

Kochi Reading Group Poetry session on Mar 4, 2011

Attending: Bobby, Thommo , Talitha, Amita, KumKum, Joe, Indira, Minu, Soma, Zakia

Absent: Priya (away to Kolkata for wedding reception), Ammu Joseph (domestic help AWOL)

The next session for reading the novel ***Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*** by James Joyce will be on Friday **April 8, 2011**, at the Cochin Yacht Club library.

Amita



Benjamin Zephaniah was born and raised in Birmingham, England, son of a Barbadian father and Jamaican mother.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/benjamin_zephaniah.shtml

Birmingham's dreadlocked bard Benjamin Zephaniah is blessed with a verbal musicality inspired by his Caribbean heritage. His work addresses global issues such as racism, animal cruelty and the need for greater social justice, shot through with a rich humour, drawing on rap and dub rhythms, that make his poetry accessible to children and perennially popular in schools.

Born in Birmingham in 1958, Zephaniah divided his early years between the district of Handsworth and the tropics of Jamaica. He left school aged 13 unable to read or write, but within two years his lyrical commentaries won him a strong following and, in 1979, he moved to London. His first collection *Pen Rhythm* was published in 1980 by a small co-operative publisher. He attracted wider public interest through performances at political gatherings and his many television appearances throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Zephaniah has branched out in to other literary forms, including plays and novels such as *Refugee Boy* (2001). He was the first to perform with The Wailers following Bob Marley's death, and at Nelson Mandela's request, Zephaniah hosted the President's Two Nations concert at the Royal Albert Hall in July 1996.

In 2003 Zephaniah famously refused an OBE for his contribution to literature with the words "OBE me? Up yours", at the time telling to The Guardian that he feels "profoundly anti-empire".

Zephaniah had little formal education and has been to prison. He became ill and took to poetry as a balm. Yet, he has written books and plays. Although he had been performing since the age of ten, and there was all this poetry in his head, he never wrote it down until the age of twenty-one. He is out to popularise poetry. In this interview:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLe8bEcCPiE>

he tells about his being brought up by a mother who was illiterate. She would remember recipes in rhyme, for that's how she got the knowledge from her mother. That was the first poetry Zephaniah heard, in the old tradition of bardic chanting. Poetry was all around him although books were not. He believes in oral performance and is confident that teenage boys will read, if the stories are relevant to their lives.

He is a Rastafarian; their belief is that the late emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was the second Christ.

You can hear Zephaniah perform a poem called *Open up your mind*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLe8bEcCPiE>

*Open up yu mind mek some riddim cum in
Open up yu brain do some reasoning*

The poem goes on to say *If you have not opened up, you have not tried*. He is performing poetry in the style of the bards, who sang or chanted and lent their breath to what they had to say, rhythmically, with a beat. Although poetry acquired formal things like meter from that tradition, we moderns have lost the

performing spirit, except that there are those like Zephaniah who rediscover it naturally, from an African tradition. He says "Jamaican is English with an African rhythm, if you like".

Poets like Zephaniah and the Bauls, re-connect us with the old traditions. There is a continuity between what we call poetry and the performances of particular (not all) popular singers, say, like Bob Dylan; there is a rhythm and a melody that makes it memorable, and many an arresting line pops out.

In the poem Amita recited titled *De Rong Song*, Zephaniah urges *Don't worry /Be happy*, and in a sudden reversal at the end, says *Don't happy /Be worried*. This poem reminds one of the lyrics to a song Bobby McFerrin wrote on the same theme in 1988, which became a hit and won a Grammy in 1989. See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don't_Worry,_Be_Happy :

*Here is a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don't worry be happy
In every life we have some trouble
When you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy.....*

Joe thought it was essential for poems like Zephaniah's to be sung. They make little sense just reciting it like other poetry.

KumKum



KumKum introduced the poet Derek Walcott with these words:

"My choice of poet today is: Derek Walcott. The Hon. Derek Alton Walcott, OCC (born January 23, 1930) is a poet, playwright, writer and visual artist from the West Indies. His works include the Homeric epic poem *Omeros*.

He is old now, but is still active in teaching English Literature. He writes and travels, in the US and Canada. He was born in 1930, in the town of Castries in Saint Lucia. It was a British colony, hence, English has been his language.

He has published more than twenty plays, some of which are

allegorical: they obliquely refer to the social injustices in the Caribbean islands during and after the colonial regimes. His plays were staged by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, an organization he founded, and with which he remains closely associated. Theatre has been his passion. During his stint in Boston University, he started yet another theatre group at the University.

But Poetry is his love. He has published many volumes of poems. His last volume, *White Egrets*, was published in 2010. He received the T.S. Eliot prize for this book earlier this year. Walcott's literary works have been recognized with many other awards, including the Nobel Prize in 1992. He was the first Caribbean writer to receive this honour.

