



**QUEER
SOUTHEAST
ASIA**

SEPTEMBER 2020



GADIS ARIVIA

AUSTERE REX GAMAO

JASON WEE



GADIS ARIVIA

I Clicked Delete

An email came in from a fellow teacher on campus
he wrote, “it is my fate to be polygamous...”

I did not reply

he continued, “better that than an extramarital affair...”

I did not reply

he stressed, “but I will care for my children and love my two
wives or three or four...”

I did not reply

he begged, “please understand my situation; no woman wants
to be divorced...”

I did not reply

he added, “I’m not alone in this: members of parliament,
ministers, religious leaders, professors, why even former fellow
activists share this view...”

I did not reply

he vowed, “the fact is men who engage in polygamy are only
following the orders of the Quran; it’s not against religious law;
women must accept it...”

I did not reply

he wrote with apparent frustration, “Marriage laws permit it;
CEDAW*) is not legally binding; human rights is a Western
creation and sexual equality a liberal myth...!”

Norton Virus issued a strong warning, my computer had been
infected by a virus: Delete all viruses?

I clicked “delete.”

*) CEDAW: *the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.*



miniskirt

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau
remember the feel of the passing wind
on the bare knees and ankles

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau
remember how you made me dance
the movement of my hips, chest, and hands

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau
remember the boyfriend who wanted to touch
whose passionate kiss filled eyes with jealousy

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau
remember the giggles and laughter
and kisses on the left, right, then the left cheek again

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau
remember how I was sworn at
told to cover myself, from my head down to my ankles

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau
the past is now gone and the present
a bitter painful hurt in the heart

oh, oh, miniskirt in my bureau...



poverty is

an independence-day poem

poverty is becoming a politician only for the sake of power
poverty is hawking God to gain more seats in parliament
poverty is one family controlling a political party one
 generation after the other
poverty is the backing from a muddled minister who refuses to resign
poverty is voting for a general pretending to be the voice of the people's
 consciousness
poverty is forgetting oppressors of the past who continue to
 hold the reins of power
poverty is spouting local jargon in a show of mental deficiency poverty is
rejecting the spirit of capital in a false show of social
 consciousness
poverty is a narrow-minded nationalism wrapped up in
 international acumen
poverty is the shackles of religion that dampens the beat of
 humanism
poverty is the mental corruption that has spread to every
 corner of the archipelago
poverty is selling a woman to Saudi Arabia for a spoon of rice
poverty is a child choosing to kill himself rather than to seek a
 life in his own land



Three Government Ministers and One Joint Ministerial Decree

Three ministers scratch their heads
looking through a holy book not the constitution
thinking hard about what Indonesia is
Aha! says the minister of justice
Indonesian law fell from the sky
and being not man-made, cannot be opposed
just the same as syariah law
now that is Indonesia!

Three ministers scratch their heads
looking through a holy book not the constitution
thinking hard about what Indonesia is
Aha! says the minister for internal affairs
This country is not like foreign nations
the people here are moral, those outside are not
let's salute the Islamic Defenders Front
now that is Indonesia!

Three ministers scratch their heads
looking through a holy book not the constitution
thinking hard about what Indonesia is
Aha! says the minister for religious affairs
religion has only one interpretation, which is my own!
backwards forwards, no difference
imprison those who do not comply
now that is Indonesia!

Three ministers scratch their heads
looking through a holy book not the constitution
thinking hard about what Indonesia is
Aha! the three ministers announce in unison:
A Joint Ministerial Decree
together we will put a stop to tolerance
together we will undermine this nation's principles
together we will encourage violence
yes, together, we can!



They Say I'm Not Muslim

for not memorizing scripture
but speaking from my soul

for not repeating words from the Quran
but singing the words of my heart

for not praying in Arabic
but praying in my native tongue

for not saying peace be with you
but saying good morning to all

for not rejecting a different interpretation of the Book
but embracing the love of tolerance

for not adhering to fatwa about what is good or bad
but accepting difference of opinion

for not forcing my child to follow my religion
but letting her choose her own

for not wearing a *jilbab*
but wearing a bikini instead

for not believing in polygamy
but arguing with religious men

for not making the trip to Mecca
but vacationing on a Balinese beach

for not condemning gays and lesbians
but calling them my friends

for not agreeing with the Pornography Law
but accepting diversity of expression

for not defending syariah law in the regions
but defending a democratic state

for not being adept at Quranic verses
but being more given to constitutional verses



they say I'm not Muslim!

they say I should be silenced!

they say I should be stoned!

they say I should be bombed!

but let them say whatever they want

my free spirit will forever live



My Soldier of Chastity

*for the Batu city government and the Jakarta Tourist Bureau that would
have masseuses wear chastity belts.*

come here my soldier of chastity
put a clamp on my vagina
come here my soldier of chastity
conduct your interrogation in my crotch
come here my soldier of chastity
reprimand my underwear
come here my soldier of chastity
thrash my pubic hair
come here my soldier of chastity
put a bullet in my clitoris
come here my soldier of chastity
and lap up my wetness
come here my soldier of chastity
doll, what more do you want?
come here my soldier of chastity
what more does your penis want?
come here my soldier of chastity
are you not satisfied?

