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CONTENTS

INDIA	3
INDONESIA	19
JAPAN	24
KOREA	29
MALAYA	35
NEPAL	37
PAKISTAN	47
THE PHILIPPINES	54
TAIWAN	58
THAILAND	60
VIET NAM	62

**THE WASHERMAN**

Strolling on the bank of the Sabarmati  
the Scientist and the Poet approached  
a washerman, who in beating clothes on a stone-slab  
was not aware of their august presence.

The poet said: As he is beating the clothes,  
what beauty unfolds itself in the water-spray!  
My heart leaps up as I behold the rainbow . . .  
Ah me! Were I born a century ago  
I would have been a Wordsworth.

The Scientist: Eh, before Newton  
there lived not even a washerman,  
who could discover this simple truth  
that light as it passes through water  
must split itself into seven colours?

The Poet said: Washermen? What would you  
expect from them? Here's one.

Rama! — he cried to the man and asked  
as he stood with his mouth agape:  
Do you ever care to stop and look  
rapt in joy at the rainbow  
in the spray with its seven colours?

The Washer man stood aghast.  
He looked to his right and left.  
Why on earth such important men  
should find it worthwhile to talk to him.  
Mabap!\* if I indulged in such antics,  
my children at home would perish.

The Poet: To have a glimpse of Beauty  
do spare a moment for the colours seven.

\*Ma—mother; bap—father

If I did that, when should I finish this heap?  
 And unmindful of the kindly visitors,  
 looking downward, he began to beat  
 the clothes. To save himself from the spray  
 the Scientist moved and mumbled:  
 Look! to no purpose did Newton live.  
 His discoveries—it is the same to this man  
 whether they are there or not.  
 The poet smiled wryly: The heart  
 of this man does not leap up.  
 In vain did Wordsworth sing.

Umashankar Joshi (1911—)  
 translated from the Gujarati by the author

### THE RAINY SEASON

A slush of clouds in the sky, the earth  
 Wallows in mud like a water buffalo,  
 Its back afloat. On slippery flanks  
 Hang weed stains, leeches in heaps.  
 The bony ridge between is bare.  
 On it a dragonfly sometimes settles  
 Or a frog jumps up to sit.

Before and behind me the day sprawls  
 Like a crocodile with saw-toothed head,  
 Monstrous belly and tapering tail,  
 Dwindling into the landscape.

Asokbijay Raha (1910—)  
 translated from the Bengali by Lila Ray

**THE STORM**

Without warning a snake of black cloud rises in  
the sky.

It hisses as it runs and spreads its hood.  
The moon goes out, the mountain is dark.  
Far away is heard the shout of the demon.

Up rushes the storm a moment after  
Rattling an iron chain in its teeth.  
The mountain suddenly lifts its trunk to the heavens,  
And the lake roars like a wild beast.

Asokbijay Raha (1910—)  
translated from the Bengali by Lila Ray

**AN EVENING**

A sitar is playing on the radio.  
I listen as I stroll.  
The Bengali news is over.  
Adjacent to the jungle lies  
The suburb of this country town.  
Into the brush the night comes down  
Smelling of the wild. Behind  
The mound of red earth that rises  
Suddenly at the road's turning,  
A mountain lifts its crest.  
With a jackal's howl the dark descends  
As I approach. An owl  
Hoots in a thorn tree overhead.  
I am startled. Look! The half-moon  
Is caught in the telegraph wires.

Asokbijay Raha (1910—)  
translated from the Bengali by Lila Ray

**EXTREMELY IMPOVERISHED**

Extremely worried. Only  
 for a small house, impoverished.  
 Through the southern window will see  
 burning unending plains. And  
 from the western window  
 will see the setting sun's red  
 evening splendour.

Extremely worried. Only  
 for a small house impoverished.

Extremely quiet. So  
 impoverished for a sweet girl  
 who will quarrel with  
 and make him wake for the whole night.  
 Will say, "What a foreigner,  
 difficult to understand,  
 tomorrow you will have to bring a bottle of red  
 nail-polish."

Extremely quiet. And so  
 impoverished for a sweet girl.

Extremely lost. Ah,  
 for a little pleasure impoverished.  
 Has travelled a lot in wind and rain and scorching  
 heat,  
 has not been able to understand  
 burning in the fire of desire.

Extremely lost. Ah,  
 impoverished for a little pleasure.

Nirendra Chakravarty (1924—)  
 translated from the Bengali by P. Machwe

**SINCE I LEFT THE OCEAN**

A drop drew out of the ocean, toward the moon's  
height,  
Began pulling between small finite, great infinite.

Forsook its vast source, then became  
Minuscule, infinitesimal particle.

Immovable, succumbed to laws of motion,  
Colored and cast by wind in shape and form,  
Left the ocean.

Rode a thundering and roaring force  
Across the sky, cherished the notion  
To measure space and time; this silly one  
Drew away from its own immeasurable home;  
Left the ocean.

Turned vapor and globe of dew,  
Sharp frost, soft rain, iota of contentment  
Moment of Catak's fulfillment. But where its depth?  
It felt the press of living outside itself  
When it left the ocean.

Wandered the sky, entered the center of earth,  
Watered roots of trees, nectared flowers,  
Counted out endless time, up and down,  
But could not for a moment forget its home.  
After it left the ocean.

O deep ocean of affection, O distant moon  
Of fulfillment, the vain drop now  
Shatters. Existence outside self is untenable.  
Come storming around me now; ages have gone  
Since I left the ocean.

**"Navin" (Balakrishna Sharma, 1897-1960)**  
translated from the Hindi by  
**Vidya Niwas Misra and Josephine Miles**

**THE FAMILY**

My father,  
    a conquered Everest,  
My Mother,  
    an ocean of milk poisoned by poverty.  
My brother,  
    a lion cub cinched up as a pack animal,  
My sister,  
    a doll made out of soiled clothes,  
And I,  
    a kettle of water  
    steaming away to vapor  
    water consumed into vapor.

