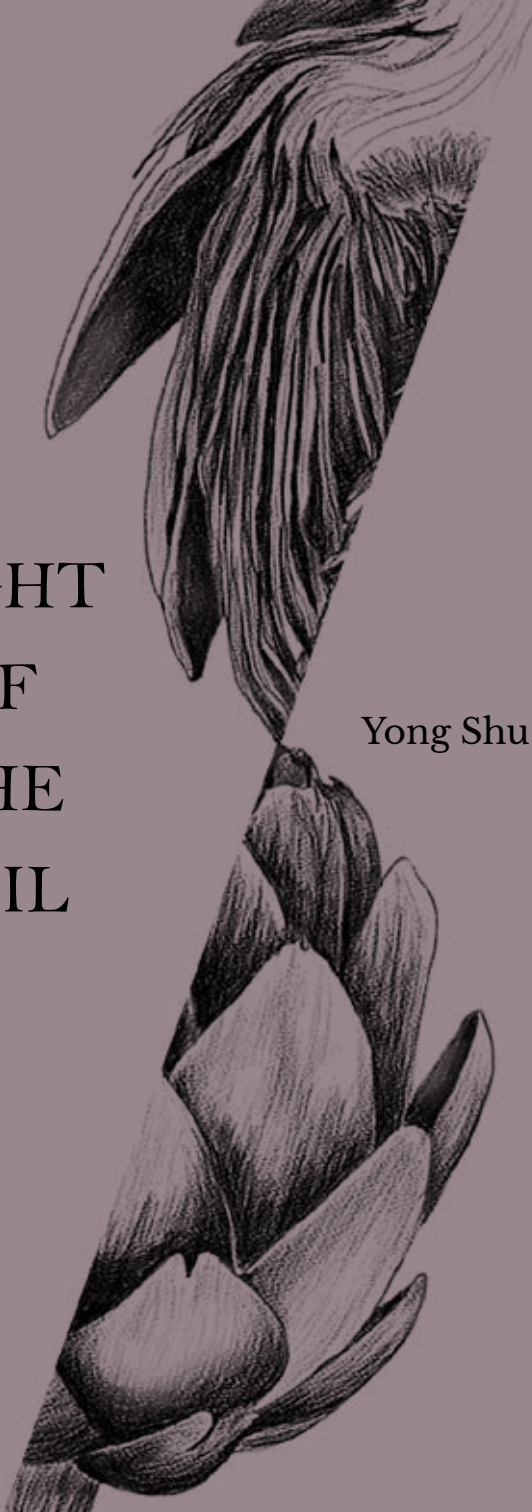


RIGHT
OF
THE
SOIL

Yong Shu Hoong



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*Air is primarily moist and secondarily hot.
Water is primarily cold and secondarily moist.
Fire is primarily hot and secondarily dry.
Earth is primarily dry and secondarily cold.*

— Aristotle, *On Coming to Be and Passing Away*

The old sceptics used to say that if Hell exists, where is it? What part of the Universe does it occupy? What are its coordinates? It had to be a latitudinal Hell, a longitudinal Hell. A Hell subject to tape measure and set square. The question 'Where is it' could not be answered satisfactorily.

— Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries*

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Gethsemane

To be awakened by a scent
is dissimilar to the way
sound, light or movement
interrupts sleep. Sweet spices:
stacte, onycha and galbanum.
Incense: clandestine tentacles.
It is 3am waking/dreaming
in the Garden of Gethsemane,
a diffusion of knowledge.
Of the nearness of nocturnal
flowers. Or prayers in an
olive grove. The interchange
of atmospheres, as the
sprawl of moonlight gets
rescinded by mist ascending.

Meat Joy, 2014

To put it blandly, it is
just lunch.

But armed with a pinch
of salt, I can certainly try
to unlock all the flavours
and serve a fresh perspective.

Take for example, a wedge
of New York City, stuck
in a mall in Hillview where a few
HDB blocks used to stand,
before the entire estate
was roundly erased. After the dust
settled, the new sign proclaims:
Dean & DeLuca. A chain of
upscale grocery stores, first
started in SoHo in 1977.

This is 2014, 11.30am.

I'm having my \$18 burger.
The beef is so thick that
well-doneness doesn't seep into
the patty's core. I survey
the large plate, and consider how
best to devour the grub.

My mouth isn't wide enough.

So I pick up the knife
to draw blood by carving
through the meat, reflecting:

*How well this red sap
must look, when splattered
across the floor space
of gleaming white marble!*

I feel like having a brawl,
the taste of violence upon
the wingtip of my tongue.

But there's no worthy opponent
here – only nerdy schoolgirls
fretting over homework, and
straight-laced office workers
celebrating Happy Birthday
with a silly cupcake bearing
a desolate candle.

I want to get up
and blow out that flame
wavering for way too long
under someone else's nose,
but I'm too filled to move.

I don't dare request
for more hot water to douse
my half-spent teabag.

Lunchtime is officially over

If not for the haze, lapping
menacingly against full-length window.

Shovelling Snow

— *Medford, Massachusetts*

There is first the crisp sound of metal
digging into snow, before the ghashtier crunch
as my shovel scraps the surface of the road.

Still I work diligently at the task, keeping
warm with perpetual movement, clearing
the driveway, while stockpiling dirt and snow

Out of harm's way. And all this time, I'm
imagining myself curating a shallow grave
just enough to deadbolt this unfamiliar cold.

I. Mirror Mind

Would 10
sectors be more
than enough for
Hell as an integrated
resort of 42-
hectare space and
39m under?
It's 2065, the
hottest month,
1.32pm, and
the Mirror of
Retribution 4.0
bears no answer –
nor does it admit
if you've been
given the fairest
of trials. "Repent"
(554 nits) lights up
on the Gorilla Glass
of the Mirror's infinity
display. Then it's
a battle of mind power,
as you try to alter the
memory of your life
hitherto. "SIN" says
your boarding pass. But
it doesn't mean
anything once you've
disembarked and
made it thus far (35.1km
by limo, no less).

From now on, we only
require you to wave
your credit card of
chosen limit. But
you play what you're
willing to pay. And
only if you're game to
see what the Mirror
can read from your
mind (viewer
discretion advised).
Hereon, you
choose your own
adventure, plot
your own escape,
if you can, from
your well-deserved
punishments. This
is your life, as true
as you want it. Or
fake, if you prefer.
Repent. Concentrate.
For \$200, the Mirror
resets and you can try,
harder, once again.

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The Latin phrase, *jus soli* (“right of the soil”), is an unconditional right of a person born within the territory of a country to be conferred citizenship. Singapore’s nationality law is based on *jus sanguinis* (“right of blood”, in which citizenship is determined by that of one or both parents) and a modified form of *jus soli* (with at least one Singaporean parent).

A two-time Singapore Literature Prize winner, Yong Shu Hoong contemplates how a person is invariably bound to the land on which he first sets foot. These poems address topics like belongingness and birthright by exploring the intermingling of the four fundamental elements of air, water, fire and earth.

In one section of the book, a sequence of poems plunges readers into Hell, reimagined as Singapore’s third integrated resort that opens underground in the centennial year of 2065, with its concepts inspired by Haw Par Villa’s main attraction, the 10 Courts of Hell.

Beyond our earthly lives, is it soil – or another element or dimension – that will assert its right to claim us?



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