oh, of course, take my money too
here, I give it all to you



Jilbabe

People call me a jilbabe because my *jilbab* is colorful
With a flower on the left side and a gemstone on the right
Don't dare to think of me in a burqa or a gunny sack of a gown
One must be neat, slender-looking, and always enticing, you know

People call me a jilbabe because my headwear is brand-name
Behind the dress are tight jeans and a thong that covers me
My bra is Victoria Secret decorated with transparent lace
And I have a heart-shaped tattoo encircling my naval

People call me a jilbabe because I freely go where I please No one is
suspicious, my costume is their assurance
I meet my johns—Ade, Balkon, or Zaenal—wherever they want to meet
What's important, they whisper, is that I look just like the girl in "Holy
Verses of Love"

People call me a jilbabe because of the red lipstick I wear
And yes my lips are sexy, able to rouse the desire to kiss
Don't get me wrong, I've memorized verses from the holy book
Whatever it is I say, the important thing is that it's heard in heaven

People call me a jilbabe
and that's all right for I'm a friend of the *jilbab* too...



AUSTERE REX GAMAO

Happy Together by Wong Kar Wai as Wishbone by Richard Siken as Austere's Mirror

I. Love

Love barges through the door and punches Austere squarely in the forehead.

But first it cries outside the door, rubbing its blood on the frame, scratching a fresh wound.

Austere takes the punch and kisses the red on love's thighs like he would his own hurting.

Sometimes there's no taste but sometimes the ladder breaks in half. Say, I want a movie that could hurt me. I've been bleeding so much, what's another bullet wound?

You're here so early. Will you stay long? There's a sofa you can sleep on. There's a mouth you can spit in. There're cigarettes for you. Here's my hand.

II. Furniture

We can watch this, Austere says, moving his mouse over the file. He has done this twice. Once in real life, the other in a fantasy. We could learn something. We could shotgun our

Bodies into the furniture. You'd like that, wouldn't you?



On the screen, Ho has bandages in his hands so he couldn't do anything but break Austere's heart. Lai sleeps on the sofa and Austere's on the bed smoking a bone he picked up in a bathroom. Austere jumps on the sofa with Lai. Lai complains but Austere's so

reticent, so wounded, he crashes the sofa and the bed together. On the sofa outside the screen, the couple kisses when the movie couple kisses. On the window outside, people gather to

watch what'll happen when the movie couple raise their fists made of broken plates. Austere practices his dancing in the apartment alone and Lai cooks eggs at the back of a car,

his side perforated with love.

III. Kitchen

We're in the restaurant kitchen dancing. Austere is both Ho and Lai in this scene.

He looks happy to be there. Happy to use his feet for something other than running from the

bones of his old country. Happy to be in the arms of a man he didn't meet in the dark. We dance too much it turns into kissing, kissing into hunger, hunger into a cut away.

IV. Black and White

The car broke down so we're breaking up.



V. Wash

Because Ho's hands are bandaged, Austere has to clean his body
with a knife. Ho

sits on a chair at the center of the room. Everywhere else, fleas. Say, I'll call
you a slut in

the future. Say, Let me feed you now. Say, and I'll hit you six times
because you

won't tell me how many men you've buried in the trunk of your car.

We're on the rooftop. Lai's fixing the roof of the apartment building
in the color-corrected afternoon. Austere climbs up the stairs with a water
bottle and pours love

on Lai's back. He kneels in prayer and drinks the bullets on Lai's
skin.

VI. Henry

Henry's always in a moving car in a freeway somewhere he can be
chased. His boyfriend's the director making the movie of their lives. His
boyfriend's riding shotgun with

a shotgun shooting a scene. Austere's in the back, his side perforated
with love.

They feel
lucky to be alive and hearing the roar of the tires as they zigzag their way to
happiness.

They feel
lucky to be making this movie, to be on this road, to be holding hands, to be in
love like this, to hurt for the fun of it.



VII. Cinema

Austere leans the movie against the uglier parts of his life. The bone-white mistakes laid bare in a script. The saturated fists carefully framed. The fast-paced lust. The simplicity of a kiss washing anger away but leaving a pebble of disgust. Austere reads the poem after he watches the movie, a small ritual.

They fit together like a knife through a ribcage.

On the screen, Lai fills his loneliness with other men's bullets. Austere cries

Because his bullets have grown in his stomach like vines and strangle him when he forgets to sleep.

VIII. Low Voices

Chang likes low voices and when he asks Lai what kind of women voices he likes, Austere tells them he likes men who can sing him to sleep.

Lai ignores them, continues

cooking.

Lai likes voices that press against his stomach.

Lai likes voices that make him lean in for a kiss.

Lai likes voices that rev the engine and start the car without him.

IX. Voice Recorder

Austere cries into the voice recorder Chang gives him to speak to at a bar.



