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Selected Poems

Ann Hunkins

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Selected Poems

Ann Hunkins

The War Widows Are Heard

The country where your husband is accused by a debt-ridden neighbor,
seized in the sun-dried cornfield, is the country no one can escape,
the country we all live in, encased in smooth walls, clean laundry,
paper cut-out newsmen and bold-faced fashion fronts.

Your homespun shawl and burning eyes hold the still point
for a room of squirming children, a youth old before his time,
a woman who will never weep again. You travel far to tell
your story in a place where nobody knows who you are.

You stood watch behind the woven walls of a house
while men threw other men into rivers like sacks of evidence,
while men with nothing to lose pushed faces underwater
until they thinned out, pale as words coming through
three languages,
transparent as tadpoles, though words swim better than
men,

better than we do through three languages, better than
your husband,
who wished to be a fish, who wished to slip away
but got caught, buckled, floated to a place of blind eyes.

The men in khaki shorts hauled their catch onto tractors,
water dripping off the bruised and splayed limbs.
The relevant authorities do not offer words at all
in any language, but you speak, you go on speaking.



Figure 1. "Buried guardian," Bungamati village, Lalitpur, Nepal.

(Hunkins, 2006)

A Choreography of Corpses

Something wants to come near,
a choreography of corpses.
Landmines, tattoos
and boys cooking rice
in the alley behind the jail.

Girls so young one could snap
them between two fingers.
Why did you join the rebels?
Nothing. Nobody. Because
the world is hard and undisturbed

by hacked roots, shallow graves
wrenched from frost. Thin flies
alight, listening for transition.
Something wants to come near, in boots,
with exposed wounds, brute opposites.

I know we can graph this violence,
indigestible myth, fragmented families, half-sunrise
on democracy. Civilization of suffering, genius
of wounding, doubled padlocks on doubled gates,
the colossal waste of time and life.

I know we can do the math: 385 prisoners,
jail built for 125. Seventeen-point list of demands,
five-point agreement, seven-party alliance.
There is always a graph. And there is always a bridge,
which sometimes unaccountably remains standing.



Figure 2. "Royal Nepal Army exercises" Tundikhel grounds, Kathmandu, Nepal. (Hunkins, 1987)

Ann Hunkins, poet, translator and former Fulbright scholar to Nepal, worked for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal in 2006, interpreting for war crimes witnesses, torture victims, and others. She is at work on a collection of poems from that time and she also has a collection forthcoming of translations of nineteen short stories by and about Nepali women. In 2008, Hunkins received a National Endowment for the Arts Translation Grant for the novel *Aviral Bagdacha Indravati (On Flows the Indravati)* by Ramesh Vikal. Other translations include contributions to W.W. Norton's *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia & Beyond*, 2008, as well as *Dhoopi (The Juniper)*, 2006, a long poem by Toya Gurung, and *Karagar (The Prison)*, 2005, a novel by Banira Giri. She currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.