

My house is cloudy

My house is cloudy.
The whole earth is cloudy too.

The wind—desolate, broken, and drunk—
roars through the pass
lays waste to the world,
and to my senses too.

Piper, you whom your melody's charm
has steered you far from this road,
where are you?

My house is cloudy,
and the clouds are on the verge of rain.
I dream of the bright days I let drift and vanish.
I face the sun, the open sea,
but the world now lies in ruins from the wind
and the piper, ever-playing his song,
makes his own path in this cloud-afflicted world.

Nima Yushij
translated by Sholeh Wolpé

I Did Not Expect

I did not expect to come face to face
with this absolute snow.

I did not expect to come face to face
with this absolute love.

These sleeping birds on the glazed tiles
portend this pure love will melt
in that pure snow.

If only you knew
how I set fire to the vine.
On that Friday I understood
there wasn't even time
to deny that absolute love.

Through a lifetime I have seen
many scarred ashtrays belonging to men now dead,
been witness to so many desolate days,
that I need no one to tell me how it is.

At times I witnessed the life of a matchstick flame
outlast my friends' lives.

At times I watched someone in search of an address in the rain,
someone who, as soon as I showed the way,
suddenly burst into flames and turned to ashes.

How I have consoled everyone
that this street shall end,
and how they have consoled me
that at the end of this street
a basket of grapes waits for me.

I entrust this absolute love
to the pages of the *Divan* of Hafiz.

Until when?

I do not know.

Until what hour?

I cannot tell.

Ahmad Reza Ahmadi

translated by Sholeh Wolpé and Ahmad Karimi Hakkak

For the New Year

Come, let's scatter seeds
and harvest fields of flowers.
We'll rip the heavens' ceiling open wide
and draw a new design up in the sky.

Throw sugar on the fire—
We'll make the winds that turn the world
blow sweeter with desire.
Pour spirit into body,
red wine into the cup,
add the essence of the rose,
stir well—drink up!

When the armies of despair rise up
thirsty for our blood,
We'll strike them down in the name of love
and leave them in the mud.

If you would have a home in heaven, come—
Come drink with me.
This barrel's dregs flow out
to the pools of paradise.

Your own hands hold the instrument, so play—
Play a good song well.
We'll sing a song to love, and dance
with flying arms and pounding feet and heads bowed in trance.

This critic brags that he has brains;
that one wears his tongue in an idle braid.
Let all these judgments at the feet
of the one true Judge be laid.

Wise words and happy song
have no value in this town.
Come, Hafiz, let's go—
may a better home be found.

Hafiz
translated by Zara Houshmand

Untitled

1

Look how they have watered the trees
so that instead of fruit they bear pigeon eggs;
how they have swept the streets
so that they are empty of people;
how they have told me
that if I wrote four more poems
you would come—but now say
that I must return and rendezvous with you
at the start my poems.

But I will not erase these verses
for one day or night you will come
and it is even possible that you may crack out of an egg
of a Simourgh-like bird, a bird
who in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*
began as *Si Mourgh*—thirty birds—
to finally become one: The One.
But we—
we were one who became many.

2

I miss you.
Until I'm happy again
tree branches shall grow in your shape;
a small bird whose name I do not know
shall pour your name on my book;
the sun, shape of a copper butterfly,
shall flutter about my voice;
and I know that silence is silent because of me
but I miss you and I push away
my words so I can see you.

Many poets
grow old without a song or a poem,
searching for their other halves.

Many poets
leaf through pages of darkness to the end,
searching for a patch of light.

Many poets
who have no pens, pen poems
with the fingertips of the wind,
iridescent as bubbles upon water.

How leaf and pen are wasted in forests
that shade birds—wordless, pen-less birds
who orate with songs while
half lit by light, half hidden in shade.

Shams Langroodi
translated by Sholeh Wolpé
and Ahmad Karimi Hakkak

A List of Names

*In the Evin prison in Tehran, each evening they
announce the names of those to be executed later in
the night. Prisoners keep their hopes alive by planting
the seeds of their brooms in their cells.*

A list of names
is waiting
for the night's turn.
I have come
as far as the light's last ray.
The bashful sun, ashamed,
melts away
at the bitterness of my glare.

The names are announced.
My chest splits open.

A storm of sounds
carries your bright name
to its vortex.
The rain that pounds on the doors,
the earth, whose cracks are healing,
and an invisible lily
that grows from my chest
are the absolute presence
of your name.

Time blazes.
I am tossed to the far side
of the world.
Years, stone-hard and quicksilver,
tear open memories,
but still
I use the spell of your name
to get through dreams,
through closed eyelids,
to spend my ration of hope.

With your name
I pass through walls,
through locked doors,
through the sound of the typewriter,
the copy machine and the computer,
through foreign languages,
through newspapers,
through the news.
I pass through picture frames
and in a pool of brilliant water
I see your image
in the shape of
a Nicaraguan man,
a Chilean woman,
a Jewish-Arab child.

Roads merge,
languages are blood kin,
and wide-split chests
are landscapes of astounding resemblance.

The sun
begins to shine again.
A woman, pierced with lilies,
passes through the walls
in search of you.

*

The seeds of the broom
that you planted
in your moldy prison
have made a green meadow
on the salt flat.

Partow Nooriala
translated by Zara Houshmand

Parts of a Pedestrian in a Tunnel

The sky was like an inverted beach
with blazing sand.
Punctured shoulders
kept alive the fear
that drilled itself into our bones.
Was it morning or evening?
We don't remember.
Were we awake or asleep?
We don't remember.
It was raining fire and sand,
still,
we don't remember anything.
We don't like
the police coming to our door.
+++
We were four, all of us insane,
inside cubic nightmares,
and what we wished for
was for the sun to rise at midnight....
We pulled the bloodied sun
from the throats of roosters
and took to the streets.
In the streets they gave us plastic flowers
and we foolishly fell in love
and betrayed with sincerity.
This is how
our story became known to all.
+++
We desired love
without its false trimmings,
a world without guns.
On dark walls
we painted red roses.
Passersby laughed at us.
Laughed at us, the passersby.
All we did
was look at them.
Roads
had knotted themselves around the city.

