

## In the Underground Train

Now, when there is no one beside me  
no lover, friend, acquaintance  
the inhabitants of my world  
left behind somewhere  
and  
beside me  
none to hear  
my secret, suppressed sigh  
none to be startled, no one here

don't stifle it now, unfetter the imagination  
and let the fancy roam  
such things that thrill you when you think of them  
possibilities that would make life such fun to live—  
such things that you are not permitted  
let your brain think of them.  
This is not a crime.  
This is not a sin.  
And even if it is, this is all done secretly.

*Fahmida Riaz*  
*translated from Urdu*  
*by Waqas Khwaja*

## Poem

The city that I left behind,  
How does it fare, that city of mine?  
How are my bitterest enemies, say,  
And all the dearest friends of mine?

Does the wrangling set meet every night?  
Or each at sundown goes to sleep?  
How do the friends all spend their time?  
How does each fiery member keep?

The taverns even then were shut,  
And open wide the prison doors.  
What does the Mufti now approve?  
What does the season signify?

The honor of the tavern's lost.  
The measure of the cup is lost.  
Then, even the gall of wine incensed,  
How is the poison suffered now?

Though near no more, at least there is  
A feeling, hope, a memory.  
In the waters of separation see  
How a straw holds up assuringly.

From land to land I've traveled much,  
Have wept, suffered from sleeplessness;  
What shall I tell you now my friends,  
Of the wonders of the world and such?

They say homes are now prison cells  
And prison cells, chambers of death;  
All this is done in God's fair name,  
O God, what rank abuse is this?

The dusk of torment does not pass,  
Night's darkness too, it does not cease;  
What is this star that thus afflicts  
My dispossessed compatriots?

And you who come from my homeland,  
You did not even care to ask,  
The poet that was cast away,  
That stricken soul, how is he, say?

*Ahmad Faraz  
translated from Urdu  
by Waqas Khwaja*

### Can't wake up

I am in the middle of a horrible nightmare  
On the sterile land of annihilation  
I have forgotten my name  
And am unable to identify myself  
I am lying in a huge trash house  
A woman beside me  
She is my mother, sister, or wife  
I cannot say  
Our necks  
Are in a noose  
The garbage of the entire city  
Is piled around us  
In the trash house, stray dogs  
Prowl around in packs  
Looking for bones and pieces of bread  
Suddenly they see us  
Thinking us dead, they leap toward us  
Attack us  
With their sharp, bloody paws  
But the sleep is so deep  
The spell of the comfortable bed so complete  
That I can't open my eyes  
Can't wake up

*Javed Shaheen  
translated from Urdu  
by Waqas Khwaja*

### I asked the night

I asked the night  
"Do you not have  
the dream pilfered from my home?  
The dream of my neighbor's children?  
The dreams of daughters waiting for marriage in their parents' home?  
All dreams that have wandered from the city?  
Do you not have them?"

The night looked into my eyes and said  
"The theft of so many dreams  
and no alarm!  
The slaughter of so many dreams  
and not a clue!  
So many bodies disposed in the river  
and the water not discolored!  
How is this possible  
without your complicity  
without your participation?"

Then she held out the moon  
in her lap toward me and said  
"Place your hand on its head  
and swear you are sinless  
that you are innocent"—  
and I stared at her dumbstruck, just stared.

*Javed Shaheen  
translated from Urdu  
by Waqas Khwaja*

## The missing season

I have not stolen  
the season that is missing  
the accusation against me is absurd  
it is useless to search my home  
I am under suspicion  
only because the footprints of joblessness  
go right up to my door  
birds know  
who the thief is  
but they are afraid to testify  
how scraps and tatters of the missing season's dress  
came to be found on trees  
the branches have not the courage to say  
so what if the wind's hands have been severed  
it has written my plea  
on its breast  
the silence of four corners  
has wrapped my complaints in its shawl  
no one plants wild flowers  
their seeds already lie in the earth  
no one starts brooks and streams  
they bubble up by themselves  
nature is not unaware of my innocence  
the missing season is not so cruel  
that I summon it for testimony  
and it will not appear  
to save me from the false accusation

*Javed Shaheen*  
*translated from Urdu*  
*by Waqas Khwaja*

## Live Long

Live long, but with your head bent  
Don't confront that man in uniform  
who is searching the half-torn pockets of that dirty-looking boy  
after slapping him a couple of times  
It looks like the pockets are stuffed  
but what is found there?  
A few dry rinds, and torn, unpaid gas and electricity bills  
If today you challenge the uniformed idiot  
Tomorrow it could very well be your turn  
After all, this is the only path to your house!

Live long, but in silence  
Indeed the incident may have happened in your sight  
Incidents happen every day  
Your evidence, you believe, could cause the killer to be convicted  
and hanged?  
More likely, the lawyer in black coat will establish in his cross-  
examination  
that you are a scoundrel and your mother a whore  
In full court!  
And the judge instead will punish you for perjury  
And the killer?  
When he is released, he'll get hold of a hit man  
who'll come looking for you  
And you can't leave your own neighborhood  
If you were capable of leaving it, would you live in such a neighborhood  
this dump of filth and litter?

Live long, but with your ears folded  
Go to the mosque, it is God's house  
but don't open your mouth there  
Do you want the Mullah who labels everyone that speaks up  
an apostate, faithless  
to brand you an unbeliever  
No doubt you have read the Holy Qur'an  
but never dream of citing from it to contest the Mullah's Fatwa

He'll pay you back with such interest  
reciting some tradition of his own sect and denomination  
that your breath will dry up within you  
You could be stoned to death right now if he calls you an infidel  
Or, as an alternative  
at least your house could be burnt down

Live long, but with eyes closed  
Don't stare at the new mansions and new cars of your leaders  
The difference between the rulers and ruled is quite the natural thing  
If the ruler were like the ruled, he would be one of the ruled, not a ruler  
No, no, don't think that he became a leader only because of your vote  
Any of his serfs or workers could have cast that vote for him  
on your behalf  
Consider, though, that if he did not get your muddy lane paved  
you have just one pair of shoes  
You are thinking  
"I can always wash my shoes after walking through the mud"  
but you forget  
even the water supply to your neighborhood could be cut

Live long  
but just like this  
just as others wish you to live  
and, after all, to live is better than to die  
this is how your mind reasons, doesn't it?

*Mushtaq Soofi*  
*translated from Punjabi*  
*by Waqas Khwaja*

## He can make us cry

No one notices ten-year-old Billu  
But sometimes he can make us cry  
Just for one rupee

A rupee can't buy anything anymore  
And it is being phased out from paper money  
To copper coins

A seven-billion-dollar expense on a new Space Station somewhere  
The splurge on atomic and non-atomic weapons  
Foreign debt  
Loan forgiveness documents on private accounts in banks  
And a thousand such customs and practices  
Have utterly ruined the rupee  
And even beggars at traffic signals  
Expect at least twice as much in alms

What does Billu receive  
For serving burgers, sandwiches, samosas, and tea  
We have never cared to ask  
Our own problems are legion  
We need several thousand just to get a young man  
To study an American book on Business Management  
And there are many other miscellaneous expenses  
That keep us striving and busy

Usually, we take our evening tea  
At places where a single cup costs around forty rupees  
But our mid-morning tea at the hotel where Billu works  
Costs only four

Perhaps Billu's master has forbidden him  
Or, maybe, this is what his parents have taught him  
Whatever the reason

When he refuses to accept the one rupee change  
Which we, out of the goodness of our heart,  
Wish to leave him as a tip  
From the five we paid for the bill  
It leaves us quite in tears

*Tanweer Anjum  
translated from Urdu  
by Waqas Khwaja*

## Interview

"How are you?"

