

A Drop

Absent-mindedly,
Night forgot a drop of water on your neck
Absent-mindedly,
I forgot my soul within it.

Now you have gone, and taken my soul with you.
Ah, God—
If, absent-mindedly,
Your hands stroke that forgotten drop
You'll see me
Like a genie
Appear between them.

Baghdad 5th of April 1998

Reem Qais Kubba
translated by Soheil Najm

From Her Book, One More Time

When
Her seesaw is me and she is my seesaw
When
Her two doves are shivering in my fingers
And her cup is full of my wine
When
Her space is redolent of my kiss
And her kiss is swimming in my space
When
The organ pipes shudder and the violins get drunk
When
Golden deer fly through the sky
And the skin of the earth starts to tremble—
The pearl of weeping becomes a river of firebrands!
That's how astonishment always comes out of her book....

Ahmed Asheikh
translated by Soheil Najm

Illusory Village

O lovely light
Passing away this night of love
You, enthralled by the stories in your blood:
By what the land said to the grass,
What the mountain said to the plains.
O lovely light
A flower is putting a crown on its head,
Conquering my kingdom and the laws of my soul,
And spilling me out in its hands.
I am a drop.
Do you see me?

What would you know of a star
That was not in any sky?
And what would you know of the power of a dream
Were you not, yourself, a dreamer?
What would you know about the masters of wheat
And the pride of the man in shackles
Or the rough mountain women
Or about the blood that opens the wound
Or two hands roaming the wind
Or a horse
Without a rider
Running free
On the mountain?
And what would you know about the whims of the mind
Or about harvest nights?
And what would you know about the body of a woman
That wears its nudity
In the night when the cannons thunder?

In that place, each house is like a village.
The village of the soul opens its windows to see
How houses look on a dark night
How a star falls
How a cloud is killed in the wind

How fields look like medals on the shoulders of the land
How a woman reaches orgasm
Or how the rain slaps me in the frosty nights.
There, hearths are brimful with fire.
A woman in love wears her slumber
Gets up warm in the morning
While another body of hers remains in bed
Pores oozing sweat and wine and lazy sleep.
Wait awhile!
You have gone back to love again
To die on the altar of a woman
Glowing naked
And dying of love every night.

O lovely light
You will dream that you call up the wind,
That you grant the sea a beautiful blowing,
And that you make a mouth for the morning from two kisses.
You will dream that you build temples,
That you toll the bells of an old tower
To announce the dance of the sea,
The wine of Easter,
The staircase to glory.

O you!
Who led us to be so alike?
Who told us to follow the footsteps of water,
To disappear in the wind,
To climb on the rocks,
Draw love on the sands,
Lie upon our two beaches?
The wine alone knew
How to make us magicians.

Khalil Al-Asadi

translated by Sadek Mohammed

Brine on the Wings of Seagulls

[*Al-Sahib, though an Arab himself, led a revolt
by African slaves against their Arab masters.*]

When the poor negroes lost their first battle,
the sailors robbed me of my beloved's keepsake
And washed the smell of the ocean from my body.
Suddenly, I was a stranger to the sea,
the sea a stranger to me.
The water closed its eyes and bowed its head,
No longer a refuge for the cast-out mariner.
On the front of my shirt
I wrote my beloved all that had happened,
and all that was still to happen:
I wrote: "Beloved, stretch out your hands—two shores of oleander."
I laid my shirt on the water
and, stirred by the hoped-for dawn,
I called the seagulls to carry my shirt to the beloved.
But the seagulls passed me by,
bearing nothing but the sea-brine to the desert.

The water cast back my white shirt, its sleeves tied together.
Who then takes the mariner's shirt to the beloved?
Who, on this open sea, can show a cast-out mariner the path to land?
Who carries the body of this murdered mariner to Basra?
Who?

No one but the sea.

The sea looked strange; its shores were locked.
Basra's negroes, soaked in brine,
pulled the Indian ships up to the merchants' doors.
Al-Sahib had not sent his seagulls as a sign of freedom.
Al-Sahib was sentenced to death
for rousing the poor negroes against the merchants.
Tonight, not Basra's palm trees nor the negroes' prayers
will hide him from the spies, the swinging lanterns in the soldiers' hands.

Tonight, beloved,
Nothing will shield Al-Sahib
Against the whips.
Tonight, beloved,
No one will rescue the lover
From the torments of his love.

Beloved....

But love had died inside the mariner.
All the lovely women had boarded ships, eloped with sailors.
And the negroes were shivering sparrows, seized by ravenous cats.

Al-Sahib was hanged with a rope of merchants' shirts.
Beloved,

If you were there, would you cry,
or rejoice at the death of this infatuated lover?

When the poor negroes launched their second battle,
I called on my beloved—
their plight gave me an angry voice,
a voice discretion could not silence—
Beloved, as you swing here and there,
you split my suffering soul,
you rock my heart, like a naked lantern glowing in the rain.
Beloved, you must either give
your allegiance to the poor negroes or to the merchants.

Tonight, as I passed by,
I overheard some seamen talking,
pointing at me, their fingers gilded with tobacco:
"Last night, the sailors murdered that mariner.
That mariner—"

"Hush, lest he hear you—"
"has a beloved the Basra merchants will slay tonight."

Tonight I will take refuge in my own flesh,
Not for fear that some spy will follow me and count my steps, and write:

"He passed by a negro, they shook hands,
a turtledove hid between their palms,"
but to see you,
for my flesh is swept by your love.
And I saw you, let me confess that I saw you
like a lantern glowing in Basra's night.
I saw the seagulls flying, laden with letters from lovers to loved ones,
and coming back, laden with letters from loved ones to lovers.
Going and coming, and going and coming again,
wings no longer weighed down with brine,
going and coming between the sea and the harbor.
And I saw Al-Sahib, wrapped in water and wild grass,
going out in the evening, attended by Basra's lovers,
and the negroes, and those
from distant cities, and Basra's negro singer, Tuman, enchanted
with a thousand loves,
all going to a picnic on the beach of Al-Ashar, on boats
all filled with oleander.

Abd Al-Hassan Al-Shaithr
translated by Haider Al-Kabi

We Are Not Dead

For Kadhim Kaitan

To no avail the doves cooing—
Our delights are cellars
And our time is ash.
We go, every sunset, to the river
Carrying the coffins of our days
Polishing our teardrops
And shrouding our fears.

We are not dead.
We still have the tearful embrace
Of sacrifice.
We compose our features,
Bandage our calendars,
Our disappointments,
And,
Under a spider's tent,
We still have the right
To conquer the city with kisses.

