

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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THE WAKE

My father lies tonight doubtless
in his own urine, strapped and locked
to the strangest bed. He doesn't weep
or scream, curse or bite; he barely

stumbles back to the other dead
who walk in his only present. I
try to think of something he
must miss, now that his pride's

spilled and dried down his necktie
and pant leg. I ask, almost
aloud, what did he care about
or leave for me to care about?

Any man must leave his son
something. I wear his hard smile:
some green spring mornings I
whistle as he used to

"Springtime in the Rockies." Though
I grow more like him than I like,
I never knew (am not sure now)
that what he had to tell me

is thankfully untellable. Everything
he owned—my guarded waiting, his wife's
great love, long beyond the sharp
point of hate—he bought on time.

For his madness he paid cash. Old man,
how even now can you leave us
like this, neither loving nor hating you
but simply to sit here, waiting?

Carroll Arnett

TWO POEMS**And Now She Moves in the Majesty of Her Claims**

and realm coherent of her childhood's light,
still part-child in her each bird wrist
slight as sparrows', but now it is the dark
she knows, or half-knows, that mingles
in her eyes, that flows, a robe assumed
and velvet, behind her where she goes.

She is of her race's bright continuance,
all of laurel and fresh oakleaves,
globe and scepter in either fist
palpable, palpable as the quick spark
she commends to martyrs, and her cause
shall prevail by the meekness of its might:
dark are her laws, and the measure right.

Dark are her laws, and her hand's commission
more regal now for her monthly sorrows
and blood's election beneath whippoorwill.
Acorns shall fall from her rich brow,
darknesses ripen in her dispensations:
ascension so into her worth and plight:
queen from now, and human still.

Three Small Songs

1. Somewhere in the night
the lovers lie in their beds
and sometime at the height

of shrill desire thread
their clammering flesh
with silence: words are death:
love mutes their breaths
somewhere in the night.

2. Be imperfect as the scallop's wings
as dip of finches in their half-flight
keep something for imagining
something for delight.

Move your hands as blind moles teach
wear some irregularity in your face
even your lapsed and mottled speech
allows for grace.

3. Boned as stems
of dandelions
to fashion flight
the gulls the gulls
o are bright
in the upper
ache of flight
Death crank
their necks
like market hens
bone will set
to bone again
Death pluck
and pluck
a beltline hand
feather shall lift
this flesh again.

R. G. Vliet

TWO POEMS**Art of the Sonnet: 220**

In my father's hand the only hand was mine,
his with the dead volcanos of the callouses . . .
I could have gone breaking bread with unicorns,
but the god was put down, and the boy— sleepy with
doom . . .

We walked in a race of shadows. My mother
stayed home with mother, and her mother with
mother—
the sun was a samovar— the body of the pond
sweated with scum. His breath, of country folk, stank
of gold midgets cleaning his teeth, sweet milk and
spring
water running down my winter limbs . . .
He would always be here at hand, I thought, and my
mother
in the dead volcanos, and the mothers before her now
in the cold smoulder— I grew up with my face in his
hand,
that I not witness the sweat drying on the body of
the pond.

Art of the Sonnet: 221

In my father's hand the only hand was mine.
The summers were always full of spiritual advisors;
in winters they collected rent. Is Eve's apple
rotting somewhere, I asked him, and do I have time

to take a bath before prayer, or must it properly be afterward? Your mother is waiting, he said.

Mother

was always waiting— with the Day of Atonement or supper.

If I put a slipper to my ear, will I hear Christ walking on water— or did pain go barefooted? Christ never lived, my father said, but certainly He died. Will that be true of you and mother, or will she go on waiting— I won't eat any rotten apples, I said, I won't. I must pay the rent, my father said; I will be back in the summer with your hand.

Gil Orlovitz

CONVERSATION CLASS IN A LATIN COUNTRY

The Algerians make passes at you because you wear tennis shoes, Madam Anjou says, perspiring rhetorically, without needing a bath (she had one three days ago), and I listen politely to her glistening upper lip.

Outside lightning catches in the Belledonne peaks and washes down into sunflower fields.

People write Amnesty in pink chalk on seventeenth century walls, and I can say all of these things to Madam Anjou.

But she obviously disapproves of tennis shoes so I cannot explain that summer, like an aging prostitute with blue veins behind her knees, is just beyond the door, waiting.

