

Prosopisia

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PROSOPISIA

Prosopisia is the official journal of A.R.A.W.LII... (Academy of *raite**(s) And World Literati) which intends to provide a literary forum to the creative writers of the world. A biannual journal, it aims at creating a platform for shared experiences of human existence as voiced in the literary products the world over.

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• *The cover page & back cover paintings are by Ajay Kumar.*

Editorial

it is Holi - the festival of colours - especially for the Indians living in the north of the Vindhya. A two day festival, it is a customary celebration and a continuum of a mythical tale from the past. The story goes that Holika - the sister of Hiranyakashyapu - a demon king - had a boon that no fire could ever burn her. Prahalad was the son of Hiranyakashyapu and ever since his childhood was a worshipper of Lord Vishnu, the fact which annoyed and enraged the father so much that he finally decided to make an end to his son's life. To this end he schemed out to ask his sister Holika to give herself along with Prahalad to a pyre of burning logs. For he knew about the boon his sister had been bestowed upon. Holika abiding by the ill wish of her brother took the little boy in her lap and sat on a burning pyre. But to the utter shock of the brother and people all around Holika herself got burnt up to ashes and Prahalad was saved by the grace of his Ishtdeva, Lord Vishnu.

The story, bereft of all its mythical paradigms reads like a metaphor for poetry as Prahalad and Holika as the burnt away, unused and unnecessary material/content. Similarly, the flames from the pyre may stand for the inspirational heat at the time of creation. And Hiranyakashyapu may look like the un-poetic, materialistic world with its apathy towards the blessed one i.e. creativity and/or poetry in the present context. As Prahalad in the story emerges unsinged and unscathed by the fire, poetry too comes of and out of inspirational combustion.

The other day my younger daughter pursuing her BFA did ask me a pertinent question using a Punjabi word 'Chull' which may have an English equivalent in the word 'itch'. She asked, "Papa, why does an artist need to express... What is the Chull?"

After a long, very long discussion passing through the Rasa theory, Freud and Jung, Derrida and Paul Klee, Tagore and Tolstoy, expressionism and the fallacy of expressive form, the discourse seemed to lead us nowhere so much so that I in particular and somewhat in frustration needed a tea break. And when we resumed, the same cobra question upped its hood and seemed to hiss away our patience and potential.

During the tea break, however, something had happened. It was late evening and I was on the rooftop of my little house. Suddenly stretching myself a bit and leaning against the back of my chair, I raised my eyes and looked at the sky perforated with starry twinkles. 'Darkling I listened' and that too with half-shut eyes sniffing the black black rose - the canoping upside down yet opened umbrella that that night sky was, with winking pollen! For few moments, motionless and

still, I was an eavesdropper to the whispers of the stars. Save a few silences nothing was clearly heard. But still unable to raise their pitch, they impressed upon some exchanges of words/sounds I seemed to overhear and tried to comprehend. (Is not all poetry a foggy comprehension, a guess mistaken for reality, an illusion about an illusion?) And yes, one shining spec at lower horizon somewhat brighter than its peers seemed to speak -- so I felt, I do not know what exactly -- but still the exchanged jargon (might have) wept out its glittering agony for being so bright and yet so lowly placed!

Suddenly could I get an answer only personally convincing to the 'Chull' raised by my daughter. Yes, the 'Chull' is there only for the Chull's sake, sheer natural for reconfirmation of one's own identity, for empowerment of one's own existence, for reiteration of one's self. The star IS for its brightness is. This ah-ful is-ness is a blink and brightness as well.

Beyond the metaphysical dictums - "I think therefore I am" or "I am therefore I think" - poetry and creativity, impression and expression are all apistasis and the poet is just an amicus curiae.

Anuraag Sharma

P.S.

And the cover page and the back cover of the present issue together display recent paintings by a contemporary artist - Ajay Kumar - from Delhi. Titled as 'Manque 1' and 'Manque 2', they seem to stand for the wish-to-be-unfulfilled and unrealised human existence in today's world. The very opaque and flat colours used by the artist suggest the morose monotony of such frustrated and/or frustrating struggles. The paintings transcend the bounds of Elia's dream children - "We are what might have been" - and seem to sob over foggy realisation of the tear of things and is-full-ah-ness of human predicament. With their two-dimensional-ity the paintings suggest that the human mettle tends to turn metallic! Ugh!! Unlike Vladimir and Estrogen, these Picabian petrified Ahilyas wait for the Lord. The wheel chaired time would cart away all agony and bechaargi! Amen!!

This Volume is dedicated to the loving memory
of Chandrakanta Verma who left for her
heavenly abode on 7th June 2019.



Subscription

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Prosopisia will publish only original and unpublished texts. All contributions must be submitted to the Editor or Co-Editor.

Contributions : A poem/short-story/one act play/essay, typed in single spacing in MS-Word, should be sent as an E-mail attachment. The writer must also mention his/her name, postal address, and the country he/she belongs to. The subject of the E-mail should be *Submission for Prosopisia*.

Contributors will get two complimentary copies of the issue in which their contribution finds a place.

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MOHAMED N ELRAMADY
(Egypt)

At The Airport

Everyone is a stranger
No patience for strangers
No homeland
Do not give your roses as a gift to anyone
but to your own heart!
Your heart is your homeland at the airport
O stranger
If your beloved forgets you
do not blame him!
May be he forgets you in order to remember you
When the faraway one takes you to a faraway distance
you will find him there waiting for you
A lover awaiting his beloved
At the airport
you are alone
No heart to comfort you
No hand to lull your soul
O stranger
Your heart is your beloved

•••

MYRNA NIEVES
(Puerto Rico)

The Wind Blew

The wind blew
And frightened the birds
The wind blew
Trees trembled
Rivers flowed from the sky and clouded the eyes of the houses
Tarred roadways cracked
Bridges fainted over waters
And
none

could

breathe

There was nothing to eat or drink

T.h.e.r.e. w.a.s. n.o. o.n.e. t.o. c.a.l.l.

Orphaned by the light, neighbors gathered together under the fear of
night

The desolation of a new inscrutable century reigned

Cows hanging from broken lamp posts

Horses, swollen and pale, lay rigid by the river's edge

"Help us," was written in chalk on the highways

But the helicopters would not land

And the foreign news showed "ethnic" faces

With curiosity and passing shock

A president threw rolls of paper towels at the crowd, imitating
basketball players

The ships with help were intercepted and restricted.

Let them sink, was the message.

Let them die, was the signal.

Let them go to hell, they spat in street slang.

Let them sell everything so we can buy cheap

And restore the beauty of the countryside
The delight of the beaches
The majesty of the mountains
The glory of the dawns
For the tourists and millionaires, it will be ideal
New gold mines for the new-old colonizers

But not all of them died
Neither did everyone leave
A new unity grew like the reflowering trees
Among neighbors
And they cooked what little there was and ate together
Cried together
Loved each other together, in their misfortune

And they did not give up

From afar their Diaspora extended a hand like a colossal branch

They sent supplies, collected money

Gave what little or more they possessed

They opened their doors and hearts

The road will be hard but we will walk it together, they said

And the reconstruction will be different

The dream will be transformed by lucidity and justice

While they argue the ideal future, according to some

Or a delirious fantasy, according to others

Between what seemed to be the sparkle of solar panels

In the distance of a mountain or a neighborhood

In front of a roofless house

A girl pricked up her ear

Raised her hand, pointed to the heavens

Above, flying before the new sun were silhouettes ...

It's just that finally the rainforest parrots were returning to paradise

And the gray kingbirds began to be heard in the greenest jewel of the
Earth.

•••

GAYL TELLER
(USA)

Once Upon a Virtual Afternoon

Around the kitchen's granite-topped island,
family central, each sits, unspeaking,
each looking down in reverence
at an electronic device, 4 of them laid out,
their bold letters dark and compelling
like granite headstone etchings.

She's young and in love with a lush, liquid stain
lipstick she untests on a finger, orders with a click,
hangs out with her best friend on her smartphone,
Snapchats a shot of her goofy brother
fingering his shaky tooth back and forth,
and her friend snaps back one of her dad, mouth open.
As best friends, they snap each other every day
to get their Snapchat rewards with dopamine surges.
Then she texts her how she danced for an hour
with "the cutest partner ever" on X Box.

Her brother is zapping dragons and monsters,
scoring higher and higher, as more and more
reincarnate in some compulsion loop app.

His mom deletes the split-screen faces
on a conference call completed, unusual for a Sunday,
on "Strategies Enhancing Sensitivity in Public Schools."
She untouches the lace on the blouse,
unfeels the fluff of the cashmere,
unscented the orange blossom fragrance,
unanswers the landline's ringing,
lets voicemail tell whomsoever—

"We seldom answer this phone.
Please hang up and text us." And so
her father, states away, sends his message

one more state removed, "like Plato's shadows
to the real, like *Reader's Digest* version
of *Gone With the Wind*," he teaches,
"like freeze-dried astronaut food
to mom's delicious stroganoff! And we can't
get Skype to hold Little Guy's whole face!"—

As she unhears his voice as he types, she continues
to roam the airless, high-end e-boutiques
of luxury e-tailers along the virtual boulevard,
then checks again for a burst of warmth
and affirmation from a Facebook like.

Her husband reads a news feed
like an exitless maze, structured
so one page path leads down to another
and another and another, till he yawns
silently, opens his online course, reads
the unheard remarks of an unmet professor,
how he should "learn how a sentence works."

Each one on the island unhears as a computer
tells voicemail, "Our records indicate
you have not updated your free Google account."
From inside, the little one rouses, cries to be held.

It's just that finally the rainforest parrots were returning to paradise
And the gray kingbirds began to be heard in the greenest jewel of the
Earth.

•

That's How It Feels

After laboring in the garden
when fresh water runs down
your whole body, washing away
all that sweat, all that grime
and the shower's temperature
is so fine! not too hot and
not too cold, so fine! as being
held in a warm wraparound
and you step out all clean
so refreshed, invigorated to do
even more than you thought
or feeling entitled to just stretch
out, and it's okay to be absolutely
nothingmore than you are
yes, that's how love feels

•

The Intelligence Bridge

“We call that the Intelligence Bridge,”
our tour guide Petr stops to point,
as he steers us through Prague.
“Such a city of castles and concerts!” I say
and get reprimanded for using “Czechoslovakia.”
“It's the Czech Republic now, since '93!” he
turns, smiles generously at my inattentiveness.
“It was built by doctors, writers, teachers,
bythe educated arrested for thought crimes,
like wanting to leave the country,
bythose who refused to lead a double-think life—
toeing the Communist line in public,
thinking on their own in private,
bythose who dared take liberties with restrictions,
who wrote and spoke the bitterness in their mouths,
but as they built, they couldn't escape
their unstoppable dream—freedom. ...
Then they forced them to work in uranium mines!
Notice,” he points, “only one set of tracks—
a train can go only one way at once.
You're either free or you're not!”

