

Bose-Oppen Reunion

read for The MUD Parcel Reading Series, Dec 2, 2022

Welcome to the fourth installment of the MUD Parcel Reading Series for 2022. The series is a video companion to the MUD Proposal online journal and archive. Currently on its seventh edition, the MUD is annually updated and features poets and projects that are international in scope and often multi disciplinary in focus.

Approximately six decades ago in 1961, two poets accidentally met in New York City. Although coevals, they were vastly separated by geography, culture, society, language and literary traditions. Bengali Indian poet Buddhadeva Bose was on his second sabbatical in the US at New York University when *New Directions* began to toy with the idea of publishing an anthology of his Bangla poems translated into English. In that connection, Bose met American poet George Oppen, who had returned to his country of origin after a prolonged stint in Mexico. 1961 – 1964 marked George Oppen’s return to poetry publishing. *New Directions* sought his help in assisting Bose in “americanizing” his Indo-British tongue. That was one beginning, which had in unpredictable ways led to other beginnings of collaboration and camaraderie across continents and languages over next few decades.

Our connection to this relationship began about fifteen years ago. I was immersed in Oppen’s *New Collected Poems* as part of the celebration of Oppen’s centenary. I had recently met Aryanil and we were becoming friends, getting to know each other. I recognized the two translations from a “Buddhadeva Bose” in *The Materials* (1962). The name sounded like it was from India, but there wasn’t much background in the footnotes. When I showed them to Aryanil, he seemed quite shocked to find this rare attempt at translating Bengali poetry into American English. The realization resulted a deepening discussion and research project that lasted several years. The result is an article published in *Jacket2* (link included on the series website). That prompted Peter Boyle to reach out to Aryanil in 2011 when he was translating José Kozer’s poem *Anima* for George Oppen into English.

We are joined by José Kozer and Peter Boyle. José is a prolific poet and author. Born in Havana, Cuba, in 1940 to Jewish parents who emigrated from Poland (father) and Czechoslovakia (mother). Left Cuba in 1960 and lived in New York until 1997, when he retired from Queens College as full professor, where he taught Spanish and Latin American literature for thirty-two years. Recent work includes *Ánima* (Fondo de Cultura, 2002), *Y del esparto la invariabilidad* (Visor, 2005), *Trasvasando* (Monte Ávila, 2007). Bilingual English/Spanish: *Stet* (Junction Press, 2006 - Mark Weiss) and *Ánima* (Shearsman, 2011 - Peter Boyle), and *Índole* (Matanzas, 2012 - Peter Boyle). 2013 recipient of the Premio de Poesía Iberoamericana Pablo Neruda (Chile).

Peter Boyle featured in The MUD Parcel Reading series earlier this year. Peter is coming to us from near Sydney, Australia. Recent work includes *What the painter saw in our faces* (2001), *The Apocrypha of William O'Shaunessy* (2009), *Towns in the Great Desert: New and Selected Poems* (2013), and *Ghostspeaking* (2016). Boyle has translated French and Spanish poets, including Federico Garcia Lorca, Cesar Vallejo, and of course José Kozer.

Original Bengali poem

বুদ্ধদেব বসুর মূল কবিতা

স্টিল লাইফ

সোনালি আপেল, তুমি কেন আছ? চুমো খাওয়া হাসির কৌটোয়
দাঁতের আভায় জ্বলা লাল ঠোঁটে বাতাস রাঙাবে?
ঠাণ্ডা, আঁটো, কঠিন কোনারকের বৈকুণ্ঠ জাগাবে
অপ্সরীর স্তনে ভরা অন্ধকার হাতের মুঠোয় ?
এত, তবু তোমার আরম্ভ মাত্র। হেমস্তের যেন অন্ত নেই।
গন্ধ, রস, স্নিগ্ধতা জড়িয়ে থাকে এমনকি উন্মুখ নিচোলে।
তৃপ্তির পরেও দেখি আরও বাকি, এবং ফুরালে থামে না পুলক,
পুষ্টি, উপকার। কিন্তু শুধু এই ?
তা-ই ভেবে সবাই ঘুমিয়ে পড়ে। কিন্তু মাঝে মাঝে
আসে ভারি-চোখের দু-এক জন কামাতুর, যারা
থালি, ডালা, কাননের ছদ্মবেশ সব ভাঁজে-ভাঁজে
ছিঁড়ে ফেলে, নিজেরা তোমার মধ্যে অদ্ভুত আলোতে
হ'য়ে ওঠে আকাশ, অরণ্য আর আকাশের তারা -
যা দেখে, হঠাৎ কেঁপে, আমাদেরও ইচ্ছে করে অন্য কিছু হ'তে ।

