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A CHAPBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY ASIAN POETRY

One of the most significant literary trends since the end of the Pacific War has been the steady growth of Western interest in what is generally termed "The Literature of Asia." A mass of books has been produced explaining and comparing and sampling. Apparently they are being read, for there is now one publisher who keeps himself quite busy with the publication of numerous volumes dealing almost exclusively with a single Asian country.

Yet this very popularity has led to an unfortunately superficial attitude. To many, the reading of a Japanese novel or a collection of Indian poems has become a matter of fashion rather than enlightenment. As a result, many readers now tend to lump just about everything written west of Hawaii into one great literary Asian mass.

The truth of the matter, of course, is that you cannot speak of "The Literature of Asia" in the singular. *Literatures* is the only really accurate word. For from country to country—and often within the same country—the styles and contents of prose and poetry change about as often as the language. (And in a country like India, for instance, there are 14 "official" languages.) Each literature has its own traditions, its own particular characteristics. Often it has maintained a consistent history for many centuries within the same geographical area even though the political history of that area has shifted in several directions.

This Chapbook presents a sampling of the writings of some forty Asian poets. They represent eleven countries, but a vaster number of literatures, languages and philosophies. Some of the poets are still in their twenties; some stem from much older generations. Some demonstrate the continuance of the old traditions; some are clearly breaking new poetic ground in their own areas. Some of the translations are free; others, almost literal transcriptions. A goodly number of the poems were originally written in English.

In every case, what is offered here is meant as a taste. It is not put forth as a cross-sectioning of the work of even one poet or the poetry of even one country—much less of the Asian world as a whole. It has been published because it is *good* poetry. But it also offers evidence that, even with

their many basic differences, the literatures of the East and the West can have the same accomplishments. All of these authors and translators have succeeded in reaching across the considerable gulfs of languages and religions virtually unknown to us to make sharp points in the hearts of sensitive Western readers.

For despite our growing interest in Asia and despite the obvious adaptations of Western culture in the East, much of the great gulf does remain. Kipling characterized it perhaps crudely; Lafcadio Hearn almost mystically. More recently, Fosco Maraini spoke of it almost bitterly. Increasing effort is being expended constantly to close that gap. Can it ever be? Should it ever be? No one can say for certain. But surely we must persist in our efforts to understand the subtle nature of the gap. Sadly, stereotypes die hard—both in Asia and in the West.

Perhaps, however, in spreading the ideas of young writers lies some help in bridging the gap. Perhaps in the rare world where poets communicate with one another (spontaneously, as they always do) the difficulties of language and geography can be set aside. Perhaps if we Westerners are intrigued enough by some Asian poets, we might even take a stab at studying some of their languages.

All of these ideas and many more motivated the collection of this special issue of the Journal. The result, we feel, is an unusual combination of enlightenment and poetic joy—something, we hope, to challenge the adventuresome.

A few comments about the organization of the Chapbook may be helpful. All poems are making their first published appearance in English. Where no translator is given, the poem was originally written in English or was translated by the author so freely that it can now be considered an English original. In a few instances, we have not been able to obtain a poet's birthdate. All missing dates, however, involve living writers, most of them quite young. So much superb material was gathered from the Philippines that the Journal now plans a special Philippine section in the near future. The small selection printed from the Philippines must be considered merely as a token of things to come.

Finally, as Journal contact for this issue, I should like personally to thank Mrs. Bonnie R. Crown and Miss Susan Conheim of the Publications Program of The Asia Society for their understanding and cooperation in the preparation of this issue. I state a simple fact: without their aid this Chapbook would have remained only a tantalizing idea.

R. H. G.

THE WASHERMAN

Strolling on the bank of the Sabarmati
the Scientist and the Poet approached
a washerman, who in beating clothes on a stone-slab
was not aware of their august presence.

The poet said: As he is beating the clothes,
what beauty unfolds itself in the water-spray!
My heart leaps up as I behold the rainbow . . .
Ah me! Were I born a century ago
I would have been a Wordsworth.

The Scientist: Eh, before Newton
there lived not even a washerman,
who could discover this simple truth
that light as it passes through water
must split itself into seven colours?

The Poet said: Washermen? What would you
expect from them? Here's one.

Rama! — he cried to the man and asked
as he stood with his mouth agape:
Do you ever care to stop and look
rapt in joy at the rainbow
in the spray with its seven colours?

The Washer man stood aghast.
He looked to his right and left.
Why on earth such important men
should find it worthwhile to talk to him.
Mabap!* if I indulged in such antics,
my children at home would perish.

The Poet: To have a glimpse of Beauty
do spare a moment for the colours seven.

*Ma—mother; bap—father

If I did that, when should I finish this heap?
 And unmindful of the kindly visitors,
 looking downward, he began to beat
 the clothes. To save himself from the spray
 the Scientist moved and mumbled:
 Look! to no purpose did Newton live.
 His discoveries—it is the same to this man
 whether they are there or not.
 The poet smiled wryly: The heart
 of this man does not leap up.
 In vain did Wordsworth sing.

Umashankar Joshi (1911—)
 translated from the Gujarati by the author

THE RAINY SEASON

A slush of clouds in the sky, the earth
 Wallows in mud like a water buffalo,
 Its back afloat. On slippery flanks
 Hang weed stains, leeches in heaps.
 The bony ridge between is bare.
 On it a dragonfly sometimes settles
 Or a frog jumps up to sit.

Before and behind me the day sprawls
 Like a crocodile with saw-toothed head,
 Monstrous belly and tapering tail,
 Dwindling into the landscape.

Asokbijay Raha (1910—)
 translated from the Bengali by Lila Ray

THE STORM

Without warning a snake of black cloud rises in
the sky.

It hisses as it runs and spreads its hood.
The moon goes out, the mountain is dark.
Far away is heard the shout of the demon.

Up rushes the storm a moment after
Rattling an iron chain in its teeth.
The mountain suddenly lifts its trunk to the heavens,
And the lake roars like a wild beast.

Asokbijay Raha (1910—)
translated from the Bengali by Lila Ray

AN EVENING

A sitar is playing on the radio.
I listen as I stroll.
The Bengali news is over.
Adjacent to the jungle lies
The suburb of this country town.
Into the brush the night comes down
Smelling of the wild. Behind
The mound of red earth that rises
Suddenly at the road's turning,
A mountain lifts its crest.
With a jackal's howl the dark descends
As I approach. An owl
Hoots in a thorn tree overhead.
I am startled. Look! The half-moon
Is caught in the telegraph wires.

Asokbijay Raha (1910—)
translated from the Bengali by Lila Ray

EXTREMELY IMPOVERISHED

Extremely worried. Only
 for a small house, impoverished.
 Through the southern window will see
 burning unending plains. And
 from the western window
 will see the setting sun's red
 evening splendour.

Extremely worried. Only
 for a small house impoverished.

Extremely quiet. So
 impoverished for a sweet girl
 who will quarrel with
 and make him wake for the whole night.
 Will say, "What a foreigner,
 difficult to understand,
 tomorrow you will have to bring a bottle of red
 nail-polish."

Extremely quiet. And so
 impoverished for a sweet girl.

Extremely lost. Ah,
 for a little pleasure impoverished.
 Has travelled a lot in wind and rain and scorching
 heat,
 has not been able to understand
 burning in the fire of desire.

Extremely lost. Ah,
 impoverished for a little pleasure.

