Account from the Leper Colony at Culion

Our souls were chartered
by this unseen shoreline
beneath the shade of palms, terrace
and bamboo
so that we may gaze through an hour
at Chinese spirals
and recall the malformed footprints of a beggar
who believed he could be
reborn upon a bright archipelago
immune to this anaesthesia. Yes,
we crouched beyond all measure of things
in some opiated palace of mosquitoes
never imagining
Our Sisters of Charity
and the caress of white cotton
in high summer
becalmed by Chaulmoogra oil
or the cool hospital arcade
where we exchange
cigarettes for coins cast in our own image
and listen to the Pacific. Yes,
when evenings are warm
the fingers of children manipulate
trumpets, drums and trombone
so this quiet, disfigured realm can rest
under God’s grace.

Paul Scott