, beauty and art.
She challenges the long tranquilized social slumber.
I clearly remember, there is something beyond the fence of the past.

She is my chosen image of myself to show myself to the opaque world.
The range of her emotions are limitless. I am Medusa myth,
I am the doleful exclamation of the metal-faced dioch.

A very tentative person I have become, believing
in a benign God, the Ardhanarishwar. Singing like a free-swimming
carnal method of a coelenterate, like a jellyfish is my free-thinking vouch.

I have an umbrella-shaped body with cutting-edge tentacles on my couch.
Medusa is this phase of my life cycle which substitutes with a monogamous phase.
I know, I should either write with my body or choose to stay ensnared.

My 'écriture féminine' takes encounters with conformist patriarchal schemes.
I address this by the edifice of our robust self-narratives and letterings.
You, my delectable, are with me in this scheme, in my Medusa epoch.

God knows when your mild woman went wild, now that
the margin of your love has been rising from stretch to stretch.
You are the song of my ululating tongue. Now life has become such.

Pulling Heart Strings

Making you the resolution of life, I am clueless now
about my own sense of the word 'purpose'.
If I think anything at all, the thoughts are just on matters of the heart.

Isn't it fascinating to paradigm the character of a woman
who has no life beyond? The theory of this poem is—
I have presented my life to you. Presenting the elemental woman

to the man who is he-knows-what-he-is! Though
this must be 'normal' in some world elsewhere. 'Me' in this story
is a missing female character on days of your choice—given subjectivity.

I disappear without a trace, you see!
Of late I am too interested in missing characters.
I find myself as in a soliloquy, talking aloud!

“Look! Look at yourself looking at Whatsapp, social media and
at that house-dress he left in your wardrobe, and his half-finished Beer
in your portico, and look at the right side of your bed!

Look at the plates he likes to eat in or the glasses he likes to drink in.
Look at your slightly swollen undereyes and the nose-pin or
the dot on your forehead. Look how some lives are a prolonged sinch!

On missing-days, look how you experiment with left-over food
from the refrigerator and with ill-fitting fabrics.
Look how he prefers one disagreeable over another disagreeable.

Look at your enviable profession, the fine books that you yield,
and your manicured neat hands, remembering some other obnoxious.
Look how freakily free he is, living multiple lives!

Look how he is having two strong legs and yet a Merman's tail too—
he is actually having it all!” Except that I pretend unhappy, but am content
and you are not, yet you envisage to be gratified.

You have given me a critique of seclusion, this is melancholy
rather than depression. Sadness rather than despair.
I no more weep alone in the kitchen on missing-days

and no longer put up a social face.
I make-believe to be baffled by the many lovers
who come and go through this revolving door.

I tell myself--- I have to be likeable; well, I am exceptionally accomplished at it!
I, thus, am incredibly liked by one and all. I apologize
my unrequited lovers for my want of wanting them convenient.

But this is another life, like exactly what I want.
Carrying the old playhouse inside me
all my life, very heavy though, I am willing now to let it go.

Nay, let me stop here. What is the point of
writing a poem that makes one chuckle and shed a tear or two!
What is the need to make heartstrings on hand! "Look, change the mood!"

I have been very taken with this Jasmine Itar, its erotic fragrance,
a bit of warm and harsh. I look at the narcissism of love
pulling my heartstrings way too hard; now I want to extinct.

The Subliminal

I always pick the right side
even if I am the only one standing there.
Because
when tall men cast short shadows, I understand
that
the sun is on the top of our head.

In this inimitable love story
we had always been on borrowed times,
like today, on this subliminal day and date.
A purist that I have been,
I believe in codependency
though you may think it's not to-be-ought.

There's plenty of fish in the sea
but I have been afraid of water.
Is it some sort of subconscious resentment?
Or I am grossed out of all of it?
You have been slipping through my fingers
some days. That is it.
But I wish I could fix the picture and not let it slip away
from our eternal presence of the past.

The winner takes it all, alright.
But does the loser
ever stand small?
Doesn't the loser even stand tall?
Likes of you decide, likes of me, abide. Is it? Is it?
No matter what,
let me face my Waterloo all by myself
tonight.

Tonight, a vivid carpet of the red Gul-mohur
has taken over the earth.
I am feeling quixotic--
it's for my childhood love's memory
and it definitely is for "us", isn't it?

