SWAMP

one Imperative | issue 17

Adibah

a world of words
and in every word
a deathless return

or two, two million
unquiet graves
jetting out of mouths —

splat!
pitiable, hopelessly
uncool

cannibals
go om
nom nom

nom nom

Mustafa

all things desire to persist in their being,

even where their being be non-being. in unprecedented fashion, i am becoming increasingly bound by necessity (destiny?) to accept i had once given love to writing that i resented to give. a love whose final hour, too many moons ago, offered me a comfort greater than i could have hoped to receive had i succeeded in finding a way to go on with it.

yet, today, the real remains confidently unnameable. and despite myself, i have come to wear the look of a knowingly unseeing woman untroubled by her own blindness — having moved onward but not forward, looping through the guilt and loss of ... well, as Pooh puts it, where do the words go when they are not spoken?

we know — no, not so well — that ancient urge to ingest, to internalise — then — to burst forth, to disrupt! and in that moment - between moments - of contact with the yet unwritten ... and the unwritable ... one hopes, perhaps one prays, to be sustained just enough, by the very effort of prolonging one's appetite to matter ...

Adibah Mustafa
24 April 2016

staging lines

by Joel Gn

These hands hold a script, and the stage lies in front, with dimmed lights. The performance, I suppose, begins with the assumption of the character, but where does the character begin and end? The scripted lines work like a map – they orientate the actor by abstracting time, space, emotion, gesture and utterance, so that one is immersed in a particular speech act. I should know where I'm going, or do I? The resolution of the character remains absent, even as the actor presents the moment in real-time.

It is perhaps this lack of a resolution that has, for some time, caused me to harbour a nascent apprehension of the lines in a script, for who exactly is the person I am called to perform, to mimic, to become? Sometimes in my reading, I am fortunate enough to meet this person and discover how similar we are; often I find myself intervening, if not interrupting his or her lived experience. Although assumption involves the temporal ignorance of what is away from the stage, it is inevitably an expression, an interpretation of the script that permits the body to live out the words. To follow the lines, in this partial sense, is both repetition, as well as a re-invention of the script.

but as they say, the show must go on

At a rehearsal, I run through the lines with my fellow actors and production crew. This space is always one of affecting and being affected, for we come together, grappling with characters that are impossible to resolve. Our embodiment is one of difference. It does not proceed in isolation, but in many ways, touches on many indeterminate others. We are never quite sure of ourselves in this context: a given scene may ebb, swell and crash. It can, on similar or separate occasions, flow into a sublime dance. Lay people call the latter chemistry, but we are not able to tell the difference. Hindsight, for the performers, means 'not quite getting it right', which quite tangibly is tucked in nostalgia after every curtain call, when that relation comes to a close.

"So I wager there is a mystical element in the act of comic relief..."

Yes, we fall in love with who we play. Like so many lost loves, they leave their lines behind, while revoking in part, our memory of them.

Thus I believe the easiest part for me to play would be the forlorn lover, but I am bequeathed the villain and mad man instead. That too, is an odd assignment, for these characters do not seem to rile, but humour the audience at every turn.

So I wager there is a mystical element in the act of comic relief, for does it not also – in relieving the burden of reality – serve to remind us that all the wisdom we partake on earth is nothing but folly before the Divine? With some effort, one can hear the echoes of St Paul's laughter, as he crafts this line in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

Even so, there is no plenitude to a roar of laughter, for those looking are likewise, overtaken by the narrative's expression. The lines move, as always.

What story are we setting out to tell? At this juncture, I'm reminded of the actor's presence and how it is compromised by the technical reproduction of film. For sure, it is the camera that captures and detaches this sameness from the actor's person, but is it not an explicit attempt to at least reclaim a form of fidelity to the script? On stage, one enters into a relation with both the script and the audience. This is a moment of vulnerability; for the story, in whatever form, is never indifferent to the ones who partake of it.

