

**MANI RAO**

From the manuscript of *Gods R Us*

These are previously unpublished poems from Mani Rao's work in progress, *Gods R Us*.

*This excerpt is an Almost Island exclusive.*

## Simili

Narcissus drowning in onliness  
The rest in duplicity

## In the Shower Thinking of Actaeon

Gaily the nymphs pretend  
To man her prudity

Hard after a hunt Diana  
Flirts water at Actaeon

### Still in the Shower Thinking of Actaeon

What Ovid does not offer  
What Slavitt does not explain  
It was the water I say  
It was the water she  
Squirted  
When you gawked that  
Masked your trail

Your curs fell on you  
Deaf to Actaeon

## Jove's Collar

How nice to have a wife  
Who's also sister you  
Fornicate in the street  
Then go home to eat

## Cadmus is history

Stacked with crawl  
The dermis  
Malignant  
These jungle skins are one  
As Cadmus walks they sync

Don't come back without her begins his story  
Exile begins a hero

Above the ground the trees appear various  
He looks at the pointed faces leaves held like shields  
His immediate hand darts to hilt

What falls is trunk  
Any arborist will tell you that  
You can't uproot history  
History's staunch  
Axes scratch graffiti

For details go to Ovid  
I just give  
The gist of it we  
Confront what we are we  
Become what we battle

## Aphrodite:

Amorous  
But no amour?

Your cock-tip smiles  
Spurting  
Moonbeam

There's a mouth  
Doesn't lie

## On the Tail

What did you  
Do with the bees  
Hermes

Every which way according to the  
Ithyphallic cacti

I am looking for the eyes of God and all I see are hollows

Your smooth lyre a lure

You know the score Circe  
See my love oodispossess

I'll be swine  
I'll be godswine

Bring hollows

# Cupid & Psyche

To p on you  
To quote myself

# My Daughter Philomela

The desire at the back of it all the  
Right of a maker

Your  
Instinct draws love  
Trust commands duty

Little Philomela  
You knead my face-putty playdough-nose  
You enter verbs prod nouns  
Body – a fact you do not separate yet

Isn't it fun    running in the open    conquest of trees    wrists    knees    crunchy hair

Twirling in a new dress    Five husbands gawk Draupadi    shuddering    lockjawed  
what's thoughts    where's mind    whose funpark    how to be wrapped Krishna

Arms crossed    knees fetal    your sleeping position's Leda

Every age imposes its season on you  
You regardless permissive

O Philomela  
A dog's fooled when lover returns as thief  
Jatayu's goosed at Sita's heist

I did not even search his face  
I thought him son his  
Ardor manner procedure  
Honored your sister

Now nightingales  
Pity Tereus's father

Parent place the snakes on Medusa's head

## Ravana's garden

The news is fragrance  
Godliness in Ravana's garden  
Sita's breath the breeze's swoon

Ravana's waylaid by a hair wave on the margin of a leaf  
At the leaftip a punctual gliss  
He holds the blade between his fingertips as infant hand  
Turns it over  
Looks at his palms  
Turns them over and back  
Eyes dilate  
A vine relaxes grip  
In the shade many shades  
Colors without names  
Where the trees keep their faces  
What's drooling in a dry web in a petiole

Listens  
Lessons rhythm

Symphony expanding to the nth

Brahma's Blood  
Siva's Pet  
Brahmin-Daitya  
Nectar-Navel  
Ten-Head  
Penance-Perfectionist  
Seer-of-the-SivaTandavaStotra

Ravana  
Turns to the sense in all this  
Sita  
To describe her

No adjective has Sita  
Sita's Rama's adjective  
SitaRam  
Life of Rama's life

Perfect Prkrti Sita  
To be crucible  
Had to be clayborn  
Density creation's material

Although  
Paris is no Ravana  
Helen no Sita  
Ravana sees Troy burning

Sita mindless  
Heart pendant lotus

Rama's Coming  
Ravana's Comet  
Lanka's on a tail

## Ode to Kali

Kali Ma  
Tongue unshy  
Your necklace chatters  
Skirt tassles sigh  
    Mercy Kali

Everyone's Ma  
Nobody's Lover  
Sister Daughter  
    Slaughter

## As Promised Tithonus

There'll be clusters ... presses ... drinks ...  
Aurora runs  
Aurora reddens

In the vineyard  
By the corky  
Tendrils on the  
Stalks :

Raisins