

Diegesis: going native

There is a woman on the stage,  
Molly Emma, I think that's her name  
she is telling us about Akbar,  
the art he loved the most.

*"All of Indian painting after  
the British colonised India,  
all of it is essentially Mughal."*

What does she know  
of the great Mughal emperor?  
Sadly, more than I do.

I dutifully scribble down  
the lexicon of my country  
transcribe every detail of this lecture on

*"The Stylistic Differences Between Mughal and Rajput Paintings"*

Can I imprint it onto my skin?

Molly Emma, does she know me? She has to know me, I think  
because she has swallowed my tongue whole,  
eaten my pronunciation, spat it in my lap in style,  
and I can only bite my lip too loud, test my salty blood.

My professor, does she remember me? She hugs me, I smell  
books on her sari, she calls me

The Returnee:

as though I am the title of a Tom Hanks movie

Have I returned, and from where?

Do I have the same claim  
that dear Molly Emma has  
to any place?

I only leave home  
to go abroad to go abroad to go home  
to catch a flight  
to go abroad.

And wait, the best part is here: Molly Emma  
show-and-tells us photos of paintings, tells me,  
*"We can see how they are filled with Indianness."*  
Every time she says this she crosses and uncrosses  
her legs, her gold-and-black skirt blind me.

I want to crawl onto the stage with my eyes closed  
pull her heels off and throw them at her,  
take her hand and ask her if I too am  
filled with Indianness?