There is a simple charm in his poems that attracts me. I think it comes from his choice of words. Here is a quote from his *White Egret*:

*Some friends, the few I have left,
are dying, but the egrets stalk through the rain
as if nothing mortal can affect them, or they lift
like abrupt angels, sail, then settle again.*

Or, look at this line, *I know what I've done, I cannot look beyond/
I treated all of them badly, my three wives.*

I'm not sure if his estranged wives get any solace from these lines, but he surely felt lighter.

Robert Graves wrote that Walcott "handles English with a closer understanding of its inner magic than most, if not any, of his contemporaries." Quite a lavish compliment from one master craftsman to another! "

Then KumKum read the two poems she had selected. *Love after love* speaks of the poet discovering himself, after having loved many others in his life. *Feast on your life*, is what he tells himself, for he is himself the stranger he never go to know. In the second poem the poet is leaving after a one-day visit to the place of his birth, and deigns to leave a gift: *to leave you the one thing I own, /you whom I loved first: my poetry.*

Walcott was denied the chair of Oxford Professor of Poetry in

2009 for which he was in the running, when a snide woman competitor for the same post, Ruth Padel, released news of one of his sexual relationships with a woman student of his. That dashed both of their candidacies. See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derek_Walcott

Zakia



Kahlil Gibran was a Lebanese citizen who came to America and met with some lady admirers. Kahlil Gibran was a Lebanese citizen who came to America and met with some lady admirers and became a mystic prophet. In 1923 he wrote the collection of semi-philosophical essays, called *The Prophet*. That volume remains in print and his works have made him the third best selling poet, said Zakia. But he himself conceded that if you analyse his writings, you may discover that half of what he writes is meaningless. John Lennon, the premier Beatle, latched on to some of his statements that sound good, even if they are without strict meaning, to induct into his songs.

After his death Gibran was buried in Bsharri in his native Lebanon where a museum has come up to preserve his memory. He wrote that even after death, *I am alive and standing beside you*. You can read more about his life at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kahlil_Gibran

Zakia commended his fragment *On Giving* which begins:

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

For more see

<http://www.katsandogz.com/ongiving.html>

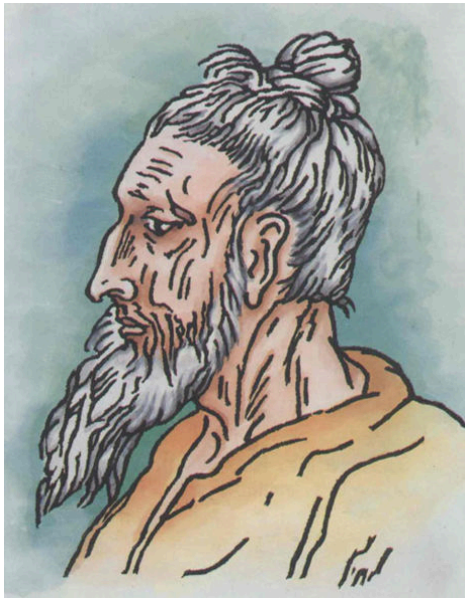
Zakia finds a lot of vaguely soothing philosophy in his writing. Bobby said his works were popular on college campuses, and sometimes served as vicarious shorthand for moonstruck lovers. Indira added that Gibran has more votaries among women. KumKum said this is like the following J.D. Salinger has on American campuses, but Joe thought what Salinger described is a remote past in America, and not quite relevant to the present

campus mood; yet Salinger, because he is a prescribed author in American literature courses on a thousand campuses, is still in print and his stories are known.

Zakia then read *A Tear And A Smile* in which the lines occur:

*The life of a flower is longing and fulfillment
A tear and a smile*

Soma



Fakir Lalon Shah also known as Lalon Shah (c.1774–1890), was a Bengali philosopher poet. He lived in a village in Bengal, in what is now the district of Kushtia, Bangladesh. Lalon composed numerous songs and poems which describe his philosophy.

The songs of Lalon seek to expose the reality/truth that lies beyond our material plane of vision. They give a feel of the indescribable. To an engrossed listener, his songs briefly open and close a narrow passage to peep through to the other world beyond the opaque glass ceiling of this world.

Rabindranath Tagore in his 1933 London Hebart Lecture applauded Lalon Shah as a mystic poet who discovered "soul" and the meaning of "man". Tagore said: "I discovered from the songs of Lalon that the 'man' is within yourself where are you searching Him "ai manushe ase se mon".

Lalon Shah had a perceptible influence on Rabindranath Tagore, who introduced the Baul tradition of Bengal to the world. Tagore's music has been influenced significantly by the diversity of Baul tradition. The American poet Allen Ginsberg was also inspired by Lalon Shah in writing his poem *After Lalon*, which is included in his poetry collection *Cosmopolitan Greetings*.