Nirendra Chakravarty (1924—)
 translated from the Bengali by P. Machwe

SINCE I LEFT THE OCEAN

A drop drew out of the ocean, toward the moon's
height,
Began pulling between small finite, great infinite.

Forsook its vast source, then became
Minuscule, infinitesimal particle.

Immovable, succumbed to laws of motion,
Colored and cast by wind in shape and form,
Left the ocean.

Rode a thundering and roaring force
Across the sky, cherished the notion
To measure space and time; this silly one
Drew away from its own immeasurable home;
Left the ocean.

Turned vapor and globe of dew,
Sharp frost, soft rain, iota of contentment
Moment of Catak's fulfillment. But where its depth?
It felt the press of living outside itself
When it left the ocean.

Wandered the sky, entered the center of earth,
Watered roots of trees, nectared flowers,
Counted out endless time, up and down,
But could not for a moment forget its home.
After it left the ocean.

O deep ocean of affection, O distant moon
Of fulfillment, the vain drop now
Shatters. Existence outside self is untenable.
Come storming around me now; ages have gone
Since I left the ocean.

"Navin" (Balakrishna Sharma, 1897-1960)
translated from the Hindi by
Vidya Niwas Misra and Josephine Miles

THE FAMILY

My father,
 a conquered Everest,
My Mother,
 an ocean of milk poisoned by poverty.
My brother,
 a lion cub cinched up as a pack animal,
My sister,
 a doll made out of soiled clothes,
And I,
 a kettle of water
 steaming away to vapor
 water consumed into vapor.

Visvanath (1932—)
translated from the Hindi by
Vidya Niwas Misra and Josephine Miles

A VILLAGE GIRL

A bundle of grass on her head
She came, her hips swinging
Full like wine pitchers
She, the girl from my village

Pataki and mustard flowers
Like blue and yellow eyes
Peep through the green grass

Long blades of grass
Hang over her eyes
Like green tassles
A net of green dreams
Her face caught in it

She lifts her skirt up to her knees
And holds my arm to cross the Suhan River
Ankle-deep water rises to her knees, to her waist,
Her legs disappear beneath the shimmering water,
And her skirt goes up like an upturned umbrella

The water goes down her thighs, her knees, her
ankles

So does her skirt

"Thank you brother," she says
Like a koel cooing from a mango grove
And leaves my arm and goes away

On the sand hill her footprints
Gleam like a prisoner's chain
She goes up the mound
Tall and slim like a sugar cane
And becomes a part of the green tree

She did not look at me
I could not see her face caught in the green net
But I cannot shake off
The dust of her touch.

Mohan Singh (1905—)
translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

EVENING

The sun horse panting and snorting
Reaches the shores of evening
Kicking his hoofs and flicking red dust
His vermilion mane wet with perspiration
He throws red foam from his mouth

The mellow-coloured Evening comes
And places her hand between his pricked ears
Her long fingers
Feel the hot breath from his nostrils
And take off the bridle from his mouth

The restive animal
Tamed and quietened
Walks behind the Evening slowly
And goes into the stable of darkness

Mohan Singh (1905—)
translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

GAJJAN SINGH

The month of March
The month of March and Gajjan Singh is worried
About seeds for the sugar cane
Brothers, oh brothers
Don't dream of help from others
The month of March has come

He took his bullocks
Gajjan Singh took his bullocks
And sold them in the market
Brothers, oh brothers
No more milk for his children
He sold his bullocks

March is over
March is over and sugar cane sprouts in the fields
April, May and June are over
Brothers, oh brothers
Gajjan Singh is happy
March is over

The rainy season comes
The rainy season comes and the sugar cane is full
of juice
Its green skin changes to rust-coloured
Brothers, oh brothers
The dry leaves crackle and fall
The rainy season has come

The grasshoppers
The grasshoppers hop in the field
The sugar cane tassels sway in the wind
Brothers, oh brothers
Men of land demand the land
The grasshoppers hop

At midnight
At midnight the stars are awake in the sky
And Gajjan Singh on his land
Brothers, oh brothers
Why does a farmer toil
At midnight

The zamindar has
The zamindar has shoes of golden zari

Gajjan Singh's shoes bare their teeth
Brothers, oh brothers
Gajjan Singh is cut to the quick
The zamindar's golden shoes

The zamindar has
The zamindar has a black flying steed
Gajjan Singh's pony limps
Brothers, oh brothers
Gajjan Singh is cut to the quick
The zamindar's flying steed

Gajjan Singh came out
Gajjan Singh came out tying his turban
With five strong friends
Brothers, oh brothers
God is no friend to us
Gajjan Singh came out

At midnight
At midnight the stars trembled in the sky
The farmers entered the sugar cane field
Brothers, oh brothers
They challenged the fates
At midnight

First of all
First of all Buland Singh spoke
His eyes blood-red
Brothers, oh brothers
I have not tasted milk for years
First of all

The heavy-voiced
The heavy-voiced Dhanna spoke
His voice like a cracked reed
Brothers, oh brothers

I have a daughter and no money to wed her
The heavy-voiced spoke

The hefty-bodied
The hefty-bodied Inder Singh roared
My bullock gone in interest
Brothers, oh brothers
I wonder at what rate they went
The hefty-bodied roared

Breaking the sugar cane
Breaking the sugar cane, Surain Singh said
I shall break Zamindarism like this
Brothers, oh brothers
Else how would I give food to my children?
Breaking the sugar cane he said

Maghar asked
Maghar asked, friends tell me
He did not touch the tail of a plough
Brothers, oh brothers
Why should he demand half of our yield
Maghar asked

At three-quarter night
At three-quarter night, Gajjan Singh spoke
Foaming at the mouth
Brothers, oh brothers
I'll rape the zamindar's daughter
At three-quarter night.

Mohan Singh (1905—)
translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

SILENCE

A pitcher of thoughts
 Empty and sad
 Lies in the niche of my courtyard
 Silence sits thirsty
 Running its tongue on its lips
 Begging for a few water-words.

Desire dug a well in my courtyard
 The days strike hammer strokes
 The nights shovel blades
 And years crack like stones
 No water-word sparkles in the pit

The dark lonely well
 Sits quiet resting its paw on its chin
 Chewing the cud of
 Clods of earth and bits of stones
 Staring at the Silence.

Amrita Pritam (1919—)
 translated from the Punjabi by Balwant Gargi

KRISHNA

In the darkness
 a rain-wrought cage!
 The God-Elephant swayed
 behind the bars of the Evil One!

Red lips nourished on butter
and flutes!
With love,
the gopi's heartbeat galloped!

The Jumna quickened
for dreams come true,
and Brindavan's bamboo-forest
was flute to that breath!

The flute left its song in the air
and made way for the Kingdom's glory;
in a Mathura-palace,
it nursed the light.

In that smiling boy's
flute-holding finger grew
the thunder of Arjuna's chariot
and in that fluting breath
the conch-shell trumpet of war!

In the bewilderment of war
hear the Lord's own song:
Here I come, I come again
in age after age of need!

Again, again the darkness
and the rain-wrought cage.
And there! again, swaying
his trunk, the God-Elephant!

G. S. Sivarudrappa (1926—)
translated from the Kannada by
A. K. Ramanujan

SUDDENLY I SAW HIM

Suddenly I saw him perhaps as his
Mother must have thrilled how often
To see baby lips surfeit from milk
Of breast, pout and smile in her heaven!