Visvanath (1932—)  
translated from the Hindi by  
Vidya Niwas Misra and Josephine Miles

**A VILLAGE GIRL**

A bundle of grass on her head  
She came, her hips swinging  
Full like wine pitchers  
She, the girl from my village  
  
Pataki and mustard flowers  
Like blue and yellow eyes  
Peep through the green grass

Long blades of grass  
Hang over her eyes  
Like green tassles  
A net of green dreams  
Her face caught in it

She lifts her skirt up to her knees  
And holds my arm to cross the Suhan River  
Ankle-deep water rises to her knees, to her waist,  
Her legs disappear beneath the shimmering water,  
And her skirt goes up like an upturned umbrella

The water goes down her thighs, her knees, her  
ankles

So does her skirt

"Thank you brother," she says  
Like a koel cooing from a mango grove  
And leaves my arm and goes away

On the sand hill her footprints  
Gleam like a prisoner's chain  
She goes up the mound  
Tall and slim like a sugar cane  
And becomes a part of the green tree

She did not look at me  
I could not see her face caught in the green net  
But I cannot shake off  
The dust of her touch.

Mohan Singh (1905—)  
translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

**EVENING**

The sun horse panting and snorting  
Reaches the shores of evening  
Kicking his hoofs and flicking red dust  
His vermilion mane wet with perspiration  
He throws red foam from his mouth

The mellow-coloured Evening comes  
And places her hand between his pricked ears  
Her long fingers  
Feel the hot breath from his nostrils  
And take off the bridle from his mouth

The restive animal  
Tamed and quietened  
Walks behind the Evening slowly  
And goes into the stable of darkness

**Mohan Singh (1905—)**  
**translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi**

**GAJJAN SINGH**

The month of March  
The month of March and Gajjan Singh is worried  
About seeds for the sugar cane  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Don't dream of help from others  
The month of March has come

He took his bullocks  
Gajjan Singh took his bullocks  
And sold them in the market  
Brothers, oh brothers  
No more milk for his children  
He sold his bullocks

March is over  
March is over and sugar cane sprouts in the fields  
April, May and June are over  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Gajjan Singh is happy  
March is over

The rainy season comes  
The rainy season comes and the sugar cane is full  
of juice  
Its green skin changes to rust-coloured  
Brothers, oh brothers  
The dry leaves crackle and fall  
The rainy season has come

The grasshoppers  
The grasshoppers hop in the field  
The sugar cane tassels sway in the wind  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Men of land demand the land  
The grasshoppers hop

At midnight  
At midnight the stars are awake in the sky  
And Gajjan Singh on his land  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Why does a farmer toil  
At midnight

The zamindar has  
The zamindar has shoes of golden zari

Gajjan Singh's shoes bare their teeth  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Gajjan Singh is cut to the quick  
The zamindar's golden shoes

The zamindar has  
The zamindar has a black flying steed  
Gajjan Singh's pony limps  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Gajjan Singh is cut to the quick  
The zamindar's flying steed

Gajjan Singh came out  
Gajjan Singh came out tying his turban  
With five strong friends  
Brothers, oh brothers  
God is no friend to us  
Gajjan Singh came out

At midnight  
At midnight the stars trembled in the sky  
The farmers entered the sugar cane field  
Brothers, oh brothers  
They challenged the fates  
At midnight

First of all  
First of all Buland Singh spoke  
His eyes blood-red  
Brothers, oh brothers  
I have not tasted milk for years  
First of all

The heavy-voiced  
The heavy-voiced Dhanna spoke  
His voice like a cracked reed  
Brothers, oh brothers

I have a daughter and no money to wed her  
The heavy-voiced spoke

The hefty-bodied  
The hefty-bodied Inder Singh roared  
My bullock gone in interest  
Brothers, oh brothers  
I wonder at what rate they went  
The hefty-bodied roared

Breaking the sugar cane  
Breaking the sugar cane, Surain Singh said  
I shall break Zamindarism like this  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Else how would I give food to my children?  
Breaking the sugar cane he said

Maghar asked  
Maghar asked, friends tell me  
He did not touch the tail of a plough  
Brothers, oh brothers  
Why should he demand half of our yield  
Maghar asked

At three-quarter night  
At three-quarter night, Gajjan Singh spoke  
Foaming at the mouth  
Brothers, oh brothers  
I'll rape the zamindar's daughter  
At three-quarter night.

Mohan Singh (1905—)  
translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

**SILENCE**

A pitcher of thoughts  
 Empty and sad  
 Lies in the niche of my courtyard  
 Silence sits thirsty  
 Running its tongue on its lips  
 Begging for a few water-words.

Desire dug a well in my courtyard  
 The days strike hammer strokes  
 The nights shovel blades  
 And years crack like stones  
 No water-word sparkles in the pit

The dark lonely well  
 Sits quiet resting its paw on its chin  
 Chewing the cud of  
 Clods of earth and bits of stones  
 Staring at the Silence.

Amrita Pritam (1919—)  
 translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

**KRISHNA**

In the darkness  
 a rain-wrought cage!  
 The God-Elephant swayed  
 behind the bars of the Evil One!

Red lips nourished on butter  
and flutes!  
With love,  
the gopi's heartbeat galloped!

The Jumna quickened  
for dreams come true,  
and Brindavan's bamboo-forest  
was flute to that breath!

The flute left its song in the air  
and made way for the Kingdom's glory;  
in a Mathura-palace,  
it nursed the light.

In that smiling boy's  
flute-holding finger grew  
the thunder of Arjuna's chariot  
and in that fluting breath  
the conch-shell trumpet of war!

