

Classic Poetry Series

Hemant Mohapatra
- poems -

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Hemant Mohapatra(-)

Hemant Mohapatra is an Indian poet writing in English. He was born and raised in India and spent much of his childhood surrounded by the Himalayan and Shivalik ranges. In 2006, he moved to Austin, Texas, where he works as an engineer during the day and as a writer during the night.

He is featured in the 2011 Best New Poets series distributed by University of Virginia Press. His work has been published in various international journals such as Eclectica, BrinkLit, Asia Writes and the Paterson Literary Review as part of the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards series. He is also the winner of the second Srinivas Rayaprol Award and the Harper Collins Poetry Prize. He currently lives in Cambridge University, UK.

All That Bravery Got Us Nowhere

This unnatural hour that I have slept in still
hungry from an unfinished early meal, you appear
with your full body and voice and ask me to write again. I
am sitting in a car, running late for my piano lesson, and you
are leaning at the door, telling me the trees have stopped
growing where you live. That you've walked across
two continents but the moon still refuses to leave you.

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I hear you've started praying now—cut your hair
and stopped wearing blue. They say you suffered
for my art, for desire and despair. I suffered
for my quietude, for I thought freedom
meant something grander. Thankfully, our inequities
were even: clear and simple, the way horses grieve.
After a while, it became harder to realize I was
not talking to my refrigerator. I was, in fact, suffering.

**

In the dream, we are now climbing a staircase.
I am walking behind you, watching your milky calves
stroll in and out of your summer skirt. "What do you understand
of love?" you ask. "Nothing," I say. "And loss?" "Nothing."
"Then why do you write about either?"
"I don't."

**

"I write about you." You pause for a moment,
but do not turn back. Outside the window,
birds are turning into stone. Around the world, everyone
is entering a conversation.

Hemant Mohapatra

Grasshopper Aria

4 a.m.: the house is full
of fever and din. He stumbles
through the dark and stops
in front of the kitchen.
It is suddenly quiet—
they are waiting for him.
He pushes the door ajar
and finds them on top
of each other. One
of them, legs splayed
around the edge
of a plate, hands folded
in a prayer, while the other,
perched on its back, proud
and alone. Their bellies pushing
through the exoskeleton, curious
compound-eyes looking up
to the light he is flashing
on them. Caught in that moment
between the sewers and metal,
they are moving into sex. He closes
the door, they begin their song—
antennae sweeping the air
like ancient radios
tuning into love.

Hemant Mohapatra

Letters From Exile – Iv

I woke up at 2 a.m. with a start.
It was raining outside — birds
were angry, the streets full
of fire-engines — and I thought
of you after years: where are you now,
and how are you living, so far away,
with your black and white t.v.
by the window that opens up
to tea stalls, your single-bed
in a square apartment, walls
calendared with gods and goddesses
all the way back to nineteen
ninety-six. Tell me, my beautiful
loss, my hyacinth, how are you living
in the valleys of Dehra,
in that house you have made
with a young man you love.

Hemant Mohapatra

Letters From Exile—ii

It wasn't just the snow
eating up the suburban baroque,
or that you had just walked in,
cold as a welldigger's heart.
It wasn't the twilight leaving us
with our loneliness, or the night
unfreezing fireflies. It wasn't you,
with your elbows shored up
on old sienna tables, nor me,
keeling my way to the moon.
It wasn't the television
drooling relentless channels.
It was us: we were never geared
for love. The regularity was too dull.
Imagine the earth in orbit,
and this giant circumference
of light slowly slipping west:
everyone on that edge, waking
up together, lovers, still in bed,
entering each other and leaving
in fierce automobiles. It was
that routine we couldn't live.
We were like a dog
in love with his bone.
You throw it to the far end
of the field and he races off,
not to recover the piece,
but just to clear
the distance in between.

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