

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
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NOTE

When the Contemporary Asian Chapbook was published in the Winter of 1962-63 we mentioned that so much fine material had been gathered from the Philippines we planned a special section at some future date. This issue—entirely devoted to poetry written in English by Philippine writers—comprises that selection. It is a culling of the best works from a vast assortment of materials gathered for us by the Publications Program of The Asia Society. The selection is ours but the real work of gathering the poetry was the Society's. We are again deeply indebted to them for their essential part in the preparation of what we believe to be a unique collection.

The Editors

SEA SCENE

Memory has taken a picture
Of the castle I made for you
On the solitary beach of my love.

The surge of dark and surf of light
The flotsam of twigs and leaves
Surround my arms around the spires
Of sand dripped from my fingers
That had touched your wet secret shores
Rousing from you your own salty swell.
The best and most of what is possible
Of sand and sea is all we can have,
The sea reclaimed our castle long ago,
Leaving as heritage this islet this poem,
You and I, this country yours and mine,
This child dreaming on the edges of life.

Andres Cristobal Cruz

POEM FOR ELEANOR

The definite asset is the definite charm:
full-blown essence in the face of gallantry
not the glib word that scatters bright tidings
too sweetly and too soon. For sugar melting spreads.

The definite charm is a hand enclosing
gem ornamentations in a box
thinking of them so deftly deep and well
until their value goes so high
from rhinestones into diamonds.

Be hard clear rock, stone-live and different,
of equal consistency most as others
but sculpted, formed individually
then radiant as rock coal:
cold rock, fired coal.

The definite charm is the openness
of map on wall, no old-fashioned deceit
steeped either in quackery or art to delude
an earnest traveller.

Be still when all is noise, be music
to heal the wound of silence. Be solace
when fever of day's living sends scampering
the daily horde. Be mother when sons cry
enclose coldness where love might not be found.

Tita Lacambra-Ayala

FIVE HOMES:**The Mason**

Down in the pit, his sanctum, the mason's eyes
Train to the quarry wall as he taps at the wedge.
From the crumbly blocks jut slowly the edge
Of the sweet sharpness he knows as muscle throes;
Yet it is purpose, too, the astuteness of a rite,
To wield the rod by which a dry stone flows,
To scratch his wedge-forms on the towering white,
To pile the bricks of passion and surmise.

Men's rages, his own, he would understand,
A craftsman, he confines them by his hand.
But fashioning his schemes, picking at the stone,
Gouging truth's niches into the echoing walls,
He sees something long since carved: his house of
bone,
Where daily his breaths wheeze in the dust-choked
halls.

The Boy

Behind them the squatty house fenced around by
stone
Diminishes less by distance than by change;
Boy and his dog they litter the fields with shouts.
Space-wise, at last he plots how he would range;
How like winged steeds his prisoned doubts
Would shake their warm wings in the sun,
How, circling the world of birdsong, insect, light,
He would follow this set and patterned flight.

But he couldn't foretell, not even his prancing dog,
 That they would come upon the one-eyed shed:
 Shutter agape; porous walls of log;
 Crumbled stone fence; rubbish; a tramp's moldy
 bread.

Back to the earth, Icarus! the bright steeds chide,
Anger has capered, home-led, at your side.

The Fisherman

The deep-sea corral churns, the catch thrashes up,
 The fisherman's hands are complacent with the net;
 He holds it poised aloft, a lavish cup
 Where the flat heads stare through the meshes,
 Where tails flip a slimy ire against the quiet
 Conviction of his knotty hands: *Fishes*
Are made for men. Pent protest stings each eye
 Peeled outward to the unfamiliar sky.

Familiar sea, warm womb, dark home, deep grave,
 Swapped for what fish-fulfillment past the cave?
 The man flinches at their eyes; perhaps they know
 They look at last upon the ancient foe
 What, man! —confront without the convenient mesh
 The jelly-fears in the caverns of your flesh?

