

parsetreef0restfire

Hamid Roslan

parsetreeofOrestfire

PRAISE FOR HAMID ROSLAN

“To read this collection is to hear poetry engaged in restless self-interrogation: What am I? Why do I exist? And what can I do? Hamid Roslan has created experiments that put language to the test—we witness it stretched, stressed, recombined and shattered. The effect is exhilarating: this is revelatory poetry produced when language is brought to a crisis. An original, unmissable voice.”

—**Alfian Sa’at**, author of *The Invisible Manuscript*

“‘We poets knock upon Silence for an answering Music.’ So goes the 3rd century line attributed to Lu Ji. When history’s elisions and silenced orators come knocking, Hamid Roslan’s singular debut answers with a never-before-heard music. *parsetreeforestfire* is borne from the space between bifurcation. Much like the Singapore he sings of, this bard’s tongue contains multitudes: languages, cadences, centuries, and source texts. Roslan performs a gripping interrogation of sanctioned speech and the legacies of colonialism (‘the secret muzzling of the speaker’) without sacrificing the sensual world, the embodied contradictions, or his sense of humor. What a thrill!

By turns mournful, slapstick, cerebral, wry, and searching, *parsetreeforestfire* is an arresting collection; one I know I will return to in years to come.”

—**Lisa Wells**, author of *The Fix*

“now I speak up,’ declares Hamid Roslan in the opening salvo of *parsetreeforestfire*, and what a sonic thrill this stew of tongues is. Half-familiar phrases are shredded and reconstituted, stitched with irreverence and Calvino-esque imagination, their bolts and nuts exposed and highlighted like pipes of Centre Georges Pompidou. And so, we savour the poet’s own sense in non-sense, scanning formats and templates, footnotes and annotations, to arrive at a point where... impossible is nothing.”

—**Yeow Kai Chai**, author of *Pretend I’m Not Here*

“Due to unforeseen circumstances, there arises a book like *parsetreeforestfire* which chooses to construct itself out of the edges language makes when it chooses to wager against its own best interests. To stake a claim not out of certainty but out of discontent, to speak against the grain of reason, to cut the line where it might bite, and to sing in spite of. This book of poems is really a manual for how to assemble a language from that space of knowing that much of what we wish to say is probably lost in translation anyway—and yet there is every reason to continue to want to speak to each other. I have long suspected that the best way to read Hamid is out loud with one ear covered with a finger and with one’s mouth either with grit teeth or wide open in a grin. Welcome to the music of being skeptical of one’s purported certainties: self, geography, voice. There is every reason to be baffled, moved, even beautifully offended by these poems. What a powerful debut this is!”

—**Lawrence Lacambra Ypil**,
author of *The Experiment of the Tropics*

“parsetreeforestfire tears apart the English language and reconstitutes it in a fiercely disorientating manner. It speaks, and it challenges us to listen.”

—**Claudine Ang,**

Associate Professor of Humanities (History),
Yale-NUS College

“This witty and accomplished book of Singlish poetry by Hamid Roslan is all revved up with Singapore attitude. It’s poems as essay as neatly done as a poem-sonnet or a poem with footnotes, zinging through one of the world’s many Englishes with a playful and determined aesthetic stance. Accents, creoles, grammars, idioms, neologisms, dialect mixes, argots, sentence rhythms, culturally specific words—and—as if that were not enough, the question of writing systems and the location of consciousness all come into this text. Everything that’s language is deftly pluralized, and all are taken out for a lively and gifted spin.”

—**Rachel Blau DuPlessis,** poet-critic

parsetreeforestfire
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somewhere else, someone else utters
—arthur yap

for the quaint but incomprehensible

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parse

parse

Write statement for what? If write must
sign. Must appear on TV say sorry sorry

Ah Kong. Sotong. You think if you write
you must follow other people. If they

makan potato you swallow starch—huh
I cannot use starch? Should I cave in

to your force of habit, sight scanning
line swooning over turns & tricks?

Ok. Statement is metaphor for tuition,
for textbook, for discount sticker label

at Fairprice. Use your brain. If got formula
we sure export lah bodoh. Kan dah kena

bodoh. Don't ask me for footnote. When
you read English you look up. They always

tell you speak up boy speak up

now I speak up.

An axiom accents assumption, lends credence
to charred dust, dialect administration &...
basis to provide a blustering planet with
conventional approach: bitten apple,
jargon arrangement doctrines, supplication
of prose-ethics, parching creation in advance
& searing guidelines to the sound of a
found nation—in short...fundamentally
bankrolled & broiled with cooking method
to roast code, styled speech for vocabulary
regulation, not forgetting voicing universes,
entrusting seething vale to word-truth &
shriveled big blue marbles, loaning canon
to argot to world with protocol to communicate
—which is to say: criterion, or rule, or
plunging dictum to conversation...or dogma, diction,
or to stake into discursive form a welt: doublespeak.

