

## Three Poems

Nokan Walis, John Balcom

### Duckweed

"More and more like the floating duckweed..."

Someone returned to the tribe this evening  
Amid bamboo fences scattered over the mountain  
Pondering the pains and regrets of history  
Too much rice wine to drink  
Makes for incoherent babbling

Mizunuo, you've lived a pretty good life  
What makes you suffer so?  
Your hut was completed before winter  
The peach trees blossomed in the saddle of the mountain  
    In the second month  
Someone married a girl from a different village  
Everyone is overjoyed  
So what is it that worries you so?

"Three hundred years ago our ancestors  
    wove fishnets and caught fish  
Large sailing ships from the West appeared  
    blocking out the sun  
Fifty years later they shunned the farmed plains  
Returning to the forests to hunt  
Aside from fighting over the land  
We lived in peace with each other  
When the Japanese came, what was termed 'civilizing the savages'  
Was in fact flogging, from the coast to the mountains  
We've been like duckweed the last century..."

Someone returned to the tribe this evening  
Rubbing the wound of history getting drunk  
No one doubted his suffering  
Perhaps he was mourning for his far-flung relatives  
Perhaps he was angry at the destitution of the tribe  
But not questioning justice and love  
Though quietly drinking and talking  
Though someone keeps leaving for distant places  
Like a ripe fruit falling from the tree

### Youth of Wushe

I don't recognize Tasiqisi's face  
The 1920s are too remote from today  
Grandma says the pink cherry blossoms flower for him  
That day he abandoned his books and returned to his tribe  
Led the Atayal people against the canons  
They all died in battle, Grandma told me to look at  
The monument at the head of the road

The monument is mottled  
Covered with lichen  
But it's still difficult to cover Tasiqisi's hard work  
At the end of the 1970s I graduated from the teacher's college  
And was stationed at the front lines, two years later  
I took up chalk and taught in a school far from home  
Constantly I complained about the wastewater and air pollution  
And the problems with public transportation  
I'm certain that if you came to the city  
You'd be bad tempered too

The cherry blossoms still shimmer in winter  
Tasiqisi gradually grows vague  
The monument is still covered in lichen  
The city performs and plunders  
I still have to make a living  
In the 1990s I'm still hoping to meet a nice girl and get married  
Having a son would be nice  
(The world's population is exploding)  
Peaceful into old age, if you were I  
I think you'd want the same

### **Down the Mountain**

At the station on the way to Baling Mountain  
A woman squats quietly and humbly  
While her children run around without worries  
They all look very happy.  
They are going down the mountain to shop  
Using their harsh Mandarin and perhaps  
Some gestures too.  
It's the spring of 1985, I'm at the station  
I saw farmers from the plains in the 1960s  
Going to the city, often quiet and ill at ease

In the city, I never speak Atayal  
I do my utmost to scrub my dark skin  
I do my utmost to suppress my savage blood  
And even suppress my childhood memories  
I've learned to chat happily with others  
Tie a bow tie and drink coffee  
They softly pat my shoulders praising me  
I suddenly felt weighed down  
Today, many years later  
At the station on Baling Mountain  
Familiar as before, the sound of a woman  
Her sadness, and the innocence of the children

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