

## India

*Yuri Andrukhovych*

1.

India begins with dreams of departing eastward,  
and these dreams are narrative dreams,  
like a film where you wander, a tin god.  
You simply hear a trumpet, or a gong, or the ring  
of water, or perhaps a voice that whispers, Arise and go!  
But whether you heard it with your ears or heart, you don't know.

India is not quite a peninsula. It is a continent  
that borders Nothing. Neither atlases nor glossaries  
take into account the fact that the world is wrapped up by the Nile,  
that the stars in the sky are, in essence, a drama  
in God's theater. The time, it seems, hasn't come—  
we prefer to imagine the plane as an orb. A body.

We perceive as a sphere what lies flat like a pie.  
But you, having heard the sudden, sharp "March!"  
procure a sword and depart for the east to perish.  
You gather a troop of merry and rabid bandits  
who sing, when they march, much like  
heavenly angels, in a concert of cherubs in the nocturnal skies.

A plane is deserts and kingdoms, ridges, towns,  
and above them, only the atmosphere's thickening height,  
seven heavens deep, and no consolation or manna!  
Only after you lose your horses and friends, the whole train,  
with the grape-like resolve of beaten and twisted vines,  
will you fight your way to the place you can utter—and mean it—  
*rahmanna.*

2.

Marco Polo lied when he claimed  
that his donkeys, oxen, and mules  
took him farther East, all the way to China  
over abysses of gloom and the Tibet of fog.  
His path, without doubt, was a circular straying.  
Marco Polo must've slept in his saddle,  
for there is no land farther east, no tracks,  
because India is the limit, the land on the boundary.

What east can you speak of, if there is only a wall  
and behind it: the great and mute Void  
and It doesn't like us, for no reason at all,  
or so we think, for in truth It has no opinion.  
Here is the end of your pilgrimage and wilderness,  
the final rock, and rain, and bush,  
so you'd better have your vanity crushed –  
this wall is not one your cutthroats can climb.

This wall is a *fata morgana* against  
which Asia spills her ridges of sand,  
harrows and plows break against her—grand—  
and above is a different dimension: God and the bodies of heaven.  
But you are a stray and such is your fate:  
To travel down as far as the river will take you,  
as long as you trust that you can climb out to light  
as if out of a sack. At your dumb body's price.

3

When you enter jungles full of parrots,  
imagine: nature is God's workshop  
where your impotence roams.  
All you can do is throw yourself prostrate.

Implacable greenery sprouts like a plague,  
like a flood, like foam, slippery to touch.  
These plants have pride. They are a drug.  
These plants resemble a choir of hellcats.

"But this greenery is nothing! It is a backdrop  
for reptiles, fiends. I absorb  
this rotting, this lechery, prototype of Eden  
where not all has yet happened and evil breeds."

You who have a sword and a spirit to match  
in your glorified body—hack away, like St. George,  
slit salamanders, fiends, harpies, and furies,  
slice pythons open like frogs!

If here, already, God has gone berserk  
and this bestiary stands for the crown of creation  
vibrating with mockery of devilish songs—  
it's your duty to tramp this slime into moss!

You must emerge from this jungle  
while Our Lady stands watch above you.  
You, with the foundling's light in your eyes,  
you must reach the silver—the river's run.

4.

Of course, this river is pulled only downward,  
slow and viscous like the slime of vegetation  
while the spear in your hand becomes a boat-hook.

And you look into the river and do not see fish,  
nor shells on the sand glowing in the depths,  
nor lilies heavy and luminous, like a jasmine bush;

But you see, as in a dream, your face in the river—  
your loneliness, the lance with which you steer,  
your face on the bottom and a wound on your cheek.

On these waters' shores live exotic folk:  
the twisted people seeded on this flat terrain.  
You wished for it—now look at these brutes!

They have a thousand charms: little goat hooves,  
love through the arse and food through the nose,  
they have no "above," only ever-darkening woods;

With maws like underground vaults and blood like rotten fruit,  
their spirit shriveled like their tongue and speech of Tartar root;  
they have a many-handed god and a far-reaching czar.

Who was it that untied a sack and let loose,  
as if for laughs, these irksome bums with hooves?  
Who gave them the yearning to be prone for their beastly loves?

Protected by your cloak, holding to your pole,  
you sail through the trumpets' blaring from under hearts and ribs  
to Eden's entrance. And hell's a gaping hole.

5.

The ubiquitous presence in the thickets of tritons, dragons,  
griffons, pythons, and the way cats go rabid  
when turned into genies, the coming of comets and cyclones—  
all are signs that the inferno sighs closer. And you  
find this opening, step into its stench and gloom  
and walk above the fire. Ramshackle bridges sway  
and ahead, who knows what else—imps, terriers, tails.  
Keep making the sign of the cross, one hundred and forty times forty.  
You soldier on through this trial like a set of maneuvers;  
Hell catches you by the hem of your cloak, by your shoulders,  
By the sheath of your sword, by your elbows, and you hear, "Pay!"  
Hey, up there, in heaven, have you gone deaf?

The saints

intrude in the course of events rarely but on time.  
Angels swoop like resurrected aces—in threes,  
even in fives and sevens, their swords and wings  
bloom fiery, unfading; they rescue you from the pit,  
and unroll a garden for you along the vertical axis:  
the trees ever taller, the fowl closer, and fruits  
ever sweeter, heavier. These are the citrus,  
cymbals, streamers etcetera, books in percale,  
oxygen, honey, etcetera. And you, raised above  
the earth's surface, after all, above its plane, finally,  
will never come back, even if you bleed or burn!  
All you have left is a steady, heavenly glow.

*Translated by Nina Shevchuk-Murray*

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