The Hunter

The man with the gun invades the sanctuary,
 Where the eight-pointed head has pierced the arch.
 Roaring and stamping, it invoked its deity's care,

Whose protection proving all too temporary,
It has fled, seeking another cloister,
A burrow, a bastion, or a Plato's cave, a church,
A fear-proof stronghold laced with thorn,
Secured by walls no spiked head would adorn.

But from whatever arched or vaulted shelters
With Tireisias' haunted eyes the man might peer,
Or with his tremulous shrewd nose he might snuff,
He will "abide in his darkness," trust those antlers
Soon caught in the clear sights of a more expert Seer.
(In scares and scuffles any sanctuary in enough!)

The City Man

His pulses blend tick-tock with the wind's roar;
In this new home the soporifics are stoppered.
All day sunlight had stung his stucco pallor,
Scorching through his layered tiredness, bone-deep,
Where the marrow-mills, fricative and cancered,
Whir now to a stop. He contemplates
(Less antispasmodics and barbiturates)
The puffy heavy-wheezing face of sleep:

The country cousins lean against the door;
Sunlight drip from the two heads and their arms.
Vaunted sun-land, yet it's ash-slithered to the core
Of corn and orange, through their weeviled veins!
No! — The true home is this body's celled alarms
Which the foreknowing pulse had beat on city panes.

Edith L. Tiempo

MIRAGE IN GALILEE

We break our bread, and pray
As the kneeling tides thirst
To the burning waters:

Our faith and wine
Shall once more flow
Down scorched throats.

Through the needle's eye
Who shall venture —
Who shall venture

Through the needle's eye?

Down scorched throats
Shall once more flow
Our faith and wine.

To the burning waters!
As the kneeling tides thirst
We break our bread and pray.

Fernando Afable

HOUSE MOUSE

A flash across the rug—curt
As an electric shock—
Or on the edge of light coming
In from the night outside.

First, a ball of cotton on
The shelf; then, he begins to gnaw,
Gnaw the bindings off books,
Reducing Plato, Cervantes, or Gogol
To flint-ticking sounds.

Gum, I think, he likes, and melon
Rind; and when the moon through
The window gets in, he nibbles at
A glint; he glints like a pebble

In a pond; and once the silence leaks—
A click or flicker in the dark—
He starts and stares, holds his round
Back rounder still until the silence
Gets deep, complete again; and then

He is no longer there; nothing stirs
But his shape it seems, and around it
Quivers the air, and then the house
With his muscle and nerve.

F. D. De Castro

TWO POEMS**Cezanne in Search of a Painting
or the poet in search of a poem**

The setting was a coffee shop
on a spring day
in mutual hypnosis he and she
sat near him
sea and land scapes that day
could not suffice
he was an artist in search of
the painting
and so had he entered the place and
seen these two
that is to say the artist saw
their hands
observed and loved their subtle
counterpoise
how properly classic they lay on
the immaculate cloth
how perfectly natural like large
sleeping petals
he began to shape his lovely
forms in air
composer master builder gentle
wizard

how he played those shapes together
with a great love

the sudden flight of hands then
shook in his eye

that they belonged at all came
like a shock

the fierceness of the kiss unnerved
his line

stay mind still tempest reconstellate
red planet

forms gyrating in space 0 struck
angels

the two softly laughing snapped the
spell

he was last seen in a village
buying apples.

Leonidas V. Benesa

The Stranger

The stranger speaking to someone at the gate
wears a blue coat.

From my space where the leaves are
veined and sick green
I can see his mouth forming
hieroglyphics of still sound:

water falling from a lilac distance.

I, island in this pale green room,

where time sits like a greyed falcon
that has forgotten the sight of the hunt

It is I, my self he speaks of.

This I know the way those eyes hold me
in the geometrics of his gaze.

And I also know and am certain

as surely as the blood's four seasons
shall rage shall perish in the heart's tidals

that he will pass this way again

his coat the blueness of flung
spaces

(are his eyes of the same color, I wonder,
or green, after all)

I shall go then to the gate and speak to him.

