

Poetry Series

Maung Shin Saw
- poems -

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Maung Shin Saw()

The Pagan Instrument

Sound

into the deep jungle
a heart-rending sound
is wafted

over there at the Yoma's foot
a few human habitations
a brush stroke of fields
on nights of hillside bonfires
a town wearing a ruby necklace

that little sound-
has it fallen?
out of a rucksack of
some backpack travelers?

or has it been brought along
stuck to the retreating winds?

or has it flowed like the Irrawaddy
from the flute of
some old buffalo herdsman?

the dried up tree with spreading horns
the wild yellow flowers waiting for their time
listening with bated breath

no more
is heard
by anybody whomsoever

very soon
the little town
is lost in the mists

Written by Maung Shin Saw

Translated by Maung Tha Noe

Widow

nothing in the bosom
nothing in the house
she looks
like the charcoals
in her late husband's little smithy

please
do be quiet

on the beams skinny mice
are scuttling

in the grocery store under the eaves
colorful cake packages sway

in the back storeroom
her man's knives begin to rust

in the pinewood box
a noiseless transistor radio lies worm-infested

in the evening
as the clock strikes four
her children come home from school
with worn-out bags
with scores on their little feet

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

Africa-a new tale

Yesterday,

in a cloud of refugee dust
mum was riding a horse.
When the horse died.
she rode dad.

I was in the cradle
in mum's womb
When I jumped down from the cradle,
suddenly,
the sky opened
as if an umbrella was unfolded.

Mum,
Where am I?
I see people.
I see guns.
I see dirty legs.
Sure,
We are floating in a weeping sea.
Mum,
please answer my question.
Is mum short or tall?
Is the god who's created me
Tutsi or Hutu?

[To children born in Rwanda refugee camp.]

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

Reverie

at the edge of our town
there in the small football field
a girl will be waiting for me

leaning against the sloping old goal-post
and staring at the children at play
through the drizzling rain
saying hello to the little blue pigeons
that soar up in a roar

from the old monastery's ceiling

the girl's eyes
all smiles
her lips
a heart-rending gaze
her tiny hands
crushing the green Bermuda grass blades

look
from twilight's back
a red eyeball
glides down and, ah, is lost

go home, young girl
from the little town
the bells
we now hear

as for me
the cigars Mom has sent
puffing at one after another
puffing and.....

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

One day and one night

Reunion at last-
me,
my eye,
and a heaven

with the mouths
left hidden somewhere
we there
had a lot to talk about

I
opened the window
the eye

strummed on the guitar
the heaven
quaked over and over again
on the guitar strings-
the night we all went riotous

before the song ended
I fell asleep
the eye
paddling through the moonlight
ran to the woodlands
in the heaven
all the stars
were left-blind

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

Three ants

so that no one may see them
they are hiding
one
in the centre of the future
hides from suffering

one
in the narrow interior angle
hides from truth

one
in a verse of the lord
hides from death

in this way
as they get bored
they change places and hide

three ants who will hide
till the end of the world

are driving like trains
in our head-
three beautiful ants

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

The house without the birdie

The house without the birdie
I don't want to go back to

with what aim and object
shall I hasten the lessons?

with what hopes
shall I welcome-accept the school-over bell?

with what smiles
shall I make the going home less boring?

I remember its beaks
with which it once pecked me
and its wings
with which it once struck me

when the bucket fell
into the old well,
when the brown squirrel plays
among the white kinpon1flowers
on the hedge row,
when March with its in-breaths
wrinkles the rice paddies
when the southern wind tolls
the dangling drumstick bells,
'Good morning! Good morning! '
is it the birdie's song?
my ears have doubts

now I myself
have become a cage gaping open

where
only endless dark nesses
rage-a storm

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

□

Attraction

My brother and I
are away from Mother.

When Mother is not with us.
in our village
there are no seasons,
no bosoms,
no eternal truth,
no new mornings and
no new lights

The sheaves of rice are
Like a French woman's hair
Just after a shampoo

The stranger-like wind
is angrily kicking
the little birds' wings.

The black cow-buffalo
With an ugly girl on her back
is ringing her bell in the field

There in the distance
the Yoma is gently caressing
the light purple cirri.

Ah, just then
at the foot of the Yoma
something suddenly comes into view.

There there there.

A long train
It's a long train.