We return to our hospitals
Lighting lamps of regret
And reciting our elegies.
Our lifetimes are paper boats
Pushed to the waves by the hand of a trifling child
Where, fold after fold,
The sea takes our dreams
And wraps them in weeping.
Our lifetimes are withered leaves
That launched an attack on the sun
And fell in flames.
The fire now licks at our names,
Sewn together with splinters.

Munthir Abdul-Hur
translated by Sadek Mohammed

The King of Sorrows

For him are all sorrows.
He describes them sorrow by sorrow
Then lights candles around them
And smiles.
So we crowned him the King of sorrows.

As for us,
We have only our sole sorrow
Which we built
Teardrop by teardrop.
We watered it
As mothers suckle their children.
So they called us slaves
And christened us
The slaves of the King of sorrows.

Once,
The King whose slaves we are
Looked down at us
And was amazed
At the pure nobility of our sole sorrow.
And, because the King had only common sorrows
His Majesty issued an edict
Confiscating our sole sorrow.

Grave will be the days that we endure:
How can a wretched lot like us,
Slaves of the King of sorrows,
Carry on our lives without our sorrow?
Bereft, we slaves began to chant a hymn:

“Oh bygone days,
The days of our sole sorrow,
How wonderful you were!

Why did you abandon us,
And leave behind
Boring days, days void of sorrows?
And you, O gracious King
Why have you taken from us our sole sorrow?
Take pity on our children—how can they grow up
Without a single sorrow?”

Baghdad, July 16, 1997

Abdul-Khaliq Keitan
translated by Sadek Mohammed

A country out of work

Everybody here is out of work:
The workers in the factories and the officers in the offices,
All of them are out of work!
Those going early to the fields
And coming back tired at noon
Are also out of work.
The students and the teachers,
Whom the government pays handsomely
To master joblessness, are out of work.
The army and the police,
The children and the adults,
The women in the houses,
The imams in the mosques—all of them are
Out of work!
So long as there are strangers spreading darkness
Across the land,
Its children will have no work, except
The job of bringing sunrise back
To their extinguished sun.

Adil Abdullah

translated by Soheil Najm

Flour Below Zero

No sun in our plates
No shadows
No oil poured by the moon
No cloud we may stealthily
Milk from the sky.
Here is your share
Of ostrich feathers
And here is my share of cigarettes.
How much is left of the family's share?
Yesterday, flour ran out.
Before that, the sugar ran out.
No tea, no water, no air.
Eat the ration coupon then
And when you are full
Go out to the street.
Beware of the dolphins
And the whizzing ghosts!
Beware of insects!
Beware of the sun!
Take your full share of the street....
What?
The street has run out!
Come back to your mothers' breasts then
Or to their wombs.
Take your share of darkness.
But the milk has run out.
Then go to the river
Lie on your backs:
The moon will be a ball
Between your hands
And the sun will be a basket
And you...
Have you run out of your feathers?
And me...
Have I run out of cigarettes?
Our lives, have they run out?...

Where have you put the girl?
I wonder
Whether we have run out of our little daughter.
Or perhaps they have stolen her?
Take this weapon
While I follow their steps.

They are hiding behind the door.
Their bellies are full.
Give them milk if you can;
These are our guests—
Leave the roof empty for them
So they can jump onto it.
Let every one of them take his share.
These are our thieves—
Give them shelter from the outdoors
And never,
Never slander them.
Pretend to be busy by loading the gun...
But the bullets ran out.
Occupy yourself then
By watching the stars
Or, go fetch water—
We'll knead these books
And newspapers to make bread.
Pick up the breadcrumbs from the ground;
Put them on the moon.
The moon has a silent light—
Have a chat with it.

Everything may run out
Even nothing may run out
We are in danger
And the world is a gun.
Thieves are in danger,
Bread is in danger.
Mothers have been stolen from their own tears.

roof Saddam's police would sometimes enter houses from the roof.

Tell the children:
Sleep before the thieves come
And wake up after the bread comes.
Switch off the light and tell them
They have stolen the light from the lamp,
Just like they stole our old neighbor's ring.
And if they ask you about the ring,
Pretend to be busy combing your hair
Or
Busy yourself with a prayer....

These are our children:
They have their share of lies
And a share of cake and bracelets
And swings.
They have wars to lose
And wars to win.
These are our children:
They ate their share
Of the storm
And were never sated.
Their inheritance is war,
Which they will also share....

But you and I,
We will depart.
And when we finally run out of sacrifices,
You will demand your share of lamentation
And I
My share of curses....

June 1995

Kareem Shugaidil
translated by Sadek Mohammed

A Wheat Seed

For Hasan, who is fond of dates

Papa
Papa
I want dates.
Take this date stone
Plant it on the roof of the house
Water it with your tears
Or
Leave it to the teardrops of the sky.
It will be a palm tree
With a long trunk
And fluttering fronds.
Stand in its shadow
Eat from its dates
And of its stripped fronds
Make a bag.
Do not draw a bird on the bag:
Your books may turn
Into airplanes.
If you draw a duck on the bag,
Beware of the river:
It may slip from your shoulder
And float all your things
In the water.
And if it gets stained from your paints,
Take a wave from the river and wear it.
Return to the palm tree:
Learn from the nightingale
How to read,
And from the palm fronds
How to withstand the wind,
And from the trunk
Learn thirst.

Make from its wood
A boat to save yourself.
You might draw one day
A fish.
Do not tell your friends about your colored shirt:
The river may dry out.
Do not tell them about the bag:
The palm tree may lose its clothes.
And about the boat
Do not tell them:
They may accuse you of lying.
If you wish, warble to them
And at the taste of dates
Let them chant,
And if they see the palm tree
Tell them:
It is the neighbor's palm tree,
There are no dates in it,
No nightingales,
No doves.
It is a pretend palm tree—
Our neighbor washed it
And hung it out in the sun.
And if you need bread,
Take this:
A wheat seed....

1995

Kareem Shugaidil
translated by Sadek Mohammed

Drawing

The teacher asked the students
To draw whatever they wanted.
The son of the principal drew
A new Chevrolet.
The son of the developer drew
A complex of markets and hotels.
The son of the party member drew
An armored car.
And the daughter of the school deliveryman
Drew a piece of bread.

Lateef Helmet

translated by Soheil Najm

Shaping

In the noisy restaurant's window
a little passer-by appeared,
his face all pale.
He was only there for two moments,
and dropped two beads of rain
on the cold, hard glass.
He thrust two hungry glances among the dishes,
and rubbed a small and dirty nose
on the chilly glass. But the people's eyes
stared back at him, and he disappeared.
And the shape of his fleeing face
remained on the noisy restaurant's glass,
like a brand stamped in the fog.

