

**Six Japanese Poets**  
Translated by Naoshi Koriyama

Shabdaguchha

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*Shabdaguchha* accepts submission throughout the whole year. Poetry, written in Bengali, English or translated from any language to these two languages, is always welcome. Book review and news on poets and poetry could also be sent. Each submission should accompany with a short bio of the author. E-mail submissions are more appreciated, but Bengali written in English alphabet is not acceptable.

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## Six Japanese Poets

### **Kazue Shinkawa (1929 -)**

Kazue Shinkawa (1929- ) was born in Yuki City, Ibaraki Prefecture. She started writing poetry under the guidance of Saijo Yaso, while she was a student at Yuki Girls' High School. She has published many books of verse, and is one of the most popular poets in Japan. Her *Complete Collection of Poems* was published in 2000.

#### **WHERE AM I GOING?**

Where am I going,  
I wonder?  
Life is a wilderness.  
Even so,  
one has to go along  
by walking on foot.  
On a windy day  
the thicket of shrubs rustled,  
ruffling my hair.

Days and months pass,  
drifting away.  
Love too drifts away.  
Even so,  
we can't live  
without love, can we?  
On a windy day  
old memories turned up,  
hurting my old wounds anew which I thought had healed.

The white road continues on and on  
endlessly.  
Life is a journey.  
Even so,  
there should be some branches  
on which one can alight like a bird.

On a windy day  
I walked along,  
telling myself, "There are flowers in the fields far away."

#### **ON NEW YEAR'S DAY**

I feel as if a new mountain arose  
abruptly  
somewhere . . .

I feel as if a new river began  
to flow  
somewhere . . .

I feel as if a new window opened,  
releasing a thousand pigeons  
somewhere . . .

I feel as if a new love began to come  
toward me  
somewhere . . .

I feel as if a new song is about to come out  
and the lip of the world is about to utter, "Ah!"  
somewhere . . .

#### **I HAVEN'T WRITTEN A SINGLE LINE**

You have been flowing, haven't you, River?  
You didn't sleep last night, as always.  
You kept diligently washing  
the round moon reflected on your face.  
I saw the moon returning  
to the western sky at dawn,  
washed clean white by you  
and a little thinner.

I have been staying at this old hotel

by your riverside for three days now.  
On the desk by the window  
my writing paper remains open,  
not a line written in it.  
How can I ever hope to write a line  
in front of the wonderful line of yours?

You have in your single line  
a thousand fish swimming.  
You have been singing songs since time immemorial,  
and moreover, singing a new song every day.  
You give moisture to rice paddies and gardens on either side,  
lighting lamps under the roof of each house.  
Your hand has a firm grip on the essentials  
of the lives of people living there.  
The hand sometimes  
runs errands elegantly,  
carrying a message of a young man of upper reaches of the river  
to a girl of lower reaches, entrusting his feeling to a flower.

I am poor,  
dried up both in mind and body.  
It's because I wanted to lie by your side  
and partake some portion of your fertility  
that I came to this hotel close by you.

You keep flowing, don't you, River?  
While flowing,  
you teach me  
that on the other side there is Nirvana.  
I wonder if I can ever get there,  
when I have never washed a moon's shadow,  
nor carried a single flower.  
You, River.

*Translated from the Japanese by Naoshi Koriyama*

## **Rin Ishigaki (1920 - 2004)**

Rin Ishigaki (1920 - 2004) was born in Tokyo. Upon finishing elementary school, she started to work at a bank in 1934 as a maid. She started to be known with her poetry around 1950. One of her poems, "Hands," is included in *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time* (Norton, 1998).

### **A DOORPLATE**

It is essential  
that you put a doorplate by yourself where you live.

The nameplate other people post up for you  
where you stay  
has never been good.

When I got in the hospital  
my doorplate was posted, saying "Miss RinIshigaki,"  
not just "Rin Ishigaki."

When you stay at a hotel,  
no doorplate is posted on your room.  
But when you get into the cremator in time,  
they will hang a nameplate  
on the closed door, saying "Miss Rin Ishigaki."  
Can I ever refuse that?

You should not put  
"Miss" or "Madam"  
before your name.

It is essential  
that you post up your doorplate by yourself where you live.

You should not let others put a nameplate  
to the place where your mind is, either.  
It's good  
just as "Rin Ishigaki."

## A CHILDREN'S STORY ABOUT ATOMIC BOMBS

A war broke out.

Two airplanes taking off from the two countries  
dropped their atomic bombs  
on each other's enemy country at the same time.

The two countries were completely destroyed.

Only the crew members of the two planes survived  
of all the human beings in the world.

How miserably  
or how happily did they live together, I wonder?

This may become  
a new legend.

## A SEASON OF SNOWSLIDES

They say  
that the time has come,

and that snowslides occur  
because the season of snowslides has come.

The vow for eternal peace and the peace of mind we had  
when our country had thrown away arms.  
When we got free from the power and conflicts  
of other countries of the world,  
the hibernation of our humble country  
was good in its own way,  
no matter how inconvenient it was in some ways.

Peace,  
eternal peace,  
the silver-white world covered with the color of peace only.  
Yes, the word "peace"

came falling like powder snow,  
piling up thick,  
on this narrow land of Japan.

While patching up my broken stockings  
or knitting something,  
I would look out, taking a rest from time to time.  
And I felt relieved.  
No bombs exploded and there were no red fires here.  
And I occasionally felt  
that I was more comfortable in this country  
than in any other country seeking hegemony.

But time passed quite quickly,  
and while the firewood I put in is still burning,  
they have now begun buzzing,  
saying that the time has come,  
and that they can't resist the times.

The snow stopped long ago.  
Under the pile of snow  
tiny buds of ambitions, falsehood, or greed are concealed.  
If an utterance: "As everyone else has come to behave like that,  
there's nothing we can do to stop it," begins to roll  
somewhere in a distant peak,  
other piles of snow are prompted to join,  
and all the snow now comes rolling down,  
saying, "It can't be helped," "It can't be helped,"  
"It can't be helped."

Look! The snowslide!  
The words gather more  
and more momentum,  
ever spreading out,  
ever approaching.

I can hear it.  
I can hear it.

*Translated from the Japanese by Naoshi Koriyama*

**Shinmin Sakamura (1909 - 2006)**

Shinmin Sakamura (1909 - 2006) was born in Kumamoto Prefecture. He went to Korea in 1934 and returned in 1946 to settle down in Tobe, Ehime Prefecture. Taught Japanese at a high school. His philosophy of life is based on Buddhism. Some of his poems are reprinted in school textbook anthologies in Japan.

**THE PURE HOUR**

“You say you always get up at 3 or 4, don’t you?  
and what do you do?”  
the other guy asks me suspiciously.

I just laugh, “Ha, ha,”  
but on some days I don’t do anything.  
On some days I just wait for daybreak blankly.  
On many days, I just sit,  
thinking of Rilke,  
or pondering on Cezanne.

But for me,  
this vacant hour is most important,  
the tranquil hour before dawn.  
This pure hour is most pleasant to me,  
just sitting quietly,  
building up my own world.

**WHEN VAN GOGH’S VOICE SOUNDS LIKE A REVELATION**

When van Gogh’s voice sounds  
like a divine revelation,  
I rise to my feet,  
moving from despair to hope,  
from death to life,  
from the present to the future.  
Gogh!

Give me a soul that won’t collapse.  
Give me an unyielding strength  
with which I can live for art,  
enduring poverty.

**JUST BECAUSE**

Just because it’s heart-rending,  
don’t close your eyes on it.  
Just because it oppresses you,  
don’t hesitate to speak out.  
You should see what you should see.  
You should speak out what you should speak out.  
You should call out  
to every corner of the world.  
You should appeal  
to entire humanity  
for the anger,  
for the grief,  
for the lamentation  
of Hiroshima.

*Translated from the Japanese by Naoshi Koriyama*

**Fumio Kataoka (1933 - 2014)**

Fumio Kataoka (1933 - 2014) was born in Kochi Prefecture. Graduated from Meiji University. He belonged to a poetry group, “Chikyu (The Earth)” While teaching at a high school, he wrote poetry, and won some poetry awards.

**THE NIGHT**

The night seems to be like a boat made of plain wood.  
Each of us has not carefully looked at each other,  
and each one rides one's own boat.  
We need to let the current drift us from now on.  
My wife and daughter, my father and mother, too,  
passing through me and out of me,  
go drifting each toward the distant nebula.  
Parting from each other's life is not cruel.  
Like a hackberry tree nonchalantly swaying all the time,  
soaking its branches' shadows in the surface of the river in the daytime,  
our parting  
is brought together  
in the nebula of human blood sadly swirling.

I lie on the sideless boat,  
feeling rightly congenial.  
It seems I have reached the end of the current.  
At the village of cells that keep me awake,  
the air is clear,  
and I wish to drift on  
even farther to the endless expanse.

**CHERRY BLOSSOMS**

At night  
cherry blossoms scatter toward heaven.  
The world is a retina  
and each petal quivers  
at the endlessness of its warm world.

In time the petals become a flock of cranes  
and flutter  
away into the expanse of death.

\*

As for its color of light pink,  
in what part of the petal  
is the bashfulness concerning its consciousness  
retained?

