

Three Poems

by [Ankur Betageri](#) (September 2018)



Tracer, Robert Rauschenberg, 1964

One Day I Sprayed Her Name on the Wall

After Amoretti 75

for A, thanks for that hickey in the brain

One day I sprayed her name on the wall
But the police came and whitewashed it all
I wrote *****a again in a cursive hand
But a painter made profit of my nightly errand.
Idiot, she texted, who attempts in vain
To make permanent a love uncertain
For you like this mark shall be wiped from my heart
And *****a—will only remind you of my horsey snort.
Alas, said I, what can subsist but dust
In this barren land emptied of trust?
What fame shall redeem a life without substance
And what verses can transfigure cold manipulation?
When spring renews the earth and there's rapture and love
I remember devil exists behind the face of a cow.

From Emmanuelle to Immanuel

When Fraulein Emmanuelle Kant

was no more than one score and five years

I had the great pleasure of making her acquaintance.

She was quite mischievous, you can even say

unpredictable, and just setting my eyes upon her
would send my heart racing.

She wore the 18th century equivalent of Chanel 5

which, in the languid afternoons of Konigsberg,

drove me so mad that in three months

I shot dead five of her suitors.

Impressed by my ferocious devotion for her

one day she asked,

“What,” she opened her eyes wide,

“What do you like most about me?”

and languorously batted her eyelashes.

Instead of giving me the joyous opportunity

to confess my deep love for her, this question

in that drunken afternoon, plummeted me

into a horrible confusion. You can say

that I began to think, think seriously,

for the first time in my entire life.

Really, what was it that I liked about Fraulein Emmanuel?

Her face was lovely but I would have lied
had I said I hadn't seen faces lovelier than hers.
Was it her voice? My sister's voice, when she sang
at the Sunday choir at church, was at least ten times sweeter.
Was it the 18th century Chanel 5 which had become
her smell for me? No, that would be to commoditize
and make her artificial. Was it the way she dressed,
sporty and chic like a man, in an age of corsets
and long skirts? Well, the queen was far more radical
and a real paragon of fashion. Were they her thoughts?
Honestly, I didn't know what they were
or whether she had any at all. Then—what was it
that I liked about her?

"Yes?" she was waiting, and the eagerness in her voice
was turning into impatience.

What, what, what is it? I thought desperately,
what is it about her that affects me so deeply?

"Yes?" she asked again, there was a definite edge now
to her voice, her impatience turning into anger.

"Oh, it is the darkness inside your mouth,"

I blurted out, "the hot and cool darkness inside you –
I think there I can find some rest."

“Indeed Herr B?” she raised her brows sharply,
and after a brief pause added,
“A nasty joke it was indeed!”
And immediately she got up and left
like a breeze, leaving me shocked and speechless.

I made many visits to her house but
she was always indisposed. My many letters
expounding the truthfulness of my response
went unanswered. I didn't see Fraulein Emmanuelle
for a long time, during which time, I was told
she joined the University of Konigsberg
and having entered a private cocoon
studied with a maddening frenzy, physics and philosophy.
And ten years thence, she had become a man, calling herself
Immanuel Kant, living the quiet life of a teacher,
lecturing on physics, theology and thinking up new sciences
and always thinking of herself—or himself—as an inner darkness
which had to be lit up with Reason.

And one day on Boulinstrasse I met Herr Kant

“Good morning Professor!” I greeted, “what an extraordinary
transformation!”

“Good morning Herr B,” he replied with some impatience

“You can walk with me if you want, I need to be back by 6.30 and continue work on my book.”

“Oh by all means Professor,” I said, “what are you working on these days?”

“I plan to call it *On the Limits of Sensibility and Reason* a treatise in which I propose to find the limits of what thought can think.”

“Marvelous,” I said, “as always, you are quite unpredictable Professor.”

“Not entirely,” he said with a smile.

“What you liked most about me has haunted me all through.

The inner darkness that you said epitomized your love for me, I haven’t been able to figure out what it really is.

I was all appearance then, I am all appearance still

and the inner darkness that we are, I am quite convinced now, we shall never be able to know, or even think,

I propose to call it—the-thing-in-itself.”

“Oh!” I exclaimed

“You and I,” he continued, “we never existed Herr B.

Never existed beyond the appearances contrived by our minds.

The time and space in which we think we are

may have flown from our minds; this road, this landscape,

and the ticking of the clock inside which we are
placing our steps and talking our talk—
may be intuitive projections of our mind, and without
our minds everything would be insensible, or an unthinkable
chaos,
because the universe, and everything inside it,
is constituted by the same darkness that is inside us
and our mind is like a lamp, which, with its
transcendental categories, illuminates the universe
and orders all the entities within it, but what we see
are only appearances.”

Loyalty

If it tugs at your neck whenever impulse compels you to run
and pulls you to a place where your spirit flags
know that Loyalty has turned you into a dog.

You have known him for a year now
yet the strain of the leash is all over your face.
You may call this loyalty but this is a bondage of pain.

Love is not a limit. It is being consumed
by the singularity of the day. Wasp to orchid flies, sunflower
with
sun does turn, these tendencies aren't rote-learnt,
love's constancy is constant betterment.

Stop and look around: how many saplings have been upturned
by virtue's mechanical plough! How many houses
filled with howls, caused by marriage's destructive vows
—taken without a thought—have made the messy bed
a sight of hell! Consider hence body's response, lightning in
breast
and thigh's tremors, carve the niche where the heart dwells.
If distance melts the edge of lips and presence bursts flowers
then it's the exchange of climes that's transforming us both
into the Mediterranean belt.

This is vital love—it's sun pouring on fevered grass.
Loyalty without love is a farce.

Ankur Betageri is a poet, short fiction writer and visual artist based in New Delhi. He is the author of *The Bliss and Madness of Being Human* (poetry, 2013) and *Bhog and Other Stories* (short fiction, 2010). He teaches English at Bharati College, University of Delhi. His poetry has appeared in *New English Review*, *Mascara Literary Review* and *London Review of Books*.

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