

DOHĀ

Dohā (Tibetan): devotional song of experience and realization from the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition of Tibet. Dohās are meant to “reveal the inner nature of the singer and express her insights and devotion in an uninhibited and unique fashion.”

ALSO BY GAIL SHER

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DOHĀ

GAIL SHER



NIGHT CRANE PRESS

2005

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Night Crane Press
1500 Park Avenue, Suite 435
Emeryville, California 94608

The text of this book was set in Minion, a typeface designed
by Robert Slimbach, first issued in digital form by Adobe
Systems, Mountain View, California, in 1989.

Typesetting and production: Claudia Smelser,
Berkeley, California.

Printing and binding: Lightning Source, Inc.,
LaVergne, Tennessee.

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ISBN: 0-9726115-6-8

For Brendan

To My Lama

ADZOM PAYLO RINPOCHE

For His Unfathomable Kindness

Bestow on me your transforming powers
To realize quickly the way-things-are.
To understand images viewed by the mind
Merely as paintings, created by the mind.

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TRILOGY OF BEING AT EASE

September dawn. I shiver in my blankets.

Chamois stems of mustard seed the morning field.

Wet earth seethes. Its creatures remain inside.

Formations peer through vast bleak space.

Brambles supplicate trees (imbibe their essence).

For gods camp in such structures routinely.

Each one in its architecture of remittance.

Cliffs, clouds, leaves, settle in a pool of haze.

Dawn suggests dawn, other dawns, long past.

For time is cavernous at first watch.

The hill waits. Birds wait. Gnarly roots accede to
delay with grace.

My *hoya's* waxy flowers fall. Wind gently whisks
them away.

A squirrel darts, quivers. What is it sensing?

Blue-birds softly moan.

The slumbering sky, dead white (pocky).

Except for the squirrel, all is still.

*

Fruit of the hill (seeding the hill) this ocean
morning is vast.

Yellow-headed stalks fan the banks of mud.

Mist from the night hovers in the trees.

I watch sweet dawn get caught.

Of the wind I am jealous.

I wish also to swish across the sod.

The great plateau, barren and cold, eking its bit of
grass.

I too want to swallow air, swirl, tumble over each
diamond-mind crest.

The seahorse sounds of silver-blue plants. From
before-time, its subtle moan.

*Brambles, reeds, the sad loon's nightly weeping.
Behold! I am everywhere.*

This makes sense. Every day we do a little bit of
wrong.

A flower blooms to its full height of beauty, over
and over and over.

Hear the conch. Limit not your footsteps.

Dazzling reefs, shimmering shells, bedeck and hale
their passionate primacy.

I offer sweet buttered cheeses, lengths of soft white
felt, the skin of a *krishnasara* antelope.

Drifting in this house of froth, my lama reveals yet
another treasure.

*

Gray-green air soaks the sleepy grass.

One dog prowls a narrow chilly street.

I and my tablet cozy up by a fire.

As I watch the browning dawn fan the nearby hill, a
feeling of sadness arises.

For what, I wonder.

A forest bird chirps.

A bell tolls the hour. Six stern gongs.

“Are you attending?” they ask. “It’s important. Pray at once!”

Earth overflows. That's what day breaks.

Do you understand? (Many die confused.)

Wandering through the *bardo*, the endless
preserving of fat.

I stare at the heavens just now cracked. Where in
me is the vision of the great ones?

Centuries ago the sages spoke of decadence.

“The pattern has vanished from the skins of tiger
heroes,” they said.

Now, myrtle, lily, tulips call the guru from afar.

Like the reflection of a moon in water, several easily
can appear in the same pool.

*

Morning buzzes from a dank, cold sky, the sound of
dawn, a trilogy.

A lone owl hoots. *Coo coo coo.*

Into this huge vault I pour jasmine and pearl (all
things white like an ocean of joy).

Garlands of rose dangle in the current.

See the underwater fountain-tree plump with fruit,
supple and ripe.

Whereby my lama smiles. He planted this ancient
seed.

Within each face he recognizes himself.

Swish swish across his *vajra* throne, his immense
white words spill silence.

Take it in. Take it in.

Wisdom is but wind swishing through our skull.

We humans are special—arise (dissolve) at will.

We waft and want from any Pure Land we want.

Ominous clouds suffuse the wooly morning.

