



Notes on Human Epoch: Sudeep Sen's *Anthropocene*

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Abstract

This paper examines how underpinning concerns with the relationships between self, community and the world in Sen's work not only articulate a need for these relationships to be recalibrated in order to avoid descent into dystopia, but also connect into the volume's contemplation of the necessity, role and value of poetry (and, by extension, art in general) in such circumstances. The paper then examines, more specifically, how Sen discovers consolations that extend beyond consumerist distractions even in the midst of signs and portents of imminent cataclysm and these might relate to the notion of poetry itself offering companionship as articulated by the British writer John Berger in his response to Sen's work. The paper concludes by considering Anthropocene in the context of geopolitical change at the global level (specifically, the concept of re-globalisation following a surge in nationalism) and the possibility of the (re)emergence of a putative world poetry.

Keywords: Anthropocene, climate change, Covid-19, companionship, consolation, environment, existential threat, globalisation/re-globalisation, pandemic, poetry

As his 2015 volume of new and selected poems and translations, *Fractals*, demonstrates, Sudeep Sen's output over the last forty years as a poet and translator—not to mention as a literary editor, dramatist, photographer and editor too—has been prodigious and so it should perhaps not come as a surprise to find that his 2021 post-*Fractals* collection, *Anthropocene*, published during a time of pandemic and extreme weather events, should itself be remarkable, both in volume and scope. Its alliterative subtitle *Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* alerts us to its topicality and the key recurrent themes which fall within the horizon of Sen's broad view of the Anthropocene, the human—perhaps, all-too-human—epoch that began in earnest during the Industrial Revolution or at a much earlier

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juncture. And yet, despite his acute observations of what he refers to in his prologue, “The Role of the Artist is Not to Look Away,” as “our world’s passage from utopia to dystopia,” the directly felt consequences of, on the one hand, humankind’s destructive impact on the natural world and, on the other, the Covid-19 pandemic are not the occasion for disheartened rumination, apocalyptic prescriptions or necessarily bleak conclusions (24). Sen also offers opportunities for consolation and, again in his words, *Anthropocene* “is ultimately a prayer for positivity and hope”(24). Or, to put it another way, using John Berger’s words to describe Sen’s poems: they “bring – like all true poetry—so much companionship.” It is this ability to look deeply into a seemingly merciless present and towards an even more apparently merciless future whilst, at the same time, seeking occasions for a solace, that goes beyond, goes deeper than the mere numbing of anxiety through the distractions of consumerism and its attendant medications which sits at the core of this particular volume of Sen’s work more generally and, perhaps, as Berget says, of all true poetry too. Here, then, I focus on the work in *Anthropocene* and discuss Sen’s diagnosis of the state we are in, where he seeks solace and how his poetry itself offers us consolation through, amongst other things, Berger’s notion of poetry as companionship.

A Topical Storm

It would be easy but simplistic to regard the work in *Anthropocene* as poetry in the form of reportage and outrage, an immediate, urgent response to pressing concerns, news that stays news after it’s been articulated, and as a demonstration of a more openly *engagé* approach than is apparent in his earlier work—in which, with a kind of tireless restlessness and detailed attentiveness, Sen brings his own perspectives to bear on lyrical tropes of nature, art and love. The sense of urgency in the *Anthropocene* poems—some brief as haiku, others relatively lengthy prose reflections—is certainly founded in what might be called topical documentary observation and is undoubtedly a felt presence—both in stark titles like “Global Warming,” “Rising Sea Levels,” “Climate Change,” and in the scrupulous detail that occasions and amasses in individual poems, whether that be a *neem*’s “serrated leaves” that “wear season’s toxicity / on their exposed skin” in “Pollution” (34) or the “fragmented waves of golden-amber spark / electrifying helical fire-

flurries” (118) in “Burning Ghats, Varanasi”, lines that are reiterated beneath one of images in the evocative sequence of photographs and poetry, “Skyscapes” (105) included in the mid-section of the collection. The unexpected beauties of nature and the equally unexpected—and not always quite so beautiful—the behaviour of humans during the pandemic are shadowed by an unavoidably ominous tone. It is almost as if we have forgotten how to live, both with our planet and with each other, Sen suggests, pointing towards the accumulating symptoms of existential crisis.