In the cherry blossom season,  
the light falling on us obliquely  
sometimes urges the bright scenery to move  
toward the gloomy horizon.

At that time, for a very short time,  
cherry blossoms' petals light our feet  
with a special glint  
that we can't find anywhere else.

We are now invited  
toward dizzy tranquility,  
toward its fearful bank,  
by an invisible big hand  
silently placed around our back.

**TIME**

What was a year anyway?  
A flood didn't do much damage this year, did it?  
A winter sun is shining on the chicken coop  
in which five chickens have drowned.

What was the ten years anyway?  
Our daughter is struggling with adverbs  
in the subjunctive mood in her grammar.  
Our son is still watching the bloody Abdullah the Butcher wrestling on  
television.

What was the twenty years anyway?  
If I open the partition wall,  
my wife is still washing the underwear.

What was the thirty years anyway?  
Invited, I rushed to the widower's rented house,  
where my childhood friend is taking out his reading glasses.

What was the forty years anyway?  
My father is now like an old game-cock,  
while my mother is still sewing the afterglow into the ground.

Well, the Earth will take a nap.  
Eternity too may be as quick as a wink,  
and I'll stay up like a night watchman.

*Translated from the Japanese by Naoshi Koriyama*

### **Kosaburo Nagatsu (1934 - )**

Kosaburo Nagatsu (1934 - ) was born in Hiroshima, but he was in Yamaguchi Prefecture at the time of the A-bombing. After graduating from high school in Hiroshima, he started to work for a bank and started to write poetry. He has written many poems about Hiroshima.

### **DID YOU SEE HIROSHIMA?**

Did you see Hiroshima?

Have you been to Hiroshima?

I beseech you to visit Hiroshima.

The jumbles of barracks in front of the station have been developed  
and department stores have been built.  
The fields leading to the army's drill ground have become the station  
buildings  
for the bullet trains.  
Things change in half a century.

We don't see any scars of war anywhere now.  
But people live quietly hiding their scars.  
Few are the A-bomb survivors who can talk about their experiences now  
and they keep silent, holding their sorrow for having survived.

Soon the temporary barracks have been replaced  
with modern residential buildings.  
Streets are widened and newly built,  
a bit different from what we remember.  
New bridges have been built and vehicles are going over them.  
Now Hiroshima is a major city for the new century  
with a population of 1,200,000.

On that day, high schoolgirls gathered to the first aid station  
around Nigitsu Shrine  
but now bullet trains dash by on the elevated railways  
through the station and a row of buildings.

Am I foolish to try to remember the old Hiroshima?  
Or is it too natural that the image of old Hiroshima should fade away?  
Are these cries of the shadows in our hearts going to fade away?  
Please inhale the air of Hiroshima now!

Did you see Hiroshima?

Please come, visit Hiroshima now.

Please inscribe the image of Hiroshima on your hearts.

### **HAS HIROSHIMA CHANGED?**

Has Hiroshima  
changed?

It has changed.  
Since that time  
survivors of the A-bomb  
have stopped  
talking about the A-bomb.

Has Hiroshima  
changed?

It has changed.  
Young people  
are no longer interested  
in the A-bomb.  
They don't want to know about it.

The number of school excursions visiting Hiroshima  
has decreased every year, as I hear.  
People just shout for the Peace Movement,  
And survivors of the A-bomb who can talk about it are dying out.  
Memories of the poets too are fading, aren't they?  
Their voices are getting thinner, aren't they?

Has Hiroshima  
changed?

It has changed.  
The streets have become much more beautiful.  
It's a major city now with many green spots.  
There is a ferry for sightseeing boats around the Atomic Bomb Dome  
and pleasure boats are moored.  
But prices seem to be a bit high.

Has Hiroshima  
changed?  
It hasn't changed.  
Things can't change:  
the pains of the wounds of the ghosts;  
the remaining ruins in the hearts  
of those who have survived.

Please, don't forget Hiroshima.  
Please pass a piece of heavy thoughts on to others.  
Please don't let the memories of Hiroshima fade away.

### **THE SKY TORN APART BLACK**

I'm trudging wearily.  
On the other side  
Electric wires and utility poles are  
Smoldering.  
I'm trudging wearily. On the other side  
Now the i that is dead  
And the i that is faintly alive  
Are trudging wearily.

Rags and  
Flesh and skin peeling off, hanging down with rags,  
Their faces swollen,  
Men and  
Women cannot be distinguished, they don't care.  
They are faintly alive now,



Just barely breathing.

They are naked,  
But they don't feel embarrassed.  
Where is their dignity  
Of being human beings?

Views are simply flat.  
Broken concrete walls are barely visible.  
The beings that were human being a while ago are  
Now a mass of corpses.  
Only occasionally someone is found alive, breathing.  
Crowds  
Of skeletons of human beings are trudging  
Wearily . . .  
Just trudging wearily . . .  
Only god knows whether they are just walking.

*Translated from the Japanese by Naoshi Koriyama*

### **Jotaro Wakamatsu (1935 - )**

Jotaro Wakamatsu (1935 - ) was born in Oshu City, Iwate Prefecture. He lives in Minami-Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture. He visited Chernobyl in 1994, that is eight years after the nuclear accident in Chernobyl. Has written many poems about the tsunami of 2011 and the ensuing nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Company's No. 1 plant, in Fukushima.

### **THE CHERRY TREE IN HANSAKI**

In an ordinary year  
it would have delighted many people's eyes.  
But the blossoms of this 300-year old pink weeping cherry fell  
with no viewers admiring them this year.

In the middle of the small grave yard on the hill  
the tree embraces the grave yard with its branches spreading.  
Shone on by the setting sun, the blossoms show a mysterious hue.  
The pink weeping cherry tree blooms for the dead.

One can see the sea from the hill in the distance.  
From the seaside which the tsunami has attacked  
one may see the pink weeping cherry tree's mysterious blossoms.

It blooms only to comfort the dead.  
It blooms on the hill with no viewers around,  
because no one is allowed to come due to the nuclear disaster.

### **PROOF OF BEING A HUMAN**

Man has learned to raise crops.  
Man has learned to keep animals.  
Both raising crops and keeping animals  
are the proof that man is man.

If man hasn't been able to raise crops, when he has farm land,  
and if he hasn't been able to keep animals, when he has animals,  
and if he hasn't been able to catch fish, when there are fish in the sea,

since that certain time,

man can't be called man,  
can he?

### THE AGE THAT I LIVED IN

When I was a child, I thought,  
"I'd like to live till I'm sixty-six.  
If I lived till I'm sixty-six,  
I could see the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

The 21<sup>st</sup> century in my imagination was  
an age of Utopia,  
when there will be no war;  
when everyone will have a rich life.

But the age I lived in  
was an age of indiscrimination, huge massacres,  
an age which was haunted by Death,  
beginning with the air raids of Guernica.

Am I a god of Death  
by any chance?  
If I die,  
will an age like this come to an end?

I'll die before long,  
but I'd like to see if we can dispose of  
the foolish thing called "nuclear energy"  
which our foolishness has invented.

*Translated from the Japanese by Naoshi Koriyama*

### Hal Sirowitz

#### BAD MUSIC

We went to see the new band "The Eye  
of the Hurricane" perform at a club.  
The force of their music didn't seem  
to be aimed at the audience, but at  
some far off critic with his head buried  
in the past. It flew by us. There were  
booing and catcalls from some unsatisfied  
customers, like "If my watch ticked  
the way the drummer drummed, I'd  
throw it away." Though, I've heard  
much worse—the time you and I tried  
to make music together with our bodies  
as instruments. It started out like rock  
but never reached the rolling part.

#### ONLY THE LONELY

She was popular. Her pen pals wrote back.  
Ours didn't bother to write, making us believe  
loneliness was an addiction, like alcohol.  
At least, if you drank too much whiskey  
you'll start to sway, as though you were  
on a carnival ride. Whereas with loneliness,  
you couldn't convert it to something useful,  
like solitude, as Thoreau did at Walden Pond.  
It was completely non-transferable. And if  
you'd ask a woman out, you'd be told she  
doesn't date anyone of your ilk. Even if you  
scream from the mountaintops, "Loneliness,  
let my soul go," it will cling tighter  
to your personality. Its only attribute  
is you'll be able to spot the lonely, because  
they look like you. But what's the use  
of spotting those you want to avoid.  
And the problem with their opposites,

the Popular, were they were too busy  
to hang out with you. They had  
to run home to make sure they  
had time to write to their pen pals.

## LONG DISTANCE LOVER

We started and ended our relationship  
by letter. During that period  
the postal carrier was the most  
important person in my life. She  
could tell how I was feeling  
by that day's delivery. I'm sure  
she read the postcards my  
long distance lover sent me,  
and took my side. She must  
have figured out what happened  
when she saw me in front of my mailbox,  
hoping. She was extra friendly, letting  
me look through her truck in case she  
accidentally misplaced my ex-lover's  
letter. But no such luck. She was  
impeccable. I should have been  
friendlier, even though she was  
at least forty years older than me.  
But if you can trust someone  
to deliver your mail, you should be  
able to trust her with a relationship.

