

## ALMOST ISLAND

### Contributors: Winter 2011

**Haruki Amanuma** (1953 - ), a German scholar by training, is a novelist as well as a premier scholar of zeppelin in Japan. He is the author of several experimental and lyrical novels for adults, as well as numerous books about history of flying for children. Currently the vice-president of the Japan Grimms' Association as well as the chair of the Japanese Children's Books Association, he is working on translation of Andersen's tales as well as the sequel to *Water Cat*. This novel, whose first three chapters are included in this issue, was the recipient of the prestigious 1998 Japan Children Books Award.

**Michael Biggins's** book-length translations of works by Slovene poet Tomaž Šalamun and novelist Vladimir Bartol, Drago Jančar and Boris Pahor have been published by Harcourt, Northwestern University Press and others. He curates the Slavic and East European library collections and teaches Slavic languages, both at the University of Washington in Seattle.

**Nikhil Govind** is finishing a doctoral degree in south asian literature at the University of California at Berkeley. His research focuses on the figure of the revolutionary in the mid century Hindi novel. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Chandrabhaga* and *Sous Rature*. A video of him reading poems (with A.B. Spellman) as part of UC Berkeley's Holloway Series in Poetry can be found [here](#).

**Takashi Hiraide**, born in Fukuoka prefecture in 1950, is a major poet coming out of Japan's postwar generation. He is the author of over fifteen books, and is a recipient of several literary awards in the various genres in which he writes. These include poetry in free verse (*The Inn*), prose poetry (*For the Fighting Spirit of the Walnut*), off-prose poetry (*Notes for My Left-hand Diary*), tanka (*One Hundred and Eleven Tankas to Mourn My Father*), criticism (*At the Tip of Attack*), essay (*The Berlin Moment*), and fiction (*A Guest Cat*). He is a Professor of Art Science and a member of the Institute for Art Anthropology at Tama Art University.

**Ayane Kawata** was born in 1940 in the city of Qiqihar in the Heilongjiang Province of northeast China. In 1969, the publication of and subsequent acclaim she received for her first book, *Time of Sky* (Kumo Publishers, 1969), established her as a prominent and emerging Japanese poet. The same year, she moved to Italy, where she has lived for most of her subsequent years. Kawata has published ten books of poetry, the majority of them by the

most important publishers of contemporary Japanese poetry: Shichosha, Shoshi Yamada, and Seidosha. Her poems have often featured in major poetry publication journals in Japan, such as Gendaishitecho, Midnight Press, and Eureka, and have been widely anthologized. In 1994 she was selected to have a book in the prestigious Gendaishi Bunko Series, anthologizing and republishing a sizable selection of her work. *Time of Sky / Castles in the Air* is Kawata's first book-length translation into English.

**Nicholas Laughlin** is the editor of *The Caribbean Review of Books* and a writer with a particular interest in Caribbean literature and art. His essays, reviews, and poems have been published in various journals and catalogues, and most are also available on his [website](#). He is also co-director of [Alice Yard](#), a contemporary art space and network based in Port of Spain, and co-editor of the broadside literature and art journal *Town*. He was born and has always lived in Trinidad.

**Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh** (bio note by Nikhil Govind) was born almost the exact moment of the Russian Revolution--in November 1917, and his socialist leanings were to remain strong throughout his life, sometimes getting him into trouble with the government. He belonged to a Maharashtrian family but wrote mostly in Hindi, a sign of the vastness, fluidity and permeability of the Hindi-speaking area and the Hindi language itself--his brother became an influential literary figure in Marathi, a sign of the breadth and tolerance of linguistic interactions across regional cultures that has an urgent relevance today. Muktibodh began to publish young and was one of the poets included in the influential first *Tar Saptak* (roughly translatable as "the higher, more difficult octave") collection. This collection, published in 1943, is often regarded as a turning point in Hindi literary modernism for its freer and more diverse rhythms and themes. This recognition did not help Muktibodh economically and his life was spent working briefly in varied jobs including the airforce, as print and radio journalist, and mostly as teacher in various schools in small towns scattered throughout central and northern India--Shujalpur, Ujjain, Indore, Jabalpur, Nagpur, Benaras as well as, briefly, in the larger cities of Calcutta, Bangalore and Bombay. Perhaps these travels sharpened his ear to the wider, more abruptly spoken and colloquial Hindi that his poems sometimes contain. Equally, his Masters in Hindi from Nagpur University gave his work historical depth--his literary criticism of the older Hindi poet Jayashankar Prasad's work carve out a newer understanding of the modern subject pruned of the cosmological-nationalist posture that Prasad's work had assumed at the crest of the freedom struggle in the twenties and thirties. Muktibodh retained much of the Sanskritized vocabulary of Prasad--but his subject, emerging out of the delirium of the World War and Partition, was marked by the fifties sentiment of imminent nuclear cataclysm.

**Mariko Nagai** is the author of *Histories of Bodies* (Red Hen Press, 2005), the winner of the 2005 James Saltman Poetry Award; and *Georgic*, the winner of the 2009 GS Sharat Chandra Prize and forthcoming from BkMk Press in 2010. She has received fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center, Yaddo, Djerassi, and UNESCO-Aschberg Bursaries for Artists. She is Assistant Professor and Director of Writing Programs at Temple University, Japan Campus, in Tokyo.

