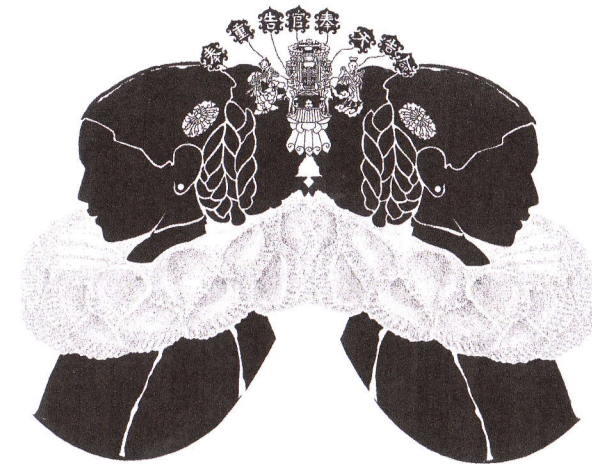


Cha: An Asian Literary Journal

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Featuring:

Krishnakumar Sankaran, Vineet Kaul, David Sutherland, Graeme Brasher, Randy Gonzales, Mary-Jane Newton, Divya Rajan, Nicholas Y.B. Wong, Jason Eng Hun Lee, Shelton Pinheiro, Jeffrey Thomas Leong, Changming Yuan and Bob Bradshaw.

Edited by Tammy Ho and Arthur Leung.

www.asiancha.com

Incubated

by Krishnakumar Sankaran

You came for butterflies, a glade like a pause
between hill and river. A wind in flux
flocked with blind colors that met and ducked
into holes in a sky held up by branches.
The branches were old fingers raking sky.
We walked into a pause of leaves, curling
wings that cracked like bones. The wind ran through you
on invisible wings. We didn't stay long.
It wasn't long when you couldn't stop coughing
up a keening knot, a weight in your chest.
You tasted ash. Your tongue, a dry white paste.
We heard later of green X rays with motes
rotting microcosmic in your lungs like
indifferent skeletons in a glade.

Parapraxis

by Vineet Kaul

Fingerprints a la prima facie
Of a sin consisting of just us three.
Me and you, then, and it:
In our involuntary, regressive, redundant fit.
Locked in the solitude
Amongst a consortium of faces,
And we?
Chose the closed comfort of silence:
Communication blasphemy.
Turn around turnaround.
You passed me the pillow and the music stood down.

Played like a fiddle
Then burnt like a witch.
Incessantly embedded earworm twitch.
Tongues rolled with fervor
But 'twas endeavor's hitch...
Broken attention in that Machiavellian pitch.
The music was loudest between the songs,
With too many strings attached
To all the puppets wrong.
Who once was the judge
Is now wagered to play clown,
The red nosed historian of a banana peel crown.
Sly vaudeville -
Out to conquer all the boudoir action,
Vain valency -
To explore a fabled opposite attraction.

Pass the buck like your pillow,
 Cross-armed till the pause.
 Vengeance is vehement in jilted applause.
 Subconsciously engineered –
 The promises thrown,
 Flawlessly faulted and out of necessity grown.
 Rolled up sleeves don't help with wearing your heart
 Whence subjugated to savoring scars.
 For it's the same place from where we started
 And worse yet
 The same place from where we depart.

These memories shall time, both, erase and unwind.
 Truth is in all negligence of presence of mind.
 The journey will dictate to the journal
 The methods to err
 In a manner to overlook as the gradients blur.
 Long after, in folly, we our destinations skip
 Yielding to emotions that time can't ascertain
 Recollections of Confessions-of-love will remain
 Nothing more than a listless *Freudian Slip*.

Little Boy Analects

by David Sutherland

Little Boy said. . .
 Life is quick, don't hesitate in its passing
 Lay wire in ground and ignite with dry wick.
 Should this be insufficient, cover your eyes,
 for the sun will never shine as bright as Hiroshima.

And where went the tadpoles on the inland toll?
 Did not the wind blow lavender or plum and fill
 this valley from green hill to sandbank?
 Where went the wren and titmice?

Best to concede with wing on breast,
 wait to sing another day.
 Is it not prudent to live from the silt ground-up?

And bury me where? Have we not loved and have we not
 cried?

Little Boy be now ever so clever, let the jade be carved,
 the old clothes hung, let the city give alms,
 Oh little one, Spring grieves.

