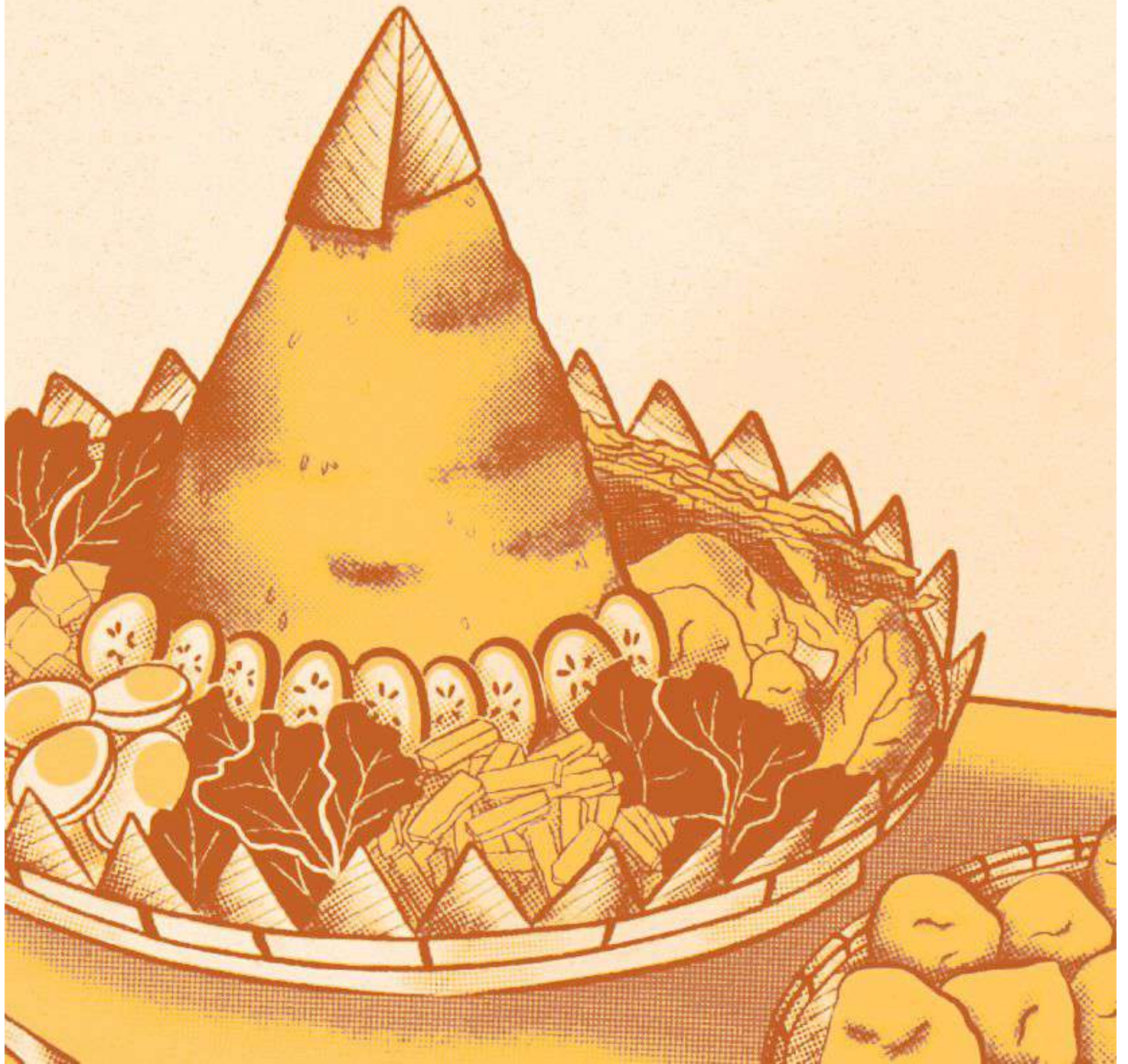


mpt

NO.3 2022

THE BEST OF WORLD POETRY

WRAP IT IN BANANA LEAVES: THE FOOD FOCUS



Smokestack

1.

Three sugar mill smokestacks stand sentry in Central Ma-ao.
Like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, watching over
people from Elga up to La Plata, from Kawilihan down to Guba
reminders of a time past when in the lands of the Araneta clan,
'Money can be picked and shoveled from the ground'.

2.

The smokestacks are giant cigars made of rolled brick
wrapped with iron sheets. But the foundation
that sucks and puffs out has long run out of breath.
Thus, as clouds are widowed by smoke,
the towers are being married by rust.
And in the lands of the Araneta clan it has long been accepted
that, 'For money, even the pick and the shovel must be pawned'.

