

Poems

Clara A.B. Joseph

Nothing Outside¹

Il n'y a rien hors du texte – Jacques Derrida

There is nothing outside,
Absolutely nothing

Noticeable outside;
Nothing standing, there,

Looking back from the outside;
No one coming, none disappearing;

No sun hidden within
A shadow;

No one bending, not
One sitting,

None moving as if to
Lie;

No rancid corpse
Stretched

Out
To be eaten;

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No whiff of wolves prowling, no cursing serpent
Lying,

None there to quickly strike
A heel,

Or steal;
None camouflaged out there,

No one to lay
A hand,

Kill,
Nor one who can redeem;

Nothing whatsoever
There:

Eternity, Now!

The unreality of time – J.M.E. McTaggart

Months yawn past unending iron
Creaking open always

Twice
Daily

Two more winters and freedom
At last! Endless labor

Outside our prison cell
Perennial roses and my companion

Bending to tend

To Kiss a Little Book

I feel... that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population – Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Afraid to breathe I tip-toe, a child
'midst lonely aisles in search of dusty friends
Now peeking when fat fathers stand busy
As I check name, to bosom hold, then smell

And kiss the little book gently laid
Against left hand, most grateful for
Promised hours of deep friendship. How rare
That only we knew, none else, the fluttering

Wonder, curious joy, the greed of speech-
Less words on paper, vibrant worlds
In hours gifted away from adults' hate-
Days or years, their brooding fault-finding.

A golden book with a Norman princess,
Remember? Who wore a long
Braid and loved Prince Whoever first or last?
That too forget, but not the hate unleashed

As races, families, clans devoured
Other people's lands, and life itself
And me, who prayed that they marry soon
Before the queen arrived to destroy such love

Poems

In little books with faded covers
Unseen by all except a child in search
Of alphabets, words, the tale's solace:
A reader colored into a postcolonial world.