

Tomorrow's Moon

Poems by

Bhikkhu Abhinando
Graham Brown
Chandra Candiani
Linda France
Thomas Jones
Ayya Medhanandi
Ajahn Sucitto
Ayya Thaniya

Aruna Publications

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Aruna Ratanagiri: Harnham Buddhist Monastery
2 Harnham Hall Cottages
Harnham
Belsay
Northumberland
NE20 0HF
United Kingdom

www.ratanagiri.org.uk
www.forestsangha.org

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Introduction

Occasionally I have shown a poem I had written to a friend and was surprised by the enthusiasm with which it was received. Often I was asked for more. Sometimes I have come across a poem in the Forest Sangha Newsletter or elsewhere that I found particularly moving. Slowly I discovered other poets in and around the Sangha who became good friends; their poems inspiring and nurturing my practice and my own writing in turn. Friendships evolved around our poems; exchanging verses and comments, encouragement and constructive criticism.

Out of this naturally arose the aspiration to some day offer an anthology of some of these poems – many as yet unpublished – making them available to a wider public. Finally the project took shape. I asked my friends whether they would be interested to contribute and all of them were. I selected my favourites from the texts they offered and tried bringing them together in a way that they would communicate with each other. To my delight it worked. The very different voices of the individuals seemed to enter a poetic dialogue which created a whole that is not only more than the sum of its parts, but in which also all the particulars enhance each other by resonance and contrast: Eight solo voices creating an ensemble of possibilities for meaning that the reader may feel invited to explore or invent.

This anthology then, is a very personal selection and is not trying to be representative of anything. It seems a lucky coincidence though that the group of writers included in the collection reflects the idea of the fourfold Buddhist Sangha of monastics and laypeople.

I would like to thank the many friends who have helped to make this book possible with their encouragement, work and donations. Special thanks go to Soph Moeng who did the layout and typesetting. I feel also particularly grateful to Ajahn Munindo, who supported the work on this book with unwavering encouragement. It was his suggestion that got the project started. He then helped with the design of the book and the arrangement of the poems.

After much pondering, proposing and dismissing of candidates by both of us, as well as other friends that got infected by our search, he also provided the title. It is a variation on a line in one of Ajahn Sucitto's contributions. We both immediately liked it, looking for its justification only afterwards. We came up with various, but perhaps it is more generous to withstand the temptation to spell out any of them, leaving freedom of movement to your own imagination. Instead, I added *Sitting by the Open Window*, which was formed in response to the title, hoping that some of the voices of the following colloquium may stimulate your own creative responses...

Bhikkhu Abhinando, Harnham, June 2005

Sitting by the Open Window

as every night

*tomorrow's moon is hiding
behind the clouds
of yesterday*

*then
a cool breeze
lifts the shadow of thought*

*your emotions huddle together
waiting for direction
ready to go
or surrender*

*while
this growing silence
eats you*

alive

1

Dreaming the Real

how I would like to know how to write
a letter to the woods
to a river or
to a quality of the sky
not a letter
of human regrets
or of indignant reproaches
but paper that blossoms
into gems drawing blood
risks of high tide
blind clear sky or clouds
without wind how I would like
a language of pine needles
of resin and floating
trout a cloudy
language obedient
to the most subtle changes.

Chandra Candiani

I Don't Use a Desk

I don't use a desk,
just bent knees
that are old and creaking now,
like the timbers in a barn
leaning and in need of repair.

But my mind is young
in its gaze,
heaven's play –
the sun at my shoulder,
a peacock calling
and the old horse
nibbling at my palm
when he dares to come near.

I love to wait
for the shadows on the leaves,
to light candles
and listen to the owls screech
across the valley,
when the sun is just out of reach
and the world is a breath
of purple haze.

On a plank wood floor,
barefoot,
night in the doorway,
on the threshold of silence.

Ayya Medhanandi

On Retreat

A little closer to the clouds,
above the scruffy heads
of evergreen scrub,
I discover the benefits
of drinking tea and watching
the sky turning pink after sunset.

Only slowly the hard-edged words
of learned truths dissolve,
and a softer voice unwraps itself,
emerging from the inside of
what is here.

What does it say? “You didn’t come here
to succeed” is all I understand for now.
Enough to feel a tiny muscle
in the mind relax,
to drop the programme, pour
another cup of tea, sit back and listen
to the elusive pulse...

Yesterday around this time an owl
came gliding like a giant moth
along my walking path,
avoiding my face by half a metre,
alighting on a branch,
and with rhythmic movements of its head
staring back into my eyes
looking for signs to recognize.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

Welkin

Sitting with my back to the sun
painting clouds.
Foreign gods have manners enough,
not to ruffle inchoate lines with laughter;
like their rowan- beech- alder-leaf thrum.
Then how to capture ...? No, no capturing.
How to pause a cloud here a moment
to shape its rippling wonderment?
Even that is too much holding.
So in this azure sky I paint heart-soft flowings.

Time has whelped me;
holds me ever close to her genesis.
In her arms ageing is the gift of paradox;
to keep me always coming –
Moving through landscapes that clutch,
and then disown me –
To come here. Where I feel you, love unbidden.

Clouds swirl, take all dream formations,
then vanish as they stay.
The sky cool, shining, edgeless.

Ayya Thaniya

*Situation Report
for Padmakara*

The path leads to a vast plain, and then ends,
petering into the expanse of grass.
We are lonely as stars out here. Sometimes
I remember the road through the forest,
its smells and colours and the beating drums,
but I don't wish for that kind of travel,
with its prophecies and wonders. Out here,
where to be lost means to be found, and home
is loss woven into a small thatched roof,
there is no anxiety of direction.
What can I say? I bake my own bread,
then sit at the centre of the turning world,
eating what my hands have shaped. The rains come,
but there is no place to hide, and no point
in dreaming of an elsewhere. The rains go.
I've a lover calls me over sometimes.
She softens the blow, the way night falls
as cold as a broken promise, out here.
You ask about a plan, about moving on.
I tell you: here, where the horizons
suffer neither fools' nor angels' pretences,
but melt the eyes' grip, and whisper only
grieving, it is best to learn to stay still.
And then, in the rigid bowl of the world,
every tree soft-stirring at the midday,
every blade of grass rich in its own light,
every weasel hunting, every mouse
and mouse-shadow crisp-drawn in the moonlight,
remind us that the path, not a path, just
a longing, leads only inward, to here.

Thomas Jones

The Exile

I know all the trees here —
pine, alder, aspen, birch —
names that ring true, like
schist, shieling, burn. The trees
wear home-made garments,
stand in native light,
while I am pegged out under nylon,
a borrowed hollow for a home.
Asylum seeker, I'm accepted by silence.
Only the moon, only that white
rock shining from the battered basking
dust in sun-glare
welcomes me. This place
is green and wet, the air
full and moving to intricate
rhythms beneath the sun
and the sun's majestic giving.
There is an unknown cave,
silent, except drip and swallow. Deep pool.
Dark. My hand touching water —
cool, ungraspable — imagined
ripples roll away.

Thomas Jones

Late September

a green butterfly or a leaf floats across the open door, still open to the coldness of the winds of the future. No flowers. No flowers but a million poems, the mushrooms & the moss & the runes of the trees, the slow Autumn colours of a chestnut fire, a green butterfly or a leaf

Graham Brown

Forest Recollections

What's it like
to be climbing through the woods
 towards a hut in the rain
as if my shadow were there to greet me...?
And the host of silver birch
 shining through the dusk
were the easy-flowing dead
 come out at last to acknowledge
just what it takes to be here.....

What's it like
to be turning a key in the door
 tugging off boots and entering into
what is a home for now:
a shelter made all the more precious
 by being built and kept with care,
and in simplicity,
 offering as an only comfort
my own questioning faces...?

