

## Rattapallax

1 Indran Amirthanayagam

### **Bengali Poetry**

- 2 Joydev Bosu  
4 Shewata Chakraborty  
5 Goutam Datta  
6 Sunil Gangopadhyay  
8 Sankha Ghosh  
9 Joy Goswami  
10 Taslima Nasreen  
12 Subodh Sarkar  
13 Mandakranta Sen  
Mallika Sengupta  
14 Kabita Sinha  
15 Sreejato  
Pinaki Thakur  
16 Marco Antonio Campos  
17 Michael Collier  
19 Jaime Anne Corbacho  
30 Philip Corwin  
32 Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac  
34 Lisa Fetchko  
38 Maiara Gouveia  
40 K.D. Henley  
42 Elvira Hernandez  
44 Bob Holman

### **Indian Tribal Poetry**

- 73 Translated by Verrier Elwin and  
Shamrao Hivale  
74 Joseph O. Legaspi  
77 Claire Malroux  
79 Becka Mara McKay  
82 Delisa Mulkey  
83 Xasan Sheikh Mumin  
84 Lynnet Ngulube  
99 Mark Nickels  
101 Ron Price  
104 Ana Rüsche  
107 Yuyutsu RD Sharma  
108 Lamont B. Steptoe  
110 Aimee Walker  
111 José Watanabe





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**Indran Amirthanayagam**

*ADJUSTMENT*

We walk across railroad tracks.  
It's late, the moon full, waves  
roaring on the other side  
of coconut trees. There  
aren't any goons asking

for id's. It's 1980 or some  
such year before current  
flapping of metal wings, birds  
alloyed everywhere dropping  
pellets right on our foreheads.

Aiyo, we say, how the hell,  
machan, don't buggers  
know how to shoot, and  
these poisons flowing  
in our blood.

What's become of older  
weapons of war, when  
knife pricked or bomb  
blew off the head but  
left the next man alive

to attend to his family  
and the fight? Now  
cancer multiplies  
his cells and we should  
not walk across railroad

tracks or down on the beach  
off Galle Face, which  
today's children know  
as a high security zone,  
and their older siblings

as no-man's land, lovers'  
folly, but we protest  
too much, surely  
we can carry passports  
in our bathing trunks?

**Indran Amirthanayagam's** *The Elephants Of Reckoning* won the 1994 Paterson Poetry Prize. He writes poetry and essays in English, Spanish and French. His Spanish collections include *El Infierno de los Pajaros* and *El Hombre que Recoge Nidos*. Besides being a poet, he is a diplomat serving for the United States of America, based currently in Vancouver, Canada.

*CLIMATE*

The odd jellyfish bothered  
my editor. He seemed  
out of sorts, blue and  
frothing from the sea  
at Trincomalee. What

poisoned the urchin?  
Or is he a fish? Certainly  
stanza and question  
break above raises  
elemental gasps

of astonishment and  
talk of license abused,  
and I've been harangued  
by senior bards for trying  
too hard to be clever,

and yes, we should not  
display bruised and certainly  
odd laundry on any line  
visible to other members  
of the human family--

who are not versed  
in enjambment and  
holding breath  
until banks open  
and the deluge begins

to snake round  
the block, great  
salmon run  
from pool to open sea,  
checkbooks

useless now,  
salmon gone  
fishing, acid rain  
falling in buckets and  
jelly fish turned odd.

Joydev Bosu

RUSTOM

কস্তম

ফালার-মালার কি সোয়া, কুছ করে সাব, উয়ো লড়কি কো ফনাও। ইনি খতরায় হামি গিরে গেছি বিফ উসি কি লিয়ে। তকদির কা রকম সেখে সাব, একবার পানি মে তুয়ায় তো গির অশমান মে উঠায়। কিউ হামি মালটাকে দেখলাম? কিউ শোচলাম কি ইসিকো গার্ল-ফেলেভ কানে কে লিয়ে জান ডি কবুল?

কহনি তো লখি হায় সাব, উয়ো লড়কি চলছিল জলুসে। সাবা সাদি, উসমে লাল বরডার, হাখ মে মাল কাভা... একদম লাল হি লাল। তো, ইয়ে লাল পাটিকা হারমিপন ডি হামার না-পসন্। একবার ইনসোর্গেবো চাপ বে নিয়া তো, সমর লো, বরবদি হি বরবদি। আজ সালা সট্টা কন্ড তো কাল লক কন্ড... পরসেঁ তো সরি ইলাকা ডি সাব? হামারি মহলে মে, সাব, আপন তো ইয়ে লাল কাডেকা চুদুর-বুদুর একদম ভেঙে দিয়েছি। সালা কম্নিস্ সেখে ঔর মারো, সেখে ঔর...কা বোলা সাব? আরে নহি-নাহি, আপনসোর্গ এক হাখ মে কায়েসে ঔর দুসরা হাখ মে হিন্দু-পর্বনি তো লে কর চলতা হায়, ডর নে কা বাত কাহে? তো যো বোল রহা বা সাব... ইয়ে লাল কাডেওয়ারী কো দেখ্‌কর ... তকদির কা বাত সাব...একদম চকর সেখে গেলো। দেখনে মে হামি বসুসুং না আছি, কাপড়া ডি মরজান—সো মেরে নিলাম আঁখ। হারমি করল কি, জলুস খেড়কে বাহার আসে লাগিয়ে নিল খারড। আপন কে... খারড... সাব, কস্তম কো খারড...! পড়িক ডি ছুটে গেলো...

কাঁহা ভাংবো সাব? কস্তম কো খুল নহি, ইখলিশ নে ভেজা। উসি নাইট মে সালীকে হামি তুলেছি। ও ঘর লওটছিল, সড়ক বা সুন্দস্, তো হামার সাখ ছিল মিশিরজী কা পেলেইভেট। রামপুরিয়া টাচ করিয়ে দিয়েছি কুকে...ফির সিবা ঠেক-এ। এক না, সে না, ফিন নাইট —তিসরি নাইট ওজর নে কা পহলে উসি রাতে কা পাস খেড়ে দিয়েছি—না, সেপ নহি বি উসকি।

খএর, গড়বড় ওয়হি সে সইট। কা কাঠাট সাব, পহলা নাইট সে হি উয়ো লড়কি লফডবাজি তো দুব, ডিগ্গায়া ডি নহি। মগর, ইতনি বডি-বডি পনুছি কি ঘর জায়সি উসকি আঁখ, উসমে কুন-কুন পানি... হুসরি নাইট মে পানি ডি নহি বি সাব, বিফ, আঁখ, বর্ক কি মফিক শীতল—আগ, ঔর হেঁটো মে হামার কিস কা লহ... আপন কা তো গলব হো গায়। উসি দিন সে উয়ো আঁখ, উয়ো লহ, মেরা শিছ্য কর রহা

In the name of my father and mother, do something, Sahib make that bitch agree. It's all her fault I'm in this spot, she bewitched and pitched from sky to ditch poor Rustom is my fate to be handled like this? She can go fuck herself. Why I ever wanted her in the first place....

It'll take some telling, it's a bit of a tale but I saw that whore walk the parade, white sari – red edged in her hand the red flag raised – I don't give a fuck for the Communist Party give 'em an inch and there'd be no dens for the denizens of gambling and drinking and my world would be forbidden, oppressed in my world we kick those Reds see a Commie, kill a Commie you agree, Sahib? People like me, with one fist we clasp the Congress with the other, Hindu Nationalist so no need to worry, Sahib.

Anyway. That sweet little chickee with the red flag flying put a spell on me. But I'm pretty good-looking, stylish, attractive so I gave her the big wink. Do you know what that bitch did to me? She broke rank and slapped me. Slapped me, the bitch – me! She slapped Rustom a crowd surrounded me...

So, Sahib, what did that leave? Rustom does not care for God – the Devil sent me so I grabbed that girl along the empty road pulled her into Mishirji's car pressed my rampuria to her breast and took her back to my ghetto crib.

One night, two, three of giving and being taken of torturous and brutal lust I dumped her on the sidewalk, unconscious and that's when this trouble broke out.

How do I say, Sahib? From the first night not a word, she didn't even scream her big eyes like birds' nests, warm with drop-drop tears. Second night, cold and dry, my blood on her lips...

Her eyes continue to stalk me.

No, Sahib, I guess I did some kind of wrong. She would not grant me pardon I asked her to send me to prison I asked her to call the cops She ignored my demands so I asked her to marry me, at least. She burned her eyes, and went back behind them.

I knocked at that door for a long time. Promised I would quit gambling, boozing, looting, mugging would even join the Party in Allah's name, please marry me still, she said nothing.

And that's why I'm here, Sahib. I've lost my mind, my sleep... you tell me what to do.

Maybe I'm a thug, yes, so beat me, slit me, but talk to that girl, Sahib a man like me, my rampuria stabs so many Communists and today, no doubt, you'd do the same to me but first you must tell me something:

this burn internal, this thing that's happening

do you call this love? Is this what happens to us? Please, Sahib, answer me in the name of my father and mother I have never felt such...

Translated by lloyd robson and Goutam Datta

হায়। নহি সাব, মক্তি মারতে হামি গিরেছি। মগর মক্তি তো উয়ো নহি কি। হামি বেলিয়েছি, অব পুলিস কো কুলগও, জেল বেতো মুকবো। উয়ো পুলিস কো ডি কুলগা নহি। অব আপন বোলা, দুতকো শাদী করে কমসে কম। উসকি আঁখো সে ডির ওয়হি আগ মিকসি... অপর চলি গরি উয়ো। আপন বিড়কি মে খটখটায় বহোং, ডিগ্গা-ডিগ্গা কর বোলা — মায় পত্না নহি লিখেগা, লককা বাছা ডি নহি কিয়েগা, নহি লুটমার, নহি কুছ, বোলো তো কুমারি পাট্ট মে ডি ভটি হো মায়গা, তুমকো ইতনা পেয়ার লোয়া কি...খুল কসম, শাদী করে মুকসে।...কুছ নহি বোলা, উয়ো কুছ নহি বোলা...

ইসি লিয়ে আপন ইয়ে পাট্ট অফিস মে চলা আয়া। তুম বোলো সাব, অব কোয়া হোয়া? মেরা তো মিস হারাম হরে গেছে সাব, একদম পাখালপন আসে গেছে। হী, মায় জলিল হী, আপন কো লিটাই করে সাব, হালাল করে, মগর উয়ো লড়কি কো ফনাও। আপন বহোং কম্নিস্ মরা সাব, চাঙ্ক চালা কর ফাড্‌ নিয়া, আজ তুম আপন কো ফাডো, মগর এক বাত বাহাও সব? ইয়ে মেরা অম্বর মে যে হো হো হায়া, যে ছল হায় মেরা লহ মে... উয়ো কোয়া লাত হায়? লাত ঐকন হোতা হায় কা? ফালার-মালার কি সোয়া, কুছ বোলো সাব...

**Shewata Chakraborty**

*STEPMOTHER*

Dad's girlfriend wiped her eyes on her sari and sobbed,  
"Your mother scares your father. He told me: 'Forget us'..."  
I dried her tears, and as we waved good-bye, I said, "You'll come back."

But she never reappeared at the front door. From time to time  
I'd see shadows moving behind our backyard bushes at sunset.  
DO NOT ENTER, the sign read. Our bushes were full of deadly snakes.

Monsoon season arrived. Mother hurried to Manasa's shrine, loaded  
With bananas and milk, red dot on her forehead. When she returned home,  
She popped a candy offering into Dad's mouth. Then I heard "Ssst! Ssst!" from the garden.

I went out to investigate—there was an odd sort of shadow swaying back and forth.  
But it was no cobra, no chandrabora, or even a krait.  
It was my Dad, gorged on sweets, with a big, satisfied smile on his face.

Translated by Catherine Fletcher and Mahua Choudhury

**Goutam Datta**

*THE SERPENT CRAWLS DOWN*

The serpent crawls down ninety pyramid steps  
as the equinox light pierces  
through the temple window to kiss its head.  
East, south, north darken  
as its vertebrae creep on hot west stones  
while a thousand cheering voices  
resonate Mayan walls at Chichen Itza.  
What are they celebrating?  
Is it the lost?  
Or the tourism through the dug outs & the remnants?  
Where have the Mayans gone? Who could tell?  
As we walk pass the stoned pyramid, hollow ball field,  
hanging hoops, listening to colorful stories from guides  
to the next resort, tequila bars, swimming pools.  
We break bread; bathe in the bright Mayan sun of Cancun,  
talk, complain about foods, and put on sun tan lotion.  
We forget, we sleep, dream the ruins  
as the serpent crawls across the scorching fields.

Translated by the poet.

**Goutam Datta** is the author of five books of poems, most recently *Griho Judheyer Dolil (Civil War)*, and the editor of African American poetry Anthology *Ami Amar Mritur Por Sadhinota Chai Na (I Do Not Want My Freedom When I Am Dead)*. At present, Goutam is working on a webzine "Urhalpool" to create a continuous literary exchange between India & the USA.

Sunil Gangopadhyay

*I AM ALWAYS ON THE WRONG SIDE OF TIME*

Doors are closed at every pension I knock at, and they say  
“Only those sick flowers await you, will you stay?”  
Someone’s fingers touch her; she asks with a dry smile of  
falling leaves “why are you so late, what is left now?”  
The frolics of the last spring emptied the store, no more light,  
the strings severed in wretched rooms — you can check.

Dust hangs in the air; the door locks can’t open in this life.  
Leprosy owns the desk clerk’s hands, his broken voice.  
Some grieve the dying fire in the oven;  
some lay in the icy warmth of barren bodies  
waiting for the certain but far-away death.  
In the hot summer, each pension languishes —  
wrinkled chin, frigid blood and ravaged ribcage.

Dead flowers in the garden lost their fragrance,  
dancing in the gusty wind like ghostly skeletons.

My fellow traveler, fearless as a Mongolian  
was a stealer of beauty, with strong arms.  
Less than the inevitable death, dreadful as a divided life,  
that sly plunderer came to scrape the last luster  
and suck the juice.

Pensions live only for moments, alas.  
History is a split in the neck,  
an age of smudged books that eyelids couldn’t hide.  
I had a nail in my shoe.  
Despite the pain, I ran all the way to the train stop.  
But I was still too late, the looting was over,  
and they were waiting with pale lips.

Translated by Yusef Kounmyakaa  
and Subrata Bhaumik

*A PROLETARIAT NON-BELIEVER*

My friend’s well-dressed wife  
won’t sit with us to eat  
because today is a special fast — neel sashthee  
in our youth we used to make fun of such things  
now only a false smile on her lips  
we shouldn’t make fun of another’s beliefs.

Another friend, who introduced me to politics,  
now wears a special ring on his middle finger.  
Seeing my raised eyebrow, he says weakly,  
“my health isn’t good  
so my mother in-law brought this ring made of moonstone  
I couldn’t say no.”

I thought, this is my own defeat.

Sometimes I go to a respected professor’s house,  
I have so much to learn.  
Today I saw it for the first time, the Hindu idol Ganesha  
hanging from the front door.

I didn’t have to ask, he volunteered:  
“my son brought this from south India, isn’t it beautifully crafted?”  
Why not put it in a display case? Why put it on the front door?  
I didn’t feel like saying anything, I’m beyond the age of teasing,  
I’m getting old and feel defeated, always defeated.  
Don’t make fun of another’s beliefs, don’t insult another’s beliefs.  
There are so many beliefs, so many beliefs, they grow like mushrooms.  
That Hindu nationalist decided that children’s blood from another religion  
would flow for dogs to lick

That’s their belief.  
Religious flag bearers think they should slit the throats  
of women who sing,

that women should wear burqas playing tennis.  
They believe this.  
The suicide bomber walking toward mass destruction,  
the strongman with his budging muscles and fake smile  
is trying to conquer the world,  
they are all believers, believers, believers...

I just once want to say in my hoarse voice  
wake up non-believers  
proletariat non-believers of the world unite.

Translated by Christopher Merrill  
and Goutam Datta

**Sankha Ghosh**

***LOTUS HEART***

While the pyre is burning  
You ask me to talk about light.  
Fine, let's talk about light.

Hey, we could wait a little longer  
And pass away the days  
Counting each other's wrinkles — still, we'll talk about light.

Yearning for the chandal's poker, you stoke the fire.  
I search and search for my spark, talking more about light.  
Though your laurel wreath's a burning ghat, I feel fire's seeds in my breast.

While the pyre is growing within my heart's heart,  
Humanity goes on dozing; more fires start.  
Then lotus petals ignite —

This is my fire, the flowering of my mother country's light.

Translated by Catherine Fletcher and Goutam Datta.  
**Note:** A chandal is the person who tends the fire  
of a funeral pyre.

**Joy Goswami**

***MOTHER WHO?***

Mother's fever rises, but the work keeps coming in.  
She's having trouble breathing... 'Hey! I've seen you on TV!'  
I could hire a nurse... I shouldn't leave...  
I can't do it all... there are deadlines to meet...

\*

'Before your mother there are two others. They will take some  
time to cremate.  
Outside, the stalls sell pakora and fried fish, but bring something  
to drink...'

How much more time do they need? Always 'one more' body.  
We were going to have a big party tomorrow, until this...

\*

'Listen, shit happens, but mothers' lives are finite.  
Look at the state of my old girl – she fell in the bathroom, broke her  
hip  
lost control of her functions, soils herself. My poor wife has to get up  
at all hours...  
but you're damned lucky – now your mother's dead you don't have to  
deal with this...'

\*

I am no one to you, but watched you in the mornings  
honoured by the winter sun  
I called you Auntie, neighbour's mother  
and I will mourn your setting, even though I am not  
your son.

Translated by Lloyd Robson and Sharmila Ghoshal

**Taslima Nasreen**

**MAKKA AND MADINA**

Makka and Madina are two sisters; one sister's nine, the other's eleven  
Returning from school one afternoon they walk a paddy field path,  
their two braids swinging  
One sister asks the other: "Why is the sky blue?"  
Why does the sun exist? Why the moon? Why rivers? Why wind?"

The two cross the field, passing under rows and rows of krishnachura trees  
Walking and walking Madina responds to more of Makka's inquiries  
"Why are flowers fragrant? Why are butterflies so colorful?"

Madina always provides answers to everybody's questions  
from books, from weird fairy tales, from her imagination  
She never leaves Makka dissatisfied  
She's not prone to uncertainty

Madina keeps an eye on Makka's back  
She walks with one arm around her sister's shoulders —  
No scratches from horse and cow traffic passing, from ditches or muddy water

Leaving Phultali's mosque after prayers,  
Matbar Ali spies the two sisters, two braids swinging  
Braids that are not braids but visions of two black serpents

His fingers find stone prayer beads  
Matbar Ali hardens  
like the black stone of al-Hajar-ul-Aswad: thirsty, anxious, yearning for kisses  
al-Hajar-ul-Aswad,  
ready to absorb all the world's sins

Prayer beads held in one hand,  
he snatches Madina's braids with the other  
pulls her into a vacant outhouse  
while inside his nearby home are his four wives,  
his sons and their sons, daughters and granddaughters

Matbar Ali satisfies himself with Makka and Madina  
Teaching etiquette, teaching courtesy  
in minute detail:  
how the two sisters will burn in dujokher fire  
if they leave the house in a rush and unveiled

Jamar Ali demands justice for Makka and Madina in Phultali  
for the bloody violation  
On his house's patio sits judge and jury:  
Phultali village's imam  
The village's upright citizens gather for the hearing;  
Matbar Ali also appears in white beard, in white attire  
looking quite like Supreme God himself

Who has violated? Who has dishonored the two sisters?  
Jamir Ali lifts his finger in Matbar Ali's direction.  
In a cold voice the imam orders:  
"Bring witnesses, Jamir Ali, bring witnesses!"

Jamir Ali looks helplessly towards the people in court  
Who will be the witness?  
No one saw the incident besides Makka and Madina  
Jamir Ali rolls at the imam's feet "I have no witnesses, no witnesses,"  
in a loud voice he cries, "The only witness is Allah himself!"

"Allah cannot be considered a witness," the imam replies,  
"Makka and Madina are guilty.  
Makka and Madina's honor is lost.  
My ruling: a five thousand rupee fine, Jamir Ali,  
in one week's time. If unpaid, these two defamed women  
will each be caned one hundred times."  
"Well done, well done!" the court's elders shout  
stroking and stroking their beards with glee

Day laborer Jamir Ali fails to obtain the fine  
Makka and Madina are caned  
All of Phultali village witnesses the event;  
Matbar Ali watches as well

Makka's eyes brim with disbelief  
"For which fault were we punished, Babu?"  
Madina, who somehow provides answers everybody's questions  
from books, from weird fairy tales,  
from her imagination,  
searches and searches for a reply; the question is very hard  
For the first time  
she falls silent

Translated by Catherine Fletcher and Poushali Mukherjea

Subodh Sarkar

*THE BRIBE*

The suicide note was left under Tagore's Collected, Volume 9,  
"Dear Son...." Choice of sharp shaving blade  
& bathroom floor — final resting place for the schoolmaster.  
Household help's screams trace blood under bathroom door

Letter to son, first & last time:

"... Arani  
I believe you my son are like holy water  
However bad our relation may be.  
I want you to know now that  
I am almost penniless — two years  
Of your mother's continuous medical treatments  
have made me a pauper. I can no longer  
bear the expense of her treatment.  
I never touched your money, not even in my death.  
I spent my life teaching my students values that I believe in;  
Never did anything knowingly wrong.  
One parent came to me last month and asked my  
Help to arrange her son's admission through connections  
I threw her out on the first day  
Turned her away the second day  
The third I couldn't resist her nor  
Her gift of 30,000 rupees in an envelope.  
That money extended your mother's life  
In the hospital, still not knowing if she would  
Ever return home. If she does return  
please tell her that I lost my right to live

Yours truly,  
Dad"

When the entire country is standing on bribes  
This suicide note is kept under the Tagore's heavy literary volumes.  
I felt uneasy walking past a tree in the hospital &  
Found that those two feet under the white cloth wrapped  
My schoolmaster's dead body

Uncovered, those two feet are the last land in Mother India.

Translated by Bob Holman with the poet

Mandakranta Sen

*ONE WOMAN DREAMING IN KOLKATA*

Today, I'm out in the city  
again. Everywhere I go, people  
in front of me and behind, busy  
and murmuring, Shit, what is that—  
a girl or a boy?

Ha, ha—I curse them—  
I'm your father. If you don't believe me  
go ask your mother, assholes.

Today: only more of the same.  
Two-rupee, three-rupee hooligans.  
If I could return home  
just once and tell my mother  
no one on the bus went for my breast,  
no one's fingers found my thighs.  
As we packed inside, no one shoved me.

If I could tell my father just once  
while sipping a cup of tea,  
that the day was strange and beautiful.

Translated by Idra Novey and Goutam Datta

Mallika Sengupta

*THE RITE*

Travelling the world through days and nights, the horse  
has gotten crops and honor, and so returned.  
On the highway he's seen the beauty of mares,  
yet through six seasons his senses have been quiet.

The queen lies down beside the silent horse,  
her bed with new silk coverlets adorned:  
a woman inured to shame, fear and fever.  
Maidens singing bawdy songs surround her.

Not horse but man — victor over land and waters.  
She too is earth, and so comes to his byre,  
a stallion still the image of the king.

Embracing the dead horse, the lusty woman shudders.  
Woman and horse burn on the bank in the ritual fire,  
only the ancient Vedic hymns surviving.

Translated by Carolyne Wright and Paramita Banerjee.  
**Note:** The Horse Sacrifice was the most powerful rite of the Aryan  
conquerors of India during Vedic times. To consolidate his earthly and  
spiritual power, the king sent out a stallion of pure breed, in company with  
a cavalry of princes and military officers, to roam at will for a year (the  
"six seasons" of the Indian subcontinent) throughout his kingdom and  
adjacent lands. Any monarch who tried to steal or impede the stallion had  
to fight; those who permitted its passage thereby conceded the supremacy  
of its royal master, and paid tribute. At the year's end, the stallion (kept  
celibate throughout its wanderings) was returned to the king amid great  
ceremonial pomp, to be smothered to death. The chief queen then lay  
down with the dead horse, in an act of ritual copulation; the animal's  
"power" was thus symbolically transferred to the king.

Kabita Sinha

*EVE SPEAKS TO GOD*

I was the first  
to know  
that what rises  
is the flip side  
of what falls.

As is the light  
so is the dark  
Your creation  
I was the first  
to know.

Obeying You  
or disobeying  
has equal weight  
I was the first  
to know.

To touch  
the tree of knowledge  
I was the first  
to take  
the first bite  
of the red apple  
I was the first  
the first.

I was the first  
with the fig leaf  
to mark the gap  
between shame  
and shamelessness  
to raise  
a wall  
between heaven and hell  
I was the first.

I was the first  
with pleasure's sport  
in the body's stem  
churning pain  
churning tears  
I knew how  
to fashion  
Your image's doll  
in laughter in weeping  
Your face  
in the child's face

I was the first  
to see it.

I was the first  
to understand  
in sorrow in joy  
in virtue in sin  
our daily lives  
no common thing.  
I was the first  
to break  
unalloyed pleasure's  
fancy  
golden shackle.  
I was not Your  
dancing puppet  
on a string  
as was  
that scum Adam.

I was the first  
insurgent  
in Your world  
I was the first.

My Dearest  
oh my Slave  
I was the first  
outcaste  
banished from paradise  
without a home  
I knew  
that greater than paradise  
greater than paradise  
was human life  
I was the first  
to know it.

Translated by Carolyne Wright with the poet

Sreejato

*RAINY DAYS, 2024*

Again morning full of clouds  
our rainy days are here  
no need to water the plants  
let me know when the work is done  
rain will be here soon  
sitting on my window sill  
there is nothing better  
than the print on your dress  
let's go and spend the day  
shaking the rusted wings  
let me say some poems  
you sing some broken songs  
more rain is on its way  
who wears less rain?  
three dry weather girls  
talk all day about rain  
while a man and woman sit  
no longer courted rain  
now playing with words  
making each other wet  
it rains all day.