Leonidas V. Benesa

MANTILLA '63

antiquated hoofbeats on the pebbles sing
admonitions

to passers-by on the pavement chasing bubbles,
yet tempers come no matter,
one moment lashing, crushing, one moment gentle,
like incongruous urchins on the streets
wooing cataclysm yet fearing it,
but it goes on, this agitation ;

one speaks and is met with derision,
so then his lips are sealed
hence forth to speak of none but fantasies.

hush, for one's own mouth is his grave, and
even the grain of rice that touches his palate
is grace no more, but the sweat of his brows
turns mud on his own hands.

the sun blinds still the squinting farmer
on the ricefields no more to promise grain
but empty hands at harvest.

this must be why the mice run the gutters,
their impatience perceived from the shuffling
soft thumps up the ceiling ;

even the spiders weave in haste
as though to fence away all else but
darkness, dust, and the howl of wind.

Erlinda Ortiz Mirafior

TWO POEMS**Spaces**

I love spaces
In which alone are possible
Pure light and pure darkness,
Within which alone
Are possible
Your mysteries and Your absences.

Without spaces, where voices grow
And silence flowers,
Where would You be?
Spaces alone
Make You possible, God:
Spaces which convey my voices to You,
And Your silences to me.

I love spaces where I journey,
Timed only in the light of Your eye:
Spaces through which Your hand will move
To pluck my flesh and life off the world
When Your eyelids close,
And I die.

Leopoldo T. Gerardo

God

I love you, so much that the language
Of reverence, which touches me,
Complete, amounts to nothing else
But quiet. But why don't you answer
Me in measures equal to my questions?
You speak to me by force, in thunder
And rain, frightening me,
Helpless and weeping and afraid.

Who ends our conversations, God:
You? Or I? I come to you when
I am silent but always you walk
Away. You come to me when I'm at
Play where, by my screaming, I cannot
Hear your call. Yet should we meet
When I am still, I know that I, scared
By your voice, shall press my palms close
To my ears or put my hands across my face.

Teach me to feel you in the dark: the
Mutest of all secrets. (Your touch and
Your breath and your heart shall be enough)
Then, everywhere, at all times, shall I
Turn to you, and you to me, and that
Only by closing my eyes. Then shall
Thunder and rain, which I fear, be
Music to me. You, You shall be near.

Leopoldo T. Gerardo

TWO POEMS**The Rain is too Harsh, Love**

The rain is too harsh, love.
Rain-praying frogs are water-logged.
So joy must to the anchorite on straw belong,
Or to the chestnut from that crammed ooze borne
With cast-off honeycomb and chrysalis.
The rain is too harsh, love.
The keen-topped weed evolves and breaks
Our powers as it does the weakened rock
Where we edge fuss and sleep away,
And now it wrestles down our fretless breath.
Rain on the horn and hoof, fever and mind,
Rain on the contests of the flesh and bone.
The fertile fire has made its pomp and rite,
Within the urns the burning harvest stored.
But rain is too harsh, love,
It dampens both the odor and the gold.
Without bloodshed, rain must give the world blood.

Alejandrino G. Hufana

Coin of the Realm, Speaking

Dear owner, I am not for spending yet.
Look once again with vision more compound
Than you would fix on passing enterprise
And caps and lower case about your fate
Cork-sealed at waterline or capstan-bound.
I was that borne, too, scudding through the neaps
Of sturgeon tracing Magellan by the whales
When they were merry — there was such a realm.
My metal hammered long, my minting set
When Suez opened, opening a flood
Which tossed from bowels of the reeking ports
Love to the lover in the musk of spice
And to the pagan merchant merchandise.
Chased by vain pirates in the dearth of gold
I passed through customs that then were not mad,
Only to pass to pariah hands though blest
By some indulgence-paying cult as tithe
Whence I was interred in a quake and found
An eyewink later by your ancestor.
The thousand years of barter on his head
But failed him, and I kept. Why spend me now?
Remember: a Caesar my dark side makes,
My bright side flares an antiquarian's date:
So pass me off against yourself. The realm
That I enjoyed is shade, is now profane.