And Tehran...
never imagined it would become this red.
Its red sky and red earth
rumbled and quaked like thunder,
attacked our stairway with fury.

But tomorrow was always a new day!
A day where the earth became pregnant
with new parts of my classmates' dismembered arms.
A day of twenty new lies I could slurp up in our history class—
and our school believed it could look for shelter
during the geography lesson,
and God...
God always yawned.

Mandana Zandian
translated by Sholeh Wolpé

Feminist

I am a "woe-man"
And the man
Puts out
His cigarette of passion
Into my whole

I am a "woe-man"
And the man plants his heritage in me

I am a "woe-man"
And the man stands on my chest
And breathes deeply

I am a "woe-man"
And my name's Maryam

And I'm green
So so ever green

Things grow out of me

Love a baby a family
And a graveyard of serene doubts
And a blue blue silence

We are women
And the "you" in us
Could make such a fuss
For getting on the bus
That drives on the trail of Rights
And seizes the moments of might
In a siege of fright

We are women
And the "T" in you
Must see it through
The dark dark history tunnels
The light of injustice
That sounds so pathetic
So so tragic

We are women
we long haired
Short brained low intellect high heeled

We who share the "you" in "T"
And scratch out the "T" in "you"

We are the bad ones
In every good
The women without a double "you"

Oh,
I am a woman!

Maryam Ala Amjadi

Criticizing the Veil

She's wearing a veil, but still makes your heart melt with a glance;
God forbid that you should see her unveiled.

The city's Sheik scorns unveiling
because all his deceits are consummated under the veil.

Since what appears in the Quran doesn't suit him,
he'll dig into the words and interpret them hypocritically.

One should never ask him for a reason
because a wolf will say anything to fool a lamb.

Somebody posed a riddle, and I couldn't answer it,
but anybody who could is doing me a favor:

Aside from Iranians, what other creatures
would choose their mates without seeing them?

Why don't the masses of veiled women
rip the veils off their faces?

A woman's veiled face creates an obstruction to wisdom;
where's the hand of truth that should open this door?

Yes, the veil allows this group of Mufti
to rule like bosses over half of our people.

The Sheik is stealthy like a cat in his piety;
no, the cat learns his tricks from the Sheik.

If the cat's paw gets a little wet,
he'll shake it wildly till it dries

Sheik the Persian word, *faghih*, signifies one of the highest-ranking clergy.

Mufti a member of the ruling clergy who issues *fatwas*, or religious verdicts.

holding his wet paw away from himself
like the city's Sheik pretending to avoid impurity.

Anyone who's unaware of such a character flaw would think
the paw's wetness is torturing the cat.

However, when his insatiable eye spies a fish in the pond,
he'll jump headlong into the water up to his tail.

Don't be suspicious of me if I call you "Ms.";
Watch out for the one who calls you "sister."

I'm in awe of how well the Sheik mastered the secrets of hypnotism,
since he can transform a waking person into a sleeper.

Women on the *Hajj* all run around unveiled;
tell the Sheik to attack and wreck *that* house.

No one can catch the full moon's reflection in water
no matter how hard one tries.

You too should preserve your modesty while allowing your face to shine;
let the deceitful Sheik remain howling like a dog.

We can't eradicate veils gradually
unless a revolution gives us a hand

by tearing away the night's dark clouds
and illuminating streets and alleys with suns and moons.

Iraj Mirza
translated by William Wolak
and Mahmood Karimi-Hakkak

Hajj women on pilgrimage in Mecca do not wear a veil, since at that
time all pilgrims are considered as brothers and sisters, close relations
before whom a woman is not required to be veiled.

suns and moons in Persian the words are both feminine nouns and are
frequently used as metaphors for a woman's beautiful face.

I See the Sea...

I see the sea shrink
then shrink again
until it fits in the palm of my hand.

And I
hear the sound of flying fish,
the dead sailors' cough, the burning whales,
the shivering mermaids, the horses and the wind,
the sea's white curls,
and the drowned strangers who have forgotten their human voice.

I see
the sea
 shrink
 then shrink even more
the oars' hopeless beats,
the foam-circled boats,
the frozen shadows,
the salt-encrusted stores,
the disheveled hopeless left on the shore....
Oh what strange mystery,
the sea!

I see your purple fingers
in the beakers of the dead,
and the shoulders of the wind
drenched with your mouth's sweat,
and I see your bitter joy.

I see
the sea
shrink,
then shrink again,
and I
float farther
from the invisible shore.

To where is this familiar boat,
whose oars' solemn sound mingles
with the rain, carrying us?

Shams Langroodi
translated by Sholeh Wolpé

Return to the Wellspring

*The world's territory, invisible,
and the invisible world is the fortress of breath.*

The crimson wind flings
dead locusts
to the cave-dwellers' empty
meal-place, caves hidden
behind skyscrapers.

People have self-deceived
and scammed their made-up gods
so much that all they want sometimes
is to be truthful
in absolute godless
solitude.

Which suckling infant
can vouch that milk tastes better in Sicily
or that in Baghdad docile
cows visit children
in their dreams to recount
true stories?
Silent sandstorms rain
on earth,
living aqueducts breathe
under busy thoroughfares.

I have drunk
from a bottomless jug
and walked on streets
where slave girls in white
rallied for future's freedom
I have seen slave boys running
on all fours and future-greedy
imposters who recorded
babble on the bark of date-palms.

Believe me
when the sand storm subsides
we will become little fish again
who in search of subterranean waters
will sink in the depths of sand.

Jila Mossaed

Religion

My father says: *If she's so concerned, she can hire someone to say them for her after she's gone. It's all the same to God.* He can't believe in the merit of children reciting prayers for him after death, or in an afterlife gotten to on tiptoe, across the razored filament of truth. Still, he tried to bury her quickly, in the white shroud prescribed by the religion, and he upheld the Turkish coffee and the halvah, which we rolled between our palms days after her death, waiting, then ate it, the oily paste lining and closing our throats at her graveside, where the showy gladiolus and tea and dates marked us out again against the green, clean-shaven American lawn, and my father's cousin chanted the *fatiheh* in his place just before the backhoe tamped soil into the hole and the hired men folded sod over her grave.