Soma said Lalon's poetry is couched in simple terms, but is infused with deep meaning. KumKum suggested that the meaning that has to be extracted from many Baul songs is not the surface meaning — which only serves as a metaphor for the deeper meaning. He comes from the tradition of Baul singers who go around the countryside with two instruments, a *duggi* and an

ektara. They are non-conformists, and are universalists, wedded to no single religion and thereby bridging Hinduism and Islam. There was some discussion whether the translation from Bengali in these lines is exact:

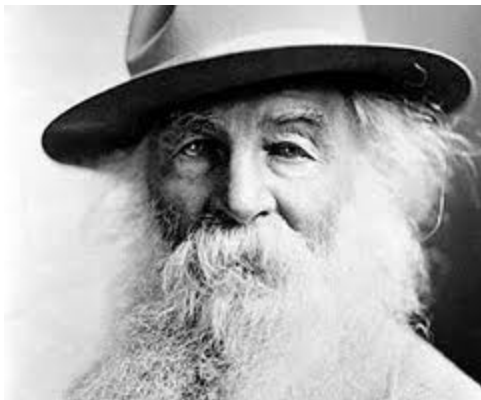
*The unknown Bird in the cage ...
how does it fly in and out?*

The consensus was that the Bengali title of the poem *Khachar bhiton ochin pakhi* is better rendered as *The Invisible Bird in the Cage*. The question of whether the poem is 'sweeter' in Bengali was asked. But who can say, except a native Bengali speaker. Soma promised to send the Bengali written version to KumKum.

Joe thought that like Zephaniah's poetry this Baul poem is really a song, and meant to be sung, for Bauls never merely recited. The word *Saiin* is meant to signify the Divine person. The poem has been translated by many people, and Indira questioned how accurate the translations are to the letter and the spirit of the original. There are many approaches to translating poetry, but in all of them something is lost. She said the readers need to hear it sung in Bengali.

Talitha raised the matter of the apparent contradictions within the language, if you follow it by logic. Joe thought that the anomaly lies in whether one has an *a priori* belief that the Divine is subject to reason, or not. In classical Christianity, say as in St Thomas Aquinas, the Divine is a fully rational being, able to do nothing that contradicts reason; whereas in Islam, God is not subject to reason, because he is thought to transcend all human categories. Joe recalls a maxim he learnt in physics, that the opposite of a simple truth is false; but the opposite of a deep truth can also be true.

Thommo



Walt Whitman was born in 1819 in Long Island. His family moved to Brooklyn. He was apprenticed as a typesetter at age 13. He joined the army and worked in hospitals. Later he worked as a department clerk and wrote his famous book, *Leaves of Grass*, at age 37. It is a

book said to have been presented by Bill Clinton, the errant former US President, to his wife, Hilary, and also to Monica Lewinsky, the junior intern in his office of whom he was fond.

Whitman has to be read aloud. Classicists reading his verse (free verse) were dismayed, but the verses have the inexplicable power to touch the heart. Indira said it is a great book for teen-agers, but did not specify why, whether there were lessons to learn from it, or a free spiritedness to imbibe at that age from the book. Bobby wondered whether we are not all going back to being teenagers again!

His most famous poem is *O Captain! My Captain!* on the death of Abraham Lincoln. See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_Captain!_My_Captain!

More about him can be found at the Wikipedia entry:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walt_Whitman

A commemoration of Whitman in Camden, NJ, where he lived is at

<http://www.camden.lib.nj.us/whitman/>

The matter of his poems being homo-erotic has been much discussed. No one is sure if he ever had sexual relations with a man, but that side of him was well-developed.

The poem (*As I Ponder'd in Silence*) that Thommo recited is a reflection on the themes of Whitman's poems. He answers the spirit of former epic poets, that his poems too are about the theme of Victory in Wars, but the war he wages is the living battle in each person's soul, and victory lies in the conquest of matter by the spirit.

Bobby



Bobby never tires of his hero, Goethe. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (28 August 1749 – 22 March 1832) was a German writer and polymath. Goethe is considered the supreme genius of modern German literature.

Goethe's *Faust*

(see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faust>)

is a hybrid between a play and an extended poem, epic in scope. The story concerns the fate of Faust in his quest for the true essence of life ("was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält"). Frustrated with learning and the limits to his knowledge, power, and enjoyment of life, he attracts the attention of the devil (represented by Mephistopheles).

In the first part, Mephistopheles leads Faust through experiences that culminate in a lustful relationship with Gretchen, an innocent young woman. Gretchen and her family are destroyed by Mephistopheles' deceptions and Faust's desires. Part one of the story ends in tragedy for Faust, as Gretchen is saved but Faust is left to grieve in shame.

