

N. B.

It was not being averse
to the town.
Just that the smokescreens
it threw up the customary blue

became thicker & thicker,
and the birds in their pinks or greens
of roadside leafage
were hard put to it:

birdsong,
something to turn over a new leaf;
ever fit to rehearse
the twitter of time past—

an open-and-shut case.
The red-vented ones
had the face
to pass for a nightingale.

No speaking terms with the horizon.
Dust filled the air.
The poets sang, yes,
to their own boutonnière.

But the river was the one
constancy it knew,
circling its waist
to the baritone bend.

The sandman sitting like a camp-stool;
midnight mumblings of the water;
a little light from the far house.
What else?

Someone must have lived there.
One October,
the wind did go nipping through the alley;
shop awnings away.

Broken orange tea
mixed with betel
leached into the ears
beep-beep:

the hottest ghazal
of the day.
Needn't have seen
the heads sway.

ALAMGIR HASHMI