In “Concrete Graves,” for example, Sen writes of “Arrogance, avarice, / real seduction”, “blighted brick buildings // spurring breath-wheeze” and “Skeletal skyscrapers / unfinished flyovers” that “collapse prematurely / burying people” — all evidence that we are heading along “a fast-track to/our planet’s detonation” (41). Similarly, in “Obituary,” reprints of two New York Times’ front pages from during the pandemic indicate again these poems’ topicality and responsiveness to current events: “Our lives” reduce to “micro point-size fonts/on an ever-inflating pandemic list—/ black specks, fugitive lonely numbers—/ the deceased, on an official roster” (53). Or again in ‘Speaking in Silence’ where Sen gets to the heart of this perfect storm of disturbances in the natural world, viral contagion and unjust and irresponsible capitalism in a single couplet:

As the world pandemically wrestles with the dry
heat
of disease and pestilence — profiteers pry, pilfer.
(57)

The element of reportage looms large too in a sequence of prose poems titled simply ‘Newsreel’ as well as in the fourteen ‘Corona Haiku’, snapshots of “our ‘new normal’ where “pestilence prevails” that hinge on the question of whether we will find “a more compassionate world/ after this pandemic’s death”, but end with images that suggest that we will not:

Hunger
migrants chew dry leaves
off the streets—no food, water—

national disgrace

*

Migrants

walking the highways

hopelessly, towards fractured

dreams, awaiting death (62)

This is not to say by any means that Sen has not engaged with contemporary realities and their political implications before, far from it — but what perhaps previously formed an undercurrent, sensed by the reader, but not necessarily explicit, has emerged onto the surface in the form of more direct language, more overt expressions of unease. Sen is not the only poet, of course, whose recent work reflects this shift towards urgency or manifests a similar desire and need to record, document, articulate lived experiences that derive from and illuminate the patterns of chaos, conflict and threat that now appear to sweep across the globe with disturbing frequency and in an equally disturbing variety of configurations (I am writing this nearly a year into the Russian invasion of Ukraine). Increasingly, poets in all parts of the world are addressing the cumulative effects and consequences of human behaviour, on the natural environment, for the world at large and the specific individuals who inhabit it. To call this a trend is to risk belittling it, as if it were merely a convenient fad, a bandwagon to leap on, but while there may perhaps be some who are spurred by a desire to be seen to be ‘on message’ or, to put it more generously, by a feeling that these are topics they *ought* to write about from specific standpoints or perspectives, there are many others who, like Sen, are producing work that directly engages with the topical at the local, national and international levels without resorting to bolted-together platitudes and slogans. Yes, in one sense, it is political poetry, in that they openly deal with key political issues, but, crucially, it is also poetry that is deeply rooted in the personal, in the impacts and pressures that make themselves felt on us whoever and wherever we happen to be.

In his prose piece “Poetics of Solitude, Songs of Silence,” in which he reflects not only on the isolation of lockdown (which, as he notes, is “nothing new” for a writer), but also on the relationship

between solitude, thought and creativity, Sen writes: “Wherever I am, I’m always at once at ‘home’ and in the ‘world’.” It is a sense of simultaneity that he suggests may derive “from a sense of rootedness” and exists within “a precious zone for philosophical thinking, a space for silence and ‘stillness’ (as Pico Iyer says) that allows an inner voice to be heard” (160). It is also — it seems to me at least—at the heart of Sen’s engagement with the global-topical themes that course through *Anthropocene* and yet remain deeply rooted in the personal and the everyday. The poems, in other words, originate, not in pungent rhetoric, broad-stroke opinion (although Sen is not afraid to voice his opinion as the phrase ‘national disgrace’ in the ‘Hunger’ haiku evidence) or in what has become conventional apocalyptic imagery (although again Sen is not afraid to deploy words like ‘pestilence’ and ‘plague’ when they earn their place), but in the close observation and re-examination of seemingly insignificant, often familiar details: those ‘serrated leaves’ on the *neem* tree outside Sen’s study, the cloudscapes that recur in infinite variety throughout the collection or, as in the opening stanzas of “Scar”, the entirely ordinary event of a lightbulb blowing out:

The heating filament snaps –
orange-white death –
electric rage.

