

A WALK WITH HISTORY

how do you write history
in a language that has no
past tense?

i don't ask for it
more than once
history stumbles over me

how is it that you are part of history
if you haven't fine-dined with her?

it was the railroad worm in adam's apple
it was the pine bark turned into rye bread
it was the rotten meat ration on the battleship potemkin
it was a hike in the price of oil
it was a viss of rice for a lot of vice
it was the iron chef in hell's kitchen at fuli restaurant

what's up in your hometown?

a turnpike,
a flyover is under construction
over the juncture of history

when did clio land?

this morning, about half past two

did she have anything to declare?

nothing
they strip-searched her anyway

what did they find on her?

a whistleblower, a conch-shell blower
a critically endangered cheroot industry
a pair of cheap putsches
the crowd psychologist dr. state with
his twin sons, racism and reverse racism
an albino cockroach, a fake hypocrite, and
an immigrant, whose name
you will never get

fuli restaurant: a Chinese-Burmese restaurant on Insein Road, Yangon.

MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE

for Zeyar Lynn

it isn't sweet or salty
it isn't sour or bitter
it's somewhere in between
somewhere from above

it's umami
the savory delight of monosodium glutamate
the buddha's poop that has colonized our cuisines since 1908
the inducer of droll and drivel, that sensation of furriness on the tongue
the teaser to the throat, the softener to the hard palate
the loveless lover to the lingual tonsil
the made-in-japan-chinese-restaurant syndrome
the diamond powder, the tortoise hair, the hare horn
recognized safe for the general population
no serious adverse reactions
no long-lasting effects

only an imperishable aftertaste
from myeik mohinga to houston beef jerky
from kaesōng instant noodle to lima pachamanca
from the shrimp cocktail of nasa astronauts in space to
the food-aid package in east africa
even the inuit imbue their whales, walruses and seals with an essence of taste
the seasoning for all seasons
the most addictive of additives
the non-essential you can't live without
the acid you yearn to lick every second
the undecided neurotransmitter
the enhancer of life's flavors
the condiment to contemporary conditions

no wonder then
99 percent of humanity is over-ajinomotoed
the rest is under-ajinomotoed
if you are a 1-kilogram rat
15 grams of the sweet dust is your lethal oral dose
it works 50 percent of the time

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Accent

My skin was born in the Year of the Pig. My accent, much later, and it'd rather be a Capricorn. I seduce women with my accent. I subdue them with my skin.

You will still hear my skin whinge even after maggots dwell and die in my accent.

My skin is my landscape, my accent my fresh air. My skin is too thin for bad weather. My accent, incredibly thick it will whistle under water.

I am *not* one of those who are sentenced to solitary confinement for life inside their own skins. I can get under your skin once I walk out of my accent.

People judge me by my skin. My skin's purpose in life is to prove them wrong. Once I open my mouth my accent will prove them right. I keep my mouth shut, my skin open.

Which is truer, my skin or my accent? When it comes to swinishness they are on the same page.

In places where I am considered white, my yellow accent always holds me back. Since whatever out of my mouth is unpasteurized lie, I will always have a yellow accent.

As for my skin —

it will be blues when it fancies the blues;

it will be jazz when it fancies jazz.

Pollen fever

*

Contrary to what they believed, I was never allergic to skins. Or sunrays. I wasn't a cadre.

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Arrested by three. Tortured by five. Fornication. For negligence. For negation. Wasn't that a question over syzygy? Or posture? He had even pawned his pearls to pose with my wax figure. I sneezed profusely in their hands.

First they spoke a language that embraced you like a failed state. Then they switched.

Like a passage from winter to summer, the transition was ungovernable, and violent.

Damn you all! Indecent infixes, triple consonants and doted vowels!

Like Mi Aye, I've had it twice.

Once for being too yellow.

Once for being too white.

Even after they'd renamed pollen fever hay fever, I insisted watchful trees mustn't bloom. Rain may settle dust, but leave us with wet pyres. For padauk, however, drizzles are never good enough.

Celebrations

Over here we celebrate absolutely everything, every single day. Everyday is someone's birthday or funeral. Every other day is an anniversary of a massacre or a wedding. We celebrate every week when we delouse ourselves by rubbing our shaven heads with lime. Every three months, when we deworm our stomachs with papaya seeds. We celebrate the spiritual power of our polluted air. We celebrate plastic in our rivers. We celebrate the lives of spiders by frying them for food. We celebrate snakes by skinning them into jerky. Sex, real or imagined, is the celebration of body's arousal. Orgasm is a celebration of body's contented closure. We celebrate celibacy. We celebrate and get humbled when rapists apologize. We feast with a lot of arak when a mother manages to rent her womb, or sell her child. On the occasions of the funerals of poets who died from excessive drinking, we toast rice wine over their graves, and get piss-drunk. When there's nothing to celebrate we celebrate for nothing, with nothing. All day long every single day of the year we smile and say to each other "How are you today? Have you eaten?" and "Sleep well." before bed. Comes the morning, we say "Have you eaten?" to celebrate the day, for we are still here.

From: bamboophobia

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