"With much trepidation, I enter the stage

With much trepidation, I enter the stage, on these lines, as if they were mine. One pretends and fabricates, for the space is arduous, yet open. Performances are tricky matters of the flesh no doubt. You leave yourself behind, only to become another…with those lines to clout (and cloud) one's way.

on these lines, as if they were mine."

My Beard Dances Like Spanish Moss in the Breeze

by Michael Kearney

A strong – and constant – wind bulls through the cypresses,
orchestrating a low-tone lament for the future,
to which the Spanish Moss slowly sways
as it thrives and decays,
the wind coiling around and between every fiber,
filling the moss with life
as it rips it asunder.

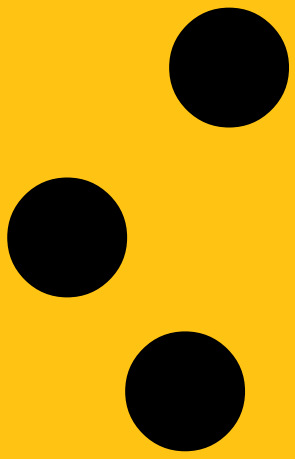
Everything is rich in
this putrid fetid
burst of life-death:
at its most exuberant,
its strongest,
just as it turns to fester.

This “divine soil,”
this land, mucked and mired,
“bursts with future distress”
in all the glory of
“the eddies of” this soaked earth,
this “orb of dew.”

I don’t know this,
I sense it,
like a scared sober passenger
– in a careening car driven madly by a cocaine fueled lunatic –
“knows” they’re going to lose it in the next curve,
that they can never hold this wild reckless course,
that they are doomed by excess and stupidity.

I feel the wind in my beard,
my beard becomes the Spanish Moss,
sways and grays toward death.
But it’s still good,
to feel it,
to be alive,
to feel this,
but the feeling flees as I become disoriented,
as I bounce off trees.
The mind becomes distressed,
lost, no longer mine own to control.

The Earth pulses,
it sucks me in:
Mother Nature is incestuous,
She’s trying to fuck me,
one of her own sons.
Or is it love She wants to make,
to me,
make She and I one?



This place is too alive,
it creeps me out,
the trees make sounds,
their slurping, like hungry gluttons, threatens me.
There are creatures here with me,
unseen, but heard,
less villainous than me,
but more deadly.
This is their domain,
and I will be theirs.
I know I will be devoured if I stay much longer,
but I can’t find a way out,
can’t back-track:
no trace of my entrance.
Soon no trace of me at all.

She lulls me
as she swarms me,
coats me with her,
so slow,
so pure,
so natural.
The lush green palliates
the severity of my plight.
My demise is at hand,
and I slide into it,
into her, meekly – too worn.

You win my dear, I will be yours.
Your soggy seduction has overcome me,
I am done,
– I was done from the beginning, and almost always knew it –
I will descend into you with a willingness,
for I know it is the only way before me.

I disappear into her and at last find peace.

Thank you Walt Whitman for the phrase “divine soil” in Leaves of Grass, “Starting from Paumanok”, section 2. [Leaves of Grass. Walt Whitman. New York: Bantam Books; 2004.]

Thank you André Breton for the phrases “bursts with future distress” and “the eddies of” from C’est aussi le bagne … and the phrase “orb of dew” from Rendez-vous, and thank you Jean-Pierre Cauvin & Mary Ann Caws for the great translations of these very cool concepts/images. Poems of André Breton: A Bilingual Anthology. André Breton. Translated and edited by Jean-Pierre Cauvin & Mary Ann Caws. Boston: Black Widow Press; 2014.

His tongue is very long, it reaches the sky!
This frog's trying to catch a fly.

Jaina Wilmer
By the Swamp
2016

Paoi Hwang
By the Swamp
2016

Fertile Crescent

— Or a call to celebrate Mother with tequila shots in the dark

by Setsuko Adachi

Rivers Flooded:

A River
An overpass in Kolkata crushes onto a crowd killing the innocent. Bare hands dig mother earth, pull the debris of the human-made bridge: attempting to save lives.

