

The Stinking Rose

Poetry by Sujata Bhatt

The Stinking Rose

Everything I want to say is
in that name
for these cloves of garlic—they shine
like pearls still warm from a woman's neck.

My fingernail nudges and nicks
the smell open, a round smell
that spirals up. Are you hungry?
Does it burn through your ears?

Did you know some cloves were planted
near the coral-coloured roses
to provoke the petals
into giving stronger perfume...

Everything is in that name
for garlic
Roses and smells
and the art of naming...

What's in a name? that which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet...

But that which we call garlic
smells sweeter, more

vulnerable, even delicate
if we call it The Stinking Rose.

The roses on the table, the garlic in the salad
and the salt teases our ritual
tasting to last longer.

You who dined with us tonight,
this garlic will sing to your heart
to your slippery muscles—will keep your nipples and your legs
from sleeping.

Fragrant blood full of garlic—
yes, they noted it reeked under the microscope.

His fingers tired after peeling and crushing
the stinking rose, the sticky cloves—
Still, in the middle of the night his fingernail
nudges and nicks her very own smell,
her prism open—



A Gujarati Patient Speaks



A heart surgeon in London made it a practice
to operate only after he and his patient
had both listened to Gould recordings.

Usually, when I'm sick
I eat rice with yoghurt,
two cloves of raw garlic
and some (dalnu pani).

After the dal has settled
on the bottom of the pot
I scoop out the top-water,
rich with onions and garlic—
I squeeze fresh lemon juice
over it in my bowl,
drink it slowly—
Usually, I feel much better.

Coriander is important.
And fenugreek.
I use lots of fenugreek.

Although I live in London
I still prefer my ways.
Sitar, tabla: I call them my basic
instruments because they help me
improve my mood, soothe my headaches.

When I hear certain notes
I can smell patchouli,
I can smell my mother's soap
and the oil she used
on her hair.

So when my doctor asked me
to listen to all this Bach,
The Goldberg Variations—
I thought he must know
something about Ayurvedic methods.

But why Bach?
And why Glenn Gould?
Normally, I don't listen
to piano.
Even my children prefer saxophone—
and mostly jazz.

Still, this morning after breakfast
I gave it a try.
Glenn Gould: such movement, exact
the way honeybees measure
and remeasure the sun
all summer—pink zinnias—
urgent wings hum after
the shifting angle of earth and sun.

And if there is sleep in the background
it is the sleep of a man
with too many dreams—
and it is the sleep of lovers
who can't ignore each other.

I see why a surgeon
who worships the gestures,
lust after the fingers behind the sound.

But me? How will the piano
understand my moods?

The above quotation is from Glenn Gould:
A Life and Variations, by Otto Friedrich,
Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd.,
Toronto, Canada, 1989.

It has not rained for months

To know whether a woman will bear a child.
Clean a clove of garlic, cut off the top, place it
in the vagina and see if next day her mouth smells
of it. If she smells, she will conceive; if not, she will not.
—Hippocrates

It has not rained for months.
Hot dirt from the fields, hot dust
whipped up with the wind
hurts my throat, my chest—

I can not breathe
and then he comes with his clove
of garlic, with his hot garlicky breath
and his beard, sharper than thorns
and his face of stone—I can not breathe
but he opens my mouth

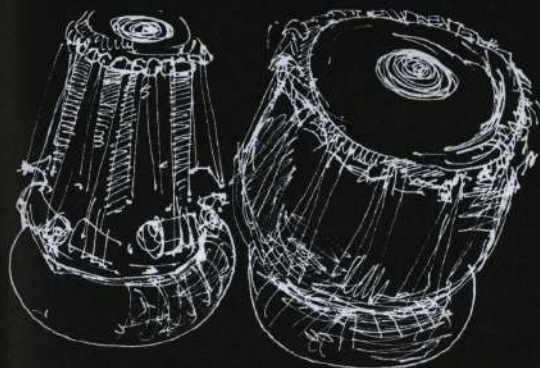
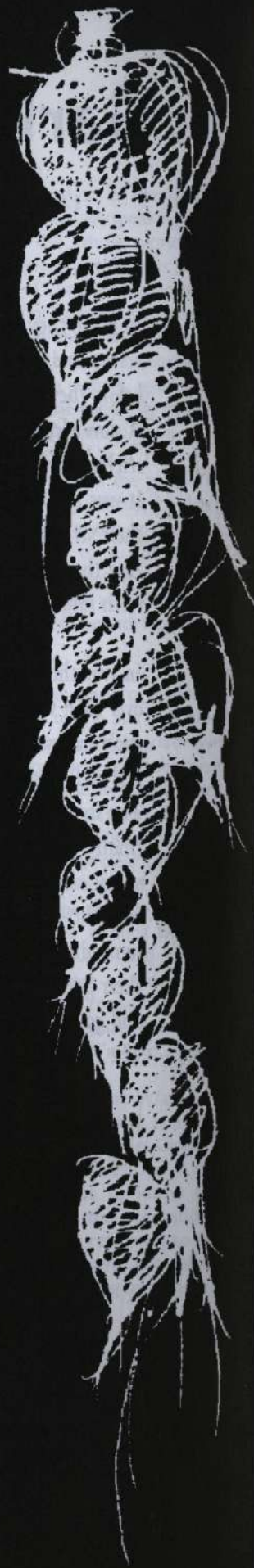
and then I must keep this clove
of garlic inside where my flesh
has become so raw
that it burns—It has not rained
for months—and I lie facing the window
and I watch the crows
peck at stolen seeds—
I can not breathe
and every morning he comes
full of remorse with his hot
garlicky breath he opens my mouth