Alejandrino G. Hufana

TWO POEMS

Mu Ch'i's Persimmons

A Lecture for Six Students

What is there in/ one two

three

fourfivesix

persimmons balanced

at the bottom of all that

aging paper surface, on

a table that really isn't there at all? The mind

simply fills it

in,

or must learn how

by a lesson in being alone, in letting a teagray

kind of silence grow around you like a skin,

to earn an event,

how to see that seeing with the mind's eye

is an Event.

It must appear strange to our Western-educated
 Eyeball
 how the break-in-space in the orderly relation,
 that forked indent,
 conjures for the gazer who gazes/
 the way one does at the wintry
 Moon/
 the table that is required,
 solid enough for the moment to thump on, &
 can hold up
 all six calligraphed persimmons. In black & white.
 Casting no shadows.
 They have absorbed shadow AND light, replacing
 volumes of
 flesh-of-fruit, and they glow
 through transparent skins
 The *sumi* brush has made,
 Darkly.

The brush
 listening in the silence
 has seen the movement of things that
 are looked
 Into/
 the movement-under-and-about-things-that-can-
 stand-Still.
 It knows that there is no such thing
 as a still-life, &
 therefore annihilates symmetry here.
 The damned difficulty of their couplet-
 balancing depends upon
 that simple division

through which the eye breathes and locates
the precise start of & quick of the
dance, so

much so that the English poet John Keats
would have broken into fits of coughing
to have seen it, would have roared
“No rocking horse have we here!”

But that would be irrelevance,
irreverence
to roar so public an applause in any manner other
than

that of silence
in the eye swelling in the mean-
Time

to the meaning that lies in:

six flat deadblots, diagrams of persimmons
fruitier than those that grow on trees,
plumping themselves in the emptiness
in which they arrange themselves,
the essential throbs of things individual
Togethering
rounded-off-in-the-all-hollowed-out-mind
in a sweep of Mu Ch'i's six held breaths
as gray ciphers/shapes/passages

into which sink the slow white
slender notes of reed oboes
flowing/dissolving into the alerter

region of luminous mists, of branchless

Air

air

in the growing articulate slopes of

solitude

which continue the sixselves of Mu Ch'i's round frail
breaths/

echoes as of water ringing
with the drop of a rock.

The unheard air everywhere becoming/

Oriental painting of this period, according to the
official handbooks, demands more than attention to
naturalistic details

Heard melodies are sweet but those

Unseen colors are brighter.

The lights in those *sumi* shapes
continue to glow.

The unheard air

is where the six

measures can take the ear to,
as far out as an imperial

nightingale

singing on a cone of silence can carry it.

At this breakpoint/past pitch
of reed oboes

the other music
prompts the *bagaku* of persimmons. Moving
into the first morning
Nudely waking to/

the rhythmic touch of the breathing body,

that morning light
 when the meaning of sensing was in dancing.

The colors break through
 Dancing in your head.

Emmanuel Torres

The Woman in the Window

Windows are abstractions through which loose
 winds blow

Like bland minds browsing on the margins of a
 Sunday.

At dawn by themselves they are stupidly blank
 To what throbs in bird, cloud, or shadow. They
 Simply fill up with squares of yellow glare
 Until eyeballs go numb to the empty brightness.

The window across the street becomes real enough
 To bruise a habit of seeing only
 When the woman moves into view, giving unstill
 Life to it, a sensible sudden space
 That has the pulse and ache of rooms lived in,
 Being the first about, a limb for eye

To grasp the openness of the air. The lace curtains
 Lose their stiffness, aware of the verb To Touch

And the simple breath of the bare body waking.
Hands that lift those curtains draw the morning
Nearer. Beneath her elbows the sill creates
For bird and cloud the wilderness in which they float.