Winters in Delhi, unpredictable
like its power supply —
adulterous, unreliable, fickle as weather. (135)

Orientations

One question that the twin crises of climate change and the coronavirus pandemic — especially during those long periods of lockdown — has brought into focus is the relationship between ‘I’, ‘home’ and ‘the world’ that Sen refers to in “Poetics of Solitude, Songs of Silence.” The relationship between the personal, the communal and the global, which brings with it questions of identity, responsibilities, negotiation and obligation, has always been but is now becoming increasingly politicised. On the one hand, we have those who suggest that this relationship requires recalibration, that we have to make deep-seated changes to the ways in which we engage with the self, each other and the world, changes that will, if

not wholly prevent, then at least ameliorate the long-term damage of global warming, potential future global health crises and their attendant human and geo-political repercussions. On the other, there are those who vehemently and vociferously deny the need for any such recalibration or reappraisal and, at their most extreme, claim that both climate change and the coronavirus pandemic are ‘fake news’, a claim, behind which lie all manner of assumptions that support a dangerously anthropocentric stance towards the small blue dot that we inhabit. In between, of course, there also lies a vast range of other positions and orientations. What there is no denying, however, is that this issue has become—or is at least starting to become—one of the principal fault lines or network of fault lines in social tectonics at the individual, communal and geo-political levels. Families have become divided over differences in opinion about global warming or vaccination against Covid 19. Societies have rearranged themselves according to new allegiances that are founded in conventional divisions (class, race, gender, religion), but have been supplemented with or penetrated by other categories of difference that relate to degrees of scepticism and acceptance, trust in structures and systems and the multiple interpretations of concepts like ‘freedom’, ‘justice’ and ‘equality’ that are continually argued over. At the global level too, the geo-political order is undergoing realignment, a realignment which may yet prove to be as significant as that which followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of communism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the adjustment of Cold War-era spheres of occupation, interference and influence—a realignment whose outlines have come into view more firmly since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. These are, of course, issues of major importance with almost inconceivable consequences if the tectonic shifts they presage occur. Such shifts may well prove not only systemic, but existential, heralding the beginning of an epochal transition from the Anthropocene to the post-Anthropocene. That transition may not necessarily result in the extinction of the human species (although that is one possibility), but it might result in an as yet almost unforeseeable repositioning of our species within whatever is left of the global ecosystem such that we are no longer able to exert the dominance over other species and over nature as a whole that many seem to believe is a right granted to us by the accident of our having conscious minds. At present, what that repositioning might look like

remains the stuff of dystopian imagination—bands of nomads roaming the few remaining inhabitable regions of the planet, perhaps, or isolated remnant communities strung out across the archipelagos of what was once high land and is now all that survives above rising oceans or maybe even a small surviving extra-terrestrial colony on the Moon or Mars with a derelict planet left behind. For the moment, the precise nature of the post-Anthropocene is not important. What is important—if not wholly crucial—is that the tectonic shifts that may well lead to it are already becoming visible.

