

Ken Norris

ADDRESS

As if time didn't exist,
as if books didn't speak,
as if sweating rivers
didn't wash clean
the decaying wooden villages they pass through.

As if ashes from the pyres
weren't rising to the sky,
as if vacated bodies
floating down sacred rivers
weren't being greeted and consumed
by crocodiles.

As if density were a value,
green a feeling, dogs
an aspiration, the slow-burning incense
wafting from the shrines.

The enchained world is infinitely green.
And sunlight attacks it like a swarm of bees.
All the eyes see everything that's happening—
look away in shyness, look away in terror—
the heart becomes invisible,
and one is lost forever in the opulence of rice fields.

As if the ox, struck,
didn't fall to its knees,
and hunger didn't fall like rain.

In the temples
the orange-robed monks are chanting,
in the mountains
the purple-robed girl is carrying water
back up the thousand steps
to her family's leaning hut
there above Pokhara.

As if colour didn't conceal,
as if love didn't conspire,
as if snakes didn't shed
their intricate skins.

As if stone weren't malleable,
as if tenderness wasn't limited,
as if compassion easily resided
in the branches of a tree.

As if illness were a paradox,
and suffering a simple dream
forgotten upon awakening,
as if to exist were, in fact, to be free.