

ALMOST ISLAND

Contributors: Winter 2017

Abul Bashar (b. 1951) is a major contemporary Bengali prose writer who has authored more than forty books. He has received numerous awards for his work, including the Bankim Puraskar and the Ananda Puraskar. Hailing from the complex socio-religious terrain of district Murshidabad in West Bengal, Bashar creates a new paradigm of storytelling about local Muslim communities that live precariously on the borders of the state, pushed to the margins by the aggressive forces of religion and masculinity. Bashar's writings emerge from the conflict between scripture and ritual, masculine and feminine, state policy and human lives, and explore without sentimentality the conflict within.

Adi Shankara (Shankaracharya), the great 8th-century Indian philosopher of Advaita Vedanta, was also a poet. A striking body of vivid spiritual poetry is attributed to him by tradition.

Amanda Berenguer (1921-2010) was one of the most important and prolific Uruguayan writers of the last century. Like many contemporaries who lived through several dictatorships, Berenguer's poetry often represents language and meaning under siege at the same time that she attempts to maintain its political efficacy. However, *The Identity of Certain Fruits* breaks this pattern by engaging the possibility of meaning through a deep sense of pleasure in the things that surround us and the language that speaks to those things. In this case, those things are fruit, and what Berenguer represents is their sensual audacity.

Anna Deeny Morales is a literary critic and translator. Her translations of Raúl Zurita's works include *Purgatory* (2009), *Dreams for Kurosawa* (2011), and *Sky Below*, a volume of selected poems published by Northwestern University Press in 2016. Her translation of *Floating Lanterns* by Mercedes Roffé was published by Shearsman Press in 2015. Forthcoming translations include *Fells* by Gabriela Mistral, *Diana's Tree* by Alejandra Pizarnik, and *The Identity of Certain Fruit* by Amanda Berenguer. Deeny received her doctoral degree from the University of California, Berkeley, and teaches in the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University. Her book manuscript, *Other Solitudes*,

considers trans-American dialogues on consciousness and poetry throughout the last century.

Aryanil Mukherjee is a bilingual poet, essayist, translator, screenwriter and editor who has authored fourteen books of poetry and essays in two languages. Anthology appearances include: *The Harper-Collins Book of Indian Poetry in English* (2011), *The Literary Review Indian Poetry* (Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2009); *Indivisible: An Anthology of South Asian American Poetry* (University of Arkansas Press, 2010), *La Pared de Agua*, a Spanish anthology of contemporary Bengali poetry (Madrid: Olifante Press, 2011), etc. Aryanil edits *Kaurab*, a Bengali language e&m-zine of experimental poetry and poetics. A PhD in Aerospace Engineering, he works as an engineering mathematician in Cincinnati, USA.

Biswamit Dwibedy is the author of *Ozalid* (1913 Press, 2010), *Eirik's Ocean* (Portable Press, 2016), and *Ancient Guest* (HarperCollins, 2017), with two new books forthcoming: *Erode* and *Hubble Gardener* (Spuyten Duyvil Press), and a chapbook titled *MC3* (Essay Press) out next year. He is the editor of *Anew Print* and a co-editor for the journal *1913*. In 2014, he guest edited a dossier of contemporary Indian poetry, translated from seven regional languages, for *Aufgabe13*, published by Litmus Press. He lives in Bangalore, where he teaches at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology, and directs the Anew Writing Program.

Epsita Halder teaches Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University. She works on the Muharram traditions of West Bengal, for which she has received grants from the India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore, and Sarai-CSDS. She writes on vernacular Islam, Muslim popular piety and new medial practices. She is currently working on a new book about her ethnographic journeys.

Erik Bergqvist (b. 1970, Karlstad, southern Sweden) is the author of six collections of poetry in Swedish and has also been a critic writing on literature and music in the Swedish press for some twenty years. In 2015, he won the Gustaf Fröding Society poetry prize. Bergqvist has translated Simon Armitage, René Char, Mai Van Phan and others into Swedish; *Virvlarna* (“Whirlpools”), a large collection of his essays, fragments and occasional pieces, appeared in 2017. He is also a keen amateur lepidopterist and is one half of the pop/electronica duo Schaum.

