

if there's  
one lesson we learn from **Ubin**  
it's writers do not live by words alone  
we pen on our stomachs  
and hunger for fame  
that if it comes knocking  
we'll gladly usher it in  
or waste away waiting  
for the phone to ring  
a writer must love the sound of his name

(last words)

...you've been **dreaming**

## By the same author

### Poetry

*Somewhere A Tiny Voice*  
*One Journey, Many Rivers*  
*Identity*

### Short Stories

*Ah...The Fragrance of Durians & Other Stories*  
*The Sins of the Fathers & Other Stories*  
*Wives, Lovers & Other Women*  
*News At Nine*

### Novella/Novel

*Different Strokes*  
*Shakespeare Can Wait*

### Non-fiction

*Kiasu, Kiasi, You Think What?*  
*Life's so like Dat*

### Anthology

*No other city - The Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry*  
*Love gathers all - the Philippines-Singapore Anthology of  
Love Poetry*  
*Rhythms - A Singaporean Anthology of Millennial Poetry*  
*Man/Born/Free: Writings on the Human Spirit from Singapore*  
*OnE, The Anthology*

### Film adaptation

*The Singapore Short Story Project (Picnic, The Story of a  
Good Man)*

### Stage adaptation

*Orchard Road*  
*An Old Man Dying*  
*In Search of Mermaids*

# UBIN DREAMING

(You've Been Dreaming)

David Leo

© David Leo, 2012

ISBN 978-981-07-2703-1

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

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

The book is published with support from:



Designed and produced by Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd  
Printed and bound in Singapore

**National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

Leo, David.

Ubin dreaming : (you've been dreaming) / David Leo. –  
Singapore : Ethos Books, c2012.  
p. cm.  
ISBN : 978-981-07-2703-1 (pbk.)

1. Singapore – Poetry. I. Title.

PR9570.S53

S821 -- dc23

OCN797993074

*for the special women in my life –  
my mother Siew Hiang  
my wife Mary-Anne  
and my daughters  
Cheryl-Jean & Cherie-Nicole*

*I would also like to thank  
Hoe Fang for the opportunity to attend  
the Arvon workshop*

*“You are not wrong, who deem  
That my days have been a dream...  
All that we see or seem  
Is but a dream within a dream.”  
(Edgar Allan Poe)*

# Contents

<i><b>The Seasons</b></i>	13	into the fog	39
another year	14	man/dog/bird	40
Cape Town sojourn		minus 12 degrees	41
(1) <i>the labyrinth</i>	15	moon	42
(2) <i>Bishop Tutu swinging on a chandelier</i>	16	nostalgia	45
(3) <i>blue skies</i>	17	parting	46
(4) <i>connections</i>	18	Ponty	47
(5) <i>the fifth season</i>	19	rain	
(6) <i>carnival</i>	20	(1) <i>New Year's Day</i>	48
(7) <i>this could be my city</i>	22	(2) <i>dance</i>	48
		(3) <i>sleepless in the city</i>	49
catacombs of Paris	23	requiem	51
challenged (growing up in Singapore)		river	55
(1) <i>childhood curiosity</i>	24	salmon rising	56
(2) <i>the woods on Kay Siang hill</i>	25	snowfall	57
(3) <i>a canal in Queenstown</i>	28	snowscape	58
(4) <i>a tunnel in Labrador</i>	29	trapped	60
		tree	61
crow		trees #3	62
(1) <i>a bird of all seasons</i>	30	Venice	63
(2) <i>black &amp; white</i>	31	waiting	65
(3) <i>only birds sing</i>	32	waiting for Jupiter	67
		when we look back	68
fall		willows	69
(1) <i>early morning</i>	34	zucchini	70
(2) <i>falling back</i>	36		
(3) <i>the splendour of autumn</i>	37		
if only	38		