What does it mean to be free?
I muse on genes you're born with,
family, culture you're born into,
all the givens of experience you never chose,
givens that can click genes on and off,
and in our republic, all those terrified children
wrenched away from their parents, no records,
their deplorable train going only one way.

What does it mean to be free?” I ask aloud.
Petr takes out his smart phone,
shows me his freedom at his fingertips—
“There,” he smiles, “can you see,
on that motorcycle in Austria's grand alps,

where it's so big, there, look how wide,
that dot, there, that's me, can you see?"

Petr's father remembered the Prague Spring,
a river of liberalization rising 7 months in '68,
squelched beneath the heavy Warsaw troops and tanks,
the land gone sodden with meaningless deaths...

Cruelty is such a bewildering wilderness,
where roaming can never be completely free,
for cruelty knows only loss.
I think of those bridge builders, holding on,
unsupported at the extremities, buffeted by winds
to shape a span that would outlast them,
overlooking that swirling gap in human empathy,
but only the dead are completely not free,
for they cannot change,
while imprisonment perceives possibilities,
and cruel taskmasters teach unknowingly
the worth of kindness that spans the whole human country.

...

ADEEB KAMAL AD-DEEN
(Australia)

A deleted letter

In the black night,
The moon was walking quietly
Turning to me in a black quiet
Lighting my heart with a lot of tears
*

My beloved said: Is there a mirror in your heart?
I said: Yes,
And I have seen your name written on it
So I wiped it with a little salt
And a lot of ash.
*

The poet who wrote a lot about the letter and the dot died
And left nothing to me
Except the book of his poems,
From which I cut off a piece of paper every day
And stuck it on my heart
To stop the raving.
*

In the forest of my wild life,
Every time I cut a tree to set a fire
I found it full of the crows' eggs,
The jinns' feathers
And the exile's roars.
*

I got tired of imprisoning my letter forever
I released him at night
To play in my memory's garden.
*

I saw you naked at the beginning of the song.
In order to compose you
I needed only one kiss.
*

Like Gilgamesh losing his friend Enkidu
While he searches for the herb of immortality,

I lost my letter
While I am searching for my dot,
I mean my life.

*

Because my heart is a broken tendon oud
So I will stop playing forever
Because the heart surgeon
Does not know how to fix a heart that has become an oud,
And the reformer of the oud
Does not know how to fix an oud that has become a heart.

*

I no longer have the joys of the song
Only the illusion of hearing it in a dream.

*

I had to be very bold
To ask a nest for my bird in your tough tree
At the time you stole its dream in front of me
And threw it into the deep past.

*

When my poem dropped and burned
I opened its black box after a lot of hard work
To find only one letter;
A deleted letter.

...

ETNAIRIS RIBERA

(USA)

Goodness

While the rain falls,
the awakened heart endeavours
to joyfully find itself
in goodness.

Silence.
Goodness is approaching...

Its lights discover,
transform themselves,
become iridescent, angelic,
floating around you
without a word.

When the rain stops,
its falling echo persists,
luminous goodness...

...

OUYANG YU
(Australia)

4.22 pm

bare legs, bare arms, bare head. a man walking. bare grass, bare sky,
bare leaves, nothing moving, or seems. bare road, bare breath, bare
breathings, a bare photograph. sent. sent. sent. all so quick, and slow. a
slow sky weighing, silent as ever. a dead tree. a tree's dead body. half
cut. all cut. dead together. dead standing, quite proud inside a cloud,
smaller than the tree. the birds have chosen to hide in the silence of the
landscape. the silence of the loose. the sigh lence of the loom large.
oroom large. oroomarge. so much there is that lies around inspoken.
stalks of white, grass. rass. white and weak. falling, fallen, but beautiful
beyond breath.

brdeath

•

8.20am

'u put urself out on sm
u make urself vulnerable

it's like, it's like
u stick out ur tongue and say hey

look at my tongue and c
how beautiful it is

n u r hit with the biggest
spittle of silence u'll ever no

that's what I no
I don't no about u'

•

The Theatre

1

On the stage
A character steals a look at himself
In silent fury
The commotion
Ends up coming to the surface
As the prelude opens itself
Light and dark
The stage
The double-face of a mask
Rows of audience
The stage in meditation
Where the director's soul is drifting in the air
The sword that slips out of the hand
The commotion from centuries ago
And time, locked on the stage
Someone is turning an egg around
As life and art are in rivalry
When the light goes out, what remains is a solitary stage
Where the actors swap roles
Wind and leaves
While souls are seeking where to return themselves
Those, candle in hand, are forming endless roads
When the stage suddenly wakes up
And the raindrops that fall into the pond are wordless and traceless
Sound of the footsteps behind the stage
And noise of the audience wearing the masks
The traces of words on paper are burning
Wind extinguished, soundless
In memory, the audience are dancing on the stage
While *ti* and *me* are secretly merging into one
An actor is holding a skull in his hand
Life has nothing to say
Someone is waiting to disembark from a bus

2

The stage is holding its breath
The rose pricking a finger
The statue changing its angles following the footprints of the sun
Stone and reality
The stage without a door
The dreamer with a single key
The city agitating under a storm
The traffic on the road slipping past, dividing the rain
Someone is holding an umbrella on the stage
Where the cage and the bird
And the playwright is thinking of the last scene in the play
While the passengers are gathering on the platform to dodge the rain
The lamps of power on the streets are on and off
There are footprints that go into the cave but none out of it
The stage is in meditation in the darkness
The director is facing a group of actors
Butterfly specimens inside the frames
Stillness and movement
A cloud rises on the horizon of heart
Theatre and garden
Where one can feel the smell of a storm
A helicopter is flying over the dome
Its fleeting shadow like that of a predator
Victims and butchers bowing in pairs
A double-fate
The actors die on the stage
But live in the hearts of the audience
Centuries are colliding
The majestic gods are expressionless
Amidst the rising applause, the cries of the kids
Prisoners squatting in a circle
Shadows
And after the performance, the director is signing autographs for his audience
Piercingly cold
The only blurry blackness in the white fog
The audience have all left the theatre

The sound of drums rises from behind the wall
The fury of the director is encircled by the actors

3

The theatre is emptied of people
The hypocrite tears off his own face
Life resembles a river that flows far in the quiet torrents
And, on the stage, the actors don't cry, and they don't smile, either

•••

KHẾ IÊM
(Vietnam)

The Bicycle Poem

The man leans the bicycle
against the wall, just as the
thunder-storm comes, the thunderstorm
comes [and] brings with rains, and rains,

and rains, erasing borders
between light [and] dark and objects
and dust blurring, pushing the man
back slowly back slowly distance

between the sounds of rain drop,
rain drops and eaves this afternoon,
and the bike deepens into
the wall [of] discoloring,

the bicycle's no longer
a bike, the curvy cycles
circle the edgy spokes
cornering into a realism

painting, and the man is the shadow
blurring amidst the storm, and
the painting admits nature
and things

•••

CHIMALUM NWANKWO
(Nigeria)

My Horizon and the Sea

I
Woman of the deep sea
New guardian of my horizon
The open sea calls my tired heart to set sail
It sings a song of distances
Painting a world of mirages

Wind and waves tug at my veins
And my mane of sturdy stallions

II
For just a while
Time cordons off my gate from the red hurricanes
And their hot desert of wild dreams
Mulling dirge or serenade

III
But suddenly
A white clarion rolls a song to me
It is the voice of my eagle woman
It is my bird of distances
Promising me a rain of jewels
In its streamer of great feathers
Energy blows in the notes
Death is not good!

IV
My crest of warm blood storms into the horizon
And my healing heart rides the billows
With its sound of evening bells
There is no memory of brambles
And no tales of winces and tales of welts
And sounds of grimaces are gentlest zephyrs

A timbre of wild flowers wail out to you
Driving my blood like a great rain wind
It s melody is a rush of strange blushes
Dreaming of a name that will endure
Plucking blossoms from old thunderclouds

Ecstasy laces your voice of pigeons
Riding on the ballast your heart grants me
Mumbling again that *death is not good!*
And roaring blossoms name you my great horizon
And they also name you my open sea...

•••

JOAN MICHELSON
(UK)

Bones

I've come upon Joe (4) exploring a hole
in a neighbour's old brick garden wall.
The hole's the size of Joe's first finger.

When he's pulled his finger out, he turns to me.
'Yesterday I felt a bone. Where's it gone?'
He looks around and shrugs with open arms.

He tries to work it out. 'Dogs dig up bones
and put them in their mouths.' Again he shrugs,
this time looks down. 'Could be in the ground.'

I picture buried bones, different bones,
larger bones, human bones in heaps,
holes, pits, travesties of massacres.

I look at Joe. His mouth is opened wide.
It's wide enough to hold a bone too large
to fit his finger hole. His milk teeth glow.

As if on cue, we growl together like dogs.

•

Smartphone

Max (2) sees himself
mouth open wide
laughing in the video
in mummy's phone.
He sees himself
and laughs full out,
head back, back arched,
eyes squinched tight.

Laughing at himself laughing,
he looks as if he's on the brink
of toppling backwards while
holding fast to mummy's phone.
We see him 10 months old laughing
in the phone and now, a hefty toddler
turning pink beside us, laughing
at his moving image.

Leaning in
his mummy and myself
are beside ourselves,
laughing and gasping
until we choke with tears
and lose our laughter
to the overwhelming joy
of his outlandish roar.

Magic

Telling stories in a Year One class,
a girl told us this, which I told Tom
who was her age.

*

She pinched her sister's furry slippers.
They were magic slippers.
In one step they stepped her
from the Tower of London
to the Eiffel Tower of Paris.
She looked down from the very top.
She saw something shiny on the ground.
She ran all the way to the very bottom.
The shiny thing was a knife. She picked it up.
Then she cut off the head of the Eiffel Tower.

*

Tom asked, 'How could she cut it off?'
I waited for him to answer, which he did.
He said, 'It was a magic knife.'

•

Volcano

Today Max (3) is piling cushions
to make a spill behind the couch,
which is his mountain that erupts.
The couch cushions are his lava.
When they are settled, he climbs
to stands astride the narrow backboard.
There he stretches out his solid arms.

He looks at what he's built and at me.
His order is to watch him jump.
He shouts, 'I'm going to die.' And jumps.
And bounces up. And climbs back up.
I think of Mount Mayon (news today
and on the telly) spewing orange stones
that tumble down the mountain into green.

