

li's song: the first attempt  
jim perkinson 12/24/01

it is night over the grasses  
the mountain bird is quiet  
the wind like an ancient lost lover  
meandering  
the island is a green feather on the back of god

you were born from a single beat of  
the heart that began that world  
the turtle looked up when you drew your first breath  
the sky was indigo and quivering silence

but the day was foreign  
broken by foreigners

it was war in the fields  
over the cities  
war beneath the cruel word of kindness  
sinking deep into the belly  
with poison  
and you took it all unsuspecting  
drinking with your heart  
draining the cup  
not feeling the lye until the blood showed

you cried and their name appeared on your lip  
you obeyed and it was your debasement  
you saw the trap in your tiny dark burrow  
and carefully hid your diamond tongue

hands became your coin, your trade  
soft and softening, caressing the trouble  
soothing the broken skin  
mending bone they could have broken

until you retched

and your mama's face cut your lung  
your grandmother looked straight out through your  
intestine  
your people climbed up your gullet  
with blood on their tongues  
and you spoke, retching  
and understood sickness  
in being sick  
and cursed it

you climbed through the night  
into the deception of noon  
and found the lie white with fever

and knew all bones pale, all  
throats dark with unborn moons

you groaned and the horizon quavered  
a little

you found ice in your eye  
severing heads and governments  
and you were no longer you  
but a groundswell  
you knew the long wail  
covered in dirt and banana leaves  
pushing up concrete on your back  
fighting bullets with song  
dying and never dead,  
the note trembling

and now the name glitters a thousand thousand  
strong  
in your hesitant breath  
you speak many and shake in your slender courage  
you labor with history in your loins  
a volcano in your leg  
a banyan tree wrapping your spine  
your words are grapes and wrath  
your trembling touch  
tumbles walls

it is i who fall

i fall inside my people  
i have been falling for a millennium  
before your pointing finger  
i fall outside

only in your burning  
have i discovered my seed  
is released  
by fire

and now i am  
fire and burning  
and there is a world to be cleared  
by flame and kisses  
by tears like rivers of ancestors  
and your tongue names it  
and my heart wills it  
and the gods dream it

and wait for us