



QUEER
SOUTHEAST
ASIA

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ZHENG
MOHAM
WANG

TEJAS
YADAV





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TEJAS YADAV

Masquerade

I waltz into a
Room full of
Masked intentions.
Do they spot me
Unmask me?

No, because I carry
My own cover
Like a brown visor.
Their masks are all
White : high cheekbones
Aquiline noses
Green blue eyes
Lurk like wordless judgements
Behind plastered smiles.

Their masks whisper
Intimately speaking of an
Intruder in the midst.
A knot tightens in my throat.
Yellow, black, caramel?
Colors drain from my brownness:
Am I an impostor?

Music strikes up, sinister.
Swirling and whirling
Throws me off kilter
For I have no partner.
Beaked masks hum and
Chant in twos
Like mystics in trance.

What are they saying?
Boil and trouble?
I escape to the periphery
As they occupy centrestage:
Confident, assured, daunting.
Dirges rise menacing under
A crystal dome.



Glittering, glaring
Fearing my expulsion
I crouch back as magical
Spinning tops with white masks
Swivel all around.

An orchestra awakens
Syncopates with the haunting
Masked chorus
All now chanting words known
But twisted into sounds unheard
Emanating from pallid beaks.

I grovel, recede, head for the doorway:
Mirrors encrusted in the walls
Reflect my alienation, despair,
displacement with a backdrop
Of nonchalant wafting bodies :
White masks in a golden cage.

Yet I do not escape: rooted
Like a tree: brown like my own mask,
One I cannot swap for a pearly one.
I watch and watch the swirling
Spinning
Turning
Pirouettes
Unconcerned
That I'm screaming
Now
To be seen.



ZHENG MOHAM WANG

Scape

Again, premonitorily
her profile escaped me
the moment I helped the easel,
made from coffins and rivets,
to erect like a human.
Like every mannequin,
I imagine a position inexistent.
A silhouette of the dark
oozing until a faint stimulus
similar to her warmth is
felt inch, by inch, caressing
as an old burnt paint
from the Venetian blinds
in a room where we smoked,
lit by the first art of the day.
A strand of hair dawned
on my canvas stretched
like a somnambulist.



The Funeral

They mourned him in whispers
as if they had done that eternally
in their life, chanting and waiting to crumble from the knees
only to steal some rest and gossip.

Many of them were old.

The bodies lowered to his level of dormancy
The plastic lenses dangled on his bulging bridge, thrusting
as life escaped him, the skeleton of a deflated balloon.

I could see his nose out of joint
for one person was wearing black, not white.
He asked for an ethnic burial as an atheist by document,
and grandma nodded in agreement
to every progression of mourners.

The casket with one screw upheld glossy, smoothened,
and manufactured like his radio to be buried along.
Anachronistic shrouds only and for all to open the casket
for the final examination—*is it final?*

Envelopes, radio, and toothbrushes, and came the hearse.

Only straight men were allowed to flank
the parade and the chicken were sacrificed
blood spilled accurately according to a lost cosmology
around the coffin lid unfit like his abdomen.

An old man's stomach, wrinkled, punctured,
and now covered in other layers, fresh or dead.
The ritual was modern enough to catch some chill in a temple.
At the end of the parade was the boy in black



I reminisced, who looked like me in my 20s
He sobbed and later sniffled a lot, almost negligible,
not as much a disturbance to the resting crowd,
but he remained outside the temple roof
like a priest arriving late but never entered in hesitation.

His fine hair and lips chapped beyond
the pallor how untanned by the summer here,
leaving films of tears crossing the bridge
and my vision blurry as the season straddled.

--Summer was here,
Grandpa was not dead yet, not until I saw the boy.
His eyes reminded me of healthy sponges,
and I envied him as a dying cactus.
I couldn't and felt obliged to justify before grandma spoke more.
He wasn't there to keep me sober and judged.
In the old days, I would make tea for grandpa
around this time. I invited the boy to join my routine.
They both would have to wake up
from that scourging game of glares.



An August Night

The bed stopped drifting apart
in time to contain the exact spill
of a toppled body, not in a trance,
as I orphaned it to join the cyclical

flux of the artery,
for which gender of the universe
to relish enough hydrogen, over-boiled.

And smells of insomnia.

A flaneur to elope and reacquaint
the over-cafeinated corpus habituating
the bed as an itinerant seat of evaporation.

Through the tickling steps of a feline,
I domesticate myself to be a productive
pond of ripe lilies and striders in a frenzy
spreading the limbs, without choice,
on the axis of light and darkness
without touching the abyss of death.

The eternal death of sex routines.

Falling asleep is ascendancy.



BIOGRAPHIES

Tejas Yadav is a writer & scientist. Themes of identity, race, alienation, social justice and mental health deeply inspire him. When not traveling to new lands or learning foreign languages, he enjoys good coffee & photography. After Mumbai, Oxford and New York, Tejas now lives in Paris. His published essays, reviews, and multilingual poetry can be found at <https://writejas.wordpress.com>.

Zheng (Moham) Wang is a multilingual artist, poet, novelist, and art historian/critic based in Singapore. He graduated from Rice University in 2020 with a B.A. double-majoring in Art History and Studio Art and from California Institute of the Arts with an M.A. in Aesthetics and Politics (Art Criticism) from the School of Critical Studies in 2022. He is currently a Ph.D. student of Art History and Theory at the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, with an NTU Research Scholarship. His poetry and novels are published in Chinese and bilingual magazines such as Voice and Verse Poetry (Hong Kong), Vineyard Poetry Quarterly (Taiwan), China Daily (Taiwan), Tsingtao Literature (China), Youth (China), and Rice Magazine (Houston, TX). His poetry has won awards internationally, and he is recently writing in English, Chinese, French, and his ethnic mother tongue, Iu-Mien, a Hmongic language native to the Iu-Mien people living in southwestern China and Southeast Asia. More at www.mohamstudio.com.