Mahmud Al-Braikan

translated by Haider Al-Kabi

Elegy for a Coffee Shop Waiter

In this vast and desolate place
Should I carry my table on my back?
Invite you to my home
And say: O guest,
Do you remember our two shadows in the sun
And our faces staring at the street,
Here in this vast and empty coffee shop?

Who shook the coffee shop's pine tree
Over the teacup?

O waiter!
I have encircled my table
With four walls
Lest I see you
Standing, forever,
Over my endless silence.

There is nothing but the last day,
Then the funeral begins.
One minute,
And then you will be thronged by passers-by.
Watch out Ali!
The tea will be overturned from your hands.
Watch out Ali!

Abdul-Kareem Kasid

translated by Sadek Mohammed

*A poet dies twice: once when he is published,
and once when a statue is erected to him.*

—Mahmud Al-Braikan

Of Freedom

You have invited me to explore
another continent with you,
but you wouldn't share the map.
I would rather sail
In my simple boat
And if we chance to meet,
It will be something to remember.

You have offered me a house,
Decorated and comfortable,
In exchange for a song
That sticks to the instructions.
I would rather stay
On my horse's back
And roam
From wind to wind.

You have brought me another face,
Fresh and flawless, ideal in size.
Thank you, but
I don't feel like having a glass eye
Or a plastic mouth.
I don't want to wipe out differences.
I don't care for perfect symmetry.
Thank you, but
My distance is something I'd prefer to save.
Is the slave master not, at heart, a slave?

Mahmud Al-Braikan
translated by Haider Al-Kabi

Affiliations

On the everyday scene
I fix my gaze. But I have my dream,
My allegiance to the beautiful and far....

Against the daily clatter I nourish my milk-white voice
And clothe bare reality in the glow of thought.

I see all history sketched in a single look.
I hear it—hear its secret pulse—in a single voice.
But the thought does not frighten me
Nor does death fascinate me.

And across the stations of grief,
Across hunger of soul and body,
Across light and shadow
I keep seeking eternity.

Alone and free, I belong in a thought
That the dead wanted (but failed) to engrave on a stone.
I belong in the voice of primitive prophesies
In revolutions before their visions freeze
In heavenly love that the world refuses
In lightning that reveals the face of the ages in the blink of an eye
In the brilliant fields of beauty flowering
In the childlike dream that fades but never dies
In the part of man that is lost in the dark
In that which sheds its light where meaning lies
In that which can't be owned, nor be defined.

Mahmud Al-Braikan
translated by Haider Al-Kabi

An Attempt at Music

- (1)
The music comes down, comes down
Like a bird, a bunch of grapes, a waterfall
And my heart flies with the bird
But my hand does not touch it.
The bunch of grapes touches my lips
But there is no love knife to cut our sharp emptiness.
And the waterfall comes to me and I become water to meet it,
But I collide with its boulders
And drown.
- (2)
Even the letters wear me out.
They alone visit me in my vast loneliness,
Without carrying in their hand a bouquet of sun,
Or a handful of moon
Or kisses of feathers.
- (3)
Everyone is dressed in someone else's clothes
Except me.
And when I found nothing to put on,
I went out naked...
Stark naked.
- (4)
The music comes down with sweet L's like children's lips,
Chirping R's, whispering S's
And dews of D's.
- (5)
The music comes
And I rise from death for it.
We meet like two orphans
Yearning for the feast of reunion.

- (6)
When I got acquainted with my blood
I found it besieged with birds.
And when I got acquainted with my heart
I found it brimming with alphabets.
- (7)
Happiness is a ballerina
And sadness is a Bedouin sitting on the ground
Playing on the *rebeck*.
- (8)
I liked my death
But when I tried to repeat it
I went insane!
- (9)
The music comes down, comes down
And the soul gets lost
Then vanishes.
- (10)
The music melts like silver
And sleeps like lovers worn out by long parting.
The music glitters and turns griefs into F
And F to a freedom
That dances like a genie.
- (11)
What beauty!
The music plays on
And the letters sparkle.
- (12)
The rich man rejoices at the hotel's harem,
The singer at the nightclub's *dinars*,
The playboy at his new mistress.
But I am like music:
I only delight in what I find within,
And only make love with my letters.

(13)

How long will the bleeding of letters torment me:
The protest of P's
The loss of L's in cities lost to memory
The hypocrisy of H's
The betrayal of B's until death.
My God!
How long will the bleeding of letters torment me?

Adeeb Kamaludin

translated by Sadek Mohammed

Croaking

I cannot stand exile anymore
And it cannot stand me.
I shall lose it like I have lost my homeland,
Palm tree
By palm tree.
Maybe I will lose myself as well.
When that happens,
I shall stand erect like a hungry crow
And paint the whole world with my croaking.

1989

Abdul Kareem Kasid

translated by Sadek Mohammed

The Mirror of the Eye... The Mirror of Memory

This boy

At a time when sorrow burns in his blood
Crowned with childhood, charm and stones
Sits in secret, radiant
To count the embers of speech in his head
Turning words and longings loose
Like flocks of deer and wolves
In the forests of writing and paper.
This boy

Secretly opens a book, the mirror to a visionary eye.
This boy

Secretly reads a history,

Long hidden in memory, until he sees

A multitude of poets

Reading their long-lost poetry

In the resounding country of the void,

Accompanied by the quiet scritch of mice

And a thunderous silence....

Saad Jasim

translated by Sadek Mohammed

More Than One, Less Than Two

Every line I write, I'm afraid,
will erase a line from your memory.

What negligent god has left you so derelict?
What charm has made you write poems?
You look like a soldier from 1914.
How charming! How charming!
How can a poem be possible,
with so much shrapnel in your chest?
One splinter is enough to burn a whole volume of poems.
How can you extract poems and shrapnel from your chest
at the very same time?
Our fathers lied to us—
They had hidden this possibility from us.

How could you have aged and slackened without the passing of time?
May God grant you a cheerful death!
You are the furious storm,
produced by words of peerless calm.

Has my silence worn you out? Has my forgetfulness frightened you?
Have you flung your hand out searching for me?
Have you hunted for something? Has something hunted for you?
Have you trusted that the gravedigger
will not put a cadaver in the grave,
but hay and lint and other trash?
A man is nothing but a nest.
"How the questions vanished,
leaving the answers alone!"
Have you found out who guides all these inhabited wagons,
and in what direction he is leading them?
There is no way, neither forward nor backward.
Who was it, before going to his gardens, threw you here all alone
in this garbage dump?