Translated by Yusef Komunyakaa and Mousumi Dutta Roy

Pinaki Thakur

*HUNGER*

Saswata, an unseen hand strikes names  
from the list. Passage through Sundarban  
is cheap but my pockets are empty.  
Could a man ever buy consolation with coin?  
Just one night of a package deal at the lodge,  
with a gaggle in the watchtower,  
and a tiger might appear! Do not call its name at night;  
it swims the river, a striated beauty — sunkissed.

No, Saswata, not even a few bills for the package deal.  
Riding a tornado, it's fate that strikes names from the list.  
We yearn for work and opportunity, not to be leaders.  
God, you hunger and hungry your hunger means.  
Five hundred years of starvation, the belly of Bengal cries out:  
I will macerate that tornado and devour the unseen hand.

Translated by Dante Micheaux and Goutam Dev

**Marco Antonio Campos**

*INSTRUCCIONES DE MACBETH EN BUENOS AIRES*

“Ya lo saben ustedes o apréndaselo de memoria:  
para guerrilleros y subversivos son costumbre y goce  
los deportes del clavatismo y de la natación”,  
pronunció el alto oficial de la Marina  
esa fría y húmeda mañana de julio  
de mil novecientos setenta y siete  
a los integrantes del Grupo de Tarea.  
Detrás de él colgaban los retratos  
de los tres generales en jefe de la Junta Militar  
“Por eso, para que los subversivos no olviden  
ni placeres ni hábitos, los subimos en el avión,  
y desde muy alto en el aire los arrojamos al río.  
Ya hemos realizado la práctica con cinco mil.”

*Macbeth's Instructions in Buenos Aires*  
Translated from the Spanish by  
Rodrigo Rojas

“You should all know or learn it by heart:  
to guerrilla fighters and subversives the sports  
of diving and swimming are joyful traditions”,  
announced the high ranking Navy officer  
that cold and damp July morning  
of nineteen seventy seven  
to the members of the Task Force.  
Behind him hung the portraits  
of the three Generals of the Junta  
“For this reason, because subversives shouldn't forget  
pleasures or habits, we put them on a plane  
and from high up we throw them into the river.  
We've carried out this procedure with five thousand”

**Marco Antonio Campos** is a prolific author of six poetry  
collections, two novels, two short story collections, many essays  
and translations of French and Italian poetry. In 2004 he was  
awarded the poetry prize of Casa de América for his book  
Viernes en Jerusalén. (Visor 2005).

**Michael Collier**

*A NAUTICAL RIDDLE*

I was a ship but not on the sea  
I had a keel unbuttressed by wrongs  
Mouth and meridian                      davit and hawser

I had a ratline draped forehead to ear  
Billet and bollard                      foc'sle and scuppers  
I breathed in water, was keel-hauled in air

Grog and bilge                              hardtack and weevils  
I was the saw that cut out the rot  
I had seams that begged for oakum

I was the mop that swabbed the decks  
And I was the swab  
Vessel and fleet                      harbor and berth

Week after week hammocked  
Hammered and scraped                      varnished and rigged  
I was a compass fixed in its bearings

Coffer and locks                      brightwork and windlass  
I was a surgeon by another name and I was thirsty  
Now tell me what am I, what's my condition?

**Michael Collier** is director of the Bread Loaf Writers'  
Conference and authors of several books including *The  
Ledge*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award  
and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Collier has received  
Guggenheim and Thomas Watson fellowships, two National  
Endowment for the Arts fellowships, a “Discovery”/The  
Nation Award, the Alice Fay di Castagnola Award from the  
Poetry Society of America, and a Pushcart Prize. He was Poet  
Laureate of Maryland from 2001–2004, and teaches in the  
Creative Writing Program at the University of Maryland.

# *FL OA T*

**Jaime Anne Corbacho**

*FLOAT*

Tiago Lucía, in all his sixty-eight years, only told one lie. It was that he planned to commit suicide. If a lie should be tolerated by the Kingdom of Heaven—whose Master, before I came to know Tiago, always appeared to me rosy and listless, a Being so disappointed with the lenticular vista of His empire, our shame seemed more often His neglect—indeed, if one lie should be forgiven, it should be the lie that restores a man his life.

Yet, when the thought first crossed Tiago's mind, he was very serious. And heart-broken. He told me that he heard his heart break. It was April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1967, at 1:18 A.M. "I remember the exact time because I was awake those nights," he said, shaking his head, "always awake." Tiago had been ferociously harvesting a crop of empty nights—sleepless and dreamless—with only the stubborn traffic for comfort, more like a New York apology to comfort: sirens and gutter-mouthed cabbies pitching woo to the junkies on their iron grate balconies, the hum of neon like an out-stretched hand grown unsteady from fruitless begging, the steam, the way people keep themselves awake. I have lived in New York City my whole life and knew instantly the type of nights he spoke of. They are vampiric and relentless.

Tiago had left the slums of Havana to live in the slums of New York. His tenement flooded with the language of his old neighborhood: the nonsense verbs of colicky children, the hungry sonata of palm to face, fist to ribs, the misfired curses of the man who came home to no dinner, the Spanish, the habla, spoken exclusively by his neighbors behind closed doors, like a dirty secret. He said years had been building up to that night. Tiago was a man of great feeling, a religious man—what had claimed full responsibility for detracting him so long from that obvious decision. Finally, his insomnia gave chase to certain doctrines buffeting the responsibility of life, and his folded hands slowly began to part.

Then he heard it—like a powder keg at twilight, like sped-motion tectonics, like a lance through the chink of the armor of the universe—his heart breaking. Upon immediate investigation, what had actually happened was a gust from a nearby window upheaved his statue of the Virgin Mary from her altar to the floor. A cloud of dust shot from her broken body as though releasing every prayer and confession he'd ever burdened her with. It covered his face and hands as he tried frantically to reassemble her, until it became unclear whether the pieces were in his hands or in his chest. "Sometimes, there is only so much a man can do with his hands," he'd told me.

He slept on the floor that night, his body a crescent moon amid the astronomy of the broken statue. He awoke and collected the fragments, plunking them one by one into an empty mason jar. As he did this, he felt each reverberation of porcelain striking glass under

his skin, and he knew something had changed. The people next door were finishing one last argument before dawn. “Oye, Pablo! Eres un monstruo mugriento sin corazón!” Tiago heard a woman scream, then a slammed door. Outside, the stars turned their faces in shame, and a sun too weak to move turned the sky a pale grey.

Tiago went to work, as usual, in the canning factory where his name was Inspector 42. “My job was to make sure all the cans were properly sealed on the conveyor belt, after entering the sealing chamber controlled by Javier,” he explained. Usually he performed his job by sight, the conveyor belt moved at an alarming rate and his job required a quick discerning eye. That day, however, he was compelled to remove many cans from the belt, shaking them convulsively to hear the sloshing maelstrom of kidney beans packed in their own juices.

“Tiago, why you shake so much today?” Javier inquired, flashing quick glances at Tiago, who stood dumb-founded, a can in each hand which he shook in turn against the closest ear, as though he were trying to hear the ocean inside them. “Hey, Tiago, what’s the problem?” Javier yelled again, over the purr of the factory.

“I am worried,” he replied, returning the cans to the conveyor belt and anxiously replacing them with two new ones, “that some are empty.”

After work, Tiago went to church, as was his custom. He knelt in the second pew from the rostrum, his face bearing the full weight of light painted purple through the stained glass cloak of St. John the Baptist. His eyes were hooked to a side altar, an alcove to the left side of the podium, where a statue of the Virgin, his Virgin Mary, resided.

“It is no doubt blasphemy to claim rights to a likeness of the Virgin,” he told me, through a brief coughing fit, “but I had been going there for ten years, for her. There were other churches, many churches in the area, ones with ceremonies in Spanish. But I chose this one, once I saw her I chose this one.”

Tiago proposed that there were two popular likenesses of the Virgin Mary: one with her eyes toward Heaven and another with her eyes cast down upon Earth. The Virgin with eyes toward Heaven (a staple in New York churches, he observed) bore a stern cold expression: her mouth a hyphen, her eyes aglow with an arcane intelligence, perhaps conceiving a shrewd nature, as though she must put on airs while beholding that stately belvedere.

“The Virgin looking down at us, that is the Virgin in my church, the Virgin I speak of,” and waved his finger in the air as if to conjure her. “Such a delicate smile and soft eyes, putting to shame all the stony faces of the Saints surrounding her. This is the

likeness in most Cuban churches, with the eyes cast downward. She seemed always to be watching a group of children playing in a burst fire hydrant. I always saw it on her face. She seemed always to be thinking, ‘What a beautiful world this is.’ That is why it was so hard for me to go to her that night—with my heart broken by this world she loved to watch.”

After praying for his family, who were few and far away, and for the love of God eternal to be distributed heavily on the weak and the poor, Tiago uncrossed his hands and looked around him. His closest neighbor was 8 to 10 pews behind him and well out of earshot. He moved to the end of the pew and spoke to the statue.

“Mi Dama Santa, por favor me perdona. Seré perdido a usted pronto. No puedo pasar. Perdóneme. Amén.”

Tiago then rose and covered his eyes with his hands until his back was to the statue, quickly shuffling out of the church. He could not risk any interpretation of pity on a face that always charmed him with its serenity.

The Wayfarer Bar, though owned by an Irish couple, served to a caustic mix of Hispanics and Irish. Because the neighborhood had changed racial dynamics since the bar’s inception, the Wayfarer had no choice but to tame the prejudices of its staff and equip itself with signs of “BAÑOS” and “SALIDA” if it were going to remain in business.

Tiago sat at the end of the oak bar and ordered another beer with an accompanying shot of tequila. Fionnuala, the barmaid—whose grandparents established the bar with money it was said came from unkind yet lucrative dealings with the Irish mafia—had been serving Tiago for two hours after his church visit. He didn’t heckle her in a language he knew she couldn’t understand, as was popular with most of their Hispanic clientele. He had caught her eye not because he was alone or polite, but because the whole time he had done nothing but drink and quietly examine his hands.

Fionnuala had only seen one other man behave in that manner. It was 13 years before on her birthday when her sister had taken her to the pictures to see “On the Waterfront.” Fionnuala had been wild about Brando since “A Streetcar Named Desire,” but it wasn’t until “On the Waterfront” that he achieved hypostasis in a teenage heart that was to beat with the same romantic ferocity throughout the rest of her life. There is a specific scene where Terry Malloy and Edie Doyle are walking on a playground. Edie drops one of her white gloves, and Terry diligently retrieves it. He carefully begins brushing the dirt off of its collapsed fingertips while taking a seat on a nearby swing. Then the ex-prize fighter becomes the clumsiest of all angels on his swinging cloud: Terry stretches the glove over his ragged-tined hand with the crevices still warm from its owner. It was a simple compassionate gesture, one Fionnuala

was sure she would never see duplicated outside the silver screen. Certainly not at the end of a tired bar, where Tiago Lucía looked at his hand as though he were wearing a glove that didn't quite fit.

"Beer and a shot," Fionnuala announced, before placing his order before him.

"Gracias," he replied without looking up from his hands. He had been ordering in her language and thanking her in his, indicating a respect Fionnuala found pleasant. He had also been preemptively leaving money for that round on the bar before it arrived, which she picked up in one hand. She had never seen Tiago at the Wayfarer before, and inferred from his gentle nature that he would never return. The bar was not a place for those of gentle nature. Therefore, she did not feel conspicuous standing in front of him, waiting for him to look up. He never did.

Fionnuala let his money fall back on the bar from the molten cup of her clutched hand. She looked around her. It was still early, her brother and the boys from the precinct hadn't finished their shift yet, and the locals wouldn't start raising Cain until they'd drunk their fill and left. The ten odd patrons were adequately absorbed in their own liquid reflections framed by the rims of their drinks.

Slowly, she placed her hands over Tiago's on the bar.

"You okay?" The cutting symmetry of his knuckles like cold magnets under her own.

"My Holy Lady, please forgive me. I will be lost to you soon. I cannot go on. Forgive me. Amen." What he had told the statue of the Virgin had been repeating itself over and over in his head. It seemed to him all he understood. He tenderly removed Fionnuala's hands from atop his own and re-crossed them in front of her. He slid out the door, leaving her there with hands in a position of prayer.

And the scene ended when Edie tore the glove off Terry's hand.

Fionnuala froze in this position until the door opened again, sweeping in a trail of men in uniform. Somebody at the other end of the bar hollered, "Cerveza!" She heard an empty glass tumble to a game of spin-the-bottle with the puckered cigarette ends on the floor.

"Fee!" someone shouted, and she added the rest of the children's rhyme in her head. "Fee!" Fi, Fo, Fum! "Fee!" Fi, Fo, Fum! Be he alive or be he dead. "Fee!" and she recognized the voice of her brother, calling her from somewhere up the beanstalk.

"What do you want, Seamus, I'm right here!" Fionnuala looked across the bar at her brother, lifted Tiago's untouched shot of tequila, and tossed it back in one gulp.

"Where were ya, Fee? No time for daydreams. You've got thirsty men here." The other police officers laughed in approval. Seamus leaned on the bar, causing something to fall from the stool

next to him. He bent over and returned with a navy blue jacket. "This belong to someone?" he asked Fionnuala.

"Give it here." She snatched the jacket from across the bar, burying her hands inside the pockets. She removed a brown canvas wallet. "TIAGO REYNALDO CRISTÓBAL LUCÍA, CURTLAND MANOR APT# 5G," read Tiago's factory identification card inside the wallet. "Seamus, I need a favor," Fionnuala said, cradling the card in her hand. "You and your boys can drink on the house the rest of the night if you do this for me."

"What is it, Fee, is something wrong?"

"A man, this man," she said, passing the identification card to her brother, "left his coat here. I need you to return it to him right now. Immediately. He's—" Fionnuala clenched the coat in her rough hands. Her brow furrowed, and she thought of Brando again, in the backseat of a taxi: "You were supposed to watch out for me, Charlie."

"He's what, Fee?" Seamus had not seen his sister look this small and frantic before.

"I think he's in trouble. He seemed so sad. I think he might be a danger. To himself. Please, Seamus, I never ask nothin' of you. Just take him back his things and make sure he's okay for me. Then you and your boys will drink free all night. Please."

"All right then, if it means that much to ya." He took the coat and wallet from his sister. "Patrick, you come with me. I want to hear the rest about that crazy who pegged Flaherty. The rest of you boys keep our stools warm and don't be givin' Fee any trouble," he said, reaching across the bar to squeeze her shoulder. "She looks as though she's had a rough one."

When Tiago arrived at his apartment, he lit all the candles on the altar around the empty space the Virgin once occupied and drew a bath of the hottest temperature the faucet would allow in the tub at the corner of his room. He took the mason jar turned urn from his dresser and sidled the only chair in his apartment to the small altar table. Opening the jar, he extracted a long jagged piece of porcelain once composing the statue's cloak and one praying hand.

Tiago had been deciding where the entire time he spent at the Wayfarer. The wrist leading to the forearm contained "rivers, quiet rivers," he told me. He followed their underground waters with his fingertip. Which river would he choose to flood? Which water would be made to swallow its boundaries, baptizing him out of this world?

"They became the rivers of Eden," he explained to me, tapping his ashen fingertips against the inside of my forearm and wrist, causing blue veins to appear like hidden characters of an ancient pirate map said only to materialize next to flame. "Here is the Pishon," he said, tracing the vein down the left side of my

forearm. "It is lost forever. And here," tapping the vein of the inner forearm, "is the Gihon, where Solomon was anointed King of Israel. Up here is the Tigris," he said grasping my wrist, "called Hidekkel in the Bible. It means 'lively arrow,' because see, here, it crosses with the Euphrates, where Seraiah sunk the scroll proclaiming the destruction of Babylon. For this reason, this is the vein I chose."

The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground. Exodus 4:9

Tiago's hand shook as the strict edge of the porcelain scraped against the vein he called Euphrates. Light pressure would be required to pierce it, less pressure than days of impoverished monotony, nights of spare curses filtered through the walls. When a heart is broken, he told me, breaking a vein is not difficult. A whisper after a scream.

And a knock. Then two. Then a voice.

"Mr. Lucía? Mr. Lucía, open up, it's the police."

Tiago was not surprised to hear the police in his building; they were frequent guests of his neighbors. But they were calling his name.

"Mr. Lucía, please open the door."

Tiago retracted the porcelain shard from his wrist, his nipsis only leaving a ghost dimple in his flesh, quick to heal itself bloodlessly. He placed the broken piece on the altar and crossed the room to open his door.

"Yes, I am Tiago Lucía."

Seamus and Patrick stood side by side. Like a piece of split wood, they leaned their upper bodies on opposite sides of the doorframe. "Hello then, Mr. Lucía."

"Yes, how may I help you?"

"I'm Officer Flynn and this is Officer Beirne," Seamus said, gesturing to Patrick. "May we come in?"

"Is there something wrong?" Tiago asked, while the officers mistook his question for an invitation and slipped single-file past him.

"No problem, sir, but I believe this is yours." Seamus extended his arm with Tiago's jacket on the hook of a raised forefinger. "My sis said you left this at her bar."

Tiago looked at the jacket, indeed it was his, but did not take it.

"How did you find me?"

"The wallet in the pocket." Seamus wiggled his forefinger and the outstretched jacket made a jerking motion.

"Oh." Tiago timidly unhooked his jacket from Seamus' finger. "Thank you for returning it. It was very kind of you."

"No worries. Drink much at the Wayfarer, do ya?" Seamus asked casually as the two officers separated to pace Tiago's cramped room like a pair of caged animals.

"Not really. I mean, no, tonight was my first time there."

Tiago had never had guests in his apartment before, and they were making him nervous.

"Never seen you there before." Seamus' eyes darted from corner to corner, fixed on something behind Tiago, then continued scanning. "And I'm a regular. You see, the bar's been in my family for years. That right, Patrick?"

"Mmm-hmm." Patrick was leaning on the edge of the bathtub. He idly went to splash his fingers in the water, but quickly withdrew them with a yelp. "Jeez-sus! You gonna go boiling eggs in here, are ya? It's like a bloody cauldron. You best let it cool a bit before ya go cozying in."

"I like my baths hot. Sorry, did you hurt yourself?"

"No, I'm fine," he said, wiping his hand on his uniform.

"What's this?" Seamus asked, his back to them both at the altar table. Tiago scampered over to him. Seamus was spinning the porcelain edge like a top with rhythmic brushes of his finger.

"It's an altar," Tiago whispered, "to the Virgin Mary."

"Like in church?"

"Yes, but—"

"I just have a cross nailed over my bed, nothing fancy like this. Did ya break something?" Seamus carefully picked up the piece of broken porcelain by its center and held it between them.

"Yes, my statue of the Virgin. It fell from the table last night."

"That's a shame. But you really ought to keep it in the jar with the other pieces. It's awfully sharp."

"That's a good idea." Tiago swallowed hard as Seamus placed the porcelain edge in the jar.

"Here's the situation, Mr. Lucía," Seamus said, taking a seat at the foot of Tiago's bed. "Do you have a sister?"

"No."

"Well, lemme tell you about mine. She's older than me, and was responsible for me growing up while ma tended bar and me da worked the factory—like you."

Tiago nodded and was assured by a quick smile that this had been the appropriate response.

"So she was always a bit maternal with me, making sure I got to school on time, telling me to mind my manners, bossing me when I was rude, smiling on me when I done her proud and the like. Then I went and became an officer, and now I'm the one laying down laws. See, I'm all grown-up and there's nowhere for all her," he made swift oblong circles in the air with his hands as if he might fly to another country in search of the correct word, "motherness," he finally settled on, "to go. She's got no husband or little ones, so I think she's of the habit lately of picking perfect strangers to shower her—"

"Motherness?" Tiago inserted.

"Exactly. Ya see, she saw you at the pub looking a bit

down, and she got herself all worked up, wanted me to return your coat and check up on ya. Make sure you were all right. She don't mean no harm. You probably just had a rough one at work, eh?"

Tiago nodded his head again, but this time Seamus did not smile.

"You all right, are ya?"

"Yes, officers, thank you for coming. Tell your sister thank you. I'm fine."

Seamus squinted an eye and began to frown. "Then why are ya crying?"

Tiago touched his cheek. It was wet. Then he felt something trickle down his other cheek. But his eyes weren't stinging, and the presence of the officers had almost completely soiled his torpor with tension and unease. Another tear formed on his forehead and eddied to the tip of his nose.

Patrick rose from his perch on the bathtub and walked over to Tiago. "Shay, it's not him. It's the ceiling that's crying." All three men looked up to see a pasty stain on the ceiling growing larger while spitting drops of water on Tiago's head.

"What's that?" Seamus stood and poked his nightstick at the stain. Suddenly, the nexus of the patch creased and gave way with a tumble of plaster on the men's heads. Now water was pouring forth with spigot velocity. "Mr. Lucía," Seamus said, wiping the confetti of plaster and water from his face, "I think we should pay your neighbors a visit."

And that's when they met me.

Apartment 5H of Curtland Manor had been crying well over an hour. By the time the men traveled up the flight of stairs to the H level, their footsteps were lost under an inch-deep puddle that had just begun feeling its way down the stairwell.

"Oh, this don't look good," Patrick said, drenching the pant legs of Tiago and Seamus as he stomped behind them, exaggerating the sad fact that this was sure to cost him another hour of drinking time. A woman behind them opened her door and cursed at the water in Spanish. Spotting the two officers, she quickly slammed the door shut again. When they arrived at 5H, the apartment directly above Tiago's, Seamus began rapping hard on the door. It was obviously the culprit, water was lapping under the door and the unusual sound of rapids roared from behind it.

"Open up, this is the police!" Seamus yelled, banging on the door. No answer. "I said this is the police. Open up or we're coming in!" Still, just the contagious echo of brimming water. "Stand back," Seamus warned Tiago and Patrick before he kicked

in the door. Almost a foot of water gushed into the hallway as the three men entered the dark room. The streetlights were adequate illumination to determine the room was completely empty, save for a sheet hanging from the ceiling, portioning off the far corner.

"Behind that sheet, it's the bathtub," Tiago said, recognizing the architecture of his own apartment.

"Jeee-sus!" Patrick said, with even more emphasis.

"What is it with you people and bathtubs? Are you trying to kill yourselves?"

Seamus shot a sideways glare at Patrick, unrecognizable in the shadows.

The three men walked over to the sheet. Patrick drew his nightstick before pulling down the curtain. There I was, not even a week old, floating naked on my back in the bathtub on the expanding surface of the water.

"Jeee-sus!"

I had remained in the bathtub by the centrifugal force of the tide pool created directly under the faucet, but I was moving closer and closer to the edge. Tiago quickly snatched me up out of the tub. Patrick turned off the faucet.

"Is she all right?" Seamus asked Tiago.

"I think so. She's breathing and moving."

"It's too dark in here. Let's take her down to your apartment. Patrick, get the landlord and find out who the hell lives here. Bring him to Mr. Lucía's room and I'll radio headquarters."

"It was the red velvet I had for the altar table. It was the only thing I owned even half as beautiful as you," Tiago later told me, with tears in his eyes. "I dried you off and wrapped you up in it. You were so tiny, and I did not think I was holding you right. But you didn't cry. You looked all around you and sucked on my finger. I told you Bible stories while the officers and the landlord and custodians sorted out the whole mess. I just held you to my chest, all wrapped in red velvet."

Three hours passed and nothing had definitively been solved except for the leak. The officers learned that the tenants of 5H had only rented the apartment for a month. It was a woman and her four children. The landlord conjectured that either the woman or her teenage daughter had given birth to the child and then left it to drown in the bathtub because the mother had too many mouths or the daughter was too young. "I see these things," he explained to the officers. Since they only needed the room for a month, the landlord gathered minimal information. They were from Argentina. Maybe Chile. Mexican, definitely, Mexican. The woman had two young boys

and another daughter, no more than ten. She was a widow. No one saw them leave. No one really noticed anything. Some neighbors say they heard the bathtub start just hours before. Some say it had been running the whole day. No one thought to mention it.

At around three in the morning, Seamus reentered Tiago's apartment to find us both fast asleep on his bed. "Mr. Lucía," he whispered, gently tapping Tiago's shoulder. "Mr. Lucía, wake up."

"Huh?" Tiago groggily lifted himself on one arm.

"Tiago, we're going to take the baby to the hospital until someone from Social Services can pick her up."

"But, she's sound asleep. Couldn't you let her rest with me for the night and Social Services can pick her up here tomorrow?"

"I don't think that'd be a good idea. Besides, you could use some rest yourself."

"Please," Tiago placed a hand on Seamus' shoulder. "She's had enough for one day. Both of us have. I'll take such good care of her. I promise. You can pick her up first thing tomorrow. Please let her rest."

Seamus looked into Tiago's eyes now absent of that sparse and timid gaze. These few hours. He needed them. From the moment he saw me, a new energy arrived, and he was no longer the man with a broken piece of porcelain.

"Okay," Seamus conceded, patting Tiago's arm. "She can stay here just until morning. But if there's a problem, any problem, there's an officer stationed in the apartment upstairs. He'll be there all night in case someone should try and come back for her. Go to him if there's any problem."

"I will. Thank you." He smiled as Seamus crept out of the room. "Thank you."

Tiago took his first day off from the factory in six years.

A woman arrived late that morning and took me to a shelter.

Three months later, I was adopted by a couple in Manhattan who could not have children of their own.

I would not see Tiago again for thirty-four years.

His wife, Yasmine, was the one who found me. She had countless times been told the story of little Baby Flota, and first located Fionnuala, who still tended bar at the Wayfarer beneath a black and white of Marlon Brando in a dusty gold frame. From there, Seamus, through favors encouraged by his sister's pursuit of poetry in everyday life, located my adoptive parents.

"Sweetheart, I need you to take down this number?"

