READING WRITING BY WOMEN[1]

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Abstract: *Differences in gender may produce differences in the style of writing. It is my intension here to show that the style used by female in contrast to male writers results in a number of significant differences. Some of them are caused by the writers' cultural background. Being a teacher, I would like to share with others how the gender and feminist theories can be applied to analyse writings by women.*

Key words: *women's writings, literature, translation*

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INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons for including the study of Literature as a part of the English syllabus. Literature in English[3] provides examples of the English language used in its "most effective, subtle and suggestive" forms (Povey 1987:4). It can give important insights into social behaviour and attitudes of English-speaking and other societies. It can present our students with some of the major questions about life which confront all human beings. Although students are sometimes afraid that Literature is "difficult", carefully chosen literary texts can be used with both developing and highly proficient students. Such texts can be used for their own intrinsic merit, and as a means of encouraging the four basic language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

In this paper I would like to address some gender issues relating to femininity (and masculinity) which are connected with the teaching of literature. The questions I hope to set for our consideration are these:

1. Are there significant differences between writing by women and writing by men? What are these differences?
2. If there are differences, how can we deal with them in our teaching?
3. Are there cultural factors which will impede or assist our female students in responding to these differences?
4. Are there cultural factors which will impede or assist our male students in responding to these differences?

My concern with these questions is that of a teacher of literature, interested in gender and feminist literary theory, the majority of whose students are women. (I am also a translator, and most of the best writers I have translated over the past five years have been women). I have to say in advance that I do not think that the paper will provide definitive answers to any of these questions. It is, nevertheless, important to raise them in this Seminar setting, in the hope that other participants may have comments and insights based on their own experience which can help us together to reach better answers. My approach depends on European theoretical texts but it is

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[3] I use this term deliberately. It includes literature from Great Britain and the United Kingdom, America, the former British colonies, and writing translated into English

important that these questions should also be contextualised within a framework of Southeast Asian thought and daily practice.

WOMEN AND WRITING

"A man's book is a book. A woman's book is a woman's book," Christiane Rochefort has noted (cited in Marks and de Courtivron 1980:183). The tendency to classify writing by women as "women's writing", and to extend to it the same attitudes which society shows towards women, is a persistent fact in many cultures. It has the effect of marking this writing off as different from, and often inferior to, writing by men which is commonly considered normative. "[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man," Simone de Beauvoir has written, "and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (cited in Sellers 1991:5). This is part of a wider mode of perceiving and organising the world – history, philosophy, government, laws, and religion – which is specifically masculine (Sellers 1991:xiv).

Literature teachers can sometimes feel that most of the texts we teach are by male authors, about the effects of the actions of men – on other men and women, and are somehow intended for male readers. Throughout much of history, women have been restricted in their right to create written works of art and, commonly, to read or listen to them as well. Mary Eagleton (1986) lists a long catalogue of "reasons why this might be so": "inequalities in the educational system, lack of privacy, the burdens of child bearing and rearing, domestic obligations", and "equally decisive", she suggests, "were the constrictions of family and social expectations". As a consequence of these restrictions, even though the amount of writing about women by men is very extensive in many cultures (in Indonesian literature, for example, it almost forms the basis of the modern canon), the amount of available writing by women appears in most cases to be very small. As Virginia Woolf remarks at the beginning of *A Room of One's Own*:

> When you asked me to speak about women and fiction ... [I] began
> to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks
> about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the
> Brontes and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms
> if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a
> reference to Mrs Gaskell and one would have done (Woolf 2000).