In the bewilderment of war  
hear the Lord's own song:  
Here I come, I come again  
in age after age of need!

Again, again the darkness  
and the rain-wrought cage.  
And there! again, swaying  
his trunk, the God-Elephant!

G. S. Sivarudrappa (1926—)  
translated from the Kannada by  
A. K. Ramanujan

**SUDDENLY I SAW HIM**

Suddenly I saw him perhaps as his  
Mother must have thrilled how often  
To see baby lips surfeit from milk  
Of breast, pout and smile in her heaven!

How many slimy years in between  
And down the decades his gross eyes  
Shot out and kneaded passing girls  
Of solid behinds but mobile for their size.

When he eats, he sweats round his middle  
And neck, takes off his greasy vest  
And belches. More rice and curds  
Slobber in, lapped up with pickles and the rest.

His rolls of fat quiver, thighs chafe.  
Hair drips with oil shriekingly scented.  
He adores wrestlers, never misses a bout,  
And gets hold of booklets privately printed.

But suddenly I saw him in sleep  
With a tender-leaf lips pouting:  
His mother's breast flattened his nose  
And on his mouth's discontented rose  
I saw a smile, from heaven, descending.

M. P. Bhaskaran (1921—)

**THE FIRST DAY**

A drop of water fell on a blade of grass,  
Shivered like mercury, then settled, sliced, on the  
blade,  
Quivering in astonishment at the green world around.

How had the leaves burgeoned in its absence?  
It was the first drop of many that would  
Fall, swaddling the earth in a blanket of water,  
Washing it, like the new-born thing it was.

The sun shrank back, amazed, a flustered midwife,  
When the air see-sawed twice, heaved its legs  
And laid the earth, shelled with light, intact.  
A silver egg after billions of failed constellations.  
Brahma chuckled and washed his fouled limbs;

From somewhere, a breeze full of pollen, freshened  
The hairs on a dusty cheek.  
An ant stumbled over the toppled architecture of  
the grass.

**Adil Jussawalla (1940—)**

**DRAKE**

The Chinese would know how to paint it—  
 This duck's simple stillness—  
 Sealed web of flesh and bone,  
 Floating.

But webbed in English ironies  
 I cough and note

the beaded blue-green neck  
 retracted against the wings;  
 the squat wooden shape  
 compact as a walnut  
 music-box, charged with spikes,  
 but playing no notable tune.

Yet the Chinese say these quaint boxes  
 Play distinct melodies

In tune with  
 the hidden intricate stars  
 the dipping dragon-flies, the rushes.

O bugger the ears England has plugged  
 With its contempt four years now.

They hear mere noises,  
 Discordant, disjointed, jarring,  
 Like pedants gabbling.

**Adil Jussawalla (1940—)**

**BALLAD OF THE MEN OF LIMESTONE SOIL**

The men have gone into the street,  
Their swords tipped with lightning,  
And the horses of the robbers  
Can be seen on the yellow hilltop.  
Blood is the speech now.

Behind barricaded doors  
Weep children, pray women.

Without victory there is no word "home."  
The coward will lie in the courtyard  
And his wife will not open the door.

The beat of hooves draws near  
And the wind begins to sing:  
"I shall tap the blood of men  
From the steel jars of their breasts.  
Like generous dealers in wine  
The man will lie in the street,  
Opened by howling wolves.

O thriving down of the breast!  
Garden of sweet vines!"

Half way round the stockade  
Spreads the beat of the hooves.  
Then the cry of combat,  
Men drawing life from their swords,  
The spread of a stinking liquid,  
Mouths foaming and dust in wounds.

At the third cry of the cockerel  
And the first blue light in the sky  
The men go back to the village,  
Erect with their wounds flowering,  
Red gashes and open breasts.

The door is marked with sweat

"Who knocks?"

"Your man has come home, faithful woman!"

The women stream from the doors  
To lick the wounds of their men.  
The girls chant in the windows.

The headman of Kudo Seto,  
Like a flower famed for its sap,  
Slowly runs his hand  
Over his red body.

And at the door of the hut  
His wife clings to his feet  
While to his son he says:

"Only child of mine,  
I bring the sword of the lord of robbers to give  
to you.

Store it in the flesh of your right breast!"

W. S. Rendra (1935—)  
translated from the Indonesian by Derwent May

## WAKING

His sleep: for prostitutes,  
His waking: for loneliness to be fed.  
The poison spreads through his body,  
He doesn't complain.

He creeps to the window,  
Watching the morning just as he always does.  
He sees trees blossoming with fruit,  
A world growing more and more beautiful.

He grows gloomier.  
Longing sweeps over him.

Turning to a woman's breast  
He dreams of a different paradise.

Sitor Situmorang (1924—)  
translated from the Indonesian by  
Jean Kennedy and Burton Raffel

## MY LOVE'S ON A FAR-AWAY ISLAND

My love's on a far-away island,  
a sweet girl, doing nothing for lack of anything  
better.

The *prau* slides quickly along, the moon gleams,  
around my neck I wear a charm for my girl;  
the wind helps, the sea's clear, but I know  
I'm not going to reach her.

In the calm water, in the gentle wind,  
in the final sensation, everything goes swiftly.

Fate takes command, saying:  
"Better steer your *prau* straight into my lap."

Hey! I've come this way for years!  
The *prau* I'm in is going to crash!  
Why is Fate calling  
Before I have a chance to hug my girl?

My sweet on a far-away island,  
if I die, she'll die for lack of anything better.

Chairil Anwar (1922-1947)  
translated from the Indonesian by  
Burton Raffel and Nurdin Salam

## A ROOM

A window delivers this room  
into the world. The moon that shines in  
wants to know more.

"Five children live here,  
And I am one of them!"

