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.