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Writing Sample

Maung Day

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Maung Day Poems

The President of Snails

Land-grabbers drink to the health of the president of snails.
Snails' president, a land-grabber himself, scoops up soot
from his purple liver and builds from it a nation that goes by
various names: Myanmar League, Terror of Laiza, Hepatitis B.

Himalayan tigers walk behind me. What do you think they got
to remind me? Now it's raining in the middle of summer
and the rain tessellates People's Square with road kill.
Something's wrong if equestrian statues are still getting paid.

The flower-biting ogress, the first lady of snails,
puts a diamond-studded leash on her six-legged pit bull.
The dog eats looted gold. I wish it'd just explode,
its entrails shooting up against gravitational pull.

Every village is a shepherd, every villager a sheep.
Inside every sheep, a tombstone. Before you comb the hair
of one-hundred-year-old shadows, you'd better delouse them.
Would I want a house full of dead sparrows? No, I wouldn't.

Fruit Cake

I eat my own syndrome. Eat my own corrosion.
I rented a room, but its location is unknown.
Somewhere in the future
granite will beautifully collide with one another
and become new land. People will just call that *a fucking prison*.
I call every fruit rotten.
When I touch an electric current, carrier pigeons break
their own wings, jump off the trees and become humans.
People working sugarcane plantations die eating sugarcane.
I move the days with the smell of my sweat and breastfeed the months.
Children are still born where there are no midwives.
Rotten mangoes fall to the dusty ground, coconuts float in the drains.
I eat my own syndrome and that's what I do in the main.

Skies over Yangon

Pterosaurs fly over the city, the soiled desire of old perverts.
Your six-shooter is your coral prick which is my oyster.
Street vendors address you as *sheitan*. I run into you in my placenta.
I have nothing to do with the fireworks
that burst inside the city's mausoleum.
On building sites, brides are hypnotized and grooms milk water buffalos.

Everything that ticks has stopped to go back in time.
Slums are otherworldly. They collect pennies in their astral bowels.
Sweatshops are swinging. Lightnings are singing.
Dust means to be mean and you fuck samsara in the morning.
You are a sickle that bitches and a hammer that snitches.
Maybe you are right. Maybe you are wrong.
But the halo hanging from your head has blinded the buffalos.

Paper Flowers

I have come here to suck on the rims of oil rigs

There are trenches and foxholes in the floor of cyber cafes

I am a mass expanding gradually

and your malaria parasite

In an anthropological museum, there's a man

who breathes through the tip of his head

You live in the HTML format too

Infinites are the length of the Independence Monument

I have to get a new email address everyday

Snakehead is a deity fish

The temple choking in my throat is an illegitimate star elsewhere

We have thoroughly searched the place

The parking buses themselves are bad karma

Let us legally do what we must do in the dark

Though it's not time yet, the instrument tuner has arrived

On the inside he is bringing child soldiers

On the inside of the inside he is bringing paper flowers

Death Metal

Today everybody can play the guitar, everybody can buy a gun.
We expect a better future from ourselves.
When I don't have a friend, I make a friend of attachment.
I turn my eyes to heaven and see a flock of vultures flying eastward.
The senator, an infant, believes in capitalism.
His pee pee has turned blue from being touched so often.
The posters of death metal bands on my wall keep me up.
They growl all night. Barbarity is a mosquito net.
A bathroom without soap is a provincial town.

After a deer hunt, I came back home and realized
my knife was missing. I found it at the bottom of a ravine.
I saw my head rolling some meters down.
I washed myself in a public bathroom and stepped into my house.
Deicide was in my house, Death was in my house,
Morbid Angel was in my house, and Carcass was in my house.

Salt from My Blood

I was born in the floodwaters of Aquarius.
No mule is a virgin. A murderer is my friend.
A surprise the size of China comes with a pig's face.
I don't live in Gaza.

I make a rope from orphans' umbilical cords.
I am fact. I am or I am not
whatever you are not.
Hold on tight to Pol Pot's oar.