The sun the twilight the blue sky.
the Yoma,
the fields
the quietness
among these
in this train moving
how I wish to go to Mother.
Oh Lord!
When I go to Mother,
will my younger brother come with me?
Hey fellow!
Will my brother come with me?

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

Two together

moon
from the glass louvers
slat after slat
indolently comes descending

alas
is mist falling, do you say?
in such scorching moonlight
never have I been burnt

into the pillow
a dagger has been thrust
under the bed
cached for years on end
are time bombs
the mosquito net's top
shines with potential barbed wires

when the breaths telephone each other
she too like me is unable to fall asleep

why
do her new dreams

time and again want to declare war
on my old dreams?

we
on this single night
go to sleep turning backs n each other
for years

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe
The Quest

Like a tree
Looking for its own roots
Like the earth looking for its own centre
like the sky
looking for stars
that are living secluded lives in its bosom
I searched for her
she searches for me
until
not knowing who's searching for whom
we're engaged in a life-long search

what have we been searching?
as a hermit in the deep Himalayan forest
seeks the truth
what have we been seeking?
as, toward the end of the universe,
a splintered planet
looks for its own circuit,
with what meaning
are we searching?

yes
such a mysterious thing
like the primitive man looking for a god
we all have searching

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

The last night

the two bicycles
among the dews of early winter
outside the house
remain icy cold, I'm afraid

to light the lantern like before,
I feel hesitant
to waken the curtain I feel timid
to touch the guitar strings I've no strength left

in the little log house
where damp silences
have rooted
we
like two snakes mutually charmed
like melting wax figures
like chunks of flesh clawed by a lion

the last night
this is the last of all the last nights
of the two of us

we don't want even a dust of pollen
to trip into our night
we don't want a single ray of starlight
to crash down on to our roof
we don't want even a puff of breeze
to heave a sigh in our flower-bed of kisses

the two flower-pattern umbrellas
in the wire netting in front of the house
stand drenched in dewdrops

we keep weeping
till we ourselves are sunk-deep
in our own tears
Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

Country teacher

While teaching
the children
I hear
The clang-clang of
an old rice mill at work

rice caught in the rain
diesel engine coughing frequently
iron sieve feverish with malaria
rice feed riding a Ferris wheel

these form
a quarter of the mill
I see
Through my classroom window

the other three quarters
of the mill I can't see

nor can I see the young worker
who has had his hand?
smashed by the conveyor belt

nor the rice brokers'
motorized tongues

nor the sky dominated
by rice husks and carbon fumes

the window's narrow
the sky narrow
and the village narrow-
among the photos with narrow lengths
me and the children
the children and me.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Tha Noe

At night's heels

Suffocated and mute,
Tonight
heavy with longing, too.
In the light purple, a piece of morning,
Crushed and broken pieces of roses
keep flowing into a dark night.
The shameless night is seducing
and dragging me into the past.
You go at night's heels,
Dizzy and trembling,
Impregnate with rose-scent,
a crescent moon dangling
the eyes closed.
Are you my younger brother?
Memory begins to fail and you worry.
Under one roof, two together.
In a white dream, with tears dropping
on the old bridge, wet with water drops
sleepy on our backs, after lighting the cheroot.
Let's go to sleep.
Days and nights never to be forgotten last long.
We wind the words on miscellaneous topics
Tuck in stray ends of hair
and look up to the stars.
Ten million sighs
on the tender grass bed
Where are you, my little brother?
Suffocated and mute
Tonight
Heavy with longing, too.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

The Banyan Ghost

the whole world is black
as I've not had a stealthy peek at anyone,
in the middle of the circle
my companions and their laughter
in the blindfold
how the whole life freezes

and darkens!

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

How do you make friends with each other?

When minus signs get very close,
Equation signs result.
Like the leaves]
of the different branches in the dark
We
Scrubbing one another.
Mechatronic.
Biochemistry.
Dolly the lamb and a rail-car
You know.
Although the stars are old,
the rays of the light are brand new.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

.....

(1)

On the other side
sunny.
A dove cooing.
Little wooden bells
from the neck of a cow
going ding-dong
And the children learning their lessons.
The running trains
at the foot of Mt Pho-saung
seen vaguely.
A fork-stick
May stand or fall on the ground.
Asparagus and red stalks of water convolvulus
Verdant

the whole field.

(2)

In this side

.....

.....

.....

.....

no present time.

Only the past time.

It would be better

to give this poem

the title 'the window'.