Night holds no answers.
Here is where all that bows down.
But there's a coming through:
 where thought-flow, and birdsong,
 and the cool subtleties of dawn
 pour through compassionate hands.
And it's as if I am walking –
 among stumps and moss and leaf-mould –
 in the beauty that blows out the stars.

Ajahn Sucitto

Wintering in the Forest

It must have been the restless stars
shuddering in their nests a thousand years up
that crowed and cast me loose from sleep.

Sandals stuck to the frozen step.
A glaring moon; and I'm stumbling out
as the warm dream shatters in winter's jaws.

The huge black cold bites off choice.
Shaking, frantic, I axe the cursed logs
fumble numb matches - the yes! miracle spurts

...onto girls, and last year's war and sport....
Old newspaper sails, billowing with flame,
bring me back home. The smoky world.

The stove croons, guts full of wood.
I suck a skinned knuckle, chew a handful of thoughts,
letting things melt with the rippling hours.

I must have gone soft wintering here.
A gaunt man dives through me, scouring the depths
for pearls to remind him of a distant sun.

Ajahn Sucitto

January

is the slow fire of a hawthorn berry
the hills are bitter, though the wind is green

things are resting, sleeping, stirring
the cold fire called Spring inside me

Graham Brown

Wintering Over

This year the primroses are incomparable,
no thousand moons are innocent, immanent enough.

I am growing old here inhabiting shifting patterns
of days, hours, years. And the dying,
when did that creep in?

So I walk in dew expanses barefoot.
I lie under 10,000 stars' welcome.
Breathe Shiva; eye-to-eye a field mouse
eats from my hand.

Ayya Thaniya

Dreaming the Real

I'm lying down looking at the colour
of sky falling through trees, dreaming
the real, tasting what it feels like to love it.

Why did it take me so long to let go, simply
exhale, so the day could breathe itself in
and open without me standing in the way?

How could I forget the grace of my own body,
strong as this blue, tender as the white
of the wild blossom, warm as midday light?

Let me practise a patience bold enough
to hold every weather, trusting the elements,
the beauty of rain, all its shades of grey.

I want whatever's real to be enough. At least
it's a place to begin. And to master the art
of loving it; feel it love me back under my skin.

Linda France

Stopping inside

These days
I don't like to go anywhere,
content to pore through my books
and smile at the cats.

They are old now,
the summer flowers are over-tall,
too much rain,
and the weeds
choking every corner of the garden.

I love that landscape,
where the world falls away
and the deer lie down
in the night's shadow.

Stopping inside the silence of being,
awareness finely tuned,
an island of peace
and plenitude,
I listen to the holy sound.

Ayya Medhanandi

2

I Search for Small Things

Monte Jalama

The wings of the Spanish Magpie
open.

So begins
our morning prayer.
Under the bright sun swells
infinitely slow the mountain song.

Ancient god, half forgotten,
herdsman of the rain,
every stream here
every bush and every tree
whisper your name.

I give my feet into the cool
running water.
I give my gaze into the glitter
of dancing fish
and dragonflies.

Their mirrored choreography.
The smell of lavender.
Voices of distant children.

Even the clouds
don't move on their own.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

O Moment

O moment
not to be grasped or sought
even for a moment.

Not late but present
letting things be
sipping eternity.

Thunderstorm
and the stream runs overfull,
clear forest pools
mirror
the mind's radiance.

On an ancient trail
soft
with a century of
pine needles
the magic
of crimson toadstools
sentinel
at every turn.

Not late but present
letting things be
sipping eternity.

Ayya Medhanandi

I Search for Small Things

shells of snails
under the hedges

the dew on a leaf
dripping in puddles

all for the robin
to drink, all

these things, so
self-contained

these small things
immaculate

Graham Brown

In the Aloka Garden, April

I had been thinking about the almost impossibility of perfection
this apple tree was made by man, ornamental
so it flowers into May, such delicate pink blossom
so gaudy, so
completely without meaning

behind it the holly straggles away
into a dark forest of its own mind
it is raining so quietly, birds are singing

Graham Brown

In a Burmese Garden

Under an ancient Buddha's gaze –
white hibiscus
a blaze of bougainvillea
and majestic moths play.

The geckos are calling
above the teak slats of the
monastery
and banana trees wave
their giant sleeves
in the hot wind.

I have my fill
to stand with them –
my tall friends in the garden,
to praise the last ember of sunset
while the rats run free
and the stars cavort
in the skies
beyond Your laughing eyes.

Ayya Medhanandi

Gardenia

It only took a single day
for the bud to break

open. One petal unfurled
itself, reaching for air

and freedom. In a spiral
all the others followed,

as if they were dancing
to the kitchen's magnetic hum.

Everything about it's a miracle –
August in the north, a plant

I'd given up for dead, kept
watering out of habit

and blind hope; that scent,
its sharp high note,

as I press my nose into
the whorl of velvet white,

breathing it in, like life.

Linda France

Water Lily

All summer I waited
and was rewarded
with maroon curls
unfurling into green.

The leaves floated
on the water
like lost hearts,
stems invisible

in the deep dark.
Late September
one curl fattened
into a bud.

The strip of white
flaunted itself,
teasing early frosts.
I longed for more,

for the abandon
of petals, a gleam
in its golden eye.
Too late, too cold.

In the pond's brown
mirror it floundered,
a baby, dead
before it was born.

Linda France

Heron Island, Hammer Pond

Here where fish jump through trees
scattering them in waves of leaves
the ripplingness is beautiful.

Ayya Thaniya

Cicada

Sunlight on the stream,
an old cicada struggles,
wings cracked –
his heart pounding in mine.

Ayya Medhanandi

The Nest

A mother's instincts wrestle
under threat. We watched the brown
blackbird approach and retreat,
worm in beak, until she swooped
into the ivy atop a stump amid
the café courtyard. Clear sky,
budding trees, bluebell borders:
a few joined us at the wooden benches.
We watched her go, hover, return,
all motherly nerves and concern.
We returned in high summer
to squeeze in the buzzing café courtyard:
the working world was chafing to play.
When we'd finished I remembered: stood
on a bench-end to look in the nest.
Five mouths, stretched open, still-
blind eyes, featherless blackening bodies —
dead mouths to catch the summer rain.

Thomas Jones

Swallows in the Woodshed

Now even formless space has to reveal
its lines of force; the subtlest channels
of air are known; these black-backed shamans
have traced the yielding edge where lightning runs
and thrown themselves through. Raptured bodies,
scissoring wings, slash the blue silk of Summer.

The audience is uninitiated;
can't read the looping signs they've drawn,
or follow, before the pathways close,
their tracks through the four dimensions.
I gawp at the turn-tumbling specks, the wing-dance;
an epiphany possesses my vision.

And it asks to be tied down; made into place.
A roof on timbered legs is ground enough,
where living forces are held into form.
Here, to be cut, shaped, and bolted
and harden into time – is a judged defiance:
a stand taken in an exploding universe

where God is amazed into gravity.
So my gaze has to unfold, has to spread wide
to follow the arc of the creative urge
that binds space into sense and structure.
Aloft out of mud-daub nests, florets of beaks
lunge out and open. Flies banged in like nails.

Ajahn Sucitto

Your Hands and the House Martin

A ruffle of feather summons you to the top
of the stairs, fingers sweeping over cold
painted plaster, that scar where the banister
used to be. The bathroom's a cage for
a curious house martin, diving against glass.

Your hands might be wings, snatching at air,
scattering dust until they find the bird and make
a nest for its oily velvet, its panicked breath.
You fill your braided fingers with fearlessness
and, out in the garden, unlock them, let them fly.

Linda France

Spring Day on Dartmoor

Into my gasp, into my covered-up face
the freezing flung slush:
the icy attack of a sleet-traced spring.
Sense is capsized;
I'm thrown out here on a storming sea.

