

ALMOST ISLAND

Contributors: Monsoon 2008

Sven Birkerts is an American essayist and literary critic. He is best known for his book *The Gutenberg Elegies*, which posits a decline in reading due to the overwhelming advances of the Internet and other technologies of the "electronic culture." He has taught writing at Harvard University, Emerson College, and Amherst College and most recently at Mount Holyoke College. Birkerts is the Director of the Bennington College Writing Seminars and the editor of *AGNI*, the literary journal. His other books are *Reading Life: Books for the Ages*, *Readings*, and a memoir, *My Sky Blue Trades*.

Nguyen Quoc Chanh was born in Bạc Liêu in 1958 and lives in Saigon. The backbone of the underground literary scene in Vietnam, a fearless critic of the government, he is the author of four collections of poems, *Đêm mặt trời mọc* [*Night of the Rising Sun*] (1990), *Khí hậu đồ vật* [*Inanimate Weather*] (1997), e-book *Cửa căn cước ẩn dụ* [*Coded Personal Info*] (2001) and *samizdat Ê, tao đây* [*Hey, I'm Here*] (2005). His poems have been translated into English by Linh Dinh and published in the journals *The Literary Review* and *Filling Station*, and in *Of Vietnam: Identities in Dialogue* (Palgrave 2001). Along with Phan Nhiên Hạo and Văn Cầm Hải, he's featured in *Three Vietnamese Poets* (Tinfish 2001), also translated by Linh Dinh. From the introduction to that book: Chanh's first collection, *Đêm mặt trời mọc*, came out in 1990 and was greeted by a degree of hostility almost comic in its intensity. In an article titled "The Bizarre in Night Of The Rising Sun," the newspaper *Youth* compared Chanh's work to "a cemetery of the spirit and of the body. There is nothing left for a person to look for or to lean on. [...] This work can only lead man towards madness, irresponsibility, obliviousness towards the present; humans and objects, the lofty and the abject, the real and the fake, right and wrong, virtues and cruelties are here mixed together in a slimy disgusting gob." In an article titled "An Unhealthy Book," the newspaper *The People* began by complaining of the "somewhat murky and entirely irrational title." Then it evoked Chanh's poem "Prometheus" to predict that both the poet's life and career will perish in a flame he's "toying with." In 2005, he gave a reading with Linh Dinh at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, as part of its Southeast Asian arts festival.

Namdeo Dhasal was born in 1949 , in a former 'untouchable community' in Pur-Kanersar village near Pune in Maharashtra. As a teenage taxi driver he lived among pimps, prostitutes, petty criminals, and gangsters in Bombay's underworld. He has had very little formal education. In 1972, he founded Dalit Panther, the militant organisation inspired by the Black Panther movement. The same year he published *Golpitha*. Since then he has published eight collections of poems from which this selection is drawn. In 2004 Sahitya Akademi honoured Dhasal with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Dhasal's long-time friend and bilingual poet **Dilip Chitre**, acclaimed for his translations of the seventeenth century Marathi poet-saint Tukaram, has translated Dhasal into English.

Linh Dinh was born in Saigon, Vietnam in 1963, came to the US in 1975, and has also lived in Italy and England. He is the author of two collections of stories, *Fake House* (Seven Stories Press 2000) and *Blood and Soap* (Seven Stories Press 2004), four books of poems, *All Around What Empties Out* (Tinfish 2003), *American Tatts* (Chax 2005), *Borderless Bodies* (Factory School 2006) and *Jam Alerts* (Chax 2007), with a novel, *Love Like Hate*, scheduled to be released in 2008 by Seven Stories Press. His work has been anthologized in *Best American Poetry 2000*, *Best American Poetry 2004*, *Best American Poetry 2007* and *Great American Prose Poems from Poe to the Present*, among other places. Linh Dinh is also the editor of the anthologies *Night, Again: Contemporary Fiction from Vietnam* (Seven Stories Press 1996) and *Three Vietnamese Poets* (Tinfish 2001), and translator of *Night, Fish and Charlie Parker*, the poetry of Phan Nhien Hao (Tupelo 2006). *Blood and Soap* was chosen by the *Village Voice* as one of the best books of 2004. His poems and stories have been translated into Italian, Spanish, Dutch, German, Portuguese, Japanese, Arabic, Icelandic and Finnish, and he has been invited to read his works all over the US, London, Cambridge, Berlin and Reykjavik. He has also published widely in Vietnamese.