Given the existential nature of the threats posed by current approaches to the relationships between ‘I’, ‘home’ (taken as meaning our place of residence, everyday mode of living and the immediate community into which we are connected) and ‘the world’ in the broader sense, no matter whether those approaches reflect what we have become habituated to thinking of as conventional left-wing, centrist-liberal or right-wing ideology, whether they seem to offer hope, indifference or despair, it may seem that poetry—especially essentially lyric poetry—has little to offer. As Auden infamously said in “In Memory of W.B. Yeats”, “Poetry makes nothing happen” and survives as an inconsequential gesture (“A way of happening”) or the articulation of opinion (“A mouth”). Even in the face of potential cataclysm (such as the Second World War, whose beginning was fast approaching when Auden wrote his elegy for Yeats), poets have every right to make such gestures and voice such opinions, but, ultimately, they cannot and should not expect their gestures and opinions to *do* anything, to make anything *happen*. Or that at least seems to be the implication. Thus, while poets have every right to offer perspectives, voice opinions, and exercise their right to free speech by writing about what they please (who else is in any position to determine what poets can and cannot write about?), including pressing political issues, paradoxes remain. Is there any point in doing so? Is such poetry merely ‘preaching to the converted’? Is it merely a form of political gesture or gestural politics? Or, worse, might it be construed as an assertion of poetic authority and exceptionalism, the construction of an authoritative lyric ‘I’ based on the traditional humanist assumption that displays of rhetorical and linguistic dexterity confer a status on an ‘I’ that allows it to speak to and for us? To put it crudely, why should anyone listen to a poet on

questions that seem to require, again, no matter what your own opinions about what the results should be, making something happen? “You write about these things, poet. But why aren’t you out on the streets? Why don’t you actually *do* something?”

In some cases, of course, the poets *are* out on the streets, but even those who don’t engage in overt activism are engaged in an activity which, I would argue, necessarily concerns itself with those relationships between ‘I’, ‘home’ and ‘the world’ that are profoundly, fundamentally linked to the fault lines that are emerging and becoming increasingly concerning because they seem to presage the tectonic shifts which, in their turn, might bring about the conditions for the arrival of the post-Anthropocene. What Sudeep Sen describes in “Poetics of Solitude, Songs of Silence,” in other words, extends beyond his own personal sense of simultaneity between ‘home’ and ‘world’ to all poetry: unless it is specifically written for self-consumption alone (that is, as self-expression for its own sake, as a form of catharsis or therapy), poetry necessarily entails—no matter what its subject, style, perspective, voice etc—an awareness of the self and its position *in* the world. Or perhaps more speculatively, all poetry is part of the process of constructing a home for the self in the world. That it does so quietly, making “amid all the clamour of public rhetoric and widespread distress ... a quiet artistic offering”, as Sen puts it, is what makes it all the more valuable. It is perhaps no accident that the word ‘silence’ appears more than thirty times in *Anthropocene*, celebrated on the one hand as a respite from “all the clamour” and, on the other, as a source, the companion of a stillness that allows “an inner voice to be heard”. On reading *Anthropocene*, it seems all the clearer to me that this silence and stillness are prerequisites, necessary pre-conditions for writing, for articulating whatever requires articulating, and consequently make possible precisely the kind of recalibration in our relationship to the immediate and then wider world that I have been talking about. To write a poem, in other words, inevitably involves reflection, even if it is not articulated in the poem itself, on the self (who is ‘speaking’ in the poem?), home (language itself is a kind of home) and the world (to whom and for whom is a poem speaking?)—reflection that leads to an adjustment, no matter how seemingly insignificant, in a writer’s relationships to self, home and world, and that occurs in the silence

and stillness preceding utterance—and in the silence and stillness that follows utterance in many cases too, I suspect.

The British poet R.F. Langley (1938-2011) was another writer with an acute sense of the value of silence and stillness both as a means to achieve a recalibration with the world and as a condition for the activity of poetry. They were his way of getting through “to what was really there”, as he put it in an interview published in *Don't Start Me Talking*, a collection of interviews with writers published by Salt in 2006, and according to his own account, he would spend hours standing in absolute stillness, a habit borne witness to by his fellow poet Jeremy Prynne who noted during Langley's memorial service in 2011:

His alertness to perception was enhanced by a studied practice of taking up an immobile, silent stance, either inside a building or upon some grassy bank outside, to open his gaze and thoughts over an extended period, mind busy with interior responses or purposefully blank, to tune in to his surroundings. (239)

Tellingly, Prynne also described this mode of being as “a kind of mental and indeed moral photography” (Langley, xii)— and this very much seems to cohere with Sudeep Sen's description cited above of finding or establishing “a space for silence and ‘stillness’ [...] that allows an inner voice to be heard”. As I have argued above, this space is not an escape *from* the world, but a space to recalibrate our relationships with it in ways which, as Sen's work illustrates, have acquired not only moral but political, systemic and existential dimensions.

