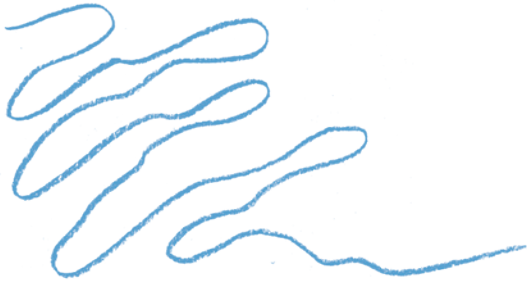


WORLD



WRITE 2



2025

WORLD

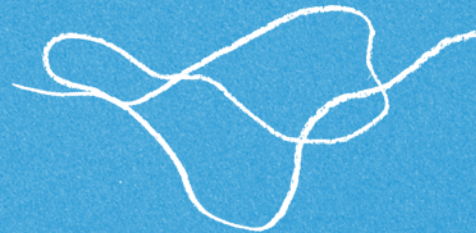
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What is language?

What are borders?  
What are walls?



### Multilingual creative writing exchange

World Writes is a writing group for people who speak English as another language. It is part of New Writing North's West End Writes programme and is based in the John Marley Centre in Newcastle (UK). The group supports multilingual writers to create great art, decentre the English language, champion marginalised voices and build safer creative spaces for migrants, immigrants, refugees and sanctuary seekers.

This publication shares work produced as part of a multilingual creative language exchange. This project took place as a series of online workshops with writers

from around the world, writing in over twenty different languages. Exploring the theme of cities, the work in this publication playfully explores how language interacts with body, place, shape and sounds.

World Writes is a New Writing North programme, which is part of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded West End Writes programme aimed at co-creating cultural activity in the West End of Newcastle. This programme has also been supported by Newcastle Cultural Investment Fund and the North of Tyne Combined Authority Fund.

## Contact Improvisation

Borders become touching bodies in words – they each show the place where contact happened, they store a history of rubbing against (again and again) each other. In words, the border becomes a unit. Words suture people back together, they say: “you were here”, and they ask: “*h o w* were you here?”.

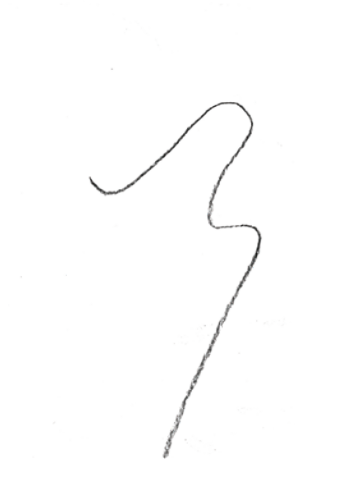
When the *h o w* wasn't good, words detach. They draw a line and shed the bits they had in common with each other. If the touch was no caress, they too retreat. If consent was not given, they turn around (and in).



Sometimes words want to reach out, but they are pushed back. Sometimes a border is placed between the word you and me. The tongue is tied and held captive. Sometimes eyes look down in judgment, and the words once holding themselves so proudly, they cave in. When you held me at the frontier, when you asked me about moving back, when you put a price on my rights, you shut the lid on a cardboard box that contained (contains) me. You took the pleasure from the play-game was I for your pr-a-ying hands.

The words breathe,  
 They are moving from person  
 To place, seeking to add  
 To the skeleton that is being built.

Old mental muscles join up with new ones,  
 As the landscape keeps changing  
 From a desert of loss into an abundant forest,  
 Filled with all kinds of life blood conjoined.



### All at Once

My mouth bleeds as the sound comes forth,  
 Unbound from its biological constraints,  
 As my depths connect and are released by it,  
 The night sky door to universal imagination.

A chaotic whirlpool restructures  
 This paper construct of a world,  
 With particles of things past slithering  
 Across the watery mirror of a laugh.

## Does the heart belong to one's mother tongue?

Can a language learnt when adulthood has stolen many dreams become the language of the heart, filling a void no other script could ever heal?

Can someone else's mother tongue become one's own, ignoring everything that maps, politics, and ideologies state as facts? Or was it always one's? How can a stranger unknowingly and effortlessly lead one to a new path? To the path of the heart, paved with foreign yet innate words, which words, like an ancient language left in a previous life, reveal themselves crawling out of the shadow, slowly, steadily, knowingly.

'Ya hemos vuelto.' they say louder and louder.

'¡Me alegro de volver a estar contigo!' they announce daily.

'Are you guys here to stay?' asks the heart, full of hope.

'Mientras nos necesites.' comes the wordless response.