Max waits for my attention.
Then he stretches out his arms
and repeats his cry, his jump
and his climb up the couch.
Five times and I listen while he recites
his prophecy of death and repeats the actions.
Then I speak for him. I say, 'You're going to die.'

But this, from my lips is blasphemy.
His hands against his chest fingers stretched
push the air as if to push me back.
Now he's God speaking from his mountain.
The truth in truth is truth reversed.
He shouts it clearly, 'I'm magic-ing it to stop.'

•••

CLAUDIA PICCINO

(Italy)

The courage of the losers

He has big eyes ... Ismael
a parched mouth Ikrahm,
a ringing voice Aziz.
They are far from the train of the wind
the English Kindertransport
when the war afflicted Europe.
They are the kids on the way
The innocent eyes of today,
the lambs sacrificed to the cross
by land and by sea
those we see parading at the tv news
we the servants of Charon,
we "the civilians"
we hostage of indifference,
victims and possibly accomplices
of a similar addiction..
We are on the edge of the path
crowded with outstretched hands,
we... we are motionless
with our hidden little arms
that do not essay to offer any help.
He has big eyes ... Ismael
a parched mouth Ikrahm,
a ringing voice Aziz.
Din of bombs
in their memories,
at the foot sores
chilblains and hands.
The baton of the guards
spares no one,
It is worse than the swing of the tides,

It seems the hunger of sharks.
 Poverty, famine, epidemics.
 Ismael, Ikrahm, Aziz;
 To go, to stay, to come back
 The civilized Europe has invented
 a deadly device:
 the refugee camp
 to make us accustom
 to the diaspora of the Lambs
 to the obtuseness of our minds
 to the unmathed courage of the losers.
 have come too fiercely,
 not like the mythic lovers' annual reunion
 across the Milky Way
 not like the touching transformation
 of lovers' souls into butterflies,
 perhaps like the love of a man and a ghost
 in the Peony Pavilion,
 or the spiritual entanglement with a serpent
 in the Legend of the White Snake
 It's a variation of fire,
 a violent rendezvous
 sour, sweet, bitter, spicy, salty –
 all five flavours.

Suddenly the sound of the Lingyin Temple bell
 provokes the Bodhi tree on Mount Tiantai
 to draw out a thousand years of metaphysics:
 “Substance is empty; emptiness is substantial
”
 Freud's pale dream world,
 Socrates' mumbling somniloquy,
 or Nietzsche's dashing madly
 with a whole heart in hand
 or Shakyamuni's meditation
 on the power of transmigration
 or Lao Zi's mind like still water
 or Zhuang Zi's soul soaring out of body?

The trumpet's big mouth
 blows out breathless river water
 blows out the yo-heave-ho
 of river boatmen
 counterattacking the flood tide
 punching at the call of conch and pirate
 breaking out ---
 bursting in ---
 what spews forth from the Qiantang super tide
 is a volume of Modern Chinese History.

Can do you hear it?
 The barking of the Hound of the Heavens
 comes rolling in from far away.
 An extraterrestrial space ship
 from the age of Pan Gu the Creator
 is inserted into future starlit skies.

“The sky is black and the earth is brown,”
 “Sun, moon and stars all change with time,”
 and all exist in profound and primal chaos.
 Magnetic force draws both tides
 and prostaglandins on the kidneys

guiding lives, emotions and all passions.
 Magnetic fields grapple with reason,
 said to be a battle with no end.
 Amid all the dimness
 everything is in order,
 all of it is empty,
 and life and death are infinite.

•

Sons of a Minor God

Minor God. .
Let's call Him so
Or perhaps *despot of the sea*
Does it sound better?
Screw sent to the slaughterhouse.
Dreams that cannot swim,
Chained atavistic fears
to his feet pushed deeply
on the accelerator
On the unfair fate
And on the ancient ballast.
The betrayal joined
To poverty and hunger
and it left you orphans
in a hundred
Into a sucked vortex
Of blue-tailed.
Orphan me too
without 900 brothers,
only daughter
of the same God.

•••

CRAIG CZURY
(U.S.A.)

The Cold

Have you come here to live
as the shadow lives when it meets its snow?

Does the snowfall hold you whiter to its heart
than the snowfalling wind?

Blanket of ice across my bed in the corner of the barn.

Were you born with a taste of rust,
or did you kiss that iron pipe with your bleeding tongue?

•

The Vacant Room

Are your four washed walls, ceiling
and floor all you need to make you whole?

Your sleep in peace when I leave you alone
with a curtain door.

Or the lightbulb singing its dark lament
to the burnt-out sun?

Does the window close its one crossed-eye
to your naked space?

Is there dancing?

•

The Curtain

Whose pretty print skirt! Did you undress the sun?

Organdy birds we can just about fly clear through.

Is your blue the wildest hyacinth of the Ganges
wearing rouge? Did you undress the moon?

Tell me,

Is there a certain breeze that makes you sway like that,
on fire in the open dark?

•••

TÒNIA PASSOLA
(Catalonia, Spain)

Galta

*The best thing will be to choose the road to Galta,
walk it again (inventing it all the while you
walk it) ...*

Octavio Paz: *El moro Gramático*

Pathways of initiation
can smash locks,
slam a wrong door.
'Santiago Pilgrims' Way',
so many labyrinths! A Mandala.
And with Indian blood, Galta.
Caravan of light,
high fever's hour,
and in the air's embers
devils in every flame.
The road, the road to Galta,
one evening it carried us there.
The bare truth
of the spirit that lives
alone with a jug of water.
And the clamour of children,
footsteps and rags
in endless dance.
Hanuman, the poet,
spirit and word
of the ascetic Valmiki,
sanctified devil,
makes fecund the Ramayana
in the shadow of those steps.
Imprisoning domes
in the smoky whiteness.

Galta, burning the light,
ablaze on every side:
and in her midst, you and I,
delighting in our capture.

•••

SAMYA SENARATNE
(Sri Lanka)

Do not seek here...

Do not seek here,
love that knows no boundaries
glistening in my eyes
looking into yours
Do not seek here,
the sweet waiting
that filled my heart
with each one of your promises
Do not seek here,
the worry I felt
seeing you unhappy
and caught up in your fears
Do not seek here,
the warmth of my touch
as I clasped and wrapped
your hand in mine
Do not seek here,
the tears that flowed down
as my heart broke
inside me, quietly
But do seek here,
a flower wilted and dying,
shuddering as you walk over it
to pick up another blooming bud...

•••

SONA VAN
(Armenia)

My Second Day Working in America

I have come to this land
like all the others
to find gold and slaves

But I've found myself
amidst the crowd of picketers
demanding a wage increase
and paid vacations

It seems like a parade in this street
white leaflets floating in the wind like doves that the cleaning lady
will throw away
into the garbage can
as soon as the demonstration is over

It is autumn...
some birds migrate
(the cuckoo moves her egg to another nest)

I've come here like all the others
to find gold and slaves but
under my feet there are only the bones
of a dead bird full of sad songs
about her short life
and long summers

...

NEAL WHITMAN
(US)

"All Life does end and each day dies with sleep."

each day dies with sleep
pitched past pitch of grief
thus for him we weep

after us does creep
knave remorse, love's thief
each day dies with sleep

from the dark so deep
follows dawn's relief
thus for him we weep

kept his faith, a leap
we wake with belief
each day dies with sleep

on the mountain peak
dapple-dawn, gold-leaf
thus for him we weep

for his sake we seek
slant rhyme's hard won peace
each day lives with sleep
thus for him we weep

...

YUAN CHANGMING
(China)

On My Birthday & Off

I don't remember how many years old
I am, but I do care about my birthday, a time
When I can imagine getting good wishes
Or words. Rather than having a party
With a big cheese cake or a bowl of longevity
Noodles, I would prefer to leave home
For a lonely walk in the country, wandering
In a poetic wonderland

where I stop to reflect:
For the past decade I have done what I could
By way of a poem, but since it is unlikely I can
Do anything with it, I find it the proper
Occasion to write one last stanza just
To commemorate my yearly visits to Qucheng
Homerburgh, Dantefield, Shakespeareston
Goethestadt, Pushkingrad, Baudelaireville
Nerudastad, Frostdale, & Tagorerboro

•••

LIDIA CHIARELLI
(Italy)

Falcon Lair, Beverly Hills

Through the open window
a dull sky
hid the stars
when you paused and listened
to the lost language
of the night.

Under glittering chandeliers
the precious clock
ticked endless hours

and your many faces,
reflected in the sumptuous mirrors,
(impassive masks)
slowly dissolved
into another place
into another time.

Unspoken thoughts
words left unsaid
broken phrases
vague illusions
dreams of passion
vainly chased.

Then
the dazzling spotlights
switched off
one by one
on the set
of your last film

•••

CHANTAL DANJOU
(France)

Stories of the War

Cry

A body. The intertwined. Another body. Bodies and bodies. Littoral cities all alike. Full of lights. Full of sand. Even through closed shutters. High fever slouching in bedrooms. Powdery path through landscapes. With eucalyptus forests. With red and white gardens. With exoticisms. Silence but for the cry of swifts.

Blue

Since the love encounter. Since the white lilacs. Since February'swattle. Always a body. Long as a line. East-West that its crosses. View point indicator. Its huge back. Its voice in the stone. It sharp shadow. And daylight. Crackling. Throws away its crumpled blue

Streaks

Erasing itself a bit more. Body. Even wanted. Open. Birds on it. Digging their nests. In the eyes' infinite. And in the mouths' paroxysm of mouths. Blindness. Black lines. Greek green. Going down. Sienna. Colours like islands. And Islands. One behind the other. Ingenuity then they. Fade

Scenery

Beyond bodies. Beyond pleasure. On the customs officer's path. Overlooking the sea. It's there. So many bodies already. One upon each other. Forming a mound decked with sand and schist. Beautiful activated landscape. Trees towering. Squeaking. Seabirds swooping. History that buries. Mass grave that lowers down its buckets. Utopia of forgetting. Of love. The sigh in the embrace. The beach and the pareo. Scenery for silting-up. Wattle of the last season. Branch with blooms. Freezing. And short

Daylight / Shade

Left only. Coniferous trees. Powerful smell. Shoot up above the void. Reflections make the water go up. And these pine cones. Suspended. Dance. Dance. Life. Life. Short gallows. Laconic. Like gun shots. To listen. That sparkle. Fallen fruit. Woody body. Frenzy. Body. Other body. Bodies. A bit of bird. And of shadow. And of couple. And of daylight

SUSAN RAY
(USA)

The Experiment

Ryan met Laila on a Wednesday. Half asleep on the futon with his legs outstretched, he almost didn't see her; she was tucked so neatly beneath Mike's shadow. The lumbering frat boy brought her along for kicks, to introduce her to a genuine townie—a lowly dope dealer. But Ryan was never bothered by Mike's air of condescension, not when he put down exorbitant amounts of cash for stale weed. He loathed them all, spoiled university kids with allowances, hybrids, and designer clothes and felt entirely justified in charging them twice as much as his regulars. Ryan never let them remain in his apartment long, despite their attempts to smoke him up, grab the other controller to his Switch, or comment on the ballgame reverberating off the paper thin walls. He needed them out. Solitude was his oxygen. But there was something about her tiny frame and soft expression, like that of a kindergarten teacher concerned that her tots were playing a bit too rough, waiting to see the outcome before she intervened. At that moment he desperately wanted her to intervene, to put him in his place. That's why he passed Mike the other controller and turned down the volume. While gathering the dirty laundry from the leather chair in the corner, he motioned for her sit. He even opened a window to let the air in and show her he wasn't afraid of the outside.