Written by Maung Shin Saw

Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

The second Error

They jumped

into a nauseating maze

of darkness.

Closing both the blind eyes,

hooking one's finger to the other's.

squeezing out giggles,

they've gone away

like one or two pieces of rubbish

from the speared breasts,

from the skin blisters of the children,

from the stone obelisks of the tribes.

Love! it's said,

Just like an earthquake

it cannot be forecast.

Then both of them will be left

among the ruins.

The apple they are hungry for

is over-ripe.

The road they are lost in

has contracted like a wire

to tie around their legs.

Death they are hiding from

is coming out of the earth to wrap them
with a black shroud.
Amidst the day's howls
the night is burning alarmingly.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

Slow Motion

From the other bank
of a table
she was looking at me,
just like peeping at
underground currents
from the roots of a cherry tree.
No food on the table.
Words cleaned by sulphuric acid,
Words playing double somersaults,
squeezed out from the throat
twisted sentences
like clothes washed, spun
but not yet taken out in the sun.
A mess on the table.
She did not speak
but I heard.
She spoke
But I did not hear.
Then,
the table became longer.
The rooms without guests in the dream
increased in number.
In the empty space of the dark
We looked at each other
with sense-organs other than eyes.
We looked at each other.
I don't want to tell anybody,
Tuesday is running out of an ink.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

Sitting An Examination In A Dream

From primitive communism of pre-historic
Times to Angelina Jolie, it is said.
they light with hope,
Really.
We expect nothing
from one another.
Searching different treasure troves
on the different road-maps,
We've become little stars.
When lost in the space,
the earth is too small to provide us
a shelter and it looks like
a ball radiating like petrol.
In this match
We both have become the worst
Goalkeepers of two different teams.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

Snakes and ladders

When a tap is opened
Splash
all come out,
Urban,
ready-made art,
community houses,
electric mushrooms and anthills,
Four artificial elements.
Gamma rays and radioactive hills
Soup of globalization
and the left-over hip hop culture,
All things
in the basin suddenly appear.
Then they disappear all at once.
The chart is spread out.
The dice is shaken.
After climbing up ladders

The snakes swallow every now and then.
I don't want to get a
Why not play the next round?
I hear a car stop in front of the house.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

Visiting An Invalid

Of the people lining with me for cessation
I feel sorry for those in the front.
Who will mend the boat's hole?
When will a dropp of honey taste bitter?
The brides and bridegrooms about to marry 'zero'
Will perhaps be having a full-dress rehearsal in their dreams.
The beginnings forget beginnings
The ends are not interested in the ends anymore.
Just in the middle
We deal out our own cards.
To pray for the missing players,
To free the birds,
To take the mats into the sun,
To sing the hymns,
To drive in the wrong way,
To meet the refugees
One robs the other of his time.
We're not free yet
Excuse.
Suppose, it's a bottle front
To be a closer to one another,
To try throwing stones
At one another's life,
These languages are not enough.
While, with more powerful glasses,
We are searching closely for
Our images in other's eyes,
The traffic lights go wrong,
The crows fly out with a loud noise.
There's a traffic jam.
In a small corner
A being or

A physical body or
A new quest of the Lord,
Tissues, and chromosomes,
The factory-made atoms begin to shrink.
The land-surveyors measure
Systematically over and over again.
The tragedies,
The names already dead and
The worn-out footwear.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

Portrait

Nothing much definite.
Just like eating ice-cream.
Just like gulping down sour, salty hot soup.
A little this, a little that
Having a hair-cut at a roadside barber's,
I looked back at the world.
Could not draw self-portrait.
Scissors clank-clink.
Impermanence.
Traffic jam on the road.
The tables and chairs covered with dust
In the furniture mart on the other side.
No parking between the arrows.
The mirror nodded sleepily,
The equations to be taught
In the next hour
Dropped on the head.
Please, don't put a knife
On the nap of my neck.
I'm afraid of infectious diseases.
A brush, a hair-clipper,
Sponge, powder and cigarette smoke.
Time was being blown by a hair drier.
In the dresser's gown
I saw myself as a saint.
Into the mirror
Life began peeling off.

Lips straightened out.
Beard and moustache
Fell down on the white gown,
When I took a glance at myself,
I felt pain in both chest,
Thud□.....
Thud□.....
Thud□.....
The nap of my neck broke
Everything was over
Under the bridge
Water did not flow,
The drainage channels blocked.
Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt
He, She, Etc.