"Do you miss your home in the camp here?"

"Yes, but its roof had collapsed."

"You must be missing your playmates?"

"Yes, but they are all dead."

"Do you wish to go back to your school?"

"Yes, but it was burnt down altogether."

"Would you take me to see your father?"

"Yes, but it is only his arm that is buried in his grave."

"Is your mother with you?"

"Yes, she is always with me in my dreams."

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"I am grown up. I can make a bomb."

*Tanweer Anjum  
translated from Urdu  
by the poet*

## Snipers in Karachi

Death is everywhere.

Also here at a jerry-built stall  
selling vegetables four days old (the trucks  
too frightened to deliver).

From under onion sacks it scuttles  
steel-plated, shiny; its tail  
slung over, vindictive as a gun.

Panic. Hard-boiled traders  
abandon shops. Screaming women pull high  
all their draperies, exposing knee, thigh.  
In which sack does it silently wait?  
Iron pipes, stones, pound, smash  
until it must lie  
minced into dust.

Not so.

The next day on a bus  
a dozen passengers crumple up.  
On curbs, in doorways, drinking tea...  
death is everywhere.  
Scuttling through traffic it rides  
a shiny steel-plated roar. The gun  
now unslung—and lethal as a sting.

*Maki Kureishi*

## names and spaces

If it weren't for my body  
I wouldn't know what I'm feeling.

Perhaps, I wouldn't even be one person.

The only continuity I'd have  
is that of a palmful of dust  
linked invisibly in the breeze:

Each moment I'd invent myself anew  
from another point in memory.

Every particle of my bitterness,  
for instance, would fall on its face  
in a different geography—  
on car windows, in people's eyes,  
get entangled in lovers' hair  
as they walk hand in hand on the beach.

I'd taste like salt on their lips.

Each mote of my sadness  
would settle in a different place  
and call out to each other  
before being lifted again—  
revealing vast spaces in between.

*Bilal Tanweer*

## Generation after Generation

Holding torches, raising slogans  
strewn on the open leaves of their narratives  
incomplete, eccentric characters  
with dreams  
nurturing in their volcanic bosoms  
stride ahead  
and  
the narrative continues.

That nascent word  
on a blank leaf  
written in a drab moment  
with a dull drop of blood  
by forebears,  
yours and mine,  
disrupts the continuity of the narrative.

That same word  
is the first inscription of the ambiguity  
that pervades the space between you and I  
it is the scripture of woe  
the tale of sorrow  
that we create  
day after day  
night after night.

That nascent word  
on a blank leaf  
written by forebears  
yours and mine  
with a dull drop of blood  
in a drab moment,  
that very word,  
pause and think  
is the legacy of generations  
yours and mine  
that are to come.

*Yasmin Hameed*  
*translated from Urdu by Iffat Sayeed*

## new millenium

yeah yeah  
spill it out  
yeah spill it out  
spill your guts out on the floor  
this is the age of liberty  
the age of free experiment  
so turn your clothes inside out  
strip  
show it all  
in this age of  
averages and statistics  
that measures up  
your lives for you

so now then let's uncover  
everything we know  
about you and me  
all the way unpeeled  
until we come back  
to the fig leaf  
& let's take that off too  
let's overlap the sexes  
uncover a whole new  
continent of love

but in pinning clever words  
to the drawing board  
taking up platitudes  
exhausting them  
ad infinitum

don't miss the decoy  
because it's your target—

we could be one with the apes too  
exhibiting our instincts

but there may be things  
intangible  
some place where nature  
puts her finger to her lips  
beckoning  
elusive

*Ilona Yusuf*

## jalebi

i

oil fizzes at the edges  
of the glistening vat  
crusted with blackened  
accumulations

the *ustad* drizzles his  
muslin-full of orange batter  
slick-skilled doodles  
burned into his head  
by years of practice

boiling they rise to the surface  
a maze of elaborately linked spirals

lifted in one effortless movement  
and laid in a neighbouring vat  
of fragrant viscous syrup  
then piled into a complex of  
crisp brittle  
sugary lace  
curlicues with  
empty centres  
bordered by  
disconnected edges  
and abrupt  
dead ends

this going around and around  
 drawing invisible webs  
 widening circles  
 around the eye of truth

a once deliberate evasion  
 of the clear and simple  
 eye of clarity  
 that's become reflex

like a dog coiled around himself  
 in unremitting motion  
 spins to catch  
 the tip of his tail

and draws an avid crowd

*Ilona Yusuf*

## Etude

A late monsoon  
 the city cloaked in cloud  
 a measured rain—  
 vertical, oblique

then unruly  
 whispering  
 words long unheard  
 barely understood—

false words  
 of comfort  
 And thunder, slow  
 orchestral

with its offstage fictions  
 while in between houses  
 a bird tests the flood  
 in rash curved flight

revealing a glint of silver  
 Visited by a child's  
 sudden sense of touch  
 I watch the runnels

of muddy water  
 on the paneled roof  
 of a freshly painted  
 white pickup van

or some bedraggled  
 leaves stranded  
 on a moving car  
 Three boys travel

in formation on their bikes  
 A credulity reigns  
 Quickened, I inch out  
 Darkly journeying

*Adrian Husain*

## Desert Tiger

Striding behind bars  
a yellow, cunningly  
striped mass  
the feted insignia of

a predator

we wonder at  
but barely coddle  
or seek to possess

He has traveled  
with us in time  
is here—now—  
lithe, a furred luxury

amber eyes  
aglow with a touch of  
impatience  
and a beleaguered

sense of ancestry  
Something tells us  
let us not look at him  
let him stay where he is

fretful creature within  
The cage, open  
will only ignite those two suns  
get those vast thews working—

and those maws—  
set a sea in motion  
give tongue to terror  
make the world burn

*Adrian Husain*

## Snapshot of my father

He sits on an office chair in the porch  
outside his room (the door to which is open)  
on what is obviously a summer evening  
in the last year of his life.

One can tell the season because he wears  
a thin cotton dress, and chappels.

In the gloom his whiteness is startling.

He is utterly relaxed.

In the upper-left corner, a tiny  
bit of topaz sky is visible, as if  
the photographer worked it in on purpose  
to indicate how much time was left.

Giving him the lie, a hint of a smile  
on father's lips. It seems to say,

time, my son, is not measured in days.

Between the falling of this shutter and that  
a million heartbeats remain.

