

Now
The phallus abandoned by God
Comes this way.
Being young and gay
And full of clumsy confidence
It, surprisingly, resembles the shadow
Of an experienced smile.

The phallus seems to grow beyond all numeration,
And, beyond counting, comes this way.
It is in fact in the singular. It comes alone.
Seen from whatever horizon,
It has neither face nor words.
I would like to give you, Sumiko,
Such a thing for your birthday.

When therewith your whole life is enswaddled,
You will become invisible to yourself.
Occasionally you will turn into the will of the very phallus
And wander endlessly.
I would wish to catch in my arms,
Endlessly,
One such as you.

Translated by Ikuko Atsumi

TAHEREH SAFFARZADEH / IRAN

Nostalgia

We are nostalgic
For the earth we know well
For the fraud we know well
Our own bread, our own compliments
And the fresh air of our own narrow streets in the mornings of yesterday
My sister wrote that my postcards do not arrive if they are attractive
But the safety of a registered letter is so sad

We ought to go home
And watch happy faces on TV
They will invite us to be patient
They will invite us to listen to Nero's lament for Rome
The General's daughter insists that in our country
We grow superior tea but herself partakes of Calcutta brand
We are tired, we ought to go back and sit
Under the tree of our neighbors' hostility
And pass round the cup of mutual trust
It is hard to attract strangers
Without Aphrodite's belt.
We might forget our mother tongue
The last time I was murdered by a man in my bed
We ran into linguistic problems.
We ought to go back and buy our ration of love on the black market

Our trip is from one Continent of blood to another
There is such chaos
The only dignity left is the willow tree bent over the water
People disappear on the hazy road of "We shall overcome,"
Our brothers die in Sinai
There is no tomb for them
All the orchards in the Nile Valley are let
In Poland the right of veto belongs to the aristocrats
In Taiwan you would be like potatoes served with every dish
You have to agree well when your brother conspires against you
He is right—he has to live his damn life—he is right.

Why should we feel so nervous so scared
We are surrounded by men
Policemen businessmen security men

Men who are wrapped up in their insurance like packages
Men who hang curtains
Men who lurk behind the curtains
Men who grow claws
They all have once made nests with the small fingers
Of their childhood.

We are nostalgic
For the fraud we know well
For the earth we know well
We ought to go home and watch the hide and seek

Played between millions of mouths and a few loaves of bread.
There is a long queue of wandering spirits
Their corpses—at the other side of the river—
Are waiting for somebody to put a coin under their tongue
The greedy boatman is cracking his whip in the smoky air
Look into your pocket, friend—
See if you have a coin
Perhaps this is your father who has spent all
His pennies bribing his way through life
Now frightened by soul-eating dogs he is running around muttering
the Kalb Surah
Look into your pocket, friend,
Even though it might be empty.

Translated by the author

WAN KIN-LAU / HONG KONG

At an Execution Square in Vietnam

one by one heads tumble down the sandbags
they fasten their ears to the earth
and listen to someone
singing an elegy for himself under the grass

the circular loosely stuck on the pole has floated away
in the wind
always
good-looking faces
disappear in mirrors

Translated by the author