



POEMS

By: Lim Swee Tin

Biodata

LIM SWEE TIN was born in 1952. He began penning in the early 70's. His first collection of poems entitled *Eva* was published in 1981. Lim has won various writing awards as in the 1983 Puisiputra 2 Award, through his collection of poems under the title of *Arkab* published in 1985, the 1982/83, 1984/85 and 1988/89 Malaysia Literary Awards and the 2002/2003 Malaysia Premiere Literary Award. Two titles among his collection of poems are *A Child and Other Poems* (1993) and *Sebuah*

Fragmen Cinta (1998, 2000). He has also penned almost 100 anthologies, seven novels for teenagers and his books on language and literature are in the double digits. In 2000, Lim was awarded the S.E.A. Write Award.

The Prima Donna 1

—For Kak Jah

The *makyung* prima donna knows her steps
when entering the theatre
art coursing through her veins
solidifying the love which for years
she carefully wrapped soft as silk

The *makyung* prima donna knows her movements
when feet touch the worn *mengkuang*
facing the public clutching a while
the roots of tradition one by one
to erupt later stirring up dust over ruins

Right now, only you have lasted
oh prima donna
bearing act and script
to halls or open spaces
sometimes to audiences who do not understand
all that you can give

Lucky, still persisting with diligence yet
distant now the situation

no longer prepared to give willingly
you push aside all confusion
difficult to hang on to a brittle bank
narrow and sharp

The *makyung* prima donna gets her vibes
from the bowing of palace maids and nurses
anxiety slipped between *rebab* strings
utter attention spread fully till midnight
none guessed the painful drops from the frames of your eyes

“Am I the only one, in this here silence, who does not care?”

Poem

It's because I am bud
I look for your fingers
It's because I am beach
I wait for your steps.

It's because you are the canvas
I extend my lines
It's because you are the road
I give my stride.

It's because I am face
I fantasise your make-up
It's because I am *lalang*
I hug your wind.

It's because you are night
I become owl
because you are the galaxy
I visit the stars.

Under the Same Sky

Under The Same Sky
we breathe the air
whether in your Bangkok or my Kuala Lumpur
we suck in the same air
under the same sky

I like the drizzle in the City of London
was bewitched by the cold sharp wind in Washington
trees green or multi-coloured
no difference
who the Australian residents who the African
because under this sky
we are the same.

I'd like to cross the South China Sea
sail the Sheltered Sea and cross the Silk Road
sharing days and owning nights
weaving love and colouring the ages
blowing hope with one tone
amongst us—world denizens
under a sky
that is the same.

It is those maps that separate
do not close the border posts
visas are only transient official necessities
passports identifying documents the beginning
we embrace dreams no different grope desires
dissolve hate bury black history
under this sky which is
the same.

When Crossing Kundasang

When crossing Kundasang
the sun spilled its pearly rays
atop hills, forests, *lalang* rows
and cabbage plots
awakening me to the chaos of the life I bear
whilst diffusing longing
peace with its colours
untouched.

I have been pressed under the noise of civilisation
human love and affection
that disappears
while you eternally watch the universe
witness events utterly amazing
lonely but tranquil
happy though ancient.

The mist thins atop Kinabalu
the road below twisting and turning
the cold breeze caressing trees
rock heaps and pieces of banks
when crossing Kundasang, the warmth of embrace
makes me forget a moment, alien newcomer
this time I will take your gentleness
to soften the harshness of my Self.

Sleep Tight Little Sister

(in memory of tsunami victims 26 Disember 2004)

Night has aged, the roar of waves fading into the distance, sleep tight
my little sister
Only the wind now and then brushed the window, as if saying the
storm was abating
The sand where oft you collected sea shells was no longer white
Mud blanketed everything, the strength of the current scattered it
beside you when you were suddenly snatched
There your humble abode too was tossed till it reached the edge of the
shore trees prostrating on the ground
Not in time to hear your mother's shout, a wailing that filled the clangour
of the moment every where
The wave's tongue pounced on the beach, leaped at the hillside, licking
roofs and momentarily hiding the sky space
The uproar drowned your outstretched hands, the fast whirls snatching
your screaming yells
Too thunderous my little sister, that no one could reach your fingers,
you at rock bottom suffering, carried without delay, me here hurt
and grieving
Sleep tight my little sister, night has aged, the roar of waves too had
faded into the distance,
Only now and then rain dropped on the verandah, as if marking the
going of the waves
Other waves then shook my little sister, suffering everywhere, hunger
beyond expectation,
Corpses sprawled by roadsides, at village corners, in lanes, and in
between closed embankments
Sobbing cries shrouded the villages, overflowing to neighbouring
houses, slipping into the rooms of sympathy of the country's
bigwigs
Your face is everywhere my little sister, amongst tens, and hundreds
of thousands more who were fated to go
Searchers there were, turning fallen buildings inside out, calling out
your name like you listen,
They moved whatever remained, in case there they might find your
body lying
But, time had recorded thus for you, not even a second's delay
We are human beings, ever under His watch He the Almighty
Passing nights lamented the disaster which had retreated to a far off
platform
Abating the tremors and uproars that rolled in the southern seas
Those too were the tremors and uproars that grabbed your parents,

your brothers and sisters, besides your friends
 Everything is quiet again, except once a while people tell of the wind's
 tongue whirling and vibrating northwards

Ah, wet curtain drying in windows, no longer will you chase butterflies
 in the garden

Your father too I know could not grab your body, when a sudden
 monstrous explosion swooped and you were gone

Before they were dragged away, those left behind clutched nightmares,
 imagining terrors

In the turmoil of sorrow, in the debris of grief in the valley, in the
 state boundary, everything is like a field splashed with mud
 blackening

Sleep, I will only want to stare at the sky, recalling how your last cry
 was around me now a million more cries are clawing at my heart.

Look the stars are starting to twinkle and somewhat, it seemed
 meaningless because suffering is blanketing the soul

That is the moon, behind the *cemara* bemused as if fully knowing that,
 many more are by the side begging to be loved

I long to sing you a lullaby, how else am I going to be able to sing all
 songs

Hey, you listen now, only in this prose poem is my humanity, my heart
 sings for you

We are in God's garden, God who opens up the road of life, we His
 servants, tottering in the steps of destiny

History is not yet ended, tomorrow's petal asks to be carved, erase this
 terrifying nightmare, imagine the radiance of blessing in disguise

Sleep my little sister, even though not by choice this is the map for
 your passage filling your life and time

At the end of this indescribable tragedy

Sleep tight in your bed for eternity.

(Translated by Hasnah Ibrahim)