I'm afraid you'll say "you".
I'm afraid.

Sabah Khattab
translated by Haider Al-Kabi

Creation

Come close
O neglected words
And let me make poems
Out of you.

Calendar

Ever since we hung this calendar
The wall
Has been oozing blood.
How could these days
Be a necklace
Unless they were pierced
Through the middle?
How can you expect us to write
For coming generations?
How can we pour our memories
Into days that have holes in their hearts?

Ali Al-Imarah
translated by
Sadek Mohammed

Doors

I knock on a door
I open it
I don't see myself, but a door
Shaped like me
I open it
I enter
Nothing but another door
Oh, my God
How many doors between me and myself!

Perplexity

My father said:
Share your vision with no one:
The road is mined with ears
And every ear
Is bound to another by a secret wire
Until they reach the Sultan.

Iraq

Iraq that is going away
With every step its exiles take....
Iraq that shivers
Whenever a shadow passes.
I see a gun's muzzle before me,
Or an abyss.
Iraq that we miss:
Half of its history, songs and perfume
And the other half is tyrants.

Adnan Al-Saiq
translated by Soheil Najm

The Black Box

My wife's tears poured down; friends wrote me elegies; dust built up
on my bookcase and...and...and I did not care.
Worms ate their fill of my flesh, but did not leave, though overstuffed,
and I did not care.
It was pitch dark when God's angels, like phosphorus inside my grave,
wrote their report: "This virtuous worshiper of God, devoured by worms,
is a true believer," and I did not care.
God Almighty Himself visited me (I had decayed; my stench would
cause gold to rust) and He gently said: "I have read your poem 'Dolphins
Swimming in God's Tears'" and He assured me that the Judgment Day
was soon to come, and I did not care.
Some creatures came, and, with great caution, lifted my skeleton and
placed it in a UFO, and I did not care.
Their skillful, all-powerful devices revived my crumbling bones, and I
did not care.
The wise devices realized their mistake, and cured me of not caring.
And then the questions poured out about everything, from my wife's
tears to the Judgment Day.
And, on a screen in front of me, the answer then appeared:
"Dear earthly friend: About the past—it's better *not* to care."

Jamal Mustafa
translated by Haider Al-Kabi

Strange and lonely child sitting in a dark garden,
this is my heart

When I opened the book of the horizon
The light fell.
The heart was resounding a song
With bitter words.
I beheld, between me and the light
Walking corpses trying to
Kidnap my lightning and quench
My song.
Listening to the flute,
The soul slumbered.
The wounds were resounding:
Peace! Peace!
The windows were silent
And the wind severely lashed
The heart.
A yellow storm blew up
And black water sprang
From my heart. The heart
Is my inkwell: I'll write
My sorrow on a soft blue cloud
To ease the pain.
My tree shakes its branches,
Awaken the birds to sing
The songs that the windows
Were waiting for,
Sinking
In the arms
Of darkness.
I'll pluck the mysterious
Rose
That sways in the soul:
The soul, a child
Strange and lonely,
Sitting in a dark garden.

Oh, deep soul
When will they fathom your depths?
Pure one,
When will they discover your whiteness,
Your spring full of
Endless green?
Quiet one,
When will the world be aware
Of your eloquent silence,
Flowering with pain,
Shivering fingers,
And the heart which never tires
Of its ink.
Houses of fog,
The morning,
The roses of the far fields,
The freezing waters,
And those who sleep on the sidewalk,
All waiting eagerly
For the sun.

Rasmiah Meheibis Zair
translated by Soheil Najm

The Transient Things

Try to sit down with Time,
To understand him
And let him understand you.
Try to reconcile with him.
Try to forget the conflicts,
The repeated offenses,
His axe's strokes.
Go out with him for a picnic—
Go to a museum,
Look at life there
With its many wonders.
Be patient, now.
The museum offers more than history.
Time may yet show you
Its beautiful things;
It may open its treasures before you.
Yes, there are instruments of war
In the museum, but
Be patient, please:
The museum holds more than just war.
There are statues,
There are Venuses,
There are gardens.
Be patient with Time—
Not every tree in his garden
Conceals a crime.
Look from an angle
Less dark:
Look more at the river,
And less at the fighting ships.
Be patient,
Sit up straight
When you sit with Time.
Try to show some respect. Time
Is not a museum:
It's the life all around you,
The fresh air of the fields,
Filled with the glitter of butterflies,

The songs of birds.
Don't look on Time as your enemy.
Enough of war!
It's just a museum exhibit.
Whether you choose to go in
Or stay out,
Look upon these modern ruins
As though they, too, were ancient monuments.
Try to pass by without harm.
And when you're tired of this museum, freedom
Can be found in death. Or,
Why not make a world that's all your own,
Brimming with creatures who are proud
Of belonging to you? A world outside this world.
How can you discover such a world?
Look! Simply look—
Look at the beautiful things.
Take a small vial of perfume
From the earth.
Look at the things that are gleaming
In your hand—the dust and the grain,
The things that are dear to your heart.
Take this path to happiness
And leave the myths behind.
Don't knock at the doors of kings.
Walk on,
Without regret for what you leave behind
On your little desk.
Let your footsteps be your country
And celebrate the road
As each path hands you onward to the next.
Delighted, be always delighted.
Be fruitful like any tree
Beside a river.
Take your delight from
The earth—
Where else will you find it?
Go with an elegant grace,
Even in the midst of ruins,
And let the world be yours

Without its sad mythologies,
Its labyrinths.
Don't be a builder of castles
Like Sinmar,
Don't build a Tower of Babel,
Don't carry weapons,
Don't pile up treasure,
Don't have a grand title.
Don't engrave your picture
On a kingdom's coins,
Or sign your name
To any secret script.
Don't be a statue
In a public square,
Don't build a museum
Or be a museum exhibit.
As you walk this earth,
Don't be a rare
And priceless antique,
Don't cover your face
With mosaics.
Don't play the buffoon,
Or the martyr.
Put your exile
On the tip of your tongue,
And say a kind word with a smile,
Without a trace of arrogance or grandeur.
Kind words and lovely smiles
Don't consort with arrogance or grandeur.
The house of your love
Is the nightingale's tear drops.
Be sure to tell him: I love you
From the heart of my heart.
From the heart of my heart,
I love you.
The house of your love
Is the nightingale's wings.

