

Rajarshi Mitra

Those English Graves in Calcutta

It's a sin to watch the dead resting.
It's a sin.
She was just sixteen.
Here's one seventeen, and another eighteen
And quite a few fifteen.
As if an auction of British graves
Of young brides, daughters, sisters
Lying in the tropics,
Crowded like yesterdays.
Primrose, daffodils
Wild hyacinths, Angel's tears
Occasional Bellflowers,
Covered like this, losing out
And so slight a remembrance on a gravestone's head,

Now, it's a sin to see the once dead mossing.

The beloved wives and faithful mothers
Grafted from England with too much care,
False experiments of chivalrous colonizers –
It's a sin, it's a sin to imagine them lamenting
To imagine these broken British men
Hitting their heads, crying,
Bereft of their flowers, their women and their native shores.
Were these our rulers?
Burdened, melancholy, heartbroken?
Resting in this garden without complaint
Amidst rare visitors, cemetery guards and a surreptitious couple.
A dry wind tells me
Perhaps they were not our enemies
Perhaps not even the fantasies we want them to be
But people trapped by weedy cages of time
Raging to come out,
Sorrowing on gravestones
Panting even in death.

Is it a sin to stand with a scythe
Sometime at twilight
And hack away their cages?
A dry wind still blows to say

It's a sin, it's a sin to sympathize –
We were colonized for god's sake!
I stand still for once
As if sin flows in slow motion,
I rest my scythe on these broken men
And I stare at their flowers
I stare wide – I feel
I see them fighting themselves.