

CLARA A. B. JOSEPH

Spivak

Good-lookin' lady sheathed in a saree,
And under them? I suspect – sneakers; hair
Trimmed like a widow's
I know you've risen out of *Water*,
Refusing to drown or deny yourself
Pleasures of jouissance.

The year my mother died in Toronto,
One thousand gather at King's Circle convinced
You are royalty;
With them I too, for a vision –
You. You whom I have
Studied, explained, and reinterpreted,
Argued about, passed an exam on.

Your studied lecture goes well,
Your pages of footnotes Harvard respects;
You narrate. We settle into our chairs
Glad to see you, hear you, know
You are speaking to us about yours
In so many words of speech and words,
Ending only at the most conventional of events:
The question period.

One black woman, a student, I swear,
Shoots out of her chair to ask
One simple question about who your audience
is –
"Who," she asks, "is your
Audience?" And I watch in horror as you
Crumble right before my eyes

In defense of a name
You cannot wring out of your chest;
One well-hidden under so much pain
For so long, loved and hated, adored, criticized,

Crushed in what appeared as bear-hugs
In comings and goings, arrivals, departures....

Drawn-out goodbyes,
Frantic phone calls,
Refusals to talk,
And bad words
In an inherited tongue.

The unspeakable name even this woman
cannot wrench out of you:
The name "mother" or "my mother" you just
cannot speak
The moment you are caught

In terror's stillness.

The subaltern weeps.

Clara A. B. Joseph is Associate Professor of English at the University of Calgary. Her poems have appeared in journals such as the Toronto Review, Mother Earth International, Canadian Woman Studies and the Journal of Postcolonial Writing. Her first book of poetry, The Face of the Other, is forthcoming with IP Publishing, Brisbane, Australia.