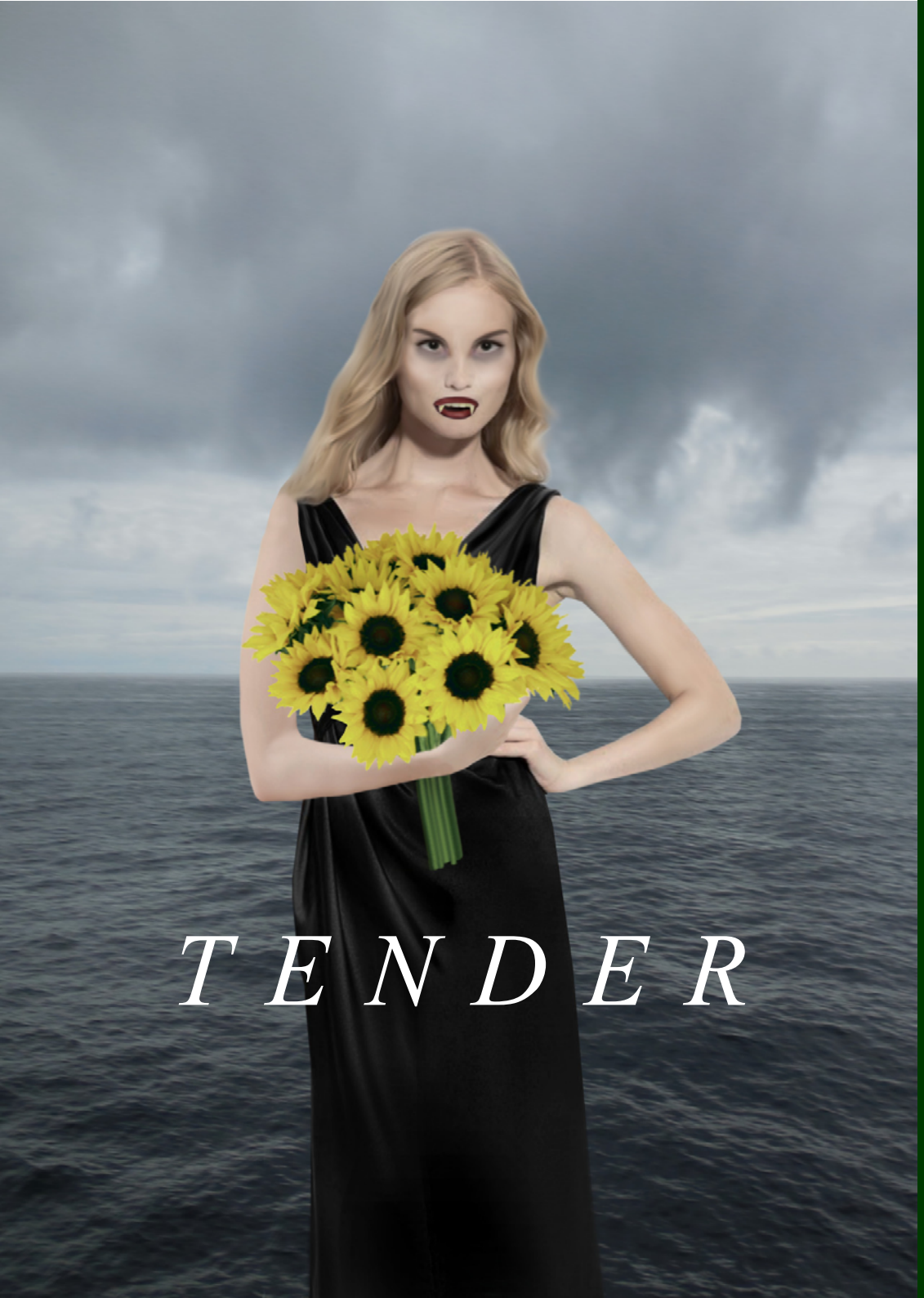


TENDER

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL MADE BY WOMEN

✶

EDITORS
RACHAEL ALLEN & SOPHIE COLLINS
editors@tenderjournal.co.uk

COVER & CONTENTS PAGE
MADELINE KUZAK
maddiekuzak.tumblr.com

Woman on train in August

‘I was alive, but I paid for it heavily. Oh fair
enough, although my coin was sex-specific.
I cupped such tenderness later in both hands
and nowhere could accept it. Now easing by
this railway cutting, rife with buddleia snouts
– bull terrier profiles solemn white, crinkled
in mauve or rusting brown at cocky angles –
we will shortly be arriving at Tale Parochial
where our journey ends. All our belongings.’

How some things came

Quant catalogues came sketched on tracing paper.
Tights came as a revelation.
Sobranies came in canary yellow, sky blue, or rosy papers.
Roll-ups always came undone.
Jam-jar papers came as pearly discs like oyster shell linings.
Abortion Law Reform Association newsletters came in plain wrappers.
Mascara came as cakes in little pans then came to grief.
Solicitors' letters came in very long envelopes.
Art postcards from friends came inked in flocks.
Court orders came 'served', or thrown at you, by courier.
Free school meals application forms came on blurry lined paper.
People usually came in twos.
It came to be intolerable.
Came apart easily but so harshly.

Strange Courtship

These are the rules.

White lilac means: 'I am falling in love with you.'
Mauve lilac means: 'Are your feelings still the same?'

You give me the white today.
Then wait five days. Don't phone me.

On the sixth day I'll give you: mauve.
Then I'll see what's laid on my doorstep in the morning.

Mint, maybe.
Or laburnum.

It must mean something devastating.
Or else I won't play.

The Hospital Porter

The hospital porter is a philosopher
but he tells no one about it.

He goes home to his room every day
and tries to wash the smell of death off his blue clothes.

But he can still smell it –
even when his clothes are clean.

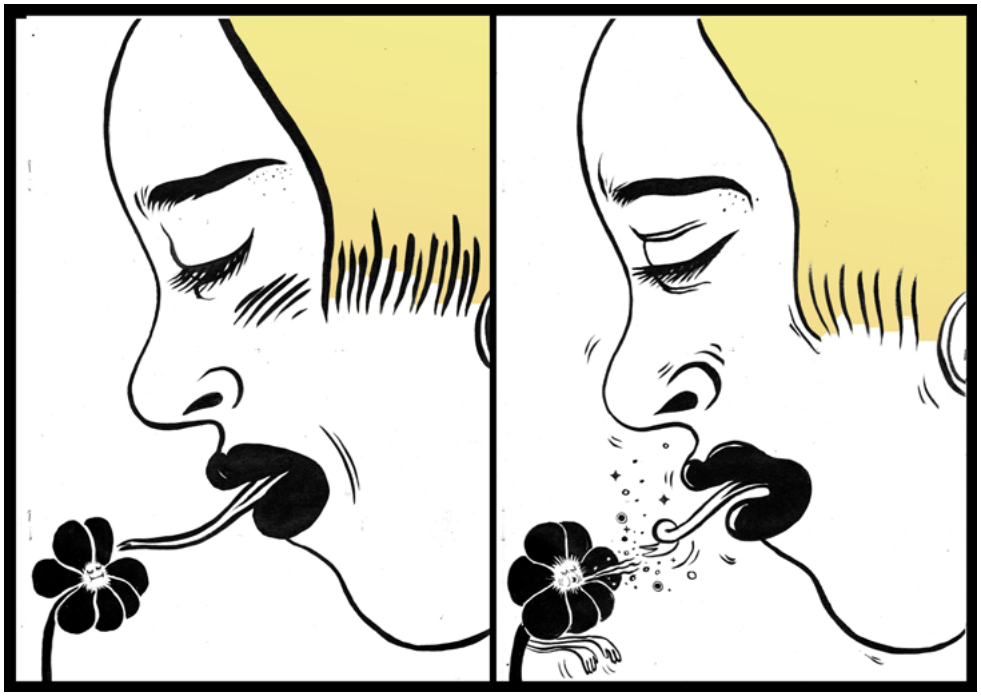
On his wedding day, his short hair was decorated with the blossom
that had blown down from the cherry tree.