Ra'ad Abdulqadir
translated by Soheil Najm

My Brother's War

Get up, brother; the war is over.
They have taken your tank to the smelter
But your rifle still lies on the mountain.
At last, the sand has erased your courage
And farmers plant fields where you fell.
The trees you planted
Have died. The enemy flooded the mountain
You vowed you would never abandon.
And from its ice-capped peak,
They lowered your banner, which always stood steadfast
Until the day of your downfall.
The enemy plundered your uniform and your splendor
And no matter how dead you were
They kept crumpling your corpse with their bullets.
Even with worms coming out of your eyes,
Out of your big heart,
They couldn't believe you were dead—
You had been such a nightmare to them.
Get up, brother; the war is over.
The children have surrounded the garden.
The balls of fire and metal
Have cooled, and
The children now kick them around—
Except for the ball that fell next to you
And tore you out of your body.
We're back in the village now,
Without war and without enemies.
Horizons of dewy nightingales
Form themselves under our pillows.
We have forgotten some of our wounds, and though
Our daggers may remember our old hatred,
All we really want
Is that our dogs not bark for anyone
Except our guests.

My mother is still in bed.
I talked to her about your height and your strong arm
And it delighted her
That they couldn't find shoes that fit you.
She asked me
On which side you were sleeping
And it saddened me to tell her
That you had not slept for seven years,
That a shell from a huge strong cannon
Crushed your ribs
And stripped you of your youth.
So I let the sun set
Upon your names and dreams,
Let lie at rest the scattered dust
You have become.
Between your life, your death, there lies
A distance of six children.

1993

Taleb Abd Al-Aziz
translated by Haider Al-Kabi

The Hanging Gardens of Death

It is your country, oh fool,
Even if its land is too narrow for a rose.
It is your country, oh enchanted one,
Even when it is hard to find a song to console you.
Oh lonely passer by,
It is your country, you who are wounded by the injuries of hope.
It is your country, your sad sonata, your country
Even when clouds of turbans closed its horizon.
Your country even when the swords of veiled men closed its windows,
Even when its routes were mined with bombs.
It is your country, your melancholy song and the graves of your dear ones.
It is your country: your weapon, the song of the desperate. Your country
Even when the chariots of its dreams were broken in the burning daybreak.
It is your country, its roses your roses
Even when it turned its Babylon
Into Hanging Gardens of death.
It is your country, your beloved and your country
Even when it kneaded the clay of its dawn with the blood
Of holy men and the tears of chaste women.
This is the widows' republic, your country and the captive of your soul,
And then the republic of fear.
Your country, a daffodil in Karkh
Befriending the dew of daybreak prayer.
Your country, even when its sweetest hearts
Are in the graveyards.
It is your country or your torment,
Your country or your despair,
Your country or the ashes of your hopes: there is no difference.
It is your country and your intimate lover,
Your dream's companion and the river of your grief.
It is your country: you, tormented and expelled.
Your country, you who take refuge in exile
From the hot sands of its valley.

It is your country and the woodcutter of memory
In your soul's forest, your country
Even when the wings of its doves were broken,
Even when the angels left its holy cities.
It is your country even when its thorns
Crowd the roses of your heart,
Your country even when its shrapnel pierced
The arm of Mary in her churches.
It is your country and the princess of your heart,
Then it is the night that fell on Baghdad,
And still it is your country, even when the train of its days
Has stopped at lost stations, its rails turned to rust.
It is your country, oh loser in the garden of evil winners.
And still, it is sonata roses and the cooing of doves:
Your country is the hope on her lips
Like the sun on a chilly day.
It is your country that sings its own requiem, your country
When even its victories felt cold as defeat.
It is your country and the nun of hope in your broken cities,
Your country, a candle
Besieged with barbed wire.
It is your country, even when happiness was outlawed.
And still, it is the princess of your heart:
It is your sonata, even when life was a hollow drum in an empty city.
It is the tenderness that penetrates when you have lost the way
Back to your homeland,
The sweetness of Baghdad's jasmine and the sadness
Of its river banks.
It is your country and the burning of your home. Your country
Even when its hopes are desert wastes, like the passage
From Heet to Arat.
It is the country you grieved, the grindstone of your fear
And all your losses.
The country that weighed you with longing, despair, yearning and love,
Your country, where the honey of tomorrow ripens
in the bitterness of today,

Where your insides sing out your sonata.
Your country of secret gardens,
Where hope grows in hiding, like a black lily.
Your country is rising from the ashes of your heart:
It is your country, oh fool: princess of your dreams and your sonata,
Last song left standing in Baghdad,
Tender and filled with love.
The sails of its tomorrow are ripped and torn, but... it is smiling.

Baghdad
August 2004

Ali Abdulameer
translated by Soheil Najm

Oh Humanity

Oh humanity
I am your grateful son.
Every man my father's age
Is my father.
Every woman my mother's age
Is my mother.
All these little ones
Are my children,
And this dog
Sitting beside me
Is my friend.
Oh humanity,
Oh my family,
I am your grateful son.

Ali Al-Bazaz

translated by Soheil Najm

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Book titles are translated from Arabic.

Ali Abdulamir Born in Babel 1955. Published books: *Two Hands Referring to the Idea of Pain* (Baghdad 1993), *Take the Songs as a Praise for Your Absence* (Beirut 1996), *Chapters in Contemporary Music*.

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Adil Abdullah Born in Baghdad 1955. Published book: *The Museum of Nothingness* (Baghdad).

Ra'ad Abdulqadir Died in 2003. Published books: *Let the Nightingale Wonder* (Baghdad 1996); *A Hawk, a Sun Over His Head* (Baghdad 2002).

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Ali Al-Bazaz Born in Nasiria 1958. Published books: *A Candle Only Hides the Sun* (Holland), *The Waiter of My Dreams* (Holland).

Mahmud Al-Braikan Born in Basra, in 1931. Though known for refraining from publishing his work, Mahmud Al-Braikan is one of the pioneering Arab poets in the twentieth century. His poetic vision is strikingly unique in the Arab literary scene. He taught Arabic at the Teachers' Training Institution in Basra. In 2002 he was stabbed to death inside his house in a crime that was never resolved.

Salam Dawai Born in Baghdad 1970. Published book: *That Bitter Rain* (Baghdad 1998).

Adam Hatem (pen name for Saadun Hatem) was born in southern Iraq approximately in the mid-fifties. He left Iraq around the beginning of the year 1976 and ended up in Lebanon, where he worked in Palestinian journalism and published most of his writings. He died and was buried in Lebanon in 1993. "That is My Life" is taken from his only collection of poems, entitled *No One*, published posthumously by Korras, Beirut, 1996.

Lateef Helmet Born in Kirkuk 1947. Published books: *Allah and Our Small City*, *The Braids of That Girl Are My Tent Summer and Winter*, *The Good Word Is a Rose*.