Mereles

by Graeme Brasher

The broad avenues blow their dusty litter
 The plane trees nod and sway
 The grey-era concrete temples looming moan
 The leaves waft and flutter; one flies
 High beyond the marble column figure
 Erect arm extending like a geyser
 Into the haze and scratched sky

This is Mereles, home of the foam
 Which blows in clumps off the brown beach
 Where the flotsam of an ocean rides the surf
 To shore and shunts up the dunes toward town.
 From this the un-homed help themselves to the prizes
 Of chance: sometimes wooden, sometimes golden,
 Sometimes metal twisted or plastic deformed by the
 waves.
 In their hands they drag lengths of weed knotted with
 rope
 And strands of net meshed with shell.
 Their glistening eyes seem transported
 But their toes are blue and their hair is matted,
 Smiles fixed on their faces keep their sadness in.

What if the gnawed core grew the leaf
 The deep shadow cast the sun

The butterfly became the pupa
 The belching frog turned to spawn?
 What if fishbone drew flesh
 The drains gushed limpid water
 The bricks glued the mortar
 Leaves returned to the tree
 Nut attached twig, skin grew from the wig?

What if death engendered life?

What if those star-scattered atoms assembled your hand?
 What if land swallowed sea?
 What if sand made the mollusk?
 What if you came back to me?

**Mereles: Three syllables; rhymes with 'error-less'*

Aubade

by Randy Gonzales

We sat grown quiet at a nibblet
in a chopstick grip. We sat at soft sake
sips over bottle clack. We grew quiet
at *tatami* stretched to welcome mat.

Grown quiet at blow fish swollen
in wide-brim hats. Quiet at trains
departing a temple's grasp. At rice-
field shimmer
under a mountain's chest.

Still quiet at a hawker's melon-
bouncing shout, an *obassan*
in blossoms swept. We sat at
her broom-bent back-- grown
reconciled with neat white piles.

At angles pigeons patch—quietly
at blue sky circle back, Yuka's
fourth kimono change, sunlight

sprint over woken toes, first
rice tangled in steaming bowls.
We knelt quietly over tea--
cups held in whispering blows.

We sat quiet at piano curls
in stilted horns, Trish's
stare-raising voice. We sat
in incense waft, temple's draft,
strumming blues-hot curry bowls,

teapots cupped with hands of snow.

At Mirin bowing to her toes, flowers
rising in the surf-- crashing waves
to blossoms birth, school girls,
freshly printed plaques-- less rhythm at
wood clattered prayers. We quietly sat
in *yakitori*-tongue
entrée skewered.

In snow snapped limbs of sculpted trees,
childhood chases of paper cranes,
morning tilts against the breeze.

At petals turned, futons stacked, golden
 sunlit *tatami* mats, trembling
 rays we go quiet at.

--Fukui, Japan

*The formatting of this poem has been altered for this pamphlet. Please refer
 to <http://www.asiancha.com/issue/13/andygonzales/>*

Two Poems

by Mary-Jane Newton

To Peter Weiss or Albert Blades

Here in my confinement, extinguished lights
 draw close the coat of night insects, which brings
 to me the loss of things I barely possessed.
 You know, your absence weighs heavy — adds
 years on top of those that I count mine.

This dark here may or may not concertina time:
 I observe the sea of glow-worms spiralling still,
 spiralling clearly and ever more beautifully into
 the proximity ... the distance ... the proximity
 again. After all, memories, like moths,

are drawn unto the very flame that burns
 their wings. I feel my fever's heat failing this
 moment, so full of expectation, no longer stripping bare
 the walls. I see you lift yourself, drooping, hairy dusk;
 I imagine another radiance awaits you.

I would prefer things darker in my cage, and so too
 the vermin. But my years unfold me now, they unfurl me

like an old, ragged banner whose long arm reaches out to
the horizon behind these dark and angry bars —
and so I watch it flutter gaily now, downwind.

Old Lovers

We are old lovers now.
Like rancid butter we drip
all over the sheets.
We smile at
the mutiny of our bodies
and we lie, holding hands.
We know we both
remember the full moons
during which we chased
our scents like unruly hounds,
during which we burnt
ourselves up like cheap candles,
during which we played gently
each other like instruments,
read each other like Braille,
watched each other
with closed eyes.
Now we lie here,
at once regretful and reconciled,
holding hands
under the duvet.

Ode to Poetry

by Divya Rajan

"...men and women came and took my simple materials, breeze, wind, radiance, clay, wood,
and with such ordinary things constructed walls, floors, and dreams." -Pablo Neruda

And then, the cervix sighed
a couple more poems basked
verses entrenched, reappearing
as eruptions on the cornucopia of pathos,
words rendered secondary
depth of silence trickling into
the comparative placidity,
the warp and weft of a word, permitting
it to reign, then.
Each of them had moldable fingernails
and bawled with energies of rivers, mountains.
Some soothed themselves, others continued
till exhaustion dripped like fiery loops
from sun's forehead that noontime.