How many slimy years in between
And down the decades his gross eyes
Shot out and kneaded passing girls
Of solid behinds but mobile for their size.

When he eats, he sweats round his middle
And neck, takes off his greasy vest
And belches. More rice and curds
Slobber in, lapped up with pickles and the rest.

His rolls of fat quiver, thighs chafe.
Hair drips with oil shriekingly scented.
He adores wrestlers, never misses a bout,
And gets hold of booklets privately printed.

But suddenly I saw him in sleep
With a tender-leaf lips pouting:
His mother's breast flattened his nose
And on his mouth's discontented rose
I saw a smile, from heaven, descending.

M. P. Bhaskaran (1921—)

THE FIRST DAY

A drop of water fell on a blade of grass,
Shivered like mercury, then settled, sliced, on the
blade,
Quivering in astonishment at the green world around.

How had the leaves burgeoned in its absence?
It was the first drop of many that would
Fall, swaddling the earth in a blanket of water,
Washing it, like the new-born thing it was.

The sun shrank back, amazed, a flustered midwife,
When the air see-sawed twice, heaved its legs
And laid the earth, shelled with light, intact.
A silver egg after billions of failed constellations.
Brahma chuckled and washed his fouled limbs;

From somewhere, a breeze full of pollen, freshened
The hairs on a dusty cheek.
An ant stumbled over the toppled architecture of
the grass.

Adil Jussawalla (1940—)

DRAKE

The Chinese would know how to paint it—
 This duck's simple stillness—
 Sealed web of flesh and bone,
 Floating.

But webbed in English ironies
 I cough and note

 the beaded blue-green neck
 retracted against the wings;
 the squat wooden shape
 compact as a walnut
 music-box, charged with spikes,
 but playing no notable tune.

Yet the Chinese say these quaint boxes
 Play distinct melodies

In tune with
 the hidden intricate stars
 the dipping dragon-flies, the rushes.

O bugger the ears England has plugged
 With its contempt four years now.

They hear mere noises,
 Discordant, disjointed, jarring,
 Like pedants gabbling.

Adil Jussawalla (1940—)

BALLAD OF THE MEN OF LIMESTONE SOIL

The men have gone into the street,
Their swords tipped with lightning,
And the horses of the robbers
Can be seen on the yellow hilltop.
Blood is the speech now.

Behind barricaded doors
Weep children, pray women.

Without victory there is no word "home."
The coward will lie in the courtyard
And his wife will not open the door.

The beat of hooves draws near
And the wind begins to sing:
"I shall tap the blood of men
From the steel jars of their breasts.
Like generous dealers in wine
The man will lie in the street,
Opened by howling wolves.

O thriving down of the breast!
Garden of sweet vines!"

Half way round the stockade
Spreads the beat of the hooves.
Then the cry of combat,
Men drawing life from their swords,
The spread of a stinking liquid,
Mouths foaming and dust in wounds.

At the third cry of the cockerel
And the first blue light in the sky
The men go back to the village,
Erect with their wounds flowering,
Red gashes and open breasts.

The door is marked with sweat

"Who knocks?"

"Your man has come home, faithful woman!"

The women stream from the doors
To lick the wounds of their men.
The girls chant in the windows.

The headman of Kudo Seto,
Like a flower famed for its sap,
Slowly runs his hand
Over his red body.

And at the door of the hut
His wife clings to his feet
While to his son he says:

"Only child of mine,
I bring the sword of the lord of robbers to give
to you.

Store it in the flesh of your right breast!"

W. S. Rendra (1935—)
translated from the Indonesian by Derwent May

WAKING

His sleep: for prostitutes,
His waking: for loneliness to be fed.
The poison spreads through his body,
He doesn't complain.

He creeps to the window,
Watching the morning just as he always does.
He sees trees blossoming with fruit,
A world growing more and more beautiful.

He grows gloomier.
Longing sweeps over him.

Turning to a woman's breast
He dreams of a different paradise.

Sitor Situmorang (1924—)
translated from the Indonesian by
Jean Kennedy and Burton Raffel

MY LOVE'S ON A FAR-AWAY ISLAND

My love's on a far-away island,
a sweet girl, doing nothing for lack of anything
better.

The *prau* slides quickly along, the moon gleams,
around my neck I wear a charm for my girl;
the wind helps, the sea's clear, but I know
I'm not going to reach her.

In the calm water, in the gentle wind,
in the final sensation, everything goes swiftly.

Fate takes command, saying:
"Better steer your *prau* straight into my lap."

Hey! I've come this way for years!
The *prau* I'm in is going to crash!
Why is Fate calling
Before I have a chance to hug my girl?

My sweet on a far-away island,
if I die, she'll die for lack of anything better.

Chairil Anwar (1922-1947)
translated from the Indonesian by
Burton Raffel and Nurdin Salam

A ROOM

A window delivers this room
into the world. The moon that shines in
wants to know more.

"Five children live here,
And I am one of them!"

My mother falls asleep sobbing,
Prison entertainment is always lonely
Even my bored father lies down
His eyes fixed on the man crucified against the stone!

The whole world is committing suicide!
I want another younger brother from
My mother and father, who aren't included
in the count: A room like this,
three yards by four, is too tight a fit for blowing life
into souls.

Chairil Anwar (1922-1947)
translated from the Indonesian by
Burton Raffel and Nurdin Salam

TRAVELER FIRST CLASS

Before I was thirty
I was never more than a deck passenger.
Thanks to the efforts of my friends
And the transfer of sovereignty
I'm now a traveler first class.

I'm one of the army
of inspection officials
Wandering
From island to island
Building up the country.

Every evening I play bridge in the salon
And drink my beer
And rage at the waiter.

I've never written a report.

I disembark
And give half a rupiah
For the workers on the first of May.

J. E. Tatengkeng (1907—)
translated from the Indonesian by James S Holmes

THE AFTERNOON OF A SOLAR ECLIPSE

Quietly, quietly, fall the paulownia flowers
in the afternoon of a solar eclipse.

I walk alone on a mountain path,
where glides, like a sorrow,
the shadow of heaven.

Crossing the heart of man,
piercing the thought of man,
it fades away beyond the earth.

The crescent moon of midday
hangs over the paulownia trees.
The thought of far, far distance flows
in man's world this afternoon,
the feeling of unknown solitude today.

I walk alone across the hills and streams;
at the end of exhaustion, there burns
the scarlet of the setting sun.

Shinjiro Kurahara (1899—)
translated from the Japanese by Makoto Ueda

A GARDEN OF WATERMELONS

Yesterday
watermelons lay in the garden,
today
nothings remains.
God stole the watermelons.

Only the field and the sky.
The clouds, coming and going,
look for the watermelons.

Right there
a young woman came by,
her ripening body flickered beneath her robe.
She is not concerned with watermelons.
But her face is flushed
as, briskly,
she turns away
and steps toward God.

The woman too is gone.
Only the field and the sky.

Shinjiro Kurahara (1899—)
translated from the Japanese by Makoto Ueda

POEM

I tried to be a little god.
But during the festivities I looked back, and saw
In the brief intervals between religious myths,
Man's ascent occurring.

Shuntaro Tanigawa (1931—)
translated from the Japanese by James Brandon

WHITE DESERT

A blank sheet of paper
brings a white desert to my mind.

And like an ostrich,
I cross and recross this desert
sometimes stopping
and sometimes scampering along.