*Pennsylvania*

## Stanley H. Barkan

### MY WIFE SAYS

*after Hal Sirowitz*

## I

Don't try to pass that car,  
my wife says.  
If you do, we'll get hit on my side,  
and I'll get killed,  
but you'll survive.  
Then you'll be all alone,  
and, after a while, you'll be so lonely  
you won't want to live anymore.  
Then you'll call Dr. Kevorkian  
who'll help you to commit suicide  
and probably be put on trial  
because there's a law against it  
in New York. Then nobody else  
who needs to end his suffering  
will be able to do it, all because  
you didn't listen to me.

## II

Don't do the Atkins diet,  
my wife says.  
All the meat you'll eat is full of fat,  
and you know you can't do without bread & pasta.  
What'll you do when we go to Sicily  
and they cook *pasta trapanese* for you?  
Are you going to refuse and insult them?  
What about all that garlic bread you love so much?  
And how are you going to refuse frijoles  
with the chili you taught me how to make?  
And how are you going to eat  
chow mein and chop suey without fried rice?  
Your veins will just fill up with fat and cholesterol

and you'll get a heart attack and die young.  
 Then I'll inherit everything  
 and eat pasta and chili and chow mein  
 with garlic bread and filjoles and rice  
 to my heart's content, and live to a ripe old age.

## ANTIQUUE SHOW

Still, gray-tinged clouds  
 covering the aquamarine sky  
 over the antique show  
 in Stormville, New York.  
 Ancient books bound  
 with marbled endpapers,  
 gold-stamped cloths,  
 glimmering out of the past.  
 Poets buried in the pages  
 still speaking in tongues  
 made for the eyes  
 & ears of seekers  
 of truth & beauty,  
 all we need to know  
 while we journey  
 above ground,  
 passing through  
 the rows & rows  
 of tents spilling  
 out daguerreotypes, ambrotypes,  
 tintypes, stereograms—  
 portraits of families  
 forever encased  
 in paper, thermoplastic  
 (so-called guttapercha),  
 mother-of-pearl, and glass,  
 waiting for the curious  
 to hold in the hand,  
 to look into the fading faces,  
 posed moments locked in time.  
 We are time travelers

moving backwards  
 into the layers  
 of moments fashioned  
 here as valued detritus  
 of bygone days . . .  
 conscious of the realization  
 when we, too, will be laid out  
 upon a table for someone  
 to look into our frame,  
 open our book covers,  
 and see & read our words,  
 before the clouds turn black,  
 open up, and spill down  
 all that waiting rain.

*New York*

**Kelven Ka-shing LIT**

**I MISS THE OLD OLD LANTERN**

I miss the old old lantern.  
When I was young and innocent,  
It was you who brought me downstairs;  
Carrying this little old old lantern,  
On the day when the moon was full.

I was afraid,  
Afraid that the lantern would be burnt,  
Afraid that the candle would be hot,  
Afraid that you would leave.

Your caring hands,  
However just comforted me,  
In that frightening moment,  
You just held me,  
Across the festive path downstairs,  
Carrying the old old lantern.

It was my happiest time,  
When warmness is no longer in scarcity  
When family is no longer in dream.

Today,  
I am still afraid,  
The lantern would be burnt,  
The candle would be hot,  
And you would have left.

You really left.

The day when the moon was full could no longer be the same,  
I cried,  
But please don't worry,  
One day,  
Under the full moon;  
I will hold your hands again,

To show you what I have done,  
To honor what you have dedicated to me.

We will play the lantern together again, one day.

I miss the old old lantern.  
I miss you.

**TELL ME THAT I AM JUST DREAMING**

Tell me that I am just dreaming.

It was our last night.  
When we had hotpot in Sha Kok Estate.  
I, playfully, put sauced Chicken Wings into the pot,  
The soup then became red in color.  
You argued with me,  
Saying that sauced Chicken Wings shall never be put inside.  
You said that I will be heavily criticized if I am having this with others.  
And you kept silent.  
After 5 minutes, we talked again, we laughed again, we smiled again.

This is our last night,  
An ordinary night,  
That we have been coming through for so many times;  
That I am eager to have it, for one more time.

Tell me that you are just playing.

We were in a department store,  
Window-shopping around.  
You told me, a modern flat shall look like this and that;  
Or otherwise my future wife will be disappointed due to my bad taste.  
I argued with you—I am just a beginner.  
Telling you that I need to learn, and please keep teaching me.  
And you kept silent.  
After 5 minutes, I realized my mistake, I apologized, and you kept on  
sharing with me again.

This is our last walk,  
An ordinary walk,  
That we have been going through for so many times;  
That I am eager to have it, for only one more time.

Tell me that I am just dreaming.

I stared at the screen,  
Asking you how to write a good message.  
I drafted, and you said,  
“You are so silly how come you do things in this way.”  
You revised, screen kept showing “Amy Chan is now typing.”  
I then read.  
After 5 minutes, I was touched, and you, like my late grandma,  
Reminded me for not committing this kind of mistake anymore,  
As you cannot be here with me for the rest of my life.

This is our last Whatsapp.  
An ordinary Whatsapp message,  
That we have been going through for so many times;  
That I am eager to have it, for just one more time.

Tell me that you are just playing.

After the death of my grandma,  
You replace her roles,  
Teaching me how to take care of myself and my family.  
You replace her roles,  
Teaching me how to cook well for my future wife.  
You replace her roles,  
Caring me in every aspect for my future.  
You replace her roles,  
Accompanying me, walking around the city,  
Driving along different highways,  
Enjoying some of my happiest moments so far in my life.

I am Nobita, and you are my Doraemon.

Without you, I can never be recovered from the death of my grandma.  
Without you, I can never realize my problems.

Without you, I can never know so many things.

And,  
Without you,  
Kelven, who was buried with his late grandma,  
Can never be reborn.

This time, I still hope for a reborn.

But the reality keeps telling me that,  
This time,  
A reborn is impossible.

This is the first time that I hate reality so much.

Sadly I need to say,  
Don't worry, I shall live well,  
I shall be independent.  
I shall follow your advice,  
I shall be serious and constant towards relationship,  
I shall never forget what you have taught me.  
No longer I shall be a playful guy,  
As I am now a Mature Man.

You are always my good sister,  
Even though we are far apart now.

But still,  
Can you please tell me,  
I am just dreaming.  
You are just playing  
Only.

I cannot pretend as usual,  
As usual.

*Hong Kong*

**Peter Thabit Jones**

**SOLILOQUY OF A LEADER**

My limousine moves like a long black shark  
Through the dust and poverty of the towns,

It cuts through the frantic and happy crowds  
That clap like children at a carnival.

I am their God on Earth. The suit I wear  
Is worth more than their miserable lives.

My chauffeur opens the window an inch,  
Till I'm overwhelmed by the growing stench

That's like a whiff of tomorrow's despair.  
They jostle like trees in a whipped-up wind.

Their shouts of joy begin to annoy me,  
I long for the shade of my palace room,

Where my American-made fan blades the heat,  
Where I rule them with thoughts of my father's ghost.

My bodyguards surround my moving car,  
For too much freedom can foster hatred.

But I am tuned in to their whispering,  
Their tongues stall when they recall my shadow

That falls like the night all over the land  
And my billboard face barbed-wires their plans.

Now I am bored, my gloved hands are restless,  
I could redden all these towns with their blood.

**FATHER**

You sailed into her life  
and out of mine.  
And who can blame you?

Your sea of words  
broke  
on their harbour

of frost.  
A strange shadow  
lost in their whispering town.

Your smiles dropped  
from the dark cliff of your face,  
the long odyssey of your youth

ended in their house.  
A child's cry splintered  
down a winter of years.

A secret ship took you  
to the summer of your life,  
a fiction of postcards

that came back to the boy.

**ELEGY FOR A GHOST OF A DAY**

I am like a man  
Who has come out of the fog  
Out of the wasted years  
Left smoking.  
On a path  
Above the Pacific,  
The landscape fanfares  
A meaning for my life,

As my mindscape  
Diminishes my false mists  
Of dreaming,  
I am a man walking

On a hard route of facts,  
As the future  
And the past  
Fall away into dust.

The poems, the books,  
The image in the news,  
The dark muse calling,  
And the voice on the stage

Now disappear  
Like a bay in the fog,  
Until I am just me,  
A man who is alone,

With truths newly unveiled,  
No longer enslaved  
In a cloud of my making,

As the sea makes its noise  
For a ghost of a day,  
And a humming bird hovers  
On a moment of faith.

*Welsh*

**Mike Graves**

**NO OTHER**

I come to this place,  
With neither woman nor child  
a narrow ravine shadowed by Eden,  
abandoned and barren  
unable to glimpse  
even a gleam  
of the sword of the angel  
who stood as its guard  
to answer your question:  
I grow older and there is no other.

**WAIT**

In this place I haunt  
where came and went  
her willing self  
In a dance that seemed protected  
from the end it met—  
the shock of unexpected meeting, the turning of her head  
to seek my eyes,  
the running by with backward looks,  
the standing still outside the door  
awaiting my approach,  
approach I failed to make  
this place where the bright, circling moon  
looks upon her face  
that looked at me  
as now she hurries past  
this place I haunt  
to glimpse her face,  
although the dance is done.