Hijab Imtiaz Ali (1908-1999) was the first Muslim woman pilot in the Indian subcontinent. That however, is not her best-known accomplishment, for Hijab was a child genius, writing her first bestselling novel *Meri Natamam Mohabbat* at the age of twelve. It is considered one of the best love stories ever written in Urdu literature. She continued to be a prolific writer throughout her life, and has been called ‘The Queen of Urdu Romanticism’. In *Adab-E-Zareen* she adheres to no traditional conception of form or genre, reflecting with authenticity the freedom with which she lived her life.

Born in 1947 to a Zoroastrian business-family in Bombay, India, **Hoshang Merchant** graduated second in his BA Class (1968) with a major in English and a minor in the culture of India. From his mother’s family he descends from a line of preachers and teachers. He holds a Master’s from Occidental College, Los Angeles. At Purdue University, he specialized in the Renaissance and Modernism. Anais Nin and he corresponded for four years. His book on Nin, *In-discretions*, earned him a Ph.D. from Purdue in 1981 and is published by Writers Workshop which has also published seventeen books of his poetry since 1989. He helped establish the Gay Liberation at Purdue. After leaving Purdue in 1975, Merchant attended the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Centre, Massachusetts, and lived and taught in Heidelberg, Iran and Jerusalem where he was exposed to various radical student movements of the Left. He has studied Buddhism at the Tibetan Library at Dharamsala, north India, as well as Islam in Iran and Palestine. Rupa and Co. published his book of poems *Flower to Flame* in 1992 in the New Poetry in India series. *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (Penguin, 1999), *Forbidden Sex/Texts: New India’s Gay Poets* (Routledge, 2009), *Indian Homosexuality* (Allied, 2010) and *The Man Who Would Be Queen: Autobiographical Fiction* (Penguin, 2012) are among his notable works. Presently, Merchant teaches Poetry and Surrealism at the University of Hyderabad and is unmarried by choice. *Secret Writings of Hoshang Merchant* (OUP 2016) is his most recent work.

Jayant Kaikini, Kannada poet, short-story writer, columnist and playwright, with six short-story volumes, five poetry collections, three collections of non-fiction, and three plays to his credit, is also a much sought-after award-winning lyricist, script and dialogue writer for Kannada films. He won his first Karnataka Sahitya Akademi award at the age of nineteen in 1974 for his debut poetry collection, followed by three more in 1982, 1989 and 1996, for his short-story collections. He has also received the Dinakar Desai Award for poetry, the B.H.

Sridhar award for fiction, the Katha National Award and the Rujuwathu Trust Fellowship for his writing. He is the recipient of the Karnataka State Award for best dialogue and lyrics, and the Filmfare Award for best lyrics in Kannada four times – in 2008, 2009, 2016 and 2017.

Born in the coastal temple-town Gokarn, Kaikini is a biochemist by training and worked with pharmaceutical companies in Mumbai for two decades before moving to Bangalore, where he lives presently. A well-known television personality, he was given an honorary doctorate from Tumkur University in 2011 for his contribution to Kannada literature, film and television. He was honoured as Zee Kannadiga of the Decade in 2016. He was the first recipient of the Kusumagraj Rashtriya Bhasha Sahitya Puraskar in 2010. His latest book is a collection of essays on cinema.

Mirza Athar Baig, a philosophy professor at one of the oldest colleges in Pakistan, is the author of three novels, a short story collection, and numerous plays for television.

Nitoo Das is a birder, caricaturist and poet. Her first collection of poetry, *Boki*, was published in 2008, and her second, *Cyborg Proverbs*, was brought out by Poetrywala in September 2017. She teaches English at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi.

Philip Nikolayev the poet of *Letters from Aldenderry* (Salt) and other verse collections, has new volumes forthcoming from MadHat (USA) and Poetrywala (India) in 2018. He is coeditor-in-chief of *FULCRUM*, a serial anthology of poetry and criticism from throughout the English-speaking world.