Go[o]d's, go[o]ds' will. It is the act of … what can we do? A closure.

A River
The earth dislocates and shakes. The block shaped buildings put on curvy postmodern outlooks; designated human-made buildings firmly built to serve as an emergency command center, as shelters, in Kumamoto. TV announcers from the studio repeat: help each other, don't give up: rescue will be there.

Human beings are powerless before nature. It is the act of … what can we do? A closure.

A River
The driver didn't have the skill set. He didn't make the curve; the bus with 41 people climbed up the barrier along the cliff and took off in Karuizawa. An instant cardiac arrest for the driver, for the alternative driver, and for 13 students on their weekend getaway ski trip. Nothing was wrong with the driver's health, physical and mental conditions; nothing was wrong with the conditions of the road and bus.

> Thank you for having me for the interview. No problem, we are short of drivers. The government implemented a safety measure to protect drivers from overwork. An alternate driver is required for long distance travel. We want you to drive the bus for 45 passengers. I am afraid I can't do that. You have the license for it. Yes, but I haven't driven a bus that big. I have been a driver on minivans. I don't have the experience. Ah, you will get used to it. But… Don't worry you will be fine. At 65 full-time position is hard to come by — I am lucky that I have the license.t

Money for life, life for money ... what can we do? A closure.

Dry Land:

Rivers flooded, subsided.
Lives washed away, closures stay

Emergency Measures Promotion is activated: Operation Fait Acompli
The instruction goes out:
Enclosed please find
the light of Go[o]d, go[o]ds, nature, and money

…In the lightness of lives peace prevails
Yours sincerely,
The Dry Land

The mass is busy
In business, in busy-ness
Minds occupied with tasks and missions to be achieved
for the glory of Go[o]d, go[o]ds, nature, and money

Life becomes light and lighter
Deaths replaced quickly by a closure and enclosure.
The life of Enlightenment abandoned
The dry land of the delta prospers
t of body text

Proctor! Don’t let them cheat! —orders the Establishment
Major drafting season, major money making time
for the sustenance of Go[o]d, go[o]ds, nature, and money!

An order to be automaton is given:
Repeat exactly what it says in the manual, no more, no less.
Make sure your eyes are open, mind focused on monitoring them.
Don’t make them feel uncomfortable but let them know you are watching.
Don’t do anything to disturb their focus.

Silence must be kept.

Proctors —professors—
Are fish in an Aquarium
Going round and round the tank

Adhering to orders:
After reading the manual out loud
Not a word is uttered.

A day is to be spent thus
In the physical un-busy-ness,
With the mind ordered not to think

—An easy wage earning work,
thrives a proctor, walking around monitoring.

—A good break from the hectic routine of everyday,
another one enjoys the rest, walks to the back,
making sure unnoticed,
hovers, and nods off leaning at the back wall.

—You don't own me,
a proctor walks uneasily to Klaus's voice in his head,
the proctor frantically zigzags
in the confines,
to avoid going insane,
to bear the unbearable,
(which is the sign of insanity kicking in…)
the Establishment owns everything—
the Educational Corporation, the body of Operation Fait Accompli.
The proctor resorts to the only weapon a human has,
as ancient sages said,
"Find peace in mind's inner sanctuary"
—maintain the freedom to think within,
which in the age where information networks are constantly
invading the inner sanctuary

is hard to maintain.
…
I am losing it.
I am failing.

“Don’t succumb to the negative thoughts”
— the twangy strings, the drum beats,
The Symbolic Order begins its crescendo.
Me to my self responds,
“But what if they are the truth? … [1]
… There are multiple truths, right?”
to avoid going insane,
to bear the unbearable,
(which is the sign of insanity kicking in…)
the Establishment owns everything—
the Educational Corporation, the body of Operation Fait Accompli.
The proctor resorts to the only weapon a human has,
as ancient sages said,
“Find peace in mind’s inner sanctuary”
—maintain the freedom to think within,
which in the age where information networks are constantly invading the inner sanctuary

After proctoring, after another long commute on a crowded train,
the proctor with a pint wanders off to take a walk on the river bank in the darkness.