The Buddha has become furniture.
The new day is *Dawn of the Dead* pink,
and so is my ice-cream.
We have technology.

Fireflies come out of corpses.
The basket of a highland girl is full of cancer.
We don't need a picture of paddies on our national flag anymore.
Calamities will always bring us together.

Monkey Poem

I chained my monkey to the table,
fed him and made him write this poem.
This is going to be my last monkey poem.
This is going to be the last rocket launch by the Chinese.
I gaze upon Yangon down in the valley.
I can't see the tree, nor the forest.
But I can see its rotten beams and pillars.
I can see the killer whales taking it away
to where the ocean is darkest.
The valley is damned beautiful, but the bodies
they found in it have made everyone nervous.
You would go into the toilet and find a body.
You slip under the covers
and there would be another dying next to you.

I stand on the balcony and look at Yangon.
Yangon looks back at me like an animal in heat.
No, it looks back at me with the eyes of a child
sniffing his first glue in an alley.
This is going to be my last monkey poem.
This is going to be the last space travel of monkeys.

Mysterious Octopus

Today the government talks about a mysterious octopus
which attacked civilians boning their hookers in the bushes by a lake.
Pox-colored piranhas nest inside a stupa, they ordain deathless figs.
I am fed up with spastic devas.
There was another in my beans this morning.

I spend my day deleting vowels from my doctor's prescription.
A group of journalists line up to lick the gold off the city hall.
In a bar, a group of young tourists eat rhino balls from shot glasses.
The end of a year is not a string of pearls at all.

I download Depeche Mode and I download The Cure.
I download Rohingyas and the Battle of Marston Moor.
Failed crops glow in the dark. I talk on the periphery of sleep.

Listening to an Old Ballad on a Hot Day

“I am an altocumulus cloud drifting in a shopping mall.”
Virgil didn't write that. Underage girls are unintended shantytowns.
A little prostitute lying in her bed is an underage ballad.
The coast cannot read the signs, and that's fair enough.
Where there's sugar, there's men. However much I keep
loving you like water, rain hasn't come yet.
And I couldn't be sure if Virgil was happy here.
And I couldn't care less about it. Somebody poured hot water
on an ant colony, which is the opposite of hallelujah.
I sit all day suffering from humidity and discomfort.
Out of my window, a car whooshes by
and drives into a guard rail of a bridge. The driver
is sucking on *Min Nandar* like Ecstasy.

Note: Min Nandar is the name of a prince from a Burmese fairy tale. He travels to his girlfriend—whom his father prohibits him to see—inside the mouth of a large crocodile.

Zombie

The fruit bat which comes around your hostel every night crooning "A Wasteland Is Burning with My Love" is me. If you go past that, you will come to the National Zoological Garden where harbor seals lie wet and naked.

Everyone wants to be with their loved ones. But most people can't tell a biscuit from a cookie. They can't tell animal from human, and human from zombie. How are we supposed to trust these people?

The rumor that the undead will rise and go berserk is true. Also, they are the ones who will enter the Kingdom of God. He will ask them simple questions the answers to which are mostly yeses and nos.

If you go further, you will see a bus terminal. These buses go in all directions, go everywhere on earth. Adults must have somewhere to go, something to do, right? Summers ago and before the time of zombies,

humans and animals fought each other for territory. Where you are standing now is also forbidden for humans. The guy who comes around your hostel every night singing "A Wasteland Is Burning with My Love" is a zombie.