The full extent of this absence is, in fact, open to debate. In a rather striking metaphor, Elaine Showalter has claimed that, with a new historical awareness of the importance of writing by women, "the lost continent of female tradition has arisen like Atlantis from the sea of English tradition" (Eagleton 1986:11). The biased reception of writing by women, however, admits of no such uncertainty. Critical reviewing of women's writing has frequently tended to belittle it as intellectually light, "domestic", and essentially trivial. In a review of *Wuthering Heights* published in *The Atheaeum* in 1850, for example, the reviewer stated simply in one sentence: "To those whose experience of men and manners is neither extensive nor various, the construction of a self-consistent monster is easier than the delineation of an imperfect or inconsistent reality." Then Eagleton (1986:72) repeated again his kind remark that the publication of the novel, together with its 'Biographical Note', to which most of his remarks in the two thousand word article had actually been devoted, is "a more than usually interesting contribution to the history of female authorship in England" – as if works by female authors were normally not interesting at all.

We can see today that this attitude is obviously unfair to women writers. It is also unfair to women and men readers, including our students. How did it come about?

Let me rehearse some of the basic principles of feminist literary criticism. They begin with the recognition that "female" and "male" are

biological characteristics, while "femininity" and "masculinity" are acquired, learned, cultural gender identities, As Stimpson writes: "we cannot understand history, politics and culture until we have recognized how influential the structures of gender and sexual difference have been." Further, "men, as men, have controlled history, politics, culture. They have decided who will have power, and who will not; which realities will be represented and taught, and which will not. In so doing, men have relegated women, as women, to the margins of culture, if not to silence and invisibility" (Stimpson 1987).

If we as teachers are to challenge this situation, it is important that women's lives and experience be seen differently from those of men and addressed in their own terms. To this end, we need a new awareness of the validity of women's subjectivities, bodies and bodily functions (Mezei 1988).

Recent feminist writing has placed an emphasis on six areas of women's lives and subjectivity which have an influence on writing by women. The first is that of women's bodily experience (1) itself: sexuality, menstruation, childbirth, child-rearing, breastfeeding, reverential attentive love, connection (rather than separation), menopause, and, frequently, rage. These topics, so often unspoken in men's literature, have a central relevance for women's writing. In an interview with Xaviere Gauthier, Julia Kristeva has suggested that "women generally write in order to tell their own family story (father, mother and/or their substitutes). When a woman novelist does not reproduce a real *family* of her own, she creates an imaginary story through which she constitutes an identity: narcissism is safe, the ego becomes eclipsed after freeing itself, purging itself of reminiscences" (Marks and de Courtivron 1980:166).

It is around this focus on "a shared and increasingly secretive and ritualized physical experience" that female subculture has developed in many societies, including those of Southeast Asia. This domestic subculture (2) offers common values, conventions, experiences and behaviours, to its members. In nineteenth century England, for example, women followed the roles of daughter, wife and mother; they practised the doctrines of evangelical Christianity, with its strong emphasis on duty and suspicion of imagination; and there were strong legal and economic constraints on their mobility (Showalter cited in Eagleton 1986:14). The bonds of this subculture relied on intimate and deep female friendships. Within this sphere, the rhythm of women's lives was assumed to be non-progressive, repetitive, static (rather

than public, competitive, aggressive, egocentric, like their husbands). It offered a smaller range of characters and had the potential, in Kathryn Rabuzzi's interesting insight, to be differently oriented towards the idea of plot (Donovan cited in Benstock 1987:105).

The technical term used to describe this condition of oppression is "patriarchy". Patriarchy (3) privileges traditional gender roles. It describes men as rational, strong, protective and decisive, and women as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive. Patriarchy justifies giving women less access to leadership and decision-making procedures, less economic opportunity, less education and fewer religious roles, as a natural consequence of their more limited abilities. As Lois Tyson (whom I am following closely here) notes: "patriarchy continually exerts forces that undermine women's self-confidence and assertiveness, then point to the absence of these qualities as proof that women are naturally, and therefore correctly, self-effacing and submissive" (Tyson 1999:85). In this way, women's bodies are subverted, undermined, deformed, and betrayed, while women's experience, and writing, is relegated to oblivion.