Unlike Egypt
there are no pyramids
in this white desert,
but because of the unnatural brightness
I sometimes would like to play baseball.

Inauspicious crows
walk over the white desert,
cruel splotches staining it.

Having nothing to ride in the desert,
I keep on walking.
Yet, there are ruins,
there is even a crumbling castle,
dark and decaying,
and it's a castle without a lord
so I won't be asked in . . .

Say, this desert is starting to scare me!

Shinohara Hiroshi (1926—)

translated from the Japanese by Harold P. Wright

COCK

Near daybreak
 a cock is crowing outside the houses.
 A long, quivering cry:
 it is my mother's voice calling up from the Nature of
 the forlorn countryside.

Towotekuu, toworumou, toworumou.

In the cold bed of the morning
 my soul flutters its wings.
 Through the cracks of the storm door
 the landscape seems bright and shining everywhere.
 Yet, near daybreak
 a sorrow slips into my bed.
 Over the hazy tops of the trees
 it is the cock's cry calling up from the Nature of
 the distant countryside.

Towotekuu, toworumou, toworumou.

My sweetheart!
 My sweetheart!
 By the sliding screens of twilight
 I scent the faint smell of a chrysanthemum;
 like the smell of a diseased spirit,
 the smell of a white chrysanthemum slowly decaying.
 My sweetheart!
 My sweetheart!

Near daybreak
 my heart wanders over a shady graveyard.
 Ah, some irritating anxiety calls me!
 I cannot bear this pale-pink air.
 My sweetheart!
 My mother!
 Come quickly and put out the lamplight.

I hear the roar of a typhoon blowing far out in the
corner of the earth.

Towotekuu, toworumou, toworumou.

Sakutaro Hagiwara (1886-1942)

translated from the Japanese by Makoto Ueda

BIRD

My male macaw escaped—
leaving his mate behind in the cage,
he opened the door himself.

Hurriedly I looked for him
and then—
I spied my green bird chattering away
in the top of a high elm tree.

I bought a net and went after him,
but that bird got away;
there was a green glittering over the roof,
but then it was gone.

That stupid creature!
no matter how far he flies
he can't find food for himself;
separation from his mate
is the same as death,
but frolicking through the trees and clouds
he's a light-hearted bird of the roofs.

Now I wonder where he is . . .
all shriveled, stomach shrunken,
and very full of pride.

Ishikawa Itsuko (1933—)

translated from the Japanese by Harold P. Wright

SELF-PORTRAIT

Father was a serf, seldom came home at night.
At home my grandmother, old as
The shrivelled root of leek,
And a blossoming date tree.
Big with child, mother wanted just one apricot.

I was a mother's son with dirty fingernails
Under a lamp by the mud wall.
With bushy hair and staring eyes
I am said to resemble grandpa on mother's side
Who in 1894 went to sea and never returned.

For twenty-three years the wind has reared two-
thirds of me,
And the world has become a more embarrassing
place.
Some have read a convict in my eyes,
Others an idiot in my mouth.
Yet I will repent nothing.

At each dawn brightly assailing,
The dews of poetry settled on my brow,
Mixed with drops of blood.
And I have come this far panting
Like a sick dog with his tongue hanging out
In the sun and in the shade.

So Chong-ju (1915—)
translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee*

*Peter H. Lee is grateful for the suggestions of Denise Lever-
tov in the preparation of his translations.

KORYO CELADON

Bluish green with subtle lines,
 O supple smooth curving,
 Like a Bodhisattva's shoulders,
 Grace and elegance combined.
 A swallow spurns the waves
 And cleaves the April breeze.
 But wake!—for this is Koryo celadon,
 This was ours for a thousand years.

Depth of color, softly shaded;
 Iridescent kingfisher;
 Blue sky glimpsed through autumn clouds
 As the rain squall passes on;
 Or a white cloud, fresh with dew,
 Wings its way on high.
 But wake!—for this is Koryo celadon,
 This was ours for a thousand years.

Flagons, pitchers, bowls and dishes,
 Inkslabs, censers, incense-boxes,
 Vases, wine-cups, pillows, drums;
 They are clay—but they are jade!

Pressed designs of clouds and waves,
 Inlaid gems and Seven Treasures,
 White cranes standing among flowers,
 Buddhist figures, lines of verse;
 Work of craftsman and of painter,
 Art of sculptor in crude clay.
 But wake!—for this is Koryo celadon,
 This was ours for a thousand years.

Pak Chong-hwa (1901—)
 translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

DOES SPRING COME TO STOLEN FIELDS?

The land is no longer our own.
Does spring come just the same
to the stolen fields?
On the narrow path between the rice-fields
where blue sky and green fields meet and touch,
winds whisper to me, urging me forward.
A lark trills in the clouds
Like a young girl singing behind the hedge.
O ripening barley-fields, your long hair
is heavy after the night's rain.
Lightheaded, I walk
lightly, shrugging my shoulders, almost
dancing to music the fields are humming—
the field where violets grow, the field
where once I watched a girl planting rice, her hair
blueblack and shining—
I want
a scythe in my hands, I want
to stamp on this soil, soft as a plump breast,
I want to be working the earth and streaming with
sweat.
What am I looking for? Soul,
my blind soul, endlessly darting

like children at play by the river,
 answer me: where am I going?
 Filled with the odor of grass, compounded
 of green laughter and green sorrow,
 I walk all day, lamely, as if possessed
 by the spring devil:
 for these are stolen fields, and our spring is stolen.

Yi Samg-hwa (1922—)

translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

FLOWERS

Autumn has come, and from somewhere the children
 bring home flower-seeds.
 They count them over, arrange them
 one by one:
 balsam, cockscomb, smartweed,
 morning glory.

After homework,
 when they are ready for sleep,
 even in bed they talk about seeds:
If only we had a garden to plant them.
 Meanwhile, night deepens; and when their mother
 covers them up with straw mats
 these poor tired flowers fall asleep, each embracing
 a fabulous flowerbed.

Yu Ch'i-hwan (1908—)

translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

ANCIENT TEMPLE

Overcome by a stealthy slumber,
A blue boy in the upper seat,
With the wooden fish in his hands,
Closes his eyes and nods.

While Amitabha and Bodhisattva
Smile, smile without words,

Along the western borders,
Under the blinding red sky,
Peonies fall, peonies fall.

Cho Chi-hun (1920—)

translated from the Korean by Peter H. Lee

THE VERTEX

Lashed by the bitter season's scourge,
I'm driven at length to this north.

Where numb circuit and plateau merge,
I stand upon the swordblade frost.

I know not where to bend my knees,
Nor where to lap my galled steps.

Nought but to close my eyes and think
Of winter as a steel rainbow.

Yuk Sa Lee (1905-1944)

translated from the Korean by In Soo Lee

HEAD

Here in December in the land of northernmost
Manchuria,
Unblest by snow, and slashed by the dry ripping wind
of the Amur,
Here at the cross-roads of a small stripped citadel
town,
Are exposed high on stakes twin heads of late
bandits;
Their dark purple faces shrivelled up like withered
children,
And their half-open eyes into the distant polar
circuit
Of hills and rivers beneath the sun-set shimmer of
the bladed sky.
Know you not in death the taste of the Judgement
of Law?
It is not that death is one of the four evils,
But that the preservation of peace renders at times
Human life as cheap as a chicken or a cur.
Your life might well have proved an instant threat
of my death.
So that to rule out force by means of force has
even been
The sanction of blood from times primeval.
Now as I pace along the wind-swept street,
I am resolved afresh of the dogged ferocity of life.
You who housed your uncontrollable souls of
treachery,
Close your eyes in peace! May merciful heaven
Cover this landscape of waste thoughts with deep,
deep snow!