Barbara Hamlin

TWO POEMS**The Elm Splits**

Lightning splits the elm
and summer's laid open
to the root. A mole
slept there in darkness
with cold claws, crumbs
of soil on his whiskers,
no lids to open and apprise
him of sudden illumination
when his house breaks.
Rain boils down the length
of the wood's wound; the mole
who heard God fall
on his world begins to swim.
The cistern where the root
was deep, deepens, darkens;
his ears are too full of water
to hear thunder open
another hole. Mole, root, heart,
he sleeps in the dark until
a power he can't see cracks
the earth that keeps him blind.

Parts*for Liz*

Rain in spring fury washes
all the pebbles from the wall.
A nut cracks, sprouts, and makes
a tree. To trade a quick leaf
for infinity, to turn life
like a bad shirt inside out
and wear the other side, still
leaves me wondering what I'll be
divided from. My daughter plays
in a pile of sand that may be me
and my roots ache with anticipation
even while I grow. In the nutshell
some part struggles with the whole.

I see the birdbath after rain.
Water poured into its bowl
shines round. A wing dips it out
with beads breaking
from the rim. Like water, breath
fills, escapes, and sings
how we move, we dance,
willing to take shape
that won't wait but spills
away. Poured into a bowl
the drops embrace.

S. Dorman

AN EXPLICATION AND A POEM

The Feast is half the text of a meditation spoken in the chapel of Beloit College on Founders' Day, February 14, 1965. The other half was introductory to the poem and does not exist now except as two pages of notes hastily written the morning of Founders' Day. From the notes I have constructed these paragraphs that keep the order of the original speaking, the present tense and, hopefully, some of the color of that occasion.

* * *

Most naturally I begin with the two-fold impulse to write *The Feast*. First off there was the loss of Mrs. Whitney, familiarly known as Deanie, news of which reached me only at summer's end. Immediately I wondered how to celebrate the magnitude and sanity of this woman's character. Later in the fall, in a eulogy for her, Professor Irrmann conveyed to me our sense of her death as a crystallization of her meaning and an affirmation of our amazement, not to mention our high opinion. Even by then my imagination was considering the controlling image—life as a banquet—in the strong, even crude diction associated with it and hardly with the elegiac mode.

The second impulse came out of Dean Clark's invitation to read to this congregation that comes together especially to celebrate the institution's losses during the year passed. Think of the excitement a poet feels when he knows that public use will be made of what he thinks he can do best—and when he approves so the collegiate occasion to meditate upon the dead. Moreover, this impulse was the shaping one, for it stimulated my sensibilities with what I can only call aesthetic emotion: that the poem must be of a certain duration, be lofty, possess everywhere a grave formality. Here was the threat and challenge of decorum. It would tax my taste and craft to make

a poem that works and is beautiful. This is the excitement of the artist.

While the two-fold impulse operated, the focal object migrated or at least enlarged. Or spread from Deanie to a whole order of human beings for whom there is no single name but a plurality of names and adjectives. One axis of *The Feast* is my effort to employ and order the great variety of words to establish my sense of their state of being, for they are large souls. And certainly they're not "nice." But they are the subject of the poem.

It has four "parts"; and if you will turn to III, you will get as close to a sermon as you are going to get this morning. The subject is *you*, the tone hortatory, and the style highly rhetorical—fit prose, I hope, for such public conclusions. But highly charged, too, I hope, with my conviction of the possibility of volition, a rather old-fashioned humanist sentiment, the confidence of which surprises me with its Victorian ring.

Part II is a central lyric cast in the conventional "I," here self-examining and meant to stand for all of us going through the process of realization and reversal; for here is the turning point in feeling. The dominant image, that of a runner running for the loveliness and virtue of moving excellently, starts with a painful sense of innateness, of ordinariness, of strict limitation. Then it moves to the terrible distinction between itself and the very dead: life possesses the runner! which sense heads into the metamorphic miracle of decision, and the will declares its power even while it touches its own mortality.

Part I is a painterly vision taken from the baroque convention (*e.g.*, Poussin) of depicting events among the gods so the painter could paint heroes in idealized renderings. That elegance I have aimed at here—in the stature of the dead, their gorgeousness. The moment is like a resurrection, the last moment of this year's deads' last supper. It is a dream of their being

brought together for our inspiration, yet even while we admire their grand partaking of the world they disappear forever to the grave.