For some critics, the existence of a separate feminine subculture, dominated by patriarchy, has led to a different sense of morality (4). Judith Kegan Gardiner in her essay "Gender, Values and Lessing's Cats" suggests that: "the good, the true, the beautiful, love, freedom and justice all traditionally mean different things for men and women", because they are embedded in larger, sexist ideology systems, in different ways. For a woman to be beautiful means one thing to her and another to the man who observes or possesses that beauty. Truth suggests sexual fidelity (otherwise women are dismissed as deceitful, changeable and unreliable). Love, Gardiner suggests, "is the center of a woman's life, her joy, her vocation, and her duty; for men, it is either a fringe benefit or a noble distraction from a full and accomplished life". Freedom, or independence, for men is associated with work and adventure. She quotes the words from a song, "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose", and asks whether a woman could ever think this (Gardiner cited in Benstock 1993:87). Norine Voss even suggests, as a consequence of her study of feminine autobiographies, that: "to be successfully feminine means to learn concealment, deceit, the graceful falsehood. Hiding the signs of aging, flattering a boss, suppressing unfeminine emotions of anger or rebellion, deprecating or concealing intellectual and athletic ability,

playing roles that have little connection with the real person – all these are part of almost any woman's repertoire" (Voss 1986:229).

Nevertheless, for some theorists being "both outside of dominant values and inside the society that lives by them" (Gardiner cited in Benstock 1993:112) can also seen in a positive way. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman suggests that exclusion gives women a critical perspective, a new angle of vision on their society. Their lack of privilege enables them to question the apparent naturalness of patriarchy (1995:38) This outsider status is, in fact, "a form of integrity" (1995:44) As Christine Rochefort proudly declared: "we don't belong to the same civilization" Marks and de Courtivron 1980:186).

A further consequence of the separate spheres inhabited by men and women is the sense that men and women use language (5) differently. The male usage is frequently the norm, while the female use is downgraded or derogated. Men, it is said, are more concerned with factual descriptions of the world; their voices are capable, direct, rational, humorous, unfeeling, strong (in tone and word choice) and blunt. Women's speech is more personalised, and more interested in describing in detail relationships and human actions. Men, in Deborah Tannen's terms, use "report talk", women use "rapport talk" (Montgomery et. al. 1992:84-85).

Christiane Makard puts this attitude to language in far more positive terms. Women's speech, she suggests, is "open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, polysemic, attempting to speak the body i.e., the unconscious, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to or clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented, masterly or 'didactic' languages" (Baym in Benstock 1987:22). Perhaps as a consequence of these qualities, the positive, subversive, stylistic attributes of a specific women's language in literature may include the greater use of irony, ellipsis, euphemism, litotes, reticence, pretermission, digression, and so on. Women's voices are also quite capable of assuming power. She can be angry, strong, decisive, sure of her judgements, acutely aware of male deficiencies and her own lost opportunities (Lanswer 1993:511 and Ozick cited in Eagleton 1986 :85-86). There is a dark side of this presumed openness to the unconscious. Throughout the ages, women have been consistently identified with madness, anti-reason, primitive darkness, mystery; this new excitement about the primordial powers of women may simply serve to reinforce traditional 'feminine' stereotypes Clement in Sellers 1991:118).

These different dimensions of female experience bring us to our final area, writing by women (6). In some cultures, the very idea of a woman who creates or writes literature for public consumption is an anomaly. In French, for example, the word "writer" does not have a feminine form. There is the word "poetess", but Gauthier describes it as being "a ridiculous word ... synonymous with foolish innocence, nature ... or old-lady, respectability" (Elaine and Courtivron 1980:161)

Tentatively, Pam Morris suggests: "many feminist critics have argued that women writers encode their experiences differently from men, that their imaginative world is articulated by means of a different range of symbolism and imagery, that their structures have been developed from different sources and traditions to those of male writers" (Morris 1993).

Other writers are more emphatic. Marguerite Duras ties writing by women to the female body:

> I think 'feminine literature' is an organic, translated writing ... translated from blackness, from darkness. Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness ... Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language. But to achieve that, we have to turn away from plagiarism. (Husserl-Kapit cited in Marks and Courtivron 1980:174).

