



# POETRY IS POSSIBLE

*Selected Poems*

VIKRAM KOLMANNSKOG



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vikram Kolmannskog (b. 1980) is a writer based in Oslo, Norway. He identifies as Indian-Norwegian, queer, and spiritual. He is the author of *The Empty Chair: Tales from Gestalt Therapy* (Karnac Books, 2018) and *Taste and See: A Queer Prayer* (Mohini Books, 2018).

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## NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### “Belief”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “For Utøya” in *Gestaltterapeuten* 2, 2011, in response to Anders Behring Breivik’s terrorist attack on the 22 July 2011 in Norway. Prior to the attack, Breivik had paraphrased John Stuart Mill on Twitter: “One person with a belief is equal to the force of 100,000 who have only interests.” The last lines of the poem (starting from “may all beings be at ease”) are based on the Karaniya Metta Sutta, the Buddha’s words on loving-kindness.

### “Homeland”

A previous version was first published in *Pink Pages India*, March 2014, in response to the December 2013 Koushal-judgment of the Indian Supreme Court, which effectively recriminalized gay sex.

### “Know”

A previous version was first published in *Milk Sugar* vol. 9, 2011.

### “My Cousin”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “Juni” in *Harvest*, June 2015.

### “Neti Neti”

A previous version was first published in *Milk Sugar* vol. 9, 2011. *Neti neti* is a phrase from the Upanishads, meaning “not this, not this”. It is often used as a meditation on Brahman, Universal Spirit, which cannot be adequately captured by any words.

### “Orlando, Mi Amor”

A previous version was first published in *Qvakk*, June 2016, in response to Omar Mateen’s attack on guests of the gay nightclub Pulse in Orlando, USA, June 2016.

### “Poetry Is Possible”

A previous version was first published as “It is possible” in *Otis Nebula* no. 4, 2011.

### “Queer Boy of Colour”

The last lines in the poem (starting from “That’s the kind of thing that makes passing hard”) are taken from “Passing” by the African-American poet Langston Hughes.

“Ready”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “Sol” in *Harvest*, April 2015.

“Someone”

A previous version was first published in *Gaylaxy Magazine*, 30 November 2016.

“Suraj”

A previous version was first published as “Your brilliant Son” in *Pink Pages India*, July 2016. In Norway, Land of the Midnight Sun, the sun does not set but shines all day and night during the summer months.

“The Cloud Messenger”

The title is taken from, and the content loosely inspired by, “Meghaduta” by Kalidasa.

“The Ocean Is Deeper”

The poem draws upon “The Ocean is Way Deeper Than You Think”, a film published by RealLifeLore on YouTube, 11 November 2016.

“Unlikely”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “Det verste” in *Aftenposten*, 27 January 2011.



## Here Right from the Start

Here right from the start,  
beginning of beginnings,  
when waters met fires,  
I came into being,  
briefly.

Then all of this.

You see the light clouds drifting in the sky?  
They are of my mind.  
The brownish red soil beneath?  
Of my flesh.  
The creamy white stones?  
My bones.  
The blue and red sea?  
My sweat and blood.  
I am Ymir, neither male nor female,  
yet both.

Some people claim they came from my head,  
that they know it all.

This is false.

You did not spring from separate parts  
of my body,  
higher from head,  
lower from foot.

No, all around you is my body.

And you are too, children of trees,  
Ash, Elm and many more.

I, Ymir, was here right from the start,  
neither male nor female,  
yet both.

## AMEN

Every night we said a good night prayer:

Dear God,  
thank you for everything,  
you take good care of me,  
you protect the little and the big.

Ending with Amen as Christian prayers do, as dad and his parents and their parents had done for generations.

But after Amen my Hindu mum added the names of her gods, asking that they too may protect us. To me then Amen became one god among many:

Amen,  
Ayu,  
Shanker Dada,  
Lirbai,  
raksha karjo.

## QUEER BOY OF COLOUR

I smear it thick on my skin,  
factor fifty,  
whiter just from that,  
and sometimes I wear a hat,  
but the summer sun is intense.

I try to build muscles,  
I try to walk straight,  
but suddenly it breaks out,  
my laughter, so light.

You were there,  
out and proud as you say,  
but alone in the school yard.  
You looked at me,  
I looked away.

That's the kind of thing  
that makes passing hard,  
having to deny  
your own family.

But what did you think of the girl with me?  
Pretty good looking, isn't she?

## FIELDS OF SILVER AND GOLD

Once there was a fight  
over the nectar of immortality.

Vishnu took a female form:  
Mohini.

She was seductive,  
she succeeded.

Meditating, Shiva  
had missed the sight.

He begged Vishnu:  
Please be Mohini  
once more, for me.

Suddenly she is here,  
playing with a ball,

throwing it up  
in the air,  
catching it.  
He watches her,  
bouncing breasts,  
slender waist.  
She notices him,  
smiles shyly.  
He forgets himself and  
everything else.  
The ball slips  
from her hand  
and rolls away.  
A gust of wind blows off  
her only cloth.  
She laughs and hides  
behind a tree.  
He chases her.  
She runs.  
He catches her.  
She runs again.

None of this is deception.

It's a playful game of gods.

I imagine myself as  
Mohini, man, woman.