A robin hovers in a branch, methodically scanning
the sea.

“It’s inhaling radiant light, exhaling ignorance, as if
practicing the Nine Sacred Breaths,” I mutter.

I watch for a long time.

*

Winter bird. You scurry from your twig.

Without a sound. No peeps. No chirps.

Freshets are cold. Meadowlands barren.

Not one flower shows its laughing face.

Mangy packs nose the refuse.

Stillness floats the mind-stream of daybreak's
eternal nostalgia.

Later, when the sun is high, heat saturates the void.

But as morning opens, this hollow bowl beckons
thoughts of former years.

Sky stops. Skimpy air freezes.

Mizzle swells the parched wild grass.

Pale light seeps through reeds where a Buddha sits
under low-lying fronds.

Drip drop drip.

Cheer-ip cheer-ip, it says, perkily throbbing the tip
of its branch.

About to fly, it teeters, stops, then suddenly becomes
a cloud.

A pack of clouds sail to the west, over the sea, to
other dawning days.

I am bereft. For a minute I feel quite alone.

AT THE SNOW MOUNTAIN OF TÖ

Flowers quake in the still, cold dawn.

Mist, like wool, powders their faces.

The sound of day stirs me. (It mauls the silence of
night.)

Bruised by wind, it reeks the odor of limp, dead
bodies.

Dawn divides (day divides). Quickening light bursts
through trees.

Birds sing and branches become clowns.

The hoot of an owl returns me to my mind, which,
for a moment, has wandered.

Having contact with no one, I practice in pleasant
solitudes.

Of myself I make a stupa.

I put a life tree in the center, cutting it square, the
same way it grew in the wild.

On it I write prayers and attach relics (such as I
have).

Would that I could place dharma wheels at its top.
surmounted by a crescent moon and sun like those
at the summit of the Great Stupa of Bodhnath.

The face of my mother arises.

For weeks she's been haggard (tired).

Suddenly random people remark, "You look so young! Your bronze cheeks shine!"

She moves as one who lives alone with the bliss-gone body of a *sugata*.

*

Day is here, but sun . . . “Where are you sun?”

Fog covers the hill, hovering like an umbrella.

Birds subdued. Cats, squirrels, deer, all hidden.

From upstairs a radio blares. My neighbor yaks
away.

My *hoya* sings! (Its sweetness is my lama's.)

We shake minds, laughing (sobbing) hilariously.

“Lend me your boots,” I say to it cryptically. “Hum me your sutra,” it replies in a teasing fashion.

In summer, when it's dry, I sweeten my lips with water, knowing that its lips (leaves and flowers) will sip to fruition.

Dregs of night soak into the hill.

Green, yellow, blue, they vividly paint the land.

“From where does morning arise?” I inquire,
peering through the haze.

Funny. Sometimes at dawn I am filled with
memories. At others (mind relatively passive)
strange sensations spread to my heart.

*

When Jetsun Mila bends his right ear forward, he
attunes to our great agony.

Through fingers and toes he breathes. His cotton
rags are not precious.

His tresses are long. His weathered skin green.

What is he doing on this swastika of rushes looking
concerned?

Singing, yes. A hundred-thousand verses.

They curl like jewels (amulets of thorn).

Sifting through clouds, clear-mind of enlightened
existence.

The *Aum* of creation (through which we continually
regenerate) arises from his astonishing way of
knowing.

A wonderland of color wraps desert, valley, plain.

Bird-kings by the hords, are gathering, preening,
feasting.

A coarse jay calls. Ineluctable its grace.

Even now, as I remember, I feel joyful.

*

Brilliant sun, high in the sky.

It appears to my meditative mind one day at the
beginning of spring.

I am out on a hill listening to grass.

In a cavernous sea, dragon clouds lick one another.

Fiery embers soothed by tongues. (I know that dragons spit hot red flames.)

Squawk squawk squawk, my lama shrieks. (He takes the form of a blue-headed jay.)

In myself I see my mother's face. Her eyes peer from these bangs.

Her bride-white dress is soiled by time, my time (eons) of endless infinite mothers.

Is she tired? (She is perched aloft a portraiture chair.)

“Sit still, lovely.” The cameraman’s head is one black box.

A bird chirps. It’s poised to fly away.

