

POEMS FOR MADRID

Introduction

These more than 30 poems are part of the answer to a call for 'Poems for Madrid' which nthposition put out after the bombs of March 11. They represent a small portion of the extraordinary, moving and humane outpouring of poetry, messages and emails which we have received since.

The poems speak for themselves, and in several languages, from poets around the world. They employ a variety of styles and themes; they range from the haunting to the rhetorical, the thoughtful to the satirical, the angry to the wise: in short, they bear witness to many, if not all, aspects of human expression and feeling at such times.

I would like to thank all the poets who sent us work, and especially those who we are able to represent here. This e-book is copyleft and we appreciate the donation of work.

Further copies of this, and of nthposition's other free poetry ebooks are available from www.nthposition.com.

Todd Swift
London, March 2004

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Prayer for Madrid

Pauline Rowe

A bomb in a phone signal
instead of a human voice.

Death in a journey to work
alone amidst the noise.

Terrified people fled.
Blood spilled into the rain.

Lord, open the gates of heaven
for the innocents of Spain.



From 'The minister of ordinary sorrow'

David Bateman

The Minister Of Ordinary Sorrow
travels by train between disasters.
He drinks only mineral water.
The purity of his tears is unrivalled.



For Madrid with respect

Helên Thomas

Trains are for daydreams
and journeys, not nightmares
and endings.

The morning commute:
A chance to wake up,
to meditate on the day ahead.

Where I come from, 'ETA' means:
'Estimated time of arrival'.
No one expected this destination.

We need to take care
where we lay blame
as we lay flowers.

We should all take to the streets
and stand beneath our umbrellas
in defiance.



Ode for Spain

Larry Ebersole

“We are all on the same train bombed by the extremists.”
– *Madrid spokesperson*, 3/14/2004

And if I am killed
by terrorists
before I finish speaking
don't kill for me

Seek justice in the Courts
legal warrants to search
for the true extremists
not vengeance
(don't invade)
no warfare
all in my honor

I oppose more vengeance
want fairness
peaceful justice
political settlements
handshakes of agreement

not a draft for linguists
twisted with public funds
train wrecked in militarism

kill not to show
that killing is wrong
no carnage
will honor me

give away
white roses
slow kisses

dance your ancient streets
spilling a vintage wine



The composer, el poeta

Dawna Rae Hicks

For Federico Moreno Torroba (1891–1982)

Madrid, I have not seen life move an inch
all night. I take the unending race 'round
the skull at dark, through the round grey worm that
loves and fears its dead, lit by orchestra.
Today will be born an elegy to
the poet's own harsh and heartbreaking hymn.
The morning sun is an orange chord strummed as
a spider web, twice. Once before and once
after the lip of the world has been torn.
I hold a silver window to the sky.

When I turn this mirror on myself these
golden shards of light disappear: they die.
I am ashamed of the glow that is lost
in transition. I am a feeble plinth
to hold such wonder on my back, my pen
not the tool suited for creators but
translators. The empty bars of the score,
settled. This, my lack, a degenerate
who points, who laughs. How can I twist colour
into one sound? Call the trumpets down, calm
the horns. Bring the violins for those scorned
hours I have wept across the papers
and considered music as a traitor,
certain Satan had affixed my ears on

melodies, like a wire vibrating in
the ground, responding to each small shiver
of the earth. Not that alone. The bell toll,
the cry of cats in the hedgerow at night,
who mewl and whine, through the entire act.
I am sure it is a cruel creature

that stakes me to sound, a barometer
for all of life. A recording device
meant to feel each scratch of the needle in
wax, each libretto of a girl at a
sidewalk cafe, her story in need of
operatic telling. A violence in
four parts, as atria and ventricle
are to the heart. I have often tried to
forget the plan, to make more of Man than
was before me. This I'm charged do, am

chained forever between octaves, as if
Andromeda prisoned on the cliffs of
Philistia. Where is my Perseus
to slay the damnable monster within?
Euterpe and Melpomene are both
lovely in their way, but I am not fooled
by their rapture. Their kiss of loneliness
is contagious, denies any other.
So I am a priest in wistful worship
ever after. Hollowed for their purpose,

as a reed becomes a flute, given to
the absolute wandering of their notes.
No other life but the wind blowing through.
And on this day of days when they both are
caught by the hair in the suffering web
of the crumbled streets; the silver clamor:
the claxon shrieks that adjure, shout, cry out
and drown their song, so faint against the rest.
What rumble did they hear beneath the ground?