Ranjit Hoskote is a poet, cultural theorist and curator. His collections of poetry include *Zones of Assault* (Rupa & Co., 1991), *The Cartographer's Apprentice* (Pundole Art Gallery, 2000), *The Sleepwalker's Archive* (Single File, 2001), *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985-2005* (Penguin, 2006), and *Central Time* (Penguin/ Viking, 2014). Two volumes of his poetry have appeared in German translation: *Die Ankunft der Vögel* (Carl Hanser Verlag, 2006), and *Feldnotizen des Magiers* (Editions Offenes Feld, 2015). Hoskote's translation of the 14th-century Kashmiri mystic Lal Ded has been published as *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded* (Penguin Classics, 2011). He is the editor of the anthology, *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets* (Penguin/ Viking, 2002), and of *Dom Moraes: Selected Poems* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2012). Hoskote's poems have appeared

in many anthologies, including *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets* (Jeet Thayil ed., Bloodaxe, 2008), *Language for a New Century* (Tina Chang, Nathalie Handal and Ravi Shankar eds., W. W. Norton, 2008), and *These My Words: The Penguin Book of Indian Poetry* (Eunice de Souza and Melanie Silgado eds., Penguin, 2012). His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Akzente*, *The Iowa Review*, *3am*, *Poetry Review* (London), *Poetry Wales*, *The Wolf*, and *Wespennest*. Hoskote has curated or co-curated numerous exhibitions, including the 7th Gwangju Biennale (Korea, 2008). He curated India's first-ever national pavilion at the Venice Biennale: 'Everyone Agrees: It's About to Explode' (2011). He was a Fellow of the International Writing Program, University of Iowa, and has been writer-in-residence at Villa Waldberta, Munich; Theater der Welt, Essen-Mülheim; and the Polish Institute, Berlin. He has been researcher-in-residence at BAK/ basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht. Hoskote was a member of the jury of the 56th Venice Biennale. He served as juror for international literature for the 2015-2017 fellowship cycle at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart.

Sascha Aurora Akhtar has been a figure on the UK/USA 'avant-garde,' poetry scene for over a decade. She is the author of two poetry collections *The Grimoire of Grimalkin* (Salt) and *199 Japanese Names for Japanese Trees* (Shearsman). Her work has been widely anthologised and translated into Armenian, Portuguese, Galician, Russian, Dutch and Polish. Anthologies include *Cathecism: Poems for Pussy Riot* (2012) and *Out of Everywhere* (Reality Street, 2015). She has also been part of poetry protests – *Against Rape* (Peony Moon, 2014), *Solidarity Park Poetry – Poems for the Turkish Resistance* (Ed. 2013). Her story 'The Nature of Wounds' appeared in *STORGY* in 2017. *Women: Poetry: Migration*, an anthology (Theenk Books: Edited by Jane Joritz-Nakagawa) is upcoming in 2018 with poems from *A Year In Clouds*.

Tejaswini Niranjana won the Central Sahitya Akademi Prize for her translation of M.K. Indira's *Phaniyamma* (1989) and the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Prize for her translation of Niranjana's *Mrityunjaya* (1996). She has also translated Pablo Neruda's poetry and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* into Kannada. Her translations into English include Vaidehi's *Gulabi Talkies* (2006). She grew up in Bangalore, and has studied and worked in Mumbai. She is currently professor of cultural studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) is best known as the co-founder of the Dada movement and author of many of its most influential poems and manifestoes. After the peak of the Dada movement, he had a brief and contentious affiliation with Surrealism and worked as a prolific lyric poet for the rest of his life. Tzara was born and raised in Romania, where, because of his Jewish identity, he could not own land or hold a passport. In 1915, he moved to Zurich and began to write in French and perform in the Cabaret Voltaire. In 1919, Tzara brought Dada to Paris, where he lived almost continuously until his death, writing and working as an art and literary critic, activist, humanitarian, diplomat, journalist, and playwright.