Mike talked too damn much and only about himself: his pledges, his car, his YouTube channel chronicling the last drunken bash at his dad's beach house. Ryan swallowed his repulsion and let his rising contempt burn against the back of his throat. She barely moved, shifting softly as she tucked her legs neatly beneath her. He studied each dark curl protecting her cheek. She would take nothing but her seat, no beverage, no cigarette, no questions. At first Laila rarely spoke, only offering her name and a similar distaste for Mike's self-absorbed ramblings, noting her disgust through her wonderfully revealing expressions.

While Mike's thumbs pounded away at the rubber buttons, Ryan watched her eyes wander. She took careful stock of the contents of the room, each framed movie poster, the pattern of the rug, the brands of

expensive liquor adorning the top of the fridge. But Ryan could only see her and would do anything to pull her eyes back to him. A sharp, fractured song cut through the moment as Mike's phone rang. He bounced to his feet, pulled up at the waistband of his skinny jeans and answered with, "What's up man?" Knowing he could never hear past the sound of his own voice, Ryan hissed, "What are you doing with this tool?" She stretched her neck forward, assuring herself that Mike too far away to hear her response. "At least he's entertaining," she purred, pulling her hair back from her face and twisting it behind the nape of her neck. "I can be immensely entertaining! Let me take you out tomorrow," Ryan grinned, inwardly praying that he didn't sound too eager. "I have a calc exam tomorrow. You can take me out to Braggio's on Friday." He was overcome by her calm and subtle confidence, the way she rolled her hips beneath her oversized shirt as she uncoiled her legs. Ryan nodded, too happy to speak.

The restaurant was too loud, the food too expensive, the portions too small; he struggled to shake the feeling of exposure that always clung to his skin in crowded rooms. But finally her eyes rested on Ryan Richetti as he confidently ordered veal saltimbocca and chicken cacciatora in performative Italian accent. Ryan hated paying top dollar for what his grandmother would call second rate Sicilian cuisine, but this is where Laila wanted to be, and that was all that mattered. "Thanks for dinner," she smiled. "Ah, thank Mike, he paid," Ryan snickered, looking down and stabbing at his overcooked veal. She leaned her chin into her palm, thoroughly looking her date over, as if deciding what to make of him. Ryan hoped he hadn't said the wrong thing. "Not that Mike's a bad guy..." he muttered. "No, no," she smiled, "You were right, Mike's a tool." They both laughed and he confidently ordered a ninety dollar bottle of pinot noir from the waiter. A former "client," the server never asked for Laila's ID, which made her eyes twinkle and again settle on Ryan.

It was after their third dinner at Braggio's that he told her. Their limbs were entangled on his futon, her tiny frame somehow enveloping his. The way her fingers dug into his back and her wet tongue lashed at his neck made Ryan feel uneasy. But she hadn't taken her pants off yet, and he liked her for that. She was so sweet and so small, so self-assured, yet professedly innocent, and he liked her for that too. By this point he knew it was partially an act, but decided that Laila was his one shot at any kind of normal relationship. He didn't mind the

hours she spent in the apartment, the way she ran her fingers over everything he owned, the chuckle that tickled the back of her throat. So he chose her. There, by the unnatural glow of the plasma TV he made her his confessor and his judge, holding to the small hope that unburdening himself to her would somehow transform him into the kind of man he so desperately wanted to be.

When she began to stand up, he grabbed her wrist and pulled her back toward the couch. "Laila, I want to tell you about my dad." She reclined her body into his, resting her right cheek against his bare chest and absent-mindedly pressing her fingertip into the cleft of his chin. He brushed her hand away and began to speak.

He told her that he was just fourteen when it happened, too young to be taken seriously, and he had hated his father. He assured her that his father never hit him, never yelled, but he never challenged him either. He painted Anthony Richetti as a large but weak, soft and unmotivated; one of those men never earning a promotion or warranting termination, just doing enough to be overlooked. His uniform was a faded tie and glasses with brown plastic rims; he would wear his shoes until the stitching tore. He hated change, hated loud noises, and especially hated to be touched. Ryan admitted that when he and his sister were little, they would amuse themselves by running up and tugging at their father's arm just to watch him pull it into to himself like an injured child. Only his mother's touch was acceptable and there was never any question that she owned Anthony, he was the ugly stray cat she had never planned on taking in. Maude told her children on numerous occasions that she should have given her daughter up for adoption and moved to Vegas after high school like she'd planned. Ryan called his mother "a wannabe showgirl." She was thin, busty, and dyed her hair bright red. Certain that such attributes guaranteed her celebrity, her roadblock had been a run-of-the-mill high school pregnancy.

Ryan sighed. "My parents were a train wreck of a couple," he mumbled through the Marlboro pressed between his lips "I'm sorry baby," she cooed, pulling the cigarette from his mouth and blowing smoke rings toward the ceiling. Ryan said what really tore him up was that his father never put a stop to his mother's cruel ranting, even when it made Lisa cry. On the few occasions his father did try to curb his wife's behavior, she would flash him a wicked smile and suggest they go for a drive. Ryan was forced to ride along a few times when he

was little. Once seated in the old Plymouth, they would just roll through the dingy neighborhood streets, the same neighborhood his dad grew up in. Maude would lightly set her slender hand on her husband's knee and entertain him with worn stories of their high school days. He would guide the car along the pavement as he listened, instinctively avoiding every bump and pothole of the familiar roads. Only when lost in the nostalgia of his carefree youth, his athletic glories and Maude's gentle admiration, was his father truly happy.

"Things got worse when I was in middle school. Mom became a raging bitch," Ryan added, snatching the half-burnt cigarette back from Laila's nimble fingers. "Mmm-hmmmm," was her only response as she sat up and began pinching the tips of her hair. Ryan told her that his mother's growing demands rendered his father helpless, just like his unfortunate trick knee. Anthony never complained when she spent his paycheck on hair products instead of groceries, not when she told him he was worthless, not even when she leaned in across the brittle kitchen table—plastic bracelets clacking, bony elbows jutting outward—and told him SHE was getting a divorce. He didn't protest as pools sweat formed on his splotchy forehead and tears slithered down from beneath his fingerprinted glasses. His cowardess had made his son's stomach curdle. Ryan flicked the butt into the ashtray as he painfully recounted how he had told his father he couldn't wait for him to leave.

"Baby," Laila sighed as she lightly ran her nails across Ryan's abdomen. "It doesn't make you bad person just because you didn't get along with your dad." But Ryan couldn't hear her; he was lost among his own thoughts. He remembered that at first his dad had tried to wait Maude out, thinking maybe she'd change her mind. Anthony talked even less, cementing himself to the center of the bruise-colored sofa and pretending to be a piece of furniture. Eyes locked to the screen, beer can in hand, he was an ugly department store mannequin that the family kept forgetting to take out with the trash. Sometimes Ryan stepped over his father's outstretched legs resting on the coffee table, sometimes he unapologetically plowed through them.

Ryan sat upright and his knees began to bounce as he recalled the night Anthony offered his son a beer, a moment most high school boys dream about. But Ryan told his father Natty Ice tasted worse than horse piss—something he'd heard his mother say on numerous

occasions—and stomped off toward his bedroom. A week later, Maude came home drunk with another man. He was shorter than Anthony, with bleached tips, a black goatee, and a victorious toothy grin. He wrapped one arm tightly around Maude's waist and planted the other firmly on her flat buttocks. When he saw Ryan hesitantly coming down the stairs he casually said, "What's up little man?"—his arms still tightly coiled around his mother. Anthony stood up from his fixed place on the sofa and slowly approached the drunken couple. The man's orange hands began to twitch as he looked up into Anthony's torched face. Maude and Ryan waited for the man of the house to say something, to hit the intruder, to finally act. But instead they watched him slowly wilt; his shoulders slumped and his neck fell forward as he quietly left the house.

"Ryan," Laila wined, "we've all been through that. Our parents are just as screwed up as we are—" but he interrupted her, "No, that's not it! Just listen!" he pleaded, speaking more rapidly as his story progressed.

It was the fall, school had started and Lisa and Ryan hadn't seen their father in months. Maude ordered her children to "Drive to 'that man's' house and get back HER antique end table." Ryan didn't mind, his sister rarely took him along on her drives since she started dating Tom. The teenagers felt replenished and free, just the two of them recklessly traveling that stretch of road separating their psychotic parents as they wailed along to "Teen Spirit." When they pulled up to the trailer, Anthony sat in a faded lawn-chair that looked just as defeated as its owner. Ryan remembered specifically that his father was half-heartedly attempting to smoke a cigarette, most likely trying to find something to do with himself.

Ryan paused and breathed deeply before describing how Anthony's face lit up as the Plymouth approached, how his own insides had tightened when confronted with the knowledge that this pit-stained failure of a man was his father. Anthony wore a striped-short sleeve shirt, buttoned only at the bottom to better cradle his newly forming beer belly. The crevasses around his mouth had deepened, white hair bit at his temples like the gray-brown grass that formed a strange halo around his trailer.

Ryan shut his eyes as he pictured how his father's face had glowed when the pair hesitantly stepped away from the protective shadows of the car. Ryan hated how happy Anthony was to see them, his feet

already tingling with the desire to escape. When Ryan spotted the end table through the glass of the muddied storm door, he kept his head down and stole up the steps. Brushing shoulders with Anthony in his haste, he was surprised his father didn't recoil from his touch. Lisa made little effort to answer her dad's questions about school and her new boyfriend as her brother loaded their plunder into the backseat of the car. Ryan gave him a small wave and climbed into the passenger seat, honking the horn when he failed to recognize that the visit was over. She didn't hug him good-bye, both children remembered that clearly, that and how their father's face melted further down toward his jaw line as they turned on the radio and disappeared into the afternoon.