The second part begins with the spirits of the earth forgiving Faust (and the rest of mankind) and progresses into allegorical poetry. Faust and his devil pass through and manipulate the world of politics and the world of the classical gods, and Faust experiences a singular moment of happiness.

Mephistopheles tries to seize Faust's soul when he dies after this moment of happiness, but is frustrated and enraged when angels intervene due to God's grace. Though this grace is truly 'gratuitous' and does not condone Faust's frequent errors perpetrated with Mephistopheles, the angels state that this grace can only occur because of Faust's unending striving and results from the intercession of the forgiving Gretchen. The final scene has Faust's soul carried to heaven in the presence of God as the "Holy Virgin, Mother, Queen, Goddess...The Eternal Feminine".

Bobby said Goethe worked 60 years on this epic, polishing and re-working it. The play gave rise to the term 'Faustian bargain' for a deal similar to Faust's bargain with the devil to gain limitless knowledge in exchange for his soul.

Bobby's selection was not any of the dramatic scenes, such as the damnation of Faust when he is carried to hell, or his bargain; the scene he chose is a pastoral one (*'Peasants under the Linden Tree'*) of simple yokels enjoying nature in a way that is beyond Faust's range of experience.

Joe



Christopher Marlowe

Walter Raleigh

The two men are bound together in English anthologies. The poem by Marlowe, *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*, is in the pastoral style, and evokes images of the countryside. It is written in six quatrains of iambic tetrameters rhyming AABB. Raleigh, writing after the death of Marlowe, decided to respond to the shepherd's invitation to his lover to 'come live with me' and enjoy the litany of rustic delights described. Raleigh plays the urbane courtier, sceptical of the blandishments Marlowe offers through his shepherd.

The two poems may be compared for inventiveness, imagery, allusion, alliteration and memorability. Joe invited the readers to choose the better one offering a parallel side-by-side text to compare stanza by stanza.

Some notes first:

The words 'love', 'move', and 'prove' were exact rhymes in Elizabethan times; the vowel has a short 'u' sound. But Joe read in the modern pronunciation. The Elizabethan sense of familiar English words is slightly different. **Prove** = v. to experience; **still** = always; **breed** = grow; **falls** = musical cadence.

Joe then read ***The Passionate Shepherd to His Love***

Marlowe died at the age of 29 in a brawl over paying a bill at an inn, as some say, but it was a hushed up case and we don't know precisely because Marlowe was entangled with political spying. Had Marlowe not died young many believe he would have been a dramatist to rival his contemporary, Shakespeare. Best known and still performed is the play *Dr. Faustus*. There are five others, *The Great Tamburlaine, Parts I & II, The Jew of Malta*, etc. He completed few poems of his own: *Hero & Leander* (~800 lines), a few fragments, and an epitaph in Latin. But he translated two Latin poets: Ovid's love elegies and the Roman poet Lucan.

Then Joe read Raleigh's ***The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd***

Raleigh was condemned to death by the executioner's axe for allegedly participating in a plot against the King. He was then 66. Walter Raleigh introduced tobacco into England from Virginia, USA, the capital of which state is named after him. He was a courtier in great favour at Elizabeth I's court, until he transgressed by secretly marrying one of her ladies in waiting. For this he served time in the Tower of London. He led expeditions to America to form a colony, and to S. America in search of gold. He was also a coloniser of Ireland on behalf of the English. In between he found time to write poetry, considered as one of the refinements of a proper courtier. He wrote only about 30 poems, about 1,300 lines in all, too meagre to be counted as the work of more than a dilettante.

Joe's analysis:

- 1.** The imagery of the pastoral scene is all Marlowe's – Raleigh contributes zero.
- 2.** In stanza five Raleigh states the same things as Marlowe but adds a negation; how poor is that for invention!
- 3.** Marlowe has a fancy line: 'melodious birds sing madrigals', but Raleigh has none; his one attempt is clumsy: 'Philomel becometh dumb' and when he wrote 'rotten reason' his feel for the poetic fell rather short.
- 4.** The only argument Raleigh trots out contra the shepherd is that everything he offers is impermanent – but when has the transient nature of pleasure ever dissuaded a lass from making it with her lover?

But most damning of all is that Raleigh has not written his response from a **woman's viewpoint** at all, though he tittles it *The Nymph's Reply*. He speaks of none of the things women might expect from a man: security, fidelity, wit, good sex ... or what have you.

