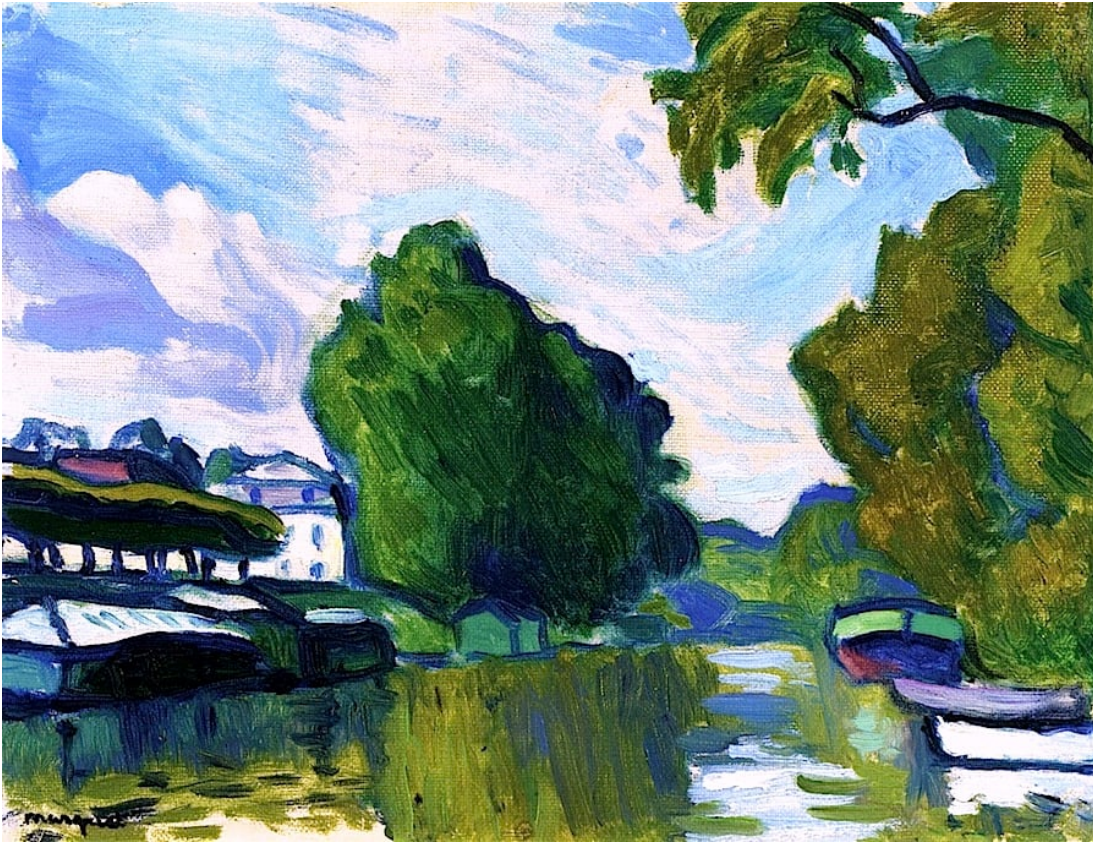


Under the Rose

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



Poissy, by the Seine, Albert Marquet, circa 1908

In spring he's drawn

to flowers in the park.

His cheeks heat up as he walks past

beds of peonies and crocuses.

And the bougainvillea radiates

the youth of a girl with shoulderless top.

'Don't touch the flowers,'

tells the sign. He doesn't want to;
in fact, he flees. But sadness
overwhelms him. Desire-
thwarting rules—everywhere.

Tired, he stands under a tree
and looks at the fallen thistles. Women in burkha
glance at him, giggle. A stray follows them
its tail swishing in diabolical menace.

Between the green hurry and gleaming stalk
the wanderer feels stranded
like a stone-chair embedded in the middle of a walk.
From Lal Bagh to Lodhi Gardens
the same floral electricity, the same brooding skies
ignites the lover's dark-dark thoughts.

When the call unanswered is smothered by leaves
and the park is a crematorium of deepening sighs,
he whispers under the wilting lips of a rose
and an eye beckons him to the edge of the woods.

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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