

# Moon Kwan Selected Poems



# Moon Kwan

August 24, 1896 [Guangzhou, China] –

June 17, 1995 [San Francisco, California]

Kwan was born in Canton, China. He initially moved to San Francisco, but moved to Los Angeles in 1915 to work in the film industry. He found some work as an actor and writer, and was an advisor on Chinese culture on D.W. Griffith's "Broken Blossoms, or the Yellow Man and the Girl" (1919). He moved back to China in 1921 where he taught acting and directed more than 50 films, returning frequently to the U.S. to promote Chinese films. *A Pagoda of Jewels* appeared in Los Angeles in 1922, followed by *A Chinese Mirror: Poems and Plays* in 1932.

*Pagoda of Jewels*. Los Angeles: Joseph A. Eliason, 1922

*A Chinese Mirror*. Los Angeles: The Phoenix Press, 1932

*Songs of China*. Hong Kong: Wing, Fat & Company, 1949

## To Witter Bynner

I, a wanderer; thou a weaver of the petal-speech,  
In the bridge-land of the East and West have met.  
Though flowers may bloom and fall,  
The Spring breeze shall not forget.

# Melancholy

I used to think there was a Paradise  
Where sorrow, grief and care should never be.  
There I sought to retire.

Alas! such a place is a vain dream,  
Sorrow fills the Universe like wind and rain.

# A White Rose

A white rose... a frail rose  
Obscure and lone in a garden grows...

Does it wish to adorn the dragon-vase  
For guests to gaze at its perfect face,  
Or rather dwell in its shadowed place  
And quietly fade in nature's grace?

# The Amateur Moonshiner

Me hikee up hills other day,  
Met a wild man on my way.  
He made a funny face as he came near  
And whispered with much mystery in my ear:

“In my cave I got a trunk  
Full of stuff to make you drunk.  
...Slip over a dollar—  
I show you my parlor.”

“No, thanks,” said I,  
“Me are not dry.”  
And passed him by.

“This morning, me saw him on street,  
Tramping by with jail-ward feet.  
“By gum!” he cried with pain,  
“.....Caught again!”

# Coolie Song

Lay ah hown—  
Off the traffic zone!

Lay ah hown—  
Watch your own!

Lay ha hown—  
Pull it alone!

Lay ah hown—  
Watch the stone!

Lay ah hown—  
Aching bone!

Lah ah hown—  
The devil is known!

# An Indian in Yuma

Along the avenue of flying wheels  
And swift passing feet  
You ride  
Like your forefathers of forgotten days.

Your stoical face and long dusty hair  
Tell me that you are still loyal  
To your race.  
Yet your ragged garments mark you  
For a victim  
Of civilized ways.

Your ancestors were once  
Masters of rocky hills  
And grim beasts.

Yet your kin are disappearing  
From the earth  
As fast as pale stars  
From the dawning sky.

Do you know why?  
It's because you live to fear God  
While others live  
To conquer Nature.

# The Grassless Valley of Sand

Like sailing on a river of fire  
We speed through the grassless valley of sand.

Long, blue shadows  
Of chained hills,  
Stretch like dead dragons  
In a veiled bed.

And barren peaks of purple  
Stand  
Like crowns of sapphire and gold,  
Against  
A red horizon.

The breast of mother earth  
Is already too dry and shrunken  
To bear  
Any vegetation.

Only a few scattered cactus  
Pointing at the flaming sun,  
Like giant fingers  
Of mother earth.

As if to say:

“See, I still have milk enough  
To nourish  
My only child!”























































































































































