Accordingly Joe sought to write a female response to the shepherd's passionate entreaty, one stanza of which runs:

*Your occupation midst the lambs —
I could not care a tinker's dam!
What's pretty is not wool, but dough;
That's what you'll need to be my beau.*

Talitha



R. Parthasarathy

Rajagopal Parthasarathy is an Indian poet and translator whose works include *Rough Passage*, *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*, and *The Tale of an Anklet: An Epic of South India*, which received the National Academy of Letters Translation Prize in 1996. He teaches Indian literature at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. Parthasarathy was a lecturer in English Literature for ten years before he joined Oxford University Press in 1971 as Regional Editor in Madras. You can read about his early career here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._Parthasarathy

He assembled a portfolio of poetry from India in 13 languages, translated into English and published in the *Poetry* magazine. You can read about this and an indigestible comment on poetry translation at: http://cms.skidmore.edu/community_relations/details.cfm?passID=433

Parthasarathy's examination of translation issues stems from his own practice as a translator from four – Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi, and Urdu – of the 18 languages recognized by the Indian Constitution as official. His translation of the Tamil epic, *The Tale of an Anklet* (fifth century) won several international awards, including the 1994 PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Translation Citation.

He wrote *Rough Passage* as a long poem in several parts, written over the years 1961-75, dwelling on the theme of language and identity, and the conflict that arises from being brought up in two cultures. You can think of it as a dialogue between the poet and his Tamil past. It is written in an extremely austere style, verging on dry-as-dust non-poetry, as Joe sees it. But he is obviously very serious in cultivating this style. You can read an extended consideration of his poetry in the book *Papers On Indian Writing In English : Poetry* by A.N. Dwivedi which has quite an extended facsimile view of pages at Google books: <http://books.google.com/books?id=fWkY20oPOkkC>

Since one of the poems Talitha chose deals with the rock-cut temple at Mamallapuram, readers narrated their own experience of the elephant sculptures, and the fact that after the Dec 2004 tsunami, a temple that lay submerged in the sea has now arisen to view. Many more lie under the seabed, waiting to be explored.

Minu



Pablo Neruda

Pablo Neruda wrote these famous opening lines of a poem called *Poesia*:

*And it was at that age...**Poetry arrived in search of me.** I don't know, I don't know where*

it came from, from winter or a river.

I don't know how or when,

A rather complete bio of more than 5,000 words is given in the wiki entry

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pablo_Neruda

He was the best known poet of S America, famous also for receiving more love-letters than any other living man in his time. Perhaps it was a response to the erotically supercharged book of poems he wrote at age 20: *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair).

Discovered in 1911 by the American explorer Hiram Bingham, **Macchu Picchu** is an Inca stronghold in the Peruvian Andes near the modern city of Cuzco. Nothing is known of its history and it appears that it was never discovered by the Spanish Conquistadors. Bingham himself believed that the site was the last refuge of the Incas from the invading Spanish.

The Heights of Macchu Picchu is a long, complex poem. It is split into 12 sections, each written in dense surreal images. In the final Canto XII, which Minu read, Neruda addresses the native peoples long vanished from these ruins. Neruda feels his own spiritual rebirth and a rebirth of these dead people, the Incas of S. America. The poem ends:

Come quickly to my veins and to my mouth.

Speak through my speech, and through my blood.

There are many images in the poem, as Minu pointed, that remind one of Christ crucified: crucify, hand, pierce, breast, hands, blood, etc. Obviously the poet is using allusion for a purpose, who knows for what.

Thommo said the Incas were a violent people in their religion, practising cruel sacrifices of humans to appease the gods they worshiped. Apparently Thommo had heard of this game:

(see

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090209223537AA5Wtua>)

"Pre-Columbian ballcourts have been found throughout Mesoamerica, as far south as Nicaragua, and possibly as far north as the U.S. state of Arizona. ... Basically, the players try to knock a rubber ball into a big stone hoop that is suspended in the air on a wall. Sort of like basketball. Except the hoop is 27 feet high. And you can only "shoot" the ball with your hips. The losers get sacrificed to the gods, and the winners go home and sleep with all the cheerleaders."

Indira



Samuel Taylor Coleridge, young

Indira introduced Coleridge as a "very English poet." It was his famous fragment, *Kubla Khan*, introduced thus at its wiki entry:

"According to Coleridge's Preface to *Kubla Khan*, the poem was composed one night after he experienced an opium influenced dream after reading a work describing the Tartar king Kublai Khan. Upon waking, he set about writing lines of poetry that came to him from the dream until he was

interrupted by a person from Porlock. The poem could not be completed according to its original 200-300 line plan as the interruption caused him to forget the lines."

The poem itself is so crystalline in its language that no haze of

muddled imagination peeps through, only a magical distillation of a dream by an accomplished young poet, aged 25. The expression 'person from Porlock' (Porlock stands for a merchant, probably collecting his bill) is now used for any unwelcome interruption of inspiration.