Is it about languages at all? Or *es que* solely the stranger's heart met one's own, so open and hungry? *¡Importa eso?*

*Después de todo*, aren't we all connected? Maybe we all have access to all the knowledge of the world, lives long lost, people never seen. If only we could stop praising maps, politics, and ideologies, *¡en vez de aceptar conexiones!*

If only we could stop praising maps, politics, and ideologies, *¡y escucháramos a nuestros corazones!* What if we accepted those connections right now? *¡Por fin! Por favor.*

Nandhein hoondein, meenji daadi mukhey **hathan saan gitiyun**  
kharaindi hui

Dari vatt wey karey, roz roz aakhaaniyun budhaindi hui

Meenji daadi-e khey **lakh aakhaniyun** yaad hundiyn huyun

Randhrein joon, ghara joon, jaanwaran joon, ae **zindagi joon**

Hikrey deen meenji daadi guzari vey, ae aakhaniyun budhaira lai  
ker kona bacho ho

Moon ghara jey mardan khaan pucho, '**Daadi ji aakhaani** cha  
hui?'

'Daadi-e khey chaa varando ho, ae daadi ji kaeri ichaa hoondi  
hui?'

Ghara jey mardan chayo '**khabar koney**', hunan vatt safa jawaab  
kona ho

Randhrein mein, velan, chakley, ae pareen jey lotey gadji  
mukhey budhayo

'Teenji **daadi rani** hoondi hui, ae huna **khey khand-mani varandi**  
**hui**'

Daadi-e jun **aakhaniyun mashoor thi vanan**, hiya-i huna ji icha  
hoondi hui

Tu budhai jae daadi-e joon aakhaaniyun duniya khey, **penjey**  
**koshish ae maan saan**

Jiye teenji daadi-e vangur byun zaalun ba raniyun thi vanan,  
**penjey shaan ae izzat saan.**'

Can your language be a place? Perhaps a  
metaphorical place?

Language is a place with new boundaries or maybe no boundaries or actually maybe just way too many boundaries. It is a place where my heart exists and tries, it is a place, scary, where I meet the others. It is a place where I feel pain and tell others, maybe I do travel my pain with words. Suffer, a journey, where does it end and what joy is found there? Is it a place where I exist, where I can survive, navigate, each word a new direction, each new language a new map of what it is to be in this world. Can I understand myself without language?

Ma langue est tellement fourchue devant les mots que je croyais comprendre, ceux que j'utilisais souvent en ne comprenant pas qu'ils coupaient la route d'autres.

Language as a way to comprehend the immensity of experience. Is there a language without words, surely, and then what is it? Just a way to be, in space? Is it space we create when we learn someone else's language? Is it space for them that opens in our heart? Rather than space for us to navigate their world.

And what does it mean when the language I speak, my mother tongue, tries to annihilate and replace twenty-eight others, on such a tiny piece of land? When it is the weapon of those who refuse to learn the way of the land, to learn the ways of the people who were there already before them? What does it mean to refuse to learn the languages of the ones who know the land, the languages of the ones who know which plant to cut and when and how to cut it and how to move it, to make the sound which is like the sound of the beings of the river?



## Reflections of a script on paper

If you were an ear  
 I'd ask if you could lean towards those who need you to listen  
 And why you can hear the message while some are tone deaf

If you were a pair of eyes  
 I'd ask why your tears cascade like a waterfall after a smile  
 And why your lids squeeze shut when contemplating what could be

If you were a voice  
 I'd ask why you are so muted in the chaos  
 And why the world walks away when you echo what it says

Now that I know you are a language  
 I ask why your glottal stops cannot gift us the much-needed silence  
 And why you don't feel heard when you are spoken.

## Dear Ambassador Sahib

Dear ambassador sahib six languages three continents and 37 years later I juggle not only my identity but my vocab my idioms my superstitions my aphorisms and my anecdotes you see they spill over like cups of tea and the mind races and the heart pounds and the breath stops and I run and run and run and still don't arrive and I ask you why we get special treatment and why we have special integration courses and why oh why do we have special statuses and labels and counters and queues and stamps and visas and identity documents as if our faces are not enough to determine our peculiarities and specialisms and alienation and forceful migration amidst the boats the bombs the planes the borders the vests and the boots and the jackets that do not keep us warm in the freezing cold of these new lands we want to make our new homes and these new tongues we seek to emulate and the new fuzzy phrases we memorise to fit in and be loved like one of them and not one of us because us is not enough and to them we are they and so we become they them and theirs accused of stealing what's mine what's ours and what's sacred and in dreaming and seeking and leaving and arriving and assimilating and suffering and withstanding after six languages three continents and 37 years of learning I am you are he is I juggle not only my identity but my vocab my idioms my superstitions my aphorisms and my anecdotes and the new gender which my language does not recognise nor appreciate and I wish to blend in but do not know how so I embrace they but they erases he and she and now they think I am trying to take away what is theirs but how can I because it's never been about them or me it's always been a matter of we.

where sounds mean something else /

a place where sounds mean something /

sounds mean something besides meaning /

sounds beside, at the side of meanings /

meanings and sounds /

words and their meanings /

words and their sounds /

some word /

some mean /

some sound /

something else /

a place beside and besides /

meiosis of meaning /

words sound meanings besides

meanings, words and sounds /

a place at the side of /

something else.



