

SLOUGH

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Nude, the poet had to fashion masks out of his own diaphanous slough.

Extract expressions and adore each as a face.

There is no face, only a deft masker, spectral spectrum.

As shadow to body, body to rhythm – follow the ruse – this far – this guise, this guile.

Slough must be eaten to the last shred.

On the last journey, tracks made by the head must be covered up by the body.

Coil to the shape of a bracelet, place tail inside mouth, fasten clasp.

The womb never leaves a child. You wear it on your back even as you look for it in absent-minded mourning.

The new skins you grow are slough.

But this is flesh, kin.

Slide back into its canoe, bark curved from memory, and thus dressed, go to the shore of your bride of death.

SELECTED POEMS FROM ECHOLOCATION

(Chameleon Press 2003 Hong Kong)

§

Arranged again in parallel lines, my bare feet face the door, welcoming the railroad of time space.

But death is not interested when I am.

I wake up like a dancer into a rehearsed, familiar position. The boatman has vanished leaving the oars and I am inflating unstopably into my hollows - shoes, clothes, pen,

§

When her voice was born for the first time without her, she became the oracle with the visitor voice. Disguised, in a costume voice. The costume, wearing her. Speaking in quotation marks. And she became a hound whose voicebox had been removed, making her barkless.

§

Views not parodied by descriptions, allowed to live and die, a cusp, from appearance to dis.
 Close your eyes, imagine the view, open your eyes, replace the view with edge to edge identical copy of the original.
 Framed by the window, held by both eyes: if you close your blinds, the birds and stars cannot see you.
 A bird's eye: Thinning rivers, half eaten mountains, bending lakes, mild agitations of sea fur.
 Clouds rush their journeys, just in case.

§

Our lips close in a precise .
 We correct the punctuation , , , , , , , ,
 On the telephone, brief _____
 ... Two subtle Four much
 Object Subject Predicament

§

The sea is in a sweat. *More salt, more salt.* The salt chain moves faster. You keep dissolving but you never finish your book, it is a roaring thirst, the jaws of a lion ajar, roaring without stop.
More water, more water.

§

Watch out! Your children crack your heads open, a jagged jig.
Trepanned, your brain releases an air balloon to lift you out of
here.

After you leave, they interlace fingers around their own heads,
like it never happened to an eggshell.

§

The sky is fitted linen, stretched over sealine without a crease,
pegged to the spikes and jags of mountains, kingsize, navy,
preparing to be sunshot. Sooner than lovers can hide, no sooner
than the taste of stars striking your lips, one by one stunned and
falling to light.

It's all been said and yet, need, blowing between our lips,
streams inside a tree. We flowed out of time and back so soon
eating eggs our own. Through each other we pass like water.

At the sun to see how it never changes, at the moon to see how it
does, algae slipping beneath our feet, roots travelling and
dewdrops dying in visible speed. There is no such thing as a
circular river.

Unlike bread, the body becomes softer with age. We tag our
children with our names, store the plaits of our daughters, stash
berries under rocks and look for them later.

Held in the fangs of a wristwatch, a well-worn path of a nail in
our veins, heart-hammered time trail.

No matter who two are kissing, eternity arrives, jelly bean eyes
black crystal balls. The longer we look, the more we recognize
and anything we could say is too obvious. The songs we like are
the songs we know, and every song on the radio is about us.

§

War is a place all thoughts have left, green salad fields sprinkled with blood and bone, birds crash when wind caves in, the cigarette drops from your hands as you water plants with gasoline, mountains wait on the bodies of reptiles, snakes run from burning skins, the ground hangs on to trees as boats to sails.

Then nipples get hot as craters, beards are stroked, eyebrows pinched, faces taken off, eyes recruited by cameras, decades of time stolen from bee pollen and clover harvests returned to the apiaries.

You know a language well if it does things you don't have control over. Bring me the words without meanings, words all meanings have abandoned, sentenced to meaninglessness.

Fortunetellers smile in magazine columns. A mystery hero steals the fantasies of people he likes the look of.

§

Bury me in a frozen lake, saltless and safe, some day lifted to the eyes of a new person, telling her what to call me as she probes me.

Drop me on coral entangled, hair streaming in the current, rocking on a seabed of pistons.

Leave me in the garden slope, a dial tilted to the stars, on the orange trail as they roll to rot.