The poem was published 19 years after its still birth. Perhaps, Coleridge waited for the inspiration to return so he could complete the poem he envisaged of 300 lines or so. It never happened, and in answer to Joe's question whether any other poet had attempted to complete it, Indira answered, No. It will therefore remain a magnificent ruin, like the Phoenix. Everyone commented on the wonderful font and the typesetting arrangement of the copy given to readers; congratulations, John!

The Poems

Amita

De Rong Song

Your house is
Falling down
Around
Your
Feet,
And you got
Nought
To eat,
Don't worry
Be happy.
Your fish
Have drowned
You wear
A frown,
You search
But you don't
Own a pound,
Don't worry
Be happy.

You ain't got

Nowhere to
Play,
Just balconies
And
Motorways,
Don't worry
Be happy.

You meet
Someone
You really like,
They tell you to
Get on your bike,
Don't worry
Be happy.

You're on your bike
And all is fine,
You get caught
In a washing line,
Don't worry
Be happy.
You go to school

The school is
Gone,
The Government
Put pressure on,
Don't worry
Be happy.
Your tea is
Dry
Your ice is
Hot,
Your head is
Tied up in a
Not,
Don't worry
Be happy.
You worry
Because
You're hurrying,
And hurry

Because
You're worrying,
Don't happy
Be worried.

Benjamin Zephaniah

Dis Policeman Keeps On Kicking Me To Death

Ina de distance of de night
you see dem moving round
investigating and crime-making
within any town,
creeping persons wid no hearts
dem control who dem please
dem only like fe see you
when you de pon you bending knees.
Some of us will fight dem, we fight dem
some of us fight back
informers will sleep wid you
den stab you ina you back
dis regime is racist we know
dis regime is bent
dis regime is like a worthless penny
Dat's unspent.

Dis policeman keeps on hitting me and pulling out my locks
he keeps on feeding me unlimited brock-lacs
dis policeman is a coward he gets me from behind
he can jail my body but him cannot jail my mind

Like a bat from hell he comes at night
to work his evil plan
Although he goes to church on Sunday
he's a sinner man,
like a thief in the dark he take me to de
place where he just left
and when him get me in der
he is kicking me to death.
Dis policeman, dis policeman
dis policeman keeps on kicking me to death.

I got me up and took me to de place fe human rights
a notice on de door said 'Sorry, we are closed tonight'
so I turn round and took myself to see dis preacher guy

who told me 'bout some heaven
dat was in de bloody sky,
now I don't wa'to kid myself
but I don't think I'm free
if I'm free den why does he
keep fucking kicking me

I tell you I'm not joking
you should see dem over der
dey have no respect for either
living or welfare,
dis policeman is a creep
I tell you he is mad
I am trying to do good
while he exhibits bad.
I am living in de ghetto
trying to do my best
when dis policeman tells me
I'm under damn arrest.
Him beat me so badly
I was on the floor
him said if I don't plead guilty
him gwan kick me more
I was feeling sick, I pleaded
RACIST ATTACK
and another policeman come to finish me off -
dis one was BLACK.

In dis war we have traitors
who don't think to sell you out
in dis war der are people who refuse

to hear de shout
for human rights to be regarded
as a basic right
still dis policeman kicks me
every day and every night.

Repeat verse 3
Benjamin Zephaniah

Love After Love

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was yourself.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott

The Flight Anchors in Castries Harbor

When the stars self were young over Castries,
I loved you alone and I loved the whole world.
What does it matter that our lives are different?
Burdened with the loves of our different children?
When I think of your young face washed by the wind
and your voice that chuckles in the slap of the sea?
The lights are out on La Toc promontory,
except for the hospital. Across at Vigie
the marina arcs keep vigil. I have kept my own
promise, to leave you the one thing I own,
you whom I loved first: my poetry.
We here for one night. Tomorrow, the Flight will be gone.

Derek Walcott

Zakia

A Tear and a Smile

I would not exchange the sorrows of my heart
For the joys of the multitude.
And I would not have the tears that sadness makes
To flow from my every part turn into laughter.

I would that my life remain a tear and a smile.

A tear to purify my heart and give me understanding
Of life's secrets and hidden things.

A smile to draw me nigh to the sons of my kind and
To be a symbol of my glorification of the gods.

A tear to unite me with those of broken heart;
A smile to be a sign of my joy in existence.

I would rather that I died in yearning and longing than that I live
Weary and despairing.

I want the hunger for love and beauty to be in the
Depths of my spirit, for I have seen those who are
Satisfied the most wretched of people.
I have heard the sigh of those in yearning and Longing, and it is
sweeter than the sweetest melody.

With evening's coming the flower folds her petals
And sleeps, embracing her longing.
At morning's approach she opens her lips to meet
The sun's kiss.

The life of a flower is longing and fulfilment.
A tear and a smile.

The waters of the sea become vapor and rise and come
Together and are a cloud.

