Selected Poems

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Recommended Citation
http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2153-8999.1036

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Waiting

My father, in a bathrobe, is sitting
in the living room watching Monday
Night Raw wrestling. He waits
for my mother, still at the Foster
Farms chicken plant. It could be hours
until he can go to sleep, though
he'll need to be at work in six.
He is probably thinking of her tiny hands
dressed in thin metal gloves, clutching
a blade just large enough
to sever breasts from the carcasses
conveyor belting by. The two have been
married for one year longer than I am alive—
I'll be 29 this year—and he performs this ritual
nightly, each time to a different TV show.
At every commercial break he walks over
to open the front door, as a monk does
a heavy monastery door, to check the night
for any inkling of return.
Pastoral

My father once got lost in a jungle for days,
found a tortoise & carried it with him,
set it down whenever he felt lost & waited
for the creature to take a step before picking it up
& following its pointing. When he made it
back, he placed the tortoise
by where forest met village & watched it
disappear into the greenery. *Jungle spirits
always care for their own* he said to me, *that's why
we offer them thanks for the things they give.*
It has been weeks since this conversation
& this evening I look out at the western horizon
where dark objects have begun
unfurling like a lazy cat’s yawn,
like the steady leaning of the Valley
Oak outside my window, slowly right,
then back against the wind, then back again. I wait
& wait for hours for the sky to turn
from blue to red, orange, then black,
for constellations to rebuild themselves,
the North Star to show me how
my ancestors used it to guide them
through the night, for Orion’s Belt to reveal itself
as the sash worn by Nuj Yob, father
of funerary qeej playing, for Taurus
to become the water buffalo he uses to plow
his fields, readying the mountainsides
for a new harvest of rice or corn
or babies. I squint now in this darkness,
find myself in the exact consciousness
between sleep & wake, relate this
to the sound of light sifting through clouds,
of mice doing whatever it is they do
in fields, of a young man holding
a qeej to his mouth to blow a botched song.
Meeting a Young Monk in late Spring

I walk out of the Student Union & am stopped by a man, a monk who looks my age. He offers a modest smile & book on Theravada Buddhism, asks me to learn what it could do for me. I politely refuse, tell him I am a student taking literature courses heavy with reading & wouldn’t have the time, but really I’d just spent my last two bucks on a bottle of Brisk iced tea, & figured he’d follow up with a request for donation if I accepted. The monk’s persistence, however, is admirable— he turns the book over, asks me to read the words of Henry David Thoreau & Gary Snyder, what they have to say about Buddhism, & leaves the reconsidering to me. Again, I refuse, but notice the sweat on his brow, & offer him my bottle. The monk accepts, bows, & I leave him standing in the sun.

About the Author

Andre Yang lives in Fresno, California. He is a founding member of the Hmong American Writers' Circle (HAWC), where he conducts and participates in public writing workshops. He is currently studying creative writing (poetry) in the MFA program at California State University, Fresno, where he is a Graduate Equity Fellow, Provost Scholar, a Philip Levine Scholar, and a CSU Trustees/William Randolph Hearst Scholar. There, he divides his time between teaching freshman composition, poetry, and working on the editorial staff of The Normal School literary magazine. Andre is a Kundiman Asian American Poetry Fellow, attended the Tin House Summer Writers Workshop and the Napa Valley Writers’ Conference, and has been recently accepted into the UCross Residency Program. His poetry has appeared in Paj Ntaub Voice, Hyphen magazine, and the chapbook anthology “Here Is a Pen” (Achiote Press) and How Do I Begin?: A Hmong American Literary Anthology (Heyday), of which he was also co-editor.
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