My mother falls asleep sobbing,  
Prison entertainment is always lonely  
Even my bored father lies down  
His eyes fixed on the man crucified against the stone!

The whole world is committing suicide!  
I want another younger brother from  
My mother and father, who aren't included  
in the count: A room like this,  
three yards by four, is too tight a fit for blowing life  
into souls.

Chairil Anwar (1922-1947)  
translated from the Indonesian by  
Burton Raffel and Nurdin Salam

### TRAVELER FIRST CLASS

Before I was thirty  
I was never more than a deck passenger.  
Thanks to the efforts of my friends  
And the transfer of sovereignty  
I'm now a traveler first class.

I'm one of the army  
of inspection officials  
Wandering  
From island to island  
Building up the country.

Every evening I play bridge in the salon  
And drink my beer  
And rage at the waiter.

I've never written a report.

I disembark  
And give half a rupiah  
For the workers on the first of May.

J. E. Tatengkeng (1907—)  
translated from the Indonesian by James S Holmes

**THE AFTERNOON OF A SOLAR ECLIPSE**

Quietly, quietly, fall the paulownia flowers  
in the afternoon of a solar eclipse.

I walk alone on a mountain path,  
where glides, like a sorrow,  
the shadow of heaven.

Crossing the heart of man,  
piercing the thought of man,  
it fades away beyond the earth.

The crescent moon of midday  
hangs over the paulownia trees.  
The thought of far, far distance flows  
in man's world this afternoon,  
the feeling of unknown solitude today.

I walk alone across the hills and streams;  
at the end of exhaustion, there burns  
the scarlet of the setting sun.

Shinjiro Kurahara (1899—)  
translated from the Japanese by Makoto Ueda

**A GARDEN OF WATERMELONS**

Yesterday  
watermelons lay in the garden,  
today  
nothings remains.  
God stole the watermelons.

Only the field and the sky.  
The clouds, coming and going,  
look for the watermelons.

Right there  
a young woman came by,  
her ripening body flickered beneath her robe.  
She is not concerned with watermelons.  
But her face is flushed  
as, briskly,  
she turns away  
and steps toward God.

The woman too is gone.  
Only the field and the sky.

Shinjiro Kurahara (1899—)  
translated from the Japanese by Makoto Ueda

## POEM

I tried to be a little god.  
But during the festivities I looked back, and saw  
In the brief intervals between religious myths,  
Man's ascent occurring.

Shuntaro Tanigawa (1931—)  
translated from the Japanese by James Brandon

**WHITE DESERT**

A blank sheet of paper  
brings a white desert to my mind.

And like an ostrich,  
I cross and recross this desert  
sometimes stopping  
and sometimes scampering along.

Unlike Egypt  
there are no pyramids  
in this white desert,  
but because of the unnatural brightness  
I sometimes would like to play baseball.

Inauspicious crows  
walk over the white desert,  
cruel splotches staining it.

Having nothing to ride in the desert,  
I keep on walking.  
Yet, there are ruins,  
there is even a crumbling castle,  
dark and decaying,  
and it's a castle without a lord  
so I won't be asked in . . .

Say, this desert is starting to scare me!

**Shinohara Hiroshi (1926—)**

translated from the Japanese by Harold P. Wright

## COCK

Near daybreak  
 a cock is crowing outside the houses.  
 A long, quivering cry:  
 it is my mother's voice calling up from the Nature of  
 the forlorn countryside.

*Towotekuu, toworumou, toworumou.*

In the cold bed of the morning  
 my soul flutters its wings.  
 Through the cracks of the storm door  
 the landscape seems bright and shining everywhere.  
 Yet, near daybreak  
 a sorrow slips into my bed.  
 Over the hazy tops of the trees  
 it is the cock's cry calling up from the Nature of  
 the distant countryside.

*Towotekuu, toworumou, toworumou.*

My sweetheart!  
 My sweetheart!  
 By the sliding screens of twilight  
 I scent the faint smell of a chrysanthemum;  
 like the smell of a diseased spirit,  
 the smell of a white chrysanthemum slowly decaying.  
 My sweetheart!  
 My sweetheart!

Near daybreak  
 my heart wanders over a shady graveyard.  
 Ah, some irritating anxiety calls me!  
 I cannot bear this pale-pink air.  
 My sweetheart!  
 My mother!  
 Come quickly and put out the lamplight.

I hear the roar of a typhoon blowing far out in the  
corner of the earth.

*Towotekuu, toworumou, toworumou.*

**Sakutaro Hagiwara (1886-1942)**

translated from the Japanese by Makoto Ueda

## BIRD

My male macaw escaped—  
leaving his mate behind in the cage,  
he opened the door himself.

Hurriedly I looked for him  
and then—  
I spied my green bird chattering away  
in the top of a high elm tree.

I bought a net and went after him,  
but that bird got away;  
there was a green glittering over the roof,  
but then it was gone.

That stupid creature!  
no matter how far he flies  
he can't find food for himself;  
separation from his mate  
is the same as death,  
but frolicking through the trees and clouds  
he's a light-hearted bird of the roofs.

Now I wonder where he is . . .  
all shriveled, stomach shrunken,  
and very full of pride.

**Ishikawa Itsuko (1933—)**

translated from the Japanese by Harold P. Wright

**SELF-PORTRAIT**

Father was a serf, seldom came home at night.  
At home my grandmother, old as  
The shrivelled root of leek,  
And a blossoming date tree.  
Big with child, mother wanted just one apricot.

I was a mother's son with dirty fingernails  
Under a lamp by the mud wall.  
With bushy hair and staring eyes  
I am said to resemble grandpa on mother's side  
Who in 1894 went to sea and never returned.

