

The Viewing Party
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ISBN 978-981-07-7694-7

Published under the imprint Ethos Books by
Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd
28 Sin Ming Lane
#06-131 Midview City
Singapore 573972
www.ethosbooks.com.sg
www.facebook.com/ethosbooks

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Cover image by Petr Kratochvil, under Public Domain
Cover design by Kum Suning and Yong Shu Hoong
Layout by Merlin Sudianto
Author's photo by Phan Ming Yen
Designed by Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd
Printed by Digicool Pte Ltd
Second printing, 2014

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Yong, Shu Hoong, 1966-
The viewing party / Yong Shu Hoong. – Singapore : Ethos Books,
[2013] pages cm
ISBN : 978-981-07-7694-7 (paperback)
I. Title.

PR9570.S53
S823 -- dc23

OCN859372517

THE
VIEWING
PARTY

YONG SHU HOONG



What would you write on your own tombstone?

Boey Kim Cheng:

Perhaps the line from Eliot:
“For us there is only the trying.”

Michael Farrell:

“God Stand Up For Bastards” (Edmund, *King Lear*)

John Yau:

“I wink at you from infinity”

Dave Chua:

A URL.

Anne Lee Tzu Pheng:

Nothing. I don't intend to have one.

– Proust Questionnaires,
Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, 2012–2013

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DRAGONFLIES

For Yong Kuan Sam

1.

For all I know, this may well be
the season for dragonflies. But
strange that one would perch
so motionlessly upon the ceiling
(for seven consecutive nights
after Grandfather died), right
above the coffin – the better
to keep a bug-eye over the parade
of condolences-givers. Or that
envelope on the mantelpiece
lightly clutching the wad of money,
white-gold for the newly departed.
The wings do not flutter, just as
lashes stay unwavering on dry lids.

Sugar Fix

In that past life, drunk on after-lunch lethargy, I'd sneak away from work, walk a bloated circle before finding a convenience store stocking what I craved. Sleep dissipated by the time I backtracked to my office, I'd leave the chocolate bar untouched upon my desk for the weeks following. Now, I hoard happiness differently: At a cafe having a cup of latte, I steal sugar for my dining table at home. I contemplate equating such transference with money laundering, while powering up my laptop. I don't play computer games, but derive amusement discovering forgotten sachets within backpacks and worn garments.

The Shell Collector

You didn't care if others deemed it eccentric. You went to work with seashells in your pockets, like how a marsupial carries the young in her pouch. But beauty should be shared, not obscured, so you showed everyone the shapes and markings of various shells, the specials of the day. Perhaps, you wanted to remind us that Singapore is still an island, although we could no longer hear the lapping of waves. Or recount – with even greater joy than staring speechless at shelves of rare shells in a little shop in Mauritius – the lure of discoveries half-buried on nameless shores.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Phan Ming Yen, Yeow Kai Chai, Jen Crawford and David Fedo for their comments on various versions of the manuscript; Fong Hoe Fang and Chan Wai Han, the kind folks behind Ethos Books, for their friendship and faith in this book; Enoch Ng for his feedback on some of the poems collected here.

‘Dragonflies’: Part 1 was first published in *The London Magazine* (October/November 2009) under the title ‘Dragonflies’. Parts 2 and 3 were first published on the *Softblow* website (Singapore) in July 2006 as ‘The Darkness’ and ‘Imperfection’ respectively. Part 6 was first published in *Over There: Poems from Singapore and Australia* (Ethos Books and the National Arts Council of Singapore, 2007) as ‘Last Day of the Wake’. Part 9 was first published on the *Writers Connect* website (Singapore) as ‘My Grandfather, Sometimes’.

‘Queenstown, 3.45pm’, ‘Art of Fighting’, ‘Goodbye, Mr Chips’, ‘Role Play’ and ‘The Fall’ were first published in *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, Vol. 12 No. 2, April 2013.

‘The Mercy Seeds’ was first published in *The Sunday Times* (Singapore) on December 20, 2009.

The section, ‘The Cutting Room’, and the poems, ‘Jung’s World’, Part II and V, are excerpted from a manuscript I produced in 2007 as part of a project to transform Singapore films into novels. In my case, the film was Royston Tan’s *4:30* (2005), whose characters include 11-year-old Xiao Wu and his tenant Jung, a Korean man in his 30s. Facing uncertainties after completing a 7,000-word draft, I eventually pulled out of the project.

‘The Great Dying’ was first published in *Balike Kampung* (Math Paper Press, 2012), edited by Verena Tay.

‘After the Fire’ and ‘Tanglin Halt’ were first published in *Asia Literary Review*, Volume 26 (2013).

‘My Hands’, ‘Tanglin Halt’ and ‘Aquarium’ were written during the poetry workshop, *The Poetry of Memory*, conducted by Boey Kim Cheng during the Singapore Writers Festival 2012.

‘The Healing Garden’ was first published, with French translation by Jacques Rancourt, in 2012 in issue No. 30 of the journal, *La Traductière* (France), on the theme of “The Poetry Reader”.

‘Growing Old’ was first published in the *World of Watches* magazine (Singapore) in July 2002. It is subsequently included in *Words: Poems Singapore and Beyond* (Ethos Books and the National Arts Council of Singapore, 2010).

An outtake from *do-while* (Firstfruits Publications, 2002), ‘Dead Actor’ was first published in *Writers Connect*.

‘With the End in Mind’ was first published in *Softblow* in July 2006 and subsequently in *Over There*.

‘Bitter Grapes’ was first published in *Tumasik: Contemporary Writing from Singapore* (Autumn Hill Books, International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and the National Arts Council of Singapore, 2009).

‘Picnic for Singles’ was first published in *Softblow* in October 2004.

‘Searching to Get Lost’: Originally titled ‘No Need for Directions’, this poem is an outtake from *Isaac* (Firstfruits Publications, 1997). It was first published in *Writers Connect*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Yong Shu Hoong has published four books of poetry: *Isaac* (1997), *do-while* (2002), *Frottage* (2005), which won the 2006 Singapore Literature Prize, and *From within the Marrow* (2010).

His poems have been included in literary journals like *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* and *Asia Literary Review* (Hong Kong), as well as anthologies like *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond* (W.W. Norton, 2008).

His short story, ‘The Handover’, was featured in the National Library Board’s reading initiative, Read! Singapore, in 2012.

He has been invited to read at literary festivals and events in Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Australia, England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and the United States. From August 2013 to February 2014, he is a writer-in-residence at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

As a freelance journalist, he has written articles for publications like *The Straits Times* (Singapore), *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) and *Esquire Singapore*. From 2008 to 2013, he reviewed films for the English section of the bilingual freesheet, *My Paper* (Singapore).