

Appendix 2

The text for the poem *Diving, Ayisha's story*

The script of the poem is performed as an interior monologue in film loop F, *Ayisha's story*, (8.51 minute loop) part of *Diving*, configuration 3, Iteration 2, shown at the *Hyphen* exhibition (2019).

In this film, a poem is spoken aloud by the colonial family's ayah or nanny. Historically the ayah's voice is rarely heard neither in written records nor in personal memoirs. This poem is an attempt to imagine what this voice might say if given a chance to be heard.

The poem is divided into six stanzas. Each stanza has three separate sections.

- The first section (red) represents a dream state or non-reality linked to nature or animals in the world around the ayah.
- The second section (green) is the ayah's daily domestic routine looking after the children.
- The third section (blue) is her reflections and more emphatic comment on her colonial relationships: the formal master-servant relationship, the more informal relationship with the young girl, and her close ties with her own family and community. She is situated in an in-between, liminal space caught between three sets of relationships.

The poem is divided into six stanzas.

(Stanza 1)

Before dawn,
I am lost somewhere between sea and sky.
I turn my head as the ghost of the raven rakes my skin.
Again, I turn and run.
I lose my footing.
I am quite lost.

I rise slowly from my mat, my head confused.
As my girl sleeps, I tie rag strips on the taps, so her bath runs silently.
Aap ka ghu-sal tayyar hai
I teach her to tie her laces and we chase her laughs to the breakfast room.

I dwell upon my mother's messages and I feel her hands gently stroking my hair.
How can I come home when this other family calls me from sunrise to sunset?
The ropes bind me to them as they are bound to me.
Each night, I slowly unpick the loose strands of that binding.

(Stanza 2)

Morning comes,
My hands outstretched, I gently rest my palm against the skin of the sky.
Screeches of green and red-flamed parakeets splinter in my ears.
I spin to catch the twist of their wings.
I lose my footing.
I am quite lost.

Beware the demons in the nullahs!
Cross the stream here so you don't fall!
Never touch the pink mayapple, it is poison!

The memsahib smiles her twisted smile,
but I overhear the names she calls me.
She keeps me at a distance ready to change me for another.
The sahib patrols the borders, where
I fear harm may come to my brother and his friends.

(Stanza 3)

At the throat of the noonday,
my fingers rasp at the thin air.
Red ants bite my soft ankles.
I scratch and teeter on one leg,
not quite falling.

The lunch bell clangs to my swing.
Panting children and dogs come running.
Later we read and sleep, for a while, on the verandah.

Ek, do, teen, char.
The memsahib hears my Wendy reciting the numbers I have taught her.
The memsahib cuffs my Wendy on the back of the head, and barks:
"That's not your language, that's the servants' language!".

(Stanza 4)

The afternoon haze brushes the trees,
I sit and stare at the sun through their leaves,
my hands absently part the dark soil.
The black and white flecks of a mongoose flash through the thicket.
Startled, I lunge to the side
I stray from my path, but only for an instant.

I stare into the muddy water when
the children dive from the river bank.
I follow my girl as she swims to the opposite shore.
In the water, she is as strong as an acrobat.

We pass through the bazaar on the way home.
There I feel release, for a moment, from the endless orders from above.
My sisters tell me to come home to the village.
My brother tells me the sky is awaking across the fields.
My head is beaten by words from both sides.

(Stanza 5)

The evening rush of wind snatches the letter from my hand.
I run like a milk-white moth fluttering in the lamplight.
There, beneath the bungalow and the forest, I stagger.
I turn and recover my step.
I reach out again and again.

I sweep the children's rooms and tidy their clothes.
I listen for their breathing.
I turn down the lamp and rest on my mat.

If the memsahib thinks I am sly and conniving, then why does she trust me to
raise her children?
Is she afraid of me?
Is she losing her hold?

(Stanza 6)

Slow and gentle the midnight constellations pearl at my feet.
I am soaked by the green night,
The comet, a tail, a blink
of sun, splits the roaring earth.
I tremble.
I wrap my shawl.
I kick a stone into the river and feel reborn.

I come to my girl when she cries in the night.
My story eases the suffocating pain of our departures.
She falls asleep against my shoulder.

My Wendy is always with me, but time is another country for us both.
Different men are taking power and we must be gone.
My family ghosts wave to me from the quayside.
A different country will lie between us.
Another ocean will separate us.