

MAIR, MIGHTY MEKONG.

Mair*, Mighty Mekong, river, axis, artery; Madre Asiatica.
Brown, drowned river; you are a knifeblade, laid flat,
Horizontal on the Oriental plain. Stretched wide,
Sliding, smooth, whirled and currented with rocks.
Pointed between us, the forelip of Thailand
And the cusp, the slow, steady rumble
Of green trees, knitted and knotted
On the mediaeval frame, the warp and weft of silken Laos.

Mair, Majestic Mekong, deep, even in your shallows
To house alike Pa Beuk – immensely Hoovering catfish –
And the once mountain dwelling opiate HMongs.
Marked, as the dusk draws down the light,
Arrowed by a last-minute canoe, swivelling the current
Across the silent brown swell to the sand-brushed edge
Fronting an empty Laotian strand. Calm, ever calm.

Mair, Mysterious Mekong, reflecting the humid cloud,
Gray as a pigeon in the last linger of light.
Strong, silent, sinuous, serene – all S's else.
For nothing has changed here in centuries – nor will.
A very few Thai fishermen; an equal absence of Laos.
Nothing, since my forty years visitation past to peace;

Except the cruel buildings, Thai concrete, massive hoardings
but nothing more essential than “things”, nothing that matters,
or changes the heart of Laos or Thailand. A girl giggles
in the hotel which switches on its lights. Oh, Mair! All, all is well.

Mike Springate

28/2/2016

[“Mair” is a term for “Mother”, both in Thai and Laotian. This poem was written just before the 2016 Anglo-Thai Association expedition crossed the Friendship Bridge north towards Luang Prabang].