

QAZI SALIM

Seven Poems

SALVATION¹

thundering
pouring clouds
ceaseless shower of hailstones from the skies
lamenting walls and doors
wounded ceilings
drop by drop, spreading, advancing water on glass
tiny rivulets, breaking, sliding
akin to the folds of tired hands
continually conjuring wondrous forms

the void of heart does not remain empty even for a moment
whatever it avails, it amasses in the heart
desire, after all, is desire
be it for death
the very same tempests of blood in sore veins, crashing,
the very same spreading expanding webs on glass

other than one last lifeless
flapping of wings
what are these complaints and laments?

I know, when Time flows,
when does it discriminate between waves?
be they full of repose
or breaking their heads over some shore
passing, sniveling and crawling

¹“Muktī,” from the poet’s collection *Najāt sē Peblē* (Allahabad: Shabkhūn Kitāb Ghār [1971], 24–26.

in agitation, merging into sands
whatever they do
what difference does it make?

sliding, breaking, these tiny streaks
have descended to the ground from closets, but
how far can they crawl thus?
solace, velvety epistles, dream-laden desires,
how will they become shields for this shower of hailstones?

myriad worlds are done, undone, each instant
sinuous trees fall
rocks, pulverized, rankle in each nerve
windows, blinded by the ceaseless onslaught of rain
surroundings are mute, deaf,
okay, this existence and death, both, are not mine from today
the vision of my eyes
the tenor of my voice
hearing, touch; they are all not mine from today
ok, I too am a witness to my own hell
my world is a spectacle
in front of me, I am capable of seeing myself tormented,
 in anguish,
and am so content, as if this birth, today,
had been handed to me moments ago
—and from some unknown world
as if I had arrived with the pouring clouds

MIRRORS²

freezing night
cold darkness in the windows
beneath the mirror of darkness
an abode-less environ
profound—how profound
simple—how simple

²“Ā’inē,” from *ibid.*, 51–54.

beyond my range
hovering over my soul

in each tree, in the wild, in the mountains
gushes, flows
our blood
a deluge—
measureless deluge
split from the swarm of travelers
unaware of me
without want from you
our unveiled reflections
resplendent until far
they have their own life
their own dreams
from the emission of a single ray
jade, scarlet, azure, violet,
how many hues—
such unrealized inscriptions
shaped out of a fluttering gaze
melted by a fluttering gaze
and then
the expanse of the night turned over

travelers, discarding year-old faces,
donned new ones
how fortunate are they
the ones who have
no mirrors
for whom
Time is merely Time
there is no succession
no good no evil
how fortunate are they
they metamorphosed
in one year
earth's womb longs for the sowing of seeds
—the last crop has been reaped
the expanse of the night turned over

“Salīm” a primeval cry

the expanse of the night overturned

let's gather up
let's gather up
sparkling reflections
—radiant likenesses
a teardrop
a teardrop from benevolent eyes
let's gather it up

or how, from our sepulchers,
shall we be raised on the day of reckoning?
how shall we be raised?

what calamity is this?
how split are we from our own selves?
what calamity is this?
what calamity is this?

RECOLLECTION³

silence woven as soft silk
yet again began to rend hither and thither
from the nest of the body soared birds
bathed in fresh warm blood
—began to flap their wings
for long, color took wing

TOURIST⁴

we have nothing
Go; we have nothing now

³“Yād,” from *ibid.*, 62.

⁴“Tūrist,” from *ibid.*, 78–79.

in frosty ashes of past pristine epochs
 there is not a single ember
 not a strand of thought's vestment
 on stain-riddled life
 throbbing throbbing throbbing
 when the beat may be struck
 when multitudes of naked savages
 break into frenzied dance
 on the city's pavements
 heads chopped like carrots

on snow-capped peaks, ancient vultures
 are flapping their wings—
 now we have nothing
 ruins and remains excavated
 all treasures exhausted
 adorned in your museums

we have nothing now—
 snake-charmers, maharajas, sorcerers
 have become Air-India mascots
 Go; we have nothing now

FRUITLESS⁵

step out of sleep
 —let's bear Time
 lock our eyes with the eyes of the night

step out of sleep
 there is a pursuit in sleep which persists always
 on the other side of skies
 beyond the traversing of seven seas
 swaying, like swans gliding with clouds,
 many of the same appearance

⁵“Bē-Šamar,” from *ibid.*, 83–85.

hide while peeking at me
as if this entire play of horizons
was enacted on some parchment

step out of sleep
amidst young dreams
let's bury somewhere in barren memories
no one grows—nor flourishes—here
merely shadows abound
—in the dense forest of shadows
again a caress of wings on cheeks
—must be angels
must be the same guileless angels
who, in the waters of darkness,
come to fetch me
—but I am “I”
my forebears were my forbears
—surely they were not shadows

step out of sleep
—but who is there?
—this grounded heartbeat
why did it emerge from the left rib?
let's bite the finger between our teeth
—and see
in the womb of the wound must be my likeness

step out of sleep
let's bear Time

HERITAGE⁶

(to a sculpted figure at Ellora)

you are the substance of twenty centuries
enigmatic substance of twenty centuries—on which

⁶“Virśa,” from *ibid.*, 92–94.

only remorseless winds had swept their tongues
 now it's my hand
 —and this sentient warmth of the hand, maybe,
 you may sense as changed season
 you would suppose that a hunk of sunrays,
 as it does each day, had caressed you
 or it was a weary bird
 —who had rested
 now don't gaze at me from such heights that my hands too are
 fossilized

with a quiver the boughs of veins
 awakened for an instant
 luxuriant—as if again
 they had bonded with their ancient roots

immersed in themselves
 —soundless, in caves
 —beneath dense trees
 I keep searching; say, where have you vanished?
 —at the wave of a finger
 akin to a toy spinning counterclockwise
 this world gathers round into the eyes

each day the morning paper impresses
 —that on this earth
 all doors have been closed
 the hands of the heavens shall not descend in the nights ever
 there is no one to share the sorrows of truth
 there is no one to reap the harvest of pristine epochs

look at me through the eyes of the cavern
 carrying the corpse of the perennial phantasm
 I have returned
 —look after this heritage of yours

I might be a sapped weary bird
 but you too stand akin to a scarecrow in the field of
 contemplation
 without reason sparrows are awed
 and fly away ravenous

are the sparrows breathing or the scarecrow?
—who knows?

TODAY ONWARDS⁷

today onwards if you want to live
you must abandon everything of today
in a flash
in a blink
let this wounded sieved figure
conflagrate
in the fires of its blood
let it decompose
step out of yearnings
move past your own selves
alight beyond boundaries
... look
such unfettered vistas
as if in all things
there was buried a seed of worlds to come
trees from seeds ... gilded trees
in each cavity of trees
birds hatch eggs
listen to the resonance of soundless melodies
emanating from the hollow of the eggs
and weave your songs from it

—*Translated by Riyaz Latif*

⁷“Āj kē Bā‘d,” from the poet’s collection, *Rustgārī* (Hyderabad: Siyāsat Publications, 2004), 114–15.