

**MANI RAO**

From the manuscript of *Ghostmasters*

The poems in this selection are from Mani Rao's manuscript, *Ghostmasters*.

"Worker" and "Airing at a Sniff" first appeared in *Tinfoil* and *XCP* respectively.

*This excerpt is an Almost Island exclusive.*

## Shorts

Some deaths are well-dressed  
Butterflies neatly folded  
    Some have banners  
    One ragged wing banging in the wind

One by one the petals bowed  
Such polite timing  
We gave each its due  
    Now uncapped  
    The smiling pod seedy teeth  
    The old bitter-gourd  
    Shaking to be a rainstick

On the contrary when  
You are dying you change  
To prose  
    The family finds out who gets what  
    You are finally understood

## Worker

Pressed poet  
Having to thing poems  
The lights are off  
Speak in your own person

Anon – Nonym – Nymous  
Strong Weak Relative Nons  
Us Them Impersonyms  
Hate Like Ignoronymous

Many master words

Poet – pretender  
Light – thunder

Permit no ambit  
Even loser's glory

Humility:  
Prolog's cunning  
Epilog's arrogance

*Stay young fox don't learn panic*

That I think it is not to be feared does not mean I don't fear it. I used to be someone. I placed so much value on it I acted humble, prefacing the admission of my fortune with 'undeserved'. How low an opinion I had of myself that I became satisfied.

Art Artifice log away

§

As soon as you start to read my poem I start to feel fond about you

Do you believe in love

the small l  
those little fires  
much huddling

two tossed aquariums in the ocean

Love|lies

All|lies

Outside The Aviary  
Two Freewheeling Snowplumes  
Interlocked  
Coi !  
Ploded Verges  
Flurry In The Cages  
The Sky Separated In To Two  
The Nets High        Humane

Across The Room. Hair Moon Clouds. Smile Said Between You And I. Sudden Gun And  
Shot. Eyes Jumped Water. Why The Sidelong Glance. A Line Between Mountain And  
Ground. The Range Watched. Grew. Not The Size The Lightness. Not The Lightness  
The Shapeliness. Not The Shapeliness The Sharpness. Not Of A Rumble. Of A Sesame  
Seed. Itch Around Which Forms Grain. Need Wind Not Water. Light Sway. Upward  
Stroke. Eye Open Dumbell.

Two Rings. Mortal § Immortal. Soft Flame. Fingernail Size.

∞

Flashfires  
Not much writing  
Greek plays – accounts of murders done off stage  
Why I find toes weird because I don't use them  
Why I fish without bait because I love jaws

Heart's enlarged  
Do I have to have it out  
The having to honor what  
means nothing but what  
not honoring does not mean

Triumph threw me  
Out on my ass

Ears blown  
Lay throbbing

Tumortime  
∞ I was supposed to swallow

Wait for the webs  
Maggotflowers

Gratitude for the gone  
Unsummonability

## Airing at a sniff

Easy in the envelope of your hands  
Rewinding to the memoir  
The glyph in your graze

Rrrrip  
Rrrrip  
Rrrrip

E a s y I said to the deaf habit of a jawdisc  
What's the hurry  
The season sprawls

My fiber was coarse  
All five: flavor color odor vibre texture

We ran amok dusting air unsettling  
And now bereft jumped on the moon  
Straycow  
Honeybell  
What else to do but ruminare

Come graze ghost bees  
About time

## Void Plate

When the gates of spring squeaked in the mouths of birds I put out a hand  
Sunflower seeds embedded in my flesh  
A bare-breasted mother re-filled the feeder with liquid suet  
Fat River Love  
Fire Forest

O the knots on Osage for fire to suckle  
Sootfaced I stood uncurling fruitdrops

I could not feed the fire considering it untouchable  
My only way was through it

The only way to knowledge is through God I had to say  
And what is God she had to say

The void is the plate  
Engraving zigzag  
Fire the flare of sound through it  
Voice ashen

Is this writing  
Then where is my tongue  
I've abandoned the pail and pitched my tent on seesaw water

*What if I am my own witness*  
My ears believe each other