Because things can be bound within frames or
 windows,
Lives such as hers tick with an instanter,
More vulnerable measure, among a clutter of
 furniture
Sustaining such various arrangements of meals and
 flowers
And coverings as keep flesh and spirit going.
The light that slopes down my nose affords a subtler
Brightness for bodies to slip in and out of.
That window that frames the woman and the
 morning
Frames also my famished ego, sucking the air she
 breathes.
She may know nothing of being wived to my sight
Beyond my will that wills to change all weathers
And must learn slowly to let things be where they
 happen.

Emmanuel Torres

THE HOUSES OF THE FATHERS

In my father's house — not really ours
But the bus company's for which he worked
As mechanic — I would wake up,
Pellucid sunlight on my face, and
Realize it was vacation and summer,
The morning dew and sparkling air
Glowing in the young eyes, startling the blood.

Pulsing all these years, in the blood
And mind, they define the wonder of beginnings,
Anticipate the wintry mood, the bracing drift
Of icy flakes at Carter Barron —
There now my daughters, laughing run,
Snowballs in their red-mittened hands;
Movement whipping their coats, blazing
Against the elm trees, brilliant in the sun.

Startling summer and contrasting colors, flickering
In the wintry sunlight transfix a moment
In time and in rapture, blaze in such memories
As accumulate in the image of the aging face
That I myself see on the frosty window pane,
Where my wife and I stand in all-too-brief grace.

Manuel A. Viray

THE PURPLE TOWN

Dust accumulates in the town:
The rank smell and clusters of weed
In the estuary, in front of the brothel,
Fester. A stallion and mare explore and feed
On scanty grass beside the decrepit store.

Disturbed is the liquid fire of air
By the beggar's stump of a hand.

Weather has ruined the cross
Of the listing church and young
Hooligans chase a snivelling pig
Across the square, where the gross
Vender of fly-infested pork stands.

Disturbed is the rank, weedy air
By the beggar's stump of a hand.

Another bar opens; another brothel appears
A block from the decrepit store;
In the dusk, the pimp meets the bus.
Hoodlums in the lumberyard sex explore,
The pimp, howling and cursing them.

The rank and weedy air rigidly closes
Like the night on the beggar's empty palm.

Oscar de Zuniga

FOUR POEMS**Portrait of a Lady**

She stirs and smiles despite
The muck that fools spit

On her name; the gods' spleen
Spells a murderous glance

That strips all wrathful disguise,
So she may sweeten glazed walls

Soot-stained, and drive shadows
From her looking-glass.

A name amid this time's rot
Utters a shaping spirit

That will make her live long
Despite the rage that brings

Her tear-torn hollow voice
Energizing all artifice.

E. San Juan, Jr.

Testament of Lovers on an Antique Manuscript

With our breaths mingling together, let us
Descend into this sorrowful place
Beyond the hush of a sudden kiss,

Between the lull of elegy and lullabye,
Arched on the curve of the fabulous grail
That the helmsman holds before him.

There are no knights today, only stampers
With scarecrow seal. Go, iron hood! Rage
For the dawn that brings no meteor.

Between the loins' firmament stalks
The night uproarious with diamonds
And the light that blows and grows.

We are dreamers descending in a fall
Far from the thorny blooms, in the twilight mire
From which our luster draws strong drink.

We feed upon dew on broken shields
That mirror wings swooping down from sleep—
We are birds of passage looking for a cage.

E. San Juan, Jr.

Dialogue in the Dark

He:

We kiss—what is that
Dark forsaken cry?
Beneath the stair lies
The body we have touched
With avenging rush—
See, eyes at the corners flash!

She:

Be hushed! Harness
Your head lulled in my arms
To the moon's aplomb;
Do not create a mess
Out of your natural mind:
It's only the tricky wind.

He:

I distrust tender speech

That tempts my skin laid bare;
 Who would not despair
 Given this jewelled deceit
 Hid under scented flesh—
 Sepulchre of cold caress!

Voice Beneath the Stair:

Pity for all innocence
 Of souls sprouting in the womb,
 Pity for all wisdom
 When bodies dream beyond all expense.