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Haider Al-Kabi Born in Basra 1954. Published book: *Bombardment* (Damascus 1998).

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Abdul-Kareem Kasid: Born in Basra 1947. Published books: *The Bags* (Beirut 1975), *Knocking at the Doors of Childhood, Picnic of Pain*.

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Reem Kais Kubba An Iraqi woman poet born in Baghdad, 1967. Published books: *Seagulls Committing Flying* (Baghdad 1991), *Celebrating Wasted Time* (Baghdad 1999), *I Close My Wings and Steal Time for Writing* (Cairo 1999).

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Jamal Mustafa Born in Basra. Published books: *Unreasonable Rain on the Romantic Hunchback with his Flute Piercing the Breeze*, and *The Black Box*.

Soheil Najim Born in Baghdad in 1956. Published books: *Deflowering the Phrase* (Beirut 1994), *I Am Your Carpenter Oh Light* (Damascus 2002). Translator of the *Gospel According to Jesus Christ*

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Rasmieah Meheibis Zair An Iraqi woman poet born in Diwania.

A Letter from Poland, October 4, 1952

Dearest Tekla, my only sister,

The war has been over for so long but still we suffer the leavings of war: We have tables but no food, pain and no medicine, strong metal beds but no straw to sleep on.

Each day I wait for night to free me from the longing but it only brings me dreams: our dead mother crying about the wash, blaming me for the dresses I can't get clean. I hold them above the tub but haven't the strength to lower them into the water.

Sometimes, I see her standing in the doorway looking east toward the autumn forest where snow already falls. Perhaps if you could come back to Poland and travel back to the village with me, maybe we could find the grave where they killed her and Genja.

Someone there must know where they are buried. Maybe then mother would stop coming to me.

If you could come in the spring perhaps, you could bring me a bolt of blue cloth, blue with little white flowers. You know the kind we wore the year before the war. A new dress for summer would be so nice.

Your loving sister, Sophia

John Guzłowski

In Krakow

Because the rain was there,
quiet as a question
that has to be asked
beneath the volume
of more sacred words,
I took off my shirt,
held both my arms out
past the window and
let the cold, dark water,
from the four a. m. sky
run down to my shoulders.
I will remember this
somewhere in the future,
not through a related light,
nor through some dog-eared smell
like the twenty loaves
of baking bread diffusing
themselves through the streets,
but maybe, I hope,
because I will be happy
and alone again, seeing
not so much this city,
medieval and perfect,
built with more stone than brick,
but myself wanting
to touch just one thing
at the dispense of all
thoughts, and from absence
of all thoughts, return to them
realizing that what happened
was, though rare, still possible.

James Davis May

Holding Her

Nights in the darkroom, I hoarded
my daughter's gestures,
the way she straddled a picnic bench
or lifted one hand as if to stroke
silk, the softest feathers.
It was her last year at home.
I'd worked to capture everything,
labeled the boxes of negatives—
camping, prom dress, Christmas.

Stirring prints beneath an amber light,
I waited for my girl's face to surface,
faint at first on the soaked paper,
pale as a night-blooming flower.
Time, which to a photographer
is both tool and the thing transcended,
worked against me too. She would go.
Even in that sealed room,
I felt the season turn.

Sharon Fein

Through the Lens, October

After a day of torch-bright groves,
sidewalks ankle-deep in fallen leaves,
I walk into a gallery in Stowe,
find the town offered in black and white:
light pearlying the limbs of maples;
lawns printed gunmetal gray;
framed roses, unobtrusive in a charcoal hue.
So much reduced to so little.

Everyone needs black and white,
a friend observed decades ago,
so we can get at the bones of things.
I had a darkroom then—
tables hammered together by a lover,
a borrowed enlarger. Late at night,
I stood before the line of trays,
lifting prints with wooden tongs,

trying to transform the lush and complicated
into something manageable, something pure.
How black thrilled me where it pooled
in unlit planes and creases.
True, absolute black. And the white
of exposed paper—a snow field waiting.

But mornings now, I feel my age
and want to be warmed by raw, noisy crimson,
all those greens, jumbled and unframed.
I carry a digital camera. Inside it,
encoded in ones and zeroes, Stowe.
Just a blaze of golden light.
The way we get ready for winter.

Sharon Fein

Lobby Stone

Rose was the color of the stone:
I stepped onto the polished tile,
a tossed marble, a numb and squared
rock doing the work of civil-
ization. Yes, I stepped onto
my day's quarry as if onto
a lost and cooling star: I found
purchase, the sun's birth no longer
figment of imagination: I said,
I turned to the sun as if I
would flower: I rose in my limbs
to the rose of being: let me
call it privilege, whether I
walk the stars or the earth: flower,
fruit, branch, thorn: rose was the color
of the stone: I stepped, foot to fire.

Melissa Peters

Strawberries

Whose brown hand chose this fruit,
sized to fit between
thumb and finger, gently,
secreted close to the mounded earth,
beneath layer of serrated green, the
swollen bud-end of a plain
white flower turned
blood-red in the heat, the accumulated
color of bending over
and over below a ripe sun?
And what is the reward, the dizzy
rush of standing upright at the end
of the row, at the end of the day,
a respite, a lull, of letting muscle
and tendon go slack,
while I reach willingly, freely,
into a clean white bowl, to choose
one plump polished berry with its
finely dimpled skin, heady with
the essence of leisure, a sweet surfeit
on the tongue, juice on the chin,
time to savor it?

Brigit Truex

Ode to Letterpress

build white space with long silver nothings.
each word, brick by brick.
occasional swirl of ornamental surprise.
reliable magic of vowels.
b or d? or p?
the zen yoga tai chi sex
of typecase rhythm.
memorizing the homes of 26 friends.
tying up the set type
a solid rectangular gift
to yourself. dark stain of love
spread on rollers. magic wand
cranked over stiff paper.
intimate apparel of pages spread to dry.
ritual cleansing in a deep white sink.
lingering eyelash of a comma.