And being a god too  
I could perhaps  
endure and enjoy  
the potency of Shiva.  
I could surrender  
and still survive.  
As he chases  
me, catches  
Mohini, loses  
me again,  
Shiva spurts  
semen, creating  
fields of silver and gold.

Everyone exhausted,  
the game ends.  
No shame.  
Everyone realises  
the greatness of their spirit  
and of the universal spirit.  
Vishnu is again Vishnu.  
Shiva returns to meditation.  
I get out of bed,  
silver and gold.

## THOR AND THRYM

Thor wakes up and  
finds his hammer  
gone.

The thief? Thrym.

In return for the hammer  
he says he wants  
to marry Freya.

Freya refuses.

Other gods suggest  
Thor can dress up  
as Freya,  
trick Thrym.

Muscular body under

delicate dress,  
red beard under  
thin veil.  
They feast,  
they eat,  
not without pleasure,  
the two,  
Thor and Thrym.

The hammer is brought,  
placed on Thor's lap.  
Tell me, says Thrym,  
that you'll be my bride.

## **PREPARATION**

- 1) Lukewarm water in the bulb
- 2) Lube on the nozzle
- 3) Insert and squeeze
- 4) Sit down and shit

Repeat 1 to 4  
till you feel clean.

## THE OCEAN IS DEEPER

He is lying next to me in bed.  
Night is falling.

He doesn't want to pull out.  
His cock, limp now, is still inside me.  
I try to get loose, he holds me tight, laughing,  
I stay.

I remember something he told me earlier.  
As a baby, as a young child,  
his young, too young, mother sometimes left him  
alone in a room crying.

I love the ocean, he says.  
It's deeper than you think.  
He finds his iPhone,  
YouTube:

Around 100 meters down,  
diving can become dangerous because of  
decompression,  
but Herbert Nitsch dove to 214 meters with one  
single breath.

Light from the surface cannot reach beyond  
1000 meters.

The phone lights up our faces and a small area of  
the bed.

The rest of the ocean is shrouded in permanent  
darkness.

At 2250 metres: sperm whales and colossal squids.  
The squids sometimes 14 metres long.  
The sperm whales found on shore sometimes  
have marks on their bodies from battles with the  
squids.

At 4000 metres: numerous strange, alien-like  
creatures.

At 6000 metres: the Hadal zone, named after  
Hades, the underworld.  
Water pressure here is equal to an elephant  
balancing on a post stamp.

Still,

after five hours' descent,  
two men in a submarine, Walsh and Piccard,  
reached a depth of 10,916 metres in 1960.  
I place his head on my chest, to rest.  
They only stayed for 20 minutes.  
A window cracked.  
Shit, I say.  
They came back up.

95 percent of the ocean's floor is still a mystery.  
Who knows what we may discover there.

It's only our first night.  
We fall asleep like this,  
him holding me tight.

## MY FATHER'S MELODY

When I was little, my father always used to whistle  
a melody.

About the morning that has broken  
like the first morning.

About the bird that has spoken  
like the first bird.

\*\*\*

Sometimes I felt all alone in the world.  
You are my friend, my father would say then.  
Am I not your friend too?

\*\*\*

In school we had to learn to play the flute.  
We sat in a circle in the music room.

When it was my turn, everyone looked at me.  
I was shaking so much I could not play.  
The others laughed.

When I had supper with my father that evening,  
I cried.  
He comforted me, a deep calm voice,  
a peaceful face, a kind hand.  
I found the flute and played for him.  
It flowed.

He said I could imagine his presence,  
focus on his face  
when I had to play for the others.

\*\*\*

I was always a little afraid when I said goodnight  
to my father.  
He was so good that he might be an angel,  
and I thought  
an angel could not be with me forever  
but belonged to the whole world,  
that one day I would wake up and be alone.

\*\*\*

I moved out of my father's house.

I was lucky to have a tree outside my new room.  
Two birds lived in the tree.  
I kept the flute and played for myself.  
My hands did not shake.

\*\*\*

One night I was wandering around alone.  
I walked past the house of an acquaintance  
and I decided to ring the bell.  
He was home.  
He was cutting a friend's hair.  
The boy was sitting on a chair in the bathroom,  
a towel around his neck,  
a pair of boxers on.  
Apart from that he was almost naked,  
that first time I saw him.  
His dark hair  
falling  
onto the white towel  
and light bathroom tiles.

Afterwards, the three of us shared a wine.  
And we fell asleep next to each other on the sofa,  
this boy with the new haircut and I.

He moved in with me.  
He became my boyfriend.

I played the flute for him.

\*\*\*

When my father's father was turning  
one hundred years,  
my cousin asked if I was seeing anyone.  
Yes, I said.  
Who is it? What is her name?  
I gave him a girl's name.  
The mayor was holding a speech,  
honouring my grandfather,  
his courage and contribution to the resistance  
during Occupation.  
I felt shame.

He was sleeping when I came back home.  
I lay down next to him.  
Half asleep he smiled and moved closer,  
his body warm from the bed and sleep.

Before going to bed my father and I  
would always say I love you and goodnight.  
Good night, I now whispered to my boyfriend  
and his real name,  
I love you.

\*\*\*

My father called me.  
He told me about a phone conversation,  
with my grandfather.  
I want to leave now, I have been here for so long,  
my grandfather said.  
Where are you going? my grandmother asked  
in the background.  
To God, he answered.  
Are you not happy here with me? she asked.

