

**John Charles Ryan**

**Siam: Four Poems**

**Jai Yen, or Cool Heart**

Tell me of your troubles,  
But I'll not tell you mine  
Twelve hours over this fryer with no fan to ease me  
And the unfaithful villagers  
Will eat elsewhere again

My hands are sandpaper  
From cutting and grinding  
My back and feet throbbing from lifting and standing  
I cannot wash away  
The rancid grease from my hair

My husband with millions  
Borrowed in my name  
Wasted on gambling, motorcycles and mistresses  
But I should sop it up,  
An old rag, and remain stoic

Have *jai yen*, a cool heart,  
As a woman must, so come dusk,  
I pedal my rusty bike past the empty temple and yowling  
Cats in search of the dusty  
Lanes of my youth when water

Buffalo with great curved horns  
Hauled carts and ploughs unhurriedly  
And father sold rice packed in palm leaves not plastic  
As a girl dreamt of worlds beyond  
And who would take her there.

## Funeral for Tuluang Yut

It is said that Tuluang Yut rescued  
so many starving dogs  
that wads of fur clogged his lungs.

Now, after a year of waiting, gold  
leaf coats his cheeks,  
and he is ready to greet the afterlife.

Dancers come first with flamboyant  
*pha nung* dresses and  
*sbai* wraps slung over thin shoulders.

Soldiers in military garb rap mallets  
on *ranat ek* xylophones,  
seeing him off with baritone flourishes.

A dragon boat with elephant tusks  
and a trunk will escort  
the monk to *chiwit phayhlang mrna*.

At his casket, under funerary steeple,  
dignitaries lay flowers,  
then cherubs in flowing green gowns,

bearing sparkler sticks, swing down  
to the pyre, triggering  
fireworks and clouds of blue smoke.

The burning masterpiece rages until all  
that remains are bamboo  
poles overarching the crematorial stage.

The audience rises en masse and rushes  
to exit, leaving Tuluang's  
dogs to scavenge the scene for scraps.

## **Kad Bantha**

There is a wild market on the highway from Chiang Mai to Lamphun  
with wriggling coconut palm grubs for sale  
*aroi mae krub*

There are fried water bugs sweeter than scallops and shiny as roaches  
with their legs stuck together with rubber bands  
*malaeng da na*

There is a well-dressed woman peddling bitter bark from the forests  
for old men to boil up and drink as a tonic  
*yin dee tee dai roo jak*

There are piles of brown pockmarked mushrooms round as plates  
with particles of earth still on them  
*hnung roi baht ka*

There are *hedtob* truffles spilling like black marbles over rims of tin cups  
from the tailgates of pickup trucks  
*hnung roi ha sip baht ka*

There are bull frogs stuffed with galangal, kefir lime leaves and coconut  
then roasted on skewers over wood fires  
*khao pat kob krub*

There are strange bird carcasses plucked and sealed in clear plastic bags  
beside tubs of eels there at the wild market  
*jee gan mai krao-naa*

**Ratchaphruek**

*I am the golden rain tree*

I am stalling here to see you

*These are my heady dok koon*

I smell them showering the soi

*My pungent fruits bring fortune*

I won't leave here empty-handed

*You felt that I was coming*

Through the many-petalled tunnel?

*I purge away the putrid*

Hope this week you are on duty

*The season rages in my belly*

You pulp the pangs of Songkran

*You are overfull with racemes*

I am peduncled with burden

*When will cool of rain come?*

When the seeds will be split open

*I overlean these temple walls*

You rain petals on the naga

*Near fishmongers in their stalls*

I stall with you just a moment

*Should I?*

You must.

*And you?*

I must too.