I think the growl of timpani aroused

thunder in their chests. The heart a hammer,
a raven in the breast. Should I set them
free they would not sing, but settle into
trees, black banners for the dead. Oh Madrid,
what lyric could inspire them now to dare,
to hearken to this anguish, and compare?



Untitled

Odette England

Just as a seahorse
is a symbol of aquatic beauty

So are the tears
that rich men fail to admire



Romantico

Jayne Fenton Keane

there is a vigilant animal inhaling the room
the scent of the vulnerable its beacon
black eyes suck on their smoke signals

olé

palming, spooning, crooning
tools of its trade
staccato fire breathing whiskers
twitch at a flame

olé olé

a snaking, hypnotic
smouldering gaze
stripping its prey of its sweat and gristle
its bones rattling in dance

olé olé olé

its snapping spine electrifies
its foot prints glitter on the boards

olé olé

seduced to dance in its percussion
feet twitch
muscles pounce
a memory
something tribal
stamping in your body's tides
beating home home home
until you are all chest

and all groin
and all bound up in rhythm

olé



The rain

Hal Sirowitz

'The rain in Spain falls
mainly on the plain,'
but the pain caused by
international terrorism
and United States bullying
falls on everyone.



On Madrid

Linda Benninghoff

The stones mourn.
They weep still tears
where they lie.
The leaves weep spring
as though shedding light.
For weeks afterwards
during the nights no star shone.

Then one at a time
they came back
with twinkling and with clarity
as if to say they had not forgotten
the world.



Colmo

Fred Johnston

Atocha, Madrid. 1988.

“Sitting upon the dead
fallen silent these two months,
I kiss empty shoes...” – Miguel Hernández, ‘Sitting upon the Dead’.

consider the heat, the iron
railings of a balcony, untouchable

or a sun scouring the walls
on a street wild with dried shadows –

we lie open to the sky on
a balcony

at midnight
there is nothing left to breathe –

a soldier young as Adam,
like a crushed flower in a bowl

of foetid water tight in his
uniform: a man standing on his

head, Yoga-thin among
the rails, bright strings of waving steel:

how the body dispossesses
itself, a rigor in love and death –

the station was a mouth fed
drooling slivers of line, cable, track

and we entered, shocked awake
by a sudden loss of light and breath.



11.3.04

Martha L Deed

Bookbags are for learning
 not bombs
 trains for travel
 not death
 and Madrid
 “vibrant crossroads
 for Iberia”
 used to tears of laughter
 not of grief
 brothers and sisters
 “gatos” broken on TV
 across the world
 parties postponed
 for weeping



Glancing up from the *NY Times* headlines (March 11, 2004)

Rochelle Ratner

She was in Spain years ago, with her parents. She walked winding alleys in Malaga, lunched at an English pub in some seacoast town, dodged gypsies in Granada. Finest broiled shrimp she ever ate was at the Marbella Hilton. Except they ate their dinners so late, the silly people. She went to high mass in Spanish, saw a bride just leaving church through the tour bus window. There's no divorce in Spain, the guide pointed out, and she imagined she saw the bride crying. Nothing lasts forever, she'd wanted to call out. She wished she was close enough to smell the flowers in her hair, but her

father was seated next to her. His eyes were straight ahead, not caring about the life beyond the glass. On a narrow road near Ronda, three men had to get out and push a parked car over so the bus could get past. A good story to tell friends at school, she thought. But she was very very very very young then.



Terrorist studies

Amy King

Always the personal, the beginning
 À propos dream force, repeat ejections

My betraying dog trusts all saccharin
 lusts, a problematic –

Next city inhabits every inch
 on its smokescreen forklift horizon.
 Pass the salt enhancer: *Por favor*
 as a new way to say *Soy*; I am
 a far person matched into this

Citified species alias. For once,
 do not pass her music-sweet breeze
 in the plaza-filled land we soon visit.

Or, Let go for the maths of emotions,
 said the man who fell asleep on his tracks.

In this train car slides peace dividends,
 taking death's valley back: some say poem,
 some seek actions spent. I want to spam
 your guestbooks, this youth of micro-wars.

I need an incomparable spirit that
 does not heed the hordes of stitchery.
 That does not brand new grammars
 the harbors of street mutilations. Such
 silence seals silent aversions adrift.



Flight from Madrid, September 18, 2001

Linda Simone

How naïve to believe
 turbulence, pickpockets
 or a lack of hotel rooms were all
 we had to fear.