\*\*\*

My father, his brothers and I carried the coffin.  
It was a graveyard by the fjord.  
The smell of moist soil.  
The weight of an old man's body and a wood  
coffin.

With ropes  
we lowered  
him into  
the ground.

My father cried.  
His father was dead.

\*\*\*

We visited my grandmother.  
There was hardly anybody left.  
She was hardly breathing.  
She fell in and out of a sleep,  
dreaming and talking out loud:  
It is summer, she is in love,  
and they are picking blueberries,  
my grandfather and my grandmother.

\*\*\*

When I was little, my father always used to whistle  
a melody.  
But that is already a long time ago.  
I have moved out.  
His parents are dead.  
He is alone now.

One evening I went to spend the night at his house.  
When I woke up the next morning,  
I heard that he was already up,  
preparing breakfast.  
I had brought my flute.  
I found it and played.  
About the morning that has broken  
like the first morning.  
About the bird that has spoken  
like the first bird.

It flowed.  
I don't know how long I kept it going,  
but at some point I heard  
my father whistling from the kitchen.

I put down the flute and joined him there.  
We ate breakfast together.

## MY COUSIN

My cousin lies here  
soaking green in the sunshine.  
No need for poetic projection,  
nor spiritual sophistication.  
It's material and sensual,  
our relation.  
Grass and I share  
a quarter of our genes.  
No wonder I feel at home,  
barefoot on this extensive body.  
Lately I've been learning  
how to kneel  
so I can kiss her lush face.

## POETRY IS GOOD FOR YOU

Poetry is good for you.  
Creating poetry, I mean.  
(But reading is all right too.)

You have to pause,  
notice,  
perceive  
this.

That's all.  
But that's a lot for most of us.

That's god seeing and being seen,  
god tasting and being tasted.

(You don't have to write anything down.)  
(You don't have to get anything published.)

# BELIEF

one  
person  
with  
a belief  
is equal  
to the  
force  
of

hard metal against soft skin, flesh and warm blood,  
hard metal against soft skin, flesh and warm blood sinking

fragile                      now  
friends,  
sisters,                      into  
brothers,  
siblings,  
daughters,  
sons,  
children,                      moist  
never  
as him,  
as her,  
as them,  
in this  
form again                      soil

may all beings be at ease. whatever beings there may  
be, weak or strong, without exception, the great and  
the mighty, medium, short and small, seen and unseen,  
near and far away, born and unborn: may all be at ease.  
kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to  
the skies and downwards to the depths, outward and  
unbounded. without fixed views or beliefs, free.

## FOR A LONG TIME, I WAS AFRAID OF HER

For a long time, I was afraid of her.  
I kept her out of my house.  
I kept her at a distance.  
I thought I could.

But recently I started noticing her,  
again and again,  
during daily walks in old Delhi,  
and she became more familiar,  
fear reduced to excitement and curiosity,  
a gentler pull.

One day I invited her to my house.

I do not remember letting her into my bedroom,  
but now, as I sleep,  
I breathe a mantra I do not know,

and she gently whispers secrets  
on my hands and thighs and everywhere.

What I feared and tried to keep at a distance  
was already inside,  
shadows that I have tried to hide  
from myself and others,  
acid green jealousy, dark red rage,  
shadows sometimes projected elsewhere.

I look at her, dark skin, wild hair, tongue out.  
She stands firmly on the ground.  
She will teach me to stand like this.  
I will stand like this when I need to.  
But for now, since I can, I remain here on my back.  
And she looks at me, with all that I am, shadows  
and what shines, all of me.  
In her eyes I am beautiful.  
With her I become beautiful.  
She lifts me up, she has raised me.  
Loving her, loving me, I have nothing left to fear.  
Ecstatically, we dance.

## KALA JAMUN

Kala jamun  
he fed me,  
drunk,  
in the streets of Bandra,  
one sweet night.

## NETI NETI

Not this,  
not that.

Let's untie  
the not.

This is  
a poem.

You are  
the poet.



## NATH

Most likely it was the Mughals who first brought the nath to India.

Eventually, it was included as Indian culture. It is now part of the traditional jewellery worn by Hindu brides.

On the wedding night  
a groom will remove my nath  
and I will remove his.

# HOMELAND

The words of lawyers  
were never the highest law of this land.  
Love was, is, and shall forever be.  
Only lovers know what has been granted  
and what, from each of us, is required.  
Here is the Supreme Court.  
Here is our homeland.

## BOMBAY --- > OSLO

Smell of kerosene, soap mixing with incense,  
cutting chai.

Later, more humid and hot, some sweat, fish, sea,  
frying oil.

Paan dripping from sweet lips, spitting, red stains  
on the street.

Despite attempts to Swachh Bharat,  
Bombay is still sexy in that slightly dirty way.  
In my mind I go, Boom, gay, Bombay!

The honking of rickshaws, saying,  
Hey, I'm here only.  
We hear them from the bedroom even.  
And my well-travelled lover remembers  
the importance of  
not making noise like this in Europe,  
Means fuck you there, na?  
He asks me to leave him something I have worn,

wanting to savour my smell more, I do,  
and I liked his too, not good or bad, just his.