Forrest Gander is the author of books of poems, translations, and prose, much of it published by New Directions. He has edited several anthologies of poems in translation and individual books by Mexican and Latin American writers. The recipient of the Nobel Maxwell Memorial Prize, Pushcart Prize, Gertrude Stein Award, and awards from PEN, The National Endowment for the Arts, The Whiting and the Guggenheim foundations, Gander publishes critical essays for numerous journals, including *The Nation*, *The Boston Review*, and *The*

Providence Journal. He is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Brown University in Rhode Island. His website can be found at: [Forrest Gander](#)

Joy Goswami was born on November 10, 1954 in Kolkata. Goswami's formal education stopped early, in grade eleven. His first poetry collection, named Christmas o Sheeter Sonnetguchchho (Sonnets of Christmas and Winter) brought him immediate critical acclaim. Goswami is one of the most powerful poets of Bengal and one of the best in the post-Jibanananda Das era of Bengali poetry. Primarily a poet, he has also written novels and literary prose. He has more than 30 published books, including three volumes of compiled poems numbering close to a thousand. He has written 12 novels, two of which are written in verse and 5 collections of essays related to interpretation and appreciation of Bengali poetry. He has received the most prestigious Ananda Puroshkar twice, in 1990 for Ghumiyechho Jhaupata? (Have you slept, Pineleaf?) and in 1998 for Jara Brishtite Bhijechhilo (Those Drenched in Rain). In 1997 he won the Bangla Academy Puroshkar for Bajrobidyut-bharti Khata (Scrapbook of Thunder and Lightning) and in the same year he also won the Birendra Chattopadhyay Smriti award for Patar Poshak (Garments of Leaf). The Sahitya Academy Award from the government of India came in 2000 for his collection of poems Paagli Tomar Shongey (With You, Crazy Girl). Goswami has expressed his dissent on several grave injustices that have taken place in India. These include the mass killing of Dalits in Jehana village in 2001 and the Nandigram massacre of 2007. He has been vocal against state brutalities. His poems have taken a very different turn in his most recent book of poems Shashoker Proti (To The Powers That Be), translated into English by Sampurna Chattarji. In 2007 he left the premier Bengali magazine, Desh and joined the newspaper, Sanbad Protidin, where he currently works.

Sampurna Chattarji is a poet, fiction writer and translator. Her translation of Joy Goswami's Surjo-Pora Chhai (The Ashen Sun) is forthcoming. Her books include Abol Tabol: The Nonsense World of Sukumar Ray (translation, Penguin, 2004). The Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) published her debut poetry collection Sight May Strike You Blind in 2007 and her first novel is forthcoming from HarperCollins.

W.N. Herbert was born in Dundee in 1961, and educated there and at Brasenose College, Oxford, where he published his Ph.D. thesis on the Scots poet Hugh MacDiarmid (To

Circumjack MacDiarmid, OUP, 1992). He has published seven volumes of poetry and four pamphlets, and he is widely anthologised.

His last five collections, all with the northern publisher Bloodaxe, have won numerous accolades. *Forked Tongue* (1994) was selected for the New Generation promotion, was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and was shortlisted for the T.S.Eliot and Saltire prizes. *Cabaret McGonagall* (1996) won a Northern Arts Award, and was shortlisted for the Forward and McVities prizes; and *The Laurelude* (1998), written whilst he was the Wordsworth Fellow at Grasmere, was a PBS Recommendation. All three books won Scottish Arts Council book awards. *The Big Bumper Book of Troy* (2002) was longlisted for Scottish Book of the Year and shortlisted for the Saltire Prize. His most recent Bloodaxe collection, *Bad Shaman Blues* (2006), was a PBS Recommendation, and was shortlisted for the Saltire Award and the T.S.Eliot Prize.

After holding several Scottish residencies he moved to Newcastle in 1994 to take up the Northern Arts Literary Fellowship and has remained there ever since, holding residencies with Cumbria Arts in Education and the Wordsworth Trust. He taught in the Department of Creative Writing at Lancaster University (1996-2002), and is now Professor of Poetry and Creative Writing in the School of English at the University of Newcastle.

He has engaged in numerous public art and cross-media projects in the North-East, making a film in Berwick, originating sculptures in Ambleside and Dumfries, writing a poem for a strip of stainless steel to be set into the pavement in Graingertown, and collaborating with the composer Naomi Pinnock on the ongoing project *Nostos*. He is the poetry consultant for the Westpark project, originating text and co-ordinating artworks across this development in Darlington, one of the largest public art projects in the North East.

In 2000 he edited the bestselling anthology *Strong Words: modern poets on modern poetry* with Matthew Hollis. He also edited the interactive CD-ROM *Book of the North* (NWN, 2000), featuring prominent writers and artists from the region; and recently edited *A Balkan Exchange: Eight Bulgarian and British Poets* (Arc, 2007), featuring both translations and specially composed poetry.