Underwater Forests

When people sleep by a pile of gravel in a new town,
when people queue up in front of a music studio
to record screams in all languages,
and when underwater forests shake because the earth swells up,
we know that these are not new beginnings, not tender arrivals.
The terror of the earth is an imbecile running with a gun in his head.
Wood is an axe lost in a stream. Clouds are voiceless.
I sit astride the axis of the earth
and eat fried crickets of underwater forests
before what is called time wears out and expires.
I sit on young grass between two angry mountain goats.
I hear somebody belch.
The smell of burnt undergrowth twirls up from his lips
and disperses in the air that roofs the earth like a steel dome.
Underwater forests dig up old cemeteries in people's consciousness.
Cornfields bite off birds' legs. I try to not doze off although I am
so tired after traveling. The number of people underwater is greater
than the number of people on earth.
In a killing field which is now a museum,
people light candles, skulls laugh themselves sick.

Ghost Story

1.

I dreamed that my guts fell out of my body.
I dreamed that I piled them up at the door.
Everything flees from me en masse.
An unidentifiable matter, I am
sicker than I think I am.

2.

I dreamed that I killed a prison guard
and piled up his parts
at the prison gate. The healthcare system
is carrying Satan's child.
I am healthier than I think I am.

3.

I am all over the yard.
Taking lives, I go to one village after another.
Always me against the whole village.
But I am still thinking I am a doll.
I am ablaze all by myself among roses.
My body trying to inhabit every soul.

4.

The disease worsens outside the spectrum of seven colors.
Eating the original dirt, the fever intensifies.
My neighbors wore celestial costumes,
went into the woods and disappeared.
This reminds me of a leaking boat in a stream.
Admitting sins to each other doesn't work.
So we are just trying to forget about it.

5.

Actually I don't know anything about boats.

There Is a Village

There is a village that doesn't know anything about
flowers for the dead. In the same village, there is this forester
who is having an affair with a parakeet.
For the villagers, the color of milk is the color of life,
and dynamite explosions in the mountains are music.
They happily take in whatever comes into their lives.

Yes, I am talking about my village.
My mistress, the parakeet, said: "Last night, you were like
a barn's door in the storm." I am happy when she is happy.
We have been sleeping together for years.
We have passed many a Tuberculosis Christmas,
and many a Throat Cancer *Thingyan*.
We together have got a few bastard children too:
one half-dog half-phoenix, one half-ogre half-mango,
and one half-man half-worm.

We have been told to not disrespect modern development.
So I can't do anything about it
except flashing my ass to the sun in disdain.
Like my sisters, I am a beach without sand,
and like my brothers, I am a well without water.

Time is a retarded son who doesn't know where to stand
in a family photo shoot. Dear children, there's a lot more
to say and this story could fill every page.

Note: Thingyan is a water festival in Burma, which marks the beginning of a new year.

Starman

I look into the universe through my telescope.
I see cow-birds and goat-birds itching to invade the earth.
Things have changed. We, the people of Myanmar,
don't live in our old economy anymore.

Things have changed. The earth now spins backward
and it snows where it never did before.
At night, stars come out to tell lies about themselves.

We have grown so used to the blackouts.
Many of us think candles have put an end to the class struggle.
If we are lucky enough, we may even see Bowie land tonight.

A group of lads go to a canal and smoke grass.
They kill a few rats. Some miles ahead,
a trail of smoke rises in the night sky.
The night starts to look like the inside of a crematory.
The lads pull the dawn from a sewer and return home.

Someone Says EAT DEATH

A lot of people can't sleep after seeing the severed head.
Those who are in charge of the funeral
put a picture of Ko Gyi Kyaw, the drinking gambling

god, near the body. A catfish and a pinkie
on the chopping block. People queue up
at the outhouse. This coffee tastes bad.

It tastes like a bat. The lights are at red.
A pilot drops the bombs and lets out a sigh.
Fireworks explode above the new capital.

People in glittering costumes walk the white elephants
before the cheering crowd. The traffic doesn't move
an inch. My desire hits the ceiling. Dogs can only

concentrate on one thing at a time. A hippo at Money
Bay. A busload of partisans get on a bus.
Geckos with only one cell. You may have washed

yourself in the same river twice, but you may still be
an asshole. You can't chew betel to quit smoking.
Donate a penny and what you have will double.

Originally written in English by the author