Tired after a long flight, not yet fully arrived,  
I almost say Hallo bhaisaheb to the taxiwala.  
Somali, maybe he would understand me.  
In my mind I still give directions in Bumbaiya,  
Yahaan right, yahaan left, please.  
He doesn't honk.

My little brother is at home.  
I smile and give him a Fab India kurta,  
He puts it on, leaves it on.  
I put some extra jeera in the soup, and he says,  
It is extra good this time.  
We watch a Bollywood film and I cry.

I go out.  
A person, fifty meters away, crosses the street,  
then gone again.  
So quiet I hear my heart beat and know I'll die.  
I remember a conversation in Bombay,  
my former lover saying,  
Oh, it's so European, your existentialism.  
Suddenly a guy passes by me, both of us wrapped  
in layers of thick clothes.  
Still, there is a smell, but of what?  
An overpriced fancy perfume, almost no body left

here, all clinically clean and cool.

But this is unfair, I know, I cannot compare  
Bombay and Oslo in November.

Come in May or June, I tell friends in Bombay.  
Not now.

And I'll come again next November. Pakka.

## MY LITTLE BROTHERS

On my way from  
one place to another,  
I saw the two  
on the pavement,  
just next to me,  
small,  
the light grey new feathers,  
two seagulls.  
I went past and  
looked back.  
Could they fly?  
One started crossing  
the road, a car came,  
I stopped, hoped.  
Could they fly?  
The little one ran back  
to his brother. I think it was his brother.  
They seemed lost, and I,

heart aching,  
what could I do?  
At least together the two grey ones,  
my little brothers.  
My little brothers, I said  
and continued  
on my way.

## THE CLOUD MESSENGER

See that cloud there?  
Once it was here with me.  
Has it changed?  
What do you see?

Maybe a drop forms and falls.  
As snow.  
Or rain.  
Lands on your forehead. Makes its way,  
a tiny river across your nose,  
towards your lips.  
A cool fresh drop.  
There.

Once it was here with me.

## THOSE WHO NOTICE WILL KNOW THIS

Along the motorway,  
cars roaring past,  
there is some  
yellow and green and purple,  
refusing to be dismissed  
as roadside dirt and weed.  
They say,  
Those who notice will know this  
world wants to be beautiful.

## ESTAR - SPANISH LESSON I

To be or not to be?

Sure, Shakespeare.

But it's also a question of what kind of be.

*Estar*: an impermanent state of being.

*Ser*: a more stable state of things.

Normally, one would say

*Soy indio, Soy escritor,*

I'm Indian, I'm a writer.

But this is poetry, so I'll instead try

*Estoy indio, Estoy escritor,*

the identification less strong.

Normally, one would say

*Soy un hombre or Soy una mujer,*

I'm a man or I'm a woman.

But this is poetry, so I'll instead try

*Estoy un hombre, Estoy una mujer.*

Shakespeare too might appreciate this,  
his actors crossdressing, his sexuality unclear.

So when would I use the more stable *ser*?  
What is always here?  
*Dios es amor,*  
God is love.

## LA LENGUA - SPANISH LESSON II

Spanish is a sensual language.

*Lengua* means language as well as tongue.

Listen to the sounds, the o's and a's.

Antonio, for instance.

I first met Antonio in Marbella.

We had a drink.

Then he asked if we could go *a la playa*.

He wanted to smoke *un porro*.

We found a sheltered place.

He lit the joint and inhaled.

We stood *cara a cara*.

He offered me the joint.

He held it between my lips.

I inhaled the sweet smoke.

The whole time the ocean was there,  
*el mar como una madre*, in the background.  
I told him about the beach in Bombay.  
*¿Eres hindú?* he asked me at some point.  
*Shiva es mi favorito*, he continued.

We kissed, lips against lips, *labios*,  
then tongues too.  
I felt him growing, *su polla*.  
When I looked down  
it had grown so much,  
glans uncovered,  
above the loose shorts.  
I kneeled religiously and  
greedily swallowed his cock.

But someone could easily see.

He drove us  
through the city  
up into the mountains  
where we parked somewhere in the dark.

He wanted to eat my ass, *comer*.  
I wanted to suck his cock, *chupar*.  
And then we fucked,  
we fucked like dogs,  
*como perros*.

*Me corro*, he said.  
I learned another word.  
*Correrse* means to come.  
Literally *correr* means to run.  
And the tempo was *rápido* and  
hearts were racing and  
he came.  
I asked him to stay a little bit,  
*dentro de mí*,  
then I came,  
and we rested, together, a slowing down.

I opened a window and sensed  
the sweet smell of figs.  
He told me that *higuero* always makes him horny.  
Since he was little, he had spent much time  
in the forest.  
It was under a fig tree he came for the first time.  
I smiled.  
Then I thought I saw  
some movement nearby.  
Had someone seen us?  
Caught us in the act?  
He remained calm:  
So?  
He smiled and kissed me.  
And I remembered Kali's tongue.  
You know Kali? *La historia de su lengua?*

Well, my favourite version is this:  
Kali and Shiva are fucking in the forest  
when these saintly sadhu guru guys come along.  
The holy men, shocked,  
assume the two will be ashamed and stop.  
But Kali just sticks her tongue out,  
in defiance or in jest.