“Part IV” consists of the five long-lined, italicized quatrains. It is a distributed part, five extended figures to convey their exit; and these serve an architectural function by separating the large pathetic units with cool objectivity of tone and also by repeating the disappearing notion in impersonal similes drawn in the manner of natural science. The last two together are a contrived redundancy intended to return us mutely to the annihilation where we began.

Nevertheless, the burden of *The Feast* is the response each of us can make to the spectacle of magnification and increase in the affairs of the spirit.

THE FEAST

*They are silent as the molecules are
that just carried music along the air
but, left still now, make this vacancy:
they silent, who were uproar on our ears.*

1.

They have risen from savories
turning to dust on their palates.
They have wiped their mouths and risen.
Their mouths have swallowed the last health
and have closed on praises good luck
inspires—on their mouths’ manifold praise.
Their mouths bite the last syllable.

They have collected in our vision
like gods painted in a story,
close by so we see how they esteem
coolly each other's magnitude,
these stubborn forces, wholes, whale-size
called in from the blind solitudes
to solemnize their common dying.

They cannot taste though salt stays salt
nor profess one more phrase nor choose
nor hunger with stomachs gone cold
but must put their goblets down and—
wrapped in magistrates' fur, gold chains
weighing their chests—abandon the feast,
the concert unplayed behind them.

*They're scattered as are the done-with forms
that every year marks progress by, spoiled parts
that perish to invisibility.*

They leave day hollow and us turning dark.

2.

My mind the runner runs to sense
its parts together wholly go
(their speed, heat, breathing deep, their shine)
and, running, takes me to extremes

where everywhere I learn how my mind
was what Fortune joined and fixed in growth
as sure as these future bones were fixed
the instant my parents were unjoined:

like short legs that run in families

or whole outside skin that confines
hereditary certainties—
full grown, trained and not Olympian

as these dead were whose breath is lost,
whose temperature is zero but reads
bright in me, who am eating the world!
I ventilate my lungs today!

I'm the two-eyed one, active still
with neural paths, gathered and shaped,
entire of tissue, endocrine,
reflexed, circulatory and live!

From my surfaces and my tips
the virtues the cosmos gave me
I'll give back increased by a will
made gold in private alchemy—

the logos *will* told in the mind
and sung and sung to magnify mind!
Will! that sound the magic dead breathed
to lift chance past brute quantity

though, as it feels the champion rouse,
my labyrinthine mind knows how
that dayspring prepares when the last sun
will empty my eye forever too.

*Their fame exaggerates like a hero's meal
in a telling that turns stuff into words
and so keeps yet not fully, without smell
while those garlanded, actual heads spoil.*

3.

Brothers, let us use these dead and leave here not astonished because they are dead or more astonished that they rose like monuments into history on their own large scale but fade, obit after obit, anyhow into black time. Watch each prodigy's nimbus fade and learn this reason for their fame: they were savage and bit life into the neck and hung on, real blood bibers, nothing delicate about them but their swift delicate minds and these strong and fed. Our host of soloists taking—each one—his major talent *sotto voce* into the privacy.

Let us use these dead in the manner preachers use holy documents: to raise wisdom. In the manner also that cooks prove their mysteries: increased appetite. What stomachs these autocrats had to begin with. Luck. But they acknowledged, valued, seized and stretched it; they trained their bodies to extravagance so that's why they were spectacular, our vast humanists, who thought as little of their dying day as they did of heaven with its neat moral compensations—though they were dignities of course and made most of their movements comely. How they held those fine heads. What Heads! What Virtues! In the manner that stories become known let them grow familiar as both our text and our art, for what more evident truth have we to work with?

Mine is the doctrine of imitation, brothers, and it begins with complete appetite. Stomach! not pickiness picking and thinking it comes out clean and good looking but the whole mess: irascibility, narrow prudence, fools, sickly fools, the mean, the malignant. Hubbub, hubbub, hubbub! in the middle of which you claim like them: "This is the world and I'm eating it." Then turn to your nerves which are bearing cheer through all the nerve canals because you have been forcing them to extreme wakefulness,

and you command: "I will be thus and so!"—the strong name you have chosen to be. When the nerves faint at such noise, you smile as if you understood and drive them up and drive them. Over and over you say to yourself in every gesture and speech and affection and domination "I am not afraid" and in the dark "I am not afraid" so that fear can never touch the pit of your stomach and thus shrink the magnanimity of your mind.