Still the most authoritative account is that of Helene Cixous' powerfully lyrical essay "The Laugh of Medusa" (Marks and Courtivron 1980:245-264)[4], which, as Jane Gallop says, "more than any other text ... defines *écriture féminine*" (1992:42). In prophetic mode, the essay opens:

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[4] Originally published in French in *L'arc*, 1975, the essay was translated into English in *Signs*, Summer 1976, and is reprinted in *New French Feminisms*, pp. 245-264. For simplicity, page references are included in the text above. Also included in this book is a translation of Cixous' "Sorties", pp. 90-98.

> I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman
> must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing,
> from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies
> for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement (Gallop 1992:245).

Cixous writes "as a woman, toward women ... woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man" (Gallop 1992:245). It is man who has repressed women, made them afraid and ashamed, "led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs" (Gallop 1992:248). The history of reason is one with "the phallocentric tradition". Woman must "Write [her] self. [Her] body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth." (Gallop 1992:250). For Cixous, "women are body" (Gallop 1992:257). Therefore:

> Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence", the one that aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes it as "the end".
> Such is the strength of women that, sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord, assuring them – otherwise they couldn't come – that the old lady is always right behind them, watching them make phallus, women will go right up to the impossible (Gallop 1992:256).

The essay is filled with those qualities of "rashness, daring, mockery, sudden alternations of the reckless and the sly, the wildly voluble and the laconic" which can so thoroughly undercut 'the male mode' (Eagleton 1986:201). For, having affirmed "feminine writing", Cixous also insists:

> It is an impossibility to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate (Gallop 1992:253).

TEACHING WRITING BY WOMEN

Let there be no misunderstanding. Feminism is not only an "an intellectual and social movement, an a heuristic tool"; it offers itself as a complete "redefinition of knowledge and power" (Green and Kahn 1993:1). It questions "the most basic institutions of literary studies: how we evaluate literature, how we constitute knowledge about it, how its study is determined by the structure of the academy, and how it is separated from other disciplines" (Wardhol and Herndl 1993). Ultimately it is not about equality for men and women within the present system, but the complete "transcendence or transformation of the present over-rigid definition of gender as difference" (Morris 1993:5).

In rethinking how we do literary criticism, and how we teach it to our students, feminist criticism can encourage us to undertake various new responsibilities. A first task is to 'retrieve' the past by rediscovering the scores of novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time. In doing so, we need to rediscover the continuity between these writers from one decade to another – not just from one Great Woman to the next. As a part of this expansion of the curriculum, we should be including more women writers within our syllabi, not only our own regional writers who already write in English but also by the translation of our own indigenous-language writers. Literature in English is a place where this can take happen.

Secondly, we need to be more aware in our examination of existing texts, many of which are written by men. We should not only be able to analyse the images of women in the works we are studying, the existing criticism of the female authors who have been studied in some detail, and reassess the standards of literature we consider to be "good" (Donovan

1989:2). We must also be able to see the gaps and omissions that have to do with women in texts, the absences, as well as the stereotypes and unfair assumptions, the denials and destructive forces that are also inscribed there. In Mineke Schipper's words: "who is *not* speaking? Who has *no* right to speak? Who does *not* see? Whose view is *not* expressed? Who does *not* act? Who has been deprived of the right to act? Who is powerless to act, to take the initiative; who is forced to submit to the acts of others?" (1985:15). We need to teach our students how to read texts in their ideological contexts (Donovan 1989:xvii).