Bury me bare as a bird obvious on a tree in autumn.

Was desire meant to be saved, kept alive, unanswered? But this is a deathfuck, different, the more I dismember, the more I want, And you my queen of honeylips, the only one who ever knew how to make a ghost of me, play me a new song, recall me.

The nagman brings a daily death, squeezes my breasts, a clay clasp cooler than your hand, gives me fingers and teeth.

The gardener of dust is using my frame as a mould for the shape of future dust. This is how the dust will grow and the pencilling will fall to bits.

SELECTED POEMS FROM SALT

(Published by Asia 2000, Hong Kong, 2000)

§

What it is that drags sound out of the throats of the dumb?

That adds words to words and words and words and doesn't get
bigger a meaning?

These furies make us pluck out and discard our ears
Clumsy ears
Flat-footed giants
Who cannot land precisely
Slipping and sliding over frequencies
Missing ears

Issinglass beads
Alternated with drumbledudux
A cryptic weatherword
Tumbled jumbled
radioweather

WhoooSssshhhH
Lissssten
The voicccce in the noisxxxe
The finetuned ranges
Sounds separated - precipitated -
Silence
Amplified

Silence is the not the absence of sound
It's the space of sound
The field of sound
S u r r o u n d

The laughing of rats

Rupturing
A stickspiderysatelliteweb hymen

§
The past has passed on. Our old people locked up in nursing
homes

Laid flat and turned over from time to time
Dying evenly on all sides

On lumplump mattresses soaked
bedsores stained oozes

Alurk in the dark, their eyes are
cannonballs in a battlefield deserted

When they roll in the breeze, you know
there are animals inside these fleshcages

(There's stuffing inside the museum dinosaurs)

Ill-fitting skins. So much skin it could be stretched and wrapped
around the body twice. So many things you can hide in the folds
of your skin. A disposal bag you weave so we don't have to
bring any when we come

With a foreceps and tray, scraping for hair and skin, for signs of
violence under your fingernails

We have to come anyway to collect your souvenirs

To slide the ring off your finger and by the way see the
skindoodles, the buzzing traffic of lines on your palm

At the lifeline no one is supposed to read, scratched over

The child is told to run to the end of the field, touch the post and run back. That precise moment when the hand touches the post and the head turns before the body. That's when the young get up and go old. When the circle stops going around and starts to come around.

SELECTED POEMS FROM THE LAST BEACH

(Published by Asia 2000, Hong Kong, 1999)

§

What do I do with my hands?
Leave them in my pockets
Let them hang
on the sides of my body

§

Can't read
Can't talk
Teeth soundless
Tongue short
Push breath Push babies
Wait under palate gate
of lost meaning
Wash words of meaning
say iggy ugga buga luga wari oh numm numm

§

I was in the bath with my forest jelly bath bubbles.
He was out, flossing his teeth.

"Bathtime is an adventure when you wallow
in these mild, blackcurrant-fragranced bubbles.
Dip your hand and scoop out some wobbly jelly,
add to running water and slide in!

DON'T EAT THIS - WASH WITH IT"

The shower curtain with violet tulips was half shut.
"I've been feeling horny for a few weeks now", I said
"Have you", said his voice and then - "so have I!"

I swept aside the tulip bush and looked up
at a point in the mirror, where briefly
our eyes touched. Then

I opened the hot water tap. He bent his head to spit.

SELECTED POEMS FROM LIVING SHADOWS
(*HKADC, 1997, Hong Kong*)

§
Disappeared into his shadow.
The man without a shadow.
The shadow had a person.
Don't let your shadow find another person.
Escorting our shadows we take them where they want to go.
Folding his shadow on his arm he went.

SELECTED POEMS FROM CATAPULT SEASON
(*Writers Workshop Calcutta, 1992, India*)

§
Waterfall at Solomon's High.
Enigmatic standing bird
gypsies a nasty winter.
Wreckless weed surrounds
whistle obtuse buffooneries.
The rockdrops want to run away to the plains..

§
Black holes are yawns of time as the universe
gets sleepier and sleepier.

§
Obaidullah.
The primieve in his
zany restaurant
by the riverside.
The chat of the chap who wore panties to
walk with a hard-on all the time. And the music,
to sneak out and fetch in the tourists.