X. Waterfalls

The Iguaza Falls is on my lamp. Ho bought it for me. I don't need
to go there

anymore but I need to dump our dead bodies into the raging waters below.

XI. Lighthouse

Chang goes to the end of the world and drops Austere's sadness
there.

Austere wakes up with a swollen forehead and a bruised lip.

XII. Slaughterhouse

Yes, Austere's naked and yes, he took painkillers when he cooked
dinner because

he has his father's teeth. Why are you looking at him like that for?

Did you do it? Haven't you slept with other guys with a morgue
between your knees?

Ask him if he wants you right now and he'll pull up the list and let
you pick the answer that would rectify the ugly bone sticking out of your
necks.

He could read you a bedtime story of when you were happier.
Sunshine yellow bleeding out of his eyes.

You'd like that, wouldn't you? He knows

you won't listen but you can still watch his lips quiver

as if he just met you.

How many times have you both fallen from your bed and you,
cotton-soft, folding him back in your arms?

Claw him here, kiss him here, dance him around the table.

Are you hungry? Sit down. Take a plate. He has burned



the meat on purpose this time.

XIII. Happy Together

By breaking, Austere swallows a bone

he picked up in the dark and spells something new in the dirt with a loaded
gun.

XIV. Wishbone

Grab an end. Please.



JASON WEE

Blueprints, A Sketch

*

The body's a machine.
As he would say.
There's always a part for me.

Nobody is
irreplaceable.
Click here for regular upgrades.

Everyone can
outlive their bodies.
Isn't that the, you know, who?

*

Asked me to name him
just not my birth's.
His full skirt pooled in a ring

in the middle of my bath.
I reached, what I touched
called me gentleness,

calls me to the copper
quiet of electric mistakes.

*

This body is not
for opening today. Call
it blackout. Call peace.

That it calls does not
mean exit. Rife, yes, with
fracture, but you can't deal.



In The Time to Turn A Full Tanker

*

Not pulling back the welcome
mat but the surprise
when your front window

breaks, the unnerved talk
of truth as never without
unjust cause, but how

do you spell
authoritarianism
without asia, or will,

given the atavic ore
we tore our now for,
the strength heard in speech

upon "I'll protect" speech
be the exit of
a limping king or a

scene, pleasuring yourself
to find your hand in
the mirror stroking a

chimp? *When should I walk
away?* When does nothing ...
remain, replace the pane.

*

Isn't that I cannot see
the lit path back, mud-
caked shrapnel, debris

blasted from the meeting of
will and resistance,
but another sight,

a wish yet-spoken I held
like a cure, full, on



its outstretched spoon.

Hearing is the last sense to
go or, the corpse still
has a way with words,

a gift-wave transmitting your
wish to its inner
ear, not *live* but *leave*

not again but forever.
I put my lips to
this dead earth. A wave.

*

The board by the lift
to my apartment
refreshes with new by-laws,

space's the crux, its scarcity
for others means watch-
words, nouns drowned by their

covert weight, of hills
razed into shores, of bit tongues.
Courtesy is for

free claims one poster.
As for the self, how much was
it for, it the grains

my built dreams tremble on,
the fact buried by
the omitted, for this?

*

Flags drape off every
porch and parapet.
Posters, in bold, 'this country

the ship that keeps us
safe'. Declarations



legible everywhere

and no evidence.
I tried to talk but
ears turn faster than questions.

I run from those who say
they love me. They say
that a lot. I run hard.



Phosphoresce, or When Forensics Fail

*

The body next to
the recycling bin
wasn't there when I left home.

I turned it over.
Their neck tears off their shoulder.
I ran up for help.

The flesh's now glowing.
When the medics lifted them
only the bones rose.

*

The news this week reported
all other things but
the case, now handled

by the serious crimes unit
(what would a crime that
cannot be serious

look like?), the death of
bees, a new server city
dedicated to

gaming, the last five
million of crude worth
more than rare metals,

the next Big Power question,
what is an eagle
learn how to spot one.

I'm not detective,
just beat, no idea how long
it takes to solve this.

*



Open a window
where none exists and
my body shapeshifts into

a house of birds.
Inside a mating call
of a recent lover

a second bird tells
the soft secrets that move
and damn her everyday

which is saying too much.
A third sings of the grave
it's leading you to.

Shut the window and the doors.
Don't bother with locks.
No one else comes in.

*

The spectrometer found an
isotope trace in
the follicles, no

blood or prints, the poison
may have been delivered
days earlier. Crime scene's

sheathed tight in white plastic
fear. Two more dead. The rare
metal's from 'the East'

but which country for
security reasons
the chief refused to say.

*

The era of science
has begun, says the
astrologer. Hasn't it



left years back? There're shops
for legal bets on feng shui.
Even chance is math.

The witch knows how long
your candle lasts, spare me your
e-condolences.

*

Trying to hide is
still synonymous with
done committing a crime

by detectives embolden
by their cognition
of their own blindness

which is not the same
as to unblinker –
more selection, less purpose.