

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank family: my mother and father, for all their love and support; my brother for encouragement; my sister for her invaluable advice and photos. Also, I give a heartfelt thanks to Mr. Kirpal Singh, both an critic, benefactor and friend; and Mr. Fong Hoe Fang, incisive editor. I also express a deep gratitude to all my teachers. A special acknowledgement to my late grandmother Li Lien Fung, who never got to see this collection.

SHRINES & STREETLIGHTS

poems by Ho Ren Chun



Shrines & Streetlights
© Ho Ren Chun, 2012,

ISBN 978-981-07-3389-6

Published under the imprint Ethos Books by
Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd
65 Ubi Crescent
#06-04 Hola Centre
Singapore 408559
www.ethosbooks.com.sg
www.facebook.com/ethosbooks

The publisher reserves all rights to this title.
Designed by Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd
Cover design by Ho Ren Chun
Cover photos by Ho Ren Yung
Printed by

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Ho, Ren Chun.

Shrines & streetlights / by Ho Ren Chun. –
Singapore : Ethos Books, c2012.
p. cm.
ISBN : 978-981-07-3389-6

I. Title.

PR9570.S53
S821 -- dc23

OCN809021116

*f*or everyone who has ever
believed in me

CONTENTS

ONE

Everyman's Odyssey	12
Dragonfly	14
Blackmore Drive	16
Passage	19
Carpe Diem	21
Soldier's Poem	22
Youth	24
MRT	26
Mokoro	27
Two Birds	29
Whiteboard	31
Sleepless	33
Pa(release)sis	35
The Limelight	39
The Race	41
Journeys	46

TWO

For My Sister	50
Silver Cedars	52
My Mother's Study	54

Incense to the Open Sky	56
Regretting	58
Silence	60
Brotherhood	63
Grandfather	65
Hokkaido	67
You and I	69
970	71
Like Hollywood	74
“An Ideal Romance”	76
Stella	79
Memory	82
July	84

THREE

How I Write Poetry	86
Qilin	88
Shangri-la	92
Exams and the Whale	94
Fabric	96
Imaginings	98
Gisele	101
Orpheus and Persephone	102
Ink History	104
Spider on the Subway	107
Stars	110
Grand Canyon	111
Monks	114
Science & Emotion	116
Mr. Moon	118

FOUR

Dirty shoes & Time	122
Graveyard	123
Alone	124
Moth on the Mirror	126
Mr. Wee Kim Wee	128
Soldier’s Poem II	132
Herbal Soup	134
Shadows	137
Melancholia	139
Po Po	142
Candles	146
Snow on the Sakura	148
Shrines & Streetlights	150

About The Author

153

Soldier's Poem

Soldiers sing their songs; sometimes war
In anticipation of something much more
A tense appreciation of what was before

In the withering darkness
a blind soldier stalks.
cannot understand this method of madness
in which he takes his shot

Guns fire bullets fly;
scarlet butterflies liberated
from fleshed confine.
Rifles aim to bite their mark
in heavy hearts already resigned.

For the blind man who has walked upon
this blood-caked soil and narrowed streets.
with men larger than he will ever be
He drags their emptiness back to retreat
for under the earth; face a fallen peace.

For the blind man who sits guarding the night sky
in which he has imagined within grasp his entire life
tomorrow there will be a fight; rumoured truth; war
Fight for the stars, for what else is there to fight for?

For the blind man who lays wounded; crying
despite being muted
screaming all the mistakes and opinions he did
not say
Do the loved at home cry with him?
And his eyes; pale and determined
understand his part in this fool's play
is over now; the world would not be on his
shoulders
their lies not stained on his teeth.

Soldiers sing their songs; sometimes war
to the rhythm of burning souls
on abused concepts that light too fast
in anticipation of something
much more.

we see whether we can
spot that portion of blue sky
no eyes have ever yet crossed.

The Limelight

Sweat; sweat; worry
Yes, worry- racing across the room in hot
rollercoaster
and it *halts*, a long screeching dragon
enraged and rugged at the wheels, iron joints
banding together
in momentous occasion and high pressure
to plant a doubt and sow anxiety.

Flash; flash; misery
The corpses of my words burgled by the lights
and future headlines;
tearing across like an elephant on red stiletto
heels.
The limelight is a vulture and it circles
over my imminent destruction.