I traffic rule hantam color color wheel, I white marker
garland feeder bus back seat, I potted plant plate
lupa water disposal, I tug-of-war afternoon shower,
I hawker center spontaneous queuing, I discount
homesick airfare ticket, I tour guide friendly half half
only, I community building in-fighting, I sandbox
playground makeover, I face mask kiasu & kiasi,
I cosmopolitan minus four season, I fail safe migrant
assimilation, I on-the-spot birth cert & I/C, I saga seed
secret collection, I KPI cannot decide, I innovation
cum smart nation, I transracial regulate framework,
I spontaneous common spaces, I sudden flora hai shi
fauna, I immortal kampung spirit, I sign sembarang
make Saussure faint, I grammar rage potong jalan
syntax expressway, I lowest common subject verb
agreement, I multilingual breakdown solution, I sui
bian diction tone construction, I exile preposition make
fugitive, I Google translate before Google translate,
I parse partridge paring talk talk tree, I haggle talking
shortcut meaning, I kan chiong forget oral practice,
I turn out turn out every subtext, I signified cardiac
arrest, I patois circuit training, I big bang pidgin, I creole
crystal clear, I syntax forward looking, I tongue internet
preinstall, I quantum see all possible word, I on-going
rule-break rebellion, I speak anyhow so can also am,
is speech lah, speech lah, speech lah, is I I I I I lor.

mosquito-squatting thigh**lah**
impossible to miss heat percolating**lah**
*I would have moved if not for the***lah**
who knows how victims chosen**lah**
breath maybe carbon bridg**lah**
branching reservoir precipitate that which**lah**
turns sewage into spring**lah**
water knows the art of bottling conversation**lah**
tone quenching thirst at this oasis**lah**
with already too many words**lah**
for the same bloody thing

Be kiasu. Put the couplet before
the octet. Buang the rhyme. Rhyme

is ruse, like when you are handed a napkin with
buttons. Nice right? But useless. Also tak perlu:
your footnote, your traffic light, your crystal
sary. Love zhen de mei you instruction, like when
mat hands you a hammer & tells you to make ice-
cube. Tau takpe. But you still get free hammer lah.
No need to Shakespeare Shakespeare, zuo bo at
void deck wherefore art thou xiao mei mei.
Everything must go—but don't go courthouse.
Sonnets don't live there. Look under a fern at
Botanic Garden. Check your napkin, the one
with the button. The button needs a hole.

Might have thought beyond-over would
preside, instead of preside being preside
being children breathing over madetobreathe-
over lines arrested by the beating, but this child
has a different idea, peering at circles of dust
made, then unmade, then wonders
if this makes center the center
& from where others are centered,

then why does it arrive last? & then what
after the close if not several answers in search
of end instead of phrases made to stand
alone while all round is razed with nothing
spoken in place? Breath is beat & words
are only allowed an exhale into.

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

The poem on page 16 was published as “Mak Kau Punya Statement” in the January 2017 issue (Issue 5.1 — Varieties of the English) of *Of Zoos*.

The poems on page 20 and 28 were published as “This One Also Call Sonnet” and “We Are Majulah” respectively, in *SingPoWriMo 2016: The Anthology* (Math Paper Press, 2016).

The poem on page 39 was published as “Untitled” in Issue #53 of ‘They Will Sew The Blue Sail’ for *The Volta*.

The poem on page 43 was published as “Not English English” in the July 2016 issue of *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*.

NOTES

- 41 Text was extracted from Yelp reviews of a restaurant in Singapore serving char kway teow; a TripAdvisor review of a restaurant in Toronto serving the same; & an Australian culinary website explaining a modified recipe of the dish. Should you feel so inclined to name & shame, Google is the place to start.
- 42 cf. explanations of kaya, sambal, nasi lemak & sup tulang from Wikipedia.
- 62 cf. Barbara A. West, *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Asia and Oceania*. (Infobase Publishing, 2010).
- 64 cf. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. trans. Bernard Williams (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 65 cf. Singapore. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 3 (1957).
- 74 cf. Oliver William Wolters, “Towards Defining Southeast Asian History” in *History, culture, and region in Southeast Asian perspectives* (SEAP Publications, 1987).
- 78 cf. Arlo Griffiths, “Early Indic Descriptions of Southeast Asia”, in *Lost kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist sculpture of early Southeast Asia* (Yale University Press, 2014).

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