Amy Motlagh

God's Poem

Satan, O god of evil! You are indeed a poet.
Often have I envied your poetic flair.
You, who have created countless poems, are the true bard,
I, who have suffered many regrets, am the one oblivious.

"Love" and "gamble" are not God's poems, they are yours.
Such poetry is irresistible to all—all except
God, who would have neither, for no one remains
pious in "love" and in "gamble."

"Woman" with all her allure—your poetry!
"Woman" in her passionate creation—your verse!
"Wine" and "songs" are not to God's taste:
He forbade one to drink, and the other to hear.

You impart joy into kisses and glances,
you infuse delight into drunkenness and sin.
To those not enticed by God's afterlife Heaven,
you have flung open the gates to an earthly paradise.

For all your poems God made only one,
but it's His masterpiece, His manifest miracle.
God's poem is *misery*—heart-filling,
satisfying sadness, and no more.

I know the poems you composed and He did not
—unless He penned others in someone else's name—
yet, if they place you and Him side by side,
which would you yourself prefer, tell me which?

Nader Naderpour
translated by Sholeh Wolpé

Rebellious God

If I were God, I'd call on the angels one night
to release the round sun into the darkness's furnace,
angrily command the world garden servants
to prune the yellow leaf moon from the night's branch.

At midnight among the curtains of my divine palace,
I'd upturn the world with the frenzy of my furious fingers,
and with my hands, tired of their thousand-year stillness,
I'd stuff the mountains into the seas' open mouths.

I'd unbind the feet of a thousand fevered stars,
scatter fire's blood through the forests' mute veins,
rend the curtains of smoke so that in the wind's roar
fire's daughter can throw herself drunk into the forest's arms.

I'd blow into the night's magic reed
until the rivers rise from their beds like thirsty serpents
who weary of a lifetime of sliding on a damp chest
pour into the dim marsh of the night sky.

Sweetly I'd call on the winds to release
the flower perfume boats on the rivers of night.
I'd open the graves so that myriad wandering souls
could once again seek life in the confines of bodies.

If I were God, I'd call on the angels one night
to boil the water of eternal life in Hell's cauldron,
and with a burning torch chase out the virtuous herd
that grazes in the green pastures of an unchaste heaven.

Tired of being a prude, I'd seek Satan's bed at midnight
and find refuge in the declivity of breaking laws.
I'd happily exchange the golden crown of divinity
for the dark, aching embrace of a sin.

Forugh Farrokhzad
translated by Sholeh Wolpé

The Plumber's Poem

That's my hair that's wrapped around your snake, Ben Yakov.
It's filthy, but it's mine.
Seventy-nine dollars and fifty cents.
A plumber earns more than a writer does,
and we both laugh.
I don't mind, write the check.

My name? Iran,
I mumble.
Your accent undresses Israel.
Our eyes meet, apologize,
just you and I
for history
for all the politicians' lies
and for the real things too.
The unspeakable things.

Are you happy? I ask,
but really I'm asking
What do you miss?
(Green almonds and the smell of kerosene;
the language of my dreams.)
But you say Yes, and anyway,
where else could I go?

Zara Houshmand

Morning Star

all these stars but

only one star to hook on the black
of her skirt

and it rips that skirt wide open

it rips the skirt of the night wide
open

and then

little by little the red

and then little by

little red-orange

and then little

by little orange-yellow

and then little

by little the yellow

milk

and when night passes out to neurosis,

the colors erupt

and it pushes itself up and up and down and up,

night, with all its nervous
energy

here, right here

in front of us

but

when the first slit of sunlight slants across us

any star, any single star can

be the morning

one

Ziba Karbassi

translated by Stephen Watts
and the author

Caravan

It's late, Galia!

Don't sing a love story in my ear!

And don't ask for passionate ghazals!

It's late, Galia, the caravan has started to move

Our love for each other?... Yes,

That's a story, too,

But as long as our people grope for the night's bread

There's no time for stories or romance

Blooming on the twilight of your birthday

Your glow lights twenty candles

Yet the same night a thousand girls your age

Sleep hungry and naked on the ground

While the dance and tease of your fingers

Move beautifully over sitar strings

A thousand weaver girls

With bloody, infected fingers

Die slowly, the soul unraveling from the body

In the tight cage of the workshop

For less pay than you would toss to a beggar's lap

And this seven-color carpet crushed beneath your dance

Has earned its prism from the blood of human beings

In the warp and weft of each line and figure: a thousand sufferings

In the design of each flower and leaf: a thousand shames

Here a thousand innocent hopes have slept buried in earth

And the wind has swept a thousand young fires

Here the hands of a thousand blameless children

The ruined eyes of a thousand sick girls....

It's late, Galia!
This is no time for kisses and love poems
Everything has the color of fire and blood
It's the revolution of voices and hands
It's the revolution of life

Don't smile in my face!
From now on your gaze
Is forbidden—so is wine and love!
And the drumming of a happy heart!

My friends are bound in wet dark
Dungeons at the Shah's palace
In fevered exile at Khark Island
At each edge and corner of this black hell

It's early, Galia!
Don't sing a love story in my ear!
And don't ask for songs of passion
It's early, Galia! The caravan has not arrived....

The same day the pearled arms of dawn
Swing a scimitar to tear the night's curtain,
The day the sun
Flickers through each crack in the wall
And the cheeks of war-tired friends
Find again the colors of laughter
I'll be back on that day
To songs and ghazals and kisses
To the fertile, heart-thawing spring
And to you

my love

Tehran, 1952

H.E. Sayeh
translated by Mojdeh Marashi
and Chad Sweeney

kissing blues

men think when they kiss my lips only they can kiss em again
men think if they kissed em once only they can kiss em again
can't stand me smearing chapstick when i won't be kissing them

men treat me like my tongue should stay in my mouth
i said men want my tongue rooted to the roof of my mouth
but i stick it out behind their back when they leave the house

been pouring my love out of pitchers and filling everyone's cup
been a barmaid pouring love and filling every man's cup
but when i sit to pour me a glass the pitcher won't drip one drop

Solmaz Sharif

Can't Handle Me Blues

i offer you a whole bottle of cognac and you say you pass
i mean a whole bottle of Hennessy and you say oh no girl i think i'll pass
you don't even stay to swirl your finger on the lip of my glass
you must like watered down women to sit on your hand
say you must like bud light women to sweat in your hand
and baby this cognac woman can never fit in no can

Solmaz Sharif

Return from My Body's Black-and-Blue

Leeches, kindly leeches suck my blood
and the crane, heavy-handed crane
lifts my corpse up from the pit,
with my skull full of snowy days.