Brothers, prepare to be counted among the feasters in the house of feasting noises where the orchestra provides a jubilee upon the celebration of your life. Think of that company. Think of your tongue from which, as from theirs, wisdom leaps and illuminates the nature of giants. We can use these Worthies! Energies! Divines! Immensities! Ornaments! Pillars! Great Hearts! the ruin of diminution. You shall admire. They shall admire you. Then the banquet is complete. The banquet is the prize.

*They divide through our memories, thin out
like the stars across accelerated space
till one by one each spins from time and drills
blackly through the confine of our knowing.*

*Deep by deep they drown below the top blues
and the black blues that rob the ocean's sun
until they touch uninterrupted night and end
among eyeless ancient life. Cruelly lost.*

Bink Noll

FOUR POEMS**The Viewer**

I watch her perform her consequential acts
for my late evening pleasure. The scene is Holland,
nineteen-forty-one, the message must
go through by hidden radio, tonight,
before the Nazis come. Too late! The bullets
slump into her chest, the earphones stutter
to the floor. I cry, for she is dead again.

No more my wife, if indeed she ever was,
I remember her best in the roles she played:
The young war bride unveils the Sunday door
to innocent disaster. Behold the crumpling face,
the telegram has fallen to the floor.
Or as a paramour, whose sadness tears
my heart, she follows her man from wretched rooms
to dim railway departures, her slim white hands
like tender nurses soothing his tragic face.

Her life is here for me to catalogue.
I've numbered all her marriages, fifteen.
(Does that include my own? I cannot say.)
There were five sad love affairs. She died four times,
was ravished twice. The war was cruel: air raids
and concentration camps, one suicide.
Which death was real I never knew,
or if she truly died. It's hard to understand.

I've looked for it in the players' eyes, the pain
of their release, some clue to let me know

the truth of where their lives begin, or fade,
and end. The credits never tell, but spin
from view without a single revelation.
Sometimes I can't remember: is Bogart dead?
and Gable? and all the rest? They come each night,
old friends and enemies, the heroes, cowards,
all are here, and she among them all.

At times she makes me laugh, at others, cry.
She's gained a certain versatility
she never had. But the torments are the same.
I watch her making love with subtle grace,
the quickening breath, the ever loosening face.
Why couldn't she resist? I never learned.
But I no longer think of what we had,
the fragile, failing body of our love.
They taste her mouth. Their fingers on her arm
indent with my desire. I find no substance
in what we were. Nothing but this is real.

The Children's Room

It's almost like another night in time,
Another house. I walk into the room
And nothing is the same. The windless windows
Shed no light. My eyes receive the darkness

Like a pain. But soon strange forms emerge
Against the whiteness of the wall, like parts
Of soldiers, fallen in forgotten games.
The stillness of their bodies calls my name.

There was another time I saw them there,
Bodies piled naked in the snow, fingers

Stiff as stone, and legs, I think they were legs,
Rising to broken pelvic bones. It's come
Again, I think. I should have known. The payment's
Never paid, the price is always steep.
To score the games we play the fire must feed
On human heat. I cross the room and feel
My shadow climb the wall. I bend my head
To weep, but then a movement breaks the spell.
My children lie in sleep. I touch their faces
And their sleep is warm. I cover the strange bodies.

For a Nun Dead in Africa

December, 1964

It is 87 degrees, humid, the flies
intrude upon her naked body which lies
in the warm dust by the river.
She hears voices like the Mass
and hundreds of bare feet crossing
her life like shadows from the sky.
But first she feels them enter her body.
"It is God's house," she cries.
Her ribs break, releasing
the caught breath, and her breasts are torn.
She doesn't know when they take
her arms and legs and feed them
to the river gods.

Sister,
I do not know when you will die.
Lumumba lives yet. The ghost of Stanley

walks the jungles. Only last week
Tshombe flew to Paris, Rome, Bonn . . .
but something of you remains, lives here
in the animal night to prove
that we pay in flesh for what we believe.

This morning the widow of a missionary
posed for photographers with her seven
children, smiling. "I know it is part
of God's plan," she said. But there is
no plan. You, innocent exploiter,
have found the living law; the pupil devours
the teacher. This is all we know.