Consolations

Sen's poem titled “Consolation” begins with a simple observation, albeit one hinging on an ambiguity in the word ‘gleam’ as potentially both noun and verb, a small but significant indicator that we should not take everything *as read*:

Wet rose petals, velvety,
gleam, tealight's soft glow.

Light is a recurrent motif in Sen's poetry, as is colour, for that matter, both of those motifs almost certainly derive from his interest in and practice of photography but also open up fields of enquiry, inviting us to consider what light actually illuminates, what associations colours might have acquired for us. Here light plays across a domestic scene where "Feather-fire radiates/early seasonal warmth//adding grain-texture/to counter-top's varnish" and in the garden there are "night candles, fairy lights / on trained greens". There is, we sense, both silence and stillness, a concomitant warmth of home, preludes to what Sen calls "raw/solemnity, soon to follow". This is provided by "a young Sufi singer" whose song assumes

a gentle
rising form, its timbre deepening,

measured lyrics unfolding
note by note, its phrasing

raw, simple, secular,
spiritual — a deep sonar

healing — its soul sombre,
magical, meditative. (152-3)

The poem bears the title "Consolation" perhaps because it might serve as a quintessence or at least emblem of the discovered consolations that Sen writes of elsewhere in the "Consolation: Hope" section of *Anthropocene*: resurgent plant life, the light of all kinds and its diverse effects, coming warmth, silence and stillness transformed into art (in both the young sufi singer's song and the poem itself). As the collection progresses away from its early strident chords, its themes of climate change and pandemic, the personal pain and fever recounted in the prose poems that make up a section called "Corona Red", its song too might be said to acquire "a gentle rising/form, its timbre deepening" and, above all, "a deep sonar healing". We are reminded that poetry not only has the capacity to articulate the traumas that humanity is inflicting on the natural world and itself but that it also has a reparative capability. It is, in that evocative title of Jeremy Prynne's 1974 pamphlet, *Wound Response*,

but it is also a response that can both remind us of the wound and point us towards strategies of healing. Sen's acute observations of the natural world are in themselves, in their acuteness, contributory: like Langley's, they arise from silence and stillness, whether they are occasioned by the *neem* tree outside his study (reborn in "Neem: Delhi Summer" as its "Bare brown branches yearn//wait for an errant raindrop to spark sex" (143) after being subjected to the "season's toxicity" in "Pollution"), the cloudscares and skyscapes over Delhi, the "metaphor spark, jagged lightning" of a meteor (149) or "the aural orchestra" of the stars with their "distant / pan-flute crackles echoing anti-gravity static, / space-dust murmurations, galactic-sighs, crests-troughs" (150). Sen chooses a quotation from William Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' ("To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And a Heaven in a Wild Flower/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour") as one of the epigraphs for the "Consolation: Hope" section of *Anthropocene* seems wholly appropriate. The collection might be read as a modern-day *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, albeit in reverse order and without such a sharp division between those two categories. Even in the poems, we might categorise as songs of experience in the first half of the book, there are moments of modest celebration and the consoling innocence of the poems later on are still tempered by experience, the knowledge of what's amiss, what's still potentially disturbing the sombre or raw or joyous equilibrium.