Laila looked at Ryan quizzically as his hands began to tremble. He tried to pull another cigarette from the pack, but it fell the carpet and rolled beneath the coffee table, where it would remain until it was brittle and stale. "Ryan..." Laila prodded, when he was silent for nearly a minute. He rubbed his temples and willed his voice not to crack. "Mom got the call the next morning, that dad took the right side of his face off with a 357 magnum," his breath quickened and he hurriedly added, "They told us he'd tried to choke himself first but he must have lost his resolve. He smashed in a neighbor's windshield to get to the gun. It's like killing himself was the only thing Dad was ever determined about," Ryan scoffed, hunched over with his elbows bouncing off his knees. "It was terrible. Lisa cried for three days straight. Mom immediately got trashed. Me, I moved out at the end of the week."

Ryan's thoughts slowly returned to the living room and he looked up at the tiny brunette beside him. She immediately sat up straight, like a dozing student suddenly realizing the lecture has ended. Laila casually patted his knee and gave him a half smile. "Is there any leftover chicken picatta?" she asked, stretching her slender arms above her head. Ryan was suddenly disgusted by Laila's naked-torso, decorated with a light purple bra she most-likely picked out for the occasion. "What do you mean fucking chicken picatta?" He was dazzled by how quickly she slipped on the appropriate expression of the compassionate listener, eyes wide, half-filled with a sympathetic glistening. She worked furiously to deliver the appropriate response, placing her cold hand on his bare shoulder, softly repeating his name, "Oh Ry..."

He needed her out, her presence weighed heavily in the air. A loud noise tore through his thoughts. "It's Mike," she said snatching her phone from the coffee table. "Just a minute." She wrapped one arm around her exposed stomach, as if overcome by a moment of modesty, and took the phone into the kitchen. The space between them gave the effect of a cracked window. Ryan started to breathe normally again. Her distant chattering was like static TV filling a once wonderfully silent room. "I'm back," she smiled as she folded her body next to him, moving her face in close to his. Ryan instinctively jerked away.

"I'm so sorry Ry...", she whispered with a gooey sweetness.

"You need to leave, now," he said with determination.

"What..." she stammered, clearly wondering if he'd gone mad or was playing some kind of horrible joke.

"I just... I just... need to be alone," he said covering his face. "Can't you just go?"

She remained motionless.

"Just get out!" he yelled.

She calmly stood up, slipping on her shoes, buttoning her shirt, never once looking in his direction. After tying her hair in a knot and checking her face in her compact, she finally turned toward him, half smiling. "You know why I waste my time with Mike? Because he's a good fuck!" Finally, after the door slammed, there was again silence.

The next day Ryan was too upset to drive, so he took the bus to his mother's house. He always found it odd that she never left the home she once shared with his father. Half dead pine bushes stood guard on either side of the front stoop, the burnt orange brick looking sadder than he'd remembered. The old Plymouth still sat in the driveway, though Lisa, its last driver, was long gone. She left shortly after Ryan did and now had a family of her own. Ryan never understood her resilience, her ability to refocus her energies on making sure she and Tom were the parents she never had. He had yet to meet his two-year-old niece, but was welcome to visit after "he got his life together." Shuffling his Nikes along the pavement of the driveway, Ryan smoked his cigarette down to the butt. He considered heading back to the bus stop when he thought he spotted my mother's face in an upstairs window. But it was like seeing a ghost, he wasn't sure if he'd simply imagined it. Then the door opened. She was blonde now, her face gaunt and shapeless. But she was still unnaturally thin, her bust still

too big. She walked toward him hesitantly, like he was a lost fawn that might bound away at any moment. “Ryan?!” Her face crunched into a sob, but she immediately collected herself and formally invited him in.

Passing through the screen door, his stomach tightened as his eyes fell upon the antique table, dusty and nestled closely into the old bruised colored sofa. He hurried toward the kitchen and desperately fought for air. Forehead against the cool table top, hands clasped behind his neck, he could hear his mother speaking to him, but couldn't make out her words. “Ryan, are you alright? Have some water baby.” He heard a glass clink against the tabletop but refused to look up. Ryan finally forced himself to take it all in, to recognize the faded green wall paper, the rusty stovetop, his mother's hardened gaze.

“I can't believe you haven't come to see me in all this time. Lisa told me you were okay, but she worries about you since you dropped out of school. She said she heard you were peddling dope. I don't like that.”

“It's nothing Mom, really,” he muttered, beginning to question why he'd come.

“I was so proud when I heard you got into college all by yourself,” she smiled, pouring herself a cup of coffee, bracelets jingling as she spooned out her sugar.

“But then you had to go and screw everything up,” she whispered into her mug.

“Just give me some time,” he moaned, twisting out of the chair and heading back toward the living room, thinking perhaps there was more air in there. Ryan ran his fingers over the railing that lead upstairs, remembering the day he walked down it to see his mother stumble in with the goateed man. He visually traced the steps Anthony had taken from the sofa and on through the doorway, desperately wishing his father had swung at the man, or his mother... But more than anything Ryan wished he'd just spent that last afternoon at his father's trailer—that was all the man wanted. Ryan pulled off his cap and tugged at his hair until it hurt. When he finally opened his eyes, he saw something new in the otherwise unchanged room, a framed picture on the mantle. It was Anthony's high school photo; he was still big and soft, but more hopeful, his eyes seemed to dance, the smile seemed genuine. Ryan wondered who his father would have been had he not met his mother.

She took her time following her son into the living room, still

caressing her coffee cup as she leaned her back against the railing. Her legs were spindly and unnatural, casting odd shadows across the orange carpet. “The lawyers finally did it,” she cooed. “It took them six years, but they did it.” She took another sip. “We're going to get the insurance money Ryan! I think I'll finally go to Vegas.” She smiled triumphantly. “I've been trapped here long enough. I deserve it,” she said with conviction. Her words rattled around in Ryan's chest. She hadn't been repenting in this house, simply waiting. He paced back and forth across the carpet, moving quickly so as to avoid her glare. He finally collapsed on the sofa, unable to fight the urge to stare up at my father's youthful picture. “You know,” she said setting her cup on the coffee table and awkwardly patting his thigh, “In this light, you look just like him.”

Ryan didn't realize how quickly he'd left the house until he heard the screen door slam against the frame. He fingered the cell phone in the pocket of his coat and traced the familiar pattern of Laila's number.

...

DARREN KUS
(German)

Nothing left of her...

The phone rang.

"Hello?" he answered. The person on the other side of the line didn't seem to know how to respond and left him in silence. He took the phone off his ear and stared at it for a second as a muffled voice finally occurred: "Mike, where are you?"

He gasped, wasn't able to move his lips. His throat suddenly felt incredibly dry just like the last time he had heard from her. He could feel his heart beat stumble up his throat into his ear.

"Mike?" Her voice was filled with a sense of joy and warmth. His head began to spin. He had to lean against the wall not to stumble and leave a mess of drool on the carpet.

"Amanda?" Mike stuttered.

"I'm not mad, I just miss you. Haven't seen you since I've been stuck here."

Mike looked around the room. Nothing left of her.

"I..." he started but then left with a moment of silence.

"Would like to come by and see my girlfriend after work?" she added and giggled. Now this hurt - not only physically by bumping his elbow against the wall; Mike's heart beat was stuck in his head, now eliminating every kind of brainwork. He leaned his back against the wall (whilst rubbing his elbow) and slowly slid down until he was sitting on the floor.

"Amanda, are you all right?" Mike had to summon his thoughts; he rapidly shook his head to get rid of his heart beat.

"Yeah, nothing bad. My arm's broken but dad thinks I should stay in hospital." "You broke your arm?"

Amanda let out a surprised gasp.

"Eh, well you should know or did you leave me alone in an alley in the middle of the night?" the woman laughed again. This time Mike thought to hear a sense of shiver in her voice; although her laughter still had the same characteristics to it: a short, hiccup-like giggle. Amanda's voice seemed more serious now: "Well, I can't really remember how it happened. The last thing I know is that we

went out for dinner at the Crown last night, then we took a taxi to - "Joker's Paradise!" Mike immediately yelled.

Amanda hiccup-giggled, then continued:

"Yeah, which was so not us actually. But we both were so wasted we couldn't stop ourselves from doing something stupid."

Mike held his breath for a moment, just staring at the opposite wall of his home office.

"Amanda, could you just give me a sec?" he then asked and placed his phone down on the table. Mike's eyes focused a calendar on the wall; he sighed and shook his head gradually increasing its speed. His breath pattern accelerated, his heart beat started drumming in his ears again, he felt like someone had turned up the heating to a million degrees - at this point, as he thought his body would give up, the room was dived into a state of calmness. His eyes wiped over a picture frame on his book shelf; he and Helen were happily smiling into the camera. A photo with awful quality, hastily taken and completely out of focus, but it was the first one they had taken together. Helen and her guitar on the streets along with an awkward little man holding a metallic butterfly in his hand. Mike smiled, then focused his attention back to Amanda's voice who kept seeking for his attention.

"I'm listening," he hesitated. "... dear."

...

GLEN PHILLIPS

(Australia)

Salty Jerusalem

Pulled into the main street to angle-park on the oil-stained kerbside in front of the pub. It was a replica of dozens of the same government sponsored hotels built after the Great War. Stained glass dining rooms, jarrah panelled lounge bars and generous gents and ladies' upstairs bathrooms. They'd been intended to entice public servants and seasonal workers to take up residence in these outback towns, in what was at best marginal country for agriculture. When you approach them across the flat country full of salt lakes, you first see the great white wheat silo. Then the pub is the next biggest building, standing out among shimmer of bungalow roofs in such a god-forsaken place. Not entirely god-forsaken since at least two or three Christian denominations would have hastily built temples of devotion, hopefully in strategic locations of every town.

'What'll it be?'

'Rum and coke, mate,' I told the sweaty bartender I guessed he was the proprietor. The name on the sign outside the saloon bar was C & H Gunnel. A typical pub bar with television monitor mounted high above the heads of the clientele, but also where the barman could glance up at it to follow a race or a footy match. And there were lots of photos of horses winning races and entire teams of footballers, all bare knees and knotted biceps. However, a new photo of a handsome Aboriginal footballer took pride of place. 'Fairest and Best' and the current year were printed below the portrait.

'Local boy?' I asked.

'Bobbie Brockmun. We couldn't have won the grand final this year without him. Bloody little beauty, that boy.' He dried some more washed wine glasses and hooked them upside down in the rack above our heads. I said nothing. Some old coots over in the shadows near the pool tables were calling for him to settle an argument. So his name was Charlie.