*New York*



**Bishnupada Ray**

**SHADOW ON THE DOOR**

a shadow falls on the door  
a tired pair of eyes thinks  
it may knock  
but it never knocks  
how many shadows are there  
in the world?  
shadows that fall on the door  
but do not knock

long distance buses come  
stop and then go away  
a tired pair of eyes waits  
and counts them all  
how long is it before  
someone will get down  
and say “hello?”  
someone who had left home  
but did not return

a wry smile contorts  
the eyes on the verge  
of tears  
for this hope  
and betrayal  
how much love is left  
in the world we live?  
love that makes us endure  
and wait for ever.

**PASSING PHASE**

this golden crop shining in the golden sun  
makes me feel that something is coming  
to an end, a phase, vanishing before my eye  
and something yet to come, a transition

but I have no name for it, except a different  
climate zone, demanding from me a rigor  
about life, some hard talk, a toughness  
that may damn my past but will rescue  
my future, from a morass of stupidity.

**ALCHEMY**

the ingredients are all rare  
nothing is of nature’s original variety  
but meddled with and pried upon  
by science and human knowledge

but there is a youthful spring  
and a natural rock formation  
in the shape of ancient deities  
inside the red zone of a forest

only on the annual worshipping day  
an access is opened up for people  
to visit the inaccessible spring deities  
and a nightlong occult festivity

faith has various names for alchemy  
a young girl’s unalloyed love  
a wife’s faith or a child’s trust  
can do more wonder than any god.

*Kolkata*

## Dhanonjoy Saha

### I SAW THE MAN

Once I was a man I never knew  
 In the midst of romping chaos, I saw praying men sitting on the floor  
 Lips sealed, eyes closed, body still, breathing slowly  
 I walked down the quiet aisle, passed the pedestal and the closed door  
 I felt the still vibration, mystic candor, the sweet smell of redemption  
 I passed the empty mind, solitude, earthly wealth and bodily temptation  
 I burned in silence, cold, purified with divine dew  
 I saw the man I never knew.

I discovered the deadly force of living, lively comport of dying  
 The dignity of the scarifying dead  
 The perception of the empty head  
 The meaning of the sky, the river, the mountain, the springing grass  
 And humble bees on fluttering flowers in the flustering wind  
 The vast seas, the shooting stars, the burning sun  
 The soothing moon and the mighty monsoon.

Did not vex me or greet me with feat the power of ignorance,  
 The pyrrhic politics and the lyrics of Wall Street  
 The pernicious power of bodily beauty did not cross my mind  
 I could leave, for a moment, without trying everything behind  
 I flew in the sky, I walked on the moon, I reached the stars  
 I played with the frolicking angels with heavenly hew  
 For a moment, at least once, I saw the man I never knew  
 Or was it a dream come true?

*North Carolina*

## Hassanal Abdullah

### CALAMITY

There is no escape from it,  
 I told myself. There is no escape  
 from juicy apples and ripe bananas.  
 There is no escape from  
 sunlight and darkness,  
 laughter and sorrow, making  
 and remaking  
 a single bit of dreamy image  
 that floats in the air  
 of my deserted island of gorgeous  
 sand dunes, my everlasting headache.  
 There is no escape from poetry.

### MOMENTS

I still remember holding hands as we passed  
 the city of dust and found an old restaurant  
 where walls were covered with loose plaster  
 of white paste and people were talking in  
 high-pitched voices in half-dark tables,  
 like the stories in the *Arabian Nights*, as if  
 they were obscene characters of  
 Biblical beauty and as erasable as  
 the morning dew of some unknown valley  
 where people are the only commodity  
 to be found only once in a thousand years.  
 A city of dust and rickshaw, pedestrians  
 and panhandlers, car horns and cobble  
 stones, recalling the crackdown  
 on the night of March 25, 1971, by a brutal  
 army that killed several thousand,  
 and the blood rushed through the streets,  
 corners of houses, student dorms,  
 staircases of the apartment buildings, and  
 the overwhelming ghostly screams were coming

out of everywhere in fear of mortar shells.  
 Though we had not had that brutal history  
 in our minds at the time we entered the  
 quick entrance that led us to the second floor,  
 we were in the state of a newly wed couple,  
 but our lost ones still did not abandon us.  
 Sitting across the table, I could see my face  
 imprinted in your eyes, exactly like the moon,  
 as I later experienced, seen under the  
 calm and clear Hudson at midnight.  
 I remember, looking at each other's face,  
 we passed eternity, and hoped the waiter  
 would take as much time as possible.

## OUR ENGAGEMENT

Sitting together under the new moon,  
 we were mostly engaged in  
 speaking about  
 the Magnetic Field  
 from which nothing managed to escape  
 even for a single moment.  
 We were happy  
 circling around our own magnificent orbits.  
 While passing over Africa, Asia,  
 Latin America, and the islands  
 spread about the globe and  
 defusing darkness  
 over our beloved universe  
 and making us worry too much,  
 we managed to confuse them  
 spraying stink bombs  
 and sometimes calming them with a  
 descending dust cloud of humility.

The moon was shining without having  
 any light whatsoever of its own,  
 and so did we. We were talking about  
 the prevention of illegal drugs,

high teenage pregnancies,  
 political corruptions, cyber crimes,  
 gang rapes, and child labor,  
 gathered in a little group of our own.  
 Our vicarious voices  
 often deplored the hissing sound  
 of a snake that deliberately  
 diluted the hope of others to get ahead.  
 We, in fact, lived a life  
 of selfishness, cowardice, and foolishness.

*New York*

## মতিন রায়হান/Matin Raihan

## নদীপুরাণ

গতিমুখ পাণ্টে ফেলে নদীটা এসেছে আজ আমার দুয়ারে  
 নাম তার শ্যামলবালিকা, ভেসে যাক উতল জোয়ারে  
 পেছনে রোদুর-মেঘ, ঝরে জল পায়-পায় জলের শৈশব  
 স্রোতেরা অকূলে ছোটে, জলে আর মাছে দেখি হৈহৈ রব!

নদীটা এসেছে কাছে, ডানাঅলা নৌকা-পাখি কাছে নেই আজ  
 জলমহালের অদৃশ্য আঙনে পোড়ে ধীবরসমাজ  
 দৃশ্যপটে কড়া নাড়ে ঘোঁয়া আর ইঞ্জিনের কৃষ্ণকালো মেঘ  
 হতাশ্বাসে মন কাঁদে, দূরপরবাসে...করণ উদ্বেগ!

নদীটা এসেছে ঠিক, ঝুঁকে ঝুঁকে আমার পায়ের কাছে, বালুময়...  
 জল নেই মৎস্য নেই রজস্বলা বৃক্ষ নেই আঁধারে-আঁধারে ক্ষয়!

ঢাকা

## নাজনীন সীমন/Naznin Seamon

## দুঃস্বপ্ন ভাঙার পর

দুঃস্বপ্ন ভাঙার পর সমুজ্জ্বল মনে হয় আমার পৃথিবী।  
 দাঁতাল সন্ধান, যাবতীয় বিবিক্ত বঞ্চনা,  
 না পাওয়ার সাত কাহন ও  
 যন্ত্রণার সুদীর্ঘ অবর্ণনীয় উপাখ্যান;  
 মনে হয়, তবুও তো আছি বেঁচে,  
 মগ্নতা না থাক,  
 রয়েছে নিভরশীলতার প্রগাঢ় বন্ধন।

অজান্তেই প্রতিদিন একটু একটু করে বেড়ে যাওয়া দূরত্ব  
 লাগে না অতোটা তেতো,  
 অপ্রত্যাশিত আচরণের দক্ষ সময় ছড়ায় অসম্ভব  
 মায়াবী সুগন্ধ হিম সন্ধ্যার কুয়াশা মাখা  
 জীবনের মাঠে, মোমের আলোর  
 মতো স্নিগ্ধ নরম তথাপি উষ্ণ লাগে সমস্তটা,  
 অতিক্রান্ত পথের অমসৃণতা  
 খটখটে ঠেকে না অতোটা আর।

দুঃস্বপ্ন ভাঙার পর একান্তে জড়াই  
 তাই  
 গভীর আশেষে;  
 বোধ হয়, এইতো সংবেদ,  
 বেঁচে থাকার নিখাদ উপাদান!

