

"Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

At the Foot of Annapurna By Jill MacGrath

Rhododendrons cluster,
vibrant chords of music,
reds in unreachable places.

A ridge below clouds,
floating world,
rocks, air, moss.

In such silence,
mountains and snow, I forget
how to speak,

and my eyes are the only
sense I am allowed
My eyes cast out,

return, I try to ascend,
to receive.
Let the sky

polish my sight
as it meets rocks
snow, as it descends

from infinite space
The wisdom of the goddess
touches down, here,

leaving mountain
and me.
Hold this silence as a gift,

admit heaven,
admit the possibilities
of timeless bliss.
How long since my eyes transcended
earth and the limits
of a body, 5'3",

hemmed by low, sere Indian hills,
by buildings equally small?
How long since my soul

rebounded to the sky,
no limits,
Annapurna better than imagination,

eyes opening each time, below,

then following each unbelievable ridge

means sky, the pathway beyond
faith, the sudden
earth-bound inhalation:

bliss,
then breath.

Silences in Deurali By Jill MacGrath

The goat and the child, in red and just as boisterous,
are butting heads, One leaps in the air
and wiggles, one crouches down for a laugh
and a preparatory jump.
The father sleeps in the sun all afternoon. Water buffaloes stare at us
eye to eye,
mournfully, as if waiting
for a scratch of a finder of fleas. Beyond the ridges
the clouds flow in their own currents,
layer above layer, glimpses of sky,
blue, gray. If the trees were still here
on these Nepal hillsides, they would be rustling,
quivering like tambourines,

but as it is, silence meshes with the wind,
monosyllabic runes,
and mountains echo
nothing, in their cloud cover,
remote, austere as snow.

If silence had color, it would be white
like this flock of wings fluttering down,
coating the dirt yard.

If there were birds
here at 3,500 meters, the cascade of sound
might linger and warm the dirt yard,
the mud buildings, the slate roof held on
by stones- waiting the first storm
for an honest reckoning.

It's snowing now, and soon the mountains
will be left alone, islands abandoned,
the arteries of color stopped in their tracks,
waiting. The father has woken, from the snow,
from the constant clatter of his wife with pans
and water, with kerosene for the fire,
with her own thoughts, heavier
than silence.

To a Woman Weaving by the Modi Khola By Jill MacGrath

Above you the sunlight has raised the tips of the mountains,
gilded them- Hiuchili, Annapurna South- and begins

the meandering kindling of the fir trees,
steep with mountains,
down towards the tumultuous gorge.

You sit on the edge of the Modi Khola. Your baby,
half-clothed, blissfully leans against you,
picking up and releasing a cotton string
with slow, watery gurgles and crows.
You are weaving on a hand loom you've made,
and you pull each new strand
toward you with the comb,
shift, weave, eyes downward,
while we, the foreign guests, shiver and watch
as the sun inches towards this lodge.
Do you have expectations
beyond the first, the next
necessity of this day?
Do you feel bound to dreams of the future,
demanding, like we do,
that it return to you
some part of what you give-

in the duties,
and then in the silences?
I imagine you living in time, what is
rather than what isn't.
You turn, the light accepts you,
turns your baby's face
into laughter. The serene light melds
with the rocks, the susurring river, the dirt, the ragged
edge of your kanji, your fire-scarred arm, the tired
lines on your face that, like the edge of the mountains,
mark the passage of time.
This is your work, this wool garment might cut
away the fierce cold, and our work- so frivolous,
so driven, is to walk these precipitous paths
muffled in our down coats.

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