<b><i>Lest we fall through the cracks</i></b>	71	kaya toast	96
donkey in the sky	72	limbo	97
geese	73	literary circles	98
go live on a farm	74	pigeon-holed	101
groundswell	75	poet	
Good Friday	76	(1) <i>come home, baby</i>	102
hypocrites & coffee	77	(2) <i>paint the wind</i>	104
i see a rainbow	78	Pulau Ubin recalled	105
i smell a storm	79	Pulau Ubin revisited	
magical 64	80	(1) <i>the dogs on Ubin</i>	106
siren of the whales	82	(2) <i>one less wild boar</i>	107
skeletons in the cupboard	83	Raffles	108
the bondage of war	84	six sticks in sunset	109
the good fight	85	stories	110
the great leader	86	sunrise	112
the storyteller	88	survival	113
<b><i>Arvon-on-Ubin</i></b>	89	the empty chair	114
blindfolded	90	Ubin dreaming	116
(a sensory exercise)			
flowers			
(1) <i>Daffodil transplanted</i>	92		
(2) <i>dandelions</i>	92		
Icarus	93		
icon	94		

## ***The Seasons***

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heaven:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.*

*(Ecclesiastes, 3.1-8)*

## CATACOMBS OF PARIS

(2011)

“Alas, poor Yorrick, I knew him, Horatio...”

(Shakespeare, Hamlet)

somewhere along the tunnel  
an inscription – do not insult death  
to laugh at the heaps of bones and skulls  
make light of their silence  
that speaks louder than words  
a grim reminder of what must be  
their present, our future  
we shall come away  
humbled

yet do we forget too soon  
the flesh is not ours to preserve  
how post-death we must all look alike  
and fare the same  
without a name  
– these that fare no better  
props for a patterned ossuary  
to amuse a curious visitor  
we are Yorricks all  
jester or none  
Hamlets we must aspire

to be

(or not to be)

### (7) This Could Be My City

this could be my city  
a riot of colours  
the diversity  
untidy spaces  
blue skies (when i was there)

this could be my people  
i walk among them unalienated  
i see faces weathered by history  
i trace the scars behind their smiles  
i hear voices unafraid, unashamed  
tell ugly tales of the past  
yet sing the good life

(outside the Mandela Rhodes  
the choir breaks the barriers  
of time, space

and race

of which there's only one)

this could be my story  
Genesis, where it all begins



## KAYA TOAST

Orchard Road is impressive  
but not quite as persuasive  
that's not his cup of Singapore  
– he wants to come home

  to *kaya toast*  
the sandwiched sweetness  
  of the humble *roti*  
the aroma of brewing *kopi*  
  spilled into china  
and two eggs boiling  
  in a *kong*

that's how  
  he'd always belong  
where the familial familiarity  
of his father's house follows,  
though he strays  
  he shall return  
to not where the bright lights  
die each night, caving  
into a hollowness  
but where a candle will burn  
of the master's wisdom  
his values, humility  
the simplicity  
  of affection  
*kaya toast* waiting  
always waiting

## LIMBO

across the darkened waters  
bright lights beckon, the night  
spread like a bed of jewels  
our names screaming

  suddenly star-studded  
  o temptress  
how you taunt and tantalise  
you always know when  
the body begins to crumble  
deprived of things familiar  
the spirit having gone ahead  
chasing the last boat

  homeward bound  
home, where we shall again  
live content dreaming dreams  
of a farther land, gazing

  across  
the same darkened waters  
we strain to hear

  soft whispers  
in the silhouettes of trees  
bathed in moonlight, an invitation  
to nest when we tire of lights  
  so loud and crude  
the spirit again restless  
the body reluctant  
those dreams

  that shall remain  
  forever dreams

## PULAU UBIN RECALLED

i was here  
when youth, crude and careless  
wasted no time dreaming  
there were no ideals to pursue  
just a troop of day-trippers  
completely physical  
bursting with vim,  
the jungle commanded our respect  
i will confess

we were afraid of snakes  
there were tales of roaming tigers  
and we left the wild boars alone  
happy to be sharing the sun  
with starry-eyed iguanas  
and barnacles  
we skirted the north shore  
broke the waters  
skied up the Kim Kim  
more wary of crocodiles  
than the law  
yet we'd take our chances  
ah, the exuberance of youth  
we didn't have to dream  
we were there

(2)

### Paint the Wind

paint the wind  
    have you forgotten how  
the gentle tints of murmurs  
splashes of splendour as it howls  
eerie streaks across the face of the moon  
the tingling pleasure of a tickled leaf  
the gloom of a tree that falls

fill in the spaces with hues  
that others do not see  
feel the Muse  
    reawakening

and write again