He lives in an old lighthouse in North Shields with his wife, the novelist Debbie Taylor, and his daughter Izzie.

László Krasznahorkai was born in 1954, in the town of Gyula in the east of Hungary, close to the Romanian border. Having studied Law first then literature in Budapest he went on to publish a series of novels and other writings. The current excerpts are from his first novel, *Satantango*, published in 1985. Other notable books available in English are *Az ellenállás melankóliája* (*The Melancholy of Resistance*), first published in Hungary in 1989 and in England nine years later and *Háború és háború* (*War and War*), published in Hungary and Germany in 1999 and in the USA 2006. Much of Krasznahorkai's work has been filmed by Béla Tarr and they have co-operated on a number of films. László Krasznahorkai has been a considerable traveller. His books are now in several languages and have received international prizes.

George Szirtes was born in Budapest in 1948. His family were refugees from the 1956 Uprising and settled in England where he studied sciences at school, trained as an artist and finished up being a poet and translator. His first book, *The Slant Door* won the Faber Prize in 1980. His twelve books since have won various awards, most recently the T S Eliot Prize for *Reel* (2004). He has been translating from the Hungarian since his first return in 1984 and has published over a dozen books of translated prose, verse and drama, that have won a number of prizes. He has edited a number of anthologies of Hungarian writing and written a book on art as well as a number of libretti and musicals. He reviews for *The Guardian*, *The Times* and other papers and teaches part time at the University of East Anglia. He is married to the artist Clarissa Upchurch, with whom he has published *Budapest: Image, Poem, Film* (2006) His website can be found at [George Szirtes](#)

Claudio Magris is the author of the landmark book *Danube*, a journey from the source to the Black Sea, and *Microcosms*, journeys in the area around Trieste, as well as the novels *Inferences From A Sabre* and *A Different Sea*. Till very recently, he was professor of modern German literature at the University of Trieste. Magris is the author of several scholarly works which include *Behind Words* and *Ithaca and Beyond*. He is a columnist for the *Corriere Della Sera*, and has been a member of the Italian Senate. He lives in Trieste.

Sharmistha Mohanty is the author of two novels, *Book One*, and *New Life*. An extract from *Book One* is at [New Writing 15](#). A long excerpt from *New Life* can be found at [Inertia Magazine](#).

Mohanty's work has appeared in journals and magazines in India, U.S.A., U.K., and France. She has held a fellowship at Germany's Akademie Schloss Solitude, as well as in France and the U.S.A. She is also a recipient of a Senior Fellowship in Literature from the Indian Ministry of Culture. Her translations of Tagore's fiction, *Ruined Nest and Other Stories* is due out soon. Mohanty attended the MFA programme in Fiction at the Iowa Writers Workshop. She is currently at work on a new novel, *Sub-continent*, and a book of prose texts, one of which can be found on the website of [George Szirtes](#).

More articles can be found at [New Statesman](#) and [Open Space India](#).

Fabio Morábito (1955) has written three books of poetry: *Lotes baldíos* (FCE, 1985), which won the Carlos Pellicer Prize, *De lunes todo el año* (Joaquín Mortiz, 1992), won the Aguascalientes Prize in 1991, and *Alguien de lava* (Era, 2002). These books have been featured in a volume *La ola que regresa* (FCE, 2006). He has also written three books of fiction, *La lenta furia* (1989, 2002), *La vida ordenada* (2000) and *Grieta de fatiga* (2006), which won the "Antonin Artaud" award in 2006 for its narrative. He has written a novel for children, *Cuando las panteras no eran negras* (Siruela, 1996). He has translated the complete works of Eugenio Montale and Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (UNAM, 2001). His works have been translated into German, English, French, Portuguese and Italian.

Poet and novelist **Jaime Saenz** (1921-1986) is considered the greatest Bolivian writer of the twentieth century. His poetry is apocalyptic, transcendent and hallucinatory. He lived his whole life in La Paz, Bolivia, seldom venturing out of the city. It is that indigenous culture of the place which features so prominently in all his writings. His life was defined by an intense experience of alcoholism and struggle. He sought God in unlikely places: slum taverns, alcoholic excess, and the street. Saenz was nocturnal. Occult in his politics, unashamedly bisexual, secretive in his leadership of a select group of writers, Saenz mixed the mystical and baroque with the fantastic, the psychological and the symbolic. He once stole a leg from a cadaver and hid it under his bed. On his wedding night he brought home a panther.

In *The Night*, Saenz explores the singular themes that possessed him: alcoholism, death, nightmares, identity, otherness and his love for La Paz. It is said that, the four movements of this epic poem, 'The Night', 'The Gatekeeper', 'Interval', and again, 'The Night', culminate in some of the most profoundly mystical, beautiful, and disturbing passages of modern Latin American poetry.