"Mom, I told you not to call me at the office this week. My column's due tomorrow and—"

"Please, you have to take down this number. It's the man

who found you, as a baby. He needs to meet with you."

"Oh my God, really? How did he find me?"

"It's a story I think you ought to hear from him. Please take down this number and call him immediately."

"Okay, Mom, but can't I call tomorrow? I could meet with him next week, I—"

"He might not be alive next week."

"Flota," Tiago whispered from his bed when I entered the room. They knew, his children each kissed him good-bye, crying, but they knew their father's wishes. Yasmine leaned over him and whispered something in his ear. Even the priest left. I was alone again with Tiago and his heart, broken this time by pneumonia. He had been waiting for me.

For hours we talked and he told me the story of the little girl he called Flota. When he began violently coughing, I rose to summon his family.

"No, you must stay here," he said, weakly recovering an even breath, "I have confessed to the Priest already. It is you that I need now."

"I don't understand. Why do you want me here?"

"Because you are a strong swimmer. Because once, a long, long time ago, you carried me from the darkest place across the river on your back. I am weak, my Flota, and need for you to help me cross again."

Tiago Lucía, in all his sixty-eight years, only told one lie. If what he said was true, if the Kingdom of Heaven exists beyond a river—the Pishon, the Gihon, the Euphrates, the Tigris, the one they call the Lively Arrow—the rivers of a wrist about to be cut, the river of tears from a ceiling, rivers beneath a crack of a door, or statue or heart. If what he said was true, must be true, then I bring him to You. The weight of his sins is an empty cargo. It is easy for me. My name is Float.

**Jaime Anne Corbacho** was recently published in *LIT: The Journal of the New School Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program*.

**Philip Corwin**

*FAR AWAY*

My dead parents are difficult to reach.  
I need a helicopter or a medium.

They're buried in a well-kept cemetery  
distant from any major traffic artery,  
at least an hour from a turnpike exit,  
through towns with lights at every corner,  
down one-way streets not even listed on  
my maps. I continually get lost.

And scarred relationships I never chose  
still rumble in the back seat of my car.

Years ago when we all were younger  
and death seemed far removed, my uncle  
negotiated a hallowed piece of earth—  
one place, he hoped, where there would be  
no yammering, no jostling for position,  
where peace above would honor peace below.

But a generation later canyons divide us,  
and the family tree is a bramble bush.

For last year's anniversary of my  
mother's death, her sister asked me to drive  
to the gravesite. She feared going alone.  
I hired a chauffeur and a limousine.

I didn't want to lose my way again.  
My parents are as remote as ever

*CASSANDRA*

I saw a woman on the avenue  
last night sobbing  
as she walked, lips trembling,  
hands groping  
to cover her face. Straight through  
the crowd  
she moved, and people parted easily,  
then closed  
behind her like water after a wake.

Alone, hair black and long,  
buoyed up by the salt of her tears,  
a mermaid riding  
the waves, a dancer distraught.  
I knew her at once:  
Cassandra  
my sister, my muse.

*I SIT IN A SIDEWALK CAFÉ AND WATCH*

the traffic hiccup along First Avenue  
like a love affair going nowhere.

Engines gurgling, brake lights blinking,  
impatience, noise, combustible cocoons.

Cyclists dart in and out with urgency.  
Everyone knows where he's going.

I can remember the time we rented  
a car and drove to Montauk. It was  
winter and First Avenue was just  
like this when we left, and your skirt  
rode up your leg when you stepped in  
and out of the car from time to time

to look ahead, seldom behind, and you  
poured tea for us from a Japanese thermos.

We were sure we knew where we were going.

*AMONG THE MENHIRS AT CARNAC*

Stone prayers, upright cenotaphs, landmarks  
for UFOs. Hundreds of rows of teeth,  
neatly spaced, rising up from the soft gums  
of earth, preparing to gnaw at the moon.  
They scratch at the spinning zodiac like  
giant cat paws poking at asteroids,  
fingers rooted in tufts of evergreen  
and weed, tracking the far constellations.  
The local Bretons thought they were  
Roman soldiers turned to stone  
by an angry Pope running for his life.  
And the Druids, not to be outdone, were  
sure they'd found the pillars of eternity.  
But we had our own ideas. Remember  
the night we flew to Alpha Centauri,  
four light years away, looked back  
and saw each formation clear as day,  
and swore they were flower stalks  
or wedding candles? At the least,  
castles rising from our enchantment.

**Philip Corwin** is a widely published poet and short story writer. He has also written memoirs about his experiences with the United Nations in international peacekeeping. His most recent books are *Dubious Mandate* (Duke University Press, 1999), about his time in Bosnia, and *Doomed in Afghanistan* (Rutgers University Press, 2003), about his time in Afghanistan.

**Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac**  
“Caarriye”

Waa curub abaadday;  
Waa laan cusayb ah  
Oo ciiro fuushay;  
Curdin weeye qaadhay;  
Waa cudur jidh yeeshay;  
Waa baahi cago leh;  
Waa ciil dad-weyne  
Canug laga sameeyey.

Caynkuu u eeg yey  
Carrab laguma koobo;  
Waa caato miiqan  
Oo caday ka dhuuban.

Waa ciirsi-laawe;  
Waa kabo-caseeye  
Ceel-gaabta jooga.

Waa caado-goys yar;  
Ma yaqaan cisaynta  
Qofna kama cabsoodo;  
Waa cadho gadhoodhay.

Casar buu agtayda,  
Isagoo cagaagan  
Oo caano-waaye  
Baatrool cabbaaya,  
Anoon caanad haysan  
Kaga cawday gaajo;  
Oo aanan caawin.

Sidii ruux canaaday  
Goortuu cabbaar yar  
Isha igu canaantay,  
Waxa caratay siigo  
calooshiisa qaawan  
Markii ay ku ciirtay  
Masraxii cadaabta  
Oo car iyo bay la’  
Calalkii ka fayday;  
kana curatay sheeko.

Cayayaanki firshay  
Cartanaw boggiisa  
Boogaha cunaayey.

Dukhsi aad col mooddo  
Oon cadad lahayni,  
Caabuqi korkiisa  
Durba caasha saare.

Carcartiyo kulaylka  
Kolkuu caydhshu guuto  
Cutub soo hor yeelay.

Anna camal-wareeray;  
Caal-waa daraadi  
Ciddiyaha qaniinay.

Waxna cirirka gaaxday  
Igu sii cusleeyey,  
Cagiduu dhaqaaqay  
Ciidan baa taxaabay;  
Lagu yidhi ciyaalka  
Cid dar yeesha haysan  
Ee aragga cawlan,  
Si na loogu caayin  
Ku cabbeeya gaadhi.

Sababtoo ah caawa,  
Waxa yimi Curuuba  
Dhawr wafdoo caddaan ah  
Iyo qaar Ciraaq ah;  
Oo Cabbaas i leeyey  
Waxa loo casuumay  
Sannadkii carruurta.

Translated from the Somali by Martin Orwin. This translation was funded by a grant from the Witter Bynner Foundation to the People’s Poetry Gathering’s Endangered Language Initiative.

**SHOESHINE BOY**

He’s a child malnourished  
Who cannot grow up  
He’s a sapling  
Clouded by gray  
A struggling boy  
Consumed by disease  
He is need with legs  
A child composed of  
The population’s rage

His kind cannot  
Be concisely stated  
He’s skinny as string  
Thinner than a caday stick

He is isolated  
A shoeshine boy  
In Eelgaabta

He has broken the code  
Knows no respect  
No one makes him cower  
He is anger turned sour.

One late afternoon  
He’s by my side  
He being bare foot  
Without any milk  
Inhaling petrol fumes  
And I had not even  
10 cents to share  
To stave off his hunger  
I couldn’t help him.

Like a stubborn soul  
When for a small moment  
With his eye he rebuked me  
The dust became angry  
Pushed aside the old cloth  
Uncovering on his naked belly  
The theatre of the damned  
Colourless and stale  
From which a story emerged

The insects spotted it  
Feasted on the infection  
The ulcers of Artan’s body

Countless flies, an enemy  
On the swollen infection  
At once came to eat

As he brushed away  
From the sharpness and heat  
One fly brigade  
Another appeared

I was dizzy with it all  
And in the frustration  
I bit my fingernails

Then a worse thing happened  
Which weighed me down further  
He suddenly moved  
Soldiers dragged him off  
He was told: ‘The children  
Who have no one to care for them  
Who look jaundiced  
So that they don’t show us up  
Load them up into the car!’

The reason being: this evening  
Europeans have come  
To the Urubba Hotel  
Delegations of white men  
And Iraqi ones too  
And a soldier says to me:  
‘They have been invited  
For The Year of Children’

**Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac** was born in Hargeysa and graduated in biology at the Somali National University. He is a poet who is not afraid to engage in the politics of Somalia through his poetry, and he was the initiator of one of the largest chain poems, “Deelley.” In addition to his poetry composition, Gaarriye was the person who first articulated the metrical patterns of Somali poetry, which he published in 1976 in a number of articles in the national newspaper of the time.

Lisa Fetchko

*RAUL MARKOWICZ IS AS BIG AS A HOUSE AND OTHER  
DISAPPOINTMENTS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM*

Dear Marta,

As I mentioned to you while we were lying on the beach that day in Punta del Este, I was eager to get back to Los Angeles so I could meet up again with Raul Markowicz, that peculiar man who so piqued my curiosity when I was introduced to him a couple of months ago (the stories you and Franco told me had not sufficiently prepared me for the astonishing vitality of his personality, that captivating mixture of masculinity and hysteria). As soon as we got back to Los Angeles (it was winter here and everything was cold and dreary), I arranged to meet him in the lobby of this fashionable new hotel on Sunset Boulevard. I was feeling rather proud of myself as I walked into the hotel (kind of silly, too, if you want to know the truth), but as soon as I saw Raul sitting at the end of the exaggeratedly long marble-topped bar, pale and scruffy like some libertine intellectual from the nineteen seventies, I noticed that he was as big as a house -- he must have put on thirty pounds since I saw him last.

"I gave up smoking," he said, clearly embarrassed by his newly inflated condition and the stiff black Levi's he seemed to be wearing for the first time (it was good to see, at least, that he knew what we were there for, impetuous young woman running after debauched older man). When I told him that he should have waited until we had sex together, he turned away from me and sighed. Looking around the bar, filled now with a hip young Hollywood crowd, I couldn't understand why I'd been so eager to get back to Los Angeles.

When we got off the plane from South America, I thought I was truly well-rested, all set for another year of intellectual labor and the most tedious domestic chores, but it wasn't long before I was plodding along again, not exactly working up to my potential, just barely fulfilling the kids' most basic emotional needs (Franco is as depressed as he always is although I know he does the best he can). You know how much I love Franco, he's everything to me, but sometimes it's all a little much -- the unrelenting pessimism, the paralyzing moments of despair, the ongoing critique of life at the dawn of our brand-new century. God knows, it's difficult to live with someone whose vision is so overwhelming bleak, but I suppose it must be difficult for him to live with me as well, to coexist with my periodic bouts of enthusiasm (how tired I am of the way marriage plunges you into these absurd juxtapositions -- the man, dark and brooding, the woman bright and full of vitality -- but I supposed it would be suicidal if both of us were to give up hope).

After his second or third martini, Raul became himself again, at least he slipped back into his commanding public persona which is the only one I've ever known although I suppose it's not the only one he possesses (when I explained my infatuation with him to Franco a couple of weeks ago, contrasting his energy and optimism to Franco's perpetual state of lassitude, he laughed at me indulgently. "The things his wife must put up with," he said, "the petulant way he must behave at home.") At the bar, there was an increasingly circus-like atmosphere. High-powered Angelinos anxiously buzzed around each other, hooked up to the latest electronic accessories. At first, Raul was amused by them -- interrogating the muscular young man next to him about his exercise routine, complimenting an attractive young woman on her matching bag and shoes -- but after a while, he turned to me and rolled his eyes. When I suggested we walk over to the lounge, a light and airy space in which small groups of chairs had been carefully arranged, he nodded with relief. Stopping every couple of steps to ask my opinion of some architectural detail or other, he finally stumbled against an overstuffed armchair and sat down, his faded denim shirt looking strangely out of place against the luxurious white cloth that was draped across the chair.

"I think you should have another drink," I said as I sat down across from him, but Raul shook his head, smiling for a moment when he saw me touch my knees to his.

More animated, now, but still a little nervous, he began to jump from one topic to the next -- the voluminous breasts of the women at the bar, the exhilarating state of contemporary architecture, the way the city of Los Angeles does and does not compare to the sprawling metropolises of South America -- a little spray of spittle escaping from the corner of his mouth as he became more and more enthusiastic, his big expressive hands occasionally dropping down to touch me on the thigh. You know how it is with men, Marta, you get sucked in by the idiosyncratic workings of their minds or maybe it's just some chemical thing that's impossible to define. In any case, it wasn't long before I was completely infatuated with him, tormented by the elusive movements of his hands, so close but yet so far. When the time came, Cinderella-like, for me to go, Raul walked me to my car with an exaggerated sense of propriety; as soon as we got there, he pressed me up against it like a desperate adolescent. Sucking in my breath, I tried to guide his hands which were fumbling around clumsily, but he's a big man, you know, and the two of us didn't manage to fit together comfortably. By the time the parking lot attendant came over with my keys, everything had begun to fall apart. Still, you know how there's a place within yourself where your spouse can't really go, some truly vital spot where your interests and his do not coincide? For some reason, Raul touched that place in me and I didn't sleep for days.

Back at the house, things went on with alarming regularity. In the morning, I got the kids up and dropped them off at school. After a busy day at the office, I went back again to pick them up. At night, after soccer practice or an uplifting trip to the library, the four of us had dinner together and we read the kids a book (most of Franco's and my free time, it seems, is spent trying to provide the kids with the basic things this society is so bad at giving them -- pride and humility, a modicum of respect for the natural world, some plausible meaning for life beyond what is available on the television set). Outside, the rain continued to fall, hillside homes slid casually off their foundations, flash floods repeatedly closed down the roads closest to the coast. Is the drought still going on down there? Are they still leading cows and sheep off to slaughter? What a terrible thing it was, the beaches filled with vacationing families happily splashing around in the water while the animals, in the northern part of the country, were dying of thirst. It was a real state of emergency, a minor ecological disaster that vanished from our minds as soon as we got back to Los Angeles and saw the water pouring out of the gutter onto the saturated ground behind our house.

One afternoon, Franco and I were trying to think of something to do with the kids (it had been raining for the last few weeks) when the electricity went out. Cursing and grumbling, we rummaged around for a couple of candles, but the whole thing turned out to be fantastic. Aside from the muffled sound of rain falling outside the windows, there was a deep and eerie silence -- it was raining so hard we seemed to be in a world apart. When Franco made a fire in the fireplace, the kids curled up on the couch, hypnotized by the flames and the sparks. Earlier in the day, I'd made some catty comment to Franco about how long it was taking him to finish his latest project and he had just begun to forgive me for my shocking lack of sensitivity. Of my night out with Raul he knew nothing, I'm sure, but still, it wasn't exactly a scene of domestic bliss as the two of us sat there watching the kids nod off. Exhausted by the rigors of matrimony and the day's unrelieved monotony, I finally fell asleep myself. Awakened a couple of hours later by the sound of Franco peeing in the bathroom -- strong, steady and contemplative -- I was surprised to find myself filled with an urgent desire to feel him inside of me, I wanted to be with him almost as badly as I had wanted to be with Raul Markowicz a couple of days before. It's never uncomplicated with your spouse, you know, especially after all these years, but I'm here to tell you that sometimes a little conjugality is just the thing you need.

Spring was here by the time I saw Raul again, at a faculty party at the university, but his wife was there so he carefully avoided me. Annoyed by his cowardly behavior, I thought I was no longer

interested in him, but the next morning, I picked up the phone and dialed his number. The time we had spent together still lingered in my mind, there are not so many people, after all, who really interest me. In short, I had a curiosity about him that had not yet been sated.

A few days later, the two of us met at a shabby old motel by the beach. Warm and intimate like the first few times we saw each other, we shared embarrassing stories about our earliest sexual experiences; he enjoyed the punishment I meted out to him for ignoring me at the faculty party; when it came down to the essential thing, it was better than you'd think -- his body was thick and a little blubbery, but surprisingly supple for a man his age (what a feeling I had when he blurted out "que puta eres" the aural part of sex is vastly underrated). Certainly, it could have been worse (every now and then, I remember the story you told me about J. and the way he came striding into your apartment that day after years of the most subtle flirtation, took off his clothes to show you the extraordinary fullness of his erection and then proceeded to penetrate you, like a bull mounting a cow, I believe you said, agilely but not very deftly, like a nervous gynecologist doing his first examination). It's hard to believe the things we go through in the name of pleasure, but it sure was nice to spend the night in that motel, to wake up in the morning with a different man than the one you're accustomed to.

A couple of weeks later, the semester was over and Raul went back to South America. Every now and then I like to think of him, showering his colleagues at the university with spittle as he expounds upon some new theory he invented about the city of Los Angeles, but it was all a little exhausting, you know, and I'm kind of glad he's gone. If my closest friends weren't scattered so uselessly over the globe, I'd go out right now and put the whole thing to rest over a couple of bottles of wines, but I'm hard at work again, things are surprisingly good with Franco, the kids are doing well.

Here in the northern hemisphere, the economic boom no signs of abating, but that's not saying much -- everyone I know is filled with anxiety, no one knows exactly how to behave. Sometimes, when it gets to be too much, I think of you down there, heading into the long cold winter, every now and then I remember that afternoon we spent lying on the beach together, but all of that seems very far away.

**Lisa Fetchko** lives in Los Angeles. Her short stories and translations have previously appeared in *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Prose*, *LAX* and *Glimmer Train*.

**Maiara Gouveia**

**NO SUMIDOURO**

Ao redor do quarto  
migra um cortejo de aves. Não vemos  
pois estamos fechados.

Ao redor do quarto  
um barco repousa em um mar sem ondas. Não vemos  
pois estamos partindo.

Ao redor do quarto  
baleias abertas e peixes mortos cobrem a angra. Não vemos  
pois estamos sangrando.

Porque estamos sozinhos não vemos  
suicidas engolfados nas brânquias tóxicas  
dos cardumes. Não vemos

a morte solitária dos corais. Não vemos  
a embarcação vazia permanecer  
no silêncio das águas. Não vemos:

pois estamos no escuro.

**SUMIDOURO**

Translated from the Portuguese by Andrea Mateus  
in collaboration with Anna Ross.

Around the bedroom  
an entourage of birds migrates. We don't see it  
for we are closed.

Around the bedroom  
a boat rests in a placid sea. We don't see it  
for we are leaving.

Around the bedroom  
gaping whales and dead fish carpet the bay. We don't see it  
for we are bleeding.

Since we are alone, we don't see  
engulfed suicides in the toxic quills  
of the shoals. We don't see  
the solitary death of corals. We don't see  
the empty ship inhabiting  
the silence of the waters. We don't see it:

for we are in the dark.

**Maiara Gouveia** has written poems and articles about film and literature published on websites, magazines and newspapers. She won 3rd prize for the Poetry prize at the Festival de Música e Literatura of the University of São Paulo (USP), and was a finalist for the 15th Prêmio Nascente of USP with her poetry book, *Pleno Deserto*.

**A MORTE CANTA. O CORPO SONHA.**

Horas em chamas  
Bebe a chama escura das horas,  
o sangue do tempo.  
Deita na sombra que estiola  
no corpo sedento.

Cada segundo é uma porta aberta  
Vejo seu dorso.  
Quero tapar todas as frestas.  
Mas você foge entre os dedos, nos seios,  
no meio das pernas.

Enquanto a morte canta  
Esse sopro de gelo na espinha é a morte que canta:  
Não se retém o amor na concha das mãos.  
Não se retém.  
O amor, não se retém. Fica.  
Enquanto puder.

O corpo sonha  
Não vive a despedida com afínco.  
Mas suga o primeiro pasmo até a última gota.

Há tanto mistério a ser capturado em pleno dia.  
Há tanta noite umedecida no sonho do corpo.

**DEATH SINGS. THE BODY DREAMS.**

Hours aflame  
Drink the dark flame of the hours,  
the blood of time  
Lay down in the shadow that fades  
into the thirsty body.

I see your dorsum.  
And I want to close all gaps,  
But you escape through fingers, breasts,  
between the legs.

While Death Sings  
This icy gust in the spine is death singing:  
You can't hold love in your hands.  
You can't hold it.  
Love, you can't hold it. It stays  
While it can

The Body Dreams  
The farewell doesn't live long.  
But it devours the first wonder to the last drop.

So much mystery to be captured in broad daylight.  
So much night moistened in the dreams of the body.

**POLIEDRO**

Ao meio-dia, a praia queima,  
o mar verdeja, a sombra rubra,  
o sol golpeia as ondas e  
as águas, líquidas fagulhas,

virando onda, e, de repente,  
como se a areia crepitasse,  
feito de um vidro incandescente,  
espalhasse o brilho, estilhaços;

e ao mar, a língua de fogo  
do vento laranja subindo,  
trouxesse o ímpeto dos fortes  
e a aparência dos guerreiros,

e como um elmo prateado,  
o cintilar sobre o cardume,  
e a vivacidade das cores,  
compondo um quadro impressionista.

E a praia, como um espelho,  
um poliedro envidraçado,  
a batalha de rubro e prata,  
e o enorme incêndio nas águas,

como reflexos de tinta.

**POLYHEDRON**

At noon, the beach burns,  
the sea greens, the shadows redden,  
sun lashes the waves,  
and the waters, liquid sparks, -

come to waves, and all at once,  
as if the sand would crackle,  
made of a glowing glass,  
splashing the shine, splinters;

and to the sea, the fire tongue  
of a climbing orange wind,  
would bring the haste of the strong  
and the shape of the warriors,

and like a silver helm,  
the shimmering shoals,  
and vivacity of colors,  
compose an impressionist painting.

And the beach, a mirror,  
a glass polyhedron,  
battle of cerise and silver,  
and the enormous burning in the waters

reflecting like paint.

**K.D. Henley**

***KNOWING WHO YOU ARE IS GOOD  
FOR ONE GENERATION ONLY***

I swing the front half of my body open, door that I am,  
exposing the final threshold to the old New World.  
In me, all the syllables that have fallen  
gather into one prairie. A roan catalogs the grasses,  
finds a bullet casing, moves on.  
A narrative takes shape in the dust,  
a boot-print left in another country called America.

What remains for me?  
The door swings shut.

High-rises corral the wind  
making one concrete step a mile.  
A fleet of taxis travels in the other direction  
toward someone else's home, their restless lights glowing 'in use'.  
This is a new frontier,  
part façade, part relic, part lyric.  
If I could tell the story straight through, I would.

***THE BLOOD-HORSES***

Paw at all that clay  
as if they could tunnel themselves  
pure  
into the earth  
Breath nearly visible  
against the burnt sun  
they make noises  
like children  
wanting  
I give in to them  
watching them  
through smeared lenses  
I will never identify  
with anything whole

***NOSTALGIA***

There is no such thing as a blackout,  
just the way things used to be.  
I was with. (The city.) In the night.  
I avoided roots breaking out of the sidewalk, owners  
with their dogs, light.  
I avoided sex,  
but opened my shirt  
to let it fill with wind. The city was an island.  
The island was an insult  
and the people were a wave.  
When they carried him to my doormat  
for rescuing,  
for my sight,  
I asked for only one promise: to not feel a thing.

**K.D. Henley** received her MFA in poetry from Columbia University in 2007. She has acted as poetry editor for the literary journals *Small Spiral Notebook* and *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*. Her own writing has been published in several journals including *Washington Square*. She currently works for the Mercantile Library Center for Fiction and lives in New York.

**Elvira Hernandez**

**LOCACIÓN**

Entre el Hotel Bristol y el Hotel Lancaster  
    está el Mago de las Ruedas  
Entre cerro y cerro los veriquetos irrespirables  
    que se meten al bolsillo  
Entre ventana y ventana un corde.l de ropa  
    pendiendo al mar hecho trinquete  
Entre vacío y litoral grúas pendulares  
    ánimas de pájaros de pronto  
Entremedio ¡upas! para alcanzar la cima y el rincón  
    prometidos los brazos que por horas  
    recogerán mi sueño metido  
Entre ceja y ceja

**LOCATION**

Translated from the Spanish by Idra Novey.

Between Hotel Bristol and Hotel Lancaster  
    is the Magician of Wheels  
Between hill and hill the jagged passageways  
    That fit in a pocket  
Between window and window a length of rope  
    hanging over the sea like a mast  
Between hollows and the coast the swing of derricks  
    Souls of sudden birds  
And between up you go! to reach the summit and corner  
    promising arms that for hours  
    embrace my abundant dream  
Between my eyes and the object of their gaze

Elvira Hernandez has published in Chile, Argentina and Colombia, "*Arre Haley Arre!*" (1986, Ergo Sum) *Carta de Viaje* (1989 Ultimo Reino), *La Bandera de Chile* (1991 Libros de Tierra Firme), and *El Orden de los Dias* (1991 Ed Embalaje).

**CERROS MARINADOS**

Un hervor de vida lejos de su olla y cerca  
dela escupidera. Un mar interior que mira  
por la escafandra. Nadie llega a puerto. Tras  
la puerta moscas que se pegan a las corvas y salta-  
montes que despegan de braguetas. Tras los ojos  
marejadas chacolí empañan vidrierías. Y los muertos  
que no dejan su persistente gotera. Tras la nada  
una ventana para arrojarse al paso del dolor e  
irse con el circo de todos los años.

Cerca de la estrella matutina y de la vecindad  
del cáñamo la adolescencia en escabeche enseña  
ropas revenidas: sus quimeras en vinagre. Bajo  
cuerda las putas venden el copihue y los innumera-  
bles reclutas la vara mimbre

nosotros el bostezo.

