

THREE POEMS



Gwyneth Lewis

THE ART OF SWEARING

Far out in India I bought my girl a bird
and they laughed, *those bastards*.
I fed it, stroked it, taught it a few words
to please my Mary. *Bastards*.

Taffy crew no good to Spiro,
chop them up for stinking stew.
Mary. *Bastards*.

I dreamt how she'd laugh when the myna'd say her name
(she smells so lovely). *Bastards*.
Fed it tidbits till the bird was tame
then she'd love me. *Bastards*.

Spiro may be fat and ugly
but he'll make whole crew go hungry
over Mary. *Bastards*.

They only went and taught the bird their curses.
Oh my mary. *Bastards*.
How do men like me get nurses
but for presents? *Bastards*.

Spiro'll stir their guts and gizzard
till they're throwing up to starboard.
Mary. *Bastards*.

Late, on watches, trained by whole crew
bird goes "Mary. Bastard".
Myna's ruined. How can Spiro woo
the fair with foulness? *Bastards*.

Taffy crew no good for Spiro.
Chop them up for stinking bloody stew.
"Mary. Bastard." *Mary!*

THE BOOMING BITTERN

Listen to that bittern boom.
You'll never see him. Reeds do sway
and so does he,
courting invisibility.
Boom, bittern, boom.

See, he points up to the sky
in sympathy with wind-stirred sedge;
he skulks, he poses
while crafty camouflage
gives his disembodied boom the lie.

This discretion's saved his life
so far. He sways in silence but he dies
alone. The boom's
his only hope—his cry
might bring a brood of chicks, a wife.

To boom or not? A car alarm
risks nothing when it calls its mate.
But in a bog
you must be *heard*, or not copulate.
So risk it bittern, boom, bittern, boom!

TWINS

Even in the womb we called each other “chi”.
We grew, companions, playing hide and seek
through membranes, lying cheek to cheek,
each a sun to the other. Formality

was instinct in us. Now we feel
each other's pain through amniotic seas,
are jealous, awkward, ill at ease
with each other's partners. Closeness is a veil

torn at our peril. I would travel space
to find you. Hide me. Mighty planets turn
unseen but pulling. How I long for dawn
and distance, rose light on your unborn face.

chi—The Welsh formal “you”, as opposed to “thou”.