



DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

CREATIVE NONFICTION

On rainy days and reading

The fact of the matter was this: the poem had been written, the call had been answered, and as lofty as it sounds—at that moment there I was, as Frank O'Hara put aptly—“the center of all beauty! / writing these poems! / Imagine!”

JAHANARA TARIQ

Through the windows of the washing space, the trees appeared to be sketched by a charcoal stick—bowing and swaying politely to some ancient conductor's orchestration. Inside, under the water, my fingers gleamed a ghostly silver. It was a February afternoon at Maribor and I was doing laundry; productively procrastinating and halting the self to write. It had started raining.

Back home, monsoons appeared like violin concertos, holding me in raptures. It always called for poetry recitations by theatrical pools of candle light. Countless times, I have worn out my index finger running up and down the columns of poetry from *King Lear's* bellows in Act III about cracked cheeks and raging winds to Ishmael's soul rotating in a whim of damp drizzly Novembers; from ancient rhymes of onomatopoeias to the raven's hoarse croaks of futility; from *Neesheeto Raatero Badolo Dhara*—the deep blue of deeper nights to the minute saga of domestic pastoral and glazed wheelbarrows.

I went back to my room and sank my head. The duvet smelt citrusy and my hair was flat and digestible in

this foreign climate. I decided to step outside with my copy of *Frankenstein* at hand. My assignment for Romantic lit was due the following week and while pacing around I held hands with the author by not only reading but through vociferous annotations. The back of the penguin edition was crooked; it would appear twisted to fellow readers but I got curious tingles with the idea of a bent woody spine. I recalled how the pages once limped due to sweltering humidity back in Dhaka where I was reading the text in line while waiting to get my visa approved. A conservative drizzle had settled in outside and a raindrop danced right into my earlobe.

Many a times it had seemed to me, through personal experiences and copious amounts of reading, that rain and rainy days—be it a spring shower or a thunderstorm—come as a spiritual reminder from nature for slowing down. Rainy days are days to lay aside the remorseless clarity needed to go through life's constant wakefulness and to fog oneself up a little, with rosy clouds or lemon-like shades. For, creativity, I suppose, necessitates solitude; a space to meditate. I think of Don Paterson's poem called “Rain” (2009) while conjuring up the image of this sacred space.

Echoing Rabindranath Tagore's impassioned invitation for the kalboishakhi in “Esho He Boishakh”, Paterson depicts how the rain becomes a way of removing the damage of prior experiences and provides a vehicle of return to a certain purer state of being, a cleaner palette. He writes: “Forget the ink, the milk, the blood—/all was washed clean with the flood/we rose up from the falling waters/the fallen rain's own sons and daughters/ and none of this, none of this matters.” Paterson's rain reminds me of a primordial soup, and the erasing quality it has over life's many squanders is an aiding factor to a struggling creative on his way of making mad, mad art.

Back at Maribor, the whole world fell in gigantic but gentle sweeps, dissolving me. It was cold and bare; I wanted to tuck myself within the folds of this unknown mossy green and indulge in mystifications while doing so. On the marginalia of Shelley's incantation—“There was something at work in my soul, which I do not understand”—I wrote a poem about carnivorous carnations and not wanting to be perceived.

In terms of aesthetics, it would appear to some as laughable—being a witness to the sublime while being donned in a

salmon overcoat in one's neighborhood park. It's less David Friedrich and more David Hockney. However, it is a moment I keep going back to continuously, for it was one which caused a gauzy watery glee within my being, one which transformed my college essential reading into a scripture and one which evoked me to pick up my pen. That day became, without a doubt, my favorite memory of reading in the rain, writing with it.

But the reason I meditated so long on this particular memory, is the lack of practicality expressed in the fruition of the act itself. I had a deadline to catch, I was alone and miles away from home and hence I wouldn't have had anyone to tend to me, if I had fallen ill. Yet, I went outside, walked the length, and got drenched, detectably so. I felt the monster's Satan-esque angst and managed to write a ghost of a haiku with a slightly memorable visual cue. And that is really all that mattered at that moment, and also later into the day, when I had to resort to yogurt and crackers for dinner with a stuffy nose.

The fact of the matter was this: the poem had been written, the call had been answered, and as lofty as it sounds—at that moment there I was, as Frank O'Hara put aptly—“the

center of all beauty! / writing these poems! / Imagine!”. For we all know how exasperating it is to have specks of ideas fly back into vapor after rejecting moments and muses urging us to sit, to read, to write, dance and play, in the tunes of what Tagore calls *anondodhara*. So, when one does, is it truly not a cause for rejoicing?

This verb of shunning away the practical, the timely and the “obligatory” appearing in the manifold “duties” and distractions like laundry days or bank appointments or courtesy visits—and to engage oneself in the act of observing with a calm curious eye, is a necessary act for all who call themselves an artist. It is also an act which requires concentration, a whole lot of conviction. But most importantly it is an act that is purely joyous. Nothing really says it as well as Carver's image of blissful indolence. He writes, if given the chance he would make the same mistake again and again of keeping himself “entirely in the keep of this rainy morning” and read through the entirety of his days.

Jahanara Tariq is a writer from Dhaka, Bangladesh. She is currently employed as an adjunct faculty at the Department of English and Modern Languages at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

Dark, blue night

SNATA BASU

Cradled by the syncope of strange dreams,
Blue evils girdle the bed around me;
As a child, I didn't know
what it would be like if I could sleep it through.
Here, in this empty space,
Like wild leopard's skin, I spread out my hair
The dark night uncurls with his roaring fleet;
I pounce on his chest, bare foot, like Kali—
Fear mopes like the devil, resenting me.
He bloats and floats with his plummeting blue
I look him in the eye, unafraid,
I ripple inside this beating cave
I soar beneath the earth and eat the night.
I hold myself like a child's brittle heart;
Tenderness follows me like wisps in the woods;
Like blood in my girth, I have battled the fury alone,
The split of dawn: blank... forgiven.

Snata Basu is an aspiring poet from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work mostly centers on passionate, personal bindings. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at North South University.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

MEMORY

REBECCA HAQUE

Memory is an inherent shadow,
an asymmetrical quasar
in the mercurial mind's plateau.
Memory is a winding range
Of coniferous mountain pine
Catching the fiery light
Of purple dusk

and orange dawn.

Memory is a fragile gazelle,
A dew-drenched deer
Traipsing upon the forest floor,
Capturing the musk of earthly desire.

Rebecca Haque is a Killam Scholar and independent educator. She is a poet, writer, and translator affiliated with Multi-Ethnic Literature of the World [MELOW], Asia-Pacific Writers & Translators Association [APWT], and New York Writers Workshop [NYWW].