Delta

The river water is slowly rising. The wetness is eroding. In the muddy sponginess unfit for cultivation, the songs are heard, woven, nurtured, shared, and liked. The warming Earth is relentlessly loosening the land. And when Operation Fait Acompli stepped in, the swamp sucked it in, swallowed the dry land fully and completely.

Mission accomplished.

…

The freshwater swamps between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East are so rich in biodiversity that the area is called the "Fertile Crescent." [2]

Time for new creation.

Bottoms up to you!

"Pint Mirror," from the album Pint Trilogy by The Symbolic Order, Bandcamp, January 2016. https://thesymbolicorder.bandcamp.com/album/pint-trilogy

"The Dry Land" section owes a debt of gratitude to Michael Kearney and Durnin Martin (members of The Symbolic Order) for their insights and inspirations. Thanks to Michael Kearney also for introducing me to Klaus Nomi "You Don't Own Me," Victor, 1981.

"Swamp," National Geographic Encyclopedia, Jan 2011. http://education.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/swamp/

From the Balcony

By Sarah-Tabea Sammel

I wonder what time is
from the perspective of a balcony.

Moving in, moving out, passing by, passing on
are centuries of micro cosmoses
spinning around themselves in their real time
actuality
factuality
inter – con – nec –ted – tele –vision -wise – wieso – lan – guage – wor – ds - /ld– ne – glected – ed – ed – etc – c – mon – day – now

The neighbours are random
they have been before and will be after
you can never see them when they are synchronised
in their balconies next to you
because then their cosmos is parallel
not in front
or behind
or in profile
orbital
centrifugal
fussy
fusilli.

I hear piano music from upstairs and smell fried garlic from somewhere, where there is also a cat and a girl asking for ‘mum’ and the shoes I see outside are never sorted, but all over and around and on top and underneath and beside several shoe rags, so there is chaos around the order of structure, or the order of structure generates confusion, but probably everybody finds their soles. Singularly. Mutually. Soulful. A mouth full.
Maybe pasta water boils over.

Our cooker stopped in the middle of me cooking some time ago, because the gas can was empty.
I was used to ignition. Electricity. The elements were out of stock.
The deliveryman came and carried fossil fuel back into our cupboard.
Forty Dollar. And that was that.
And then there was a hot meal.
A solution.
Evolution.

"You can regularly hear chanting and shouting and singing..."

Have you noticed that we were almost out of coffee and toilet paper?
The temple outside is quiet today.
The neighbours in the street behind walk their dogs. And kids. And cars.
You can regularly hear chanting and shouting and singing and whistling and sneezes.
In this century. In this dynasty courtyard of present history collection and dust particle specification and random tax payment to enrolment systems of overcome and uncollected sounds and memes and memories and momentary bliss, which isn't recorded, but present, again, again, and now there is laughter!
And we dust the dust from the documents we thought we need to keep and have collected but not documented in their objectivity as documents that are objects that are filed in our perception of space. Home. Earth. Planet. Wooden tables.

"...you watered the flowers yesterday morning, whilst I had breakfast..."

From the balcony I can see the airplanes coming in.
So many people watching through the small windows onto the houses they fly over.
So many little tiny balconies of perspectives, belonging to their owners, like little front garden views of lives and houses of humanity and stories.
From our balcony, I can watch the sky.
I liked that you watered the flowers yesterday morning, whilst I had breakfast and looked out towards the streets and rooftops and into the clouds.
From the balcony, I pretend I am in a private setting.
From the balcony, I am connected with the world. And I see you coming down the road. I gesture, where the key is hidden, and you nod up to me. World, you.
Welcome, to my world. Me, thank you, much appreciated. Would you like to drink something? Feel free to sit outside, for the view.

