

Book Review

John Solt: *Anything You Don't Want You Can Have*, Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group Co., 1988.

*Underwater Balcony*, Ito: Kaijinsha, 1988.

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We know the story of Romeo and Juliet. Romeo and Juliet, however, do not exist in the same way as you and I exist: they were born into the English language. We are told that Shakespeare created them. This is a fact which everybody wants to admit. The truth is that nobody knows Shakespeare. We only accept the fact by various kinds of education. If some scholar should prove it and convince us to the extent that we recognize it as we do some of our fundamental instincts, then we would be glad to know literary history is as real as our blood. As this is next to impossible, we need a belief when we want to admit a certain fact. So any education, or any effect of education presupposes a belief.

To avoid such a futile argument as I have committed above, it is necessary to be reminded that the English language is the mother of Romeo and Juliet and at the same time it is the world in which they live. When the language ceases to exist, they must die, just as when the seas dry up, the fish must die. As long as we can breathe the sound of English, we will find Juliet on the street and Romeo at

a bar.

Happy days come slowly and they go quickly. At the beginning of this century something happened that made people abandon their love for stories and go for facts. This new monster is stubborn and uneatable like a stone. The rise of science and technology and the decline of faith, for instance, might have something to do with this sudden change of people's taste. Sociologists and historians will show us more plausible reasons, but here I am not interested in elucidating where this sudden shift of taste came from. We are left with the present situation anyhow: we don't listen to our grandmother's tales on winter evenings any more nor do we rush to a nearby bookstore to get hundreds-of-pages editions of the latest novels. We are fed up.

We are not hungry, but still we are thirsty. This is why we read newspapers and magazines everyday to see in them the facts of the world, the facts of sports, the facts of big names, etc. To us interviews are more real and more interesting than fiction. And here some began to hold that the end of the age of fiction meant the end of literature. Especially literary critics blindly believed that our future would be dark because people started to go to movies and listen to jazz. The future they were worried about turned out to be their future, not ours. For if *new* media means that which doesn't depend upon the printing press, and if commercialism means the end of the monopoly of literature by a handful of elites, then the new media and commercialism are what people choose.

Poetry has been free from any establishment, if it is true. Romeo and Juliet are so famous that we tend to believe that they represent

something established. As I said at the beginning of this review, they live in the language. If you believe that Romeo and Juliet are special beings, it is merely an illusion. Did you read the play?

I am inclined to believe that the life time of poetry is not so long as we usually suppose. Like human love, its happy condition does not last so long. We must compensate for its loss. Memory, therefore, begins to play an important role. Good poetry is principally contemporary. The rest is fiction sustained by generations of memory. We all want permanent value and we force it to anything we met and fell in love with in our lives. Poetry is no exception. But again, I have to add that really hot poetry is the one freshly written here and now.

*Anything You Don't Want You Can Have* is a poetry collection of John Solt, published on the occasion of the tenth World Congress of Poets which was held in Thailand in the fall of 1988. The book contains 40 odds poems. They are compact and powerful, full of rich "time-shifting" images and translunary ideas. And *Underwater Balcony* collects the various poems written by the same poet from 1968 to 1988. The book is beautifully designed. The world of John Solt is most vividly reproduced here and through these poems one can feel as if time and space were fixed on paper.