Where struggle is vital – under layers of cloth
and animal fibre, and pulsing skin.
Wrapped within my densest wraps –
a wintered softness, my buried life,
staggers in the shove and the fight to be born.

Steely whips lash the moor's back.
But the gorse holds. Splattered by snow,
it shelters the hag-bitter blast close to its spines.
Its yellow blazes into the rawness,
like the mercy that cuts through flesh and bone

to haul me out: to be unpeeled in this.
As the mother-wind thrusts and grinds,
my reluctant flame kicks back.
Its birth-curse wakes and rages,
feels for the heat within the crushed land....

Then the cold squelching grasses break under my stride;
and my reach claws through soft finger-tips
to scabble over the lichen-scabbed granite.
I lock into the wind. Like dogs in a tussle,
our struggle. It will kill me,

but today I snatch breath-threads
out of the freezing grey vortex;
clutch them into flesh and throw the line back.
Like a gale-bucking crow's croak,
my spring. It spits out consequence,

cuts the ties and strings of purpose;
just gives back how it feels today
to be a warmth bursting out naked;
to be the inside of a circle of worlds
holding their passion, and know it.

And how this feels, this marvel,
that as sense skewers in again and again,
its charge spins a prayer-wheel through me;
and my whirl holds the world's emerging—
and it comes out wet and glittering and green.

Ajahn Sucitto

Glacier

A new sun throbs like birdsong in this high space,
whetting ice into streaming windows of sharp glares.

The jagged snout spills cracked eggs, broken columns, grit —
rocks scraped off the mountain and crushed in cold,
dumped in jumbled edges of moraines.

The glacier is retreating,
creaks of ice are surging louder;
the melt that scours grey rocks is thick
with gravel and ground lodes.

Fresh light leaks into splitting crevasses and blue caves —
prisons of space rocking with lost horizons and lone drips;
a warmer breeze roams through, tinged with grass and dew,
and rigid ice releases, crashes, into bouncing streams.

So this high valley's grandeur is waking to itself
with long views and wheeling choughs celebrating thin air.
In the raw verges of the glacier's shrink have sprung mosses,
and the odd pioneering juniper,
 grabbing sun off the wind,
 prickling roughly at stones.

Thomas Jones

Winter's emptiness has overflowed

With the bats' return Night has started laughing.
Her eyes, her eyes ...
I drink the star tears of joy.

Look what the day is laying out!
I am an old crow flying,
here crocuses, there primroses
In a great candelabra of white flowers
I land cawing.
YAHAA! YAHAA! YAHAA!

Ayya Thaniya

Amaravati

lovely October sunny afternoon, the flowerbeds are full of chickweed & daisies,
my love lies resting behind the white cloud & my faith is a robin in the holly
& if I have learnt anything, then it is here, alone with the other things, the red
maple beginning to live up to its name

3

Evidence

My Father's Boots

They were black, leather-soled and nail-cleated;
well-made and plain 1950s boots.
Aged twelve, ascending Lingmell in the boots
he'd had for his own school trip to the Lakes,
I was proud of their Edmund Hillary look
and stiff metal clatter. But, descending
among the wet tufts of peat-moor, a heel
fell off in the grass. My boots! — The old soles
were unlayering, like the paper tubes
of lollipops. He would have loved me to
become a priest, make the steps he'd been stopped
from taking. I knew. I wore his boots.
But the years had eaten them from inside.
I wore plastic trainers. I feel like I tried.

Thomas Jones

Corrections

I take a red pen to my life, cross out
words like daughter, mother, wife;
strike out all those oughts and buts,
the endless hopeful lies. Every day
it's getting shorter. Even vanity fades
along with bloom and giggle and slender.
Last thing to go is my mind, never mine
anyway. Like everything else, a story
to keep myself uptight and occupied,
on the right side of my demon teachers.
Each page is a horror of blots,
omissions and errors. I hear myself
thinking Could Try Harder. Try to
ignore it, harder and harder; not to
set my heart on ticks and stars, on how
it might feel to be recycled,
a clean sheet of paper, a fresh draft;
someone else's name at the end.

Linda France

is I this boundary
which sometimes embraces you?
or the placid angel
settling on the evening,
or the limit of fullness,
is I the lost or worn out
minutes? is it the fear,
the stubborn giant
sitting on your chest
during the night hours of thought?
when the butterfly of the mind is still,
what is I?
is it I that encounters you?
or is it the emptiness that embraces emptiness
and I and you trembling
pressing each other's hands in the shadows?
is it I that stammers before the name
of dawn and dusk
while the immense void gives thanks silently
for the miracle without name
that comes and goes,
comes and goes? is I the law
that doesn't see itself
and the little flags that sow
alphabets of prayers
into the wind?
is I the jewel
you hold between the lips
the furtive death
will bring into flower with a kiss?
is I
a prayer mat
when the edge inside you
bows?

Chandra Candiani

Winter Rain

In this dank fugue
worn brush-head,
this sway of birch,
a revelation in vertical.
With love's mad arms
----- horizontal -----
black power lines.

Religious dhamma, where is its sweep and breadth?

First: no 'surviving life'
 to live araining
 astream in the blessed.

Second? no meditation
 of unbreachable divisions
 a seeping grace a warmth....

... Ahh ... stopped here with myself
 edges crumbling
 ground washing away.

Ayya Thaniya

Will o' the Wisp

Through the crack in personality
enters something tender:

A dark angel deals the cards
building a prison from light.
Faces flap like
transparent flags.
Bright candles, white tulips, dark room.
Emptiness towers in cathedrals.
A tree groans inside the soul.
(Outside the world belongs to passers-by.
Inside we are not bothered.).

The brain-muscle simulates a cramp,
with an empty line expanding:

On the pathways of silence,
behind history's back,
at the abyss of a concluded thought
the smile of sleeping shepherds
is tending the stars.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

NIGHT approaches shyly:
touching this wintered branch,
edging round that sprawling tree,
pausing to let a blackbird pass.
Seeming to come musing on what
light lets forth,
all she will enfold in her spangled cloak,
grand and indiscriminate.

Ayya Thaniya

Not-Self

Night, the bride of heaven
and her eyes –
the good stars,
leave no trace of memory or fire.

Then what am I but
a tiny wick
guarding a bold blue flame,
that soon will mix with time
and drop from sight
like the sun
from a cold sky?

Ayya Medhanandi

Where the water flows

Through the silence owls sound of Night's coming:
time has lost itself.
The flood water turbulence has long since spent itself.
Fluvial the mind has pooled and emptied.
Bats soar here undisturbed.
Night she has come; the day has yielded –
Awaken. Let her Jewels shine.

Ayya Thaniya

Your Next Dream

Rain clears the eye of the night.
Shadows disintegrate in space.

A servant of the unknown desire
dresses up as a landscape
for your next dream.

A dream with a secret compartment:
In a hollow tree
a message awaits you every day.

You hardly notice yet.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

Himalayan Rain

We'd caught the bus from Kathmandu, to trek
the Everest trail. Up and down, against
the grain of the mountains, we walked until
our shaking legs steadied. The days were full
of wooded ridges and swaying bridges;
I'd never been so far from modern life.
One rainy day we detoured off the main
trail to visit a new-built cheese factory;
stock fences and alpine trees contrasted
with the huts and chickens of village life.
We drank tea in a dark wooden kitchen;
I went out on my own to look around.
A sound like goat-bells pulled me round a barn:
drips drumming on the metal lids of churns
lined up under a gutterless roof-eave.
The splash-notes of the shining drops left half-
imagined melodies hanging in mist,
took me through its living curtain of beads
to where music heals what time exiles: cloud-wrapped
among the vastest invisible hills,
I was played to by rain on silver chimes.
How I loved that illusion of heaven;
I heard; I was a believer. Years on,
last winter, at the back of a Welsh barn,
a line of icicles along a low
roof-edge rang at my touch just like those churns.
But I would have needed a hundred hands,
a mind as subtle as the rain, to make
that music, go through the curtain again.