Having heard the story, he smiled, *una sonrisa*.  
We kissed again, *labios y lenguas*.  
We lit up the dark night.

## A POEM BY WALT WHITMAN

Having pissed and washed my hands,  
on my way back to a poem by Walt Whitman,  
I catch a glimpse of something.

Through a half-open door, the bedroom,  
I see it on the bed, my unmade bed,  
something spilled, like liquid, bright.

Someone's spilled something on my bed. It's near  
the window.

I come closer, touch it, this light,  
and it's on my hand now, warm.  
I look out the window and see the sun.

I sense myself smiling, grateful that,  
having pissed and washed my hands,  
on my way back to a poem by Walt Whitman,  
I looked through the half-open door.

## HIP BONE

I had trouble falling asleep.

I tried to get more comfortable,  
shifting to lie on my back.  
Suddenly the left hand came  
to rest on the hip bone,  
so I sensed the hardness,  
skin but very thin over the bone,  
a bone like any other bone  
but this one a part of me right now, hip.  
For the hip bone,  
it's not important whether the poem is read or not.

I fell asleep.

## DEATH OF A DOVE

a backpack girl looks  
at stone tiles  
under a train flyover  
at a dove standing  
another dove lying

not crushed so that she can't make out the head  
with beak and eyes and body and wings  
not crushed so that there is blood  
but still crushed, a lump, still on the stone tiles

another girl arrives  
the backpack girl says  
it's obviously hurt, what's it gonna do  
they stand there for a while  
then both walk away

the dove remains here

next to the other dove  
walks close, touches  
the other's feathers with its feet

a man and a woman with baby in arms  
the man sees the birds  
the woman sees the birds  
the baby looks elsewhere, into the air  
kadunk kadunk kadunk  
train on tracks  
kadunk kadunk kadunk

the dove remains here  
walks around the other dove  
bends, beak  
near the other's head

two young men, absorbed in conversation  
looking at each other, closer to the doves  
one man sees  
oh shit  
steps away  
passing by

the dove remains here  
pokes the other dove on the back  
turns, stretches, fixes its own feathers

a boy and a girl arrive  
oh, that's so sad  
looking while walking away  
the girl with a hand on her mouth  
the boy with a smile  
the dove walks on top of the other  
the girl smiles  
turns and walks back  
takes out her phone  
runs back to the boy  
I can send it to you

the dove remains here  
walks on top of the other, poking  
feathers coming off

two boys arrive  
hey, don't eat your friend

the dove remains here  
walks around the other

a man with a plastic bag and a young boy  
the boy runs around, the man shouts  
the boy sees the birds  
looks over his shoulder as he walks  
almost trips over  
runs after the man, takes his free hand

the dove remains here  
looking at the other

oh guys, look at that  
that's sad  
it's a funeral  
ha ha ha

the dove remains here  
fixing its feathers  
do you think he's been there  
looking after him the whole afternoon

the dove remains here  
beak near the other's head

oh my god, I need to take a picture  
no, you don't  
yes, I do  
he killed him  
no, he didn't kill him  
it's very morbid  
it's more morbid that you're taking a picture  
hey you guys, we actually saw the fight  
kadunk kadunk kadunk  
kadunk kadunk kadunk

the dove flies

## THE ROAD

He takes off his sandals before entering the room,  
and I notice immediately

feet that have walked far.

We greet each other. I offer him some water and biscuits. He eats, almost everything. When I say Ethiopia, he cries. There was a drought. They starved. He is not old. He left to find a better life. When the boat arrived in Yemen, everyone on board was kidnapped. He had no money nor family to pay him free. Some of the others were sold. But the kidnappers eventually let him go. After three months of torture. He pulls up his shirt, shows me

scars, something cracks in me, my heart like a raw egg.

He walked from the torture camp in the north all the way here to Aden in the south. And then, open and raw, I think to myself that's far for someone to walk, and I ask how he managed, and he answers  
  
people along the road.

Strangers, ordinary folks, they offered him water and food and shelter and kind words along the road.

## LONGING

In the middle of the night, I woke up to the calling:

Allahu akbar.

Lying on my back, I looked out into utter darkness,  
a foreign place.

Silence again.

I started writing you this email.

## ONE YEAR

I'm sitting in the living room, writing.  
You come in through the door.  
Then I wake up, alone.  
It's been one year since the separation.

## WHEN YOU DO THAT

Almost naked on the rooftop terrace,  
facing the summer sky,  
still restless, stuck in thinking, I  
feel a gentle, cooling evening breeze stroking my  
toes, feet, legs, stomach, fingers, hands, arms,  
chest, throat, face, and I say I love it when you do  
that.

## LIFE

A swarm arrives,  
laying eggs on the skin,  
around the mouth that has tasted,  
kissed and yelled,  
the anus that has been passionately fucked,  
that most recently shat.

Then they hatch,  
and lovely larvae enter.  
Beautiful beetles also break through the mass.  
There is gas, bloated body, liquids pressed out.

If left alone, soon only bones  
remain on the ground,  
washed by the rain, bleached by the sun,  
only white bones with green grass around.

Cessation perhaps, but also transformation.  
We are beetles, flies, roots and flowers,  
divine that eats and is eaten, forever.  
We are life.

