



**In the Evenings When  
Color-Changing Magazines Fell Into the Trench,  
I Knew Not Where to Look for Maung**

**Shin Naung<sup>1</sup>**

Pronouns, how they've become lifeless, Maung  
Life no longer lingers upon them now  
A clod, which desultorily descended  
At my scream  
Fell off and died  
Off into the memories of a blue runner.

Languages lost amidst the great ever-smiling<sup>2</sup> forest  
O Leaves, behold  
The iris of he who holds  
All the Earth  
Screamed. At his name  
How tears came  
I<sup>3</sup> know not any longer, dear.

To rescue the inflated love  
From one mist particle to the next

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<sup>1</sup> The author's name is a construction of two feminine names: in their own words, "Because I'm gay and a part of me is feminine". The English translation and footnotes for this poem are by Myat.

<sup>2</sup> The Burmese term for "ever-smiling" is *amyehpyone*, which in alternative spelling could also be a pun for "ever-deforested". Myanmar has suffered serious deforestation in recent decades under military rule.

<sup>3</sup> In this line the poet uses the gentle first-person Burmese pronoun *ko*, usually used by males to refer to themselves when they are talking to loved ones. But in the rest of the poem, the pronoun *nga* is used. This creates a brisk military tone, sharply contrasting with the gentle second-person form of address used in the poem: the affectionate *maung*. Usually, in a heteronormative setting, the form of address *maung* is spoken by a person using the feminine pronoun *kyanma* for themselves. In this poem however, the poet self-identifies as *nga* but unusually addresses the object of his speech with *maung*. This may imply the poet is a homosexual man, but this is lost in translation without a footnote. English indeed renders pronouns lifeless.

From one molecule to the next  
From one's hand to another's entire life  
If only  
Inflated love could be  
Obtained at Scott's Market  
Wantonly  
Mists, Molecules, Hands Held  
Would be sundered.

Photographs  
Cannot tell History  
Crossroads  
Cannot be treaded  
Magazines  
Cannot take a human life  
Trenches  
Cannot protect the Revolution  
For one's hand to be united with another's,  
The sovereign power of the State  
Is not needed.

The clods I have been searching for  
Are meditating furiously  
What have I been thinking ?  
Such a pity  
That I  
Traded your arms on which I could doze off  
With a war.

Not that I cared  
That Dean Young passed away<sup>4</sup>  
Pronouns have become lifeless now  
I who was reciting poems at my own funeral  
Was strangled by the vessels of my heart  
In my sight  
Military boots were marching toward the soundproof halls.

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<sup>4</sup> Dean Young is an American poet who passed away on 23 August 2022.

Who is responsible for families  
Torn and tattered?  
One day though, the due price shall be  
Paid.

Only History can tell History  
Only the crossroad can take a walk  
Only a human life can take a human life  
Only the Revolution can protect the Revolution  
And the sovereign power of the State  
Is capable of uniting two hands  
“Church towers— what a good hiding place for a slaughter-  
house.”<sup>5</sup>

As I rushed through Dean Young’s night,<sup>6</sup>  
An Orange<sup>7</sup>  
Was vomiting *kamma* and *kamma-phala dhamma*<sup>8</sup>  
While being opulent  
(Further discovery of facts at hand proves that oranges are in-  
deed symbols of the counter-revolution)  
Now the con artists<sup>9</sup> have all left the Parliament.

In Truth  
I eventually learned  
That  
Just at a distance of a mist particle  
Maung lived  
Our Knowing

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<sup>5</sup> This is a reference to a Dean Young poem, *Gray Matter* (2005, p. 79).

<sup>6</sup> A reference to *Rushing through the Night* (Young, 2005, pp. 88-90).

<sup>7</sup> Here the term “orange” refers to a Buddhist monk.

<sup>8</sup> This line refers to Buddhist doctrine that wholesome or unwholesome action (*kamma*) produces consequences, i.e., fruits of action (*kamma-phala*) which determine one’s predicament within or with regard to the cycle of rebirth.

<sup>9</sup> Members of parliament belonging to the National League for Democracy and others are notably not spared from this accusation.

Was never beyond Being itself  
Just how difficult to attain<sup>10</sup>  
Our homeward steps were.

## References

Young, D. (2005). *Elegy on Toy Piano*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a Pali word in the original Burmese poem: *dullabha*.