Chi Hwan Yoo (1908—)

translated from the Korean by In Soo Lee

EMBERS

The time will positively come
to the eyes and the heart,
the hope will positively be achieved,
glowing in the heart of the fire.

For this world, this song.

Promises need not be honored.
The passing wind is not a friend,
the passing wind, the breath of Satan,
promising the climax of destruction.

For this world, this song.

Three wishes, one beloved,
three bones bleached white,*
three hopes, one beautiful,
three revenges, all red.

For this world, this song.

Morning comes to faded eyes.
The only news is of blood.
Who will fly, who will fly to the moon
will not be asked in the blackness of hell.

For this world, this song.

Man will positively fall.
on the scorched earth and the burning sea.
Everything will positively writhe,
from the buds to the roots.

For this world, this song.

*There is a Malay saying: "Better white bones than white eyes." It means, roughly: "Better to die in the attempt than to live on in disappointment."

Tonight there is darkness in my breast.
Everything is afire—everything, yes.

This morning men pray,
the reflection of sin on their brows.

Samad Said (1934—)
translated from the Malayan by
Abdullah Majid and Oliver Rice

I DO NOT CARE

This time I do not care.
Although others may be indifferent
to the flickering stars in the angry night,
on one conviction, clear or hazy,
I stand firm.

The stones of the pyramid are stacked
high and sheer across the meadow of my life—
if I had not maddened myself with the thoughts of
other men,
perhaps I would not now have such a problem.

Let the rustling wind blow,
knowing that the dead are friendless,
or even more gruesome,
that corpses lie uncovered.

This time I do not care.
On one conviction I stand.

Masuri S. N. (1927—)
translated from the Malayan by
Abdullah Majid and Oliver Rice

LAST NIGHT OF AN OLD WOMAN

Night.

Cold.

Dark.

And dread.

An old woman was curled up in a hut.

She was eighty-three running.

She wrapped a rugged rug closer about her—

Death shouldn't slip in!

She covered her hands and feet well,

And covered her head,

And hid even her face.

Yet she felt the cold hand of Death

from outside the rug,

T'was pushing now,

And pulling then.

There were many holes in that rug,

One of them came in the way of her sight;

She felt it by the ventilation,

So opened her eyes cautiously and peeped out.

As if from the bridal veil,

But could not see her new bridegroom

Because of his black face

Blacker than that of her husband

Who was no more—

Whom she had betrayed.

Now a light from the lightning entered the hut,

This time the lover!

Yea, she had a lover in her life.

(She loved him because her fortified heart

Liquified in love when she saw him first,

Saw him smile and heard him talk,

And when he exchanged his love for her love

She adored him in the extreme;

There's no God but man!
 And that adoration begot jealousy
 On the side of her husband.)

Light again, and again lightning.

(Though that jealousy was as dark red
 As a hue of private conspiracy,
 Yet the party went to a picnic
 Somewhere at Patan.
 She was in dark blue.
 The sky was lighter brilliant blue,
 The garland of white-rose-clouds
 Were hanging on the mountain tops.)

Lo, the lovers could eat nothing
 For they had drunk each other through the pupils
 of their eyes
 To their heart's content;
 They could drink no more.

(But the jealousy's hunger at end.
 It was thirsting for hot human blood.
 It was hungering for sweet revenge.)

Thunder and lightning.

(Oh, then the lover danced,
 Along with him her heart frolicsomenely danced,
 And she was timing the tomtom
 By clapping her bangled hands.
 But the jealous side was motionless,
 Smiling like a burnt skull.)

Thunder and lightning and storm.
 Cold.

The new bridegroom, Death
 Searched chance to enter her bosom
 And shelter there.
 But she, with all her feeble might

Grasped the rug, and by her bent head
Shielded and globed the little life-light
That was trembling in her heart,
With the oil-supplier the cerebrum—
The ruin of her love's past glories.

(Ah, jealousy, what hell does it mean!
The lover was murdered cruelly
And thrown away in the river.
The river cried bitterly and wept.
O, weep for him!)

She could not weep
For she was cold and dry;
She had no blood to filter tears,
Nor watery saliva to make tears.
Her mother had died at eighty—
She could not remember her father,
Who was hanged.
Her husband had died long ago
She has a daughter
Married.
She has two sons
Both in khaki
Gone to the dark war.
Thunder
She could not wink.
She could not weep,
But it rained.
Storm and rain with thunder.
It rained heavily like bears and tigers.

Again the lovable lightning.
But Death, her new husband
Murdered the light,
Came closer to her with his heavy lips,
She could not oppose.
He kissed her.

They rolled.
 Cold.
 Dark.
 Night.
 Dread
 And Death

Balakrishna Sama (1903—)

WINE

Earthquakes are in my hands,
 And shaking of the sky in the heart,
 They are like tongues of flame, dancing and going
 round, licking up the overturned reflection,
 streak after streak like silvery lines, reflected
 on the waves of clear golden Wine filled to the
 brim of the transparent cup;
 The cup that has found the touch of your lips strikes
 against another,
 So softly it rings in seven musical notes,
 For the heart shaped like an ear
 Wine sings the sweetest tune,
 It is the shrill musical tone of intoxicating song,
 It strains every hair and every nerve of the body
 And confounds every organ of senses.
 My eyes drink you in draught after draught.
 My mind springs up from the heart and fluttering
 its wings—the lips—
 flies to the Heaven of Wine—
 It pushes the sky back and proceeds further ahead,
 The thirst, unquenchable, still increases,
 The water presses the fish.

Earthquakes lie in my hands
And shaking of the sky in the heart.
More, again more, add more colour, churn your intelligence,
Bring forth the butter of white verses;
Your likeness shall be aeriformed,
It shall ripple quiveringly,—
It shall vanish and shall again appear, and then shall
vanish again,
And your form shall be transcendent,
When golden beauty anointed
All appear golden.
When the loveliness of rainbow circumambulates
Everyone and everything become charming,
Such as—
The spots in black walls from where the chips are
fallen, appear like stars,
A worn-out curtain appears like an embroidered
skirt of a woman.
The threads of a torn carpet
Form the lines of best poems,
A torn straw-mat looks like a bed of plaited bands of
hair.
The spots of oil on table-cloths
become the beds of passionate kisses.
Dip your lips in Wine,
Leave a small portion of your lip in it and dip it
deep into the bottom,
Melt your teeth, the pieces of ice, in it,
Flow your breath in it,
Blow it with the charms of smiles,
Now, let me swim in it.
O, yes!
Some miseries are so deep they cause profound sleep.
Make me forget the memory of those people who are
dead and gone.

The Pacific Ocean shall weep for us ;
 Hope abides far and there lies
 Deluge and clamour and aching, void similarity.
 Here you are, the sacrificial-fire, the oblation, but
 nothing else ;
 I have the exciting demands of the calf that pushes
 against the udder with its head ;
 And more, give more, pour out, let it overflow.
 Let the plentiful charity be with you,—the charity
 of waterfall which wears away the rock below
 that raises its head up towards the sky,
 Pour more and take more,
 Make a solution of your heart and overspread your
 lips,
 And heal the wound of the wounded.
 Caress my mind and string it with your heart,
 Give intolerable stinging happiness !
 Feed me !
 Earthquakes lie in my hands,
 And shaking of the sky in the heart.