Now 11 days later, we fly home,
 air thick with war,
 terrorism no longer a word
 with roots in faraway mountainous lands.
 Its runners burrow deep
 into our very soil, our very souls.

Eight endless hours, we wonder,
 Will we make it back alive?
 What will this new America be like?
 Flight attendants wear white ribbons,
 serve drinks, force smiles.



The death of Lorca

Merryn Williams

Most of them are dead now, members of the 'black squads'
 whose cars raced off down darkened streets, that summer of '36.
 All died violently, one way or another.
 The names are lost. The old are afraid to speak.

The poet's books come off the presses in thousands,
 translated, carried in students' pockets
 down the highways of Paris and Buenos Aires;
 his plays sung over the air, his picture goes round the world.

Some died in exile. Picasso painting
 horse, bull and naked lamp in raging black and white.
 Or the English housewife recalling her childhood trauma:
 Send me a ghost writer. Make them hear my story.

He lies with the obscure. 'Give him coffee', the general
 joked. The gravedigger found four of them at dawn,
 roped together, Lorca by the one-legged schoolmaster,
 dug a new trench in the olive grove.

The moon reveals a landscape with no shelter,
 women wringing shirts by an icy mountain stream,
 and heaped bones in the ossuary white as jasmine;
 the juicy oranges lead globes, discoloured by moonlight.

Yet the poetry, bound in olive and khaki
 spreads wide, and the fountain gives good drinking water.
 Still it murmurs, half a mile from the place
 where Lorca fell. His death unjarred a door,
 disclosing more killings, and then more.



With reason, or without

Jo Mazelis (Hughes)

Con razon ó sin ella -

I pretend comprehension
but this language is stolen
from Goya's Disasters of War.
Nothing is lost in translation –
a human limb hug artfully from a tree
is no better or no worse
than one thrown by chance
on the railway tracks.

The journey does not end,
with reason or without –
Grande Hazaña!



My heart no longer sings

Sue Littleton

Madrid, that clever, graceful city,
blindly covers her face with a tear-wet handkerchief
before 200 coffins,
the mutilated bodies of the living,
the shattered psyches of her citizens.

I have no more questions, no more answers.
The years ring past, cold stone striking cold stone
and nothing changes.
It is always the same scenario –

the hidden bombs, the slaughtered strangers,
the severed head of a young suicide bomber
staring from blood-filled eyes at the ruin
around it.

The religious rights of a hundred countries
acclaim their gods, exalt them,
and the footprints –
the footprints of those sweet gods of war –
guide armed followers
across molten sands fused obsidian,
made cold in the moonless night –
cold stone striking cold stone.



Calling all calling

Penn Kemp

Murdered in Madrid,
two hundred too close
a call, too far to call
now. No holding back.

Deliberate mayhem.
Deliberated long and
hard. Carnage uncalled
for. No holds barred.

No way to hold, no way
to sway
an election.

Deliberated, so far from
 liberated. Ideas of March.
 March in peace.
 Peace in March.

The Ides come and gone,
 a year now since Bush
 declared war on Iraq.

Three minutes silence
 for *dies irae*, for all
 souls lost, for

Madrid, where Goya
 stalks El Prado, squats
 sordo in el cuarto, still
 surrounded by Saturn,
 by war torn canvas
 time worn dark.



Venid a ver

Alex Porter

Fate stumbled this morning
 and spilled us to the ground.
 If you do not believe me, come and see.
 Look, if you will, at the cooling
 tar of our blood, the dying bonfires of our skin.
 Come visit the wrecked temple of our bones,
 the cinders that once were
 our hearts.

O Pablo, what would you say?
 Federico, what song for us?

This morning our futures
 were cancelled, our promises mocked.
 If you do not believe me, come and see.
 Look at what was done to us –
 in Washington, London, Baghdad,
 in sunlit rooms and frigid caves.
 How they made new plans for us but
 neglected to tell us the news.

O Pablo, where are the flowers?
 Federico, a kiss from your dead mouth.



After Madrid

Katerina Fretwell

This two-minute meditation
 on perp and victim in Madrid
 can heal the riven world
 and port us to Spain's
 epicenter –

see ourselves as both
 plastic-maker and train-taker,
 the part that's dead inside
 and part of the dead and dying –
 we are sparkle and flame,
 whitehot, coolblack.

Branded, divided, we need
 only one logo: our planet
 as seen from outer space
 cloud-swirled blue and green,
 a gift marked fragile, flammable,
 our choice.



