

*in the closing weeks of the tiger year,
I wish for courage and a stilled mind*

metal tiger chi, the forecast stern:

“don’t fight this year or take a leap
of faith, better to hold still and wait,
don’t stick your neck out, kid, or rush
into a big decision, lay low”

but

I think about Rangoon, the brown robe
shave-heads I was one of, walking slowly
through rain-soaked streets, we did that too
but only with our bowls, we were held
in ransom silence and our bare feet shone

the betel in the street mixed with tar and oil, stained
our soles a gummy black, not quite
the red dye Radha paints her feet
to stun the blue-skinned god; she waits
all night, despairing, staring at the road
he never comes

but the monsoon thunder always does
in August when you think you can’t
take one more day of still, dry air
it breaks, four-thirty in the afternoon
the sky a blue-black answer to the ocean’s call

we’d walk, regardless, just a few,
alms-robles drenched and clinging, tied
as always in the formal way for public space
no faster than on any sunny day, as if to show
the power that accrues in one who knows
that All Things Just Are

now every website prints the photos, all the men
boys, really, walking wet and silent in their lines
and other men in green with rifles, watching
from nearby, ready to trespass on an ancient
sacred trust; the air is fecund, thick and old

and I am nearly forty, older
than the ones who died and see that
no great revolution came, no flood
of righteousness, no red sea breaking
warm and deadly on the valley floor
the delta

sleeps capacious, still inside the daily rain
red-brown silt makes islands of alluvium
the old monks rub their beads and wait
for what?

there is no angel’s trumpet call

no “sinner, wake!”, no voice at all except a still
stone-whisper I can hear at night
when haunted by the things I haven’t done
I lie awake, repenting for a life of hesitance
and doubt.

a broken sun sets red on Inle Lake.

sean feit, jan 2011