Comrades, March On

The eclipse was now total; the moon eaters had finished their job.
Manohar Malgonkar, *The Devil’s Wind* (1972)

They shot the poet at dawn
when the sun was just coming on . . .

Dear Sir,
It gives me immense pleasure
to write to you on behalf of our Honourable Head of the State,
who’s of late
a little perturbed by what you write,
but promises that if you feel contrite
and mend your ways,
you’ll see your contrition amply pays.
So pay careful attention to what follows,
and choose wisely whether or not you want to end up in the gallows
on charges of sedition;
let us know at your earliest your unambiguous decision,
for you, poets, can so twist language
that though you write cab it might as well mean cabbage.

My dearest Sir:
Please, please don’t stir . . .
I know you know what I mean—
So relax for a while and enjoy a glass of gin.
The trouble with people like you is
you’re ever so keen to tease
us, that is, people in power—
Why don’t you say in plain words what you desire?
Now it’s a simple point—
times are out of joint—
(see I’ve read *Helmet*!
for I’m a fan of Shexpear, the great).
To get back to my point—
times are really out of joint—
a point so simple even a child understands,
whereas you have strands
of graying hair on your head.
You know to what it has led—

Md. Rezaul Haque. ‘Comrades, March On’.
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
I mean the last book of your poems—
Your chelas call them gems.
Whatever they be,
we don’t want to see
any more of your poetic bubbles—
they have already given us too many troubles.
Hence we would advise:
you’d better announce your poetic demise,
or write about eternal topics such as love and nature,
so that we don’t have to write to you in future.
Take careful note that from now onward
there’ll be no ‘comrades, march forward.’
We’ll not write to warn you again:
the bargain
is sealed—
you must yield,
otherwise it would be too late
for you even to regret.

A single bullet did it all,
a single bullet made the poet fall . . .

Honourable Head of the State,
To be honest, I don’t regret
that you consider my poetry so revolting;
in fact, it would have been surprising
if you had found it otherwise;
from what you say I’m able to surmise
it’s doing what it’s meant to,
though what it’s doing is nothing new.
However, I won’t take long—
I know you don’t like to play ping-pong
with words,
though for trapping birds
you’ve no end of time.
Now I think it’s a crime
to tell a poet what to write and what not to,
after all a poet is not an animal in a zoo.
As for myself, my answer is clear and simple—
I write for people,
to make them see
the roots of man-made misery.

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I repeat,
a poet
is not an animal in a zoo,
or a pet that's happy to lick your shoe.
As long as there will be cruelty, injustice and oppression,
I'll keep urging, 'comrades, march on.'
Do whatever you can.
I write for people, for both woman and man,
not to please you,
so you're free to do whatever you want to.
I'm not going to fall in line.
For better or worse I don't mind.

They shot the poet at dawn
when the sun was just coming on
to flood the world with its brilliant light,
but the ghastly sight
made it trip
into a total eclipse.

Md. Rezaul Haque