But when he kissed his wife on their wedding night,
the petals were nowhere to be seen.

His new wife said: Don't worry! I didn't get married just for flowers.
But that wasn't true.

From then on, each time he worked the night shift
she placed another item in her suitcase.

By winter she was gone.
Snow fell on her hair like confetti!



EMBARRASSING

it's close to humiliating
how people use the word
limitless in earnest

(almost there!)

anything can be dynamic
if you rub your pennies
together fast enough

(too late!)

uselessly seems
a way of living
under the threshold

A DEPICTION OF MY BODY

a depiction of my body as small, neat
as though she doesn't eat corridors, hallways
as though she crawls in streets, tall

a description of a politics outside of power, pride
as though we move sideways, against towers
as though we are, butt first, against tides so sour

a denunciation of the coldness in things, a hearth
as though here, on earth, I have access to empathy
imagining, with fright, a power in women

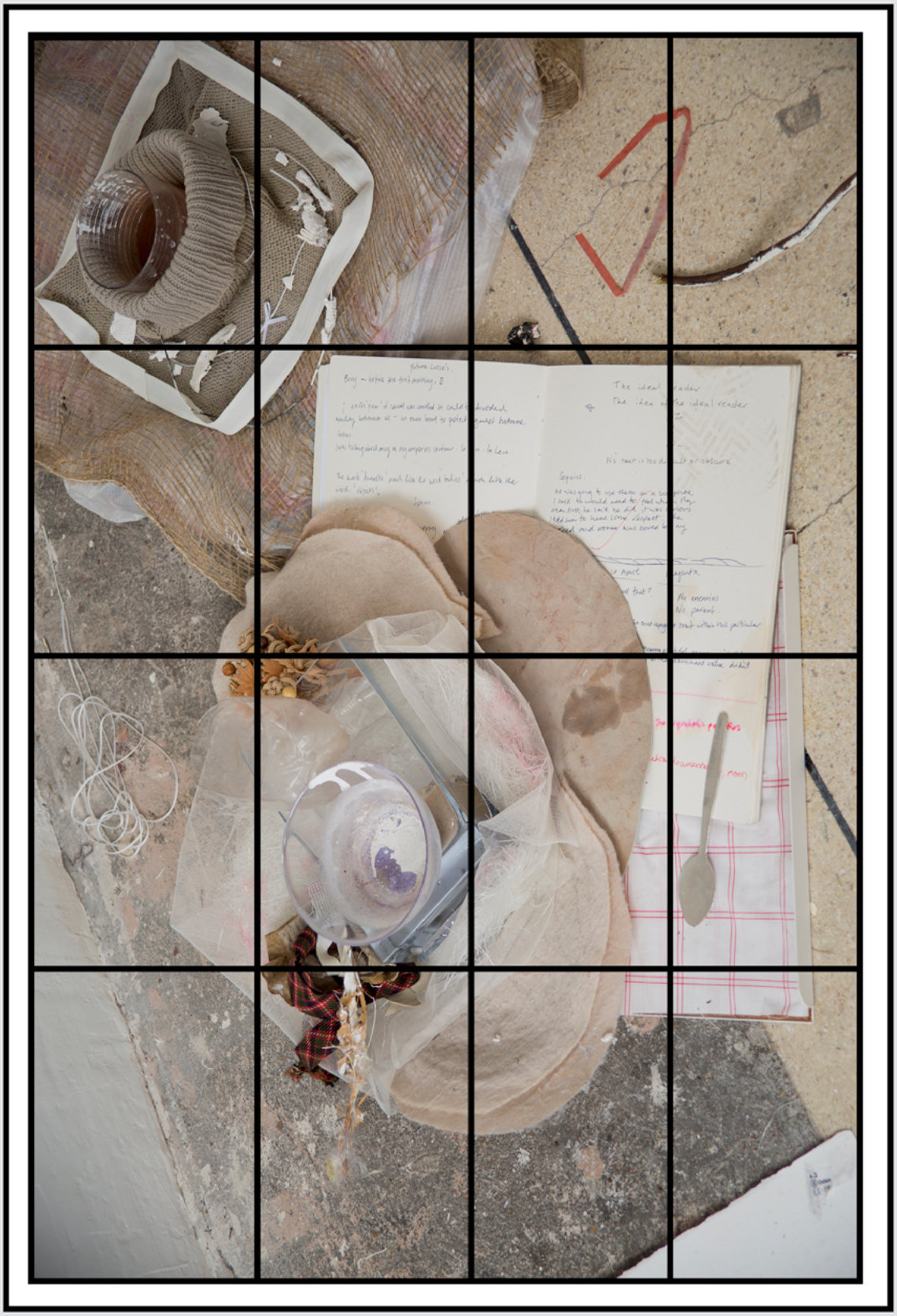
UNPROTECTED

falling
into
the

type of sleep

that has to
involve

strangers



KHAIRANI BAROKKA
in conversation with
DEBORAH SMITH

I TOO DESPERATELY HOPE I'LL DO THINGS RIGHT AS AN OUTSIDER. NO 'VOICING AS THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS' BULLSHIT

I first came across Khairani Barokka (Okka to her friends) when I saw an ad for a London performance of Eve and Mary are Having Coffee*, the deaf-accessible solo spoken word performance she'd premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe. Sod's law meant I wasn't able to be there, but later, when I'd decided for reasons still obscure that the best way to supplement a career as a literary translator (being famously well paid) was to start a small press, one focusing on translations from Asian languages that would publish at least 50% women (but in reality much more) and prize formal, stylistic and linguistic experimentation over such tawdry concerns as whether the books might sell at all, Okka's name was still in my head, and so I looked her up. That's one version, at least; the other is that I Googled something along the lines of 'badass Indonesian artist writer woman' and was met with images of Okka performing, leading workshops and wearing a series of fierce outfits. Either way, when she showed me the manuscript for* Indigenous Species *and explained her idea to produce it as a sight-impaired-accessible art book, my immediate thought was 'No one else will ever publish this; we have to publish this.' Fuck commercial viability, this*

was EXCITING. A year on, and with the book about to go to print, I know it was the right decision. All of us at Tilted Axis Press are grateful that Okka joined us at a stage when her radical work around accessibility has the chance to shape our entire publishing practice for all the years that lie ahead.

✷

Deborah Smith: Indigenous Species *developed out of a spoken word performance – is there a meaningful difference for you between poetry on the page and poetry as it's performed? And does that performative aspect/potential (I know that physical performance isn't always going to be an option, depending on your health) make it a completely different beast to other forms of writing you're engaged with, whether that be fiction, essay or (I apologise for even bringing it up) your PhD thesis?*

Khairani Barokka: You're hereby forgiven for bringing up what I've monikered 'The Peej' (as though it's a wee marmoset wearing pajamas, perfectly innocuous, instead of twisting round in the head constantly…). Though I think any and all poetry can be performed in any number of ways, there are definitely flourishes that are applied to performing with the intention of having a different effect to the written, more oral improv opportunities, of course, such as the chance to improvisationally interact with audience members, in a way immediately engaging to both poet-performer and person engaged with. These are different sensorial languages, the same poem experienced differently by a D/deaf reader, a sight-impaired reader, or someone who identifies as both. I do, however, think spoken poetry gets an undeserved rap for being more of the same, or somehow lesser than written poetry, when it's open to innumerable variations. Poetry is poetry. Indonesian cultures have an incredible and varied amount of different ways in which spoken and written poetry are weaved into society. The entire Javanese alphabet read aloud, or silently, for that matter, is a single poem. Serat Centhini is an ancient, 12-volume narrative poem in Javanese. Improv comedy-poetry MC-ing is an aspect of Padang or West Sumatran culture I love. And those are just three examples, from cultures I happen to come from.