I think of the days when my hair was longer
and reveries were briefer;
and I then love my 'today' as
today it's the other way round.
Still, some pictures just get stuck
in the perpetual past
like those pluperfect lovers,
satiated with reminiscences and mothballs.
Like denoting an action
finalized prior to some remote past

of time oblique or time quantified.
Like an unsettled ornament confabbing with the ghost
of twilight.

Not bad if we can dust them from time to time
and then put them posterior
on our combined-concentration-mantlepiece, right?
We discover at times how we have taken over
what actually has fabled “us”
and the here-and-now-you-and-me
to the utmost.

VINAY SHARMA

1

alphabet

we are here. there is no map to tell us this.
we are here. this we must know.

there may be signs, we may accept. that.
though there is no reason to believe

one sign over another, to believe what
is sign is sign, such meanings

as we assign arising out of nothing
may find their way back leaving.

us.
leaving us without within.

where we are. in a space. the same. in all directions

as an image this is barren.
this is an image. it is barren. we are

free to create pictures that may change the image.
the image is without motion. we move.

one statement after the other. nothing
chasing nothing. nothing changing nothing.

in the unnoticed dying of insignificant things

only on some nights
like nights on which
the night trucks go by

you choose to time the
passage to morning

you may be alone or
in your bed unquiet
asleep there may be

another figured dream
breathing like a clock

between this instance and
its past you find the
colour of difference

trying to put a name
around itself and failing

this is a scene for an
actor without a stage
an age without

character playing
out a music without names

only on some mornings
like mornings when
the morning's act seems sly

you choose to pass
the time till evening

hoping to stay invisible
so through your eyes unseen
any crime may see

another witnessed stream
seething like a lock

between its silence and
its key you find the

colour of difference

trying to feel a shame
about itself but failing

in this scene for an
actor without a stage
an age without

character burning
out a fire without flames

death and a 1/2

it sits beside him
all the time
not shadow
not presence
not known not unknown

it goes to bed with him
sometimes in him on him

it does not sleep or wake
does not admit of sun or night
betrays no knowledge
of earth or rotation
nor revolutions

not any the richer or poorer for his being
what he is when he is what he is

it surrounds him with himself
receding he is constantly conversing
with it it does not talk back but
he feels it hears him say
each word he nearly speaks out

it has no ears no hands it touches him
he cannot reach out or reach in or reach it

4

delubrum

consider

a single moth
one drop of rain
a bird on its own

consider

the heart of an ape
the love in a breath
the burning of a flame

consider

a single sound
one night
a thought by itself

consider

the last gasp
the face in a foetus
the loneliness of an instant

consider

a single dream
one victim
a desert all alone

consider

the firing of a neuron
the growth of a fingernail
the time in an action

consider

singularity
one star
a god on its own

consider

a line

the four directions
the imaginary made real

consider

living

SAIMA AFREEN

An Interrupted Dream of a Refugee Child

Drawing faces with chalk on walls
Is a happy game for any child
But not when she doesn't have enough light,
To redraw the lips
And erase the broken smile
Divided between a solitary lamp
Safeguarding its warm yellow light
In a lane dusted with powdered snow
That appears *Christmasy* but far, distant as if in a dream
Leaving behind a trail of sugar that you can't taste

But have to rub on your exit wounds
So that it blurs the picture of sunlit, leafy
Courtyards on the other side of the hole
And the songs that grow unsung around dry mud stoves

A blade of wild grass shoots its head
Trying to find its way through your iris
But shivers in the chill
Of blood-puddles around.

It hides its body in a grave nearby
Unmarked, open, the body still warm
Its eyes open with a picture
Muddled with dead babies

Their bibs painted in red, the small cheeks
Sleeping with snowdrops
The poor grass blade hides itself
In the heart still warm

With fresh blood
Hoping for a map

To become blank
Hoping for a home

To get unburnt!

The child in her refugee camp

Was a dream safe inside

The eyes of another child

Dying under rubble in Damascus,

In her sweet sleep

The guns, bullets and dead babies turn into

Millions of dandelions

Sleeping safely under snowflakes.

Return

Everything has a habit

to come back to you

with different reasons, seasons

the slant of summer light is never different

when it falls on the pages

you turned and forgot years ago the ache

of final words

the glow of a single one

floating, silver in blood

you watch crystals of salt dissolve in fire

they know the art of owning

they ask you to see in the flaming ocean

the crackle of dawns

where you hand over your shadow

to the raconteur and become somebody else...

