SUJATA BHATT (1956-)

"A Different History"

Great Pan is not dead;  
he simply emigrated  
                         to India.  
Here, the gods roam freely,  
disguised as snakes or monkeys;  
every tree is sacred  
and it is a sin  
to be rude to a book.  
It is a sin to shove a book aside  
                     with your foot,  
a sin to slam books down  
                       hard on a table,  
a sin to toss one carelessly  
                       across a room.  
You must learn how to turn the pages gently  
without disturbing Srasvati,  
without offending the tree  
from whose wood the paper was made.

Which language  
has not been the oppressor’s tongue?  
Which language  
truly meant to murder someone?  
And how does it happen  
that after the torture,  
after the soul has been cropped  
with a long scythe swooping out  
of the conqueror’s face –  
the unborn grandchildren  
grow to love that strange language.