

### 3 Poems by Maria Bennett

#### god and the city of new orleans

i spit out the fruit  
in disgust  
throw away  
a perfectly ripe strawberry  
while watching a half-naked mother  
holding her starving infant  
aloft  
this irony will not be forgotten  
i pray  
as flood waters rush  
around her waist  
my shame  
is this sacred city  
new orleans  
birthplace of the high and joyous miracle  
which is jazz music  
home of impossibly beautiful creole women  
heads wrapped in red bandannas  
chanting the blessings of hot rice fritters  
*calas tout chaud*  
one dollar each  
on street corners  
where louis armstrong  
once sang for his supper  
beneath a wrought iron lamppost  
unaware of his princely  
destiny  
accompanied by a lone clarinet  
defying nature  
to try and stop swaying  
with the rhythm  
on this corner  
the glorious reminder  
god made the human body  
for dancing  
the voice  
for singing

here now  
where all processions  
have turned to funeral marches  
slow and muddy  
as the levees break  
or are thrust open  
even the saints have left  
along with the rich  
of course  
as happened once before  
but we are too lost to remember  
the lifeless poor  
float  
like water lilies  
as lake pontchartrain  
spills  
into  
the parish  
of saint bernard  
and i begin  
my long quarrel  
with god  
wondering  
who  
will  
listen  
and who  
will  
save  
us

### **metaphor of the vine**

these roots  
struggle  
to create  
sink down  
thirsty  
upon planting

here is your source:  
clay  
water  
sunshine  
breath  
your mystery  
is this:  
good soil  
makes a lazy vine  
and the lazy vine  
births a grape  
without  
distinction  
rocky soil  
makes each tendril  
push harder  
for its life  
scrape past stones  
for its essence  
and in the work  
grows the sweetest  
fruit

### **scrubbing your back**

this is our  
nightly  
ritual  
you soak  
in the  
claw-footed  
tub  
steam rises  
from the bubbling  
water  
with lavender soap  
i scrub your  
back  
gently at first  
then

pressing harder  
your skin,  
like an infant's  
milk white  
grows red  
in this crescendo of touch  
memory intersects us  
my hands become  
your mother's  
washing away fears  
warm fingers  
unknotting  
all distances  
as she sings to you  
her favorite child  
long ago  
this polish lullaby  
circling us  
still