and then I must remove
this clove of garlic
from his burning flesh
and I think that if
I would bleed at least
the blood would heal
me, at least the blood
would soothe
the garlic scrubbed cuts.

It has not rained for months.
I am wet from my own sweat.
Hot dirt from the fields
stuck in my heart.

Every month I bleed
too much—

too much—and then he comes
with his clove of garlic
and then I must keep
this clove of garlic deep inside me
where it burns.



Garlic

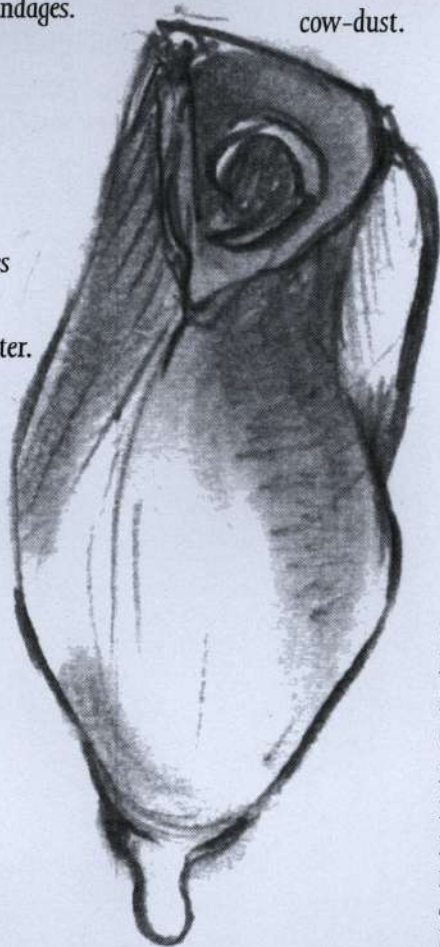
in War & Peace



In peace they rubbed garlic paste
across their lower backs
before they lay together.
A slow cleansing—it was
sticky, then strangely cool.
It was their secret bite
their strongest aphrodisiac.
And they preferred green garlic
with large purple cloves.

In war they dabbed garlic paste
over each wound—
such endless wincing
and endless those white cotton bandages.
The stench of pus and garlic
finally giving way to pink skin
shiny as a freshly peeled clove
of garlic—new patches of skin
reminding them how in peace
their garden overflowed with lilies
and garlic—and the roses!
The roses sprayed with garlic-water.

In peace their only war
was against worms.'



A Brahmin Wants The Cows to Eat Lots of Garlic

So he can drink
the garlic-rich milk.

That's the only way
he's allowed to take garlic.

A brahmin wants the cows
to eat lots of garlic—
and he watches making sure they do

He wants to step out
of his brahminhood and wander
cow-like through the spring-hazy-purple-dust,
cow-dust.

But a little bit of milk
will bring him back to his senses.

Sujata Bhatt was born in Ahmedabad, India. Presently she lives in Bremen, Germany. These poems are from her most recent collection of poetry, **The Stinking Rose**, due from Carcanet in 1995. Her **Brunizemf** (1988) won the Alice Bartlett Prize and the Commonwealth (Asia) award and **Monkey Shadows** (1991) a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Both publications are from Carcanet. Illustrations by Amir Ali Alibhai (p. 19, 21, 22) and Adam J. Bochynski (p. 20, 21). A. Alibhai is a Vancouver based artist, curator and art educator. A. Bochynski is an illustrator and designer who lives in Calgary, Alberta.