Leeches, kindly leeches
blacken my body
you return from my body blues
hitting your head against your hands!

Save your teardrops for me, love.
I have run head-on into myself, crashed into myself
and the road's searchlights have dumped me onto this lake's floor.
Look at how black I appear in your smoke-colored sunglasses!
And these women
look how they hide my breasts under their chadors.

Save your teardrops for me, love.
Why do you, so pale and fair, arrive so late?
And why has my son, so little
swelled so much inside me in the few months of my pregnancy?
And the leeches—kind leeches
Look how they suck my blood....

Sheida Mohammadi
translated by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak

Mulberries and Chador

She would spread her chador
under the mulberry tree, and gently
hit the branches with a long pole.

Sitting on the edge of her cotton chador
I thought my grandmother was a magician.
Giddy with joy I'd watch

the mulberries drift and dance
like fattened snowflakes
into my cupped receiving hands.

Harder, grandma, I would plead,
hit harder, and she'd laugh, and say,
"We can't hurt pregnant trees,"

and twirl her wand into its blizzard
of decades, oceans I've yet to travel
beyond the hem of her mulberry-studded dreams.

Farzaneh Milani

Hot Tea, a Warm Muffin

You have forgotten the simplest of things—
like our names,
what year it is,
or that you were once married to a man
you did not love,
but spent your life with anyway.

Some days you are a curious child,
others, an old woman ready to die.

And some days you are my grandmother,
who sits at the café
and asks if I'm cold,
if I've fallen in love
yet.

This is all that is left for you—
hot tea, a warm muffin,
and our familiar hands ready
to feed you the only sweetness left.

And somehow,
even though you can't tell me
how long we have been here for,
you can sit in this chair and say,
I am sitting in the greatest place of all.

Shida Ettad

The Circle

Form is what we give to everything
in which we need to believe.



God is a presence
who does not lend itself to forms.

Beliefs are the guarded flora
of the universe.



Fear is the blinding light
in which we hide God.

The Universe is a shifting form
feeding us illusions.



Illusions are nourished by want,
cultivated by fear.

Sholeh Wolpé

Of Your Uncles

for little Siavash

Not for the sake of the sun
but for the sake of a tiny rooftop shadow,
not for the sake of epics
but for the sake of a song
smaller than your hands.

Not for the sake of forests
or for the sea
but for a leaf,
for a drop
brighter than your eyes.

Not for the sake of walls
but for the sake of a fence,
not for the sake of the world
but for the sake of your home
and for your childish certainty
that each person is a world.
For the sake of my wish to be with you
even for a moment,
for your small hands in my big hands,
and my large lips
on you innocent cheeks.

For the sake of a dove inside a breeze
when you shriek with excitement,
for the sake of dew on a leaf
when you sleep,
for the sake of a smile
when you see me beside you.

For the sake of a ballad,
a story on the coldest night, on the darkest night,
for your dolls, not for the sake of big people,
for a cobblestone path that leads me to you,
not for the sake of distant highways.

For the sake of a drainpipe when it rains,
for the sake of hives and honey bees,
for a cloud's white proclamation in the big serene sky.
For your sake,
for the sake of everything small
and everything pure
they fell to the ground.
Remember them.
I speak of your uncles.
I speak of Morteza.

Ahmad Shamlu

Morteza Keyvan (1922-1954) was an Iranian poet, writer and journalist who was executed by the Shah's government a year after the U.S.-led coup in Iran against the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh.

5 Poems by Rumi

translated by

Coleman Barks

A New Idea

Every dawn we rise out of the east
and shine like grains in the light.

We thrash about between wet and dry,
being neither one nor the other.

We hear what the brass objects want,
Turn us into gold.

To help with that we rise up into the stars.
We become pieces of amber on a necklace.
Our patched robes change to elegant apparel.
The world's poison turns to sweetness in us.

We move to the center of the fighting,
this circle of bewildered lovers.
We give the sign.
We knock at the placeless door,
riding a horse of green air.

Soul becomes pure in the body,
purer, we move inside love and stand next to Shams,
our shoulders touching in the infinite house.

Shams Sufi mystic who was Rumi's teacher and friend. Rumi sometimes uses his name, which means "sun" in Arabic, as a symbol of divine light.

I Am Inside Your Thirst

Do not run away.
Run *inward*
as unripe grapes hurry toward their own sweetness.

Do not try to bite through this rope.
You are the bow. This is the bowstring.

You kick your hindlegs up,
thinking you are permanently through with work.
I have just put you out to pasture for the day.

I am deep inside your thirst and your hunger.
There is no escaping me.

That other wanting, that other rationality,
those are donkey's milk, or worse.
Do not drink them.

There is no security, except for what you feel among lovers.
Crawl in with those.

Remember the ababil birds, who picked up little stones
and dropped them from a great height onto invading elephants.

The love in your chest is like an ababil bird,
searching the ground, listening, then flying higher and higher.

The rose opens.
A cauldron begins to boil.
The sun heats up,
but you must wait a long time. Wait.

Shams put a taste of light inside patience.
The bat flies back to his cave.

Stay Light on Your Feet

Do you hear what the stringed instrument is saying?
I am long separated from a living body.

And this dry stick says, I was once part of a green branch.
Then a rider broke me off.

We are no different.
What we say is a caravan bell,
a cloud moving across.

Traveler, do not try to decide where to stop and live.
Whatever you are attracted to you weary of.

From being a sperm cell to a young man to an old man,
notice how you change.
Stay light on your feet and keep moving.

Speak any language, Turkish, or Greek, or Arabic,
but always speak love,
as wind rising off water tells about the river.
Follow my wake. Find a mirage that is real.

Learn from the moth what to do with fire.
The king has come into the city.
Why wander in ruins on the outskirts?

Take an oxwhip to your donkey.
Tenderness is not always appropriate.
Sometimes there must be sudden turning-aside.

Perfect Rest

Death is a wedding feast in eternity.
The secret of that is that God is one.