*Taufiq Rafat*

## Uncle

*In memoriam F.M. Kamal of the Mohmand*

i

Through mud-house lanes, dimly lit  
Like sensation half comprehended  
The whole village follows you this spring night.

Swathed in blankets like ancients, muttering a language  
Your children do not understand  
Relatives and retainers carry you into the night

To where you wished, where you willed.  
On the railway platform  
A pause for final prayers

Division of charity—  
Money wads, Quran copies, soap cakes—  
Then to the ground of grass and rock.

From the city on the sea  
Your sons have brought you to where  
No name marks any grave.

From now on, where you were let down  
And next to which kin  
Only the tribe's memory will tell.

ii

Threescore years or more ago  
You left the language of rock and stone  
In search of the sea in all of us.

At that age, not knowing  
Where what was going to happen  
How who would come your way.

Threescore or more years later  
You are brought back to where you began  
Leaving an absence in many places.

Now your kinsmen's hands  
Aflutter like moths  
Adapt the soil to final form.

*Mohamad Athar Tahir*

## Father's Farewell

*for Ashhar*

Maternal grandparents too frail to walk  
Are there sitting in the car  
And uncles and aunts and gagging cousins  
From both sides crowd to see you off east.

Other families, even father's uncle  
In his starched, wing turban  
Gathered three decades ago  
In a black-and-white goodbye to see me off west.

As I hug and center you  
In God's protection  
I am your grandfather  
Sending me off.

*Mohamad Athar Tahir*

## Response to Rumi

Unlike the flute that mourns  
Its parting from the reed  
The silent pen atones  
For it with a song freed

In the flow of ink tones  
That with care, held breath lead  
To any shape that hones  
Our one eternal need.

*Mohamad Athar Tahir*

## Pen and Ink

Cut from the tree, the branch that had become lifeless  
returned to life when shaped into a pen.  
The ink that was blacker than the black night,  
illuminated the whole dark world.

*Basir Sultan Kazmi*  
*translated from Urdu*  
*by the poet and Simon Fletcher*

## Peacock in the forest

Once a female peacock said to her mate:  
"You've elegance, a sweet voice, amazing steps and colours,  
but alas, you are confined to this wilderness.  
Whenever I see you, absorbed in dancing,  
an immense desire disturbs me.  
Would that every living eye could see you!  
Would that others could benefit from your art!"

The peacock replied: "O, my co-dancer, my soul mate,  
you don't know how much I have travelled,  
how many forests I have traversed, how many places.  
Countless eyes have seen my art, my skill.  
My sole aim was to seek applause from those present.  
In this way I conquered them.  
When in their eyes I'd see the spark of appreciation,  
my feathers would there and then grow wings.

Then as it happened, one day, during the dance,  
a piece of glass or a pebble cut me.  
So much for dancing, I could hardly walk!  
Gradually, I got estranged from the world.

After a while, one day, when I went to the arena,  
I saw a peacock, elegant and handsome,  
better than me and how different,  
enchanted the spectators with his art.  
I kept gazing at him for a long time.  
It seemed he was like me, but in my place.

Life's caravan does not halt;  
time's river never stops.  
Today it's me, tomorrow someone else,  
and someone else the day after tomorrow.  
Everyone has their time, their day in the sun.

Now, if ever I dance, it's for myself,  
or just for you, for you!"

*Basir Sultan Kazmi*  
*translated by the poet and Simon Fletcher*

## Quail

It is always the natural thing  
that binds us most firmly to love.  
Seeing a quail rise  
by our intrusion, alarmed,  
I am filled with a sense of wonder:  
it needs no miracle greater than this  
to transcend the prosaic.  
And when my oblivious friend  
points his gun at the bird,  
I cannot stay his arm; this too  
is consistent, for I am spun  
on the wheel of illogic  
that merges moon and sun.  
I do not hear the shot, nor the call  
of the beaters, exulting.  
Knee-deep among words,  
I can only see  
a startled shape take wind,  
then fold and fall.

*Taufiq Rafat*

## Thinking of Mohenjodaro

Thinking of Mohenjodaro  
Alexandria and Rome,  
I note how time curves  
back on itself  
Like an acrobat.

This year's harvest is late.  
The archaic sun  
has been playing  
like a poem  
on the farmers' nerves.

The ink dries slowly  
on the half-written page.  
Who will read this?  
Stranger, the crumbling fort  
you pass is your home.

*Taufiq Rafat*

## Abu Simbel

The electric flash  
Of the sun  
Denied access  
By these blocks of stone  
Yet these blocks of stone  
Inveigling somehow  
To draw from the hairy  
Neurons of that sun  
A single pin-strobe,  
A belly-crawl of light—  
Just once a year—  
To slither through  
The sweaty thongs  
And armpits of a million  
Pilgrims, till it finds  
And signs the shaded cheek  
Of the Great Ramses  
On his birthday. Then,  
Be gone! Crumbler of  
Stone, and come again  
Next year, like a penitent  
With your present of light  
To praise the builder  
As you have done for four millennia.

*Mehvash Amin*

## Tesseract

I am a cube deconstructed.  
Difficult to comprehend,  
I surrender  
To one-dimensional space.  
But do not underestimate me.  
Haul up my sides, and again  
I become the Ka'ba,  
The centre  
Of a cubist faith.

*Mehvash Amin*

## Primer

(The name *Al Qaida* means first textbook or primer.)

Ma	Ma	Li
Ra	ry	la
Ma	Ye	Li
Rah	su	la
ma	Je	La
an	su	Ila
Brah	Ma	ha
ma	sih	Alo
B	Iss	ha
rah	a	il
man	Je	Al
Ra	sus	lah
him	Chr	Lil
Brah	ist	lah
him	Chri	Li
Ib	stna	la
ra	Crish	Illa
him	ma	La
Ab	Krish	Illa
ra	na	ha
ham	Ra	il
Ab	dhay	Al
ram	Ram	lah
Ab	Si	Kal
ra	ta	ma
ham	Sat	Kal
rahm	Sat	i
Ma	guru	ma
ra	Sat	Kali
Mar	nam	ma
yam	Ram	Ma

*Waqas Khwaja*

## Pakistan Feature Contributors

**Moniza Alvi** was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and grew up in England. She has nine poetry collections, among them *Peacock Luggage* (Poetry Business Prize 1991), *The Country at My Shoulder* (1993), and *At the Time of Partition* (2013), a Poetry Book Society Choice. *Split World* includes poems from her first five collections. In 2002 she received the Cholmondeley Award for her poetry.

**Mehvash Amin** was editor of *Libas International* for 11 years and is currently editor-in-chief of *HELLO! Pakistan*. Her poetry appears in *Vallum*, *New International Poetics*, *Sugar Mule*, *The Missing Slate*, and *Tangerine in the Sun*. Her poem "Karachi" was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She is currently working on a novel.

**Tanveer Anjum** is an Urdu poet known for her prose poems. She has seven collections of poems, including a book of ghazals, *Sar-o-Barg-e-Aarzo*, and a bilingual book of selected poems, *Fireworks in a Windowpane*. With a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Texas, she teaches and translates international literature into Urdu.