What roles do our different languages  
play in our lives?



What roles do we play  
in our different languages?

How does it feel to hear  
the different languages?



What meaning do you derive if you  
didn't know those languages?

on the way out  
 the new border line -----  
 gulmohar & dust  
 carry your name;  
 you say safar  
 & it slips  
 like train smoke  
 from your mouth...  
 but in another tongue  
 it burns & bruises—  
 suffer sticks  
 to the roof of your throat  
 like an old prayer  
 your dadu's hands  
 hold stories like torn tickets  
 Your thakuma folds memory  
 between flour & salt  
 & your mother  
 presses a suitcase shut  
 as if she can trap  
 the past inside  
 somewhere, 1947  
 splits open like a monsoon  
 somewhere, language  
 forgets its own bones  
 safar  
 means movement  
 means miles & miles  
 of dust, of feet,  
 of home fading behind  
 like a setting sun  
 suffer  
 means the same.



Unity means something has been overlooked.

The first border is my own: my skin, my sex, my mind. The first border is my one's own: my one's skin, my one's sex, my one's mind. The first border is my one's own: my one's skin, my one's sex, my one's mind. The first border is my own. The first border is our own. The first border is owned: skin, sex, mind. The first border also owns: you, me, us.

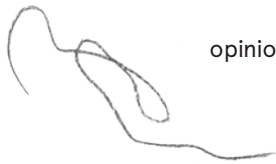
I wish to come across. To cross the first border, I shall step aside. I shall step aside. The infinite self shall step aside. I-dentity, step aside.

How many verbs in how many languages to describe the feeling of sitting around a horizontal surface in the company of others, sharing something to eat, to drink, both? Sitting on a chair, a pillow, a rug, your heels, I promise you, I understand your heart, no matter the words. This feeling we call "no words to describe, nothing translates", that is nostalgia. We are right. Rivers, mountains, skies, they do not translate. Houses, streets, interiors and lights, stairs and voices do not translate.

Here is a surface; here is a beverage; here is food. Unity means something has been overlooked. Come sit at the table; overlook what is missing; forgive it. Meanings will abound for us to share.

Tell me about home.

### Response to the prompt about the Georgian handwriting



I am quite round.  
I relish things nicely framed – ideas, opinions, concepts.  
No roughness.  
Gentleness.  
I want smooth edges on my frames.  
Sometimes I go off on a tangent – take it up, lead it down, leave it suspended, if not upended.

I relish repetition, sometimes.

Repeating a word, a sound, a certain shape in my mouth, through my fingers, sometimes, my fingers repeat to count, tap and bounce to count, sometimes around.

Sometimes I wear my words like jewels.

Sometimes I wear my words around my fingers like jewels.

Sometimes.

I make a knot.

I've made a knot.

At times, I have made knots.

Not often, though.

It is rather rare.

It opens, a little.

I've made a knot.

At times, I have made knots.

Not often, though.

It is rather rare.

It opens, a little.

To be quite round.

To relish things nicely framed – ideas, opinions, concepts.

No roughness.

Gentleness.

To want smooth edges on the frames.

Sometimes, to go off on a tangent – to take it up, lead it down, leave it suspended, if not upended.

To relish repetition, sometimes.

To repeat a word, a sound, a certain shape in the mouth, through fingers, sometimes, fingers repeat to count, tap and bounce to count, sometimes around.

Sometimes, to wear words like jewels.

Sometimes, to wear words around fingers like jewels.

Sometimes.

To make a knot.

Having made a knot.

At times, having made knots.

Not often, though.

To be rather rare.

To open, a little.

A vagrant of worlds I have been, in places and houses many,  
 but in a home none.  
 I have found a home in languages more than a place.  
 In words I find solace; English, Urdu, Arabic or any.  
 But, I reclaim and proclaim:  
 Let my language be clear  
 Sharp and precise  
 Not confined by English barriers  
 For love in English is just love  
 But in Urdu we have  
 Levels to describe the extent of love—  
*Dilkashi, Unns, Muhabbat, Aqeedat, Ibaadat, Junoon aur Maut.*

The maps we draw lines on are not the borders that alienate me from my neighbour. It is my inability to understand what their heart speak. But as Tupac wrote about the rose that grew from concrete, English as the language is the rose we all share. But my border stops before the English Channel, and its influence, though remaining, is now my choice on its extent of use. A choice that allows me to twist and turn the language as I see fit. I now draw my own lines on the map. Someday, if the oppressor in my country asks me to forego a language and declares one language as supreme, as I stay within political borders, what shall remain free are the borders of my mind, embracing all languages I allow to shape my whole being.