Thomas Jones

On Being a Meadow

Meditation used to mean mowing back
the lush profusion of my mind.
But I felt like a tyrant sitting on his oppressed lawn.

Now I spread my arms wide
around the mass of swaying grasses
and attend to each one lovingly.

Sometimes I am quaking grass
hung like heavy tears on bent stalks.

Sometimes I am a thistle,
a vague blue-green and stoutly defended.

Sometimes I am a poppy
mouthing the raw red silks of my black heart.

Sometimes I am Yorkshire fog.

The sheep of entertainment occasionally get in
and chew back my tender new stems:
but I am laying my hedges to control them.

There are orchids growing in secret corners
that no-one has ever discovered.

My diary is an enormous collection of pressed flowers.

In late July, I am scythed down
— then what bliss to have nothing to do!

Next June I shall thicken with smoky blue
my concentration of cornflowers;
I shall hum even louder with eternal life.

Thomas Jones

You ask how I am?

The lake is easier:

Mostly its been the kind of calm
that holds trees and clouds cradled,
that sudden circling ripples speak of fish flashing
and death to water dancing beetles – what are they?
Where exclaiming shrilly herons deign to visit
stiffly walk, pause, dart, signing death to fishes
– living's a harsh thing.

Today it is a vacant pool:

no duck splash, no geese glide
no turquoise iridescence of the kingfisher's wing
heron's disdain floats empty
– how could so many beetles disappear?

There is just this quiet breathing.

Ayya Thaniya

Evidence

smudge of smoke where the chimney pokes the sky,
upstairs, in the dark hours, a soft light;

yardbroom outside the door,
sandals, just inside;

rug slightly skewed on the floor,
beside it, dented, a pillow;

image on a small table, bronze, a Buddha
a begonia sprawling beside it;

fragrances: musks, sandalwood,
plain white walls;

stubby head, broken nose,
scar on the left thumb;

phrases such as: 'noetic field',
'a resonant intent';

behind them, the usual flagrant cosmology
surfs the flows of silence.

There appears to be no centre
the boundaries keep shifting –

I rest my case.

Ajahn Sucitto

4

The Northern Gate

Summer night

The warm night gives all the time
to speak quarter- truths and quarter-lies
about things that are not here.

Daubenton's bats flick the lake's full moon
with sudden dark kisses.

Most of us is madness.

Ajahn Sucitto

Moonshine

We are here and it is now. Further than that all human knowledge is moonshine.

H.L. Mencken

Even in the middle of saying it
I know the argument my lips
are trying to convince themselves of –
and you, of course – is fragile
as a web strung with dew,
jewel for just one morning,
air's own fibres made visible.

Not to mention the autopsy
of words and sentences – laying
them out on the slab of my head,
picking them over for evidence
of violence, pretence, some weakness
I take out of the dark to make sure
I'm not completely sure about.

The brightest knowing happens
in silence, alone, those empty
spaces where it's possible to notice
how things begin and bring their own
ending: the same way I watch
the coming and going of the moon,
enchanted by its borrowed light.

Linda France

IN THE PROVINCE

where nobody laughs
at your jokes,
anxiety creeps
with heated feelers into your face.
Merciless friendship listens
and hears
what drives you into speech,
when love's own voice keeps
silent.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

Therefore, angel, you love in me
what I have loved
that I have subtracted
from the idiocy of judgment:
to cry as an adult
neutral to space
like poppies
in a cluster indifferent
between the rails of speeding trains.
To sob as an adult
in the fervour of the sounds of a square
without covering one's face
tears without refuge
running in the barren courtyard
of the face torn from what is known.
Is there a threshold, angel, or a gate
by which to pause? Neither here nor further on
entrusted to the space
of skies down to earth?
Is there an almond-tree in which to bloom
like humans rained down
from a painter's sky?
A shell in which to sail,
a soul without a voice?
And verses which walk without blushing
on the polished corridors of the hospital?
Is there a verse like the cross
on which to hang human insubstantiality
that becomes a morning moon
ready for transparency
useless and radiant
like that which exists
only for a short time? Is there a breast capable
of bearing senseless beauty:
Marina's cancer
geraniums climbing over the balcony
motorcycles like moored ships
under entwined Peace banners?
Is there a present in this news
of murderers and silent clouds
which will forgive us all
which will raise us to a destiny
from the bitter almond
of obedience? Is there a present
that loves us without love

a nameless vastness
words that undress us
ears as tender as grass
without a meadow? Is there a young god
not yet tired of us?
Is there a scent
that doesn't fell angels
a recollection without I
a nostalgia for what I do not know?
Therefore, angel, you love in me
what I still have not met,
the light vision
which suspends me
between past and present
on this valley of snowflakes,
what I have subtracted from waiting
this pause without guarantee
or remedy, without threshold,
therefore in me, angel, you love what is not.

Chandra Candiani

Certainty

So when the angel of absence
seizes you again with the desire
to find the right formula for truth,
stay with the desire,
let it burn you inside out.
Let it roll with no resistance
down your scorched slope
spitting gravel, shifting boulders,
gathering momentum,
until it takes the whole
of your realities down
in one grand landslide.
As your knowledge in the end
will prove to be the greater ignorance,
lay it down –
and hear the stern master in your heart
ring her bell again,
sending you back to hug your skeleton
a little more.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

what else would you expect?

I expected sunshine
but it mainly seems to rain;
I had hoped for a welcome
but they don't recall my name.

I thought it might be wooded
but the hills have been cut bare;
I took May as a model
but October's less unfair.

I expected a mirror
that brightened as it blessed,
but I fear the tide will part us
from both heaven and the nest.

The stars' symphonic glitter
is sucked dumb through years of space;
the cosmic ceilidh stiffens
like the lines etched on a face.

The ardour of an empire
means a medal to a thief;
awareness broadcasts happiness
but reaps hard grains of grief.

May I drink what drowns me,
repay my master's loan,
expect the unexpected,
be as marrow to a bone.

Thomas Jones

The Monastery

once I knew, nothing in life could save me
& the monastery will wake you up in the cold mornings
it will kick you & drive you with more efficiency
than any alarm-clock, it will bore you with its routine
then seek forgiveness with a bowlful of food
& the monastery will always be showing you
that you are nothing & restore a sense of wonder
at the falling of a leaf, the monastery will turn you
into a giggling child & a crying child & a wise old man
whose mission is telling the world that it has to let go
& the monastery will dredge up all the horrible
secrets from the corners of the mind of a long-dead boy
screaming the truth of misery to the birds & trees
& the monastery will show you acceptance
in a good friend, the poetry of restraint & the patience
of sitting with restlessness & you will hate it & hate it
because your love is stronger & the monastery will get in your blood
more exciting & depressing than alcohol & you know
the monastery will forget you if you leave
& remember you with gratitude when you return
& the monastery will give you the open silence
you will be unable to receive they say until years later
they say the monastery will give you the strongest of feelings
& you will want to run away & curl up & die
& be born again like the greenness of a beech & the monastery
will make you want to dance & sing & regret those times
when you could & you didn't & the monastery will protect you
like an island & you will want to swim & like a kind parent
the monastery will remain where it is

Graham Brown

The Northern Gate

In this deafened climate,
every call freezes on the lips.
It's a home-land with no hearth.

And spring had such a willing touch....

The grey damp is an utter denial.
No lash and surge of rain,
no sun, no moon, no stars.
I have no way through.
Even pain can't see me:
it's like a blind thief
fingering an empty pocket.

Sense can only extend its span –
and weather into the northern mind.
Let south be a softly opening palm:
here bleakness is the gate.

I'll learn to lean on that.

Ajahn Sucitto

If She Does

(leaning on Kabir)

Knock - and she will say:
"There is no-one here."

Enter - and she will spit you out.