So much of the disciplinary boundary making is artificial, especially when you realise that seeing art in terms of a painting framed on a wall, rather than carvings on a temple you visit daily, or call-and-response song-poetry at gatherings, historically came from Western influences, and the meanings of such things are being forgotten. We're slowly losing the myriad ways of how

to be a community, from forgetting the meanings of textile patterns to full-on language extinction. As a result, I've had a real sense of wanting to recenter the oral and tactile, and the multiplicity of forms within art and literature, to try to preserve in a tiny way disability cultures, feminist cultures (Padang culture is the largest matrilineal population in the world, for example, with varying degrees of implementation, of course, which probably explains all the strong-willed women in my family). Expressing that frantic sense of panic at all these losses on a grand scale, of culture and nature, feeling unmoored as we watch terrible social and environmental policies' effects – these anxieties are what foreground a lot of work, never knowing what form that expression will ultimately take.

WHAT DOES FEMINISM MEAN FOR YOU AND, CRUCIALLY, DOES IT TRANSLATE?

I envisioned and made *Indigenous Species* as a visual/oral performance, but then, having a new appreciation for the tactile as a language, as a sense, as a form of literature that is so ignored and belittled, brought it to its current form, as a poem ensconced in collage art and Braille. It's also, of course, a love letter to the book as a physical art object. One of my best friends is a book artist, and I've slowly woken up to the magic of making something you hold in your hands and open wide. I do think we seeing folk lose a lot of tactile understandings when everything is digital. The other day I was speaking to someone on videochat on my phone, and suddenly said, 'You're in a metal box right now.' And that box is flat, and has been produced by humans out of most people's line of sight we hope didn't have to suffer too much to make it … (Though then, of course, books mean the unfortunate cutting down of trees, unless from truly sustainable means.) With my body and the way it's experienced change over the years, as opposed to 'abled' people, because you move slower, you do notice the tactile more.

The *visibility* of signs that are ostensibly for blind or seeing-impaired folks, but are actually for the benefit of seeing people, is something I've become more aware of in reading the literature and being involved in accessibility work. *Indigenous Species* is in a way trying to do the opposite of that – in the non-Braille-and-tactile version, which is for seeing people, it's very important for me to have a marker of absence: of Braille and the tactile not being there, which is what blind and sight-impaired artists and activists have long brought attention to, and what someone feels on a smooth-surfaced book.

As for performing and health – and, as you know, though my particular disability involves chronic pain and health, many, many other disabilities do not, and don't cause suffering except for discrimination – a big struggle for an arts workaholic is to listen to the body, and stop when it tells you to stop, to move in a way that lessens pain rather than increases it. When I performed prior to 2014, I would nearly kill myself performing standing up, just because that was what I saw all around me, and then crash to bits in private later. So in *Eve and Mary Are Having Coffee* I deliberately performed 98% of the show lying down in various poses, in order to normalize it, as at that time I still wasn't getting the medical treatment I needed. So from then on, and when I perform now, I still have to drown out all the voices that make me feel self-conscious, if it's a day when I won't be able to performing standing, or sitting, and have to perform lying down. Even for an arts and disability practitioner, those voices still exist, until you scare them off. More improv opportunities for sure, since you get that drive to prove that difference doesn't mean less rich, elevated, mischievous or impactful. I can do sit down or lie down spoken word and be fine. And if you're not fine with it, that's your problem.

DS: *Art and activism seem to go hand in hand for you. As well as all your writing, performance and artwork, you've advocated for reproductive rights for disabled women in Indonesia, participated in accessible translations from a women-only language in India, and much more besides. Last year, you spoke at a symposium on 'Translation in the Margins' on why accessibility in translation, and widening the remit of 'accessible translation' is a feminist issue, particularly for the Global South. What does feminism mean for you and, crucially, does it translate? Do you see feminism as a means for women to form alliances across languages, cultures, professions etc., or is not enough space being given for local inflections and specificities?*

KB: Lots of activism, sadly, is unpaid labour with an emotional and physical toll, so I feel very cautious about using the word these days. I struggle with not wanting to reify and glorify it, at the same time as I'm very grateful for your recognition of the work as activism. We need to get very serious about self-care as activists, especially as women, when we constantly have to correct people and/or find safe spaces for ourselves. And in response to your question, there isn't enough space, for sure, in much of Western media – but there may be plenty of space in a specified local setting. In Minang matrilineal culture, our bloodline and clan affiliations are passed on through women, though there are all sorts of complications relating to certain titles being given to men only alongside that, religious leadership concerns that

may still be patriarchal, etc. I live as part of my family among all this, and there's scholarship about it, but these particular feminist struggles I feel are mostly negotiated very privately within individual families and households. A woman in Porto Alegre, Brasil, dealing with her own experiences of feminism and striving for it, has no idea that any of this stuff is going on in the Minang diaspora, if she's even heard of it. But just because we may have never heard of each other, and our struggles don't go on blast in Western media, doesn't at all mean that these stories in the global majority (if you want to avoid calling us 'the Global South') don't exist, and doesn't at all mean our stories aren't crucially important. Feminisms, to me, are plural or nothing. White European feminisms may universalise assumptions about women that don't apply to everyone, or worse, proclaim that, for example, us Muslim women 'need to be saved'. Abled feminisms have their own issues with erasure. Speaking disabled feminisms may erase non-speaking disabled feminisms. So do Javanese feminisms that don't take into account aspects of life that occur for Sundanese women, which is to say, West Javanese, an entirely different culture from Javanese (Javanese and West Javanese – also known as Sundanese – are two entirely different cultures and languages). Within Javanese itself, you find local variations in how women face life. I'm sure I make tons of generalisations all the time that may not apply to everyone. This is why feminisms to me are always plural, and always intersectional – we don't exist as sectional inhabitants. We exist as human beings, and the human experience is mindbogglingly diverse and complicated.

Who in the UK knows about the first Indonesian Women's Congress in the 1920s? There are so many different kinds of feminism that we're all learning about slowly, that I only have basic knowledge of still. We need to have all voices at the table, but it also matters which table, and why and how. There are incredible social movements that don't have Twitter accounts nor English fluency, and they need to be respected and acknowledged as existing, vital and fluid.

DS: *Indonesia is famous for having an incredible mix of languages – 'more than 700 living languages' according to the authority that is Wikipedia, though I doubt they're including languages used by Deaf and disabled communities, which I know is a topic close to your heart. What's your relationship to these languages, both personally and as an artist?*

Identifying as disabled for political purposes has gradually led to even more understanding of the ways in which people seen as 'other' are excluded,

including in terms of the languages and poetics of D/deaf and disabled people. My peer Slamet Amex Thohari writes in his book Disability in Java, for instance, that though Javanese gods included disabled deities, with the influence of Dutch colonial medicine, these differences became seen as things to be healed and erased, regardless of whether the recipient of care saw it as an illness. It's become increasingly clear to me how commonplace it is to dehumanise D/deaf and disabled people and languages, usually by framing us in terms of charity objects, especially when we're brown and female. It's something I'm enjoying playing with a lot in the PhD, which involves both writing and visual work, and pushing against that dehumanisation in hopefully more informed ways is something my work has dealt with a lot in the last five years. It's an added layer to somehow realising that we're devalued by large parts of the world for being who we are. It is something many of us go through, so it helps to know others are pushing back as well.