**MARINATED HILLS**

A boil of life far from its pot  
and near the spittoon. An interior ocean  
that peers through the diver's suit.  
Nobody arrives at the port. Behind the door  
gnats that stick to the back of knees and grass-  
hoppers that unstick like an unzipped fly. Behind  
swelled chacolí eyes the fogging of glass factories. And the dead  
with their persistent drip. Behind nothing  
a window to hurl oneself through the passing  
of pain and move on with the circus of every year.

Near the morning star and the district of hemp  
the pickling of adolescence imparts  
its shrunken ropes: their chimeras in vinegar.  
Under the rope the prostitutes sell copihue  
and the innumerable recruits the wicker things

we the yawn.

**Bob Holman**

**INDIA JOURNALS**

*Bob, you must write the poem! Yusef cannot do it.  
We need it for the plaque! — Goutam*

US POET DELEGATION KOLKATA BOOK FAIR 2008

Stock market dives into Ganges! Holes crack Holy Sky!  
US Poets enter Kolkata! Nothing but words.  
Everything is words!  
Words greeting breath  
Words transforming political  
Word's history roaming finding itself — Surprise Future!  
How about more words? Flow flower full force!  
Words' roads leading — follow complexities of Heart  
Dance aortic pleasure, rush ventricular whoosh  
Lost? Read map to me — it's a Poem!  
A gift of imperfect understanding

**11 JANUARY 2008**

EMAIL:

hi bob:

I know sunil knew ginsberg ... can you find out if the others  
actually met ginsberg in india?  
we probably won't have much time meeting all these people ...  
one thing you really, really need to be careful of is being invited to  
an indian family ... traveling in kolkata takes forever, so we need to  
maximize our time.  
also, when you go to an Indian house, you need to spend a few hours  
there ... time is really really precious during our trip.  
i only want to visit people that directly knew ginsberg and have  
interesting stories ...  
cheers  
ram

EMAIL:

Ram-baby, have no fear! I am simply wanting to spread the nets as  
wide as possible: as I am able to synthesize info I'll give my opinions,  
but I count on you to do scheduling, I think I'm great about getting  
in and out of places on time (you know my reputation: "Bob  
Holman, he made poets read on time"), but am ready to admit my  
naiveté re: India time-sense and ultra-politesse, so I COUNT on you  
to haul me out w/ samosa chat half-eaten ...

Me, I want to get to a real burning ghat (are there any left in  
Kolkota?), stay up all night w/ Saddhus, and visit an opium den,  
in that order, as Ginsberg experiences (plus read poems w/ Indian  
musicians).  
B

**INDIA BEGINS EVERYWHERE.** Kali's tiniest toenail, little tag of  
horn digging deep into lion's throat, I am swimming in blood, some  
beginning! Start over, visualization, elaborate birth image: elephant  
balanced on the back of a tortoise, the gyres unwinding, time  
spinning round Gandhi's spinning wheel, and here I am again of  
course (who else? where else?), wandering the mudra space between  
elephant toenail and turtle carapace. Hello, India, at the Beginning.

For purposes of my story, let's begin with the long-planned trip  
Elizabeth and I had been looking forward to, 25 years together,  
parents of two, wait till the kids grow up. When she was diagnosed  
with lung cancer, spring 2005, children now 22 and 20, we moved  
the trip up, would do it in a year. Which meant I had to figure  
out a way to hand over the daily-ness of the Bowery Poetry Club,  
downtown NYC culture spot where I serve as founder/proprietor.  
And amazingly, a year later, thanks to the community of poets  
around the Club, it happens. Elizabeth and I, and our family, travel,  
not to India but Valencia, where E's terrific painting retrospective  
had moved from MOMA. The next year we'd also travel, this time  
to Venice, where her work was on exhibit at the Biennale. She died  
two months later. Five months after that I was in India, an "official  
US delegate" to the Kolkata Book Fair. Trip as fulfillment of a  
promise. Trip as first step in a new direction.

Ref No. Sec/12/26

20 December 2007

**Mr. BOB HOLMAN**

Dear friend,

We feel honoured to know that you will join us at the biggest book  
festival of India, the 33rd Kolkata Book Fair 2008. You must be  
aware that Kolkata Book Fair 2008 is scheduled from 30 January  
to 10 February 2008. The Inauguration will be held on 29 January  
2008 at 4:30 pm.

On behalf of Publishers & Booksellers Guild we cordially invite you  
to participate in the programmes to be held at the A.C Auditorium  
of Kolkata Book Fair 2008. The seminars and symposia will be  
arranged as per your schedule of stay at Kolkata.

Expecting your gracious presence in this 'City of Culture and  
Literature' and with regards,

Yours sincerely,  
Tridib Kr. Chatterjee  
Hony. General Secretary

**THE TRIP EXPANDS FROM THE KOLKATA INVITE** — Ram Devineni, poetry film mogul (psyche!), is wants to make a on the Beats in India, concentrating on Allen Ginsberg's search for a guru. Am I up for being the host? Am I up? I am flying! Ginsberg's been my guru since I was a teen in conservative, rural Ohio, a big force in my escaping to a poet's life in New York, where we became friends — I produced an album of his when I was at Mouth Almighty/Mercury Records, the spoken word label. This in turn can lead into another project — a series I envision to bring attention to the world's endangered languages via poetry, continuing the work I'd done creating the PBS series United States of Poetry — this can be The New World of Poetry! And as long as I'm in India, Ram wants me to meet his family in Chennai which is coincidentally where my friend Eric Miller is living: a linguist studying the endangered language of the fishermen of Chennai. And there's more: Catherine Fletcher, a poet who is working on the Endangered Language Initiative with me, and who is administering the US delegation to Calcutta, will be researching in Chennai! And more, more: I've garnered an invite to read at the Attic poetry series in New Delhi, so we will visit the Taj Mahal, a la Allen. This trip is coming together! And the adventure of leaving my passport at home is just another way to begin.

#### JANUARY 24

#### **BIG GLOBS OF BEAUTY ON PAPER, APPROACHING JFK SECURITY**

Security: This passport has no visa.  
Me: Sure it does. Security: Find it.  
Me: Hmm, what's this picture of my daughter  
Daisy doing in my passport?

Uhhhhhhohhhhhhhhh.

Call my friend Howard, have you met my new friend  
Howard, the 40-something bachelor poet of Tribeca?  
His passion: commiseration and poetics, a salvage  
To my new widower-hood. My man not only answers  
The phone, agrees to ferry me my passport, but  
Actually finds a cab, whose driver is savvy enough to speed  
Through Queens local streets, missing the famed rush-hour  
Jams of Long Island Expressway, Howard texting updates  
Relayed to Security, O! Passport!  
Passport with ten year multiple entry India!  
Visas to Eritrea, with Papa Susso! Yemen, with  
Poet laureate in Sa'naa! Working permit to Banff  
Spoken Word Summit! Italy and Spain and England  
For Elizabeth's shows! Poetry Africa, South Africa!  
Poetry Slams Germany, Holland, France, Denmark, Poland!

Po Fests in Mexico! Costa Rica! Oh aging vagabond  
Citizen of the World of Poetry!  
Citizen of New Richmond, Ohio!  
Long way from Harlan, Kentucky!  
Who cancelled two of three big Bob's Not 60  
Birthday Readings to perform poems  
At SXSW Music Fest. Booked reading in L.A.  
Just to see grandsons and Kota, Lisanne! They're  
The age that E and I were when... and all  
In tears I eat the past, As sour  
Tasting and tear inducing as ever.  
This Is Your Life when You are Utopic and  
Unbearable and in Full Grief Regalia, You,  
Poet in airport bar, c'mon Howard! canceling the past,  
Waiting for everything to be India.

#### **FLYING OVER IRAQ EN ROUTE POETRY READING CHENNAI**

Blessed white snow peaks of Turkey  
My x-ray vision delineates travelers on horseback,  
Camel humps! Geography gives way to Iraq.  
Drama! Here in plane, nothing happens.  
Maybe a red wine sir? or the insane  
Death and destruction of a culture to be  
Mentioned in poem writ in airplane perfect  
Accompaniment to the red wine sir? All  
Languages swirl. Creep  
Infatigably — gonna' be 60, always was.  
First time in India. Ratchet up pen.  
Stop war. Don't even start war. There  
Goes Iraq sliding under. Here comes Iran.

#### **VEG OR NONVEG?**

Stewardess: Veg or Non Veg?  
Me (internal dialogue): Hmmm. Veg or Nonveg? People usually say  
what they want you to take first, so that'd be Veg. And she didn't say  
Meat or Veg or even Meat or Non-Meat? It's a vegetarian template.  
And to tell the truth, I've always liked veggie food, especially Indian,  
I think I'll say  
Me: Veg!

And voila before me appears chaat and shag, delicious unknown  
greens, more tasty than I can believe (if this is airplane food, hold  
onto your seatbelts!), a new world's fresh smells and tastes. And I  
have a new approach to life, a simplifying one. What would you care  
to have for dinner sir? Why Veg of course! Veg me! Veg it is!

## JANUARY 25

24 hours in transit. Closing: New York. India is open.

Slide off plane and holy mama there's Ram and Kumar at the gate — happy round the world kiss the ground happy. Half-hour to house, rice flower mandala on cul-de-sac at end of the lane off the street off the road past the highway. Landmarks run into each other, repeat till you are lost finding yourself, you are — home in India! It's the Prasads, the great Bollywood family, Ram's aunt and uncle and movie-mad cousins — Sanjay, the star, with the deepest eyes, and his producer, the wild Kumar and his toothy grin. Sleep in big upper room with washing machines and clothes lines. Hand me the blue lungi, strip off sweaty suit, vest, take the blue Halcyon, blessed wondrous sleep, where am I, here I am. Dream of Elizabeth. We are at some kind of poetry conference, and I'm getting attacked for my radical poetry of endangered languages ideas, she supports me genuinely as if it doesn't matter, and guess what, it doesn't, now I'm a hero, she is smiling.

### DHOSA BREAKFAST

Morning Mama making dhosa,

Mama: first lentil with veg,

Me: veg

Mama: peanut sauce,

Me: I can taste coconut. Soupcon of shredded carrots and onion.

Mama: hot sauce too hot?

Me: (a drizzle of hot sauce) mmm yes, I mean no, I..

Mama: White flour dhosa next,

Me: Oh

Mama: coffee?

Me: yes please, black (coffee comes with condensed milk and sugar and is perfect)

Mama: One more dhosa?

Me: Light as Bubby's matzo balls — ah! The infernal continuing, the infernal culinary cultural comparison dollops. Sure why not ahh, Prasad house, from Utter Pradash, here we speak Telugu, not the Tamil of Chennai. Sandals lined up on the balcony.

### THE WORLD'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL POETRY READING

So what to do this first night in India? Obviously, Big Poetry Reading! Eric's the hardest working guy in po biz lovely wife Magdalene from Chennai is a psychology counselor, a rarity in India. Oh, let's mention little Kamala, six months old! Asleep behind one of many doors that open from this large meeting room. Yes, the reading takes place in their house, near the city center, near the beach,

and, therefore, near the fishing village where Eric's been field work (Doctor in Linguistics from U-Penn). They got this house because of its proximity to the village which is perched precariously on million-dollar beachfront property. Most important are the big white walls that can be projected upon — most important for Eric's digital learning/translation theories!

The reading came about as a way to introduce Ram, Catherine, and me to community, community to us, but Eric also wants to broadcast it over the internet as part of his experimental distance learning project. So as usual with Eric it's manic ultra-energy, a big heart of chaos, and a generous helping of conflicting agendas. His distance learning audience has already logged in: a solitary Japanese geek in San Francisco who hasn't missed Eric events in years.

An incredible array begins quietly filing in: two Opari (professional mourners), fisher folksingers and fisher storytellers and young poets, a guy with a motorcycle helmet, some poetry lovers, some friends of Eric's and Magdalene's. Exactly at seven, Eric introduces the Opari singers, ancient, extraordinarily tiny women, who get right into performing, if that's the right word, doing their thing, voices low in harmony, professional mourners from fishing village. They have been asked to perform a lullaby for baby — sounds surprisingly dirge-like. Now it's the time for the actual Opari, introduced by Eric in great detail, quite erudite and full of feeling and longer than the previous song. He's a big lug of a host with a passionate, ungainly style, and then mayhem descends! A verbal battle ouch off breaks out. THE VIBES say Rimchin (Rain Drop), THE VIBES of Opari is not cool for baby! Big hubbub! Eric fends like a fencer, Opari singers look blankly in void, what is this, English? Endangered language disappears — silence.

Well when is she not a baby?, asks Eric.

Well, let's ask the Opari singers what THEY think. Here at last the guttural sing-song of Telugu-Tamil, translated by Rimchin Raindrop: its fine for baby, she is saying, but of course I would never bring a baby to a funeral. Eric's aside to me "We must be sensitive to audience too. It's a class thing." Let's let them do one more, is the consensus. Opari lulls and wails — to me, it sounds exactly like the lullaby. No one can translate what they're singing but one singer breaks out in tears. Rimchin Raindrop rushes to her, hugs her, hugs them both, an extraordinary funereal moment conjoins, but Eric's introducing the fishermen poet Mutu. The juxtaposition is striking: formality, raw, performance, cooked, emotion, academy.

And now Eric remembers his other purpose and asks a hot-tempered young poet, the Meena, is called in to duty to type English

translation which will be projected directly on white wall. Eric has the technology, but no one prepped to use.

Mutu starts. Typing rapidly, a nervous Meena runs into trouble right away — he's just too darn fast! She shouts out that she wants to translate orally. Eric intercedes: this screen with poet performing in front is his preferred method of translation, It IS the future (now! in upstairs room! in Chennai!). Meena, ok, goes back to typing but now it's ABOUT what Mutu is saying, not the words themselves, which I point out when she again halts the action and starts to translate orally which Eric quickly puts a stop to. "Get back to typing!" And she restarts typing. Now Eric feels the story is going on too long, so he asks Mutu to finish up. The sea tortoise story somehow morphs into Rip Van Winkle. Wrap it up, Mutu! The fisherman goes back to his village but a century has passed. All kinds of luxury condos coming to your neighborhood soon and no one remember him. He ages a hundred fifty years, jumps back on to the turtle, goes back into the sea his love, is there happily ever after Eric's arms around him squeezing time out. It's over.

Next up — what a voice! Basso, sotto voce. Meena, back at typewriter, is having an easier time of it. This poet's cadences are much slower — but uhh it's a history tale, "Rajraj," full of dates and what happens next and son of son of son of son of — Meena is now stymied by the surge of facts and details; again Eric jumps in proclaiming the speaker, who is really quite good, a "Professional!" Basso fisher-poet speaks, asserts that it is not true, it is his first time on stage, Rimchin translating. Eric stands behind him as Meena does translation, squeezes shoulders, history ends, this is only the prologue, and how long does it go? Hours, days, it depends how long the day continues. Ah West Africa jeliya, a griot in Chennai! The global oral tradition.

Eric calls for intermission. A young man later with motorcycle helmet speak ups for the fisher poets — he's Che, and now we're in a People's Revolution! His name is Kotok, a student filmmaker. Eric goes into ring master mode. Did he cut them off too quickly? We have three guest poets from the US who are the purpose of this gathering. Rimchin supports him. Meena's dad offers a lullaby to Kamala. Ram: this is the most controversial reading I've ever gone to! Rivithy, the poet we came to hear, now has to leave, the reading is well over an hour at this point, would I like to hear the poem that caused all the controversy in India? She reads me her poem in Tamal, "Breasts", the poem that was the first appearance of something feminist — extraordinary, to hear this version, one to one, at intermission, in hallway.

## "BREASTS" BY REVATHY

Breasts are bubbles, rising  
In wet marshlands

I watched in awe — and guarded —  
Their gradual swell and blooming  
At the edges of my youth's season

Saying nothing to anyone else,  
They sing along  
With me alone, always:  
Of Love,  
Rapture,  
Heartbreak

To the nurseries of my turning seasons,  
They never once forgot or failed  
To bring arousal

During penance, they swell, as if straining  
To break free; and in the fierce tug of lust,  
They soar, recalling the ecstasy of music

From the crush of embrace, they distill  
The essence of love; and in the shock  
Of childbirth, milk from coursing blood

Like two teardrops from an unfulfilled love  
That cannot ever be wiped away,  
They well up, as if in grief, and spill over

**HERDED BACK FOR THE SECOND HALF**, Ram shows great poetry videos, Catherine reads poems about love and the Bowery, and I do a set of Papa Susso's poems with Meena in Manding English Tamil — here's a translation method, she performs center stage in insta-Tamil while I weave around in English and the occasional Manding. That's it. End of show. But talk talk talk talk into night. Shayshona reads her witch poem with Kotok filming. True poets? Shangri-La. Crowd drifts off sated. Then of course that wild ride back, chilled red wine, etc.

## JANUARY 26

Now next day Eric and I wander the fishing villages, poverty overwhelming, family and life overflowing. I don't smoke the Ganja — what would Allen say? I'm shooting some video of the

garbage-strewn beach, worth millions to hoteliers, realize the little boy I'm using as a focal point is taking a dump. The huge logs that litter the sand are catamarans, actually the Tamil word for the canoe the fishermen launch en masse in the morning, to be hauled in by the whole village in the afternoon, all to the words sung in rowing rhythm with the peculiar Tamil-Telugu local vocabulary, full of fish names and local gods, that Eric is pushing as centerpiece of this local culture — a theme park? He's got a brochure ready. Sit with a cop and a gambler and the mayor of the block as Eric runs home for a minute, immersed in their language of laughs and stories. Out of sight of Ram, get to chow down on some delicious fish, sardines, straight off the grill, wow. Eric tells the story of warrior woman Kanage, a true feminist spirit of this city, once Madras, now Chennai.

The Wedding! Once again on backseat of Kumar's motor-scooter busting the barricades of light. It's the wedding of Seravan, a Wall St dude from New Jersey and his appointed betrothed from Chennai, Gettee. My assignment? Write wedding blessing poem! On back of motor-scooter get the repeat beat:

Seravan Gettee  
Gettee Seravan  
Your wedding is the wedding  
We've been dreaming on

It's a big hit in the audience, and the happy couple and family love it when it's our turn to have picture taken under the be-flowered canopy — I let loose with the full 45-second version. We have our picture taken with happy B & G.

Seravan Gettee  
Gettee Seravan  
Your wedding is the wedding  
We've been dreaming on

We are quietly approached and secretly whisked downstairs to the intimate 150-seat dining room where people are digging into some unbelievable looking food.

Sit down along one side only of long steel table paper tablecloth is unrolled before you followed immediately, like a silent film, by banana leaf guy, water guy. "Don't drink!" from Ram, producer protector guide god! — we're here only two weeks, shooting two films — hey, I cannot get sick. Word is no one has ever gotten sick who listens to Ram's wisdom of appetite. So I pour a little water on leaf spread around. A parade of servers, bits of this and dab of that dropped on leaf, all wonderful spice and veggie, incredibly good. Some kind of dense root curry, a cream of wheat yogurty thing,

fruity chutney bhaji onion fritters, dhal, chapattis — getting the hang of "right hand only" but fellow neighbor into onerous use of water as finger bowls, have to keep remembering I have no napkin. Want to use new white Punjabi long shirt as napkin.

Honking wild ride home. Packing takes awhile, all these books! Just going to bed when Ram, Beatriz and boys come up ... I take over computer for emails, spray down for mosquitoes, try for sleep, hard-on, Ambien, don't I ever sleep? Strange waking space think of Ginsberg dreams from past: one, Ginsberg is part of rock cliff by cave by sea. My feet in the water. Rock tables, rock chairs. Ginsberg appears beside me. We stand with pants rolled up in light surf, look at each other, a blessing. In Berlin, right after Allen's death, great dream of Allen arriving in plane-car, Uncle Sam hats make as cones to help him land. I get in the driver's seat, Allen leans in and whispers, it's a boat too!

Last thoughts are Elizabeth, in bed with me; we are going to the Taj Mahal with Sophie and Daisy.

#### JANUARY 27 SUNDAY (DELHI)

After hours of circling, land in Delhi, a jolty one. Stay at "New Modern Hotel" which is neither and especially not both. First stop, a visit to the SADHO poets in suburbs. Here in the gated compound by the new hospital live our poets: a couple, Nandana Sacema and Kavita Bahl, filmmaker/poets, their son Siddhartha, nine, and their pal Jitendra Ramprakash, a small but thunder-voiced professor, who welcome us into this well-appointed intellectual home, with some chilled red wine.

Formal, knowledgeable Jitendra is a true character. Somehow we uncover the story of Trilochen, the Delhi-Benares poet/guru who was Ginsberg's Delhi connection. Is this the missing link? Hold that story! Lights, camera, poem! Make movie now! Kavita appears — its dinner time, more wine time too! Siddhartha, the nine-year old, ends up setting up camera — it's the Marx Brothers Combo Poetry Film and dinner! Siddarth uses the boom mike like a spear as Jitendra and I settle back on stools going on and on about Pound and Eliot, the intricacies of India's multitudinous poetry traditions.

And now Jitendra starts to rock, rolls it out like Ginsberg himself, a moment of satori including the revelation that "Trilochen" actually means "third eye" in Hindi, flowing to a gorgeous Trilochen poem about Ginsberg in Hindi. Have we found the missing link of Ginsberg transformation from drugs to spirituality? The story continues — Trilochen and Ginsberg high on meditation and breathing techniques racing madly through Benares until the sweat

from their faces became the rainbows of psychedelia, seeing the world refracted not by LSD but honest physical joy belief spirit — is this the story we've been seeking, the moment when meditation and pure body breath ecstasy get you higher than dope? The missing link is linked! And we got a reading in half an hour in downtown New Delhi!

Mad, mad dash craziness back to town to get to The Attic, renowned young poet scene. Pull up alongside Regal Cinema mad house parade street peddlers, movie-goers, total chaos, peanuts and handkerchiefs for sale buy 'em! Finally hook up with grand hip smart wild ah! — poets! Monika Mody, la jefa, Vivek Narayanan, Roselyn D'Mello, the whole beautiful crowd. Guess what? Surprise! There ARE gay people in India — and they're all here! AND it's time for the Bob Holman Challenge! — at which Bob responds to each poet in the Open Mike with a poem of his own. This stunt worked out via email over months of intense digital hilarity cross-purposeful cross-cultural-ism. I start off with two cuts from CD "Awesome Whatever." "She Never Phoned Me Back" and "Love Lake."

You never thought it would happen to you  
I never thought the same thing too  
But together our dreams come true  
Swimming in a Love Lake with you

First up: gorgeous Roselyn D'Mello starts off with fully-charged eroticized archetype fuck poem which begins

*After I left you I undid myself in the secrecy of glass, only the golden stream of bulb light cascading all over my dark, winding streets, giggling around the periphery of my reflected cunt, my charcoal coloured skin erupting into soft salts, my middle finger skimming the surface of my overflowing lust, slicing through the kingdom of mirror, feeling the wet touch of my body spilling and spelling itself out to you.*

I can only respond with "Let's Get Butt Naked and Write Poetry"

So entwined are we, double-dutching free  
Anti-cute in a schoolyard whose verses  
Curses and reverses the nurses  
Confessional sign please  
To the doctor's obsessional re-re-release  
Fingers playing harmonies' delights  
Body parts arts signifying hearts  
Merciless mercies just lips kissin' free  
Getting' butt naked writing poetry

And we're off! Vivek is the real deal, his poem flips Kanage story that is Eric Miller's icon into a postmodern delirium, and I reply with short love poem. Totally unusual Bengali hip-hopper recites in Urdu, I come back with "Impossible Rap" a big hit.

The Impossible Rap  
Is ready to appear  
Is it possible that  
You are ready to hear  
It has something to do  
With what you just said  
It's the thought you can't remember  
In the back of your head  
It's the dream you won't surrender  
When you get out of bed  
Just Return to Sender  
Think The Other Thought instead

Reggae rapper dude gets "Pastamon" response.

Pasta Mon starrin on his own TV show  
Yesterday's menu's already obsolete-o  
Shows you how to roll a pasta-filled burrito  
No habichuelo on my tuxedo

Back in the history I shot the deputy  
For not makin' sauce sufficiently garlicky  
Everyone connected in a single ecstasy  
We're a single strand of Pastamon's linguini

I'd been warned about the last poet. Indr has been backstage (a tiny kitchen, actually) preparing all this time, and after Monika's caveat, here he comes: stark naked, his penis held out by strings connected to nipple clamps. He is reciting his philosophical dilemma, "attach/detach." He asks for my hat, and, with trepidation, I hand it over and he puts it on. Glad you put it on your head, I tell him. It is truly awful poetry. He reaches out to touch, to connect, as the lefty liberal gay or not poets recoil. Finally, in conclusion, he asks me to cut the string. I take it to the audience: how many people think I should cut the string? Silence. No one seems to care one way or the other. Ah, democracy at work. His look — begging? In absolute pain? Finally, I cut the string. That really was the Bob Holman Challenge.

After-party at the hotel. Woowie!

*JAN 28-29*

Start off morning writing poem to the GARGANTUAN Disney-like  
Hanuman shrine across the highway, visible from the hotel.

**HANUMAN**

Oh! Loyal God-Connect!  
Superpower Island Lifter!  
Ape Brother!  
Oh! Praiseworthy Poobah Fascinator  
Forget-A-Chimp!  
Magnamagibeastarooni!  
Fraternal Mate! Dear Self, dear Rama, dear Hand!  
Every day move the entire population of India  
From one city to another to greet me with  
The teeming masses. Yesterday Chennai, today Delhi,  
Tomorrow Kolkota — come with me, be me!  
Half-human, half-monkey,  
Flip! Banana Ponderer and oh!  
Ponderous Banana! It's Shrine Time!  
Do the ever-lovin' monkey see do see do? At least a sensible hat  
Inside moment of chaos that springs all clocks unstuck  
Truth serum net-flux! You are  
My sunshine, my only raincoat, my laughing snow bank,  
My river of forgetfulness, as Hanuman as possible as Krishna is  
possible:  
Mustache plucking  
Monkey brain vine-spring and land on your head,  
Dear listener, audience to the sea that roils  
In Hanuman's belly button- great cosmic joke  
Where everything's born! Forget it. Start over tomorrow.