## I CAN'T

I can't.  
I don't want to go there.  
I want to cry.  
I want to lie down,  
disappear.  
But

I go there,  
and on the way I walk through the park,  
and I decide to listen and see.

And it's the  
ah of exhale and wind in autumn trees.  
It's the  
rhythmic clapping of feet and ground.  
It's the  
blood in my veins and water running next to me.

It's the  
we will do this together.  
It's the  
you are not alone.

## ALPHABETICALLY ORGANISED, INCOMPLETE LIST

Advaita ass  
Bhakti bottom  
Cross-dresser  
Devi daddy  
Ekalavya  
Faggot  
Gopi gay  
Hari-hara hook-up  
Iravan  
Jivan jism  
Karma kothi  
LGBT  
Mohini male  
Nasty  
Om  
Paramatman panthi  
Questioning  
Radha-Krishna  
Shakti sub  
Tantra trans\*  
Urvashi

Veda vulva  
Wonderfuck  
XXL  
Yogi yearning  
Zero zig zig ha

## PO'O-UOLI

Po'o-uli, po'o-uli.

A female found,  
but next day gone.

Po'o-uli, po'o-uli.

A male now, but  
no female around.  
Biologists despaired,  
no breeding to be done.

Po'o-uli.

Alone,  
or a biologist by his side,  
died,  
26th November, 2004.

## SOMEONE

Someone is trying to open  
the door, the main door.  
Probably a mistake,  
easy to make since I don't  
have my name on the door.  
They'll soon realise, but  
no, they insist.  
I get out of bed, hard-on,  
to the main door.  
Someone trying to get in.  
I open and close another door,  
making my presence known, but  
no, they insist.  
If they break in and  
I'm naked, it will be  
so demeaning.  
Perhaps they'll even  
rape me, kill me.

My family will find me like that  
on the floor.

They'll think it was  
a random lover,  
I had it coming,  
since I pick up  
men like that.

I go back to the bedroom and put on boxers  
and trousers and black socks and button a long-  
sleeved shirt.

## LIKE STICK OF ZEN MASTER

sitting silent

hearing car starts crying joyfully

feeling face and body whole

afterwards in gym

doing doing doing back extensions to become  
more attractive after all

mind on another man not here

snap goes the back like stick of zen master

walking away slowly softly laughing

## HEADSTAND

When I saw my feet  
and wiggled my toes  
up there in the sky,  
my head no longer  
the highest top,  
I smiled, an upside-down  
kind of smile.

It was so refreshing,  
even a revolution of sorts,  
my perspective different,  
my priorities changed.

But then I felt some serious pain.

Wikipedia listed many contraindications:  
high blood pressure,  
heart palpitations,  
brain disease or injury,

neck or back injury,  
various conditions with  
Latin names I can't recall  
but I may have one or two,  
oh, and death, yes, death.

Now it's mostly savasana, just as well, corpse  
pose. My head is still on the ground, my toes close  
enough to the sky. Less risk of falling and injury.  
And it's not to be dismissed as easy, this asana.  
Still, letting go, dying, awakening. But yesterday  
I was with my nephew and he is six and he looks  
up to me. So

I took a risk  
and stood on my head again.  
His little feet and toes  
at the level of my eyes,  
his laughter somewhere  
near my left thigh.  
I wiggled my toes,  
and smiled,  
an upside-down  
kind of smile.

## AWARE

pause  
breathe  
in  
out  
sense  
what is  
send  
love  
wherever  
it hurts  
every  
where  
every  
one

## SABBATH

I've decided I want Sundays,  
days of rest, reintroduced.  
No Google,  
no Grindr,  
no Facebook,  
no Scruff,  
less get get get, it's never enough.

Waking up,  
I stretch out my arm,  
my eyes not yet open,  
to check my phone  
like it's another limb,  
but it's not there now,  
not on the nightstand,  
not on the floor.  
I open my eyes,  
remember my new rules.

I've turned it off,  
moved it to another room.

I remain in bed,  
thoughts racing.  
What was my last Facebook post?  
Was I too emphatic, too absolute?  
Did I really mean that?  
What will people think of me?  
I should nuance it.  
Alone.  
Many feel alone.  
I could find another.  
Sundays are great for gay social media.  
Today the one I'm looking for,  
the one looking for me,  
he might be online,  
and I'm not, but  
no.

I smile,  
eyebrows raised.  
Impulses, thoughts, tensions arise,  
I let them pass.

Something new now,  
my phone off,  
I sense a physicality here,

skin of right index finger,  
normally on some screen,  
now thin skin against soft sheets.  
I sense these sheets,  
these sheets exist.  
I sense the sun on my cheek,  
this sun and cheek exist.  
There is a whole world here  
on Sundays.

# I FALL ASLEEP THINKING OF YOU

I fall asleep thinking of you.

You in my mind,  
me in your mind.

What words can describe this sensation?  
A lake in mid-air?

I dream about a dream.  
Am I the dream?  
You the dreamer?

Will you discern what is real?  
Do I even want that?  
No, this distinction is not helpful here.

Let's remain playful for a while,  
you in me,  
me in you.

## BRIEF

*Mayfly*, they get a month in the English language.  
*Eintagsfliege*, fly for one day in German.

