

Sunthorn Phu  
translated from the Thai by Noh Anothai

## When the Candles Went Out

*While visiting a mountainous area  
some ninety miles north of Bangkok  
during a festival*

At the foot of a hill, we reached a cave  
overhung by a massive slab of stone:  
a fringe of bamboo grew under the eave

while the slope above was tangled and green  
with profuse other plants. This the ancients  
in days bygone dubbed the “Cave of the Screen.”

There was a pavilion outside its entrance;  
from here we invited six women in  
to explore the rooms hung with stone pendants

from which water was dripping like beads of rain.  
When the candles went out and all forms were hid,  
the maidens ran pell-mell into the men—

their cries through the cave’s chambers resounded.  
And we, of course, through the darkness gave chase:  
whoever could catch a girl as she fled

and fondle her body in his embrace,  
that fellow with whiskers of clay was smeared.  
Soon we were all mangy as alley cats.

When, into the sunlight, we reappeared,  
we whooped and hollered to see our pals:  
how we by the women had been disfigured!

Some bore on their arms long marks left by nails.  
Still laughing, we left to see more of the hills.

