

Three Sonnets

by Ankur Betageri (April 2018)



The Massacre, Grace Hartigan, 1952

Mauser-bearer, Will I Ever have Peace with You?
(After Amoretti 57)

Mauser-bearer, will I ever have peace with you?
I beg you, please end this war
These arguments I cannot bear to pursue
Nor wish to outdo you in wrangling and torture:
So weak are my powers and so deep my wounds
That I feel I'll collapse, die on the spot
Seeing how my heart's pierced all around
With a thousand bullets which your tongue has shot
Yet speak sharply still, cut my calls
Revel in clawing games, in ritual assault
O cruel one—why do you erect these walls
And slaughter him that would for you fight?
Imitating the poets, I had reached this wretched state
And thought fighting with shrews was Man's estate.

Shall I Compare You to a Muskmelon Bright?

(After Shakespeare's Sonnet 18)

Shall I compare you to a muskmelon bright?

You are more luscious, more immutably fresh:

Muskmelons last not, after summer's height

Their flavour lingers, like the memory of their flesh.

Their taste too declines, like the delicate air of morn

You can't stay their passage from fruition to rot;

By farmers, and by seasons, from their princely seat torn

Like all things bright—they appear, and are not.

But sun-like you rise, ever-radiant and ever-renewed

Your sweetness welling in speech, loveliness in manner

A happy bouncing of light, by no limits hemmed

Your beauty so affecting that language beings to stammer.

My eyes, my breath, my spirit, awake to your sight

And find themselves in a life pierced by deathless light.

If Language Didn't Stretch and Melt like Cheese

(After Shakespeare's Sonnet 116)

If language didn't stretch and melt like cheese

Would it wrap around the thousand mysteries of love?

Love's truth is flux, you can't stabilize what it is

Or contain it in the coma of a statement: it is a know-how

Realised in play, no mark can its shifting essence fix.

An actor is not, but plays, the roles; a body, by playing,
feels

For the lover, these are * * * * kisses, not asterisks

Life gives the meaning that knowledge steals.

So if I touch the name and not its referent

Find thrill in deception than in sober communication

If my love is a game and not my heart's conferment

And if joy is to start off and not arrive at a station

Then let this movement in language be my movement in world

Let fulfilment be flight—the joy of a humming bird.

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 *Maple Tree Literary Supplement*, *Mascara Literary Review* and *London Review of Books*.

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