

梁秉鈞：蓮葉七題

Lotus Leaves: Seven Poems

By P. K. Leung

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Leaf Contact

By chance we come to this lotus-field
Walking an old plank into the thick of leaves
Silence, rubbing silence, utters sound
This is a wonder, green
Answering green, an encounter in this morning of a world
There the wind blows open the closed faces
Here it sets in motion my cusped leaf-edge
We shall make contact
And begin clumsy explanations
The leaf-veins which language can illuminate
Are the only world we have
The fresh dews of morning which gradually grow round
Make me still, my silence
Touches another leaf, each bearing alike
The weight of an insect at rest
A chance encounter in this world, side by side
With no intentional prosody
We utter the same sound, then drift apart
Rather than explore each other in the wind,
Raise our heads naturally, meaning surfaces gradually
The frosted snow on the leaves still weighs upon me
Growing from the same shallow, narrow water
We strive to stand erect on a hollow green stem
Extending toward a more genuine space
I know we cannot depart from this world and its
Language, but neither would we follow it

P. K. Leung studied comparative literature at the University of California, San Diego and is currently teaching comparative literature and translation at the University of Hong Kong. He has published two books of poetry, one novella, two volumes of short stories and six volumes of essays, and has collaborated with artists from various media and held joint exhibitions of poetry and painting with Hong Kong painters Donna Lok and Choi Yan Chi.

When we are silent, there will still be noise
Each abiding the seasons' dust
Listening attentively, and as we unfurl
Sensing the colours of distant waters

Summer 1983



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Leaf Crown

The word *lotus* is itself archaic, if
We cannot find our own
Seeds, bud new flowers.
Pointing to this trembling pale red apex, you name
It *fuqu*, *handan*
Many fine names
Beautiful, splendid names.
Having no relation with me, what significance
Do its beauty and splendour have?

In faith that after a long interval
The sepal breath will be heard, I am heavy and clumsy,
Thwarted by mud. You drift lightly across the water
Shedding the petals of yesterday, a fresh clean face again
In a public world, amidst the disseminations of men.
The leaves on my stem are loaded too with human clamour, but muddy,
Sluggish, caught in private nightmares and
Perilous deluges of dawn, and my roots tangled
In silt, cannot make themselves clear

Before I can finish, you turn impatiently to
The attentive gaze of others, the rhetoric habitual, recognized
I think eventually my words will be futile, will fail to make you
Abandon the demarcations, or feel true cold and warmth.
If you are for grandeur
You will naturally find my lack of embellishment shabby.
Finally I fall silent, looking up to the distant hills
Watching the pale blues and greyish greens
Rush onwards, breaking the symmetry

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Leaf Letter

Beside Winding Bridge I glimpse in the distance a cluster
Of broad palms, waving gently in the wind.
I want to write you a letter, tell you about
West Lake, and how we made our way through the jostling sightseers to a pond
Of free-furling flowers and leaves. I shall not employ
Archaic language to narrate an antique drama
Performed on the water, on Duke Ruan's Knoll.
In a tourist spot so replete with allusion, I would
Rather tell you my story, in serpentine fashion,
In faith that beyond the miniature shrubbery
We can approach the tranquil pond
Within the mind, can bend and stretch at will, beholding
The fresh crimson bloom by the withered leaves.
When I write, I study the faint patterns of flowers on the paper
That seem to contain some hidden conception of their own.
I do not wish to stain them with words, how
Can I portray the mirages of man in the intertextures
Of flowers? Again and again we copy elegance
Yet the rubbings fade, stone sculptures
Record history and are destroyed in a cultural holocaust
Or eroded with graffiti. We follow the dots and strokes
And find the hidden scars, lament the fragmentation of language.
Beautiful legends still spread far and wide, and ever more
Mundane, tall buildings arise to rebuke the leisurely
Landscape of the lake; we cross the bridge but cannot
Draw near, flower-lovers must tolerate
Mockery, when the fish-watchers discover
Manipulating hands above the preying mouths, and that moons in the water
Are only multiple reflections of artificial light.
Myths turn out so differently in the end, I can imagine
You sneering at the refined, effete lines on the paper
By this lake with its old scars and new bewilderment.
Pain and grief lurking in the shadows of
Trees, bitter moans swallowed perhaps in the dark swell,
But the wind freely articulates her hands, the ripples
Unroll scrolls, Heaven and Earth write a graceful though desolate hand
Against a boundless misty watermark, we are scattered ink spots.
From the broken strokes we vaguely surmise the wash and flow

