

The River

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Your waters pacify the sun, then lift sad lilies;
Magnify the Milky Way; take up tiny stars.
Mute the wild tumble of angry cataracts,
Then flow quietly onto succulent plains where
The doe drinks with no leopard in her eyes.
You push the world's roots to speak in flowers.
Cleanse us, moreover, along your sacred banks.

For we write beautiful and wretched lives.
Whose contradicting seasons enchant and loot.

Enter as in the days of youth, by Mandai Lake,
To teach as eagles scooped fish; chased by swift
Otters the smaller leapt in silver. Death looked
Cruel. Now I know. Time then was fall of leaves,
The wind's call along the top of trees. The damp
November moon rippled on your face, unbroken;
Night-jar's calls comforting, secure. Now you repair.

Regulated jungles do not heal. Nor intelligent, tall
Buildings, integrated systems, neat globalisation

I search for tranquilities, yours especially. Move
Point to point. Do your thing. Subdue blood-clots
Along with knots, heresies, post-modern longings.
Move the blue sky home. Loose dolphins into tides.
Help the land unleash its memory. Let the pattern
Of blown grass shift, as dreams return, decompress,
Drift, connect destinations, renew their meaning.
Flow but do not leave.

(Written on 20 November 2007)

With the Sixth

I hear what is not heard: songs of your hair
Against the wind; then reluctant silence.

I see what is not seen: your fingers climbing
The nape of my neck; swans are in season.

I touch what is not touched: a world of origins
Unfolding continents; its lips warm our oceans.

I smell what is not smelt: nostrils flare, flame
Before the purest rose; it has no second name.

I taste what is not tasted: your fruits teach
My tongue first lessons. Fulfilling is hunger

Sliding into
This knowing. Now the black pearl rings
Luster, rising light. Luminescence so pulsates,
Turns favourite corners, itsy tuckshop laughter,
A blown kiss, a sip of dew, a slim moment,
Into 5 Takes
And this.

(Written in December 2007)

¹ Edwin Nadason Thumboo (b. 1933) is one of Singapore's most distinguished poets. He has published four collections of poetry: *Rib of Earth* (1956), *Gods Can Die* (1977), *Ulysses by the Merlion* (1979) and *A Third Map* (1993); and two collections on nursery rhymes: *Child's Delight 1 & 2* (1972), and is currently working on his next volume. He is an Emeritus Professor at the National University of Singapore where he was appointed Professor of English in January 1979, Head of the Department of English Language and Literature (1977-1993), the first Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (1980-1991) and Professorial Fellow (1995-2002).