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VAHNI CAPILDEO's seven publications include *Utter* (Peepal Tree, 2013), *Simple Complex Shapes* (Shearsman, 2015), and *Measures of Expatriation* (Carcenet, 2016) (Forward Poetry Prize, Best Collection; T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist). She is a contributing adviser for *Blackbox Manifold* and writes a regular report for *PN Review*.

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Vahni Capildeo

Persephone In Oulipo

#1

~~tt~~

No intercessor comes between or can reach from one to the other; what we were is now abstracted like green from the shade of sky or sea, like grey from the idea of violet – we were one since being two I was won over and moved by the stringent and maidenly idea of her, yet am I now one again, casting a single shape of hades in fields which I walk in darkness from dawn to noon – given the daylight at the edge of my eyes and overspilling the crown of my head appears like direct address – O forgive me! – radiance was ever something stealing from, something I stole from – I cannot write it – cannot simply write, write simply, the significant word that might mean my little other; ah I owe her more than fractional or waxen appellations, my brighter half, my trinity pronominal; how my lips tensed and sphered allowing sheer vowel that meant that, that – not alone –

~~it~~

When she left she meant to stay gone.

~~e~~

Difficult to track from portal to portal who sought whom; nobody was found.

#2

'Radios / talk of Rhodesia'

Advertising

Snap. Crackle. Coup.

Riddle

In a hot land I was unrecognized and cold.
To name me summons the pale and wealthy dead.
My new first is lightning-like and a final sound.
What am I?

Haiku

the gold mines shut up
voices where old friends went dark
let us switch them off

Chat-up

Damn girl r u kitted out with transmission equipment? Cuz
I feel like I'm pickin u up

Mainstream English lyric

This afternoon I sat down slowly
with my golden notebook,
having no job and needing none
since you, Aunt Florrie, passed away
bequeathing me the sweets of leisure
and the ill-gotten, bankable treasure
of the lady agriculturist
you once were.
Your tobacco-farming, auntly kiss
lingers in me like nicotine;
(I mean this in a nice way,
not incest, of course
left-justified and justifiably
a winner)
as in your honour
I sip Colombard,
a strangely peacefully named
wine from an eternal war zone.
O so much to regret,
the shady media of the heart.

#3

An accidentally Achaean anemone affects and aggravates an abductor, an aesthete, an assassin; and anyone asking about aggression also appears as audience, and all are annexed amorously and annihilated anyway.

As an amaranth arises as a beloved bleeding, as amber amasses arboreal balsams, as ambitious bystanders balancing arguments become authentically attentive, a bitch and a bint are beautiful because activated by and activating a brilliant agony.

And by coercion and by confrontation and by chaos and by consensual command causing cognitive booms and conscious betrayals, a charioteer careering beyond character commits a crime also bringing bliss.

Did anyone bid Death come?

Any account better consider Desire an extreme adversary.

#4

~~this data's made up~~
quest' informazione è mito
quest in form a Zion emit O
~~you promised us a springtime~~

#5

'Who is the god, not of gardens but of / the edge-lands?'

goddess and revered Demeter eyes narcissus sing
gods at river Drakanon Egypt Naxos some
glorious appeared rich Dionysos each nodded son
goddess and rarity Demeter essentially naked sacred
grace and roaming Dionysos essentially nymphs sing
get all remaining data exact non-linear stellated

#6

a recipe for death by foolishness

O
HE
AND
PINK
BELLS
ORCHID
SEDUCER

#7

'Save our city / and guide my song'

Don't cut our Arts Council funding.

Vote UKIP with a to ro ro with a to ro ro like the British Grenadiers!

Please call off the aeroplanes; we're feeling quite sufficiently free now, and I'd like to go outdoors except the door's blown off, also the roof, so outdoors as a concept doesn't make sense; still the avenue of flowering trees remains intact and in flower, something like limepeel and something like ash (though let's not look back; we're facing the future together), so can you tell me if that's the best way to the radio station? Thanks so much for getting our voices heard by the outside world.

Truly, a cultural boycott isn't the best way; we're staying engaged!

You can see on the map where the outer walls were; I've got a recording of the last speaker of the language but the file's in an old format – can you convert it? – singing their spring equinox hymn.

#8

HEAD

HEAT

FEAT

FEET

GREEN

GREEK

BREEK

BRECK

BRACK

BLACK

CERES

CARES

HARES

HADES

#9

eye and evil eye meet sleep peels teem eye live dna eye

#10

Whether I have or have not aborted girlchildren and washed blood off cotton near the fishpool, I can abstract nouns and prepositions from this sentence without making nonsense –

Whether I have or have not aborted girlchildren and washed blood off near the fishpool, I can abstract nouns and prepositions from this without making nonsense –

Whether I have or have not aborted girlchildren and washed off the fishpool, I can abstract nouns and this without making nonsense –

Whether I have or have not aborted girlchildren and washed, I can abstract and this without making nonsense –

Whether I have or have not aborted and washed, I can abstract and this making –

Source texts: Helen Tookey, *Missel-Child* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014) and Jules Cashford (tr.), *The Homeric Hymns* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).