In any case their lives are brief, and so is this poem:

Be born,  
dance with others in this light,  
catch another or be caught,  
fuck,  
fall to the ground,  
perhaps some rest,  
then die.

## THE MOTHER SMILES

Kali, I will meet you, this evening in the graveyard.  
I don't feel afraid. My desire is strong.

Arriving, I realise I'm not alone.  
Old trees loom large, winter black and silent  
in blue dusk.  
In the treetops crows are having a conference.  
Their talk sounds like your mantra.  
Perhaps this is their offering.  
Perhaps this is already your answer.

Sitting down on a bench, I realise that I have come  
empty-handed.  
I have come here without any offering.  
I have come only to ask something of you.  
I am ashamed of myself.  
Are the skulls that you wear not of this selfish  
kind?

I should be larger than this.  
I should ask what I can do for you.

But no, you answer me in the form of sudden  
sadness in my body.

And I allow myself to feel the desire.

And I ask you to address it.

In return I will let go and receive whatever you  
give with gratitude.

Perhaps that can be my offering.

Perhaps that is appropriate.

After all I am small and you are large.

A woman and a child walk past me.

The mother smiles, I smile back.

## READY

I don't know if I'm ready for this gift.

It has come, the sun,  
shining in on me at breakfast,  
warming my face,  
striking the newspaper pages  
and lighting up dancing dust  
in the room.

It has come after a long and dark winter.

I don't know if I'm ready.

Doubt sits as a knot in my stomach.  
I hear myself wondering:  
Should I not have changed more,  
become a better person,  
accomplished more?  
Still, it is already here,  
suddenly, the sun.  
So for a moment  
I let myself rest in the chair,  
look at the sun instead of the news,  
listen to its silence instead of old words.

I close my eyes, I'm red and warm.

## SUMMERBODY 2017

A friend is on the beach,  
hashtag beach hashtag biceps hashtag instagay  
hashtag summerbody2017.

Fuck, my finger already there,  
a light touch on the screen,  
summerbody2017:

A man, thumbs up, arms bent so biceps bulge.  
A girl, thin and tender but with big boobs.  
More people on beaches, almost naked in the sun.  
People in gyms, fluorescent light on selfie bodies.  
And salads, of course, ostensibly healthy and fun.

A sensation in my stomach,  
hunger, while buns are heated  
or only dread.

I look at it, not as toned as last year,  
the body hair insufficiently trimmed,  
and it's summer and sun and biceps and bodies,

summerbody2017.  
I should too:  
eat a small salad,  
go to the gym,  
shape summerbody2017.

I continue scrolling down, but now  
instant grace even here on Instagram:

A belly, a pregnant body.  
In the photo there is only belly  
and sunshine bouncing off the skin.

A middle-aged man, not thin,  
not toned, not trimmed,  
smiling,  
at his daughter, I think.  
That's what it says, they're out on a family trip.

A mirror selfie of a young guy,  
holding up his shirt.  
But revealed here where abs would normally be  
are black lines drawn,  
marking an absence,  
creating another kind of presence,  
and a shortcut to sexiness.  
A cheeky, cute guy,  
hashtag summerbody2017,

hashtag ftm,  
hashtag transbeauty,  
hashtag transmen.

I sense myself smiling and exhaling,  
coming out of the screen,  
smell the buns from the oven,  
leave the smartphone on the sofa,  
take out the buns, hot in my hands.  
I cut a generous portion of cheese.

I sit down with my plate.  
It tastes good,  
I feel fuller,  
a sensation from the inside.

Maybe I'll go out later,  
meet friends on the beach.

## SURAJ

Auntie-ji, we need to talk.  
Your brilliant son and I, we're having an affair.  
And it's so passionate, I can't help myself.  
He's so hot, I let him penetrate every inch of me.  
Lately, it's been so intense I can't sleep at night.  
I'm losing my mind, Auntie-ji.  
What will people say?  
Oh, don't worry. The problem is quite the opposite.  
Only you have been so blind.  
You see, he's ridiculously promiscuous,  
your brilliant son.  
And this is why I wanted us to talk.  
I can't bear the thought of a single ray of his  
entering another's body.  
Please, talk to him, Auntie-ji.  
I'm going crazy.  
Arrange for our marriage now.  
I beg you.

## A FLY SETTLES ON MY HAND

A fly settles on my hand.  
It irritates me.  
I take it as an insult.

Flies sit on filth and shit.  
Flies will sit anywhere.

And now this fly sits on me.

I watch the fly,  
rubbing the forelegs together now,  
touching its face with them too,  
washing, it seems.

## FOREIGNER

She will be seventy this year.  
This is her third country.  
This is her third husband.

Before any of the husbands,  
on lush sugar-cane farms,  
in her first country,  
she had a good childhood.  
She was close to her Ma.

But one day Ma was gone.

Her older sister tried to comfort her.  
Ma would be back in three weeks.  
Ma had gone to see her own Ma in her country.  
The first time in almost thirty years.  
She was dying.

Now her husband's son is visiting with his son.  
Her third husband.  
Her third country.  
They speak in their language.  
She goes upstairs.  
She lies alone in bed.  
She is crying.

He comes upstairs.  
He tries but he doesn't understand.

You don't love me.  
I'm a foreigner.  
I'm tired.  
I'm soon seventy.