Thirdly, as Elaine Showalter suggests, the next phase of feminist criticism is one that focuses on "women as *writers* ... its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution or laws of a female literary tradition" (Donovan cited in Benstock 1987:99). We need to develop courses that are about women writers, just as there have always been courses which have been exclusively about men writers. Some at least of the following names — Emily Dickinson, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Hannah Arendt, Margaret Mead, Suzanne Langer, Rachel Carson, Dorris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Maxine Hong Kingston – as well as Indonesian writers such as Toeti Heraty, Dorothea Rosa Herliany, Ayu Utami, Dewi Lestari, Oka Rusmini, Malaysian writers such as Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Beth Yahp, Philippine writers such as Linda Ty Caspar, Edith Tiempo, Marjorie Evasco, Merlinda Bobis, Ma. Luisa Aguilar-Carino, Vietnamese writers such as Ho Xuan Huong, Nguyen Thi Thu Hue, Pham Thi Hoai and Duong Thu Huong ... the possibilities are many — should be familiar to all, and not just the best, of our students.

In so doing, we should not "essentialise" all women, in all places and times, as being "the same", or get caught up in harsh prescription ("a woman must ...be like this, do that, etc."). There is a place, however, for a "strategic essentialism", which can recognize "multiple selves, identifications, and instabilities in the self" as a way of exploding "the rigid boundaries of traditional gender roles" as well as "the potentially claustrophobic rooms an identity politics relies on for personal and political empowerment" (Neely 2000:186).[5]

Finally, the mere study of such ideas is insufficient. Robert Scholes has suggested that: "Our true aims as English teachers can be summed up as a desire to increase the textual competence of our students: to help them gain the ability to read with interpretive and critical acumen and to write with clarity, power, and grace. In short, we would like our students to be able to function textually in a society that constantly bombards them with texts." (Scholes 1990). As a thoughtful teacher of English, Scholes is interested both in helping students to understand how texts work and in "giving them practice in the generation of texts themselves", in both reading and writing, theory and practice, within the educational institution as a way of living more intelligently in society. Catherine Stimpson puts this more forcefully when she insists that: "We must also act, politically and culturally, in order to change history. Theory and practice must meet, engage each other, wed." (Stimpson in Benstock 1987).

IN THE CLASSROOM

I find Scholes' statement extraordinarily reassuring, as I'm sure you do. A sensitivity towards issues of gender, both feminine and masculine, in literature and society does not require us to confront the Dean, divorce our spouse, or destroy our underwear. Rather, it is a way of doing better what we already claim to be doing: teaching students to read and write in better and more sensitive ways.

Over the past two decades, Reader Response Theories have challenged the way in which we teach, in general, and the way in which we teach students to read texts, in particular. These theories are interested in encouraging students to examine the ways in which they themselves read texts. Lois Tyson has pointed out some of the ways in which different Reader

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[5] Carol Thomas Neely: "Loss and recovery: homes away from home", in *Changing Subjects*, p.186. An extremely important essay on dealing with student concerns about their ignorance of the cultural backgrounds of writers from societies with which they are not familiar is Sally McWilliams: "Trajectories of Change: The Politics of Reading Postcolonial Women's Texts in the Undergraduate Classroom", in (ed.) Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj (2000): *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, Garland Publishing, New York, pp. 252-283.

Response Theories focus on different points in the interaction between the text and the reader Tyson 1999:153-173). Wherever we rest in this discussion, however, it seems clear that the emphasis in the teaching process should move from us, the teacher, to the student, the reader. Students read in different ways, because they come from a variety of genders, classes and ethnic communities. We can no longer dictate the one single "true" meaning of a text, which our students must learn and give back to us. If we are teaching the four basic skills, and can accept different content, properly presented, on its own merit, that should be no problem. (As one of my women students in Hanoi sagely said earlier this year: "The teacher must now know more than one answer, that's all.")

Our teaching changes when we recognise and make room for the significant differences which exist among our students. We will be led to ask, for example, what difference does it make to the experience of literature, and thus to the meaning of literature, if the reader is a woman, and the experience of the reader is that of a woman? For too long women have been taught the way men read.