Sunday

by Michael Kearney

Sunday,
silence is saddening.
Sundays,
even as a child
so sullen
but now much worse,
no one to distract me from,
protect me from,
the darkness within that prevails over this

sunny day.

A day that has me fall into my own mind,
into its depths,
spiraling down neural pathways,
untraveled for ages, to past times,
always there, but so long forgotten,
to memories of times
– Were they real? –
that can never be again.
Then jumping to new, not-as-of-yet-real images,
to possibilities that I hope will never come to be.

A grandfather, three decades dead,
that I long to talk to,
never got to be a man with him.
If only he were here,
could we find the joy of existence together?
What advice could he give me to battle this day?
Or would he merely look at me with a lost expression,
unable to grasp my despair?
I doubt I ever really knew him,
but I have no doubt he knew/knows me.
I loved/love him,

but who was he?
What did he feel?
What did he think of Nixon, de Valera, Hitler?
What did he think about women? Sex?
I know he loved me, but what did he want for me in my life?
Could he not come back now,
for just a quick visit from beyond?
Put his arm across my shoulder, tell me I was alright,
that all is, was, and will be alright.

This wish, which wells up from within,
uncalled for,
unwanted,
unnerves me.
If I heard it uttered by another, I would deem them dumb, childish, unbalanced, a shmuck.
Coming out of me, it fills me with fear: I'm losing it, myself, everything.

Hey, I dig existentialism, but not today, not in this swirling storm of despondent thought and images, where neither the past nor future offer solace, and where the present,
the continuous, non-existent/ever-existent/only-thing-existing present,
offers only the inescapable pain brought about by the fear of losing the joy of life.

A treasured teddy bear
- Gone, burned in a garbage dump? –
that I cannot hug, even though I need it now:
he would do more good for me than reading
Vonnegut, Camus, Corso, or Creeley.

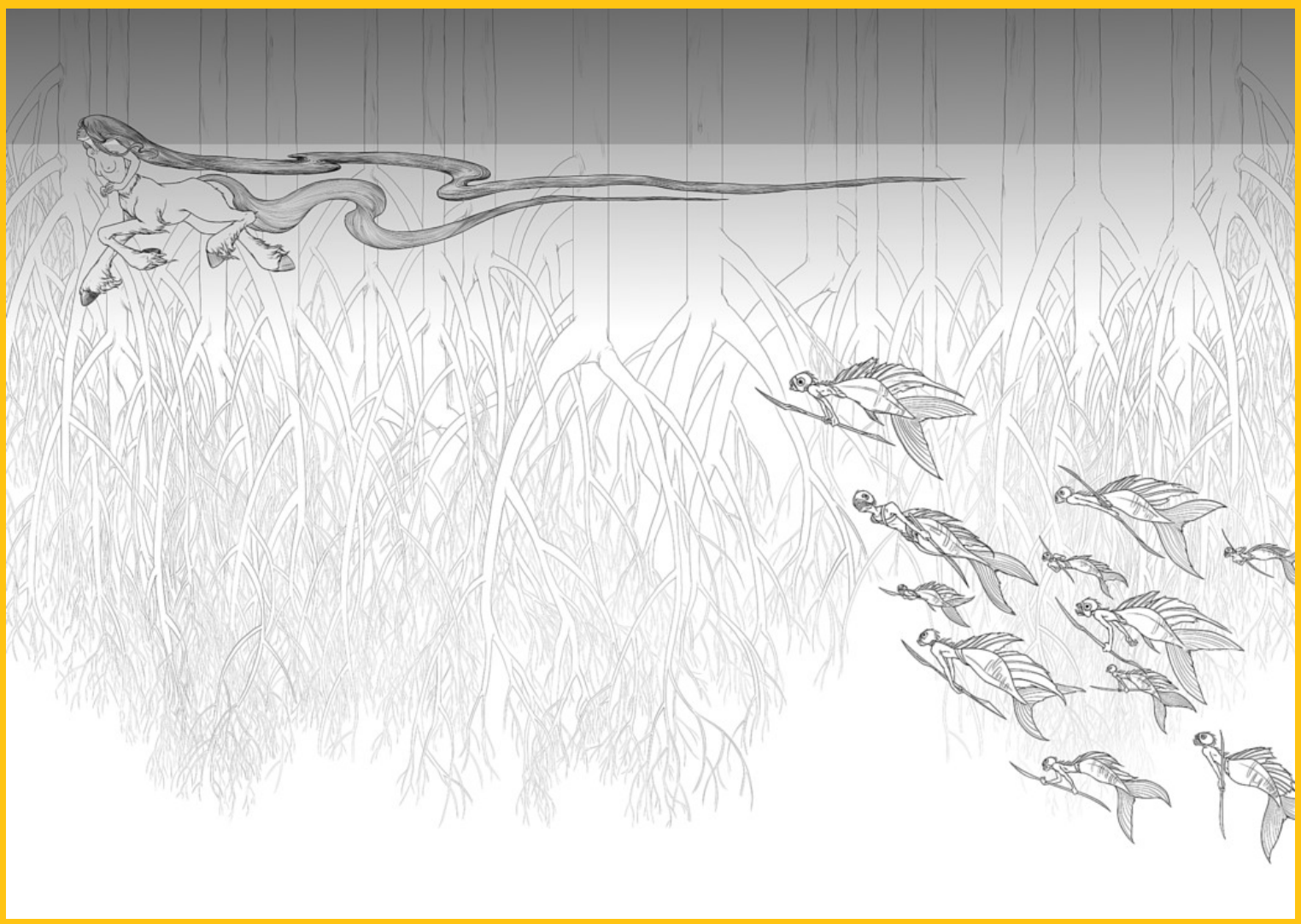
They are great,
but would only
sink me deeper.

