

## Silent Trades

CYNTHIA ARRIEU-KING

The class hates when in one translation blue night ends in a lily,  
and in the other a man goes into a bodega.

Their suffering is great when faced with no correct translation.  
A few hundred Venn diagrams overlapping  
nowhere. Always a piece seems missing.

Back in the times of silent trades  
if two peoples did not speak a common language  
one party left goods in a grassy area, the other waited, got closer, felt  
how heavy the salt or beef was,  
or picked the tool they needed, left pieces of gold.

Students start to translate: Some argue the plums  
in a poem should be plush, others fresh

In a poem, one thing is meant but that thing  
is meant by the totality of all language,  
the pure language that no one speaks.

So we are left with a goose flying overhead,  
but in place of its shadow  
a mallard swims.