Sunlight comes in through the windows
and gets reflected all around the room.
Then the windows are shuttered and closed.

Individual grapes become one wine.
For someone who lives in the light of God
death is deep nourishment.

Do not judge those who are beyond judgment.
Do not speak of anything you have not experienced.
There is another light. Try to see by that.

The *Qutb* watches for you.
Allow him to see you.

Let your eyes fill with tears.
Let your eyes sleep, while you stay awake,
the perfect rest.

Be clear and thoughtful in sleep.
Interpret your dreams.

If you are not lucid,
you are just boiling and cooking unconsciously
in the love-stew of wanting-oneness all your life.

Qutb a spiritual master who mediates between the human and the divine.

Sun and Sky

Sit with lovers and choose their state.
Do not stay long with those who are not living in the heart.

There is one who shines inside the face,
whose hair grows with the world,
whose eyes recognize you,
whose body is all honey and milk,
who holds absolute beauty in an embrace,
full morning without a dawn,
essence without attributes,
living without grief,
twilight with no dark streaks in it.

How can this be?
Can the sun borrow light from the sky?
Can a rose smell like jasmine?

Be a fish in this ocean, speechless.
I will whisper the answer in your ear.
Do not tell anyone.
In Tabriz, the one named Shams.

IRAN FEATURE CONTRIBUTORS

Mana Agahi was born in 1973 in Bushehr, Iran. She lives in Sweden and is the author of three books of poems and several scholarly studies on modern Persian literature.

Ahmad Reza Ahmadi was born in 1940 in Kerman, Iran. He is the author of thirteen books of poetry.

Pegah Ahmadi was born in Tehran. She began writing poetry at the age of seven and published her first poem at the age of seventeen in the literary magazine *Takâpu*. She is the author of four books of poetry.

Maryam Ala Amjadi is an Iranian poet living in Pune, India. She is the author of *Me, I and Myself*. She was awarded the silver medal in the 14th National Persian Literary Olympiad, 2001, and an Honorary Fellowship in Creative Writing by the International Writers Program at the University of Iowa, 2008.

Ali Alizadeh was born in Iran in 1976 and migrated to Australia at fourteen. He received his PhD in professional writing from Deakin University, Melbourne. His books include the collection of poetry *Eyes in Times of War* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2006) and the novel *The New Angel* (Melbourne: Transit Lounge Publishing, 2008).

Reza Baraheni was born in Tabriz in 1935. He is a poet, critic and novelist who spent time in prison for his writing during the Shah's regime and in the early years of the Islamic Republic's government.

Coleman Barks was born in 1937 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. His translations of Rumi, including the bestselling *Essential Rumi* and *The Soul of Rumi*, have resulted in two appearances on Bill Moyers PBS specials and inclusion in the prestigious *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. They have sold over a million copies, making Rumi the most-read poet in the United States.

Kaveh Bassiri is an Iranian-American writer with an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, where he was the Editor of the 2006 issue of *Lumina*. He is co-curator of Shab-e She'r (Persian Poetry Night) at Bowery Poetry Club and Triptych Readings in the East Village. He recently won the *Bellingham Review's* 49th Parallel Award.

Simin Behbahani is a distinguished voice in Iranian literature. She is the author of numerous books of poetry and essays.

Mohsen Emadi was born in Sari, Iran, in 1976. He is the author of

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Shideh Etaat is a graduate student in the Professional Writing Program at University of Southern California. She lives in Los Angeles.

Forugh Farrokhzad was born in 1935 in Tehran. Arguably one of the most significant female Iranian poets of the twentieth century, hers was a poetry of protest and revelation of the innermost world of women, a taboo subject at the time. On February 14, 1967, she died in a car crash at the age of thirty two.

Hassan Fayyad is an alumnus of UCLA's film school and a former writer-director of documentary films for the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Arts. He has translated two collections of poems into Persian: *Freedom, Selected Poems of Octavio Paz*, and *Homesick Blues: Langston Hughes Selected Poems*.

Hafiz is Iran's most beloved, highly revered, and most frequently quoted lyric poet. He was born in Shiraz circa 1320 and died around 1390. The son of a merchant, Hafiz was well educated, married, and had a son. After his talent for poetry became apparent, Hafiz became the court poet for most of the rulers of Shiraz during his lifetime.

Zara Houshmand is an Iranian-American writer who lives in Austin, Texas. Her work includes poetry, theatre, virtual reality, literary translation, and editing the Mind & Life dialogues between the Dalai Lama and scientists. Her poetry has been published in both online and print literary journals. Her latest book is *A Mirror Garden* (Knopf, 2007), a memoir co-authored with Monir Farmanfarmaian.

Sheema Kalbasi is the founder and president of Reel Content, a film production and publishing company. She is the director or co-director of several literary projects including the Other Voices International. She has published two books of poetry and two poetry anthologies.

Ziba Karbassi was born in 1974 in Tabriz, Iran. She left Iran in 1989 and now lives in London and Paris. She has published five volumes of poetry in Persian, all outside Iran, and continues to write prolifically.

Persis Karim is the editor of *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora* (2006) and co-editor of *A World Between: Poems, Short Stories and Essays by Iranian-Americans* (1999). Published in numerous journals, she is the founder of the Association of Iranian American Writers and teaches

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Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak is currently a professor and the founding director of the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute Center for Persian Studies in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Maryland. Professor Karimi-Hakkak is the author of nineteen books and over one hundred major scholarly articles.

Mahmood Karimi-Hakkak is the artistic director of Mahak International Inc. His literary credits include five plays, two books of poetry, several translations from and into Persian, and numerous articles and interviews both in English and Persian. He is the Associate Professor of Creative Arts and Producer of Theatre at Siena College.

Siavash Kasraii was born in 1927, in Isfahan, Iran. He is the author of four collections of poems. He has composed many revolutionary poems, some of which have served as anthems for political parties.

Shams Langroodi was born in 1951 in Langrood, a coastal town on the Caspian Sea. In 1981 he was arrested as a political activist and served a six-month sentence.

Mojdeh Marashi is a San Francisco Bay Area writer, designer, and visual artist. Her translations of Sayeh (with Chad Sweeney) have appeared in *Crazyhorse*, *Indiana Review*, *Poetry International*, *Seattle Review*, *Subtropics*, and *Washington Square*.