**Nasreen Anjum Bhatti** is considered an imagist, but she also writes effective narrative poetry that plays with causality and sequence. She has poetry collections in Urdu and Punjabi, and edited *Apni Gwahi (Our Testimony)*, autobiographies by Indian and Pakistani women.

**Hassan Dars** (1968-2011) bled to death in a car accident, cutting short a promising career as a poet. His innovative style fused traditional and modern forms of poetry. Sheikh Ayaz, the most revered modern Sindhi poet, regarded him as foremost among the new generation of poets.

**Faiz Ahmad Faiz** (1911-1984), the most widely read and influential poet of Pakistan, was a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement in pre-Partition British India. A professor of English, he edited the English-language daily *The Pakistan Times*. Exiled in Beirut during the Zia-ul-Haq era (1978-1988), he edited *Lotus*, the journal of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association. His many books of trend-setting poetry were collected in the volume *Nuskha-ha'ay-Wafa*. He won the Lenin Peace Prize in 1963.

**Ahmad Faraz** (1931-2008). Born Syed Ahmad Shah, "Faraz" is his *takhalus* or poetic pseudonym. After Faiz the most popular of revolutionary Urdu poets, he spent six years in Britain and Canada during the

Zia-ul-Haq era, but returned to serve as Chair of the Pakistan Academy of Letters and the National Book Foundation. Author of fourteen books of poetry, his collected works were released posthumously in 2010. As revered for his love lyrics as for his protest poetry, Faraz won the highest national awards: the Hilal-e-Imtiaz; Sitara-e-Imtiaz; and, after his death, the Hilal-e-Pakistan for his contributions to literature.

**Asif Aslam Farrukhi** was educated as a physician at Karachi University and Harvard. He has published several collections of short stories and literary essays and has translated widely from world literature into Urdu. He is the founder-editor of the literary journal *Duniyazad*, which publishes works from Pakistani and world languages in Urdu translation.

**Simon Fletcher** is a freelance writer, poet, novelist, and storyteller. He lives in Shropshire. With Debjani Chatterji and Basir Sultan Kazmi, he founded "Mini Mushaira" to promote intercultural understanding.

**Hasina Gul** works as a broadcaster at the Peshawar radio station and is a highly-regarded poet from the younger generation in Khyber-Paktunkhwa. Her poetry collections include *Shpoon Spole Shpelai*, *Khutah Khabray Kava*, and *Da Hum Hagsey Mausam Dey*.

**Yasmeen Hameed** is Coordinator of the Gurmani Center for Languages and Literature at Lahore University of Management Sciences. Her first four poetry books are collected into *Dūsri Zindagi*. Her fifth is *Bē Samar Pēron Kī Kvāhish* (2012). Her anthology *Pakistani Urdu Verse* was published by OUP in 2010. She has received many national awards.

**Shireen Haroun** studied at the University of Warwick. She has practiced law, taught ballet, and is currently teaching English literature in Karachi. Her poetry has appeared in the *Alhamra Literary Review*; in *Pakistani Literature*, the literary journal of the Pakistan Academy of Letters; and in *Vallum*.

**Shadab Zeest Hashmi's** *Baker of Tarifa*, based on the history of interfaith tolerance in Muslim Spain, won the 2011 San Diego Book Award for poetry. Widely published, Shadab has been writer-in-residence in the MFA program at San Diego State University. She is a guest columnist for *3 Quarks Daily*. *Kohl and Chalk* is her latest book of poems.

**Adrian A Husain**, a recipient of the Guinness Poetry Prize, received a Ph.D. from UEA and is the author of *Politics and Genre in Hamlet* (Oxford University Press). His anthology *Desert Album* was part of Pakistan's Jubilee series (OUP). He teaches creative writing workshops at the Karachi Literature Festival.

**Sonia Kamal** was born in Pakistan, raised in England and Saudi Arabia, and earned her B.A. in the US. Her essays and short stories have appeared in the US, Canada, Pakistan and India. She is an officer of the Atlanta Writers Club and literary correspondent for ArtsATL. She edited a Pakistani literature feature for the online journal *Sugar Mule*.

**Basir Sultan Kazmi** was born in Pakistan and migrated to the UK in 1990. A poet, playwright, teacher, and director, he has two books of poetry and two published plays: *Bisaat* (1987) and *The Chess Board* (1997). He was awarded the MBE at the Queen's Birthday Honors in 2013, for Services to Literature as a Poet.

**Nasir Kazmi** (1925-1972) was born in Ambala, India, and migrated to Lahore, Pakistan, during the Partition of India in 1947. He is known for the evocative, imagistic style he brought to Urdu's traditional poetic form, the ghazal. He served as editor of two well-known literary magazines, *Auraq* and *Khayal*, and also worked for Radio Pakistan, Lahore.

**Waqas Khwaja** is a professor of English at Agnes Scott College, where he teaches Postcolonial Literature, British Romanticism, Victorian poetry and fiction, and Creative Writing. He has published three collections of poetry, the latest being *No One Waits for the Train*. He was translation editor for *Modern Poetry of Pakistan* (Dalkey 2011), showcasing the work of 44 poets from Pakistan's seven indigenous languages, and edited a special issue on Pakistan for *The Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* (Spring 2011).

**Maki Kureishi** (1927-1995) was born in Calcutta and moved to Karachi after Partition. A graduate of Smith College, she taught English at Karachi University. Her one volume of poetry, *The Far Thing*, was published posthumously, but the unique precision and power of her work had already been recognized. When almost all the Pakistani poets writing in English were males, Maki Kureishi was a female voice who struck a distinct and compelling note of her own.

**Mina Malik-Hussain** is a writer and poet based in Lahore. Her work has appeared in several national and international publications, including *Pakistani Literature*, *South Asian Review*, and *Vallum*.

**Zahra Nigah** was one of the first women to break into the primarily male domain of Urdu poetry in the 1950s and find a popular audience. Her collections include *Sham ka Pehla Tara*, *Waraq*, and *Firaq*. She received the Pride of Performance Award in 2005.

**Munir Niazi** (1928-2006) was a richly allusive poet of love, loneliness, and alienation. Deeply steeped in the tradition of Urdu and Persian poetry, he was also influenced by the French symbolists. He wrote in both Urdu and Punjabi. In 2002 he was awarded the Kamal-e-Fun, the highest award for artistic excellence, by the Pakistan Academy of Letters. He published nineteen collections of poems during his lifetime, including his *Kulliyat*, or Collected Works

**Shah Muhammad Pirzada** was born to a family of writers and poets in a village near Mohenjodaro, Sindh. Trained as a medical technologist at Karachi University, he is a well-known Sindhi poet who occasionally also writes in Urdu and English. In collaboration with Asif Farrukhi, he has translated selected poems of the Sindhi poet Sheikh Ayaz into English and has published a collection of his own poetry as well.