And how can we expect those
who are new beyond hunger and mere survival
to learn what we have never understood?
If it were mine to do, I would forgive.
There were times I could have killed,
raped, walked on naked bodies. None of us
is exempt from what we are, for our hate
comes before love, is the birth of love,
the incarnation.

It is not through love
you teach, brave and foolish sister.
It is we who come after,
embittered, sickened in our stomachs,
who must move into what we have of love.

There is no time for innocence.

The School Children

Winter has stiffened the school yard.
I see the starched children
caught in their movements,

iciced there while warm parents
watch, wondering if fear
will freeze them too.

And the children, stopped in play,
wait as they must
with faces softly thawing,

while teachers at windows
chide, and call, "Come in."
But there is no answer,

for the children are placed
like wickets in a game
and cannot move.

In time, they melt like snow
and take their bones inside
and rattle the chairs.

Herbert Scott

NINE POEMS BY JIBANANANDA DAS

Translated from the Bengali
by Mary M. Lago and Tarun Gupta

Jibanananda Das was born in 1899 in Barisal, East Bengal. He was raised in a rural area where he early came into close contact with the birds, trees, flowers and natural phenomena that play so important a part in his poetry. He attended the University of Calcutta, earning a Master's Degree in English Literature. He taught, first at Calcutta City College and later at Barisal. In 1954 he was killed in a streetcar accident in Calcutta.

During his career Das published some six volumes of verse spread between 1926 and 1954. He is generally considered the most important Bengali poet after Tagore. Asked to comment on his poetry, he once wrote: "My work has been described as difficult, solitary, withdrawn. I have been labelled variously: a nature poet, a poet socially and historically conscious, even a poet unconscious! I am a Symbolist, a Surrealist, a Whatnot. These are all partially correct, I suppose, but they do not explain the total fabric."

The *Sahitya Akademi*, the Indian national academy of letters, posthumously presented Das's *Selected Poems (Sreshtha Kavita)* its highest award.

R. H. G.

The Birds

My eyes want no sleep
This spring night,
I lie in bed awake;
—I wonder what time it is!
Opposite sounds the voice of the sea,
Overhead, the skylight.
In the sky birds speak to one another,

Then vanish into the sky—where did they go?
The smell of their wings floats everywhere.

Desire came to my body this spring night,
My eyes want sleep no more;
That starlight falls from the window,
The sea-breeze
Refreshes my soul;
Everyone else is asleep—
Whose anchorage-hour has come on this sea-shore?

On that shore—a farther shore,
All these birds
Found some sheltering hill;
Then in flight before the blizzard they descended
In flocks upon the sea,
As man unknowingly meets his death.
Within wings of brown, gold, white, motley,
Their life was like a rubber ball
Inside a tiny breast—
Death was present for countless miles on the face
of the sea,
Truth, too, is unfathomable.

Wherever life is—the flavor of life endures,
Wherever the river endures—the sea is unperturbed,
Their lives are a game of strength—
They know this;
Wherever they turn their backs to the sleet
They find hope.

Then they leave for another land;
Traversing the skies with their loved ones
What need be said?
It was time for their first egg.

Much sea-salt is mingled with the smell of this earth,
Love and the child of love,
And that nest,

This desire—profound, profound.

On this spring night
 My eyes want no sleep.
 Opposite sounds the voice of the sea,
 Overhead, the skylight.
 In the sky birds speak to one another.

If I Were a Wild Swan

If I were a wild swan,
 If you were a swan,
 Beside the Jalshiri River on some horizon
 Next to paddy fields
 Among slender reeds,
 In a secret nest—

Then, on this April night,
 Seeing the moon rise behind the tamarisk limbs,
 Leaving the lowland water smell, we
 Would float among silvered harvests of the sky—
 My feathers on your wings, on mine the pulse of your
 blood—

In the blue sky, innumerable stars like golden paddy-
 field flowers,

In the shaggy green nest of the *sirish* grove,
 Like a golden egg,
 The April moon.

Perhaps a shot sounds:
 Our flight is oblique,
 In our wings, the joy of pistons,
 In our voice, the north wind's song!

A second shot, perhaps:
 Our silence,
 Our peace.