Shhh; shhh; silence
As the curtains beckon so murderously
and every stare seems to be of disdain,
eyes leaking toxicity in their stony grip-
we pound our acts unto one another with flary
weakness of mind, and hope for a best;
saying but not understanding half the lines.

Clap; Clap; Happiness
They loved it, they drunk it
like a pantheon's ambrosia on wet lips
and they sung it, in cheers and claps
while we pretend to scoff and be insouciant.
The hard-creased judges smile wrinkled empathy
and we rejoice inwardly.

"Why so fast off the stage?" we mourn.
The limelight had only just begun
to *warm*

The Race

The morning is slow to realize
as people flit in and out of the stadium –
nervous animals rattled by some
semi-foreseen danger, intangible but present.

The sun is shortly sober on this occasion;
climbing with solemn attitude.
For a while, it rests its fire –
till the flames fidget and itch and
Helios returns to his primal anger –
and then slides tendrils over his drums
of passionless heat and *crackle!*
– the crackle of heated air fizzling and singeing
sweat-worn cheeks; brows furrowed hard
as contestants pour in dizzy trickles
unto the track, unto a *death*.

Lane 6;
Doubt seizes him by the stomach, forces its visage
over darting eyes. Shallow breaths cut the throat –
the crowd rolls about rowdily, an incoherent din
of colorful noise –
as the runner spies the stands for approving faces.
There are
none.

Qilin

it is the straight lines I cannot endure, and
straightly the frequent numb moment drops like a
coin into the slow, perennial whirr of my bustling
bus cabin heart

feeling like a worthless
cascade

of insecurities, or a heart
tightly-wound in dead knot,

too heavy to pass over
the dark,

yet too weak, too small
fragile things caught like
bloody feathers.

I usually swim and emerge from the water feeling
more
whole, or reminded of transience and my human
hands

but if it were possible
I'd like to walk out of that water a Qilin;

no, not rise a dragon, with its clear-cut
authority and benevolence,

nor a phoenix with an apathetic
immunity to tragedy and death.

a Qilin, indescribable, either
sinewy with flame or lightning,
head of a dragon or deer or horse or giraffe,

oxen yet fish-scaled,
possibly with hooves or a lion's tail:

some diverse definition of serenity
in which I will feel beautiful and
unconfined.

the thing is we are all either born with some
crookedness
in our bodies or in the acute angles of our hearts

I pine for some general,
uncontainable, symmetry
that would release
me;

maybe that's why I've always paced,
running in my head
down to my legs,

tracing straight lines to escape,

yet why are we always made to stand still in
buses, MRTs
classroom corners, family meals, weddings,
funerals?

“fa zhan”
maybe holding still
would affix the straight lines
into our souls

and we’d melt like an aftermath
of dominoes, into tangents
and normals;

but no. I dream of being a Qilin
– or at least, a human one –
if life was a paper

parallel lines would somehow
intersect, asymptotes meet, curves
repel and make me,

cloaked in fire or maybe not,
possibly with a unicorn-like horn
or antlers;

an amalgam of golden traits;

after all,
there is no such thing
as one Qilin,
no such thing
as a perfectly straight
line.

this is just periphrasis for
marble shrines, fine enough
for the living to sculpt
but the noble deceased deserve more.

and well, there I was,
in my greatest moment of loss,
staring so wondering
at rows and columns
of streetlights.

in my mind they were pulled
off the pavement and shattered
their moments of past scattered
into a collective burst,

this incandescent furor of big
orange that liquefied
the streets,

so for one instant there would be no city,
to come but not yet to be,
none at all,
and all your souls could find
easy exit
for some altar above.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ho Ren Chun wrote his first poem on a piece of newspaper when he was 8 years old. Since then, he has been writing in classrooms, in airplanes, restaurants, parks, even in washrooms. Now 18, he continues writing with a passion.



Besides compiling a collection of poetry for his family when he was 13, he has contributed to school magazines, online forums, and has had his writings featured in *The Straits Times*. He achieved the *Top in the World* award for his IGCSE (English) exam. He is currently finishing his IB Diploma at ACS (International). Ren Chun also enjoys drama, and acted in school productions of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, *Animal Farm* and *Monty Python*. His other interests include romance, ramen, and running. He'd like to write a graphic novel some day and has a ginger cat named Sandwich.

This book is his first publication.

Write to him at ho.renchun@gmail.com