For twenty-three years the wind has reared two-  
thirds of me,  
And the world has become a more embarrassing  
place.  
Some have read a convict in my eyes,  
Others an idiot in my mouth.  
Yet I will repent nothing.

At each dawn brightly assailing,  
The dews of poetry settled on my brow,  
Mixed with drops of blood.  
And I have come this far panting  
Like a sick dog with his tongue hanging out  
In the sun and in the shade.

So Chong-ju (1915—)  
translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee\*

\*Peter H. Lee is grateful for the suggestions of Denise Lever-  
tov in the preparation of his translations.

**KORYO CELADON**

Bluish green with subtle lines,  
 O supple smooth curving,  
 Like a Bodhisattva's shoulders,  
 Grace and elegance combined.  
 A swallow spurns the waves  
 And cleaves the April breeze.  
 But wake!—for this is Koryo celadon,  
 This was ours for a thousand years.

Depth of color, softly shaded;  
 Iridescent kingfisher;  
 Blue sky glimpsed through autumn clouds  
 As the rain squall passes on;  
 Or a white cloud, fresh with dew,  
 Wings its way on high.  
 But wake!—for this is Koryo celadon,  
 This was ours for a thousand years.

Flagons, pitchers, bowls and dishes,  
 Inkslabs, censers, incense-boxes,  
 Vases, wine-cups, pillows, drums;  
 They are clay—but they are jade!

Pressed designs of clouds and waves,  
 Inlaid gems and Seven Treasures,  
 White cranes standing among flowers,  
 Buddhist figures, lines of verse;  
 Work of craftsman and of painter,  
 Art of sculptor in crude clay.  
 But wake!—for this is Koryo celadon,  
 This was ours for a thousand years.

Pak Chong-hwa (1901—)  
 translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

**DOES SPRING COME TO STOLEN FIELDS?**

The land is no longer our own.  
Does spring come just the same  
to the stolen fields?  
On the narrow path between the rice-fields  
where blue sky and green fields meet and touch,  
winds whisper to me, urging me forward.  
A lark trills in the clouds  
Like a young girl singing behind the hedge.  
O ripening barley-fields, your long hair  
is heavy after the night's rain.  
Lightheaded, I walk  
lightly, shrugging my shoulders, almost  
dancing to music the fields are humming—  
the field where violets grow, the field  
where once I watched a girl planting rice, her hair  
blueblack and shining—  
I want  
a scythe in my hands, I want  
to stamp on this soil, soft as a plump breast,  
I want to be working the earth and streaming with  
sweat.  
What am I looking for? Soul,  
my blind soul, endlessly darting

like children at play by the river,  
 answer me: where am I going?  
 Filled with the odor of grass, compounded  
 of green laughter and green sorrow,  
 I walk all day, lamely, as if possessed  
 by the spring devil:  
 for these are stolen fields, and our spring is stolen.

Yi Samg-hwa (1922—)

translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

## FLOWERS

Autumn has come, and from somewhere the children  
 bring home flower-seeds.  
 They count them over, arrange them  
 one by one:  
 balsam, cockscomb, smartweed,  
 morning glory.

After homework,  
 when they are ready for sleep,  
 even in bed they talk about seeds:  
*If only we had a garden to plant them.*  
 Meanwhile, night deepens; and when their mother  
 covers them up with straw mats  
 these poor tired flowers fall asleep, each embracing  
 a fabulous flowerbed.

Yu Ch'i-hwan (1908—)

translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

**ANCIENT TEMPLE**

Overcome by a stealthy slumber,  
A blue boy in the upper seat,  
With the wooden fish in his hands,  
Closes his eyes and nods.

While Amitabha and Bodhisattva  
Smile, smile without words,

Along the western borders,  
Under the blinding red sky,  
Peonies fall, peonies fall.

Cho Chi-hun (1920—)  
translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

**THE VERTEX**

Lashed by the bitter season's scourge,  
I'm driven at length to this north.

Where numb circuit and plateau merge,  
I stand upon the swordblade frost.

I know not where to bend my knees,  
Nor where to lap my galled steps.

Nought but to close my eyes and think  
Of winter as a steel rainbow.

Yuk Sa Lee (1905-1944)  
translated from the Korean by In Soo Lee

**HEAD**

Here in December in the land of northernmost  
Manchuria,  
Unblest by snow, and slashed by the dry ripping wind  
of the Amur,  
Here at the cross-roads of a small stripped citadel  
town,  
Are exposed high on stakes twin heads of late  
bandits;  
Their dark purple faces shrivelled up like withered  
children,  
And their half-open eyes into the distant polar  
circuit  
Of hills and rivers beneath the sun-set shimmer of  
the bladed sky.  
Know you not in death the taste of the Judgement  
of Law?  
It is not that death is one of the four evils,  
But that the preservation of peace renders at times  
Human life as cheap as a chicken or a cur.  
Your life might well have proved an instant threat  
of my death.  
So that to rule out force by means of force has  
even been  
The sanction of blood from times primeval.  
Now as I pace along the wind-swept street,  
I am resolved afresh of the dogged ferocity of life.  
You who housed your uncontrollable souls of  
treachery,  
Close your eyes in peace! May merciful heaven  
Cover this landscape of waste thoughts with deep,  
deep snow!

Chi Hwan Yoo (1908—)

translated from the Korean by In Soo Lee

**EMBERS**

The time will positively come  
to the eyes and the heart,  
the hope will positively be achieved,  
glowing in the heart of the fire.

For this world, this song.

Promises need not be honored.  
The passing wind is not a friend,  
the passing wind, the breath of Satan,  
promising the climax of destruction.

For this world, this song.

Three wishes, one beloved,  
three bones bleached white,\*  
three hopes, one beautiful,  
three revenges, all red.

For this world, this song.

