

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