I served them as knick-knacks,
even staple sometimes
on marmalade plates from a thrift store
and guests devoured
them, some tenderly
taking time off
to digest
and some gorged

till their eyeballs
literally sucked in juices
from the serving bowls.

I hung them up to dry, their humid
sweat still clumpy
after a tornado and rain combined
had cooked them the night before.
They were starched stiff and ironed,
folded and laid into raspberry closets.
In the morning, I dressed them in pink and blue,
drove them to school, where
syllables'd be flattened further and
drawls perfected as sequins on a kurti.
Of course, I'd rush in with the pencil case
abandoned on a lazy nightstand.

And then, the conundrum
that existed before everything else evolved
will continue to be conspiringly taut and inconspicuous
at the same time, at odd times, even creatures of awe,
with antennae resembling aliens that, we
ingratiatingly claim to understand, especially when
emotions run amok and
rants refuse to soak in brain nectar.
If ever you stripped off the cover
of a Mayan codice, that's what you might find
too.

Appetites

by Nicholas Y.B. Wong

1.

Scientists say one's want reflects one's lack.
Let's say in the street, you see the smooth
thighs of women. Then, an urge from the parietal lobe
in your watery cerebrum kicks in, so you want to suck
a cherry dipped in dark hot chocolate.

This association is nothing erotic. It is biological –
your body simply lacks sugar and fiber.

2.

Here I am, in a two-star Michelin
restaurant, reviewing your signature green
lies, soaked in a thin layer of lemon
liqueur and ginger oil. They look fresh
and organic. I put a slice, soft and creamy,
on my tongue, the one that you tasted
and tasted you. The lies melt at once, followed
by an after-kick of tepid alcohol. Then,
you appear from the kitchen in white,
looking professional even without the tall
ruffled chef hat, and ask me how many stars
your gratifying lies are worth.

3.

I wake up this morning, with a compulsion to taste my blood.

I distrust Descartes; I believe in the body,
so I listen to it.

I slide a razor along my chin,
the sound of which so calming, almost quiet,
like a cat licking its paws.

A thin red line appears, blood slowly soaking
the white foam. I look into the mirror,
bored with my surface.

Then, I wipe a drop of red with my finger
and have a good taste of my inner self.

4.

Last day of every month,
in this elderly home,

the same birthday song dies out,
followed by disjointed rounds of clapping.

Wishes then fill up the room,
wishes whispered by those

who cannot name names
and recall when they were born.

Their bed, their breaths and their hair
smell fetidly the same.

Nurses urge them to make wishes
before it is too late. They do.

Wallpapers are busy listening,
contemplating what they want.

*Let me live one more day
I want to see my children*

*I will give them up if only
I could live one more day*

Then, they gather the greatest
strength from their weakest lungs and

blow the candles.
As they wish,

the flames are gone,
leaving the lonely sugar-coated

cake on the table,
surrounded by soulless gazes

that truly appreciate perhaps
their last sweetness in life.

5.

He finally confessed
 his dirty deeds.
 She did not cry.
 Her face
 once hidden in her body
 surfaced slowly.
 She started to become
 like a human
 especially when he
 introduced his pores
 to her fingertips again –
 warm but crunchy
 like home-baked brownies.
 He endorsed the divine touch.
 She repaid with discreet food
 from the microwave
 that gorged their stomachs
 gorgeously in micro ways.

After eating,
 he hushed her.
 He forbade speeches.
 He skipped pillow talks.
 A woman's lips –
 he thought –
 should chant for his hairy skin.
 To him, words lost what
 they meant when said to those
 who meant nothing.

— *Ssshhhh!*
 That mouth should be sealed
 and concealed –
 proper-*ssshhh*-ly.

Dragons Rising

by Jason Eng Han Lee

They come flying across azure skies,
straddling great earthenware hills,
paddling out of sunken depths
and rousing eyelids from stumps of trees.
Like great rivers, their torsos writhe and coil
at every bend. Under each crevice,
beside each faint shadow, they emerge
from all the elements to speak to me.

The greatest amongst them are flanked by
crab-nosed guards from brittle glass palaces
who will order me to pay them homage
with my hornless head hung low
and my claws sheathed and bowed.
I must pray for their benevolence,
always obedient, never pleading
for them to turn their gaze from me.