As when emerging from a narrow gorge onto a high, wide mountain pass, I savor the view of its evenness.

Evergreens with cones, reeds with yellow flowers, all
are ripe and cheerful.

Yet I, in the day's auspicious light, feel weary.

The ardent limbs of my *hoya* drop rich purple fruit.
A hummingbird pauses (almost tipping itself over).

"Hey there, bird!" My *hoya* bows ever so slightly
toward it.

*

The air is brisk, sun tinged with orange.

One dazzling ray drains across the bluff.

Through whose intelligence wraiths of
bountifulness speak.

“What do they say?”

“We are empty. We rejoice.” (Peels of lightness ring.)

Their silence is weighty. Even heady.

I chant the hill’s full liturgy, carefully pronouncing
each rapturous Sanskrit syllable.

Ah ahh, I ii, U u, Ri rii, over and over and over.

Shivering reeds. You have been my mothers,
exceedingly kind, protective of me always.

Glistening flower, butterfly, bee, waxy petals that
fall.

A bushy-tailed squirrel surpasses thousands of
yojanas.

I look out on the bluff. It is brown and quiet. *Lama,*
hear me. Kind root lama.

For faith makes room for magic.

“There’s something rolling inside that statue,” I think.

Sure enough, when I pry off the metal base, I find a pure white *ringsel* the size of a large pea.

Adamantine glistens on the sides of the Buddha where this beguiling sphere “grows.”

*

The echo of the sea slips away.

Mother (mother) please don't go!

We will never meet again.

This will have been our only meeting.

These words slip (slap) over my ears, endlessly.

To excoriate the stars, I scream.

To placate clouds, I wail.

Clearing my throat, I chant a hundred thousand
mantras.

In this way my craving dissolves.

The child knows. It wants (it wants) beyond its
mother's understanding.

For himself (as he is) in the infinite swirl of motion.

What would you like, dear? He can't be consoled.
(She, beside herself with worry.)

Finally the child rocks himself to sleep. He dreams.
Above a large blue lake soars a royal white eagle.

Longing for her, I listen to a loon.

Can its midnight cry be sadder?

I (transfixed) under blossoms radiant with dew.

In a pleasant ascesis bow and hum the *Heart Sutra*.

*

Again my mother's face, rotund and gloomy, rises above my dresser.

"Daughter," she says, "are you paying attention to what is important?"

I look up. (I had been reading in a chair.) Her floating face does not surprise me.

"Sweet one, I wander. I'm continuously tossed among the wiles of the six realms."

“You disappoint me,” she continues. Her hair, in disarray, shoots from her skull, yellow and moldy.

Alarmed, I look more closely. Her skin is mottled. Splotches of rouge smear her cheeks.

She wears lipstick as usual, but it’s purple and forms a false (exaggerated) smile.

“Have I ever told you how much your mothering means to me?” I wail.

At that moment, a dragon alights on the ground,
drinks some water and rises to the sky.

We watch in awe. “Extraordinary!” we cry.

“I’ve heard the rumbling of the turquoise dragon,
but I never thought I’d see it,” she says.

“I’ve heard the fame of the Precious Protector, but I
never imagined I would meet him,” she repeats.

Next night I dream:

*Palace of the eight great nagas,
Playground of mamos and dakinis,
Gathering place of the god who take delight in
virtue,
Growing place of the Rose-apple Tree.
Source of the four great rivers—
Here is the turquoise lake, Manasarovar!*

Excited, I think, “This place is so familiar.”

But it vanishes in black-eyed morning.

PIGEON OF THE MYSTERIOUS TREE

“The sun is warm, the water excellent at Horse
Tooth White Rock.” (I am reading *The Life of
Milarepa*.)

“The yellow valley is broad and blanketed with
flowers,” he says.

“Two rivers flow across it softly (softly).”

“Green slopes, cool leafy shades—of all secluded
places, this is the most pleasant.”

“After about a year, some out-of-luck hunters barge into my cave. ‘It’s a ghost!’ they cry when they see me.”

“‘I’m a hermit,’ I yell as they run away.”

“They rush back. ‘Where is your food? Give it to us. If you refuse, we’ll kill you.’”

“‘I have nothing but nettles. Lift me up and see.’”

“‘What would happen if we tried it?’ one ventures.
‘It might bring a blessing,’ a second suggests.”