THERE ARE INCREDIBLE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THAT DON'T HAVE TWITTER ACCOUNTS NOR ENGLISH FLUENCY, AND THEY NEED TO BE RESPECTED AND ACKNOWLEDGED AS EXISTING, VITAL AND FLUID

DS: *You've included some untranslated snippets of Bahasa Indonesia in IS, though with a glossary at the back. I was initially happy to do without a glossary, as I think the refusal to translate can, in carefully chosen instances, be an effective way to protest against the terrific imbalance in global translation flows – when the majority of Asian countries translate almost exclusively from English, to the detriment of engaging with their own neighbours' literature, and with an almost complete lack of reciprocation on the part of the 'powerful' countries like the UK and US – and ideas of cultural assimilation, it can be a momentary disruption in smooth consumption that can shift power back to the 'insiders'. This is especially important at a time when fluent command of English is one of the major criteria for membership in the global elite (not least in the publishing world). I would never italicise, though: to italicise is to exoticise. What's your view on the politics of transparency vs. opacity when it comes to translation?*

KB: I think transparency-opacity can be a false dichotomy for translation. For instance, yes, there is Bahasa Indonesia in *Indigenous Species*, and also one sentence in Baso Minang/Padang, from West Sumatra – so I think the glossary is important to include, in that it does at the least explain that

these non-English words are not all from the same language. Sometimes transparency in that sense is really needed to avoid generalisations, to enrich the reader's understanding, in conjunction with non-italicising to avoid exoticising.

Completely agree on English being problematic in terms of enforcing cultural norms – which is why it is important to dismantle the master's house without the master's tools, etc. Certainly I've thought about this constantly, with much guilt, as an Indonesian who works primarily in English, hoping not to enforce the perception that English is in any way better than our rich local languages! But firstly, we should of course never assume that someone who reads a work in English is an 'insider', as increasingly more people speak English as well as other languages, and Singlish (in Singapore), Spanglish, English-based sign languages, etc. are, in their own complicated ways, certainly subversions of the English we see in most British media. I do think, and what I think you and I are both trying to do is, if we recognise how problematic English can be, and work to preserve local languages at the same time, there are also opportunities to dismantle the master's house a wee bit with those tools. Taking things down a notch. Maybe someone who doesn't speak an Indonesian language will buy *Indigenous Species*, turn to that page with the rainforest-lipstick, and understand a new connection – between children unable to go to school in Southeast Asia, due to smog from forest fires, and what they choose to put on their lips, thanks to unsustainable palm oil plantations. Little prayers like that went into the work.

DS: *The artwork for* Indigenous Species *is a bright, exciting, jagged collage, featuring patterns based on Kalimantan fabrics, historical photographs, and even a cameo appearance by your mum! Could you talk a little bit about the ideas and techniques that went into it, the impulse behind researching certain traditions and incorporating them into your work, subverting stereotypes around the jungle, etc.?*

KB: Thank you, Deborah, and yes, you know the pressure is on when you put your mum's head in your book! She's seen every iteration of the page she's on at this point, and thankfully it has her blessings. I can visit home in peace, haha. To sum it up, I freestyled with *Indigenous Species* in terms of collage – the bright pink-orange-blue-purple-green river is a contemporary Kalimantan print, not an old, traditional one, and I look at prints like that and am of two minds: *Cultures evolve, and art can go anywhere (certainly this book isn't upholding ancient forms of poetry, and the pictures I incorporate in it*

come from many places, not all in Indonesia) and also, How much human effort into making and marketing contemporary prints for consumption displaces knowledge we're losing, and aren't disseminating, about our traditions, in textiles and otherwise? I wanted to show the bright river water that flows through each page of the book as analogous to the forces of time and commercialism, with some ambiguity. In the spirit of artists who take the colour black and how it's used in language to highlight the dehumanisation of black Americans, and in turn glorifies that blackness in art, I wanted 'bright' and 'neon' to evoke anxiety and pressure in terms of the mass destruction of rainforest,

indigenous habitats, and native cultures of all kinds. I wanted to show that the rainforest, though it contains bright colours in its cultures and nature, is actually dark when it's healthy, and soothingly alive in that darkness. I wanted artificial colours and freneticism to be the frightening part of this story. There are a few traditional motifs from Dayak cultures that I did incorporate in accordance with their meanings; there's a page with just the symbols that travelers traditionally wear, that match the verse. But the visuals are a mish-mashed thing.


And develop philosophy so astonishing
It will be studied by all of five
Anthropologists in one-movie-theatre,
Frostbitten towns in far-off lands,
And drivers in cities the factory built into ash,
Who wish they had more time to know.
Alam takambang menjadi guru.
Nature as teacher and womb,
Zygote fraternal twin to sapling.

DS: *When I was writing the blurb for* Indigenous Species*, I remember lazily shoehorning 'anti-colonialist' in alongside 'feminist' and 'environmentalist', and you gently correcting me, explaining that it wouldn't be accurate to portray environmental and cultural degradation in Indonesia as solely or even primarily a hangover from colonial times. One of the reasons I wanted Tilted Axis Press to publish exclusively contemporary work was to get away from the tendency to view vast swathes of the world through the prism of colonialism, as though this were the most important thing to ever happen there (on the other hand, I sometimes daydream about what it would be like if UK writers thought it was the most important thing ever to have happened here ...). Do you think that more translations of contemporary writing from Indonesia, and South-East Asia more widely, would change these perceptions?*

KB: Ha, absolutely, re: thinking about colonialism as something harmful to the thinking and policies of the coloniser. The effects, of course, are lingering, and permeate, for example, how feminism and suffragettes are spoken of here in the UK, whilst the denial of rights of women in colonies at the time are tacitly condoned. I certainly think that more translations of contemporary writing from Indonesia and Southeast Asia are needed, between Southeast Asian countries and also beyond, hopefully to make people from elsewhere in the world not think twice about seeing us as human and worthy of having our humanity preserved, which, with the proliferation of stereotypes and ignorance about us, especially us Southeast Asian women, is not a small thing. It translates into everything from policies towards millions of domestic workers abroad to mistreatment of sex workers on a mass scale to how we manufacture palm oil to the psyche of an individual woman. Everything depends on diminishing gaps in power imbalances, of course, and that applies to languages as well.

I don't think you were incorrect at all that colonialism contributed to how screwed up our environment and social welfare have been – large-scale extraction of resources to feed wealth elsewhere can't help but leave a lasting mark. However, the tragic effects of Cold War politics resulting in mass murder and Soeharto's New Order government, which deeply scarred Indonesia's environment and the welfare of many, shouldn't be let off the hook. The river that led from colonialism to Soeharto's harmful extractive policies is something implicit in *Indigenous Species*.

DS: *I heard that you've recently joined Sandra Alland and Daniel Sluman as one of the co-editors of Nine Arches Press's UK D/deaf and disabled poets' anthology.*

How did that come about, and what are your thoughts re: the need for such initiatives / the positive impact you hope to see? Something I've seen myself with Tilted Axis Press is both the need for quotas (only Asian languages, at least 50% women), because no, quality does not just get through regardless, but equally the need for careful and clever marketing, lest people regard what we're doing as some dreaded 'worthy cause', as opposed to an attempt to circumvent the biases that otherwise prevents the best writing from getting through. 'Oh, you're only publishing this Indian woman because she's an Indian woman, not because she's a great writer' is bad, but so is 'Oh, well done for publishing an Indian woman!' They should be congratulating her for writing such a fucking brilliant book. Perhaps, as a white woman, I'm not the best person to be running an Asian lit press. 'Nothing about us without us' is a slogan I've learned from you. Do you wish it held true more widely?