Kent Johnson is Instructor of English and Spanish at Highland Community College. His books include *Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz: Eleven Submissions to the War and Immanent Visitor: Selected Poems of Jaime Saenz*, with Forrest Gander.

Anne Waldman, poet, editor, performer, professor, curator, cultural activist carries in her genetics the lineages of the New American Poetry, and is considered an inheritor of The Black Mountain, Beat (Allen Ginsberg called her his "spiritual wife") and New York School (Frank O'Hara told her to "work for inspiration, not money") mantles as well as being an originator of her own deeply investigative and polyvalent "modal structures". She is a noted performer of her own work, and its rhizomic sprechstimme strategies. Her published work is prodigious. She has had her work translated into German, Italian, Czech and there are forthcoming editions in Chinese and French. She has been working on her epic IOVIS for over 25 years, now running to 800 pages. Waldman has helped create and nurture poetry zones in the USA and abroad for much of her life. She has received a National Endowment for the Arts award, the Shelley prize for poetry, and has had residences at the Civitella Ranieri Center in Umbria, The Atlantic Center for the Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center and at the Christian Woman's University in Tokyo. She has taught experimental writing workshops for years at the Zen Mountain Monastery, as well as universities and colleges across the USA and abroad. Recent appearances and residencies: Wesleyan University, Barnard College, Cal Arts, and The University of Buffalo, and she participated in a recent Poetry festival in Mumbai this past February of 2007, and the PEN World Voices in New York.

Directing the Poetry Project at St Mark's Poetry Project over a decade, she co-founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics with Allen Ginsberg at the Buddhist-inspired Naropa University in 1974. She currently is a Distinguished Professor and Chair of Naropa's Summer Writing Program and is working with the Study Abroad on the Bowery project in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Author and editor of over 40 books and small press editions of poetry, including the epic IOVIS project (two volumes published by Coffee House Press, 1993, 1997, the full text: *Colors In The Mechanism of Concealment* due in 2009) and has published in recent years: *MARRIAGE: A Sentence*, Penguin Poets 2000, *IN THE ROOM OF NEVER GRIEVE: New & Selected Poems* with CD collaboration with Ambrose Bye, Coffee House Press 2003, *Dark Arcana: Afterimage or Glow*, with photographs by Patti Smith,

Heavenbone Press 2003, and *STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD COMPARED TO A BUBBLE*, a long Buddhist poem, Penguin Poets 2004. She also co-edited the major anthology *CIVIL DISOBEDIENCES: Poetics & Politics in Action*, Coffee House Press 2004 with talks and essays by Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Michael Ondaatje, Barbara Guest, Robert Creeley, Sonia Sanchez and others. She has directed productions with the Gertrude Stein Players in Boulder, Colorado and has worked in collaboration with students, dancers, videographers, visual artists, musicians, composers for over 30 years. She has, in particular collaborated with artists Joe Brainard, George Schneeman, Susan Rothenberg, Elizabeth Murray, Donna Dennis and Richard Tuttle and her husband, movie director and writer Ed Bowes. She has also helped cultivate and worked with poetry programs in Vienna (the historic Schule fur Dichtung) and Prague. She is co-founder of the Poetry Is News collective which curates forums of political and poetical discussion, and is a co- artistic/curriculum Director of The Study Abroad On the Bowery Program in New York City.

RED NOIR, a collection of short performance pieces and the CD *THE EYE OF THE FALCON* (produced and with music by her son Ambrose Bye are now available from Farfalla, McMillen and Parrish. And *OUTRIDER* - a selection of essays, interviews and poetry, including an interview Waldman did with Nicaraguan poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal, has just been published by La Alameda press in New Mexico. She is also a cultural guardian of some of the history and archive of the New American Poetry L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry and beyond and is active with the Audio Archive project at Naropa which has thousands of hours of readings, performances, lectures, panels by the likes of William Burroughs, John Cage, Gregory Corso, Jackson MacLow, Jerome Rothenberg, Allen Ginsberg, Roberto Tejada, Lyn Hejinian, Leslie Scalapino, Diane diPrima, Joanne Kyger, Gary Snyder, Amiri Baraka, Cecilia Vicuna and many others. Anne Waldman's comprehensive and ongoing personal Archive resides at the Hatcher Graduate Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Some of her performance work may be accessed on Charles Bernstein's PENN SOUND. She makes her home in New York City and Boulder, Colorado and frequently travels to other poetry zones throughout the world, most recently the Conference on 20th Century American Poetry in Wuhan, China and at the International Literature Festival in Berlin (2007).