**Taufiq Rafat** (1927-1998) was born in Sialkot and educated in Dehra Dun, Aligarh, and Lahore. He was one of the first to talk about the need to develop a Pakistani idiom in English. His work has featured in three OUP collections of Pakistani English verse, *First Voices* (1964), *Pieces of Eight* (1970), and *Wordfall* (1976), and has been anthologized widely abroad. His first independent book, *Arrival of the Monsoons: Collected Poems, 1947-1978* (Vanguard: 1985), is probably the single most significant contribution to the development of Pakistani poetry in English. In 1984 he suffered a stroke and was never able to write poetry again. *Half Moon Poems* appeared posthumously in 2008.

**Fahmida Riaz** was born in Meerut before Partition and the creation of Pakistan. She is regarded as a major feminist poet in Urdu. Deeply conscious of language issues and the presence of a working-class audience, she often chooses colloquial and/or rustic diction in preference to the Persianized idiom generally employed by Urdu poets. Her poetry collections include *Pathar ki Zaban*, *Badan Dareeda*, and *Kya Poora Chand Naan Dekho Gay*. Fahmida Riaz has also translated selected works of Rumi and Farogh Farrukhzad and has worked as head of the Urdu Dictionary Board of Pakistan.

**Shiza Sophia Sabir** has translated Persian works of Rumi, Hafiz, and Amir Khusrau, as well as many modern Pakistani poets, into English. Her interest in literature ranges from Eastern and Western classics in English, Arabic, and Persian to contemporary French and Urdu poetry. She explores the effects of foreign poetic forms, such as the sonnet in Urdu or the ghazal in English, and is especially drawn to mystic themes.

**Naheed Sahar** is a poet from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa who writes poetry in Pashto. She is considered to be one of the most promising poets of the younger generation.

**Iffat Sayeed** is a translator based in the UK.

**Sarmad Sehbai** obtained his M.A. in English from the Punjab University and started his career as a program producer with Pakistan Television Corporation, where he rose to become Managing Director. His collections of Urdu poetry include *Unkahi Baton ki Thakan* and *Neeli kay Sau Rang*. He has also published a volume of Urdu plays titled *Kathputliyon ka Shehr*. He writes in Urdu, Punjabi, and English and has been quite the leader of counterculture challenging the status quo.

**Ata Shad** (1939-1997) is the *nom de plume* of poet, playwright, and research scholar Muhammad Ishaq. Author of many works in Urdu and Balochi, he held the post of Director General Archeology, Baluchistan, for several years. He has received the Presidential Pride of Performance Award and the Sitara-e-Imtiaz.

**Javed Shaheen** (1932-2008) Progressive poet, novelist, and essayist, he was an important representative of modern Urdu poetry of social commitment. He had the gift of turning commonplace everyday events into memorable poetic experiences. *Ishq Tamam (Love Entire)* brings together the several volumes of his poems and was published to great acclaim in 1993.

**Parveen Shakir** (1952-1994) was born in Karachi. She taught English before becoming a senior customs officer. Her sensuous, romantic poetry won her the Adamjee Literary Award for her first book, *Khushboo*, in 1978. She later moved from ghazal to free form poetry, and her themes evolved to include women's issues that she saw arise in her private, social, and professional life. Her collections *Sud Burg*, *Khud Kalami*, *Inkar*, and *Kaf-e-Aaina* were published in quick succession, followed by *Mah-e-Tamam*, which brought them all together in one volume. She died tragically in a road accident in Islamabad, barely 42 years old. She won the Faiz Ahmad Faiz Literary Award in 1989 and the Pride of Performance in 1990.

**Pervez Sheikh** was born in Peshawar, where he is the principal of Government High School. He holds M.A. degrees in Urdu, Pashto, and English, and is the author of a Pashto novel, *Tauda Bakara*. He translates regularly for the Pakistan Academy of Letters' journal *Pakistani Literature* and other Pakistani publications.

**Mushtaq Soofi** is a modernist Pakistani poet who writes poetry and literary criticism in Punjabi and contributes a regular column on Punjabi culture and literary tradition to the leading English-language daily of the country, *Dawn*. He worked for almost thirty years with the Pakistan Television Corporation, rising from program producer to become Director General of the organization. He has published several volumes of his spare, ironic, and cerebral poetry, notably *Taa* and *Din Pani*, among others, and is the chair of the Punjabi Adabi Board. He also runs Sachal Studios, an organization that he and Izzat Majeed founded for the promotion of Punjabi music, literature, scholarship, and culture.

**Mohammad Athar Tahir**, 1974 Rhodes Scholar from Pakistan, he obtained his Masters in English from Oxford University before joining the Civil Services of Pakistan. He has published five books of poetry in English, *Body Loam*, *Yielding Years*, *A Certain Season*, *Just Beyond the Physical*, and *The Gift of Possession*, a book of short stories, and several volumes on art and history. Among many honors and awards, he is an elected fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain.

**Bilal Tanweer** is a writer and translator who teaches creative writing at Lahore University of Management Sciences.

**Ihona Yusuf** is a poet and printmaker. Her professional life involves lighting design, including pieces that feature her artwork. She published her first collection of poems, *Picture This*, in 2001, and her work has appeared in literary journals in Pakistan and abroad. She has worked as an editor for the *Alhamra Literary Review* and guest-edited a special issue of Pakistani poetry for the Canadian journal *Vallum*.

## Special Feature Section

*Vois sur ces canaux*

See on those canals

*Dormir ces vaisseaux*

The sleeping vessels

*Dont l'humeur est vagabonde...*

That are nomads by nature

—Charles Baudelaire, “*L’invitation au voyage*”

In this special section of *Atlanta Review* we invite you to experience a virtual travelogue of places off the beaten track. For those still suffering from cabin fever after a long winter, we offer vast expanses of ocean and desert, thought and feeling.

R. T. Smith and Stephen Bluestone take us on a voyage to earlier times. Smith considers J. M. W. Turner’s painting *Slave Ship*, which the poet calls “a sermon / wild with beauty and Hell’s horrors, all in the cause / of abolition.” Stephen Bluestone recreates a little-remembered disaster that resulted in the deaths of 1,021 happy pleasure-seekers aboard the steamboat *General Slocum*.

Beth Gylys takes us to the nightmare alleyways of the Great Recession (but more than compensates with her cure for tax time), and David Chorlton explores the trackless American Outback.

Finally, we have those interior journeys we all take, whether in the land of dreams, as in Rachel Hadas’s “Blackberries in the Snow,” or in the revelatory instants when we appear to ourselves in a later edition than we imagine, as in Ralph T. Wilson’s “Elegy for My Right Eye” and Gaylord Brewer’s “More Honored in the Breach: The Immortal Body of Youth.” But, as Brewer hints, we can always correct for the aging process with medicines both manmade and natural, emerging

grateful, anxious even,

for that next step as you limp along—

hardly noticeably—in the glorious sunlight.

It would be churlish to refuse an invitation to a voyage such as that.

