

## 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.

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