BIRENDRA CHATTOPADHYAY

Translated by Sayandeb Chowdhury from Bengali

Bengali poetry has been sporadically translated into English, ensuring that some like Rabindranath Tagore and Jibananda Das have been frequently de-anchored from their native language, while some, like Birendra Chattopadhyay, rarely so. This is the first English translation of one of his key poems. The poem is about the abominable misery of hunger and the despondency for 'daily meal' (or the lack of it), uttered as it is, in the voice of the poorest of citizens. Ironically, in this poem the poignancy of desperation assumes the tone of delirious hyperbole bordering on a bizarre sense of humour. Like most modern Bengali writing of that time, this too treats poetry as a site of encounter between a participatory planetary present and a more personal belonging in the complex realities of the Global South. In this case there is an unambiguous socialist cry against the perpetuity of hunger and an explicit revolt against the prevalence of romanticism in poetry. This poem is from the collection *Ulukhor*, and was published in 1954.



*Give me bread*¹

It may turn out to be bogus, burnt or smelly
But it still tames the hunger in my belly.
Our sermon is 'Give me bread'; 'Bread', we say!
In return, friend, take whatever you may.
Samarkhand, Bukhara are but ration paltry
I can expend the liberty of my country.

For two meals of burnt bread a day
I can wake up before the sun makes hay,
I can catch the stormy sea by its mop,
Or uproot the Karakoram from its top.
Hurt, grief, conscience are but matters faded,
For bread, I can squander the eyes of my beloved.

¹ The Bengali word *roti* used in the original commonly means the handmade flat cake made from fresh wheat dough, which is a staple across the Subcontinent. But I have used *bread* to give it the wider connotation of being a *basic meal*; and also because bread – the baked breakfast item of most of Europe, which travelled with it to South Asia and is widely available – is also called *roti* in several languages, including Bengali.

ZAFIR SETU

Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam from Bengali

Zafir Setu (b. 1971) is well-known as a poet of soil and soul, light and love, and sound and sight. His poetry leads readers to intensely mull over myth, history, philosophy, tradition, and civilisation. Deeply rooted in his own land and culture, Setu is on a par with the distinguished transnational poetic voices, who demonstrate world consciousness in his poetry. The two poems titled 'My Family by the Haor' and 'This Condensed Colostrum' are from the poet's latest collection, *Ami Karachgaach* (I Am a Karach Tree). The collection, engaging with myth and metaphor, paints the portraits of the people of the haor, the low-lying land in the north-eastern region of Bangladesh. The karach tree, which is a special kind of tree growing in the haor, has a great and long-lasting bond with the haor people.

Almost everywhere in Bangladesh, villages are disappearing with the aggression of urbanisation. As a result, clothes, food, and culture are going through transformation, and people are distancing from tradition and roots, losing self-identity too. The poem 'My Family by the Haor' shows how a farmer feels while eating steaming rice mixed with ghee. It touches readers for its candid rendering of the simplicity of haor people. Similarly, 'This Condensed Colostrum' exhibits myth, folk, and tradition through symbols and metaphors. Village people believe that the condensed colostrum of cows is very useful for both people and calves – it is propitious to pour some colostrum onto water for the wellbeing of river and fish. Consequently, the cows give more milk and give birth to lots of calves as fish breed innumerable eggs. In the poem, the poet invites his beloved to go back to childhood so that they can take colostrum together in order to keep hale and hearty. The mood, image, and implications of the two poems invoke deep thoughts about life and nature, and the poet's love for life and nature is eternal.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ADELE BARDAZZI is the co-founder of «Non solo muse» (www.nonsolomuse.com), «Italian Poetry Today» (www.italianpoetrytoday.com) and the «Gender & Authority» Network (<https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/gender-and-authority>).

ADRIANA LISBOA is the author of widely translated fiction and poetry books. She won the José Saramago Prize for *Symphony in White* and an honorable mention in the Casa de las Américas Award for *Pequena música*. Her novel *Crow Blue* was chosen as a book of the year by *The Independent*.

ALEXANDER STILLMARK is Emeritus Reader in German at University College London. An elected member of the Austrian P.E.N. Club, he has twice been awarded a translation prize by the Federal Chancellor's Bureau, Vienna. His translations of Georg Trakl and Ivan Turgenev have appeared in *MPT New Series*, Nos. 8, 11 and 16.

ANNA YIN, Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate, has authored five poetry collections and a book of translations: "Mirrors and Windows". Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *China Daily*, *CBC Radio*.

ALISON ENTREKIN has translated many of Brazil's most beloved and iconic literary works, earning her a number of honours, including the 2019 NSW Premier's Translation Prize. She is currently working on a new translation of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* by João Guimarães Rosa, with support from Itaú Cultural and the Australia Council.

ARCHANA MADHAVAN is a translator of Korean literature into English. She is currently working on translating Lee Jenny's debut poetry collection, *Maybe Africa* (Changbi, 2010). She resides in San Jose, California.