“One of the hunters who has stood by without hurting me, says, ‘Wait! This man seems to be a real seeker. Even if he were not, you do not prove your manhood by harassing such a bag of bones.’”

“He turns to me, ‘Please put me under your protection.’”

“‘There are different kinds of protection, believe me,’ remarks the first and bursts out laughing.”

“A year passes. ‘It’s a ghost!’ This time the hunters are laden with game.”

“‘There are no ghosts in the daytime,’ one proffers. ‘Take a good look. Is it still there?’”

“‘I’m not a ghost. I’m a hermit,’ I explain.”

“Though I have no clothes and little nourishment, when I place the scroll my lama has given me on top of my head, my stomach feels full and there is a pleasant taste of food in my mouth.”

*

CAW CAW CAW. A jay swoops by.

Three white blossoms bend in its wake.

I peer through night. Moonless sky hovers over
trees.

I am aroused (having just finished *The Tale of Red
Rock Jewel Valley*).

“Today’s shabby sky (the heavens are toppled).”

“They’re split. (At war.) Sun can’t get through.”

“Autumn ends. Seals line the rocks.”

“In bitter cold, all the animals hide.”

“Are you a ghost?”

“Out of the wool and goat hair cloth my sister weaves I sew a hood for my head, a sleeve for each extremity and a sheath for my penis,” Mila reports.

“‘Look at him! My brother has nothing human left!’ Peta screams at the sight.”

“Not only is he completely without shame, but he has ruined the cloth that I made with such labor.”

“Father, look at that fantastic thing! A man flying through the air!”

“‘It is no great wonder,’ says his father. ‘It’s the son of that wicked woman, White Jewel of Nyang—that cunning, obstinate Mila, wracked by starvation. Don’t let his shadow fall on you.’”

“The father keeps moving around, fearful of being touched.”

“‘If a man can fly, obstinate or not, there is no greater spectacle than that!’ says the son.”

“Look! Look at you!’ my sister shrieks, grabbing my wrists in disgust.”

“Are you a ghost? Why is your body so thin?”

“My form is flame and spouting water,’ I reply.”

“But inside I’m thinking, ‘Your affection distracts me. Worldly talk disturbs my patience.’”

For death is now. (You have given me the instruction.)

Watch the night-water lily endlessly crushed by snow.

As I walk you are on my shoulder, as I speak you are in my throat.

“Do not kill the *dzomo's tolbu* calf!” (is your ever-vigilant advice).

*

Dawn bleeds night. (A white sky screams.)

Tree ghosts line the hilltop.

Wet wings birth. Trunks of them in a filigree of
hack.

Now that you're dead, the debris of a cold one.

Silver bush, you stalk these headlands.

Flaunt your light at the morning's dowdy sky.

Browning growth (like savages) decays. It lacks your
brilliant edge.

See how the birds flock to your branches, chirping
their heads off.

The sun now casts an early-morning shade.

Bald, my hill appraises cold.

Stunning light converges on its muddy bank.

I fill an altar lamp with butter, light it and place it
on my head.

A young lady appears in the fashion of Mon.

The eastern snow lioness' milk must be served with a golden ladle—these words emerge eerily.

It is the beginning of October. Late afternoon light hugs the yarrowed mead.

Lush green meadows are blanketed with flowers, bees, birds, berries, fruits, edible plants, even bamboo.

*

Is that a lingam behind your cushion?

Greyhounds sniff then melt into breeze.

“Look up there!” a herdsman points. An old dove
coos its spasms of prayer.

“The seminal mind is empty,” I recite. “This wind
(this cold) is simply an old habit.”

A falcon descends, considers extending her talons.

It dips its head calmly, gulps a bit of gentle rain.

It's startled by your knotted hair, protruding bones,
disappearing visage,

more vast than the sky, more vast than the view of
emptiness.

Sweet morning. You cover the squirrels with your warmth.

My *hoya* too spreads her arms, luxuriating in your spell.

Today they touch the earth. (Yesterday they could barely bow.)

Petals in three colors, being as delicate as the wings of bees, lay ankle deep at Chuwar.

DAWN MOUNTAIN

Brown day emerges from fading-night rain.

I shiver from pale dreams.

The earth is clogged, the hill a maze of wet.

One owl flaps its wings.

Dawn's avuncular rays roll gently through the tent.

