December 2017

Selected Poems

Carsten Smith-Hall

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol37/iss2/16
Acknowledgements

These poems were written shortly after the April 25, 2015 earthquake in Nepal. Many men and women who helped my research team with our research—which focused on the economic importance of environmental products to rural livelihoods in Gorkha District—were killed. Several medicinal and aromatic plant traders we had just interviewed for another ongoing research project—focused on transiting to ‘green growth’—also died in the natural disaster. These poems are for them and their country.
Selected Poems

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Going Down [26°12'-30°27'N & 80°4'-88°12'E]

Triple-whammy slammed is what she is no one batting an eye too occupied looking elsewhere counting cash or sucking on hope like some goddamn red lollipop and she can’t go nowhere. Yeah fifteen thousand times it happened an Everest of bodies in the name of change happening so fast a snail flashes by Formula One style left isn’t right hard bullets replacing hard words one indifference replacing another everyone starving as always goodbye innocence pain doesn’t help her wake up there’s too much mind too little faith and the divinity of no hope is radiant: small wonder strength’s leaving she’s been de-youthed family scattered in the desert and plains sweating gunny sack heaving humanity on trips of unlove we’re talking millions here goodbye demographic dividend her femininity imploding in silence pop pop tears prayers for salvation future disappearing in the rear-view and the river keeps snaking carrying one child after the other but she’s still alive and her perfume is on every body: time for the bonus climb another nine thousand times courtesy of the Gods or just tense plates whatever entire villages cut out of her story dessert has been served time to pay the billion-dollar bill with an empty wallet soul-purchasers roam freely still no one sees her faint breathing visible on cold mornings her slow-motion ride towards existence maybe she won’t live forever as beautiful as she is cursed reproducing every possible human error on a daily basis while touching your heart. She is inside you billowing mirror reflecting the dark sky what are you waiting for bat that eye and take her hand.
Going Home
There’s the old tree, the Sentinel in front of our house!
Look, dad. Even taller than before. But where’s the house? Where did it go, who left that rubble, all those crumbled bricks? Weren’t the Sentinel watching our house, like you said? He couldn’t. It was the big shaking that did it, wasn’t it. I was so scared.
Why would the Gods do something like that? I don’t know.
Where’s mom? She is always home at this hour, making lunch for us. This morning she said she would cook a surprise. Maybe she went out to buy some rice or fresh fruit. I’m sorry. Perhaps she went over to aunty, or for a walk, to stretch her legs and watch people. She likes that. Talking to neighbours. She didn’t go out. Yes, she did, or she would be here. Let’s look for her and see who finds her smile first. We cannot see her smile anymore. I think she’s playing hide and seek in the house. Yes! She wants me to find her. Yes. She always has such good hiding places, like behind her dresses. Stay here. Let me go! You’re hurting my arm, I’ll find her for us. She’s not here anymore. Then where is she, where has she gone? You said she went home.

Carsten Smith-Hall is Professor of Forest-People Relationships at the University of Copenhagen. He is Director of the Sustainable Tropical Forestry Program and the Forest and Nature for Society PhD Program. He enjoys doing fieldwork during the monsoon. His non-science texts have appeared in the Yellow Chair Review and LaLit.

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