Farzaneh Milani teaches Persian language and literature and women's studies at the University of Virginia and is the author of *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women*.

Iraj Mirza (Jalalu'l-Mamalek) was born in 1874 in Tabriz. Iraj's fluency in French and Russian and travels in Europe deepened his belief that Iran needed to modernize and that a crucial part of this process was the emancipation of women. Returning to Tehran near the end of his life, he died at the age of fifty two on March 14, 1926.

Melody Moezzi is an Iranian-American author, essayist, and attorney who writes about religion, public health, and politics and culture in Iran. She is author of *War on Error: Real Stories of American Muslims*, a commentator for NPR, a blogger at The Huffington Post, and founder of the activist group Hooping for Peace.

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Jila Mossaed was born in Iran in 1948 and has been living in Sweden since 1986. She is the author of eight volumes of poetry in Persian and three volumes of poetry in Swedish, as well as numerous political articles. She once declared—controversially—that Iranian literature has a “mustache,” referring to its domination by males.

Amy Motlagh currently lives in Egypt, where she is an assistant professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the American University in Cairo.

Granaz Moussavi, born in 1974 in Tehran, is an award-winning poet and filmmaker. Author of four books of poetry, she is currently completing her doctoral degree in “poetic cinema” in Australia.

Nader Naderpour was born on June 6, 1929, in Tehran, Iran. He was a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature and a 1993 recipient of the Human Rights Watch Organization’s Hellman-Hammett Grant (for writers whose works are banned in their own homelands). He died in exile in February 18, 2000.

Majid Naficy was born in Iran in 1952. After the 1979 revolution the new regime began to suppress the opposition, and Naficy’s first wife and brother were executed. He is the author of five collections of poetry as well as two books of essays.

Partow Nooriala was born in Tehran. She is the author of five books of poetry, a collection of critiques, and a collection of short stories.

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Yadollah Royai was born in Damqan, Iran, in 1931. He is one of the best-known poets of post-revolutionary Iran. Shortly after the 1979 revolution he emigrated to France, where he continued to write and publish.

Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), also known as Maulana, was born in present-day Afghanistan. The thirteen-century Persian lawyer-divine and Sufi is considered one of literature’s great mystical poets. His followers founded the Sufi Order of the Whirling Dervishes.

Kaveh Safa has taught courses in anthropology and Persian at the Universities of Virginia and Chicago.

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Roger Sedarat’s first poetry collection, *Dear Regime: Letters to the Islamic Republic*, won Ohio University Press’s Hollis Summers Prize. He teaches poetry and translation in the MFA Program at Queens College, City University of New York.

Ahmad Shamlu was born in 1925 in Tehran. A gifted poet and a follower of Nima Yushij, Iran’s first modernist poet, Shamlu went on to develop his own distinctive style. He published over twenty volumes of poetry, becoming one of the most revered literary figures in modern Iranian history.

Solmaz Sharif was born in Istanbul. She holds degrees from U.C. Berkeley, where she studied and taught with June Jordan’s Poetry for the People, and New York University, where she was a Goldwater Fellow. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Diagram*, and *Tehran Bureau*. She currently spends her time between Los Angeles and New York City.

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Steven Watts was born in London in 1952. He has published three books of poetry and edited several anthologies. He has translated contemporary Kurdish, Slovenian, and Persian poets, and compiled a bibliography of 20th century poetry in English translation, due to be published online.

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Sholeh Wolpé is the author of *Sin—Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad, The Scar Saloon, Rooftops of Tehran, and Shame* (a play in three acts). She is the associate editor of *Tablet & Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East* (Norton, 2010). She lives in Los Angeles.

Nima Yushij was born in 1897 in the village of Yush in Mazandaran. A believer in reflecting on deep-rooted problems in order to deal with them better, he was very influential in the evolution of modern poetry in Iran. He died in 1959.

Rasoul Younan was born in 1961 in Iran. He is the author of several collections of poetry, a novel, and a play.

Mandana Zandian was born on March 1972 in Isfahan, Iran. She is the author of four volumes of poetry. After graduating from medical school in 2000, she moved to Los Angeles, where she is currently living with her family.

Before There Were Barbies

our dolls had little-girl bodies,
even the taller ones supposed to be older
whose legs were longer, only that.

Some of them had real hair and glass eyes
that opened and closed. They wore
white anklets and leatherette Mary Janes.

We were wartime girls whose parents
turned gray and middle-aged in five long years.
We had no bikes, our shoes always hurt,

and our hems were turned down twice
before our mothers cut up our dresses
for doll clothes. Somehow

there was always a doll for a birthday
or Christmas, certain as a ration book
or a terrifying newsreel before a Saturday matinee.

While faraway children starved and the faraway
world blew up and fell apart,
our grandmothers knitted miniature sweaters.

Even now we cannot part
with our childhood dolls, loved so tenderly
within our years of being safe,

their glass eyes that saw nothing,
their perfect little bodies—sturdy, whole,
unassailable.

Lianne Spidel

Ghost Hours

1. *Spring Forward*

The government's at it again, tampering time.
We stagger behind, wishing Salvador Dali minutes
would lag instead of leap. April, the month of taxes
and poetry, trails us like an urchin, asking for thanks
while we are thanked by the government
with jet-lag and loss of easeful dark.
Do you really expect us to pump
the big-top minutes into this shell game
with lifespan, this unsought forward-swap?
And where do the authorities keep
my acrobat hour? My purse's emptiness
holds shadows and stars.

2. *Stashed*

Perhaps Congress has stashed the saved time
in a teak box inlaid with mother-of-pearl roses
and lined in dawn-like blue satin.
Or perhaps they use a big penny jar
shaped like a trumpeting elephant.
The lock in his triumphant, raised trunk.
Too many of us must have keys,
for every fall we find it looted
like the empty bank I once saw hung with a For Sale sign.
The silver-hinged vault lay open
for deposits of dust. Ghost hours
must have danced in that mouth at midnight.
I won't put my overtime
into anything so mawed
or keep my memories under its picked lock.