Link to article: <http://jacketmagazine.com/36/oppen-clifford-bose.shtml>

The North American morning following the reading, José Kozer wrote a letter for Aryanil Mukherjee –

DEAR ARYANIL

I WAS SO MOVED BY LAST NIGHT'S REUNION, WHICH FILLED ME WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, AND BY YOUR RENDERING OF BOSE POEM (STILL LIFE) THAT YOU KINDLY READ TO US IN BENGALI THAT THIS MORNING, AFTER BREAKFAST, I SAT DOWN AND WROTE A POEM OF THE COMPLETE EXPERIENCE WHERE YOUR VOICE AND THE VOICE OF BOSE AND THE HIDDEN VOICE OF THE GODS ENTERED MY SPIRIT CLEANSING IT FROM FALSE ILLUSIONS.

I AM SENDING THIS POEM TO PETER (BOYLE) AND ASKING HIM TO TRANSLATE IT SO YOU CAN READ AND FOLLOW IT, SO PLEASE GIVE IT A FEW DAYS UNTIL PETER CAN DO THE TRANSLATION. MEANWHILE, THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY, THANKS TO PATRICK (CLIFFORD) AND HIS SENSE OF PERFECT TIMING, I READ HIS ESSAY PUBLISHED IN JACKET 2 AND THAT HELPED ME A LOT BEFORE OUR MEETING TO ENTER INTO THE SOUL OF OUR REUNION.

HOPE WE CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER AND DO THINGS IN THE NEAR FUTURE,

JOSÉ

José Kozer

ÚLTIMA THULE

Oí una voz leyéndome entre sueños un poema
(Naturaleza muerta) de
Buddhadeva Bose en
bengalí, voz carnal de
lo ancestral manifestando
del momento original lo
que queda, voces
golpeando el silencio
ulterior (primer silencio)
traspasándolo, lo oculto
intacto, jamás vulnerado,
dioses de un solo género,
de sus esquirlas, entre
hendidias, nos llegan a
veces, veces raras (cada
vez más raras) jirones de
la primera Piedad, Pasión
primera.

Bengali idioma regocijo de unos últimos dioses Kali
Kali, sacadla con Shiva
a patadas de los
camposantos, gálbulas
entre cipreses, mausoleos,
criptas donde la Nada
convalece unas horas,
reposa tras cumplir la
Muerte el mecanismo
inerte de Shiva.

No quedan dioses no quedan voces no hay transmisión.
Aryanil Mukherjee nos
leyó un poema de
Buddhadeva Bose
en el original, los
dioses tripartitas se
sometieron más allá
de toda rencilla a la
Nada, comedero de

tuétano, la lengua
bifurcada de los
dioses lamiendo los
últimos rastros de
ceniza en las urnas,
criptas, nosotros
oyentes nos
inclinábamos ante
la sucesión de sílabas
en la boca de Aryanil
Mukherjee al subsuelo,
y nadie parecía: Oh
Muerte deslavazada
flor de loto, ave Roc,
anchas caderas de la
madre, madre y padre
potestad de la Danza
Macabra anterior al
olvido, cantemos con
los dioses inorgánicos
polvo y Nada en bengali.

Ultima Thule

(Translated into English by **Peter Boyle**)

I heard a voice read to me in dreams a poem

(Still Life) by

Buddhadeva Bose in

Bengali, an ancestral

full-bodied voice

revealing what is

still here of the original

moment, voices

striking on the ultimate

silence (first silence)

going beyond it, what is hidden

intact, always inviolate, gods

of a single nature from

their splinters, in cracks

and crevices, reach us

at times, in rare moments

(more and more rarely) tattered

shreds of the first Pity, first

Passion.

Bengali language joy of some last gods Kali

Kali, drive her and Shiva

out of the cemeteries, cones

among cypresses, mausoleums,

crypts where the Void

recuperates for a few hours,

after fulfilling Death the
inert mechanism of
Shiva rests.

The gods have gone the voices have gone there's no
transmission. Aryanil
Mukherjee read us
a poem by Buddhadeva
Bose in the original, the
three-fold gods submitted
beyond all quarrels to
the Void, the marrow's
feeding trough, forked
tongue of the gods as they
lick the last traces of
ash in the urns, in crypts,
in ourselves who listen we
bowed before the
succession of syllables
in the mouth of Aryanil
Mukherjee to the subsoil,
and no one appeared: Oh
disjointed Death lotus
flower, the great roc,
the mother's wide
thighs, mother and father
the Dance Macabre's
jurisdiction immediately
before oblivion, with the

incorporeal gods let us sing
dust and the Void in Bengali.