My mind is eating
me alive,
dragging me down
to its murkiest,
dank morose.

Sucking me into
a view of my
past, present, and future
that convicts me of
screwing-up, irrevocably, long ago,
of having a past that dooms my future.
Afraid to look forward,
for what I envision is dark;
afraid to think of tomorrow
because the unreal, untrue future,
the things that yet might come to be,
the things that my mind conjures today,
are too bleak.
But I cannot control mine own thoughts,
not today,
so these non-existent phantasms hold sway in my mind,
and mock me and doom me.
I know they are not certainties,
false foreshadowing.
– ah, “false,” does hope yet hold out? –
Still, I dare not mention them,
giving voice may bring these horrors
to the realm of the real.

A Sunday mind is
slurping the life
from my soul.
Thoughts sag and
I slide into the depths.

I know I should go for a walk,
but my feet are static,
sunk deep,
stuck in the mire and muck of
another spirit sucking Sunday.



Sara Chong
Stay Awake
2016

Preparations

by Lim Lee Ching

And how they bought their positions
With saccharin and trust
And the world was asleep
To our latent fuss
-- David Bowie, “The Bewlay Brothers”

I

Shining bright, a whim of the waning day cast on waves
Bathed in the shallow breaths of an ancient yearning
Cast low, our shadows stretch through the fingertips of dreams
Dusk after distant dusk
Not having glanced beyond these clear lines
The searing only ever stand us on ceremony
With empty rituals emptying past the tips of keenness
Moving lips in restless halls echoing the tips of keenness
Taking a stand against the flood of querulous envy
Everywhere it exposes the yawning need
For the stamp of our acquiescence
Tip on tip, hip to hip, the meaningful blast
Of these unsung verses
Relocate the calculation of rests