**TRIP TO TAJ MAHAL**

Ram's got an idea for another movie: He films me travelling to Agra  
with a bunch of young poets, the journey is the poem (duh), we all  
go wow, and there I am at the TM ala Ginsberg. Then we come back  
to the US and make the same trip but this time it's with a busload  
of Chinese senior citizens making their weekly pilgrimage to the  
Taj Mahal in Atlantic City (ta da!). I stop taking notes: Let camera  
record this part, I'll just live it! Write it with my body direct on film  
(digi-film, whatever), Ram, my collaborator (I should talk more  
about this (writing is talking!)) shooting (shooting is writing! (I  
am not being filmed, I am "improvising" a poem for the camera!)),  
driver driving. And my co-po's, Monika, Vivek and Roslyn, talking  
the po talk and walking the po walk. One Big Poem. Who arranged  
the Death on the Highway? The sunset at the Taj Mahal? The late  
night Pon?

But allow a few facts to emerge as prose placeholder: It was chilly,  
not what you'd think of as normal weather in India, I'm wearing my  
green Barbour jacket from Sligo. Getting around and out of town  
was getting lost and backtracking as usual. The marijuana wafers  
took the edge off — Vivek had bought them over the counter at a  
Pon shop, which is basically a guy sitting on a counter making Pon  
and selling gum, candy, and, now I know, Munika, or marijuana  
wafers. And Pon. Munika, 70 cents; Pon, 35. The trip was long  
and eventful. We ran into a serious traffic jam — first noted as cars  
began streaming towards us on BOTH break down lanes, so we were  
literally driving at 50 mph with cars coming towards us at the same  
speed on both sides of us. A pedestrian had been hit, "smeared."  
Vivek and I stride into the mob and — the body. Death Unbound. A  
sign of, well, I know not, I'll not say, as we slide the van around the  
scene.

And then The Taj one-upped The Taj. A moment in the absolute  
dark inside the Shrine Tomb when I am thinking of Elizabeth and  
then find Rose, a physical seeing in the dark. She is sitting there,  
quite beautiful, silent, and I think, Rose was Elizabeth's middle  
name, only I thought, "is."

**AT TAJ MAHAL SANS BELOVED**

Built as a shrine for love  
So of course there is no love  
I am here which is to say  
The phrase "which is to say" to keep  
Me from saying "let's just say" eyes  
My eyes are here they are floating like  
The dome is floating, the synchronous  
Sun-moon float connected perfected  
Make tears fly and understand  
Everything completely forever and  
Your tears do float up  
To hell there is no heaven and there is  
My beloved delicately shimmering  
Down is tomb where life is not  
Entombed nor enshrined  
Living live life beating heart blood  
Oh dear Elizabeth eyes unblinking

We haggle for chotchkes after. Buy four little marble models of the  
Taj for the girls and boys, nice (all would be broken when opened  
in States — always look inside the boxes, Folks, even if the boxes  
are nicely neatly closed — when I give them away I call them "Taj  
Mahal Kits"), and a brown jade Hanuman for me. Cold long night  
ride home, poems slower. Stop at a truckers road stop —

It's my first Pon!, a green leaf soaked in what one hopes is filtered water. Then the guy uses his with any luck washed finger to spread some white mayonnaisey stuff on it. Then he pours tiny piles of things: betel nuts, cardamom seeds, was that tobacco? WHO KNOWS ANYTHING. At least ten ingredients. Some jam. Fold it up, pop the whole thing into your mouth and chew long and hard. Somewhere between soap and roses. A mouth wash for the body.

Drive Monika and Vivek home — Vivek has me up for a moment, proud of his poet's quarters, and indeed the tiny book-strewn room is the perfect launch point for a poet in the old Bengali tradition. Could be Sunil's room back in the day — Allen would have loved it's Spartan feel — one can write here. And then, at a bus stop, it's good night to dear Rose, off into the night as Ram and I make it back to the not New not Modern and settle into creaky beds for creaky sleep.

#### JANUARY 30TH

5 AM waiting for breakfast with Ram at New Modern. Then off to airport where Ram gets the news: the Book Fair has been canceled!

In which the book fair is canceled after which it opens to a crowd of 500 with speech by Paul Theroux and a great poem and sax by Joy Harjo also meeting Sunil Gangopadhyay at the Rowing Club and other adventures. Headline of *Daily Telegraph*: "Buddhist Battles Book Battalions." The irony, or one of the ironies, is that our plane has to circle an hour over Kolkota because we have to wait for the pollution to lift so there's enough visibility to land! That's right! the dust of 2.8 million is such that the Book Fair is cancelled for environmental reasons! More on this later! Poetry Pollutes Brain!  
**Book Fair Canceled! Please come to the Book Fair!**  
**Read all about it!**

Meet poet/musician dear friend Joy Harjo at Airport.

#### RIDING WITH JOY AIRPORT KOLKATA TO HOTEL LANDMARK

Hurling black taxi into mad river chaos  
Rickshaws! Rickshaw humans, bicycle rickshaws,  
Moped driven scurries with fringe, bicyclists,  
Occasional sacred cow bringing all traffic  
To a dead stop candy-colored trucks eyes painted  
Next to head lights ward off accidents and signs  
On back of truck 'Please Blow Horn!'  
OK all together HONK  
Individual build constant bleat eternity Honk Honk  
Honk as you start to pass there are no lanes honk ok come on

Honk Thanks I am now coming dangerously close  
Honk ok no problem honk I see you I like it this way honk honk ok  
Me too Sort of got by you and I wish to long honk you  
Fantastic I shall staccato burst honkonkonk as drone hooooononk  
Goodbye good honking you  
Honk at cars parked too close together  
Honk at cows ambling like Ganges cross thoroughfare  
Honk at bicycles going in the same direction on other side of the road  
Honk at stop signs "Do Not Stop"  
Honk at taxi driver as they  
Honk at rickshaws as they paddle dhosas tin containers  
To market, to hungry masses awaiting lunch curries  
Honk at planes over head — will they honk back?  
Make sure to honk as passengers exit from any vehicle  
Honk at gas stations "you never know"  
Write poem about when not to honk  
Build car around horn  
Holy Mother India  
Every Honk a prayer to God.  
Honk as you approach a fly over  
Honk lullaby  
Honk Howrah Bridge  
Honk salt lake  
Honk at wet diaper smell  
Honk if you have a horn  
Honk if you do not have a horn  
And now on back of (honking) truck Joy reads "Please Use Horn"  
Pulls sax ebony alto  
From case begins  
Serenading symphony, Kolkata concerto  
Please honk  
Whatever you do please honk

Immediate blessed sleep in tiny room with lumber solid bed,  
but first!

#### MORE ABOUT CANCELLATION OF BOOK FAIR

Same thing happened last year, but there was time enough before the scheduled time to go back to court, treat it as a postponement. This year the High Court waits until the day before to cancel totally. Months ago the Guild Committee had done complete environmental review, gotten okay from everyone. Politics as usual says Goutam who hasn't told Joy yet (this too will become a theme) so I break the news which goes something like this: The book fair is cancelled and everything we're scheduled to do is going to happen. HONK!  
Catherine meets us at hotel positively glowing and totally tired

from two days communing with press, setting up alternate sites for readings, attending to getting new programs printed. And this is my first view of the US delegation poetry anthology, which she edited: *A Mingling of Waters*. It's a knockout! Looks super, 300 pages, and leafing through, guess what, poetry that is actually quite good — moving, diverse in voice, style, content, AND not representing anything. Being! Poetry being, as it should be. True USA Represents!

And now, they're off! Goutam, Catherine, Ram to try to save the day if not the whole Book Fair. Room service! Immediate blessed sleep in tiny room with lumber solid bed oh I said this.

### THE OFFICIAL NON-OPENING

Off to the Official Non-opening. Traffic is terrible, surprise, Beatriz, Ram's wonderful Brazilian camerawoman says, "Oh everybody's coming to the Non-book Fair!" Ram, drained from long day's battering nothingness to bureaucracy, shakes head — no one will be there. Town Hall is a big white colonial building, gated, huge columns. Lots of press running around. "They have lots of events here," Ram says, "this isn't for us." And then Folks, lo and guess what — It is! Guess what, it's not that it's canceled and no one shows up its canceled and everyone shows up and its front page news! Must be 500 people, with TV crews and photos up front blocking views of assembled poet dignitaries. Very formal Sunil, totally beloved and in charge, Dr. Napur, the marvelous New Jersey Bengali therapist and free spirit, Sodoh Sarkar, poet, nice chap, instant connection. What a buzz! You can feel revolution in air. Tons of press stepping over everybody. The sound of Bengali rolls between Japanese and Romanian, very musical, emotive. The mayor is here, the governor — US consulate babbles Bengali, sounds like Iowan, and, *from* Iowa, the head of the Writing Program there, Christopher Merrill, greets the community of the word and speaks for the group. Merrill was here last year, is main connect with the Indian government, our leader, give great talk, and quotes Frost here's a couple of couplets from his "Ghazal" for Aga Shahid Ali:

There's no sugar in the Promised Land  
Swear by the olive in the God-kissed land  
The way you danced along the crowded bar —  
The saffron-harvest in a star-crossed land

Now it's Paul Thoreaux's turn — the great travel writer and novelist seems even more disbelieving of the situation, wry, sardonic, — hurt, even, but soldiering on. This will be the last we'll see of him as he is whisked off in official car for official tour to official reading sites and dinners around the country — poor Paul. I get my moment, hold the Actual Plaque with my Actual Poem on it. The Mayor is reading over

my shoulder, "A Gift of imperfect understanding."

Many many welcomes in Bengali. At last Joy is introduced but then another Bengali politician steps in front of her and drones on. Finally Joy launches into poem about her granddaughter and transition — incredible overtones with sax. Paul Horn in Taj Mahal — brilliant!, but the Bengalis walk out, the hall basically empties press audience walks straight across in front of her as the pure poem covers the air, insinuates the space, builds a future of music. Listening with me is Willie Kgositsile, old friend and ally, poet laureate of S. Africa and his pal Kase also from South Africa. They're staying at the Hilton, will check in later as US delegation is herded into press conference. We all say our pieces. Peace. The assumption is get through this quickly so we can have some dinner. Wrong! Off to yacht club to hang with Sunil and gang. Several bottles of whiskey and limited menu. Ram hasn't eaten all day, Beatriz comes all the way across town — down to chips and peanuts, now some fish bits arrive. Ah! The world needs these words! Drunk poets party blitz chowder dip man Italian/India engineer poet diagrams poems the gallery owner installs on walls. Time for sleep.

### JANUARY 31

Breakfast with Joy, Ram, Beatrice, Christopher fun and games Off to Kali-Ghat.

### ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER

Something about everything — e.g. gets in cab  
Head for Kaligat  
But there is no Kaligat so  
We turn around and decide to go to Kaligat  
Which is the crematorium we stop and go in  
Yes there is wailing yes I AM WAILING  
Wired for sadness, camera stays out, go into the room  
Of pipes to chimneys, the room of gates  
And grief, a woman is Opari no it is  
A boy, a teenager, keening  
For his mother where are my daughters  
Try to call on phone, busy  
One rupee twenty seconds Kerutala burning ghat  
Now a site for sleeping dogs  
To growl and behind more temples  
Profound simplicity where I sit lotus  
Walk into Mouth of Lion

### KALIGHAT

Since everything is happening now in front of  
Me is India we go to where Ginsberg  
Learned life is death is life burning  
With desire real flame the final  
Unreeling at extreme  
Speed that is slowly horn blowingly  
Slowly appearing Kali from Ganga, the  
Dripping Naga and Veda cloud poem! the  
Sun is just another thing happening  
Beside the eternal taxonomy of garbage  
Life begins to notice it is not here  
The only thing missing is the body and the  
Leg sticking out of pyre is ever so  
Gently nominated as beauty queen of  
Total Understanding.  
Maybe what we mean is  
Rapture Peace Nothingness

Off to Howrah bridge! And walk to Ghat through flower market  
towards Ganges — a riot of colors, garlands red yellow carnation  
petals like dust find our way to the ghat where we hang out with two  
gurus, Shanando Mondol and Genehsi shankar. Apni Amar Guru?  
Are you my guru?

Teaching at Kolkata University with Bhatri Mukerjee, a paying  
gig. University conveniently situated next to Coffee House on  
College Street where Ginsberg first met Sunil. So Subodh, Ram  
and I stop in for hadj — wind up creaking memories stair to giant  
room, walls browned by coffee smoke, bored waiters, hubbub of  
intellectual conversation ebbing and flowering and bouncing. The  
eternal now of the Kolkota coffee house scene. Outside we are  
surrounded by hundreds of bookstalls, so jammed that books must  
arrive by rickshaws — no trucks can penetrate. Proprietors sit on  
stall, cross-legged, stall seven-feet wide, thousands of books stuffed  
in all available space, make that no available space. Old, flaking,  
falling apart gorgeous University, with stained and faded photos  
of great professors of the past stretching from forgotten to oblivion,  
all the way to the ceiling. The students have all read Bahtri's  
Jasmine — and she is a wonder, weaving together her Kolkata  
past and present, her romance in Iowa and the resultant ongoing  
happy, mixed marriage, her originating what is an now an entire  
genre, "immigrant fiction." Students listen closely, well-behaved,  
smart, like a polite private high school in the States. Beatriz shoots,  
Ram too, and national TV is on hand. I'm on next, students get  
into modulation to performance, hip-hop. Pay for teaching is \$25  
for two hours. Lunch is boxed tuna and pasty with cardboard cake.

Then it starts to rain, as much inside as out, the old buildings barely  
standing up to the deluge, just let it pour through.

### DOWNPOUR KOLKATA UNIVERSITY

Halls hold scholars' centuries  
Photos yellow dust darkened walls  
Swinging doors to the Dean's Office  
Pouring down wet precious liquid  
Burble glurg pl'flow write  
Outta the pipes hold it! It is now  
Increasingly rising over your feet wear  
Sandals — lucky. Hoist your dress, graduate  
Student in Aboriginal Behavior!  
The shadows plummet! Total flood overflow  
Rinses university. Boat drives by, open door  
To taxi? water pours in!  
Water drips from every department:  
History, Literature,  
Science, Mathematics.  
Antiphonal raindrops,  
Galleons subaqueous  
Drowning in Wisdom

### PALM POEM

The sound of one hand clapping  
Is exactly the same  
As the sound of the other hand clapping

Breakfast with Joy Ram Bea off to Pakistani refugee — I sit in  
car prep for tonight's reading finish inspiring Ginsberg letters  
a completely different person when writing to his father or to  
Ferlinghetti. Very formal with Father, very honest, wanting Louis  
(who is also a poet) to approve of his poems. Ferlinghetti gets mad  
dash of imagery and publishing biz details. I am fading in and out  
of sleep in the car, warm Kolkata morning, air still, quiet dirt road  
somewhere in this City's madness. Then I hear a twang! twang!  
twang! It's a street musician — my opportunity for spontaneous  
jam! I stop him just as Ram, Bea and Goutam II return, Goutam II  
translates. Turns out street musician is actually a dhunuri, cotton  
wool fluffer with string on stick his tool which he idly plucks as he  
walks to work — the string sounds like a bass. Ram sets up the  
camera. Dhunuri accompanies me in a spontaneous poem. I am  
in heaven.

Then we realize we're standing in front of an old print shop. Goutam II, our interlocutor, has an idea, strikes up a connection and next thing you know we're handing over the text of "Relationship" to be printed on beautiful Indian rag paper. \$5 per hundred. I order 200.

### RELATIONSHIP

In order to save the relationship  
We will never see each other again.

We go to Howrah Bridge, where Ginsberg envisioned all human populace crossing, Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims multiplied to infinity, an image that still works as the world hustles by Bea shooting the sunset.

### POET AT WORK ON GANGES

The vibrating Howrah is writing this  
As I meditate the sun down  
Ganges, simple flow below, sun sinking  
Into eternal bridge — crossing humanity  
O, India flowers of no resistance, how  
I have waited to wait here forever for  
Night, and night today, and day and ...  
Which is the only reason for poetry  
Where time stops and only eternity dawns

### MAGIC HOUR AT KOLKATA CRICKET STADIUM

Fanatic nonviolence and fish  
That live on land because no one  
Tells them — hey Fish, Get back  
In the water! Fanatic nonviolence  
Where no one swats a mosquito the  
Mosquitoes die of obesity and malaria  
pills no longer disturb dreams

In fact dreams are never  
Disturbed no matter what, not even, by wakefulness  
I have been there. I am  
Still there. These eyes you see  
Are my eyelids, these eyes are painted on.

Dinner — what else? A mass trip to the US Consulate! This will be the worst food I will taste in India.

### 31 JANUARY 2008

Hey you,  
You sound great you sound like Kolkata.  
At 10:30 Ram and I took on the faculty at the Satyajit Ray Film Academy, you would've loved it. We got so many directions/films/agendas/screenwriter phenoms/friends of Ram it seems Poetry Films is as much a genre as Action or Comedy. There's Ram's film school in Sao Paulo. There's the doc he's making with Bea about The New India. There's Bea's film — Brazil girls dreams of Bollywood, many misadventures as they make way to subcontinent, film of the film. There's Ram's and my movie about Ginsberg in India. There's Ram's Poetry DVD Magazine Rattapallax. There's my United States of Poetry and New World of Poetry emphasizing poetry of Endangered Languages (I have a lead on Funding! Whoops, where did I put that address?). Then, we hit the students for two hours of "What is Poetry Film?" The students are active, engaged, falling over each other to talk, with a few survival of the fittest types grabbing the air. One young woman: has anyone written a poem in collaboration with the making of the film? You go girl, I say, your idea! But it slowly dawns on Ram and me that that's exactly what we did, just yesterday, at the Burning Ghats, my improv-on-camera prayer poem.

We then have another one of those glorious and interminable Kolkata cab rides. Fantastic sights, smells and thrill a minute car maneuvers — one threw all passengers forward, not a bad stunt at 15 mph! All events are separated by these 40 minutes or so of total insane constant horn blare traffic blastoff through deadly poverty and mind-blowing colors on everything. We are to visit Upal Basy, another pal of Ginsberg's (note:) who turns out to be Alzheimeric except nobody knows but me cause we're talking esoteric poetry facts "Basil Bunting Scottish poet T.S. Eliot funeral at Royal Albert Hall" etc., all confused and patched together, stories overheard, remixed, played back at another speed.

So I'm too tired to go to 6 pm reading which has been hastily booked as Opening Ceremony for Canceled Book Fair (I did tell you Book Fair was canceled, correct?) because of 9 pm performance with Joy Harjo but I'm told this will be Big and Important so we fight traffic and guess what it's Small and Unimportant but that's OK. At least we get to here Chris Merrill singing "This Land is Your Land" with an Indian folk poet. Yes, Joy and I are there singing too. It's not so much that anything can happen in India it's that everything happens.

There's not enough time to go to hotel and back to 9:30 gig (hotel is at least an hour of traffic away) so we go straight to gig. "Somewhere Else" at Park Hotel is blaring generic US hotel pub with NYC prices. Discover our names aren't on the set list at The Pub. Discover that the organizers didn't quite get this thing together and the famous Bob Dylan of India folk-rocker we are to share bill with really isn't into it — we can sit through his encores and then take the stage for an empty room. So Joy and I nod and it's traffic and hotel and a cry and email.

I write you Sweet-T 'cause your life has so much suckiness right now and my as you call it Perfect Life is just one crazy nightmare after another. Somehow your struggles there reminded me exactly of what I went through today. Also you write so personably and eloquently I feel like we're talking and that's a sweet wonderful endearing feeling.

So I wanted to expand on Hey You and just say that crying is a very good thing and you certainly deserve a good long one and I wish I were there my shoulder could be put to good use. I cry daily still you know. And you've got a ton of great friends around you, so cry alone and cry with them. I am sorry about the sculpture but now there's less in the truck right and art is long but not that long, as life is brief, but long enough to hold most everything. And you are young and terrific and this adventure will soon enough be a glorious moment of the past as you find yourself at last! In it and not transitioning to it.

Thanks for writing me. It feels good, and now I won't have to write today's journal. You can be my journal tonight, ok?

#### TO GURU

trust eyes  
never lies  
tongue of teeth  
lash of eye  
pure touch  
ash to sky

okay to do anything  
okay to go anywhere  
just stay here always  
doing nothing

#### FRACAS ON BLANKET

Me and Sherando Mondol  
And 150 flies divided into  
ABCDE forms of caste  
In a very street high school

All are sitting on Sherando Mondol's  
Blanket and are singing  
The these words: Lift, voice-sky!  
Dance! Dance! Dance!  
As if some magic force!  
Flies fly off Sherando!  
He and I still sitting and  
Next thing you know we are  
Flying off too!  
Are we flies? I ask my Guru.  
Eye compassion  
From my guru lets me  
Know everything.

#### 3 FEBRUARY

Of course when rest of US delegation arrives, Natalie, Carolyn Forche, Ed, Suji — nobody had told them. Nobody had told them about the cancellation of the book fair the week before.

I have to second Joy's informing everybody that the book fair is cancelled there's a shared sense of stunned. Disbelief and over-tiredness. The complexities bred more complexity and then Yuesf shows up. He's not happy. Just that no one knew. Not that they would have done anything different, it's the idea. A brief break of our reading a crossword Goutam finally appears tension thick we get through it Goutam and I take a cab together. Poetry reading goes well. What is the meaning of meaning?

Get up etc. I love the hotel food I love all the food of India discover that the bottled water in the room is tapped water. I've been having no problems but now have switch to real bottled water. Oh how I wish I could eat the street food! Barhatri is speaking about the effects of book fair's cancellation she wanted to pick up Bengali novels and poems for teaching translation and maybe even publication but, no vendors. Also Bengali audience doesn't get to hear the incredible US delegation, living representation of multi-culti lit. Sleeping in Kafaks Ear preparing poems then "the mingling happens/ and we are transformed/ and then we are destroyed by that mingling" Catherine is now having a golden moment. She is asking Goutam to give us the schedule. Read it to us, she says, just to be sure." We still have no idea which events are happening and which aren't and which when have arrived have no prep. I find it totally hilarious. Now Goutam is speaking Bengali to get back at her. And seems licks for the lack of media coverage.

Another great cab ride, its Saturday traffic flows better. That is until we get to the bridge. Cab parks we proceed on foot bridge that

crosses the flower market. We make our way out to the Ghat, I really don't see any "real" saddus but then, sure enough, one appears, with natty dreds and a red turban unwrapping hanging down from his head flies all around. Oh my goodness I've already written this. Could this have been yesterday? Yes.

Now I'm at the art gallery. It's supposed to be Joy and me. But everyone must read first so by the time I'm too read most people are gone. Sunil is the main man. When he hands out newly published books men reach down and touch his feet some just wave below his knee is this a hierarchy of obeisance or is it just who's flexible enough to touch the floor?

#### **KALI A TEMPLE**

Krisna Vishnu, Veda Vedantic  
Ganish koli, anti-penantic  
Ringing every bell in every weigh station  
Kindly grant me the poem snake  
Me and my friend Dante are entering  
We have waited we have crossed the Ganges  
We have tossed our flowers to the goddess  
Covered our mouths with tea towels  
Wept over the sorrows, left-over tomorrows

#### **EVERYBODY READS PLENTY OF BENGALI POETS READS**

**TOO** a woman Una Bodes play harmonium sings Tagore everybody knows everybody sings along then she says here another Bengali poem doesn't mention the name everybody sings along with this one too. I get Una to play along with me when I read my Urdu love poems. Willie Kghostile is there and he reads a poem. I am Joy's tech but somehow when I push the button on the ipod nothing happens. She smiles at me I think, I'm fired.

Off to buy beer back to hotel buffet dinner big party in Catherine and Lloyd's room. Fun. Next day big ruckus in hallway its Goutam dancing and screaming the giants just won the super bowl. The sewage smell drifts in from Salt Lake.

#### **SAMOS WITH JOY**

Is it meat or veg,  
Who can tell ?  
Well,  
It matter to Joy  
And not to me  
So we work it out,  
And I hear the

Words I've waited a lifetime to hear:  
I'll eat you're outside if you eat my inside.

**DANTE AND I MAKE IT ALL THE WAY UP TO THE KALI TEMPLE** 2 hours north of the city get stuck in a political demo a corpse on a bed of flowers dances through traffic. Driver wants us to leave our shoes in the car. But we finally figure out that's not sure a good idea no thanks we'll take our shoes we're off to monkey park take slow boat to Rama Krishna campus and temple then back for a wander through the incredible red and yellow collied temple ring bells along the station of life. Toll cobra. See colli mother!! Oh Oh Oh! Sun is setting beautiful duck. Find way out to cab driver is talking in Bengali wants more money I give it to him. Enough to appease him Dante sees that 30 rupees is written on the paper I gave him 50 to start now 10 more I figure we didn't do too bad Dust settling in for the night we pass a green bus and a gold star I think of my mother it's here favorite Chile diner in Cincinnati. A boy selling chiceffs for 5 Dante wants one give me blue one I give him a 20 he tossed him tow red ones no time for change his car races off to Kolkata. Now we're in the back row sitting between Chris and Ed Sadbode is reading the last poems we're all out of flowers I give the famous plaque to the major sit with Dr. Napur it's a Bengali reading people talk continually walk in and out talk on cell-phones poems sails. Dr. Napur has us over for her famous fried fish Goutam and I bring the Bhang this is where the poems start to fall down but luckily it's all part of the dance. Across from the university are a thousand book stalls each on eight feet wide with a desk in front where the book seller sits.

