

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry
The Poets of Myanmar

by Paul F. Cummins



BASIM MAGDY. INVESTIGATING THE COLOR SPECTRUM OF A POST-APOCALYPTIC FUTURE LANDSCAPE. SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK PURCHASED WITH FUNDS CONTRIBUTED BY THE MIDDLE EASTERN CIRCLE, WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDS CONTRIBUTED BY ABDELMONEM BIN EISA ALSERKAL AND LAMEES HAMDAN, 2017. © BASIM MAGDY

The Poets of Myanmar

"With the farming of a verse,
Make a vineyard of the curse"

— W.H. Auden

Blessings, my brothers, to you—
To Chan Thar Swe who was executed
By the state—a bullet to the head,
His tortured torso torn apart, why?
For writing poetry.

Blessings too,
To U Sein Win,
Incinerated by gasoline, why?
For the subversive art
Of writing poetry.

You see, Mr. Auden, poetry does make things happen,
It survives not just "in the valley of its saying,"
It survives in cities, countries, terrifies dictators
Who imprison, torture, murder those who dare speak truth
By writing poetry.

Yes, poets are being killed in Myanmar,
So blessings to you, Khet Thi,
Arrested, mutilated, eliminated, why?
For writing poetry.

Yes, you "enemies of the state"
We meet only in scant news,
How then to convey outrage?

How to honor your courage?

Perhaps, by writing poetry.

Oh, gentle souls of Burma,

Please shower these poets upon your people,

Float them upon sacred rivers and streams:

Memorize and recite over and over their lines

Write out their poetry.

You who knew and loved these poets,

Sing their poems in town halls, temples, schools,

Scatter their lines and images in every village,

Teach the young to revere their souls, how?

By writing poetry.

Paul F. Cummins's poems have appeared in numerous publications including *The New Republic*, *Poetry LA*, *Whole Notes*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Coracle*, *Black Buzzard Review*, *Rattle*, and *Cloudbank*. His publications include an autobiography, *Confessions of a Headmaster*, three other books on education, two children's books, four collections of essays, a biography of a holocaust survivor, *Dachau Song*, and three volumes of poetry.

Following classroom teaching 1960-71, he went on to the founding and co-founding of six schools — including private schools such as *Crossroads School*, *TREE Academy*, and *Camino Nuevo Public Charter School*. Through the creation of educational outreach programs such as *P.S. Arts* and *The Coalition for Engaged Education*, Cummins has been a champion for quality education, especially for at-risk, foster, and incarcerated youth.



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