3. *Fall Back*

When skeletons dance
and red devil leaves seesaw,
the clock spins backwards. *Spring
forward, fall back*, I repeat to timepieces

whose hands I wring.

The powers-that-save have conjured
the phantom hour. It imps my night, keeps
afternoons whirring like hummingbirds.
I see now why we must hoard every spark
of light against night's snip-end and hold life
by the tail—the dark dot
of the question mark.

Rachel Dacus

Death by Chocolate

Hey, sweetie, I just wanted you to know
there'll be no razors, pills, or smacked-up cars
cause ever since you left me three weeks ago,
I've been killing myself with chocolate bars.
The problem is I'm liking it a lot;
the highs are great, so much better than drink,
and I'm feeling fantastic. I guess that I forgot
this stuff is more nutritious than people think.
My friends, of course, believe I've lost my mind,
and I can understand why they're uptight,
they feel my diet's a little bit confined,
but I'm convinced that things'll be all right.
As for your message, sorry, I've got my doubt,
I'm not so sure I want to "work things out."

William Baer

Consider the Rest

His pickled lungs and liver sealed in jars,
A golden replica upon his face:
I can't forget that king, whose pious vizier
Stashed him with spoils to buy eternal life.

* * *

The undertaker dressed Aunt Jill in velvet.
Her nails were varnished red; tight-curved, her locks.
And just before they sealed the satin lid,
Her daughter dropped Jill's charge cards in the box.

Joan Kimball

Pantomime

A producer took my pantom to lunch.
He's on his own now and needs a free meal—
at least that's what he says—and he talks a lot—
he's got this compulsion to repeat himself.

He's on his own now so he needs a free meal
and someone to listen while he complains
about his compulsion to repeat himself.
It's hard for him to meet girls when all he wants

is someone to listen while he complains
about being the river that runs beneath the river.
It's hard to meet girls when all they want
is a pretty boy gazing in a pool

where the river that runs beneath the river
suddenly surfaces. He wants to say,
I'm more than a pretty boy gazing in a pool.
I'm the shadow that refuses to lie down

and suddenly surfaces in what you say.
I'm the reverses you suffer looking in a mirror,
the shadow (there I go again) that refuses to lie down,
the echo when you have nothing to say.

You suffer, don't you, when you look in the mirror
and there's nothing to say, not even an echo.
That's what he said he said—and he talks a lot—
the producer who took my pantom to lunch.

Lee Rossi

At Uncle Sam's Bar

In Uncle Sam's, the beer is cheap
And served in mugs as cold as ice.
A few, tonight, might help me sleep.

I find some change by digging deep
And tip my waitress to make nice.
In Uncle Sam's, the beer is cheap.

A weekly paycheck lets me keep
My barstool in this paradise.
One more, I think, might let me sleep.

I've got the cash, so what the bleep.
Don't tread on me, that's my advice.
In Uncle Sam's, the beer is cheap.

You'd think to run a tab so steep,
I owned the bar, though, once or twice,
When I have needed most to sleep,

I've counted empty mugs like sheep
And found a thousand won't suffice.
In Uncle Sam's, they sell beer cheap
But buying it won't let you sleep.

Chris Bullard

July 20, 1969

Like a birth he emerges head first from the module,
takes in the soft gray skull of moon, tiny earth bobbing
and hopelessly lost, wild black ocean of nothing.

Moondust spouts in little clouds around his feet
as he toddles and stumbles, learning to walk
for the second time.

Applause in his headphones,
shirtsleeved men weeping and cheering,
their empty coffee cups, their endless rows

of buttons, dials, knowing now that everything
is possible: he basks in glassy stippled light,
jumps up nearly twice his height.

Tom Chandler

Craft Fair

I went to the craftsmen's fair, setting my tent
with a sign: "Anything with Words." An old
man stopped by, seeing only the raw letters
hanging from hooks around me. "What do you
do with all those letters?" he asked. "I craft them
into whatever I want," I said. "Anyone can
do that," he responded. "Just you watch," I said.
What he didn't see was my coal fire & anvil.
I used my tongs to pick out the letters I had heating
in the fire. While they were still glowing,
I brought them to the anvil and used my 100-kg
hammer to fashion out a noun. "That's impressive,"
said the man. "But who's going to pay for a noun?"
"I'm not done yet," I responded & stuck that word
into a bucket of water to cool off, steam rising
like pyrotechnics. I then took up some other letters
& strung them on my loom like thread. By this time
more than just the old man were watching—
a few kids had taken seats in my tent. I wove
& wove, pushing that wooden shuttle back & forth
until I had a poem—the people didn't read it,
but were fascinated by how the threads
went together. "What else can you do?"
someone shouted. "I can do a lot," I answered
& took out a ball of words, put it on a pottery
wheel, switched it on, & started molding those
words like clay. The audience clapped as I let
those words spin in my hands, creating a perfect
symmetry. The tent was full, crowd on edge—
many people had no seats. I decided to bring out
the big guns—a large chunk of words, & I pulled
the cord to start my chainsaw, lifted it up, &
commenced carving. Adjectives & adverbs fell
off to the wayside as I cut & sliced the words away.
It started to form into something. The tent was silent
except for the roar of my saw. All eyes on
what I was making. It had glasses & was sitting
at a desk. Two hands. Two legs. A head & a pen.

Timothy Kercher

The Culling

"You can tell they're senior by the thickness of their coats," my father whispered as three males and three females emerged from the stand of woods. They shuffled protectively surrounding two fawn petite interns probably just hired that Spring. One of the males turned, warm steam billowing from his toothy grin, as he waved a small card at us.

"Staunton Melich, Senior Account Coordinator," he shouted, and indeed he seemed the most senior of this herd of senior account coordinators.

Driving home that evening, Staunton's card tucked in the driver's side visor, I asked my father how it felt pulling the trigger.

"At all times," he said, "you must exercise authority." A systems analyst scurried into the path of our hurtling radials. "You exercise your authority, or you risk the authority going soft," he said steadily accelerating into the bump.

"This is what separates us from the primal."

