

Eddin KHOO

(from the collection *Mirror of Private Troubles*: forthcoming 2003, *Kala*)

Self Portrait

In the footsteps of my history
And shadow, I am caught
In the half light of remembering,
The house, the mouth,
The woman, whose cotton-coiled
Waist is the yearning for an India far away;

In the archipelago dusk,
This world is a water kingdom
That swims and hisses,
And urges a love for the shimmering hills,
The parched sand, the plaited rain,
Where, *Malaya*, my freedom,
Is a dark face reflected in this sea.

*

Varnam

(for M.K)

In the beginning,
No beginning, only
The silvery glimpse of a history,
Solid as a rock,
Or the lotus.

Till you, Shiva,
Ashen faced, plough lined,
Danced the dance of destruction,
Your right leg, a
Stern spear, to the moon,
Your left, black root,

Upon the orange womb, this earth;

Prayer, the wild
Dance of your hair,
Place of our pilgrimage,
Where all is surrendered,
Clay, ash, the universe...

Time is only the unfurling
Of the blackness that we track;
So, learning the names of origins,
I can never go back.

*

I will Tell You This (A Love Song)

(for J.F.R, with thanks to Michael Longley)

I will tell you this;
That love, is the art
Of green hands, nestled
Keen as the root,
In red earth.

Here, where my body
Grows thin and stalk like,
Where you, woman,
Give me life,
A patch of grass, a finger
Turned lily shaped and purple;
Here, love is a reaping,
A marriage, a baptism,

Where my body bends,
Broken backed and rump like,
I search the names of flowers,
Where you hair rests, snug
As the scattering of falling, frail branches,
Dissolving ripples,

Like a mellow monsoon;
Here, love
Is the holding of a breath, a drowning,

I will tell you this;
That love, is the art
Of green hands, nestled
Keen as the root,
In red earth,

For always.

*

The Idea of Love

(an episode from the Sejarah Melayu – the Malay History)

And then several horses and cows and goats were slaughtered. Rice crusts collected in a mound. Water for the ceremony amounted to an ocean upon which the heads of buffaloes appeared like islands. After 40 days and 40 nights, bath water was brought in a procession abounding in joy and noise in a vessel decked with jewels. Then Seri Teri Buana and his wife Princess Uwan Sundari walked seven times around the raised throne. Then they were bathed on their raised thrones by Bat. Following the bath they covered their bodies with the finest threads, the threads of the kingdom; and sat as man and wife on a throne decked with jewels...

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Poem in a Classical Style

(from a Malay Pantun)

The flying dove high above,
Perches a while on a dead tree;
Strike the water in a pail,
It will spatter on your own face, you see.

*

Goenawan Mohamad: Morning Star

Morning star: like a signal
To stop. In the hard air words venture, through night,
In sleep: somnambulists plan, on the wings of a cloud, bare,
Towards a cape

That sometimes disappears. Perhaps
There's a process, towards a black hole,
Where desire – and all that is remembered – collects
Like the carrion of birds

Where the precipice may no longer exist.
Who designed it? What delivered it?
From where? From us? There's a cove that's been set apart
And a horizon that's been lost, perhaps.

While you and I, sit, speak,
In a broad room.
And I ask you: summon the morning star,
Stop its talk. Give it a sign!

You are silent. Perhaps there are meanings that won't be encountered
On this journey, or a purpose, in God's wilderness,
That for eternity has awaited the break of day;
The storm, the darkness, or –

Not the morning star.

translated from the Indonesian by Eddin Khoo)

Latiff Mohidin: Maya

year after year
i bear you name
 maya
from village to village
i bear it like a fresh wound
on my brow
 maya
from city to city

at times
it suddenly tears open
 at other times it does not stir
at times
when i call your name
 maya

blood flows
upon my face

(translated from the Malay by Eddin Khoo)