Jim Daniels

On Ether

Inside Royal Albert Hall, six giant trees lower from the sky, like brooding deities. Intermission. I am supposed to ignore this, exit through one of 48 doors, let my shoes walk me to the restroom, let the coins in my pocket jingle me to the nearest kiwi sorbet. Simply forget Bizet's Carmen for now—the blood she drew from a co-worker in a cat fight, the fine gypsy body that soothed throbs from watching soldiers, as if she were magnetic north. Intermission. The massive crucifix overseeing the Spanish kingdom circa 1853 has been dismantled, the tables suggesting barracks carried away. Replaced by these trees. Which float down, elegant in their bareness, massive, spinning ever so slowly as if testing thermals. The orchestra has muted its 63 voices. The actors have unzipped their faces. Even the stage itself, an elongated tear that turns back on itself, reposes. I have left the seat I paid twenty-two pounds for and settled into a better seat across the aisle. Intermission. A seat where I can watch this cabal of twisted branches descend, the pause, then hover a few feet above earth, like landing spaceships. What does it mean, this lowering of the heavens, this haunting? How can I explain the inwardness that suffuses the stage? One can taste the unsung tremolo, a lightness. But wait, one tree now touches down, and stage hands gather to anchor it. Then a second tree, then all of them. Stupid earthly trunks, opera, history, convention. I who was floating have touched down too. Let the trees rise, let all of us rise.

Lance Larsen

Voice

Reading Spanish to myself, I taste my tutor's voice again, a lift, a certain Santiago darkness. As if my words

were chunks of bread dipped in steaming *maté*, then swallowed whole. No, more intimate than that.

Have you ever watched a peasant mother wet a crust of bread by mouth then pass it to her hungry child?

Like that. *La bruja*, children called my tutor, *witch*. Meaning she was widowed and 39, meaning her white

zigzag of hair proved Satan still kissed his brides.

Shy and gringo, I kissed no one, and felt lost

tonguing words and mouthing air to get my accent right.

She'd laugh, then read headlines, making a doleful stew

of car wrecks, scripture from the falling price of eggs.

At night, it wasn't thieves she feared, or another *golpe*,

which killed her aunt, but haunting spirits. That's why she threw open her cracked windows. New air, stray cats—

these wove spells around her sleep. Thirty years:

I wander a paragraph and that voice from the other side

of sleep and summer tries my grammar. Reads me the way God reads his lost ones, without lips or eyes.

Lance Larsen

The Milk of the Mountain Goats

from *Cantiga de Santa María No. 52*
by Alfonso X, *El Sabio*

Wild beasts obey Saint Mary so adored
The Spotless One, Mother of Our Lord

I

Listen to the Glorious One's wondrous act.
The church at Montserrat bearing Her name
lies at a mountain's foot. Evenings, down came
a flock of mountain goats. They stood before
the church's door, and waited meekly for
the monks to milk them. This I have for fact.

Wild beasts obey Saint Mary so adored,
The Spotless One, Mother of Our Lord.

II

Four years and more, they were wont to slake
their thirst at Her behest, until a foolish
novice stole and ate a kid. At Her wish,
the bounty ceased. The monks, to no avail,
their robes flailing, pursued the goats. This tale
draws pilgrim throngs. It's true, make no mistake.

Wild beasts obey Saint Mary so adored,
The Spotless One, Mother of Our Lord.

Chris Waters

Sky Market

It seemed a sky
free of commercials,
blue and cloudless.
But he could sense,
swimming in all directions,
waves of banded frequency,
like hungry carp
fighting for food pellets
in a tiny pool
at the Botanical Garden.
With his rifle raised,
he shot to break
their pitching rhythm.
The dog ran out
to gather worry-free guarantees
and limited-time offers.
For dinner he'd eat
an employee discount
and wash it down with a bottle
of celebrity voice-overs.
If he awoke before dawn,
still hungry,
there'd be enough
for buy-one-get-one-free leftovers.

John Randall

Taq Kasra

Where the army marches, prices go up.
The simplest letters home turn into poems.
A nimbus of significance surrounds
common gestures, even births and deaths. In time,
the novelty and attraction will wear,
and the sordidness expand like landfills
through endless stinking days. But we all know
history will retain what interests us
while fear and revulsion seldom linger.
Recruiters will promise and young men want
their proving range. So my city displays
bronzes that no one completely believes
yet none of us quite disdains. Flags still move us,
though wholly dependent on chance and wind.

M. A. Schaffner

How to Make Plum Dumplings

Pluck them
purple under dusky coats,
polish against thigh,
take a bite—

Ah. Now hold
the stoneware bowl
swollen with gems
to your breast,

sit on the porch,
inhale the bluing-
to-indigo sky,
invite

twilight to your table,
lap spilling over
with ovals. With one
arced flick,

liberate the pit,
(but leave the skin),
heal again whole.
Center in dough,

fold corners,
massage between palms
until seamless, smooth.
Drop into blue

enameled pot, flame hot,
flesh yielding, skin
bleeding its night shade
crimson to aubergine—

breathe in steam.
When risen, tender,
slip from water,
christen

in crumb and butter,
lover, in cinnamon sugar
and a lick
of cream.

Ronda Broach

Reunion

It felt like life flashing by—the heavy heads of summer wheat taller than us, them going soft brown in drought. They whispered secrets at my shoulders, told me of months spent in darkness, the force of light and heat. We flew into that late-June field, my cousin and me, him at the helm of the four-wheeler, me grabbing tight his waist as he sped us across blades. Flat there, smooth and even, I quit screaming. What I said to no one was, “Wow. How lovely.” Even over the motor, my cousin heard. He turned, took some pressure off the throttle to slow and say, “You like this.” Not a question. But to his back I answered, “Yes.”

Then at the field’s end, the cold camp spot with its black fire ring, a bench set to face the Tallulah River where it turned from the bridge and ran away between a deep cleft valley. I wanted to stop there, to hide behind the wheat’s tall scrim and touch our every memory, watching the river flow while time held the wheat just as it was, while time held us for a spell in rare and changeless arms. But it didn’t.

Bill turned the thing around and drove us back across the field, and I rode along knowing time never does let us stand still. And if that’s how it has to be, then what I wanted was to keep riding behind my cousin, holding my own hands above his new scar while he drove us over every hay field in the county. I wanted grass to rush by high as our heads, to have it tickle my ears, to get crickets on my shins, to be at peace while the motor revved,

and to have my cousin turn to me and say, “You like this.” Looking over his broad shoulder, I wanted to see a wide and easy way open before the both of us, to drive down it unafraid of all we face, as family and alone. To hold tight forever that dear one, answering him “Yes” in my calm and purest voice.