DEBASISH LAHIRI

VARANASI QUARTET

I

She
who thinks
the sky is hard
must have hit her head
on the looking glass.

(Gadaulia, Varanasi)

II

He
who thinks
benediction
is an aged sweet
dreaming
of syrup in the maw of ants
shall have ants
uttering
the praise of gods
in his throat.

(Assi Ghat, Varanasi)

III

A camel
looks across the expanse
of the mudflats
on the Ganga
as if it were a desert.

The thirst at the heart of the river
is unquenchable.

Drought
dulls the pinions
of boats moored in the shallows;
the boatman
is fast asleep
and dreams of the monsoon.

The sweet smell of human perdition
wells
from the ghats:
its disguise as smoke
from a local factory
has failed,
its déshabillé –
original,
grotesque, ancient incense –
has been revealed.

Death
goes on
at the ghats
after bath and prayer.

I sit
awaiting life.

(Dashaswamedha Ghat)

IV

The serviceable river,
the sacred river,
the river of salvation,
the cleansing river,
the thirst-healing river,
the river of sport and frolic,
the river of retired luxury,
none are mine.

Last night's rain –
its last remnants
gather at the edge
of yon Asoka leaf,
its teathed marge
halts the raindrop,
holds it.
I shall go seek my Ganga there!

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Saima Afreen is an award-winning poet who also works as Deputy City Editor with *The New Indian Express*. Her poems have appeared in several Indian and international journals, including Indian Literature, HCE Review, Barely South Review, The Bellingham Review, The Roanoke Review, The Stillwater Review, The McNeese Review, The Nassau Review, The Oklahoma Review, Staghill Literary Journal, The Notre Dame Review, Honest Ulsterman, and Existere, among others. She received ‘Writer of the Year Award, 2016’ from Nassau Community College (the State University of New York). She has been part of several literary festivals and platforms such as Sahitya Akademi Poets’ Meet, Goa Arts and Literary Festival, TEDx VNR-VJIET, Prakriti Poetry Festival, Hyderabad Literary Festival, Betty June Silconas Poetry Festival, Helsinki Poetry Jam, Pulse Radio Glasgow, the University of Stirling, the University of Westminster, Waterstones Bookstore Canterbury, and the University of Kent. In the autumn of 2017, she was awarded the Villa Sarkia Writers’ Residency (Finland), where she completed the manuscript of *Sin of Semantics*, her debut poetry collection. She was awarded the Charles Wallace India Trust Fellowship in Creative Writing at the University of Kent, United Kingdom in 2019.

Meena Alexander’s (1951-2018) collections of poetry include *Atmospheric Embroidery* (TriQuarterly Books, 2018); *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (TriQuarterly Books, 2013); *Quickly Changing River* (TriQuarterly Books, 2008); *Raw Silk* (TriQuarterly Books, 2004) and *Illiterate Heart* (TriQuarterly Books, 2002), the winner of a 2002 PEN Open Book Award. Her ninth collection, *In Praise of Fragments*, was published posthumously by Nightboat Books in February 2020. Alexander’s work has been widely anthologized and translated into various languages, including Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, French, German, and Swedish. Alexander was also the editor of *Indian Love Poems* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), and the author of the novels *Manhattan Music* (Mercury House, 1997) and *Nampally Road* (Mercury House, 1991). She also penned *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (South End Press, 1996), a volume of poems and essays. Her works of criticism include *Poetics of*

Dislocation (University of Michigan Press, 2009); *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (Barnes & Noble Books, 1989); and *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (Humanities Press, Inc., 1980). Her memoir, *Fault Lines*, was reissued for the third time by the Feminist Press in 2003. Alexander received awards and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Fulbright Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Arts Council of England, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Council for Research on Women, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. Alexander taught at the University of Hyderabad, Fordham University, and Columbia University's Writing Program. In 2014, she was named a National Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. She was a distinguished professor of English at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY).

Aura Christi is a multiple award-winning poet, novelist, essayist and editor. She is one of the most important and challenging contemporary Romanian writers, and a contributor to the country's most prestigious reviews and publishing houses. Her poems have been translated and published in Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Russia, the United States of America, Bulgaria, Albania. She is Editor-in-Chief of the *Contemporanul Review*, one of the oldest literary magazines in Romania (1881), which she has revived as a successful monthly. In 2006 Aura Christi launched an Appeal for the Salvation of the Living Romanian Culture, signed by approximately 900 Romanian personalities throughout the world. She is a member of the English Writers' Union and of the PEN Club. Reputed publishers outside Romania brought out books by Aura Christi, such as: *Geflüster / Șoptirea* (Whispering), a bilingual German-English collection of poems, translated into German by Christian W. Schenk, Dionysos Verlag (Germany), 1994; *Elegien aus der Kälte / Sfera frigului* (Sphere of Cold), trans. Edith Konradt, Pop Verlag, 2008 (Germany); *Arkitektura e natës / Arhitectura nopëtii* (Architecture of the Night), KopiKÿçyku, 2008 (Albania).