Away with the fragmentary dying of this life;
 Away with its fragmented wishes, failures and
darkness;

If I were a wild swan,
 If you were a swan,
 Beside the Jalshiri River on some horizon
 Beside the paddy fields.

Grass

This dawning fills the earth
 With soft green light like tender lemon leaves;
 Grass as green as the unripe pomelo—such a
fragrance—

The does tear it with their teeth!
 I, too, crave this grass-fragrance like green wine;
 I drink glass after glass.
 I stroke the body of the grass—I smooth it eye to
eye;

My feathers on the wings of the grass
 I am born as grass amid grass from some deep
mother-grass,
 I descend from the sweet darkness of her body.

She

She once called out to me
 Saying: "The water of this river
 Is the fading fruit of the reed, like your eyes;
 They keep the canvas free
 Of all fatigue and bloodshed.
 You are this river."

Sirish or plum

Casuarina, mango;

Then after twenty years I think of you no more!

Our life has traversed decades—

If we suddenly meet again on a country road!

Then, perhaps, the owl ventures down to the field

In darkness of the acacia lane,

In gaps of the peepul windows—

Where does it hide itself?

Descending as quietly as eyelids, where do the kite's
wings rest—

Golden, golden kite—the dew has hunted down the
kite—

Twenty years from now, if suddenly I meet you in
that mist!

You Once Showed Me

You once showed me:

The vast meadow—dense tops of pines and palms—
mile upon mile:

Sombre air of solitary afternoon

Hazed and lost in kites' wings in empty distance;

Returning again like the tide,

Conversing at length from window to window,

This world seems an illusory riverbank land.

Then

In the distance,

In the far distance,

Like a beautiful old woman, feet outstretched

beneath strong sunlight, husking rice—singing—
singing,

This afternoon breeze.

A whole lifetime passes, it seems, in a single

afternoon.

Tender moments of the evening:

In river-water, flicking shadows of *shambar*, *nilgai*
deer,

Of one spotted white doe

Formed in milk like an image of graying custard-
apple

On the river-water,

Steadfast

Through the evening.

Sometimes from afar the sandalwood fragrance of
the pyre,

Of fire—the scent of *ghee*;

At dusk,

Unutterable sorrow.

Evergreens in the dying sun,

Piyashal, *piyal*, *amloki*, *devdaru*—

Desire at the heart of the breeze, energy, surf of life;

At night,

The doves—white, white-flecked, black—darting
from moonlight to shadow,

The bygone silence

Of stars and starlight.

On the shore beyond death is a great darkness

Like this darkness of light, love, and solitude.

The Story of The Field

1—*The Moon in the Field*

The moon in the field keeps staring

at my face—to right and left

barren land, straw, stubble, creviced earth,

water of dew.

The moon in the field, sharp-curved like the sickle,

looks on; thus it has stared through so many
nights — there is no counting them.

The moon in the field says:

“Beneath the sky
plowmarks on soil
are erased—harvest time
came, is long gone!
The crop already is in—so why do you
still stand
all alone! To right and left
straw-stubble, barren land, creviced earth,
the water of dew!”

I say to the moon:

“A plentiful crop was harvested
and so much grain fell!
You have aged like this old woman Earth!
The mark of plow on soil
has been erased so often—so many harvests
came, have long gone.
The crop is already in—so why do you
still stand
all alone! To right and left
barren land, straw-stubble, creviced earth,
the water of dew!”

2—*The Owl*

The first harvest has been brought home—
nothing but dew-water
falls on the autumn field;
with breath of a November river
frost comes
to bamboo leaves, dead grass, stars in the sky.

The moon pours a fountain of ice!

In paddy field, in meadow,
smoke has settled,

a keen-edged fog.
The farmer has gone home ;
this world drownses—
still I see that
someone's eyes do not desire
this sleep!

Seated in the crowd of yellow leaves,
rubbing feathers against the dew,
covering the branch with the shadow of wings,
staring at the picture of sleep and sleepers
with the moon and stars of the field
that bird
is awake alone in the November night.

Now I recall
another day when the first harvest
was brought home—
the music of this dew fell upon the fields—
an October or November midnight.

Seated in the crowd of yellow leaves,
rubbing feathers against the dew,
covering the branch with the shadow of wings,
staring at the picture of sleep and sleepers
with the moon and stars of the field
this bird
was awake in the November night.