Heather Leigh Johnson

Old Man and Nurse

My father is dying
slowly and with much glee
always pleased to see me
though he can't tell who I am.
He writes the weather
each day on small scraps
of paper he tucks into his jeans
and when I arrive he unfolds
what time will bring—
on Monday, clear skies,
on Tuesday, *wrinkles*
and *headstorms*, more
of same till week's end:
beware. He watches TV
six hours one day
waiting to see a commercial
in which a girl he likes
drinks juice. Her pigtails
coiled, her fat cheeks sweet,
she is the me he remembers
but doesn't know I am.
There's my girl he says
when she appears. *There*
she is I say as I pull the plug.
He will think the set
is broken and when I return
to fit the prongs into their holes
oh what he will make of me,
so clever, fixer of TV's, opener
of jelly packets he tries to spread
whole on toast, bringer of bottles
of Pepsi and pain pills, not his girl

but someone equally nice,
someone whose name escapes him
now as I spread salve on his shingles,
as I fluff the pillow where he will
lay his head, his puff of white
hair, thick and greased. Not
his girl. I kiss his sunken face
and know whoever we may be
he has loved us both, that girl and me.

Melissa Crowe

Love's Lexicon

I spy my father in his seventy-third year,
pausing on his daily walk through the forest
to gaze upward at a patch of light in the sky,
arms held aloft as though worshipping a silent muse.
I should have known, peering down this tunnel
of dark pine & cedar toward the clearing where he stood,
that he was being called, that he would soon go.
But I approach as any son might, hoping
for a few more good years—
stand next to his slightly stooped figure,
massive arms still strong, pulling me closer,
looking me in the eye, saying
do you know how loved you are? And I do,
but cannot bear it, heart filled beyond
what such a small sack can contain.
Listen instead to his story: how he walks
pausing here and there to listen,
how certain brothers & sisters, long dead,
visit—assuring him there is another road
just ahead, that they will be waiting.

Sometimes the years seem too many,
sometimes too few. But just now,
this moment fills a space that could
only be called *infinity*, lasts a time
that could only be named *eternity*—
love's lexicon imprinting the heart
with language only grief can bear,
only joy pronounce.

Dane Cervine

The Night My Father Died

I didn't think that he would really die.
It was like the Halloween when I was ten,
and dressed up as a clown, and, loaded down
with candy corn and Hershey bars and five dollars
all in dimes, took the shortcut I had heard about
past the sawed-off tree on Williams Way
and saw numbers going down instead of up
and ran and ran and ran and I was lost.
I saw his skin turn yellow, watched flat blue lines
worm their way across black screens. But his will
had been so strong, he'd been so much his own law,
I half-believed he'd sit up on the bed,
open the back door of a light blue Chevrolet
and say *It's dark out there, get in, I'll drive you home.*

Carl Auerbach

The Wayward Marl

said Beatrice to Benedick

Standing here between the flowers and the upturned earth
I have the time to listen to our youthful foolishness
in stereo in memory: you, the once and future bachelor,
my rants of barbed wire words that kept all men at bay,
and when our wits crossed blades, oh how the language sang!
I said, *Not till God make men of some other mettle than earth*
would I be husbanded. And here you, *piece of valiant dust*,
lie, to return from whence you came, and make more brave the ground
by ashes left behind. The digger-men rest on their shovels,
not impatient, as the dew still wets the grass and weeps
in through the calfskin of my shoes. I have come to pay respects,
to eat my words as though they were of clouds and not of clods,
to *make an account of life* to you, *my wayward marl*, my clay
and limestone calcified for forty years of marriage, shortened
this spring as the rains come down and make the greenery anew.
Next year the vinesmen will not know you wait here when they come
to lay down plants and stick the soil with arches whose curves imply
the hope of terraces of grapes to come. The full-blooded red,
the warrior spirit of wine, the undercut that comes as aftertaste,
these are the tales that I will tell of these untasted grapes,
for marl makes possible the golden slope of vintages.
To the seedlings' warp and weft, I will recall our romance,
the children, pains borne, the everydays we celebrated.
I will die thirsty—the rough scratch of grape leaf against my cheek
as soft as the whiskers you put by to woo me—and never know
again the sweet drunkenness of you.

Mary Alexandra Agner

Votive at an Open Window

Rived cloud flies from wood to wood
the wind in antiphony from hill to hill
witness the crossings and the uncrossings
the scissors of day and night
the turning and returning of winter
and of consciousness and of blank being
you at the center where the shadows swing east
the earth slung 'round the sun the hurtling sun
the circles of planets the courses of galaxies.

Hold fast to the sill in the speed of it all
it is the stillness we pray to
the pure nothing we can't imagine
and to which everything returns
the dun birds alighting in thorns
their claws intersecting under wine-colored stems
the rabbit leaping triads in snow
a fathom apart the length of a man
the pines in the wind saying *I saying I*.

Light a candle for yourself my friend
soon to become God again.

Jeff O'Brien

Pythagoras's Flowering Heart

The calculations by which he arrived
at theorems for the fragrance of sunlight
are vanished now. If only they'd survived,
we'd better understand the deep delight
he must have taken from dawn's rose perfume,
the luminescent orchids of midday,
the way slow violets of late evening bloom
before the darkness seals their glow away.
But just the notion that the air can breathe,
while gold rays flower and make love to stone,
reveals a fevered ardor, one that seethes
with lust for leaf and dust, for bark and bone.
Spring mornings at the pond, he must have known
seduction by first shimmer. Sunlight's moan.

Lee Stolinmsky

yes I say outspread

To drink in all this green:
the long lawns stretching
before one, liquid, languid; flanks
of women turning in their beds, blue
dreams and the green whisper
like a questioning caress.
First sun, an idle tickle,
lazes along the elongated
shadowed lawns and yes, I say
outspread, opening my
chartreuse soft
shade-spreading grass
to you and drinking,
slaking until
satisfied by green.
Oh Summer, strike your gong
and clamor. Let the curtain part!

Kathleen Spivack

CONTRIBUTORS

Kelli Russell Agodon is the author of two books of poems, *Small Knots* and *Geography*, winner of the Floating Bridge Press Chapbook Award. She lives by the sea in Washington State.

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Kathleen Spivak is author of *The Break-Up Variations*, *The Beds We Lie In*, *The Honeymoon*, *Swimmer in the Spreading Dawn*, *The Jane Poems* and *Flying Inland*. She teaches in French universities and also teaches an Advanced Writing Workshop in Boston and Paris.

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Chris Waters has published poetry and prose in French and English in the U.S., Canada, France, Australia and Senegal. "The Milk of the Mountain Goats" is from his adaptation of 26 animal-miracle *cantigas* written in Galician by the 13th-century Spanish king Alfonso X, a collection titled "The Bestiary of Alfonso The Wise."

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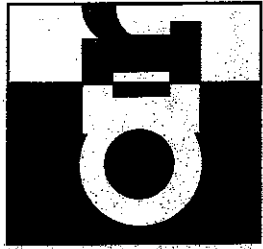
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