Rui C3oias is a poet, essayist and translator. He is a graduate of the University of Coimbra and holds a postgraduate degree in Legal Sciences. Soon after the publication of *A Funç3o do Ge3ografo* (2000) [The Function of the Geographer] and *A Ordem do Mundo* (2006) [The Order of the World], C3oias earned public recognition. His third book, *La Nature de La Vie* [The Nature of Life], is a bilingual Portuguese/French edition published in 2014 by Orfeu, Librarie Portugaise et Galicienne which debuted at the Transpoesie Festival in Brussels. In 2015, *L'Ordre du Monde* [The World's Order] came out in France in a bilingual edition by L' Harmattan. *Europa* [Europe] was published in 2016. Among other texts, it contains a series of poems about the Great War in France, in 1916. For this project, C3oias received a fellowship from the French Ministry of Culture & Communication. C3oias was one of the authors invited by the Portuguese literary committee to FIL Guadalajara (Mexico), in 2018, when Portugal served as the festival's Guest of Honour, where he presented *Las M3rgenes Sombrias* [The Shady Margins] a bilingual edition by El Errante. His work has also been translated into Dutch, and published in 2018, by Vleugels as *Laat de Stilte* [Let the silence].

Bina Sarkar Ellias is a poet, fiction-writer, art curator and founder-editor-designer-publisher of International Gallerie, the award-winning global journal encouraging unity in diversity. Her book of poems Fuse, was taught at Towson University, Maryland, USA, and has a Chinese edition, while poems from it have been published in Arabic, Urdu, Greek and French. Her recent book of poems When Seeing Is Believing is in praise of art. As art curator, her project Migration, was exhibited at the Pune Biennale 2017, involving photography, films, art and poetry. She took up a curatorial project of women artists for the Pen and Brush Gallery, New York, in 2020. She has received a Fellowship from the Asia Leadership Fellow Program, Japan, 2007, the Times Group Yami Women Achievers' Award, Bombay, 2008, and the FICCI/FLO, Calcutta, 2013 Award for Excellence in her work.

Bashabi Fraser, CBE, is an award winning poet, children's writer, editor, translator and academic. Bashabi's work traverses continents in bridge-building literary projects. She has authored and edited 23 books, published several articles and chapters, both academic and creative and as a poet, has been widely anthologised. She is the Chief Editor of the academic and creative peer-reviewed international e-journal, *Gitanjali and Beyond* and on the Editorial Board of *RLF Writers Mosaic*. Bashabi is the recipient of a CBE (2021 Queen's New Year Honours) for Education (academic achievements), Culture (poetry) and Integration (for work connecting Scotland and India) and has been made an Honorary Fellow by the Association of Scottish Literary Studies (ASLS) in 2021. She has been declared Outstanding Woman of Scotland by Saltire Society in 2015. Her other awards include Kavi Salam from Poetry Paradigm and Voice of the Republic in India in 2019; the Word Masala Foundation Award for Excellence in Poetry in 2017; Special Felicitation as a Poet on International Women's Day by Public Relations Society of India, 2017; Rabindra Bharati Society Honour, 2014; Women Empowered: Arts and Culture Award in 2010 and the AIO Prize for Literary Services in Scotland in 2009. She has received various Scottish Arts Council Grants in 2009, 2008, 2003-4 and 2000, a British Academy Research Grant for her book, *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter* (pub. 2006) and her co-edited book (with Debjani Chatterjee), *Rainbow World: Poems from Many Cultures* (2003) was the runner up for EMMA Best Book Award in 2003-4. Bashabi is Professor Emerita of English and Creative Writing, Edinburgh Napier University; Director, Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs); an Associate Royal Literary Fund (RLF) Fellow and an Honorary Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh. Bashabi is on the Editorial Board of several international peer-reviewed journals and has been an adjudicator for several national and international creative writing competitions. She is also Professor Emerita of Bankura University, India and on their Advisory Board. Bashabi is a Trustee on the Board of Scottish PEN, the executive committees of Writers at Risk, Writers for Peace, Poetry Association of Scotland; she is Honorary Vice President of the ASLS; Trustee, Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust; Director of the Patrick Geddes Trust; Chief Ideator and President of the Advisory Board of Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library (IPPL, Kolkata) and Advisory Board member of V&A Dundee. Bashabi lives and writes in Edinburgh.

