



# Rose Is a Verb

*Neo-Georgics*  
(poems)

Karen An-hwei Lee

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KAREN AN-HWEI LEE

 SLANT

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Georgic:  
A poem or book dealing with agricultural or rural topics.  
—*Oxford Dictionaries*

For you shall eat the fruit of your hands:  
happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you.  
—*Psalms 128:2*

The time for harvest, the time for planting seeds,  
The time to brave the unfaithful sea with oars,  
The time to bring the warboats down to water,  
The time to fell the pines. . . .  
—First *Georgic* by Virgil

Virgil's call to himself to "rise" at the end of the *Eclogues* (10.75 *sursum*) was answered by a rise in generic level with his next work, the *Georgics*. . . . As with the *De rerum natura* [*On the Nature of Things*, by Lucretius], the central concern is rather the place in the world of human beings and the possibilities of happiness.  
—*Oxford Classical Dictionary*

Hold onto what is good,  
even if it's a handful of earth.  
Hold onto what you believe,  
Even if it's a tree that stands by itself.

Hold onto what you must do,  
Even if it's a long way from here.  
Hold onto your life,  
Even if it's easier to let go.

Hold onto my hand,  
Even if I've gone away from you.

—Pueblo Indian Prayer

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# I.

## On Love in Millennial Weather



## GOLD-BLACK CADENZA OF NOONS

Nanograms of rose-plumed bullion  
towed onto furred heads of pollen,  
frenzy shot through salvos of gold,  
wingspeed over wingspan—  
A bee's mass far exceeds its airfoil,  
yet its speed verbs a heliotrope's ear,  
humming, I rose, I rose, I rose.  
The sage asks, is labor a miracle  
or levitation of the mundane?  
Oyster-moss, gold-black cadenza  
of noons, of brassy squash blossoms  
loaded with pollen cargo, powdered  
queens of unbleached wax, of honey  
royalactin. Never smoked or drank,  
fondness of calla lilies with napes  
of neon trailing to a sea—  
Yes, kissing astro-silk—*taraxacum*—  
kindness stroked out of milkweed,  
epidemics, fruit-bat fever.  
Do no harm.

## ECLOGUES WITH STRANGERS

Yield of sister ice-blossoms, of apiarian labor,  
double-edged nectar of eclogues. Is a lyric cut  
of a mytho-siren's tongue? Is happiness  
restrained by jute-cords?

## ROSE-SPILLED JUG OF PRAISE

Orbed sea-petals of global indigo unfurl their veils,  
rain commingles with oaky wine notes, a ferrous  
floral carbon, floral iron: corpus of sage-blossom,  
not envy-laden venom. Do not shun firelight's  
greenheart candor sipping your apiarian wax,  
a rose-spilled jug of praise.

Waterless sink-basin on the moon, *sea of crisis*—  
ashtray of lunar basalt and shelled pistachios  
used to aid memory. No happiness. Not yet.  
Citronella tears in the hazelwood hair of a girl  
with burned eyelashes. Yes, say every name.  
*Davina. Elidad. Jacynth. Kayla. Luvena.*

Prayers bless our lobes of wax. Olives purr  
in oiled tongues of flame: jacaranda, myrtle,  
African tulip, names of flame trees: illawarra,  
firebush, royal, and flame-in-the-woods. Yes,  
yes, all the girl's names translate as *beloved*.  
Bugonia is not ultimately about bees alone.  
Praise, neither tangible nor bodiless offering—  
an adobe dove with a clay shovel for a heart,  
neither flesh of bird, fish, nor reptile—a rose.



## SOLAR VALVE OF LOVE, SEA WALL

Neither nymph nor cloud of the troposphere,  
I dozed at an altitude of forty-thousand feet  
above sea level, I saw mothers in a lighthouse  
with their children: orchid-haired great-aunts  
called by name to a helical stair. *Young woman*  
but not *young mother*. All the young women,  
half-sprouted females with grasshopper shins,  
were asked to stand in a circle. Spiral cupola,  
neweled staircase in a lighthouse room of ships,  
*I do not belong anywhere*. Not young mothers,  
not even half-grown women, dayspring girls,  
not our grandmothers whose bodies exploded  
to give light to generations. A flash unseals  
alabaster vases, a decolonized female dagger,  
a lightning rod, a solar valve of love, sea wall,  
a cloud of grasshoppers-to-locusts in famine,  
a chimeric hive of honeybees on a turntable  
singing the waxy heat of a groove on a gallery  
deck in ruthless weather, hailstones pelting  
ocean icicles, a hybrid of ice and barnacle  
or brine and icicle, *brinicles*.