## অশ্রুসন্ন সময়

আকাশ একটা আমারও ছিলো  
 ভীষণ ক্ষুধার্তের মতো  
 খুবলে খেয়েছে তাকে সময়, দিনান্তে  
 তাই নিঃশ্ব ও বিষণ্ণ বোধ হয়  
 অথচ কস্মিনকালে কেউ  
 শোনেনি এমন হিংস্রতার গল্ল

বাইরে বিবর্ণ সব, ভিতরে সন্ত্রস্ত  
বসবাস খুব অচেনা তাদের  
মুহূর্তান্তরে বদলে যায় স্বজন, নির্ভরতায়  
আকাজ্জিত স্বর,  
যদিও এটাই চলমান নিয়ম, এ সব বলে  
আশ্বস্ত করেন কেউ কেউ

গোছানো জীবন বারবার  
ভাঙে পলকা বাতাসে  
বহু যত্নে সাজানো সমস্ত উড়ে যায়  
আমের বোলের মতো নিঃশব্দে নিমেষে  
হতে পারে,  
আদতে ছিলো না কোনোদিন,  
কেবল মরীচিকার হাতছানি  
হয়তো তাড়িয়ে বেড়িয়েছে  
উপত্যকার উপরে এবং নিচে  
প্রান্তরে প্রসন্ন মুখচ্ছবি কোনোদিন অথচ দেখিনি  
ভারী চীৎকারে কেবল মিইয়ে গেছি  
কিংবা অসন্তোষের প্রবল প্রকাশে  
লুকিয়েছি নিজের ভিতরে নিজে  
দৃঢ় খোলের বয়সী কাছিমের মতো

পড়ন্ত বিকেলে যুদ্ধে পরিশ্রান্ত,  
বিধ্বস্ত আহত সৈনিকের মতো  
একান্ত উঠোনে ধীর লয়ে  
জমানো কষ্টের ধারাপাত পড়ি,  
পেছনে সময়  
আমি একা

নিউইয়র্ক

আনিসুর রহমান অপু/Anisur Rahman Apu

আছে কিছু পিছুটান

দুপুরের ডাকে আজ এসেছে সে অতিথি রোদ্দুর  
এসেছে সে অনবদ্ব উষ্ণতার নিরন্তর খামে  
ঘামে-প্রেমে মেখেছে প্রথম খাজুরাহ মুগ্ধতায়  
অজন্তা ও ইলোরায়ে হেঁটেছে দুরন্ত হাত ধরে  
অন্তরঙ্গ, পাশাপাশি, ঢেলেছে সে সান্নিধ্যের সুর  
আমাদের পরিযায়ী ডানায়—যেখানে নানা নামে  
জমেছিলো দীর্ঘতর হিম আর সোনার থালায়

ছাই দেয়া প্রবঞ্চনা। কাজ্জিত আগুনে ধুয়ে সব  
এনেছে ফিরিয়ে ফের কলবর—কাব্যের মঞ্জরি  
যাপনে প্রসন্ন—জলাবদ্ধ—শ্রোতের গাইছ্য গান  
বিশ্বাসী ব্যঞ্জনা আর শরীরের প্রতিটি প্রান্তরে  
শুদ্ধ শিহরণ কবিতার কল্লোলিত অনুভব;  
তবু সব ভুলে, এই শীতে, ভীর্ণ জীবনের ঘড়ি  
বেয়ে উঠি, কারণ সেখানে আছে কিছু পিছুটান।

নিউইয়র্ক

## তুষার প্রসূন/Tushar Prasun

## জলের পাণ্ডুলিপি

স্রোতের সম্ভাবনা থেকে উড়ে যাচ্ছে, ভেসে যাচ্ছে, গড়িয়ে পড়ছে জল।  
আর আমি পড়ে যাচ্ছি জলের পাণ্ডুলিপি। সেই সাথে শ্যাওলা পড়ছি,  
মাছ লিখছি, মাছের চোখে চঞ্চলতা শিখছি, আঁকছি বায়বীয় বিদ্যা নিয়ে  
জলের চলে যাওয়া। চোখের ভেতরে ইতিহাস জমা হয়ে গড়িয়ে পড়ছে  
জল-গণ্ডুষ পেতে তা-ও জমা রাখছি।

তবু বলছো আমি বসে আছি।

আসলে আমি ভেসে আছি। ভালোবেসে আছি চোখের জলতরঙ্গ।  
যেখানে বাসা বেঁধে আছে মেঘ, বৃষ্টি আর যত জলের অনুষ্ণ।

ঢাকা

## শিবলী শাহেদ/Shiblee Shaheed

## দৃশ্য-উপদেশ

শরীরের দেশে কোনও সোজা রাস্তা নেই।  
তাই তোমাকেই  
লিখে দিলাম বিক্ষিপ্ত যাতায়াতের নিয়মকানুন।  
হেঁটে হেঁটে তুমি চলে যাও  
সুখমার আলোকাভিজানে তুমি ব্রতচারিণী  
করে চলো আরো কোনও প্রাক্তর ধ্যানের নির্মাণ।  
তোমার ঠোঁট থেকে, চিবুক থেকে  
পতনমুখী দৃশ্যের বিহ্বলতা  
লেগে যাচ্ছে নাভিমূলে।  
বুকের ভাঁজে আলোক-বরফ—সেও গড়িয়ে পড়ছে  
অস্থিসন্ধিতে।  
সুতরাং এখনই সময়  
দেখে নাও কত বিক্ষিপ্ত পথ ফুঁড়ে বেরিয়ে আসছে  
আরো কত পথ!  
কোথাও যতিব্রহ্মের রেশটুকু নেই।  
শেষটায় আছি আমি  
অনুদিত গানের অববাহিকায় চুপচাপ দাঁড়িয়ে...  
দু'একটা পানকৌড়ির সাথে  
খসে পড়া দৃশ্য দু'হাতে ধরবো বলে...

## নিখোঁজ লবণের ডাকে

সমুদ্র তোমারই জলীয়-রূপ, আংশিক রূপান্তর মাত্র। পঞ্চাশের দশক হয়ে একদিন আমিও  
সমুদ্রে নেমে যাবো। আর দেখবো তলিয়ে যাওয়ার ভিতর আছে নাকি অতলের সুখ! নিশ্চয়ই  
এই অবগাহনের একটা শিরোনাম থাকবে। কোন্ ভাষায় সেই নাম হবে—তুমিই ভেবে ঠিক  
করো। শিরোনাম নিয়ে ভাবতে ভাবতে দেখবে রাতের বাতিঘর থেকে আলো ঠিকরে  
বেরাচ্ছে, তোমার শরীর থেকে খুলে খুলে পড়ছে দেহের বাকল। হয়তো বুকের গভীরে  
কোথাও লোনাজলের ডাক শুনতে পাবে কিংবা কোনও পরিচিত ঝড়ের আগামবার্তা পেয়ে  
দিশেহারা হয়ে যাবে। আর জেনে যাবে—কীভাবে আমি পর্যায়ক্রমিক উজানভাটির টানে  
নিজেকে হারিয়ে ফেলেছি সমুদ্রের ভিতর।

ঢাকা

**STILLNESS MOON: AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM HEYEN****by Bill Wolak**

WILLIAM HEYEN was born in Brooklyn, NY, on November 1, 1940, and raised by his German immigrant parents in Hauppauge and Nesconset in Suffolk County. Eventually, he earned his PhD in English at Ohio University, and has also been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from SUNY. A former Senior Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature in Germany, he has won Guggenheim, NEA, and several other awards. His work has appeared in hundreds of magazines and anthologies, and he is the author or editor of dozens of books, including *Noise in the Trees* (an American Library Association "Notable Book"), *Crazy Horse in Stillness* (winner of the Small Press Book Award), *Shoah Train* (finalist for the National Book Award), and *A Poetics of Hiroshima* (a Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle main selection). His voluminous journals are appearing from H\_ANGM\_N Editions. In 2016, Etruscan Press will publish *The Candle: Collected Holocaust Poems / 1970–2015*. Mr. Heyen lives with his wife in Brockport, NY where he is Professor of English/Poet in Residence Emeritus at the College at Brockport.

In July of 2015, Bill Wolak and Stanley Barkan traveled to Brockport, where this interview began. The interview continued during a visit with the poet to his archive and book collection at the University of Rochester Library, and then was completed by e-mail.

**Bill Wolak:** At what age did you first become interested in poetry?

**William Heyen:** You know, Bill, I was an athlete, even an All American soccer player in college, so most of my time was taken up with sports. But I remember being about nineteen and scribbling verses on the flyleaves of textbooks while in undergraduate classes. My doggerel was probably the result of being dropped by a high school girlfriend a couple of years before. I do believe in trauma as (sometimes) the spark for poetry. My hurt sounds trivial, maybe, but I was devastated. But we never know when we are having good luck. I've been married to my soul-mate for 53 years.

In graduate school at Ohio University, I began to get serious, began reading contemporary poets like Richard Wilbur and James Wright and saying to myself—competitive now but not in sports—hey, I can do that. I soon found out how hard it was as I lost sleep scratching and scratching. How was it possible to break through into a poem? It took me about five years of fairly obsessive work to have enough poems for a first collection (*Depth of Field*, LSU Press, 1970).

**BW:** Can you give us an idea about the poets who have had the greatest influence on you?

**WH:** Well, maybe I've been most influenced by individual poems—or prose (I think the greatest book I've ever read may be William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*—I get choked up reading many passages)—but certainly Walt Whitman is at the top of my list as the greatest poet who ever lived (except maybe for Homer). You'll find essays of mine about him in a couple of my prose books. And a couple of sons of Whitman have been important, Theodore Roethke (subject of my dissertation) and Allen Ginsberg, as I always try to stay receptive to break-through, as they and Saint Walt broke through. Among the modernists, I knew and corresponded with Archibald MacLeish, and loved him and learned from him: "For all the history of grief / an empty doorway and a maple leaf." But I think the modern poet who most helped me land and helps me still is Wallace Stevens, and this mainly for the way a poem can keep moving, keep flowing, forge a forward motion that penetrates and encircles the musical imagination. Poems like "The Woman in Sunshine" and that wonderful late poem "The World as Meditation" show the way for me. And there are the poets of exile, Paul Celan in particular—what voltage! Too many other poet influences to try to mention them.