Fall - and she will say:
"Fall deeper."

Stand up and she will run you over.

Give up and she will say:
"It's not enough."

Cry and you will hear her laugh.

Become nothing and she will say:
"Too late."

Love her anyway and she might kill you.

And how lucky you are
if she does!

Bhikkhu Abhinando

The Break

If you're lucky there will always be a white horse
called Pandora who'll rear and whinny
and throw you so you can't get up and walk away.
Where did you think you were going?
That circus trick of not covering your eyes
or your ears when Pandora cries *Look! Look!*
Can't you see you're in danger? Still you try,
studying so hard how to mend one thing,
no inkling of what else might be broken.

You carry your fractures around like a bad smell
that won't go away. You imagine it's coming
from the rooms you walk through, the people
you talk to. Everything tastes wrong, sour
on your tongue, and you lose your appetite.
Easy to fall from there to where all of you
is stinging and aching. Until you crack open
like an egg, spilling the gold you must lay out
and count, your silver, your wound's treasure.

Only when you're here, your shell smashed,
can the magic start, the healing; like a myth
about horses, the print of their hooves in sand.
And you see nothing is what you think it is;
nothing to do with you and what you know. It hurts
and will always hurt; it's ugly and beautiful
and you're utterly changed by it. And it's all this:
ordinary, steady, as the breath that breathes you,
that only needs you to be there, tall in the saddle.

Linda France

To Walk Alone

I want to walk alone again
this wide mosaic of black sands
and pearly relics
perilously tossed ashore
with a cortège of bottles
and driftwood
borne downstream.

I want to know myself
more and more
every inner crevasse
every uncharted ravine.

O, to let God find me
like a broken shell
curled up on the lip
of the outgoing tide,
a weary pilgrim
at the shrine of the Mother sea,
sanctified.

Ayya Medhanandi

Middle Way

Out there, take the subtle track.
Follow it where disbelief and certainty,
like land and sea, shake hands briefly...

and where that glance through which we meet
what is, delicately, most here,
sees all impressions are way out of touch;

and where the white that gives words
a sharp black conviction
blossoms to break up their clench...

until where and why are lost.
And you are over the edge, in the listening hush
as it plunges on through wavebreak things:

scent of lemons; yesterday's moon;
or the gleam of that fire that sings of you.
Nothing, no-one, gets off this wave.

No way to tramp the lifeflows.
But right there is the heart-emerging tide
and a deep-keeled craft, gently rocking...

with room on board for outcasts.

Better take it.

Ajahn Sucitto

My old sandals

My old sandals heavy with brine,
play tag with the waves
that steal home at twilight,
my robe a sail in the vernal winds,
I veer between
tangled weeds and woods,
and gleaming stones
gathered at the edge of Truth.

Where will I go now the sea is dark,
night is everywhere and the beach –
a plane of shadows,
my thoughts as profuse
as these battered shells
and ancient refuse
that cling to the shore
waiting for high tide?

Where will I rest in all this movement –
travelling time
like the gulls and terns
that scout the coastal hills
and retreat
in the first breath of evening?

I am praising, praising
the seamless sky,
that Emptiness unabashed,
a still exuberant sun
bowing to the world,
while crustaceans die in their berths
and stallion clouds blush
with gratitude.

What is this work we do,
blessing every ache and sting,
the darkness and the light
death and the ending of day?

Night holds the cosmic sceptre,
galaxies lean close
and the waters chant with me
this litany of love.

Ayya Medhanandi

Mother Moon

O Mother Moon,
silent silver albatross,
You take away the night
you chase the shadows
where my fears would play,
inviting all the stars and satellites
to dance,
with a glance so pure –

I dare not wait for sunrise
but fall into your arms
drenched
with light.

Ayya Medhanandi

5

The Presence of You

Together

In the hemisphere of silence
the leaves fall
all year long:
every word a gesture.

We sit closely packed
between fire and night.

Where we are touched by the silence,
flowers the winter's
southernmost shoulder:

an auspicious ache.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

The Presence of You

Hot milk on my cornflakes, my breakfast treat;
so quiet, just you, your dog and me.
Before going to school, I'd be down well in time,
would find you shaving at the kitchen sink,
your big chest bare, your muscles drooping,
your body amazing, like an old strongman's.
You'd comb your sparse, grey hair with metal,
then join me for tea, poured from a pot
remaining from your wife's days — she who said
it was not to be cleaned, the thick brown taste.

Staying at my grampy's house — not
that you spoiled me, or that anything happened —
just the different rhythms of your days, the way
I found myself feeling at home with you,
amidst the story of a different life, yet
one that I was part of, heir to. Perhaps
we had a temperament in common, quiet
and lonely, prone to moments of pensive
intensity; sometimes ravished
by night air, by wild and secret things.
We had an understanding: I trusted
the Longfellow at your bedside, the china fox
on a shelf.

Once I caught your eye
whilst I was skateboarding. Sat
on a bench, bowed over your stick, you saw
right into my youth — an old man
enjoying a grandfather's pride — so much wiser
than my few years. Then you smiled:
that look was love made of blood-recognition,
a heart-transmission from man to man.

You're now long dead, Thomas Harry, but
I still live strong moments in the presence of you.

Thomas Jones

The names tremble
like mist coming
down from the hill
and slowly your majestic
smile advances
smile of grass
and of stone,
I live in your smile
like grain from the heart of bread.
A village of trees
suspended above
the nothingness of breath
invites me to become a bell
to ring out again,
sound and tone
in the score of emptiness
notes that love each other
heart of the world
in your wake
like a gown's train made of wings
like snow
yes not like air
like snow
I miss you.

Chandra Candiani

I live in your voice
and when it falls silent
the silence has wings
I live under the violence
of your wings
and when the silence is flooded by noises
they are the heart of the world
I live in the world
and the feathers of the world
know that beauty exists:
“When your footstep arrives
I will put a shell on the threshold
and as you open it
the flying shards
will recite your name.”

Chandra Candiani

You are Her

- on an information board at Cawfields Quarry, Hadrian's Wall -

There are no maps for anyone's longing
but I find you anyway, playing invisible,

your lightness disguised in black, a scarf of stars.
You are marking the borders of quarried water,

considering the wisdom of revealing
just how glassless and surrendered you really are,

how totally without any reflection. It could
never be a mistake, this shattering.

Let yourself feather and fly out of the cracks
in the wall, a cloud of whiteness, to dance

with whatever it is life wants to do
with itself in the uncharted spaces

of this north. We all need more courage
for peace than for war, more lightness of heart,

but you are her, and her, and her, always guessing
that missing last letter, a perfect mistake.

Linda France

from *Gathering In the Unloved: Voices From the Edge*

iii.

I am old, aching,
these bones sing of too many journeys.
Leave me underneath some gnarled tree,
journey on alone.
I cannot go to the warm fire.
Your path's end means nothing to the tired.

You will wait?
Then it must be for endless reaches of time;
here and no further
where nothing is satisfied.

iv.

Tears? Buckets of tears?

Let me give you the oceans.
So many partings.
And the bones of the dead are the mountains
where mighty rivers are born.
Broken hearts cling on the sea's cold belly.
Tears? Can you hold them all?

Just let them wash over you
through you, around you.
Let them lift you victorious.
And your tears?
Diamonds that encrust the crown.

viii.

You are trying to hide at the centre
under some small snatches of breath
BUT I AM OUT HERE YELLING
YELLING SO LOUD THE VIBRATIONS SHAKE THE WORLD.
ARE YOU LISTENING?
HEY YOU, CAN YOU HEAR
WHERE THE LOVE IS?!