To the sanity of commuters

Jeanne Marie Beaumont

No one expects to die aboard a train.
 Each shuffles on, grateful to find a seat,
 Relieved that those nearby seem calmly sane.

Coats overhead, some turn to the terrain,
 or cup of coffee, paperwork to complete.
 No one expects to die while on the train.

There's no seatbelts to buckle, as on planes.
 Conductors pass, efficient and discreet,
 Collecting tickets from the usual, sane

Commuters, who have no cause to complain
 Until the train breaks down and makes them late.
 They don't expect to die aboard the train

As many did one day in March in Spain.
 Now scanning cars for misfits, eyes might meet
 To test that fellow riders aren't insane.

"To exit, pull red handle, push out windowpane."
 Escape within reach—why you choose this seat,
 Relieved that those in sight appear so sane
 Not one expects to die aboard the train.



Madrid 2004

Robert Paquin

À chaque fois qu'il dort, il rêve de massacres,
 De jambes arrachées, de morceaux de metal
 Hurlés ensanglantés dans cette fumée âcre,
 Les yeux brûlants de larmes sur un lit d'hôpital.

Un silence d'effroi au milieu de cadavres
 Au cri muet figé dans l'explosion des bruits,
 Le même cauchemar implacable se grave
 À chaque fois qu'il dort, les yeux ouverts, la nuit.

Il revoit tous ces gens aux lents gestes hagards,
 Qui errent éperdus au milieu de la rue
 La main tendue vers les décombres d'une gare.
 Le coeur lui bat aux tempes d'avoir tant couru.

Il fait maman des lèvres et il attend, longtemps.
 Il ne sait plus s'il a cinq ans ou quarante ans.



One more

Margo Berdeshevsky

If you know nothing else and we know nothing else, we dare not understand and that is all that is true, then: say what strangled gull screech needs be requiem each time – does a different wing watch, each time – or whose meaning of “duende” is a dire enough deep song? Say: see these newest guests at grief’s table, how – they have raised their darkest choir now – are a thousand, thousand mummets, ghost-faced – palms – painted chalk, and facing day no soul should have to waken to. Say that they are facing out – in painted-face, say: if you know nothing else and we know nothing else, say we have heard the gull, screaming. Heard her chill beak mouthing – I know nothing and we know nothing. Say that, to the sky and cry as softly as you can. Don’t want to waken the mountain, do not waken the sea, the spotted gull chicks will never understand, but see the thousand upheld hands that say – un-saying, stop – say gods, say, when are you off duty? Anticipating no response – say, angels, all somnambulates ? Don’t reply: You know nothing, we know nothing, only clocks can stop, knowing that quiet heartbeat of symbolic gesture. The repetitious song is known to the soil, is known to the repetitious drum, is known to Spanish birdlings and Andalusian hills, songs, none want to hum. But they are singing, we must be singing, must be mouthing, how we must be singing, our useless claw and hoof and handprint – with theirs, held high in the damaged air.



No more tears

Kevin Higgins

Through the increasing murk of the evening,
This Blackness, it slants across our path again.
Not the utter form of sky between stars
but the low sort, a rot which will nag like cancer,
then, suddenly, be nearly everywhere.

And I, Charon, awful old miser,
lurk among black poplars
to snatch the coins
from beneath dead tongues and laugh!
Oh my shaking hands!

Now all is still again.
Laments might pierce the air,
but no, not a syllable packaged away in a mutter
let alone cried out. I, who have no tears.



invocation of intercession to the earthly angels

John W Sexton

magpie	over the darkened river	pray for them
fox	hidden in the reeds	pray for them
crow	finding the shape of the wind	pray for them
snail	in your tunnel of self	pray for them
grass	in your infinite bodies	pray for them
whale	in your palace of water	pray for them
pebble	in your shouldering nations	pray for them
worm	filtering the endless earth	pray for them



Here here

Todd Colby

It's the words
that bloom
with blood
under a tidal wave
of total fear
taking us muffled
from this world
removed from
the joy of tenderness
looking at the faces
that are no longer here
sure of the emptiness
left in space
it takes
a long time

to get together
and an instant
to fall apart



Commuter train exchange

JR Carpenter

Flesh jostled by rush hour steel on steel, train on track,
today's newspaper's headlines dance in my hand –
unread through the outskirts of Madrid.

In the seat across, my wife applies mascara deftly,
as if we had not argued earlier, and then made up –
a quick toothpaste kiss.