'On your own here, with the pub?' I asked.

'Just me and the missus. Pretty quiet except weekends. If there's a footy crowd old Margie always helps out. Or opening of the duck-shooting season.' Balding now, he must have been quite a

bruiser one time. Probably used to play ruckman in the local footy team.

'What's a single room these days?'

'Off season,' he replied, eyeing me slowly, 'it's forty bucks or fifty with breakfast. There's a couple of motel units out the back of the yard. You can have one for sixty. No women allowed in your rooms in the pub here.'

'I'll take a room inside the pub anyway. One night.'

'You'll be wanting dinner, then?'

'I guess. What time?'

'Six thirty to eight, but no orders after seven thirty. Cook comes in off one of the farms and has to get back to her own family. Sharpish. Want to come to the office and fix things up?' He saw I had downed my drink.

'Just get my bags from the car, so's I can dump them up in my room.'

When I saw the room I remembered how small they built them in those days. Not much fun at night if that was where you had to live. For months on end. I glanced in at the bathroom, smelling of new paint. All exposed pipes and mouldering mirrors. Swinging my door key on its leather thong, I clattered down the stairs to the street.

As I drove around the outskirts on some dirt roads I could see the town had changed little. If anything it was even smaller. Forty odd years is a long time. The schoolhouse was boarded up, the school itself now larger and with modern additions, a patch of lawn and a rose garden. They had bituminised the playground. Thankfully the boys' and girls' stinking old outside lavatories must have been long gone. Beyond the school grounds the salt lake seemed a lot closer, and a lot smaller, than I remembered.

But there was only one memory that had brought me back. And so I drove on, passing the little Methodist church, suitably severe with its still-unpainted tin roof and the weatherboard cladding of the walls oiled and dark. I remembered the Sunday school sessions when I was a pre-schooler, the plasticene models of crosses and angels we rolled on the benches. The feeling of gloom as Easter approached and the Bible stories of the humiliations, the scourgings and vinegar sponge, trickles

of blood on the figure's temples. What would it feel like to have a spear stuck in your side? That kind of thing used to make me physically ill to hear about, even if I was too young to understand properly.

But at the church services I liked to sit up the back near Old Bob, who would talk to us about bush animals that nobody knew about. He was usually next to MrsSchorer, the widow who did our washing. Mother said he was a Wongai but he didn't look like it.

What did I know? Then there was that Grand Final night. The local supporters watching the game at the showgrounds would toot their car horns for every score, a point or a goal. Afterwards you could still hear them roaring at the pub, even from our place. 'Dirty pigs,' mother said. 'They're no better than two armies trying to kill each other.'

'I'd say, more like gladiators, or Roman legionnaires,' our father muttered, crackling the pages of his newspaper. He was reading about England and the test cricket. Bradman and Morris and Lindwall were his favourites.

The people at church that Sunday after the Grand Final couldn't contain themselves. I knew it was something to do with Bob, but they hushed when any children drew close and tried to listen. Neither Bob nor MrsSchorer was at church.

'Serves him right. Hanging about with her in public,' someone said incautiously.

'She was in the Ladies Lounge and passed a shandy out to him, they say.'

'Men are brutes!'

That afternoon I found out more, when my brother took me down the bush track behind the hospital. 'See that room by itself, with the chimney? That's the morgue where they burn the bits off people. And the babies that get born too soon.' It seemed like a nerve or something pinched in my stomach.

Further on we came to an open space among the jam trees and blackbutts. There was a small galvanised iron hut and what looked like a lamppost next to it. We went over to it. I could hear an awful noise of blowflies, a cloud of them hung over the square of cement at the back

of the hut or shed. My brother pointed to the post with its crosstree, 'That's the gallows,' he told me. 'Old Buller hangs the animals up there when he's skinning and butchering them. They reckon the pigs go on squealing even after their throats are cut.'

'Why you brung me here?' I complained.

'Didn't you listen? They hung Old Bob up here last night.'

'What did they have to do that for? Could of killed him.'

'You don't get it, do you? Old Bob's gone now. Just because he tried to be a white man.'

But I couldn't grasp it all at the time, for I could see what was making the blowflies buzz around that place. It was the colour of a pig, brown with bristles and some bluish trailing things in a heap. I could only point, unable to speak. My brother said, 'It's just offal, you fool!'

Nearing the hospital, suddenly I turned the car around and headed back past the new shire buildings next to the showgrounds, back towards the town centre, and parked outside the pub once again. Inside, the barman was on a stepladder pinning up Christmas tinsel streamers. This time I ordered a stiffer drink. A double.

'You know,' I said to Charlie Gunnel, as he wiped the bar down in front of me and rearranged the little bits of towelling spread there to take up the slops, 'I remember once when I was a kid, going to the church Christmas tree night.' He didn't answer for a while as he started back up the ladder.

'Yeah, we still have 'em here too. For the kids at school. Even when it's topping the century in the shade. Bloody Father Christmas and all. Guess who gets to dress up?'

'That reminds me,' I said, 'of that night. The old feller in red presented me with a teddy bear. And my brother with a nice big toy truck. I stacked on such a show my brother took the teddy bear and let me have the truck. Talk about Shem and Ham!'

'Don't you mean Cain and Abel? Sibling rivalry or something is what they call it.' He came down the stepladder and roughly straightened the photo of the fairest and best footballer. 'Don't they?'

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ZARKO MILENIC

(Bosnia)

A Packet of Tissues

It was in September, during the Mid-Autumn holiday. Chinese traditionally celebrate that day and enjoy the light of the moon. At this time Chinese eat a special treat – the so-called moon cakes. This is on the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese calendar. That is most important Chinese holiday after the Chinese New Year. Chinese believe that during the feast of the mid-autumn moon disk is fullest and most round and brightest in the whole year. It's the end of the harvest period and the other agricultural activities. In China the moon is a symbol of femininity and fertility. Chinese people celebrate that day with family. Circle icon is present everywhere - a circle around the table, sharing cakes round... It's celebrated not only that day, but the whole week, and all these days are holidays.

During this feast, held at the Century Park, in Pudong district of Shanghai, International Festival of music and fireworks as part of the Shanghai Tourism Festival was organized.. I'm not a fan of fireworks as my wife Natalia, but I agreed with her to buy tickets for the show where the fireworks would be accompanied by famous musical tunes making the fireworks very imaginative. The cheapest tickets, the ones guaranteeing standing places, cost seventy yuan. We also bought a ticket for Zdravka, a writer from Bulgaria.

On that day, Natalia wanted to go to Qibao, an ancient city located in the suburbs of Shanghai, in the Minhang district. I like that typical Chinese city, a tourist attraction, which is so different from Shanghai, the Chinese megalopolis. We were there once, walked the banks of the River Po Tong and watched boats sailing through it. We also toured a number of shops where could buy products cheaper than inn Shanghai. We bought In one store, we bought a wooden tea table and several types of teas. In another store we bought a bag and a backpack in the shape of a panda bear for our two-year son Daniil.

When we returned to the hotel in Zhong Shan Park, where we stay, Natalia found out that the array of the backpack was damaged, and that the bag did not have a belt for wearing it on the shoulders..

She decided to go back to that store and replace the backpack and ask for a belt. She suggested to me she go alone, but I insisted that we should we go together. In this store, they agreed to replace the

backpack, and they gave us the belt. We decided to go from Qibao to our hotel, near the metro station Zhong Shan Park, leave there our purchases and meet there Zdravka, at the entrance of the hotel, at the agreed time. However, when the metro line number 2 came bound to the station People's Square, the train stopped. There was a failure.

The People's Square is a focal point and the busiest subway station in China. Through I, always a big crowd of people pass by, especially during the holidays. The passengers often stand in a row at the front door of the train. That day, Natalia and I barely found a place for standing in the train. And then there was a failure and the train, in which we were, stopped at the station People's Square. The train did not move and the doors opened. People inside it stared at them; those who wanted to get inside could not do that, and people outside stared at them.

I suggested to Natalia that we go outside and look for a taxi to take us to the Century Park. She agreed with me. We phoned Zdravka and proposed her to do the same. She agreed with our suggestion.

We went out through in the street one of the twenty exits and waved at the many taxis that are constantly passing by. But on left and on the right right around us there were people who stood waving. And most of the taxis already had passengers.

One car stopped near us. It was a so-called "wild" taxi, unregistered. I asked the driver:

- Century Park. How much?

- Park? - he asked. He did not speak English. He did not understand me and went away.

Later Zdravka told us that she was nearby and asked a taxi just like I had done and that the driver asked for it 200 yuan. It was an astronomical price for a five minute drive. The Metro ticket on this route cost 4 yuan.

I suggested to Natalia we go back to the subway. It was expected to start work again. She agreed with me.

I was right. We were backed on the train and finally arrived at the Century Park station. We came out of the station at exit number 4. It was already dark. We did not know where to go and in which direction the Century Park was. Natalie suggested that we come at a nearby restaurant with French delicacies and ask where is the Century Park. We asked one girl, who served there. We showed her the tickets. She spoke English. She said that the place was near, but added that the

performance would be on the following day, 30th September, and that day was 29! At this she smiled, but it seemed that her smile was not not at all ironic.

Impossible - said Natalia. - Check on your cell phone, which is the date.

Unfortunately I didn't have a calendar in my cell phone. There, we went to the store belonging to the retail chain "Family Mart". These small shops are open around the clock. We remembered that that morning we had not eaten anything. I bought a small packet of buns and soy milk. Natalia chose a dessert called "First Kiss." She checked the date on it. It was written September 9th. And we thought the whole day was September 30th! In this store, there was a long bench with three stools on which we sat and ate our food. I sat in the middle, and Natalia on the far left chair. On my right, sat one man. I quickly began to eat. It was already six-fifteen. On the ticket it said that the entrance of the Park opened at 18 pm, and that the spectacle would begin at 19.30. After this horrible day I did not want to go there. I would like to come back to the hotel room and have a good rest from that hectic day. While I ate, something happened unexpectedly. A young Chinese man next to me gave me a packet of tissues!

I was so embarrassed that I forgot to thank him. After such a terrible day it occurred to me, that finally, something good happened that cheered me up. I forgot my anger and fatigue.

SABRINA DE RITA

(Israel)

The books - A short play

Near a fence, A man is sitting by a pile of books, counting and arranging them, he is a sorter. another man, a nomad, approaches him. They begin talking.

Nomad – How long have you been here?

Sorter – Who are you? I did not notice anyone approaching.

Nomad – Why are you staying here? Its still dangerous.

Sorter – I must arrange these books.