§
Sheltering Sky
The soul picks at cuticles in concentration
In the rollercoaster I cling to my body as if I was separating
See low white clouds posing like silly ghosts with hands thrown
up
The sky is limitless however high you fly you know you'll fall
down down here
Yet jump into a sea and you disappear leaving a bubble.
Two people exclude everyone else - if one of them should die
what is the other to do?
Cry, cry, you can reach the end, finally the kitten in the bag
pulls in its tail behind it.
Are you alone? Yes, the friends I love most are far south
And then we act as if distances are impermeable.
Take my face in my hands and show it around.
Mirrors will keep screaming night after night tirelessly for faces.
Every man is my husband. Every woman my wife. One day
we will unite.

(Fiction)
JUNKET

(First published in HKID, HavenBooks, Hong Kong, 2005)

Remember the lions outside the Bank of China tower? And how we used to use their jaws to staple extra-thick bank documents? One day, when a security guard went to relieve himself, the teeth disappeared and the Hong Kong stock market crashed.

According to rumors, the teeth got on the list of an auction and the seller was an antique shop really in the business of antique-style furniture. But when the police wrenched open crates in the storerooms on Hollywood Road and Cat Street, they found nothing but ivory, tons of ivory. The shop-owners claimed it was old stock from the 90s, there had been no new deliveries since it had been made illegal to trade in ivory. As for missing teeth, they pointed at the China Resource Centre, try the medicine section, they said.

When the stock market went under it was not a big deal because the really rich turned to PlanB, the really poor lost nothing, and everyone else had jobs. But newspapers and internet sites were still uncensored, and as a result, things were loose and a lot was said. One newspaper looked at their archive of the annual horoscope for the city, which had clearly indicated change beyond control. A legislator (a newcomer), in a radio interview, showed off by pointing out that the sound of the word for teeth was similar to the sound of the word for energy; Hong Kong had lost its energy. A Chinese proverb about the impossibility of pulling teeth from a tiger's mouth did the rounds, and if you considered the lion as a kind of tiger, then the impossible had occurred. One proverb said: If you cannot bite, never show your teeth. Another proverb said: When fortune turns against you, even jelly breaks your teeth. Hyped, people shat themselves. Sewage emptied into the harbor faster than the efficiency rate of the effluent recycling system, the water level rose and the streets were flooded. The water measured five-people deep and would not recede. The death toll was not too bad, numbers somewhere between India and Iceland: Iceland where every single person was rescued from lava by using

choppers, India without enough escalators and elevators. Many security guards died when the water rose and people murmured in private that it was retribution for the negligence over the teeth. Many of the guards were Gurkhas, the same community that fought for the British army.

While the city's lowlife escaped into the hills and fought it out with the illegal immigrants, wealthy construction companies with directors who lived on the Peak flew in cheap labor from Shenzhen and built walkways connecting the high floors of Hong Kong buildings. New airports, car parks and flyovers went up in a matter of weeks. The MTR re-invented itself and turned the trains into submarines.

Commercial, shopping and housing infrastructures were already in place. Food was already being imported. Clothes and money were already made of plastic. Having watched what happened in Mumbai monsoons, many buildings had already launched Crisis Management Solutions. This meant that when the bowl of the South China Sea spilled over, there were no expensive assets at the street level anyway, and MIS had already relocated servers to higher floors.

It did not take long for the city to return to business as usual. The stock market recovered. Hong Kong Tourist Association got a new lease of life with an advertising campaign. Two ad agencies competed, one multi-national and one Beijing-based. The gweilo agency recommended 'City of Sails' and felt that the controversy about plagiarizing Auckland's tagline would help amplify the impact of the budget. The China agency recommended 'Hong Kong Junk City' and proposed retaining the existing campaign with the logo of the Hong Kong Junk; they would simply change the text everywhere and save HKTA millions of re-branding dollars. The China agency won. Embankments were built all along the harbor to ensure that the risen waters would stay in the city. Chlorinators and cleaning systems were installed to maintain a beautified waterscape. Hong Kong was hailed as the Venice of the East by Time magazine. China was proud of the sobriquet. Singapore was now mud.

A memorial was constructed for security guards in Chatter Garden, and HSBC opened a Premier account for each of the surviving families. One artist set up a lounge with tall chairs, a coffee machine and scalloped cookies in case the ghosts of the security guards dropped in. Another artist erected a figure in guard uniform, as if walking on water, and called it resurrection.

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