But this caution. William Stafford—another poet important to me for myriad reasons—when asked about the greatest poetic influence on him said that it had been his mother, her voice. So, yes, we read and absorb and find poets and poems to help us create our own sense of beauty on the page, but family influences are strongest, and our childhood landscapes, and our teachers and teammates, and the history, in my case certainly, that enthralls

and appalls us.... My book *Titanic & Iceberg: Early Essays & Reviews* is a good indication of what was on my mind in my early years, my readings I was hoping to become, as we say these days, "part of the conversation." Also, *Home: Autobiographies, Etc.* (which includes a few other interviews).

**BW:** How would you define poetry?

**WH:** Well, any definition would seem to narrow it. Maybe it has something to do with that which exists beyond paraphrase, beyond interpretation and theory, beyond translation. But I do think that poetry is our only chance as a species to survive on this earth, and I'm not just talking about our lyrics, our word/language constructs, but about a way of thinking that might enable us, as Emerson requires, to "integrate." The poet is the one who integrates, who makes us realize that we of all cultures are in this together, that the bell tolls for all of us, that all is One, in the end, as we move toward our common death. But I don't want to preach about this, or to understand it to the point where I become smug. I just want, by way of sound/story/image/rhythm to find on my own page a poem that is smarter than I am, as Archibald MacLeish says it must be, that has within itself whatever it needs to go on thinking about itself (and us) and its meanings longer than any one of us will. I've written my best poems in a semi-trance, one line appearing after another, rave and dream and song-sound, and have later been surprised at how much has welled up from me into them.

**BW:** Can you explain a little about your writing process? How do you compose poems? Do you begin by jotting down the lines by hand or do you compose directly on a computer?

**WH:** Everything is by cursive, at first. I compose myself, and any poems I'm lucky enough to hit, by way of the handwriting I learned in grade school. New generations of writers I'm sure can feel the fusions of mind and word while their fingers are on a keyboard and their writing appears for them on a screen, but I can't imagine this for me. I'm a thousand years old. I need a pen, ink, paper, the flow of letters from left to right and then left to right again. I type nothing up until I think it's finished, though I

do sometimes make minor revisions before printing something up for staring and hearing. These years, when a poem does come—I've 250+ new ones toward a huge book that will be called *Chainsaw*, and I'm in no hurry to publish it, and won't be—it usually needs little revision, certainly not as much tortured rewriting as when I was in my 30s, 40s, 50s. And I have so many new ones now that I'm not afraid just to cross a poem out that has appeared in my notebook, and scrawl "forget it" below it if it doesn't sufficiently complicate itself or if it lurches in ways I can't fix. And I've been in poet's heaven, thinking (maybe of course deluding myself, but I don't think so) that my recent poems are my best, by way of natural voice and by way of the unconscious consolidations of craft over the decades.

**BW:** Do you have a daily writing routine?

**WH:** Not really. When I was young, I'd sometimes write all night when I should have been doing something more practical or sleeping, and then I'd be wiped out the next day. Now, I usually begin by writing in my journal each morning, & then maybe draft a new poem, or go through a sheaf of things, or write a snail to a friend. Then, for the rest of the day between whatever else is going on and helping to keep our house in repair and this acre of land not manicured but in some kind of order, and not to mention that my wife and I have four teen-age grandkids, my writing is hit or miss. But I've been very fortunate, and know this, because of my academic schedule over decades, to have had summers off, long vacations, sabbaticals, grants. And reading intensely for teaching literature classes has been part of the whole learning and writing process for me. I got into teaching when there were plenty of jobs. I'd not like to be getting out of graduate school now and looking for work.

**BW:** Hidden back in the woods behind your house on your acre of property in Brockport, you have a delightful little writer's cabin. How and when was that constructed? Is that where you do most of your writing?



**WH:** Well, Bill, to call my 8' x 12' shack a cabin (as I've called it) is probably to flatter it. But, yes, I'm glad I've had it, and you can see artists' woodcuts of it on the covers of the first volume of my journal. Anyway, about forty years ago my father and my older brother, Werner, drove up from Long Island and banged it together for me (I'd laid down the foundation blocks). It ain't much, but is secluded, & quiet, and I used it a lot for decades. It's only 250' or so from my house, but I never did schoolwork back there, so by the time I walked back I was ready for journal writing and poetry and maybe some snail correspondence. I still get back there, but not nearly as often as when we had so much stuff going on in our home when our two kids were knocking about and the phone was always ringing . . . Look, all of us who belong to the tribe of scribblers try to place ourselves, like old dogs, where we are comfortable, and where we don't have to be social every minute. And the cabin is a sentimental place for me, too: William Stafford and Joyce Carol Oates and Stan Plumly and publishers Bill Ewert and Antonio Vallone and my late friends Anthony Piccione and Al Poulin have sat in there with me. And even poets from China and Sweden. And all my family, too. And now you and Stan Barkan have visited the cabin. Maybe I should have kept a guest book!

**BW:** What was the best poetry reading that you ever attended? Why does that reading stand out in your memory?

**WH:** Interesting question, one I've never been asked. Several readings come to mind quickly. One by David Ray in the early 60s at Cortland, NY, where I was teaching at the time. A student asked Ray how he felt about it when someone didn't understand his poems. He said he didn't care. I was upset at the time, but now understand this better (as defensive, as not wanting to water down) but would have expressed this more gently than he did. Whitman said that in the main people had to come to poetry, that poets couldn't go to the people (even as he had his arms wide open for all of us).

And a reading by James Dickey when I was in grad school—his stories around and within his poems. And a reading at Brockport by Galway Kinnell that dazed me for the command of such earned

poems known by heart; and a few readings by that generative force Joyce Carol Oates, on whose every sentence I felt suspended; and a reading by William Stafford in Rochester when he said something that still reverberates for me in complex ways: "I love feeble poems"; and, to mention just one more among so many vivid recollections, a reading by William Everson where, in an uncomfortable science lab room, after being introduced, he didn't say a word for a full five minutes, but tried to get comfortable, turned around & around, closed his eyes, & folks were even beginning to leave, but then he began, and was mesmerizing.... These days, I guess I most enjoy small readings, poets/folks in a circle, taking turns, kindred spirits communing. Over the decades I read or lectured at several hundred places, but am no longer interested in travel. I can travel while being at home. I might never get on a plane again.

**BW:** What role does stillness play in poetic composition?

**WH:** Yes, we have to reach, I think, even after agitation or fear or bafflement or any of a hundred unsettlements, some state of calm, quiet, stillness wherein, almost of its own volition, our poem can keep on its own course. A Zen teacher at Brockport, years ago, spoke of the moon being reflected on a river, the river (with its disruptions) flowing by, but the moon, the moon beneath our breastbones, staying in one place. I have an essay about this in *Pig Notes & Dumb Music*.... You know, Saint Walt could get angry at a dumb dog who barked even at a familiar neighbor, but he carried the moon of stillness inside himself.

**BW:** What is the relationship between your journal writing and your poetry?

**WH:** I don't know. Maybe it helps me reach ease as I get my worries and angers off my chest, and as I keep hauling myself up into the present. You know, Bill, my journal might be the most extensive (I didn't say best) in our literature. So far, I've gotten only three volumes into print, and keep typing little by little, but seem to write more new entries than I can type old entries. I'm typing 1999 now for volume four, and these are quarto-sized single-spaced 10-point 575 or so paged volumes. I might have to try,

though I'm a semi-Luddite and creature of habit and reluctant, voice-into-print technology before long.

But I don't draft poems in my journal. I talk of my reading, my family and friends, ask my journal what it might like to hear from me today, report my anxieties and successes and furies and failures as I try to become a grown man. I let memories arise. I think I'm pretty good at not being self-conscious—and being so far behind when an entry I'm writing today might eventually appear (maybe not in my lifetime) helps. But the most important thing for me is not to censor myself, and when I publish a volume I do not edit down to scintillant moments. I wish I had journals from poets important to me who talk not just about aesthetics, say, but about taking out the garbage and dental appointments, about how they live in the world when they are not reading Dante or are in the ethereal throes of inspiration. Maybe my journal is part journal and part just diary.... Look, we're all scribblers—let's enjoy ourselves and fill blank books (or computer files) with thought and feeling, with life. And I must say, I'm sort of surly about my journal volumes, thinking that I didn't ask you to read them, so don't look for them, and if you don't like what you read and think me unworthy, just fuck off and find something else to read.... At the same time, I'd like to think that reading Heyen's journals might become an acquired taste, that the often-asinine and puerile journalist might grow on you....

**BW:** How do you conceive of the poet's role in America today?

**WH:** I don't suppose it's any different from any poet's role in any society at any time. In any case, I wouldn't want to freeze myself into any position on this. Let me answer with a little poem. It's maybe too sentimental, too-too, but here it is, plaintive and resigned and maybe content and even happy. I call it "Evening Song":

Now it is too late not  
to kiss goodbye  
to all I might have been & done  
if only  
I'd not kept faith with you

& you with me  
all my years, my soul,  
my poetry.

I hope I've kept faith with my soul, my inner-self, my intimations toward ... beauty, even when beauty is shot through with terror. I might have been and done other things, but I've no regrets. I do wonder what other life or lives I might have had, but I've needed to try to write poems, or, to put it better, to put myself into a position of reception wherein poems might emanate from my mind-pen. There's a powerful moment in Emerson's *Nature* when he says that "Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put." Maybe this says that I've had the life I've had and am now in this place where I am, doing what I do, because of the questions I asked myself, unconsciously, when I was a boy and young man.

