

Trivium Siam

John F. Sherry, Jr.*

These poems describe the public place where three roads meet. The first road runs from East to West, the second from Old to New, the third from Ethnographer to Other. Their intersection is an experiential *erehwon* of consumer culture I have situated in Bangkok. Together, the poems address an issue of moral geography beyond the imagination of conventional marketing research. They comprise an exploratory, postmodern cartography in the service of lyricism in consumer research.

LOY KRATHONG¹

heads bowed beneath

a full ancestral moon,
its glow diffused in this

close humid air,
the intermarried fragrances

of incense and exhaust
inspire among us

awkward vigilants
an unconverted

catalytic high
cupped in the woven palm,

banana leaf become
a lotus boat,

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our gift begins
 all life upon the klong
 a simple sacrifice this
 candle, coin and flower,
 to thank the river
 for its petulant resistance
 for its sounding of our souls
 now long possessed,
 our exorcisms fail
 fouled in all manner
 by all matter
 still it lifts our spirits
 with our boats

KRUNG THEP²

In this city of angels
 amulet sellers
 cellular phones,

 saffron boddhisatvas glide
 among the throng above the walk,
 like marigolds adrift
 upon a clotted klong
 their stubbled scalps
 an almost burnished bronze
 of amulet patina,
 their sole rejoinder
 to a world become
 a carnal kindergarden
 once again

In this city of angels
 amulet sellers
 cellular phones,

 a young grandmother
 braced against unbalanced weight,

stooped below
 a bowed yoke
 humps her eggs
 her melons and her nuts
 across a cobbled corridor,
 hugs the shadow parsed along
 the path of worn umbrellas
 tenting vendors in the open air
 and margilded mendicants
 with empty bowls,
 her eyes alive beneath
 the broad straw brim
 to every hint
 of hunger in the stalls

In this city of angels
 amulet sellers
 cellular phones,

children of Chao Phraya,
 houses on the water's edge
 on stilts
 defy the floating weeds
 and polystyrene
 that choke the fluid freeway
 at their doors
 and dive with joyful noise
 into the brack,
 displacing petrol rainbows
 on the ripples of the drink,
 bob for blocks of soap
 pitched with a mother's eye
 toward dampening
 the early morning din,
 rinse, brush their teeth,
 then mount the stairs
 and dress
 for work

In this city of angels
 amulet sellers
 cellular phones,

young muay thai oblates,
 their rituals lacking grace,
 atonal music guiding
 their dumb dance,
 slap sole against the sacred head
 unseating spirit, sense
 and will to strive,
 the blessing bruise
 delivered with the knee
 then with the fist
 while gamblers sign
 the universal gestures
 of the trading pits
 amidst the building roar,
 fingering, hawking snot
 and smoking hard,
 making market, mocking merit,
 divided by the action
 in the ring
 the card and unmade partners
 on an upper bench

In this city of angels
 amulet sellers
 cellular phones,

young girls
 clean girls
 beautiful girls
 becomes the mantra
 given to the guest
 without the tongue
 to order beer and not get laid,
 that funds upcountry families
 fractured
 in the iron mortar
 of pestilent advance
 who offer up
 these sacrificial virgins
 to the dark
 genius of this place,
 as fruit or garland

on a spirit house,
 whose farming fathers still
 must end their days
 between the handles
 of a taxi

In this city of angels
 amulet sellers
 cellular phones

MAH BOON KRONG³

urbane silken
 teenage Thais
 surround HDTV
 entranced by the
 loud mouthings of
 the wrestlers of the
 World Federation
 amidst the rant and wait
 of shoppers sifting jeans
 and compact discs
 enroute to KFC

NOTES

1. A Thai festival honoring Mae Kongka, goddess of waterways, wherein celebrants launch tiny vessels laden with offertory gifts across canals and rivers throughout the country.
2. Capital of the Kingdom of Thailand
3. An enormous Bangkok shopping center combining aspects of contemporary retail design with those of a traditional open air marketplace.