N. M. RASHED (1910 - 1975)

Born: Gujranwala, Punjab (now in Pakistan)
Mother tongue: Punjabi
University: Punjab University, M. A., 1932.

A civil servant working in radio and public relations, Rashed pursued his career in a number of countries, including the United States, where he was an information officer at the U. N. Headquarters in New York. He is regarded by many as the founder of the free verse in Urdu.

Four volumes of his poems appeared between 1941 and 1977.
AT THE WINDOW

Awake, light of my love’s chamber.
Arise from your velvet couch of honeyed dreams.
Though your body be still thrall to the night’s joys.

Come with me to the window.
Look how tenderly the morning light is kissing
The minarets of that mosque
Whose heights recall
My age-old longings.

With your silver hands, dearest one,
Open your wine-dark eyes that awaken storms.
Look! that very minaret
May be drenched with dawnlight.
But remember, beneath it,
Like his own futile God,
There nods in a dark cellar
A wretched mullah, prey to poverty.
A demon – filled with grief,
Embodying three hundred years of scorn,
Disgrace we cannot wipe away.

Look at men crowding through the market,
Surging like an untamed tide,
As if Jinns had come forth from the desert,
Brandishing torches in the night.
In every single heart,
Like a bride adorned,
Hides a trembling lamp of self,
None with life enough
To leap into a whirling flame.
Sick and poor float with the tide,
Enduring evey tyranny under the sun.

I am a weary old nag.
Hunger is my rider,
Masterful, fierce with spur and bit.
Like others in this town
After each night of revelry,
I scavenge for straws and twigs
Under skies forever turning.
I go back to the same old refuge.
Beloved, behold my helplessness,
As I only gaze at the minarets
Yet again from this window
As the twilight gives them one last embrace.
WHAT TANGLES ARE WE TRYING TO UNRAVEL?

Lips like deserts, kisses of the dead,
What tangles are we trying to unravel?
In these factories for bodies
We ourselves serve as the fuel.

Deep night, and the town drowsing,
Neighbours seem prowling thieves.
Since dusk we have turned slaves to vain desires,
Drinking cup after cup of wine,
Always hoping that the next
Will give a key
To the mystery we live in.

Meanings are plain enough,
Words are absurd.
The calculated curves that we call smiles,
Mere footnotes to the crazy text

 металл, оман, ветер; том, что волшебных
треб к неизбежности
всё к смерти;
That offered for flawed pleasures
A hypocrite perfection.
In the end, not a hairsbreadth lay
Between our bodies,
As our hearts beat on,
Each in a stony roadless wasteland of its own.
What tangles did we try to unravel
As we gazed into each other’s eyes
And strained our ears for every murmur?
What tangles are we trying to unravel?
When we steal forth from our hovels every evening
Does our life seek fresher channels?
Are we confounded by Death’s busy demon?
Or do our cramped limbs of self long for
A sense of space?
What tangles are we trying to unravel?
INTRODUCTION

Do come and meet them Death.
Come and meet those idiots
Who neither pray nor drink.
They are not scholars, scientists,
Nor heirs to any revelation.
They have no sacred text,
They are not worthy of machines,
And don’t belong to either earth or space.
They are just faithless.
Death, don’t evade them.
Do come and meet them, Death.

You too step forward
And be introduced to Death.
Approach, you upstart wealthy beggars,
Don't try to hide your begging bowls.
No longer linked to life,
Come, be amused by Death,
And entertain him too.
Approach, you serfs of time.
You slaves to money.
Death, all these men are negatives;
Life-deniers, less than human.
Come and graciously receive them.
LIFE – AN OLD CRONE

Life – an old crone,
Scavenging the streets for rags day and night,
Wary, pathetic, shrieking with mad laughter,
Her hair dishevelled, teeth discoloured,
Clad in an impenetrable forest of dark rags.

A sudden gust of wind
Snatches sheafs of papers from her hand,
And she shakes her fist in impotent rage.
Her state grows worse,
For who can bear such great calamity?

Victim of the wind, the weary old crone bows,
Bending over her feet as if she stood on treasure.
Life, what good is there in peering down that well,
The well of the past, barren, still with poison fumes.
What can you possibly find there?
Nothing lies down there but pebbles.
Nothing but a hollow echo.
But you seem unaware,
That hands arise when lips are silent,
Hands rear up like signal beacons,
Like the tongue of light.
Hands start calling like the cry from the muezzin.
Are you afraid of the light?
But you are the light, just like us.
Afraid of light?
The city walls at last
Stand free of the demon spell.
Night's garment too,
At last is torn to shreds,
And ground away to dust.
From the masses came one single voice,
The voice of self,
As if blood would surge down the road of desire,
A new madness leap ahead,
Men begin to rise,
Bubbling with light.
Towns spring again to life.
You are frightened of this moment?
This moment, when like us, you are right here?
Yes, you are frightened of this moment!
THE NEW MAN

Song and the merry harp.
The merry harp hymns the song of desire.
Hooligans hurl stones at the sound.
The joy of the merry harp in a rain of stones.

The heart and a new fire.
New fire in the fickle heart, a joy for all.
We worship a new sacred flame.
To whose altar should we bear it?
To whom expound its meaning?
The new fire – a joy for every eye and mouth
The new fire – a joy that all may share.

Tradition and a hearse.
God lamenting
Under the parasol of his sun.
Walking behind the hearse,
A seething mass of stay-at-homes,
The joy of tumult in a people full of lies.

Man descends.
In face of that, an outrageous joy,
Before this coming,
Wolves howling, starved for months,
(wolves turned old and cunning by the rain of time)
Word and meaning drawing ever closer.
In face of this, wolves young and old are howling,
The outrage of grief, and joy of outrage.

The new man's poems,
The new man and his poems,
The joy of his fierce demanding.
Even his dreams became realities.
Boundless dreams
Give birth to wisdom.
As a fragrant breeze
Stirs the sap in leafless trees.
The new man's poems
And his joy in them.