Coming earlier than the "Consolation: Hope" section, the bridge between the two is the sequence of photographs and short excerpts from other poems that serve as subtitles for the images reprinted in "Skyscapes." The excerpts look both back and forward to poems elsewhere in the collection and the vivid, sometimes almost surreally vivid photographs might be sensed as either ominous or reparative: are these extraordinary skyscapes manifestations of nature's beauty or portents of imminent disaster? Could their "terrible beauty" (Sen quotes Yeats' phrase three times in *Anthropocene*) itself be a portent of coming catastrophe? From here, the poems become more concerned with consolation, become more consolatory. In the "Holocene: Geographies" section, the poems begin to find what Sen calls in "Abandoned Gods" "a temporary finery" and experiences when "at least the moment is living" (124). They may be fleeting and

transient, but at least they are alive, not already subsumed into the wounds and anxieties striating earlier poems. There are human compensations too, in the form of friendship (most notably in “Wetherstone”), art and—love, most poignantly expressed because brought up against the consequences of the anthropocentric threat in 'Aspen':

Forest fires conflagrate,
but cannot raze

the incandescent love
for my beloved. (139)

Companionship

Not so long ago, in a creative writing class at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski in Bulgaria where I teach, I asked my students why they repeatedly used the word ‘relatable’ to describe and designate a text successful and why they thought relatability might be a criterion for assessing whether a text works or not. They came up with some convincing answers, but these seemed rather more connected with readability and comprehensibility than with what poetry and literature in general might be capable of doing. Or of at least attempting to do. At the time, it seemed as if they wanted literature to be something they could rely on, like a good friend. Something that would reflect back on their own experiences and tell them that everything was going to be OK. That it was, essentially, a mirror—not of the world they lived in, but of their opinions about it. I have to admit that I'm not sure how's literature works. Shakespeare famously had Hamlet talking about putting a mirror up to nature but then showed us many things which are not—to be honest—immediately 'relatable'—likewise, Keats, Baudelaire, Eliot, Plath and on and on. My counterargument was that maybe it's good sometimes to encounter work that manages to be both partially relatable and partially unrelatable. Isn't that how art works? By making the familiar unfamiliar but yet introducing an element of the familiar into the unfamiliar? How relatable, for example, is *The Waste Land*? Or *Finnegans Wake*? Or *The Castle*? Or *The Naked Lunch*? Isn't great literature often great because it's entirely unrelatable and offers us the opportunity to look at our own experiences in a wholly new way? It might start with the relatable, but then lead us with varying degrees

of gentleness or harshness towards the unrelatable because previously unthinkable.

A few weeks later, I probably still hold to that thought. However, re-reading *Anthropocene* in the light of that discussion and of John Berger's comment on Sen's work that suggests all true poetry offers companionship has afforded an opportunity to think again, not only about poetry's liminal status as a way of happening that yet makes nothing happen but also about why we read it, about what it offers us. Does a poet – another individual whose circumstances and life are very different to ours—finding consolation mean that we can find consolation in that too? Berger's phrase returns. His choice of companionship—rather than friendship or relatability—was no doubt intended to be precise. A companion is not the same as a friend, an acquaintance or a relation—or someone we necessarily directly relate to. It is a presence, sometimes someone well known, sometimes someone who is a total stranger. Companionship is a category of relationship, of interaction that might encompass what we feel when we share a railway compartment with someone who happens to be travelling in the same direction but has no other connection with us. Such a companion maybe someone who, in the intimate unfamiliarity of a chance encounter, is granted or grants themselves a certain licence. A licence to articulate thoughts and emotions that they might not otherwise be comfortable articulating, untested, in other companies. Not simply to speak or share but also to both challenge and console. Companionship, in other words, may well be a comfort, but it is not always necessarily comfortable. And it is in this that Berger's identification of companionship with "all true poetry" is in itself precisely true. Poetry, like all art forms, is work, a form of work, and, contrary to Auden's assertion that it "makes nothing happen", it has work to do even if its consequences are not immediately perceptible. And part of that work is to be a companion, not the instantly relatable companion who flings an arm around you and assures you that all is well, the boon companion of various polished tales, but the stranger in the railway carriage who might, let's say, point at the arrangement of clouds on the horizon and see in it a yearning for rain, a yearning for reparation. Or who rages against the dying of this or that light but also encourages you to look again at the serrated leaves of a *neem* tree or how shadows play across a garden

as someone begins to sing. Or who offers, in place of rhetorical political clamour, considered reflections born of moments of stillness and silence, reflections that are, like the young Sufi singer's song, simultaneously secular and spiritual.