I do not desire to keep myself aloof high up above all
 others with the pride of abstention,
 Rather I will mingle with the soil,
 I do not desire blood,
 Rather I shall give up my separate identity and live
 amid heart-broken bloodless men.

Fill once again,
 Sprinkle Wine and put out
 The blazing fire of my heart.
 Pour on,
 Let streams of Wine flow from the pores of my skin,
 Let the Earth with Wine be drenched to the skin,
 Let the seventh note of octave from the throat of a
 mad elephant sing the song of Wine,
 Let the Cuckoo with its sweet ringing voice sing
 poetry of disappointment,

Let all these be written on the drops of its tears,
Let the ocean, into which the tear-drops drop, turn
into Wine.

Then the Moon, when it raises flood-tide, be intoxicated,

And when it runs, turning and twisting, on its orbit

Let the Milky Way be agitated

And the Sun dive in it and bathe

Let him too be tipsy and his fire burn with the Wine.

When the Sun walks staggering, let Day and Night,
every minute, go round and lay waste the forest
of Rainbow.

And let stars be flowers of diamond and rain down
on Earth,

And glimmering be scattered far and wide.

Behold the meadow-coloured evening sky has melted
and gathered in beads,

And the beads like clusters of grapes have been the
canopy,

They are fermented between the Sun and Moon and
dropping the essence drop by drop.

Bring out your tongue and spread far out and away,
Taste it and let me taste.

Wishing health to one another

Drink in a single draught . . .

Fill more and give again, O.

With the sluggishness of Wine your eyes have
stretched like "Khukuri."

Now there remain your eyes and your lips alone,

Rest are all cloud,

Wine is your lips,

All the world is but your eyes, your eyes.

Its silence is your vacant looking,

The rippling sounds of your lips are its words,

Your lance-like eyes are "Cocks" and your lips
"Hens,"

The obvious and the secret,
 "The Heaven is the father and the Earth the
 mother," of the Rig Veda.
 "The land is the wife and the sky the husband," of
 the Ya-jur Veda
 Earthquakes lie in my hands
 And the shaking of the sky in my heart.
 Keep this knowledge secret, as hidden as a part of
 yours,
 O Guhyeshvari!
 The Universe is drinkable, we drink and offer others
 to drink.
 We spit all that is not worth drinking.
 We swallow what is worthy.
 We evoke both the Celestial Gods, Indra and Vayu,
 and offer Soma to them.
 The impatient poet is but Wine and Wine,
 Or what deliverance is there?
 Should I die or like an ascetic give up all heart?
 Or, O Maid of Wine! drink and let me drink.
 Whose thirst is ever quenched here, whose hunger
 satiated?
 Hope, for a while, glows in the dawn in all its redness,
 And in the dew-time the blue clouds of despair come
 up from the west.
 If sleep would not infuse intoxication in the night,
 the fire of anxiety would consume all.
 What is here—Feel and perceive
 For light of your eyes cannot realise the darkness.
 It is so thick, O, light only takes form,
 Light does not spread beyond its surface,
 Eyes, though they see, turn blind, hence feel with
 your hands;
 What do you find?
 Poking, piercing, irritating, burning, branding, agi-
 tating,

Deception, bribe, murder, injustice, vice, disgrace,
 tyranny, envy, malice, wrath, heart-rending
 words,
 Heartlessness and total eclipse on sympathy.
 Who has found what for eternity?
 Who had not been tipsy? Who had not defrauded?
 Who has, in his trouble, not received rejoicing from
 others because he too had rejoiced in others'
 misfortune?
 Whose established principle has not been set at
 naught by the passage of time?
 Whose crest of pride did not submit?
 Has there ever been an enthusiast whose great fore-
 sight did not view delusion?
 Who is not defrauded at last?
 Who did not weep? Who have not had to bow down?
 Who does not die and who did not die?
 What did not transform into vapour and disappear?
 Fill once more, again, O Maiden of Wine! Pour more
 and drink more.
 It is the season of sweet Spring.
 I am, like the great Rishi Ma-dhu-chan-da, drinking
 ceaselessly deep and long.
 This is Science, the Canto Electricity, the "Why" of
 the infinite Future.
 This is the Veda, the Canto of Wine, it is the system
 of Vedas.
 It is the mystery of enchantment, it is the great re-
 joicing of the Truth, the Wine.
 Resting on it, I can, in all love lie down with Death,
 I cling to the Earth and be one with it.
 I lie down,
 Be lulled by the Wine
 And fall into a profound sleep.
 I am liberated.

Balakrishna Sama (1903—)

THE SONG

Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.
 In the town of Mathura,
 In every house
 In every room
 In every fold of the heart
 The air began to tremble in concord with the flute.
 Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.

The grasses fell down from the chewing mouth of the
 cows,
 The fishes came out of water.
 The peacocks were lost in meditation,
 So they dropped down their feathers on the Lord,
 And the cuckoos and the nightingales,
 Tearing off their breasts with their own nails
 Fell down on the branches of the trees in concord
 with the flute.

Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.

The milkmaids began to weep bitterly in happiness,
 After sometime like the golden images they remained
 motionless,
 The river of adoration was profusely flowing,
 And Krishna began to smile,
 The whole universe dozed in ecstasy,
 The Heaven and the Earth kissed each other,
 The eyelashes of the milkmaids began to be entangled
 in concord with the flute.

Krishna played on the charmingly juicy flute.

Balakrishna Sama (1903—)

SHEBA IN RUIN

Solomon sits, head on knees.
The land of Sheba is ruined;
Sheba, laid waste,
A haunted land, a heap of agony,
Without flower, without shrub.
There, dry winds thirst for rain;
Birds bend beaks under wing;
Men with parched gullets writhe.

Solomon sits, head on knees,
Dour, dishearted, with disheveled hair.
Was cunning, might, the bounding of a deer?
Love, a flame's sudden leap?
Desire, a rise without scent?
These are life's ways;
The less said of them the better.

Sheba is ruined;
Nothing remains but marauders' tracks;
Neither Sheba nor her fair queen remain.

Solomon sits, head on knees.
From where shall good fortune's messengers come?
From where shall wine
For the cup of age come?

N. M. Rashed (1910—)
translated from the Urdu by
M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

NEAR THE BALCONY

Wake up, winsome bedroom's Light;
Wake up from your bed of velvet dream,
Though you still cling to night's delights.
Come to this window;
Morning's lights
Caress minarets
Whose heights
Mirror my desires.
Open those drowsy eyes
That awaken love in my heart;
Look at the minarets
Basking in the dawn.
Do you recall beneath their shadows
A shabby *mullah*
Drowsing in a dark basement,
Like his idle god,
A demon, sorrowful,
A sign of three hundred years' shame,
A shame without cure?
Look: as if jungle spirits with torch in hand
Had left their lairs to prowl,
The crowd in the market rushes madly—
Like a flood.
Somewhere, in each of these men's hearts
Flickers—bride-like—
A spark of soul.
But not one has the power to burst
Into a raging flame.
Among them wallow the diseased, the poor,
Nourishing cruelty beneath the sky.