KB: Oh my goodness, I am so glad we're having this conversation. First of all, as an Asian woman being published by Tilted Axis, I personally don't have an issue with you not being Asian, since you have a mission statement that we believe in in terms of all you just said about Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay and how we Tilted Axis authors should all hopefully be read and accepted for craft and individual visions of storytelling. To allow the foundations of unhelpful stereotypes and patronising attitudes to be shaken, it helps to have advocates, and the connections and experiences of UK publishing that we may not have. In answer to the last question, yes, of course. The fact that you're being so honest about the potential problems of being an advocate from the outside, when in so much of publishing these issues are mishandled or swept aside, is something I appreciate, and it's of course part of the reason why I work with you. As you've said before, Tilted Axis Press is actually majority women of colour, and that feels good. It's always positive to have a dialogue, which will be ongoing, and, as you mentioned, the disability rights movement has coined 'Nothing about us without us'.

I'm not blind nor sight-impaired, and something that I tried to do early on, in the process of creating the book version of *Indigenous Species*, was to run the idea by sight-impaired colleagues in arts and disability, and to establish from the get-go that this is not a charity project, that I am not saying, 'Look at what we're doing for these poor blind people', which is what so much of the world says – I certainly have been on the receiving end of slimy 'charitable acts' attitudes as a disabled woman myself – and in no way would I want to completely deny the work blind and sight-impaired artists and activists have been doing for ages and continue to. What this book is is an art and poetry

book that uses Braille translation, that is also an experiment in highlighting the endemic discrimination against blind and sight-impaired readers in publishing (and in general), by presenting Braille alongside visual text, and making art tactile. I too desperately hope I'll do things right as an outsider. No 'voicing as the voice of the voiceless' bullshit. And it is crucial to me that people know the translation here is not from Indonesian into English, but from English and a bit of Indonesian and Baso Minang into a particular form of Braille. I'd love to have an Indonesian-into-Braille translation sometime in the future, the future permitting.

So again, it's great to check in on each other like this, and that you and everyone else at Tilted Axis has been so open to, in my case, conversation and input in all those emails about shades of blue (*50 Shades of Blue* would be a great *Indigenous Species* spin-off), and it's fantastic to be listened to with respect and care. I remember an email I sent you in discussions, with a link to a song that I think of as how *Indigenous* might make someone feel, and after sending it off, thinking, 'They're going to think I'm nuts, and totally dismiss that.' Instead you embraced it and wanted more information. To be listened to and respected isn't something I take for granted, as a member of several oft-misunderstood and oft-maligned groups, so it's nice to be able to build on that good energy, and the back and forth. I think a really fruitful way to see this kind of work – and all work in the arts – is as a process, a relationship.

As for being asked to coedit the Nine Arches Press anthology, that was unexpected and it's been a joy so far, honestly. I'm discovering great writers and all the diversity within writers here who identify as D/deaf and/or disabled. How it came about was an organic culmination of a few things. My friend Nine introduced me virtually to (poet and now co-editor) Sandra Alland when I came to Edinburgh to do a solo show, *Eve and Mary Are Having Coffee*, at the Fringe. We never got to meet up, but stayed in touch on social media and supported each other's work, including her work on the anthology, and I remember being so excited to read its mission statement. Unapologetic and spot on. Then I came to know of (now co-editor) Daniel Sluman and Nine Arches Press editor Jane Commane, the latter via Sandra; Daniel and I were on the same 'Poetry and Mental Health' panel at the London Book Fair this year. When Marcie Burnhope sadly had to end her tasks as co-editor, Sandra solicited me to join the team. Though initially wondering if it would be too much to handle in terms of doing a PhD and book work already, coediting this anthology has actually been informing the PhD and other work. Am quite chuffed to be working with people I respect,

and also happen to like, on this front as well. We think it will be the first of its kind, in terms of being an anthology by UK-based D/deaf and disabled poets.

DS: *You've been in London for around a year now, and you've immersed yourself in doing events at the Bare Lit and Southbank's Unlimited and London Literature Festivals. How are you finding the 'scene' here, if there is such a thing? Or perhaps: which scenes are you finding?*

KB: Yes, exactly a year and two weeks now, somehow (clinks imaginary glasses). Time really does fly – perhaps this feeling has a lot to do with how often we all check the time on digital devices, and how quickly interactions and actions come about and are expected to occur. Unless there's a concerted effort, there's less time to *savour* time and just enjoy that sense of being (an awkward species). So, in answer, there are definitely multiple 'scenes' here if there are any, and I feel as though I've barely touched the surface of them (thanks to my favorite three-letter word, PhD, of course) and, at the same time, have been extremely lucky to get to dive in now and then, and be welcomed by some fellow writers and poets, thinkers, organizers, and others in the lit and art worlds. Bare Lit, for example, was such a gorgeous festival, and it felt like kismet to have arrived several months beforehand in time to be a part of it. Of course, Bare Lit, Unlimited and others are also a reminder of how stratified publishing and art still are, and how deeply difficult it is to do this work at all. And I hope to have more opportunities to learn and share and question and listen and make here.

Temple of Literature, Hanoi

'Nothing is simple,' says a man in his sleep.

Doubtful; many things less fussed with tangle: days before, five temple courtyards the light thrashed through, giving just myself joy. Corpus shaking with insect sounds, barraging violent in constant treetops.

No sin unforgiven by cicadas, cracked double with the weight of how *homo sapiens* break and chafe. All these terrors, storming bats, we split and split ourselves. Arthropods cackle plain.

Two schoolgirls tracing prayers on the red-painted wall with index fingers. Watch them speak to the gods, like thieves casing haze and cloudlets for some of that peace.

Pool

Stunt, little children,
Seafoam light.

Backyard blues, splat
Splutter.

Held breath so long,
Crashwater in ears.
Friend's father scolds.
I'd laughed.

Any small child
Next to any small child
Is considered its friend.
God, help.

Hold breath again.

FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY ON THIRD HEARTBREAK

¶ 1.
'Above all,' the narrator of Elena Ferrante's *The Days of Abandonment* instructs
herself, 'don't give in to distracted or malicious or angry monologues.
Eliminate the exclamation points. He's gone, you're still here.'

She gives in to monologues, of course, she exclaims, she doesn't
even remain 'here', in the real apartment, lives instead
in the apartment that splits open, rots, breaks, like she does:

'You'll no longer enjoy the gleam of his eyes, of his words, but so?
Organise your defenses … don't let yourself break like an ornament,'
it goes on, citing de Beauvoir's *The Woman Destroyed*,

citing Ferrante's own recurring *poverella*, citing her own monologues,
the ones to which she gives in. By reading *The Days of Abandonment*
alongside the saddest fucking songs, like Dusty Springfield's

'You don't have to say you love me', Sinéad O'Connor's
'nothing compares 2 u', and Lee Hazelwood and Nancy Sinatra's
'You've lost that loving feeling', and by rereading

a failed poem one woman wrote immediately after being
'destroyed', lol, we can see that the woman is normal
and, for that reason, entering a depression, evidenced

by the following three examples: 1. fantasies of doing well,
2. fantasies of doing badly, and 3. fantasies of reconciling
the first two, such that, just like Ferrante's

Olga, the self-directed instructions to regain control function
mostly to provide narrative evidence that she is,
so to speak, out of 'it', as they say, out of a story.

¶ 2.
'I'm doing much better than I expected to be,' she said,
with some regularity, for the first few months, 'I've been spending
a lot of time with friends and a lot of money, ha, but

I don't feel like I'm dying.' She'd emphasise the last word,
making it clear, to some listeners, that by bringing up 'dying'
she was entertaining it. Alone later, she'd try to write a poem:

'Once, I thought / it would be important to change – /
a new breast, scar, style, symptom, pain, fire, lay, death, body,
would make it bearable.' She referred here to an earlier poem

she wrote after the second breakup, where 'Starting
with the right nipple,' she would disfigure herself, become
religious, ugly, transform into various creatures. 'Eaten up, then,'

she wrote in this new poem, 'I'd listen to "You Don't Have to Say
You Love Me" on repeat,' when she still believed
'some reduced presence / would be better than absence …

Not this time.' In the new poem, instead, she imagined staying
the same, waiting two-three weeks for her skin
cells to fully regrow, applying nail polish as a measure

of when she'd have nails that hadn't clawed him. She counted
the number of years (two) before her hair, with regular cuts,
would replace itself. 'In this way, remaining just the same

produces our best evidence of chronology's terror.'
That sounds sad, but it was meant to be 'positive', about how,
'When your heart is broken, women want to know if you'll survive.

By doing so, you prove, perhaps, that they too will survive.'
In order to survive, she put off reading *The Days of Abandonment*,
for which everyone agreed she was not ready, and she gave up

on the poem because, though it was meant to be about staying
just the same, she kept accidentally rewriting the same line:
'Still, it's sad not to die of a broken heart.'

¶ 3.
Since trying to be healthy was a sign of depression, she figured
she'd try, instead, trying to do badly. 'Proving to women,
by surviving, that they will too, assumes the women identify

with you. Assume instead they compete with you; show them
this won't happen to them, that they won't have to survive
because no one will leave them, because they, unlike you, are lovable

still, they aren't the sort of people who get constantly drunk, kiss
everyone, make their friends uncomfortable, fuck the cab driver
on the way home, somehow remember the fucking, stay in bed

sad for the next three days, weakly type emails of regret, etc.
Show them you had this coming,' she instructs herself, 'Fall apart:
"Of all means of dying," you wrote yesterday, "the refusal

to simply give oneself food and water is the most appealing."' We see how
she's trying to stave off the Hazelwood for the sake of the Springfield,
i.e., not to have lost the loving feeling, but to maintain it at all odds.

This about-face, 'I'll go running every day I'll be beautiful
I'll realise I have better conversations with all of my friends' to
'I'll refuse to do anything until someone hospitalises me for sadness,'

it's even more damning than the second impulse on its own.
And pathetic, too, because all of the fictional representations of *destroyed, a woman* at least rely on daily life with children.

She doesn't have that excuse, has only her fragile sense
that she had been writing a story with confidence for some years
only to find herself unable to win out against an editor

who wrote in an ending so stupid, so unrelated to what came
before, the whole story became dumb but meanwhile,
somehow, more 'marketable'. She had no kids. She had a cat,

and for this reason the death of Otto in *The Days of Abandonment*
was much worse than the kids, she saw herself whipping the cat,
hating it for loving him, burying face in fur, it bleeding to death.

¶ 4.
As the girl read of Olga's apartment growing solid again, the cellist
handsome, the friends less afraid to look her in the eye, the girl wondered
if this division between 'doing well' and 'doing badly' was false.

'No: If I could give myself permission to see him worth dying
for, which I don't, my favorite way to go would be to hold my breath,'
she wrote. The 'which I don't' perfectly represents the third sign

things were bad: the desire to maintain both the desire to die
for him and the knowledge he is worthless our surest sign
yet she was fucked. She went for a run

but listened to 'nothing compares 2 u' on repeat,
she ate alone and decided it did, contrary to expectations,
take away these blues, she went home and

wrote new lines to the bad poem, now rational
rather than hysterical, she read it aloud to her friends
who were all very high, she announced, they were

having a great time, 'the best time,' and admitting this,
she said sagely, did not mean she hadn't been devastated; it meant only
that she knew how to take care of herself, and how to ask for help,

she added, a very important skill, one Olga has even in her worst
moments, with the ghost of the *poverella* and the daughter's assignment
to stab her whenever she seemed to be fading away, she knew to ask

the daughter to stab her the man who had failed to fuck her
the night before to save her the phone to work please her brain
to quit betraying her, to remember the son sweating in the room,

like Olga, she told her friends, I may lose my mind but I know
where to look for it, she put her legs in the air and held her
belly and laughed, can I read this Ferrante quote to you, she

asked without waiting for a response: 'Because I was forced
to do that torturous work of analysis for Mario,' see,
'women have to become scientists of love when

men are just dumb parents who refuse to tell you
why they believe in God, they say some things aren't for analysing,
I have to remain evidence the love was real while really

working to find out what went wrong; I have to draw charts
of my panic attacks, map them onto my childhood and his,
map them onto the body of the new woman, I have to

get to the point where I can say, as Olga does, “I don’t love you
anymore because, to justify yourself, you said that you had fallen
into a void, an absence of sense, and it wasn’t true …

No. Now I know what an absence of sense is and what happens
if you manage to get back to the surface from it,’” she read, she said
‘I want to say this and mean it, but to do so I have to fall

into the void he pretended to, in order to understand.’ Her friends
put on the song by the man about how he’s sad his ex-girlfriend’s having fun
dancing and getting laid and making new friends and dressing sexy.

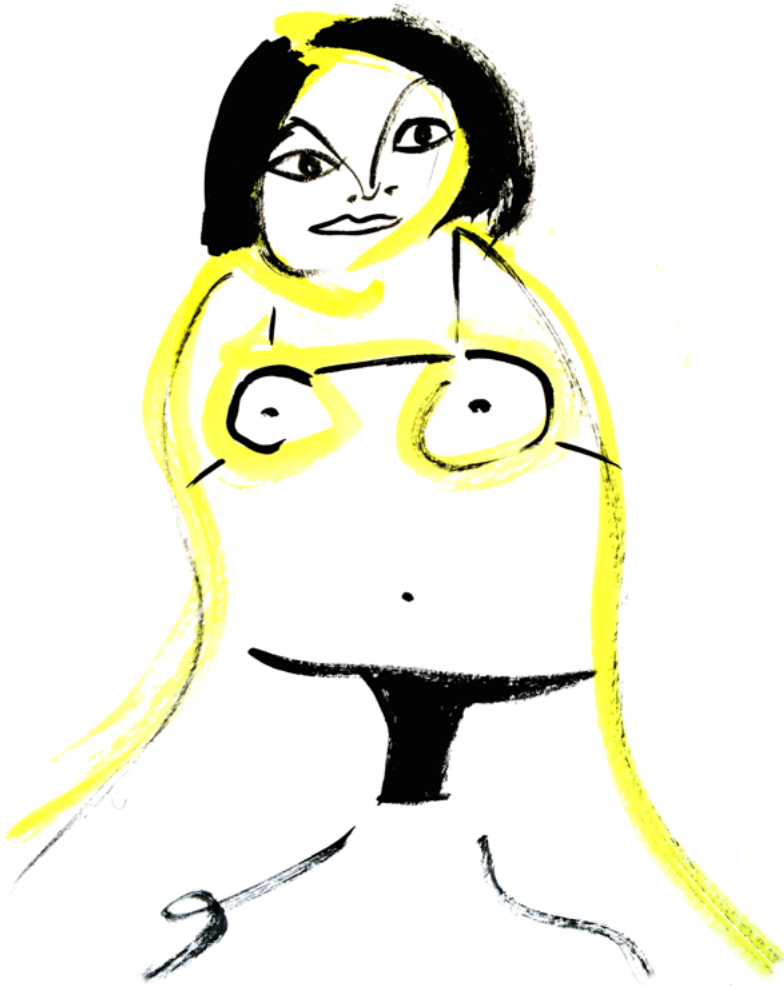
¶ 5.
From the girl’s experience, from Ferrante, and from songs, we learn
that you do not get rid of exclamation points by deleting them; they slip
into the small intestine, come out as diarrhea, they slide up the vagina

and rub against the part of the clit you can hit from the inside, they
make a girl sleep around; her feelings hide the exclamation marks
in her pasta and they get caught in her monologue.

Of course, she did not accept being trapped. One day, she heard a story
about a man having to leave a woman because she gave him, for their first
anniversary, a knife, an omen he couldn’t live with. He left her.

She, our girl, not his, went back in time, as if in a story or in a movie
where the genre does not change but accepts nonetheless the signs
of other genres; she visited their first anniversary; she gave him the knife.

She knew it would take awhile – four years – for him to know
to leave, because he is so slow at analysing love’s evidence. But
she was patient, she waited, and when it happened, later, it made sense.



At the Launderette

When confronted with the question
Why is there something rather than nothing
I sometimes wonder, Why is there anything at all?
We are all here for the same reason
but all the same we crouch over our soiled underthings
looking like crooks.
I remember reading there is a Spanish idiom
for the sense of embarrassment you feel for others.
I have found this phrase to be less useful
than it once might have been.
Besides, shame has no place here:
we have arrived with our seal again bags
containing our rations of washing powder.
We have arrived.
We have all been turfed out of someplace
and have crept back into civil society
clutching fabric softener samples.
So here we are
pressed between the fleshy folds of midmorning
sitting stunned before our meagre belongings
that spin round in the dryer.
I try not to be discouraged.
Here at least the attendant calls me honey.
I can get a cup of coffee, a biscuit
a smoke if there's one going.
And then there's the other thing.
So what else can we do.

Heroic Age

Sitting in a place that does all day pancakes
I wonder, Is this really the heroic age
or is it merely a nightmare.
I would like to ask the waitress what she thinks
but she seems a serious sort of person.
Instead I read in the paper that we have loaded the dice
for more extreme wildfires. They have been saying it for years.
We have entered the age of infernos.
In the pancake place it is clean and cool. The placemats are red plastic.
I feel come over me a kind of benevolent inertia.
Meanwhile smoke pours over Alberta.
We have been fed the line, the paper says, of equal responsibility.
But we are not equally responsible.
We accuse the following:
corporate arson
the prevarication of political cowards
the muzzling of scientists
ego running unchecked.
The paper has run an accompanying article
about the rescue of three hundred family pets
which begs the question of who was left behind.
So many sad things.
On the edge of a rally of thousands of people
a man speaks into a microphone:
This is not a revolution. It's a joke.
I drink my coffee. I read
that one of the defining features of the heroic age is patience
which only muddles the issue further.
All this wretched waiting forever.

It occurs to me that we get the world that we deserve
and our abiding question has always been
how much can we burn.

USE IT

His purple shirt
hat and sheets

Some of the fields
and the river

The point is –
truth can water down
skin and mind

Best!

Change contracts, body

jump jump jump

SWEET CHERYL

– the festival of change

Clothing on the dance floor
Blankets woven with string

But the opposite is true

Her weight and balance
her skin and brain

And regulations mean
for a long time after

(*jump jump jump*)

Cheryl is semi-dead

ANDREA PHONES

Red cloth covers the furniture
and plenty of water spills

The point is – real power
establishes the heart

Of course, they jump
Of course, it's hot

Half that again for Cheryl

Jump –
she changes her dress

ANDREA'S UNDERWEAR

Red furniture *(jump jump jump)*

Floats downriver

The point is – power
should be determined by Cheryl

T-shirts

Sure, they are warm
Sure, they are elderly

And for a long time

– glass

Of course, it's hot

DANCEWEAR

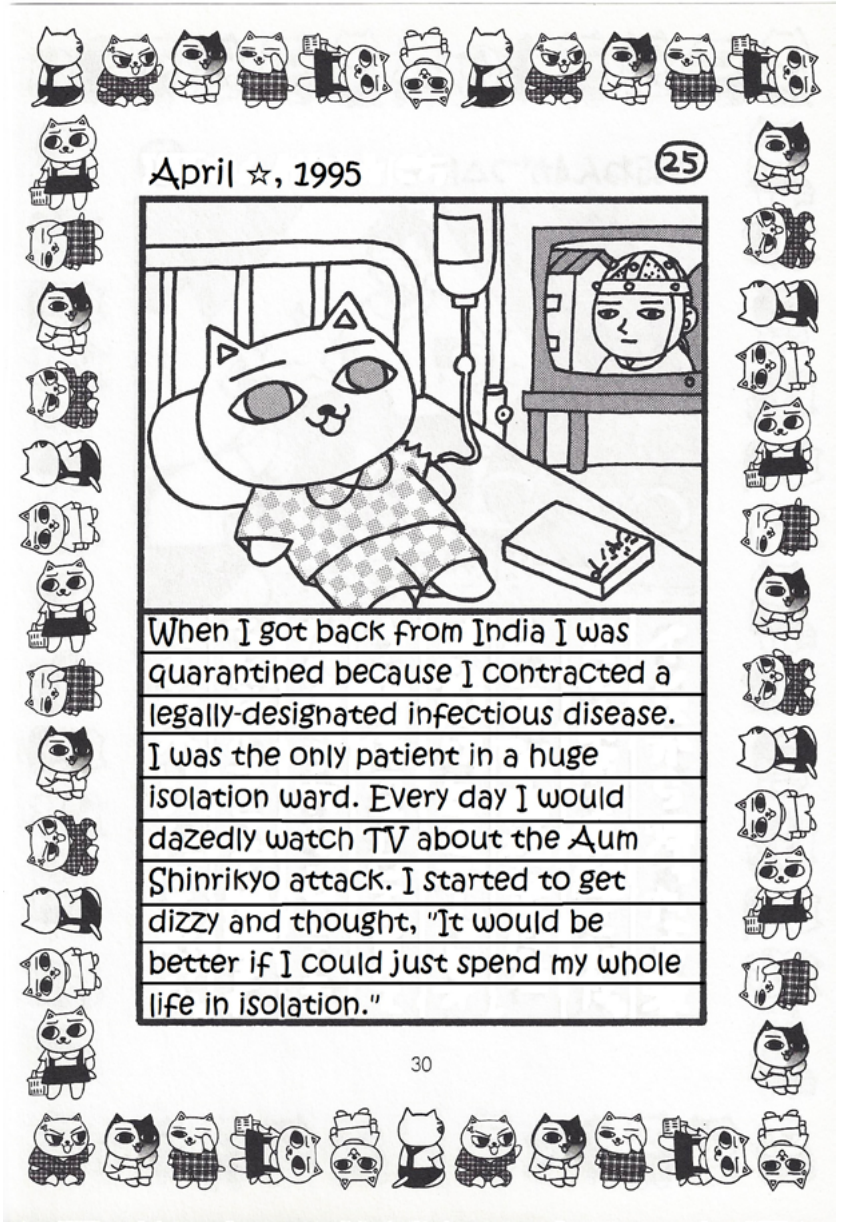
And are you not satisfied
with the progress?

His clothes and the industry
Her skin and her mind

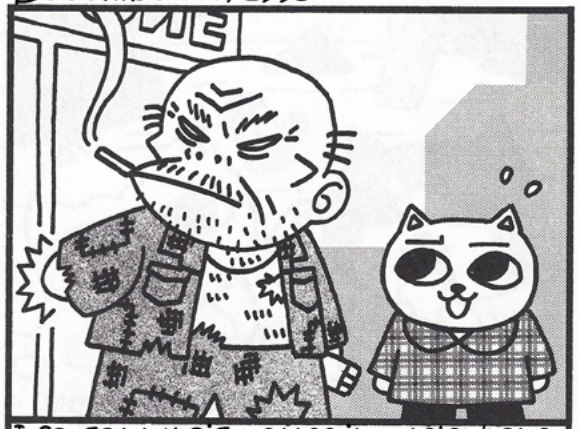
Red is the problem

– use it (*jump*)

Do you like change, old artist?



December ☆, 1995 (41)

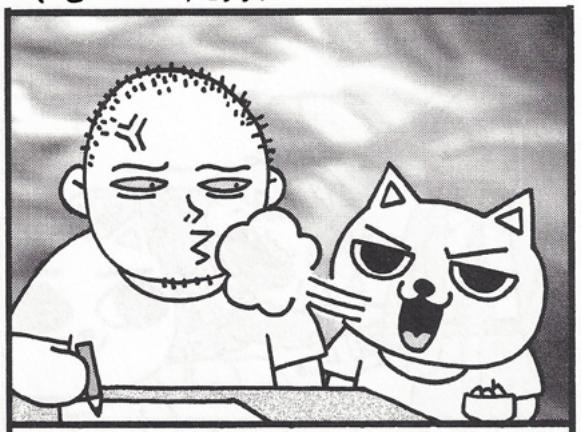


I forgot my cigarettes in a telephone booth. I was about 10 meters away, so I went back to get them. Although it was only a short period of time, an old construction worker spotted my cigarettes and snatched them up. He didn't even make a phone call. Rather than being shocked, I was impressed.

August ☆, 1996 (57)

When my husband was really busy I asked, "Hey, when Nyansuke dies can we have him stuffed?" He look annoyed, but, never the less, I persisted. "Is it okay?" "Hey, it's alright isn't it?" My husband got angry and said, "No way! We're burning him!"

August ×, 1997 (82)



I ate so many pickled scallions that my breath started hurting my eyes. I told my husband, "See! It'll make your eyes hurt!" Then I breathed in his face for about 5 minutes straight. He got angry at me and said, "I got it already! Cut it out!"

June ☆, 1997 (77)

I went on a drive to Ito with my husband. On the way there I was sound asleep from the Shirohama Coast all the way until the hotel parking lot. On the way back too, I was asleep the entire time until we got home. So in the end I didn't even see anything.

October 26, 1979

Your Excellency,
I present you a letter of certain grave significance.

Noitalsnart si a edom.

Noitalsnart si na itna-lainolocoen edom.

It's written in a foreign language. No translators are currently available. The members of your cabinet may not have any tolerance for foreign words or incomprehensibility in general. And the photograph is of an event in the near future. However, you, Sir, may recognize many of the letters. Now I leave you to your own pleasure, in your room, alone, fully alive. *Edom*, *edom*. I repeat, *Edom*.

Yours faithfully,
Gnihton ta Lla

Note

The photo is from 518 Photo Club, blog.naver.com/518photoclub. This site contains photos taken by several South Korean journalists during the May 18 Gwangju Uprising in 1980.

The Gwangju Uprising, also known as the May 18 Democratic Uprising, took place in Gwangju, South Korea, May 18, 1980. Students and civilians rose against the martial law and military coup of 1980. With the tacit consent of the US, the South Korean martial law troops brutally assaulted and opened fire at civilians of Gwangju. According to the UNESCO archives on the massacre, during the uprising, 165 died, 76 went missing, 3383 were injured, and 1476 were arrested. Another 102 died due to injuries after the uprising. The May 18 Democratic Uprising played a crucial role in building a populist movement against the dictatorship through the late 1980s. It still continues to inspire resistance against any political, social and economic injustice.


Dylan

TARA BERGIN'S first collection of poems, *This is Yarrow*, was published by Carcanet in 2013, and won the Seamus Heaney Centre Poetry Prize. She lectures at Newcastle University.

KHAIRANI BAROKKA is the brewmother of *Indigenous Species* and a forthcoming poetry collection *Rope*. She is co-editor of *HEAT: A Southeast Asian Urban Anthology* and *Stairs* and *Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*.

SARAH BERNSTEIN'S writing has appeared in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, *The Malahat Review*, *Room Magazine*, *Numéro Cinq* and *Lemon Hound*. Her book *Now Comes the Lightning* is published by Pedlar Press in Canada.

DON MEE CHOI Is the author of *Hardly War* (Wave), *The Morning News is Exciting* (Action Books) and *Petite Manifesto* (Vagabond Press). She received a 2011 Whiting Award, a 2012 Lucien Stryk Translation Prize and a 2016 Lannan Literary Fellowship.

SHEENA COLQUHOUN was the recipient of the 2015 Sunshine Coast New Media Art Prize. She is based in Melbourne and has exhibited locally and internationally.

BRIGID ELVA'S work has appeared in *The Chapess*, *The New York Times* and several anthologies. She is the author of *Coma Deep* plus other ongoing projects and zines.

ROSE O' GALLIVAN'S solo shows include *No norms and healing* (Ingrid, London) and *Mrs Soprano* (Furini, Rome). She has recently been in residence at Hospitafield Arts, Arbroath.

GEORGIA HAIRE is an artist and researcher. She is currently completing an MSc in the History and Philosophy of Science.

DIANA HAMILTON is the author of *Okay, Okay* (Truck Books). *God Was Right* is forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse. She is the Associate Director of the Writing Center at Baruch College, City University of New York.

STEPHANIE HIER has exhibited in solo and two-person shows in New York, where she lives and works, and internationally. Hier was a finalist in the 2016 RBC Canadian Painting Competition, and the recipient of the 2014 Evans Award and BIG Grant.

MADELINE KUZAK is pursuing her BFA at Wayne State University. She has recently shown at What Pipeline in Detroit and been on a world tour with cult performer Lisa Crystal Carver.

MARIA INEZ MIE is a reluctant artist and translator currently floating between the US and Japan. She's interested in all things horror, textiles and crafts.

NEKOJIRU (a portmaneau of the Japanese for 'cat' and 'soup') was the pseudonym for Chiyomi Hashiguchi, a Japanese manga artist known mainly for her work concerning two kittens, Nyako and Nyatta, and the darker side of nostalgia and childhood.

ERIN JANE NELSON is an artist and writer living in Atlanta, Georgia.

DENISE RILEY is a philosopher and poet, and is currently Professor of the History of Ideas and of Poetry at UEA. Her latest collection is *Say Something Back* (Picador).

DEBORAH SMITH'S translations from the Korean include Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (winner of the 2016 International Man Booker Prize) and *Human Acts*. In 2015 she founded Tilted Axis, a non-profit press focusing on contemporary Asian fiction in translation.

KATHRINE SOWERBY is the author of *Unnecessarily Emphatic* (Red Ceilings Press). Her collection of stories *The Spit, the Sound and the Nest* will be published in 2017 by Vagabond Voices.

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MADELINE KUZAK
maddiekuzak.tumblr.com