# edited by EDWIN THUMBOO

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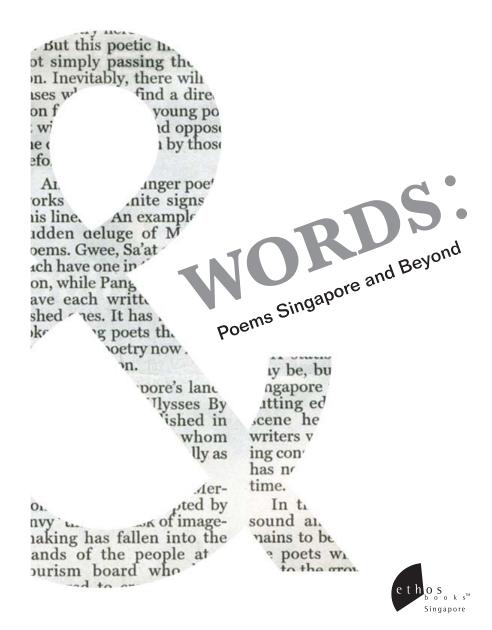
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# 我是 (i am)

Paul Tan Kim Liang

chinese too skin as yellow as loess shining like good gold my eyes surely black dark mirror black well limitless unlike my tun-tun-tu-tu<sup>1</sup> vocabulary english speaking cursing dreaming moaning in it waist deep chest deep in over my head i eat these words a whole thesaurus stuck in my throat stuck like sweet treacle or glutinous rice, you say why does the teacher strike me with her wooden pipa as i sing whitney houston for you? my tongue feels kinda funny i think i'll go eat worms mr neither-here-nor-there doing a slow limbo rock<sup>2</sup> lower and lower straddling two halves there's a smell of joss and the crowd is crunching ritz<sup>3</sup> something's about to dislocate

# Interview with a Beauty Queen

Eddie Tay

For beauty is a kamikaze act; my great-grandmother used to sit pretty and totter daintily on bound feet, yet in the evenings, she pleaded in agony as wrappings were removed. Such foolishness! I know better. So long as I feel good about myself, it's okay. It's pointless; men are at fault when women pick their food. That's their idea of beauty. Magazines talk about it too – slitting breasts open for silicone implants, and weight routines just to stay trim and tight. That's how girls learn.

I think I have to go. Our time is up. No pictures please, I'm not wearing make-up.

<sup>1</sup> Chinese proverb (呑吞吐吐) meaning having difficulty articulating a thought

<sup>2</sup> popular song by Chubby Checker associated with a dance where participants have to take turns to cross beneath a long stick, bending backwards without touching the stick or the ground.

<sup>3</sup> brand of popular American cookies.

### The Portrait of a Sentenced Library

#### Alfian Sa'at

So these bricks will be torn down And books will still not have learnt To spread their feathers and fly Like pigeons from a shaken tree

So this balustrade will be dismantled Perhaps reassembled somewhere else – A conch paperweight by my head is a beach. Each hour from a postcard Big Ben chimes.

This is the logic of nostalgia -This is what I mean when I say That my memory is selfish. Who can guarantee that roaming

Through a tunnel I will find again The Children's Section, where a boy walked With 'the Little Prince' in his hands, His smile the first line of a novel

Neither of us had read before? One cymbal left in Chinatown. Blueprints and forums and rhetoric ensure That a firecracker makes no sound.

### Dance

#### Fadzilah Amin (Malaysia)

We two are like partners in the ronggeng<sup>1</sup>, Approaching nearer, nearer and nearer; But just when one would think we'd meet at last, We turn away, reverse our steps, withdraw.

And like the ronggeng too, my life seems now, With steps mechanical, repeated, meaningless; Arms swinging back and forth, expressing nothing, Feet pacing up and down the floor, going nowhere.

I am tired of going through these ronggeng motions, Long to break this impasse of reserve; If only at one point our hands could clasp, What rich variety of movement and gesture could be ours.

<sup>1</sup> A Malay dance accompanied by orchestra and a singer in which a couple move forwards and backwards

# River

Yong Shu Hoong

Your veins still pulse with unstoppable delight day in night out Your habit inconsolable even after a lobotomy to glean aberration from your surface light

Your temperament will not be reined into submission You change your colour one weather to the next

Weekend fishermen continue to extract hope from your depleted bureau

But what the men in their lofty offices really want is to comprehend your feng shui powers

They try

To grasp the content of your hidden cache yet strange enough are unable to distinguish one colour from the next

# **Other National Virtues**

Gwee Li Sui

I asked for teh tarek Got half the glass in effervescence Got food poisoning because Half my mee's in its adolescence Criticize, complain, condemn With a hand over the abdomemn.

The players pant like pups Think they are playing table tennis The blundering referee Is giving me tuberculosis Criticize, complain, condemn Throughout the National Stadiemn.

Sure, we may know we live In a kind of modern paradise But it's hell when we come to Any bureaucratic exercise Criticize, complain, condemn All over on the referendemn.