#### **LAST NIGHT IN KOLKATA**

Talk with Sunil about Lorca  
Sodbah-Translations. Publish?  
Ram-Dailes? Pickup shot,  
Benares? Allen's last night wind blue  
Tonight no wind, still blue  
Allen's last night carousing well,  
There was carousing that's for sure  
Allen was with Sunil — me too!  
Allen used his name in poem  
That's too much for Bob Holman  
Who finds his own home  
Writes his own poem

### OPENING NIGHT DETAILS

Playing the cotton picking instrument  
Introduce the characters  
Party at Dr N.'s.

Tonight is big dinner party at our benefactor and spiritual humdinger, the poet-shrink Dr. N., who splits her time between suburban Jersey and a gorgeous pad in old Kolkata. Dr. N. is renowned for waiting till the kids grew up to divorce her Bengali husband and henceforth become the Bohemian spirit of Kolkata and Indian New Jersey, which is to say, the Little India of USA. Yusef has mentioned that this is one of the highlights of the Book Fair, and there's a lot of anticipation from all quarters.

Goutam and I go out to gather supplies. It's a lot of adventures and misadventures through the greeny Blade Runner smog of Kolkata. He and his driver \_\_\_\_\_ have been together so long, with their old Checker car it's a single unit. Wild to be along for the ride, the back alleys, the old friends. By the time we get to the party, it's in full swing, Sunil holding court, Yusef roaming the edges, and Dr. N. singing poems. The food, smelling wonderful alas where — gotta say we do enjoy and Sunil is already holding court when we arrive. The wine is flowing, the cigarette smoke is thick.

### SHOPPING PLUS LUNCH W/ DR. NAPUR

### IT'S A FUTURE I'D HAVE NEVER INVENTED

We're all on Cell-phones! Alone. B.F.D.  
(Big Fucking Deal). Gog Magog. I  
Will tell you the stories. You will eat this poem.

### GINSBERG ON DEATH

However I am sick of capital D Death wish, Finally.  
Might as well use the head I got — though learned a lot  
From testing its limits. The problem to find verbal.

### EVEN DOGS GO TO SLEEP

They do it when you're dreaming  
So you can dream of them barking  
To balance their barkings'  
Interrupting your meditation

### EVEN HOLY MEN RIDE MOTORCYCLES

They pull alongside  
To teach you  
The dog is not interrupting  
The dog is accompanying  
Honk at planes overhead  
Make sure to honk as passengers enter or exit  
Honk at gas station "you never know"  
Write poem about when not to honk  
Build car around horn  
Holy holy mother India  
Ever honk a prayer to god  
"A train is coming straight at you be sure to honk"

### MORE INDIA

The shakedown continues. Everyone is.  
Here the sun is just another input,  
Pay extra for the pollution chip  
In your cell-phone never stops ringing.  
Cell-phones! The new, personal automobile horn?  
The noise builds builds and FINALLY  
Cop nonchalantly waves us on

### SOCIAL COMMENTARY: MANNERS IN KOLKATA, IOWA

By happenstance I was sent to Iowa  
Isn't that like Hollywood? I thought  
You can take dowry money or  
You can get an MFA. Pick # 1, and  
I, says Dad, will arrange the Perfect  
Marriage. We found him — an engineer  
Whose mother was dead: no mother in-law!  
So I head off for school — writing was girls' work,  
Like sewing. I found myself for the first time  
Ever in a co-educational classroom, first  
Time in a rural setting. So, escaping marriage,  
I promptly fell in love and married after two  
Week courtship. We held hands after a play —  
It felt like the end of chastity

A non-white person in a white society —  
Suddenly I was exotic or passing.  
My mind was living in Kolkata,  
The neighborhoods, the life. I was not

There. I knew Kolkata would change.  
I'm still married he's wonderful.  
We wrote days and nights together.

Book by book I change.  
My language changes with me.  
Indian couples come to Queens.  
US did not invent "immigrant fiction."  
Except for Europe. Brown people were  
Invisible or sojourners.

Started getting into American pop culture —  
I'd never seen TV before I'd come to America,  
And I haven't stopped watching it since.  
I have a five room condo, big TV in every room.  
They're always on! The frenetic jump cuts  
of the news — Kenya, China, India —  
have insinuated themselves in my work.

The language I write is far from colonial,  
But also different from the American way  
Of self creation. Now, being back, I can say  
We have changed together.

**Bob Holman** produced for PBS, *The United States of Poetry* (USOP), aired nationally in 1996 and co-edited *Aloud! Voices from the New York Poets Café*, the winner of the American Book Award. He won three Emmys over six seasons producing Poetry Spots for WNYC-TV, and received a Bessie Performance Award.

## Indian Tribal Poetry

Orissa is the homeland of indigenous tribes. There are 62 scheduled tribes in Orissa, and therefore, this land is a fascinating ethnographic state with living cultural aspects. Tribal of Orissa constitutes 23 percent of the total population of the State (as per census 1991). Next to Madhya Pradesh, Orissa comprises the largest tribal population in India. Majority of tribes lives in the southwestern part and northern part of Orissa. There are districts like Koraput Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Malkangiri with more than 50% tribal population. The major tribes in the state are the Kondhs, the Gonds, the Santals, the Saora, the Kishan, the Oraon and the Munda.

### *FOLK SONG OF CHHATTISGARH*

Documented and translated by Verrier Elwin

3  
How dark my bed is now  
Your body was a moon  
Your eyes were antelopes  
Long was your hair, my diamond  
You loved me for two days  
And went away to your own land  
How dark my bed is now  
The koel cries on the mango branch  
In the forest calls the peacock  
On the river bank the crane  
And I mistake their music  
For the voice of my love  
How dark my bed is now.

This translation was funded by a grant from the Witter Bynner Foundation to the People's Poetry Gathering's Endangered Language Initiative.

### *SAORA SONG*

Documented and translated by Verrier Elwin  
and Shamrao Hivale

11  
Where has your diamond-body gone?  
As a child, games delighted you  
You danced and played in the open air  
Then you came in and ate what you desired  
Childhood passed and youth came  
Love filled your eyes  
And carried away the memory of home  
Youth passed and old age came  
Your skin withered and you reaped  
The fruit of youth.

Joseph O. Legaspi

*SUBWAY PROSE POEM #2: PASSENGERS*

Passengers are passing through terminals. Train doors glide open for a Nepalese boy with eyes like polished onyxes. He keeps his rice hat on, framing his strange beauty. It is past midnight, New York City. We are all visitors here. An African family sits in their Sunday best. Families are passing through. A leopard headwrapped woman falls asleep on her lover's stiff shoulder, his shirt buttoned tightly up to his neck. A man wears a bloody gauze eyepatch while rolling silver balls on his right hand. People are passing through our lives like refracted light or shadows. A homeless man announces every fleeting station. What is train but transport to other lives? What secret stories travel beneath the faces? A nun of Mother Theresa's order shepherds a young sister, tight-fisted, holding her rosary. In my messenger bag I carry books, scissors and pieces of raw chicken.

*MY GRANDMOTHER, IN INCREMENTS*

After dinner, when the plates rest on their rack, drying, my grandmother ambushes me at the kitchen table. She hands me a contract, a term of payment for a plot of land at Rose Hills cemetery. She asks me to calculate her leftover balance. While I add and deduct, in long hand, she sits there, her eyes the color of foliage on the brink of autumn, her lips curve as always in that wry near-smile. Her hair was red in her youth, born in a brown equatorial island to Caucasian parents. It was the first thing my grandfather noticed, she once told me. I can still see them in the summer of their lives, a mustachioed man with deep tamarind eyes and his Dancing Flame waltzing together, their feet gliding across the bamboo floor which moaned like a violin. On the table, my grandmother pinches the ripe bananas; a gray wash of numbers waterfalls down the page before me. I glance at her grand hips which bore her fifteen children, three died in infancy, my mother in between two deaths. In W.W.II, Japanese soldiers, mistaking her for an American, confronted my grandmother with three children in tow and my mother inside her. It was the early phase of the occupation, when citizens deserted the cities for the safety of demilitarized camps where my grandfather awaited her arrival, where they spent weeks in a cave that muffled the thunder of nearby war. A soldier pulled my grandmother by her hair, threatened her with his bayonet. Her neck arched, she only had the sky before her as she screamed Spare my babies repeatedly in Tagalog. That year of the war, she might as well have given birth to me, too, this woman who is nine-hundred-and-eighty-seven-dollars-and-sixteen-cents away from a peaceful death.

*MY FATHER IN THE NIGHT*

My father sleeps when the city rages around him and rises to work the graveyard shift in the linen department of a hospital. Boxed in his heavy-curtained room, the glass window shut, we would think him dead if not for his snoring, amplified by the thick, stagnant air which holds the sound before it dissipates and is absorbed by the walls. Before he leaves for work, my father sits at the table, eating his meat and rice, his children bewildered by the sight of him. With boiled eggs and bread slices in a brown bag, he steals away into the urban darkness while his wife stumbles into bed, alone, rearranging the disheveled sheets. And my father in the night changes the sheets on hundreds of hospital beds, the kind where he laid when his skin was like potato-sack burlap from dialysis and chemotherapy. He removes the soiled pillow cases, replacing them with starched ones. He puts on the white sheet, unfolding it in the air like a woman's skirt, settling it down onto the mattress.

Joseph O. Legaspi

*VISITING THE MANONGS IN A CONVALESCENT HOME IN DELANO*

Those mountains, ocher in the distance,  
resemble the wrinkled skins  
of the manongs from Delano,  
a town north of Bakersfield that smells  
like the first rain after a drought, the pungent  
collision of earth-dryness and sky-wetness.

The fields near the highways are packed  
with rows upon rows of sweet melons and sprouts.  
Filipino migrant workers picked them  
for cents: winter peas, oranges, bushels of apples.  
Their backs arched like bent bamboos.

Santa Maria. Barstow. Salinas.  
Fresno. Seattle. Juneau.  
The west is too familiar  
to these lonely, old men trapped in their rooms  
filled with photographs of white girls  
they had loved but cannot marry.  
Each told the story of the collective,  
the many eyes of a single pineapple:  
*I came to America at sixteen, at fourteen,  
at twelve, aboard a dysenteried ship...*

Looking at the east, shunned by the west,  
they wander as ghosts in-between worlds, haunting,  
and yet haunted by their own ghosts,  
the white membranes over their eyes like sadness.  
*This is all we know, said the manongs,  
To harvest grapes, you must destroy the vines.*

**Joseph O. Legaspi** was born in the Philippines and currently resides in New York City. *Imago*, his debut poetry collection, is out from CavanKerry Press. A recipient of a poetry fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, he co-founded Kundiman, a non-profit organization serving Asian American poets.

Claire Malroux

*ELEGY FOR A YOUNG GARDEN*

Shattered bricks, flayed sockets  
Facing the snow's glare of absence  
The air's shock, expectation of an avalanche  
Our eyes Our emptiness Our anguish  
Spades and saws, old tools of amputation  
Left on the site by the black laborers  
(They'll return tomorrow and tomorrow  
With huge plastic shrouds  
To gather the debris, arms, feet  
And fists of plants like human  
Limbs in an earthquake or a massacre )  
Annihilated garden, statue with feet of clay  
Although anchored in earth To anchor it within  
Yourself would be a trap Paradises only last  
When lost Bury it in your own depths instead  
The fir tree upside down to seize  
The soil's surging, the bushes hollowed  
To cradle all that aspires to air  
The ivy to serve as its own rampart  
Let memory be supple earth which you  
Turn and re-turn, fallow ground and rootlings  
Far from the flowerbeds of eternity

II

Muted noises  
Stones being thrown to the ground  
Bodies fall

Memories  
Dissolve  
Without a breath

No rip in time  
No anchor either

For anyone living  
They are eternal  
The fall and the flight

Let him sing of change  
Like the construction site  
So that the song becomes whole

Claire Malroux

### III

The garden has been driven from its den  
On the roof-terrace of the building's parking lot  
Where, with the cats, it yawned at seasons  
(Its crime: giving shelter to rain)  
The naked plot parodies a beach  
Alignment of translucent dunes  
Glass roofs, steel-encircled gravestones, with nothing  
Around them to soften their geometry, neither  
Lyme grass nor that thistle which concentrates the blue  
Of sky and ocean in the sand  
A calm installs itself, a space between  
More moving than what comes before or after  
Already birdsong has begun again  
In a leafy elsewhere, the earth bends its ear  
There'll always be that anticipation  
Of a world on its way to beauty  
Against the tide of entropy  
Where anguish sees only a seed ripped by the wind

### IV

Each stage of the renovation  
Violently contradicts hope  
Convalescence with strange relapses  
Like that trellis of fine stakes and wire-mesh  
As if to shelter the terrain  
Stripped of its treasure  
(In spite of its resemblance to sepulchers  
Opening the underworld to the light of day  
This will never be a ground for excavations  
Except perhaps after the galactic wars)  
Only the watchtower is lacking  
Unless even my onlooking is complicit  
With the human rage to imprison  
Determined to force back the exuberance  
Of any life which escapes it  
Still there's a hope:  
Wires may bedeck that jewel-box  
Lianas and climbing stems to quench  
The eye's thirst, clematis, sweet  
Peas, and why not, morning glories?

### V

Prosaic relapse No botanical  
Arabesque to dress the emptiness  
No festoons to whisk off the vertigo  
The aim of the enclosure: to prevent a fall  
From the platform New European  
Standards, like the bathtub  
Shower and toilet in a hotel room  
Where, for a century, travelers  
Had slept insalubriously facing a washbasin  
For a long time the gardeners ambled  
Thoughtlessly behind their lawnmower  
Now there's concern about their balance  
But not out of philanthropy Instead they're given  
Full responsibility for any suicide  
Nothing will decorate the guard-rail That would be  
An incitement to throw oneself against the ropes  
Before the match was over, to renounce life  
And sink into the arms of poetry

### VI

Mowed down, the last soldiers standing guard  
At the foot of the platform  
Those who hurled into the battle, as I did,  
The bloodless spring leaves  
Tried to slow down the gallop of the void  
But a rumbling never ceased  
In the furious silence  
Lying in ambush in the heart of color –  
Last witnesses huddled in the skip  
Cut in small pieces like the children in the tub of brine  
Before the arrival of the saint  
Scattered with the poem's letters  
Why insist on mourning the green and the living  
Stone, glass, steel are destiny's bones  
Left for dreamers: ponds, mud, drool  
Stammerings

Claire Malroux

**VII**

That garden was a young man  
Barely thirty years old and so  
A bit like my son, my brother, my lover  
Fed on my watching, I like to think,  
As much as on light, on water, on juices  
I invoke Mozart's concerto of that name  
The name is a guide through the sound's  
exuberant order  
I would like, just the opposite, for music  
Not language, to fill the senses' absence  
The silence in which this young garden precedes me  
In all its lack of being

**VIII**

No verse will re-create Eden  
Even if garden almost rhymes with eden  
No Adam will re-create Eden  
No Eve will re-create the sap  
Even if a poet's name  
Rhymes with the vegetal blood  
No Eden will rewrite the verse  
Even if eden almost rhymes with garden  
No Eden will re-write Adam  
No sap will re-write Eve  
Even if the vegetal blood  
Rhymes with a poet's name  
And if everything cries out that for a garden  
There is no life without Adam and Eve  
No life for Eve and Adam  
Without eden

Becka Mara McKay

***A METEOROLOGIST IN THE PROMISED LAND***

The linguistics of clouds changes from country to country.  
What connotes a storm at home is only a child's flushed cheek

pressed close to the tropical atmosphere. New climates can render me  
illiterate. What began as relief turned to sunburn,

like the voice of the man next door, soft in the sky's throat, but treacherous.  
When we touch I'm struck by the paleness of his nailbeds in his brown fingertips

against the reddened error of my skin. Signals for disaster here are only  
another kind of silence: the sea holding its breath, a lover's hands gone too still.

Misreading the air, I'm caught without my umbrella, the shibboleth  
staining my shoes with mud, rinsing me clean with rainwater. This country keeps

infinite grammars of betrayal, beginning with syllables of shadow  
appearing beneath my fingers, mispronounced as the fog burns away.

Translated from the French by Marilyn Hacker

**Claire Malroux** is the author of numerous volumes of poetry including *Birds and Bison* with English translations by Marilyn Hacker. Malroux is herself a highly esteemed translator and received the Grand Prix National de la Traduction in 1995. Among the poets whose work she has translated are Derek Walcott, Emily Dickinson, and Emily Bronte.

Becka Mara McKay

*EPITHALAMIUM (in seven disciplines)*

**1. Cosmochronology (the science of the age of stars)**

Before I knew you, I spent half my life below the surface, coming up for air only when the sun reached melancholy in the slatted sky. Before you knew me I was only texture: velvet, sandpaper, and gooseflesh. Before I knew you I was a rain gauge at midsummer. A camp stove during the burning season. Before you knew me, you hid your unstrung heart in the snow and fashioned winter boots from the skins of a dozen supernovae so that your feet might light a path home over the cobblestones of the soul's slick alleyways.

**2. Catacoustics (of echoes)**

I was always looking for the ricochet of your reflection in a pool of polished stone. You were always waiting for my voice in the trace of light that scars the wet sky.

**3. Pharology (of lighthouses)**

When we were not invented I strapped a camera to my forehead and walked backward into an evening sea, daring the local phosphorescence to construct someone I could really talk to from the breath of high tide. When we were not invented you tied a listening dish to the roof and tried to transcribe the invisible music of bats. When we were not invented we stood back to back where water and sand join hands and asked the whole continent to bend so that we could stand face to face.

**4. Sphygmology (of the pulse)**

Once someone told us that it was unnatural to say "I love you" in Chinese. But I do love you in Chinese. I love you in Chinese, in English, in semaphore and in smoke signal and in telegraph. I love you via satellite and I love you during the delay on the line that represents the earth's curve. I love you in the shape of X. I love you in the presence of light. I love you when the light is fading behind you.

**5. Proxemics (of the human need for personal space)**

The verge of joy is also its own kind of happiness.

**6. Pteryology (of the distribution of feathers on birds)**

Once I was all quill and barb, plume and spike, carrying useless aerodynamics on my back and waiting. Now I know that every wing has a history, a memory of the first journey through the air, pushing against nothing until nothing becomes solid. Now I know wings are no longer wounds but maps we tattoo on the bellies of clouds.

**7. Thaumatology (of miracles and wonders)**

Before the science of you, cardiology was only an empty box at the back of the closet. Meteorology was a wet afternoon in a chilly room. Cosmology was beauty school for the Milky Way.

Becka Mara McKay earned an MFA in translation from the University of Iowa and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Washington. She edits *eXchanges*, an online journal of translation. In 2004 she received a fellowship from the American Literary Translators Association. In 2006 she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her translation, from the Hebrew, of the novel *Laundry* will be published in 2008.

*GOOD EXCUSES IN LOUSY WEATHER*

You exhausted the compost of your old vocabulary. You found that the flaw in the absurd was its distance from the finish line, like a circus tent laced shut before the fable's end. On the other hand, you understood the problem with the abstract to be its inability to stop squirrels from raiding the feeder. When you discovered that oenology was a hard science, you decided that drinking wine might have more to teach than previously believed. All morning you had trouble adding up change, offering each cashier your palm of coins as you searched for a second opinion. Two letters arrived from the coast of sleep. One was signed breathless. One was signed soon. As if there are people in this world who cannot wait to reach you. The letter that never arrived ended like this: If you ever do anything that stupid, I'll hunt you down in the afterlife and kill you. The letter that never arrived ended like this: I'll sink your name with stones. The letter that never arrived ended like this: Wait there.

**Delisa Mulkey**

*A GAY HERMIT LIVING IN BALLGROUND, GEORGIA, ATTENDS A CHRISTMAS PARTY*

Ramón St. Ramón arrives two hours early  
clutching calla lilies to his chest, the white blooms  
quivering against his black velvet cape  
like a dozen lithely naked virgins.

He's a centerpiece: Tells impressive stories  
from ten years spent as Bette Midler's personal assistant.  
Explains the Tibetan Book of the Dead  
and how he used it to summon a queer incubus.

Poses grandly when the camera's brought out—  
in front of the lush botanical landscape,  
his handlebar mustache graceful  
as the cockatoo's wings in mid-flight.

And he's come through a lot to get here.  
None of us knows his real name,  
but I know his bathroom is wallpapered  
with cherubs and male centerfolds

cut from magazines with names like Blue Boy.  
None of us knows why he left Hollywood to come  
here and live, or how many friends and lovers  
he's watched, or helped, go to death, but when a girl

eating country pâté wrinkles her nose and complains  
about a squashed cat in the street outside,  
he comes to me quietly, a German villager  
long-tired from cleanup, and borrows a shovel.

*GEORGE A. ROMERO COUNSELS SOCRATES*

*"The soul is something strong and divine and existed even  
before we were born ... but its very coming into the body  
was the beginning of its destruction, like a disease.  
from Phaedo*

But what, then, do the living dead feel?  
—A blossoming of nerves in teeth,  
the synesthesia of sense coagulating  
in bone, forcing its maturation deep  
into the worm of hunger and violent yearning.  
Let loose the worm, festering in a compost  
of its own desires, let loose on flesh  
the craving for flesh, the sinking of tooth  
into pulp, and the perfect release of lives  
not quite worth living. Beyond name  
and all knowing, they come home to us.  
Come home to flesh on the nod, come home  
to life, which we can only know as that time  
between when we exit the womb and the world.

Delisa Mulkey

*A HISTORY OF SILK*

2140 BC

How stunned Lei-tsu must have been  
when, after plucking cocoons from the royal  
mulberry bushes, she accidentally  
dropped one into the warm water  
that was not yet her tea  
and saw it bloom like an exotic  
sea creature; how delicately  
the young bride must have cupped  
that yellow tangle as she lifted it to air;  
how she must have wished  
to wind that long strand around  
her emperor's hands and feel her body  
move against that new, pale skin.

550 AD

Picture Justinian rebuilding Rome,  
codifying law and imposing order;  
picture him pacing the Hagia Sophia  
surrounded by richly veined marble,  
vaults, arches, half-domes of gold,  
columns of crystal porphyry rising  
to a crown of windows; picture him  
indifferent to the harmonies  
of bright mosaics, consumed  
with discovering the 2,000-year-old  
secret, dispatching warriors,  
friends, priests—all executed  
in the Orient, until two Nestorian monks  
smuggle eggs back to Constantinople  
in their hollow bamboo staves,  
back to his Theodora, who wishes  
to close her eyes and feel nothing  
but the breath of silk as it descends upon her;  
picture Justinian picking mulberry leaves,  
serving those worms, wishing to be nothing  
but their flossy kisses hardening in the air.

**Delisa Mulkey's** work has appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Poetry*, *The New England Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *New York Quarterly*. In 1997 she received the Ruth Lilly Fellowship, awarded by *Poetry* magazine and the Modern Language Association. She has been a featured reader at the Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, and won the Redbone chapbook competition with *Peacock By Moonlight*.

2nd Millennium, AD

I can't live without you; I am unknown in the wild.  
I once spun armor for the sons of Genghis Khan,  
and all of Russia trembled before me:  
amazed when their arrows could not pierce,  
when the Golden Horde shook off those iron heads  
with only a tug of their silk mails and charged the Volga.  
But you can sleep on sheets of silk that I have spun  
for thousands of years. You can dream about love  
and wake with my work twisted around you.  
Persian kings once enslaved thousands  
of young women to pull apart my Chinese dragons  
thread by thread, re-dye each fiber, and re-weave  
them into Mithra slaughtering the bull. You  
can have any picture you like. I now have no instinct  
to wander or hide myself. I can be kept in open trays,  
and if you don't feed me I will die. You will know  
when to move me, you will know when to set me  
on the spool or leaf or cone because I will stop  
eating the purple mulberry you grow for me, I  
will stop growing, and begin weaving my head  
from side to side, practicing my style  
like a flautist fingering her keys  
before I spin gold like a poet singing his lover.  
And in a few days, when I have enclosed  
myself, you will place me over steam until I die  
so that I cannot cut the one perfect strand  
and you will begin to reel me off, 3,000 feet of filament  
that will become nothing but a bra,  
nothing but something you can toss aside,  
your hands already filled with the fleshy moment.

**Xasan Sheekh Muumin**

*CAQLIGII WANAAGSAN*

Gorayadu ilmaheed  
aroori bay dhigtaayoo  
aboodigu ku laayaa,  
shimbirtuna aroosay  
ilaxidhoo ammaana bay  
ubadkeeda seexisaa.

Kala awran labaduye  
edebtiyo aqoontiyo  
asluubtay isku dhaafeen.  
Caqligii wanaagsani  
itaal in uu ka roon yahay  
bal eegoo u fiirsada.

Ilka weynoo maroodigu  
araduu mirtaa buu  
cadawgu ku ugaadhaa,  
aboorkuna duddumadaan  
aragnay buu dhiistaayoo  
naftiisa ku ilaashaa.

Kala awran labaduye  
edebtiyo aqoontiyo  
asluubtay isku dhaafeen.  
Caqligii wanaagsani  
itaal in uu ka roon yahay  
bal eegoo u fiirsada.

Ma ogtahay sagaaradu  
awaarahay qoddaayoo  
saaladeeda ku aastaa,  
libaaxuna ma asturee  
hilimaduu ka arooruu  
digadiisa ku aslaa.

Kala awran labaduye  
edebtiyo aqoontiyo  
asluubtay isku dhaafeen.  
Caqligii wanaagsani  
itaal in uu ka roon yahay  
bal eegoo u fiirsada.

From Shabeelneegood. Translated from the Somali by Martin Orwin. This translation was funded by a grant from the Witter Bynner Foundation to the People's Poetry Gathering's Endangered Language Initiative.

Poet, playwright, actor, and composer, **Xasan Sheikh Mumin** was born in the Borama district in northwest Somalia to a prominent man of religion. Between 1965 and 1968 he was employed by

*GOOD SENSE*

The ostrich places  
Her young in the open  
Where the hawk kills  
But the small bird marries  
And beds her young  
In a nest that's safe

Different in size, the two  
In manners, wisdom  
And sense are opposite  
See how good sense  
Is superior to strength  
And think on it.

