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Unhomed © Ethos Books, 2016

ISBN 978-981-09-9043-5

Published under the imprint Ethos Books  
by Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd  
28 Sin Ming Lane #06-131  
Singapore 573972  
[www.ethosbooks.com.sg](http://www.ethosbooks.com.sg) | [www.facebook.com/ethosbooks](http://www.facebook.com/ethosbooks)

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Cover design by Lim Qi Xuan  
Design and layout by Lim Qing  
Typeface: 10pt Crimson Text  
Material: 220gsm Cartridge Ivory (Cover)  
80gsm Enso Lux Cream (Text)  
Printed by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

With the support of



National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lim, Qing, 1992- editor.  
Unhomed / edited by Lim Qing.  
Singapore : Ethos Books, [2016]

*Identifiers:* OCN 945749785 | ISBN 978-981-09-9043-5 (paperback)

*Subjects:* LCSH: Home--Poetry.  
Singaporean poetry (English)  
Singaporean literature (English)

*Classification:* DDC S821--dc23

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## Preface

Unhomed.

The condition not of being homeless, but of having a home and being outside of it.

Homi Bhabha theorised this experience with reference to migrants and post-colonial people who have lost a sense of home because they have physically moved away, or because a familiar place has undergone radical change and become unrecognisable.

In many ways, however, unhoming is a modern, urban condition: the result of living in a world, a landscape that is changing more rapidly than ever before. Although it was not proposed as a theme, the experience of being unhomed surfaced organically in the works of the young Singaporean writers in this anthology.

The young writers expressed the anxieties of unhoming on different levels—personal, domestic, societal—and through varying modes and genres. The collection opens with the folklore-inspired “Of Sea Folk”, which juxtaposes the lull of a storytelling voice with an acute sense of defamiliarisation. This is followed by poems that explore the politics of the body—that which is the closest to the self, yet also threatened by external forces and social mores. The next few pieces explore a sense of alienation within the

most familiar of spaces and places: the domestic home and the home country. The anthology ends on a surreal note with “Carousel”, which dramatises the escape from reality into fantasy.

Tying these diverse pieces together is the ebb and flow of a feeling of dislocation that gnaws away at the heart. A pensive, bleak mood prevails, and yet there is a redemptive glimmer—a sense that through giving form to these deep-seated anxieties, these young contributors are one step closer to making a home in their pursuit of writing.

*Lim Qing*

## She, or I?

*Sim Jia Ling*

i.

The emancipated artist says,  
“It’s ok even if my body buckles.  
My mind is buzzing on such a high  
I cannot sleep, cannot pause to eat.  
Maya Angelou once said—  
‘There is no greater agony than bearing  
an untold story inside you.’  
I tell you it is a physical pain  
More desperate than hunger.

ii.

“Mother makes a visit.  
Bringing a basketful of bread,  
She begs me to take a break.  
I tell her No. I know  
Why bread is ‘pain’ in French.  
It stems from the Latin *panem*.  
*Panem et circenses*; bread and games,  
‘A superficial means of appeasement’.  
Foolish feeding would only distract my brain,  
And send the quality of my art down the drain.

“Mother is horrified.  
Tries to talk me into eating.  
Is in turns



Patient,  
‘I’ll leave it here, eat earlier.’

Pleading,  
‘Even a little is enough’

Demanding,  
‘I am your parent; I know what’s best for you!  
I am telling you to eat!’

Defeated.  
‘不听老人言，吃亏在眼前’  
‘You want to rebel? Fine!  
Don’t come crying to me when you collapse!  
I won’t go to the hospital to see you!’

“Guilt-tripping is her last resort.  
She asks me why I am doing this to myself,  
Pounds her chest in  
And moans out strings of Chinese proverbs.  
‘I gave you an unblemished, healthy body.  
What have you done? You have wrecked it.  
What right do you have  
To do that to

My Gift?’

“She tells me she has failed as a mother.  
Asks me if I’m trying to ‘气死她’.  
I offer no reply  
Nor attempt to contradict her.  
Not when I have heard this for over ten years.

iii.

“Mother tells me I’m naïve.  
 Decides I am doomed,  
 Having wasted my youth and health on  
 ‘meaningless moneyless pursuits’.  
 ‘If you don’t earn money, why do it?’  
 I tell her money isn’t everything,  
 Try to explain that creating good art  
 Is an exulting experience,  
 Bliss, bliss, bliss.  
 She tells me, ‘You’re just being naïve’  
 I ask her, who owns this body,

She, or I?”

~~~~~  
<sup>1</sup>不听老人言，吃亏在眼前：A Chinese saying that means  
 “Disadvantages lie ahead for those who do not listen to  
 their elders”.

<sup>2</sup>气死她：A colloquial Chinese expression that means “Make  
 her die of anger”.

## About LIVEpress Pilot

LIVEpress Pilot, the prototype of LIVEpress, started in February 2015 and concluded in June 2015. Funded by the National Arts Council, this initiative aimed to surface young writers through assigning them to teacher-mentors, who created writing prompts and provided editorial feedback on submissions.

Selected pieces, which the young writers produced and revised with the help of their mentors and peers, were first posted onto the LIVEpress Tumblr ([livepress.tumblr.com](http://livepress.tumblr.com)). These underwent another round of curation and editing before being included in this chapbook, *Unhomed*.

## ABOUT ETHOS BOOKS

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Between here and wherever home is,  
you wonder if you'll ever  
get used to the cold.

UNHOMED



ISBN 978-981-09-9043-5



9 789810 990435

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