And the cloud floats above the hills and valleys
Until it meets the gentle breeze, then falls weeping
To the fields and joins with brooks and rivers to Return to the sea,
its home.

The life of clouds is a parting and a meeting.
A tear and a smile.

And so does the spirit become separated from
The greater spirit to move in the world of matter
And pass as a cloud over the mountain of sorrow
And the plains of joy to meet the breeze of death

And return whence it came.

To the ocean of Love and Beauty----to God.

Kahlil Gibran

Soma

http://www.parabaas.com/translation/database/translations/poems/lalon_sudipto1.html

The Unknown Bird in the Cage...

how does it fly in and out?
Catch it, I would, if I could...
and put my mind's chains on its feet.
There are eight rooms with nine doors,
with lattice-work in between.
On top of that, there' s a central yard
and a hall of mirrors.

The unknown Bird in the cage...
how does it fly in and out?

The Bird wouldn't behave so,
had it not been for my ill-luck.
It has broken through its Cage
and flown away somewhere....

The unknown Bird in the cage...
how does it fly in and out?

O Mind, you have lived with high hopes,
but your Cage is made of raw bamboo.
One day this Cage (too) will fall and break.
Lalon says, "The door 's ajar, the Bird's flown!"

The unknown Bird in the cage...
how does it fly in and out?

The unknown Bird in the cage...
how does it fly in and out?
Catch it, I would, if I could...
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The unknown Bird in the cage...
how does it fly in and out?

Fakir Lalon Shah

How will you understand the Saain's Divine Play?

His play knows no end...
no telling what shape He'll take, and when...
How will you understand the Saain's Divine Play?

Water of the Ganga is called Holy.
But it's the same water filling
The puddle on the road we call dirty!
That is how the Saain shapes Himself...
in size with the vessel He fills!

How will you understand the Saain's Divine Play?

He is the room and its occupant,
as well as the thief that steals from it!
He is His own Magistrate,
sentencing Himself to chains!

How will you understand the Saain's Divine Play?

Eternal streams flow out of the One.
You and I are nothing in it, nameless.
Lalon says, "If only I knew 'me,'
all riddles would be solved!"

How will you understand the Saain's Divine Play?
Fakir Lalon Shah

Thommo

As I Ponder'd in Silence

As I ponder'd in silence,
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering long,
A Phantom arose before me, with distrustful aspect,
Terrible in beauty, age, and power,
The genius of poets of old lands,
As to me directing like flame its eyes,
With finger pointing to many immortal songs,
And menacing voice, What singest thou? it said;
Know'st thou not, there is but one theme for ever-enduring
bards?
And that is the theme of War, the fortune of battles,
The making of perfect soldiers?
Walt Whitman

2

Be it so, then I answer'd,
I too, haughty Shade, also sing war—and a longer and greater
one than any,
Waged in my book with varying fortune—with flight, advance, and
retreat—Victory deferr'd and wavering,
(Yet, methinks, certain, or as good as certain, at the last,)—The
field the world; 15
For life and death—for the Body, and for the eternal Soul,
Lo! too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
I, above all, promote brave soldiers.
Walt Whitman

Bobby

(From Part 1 of *Faust*)

Peasants under the Linden Tree

Peasants under the linden tree. [Dance and song].
The shepherd decked him for the dance,
In ribbons, vest, and wreath to prance,
Adorned with fine arraying.
Now round the linden lass and lad
Were thronging, dancing there like mad.
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Hurrah-a-rah-a-rah!
Thus fiddle-bow was playing.
He crowded and he pushed in haste,
Then bumped into a maiden's waist,
Elbow against her laying.
The lively damsel turned her head:
"I find that stupid, now!" she said.
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Hurrah-a-rah-a-rah!
"Don't be so rude and swaying!"
Then round and round they winged their flight,
They danced to left, they danced to right,
All petticoats displaying.
They grew so red, they grew so warm,
Then rested panting, arm in arm,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Hurrah-a-rah-a-rah!
On hip the elbow staying.
"I say, don't make so free with me!
How many fooled his bride-to-be,
Deceiving and betraying!"
And yet he coaxed her to one side,
And from the linden far and wide:
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Hurrah-a-rah-a-rah!
Rang shouts and fiddle-playing.

Old Peasant. Good Doctor, this is fine of you,
That you don't scorn us here today,
And now amid this crowding throng,
A highly-learned man, you stray.
Hence take in turn the finest mug
That with a fresh, cool drink we've filled.
I pledge you, sir, and wish aloud
Not only that your thirst be stilled:
For every drop the mug conveys,
A day be added to your days!

Faust. I take the refreshing drink and thus I too
Return the health with thanks to all of you.