Amlanjyoti Goswami's collection, *Vital Signs* (Poetrywala, 2022), follows his earlier book, *River Wedding* (Poetrywala, 2019). Amlanjyoti's poems have been published in India, Nepal, Hong Kong, the UK, USA, South Africa, Kenya and Germany, including the anthologies, *40 under 40: An Anthology of Post Globalisation Poetry* (Poetrywala); *A Change of Climate* (Manchester Metropolitan University, Environmental Justice Foundation and the University of Edinburgh) and *The Sahitya Akademi Anthology of English Poetry by Younger Indian Poets* (Sahitya Akademi). He grew up in Guwahati, Assam, and lives in Delhi.

Debasish Lahiri is an internationally acclaimed poet. His poems have been widely published in journals like *The Journal of the Poetry Society of India*, *Muse-India*, *Indian Literature*, *Inkapture*, *The Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *Six Seasons Review*, *Byword*, *The Punch Magazine* and *The French Literary Review* among others; in French translation in *Siècle 21*, *Europe*, *Recours au Poème & La Traductière*; in Italian in *NUOVI ARGOMENTI* and in Portuguese in *NERVO: Colectivo de Poesia*. His seven books of poetry are: *First Will & Testament* (Writers Workshop, 2012), *No Waiting like Departure* (Authors Press, 2016) which was shortlisted as one of the five best collections of that year by Scroll & India Today, *Tinder Tender: Poems of Love & Loitering* (Authors Press, 2018), *Poppies in the Post & Other Poems* (Authors Press, 2020), *Paysages sans Verbes* (Editions Apic, 2021), *Tether that Light* (Red River, 2022) and *Legion of Lost Letters* (2023). In addition he has one collection of essays *Chiaroscuro Curfew: Essays in the Lives of Art* (2020); two co-edited books, *Literary Transactions in a Globalized Context* (2010), and *21st Century Perspectives on Indian Writing in English: A Time to Turn* (2023); one co-authored book, *Tragic Survivals: From the Hellenic to the Postmodern* (2017) to his credit. Lahiri is currently on the editorial board of *Gitanjali & Beyond* (Scottish Centre for Tagore Studies). He is a reviewer and regular contributor to the 'Life & Letters' column of *The Statesman* newspaper. Lahiri's essay on the pandemic in Kolkata appeared in the *L'Obs* magazine on 27th July 2021. Lahiri is the recipient of the *Prix-du Merite*, Naji Naaman Literary Prize 2019. He is an honorary member of Maison Naaman pour la Culture .

G.J.V. Prasad, formerly Professor of English at Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), is a poet, novelist, and translator. His teachings and research have focused on Indian English literature, modern drama and translation. Among his many books are *Writing India*, *Writing English: Literature, Language, Location, Continuities in Indian English Poetry: Nation Language Form*, *In Delhi Without a Visa* and more. His edited works include *Violets in a Crucible: Translating the Orient*, *Translation and Culture: Indian Perspectives* and *Reclaiming the Disabled Subject: Representing Disability in Short Fiction* (Volume 1). His latest works of translation include *A Woman Burnt* (a novel by Imayam in Thamiz) and *Red-Necked Green Bird* (a collection of short stories by Ambai in Tamil).

Cécile Oumhani was born in Belgium of a Belgian and Scottish mother and a French father. She developed strong personal links with Tunisia through marriage. She currently lives near Paris, where she devotes herself to writing after teaching at

the university of Paris-Est Créteil as a senior lecturer. Among her recent publications in poetry: *Tunisie carnets d'incertitude* and *Passeurs de rives*. Among her novels, *Tunisian Yankee* received the Prix Afrique méditerranéenne-Maghreb ADELFF 2016 and was a finalist of the Prix Joseph Kessel 2017. She also received the Prix Virgile européen francophone 2014 for her work as a whole. Cécile Oumhani is on the editorial board of French journals *Siècle 21* and *Apulée*, as well as the Indian online journal "Caesurae: Poetics of Cultural Translation."