Morning comes to faded eyes.  
The only news is of blood.  
Who will fly, who will fly to the moon  
will not be asked in the blackness of hell.

For this world, this song.

Man will positively fall.  
on the scorched earth and the burning sea.  
Everything will positively writhe,  
from the buds to the roots.

For this world, this song.

\*There is a Malay saying: "Better white bones than white eyes." It means, roughly: "Better to die in the attempt than to live on in disappointment."

Tonight there is darkness in my breast.  
Everything is afire—everything, yes.

This morning men pray,  
the reflection of sin on their brows.

Samad Said (1934—)  
translated from the Malayan by  
Abdullah Majid and Oliver Rice

### I DO NOT CARE

This time I do not care.  
Although others may be indifferent  
to the flickering stars in the angry night,  
on one conviction, clear or hazy,  
I stand firm.

The stones of the pyramid are stacked  
high and sheer across the meadow of my life—  
if I had not maddened myself with the thoughts of  
other men,  
perhaps I would not now have such a problem.

Let the rustling wind blow,  
knowing that the dead are friendless,  
or even more gruesome,  
that corpses lie uncovered.

This time I do not care.  
On one conviction I stand.

Masuri S. N. (1927—)  
translated from the Malayan by  
Abdullah Majid and Oliver Rice

## LAST NIGHT OF AN OLD WOMAN

Night.

Cold.

Dark.

And dread.

An old woman was curled up in a hut.

She was eighty-three running.

She wrapped a rugged rug closer about her—

Death shouldn't slip in!

She covered her hands and feet well,

And covered her head,

And hid even her face.

Yet she felt the cold hand of Death

from outside the rug,

T'was pushing now,

And pulling then.

There were many holes in that rug,

One of them came in the way of her sight;

She felt it by the ventilation,

So opened her eyes cautiously and peeped out.

As if from the bridal veil,

But could not see her new bridegroom

Because of his black face

Blacker than that of her husband

Who was no more—

Whom she had betrayed.

Now a light from the lightning entered the hut,

This time the lover!

Yea, she had a lover in her life.

(She loved him because her fortified heart

Liquified in love when she saw him first,

Saw him smile and heard him talk,

And when he exchanged his love for her love

She adored him in the extreme;

There's no God but man!  
 And that adoration begot jealousy  
 On the side of her husband.)

Light again, and again lightning.

(Though that jealousy was as dark red  
 As a hue of private conspiracy,  
 Yet the party went to a picnic  
 Somewhere at Patan.  
 She was in dark blue.  
 The sky was lighter brilliant blue,  
 The garland of white-rose-clouds  
 Were hanging on the mountain tops.)

Lo, the lovers could eat nothing  
 For they had drunk each other through the pupils  
     of their eyes  
 To their heart's content;  
 They could drink no more.

(But the jealousy's hunger at end.  
 It was thirsting for hot human blood.  
 It was hungering for sweet revenge.)

Thunder and lightning.

(Oh, then the lover danced,  
 Along with him her heart frolicsomenely danced,  
 And she was timing the tomtom  
 By clapping her bangled hands.  
 But the jealous side was motionless,  
 Smiling like a burnt skull.)

Thunder and lightning and storm.  
 Cold.

The new bridegroom, Death  
 Searched chance to enter her bosom  
 And shelter there.  
 But she, with all her feeble might

Grasped the rug, and by her bent head  
Shielded and globed the little life-light  
That was trembling in her heart,  
With the oil-supplier the cerebrum—  
The ruin of her love's past glories.

(Ah, jealousy, what hell does it mean!  
The lover was murdered cruelly  
And thrown away in the river.  
The river cried bitterly and wept.  
O, weep for him!)

She could not weep  
For she was cold and dry;  
She had no blood to filter tears,  
Nor watery saliva to make tears.  
Her mother had died at eighty—  
She could not remember her father,  
Who was hanged.  
Her husband had died long ago  
She has a daughter  
Married.  
She has two sons  
Both in khaki  
Gone to the dark war.  
Thunder  
She could not wink.  
She could not weep,  
But it rained.  
Storm and rain with thunder.  
It rained heavily like bears and tigers.

Again the lovable lightning.  
But Death, her new husband  
Murdered the light,  
Came closer to her with his heavy lips,  
She could not oppose.  
He kissed her.

They rolled.  
Cold.  
Dark.  
Night.  
Dread  
And Death

Balakrishna Sama (1903—)

## WINE

Earthquakes are in my hands,  
And shaking of the sky in the heart,  
They are like tongues of flame, dancing and going  
    round, licking up the overturned reflection,  
    streak after streak like silvery lines, reflected  
    on the waves of clear golden Wine filled to the  
    brim of the transparent cup;  
The cup that has found the touch of your lips strikes  
    against another,  
So softly it rings in seven musical notes,  
For the heart shaped like an ear  
Wine sings the sweetest tune,  
It is the shrill musical tone of intoxicating song,  
It strains every hair and every nerve of the body  
And confounds every organ of senses.  
My eyes drink you in draught after draught.  
My mind springs up from the heart and fluttering  
    its wings—the lips—  
flies to the Heaven of Wine—  
It pushes the sky back and proceeds further ahead,  
The thirst, unquenchable, still increases,  
The water presses the fish.