If you cry
Because you've missed the sun,
you'll miss the stars, too.
Tagore

The stars've fled from the war.
The moon piles up the electric
Thorns on her head,
Like the portrait of Christ before the fall,
the rain-clouds gather to darken.
The whole world seems near a landslide.
After closing all the windows
her man sawed the double bed into two
It's sure.
At last he will arrive here.
Yes and no,
Presence and absence.
If there is an `or'
between these two uncertainties,
that `or' is an untreated border area.
No need of a gas stove.
No need of cyanide.
You need only to be merry in life,
I'll never turn up a card facing downwards
till I die, she said.

I'll put roses in vase.
I'll glue the torn calendars together.
There they've put the rings
in lumps of cake to swallow them.
'Our misfortune is not as bad as
the Jew girls in the Nazi era.'
It's certainly right.
She plants the flagmast
on the second hand.
Hello!
Is there any body who crossed the line?
Although I'm facing the other side,
I know by instinct
the shadows are marching behind me.
1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10
My elder sister,
Let's play stone statues
as in our childhood.
Written by Maung Shin Saw(translated by Maung Zeithu)
Conjecture

Some are cold and stiff.
Some with fumes rising.
In the boundless open expanse
Burning years in heaps.
A flower patch
group of wild elephants had trampled on.
A song in the cemetery.
The eternal forgetfulness of the god
in the Bible with a host of holes.
Let roses bloom stained with blood as they are.
Rwanda, Hezbolah, Enolagae.
The snow from afar.
Asleep in Jesus.
A basket of beal fruits.
A basket of sesame.
We come without Ma Htwe.
The waters of the black sea bitter.
Movies one after another.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

Facts

Rappers say, 'You. You.'
Post modernists say, 'You. You.'
Pointing their fingers to us, they rail.
We, poor fellows, have to hide in fear,
Amidst the boring afternoon shouldering
the unmanageable load of the noises
from the concrete mixer and
breaking of the bricks,
the 'you' poems and 'I' songs
bomb our New Culture words.
The beer pubs, video games and
Weeklies machinegun the idle youth.
'Have our epicenters moved away? '
a friend who died 20 years ago phones me.
Art is art.
The Second World War is the Second World War.
In the haunted house we are just competing in story telling
to have a clear conscience.
When you do not need to be checked again,
we're just to step gently
on the overdue birthday cakes
'They don't trust me any longer, '
a mad man shouts in the spring.
The cotton tree flowers fall unexpectedly.
They've resigned for life as reserves.
(In fact, they've never played in a single match.)
Metanarratives, conservatives,
nihilists and decentres
Sorry, I've forgotten the remaining ones.
'What will you choose? '
Why are you writing these?
What do you consider yourselves?
Excuse. Excuse me.
I have to appoint a hundred agents
to spy on myself.
The times move like faults.

The cobweb is systematically tangled.
The drizzled soil fragrance in dead.
Chaos!

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

Awake

Whenever I'm startled to wake
in the dark,
I doubt my existence.
When I am sleeping,
who
is driving my life element?
When I awake,
Who
is rope twisting my mind?
Sleeping is a big deep pit.
In the drumbeats of silence fumbling
like a butterfly
floating on the brink of the pit.
Is it me or my mind or my body?
Sleep is the lake of a god
Guarded by an ogre.
Dripping with water.
Dreams come up from the lake
and they draw me.
The abstract nouns I have done,
the contract buffer zones of nothingness I've created,
the action and the results of the action
and the secrets of time I've observed
are taken off layer by layer.
The mind remains just the thing inside
intends to jump into the lake.
My consciousness is the fruit of my existence.
It is the surest time now.
The roof of the mosquito-net
comes down gradually.
It is the time to know clearly
my breath is the root of my cycle of rebirths.
The root of the mosquito-net

gets further gradually.
At that time
consciousness and sub consciousness
garland each other
and then
they are pated from each other
like a sea and waves
are suddenly broke at the shore.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt
Speaking

'Help, ' shouted the lion caught in a trap.
'Don't worry. Here's the sea-horse balm,
someone said.
While the mouse comes running....
Suddenly, half way through the story,
he is alone, grieved in bed.
Mozart, Mozart. Where are you?
On the roof of the mosquito-net
Duty reports rain down heavily.
On the pillows phone numbers get soaked like dews
As usual.
He gets on a tramcar where there are
a lot of wax-statues reading newspapers.
The weather report says ' A storm hits some Asian countries'.
Oh, Lord!
Reason has gone to office.
Homesickness has hired a taxi
to the airport.
In the subway stations, super markets,
and stock exchange
too many people, too few words
will step on ice-blocks to shake hands.
A pound of cake
A box of ham
A package of powdered raisin
A bottle of Johnnie
Well, Look! I forgetfully happen to put in
a box of jelly for the youngster.
The great hero pines away.