I am but a beast of burden, tired, old,
 On whom Hunger, hefty and strong, rides;
 And like other city folk
 After passing a night of pleasure,
 I too go out to pick up rags and trash
 Beneath that fickled sky.
 At night, I too return to a shack.
 Look at my helplessness!
 Again and again I return to this window
 To look at the minarets
 When evening gives them a departing kiss.

N. M. Rashed (1910—)

translated from the Urdu by

M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

INTRODUCTIONS

Death, meet them,
 These simple-hearted who
 Neither pray nor drink,
 Who are neither artful nor worldly-wise,
 Who have learning
 Of neither books nor of machines,
 Of neither this world nor another.
 Merely faithless in all things .
 Don't be shy, Death;
 Meet them.

Come ahead; you also, come ahead
 To meet Death.
 Come, you nouveau riche;
 Don't bother to hide your begging bowls;

There is no life in you now, slaves of Mammon, and
of Time.
Laugh with Death ; woo him ; please him.
Death, these are negative men ;
More than negative, less than men.
Give them a sweet glance.

N. M. Rashed (1910—)
translated from the Urdu by
M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

THE SMELL OF MANKIND

From where has this smell of Man suddenly come ?
Jungle demons stand stone-still ;
Their footprints turn to fetters on their feet ;
The smell of Man.
In dim jungle meadows,
In the moonlight, they dance without fear, without
sorrow.
But now, their feet are numb, their hands cold,
Their eyes petrified, without light.
A single whiff has turned them white with fear ;
For them, one smell is enough.
Who is a match for them ?
A shadow, hidden in the Tree of Time, among the
branches of months and years,
Looks on them through tangled silent branches.
One smell of Him and they panic.
They turn to wax.
Yes ; tonight Man will descend,
And demons' valor will be shattered.

N. M. Rashed (1910—)
translated from the Urdu by
M. H. K. Qureshi and Carlo Coppola

POEM 1

After the whimpering now
Time for full-throated song;
The joy and abandon
Such as rude boys know.

Time for a word of nonsense
Again. So let mad eyes
Sparkle, while behind them,
The Sorrows sleep like swans.

Taufiq Rafat (1927—)

POEM 2

This mountain, like a benevolent giant
Wears its cap of pines at a cocky slant.
Up one side of it runs a man-made scar
Ending at a rheumy cave, not visible
From this spot. We have often picnicked there.

Two lovers pass me, arm in arm. An idle
Glance, a whispered word is all I get.
For them I am as much part of the landscape
As the railing I lean against, or that
Red-roofed house, or the famous mountain-top.

Taufiq Rafat (1927—)

POEM 3

We two on the sands walking,
Madness to madness talking
Of the need for sanity.

We now unhand each other,
And stroll like sister and brother
Along the edge of the sea.

The bathers are men: they stare
At your legs, your wind-tossed hair,
And your . . . but let it be

Lest it veer again to sex;
So we quickly turn our backs
On the lusty dunes, and flee

To the stalls and laughing faces.
And while you wipe your glasses
I shout for a cup of tea.

To celebrate the success
Of this new mood, we relax
Discussing art and poetry,

And with a loud yawn pretermit
The over-ripe sun as it
Drops softly into the sea.

Taufiq Rafat (1927—)

POEM 4

The time to love
is when the heart says so.

Who cares
 if it is muddy august
 or tepid april?—
for Love's infallible feet
 step daintily
 from vantage to vantage
 to the waiting salt-lick.

If Spring
has any significance,
it is for us,
 the rhymesters,
 who need
 a bough to perch on
 while we sing.

Love is a country
with its own climate.

Taufiq Rafat (1927—)

THE BLIND WOMAN NEXT DOOR

That afternoon the new people next door
Removed the "For Rent" sign and viewed the rooms
Upstairs and as the burly man with the
Smooth hair and slick mien slowly bore
The mattress; blue vases with yellow blooms,
Up the steps, the three girls from the balcony
Came down and set the neighbors to quiet inquiry.
Fugitive sunset rays lighted their faces,
Etching past their fairness some kind of dissipation:
The first apologized for her plunging neckline:
"It's warm," she said, moving her arm with grace,
Studied, provocative; and the second with passion
Boasted they would bring their effects of the best
design

And would soon be having the mayor for a visit,
The twin moles beneath her eyes lending
Her a deceptive beauty as she looked at the third
Girl who declared with vivacious smile and wit
The Senator from Las Palmas was sending
Them a trusted maid, a watchdog, a pet bird.
And, of course, when they had gone that night
The people opposite the street and first floor
Partly knew the meaning of the heady scent
The girls left behind in the coming night
Shading the shabby street and the crowd at the store.
Someone hazarded: "They must be very prominent."
"The mole girl is sexy," said the young man who
was tight.

Monday and Tuesday the interior decorator
Came with the moving van and supervised
The color schemes of all the rooms, placement and
drapes

And furniture and if we tried to explore
The new tenants' future routine, disguised

Our voices with a whisper; our gasps and gapes,
I suppose, betrayed us, but their eyes revealed
Nothing for parked in the street was a car
With a low number and out came a fat man
Smiling. This was the clue that reeled
In the fragments and showed, you might say, the
 sear

Of our lives and tricked the senses to misunderstand
The first studied grace, the boast, the vivacious wit.
There was an old woman in the house, too:
Withered, blind in one eye, with greedy lips—
“The mother of the burly man, the pimp.” Bit by bit
The pattern of their lives and ours showed slow
Decay: What desires then leap? What substance
 drips?

For from six to eight the girls powdered
Their backs, faces, and breasts, and then
Were whizzed to “Remy’s,” hotel or bar,
And from midnight to one sundered
The quiet as they came “home” in their escorts’ cars
Plunged into bed and received the grace of pain.

The children asked questions: “These girls aren’t
Hindus,

Why do they go out at night, come home late?”
“They must be rich. They’ve many visitors.”
The neighbors gild their tongues: such loss
Of beauty is paid for by the gross and such fate
As we know we can never recall, restore.
“Society shapes our ends,” volunteered one.
“Man lives by flesh alone,” said a second.
“But our will . . . ?” protested a third, a housewife.
“The will,” a fourth replied, “Breaks. We’re alone,
All of us. The spirit always breaks its bonds,”
As if the protest against mortality, the fierce gripe
Against broken wills, nymphs, insomniacs

Would stop fall from innocence, restore again
 The smooth functioning of reason, with facts;
 The normal beat of the intricate heart.

In the meantime, music floats through the air,
 The shuffling, the laughter, the pain and gain
 Go on next door, while, rebelling, as part
 Of all these, the old woman with the blinded eye,
 Sits in, stares from, the balcony, past all care,
 Passion and opulence. Quiet, she sits there,
 Her tiredness and pose seeming to indicate
 That since the brave are never safe they cry;
 That since those born are naked, bare,
 Their rigid wills they abdicate
 While the wise can never lament or prophesy.

Manuel A. Viray (1917—)

LAMENT OF A CATHAY HANDMAIDEN IN MARCO POLO'S TENT PAVILION

No longer and not yet
 he forescents my fate.

So far inscape —
 bonfiring cassia, but char entrained,
 and his mouth salt-fresh
 from a sea beyond
 my sea.

Between his eyes
 no longer and not yet
 he foredances my fate

from my silk straw shoe
torn by the sound of one
but clapping of one hand
he foreseals my fate.

Virginia Moreno

THE DOGS

I had my share of hunger.
Stray dogs trail me
Without muzzles for anger.

From a Chinese eatery
Comes the sound of plates,
Spoons, bowls and chopsticks.