What used to be an empty room has now become / a home.  
 You, ba mẹ / will never be able to visit me here. On the first  
 day you sent me / here you imagined this place to be / a  
 miraculous land full of open doors. You knew you won't be  
 able to visit me here, but you knew it was for the better / for  
 me, maybe for you too, maybe for the both of us.  
 I brush my teeth and make my bed here. Before I met Quang,  
 I was so busy making myself comfortable in this place that I  
 forgot to look / back at the place just outside / that door where  
 I began –

let me begin again:

I find myself again in Vietnamese. I am finding myself again  
 in Vietnamese. I find my first steps  
 Tôi tìm lại mình trong tiếng Việt. Tôi đang tìm lại mình trong  
 tiếng Việt. Tôi tìm lại những bước  
 again to find my way back to Vietnamese. I find my way back  
 to Vietnamese to find myself  
 đầu tiên của mình, để tìm lại đường về tiếng Việt. Tôi tìm  
 lại đường về tiếng Việt để tìm lại  
 again.  
 mình.

If it weren't for Quang, maybe I would have been stuck in this  
 room forever. Maybe I  
 Nếu không có Quang, có lẽ tôi đã mãi mãi kẹt lại ở trong  
 căn phòng này. Có lẽ tôi đã quên  
 would have forgotten the way home. Maybe, I even would not  
 have realized that I was  
 đường về nhà. Thậm chí, có lẽ tôi cũng đã không nhận ra  
 rằng mình đang ở trong một căn  
 inside a room. The room is vast, cozy, and full of comfort,  
 while the path home is  
 phòng. Căn phòng rộng thênh thang, thật ấm cúng, thật  
 tiện nghi, còn đường về nhà thật  
 desolate and neglected. For a long time, no one had tended to  
 this path.  
 hoang sơ, thật cũ kỹ. Đã lâu rồi đã không ai chăm sóc con  
 đường này.

Word by word,  
 Từng chữ một,

word by word,  
 từng chữ một,

tôi tìm lại đường về nhà.



## A Very Short Plane Ride

got

I on the plane

in Kolkata

to fly across the border, to the other half of my broken land ||

In history books, I have seen the images –

barbed wires, fences, hands dripping with blood,

রক্তে আজি লেগেছে আমার সর্বনাসের নেশা

clenching on wooden poles ||

At Dhaka airport the walls are adorned in আমার সোনার বাংলা,

I look hard – are these letters any different?

Perhaps they write the ব in another way?

Surely, their মাত্রা is placed elsewhere?

In the sky I saw no line |

No letters

No wires

I step out into the city, a relic of revolution

But the people

Say: হিন্দুস্তান থেকে আসছে – বাঙালি নয় হিন্দুস্তানী ||

Words are footprints of a former passage – a sliding,  
a stomping, a sidestep?

I envision the terrain – in all different colours, like the rubber carpet my niece plays on. There aren't any walls but it's sunny. If my language was a place, then it is a place under construction, and there are holes here and there, but also lots of useful material. *Se la mia lingua è un posto, allora è un posto che si muove, perchè sto parlando.* Perhaps it goes up and down, in little shakes, and part of the fun is to keep the balance. *Se o meu idioma é um lugar, è lugar de saudade, e tem uma janela virada pro mar. Pro lar.* Если бы мой язык был бы место, это место было бы вопросом. Как бы это было? Знание не даётся в заданный момент. To cut is short: a place in pieces, in movements, without walls but with windows, with wanderings – no wonder. My language is a place in disorder, a place with no border, a borderland and a threshold. Does it make sense? No. It doesn't matter. If my language is a place, it is one drawn by a kid's fingers on the moisture print caused by breath on glass. I breathe on it again. It fades.

To speak a language sometimes means you are returning to a home that no longer exists. The structure isn't where it once was.

*Perhaps you never visited.*  
Every time you speak.

It is woven out of messy and uneven patchwork  
you are trying to piece together.

It is a line  
then a boundary  
then a murky river that runs through cities  
past red zones and Kentish fields.

After some time, it arrives at my tongue, the hope  
to belong, my mother's tongue, la lengua de mi  
abuela.

It is mine, *mi idioma*, no-one else's.



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