Earthquakes lie in my hands  
And shaking of the sky in the heart.  
More, again more, add more colour, churn your intelligence,  
Bring forth the butter of white verses;  
Your likeness shall be aeriformed,  
It shall ripple quiveringly,—  
It shall vanish and shall again appear, and then shall  
vanish again,  
And your form shall be transcendent,  
When golden beauty anointed  
All appear golden.  
When the loveliness of rainbow circumambulates  
Everyone and everything become charming,  
Such as—  
The spots in black walls from where the chips are  
fallen, appear like stars,  
A worn-out curtain appears like an embroidered  
skirt of a woman.  
The threads of a torn carpet  
Form the lines of best poems,  
A torn straw-mat looks like a bed of plaited bands of  
hair.  
The spots of oil on table-cloths  
become the beds of passionate kisses.  
Dip your lips in Wine,  
Leave a small portion of your lip in it and dip it  
deep into the bottom,  
Melt your teeth, the pieces of ice, in it,  
Flow your breath in it,  
Blow it with the charms of smiles,  
Now, let me swim in it.  
O, yes!  
Some miseries are so deep they cause profound sleep.  
Make me forget the memory of those people who are  
dead and gone.

The Pacific Ocean shall weep for us ;  
 Hope abides far and there lies  
 Deluge and clamour and aching, void similarity.  
 Here you are, the sacrificial-fire, the oblation, but  
 nothing else ;  
 I have the exciting demands of the calf that pushes  
 against the udder with its head ;  
 And more, give more, pour out, let it overflow.  
 Let the plentiful charity be with you,—the charity  
 of waterfall which wears away the rock below  
 that raises its head up towards the sky,  
 Pour more and take more,  
 Make a solution of your heart and overspread your  
 lips,  
 And heal the wound of the wounded.  
 Caress my mind and string it with your heart,  
 Give intolerable stinging happiness !  
 Feed me !  
 Earthquakes lie in my hands,  
 And shaking of the sky in the heart.

I do not desire to keep myself aloof high up above all  
 others with the pride of abstention,  
 Rather I will mingle with the soil,  
 I do not desire blood,  
 Rather I shall give up my separate identity and live  
 amid heart-broken bloodless men.

Fill once again,  
 Sprinkle Wine and put out  
 The blazing fire of my heart.  
 Pour on,  
 Let streams of Wine flow from the pores of my skin,  
 Let the Earth with Wine be drenched to the skin,  
 Let the seventh note of octave from the throat of a  
 mad elephant sing the song of Wine,  
 Let the Cuckoo with its sweet ringing voice sing  
 poetry of disappointment,

Let all these be written on the drops of its tears,  
Let the ocean, into which the tear-drops drop, turn  
into Wine.

Then the Moon, when it raises flood-tide, be intoxicated,  
And when it runs, turning and twisting, on its orbit

Let the Milky Way be agitated  
And the Sun dive in it and bathe

Let him too be tipsy and his fire burn with the Wine.  
When the Sun walks staggering, let Day and Night,

every minute, go round and lay waste the forest  
of Rainbow.

And let stars be flowers of diamond and rain down  
on Earth,

And glimmering be scattered far and wide.

Behold the meadow-coloured evening sky has melted  
and gathered in beads,

And the beads like clusters of grapes have been the  
canopy,

They are fermented between the Sun and Moon and  
dropping the essence drop by drop.

Bring out your tongue and spread far out and away,  
Taste it and let me taste.

Wishing health to one another

Drink in a single draught . . .

Fill more and give again, O.

With the sluggishness of Wine your eyes have  
stretched like "Khukuri."

Now there remain your eyes and your lips alone,

Rest are all cloud,

Wine is your lips,

All the world is but your eyes, your eyes.

Its silence is your vacant looking,

The rippling sounds of your lips are its words,

Your lance-like eyes are "Cocks" and your lips  
"Hens,"

The obvious and the secret,  
 "The Heaven is the father and the Earth the  
     mother," of the Rig Veda.  
 "The land is the wife and the sky the husband," of  
     the Ya-jur Veda  
 Earthquakes lie in my hands  
 And the shaking of the sky in my heart.  
  
 Keep this knowledge secret, as hidden as a part of  
     yours,  
 O Guhyeshvari!  
 The Universe is drinkable, we drink and offer others  
     to drink.  
 We spit all that is not worth drinking.  
 We swallow what is worthy.  
 We evoke both the Celestial Gods, Indra and Vayu,  
     and offer Soma to them.  
 The impatient poet is but Wine and Wine,  
 Or what deliverance is there?  
 Should I die or like an ascetic give up all heart?  
 Or, O Maid of Wine! drink and let me drink.  
 Whose thirst is ever quenched here, whose hunger  
     satiated?  
 Hope, for a while, glows in the dawn in all its redness,  
 And in the dew-time the blue clouds of despair come  
     up from the west.  
 If sleep would not infuse intoxication in the night,  
     the fire of anxiety would consume all.  
 What is here—Feel and perceive  
 For light of your eyes cannot realise the darkness.  
 It is so thick, O, light only takes form,  
 Light does not spread beyond its surface,  
 Eyes, though they see, turn blind, hence feel with  
     your hands;  
 What do you find?  
 Poking, piercing, irritating, burning, branding, agi-  
     tating,

Deception, bribe, murder, injustice, vice, disgrace,  
 tyranny, envy, malice, wrath, heart-rending  
 words,

Heartlessness and total eclipse on sympathy.

Who has found what for eternity?

Who had not been tipsy? Who had not defrauded?

Who has, in his trouble, not received rejoicing from  
 others because he too had rejoiced in others'  
 misfortune?

Whose established principle has not been set at  
 naught by the passage of time?

Whose crest of pride did not submit?

Has there ever been an enthusiast whose great fore-  
 sight did not view delusion?

Who is not defrauded at last?

Who did not weep? Who have not had to bow down?

Who does not die and who did not die?

What did not transform into vapour and disappear?

Fill once more, again, O Maiden of Wine! Pour more  
 and drink more.

It is the season of sweet Spring.

I am, like the great Rishi Ma-dhu-chan-da, drinking  
 ceaselessly deep and long.

This is Science, the Canto Electricity, the "Why" of  
 the infinite Future.

This is the Veda, the Canto of Wine, it is the system  
 of Vedas.