They feel momentous as I lie in my cot.

"Is that a rodent?" (An animal scurries by.)

I walk and drink (in) the fresh morning air.

I reach into my mind.

My room of wood is lush and dark.

(My home faces south on an embankment that
slopes steeply.)

From time to time mists wreath its imposing neck
like a silver scarf.

Songbirds sing this morning.

A single flower flops across the mud.

Saltwater spray, kids, bones—a pup dashes forth,
turning its head eagerly.

As I listen to an owl and spy the ruby sun, I gasp
with pleasure.

*

Blue and blue (the sober voice of day).

The after-rain smells of cucumber, oddly.

The stirrings of my sister . . . but she sleeps (which
is good).

Heather in the field plays little purple-bells.

“It’s been snowing here for weeks. Very unusual at this time of year.”

“The first night as I was walking, admiring the trees under inches of drift, I wandered through a cloud of cherry-blossom fragrance.”

*The cuckoo has come from Monyul;
The sky softens the earth with its moisture.*

Dank sounds meld with murky cold as I nestle in the splendor of my lama.

Sweet showers fall.

“They’re pink!” I mutter.

Yet the sky, packed with white, assuages the notion
of the present.

Tender plants drink gratefully.

*

My mother is dying (on this day of All Mother's).

I watch her aggregates fall.

Eyes, ears, ability to eat, slowly dwindle away.

She herself feels revolted by it.

Her wily limbs are edgy and restless.

“Fix your hair!” she gratuitously shouts.

Drops rattle in the darkness. A dove’s solemn moan
exudes (in the night) in oblivion.

As the pain of my mothers ripens on me, my load is
lightened.

Darkness spreads through my nightmare's tangled
body.

Parrots squawk. One is particularly insistent.

Swirling pirouettes (an elegant letter's grace).

People are kind, escort me through places
unnamable (though painfully familiar).

Light folds, doubles over the day.

Blossoms lift their necks. A sparrow on a fence
blinks casually.

A house on stilts sits quietly in the dusk.

Sweet bird, where is your mother?

MINGLING THE THREEFOLD SKY

Today as I was chanting, rosary beads clicking,

my voice became a bell from whose echo a strong
remembrance arose.

I am in a hall with monks and horns high in smoky
mountainous air.

Daffodils cover the ground.

Still, when it falls, the rain smells sweet.

I close my eyes. Imbibe.

Crows caw. Jays hawk their cries through the trees.

Kids spit pits among the dandelions.

Tsa. Dza. An infant mumbles letters.

Could she be singing? (Calling to old friends?)

She dreams of a buddha seated on a lotus, the white
letter *hung* burning in his heart.

Asters (lavender-blue) shed lustrous shadows across
the ravine.

Nimble (agile) her limbs hum a *sutra*.

Thrice she offers *tsampa* to the Three Precious
Jewels.

“Look! A flower!” she says to them lovingly, urging
her companions to savor it first.

Sugatas crouch. They water the earth profusely.

*

Low horns wake me. (They roll through mud.)

Ducks, rabbits, snakes wander among the grass.

Pilgrims circle *chortens* (undulating tiers melt into sand).

Then desert. Masses of sand and sand-flowers.

Thus I age and die and see the luminous white field.

“Send me to Sukavati, please.” (I pray hard as the wise ones suggest.)

A cycle of teachings is repeated by heart.

I hold to my heart.

I eat before noon. Afterwards I sleep.

It was written long ago. (The ancients understood.)

Under vast dark sky lay vast dark sand—my mind,
stretched out. Relaxed.

Rest mind. Be poised.

A drum, a gong, a band of gods.

Lama, *yidam*, *dakini*, its roots.

Bliss-gone ones, we remember you always.

With gratitude we deflect your kindness.

*

It rained during the night.

Trees smolder in diamond wet.

Fish jump with life. Prayer flags toss.

Somehow they remind me of the monk wracked by weakness who, thoroughly consoled, said, "If I die, I will be fulfilling the advice given by the early masters."

The pulse of the hum. The tilt of the sky.

Fragile fingers yawn, paper thin and shiny.

Shavings from my gouge trail to the ground.
Curlicues pile up.

In thinness, absorbed in my ablutions.

I see snow (the pearly ridges of my land).

Evil doctrines will spread. People's minds will be possessed by demons.