Nomad – Do you have some food? I have not eaten in two days

Sorter – There are some potatoes in the pot, though they are cold.

Nomad – Do you mind me sitting with you for a while? I'm tired. do you have something to drink?

Sorter – There is some water left over there.

Nomad – Where did all these books come from?

Sorter – It's a treasures here, look how old. This issue is from 1890.

Nomad – Is it worth a lot of money?

Sorter – That's not what matters. What matters is that it survived.

Most books were burned.

Nomad – These are just books, not people. Don't you care about the people?

Sorter – I care very much, but I cannot do anything about it. Books you can save. Besides, I have nowhere to go.

Nomad – Did you find other things here? Maybe clothes, or money. I need money.

Sorter – I did not see any.

Nomad – So how will these books help you? Will they help you get some food?

Sorter – I don't think about food, just about this treasure.

Nomad – They are not holy.

Sorter – To me they are .

Nomad – Its not the Bible.

This Order – This is The Odyssey, a 1890 edition. Translated by a famous poet ...

Nomad– Are you a writer or something?
 Sorter – I do not know what I am any more.
 Nomad – How long will you stay here?
 Sorter –Till I arrange all this, and then I'll think about where to go. I'll look for a place somewhere. And I'll take these books.
 Nomad– Maybe we'll go look to for a place together.
 Sorter – You and me? I do not know you.
 Nomad–I can help you with some things. I am a carpenter and can build us beds and closets to put the books. What do you say?
 Sorter – I'll think about it.
 Nomad–If you sell the books, this treasure, we'll have a good place to live, like people do, and not animals.
 Sorter –Us?
 Nomad– Where were you?
 Sorter–There.
 Nomad – Me too.
 Sorter –I do not remember you.
 Nomad–I was sent here towards the end. what did you do there?
 Sorter – I arranged things.
 Nomad– What kind of things?
 Sorter– Coats, shoes, glasses, earrings, rings, teeth.
 Nomad – All this time?
 Sorter – All this time.
 Nomad– If we live together we can make a nice house. I don't know to arrange things, but I know how to get them.
 Sorter– You mean to steal them? Any way, as long as there's something to arrange, I'll stay.
 Nomad – It's over, why are you staying here, you're free now.
 Sorter– I can't leave this here. Someone else will take them.
 Nomad – Where did they come from?
 Sorter – They threw them out. First they threw the people, then the books.
 Nomad– You are a hero, a cultural hero.
 Sorter – I'm not a hero. Now that I think about it, I heard about you, you saved a few people, you helped them escape, You're the hero. I only know how to tell a story. Give me a copper coin and I'll tell you a golden legend.
 Nomad– You dream dreams and solve them, a magician. I dream of the beautiful woman I met there, I worry about her. Maybe you saw by

chance?
 Sorter– What's her name?
 Nomad – Her name was Ruth. She has black hair and mysterious eyes.
 Sorter– I might have seen her.
 Nomad– If I see her I will ask her to marry me.
 Sorter– You're a romantic warrior.
 Nomad– I'll wait with you here, maybe she'll come. Can you read to me from the Odyssey? Maybe I'll learn something.
 Sorter– (*begins to read*). Maybe we'd better finish with the books and then I will read to you. In case they suddenly come again.
 Nomad– I'm really worried about her. I told her to meet me by the fence, and she did not come. Maybe she is hurt. I must go back there. I must.
 Sorter–Maybe she went from the other side.
 Nomad – I look at you, sitting with all these books, as if there is no suffering in the world, as if it does not concern you, so calm, there is war, brother.
 Sorter– You do not know anything about me.
 (*The Nomad leaves, and goes back through the fence.*)

waiting and watching,
 eating the rest of my lunch.
 Our dance is over.

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DEEPTI JOSHI
(India)

*A Literary Sojourn to Fiji and the Girmityas
via Satendra Nandan's Poetry*

*"Those who have never felt bereft of a home will not understand their void:
homelessness."* -Kavita Nandan

Grief often lies in memories, because they link us to our dispossession. It is possible to retrieve and transmute through the act of imagination, what has been lost through history and human perfidy. The elements of loss and grief find a prominent place in the poetry of Satendra Nandan. It is the indenture experience that forms the psychic echelon of much of his works and an immensely disturbing vision of a dislocated people caught in the grasp of a perishing past.

The Indenture system, popularly known as Girit in Fiji, was, a new system of slavery involving recruiting poor, landless Indian laborers to work for profit hungry plantation owners all over the British Empire. From 1879 to 1916 Indians came as indentured laborers to work on the sugar plantations. As most of them were illiterate, they pronounced 'agreement' as 'girit'. They were asked to sign an agreement or put their thumb impression on it. It contained terms and conditions of their employment. In the early 1800s and with the elimination of slavery worldwide came the alarming need for workers in the expanding British Empire and its colonies. The British Raj had found Indians most suited to farming. The seeds of great Indian diaspora were sown. 60,000 Indians were transported to Fiji as indentured laborers (girmityas) to work the fertile soil.

From a little village to the dark lines
Twelve thousand miles, sixty thousand lives.
(*Lines Across Black Waters*)

Life was difficult from the beginning of the journey. For the Indian Fijians it has been a long journey, a journey of survival and arrival. The working conditions during the initial period of indenture were doleful but some of them would sing to assuage the boredom of work and slash the harshness of life. It seems they adopted some original verses which they had brought with them from India to suit, their personal predicaments but some of the verses and couplets arose and were developed by them from experiences of their daily life in Fiji.

Memories of their homes back in India, lost love, harsh treatment by the white overseers of the CSR Company, living conditions were the themes of many of the verses.

A country perhaps never belongs to one unless one is prepared to die for it but there are so many ways of dying and death has many faces: imagine those thousands of old men and women-the girmityas and their descendants who have perished over the past one hundred and ten years.

The chariot of history
Is still
In revolution
Its broken wheel
I am – a girmitya
A man, too.

('A Broken Wheel', *The Loneliness of Islands*)

They had come when they were young and sturdy. From the isolation of grandparents to another hundred years of enslavement for their great grandchildren. All this was being done during the last decade of the 20th century with the quiet knowledge of the countries of the region, including those for whom freedom was a living thing like Australia and New Zealand. What happens today to a vulnerable migrant people could happen tomorrow to a migrant country. The momentum of moral law, like an earthquake, is subversive and it works in strange ways.

From the little, inland, unexplored villages of Mother India, they began their journey on foot, perhaps even on a bullock cart or a camel, or a tonga or a train; then in sailing ships, they travelled almost 10,000 miles with little knowledge of history, less of geography. Most, for generations had never set foot beyond five miles of their place of dwelling. It was the longest cultural journey of any community. Every tree, every rock, every hill, every track had the footprints of their faith. They were poor in material terms but the places in their hearts were permeated with a sense of the spiritual; the ground on which they worked and worshiped was theirs- generations had trod upon it. It was the most hallowed piece of earth they had to grow up in like a mother's womb: whole and warm, beautiful and life giving. It gave breath and bone to their body and being.

It is difficult to imagine the uprooting, the transportation, from the subcontinent to some of the smallest islands in the largest ocean in the world. While examining their state two words strike in the mind: courage and work – the bread of labor. Courage came out of

a deeper civilizational frame. They bore the yoke of girmitya in quietude but they developed an inner integrity. They had lost their land of birth, their place called home, indeed their homeland. They were deprived and dislodged. But they never gave up hope. They carried their civilization in their tattered gatherings, in their holy books which many couldn't read, in their songs and ceremonies of innocence and bauble of faith.

But the life of almost all the Indian workers was very difficult and full of humiliations and working conditions were miserable. Both men and women worked long hours in the cane fields. The white overseers and their sardar would move around with whips in their hands to see that their indentured labourers completed their allotted tasks before the end of the day.

Small wounds, slowly weeping.
To the cruel rhythm of a whip
Those blows resound still
Healed by the Sun and salt water.

(Lines Across Black waters)

Many women from India were lured by the recruiting agents, called arkatees, to come to Fiji with false promises of a rosy future. After their bitter experience in the plantations, they would remember the way they were misled by the arkatees and who scolded them almost daily. Sometimes there was nobody to listen to their tales of sufferings: only witnesses were the sugarcane plants.

Human beings have unlimited capacity to endure suffering but a stage does come when the cup of patience is full to the brim. Suffering can bring a new sense of destiny and maturity in a resilient and resourceful people. They suffered alone, but they survived together. This indeed is the real and enduring meaning of the word girmitya. To an English word, agreement, they gave a vernacular, variation, a timbre, tone and passion. Girmitya now has an immortal meaning. And a new definition to an old indefinable experience. Only the word girmitya conveys the resonance of lines that could not be destroyed. No matter who they were, where they came from, they knew they were all traveling as jehajibhais, shipmates, in the same ship across very dark waters. Out of that experience grew a decency and dignity of a very special kind against overwhelming odds at a time when others made decisions for them and their unborn generations. The shackles of caste and clan were loosened, even as they were welded to the chain of another injustice. But the anvil on which the links of the chain were forged also forged a new and challenging sense of identity among these strangers in a colonial paradise. The girmityas

are a symbol of sacrifice and inspiration, as all pioneers and path finders are.

The tree of truth in life has many leaves – the most colourful, are the lives of these ordinary men and women who were truly the most extraordinary. They were simply decent men and women. No group of Indians had ever ventured this far in the Pacific: indenture was their deepest and most daring adventure. They wrought a sea-change in more than their lives. The girmityas, as migrant community, gave whatever they had to protect the way of life of an indigenous community, who never killed a single native person or stole an acre to their land or attempted to convert or crush their system of belief and faith; who through their toil, sweat and tears, made a bankrupt colony into a prosperous country. If we look back at the pages of history on any island or continent, we will find this as the most remarkable, if not unique, fact of human history. From their left thumb mark on a piece of paper to work on cane fields, their grandchildren today are making a mark in many fields.

The most wondrous epic is the odyssey of these simple men and women who came to the islands not as conquerors but workers – the true creators in any society. The soil they tilled became part of their soul. The real gift of the girmityas is that we must never accept second – class citizenship anywhere in any country and that we must continue to join hands and hearts in every parish or parliament where men and women are denied their human rights and their humane ways of living. This common humanity is the greatest gift of the girmityas.

The soil of memory haunts our face
Trembling the greenfields of bitter cain
Your pain flows in our landless vein –
As we feel the gift of a people's grace.

You are our glory, our deepest grief
You are the poems of a living land-
Giving meaning to every grain of sand,
And to every beloved tree, a green leaf.