Re-Globalisation: A Conclusion

In the 1990s and 2000s, following the crumbling away of the Cold War geo-political order (which was nowhere near as abrupt or as extensive as many interpretations claim), the word 'globalisation' became talismanic. Globalisation was what the post-Cold War geo-political order, supplemented by the internet and digitalisation, would enable, and with that would come—we were told—a new stage in the Anthropocene. A floriation of equality and freedom that would replace the rigid structures imposed by imperialist structures and nation-state aspirations. What we now know—and probably knew at the time but did our best to avoid knowing—was never going to happen. The so-say globalised world operates along different fault lines, but it nevertheless replicates divisions between 'us' and 'them' that have characterised so-say civilisation since the ancient Greeks defined themselves in opposition to the barbarians. It has also exacerbated the damage we are doing to our planet and ourselves by supporting unsustainable economic practices such as sending endless shipments of goods manufactured by underpaid workers in one country to overpaid consumers in another country halfway across the globe, whilst at the same time encouraging an airy indifference to that damage via a pragmatic perception of individuality built on that old British cliché "I'm all right, Jack" and a phlegmatic optimism founded in the assumption that "it might all look like chaos now, but it will turn out fine in the end".

As it turns out, of course, this concept of globalisation has sent us back, scurrying into our silos—a process accelerated in a very real sense by the Covid-19 pandemic—and has ushered in a passive-aggressive right-wing populism that takes succour from the traumas and anxieties that globalisation has spawned and appears not to care about the consequences of its desire to provide quick fixes for perceived individual and social disparities in—let's be honest—the name of profit. It is the kind of populism that allows the tyrannies imposed by imperialist governments to be replaced by the tyrannies

imposed by multinational companies with, as it were, compliant politicians, nodding along to the tune. What we need, perhaps, is a reinvention of globalisation. A re-globalisation, as it were. A re-globalisation that's embedded not in profit margins and trade deficits but in what we actually have in common with both ourselves and the environment we live in. It would be entirely naïve, possibly foolish, to claim that a reinvigorated notion of 'world poetry' might achieve or even be a contributing factor to the achievement of that, but that seems to be what collections like *Anthropocene* are starting to make possible. Heterogenous, but also rooted in specificities, it is undoubtedly of and for this world, alert to shared experiences, wired into the poetry that has preceded it, addressing that terrible beauty that humankind seems capable of creating in multiple forms and circumstances. Sen's is poetry which is open to both outrage and solace. For all its anger, it is deeply rooted in the appreciation of the unavoidable locality of where we each live, where we each form our attachments, where we each form friendships and love, and we need to accommodate ourselves to that, its similarities and differences. Above all, perhaps, it is capable of that "terrible beauty" that Yeats spoke of, exemplified here in "Aspen", the poem mentioned above that operates on all manner of levels, but crucially leaves us, the reader, the other, space to respond and find a shared consolation in our shared experience:

ASPEN
for Simi

Gold-orange patina
imprinted serrated leaves

glow silk — incarnadine
like russet sunsets.

Foliage slow-shivers —
every breath, heaving.

Winter-white barks
studiously slow-burn.

Forest fires conflagrate,
but cannot raze

the incandescent love
for my beloved.

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Wave after wave,
the Northern lights'

luminously pirouette
in polar-cooled wind

chill — redolent colours
sculpting translucent

letters in this frozen air —
a sacrament of faith,

brightly lit. Decoding
hieroglyph's lost
lyrics — an exquisitely
sung ghazal unfolds.
Glava, Sweden (139-140)

Endnote

All page references, unless otherwise stated, are to: Sudeep Sen, *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation*.

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