



Ivan Arguelles

XXII

JUGGERNAUT

*“In Pukār, our town,
A whirling bee can’t tell a woman’s eyes
From a pair of blue flowers
Opening in the moon’s reflection in the water”
Cilappatikāram*

everything falls apart
what the mind is capable of
and what the mind utterly fails at understanding
are the same
crushed by the rolling wheels of time
maze of flowers fragrances bees aiming for the heart
secreto de amor compelled by hundreds of deities
onslaught of stellar whirlpools at midday
richly caparisoned elephants swaying on the royal road
horse drawn chariots without number under yellow canopies
somewhere in their midst king of the gods Indra
dead drunk lurching under the gemmed white parasol
on either side dimensions of *apsaras* seductive and sweating

blaring conch shells ankle bells clashing cymbals drumming tabla
for a hundred years this noon hour stretches in a riot
of cosmetics kohl henna lip gloss rouge lacquered nails
sandalwood paste smeared thick over bared melon breasts
tintinnation of the high pitched flute and OM chanting
by the thousand bards who line the monarchic thoroughfare
crowds dense with devotion and incense wafting black clouds
into the intense heated air that none can breathe
palm frond fans waved by copper skinned slave girls bought in Chennai
do nothing to quicken the stifling meridian atmosphere
nobody is anybody in this throng everybody is absent
the crush of human forms wild with witless ecstasy
moves as a tsunami wave across the city in its rectangular math
umbrellas made from the eyelids of *rakshasas* steam
beneath them courtesans and the hundreds of royal wives wilt
as flowers that can no longer hold their heads in a hot house
an odor of immense and lush decay pervades the festival
a labyrinth of colors saffron yellow mauve violet rose swells
like a mirage produced by the billowing tides of incandescence
blowing out of the doorways of the magnificent palaces
each in form and content like mountains of sugared candy
sultry eyes the pupils baked with desire peer through
the honey scented haze in search of the perfect lover Krishna
the ear fills with the deafening roar of an unseen orchestra
cinema love songs blare out of the cornices of hotels
it is an orient of spectacular and cosmic proportions
heaving buttresses and arches of polished stone into the sky
from which perch richly decked jewel crowned monkey gods
whose deft paws scatter red powders into the four quarters
of a heaven that seems to be painted like a massive paper
with threatening sulfur streaked thunder clouds rippling
just above the heads of drugged divine kings parading slowly
on their heavy draped mounts everything moving at lizard's pace
across a sun burnt paving stone in all directions dimensionless
no end to this infinite procession punctuated by the cries of peacocks
dancing in mid afternoon drizzle and the rich aroma of earth
lifting through groves of yellowish-white *champa* flowers into the ether
nobody has recall of the morning dew stained and flush pink
when the wheel was set into motion by mendicant Brahmans
reciting all four Vedas and the eighteen Puranas in mellifluous tones
when great dust balls arose from stables where the steeds finely
bedighted were readied for the concert of the altars
fuming with holy fires and banners smoking into the horizons
and the enormous pearly sea conch with its roseate ear
set forth the summons resounding as far as Mount Kailas
where dormant Uma still deep in a sultry perfumed sleep
barely stirred lifting a heavily serpent-braceleted arm
who was there to recount how the cars of the Sun glistened
moving out from night's ancient mansions into the empyrean

which is the shadowless house of the Unformed One
no one can recall how the day sped from its dark eternity
through the wakening among red lotus buds and the clamor
of distant oceans echoed in the nymph's earlets like salt murmur
cascading through the gilded fingers of the Merciful Goddess
and how mushrooming from invisible abodes the crowds
speaking the twenty eight Prakrits of the subcontinent
painted daubed bejeweled and scented with musk and sandal
no one distinguishable from the other dazed in a rain of yellow pollen
hypnotized by the world's myriad gaudy cinematic allures
among them girls scarcely adolescent hiding in themselves death
wrapped in costly silks and wearing their hair in towering pagoda shapes
on their hips blue lotus blossoms emit intoxicating fragrance
exulting in the enormous reference of smothering heat
who doesn't swoon at one time or other in the lush tropical syntax
from mid morning when the rush began and the array of ministers
of eunuchs dancers and mimes everyone as if a figure from a mural
on the walls of the Ajanta caves hardly aware of the person
or the passage of time embalmed as it were in great hives
honeycombs of intricate waxen chambers in which gamblers
some with dice others with dominos displayed on great carpets
cheat and swindle one another sweating in costly raiment
and the constant murmur of those paid to enchant and entice
filling the head with tales of colorful nonsense and pornographies
becoming drowsy with alcoholic drinks or sweet opium Bang
a dream a kinetic depiction a deception of being born and living
running before eyes half shut in illusory slumber the acts
of individual existence mummified as humans performing
the various duties and businesses which involve the time of life
money passes hands in great sums women suddenly appear
marvelous and cunning barely clad bodices falling from the breast
rubies ensconced in deep navels nipples heightened to excitement
theft of mind enormous whisperings in endless corridors
being led through the inner sanctum of palaces the size of suburbs
where in the world is the outside where is the unfinished procession
smell of horse manure elephant dung rotting fish undone beds
stained yellow with sex play sashes drawn over wall-length windows
and the drone and hum of bees unraveling girdles and bow-strings
darkening hush passing from consciousness into trance state
flower petals falling inertly from withered victory garlands
memory now dim of daylight and the throbbing of drum and cymbal
specters of demons flying through the air in a dash to overtake
child brides living goddesses from the Himalayas and rape them
in cloud houses where anvils work to create menacing thunderstorms
no one is possessed of right thinking only error and human delusion
triumph of painted symbols of loud and roaring music of heat
and the broad way now quakes and cracks from the weight
elephants sway drunkenly out of line horses start on rear legs
bells ring dissonantly shrieks of women obsessed with obscenities

in whose house am I sleeping
do you enter the chamber of silences
drawing the curtains of whisperings
and beside me lie drawing from my breath
the red thread that leads to death
and mouth to mouth confess who you are
the other the blank manifestation
the devotion to the Nameless
wet petals your locks
darken on your white brow
your fingers tighten the chords
of the stringed instrument the first
and third notes strike perfection
together we descend
inside and out the same *being*
there is a drizzle of pollen
a lone bird purple plumed cries out
eerie phantoms across the water
echo some indistinct words
fragrance of the yellowish-white *champa*
in the temple of the young white god
in the temple of the meridian deity
JAGANNATH

I dreamed we went to the great city Maturai
in the middle of the night its broad paved ways
teeming with coopers goldsmiths iron mongers
and mendicants who come from up country
seeking refuge in the sanctuary of the Tathagata
separated from each other we became *other*
ghouls inveigled us into distinct labyrinths
I was taken by the golden goddess who feeds
on the newly dead in the crematoria
and you gone forever

*“I didn’t know she was a goddess,
Had I known, I wouldn’t have gone there.”*

Ivan Argüelles is the author of many poetry books, most recently *ARS POETICA* (2013). Others include: *Comedy*, *Divine*, *The* (2009) and *Madonna Septet* (2000). Of Mexican-American heritage, he has known life on either side of the border, and is the identical twin of New Age prophet José Argüelles (d. 2011). A retired professional librarian, he resides in Berkeley. The poem printed here is the 22nd canto of Argüelles’s long poem, *FIAT LUX*.

Photo: Gopuram (Gareway Tower) of Madurai Meenakshi Temple