**BW:** Part of your archive is now housed in the University of Rochester Library; many of the books that you've collected are now in a room surrounded with glass-front bookcases.

**WH:** Yes, for fifty years now I've collected first editions of contemporary poetry, and had books inscribed whenever I could. Association copies are very important to me, and I haven't wanted them spread out on the rare books market as have been books from the libraries of Richard Hugo, William Stafford, Paul Zimmer, and so many others. Luckily, Peter Dzwonkoski, the head of Rare Books & Special Collections at Rochester about twenty years ago foresaw such an archive as it came to be, felt the way I do, and worked to buy my books, correspondence, manuscripts. Now, it's as though I still have my books together—nothing can be placed in that room without my permission—and the institution is caring for them in a climate-controlled room where there are sometimes classes and readings where all my precious Wilburs and Staffords and Oates and May Sarton and Cynthia Ozicks and Seamus Heaneys and Ray Carvers and Robert Penn Warrens and Archibald MacLeishes and hundreds of other poets ranging from the very famous to the largely unknown listen in. There are long stories behind my obsessive gatherings of so many books, all my altruistic and selfish

reasons. I was so glad that you and Stan Barkan got to experience that room.... Of course, I still have at home hundreds of gems, so am not lonely for books. I have for example copies of the anthologies I've edited, special copies inscribed by dozens of contributors to *American Poets in 1976, The Generation of 2000: Contemporary American Poets*, and *September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond*. Priceless.

**BW:** Can you describe a few of the unpublished poetic projects that you're working on now?

**WH:** Ha, glad you asked.... Well, there are the journal volumes that will keep coming out as long as I live, knock wood. And I've mentioned *Chainsaw*. And I've enough essays to expand *Pig Notes & Dumb Music*. And I've got about 3,000 (no kidding) 13-syllable poems, my "scherzi," to do something with eventually. And a letterpressed book of 28 baseball poems is coming out. And *The Candle*. And I've a folder building of form poems, non-free-verse pieces. And, come to think of it, I've written about 30 little plays, meant to be read only, staged only in the mind, that I haven't typed up yet. (And there will be productions of June Prager's *Distant Survivors*, a play which she built from my Holocaust poems.) And I'm fooling with a preface right now for the bibliography of my work by Michael Broomfield that he's been at for decades (his two previous bibliographies, ahem, are of John Updike and Robinson Jeffers). And I want to do a book called, in homage to incendiary Emerson, *Nature*, which would reprint my books *The Chestnut Rain*, *Pterodactyl Rose*, and *The Rope*, nature/ecology books, and select such poems from other of my volumes. I'd like to find an editor for this who might do the typing grunt-work & write a preface. I think I have a publisher. Is there a volunteer out there? I'm at 142 Frazier St. / Brockport, NY 14420....

## Book Review:

### Under the Thin Layers of Light

#### 1. NEON LIGHTS AND LEMON-ICE EVENINGS

by Nicholas Birns (USA)

Hassanal Abdullah is so well known as a translator from the Bengali and a poet in English that his poems actually in Bengali have been in danger of being obscured. This volume not only negates any possibility of that, but casts Abdullah as a major poet just hitting his stride in midcareer. A diasporic writer has inherent problems to face and not just those of personal dislocation, or being from one place and writing about another, or caring more about a place one is not in than one is—these issues, especially if one defines “place” metaphorically, pertain to every writer—but simply in isolating a subject and a standpoint. From where does one speak? And what does one speak about?

Abdullah is an American poet, from Bangladesh, writing in both Bengali and English, and his subject is threefold: daily life, remembered life, literary life. We see the daily life of New York, as in the funny and endearing “West Village”, observing the “neon lights of the city” with the surreal glow of a “lemon-ice evening.” We see beatniks, lesbians, local Indian restaurants, pimps and alcoholics on the street, all observed with just the right mix of humanness and acerbity, defamiliarization and empathy. The tome is gleeful and comic, but the incantatory language underscores the fierce demand that the “human race” fully realize its “growing civility.”

But Abdullah does not simply leave Bangladesh behind, and when he speaks of the country of his birth he leaves daily life for remembered life, “A Story of Immigrants” portrays the teeming variety of Bengali life in New York, where people from Bangladesh are “beyond dreams dark doom” (Nazrul Islam Nazi’s translation uses devices like alliteration and assonance with great adeptness), but recognizes that intolerance, in the old land and even potentially the new, lies beneath this, and that the old country’s pain cannot be forgotten. In the 1990s there was a popular intellectual idea that the South Asian diaspora was the future of literature from that part of the world, that the old territories would be left behind. But now we know they cannot be, and the sanctuary diaspora provides is at once recognized by Abdullah but

denied a utopian elevation. The Bangladeshi homeland is suffering, yes, but is still important, and its future not only still matters but also is vital for the entire world. The diasporic, in other words, is hybrid and mobile, but not entirely post-national: nor, the poet's continuing concern for the Bengali homeland indicates, should it be.

The third kind of life in Abdullah's poems is imaginative life, the life we find in books, literature, and culture, that is not organically our own but, by graft and addition, becomes part of our cognitive equipment. "Worship is a poem not about religious but aesthetic experience, where 'the eloquent hand of poetry touches the mountain peak,' its 'impressionist tongue' soothing 'the cloud's silky hair.'" But this is not just a surreal pleasure-dome, but a peak whose ascent requires arduous effort by the writer, who must "climb up faster wearing tight shoes," under the judgment of "the age-old/sun." The poem ends with an injunction to at once enjoy poetry and recognize the inherent danger that comes with its power:

*Jingle poetry's bangles, dance at the mountaintop,  
To embrace the flickering fire, simmering and racing up*

Terror and pleasure are juxtaposed, but this is less than conventional "sublime" than a less premeditated and more spontaneous energy, accompanied by a knowing sense of the perils any artistic endeavor brings. The poem was translated by the poet himself, and not only does "flickering fire" again take advantage of the proclivity (stemming from Anglo-Saxon poetry) of the English language for the alliterative, but in using playful, assonant, yet revelatory words like "jingle" and "bangle," Abdullah renders the poem not just into contemporary English but into contemporary poetic diction: jingle and bangle having just the right sense of the tangible and palpable, the connotative force to not just describe but evoke, by which poetic language today makes its discursive self-justification. "Under The Thin Layers of Light," which gives its title to the volume, operates in another mode, not one of contrariety but of contemplation, and of meditative "vital prayer," a sense of being at peace with nature in which "hornets and bees swarmed in ecstasy" and makes "the young exuberant heart shine in luster. This is reminiscent of poets such as Rumi, or alternatively its might be described as this secular Muslim Bengali poet's most Hindu poem.

There is a great tradition of love poetry in Bengali, epitomized in the past century supremely by Jibadananda Das's "Banalata Sen." In the

poems selected from the sequence "The House on the Green", Abdullah devises lyrics-whose meter and line, if lacking rhyme, nonetheless resembles the Petrarchan sonnet with its fourteen-line, eight-six structure but which also powerfully exude an intensely Asian atmosphere, giving the reader a window to an alternate tradition of rendering romantic love than in the European tradition. Purnima Ray's translations bring across the extravagant, ardent, yet diamond-hard intensity of feeling:

*White rows of cloud-jubilant and bold—  
Swimming at ease, offering as cold air as a gift*

These lines conclude a poem which starts with the memorable and hands-on encouraging lines, "Go, go on to offer the golden touch," by which the poem does not mean a Midas-like death touch but an aureate embrace, a living and mindful celebration of the life of the body and its circumambient joy.

The book's final poem "God is Dead," is at once playful and deeply serious, and occupies a dual genealogical position, of considerations of God and his presence or absence in American poetry since Wallace Stevens'

Sunday Morning," and of the debates between secularism and fundamentalism in Bangladesh and in the Muslim-background world diaspora. The poem's position is clearly atheist, and assumes a Nietzschean brio in talking about the happiness that will come after God's funeral:

*When God is dead  
I will swim in the river  
I will play football  
And get a lot of fans  
To cheer for it*

But as the poem goes on we realize that this happiness is in fact the impossible, what the poet will not or cannot do, not just play football but "eat a tuna fish sandwich/and five fried cockroaches as a side order" and even "to stop writing poems." And "be in a bed" with his lover for "three consecutive days and nights," never to be separated from her. It is a consummation perhaps devoutly to be wished, but never to be achieved, and thus even as the poem celebrates God's absence it speculates that the concept of God is yet needed in this world as a measure of possibility. If

John Lennon famously observed that God is a concept by which we measure our own pain, Abdullah's concluding bouncy ballad suggests that the concept of God may be vital, less as a dogmatic given than a measure of possibility—even though, very plainly, the poems' perspective is secularist and atheist.

That this intellectual complexity coexists with a robust and passionate language and an achieved sense of place and feeling means that we now will have to regard Hassanal Abdullah not just as a major figure in contemporary Bengali literature, but as one of the central poets of his generation. It should be noted that the book's publisher, Cross Cultural Communications, has been publishing global poetry for many years (I first met Stanley Barkan in 1986 at a reading given by a poet he then published, the Romanian writer Nina Cassian) and that *Under The Thin Layers of Light* is a book of which both author and publisher, not to mention all the translators (including the distinguished poet Jyotirmoy Datta) should be very proud.