*Lee Passarella*

## More Honored in the Breach:

### The Immortal Body of Youth

The Benicar and glucosamine,  
for blood pressure and arthritic hip,  
are essential. You're a converted  
skeptic, maybe, regarding E and B-complex,  
are keeping an open mind on fish oil.  
The zinc and magnesium  
are mostly for fun.  
Green tea extract? A far east  
element of faith—no further comment.  
Meloxicam only as absolutely  
required, if the foot flares up again. It's hell  
on the stomach. With your rakish  
new reading glasses, you may discern  
even the finest warnings. Otherwise,  
here's your morning mouthful of dry cocktail.

Sure, you were immortal once,  
for a good long time, and abused  
the body without care or consequence.  
Now it's all care and consequence,  
accommodation, or else.  
The drag of gravity, humbled cadaver  
heavier every day on the earth that beckons.  
That is, appreciating what works  
and finding a bleak humor in it all.  
There's surely more to say. But for now,  
on this bright Saturday morning  
sitting pain-free, relatively, in the open  
window, roses in full blowsy languor  
and sparrows attentive to the nest,  
you're grateful, anxious even,  
for that next step as you limp along—  
hardly noticeably—in the glorious sunlight.

*Gaylord Brewer*

## Phenomenal Body

The far reaches need gathering in.  
"Springtime, and the first birds and letters reach  
the lonely Arctic."

The left hand with its jimmied fingers.  
The right hand crooking a cup's ear.

The changes. The feet more serious  
The toes more chary.

Bridge I love you says the pelvis.  
Knee asks how ships effortlessly raise and lower  
On the world's great canals.

The body packed with travel. Gallop of the circulatory,  
Lanes and flyways of the lymphatic, the glandular, the nervous.

The back of the head nonplussed  
Never to know itself directly  
Within it the pituitary of the nine secretions,  
The multiple dynamic equilibriums.

The eyes' individual oceans  
Shadowed with debris. The retinas,  
forward parts of the brain.

The forehead's masonic third eye, messenger  
of morning twilight.

*Angela Ball*

## Missing

You get used to  
Absence—the way  
An inmate might adjust  
To prison food, with hunger  
For the stuff least  
Wretched. You learn again  
How irreplaceable each particular  
Self, how distinct one  
From the other. X's flair  
For comic panic, Y's loveable  
Drumming fingers,  
Z's calm way of leveling  
With a problem. Footsteps.  
Keys in doors. Now  
Is never.

*Angela Ball*

## Elegy for My Right Eye

Now that vision is turning into milk  
spilt across a vast cloudy space  
where I keep looking to be disappointed  
by what once was there—

Now that the ciphers have slid  
surreptitiously into the obscure  
slough of what I meant to say  
and the mote of that meaning  
is drifting like a tarred tear  
across the arced & filmed horizon—

Now that Milton, Borges, and Creeley  
have passed into the empathetic membrane  
of my imagination: each into his own separate  
solace where the world begins to blur  
& dim, or flash with smears of light  
oddly across the dark of a remembered  
room or of a face whose fading  
fills one with entire hours of dread—

Now that it has begun to be its own  
kind of vision of things to come,  
I have come to appraise it—  
the blue, balled iris flicked up at me  
as image in the mirror, likely  
inheritor of flaccid furrows & tracked  
crows' feet upon the fleshy winding sheet  
of this parchment, this brow, this face:  
as if, looking it in the eye,  
I could surmise exactly what it is.

*Ralph Tejada Wilson*

## *Hambre*

Sometimes the pomegranate won't fall from the tree.  
It hangs there in sunlight getting darker and darker  
until moted in a man's eye. *Homo erectus*,  
he waits & waits & walks himself in circles  
like a horse on a carousel or tiger into butter.  
Pauses in thought, an animal rearranging its fleas.

Still up there, the birds are growing down  
on grifted wings performed as shadow  
for something he can't lure or touch or buy—  
the graceless gift of himself shouldered awry  
over the pack of his heart unkennelled  
unto wincings among the thorns.

Out of his nature, he is fingering  
the little wounds, thistled leaf, tendered pawprint  
on a world to which he can't return  
without ever more willing suspensions  
of his tangible disbelief, flutterings  
inside himself towards which he squints,

startles, can't conceive.

*Ralph Tejada Wilson*

## *Strays and Recessions*

*Fall 2008*

Scrawny and haunted,  
they appeared, spoke in tongues  
we could not understand.  
Their nails pick-picked  
at our doorstep. They panted  
through open windows,  
cried as if announcing the end.  
Even as we slept, their eyes  
sought us, insistent as hunger.

Indeed, they hungered,  
though we fed them all we had—  
salmon bones and chicken bits  
littered the yard. Nights  
their shadows humped  
against the walls. They  
slunk through darkness  
like the offspring of nightmares.

Brooding and full of pathos,  
they would not leave until we,  
too, angry, yowling, stirred  
by moons, by sirens and slow cars,  
headlights panning the emptiness,  
lay awake, wide-eyed and nervous,  
pressed into corners, burning  
with what we could not tame.

*Beth Gylys*

## “Wine the Liquid Cure for Tax Time”

*advertisement, wine.com*

Hello, uncorked spirit, my ruby elixir,  
my evening's closer, savory light, rest.  
Hello, my tax-burdened, work-dulled fixer.  
Take me to your garden, with its breasts  
of swelled fruit shirking behind leaves,  
where I'll curl in the shadows like a pod,  
absorb dirt's cool knowing—no fraud  
in chlorophyll or the unsensed heaves  
of earth's rotation. Oh life juice, oh sauce  
that stirs loins, let me climb back  
along the curved map of your vines  
to taste grit and the sun's gloss—  
salt and iron rising in the veins—  
to plunge as deep as possible into black.

*Beth Gylys*

## Layers

I.

Inked girls with mathematical faces,  
sleepy, eastern, flocked with birds and debris,  
those little doodles are my sanity.  
Poverty in the mouth like a vow,  
and symbols of flight stamped there.

II.

The late peach twists from the tree,  
sun-warm skin so perfect I can disregard its fuzz,  
swipe in with my teeth, the sky thrown back,  
the blissful sugar spread,  
and by and by the jubilee.

III.

To be played, not like a lute, but a fool  
laughing at the blue sky, the blue sky,  
my belief so quiet I can't hear it.  
Are we all so different, passing  
pain around inside our broken homes?

IV.

With age, more pleasure in what's seasonal:  
the green acorns spotted in the heat,  
the no-show anemone now memory,  
blue damselfly inked on lips.  
My life now, scraps of history billowing,  
shameless little sorrows scratched in wax.

*Tara Bray*

## Hot Water Return

After serving a long sentence  
in the Concord Women's Prison  
you rejoin me in the clawfoot  
painted iron bathtub you love.

You lower your pansy-pink self  
into the heat and steam and sizzle  
as we entwine. Almost as if  
thirty years ago you hadn't killed

your saucy black-clad lover  
by shoving him in front of a bus.  
So many grizzled witnesses  
sobbing like so much bacon fat.

Why didn't you plead a sudden  
attack of sanity? Prison bars  
enameled the hue of your blush  
braced you against the religion

your family impressed on you one  
book of the bible at a time.  
The place reeked like a stone bouquet.  
The guards cowered like turnips.

The intonation of voices caught  
in that steel and concrete maze  
suggested that the human race  
had disinherited everyone.