**Sawako Nakayasu** was born in Japan and has lived mostly in the US since the age of six. Her books include *Texture Notes* (Letter Machine Editions, 2010), *Hurry Home Honey* (Burning Deck, 2009), *Nothing fictional but the accuracy or arrangement* (she, Quale Press, 2005), and *So we have been given time Or*, (Verse Press, 2004). Books of translations include *Time of Sky / Castles in the Air* by Ayane Kawata (Litmus Press, 2010) and *For the Fighting Spirit of the Walnut* by Takashi Hiraide (New Directions, 2008), which won the 2009 Best Translated Book Award from Three Percent, as well as *Four From Japan* (Litmus Press / Belladonna Books, 2006) featuring four contemporary poets, and *To the Vast Blooming Sky* (Seeing Eye Books), a chapbook of poems by the Japanese modernist Chika Sagawa. Her translation of Sagawa's *Collected Poems* is forthcoming in 2013 from Canarium Books. She has received fellowships from the NEA and PEN, and her own work has been translated into Japanese, Swedish, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese. More information can be found on her [own website](#).

**Sarah O'Brien** is a graduate of Brown University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She grew up on a small farm in Ohio and has lived in Cape Town, Paris, and various places in the United States. Her first book of poems, *Catch Light* (Coffee House Press, 2010), was a National Poetry Series winner in the US. She is currently based in Atlanta, Georgia, where she is opening a bakery.

**Tomaz Šalamun** lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He will teach Spring semester 2011 at Michener Center for Writers at The University of Texas. His recent books translated into English are *Woods and Chalices* (Harcourt 2008), *Poker* (Ugly Duckling Presse, second edition 2008) and *There's the Hand and There's the Arid Chair* (Counterpath Press, 2009). His *Blue Tower* is due from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in Fall 2011.

Born and raised in India where she taught English and worked as a freelance journalist, **Mukta Sambrani** moved to the US in 1999, where she earned an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Her first book of poems, *The Woman in this room isn't lonely* was published by Writer's Workshop, Calcutta in 1997. Her work has appeared in journals and anthologies such as *Verse*, *Em Literary*, *Cipactli*, *Fourteen*

*Hills, Hyphen Magazine, Laundry Pen, The Scribbler, Poetry Chain, Fulcrum, The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets, Sixty Indian Poets* edited by Jeet Thayil and an anthology of contemporary Indian women's poetry published by Sahitya Akademi--*We Speak in Changing Languages*. She is the recipient of the 2003 Audre Lorde creative writing award and an honorable mention for the Starcherone prize. She lives in Berkeley, California and teaches English at a High School in neighboring Oakland.

**Ryoko Sekiguchi** was born in Tokyo in 1970. At an early age she began to write poetry in both Japanese and French, and when she was eighteen she received the Tokyo Literature Prize of *Cahiers de la poésie contemporaine*. Since 1997 she has lived in Paris, where she studied Art History at the Sorbonne. Three years later she completed her doctorate in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Tokyo. Today she teaches at various institutes including INALCO, the Paris Research Centre for Oriental Languages and Civilisations. Sekiguchi has received numerous grants from the Japanese Foundation for Writing Arts and the Centre National du Livre, amongst others. Her poems have been translated into English, Korean, Swedish, and Arabic. The Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Maison des Ecrivains, the New York Library and the San Francisco City University are all institutions where Sekiguchi has been invited to give readings. She has participated with writing contributions in exhibitions of contemporary art, of which the last--*Le monde est rond* (2004; Engl: *The World is Round*)--is documented in book-form. In 2007 her volume of poetry, *Adagio ma non troppo* was published. Sekiguchi lives in Paris.

**Cole Swensen** is the author of thirteen volumes of poetry, most recently *Greensward* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010) and *Ours* (University of California Press, 2008), which was supported by a grant from the Creative Capital Foundation and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Her 2004 title, *Goest*, was a finalist for the National Book Award, and other volumes have won the Iowa Poetry Prize, the San Francisco State Poetry Center Book Award, Sun and Moon's New American Writing Award, and the National Poetry Series. A 2007 Guggenheim Fellow, she is the co-editor of the 2009 Norton anthology *American Hybrid*. She's also a translator of contemporary French poetry, prose, and art criticism; her translation of Jean Fremon's *The Island of the Dead* won the 2004 PEN USA Award for Literary Translation, and she has received translation grants from the Association Beaumarchais and French Centre du Livre. The founder and editor of La Presse, a small press dedicated to experimental French poetry translated by English-language poets, she co-directs the annual Reid Hall Translation Seminar in Paris. She was the writer-in-residence at Yale's Beinecke Library in 2007-2008 and has served as a visiting writer at the Pratt Institute, Brown University, Temple University, Grinnell College, and the Vermont

Studio Center. She teaches at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and divides her time between Iowa, Washington DC, and Paris.

**Gene Tanta** was born in Timisoara, Romania and lived there until 1984, when his family immigrated to the United States. Since then, he has lived in DeKalb, Iowa City, New York, Oaxaca City, Iasi, Milwaukee, and Chicago. He is a poet, visual artist, and translator of contemporary Romanian poetry. His two poetry books (both excerpted from in this issue) are *Unusual Woods* and *Pastoral Emergency*. Tanta earned his MFA in Poetry from the Iowa's Writers' Workshop in 2000 and his PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2009 with literary specialization in twentieth-century American poetry and the European avant-garde. His journal publications include: *EPOCH*, *Ploughshares*, *Circumference Magazine*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Watchword*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, and *The Laurel Review*. Tanta also has had two collaborative poems with Reginald Shepherd anthologized in *Saints of Hysteria: A Half-Century of Collaborative American Poetry*. Currently, he is working on two anthologies while teaching post-graduate creative writing online for UC Berkeley Extension.