Her mirror glints, bright as the light in my ring on her finger,
one eye's lashes thick as thieves, the other still undone –
her smile reflected in the window of the train.

The world could end an instant from here,
or rush past our faces floating in the window –
I hold tight to the life my wife's eyes.



Poem 13 from September 12

Robert Sheppard

Burn friendlies on the wreck of human
terror the body of the people O!
Erato! scorched by the blaze of blue-on-blue

Eye witness. The same railway station. We.
Search out the others' errant gunshots

Enchanting for democracy O! Muse you wing it
for shepherds sporting iambic lambs on
the platform so enthralled by Love bo-
peeping his fluttery sonnet in Venus' softest target I

miss my earthly transport, and survive. No
golden glove thrusts from the dust. Erratum
for Erato: Nobody drops into the same
device twice. Human error. Petrified watch. Our
sponge of blood drips into the same device forever



The wake-up blast of her alarm clock

Hall Gardner

The wake-up blast of her alarm clock
Belatedly warns her of what she already knows.

She has already stripped the bed sheets
And showered with lime-scented soap.

She sprinkles salt and pepper on her tortilla de jamon.
She stirs spoonfuls of sugar into café con leche.

She nibbles on deep fried churros.
She chokes down freshly squeezed jugo de naranja.

The balmy winds of an early spring waft
Through the white curtains of the open window.

A radio voice in bass tones announces the daily news.
She hardly listens. There is no news except

That it is now 07:30. She knows she must catch
The train. She knows she cannot be late once again.

A pigeon flies up and flaps its wings in her face.
On its leash a muzzled Doberman snarls.

A rat scurries from the gutter. Still she rushes onwards
Up the stairs to the platform where the crowd

Is already swarming. There she must jam into already
Overcrowded wagons where she will be pushed and shoved

And obliged to breathe bull sweat and garlic breath
Nostril to nostril ?as on every workday morning.

A cell phone rings: It seems a handsome young man with a goatee
Has a rendezvous a las cinco en punto de la tarde.

For a moment, she thought it was her own office calling.
But this morning she awoke before her own alarm had even rung:

It had not let her linger in the breezes of unanticipated rays
And then make the usual excuses for being late?

Arsenic balls and smoke cover the tracks at Atocha.
Death had decided to set its alarm at precisely 07:39.

The wounds were burning like stars at El Pozo.
Death had decided to set its alarm at precisely 07:41.

The train cars became coffins at Santa Eugenia.
Death had set its mobile alarm at precisely 07:42.

From a distance Death spread its gangrene on March 11:
Those horrific mornings of September and March 11!!!



The confirmed living

Raymond Filip

Where can we find fairness in this world? At the campus arena, eleven of us drop our hockey sticks on centre ice. The player-with-the-honor for this week tosses the sticks toward opposite ends. Wherever our sticks slide, we take that side. Even or uneven, sides don't matter. No one keeps score. No referees. No timekeepers. Just a bunch of slapstick academics skating around like a school of fish in silence – until laughter explodes from both teams after the puck finds its way into a net.

The Geritol League. Bodychecking is permitted. (We are allowed to check our own bodies to feel if we still have a pulse after one hour of unstiffening.) Lean and clean, maturing as smoothly as blended whiskey on ice, we Canadian boys barrel into each other, (no intent to injure, of course), misjudging the right-of-way on left wing, stooping to ask in horror: "Are you okay?" Standing up, you bobblehead: "Yeah, I'm alright. I like seeing stars during the day." And in the dressing room, hardened survivors, we don't even notice our wet dicks shriveled up after a shower. Yet we exhibit a sense of loss, one man short, Tall Ted, going under the laser for a "fried prostate," probably this very minute. "Didn't he have two sons who died?" Mike enquires, toweling off his chest. "Yeah. Both in bicycle accidents. Both in the same spot. One year apart." A moment of silence ensues... passing thoughts... as Ted rises in our respect department.

Coming home to Pincourt, (no pines now), an oak boisé is being choked into claus-

troburbia. Development or diminishment? Red X's mark the trees to be spared. Tree-age. No sign of birds yet. Dead leaves. Dirty snow. Will the moon at least reappear? In the driveway, no more blood stains from our 15-year-old cat who had wandered out to bask in one more longer and lovelier day of March sunshine, lying down on warm gravel; a helpless yelp as the car backed out of the garage, breaking her neck, oozing yellow eyes like stringy egg yolk during her death spasm. Our black beauty, Whizzy, had grown thin or chubby with us during the hungry years and the happy years. A kitten found dashing like black lightning across the street. But this spring break, our eyes watered as we took the mess of her remains inside a garbage bag for one last ride through her old neighborhoods. "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" tumbled across the radio. Serendipitous pity. How lucky. Didn't she ramble? To where? A dignified incineration.