Although you were proud of yourself  
and the mess you'd made of your boyfriend  
your hack lawyer failed you in shades  
of gloom no mere pornographer

could assay. Now the hot water  
absorbs us, resolves the gap  
between body and soul, and seals  
our mutual text with kisses.

Now the vapor rises around us  
to eradicate those sordid years  
and burnish the flesh we've bared  
with a slippery athletic sheen.

*William Doreski*

## Vernal

The beating of unseen  
wings grew louder. Why?  
I couldn't guess the reason.  
Could it have been the season  
spiralling relentlessly  
around to blinding green?

Fluttering intimations, bird or pulse,  
hole in the heart or hollow in the brain  
trellised over with tenacious new  
shoots, fine tracing of each silver vein.  
Fresh old flavor of survival. Bath  
of warm spring rain.

*Rachel Hadas*

## Nap

Our waking hours are stiff with the unsaid.  
Sleep's feathery fingers unlace silence's  
corset. A laugh erupts  
that started as a snore.  
This muggy August afternoon, light rain  
sparring with streaks of sun,  
I am a cargo-laden barge; and am  
also the drowsy stream  
the barge is drifting down.

*Rachel Hadas*

## The Scenario

When I tried to think ahead to mourn  
your loss, I would imagine you as free  
of life's productions, having taken wing  
and flown north from your body  
straight as a bird that hears the call of spring.

You died last summer. Now in March I see  
things differently. You loved performances  
like any actor: costumes, makeup, scenes,  
intrigue, betrayal. In the midst of these,  
with more than half the story still to tell,

the lights dimmed and went out. The curtain fell.

*Rachel Hadas*

## Blackberries in the Snow

In pre-dawn light I climb back into bed  
and wake up on a hill inside my head,

that ridge where the Briggs farm sits. Deep in snow,  
dead ripe blackberries are peeking through.

It takes a while to realize I'm awake  
and see afresh the whiteness of that drift,

the glossy blackness of those berries in  
all their unseasonable lusciousness.

Both white and black soon shed their oddity,  
fir smoothly into my unfolding day.

Only when darkness is returning do  
I ask: what did those berries signify,

or the harsh hill I struggled up through snow?

*Rachel Hadas*

## Impasto

In Winslow Homer's *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, the three black women gaze at the plantation's "lady"—now graying but still carefully coiffed, straight as a pine and necklaced in rescued lace.

The hostesses in their homespun almost blend with worn wood and smoked stone of the kitchen. Their dresses dyed the shades of earth and birds are dingy, piecemeal but stitched with dignity—

Anna-Dovey? perhaps Clarice? In her quarter of the canvas Madam wears a dress for mourning. "Mistus" they call her to her face, but no chair has been offered nor chicory to ease her thirst.

From the shadows, yet no longer *in* them, the trio hold their ground in sharp profile. The guest's expression may indicate self-pity, or the art of doing without—brandywine, violas, Spode,

her beloved show pony now dragging a plow. Every keepsake thrown down the well or privy was found, hauled off to adorn a foreign parlor, and she thinks of this state as "starting over,"

as *asking* where once a sharp gaze sufficed. She still cannot read their silence.

The fifth face is a babe's, thank God too young to have been her late husband's get. Like its elders the infant

beholds her without flinching. All women, but too much misery between them for "sister" to pass their lips. Homer has allowed no space for step or gesture, the whole tableau wrought

in French oils brushed rough, tinged with dirge and bistre, then gouged in paste pigments. If only some chimney swift would flutter in and startle them awake, then the earth might turn

and breath be released. Yet here they stand, unable to resist this impasse. The merciful angel they need may never come. The artist might as well have carved them in ice or granite.

History lies heavy as a bullet on the tongue.

R. T. Smith

## Turner's *Slave Ship*

1

The colors rage, conflagration in an apothecary shop, but this is mid-Atlantic, sunsmear warring with storm, that purple scourge off the bow recalling Ruskin's claim—he owned the canvas once—it is the shadow of death upon the guilty ship. Not God's wrath, but Wrath itself, the thing older than worship or remorse.

Much as he loved the craft of it all—three-masted schooner (maybe Dutch), roil of great waters, brushwork anguished, the colors in tormented cloud and shaft and whorl—Ruskin could not keep it in his rooms.

"Terrible punishment, if just," he wrote, "will not keep silent when the candles are snuffed." In chaos, sky and sea are one, but distinct enough (starboard foreground and center) just before a gray wave breaks, arms upthrust from the molten swaths of lit pigment, and about each wrist the linked shackles are visible, thrashing, last grasp of the ailing thrown overboard to claim insurance for "drownings." The supercargo, no doubt, with his bills of lading scratched off the names, which were only numbers, and noted "Lost." A travesty, Turner thought, struck by lines from Thomson's *The Seasons* and first-hand accounts of the *Zong* massacre. He wanted to paint a sermon wild with beauty and Hell's horrors, all in the cause of abolition. He wanted to halt the catastrophe, so he called his work *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon coming on* (1839).

2

When I saw it in Boston, awed, my breath stopped like a blow to the stomach, I never once thought, "Romanticism run amok, Gericault's raft without faces, too active, too garish, too much," but *Punch* mocked the whole composition and christened it "A Typhoon, Bursting A Simmoon, Over a Whirlpool Maelstrom, Norway, A Ship on Fire, An Eclipse, With the Effect of a Lunar Rainbow." All lampoon, no mention of desperate men nor reference to shark

fins circling and ghostly birds already counting on eyeballs and orts, instead a pundit's smug humor because the painter was shuddering, self-indicted, transported, himself all but drowning in a burning ocean. But perhaps that's too much, my own forced unraveling and reading, though I will not surrender to the belief that it's just another period essay on hue, the humans pitiful but anonymous, an apt pretext to excavate light and toss Triton's briny cataract with water and oils, compose with cross-hatch and line and scumble. Turner's tools, of course, but not his testimony, which was pure grief and fury.

3

The castaway nightmare, the drowning dream, feel of icy waters crawling the sheets—as a child I was always haunted by maritime disasters—*Titanic*, *Thresher*, Graveyard of the Atlantic—that something Other cold and coming for me, my whole family, so Ruskin was no fool to say this magnificent torrent with all its weeping for doomed mankind must hang in museum chambers where the unshackled wander to find the species thrown into crisis, each witness to this elegant gallery of treasures due back from lunch in half an hour struck eloquently dumb, each innocent desperate to undream the captive cargo flung overboard like timber or baled cotton. No single owner can bear the burden alone.

The nearest window glazed a tormented sky. I shuffled my feet, studied erratic shadows on the floor's parquet pattern. Aware Turner's seascape offers no true horizon, I was eager to stray to some Egyptian wonder or a Winslow Homer image of timely rescue, loath to surrender to Turner's assay of shame, but equally afraid to walk away and be damned.

R. T. Smith

## The General Slocum Disaster

“Cover my defenseless head,”  
the hymn on the program said,  
“with the shadow of Thy wing,” on the seventeenth excursion

north from Germantown  
of the St. Mark’s Sunday School,  
sailing up the river from the tenements to Locust Grove,

an outing in the heat  
with a band aboard to play  
“America” and “Unser Kaiser Frederich” too.