Gregory Hischak

Mathematics and the Girl

Her father stands at her bedroom door with a slide rule, graph paper, and a box of pencil leads. She sighs and looks down at her long fingers that wander the roll top desk at night. The blue moons of her nails move in the dark, wooden drawers finding torn slips of verse, smooth sea stones, a hand-painted card from China. She takes the card and runs her fingers across its rough surface feeling the thick, dried oils, imagining the touch of the delicate brush. She prefers, she thinks, the brush to the lead, the brittle lead necessary for correct, conclusive, arithmetic results. Now she dips her finger into a pool of spilled ink that runs into the spiraling contours of her flesh, transgressing perfect angles and degrees and certainties. Her father sighs. She thinks the lines of blue form a destiny in the skin, reaching deep into the smallest of the small, into the places that the digits of Euclid cannot sense, like the lilac and light that wake her at her desk this April morning.

Judith Kennedy Mazis

Malinche

*After God we owe this conquest
of New Spain to Doña Marina.*

—Hernan Cortés

Doña Marina, Malinche, Malinchista,
La Chingada, Madre de Mexico.
Lady, consort, traitor, whore,
mother of Mexico. Names like idols
carved into an Aztec breastplate.

Beneath that shield,
the rabbit heart of a child,
a princess sold to Mayan slavers
by her mother.
The heart of a handmaiden
laboring like an ox,
passed from one master
to another, given to Cortés.
The cunning heart of a raven
as she soars
where even dreams
could not take her,
perches close enough to Cortés
to feel his body heat.
The two of them
like right and left wings,
as she translates
Nahuatl to Mayan to Spanish,
negotiates,
saves the lives of Indians
by the thousands.
The fierce heart
of a jaguar
protecting the first-born Mexican,
her son,
Don Martín Cortés.

The heart of a woman
standing on the rim
of the world,
her child on her hip,
watching the ship
that bears Cortés back to Spain
and his wife,
as it shrinks from quetzal
to dove, to hummingbird,
to butterfly, to nothing.

Gayle Eleanor

Whether

*...things standing shall fall
but the moving ever shall stay*
—Basavanna

Whether I watch or not, the two wood ducks
will crease the flat satin of the river,
heads turning together
to banks still brown with winter.

Whether or not I am there, snow vapor
will fill the air—no one needs
my footprints among the reeds
where black birds weave order.

I'm of less interest than the hawk's shadow.
Probabilities swirl and become *now*
whether I stay or go,

whether or not my brain, itself mostly water,
presumes in this manner
to freeze-frame the river.

Elizabeth Poreba

Eating Meat

We must kill the rooster today,
his legs having failed, his white
feathered body too heavy for himself.
So I search his black eye for acceptance,
for a premonition which, like memory,
is obscured and shapeless. His eye,
dark against the white, a small coal
near the red of wattle and comb,
reflects my ignorance, spins out
all the questions of what to eat,
here where earth offers death as our
intimate companion, and I, my tall
boots firm on the floor of the coop,
am filled with the day when I first
held him, a fluff, in my hand—a past
reflected now in the knife that brings
a red river from his neck, hurls me
up against my own survival while
the hayfield stretches away, eerily green
this December, because we in these bodies
still wage war against ourselves.

Yet there is something to love here—
red against green, white dipped
in the steam of hot water. There is
my husband with the knife—the man
with an appetite for chicken, who builds
himself into my life with hard work
and muscles I don't possess. There is
the windy sparkle of a snow shower,
its resemblance to stars, its bridge
to all winters, and in the stillness,
the last cry of the rooster, a heaviness
that wings across the yard, as he, full
to the brim, overflows into everything.

Susie Patlove

The Great Lake

I row my boat beyond the river's mouth,
its creaking gunwales echoing from a cliff,
where an old spruce clings in dawn's half-light,
its gnarled roots like fingers folded in sorrow.

The thousand-foot dock, loaded with railroad cars
and iron ore, levitates over the lake,
a red-headed beauty dreaming beside the long
ship. Shoreline aspen glow like filaments.

Restlessly the water washes, rustling gravel
words along the shore, hiding drowned
sailors beneath its waves. The hull-held ore
glides away in silence to be transformed
by fire in the east, a blast furnace far

from grassy hillsides shining now with dew,
this just-born world struggling to its feet,
while I bend and pull these burnished oars,
handled by so many, words reaching
down again to stir this deep lake.

Daniel Thomas

CONTRIBUTORS

William Baer's fourth collection, "*Bocage*" and *Other Sonnets*, recently won the X.J. Kennedy Poetry Prize.

B.J. Best's first book is *State Sonnets*, published by sunnysideout. *Birds of Wisconsin* is forthcoming from New Rivers Press in 2010.

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Larry Ollivier has a poetry book, *The Voice of All Things Singing* (Bellowing Ark, 1997), and a chapbook, *Albert Einstein in Las Vegas*.

Alvin Pang of Singapore was the Featured Poet of *Atlanta Review's* ASIA Issue. His books include *Testing the Silence* and *City of Rain*.

Susie Patlove has appeared on NPR's *The Writer's Almanac*. Her chapbook *Quickening* was published by Slate Roof Press in 2007.

Elizabeth Poreba appears in *Commonweal*, *Poetry East*, *Snowy Egret*, *Ancient Paths*, and the anthology *This Full Green Hour* (Sonopo Press).

Lee Rossi appears in *Chelsea*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, *The Sun*, *Nimrod*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poetry East*, and *Poet Lore*.

Richard Schiffman, a commentator for NPR, appears in *New York Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Pedestal*, and *Poetry East*.

Faith Shearin's first book, *The Owl Question*, won the May Swenson Award. Her second, *The Empty House*, was published in 2008.

Marcus Smith lives in London and appears in *Ambit*, *Acumen*, *Envoi*, *Orbis*, *Pleiades*, *Salmagundi*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

Lianne Spidel's chapbook is *Chrome* (Finishing Line Press, 2006). She appears in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Oracle*, *Cloudbank*, and *Xanadu*.

Daniel Thomas appears in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Nimrod*, and *Bitter Oleander* and is forthcoming in *Southern Poetry Review*.

Charles Harper Webb's latest book is *Shadow Ball* (U. of Pittsburg Press, 2009). He directs Creative Writing at Cal. State U. Long Beach.

Diana Woodcock Selected for *Best New Poets 2008*, her chapbooks are *Mandala* (Foothills) and *Travels of a Gwai Lo* (Toadlily Press).

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