It is the mystery of enchantment, it is the great re-  
 joicing of the Truth, the Wine.

Resting on it, I can, in all love lie down with Death,  
 I cling to the Earth and be one with it.

I lie down,

Be lulled by the Wine

And fall into a profound sleep.

I am liberated.

Balakrishna Sama (1903—)

**THE SONG**

Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.  
 In the town of Mathura,  
 In every house  
 In every room  
 In every fold of the heart  
 The air began to tremble in concord with the flute.  
 Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.

The grasses fell down from the chewing mouth of the  
     cows,  
 The fishes came out of water.  
 The peacocks were lost in meditation,  
 So they dropped down their feathers on the Lord,  
 And the cuckoos and the nightingales,  
 Tearing off their breasts with their own nails  
 Fell down on the branches of the trees in concord  
     with the flute.

Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.

The milkmaids began to weep bitterly in happiness,  
 After sometime like the golden images they remained  
     motionless,  
 The river of adoration was profusely flowing,  
 And Krishna began to smile,  
 The whole universe dozed in ecstasy,  
 The Heaven and the Earth kissed each other,  
 The eyelashes of the milkmaids began to be entangled  
     in concord with the flute.

Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.

**Balakrishna Sama (1903—)**

**SHEBA IN RUIN**

Solomon sits, head on knees.  
The land of Sheba is ruined;  
Sheba, laid waste,  
A haunted land, a heap of agony,  
Without flower, without shrub.  
There, dry winds thirst for rain;  
Birds bend beaks under wing;  
Men with parched gullets writhe.

Solomon sits, head on knees,  
Dour, dishearted, with disheveled hair.  
Was cunning, might, the bounding of a deer?  
Love, a flame's sudden leap?  
Desire, a rise without scent?  
These are life's ways;  
The less said of them the better.

Sheba is ruined;  
Nothing remains but marauders' tracks;  
Neither Sheba nor her fair queen remain.

Solomon sits, head on knees.  
From where shall good fortune's messengers come?  
From where shall wine  
For the cup of age come?

N. M. Rashed (1910—)  
translated from the Urdu by  
M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

## NEAR THE BALCONY

Wake up, winsome bedroom's Light;  
Wake up from your bed of velvet dream,  
Though you still cling to night's delights.  
Come to this window;  
Morning's lights  
Caress minarets  
Whose heights  
Mirror my desires.  
Open those drowsy eyes  
That awaken love in my heart;  
Look at the minarets  
Basking in the dawn.  
Do you recall beneath their shadows  
A shabby *mullah*  
Drowsing in a dark basement,  
Like his idle god,  
A demon, sorrowful,  
A sign of three hundred years' shame,  
A shame without cure?  
Look: as if jungle spirits with torch in hand  
Had left their lairs to prowl,  
The crowd in the market rushes madly—  
Like a flood.  
Somewhere, in each of these men's hearts  
Flickers—bride-like—  
A spark of soul.  
But not one has the power to burst  
Into a raging flame.  
Among them wallow the diseased, the poor,  
Nourishing cruelty beneath the sky.

I am but a beast of burden, tired, old,  
 On whom Hunger, hefty and strong, rides;  
 And like other city folk  
 After passing a night of pleasure,  
 I too go out to pick up rags and trash  
 Beneath that fickled sky.  
 At night, I too return to a shack.  
 Look at my helplessness!  
 Again and again I return to this window  
 To look at the minarets  
 When evening gives them a departing kiss.

N. M. Rashed (1910—)

translated from the Urdu by

M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

## INTRODUCTIONS

Death, meet them,  
 These simple-hearted who  
 Neither pray nor drink,  
 Who are neither artful nor worldly-wise,  
 Who have learning  
 Of neither books nor of machines,  
 Of neither this world nor another.  
 Merely faithless in all things .  
 Don't be shy, Death;  
 Meet them.

Come ahead; you also, come ahead  
 To meet Death.  
 Come, you nouveau riche;  
 Don't bother to hide your begging bowls;

There is no life in you now, slaves of Mammon, and  
of Time.  
Laugh with Death ; woo him ; please him.  
Death, these are negative men ;  
More than negative, less than men.  
Give them a sweet glance.

N. M. Rashed (1910—)  
translated from the Urdu by  
M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

### THE SMELL OF MANKIND

From where has this smell of Man suddenly come ?  
Jungle demons stand stone-still ;  
Their footprints turn to fetters on their feet ;  
The smell of Man.  
In dim jungle meadows,  
In the moonlight, they dance without fear, without  
sorrow.  
But now, their feet are numb, their hands cold,  
Their eyes petrified, without light.  
A single whiff has turned them white with fear ;  
For them, one smell is enough.  
Who is a match for them ?  
A shadow, hidden in the Tree of Time, among the  
branches of months and years,  
Looks on them through tangled silent branches.  
One smell of Him and they panic.  
They turn to wax.  
Yes ; tonight Man will descend,  
And demons' valor will be shattered.

N. M. Rashed (1910—)  
translated from the Urdu by  
M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

**POEM 1**

After the whimpering now  
Time for full-throated song;  
The joy and abandon  
Such as rude boys know.

Time for a word of nonsense  
Again. So let mad eyes  
Sparkle, while behind them,  
The Sorrows sleep like swans.

**Taufiq Rafat (1927—)**

**POEM 2**

This mountain, like a benevolent giant  
Wears its cap of pines at a cocky slant.  
Up one side of it runs a man-made scar  
Ending at a rheumy cave, not visible  
From this spot. We have often picnicked there.

Two lovers pass me, arm in arm. An idle  
Glance, a whispered word is all I get.  
For them I am as much part of the landscape  
As the railing I lean against, or that  
Red-roofed house, or the famous mountain-top.

**Taufiq Rafat (1927—)**