The Last Page

Scenes from a Failed Revolution

A slender rivulet, polluted with soapy, slippery foam,
Found its way slowly, gradually thickening,
Through the labyrinthine channels connecting the temple’s tiled belly.

The soldiers tipped over more buckets, desperately trying to erase,
The stains that had seeped into the concrete,
‘Stubborn!’ one cried,
Though who or what he meant, the others could only guess.

On the city side, under the jade dragon,
Whose eyes glinted in the sun’s last breaths, the liquid ran,
Faster now, seeking tributaries,
Up and down, defying gravity it spread.

Around the old stupa, heavy and stooping,
It sped, chasing the vacuum,
To the valleys of wax,
That had fallen, drop by drop,
Prayer by prayer, of a hundred thousand penitents.

The water and soap were not enough,
The soldiers saw, as they called down for brooms and mops and gloves
Though they were useless,
For these stains were indelible.

Dusk fell, a damp chill settled,
A drizzle broke,
Over the city quiet and peaceful,
By law.

The rain turned the streams saffron and maroon,
Carrying platelets that had surrendered,
To the hemorrhaging of a nation.

And as the gutters hanging desperately to the rusty-red pagoda swelled,
The soldiers stopped to watch the channels fill,
Running even faster now,
Racing to escape, to spread the word,
Death was here!
Down the side of the hill and around the empty stairwell,
Nothing could stop it now,
Into Lake Kandawgyi, up to Inle,
Through the paddies of the delta,
To the sea and beyond,

But there, amongst the fish and sea cucumbers,
And the essence of other peoples,
It tired, its momentum slowed,
Its voice,
Was,
Silenced.

Stewart Manley