(‘The Gifts of the Girmityas’, The Loneliness of Islands)

Satendra Nandan's works reflect the atmosphere of past girmitya days. His pen and heart blend with each other and pour forth the deep rooted agony and afflictions of their bleeding, un-healing wounds. Nandan stands supreme because of his truthful account of the coup and the predicament of the girmityas. His works are a projection from his inner-self into the outer world reflecting assertively the emotions of loss, pain and suffering.

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ANURAAG

(India)

A Poetic Obituary For Les Murray

An obituary indexes a journey
to the years gone by—
the exposition to the play
never to be written. But why
he hated Shakespeare and his men
for making fun of a fat man.

He took everything so personal!
His laughs were his, very professional.
The tears of others
were his too
for which he kept fighting
a Waterloo.

The 'is-ful ah-ness' of things
was forever his soul's blings.
When I saw and him I met
he was gentle, magnanimous and fat.

His oeuvre:
a rainbow extraordinary—
an arch between grace and transcendence.
In the temporal he looked for permanence.
He ate from the 'Common Dish'
stopped eating though
months and months befo'.
He succumbed to the Divine Wish
bowing to the Glory of God.
An oaken life has though not been a sod.

Well he knew he was different
like chilly saus.
Wooing for ever controversy each
he himself carried his cross
untouched by the winds of the world
in shorts— 'spirituality with pockets' unfurled.

He rose and did reach
his Master.
He laughed at human vanity
wept over the slaughter of innocence
at the altar of inhumanity.

The Whitman from Bunyah
sang of beans and Lotus Dam
saw Sydney Highrise variations
through a poetic cam
danced in Goloka
in Sanskrit with Strine Shinto.
And when he did go
kookaburras became koalas
mum and napping for ever.

*Gori sove sej par
Mukh par dale kes
Chal khusro ghar apne
Ren bhai chahun des*
And he left never to return crossing
the last lap, ending his race.

Contributors

Mohamed N Elramady is an Egyptian American poet who lives in Alexandria, Egypt. He has published five collections of poems: *I Wash in the Light of Your Eyes*, 2011, *Love after Deliberation*, 2010, *Ramadyat and Other Colors*, 2009, *When the Pulse Speaks*, 2009 and *Songs of a Wayfarer*, 2006. His poems have been translated into Italian, English, Turkish, French, Indonesian, German, Farsi, Nepali and Hindi.

Myrna Nieves is a writer and educator, born in Puerto Rico. She lives in New York since 1972. A founding member and professor of Boricua College, she was director of its Winter Poetry Series for over twenty years. Published books are: *Libreta de sueños (narraciones)*, *Viaje a la lluvia: poemas*, *El Caribe: paraíso y paradoja* and *Breaking Ground: Anthology of Puerto Rican Women Writers in New York 1980-2012*.

Gayl Teller was Nassau County Poet Laureate for 2009-2011. Her poetry collections include *At the Intersection of Everything You Have Ever Loved*, *Shorehaven*, *Moving Day*, *One Small Kindness*, and most recently, *Inside the Embrace*, selected in national competition and published by WordTech/Cherry Grove Collections in 2010. Her poems are widely published and anthologized, and her reviews of poetry books have appeared frequently in *Small Press Review*.

Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen is a poet, journalist and translator who has degrees in Economics 1976 and English Literature from the University of Baghdad 1999 plus a Diploma of Interpreting (Arabic-English) from Adelaide Institute of TAFE, South Australia 2005. He has published 19 poetry collections in English and Arabic and won the major prize of Iraqi poetry in 1999. He now lives in Australia as an Australian citizen.

Etnairis Ribera is a Latin American poet born and raised in the Caribbean Island of Puerto Rico. She writes in Spanish and translates her work into English. She has published fourteen poetry books, among them: *Ariadne of the Water*, *ZEN, A(mar)es*, *The birds of the goddess*, *Return to the sea*, *Memoirs of a Poem and its Apple*, *Intervened*, *Of the flower, of the sea and death*, *The voyage of kisses*, *Song of Mother Earth*. Her poetry has been translated into English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Catalanian, Swedish, Arabic, Quechua and published in bilingual books and anthologies.

Ouyang Yu came to Australia at the age of 35, and, by 59, has published 73 books of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, literary translation and criticism in English and Chinese languages, including his award-winning novel, *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* (2002), his collection of poetry in English, *The Kingsbury Tales* (2008), his collection of Chinese poetry, *Slow Motion* (2009). Ouyang is now Professor of English and the Siyuan Scholar at Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, China.

Khe Iêm was born in North Vietnam, in 1946. Founder and editor in chief of Tap Chí Thơ (Journal of Poetry) from 1994 to 2004, founder and leader of Vietnamese New formalism poetry movement, editor in chief of online *Câu Lạc Bộ Thơ Tân Hình Thức*, founder and editor in chief Poetry Journal in Print - *Báo Giay* since 2014. His translated poems have appeared in Xconnect, Literary Review, and The Writers Post.

Chimalum Nwankwo Born in Anambra State, Nigeria, Chimalum Nwankwo was educated in Nigeria and the United States of America. He holds a Ph.D in English from The University of Texas, Austin, and is currently a Professor of English at North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro. His publications include the poetry collections: *Feet of the limping Dancers* (1987), *Toward the Aerial Zone* (1988), *Voices from Deep Water* (1997), *The Womb in the Heart*, 2002.

Joan Michelson, originally from Boston, MA, lives in London, England. Joan's published works include *Toward the Heliopause*, Poetic Matrix Publishers, CA, USA, 2011, Poems, fiction and essays in British Council's annual showcase anthologies, *New Writing*, vols 3,4,14; poetry and fiction in numerous magazines and anthologies USA, UK. Poetry Society of England, Hamish Caham Prize, 2011; Thornton Budgen's Poet Laureate (2011-13); Writing Fellow, The MacDowell Colony, NH, , Poet-in-Residence, Key West Art Studios, Florida; Writing Fellow Hambidge Center for Creative Arts, Georgia, USA.

Claudia Piccinno was born in Lecce in 1970, but she moved very young in the north of Italy where she currently lives and where she teaches in a primary school. Contributing to more than sixty anthologies, she's a former member of the jury in many national and international literary prizes. She has published *La sfinge e il pierrot*, 2011, *Potando l'euforbia*, 2012 and *Il soffitto, cortometraggi d'altrove*, 2013.

Craig Czury (M.F.A. creative writing Wilkes University) has spent three decades conducting poetry, life-writing, and writing as healing, workshops in schools, universities, community centers, juvenile detention centers, homeless shelters, and mental hospitals. A lecturer at Albright University, an editor, publisher, and tireless arts advocate, Craig is the author of over 20 books of poetry, most recently *Thumb Notes Almanac: Hitchhiking the Marcellus Shale*.

Tònia Passola is a Catalan language poet born in Barcelona. She is the author of *Cel rebel* ("Cadaqués a Rosa Leveroni prize"); *La sensualitat del silenci* ("Vicent Andrés Estellés prize"); *Bressol*; *L'horitzó que no hi és* and *Margelled'étoiles* (bilingual French-Catalan). Tònia Passola's work takes the form of a personal diary. Using memory, imagination, and dream she transcends the limitations of language and creates an extraordinary poetic world.

Samya Senaratne is a young poet from Sri Lanka. She is passionate about poetry and has been engaged in writing poetry at leisure since the budding age of 8 years.

Sona Van, a native of Yerevan, Armenia, has lived in California since 1978. She is a medical school graduate with Master's degree in Psychology. Sona Van has authored six books of poetry, the latter of which (*Libretto for the Desert*) has been translated into more than 18 languages. In 2017, she was awarded Homer's medal in poetry from the European Union and the International award of Clément Ianicus in Poland. Sona Van is also the co-founder and editor of *'Narcis'*, a literary magazine in Armenia, since 2006.

Neal Whitman lives in Pacific Grove, California, with his wife, Elaine. Outside his home country, Neal's poetry has been published in Australia, Canada, India, Israel, Japan, Romania, and Serbia, and the United Kingdom. His 2014 awards include the *Oak Magazine* Minnie Memorial Award, 2nd Prize in the California Coalition of Chaparral Poets.

Changming Yuan, 8-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* (2009) and *Landscaping* (2013), grew up in rural China and currently tutors in Vancouver, where he co-edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan. Since mid-2005, Changming's poetry has appeared in 849 literary publications across 29 countries, which include *Asia Literary Review*, *Best Canadian Poetry* (2009;12),

BestNewPoemsOnline, *London Magazine*, *TajMahal Review* and *Threepenny Review*.

Lidia Chiarelli was born and raised in Turin (Italy), where in 2007, she founded with *Aeronwy Thomas* the Art-literary Movement: **Immagine & Poesia**. Lidia's passion for creative writing has motivated her to write poetry and she has become an award winning poet since 2011. Her writing has been translated into more than 20 languages and published in Poetry Reviews and on web-sites in many countries. She is also an appreciated collagist and installation artist.

Chantal Danjou is a renowned French poet, novelist, essayist and literary critic.

Susan Ray is an Associate Professor of English at Delaware County Community College where she teaches composition and literature. She completed her doctorate in Victorian literature at Binghamton University in 2011. Her publications include, "Thackeray: Poking Holes in the Narrative of Empire," in *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, "The Imprint of the Western Dime Novel on Hard-boiled Pulp Fiction" in Gale Cengage's anthology *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, and multiple book reviews in the *Journal of George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies*. She recently began writing fiction, and finds it challenging and thrilling!

Darren Kus is a young German-British graduate in Creative & Professional Writing and Screenwriting and has published articles, poems and film reviews online and in the *Sabrina Magazine*. He also writes films and prose as well as songs and is a member of a one-world group.

Glen Phillips is a West Australian writer and is an Honorary Professor of English at Edith Cowan University, Perth and has 10 published poetry collection of his own. His poetry has won prizes and appeared in more than 50 American, British, Italian, Thai, Singaporean, Chinese, Korean, Indian and Australian journals and/or anthologies.

Zarko Milenic (Brcko, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1961) finished postgraduate study of Russian literature in Moscow. He is president of Literary Club P. N. of Brcko district, editor of culture magazine "Meetings" and books by Club. He has published over 30 books: novels, collections of short stories, poetry, literary critiques, plays and

essays. He has translated over fifty books from English and several Slavic languages.

Sabrina De-Rita, born in 1969. Moved to Israel in 1972. Lived on a kibbutz and today a resident of the city HAIFA. Has published six poetry books in Hebrew. Also she is a painter, musician, composer and singer.

Deepti Joshi is an academic and aspiring research scholar. Presently working as Assistant Professor (Department of English), in Government Arts Girls College, Kota, Rajasthan. She is pursuing research on "The Land and The People: Major Pre-Concerns in the Poetry of Satendra Nandan".