The elephant with large tusks  
Grazes at night in land  
Where the enemy hunts him  
But the termite builds  
The mound we see  
Protects himself within it.

Different in size, the two  
In manners, wisdom  
And sense are opposite  
See how good sense  
Is superior to strength  
And think on it.

Do you know the dikdik?  
She digs at the dust  
Buries her droppings  
But does the lion conceal his?  
The path to the watering hole  
He stains with his dung.

Different in size, the two  
In manners, wisdom  
And sense are opposite  
See how good sense  
Is superior to strength  
And think on it.

Radio Mogadishu, where he produced programs of recordings of Somali oral literature which he collected in villages throughout the country. His play, *Shabeelnaagood* (Leopard Among the Women) about a lecherous youth who seduces and impregnates a foolish girl, won him national recognition.

*MR. CHOGA GETS AHEAD*

The health officials pulled up to Choga & Sons Bakery in their ramshackle pick-up and caught Mr. Erasmus Choga by surprise. It was their third return in as many weeks. The bakery had been open at least two hours and was just serving the last of its morning rush customers. Mr. Choga, himself not a baker, stood in the kitchen with the old man he employed for that purpose, demanding a very large batch of hot cross buns.

And thus he didn't hear the horrible screech of the city council truck's brakes as it came to a stop outside his store.

"The kids," he said to the baker, using his mouth and his fat hands. "The kids like those."

Mr. Choga used his entire body when he spoke so that he always seemed in perpetual motion even while he stood still. As a result, he appeared to be a nervous man, someone about to fall off the verge of sanity. A rather large man, he had the type of body that could look good in loose-fitting Safari suits. But Mr. Choga wanted to look professional. He squeezed his rotund frame into one of four silk suits every morning for work. Today he wore the grey suit. It fit a little too snugly and he was already sweating.

The old baker protested.

"It's the middle of November, sir," he said.

"I know what month it is!" Mr. Choga snapped, exasperated already with this day and everyone in it.

So far this morning he had had a fight with his wife before leaving the house. Their only daughter, Clara, was sick with something more than just a cold, she claimed. She wanted a ride to the clinic in the city because her car was acting up. Mr. Choga had yelled at her to stop being such a spoiled cow and catch a bus like other women did.

Now he was being challenged by this old man who he had saved 20 years ago from a life of homelessness and hunger.

"I say that only because we end up throwing those buns away after two days," the old baker said. "Besides, I don't think the kids want to think about Easter a month before Christmas."

Mr. Choga started to give the old man a lecture about who paid his salary when a brisk knock came at the door. Before either of them could answer, the door swung open and the two men from the city council walked in with their clipboards.

"Mr. Choga, please vacate the kitchen for inspection," said the younger one whose name Mr. Choga had forgotten. He was the one who always did the talking, while the older man looked on intently as if he were being trained.

"Gentlemen, I wasn't expecting..." Mr. Choga began but the young man cut him off.

"Of course not," he said tersely. He had already begun to jot things down on his clipboard. "We did warn you that we'd be back to make sure you did what we asked. Now please, you and your employee leave the kitchen and let us do our work."

The young man lifted a baking sheet with the tips of his fingers and inspected it with a disgusted frown. He let it fall back on the counter with a loud clatter and wrote something down quickly. Mr. Choga cleared his throat nervously. He waved the old baker towards the door and lingered at the entrance, his heart thudding in his chest.

Something about this young man reminded him of his oldest son, the one who now worked as a solicitor in Harare. The boy had always had a blind determination to his every move. He possessed the kind of ambition that left no room for relationships outside of work. Mr. Choga liked to tell anyone who would listen about his successful sons: the lawyer, two working in Britain, one studying literature in South Africa, and the other a proud owner of a fleet of taxis in Harare.

The young inspector moved with slow precision through the kitchen, checking everything. The older man followed.

Mr. Choga fumbled with the door knob and both men looked up as if they had forgotten he was there. Mr. Choga started to speak.

"Please sir," said the young man looking away. "Let us do our job."

Mr. Choga bit his lip and opened the door. He stepped into the space which was his store, now devoid of customers. The baker stood near the till whispering with the girl who worked there.

The store had four aisles, two for bread and the other two for sundry items like cooking oil, dried beans, ground maize meal, and evaporated milk. These last two aisles were a recent addition because he had heard that Zvanaka across the street with his "mega-bakery" was selling more than just baked goods. There was talk that Zvanaka sold everything, that his bakery was becoming a supermarket as well.

Mr. Choga felt something scratch his throat at the thought of his competition. The feeling rose rapidly and it was like being choked. He tried to contain the emotion but could not do it. Instead, he started forward with an ungraceful flourish, muttering poisonously under his breath and sweating more profusely. The baker and the girl stopped talking.

From halfway down the two left aisles Mr. Choga could see the large neon sign across the street, flashing **Zvanaka Goods Store**, in alternating red and green. When it opened a year ago it had been just Zvanaka Bakery. His wide chest heaved spasmodically, as if he had been through some strenuous exertion of the flesh and, as he loosened his fat tie, his fingers fluttered nervously. But he wasn't getting enough air so he proceeded to unbutton the jacket of his suit.

A clatter from the kitchen made him gasp. Nothing good was going to come out of there, he knew that now. He stopped just a short distance from his two employees and grunted. Mr. Choga was

unaware that he had forgotten to do up two crucial buttons over his generous stomach, and in the unbuttoning of his jacket had revealed a mound of his thick, brown flesh.

The girl behind the till covered her mouth with her hand. From the glint in her eyes, he knew that she mocked him. Mr. Choga despised feminine wiles as passionately as he loved the women who used them. His wife no longer did it – the giggles, the lowered eyelids – and he respected her for that. But he had slept with this particular girl enough times for her to get cocky. He took great pleasure in what he did next.

“Pack up your things and leave,” he said addressing them both. “You’re fired.”

The shock on their faces would have been enough of a joy to get him through the day. Another crash from the kitchen reminded him of just how badly the rest of his day was going to go. There would be no more joys besides this one.

“We didn’t do anything wrong,” the girl said but Mr. Choga dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

“Please, wasting my time...you both are just wasting my time. Out, please, out,” he shooed them about like children.

Within seconds they had their belongings and were stepping out of the store. Mr. Choga closed the door after them and stood there a moment, watching the old man and the girl walk dazedly in the same direction. He would probably never know who it was that had started the rumours but he knew that things had changed drastically for him.

Across the street, customers streamed in and out of Zvanaka Goods Store. The neon sign flashed almost joyfully in the early morning light.

“Mr. Choga times have changed,” a voice said from too close behind him and he turned.

The young inspector with the clipboard was still writing. His older colleague stood a few feet behind him, arms crossed over his chest. Mr. Choga couldn’t tell which one had spoken. The young man ripped a piece of paper from the clipboard and handed it to Mr. Choga.

“You are hereby ordered to cease and desist any business operations in this store,” he said. “Your kitchen is still not up to code and we are aware of your unsavoury business practices.”

“Gentlemen, I really don’t know what you mean...” he started but the older inspector interrupted.

“Times have changed,” he said and Mr. Choga realised it was him who had spoken earlier. “We are not in the age of Nehanda. You can’t depend on potions and n’angas for prosperity.”

“Come on, man, what kind of a person do you think I am?” Mr. Choga said trying to laugh the accusation off.

But neither man smiled so Mr. Choga affected anger and said, “I don’t do that.”

“Well, old man, let’s hope your n’anga is a good one,” the young inspector said, reaching for the door. “This establishment will only be re-opened after your kitchen and shop have been completely renovated to suit our standards. We will also need sufficient proof that you will bake bread with real ingredients.”

The young inspector pulled out a piece of red paper from his back pocket, peeled the lining on the back of it, and slammed it against the front door. “Closed for Town Health Code Violations” the sign read in big black letters.

“After you,” the older inspector said and Mr. Choga patted his pockets to make sure he had his car keys. They were there but he forced his palm into the pocket anyway, his fingers feeling the charm attached. With a sigh of relief, he went down the crumbling concrete steps onto the pavement. The air smelled of exhaust fumes from the buses that had started ferrying people into the city to work. For Mr. Choga, the air smelled like disaster.

He watched helplessly as one of the men retrieved a power drill from the back of the old pick up truck. They changed the lock to the door in less than two minutes. A few people slowed down to watch. Mr. Choga inched slowly backwards to his own car, a fifteen-year-old gold Mercedes with paint peeling near the bumpers. The inspectors padlocked the door, checked its sureness and started toward their truck. Once inside, the younger man rolled down the window to the driver’s side and looked at Mr. Choga.

“We will return tomorrow for the complete clean-up. Be here if you need to collect anything,” he said and started backing up.

The city council pick-up truck began to rumble up the dirt road toward the city, a train of red dust billowing after it. Mr. Choga leaned against his car, causing it to creak with complaint at his weight.

Around him, people who had nowhere special to go were still staring and whispering. Mr. Choga did not want to care but he did. He was used to being stared at because he drove the only Mercedes in town, despite its age. He was used to whispers because he knew they were all jealous of his success.

Now these very same people were witness to his shaming. The two people he had just fired from his store had not gone far. They both stood leaning against the slag table that had been sitting outside of Macheke’s Barber Shop for the past five or six years. They were talking with other people and looking at him. Mr. Choga couldn’t dive into his car and disappear. His fingers sought something in his jacket pocket. He pulled out a soiled handkerchief and dabbed his thick neck with it.

And with as much dignity as he could muster, Mr. Choga straightened his shoulders, kicked his left leg out a little in an attempt to discreetly rescue his privates from his confining underwear, and got into his car. From the rear view mirror, he could

see what seemed like more and more people streaming in and out of his rival's store. His fingers absently stroked the fur of the charm dangling from the ignition with his keys. Before him, his own doors were closed for the first time in twenty-five years. He had no neon sign to turn off. He could not call his lawyer son to come and help him. He had finally stopped coming home almost a year ago now, having held out longer than his younger brothers.

Mr. Choga squeezed the charm one last time, took a deep breath and calmly reversed his car into the street. He turned the car in the opposite direction from where the city council truck had gone, away from his own home, his store, and the little strip of main street which constituted the "town centre" of his small world. At first he wasn't sure where he was going but it started to become clear soon enough. The terrain changed around him the moment he left the town centre's main street. It was like driving off an edge. In less than ten seconds he had left the busy sound of commerce and gossip and fallen into a vast world of silence and trees.

He drove on a path he was sure many in the town did not use. He himself had only come out here under the cover of darkness and sheer determination. Today he took the time to notice that the trees which normally loomed over his car in the moonlight were not as tall as he had previously thought. The shadows they cast on the ground in the growing heat of that November morning were normal shadows. The scratching sound under his car came from brush and small stones and nothing else. Mr. Choga eased up on the accelerator and rolled down his window.

A medley of strange symphonies of sound came from the woods. He heard birds. The only ones whose call he knew were the crows. He heard the clicking sound made by the colourful lizards that crawled along the barks of acacia trees. A monkey cried out and others answered him but Mr. Choga knew they were nowhere near here. Monkeys generally stayed in the hills and trees unless they were coming down to the valley to raid maize fields. With the harvest recently over, the little pests had to find other sources of food.

And suddenly he came upon the small clearing. A man in jeans and a tee shirt stood outside the n'anga's hut looking in the direction of Mr. Choga's car. At first, Mr. Choga thought he might have been lost but as he put the car into first gear and turned it off, he realised that this man was the n'anga.

Mr. Choga stepped out of his car and tried not to make too much noise as he closed the door. He stuffed his keys into his back pocket, fondling the charm as he did so. Mr. Choga began to clap, both hands cupped toward the other in a praying motion, as he walked with head bowed toward his spirit guide of many years.

"I knew you would come," said the n'anga in an unfamiliar voice.

Mr. Choga stopped a few feet away from the man and

looked up. He scrutinized the man's tattered black jeans and blue t-shirt with a big white check mark on the front. Gone was his attire of brown loincloth, necklace of lizard bones, and the leopard-skin sash which he wore across his black chest. His headgear of ostrich and peacock feathers was gone too and he looked so... ordinary. Mr. Choga swallowed hard. He knew why the man's voice sounded unfamiliar. It was normal. It was as ordinary as the sun erasing night, the shadows of the trees he had just passed, the life he led with his wife and his last child. It was just like this almost normal November day.

He couldn't understand it but he felt disappointed.

It was a feeling he had never imagined could be associated with the powerful man before him. In his few visits to this man, he had cowered in the darkness of the hut, grimacing at the growls that came out of the n'anga's mouth as he mixed potions for him. Mr. Choga had broken the skin of his palms with his unkempt nails many a time in fear as flames from the crackling fire lit the shadows of the n'anga's face into unnatural contortions. He couldn't overcome the feeling of wanting to swing around and drive back to his home. He trembled a little.

"If you had taken my advice and done this last year..." the man said and stopped. He chuckled. "Let me ask you first, this is why you've come right?"

Mr. Choga started to respond but his voice caught. If he understood correctly, what the n'anga wanted to do, which he had advised him to do a year ago when renovations began on the empty space that became Zvanaka's store, was the ultimate of all potions. It involved more than the throwing of old animal bones or the divining of boiled leaves.

Living things had to die to bring forth the life of new and more powerful things. This is how the n'anga had explained it last year. But Mr. Choga had not come for that. He did not want the responsibility of that task and that is why he had not done it before. So why had he come, he wondered? He wanted advice, that's right, just some advice. He started to say so but he sputtered into a coughing fit instead.

"This is what you want," said the man sweeping the air with the long fingers of his right hand. He didn't point to anything in particular but to Mr. Choga it was like saying the whole world. He wasn't sure he could handle the whole world. He just wanted this small part of it. The part that allowed him to command respect from his peers and to not succumb to johnny-come-latelys like Zvanaka and his goods store.

"I just want my store back," Mr. Choga managed to say finally.

"Yes, of course. That is what you want," the man said not looking at him. "You know what we must do."

“Well, ummm, how do you mean, we?” Mr. Choga stammered.

The n’anga looked at Mr. Choga with his green-flecked cat eyes and frowned. Mr. Choga felt as if his heart were crackling into a small chunk of ice.

“I mean that I do this for you and when everything falls into place as it will, you can pay me,” he said.

“Pay you in what way?” Mr Choga asked shifting from one foot to the other.

“I’ll think of something,” said the n’anga, looking away again.

And Mr. Choga knew, because everything in his being told him so, that he could no longer trust the course of his life to this person. Even after all the charms and the libations to the ancestors, things Mr. Choga had believed brought him into prosperity, he knew that not all the bones were in place today.

The sun had moved a little further toward the middle of the sky but there was no warmth around the n’anga’s place.

“May I,” he began. “May I go and think about it.”

The n’anga did not reply nor did he look at him. Mr. Choga swallowed hard in anticipation.

Suddenly, the n’anga smiled, turned to Mr Choga and patted him on the shoulder in an almost friendly manner.

“Of course,” he said. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

With that, he turned and ducked into his hut and promptly closed the door. Mr. Choga hesitated for just a moment outside, wondering if he shouldn’t just go through with it. If he went home now and his wife found out that the shop was closed...He couldn’t face her. But he was too confused to make a rational decision, he knew, so he quickly made for his car and started for home.

Mr. Choga’s house was a testament to colonialist idealism. It was one of twelve houses in a section of the town known as Killarney. The houses were evenly separated by Cornwall Street. The British settlers had erected this little suburb in the middle of a valley with uncertain weather, calling to form the shapes of the homes they could not afford in places like Leeds and Birmingham and Dover as they raced to find wealth and standing in Africa.

Each house had two stories but the forms varied just a little from the other. A few had verandas in the front but some had them in the back. Each house had a fence. Some gates still shut all the way but most stayed open. Some of the picket fences had fallen apart from flooding during the rainy season and had never been repaired. A couple of front yards were covered with gardens of choumolier, rape, and covo. No whites lived here anymore.

But somehow they were still there. People who didn’t have dogs still kept signs on their gates that read “Basopa lo Inja/Beware of Dogs”. One sign read “Trespassers will be shot. Survivors will

be eaten.” Macheke the barber lived here now and loved to laugh about the sign. It was the uneasy laughter of men who had come dangerously close to extinction in the land of their birth. The settlers who had erected such signs had not meant it to be a laughing matter. Many people had really been shot, and not even for trespassing.

The Europeans had gone now and not because they had wanted to. The second Chimurenga war forced them out despite the help they were promised by the Rhodesian army. The natives hid rebels in their homes and in the middle of the night these men with guns provided by Russia and trained in the art of war by China and Korea in neighbouring Mozambique raided the suburb. After the Europeans had either fled or been shot, the freedom fighters occupied the houses right up until peace was declared and in April of 1980 an agreement was signed giving Rhodesia back to Zimbabweans.

The suburb stood empty for months after the rebels left. No one wanted to be the first to claim it. The locals were too weary from the war. They gazed upon the suburb with apathy, as if they expected the settlers to return or for someone else to occupy the space, someone else to lead. And when no one laid claim to the place people like Mr. Choga, established businessmen and/or prominent friends of the new government, moved from the mud compounds that had been their homesteads and set up in Killarney.

Men like Mr. Choga became the new lords of Killarney.

Mr. Choga’s house was the fourth one on the left on Cornwall Street. His gate was intact and made of wrought iron. He knew that he had the nicest house on the block. Despite the prominence of Macheke the barber and Nyamayevhu the butcher, Mr. Choga had been the only one of that breed who had put his riches to obvious use. His sons had gone to the best schools and he drove the best car. And he had renovated the home, adding an extra carport for his wife’s car and three more rooms to the house, so that he had a bedroom for each child and an extra living room.

Two mongrels guarded his home. Often he had to arm himself with a stick if he came home late at night. His sons had trained the dogs to be vicious and sometimes they didn’t recognise even him. The dogs lay basking in the sun near the veranda. They looked up, their ears cocking expectantly, then nestled their heads back on their paws and didn’t move.

As he pulled up to the gate, the garden boy who had been pulling things from the dying lawn looked up and dashed to open the gate. He had a grin on his face like an anxious child anticipating a reward for his efforts. Mr. Choga drove in without acknowledging the man. His wife’s car was in its usual spot.

One of the maids was outside sweeping as he brought his car to a stop. She was bent forward, and swept rather enthusiastically with the short broom in her left hand. Her buttocks jutted up provocatively even with the wrap that she had put on over

her dress. Many fantasies of what he could do with her if they were alone started to flutter to the surface of his imagination, but Mr. Choga swept them away like cobwebs. There would always be time for that.

He heard her humming when he got out of the car. She straightened when he slammed the door shut and turned to face him but with her eyes averted to the ground. In an automatic fashion and without seeming to even think about it, she dropped the broom, her knees folding halfway towards the ground, and brought her hands together in a respectful clap.

“Good morning Baba,” she said to him without looking up and he grunted and walked into the house without answering her as he should have.

The silence of the house was unusual, interrupted only by rough little coughs. Whenever he came home, the television would be on and his wife would be on the phone. But he remembered that he did not usually come home until after the bakery was closed for the day. It was now mid-morning. He had no reason to be here. The coughing got louder as he entered the living room. His daughter Clara lay on the sofa, covered with a blanket, her school shoes and bag on the floor.

“Why aren’t you in school?” he asked.

She turned around slowly, her chubby pubescent body ungraceful and gasping for breath.

“I threw up. They made me come home,” she said.

She sounded bad. He could hardly hear her.

“Where’s your mother?” he asked.

“Meeting. Church,” she answered and her head fell onto the cushion with apparent exhaustion from the lifting of it.

Mr. Choga left her alone. He wandered into the next living room. It looked clean as always and smelled as if a new coat of floor polish had just been recently applied. The leather furniture in here was new, recently bought on credit from a place in the capital city Harare. He had barely made a dent in the payments. Mr. Choga hardly ever used the room and he discouraged the use of it by his own family. Only visitors were brought into the room. Standing next to the recliner reserved for him, he lovingly ran a hand over the special burgundy leather. But the room made him angry all of a sudden.

He walked out and found himself in his eldest son’s old bedroom. The room was still as he had left it. There was a double bed because he had come to visit once or twice with his wife. The room adjoined to the only full bathroom on the first floor. Mrs. Choga had decorated the walls and shelves with proof of this first child’s achievements, from his first spelling award to a framed copy of his law degree.

Mr. Choga had made his own decoration in that room and others in the house. His contributions were never in any conspicuous

place. He opened the wardrobe and parted the clothes his son had left behind. In the dark recesses of the wardrobe, in a little corner where he had been sure no one but he could reach, was a little plastic pouch pasted against the wood. Mr. Choga felt the pouch. The contents were grainy. When he brought his hand back out of the wardrobe, he could sense a hint of what the contents smelled like. The smell was sharp like aged cheese but it didn’t attract the palate in the same way. Mr. Choga shivered a little as he closed the door. Despite his wife’s new-found Christianity, she had not gone around and removed his charms.

Mr. Choga thought about his bakery and sighed. The charms had stopped working. In moments like these, Mr. Choga wondered why none of his sons had wanted to stay and take over the business. This whole mess with the health officials would not be happening if just one of them had stayed.

Before he knew what he was doing, he found himself on a slow tour of his own home. He checked every little charm in every room. They were intact but they were not working. In his youngest son’s room with the boy’s pictures on the walls, Mr. Choga caught himself stifling a sob. His body started to tremble as he walked around the room, touching the navy blue duvet, the edges of the Mungoshi, Dickens, and Achebe novels on the shelf. Out of five, he would have been content with just one.

And now around the corner was the first Christmas when none of his boys would be home.

“What have I done wrong?” he asked the air. He stopped in front of the last picture taken of his youngest son. “What?”

The brooding poet at seventeen looked back at his father and did not respond.

His n’anga was right. Maybe it was time for something stronger.

Mr. Choga found his handkerchief and blew his nose. He couldn’t look to his children for answers. He had to be the man about this.

He walked back to the living room where Clara still lay in a coughing heap on the sofa. She was barely twelve but now had the body of a twenty-year-old and something about this fact scared and surprised him. Mr. Choga had been more than happy with his male progeny. He prided himself on the fact that his beautiful wife had given him more than enough heirs, none of whom had been lost in the madness of the war. He had lost them to other things but not to the war.

And then Clara had shown up, right when the Chogas were convinced they didn’t need more children. She had his mother’s face and he had given her that name for his mother. But he had always thought of Clara as his wife’s child, her gift for having dealt with six strong males for so long.

Lately he had started noticing Clara’s presence. Her

bumbling mannerisms were hard to miss. She was just like him. He supposed that eventually he would have to leave the store to the girl. And although he loved that she reminded him of his dead mother with her smooth brown cheeks and her strange wit, he could not fathom how she could run a business after he was gone.

“When is she coming back?” he asked.

Clara shrugged.

“Why don’t you sleep in your room?” he asked, a little annoyed by her first response.

He knew he should be asking her if she needed anything, if she felt all right.

“I like the sofa,” she mumbled.

“You’re just going to spread germs to anyone who comes into this room,” Mr. Choga growled as he sat down in his favourite chair.

He turned on the television. There was nothing but white noise. He hadn’t paid the satellite bill, he suddenly remembered, and the company had disabled service. Basic television didn’t start broadcasting until about four o’clock in the afternoon. He switched it off and waited for his wife to come home.

In the middle of the night he awoke with a start from a strange dream and found that his wife was staring at him.

“What is it?” he said angrily but his voice came out in a squeak.

She didn’t speak. As his eyes adjusted to the night partially lit by a wash of moonlight streaming through the window above their bed, he recognised the look on her face. He had seen that look a few times in the bush, when he had fought briefly in the war. It was the look people got the first time they saw a dead body. There was horror and disgust in the contours of her face. And in her squinted eyes he saw anger.

He turned to face the other way but could not go back to sleep. He could feel her eyes still boring into him. Mr. Choga did not know how long she could keep that up but he knew that he couldn’t forget that look.

She had looked at him like he was less than a man.

He left a little before dawn, dressed smartly in his navy blue suit. The dogs growled as he made his way to the car but he wasn’t afraid. He drove towards the shop but instead of stopping at the bakery, he drove slowly past it. The only thing he could see was the scarlet paper on his front door. He glanced to his left and saw a light on in the Zvanaka store. They were already baking. Mr. Choga picked up the pace and again found himself at the edge of the world. The sun was beginning to peak through the canopy of trees. He thought he could already feel its warmth.

It was going to be a good day.

The n’anga waited for him outside, in the same clothes he had been wearing the day before.

“Good morning,” Mr. Choga said clapping respectfully as he always had to do when he approached.

The n’anga nodded. Mr. Choga felt nervous again. The fear from before returned. He tried to put his hands into his pockets but they wouldn’t fit so he pressed his palms to his thick thighs instead.

“You will wait here for my return. When I have the instrument for our task, then we shall begin to get you back your store,” said the n’anga and immediately started walking away in the direction from which Mr. Choga had come.

Mr. Choga watched him go. The back of his t-shirt read “Just Do It!” He wondered if he should offer to drive him half way, but he didn’t know where the man was going. Furthermore, he had been told to wait and he didn’t want to involve himself in “the task” anymore than he needed to. It was a strange and ugly thing to do, this he knew. But Mr. Choga told himself that everything would be all right in the end. When his eyes focused on the road again, he realized he could no longer see the n’anga.

Unsure of how long the n’anga would take at what he was doing, Mr. Choga sat in his car to pass the time. He turned on the radio. Some noisy American pop burst forth and he quickly turned it off. It probably wasn’t a good idea to play such music in the vicinity of the n’anga’s hut. The ancestral spirits were averse to modernity and the white man’s world. Nothing good came from a mixture of the two. He leaned the seat back and tried to take a nap, but he could not shut his eyes. He shuffled uncomfortably then climbed out and paced up and down in front of the hut. Mr. Choga checked his watch. Time seemed to stop in this place.