He sits down exhausted on the roof
of the plant which does not smoke
The black swans are swimming in the Thames.
I alone am not beautiful.
If you were with me, I think,
my eye-sore would feel better.
Hello! Hello!
As they come running at 300 million
metres a second, the hellos are panting
in my ears.
Vomit them.
Vomit anything that nauseates you
into the mouth-piece.
The poor fellow thirsts for
what I'm tired of.
It's 4 o'clock in the morning.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu
A shadow of bird

When suddenly the winter comes,
The snow thunders
In the contracting sky.
Friction between stars causes
The rivers to overflow.
The trees feel a great weight and
No magpie robins sit on the power lines anymore.
When suddenly winter comes,
Love flows continuously
In my other body,
The frozen radio waves
Break into an inner life
Overwhelmed by a great darkness.
When suddenly winter comes.
The mirrors break and crack.
On these wrecks
My face is out of shape.
My nose begins to disappear
My eyes, one standing up,
The other falling down

The pieces of apple between my teeth
Feels cold and hard like steel.
I'll greet you in the language of birds

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Zeithu

Pyramid

(1)
Finally.
The maharajahs
had to kow-tow to me.
All their beloved queens,
the elephants, the horses,
the cattle and the precious stones
are in my grand darkness
and sad,
Egypt a hundred times.
Oasis a hundred times.
Sand-storm a hundred times.
Under this desert,
how long I have been fast asleep?

(2)
I grew up
Among the whippings
that scrapped the wind like lightning.
In the nightmare
The slaves have had their whole lives
I am a ghost.
Every stone of my body
is the amputated hands and feet of the slaves,
the blinded pupils of the eyes of the windows,
the cruel syllabuses
from the stomachs of the children.
Each stone was finished with
a blood oozing fable.
It is true
they built me with mere hands.

(3)

The dates have come to extinction.
The foot prints of mules and camels
have faded
It is difficult for the sun
to stab my back with a harpoon.
Like a ship-wreck sunk forever
with feudalism
I lie at the bottom of the sea of sand
The centipedes heading
From one coffin to another,
dark shadows running
from one life to another
and the secret music of silence
vibrating from one hall to another
the only things left with me.

(4)

One day
a young history researcher
will stumble over my summit.
Then he will try striking
our times against their times,
trying to dig himself,
he will try to dig me.
A new syllabus will be added
to the last page of the history book.
Pyramids
Sands
And
Sands
And pyramids.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt
Possessed by a spirit

(1)

At the moment,
On the straight beauty of a nose
My heart whirls round.
Drumbeat waves rise roaring

Powerful like an earthquake.
In the tenderness of love
All the traditions
too big for a cover-up
fall step by step.
A dream of smoke
Pillars, roofs, walls of shadows
I was put in prison
The blood lust of love.
At the doorway of a vapory heaven
of the intangible dream.
A gorge, narrow in width or length.
Blazing fire
Bubbling water.
The tremendous rollers on my life
I, me, like others.
The beauty of having no dignity, no honour
And integrity by myself
At that moment,
Total peace and quiet
On the poison of pot, the depth of my misery,
I am going to sleep.

(2)

My mind is indecorous
With my matter-of-fact perversions/
Wrongs in days and nights
The stars are short-lived
Misunderstanding with the religions
My wound, a stand for my corpse and my desire,
The straight stabs
I withdraw
Before the time comes
The bad deed sculpted by the mind
You suppress it gently with the mind.
Build with mind again and again
Before I've packed my wrongs safely
From the hell, from the icebergs,
From the vibrating concrete roads
Whinny, gliding noises, hooves
Attract me.
You or she

Or the universe of millions and billions
Let the eternal peaceful music
From the enchanted strings of the harp
Oozing in many past lives
Be born for me.

Written by Maung Shin Saw
Translated by Maung Nyi-nyutt

Maung Shin Saw