AW PRIATMOJO is an Indonesian author whose poetry and short stories have been published on various platforms. He is one of the founders of Nyalanesia, a platform for promoting literacy in Indonesia.

BIRENDRA CHATTOPADHYAY (1920–1985) was a prominent, powerful and impenitent Bengali poet of socialist causes and small presses, of petite poems and direct proclamations, of unsung miseries and postcolonial doubts. ✓

CATHAL Ó SEARCAIGH (b. 1956) is the last native speaker of the Min `a Leá dialect of Donegal. Irish is one of the great Irish-language poets of the modern era. The poem *Úll* (Apple) is from his latest book *An Tír Rúin* (Arlen House 2022).

COLABORATORIO ÁVILA is a transatlantic translation collective formed by Katie Brown, Claudia Cavallín, María Gracia Pardo and Raquel Rivas Rojas to translate into Venezuelan Spanish and share Venezuelan women's voices in English.

CRISTINA MORANO is the author of *La insolencia* and *Hazañas de los malos tiempos*, among others. "Poet", appeared in English translation (*Waxwing*, 2017), and her debut novel, *Las Novias*, was published April 2022.

CSILLA TOLDY is the writer of three poetry books and a short story collection. She translates contemporary fiction and poetry from Hungarian and German.

DICK CLUSTER's recent books include *The History of Havana* (OR Books), and translations of Gabriela Alemán's *Family Album* (City Lights Books) and Paula Abramo's *Fiat Lux* (FlowerSong Press).

ERIC ABALAJON is a lecturer at UP Visayas, Iloilo. Recently his poems were included in *Sobbing in Seafood City* (Sampaguita Press, 2022) and *Footprints: An Anthology of New Eco-poetry* (Broken Sleep Books, 2022).

PEDRO DE JESÚS (b. 1970) is a prize-winning author of poetry, fiction, and criticism. He lived in the town of Fomento in central Cuba.

PRAKALPA RANJAN BHAGAWATI is an Indian writer and translator who writes in Assamese. He has drawn wide critical attention through his first collection of poems titled *BALADHAROHİ ARU ANYANYA KABİTA (THE BULLOCK RIDER AND OTHER POEMS)* published in 2021. He is a member of a group of poets and critics who streamlined *Parbantarat Padya* (a New Chapter for Verse), by publishing a manifesto in 2020 to consider and reconsider certain issues related to Assamese poetry.

PRATYA APRILANA is an illustrator based in Bandung, Indonesia. She is a former architect who found her way into illustration later in life. She currently works freelance and enjoys illustrating for children's books.

ROBERT BINETTI holds a DPhil in Medieval and Modern Languages from the University of Oxford. He is co-founder of «Non solo muse» (www.nonsolomuse.com) and «Italian Poetry Today» (www.italianpoetrytoday.com).

S. VIJAYALAKSHMI, a teacher by profession, is actively engaged in the Tamil literary field, penning poetry and articles on literary and social issues. She has contributed poems and essays to several Tamil magazines, and has to her credit four published books of poetry, one book of short stories, and two collections of essays. An ardent feminist, Vijayalakshmi continues to participate in literary and social forums that explore the place of women in society.

ŞAFAK SARIÇİÇEK is a law clerk in the Karlsruhe district. He's published five poetry books, and won various literary awards and scholarships, most recently the Klagenfurter Literaturkurs of the Bachmann Prize.

SALMA HARLAND is an Egyptian-born, England-based literary translator who works between Arabic and English. Her works have appeared in *NCW's Emerging Translators Anthology (2022)*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, *Ancient Exchanges*, and elsewhere.

SUZANA VULJEVIĆ is a historian, writer and translator who works from Albanian and Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian. She holds a Ph.D. in History and Comparative Literature from Columbia University. Her work has been published in *Asymptote*, *Eurozine*, *Exchanges*, and elsewhere.

SAYANDEB CHOWDHURY teaches literature and cinema, writes on culture and politics, and has authored *Uttam Kumar: A Life in Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2021). He is most readily found at <https://sayandeb.in/>.

SHEN HAOBO (b.1976) is a Beijing-based Chinese poet, who used to be the leading figure of the *Lower Body Poets*, an influential but controversial poetry group in the early 2000s.

TEEMU HELLE (b. 1982) is a Finnish poet and the author of 6 collections of poetry. The seventh collection will be published in the fall of 2022.

THILA VARGHESE lives in Canada, where she works part-time during the academic year as a Senior Writing Advisor at Western University. Her translations of Tamil literary works have been published in *World Literature Today*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Indian Literature*, *Metamorphoses*, *National Translation Month*, *Columbia Journal*, and *Asymptote*.

UPENDRA SUBBA, a popular Nepali poet and writer, is one of the crusaders of Creative Anarchy literary movement in Nepali literature. Recipient of numerous awards, he has authored three books of poetry and a collection of short stories.