That night, too, the river's breath
was frosted,
the bamboo leaves, dead grass, stars in the sky.

The moon poured a fountain of ice!
In paddy field, in meadow,
smoke had settled,
a keen-edged fog.

The farmer has gone home ;
this world drownses—
still I see that
someone's eyes do not desire
this sleep!

3—Twenty-five Years Later

The last time I met her in the field
 I said: "At this time one day
 Come again—if you wish to come!—
 Twenty-five years from now."
 With these words I returned home.
 How often since then moon and stars
 Died above the fields, mice and owls
 Came and went, searching the paddy fields
 In the moonlight. How often
 To right and left, many people closed their eyes
 And slept—I stayed awake,
 I alone —
 The stars raced through the sky.
 Time moves even faster—
 Still, twenty-five years have not ended.

Then one day
 Yellow leaves again
 Fill the field;
 Mist is set afloat
 On leaves, on dry stalks
 Everywhere—the swallow's broken nest
 Is wet with dew; on the road
 Are shattered birds' eggs, cold and stiff.
 On vines, on leaves,
 Are cucumber blossoms, a few ruined white
 cucumbers,
 The torn spider-web, the withered spider.
 In the bright moonlight night the roadway is marked
 out
 A few stars can be seen
 In the frosty sky—mice and owls
 Wander from field to field;

Gleanings still satisfy their thirst—
When did twenty-five years pass by!

4—*Moon of the November Field*

Longing wakens in the heart—
This mountainous cloud
Brings you with it
In midnight or morning sky.
Those whom the dead earth discarded by night are
now alone.
Tattered white clouds have gone fearfully
Like frightened boys. For a long time
The stars have burned in the sky.
Then, moon, you came to the head of the field;
That which is now impossible on earth,
Which happened once, then, uncontrolled,
Was lost and spent, is what you savor today;
Once again you took your stand.
Fields were plowed all over the earth,
The seeded plot was tilled,
The cultivators left.
This is the tale of their fields: if the story is ended
Much still remains which
You know—does this world know it, too?

Jibanananda Das
Translated from the Bengali
by Mary M. Lago and Tarun Gupta

TWO POEMS**Our Lord in Heaven**

James William Fitzroy
Concannon II lived in a
billion dollar subdivi-
sion in the Mohave
desert his address was
1096673 King Arthur's
Court our Lord in Hea-
ven Hollywood be thy
name lead us not into
Socialism and unrest we
shall be the greatest
nation ever as long as
you remain against all
the others and please
not too many revelations
if the word leaked out
that Christ was a Com-
munist we wouldn't know
which way to run.

An Artifice or Two

When I was small,
I wouldn't shoot my father
Without my helmet on.

He saw in this,
A point of honor.
It wasn't that at all.

The murder
In a small boy's heart
Disturbs his dreams.

He needs an artifice or two
To separate what is,
From what seems.

The soldier made the kill,
Leaving me to study
The body tumbling,
And the final breath.

My father's art
Could not unravel
Any mysteries of death,
But it served as well.

I grew disquieted, surviving,
And pleaded with him
When he lay
Too still.

James Spencer

A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS IN LIMA

He smiles at me benignly as I question him
but we are talking different languages.
I don't know God. What's God? A force? It?
Words only. And after death Paradise?
In the flesh? Playing with the tiger
in eternal sun? . . . I smelt it. Fear of death
which I feel too, but could never believe
in this cheat God, his Heaven like a cheap
card trick. I prefer it that way too.
No God and death final. The beauty of life
is that it's meaningless. God's all wise, he says,
and omnipotent. And Man his supreme poem.

I don't see God in the adobe shanties
like beehives in the hills. Or in the bowler-
hatted Indian woman crouched in her
tattered skirts rummaging through the rubbish
for titbits—detritus of the suave rich
who dare death in chromium-plated cars.
Nor in the scarlet flash of the cardinal bird;
only life and fear of death in life.

Last week I visited the catacombs
in a pink Franciscan monastery.
Grey with dust and musty odour of dust
they were piled high with browned bones; skulls,
shreds of parchment skin, shards of death
that had survived four centuries' decay.
I was fascinated by these relics
of the charnel house yet outside
after my tourist jaunt of the macabre
revelled in the aimless sexual bustle

of the street; the anticuchos sizzling
at the stalls; the pinkish glow of sunset.
But no God I knew. Life but no God there.