The dogs bark freely as I cross
The street to the restaurant;
The twin glass doors are locked
And silence sits on the tables.

I squat beside a garbage can.
The dogs tail a black cat
With a fishhead in its mouth.

I stretch my fleshless arms,
A drunken sailor ambles by
And spits his gin on my palms.

Suddenly I feel the sun cold
Upon my back. The mind spouts
Darkness but from afar I hear
The soft howl of dying dogs.

Oscar de Zuniga

WHERE QUIETUDE REIGNS

Where quietude reigns a tract
of watery sensations adrift
to and fro the still floor
Autumn falls abruptly by the eaves
As the syllables of voices flame
out of the uncouth chambers of the heart
The enveloping night mystifies
the eye and the visible
Autumn falls into where quietude reigns
The room sinks into a trance in brew
Rustling of leaves from distant provinces
Rustling of silk gliding over strings of a lute
So we go into a rainy season
Rains that drip and drip
Rains that have a downward cadence
downward down-a-down
In the faraway provinces
a shower beats a city in an afterglow
stirs up a flight of white cranes
from the marshes
In an afterglow they say one senses
a pavilion of brightness of the past
screened in a sunny shower
undertones in time of war
gold winds winding down the cornfield
wafting a flowing of glimmering hair
with a downward cadence
downward down-a-down
A canticle of bones
rises from where quietude reigns
Drums and heads of martyrs from the plain
flow here and away

with a downward cadence
 downward down-a-down
 (Unknowing of full dawn's advent. That comes like
 the wheel
 Comes in mourning drapery Where the door opens
 The shouting of peddlers of the well known yesterday.)

Wai-lim Yip (1937—)

FRAGMENT III

The east abounds in fishes
 take a bream take a carp
 and a table is prepared
 blithely we strum a harp

 the east bristles with trees
 grow an oak grow an aspen
 grandpa tells a tale
 we are busy in catching a hen

 the east looks big for its hills
 The Omei and the Tai
 poets sentimentalize
 How futile! let me ask why

 rivers are impatient
 talks long talks short
 go back to where we begin
 I want only a cod

Wai-lim Yip (1937—)

TILL HEART'S END

My mind glows,
 Knows no fear of the darkness and its tight web
 Though the stars blur, and the moon's dim rays
 Are sucked into nothingness,
 And the oneness of man still cannot be found ;

Though the sky splits and crackles,
 Drops no gentle music,
 Though a rooster's hurried cackle jars my ears,
 And a frightened dog goes whimpering up and down.

This clear light inside me
 Pushes the wild, heavy night back:
 It will never flicker, it can never change,
 Neither pain nor sorrow can reach it.

The earth swings in circles:
 Soon, light must break through, dawn
 Hanging golden and clear over all the world, men
 Living like men.

In the lonely night I lie listening to my own heart,
 The darkness so thick I could lose my way
 Except for the faint, echoing chant
 Of the most precious words ever written —

Words like drops from heaven
 Falling like wisdom, strength, peace, beauty, into
 my waiting heart.

These two small hands will move as this mind leads
 them,

Will carry Buddha's divine Law
 Here to this earth, until this heart no longer beats.

Chayasi Sunthonphiphit (1934—)

translated from the Thai by

James N. Mosel and Burton Raffel

THE COLD WINDS

Sakawa — the cold winds are blowing.

Loving my love quickens the senses, my incomparable
love.

Ah! The winds turn back, bring back

Thoughts of my lawful partner in combat, fleeing
abroad, running from these cool breezes.

Are a hundred mistresses as good as a single wife?

But oh my love, can a hundred wives compare with
you —

You with your smooth, soft skin, your shining face,
your bright smile, your loveliness?

It is you I think of, my soul, every day, every night—
oei!

Khukrit Pramot (1911—)

translated from the Thai by

James N. Mosel and Burton Raffel

THE WHITE LOTUS

A white lotus, gleaming in the wide

Circle of the pond,

Its petals pure to my eye:

The clear water flows, splashes; there are fish

Gliding in and out and all around. Watching them,

My heart goes soft inside me.

Droves of butterflies arch back and forth,

Hanging over the lotus, inhaling its breath,

Drinking from its center.

The small boat shuffles by

And the lotus slowly drifts out of sight.

H. R. H. Prince Phanuphan Yukhon (1883-1932)

translated from the Thai by

James N. Mosel and Burton Raffel

THE LONG RIVER

The rippling waves on the long river
Bring sorrow, fold upon fold.
The drifting boat leaves parallel wakes,
The bark goes downstream,
The waters flow upward,
Calling out melancholy thoughts:
How far will a dry piece of brushwood drift?

Solitary winds blow on sparsely-covered hills
Carrying bustling noises from a distant village
As its market is about to close.
The sun slashes down and the sky reaches far up.
Long river, vast sky, deserted banks.

Where are these duckweeds floating, string after
string?

There is not a single ferry boat in this immensity
Or a bridge to recall familiar sights.
Green banks follow upon sandy shores.

The clouds pile on the silvery mountain top,
A bird inclines its wings, bringing evening down in
its flight,
As the waves stir memories of home.
No wisp of smoke is seen in this dusk,
Yet I still yearn for my land.

Huy Can (1919—)
translated from the Vietnamese by
Nguyen Ngoc Bich

GREEN NOSTALGIA
(Soliloquy of a Tiger in the Zoo)

Chewing a cud of bitterness, in my iron cage
I lie, watching the days and months go past.
Oh, how despicable, presumptuous and naive are
those observing me,
Peering from their little eyes, scorning the sacred
forest.
How degrading, by that single blow of destiny, to be
confined,
A thing of the curious, a toy,
Thrown in with demented bears,
The neighbor of mindless leopards.
From that hour I have lived in nostalgia
For those days of proud independence.
Oh, how I envision those scenes of hill and forest,
the jungle light, the ancient trees,
The roar of wind through the woods and the hill-
shaking rumble of torrents.
Those were the times I sang immortal and terrible
arias
As I set out, stately, majestic,
My grace like the rhythmic waves,
Gliding through silent shadows, through prickling
leaves and brilliant grass.
Whenever, in my cave, my lordly eyes lit up,
The world at once turned deadly still.
I know myself the king of beasts

Within that nameless, ageless, green domain.

Where are they now, those splendid nights by the
brooks,

When I stood, elated by the hunt, and drank the
melting moonbeams?

Where are the days of storms when every corner of
the forest shook

As I gazed, unperturbed, at my flourishing realm?

Where are the evenings when the woods were tinged
with blood

As I waited for the torrid sun to sink

And leave that dark and secret universe to me alone?

Oh, where are they now, those glorious days?

Now I bear an eternal grudge.

I hate this never-changing scene,

These false and vulgar fashioned views

Of tended flowers, pampered lawns, symmetric walk-
ways lined with trees.

Does this clogged trickle among these paltry mounds
Suppose itself a brook?

Do these innocuous clumps of leaves

Pretend to emulate the wilds,

The sublime, the mysterious realm?

Oh, solemn, majestic landscapes!

Oh, land our holy race once ruled,

Lands I roamed in perfect liberty,

Lands I shall never see again!

Do you know, all these days of weariness,

How my mind explores the noble forest dreams,

How my soul hovers about you?

Oh, my terrible wilderness!

Nguyen Thu Le (1906—)
translated from the Vietnamese by
Nguyen Ngoc Bich and Oliver Rice