Ayya Thaniya

Birthday Card for Bernd

to stand under means
to understand

I have nothing to give you
but these words

I hope you find
an ancient tree

Graham Brown

And yet there is a garden
where lost gardeners
water the grass
not always at the same time
but always in the same moment
and night-flowering roses open
accepting the velvet of darkness.
And yet there is a garden, Marina,
perhaps it is lacking heart
because the abyss of uncertainty
is so deep, and yet
it is a garden,
where in the mirror of the pond
life and death
appear as sisters
and the best and the worst
are nothing but closed
eye-lids of
a face loved,
lost
loved

Chandra Candiani

*teamwork
for Manapa*

the flock of pigeons over the allotments
leant into the bend as one, while I

stood among my potatoes and weeds
watching and wondering

at how good ideas had only led to a gate
and how the way on beyond was unknown,

so I took it, stepped off the edge of myself
to find you there, at the head of the chevron

goose-leader, far-sighted, straining
back to sea beneath the moon, top dog

howling verses outside the crowd,
half-bard, half-balancing your laughter rising

in the Jetsun's halls, where they sing
in many nations' voices,

and I have followed yours, your gentle lead,
learned to lean with you into the bends

Thomas Jones

Cloud-Forest

The mountain forest receives us like a cloud.
Our groping steps drink
melted water from the moss.

We climb on and on. In the branches
glows the horn of the moon. We feel
it is here where the invisible bull
hides his shadow.

We stop to admire
ice-slush in the torrent,
listening with shivering feet
to dumb nature's rumbling echo.

We know it is here
where the mood loses
its wolf to the trough.

We peer upwards: withdrawn
above the darkness
covered in grey-white veils,
a distant face of rock.

Is it there where the ibex
leads our lies
to the precipice?

We turn back and notice now
the sign, warning of dangerous creatures.

In the valley we are greeted with relief
by our friends

and my fearful dog.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

Welcome

There's enough dust in my eyes
from all the winds that blow through;
enough to build a house.

There's still some fire in my heart
from the last true flame.
That'll keep us warm.

And the Big Idea has flesh to spare –
ribs, chops....Before it rots,
there'll be a bite to eat.

Wanderers, who come by selling their gear –
caged birds, panaceas, charms:
they've beaten a path to my door.

Listen friend, don't even knock.
Come right on in and wake me.

Ajahn Sucitto

Your rose has dropped its petals
as if into a gentle wind
what is left is not the empty stalk
but the scent
of the bird just flown
away
we are not roses
nor birds
nor the wind
but the anticipation of blowing
of flying
of blooming

Chandra Candiani

A FEELING ADVANCES

hesitating
with the dignity of a deer.

The gesture —
dancing ship
on the waves of your smile.

Between two darkneses
the flower
opens,

between two eternities
she gives her perfume
away.

The loving heart is black,
formless and deep
as the night.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

6

A Secret

My Religion

'To live and die without regret' –
that is my religion –
to taste the cup of the sacrament
of this moment
now,
my only moment.
How otherwise to spend it,
for tonight I may die?

To abide in the fragrance of
goodness in this world
enduring
awake;
To bring no harm to myself
or any one;
To be a cause for kindness
and compassion –
a joy that defeats
despair.

To smile with courage
through life's storms and trials;
trusting
the inherent principle
of Love.

To pray –
to live and die
a simple way.

Ayya Medhanandi

Cactus

I love their stubborn roots. Under a pounding sky
with no shelter, with no deep lush earth...
caught in the glare, they hold their greenness.
Maybe it's age, but I attune to a growth
out of what is trapped, exposed and dry.

Beneath the thickest skin, it's the same old madness:
but where the sap rises through a desert sense,
the budding' s gritty. Spiny, beautiful –
and needing nothing from garlands and scents.
An icon of inviolate tenderness.

I can bow to that, just; let the dry space ripen,
taste it, swallow it; and get it down
that there's nothing to know. To get used to that –
to sit upright among purposeless stones
and take the heat that bursts the heart open.

Drape the leafless spire with prayer flags;
let it rise and move the senseless sun
to witness: a desert can bring forth
a voice of rare untrembling tones.
And in that flowering, years throw off their rags.

Ajahn Sucitto

Pilgrim on Vulture's Peak

They were bringing in the sugarcane all through Bihar,
piled high on bullock carts, long leafy green canes
jolting across potholes, bouncing in the cold
mist at midday, cold horns swaying, necks strained.
They were foraging for firewood below Vulture's Peak,
where cowbells clanged, wandering on the slopes.
Any expectations I might still have harboured
had been baffled by a bus ride through a day and a night,
halted for hours at borders or in a line of trucks
waiting for a crushed motorcyclist's wife's
reluctance to move him uncompensated,
and parked up at a filthy nowhere truckstop until dawn
to be safe from the bandits who might have been
huddling with us round the same foul burning tyre.

The Buddha's favoured resort. We climbed a stone road,
goaded by boys armed with chocolates, maps and carved rocks,
away from the car park and penguin litter bins,
out of winter mist onto a sunlit hill
among hills above jungle where a city had been.
Grey-brown boulders leant together making caves
still honoured for the efforts made within.
At the peak, three Tibetans intoned long and low
as we settled to our devotions. For what
had we come? To get away, to see the sights
of India, so fascinating, friendly and cheap,
and watch a billion hands reach for modernity?
To take five hundred photographs, write ten thousand words,
to render inadequately what had overwhelmed us?
To share significant experience with old and subsequent friends?
Experience of what? — A few superfluous conceptions
that we'd ditched days before, having found
the places where the Buddha had lived, taught and died in
were now weekend picnic parks, charging us
two dollars at the gates where lepers
and old widows made a withered living.

But the peak was clean and had no signs.
The air stirred incense among our silences.
The attendant in his dhoti began to snore.
One of the dogs that had followed us up,
flea-ridden, whining as she lay near my feet,
had also fallen into a whimpering sleep.
A butterfly, orange wings with sunshine eyes,
settled on the worn fur of a knee, and
the moment opened, infinity's angel
appearing in history's prison window,
then flew on to other open flowers.

I put my hand to the dog's tucked, quivering neck
with love's gentleness. Voices rose from below
much as they had for centuries, and,
meditation ended, we went down, though not, it seemed,
into a world as bound by the cold as it had been.

Thomas Jones

Music Lesson

On due occasion, there' s still the allowance –
even in a set-up made stiff with things –
that place may have its familiar spirit:
a way of harnessing transcendence
by tethering it to river, rock, tree or sky.

What address then for the dislocating angel...?
who flies between appearance and change,
bending a blue note - dissonant, plangent;
in the minor key of expectation,
plays riffs and ragas of the Way It Is.

This spirit's here. Listen and enter:
between two thoughts is place enough;
and a moment when a sensed solidity
is turned back, purely, on itself –
that's occasion enough to unleash your silence.

Time for Creation's closet demon
to come out, let go, and face the music.

Ajahn Sucitto

Lady of the Sound
grant me a useless time
to prepare an empty table
and to serve the guests
This silence, not another
moment but the roaring opening
of just This

Chandra Candiani

To Bless

(Cool Morning, Saddhammaramsi Meditation Centre)

To bless
is to be blessed
nothing augmented
nor made less

in the small hours
when I address you
Lord

I am a wedge in
a doorway

a pale shaft of light
on the temple
window

a spider curled up
inside Your
earlobe

listening
to the notes of
today –
sweet river of
happiness.

Ayya Medhanandi

Blossom Moon Buddha

He has the hands of a man
who could draw a map
in water. He brings me
a single flower, small
and white. When I open
my eyes I can't see
the garden for petals,
the smoke of pollen rising.

Linda France

Therefore joy
is this crumbling mountain
which becomes voice,
the key to the secret
misaid in the hair.
I have lost myself
in your glass
mistaking it for the sea,
I wander in the transparent circle
of your limit
beating the strokes of joy,
therefore joy
is this blood beating
at the pulse, this friend
of the tolls.
For whom is it tolling?