## 2. TIME THAT SEIZES HANDS

by Caroline Gill (UK)

*The breeze runs an eloquent finger through our hair ...*

—“Ferry Ride”

This arresting collection from Cross-Cultural Communications opens with an evocative poem about “casting off” from a port, in this case from New York, a city under the gaze of the Statue of Liberty, with what Emma Lazarus described more than a century ago as Liberty's “beacon-hand,” glowing with “world-wide welcome.”

Even before the first poem appears on the page, Hassanal Abdullah is quick to acknowledge Eliot, a man of the United States and the United Kingdom, who drew on mythological sources from east and west. The epigraph from *The Waste Land* places *Under the Thin Layers of Light* in a wavering multicultural universe in which time is a crucial but unsettling commodity, time that “seizes hands.”

The image in “Ferry Ride” of launching out into a world of familiar and unfamiliar cultures is surely a suitable metaphor for the book itself. The poet is a master of dexterity when it comes to navigation. He can often be found “wriggling between hills” or deciphering the “unknown tongue” of the ocean of poetry.

Hassanal Abdullah, described by Jyotirmoy Datta as “a phenomenon,” an apt title for this energetic poet-editor-translator, continues to expand the horizons of his unique world vision. As a poet from Bangladesh in New York, writing in Bengali and English (and as a teacher of Mathematics), Hassanal has a wealth of linguistic experience and expertise at his disposal, and he exploits this rich resource to great effect. The poet is well aware of the constraints and boundaries that so-called civilisation has imposed upon its people, but he prefers to envisage a fluid and united universe in which “words” can “swim across the land.”

As the ferry embarks on its voyage in the opening poem, the reader soon encounters those on board who become anxious as a ship draws close on the starboard side. These passengers are in the company of more seasoned travellers who feel sufficiently at ease, rightly or wrongly, to start waving “kerchiefs at the people leaning on the rails of its deck.” This piece sets the scene for a collection that encompasses peaks of joy and depths of searing pain. An edgy undercurrent of potential menace lurks beneath the surface, rearing its head at intervals.

To return to the opening poem, the unsuspecting reader is confronted with the image of waterfront warehouses, which may have housed “secret facilities for the making of nuclear bombs.” Even the industrial cranes lean like Indian vultures (*Gyps indicus*).

In “Time seizes the Hands” the poet presents a list, indeed a veritable litany, of

*war, hunger, perpetual public terror,  
suspicion . . .*

These words, piled one on top of the next, present a tragic, but not unrecognisable, worldview. The famous Wilfred Owen words about the poet's ability to warn are surely not far beneath the surface. A human being can only take so much, and Hassanal's final stanza propels the reader forward in a quest for “Total Truth,”  
*from the chilling past to the unspoken future.*

There may still be blood baths and their accompanying vultures, but all is far from doom and gloom in this collection. It is important to acknowledge the reality, which has indeed been a grim one in recent

times. However, it is surely to the poet's credit that his remarkable zest for the richest of life's experiences has not merely surfaced in this unstable environment, but has indeed come to the fore.

This sense of *joie de vivre* is nowhere more finely evoked, it seems to this reviewer, than in the poems from the extended sonnet sequence, "A House on the Green." In the second sonnet, translated from the Bengali by Purnima Ray, the collection's initial *leitmotif* of the workaday ferry has been cast adrift in favour of a romantic metaphor in the guise of "the colourful raft" that "danced over the cloud." Horror in this poem still has to be "crushed," but "nature blinks with joy" as birds continue "to set their beautiful wings in the sky."

In the third poem of the sonnet sequence, the reader is transported to the country of the poet's birth. Here the built-up banks of the River Hudson have been exchanged for the rural meanderings of the Modhumoti, a distributory of the upper reaches of the Padma river. The gentle flow of this watercourse in Bangladesh enables the young, and perhaps somewhat idealistic, poet to begin "weaving hope" as he prepares to see the fulfilment of his dreams. There is a certain resonance with Yeats and his "small cabin" in the "bee-loud glade." Parts of Shelley's poem, "The Cloud," also seem to come close: consider, for example, Shelley's line about the "woof of my tent's thin roof."

Love is the universal song of the poet. Hassanal approaches this theme with great tenderness and skilful application of metaphor. Love is often set against the shadows of political unrest and the uncertainties of human migration. There may still be real troubles to face as the lighthouse disappears below the horizon, but perhaps love's ardour shines most brightly in times of unease or adversity. Ultimately, poetry may not be the cure for all ills, but the reader is left in no doubt that the clock of possibility is still ticking. In the words of "A House on the Green 37,"

*sometimes, our minds swell in sorrow for home.  
Amidst all this, love stretches out its hands to us ...*

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*UNDER THE THIN LAYERS OF LIGHT* by Hassanal Abdullah  
Translated from the Bengali by Jyotirmoy Datta, Nazrul Islam Naz, Siddique M. Rahman, Purnima Ray, Dhananjay Saha and the poet.  
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উত্তরাধুনিক সময়ের উজ্জ্বলতম কবি ও বহুমাত্রিক লেখক  
হাসানআল আব্দুল্লাহ'র গল্পগ্রন্থ *শয়তানের পাঁচ পা* সংগ্রহ করুন  
(২০১৪ সালে কবির দ্বিতীয় উপন্যাস *ডহর* প্রকাশ করেছে হাতেখড়ি)



“গল্পগুলোর বেশ কয়েকটা  
আগেই পড়া ছিল। বাকিগুলো  
পড়ছি। সব গল্পই আলাদা—  
ভিন্ন স্বাদের। Welcome to  
the club। কথাসাহিত্যের  
ভুবনে স্বাগতম।”

—পূরবী বসু

পৃষ্ঠা: ১২৮ মূল্য: ২০০

প্রচ্ছদ: প্রব এষ ৥ প্রকাশক: অনন্যা



নাজনীন সীমন-এর

তৃতীয় কাব্যগ্রন্থ

বিশেষণের বিশেষ বাড়ি

মূল্য: ৫ ডলার

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২০১৫ বইমেলায় প্রকাশিত

হয়েছে

প্রবন্ধগ্রন্থ

অস্তিত্বের সঙ্কট

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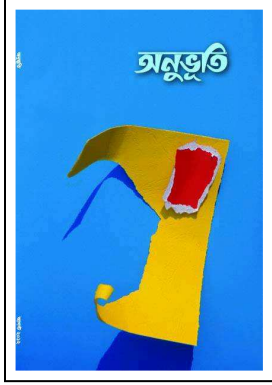
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লিটলম্যাগ কর্নারে  
শব্দগুচ্ছ  
স্টলেও পাওয়া যায়

প্রকাশক: অনন্যা

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roni\_adhikari@yahoo.com

বিশিষ্ট গদ্যশিল্পী ও বাংলা একাডেমী পুরস্কার প্রাপ্ত গল্পকার-দম্পতি  
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শূন্য নভে ভ্রমি

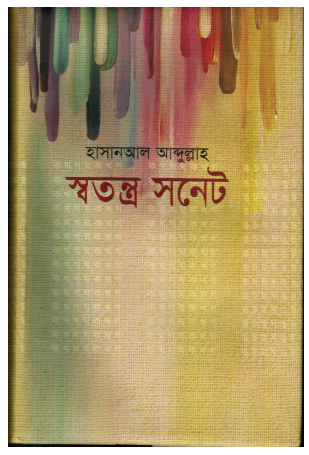
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প্রচ্ছদ: প্রব এষ ॥ প্রকাশক: অন্য প্রকাশ



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স্বতন্ত্র সনেট-এর

তৃতীয় সংস্করণ প্রকাশিত  
হলো

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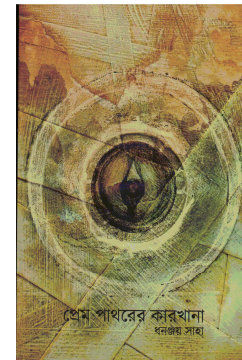
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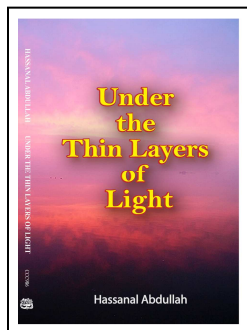
এখানে আমার ঘর, দেয়ালে আমার  
দেবতার ছবি, এ মাটিতে মিশে আছে  
আমার আশিশবের স্মৃতি  
আমাকে যদি যেতে বাধ্য করো  
আমি রুখে দাঁড়াবো  
এই মাটি ছেড়ে আমি কোথাও যাবো না।

—ধনঞ্জয় সাহা

আপনার কপিটি সংগ্রহ করুন!



Hassanal Abdullah  
Under the Thin Layers of Light

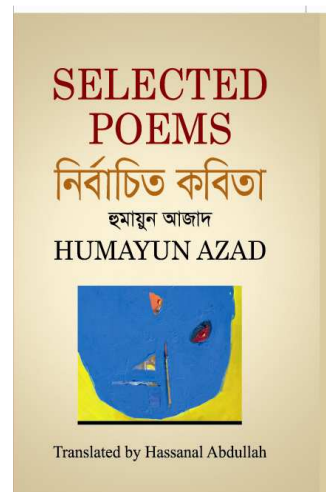


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