E. San Juan, Jr.

The Stature of the Native Man

The Native Man and his grasp
 Encompass all limits;
 Renouncing all delights
 He controls apocalypse.

Renouncing all praise
 He acclaims the cosmic dance;
 Being on the Center once
 He knows the rhythmic grace.

If ardor fails and words mock,
 If the Ideal disillusions;
 If Symbols lack reasons
 And all Figures distract—

The Native Man must stake
 His animal despair,
 Controlling the wager
 That experience makes.

E. San Juan, Jr.

TWO POEMS

On the Portrait of a Peeress by Sir Joshua Reynolds
*("The Countess Camden" at the Thomas Welton
Stanford Gallery, May, 1951 without benefit of
biography)*

Aspects are curious
in the formal frame
celebrating virtue
to consequence in
the consequential:
this is a most pontifical
Grand Dame. The light

is correct, limpid
and blue; neither addition nor
withdrawal, a piece of soul,
and bends to influences
according to the hour or place.

The light indeed
has her forehead a matrix of
tremendous pressures; the sense and
insights glimmer in a heap
that Light has made.

The lunar furnishings
vibrate;

and with rattling shed
 metallic images
 lacklustre in that lunar world.

This is her England.

And knowing women come to see
 what warmth was flung against what cold;
 what monarchy must sleep within that world.

Valdemar O. Olaguer

Genaro and Victoria

Young Genaro, late to the feast
 at twelve years
 plotted his conquests
 early age
 (frothing-wild, champing at the bit)
 the afternoons were cool
 and civil
 the pressures in his brain
 spoke and rose
 and ran
 around the room
 girded him for combat
 between flannel covers
 (well, this had parallels in
 Cressida, only Troilus
 needed a panderer-de-camp)

to assure him
dignity and status;)

Aged twelve, Genaro came
already late

to this new Babylon
which wasn't somuchofahotcenter anyway,

indulged in steam
up to his thighs
from the neck down

(dreamt of Peru
in the sleepy sun
and the silences of
sleepy galleons
loading Inca legs:
vigorous paramour
twelve is late
moon is a crescent
seven days)

Valdemar O. Olaguer

POEM TO ANY WOMAN

It is best that I see you,
Here, at the crossroads of your
Most wanton womanhood: let the
Seeing be brief, but good!

Through what contagion of delight
You move in the impersonal sun:
For unthinking joy, for celebration.

Through what austere manner
You live your days,
Without effort or discovery,
Impinging, throat and nerve,
Pieces left out of the world!

How, as they gaze gladly home,
Your huge, incurious eyes
Bid the signal generosity:
Simplicity's unwanted gift.

How, as it treads the common earth,
Your rude uncivil spirit
Dares outrage the mind's zone,
The jabber of intellectual clowns
Which is the voice of civilization
Over here.

It is best that I see you,
And to you, never my grim thinker,
I dedicate this life of the moment,
I exacerbate this life of the true!

Always this is our lot:
Here time moves vindictively fast,
Here time takes away uncommon gifts
From uncommon children,
Retain your individual beauty!

Here things endure but for a season,
Here joy must be equated with reason,
Here till existence ends
Existence does not matter,
Retain the last latent remnants
Of your liberty!

It is best that I see you,
Here, at the crossroads of your
Most wanton womanhood: let the
Seeing be brief, but good!

Alfredo Cuenca, Jr.

SIX P.M.

Trouvere at night, grammarian at morning,
ruefully architecting syllables —
but in the afternoon my ivory tower falls.
I take a place in the bus among people returning
to love (domesticated) and the smell of onions
burning
and women reaping the washlines as the angelus
tolls.

But I — where am I bound?

My garden, my four walls
and you project strange shores upon my yearning:
Atlantis? The Caribbeans? or Cathay?
Conductor, do I get off at Sinai?
Apocalypse awaits me: urgent my sorrow
towards the undiscovered world that I
from warm responding flesh for a while shall borrow:
conquistador at night, clockpuncher tomorrow.

Nick Joaquin