Wolfgang Goethe

Joe

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs;
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

Christopher Marlowe

(1564-1593) written probably 1592, publ. 1599, six years after
his death

The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,

These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold;
And Philomel becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields:
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

The gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten,—
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Walter Raleigh

(1552-1618), written 1596 (probably)

Talitha

poems from *Homecoming*

1

My tongue in English chains.
[return. after a generation. to you.
I am at the end
of my claviclie tether,
hunger For you unassuaged.
I {alter, stumble.
Speak a tired language
wrenched from its sleep in the *Kural*¹

teeth, palate, lips still new
to its agglutinative touch.
Now, hooked on celloloid, you reel
down plush corridors.

Rajagopalan Parthasarathy

2

To live in Tamil Nadu is to be conscious
every day of impotence.
There is one language. for instance:

the bull, Nammalavar² took by the horns,
is today an unrecognizable carcass,
quick with the fleas Kodambakkam.

There is little you can do about it,
except throw up your hands.
How long can foreign poets

provide the sta[le fo your lines?
Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your past.
Ransack the cupboard

for skeletons of your Brahmin chldhood
(the nights with father dreaming
the *Four Thousand*³ as sleep

pinched your things blue). You may then,
Perhaps, strike out a line for yourself
from the iron of your life's ordinariness.

Rajagopalan Parthasarathy

3

And so it eventually happened—
a family reunion not heard of
since grandfather died in '59 – in March
this year. Cousins arrived in Tiruchchanaur
in overcrowded private buses,
the dust of unlettered years
clouding instant recognition.
Later, each one pulled,
sitting cross-legged on the steps

of the choultry, familiar coconuts

out of the fire
of rice-and-pickle afternoons.

Sundari, who had squirrelled up and down
forbidden tamarind trees in her long skirt
every morning with me,.

stood there, that day, forty years taller
her three daughters floating
like safe planets near her.

Rajagopalan Parthasarathy

9

Hawks in ripples circumscribe my vision.
Painstakingly a wind ,
thumbs paragraphs of bright sea.

The sky bends in adoration
under a diminished sun; Rocks⁴ dream
in stone. Here, a king and his people built,

Only the casuarina endures, survives
the penance of Bhagiratha⁵.
The many-clawed sea

has picked the face of the temple clean.
Knuckly stones protrude
from under the skin of time.

The water gossips idly, its tongue
loosened by heat. Humped tourists,
kodaks round their necks,

prod the stone-carrion
that once pranced on this extreme shore
before the sea horses from Kambuja.

All around, amongst the casuarina groves,
slow, but inexorably,
trundles the elephant of history.

Rajagopalan Parthasarathy

1. Tamil classic of the third or fourth century A.D. by Valluvar.

2. Tamil bhakti poet who flourished about A.D. 900.
3. Collection of Tamil hymns written between the fifth and ninth centuries A.D.
4. Rock-cut temples at Mamallapuram near Madras.
5. King whose penance brought the Ganga from heaven down to earth.

Minu

Canto XII from The Heights of Macchu Picchu

Arise to birth with me, my brother.
Give me your hand out of the depths
sown by your sorrows.
You will not return from these stone fastnesses.
You will not emerge from subterranean time.
Your rasping voice will not come back,
nor your pierced eyes rise from their sockets.

Look at me from the depths of the earth,
tiller of fields, weaver, reticent shepherd,
groom of totemic guanacos,
mason high on your treacherous scaffolding,
iceman of Andean tears,
jeweler with crushed fingers,
farmer anxious among his seedlings,
potter wasted among his clays--
bring to the cup of this new life
your ancient buried sorrows.
Show me your blood and your furrow;
say to me: here I was scourged
because a gem was dull or because the earth
failed to give up in time its tithe of corn or stone.
Point out to me the rock on which you stumbled,
the wood they used to crucify your body.
Strike the old flints
to kindle ancient lamps, light up the whips
glued to your wounds throughout the centuries
and light the axes gleaming with your blood.

I come to speak for your dead mouths.

Throughout the earth
let dead lips congregate,
out of the depths spin this long night to me
as if I rode at anchor here with you.

And tell me everything, tell chain by chain,
and link by link, and step by step;
sharpen the knives you kept hidden away,
thrust them into my breast, into my hands,
like a torrent of sunbursts,
an Amazon of buried jaguars,
and leave me cry: hours, days and years,
blind ages, stellar centuries.

And give me silence, give me water, hope.

Give me the struggle, the iron, the volcanoes.

Let bodies cling like magnets to my body.

Come quickly to my veins and to my mouth.

Speak through my speech, and through my blood.

Pablo Neruda

Indira

Kubla Khan

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round :
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree ;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh ! that deep romantic chasm which slanted

Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover !
A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover !
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced :
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail :
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean :
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war !
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves ;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice !

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw :
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome ! those caves of ice !
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware ! Beware !
His flashing eyes, his floating hair !
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge