

The Dream

The heart is baffled
By the attache case,
All filled with dust,
Instead of manuscripts.

You woke me up at seven
By jumping on my bed;
And now it's ten o'clock
And you're an Indian chief!

For three hours we have played;
And I have quite neglected
My lesson plans and poems
That run around my head!

But I have quite forgotten
My white hairs with our shouts;
I wonder who is younger,
Your baby self or I,
Who rumple up the bed.

— Ricaredo Demetillo

The Ricksha Grew Wings

my son points at paper planes
 on the front page.
 i tell him: this — the ricksha
 has gone berserk, grown
 wings upon bronzed veins
 cold sweat dripping flesh
 these speed on, on —
 disgorging canopied cargoes
 in their hearts, they wish invincibility.

it's a far place son
 (i assure myself):
 skeletons of huts all around
 strangers have been there
 shooting wingless herons
 off the backs of buffaloes
 slitting open girl-wives, their
 slender bodies writhe and heave —
 fire everywhere, the heavens seethe—
 the children cry for grapefruit
 men's hats float upside down
 the swollen river flows with red
 red mud.

my son (gleefully)
 spreads the paper on the floor
 to trace the silhouette
 of Hercules chasing the dying sun.
 that's thunder son and it's far,
 far away, above the clouds
 the rickshas rumble on —
 the cries of burnt children
 do not echo in this room.

— Christine Godinez-Ortega

Treehouse on a Hill

steep stairs encroach the hillside
 a transmitter looms somewhere
 over a children's playground
 some minutes' walk from a city jail.
 below, rooftops fill up spaces.

on one side of the hill
 stands a charred treehouse
 floorslats gone— only the blackened
 woodends seemed to smolder still
 a cold, slow fire which chose to burn some walls—
 the stairs remain untouched
 laced graffiti up its balustrade.

was the treehouse burned
 to appease some god?
 i see blood, blood, blood
 through the trees.
 the sun's rays fail to scorch my skin
 the air is so stale — so strange
 no birds flew by this quiet morning.

who can coax these deadwood to talk
 of secrets buried in their hole?
 what god is this who didn't stop
 a nightmare that occurred here?
 and, as if in answer, i heard
 the trees whisper
 urging me to leave at once.

— Christine Godinez-Ortega

Are We a People Without Hope?

Are we a people without hope,
So young in years as reckoned by the clocks
But so experienced in all the devil's tricks?

I am Diogenes with the searching lamp —

Corruption thrives among the petty bureaucrats
But also clogs the pockets of ordinary folks
Whose balances are crooked like their finger-tips.

I am Diogenes with the seeking lamp —

The humble clerk whom you see is clad
In white impeccable barong may be
Tomorrow's headline of a scandal sheet.

I am Diogenes with the seeking lamp —

Those tellers that stare with their myopic gaze
Have just absconded funds to buy a house and lot
They know the tricks of every evil trade.

I am Diogenes with the seeking lamp.

And in his air-conditioned offices,
The bank director salts the dollars in Swiss banks
And cashes gilt securities to line his bank account.

I am Diogenes with the seeking lamp —

The headlines shriek our President has bought
Mansions costing millions in Manhattan lots,
Arranged for him by clever legal fronts.

I am Diogenes with the seeking lamp!

Where shall we look that we may see a bright
Spot of the nation's far-flung hinterlands?
I shake my head, discouraged in the search.

I am Diogenes with the seeking lamp!

— Ricaredo Demetillo

Imperions Conscience Cannot Be Denied

Imperions conscience cannot be denied.
 The time raps knuckles on our mind;
 And we are startled by imperative cries.
 The raiders swoop;
 We have no place in which to hide!

The cries of widowed mothers assail the ears,
 The helpless orphans
 Suckle frightened breasts.
 The hobnailed soldiers leer and stab to kill.
 Where shall we turn
 Hobbled by our fright?

Where are the fathers and their stalwart sons
 Who were our tall defense in happier times?
 They have been salvaged,
 An ambiguous term,
 The truncheons swerve and crack the brittle skull.

Look!
 Look upon the marching streets!
 The boys and girls,
 Dreams blazoned on their brows, shout
 To defy the state,
 But the armalites
 Mow them,
 To silence their visionary cries!

Mobs hoist the banners scrawled in red.
 The proud dictator shrugs, indifferent.
 Decrees are signed
 While harbingers of hate recruit
 The malcontents needing fish and bread.

Imperions conscience cannot be denied,
 The times rap knuckles on our mind;
 And we are roused by imperative cries!
 The raiders come;
 We
 Have no holes in which to hide!

— Ricaredo Demetillo

Beggars

Beggars, vermin of our society,
 Sleep in dark corners of an underpass
 Or sprawl in slimy postures on the streets,
 Reproofs to all who pass, indifferent.

They whine behind us or assault our eyes,
 And we are nudged by guilt as we pass by;
 For they are dressed in filthy tatters, while we
 Are well-prest, well-fed and well-scented, too.

Loathing such filth may partly spoil our fun.
 The present time has promised brilliant hues,
 And habit re-asserts and we forget
 The dirt-black fingers held out to our view.

We go our separate ways, indifferent.
 We have not noticed we've grown callouses.
 Still thought in fleeting moments call to mind
 The crawling lice of our society.

What if these crawling pests of lice and fleas
 Weaken the body of our tottering state?
 Our callouses refuse to feel and see
 The mighty Bastille — crash on Judgment Day!

— Ricaredo Demetillo