

Ban

In Mururoa
there is a power to silence all
mutual confession and whispers,
kill the trade
in rumour, gossip, affection.
It's the blasts not heard
that people desert so early
the waterfront bars and the bo-
like ocean along the beach
that constricts them to these islands.

Where are the retired sea captains,
slouching planters, boatswains,
lawyers, bankers,
and pilots of vac aircraft?
The stunning Samoan blonde
just out of her bikini?
The schoolchildren diving
into the blue lagoon
from the bows of a vessel from Vanuatu?

How is one to loosen up the serious
boondoggle of species from afar?
First, Bougainville stopped off for a bite
and tagged his name on to our flowers.
His men hooked us to their skirting faith
and, as if in return, gifted us
Europe's venerable disease.
They all came, one after another,
in their sloops, looking for such a paradise
where one could dream before nature,
dot or space time to a line
or crumple it for the corner basket.
And here it was: in Hivaoa or Tahiti,
off the steamer, Gauguin painting, happy
suckling at the mangoes
for inspiration, tree after tree.
And ready victuals:
breadfruit, absinthe or claret, women.

Now the earth implodes
I don't know how many thousand
leagues below the sea.
No upward mushroom
to delimit the heavens—
for that is done already;
just the invisible downward kill.

If the earth shakes
with muted rage
or the sediment is a shine faster
or darker, it's just the water's concern,
whatever, whoever, wherever breaks.

Tuna, Mahimahi, Wahoo—
all know it in their bones
and in the fission of their body
clung to the coral,
weedy raft of the testy sea.
Foodchain like them,
I do not like
to eat lead or mercury.

Here again the slow current
from the atoll caresses the island,
a Pacific gesture to the strand:
"This French kiss is without radiation!"
But has anyone asked the shellfish?

These flowers, they blossom and blush
into so many colours all over
looking for their name.
No, my soul was not annealed
for your dyestuff when you last came.
My earlier wounds have not healed.
Please bring me no further civilization.

ALAMGIR HASHMI