II

A return begins before fading back to the shadows of fulfilment
In village after village, the mews defy the gathering circus
Who comes, who shines, greeting with raised hairlines
Kicking off the dust beneath old papers and dead news
Surely rest must come to bully the outstretched body
Limp to the touch of dim dusk
Turning on the ash of forgotten scribbled sheets
The words gather lightly on the lips
As if returning to the day of toil
Watching the shadow grasping towards the wall's end
The words on the lips listing adjacent melodies
Lips searching for a near-rhyme
To cast aside the waning day for the night

IV

Enter the great swathes of turning attitudes
Where the root notes of our instincts
Take a stand against envy
Unlayering the stubborn peels of forward face
The carrier asks no questions, only holds up an end
Of the bargain
Keenness is a light that cannot be blinked away
Just as the shifting sand of petty shillings
Give way to stagger and appetite
Day breaks and the grip on buried memory
Is sustained by the sighs of a generation wedded
To the age-old wisdoms of age-old bargains

V

They left the song too late
But the half rhymes joined the march of days
Half blown by the rousing sweep of feet on rust
Tomorrow's people did not fade
In fact they turned and turned again
To a time to come, to a promise pouring from the lips
Of the bargaining throng
Line on line, hip to hip, the well-meaning people
Saw to the passing of the rite

VI

Today the yearning still beat on the heart
Today fading saffron flails in the wind, brightening the sun
On the station platform outstretched bodies hand over
Parcels of wrapped up wariness
On the station platform prayer beads change hands.

Lim Lee Ching
March-May 2016
Singapore

Chanson de la mer

par Jeremy Fernando

Le matin du dix-huitième jour de novembre, je m'asseyais — sur une planche, dans le petit vaisseau. Un vaisseau sans nom — ou peut-être dont je ne connaissais pas le nom. Dans un vaisseau qui m’éloignait de la terre ; transportant un vase contenant quelqu’un dont je ne connaissais pas le nom. Peut-être, quelqu'un que je tentais de connaître trente-trois ans plus tard ; pas trop tard, car il était toujours déjà trop tard. Je ne l'ai jamais connu ; mais, parce que je connais son nom, son nom me connaît.

En fait, tout ce que je savais, c'était qu'il avait dit : je suis Jésus. Ainsi, peut-être que c'est son nom secret.

C'était une belle journée ; une journée trop belle pour la tristesse, le malheur ; même si nous avons quitté l'heure du bonheur sur la terre. Un malheur qui ne sait pas, mais qui voit — qui voit qu'il n'y a rien à voir. Qui sait que tout ce qu’il y a à savoir, c'est le néant.

Un néant qui ne peut être vu sans terre.

Où peut-être « lui » seul sait où.

Le temps était magnifique, et les nuages ont appelé à l'esprit le vaisseau de l'Odyssée. Peut-être, une chanson apte au temps. Je n'ai pas senti un instant que je devais être dans ce vaisseau — c'était peut-être la chanson. Après tout, il ne faut pas oublier que le temps vient du temps — mais peut-être seulement dans une chanson, dans toutes les chansons. Et que les chansons sont dangereuses surtout lorsque vous écoutez leur appel — elles apportent malheur.
sait d'où il est venu.

Surtout lorsqu’on essaie de retourner à la terre.

Surtout lorsqu’on peut voir la terre.

Mais maintenant, « il » était déjà terre — une terre qui se passait dans la mer.

Viens, viens, venez.
Je n'étais pas sûr si c'était une voix, ou une chanson — ou d'où ça venait.
Peut-être, c’était seulement dans ma tête. Mais, nous avons déjà dit : toutes les chansons sont déjà — quelquefois — dangereuses.

Mais, peut-être seulement si quelqu’un entend la chanson — et est-ce même une chanson si personne ne l'entend? Toutefois, entendre quelque chose ne signifie pas que l’on comprend son sens — ou sait d'où il est venu.

L'écoute de l'appel — mais, de quelque chose d’inconnu.

Et, puisque nous ne savons pas d'où vient la chanson, je la nomme : chanson de la mer.

Une chanson avec les mots « au revoir grand-père ».

"Une chanson avec les mots « au revoir grand-père »..."