He left then smiling benignly to himself
for we were talking different languages.

David Tipton

AFTER YOU, TU FU

Stars reeled above, like tipsy gulls, that night
In Maine, when we lay drunk upon the dock
With loons and frogs mocking us from the far
End of the lake, the sea a step beyond
Megunticook. So now I think of you.

Green wine bottles and red lobster shells
Lay shattered on the granite shore, empty
So our friendship could be full. Like a pair
Of aging T'ang Dynasty poets
We drained the joyful moonbeams in our cups.

Now, in an empty prairie state, I sit
Awaiting years while flights of geese form rhymes
Across the face of a corn-yellow moon.
Leaves crunch beneath my feet like broken glass.

Van Lesley

THREE POEMS**Holocaust**

As the burning church shrugged in its mire of light,
the steeple tumbled. A loosened bell broke
the altar to sparks, and the stained glass windows
burst. Afterwards, sorting through the bright
shards of mosaic stories for Moses' burning
bush, I found an infant Christ whose face
was blank with melted lead. The whole place
stank of scalded ash. A month of spring

somehow conjured its flowers from shrubs scarred
by the blaze. Some scorched and stiffened leaves
were dead, black on top and pale underneath,
but half-bushes bloomed and now charred
twigs kink toward the church's shell
while blossoms nod like innocents near hell.

**Instructions Concerning the Painting of an Orchid,
*after Lu Ch'ia***

The brush must not ever be slow. Its quick stroke
is appropriate. Such is made with elbow
raised, heart light, and an eye grown keen.
The blowing orchid flutters. Its waving leaves
and stem resemble the tail of a soaring phoenix.
Light as a dragonfly, teeters calyx.
In full bloom, the orchid stands erect
and faces upward. Do not neglect the stem.

Remember that its stance without the blossom
 is rigid. A master's stroke will hint this posture
 not with curves, but with a curving straightness.
 as wind moves not the flower, but its weight.

Triangle

*After a Painted Limestone Relief in the Tomb of Ti,
 an architectural overseer; Saqqara, c. 2500 B.C.*

Unrelievably vigilant, Ti
 in limestone stands by Ti in dust.
 The flesh on his bone (four thousand, five
 hundred years entombed) is gauze on crust.
 To hold his spirit, the Overseer's
 pose is cut in stone. A papyrus
 thicket behind his figure rears
 bamboo-like stalks, corrugations
 roofed by cluttered birds. Spears
 are raised and a river-horse flattens
 its ears. Detached, a giant
 Ti—poled on zigzag patterns
 meaning water—observes the hunters
 and a hippopotamus. The bottoms
 of loaded boat skim the rumps
 of huddling, scrambled beasts. Caught
 in ropes, one squats improbably,
 twists its neck and cocks its jaw.
 Ti, eternal Overseer,
 staff in hand, watches close
 the hunters' angled spears. Exactly

parallel, they juxtapose
against the boatman's pole, and static
shafts balance: control.

Broken by a jaw, the basic
river-line provides the final
plane, creates that most fixed
and eternal form: an equilateral
triangle. Permanent
amid the agitated, vital

scene where fox-like creatures menace
nesting birds above the reeds,
and river-horses bawl at men

with spears, Ti the Overseer
neither supervises nor
inspires the hunt. His figure seems

aware of every thing, divorced
from each. His body dead, its
spirit haunts a world scored

on stone walls. Time could stitch
his flesh with death, but Ti
had carved this tomb to mark his spirit.

Imperturbably alert, Ti
in limestone stands by Ti in dust
watching hunters, and watched by us.

William Pitt Root

WAKENING

Rain set on me heavily, great clouds slumped
And twined into the trees, the brittle drops
Shattering against bricks—a few buds humped
Like insects on the dipping branches. Flops
Of vine lay in the mud, peeled from the stone
Like wallpaper. The rain stopped—footsteps hung
In the air like drops on leaves—lamps glared, alone
In the fog and the babble of dripping. The muddy
lung

Of a seed breathed deeply—in the garden, half sunk
In the shadows of weeds, I heard a sound, stirring
In tendrils, the mud, choking with life—

the junk
Of houses and rooftops fades in the distance, clearing
To fields. The rain still hovers here. The husk
Of winter darkens,

shuttered by dusk.

Charles Wyatt