Had Guru Rinpoche (when he was in Tibet) been able to perform the exorcism thrice (bonding the evil forces) the *buddhadharma* might have remained for a long time.

But he was hindered by wicked ministers and could only perform it two times.

“Oh, Gyalwa Rinpoche! We have all received your blessings.”

We are linked in the *dharma*. (The *samaya* must be observed.)

We climb toward the sun. It rises early in this country.

The majestic expanse of meadow and horses.

*

“What a magnificent March day!” a woman
exclaims.

The sound of rain flatlines with her sigh.

A boy blows on a weed (perhaps it is a bubble).

He doesn't move. He stares. He thinks. The refuge
of water he takes silently.

The decrepitude of watching. (I've often wondered at my lack of faith.)

"That bird could be a tsar," I think, the muscles of its thick neck raw.

In a ditch a dog lay dead.

"*Tara*. Sweet *Tara*," peals from the day-black sky.

“Who is that man?” I ask a friend. (His yoga is meant for only me to see.)

Facing east, I watch the water swell.

An old woman hiker leans on her cane. She feels the vibrations as an offering from the foothills.

Its melody tolls methodically.

For it is written. (Our time will come.)

Fire and flood will ease all.

The gutted slope displays its roots, throbbing,
twisting, dangling in air.

I know that I am a mountain (that I will continue
to be a mountain) for three incalculable eons.

*

The woodlands are quiet this forenoon. Crickets,
frogs, all creatures seem subdued.

“Is that a mosquito?” It is curled up, looking
amazingly comfortable.

Nubile women hang clothing in the sun.

A deer in dripping silence stares at yellow flowers.

I close my eyes (recall a winter morning).
On fire with snow, each brown stone breast.
I gaze at a ridge. Boughs roil. One breaks.
Then disappears, leaving no tracks.

Om Tare tan swa ha. Om Tare tan swa ha.

Softly a syllable drops to the earth.

My mind is filled with space. My ears begin to ring.

Birds look up.

There is no air. Only sky (rippling sky-facades).

Black gates of mind, the spontaneous presence of
ultimacy.

I kneel. An oasis of green becomes ash.

But for the mere names of the places where they
happened, nothing at all is left of these marvels.

*

The savannah is dull. (It is late afternoon.)

A low wind rises as the temperature falls.

In the after-rain's spume, birds are mute.

Day turns to night. Without dusk. Not one star
comes out.

A candle is lit. (Cold shimmies in the air.)

I lay in my cot and see cloud.

A vulture on a southerly peak—the angular white
outline—

from where does she know it. (It bothers her that
she can't tell.)

A master tells his monk: “At a particular place about two day’s walk, a *dakini* is dying. Make haste and as soon as you find the corpse, chop open the skull and quickly eat whatever you find.”

A second disciple, a *ngakpa (tantrika)*, from his sealed cave intuits the passing. He breaks open his door, speeds to the site, severs the head and strolls along munching.

Thus he dissolves the three-fold motionlessness.

The votive flame is bright rose-yellow.
I rock (gaze) steadily at its pith.
Animals eat. I watch them quietly foraging.
Red eucalyptus drop berries onto the ground.

*

To seize and become fire (twice, thrice).

“Ahhhhhhhhhh,” it seethes through its follicles of earth.

To the north, sand rolls high. To the south, blazing columns of light.

Ah-ooo-mmmmmmmmm. Ah-ooo-mmmmmmmmm
buzzes through my skin.

My unborn mind is a fetus groping.

In a liquid orb it swirls by parcels of flesh.

Random objects rise. I feel washed by their
proximity.

Are those hieroglyphs? (I can't tell.)

The burden of night (its weight on the berries).

Branches droop. Children go home.

Little red clusters scatter in the bog.

They bob. She looks, experiencing bobbing.

The steely hills are darkening.

Scrubby land, flocculent and thin.

The earth is a closet. (Its echo a pall.)

Seeing with my tongue this place of no water.

A HO A LA LA HO!
PLEASING PLAYSONG I OFFER

This morning's sky is white. Icy mist lingers over
the trees.

A gong and its echo still reverberate inside me.

I look out on the hill. Not one bird screams.

Within a cycle of prayer, everything accumulated is
dissolved.

The trees—“They look tortured,” she thought.

