



SHAWN HOO

**Mempat**

*after the myth of Hu Tianbao, the Rabbit God*

A crow dreams of the pink mempat  
and is sent to die on a fern. The avian  
underworld is full of others: a recalcitrant  
bulbul who would not stop singing  
falsehoods; a mynah who took too much  
from a satin hand; a lost egret. They laughed  
at his story for being sent down, conferred  
him the status of the crow who would guard  
other crows who dream of the pink mempat.  
The following month, he revealed himself  
to a citizen of the rain tree. He caught him  
drinking a mango, from behind the morning's  
folding screen, watching as the mempat flushed  
into colour. That those whom we call gods  
can still know desire. That those who desire  
may not act on them without a god's impetus.  
Now the crooks of the underworld have given  
me the title of guardian, he said, that I may  
be in charge of the crows who delight in—  
without deserving—the mempat's dowry.  
The guardian dropped a single seed into  
the beak of this simple crow, instructed  
him to plant it where he thinks it safe. What grows  
in its place will be a temple for other birds  
like him. What others like him who have yearned  
for bearing like that lost egret. When the guardian  
disappeared, the citizen of the rain tree understood  
he had to leave for elsewhere. A crow dreams  
of his own home and is sent to die abroad.



## **Ode to the Public Toilet**

Blessed be the stained urinals passing for high windows. Blessed be the saints you make out by staring at these panes. Blessed be the view of priests' hats and bald queens. Blessed be the conscientious men who shake them dry. Bless he who practices personal hygiene in public. Bless the lewd looks. Bless the tight jeans. Bless the other bodies swimming in and out of view. Bless darkness. Bless the ungoverned park which holds this toilet like a cup holds water. Bless the water fixture for its background pleasure. Pleasure—bless her. For a man walks in like a stray tune into an empty hall, searching for another voice, and is blessed with noise. Bless the man that comes to each cubicle and knows which confessional sputters forth which sin. Blessed be the boy who puts his ears on the panel hoping to receive something. Blessed is the old man whose value climbs with the night. Blessed is he who comes once, and leaves three others pining. Bless the mouth. The toe. The lobe. The foot. The fetish. The fold. The jaw of the man—the man whose knuckles bled you for daring to want him? Bless him for teaching rejection with a human punch. Bless the sight of him kissing his knuckles, and count yourself blessed he was no undercover. Bless those who taught you how to spot an undercover. Bless the men who finally acquired names—one night, this gift, like a proposal. Bless him for acquainting you with other blessed men. Bless the less lonely, bless the blanket



of a cheap hotel. Bless cheap hotels built beside parks. And bless the man  
who opts for sex in public. Who knows a tap is not a tap  
without a shoulder. Who finds friction arousing. Who strolls  
all night for nothing  
but to leave the scent of his publicity—not scroll  
all scentless night into nothing. Bless he  
who knows a grid is not a public square  
—it is nowhere. We have no one.