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Leaf Margin

You regret that the nutrient cannot reach the furthest leaf-edge.
The admiring gaze should of course focus on the main flower,
You are the centre, battlemented crown-petal radiating power,
Official history many times revised. I am an ambiguous point
On the circumference, smoke of warfare scattered by dust and wind,
Rumour of the borderland, vague synopsis of an unofficial history.

Please do not bend down towards us with a condescending look,
Singing inspirational songs of rain, or echoing popular ballads in the wind.
Leaves and flowers at the margin have their own charm, have you noticed?
Will you read them closely? The veins are unique, they intersect like a grid of streets

Countering the preconceived blueprint in your mind: have you ever realized?
—Fleeing the attentive gaze of the crowd, beyond the solemn countenance
Of the main leaf: connected roots beneath the water, new leaf-buds.
In the wind chorus, an obscured lyric demands a new understanding.

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Leaf Distinctions

Among the serried lotus leaves there are varieties.
We stand by the pond, chatting, you stretch your hand
Across layers of prostrate green leaves, pointing to
The precious velvet support which props up the perfect pearl
Like a king looking disdainfully at the shades of dark and light green below.
You say you never expected there to be scenes worth watching on the way

Fondly remembering grey London evenings, you recall
Drinking strong tea, by a desolate fireplace
You reminisce about the old bookstore and its lingering gloomy charm, a
Precious, musty aroma of books I nod and listen

Things past and present cannot be clearly delineated.
At this moment the wind is blowing in the leaves, rustling
Like students struggling to recite a foreign vocabulary, a
Hybrid, inarticulate language, the high branches sway
While common folk below strive to arch them

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Leaf Pity

It has not withered
But is made acrid and flighty
By the sounds of a torrid summer

Spread upon the broad leaf,
Are the spots that slowly multiply
Light red or faded brown?
Specks of dust and bruises
Gentle arcs dried to a craggy skeleton
Criss-crossing, shielding a spot of green in the centre

Well-meaning raindrops are excluded
Petty spider-webs and the ankles of craneflies
Are closer
Still it does not spread itself out easily.
For the dragonflies and flies
Even the beckoning of the wind seems an offence

Curling its muddy veins
Standing quietly upon the water
It reposes in a vague fragrance of its own

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Leaf Enchantment

At this limpid pond in early morning
When she bows her head to quench the cravings of thirst
Another desire is born in her heart
Like the swaying of seaweed, the flapping of gills.
Not a shoulder glimpsed amid trees, nor
A shattered countenance, but a complete human form
Is what she craves sight of, to see the image seen
Seeing her. Between us,
She says, lies only a film of water
Her eyes glisten with strange lustre, her face
Flushes, her voice becomes more tender
As though she were drunk, she makes strange movements
For reasons unknown, she turns her body, raises her hand
Caresses her willowy hair, sways her head
After a falling leaf; or weaving gracefully, stretches
Herself, looking at the mirror of water, looking at her
Stretching herself, she reads the oncoming hand, as if beholding
A likeable sign. Extending her hand, she tries to unfold it, the sudden contact
Shatters the vision to pieces, surprises after surprises, seen
Then not seen; thunderbolts and lightning, the tearing agony
Of ferocious gales, reunion, then separation, there is always the link in a lotus-
Root snapped in two. During the patient waiting, ripples mature
Into circles, something always added to the mirror
Or omitted? She becomes calm
And steady, a secret heaviness transformed into
An opulence of seeds, not seen
Heavy and opulent, she hangs her head
Between the desire of gazing and the depth of water
The wind sweeps by
Rippling language

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