Pilgrims glide along the ground.

Om ah hung. Om ah hung. Om ah hung. Om ah hung.

Wooly leaves and, by the road, squirrels.

A girl looks up hollowly.

Through the rain the light seems full.

Inside my rug, my legs fold perfectly.

I watch. The skin of the earth tightens against the
frost.

Dawn's cranberry sky crosses the mountain trail.
How many have climbed it?

Who wanders through the pass at daybreak today?

Rosebuds cover the turf. Tumultuous clouds
straddle gray beds.

They chew flour.

Look! A flower! It pops through white.

The Land of Snow is protected. (It was written.)

Lord Buddha said that after his *parinirvana*,
another, greater one, would propagate the teachings.

In this way he announced the coming of the Lotus-
Born.

I was there. I know these people.

The man (seeming not to hear) doesn't alter his stride.

Drops splatter on the gulch, the trees, the dirty sandstone's graffiti.

In my dream I'd been admiring a fabric that was covered with animal spirits.

Caw caw caw. Caw caw caw. Molested by rain, all is
wet and black.

The cull of night oozes through the grass.

Somewhere far off a single owl hoots.

Pristine, its essential nature untouchable.

Ten thousand reddened lamps burn butter (beyond
the drizzle, despite the storm).

I stand at the window. The burden of water presses
on all beings.

Two birds kiss.

The land absorbs. Then it too drains (seeps to its
world's edge).

Only I know if an action is a “sky action.”

Only I know if its origin is unstained.

She glanced at the clock. Flowers stood solemnly,
pink with mud in a wetland full of cattails.

I'm beginning my evening prayers.

The nectar of peace seeps into my thigh.

I dissolve into my song. The cry of a bird, my
primordial voice.

It feels like a cave. A place of no flowers.

*

Lovely one. I sit, listening to rain-having-ended.

Its sound pervades my hill.

One bird wails. The air absorbs its trace.

Throaty dew hovers over the garden.

I mention it, not only to bring its beauty to your attention, but its silence (and penetration) in the just-now-porous earth.

Where are you, dear?

When I read of teacher and disciple, repeatedly meeting as teacher and disciple . . .

When Gyalse Zhenphen Thaye saw his teacher's home from afar, he got off his horse and cried like a child.

To count the geese . . . “Try. Try, honey.”

“I can’t. I see that I can’t do it.”

Studying the breeze, the memory comes back.

Generated endlessly, they vastly assuage our
desuetude.

“Wind holds these words,” she whispered to herself.

“Let’s rest. It’s good to rest.”

Long-stemmed freesias waved a thousand arms.

Lama Khyen! Lama Khyen! A voice rose, then gradually drifted away.

TWELVE KINDS OF VAJRA LAUGHTER

It is a day of amber light with the shiver of
oncoming winter.

I look out. See nothing but barren hill.

The sea, its patois smooth, sputters in its bareness.

(The dune, I notice, is covered with lavender
blossoms.)

A man looks up. His eyes are cold.

Fronde tilt toward sea.

A ring of moon appears. (Gulls swirl, dive, take off.)

Waves snap. Their seething withdrawal makes your skin crawl.

The after-rain smells of cucumber, oddly.

My window-shade flaps softly.

Stags stalk the yard. Unwieldy horns get tangled in
the trees.

Tiny birds dash in and out. Their drab feathers fade
in the chilly air.

The land lay wet, oozing white water.

A lone bird calls from a thicket of reeds.

Under oaks (near a river) through the leaves, there
are stars.

Jonquils pop from the dull dark earth.

*

A common day. My hill supine and blue.

A fat yellow pussy slouches up the path.

“Is that a rodent?” (An animal scurries by.)

One owl flaps its wings.

The fog melts quickly.

“It’s dry,” a woman says, rolling a carpet into place.

Blood trickles in. Squiggles of raw-red prick the stark terrain.

Golden ears trail (move out of sight). They prance slowly.

I drift with the wavelets. (Actually I am reading.)

The sudden sound of water wakes me from a
dream.

“What do you want, crow?” (A young throat caws.)

Rain shakes the blinds that are clattering noisily.

“Good morning.” (The boy wears shorts.)

Birds wrestle in the tall blue grass.

They grab the light, suck it in like water.

A single palm waves its arms wildly.