Nandini Sahu is an Indian poet and creative writer. She is the Director, School of Foreign Languages and professor of English at Indira Gandhi National Open University [IGNOU], New Delhi. Her areas of research interest cover Indian Literature, New Literatures, Folklore and Culture Studies, American Literature, Children's Literature and Critical Theory. She is the Chief Editor/Founder Editor of *Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Language (IJLL)*, and *Panorama Literaria*, both bi-annual peer-reviewed journals in English. She is also professor of English at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India. She has written several books including poetry in English. Her poetry has been published in India, US, UK, Africa and Pakistan. She has won three gold medals in English literature and also the award of All India Poetry Contest in 1993 at Saint Xavier College, Ranchi and Shiksha Ratna Purashkar.

Chrys Salt, MBE, has performed her poetry across the UK and internationally. She has published four full collections and five pamphlets, had her poems published in magazines and anthologies and broadcast on Radio 3 and 4. She also writes theatre and radio plays, features and documentaries and has written seven books for actors (Methuen Drama). She runs performance and skills development workshops for writers and performers, and is Artistic Director of The Bakehouse, an arts venue in SW Scotland, and Literature Convener for BIG LIT: The Stewartry Book Festival in South West Scotland. Her notable works include *Inside Out* (Autolycus, 1989), *Daffodils at Christmas* (Galloway Poets Series, 1996), *Greedy for Mulberries: selected poems 1989-2007* (Markings, 2008), *Old Times* (Roncadora, 2009), *Grass* (Indigo Dreams, 2012), *Home Front/Front Line* (Roncadora, 2013), *A 'Fighe Le Feur / Weaver of Grass* (Hattericks House, 2013), *Dancing on a Rock* (Indigo Dreams, 2015), *The Punkawallah's Rope* (Indigo Dreams, 2017) and *Skookum Jim and the Klondike Gold Rush*.

Sudeep Sen's prize-winning books include: *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins), *Rain, Aria* (A. K. Ramanujan Translation Award), *Fractals: New & Selected Poems | Translations 1980-2015* (London Magazine Editions), *EroText* (Vintage: Penguin Random House), *Kaifi Azmi: Poems | Nazms* (Bloomsbury) and *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* (Pippa Rann). He has edited influential anthologies, including: *The Harper Collins Book of English Poetry* (editor), *World English Poetry*, and *Modern English Poetry by Younger Indians* (Sahitya Akademi). *Blue Nude: Ekphrasis & New Poems* (Jorge Zalamea International Poetry Prize) and *The Whispering Anklets* are forthcoming. Sen's works have been translated into over 25 languages. His words have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Newsweek*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *Herald*, *Poetry Review*, *Literary Review*,

Harvard Review, Hindu, Hindustan Times, Times of India, Indian Express, Outlook, India Today, and broadcast on BBC, PBS, CNN IBN, NDTV, AIR & Doordarshan. Sen's newer work appears in *New Writing 15* (Granta), *Language for a New Century* (Norton), *Leela: An Erotic Play of Verse and Art* (Collins), *Indian Love Poems* (Knopf/Random House/Everyman), *Out of Bounds* (Bloodaxe), *Initiate: Oxford New Writing* (Blackwell), and *Name me a Word* (Yale). He is the editorial director of AARK ARTS, editor of Atlas, and currently the inaugural artist-in-residence at the Museo Camera. Sen is the first Asian honoured to deliver the Derek Walcott Lecture and read at the Nobel Laureate Festival.

Vinay Sharma is a veteran actor, theatre director, and writer active in Calcutta theatre since 1981. His work is known for its conceptual rigour and imaginative presentation. He has received critical appreciation for leading roles under renowned directors including Shyamanand Jalan, Rodney Marriot, and Usha Ganguly. His directorial works have toured in India and abroad and been invited to most major Indian theatre festivals. His production of *Atmakatha* starring Kulbhushan Kharbanda featured at the 8th Theatre Olympics. From 1987 to 2003 he co-created plays for children at Happy Hours, an institution exploring alternative approaches to education. He is also known for his performance art in installations by the artist Chittrovanu Mazumdar. Plays written and directed by him include *Ho sakta hai do aadmi do kursiyaan*, *Camera Obscuras*, *Yahan*, and *Dosh*. In 2018, he performed the monologue *Mark Twain: Live in Bombay*. Vinay was shortlisted for the TLM New Writing Award 2006 and the Bridport Poetry Prize 2017.