Mixture of the old and new,  
of “Under the Double Eagle”  
and “Hip Hip Hurray” and “On the Beautiful Rhine,”

such music, holiday tunes,  
with waltzes, gallops, and marches,  
was meant to entertain, a pleasant counterpart

to the lieder that were sung  
as the ship undocked and turned,  
on its way toward Hell Gate and then Long Island Sound.

“Let me to Thy bosom fly  
While the billows near me roll,”  
the children sang, to the Ground of Being, to the Rock of it.

To the Lord of Melody,  
who, throned above the choir,  
and listening with interest, heeds but hides

(Master of the Universe,  
of darkness and of light,  
whose brawny utterance alone made time and space)

and who, afterwards, will save,  
though Pilot now of the spun  
and lung-filled passion down, the spiral cruciform...

As perfect as a rose,  
their mother-made flesh,  
like thunder in a bell, sang to the Preserver,

who took note, but said “This first!”  
and saw them as they sank,  
tossed from the burning deck and bound to rotten floats.

In that airless dismal murk,  
He watched His pretty work  
in their slow fall, and, after the oil-spread fire, received them.

*Stephen Bluestone*

## The Scribe

*for Donald Hall*

And when that almost-perfect draft is done,  
and the steeple of a Danbury church rings out  
its modest knell, and your grieving friends recall  
what a happiness it was among the flowers  
that march across the yard and through the fields,  
the zinnia, the phlox, the Queen Anne's lace,  
sweet banners of the year's processional,  
then, after that, for sure, it's back to work.  
Who wouldn't want to spend infinity  
restoring the alphabet, re-inking the scroll,  
rejoining its broken ligatures and curls?  
Who wouldn't want to pass eternity  
mending the names of sex, love, and loss,  
returning the vowels of compassion to utterance?

*Stephen Bluestone*

## *Adam Bede*, Chapter XVII

### In Which the Story Pauses a Little

*"This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!"  
I hear one of my readers exclaim.*

If your first novel's cooking along  
(the Laird so close to banging the milkmaid),  
why leave what John Gardner would one day  
call *that vivid continuous dream*,  
the spell cast by page-turning fiction?  
But Marian, disguised as George Elliot,  
decides she must stop, address her critics.  
The story must wait, for it's 1858,  
she's left the church, shackled up with a married man  
and fears the day London finds out  
a woman has written this immoral book  
(suffrage and Virginia Woolf still undreamt).

*—"How much more edifying it would have been  
if you had him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice!"*

Marian lets her readers keep talking,  
allowing them the rope to hang themselves.  
She has somehow predicted, played to,  
our post-modern crankiness, our distrust  
of any *truly spiritual advice*,  
one brain's chemistry presuming on another's.  
Yet *seeking*, somehow, remains with us.  
The Bible suggests fasting in the desert.  
And I, dear reader, spent eight years  
cramping my knees deep in scrub-oak woods,  
sitting in community, watching my thoughts  
come, go, then come again.

George Mallory, marching to Everest and his death,  
passed Tibetan Sadhus staring from caves  
at what had to be insane British Sahibs  
who, in turn, judged the hermits deranged.

But both were on a quest we might call  
spiritual were we not impatient,  
in a hurry to turn the next page,  
re-enter the dream, find out what happens.

*Rupert Fike*

## The suicide of dolphins

No one, not even the scientists who study  
you, knows why you beach yourselves  
whole family groups, communities  
on our beige sand to gasp and die

unless the volunteers, called phone  
to phone quickly in a spider web  
of summoning, can keep you wet  
and push you into deep water again

like shoving a huge wet sofa. Some  
think it's disease or following your  
leader into danger or chasing fish  
into water too shallow so you run

aground. An old fisherman said to  
me, *they remember how they used  
to live on the land, they remember.*  
We know nothing but still we grieve.

Is your act any more opaque than a friend  
who drinks himself into a fiery crash?  
Another who burnt his brain to a crisp  
on crack; the woman who could not

walk out on her husband even after the fifth  
trip to the emergency ward, leaving only  
feet first when he shot her? Or my friend's  
daughter who hung herself at fifteen

because of names she was called,  
because of words on a computer  
screen, because of a boy. We cannot  
stop each other but still we grieve.

*Marge Piercy*

## Wisteria can pull down a house

The wisteria means to creep over the world.  
Every day its long tendrils wave in the breeze,  
seize the bench under its arbor, weave  
round the garden fence obstructing  
the path. Its arbor's long outgrown.

Such avidity. Such greed for dominance.  
It has already killed the Siberian irises  
it has shadowed, stealing all their sun.  
Should I admire or resent? Neither.  
I go out with loppers and hack and hack.

If it could, it would twine around my neck  
like a python; like an angry giant squid  
it would pull me into a strangling embrace.  
I will grow back, it swears, and outlive you.  
Its vigor outdoes mine. It will succeed.

*Marge Piercy*

## The Descent

The vultures ride  
on carrion scent  
through the day's penultimate glow.  
They are a vision  
of souls holding on  
to the light  
with their primaries frayed  
and they tilt gently earthward  
as the Earth rises  
to meet them  
with blood on its breath.

Asleep on the wing  
they pass from the sun  
to the stars  
in a silence  
picked clean as a bone.

*David Chorlton*

## Giving Rattlesnake Advice to German Visitors

This year, only nine  
trogons inhabit South Fork  
and the family from Heidelberg  
don't care which one they see  
after lunch at the Portal Café,

but before they enter the canyon  
with its red rock walls  
weighing less than the trees  
growing between them  
they want to know  
how dangerous the dangers are

in Arizona. They've heard  
about spiders with an hourglass  
shining like a blood drop  
on their torsos, and the local  
obsession with guns, not to speak

of rattlesnakes. This is  
Black-tailed altitude. Watch  
for one stretched out for warmth  
in a clearing, and when  
the golden scales spill out before you  
consider it a gift of loose change  
from the spirit world. You only need

worry about the ones in the grass,  
following their appetites  
inch by invisible inch.

*David Chorlton*

## Snowflakes on a Hardening Land

I am tired of beauty.  
Its touch grows colder  
across the landscape of lost dreams,  
holding hostage the memory  
of when beauty had a different face to tire of.  
Winter grows harder each day,  
and now I cannot see much beyond  
the iceberg of my nose.  
Fashion is fickle,  
but now cold hearts are in style.  
Everything wears a gown of snowflakes.  
A beautiful snow-woman offers no warmth.  
In this land, no snow-angels point the way to fire.  
The flag stands guard, at stiff attention.  
Lost in the blizzard, the river shivers and clots.  
Empty nests fill with young snow.  
Memories and eyes freeze shut.  
Still, old hopes keep a small fire burning,  
feel the face of beauty growing old,  
then young, then old again.  
In hard times, touch must be the vision  
that senses clouds breaking,  
the warm lighthouse of sun shining through.

*Robert S. King*

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