*

“Honey, do you want some toast?” (Her grandmother’s gruff voice.)

“Don’t play with your food, dear.”

A man grunts. (He has nothing to say.)

A train in the distance forges ahead slowly.

“Can you help me, dear?” (She is on her hands and knees.)

The pom-poms on her scuffs press her foot uncomfortably.

A baby cries. Bits of water spew onto the blind.

“Please, dear.” Your eyes are young.”

“Nevermind, I found it!” She slumps over the rug.

Its shags are limp (not clean).

“Grandma, you should wash it. Don’t just put it in your eye.”

“Nevermind, dear. I found it.”

The sound (of old paper) sighs in the wind.

Prayer flags toss in a backyard plot.

A basset, alone, dragging its leash. Sniffing, scuffling
along in the dark.

One bird angles its call north.

Ding! Ding! A single chime in the morning breeze.

Daylight seeps across the hill.

Fish flop. I look out and see nothing.

The motion of the grass—tall, red, easy.

An animal halts, pants, looks around.
Could it be a deer? Its ears are like a dog's.
Wet with rain, it sparkles in the light.
The sky holds this memory.

Branches of sky. Pulsations of hill.

The tilt of the sand, sideways and steep.

Yet there are buds. Fierce light hawks little sky spots.

Water pours down the little island soberly.

“The sun is showing!” someone yells.

Pale light breaks through the screen.

The sound of birds, traffic, water—“Is that rain?”

The idea of it changed me (the whole day ringing differently).

*

Labyrinth of sky. Twill sky of an evening.

Red-berried asparagus splatter on the ground.

So all around is water and a hump of earth, bland,
like a white man.

A violet wind blows soberly through the grasses.

“Hurry Greta!” Three girls grab their bags.

A trail of blue straggles behind their flip-flops.

A shoeless being squats at a curb. Palms cup his face.

Is he crying? I can only see his back, which is still, as if he were reading.

A man rises, slouches toward the water, stares for
awhile, then fiddles with his radio.

Wheat-colored light razes the dusk.

Black frost fills the air heady with wind and rattling
sunflower stalks.

On the shroud of death, inhaling lovely flowers.

Dark red husks empty their world.

Whose girdle is tight (pelvic bones protrude).

Examining, probing. Even doves lose their voices.

A tern flies by.

*

The chapel is quiet toward dusk.

Uniformed girls play kick-ball in the field.

I kneel in the pew relieved to be alone.

Loons laugh. Their weird high call.

An old man on a bench awakens slowly.

It is early. The sun cool.

The man rises. He has nothing to do.

Sun cracks through a frond.

His stencil on the earth, triangular and nude.

A priest blesses it as it bleeds away, back into the
lake.

Within the wind, torrents of rain gather.

It's intense (full-on, right away).

It clings and fills, clings, grows fat, clings and fattens
beyond the point of bursting.

Feathery rain on the edge of a field. Its spray fills
one's face but won't make one wet.

It falls with the weight of water but on landing it
dissolves.

Sweet rain among the fine-grained greenery. It
dribbles down the draw into a shady cow pasture.

A girl from a bridge (her gaze is intent).

Gritty sunglasses sag.

One dove coos. *Coo coo coo.*

Her imago in the deafening moon.

Clinging to my *hoya*, the moon's mysterious
shadow.

Tossing in the morning light, from where did it
arise?

The ocean cracks against the sand (animals at bay).

Your voice keeps moaning in my head as I watch the
creepers fall.

The sky is black, indistinguishable from sea.

Sea and sky and rain and now, even the sand is
coal-colored.

A few drops splatter.

I pity the poor animal wandering the barren hill.

*

I'm aware just now of quiet.

Yesterday's storm has soaked into the trees.

Not even the moon moves.

Rounding a bend, a tire spins helplessly.

The land lay wet, oozing gray water.

Trees droop. Branches crack (hang limply as appendages).

A squirrel scurries along the path, starting and stopping nervously.

It never once puts anything in its mouth.

A frozen world. Where is the snow?

Fog's somnoric glow subdues the stoney woods.

Cats prowl, squirrels linger, birds dart—on an ordinary morning.

Today, silence. Everything is broken.

The sun, with a smell of coolness, sinks.

A slow drizzle falls.

A man dies. But it is not a breach (really).

Jasmine and rose follow him everywhere.

