

A selection from U Tin Moe's poetry

Desert Years

Tears
a strand of grey hair
a decade gone

In those years
the honey wasn't sweet
mushrooms wouldn't sprout
farmlands were parched

The mist hung low
the skies were gloomy
Clouds of dust
on the cart tracks
Acacia and creepers
and thorn-spiral blossoms
But it never rained
and when it did rain, it never poured

At the village front monastery
no bells rang
no music for the ear
no novice monks
no voices reading aloud
Only the old servant with a shaved head
sprawled among the posts

And the earth
like fruit too shy to emerge
without fruit
in shame and sorrow
glances at me
When will the tears change and
the bells ring sweet?

Nocturne

night adorned with dreams
drunk on silence
longing for first love
chasing stars
fragrant *kanqko* flowers
spread on the ground
singing sad songs
of the night sad wings fluttering
on the shore of Inya Lake
wavelets gently stirring
sweet notes of the trembling breast
sprinkled with moonbeams
shamelessly teasing
the smiling moon
the little box of words bursts open
we take turns listening
never fed up however much you hear
now the season's days have fallen
one rainy season changes to another
one March to another
long, long are the years
night will renew sorrows

Meeting with the Buddha

Not for anything in particular—
even me the very Buddha
along with other antiques
they've put up for sale
here in Europe,
they have such a sharp eye for business—
what business brings you here?
asks the Buddha

You may not know it
but if you were in Burma
you would surely receive
all kinds of veneration,
but
telling only untruths and preaching only falsehoods
Your Holiness would exclaim “Buddha!”
and long to flee
Telling untruths
you tire yourself out
on the rounds of births
A scandal to the whole world
the generals delivering all kinds of orders
engaging in all kinds of impropriety
what if they bind you hand and foot
and put you under lock and key?

These hare-brained guys
don't know the truth
they don't keep promises
all kinds of lies
come out of their foul mouths
they have no respect for the nation
with their childish mentality
they're too dirty

An army exists to oppress the people
who flatter them
they ask them to sharpen the swords
it's a haven for thugs
the king of the master gangsters
Bo Ne Win's army
only knows how to shoot and cheat

The people are paupers now
the monks are beggars now
the scoundrels are monsters
weapons matter most
weapons are paramount
weapons reign supreme—that's militarism

For you
to sit in peace
here in a European supermarket
is much safer
far from all the mishaps
fame growing a million-fold
and the name Buddha bandied about
don't feel uncomfortable

With all the crimes of the Burmese military
the Buddha will never leave prison
will always be in trouble
then you'll really be uncomfortable

Don't think such an ignoramus as me
was lecturing you
I've come to think like this
because so many lay disciples in my country
have been victimized—
excuse me,
Venerable Sir!

April 20, 2000

Years of Failure

Among eyes of doubt
I've come into this human world—
how can I find happiness?

With every step I take
no flower blossoms
only flames arise
This is how the years burn out
The path that light deflects
has so many turns
and takes a long time
with a bagful of mistakes
crossing the mountain of woes
unable to determine our destination

Provisioning yourself with untruths
and swallowing falsehoods—
how can that sustain you?

My life, my years, have lost all meaning,
all ending in blame,
have become a bare mountain—
a journey made of loss!

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translated from the Burmese by Maung Tha Noe, Sandra de More, and Christopher Merrill