Enter a house that seems smaller, quieter, emptier. Check the answering machine. It's mother. Winding and re-winding her way through guilt and dementia, she leaves the same monthly message to record and erase: "I want to die." What can I say, ma? Death always defeats life: second law of thermodynamics. But I conserve my love and my energy for you.

Check the pixel people on TV. Click here to enlarge death consciousness. Death by remote. How many guns on how many channels will point at our heads in between how many commercials? How many suicide bombers on CNN Live Today? How many deceased friends and family members go on shadowing us through memory? How many fears to downplay? With humor? With words as secret weapons? Poetry is dead and music is beginning to stink. But we keep on writing and whistling. Products of our time. When will our expiry date arrive? And in Madrid, a sports facility fills up with coffins, not enough funeral parlors for 200 dead, not enough room in all of Spain for all the mourners across a dying planet. Our sorrow, however brief. Our respect, however distant. Passing thoughts...

And the world is a safer place.



“esa noche hubo viento”

Suzanne Lapstun

esa noche hubo viento
con vuelos de nubes migrando hacia el este
y una luna menguante para tapar
a los muertos de la tempestad

pero en el espacio de adentro
el tiempo se paró

de la pared salió una silueta rupestre
con cara de estrella fugaz
que iluminó mi cuerpo oscuro
sus manos azules
despertaron mi lengua dormida

bajo el faro
entre dos luces
recordamos el mar

dios-ave, visitante del tiempo
de antes de la lluvia
viniste con el viento
trayendo mensajes de un paisaje lejano

dios-ave,
enséñame pues tu vuelo ligero
para las noches de viento
y luna menguante
y muertos que no quieren callar



Footage for a trance

Ranjit Hoskote

For Shuddhabrata Sengupta

The hours stop in my veins.
Evening falls, a spotted tissue
draped across dayglo streets.

The clocks go on marking
the time in another city

where the trains still run,
taking people home.



Over my shoulder, I see my country vanish
in a long unfurling of cornflower-blue sky.
My limbs are clear as glass.

The wind grazes my shoulders,
the animal buried in my voice
wakes up and growls.

Where I am is a boat without a pilot,
sculling through cold water.



Start again. There is no safety in numbers.
The sixty-four saints stand paralysed
in the authorised version of the legend.
No footnote explains the hunting songs
or the red skein curling downhill
in place of the river.

Script thrown away, I'm on my own.
 The detectives will find me
 when a rainbow prints itself
 on the litmus sky at noon.
 I clear my throat,
 the movie stops.



The hours have stopped in my veins
 but late-night travellers rush past me,
 through me, to reach the midnight express.
 My country's been swallowed
 by a sky darkening to cloud and sleep.

The sixty-four saints have formed a caucus
 of havoc birds, the rainbow is a stanza
 they refuse to sing. Close to the tympanum,
 the horseshoe weather taps cryptic clues.
 On every clock-face,
 the hour hand and the minute hand
 go on mating.



Wakeful, all eye, the havoc birds read
 the scroll of earth unfolding,
 every fleck a signal:
 prey, home, danger,
 hiding-place.

From a great height, each bird watches
 its shadow falling
 to its death.



I vanish, again, in the darkroom.
 A lamp exposes
 my heirloom bones.

On a park bench,
 a gardener finds a surplice,
 drooping, ravelled at the seams:

my skin, abandoned in flight.



Travel sickness

Sampurna Chattarji

No rapture can transport me now.
 Only metal, beaten into place around my heart.
 I trust it, blindly, as I dive in,
 a swimmer in mineral dark.

Plain toxicity replaces the rush-hour breath
 in my lungs. I inhale the nervous energy
 that squeezes my diaphragm and
 constricts my pupils into shining pricks of fear.

I damage my brain. I live.

Booby-trapped by an illusion of movement
 I wait to be delivered. Any moment now
 will be the last of a series of anticipations.
 Any moment now will release me into the sun.

The next stop is mine. Till then I must carry
this backpack this cellphone this plastic bag
this paper news this silver amulet this soundless
om this coherence of faces hands and feet inside me,

intact, blameless, unterrorized.