He stood still and closed his eyes, thinking about the new and improved bakery he would open up. He had always wanted to have a bottle store as well. After a long week’s work in the city, there was nothing the village men wanted more than a case of Castle Lager or Pilsner, and maybe some Coca-colas and Fantas for their children. Mr. Choga himself was partial to rum.

The thought pleased Mr. Choga very much. He liked to find pleasure in every little thing he did. There was still hope. He opened his eyes and could not help gasping in surprise when he saw the n’anga walking toward him carrying something in a bag. Mr. Choga glanced at his watch, unsure how much time had gone by but knowing that it couldn’t have been too long.

The n’anga grinned.

“That was fast wasn’t it? I still have it in me,” he said proudly, his long pink tongue sliding slowly over his cracked grey lips.

Mr. Choga tried to smile too but he was too scared to move. The man had returned from his task no longer looking ordinary. It was as if whatever spirits enveloped him when he cast bones in the

hut, had followed him on his journey. They allowed him to appear normal for a while, and then as soon as he had done what he had to, possessed him again. Jeans and t-shirt or not, he was not someone to be toyed with.

“You want to see?” asked the n’anga and Mr. Choga’s fear instinctively made him step back.

He looked around as if expecting to see a face spying them from the bushes. No one ever ventured this far into a n’anga’s territory without purpose. They were alone. It was the kind of alone that was not altogether good. The man dropped the bag onto the ground. It landed with a thud that unsettled a little dust from the dry, cracked earth.

“Do you have to open it out here?” asked Mr. Choga in a squeaky, childlike voice.

“There is no one to see you. Come and take a look,” the n’anga invited as he crouched over the bag and unzipped it.

Mr. Choga took two steps forward as the mouth of the bag opened to reveal the severed head of what looked like a child. Thick globs of crimson were pooling around the child’s crinkly brown braids. Mr. Choga suddenly folded onto the ground, landing on his fat knees and ripping the back of his trousers clean in the middle. It wasn’t that he had never seen a dead person before. During the war he had shot his fair share of Rhodesian soldiers, even collected a lock of blonde hair here, a red ear there. But this...

“She gave quite a fight,” the n’anga was saying as Mr. Choga’s hand reached toward the bag and touched the child’s nose. It felt warm, still.

It was a familiar nose.

“Unfortunately I had to kill the mother too. She started screaming when I tried to take the child,” the n’anga chuckled with pleasure.

Mr. Choga touched the child’s left ear and it too was warm. The gold hoop earring sparkled in the sun. He thought he knew that earring too. His body was now alight with a fear he had never known existed. A piece of blood-stained blue cloth lay stuck against what remained of the child’s neck and Mr. Choga picked it up.

“We shall have to get started right away,” the n’anga said but Mr. Choga had stopped listening.

He tried to summon up the tears he knew should be streaming from his eyes but they wouldn’t come. Mr. Choga began to rock slowly. A low moan like the dirge of a new widow hummed from his throat. The moaning grew into a dull wail as he looked at what remained of the child. The n’anga started to take the bag away but Mr. Choga clutched it to his chest, smearing blood all over his suit.

Mr. Choga picked up the bag and started for his car.

“What are you doing, Choga?” the n’anga demanded.

The n’anga tried to wrestle the bag from him. Mr.

Choga pushed him away with such strength, the n’anga tripped and fell backwards. Mr. Choga got into his car and placed the bag with the head on the front passenger seat. He backed away from the hut. He could see the other man waving desperately at him but he couldn’t hear what he was saying.

Mr. Choga drove home, his body wracked by sobs. As he pulled up to his gate he saw two cars and a van parked in his driveway. They had heard already, he thought, and had come to comfort him. He parked his car in the grassy area that ran alongside his fence.

As he turned the car off his eyes wandered to the bag beside him and immediately he was blinded by tears. He reached for the bag, held it gently in his lap, and let out a mournful wail.

It didn’t take much to drive to town, he thought as he wept. I should have just taken them to the clinic. The sound of the dogs barking viciously outside his car made him look up. He slowly pulled the zipper closed on the bag, and stepped out of the car. There was no fear of the dogs today, even while they howled like wolves after the trail of blood he left on the driveway as he walked toward the house.

He heard voices singing melancholy Christian songs as he reached for the doorknob. On turning it, he walked into a living room full of women in blue uniforms of the United Methodist Church.

The singing continued for almost a minute while he stood there weeping and then stopped instantly. With his free hand, Mr. Choga wiped the tears from his face. He looked around the room. They all looked the same with their red collars and red hats. And he had always loathed them for their shows of piety and goodness but they were here now, to comfort him...

And then he saw her, sitting in his favourite chair with a hymnbook in her lap. She stood up slowly and Mr. Choga gasped.

“You’re here,” he said not as a question but a sign of the overwhelming relief now coursing through his body like electricity.

“Of course I’m here,” she replied just as he remembered that it was Wednesday and Bible study for his wife’s women’s group.

“Where’s Clara?” he asked as if it were just the two of them in the room.

The other women were still quiet. They were all looking at him. The bag in his hand started to feel very, very heavy.

His wife’s eyes registered the bag, the blood on his shirt and jacket, on his hands.

“What did you do?” she asked softly, cautiously.

“Where’s Clara?” he asked again.

“She’s in her room sleeping,” she answered.

“Are you sure?”

“What did you do? Oh, god what did you do?” his wife wailed.

Mr. Choga pushed past the women and hurried up the stairs to Clara’s room, vaulted forward by the desire to believe that he wasn’t dreaming. He pushed open the door and sure enough there she was. She lay tangled up in pale yellow sheets and a blanket, drool dripping from

Lynett Ngulube

her open mouth as she breathed shallowly. He sank to the floor of his daughter's room, unable to take his eyes off her podgy face or the gold hoop earrings she wore. He could feel how much he loved her, with his eyes and every surface of his out-of-breath body, and it was a big love, an immense thing too much for him to understand.

Outside, the van sputtered loudly to life as did the other vehicles. The church women were leaving.

He could hear his wife screaming his name as she thudded up the stairs. The force of her was another love he carried. And he had never loved her more than he did right then as she burst into the room and came menacingly toward him.

"What's that, Erasmus," she cried as she pointed at the bag. "What is it?"

Clara started to waken and from inside the lightness of Mr. Choga's relief came the realisation of what was really happening. Inside this bag he held was the death of another man's world, even while Mr. Choga's own world thrived ever more brightly. He withdrew his bloodied hand from the bag's handle as if he had been burned.

But the heaviness was already all over him. It found him inside the same places where he had hidden his love for his wife, the sons that wouldn't come home, and Clara, and it stayed

**Lynnet Ngulube** is a native of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She recently received her MFA in creative writing from George Mason University. Her short stories have appeared in *SnReview.org*. She currently lives in northern Virginia and is working on a novel – her graduate thesis – entitled *A Madness of Blackbirds*.

Mark Nickels

*IN RATTLESNAKE GUTTER WITHOUT A FLASHLIGHT*

*For R & S  
Leverett, Massachusetts*

One way intrepid only, one way chaste,  
you leave the flashlight on the porch.

Pine bark from the Eighteenth Century  
peels from crossbeams quickly sistered-in.

You'll plant tomatoes here next month,  
next spring a basswood to the south-southwest

so that the house is hallowed with white-  
clustered blooms in early summer.

\*

You waver through the hemlocks racked  
upon erractics, boulders of New England cast

like dice in longest geologic time.  
In your life these stones won't seem to move

and shoulder off the seasons, deaf to any raging  
conflict underneath the hairline, or the grass.

Everyone you meet is fighting a great battle,  
said a mystic very plainly, once.

Yours transpires in darkness, where you walk  
the way you've come to like to walk, alone

with recall of the day-lit path and any  
lunar ambience not shorn to tatters.

The usable light is a fated gift; it vies  
with inattention and uneven ground.

\*

Just prior to dark, rose color in the field  
marries in the spectrum with high blues.

Dusk you like the best, and always have:  
a breathing instant wedged between two facts,

and you wonder if it's hazardous to hold two  
unlike notions of the properties of time, at once:

synchronically the whole seed of the eternal present,  
or the diachronic lineage of this time and place.

You mean to contrast being in the present— if such  
a thing is possible—past instants not more

resonant than dry, determined burrs stuck to your legs,  
the sweet, galactic muddle on your shoes—

with your conceit of every past occurring now: in every  
molecule a backward-calling seed, braced in mullioned  
ports.

\*

Everything remembering. The attent, long necked geese  
are cradled on the pond, a brood of plesiosaurs.

Your hand laid on the middle distance  
blots out the cottage floodlight, and the woodlot

pitches with King Phillip's War again.  
You could live for this, subsist by skimming

pond-sheen from the pond—  
on bread and butter, apples, pollen, sleep—

ghosting fishermen and runners on the ticking path.  
Behind the window-screen each night, you'll read,

your living skull the last release of loss,  
while dim, recumbent summer rattles and expires.

But nothing is compounded here. The evidence  
suggests no gathering, does not support

the soothing gravity of linkages and pasts, the occidental  
mind thrummed gently with its rewrites,

Mark Nickels

never present, never here, that knows itself an exile,  
hoping to hang on, to splice one sunset

end to end as we seemed to at the lakeside.  
If nothing is compounded, you may run out  
of subjects— your life, a dot upon a horizontal  
axis with the rest, is going thin, untraceable.

Maybe you will write of what is left  
when you've torn it all up out of love—

had it out with what you looked at, heard,  
could not become, inhabit or consume.

\*

Half a moon is pearling through high columns,  
but it fails the path. You can find

anything in the phenomenal world  
to support an ethic of the motionless,

of time layered over time.  
You thought you grieved being lost in time,

but to imagine yourself lost the safest place.  
Returning from the pond-side boulder in whole

blackness, your wrist is pulsing, and your  
upper lip, a vein there, thrums with blood arterial,

even if the eons drum beneath the topsoil  
like a nerve. Hemlocks watered by the moon

have never heard of being lost and cannot know  
how lost you are, who parts the saplings

snapping back like hatchets in the air,  
too thin to own a shadow of their own.

**Mark Nickels** is the author of *Cicada* (Rattapallax Press) and is writing a novel entitled, *Sumac*. He lives in New York City, but is from Michigan.

Ron Price

*A LOST CHILD COUNTING THE FOUND*

The vines of philodendron leaves draped around the window frame the cold  
otherwise.

I can't recall the last time I noticed a water tower,  
Or when I last honored the hag who sneered at my face in the mirror.  
She connected me to things larger than I am alone, & I could use her help  
now.

All day I've been tangled in chicken claws without a door to pass through,  
set one foot on the floor, bend & place the other on the ceiling –  
so I honor the willingness of water to rise & fall, to flow,  
& honor the crude, that vulgar thing, the willingness to keep on,

Though the hurt child accuse her, accuse me –  
No one is innocent.

I lost the keys to our apartment once it stopped feeling like home.  
Isn't that how each beginning entails a loss? Mistrust  
Multiplying like spider eggs. What's partial blossoming.  
Let melting sleet and snow slush our arguments as only the dead can clarify.

What wants to live comes unbidden, as you came, XiaoXia.  
The cow's head, the goat's hoof – they know what the branch of any pear tree  
knows.  
Listen and you'll hear rising from the rootstalk  
The anonymous, unashamed buds of one trunk's dark longing to blossom into  
more than flower and leaves.

Ron Price

*A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE FAILURE OF BODIES TO ADEQUATELY BURN*

Into the ruined elm standing like a legend  
created by the survivor of his disease,  
down into the roots, under memory's foundation of smoke,  
and the folly, a fool's hope –  
isn't that why a singer turns to look back?  
If a pillar of salt isn't about the failure of nerve or faith  
maybe it's about grief, a sense of place  
lost, except in the heart of the one left to carry it,  
to sing it into the living, to make a place for it,  
for the mind of the dead  
among red poppies and saxifrage, that the stones  
of the field and the dried blood on the stones  
go down into the earth, the true faith  
grief always leads toward: renewal  
money cannot buy, that longing to disappear into –  
what? an elm tree, shade,  
a triangulation of heartache, ginestra, and breath  
billowed with the conviction of: what if?  
perhaps then, maybe –  
before death's I'm sorry, what did you say?  
I dream of an unbuckling  
that might enable twisted legs to dance  
instead of everything lingering like an abscess  
because finally singing isn't enough  
to make the dawn begin – though something is –  
if not blood on the stones, dried, drawn down into the earth,  
if not to rest with moles  
burrowed into the ground among beetles and worms,  
then what? for what? – if not for a change.

**Ron Price** grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, and currently lives in New York City, where he is Poet in Residence at the Juilliard School. He is a past U.S.I.A. Visiting Poet in Belgium, and the recipient of a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship. His most recent collection, *A Small Song Called Ash from the Fire*, was published Rattapallax Press.

*FOR WHAT*

I tried to lift a star –  
galloping a long time alone  
does that to a man –

His voice turns into a flaring of nostrils –

Two handfuls of mane –  
guided by the list of his shoulder –  
angling hooves into the sky –

What more natural than to imagine –  
wings in a closed room  
might find a window – the universe – open –

It's that tilt – a jellyfish must taste –  
thrown from the sea  
onto the shore and sand –

*DEATH'S DREAM KINGDOM*

Little medallions of snow wheel straight up  
In a music that is the grinding of metal  
Against glass, against stone,  
The intestinal groans of a creature stretched taut.

It isn't as if I were making up a story,  
As if the lies were other than a form of technical control,  
A stick in the spokes –  
Little medallions of death drifting through sleep,

Or the letter you might read to a child never born:  
Somewhere is such a kingdom not lost to me but I lost to it  
Amid fertility images cut in almond shaped emeralds  
& blessed by hands we no longer believe.

It is an easy thing to get lost.

I followed a path between sycamore trees to a lake  
& sat only a few minutes on a dry stump  
Before I heard the gray heron gliding above green water  
Past a boat with no mooring.

There was a slight wind, & rattling sedge in the wind,  
& a scent like the tanned olive skin  
Covering her veins – delicate,  
Blue-green, the veins under my mother's wrist.

Ron Price

*THE NEW JERUSALEM OF THE HEART*

When the Lord calls out at dusk  
I push my chair away from the desk  
And listen to a brood of wild turkeys  
Feeding on worms in wet grass by the shed.

The turkeys breathe gently,  
Attentive to the least sound from the weeds  
Where they know the fox will emerge  
When he comes.

It is beginning autumn,  
And I'm tempted toward my childhood  
Among chickens and turkeys – the hen's neck  
Wrung by my father for Thanksgiving.

Dawn began with a staindrop of birdsong.  
All day I've been brooding on an image  
To match the wreckage my hand has wrought.

I know the fox must eat,  
And the hungry turkeys near the shed,  
The neighbor's chickens beyond the treeline,  
The black bears in the woods.

I know it – despite the crow's kaw,  
its resident ache in my ear. I know we live  
And die by laws my father did not write.

Ana Rüsche

*A CANÇÃO DO LIMPA-VIDROS*

eu, um peixe de aquário, gordo,  
consumindo o que surge dessas águas turvas.

os passantes lá embaixo como polvos de patins,  
uma menina com um buraco-negro a tira-colo e chicletes.

ao lado dos jornais de internet,  
meus cactos morrem em sua compulsão por água.

os ursos polares serão extintos pelas geladeiras.  
na Austrália, baleias se suicidam na areia.

continuo consumindo qualquer coisa que brilhe um pouco,  
eu, um peixe a apodrecer gordo nessas águas sujas.

*THE SONG OF OTOCINCLUS, THE GLASS CLEANER*  
Translated from the Portuguese by Dirceu Villa

i, a fat aquarium fish,  
consuming what comes in these dim waters.

the passers-by down there like roller-skating octopuses,  
a girl with a black hole to-go and  
chewing gum.

next to the internet news  
my cacti die in their water compulsion.

polar bears will be extinguished by refrigerators.  
in Australia, whales commit suicide in the sand.

i keep consuming whatever shines a little,  
i, a rotting fat fish in these dirty waters.

*LUGAR COMUM 10: SALOMÉ*

E ela dança.

Seus guizos ainda molhados,  
olhos de cocaína e peito  
arfando. E ela brada:  
– Tragam-me a cabeça de João Baptista!

Trouxeram-lhe na bandeja de prata, os cabelos de mendigo escorriam na palidez  
arroxeados dos anjos decepcionados.

Anticlímax e luzes brancas no palco. Algum espectador tossiu, sacos de pipoca.  
E por não haver palavras suficientes, inventou-se o beijo:

Cravo com ódio os lábios naquela boca de impropérios.

E ela suga – os lábios duros com o resto da última saliva,  
a língua do morto solta como pedra forrada de veludo.  
Ela acaba e olha ao redor.

Salomé em luz, com o vestido branco pela lua falsa, com a cabeça horrenda a escorrer  
pela mão.  
E por não haver palavras suficientes, os aplausos vieram:

No início a balir como rebanho lerdo, depois exultantes, o exército de mãos brancas,  
ante a plasticidade romântica da cena.

E ela dança.

*COMMONPLACE 10: SALOME*  
Translated from the Portuguese by Dirceu Villa

And she dances.

Her sleigh bells still wet,  
cocaine eyes and panting  
chest. And she yells:  
– Bring me the head of John the Baptist!

They brought it on the silver tray, beggar's hair running down the purplish paleness of beheaded angels.

Anticlimax and white lights on-stage. Some spectator coughed, popcorn bags.  
And lacking sufficient words, the kiss was invented:

I thrust the lips with hatred into that cursing mouth.

And she sucks – stiff lips with the rest of the last saliva,  
the dead's tongue loose like a rock overlaid with velvet.  
She ends it and looks around.

Lighted Salome, in a white dress by the fake moon, with the horrendous head slipping by the hand.  
And lacking sufficient words, so started the applause:

At first bleating as a dull herd, then exulting, the army of white hands,  
for the romantic plasticity of the scene.

And she dances.

Ana Rüsche

**A FLOR ROXA**

Subitamente desabrochou tatuada no meu seio esquerdo  
Essa daí deve gostar da noite

Anoréxicas

Emagrecer,  
extirpar a última gordura,  
devolver as costelas emprestadas  
e desintegrar-se em luz

teimosia

profundidade na sombra de um azul cintilante,  
disciplina nos 3,7 cm de delineador,  
mas gostam mesmo de mim borrada pelas manhãs.

**THE PURPLE FLOWER**

Translated from the Portuguese by Dirceu Villa

It has suddenly blossomed, tattooed on my left breast  
This one must like the night

Anorexic

Losing weight,  
extirpating the last fat,  
returning the borrowed ribs  
and disintegrating into light.

Stubbornness

depth in a scintillating blue shadow,  
discipline in the 1.54 in. of eyeliner,  
but they really like me smeared in the morning.

Ana Rüsche lives in São Paulo. She is the author of *Rasgada* (2005, poems), *Sarabanda – Um Caderno de Estudos* (poems, 2007). Her first novel, *Acordados* will be published with a grant conferred by State of São Paulo, PAC Prize 2006. She writes every day on Peixe de Aquário.

Yuyutsu RD Sharma

**MILAREPA'S BONES**

*Melamchehang, Helumbu*

A used CD hangs  
from the balcony of the wooden lodge  
where once a wind horse chimed.  
The heap of mineral bottles,  
beer cans, tin cans keeps piling up,  
day by day. Maybe one day  
we will make a dome of empty bottles,  
a cairn of bottle bones  
instead of stones  
a monastery of plastic jars and canisters  
instead of mantras from Guru Rinpoche,  
a prayer wheel of tin cans and tumblers  
instead of Milarepa's astute body bones.  
out of service to the aged and the ailing

Yuyutsu RD Sharma is a recipient of fellowships and grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, and Ireland Literature Exchange. He is the author of several collections of poetry including a collaborative photographic book *Poetic Journey to the Foot of Everest* (Epsilon-media, Germany, 2006) with German photographer Andreas Stimm. He currently lives in Nepal.

**CLEVELAND**

Tears in the eyes  
of the lake Erie have frozen,  
hidden in its eye sockets  
the thirst of the world's fresh waters.

Its waves grey  
like Gandhi's feeble staff  
as he raises his neck  
in rusting belt's cold furnaces,  
rolling mills and withered gardens.

The vacant eyes  
of the church staring into  
the glassy surface of the skyscrapers  
that once wrote the billionaire future of the city of steel.

The cartoon of the corrupt politician  
eating with his horse's bushy tail  
and the freedom stamp silently tilted sideways,  
ready to move over to some obscure edge of history.

The town where Anne Sexton  
came to declare her resolution to 'do' it.  
I met a deer there,  
probably her current incarnation,

and in the cemetery of the famous dead  
a raccoon that came hunting for crumbs,  
in fashion of the town itself making a living  
out of service to the aged and the ailing

Like the pear blossoms  
the deer had dared to come out  
to greet the spring from Hart Crane's bridge  
where he once waited to kiss his cruel mistress, the Sea.

**Lamont B. Steptoe**

***NOTHIN' LIKE THAT HORN!***

Nothin' like that horn  
That growls meows mutes and screams!

Goes all blue on you  
Knows heartache and dreams

Nothing like that horn  
Pressed to a Blackman's lips

Turning brass into gold  
Growls it's magic even when the streets are cold

Mutes and screams  
Inside dreams

Climbs so high it makes you wanna die  
To reach where it's gone!

Don't ask about the bass  
I'd have to give you a taste

Those scattin' high hats  
Under the drummers control

Be workin' mojo on your soul  
O' muted horn where was you born?

Growl now then scream!

***REED NOTES NILE BARGES OF MEMORY***

Up in the place  
Inside the outside

Five Spot on Bank street  
Liberty Bell turf colonial alley bricked in with  
history and ghosts

Ex-pat Blackman all the way from Paris  
Bringing his horn to blow up the joint

Reed folks they rights in notes burning like  
planations  
On the island of St. Dominique in the eighteenth  
century

The gospel of L'Overture smoking sugarcane fields  
A spook with a cutlass going crazy with African  
spirits in his bones

Rivers of red blood from sacrificed chickens  
Holding up Nile Barges of memory bathed in the  
golden light of RA

Divinity ruled empires returning with breath

***FOR EMILY DICKINSON***

Found the house of Emily  
Stood in her bedroom door

Marveled at the light she left  
Polishing the floor

***FAMILY***

Gasoline in all the rooms  
Flint striking flint

A bar room brawl of emotions  
Not a house but a crator

**Lamont B. Steptoe** is a poet, photographer, journalist, and activist based in Philadelphia. His most recent collection of poems, *A Long Movie of Shadows*, was awarded a 2005 American Book Award. Lamont is the founder/publisher of Whirlwind Press. He was a Combat Army Sergeant in Vietnam and was decorated with the Bronze Star. Lamont has won the 1999 Literary Fellow for the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and was a Discipline Winner in the Literature Category of the Pen Fellowship Program in Philadelphia.

Aimee Walker

*KILLING FIELDS*

We drove the rusted, heavy car  
over a dirt road, gathering

near this permanent burial.  
The ground was the shape of authority,

a dip of grass holding hundreds of lives,  
its green astonishing.

I don't yet know what to do  
about history, the murder and milk of it.

I bought a folded lotus,  
watched it brown in my hands,

felt my hair tighten  
around my unbroken skull.

*FROM THE WORKSHOP OF PROTECTION*

On Thursday children seemed to die  
everywhere but America.

In Baghdad, the young  
soldier rose to his own daily miracle.

He saw the daylight and sympathy  
of a new assignment,

children collecting candy from his tank,  
expecting from him a kind of miracle—

sweet and orange and new,  
till they began to see earth opening

after the brilliant explosion,  
splitting itself as soft fruit,

and the curled seeds of their bodies  
were scattered, unable to take root.

*Aimee Walker* is a poet living in New York City. Her work  
has appeared most recently in *The Paris Review*  
and *Heliotrope*.

José Watanabe

*INTERIOR DE HOSPITAL*

Cómo envidiamos el largo cuello  
de las garzas que se posan en la cumbre.  
Ellas pueden doblar el cuello y dormir sobre la música  
de sus corazones.  
Nuestros latidos están en la línea verde del monitor cardíaco  
y son el ansia que miramos.

Las garzas pueden alzar el cuello como periscopios  
cuando sienten el paso de otro nivel de aire. Y ya verán  
si lo viajan o lo dejan seguir al Báltico helado.  
Ah, si nosotros, pájaros de camión blanco,  
pudiéramos estirar el cuello  
por encima de esta lenta y dolorosa danza...!  
Aquí la realidad se presenta como un sutil cambio de niveles,  
pero me falta atrevimiento  
para asomar mi cabeza a un conocimiento definitivo:  
Sólo ignoro y respiro.  
A veces siento el paso de una realidad primera y prodigiosa  
y me encojo  
para que no se lleve mi cabeza, o la seccione.

En Berlín una cabeza volando es una cosa indiferente.  
En mi pueblo es un mito peligroso.

*HOSPITAL INTERIOR*

Translated from the Spanish by Rodrigo Rojas

How we envy the long neck  
of cranes that perch on the lintel.  
They can bend their necks and sleep over the music  
of their hearts.  
Our beats stretch on a green line in the heart monitor  
and they are the anxiety we observe.

Cranes can raise their necks like periscopes  
when they feel the flow of a different current. They see  
if they travel it or let it drift to the icy Baltic.  
Oh, if we, birds in white gowns,  
could stretch our necks  
above this slow and painful dance...!  
Here reality presents it self as subtle change of levels,  
but I lack boldness  
to stick my head into a definite knowledge:  
I only ignore and breathe.  
Sometimes I feel an immediate and prodigious reality approaching  
and I shrug  
so that my head is not ripped or severed.

In Berlin, a flying head makes no difference.  
In my country is a dangerous myth.

*José Watanabe* was born in Peru to Japanese father and a  
Peruvian mother. His family left the sugar plantations where  
they worked thanks to a small lottery prize his father won when  
Watanabe was twelve. His collections of poetry were influenced by  
Japanese Haiku and French symbolism, and he adapted several  
movie scripts including one of Vargas Llosa's novels. He died of  
throat cancer on April 2007.









