

## HOTLINES

by Lyle Daggett

*José Martí: Major Poems*, ed. Philip S. Foner, translated by Elinor Randall (Holmes & Meier, 30 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, \$15.95) presents a solid basic selection of work by one of the seminal poets of modern Spanish language literature. Martí wrote in a lyrical, sweetly passionate voice, infusing traditional poem forms with intense charges of feeling: "My poems are palest green/And flaming scarlet;/ A wounded deer that searches for/A refuge in the forest." And: "I want to cast my lot/With the humble of this world;/A mountain brook means more to me/Than does the sea" (stanzas from two different poems in the sequence *Versos Sencillos* or "Simple Poetry"). Randall's translations, while using many choices different from what I would have done were I translating the poems, are uniformly effective. Book includes the original Spanish. "Yo soy un hombre sincero/De donde crece la palma...."

*The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* by Jack Mapanje (Heinemann: Division of Reed Publishing, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03081, \$9.95) is a recent collection of poems by a powerful poet of Malawi, dealing in part with the author's imprisonment in Malawi for some three and a half years without charges. Poems controlled and resonant, full of detail, a tone approaching high oratory, as in the poem "The Streak-Tease at Mikuyu Prison, 25 September 1987": "The streak-tease at Mikuyu Prison is an affair/More sportive. First, the ceremony of handcuff//Disposal, with the warder's glib remarks about how/Modern handcuffs really dug in when you tried to//Fidget; then the instructions: take off your glasses,/Your sweater, your shirt. Shove these with your//Jacket into their shroud-white bag or your handbag/Until your release, which could be tomorrow, if you//Are lucky, and he seriously means release anyday/(Haven't I heard about the four parliamentarians//Who stayed one night here, then got 'released'/The next day?)"...

*Arguments with America* by Prairie Miller (Pemmican Press, P.O. Box 16374, St. Paul, MN 55116, \$4.00) brings us poems by a fiery and lively poet, a true treasure of our culture. Poems throbbing with the rhythms of modern life, massing great globes of energy that release into long ecstatic incantational lines bearing the flavor of Blake's "Prophecy" poems, of Whitman and the early Ginsberg, of Kenneth Fearing and some of Muriel Rukeyser. Miller's poems carry a more immediate personal undertone than much of Blake or Whitman, a quality that adds depth to her already powerful work. "I am trying to love you despite the contamination of our spirits, being held prisoner inside the commercial fairyland of a brand X nation./I am trying to touch you through a hopeless blockage of seductive consumer merchandise that tantalizes you endlessly./I am trying to reach you across the impenetrable jungles of advertising slogans and promises, where my words are overshadowed by the ostentatious verbal illusions of madison avenue (causing my messages to pale and wither because they are merely composed of the delicate fabrics of

reality" (from the poem "The Industrialization of Love under Capitalism").

Also currently available from Pemmican Press is issue #3 of *Pemmican* magazine, edited by Robert Edwards (same address; annual, single issue is \$3.50), featuring poetry by Dale Jacobson, Louis Ryan, Leonard Cirino, Allison Kress, Floyce Alexander, Adrian C. Louis, Sherman Alexie, Shadd Piehl, Margaret Randall, Prairie Miller, Patrick Stanhope, and yours truly, among others. It's a great one.

*The Country of Dreams and Dust* by Russell Leong (West End Press, Box 27334, Albuquerque, NM 87125, \$8.95) is a collection of richly interwoven poems growing out of (but not limited to) the author's life and experience in Chinese American culture, and larger collective experience of Asian American culture generally. Speaking in a careful, quiet voice, Leong's poems read like a diary in which he traces the fabric of memory and observation, thread by thread. From the long poem bearing the same title as the book: "Boarding decrepit ships/of foreign name and dubious claim,/we scrape, beg, or borrow/silver coins, sacks of rice,/steel knives and oranges./Back to belly/we swear, belch and snore,/blanket steerage with stiff bodies... Warm rain whitens into fog/yielding to Yerba Buena./Our tongues unloosen/when we find ourselves floating/in the country of dreams and dust—/meng chen.//Some scatter to sift gold dust/in the Mother Lode./ Others, who linger too long/in the shifty shantytown/of tents and timbers,/are prey for missionaries/under church mandate to open dusky/souls to the holy spirit.//Stricken by faith and a November wind,/the Reverend William Speer/follows goldseekers to Calafia,/casts blue eyes on the muddy bay,/anchors his faith/at the thumb of San Francisco,/thus cornering the first church for Chinamen in the new world."

One other this time: *Desert Soldiers* by Julia Stein (California Classics Books, Box 29756, Los Angeles, CA 90029, \$6.95), second book of poems by an energetic working class poet. Tough spare poems hot with sparks, warm and glowing. "I come from downtown women,/not uptown ladies...I come from sewing on coats in the sweatshop/piecework rates at the factory,/complained to the boss, black-listed,/when the uptown ladies came downtown with their charity baskets/I threw their baskets at them, said,/"Go to hell," got another shit job,/I came back under a phony name./ /I come from they cut my piecework rates again,/petitioning the boss, got ignored,/I walked out of Shop No. 5 of Hart, Schaffner, and Marx,/8,000 sweated there in Chicago,/I got a band of thirteen immigrant girls/to picket three weeks,/I came back to storm the fort" (from the poem "Downtown Women").

That's all for now. Keep going.—Salud.

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