Her older sister comes to visit.  
She comforts her.  
Ma loves you so much  
(and Ma's Ma loved Ma)  
and when we die we will all  
(all foreigners)  
be together.

She doesn't know if she believes that.  
She has never been particularly religious.  
But it is a beautiful thought.

## SILVERFISH

I wake up,  
need to piss,  
go to the bathroom,  
switch on the light,  
notice something,  
small and silvery,  
soon gone.  
I piss.

Back in bed,  
I google  
bathroom insect:  
Silverfish.  
What a beautiful name.  
Shiny, silvery, scaled, yes.  
Move in a wiggling motion.  
Evolved 400 million years ago.  
Wow.

Nocturnal.  
Hide in cracks during the day.  
Cosmopolitan.  
I smile. That's what I call myself.  
Don't spread disease.  
Need water.  
Don't bite,  
but like starchy stuff,  
such as dead skin.  
I think I can live with silverfish.

In the morning  
I have a shower.  
I leave a small puddle,  
some dead skin perhaps,  
then turn off the light  
and close the door  
for my silverfish.

## ORLANDO, MI AMOR

I heard about the shooting. Sorry I didn't get in touch sooner.

They say the gunman had seen you kiss.

It made me think of us again. Those tentative first touches, your scent, hearts racing. But outside the bed so brutal, my silly rationalisations: Public displays of affection are just vulgar, I said, it's not about being less gay.

Lo siento, mi amor. Of course it was. About being less gay. About the terror. I was terrified when you tried to kiss me at the station.

And then, te acuerdas, that time I fell asleep on the bus, my head resting on your shoulder? I woke up to an angry voice, I did wake up, that

white guy yelling at us, perverts, burn in hell, you yelling back, hearts racing. I kept my eyes shut, pretending to still be asleep, only later asking qué pasó?

Lo siento, mi amor. I've been so proud of you. And I've been so ashamed of myself. For not fighting more, fighting for our love.

But now, writing this, I also see that eyes closed, pretending to sleep, I at least remained with my head on your shoulder. At least I did that, while you yelled back. I hope you felt that.

And next time we meet, Orlando, for old times' sake, for a future, let's do a public display of affection. Hell, I'll even sing your favorite song. Bésame, bésame mucho.

## MORNING RUN IN THE MOUNTAINS

Sunshine splashing  
on my naked skin.

Long leaves and grass  
gently whipping  
my arms and legs.

Moist soil  
yielding slightly.

This intimacy, as intimate  
as I've ever been with any man,  
as intimate as sex,  
this intimacy of me,  
sun, plants, moisture, soil.

# KNOW

Know walking on the grass.

Know public display of affection.

Know dogs.

Know other gods.

Know hope.

**HEY!**

You just ran  
naked  
through my mind.

## UNLIKELY

You ask questions.

I answer.

I'm gay.

I was persecuted.

They can burn you with a cigarette on the face,  
neck, shoulders, genitals.

That is not the worst thing.

They can crush or break your fingers, hands, arms,  
toes, feet, legs.

They can pull out your hair, teeth, nails.

That is not the worst thing.

They can penetrate you with a stick, a gun or an  
everyday soda bottle.

That is not the worst thing.

I came to a safe place.  
Now I sit here before you.

But do you believe me?

I smile, and you think I'm mocking you.  
I cry, and you think I'm putting on an act.

The worst thing?  
You can dismiss me and my story with a word or  
two.

*Unlikely.*  
*Not credible.*

## POETRY IS POSSIBLE

Asking is possible.

Answering is possible.

Aurora borealis, this elusive northern light, is possible.

Banyan, this great tree spreading out through aerial roots and beyond through fruit eaten and seeds dropped by little birds, is possible.

Body, my brilliant body, is possible.

Breathing, this affirmation of life, letting go, connecting to plants and everything, is possible.

Cloud, this shifting soft shape in the sky, millions of light water droplets, is possible.

Continent, this mass of land, so heavy, slowly moving across the ocean bed, is possible.

Conversation is possible.

Dancing is possible.

Embracing, sensing his breath and heartbeat, a short moment together, is possible.

Earth, this mother, smell of moist soil and feeling of soft moss, is possible.

Flirting is possible.

Fucking is possible.

God is possible.

Holding my own hand, holding his, being held, is possible.

Homosexuality, our brave love, is possible.

I am possible.

Jacaranda, purple in bloom, is possible.

Kissing, on the cheek like little children, on the forehead like guru or god, or even tongues struggling like passionate wrestlers, is possible.

Laughing is possible.

Listening is possible.

Love is possible.

Music is possible.

Nature, this ant, this plant, this mountain, is possible.

Ocean, this vastness of waves reflecting the blue above, rippling currents, full of life and mystery below, is possible.

Peace is possible.  
Poetry is possible.

Questioning is possible.

Refuge is possible.

Smiling to him, smiling unnecessarily to a stranger, a kind gesture, is possible.

Spider spinning a web out of his body, is possible.  
Starfish under water healing themselves, is possible.

Touching him somewhere, tenderly, till now untouched, the back of his knee, is possible.

Union is possible.

Voluptuous thought is possible.

Waking up slowly with the sun shining on our  
entwined bodies, is possible.

We are possible.

X, an unknown variable, is possible.

You are possible.

Zooming in is possible.

Zooming out is possible.