

edited by
AMIT CHAUDHURI



Memory's Gold

Calcutta

Composed While Drunk

Saratkumar Mukhopadhyay
Translated by Rosinka Chaudhuri

SARATKUMAR MUKHOPADHYAY, poet, was one of the main protagonists of the *Krittibas* circle; the poem below, especially its famous first line, is seen to be a record of the activities of at least some fictional incarnation of the four friends—Mukhopadhyay himself, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Sandipan Chattopadhyay—at large in the violence-afflicted city, seeking sensuousness and courting anarchy. The title of the collection from which the poem is taken, *Rimbaud, Verlaine ebang Nijaswa* (Rimbaud, Verlaine, and My Own), nods self-consciously and self-reflexively at fraught, legendary literary friendships.



After midnight Calcutta is ruled by four young men
Chowringhee, Bhabanipur to the Shyambazaar delta
Only the insomniacs hear the sound of the galloping horse, the whistle
of the whip
Stray dogs see the sparks flame on the unpeopled tramline and are
blessed.

The red tops of a fistful of policemen lie hesitantly scattered
Hearing the sound of the horse's hoofs, they stand to attention
When the sound of the horse's hoofs become distant they pick up
half-rupee coins, heads bent;
Oh none of you have seen this sight, the prostitutes have seen it at
midnight.

Translated from 'Mattwa Abastay Rachita', published in *Kavitasamagra*,
Calcutta: Antaranga Prakashana, 1994.

In front of the yellow house, the four jump down from the horse
Look up in jest, as if they were gods of the hunt;
From row after row of windows hang maids as if they were pictures,
 it takes three minutes
To identify a princess; after this follows commotion, the sound of
shoes on the stairs, flowers, curtain, neon light, darkness.

Once again the sleeping city will awaken with a start when the four
youths on the horse begin to laugh—
Yet no one will know that the insects kept in the secret shells have
turned into pearls in amazement.