As has often been said, "RRT needs feminist theory" (and other types of social theory as well) for it to be a complete account of the processes of reading. Feminist literary criticism is a way of allowing our women students to deal honestly with their own. responses to what they are reading. It enables them to be free to see texts more clearly from their own perspective and, where appropriate, "to learn to read against the grain of emotional language and imagery, and to construct oppositional positions within the text from which to challenge its dominant values and gender assumptions" (Morris 1993:29). This way of reading can empower women for their future lives after the academy.

But what about our men students? "Can a *man* read as a woman?" as Elaine Showalter asks – can he, in other words, surrender his "paternal privileges"? (Marcus cited in Benstock 1987:81) Can he ever "learn to be silent", as Marguerite Duras demands (Duras cited in Marks an Coutrivar 1980:111).

Annette Kolodny has argued that this is virtually impossible: "male aders who find themselves outside of and unfamiliar with the symbolic stems which constitute female experience in women's writings, will

necessarily dismiss those systems as indecipherable, meaningless, or trivial." Men are at a disadvantage because they cannot understand the "sex related contexts out of which women write" (Kolodny 1980 cited in Adams and Searle 1986:502). (Kolodny includes in these contexts, "historically, the lying-in room, the parlor, the nursery, the kitchen, the laundry, and so on" (1986:507). Yet, as Jenefer Robinson and Stephanie Ross point out, "When put this baldly, the argument can't be right. Many men do have experience of typically female tasks; many women lack this." This argument, too, is essentialising: it relies on stereotypes about the domestic world as essentially female, and economic and political worlds as essentially male. To read well is to read carefully and attentively; these may be feminine traits in many cultures, but they are not exclusively female traits (Robinson and Ross cited in Hein 1993:105-118).

The answer to the questions asked by Showalter and Duras calls, perhaps, for a different kind of question: "Can this man, with that background, and" – importantly for us as teachers, — "with this kind of training, learn to read that woman's writing in a more insightful, open, and less dominating way?" And I would suggest that it might end in the sense that a man does not need to learn to read as a woman at all, but rather as a more sensitive, less patriarchal man, who is capable of understanding his own masculinity and being at ease with it. There is no need for "critical cross-dressing", in either direction. We can also empower our men students in a totally different way from the old knightly armour-plating they have been used to wearing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I offer you a small zen-like fragment from a session which I attended at the *2002 Conference of the American Literary Translators Association* on "Translating Writing by Women". The words were these:

> "You mirror me. Where is the real you?"
> "Behind the mirror".

The mirror is language. As teachers of language, it is our privilege to help students to begin to see how language, including the language of literature, articulates, shapes and defines social as well as subjective experience, and help them use language in more powerful, creative and liberating ways to beyond the illusions which imprison us all.

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APPENDIX

How do I Love thee? Let me count the ways
Elizabeth Barrett Browning (England)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, — I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose
I shall but love thee better after death.

Silent Love
Nguyen Bao Chan (Vietnam)

You have never seen me.
I'm the soft sunlight of dawn.
You always wake up later
Than my pure love.

You have never heard me.
I'm the whisper of the night
In the buds on the tree.
You are never alone.

You have never recognised me.
The faces of so many women.
Remain in your memory.
None of them is me.

Many tiny petals
Have fallen from your mind
And one of them is me,
Whom you never knew.

Translated by Nguyen Bao Chan and Harry Aveling.

Nothing
Dorothea Rosa Herliany (Indonesia)

unending, ourbed is surrounded
bysomesortofangels. unlit, our bedroom
is like a coffin. uncovered, our house
is like a grave.

what do you hope to create from this clay?
there is no sky. there are no windows
in the walls.

you prefer the floor. it is quiet, safe.
I never thought
I could live this way.

1992 Translated by Harry Aveling

Jouissance
Marjorie Evasco (Philippines)

We have loved.

We know from having survived
Wars, betrayals, executions,
Skulls hang around our necks
Like amulets or prayer beads.

Flesh is fragile, intimate.
Any moment touchlessness
Can rend us fatal to festering.
We must love, with body
Even as sure decay sets in.