Chandra Candiani

my refuge
my swallow without head or tail
pure flight;
where to turn
having neither home nor pace
to which wings entrust oneself
in the space without language of the limit
at which fire to warm
the hands without a body.
to entrust oneself blindly to the fall
of a groundless flight
to entrust oneself
without destiny,
refuge
swallow without head or tail
pure flight.

Chandra Candiani

A Secret

A secret burns at every end
of our separation,
preparing us.

An absence is pulling
like a black sun.
A longing is spreading me out
like a flower of mirrors
like a room without walls.

My song, untenable,
is burning its notes
on the stammering tongue.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

Prayer-Beads

One name is You
One name is I Am
One name is That
One name is Hungry Eye, the Thunder
One name is Angel of Conscience
One name weeps and weeps
One name is Wave of Balance
One name squats on a rock in the desert,
 night and day
One name is Jewel of Listening
One name is Loser,
 all rhythm, no pace
One name spews forth a world
 is made to feel guilty
 wipes its mouth
 walks away
One name is Questioning –
 the always question
One name is Ancient –
 old enough to have forgiven Time
One name is the Moment,
 spreading the eagle's perfect wing
One name is Fitting
 wheel on axle, chisel in hand
One name is like a matador's cape to a bull
Who is No-Name
One name thrusts
One name suckles the shadows
 doesn't need to know why
One name gets up in the morning
 goes to work
 wonders what the hell
One name went public as "I'll never leave you"
One name glows in the hero's breath
One name is Fruit
 ever-ripening...golden, sweet...
One name is Hold It All Gently, very gently
One name survives, in the hyena's mouth
One name is Blessing Vastness
 between prayer and heart
 reaching out...
One name is Laughing Zero.

One name is always forgotten
 down here in the straw and leaves.
Where it's only the address that counts.

Ajahn Sucitto

Bodhinyana Cedhi

Here at the edge of the world
a prayer wheel turns to the crack
of frozen flags in the wind.
When all is slowly stripped away
what is there to do but chant in praise?

Ayya Thaniya

Chestnut Summer

the mind has such long
lazy shadows

it keeps me from burning

Graham Brown

7

Empty Shells

Homeward Journey

Travelling, the location gets smaller:
a lodge, a room, a train, a car.
At the airport, it had come down
to my worn immediacy and zip-up bag –
and that lighter and less important now
with the "return" label dangling down
like a notification of terminal disease.
And how much, then, does anything weigh?
Half my world goes down the belt...

...and in exchange, a right to passage,
a gate, and seat are granted. And so it's time
to cram with fellow dislocated cells
inside the hull...get comforted...get made secure....
The ground withdraws; and our lives suspend
like verbs become nouns, abstract, common...
inflexions sealed under a pressure
through which remote stewards flitter
bearing consolations wrapped in plastic.

I turn down the lot; let senses float
and pivot around a centering pulse...
and under the glass of my name and number,
feel a resonance: this homeless tribe,
this unloved night, this journeying on....
Strapped down in space, onwards, nowhere....
And I am dropping open, eight miles up,
above the skin of restless nations.
Destination: the shared lost planet.

Shine on, our planet, under a pilgrim star –
homewards is the farthest journey:
orbiting, off track, letting go;
the lurch, then the lift, snug into vastness.

Ajahn Sucitto

Verbing the Noun of Her

Today I found myself wanting to wash her,
let her skin feel the soothe of water.
I would give her shoulders grace, watch
the startle in her eyes. I anticipate
her questions about *fire* and *broken*: the full moon
howls. Sleep is never neutral, never as lost
as it appears; morning always brings the possibility
of cloud or shine, the sigh of the wind,
drizzle's doubting. I want to tell the beads
of her waking, blur the silver of *soon*, *later*,
all the old nouns, all the proper and common,
compound and abstract, that keep her from
the twist and braid of knowing and letting go,
flying open. The silk of the day is so thin
it is smoke but white is what I want
to call her, the colour she bears her blood in,
the paper she's peeling off her cracks,
those small signs scribbled on her bones.
And after I have washed her and made her clean
I will show her a diagram of the human throat
and the shapes it falls into with each part
of speech, the sounds between things, of love.

Linda France

Another Raw Blue Morning

the patch we cleared & planted
crocosmia & mallow
burdock & nettle

do they fight it out or are they dancing
with each other?

my anger & my love, they are
old companions, they have
been walking for a long time
to enjoy their flowers together

Graham Brown

dear angel executioner
of feelings, since
you passed by my window
I stray drunk scattering
the sand of the soul
the mad clock of the nerves
what is justice in emotions?
the bitter home
of solitude or the experience
of the ashes of those who do not
avoid the fire? Dear angel without glasses,
what is near?
and what is far?
what is more strange to us –
the heart of the other
or our own?
who is beating and beating
at fire and sword in the breast
unbeknown to us forging
the emotions? who directs some
to an invisible periphery
while sending others
hand in hand
to the portico of the soul?
which centuries, which exiles
which ancestral refugees
have measured the geometry
of my receptivity
my ability to stand
firm on the bridges
watching the yeses and the noes flow past
the betters and the worsts
of an indifferent hourglass
that doesn't know quality
but only the incessant sliding
of seconds? in which moment
do two beings meet each other
in which point in space
do two lone trajectories
intersect? I don't know and I don't want
to know, execute my head
together with my shoes, I want
to fly beyond measure
to the provisional conclusion
of nothing achieved
everything loved.

Chandra Candiani

Empty Shells

Leaving one life is beginning another,
they go together like days and nights,
like the roots of a tree and its fruits,
like empty shells
in the steel blue sands of twilight
when the near-full moon casts an eye
and a vagrant tide washes the soles
of my feet.

Leave softly, but leave –
then will you be complete
as you touch and receive
the rising moments
in their unabashed splendour,
and allow all fear in your heart
to dissolve forever.

Are we not then like these
tudong shells
that gather on the beaches
buffeted on the waves,
polished and refined in the depths?

Wandering the vast seas
we arrive, yes
we arrive in one majestic
breath on the shores
of freedom,
to cease at last, to rest,
smiling jewels
discrete,
we reflect
the unnameable Silence.

Ayya Medhanandi

Always Beginning

I once found water welling in grass,
at the lane-bottom field-corner
of my own map of home.
For years I'd known another spring
sprouting in a hollow among old trees,
pattering over small stones to a stream
veining a garlic valley; I'd dammed
and directed it. But this was different:

chickweed and speedwell eddied at edges
treacherous even for wellingtons.
Here, there were no stones, just mush-
rooming water, bucketing up,
a wet window in the floor of earth,
with a view churned into mystery.

*I remember on an aging afternoon, rivers
clogged by weeds, home only for eels,
this overgrown beginning, ready to redeem.*

Then I was a child, but now I want
to know the inside of that open eye
where metaphysics drowns in immediacy.
I'll do now what I didn't do —
plunge my hung head into that spring,
look deep into a wet world made
of what rises fresh from depths
where no light pollutes truth with extension
or number, ears overwhelmed
by silvery shock, my body left
resting suspended elsewhere —

till mind, freed from stagnant meanders, feels
for an unfamiliar face
without tongue to muddle
unquenchable moments, constantly refreshed.

Thomas Jones

After Li Po

(for Gunaketu)

in late
March
I go
down
to the water
there are
anemones
flowering
in there
blue sky
green
with life

young
as I am
old
as I am
the roots
& wings
of the mind
dog's
mercury
celandine
joyfully
ancient

Graham Brown

There is an Island

The day's ease sits warm
where the rain falls
glistening ripe to drop
leaf-to-leaf and down
through the mind's green valley
where it ceases.
It reveals a vast wonderment as continuum –
This flow
is Nibbana bound.

