

Two Poems

By Edmund Blunden



By John Wu

The Sleeping Amah

The East has all the time, the West has none;
But I know not what I say.
Others must come this way
To tease this riddle out, if it be one,
Better or not—yet who
Will find me what I thought I knew?

There she still sits, unknown to me else, in her chair
After the long day's labour, sitting there
Tired out, her sewing not yet done,
A child, a mother, the wise face now begun.
Like me she falls asleep
Quietly moored upon the warm time-deep.

Edmund Blunden (1896-1974) enjoyed a long and varied literary career as poet, critic and teacher. He came to Hong Kong in 1953 as Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong. In 1956 he was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry.

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View from the University of Hong Kong

How like a large and cheerful family show
Those ships in the harbour below,
In the roomy friendly household of the port,
Venturers of various build and sort,
But all the progeny of old Land and Sea.
In their diversity how these boats agree!
Some, ponderous uncles or rich round aunts, sit there
Each as in a stately elbow-chair,
Majestic and much-travelled, giving out
The law of long experience, no doubt,
But nobody listens much; yet on their state
Several intelligent nimble nephews wait,
Nieces perhaps, and briskly fetch and bring
This, that and the other thing,
As if to a queen, as if to a king.

But still it is liberty-hall; and look at those
Other water-children, how each comes and goes
With familiar freedom, some trim and ragged some,
Each in the confident way that says 'This is my home.'

'I'm a-fishing today,' sings that many-patched sailor,
And 'Who's for the ferry?' one fresh from the tailor;
A tiny one pilots itself through the throng
Like an infant that makes his first journey along
On hands, knees and toes and does famously well.
Then the swift child shoots past, as when all can foretell
(Even uncles and grandparents seemingly dozing)
That this in school races will seldom be losing.
Thus gently all these from the greatest to least
Like a free lively family merrily all
Are arriving and off again, West or East,
In the blue-china hall.