They will hold me fast in their embrace
like a prodigal son newly returned,
whisper at origins beyond the Eastern seas
and lash their tails across great continents,
eager to measure their momentous tides
with their old-age wisdom and their charm,
expecting to see their offspring running

back in droves before their immortal eyes.

They tell me I too can pass through
this arched gateway to heavenly peace,
that my scales will glisten with pride again.
Spewing up great mouthfuls of smoke,
they tell me everything has changed.
You are descended from dragons
they say, stretching their gleaming talons
behind their backs. You belong to us now.

#50

by Shelton Pinheiro

In the parlour beneath the flickering fluorescent light
 a woman writes zeroes, perfectly round, lizard egg-like
 they line up obediently in her ledger, to be locked
 into red and green boxes where they'll stay imprisoned
 unlike the man who'll come home tomorrow,
 that's the thing she likes about zeroes that stay put
 within boxes and don't bother her like people, for instance
 the manager who is now pressing the steel bell
 even as she says good afternoon and how are you sir
 and of course sir and can I take a day off tomorrow sir,
 pulling down her dupatta just a bit to fend off a stray
 glance,
 as she mutters may I be excused
 and enters, almost priest-like into the holy of holies
 pen poised over the empty column awaiting zeroes
 like a tabernacle yearning for sacrificial lambs, she
 imagines
 with a smile, which reminds her, as she fills in the zeroes,
 about her daughter who should be back from school
 by now and that she will have to
 leave some zeroes unfinished
 which she always found was the hardest part
 for deep inside, she knows she must
 leave one quiet evening,
 some zeroes unfinished and her pen laid

diagonally across her ledger, as if she had gone out
 for a drink of water from the earthen jar beside
 the canteen at the end of the long, dark corridor.

Late Speaker

by Jeffrey Thomas Leong

Who knew my father's last converse with me
would be in a vernacular I couldn't speak:

Nam Long, ancestral language of a South China village,
Zhongshan prefecture, Guangdong province,
place name for some 1,000 - 3,000 missing souls,

and he who immigrated to San Francisco 87 years ago?
There are dead dialects some say not worth relearning,
not scholars bent on positioning
up that variable ladder towards tenure,
nor social anthropologists who examine what

natives ate daily, their burial customs,
how "Hell Money" is placed in a casket
with an extra pair of shoes for the Afterlife.
I heard not idiom, that simple know of lingo for
Who's beside you? or *What do I eat tonight?*

A utility sear to which I had no answer
that Sunday afternoon late September,
his fast food French fries hardly drawing a tear,
and the plastic straw, the one which possibly broke
the spit which choked his trachea,

esophagus, windpipe, nothing should

but a hose of air, then more terms that weren't there.
When he stared back in return, 6:32 p.m.,
as if I withheld a speech umbilical,
critical shrill with which to voice an old world,

I felt accused, his betrayer,
me who's lost more tongues I never knew
I couldn't master,
and wished and wish for
just one word.

Two Poems

by Changming Yuan

Crows in Sunlight

Soon after their dreamless roosting
The crows on the boughs begin to look up
Some ready to fly, some to land
Beyond the darkest moments of last night

Disturbed by their calls, a solitary squirrel
Climbing down the tree, crossing the fence
To a pasture no greener than the leaves
But there is certainly more sunshine
More photosynthesizing, under the golden film

As I walk past, neither the crows
Nor the squirrel bothers to notice my presence
Why should they be startled away? It is me
Trespassing a new territory between day and night
Where the crows hide their night-dyed feathers

Ritual

A gull glides
Its motionless
graceful glide

Above a million freshly foamed waves

From this realm
You hear the gull
As all birds are

Little is definitely impossible

Hiroshima... A Woman Talks to a Reporter

by Bob Bradshaw

There's no need to stand on ceremony.
We'll drink and talk. The moon's face
is as swollen and as disfigured tonight
as mine was the morning the sun burst.

Thrown to the ground, I squirmed loose
from a fallen beam. I was frantic to find my mother.
Outside I found a dirty dusk.

People everywhere were pleading
for water, water.

Strangers, naked or half-clothed,
wandered the street.
Everyone had blistered faces

and many passed like sleepwalkers,
black streamers of flesh
hanging from their limbs.

The river filled with bodies,
I waded across.

Somehow I made my way home

but Mother wasn't there:
she had left early to shop in Hiroshima.

Here, fill your cup. Write my story.
Some days, despite this bloom
of purplish spots beneath my skin,

I swear I only dreamed that day...

Do you like your sake warmed?
I do. It's as if I'm sitting
in a winter hot springs, the cold
hidden behind a veil
of mist.

(First published in *Verse Libre Quarterly*, 2005)