Ayya Thaniya

Sparrow Mind

catkins from the
hazel, the alder
will do for me
this time
 no glory
no vision, no phoenix
rising from the ashes
of a Winter fire
just this
 keeping
warm enough, on
this old grey stone
which is alive

Graham Brown

The heart of religion

Winter sunset: fire flowers within the frost.
The air warms itself in my throat
burrowing down like some small mammal...
to expire... be shaped, and sent out pluming
as far as my life-tide, as far
as the outreach of naked branches...
as far as the stars and their self-abandonment
into a darkness that eats the boundaries.

But at the living edge – things feel for themselves.
The owl's floating call; and how it wakes
an old trembling... that hover, that widening
to find poised centre. My mind stretches,
lifts... and slips out of image; into night.
Held in a quietly turning eye.
In that black pupil is pure celebration:
without precedent, free of consequence.

Ajahn Sucitto

Her Blueness

Halfway between sea and sky, she reaches
into a deep nowhere I'm afraid to navigate.

Isn't she always autumn, pilot and diver,
never still, and her voice the roaring of water

falling into itself, letting the whole of itself go?
The shine of it deafens me. Her lightning

scorches my skin till there's nothing to do
but step out of it, make myself new.

Her blue is the lip and hiss of azure,
of knowing what must be so and holding it

up to the light to see what it's made of
before giving it back. She gives me back

to myself. I wear her blues, her silver;
dress my hair with diamonds, faceted tears.

There are many days I will need their bite
and skitter. She tells me her secret name,

an ace I'll keep close to my chest, its single syllable;
feel its slow trickle down inside me.

Linda France

WHAT BURNS, burns out:
A feeling flapping its wings
in my shrine,
the metaphysical stomach.

As the alluring call fades,
my hand
opens:
I receive the pain.

Here,
where you are missing,
there is a sweetness listening
like simmering honey,

melting from the inside
my song,
my gesture,
my pretext for being.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

and so there is light
and every leaf is attached to the branch
with precise love
and every leaf at the right time
will let go of the branch
with an audacious surrender
and every departure from the threshold
of the body is received
with unanimous welcome
by that science of joy
that just now, just here
fills the sheet with scribbles
to tell you that therefore
there is light.

Chandra Candiani

Jerusalem

(Wanganui River)

I am a log of wood
tossed into the flame
of my longing,
disappearing into the smoke
of Your breath –
a wind that turns galaxies
and sets the heart free.

Out of the fire of that wanting
I stop forever.
There is no sound left but
Your holy name
in the fading dance of petals
drifting everywhere.

I am a small bird
dressed in a
song of praise.
Night has ended
and my heart
is clear.

Ayya Medhanandi

The Island

There's a mountain that stands for everything.
There's a valley that empties everything.
There's a sky that blesses everything.
There's an earth that gives back everything.

There's a muttering over the maps and charts
that runs calling across the hopeful world;
and ransacks, howling, the jeweled cosmos....
The abyss sucks it whimpering back.

Then, where could attention surrender...?
But, there's the near side of nowhere –
intimate, dangerous, untrodden.
The abundant.

Yours. Mine. Everything's.

Ajahn Sucitto

The Authors

Abhinando Bhikkhu was born in Hamburg in 1966. He became a Buddhist monk in the Theravada lineage at Chithurst Buddhist Monastery with Ajahn Sumedho as preceptor in 1994. At the moment he lives at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery at Harnham, Northumberland, in the north of England.

Most of his poems included in this anthology are translations from the German by the author with the help of various friends.

Graham Brown was born in London 1972, typical Gemini Pisces moon, brought up & educated near Birmingham, after travelling in India studied Comparative Religion at Manchester University where he won the Blackwell Prize, after working as a gardener ordained anagarika in Feb '96 at Harnham, spent 5 years - half his 20s - in the monastic Sangha, mainly at ABM & CBM, becoming Samanera Issaramuni in the process, is now a fully-fledged eco-nerd Dharma Bum gentleman-tramp

Chandra Livia Candiani was born in Milano in 1952.

She lives in Milano with her cat Zhivago. She translates Buddhist texts into Italian. She tries to practice the Dhamma. Her poems appeared in: *Antologia della poesia femminista italiana* (Savelli, 1978), *Poesia degli anni settanta* (Feltrinelli, 1979), *La pratica del desiderio* (Sascia, 1986), *Sette poeti del premio Montale* (Crocetti 2002), *Io con vestito leggero* (Campanotto 2005), as well as in the yearbooks *Le stagioni dei poeti* 2003, 2004, 2005 edited by Castalia. She published the books: *Fiabe vegetali (Aelia Laelia, 1984)*, *Una poesia* (Il pulcino elefante, 1996), *Ritratto* (Il pulcino elefante, 1998) *Sonatina per gatto* (Il pulcino elefante, 2004), and the book of fables *Sogni del fiume* (La biblioteca di Vivarium, 2001). In 2001 she won the Montale-Prize for inedited poetry.

Her poems included in this anthology have been translated from the Italian by Bhikkhu Abhinando with the help of the author and various friends. 'Therefore joy...' and 'Therefore, angel...' are based on translations by Giulia Niccolai.

The original Italian versions of the poems 'how I would like to know how to write' and 'dear angel executioner' were first published in '7 Poeti del Premio Montale' by Crocetti Editore, 2002; 'and so there is light' and 'Your rose has dropped its petals' are translated from the original Italian versions published in *Io con vestito leggero* (Campanotto 2005)

Linda France lives in Northumberland, a short walk from Hadrian's Wall. She works as a freelance writer, teaching Creative Writing and collaborating with

visual artists on Poetry in Public Spaces. Bloodaxe Books have published five collections of her poems: *Red* (1992), *The Gentleness of the Very Tall* – a Poetry Book Society Recommendation (1994), *Storyville* (1997), *The Simultaneous Dress* (2002) and *The Toast of the Kit-Cat Club* (2005) – a life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She also edited the acclaimed anthology *Sixty Women Poets* (1993). She has written two plays: *Diamonds in your Pockets*, for Théâtre sans Frontières (1996), and *I am Frida Kahlo*, for Cloud 9 (2002). Her work has received various awards and prizes, including the Arts Foundation's first Poetry Fellowship in 1994. She is currently working on her first novel.

Corrections was first published in *The Simultaneous Dress* (2002); reprinted with permission from Bloodaxe Books.

Thomas Jones (ordained into the Western Buddhist Order as Dharmachari Dhivan) started writing seriously in 1996 after a month's solitary retreat in the Scottish Highlands. Since then he's written poems, short stories and novels. He is also involved with editing *Urthona*, the magazine of Buddhism and the arts. He lives in Cambridge, UK.

Himalayan Rain and *Situation Report* were first published in *The Heart as Origami*, Rising Fire Press, 2005.

Ayya Medhanandi was born in 1949 in Montreal. She began meditating as a student and practised in India under the guidance of an Advaita master. After completing an M.Sc. in nutrition, she served in aid programmes for malnourished women and children in Southeast Asia, Africa and South America. In 1987, she began her nun's training with Sayadaw U Pandita in Myanmar and spent ten years at Amaravati Monastery under the tutelage of Ajahn Sumedho. She now lives in New Zealand.

Ajahn Sucitto was born in London in 1949. He began his monastic training in Thailand in 1975 and became a Bhikkhu in 1976. In 1978 he returned to Great Britain to practise with Ajahn Sumedho. Since then he remained always based in Great Britain and lives at the moment at Chithurst Buddhist Monastery.

'I experience poetry as a 'yoga of language.' It can restore depth and vitality to the way the mind arranges experience. It can carry the mind over the edge of words to sense the undercurrents in the spaces, and in the interplay of images. Its ability to carry the mind beyond its knowledge is for me what connects it to the practice of Dhamma.'

Ayya Thaniya was born in the King Country in New Zealand. Wishing to deepen

and extend her Dhamma practice within one of Luang Por Chah's communities
she
journed to England to take robes. Of the last 14 years or so most of her time
has been spent in the forest monastery of Cittaviveka.